



# The Noodle Rack

Changsha, China  
Luk Studio

Photography by Peter Dixie for LOTAN Architectural Photography



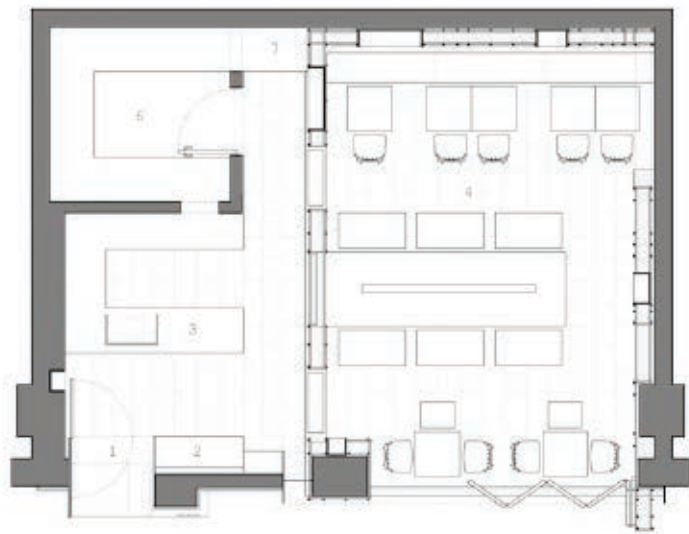
Imagining China without noodle soup shops is like imagining Seoul without facelift clinics... Just hard to do. Usually, their 'taste' is kept in the bowls, steaming with delicious carbs in broth, and they attract – if they are good – hordes of people who can't go too many days in a row without a hit. Once in a while, though still rarely, the taste is also evident in the environs, as design permeates the major city centres of China even outside Shanghai and Beijing. This tiny (50sq m) addition to the field helps elevate the experience of downing a bowl of noodles into a feast not only for the palate, but for the eyes as well, and it starts outside on the pavement.

Luk Studio, based in Shanghai, took on the commission to help LongXiaoBao establish a foothold in the soup noodle biz... with their first location of a planned expansion. The designers had to transform the tiny space, but also create a whole brand identity. The concept they descended on was the noodle rack. The site was pleasant, located along a prominent outdoor promenade in a shopping zone near the Xiangjiang River. The facade of the noodle shop, fighting for attention among the usual agglomeration of

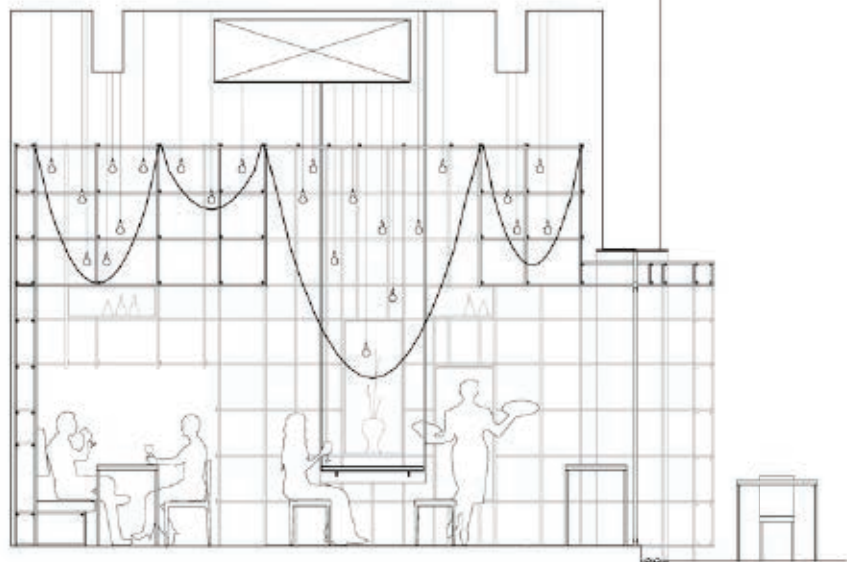
busy storefronts and signage, is a breath of fresh air. Using bamboo to cast it, the external wall presents a kind of negative 'forest' of bamboo etched onto the grey concrete surface. This is punctuated by a pair of apertures framed in rusty steel: the doorway and logo on the left, and a wide opening on the right that lets the shop spill out with tables in good weather. The latter is also a bit of self-advertising, offering an open glimpse into the alluring, dimly lighted interior space. Pushing out around the opening is what appears at first to be a steel scaffolding frame. The combination of the orange steel and pale concrete, with its captivating bamboo texture, sets up the visual essay of the design: natural with industrial, aged patina with abstracted representation, and so on. Inside, things get even more interesting.

Once past the entry counter, which is clad in bamboo casting as well, visitors encounter a metal 'cage' that is juxtaposed against a raw, concrete block wall. In fact it is the existing enclosure wall of the space, which the designers have stripped of stucco and paint to make of it a backdrop canvas for the cage. Into the latter





- 1 MAIN ENTRANCE
- 2 WAITING AREA
- 3 CASHIER
- 4 DINING AREA
- 5 OUTDOOR DINING AREA
- 6 KITCHEN
- 7 SERVICE STATION





are placed varied wood boxes that can hold decorative elements such as porcelains. The clash of the rough materials is handsome and exciting, and it is capped with a dramatic overhead soffit of hanging metal wires and suspended lightbulbs. The wires are draped to produce a gentle curvature that recalls elaborate chandeliers, but also strands of edible noodles. The curves of silvery wires play well against the relentlessness of the square steel grid, and the dispersed lightbulbs make a 'night sky' of the overhead lighting. It is triumph of complementary elements, each quite simple in its own right but adding up to something sort of wondrous. Straightforward wood tables and bench-stools complete the space. Well, actually the soup noodles do. And if they are half as delicious as the design, we pray for a branch to open soon in Hong Kong.