

An urban block as a journey into memory

Reinterpreting the past.
An integrated approach to urban transformation in historical Suzhou.



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Reinterpreting the Past

**AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO URBAN TRANSFORMATION
IN HISTORICAL SUZHOU**

An urban block as a journey into memory

Master Thesis
Architecture for the Restoration
and the Enhancement of the Heritage

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N.B. All images and drawings are made by the author except where it is indicated.

ABSTRACT

A MODEL FOR RESTORATION OF THE HERITAGE

In recent years, tourism in China has sparked a concern for the preservation of heritage. However, the regulations implemented to protect the architectural heritage were born under the model of a Western vision. As a consequence, these regulations lack of adequate protection for the many valuable historical and cultural small spaces, as well as the defence of intangible heritage, one of the most important elements in Chinese culture.

This thesis will focus on the strategic restoration of one of these small places in the old Suzhou that englobes several Chinese historical periods. Therefore, this research pursues to be a reference of future urban renewal plans in the old Suzhou.

The proposal seeks to achieve the restoration of the areas adjacent to the Five Peaks Garden, the rehabilitation of an old abandoned house and the revaluation of the neighbourhood through the introduction of new cultural functions.

In this way, it is important to understand what heritage really matters in the Chinese context. For this purpose, it was necessary to approach the basis of the regulations for protection and enhancing of heritage in China.

Thanks to the interpretation of the traditional elements and the creation of exciting areas like the Chinese gardens, it is possible to give back life to an abandoned historic building and raise the status of the garden within the block. It is proposed as a form of evocation and active conservation of the memory of the past.

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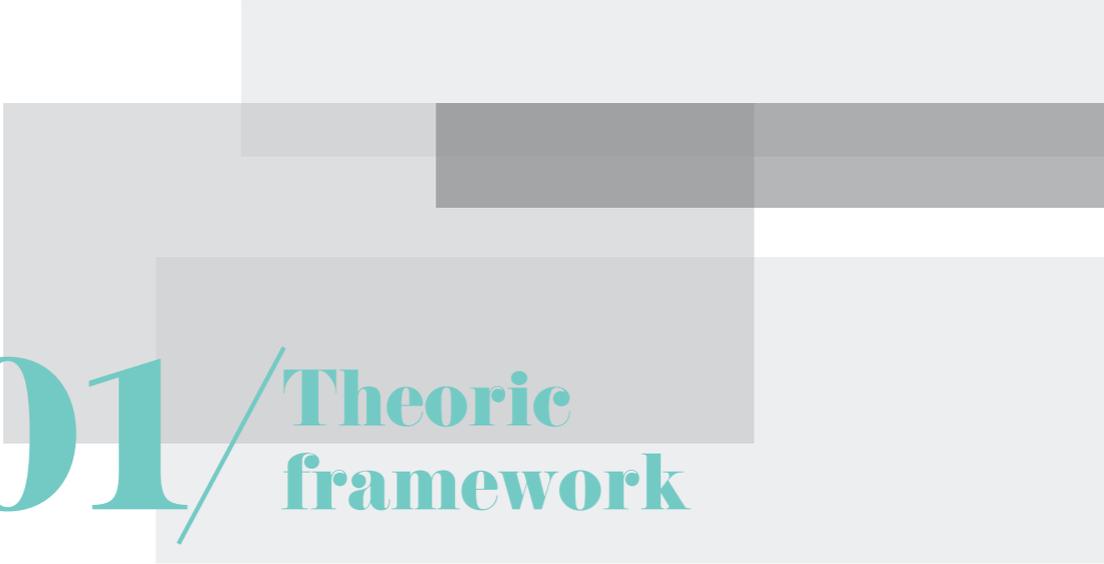
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01 / Theoric framework

SUZHOU: TOWARD A CULTURAL URBAN RENEWAL

In the 1980s, the urban population of Suzhou began to grow¹ and the neighborhood of the ancient city of Suzhou was affected by overpopulation. Many residents moved to the outskirts of the city center, seeking for new opportunities and a better quality of life. Due to this displacement phenomena, many areas were affected causing deterioration and abandonment.

In order to improve quality of life of its residents, the government began to allocate services like public toilets and performed urban renovations plans within the ancient city. But those transformations put the historic areas of the city in risk.

Consequently, based on the Burra Charter applicated on Australia's heritage industry, the China ICOMOS created a couple of principles and measures to manage built heritages. They decided also to implement the "purple line" as the limit to protect the heritage and its surrounding.

Despite these efforts, a huge part of those areas were partially or totally demolished, resulting in the change of the historical and cultural characteristics of these areas. Therefore, the goal is to reach a balance between conservation and development. It is necessary to create strategies for renovation and restoration of the old urban fabric of Suzhou and maintain a development able to evoke the past without compromising the traces of the historical memory that remains in this area. These strategies should not

be a limitation to the local community that seeks to improve their living conditions.

The objective of this thesis is to create a functional model of restoration and preservation of the heritage for future areas that could be demolished or modified by urban renewal plans inside the historic city. It is necessary to understand what is the appropriate reading that should be done when we include the historical memory of China.

A good evaluation of the Chinese context should be done in order to not compare it with the European or the Western context as mentioned by Pr. Stanislaus FUNG in his article Notes on Architectural Criticism and Contemporary China. In this way, it is possible to preserve and value the identity of the Chinese culture and, more than that, to generate an attitude of belonging towards the past of the population.

This mentality was altered during the Cultural Revolution led by Mao Zedong from 1966 to 1976, where many ancient relics and monuments were destroyed. The search of a modern vision related to the development cancelled the relationship between the past and the traditions.

Therefore, it is important to understand how is the Chinese's past conceived and treated by the population and what is the attitude of Chinese government towards its heritage and its conservation nowadays.

¹United Nations, Department of economic and social affairs, Population Division, (2018)

CHINESE' PERSPECTIVE ABOUT HERITAGE

The spiritual and immaterial heritage:

"The Chinese civilization is transmitted through documentation, human experience, and the relationship with social and cultural life and its spiritual meanings." (MOTE, 1973)

In China, arts such as poetry, music, calligraphy and painting are some of the most significant expressions of traditional heritage, capable of evoking the cultural memory of the society.

Sources such as painting and calligraphy illustrate past experiences and the different local habits, in particular the ones of the scholar. The main purpose of those sources was to transmit the ancient values. Habits such as artistic and recreational activities, carried out by the scholar and aristocrats, took place inside many gardens. In the same way, the structure and the landscape of the gardens

were inspired by the paintings that were conceived within.

Yolaine Escande mentioned four principles in the painting that inspired the "jardin lettré" such as: the structure, the aesthetics, the form, and the influence of the arts.

In the first place, structurally the Chinese landscapes recreated within the garden are defined by the mountain (shan) and water (shui) as founding elements. Aesthetics manifests itself through colours, simplicity and the importance of emptiness. The form recreates, as in a painting, a space-time journey that guides the observation of the visitor either through a static vision or a dynamic vision of the different sections of the garden. And the last form of inspiration refers to the scenes illustrated in literature,

history and philosophy among others.

Each path to the interior of the garden evidence traces of diverse periods that maintain a historical continuity between the different generations and social classes. This allows garden's visitors to maintain a social bond that reinforces the sense of belonging and existence within a society. It also makes them aware of the pleasure of being in that place and sharing it with others (Yolaine Escande, 2016).

As the visitor walks through the garden and tries to understand it, he builds his own memory of the lived experience. It is the story that everyone can live and write, that makes the narrative and cultural memory of the gardens important. In fact, Chinese heritage is a compendium of mental creations and written traditions, based largely on stories that may never have existed but are poetically present and have a socio-cultural role.

Therefore, the Chinese gardens are evidence of the spiritual and intangible heritage, which give life to the Chinese identity and culture. A place

where it could be possible to find values that "did not vanish in spite of the Maoism and the destructions of the Cultural Revolutions (1966-1976)" (ESCANDE, 2016) (see FIG. 1,2,3) like the rituals which mark the seasons, the concentration of positive energy and the ideological recovery.

Moreover the natural landscape of the gardens of Suzhou suggests the capacity to control the territory and the need of its owners to be recognized and legitimate by the illustrious society, elevating the status and the value of the city. Suzhou seems to reflect elegance in its constructions and in the lifestyle (see FIG. 4,5,6) of its residents. Gardens, markets, operas, planting festivals for the cultivation of rice, tea, flowers and silk are illustrated by paintings, calligraphy and poetry. These elements are part of the traditional practices that give sophistication and make this place famous.

For this reason, the city of Suzhou is an important testimony to the history of China. It is known as the most popular Chinese city because of its ancient and magnificent gardens but also as an UNESCO World Heritage Site for its landscape of high scenic, cultural and ambient value.



Destruction of religious objects under the slogan, "smash the four olds" by the Red Guards of Lhasa

Source (1): Pictures 1-2. Central Tibetan Administration / 3. La gran Epoca



Kun qu opera

Source: ???



The scenes of the bonsai garden.



A flag praising the Emperor's rule, village opera.

Source (2): Wallace Chang Ping Hung, 2000

The built heritage:

The idea of conservation of the heritage in China has not been a concept that has remained irreplaceable. In fact, Pierre Ryckmans in his writing "The Chinese attitude towards the past" invites us to get away from western standards and get closer to China. We should also keep in mind that the past in China is perceived as spiritually present but its physical feature is absent.

As a matter of fact, it evidences a "periodic destruction of the material heritage of the past, which seems to have characterised Chinese history." (RYCKMANS, 1986). This act is derived by two diverse objectives. The perishable nature of the materials used to construct implicates a constant reconstruction and replacement of the old materials with newers. Indeed, this represents a "way of showing respect to the ancestors, gods and heroes to which the buildings are dedicated" (QIAN, 2007).

Likewise, maintaining the structures under repair ensures the transmission of the different techniques and the "know-how" acquired by the ancestors, giving this way an eternal character to the traditions and cultural heritage.

The last one, as an evidence of the Confucian tradition, China's dominant ideology, in which the antiquity is considered as a way to exalt moral and spiritual values of the Ancients, makes them part of a life code that regulates the lives of the citizens. Also, it is a way to applaud human's capacities until they achieve the immortality of someone and preserve moments as eternal. The effort to keep the longevity of the present and

every space as "time-free", is done through the literature, paintings and calligraphy which are the Chinese way of heritage expression.

Moreover, buildings are not supposed to represent or characterize the Chinese civilization (RYCKMANS P. , 1986) "[They even] seems not to have regarded its history as violated or abused when historic monuments collapsed or burned, as long as those could be replaced or restored, and their functions regained." (RYCKMANS P. , 1986) The material value of the heritage seems to be invisible on Chinese traditions.

However, nowadays the western vision seeks to preserve around the world buildings such as temples, palaces, gardens and private residences. For this reason, the heritage movement contributes to the Chinese conservation theory with some western conservation ideas adopted on the China's Principles. Despite this, one of the most important western concepts in the conservation makes reference to minimum intervention on buildings. Fengqi Qian, writer of the "China's Burra Charter: The Formation and Implementation of the China Principles", explain that this position "may appear to contradict what is frequently seen as the Asian approach to conservation" . (Qian, 2007)

Nevertheless, in order to create a model of conservation and restoration as mentioned above, it is necessary to study those principles that constitute today the current regulations and the theories of reference in this field.

"Nel 1985 la Cina entra nella Convenzione Internazionale per la Conservazione del Patrimonio Culturale e Ambientale. Nel 1986 il Consiglio di Stato istituisce le Aree Protette per la cultura storica, secondo valori storici, scientifici e artistici. Il criterio guida è la densità di testimonianze o l'integrità dei caratteri tradizionali di un determinato periodo, concentrati in strade, gruppi di architetture, agglomerati urbani o villaggi." (Vazzano & Xu, 2008)

In this way, three dimensions of conservations are distinguished in China Principles: isolated goods, historical cities, and historical sites (or streets). For these three levels, Vazzano and Xu mentioned three different methods of conservation interventions:

1. For isolated goods: "The preservation of the present situation prevails."
2. For the historical cities: "It is important to protect individual artefacts, streets and characteristic sites but also to preserve and keep alive the urban fabric, the context and the characteristic signs of history, especially the new buildings that are built."
3. For historical sites and street: "The guidelines are realism and integrity" and implies the identification of the perimeter of interest.

For this study, the reference of the isolated goods and the historical sites and street will be taken into account. Regarding "the isolated testimonies", emphasis is placed on the conservation of the original context, the intervention of the environmental control of the protected property and the intervention on modern and contemporary architecture. Conversely, in the case of the historical sites and street, is it possible to define what could be considered as historical area like "a block , a small urban center or

a small village, with a high concentration of cultural testimonies or historical or traditional characters" (Vazzano & Xu, 2008) , but the conservation practices seems not to be clear. As the authors explain, falling into the idea of preserving traditionally the site can be considered as a risk at the moment in which the management of the patrimony show a tendency towards the "museification".

