

“THE ART OF ABSENCE: NERI&HU REVEALS ITS LATEST CAFÉ DESIGN”

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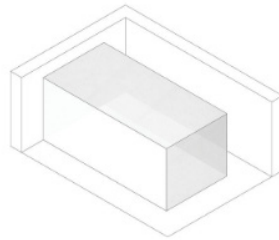
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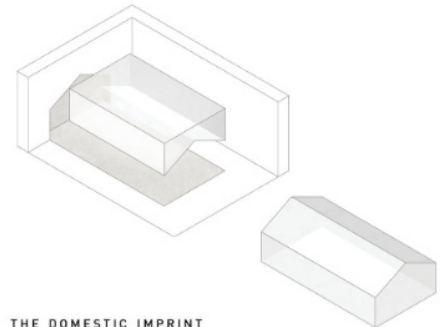
The Art of Absence: Neri&Hu Reveals Its Latest Café Design

1 Aug 2024 · News · By Allie Shiell

For a space in a historic 1912 brick building that now forms part of Shanghai’s Columbia Circle, a former industrial park renovated into a vibrant mixed-used hub by OMA, Blue Bottle engaged [Neri&Hu](#) to design a café that would exemplify their brand value of community culture, inviting people to connect and exchange over coffee.



THE DEFUNCT DWELLING



THE DOMESTIC IMPRINT

Impactful absence is one of the design concepts often explored by acclaimed interdisciplinary firm Neri&Hu. For this café, the design started with a sketch of a domestic structure. Subtracting the core structure left behind a white suspended form in the shape of an archetypal roof hangs over recycled clay bricks.

Beneath, a continuous surface of recycled clay bricks and plaster reveals a house whose finishes have been stripped away down to the subtle outlines of a building footprint and traces on the surface and neighbouring facade. “Even if the building is no longer visible in the physical world, the traces it leaves in our individual or collective memories serve as a source of nostalgia and remembering,” the architects explain. The impression implies a sense of domesticity, an imprint of “home,” to reflect on the essence of inhabitation in a condition where surroundings are constantly shifting and changing with the pace of the city.

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Upon entering the space through the main entrance, customers can select products, wait in line to place their orders alongside the merchandise display area while browsing books, and finally sit around the floor to enjoy a cup of coffee. The multi-functional floor takes up the center of the space, resulting in a circular flow, with tables and chairs distributed around its perimeter. With the centralized focal point of an absent house, the “imprint” invites patrons to partake as a community in the various rituals of daily life and delight in new potential encounters and gatherings.



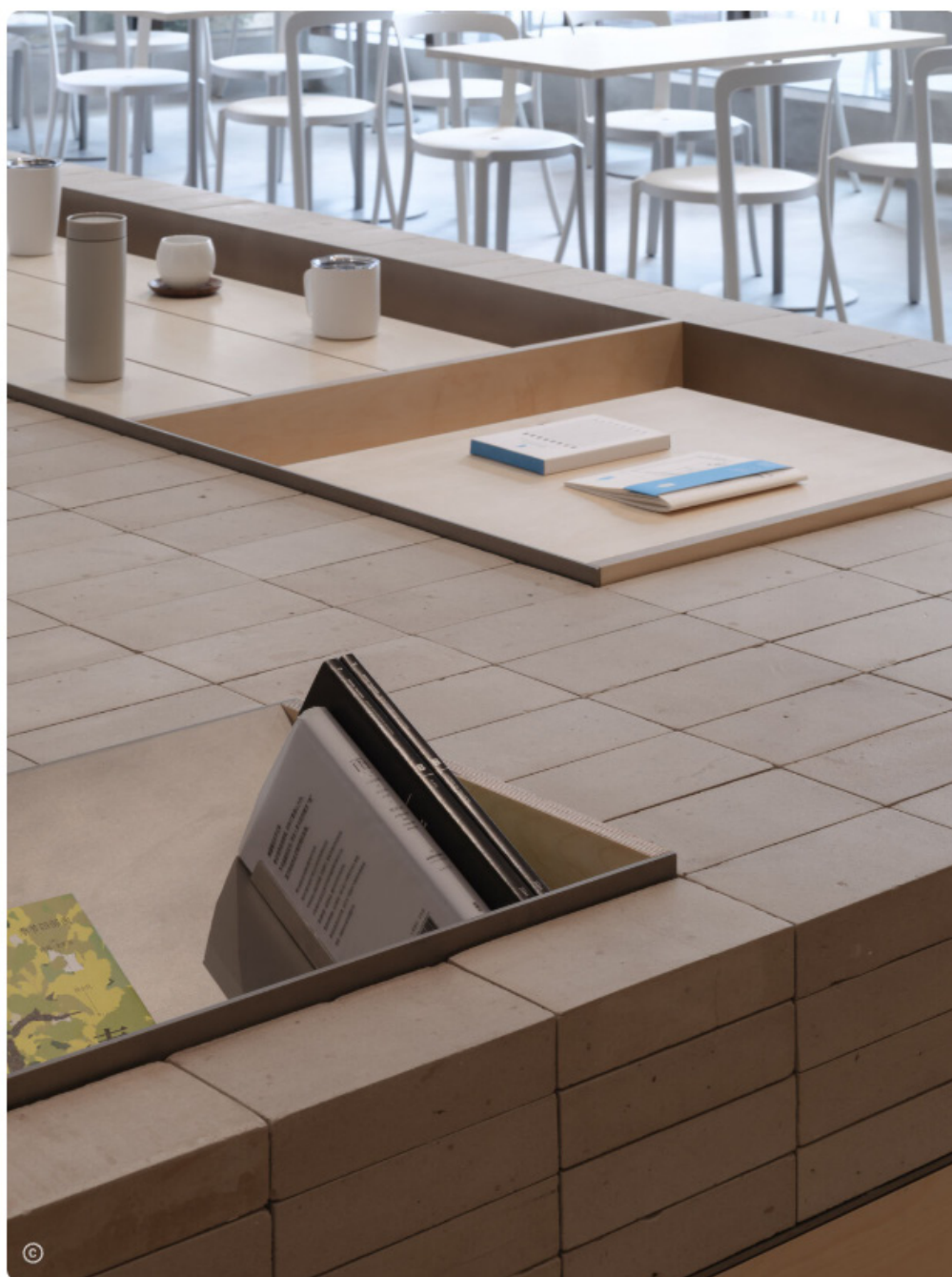
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An interplay of materials and textures, including wood, concrete, and metal, creates a tactile experience that enhances the space's sensory enjoyment. The coffee bar, made of sleek marble, is a focal point in the room, emphasizing the meticulous craftsmanship and attention to detail.



In addition to the Columbia Circle location, Neri&Hu simultaneously designed the Blue Bottle Coffee “Anchor” at the Shanghai Pudong International Airport, with sculpted minimalism and thoughtful details.