

David Maguire



# Icon love affair leads to a tribute

**S**o this infectiously vibrant young woman born in east Germany is speaking to a decent sized crowd in a restaurant on the Bund in Shanghai about a book she's just published on a Danish architect responsible for one of the world's great landmarks, the Sydney Opera House.

Katarina Stuebe, 29, was holding forth with poise and grace as she introduced the 200-page large format, hard cover photographic essay and showed genuine interest, when signing copies bought by people who felt at ease just chatting with her. She's that kind of woman.

They admired her passion about a subject — a symbol for a city and a nation with hallmark concrete shells — that fired the considerable effort of publishing her own paean to the late designer called "Jorn Utzon's Sydney Opera House, A Tribute."

The book launch was hosted by Australian Consul General Tom Connor and, truth be known, many of the attendees were probably as passionate about the building as Katarina. But hers was the name on the cover as co-author and hers were the pictures illustrating it inside.

Katarina admits to a love affair with the Opera House which started in 2001 when she moved to Sydney to study architecture and photography. "I fell in love with the Opera House and started taking photographs. I wondered how anyone could possibly ever imagine this complex and unconventional structure in their mind," she said.

"I felt the desire to speak with the architect, to meet with him and ask him about his ideas. I wanted to meet him as an architectural student though, not as a fan."

She spent time "casing" the building, walking around it, absorbing its energy but with no plan about what she wanted to capture in her photographs.

"I allowed the building to reveal itself to me, to show me angles and moods it wanted me to see," she said. "It felt like the building would talk to me and I often just touched the concrete or the tiles and felt this gracious sculpture."

"The questions that rose inside me about the

building and the architect helped bring it to life ... I would try to either capture my questions in a photograph or I would try to capture the answer to the question I had in my head."

Katarina graduated with a Diploma in Architectural Technology in 2003 and continued with life and work, staging a photo exhibition of Sydney people in Mallorca, Spain. But that Opera House was always on her mind. She tried to get in touch with Utzon who by then had left Mallorca and she became busy in the music business managing and photographing bands.

On a visit in 2006 to one of her bands in Denmark, Katarina met the visionary Utzon for the first time. Her inspiration for the book came from this and subsequent meetings when he shared anecdotes about his life and philosophy.

"His approach was always positive — even if something looked bad he would try to find the positive message behind it," she said, aware that the architect had never seen the completed icon building that he started.

"He had his own interpretations of my photographs and what fascinated him was the fact that to him I had captured the music of the building," she added.

## Whirl of media

Katarina, now an accomplished photojournalist, worked on the book for three years with the architect's son, Jan Utzon. It was finally published with their dual bylines in May this year and generated a whirl of media appearances and book talks. Jan's father had died in late 2008.

"The book is a tribute to Jorn Utzon. Since this building is his masterpiece, it is equally a tribute to the Sydney Opera House as well," she said.

She talks of its magnetic powers: "I feel that his spirit is reflected in every pore of the Opera House."

"Having lived and studied in Australia I knew how much Australians loved their Opera House. It is quite rightly the icon of a nation but it is more than that — it is an attraction for millions of people from all over the world each year."

And the China market? "Many Chinese people visit the Opera House every year and share the same love for this Australian icon," she said. "In China the book will be available in stores that carry English books and the aim is to translate it into Chinese later this year."

She is determined that what Utzon achieved with the Sydney Opera House be spread as far as her book will enable. There have been nine book launches in Australia and after the Asia tour she will introduce it in six European cities next month, supported by both Australian and Dutch governments. (It can be ordered (A\$95/US\$79) through the Web page [www.utzonoperahouse.com](http://www.utzonoperahouse.com).)

And then? "To me, art, architecture and photography are directly related to life and our relationships. I like to go deep and show what 'makes us' the structure behind the facade — I have no interest in staying only on the surface." With this considerable project behind her, one thinks we'll be hearing a lot more of Katarina Stuebe.



Katarina Stuebe



# Director alive to new ideas, styles

Vivian Yang

SHANGHAI native Lin Zhele, considered one of China's most promising young contemporary directors, first forged his name at home with an award-winning short film "Fill Kish" in France in 2005 when he was only 22 years old.

"Fill Kish," which cost less than 1,000 yuan (US\$146) to shoot on digital video camera, tells the story of a one-eyed fish who daydreams of killing all the other fish in the aquarium except for his lover.

The short film later earned Lin top prize at the competition hosted by UniFrance — an organization promoting French Films — plus

a trip to the Cannes Film Festival where he met many international and Chinese filmmakers.

Heartened by his triumph in the international film arena, Lin, a graduate of the Film & TV Arts and Technology School of Shanghai University, is now an independent director who has been shooting TV commercials and art-house films.

Some of his popular works include the short animation film "Repanda" (image pictured above) and the subsequent "Panda" series which is making passengers' trips by running on the interactive video screens of tens of thousands of taxis in Shanghai.

**Q: How did you start your filmmaking career?**

**A:** Well, I once majored in advertising at college. But after a year's study, I found myself more interested in filmmaking, so I just shifted my major into directing. I started making short films and mock TV commercials after persuading my father, who is an avid artist, to buy me a 20,000-yuan film camera. Luckily enough, my works were well-received, encouraging me to produce more films. That's how I started my business.

**Q: Did you have any major difficulties in filmmaking in the beginning?**

**A:** No, not really (smiling). I mean, if you're really into something, there are always more solutions than problems. Take myself as an example. In my early years in college when I was still an amateur, I had only a faint idea about how to make a film. One day, I thought I should do odd jobs at film studios where I could learn film techniques and skills. And I did. After years of learning and practicing, I now know most tricks of this trade.

**Q: What quality helps you stand out from your peers?**

**A:** I think a lot of personal characteristics shape who and what you are. I am an enthusiastic, persistent and industrious filmmaker who wants to generate as many pioneering ideas and distinctive styles as possible.

**Q: Name one or two of your favorite works.**

**A:** "Fill Kish" and "Repanda" are definitely two favorites, not only because they are popular, but also for their playful scripts. I spent days and nights drawing inspiration from everyday life to write a script loaded with humor and depth. I think both are most typical of "Lin-style" films I've made till now.



Director Lin Zhele (left), is seen on a filming shoot with his crew.

**Q: Talking about film styles, is there anyone who has been a major influence on you?**

**A:** Stanley Kubrick, who is widely acknowledged as one of the most innovative, influential and intriguing directors in cinema. Often characterized by a formal visual style and meticulous attention to detail, his cinematic approach has had a great influence on my own creations.

**Q: Are you involved in any new projects?**

**A:** Yes. I'm working on "1/3 Heaven," an 80-minute documentary paying tribute to the victims of the Sichuan earthquake last May. With a camera crew, we visited the hardest-hit areas in Sichuan three times over the past couple of months and recorded the stories of two young girls who both lost their families in the quake. Instead of capturing the mournful moments of their lives, we tried to focus on their strong vitality and optimism in the face of catastrophe.

**Q: What would you do if you weren't a director now?**

**A:** Oh, there are lots of things I'd love to try, especially anything involving artistic creativity, such as painting or playing music. I also dream of being a teacher. But all in all, I feel good about what I'm doing now!