

Slideshow: China's Imperial Kiln ruins inspire museum design

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The view from an open-ended amphitheater across a sunken courtyard containing Ming-era ruins. (Courtesy of schranimage, via v2com)

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Aerial view of the Imperial Kiln museum and ruins. (Courtesy of Tian Fangfang, via v2com)

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A mixture of old and new brick were used in the museum's new vault-like buildings.
(Courtesy of Studio Zhu-Pei, via v2com)

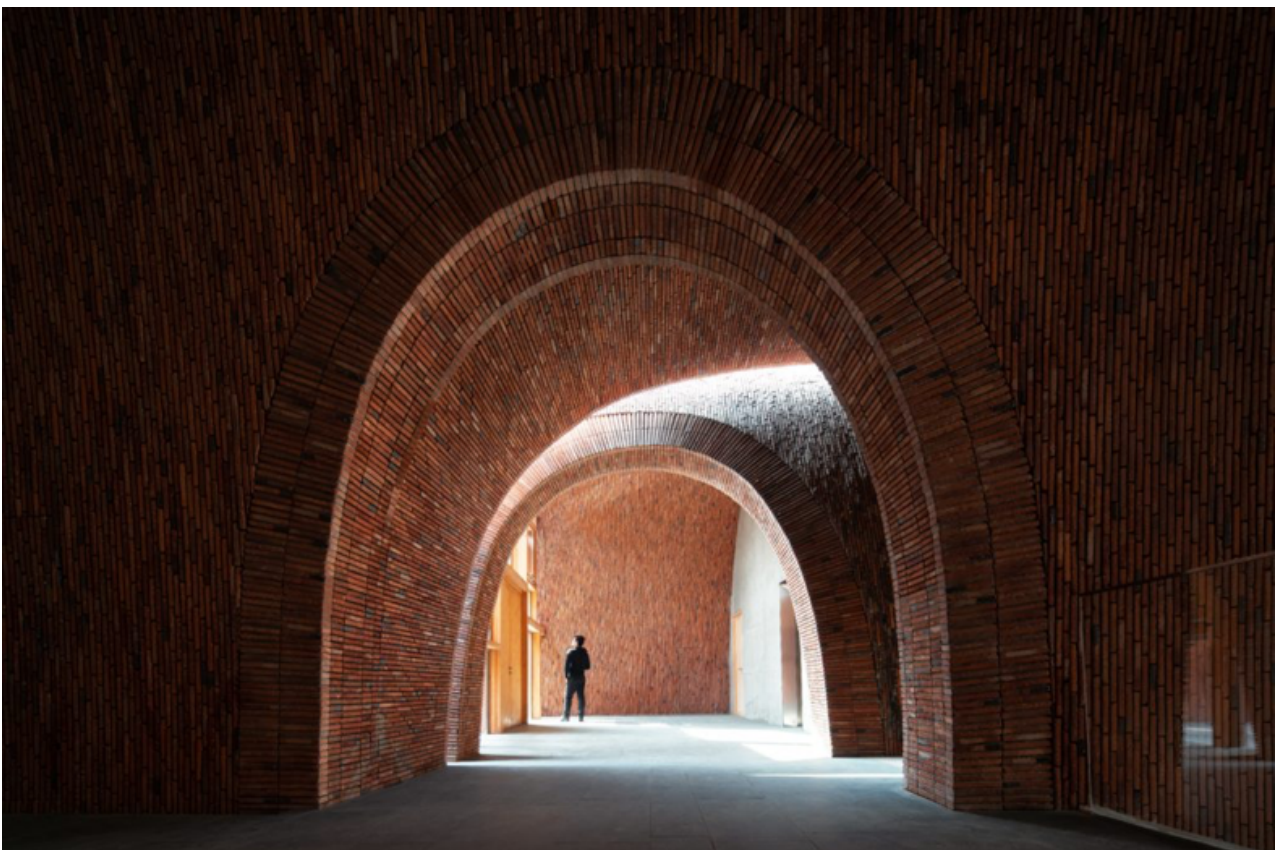


The museum's foyer. (Courtesy of schranimage, via v2com)

