

SMARTPHONES INTO EVERYDAY REALITY, **TO AMAZE**
A HYPERTECHNOLOGICAL AUDIENCE OF VERY DEMANDING
MILLENNIALS

The days that disrupted design were those when human beings realized it was better to be than to have, geolocating and letting the world know where they were. Those humans match a precise identikit: over 20, under 40, residing in big Chinese cities, upper class, sufficient income for shopping and leisure expenditures. They are looking for places where architecture and design become a mirror of identities, histories and social ambitions. Few phenomena in the world are reshaping visions and styles of designers in the Far East like the evolution of millennial tastes and the tendency to live consumption as an experience via social media, in a region where the latest generation of creative talents, starting with those trained abroad who are now returning home with a trove of suggestions and disciplinary expertise, is intent upon sculpting in huge structures the contradictions of a country increasingly used to seeking stimuli online and constantly in search of places that can surpass the latest digital wow effect in real life. An intense competition between reality and fantasy, in which the latter tries to shift from smartphones and end up in restaurants, coworking facilities, bookstores. Often managing to do just that. The spectacle in everyday life. As in the multiplex cinemas created by Alexander Wong by borrowing spatial tenets from art galleries, amidst psychedelic hues and fine materials. Or like Neobio, the indoor playgrounds for families in Shanghai and Hangzhou, which seem to come straight out of a comic book, both designed by X+Living, on respective areas of 3000 and 8000 square meters, like true cities for kids featuring climbing walls, dress-up rooms, party rooms and bookshops. This design headway, in most of the spectacular briefs, is the result of social and economic mechanisms of a country in constant growth: clients demand to be amazed by designers, in order in turn to amaze the public, aiming at an audience of wanghong, the Chinese word for influencers: this is a much more massive phenomenon here than in the West, if we look at the numbers. The Chinese millennials are a population of almost 400 million, mostly only children. A generation with economic clout at record highs, which cannot wait to roam the web in search of the suggestions that are orienting global purchases, from luxury downward. If we add this generation's peerless technological aptitude, we can get a more precise idea about the setting a wealthy Chinese person in their thirties wants to find in a club, a restaurant or a mall. This is why precisely the shopping malls are standing up to the crisis caused by e-commerce, transforming themselves into plazas full of pathways that simulate an urban panorama, often amidst classical-style elements to summon up European scenarios. Bookstores become a design obsession, in the most daring forms and contexts. While in the West bookstores are shrinking, here – with the growth in publishing – new ones are opening, with very large floorspaces, where books become a pretext to socialize or to get away from urban chaos, enjoying a cup of coffee in a spectacular setting perfect for Instagram. The M.I. Bookstore in Harbin, for example, created by HMA Architects & Designers, takes its cue from the landscape of the nearby mountains and features green niches for privacy, also with soundproofing, to read and relax in peace. In the case of the flagship store of the Yan Ji You chain in Chengdu, the architects Kyle Chan & Associates explain that they have used “books as a binder” for a structure of 4000 square meters that even includes a beauty parlor. The race to create the bookstore of everyone's dreams is stretching the envelope of design. For example, all the way up to the 52nd floor of the Shanghai Tower, the city's tallest building, where Wutopia Lab has just completed “Books above the Clouds,” the home of 60,000 volumes and a new landmark open to the public, with the obligatory array of conference rooms, galleries and breathtaking views. For years the chain Zhongshuge and the studio X+Living have had a successful collaboration based on a series of spectacular galleries of volumes where floors are reflected in the ceiling, doubling the sense of space, in a hypnotic dimension that reminds us of Escher. Li Xiang, the founder of X+Living, is the unrivaled star of these flamboyant works of architecture. Trained in Europe, with a degree from Birmingham, winner of many prizes, Li Xiang transforms engagement into visions of perfect symmetry, or very colorful set-

tings like the Unova coworking space of almost 9000 square meters in Shenzhen, much closer to an Ultra-Pop fable than to a place of business for dozens of workers. Her favorite architect? We should have guessed: Gaudi.