As mentioned above, to ensure the conservation of each patrimonial property, it is necessary to assign to the built area - also known as the Core Area-, a Buffer Zone. In charge of protecting the immediate surroundings of the building, the Buffer Zone influence as an additional layer, the way in which the patrimonial building is perceived. The "designation of a buffer zone [seeks to] achieve the physical authenticity of a site" (Vazzano & Xu, 2008).

In China, the Buffer zone concept is known as the "purple line" and defines the perimeter of interest of a cultural heritage site as "the margin of the historical road [...] and the margin of historical construction [...]." (Vazzano & Xu, 2008) giving a particular importance to the build environment. Consequently, the "purple line" as a way to protect historical site, is related directly with the environment and not with the "isolated testimonies".

"In this way, urban development continues, but without completely cancelling the traditional fabric and avoiding, at the same time, completely embalming a few isolated relicts within the contemporary construction. It would be anti-historical to block the process of urban development, and to completely renounce the forms of tradition" (Vazzano & Xu, 2008).

If we consider Chinese gardens as a Core Area that should be protected,

one of the main objectives should be to maintain the existing traditional fabric around the walls that delimit the garden, or at least, all those properties associated with the presence of the same as along the path that leads to the garden.

Genuine cultural construction:

Over the last decades, tourism has driven the growth of the economics of cities by attracting visitors from all over the world and generating modernization phenomena within the city centers. In search of international recognition, rapid economic development, poverty reduction and municipal governments have concentrated their efforts on implementing efficient technologies to improve public transportation (the metro at the urban level for example), and intervene historical, cultural and environmentally in the sites of interest.

However, in the urgency of carrying out these transformations, new urban plans influenced by international typological tendencies, have reduced the traditional precincts to a modern scenario without Chinese identity. In this way, the profile of Suzhou begins to be built by the grandness of the skyline that stand out at night for their game of light as in Shanghai or Hong Kong.

Furthermore, nowadays cultural tourism has become one of the most recurrent travel motivations among tourists, beyond traditional tourism related to leisure and pleasure activities. This type of tourism is focused on the recognition and the study of ancient civilizations with the intension of learning something genuine about the place visited.

It seems that the human, being in the

search for self-growth, try to relate to their origins and discover something that allows him to feel a connection with the past. Somehow, this connection implies living an experience linked to a strong "cognitive content and [a] sociological efficacy (meaning and function)" (Sax, 2010) that consent an individual to identify himself with a society and build a cultural memory. For example, in the western case, the experience of knowing the ruins and ancient buildings alludes to a journey into the past thanks to the relationship that these artefacts have with history. If you do not know the historical context, great monuments such as the Acropolis or the Roman Coliseum lose their essence and meaning. However, time travel in China is made through the experience provided by oral and written tradition, and interaction with the community. It is a journey to a place in the present that seems to be frozen in the past. A place that seeks to preserve the original image of its buildings despite the passage of time. A place that can change its function, and where customs are maintained.

Yujie Zhu, 2012 presents tourism as a practice that seeks authenticity as a reflection of the "desires of tourists and consumers for genuine and credible cultural construction and representation in diverse cultural and heritage context"(Zhu, 2012). In this sense, the author explains that the concept of authenticity can be

understood from three contextual approaches: objectivism, constructivism and existentialism. The first one, refers to the true nature of an object examined. The second relates the authenticity of something if it is "invention of tradition"(Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). And the third approach according to Wang (1999), refers to the authenticity of the object which is given by the non-familiarity that a tourist can find with their daily life and by the "cultural exchange" with the tourist communities (Turner, 1967).

As in the ritual of Fuhua, mentioned by Yujie Zhu, the experience of heritage through a story allows the visitor to enter into a dimension of liminality (Wang, 1999), a threshold between a physical or mental site and another, which helps to understand a society and embody a cultural belief or practice, as a real experience.

In fact, when carrying out the construction of a restoration project, it is important to take into account heritage valorisation strategies. Currently, many methodologies invite us to add a "memory" value to the intervened built craft that allows to link this heritage within a society. An element that promotes the identity of the different entities associated with this heritage. It is interesting to see how, in the Western vision, there is a need to associate a spiritual character to the building, where it seems to lack, in order to endure over time. Instead, within the Chinese vision, this "memory" factor is the starting point

for heritage conservation.

Suzhou Museum for example, designed by I.M. Pei Architect with Pei Partnership Architects, seems to be the case of a genuine cultural construction embodied by three kind of specific cultural memory:

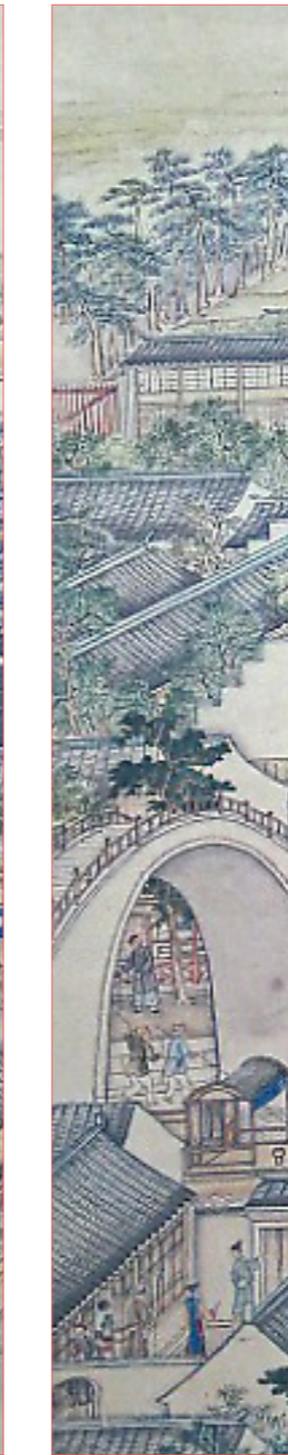
- the procedural memory, i.e. the habits of local builders,
- the semantic memory, i.e. vernacular styling, ornaments, symbols, embedded in local traditions, and
- the allomnesia, i.e. How a content or context can evoke past experiences"(Stanislaus Fung, 2018).

Suzhou Museum is dedicated to preserve the local history and culture of Suzhou. It is a complex structure that adjoins heritage structures such as the Zhong Wang Fu with the ancient garden of the Humble Administrator.

"The design of the museum takes its cues from the rich vocabulary of Suzhou's traditional architecture, with its whitewashed plaster walls, dark grey clay tile roofs and intricate garden architecture"(Suzhou Museum [Web blog post], 2018) composed by "zigzag bridge, long corridors, piled rockery resembling mountains and water pavilions"

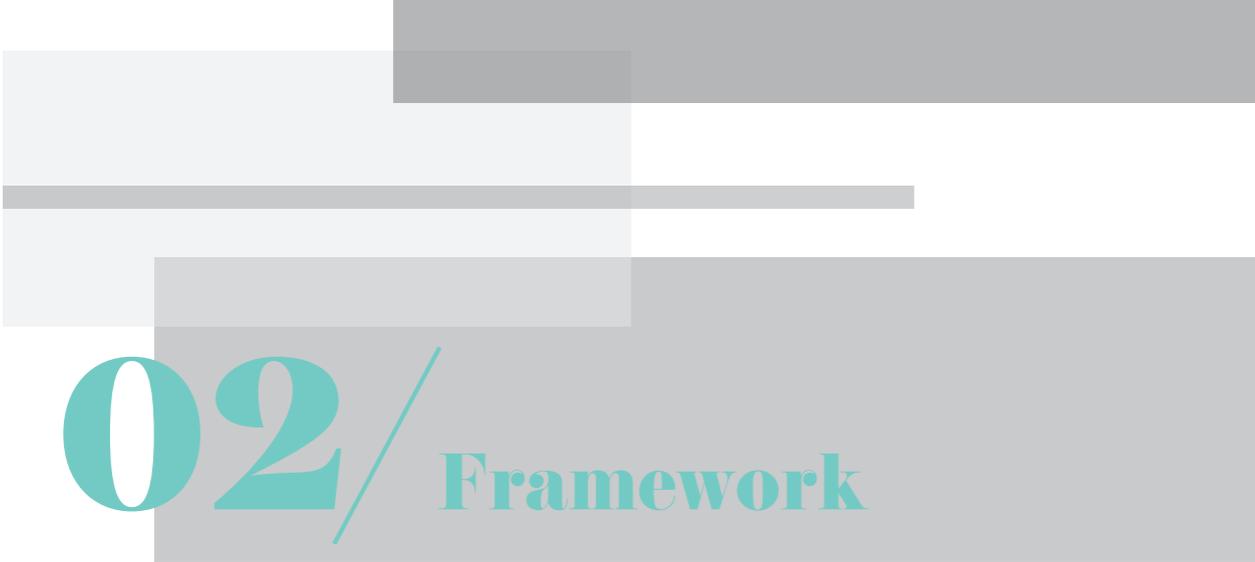
(Case study Topic: The application of vernacular elements in the modern courtyard of Suzhou, Museum in Jintan, China., 2018)

However these elements have been reinterpreted into a new language guiding the visitor on a journey inside a Chinese ink painting as a metaphorical approach.



A prosperous Suzhou

Source (3): chinaonlinemuseum.com



02 / Framework

READING OF THE HERITAGE WITHIN THE PROJECT AREA

The project is an opportunity to enhance the cultural route in Suzhou related to the gardens' experience and generate an interaction between the heritage buildings and the local tourist facilities that are being developed.

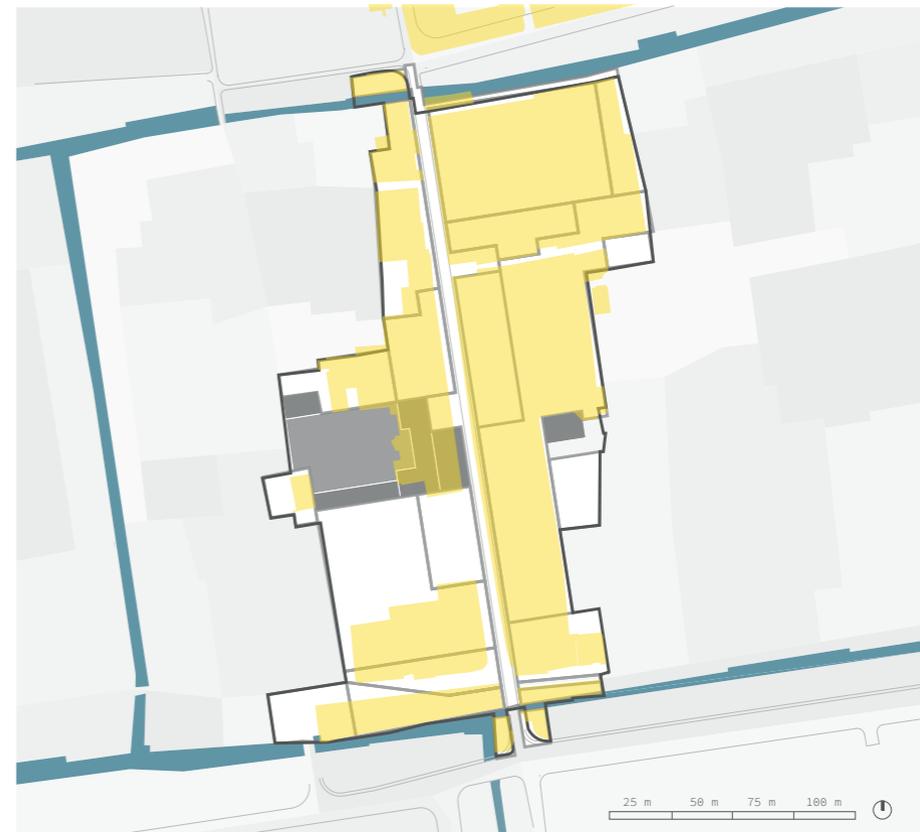
This chapter aims to explain the selection of the project area and delimitate the areas to intervene in order to achieve the goals of this thesis through the design of a new fabric. A solution capable to communicate and reflect the ideas and values over the intangible and tangible heritage of Chinese civilization, is developed in this section.

