

Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu

The story of an original development



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Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu
A new heart of Chengdu

2011



Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu



2015



Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu





Throughout our 40-year history Swire Properties has initiated projects that add value to both a place and its people. Nowhere is that more evident than in our newly opened retail-led, mixed-use Daci Temple development in the heart of Chengdu.

The Jinjiang district authorities in Chengdu wanted to continue the energetic development of the city while at the same time respect the heritage of a historically important site, with the 1,400-year-old Daci Temple as its centre point.

We shared their vision and very much appreciated the confidence they showed in our commitment to create an original, premium commercial complex that preserved the singular nature of the location and enhanced the fabric of the neighbourhood in a positive manner.

Swire have been trading in China for 150 years and Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu is one of five completed or nearly completed developments in Swire Properties' own expanding portfolio in the country. The centre takes many of its cues from our already successful Taikoo Li Sanlitun complex in Beijing, where the low-rise, open plan, pedestrian retail centre happily embraces the surrounding community.

This book tells the story of our development in Chengdu and traces the many different elements that have gone into its creation and eventual success. We are hugely proud of what we've achieved in the city, reflecting, as it does, Swire Properties' attitude to original and sustainable urban transformation.

I hope you enjoy reading this book.

Guy Bradley
Chief Executive
Swire Properties



Relaxing in Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu
next to the ancient Daci Temple

Preface

Chengdu is thriving. As capital of Sichuan Province, the city has enjoyed a period of substantial growth resulting in it becoming Western China's largest retail hub. This advancement, in conjunction with the accolade of recently being identified as the country's 'most liveable city', has contributed significantly to Chengdu's graduation from its historical 'tier-two' status, to that of a 'tier-one' city - in perception as well as in reality.

The newly opened Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu (Taikoo Li) relishes the different influences of its unique city-centre location. Wrapping itself around the landmark Daci Temple, whose lineage stretches back to the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907), the site's historical credentials are sublimely balanced by its more modern position within Chengdu's busiest shopping area, especially popular with the city's younger lifestyle-conscious consumers.

In response to the city authorities' vision to preserve both the heritage and dignity of the location, Swire Properties conceived and executed a plan that acknowledged the historical significance and essential character of the setting with both acute sensitivity and commercial insight. The development is therefore the result of a deep understanding of the structural imperatives, in terms of an innovative re-interpretation of a traditional Sichuan architectural aesthetic, and an appreciation of the human opportunities afforded by, and a consequence of, substantial urban regeneration.

The result is a 270,000 sq m mixed-use commercial complex comprising of three distinctive elements. First and foremost is a 116,000 sq m, lane-driven, open plan shopping component, made up of 30 new two-and-three storey buildings - seamlessly connected to the city's metro infrastructure for easy access. This is a joint venture between Swire Properties and Sino-Ocean Group and was opened in April 2015 with the appropriate fanfare. Like other successful shopping areas, the centre has created a well-networked, high street retail model with proven high-profile anchor tenants, joined by interesting local brands - among these are 110 new entrants to Chengdu.

Adjacent to the retail centre is a 100-room luxury hotel which also includes 42 serviced apartments. The Temple House joins The Upper House in

Hong Kong and Beijing's The Opposite House as the latest hotel in The House Collective, Swire Hotels' exclusive portfolio of luxury, and much acclaimed properties.

The full mixed-use nature of the complex is completed by the 47-floor Grade-A office tower, Pinnacle One, designed to service the needs of the city's dynamic economic growth.

In order to realise the ambitions of both the city and developer alike, lead architect, The Oval Partnership was given an unparalleled opportunity to develop a new heart for Chengdu. Building on its collaboration with Swire Properties on the admired Taikoo Li Sanlitun centre in Beijing, the architects created a master plan based on their innovative 'Open City' concept. This envisaged an adaptable, forward-looking framework of naturally lit and ventilated streets, alleys and squares open to the public at all times. The quality of the public spaces, the considered landscaping, enhanced by art pieces and water features, were designed deliberately to make the lanes and squares pleasurable for the visitors and create a compelling whole-day shopping and leisure experience. The architectural alchemy clearly honours the site's heritage by retaining two historic lanes and courtyards, and restoring the six remaining historical buildings in impeccable detail, and realising that an innovative solution was as much an inner-city regeneration of the public realm, as a plan for a unique integrated commercial development that stands out from an increasingly competitive pack.

The Oval Partnership was aided in its quest for originality by two further design mavens. Elena Galli Giallini, in partnership with Spawton Architecture, brought her extensive regional experience in distinctive interiors to the complex's expansive three-storey basement. Here the ground-level retail element, which follows the Chinese tradition of lanes and courtyards, is substituted by a more

fluid and organic space with themes related to a culturally-derived world of caves and underground rivers.

In designing The Temple House, Make Architects have maintained the project's wider ambition of marrying cultural preservation and contemporary design. Two of the original heritage buildings, the Zhanghuali Courtyard and No. 15 Bitieshi Street, have been beautifully restored to house the hotel's spa, a teahouse and lobby.

In recognition of its originality, the retail component has received a swathe of high profile awards, including being chosen as a 2015 global winner in the US-based Urban Land Institute Global Awards for Excellence, widely accepted as one of the development industry's most acclaimed accolades. This was followed closely by other tributes that have praised the complex for its contribution towards urban renewal and the public realm.

This book explores the thinking, planning and construction of Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu as another in a long line of original developments that will enhance Swire Properties' proven track record in transforming places and creating enduring value for commercial stakeholders and the community alike.

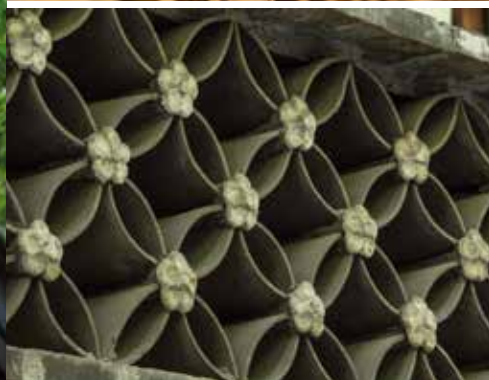
Site plan of Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu and Daci Temple

Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu



Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu









"It is the whole district here that is the architecture"
Christopher Law, The Oval Partnership



The temple, the square, the streets and the market. Together these are the heart of the city, the essence of urbanity. Whether it is London, Rome, Isfahan or Chengdu, these archetypes of urbanity form a centre of gravity for metropolitan life.

Introduction: Setting the scene

For as long as there have been cities they have formed themselves around a core of commerce, public space and worship and the proximity between the architectural and urban elements constitutes the fundamental framework around which everything else grows. At the extraordinary site of the Daci Temple, a holy site for over 1,400 years, exactly that combination of the sacred and the profane, the holy and the commercial and the plaza, the lane and the street has been characterising the centre of Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan and one of China's most historic and resilient cities.

Swire Properties' Taikoo Li developments represent an attempt to weave together that traditional, complex series of demands which makes a city work, to reconcile the symbolic, the commercial and the civic. In reinterpreting the contemporary commercial context as a public network of streets, alleys and squares as it might have once been, and anchoring these public places into the fabric of the city through the existing historic structures and lanes, Taikoo Li is a fundamentally different approach to the mega-mall which has become the default solution for luxury consumption in the modern Chinese city.

Chengdu has, like many historic Chinese cities, suffered from the destruction of much of its historic fabric. What was once - not even so long ago - still a city of low-rise courtyard houses, markets and sprawling temple complexes, is now the familiar urban landscape of high-rise towers, super-dense housing blocks and wide roads. The alleys, which were once the fundamental conduits of urbanity and commerce, have now been relegated to the dark, unloved backs of service entrances and forgotten spaces.

Where a semblance of their original form has survived - notably in the city's Wide and Narrow Alleys, a terrific appetite has emerged for this flavour of the traditional Chinese city with its characteristics of sociable networks and modest but humane brick architecture and an



intricate plan of streets and courts. It has become the city's tourist mecca and the night scene's definitive experience for national and international visitors. Taikoo Li builds on these complex structural patterns to create a memory of the spatial experience of the city and to stitch the remaining vestiges of historic architecture back into a coherent urban realm.

This book is an attempt to illustrate how the architects, The Oval Partnership, have used Taikoo Li to reconstruct a fragment of Chengdu, negotiating between the delicate historic fabric of the temple and the heritage structures, and the demands of the contemporary city. It is the story of finding the balance between history and the future, between conservation and commerce and between the city and its citizens.





Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu –
Ancient and Modern, looking towards Metro Plaza



The historic buildings, courtyards and lanes incorporated into the new streetscape and the Daci Temple at the heart of the complex weave Taikoo Li into the fabric of a city with a history spanning two millennia.

