

# JINGDEZHEN IMPERIAL KILN MUSEUM

Zhu Pei | Studio Zhu-Pei

**Location:** Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province

**Architect:** Zhu Pei

**Design team:** Han Mo, You Changchen, Wu Zhigang, Liu Ling, Zhang Shun, Shuhei Nakamura, He Fan, Yang Shengchen, Du Yang, Chen Yida, Zhang Haicheng, Lu Xia, Wu Haiying, Zou Yujin, Ding Xinyue, Wang Liyan, He Chenglong

**Structural consultant:** Architectural Design & Research Institute of Tsinghua University

**Critic:** Zhou Rong, Li Xiangning

**Art consultant:** Wang Mingxian, Fang Lijun

**Area:** 10420 square meters

**Design period:** 2015–2016

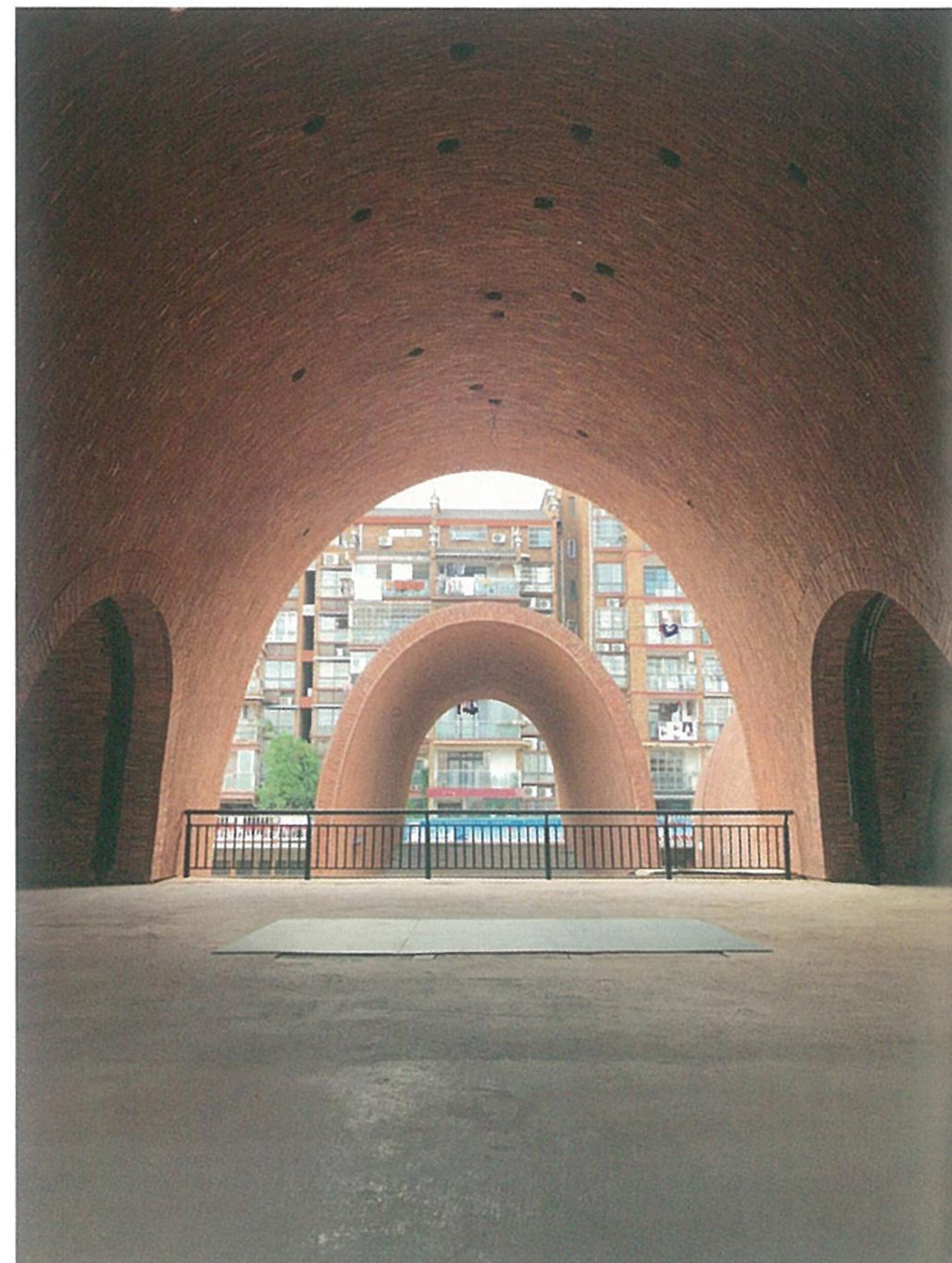
**Construction date:** October 2016 (near completion in late 2018)

**Photography:** Studio Zhu-Pei

## Towards an “Architecture of Nature” Interview with Architect Zhu Pei

Jiang Jiawei, Zhu Pei

On the theme of “Building for a New Culture,” this interview of Zhu Pei by Jiang Jiawei focuses on the design process of Studio Zhu-Pei for Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Museum. The interview is divided into three parts to gradually present the general conceptions and detailed design methods of architect Zhu Pei.



Semi-outdoor space, under construction

## Avant chantier: ideals and perspectives

**Jiang Jiawei (JJ):**

*Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Museum is a new-built project in a historical and cultural area, and adjacent to relics. Its program and appearance are quite different from most of your completed projects in the past decade. How do you see it within the context of all your finished projects? And could it be said that it is somewhat a milestone or a turning point of your design conception?*

**Zhu Pei (ZP):**

Currently the Kiln Museum is significant in my career. I would hesitate to say that it makes a fundamental change in my conception, but it did bring me the first chance to erect a museum in a historical site. It is located at the hub of the ancient city, adjacent to the relic of the Imperial Kiln, which makes it regionally specific. Why I mention this museum as significant is that it fully exposes how I comprehend architecture conceptually.

In the past 10 years I repeatedly use the notion of “architecture of nature.” It has nothing to do with landscape architecture or green architecture. It refers to an attitude to nature rather than a sort of nature understood in a narrow sense. To sum up, such an attitude means that a rootedness from

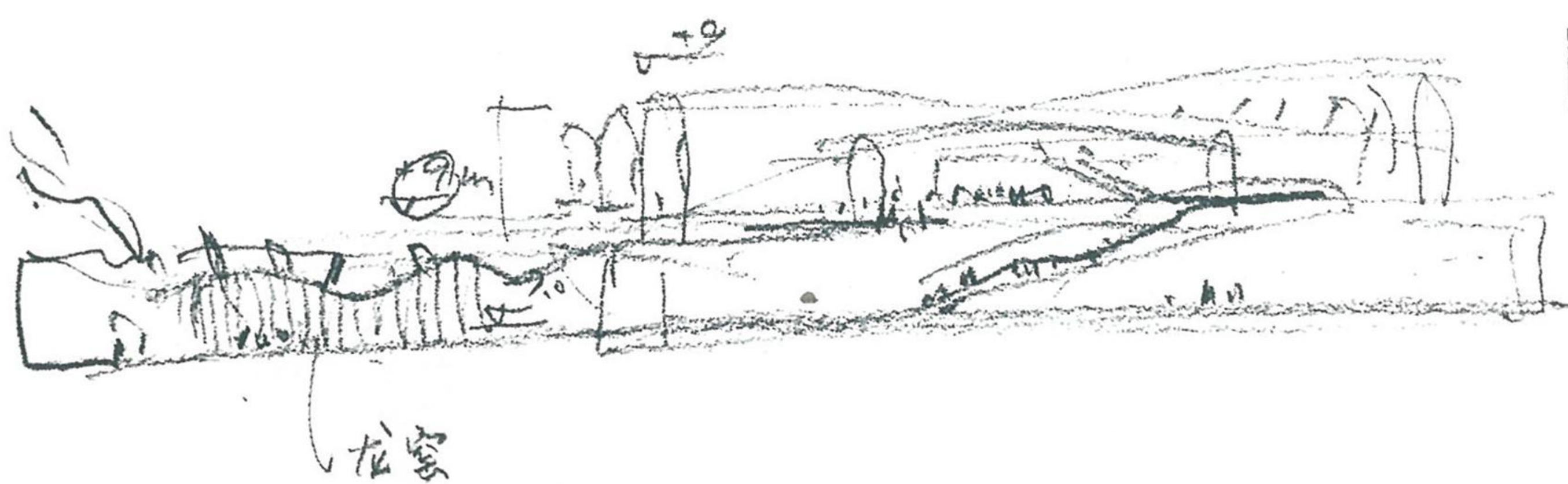
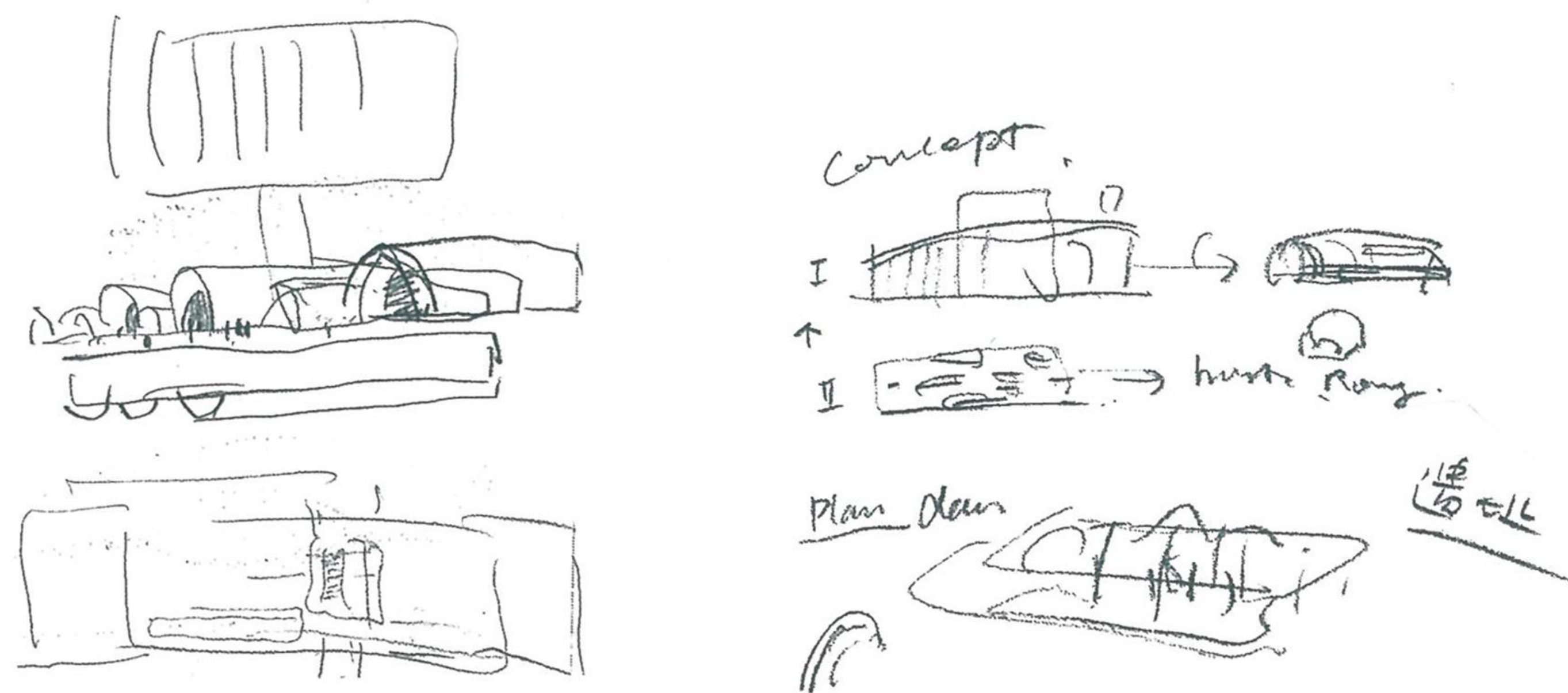
top down in architecture is determined by the specific factors of region, climate, culture, and tradition. It is not literally about building something in the woods, but concerned with the laws of natural construction beneath the mere appearance of architecture. I believe the significance of architecture lays not on what that is conducted by human subjectively, but on what that is shaped by region and culture. By way of “architecture of nature,” I wish to discover the rudiments of construction. It could also be connected to the experience-oriented art spirit in Chinese aesthetics.