SITE SELECTION:

Location and context:

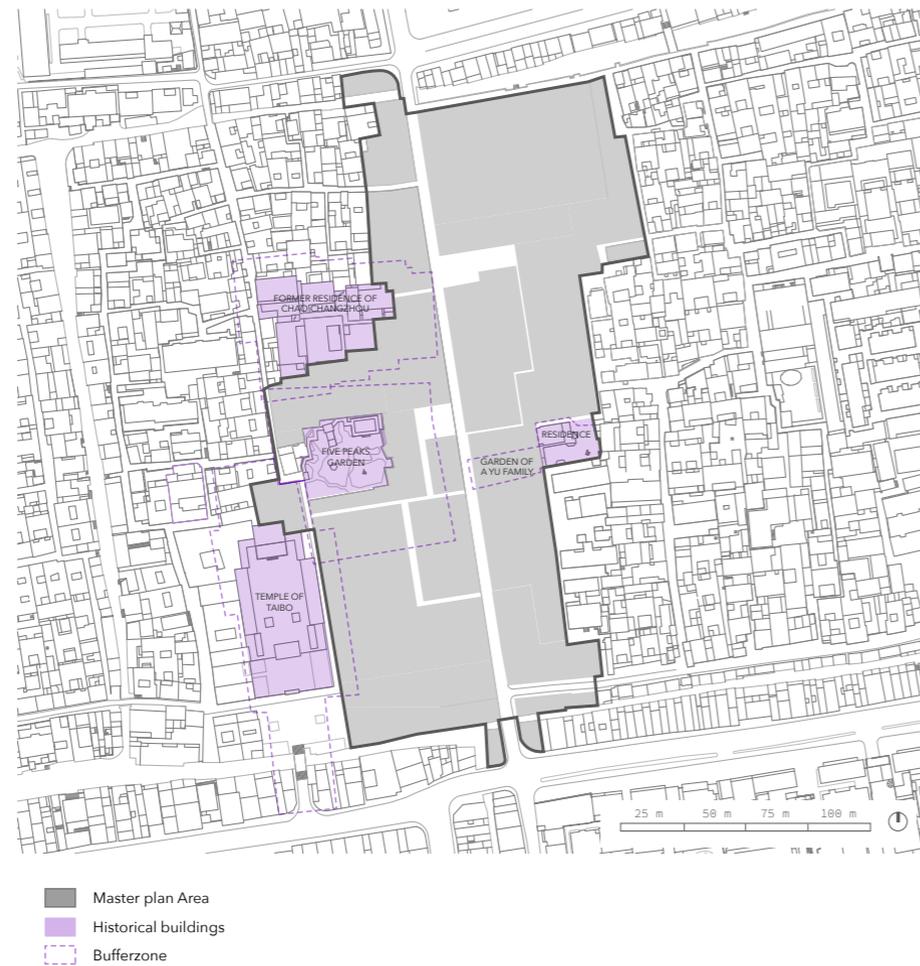
The project area is a portion of a Masterplan design for urban renewal on the neighbourhoods of Xijie and Changmen, divided by Changmen West street.

Based on the previous analysis done in group, it is interesting to notice that this area makes part of an organised historical fabric of blocks, externally regular in shape but apparently chaotic, because it has changed a lot over the time. Since 2011, most of the courtyard houses of this area were demolished for constructing a commercial project. Currently the zone remains abandoned affecting the surrounded spaces of both neighbourhoods and the interaction between those communities.



■ Project Area
■ Demolish area

Historical building location



This area is characterised by the presence of important heritage traces of the historical fabric and traditional gardens, such as the Tai Bo Temple, some residential ancient houses, Five Peaks Garden, and the proximity of Garden of Cultivation.

Although the garden of Five Peaks Garden was recently opened to the public and the temple restored; near the site, many areas are affected by the construction of new buildings in search of urban renewal, and others begin to be abandoned either because of the increase in land value or because of the lack of interest on the part of the community and the government to invest in them.

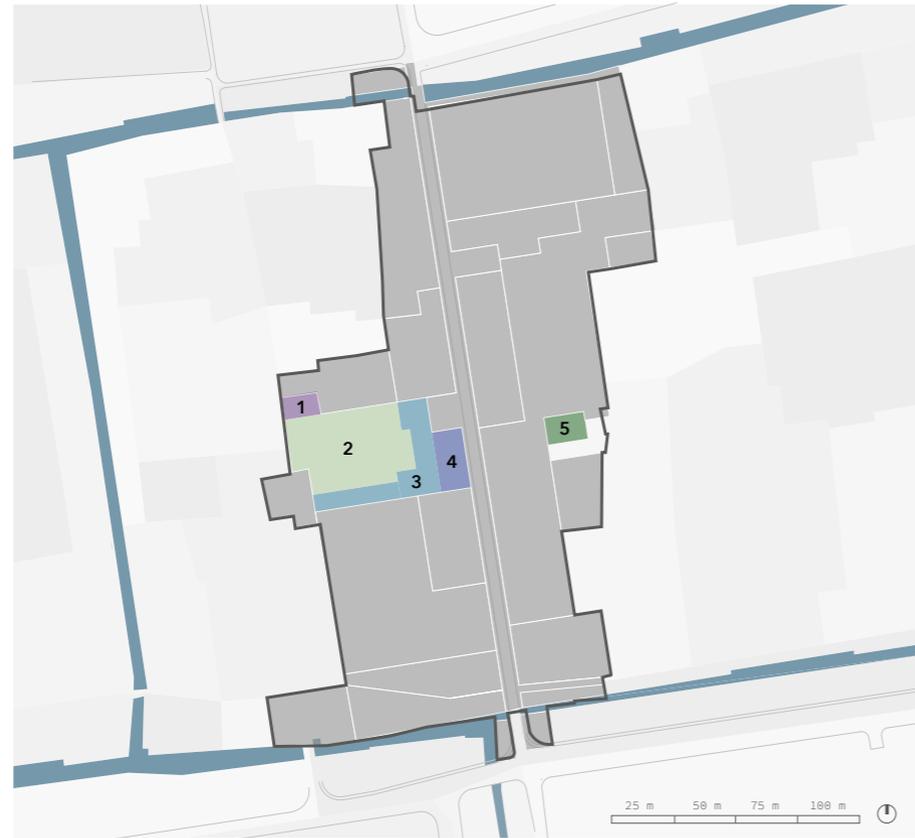
Historical building's purple line



The context change and adapts its shape to the demands of tourism facilities and a modern lifestyle by urban renewal plans inside the historic city. In this way, regarding the enhance and the protection of these historical sites, the project seeks to intervene in those small municipal historical and cultural units. Future areas that are not yet protected by the state or the UNESCO regulations, could be demolished or modified.

This project concerns the intervention inside the area delimited by the buffer zone of both, Five Peaks Garden and the vestiges of the historical residence, as a measure of restoration and protection of heritage.

Function of the Project area



- Master plan Area
- 2. Five Peaks Garden
Tea House & Garden
- 4. Turning Tables
Community Hub
- 1. Falling Rain
- 3. The cherry Wood Flaw
- 5. The Curious Pupil

The area is molded according to the different cultural uses as proposed within the Master Plan.

In this way, two cultural blocks that are located at the center of the project area, are identified as a strong driver of the area for the enjoyment of the community.

Keywords of the Project area



- Master plan Area

This complex block surrounded by the presence of Five Peaks Garden is made up of activities such as a Community center and a Library. It allows the communication of the Heritage as well as the interaction between the members of the community. Also a Fab lab is proposed with spaces for developing different craftwork and supporting the local enterprises with the aim to start up.

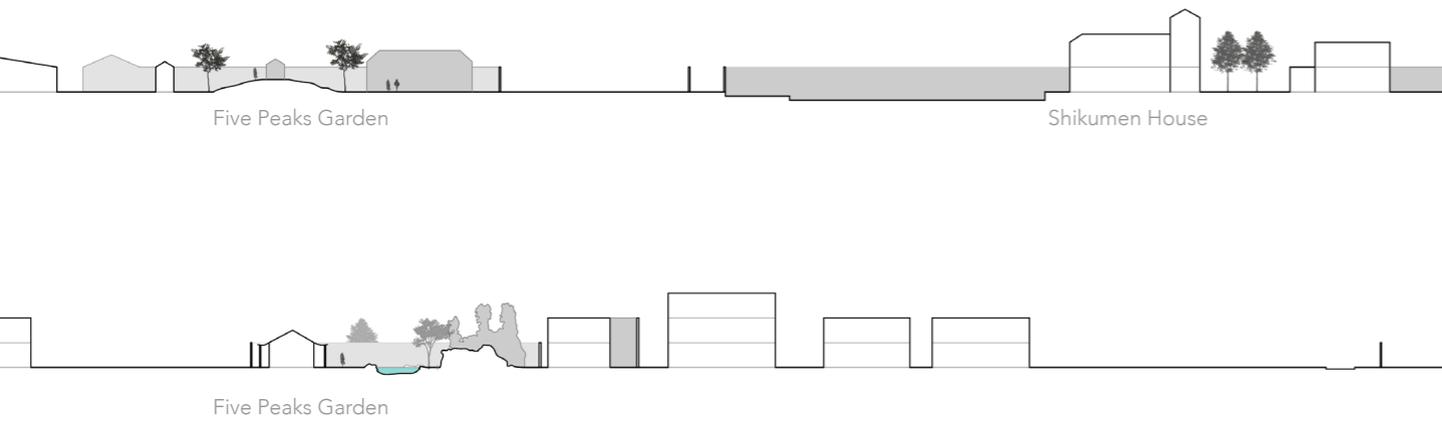
HISTORICAL SITE:

Relation between historical buildings

The presence of Five Peaks Garden, and the vestiges of the historical residence within the project area, involves the reading of diverse historical periods and different stories.

Taking into account the band of respect delimited by the buffer zone of each core zone, it is possible to notice that these two buildings are related through the presence of a fabric illustrated by a Chinese vernacular architecture that surrounds them.

In this way, a short description of the three architectural environments evidenced will be done with the intention to highlight the symbolic elements and referents in each "patrimonial structure". It will also help us to configure an approach of the cultural memory of the area.



Chinese vernacular context



Pattern of the street



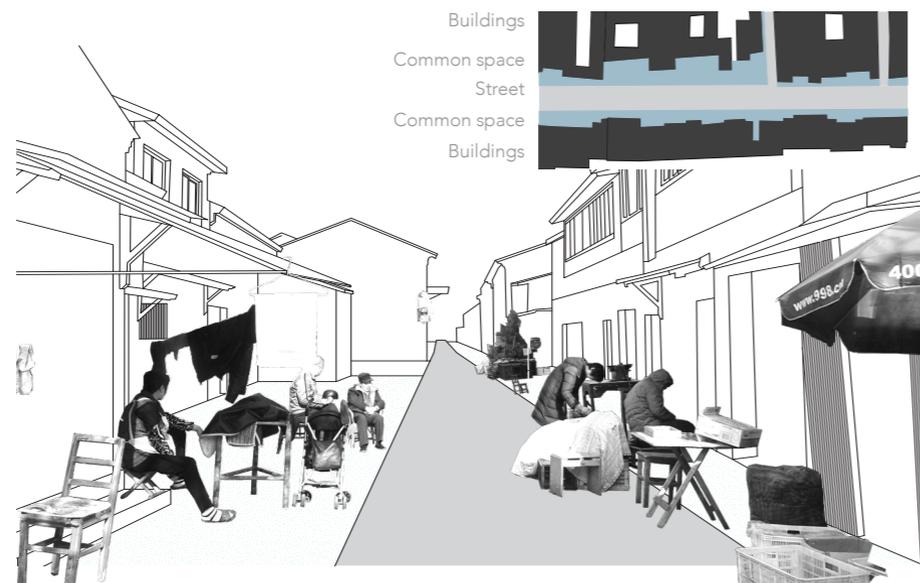
The urban fabric nearby is characterized by a dense and homogeneous context in terms of materials and construction techniques. However, these houses with white walls in structural masonry, grey ceilings and meticulous carpentry, give diversity to the urban space.

The residential area is composed of a typology of dividing houses where housing is not a single block, but a set of elements connected together to form the space. (See outline of the structure of the Former Residence).

The local environment constructed by buildings of one or two floors, can be conceived as a dynamic visual environment. Movements are present in its facades both on the horizontal axis and on the vertical axis, and in the movement of ceilings.

Movement on the street

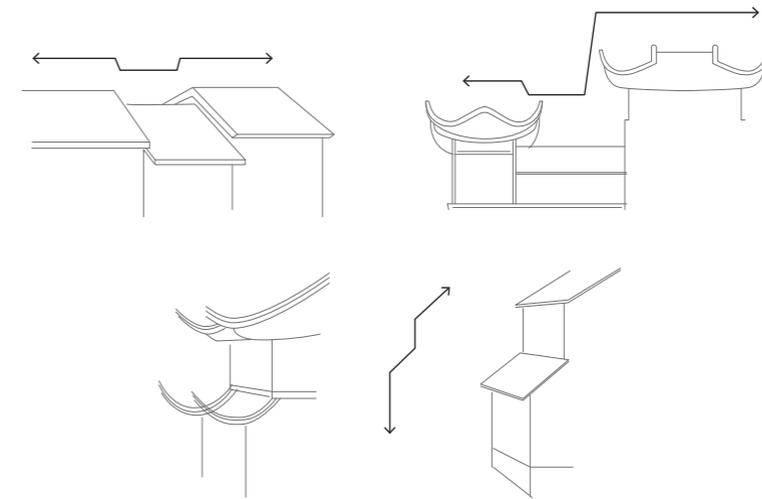
The streets inside the neighborhood are not straight. The road has a zigzag pattern that gives movement and becomes a corridor that families appropriate and where different activities are carried out. It becomes an expansion of the house.