History: Brick, dragons and burning words

The grey bricks, the carvings, columns and delicate tiled roofs of the historic buildings were retained and restored and placed within the plan so that they are glimpsed in unexpected views; so that they appear from seemingly nowhere, always a surprise, always a delight. It is at least in part the juxtaposition between the shiny shopfronts and their illuminations and the human scale and patina of the old structures that gives the richness of grain to this new piece of city.

Most impressive of all the renovations however is the Guangdong Hall. An imposing barn of a building with a deep portico, it immediately reveals its public nature - an inviting, generous shelter from the rain, the sun and the crowds. Like the courtyard houses, this building too gradually reveals an inner world, a layering of space from the resolutely public to the more hidden, more mysterious internal rooms. This was once a community centre - a place for the Cantonese community to gather and entertain themselves. That essential character of a place of gathering has survived in a building that has been restored as part of the project to house cultural and community events - Chinese opera, theatre and social comings together. More than any of the other structures on the site this is the building which weaves the development back into the public networks of the city.

In terms of its architecture, the Guangdong Hall is a fine example of Chinese construction. The grey bricks of its flank walls symbolically tie the earth (grey stone slabs) and the heavens (grey roof tiles) together. Its open, public nature is denoted by the scale of its openings (now enclosed with delicately-carved timber screens) and the span between the hefty structural timber and stone columns. Its centrality to city culture is conveyed by the intricate brick carvings which frame the entrance and depict scenes from Chinese legend. These suggest a depth to the structure of the building - an idea that the walls have stories to tell, myths inscribed deep into their surfaces.



The new Chinese city has largely ignored public neighbourhood facilities space in favour of commercial floor area and consumption has replaced community. This reminder of a very different and now rather fragile-looking past is a significant element in the building of Taikoo Li as a piece of real - rather than merely reproduction - city. Perhaps the most important idea here is the concept of 'patina'. If conservation of historic architecture is still a relatively new art in Chinese architecture, the idea of maintaining the delicate surface and its blemishes and the history of wear and tear inscribed in its fabric is yet less well-understood. But the architects here have worked carefully and thoughtfully to maintain the features of surface and material which reveal their use - rather than recreating the fabric and having everything shiny and new - as can so often be the case in historic districts.

That contrast of the old and the new works most strikingly where contemporary retail and hospitality have been incorporated into the heritage buildings, architectural interventions which blur the boundaries between historic and modern and open up interiors which were once private.

One of the historic courtyard houses has been cleverly turned into a store for top-end timepieces. It is interesting to note that whilst you might expect the big storefronts, with their huge plate glass windows and dimensions to impress, it is the tiny traditional courtyard house that feels like the nexus of luxury here. It's part of the designers' achievement to create an architecture of relative ordinariness which allows these older, more delicate buildings to shine - putting them clearly centre-stage. Another courtyard house is occupied by a small gallery; another building still was brought to the site from elsewhere in the city where it had faced demolition. Instead it was transported brick by brick and rebuilt here.

The designs for The Temple House adopt one of the traditional buildings as lobby, forecourt and library. The hotel itself is a determinedly contemporary building, on a scale commensurate with the high-rise scale and nature of the modern city. But the way you enter it, through a discreet gate from the street and into an intimate courtyard introduces an uncertainty of scale which is surprising and delightful.

Like most of the other original buildings retained on this site, this one dates from the last years of the Qing Dynasty - perhaps a century old. The delicate, sophisticated structure once accommodated scribes and clerks and that legacy has been retained in the creation of a library to one side of the courtyard. The hotel lobby and reception area face the gate and, above these, is a gallery beneath the restored timbers of the roof used for events and receptions. This loft-like space, with its dense lattice of dark-stained timber joists and purlins looks like something between an English Tudor house and the homely domestic scale of the early West Coast modernism of Rudolf Schindler or Greene and Greene. The galleries running around the sides of the courtyard meanwhile create beneath them, a finely-wrought arcade, an almost cloister-like effect with a garden at the centre.

The delicacy of the timber structure and the finely-carved, traditional window shutters contrast with the more monolithic nature of the hotel itself, clad in brick and glass, but it appears like a welcome shot of Asian exoticism and a relaxing introduction through an architecture which speaks of a particular place rather than the archetypal cliché of the global luxury lobby.

One of the historic courtyard houses serves now as the hotel spa and teahouse. A brick building wrapped around an intimate central core as garden, it appears as a perfect retreat from the contemporary city - its rooms and cape well-suited to the idea of the architecture's relationship to the scale of the human body shared by Chinese culture and contemporary pampering.

Architect Christopher Law explains that the urban plan was formulated around these historic structures. The scale of the blocks, the layout of the streets and alleys, the heights of the roofs and the colours of the modern materials both refer and defer to the heritage buildings. The paths through the retail site and the hotel are carefully planned to give glimpses of the old structures, to use them as points of orientations - visually as well as culturally. They root this new place in the culture and material of the city, anchoring Taikoo Li in the long history of Chengdu.



An architect’s vision

Working closely with Swire Properties, The Oval Partnership, under the guidance of its founder and Lead Architect Christopher Law, conceived of a master plan designed to restore the Daci Temple area to its rightful place as the real heart of Chengdu.

The concept of ‘the Lane’ and its place in Chinese tradition was obviously of paramount importance to your practice’s development of the Chengdu project, and to you personally.

Lanes have been an important part of Chinese life for thousands of years. If you look at an old Chinese painting, like the Qingming Scroll from 1,200 years ago, you see all these lanes and streets bustling with the activity of people. The essence of the lane is its diversity, and diversity is vital for a vibrant city. In a lane you have people from different parts of the country, from all walks of life. They enjoy city life through promenading down the streets enjoying all kinds of wonderful foods, and goods and curios – everything is on offer. The lane is a festival of life, which makes life worth living in the city.

So your task was to remain true to that traditional context and bring it up to date?

Exactly - in order to support this point we needed to provide extremely high quality public spaces. So the quality of the paving on the streets, the quality of the landscapes and the street furniture, are all important ingredients to make the lanes a pleasurable place to be - as is the range of offers in terms of the restaurants and bars and shops and market stores and cultural diversions. This diversity is really the essence of the lanes.

A really good lane concept should allow people to feel that they own the place, feel that this is my lane. This is the lane of my city. We own it; when the community feels that it has ownership of the place, then you know that you have succeeded.

Taikoo Li Sanlitun in Beijing was your first lanes-driven project, was it not?

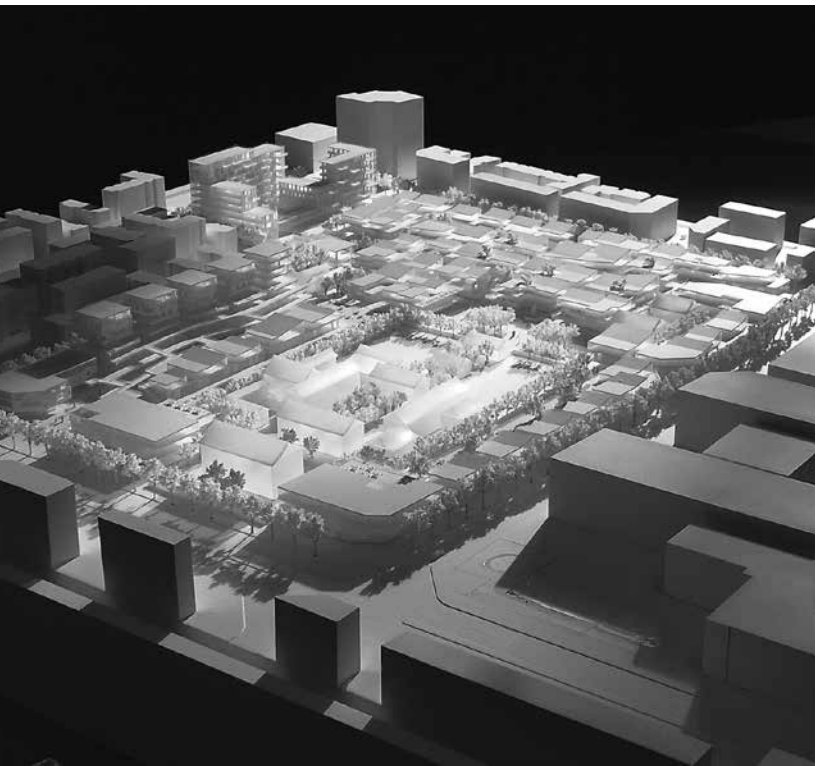
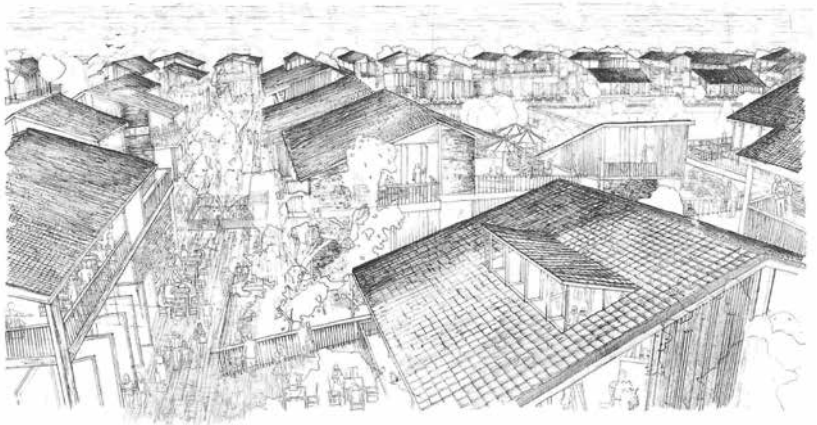
Yes. The Sanlitun area shot to fame in the 1980s as the original ‘bar street’ of Beijing, if with a slightly seedy reputation during the day. It was where the foreign residents and the local people met. But the district rather went into decline in the early part of the millennium. To regenerate the district, we came up with our unique ‘Open City’ concept. In essence our plan was to adopt the urban typologies of streets, alleys and squares that are open to the public at all times. We created an urban village with a unique atmosphere and a network of naturally lit and ventilated streets that seamlessly connect with the surrounding community. Taikoo Li Sanlitun in Beijing has been a catalyst for revitalising the whole district as a desirable destination; a place that the new generation of Chinese can feel proud of. It represents their values and their emotions.

