

MODERN HISTORY

Project Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Museum
Location Jingdezhen, China
Firm Studio Zhu-Pei, Beijing, China
Team Pei Zhu, Changchen You, Mo Han, Fan He, Shuhei Nakamura, Ling Liu, Shun Zhang, Zhigang Wu, Yang Du, Shengchen Yang, Yida Chen, Chenglong He and Xinyue Ding
Photo Schranimage

● For almost 1,700 years, the city of Jingdezhen in southeastern China has been synonymous with porcelain production. It's this rich history that the sprawling Imperial Kiln Museum, designed by Studio Zhu-Pei, honours and celebrates. In fact, during the site's excavation, the architecture team uncovered a set of Ming dynasty ruins, and rather than relocate the foundations, Zhu enveloped the remnants in his 10,370-square-metre scheme, transforming them into five sunken courtyards. The architectural design, meanwhile, borrowed directly from brick kilns. Zhu adapted the region's traditional method of building the porcelain-firing enclosures in order to create the museum's eight barrel-vaulted structures, but with an innovative sliding scaffolding system he devised to support the construction of their concrete shells.

Lined in new and reclaimed bricks, the deep and cavernous spaces house exhibition halls, an auditorium, an amphitheatre, a bookstore, a café and more. Roofline perforations that allow light to dapple the interior are a direct nod to the smoke holes of traditional kilns — and suggest the experience of actually inhabiting these endemic structures. The naturally ventilated halls also prioritize a connection to the surrounding landscape, with its gently swaying bamboo, and to the trickling waters of the shallow pools that line their perimeter. The feat is equal parts poetic and technical, and it expertly elevates the area's vernacular — one deeply enmeshed with the city's cultural memory — on a grand scale for a new era.

“This project is a beautiful synthesis of a museum program, an innovative site plan and the use of a traditional material — brick — in a very creative way.”
— Gilles Saucier