In a word, architecture needs to have rootedness on the one hand, and creativity on the other. The rootedness does not necessarily mean to inherit the appearance of a tradition, but to discover the principles of hidden culture and life. For example, in cities in South China where the climate is warm and wet, local courtyards tend to be small-scaled and often verticalized, thus enough shade is provided in summer. On the contrary, in North China, courtyards like the Quadrangle Dwelling in Beijing are horizontal, letting sunshine come in during the cold and dry winter time.

I believe that man in each era develops his own comprehension of things with related cultural imprints. One might not survive in the current brand-new era unless he brings in new experiences. So, rootedness and reinvention, these are two wings of “architecture of nature.” I wish deeper essence could be discovered, but it should be a kind of presence of reinvention, rather than a mere reproduction of tradition.







Sketches of Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Museum by Zhu Pei

**JE:**

What you said has given a general framework of conception. Would you please provide specific examples for elaboration?

**ZP:**

The theoretical framework of "architecture of nature" constructs the ladder towards my thinking and design. Going back to your question of whether or not is it a turning point, I cannot say yes loosely. When I had a commission in a typical Beijing Quadrangle Dwelling years ago, my idea was to stay away from traditional materials, as much as possible. Indeed, it is based on the reality of this city—it's hard to find clay bricks or clay tiles around Beijing nowadays. I regard it as unnatural if new buildings are still constructed in gray bricks and black tiles in Beijing. A person is judged natural or unnatural not according to his appearance but to the truthfulness expressed from within.

I used to underline that it is the task of contemporary architecture to reflect reality in truth, and that one should be cautious with traditional materials. However, once submerged in the atmosphere of Jingdezhen, one seems to lose their capability of discerning the old and the new, because it has even become a tradition to build houses and pave roads by using bricks from old kilns. Every two to three years the old kilns are dismantled and reconstructed due to their declining performance in heat storage, so the bricks from those deserted kilns become the main material for the construction of the city. Accordingly, the recycled use of the old kiln bricks is established as a law in such a natural way other than any subjective preference. This is exactly what I mean by the notion of "architecture of nature." It has been sustained together with the vicissitude of this city until now. My strong interest in old kilns and traditional construction methods is aroused by this kind of rootedness.

What I conduct in Jingdezhen is more like a discovery of rootedness, and this is quite different from the project of the Courtyard House of Cai Guo-Qiang, for which I undertook preservation and restoration. In the latter, the challenge to tradition is emphasized, for the newly added elements seem to bring in a completely new tone. Such new elements form an abstraction of the ancient courtyard—to keep a similar scale and prototype without using gray bricks and tiles. Both are confronted with the traditional environment of preserved heritage, yet they differentiate hugely in the finished appearance. But in fact, both were intended to discover the rootedness for reinvention regardless of appearance. Reinvention is actually a kind of thought in an artistic way, and the essence of art is to make a new experience. This is exactly what I hold to in my design conception in recent years, whether its form tends to be new or not.



Design model of a section of Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Museum

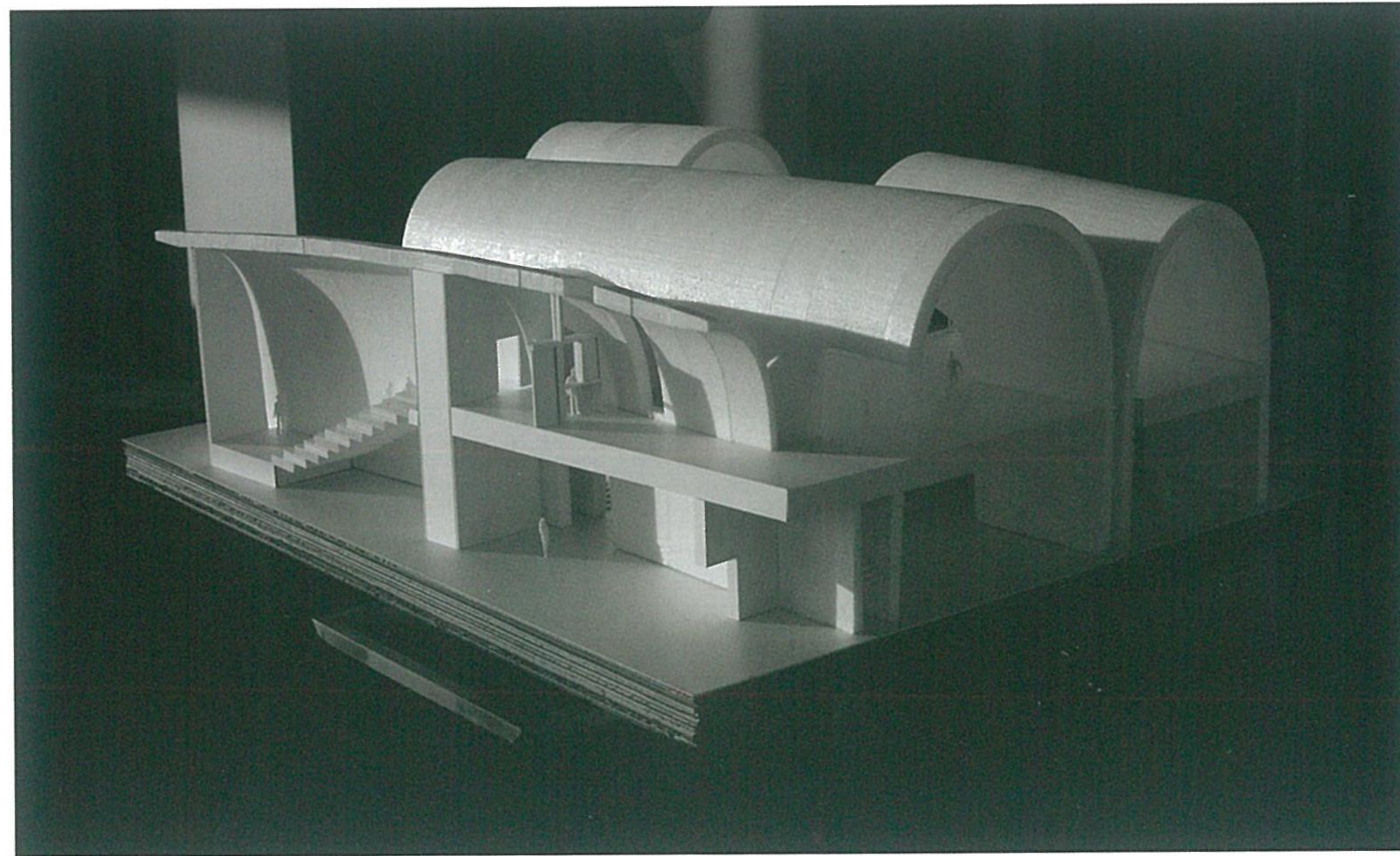




Design model of surrounding environment



Design model of Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Museum



**JL:**

You led a design studio at Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP). Have you ever communicated with Kenneth Frampton? How do you see the possible relation of your conception of “architecture of nature” and his theory of critical regionalism?

**ZP:**

It is a coincidence that I was teaching in the Advanced Architectural Design Studio at GSAPP when I stood at the outset of conceiving the design of Imperial Kiln Museum. I had quite a lot of personal contact with Kenneth Frampton. We had lunch sometimes, or talked about architecture in his office. We once had a discussion of my works, especially this museum. I was deeply influenced by Frampton’s critical regionalism when still at school, and it can be said that the notion of rootedness and reinvention is my own thoughts and understandings on critical regionalism. Certainly, I would avoid anything too much related with the vernacular in my design. When I look for rootedness, it should be something with reinvention rather than directly put to use. It can be clearly seen in my design studios at Columbia or at Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD).

**JL:**

You frequently mentioned some key notions like “nature” and “culture” in your past lectures. What do you think of Imperial Kiln Museum as being representative of your thoughts on these notions?

**ZP:**

I led a design studio themed “ROOT: Rediscovery of Jingdezhen Contemporary” at Harvard GSD this past spring. With a thousand-year history in kiln factories, Jingdezhen is shaped by hands of generations of craftsmen—this is what I mean by a “city of nature.” Different from rigidly planned cities, such as Beijing or Xi’an, the structure of Jingdezhen originated from its unique natural landscape and mode of living. Surrounded by mountains with Chang River passing through, Jingdezhen extends alongside such a topographic pattern. Alleyways are mostly perpendicular to Chang River for the transportation convenience of porcelain, while parallel main streets are packed with markets.

**JL:**

Last year you organized an exhibition themed “Mind Landscapes” at Architekturforum Aedes in Berlin. In fact, there is a sort of displacement between the English and Chinese versions of this theme, for they do not directly match in the signified ways. It brings out something quite interesting. Imperial Kiln Museum, which was still under construction at that time, was one of your five showcased projects. Would you please talk about the relation of this museum to that theme?

**ZP:**

That exhibition displayed my career as an architect, as well as my attitude toward nature—the nature within the mind instead of before the eye. And this is what I think of Imperial Kiln Museum, for its location and setting is a perfect example for the “nature within the mind.”

