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Research on the Environmental Design of Contemporary Chinese Tea Houses from the Perspective of Spatial Narrative (A Case Study of Changzhou)

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in specialty B2 Design

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The qualification work contains the results of one's own research.

The use of ideas, results and texts of other authors must be referenced to the appropriate source.

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Abstract

In recent years,Tea culture, as an important part of traditional Chinese culture[1], the number of teahouses in the Jiangsu–Zhejiang–Shanghai region has continued to grow, while their spatial design has shown a marked tendency toward homogenisation. White walls, dark timber, wooden latticework, dry landscape gardens, suspended tea tables and compositions based on negative space have gradually formed a "generic Eastern" commercial visual template that can be rapidly reproduced. Although such designs may satisfy the demands of social-media communication and brand recognition, they can also reduce regional culture to consumable visual imagery. As a result, they weaken the original characteristics of Jiangnan tea spaces, including the everyday life of literati, the relaxed atmosphere of water towns, the vitality of ordinary urban life and the diverse social functions of tea-drinking spaces.

Taking Changzhou as the site of design practice, this study explores how contemporary teahouses in the Jiangsu–Zhejiang–Shanghai region can move beyond the simple accumulation of traditional symbols and internet-oriented visual production. It investigates how a spatial language with regional relevance and practical social value can be reconstructed under contemporary commercial conditions. In this research, "Jiangnan" is not understood as a fixed collection of formal symbols. Instead, it is regarded as a dynamic cultural structure produced through climate, water systems, the scale of streets and alleys, everyday behaviour, local materials and social relationships.

The research adopts literature analysis, comparative case study, spatial typology analysis, site observation, behavioural observation, supplementary analysis of publicly available online reviews and research through design. It establishes a research path consisting of "historical spatial prototypes, contemporary commercial translation, real user needs, design intervention, reflection and evaluation". The design strategy is developed through six dimensions: street-and-alley relationships, spatial scale, variations in light and shadow, watertown circulation patterns, the temporality of materials and operational mechanisms. Based on these dimensions, the study proposes a composite spatial system consisting of a street-facing shop, transitional alley corridors, a shared tea lounge, a light courtyard, relatively private tea-seating areas and a waterfront interface. This system is intended to accommodate brief stops, light social interaction, solitary rest

and small-scale community cultural activities, rather than functioning merely as a photographic background or a high-end consumption space.

The study argues that the contemporary reinterpretation of Jiangnan regional identity should not rely primarily on traditional patterns or pseudo-historical architectural elements. Instead, it should be reconstructed through spatial relationships, bodily experience, temporal change and everyday use. Teahouses should not be regarded as static cultural exhibits, but as low-pressure social spaces within everyday urban life. At the same time, the design must remain aware of potential problems such as cultural essentialism, the dominance of middle-class aesthetics, the exclusivity of commercial operations and the gentrification of historic districts. Therefore, the reconstruction of regional culture is not merely an aesthetic issue; it also involves the reorganisation of spatial rights, consumption thresholds and local social relationships.

Keywords: contemporary teahouse; Jiangnan culture; regional identity; spatial design; Changzhou; research through design; everyday experience; cultural translation

INTRODUCTION

This study selects Changzhou as the object of design research not in order to construct Changzhou as an abstract “typical Jiangnan city”,Based on the Current State of Contemporary Development of Tea Spaces in the Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shanghai Region[2], but rather to identify its distinctive spatial logic and everyday urban character within the broader cultural foundation of the Jiangnan region. On this basis, the study explores how these local characteristics can be translated into contemporary teahouse spatial design.

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

1.1. Design Problems

Symbolization, Homogenization, and Imbalanced Spatial Experiences

With the rapid expansion of contemporary teahouse design, issues of symbolization and homogenization have become increasingly prominent. First, traditional cultural elements are often employed merely at a superficial, formal level. Many projects use recurring elements—such as wooden latticework, gray bricks, stone, water features, calligraphy, tea sets, and dim lighting—to create an atmosphere of "Eastern aesthetics," yet these elements have very weak connections to the specific site, urban culture, and actual usage patterns. As a result, traditional culture—which is originally rooted in daily life, aesthetic experiences, and social relationships—is reduced to a commercial visual language that can be rapidly replicated.

Second, some teahouses overly prioritize social media visibility, subordinating spatial functionality to image-building. While large feature walls, central water features, ceremonial long tables, and stark contrasts of light and shadow can create visually appealing scenes, they do not necessarily provide a comfortable or flexible environment for extended stays. Issues such as seating dimensions, privacy, acoustics, storage, service flow, and diverse ways of spending time in the space remain inadequately addressed.

Finally, teahouses are showing a trend toward polarization in their functional layouts. One type emphasizes private rooms, high-end spending, and comprehensive tea ceremony services, resulting in closed-off spaces; the other emphasizes openness, photo-oriented consumption, and brief stays, leading to superficial engagement patterns. Between these two extremes lies a middle ground.

1.2. Research Purpose and Significance

Based on the above problems, this study proposes that contemporary teahouse spatial design should move from the reproduction of visual symbols toward the construction of everyday experience; from the imitation of traditional forms toward the extraction of local spatial logic; and from singular aesthetic display toward the support of diverse modes of stay.The history of teahouses dates back thousands of years, and their forms and names have evolved over time. Common terms include "teahouse," "tea gathering," "tea party," and "tea garden." Despite the variety of names, the core function of teahouses has always revolved around drinking tea, fulfilling people's needs for relaxation, socializing, and entertainment.[4] The value of teahouse design in Changzhou should not simply be understood as the representation of a certain "Jiangnan style". Rather, it should be grounded in urban life, canal memory, street-and-lane scale, climatic perception and contemporary tea-drinking behaviour, in order to construct a spatial model with local relevance and practical value.

1.2.1 Research Purpose

This study focuses on contemporary teahouse spaces in the Jiangsu-Zhejiang-Shanghai region, with Changzhou serving as the specific site for design practice. It aims to analyze the developmental characteristics of contemporary teahouses in terms of visual language, spatial organization, usage patterns, and regional cultural

expression, and, based on this analysis, propose design strategies that align with the local context of Changzhou.

Specifically, this study has the following objectives:

First, to review the developmental history of traditional Chinese tea spaces, Jiangnan spatial culture, and contemporary teahouse consumption spaces, in order to elucidate the transformation of teahouses from traditional tea-drinking venues to contemporary multifunctional cultural consumption spaces. Second, through a comparative study of representative teahouse cases in the region, this study analyzes the similarities and differences among current design languages—such as "New Chinese Style," "Eastern Aesthetics," and "Jiangnan Imagery"—in terms of entrances, circulation paths, seating arrangements, materials, lighting, and the use of traditional elements. Third, by integrating Changzhou's urban context, canal culture, street and alley fabric, climatic characteristics, and contemporary lifestyles, this study distills local spatial cues applicable to teahouse design, thereby avoiding the reduction of Jiangnan culture to a mere decorative style.

Finally, this study transforms case studies, spatial observations, field surveys, and theoretical analyses into concrete design strategies, resulting in a contemporary teahouse proposal that balances openness, everyday functionality, light social interaction, moderate solitude, and cultural experience. It explores a design methodology that shifts from a visual-symbol-oriented approach to an experience-oriented one, providing a reference for the renewal of tea culture spaces in this region and similar urban contexts. It should be noted that this study does not involve the large-scale use of.

1.2.2 Theoretical Significance

First, this study expands the analytical dimensions of research on contemporary teahouse spaces. Existing research on teahouses often focuses on the history of tea culture, traditional architectural forms, or expressions of the "New Chinese" style, while paying less attention to teahouses as everyday urban spaces—including their mechanisms of use, modes of entry, patterns of stay, and social relationships. Zen aesthetics, traditionally focused on simplicity, nature, and inner peace, have evolved and found expression in modern society, particularly through tea room design .[1]This study seeks to examine teahouses through the relationships among space, behavior, culture, and the city, viewing them as composite spaces that integrate cultural, commercial, and public attributes.

Second, this study deepens the exploration of contemporary interpretations of Jiangnan regional identity within interior spaces. In the field of design, Jiangnan culture is often simplified into visual symbols such as white walls and black tiles, garden compositions, wooden latticework, and landscape imagery. A tea room is not merely a place to drink tea; it is also regarded as a sanctuary for spiritual

relaxation.[5]his study argues that regional identity should not only be expressed through the reproduction of traditional forms but should also encompass multiple dimensions, including site relationships, spatial scale, the rhythm of movement, transitions between interior and exterior spaces, climatic experiences, the tactile quality of materials, natural light, and everyday social interactions. By transforming Jiangnan regional identity from a stylistic label into a spatial mechanism, this study offers a new perspective on the in-depth transformation of regional culture in interior design.

Third, this study offers a critical supplement to research on "New Chinese-style" commercial spaces. Although "New Chinese-style" design currently wields broad market influence, academic research still needs to further explore its logic of commercial dissemination, the risks of visual homogenization, and the authenticity of its cultural expression. This study does not deny the market value of "New Chinese-style" design but rather seeks to establish a critical perspective.

1.2.3 Practical Significance

This study offers practical significance on four interrelated levels. First, it provides locally relevant strategic references for contemporary teahouse design in Changzhou. Although the city possesses distinctive urban characteristics—including canals, waterfronts, streets and lanes, gardens, industrial and commercial heritage and community life—these features have not yet been fully translated into a recognisable spatial language in many new consumption spaces. By analysing Changzhou's urban context, the study proposes design strategies based on canal docking, street-and-lane transition, courtyard light and shadow, and everyday social interaction, thereby avoiding direct imitation of Suzhou-style gardens or generic East Asian design. Second, the study contributes to the functional optimisation of teahouse spaces by responding to common problems such as enclosed entrances, limited seating, shallow modes of stay and the prioritisation of photographic effects over user experience; it proposes a gradual spatial sequence, a seating system combining sharing and solitude, a street-facing interface for short stays and a multi-layered organisation of privacy, enhancing the adaptability of teahouses to different visiting situations. Third, as small-scale cultural consumption venues, teahouses can play a positive role in urban renewal, the revitalisation of historical districts, community public services and commercial upgrading; by connecting tea spaces with streets, communities, cultural activities and local memory, they can become micro cultural nodes in everyday urban life rather than isolated commercial installations. As a "third place," a teahouse serves to bridge social divides; conversation is the primary activity; it is convenient, easily accessible, and well-equipped; it has regular patrons; it is low-key and understated; the atmosphere is relaxed and pleasant; and it serves as a "home away from home."[6]Finally, the study provides methodological references for the design of similar regional cultural spaces: its design logic of "local cultural extraction, spatial mechanism translation

and contemporary use adaptation" can be applied not only to teahouses in Changzhou, but also to bookstores, restaurants, guesthouses and community cultural spaces in the Jiangsu–Zhejiang–Shanghai region and other cities with rich regional cultural resources.