CAPTIONS: pag. 29 *The Zhongshuge bookstore at Chongqing, designed by the studio X+Living. A spectacular game of staircases, as in the visionary art of MC Escher, with mirrors that hypnotically reflect the interiors, amplifying the sense of space. Photo courtesy of Shao Feng.* **pag. 30** *On these pages, the Metal Rainbow bookstore of the Zhongshu chain at Suzhou, designed by Wutopia Lab as a series of spaces with different functions. Above, the area renamed Xanadu of Rainbows, a tribute to the ancient Chinese city of Xanadu. Right, the Firefly Grotto where visitors can take books and reach the reading room by following the lights. Photos courtesy of Yijie Hu and CreatAR Images.* **pag. 32** *Neobio is the family park designed at Hangzhou by X+Living: 8000 square meters that seem to come from a fable, with play areas, a restaurant and very colorful bookshops. Photo courtesy of Shao Feng.* **pag. 33** *Another bookstore by X+Living for the Zhongshuge chain, in the Minhang District of Shanghai. A potentially infinite gallery of volumes, where the designers have played with mirrors to multiply the spaces. Photo courtesy of Shao Feng.*

INSIDE ARCHITECTURE

P34. CHINESE SPIRIT

by Alessandro Villa

AN EXCLUSIVE ENCOUNTER WITH THE ARCHITECT **LIU YICHUN** BECOMES AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE STOCK OF THE RECENT **PROJECTS OF ATELIER DESHAUS**, WHICH MARK A BREAKTHROUGH FOR THE ARCHITECTURE AND THE **IDENTITY OF CONTEMPORARY SHANGHAI**. IN TERMS OF SYSTEMATIC **PROTECTION OF HISTORICAL TRACES**

For about a decade, in the wake of Expo 2010, Shanghai has gone through a phase of extensive transformation of the urban territory that involves the regeneration of many abandoned industrial zones. Worksites have sprung up in the center, constantly updating the skyline. Others are along the river that crosses the city for dozens of kilometers, and fill up the empty spaces created on a new street map that was already waiting for their insertion. Billboards triumphantly display (virtual) images of what we will see in a few years. For the moment there isn't much traffic. Mechanical arms, cranes and bulldozers move behind the barriers of construction sites, in a constant din of deafening noises at all hours of the day and night. One crosses very long stretches of construction to reach the new spaces for contemporary art, which have also grown in number. Many of them are in old industrial structures that are ideal of such new uses. Silo Hall at Minsheng Wharf is one of the most extraordinary: an imposing concrete building composed of 30 eight-story silos, once the largest in Asia. It has recently been transformed by the architecture firm Atelier Deshaus to create a very striking exhibition space, and at the moment it is used for temporary exhibitions and events. In May it was the location of the Prada spring-summer 2020 fashion show, with a spectacular installation of lights by OMA/AMO. From the outside, the conversion of the silos is revealed by just one big feature, the overhanging glass volume of the staircase that diagonally crosses the whole facade and rises up to the exhibition spaces at the top. Liu Yichun, founding partner of the studio, explains this choice in terms of the visitor experience, since at the top people can see an amazing view of the river and the city. The broken line of the transparent volume is an important signal, since the overall organization of the site, surrounded by dusty construction zones, is still in progress. Nevertheless, the sense of in-completion of the complex makes the place fascinating, and the vestiges of the original silos convey a sensation of authenticity that would be hard to find in other new parts of the city. Silo Hall is not the first project of this type. Many others have been built in the vicinity of the Huangpu River. The most famous is the Long Museum, also by Atelier Deshaus (shown in Interni 619, 2016), preceded in some aspects by the restoration of the former slaughterhouse, an intricate, impressive concrete building now known as “1933” and described in guides as a unique example of Art Deco Brutalism. These are projects that

