

by Sophie Lloyd 21 September, 2009

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Finding the unfindable: Francine Martin makes your shopping her business

Shanghai's shopping extraordinaire tackles your weird and wonderful requests

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The ultimately shopping buddy: A walking, talking, human shopping-guide book, Francine Martin shows you which Shanghai shops are worth your time -- and money.

Shanghai may be a shopper's paradise, but shops open and close so frequently that the latest guidebook is outdated by the time it hits the shelves. Then there's the haggling, not to mention trying to pretend that you know the difference between a real and fake antique.

To make life easier, make a date with the human shopping guidebook, Francine Martin, founder of Shanghai's personal shopping service East of the Sun.

"If you know where to go, Shanghai is great for local designers, pearls, silk gift items and ceramics," says American-born Martin, who's been conducting personalized shopping tours by car and foot for over three years.

Relying on her little black book of contacts and years of detective-like shopping research, Martin knows which boutique, backstreet or market to go to find virtually anything.

"I turn down requests that are way out of my area of expertise," she says.

Unusual requests she's received?

"I was walking through an outdoor restaurant area with a client, and she saw an industrial fan that she wanted for her bedroom to block the noise from a nearby construction site," she says.

Other unusual requests (that Martin pursued and conquered) include an electric folding bike and a full-day excursion shopping for un-dyed yarns.

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"I spoke with the restaurant manager, who put me in touch with various staff, and I eventually got the contact for the fan supplier."

"Another client contacted me looking for leather replacement cushions for her collector [Mies van der Rohe](#) chairs," she adds. "The leather had to be high grade and durable."

That happy client went home with four new cushions. Other unusual requests (that Martin pursued and conquered) include an electric folding bike and a full-day excursion shopping for un-dyed yarns.

And what Shanghai store can't Martin live without?

Cha Gang by local designer Wang Yi Yang.

"His edgy clothing is an acquired taste but if my clients have an appreciation for creativity, I take them there," she says.

Tours are tailor-made, focusing on clients' requests or interests and are by appointment only. Rates are available upon request. Don't expect shopping expeditions to cater to busloads of tourists -- Martin engages individuals or small groups only.

the details

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Prices available upon request

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