1.3 Research Status at Home and Abroad

1.3.1 Foreign Research on Tea Spaces and Tea-Drinking Cultural Spaces

Overseas research on tea spaces has primarily focused on Japanese tea rooms, British afternoon tea spaces, comparative studies of East Asian tea cultures, the tea ceremony and bodily experience, and the modern transformation of traditional spaces. Among these, research on Development and Transformation of Japanese Chanoyu SpaceJapanese tea rooms has developed into a relatively mature theoretical framework.[7]These studies emphasize the control of spatial scale, simplicity of materials, ritualized pathways, the relationship between interior and exterior spaces, the interplay of light and shadow, atmosphere, and bodily behavior. A Japanese tea room is not merely a vessel for drinking tea; it is a complete experiential system composed of elements such as the entrance, the roji path, the waiting area, the ninokuchi, the tea room itself, hanging scrolls, floral arrangements, and tea utensils.Research on Japanese tea rooms emphasizes the control of spatial scale, the use of simple materials, and ritualized pathways.[8]

Western research on tea spaces often examines tea culture from perspectives such as consumer culture, colonial trade, cross-cultural exchange, public social life, and everyday history. For example, British tea rooms and afternoon tea culture are often viewed as part of modern urban public life, women's social interactions, class culture, and commercial consumption. Such studies focus on how tea-drinking spaces contribute to the formation of modern urban lifestyles and reveal the relationships between tea drinking and identity, etiquette, gender, class, and public life.

However, Jiangnan spaces are not synonymous with classical garden spaces. Jiangnan culture also encompasses multiple dimensions, such as canal-based commerce, daily life in streets and alleys, neighborhood relations, craft traditions, everyday food culture, and modern urban development. Treating garden imagery as the sole primary source for the design of Jiangnan teahouses may lead to a singular narrative of a "garden-ified Jiangnan" and overlook the individual differences among various Jiangnan cities such as Changzhou, Wuxi, Jiaxing, Shaoxing, and Huzhou.

1.3.2Research on Regionalised Space and Critical Regionalism

Research on regionalised spatial design mainly focuses on how architecture and interior spaces respond to local natural environments, climatic conditions,

material resources, cultural traditions, construction methods and living habits. Related theories argue that regionality is not the narrow reproduction of local symbols, but rather a design position based on site and cultural context. Avoid reducing Jiangnan culture to mere decorative styles and emphasize regional contextual translation.[9]In particular, the theory of critical regionalism emphasises that, under the conditions of globalisation and standardised construction, design should resist placeless international styles while also avoiding the romanticisation, superficialisation and folklorisation of local culture.

In the field of interior design, regionalised research usually involves local materials, the translation of traditional craftsmanship, the extraction of spatial prototypes, the application of regional symbols, climatic adaptability and cultural narratives. In recent years, with the development of urban renewal and cultural consumption spaces, many studies have begun to focus on regional expression in the renovation of old buildings, local brand spaces, guesthouses, restaurants and exhibition spaces.

However, existing studies on regionalisation still have two major limitations. First, some studies understand regionality as the “visual presentation of local elements”, such as the use of local bricks and stones, traditional patterns, folk motifs and historical symbols. They pay insufficient attention to spatial behaviour, site relationships and contemporary lifestyles. Second, the application of regionalisation theory to commercial interior spaces is not yet systematic. In particular, for small-scale spaces such as teahouses, which combine cultural consumption, everyday rest and social experience, there is still a lack of operational spatial models.

Based on regionalisation theory, this study proposes that the locality of contemporary teahouses in Changzhou should be constructed from the following dimensions. First, it should respond to the spatial experience of movement, docking and transition formed by canals and streets. Second, it should respond to Jiangnan climatic conditions such as rain, humidity, soft light and semi-outdoor transitional spaces. Third, it should respond to the relatively everyday and modest urban character of Changzhou, rather than creating an overly spectacular visual landscape. Fourth, it should respond to different intensities of stay, communication and solitude in contemporary urban life. Through these dimensions, locality can be transformed from decorative symbols into a spatial structure that can be perceived and used.

1.3.3Literature Review and Current Research Gaps

In summary, domestic and international research on tea spaces, tea culture, New Chinese-style design, Jiangnan spatial culture, and regionalized design has laid a solid foundation. Overseas research has provided important theoretical references in areas such as tea etiquette, physical experience, sensory environments, and public

life. Domestic research has accumulated substantial achievements in the modern adaptation of traditional cultural elements, teahouse design methodologies, and the spatial expression of the New Chinese style. Research on Jiangnan spatial culture has also provided multidimensional resources for local design, including gardens, streets and alleys, water systems, residential architecture, and daily life. However, several research gaps remain.

First, systematic exploration of the relationship between visual communication and actual usage in contemporary teahouses remains insufficient. While many studies focus on how teahouses create an Eastern atmosphere, few analyze their social media-driven characteristics.

Second, research on teahouse spaces from the perspective of everyday urban life remains insufficient. Existing studies often emphasize tea culture traditions, aesthetic styles, or commercial branding, while paying less attention to the connections between teahouses and the contemporary urban rhythm, short-term stays, low-pressure social interactions, solitude, and community life.

Third, research on Jiangnan teahouses often tends to “landscape” and “symbolize” them. Elements such as white walls, black tiles, courtyards, latticework, and water features are frequently employed, but spatial characteristics of Jiangnan more relevant to contemporary life—such as the scale of streets and alleys, canal docks, semi-outdoor transitional spaces, experiences on rainy days, everyday life, and inter-urban differences—have not been fully explored.

Fourth, research on the design of contemporary teahouses in Changzhou remains insufficient. Although Changzhou is often included in the grand narrative of Jiangnan culture, its canal culture, modern industrial and commercial traditions, historic urban spaces, and contemporary urban life have yet to form a representative research framework for teahouse spatial design.

Fifth, there remains a lack of effective connection between regionalization theory and commercial interior design practice. Existing research often remains at the level of general principles, lacking specific methods that can directly guide floor plans, circulation planning, seating systems, lighting design, material selection, and operational interfaces.

Therefore, using Changzhou as a case study, this research aims to construct an analytical and design framework linking “Jiangnan regional identity—contemporary urban life—teahouse spatial models,” thereby filling the aforementioned research gaps.

1.4 Research Content, Key Points and Difficulties

1.4.1 Research Content

This study, titled “A Study on the Spatial Design of Contemporary Teahouses in the Jiangsu-Zhejiang-Shanghai Region of China: The Case of Changzhou,” primarily covers the following five aspects.

First, theoretical research. This study reviews relevant theories on traditional Chinese tea culture, traditional tea spaces, Jiangnan spatial culture, new commercial spaces in China, localized design, and experience-oriented spatial design to establish the conceptual foundation of this research.

Second, a case study of contemporary teahouses in the Jiangsu-Zhejiang-Shanghai region. Representative contemporary teahouse cases from Changzhou, Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Shanghai were selected for comparative analysis in terms of entrances, functional layout, circulation organization, seating types, materials and colors, lighting environments, traditional elements, brand communication, and local relevance.

Third, a survey of the urban context of Changzhou and teahouse spaces was conducted. Combining Changzhou’s canal culture, street and alley fabric, urban life, climatic characteristics, and the current state of teahouses, this study carried out site analysis, spatial observation, and supplementary analysis of comments on public digital platforms to identify spatial issues in the design of contemporary teahouses in Changzhou that could be further optimized.

Fourth, the formulation of design strategies. Based on theoretical research, case studies, and field investigations, this study proposes design principles for contemporary teahouses in Changzhou, including the transformation of regional characteristics, progressive spatial sequences, the coexistence of openness and privacy, support for everyday lingering, the creation of atmospheres through materials and light and shadow, and the optimization of street-facing facades.

Fifth, design practice and verification. The above strategies are translated into a concrete graduation design scheme. Through the master plan, functional zoning, circulation organisation, spatial nodes, material samples, lighting design and furniture arrangement, the research conclusions are spatialised and preliminarily verified.

1.4.2 Research Focus

The focus of this study mainly includes the following three levels.

First, the contemporary translation of Jiangnan locality. This study does not restrict Jiangnan to gardens, white walls and black tiles or traditional decoration. Instead, it focuses on how spatial experiences such as streets and lanes, canals, docking, semi-outdoor transitional spaces, rainy scenes, soft light, scale transformation and everyday life can enter contemporary teahouse design.Research shows that this emotion-driven design strategy effectively enhances users’

psychological experience, providing them with psychological fulfillment and emotional resonance. Design is not merely a visual presentation; it is a bridge for psychological communication that fosters a deep emotional connection between users and the space.[10]

Second, the optimisation of spatial experience in contemporary teahouses. The study focuses on issues such as entrance accessibility, spatial sequence, seating hierarchy, the relationship between sharing and solitude, service circulation, modes of stay and lighting environment. It explores how teahouses can shift from purely visual consumption spaces toward sustainable everyday cultural spaces.

Third, the relationship between Changzhou's urban characteristics and the design scheme. Taking Changzhou as the core case, the study emphasises that design strategies must be grounded in the specific urban context and site conditions, rather than directly transplanting the formal language of other Jiangnan cities.