Movement on the roof and in the vertical axis of the facade

The different heights and curvatures of the wooden ceilings and tiles enrich the visual play of the urban fabric. The houses present intentions and gestures of the architectural language that is apparent in the pavilions inside the gardens.

The sloping roofs rise in different heights and create a zigzag movement. This gesture is also present in the facade as the building rises in height and is set back.



Ancient residence from the early 1900s



Photos of an early 1900s house near to the project area in Suzhou

Context and history:

Although the history related to this old residence is not known with certainty, we can deduce thanks to the references found in the plan that delimits the buffer zone of this building, that the house adjoined or was part of the complex formed by the "garden of a Yu family."

Currently, although it no longer fulfills its residential function and seems to be abandoned due to the deteriorating conditions in which it is found, the house has still managed to maintain its standing along with a few others that we could find during our tour of the city.

It is possible to observe in it the traces of an architectural period in China where the use of the imperial brick that we find in the Imperial Brick Museum in the city of Suzhou converges, and Chinese and western architectural styles.

In the history of Chinese architecture, one of the buildings that appears similar to the characteristics listed above, are the Shikumen residences. s study gives us an idea of how to understand and value this rare building, in relation to the context, which deserves to be conserved.

The style of the Shikumen residences, whose literal translation is "Stone Warehouse Gate", is one of the most representative traditional housing styles in Shanghai, which can be found in both Xintiandi and Tianzifang. These old houses were renovated in public commercial areas and now function as restaurants, bars and shops: an attraction for locals and tourists.



Photos of an early 1900s house near to Suzhou Museum



Photos of Xintiandi in Shanghai and a model of the area

"These residences can date back to the 1870s, when the Taiping Rebellion against the domination of the Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1911) broke out. Due to the turbulent warfare, the businessmen, ministers and wealthy people had to move to the concession for protection"(Shikumen Residence [web site], 2016). In this way, "the shikumen is a cultural blend of the elements found in Western architecture with traditional Lower Yangtze architecture and social behavior"(Shikumen [web site], 2017) Lower Yangtze architecture refers to the traditional Chinese dwelling with courtyards, characteristic from the region of Jiangnan, that include Shanghai and the south of Jiangsu province for example.

Though the general feature of the dwelling is the Chinese courtyards, from the outside, it is possible to see the western influence of the terrace houses. "The the sloping roof is a dormer window. It has a stone gate frame and wooden doors. [...] As the residences are usually linked, a lane naturally comes into being. At the end of the lane, a traditional archway can usually be found. Stepping through the stone gate, you enter a patio from where the sunshine lights the whole yard. The major rooms are on both sides of the patio"(Shikumen Residence [web site], 2016).

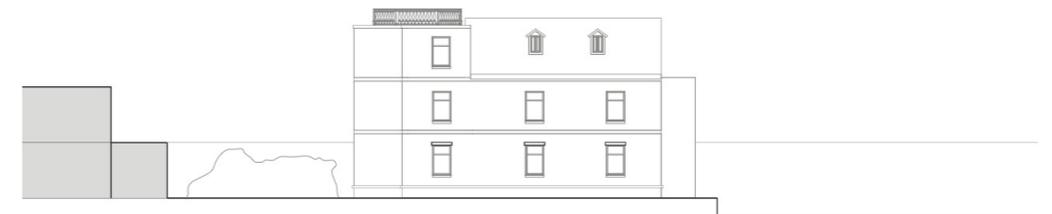
This style of building constructed with wood and traditional Chinese bricks, became quickly popular on the old cities and the port cities in China.

Map and section of the isolated testimony

From a photographic survey, it is possible to reconstruct an approximation of the house's current state planimetry. However, the internal distribution of the dwelling is unknown.



Roof Floor



South Facade



North Facade



Elements of the natural scenery

The courtyard is divided into two parts: an open space that responds to the main facade of the house and a more intimate space to the west. The last zone is made up of trees and a fake mountain of rocks, derived of the elements that compose the Chinese garden, where it is possible to make a walk inside its caves.

It is a two and three story house that rises from the ground on a plinth. Its silhouette is made by a roof with a dormer window and a terrace. The house opens on its main facade towards the patio by means of a corridor on the first floor and a balcony on the second.



As for the materiality, the house is built in brick, also known as the imperial gray brick, cement elements painted in white (railings and plinth) and wood. As for the decoration, the balustrade railings have a baroque style. And, the doors and windows are adorned with a rectangular lintels.



Buffer zone of the Residence

At a visual level, it seems that three volumes surrounding the building and built in cement, were added. Two on the west side and one on the east.

On the other hand, it is possible to perceive from one urban plan of the area, that the house was composed of a succession of gardens: the garden that surrounds the building and a garden next to it that prepared the entrance to the house. However, as it was not yet considered a high-ranking heritage, the garden was not protected and today it does not exist.

It would be interesting to recreate the presence of the garden and revive the relationship between the house and the garden.

The garden of FIVE PEAKS GARDEN

Context and history:

Located on Tao Hua Wu district, Five Peaks Garden evidence the cultural style of the Ming Dynasty (1522-1566). The landscapes defined to the interior of the garden, also called Wufeng Garden, were modeled by the strokes of Wu Boren (1502-1575), painter and grandson of Wen Zhengming, one of the most important painter of Ming Dynasty and the creator of some other gardens recognized as UNESCO heritage today.

After the War of Resistance against Japanese aggression (1937-1945), the garden is smashed and took the function of a dwelling house. In 1983, the stone that fell to the ground during the war was repaired and protected. In 1982, Five Peaks Garden acquires the title of a municipally historic and cultural relic protection unit. Finally, in 1998 the garden open its doors to the public as a tea house.

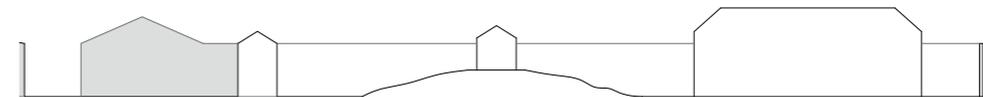
Even if the name of the garden is due to the presence of five pinnacles issues from the rocks of Taihu lake, the garden also guards on a hill over a small pavilion was built, the tomb of Liu Yi, a Confucian scholar in the Tang Dynasty.

(History of Wufeng Garden, Baidú)

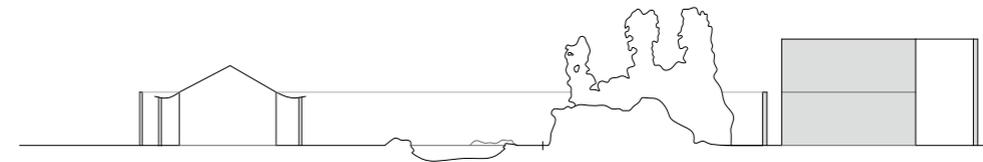
Map and section of the isolated testimony



Roof Floor



Section AA'



Section BB'

Elements of the natural scenery



Inside the garden, the buildings are situated on the north and, nature elements, on the south. It seems that a balance between the built and the nature layout is maintained.

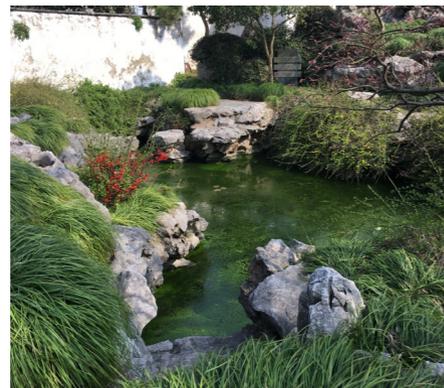
The natural scenery is composed by the traditional elements. The UNESCO Gardens previously analysed, such as: the rocks, hills, a water layout, and some open pavilions.

Water and nature layout:

In the south of the hall, there is a small artificial pool that, more than reflecting the skyline of the rocks, force the visitor to contemplate them with distance and surround it to climb up to them.

Moreover, the design of the vegetation path is also complemented by rocks, flower plants, ancient and beautiful trees and the type of grass that gives the sensation of relief. It seems that the nature path is more rich and visually accessible on the west side than the east side, near to the entrance. In this area, the trees and the low vegetation create the image of a forest.

"Let flowers bloom in full and bamboos thrive under your loving care" (Quote taken from a plaque in the garden)

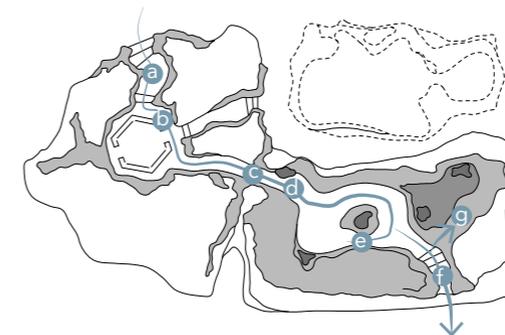


Rocks and hills:

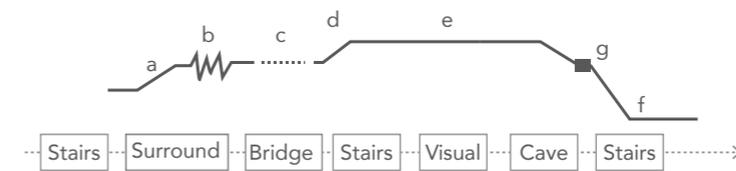
The five rocks of about seven meters high at the south side of the garden, compose the principal scene: "Sanlao Peak", "Taohua Qingyun Peak", "Qintian Peak", "Guanyin Peak", "Zhangren Peak". In the rockery, there are some caves, stone bridges and stone beams that allows one to perceived the whole space from the top of the hill.



Interpretation of the path on the mountain



Sequential analysis



It is not a linear path.

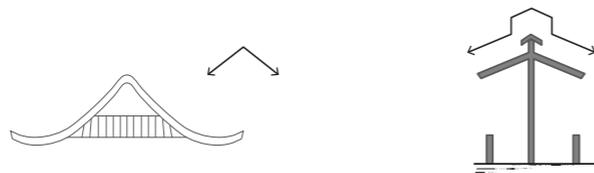
Pavilions:

The garden is composed by three main buildings: "Wufeng Shanfang" the actual tea house, perfect to admire the five pinnacles, "Zhu Shi Fang" a quiet pavilion to stay, and Liu Yi Pavilion, located on top of the hill.

1. Wufeng Shanfang
2. Zhu Shi Fang
3. Liu Yi Pavillion



Relation with the roof



Corridors:

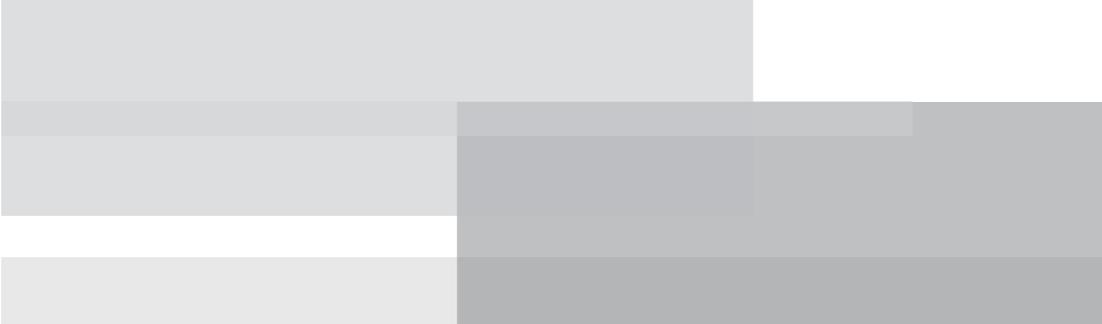
The long corridor that surrounds the perimeter of the garden, connects the entrance with the tea house through a zig zag path that creates some small patios for the light entrance or vegetation.



Buffer zone and protected area of conservation of the Garden.

Nowadays, the area within the "purple line" of the Garden is partially destroyed. Just a few houses, maintain the profile of the main street of the garden.

However, some buildings seems to be added to the complex. On the north, an old house is adapted to supply the need of a restroom. On the east side of the main building, a house seems to be connected to the garden which complements the tea house.