Why was the history of the location in Chengdu so important to you?

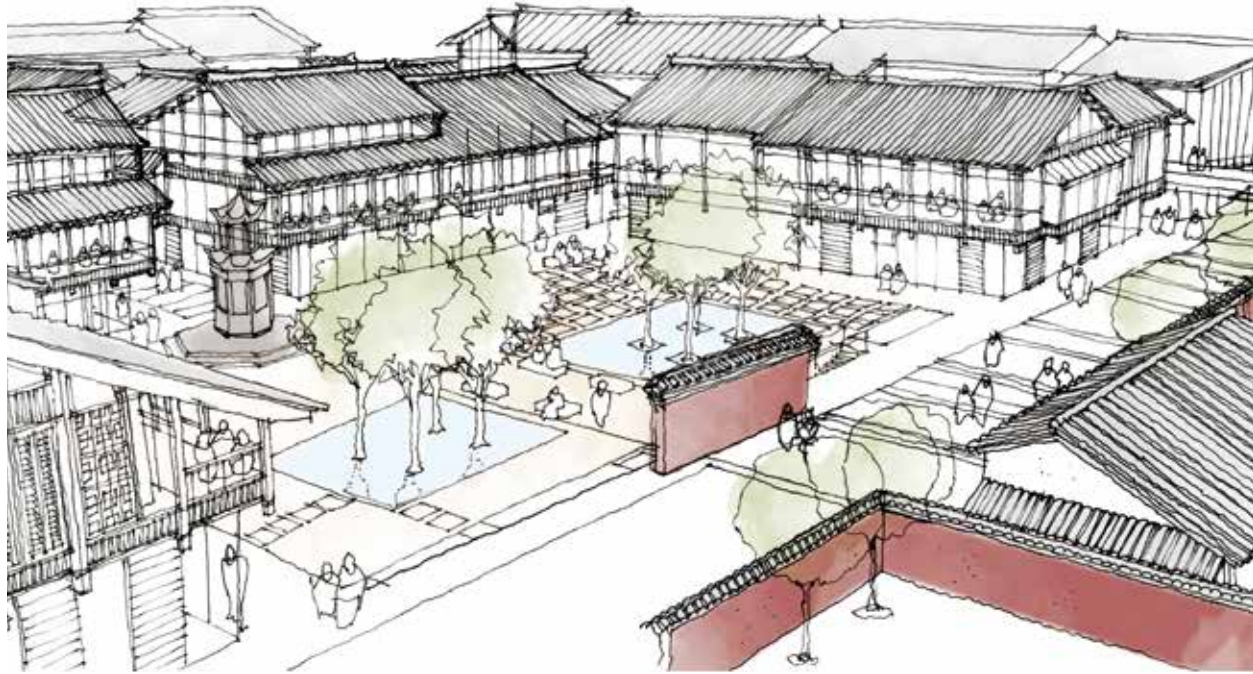
The history and the setting of the site were incomparable. I think it offers for me as an architect, an unparalleled opportunity to develop a new heart of the city, but one based on the very solid foundations of the 1,400-year-old Daci Temple. Daci Temple in fact, from time immemorial, has been the centre of the city, but for one reason or another, people have forgotten that. Now this project gave us an opportunity to regenerate the whole Daci Temple area and that allowed us to rebuild Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu into the heart of the city.



The Qingming Scroll



An early concept model shows the innovative open-plan retail component wrapped around the historic fabric of the Daci Temple and a developing architectural language that is consistent with local and regional influences.



Early illustrations showing the intimate scale of the low-rise, lane-driven 'Open City' concept in Chengdu – the perfect environment for the shopper and visitor to circulate and linger.



How did you reflect the historical credentials of the setting into the designs?

Our regeneration concept builds on this sophisticated past by conserving six historical buildings, including the priceless heritage piece Guangdong Fraternity Hall, and adapting them for new modern roles within the open-air, retail-led component. It's always a challenge to incorporate or integrate modern facilities especially food and beverage and retail facilities around heritage buildings. So, first, trying to integrate the Daci Temple with the modern retail development has been a very refreshing challenge, but we mustn't forget that right from the beginning, the temple and shops and restaurants and public space have always been next to each other, cheek by jowl. Even 500 years ago there were vibrant markets around the Daci Temple and that contrast actually gives us a lot of opportunities to develop spaces that are surprising, vibrant and at the same time unique. So we welcomed that challenge.

How would you describe the unique qualities of Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu?

It has many qualities, but first and foremost it has a distinctive sense of history and a sense of identity. Daci Temple was not only a religious centre it was always a cultural and commercial centre. Around the temple you can see it from the names of the streets. There's been a farmer's market, there's been a market selling silk, fabric, and all kinds of things were centred there. This we have re-captured and enhanced.

Then there is the wonderful quality of openness. There is a lot of open space. What we call the public realm. People can then enjoy the park. They can bring

their families and meet their friends and then they can do anything they like. They can bring a book and then sit down and read in one of the lanes or they can have fun with the kids in the open spaces, maybe with the water. You can have fun, and I think fun is a very important quality. These days there are too many shopping centres in Chengdu and in China that only offer shopping, just a single activity. Now, this centre allows the whole family or a group of friends to go there and just have fun – all day.

Obviously you worked closely with Swire Properties and a number of fellow designers. Did you enjoy that creative process?

Oh yes, indeed. Swire Properties is very good at getting the best out of the architects. I think they do it by allowing the architects a lot of room for innovation and creativity, but they do it in a highly collaborative way, so teamwork is very important.

Creativity is about making something new happen. To me the highest form of creativity is collaborative creativity. If you just think about it, all kinds of wonderful creative things that have an impact are a result of many, many people working together in a collaborative way - coming up with something that has never been seen before. The most important thing about creativity is execution. Collaborative creativity allows the initial creative spark to be executed at a very high level of excellence. Now, that to me defines the highest form of creativity.

