



A study in maintaining the past

The Zhijiang campus of Zhejiang University was built more than 100 years ago, and many of its distinctive buildings are in desperate need of rejuvenation. Xu Wenwen discovers how the restoration process is keeping things as they were.

For those who appreciate universities as scenic destinations, the Zhijiang campus of Zhejiang University in Hangzhou is a must-visit site because of its hilly location and national-level precious architecture.

Located on the side of the Qiantang River and close to the Liuhe Pagoda, the campus covered by lush vegetation was originally built in 1897 and was previously the campus of the Hangchow University.

Covering 440,000 square meters, the campus has more than 40 buildings, among which 22 were built before and during the Republic of China (1911-1949), and hence have a special combination of both Western and Chinese architectural styles.

In 2006, the 22 buildings were approved as National Historic Sites and Cultural Heritage under State Protection. Since then, a long-term repair project at the site of Hangchow University has started to rejuvenate these old buildings.

So far, five buildings have been renovated and two buildings — the library and Severance Hall — are being used on a daily basis again.

To protect and keep the original condition of these national historic buildings, the renovation project “repairs the old as it was” by reusing old materials to maintain the former look.

Fu Jialin works for the property maintenance department at Zhejiang University and has attended the project since it began. According to Fu, because most of the buildings are made of brick and wood they have suffered severe damage.

“To repair the old as it was, we restore these buildings by using the original techniques and old material,” says Fu. This means the use of modern machinery and new-style paint is avoided.

Though old techniques are not hard to execute, it is difficult to get old materials the same, or similar to, those originally used for the buildings. As a result, the construction team has to collect old tiles and bricks in nearby countryside and even neighboring provinces.

“Even if we couldn’t get the bricks the same as the original ones, we prefer to leave the old look rather than substitute it with new bricks,” says Fu.

“We try to reuse every material from the old buildings,” says Hu Wei, Party secretary of the Zhijiang campus.

Hu cites examples: though several wooden floors had been bored by termites, the sections less affected would be cut off to make floorboards; to restore the original look of the buildings whose windows and doors had been painted many times over the years, the team scraped off each layer of paint but kept the first layer and applied varnish to protect it.

“To repair also means we need to consider the practicability,” says Li Lepeng, who takes charge of compiling the profile of the campus. “Buildings with people can enliven the surroundings, which is dynamic protection.”

The library built in 1931 is back in use again. It was one of the best libraries in the



The Severance Hall established in 1911 is currently the administration building for the Zhijiang campus of Zhejiang University.
—Photos by Pan Liangchao



Lover Lake is lovers' favorite inside the Zhijiang campus of Zhejiang University.



The library built in 1931 has been equipped with Wi-Fi.



The 74-year-old bell tower has four clocks that still work today.

Far East, but had long been in disrepair. Today, the distinctive magenta, two-story Western-style building has been equipped with Wi-Fi and other advanced technology.

The Severance Hall established in 1911 is the main building and currently the administration building for the campus.

The European-style building features a hip roof, and under the roof are arched windows as well as a Doric lobby. In front of the building, two camphor trees more than 200 years old as well as a couple of traditional stone lions indicate the hall's age.

Both the library and Severance Hall's interiors maintain the old-fashioned look — white walls and ceilings, russetish floor and

stairs, as well as vintage lamps with warm yellow lights that take visitors back to the old age.

Besides the two that have been repaired, many other historic buildings deserve a visit, such as the 74-year-old bell tower which boasts four clocks that still work today; the Tooker Memorial Chapel, a stone-made Gothic church with strong Tudor revival features; and the North Pacific Residence that once accommodated John Leighton Stuart, the first president of Yenching University (it was a notable university in Beijing and integrated three Christian colleges in Beijing in 1919.), and later United States ambassador to China,

who also taught here for 10 years.

Apart from these precious examples of architecture, the school halfway up the hill has a breathtaking landscape.

Unlike its peers, the campus has no flat boulevards but mountain paths. Stepping on the winding paths scattered with golden leaves, visitors can ascend and descend the hill that is sheltered by towering trees much older than the school.

At the east end of the campus, a small emerald green lake romanticizes the beauty of the site. It is named Lover Lake since it used to have a double waterfall. Though the cascade has disappeared, the lake's unique cyan color remains to dazzle visitors.