03 / Design proposal

USER'S GUIDE

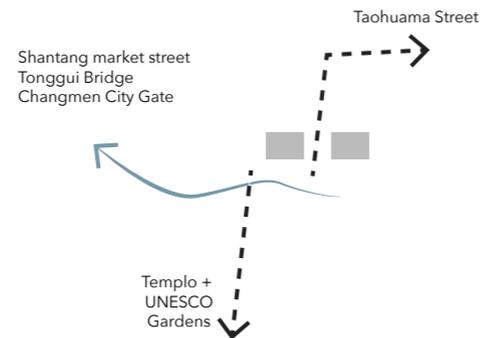
The project aims to interpretate the spirit of the traditional architecture and consolidate the architectural language that is not clear but that people know and experience daily.

This chapter illustrate the intentions of the design process of spaces for interaction of the community, step by step as a construction manual.

Urban concepts:

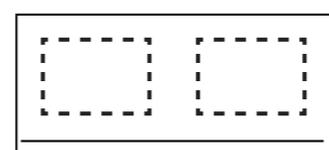
1.

Take advantage of the canal situated on the south of the Masterplan Area, to connect the patrimonial areas through the water. Interact with landmarks and cultural attractive points: Nearness of UNESCO Gardens as Garden of Cultivation and Mountain Villa with embracing beauty.



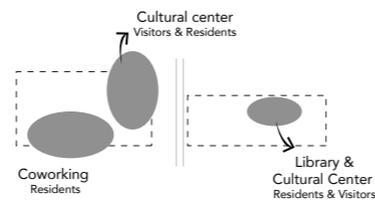
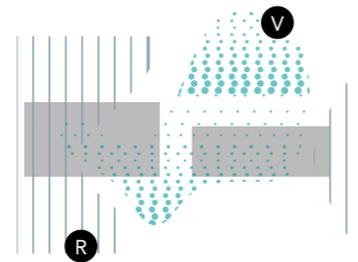
2.

Individuation of an unitary space of 2 blocks that establish the connection of two neighbourhoods: Xijie and Changmen.



3.

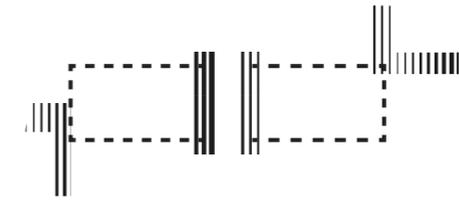
Creation of a cultural area with a mix of cultural activities that allows the block to be used by locals and visitors



Local concepts:

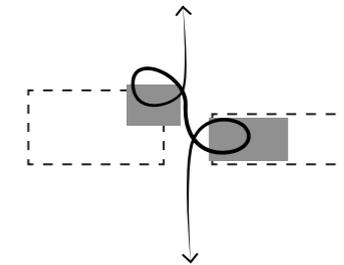
4.

Relation with the street



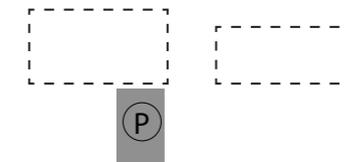
5.

Creation of a continuous public space on the ground floor as an expansion of Changmen West street that difficult the pedestrian connection today.



6.

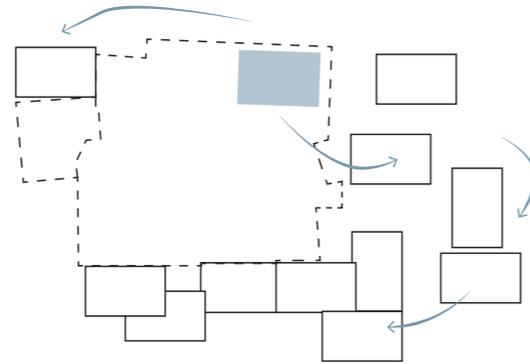
Solve the need of parking areas.



DESIGN STRATEGIES

1. DEFINE

Tea House as a module that could be multiplied.



2. ADJUST

Adjust modules in relation to the limits of the garden and to a 3x3m frame that configures the structure.

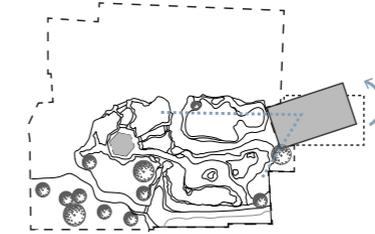


The modular reticle is configured by The Nine Constellation Magic Square Matrix.

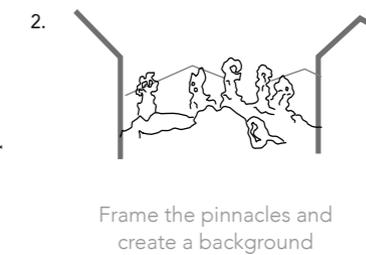
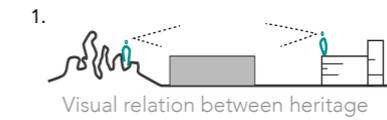
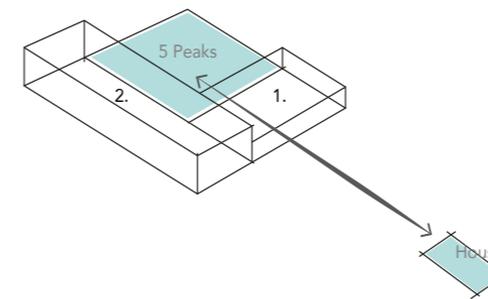
"The number 9 was a supreme figure, and the Earth was represented by a large square divided into 3 x 3 into nine smaller ones" ZHANG, D. (2013)

3. ROTATE

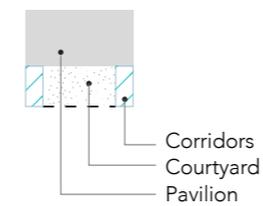
Rotate the module to see the pinnacles, respecting the edge of the garden.



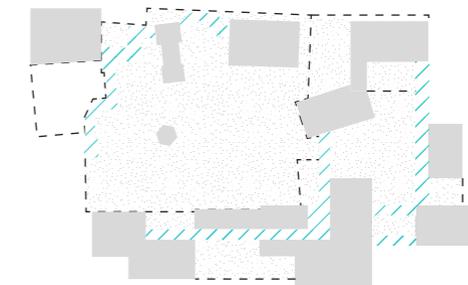
4. RAISE



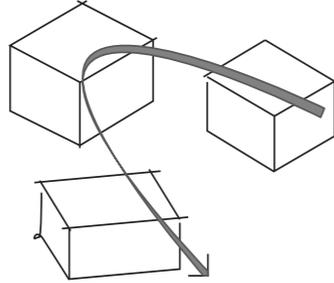
5. SPATIAL ORGANIZATION



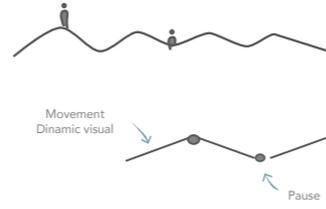
Keep the structure of the pavilions inside the garden.



6. IMITATE THE MOUNTAIN



Ribbon that connects the isolated modules

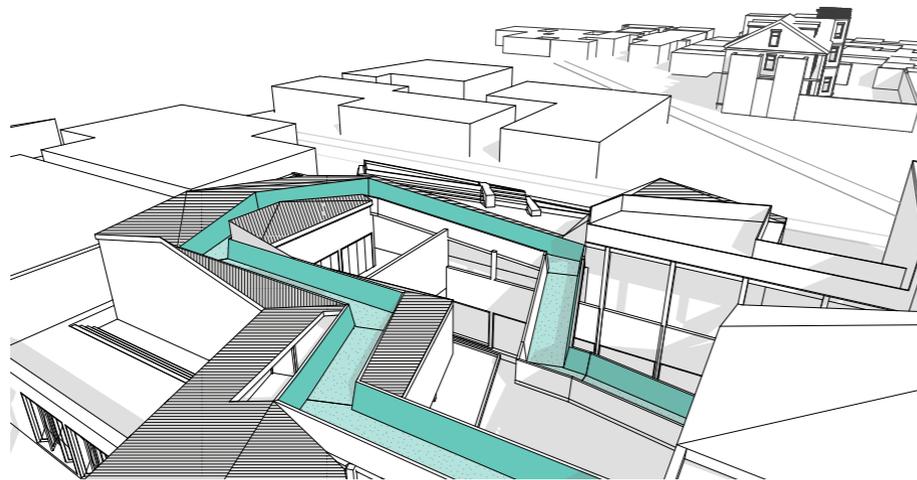


Interpretation of the path on the mountain that creates a visual movement.



1. Lion Forest Garden
2. Mountain Villa Garden

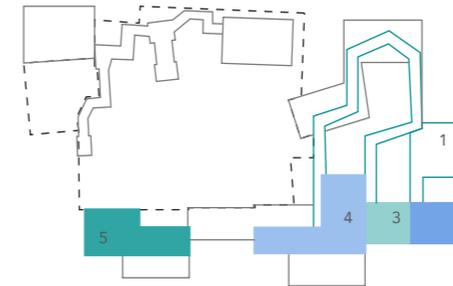
Also see scheme of Five peaks mountain on page 43.



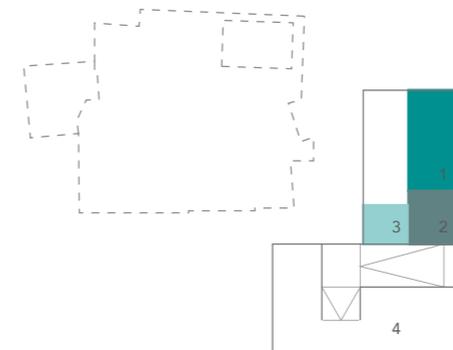
7. FUNCTIONS INSIDE THE CULTURAL BLOCK



1. Culinary Workshops178,9 m²
2. Fire place88,4 m²
3. Turning tables60,73 m²
4. Administration80,5 m²
5. Stairwell56,2 m²
6. Coworking214,55 m²
7. Laboratory108,28 m²
8. Parking Stairwell84,2 m²
9. Exposition area129,4 m²
10. Laundry & Public toilets128,15 m²



1. Terrace
2. Turning tables80,5 m²
3. Stairwell56,2 m²
4. Meditation center165,6 m²
5. Exposition area124,25 m²

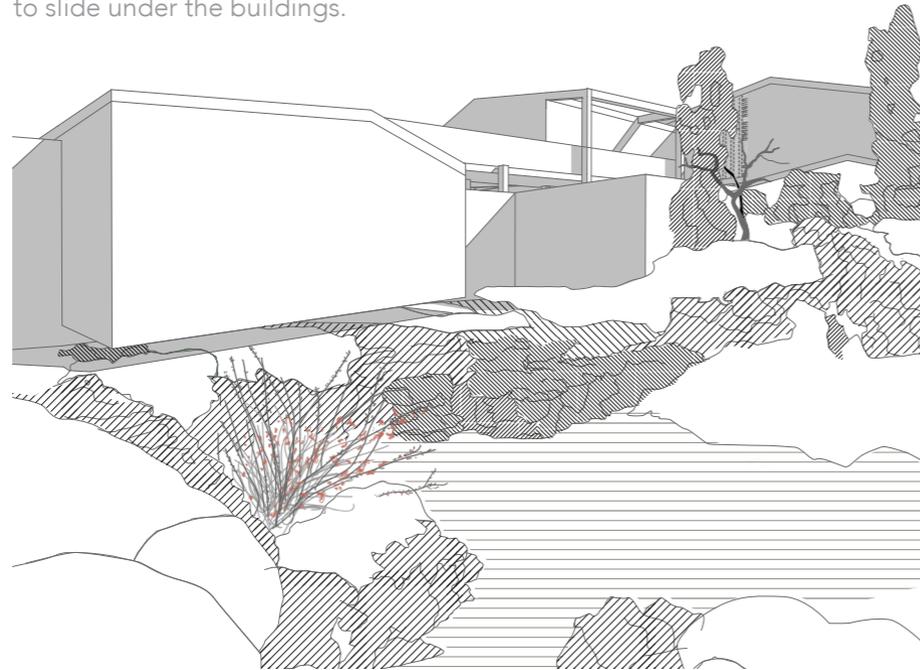
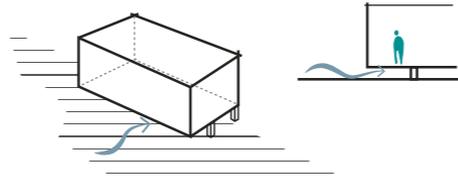


1. Multifuntional space151,94 m²
2. Laboratory81,84 m²
3. Stairwell56,2 m²
4. Parking

8. FLOATING PAVILIONS

As in the Chinese gardens, the pavilions rise from the ground and transmit through a subtle gesture, the idea of depth and continuity.

The project is not buried in the site allowing the context to slide under the buildings.



