
BEAUTY

AND THE EAST



New Chinese Architecture

gestalten

DESIGNER J.C. Architecture

PROJECT JCA Living Lab

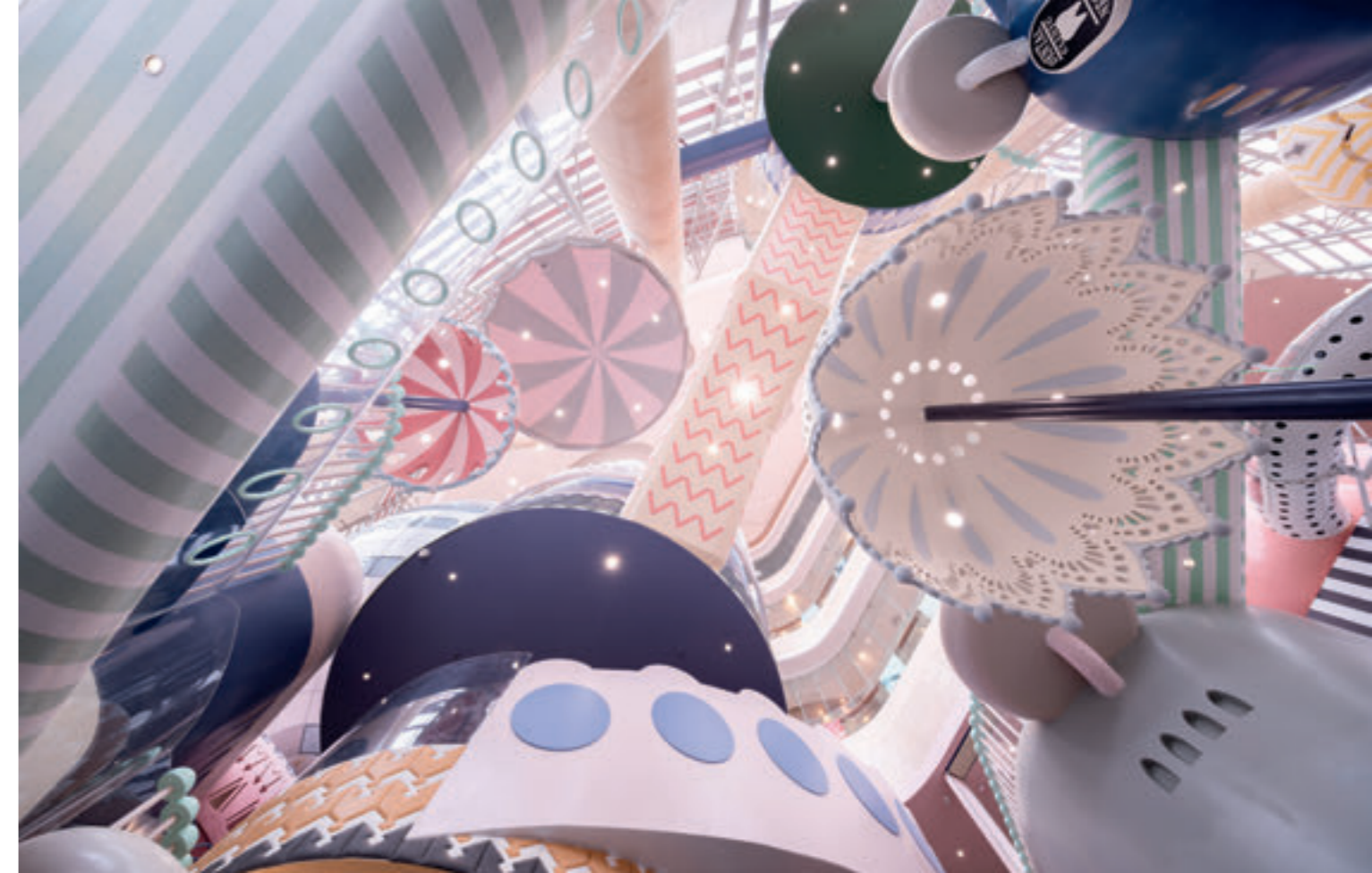
LOCATION Taipei, Taiwan



Old Vibes, New Energy: Adapting Historical Spaces to Suit a Modern Lifestyle

J.C. Architecture found a number of innovative ways to breathe new life into the disparate spaces of this early-twentieth-century, inner-city Taipei residence, which includes university dormitory rooms that were added in the 1950s. The design of the single-story abode, refurbished with a young family in mind, prioritizes the connection between the inside and outside spaces—each room has its own function, but also serves as an area to pass through as you move from one activity to the next. The main bathroom links to the living room, the backyard, and the kitchen-dining area, for example. Overhead, generous skylights allow sunlight to flood the spaces below, while offering welcome glimpses of sky and the verdant garden outside. A wall separates the most private rooms of the house—which also happen to be the oldest—from the more open, public spaces, allowing the architects to maintain a deliberate contrast between the historical and the contemporary elements of their scheme. Old brick walls, wooden-beamed ceilings, and opaque Japanese-style screens are juxtaposed with concrete finishes, wire-mesh structures, and ceramic tiling, and between the two halves, a bright-red front door symbolizes the infusion of new energy into the old. At the rear of the house, a red ladder rises up above the lush planting to the roof, connecting the home to the ground and the sky.





