

Making the city oh so pleasant to take a load off your feet

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Shanghai residents are sitting pretty after the city launched a three-year project to install more public seating along streets and popular gathering sites. The plan has been creative in its execution.

“Urban renewal now focuses on what people need rather than on just creating big landmarks, such as sculptures, plazas and skyscrapers,” said Fan Wenbin, a professor with Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

Residents are sometimes pleasantly surprised by the effects of the new seating.

Lu Pengcheng, a resident of a century-old villa on Yuyuan Road, and his neighbors recently opened their private courtyard to pedestrians under an agreement with the downtown Jing’ansi Subdistrict.

The yard, jointly owned by seven households, used to be a bit of a dumping ground, but the subdistrict promised to clean it up and take over maintenance if residents provided seating for pedestrians.

“We didn’t like the idea at first,” said Lu, 35, an information technology engineer. “We had safety concerns. But we changed our mind after seeing the subdistrict’s beautiful blueprint. It has turned out to be a nice experience talking with curious pedestrians who stop here.”

Lu’s neighbor, a retiree surnamed Fan, lives alone. She said she used to feel isolated by the courtyard wall, but now that the area is open to pedestrians, it has “become alive and interesting.”

American-Canadian journalist and urban studies activist Jane Jacobs (1916–2006) once said, “If a city’s streets look interesting, the city looks interesting; if they look dull, the city looks dull.”

Shanghai’s government, perhaps taking a cue from her observations, is trying to make streets more interesting by creating more public outdoor seating.

Shanghai now has more than 14,000 public seats — some new, some renovated old seats and some donated by individuals or companies, the Greenery and Public Sanitation Bureau said.

Creative designs are deployed in new seating, especially along the banks of the Huangpu River and Suzhou Creek — sites popular with locals and tourists.

Along the Hongkou section of Suzhou Creek, wooden benches evoke the waves of Shanghai’s “mother river.” Some iron seats feature the patterns of butterflies or even envelopes to highlight the nearby Shanghai Postal Museum.

Similar seats have been installed along the creek in Changning, where visitors can sit on S-shape steel “waves” right beside the water.

Along the Huangpu River waterfront in Yangpu District, known as the cradle of Shanghai’s modern industry, seats are made with rusted metals to recall the former glory of power, textile, soap and other factories.

The North Bund waterfront has four colorful seats made of 160,000 recycled milk cartons to promote the city’s trash-sorting policy.

“The riverside region has become my sitting