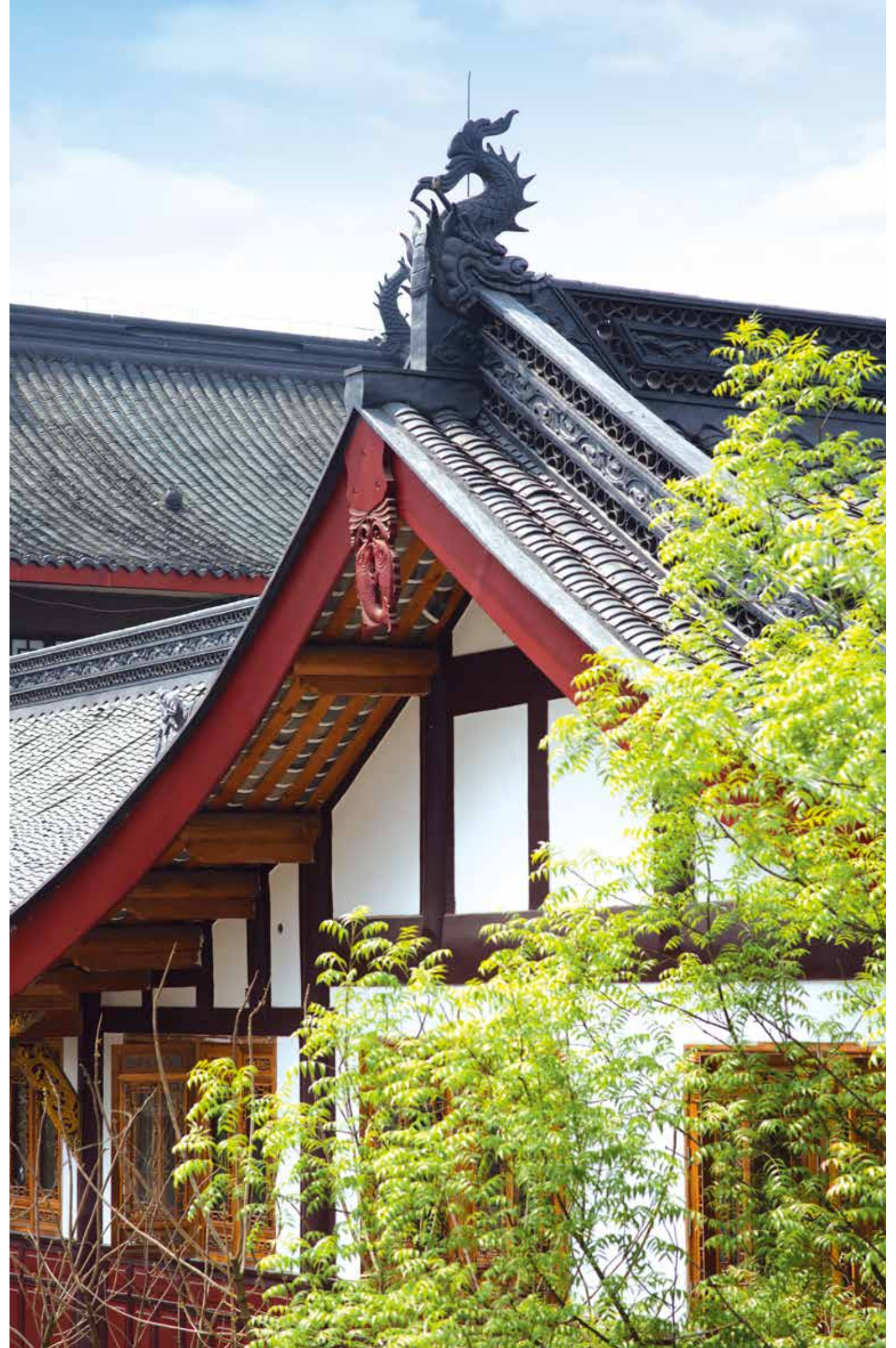
Architecture: Good ordinary buildings

It might sound strange to commend an architecture for deferring - for deliberately staying in the background - but that is exactly what characterises the new streetscape of Taikoo Li.

Contemporary architecture revels in the idea of the icon, it celebrates scale and technology - and nowhere more than in the new Chinese city in which centres compete to be more modern, to boast taller skylines, bigger signs and brighter lights. The expectation is that scale gives presence and through wrapping a mall in a veneer of architecture it is possible to stamp a certain scale on the cityscape, to complement the perceived power and status of the brands and the luxury of their consumption.

The mall is, however, an essentially suburban model. It internalises the streetscape, part of an attempt to create a sensation of urbanity and intensity within the poorly-defined and low-density structure of the suburban. In an urban setting the mall, no matter how high its specification or how well-conceived it might be as architecture, can tend to squash the city around it, presenting to the streets an impermeable box which contributes little to urban life outside. The Taikoo Li development design represents a different conception of shopping as a fundamentally urban experience. The architecture is self-effacing. There is no attempt here to make this a place through dramatic design but rather the buildings defer to the historic buildings which punctuate the site and the huge, historic temple complex which sits at its heart.

There is no attempt at pastiche, no effort to create a faux-historical setting - as there has often been with some of the more zealous 'restorations' of historic districts across Asia. But there has been an effort to understand and reinterpret the fundamental urban grain and scale of the historic city. Looking down on the shopping streets from above reveals a carpet of grey roof-tiles and a characteristic profile of complex pitched forms. The intricate dragon roofs of the six historic structures dotted around the site - as well as the still more elaborate examples of those in the temple complex - are allowed to stand out against the more stripped down designs of the new buildings. And, in a way, this is the same approach which spreads to every aspect of the contemporary architecture.



Christopher Law, the director of the project's designers, The Oval Partnership, points to a detail from the almost thousand year old Qingming Scroll which depicts an extremely simple architecture of commerce, a row of posts and a basic pitched roof which is adaptable and flexible and capable of housing any function from blacksmiths' workshops to market stalls. 'It is simply a frame' he says, 'within which things can happen'. The same architectural modesty is much in evidence in this twenty-first century counterpart.

'The challenge here' says Law, 'was to make good, ordinary buildings.' It isn't always as easy as it sounds. The architectural impulse tends towards the icon, the special, the extraordinary. The trick is to tone down the intent.

Those buildings here represent a stripped-down framework for the stores within them - just as a market hall allows the stalls to provide colour and texture. The formal language is of a metal structural system clad in slender aluminium fins and dark grey I-beams, with a touch of Chicago Modernism about it. The darkness of the tone and the delicacy of the cladding represent a continuity with the frames of some of the heritage buildings and the walls of the temple within the complex with their stained timbers and light in-fill panels. The blank spaces within the frames are filled with the capacious shop windows of the brands - allowing them to express their identity at an architectural scale within the streetscape. The light and colour of the displays contrasts with the greys, browns and blacks of the frames, illuminating the streets and lanes.

Up above the structures feature deep overhanging eaves which faintly echo those of traditional structures and which create a sheltered zone directly in front of the stores, implying a kind of porch, so that window-shoppers are protected, brought into the embrace of the building. In between ground and roof another layer of retail appears and the first floor walkways have allowed the architects to reduce the height in certain places giving an increased sense of intimacy whilst expanding the public space. The

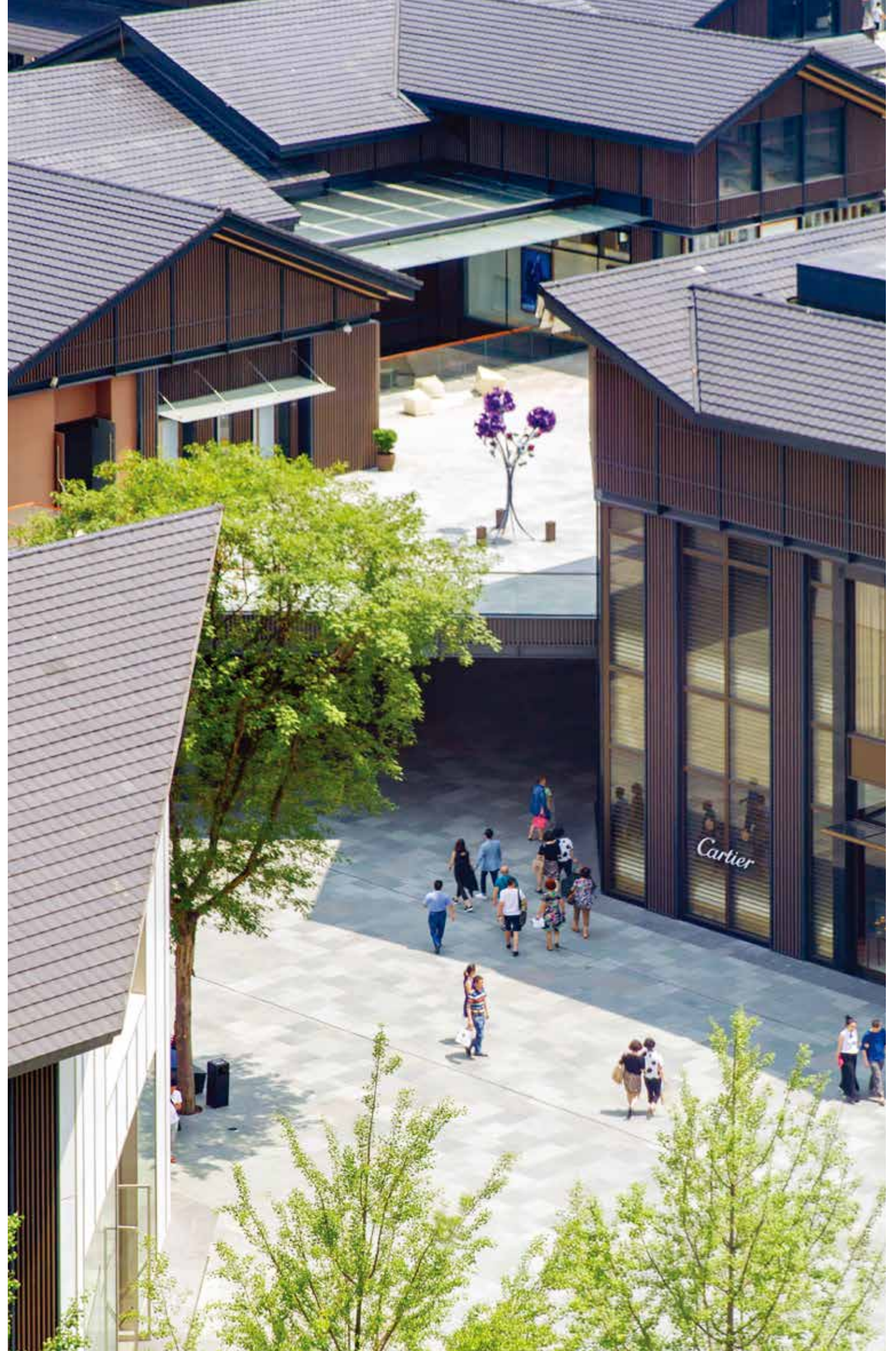
walkways and the eaves lend a complexity to the lanes in which horizontal and angled surfaces vie with verticals to compose a more layered architecture.