1.4.3 Research Difficulties

First, how to define the contemporary meaning of "Jiangnan locality". Jiangnan is a concept with rich historical, geographical and cultural layers, and it can easily be simplified into a visual label. The difficulty of this research lies in selecting spatial elements from the complex culture of Jiangnan that are relevant to teahouse design in Changzhou and translating them into operable design language.

Second, how to balance cultural expression and commercial use. A teahouse is both a cultural space and a business space. Its design needs to express tea culture and locality while also responding to contemporary consumers' needs for staying, service, social interaction, hygiene, operation and cost control. Avoiding excessive artisticisation, excessive ritualisation or excessive commercialisation is an important challenge of this study.

Third, how to avoid mistaking design judgement for user conclusions. Since this study does not conduct large-scale interviews, it cannot use statements such as "users generally need" as direct evidence. Instead, the study needs to propose cautious spatial hypotheses through literature, cases, observation and design logic, while clearly defining the boundaries of the research.

Fourth, how to effectively transform research conclusions into a graduation design. There is often a gap between theoretical research, case analysis and design outcomes. How to translate abstract concepts such as locality, everydayness, light social interaction and gradual spatial sequence into specific plans, circulation, materials, lighting and furniture systems is the practical difficulty of this study.

1.5 Research Methods and Technical Route

1.5.1 Research Methods

This study adopts a combination of qualitative research and research-through-design, emphasising mutual verification among theoretical analysis, case studies, site observation and spatial design.A literature study can be obtained by reading books, journals, and blogs on the internet .[11]

1. Literature Review

Through the review of literature related to tea culture, tea spaces, Jiangnan culture, regional design, critical regionalism, experience design, commercial space design and everyday urban life, the theoretical foundation of the study is established. The literature review mainly serves three purposes: first, to clarify the cultural and spatial characteristics of traditional tea spaces; second, to analyse the constitutive dimensions of Jiangnan locality; and third, to establish an evaluative framework for contemporary teahouse design.

2. Case Comparison

Representative contemporary teahouse cases in the Jiangsu – Zhejiang – Shanghai region are selected and compared according to unified analytical dimensions. The analysis includes project location, entrance mode, spatial scale, plan layout, circulation organisation, seating types, materials and colours, natural and artificial lighting, tea cultural elements, social media communication characteristics and local cultural expression.The purpose of case comparison is not to judge the superiority or inferiority of individual projects, but to identify commonalities, differences and limitations in the spatial organisation and cultural expression of different teahouses, thereby providing references for design practice in Changzhou.

3. On-site Spatial Observation

Non-participatory spatial observation is conducted in selected teahouses in Changzhou. The observation records their street-facing relationship, entrance visibility, seating use, customer stay patterns, service circulation, spatial atmosphere, lighting environment, acoustic environment and photographic behaviour. The results are used to analyse the relationship between spatial layout and actual use.

The observation in this study does not constitute a statistical study of user behaviour, nor is it used to represent all consumer preferences. Rather, it serves as supplementary material for understanding the actual operation of space.

4. Auxiliary Analysis of Digital Platform Comments

Public comments, images and tags related to teahouses in Changzhou are selected from platforms such as Dianping and Xiaohongshu. The study summarises common consumer expressions concerning environment, atmosphere, photography, price, service, quietness, seating, conversation and ritual experience. This method is used to supplement consumer evaluation information that cannot be directly

obtained through on-site observation.It should be clarified that public online comments are selective, subjective and influenced by platform algorithms. Therefore, they cannot be treated as rigorous survey data. In this study, they are regarded as auxiliary digital ethnographic materials rather than substitutes for interviews or questionnaires.

5. Site Investigation

The study analyses the design site in terms of urban location, transportation conditions, surrounding businesses, pedestrian flow, street interface, building conditions, natural lighting, landscape resources and historical-cultural clues. The purpose of site investigation is to translate the macro-level understanding of Jiangnan culture and Changzhou ' s urban characteristics into specific spatial conditions.

CHAPTER 2

RELEVANT PROJECT PRACTICES

2.1Interior Design of Tea Rooms in China

Using the example of a single teahouse, this paper examines optimal solutions for designing the interior space. It proposes incorporating plenty of natural materials into the interior, as well as decor drawing on various Eastern cultures, which will help instill in the visitor's mind a sense of oneness with nature and the universe while enjoying tea.[12]

（1）Name of Project：Maoshan Dingdang Valley

Nestled at the foot of Maoshan Mountain in Jintan District, Changzhou, Jiangsu Province, Maoshan Dingdang Valley sits beside Xinfu Reservoir. Years ago, Jintan had not yet been connected by high-speed rail, so traveling here from Wuhan required transferring to intercity buses in Changzhou or Nanjing.

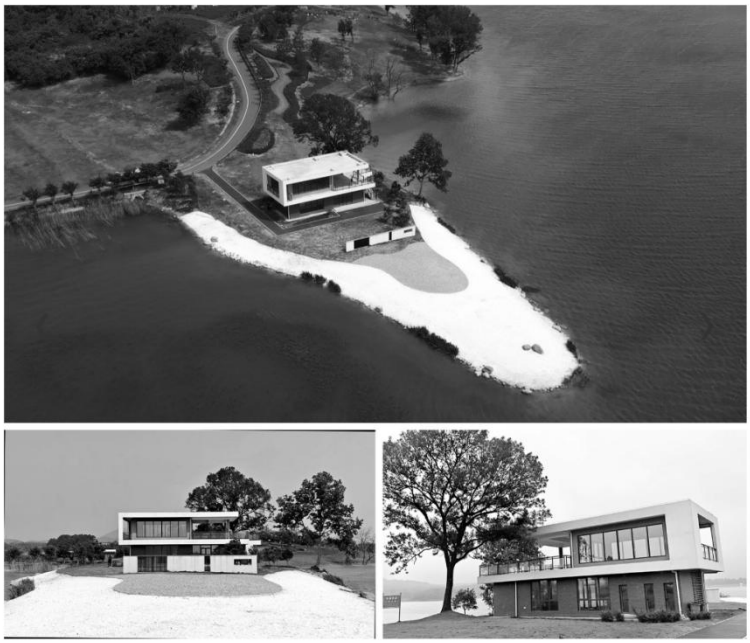


FIG 1 Original Building

https://www.gooood.cn/from-six-square-tearoom-to-maoshan-dingdang-valley-by-uao-design.htm

Design Insights：“Grand Landscape + Intimate Architecture” is more than just a contrast between large and small forms; the design perspective extends beyond the building's property lines, incorporating the mountains on the opposite shore, the lake surface, and the buildings in the view into the design considerations, treating the entire peninsula and the lake as an extension of the architecture. At the same time, the project proposes the **concept of “light architecture”**: moving away from grand narratives to focus on human sensory experience and the genuine needs of users, while balancing commercial operations and cost control. It rejects mere

architectural self-expression and instead pursues public commercial architecture that “empathizes with users.”

Site Strategy: “Adding and Subtracting” from the Existing Site

Additions:

1. Form Transformation: Gourd (Symbolizing Fortune and Prosperity) Design

Echoing the gourd logo of the Maoshan Cloud Travel Festival — which symbolizes “fortune and prosperity”—one corner of the building is raised upward to form the slanted silhouette of a gourd’s spout; the second floor is entirely white, while the first floor features a gray, cement-textured finish, creating a visual effect where the second-floor volume appears to “float.”

2. Opening Up the Facade: Fully Transparent Glass Facade

The lakeside side of the first floor features floor-to-ceiling glass; the second-floor conference room has floor-to-ceiling glass on three sides; viewing terraces were added on the second and third floors to bring the lake views, morning mist, and distant mountains into the interior, eliminating the visual barrier between the interior and the lake.

3. New Curved Ramp + Artificial Grass Slope

A curved ramp was designed to wrap around the site’s native large trees, connecting directly to the second-floor platform; soil was added beneath the ramp to form a grass slope.

- Function: To screen out negative elements on the rear of the building, such as restroom doors and air conditioning units;

- Integration: Harmonizes the building, topography, and native trees, revitalizing the previously unappealing rear facade;

- Details: The ramp railing features simplified vertical balusters, with **colored nylon rope used as safety guardrails** in open sections. This creates a small, high-saturation visual focal point on the white building, echoing the red cottage on the opposite shore of the lake.

4. Creating a View from the Opposite Shore

The existing wooden cabin on the opposite shore of the lake was renovated with the addition of a red pitched roof, creating a point-like red visual anchor against the verdant landscape and lake surface. This incorporates the opposite shore into the project’s landscape system, establishing a visual dialogue across the lake.

Subtraction:

1. Demolish the existing solid retaining wall blocking the lake view to remove the physical barrier between the building and the lake—this is the starting point for the entire project.

2. Downplay the building's ostentatious form, allowing it to serve the natural landscape; all design variations respond to site conditions rather than being a display of technical prowess.

Spatial Layout and Functional Organization：



FIG 2 Elevation

https://www.gooood.cn/from-six-square-tearoom-to-maoshan-dingdang-valley-by-uao-design.htm

The building has a total of three floors (including a rooftop terrace in part of the structure) and was converted from an existing structure:

1. First Floor: Public Coffee Lounge

Completely open to the lake, this space features coffee seating, a bar counter, a kitchen, a takeout counter, and restrooms, with outdoor seating facing the peninsula lawn. Open to visitors, it serves as a space for casual dining and brief stops for photo opportunities.

2. Second Floor: Conference Room + Open-Air Viewing Gallery

The conference room features glass walls on three sides and can be used for team-building and educational activities; an open, column-free viewing gallery encircles the building, offering multi-angle vantage points overlooking the lake.

3. Partial Rooftop Terrace: Panoramic Views of the Lake and Distant Mountains

Outdoor Spaces: The peninsula's white sand beach, large lawn, campground, and water sports dock. The building serves merely as a "micro-architectural" node within the larger landscape, forming a complete experiential chain with the outdoor campground and the water.



