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ARCHITECT SPECIAL

# ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECES

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08



ISSN 2289-3768 PP 17836/08/2013 (032963)

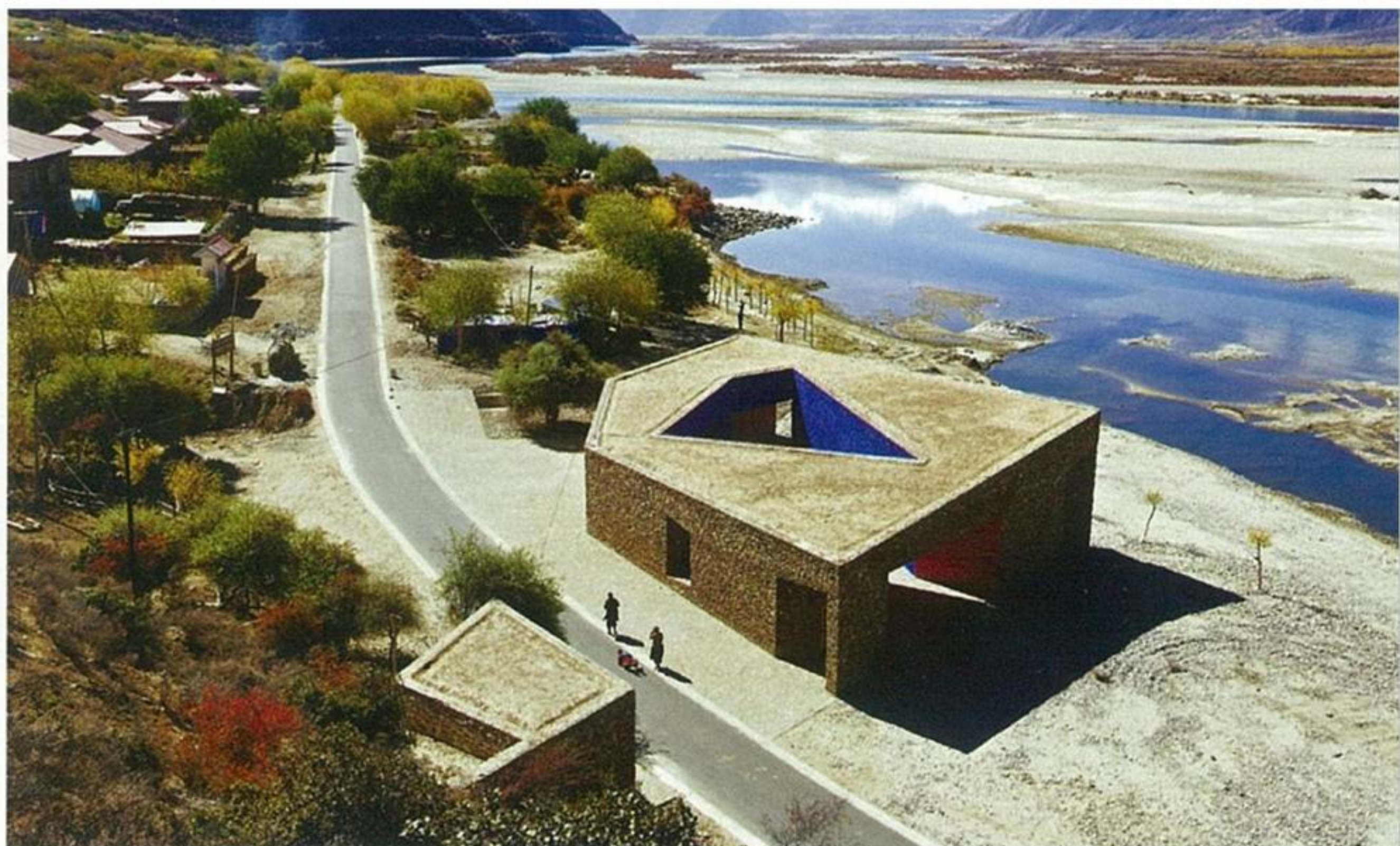
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"DON'T LOOK AT  
ARCHITECTURE  
BUT WATCH IT."

Architect Yang Zhao of  
ZhaoYang Studio



# MAVERICK SENSIBILITIES

Taking a road less travelled, Yang Zhao uncovers his insights and passion of his form of architecture among the prevailing design realm.

TEXT CLARA LING IMAGES COURTESY OF ZHAOYANG STUDIO

There is a saying that states different strokes for different folks. Chinese architect Yang Zhao is a perfect example of that. Already making headlines worldwide, the master's degree graduate from Harvard Graduate School of Design is unlike most architects. He has no interest in building dazzling erections whatsoever. Rather the 34-year-old's projects are acutely sensitive to their social and environmental context, often located in the outskirts.

Like many of his ambitious peers, Zhao began his journey in the field of design as a fresh graduate in Beijing. Shortly, Zhao set up his own practice - Zhaoyang Studio - in 2007. Currently based in Dali, the Chongqing-born was shot to international recognition with his highly acclaimed Niyang River Visitor Centre in Tibet. The project pays respect to the



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BEING AN ARCHITECT IS A  
GIFT BUT ALSO A JOB. IT'S AN  
HONOUR BUT ALSO A MISSION.

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natural landscape while simultaneously projecting a sense of belonging. Thus his remarkable work earned him the WA Chinese Architecture Award in 2010.

With the affirmation of his skills and talent, Zhao left China for America the same year. "Leaving for Harvard is a valuable experience which broadened my mind. It was a great platform for me to meet and understand various cultures around the world," recalled Zhao. Besides the heavy load of knowledge to digest, Zhao was also in hard-core parametric studio. "Through this, I have developed my confidence to establish my views and identity and contribute back to my country."

All about designing spaces that reflect life, this inspiring architect is determined to create a pleasant environment for people to live in lieu of emphasising on the materialised architecture itself. "It has to be subtle yet sophisticated at the same time...like how a cultured man behaves," remarked Zhao.

Under the tutelage of leading Japanese architect Kazuyo Sejima, Zhao had the opportunity to work on Home-for-All, a project initiated by Sejima and other leading Japanese architects in response to housing crisis following the devastation caused by the 2011 tsunami in Japan. Putting his heart and soul into every project, it was difficult for Zhao to name his favourite. "They're like your children and it's impossible to choose who you love more. I appreciate the significance of every project which impacted me in different stages of my life," Zhao confided humbly but with a sense of pride written on his face. ❖

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