

# Historical teahouse reopens in Fangta Park after meticulous restoration

Tan Weiyun

A beloved sanctuary woven with memories and traditions has been reborn in Songjiang. The Helouxuan Teahouse has once again opened its doors after a meticulous restoration, reconnecting the local community with a cherished piece of their heritage.

Nestled within Fangta Park, Helouxuan is a marvel of architectural beauty and cultural depth. Conceived by the renowned architect Feng Jizhong (1915-2009), a pioneer of modern Chinese architecture, the teahouse was completed in 1986.

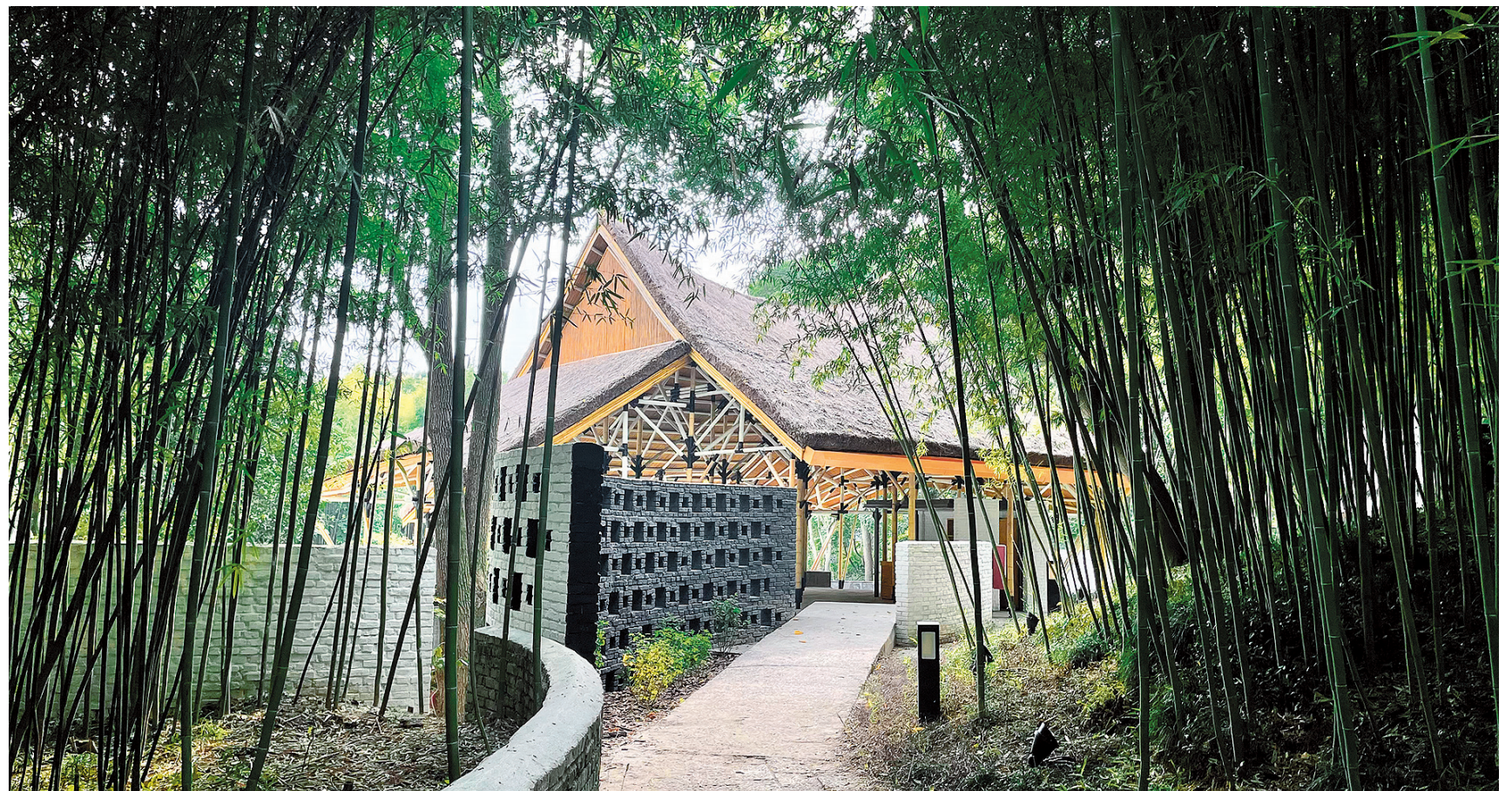
Its architectural style, masterfully blending the essence of Shanghai's suburban residential charm with the grandeur of Baroque influences, showcases Feng's visionary design principles. The bamboo structure, thatched roof and brick flooring invite visitors into a world where nature and craftsmanship intersect.

