

DESIGN



Li-An Lodge, Keren Su's first construction project, stands proudly against the rice terraces in the mountainous region of Longsheng in Guangxi province. Photos: Keren Su

ONE MAN'S MISSION TO KEEP CULTURAL TRADITIONS ALIVE

Photojournalist and collector Keren Su fell in love with his homeland as he cycled across it in 1981

Tamara Thiesen
life@scmp.com

Standing amid the mist-shrouded hills and highland rice terraces of Longsheng, Guangxi province, in 1997, Keren Su had a vision. "I dreamt about building a house just like the traditional houses in surrounding villages, which are built the ancient Chinese way: entirely wooden and not a single nail. It took me nine years to fulfil that dream."

At the time, Su was photographing the so-called Dragon's Backbone Rice Terraces, some 100 kilometres north of Guilin. He found a plot of land for sale and his vision took flight.

"I am an art collector. During the Cultural Revolution they destroyed so much art, especially folk art, so I built up a personal collection, including antique furniture, wood carvings, porcelain and embroidery."

"I thought it would be a wonderful idea to display all the objects and make a special place where I could retire and move all my collection. But then the idea grew to turn that into a small, special lodge to share with people like myself, who love travel to remote, fantastic landscapes."

Su's passion for such places goes back to his youth. In his late teens he was separated from his family during the Cultural Revolution and sent to a remote labour camp in northeastern Heilongjiang province.

In 1981, after eight years in the fields, Su, now 67, graduated from the Hangzhou Teacher's Institute – but adventure, not the classroom called. He did a solo cross-China bike trip that same year, from Hangzhou to Urumqi.



Inside the Li River Gallery Lodge in Yangshuo; and the exterior, featuring the "rich people's brick".



"The journey was an education in itself... That trip really enlightened me," he says. "I was dreaming of Marco Polo, and along the way, I got to know China and it really opened my mind. I ate potatoes with Gansu peasants in a cave, drank yak butter tea with Tibetans in a felt yurt on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and sipped sweet wine with northern Shanxi farmers in the field... I also took photographs, sketched, recorded conversations and wrote poems."

During his epic 2,600km, 68-day journey, Su crossed paths with a mountaineering expedition. He later worked for

seven years as a mountain guide. Taking a group of Americans to Mount Everest in 1983 prompted his move to the United States, where he established himself as a photographer.

He has spent the past three decades as a photojournalist recounting the lives of ethnic minorities, their folk art and customs. "Myurge has always been to travel, to record change – and the things which are disappearing."

That urge can be seen in the three lodges he built in southwest China, and in his thwarted ambitions as a designer. "I was thinking of becoming an architect, then the Cultural Revolution destroyed my hopes."

Each house took nearly a decade to complete, starting with Li-An Lodge – built entirely from cedarwood – which opened in Longsheng in 2006. "This is one of the last remaining areas deep in the mountains where you see such traditional timber houses and I wanted to help recapture this craftsmanship," Su says.

The house has a framework of interlocking poles, tied together and topped with a tile roof. Su says

in former times the work was all done in a day, "and villagers came to celebrate, throwing candies from the top and playing musical instruments".

Su is an accomplished artist, having practised calligraphy since his youth. "Like most children in well-educated families," he says; he later created his own style by combining modern and traditional Chinese brush painting techniques. His work is widely exhibited across the US.

One of his sketches for Li-An Lodge shows the design process for the house, using interlocking tongue and groove panels supported by the frame. "When I started finding the wood, I designed everything inside and out," Su says. "I assembled it with the help of a master carpenter who, instead of using a blueprint, wrote his instructions on a bamboo stick for the placement of each log."

"Inside we classify each room with a folk art subject, and tell the story behind the objects," he says. The objects on display include artefacts in the lobby and stone carvings and sundials outdoors.

With his mission accomplished, Su set about building another two lodges a couple of hours drive south, amid the karst peaks, grazing buffalo and flourishing begonias of the Unesco-classified Li River valley.

Like Li-An Lodge, they are cultural museums, art galleries and rustic rural stays rolled into one.

