

“A SOPHISTICATED WELLNESS RETREAT OPENS IN CHINA’S TROPICAL REGION”

GRAY; JAN 2024

<https://www.graymag.com/post/a-sophisticated-wellness-retreat-opens-in-china-s-tropical-region>



Located on China's Hainan Island and designed by Neri&Hu, this contemporary hotel and spa uses architectural forms to capture views of sea and sky.



The Sanya Wellness Retreat, designed by Neri&Hu Design and Research Office, is located on China's Hainan Island. Granite floors and teak details act as a unifying palette throughout the property.

For most people, aquamarine waters and white sand beaches aren't the first things that come to mind when thinking of China. But, a trip to Hainan Island, a small water-bound piece of land in the country's southern Haitang Bay, reveals just that—long stretches of pristine beach, lush green hills, and a mild climate with hot, albeit muggy, summers.

“It's like the Hawaii of China,” says architect Lyndon Neri, a founding partner at Neri&Hu Design and Research Office, a firm that recently completed a luxury hotel in Sanya, a city on the island's southern tip. “Just like Hawaii, people from China go here on vacation to get some sun. It has a tropical climate and is a popular resort destination.” Inspired by ancient Chinese walled cities—usually elevated on a heavy plinth and surrounded by water for protection—the Sanya Wellness Retreat has two distinct sections: a wooden volume comprising guest rooms perched atop a masonry base holding all public zones including restaurants, lounges, fitness centers, and ballrooms. The two volumes connect with a courtyard containing a series of water features. All of the hotel's public amenities spread out from this central space.

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The resort is set back from the ocean, so the architects elevated the guest rooms to take advantage of the views.

**“There were several considerations we had to keep in mind,” Neri says of the design. “The lot is set back from the beach, so the building needed to be elevated in order to view the water. Also, the clients aren’t typical resort owners—they own a large network of homes for elderly people. Because of this, our design needed to accommodate a range of needs from young children to those of much older people. We had to ensure it had everything from ramps and high railings to corridors with super-wide, five-foot turning radiuses. As a firm, we decided to celebrate these features without making it look like a requirement.”**

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Openings above the lobby-level water courtyard frame views of the sky.

**Constructed with masonry walls made from handmade clay bricks, the hotel's first level is a garden landscape with walls, ceilings, and openings strategically placed to take in specific sights. Lowered ceiling heights provide a human scale while directing guests toward the punched-through sections that open up to a great expanse of sky. Instead of having one large, continuous lobby, the design team opted to fill the in-between spaces with ponds, lining them up with openings for a poetic connection of elements. “We borrowed landscape by using the architecture to frame views,” Neri says. “In the public realm, there isn’t a view of the beach, so we created an aperture to the sky above the ponds. Every time you encounter water, you will also see sky.”**

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Turning to local craftsmanship, Neri&Hu opted for masonry walls clad with handmade clay bricks and granite flooring. Teak wood details abound—the wood softens the appearance of the predominantly brick boxes and is highly weather-resistant, an optimal choice for tropical seaside construction. Elsewhere in the resort—the lobby, guest rooms, restaurants—woven rattan appears, “woven rattan appears, while other areas tap into the ancient technique of soaking and pressing bamboo for construction material.



Wide breezeways outside of guest rooms help facilitate air flow and encourage mingling.



The rooms at Sanya Wellness Retreat are minimal and elegant, with custom furniture designed by Ner&Hu.

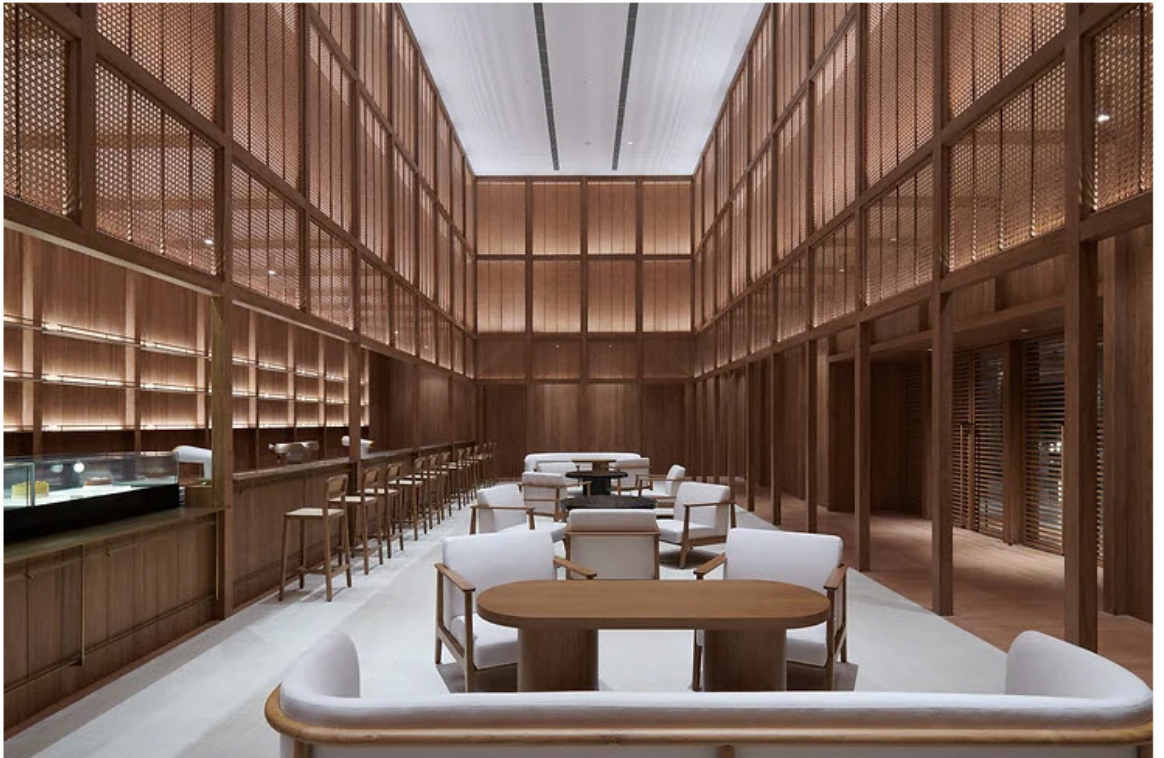
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**The 343 guest rooms are in a second-floor volume that seems to float, lantern-like, above the stone base. Each unit was conceived as a wooden hut containing amenities such as washrooms. The spaces between the wooden boxes hold zones for sleeping and relaxing, including balconies that provide guests with sweeping ocean views. Custom-designed furniture further underscores dedication to a minimal look—light wood, uncomplicated lines, and rattan connect to details found elsewhere throughout the property.**



A dining area utilizes rattan to add texture to the minimal palette.

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Weather-resistant teak and granite are the two main materials seen throughout the property.

**“We tend to keep things simple,” Neri says of the design. “That’s one way to keep things cohesive [throughout the property] is making the materials as simple as possible. We’re not into a lot of decoration, what’s important to us is the spatial experience.”**

**Corridors between guest rooms reinforce this. Breezeways provide shade and airflow during the hottest summer months, and furniture groupings encourage guests to spend time outside their rooms. According to Neri, much of the hotel’s design was to encourage exploration and interaction—often, those unexpected, chance encounters with other guests reinforce the magic of travel. In the case of Sanya Wellness Retreat, exceptional design is a welcome bonus.**