

Chinese Gift Palace: Stories Beyond The Gallery



The interior of the Chinese Gift Palace

The wind chimes clink softly, mighty Chinese deities watch from above, while we walk in to the calm vibe, feeling the absolute disparity from the harshness of traffic. The Chinese Gift Palace is located in Wellawatte in the heart of Colombo, symbolising a story of generations that goes beyond a gallery of embellishments.

Words Mathishani Dissanayake **Photographs** Indika De Silva

It was 1936 that Stephen Hsu, a 19 year old, travelled to Sri Lanka from China. He made the Island his home, where he had a family and initiated several businesses. In 1960, he started a small shop with local handicrafts. His son Roger Hsu, who took over the business after him, nurtured the store to success, while preserving his father's memories and staying on par with modern trends. Owing to the strong ties that had been maintained with village suppliers and traditional craftsmen, they now have one of the finest collections of Sri Lankan wood carvings and statues. With China expanding its authentic cultural domain throughout the world Roger Hsu sates that, "the close connections between the cultures of the two countries, and my roots both in Sri Lanka and China, I felt that the store should represent both cultures, and we have enough space to do so."

Each gift item here has its own symbolic value, which is far beyond its artistic value. A vast array of wooden Buddha statues in standing, reclining and meditating (*Padmasana*) positions bespeak refined carving techniques. The Expansive collections of sculptures and drawings of Hindu Gods, include Ganesh, Radha and Krishna, Hanuman, Avalokiteshwara Bodhisattva, Manju Shri Bodhisattva and the Wealth God. The gallery is well known as the opulent destination for many locals and foreigners who seek traditional Sri Lankan wood carvings with the finest quality. Keeping up with the trends all over the world, traditional Chinese porcelain, with their unblemished reputes are also showcased here.

Eventually Hsu began to create a Feng-Shui collection touring China, and selecting Feng Shui products of the finest in quality. The sweet sound of the flowing water emitted by the elegantly designed water features at the Chinese Gift Palace is intended to take your fatigue away within seconds. These selections of Feng Shui display the art of living in harmony with nature where flowing water, trees and animals are essentials of life on earth. Feng-Shui products extend to many more choices, including the Laughing Buddha around which there are many legends, the warrior who chases away evil eye, the Dragon resembling leadership, the Lucky Fish bringing fortune, the lion characterising strength, the Frog that catches the opportune moment and water features such as ceramic cascades and the crystal cluster that embody the elements of Earth. All five elements of nature are represented at the gift store. Hsu himself still keeps his father's abacus on his worktable with the undisputed trust that it brings success and good fortune to him. Those who step into the Chinese Gift Palace are also provided with Feng-Shui advice with personalised guidance to pick the most suitable product that best match their aspirations in life.

Next time you are buying a gift for your loved ones, let it be something beyond its ornamental beauty. Step into the Chinese Gift Palace and take a gift that reflects harmony and good health into their lives.

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