At first floor level an additional layer of retail gives a gallery level on which the stores appear as autonomous houses. This upper floor adds density to the streets, a sense that there is always something else going on above or below. Above this, within the embrace of the regular roofs, small terraces are carved out which give a faint echo of the courtyards in the traditional buildings at ground level.

What is most important here is that, counter to development in most Chinese cities, the architecture was conceived not as object but as setting. 'We weren't looking at the individual buildings' says Law, 'It is the whole district here that is the architecture. The important thing is for the new district to work as a centre.'

This sublimation of the architect's urge to make original, notable individual buildings is at the heart of Taikoo Li's success as a place. The height of the buildings defers to the historic structures of the temple complex, keeping to a maximum height of 16 meters. The architectural language is repetitive, almost modular. In this it refers to the buildings of the traditional Chinese city which were standardised so that carpenters could be familiar with techniques from one place to another, using the same details, materials (and, crucially, were only able to charge the same rates across the city and the nation).

This repetition gives the streets a familiar feel, a slightly subdued, but nevertheless contemporary appearance which allows the storefronts to shine, but which also retreats into the background so it is the street itself and the people wandering down them, which become the attraction. The muted colours ensure that it is the displays and the people themselves who animate the streetscape - the real architecture here is the ever-changing spectacle of the crowd.



Ancient and modern

The architectural alchemy that characterises Taikoo Li derives from the completed centre’s success in preserving and celebrating the ancient, and then confidently embracing the very best of modernity – the drama being reinforced by the combination of both.

A number of traditional courtyards and buildings have been restored in impeccable detail, and then given an active retail or leisure-focused role across the complex. This has added a unique character and personality to a credible, authentic sense of place.



Guangdong Hall

Built in the early period of the Republic of China, this building was once a community centre - a place for the Cantonese community to meet and entertain themselves. That essential character of a place of gathering has survived in a building that has been restored as part of the project to house cultural and community events - Chinese opera, theatre and social comings together.



No. 15 Bitieshi Street

One corner of the complex is defined by the historic wall and gateway of an old scribes’ office - the Bitieshi Building. This finely-wrought, hundred-year-old Siheyuan courtyard house was first used as a government building for lower-grade feudal bureaucrats to translate official documents between the Manchu and Han Chinese languages. No. 15 Bitieshi Street now serves as the memorable entrance hall of The Temple House.



Xin Lu Courtyard

Built in the late Qing Dynasty and named after its last owner Pu Xin-lu, Xin Lu is a classic Sichuan-style three-section courtyard house, with the ground floor designated for business with living quarters upstairs. Following the restoration, the Xin Lu building has become the unique retail home to a prestigious watch company.



Majiaxiang Ashram

Situated close to Daci Temple itself, Majiaxiang Ashram was constructed in the late period of the Qing Dynasty as a home for Buddhist worshipers who were able to live, meditate and pray together in peace. It has now been transformed into an exquisite restaurant to be enjoyed by visitors to Taikoo Li.



Tower of Entombed Writings

Also known as The Pagoda of Entombed Writings or Ziku Tower, the distinctive 7.6-meter-high hexagonal tower was built during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). The faces of the tower’s two layers are engraved with decorative writing and pictures. It was originally used as a place to burn inscribed parchment; then seen as a respectful method of disposal. The historical tower can now be enjoyed in exactly the place where it once stood, adding historical ambience to the centre’s Temple Plaza.



Zhanghuali Courtyard

The original buildings at 7 and 8 Zhanghuali Lane were a courtyard residence initially occupied by a wealthy family in the period of the Republic of China and a home belonging to a government official by the name of Li. The two buildings have been jointly restored and transformed into a high end spa and teahouse.



The explosive growth of Chinese cities has resulted in an unprecedented scale of rebuilding. But along with the astonishing achievements and the creation of dozens of modern metropolises has come a sense of unease about the specificities of place.

Place: An original city centre

The speed to redevelopment has left little time for sensitivities to notions of what exactly it is that makes a place particular, different from everywhere else. If all cities aspire to the conditions of Shanghai or Hong Kong, will the result be mere clone cities - or is there room for urban individuality to flourish?

This second branded Taikoo Li development in China is, in a way, a response to exactly that question. In poring over the original maps of the neighbourhood and in restoring the historic street patterns and resurrecting the traditional routes through the site as well as in conserving the historic buildings already there, Swire Properties and The Oval Partnership have envisaged the development not as a self-sufficient, self-referential object, but rather as a network of connective urban tissue - a repair to the city's fabric, rather than just a wholesale rebuilding of it.

It might be instructive to look for a moment at the large mall on the site opposite - an exactly contemporary building and a good example of its type - to understand the radical difference between the two approaches. The site opposite represents an intriguing example of the urbanisation of a suburban archetype - the introduction to downtown of the mall typology which originated in out of town sites. Together, however, the two developments facing each other present a twin portrait of the city, amplifying the profile of the street as high-end shopping boulevard.

In breaking up the volume of the accommodation on site, this new, unique development in Chengdu responds to the mass of its neighbour opposite not through an assertion of equal scale and bombast, but rather through a modesty, an attempt to acknowledge the scale of the historic city and to mediate between the high-tech, high-rise language of the city's main shopping drag and the low-rise, hand-crafted nature of the remaining fragments of old Chengdu.

The roofs of those old buildings feature expressionistic dragons at their corners. The dragon was the symbol of the sky, the gods. The traditional pitched roof was a way of bringing the sky down to the earth, of uniting the



realms of man and his gods. This idea of bringing the sky down into the streets might sound archaic but it could be reinterpreted as a response to an architecture which has lost its way in terms of symbol as well as sustainability.

These are streets open to the weather, to the movements of the clouds, the sun and the moon. If China's hyper-inflating cities have severed their citizens' bonds to nature and to the earth, Taikoo Li is an urban response, a riposte to the mall. Architect Christopher Law says, 'The presence of the temple allowed us to recreate a real city centre with transport, a hotel, bars and public space. It gave us the density.'

'The question was how can we find a way to build a centre for contemporary Chinese cities where people would feel more at ease? Where they could feel the air on their faces, the sun and where they could just be with their families.'

'My idea' Law continues, 'was that Chinese zoning is vertical rather than horizontal - we have the zone of the roof, of heaven above and we have the ground, space that can be employed for all uses.'

He refers once again to those images on the Qingming Scroll. 'If you look at its depiction of city life you'll see that it is extremely vibrant and people are virtually living on the street. This is' he says 'a hybrid space'.

The architecture is rooted into place not only by the new tissue of streets and lanes but through its penetration into the fabric of the earth. If this is a horizontal, rather than a vertically-zoned piece of city, its foundations run deep. Its subterranean aspect houses a more conventional mall, with large-scale shops, a cinema and a new metro station. The city below ground looks very different. Without the requirement to defer to the historic buildings, the designer's hand was freer. Folded and fragmented surfaces and origami ceilings finished in luxurious materials create a lighter series of spaces framed by dramatic forms, receding into the ceiling and layering into the walls. They culminate in the remarkable interior of the Fangsuo Commune lifestyle store, a seductive space between expressively rough and deliberately angular columns and jagged stairs.

The section through the site expresses the traditional Chinese trinity, the three elements of the universe - earth, man and the heavens. Earth is the subterranean space, rooted in the landscape, man is represented in the streets, squares and lanes and heaven in the roofs of the temple which are allowed to float above the streets, always expressing dominion over the surrounding spaces.





Public Space: Intimacy, human scale and enjoyment

The new shopping streets of Taikoo Li create a network of public spaces which knit the neighbourhood back into the fabric of the city, binding it into a historic metric of streets, alleys, lanes and both sacred and secular public spaces. The task is complicated as, to make a difference, the design needed to negotiate between the radically different scales, atmospheres, textures and grains of a historic city in flux.