The name Helouxuan pays homage to the Tang Dynasty poet Liu Yuxi's "Inscription on the Humble Room" with its reflections on the beauty of simplicity and nature's embrace. Written by Feng himself, the central plaque of the teahouse bears the name, setting the tone for the tranquility that permeates the space.

After decades of serving as a serene haven for tea lovers in Songjiang, time and elements took their toll on Helouxuan.

Extensive efforts were undertaken to restore it to its former glory. The restoration, initiated in December 2021 and completed in September 2022, was a labor of love and dedication, involving top architectural experts and meticulous craftsmanship.

Huang Yiru, a protege of Feng's and a key figure in the original construction and recent restoration, highlighted the challenges and



The Helouxuan Teahouse, behind a bamboo forest, is a marvel of architectural beauty and cultural depth.— Ti Gong

triumphs of the process.

"Professor Feng managed to construct it in just four months, but the restoration took us a full two years," Huang said, highlighting the rush and budget constraints of the original project that led to several compromises.

For instance, rice straw was used on the roof instead of thatch, resulting in disarray from even the slightest wind and necessitating annual replacement. The bamboo was not properly treated to prevent decay and was susceptible to infestation. "We've addressed all these issues in our recent restoration efforts," Huang added.

With the principle of "repairing the old as it was," Huang's team employed advanced technologies such as 3D scanning to preserve the integrity and authenticity of Feng's design. The restoration also embraced traditional

techniques and materials, from selecting bamboo of specific age and moisture content to finding the ideal thatch for the roof, ensuring the teahouse would withstand the test of time and nature.

The data center performed a three-dimensional scan of Helouxuan, archiving detailed information on the original structure's dimensions, shape and location, while also employing infrared scanners to record data throughout the process. Additionally, all the original design documents were digitized.

"This ensures that future restorations can be carried out without any issues, regardless of who undertakes them," Huang said.

The project team sought out master craftsmen with extensive experience in bamboo construction from Zhejiang Province. They also selected bamboo aged between four to six

years, harvested in winter with a lower moisture content, and used techniques such as sugar removal and wax elimination for deep treatment, extending the bamboo structure's lifespan by five to ten years.

For the roof's thatch, the ideal choice was the small-leaved purple real-core stem thatch, which is typically an annual plant harvested in autumn, but not aligning with the project's timeline. Therefore, the team embarked on a search across various locations, ultimately finding a similar type of thatch in Lianyungang, Jiangsu Province.

Today, Helouxuan stands not just as a piece of architectural beauty but as a living part of the community.

A PLACE TO LINGER

## Qing Dynasty era Taoist ascetic a pillar of support for those in need

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WANG Yun'e, once a Taoist ascetic from Huating (now Songjiang), was respected as a model of virtue. Leaving behind monastic solitude, he pledged to dedicate his existence to compassion, becoming a pillar of support for the needy, the ill and the impoverished. His boundless generosity illuminated the lives of many, making him a symbol of hope and kindness in times of despair.

During the reign of Kangxi in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), a

tumultuous event shook the lands of Wenzhou and Taizhou in Zhejiang Province, where many women were abducted during raids by mountain bandits. Wang, upon hearing of their plight, liquidated his estate and borrowed heavily to muster a formidable sum for their rescue. Alongside his friends, Wang's campaign rallied support, amassing a fortune in aid, ensuring the safe return of numerous women to their homes, to the tearful gratitude of their families.

Later, Wang heard that more than 70

women captured by bandits had been taken in by the military in Songjiang. He went there to investigate one by one, confirmed the situation and reported the names of the women to the military authorities. He then used his own savings to ransom them back, allowing them to reunite with their families as soon as possible.

Wang lived in eastern Songjiang and he always kept his door open to those in need, financed by selling off much of his property.

Miraculously, despite the adversities

faced by his county of Songjiang - droughts followed by floods - Wang's modest farming fields thrived and his village remained untouched by epidemic.

This, many believed, was the universe rewarding a life of unwavering goodness, a testament to the belief that true virtue invites divine protection.

FAMOUS NAMES