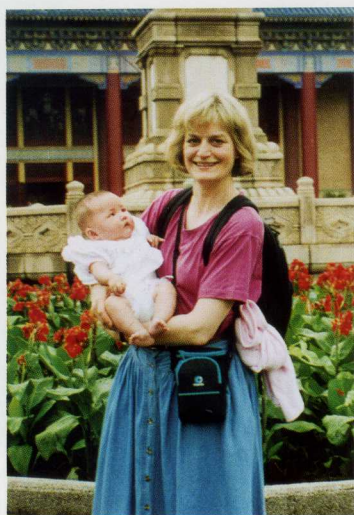


*She was relating to the house in a way that is in her spirit,  
as if she had a special bond with the structure.*

—JAN CLARK, MUSEUM VISITOR, SPEAKING OF HER DAUGHTER CAROLINE

## YIN YU TANG: *an image of home*



A joyous Jan Clark cradles her new daughter, Caroline, in Anhui, China.

In 1997, PEM curator Nancy Berliner returned from China's Anhui province with an idea to relocate the Huang family's ancestral home, Yin Yu Tang, to the Peabody Essex Museum. One year earlier, Jan Clark made a similar 7,500-mile journey to the same mountainous province and returned with her six-month-old adopted daughter, Caroline. In 2003, the Clarks traveled from their home in Pennsylvania to visit Yin Yu Tang, now a central feature of the transformed museum, and discovered the power of imagination in Caroline's search for her cultural roots.

Clark can trace her own lineage to the 1600s. She has visited churches in France in which she knows her ancestors were baptized. Yet, she says, "we don't know anything about my daughter's birth family or background." Visiting Yin Yu Tang, she hoped, would help give her now-eight-year-old daughter a similar sense of connection to her past.

The family visited *Worshipping the Ancestors* first, an exhibition of Chinese ancestor portraits from the Smithsonian. "Caroline walked around saying, 'I wonder if I'm related to him,' and invented a very rich background for herself. She took great pride in the exhibition" and the idea that her own history could include such lofty figures as emperors and dignitaries, Clark says.

Then the family stepped into the courtyard of Yin Yu Tang and the little girl straightened with pride upon entering the house that came from the same part of the world in which she was born. Caroline immediately left her mother's side to explore on her own.

"She discovered all the nooks and crannies

and passageways and then came back to lead me on a tour of *her* house," Clark says. She listened and watched as her daughter led her from room to room. An area of the courtyard near the kitchen seemed especially important to Caroline. "This is where my grandmother sits because she can look out the window," Caroline said, narrating as if Yin Yu Tang were an elaborate stage for playing house. "It was very poignant," says Clark. "Caroline was relating to the house in a way that is in her spirit, as if she had a special bond with the structure. It's not a photograph or a story I've read to her. It's something she can see and touch and experience. She knows it's not her particular past, but it is real."

Having Yin Yu Tang is a treasure, Clark says, and she expects to return often. "It's a very emotional place for me. It's somewhere that I can maybe give my daughter a broader sense of home and of her roots." ■



Jan and Caroline Clark