

Iconic architecture showcased as 'city of design' takes shape



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Shanghai is a young city compared with Beijing, London and Paris. But over the past century, it has been capturing the world's attention.

The city provided fertile ground for budding architects such as Laszlo Hudec

(1893-1958) and Alexandre Leonard (1890-1946) to build their careers, as well as attracting the likes of renowned architects Jean Nouvel and Tadao Ando, who blazed new trails.

Shanghai will complete the construction of a world-class "city of design" by 2030. During the recent World Design Cities

Conference in the city, renowned French architect and Pritzker Prize winner Jean Nouvel said Shanghai is outstanding especially in the field of design, architecture and art.

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Museum of Art Pudong

Architect: Jean Nouvel | Address: 2777 Binjiang Avenue

The museum looks standard and balanced, or to say "reserved" and "introverted." But it's not dwarfed by towering skyscrapers in the bustling Lujiazui area.

From simple geometric designs to restrained decor, the marble-and-glass rectangle along the Huangpu River is a reminder that art matters. There's also something to be said about tactfully blending into your surroundings.

Jean Nouvel himself said: "I'm playing a game with the Huangpu River and surrounding spaces."

The design was meant to blur the distinction between the structure and the environment.

"I hope the museum can naturally, seamlessly, integrate into the surroundings, like a serene sculpture rather than an individual building," he said.

Hence, a 53-meter-long bridge

stretches from the second floor and links the museum to the waterfront platform, creating an integrated space. Facing the river are two "glass halls," one with a height of 6 meters, the other at 12 meters.

One side is paved with glass, allowing people to enjoy beautiful views of the Bund across the river, and the other side has high-reflective LEDs, mirroring the Bund view. The design echoes with the river and creates a subtle blend of light, art and image.

Small facts: Two new exhibitions will soon come to the museum. "Design for Fun" is set to begin September 28, and "The Dynamic Eye: Op and Kinetic Art from the Tate Collection" will open on September 30. Masterpieces by Jesus Rafael Soto, Victor Vasarley, Ettore Sottsass, Alesandro Mendini and more will be displayed.

Okura Garden Hotel Shanghai

Architect: Alexandre Leonard | Address: 85 Maoming Road S.

The Okura Garden Hotel Shanghai, or to be more specific its older section, is the city's quiet nod to its former French Concession area. The white building, facing a large lawn, was built around 1925 in the French Renaissance style with Art Deco influences. It was used as the Cercle Sportif Francais, literally French Sports Club.

It was equipped with a bowling alley, billiards room and tennis courts, among a variety of sports facilities. It also had an incomparable ballroom hailed as the best in the Far East. It featured sprung floors and the longest-spanning glass ceiling in the city.

The project brought the young Alexandre Leonard huge success. Compared with his contemporary and rival Hudec, Leonard is lesser-known today. But his work hasn't gone unacknowledged.

The French architect came to Shanghai in 1920, two years after Hudec's arrival, burning with a fierce ambition to leave an indelible

mark on Shanghai's skyline.

In 1924, he created his own company with Paul Veyseyre. The third partner, Arthur Kruze, joined them in 1934, which determined the company's name as Leonard Veyseyre & Kruze.

The firm has left a swath of more than 100 stylish buildings in the city, such as the typical Art Deco Midget Apartments, Baroque-style Bearn Apartments, and the Modern-style Gascogne Apartments.

Small facts: Leonard disappeared from Shanghai in 1946. He never came back after he left his home at the Amyron Apartments on March 13. It wasn't until May 25 that his death was made known to the public. The French Consulate General in Shanghai was said to have received his farewell letter which is kept in the basement of the Institut Pasteur of Shanghai under the Chinese Academy of Sciences. But the letter is only allowed to be revealed 100 years after his death, which will be in 2046.