"The second house is also representative of local tradition, but built in brick – we call it grey brick or rich people's brick," he says.

On the banks of the Yulong River in Yangshuo, the Li River Gallery Lodge showcases Su's photos of Chinese scenery and historic sites. Working with photo agencies such as Getty, his images have appeared in leading nature, science and travel magazines, including *National Geographic Travel* and *Smithsonian*.

His Li River Lodge opened in the fishing village of Xingping last year, and the black and grey tiles and cornices on its facade reflect typical residences along the river. The lodge is dedicated to Su's collection of classic Chinese furniture: from lacquer screens and gilded carved bed frames to intricately carved wall panels, Luohan daybeds and huanghuali (yellow flowering pear wood) lamp-hanger chairs, named because of the back rail's resemblance to a lantern support.

He hopes to rekindle a connection with the past through these mini-museum houses – especially the past he discovered on his transformational trip nearly four decades ago.

"At that time China was a living museum, a nation of diverse people who still maintained their own ethnic customs, language and lifestyle. But now China is at a really big changing point in history. And with all the improvements, it's all too easy for people to forget their own traditions."

HEALTH

Cancer treatment utilises electricity to generate hope

Device employs a non-invasive electrical field to stop growth and propagation of brain tumours

Nan-Hie In
life@scmp.com

A new cancer therapy based on electrical fields, which has seen promising results in patients in the United States and elsewhere, has launched in Hong Kong, bringing hope to patients suffering from a deadly brain tumour known as glioblastoma multiforme (GBM).

Optune, the name of this innovative cancer treatment, is an electrical therapy device also known as Tumour Treating Fields (TTFields).

Its introduction is the result of a collaborative effort between TTFields company Novocure in the US, and biotech firm Zai Lab in China. Novocure licensed its medical technology to the Shanghai-based company to promote TTFields in Asia, including Hong Kong and the mainland.

Optune helps fight GBM, which is a malignant brain tumour that is the most aggressive type and difficult to treat. Patients battling this disease face a dismal prognosis: fewer than 5 per cent of patients survive five years after diagnosis. In Hong Kong, one or two people out of 100,000 are affected. On the mainland, the disease afflicts 45,000 people annually.

Since September last year, Zai Lab has treated four patients in Hong Kong with the therapy and plans to treat mainland patients too, according to the company's CEO, Dr Samantha Du.

"We bring this breakthrough to Hong Kong hoping that it can help many patients... to prolong their lives and give them more time with their family and friends," Du said at a press conference to introduce the device. She added that patients could carry on with their normal day-to-day activities as they wore it.

One of the patients that underwent this treatment in Hong Kong, a local cook surnamed Wong, was diagnosed with GBM and underwent surgery to excise the brain tumour as well as chemotherapy and radiation therapy. He started electrical therapy in January this year. According to Zai Lab, Wong wears the device for 18 hours a day and continues to undergo treatment. He no longer experiences symptoms such as nausea and seizures.

The premise of TTFields, conceived by Professor Yoram Palti from the Israel Institute of Technology, is to create an electric field around the tumour to disrupt the growth and reproduction of cancer cells in the brain. This non-invasive strategy results in cancer cell death.

According to Bill Doyle, Novocure's executive chairman,

Optune relies on electrical properties, rather than chemicals, to fight cancer.

"It turns out in our body, many of our proteins are charged. In fact, proteins involved in cell division are among the most charged proteins in the body," he explains.

Standard care such as chemotherapy kills healthy cells along with cancerous ones, resulting in negative side effects, but this new therapy is more target-specific.

Cancer cells have a specific frequency, while normal cells have different electrical properties. This electrical therapy is fine-tuned to the specific frequency of cancer cells and as a result only targets these and not healthy cells, Doyle says.



We bring this breakthrough to Hong Kong hoping ... to prolong lives

DR SAMANTHA DU, NOVOCURE

"As a result, we see no systemic toxicity with TTFields," he says, adding that this treatment is combined with standard cancer care such as chemotherapy and radiation to provide better results for patients.