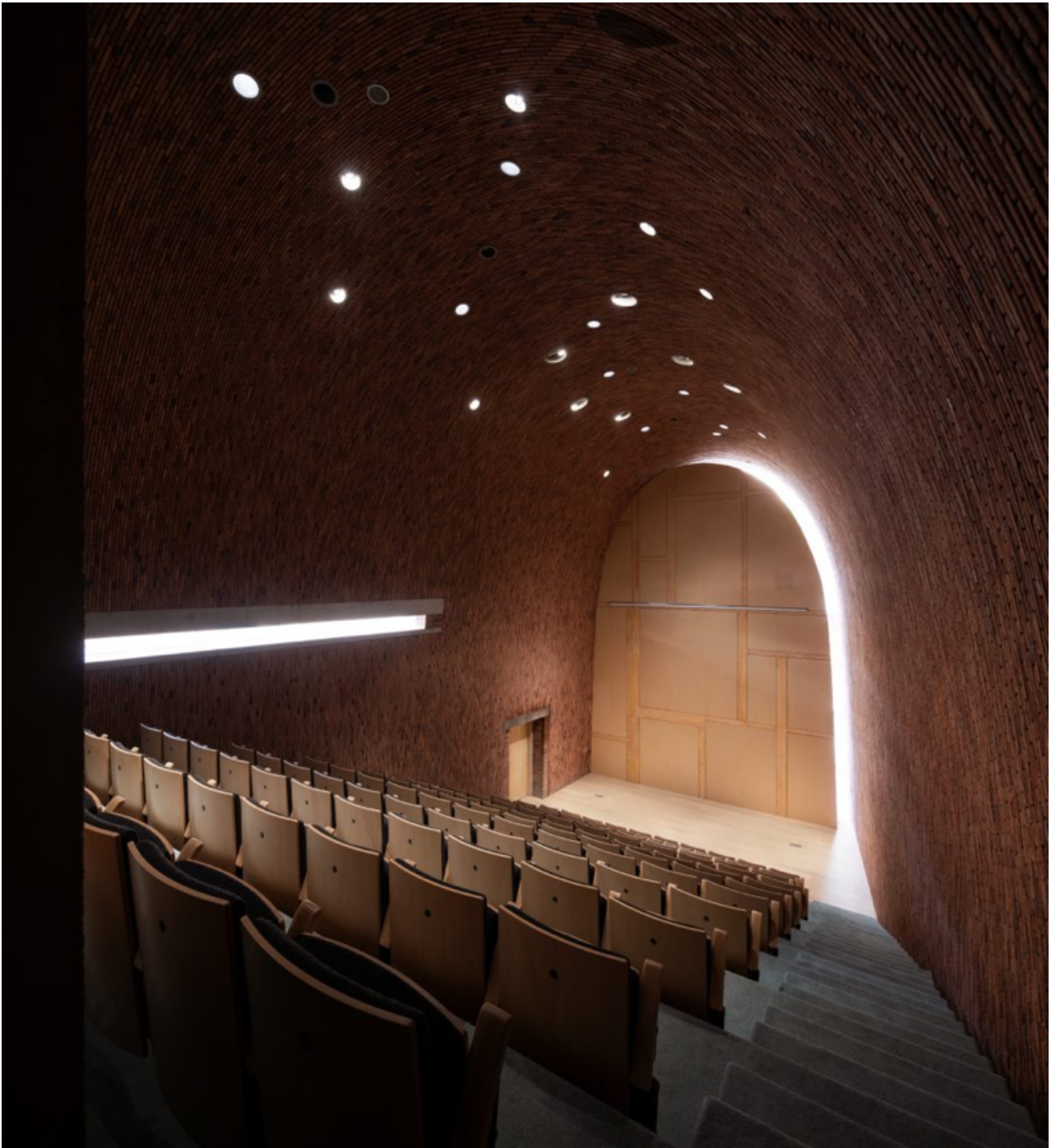




View from the museum's foyer through the design studio and into the tea room.
(Courtesy of Studio Zhu-Pei, via v2com)



The auditorium's foyer. (Courtesy of schranimage, via v2com)