The site is the confluence of the city's main shopping drag Chunxi Road, the sacred spaces of the temple precincts and the historic public buildings on the site, and between the radically different scales of the high-rise development which now characterises Chengdu, and the intimacy and human scale which makes these new streets so characteristic.

This sense of mediation between the city's seemingly irreconcilable differences - of scale, height, mass, material, history and modernity, permeates Taikoo Li and it has been achieved not only through the new streets and the architecture which defines them, but through a very careful and deliberate imposition of a new layer of determinedly public and porous space.

If the modern mall represents an attempt to shut the world out and create a hermetic, controlled environment in which shoppers are freed from the vicissitudes of climate, air, sky and the noise and unpredictability of the urban street - then Taikoo Li positively revels in exactly those characteristics that the conventional mall attempts to neutralise.

At its heart is the idea of a city connected with the elements, with the gently-moving clouds in the sky, the rain on the streets and the way it refracts the lights of the stores and the neighbouring LED-encased skyscrapers, changing with the seasons and the temperature. But it also produces just enough shelter to provide refuge and respite from the weather - generously overhanging eaves, walkways affording shelter below and an entire basement level which gives an alternative subterranean urban network to parallel the more conventional spatial language of the mall.

In a way, the architecture here is more a framing device than a focus. The buildings defer to the historic fabric in scale and language and to the identities of the brands in the shop windows, so that the essence of this new piece of city resides far more in the nature of the space, the character of the ground and the routes through the development, than it does on buildings. Consequently we need to look at the





spaces between, rather than the structures that define them, to begin to understand what makes it successful.

At its heart is an acknowledgment of - and respect given to - the found historic spaces. Chief among those is Temple Plaza, a generous square which mediates between the sacred and the secular elements of the city. Bounded on one side by the red wall of the temple complex, the plaza is also rooted in the history of the place through the presence of the restored Tower of Entombed Writings. As the principle public space in this neighbourhood, Temple Plaza becomes a forum for public events, gatherings and celebrations, so that the ritual life of the city and the rhythm of public celebrations and holidays are placed at the centre of Taikoo Li. At other times of the year it remains a public amenity, circled by cafes and restaurants, their terraces suggested, rather than explicitly defined, by the overhang of the walkways above which act as a kind of subtle arcade around the edges of the square.

The walled temple complex appears as a red block set within the development but the wall is animated and taken advantage of rather than being used as a pure barrier. The dragon roofs of the temple buildings poke their tiled layers up above the parapets so that the historic architecture is always allowed to define one side of the street, whilst the lanes to either side become attenuated public plazas rather than dark access alleys. In this, the landscaping is critical. Water features recall the picturesque gardens inside the temple but are expressed in a modern, minimal sculptural language. The flow of the water produces a kind of urban background sounds, a gentle aural expression of

the passage of time. Shallow pools reflect the red of the walls back down onto the pavement and trees sprout from islands in the water. Behind these, greenery grows up the walls, the landscape attempting to subsume the cultural artefacts - but they also soften the appearance and the sounds of the stone-paved street. To one side a row of restaurants and cafes with terraces spills out its activity onto the street, beneath the deep, overhanging eaves of the new structures. The effect is of a series of layers between the shopping streets and temple, an expression of the transition from everyday streetscape to sacred precincts, each layer subtly demarcating another level of separation, becoming less physically accessible with each new layer, yet remaining completely visible. Between the pools, seats appear almost as cut and quarried stones, geometric standalone objects which sit as sculpture when unused, but utility as people gather around them.

Here, as elsewhere in the streets, long, grey stone pavers echo the air-dried bricks of the traditional buildings and give directionality to the streets, suggesting routes subliminally through the patterns inscribed in them.

Unlike the buildings, there is no single language in the landscape. Planters, pools, seats, benches and walls are expressed in stripped-back forms, deliberately different to the complex, handcrafted profiles of the historic structures, but also more determinedly solid than the contemporary architecture. Punctuated by striking sculptural works and art installations, they create an in-between world of sculptural objects and a language of public engagement with the landscape.





The elements of Taikoo Li are placed to encourage movement through the site. Whether it is shopping, dining, exploring the historic buildings or the temple complex or just an aimless stroll, the dispersal of the sites of interest drive visitors through the streets, alleys and squares in a pattern designed to make walking enjoyable and keep the eyes and the mind engaged.

Movement: Fast and slow

This is a very different shopping experience to those more normally encountered in China - or indeed in the streets around Taikoo Li, particularly the bustling, highly-illuminated Chunxi Road. It refuses to be bound by the local precedents, the mall or the globalised shopping street, preferring instead the more leisurely, more historic scale and pace of a complex network of streets between smaller blocks, chiming with the scale of the historic structures with which they are interspersed.

It introduces a carefully-tailored concept of 'Fast Lane' and 'Slow Lane'. Roughly analogous to main streets and side streets, these create routes of varying urgency and intensity within the grid of streets. These enable faster cuts through the site or slow, lingering strolls - short, sharp journeys to individual destinations compared with more aimless wanderings. It is in the slight friction produced between the fast and the slow, that the nature of the streets as a place truly bound into the energy and fabric of the city emerges.

The difference in pace is further adjusted through the presence of Temple Plaza, a more sedate but overtly public setting, and the lanes which run down the sides of the temple itself, more contemplative and less directional spaces. It is further mixed up by the insertion through the streets of escalators down to the basement level and metro station below and up to a layer of elevated walkways serving the shops above. The three dimensional movement through the site, vertically and horizontally, combined with the varying paces of those walking at ground level, produces an effect of animation throughout the day. Even at quiet times there is the sense that things are going on above and below - that the city doesn't stop at street level. Below ground the huge Fangsuo Commune, with its cubist-influenced concrete columns and seemingly endless displays, reveals a cornucopia of cultured delights, whilst cinemas and supermarkets take advantage of functions that need no windows.

Finally, through breaking up the edges of the development so that those entering from the surrounding streets are not confronted with a monolithic grid, a system of small plazas and lanes of widely differing dimensions produces an effect of a real, bustling fragment of city - with glimpses of the grey brick walls of heritage buildings always visible to entice the tourist as well as the shopper, drawing people in - and keeping them there.





Art: Personal and public expression

Even when the streets of Taikoo Li are almost empty, the public spaces are always animated - brought to life by the presence of a series of specially commissioned artworks which inhabit the public spaces, bringing a sense of scale, craft and humanity to the place.

Public art is nothing new but it is something which has shifted in meaning. Once the preserve of the monument and the memorial, public art was a medium through which power and patronage was expressed and sacred sites were delineated. This kind of public art still plays a role - statues of revolutionary leaders and poets, war memorials and places of pilgrimage still play a central role in the self-image of cities. But the modern era saw a new kind of public art introduced - one which was more deracinated. This kind of art - which can span installation and sculpture to temporary sound works and performances - responds to the site and the community, but is usually a more personal expression of artistic intent, less connected to politics or power.

So if the commemorative, memorial and monumental impulses are stripped away, you might ask the question - what exactly is public art for? The disparate, striking and varied works scattered around the streets and lanes of Taikoo Li begin to articulate that purpose.

The art animates the street. It provides a kind of presence and a counterpoint to the architecture and the streetscape. But, perhaps most importantly of all, it is a way of marking space, time and route through the complex. This is a new piece of city, even if it is carefully woven back into the historic topography and streetscape of the centre. A pedestrian can navigate through spaces, or using the historic structures as a key. They could mark their position through the branded displays of the shop windows or they could use the artworks as urban markers, surprising encounters in the streets which define the ways they make their way through the complex. Some of the works act as gateways - devices to frame introductory views of the complex as visitors arrive from the new metro station, or form the thronged streets of the city outside. Some act as a focus or a locus - a place to sit, to wait or to meet. Others still act to lead the eye from one point to



1

another, to open up routes, views and glimpses that are unexpected, or that wouldn't otherwise have been taken. And still others will, over time, become as familiar as old friends, works which go almost unnoticed, yet which provide visual clues and anchor the gaze amidst a city which is changing so fast that points in its streets can become difficult to fix in time and place.

Taikoo Li is a carefully layered complex. There are the striations of the subterranean levels and the metro below that; there is the ground and the gallery level. But within that literal layering is another series of overlapping languages, the historic and the contemporary, the garden and the city, the brick and tile of the old buildings with the glass and steel of the new. The art, ultimately, introduces a new layer to this already complex mix, another language of form, colour and invention and one which enriches any walk around the new streets with surprise, humour and delight.



2

1. **Walking Through**
Polo Bourieau
2. **Written In Stone**
Polo Bourieau

The public art of
Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu

The varieties of technique and conception, from the figurative to the abstract and from the reflective to the illuminating bring the streets to life. If the architects chose to deliberately underplay the new buildings to allow the heritage structures and the storefronts to shine - the sculptures and installations bring a sparkle of expression and variety back.

