

CITYSPACE by Christopher Choa

sign o' the times

10 spring-cleaning tips for a better city

following Shanghai's Winter of (some) Discontent – more development and a drop in real-estate values – it is time to prepare for the warmer seasons. My spring-cleaning list includes a good swabbing in the area of urban design. There are some improvement projects we've been putting off for a while, and it's time to get going on them. So here are my top 10 clean-up projects in ascending order:

10. Glazed-tile facades

Shanghai facades are supposed to be self-cleaning (read: when it rains). Who's kidding who? True, certain farm houses in Italy look fabulous after years of weathering under the Tuscan sun, but for the most part, it's better to choose materials that are less likely to remind you of the rear windows of sooty cars. My suggestion: If you're not going to hose it down very often, better choose richer materials that look nicer with a little dust.

9. Ceremonial grass

Unfortunately, Shanghai's zoning codes count grass and bushes – but not trees – as concentrated green space. So in spite of all the efforts to set aside more open space, we have to settle for skinny strips of land that nobody can use. Let's challenge the code and plant more leafy shade

trees. And place benches beneath them.

8. Air-con crustiness

There is no good reason why cooling towers should be exposing themselves on podium roofs or air-conditioning compressors bolted willy-nilly to the outside of buildings. Shanghai is now so full of these angular barnacles that it can be classed as an epidemic. Developers and designers: stop being so lazy! Tuck those things away with screens and centralized systems.

7. Temperature translations

Construction south of the Yangtze River still does not require central heating, which is why in Shanghai we shiver indoors during the winter, and in Beijing people throw open their windows. This policy is an anachronism. Forget the term "recommended", which translates as "not required". Take the edge off winter and the asphyxiating heat out of summer. Time for mandatory insulation for walls and windows. And save some electricity.

6. Monster project sites

The impulse to redevelop Shanghai as the perfect city by 2010 is madness. After gouging entire swaths of the city in giant sweeps, and cramming in some crazy stuff, citizens will be left scratching their heads in the aftermath of the World

Expo. Give things more time. And break down projects into smaller pieces so that older, established neighborhoods have a chance to regenerate naturally.

5. South-facing – or else

The law requires that all residential buildings face south. It's a well-intentioned rule, but when applied in combination with high building densities it has nasty consequences. We end up with predictable arrays of domino-slabs saluting the sun but little else. Other directions are okay. Let buildings refer to natural street patterns and other open spaces. The result: less height, more courtyards, and more interesting spaces in between.

4. Gridlock

Remember when you could get to work in half-an-hour? That's next to impossible today. Automobiles may be a symbol of modernity in Shanghai, but they are not good for the city's commuters. We all suffer from traffic congestion, especially when it's at the expense of developing mass transit resources. And it's only going to get worse. Time for congestion pricing. All rush-hour autos and trucks entering areas inside of the 1st Ring Road: pay up.

3. Metro abbreviations

As traffic jams and pollution build up all over Shanghai, we really should be trying to make the metro a better place. Drop everything and focus on getting those nine new lines built as soon as possible. In the meantime, hitch on two more metro cars to each train. The stations are long enough, and it's the quickest, easiest way to build capacity.

2. Blue glass

In the late 80s and early 90s the use of colored glass became a modernistic architecture cliché in China. Today, its overuse has resulted in a legion of towers with a cadaverous pallor. It is horrible stuff, despite the occasional fengshui rationalization. No excuses; get rid of it.

1. Slip-sliding away

Shanghai's paving materials are burnished like nothing else except the Tiffany diamond. Even when dry, walking on Zamboni-polished marble requires the agility of an acrobat. Get rid of this omnipresent contagion; replace this dangerous material with something we can put our feet on with confidence. And what's with those colors?! ■



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