

Piecing history together with porcelain

Avid collector displays favourite items in private museum

By YU NAN
China Daily staff

Want to touch something 1,000 years old? Want to enjoy traditional Chinese tranquility? Want to have a cup of tea with your friends while studying the ancient Chinese legacy?

These are the charms on offer at Mumingtang Ancient Porcelain Samples Museum in central Beijing.

Mellifluous and soft notes flow from a Chinese zither played by a young lady, an enchanting fragrance graces the air from green tea in pretty porcelain teacups, bright but gentle lights make hundreds of pieces of ancient porcelain fragments dazzle on dozens of delicate wood shelves — a peaceful ambience that can comfort one's tired body and mind within a few minutes.

As one of the few private museums to have emerged in Beijing in recent years, the 300-square-metre museum offers a good opportunity for fans of porcelain not only to glimpse the beauty of nearly all types of the nation's famous chinaware but also touch them with their own hands.

"It is an impossible experience that cannot be enjoyed in other porcelain museums where delicate and precious porcelains are protected by translucent yet thick showcases," said Bai Ming, 44, founder and curator of the museum.

"Few people can resist the temptation to touch, particularly if the items are more than 1,000 years old."

The 1,200 pieces of ancient porcelain fragments on the shelves and nearly 50,000 pieces on rotating display represent Bai's 15-year collection.

Most items were made in the Tang (AD 618-907), Song (960-1279), Yuan (1279-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

Touching history

With an investment of 3 million yuan (US\$360,000) and the help of two of his friends, Bai redecorated a former tea-house into a museum last year. He displayed the best of his previous collection in the museum which now consists of 80 per cent of exhibits in the museum.

"Some people will think I am crazy to spend so much money just to exhibit some porcelain fragments," said Bai.

"But I think they are worth exhibiting because the production history of Chinese porcelain is pieced together and linked by these fragments, even though their prices are much cheaper than complete utensils.

"In other words, history itself is priceless and should be known to all Chinese people because this is our own culture handed down through generations."

Bai is glad to see that his idea of "touching history" is gradually being accepted by visitors.

Liang, a porcelain fan who lives nearby the museum, is grateful to find such a unique museum catering to her tastes.

"I feel so wonderful when touching the porcelain pieces and examining them. It makes me feel that I'm getting closer to ancient history and arts," she said.

With the improvement in lifestyles and education, Bai said more and more people want to join the group of porcelain collectors.



China in his hand: Bai Ming, 44, carefully places a Ming Dynasty porcelain in his Mumingtang Ancient Porcelain Samples Museum in central Beijing.

"But the first big obstacle remains money, because the price of complete authentic ceramics is still enormous to most people," he said.

This explains why the collection of ancient porcelain fragments has been quietly popular among common collectors in recent years.

They can buy fragments from construction sites, from farmers living around ancient kiln sites and from second-hand antique markets to enrich their collections at cheaper costs, usually about 3-20 yuan (US\$0.36-2.42) for each piece, he said.

But Bai added that not all fragments are cheap, such as the 100 pieces of authentic Ruyao porcelain fragments of the Song Dynasty exhibited in a special room. The most precious one among them, which comes from a dragon-like sculpture in celadon glaze, cost Bai 8,000 yuan (US\$966).

Ruyao kiln, with the kilns Dingyao, Guanyao, Geyao and Junyao, were the five royal kilns in the Song Dynasty which were famous for their fine craftsmanship and unique pottery skills.

Among them Ruyao porcelain is the most precious because records said the kiln was operational for only two decades, starting from the first year of the reign of Song Emperor Zhezong (1086) and ending in the fifth year of the reign of Emperor Huizong (1106).

Only 60 or so Ruyao porcelain pieces have been handed down through the past 900 years. They are housed in the Palace Museum in Beijing, the Palace Museum in Taipei, the Shanghai Museum and museums in Osaka, St Louis, Philadelphia and a few other places, according to Bai.

Ruyao kiln was located in Baofeng County in Central China's Henan Province, which was under the jurisdiction of

Ruzhou in the Song Dynasty. As visited the county 11 times just to buy authentic fragments.

Outsider to profession

Another reason for building the museum is to let more people gain basic knowledge of porcelain before making a decision on whether to buy them at high prices, Bai said. He still regrets selling some pieces of authentic porcelain from his and Qing dynasties, handed down his grandfather, to one of his relatives in Hong Kong for 10,000 yuan (1,208) in the early 1980s.

"A big slap on my face when I heard their actual value, hundreds of times the price I sold them for," Bai recalled.

The painful experience was the main impetus for Bai to study in this field after he graduated from the Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Central University of Nationalities in 1984.

He worked in the Beijing Spring House as an editor and most of his salary and spare time went towards collecting.

