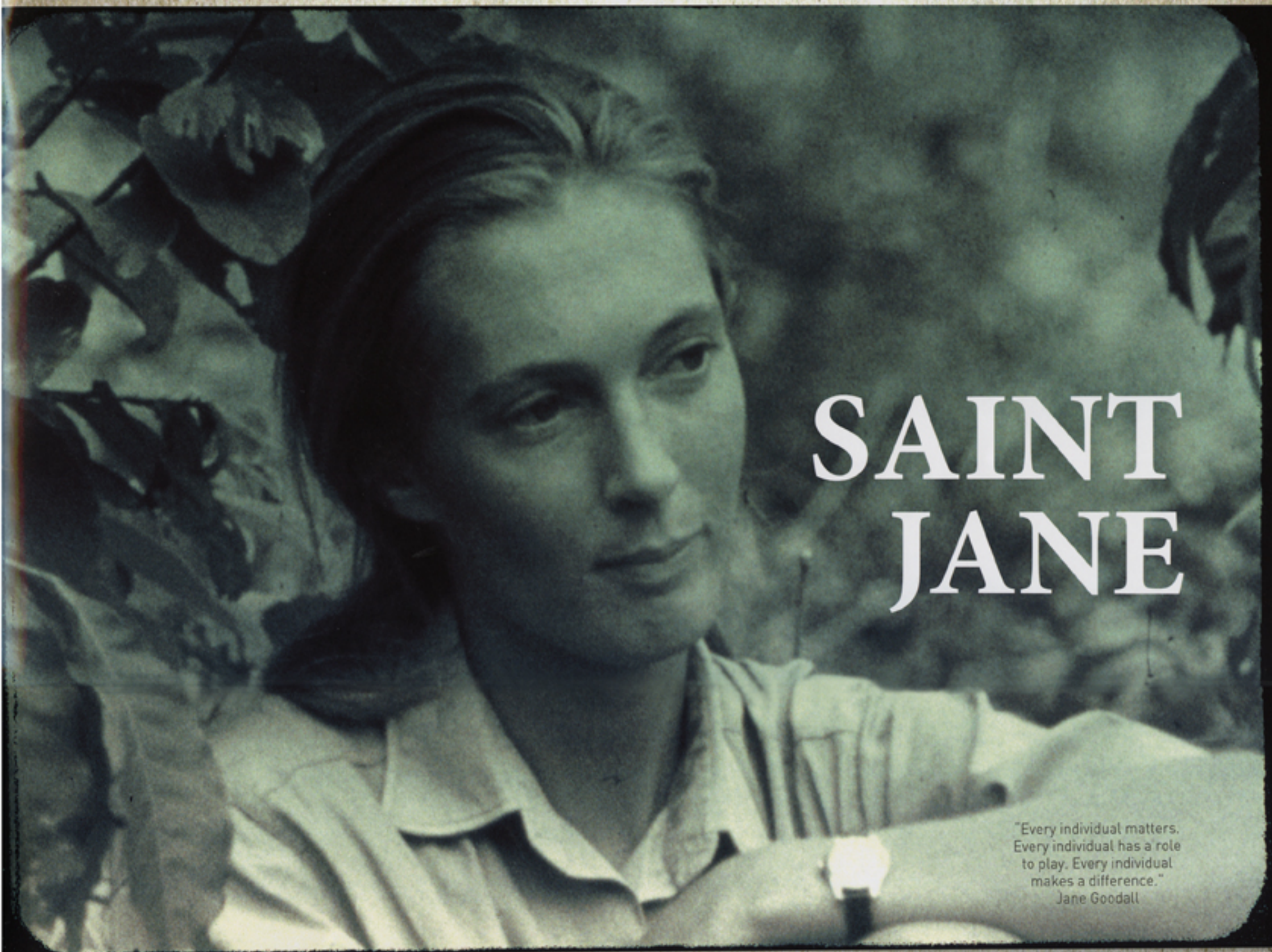


# TALK

动感 SHANGHAI / SEPTEMBER 2010

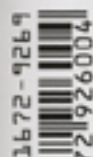


## SAINT JANE

"Every individual matters.  
Every individual has a role  
to play. Every individual  
makes a difference."  
Jane Goodall

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# A Questing Life

## Ladislav Hudec: The Man Who Changed Shanghai

CARL LORIMER

The world premiere of a new documentary film about the life and work of Ladislav Hudec, one of Shanghai's pre-eminent architects, is set to debut on 3 September. Using recently discovered film taken by Hudec himself, his life story is retraced through the memories of his three children, each in their 80s, as they reflect back on Shanghai's golden age, their father's struggle for identity and his importance in the city's development.