Think about the old city of Beijing—its rigid geometric planning in a chess grid, with implanted gigantic natural landscape. Houhai (“Back Sea”), Beihai (“Northern Sea”), Zhonghai (“Middle Sea”), and Nanhai (“Southern Sea”), as well as the West Mountain and the gardens at the foot, all constitute a living system featured by two Chinese philosophical ideas: that of the symbiosis of the void and the solid, and the complement of yin (the negative/feminine) and yang (the positive/masculine). It reflects a philosophy of dwelling in the urban ambience as manifested in an ancient proverb, “literati situate themselves high in the temple hall, yet with the mind indulged wandering to mountains afar.”

The vault-shaped void in Imperial Kiln Museum provides a semi-outdoor place—a protection from sun and rain, a passageway for wind, a transition space blurring the boundaries of architecture and the surrounding environment. Each of these vaults is open on both sides, like telescopes capable of seizing various scenes in the city. The relationship of the museum to the city shows exactly the typical conception of “mind landscapes.”

This exhibition fully displayed my conception of the “architecture of nature.” Wherever one designs a building, they are obliged to discover the rootedness of its culture and nature. By adopting such a strategy, the design of Imperial Kiln Museum has been conducted in accordance with the adjacent relics as well as other factors, thus creating a new experience of promenading around inwards and outwards.

Promenade, as a kind of architectural experience, reveals a Chinese way of comprehending architecture. In Chinese landscape paintings, the majority of the picture is contributed to nature, with small-scaled artifices inside. *Mountains in Misty Rain*, a significant work by Gao Kegong in the Yuan dynasty, brings me great many inspirations in the perspective of architecture. Firstly, the nature takes complete command of the whole picture—an action through inaction—and leaves a minor corner for a mere trace of civilization. The second is about Chinese visual arts, especially the relatively abstract landscape paintings, which are all about experiences and reinvention of comprehension. The Yuan dynasty paintings are relatively more abstract than the Western painting at the same age, for they are not an imitation of nature. Chinese literati barely sit down and make sketches in front of a landscape, so if one looks into the *Mountains in Misty Rain*, they cannot tell which mountain Gao was painting. Literati choose to abstract from experiences and then reinvent, apparently turning away from a mere depiction and reproduction of things. My third idea, inspired by the large blank space on the painting, is about the relationship of the solid and the void. The way architecture exalts itself is not from the substantial building, but from the space and the activities that humans bring in. From Gao’s painting, different experiences of architecture in different epochs can be felt, and this is a fundamental revelation to us—who comes after the author could even participate in the design process of the intent that the work is aimed to exalt. This is the same case in architecture. Only when a building is completed does the most significant phase arrive. The arrival of human activities is the complete moment of its lifetime.

What the word “critical” in critical regionalism underlines is an admonition of copying traditions. What I mean in the word “reinvention” shares a similar connotation. The five projects at the Aedes exhibition last year were actually still unfinished, and they all express my thoughts in recent years.





View from the imperial kiln site to the museum, rendering of preliminary design

**JL:**

*The word “nature” appears repeatedly just now in your narration. In the English context, this word, except signifying the natural, physical world, has another meaning of “essence” or “being essential.” Presumably this polysemantic explanation of “nature” can help us understand what you mean by using that word in Chinese. You are not referring to a mere natural environment of birds twittering and flowers blooming, but a concept of, as Frank Lloyd Wright once put it, the “Nature” with a capital “N.” What do you think of it?*

**ZP:**

You’ve got it. I used to entitle my past lectures as “Nature Attitude” or “Mind Landscapes,” both of which tend to encourage the understanding of the essence of nature, instead of remaking a physical form of it. Humans are obliged to respect nature, utilize it, and keep in harmony with it.

## In the process of design: image and transformation

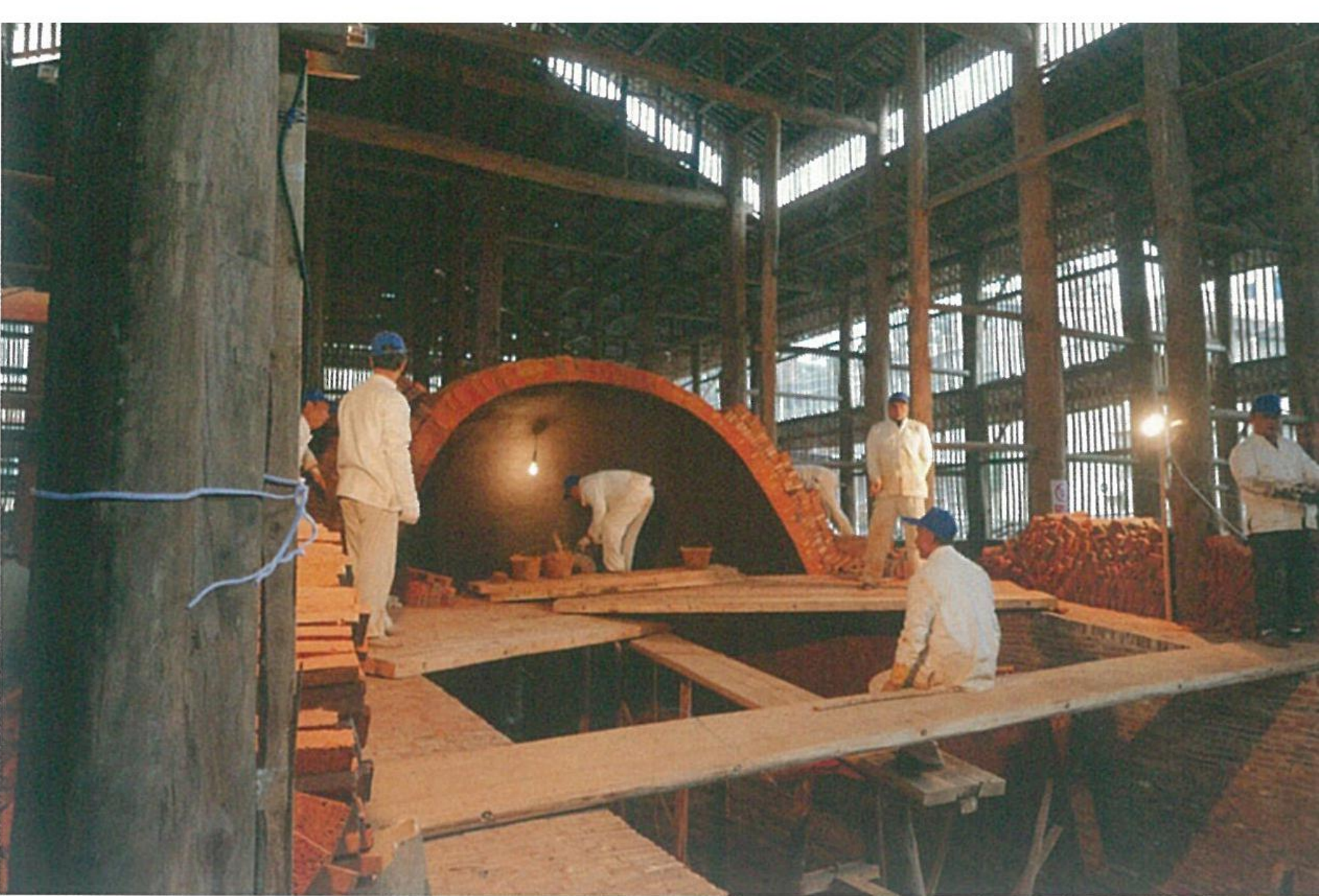
**JL:**

*It is apparent that the formal language of the museum is largely inspired by the image of old brick kilns in Jingdezhen. The form of the new museum, at least to my eye, shares a similarity to those forms resulting from the structurally efficient local building methods. And both of them bring us similar mental implications. Have you conducted any specific survey on the construction methods of local kilns before you designed the museum?*

**ZP:**

The moment I started to conceive the museum, the famed Xujia Kiln was by coincidence under reconstruction. I was deeply attracted to the way local masons build. The parabolic shape of kilns is made from light, thin clay bricks. No scaffolding is used, and the construction is done by gravity and viscosity of clay. The process of kiln construction is similar to that of jiggering and jollying in porcelain making.

The city of Jingdezhen originated from the mode of living in making porcelains. Inhabitants live alongside the river, and build their workshops



and houses surrounding kilns. The basic unit of the city is constituted by kilns, workshops, and houses. The ancient Jingdezhen was packed with basic kiln units of various sizes, and narrow alleyways were squeezed in between kilns thus making room for transporting porcelains by trolley to the riverside. All main streets are oriented south to north, parallel to the river, and they connect a series of commercial space. The entire city pattern of Jingdezhen has been decided by kilns, even the smallest alleyway would still lead to a certain kiln.



View from the outdoor theater to the Ming porcelain relics, on-site construction



Reconstruction of Xujia Kiln



In the early eighteenth century, French Jesuit priest Père Francois Xavier d'Entrecolles wrote in his diary, "The city of Jingdezhen is completely occupied by kilns of all sizes. Surrounding mountains are illuminated by kiln flames at night." It can be imagined how busy this "Porcelain Capital" of the world once was. Kilns become a place not merely for making porcelain but also for communication in public urban space. In the old days a child would pick up a burning hot kiln brick on his way to school and put it inside their schoolbag to survive a freezing cold day. In summertime, when kilns are temporarily closed, the cool wet air makes it a wonderful resort for playing and socializing. It is clearly felt that the memory of the kilns has been injected into the local blood, and the image of its prototype stays lingering in the local mind. Naturally it became the reference of my design.