"I just wanted to be more professional so I could gain compensation what I'd lost previously," he said.

But this transition was not sooth as he expected. He read all kinds of books on ancient ceramics but all his main, most of which he bought from antique markets at high prices, were identified as fakes by experts.

Things improved in 1987 when his father-in-law, a connoisseur of Chinese jade, gave him a box of porcelain fragments and asked him to learn the difference between them.

"Since then, I began to pick and buy porcelain fragments from construction sites in Beijing and from kiln

relics where I passed during my business trips."

After moving bags of fragments back home, Bai cautiously washed them, occasionally selecting pieces and putting them on a big table. Then he tried his best to invite an expert to classify them chronologically for him. After examining and remembering the special characters of different eras and types, he mixed the fragments again and learned to classify himself.

"The more I touched them, the more familiarity I felt with them. A few years later, after touching about 100,000 pieces of porcelain fragments, I could recognize any porcelain's accurate type and the time it was produced at just glance," he said.

"Look at this piece of the late Song Dynasty," Bai said, pointing at the bottom of a blue-white plate with a fine picture of a fisherman and a wood cutter. "I bought it for only 10 yuan (US\$1.21) from the construction site of Beijing's Ping'an Street in 1998."

"No one wanted to buy it when hearing the price offered by the construction workers but I bought it without hesitation because I knew it was worth far more due to its near 1,000-year history."

To share more of his professional knowledge in porcelain with visitors, Bai spends all his evenings in the museum as a narrator.

He regrets that he cannot show all his collections due to space limitations. But he said he would show them in groups and themes monthly to let people have different experiences in touching porcelain.

"I think we are a lucky generation because our ancestors left us beautiful porcelain beneath the earth. And I hope our descendants 200 years later can still be lucky in unearthing something beautiful and not just plastic bags," he said.

TODAY'S RADIO

FM 87.6 MHz (all stereo)

10:00 About Beijing
13:30 Korean Hits
16:30 Music Online
17:00 Entertainment Today
21:00 Liyuan Theatre

FM 97.4 (all stereo)

08:30 Music World
13:00 Pop Concert
14:00 Hello Taxi
16:30 Review of Old Albums
18:00 New Sound of Modern City
20:30 BBC Pop Music

FM 90.0 MHz (all stereo)

12:00 Conversation
15:00 Peking Opera excerpts
16:00 Literature Cafe
16:30 Popular CD
18:00 Chinese folk music
20:00 Into Music

AM 603 kHz

08:30 Reading Time
10:00 Community & Life
12:00 Legal Times
18:00 Travel Guide
20:10 English pop songs

TODAY'S TELEVISION

CCTV-1 Channel 2

11:20 Half of the Sky
12:40 Law Report
17:00 World Express
19:00 News; weather
20:00 Science Review
20:56 Serial: The Days When We Were Young (9)
22:00 World Report

CCTV-2 Channel 8

10:30 Road to Health
17:05 China Market Update
20:06 China Business Report
21:35 Economy 30 Minutes
22:15 Stock Market

CCTV-3 Channel 15

15:12 Dream Theatre
18:03 Studio Express
19:30 Symphony World
20:33 Performing Arts
21:35 Art Scope
22:40 Late News

CCTV-4 Channel 32

18:30 Across the Straits
20:05 China Showbiz
21:00 China News
21:30 China Report

CCTV-6 Channel 18

11:54 Documentary: Sound of Music
14:19 French movie
16:15 Movie: The Virtue
19:45 Chinese movie: Wang Zhongcheng
21:21 Film Market

CCTV-8 Channel 29

11:05 Animal World

19:00 Around the World
20:00 Prime Time Theatre
21:48 Jiayi Drama: Prediction (11)
22:43 Late-night Theatre
23:38 Mexican drama: Wild Heart

BT-1 Channel 6

17:25 Stock Update
19:53 Serial: Story of 2001 (11)
21:45 Documentary: The Crucial Decision (3)
22:55 Hello the World

BT-2 Channel 21

10:32 World Music
13:08 Current Popularity
15:46 MTV
18:20 Chinese Top Music
19:38 Serial: Party Secretary (11, 12)

BT-3 Channel 27

17:35 Serial: Someday (9)
18:30 Modern English
19:30 Science and Technology
20:05 Knowledge is Power
21:00 News

BT-4 Channel 17

17:13 Hong Kong drama: Flaming Hearts (17)
18:00 630 Theatre
18:35 Art Life
19:10 Entertainment Live
19:45 Serial: Shanghai Story (47, 48)

BT-7 Channel 24

15:00 National Geographic Channel
19:14 Day 7, Channel 7
19:35 Modern Times
20:30 Luxury & Elegance

BRIDGE (By Phillip Alder)

I made a rare play during the final session of the Life Master Pairs at the Summer Nationals in Washington, DC, last July. If you were South, how would you have played the play in four hearts?