There are recognisable pieces here by internationally-known names and others by young local artists given the most prominent possible places in the city. Some act as gateways to the streets. Kim Tae Sue's looping arch 'Eco Flow' resembles a fan folded over on itself, its fluid curves wrapping around itself to create an opening and an arch giving onto the shopping streets from the city. It seems a perennial favourite with children fascinated by this abstract, toddler-scaled gateway. Marvin Fang's 'Through the Keyhole' likewise sets up a perspective through an arch - this time an elaborately carved wooden fretwork frame. Natalie Decoster's 'Meeting in Time' manages to frame views through its two red loops, but is actually more about human encounter. Nevertheless the intertwined circles evoke the gates in traditional Chinese gardens.



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- 3. **Through the Keyhole**
Marvin Fang
- 4. **Meeting in Time**
Nathalie Decoster
- 5. **Eco Flow**
Kim Tae Sue



Be Our Guests
Marvin Fang



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6. **Flowers of Life**
Natalie Decoster

7. **Hibiscus City**
Jenny Pickford

Elsewhere more organic analogies bring a sense of the natural to the grey paved streets. Jenny Pickford's 'Hibiscus City' inflates a bunch of flowers to an absurd, urban scale, bringing kitsch colours to the upper levels, whilst Natalie Decoster's 'Flowers of Life' combines the imagery of a child's wind-driven toy with a memory of both flowers and machines in a striking mixed metaphor. George Cutts' sinuous stainless steel 'Dancing Bamboo' brings a playful, shimmering pair of lines to one of the reflecting pools, evoking that most Chinese of symbols.

A more figurative version of bamboo appears beside the red walls of the Daci Temple in Marvin Fang's impressive installation 'Be Our Guests'. Here six Sichuan-style bamboo chairs of wildly differing heights (including seats that seems to reach up to the sky) both invite the viewer to sit and mock them with their impossibly attenuated legs. The playful take on hospitality and impossibility is amongst the most visually arresting of all the sculptures here, particularly when illuminated at night.

Rob Ward's ensemble of marble forms 'Circles of Solitude' invokes another archetypal Chinese image - a chess board - whilst blown-up fruit appears in both Wu Haiying's 'Chengdu Cherries' and 'Sichuan Strawberries'. French artist Polo Bourieau appears twice in these precincts with his curious stack of stone books 'Written in Stone' and 'Father and Son' a layered sculpture which both rejects and absorbs its surroundings whilst referring to the ancestor worship of Chinese tradition.

Ye Hongxing's 'Wait and Expect' depicts a dog, a sculpture executed with the seemingly quick brushstrokes of a Chinese watercolour. The faithful, playful dog becomes a totem of the street, alert and expectant, waiting for its master.

David Harber's 'Ginkgo Mantles' is a sphere constructed of a complex network of finely-crafted Ginkgo leaves cut from stainless steel. The armature is painted gold inside so that it glows, a play on the idea of earth's molten metallic core. It glows at night with a warm, enigmatic light. Blessing Hancock's 'Philosopher's Stone' also takes on themes of a world of nature distorted through the lens of modernity. An organic form cut with seemingly endless ribbons of text from English Romantic poet William Wordsworth alongside poems by Du Fu and Tao Yuanming, it exudes light and spreads its texts on the ground around it.

Finally Belinda Smith's 'Lunar Night' suspended like a slivery moon in the sky and David Harber's 'Eclipse' bring the heavens down to the streets of the city in their reflective, super-polished orbs.



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10

8. **Circles of Solitude**
Rob Ward

9. **Philosopher's Stone**
Blessing Hancock

10. **Lunar Light**
Belinda Smith



The Temple House, the centre's 100-room premium hotel joins Hong Kong's The Upper House and Beijing's The Opposite House as part of Swire Hotels' exclusive portfolio of luxury hotels, The House Collective. With its 42 serviced apartments the property has been designed to maintain the overall project's wider ambition of marrying cultural preservation and contemporary design.

Hospitality: The Temple House

One corner of Taikoo Li is defined by the historic wall and gateway of an old scribes' office - the Bitieshi Building. A finely-wrought Siheyuan courtyard house has been meticulously restored to function as a courtyard and foyer for The Temple House. Carefully-crafted and delicately restored it marks a radical transformation from the bustle and traffic of Kang Shi Street to the calm and quiet of the Qing Dynasty interior.

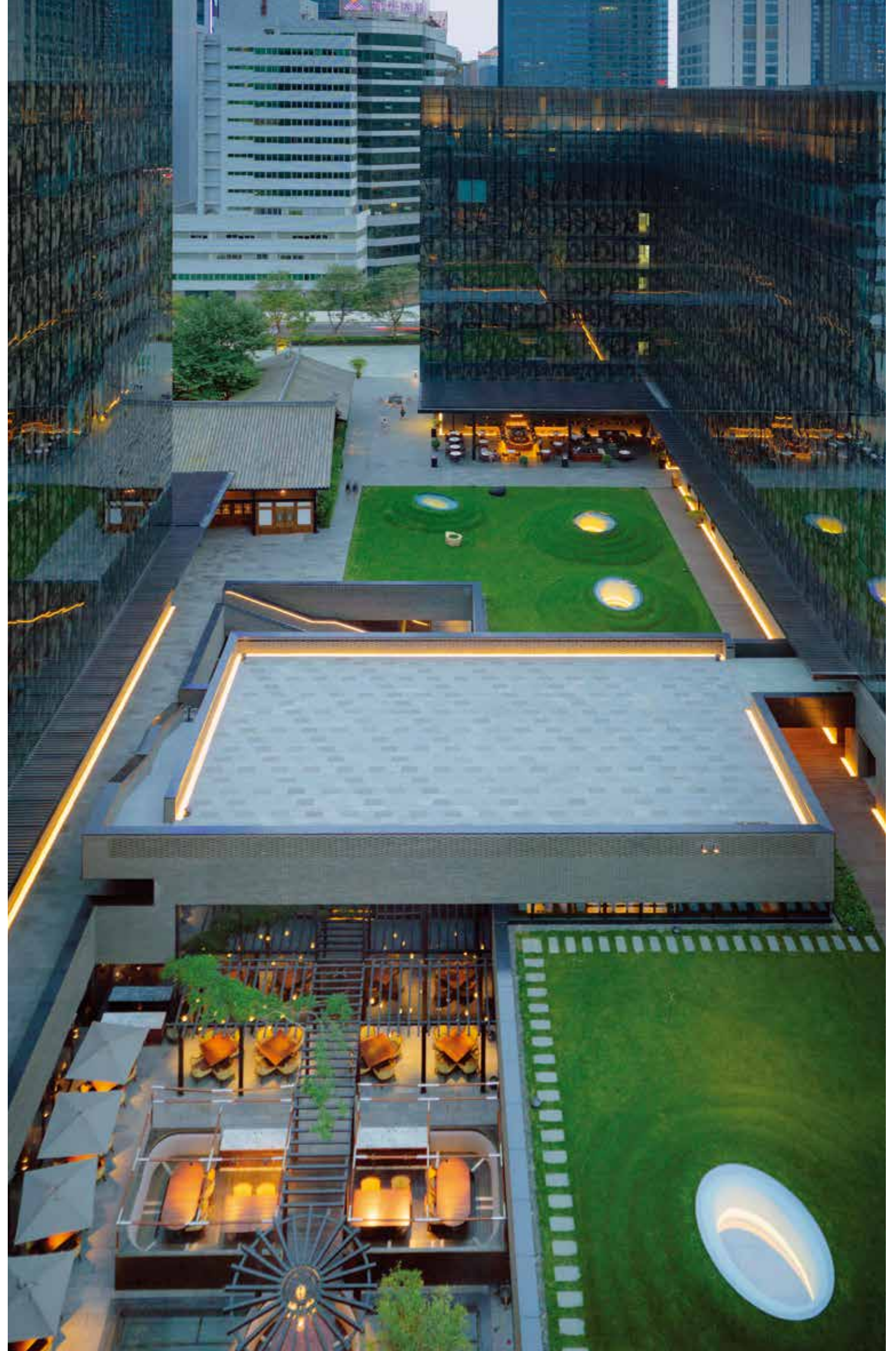
The domestic scale and refined, open-work detail of the delicate window shutters lasts till the edge of the lobby. And then, something else.