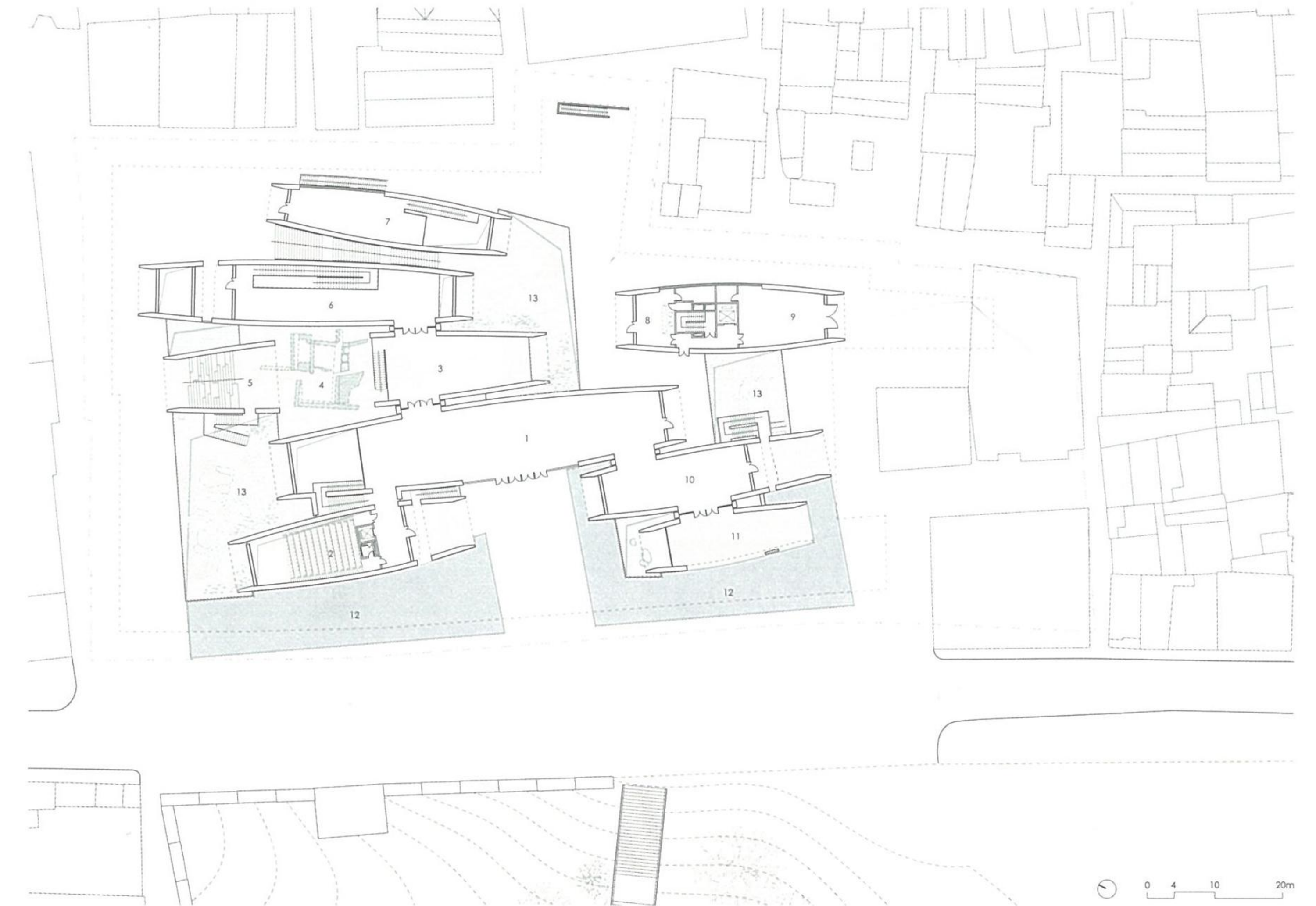
This museum is to exhibit the antique porcelain from the excavation of the Imperial Kiln relics, as well as some that are now preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing and originally made here. If a question is posed to the porcelain, "Where is your homeland?" The answer would

definitely be "Kilns!" Thus, the fundamental idea of my design is to bring back a sense of homeland for the porcelains. In fact, the scale of the museum in section is quite similar to Xujia Kiln. Imagined ancient working scenes of craftsmen inside the kilns would be evoked when a visitor watches and promenades around the museum. This is exactly the so-called rootedness. It reshapes a past experience, represents a kind of isomorphic inner-relationship of "kiln-porcelain-human." In this way, new designs are combined with the past experience.

Many of the construction techniques in ancient kilns are characterized as being of the East. The vaults used by ancient Romans differentiate fundamentally from those in Jingdezhen. Because of the increasing inner air pressure when the kiln is at work, a precalculated form by static mechanics probably leads to collapse due to the pressure difference. This is why in Jingdezhen not even a full semicircular form of vault can be found. All kilns have a more or less parabolic shape and shrink inside on both ends. It reflects a kind of Eastern wisdom, quite different from the construction methods in the West.

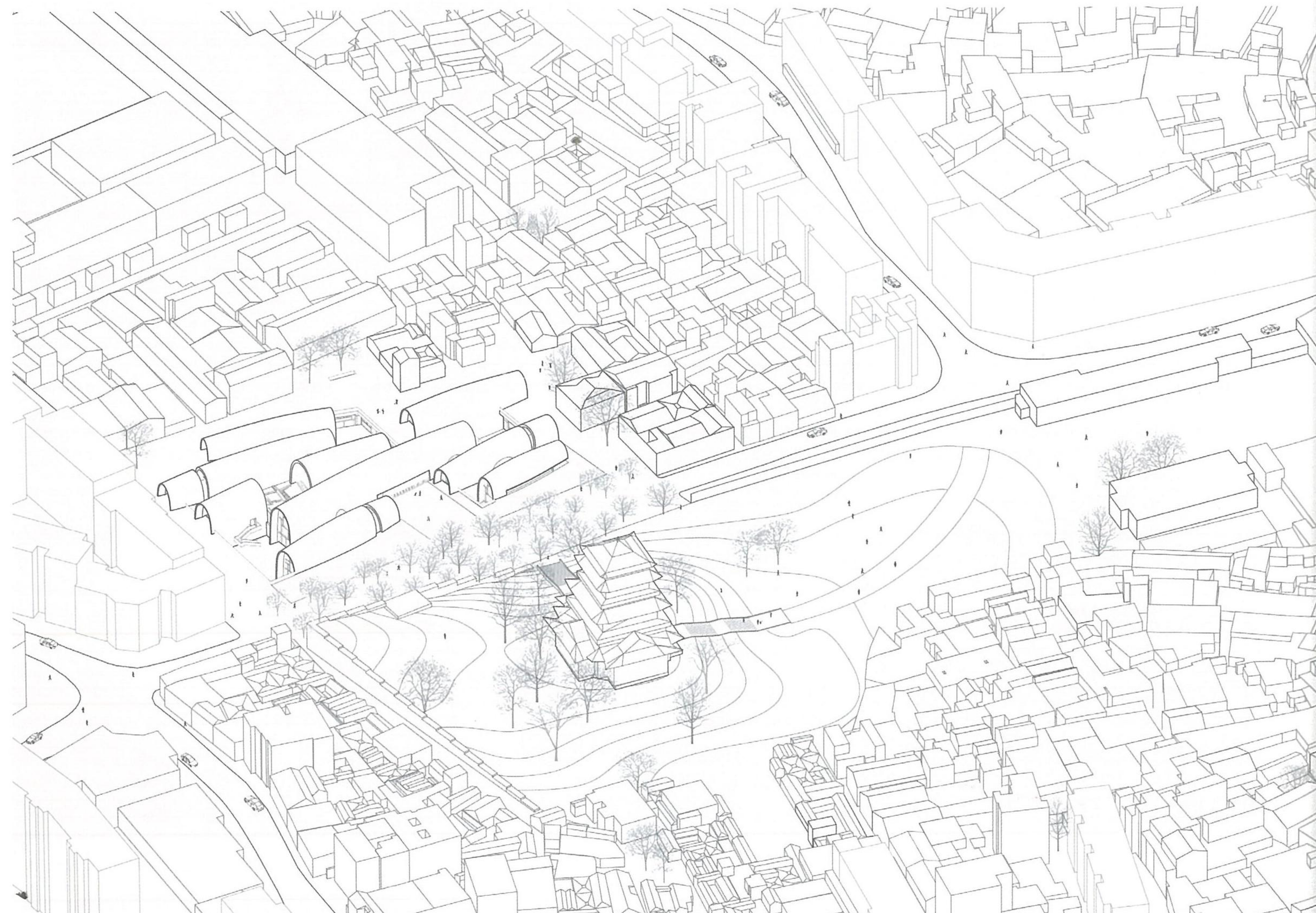
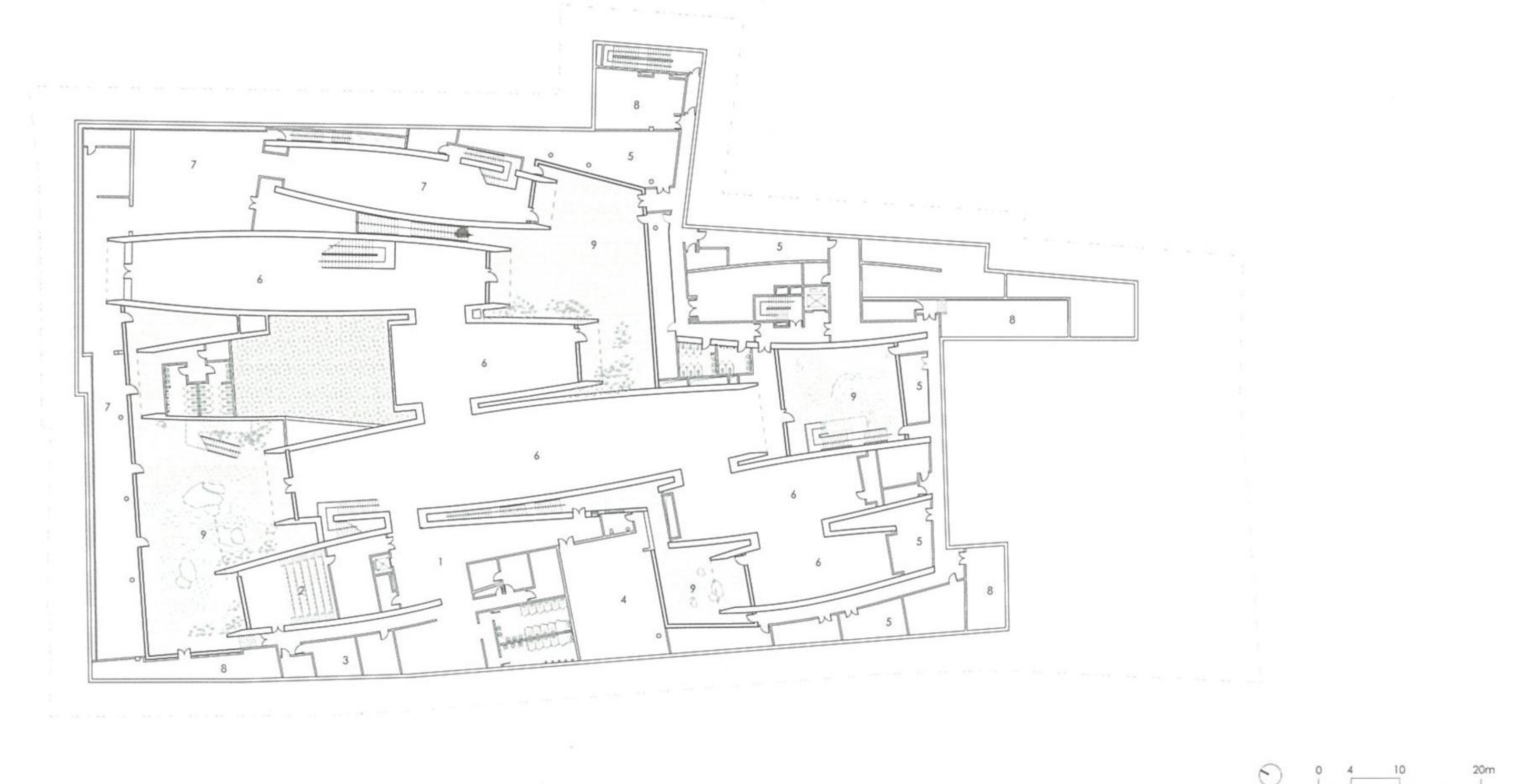
Ground-floor plan