Although Marilyn Eber (East) opened one club, Norma Sands (West) led the spade jack.

In a pair event, overtricks are important. You receive one point for each pair you beat on a deal, and get half a point for an exact tie. If, for example, all the other North-South pairs are plus 420, you get a top by registering plus 450.

George Tornay (North) might have bid one heart at his second turn, but feeling his suit was too weak, he contented himself with a diamond raise.

Success depends on your handling of the diamond suit. Clearly, East should have the king for her bid. If the king is singleton or doubleton, cashing the ace first would work. (You plan to duck the second round completely if the king hasn't dropped.) However, the columnist in me decided to play East for king-trick.

After winning trick one with dummy's spade ace, I drew trumps with honours from hand, then led a low diamond to dummy's nine. East won with her 10,

North			
♠	A 5 3		
♥	J 8 4 3 2		
♦	Q 9 6		
♣	10		
West			
♠	J 10 8 2	♠	K Q 9 7
♥	10 5	♥	A 8 5 3 2
♦	J 4	♦	K 10 7
♣	9 7 5 3 2	♣	K Q J 8
South			
♠	6 4		
♥	A K Q 6		
♦	A 8 5 3 2		
♣	A 6		
Dealer: North			
Vulnerable: Neither			
South	West	North	East
1♦	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	4♥	All pass
Opening lead: ♠ J			

cashed the spade king, and shifted to the club king. I won with the ace, entered dummy with a trump, and called for the diamond queen, which flushed out East's king and pinned West's jack. Now I had 11 tricks: one spade, five hearts, four diamonds and one club. Plus 450 was worth 57.5 matchpoints out of 64.

I had brought off my first-ever intrafinesse.

CROSSWORD (No 6734)

- ACROSS
- 1 Tokyo's locale
- 6 Novelist - Zola
- 11 Blackout
- 12 Vacation plus
- 14 Happy
- 15 Quizzes
- 17 Chi. to Miami dir.
- 18 - Abner, of the comics
- 19 Two hundred fins
- 20 Compete
- 21 Underwater shockers
- 23 NATO cousin
- 24 Committed perjury
- 25 Embraced
- 27 Unwanted sound
- 28 Musical note
- 30 Unfold, in poetry
- 31 Family MDs
- 32 NFL score
- 33 Metalmaking giant
- 35 Empty
- 36 Favouritism
- 37 Drain
- 38 Mounties' org.
- 42 Chocolate-coloured dog
- 43 Pastoral spot
- 44 August sin
- 45 Plural ending
- 46 Actress - Prentiss
- 48 Has a cold
- 49 Condenses
- 51 "Yankee"
- 53 Doodles
- 54 Overcast

11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60

Solution to No 6733

M	A	W	A	P	E	D	D	A	N	A
U	T	A	S	A	N	E	E	R	I	K
L	O	G	I	B	I	S	U	C	L	A
E	M	E	R	A	L	D	S	C		
O	N	O	P	S	E	U	D	O		
Y	E	L	L	S	Y	E	T	S	O	D
I	D	O	L	S	A	T	A	D	Z	E
P	E	A	N	I	P	C	L	A	I	S
E	N	D	E	A	R	P	U	P		
V	B	R	E	S	O	R	T	S		
L	A	K	E	N	E	S	T	U	R	L
O	D	I	N	U	N	T	O	L	O	U
P	A	I	D	S	B	O	O	M	E	T

WHAT'S ON

Acrobatic Show

Chaoyang Theatre is a theatre which specializes in acrobatics all the year round. Many top acrobatic artists from all over the country are invited to perform for the Chinese and foreign tourists.

Venue: Chaoyang Theatre, 36 Dongsanhuai Beilu, Chaoyang District, Beijing

Time: 7:15 pm, nightly Telephone: 6507-2421, 6507-1818

China National Acrobatic Circus

China National Acrobatic Circus was the first State-level acrobatic troupe of New China and has won lots of gold medals in various well-known international acrobatic contests in places such as Monaco, France, Hungary, Russia and Italy. Now the star-studded cast are exhibiting the charm and elegance of the most professional comprehensive acrobatic art every night. Integrating superlative juggling, unicycling, balancing and jumping through hoops with the finest ancient Chinese dancing, the award-winning variety show will amaze you at every turn.

Time/Dates: 19:15 - 20:30, every evening

Location: Universe Theatre, 10 Dongzhimen Nandajie, Dongcheng District (100 metres north of Poly Plaza)

Tel: 6502 3984, 6502 2649, 6416 9893 Fax: 6500 2743

Kung Fu Show

The 90-minute performance displays dazzling skills of mysterious Chinese kung fu in a hero-plus-beauty story. Fifty kung fu masters amaze the audience with bare-handed practice, one-to-one competing and weapons practice.

