Research on Urban and Rural Environmental Design and Redevelopment – a Case Study of Chengdu

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Abstract: There is a term called “Heart Land” in the West, and the Midwestern United States is known as the heart of the US in the English-Chinese dictionary. As the saying goes, “The route into Sichuan is more daunting than climbing the blue sky.” Chengdu, as a major inland city in Southwest China, is located in the so-called “Heart Land.” In the design of architectural environment, it blends the old style with the new, the local features with the international, and the urban characteristics with the rural, showing that the city is exceptionally inclusive and diverse.

1. Introduction
Chengdu is constructing itself a warm and friendly city while growing at a fast pace, and for this reason, native Chengdu people, outsiders and tourists all share the same love for it. The architects of the cases in this paper created “new experiences and contrasting experiences” in urban and rural environmental design and redevelopment. These “new” elements in terms of design, appearance, concept and target people are accepted by the people of Chengdu, and they also fit the character of the Chengdu people who are inclusive and enjoy trying new things. In this paper, two Internet-famous architectural design projects in Chengdu are selected, including the Yulin Community which is located in the urban hinterland with the most urban atmosphere in Chengdu, and the Sansheng Township, a famous rural leisure and tourism settlement outside the East Third Ring Road of Chengdu.

2. A Case of Urban Redevelopment – Community Center in Yulin Alley

2.1. Current Status of Old Urban Areas
The downtown Chengdu refers to the five traditional urban areas, where nearly 60% of the buildings are old communities built before 2000. With the development of urbanization, the central community is gradually aging, with young people departing and the elderly people living there. Figure 1 shows the Yulin East Road Community in Chengdu. According to the home visit survey in this community conducted by Nhoow Architects, the main age group of disabled people is around 40 years old, mainly with hearing impairment and emotional impairment, and there are also some elderly people in their 80s to 90s. Many of them avoid community activities, mainly because of “nothing to do,” “not being acquainted,” and “feeling insecure about unpredictability.”
2.2. Design and Redevelopment of Yulin Alley
Yulin Alley is initiated by Yulin East Road Community and Disable Persons Federation of Wuhou District, and is planned, designed and operated by Nhoow Architects. This semi-open space covering 150 square meters is colored in white and burly wood, and presents an open, free and inclusive design concept through the extensive use of glass.
Figure 4 Sunlight Analysis Diagram

The highlight of the design is the soft and translucent membrane structure at the top of the whole space, which is different from other hard materials such as wood and glass in the space. It can softly bring in natural light in daytime, and reveal hazy light at night.

Seats are designed on the exterior of Yulin Alley and the original trees are preserved, making it comfortable to communicate with others both indoor and outdoor.

The interior design of Yulin Alley also shows the friendliness to the disabled. For example, the entrance is designed with a ramp for wheelchair users and installed with sliding glass doors. Besides, there are 1.2-meter-wide aisles for wheelchair access, a height-adjustable bar, the wear-resisting wooden floor that bears wheelchair friction, handrails through the whole space, etc.

Figure 5 Elevation

3. Redevelopment of Rural Recreation Areas Around Cities: “From China to North Africa”

3.1. Background of Rural Leisure in Chengdu

The rural tourism in Chengdu has developed in the early years. The first Chinese agritainment was the “Xu’s Courtyard” in the Nongke Village of Pixian County, a suburb of Chengdu, Sichuan, in the mid-1980s, which is known as the originator of agritainment. With the rapid development of urbanization and social economy in China, people’s living standard has been improved, and leisure tourism, especially rural leisure tourism around the urban areas, has gradually evolved into a mass consumption from the leisure recreation of a small group of people. It can even be said that rural leisure tourism has become a part of the lives of modern Chengdu people, and trips with relatives and friends on weekends or during leisure time have been a common occurrence. Chengdu people live in a slow pace, and their love of pleasure and recreation has led to the rapid development of local leisure tourism. It is evident that the traditional agritainment in Chengdu are gradually transforming into the integration of rural leisure and vacation. On the other hand, the era of personalized leisure has arrived, and rural tourism products have stepped into a new stage of creative, branded and exquisite development.

