

D E S I G N 2 0 2 0

M A D E I N C H I N A

CATCHON
FINN
PARTNERS

MADE IN CHINA

Once upon a time, that stamp may have had a less than appealing connotation. It's not the case now. Visible in the arresting, now-iconic buildings by star architects from Frank Gehry to the late Zaha Hadid, and in the proliferation of museums, high-end hotels and otherworldly retail spaces, design and culture in China have come a long way since the year 2000. On the ground, the swift rise of homegrown talent as well as a creative landscape that has matured dramatically in the last two decades have given rise to international design fairs such as Salone del Mobile, which arrived in China in 2016, joining leading local events like Design Shanghai and Design Beijing.

As the industry moves toward entering a new, post-pandemic era—one that continues to see change unfold at seemingly lightning speed—the agility and innovation of Chinese design are proving more significant than ever before in the transformation of our world. Truth be told, this trend report was due for release earlier this year. The world this is coming to has changed irrevocably since, and we are viewing the findings presented here in a very different light. But one thing remains true: In 2020 and beyond, China remains an imposing presence on the world—and we are privileged to be a witness.

In this report, CatchOn, a Finn Partners Company, evaluates the trends shaping the state of design in China, and the extraordinary architects, designers, creatives, and tastemakers leading the charge.

DESIGN 2020

10 TRENDS

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**NEW GENERATION,
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DESIGN COLLECTIBLES

As the definition of luxury evolves in China, design collectibles are in the spotlight. A renewed commitment to quality, creativity and fine craftsmanship means collectors are looking for unique pieces which have their roots in movements as diverse as global modernism, industrial design and Chinese contemporary.

High numbers of Chinese buyers visiting international and domestic art and design fairs are testament to a growing desire for individuality and authenticity. Their aim? To source authentic one-off pieces that cross both design and art disciplines.

Shanghai-based Studio MVW founded by Xu Ming and Virginie Moriette was one of the first China-based studios to focus on design collectibles. Represented by Galerie BSL, the Chinese-French duo shows regularly at PAD Paris and London, recently launching a Patagonian quartzite and brass table from their nature-inspired JinYe (gold leaf) series. Similarly, Beijing and Los Angeles-based Gallery All, founded in 2014 by Yu Wang and Xiao Lu, has an impressive roster of Chinese and global contemporary artists on its books (think Zhipeng Tan, Chulan Kwak, Haoyu Wu), creating edgy, experiential displays at powerhouse shows like Design Miami, Design Basel, Salon Art + Design, West Bund Shanghai and Jing Art. This year, Gallery All is collaborating with leading design fair Design Shanghai to curate its Collectible Design Hall, bringing French Modernist, Nordic and American Pop Art and Chinese contemporary works to the city in 2020.



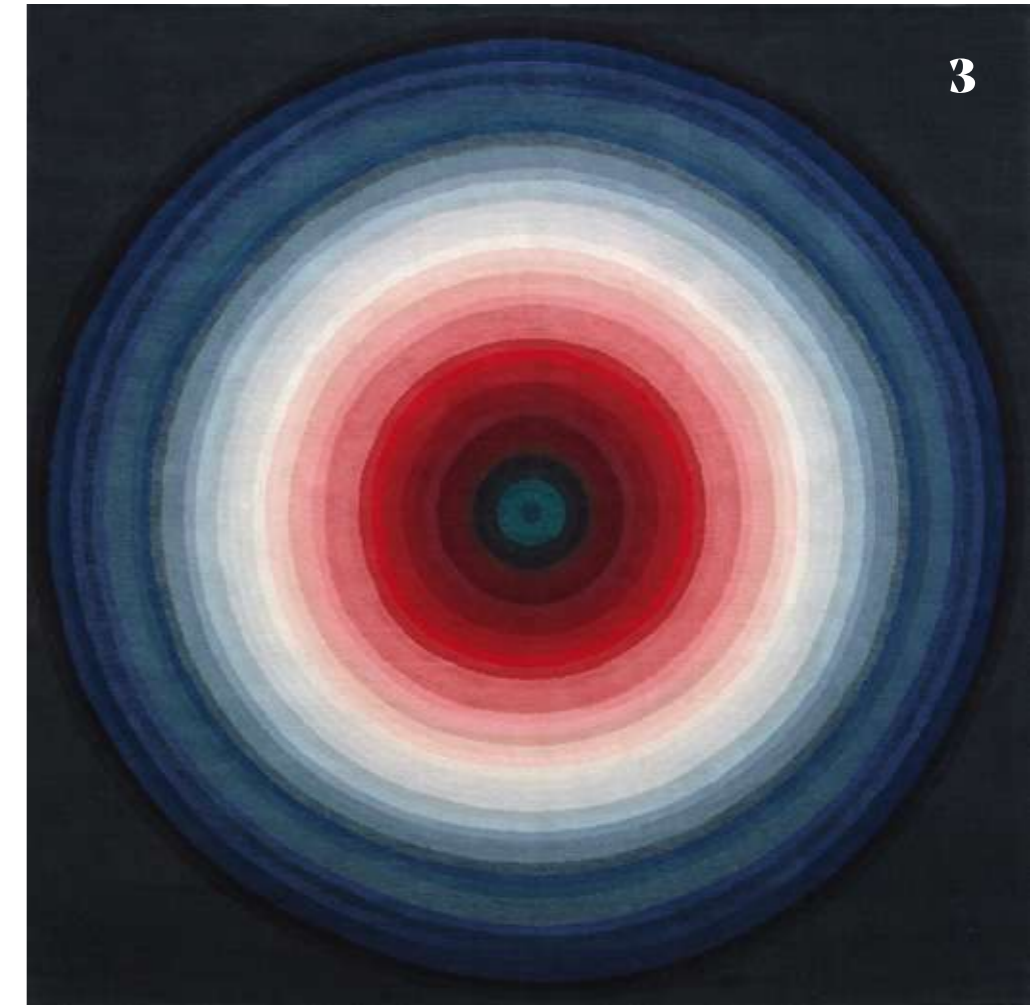
Garnering attention from collectible design lovers are contemporary artistic rugs from luxury carpet house Tan Carpet & Home. Loved by the celebrity set – including Zhou Dongyu, Jing Boran, Jiang Shuying – Tan works with premier Chinese artists like Lei Yan, Wu Guangzhong and Zeng Fanzhi on collections like the China Master Collection, where it translates artworks into physical form. Beijing-based artist and designer Lin Jing has just launched a new collection with Tan, recently made available at TRB, Beijing.

