

“NERI&HU’S LATEST ADAPTATION HINGES ON CONFECTIONS AND THEORY”

AN Interior, DEC 2022

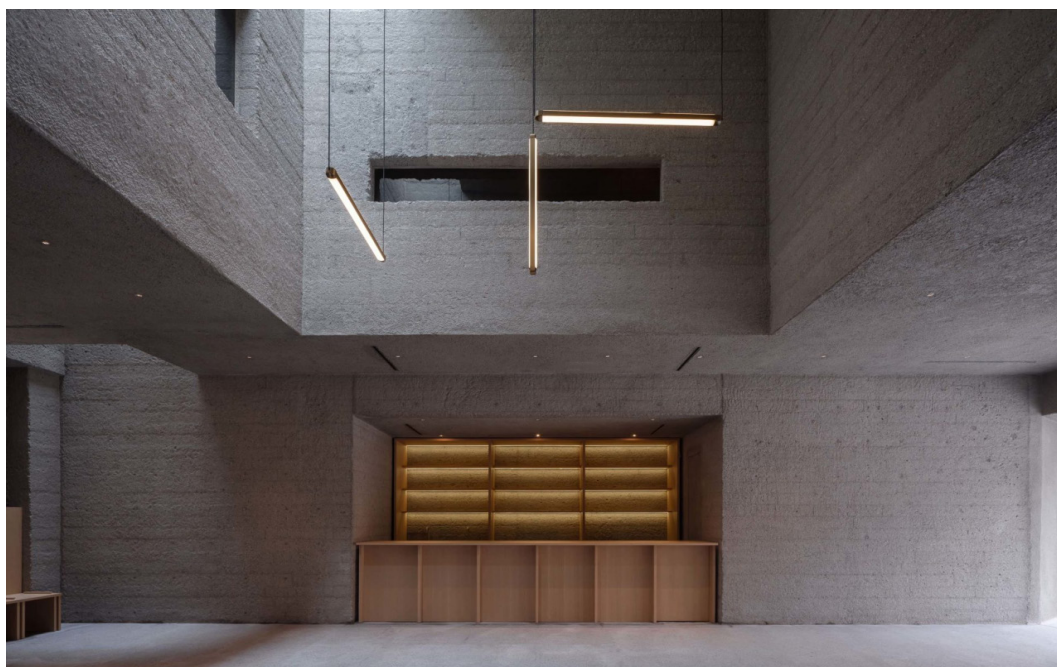
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AN Interior

Neri&Hu’s latest adaptation hinges on confections and theory

Sweet Talk

By Anna Gibertini



Neri&Hu, brainchild of cofounders Lyndon Neri and Rosanna Hu, are no strangers to adaptive reuse. Since 2004, the firm has been focused on “the adaptation of found artifacts seen as fragments in time.” That focus has morphed in recent years and elevated to new levels of design intervention, as the typology has become more environmentally imperative and aesthetically popular with architects and clients alike. Their latest project, Recast, a former textile warehouse turned corporate headquarters and concept store for the Lao Ding Feng pastry company, emblemizes this new design thinking.

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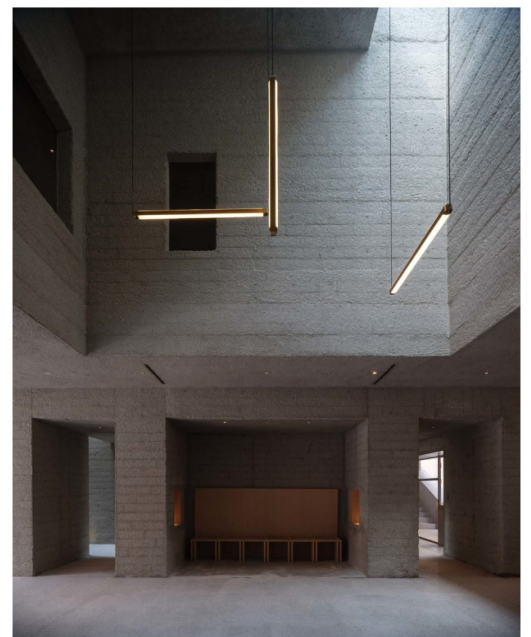


(Zhu Runzi)

“The basis for adaptive reuse, and even some seemingly ground-up projects, are actually non-romantic relics from the past,” says the firm. “These remnants pose important questions to architects in terms of sustainability and construction waste management, as well as deeper philosophical questions regarding originality and authorship.”