have marked a breakthrough for the architecture of the city. Timidly at first, and now in a more systematic way, the protection of the traces of past epochs that have survived various kinds of destruction now contribute in a meaningful way to the construction (and reconstruction) of the identity of contemporary Shanghai; not only the famous works of eclectic architecture of the Bund and the foreign concessions, but also what remains of old neighborhoods, like the narrow streets of Tianzifang, a destination for alternative shopping well known to foreign visitors. The trend is even more visible on the riverfront, where an extensive network of linear parks, public spaces and pedestrian-bicycle paths connects satellites and small galaxies of museums and art spaces, nearly all in former industrial buildings, true outposts of urban renewal. The architect Liu Yichun welcomes me to the headquarters of the firm, precisely in the vicinity of one of these exhibition centers. He begins by talking about recent projects, explaining that sensitivity to the history of places and their ruins is a conscious choice for the studio, though it can never be separated from a response to the needs of the client and the parameters of the program. Every aspect of recovery comes from an architectural idea that identifies a strategy of reuse of existing structures as integrated elements, functional for the construction of the new building. A modus operandi that is effective to explain to clients the advantages of the approach, while establishing a dialogue with the public authorities, which after the success of the Long Museum has become easier. In the more recent Shanghai Modern Art Museum, for example, the 9000 square meters of exhibition space required have been created from a structure that covered only one third of that quantity. With this clear objective, the concrete skeleton of the old coal storage facility has become the framework to support the new steel beams of the roof, to which slabs with a slender exposed structure of metal struts have been attached, resembling in certain details the architecture of ships and waterfront buildings. The exhibition spaces have then been organized in the intervals between the two systems, and the older structures often appear by surprise in the new, like fragments of an archaeological discovery made during the reconstruction. Visitors can make an unusually close approach to the coal chutes, which are now a ceiling or a detail of the walls. From the outside the existing structure is partially hidden by the forceful horizontal extension of the new floor slabs, broken up only by the staircases that can be glimpses between the parapets. The same principle has been applied in the service structures, a strip of cafes and shops that form a sequence of volumes, again suspended from an existing reinforced concrete truss. The complex faces the river, and at dusk, when the sun's rays are reflected on the windows of the museum as it closes, the night life continues outside, in the pedestrian areas, where the boats at the docks suggest the atmosphere of a tourism resort. The projects by Atelier Deshaus are deeply interwoven with the cultural identity they contribute to formulate, and the headquarters of the studio itself is part of the flow of urban transformations and experimentation. At present it is located in a complex of small constructions adjacent to the West Bund Artistic Center, a vast system of exhibition spaces where art and lofts are developed in clusters around the hangar of what was once an airplane factory. This is a creative village, a community of studios for architecture, fashion, photography and art, self-financed and independently constructed by the residents on land made available in a five-year lease by the municipality. The buildings have been made with an eye on costs, but precisely for this reason they have greater freedom from the constraints of speculation. At the moment the lease deadline is approaching, and the entire complex could be demolished to make room for a hotel. While Arch. Yichun speaks, I can already feel a bit of regret for the irremediable loss of a place with a young, strong cultural spirit and an urban identity; the unique character of the area does not escape the many photographers – amateurs and professionals alike – who wander its streets. At the same time, in the words and the serene gaze of Yichun one can sense the faith and desire to approach this new challenge as an opportunity for the growth of the studio, which is in need of a larger facility today. It is clear that any new project may still involve the whole community, perhaps in a new experiment. While Zheng Yi, part of the studio's staff, accompanies me to visit the outdoor areas, she explains that some of the pavements and walls of the district belong to the previous airport complex, now surviving in the large exhibition space of the main hangar. The relationship of proportion is like that between a large cathedral and the surrounding town. From the studio we go to a nearby fashion

