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Poised for Action

How a New Zealander transformed a dingy Jing'an billiards hall into a neighborhood tai chi center ▶C4

Slow and Steady

A new Jing'an community center hopes to revive the ancient tradition of tai chi

Most residents of Shanghai will be acquainted with the familiar scene of tai chi in the park, with crowds of people slowly moving their limbs in complicated formations. But the newly opened 9 Clouds studio in Jing'an is bringing the martial art back indoors, creating a community hub

where the ancient tradition will be taught alongside other internal arts, including yoga and meditation.

Housed in a beautiful top floor studio, 9 Clouds opened this spring as a business for cultural exchange led by Patrick Kelly, the New Zealand-born founder / director. This is the third not-for-profit studio

Kelly has opened of a similar ilk. Over the course of his 40 years practicing and teaching the art, he established his first studio in New Zealand, and the second in Zurich 20 years later. Now, by opening a space in Shanghai, Kelly is bringing tai chi back to its origins. "We are trying to recapture the old tradition of the Chinese martial

art (or tai chi) as it was taught in the past," he said. Instead of seeking profit, the group's key focus is to give something back to the tai chi and Daoist internal arts, from which Kelly feels he and his students have benefited enormously. They also hope to cultivate a community of people—old and young, foreign and local—in a



Class in session

naturally evolving exchange of culture.

The idea came together last October when Kelly, in his search for a studio, stumbled across a dilapidated former billiards hall. Designer Daniel Saracino transformed the dingy space into an open-plan, industrial style studio, leveraging the natural light flooding through its floor-to-ceiling windows. These days, the spacious 400 square meters consists of four separate teaching spaces, a reception area with tables and tea facilities, and changing rooms at the back. With the exception of the smaller meditation spaces, the rooms are never entirely closed off from the rest of the studio, merely separated by wooden doors. This was a deliberate part of the design; Kelly believes distractions are a natural part of life, and with classes taking place simultaneously, the entire studio becomes dynamic and interactive. This concept mimics 9 Cloud's essential objective: to integrate this myriad of internal arts.

Given 9 Cloud's intention to serve as a cultural exchange, the studio's location couldn't be better. It overlooks the busy intersection where Xiangyang Lu meets Changle Lu, a spot renowned for low-key restaurants that spill onto the sidewalk opposite a cluster of trendy wine and oyster bars. Small lanes peel away from the street, filled with traditional *shikumen* houses and communal courtyards in the shadow of nearby high-rises. The studios' bilingual teachers—invited by Kelly from all over the world—have been busy exploring the neighborhood and meeting the locals living there. Many have already shown an interest in the studio, particularly the idea of practicing tai chi in English. Regular classes take place on a daily basis; when Kelly is in Shanghai, he offers a free class on Sundays at noon. This, he hopes, will



9 Clouds founder
Patrick Kelly (L)

engage more people. A visit to the space one rainy Sunday testified to 9 Clouds' burgeoning community; the studio was filled with people of all ages and nationalities.

Before founding 9 Clouds, Kelly already had ties with Shanghai as he was previously taught by Ma Yueling, a celebrated figure in Shanghai's tai chi community. For

to be made more accessible to help cultivate this interest. He explains that 9 Clouds uses "a type of modern educational approach to a very old and refined traditional art" to encourage learning.

To make sure the studio isn't too restrictive, Kelly encourages other forms of practice, including free meditation sessions, in the space. Several

to avoid that shopping center, Pure Yoga effect," he says, instead taking pains to create a calm, welcoming environment. The space has already received overwhelmingly positive feedback, particularly during a weekend Yogathon in March that brought students and teachers from all over Shanghai. Kelly hopes that tai chi and other practices will be

balanced within the studio as more teachers and students begin using the space; in the short time 9 Clouds has been open, the studio has already begun to organically evolve. "This is a natural process, it should not be forced," he said. A beautiful studio space with

reasonable prices seems hard to beat. But with the added dimension of cultural exchange, 9 Clouds is an inspiring addition to the neighborhood.

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Find it: 4/F, 17 Xiangyang Bei Lu (near Changle Lu), Tel: 181-1622-3766, <http://9clouds.ch>

Kelly believes there is a growing interest among younger people in this historic Chinese tradition

several decades, Ma and other renowned practitioners were unable to teach in schools and the practice became even more of a public event. Kelly believes there is a growing interest among younger people in this historic Chinese tradition. He insists that the art should

yoga classes are already in motion, and plans are forming for dance classes to be introduced later this year. With low rental fees and a deposit scheme, 9 Clouds is an appealing option for teachers, which helps open the community up to a larger spectrum of society. "We try