(Zhu Runzi)



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For Recast, Neri&Hu specifically turned to cultural theorist Svetlana Boym’s theory of an “off-modern” attitude of preservation for inspiration. According to the architects, applying Boym’s notion of an off-modern attitude “can recover the unforeseen past and chart unexplored territory of modern history” within the built environment. Recast’s site, a rapidly transitioning postindustrial neighborhood near Beijing’s Northeast Fifth Ring Road, and the original warehouse presented ideal experimental fodder to test Boym and Neri&Hu’s approach to making something new out of the old.



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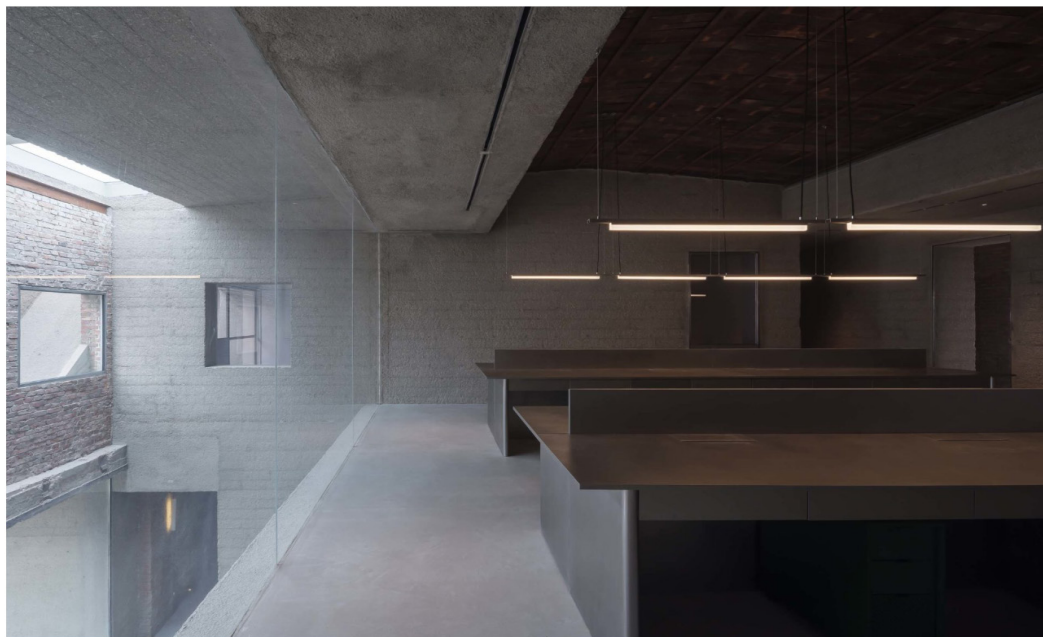
Comprising a main warehouse building, three annexes, and a courtyard, Recast stays true to its past on the outside by preserving the building’s brick shell in almost all its entirety. Inside Neri&Hu injected modernity. The stand out element here is a cast-concrete object that mimics the shape of Lao Ding Feng’s signature product, a traditional Chinese pastry created a decorative mold. This object defines the floor plan and flow of the interior spaces, and protrudes out of the original building’s ceiling. By opening negative spaces between the object and the brick shell, Neri&Hu form a flagship store, a gallery, a cafe, and a garden on the ground floor, with the client’s offices located on the second story. Double-height spaces and apertures create visual connection between the two floors’ public and private areas.

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Concrete was also used for the annexes and occasionally permeates the facade of the original building. This was an intentional choice, as it creates a material congruity between the old and new buildings. It also echoes the client’s desire to both celebrate its past and embrace modern tastes.



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Returning to the bigger ideas that drove the project, Neri&Hu also point to *pentimento*, an art historical term suggesting a visible trace of earlier painting beneath a layer of paint on a canvas. “The suggestion here is that through experimental means of preservation and adaptation, we can exploit a different logic of the ruin,” the firm told *AN Interior*. “It is not romantic, not baroque, not melancholic, but a form of toleration of disharmony—a toleration of plural modernities with which we live.”