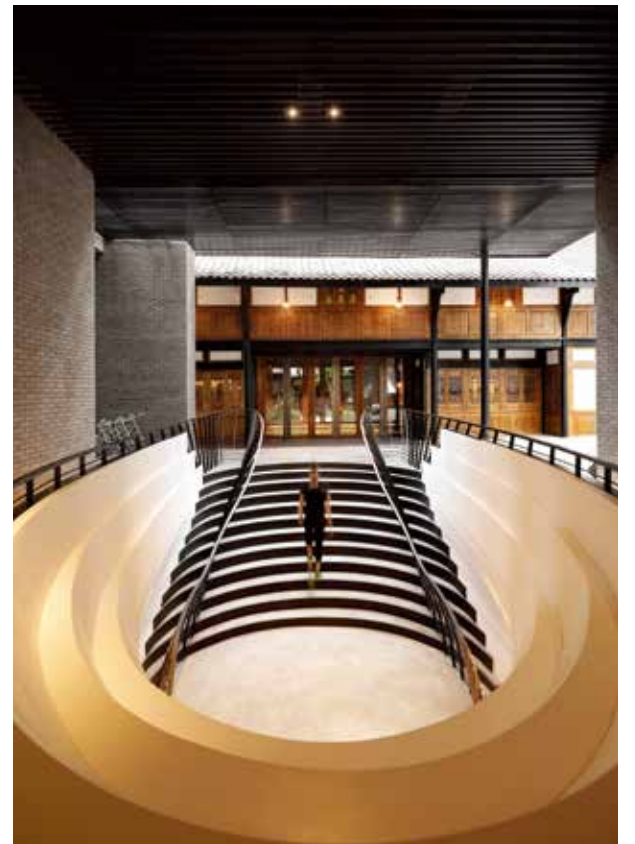
The Temple House and joining apartment blocks are built to a scale to buttress the architecture of the contemporary city. Very different in material, scale and architectural feel from the rest of the development, it sits on one corner and acts as the pivot between the two worlds - the broad shopping street and the more human historic fabric surrounding the Daci Temple from which it takes its name. Built as a pair of L-shaped blocks containing a courtyard, the two interlocking structures are clad in a combination of grey brick - to refer to the traditional materials of the city - and glass inscribed with an almost abstract image of trees, which does something to soften and break down their otherwise stark mass against the skyline.

The hotel's bars and cafes are placed around the courtyard and the central area is grassed, its enigmatically bumpy surface subtly revealing the presence of the pool and main restaurant below, each appearing on the surface in the form of the large glass disks of their skylights. Those dark circles hint that much of the hotel world resides beneath ground, just as a whole other realm appears on descending the escalators in the retail centre. So here too the surprising discovery is of a lively, buzzy series of places in complete opposition to the dark, monolithic hotel and apartment blocks and the quiet courtyard.

The open ends of the complex between the interlocking volumes are completed by the two most elaborate heritage buildings on the site - the Bitieshi which forms the welcome and the Zhanghuali Courtyard which houses the spa and teahouse - so that even this most resolutely contemporary of structures is set into the scale and context of the historic fabric.

The hotel introduces a complex new layering of space. Its dynamic is driven by the sequence, from the delightful courtyard through to the green of the garden and the stripped architecture and stark brick walls of the hotel block behind. It achieves the transition from the intimate, hand-crafted scale of the historic house, to the dimensions and language of the contemporary city. The carefully-wrought interiors of the restaurants and bars on the ground level and below mediate between the delicacy of the heritage buildings and the scale of the hotel, which eases the complex into the skyline. The journey through The Temple House becomes a thread which can be followed through the centuries and the styles that connect them.









The author Edwin Heathcote

Edwin Heathcote is a writer, architect and designer. He is the Architecture and Design Critic of The Financial Times and the author of about a dozen books. He is a contributing editor for ICON Magazine and has a column in GQ Magazine. He is also the founder and editor-in-chief of Readingdesign.org, an online archive of critical writing on design.





Vital statistics

The Project

Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu

Developers

Swire Properties Limited (50%) and
Sino-Ocean Group Holding Limited (50%)

Joint venture company

Chengdu Qianhao Property Company Limited

Masterplan Architect

The Oval Partnership Limited

Total site area

Approximately 76,000 sq m (815,000 sq ft)

Total gross floor area (GFA)

Approximately 270,000 sq m (2.9 million sq ft)

Direct connection to the Chunxi Road interchange
metro station of line 2 and line 3

The Retail

Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu

Design Architect

The Oval Partnership Limited

Interior design team of the basement shopping mall

Spawton Architecture Limited and
Elena Galli Giallini Limited

Total gross floor area (GFA)

Approximately 116,000 sq m (1.25 million sq ft)

300+ shops and restaurants

1,056 car parking spaces



The Hotel

The Temple House

Design Architect

Make Architects (UK)

Total gross floor area (GFA)

Over 33,000 sq m (over 356,000 sq ft)

100 rooms

42 serviced apartments



The Office

The Grade-A office tower – Pinnacle One

Design Architect

Make Architects (UK)

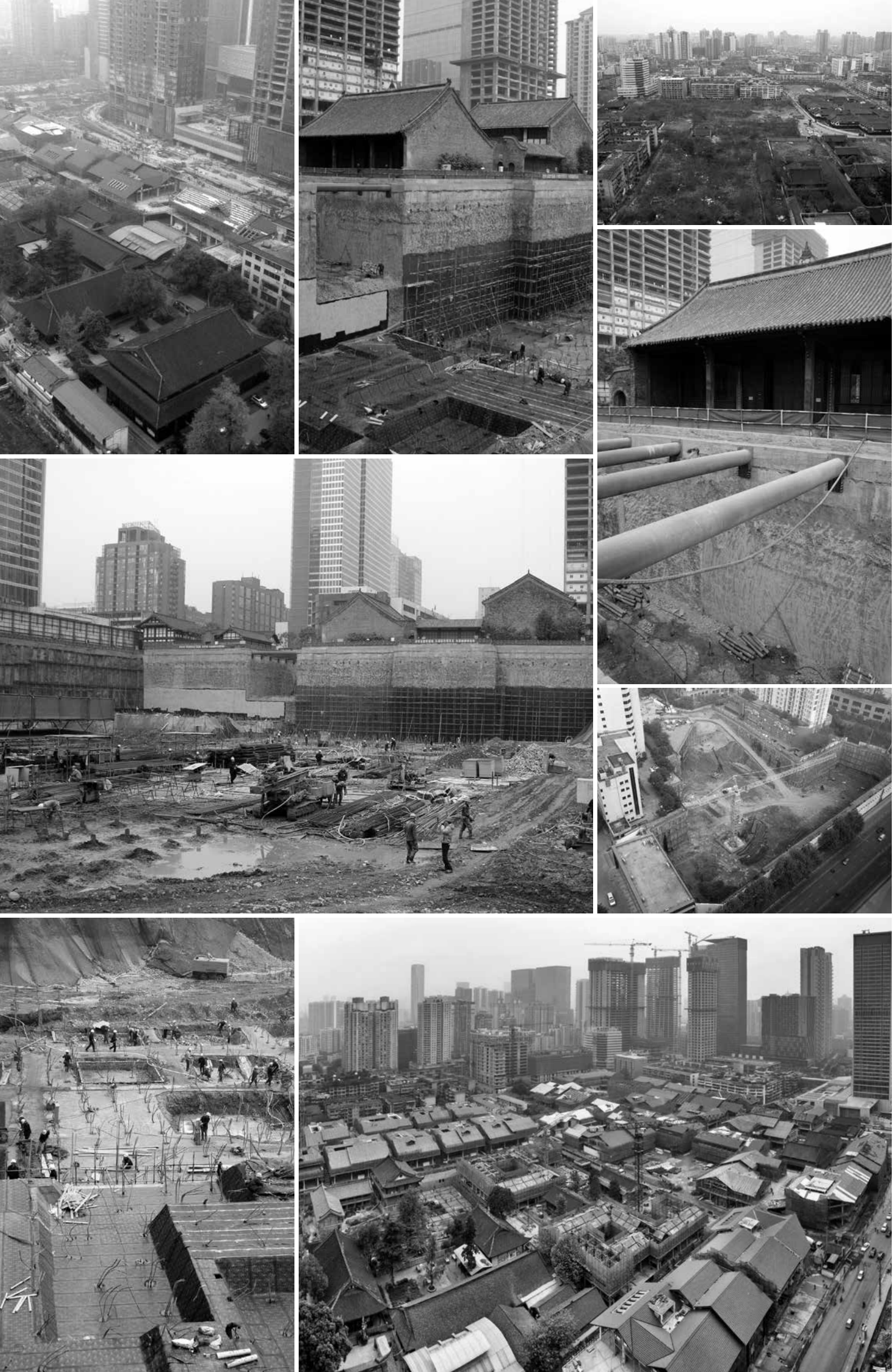
Total gross floor area (GFA)

Approximately 121,000 sq m (1.3 million sq ft)

47 floors

499 car parking spaces

Website: www.soltkled.com





Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li Chengdu

The story of an original development

Photography

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Jonathan Leijonhufvud

The Oval Partnership Limited

Chen Yao

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Illustration

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Design

London Transcript

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