Ladislav Eduard Hudec was a humble man. Originally he wished to be a pastor and study ancient Christian archaeology, however at his father's insistence he became an architect instead. Through a series of chance events Hudec ended up in Shanghai in 1918 at the

dawn of the city's initial period of dramatic development; nearly three decades and over 60 buildings later, Hudec left an architectural legacy that still survives today. Once writing in his journal, "It doesn't matter where I go, I will always be a stranger, a guest, who is at home everywhere he goes, but still has no fatherland", today Hudec is claimed as a favourite son by both Hungary and Slovakia. This modest man who struggled with national identity for most of his life is, in death, glorified by two countries, as well as the city of Shanghai.

Hudec was born in 1893 in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, which at the time was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His father was an architect who pushed his first-born son into the profession, sending him to Budapest to obtain a degree. Hudec designed only one building outside of China, a small chapel in the village of Vyhnice. Soon after graduating the First World War broke out and he patriotically volunteered for duty. In 1916 he was captured by the Russians and sent to a prison camp in Siberia. Two years later while



being transported near the Chinese border, Hudec jumped from the moving train and made his way to Harbin, and eventually on to Shanghai.

In 1918, while the Austro-Hungarian Empire dissolved and his hometown was absorbed into the newly formed Czechoslovakia, Shanghai was experiencing an economic boom and in need of skilled workers. Hudec quickly found work as a draftsman with the American architectural firm RA Curry and within five years he was chief architect. Highlights of this early part of his career include the American Club, Normandie Apartments and the Joint Savings and Loan Buildings. By 1925 Hudec had established his own practice and was quickly emerging as one of the city's most important

and influential architects. Architectural historian Anne Warr believes, "Hudec's work must have been highly regarded in Shanghai, given the prominent coverage his work always received in the local press. His Avenue Apartments (known today as Lianhua Apartments on Beijing Lu) sold out before the building was finished – based on Hudec's reputation for high quality work. In the 1930s, his work received coverage in a number of European and Japanese architectural magazines."

His legacy from this era includes many buildings and private homes that still exist today, among them the Union Brewery, Country Hospital, Grand Theatre and Moore Memorial Church. However, Hudec's masterpiece is the 22-storey Park Hotel,



PHOTO: HUDEC FAMILY ARCHIVES

# Highlights from Hudec's 28 years in Shanghai

which was completed in 1934 and is still a People's Square landmark today. "His greatest technical achievement shines through in the Park Hotel," notes Warr. "The hotel was Shanghai's first real skyscraper and remained the tallest building in the city until the 1980s." Hudec's style varied greatly throughout his career, from Beaux-Arts and Skyscraper Gothic to Art Deco and Modern. His daughter Alessa Hudec remembers, "My father used to tell me that he thought the most important thing for an architect is to produce what his clients want."

In 1938 his homeland of Czechoslovakia was invaded by Germany, prompting him to apply for Hungarian citizenship. The Japanese occupation of Shanghai in 1941 put an end to his architectural career; however he was soon given the role of Hungarian counsel

for the city. Hudec immediately started issuing Hungarian passports to Jews connected in any way to the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, allowing them to escape

the overcrowded Hongkou ghetto for the US or Canada. Upon war's end, Hudec left China with his family, eventually settling in California where he taught at the University of California, Berkeley. He died in 1958.

The last several years has seen a resurgence of interest in Ladislav Hudec. The Shanghai General Consulate of Hungary celebrated 2008 as the 'Year of Hudec' to mark the 50th anniversary of the architect's death and his contribution to the city's cultural and architectural heritage. Now it is Slovakia's turn. Eight years ago, renowned Slovak documentary director Ladislav Kabos began researching architects originally from Slovakia who had made their trade abroad. "I was fascinated by the 'Hollywood True-Life Story' of Ladislav Hudec and that he is considered the father of high-rise architecture in Asia. I was surprised that the world knew him to be the Hungarian architect László Húgyecz/Hudec, born in the Hungarian town

of Besztercebánya. However this was in the time of Austro-Hungarian Empire, today the city is called Banská Bystrica and is one of the most important cultural and political centres of the Slovak Republic."