atelier with a connected Tea House, also designed by Atelier Deshaus. Past the entrance, a two-story space opens up with a window facing an enclosed garden, shaded by a large tree that already existed at the site. The Tea House is a micro-architecture designed down to the smallest details, with a few fixed furnishings inserted in a composition gauged for the perception of the internal space and the garden, which seems larger from the inside. Everything is inserted in the framework of a structure in square tubing, painted black, with inserts in natural wood, transparent glass in the low part of the walls, and printed glass above to spread light while limiting the gaze. The effect is intimate and very luminous at the same time. The sensitivity to relationships of perception and scale is a major concern of the atelier, already explored in the stepped ramp of the Long Museum, which takes the space of the majestic exhibition halls back to a more human dimension; the roots of this interest date back to the studies for a kindergarten, one of the firm's first important achievements. Towards the end of our visit Yichun shows me that also in the projects in progress, the person-space relationship returns in new interpretations, on the scale of landscape or in the design of domestic interiors. These works are very different from each other in terms of language and functions, displaying a rediscovery of the ancient Chinese conception of construction of space: the topic is very stimulating, and we hope we will have a chance to delve into it, and illustrate it for our readers, in our coverage of new projects that are about to be implemented.

CAPTIONS: pag. 34 *Silo Hall is a new exhibition space for art, created inside a gigantic industrial construction in concrete, once the largest silos in Asia. The project can be recognized from the outside thanks to the overhanging glass volume of the staircase, already a distinctive feature of the urban landscape of Shanghai. The design also conserves the character of the original structure in the interiors. Photo courtesy of Su Shengliang.* **pag. 36** *The architect Liu Yichun in the headquarters of Atelier Deshaus, of which he is one of the founding partners. At present the offices are in a complex of small constructions, many of which were designed by the firm, clustered around the hangar of a former airplane factory that has now become the West Bund Artistic Center.* **pag. 37** *Near the studio, the Tea House is a small pavilion designed down to the smallest details, combining a few fixed furnishings in a composition gauged by perception of the space and the enclosed garden, which appears larger when seen from the inside. Photos courtesy of Tian Fangfang.* **pag. 38** *Like many of the firm's projects, the Shanghai Modern Art Museum stands on the traces of an earlier industrial building. In this case the concrete skeleton of the old coal storage facility has become the framework that supports the new construction and the pedestrian walkways along the river. Fragments of the original structure can be observed up close inside the building. Photos courtesy of Tian Fangfang.*

P40. FLUID NARRATIVE

project **MAURO LIPPARINI/STUDIO LIPPARINI**

photos Boris Shu and Zhizhou Zhang/courtesy Domus Tiandi
article Antonella Boisi

NEAR **BEIJING**, A SOPHISTICATED **HOUSE** ON FIVE LEVELS, WITH THEATRICAL AND INTIMATE SPACES, AND A SINGLE TUTELARY DEITY: **ITALIAN DESIGN**

Shadow Creek is the nickname chosen by the client for the new mansion built along a stream in the vicinity of Beijing. In effect, in this home-stage we can find the elegant combination of Tuscany twilight, compositional detail, references to the local tradition and Italian design furnishings selected for their outstanding workmanship. In short: the pleasure of things, expressed in a harmonious encounter between two cultures, West and East. From Florence to Beijing, the ‘thinking hand’ of the architect Mauro Lipparini has worked on the quality of materials and a complexity of overlaps to rigorously update the layout of a large villa, on five levels, four above ground plus one basement, radically revised starting with the features of the facade. “For the success of the project, a triangulation has been fundamental,” Lipparini explains, “through interaction and exchanges with the Chinese client, a tycoon in the field of hydroponic cultivation, and with the collaboration of Domus Tiandi (the local dealer of products by Baxter, Minotti, Poliform and other well-known brands of design Made in Italy). “The original architecture, as often happens in China,” he continues, “was an anonymous pseudo-classical pas-