Every November, Shanghai Art Week turns into a global art world hub, hosting heavyweight art and design fairs, exhibition openings and events. China collectible design expert Morgan Morris (of cultural and creative consultancy Perfect Crossovers) seized the moment to launch Unique Design Shanghai, the first platform dedicated to collectible design in China. A collaboration with the Modern Media Group, UDS promotes design galleries, collectors, patrons and institutions through exhibitions, speaker forums, performances and more. With China now ranking as the world's third largest art market, the future of design collectibles looks bright.

1 | Studio MVW's JinYe series

2 | Design Shanghai exhibitor Gallery All

3 | Colour Wheel rug collection, by Lei Yan, at Gallery All



SUSTAINABLE VISION

Sustainability is a hot topic in China – and the design industry is no exception. Increased environmental awareness (Shanghai’s new waste sorting laws are a case in point), an emphasis on recycling, and efforts to blend craft and creativity with a sustainable outlook mean more designers are creating objects that we want to keep and treasure – rather than dispose of. As Zhang Lei, founder of Pinwu Design Studio and a Chinese design advocate, recently noted at a sustainability panel hosted by fashion brand Prada, early Chinese society was built upon a sustainable agricultural economy, where people naturally followed no waste principles. This message is being heard loud and clear by both Chinese designers and consumers, with sustainability becoming an important factor driving purchase choices.



Berlin-based Yuue Design founder Weng Xinyu creatively reimagined a daily object with his Upcycling Shared Bicycle collection of furniture (launched at Milan Design Week 2019).

Made from discarded Mobike parts, the collection addresses the massive wastage caused by China's competitive, and rapidly expanding, bikeshare providers. Similarly, Guangzhou-based design brand Bentu recycles construction waste, coal cinder and ceramic leftovers, transforming them into items like the Tu and Pendant lamps from their Terrazzo Collection. Emerging designers Re:Studio also creates objects solely from recycled materials, including the Repaper and Replastic collections which turn plastic and paper waste into terrazzo-like homeware.

Wu Wei, founder of Thrudesign, only uses FSC-certified woods (maple, walnut and cherry) from sustainably managed forests to create his simple, timeless wood furniture pieces. He advocates a slow, thoughtful approach to both design and consumption, to ensure his collections remain durable and classic, with a long product life. Traceability is an important consideration to both designers and consumers; see fashion designer Ban Xiaoxue's traceable Merino wool knitwear collection for Fall/Winter 2019 in partnership with The Woolmark Company and spinner Xinao. His Merino wool can be traced back to the farms in Australia where it was produced, offering supply chain transparency and insight into the real story behind the product.



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- 1** | Yuue Design's Upcycling Shared Bicycle collection
 - 2** | Ban Xiaoxue's collection with The Woolmark Company
 - 3** | A guest room at 1 Hotel Haitang Bay, Sanya
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Travel too is on the sustainability radar, with Chinese consumers keen to understand the potential impact their travel choices have upon their destinations. On Hainan Island, the upcoming nature-focused 1 Hotel Haitang Bay, Sanya, is committed to eco-conscious architecture through its design by Oval Partnership. Vernacular architecture, locally-sourced materials, living green walls and roofs, and energy-efficient technologies (rainwater recycling, grey water reuse, solar thermal hot water) are integral to 1 Hotels' eco-oriented, luxe-level ethos.



ASIAN SENSIBILITY

Truth in simplicity: interior design has become an important means of aesthetic expression. Refined minimalism, understated luxury, quality furnishings and a desire for comfort and functionality form the basis of a more thoughtful approach to interior design. Attracted to a subtle Oriental aesthetic and a commitment to space and light, Chinese consumers are pushing for more artful, contemporary designs that are accessible to all.