1. Entry/foyer
2. Auditorium
3. Covered outdoor exhibition
4. Ruins
5. Covered outdoor theater
6. Exhibition
7. Temporary exhibition
8. Office lobby
9. Loading area
10. Café/book/shops
11. Covered outdoor tea area
12. Water pool
13. Sunken courtyard

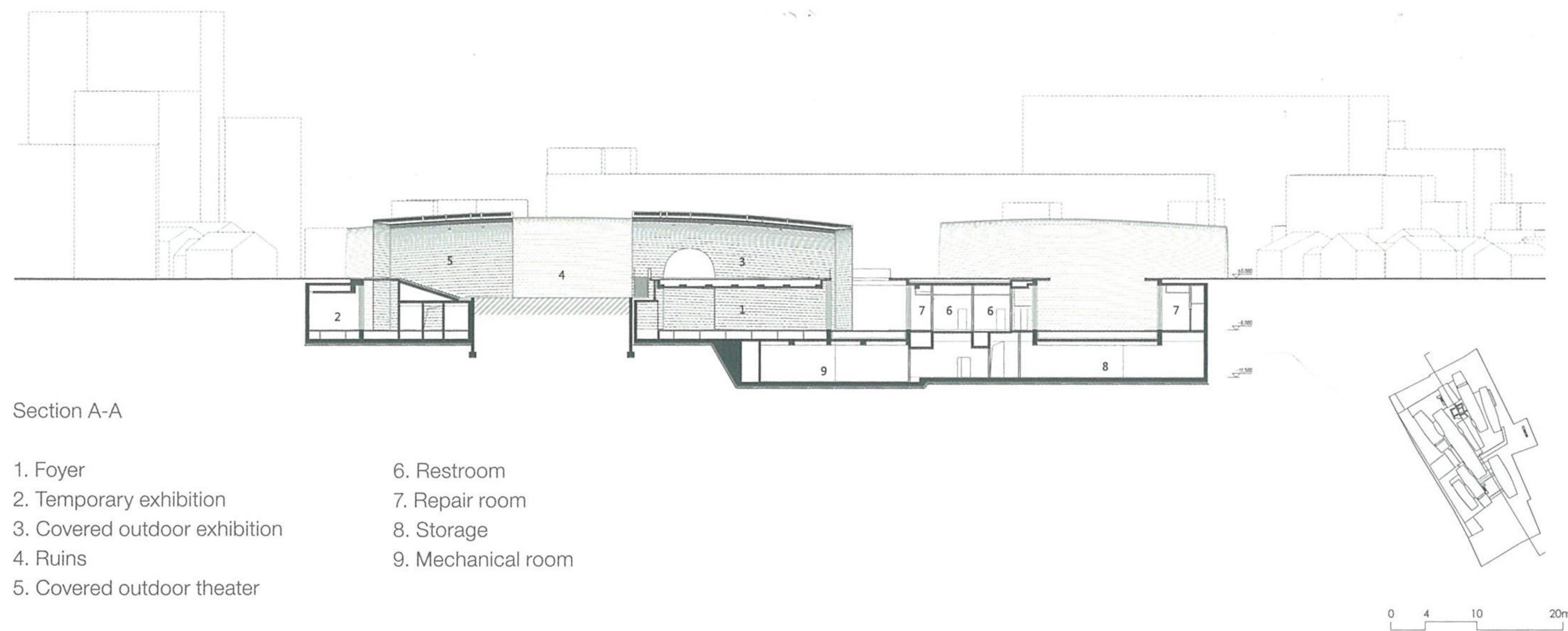


Underground-floor plan

1. Foyer
2. Auditorium
3. Preparation room
4. Multifunction hall
5. Repair room
6. Exhibition
7. Temporary exhibition
8. Mechanical room
9. Courtyard/garden

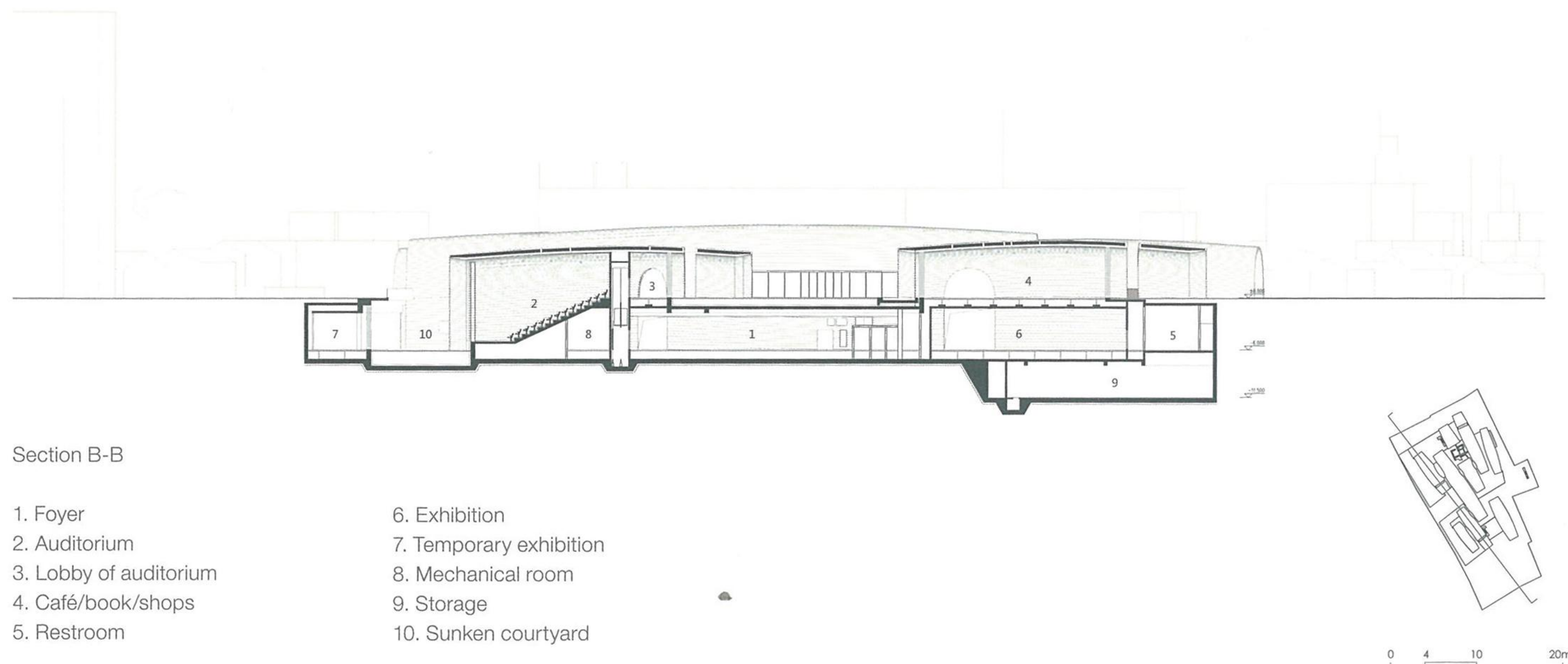






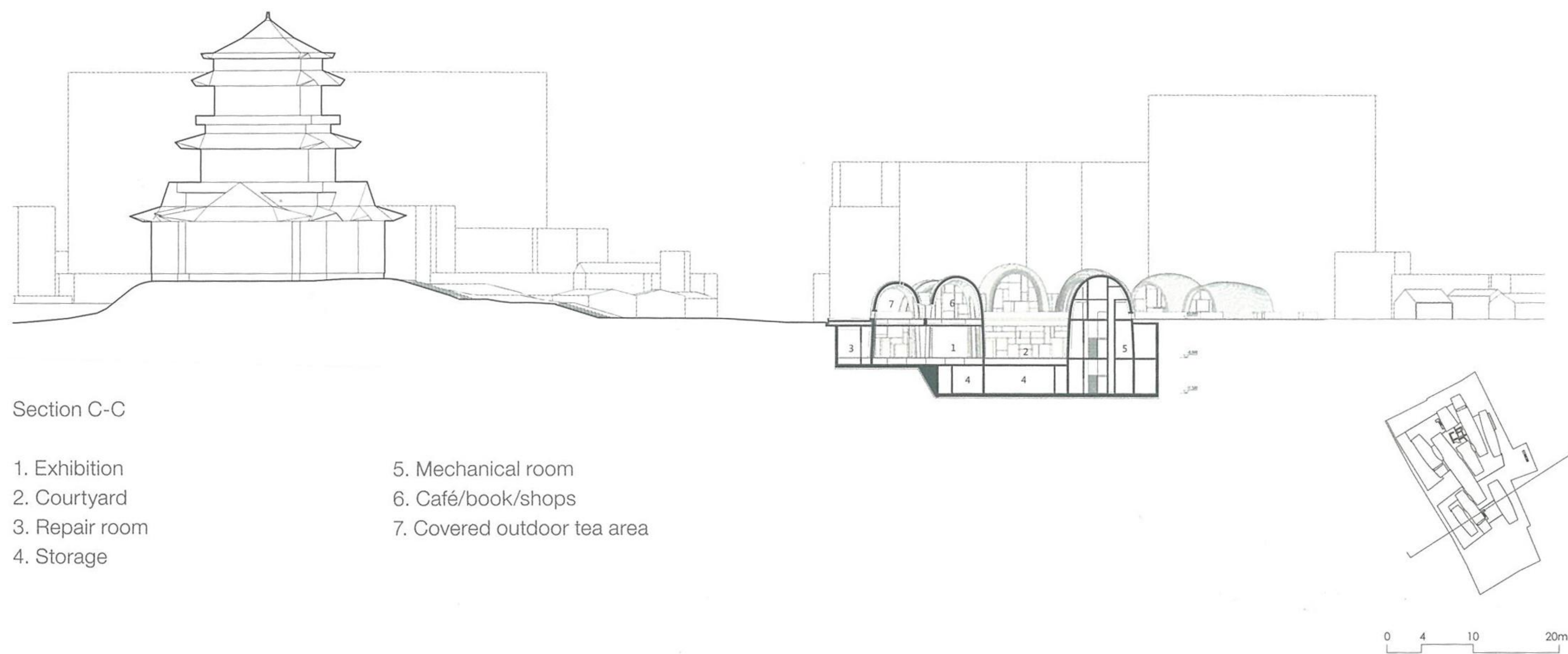
Section A-A

1. Foyer
2. Temporary exhibition
3. Covered outdoor exhibition
4. Ruins
5. Covered outdoor theater
6. Restroom
7. Repair room
8. Storage
9. Mechanical room