Garden of Cultivation



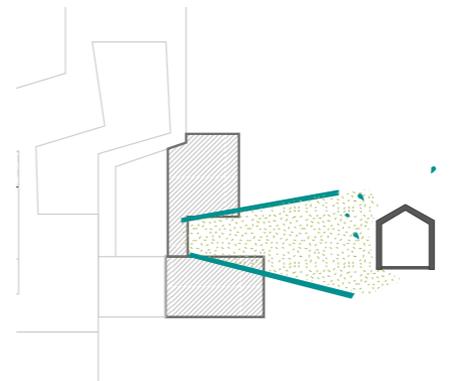
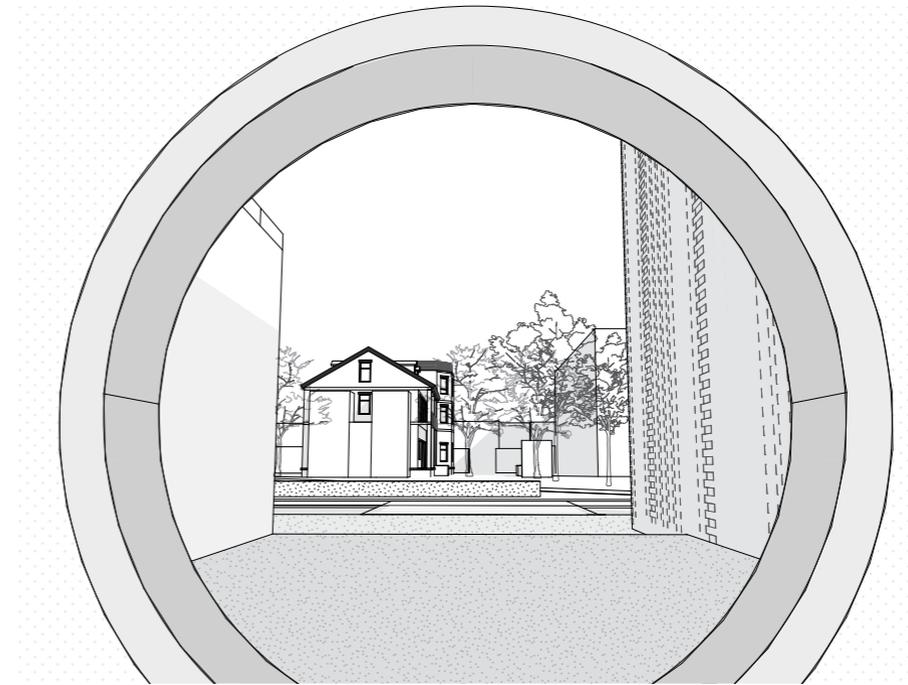
Humble Administrator Garden



Facade Renovation for No. 8 Building, Atelier Archmixing
Source (4): Archdaily.com

9. HIGHLIGHT THE LIBRARY

View from the entrance of the Cultural Center



The main access of the Community Center is oriented to the ancient "Garden of a Yu family" that used to be an entrance door to the ancient dwelling. In this way a moon gate frame the ancient house creating awareness about its cultural memory within the inhabitants.

10. SKIN

a. Use of traditional tiles



Source (5): plataformaarquitectura.cl



China Academy of Art's Folk Art Museum, Kengo Kuma
Source (5): plataformaarquitectura.cl

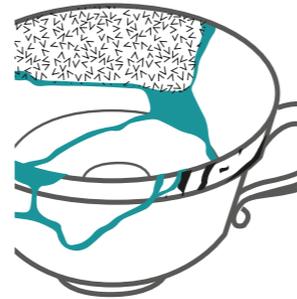
b. Use of traditional bricks and creation of new design



Suzhou Museum of Imperial
Kiln Brick

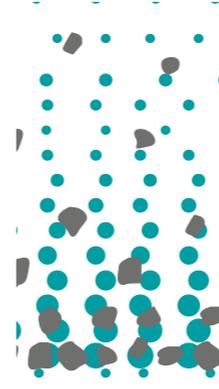


Source (6): Lafarge Holcim Foundation
One wave and three Twists by
Amateur Architecture Studio



Objects restoration

c. Brick wall with openings



Pixels



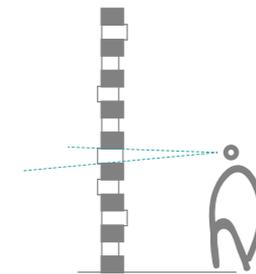
Suzhou Museum of Imperial
Kiln Brick



Office and Exhibition Space
by Archi Union Architects
Source (7): detail.de



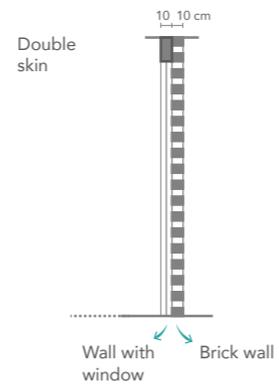
Rhapsody in grey: a courtyard community by Zhang Bing
Source (8): chinauhu.com





Fan Zeng Art Gallery, Original Design Studio

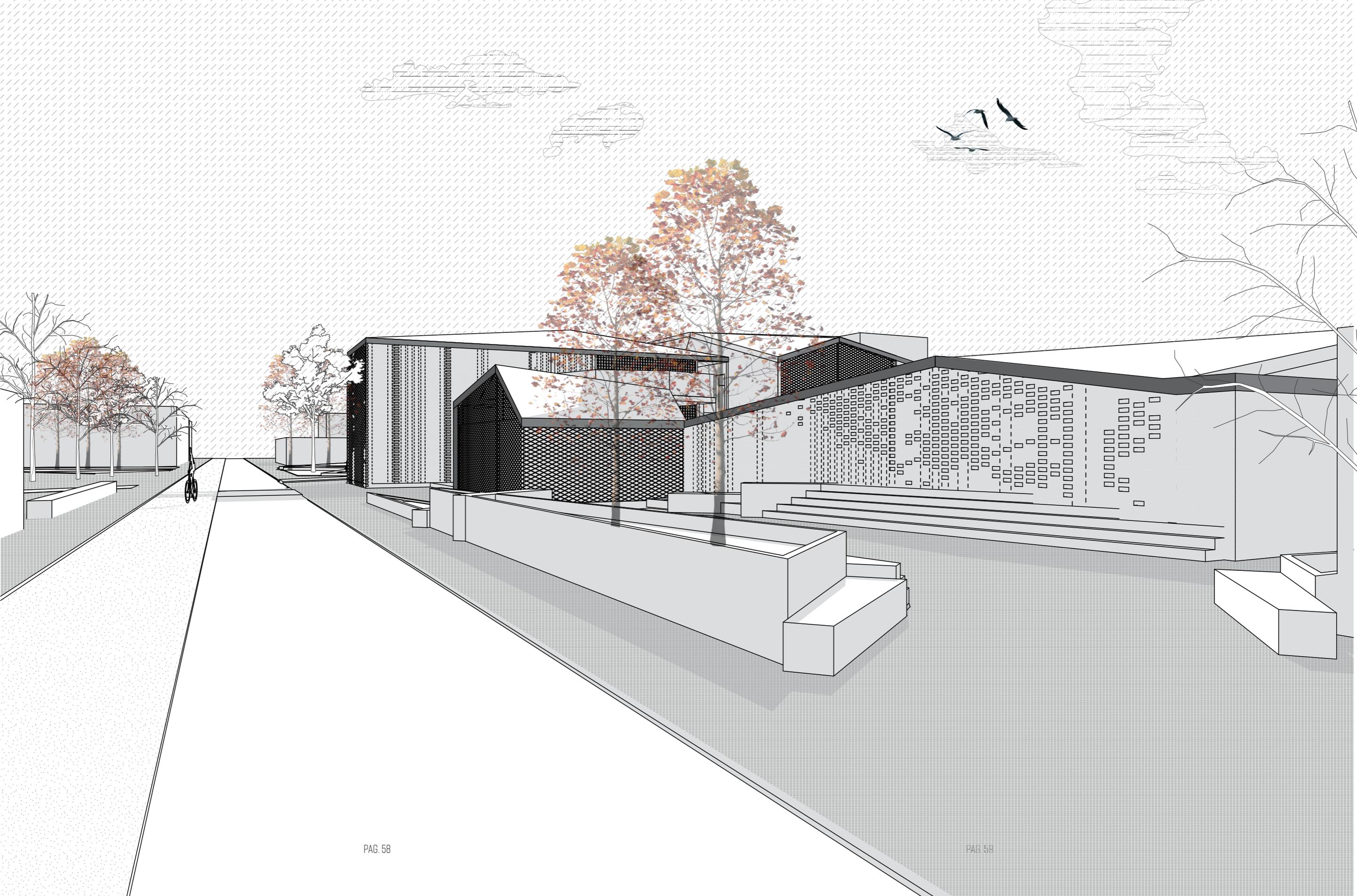
Source (9): Archdaily.com



Interpretation of the changing and ephemeral nature of heritage through materiality



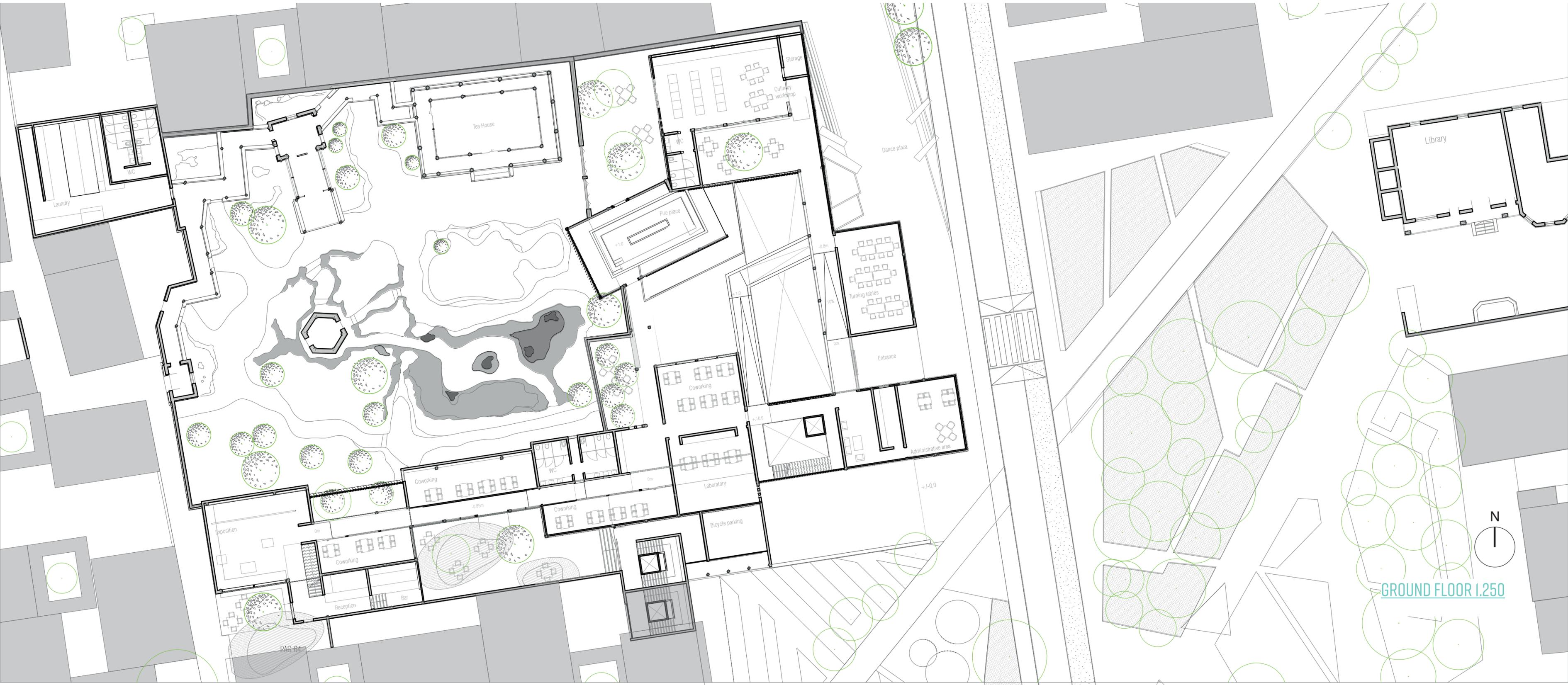
- Keep the edge**
 Relation with the garden.
 (Closed space concept)
- Pavilions semi-compact**
 Destined to different activities
 related to the community.
- Pavilions semi-permeables**
 Relation with the context
 (See and not be seen concept)
- Pavilions permeables**
 Relation with the intangible
 heritage.
 (Concept of ephemeral)