1

Yuichiro Hori's hugely successful Shanghai-based Stellar Works is a case in point. Hori's Japanese roots bring together East and West, heritage and modernity, craft and industry in his Shanghai workshop. Collaborations with top design talents – think furniture from Neri&Hu's Discipline collection and Space Copenhagen's Ren collection – celebrate culture and Asian sensibility. European luxury design houses are also gaining appeal. For example, the elegant new villa showroom of French master Christian Liaigre, on Shanghai's Huaihai Middle Road, conveys a message of purity, simplicity and luxury to growing numbers of fans. On a more accessible level, modernist Nordic brands like Fritz Hansen and Hay and domestic label Zaozuo's streamlined, Scandinavian-inspired furniture and homeware collections are garnering a large following among young urban Chinese shoppers.

China-based interior designers are growing in reputation – and appeal. Residential and commercial interiors by Shanghai-based French designer Baptiste Bohu are proving a big hit among the city's style-savvy A-listers who love his elegant mix of art deco, classic French and contemporary. Mixing minimalism and tradition, architecture studio Linehouse designed the Tingtai Teahouse in Shanghai's arty Moganshan Lu district, where they built a series of stainless steel teahouses on green terrazzo flooring in a former concrete-clad factory space. Also working to boost the appeal of China's tea ceremony tradition for a younger generation are designers Jingzi Pan and Danyang Fu of Defront, whose sleek Hei teapot is made with Yixing clay and incorporates a metal infuser and thermometer for ease of use.



2



3

A connection to nature and a clean, uncluttered, organic design is evident in the Six Senses Qing Cheng Mountain resort outside Chengdu. With its nature-focused architecture set within an extensive bamboo-forested landscape, the serene resort complements the UNESCO World Heritage and Natural Cultural sites at nearby Dujiangyan. Chinese-inspired interior elements are of course integral to the design – much of the resort's wooden antique Chinese-style furniture is locally made, underscoring Six Senses' commitment to give back to the local community.

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- 1 | A piece from Neri&Hu and Stellar Works' Discipline collection
 - 2 | Hay's Bund collection at Design Shanghai
 - 3 | Inside Six Senses Qing Cheng Mountain
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EXPERIENTIAL RETAIL

For mobile-savvy consumers in China, offline shopping has attracted a 'special event' status, places shoppers visit to be inspired and entertained, to engage with a brand and interact with their friends. As such, forward-thinking brands have moved away from traditional product and service-based stores, instead creating retail spaces that are diverse and immersive, that emphasise experience and exploration.

Images: Sybarite/Noah Sheldon
Dirk Weiblen/Aim Architecture (Harmay)

In this changing retail landscape, tools such as personalisation, customisation, and virtual and augmented realities are used to create social media-friendly spaces that motivate shoppers to share their experiences. In so doing, the stores raise brand awareness and drive sales. Pop-up stores too are proliferating, made all the more desirable by their limited timeframes. The pop-up concept is expected to explode with up to 3,000 pop-ups in China by 2020.

Sensory perception is key. Time-honored brand Erdos' (luxury cashmere) new Shanghai store was designed by WAA (We Architech Anonymous) to respond to emotions, with an emphasis on touch, sight and movement. The store's interior spaces respond to the folds and creases of cashmere, with floating garments hung on Erdos' signature bold red pigment metal supports. Similarly, renowned green tea brand Zhuyeqing's flagship store in Chengdu designed by X+ Living is based on the idea that drinking tea requires a favourable sense of place and mood. The store features wooden clouds, mountains and graceful arching display panels for a poetic and calming sensory experience that enhances the ritual of drinking tea.

Shanghai-based Aim Architecture's work on Chinese cosmetics retailer Harmay's flagship store in Beijing has been a runaway success, turning Harmay into the city's number one retail store according to apps Dazhongdianping and Xiaohongshu (late 2019). Offering a sense of theatre, the warehouse-style space offers access via two tiny doors set into a glass brick façade. Customers can not only engage with the products, but also see how they are distributed and delivered. An assembly table downstairs, a huge spiral staircase leading up to product-focused rooms (travel kits, perfumes, product try-on) and a final black space where visitors can "write the next act on their own" are drawing crowds.



- 1 | The façade of SKP-S, designed by Sybarite
- 2 | Inside the futuristic SKP-S in Beijing
- 3 | Harmay's flagship store in Beijing, designed by Aim Architecture



On a large scale, London architecture firm Sybarite, which redesigned and refurbished both Beijing and Xi'an's upscale Shin Kong Place department stores (140,000 square metres and 250,000 square metres respectively) into luxe-level fashion meccas, rebranded as SKP with a curvaceous new logo based on the Chinese character for rice. Sybarite also recently collaborated with Gentle Monster on SKP-S, a four-floor global fashion brand incubator with different perspectives and identities on each floor. Luxury labels enjoy a museum-like space, cult streetwear gets a more industrial palette (terrazzo, polished concrete, backlit glass) and fashion brands are housed in futuristic pods to create a stylistic fashion journey with varying landscapes, ripe for experimentation.



STAR POWER

China is known for its architectural innovation, with statement buildings defining the skylines in cities across the country. In these increasingly patriotic times, China has remained committed to working with international 'starchitects' whilst at the same time recognising the power of its home-grown architectural talents who are fast changing the face of the modern cityscape.