FIG 3 Exterior View

https://www.gooood.cn/from-six-square-tearoom-to-maoshan-dingdang-valley-by-uao-design.htm

Materials and Construction Details：

1. Exterior walls： Two coats of white paint on the upper level； a gray cement-textured finish on the lower level；

2. Large floor-to-ceiling glass panels that blur the boundary between interior and exterior；

3. Experiment with homemade fiber-reinforced concrete (for the entrance wall；due to construction constraints, this was modified to precast blocks that were laid and sanded)；

4. Colored nylon rope used as railing on the ramp—low-cost， lightweight， and creating a visual highlight.

（2） Name of Project:POINTViewpoint Tea Room

POINT is a tea-led retail and experience venue on Hanzhong Road, Qinhuai District, Nanjing, serving anarea shared by commercial premises and universities. Its layout draws on two figurative sources-theterraced character of a tea field and the clustered order of a settlement-both expressed through offsetfloor levels that open up sightlines and lengthen the visitor's route. Compared with tea shops organisedprimarily for sales, the project relies on spatial configuration to convey brand identity and distributes social use throughout the plan.

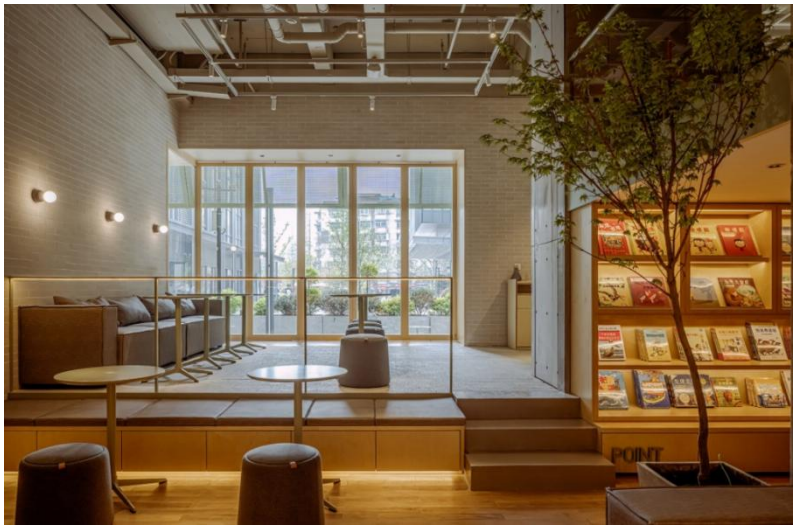


FIG 4 Indoor space overview

https://www.gooood.cn/point-tea-china-by-triostudio.htm

Design Concept: The Image of Tea Fields and Settlement Spaces

1. The “Tea Field” Image: Rather than directly replicating traditional Jiangnan garden symbols, the design draws inspiration from the terraced, undulating topography of tea fields. Through variations in ceiling heights, split-level layouts, and stepped platforms, the layered texture of tea gardens is translated into the interior space, creating a sense of undulating movement.

2. “Settlement” Layout: Mimicking the layout of a village settlement, the space is divided into multiple small areas of varying sizes that are relatively independent yet interconnected, rather than the traditional open-plan layout or enclosed private booths found in conventional tea houses.

Objective: To move beyond the traditional model of tea shops focused solely on retail sales and establish a diverse, social urban public teahouse that accommodates various ways of spending time—from solitary meditation to one-on-one conversations to group reading sessions.

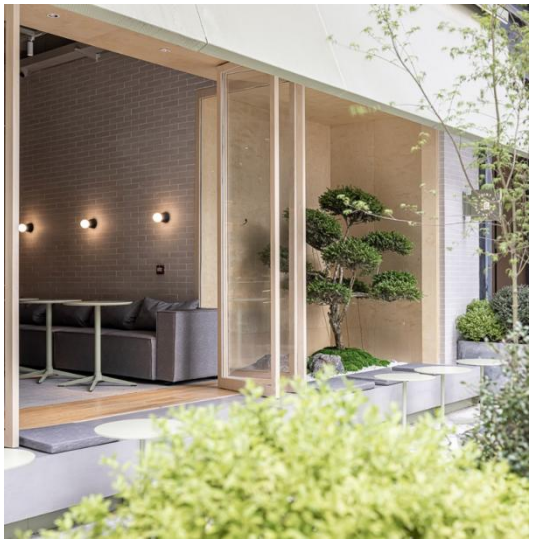


FIG 5 Outdoor courtyard design

https://www.gooood.cn/point-tea-china-by-triostudio.htm

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Objective: To move beyond the traditional model of tea shops focused solely on retail sales and establish a diverse, social urban public teahouse that accommodates various ways of spending time—from solitary meditation to one-on-one conversations to group reading sessions.Emptiness is not merely a physical absence; it is a deliberate design choice—simplifying the space to foster tranquility and clarity. In tea room design, emptiness is expressed through minimalist layouts and restrained decoration, allowing the mind to focus on stillness and reflection.[13]



FIG 6 the bar at the entrance

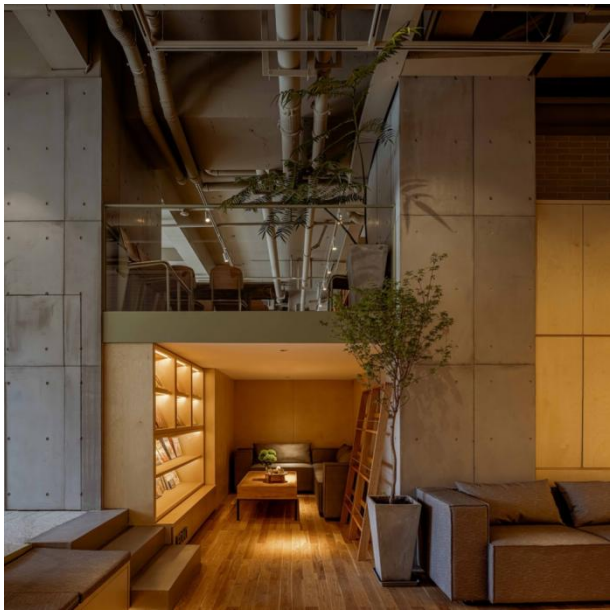


FIG 7 Interior furnishing details

https://www.gooood.cn/point-tea-china-by-triostudio.htm

Spatial Layout: A Multi-Level, Multi-Elevation Three-Dimensional Complex

Given the site's high ceiling height, the design avoids creating a simple, solid mezzanine level. Instead, it employs a strategy of fragmented, staggered levels and multi-elevation platforms to delineate the following zones: an outdoor seating area, a first-floor casual seating area, transitional resting terraces, a sunken semi-private area, and a second-floor salon, reading, and activity area.By carefully designing the visual effects of the space, the tea room not only achieves aesthetic harmony but also enhances users' psychological enjoyment and spatial experience.[14]

1. First Floor: Entrance bar, retail display area, and open seating; steps and low platforms segment the floor, creating "tea terrace"-like variations in elevation; transitional resting platforms are added around the staircase, transforming circulation spaces into places where people can sit and linger, thereby improving space utilization.

2. Semi-basement / Sunken Corner: Low-ceilinged and offering a stronger sense of enclosure, this area is ideal for quiet seating for individuals or small groups.

3. Second-Floor Mezzanine: A salon and reading area suitable for book clubs and small-scale sharing events.

Key Features: There are no completely partitioned rooms; spaces are visually connected yet maintain a sense of distinct zones; a single space simultaneously offers open, semi-open, and semi-private seating arrangements, catering to the varying needs of "progressive lingering" (brief check-ins, casual socializing, solitude, and group activities).

（3） Name of Project:Wujie Xixi Tea House

Set in Xixi National Wetland Park to the west of central Hangzhou, Wujie Tea House occupies a site whosecharacter derives less from a single landscape feature than from the overlap of several. Urban wetland,agricultural wetland and cultural wetland are present simultaneously, the first produced by the city'soutward growth, the second by generations of farming and fish-rearing, the third by temples, gardens anda long record of literary visitation. The terrain itself is fragmented: channels curve and double back, wateris divided into narrow strips of land, and views are repeatedly interrupted by embankments andvegetation. These conditions establish the spatial logic to which the tea house responds.



FIG 8 project overview

https://www.gooood.cn/boundless-tea-house-china-by-atdesign.htm

Design Background and Core Concept：

Before the renovation, the site was a closed-off, dimly lit traditional Jiangnan courtyard residence with thick walls, poor natural lighting, and an interior completely isolated from the surrounding wetland landscape.

The designer proposed the concept of “Boundlessness”—not by removing physical walls, but by dissolving psychological boundaries:

1. Architectural Boundaries: The interior and the wetland landscape interpenetrate;

2. Temporal Boundaries: By preserving the traditional wooden framework and layering it with modern glass and minimalist white walls, a dialogue between the old and the new is achieved;

3. Experiential Boundaries: Tea tasting, meetings, sightseeing, and quiet reflection blend together, breaking away from the tea room’s single-purpose function of merely serving tea.

Design Concept: “A place where visitors interpret the landscape”—the landscape is no longer merely a backdrop outside the window; it actively

participates in the spatial narrative, allowing visitors to interpret the scenery and experience the atmosphere of the space.



FIG 9 exterior view

https://www.gooood.cn/boundless-tea-house-china-by-atdesign.htm

Site and Architectural Strategy: Courtyard Renovation That Harmonizes the Old and the New

The site is a multi-courtyard Jiangnan-style compound. The historical framework—including the original wooden beam structure, pitched roofs, and blue-brick walls—is preserved through a "subtractive renovation"*approach that avoids damaging the existing building structure. Instead, new elements are added to reconfigure the spatial interfaces:

1. Inserting Glass Boxes: Transparent, all-glass cubes are inserted into the interior of the traditional courtyard. Glass serves as an "invisible boundary"—physically dividing spaces while visually connecting them seamlessly. From inside, the trees, water surfaces, and courtyards of the Xixi Wetland are all framed within the view, creating a Zen-like atmosphere where the real and the abstract intertwine.

2. Interface Separation Technique: Deliberate gaps are left between traditional wooden columns, white walls, and glass curtain walls—they do not fit together perfectly—creating a "beauty of distance." The old structure represents history, while the glass embodies the contemporary; the two coexist in dialogue without overshadowing one another.