Section B-B

1. Foyer
2. Auditorium
3. Lobby of auditorium
4. Café/book/shops
5. Restroom
6. Exhibition
7. Temporary exhibition
8. Mechanical room
9. Storage
10. Sunken courtyard



Section C-C

1. Exhibition
2. Courtyard
3. Repair room
4. Storage
5. Mechanical room
6. Café/book/shops
7. Covered outdoor tea area

**JJ:**

*I studied the surroundings of the museum and compared it to the former condition of the site, and discovered that several buildings were dismantled to level the land and open the interface to the main street. Was this lot of land chosen by the client or by your suggestion?*

**ZP:**

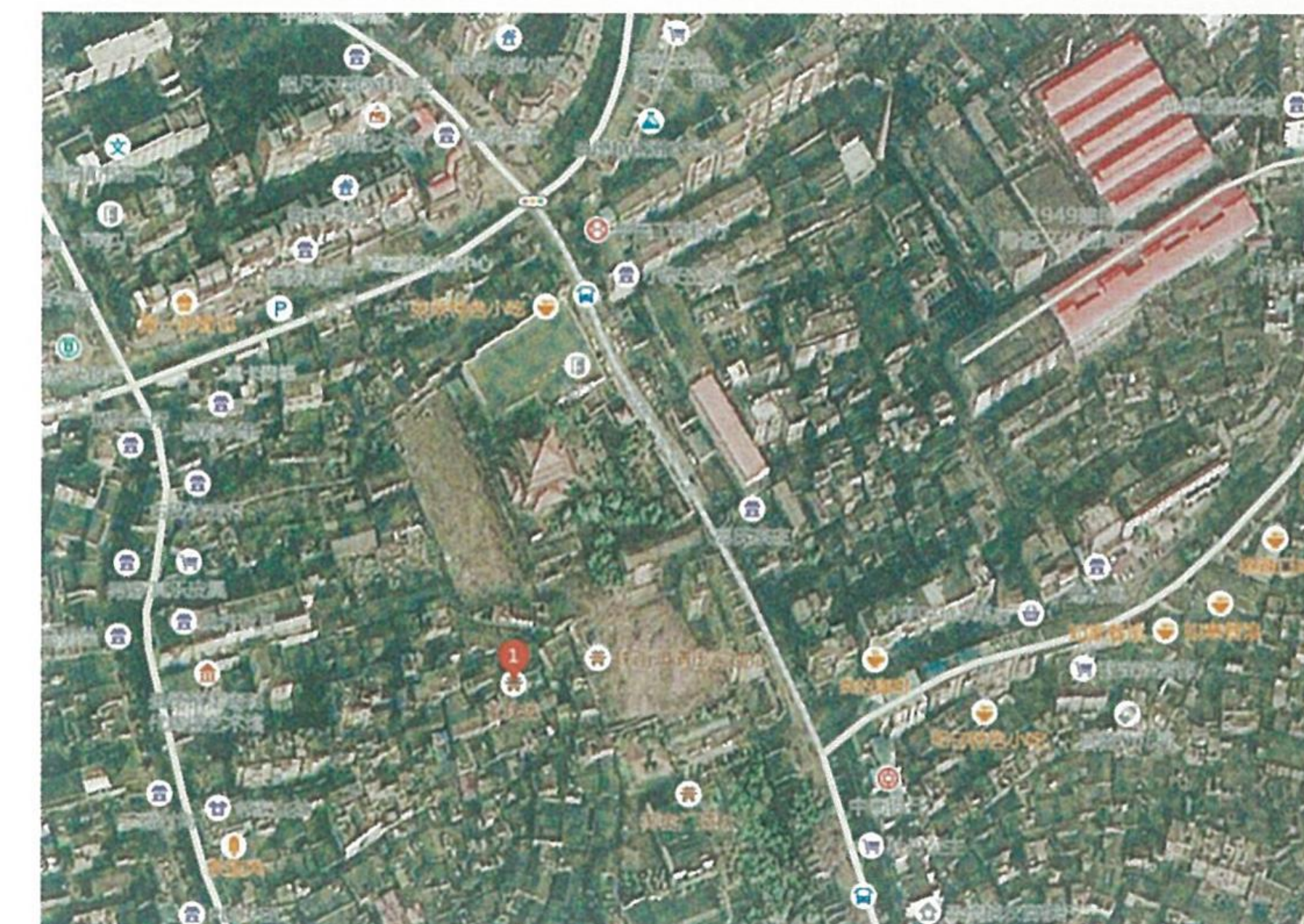
The site was chosen by the client, adjacent to the Imperial Kiln relics to the west, and surrounded by old buildings to the east and south. The zig-zag contour of the site was made due to the circumvention of protected houses. And part of the site was occupied by the office and dormitory of the local fire brigade. The maximum height of new-built architecture in this historical zone is 9 meters. So, the original idea of the volume and scale all result from these limitations. Most of the exhibition space is put underground, together with five sunken courtyards of various sizes, which bring in natural light.

**JJ:**

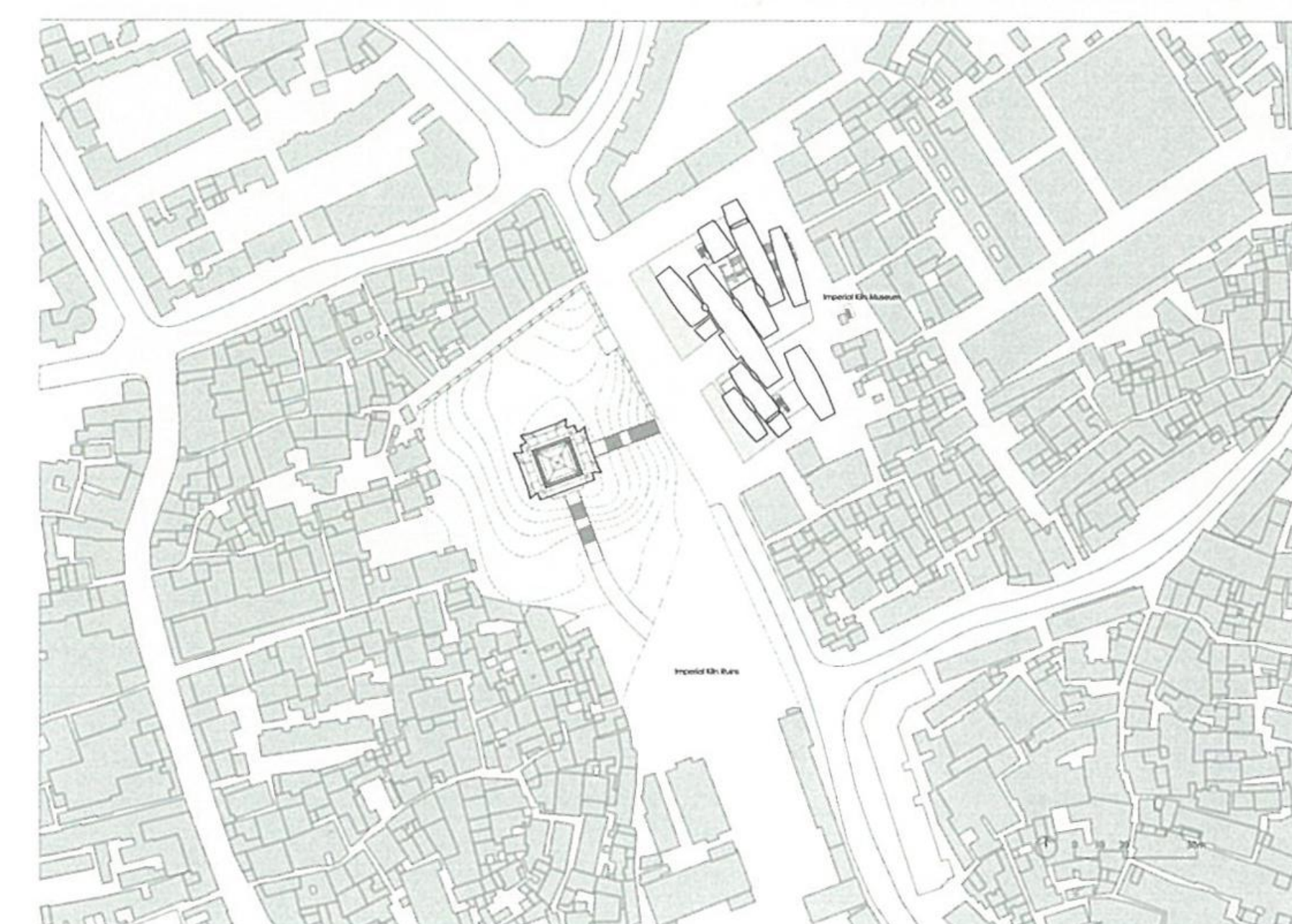
*Did the client make any specific requirements throughout the rounds of design? Was there anything that left you with a strong impression?*