When it comes to bigger and better, Zaha Hadid Architects continues to redefine innovation with its record-breaking projects. Beijing's Daxing Airport, with its starburst floor plan, is reportedly the largest single structure airport in the world, and the 45-storey Leeza Soho skyscraper in Beijing's Fengtai District has the world's tallest atrium rising through its centre. The firm was also behind the Changsha Meixihu International Culture and Art Centre in Hunan province, part of a \$130 billion infrastructure plan for the area. Comprising 1.2 million square feet, the futuristic ribbon-like structure contains undulating pedestrian walkways linking the MICA contemporary art museum (eight galleries), theatre, workshop, café and more.

Emphasising the existing environment, Thomas Heatherwick's mixed-use 1,000 Trees project

near Shanghai's Suzhou Creek is due for first phase completion in May 2020. To avoid a high-rise tower looming over the established art district, Heatherwick came up with a tree-lined mountain that wraps itself in the landscape and lifts trees over different levels, "knitting the new with the old". On the river side, there is a public park and walkway; on the other, an exposed structural grid with original paintings and graffiti art. Phase two should be completed by 2024.



Demand for innovation has spread to second- and third-tier cities. In northern coastal Qinhuangdao, Neri&Hu's Aranya Art Center with its large amphitheatre-like conical concrete void creates both a place for art and for the community to gather. In the same area, Open Architecture built the cave-like UCCA Dune Art Museum under a sand dune on a beach in a bid to preserve the natural ecology of the site. Ma Yin, founder of the Aranya group, felt that using Chinese 'starchitects' would add emotion and spirit to the town; his vision has proved highly popular among the public.

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- 1 | Beijing's Daxing Airport by Zaha Hadid Architects
 - 2 | Thomas Heatherwick's 1,000 Trees project, to be unveiled in May 2020
 - 3 | Vector Architects' Changjiang Art Museum
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So too, Beijing-based Vector Architects emphasised the role architecture plays in the community with the Changjiang Art Museum in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province. With galleries arranged around a light well, the pale brick volumes of the structure include a public space which links a residential community and the city. And Ma Yansong of Mad Architects recently completed designs for the Yiwu Grand Theatre, a new cultural centre and public space that is surrounded by water topped with glass sails to make it look like a Chinese junk. The subtle curves echo the Jiangnan-style eaves of the region's vernacular architecture. Construction begins this year.



DIGITAL REVOLUTION

China is at the forefront of digital technology, with the country determined to become the world leader in Artificial Intelligence (AI) by 2030. Big news, as according to market intelligence firm Tractica, annual global AI software revenue is set to grow from \$10.1 billion in 2018 to \$126 billion in 2025. The pace of change is considerable, with early adopting consumers and far-reaching mobile-operativity (who could live in China these days without the all-pervasive super app WeChat, for example?) rapidly transforming how people live and work.



The country is fast becoming a creative superpower. The Made in China 2025 policy includes a commitment to technological advances in many areas, including solar power, battery technology, drones and electric cars. Innovator NIO is busy creating electric SUVs for environmentally conscious millennials with vehicles equipped with an artificially intelligent dashboard robot, access to drive-through NIO power stations and exclusive NIO clubhouses. Tesla too has recently announced plans to make the Model Y SUV, at its new Shanghai factory, and says it will open a design centre in China with the aim of creating an original car for sale in markets around the world.

The recent 2019 Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture in Shenzhen – held inside the new Futian highspeed railway station – explored new phenomena brought about by the digital revolution and how

citizens can become involved in shaping cities. Audiences engaged with installations from architects around the world, including curator Carlo Ratti and MVRDV's Winy Maas' *Eyes of the City* that invited visitors to question how technologies like facial recognition can be integrated into urban life – a hot topic in China right now.

New-generation designers are exploring creative processes in the design-tech realm. Independent designer and digital artist Zhang Zhoujie Digital Lab uses computer-generated design work to make his origami-like Endless Form chair collection. The stainless steel chairs are designed by computer algorithms which map the real world and produce different chairs based on human interactions; the chairs are then constructed using traditional



hand-welding and polishing techniques. In the spirit of digital exploration and discovery, TeamLab Borderless Shanghai (the Japanese digital art collective's largest ever museum), opened in Huangpu District. Visitors are invited to experience the psychedelic interactive digital artworks which spill between rooms and communicate without boundaries. In another first, Wutopia Lab built the sci-fi-themed Last Redoubt, an architectural model museum made using 5,000 white steel pipes. The collections housed within a mirror and steel backdrop aim to present architectural visions of the future.

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- 1** | MVRDV's proposal for Tencent's headquarters in Shenzhen
 - 2** | TeamLab Borderless Shanghai
 - 3** | Zhang Zhoujie's Endless Form collection
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TOGETHER FOREVER

Collaborations, partnerships, connections: Finding new ways to work to get your message across is vital to design brand success in China. Interiors have become the new playground for aesthetic expression, evidenced by younger design fans who curate tailored online lifestyles to share among their networks (via WeChat, Weibo and Xiaohongshu, for example) and express their aesthetic style and personality.

