

“IS WHISKY TOURISM SHAPING DISTILLERY DESIGN”

MODUS; AUG 2023

<https://ww3.rics.org/uk/en/modus/built-environment/commercial-real-estate/designing-whisky-distilleries.html>



Whisky is a growing industry and while producing a marvellous malt is still top priority, offering visitors a memorable experience is also a key consideration



Chuan Distillery, China

Chuan Distillery

Where: Sichuan province, China

Built: 2021

Spirits giant Pernod Ricard engaged architects Neri & Hu to design the **Chuan Distillery** on Mount Emei, in the Sichuan province of China. Lyndon Neri and Rossana Hu are the founding partners at Neri & Hu.

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What were the key requirements in the design of the Chuan Distillery?

N&H:The design brief was for a hybrid site, incorporating both the whisky production facilities as well as the visitor centre for the distillery. The challenge was to weave together the visitor’s experience in a journey through architecture and landscape, industry and hospitality, mountain and water.

For the construction part of the project, the task was to adapt an authentic whisky making tradition from Scotland, while accommodating local building codes. For example, several parts of the production process had to be separated into different buildings due to differing fire safety classifications, which gave rise to the three long buildings with gradually descending rooflines, tucked into the natural topography of the land.

When we started the project, the whisky brand was still in the making, so there was no name, no logo, no bottle, no flavour profile – everything was built from scratch. All the brand assets developed later had their foundation in the architectural concept, which became instrumental along the way.

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What impact did the location have on the design of the building? Did the weather and climate of Mount Emei create any challenges?

N&H: Our first visit was in January 2018, when it had just snowed a few days before. The site was overgrown but you could see the beautiful rustic stone walls built by farmers, which formed terraces across the land – this was one of the inspirations of our design. There were varying topographies, from gentle rock beds with trickling waters to strikingly steep rock faces that plunge vertically into the river.

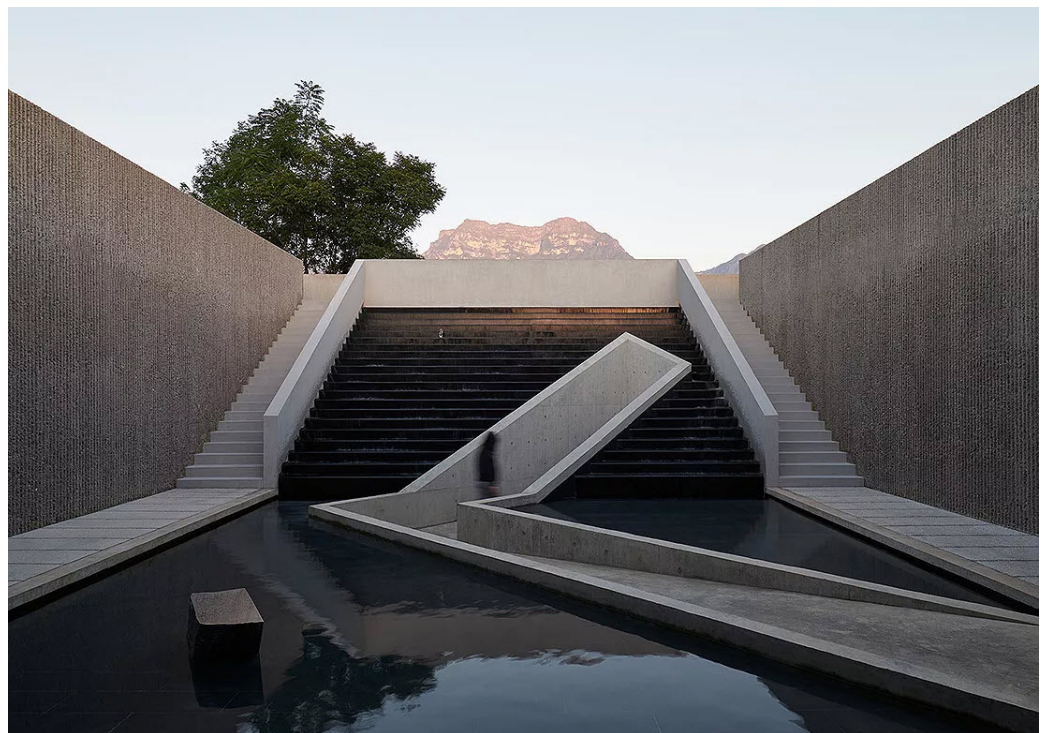
Our attitude to the land was to keep a light touch. This can be seen in the way that we tucked the main industrial buildings on the northern edge of the site, while leaving the centre of the site relatively empty, with only the circular building barely rising out of the ground.

Where there was excavation and site levelling works, we were intent on saving all the **rocks** from the ground and reusing them in the façades of the buildings.

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Was the design influenced by the recent growth in whisky tourism? Is it hoped that Pernod Ricard will get lots of visitors at the site?

N&H: Mount Emei itself has long been a destination for visitors. We believe that the water and mountain should remain the heroes of the project, that architecture is there to enhance it. The idea of 'destination' that we want people to take away is to have a truly memorable experience, not just an Instagrammable image. When you are physically there, the sounds, atmosphere, and shifting qualities of light really make it special.