**ZP:**

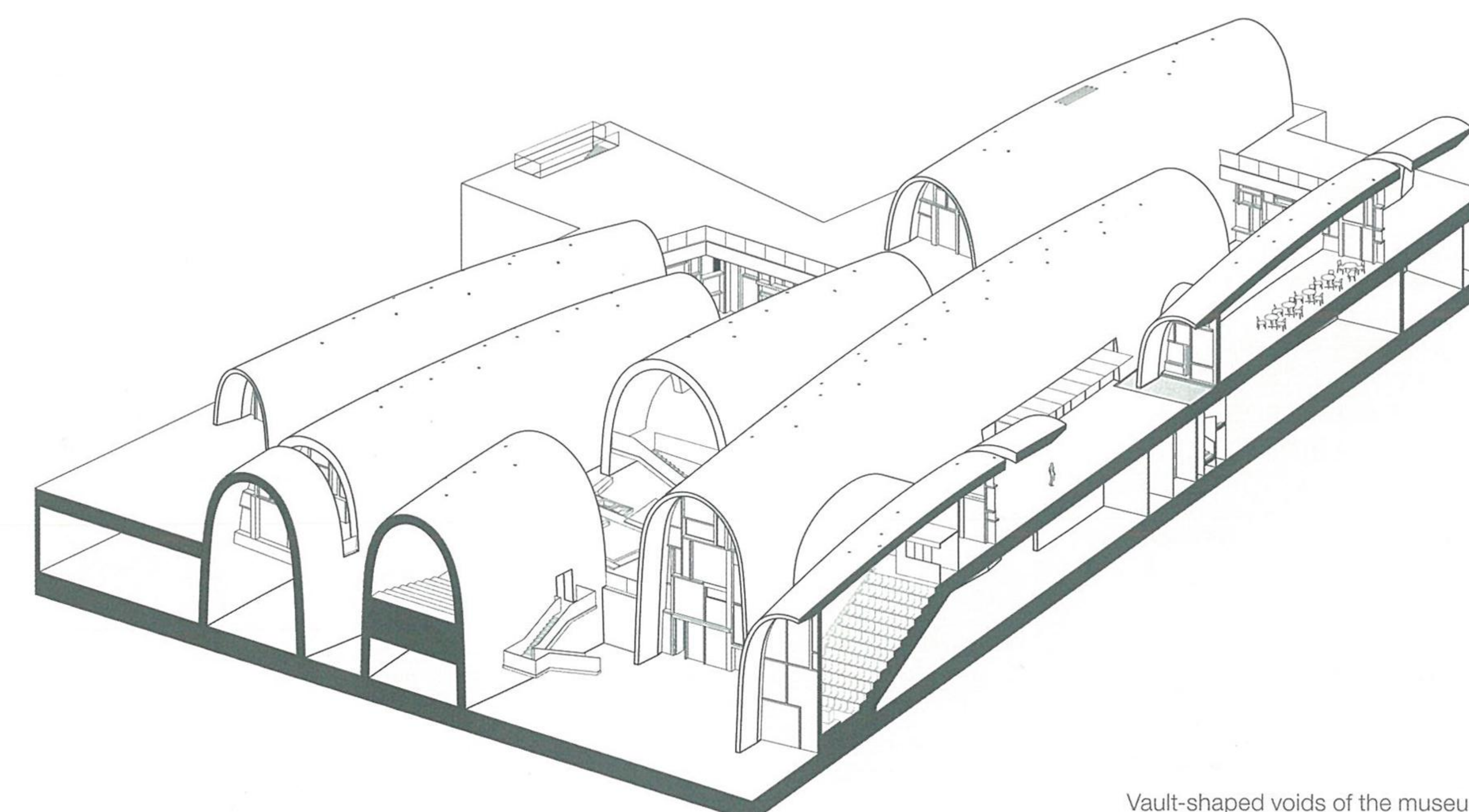
The client did not make any specific requirements, yet their expectation for a good design could be felt clearly. They wished that the museum take responsibility for both the history and the future of Jingdezhen, and that it be loved by people, and become a place for lingering and get-togethers just as the ancient kilns were. I still remember the first time I gave a presentation of my conceptual design to the client in my office in Beijing. The mayor and other experts of Jingdezhen came to my office, and both surprise and doubt emerged on their faces when they caught the first sight of my design. I prepared models of different scales and materials—some show the relationship of the museum to the surroundings, and others present the study of details. I elaborated my design concepts to the client around these models, and I extremely enjoyed that atmosphere of discussion and even controversy.



Original condition of the site



Site plan



Vault-shaped voids of the museum





**JL:**

*It seems that you've successfully made your ideas concrete anyway.*

**ZP:**

Yes. After rounds of presentations to Jingdezhen and Jiangxi Province and then to the experts from the Palace Museum in Beijing, my original ideas of the project were eventually implemented. The design is quite well targeted, and cautiously deals with the relations to the Imperial Kiln relics, the surrounding residence, and the newly discovered relics. Eight brick vaults of different sizes loosely form a relationship that is not fixed, and they are embedded into this complicated site in a humble way and proper scale.

**JL:**

*The form of vaults in this museum is not that of the straightforward barrel vaults. It shrinks on both ends, thus making a slight spindle shape, a quite elegant form. I regard it as a kind of improved calabash form, which originated from the local kilns after the explanation of your design conceptions.*

**ZP:**

You're right. The essence of art exists between the status of being "like" and "unlike," which is actually about rootedness and reinvention. It engages people with a feeling of familiarity and strangeness. These brick vaults of different sizes and volumes scatter about, in a loose relationship with each other as if dead leaves fall down in later autumn. An ambience of relaxation, of contingency, combined with a sense of handicraft, as well as being in the nature, pervades the brick vaults and courtyards in between. When getting through the sequence of void and solid, one might be fully drenched in a spatial experience of familiarity and strangeness. The attraction of this architecture results from the surprises aroused within.

**JL:**

*So, in the phase of further design, do you need to adjust the numbers and sizes of the vaults?*

**ZP:**

Exactly. A major challenge we met later is that another relic was discovered when the foundation was excavated. It actually matched my judgment at the very beginning—uncertainty of relics always remained until construction commenced. And this is exactly the reason why I took the strategy of breaking up a single gigantic building into smaller parts. It is easy to adjust when any unexpected situation occurs.

**JL:**

*You mentioned the strategy of breaking up the whole into parts, so does it mean that each of the calabash-shaped exhibition halls can be moved freely for adjustment? Could it be said that the ultimate distribution of these forms, in the sense of composition, was determined by you towards a flexible status? It is actually unfixed.*

**ZP:**

It indeed was.

**JL:**

*From the beginning of design, did your team ever think of designing a structure that is self-supporting in bricks? Now in the finished museum, the surface of the bricks is functioning rather expressively than structurally. In the design conception, did you regard the expressivity of the image of the bricks more important than the authenticity of structure?*

**ZP:**

In fact, our idea at the beginning was to build self-supporting brick vaults, as in the traditional brick kilns, such as Xujia Kiln. It is possible if the building is scaled down, however, there remains a big problem: it cannot resist the thrust of earthquakes. Reinforced concrete has to be added into the brick structure, thus turning it into a sort of "sandwich structure." I mean, reinforced concrete functions as the real structure in between the two layers of bricks (interior and exterior). Spanish architect Rafael Moneo also adopted similar structural methods in the interior brick arches in National Museum of Roman Art in Spain. In fact, such methods had already matured in the time of the ancient Roman Empire. By the way, I do not quite agree with you when you use the word "surface" or anything like "surface architecture." The way we use bricks here should not be described as merely "expressive." On the contrary, it constitutes a fundamental part in the structure and construction, for it reflects the typical building methods in traditional Jingdezhen brick kilns.

**JL:**

*I notice that such "sandwich structure" could be flexible enough to derive a great many mutations. Have you applied the same construction method to both the interior bricks and the exterior bricks?*

**ZP:**

No, they differ. The bricks outside of the reinforced concrete were laid according to the local traditional masonry method, while the interior bricks were attached to the structure by steel keels. The masonry method is what we learned specifically from Xujia Kiln. Moreover, inside the museum there are still a few places that directly adopt the method of brick masonry.



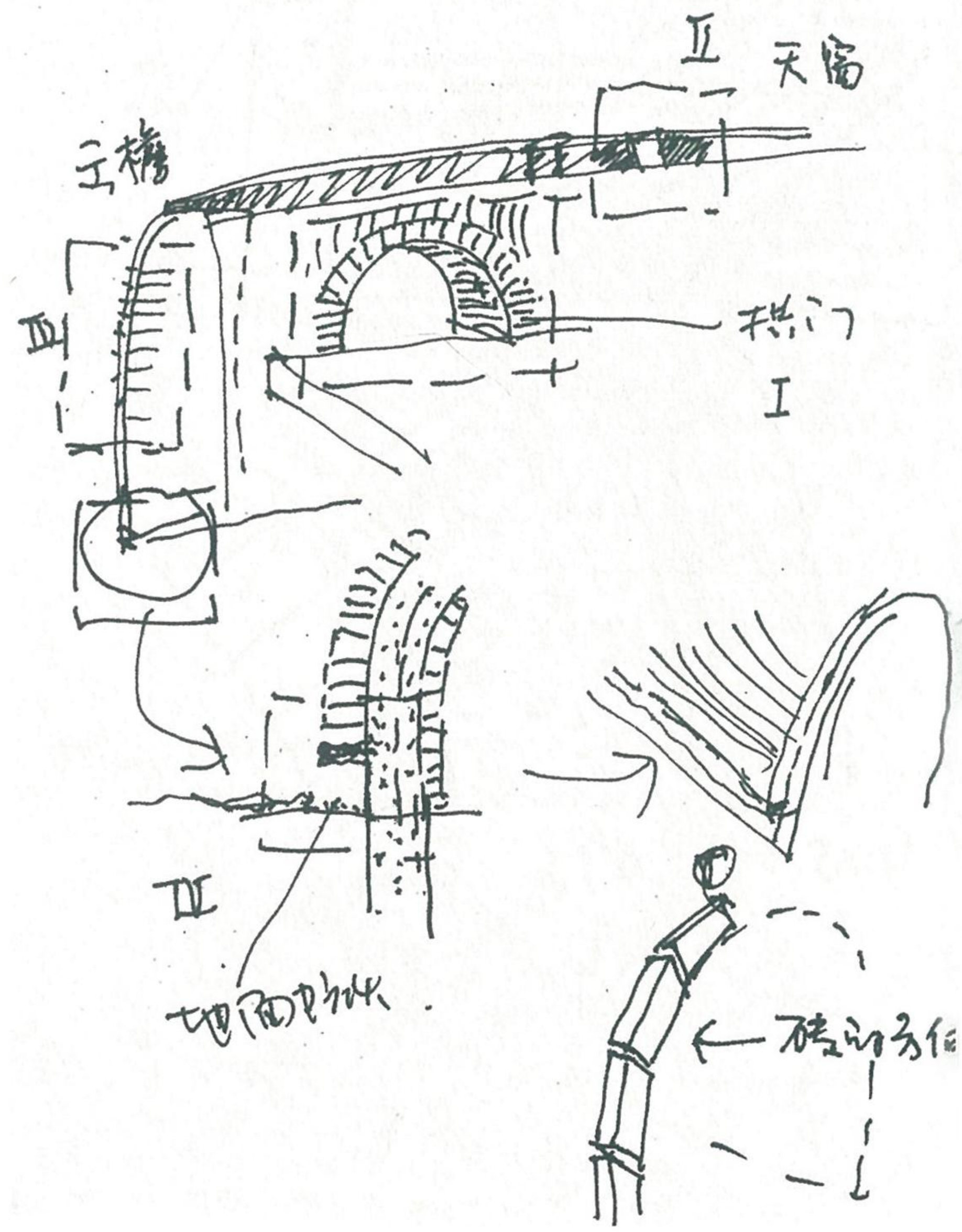
**JL:**

It is quite an interesting coincidence that the way of handling the bricks in Imperial Kiln Museum shares a similarity to that in Wang Shu's Fuchun Cultural Complex, which is also introduced in this issue of Architecture China. Such could be seen from the juxtaposition of some details.

