

“THE CHUAN MALT WHISKY DISTILLERY BY NERI & HU OFFERS A TWIST ON CHINESE TRADITION”

wallpaper*; NOV 2021

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ARCHITECTURE | 1 WEEK AGO | BY YOKO CHOY | PHOTOGRAPHY: CHEN HAO

The Chuan Malt Whisky Distillery by Neri & Hu offers a twist on Chinese tradition

Neri & Hu designs headquarters for The Chuan Malt Whisky Distillery in China's Sichuan province

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When Shanghai-based architecture studio Neri & Hu won Pernod Ricard's competition to design a home for its first whisky distillery in China three years ago, Lyndon Neri and Rossana Hu's vision was to combine the values of an innovative new brand with the cultural heritage of its location. As a result, The Chuan Malt Whisky Distillery, bridges cutting-edge technology with Chinese tradition, set in its idyllic, rural location.

The architectural site, in the Sichuan province, nestles among a meandering creek and terraced fields overlooked by the imposing and spiritual Mount Emei – a stunning Unesco World Heritage Site – and reflects the traditional Chinese philosophy of the interdependence between mountains and water. This not only presents a deep understanding of nature, but also expresses its metaphorical power.

The Chuan Malt Whisky Distillery



The complex itself symbolises this natural formation in many ways. The distillery buildings are a reinvention of everyday traditional Chinese architecture, while the visitor-experience spaces mirror the elements of the terrain. The distillery comprises three long, parallel buildings on the north side of the site, nestling into the slopes, while the roofs are supported by a modern concrete post-and-beam structure. The descending rooftops are made from reclaimed clay tiles to give an effect of permanence.

There are two visitor-experience centres in the complex, which are graced by strong, primary geometric forms – the circle and the square. The ‘circle’, a tasting-experience building, is partly underground, with five subterranean tasting rooms enveloped by a domed courtyard featuring a central cascading water feature. The top of the dome protrudes slightly above the ground, topped by three concentric brick rings evoking the silhouette of Mount Emei. Further down the slope, the ‘square’ restaurant and bar volume is cantilevered on two sides with one corner leaning over the creek.

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The design for The Chuan Malt Whisky Distillery also pays tribute to the site's natural resources. The boulders taken from the ground when the site was levelled have been recycled to provide infill for the rock walls. In addition, other materials – concrete, cement and stone – are a nod to the minerals that can be found on the site. The craft of whisky, appropriately, provides the theme for the interiors, with tools such as copper distillation pots and aged oak casks evoking the rich sensual comforts of the famous spirit. ★



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