3. A Progressive Pathway Through the Courtyard, Foyer, and Tea Rooms: The journey begins in the ancient brick courtyard outside, leads into the glass foyer, and then branches off into various themed tea rooms, forming a complete narrative sequence. The entrance path, paved with gravel and stone stepping stones, guides visitors slowly inward, slowing their pace and facilitating an emotional transition from the hustle and bustle of the outside world to the tranquility of the tea rooms.



FIG 10 the public reception area 1



FIG 11 the public reception area 2

https://www.gooood.cn/boundless-tea-house-china-by-atdesign.htm

Spatial Layout: Multi-Themed, Distinctive Tea Spaces：

The overall design adopts a cluster of courtyards model. Rather than creating a single large space, it is divided into multiple independent tea rooms, a public foyer, a large conference space, and a dining area. Each room corresponds to a dedicated outdoor landscape(bamboo grove, pond, or ancient courtyard), ensuring that each room features its own unique view.Emptiness is not merely a physical absence; it is a deliberate design choice—simplifying the space to foster tranquility and clarity. In tea room design, emptiness is expressed through minimalist layouts and restrained decoration, allowing the mind to focus on stillness and reflection.[15]

1. Central Foyer (Narrative Core)

This glass-enclosed inner courtyard features a miniature kare-sansui landscape that echoes the expansive scenery of the Xixi Wetlands outside. Natural dried branches hang from the ceiling, and lighting projects their shadows onto the white walls—using light and shadow to create a landscape that “translates” the aesthetic

of the outdoor trees into the interior. The latticework of the tea display cabinets subtly resembles the traditional Chinese character for “無” (wu), echoing the project’s “Boundless” theme.

2. Landscape Tea Rooms (Private Suites)

The various tea rooms face bamboo groves, ponds, and the inner courtyard, featuring expansive floor-to-ceiling glass that minimizes the visual presence of window frames. Some rooms accommodate kneeling on the floor, while others feature traditional tea tables, offering diverse ways to enjoy tea.

3. Multifunctional Meeting / Dining Space

Large glass walls open directly onto the bamboo grove and wetlands, immersing meetings and banquets in a natural landscape. This expands the functional boundaries of the tea house, accommodating forums, team-building events, and banquets—going beyond the traditional social context of tea tasting.



FIG 12 the landscape tea space

https://www.gooood.cn/boundless-tea-house-china-by-atdesign.htm

Tea viewing makes the meeting a pleasant thing, blurring the boundaries of the rules, and making thinking more efficient and meaningful.By incorporating natural light, scenic views, and indoor plants, the designers have created spaces that reflect the changing seasons and foster a sense of balance. This design philosophy not only promotes visual harmony but also supports emotional and mental well-being, with spaces designed to reflect the tranquility found in nature.[16]



FIG 13 the tea space surrounded by a bamboo forest

https://www.gooood.cn/boundless-tea-house-china-by-atdesign.htm



FIG 14 interior detailed view

https://www.gooood.cn/boundless-tea-house-china-by-atdesign.htm

Materials, Lighting, and Atmosphere Creation

Preserving Original Materials: Original dark wooden beams and columns, along with aged blue-gray bricks, carry forward the historical texture of traditional Jiangnan dwellings;

Incorporating Modern Materials: Ultra-clear glass, plain white latex paint, and terrazzo; the direct juxtaposition of old and new materials avoids forced antiquity;

Lighting Strategy: Make full use of natural light, with the shadows of trees and bamboo filtering through the glass onto the interior walls and floorsFor instance, the natural lighting, quiet environment, and intricate decorations of the tea room

collectively foster a sense of peace;[17]pair this with indirect ambient lighting strips to enhance a sense of tranquility and Zen-like serenity; intentionally leave spaces empty, minimize ornate decorations, and rely on natural light and shadows to evoke the desired mood within the space.

2.2 Tea House Interior Design Abroad

（1）Name of Project: Chi Ban Tea House

This scheme takes an existing house of approximately twenty-five years as the basis for a teahouse. Thebuilding occupies a riverfront plot along the Kamo in Kyoto, near Gojo Bridge, where the relationshipbetween interior and water governs both the orientation of the rooms and the treatment of the openingonto the river.



FIG 15 overall of the project

https://www.gooood.cn/ikehan-by-koyori-atelier-salt.htm

On the ground floor, daylight is deliberately restricted: the openings were narrowed rather than enlarged,and the room is consequently introverted in character. This decision, made in response to the client's wishfor a space of concentrated attention, subordinates the riverside outlook to the internal conditions of the tea ceremony-an inversion of the usual priority given to waterfront views.The result is a design that is both practical and aesthetically pleasing, rooted in minimalism.[18]The second floor adopts the opposite position. Its eastern face is opened to the river and to theHigashiyama landscape, so that the compressed, top-lit character of the ground floor gives way to anoutward, panoramic condition. The compactness of the plan is instrumental here-the ascent is short, andthe reversal is therefore experienced as an abrupt transition rather than a gradual one.



FIG 16 Second-floor private dining room 1

https://www.gooood.cn/ikehan-by-koyori-atelier-salt.htm

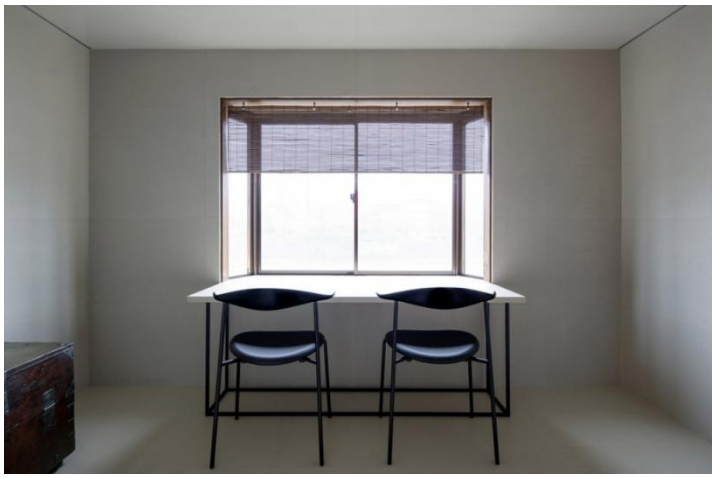


FIG 17 Second-floor private dining room 2

https://www.gooood.cn/ikehan-by-koyori-atelier-salt.htm

Despite the opposition between the two floors, the interior is not experienced as divided. Japanese paperand lime plaster are used throughout, and their plainness provides a constant against which the differencein openness can register. The stair is the instrument of this reconciliation: functioning as a vertical openingrather than merely a means of circulation, it transmits air, daylight and material continuity between levels,binding the enclosed lower room to the outward-facing space above.

(2) Name of Project: Renovation of the Boa Nova Tea House.



FIG 18 Project Overview

https://www.gooood.cn/boa-nova-tea-house.htm

The building resulted from a 1956 competition won by Fernando Tavora, who fixed the site on the cliffs atLeca da Palmeira before transferring the work to Alvaro Siza. It was among Siza's earliest realisedbuildings, and it was made in a landscape he had known since childhood. What distinguishes the project isthe method rather than the form: rock, tide, wind, vegetation and the descent from the road weresurveyed and then absorbed into the plan, so that the building neither sits upon the site nor is concealedby it. Seen alongside the Kyoto teahouse, the contrast is instructive-where the Japanese project regulatesthe landscape through the calibration of openings, Boa Nova negotiates with it at the level of section and ground.By incorporating natural materials and emphasizing harmony with nature, this approach has profoundly influenced spatial design. At the heart of this approach is the use of materials such as wood, stone, and organic fabrics, which foster a connection with the environment and promote balance. [19]



FIG 19 Building Exterior

https://www.gooood.cn/boa-nova-tea-house.htm

The palette is deliberately varied rather than reduced. Masonry is rendered and whitewashed; concrete isexposed only where the columns address the Atlantic elevation; timber-afzelia, red-brown and close-grained-is carried across walls, ceilings, window frames and built -in furniture, so that the interior reads asa single continuous lining set within a masonry shell. The eaves extend this logic outwards, their soffitsboarded in timber and trimmed in copper, so that the material encountered inside is also that seen frombeneath the overhang. The roof is layered accordingly: terracotta tiles above, concrete slab between， suspended timber below.The Boa Nova was now fully restored, with all of its original characteristics being preserved. It was now possible to recover the roof, interior and exterior woods, the windows and doors frames and also the exposed concrete. Even the original furniture designed by Siza was reproduced according to the original designs of the time and using the materials originally planned.



FIG 20 Building Exterior

https://www.gooood.cn/boa-nova-tea-house.htm

(3) Name of Project: Tea Room in the Sky



FIG 21 external view of the teahouse in the roof garden

https://www.gooood.cn/vancouver-teahouse-by-kengo-kuma-associates.htm

The pavilion occupies a roof garden above the city. Four thin steel columns carry the roof, leaving theperimeter free of structural walls; the enclosure is formed instead by glass and by partitions that can bemoved or removed. The resulting room is small-about ten square metres.



FIG 22 Exterior of the Tea Room

https://www.gooood.cn/vancouver-teahouse-by-kengo-kuma-associates.htm

Because the enclosure consists only of glass and adjustable screens, the long view is retained from insidethe room. The floor does not stop at this boundary but carries outward as a perimeter veranda, and thetea garden lies immediately beyond. A path of stone slabs crosses the garden, and the sequence itestablishes is the essential device here: the visitor is not admitted directly but is made to traverse anintermediate zone first. Seclusion is produced by the length of the approach rather than by any solid barrier.