04 / Suzhou cultural center







Laundry

WC

WC

Tea House

WC

Storage

Culinary workshop

Dance plaza

Fire place

+1.0

+1.0

10%

0m

+/-0.0

+/-0.0

+/-0.0

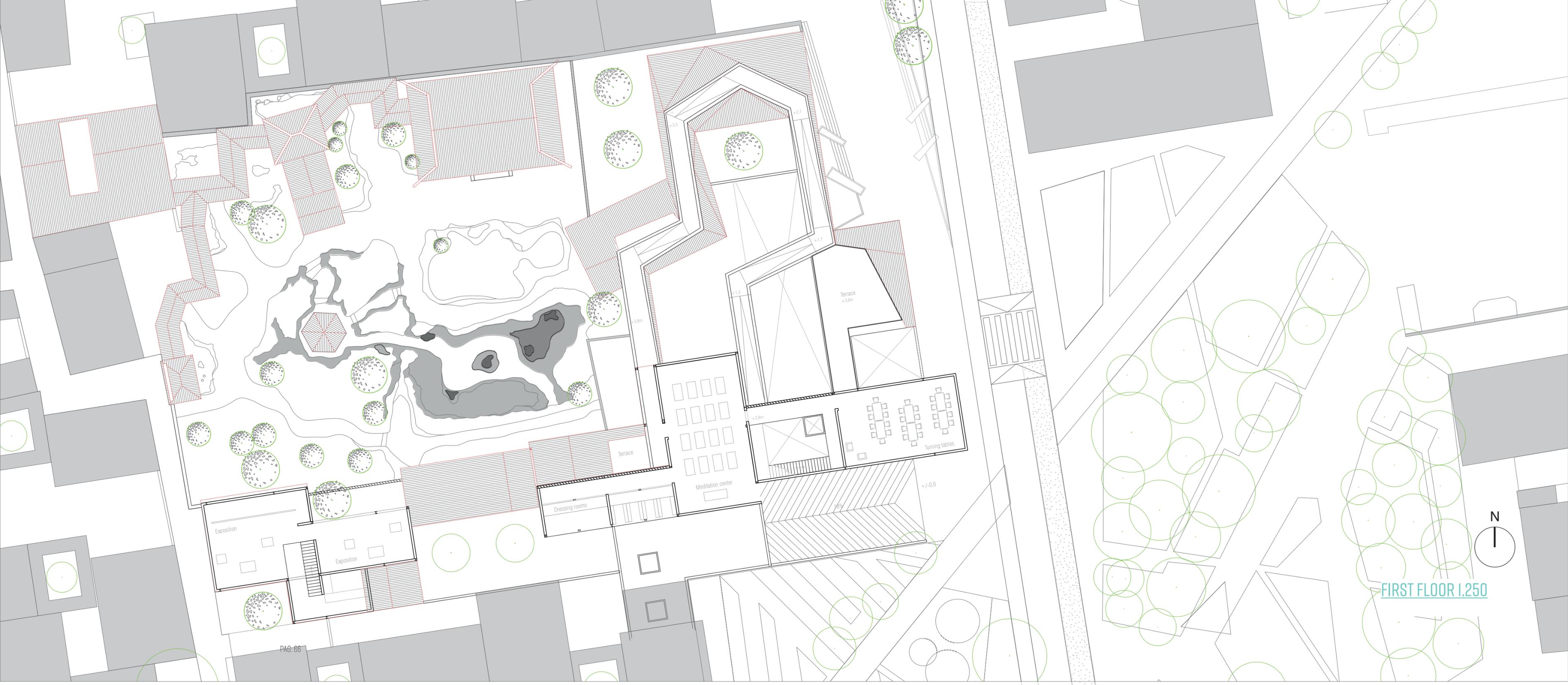
0m

Library



GROUND FLOOR 1.250

PAG 04



Exposition

Exposition

Dressing rooms

Meditation center

Terrace

Terrace
+3.8m

Turning tables





Buffer zone limit

Multifunctional Space
143.13m²

Laboratory & Plotter

Power plant

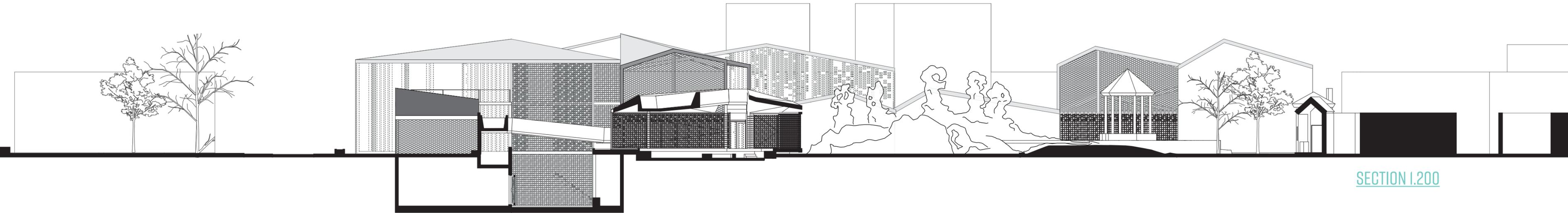
Access to Cultural c.