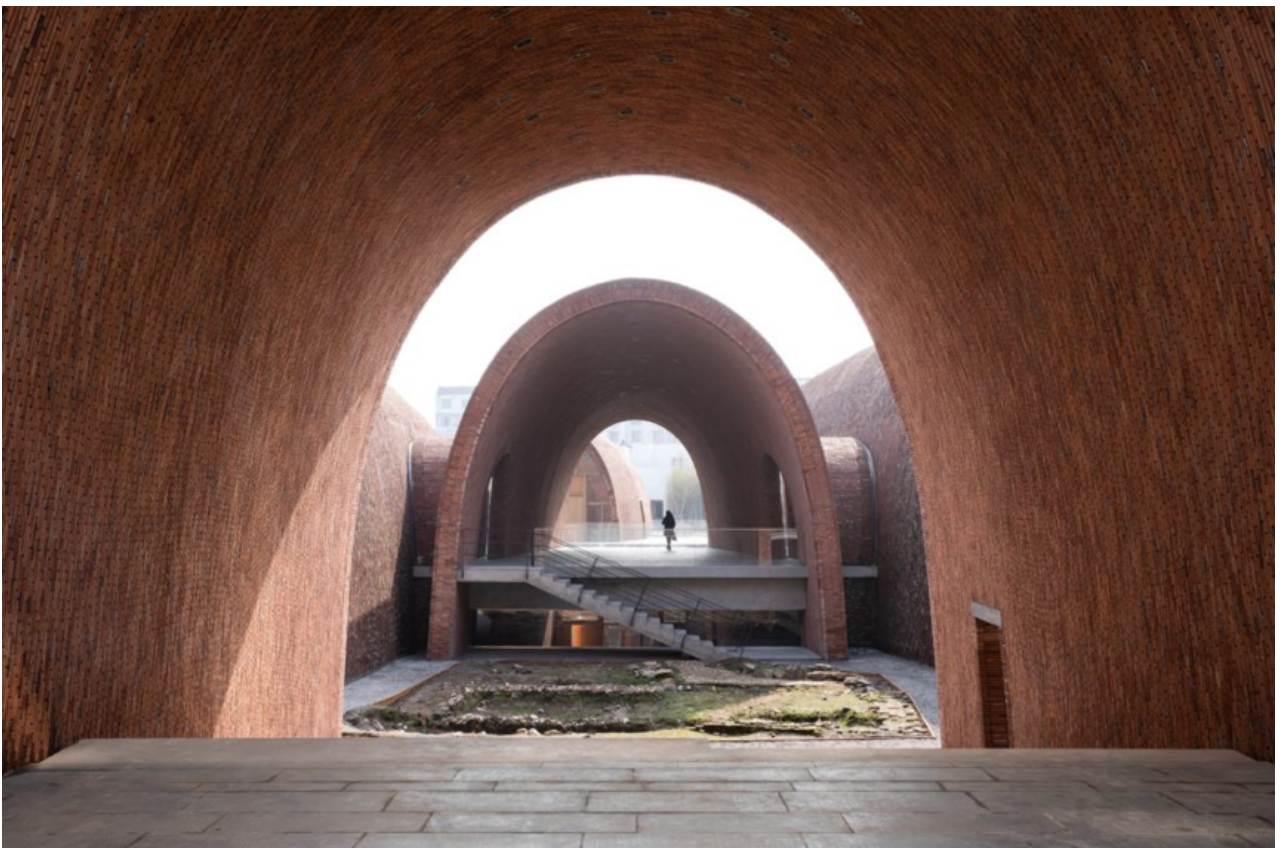


The auditorium. (Courtesy of schranimage, via v2com)



A view of the exterior of the foyer with adjacent open-ended vaults. (Courtesy of schranimage, via v2com)

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The view from an open-ended amphitheater across a sunken courtyard containing



Aerial view of the Imperial Kiln museum and ruins. (Courtesy of Tian Fangfang, via v2com)

The city of Jingdezhen, China, has been producing pottery for 1,700 years. Dubbed the Porcelain Capital, this area is known to have exported huge amounts of Ming and Qing dynasty pottery to Europe. This year saw the opening of a new museum honoring that history. With a design inspired by the area's Imperial Kiln ruins, the museum also pays homage to the construction methods and craftspeople who have been responsible for the kilns through the generations.

The Imperial Kiln Museum is located on a restricted

historical area that is adjacent to the Imperial Kiln ruins. It includes just less than a dozen brick vaults — some interconnected — that have been shaped in the traditional form of a kiln and nestled together in rows. Each of these new vaults is formed with a slightly different curvature, length, and size, according to [Studio Zhu-Pei](#), the design's architects along with the [Architectural Design and Research Institute of Tsinghua University](#). The project's chief designer was Zhu Pei, Hon. FAIA, the founder and principal designer of Studio Zhu-Pei.

Traditionally, craftspeople built the thin and light brick kilns with a minimum of materials and a maximum of space — all without scaffolding. The arched structures of the kilns are made up of two thin layers of masonry brick walls that sandwich a thin layer of concrete, according to the architects.

The vaults each extend below street level, forming two stories of visitor spaces that offer a variety of interior-yet-open-ended, open-air, and enclosed spaces that overlook five sunken courtyards. Each of these courtyards has a dedicated theme — water, soil, wood, fire, and gold — that reflects traditional Chinese thinking about the earth. Each also has a role in the creation of porcelain, according to Studio Zhu-Pei.

Recycled kiln bricks were used in the structures, which were

built with a mixture of old and new brick. The use of recycled kiln bricks is literally embedded in the fabric of the city: Brick kilns are demolished every two to three years to maintain a certain thermal performance within the kilns, according to Studio Zhu-Pei. As such, the use of recycled kiln bricks to build homes and other buildings is an age-old tradition within the city.

This mixture of brick interweaves the past and the present together, according to Studio Zhu-Pei. This strategy was used to excite visitors' curiosity and interest, evoke memories, and generate new questions. "The past cannot be erased but can be rewritten by recounting a new awareness and maturity, a sort of contemporary archeology," says material released by the architects.

The 10,370 sq m museum also houses an auditorium, bookstore, and a tearoom.

Project credits:

Client: Jingdezhen Municipal Bureau of Culture Radio Television Press Publication and Tourism, Jingdezhen Ceramic Culture Tourism Group

Architects: Studio Zhu-Pei and the Architectural Design and Research Institute of Tsinghua University

Structural; mechanical, engineering, and plumbing; and

green building: Architectural Design and Research Institute of Tsinghua University

Facade: Shenzhen Dadi Facade Technology Co. LTD

Lighting: Ning Field Lighting Design Co. LTD

Acoustic: Building Science & Technology Institute, Zhejiang University

Main contractor: China Construction First Group Corp. LTD, Huajiang Construction Co. LTD of China Construction First Group