After the epidemic got controlled, people’s long-suppressed intention of tourism needs to be released urgently, but their expectations of tourism cannot be met by the original industry, which requires the renewal and upgrading of urban and rural leisure industry. In this paper, through the ranking and
screening on online platforms, we found that the original rural self-built houses, restaurants and some Internet-famous stores in Sansheng Township, which is 11.7 kilometers away from the downtown Chengdu, have been revitalized after the epidemic. At present, Sansheng Township boasts numerous Internet-famous stores from Kashgar Prefecture, other countries like Morocco, Vietnam, Thailand, Japan, and European countries, making it as the “Window to the World for Chengdu People” in the post-epidemic era. These personalized cases with creative designs enrich the lives of urban residents and temporarily solve the problem that the existing rural leisure space fails to meet people’s needs. Meanwhile, we also found in the research that these cases also require optimization in terms of design, service and support.

3.2. Redevelopment of Casa Jardin, a Moroccan Restaurant in Chengdu

“Yulin Alley” creatively revitalizes the old urban community, while Casa Jardin creates a “new” environment to some extent.

3.2.1. Location and Original Appearance

The restaurant is located in No.118, Shangmei Road, Plum Forest Scenic Area, Sansheng Township, Jinjiang District, Chengdu, covering an area of about 666.7 square meters. The original site is a traditional agritainment named “Dongsheng Farmstead.”

Figure 6 Original Appearance

3.2.2. Plane Structure of the Original Space

Figure 7 Layout Sketch of Dongsheng Farmstead
The original site covers a large area. The entrance for customers is a festooned door with typical western Sichuan style (Figure 8), and the inner courtyard is equipped with staff access. Inside the courtyard (Figure 7), 1 is a drinking zone made of raised anti-corrosive wood, while 5 is an open-air plum garden with a terrain high on the left and low on the right, linked by a narrow path built by 1. 2 is the dining room built of glass, steel and masonry, containing a reception and traditional round tables. The narrow inner courtyard is surrounded by 2, 3 and 4, and contains two parts of a one-story kitchen (4) and a small two-story building (3) with six private rooms. Besides, 6 is an open-air entertainment zone, equipped with automatic mahjong tables and portable KTV facilities, and other zones are toilet (7), spare zone (8), and spare storehouse (9).

3.2.3. Problems of the Original Project
Firstly, the main architectural style of the project integrated many elements of western Sichuan style, including the brick structure of rural self-built houses, houses of glass and masonry structure, temporary building of steel structure and other forms, which lacked overall and unified design. Secondly, the service flow was lengthy, and the miscellaneous items like the kitchen and food preparation table in the inner courtyard were placed on the customer flow, making it low-grade. Thirdly, a large number of areas were planned in poor integrity. Due to the large size of the yard and the lack of staff and funds, there were massive spaces that were deserted and lacked maintenance over the years, and farmland and gardens were set in one space.

3.2.4. Plane Structure of the New Project
The new project is a Moroccan-style courtyard restaurant, specializing in Western and Moroccan cuisine. The architects designed the customer entrance (Figure 9) at the open-air plum garden of the original project, where the terrain ranges from low to high, allowing customers to view the main building and the entire courtyard. The previous open-air space was transformed into an entrance with water feature, a cactus garden, and a dinning zone in the pool.

The main building area consists of the main restaurant with steel and glass structure, private rooms, and two dining zones on two stories. The inner courtyard enclosed is transformed into a long and narrow Moroccan-style pool with various colors of tiles, featuring a strong exotic atmosphere (Figure 10). The staircase designed with the style of “Monument Valley” is the only way to connect the two stories.

Blue Zone: The blue zone shown in Figure 11 is a specially designed landscape zone, where the architects ingeniously take advantage of the height difference to design the staircase and arch with the style of Chefchaouene, a famous city in Morocco.

3.2.5. New Business Form of the Project
Casa Jardin has quickly gained popularity among Chengdu people since its opening. According to the analysis of its customers, they are mainly female and have a wide age range, with young people, middle-aged women, white-collar workers, and members of We Media being its main target. Through the integration of information in the online platform, we found that the rich design of landscape points in the restaurant is highly appreciated by its customers. These designs have expanded the functional concept of the restaurant as a place to eat and drink tea only, and new media forms such as photography,
live broadcasting by Internet celebrities and commercial marketing have enriched the business form of the dining space.

3.3. Reflection
Although the new project has made great improvements on the original one, the problem of slow serving is still not completely solved due to the large area of the site and the lengthy service flow. In addition, the business of this rural leisure space is dismal at night, so the traffic and lighting within and around the scenic spot at night require improvement.

4. Conclusion
Urban and rural areas are complex organisms that grow naturally, and they are invigorated by the constant renewal of the commercial businesses. In Chengdu, the free, inclusive and energetic ecological environment circle provides new experience for the citizens and keeps giving rise to good design and redevelopment.

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