

“BLUE BOTTLE COFFEE SHOP BY NERI&HU IS A ‘PRIMITIVE SHED’ WITHIN HISTORIC SHANGHAI HOUSE”

Designboom; DEC 2022

<https://www.designboom.com/architecture/neri-hu-blue-bottle-coffee-shanghai-china-12-09-2022/>

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blue bottle coffee shop by neri&hu is a 'primitive shed' within historic shanghai house

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OCCUPYING SHANGHAI'S HISTORIC ZHANGYUAN NEIGHBORHOOD

California-founded Blue Bottle Coffee celebrates the opening of its third café in **Shanghai**, with architecture by **Neri&Hu**. Designing the space, the **Chinese** architects look to the heritage of the nineteenth century-era neighborhood of Zhangyuan, whose historic streets have been renovated to become a vibrant public and retail district. The project itself occupies one of the many Shikumen-style houses which define the urban fabric of the place. Describing the café's relationship with its unique site, the architects notes: *'Coffee initiates a dialogue between Shanghai's rich history and the contemporary urban social realm.'*

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NERI&HU PRESERVES THE HERITAGE EXTERIORS

As part of the design of its Blue Bottle coffee shop, the architects at Neri&Hu transform a typical Shikumen house, a traditional style which became popular in Shanghai during the late nineteenth century. This building type is recognized by its brick walls, wooded framing, and combination of Western and Chinese architectural features. In accordance with the district's historic preservation guidelines, the exterior shell of the building was largely preserved with the existing brick walls, doors, and windows left untouched.

To contrast this historic shell, Neri&Hu expresses the new interiors with exposed concrete. At the center of the room, the team inserts a simple, free-standing structure which evokes 'a primitive shelter, symbolizing a return to the origin of architecture.' Here, where the coffee is prepared and served, a visual and circulatory focal point is created among the lofty space.

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A BLUE BOTTLE COFFEE SHOP TO MERGE THE OLD AND NEW

Contrasting the heavy palette of the existing architecture, Neri&Hu carefully studied the structure of the shed and its tectonic joinery, seeking an intervention which is ‘as light as possible.’ The shed’s structure is assembled with brushed stainless steel while its lightweight surface is built of perforated, corrugated steel sheeting – materials which the team claims to ‘reflect the surroundings in a subtle and fuzzy manner.’

Neri&Hu took inspiration from ‘the informal construction and simple attachments that people once used to extend their private spaces into the alley,’ which may include metal rods and small platforms added to function as light posts, side tables, and benches. The interiors integrate a selection of traditional furniture which have been repurposed to evoke ‘the traces of time,’ and to ‘bestow a sense of warmth and familiarity, merging old and new.’



the ‘primitive shed’ is a visual and circulatory focal point for the coffee shop

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the roof of the shed is built of perforated, corrugated steel sheeting



Neri&Hu ensures a lightweight structure to contrast the heaviness of the historic building

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the original brick walls and timber framing are preserved



Neri&Hu hopes to ‘capture the spirit of the local urban fabric’

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brand furniture is combined with a selection of repurposed pieces



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project info:

project title: Blue Bottle Zhang Yuan Cafe
architecture, interiors: Neri & Hu | @neriandhu
location: Jing'an district, Shanghai, China
client: Blue Bottle Coffee | @bluebottle
gross area: 175 square meters
completion: November 2022
photography: © Zhu Runzi | @zhu_runzi

partners-in-charge: Lyndon Neri, Rossana Hu
associate-in-charge: Qiucheng Li
design team: Jiaxin Zhang, Xi Chen, Peizheng Zou, Shangyun Zhou, Greg Wu, Luna Hong
FF&E design and procurement: Design Republic
general contractor: Blue Peak Image Producing Co.,Ltd

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