X+LIVING

Despite the pleasure-seeking spaces, it's not all fun and games for this successful Shanghai studio, although the founder clearly has business acumen when it comes to enjoyment.

Playful is used so often to describe the more exuberant works of architects and designers that the word is in very serious danger of losing its significance. With that in mind, referring to the prolific portfolio of Shanghai-based studio X+Living, which includes giant pastel flowers and M.C. Escher-like staircases, the word "playful" is somewhat redundant. And although this interior architecture practice's founder and director Li Xiang is known to enjoy watching her beloved cat attempting to type on her computer keyboard, and most of her projects have a fantasyland quality, an air of complete professionalism dominates.

"Building a studio was not a sudden decision that flashed through my mind" says Li, looking back at life before she established the practice in 2011. She recalls that the projects she was working on at a government-run construction institute were based on conventional concepts and lacked creativity. Li was hankering for more innovation, and the chance to build something she felt was more connected to her values and spirit, "so I quit the job and founded my own studio" she says. X+Living has drawn much attention both at home and abroad thanks to what seems to be a shrewd commitment to the pursuit of architectural adventure and interior pleasure-seeking, and, it has to be said, for the exceptionally visual, photogenic quality of their output.

It is something of a paradox that the projects most demonstrably devoted to user experience, those that are built for children to play in, are X+Living's most articulate and arguably the most



BACK TO THE COUNTRYSIDE: HOW CHINA'S HINTERLANDS ARE BEING REVITALIZED WITH MARKETS, LIBRARIES AND HOTELS

For decades, China's modernization emphasized the growth of urban centers, with the countryside all but left behind. A new movement is rethinking rural areas to be a sustainable and serene contrast to the megacity.

In early February 2020, just before COVID-19 took New York City by storm, an exhibition titled "Countryside: The Future" opened at the Guggenheim Museum in the Upper East Side. Organized in collaboration with Rem Koolhaas and Samir Bantal from AMO—the think tank of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA)—the center-wide exhibition sought to put rural areas around the world at the center of discussions about the global future in the face of urban decay and accelerating climate change. A considerable proportion of the exhibition was dedicated to the Chinese countryside.

Koolhaas is certainly not alone when it comes to being interested in rural China. The early stages of China's modernization project following the reform and opening-up policies of 1978 largely focused on urbanization, but a marked shift in emphasis toward the potential of the country's rural heartlands has been underway for the past few years. However, this state-led rural reconstruction is not aimed at transforming rural villages into analogs of their urban counterparts along the coast. If anything, it is a response to the myriad consequences of China's urban acceleration over the past decades, which range from regional inequalities and soaring real estate prices in cities to environmental pollution and cultural homogenization, and aims to promote a more sustainable way of life as well as a more equitable relationship with nature. As part of this movement, a wave of Chinese architects has enthusiastically brought new projects to the hinterland.

For architect Xu Tiantian of the Beijing-based practice DnA Design and Architecture, innovative rural architecture has the power to help restore rural heritage and activate local economies. In January 2014, DnA began collaborating with Songyang County in southwest Zhejiang Province on what



← The Tofu Factory by DnA is programmed on a linear slope following the river by the Caizhai village entrance.

↑ DnA's Bamboo Pavilion is a resting space in Damushan tea plantation for local tea farmers and tourists.

eventually developed into a comprehensive revitalization plan consisting of more than ten buildings located throughout the county's ancient villages, ranging from heritage museums and village centers to factories.

Adapting to a rural context, the urban design theory of architectural acupuncture, which proposes small-scale



DESIGNER	Atelier Tao+C
PROJECT	Capsule Hotel and Bookstore
LOCATION	Qinglongwu Village, Tonglu, Zhejiang Province



A Dual-Purpose Development Evolves from Building within a Building

Nestled in the ancient village of Qinglongwu, against the mountainous green backdrop of Huaxi Forest Park, this capsule hotel and bookstore is the creative work of Shanghai-based architects Atelier Tao+C. “Creative” is the right word, for almost the only thing that remains of the original structure is the timber-framed shell and its mud walls. Even then, the entire gable wall at the eastern end of the building has been replaced with a transparent structure of wooden frames and corrugated polycarbonate panels to maximize views of the verdant landscape. Inside the building, Atelier Tao+C removed the original floors and partition walls and remodeled the space to house two independent floating volumes inside it. Each of these volumes—one for men and one for women—contains ten identical capsule bedrooms and a shared bathroom. There is a neat balance between the privacy of the accommodation and the openness of the surrounding public spaces. At 4.4 ft (1.35 m) tall, the ceiling height of the sleeping accommodation allows guests only to sit or to lie down but frees up space to split the rest of the space into three floors with staggered walkways and mezzanines. The result is a collection of public spaces with an intriguing mix of treble- and double-height areas connected by thin metal staircases. Zigzagging routes echo mountain paths, and offer spots for meandering, ascending, resting, reading, or simply taking in the view.



