



The outdoor public seating in Xuhui District allows locals and people working nearby to get together in a neighborhood square. — Xinhua

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We didn't like the idea at first. 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 Pengcheng**

Resident of a century-old villa on Yuyuan Road

room,” said Wu Wen, a 74-year-old retiree who practices tai chi near a row of benches on the North Bund every morning.

To a grandmother surnamed Wang, chatting with neighbors on a public bench near her home on Yuyuan Road is a daily pleasure.

“My home is small and lacks sunshine,” she said. “I need fresh air, and I enjoy keeping in touch with old friends.”

Some circular seats on the North Plaza of Shanghai Railway Station have become social gathering sites for travelers from the same provinces. There, they share information from back home and help newcomers to the city.

However, it can be difficult sometimes to balance artistic design with comfort. Some of the city's fancy new seats are a bit hard on the backside, Shanghai Daily found.

The metal benches on the Yangpu waterfront, for instance, are too cold in winter and too hot in summer, and the rusted surface is a concern to parents.

Other seats attract few users because they have no backrests. Some made with wooden or plastic materials are easily damaged, and most seats have no shield from rain and are often wet.

Zhou Hongtao, a professor with Tongji University, has suggested that public seating be designed with holes on the surface to shed rain water.

“These seats must be durable for at least five years without any maintenance,” Zhou said.

Following his own criteria, he has designed seating for seniors in the Siping community, one of the city's oldest workers' areas, built between the 1950s and 80s.

City authorities are also trying to encourage shop owners to allow people to use their streetside seats, even if they aren't buying anything.

Meanwhile, companies and individuals are invited to donate seating and cover maintenance costs. Some notable names have heeded the call.

The first donation campaign was initiated in downtown Jing'an District late last year. Renowned composer Lu Qiming and conductor Cao Peng donated two seats on Yuyuan Road. Their names and mottos are inscribed on the benches to inspire musical interest.

A dozen benches on Changde Road, donated by a technology company, won favor with local residents because they come equipped with wireless charging facilities.

A cake shop on Panyu Road installed several seats made of beer cases and cushions, creating an online sensation that brought in more customers.

The Shanghai Institute of Computing Technology collaborated with a neighboring cafe and restaurant to convert a row of shelving once used for take-out orders into public benches.

“I always see seniors enjoying the sunshine or chatting with friends on the seats outside the institute,” said Li Feng, property manager of the institute. “I think it gives the city a sense of softness and warmth.”

Citywide, some 600 seats have been so far donated by citizens and companies, while some 1,700 are being shared by street shops, according to the bureau.

Jiao Tong's Professor Fan has suggested that public seating be mobile, as is common in Paris.

“If the seats can be packed up easily and moved around, they can better adapt to the needs of the public,” he said.



A Lego-style bench at a “pocket garden” on Yuyuan Road. — IC



An artistic seat at Sinan Mansion entitled “Shanghai Heartbeat” is popular with photograph-takers. — IC