

# design anthology

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# A Nesting Place

Text / Yoko Choy Images / Courtesy of CHAO Hotel

When it comes to lifestyle businesses, Beijing still has some distance to go compared to other first-tier Chinese cities such as Shanghai and Guangzhou. But this also implies that the potential is huge and the market is still young enough to welcome new creative offerings.

With its soft opening in August this year, CHAO is ready to be one of the first to push things forward in the capital city. It is one of the first hospitality and lifestyle brands rooted in the country, if not the first. The brainchild of hoteliers Ivy Fei and Ming Li and brand strategist Maurice Li, the Beijing CHAO Hotel & Clubhouse is the brand's flagship outlet targeted at 'an emerging new tribe of people in the city who are redefining what it means to live a life of quality'. To this end, the building has been designed to provide far more than the traditional hotel experience.

It began with the transformation of a typical communist-style building. Formerly the City Hotel, the 28-storey structure was never luxurious, but it enjoyed the status of a historical landmark. The renovations, undertaken by gmp Architekten from Germany, have produced a minimalist building of glass and concrete with striking features such as the 10-metre-tall outer colonnade leading to the main entrance.

The in-house interior design team led by New Zealander Lucas Chirside took full advantage of the building's unusual triangular-cylindrical shape to create a multi-level, open-plan experience. With over 45,000 square metres of combined public and event space to design, natural materials and colours were the design code of choice. A wooden floor in the lobby is made from reclaimed doors collected from Beijing's historic *hutongs*

(courtyard residences), while the ceiling is composed of woven panels in a palette inspired by the old city. The grand staircase leading to a chapel on the second floor is made of stone steps. Part of the original wall of the building has been retained as a unique decorative element.

The generously sized 180 studio-style guest rooms and 40 apartments have floor-to-ceiling windows and are fitted with bespoke handcrafted furnishings made from solid walnut, linen, cotton and leather in a muted palette. Collaborating with Yuichiro Hori, co-founder of Shanghai-based furniture maker Stellar Works, Chirside and his team designed most of the furniture in the building and plan to launch a select collection under CHAO's brand next year.

Intriguingly, the word 'CHAO' can be translated in a variety of ways: Chaoyang, the district in which it is located; a bird's nest; a beehive; or, simply, a home. But it can also mean 'trendy' or 'bustling'. Perhaps then it's in the amalgamation of these interpretations that CHAO is best defined — a series of spaces designed for all aspects of contemporary life that take in business, leisure, socialising and travelling. According to Maurice: 'Beijing is a lonely city; its vast scale makes it difficult to meet with like minds.'

CHAO aims to redress this perception through a year-round programme of cultural events and gatherings — already Japanese art director Kenya Hara, Hong Kong designer Alan Chan and Canadian entrepreneur and publisher Tyler Brûlé have been guest speakers. The future will see a rotating roster of art exhibitions, live performances, pop-up shops, master workshops, private dinners and more. The idea is that guests don't just check in, eat and sleep, but take the time to make new friends and push boundaries for new experiences.



The Beijing CHAO Hotel & Clubhouse features over 45,000 square metres of combined public and event space and is targeted at Beijingers who value a creative lifestyle



Facing page: The hotel's studio-style suites and apartment accommodations are generously sized

This page: The interiors at CHAO are decorated in natural materials and colours