

Fresh eggs

Sleep on it Several years ago, an adventurous couple made the news by hiding in a bed shop in Germany until after closing time, so they could test the merchandise “properly”. The police, who were alerted by an alarm, were not amused.

If nothing else, the episode underscores the fact that bed buying is serious business. We spend a third of our lives sleeping, so our beds should be the best we can afford. Shopping for them, however, can cause sleepless nights.

To remove some of the anxiety and help make the decision-making process easier, Okooko recently opened a sleep-trial area, where customers can spend hours testing the beds and mattresses sold by the New Zealand company. Forty winks are actively encouraged in the 400 sq ft kip corner of the 4,000 sq ft Ap Lei Chau shop. Unlike elsewhere in the store, the screened-off slumber zone is carpeted, dimly lit and made to feel cosy with a low ceiling. Stress-busting essential oils also help to bring on the Zzzzs.

To personalise their beds, couples can add or subtract mattress-supporting slats; if he’s much heavier than she, his side can have narrower spaces between the slats so that his half is firmer.

“Fourteen slats give you a soft system, 28 a firm one and medium is somewhere in between,” says managing director Rochelle Le Pine. She adds that the sleep area, which accommodates three beds, has proved so successful that 60 per cent of customers end up buying entire sets, including the



bed base with flexi-slat support, mattress (and overlay if that improves comfort), plus pillows (HK\$800 each), which are available in two styles and two depths.

So just how long are customers invited to snooze at the store? “As long as they want; as long as possible,” says Le Pine. “By lying on a bed for only a minute or two you really don’t get any idea of whether it’s right or wrong for you.”

Better still, customers who have bought Okooko beds (HK\$5,700 to HK\$54,000, depending on size and accessories – which include iPod and Bose music systems and colour-changing LED lights) and mattresses (HK\$15,200 to HK\$21,500) have two weeks to sleep on their purchases. If during that time they want to return them, they can – that in itself should induce worry-free sleep.

Okooko is at 27/F, Horizon Plaza, 2 Lee Wing Street, Ap Lei Chau, tel: 2870 1132. For more details, see www.okooko.com.

Charmaine Chan

Long-distance call

Huang Jiawan revisits her painful past as she chronicles the horrors of the Cultural Revolution, writes **Chelsea Shover**.



“I was among students who had to witness ... teachers, including my father, [being] tortured during the Cultural Revolution,” says Huang Jiawan, an émigré who feels the time is right to commit her personal history to writing.

In 1966, she had been about to go to college but, instead, had to re-enact the Long March with her classmates.

“We left Xiamen and walked to Beijing. We walked for ... over three months. And only one other student and I reached Beijing.”

Then, in 1969, Huang and six siblings were sent to the countryside to be “re-educated”. While there, she married another youth undergoing the process, but he returned to the city. “My two children and I were left in Tongan [on the outskirts of Xiamen] with the work unit,” Huang says. “It was the most difficult time in my life. No one could believe I could live in the countryside with two children.”

In 1977, after eight years of farm labour and with the national higher education entrance examination reinstated, Huang was finally able

to go to college, after which she became a teacher. She met her first Americans, a couple from Baltimore, while she was teaching high school English. The couple helped her move to the United States in 1988. She earned a master’s degree and had various jobs: training real-estate employees in technology, running a mall kiosk, working as a family counsellor and teaching again back on the mainland.

Now living in Baltimore with her daughter and two grandchildren (her two sons remain in Xiamen), Huang is concentrating on chronicling her experiences. She began in English but has since switched languages.

“I could write in Chinese more freely to express my feelings,” she explains. “I posted my writings in my hometown, Xiamen [on a city-based website], and also on a site called Wenxue Cheng [Literature City].”

On the sites, Huang found blogs from other overseas Chinese. “We exchange ideas,” she says. “Although we live in the US, most of our lives were in China. We can never forget it.”

“Most of us left China in the 1980s to come to the US to study. At that time, we had nothing, we had no money with us, we had no family support,” she says, adding that the salaries they left behind were often no more than 100 yuan (HK\$114) per month. “We also tried to work hard and save, and send money back to help our parents [Huang’s father survived the Cultural Revolution and died, in Xiamen, in 1991; her mother in 2006] and our children and our relatives in China.”

“We have been through two difficult times; one [when we were] sent out as youths to the countryside, and the second as we struggled to survive to stay and to build our life [abroad],” she says. “We must write and let the new generation of Chinese people know what we’ve been through – that is my motivation.”

Toast rack

No walk in the park On Tuesday, many of our leaders did their bit for Car-Free Day by taking public transport. Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen walked from Government House to the Central Government Offices, in the process highlighting how close he lives to his place of work; the stroll took about five minutes. If he were serious about doing away with his car whenever feasible (which, given his actions on Tuesday, we are led to believe), why doesn’t he walk in every morning? It would save time and taxpayer-funded

petrol and cut down on pollution – and it’s not as though he’s likely to come to any harm in one of the safest parts of one of the world’s safest cities, now, is it.

“I very much want to,” he says, but he fears he’d be hounded by reporters. “When I walked from Government House, about 50 media people were after me,” he says.

Well, of course they were; it was a publicity stunt. It would have been a hugely unsuccessful one if there had not been reporters present.

If a morning stroll to work became a habit, Tsang would no

doubt have to contend with the odd reporter or two, but what’s wrong with that? A chief with a bit of charisma would use such an opportunity to his advantage and prepare sound bites for a ready audience. Our CE may not be relaxed around the press but talking to them is part and parcel of being a leader. You won’t get the job done by taking the easy way out, Mr Tsang. *Mark Footer*