The Optune device comprises two parts. The electric field generator is a boxlike device weighing about 1kg, and is carried in a knapsack or handbag. It is connected to flat circuits that are fixed to the patient's scalp.

"We are not just treating the specific tumour, but the whole region around the tumour, so that there have spread which are not that be removed surgically or treated with radiation can also be treated," Doyle explains. "We are able to treat these cells in the whole region over a long period."

In an initial large-scale clinical trial involving 695 GBM patients to test Optune, it was found that 43 per cent of those that received standard care plus this therapy lived two years or more longer than the group that underwent only chemotherapy. The study was in the *Journal of American Medical Association* in 2015.



TRAVEL

Be on your guard when going off the beaten track, virtually speaking

The Washington Post

You think the real world is a dangerous place for travellers? Try visiting the virtual one, a place filled with shady travel offers and criminals who want to steal your personal information.

It's the time of year when people start planning their summer holidays, and with everyone watching the bottom line, the temptation to save a few dollars by booking online is strong.

A recent survey by British security company Compartech should make you consider carefully where you buy. The research discovered a vibrant market for frequent-flyer miles on the "dark web", a hidden part of the internet that requires special software to access. On one site, Compartech

found that you could buy 100,000 points for as little as US\$884.

"The type of sites most commonly associated with the dark web are marketplaces where illicit goods such as narcotics, firearms and stolen credit card numbers are bought and sold," says the report's author, Paul Bischoff.

"The darkest corners are used to hire hit men, engage in human trafficking and exchange child pornography."

Bischoff says that if you get caught with stolen airline miles or selling your own miles, the airline can wipe out your account and leave you with nothing. "Airlines can even cancel your bookings if they've found you've broken the terms of service," he says.

A study by Seon, a security consulting company, found any number of travel products

available on the dark web. They included airline tickets, car rentals and, on one forum, tours sold at a 30 per cent discount.

On another forum, customers were "impressed with this seller's ability to deliver flights bought with stolen credit cards," the

study notes. "With over 200 sales, they had only five-star reviews."

The dark web is just one of the places travellers should avoid.

Others include unsecured websites and wireless hotspots designed to collect personal information. Bottom line: online



Exercise caution when connecting to unfamiliar Wi-Fi. Photo: Alamy

security can be as important as physical safety for travellers.

Even visiting a legitimate travel site, you might not be entirely safe. Consider the data breach Marriott disclosed last year, in which hackers accessed its reservation systems over a period of four years and exposed the private information of up to 500 million customers.

Last year also saw a data breach at Cathay Pacific that compromised the personal details of 9.4 million passengers.

How do you know if a company is taking security seriously? One way is to look for the little padlock icon next to the website address on any page where you type in sensitive information, including credit card numbers.

That icon is missing from a lot of travel sites, says Sertigo, a web

security company. It studied major airline, hotel, travel comparison, car rental and train websites and rated them on how effectively they were secured. It flagged the sites for Firefly, SkyWest and Ritz-Carlton for triggering "not secure" warnings, and numerous others for lesser security issues.

"Many major travel brands fail to provide assurance of their sites' security and identity," says Tim Callan, a senior fellow at Sertigo.

But the most common danger to travellers may be the network of wireless hotspots – set up in public places such as airports, convention centres and hotels – that are designed to steal personal information.

"Malicious actors can set up fraudulent Wi-Fi networks and even fake mobile hotspots to

collect and record traffic that connects to them, especially in top destinations," says Matthew Gardiner, a cybersecurity expert at security provider Mimecast.

Avoiding a public network pays off in additional peace of mind, says Chandler Givens, CEO of TrackOff, a provider of data privacy software for consumers.

That brings us to the solutions. You can stay off public hotspots, log into a secure public hotspot such as Boingo, or use a virtual private network (VPN), which offers an extra layer of encryption.

To protect yourself, for example, when at airports or hotels, find out the official Wi-Fi network of the facility from the management, and do not connect to any others," Gardiner says.

"Remember: how the network is named means nothing."