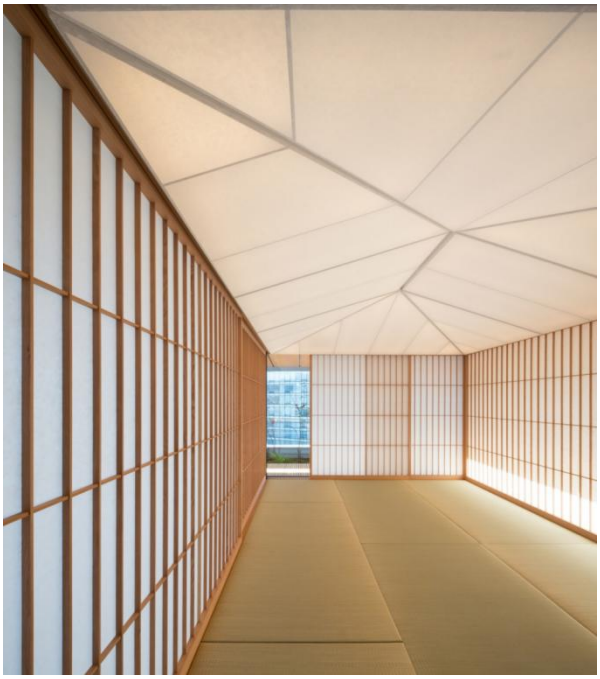


FIG 23 interior of the teahouse

https://www.gooood.cn/vancouver-teahouse-by-kengo-kuma-associates.htm

Removing the tatami in the middle of the teahouse, people could open the floor slab and put in their feet to seat around the table, organizing a meeting or other events.The simplicity of the layout emphasizes minimalist design principles, focusing on the removal of unnecessary elements and the use of negative space. This negative space requires careful arrangement of objects to create a balanced and spacious layout. It not only meets functional needs but also provides psychological space for contemplation and imagination.[20]

(4) Name of Project: Deulkkotsoop Coffee (Fields, Flowers, Forest)



FIG 24 Architecture and the landscape of the land

The premise was simple: the site did not need improving. It had been left alone long enough toaccumulate the usual evidence of abandonment, yet its topography, vegetation and edges remainedcoherent, and any building placed here would either

respect that coherence or interrupt it. We chose tokeep the volume to a single storey and to let it extend horizontally, so that its silhouette would sit belowthe existing tree line and no part of the structure would rise into the longer views across the site. Massingwas distributed rather than concentrated; the building steps back at the points where the ground is mostlegible. The intention throughout was that the place should register first, and the architecture only on second reading.



FIG 25 Top views

https://www.gooood.cn/deulkkotsoop-by-mtt.htm

The property occupies 18,409 square metres in Yangji-ri, Bongsan-myeon, Damyang. Some two thirds of itis protected green land and cannot be built upon, and the remainder had for years been given over to thestorage of derelict equipment, construction debris and waste. The Yeongsan River lies just beyond theroad at the site's frontage, but the levee interrupts every sightline towards it; the river is audible andadjacent, and invisible. The client's brief began from this fact, proposing two or three storeys so that thewater might be brought back into view. The building as designed does the opposite, and the reasons for that reversal are set out below.



FIG 26 Closer views of the building

https://www.gooood.cn/deulkkotsoop-by-mtt.htm

The governing decision was to spread rather than to stack. A low plan following the perimeter of thebuildable ground turns on itself and encloses a courtyard, and it is this courtyard, not the river, thatbecomes the building's principal outlook. The distant view was given up deliberately: reaching over thelevee would have required lifting the whole volume above the tree line, and what it would have purchased-a strip of embankment and water-did not seem worth the cost. Five volumes are arranged along theperimeter, differing in proportion and height so that each addresses a different part of the surroundings.The sequence of views is therefore lateral and near rather than distant: courtyard, field, woodland, interioragain. Section and daylight carry the variation; materials and detailing are held constant, so that five rooms are read as one building.



FIG 27 Interior spaces oriented toward nature

https://www.gooood.cn/deulkkotsoop-by-mtt.htm



FIG 28 Seating areas

https://www.gooood.cn/deulkkotsoop-by-mtt.htm

Deulkkotsoop was not complete at opening, nor was it meant to be. The planting was young, thecourtyard bare, and the intervals between the five volumes still read as gaps rather than as rooms. Theseconditions will resolve slowly: the trees will eventually reach the eaves line, the meadow will establish itselfacross the cleared ground, and the courtyard-whose enclosure the building only half provides-will beclosed by growth rather than by construction. The architecture was designed as the fixed term in thisprocess, deliberately restrained in material and detail so that seasonal change would register against it.What has been built is a condition for that change, and the place itself will be finished by the planting, byits occupants, and by the passage of years.

Chapter 2 Conclusion

A review of typical tea house cases both domestically and internationally reveals that contemporary tea house design has moved beyond the single function of traditional tea tasting and the simple replication of classical symbols. In domestic practice, Maoshan Dingdang Valley adheres to the concept of “light architecture,” using the “addition and subtraction” of the site to dissolve the boundaries between the building and the lake view, thereby balancing the landscape experience, commercial operations, and construction costs; The POINT Tea House in Nanjing draws inspiration from tea fields and settlement patterns, using a staggered, three-dimensional layout to create diverse social settings; the Boundless Xixi Tea House in Hangzhou repurposes a traditional Jiangnan courtyard, blending old and new materials to dissolve multiple boundaries and integrate the natural landscape into the spatial narrative. International examples similarly emphasize architecture ’ s response to its site: Japan focuses on contrasts between light and shadow and simple, The play of light and shadow in a tea room is typically achieved through carefully designed lighting fixtures and the arrangement of light sources.[21]natural materials to create the atmosphere of a tea house, while projects in Portugal, Canada, and South Korea integrate with coastal, urban rooftop, and rural sites, respectively, adopting understated and expansive architectural forms that respect the native environment. Overall, modern tea houses generally prioritize the dissolution of boundaries, multifunctionality, and adaptation to regional contexts, balancing natural experiences with diverse social needs.

CHAPTER 3

SPATIAL REGENERATION DESIGN OF THE CHANGZHOU DAMING COTTON MILL INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THEMED TRAILS

3.1 Project Status

The project is located in the Qingguo Alley Historic District in Changzhou. As a key hub for canal trade and the culture of the literati and gentry in Changzhou since the Ming and Qing dynasties, Qingguo Alley features the typical street fabric of the Jiangnan region, a riverside setting, deep courtyards, and the atmosphere of everyday urban life. The team has completed on-site observations and documentation of Qingguo Alley's street scale, relationship with the water system, variations in light and shadow, use of materials, and pedestrian behavior. Supplemented by an analysis of public online comments, the team has identified six dimensions of place-specific character that can be translated into the design: street relationships, spatial scale, variations in light and shadow, watertown circulation patterns, the temporality of materials, and operational mechanisms.

Based on the above dimensions, the project is building a complex space system, including six levels: street-facing storefront - transitional corridor - shared teahouse - light courtyard - semi-private teahouse - riverside interface. It is designed to accommodate multiple use modes such as short stops, light social interaction, solitary rest and small community cultural activities, and respond to the daily needs of Qingguo Lane as a living historical district.

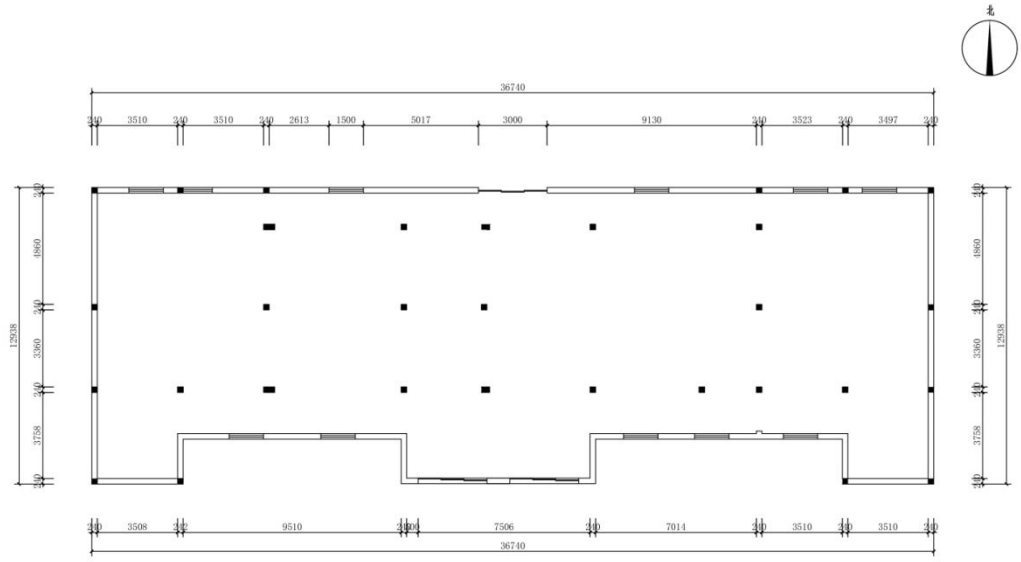


FIG 29 Original structure of Building　　1 : 120　(Author's self drawn)

3.2 Existing Issues

（1） The Tension Between Commercialization and the Loss of Local Character in Historic Districts

Since its renovation and reopening, Qingguo Alley has become an important cultural and tourist destination in Changzhou; however, the commercial establishments within the district show a marked tendency toward homogenization. A large number of shops employ convergent visual languages such as “ New Chinese Style,” “Chinese Trend,” and “Jiangnan Imagery,” reducing Qingguo Alley’ s original atmosphere of everyday life, the culture of gentry residences, and the memories of canal trade to a rapidly replicable consumer landscape. The neighborhood is at risk of slipping from a “living historic district” into a “cultural tourism check-in spot.”

（2） Imbalance Between the Scale of the Alleys and Commercial Facades

Qingguo Alley ’ s original spatial characteristics — narrow alleys, deep courtyards, and small riverfront wharves—possess a unique charm in their scale. However, some newly established businesses have failed to fully respect the original fabric of the area, resulting in issues such as excessively open storefronts, out-of-proportion signage, and a disconnect between interior and exterior spaces. These issues have weakened the rhythm of pedestrian movement and the spatial layering of the alleyways.

（3）Superficial Use of Traditional Cultural Symbols

Existing teahouses in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shanghai commonly use elements such as wooden latticework, folding screens, gray bricks, dry landscape gardens, suspended tea tables, and blank background walls as a generic formula for “Eastern aesthetics.” These elements have weak connections to the specific site, urban culture, and actual usage patterns, reducing traditional culture to a mass-reproducible commercial visual language.