Global-local collaborations are one route to success: Asian luxury carpet brand Tai Ping targeted Chinese consumers by teaming up with Shanghai-based couture fashion design house Atelier by Fang in their latest luxury collection. They translated lead designer Fang Yang's passion for the ancient art of origami into artisanal floor coverings in luxurious wools, silks and lurex. Shanghai-based interdisciplinary design studio Mattersofseeing, founded by Mi Dong and Jingfeng Fang, gained recognition when it was shortlisted for the Loewe Craft Prize 2019 for its Hui ceramics. And Neri&Hu has been receiving global awards for their collaborations: its Twelve A.M. collection for Molteni&C won the Best Furniture Design in last year's ELLE Decoration International Design Awards; and its Light candleholder from The Society Collection for Paola C. won Best Design in Wallpaper* Design Awards 2020.

From a brand perspective, KOLs (key opinion leaders) tap into an increased desire for individualism and authenticity, aligning themselves with products and designers that further reflect their take on style and culture. Popular fashion and lifestyle blogger Savi – @savislook – whose modernist, clean-lined Beijing home was featured recently in *Architectural Digest China*, posts accessible videos of her home decoration ideas on Weibo,

YouTube and Instagram, mixing global brands with vintage finds. Industrial designer Jamy Yang of Yang Design was flagged by *Forbes* as China's most influential designer; his soulful Chinese aesthetic and commercially viable designs have thus far garnered him nearly 100 design awards and a global client roster that includes Haier, Boeing, Samsung, Vanke, GM, Unilever and more.

The cultural arena too is benefitting from some exciting international collaborations. In Shanghai the Centre Pompidou Paris teamed up with the publicly-owned West Bund Group to establish a major product for cultural and artistic exchanges between France and China. The ambitious Centre Pompidou x West Bund Museum project designed by British architect David Chipperfield is housed in a 25,000-square-metre building on the Huangpu River. Organisers hope to develop exchange projects with artists from China and create a crossroads of artistic disciplines which will appeal to a cross-section of audiences.

1 | Jamy Yang, founder of Yang Design

2 | Tai Ping's Atelier by Fang collection, in collaboration with designer Fang Yang



DESIGN DESTINATIONS

The growing appreciation for good design is driving domestic travel choices, with second- and third-tier cities like Chengdu, Chongqing, Qingdao and Xi'an using design innovation and creativity in commercial (shopping centres are prime examples), hospitality and cultural sectors to lure visitors. Experts also argue that lower-tier city residents represent 35% of true luxury consumers in China, so local investment in design and architecture plays dividends on many levels.

Beijing's successful bid to host the 2020 Winter Olympics meant big change for nearby Hebei Province. Plans to turn China's winter sports market into a trillion-yuan industry by 2025 have encouraged a pipeline of new ski resorts across the province. With a commitment to rejuvenation and sustainable development, projects such as Maison H's design for the Winter Olympics Museum and Academy in the heart of Chongli are part of a local government initiative to revitalise the town centre. A world first, the building will contain an Olympic Academy, Youth Training Centre, VR Experience Centre and Mountain Sports Centre plus cable car station and commercial and conferencing facilities in a bid to extend the legacy of the Olympic spirit and act as a catalyst for sustainable social and economic development.



The coastal city of Xiamen, in the country's southeast, is becoming a design hotspot. Blink Design Group – known for designing luxurious hotel experiences across the globe – is working on the upscale boutique lifestyle hotel Andaz Xiamen, set for completion in 2020. Further afield, architects WATG, inspired by the people, culture and environments in which they work, built 87 luxury villas perched within a mountainous landscape on the edge of the Tibetan Plateau for Ritz-Carlton Jiuzhaigou and designed the urban Ritz-Carlton Xi'an hotel and retail atrium with its sleek angles and intersecting forms.

As brands work to expand their retail networks into provincial cities, cutting-edge retail spaces are making news. Art-loving, luxury-led Chengdu – earmarked by the government as the engine of growth for China's West – has also seen an influx of global brands, which in turn lure design-savvy travellers to spaces like Chengdu's IFS mall with its unique art installations, such as the iconic gigantic hanging panda sculpture by artist Lawrence Argent. So too, Chongqing's SND boutique in Shin Kong Place by Shenzhen architects Various Associates offers consumers a room-within-a-room experience from which to enjoy global brands. And, even when a mall itself is not yet quite as cutting-edge as brands would like, designers like Neri&Hu for Valextra's flagship store in Chengdu and Atelier & Co for JWH in Zhengzhou respond by using innovation in design to make their clients stand out from the crowd.

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- 1** | The Winter Olympics Museum and Academy in Chongli, by Maison H
 - 2** | The Ritz-Carlton Xi'an, with architecture by WATG
 - 3** | Inside Andaz Xiamen, designed by Blink Design Group
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CRAFT AND CULTURE

Craft appeal is inherent through the history of design, and is proving to be increasingly important when making design choices in China. Consumers are forging emotional connections on an aesthetic level, revealing a desire – and deep-rooted respect – for genuine, handmade products that offer exquisite craftsmanship and a sense of heritage. Designers are responding with deep dives into research projects in order to weave craft history into contemporary living.



