

— / WORDS MICHELE KOH MOROLLO

HOMAGE TO HOFFMAN

The architecture of a brick kiln is adapted in the design of this modern, public, botanical art centre in a wetland park in Hebei, China.





Hengshui is one of China's most polluted cities, so the wetlands was converted into a botanic park to help reduce pollution and serve as the city's green lungs.

On a wetland reserve near Hengshui City in China's Hebei Province, Shanghai-based Interval Architects have completed Tower of Bricks – a botanic art centre that references an old brick kiln that once stood on the site.

Abandoned and in bad condition, the former Hoffman kiln had become a place where nearby factories drained their sewage water, and was eventually demolished.

Because wetlands are a convenient water source for plants, local government entity Hengshui Botanic Park converted the area into a green lung. The site of the former kiln was then transformed into an art centre.

"Hengshui was one of the most polluted cities in China. In an effort to combat this problem, the city decided to turn its wetland into a botanic park," says Oscar Ko, one of the project's two lead architects.

"The brief called for the design of a supplementary building in the park that would serve as a leisure and gallery space



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The former abandoned kiln had been used as a sewage dumping site for nearby factories before it was demolished and reinvented.

/ OPPOSITE

The new building includes a vaulted arcade with a chimney in the middle that references the layout of typical Hoffman kilns.

where the public can come to enjoy floral art, plant and pottery exhibits."

RESPECTFUL OF THE PAST

In homage to the old structure, the form of the new building – designed as a vaulted arcade with a chimney in the middle – echoes the spatial configuration of a typical Hoffman kiln, but with interiors that accommodate exhibition and dining spaces.

"We decided that the new architecture should recall the history of the demolished kiln. Our hope is to connect the past and the present in the design of the new building," says Ko.

Adds Yunduan Gu, the project's other lead architect, "Our design philosophy is based on context, and we find solutions from our reactions to site conditions, which might include geography, landform, climate, history, human behaviours, and scale. In this project, our solution was a response to the site, as well as the history of the former brick kiln."

Because the old kiln was constructed with red bricks, the architects chose them as the dominant material for the new-built





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To lighten the monolithic character of the brick walls, the architects used different stacking patterns to draw in light and improve circulation.

too. This enabled the structure to maintain a strong link with its history, while conveying contemporary aesthetics and exuding a sense of welcoming warmth.

A variety of stacking patterns was used for the façade to break the dense, monolithic character of the brick walls. This helped to create translucency, enable light and shadow play, and open up the building physically and visually.



BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES

Within Tower of Bricks are five different zones – a lobby, galleries for the exhibitions, restaurants, offices and service areas.

The floor plan consists of a looped, vaulted arcade with a series of brick arches surrounding a central courtyard. This layout results in an extraverted space that encourages easy public access.



The vaulted arcade creates a flow of interconnected rooms, which provides a sequential and rhythmic experience for the visitors as they view the exhibits. In the middle of each “room” is a table where the pottery and plants are showcased.

Several smaller courtyards break the continuity of this arcade, blurring the boundaries between architecture and landscape, interior and exterior, while connecting the central courtyard with the wetland views outdoors.

The restaurants, which are contained within larger, less linear spaces, are located at both ends of the arcade.

At the podium level, a roof garden helps to further open up the building and draw in the outdoor views.

Courtyards were also incorporated in

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A number of smaller courtyards connect the central courtyard to the wetlands outdoors so the landscape is embraced within the architecture.

/ OPPOSITE

The vaulted arcade results in seamlessly connected spaces that create a rhythmic experience for visitors as they view the exhibits.

TOWER OF BRICKS

LOCATION / HENGSHUI BOTANIC PARK, HEBEI PROVINCE, CHINA
COMPLETION / 2018
SITE AREA / 19631.38M²
BUILDING AREA / 1697.41M²
GROSS FLOOR AREA / 2065M²
ARCHITECT / INTERVAL ARCHITECTS
COLLABORATING ARCHITECT / BEIJING NEW ERA ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN
CONTRACTOR / HAOHUA CONSTRUCTION
LANDSCAPE / ORIENT LIHO
AWARDS / ASIA DESIGN PRIZE 2019, IDA 2018 HONORABLE MENTION

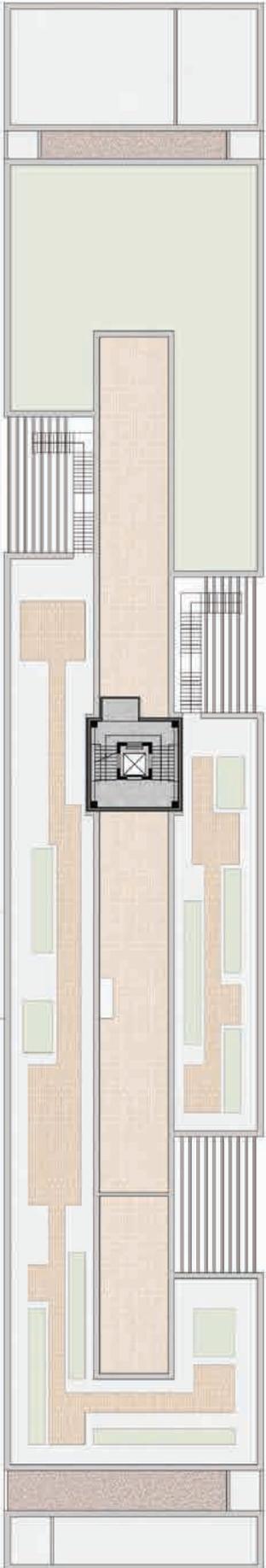


FLOOR PLANS



GROUND FLOOR

- 1. RECEPTION HALL
- 2. EXHIBITION
- 3. OUTDOOR COURTYARD
- 4. OFFICE
- 5. VIP HALL
- 6. VIP RESTAURANT
- 7. RESTAURANT
- 8. RESTAURANT CUBICLE
- 9. TOILET
- 10. KITCHEN
- 11. EQUIPMENT ROOM
- 12. OBSERVATION TOWER
- 13. 4F VIEWING PLATFORM



FORTH FLOOR



the spaces between the restaurants and kitchens at the northern and southern ends of the building to bring more natural light into the dining areas.

One of the project's most remarkable features is its red brick observatory tower with four viewing platforms. Visitors can climb up this tower to take in panoramic views of the wetland park.

"The observatory tower is the most unique feature of the project. Because

bricks are rarely used in such tall structures, this tower has quickly become an iconic symbol of Hengshui," says Gu.

"While the design of the Tower of Bricks references the traditional Hoffman kiln, the new architecture holds a contemporary position in terms of its character as an open, public space, connectivity to the environment, and user experience. It is an architecture that connects history with the future," says Ko.

/ ABOVE

The perforated brick walls enable interesting and ever-changing shadow play throughout the day.