（4）Spatial Function Subordinated to Visual Production

Some teahouses excessively prioritize social media visibility, featuring highly visual elements such as large feature walls, central water features, and ceremonial-style long tables. However, they exhibit significant shortcomings in practical functional aspects, including seating dimensions, privacy, acoustic environments, storage, accessibility, and diverse ways of spending time in the space.

（5） The Dissolution of Urban Diversity Under the “Generic Jiangnan” Narrative

Jiangnan cities such as Changzhou, Suzhou, Wuxi, Jiaxing, and Shaoxing each possess unique cultural textures. However, in contemporary teahouse design, these are generally subsumed under broad labels such as “New Chinese Style,” “Song Dynasty Aesthetics,” and “Eastern Zen,” resulting in the absence of Changzhou’s local canal culture, modern industrial and commercial heritage, and the distinctive features of its old city streets and alleys within teahouse spaces.

3.3 Technical roadmap

（1）SWOT

	Opportunities (O)	Threats (T)
Strengths (S)	**SO Strategy (Growth-Oriented)** Leverage the cultural resources of Qingguo Lane and the strengths of the research methodology, align with the Grand Canal National Cultural Park initiative and urban regeneration policies, and develop an exemplary teahouse project characterised by academic depth and locally grounded cultural richness.	**ST Strategy (Diversification-Oriented)** Draw on rigorous locality-based research and a critical design position to counter the "generic Jiangnan" commercial template, and establish differentiated competitiveness through the distinctiveness of spatial mechanisms.
Weaknesses (W)	**WO Strategy (Turnaround-Oriented)** Capitalise on the transformation of New Chinese-style tea consumption and the growing demand for "third places" to position the project as an "intermediate teahouse" that fills a gap in the current market, while compensating for the limitations of user data through research-through-design methods.	**WT Strategy (Defensive)** Acknowledge the pressures of district commercialisation and the limitations of user research, and mitigate the risks of gentrification and commercial failure through reflective design mechanisms, flexible operational strategies and a community-friendly positioning.

（5）Design Strategy

Based on field investigation of the Qingguo Lane historic district, typological analysis of contemporary teahouse cases across the Jiangsu–Zhejiang–Shanghai region, and theoretical research on traditional tea spaces and local culture, this design proposes six core strategies that together construct a contemporary teahouse spatial system characterised by locally grounded cultural depth, everyday usability and critical reflection.

Strategy One：Street Extension, employs semi-open street-facing façades and transitional lane corridors to blur the boundary between interior and exterior, dissolve consumption thresholds, and treat the teahouse entrance as a natural extension of the surrounding lane.

Strategy Two, Light and Shadow Narrative, treats light as a temporal dimension of locality, using natural-light priority, latticed filtering and layered warm illumination to allow the space to register the changes of the day and the seasons.

Strategy Three, Waterfront Reconstruction, revitalises the spatial relationship between the teahouse and the Grand Canal through riverside seating, the translation of historic water-dock memory and a rainwater system, avoiding the reduction of water elements to decorative symbols.

Strategy Four, Material Temporality, adopts locally available and age-friendly materials such as grey brick, tile, aged timber and bamboo weaving, and through the reuse of old materials and the preservation of handcrafted traces, allows the space to grow with use and transforms time into spatial value.

3.4 Interior Solutions and Sketches

(1) Design Zoning Diagram

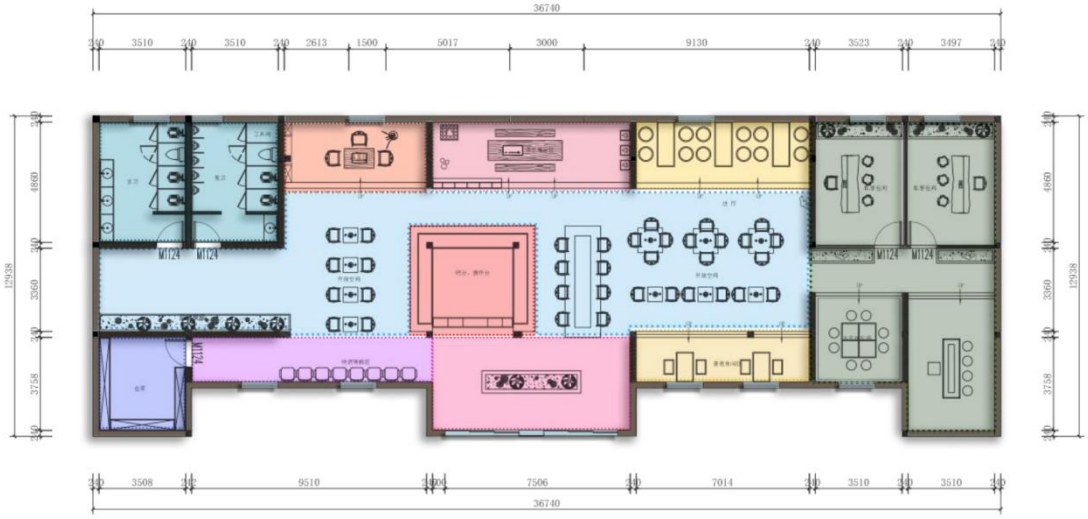


FIG 30 Functional Layout Diagram

（2）Floor plan

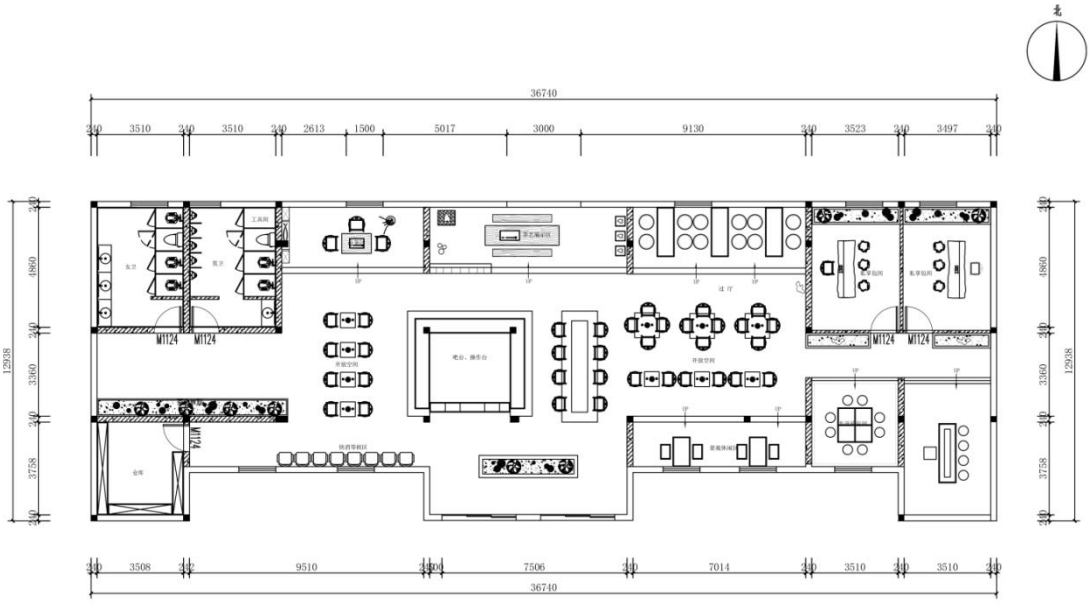


FIG 31 Floor Plan

3.5Project Design Renderings and Design Philosophy



FIG 32 Tasting Area

A serene, composed, and ceremonial tea-drinking environment is created through a restrained spatial design. The overall layout follows a central axis of symmetry, with the tea table positioned at the center of the space and two round-backed armchairs facing each other on either side. The pendant light, tea seating area, and the large window at the rear align along a unified axis, establishing a clear spatial order. The color palette centers on low-saturation grays, dark browns, and walnut tones, complemented by off-white cushions and natural greenery, creating a subdued yet warm visual experience. The materials combine microcement walls, dark gray stone floors, and dark woodwork, embodying the warmth of wood, the tranquility of stone, and the vitality of bamboo.

The lighting employs a multi-layered approach, including a central chandelier, recessed ceiling lights, cabinet-embedded lights, and wall-washing lights for decorative artwork, highlighting the tea seating area as the focal point while enhancing the sense of depth in the space. The design minimizes ornate decoration, expressing modern Eastern aesthetics through proportion, negative space, light and shadow, and natural scenery. During implementation, further refinements can be made—such as adding anti-slip measures to the raised platform, installing LED strip lighting for guidance, incorporating concealed electrical and plumbing systems, optimizing tea set storage, and implementing acoustic treatment—to enhance the space’s safety, comfort, and functionality.



FIG 32 Open Space 1



FIG 33 Open Space 2

This project creates an elegant and serene atmosphere for tea drinking through the fusion of wood, stone, sheer fabric, and warm lighting. The space features an open layout, with the central tea table serving as both the visual and functional focal point. It is softly partitioned by columns and translucent sheer curtains, ensuring the space remains airy while creating a subtle sense of layering. Decorative items like screens and hanging scrolls serve not only as visual elements but also play crucial roles in spatial partitioning, privacy protection, and atmospheric enhancement.[22]The wooden latticework on the ceiling and the square lighting fixtures incorporate traditional architectural principles, reinforcing the sense of a central axis and a ceremonial ambiance; while the landscape motifs on the sheer curtains add an air of Eastern cultural ambiance.

The overall color palette centers on warm gray, natural wood tones, and deep brown, combined with stone countertops and wooden furniture to present a natural, understated texture. Concealed LED strips, accent lighting, and the interplay of light

and shadow near the windows collectively enrich the interplay of light and shadow within the space, making the tea table an even more prominent visual focal point.Recessed lighting and concealed light strips are widely used along walls and ceilings to distribute light evenly while minimising direct exposure to light sources. This design not only ensures a more natural and soft effect but also avoids the strong contrasts typically created by traditional lighting fixtures.[23]



FIG 34 Landscape Experience Area 1

Centered on natural Zen-inspired elements and modern Eastern aesthetics, this project creates a quiet and elegant shared tea-drinking space. Inside, a raised wooden platform divides the space into functional zones. Three sets of low tea tables are arranged side by side, paired with rattan chairs and round meditation cushions to create a relaxed and intimate floor-seating experience.

