

“Neri&Hu restores a historic Chinese residence in Fuzhou into a public teahouse”

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Neri&Hu restores a historic Chinese residence in Fuzhou into a public teahouse

Shanghai-based Neri&Hu covers 'The Relic Shelter' in rammed earth and copper roof as it creates an enclosure for a Chinese artefact in the old town of Fuzhou.

by Zohra Khan | Published on : Jun 15, 2021

A dilapidated building with no roofs and walls but only a torn wooden structure in the Chinese city of Fuzhou has been restored into a public teahouse by Shanghai-based **Neri&Hu**. Designed as 'a building within a building', this new rammed earth and copper clad structure referred to as 'The Relic Shelter' by its architects keeps the sanctity of its historic identity intact while embracing architecture as a way to shelter it.

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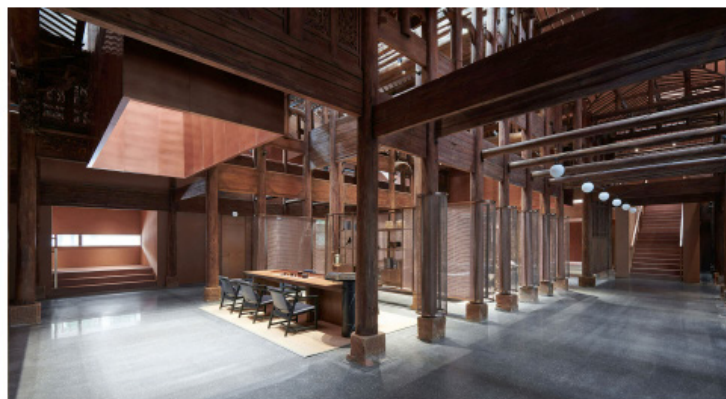
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Façade of the Relic Shelter

Image: Chen Hao

Dating back to the Qing dynasty, the 1800 sqm Hui-style structure formerly hosted the residence of a reputed official, and its architectural features include wooden framed courtyards, ornamental carvings, and intricate joinery. Commissioned to design an enclosure for the Chinese artefact, architects **Rosanna Hu** and **Lyndon Neri** drew from the imagery of a house atop a rock and created 'a modern homage to the traditional earthen dwellings of the region'. In a context populated by cookie-cutter concrete apartments, the building with its rammed earth base and copper clad upper floor stands out with its shiny, irregular roofline. “Conceived as an urban artefact and drawing from the historical roots of the city of Fuzhou”, explain the architects, “the Relic Shelter internalises a piece of distinct heritage at a time when rapid new development has eroded traditional culture and identity”.



The main hall of the teahouse

Image: Chen Hao

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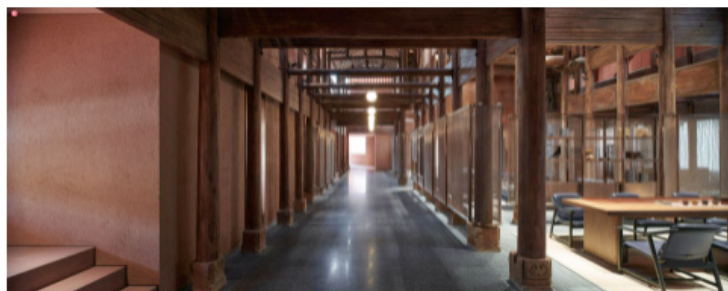
At the entrance, a meandering dark grey terrazzo path criss-crosses the area around a reflecting pool, and it leads to the main double height hall where the former wooden pillars have been restored to give space to a dedicated seating area, copper-meshed screens, penetrating sky wells and open and wide alleys. At every nook and corner, several apertures and inconspicuous openings blur the boundaries between indoor-outdoor space where light filters through these miniature and massive cracks of the structure's skin to create stunning silhouettes and reflections on the exposed wooden surfaces.



The mezzanine floor

Image: Chen Hao

As per the architects, only upon reaching the mezzanine does the structural configuration of the building begin to reveal itself and the grid unfolds to render the complete picture. Moving through this space, one could witness the charm of meticulously carved timber beams and brackets that line pathways transitioning into the various interior spaces. “Wrapping itself around the historical wooden structure, the mezzanine space allows visitors to appreciate intricate carpentry details at eye level,” mention the architects.



Copper mesh screens create privacy within the spaces

Image: Chen Hao



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Adding to the original courtyard configuration of the building, while keeping the new functions in view, the **interiors** reveal a set of open and partially veiled spaces. Copper mesh screens run along the pillared walkways to separate the transition spaces from the seating areas while varying floor heights on the upper level create a sense of visual intimacy.

Apart from the seating areas distributed on the two floors, the building houses a basement level which has a sunken courtyard, various tasting rooms, and a secondary arrival lobby combining a rotunda. “At the top of the rotunda,” explains Neri&Hu, “a carved oculus capped by glass is submerged beneath the pool in the courtyard above. It filters the sun through a thin film of water, creating a mesmerising play of reflections”.

Along the building’s periphery runs ‘a sliver of continuous illumination’ created as a result of elevating the metal roof 50 cm above its base via copper clad trusses.



Fuzhou’s Jinshan Temple documented by John Thomson in 1871

Image: Courtesy of Neri&Hu

As per Neri&Hu, the project has been derived out of a fond imagery of Fuzhou’s Jinshan Temple, resting serenely above a floating rock in China’s Min River, documented by photographer John Thomson in 1871.

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Project Details

Name: Relic Shelter - Fuzhou Teahouse

Location: Fuzhou, China

Client: Yango Group Fuzhou

Gross Area: 1,800 sqm

Architect: Neri&Hu

Partners-in-charge: Lyndon Neri, Rossana Hu

Senior designer-in-charge: Scott Hsu

Design team: Jorik Bais, Yinan Li, Kathy Hu, Fong Huang, James Beadnall, Ivana Li, Jesper Evertsson, Du Shangfang, Bingmiao Li, Evelyn Jiang, Junho Jeon, Ath Supornchai, Haiou Xin, July Huang

Completion: 2021