

“ARE THE STRONGEST BRANDED SPACES
THE MOST SUBTLE?”

Frame; DEC 2022

<https://www.frameweb.com/article/retail/are-the-strongest-branded-spaces-the-most-subtle>

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ARE THE STRONGEST BRANDED SPACES THE MOST SUBTLE?



Location

📍 **Shanghai, China**

Design, Architecture

Neri&Hu

Brand

Blue Bottle Coffee

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Neri&Hu designed a quintessentially Shanghainese space for Blue Bottle Coffee in Zhang Yuan, a recently refurbished historical garden in the city.

Key features

Known as one of modern China’s first public and commercial spaces, Zhang Yuan opened in 1885, and helped craft the image of urban lifestyle in Shanghai. Neri&Hu took to one of the *shikumen* buildings on the grounds – a historical lane-house style that combines Western and Eastern elements – for global coffee retailer Blue Bottle. The designers retained the brick walls, doors and windows of the original architectural façades and atriums, utilizing these features as a backdrop for new additions.

Introducing a light palette was foremost to the project to counterbalance the material heaviness of the building. Neri&Hu erected a roof structure from brushed stainless steel, finishing its surface with perforated and bent steel. The informal constructions Shanghai dwellers once used to extend the private spaces of their *shikumen* into the adjacent alleyways informed the café’s rails, side tables, benches and object displays. Brand furniture coexists alongside repurposed traditional Shanghainese pieces.

FRAME’s take

Big-brand shops situated in historical settings can feel disparate and ingenuine, their physical presence an eyesore in a hyperlocal context. Blue Bottle occupies prime real estate in many storied neighbourhoods across the US and Asia but is (to its benefit in this regard) less visually domineering than its competitors. Neri&Hu’s tactful refurbishment of the Zhang Yuan *shikumen* allows Blue Bottle to exist as a neighbour, not an occupant, using architecture to connect visitors with the garden’s strong place in Shanghai’s history and culture. This, notably, is a **conscious and ongoing endeavour** of the coffee brand.

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BAR

SHANGHAI

SPACES

RETAIL

HOSPITALITY

SUSTAINABILITY

SINGLE-BRAND STORE

BLUE BOTTLE COFFEE

STEEL

CHINA

NERI&HU

CAFÉ