The wooden ceiling framework and woven materials enrich the space's texture while enhancing a sense of enclosure. Large windows frame views of distant mountains and the lake, while semi-transparent linen curtains soften the natural light. Hidden LED strips beneath the raised platform highlight the spatial elevation while enhancing the ambiance and safety at night.

Through the harmonious use of natural materials such as wood, rattan, pottery, and linen, the design evokes a warm, rustic, and poetic atmosphere that embodies the essence of tea culture.



FIG 35 Landscape Experience Area 2

This project centers on a modern Eastern Zen aesthetic, creating a serene and airy tea-tasting space through expansive views of the landscape. The overall layout follows a central axis of symmetry, with two sets of low tea tables and cushions arranged facing each other to enhance a sense of interaction and the ceremonial atmosphere of the tea gathering. This design not only enhances the functionality of the space but also deepens users' sense of immersion and emotional engagement, transforming the tea room into a place that combines aesthetic and practical value.[24]

Large floor-to-ceiling windows bring distant mountains, the waterfront, and views of historic architecture into the interior. Wooden blinds not only regulate light but also lend a subtle, dreamlike depth to the outdoor scenery. A wooden lattice ceiling extends the sense of spatial depth, while semi-transparent sheer curtains create a soft enclosure that balances openness with privacy.

The light-wood-toned raised platform, rattan stools, and natural textiles collectively create a warm and rustic material palette, while LED strips embedded in the steps clearly define the spatial hierarchy and enhance safety. Suspended tea lamps on both sides echo the symmetrical arrangement, resulting in an overall aesthetic that embodies simple, serene, and poetic Eastern beauty.



FIG 36 Private Dining Room

Centered on a calm and elegant modern Chinese style, this design features a dark wooden tea table and high-backed chairs as the focal point of the space, creating a solemn and serene atmosphere for tea appreciation. The wooden lattice backdrop, combined with curved LED strips, forms a layered visual focal point, while the alcoves on either side display artifacts that enhance the sense of Eastern cultural significance.

Natural light streaming in through the windows and greenery from the courtyard soften the heaviness of the dark interior. Blue-and-white porcelain, dried branches, and tea ware serve as decorative accents, enriching the variety of materials and colors. Through warm lighting, natural scenery, and a symmetrical layout, the space as a whole presents a tea room that is understated, refined, and imbued with a sense of ritual.



FIG 37 Private Room 1

This project is designed around the theme of a modern Oriental study. The wooden entrance door, featuring bamboo-shaped handles, reinforces the space's identity and cultural charm. Inside, dark wood bookshelves and a long writing desk form the visual focal point; open shelves display books, pottery, and sculptures, serving both storage and display functions.

Warm-toned shelf lights create a serene atmosphere, while linear ceiling lights enhance the sense of depth in the space. The writing desk and chairs are arranged symmetrically, creating a clear sense of order; green plants, an ancient zither, and natural decorative pieces soften the sharp lines. The overall color palette is subdued and restrained, presenting an elegant, tranquil, and scholarly Eastern space.



FIG 38 Private Room 2

This project takes the Zen concept of wabi-sabi as its central design theme, using a low tea table and surrounding cushions to create a setting for enjoying tea on the floor, fostering a peaceful and intimate atmosphere for conversation. Gray brick walls, natural wood, linen, and natural stone are harmoniously combined to present a simple yet warm spatial texture.

Floor-to-ceiling windows paired with semi-transparent sheer curtains bring in soft natural light and the greenery of the courtyard, blurring the boundaries between indoors and outdoors. Ink-wash decorative paintings on the walls enhance the Eastern aesthetic, while recessed niches serve both display and lighting functions. A natural focal point is formed by bamboo plants, rocks, and moss, complemented by hidden LED strips to create a quiet, understated, and layered tea room space.

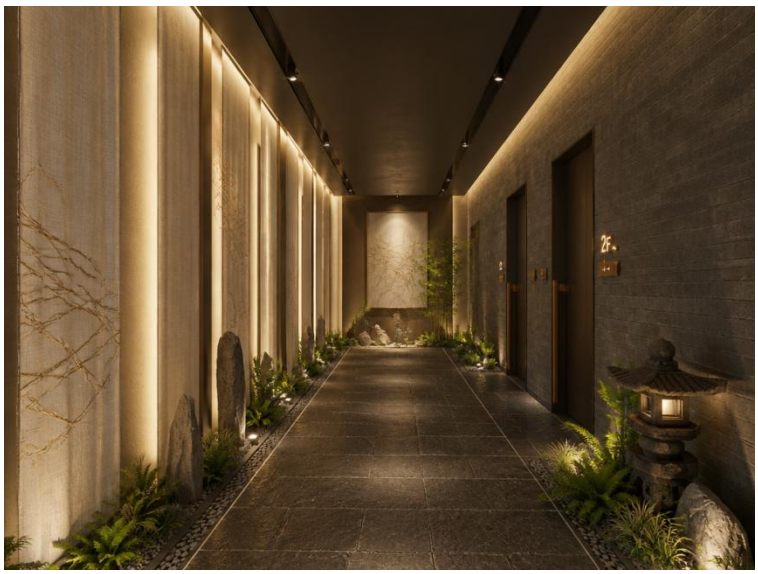


FIG 39 Hallway Space

This project adopts a modern Zen aesthetic as its design theme. The long, narrow corridor features dark stone flooring and gray brick walls, creating a calm and serene atmosphere. On the left, translucent stone combined with vertical light

strips enhances the sense of rhythm and depth; on the right, a series of doorways maintains a clean, understated look, while warm-colored signage improves visibility.

On both sides, a miniature dry landscape garden composed of gravel, ornamental stones, ferns, and bamboo softens the architectural interface. Wall-washing lights on the ceiling work in tandem with recessed floor lighting to guide the flow of movement and create a visual focal point at the end of the corridor, resulting in a transitional space that is natural, elegant, and imbued with a sense of ceremony.

Chapter 3 Conclusion

Taking the Qingguo Alley Historic and Cultural District in Changzhou as the project context, this study conducted on-site research into the scale of streets and alleys, the relationship with waterways, changes in light and shadow, material characteristics, and visitor behavior. Combining these findings with online reviews, the project distilled the site's characteristics across six dimensions: street relationships, spatial scale, changes in light and shadow, water town circulation routes, the temporal quality of materials, and operational mechanisms.

Addressing issues such as commercial homogenization within the district, the imbalance between storefront facades and the traditional scale of the alleys, the superficial treatment of cultural symbols, the prioritization of visual communication over spatial function, and the dilution of Changzhou's regional characteristics by the "generic Jiangnan" narrative, the design constructs a multi-layered spatial system comprising "street-facing storefronts—transitional corridors —shared tea room—light-filled courtyard—semi-private tea room—waterside interface" to accommodate needs such as brief stops, social interaction, solitary relaxation, and small-scale cultural activities.

The design strategy emphasizes the extension of streets and alleys, the narrative of light and shadow, the reconfiguration of the relationship with the waterfront, and the temporality of materials. It reinforces the memory of the place through semi-open facades, natural lighting, filtered views via louvers, a rainwater system, and local materials such as reclaimed bricks, wood, and woven bamboo. The interior design encompasses tea-tasting areas, open spaces, landscape experience zones, private rooms, and corridors. Grounded in modern Eastern and Zen aesthetics, it combines axial layouts, borrowed scenery, gray bricks, wood and stone, sheer curtains, greenery, and multi-layered warm lighting to create a tranquil, elegant, and ceremonial tea space. The design also prioritizes slip resistance, lighting guidance, concealed utilities, storage, acoustics, and accessibility, striking a balance between cultural expression, daily use, and operational requirements.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Set against the backdrop of the Qingguo Alley Historic and Cultural District in Changzhou, this study explores the regional expression and spatial renewal of contemporary tea spaces. Through literature review, field research, case comparisons, and SWOT analysis, the study examines site-specific characteristics such as the scale of streets and alleys, relationships with water features, material textures, variations in light and shadow, and user behavior. By drawing on exemplary tea house cases from both China and abroad, the study summarizes the diverse ways in which traditional tea culture is reinterpreted in contemporary spaces. The study found that some contemporary tea spaces suffer from issues such as homogenized commercial imagery, superficial use of traditional symbols, imbalanced spatial scales, and an overemphasis on visual appeal at the expense of practical usability. Furthermore, generic design languages such as “New Chinese Style,” “Song Dynasty Aesthetics,” and “Eastern Zen” have, to some extent, diminished the distinctiveness of Changzhou’s local culture.

Addressing these issues, this design centers on regional culture, daily use, and spatial experience to construct a progressive spatial system comprising “street-facing storefront—transitional corridor—shared tea room—light-filled courtyard—semi-private tea room—waterside interface.” Through strategies such as extending into the alleyways, creating narratives through light and shadow, reconfiguring the relationship with the waterfront, and emphasizing the temporal quality of materials, the design responds to the historical context and lifestyle characteristics of Qingguo Alley. Based on natural materials such as gray brick, reclaimed wood, woven bamboo, and stone, the design combines semi-open facades, borrowed scenery, lattice filtering, rainwater harvesting, and multi-layered warm lighting to create a modern Eastern tea space that is tranquil, unpretentious, and imbued with a sense of ritual. At the same time, through the thoughtful organization of open areas, landscape experience zones, private rooms, and public corridors, the design meets diverse needs—including solitude, social interaction, tea tasting, and small-scale cultural activities—while addressing practical considerations such as slip resistance, storage, acoustics, accessibility, and concealed utilities.

Overall, this study demonstrates that the design of tea spaces within historic districts should not be limited to the simple replication of traditional elements. Instead, it should extract cultural significance from the structure of the site, local lifestyles, and traces of time, thereby transforming traditional culture into a spatial experience that is perceptible, usable, and capable of sustainable growth. This design offers practical insights of significant reference value for the commercial space renewal of Qingguo Alley and the revitalization of the Jiangnan historic district.

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