

# HOUSED IN TRADITION: The Palace Museum, a masterclass in ancient architecture and modern preservation techniques

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*In our "Housed in Tradition" series, we explore the Palace Museum in Beijing, a leading example of architectural preservation and restoration.*

BEIJING, BEIJING, CHINA, December 5, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Palace Museum](#) in Beijing is an iconic symbol of Chinese imperial history and architectural excellence. Known as the largest and best-preserved palace complex in the world, the Palace Museum showcases not only China's deep cultural legacy but also a commitment to preservation that spans generations.

Completed in 1420, the Palace Museum, also known as the [Forbidden City](#), remains an architectural masterpiece. With its 600-year history, the palace complex houses some of the world's most well-preserved ancient wooden structures. On a summer day, we met Li Yongge, a master of [ancient architecture](#) restoration, to discuss the meticulous care required to maintain such an extraordinary site.

Accompanied by Li, we toured the Hall of Martial Valor (Wuying Hall), which now serves as the Pottery Gallery. This hall was a focal point of the Palace Museum's conservation efforts, marking the start of a major preservation campaign launched in 2000.

"From 2000 to 2020, the Palace Museum initiated an extensive conservation plan, and this hall was the first pilot project," Li explained. The complex has undergone three significant restoration phases since the founding of the People's Republic of China. The first phase, from the 1950s to the 1970s, focused on repairing buildings along the central axis of the Palace Museum, including significant restoration of the Corner Towers.

"The work in the 1950s and 1960s primarily addressed structural issues in key buildings, such as the northeast and northwest Corner Towers," Li recalls.

By the mid-1970s, preservation efforts escalated, with further restoration projects extending through the 1990s. The work drew on the expertise of skilled craftsmen from Beijing and beyond, with a strong emphasis on maintaining the integrity of ancient structures. Li joined the project in 1975, witnessing firsthand the intense dedication to preserving these invaluable structures.

One key achievement was the completion of the first major restoration of Wuying Hall in 2005. Standing in front of the hall, Li pointed out the subtle changes that most visitors might overlook. "For example, we installed glass behind the old windows to make the space windproof," he said.

As we walked through the complex, Li highlighted one of the challenges in restoring this area: the addition of an "I-shape" corridor during the Qing Dynasty, connecting the front and rear halls. The junction created water leakage problems, particularly during the rainy season. "This was one of the many challenges we faced. It has now been resolved," Li added.

For Li, restoration is not just about physical repairs but about maintaining a continuous dialogue with the past. "The restoration of ancient buildings is like a conversation between our ancestors and us," he noted. "These structures bear the marks of different dynasties—Song, Ming, Qing, and even earlier—each with its own unique characteristics and lessons."

Li's words show a deep understanding of the significance of the Palace Museum and similar architectural treasures. Generation after generation, skilled artisans like him have preserved these historical gems, ensuring they remain relevant for future generations.

As the tour concluded, the ongoing preservation of the Palace Museum was underscored as both a technical achievement and a testament to China's cultural heritage.

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