

CHINA CROSSROADS

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Vanishing Shanghai: A Personal Journey in Photographs

Hisham Youssef

Architect and Author of [Vanishing Shanghai](#) (2024)

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“Vanishing Shanghai” is a photographic narrative by architect Hisham Youssef AIA RIBA. It serves as a reminder of Shanghai’s neighborhoods and heritage amidst the relentless march of progress. Through his lens, his photography is a critical commentary on the fading tapestry of Shanghai’s rich cultural heritage in the face of urban development. The photographs, more elegy than celebration, capture the quiet disappearance of historic neighborhoods, traditions, and communities, being swept away by the tide of modernization. Hisham’s eyes become a witness to the vanishing urbanscapes, allowing the viewer to peer into the lanes of a city grappling with the erosion of its roots. “Vanishing Shanghai” is an exploration of heritage slipping through the fingers of time, urging us to confront the cost of progress and the fragility of cultural identity in the wake of urban transformation. Each photograph tells a story of what once was, inviting contemplation on the irreplaceable value of the disappearing past.

[Hisham Youssef](#) is author of [Vanishing Shanghai: A Personal Journey](#) (2024). “Growing up in Cairo immersed in the rich tapestry of historic architecture laid the foundation for my deep appreciation of the built environment. Labyrinthine streets adorned with timeless structures became the backdrop of my formative years, shaping my perception of urban landscapes and inspiring a passion for architecture. The juxtaposition of heritage structures against the backdrop of modernity instilled in me an understanding of the delicate balance between preserving cultural heritage and embracing progress. This early experience led me to pursue a formal education in architecture. I graduated with a liberal arts degree at Harvard University, and then completed my Master of Architecture at Columbia University. For work, I lived in many parts of the world. Each location offered a unique opportunity to explore and absorb different cultural narratives. From the historic charm of old cities to the contemporary metropolises, I witnessed the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation. My journey culminated in Shanghai, where my time spent there deeply resonated with my cultural sensibilities. The city’s historic urban fabric, a mosaic of lanes and heritage structures. Photographing the delicate dance between tradition and modernity, I tried to capture the unique character of a city in the throes of transformation. This unique perspective, shaped by a childhood in Cairo, a foreign education in architecture, and a global exploration of diverse architectural landscapes, culminated in a profound appreciation for the delicate dance between history and modernity in the ever-evolving urban tapestry and the communities of Shanghai.”

[China Crossroads](#) hosts talks on all topics related to China, including business, foreign policy, and other areas as they relate to China, the idea being that China is both already a “crossroads” of the world and itself at a “crossroads” in terms of its future global influence. For more information, contact Frank Tsai at editor@shanghai-review.org.