Millennials have a profound interest in their own culture, an appetite for knowledge and discovery that reveals a genuine interest in what has gone before. In Hangzhou, Pinwu Design Studio has partnered with the local Yuhang district government on the Rong Design Library project. Rong, which means to melt or fuse, aims to research new and future applications of traditional crafts for contemporary design (a cornerstone of Pinwu's design philosophy to date). Alongside inviting designers from all over the world to contribute, and to look at Chinese craftsmanship with fresh eyes, Pinwu also offered a monthly residence at the library to young designers from Salone Satellite Award 2019, to facilitate collaboration and exchange.

Wood master craftsmanship, especially, remains a revered skill. Architect and lead designer Lv Yongzhong of Banmoo showcases a deep-rooted love of traditional Chinese culture

and craft via his streamlined pieces which balance the demands of modern living. Currently celebrating its 14th year with a new store in Shanghai's Xintiandi, Banmoo's modern classics include the graceful walnut wood Suzhou Chair and the pared down Anhui Emperor Desk. Contemporary minimalist Chen Yanfei of Pusu, uses practices from ancient China to create harmonious objects that reflect a saying by philosopher Chuang Tzu: "Nothing in the world is more beautiful than simplicity." Chen's Ming dynasty-meets-contemporary literati-style collections are made with rare red sandalwoods, and a small amount of beech and camphorwood; they include the award-winning Cloud-Rocking chair and modular Wanli cabinet.



Turning a global eye to China craftsmanship, Shanghai-based designer Alexandre Chary fused China craft techniques with French influences via his colourful multifunctional Evolve stools, which also serve as a tea ceremony seat, a side table and a storage unit. Emerging designers have also tapped into the craft aesthetic, among them Furong Chen who founded Xiamen-based Wuu to produce timeless, research-driven collections which blend handcrafted techniques with a modernist vision. His popular twistable T lamp collection has been well-received internationally.

1 | Wuu's Quark collection

2 | The Stargazer lighting series, also by Wuu

NEW GENERATION, NEW ENERGY

Interest in design is at an all-time high in China, with growing numbers of emerging new designers launching their own brands and collections, forging fresh identities and setting the scene for change. With a growing sense of self, these upcoming design stars are committed to innovation and quality; making their presence felt, both locally and globally.

The boom in China's mobile-connected urbanites interested in design has helped discover and promote these rising stars; so too has the growing number of platforms for exposure. Annual design fairs both in China and overseas (Design Shanghai, Design China Beijing, Beijing Design Week, CIFF, Salone del Mobile Milano and Shanghai, Maison & Objet, among many others) are big business these days, and showcase an increasing number of China-based participants. With a keen eye on the future, the shows know it is prudent to create special exhibition areas to support young Chinese talents. Beijing-based designer Frank Chou – who likes to project a modern image of China by using pure, simple modern forms in his furniture collections – has seen his star rise in recent years. In 2020 Chou will act as Mentor for the Design Shanghai Talents initiative, which will support emerging designers by providing connections and a network for them to grow.



Speaker forums at shows like Design Shanghai and Festival of Design are usually packed to the rafters with eager audiences keen to expand their architecture and design knowledge. Hugely supportive of home-grown talents, this loyal fan base ensures that Chinese designers get lots of attention on stage – sometimes even more than international design personalities.

As well as reflecting their Chinese roots through design, emerging designers are also keen to nurture a global outlook. Hangzhou-based design brand Above, founded by Rhode Island School of Design graduates Xu Lu and Zhang Zihan in 2017, mixes Chinese culture and heritage with a world vision through products like incense holder-timekeeper Timer and the circular Float Clock with floating copper hands, sold via its online store. Educated in Shanghai and Milan, Ximi Li, through his furniture brand Urbancraft, creates timeless pieces like his Jiazhuang ('dowry') steel, leather and oak dressing table that combines cultural fusion with quality craftsmanship.

There is an increased confidence in creative thinking. Designers to watch include Guangzhou graduate Shaw Liu, whose sculptural lighting series The Sanctuary, with its moonlight-like glass globes, creates an ambient light. See also Mario Tsai, who prefers to "use less, design better". Tsai is committed to restraint through design, using a sustainable approach for his Mazha modular lighting and lightweight aluminum Gongzheng table collection.



- 1 | Beijing-based designer Frank Chou
- 2 | Float Clock series, by Above
- 3 | Colosseum series, by Mario Tsai
- 4 | Shaw Liu's The Sanctuary at Design China Beijing

10 TRAILBLAZERS

NO **1** WANG SHU
SENSE OF SOUL

NO **2** ZHANG ZHOUIE
DIGITAL FIRST

NO **3** PENG ZENG
EXPECT THE
UNEXPECTED

NO **4** BAPTISTE BOHU
HIGH FASHION

NO **5** OPEN ARCHITECTURE
MUSEUM QUALITY

NO **6** XIMI LI
TALE OF
TWO CITIES

NO **7** QIAO ZHIBING
TANK SHOW

NO **8** AIM ARCHITECTURE
EXPERIENCES
FIRST

NO **9** VECTOR ARCHITECTS
SPIRIT LEVEL

NO **10** NERIGHU
BUILT TO LAST

SENSE OF SOUL

Urumqi-born Wang Shu, China's first and only recipient of the Pritzker Architecture Prize (2012), is a leading expert on sustainable and socially conscious architecture. Founder of Amateur Architecture Studio in Hangzhou (alongside his wife Lu Wenyu in 1997) and a professor at Hangzhou's China Academy of Art, Wang Shu disagrees with China's explosive urbanism and the rise of soulless architecture; instead he uses recycled materials and artisanal craft techniques in a modern context, visible in projects like the Ningbo History Museum, Fuyang Cultural Complex and CAFA's Xiangshan Campus. The multi-award-winning architect – or artisan, as he prefers to be known – recently won the DFA World's Outstanding Chinese Designer 2019 award.