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DESIGNER	OPEN Architecture
PROJECT	UCCA Dune Art Museum
LOCATION	Bohai Bay, Qinhuangdao

Striking a Delicate Balance between Nature and Architecture

On a quiet beach along the coast of northern China's Bohai Bay, curious protrusions emerge from the sand dunes. They belong to the UCCA Dune Art Museum, which lies beneath the surface, and comprises a series of curvaceous interconnected spaces that resemble caves. It seems appropriate that visitors to the gallery are invited to appreciate art in the most primal and timeless form of space as they are reminiscent of humankind's earliest "art galleries." The decision to build this subterranean art museum arose from the Beijing-based OPEN Architecture's desire to protect the delicate local dune ecosystem, which has evolved over many thousands of years. According to the architects, the siting of the museum will ensure that the sand dunes will be preserved "instead of being leveled to make space for ocean-view real estate developments, as has happened to many other dunes along the shore." The cavernous spaces include eight interlinked galleries and a cafe. Construction workers in the port city of Qinhuangdao built the rounded concrete shells that make up the museum's structure by hand using formwork molds made primarily from small strips of wood. The architects deliberately retained the irregular and imperfect texture left by the formwork, allowing visitors to see traces of the building's manual construction. And the protrusions? These are funnels and openings that allow natural light to fill the museum's spaces. They also frame different views of the outside world so that museum visitors can observe and appreciate ever-changing views of the sky and the sea throughout the day.

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After two decades of wild experimentation China has found its own unique architectural language that bridges millenia of traditions with a promising future and looks nothing short of amazing.

The transformation of China in the past three decades has been nothing short of spectacular. Now a cultural and economic player on the world stage, its rise has also given air to a new generation of architects and interior designers. China previously looked to the West for architectural references, today they are moulding a new design expression which fuses centuries of local tradition with idealistic design. *Beauty and the East* presents the homegrown talent shaping this new aesthetic that is bound by the surrounding environment. Adopting new methods and techniques, they are pushing design possibilities and influencing the watching world. From cultural institutions to cityscapes, explore the tantalizing world of Chinese architecture and get a window into the world of tomorrow.

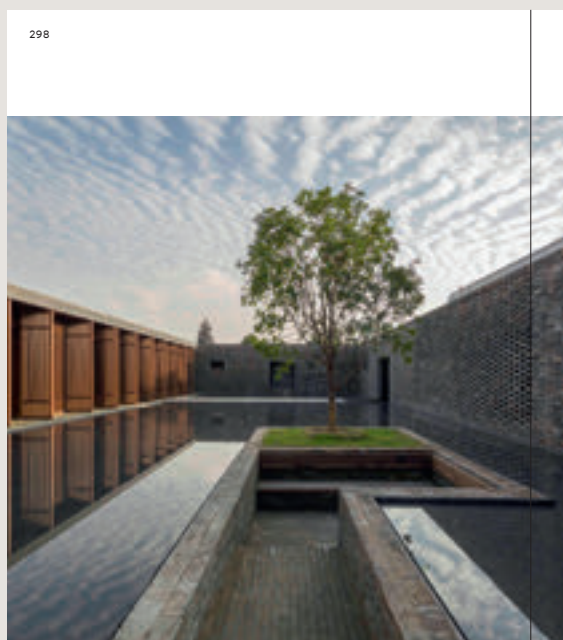
WHAT TO EXPECT

- Inspiring photography of breathtaking architecture structures across mainland China
- An objective, honest analysis of the most exciting Chinese architects working in China
- A deeper understanding of Chinese culture and design identity through the lens of its architecture

NEW



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298



NERI & HU

A husband-and-wife team that achieves synchronicity between architectural, interior, furniture, and even graphic design, buying them time to execute the high standards that they have become known for.

"Contrary to what many people think, that we are extremely strategic, that we have this innate sense of what is going to happen, none of that is true!" exclaims Lyndon Neri as he cozies up beside his wife and business partner Rosanna Hu on the couch. They founded Neri+Hu in 2004 in Shanghai, and are now among the most sought-after architecture and design studios in the city if not in all of China. But despite Neri's glib, witty, and ultimately very confident demeanor, he insists that far from being some genius act of "brilliance," setting up in China and managing to capitalize on an explosion in demand and their own unique cultural identity was merely circumstantial. While Neri was overseeing projects for his then-employer, the office of famed postmodernist New York architect Michael Graves, they found themselves stuck in China due to the SARS epidemic and then decided not to return to the US, where they had begun their careers as architects. Rather than having some sort of foresight or knowing what the future would hold, the young couple was concerned that their children should not lose their grounding in the family's Chinese roots. Whether intentionally business savvy or not, that decision proved to be the right one.