



Hungarian architect Laszlo Hudec and perhaps his most memorable Shanghai creation, the Park Hotel.

CELEBRATING A LEGACY BUILT ON GENIUS

For a man who arrived in Shanghai in such humble circumstances, Hungarian architect Laszlo Hudec managed to leave an indelible mark, writes Nancy Zhang

He was the man responsible for more than 60 buildings around Shanghai, some of them still revered city landmarks.

A graduate of the Royal Architecture Academy in Budapest and later an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army, architect Laszlo Hudec arrived in Shanghai in 1918 not long out of a Russian prison camp in Siberia.

But in the years ahead he left an indelible mark on Shanghai, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s. Today his legacy is no less visible.

Fifty years after his death in 1958, the Hungarian Consulate General in Shanghai is celebrating Hudec's life and work with a year-long series of events, including walks, talks, seminars and an exhibition.

Hudec's Shanghai buildings are strikingly eclectic. He designed hotels, private houses, and even factories. His style ranged from Classical to Art Deco to Modern, and this flexibility not only served the varying needs of his client but also showed him to be an architect of his times.

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The Hungarian who put his stamp on old Shanghai

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On arriving in Shanghai in the wake of World War I, Hudec immediately joined a local architectural firm where his talent shone through. His works reflected the great changes in society, philosophy and technology of the turbulent decades that followed.

"It was the end of an empire. The old world was ending and a new world was beginning," says architect Anne Warr, host of one of this year's seminars "Hudec and His Architecture" and author of "Shanghai Architecture" (2007).

"It was a most interesting time for debate and discussion for architects in Shanghai. I really admire Hudec who was always traveling, learning and keeping himself up to date.

"At the same time he had a solid foundation and skills as an architect which always shone through," she says.

Hudec's work reveals his progression from traditional craftsman to pioneering modernist, the biggest shift following a year-long move to the United States in 1927. Before the trip, Hudec's work featured classical designs such as the Joint Savings Society Building on Sichuan Road. But impressed by New York's skyscrapers, he returned to introduce American high-rise architecture to Shanghai.

The most famous legacies of this period are the Grand Theater and the Park Hotel, built in 1934, Shanghai's first skyscraper and the city's tallest building until the mid-1980s. The Park Hotel's imposing Art Deco style remains one of Hudec's most loved creations, according to Warr.

"Art Deco is easy to see and it's lovely to look at, but it is really a decorative bridge from classical architecture to a modern way of thinking," she says. "If you look for the deeper story, you will find at the time a whole new approach to living was developing that emphasized simplicity and light.

"In the age of airplane travel, people saw the future as this bright,



Laszlo Hudec designed many memorable buildings in Shanghai, including these — (clockwise from top left) the Grand Theater, Joint Savings Society Building, Moore Memorial Church and Wu's House.

shiny thing. This was the Bauhaus or Modernist style."

A truly groundbreaking leap into the Modern age can be seen in another Hudec building, Wu's House on Tongren Road.

A superb example of the streamlined Modern genre of architectural design featuring steel windows with an almost 360-degree view, Wu's House fits

almost seamlessly into 21st-century Shanghai even though it was built in 1938.

Upon its completion, Hudec was reported to have boasted the building would remain avant-garde 50 years into the future.

From now till June people will be able to enjoy the eclecticism of Hudec's buildings through the events of "Year of Hudec."

As well as guided tours and talks about his architecture, an exhibition in June to coincide with China Cultural Heritage Day will showcase rare documentation collected from Hudec's life in Shanghai.

There is also state-of-the-art software that takes visitors on a 3D tour inside the buildings based on original blueprints, says Tamas Hajba, Hungarian consul general.

Hudec's buildings

Park Hotel

Built in 1934, this imposing Art Deco building on Nanjing Road was Shanghai's tallest building for the next 50 years. Hudec was inspired by the Gothic Art Deco American Radiator Building in New York. Famous Chinese-American architect IM Pei claims the Park Hotel inspired his interest in architecture.

Grand Theater

Built in 1933, the cinema on Nanjing Road was the most state-of-the-art and modern cinema in Shanghai at that time. With a capacity of 2,400, the cinema even had earphones that provided simultaneous translation. It even pre-dated the famous modern English cinemas in London's Leicester Square (1937).

Wu's House

Built in 1938, this building on Tongren Road was a superb example of the streamlined Modern genre. The house takes advantage of its corner location to feature an innovative drive-through that links the streets. In its time the private house had luxuries such as a lift, air conditioning and billiards room.

Joint Savings Society Building

An example of Hudec's classical designs, the building on Sichuan Road was commissioned by China's largest bank at the time in 1927. It shows Hudec's mastery through its fine proportions, the grouping of elements, the combining of different materials for effect and attention to detail.

Many of Hudec's buildings are closed to the public, but Hajba says there are plans to open many buildings for visitors on China Culture Day.

For more information, visit www.hudec.sh, e-mail the Hungarian Consulate General at sgh.missions@kum.hu or call 6341-0564.

The life of Laszlo Hudec

- 1893 — Born in Besztercebanya, north Hungary
- 1911 — Studied architecture at Budapest's Royal Architecture Academy
- 1914 — Joined Austro-Hungarian army after graduation
- 1916 — Captured by Russian army
- 1918 — Escaped while being transferred to a prison camp in Siberia and made his way across the Chinese border into Shanghai where he joined American architectural firm R.A. Curry
- 1925 — Opened his own office
- 1927 — Year-long study tour to the United States
- 1928 — Returned to Shanghai and started to apply the rules of American high-rise architecture here
- 1947 — Left Shanghai to live in the United States with his family
- 1958 — Died in the US



Hungarian architect Laszlo Hudec

Year of Hudec: Dates to remember

February 24

Walking tour of Hudec buildings around People's Square (in Chinese)

March 16

Walking tour of Hudec buildings around People's Square with Anne Warr (in English)

April 4

Seminar "The Architecture of Hudec in Shanghai" by expert Ann Warr

April 13

Walking tour (in English)

April 18

Social event for all interested in Hudec's Shanghai architecture

May 11

Walking tour with Tess Johnston (starting with a short lecture, then visit to Fanyu Road, Tongren Road, Julu Road, Columbia Circle)

May 16

Seminar "Hudec and Shanghai — Architecture Then and Now"

June 14

Hudec exhibition opening on the Chinese Cultural Heritage Day

September

Interior and fashion design in the time of Hudec — University workshop

December

Book launch of the year's events