WANG

SHU

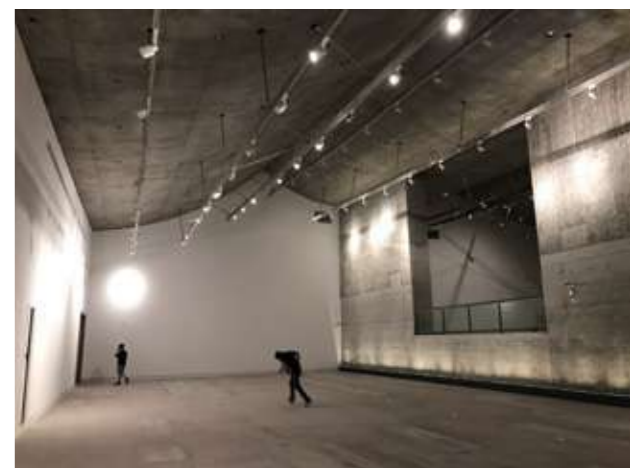
NO.

1

MADE IN CHINA



Ceramic House, Jinhua



Fuyang Cultural Complex, Fuyang

Wa Shan Guesthouse, Xiangshan



Images: Gao Yuan/Zhang Zhoujie Digital Lab

DIGITAL FIRST

ZHANG
ZHOUJIE

NO.

2

MADE IN CHINA

Shanghai-based designer and digital pioneer Zhang Zhoujie has a future-first mindset. He launched Zhang Zhoujie Digital Lab in 2010 after studying at the China Academy of Art and at Central Saint Martins, London, and is a firm advocate of the power of computer-led design, where computers are the authors and designers are the creators. Collected by museums and individuals alike, Zhang's work includes the geometric, algorithm-generated Endless Form chairs and new Tables collection, which provide an intriguing glimpse into an AI-led future and mixes Chinese and Western perspectives with digital and handmade. Zhang's work is included in the exhibition *Values of Design: China in the Making*, which runs until 20 December 2020 at V&A Gallery, Design Society, Shenzhen.



The Endless Form collection



Tables series

Images: Buzao

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

PENG
ZENG
NO. 3

MADE IN CHINA



Buzao's Null (topmost) and Hot (above and right) collections are also purveyed at Gallery All in Beijing and Los Angeles.

Buzao – which means “I don’t know” in Chinese – is a spirited brand established in 2017 by Peng Zeng, the former lead designer of Guangzhou-based recycling pioneers Bentu Design. With a philosophy open to innovation, Buzao enjoys working with unexpected materials and processes to explore new avenues of design and embrace natural imperfections. The calm and rational Null (blue laminated gradient glass) collection with its stackable rectangles and spherical layers, and the colourful, thermal image-like Hot (psychedelic, rainbow-hued electroplated stainless steel) collection inspired by a simple wooden palette were shown at Design Shanghai and Design Miami (2019) and Maison & Objet (2020), proving especially popular among the millennial-Gen Z demographic.



Images: Baptiste Bohu

HIGH FASHION



BAPTISTE BOHU

NO.

4

MADE IN CHINA



Baptiste Bohu is a French designer whose contemporary art deco-style vision with a classic French twist has garnered him an ever-growing fan base among China's fashionable A-listers. Based in Shanghai since 2006, the former finance professional bowed to his passion for architecture and design in 2008, demonstrating a work ethos which balances design flair with a head for business. It's going to be a busy year for Bohu: Alongside designing numerous private residences, Bohu has a new mod-colonial-inspired boutique hotel in Shanghai's eco-friendly Chongming Island set to open in 2020; a new office in the iconic Embankment Building on the Bund; and more Asia-based resort work in the pipeline.



Bohu's designs for commercial, hospitality and residential interiors are often characterised by understated glamour

Images: Ma Nan (portrait) | Wu Qingshan (UCCA)

MUSEUM QUALITY



OPEN
ARCHITECTURE
NO. 5

MADE IN CHINA



Inside the UCCA Dune Art Museum (above and below); Tank Shanghai (bottom right).



Architecture has the power to transform the way people live, according to Li Hu and Huang Wenjing, who co-founded Open Architecture in New York (2003) and Beijing (2008). As visiting professors at Tsinghua University and Central Academy of Fine Arts, China (CAFA), the duo work to balance the demands of man and nature. Award-winning projects include the serene, submerged UCCA Dune Art Museum in north China's Beidaihe zone and the repurposed oil drums exhibition spaces of Tank Shanghai art centre, both of which scooped *Interior Design's* Best of Year Awards 2019. Coming in the summer of 2020 is their Chapel of Sound project, a semi-outdoor concert hall that resembles a prehistoric boulder, nestled in a rocky valley at the base of the Jinshanling Great Wall outside Beijing.