The result of Kabos' research is the documentary feature *The Man Who Changed Shanghai*, a narrated journey by Hudec's three octogenarian children through their father's legacy - visiting Slovakia and Shanghai to share not only the memories of their father, but giving an authentic account of European colonial life during Shanghai's golden age. Moreover, much of the film includes restored home movies taken by Hudec himself, serendipitously discovered by the architect's son Theodor, in the attic of his Victoria, Canada home, under layers of dust and mould. The movie is produced by Media

Film in cooperation with Slovak TV and the Shanghai Documentary Channel. On Friday 3 September the film premieres in Hudec's own building - Shanghai's

Grand Cinema (formerly know as the Grand Theatre) - to an audience that will include Theodor and the President of Slovakia.

Whether he is Slovakian, Hungarian, American or even Shanghainese, Ladislav Hudec's identity is not what truly matters. Instead, what is important is he not only changed the face of Shanghai, but also the lives of everyone around him. "Hudec isn't only a pioneer of architecture in the Far East, but his life also shows the important moments of history of the 20th century. Hudec lost his 'home', found a new one in Shanghai and lost it again," says Kabos. "Hudec's life proves there are no obstacles between connecting and understanding peoples of all lands regardless of culture, language and religion, they exist only in our minds."

*Tickets for the premier are by invitation only. For inquiries contact the Slovak Consulate General. Tel: 6431 4205. Email: consulate.shanghai@mfa.sk*

**"Hudec isn't only a pioneer of architecture in the Far East, but his life also shows the important moments of history of the 20th century."**



## Grand Theatre

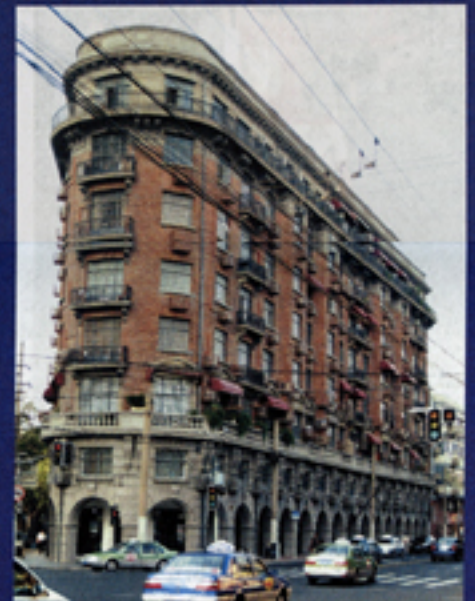
Year: 1933  
Address: 213 Nanjing Xi Lu

The Grand Theatre was Shanghai's first large, luxury cinema and an important milestone in Hudec's career - it marked a turning point in his architectural style. Both inside and out, the building is modern Art Deco with interleaving horizontal and vertical lines of light-yellow stucco. Above the entrance is a large 30 metre tall glass canopy that glows various colours at night. The original 2,016 seats have been reduced by a quarter and the theatre is currently known as the Grand Cinema.

## Normandie Apartments

Year: 1924  
Address: 1858 Huaihai Zhong Lu, near Wukang Lu

One of Huaihai Lu's most recognisable and striking buildings, Shanghai's 'flatiron' was one of the last buildings Hudec designed for RA Curry. It was built for the International Savings Society in the neoclassical style of the French Renaissance period and constructed of steel and concrete. The red brick façade is broken into three distinct sections separated by cantilevered balconies. Originally housing 76 apartments, today, known as the Wukang Mansion, there are 95 in total.



## Park Hotel

Year: 1934  
Address: 170 Nanjing Xi Lu

Upon completion, the Park Hotel was Shanghai and Asia's tallest building, titles it held until 1983 and 1954, respectively. The 22-storey steel-framed landmark is an Art Deco masterpiece and one of the city's best preserved buildings from its era. It was designed with technological advancements such as automatic fire suppression, a tap water system and air conditioning. The structure has served as an inspiration to many architects including I.M. Pei who credits the building with sparking his passion for architecture.

## Wu House

Year: 1938  
Address: 3 Tongren Lu, near Beijing Xi Lu

Commonly referred to as the 'Green House' due to the colour of its exterior tiles, this house was considered one of the most luxurious residences in Asia upon its completion. It was built as a private home for Mr Wu Tongwen in a blend of contemporary and Art Deco architectural styles - one of Hudec's most ultra-modern designs. The interior included a marble staircase, ballroom, sun parlour, greenhouse and extensive air conditioning equipment, while the exterior profile looks like a passenger ship.