In Imperial Kiln Museum, there are various bricks—standard-quality red bricks in pure color, and secondary-class bricks in sandy brown, gray, or black due to excessive firing. The walls of the museum are mottled because of an organic mixture of these bricks. Would you regard such a strategy in details as a correspondence to the local cultural atmosphere?

**ZP:**

It has been a construction tradition in Jingdezhen to recycle old kiln bricks. The ancient city was built upon the old kiln bricks, from houses to street pavements. A kiln has to be dismantled and reconstructed every one or two years due to the declining performance in heat storage in bricks. And the old bricks from destructed kilns become the continuous resource for building houses and paving streets. So old kiln bricks have constituted the cultural memory and urban life of Jingdezhen, thus logically become the perfect material for the museum.



Sketches of detail design by Zhu Pei

**JL:**

The word "surface" usually leaves an impression of a "thin layer," which might signify the "thinness" in culture that you are definitely against. It is rather a kind of "thickness" that is presented in the walls of both Imperial Kiln Museum and Fuchun Cultural Complex. A material has its significance in culture, and this is more or less what you and Wang Shu are thinking about as an architect.

**ZP:**

I agree. This is the reason why the old kiln bricks in Jingdezhen should be mentioned each time I talk about the bricks used in the museum. I would probably apply a similar strategy to the museum to what I did in the Courtyard House of Cai Guo-Qiang, if such tradition of bricks were not in Jingdezhen. The kiln bricks would adopt various colors—darkened or even over burnt, or with enamel dripped onto the surface—after hundreds of firings. When cooled, the enamel condenses to different colors in accordance with different locations in the kilns. So do the bricks. When they are later used to build houses or workshops and to pave streets after the dismantlement of kilns, a strong DNA is preserved in the material. The whole of Jingdezhen has been built upon it, so such a character should be transformed into a new design.

**JL:**

Earlier you mentioned how children would put a burning hot kiln brick in their schoolbags on freezing cold days. It is a great depiction of a scene full of human life and kindness expressed in a brick or a tile. So, at the start, when you conceived the design, did you ever imagine that the interior bricks could be touched and felt by visitors?

**ZP:**

That is of course part of my design concept. A local memory for hundreds of years cannot be easily forgotten. For Jingdezhen, it is hot in summer and cold in winter. It snows in extreme weather in winter. Additional bricks have to be placed alongside the exterior of kiln vaults to increase the resisting force against the increased inner air pressure when firing. So these bricks would also heat up. Because they are put loosely on top of the vaults, children passing by will pick up a brick to warm up on a freezing winter day. Girls might take advantage of the lingering warmth closer when they take a shower or wash their hair. Washed clothes might be placed on the interior walls of kilns for drying. In other words, kilns have become an essential part of the living environment for local residents.

Now, when one reaches out to touch, the experience inside the museum would be a dark glazed jade or a huge condensed waterdrop, and one could fully imagine that feeling of flowing enamel. Visitors are provoked to wonder whether these bricks were from the Ming dynasty, or Qing dynasty, or from the period of the Republic of China, or even contemporarily made. Thus, they might be reminded of the ancient living experiences in kilns. This is exactly the way I "thicken" the museum. This sense of memory is like Chinese paintings, to invite beholders to participate in the process of invention. Once the imagination is evoked, one would be preoccupied in posing and answering many questions.

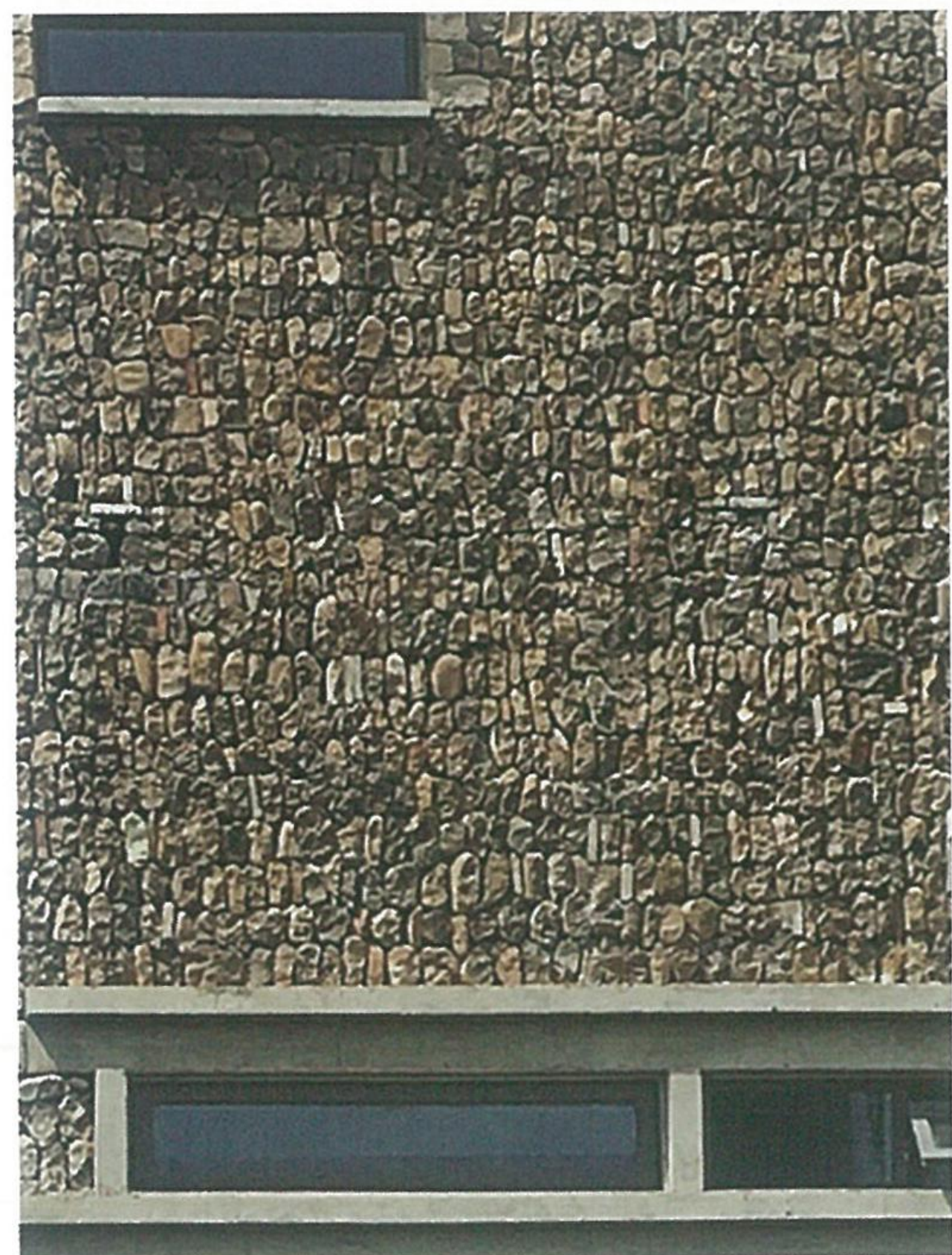
**JL:**

Are there any interesting experiences that you would like to share from the construction process? Anything that unexpectedly occurred during design or construction?

**ZP:**

I travelled to the construction site quite frequently throughout the whole process. To my understanding, design is always in a dynamic status until the building is completed, so unexpected things are destined to happen. The initial design had to be adjusted due to the newly discovered relics. It seemed to be bad news at first sight, but the modified design actually turned out to fit more properly into the site, making the form more impressive. Again, another new relic was discovered after the main body was just finished, so it led to another adjustment of the design. Ultimately this progressing design has enriched the experience in the museum.

The biggest challenge in the construction process was how to construct the fish-shaped hyperboloid surfaces by using a system as simple as possible. The sizes of the eight vaults differ from each other. Together with the construction team, we researched and developed a sliding scaffolding system. Adjustable metal bars are placed to extend the scaffolding, and the entire formwork can be moved along a central track after each time the concrete is poured. Those adjustable metal bars help with this slight moving action. So, the final hyperboloid surfaces are accomplished by such a method of flexibility.



Fuchun Cultural Complex



Imperial Kiln Museum



On-site construction



After construction:  
experience and enlightenment

**JJ:**

*Is there an experience in the design and construction of this project that will be important in future projects?*

**ZP:**

To understand local climate, culture, history, and make a design capable of adjustment. All are the essential experiences from this project. The concept of “architecture of nature” has also been fully expressed in it.

**JJ:**

*Both Imperial Kiln Museum and Shou County Culture and Arts Center in Shouxian, Anhui are located in South China, and both are surrounded by an ancient city of history and culture. What is something that differs between their design conceptions? And how does designing a new building in an old city provide more ideas and conceptions for your career in the future?*

**ZP:**

The project in Shouxian is located in the new Development Zone, which is about 6 or 7 kilometers from the old city center. Though these two projects differ in their contexts, my conception beneath the designs are the same.

Always, as before, at the outset of design the first question is, how could the rootedness of Shouxian in its climate and culture be found? Each time I arrive at a new place I love to walk around the oldest cultural heritage, to have a look at the local dwellings or relics, and to have a sense of how the balance between the primordial nature and the positive construction can be reached by our predecessors without any advanced technology. The old buildings in Shouxian old town inspired me a lot. The form of families and the inner vertical courtyards, the extending roads and alleyways connecting families—such characters not only reflect the living mode of local inhabitants, but also imply the building laws for the climate of the region. The Shou County Culture and Arts Center is deeply rooted in the local soil, once such experience specific to its life and space is reshaped.

The initial sketches clearly show several courtyards of various sizes incorporated into a closed rectangular volume. And these courtyards are linked by a meandering public corridor, which extends up and down. Each of the functional zones has one to two courtyards. A public plaza, referring to the traditional ritual space called Tang Wu (grand hall) in Shouxian, is formed in the front yard before the main entrance. Similarly, the back yard of the building expresses a sense of the back garden in traditional Shouxian dwellings. One might be led by this meandering corridor across the front pool into the building. Starting from the front yard, one could move around the inner courtyards without breaking the continuity of the interior. Thanks to this corridor that provides sun shade and rain cover, one promenades freely between different floor levels. Space is made intricate and enigmatic, like mist, and full of unexpected surprises, giving a sense of standing inside a traditional Chinese garden.

**JJ:**

*You’ve made a fabulous summary. Thank you very much for the interview.*

Interview, transcription, and translation by Jiang Jiawei.



Interior brick detail, under construction