Images: Urbancraft



XIMI

LI

NO.

6

MADE IN CHINA

TALE OF TWO CITIES

Designer Ximi Li sits between two cultures. With a bachelor's degree in Industrial Design from the China Academy of Art and a master's degree in Furniture Design from Milan's Polytechnic University, Li studied under Andrea Branzi and Luca Trazzi in Italy before returning to China to join Neri&Hu. Such experience, he says, allowed him to appreciate different points of view and create timeless designs with cross-cultural appeal. Li launched Shanghai-based Ximi Li Design and Urbancraft in 2016; he was named a Gen.T 2019 honouree (among other trailblazers driving change in Asia) and a Rising Talent at last year's Maison & Objet. Works include the Yuan brass pendant and table lamp, the steel leather and oak Jiazhuang dressing table and the BY3 interlocking coffee tables made of terrazzo, glass and marble.

Urbancraft designs



TANK SHOW



NO.

7

MADE IN CHINA



For Tank Shanghai (above and below), Zhibing commissioned Open Architecture to bring his vision to life

Contemporary art collector Qiao Zhibing opened Tank Shanghai in 2019. A nightclub and karaoke operator turned art innovator (he has been collecting art since 2006), Qiao's mandate is to make the art scene feel accessible to the public and nurture art's relationship with the city. He chose Beijing-based Open Architecture to repurpose a former oil tank storage facility at West Bund's Longhua Airport and turn it into a 60,000-square-metre non-profit art museum with exhibition spaces (with the tanks as the centrepiece), gardens, cafe and recreation zones. Tank Shanghai has shown works by teamLab, Adrián Villar Rojas, Cyprien Gaillard, Fanzhi and Ding Yi; with plans for 2020 including the first contemporary artist to bring LEGO into the art world as a medium, Nathan Sawaya, and his imaginative *Art of the Brick*. Blue-chip artists such as Damien Hirst, Luc Tuymans, Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger have paid visits to the museum.



Images: Dirk Weiblen (Harmay)

EXPERIENCES FIRST

AIM
ARCHITECTURE
NO. 8



Aim Architecture's Harmay project in Beijing features intriguing walkways (below) and a theatrical staircase (bottom right)



Founded by Wendy Saunders and Vincent de Graaf in 2005, Shanghai-based Aim Architecture has collected awards and nominations for their design, architecture and urban planning portfolio. They have reimagined bricks-and-mortar retail spaces into digital-first experiences across China for online cosmetics retailer Harmay; fused technology, art and academics at Shanghai's educational B Campus; and woven nature and architecture at the serene K-House in Sri Lanka. In 2020 they are turning their attention to Zhang Xin and Pan Shi Yi of SOHO China's Commune on the Great Wall resort as it transitions into a Hyatt Unbound property. An iconic architectural monument since 2005, the Commune – with its leading architect-designed villas – was a pivotal moment in contemporary architecture in China.

Images: Vector Architects

SPIRIT LEVEL

VECTOR
ARCHITECTS

NO. 9

MADE IN CHINA

Committed to thoughtful, innovative architecture that respects history, culture and the environment, Gong Dong founded Vector Architects in Beijing in 2008 after returning from study and work in Germany and the US. At the Alila Yangshou hotel near Guilin, set in a natural karst landscape on the Li River, he repurposed a 1960s sugar mill, using its industrial heritage to reflect the spirit of the older generation. With the voluminous, airy Restaurant y Sea, part of the design-led Aranya community in Beidaihe, he completed the final part of his Seaside Library and Chapel trilogy. And in Taiyuan, he built the Changjiang Art Museum, with its convivial open spaces and soaring central light well, to foster a sense of community in a town that was practically razed in 2016 in the name of urban development.



Changjiang Art Museum

Alila Yangshuo



Seashore Library

Images: Neri&Hu

BUILT TO LAST

Power couple Lyndon Neri and Rossana Hu of Neri&Hu Design and Research Office have built a substantial portfolio since founding their diverse Shanghai-based practice in 2004. With architecture and interior design projects that span hotels and restaurants to cultural buildings (Suzhou Chapel, New Shanghai Theatre) and boutiques (Valextra in Chengdu, Sulwhasoo in Beijing), in the last decade Neri&Hu has helped to define, and consequently elevate, the contemporary Chinese design language. Along the way, the studio has been profiled in nearly every architecture and design publication of note; they've also been recognised as Designers of the Year by *Maison & Objet Asia* and *Wallpaper**, among others. In 2019 Neri&Hu designed Aranya Art Centre, a textured concrete building volume containing gallery spaces and communal areas.

NERI & HU
NO. 10

MADE IN CHINA



Pieces from the Molteni&C Twelve A.M. collection, designed by Neri&Hu



CATCHON

F I N N

PARTNERS

Founded in 2001, CatchOn is a brand communications consultancy with offices in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Armed with a hybrid expertise in branding, integrated marketing communications, market research, and public relations, we create and communicate brands throughout Asia. In 2019, we joined Finn Partners, a global integrated PR and marketing agency. Visit the website at www.catchonco.com and follow us on Instagram at @catchonco.

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