Time/dates: 19:30, nightly

Venue: Xin Rong Theatre (16 Baizhifang Road, Xuanwu District)

Presented by Beijing Detian Shunyi Culture Development Co., Ltd.

Tel: 8354-0774, 8354-0775

STAGE

Fox and his son:

To commemorate first anniversary of the death of Japanese composer Danikuma, his opera "Chanchiki (Fox Happiness in the Wild Mountain)" is to make its debut in Beijing.

With the script based on folklore depicting a father fox's love and concerns for his son, the composer includes comic touches to the music.

In addition to the Japanese performers, around 150 Chinese artists take part.

Time: 7:30 pm, November 10, 12

Place: Poly Theatre, 14 Dongzhimen Nandajie, Dongcheng District

Tel: 6500-1188

Monkey King: Two Peking Opera excerpts, one focusing on the Monkey King, are being performed every evening at the Zhengyi Theatre.

"The Broken Bridge" and "Eighteen Arhats Fight the Monkey King" are featured on Fridays.

On Saturdays, there is "Picking up the Jade Bracelet" and "Havoc in the Dragon's Palace."

On Sundays, "Farewell My Concubine" and "Monkey King's Havoc in Heaven" are the featured pieces.

Time: 7:30 pm, daily

Place: Zhengyi Theatre

Tel: 1362-119-5714

Ming-style theatre: The Liyuan Theatre presents traditional Peking Opera excerpts specially packaged in short programmes for foreign audiences in its original style.

The theatre revives the ambience of old Beijing by setting up Ming-style tables that enable guests to sample snacks during the performances.

With an interpretation in English, the performances are from the Beijing Peking Opera Theatre.

Time: 7:30 pm daily

Place: Qianmen Hotel, 175 Yong'an Lu, Xuanwu District

Tel: 6301-6688 ext 8867

CONCERTS

Music from Germany: The Rhine Youth Symphony Orchestra is to play in Beijing.

Young musician Karina Buschinger will play the violin made in

1779. Learning the instrument at 6, she was required by the Schumann Conservatory of Music in 1996 and won piano music competitions in China and Poland.

Time: 7 pm, Nov 6

Place: Beijing Uni Hall

Tel: 6275-2279, 6151

Music from Germany: The German Bremen Philharmonic Ensemble stage a concert in Beijing. Stefan will conduct, with Ragna Schirmer at the piano.

Founded in 1974, a group of young, promising musicians, the chamber ensemble toured North and South America, Russia, Japan and Indonesia, as well as all over Europe.

Programme: Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4, Liszt's Symphony No. 4, special piece entitled "Invisible Scapes," written especially for the group by Chinese composer Xiaoyong.

Time: 7:30 pm, Nov 8

Place: Century Theatre, 40 Liangmaqiao Lu

Tel: 6466-4805, 8109

Melbourne: Conducted by Markus Stenz, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra will perform in China. Geoffrey Oster will play the piano.

Programme: Nov 9: Violin concerto (transcribed for piano) by Beethoven, Willow and Wattle by Julian, Symphony No. 9 by Dvorak.

Nov 10: Egm.verture by Beethoven, Piano concerto in G Major by Mozart, Symphony No. 5 by Mahler.

Time: 7:30 pm, November 9, 10

Place: The Great Hall of the People, west of Tian'anmen Square (November 9) and Century Theatre (November 10)

Tel: 6466-4805, 8528-2509

EXHIBITIONS

Art show: The Wanfung Art Gallery is hosting two exhibitions. In its western hall is a group exhibition of paintings on birds, dogs, flowers and figures by seven veteran Chinese artists — He Jiaying, Feng Linzhang, Zhou Zhongyao, Zou Chuan'an, Mi Chunmao, Lin Decai, and Liu Jibiao. The exhibition runs until November 9.

In the gallery's eastern hall, 12 young artists are holding a joint art show. More than 30 exhibits include oil paintings by Yin Kun, Liu Baomin, Han Xuejun, prints by Xie Feng, Wei Jia, Yu Pingren, sculptures by Suo Tan, watercolour works by Huang Youwei, Li Shengquan, Yin Wanfu, and pencil drawings by Kuang Han. The exhibition runs through November 11.

Time: 9 am-5 pm

Place: 136 Nanchizi Dajie, Dongcheng District

Tel: 6523-3320

Woman's world: This exhibition focuses on works by Chinese women oil painters who depict women's role in human progress.

More than 70 oils by 23 female artists are on show to reveal today's Chinese women's attitudes.

Time: 10 am-5 pm until November 11

Place: Deshengmen Watchtower, Bai'erhuan Zhonglu

Tel: 8201-4962