Access to Residence

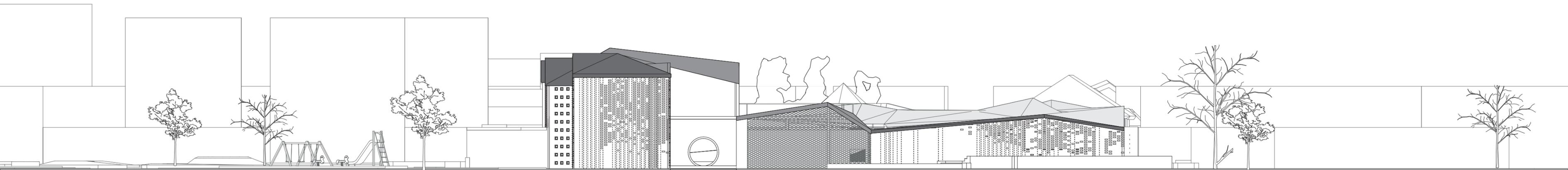
Parking Scooters



UNDERGROUND FLOOR 1.250



SECTION 1.200

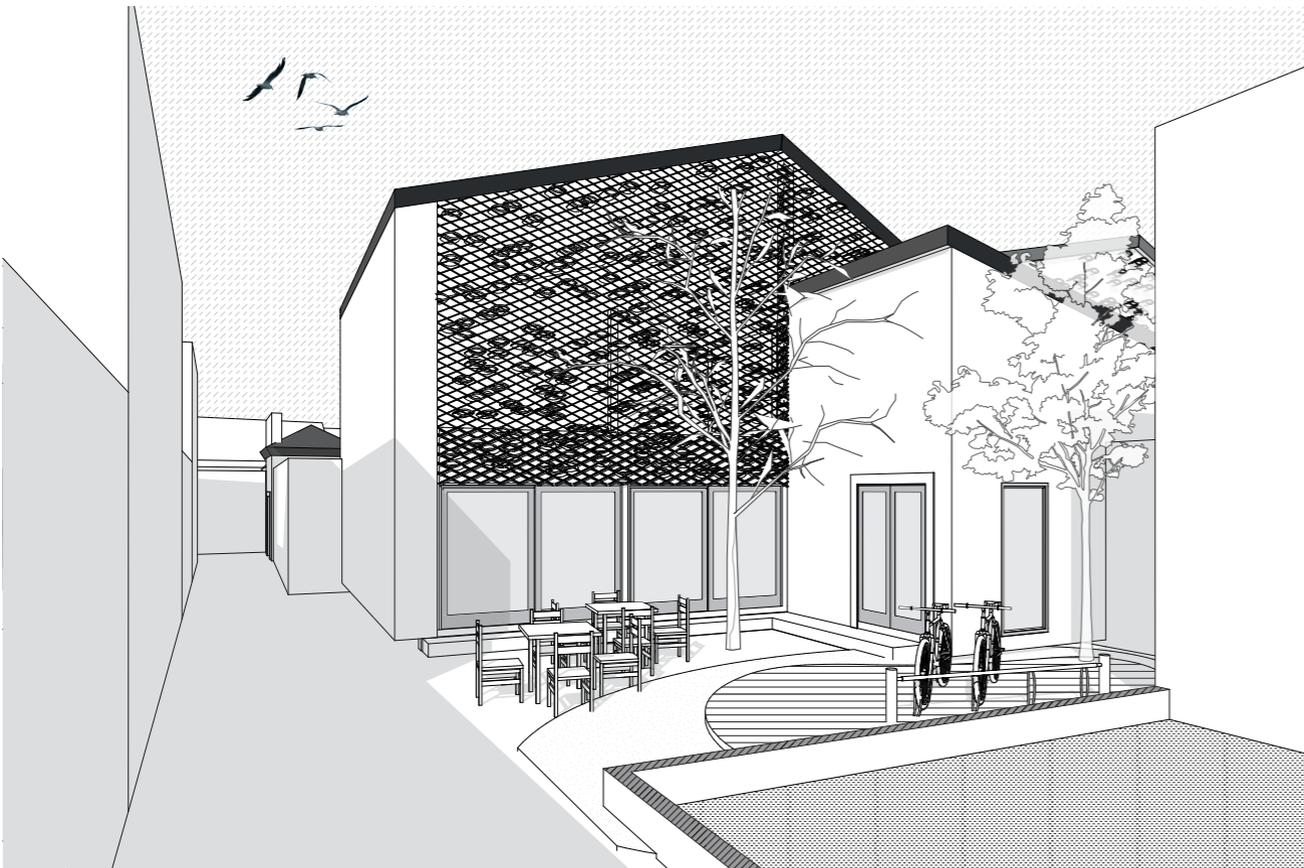


WEST FACADE sc. 1.200

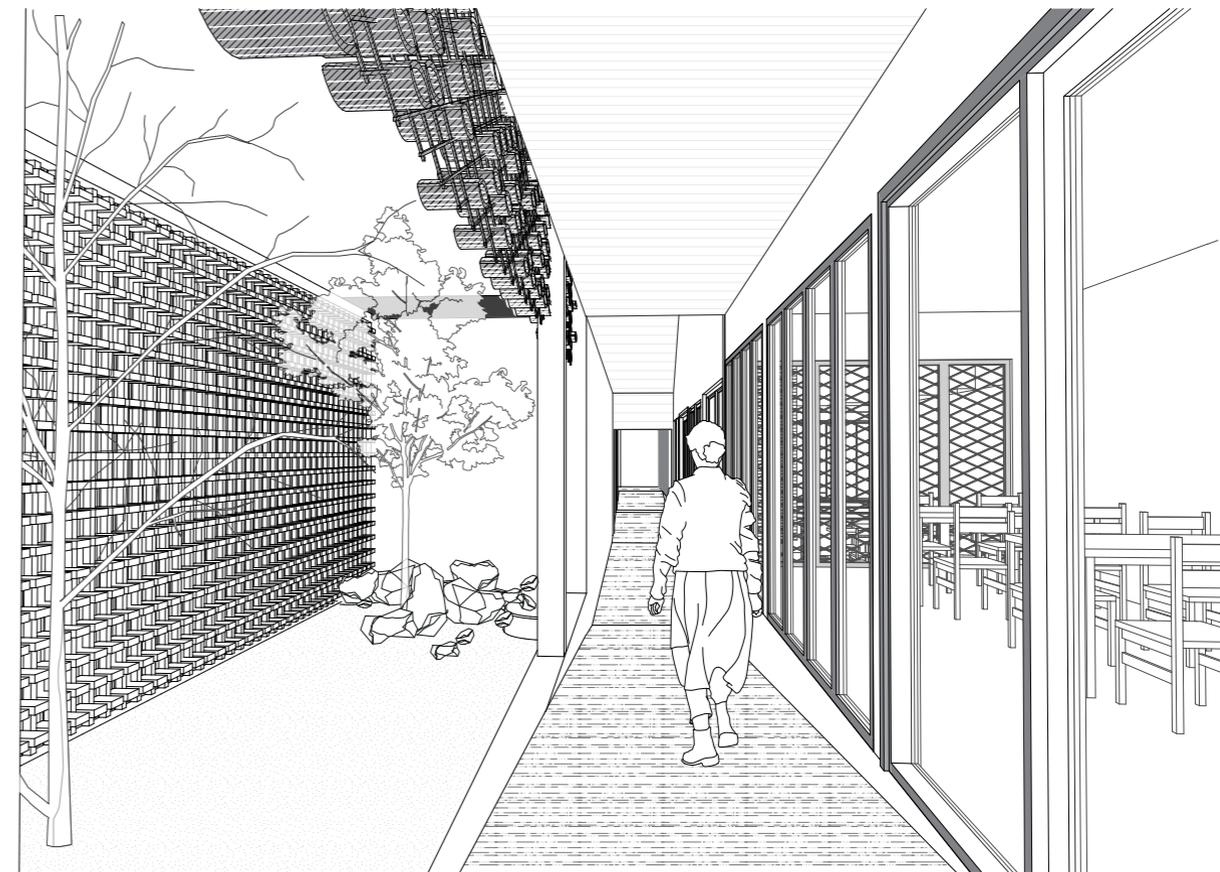
SCENIC VIEWS

**The experience of a
journey into memory.**

INTO THE NEIGHBORHOOD



Secondary entrance



Corridor

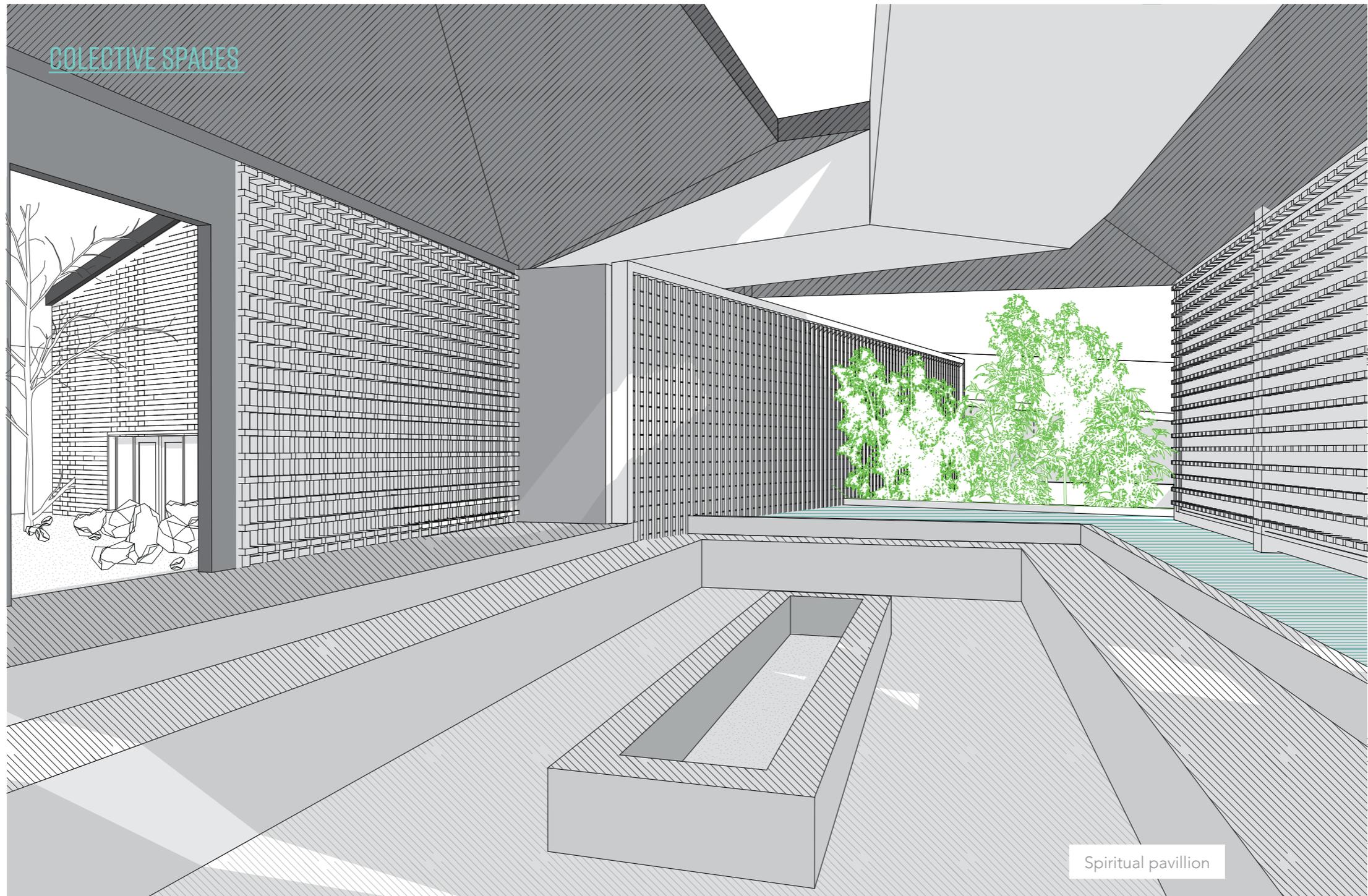
OPEN SPACES



View to the courtyard



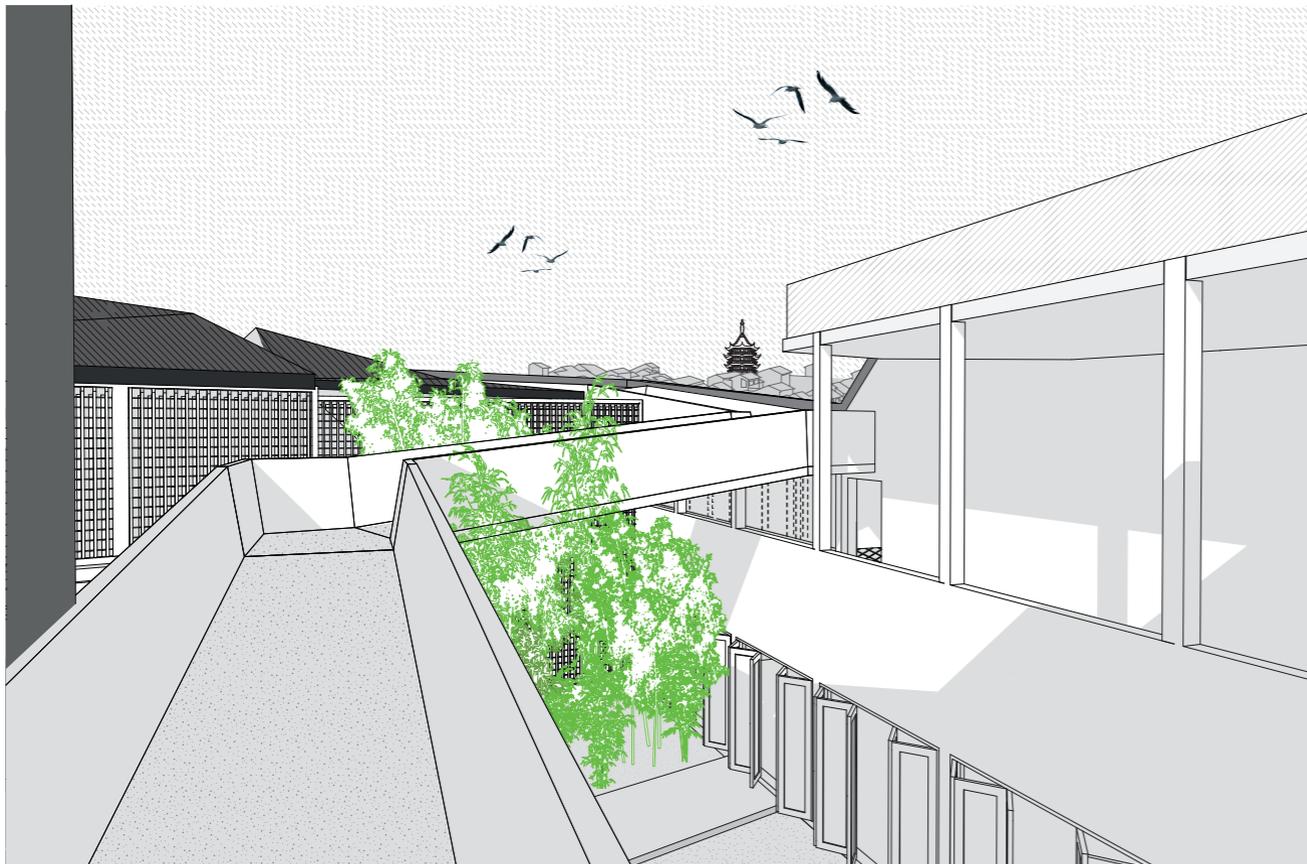
Extension of the forest



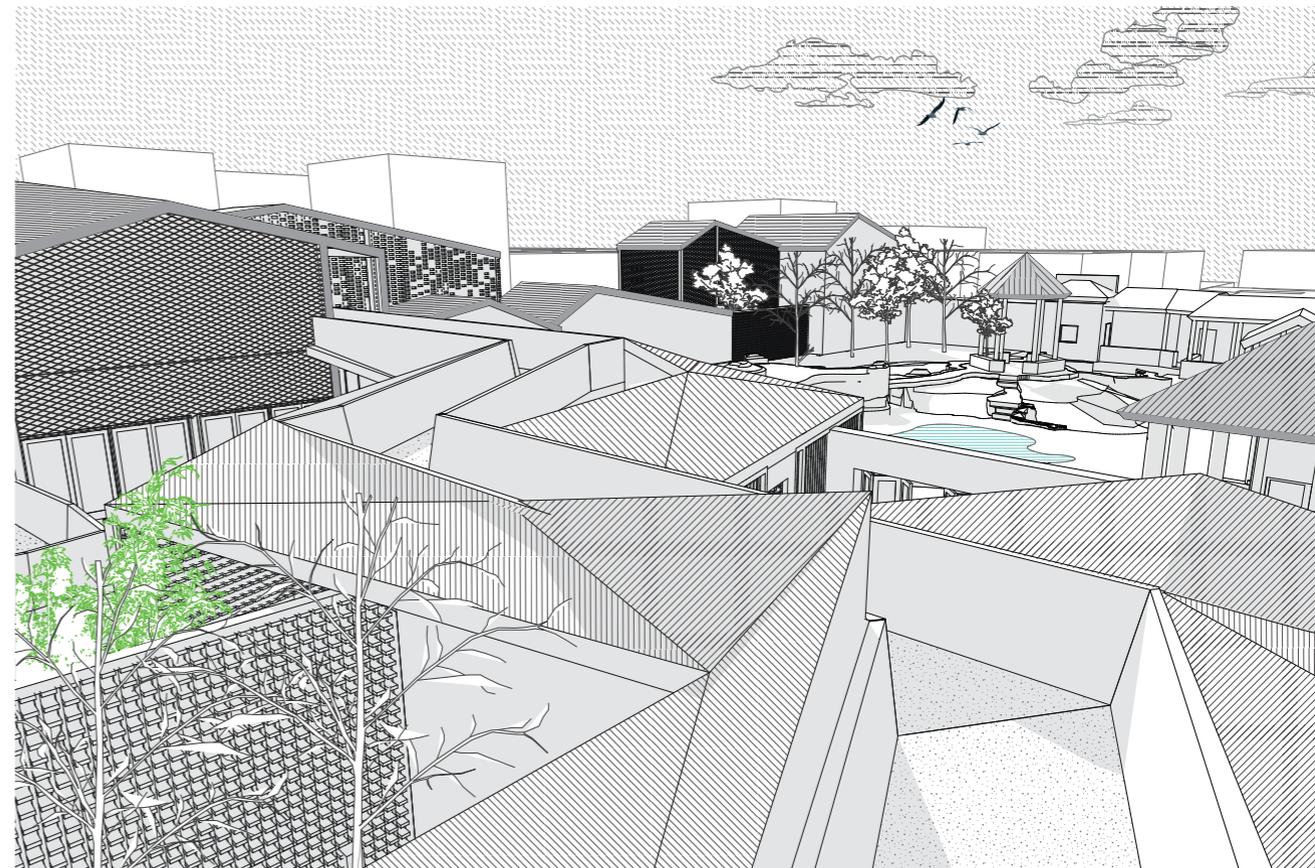
COLECTIVE SPACES

Spiritual pavillion

SPACES TO CONTEMPLATE



A trip into the bambu to the Pagoda



View to the garden



05/ Conclusions

Nowadays the trends of modernization and development are constantly changing the urban fabric. Therefore it is necessary to protect the cultural testimonies that still remains in the historic urban fabric.

Making the effort to protect the longevity of the intangible heritage inside the historical neighbourhood of Xijie and Changmen, this intervention provides spaces for the regeneration of the local culture. The project establishes modules that maintains in harmony the traditional style of the urban fabric and keep using the conventional materials in a contemporary way. As an input to reinterpret the local spirit of the area, the design proposal values and creates an alliance between two small historical and cultural municipal units. It is a protective container and carrier of memories that allows to experience the unique cultural aspects of the city.

This community center contributes to the activation and renovation of the area, the creation of spaces that allow the interaction between local inhabitants and visitors, encouraged to find out, discover and experience the local culture in a unique way. The project represents and revives local traditions, offering spaces for the development of daily activities, related to the culture of sharing and community participation that characterizes Suzhou's urban space.

The development of an area should not imply the loss of its identity. The context changes and is renewed but the traditions have to be maintained.

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