



The north and south wings of the development are connected by an innovative double bridge



The project exudes tranquillity, particularly in winter

Photo: Lacime Architects

Poetic justice

Traditional Suzhou architectural forms are reborn in the award-winning Dajia community villas, a development of contemporary homes that embraces the city’s poetic past

It’s no secret that, since ancient times, Chinese culture has valued the family above all else. This is reflected in its architecture, with traditional Chinese houses based on the concept of the courtyard, which connects individual family members through multiple entries to the home. The underlying reasons for this philosophy, ranging from the psychological to the spiritual, also help to define modern Chinese architecture.

Enter the Dajia community villa project, a unique residential development in historical Suzhou. It’s important to understand that the 2,500-year-old city has a long history of urban planning: the Pingjiang Map, depicting part of the city, was carved in stone during the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) and is the earliest discovered city-planning map in China.



The Dajia community villa project design has references to the historical and cultural roots of Suzhou

A blend of modernity with traditional spaces

With hundreds of intertwining rivers, water plays an integral role in Suzhou's landscape, to the extent that the "water lane" of a residential area has become a communal space. Continuing this long tradition of history and culture, Dajia takes a modern approach to the traditional spatial order, blending architecture and the natural environment.

Spanning 980sqm (10,550sqf) on a flat parcel of land adjacent to Qingjian Lake, in the Suzhou Industrial Park area, Dajia employs modern construction materials such as ultra-white glass, aluminium plate and white linen stone, anti-arc roofing and a facade effect. Strikingly, the project retains the charms of the past. It addresses the classic multiple-entry courtyard with a square axis and a series of traditional Chinese gardens. Other elements are almost poetic: the slightly raised roof has the distinct curvature of a bird's spread wings. The project embraces the city's waterways with a river that effectively divides the development into two blocks – north and south – connected by a stunning double bridge.

This unique double bridge was shortlisted for the 2018 Structural Awards, in the Pedestrian Bridges category, with the judges commenting: "The brief was to provide bridges of equivalent high quality in a form that recognises the traditional Chinese footbridge. Old bridges were made of wood, had relatively short spans and were covered with a tiled roof. The challenge was to create a new design in contemporary materials that could span 28 metres. The design that was developed makes use of the canopy and the bridge deck, working together with ingenious triangulated steel frames... [These] are placed in the centre of the footpath so that both sides of the bridge are entirely clear of structure. The result is a very elegant, contemporary version of the traditional bridge."

Dajia was completed in December 2017, with acclaimed Chinese firm Lacime Architects handling the architectural design and Song Zhaoqing as the project's chief architect. Among the project's accolades, it was shortlisted for the 2018 World Architecture Festival Awards in the Civic and Community category, and won the Innovative Architecture category at the 2018 Iconic Awards. Following tradition, but in keeping with modern times, Dajia has the harmony of poetry – free of boundaries, full of whimsy, and with echoes of the past as it looks firmly towards the future. ■

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