

Lukstudio creates a prefabricated showcase for Chinese designers in Shanghai



The modular lightweight structure of die-cast aluminum channels creates an open frame that can be disassembled.

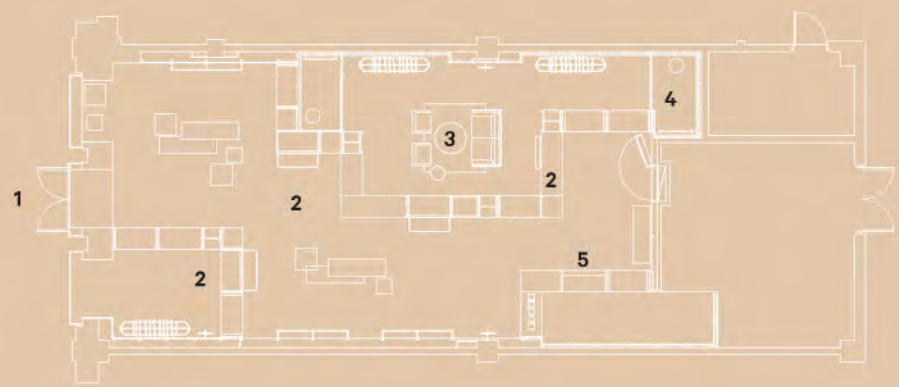
# Modular Jilong

By Michael Webb  
Photography by  
Dirk Weiblen





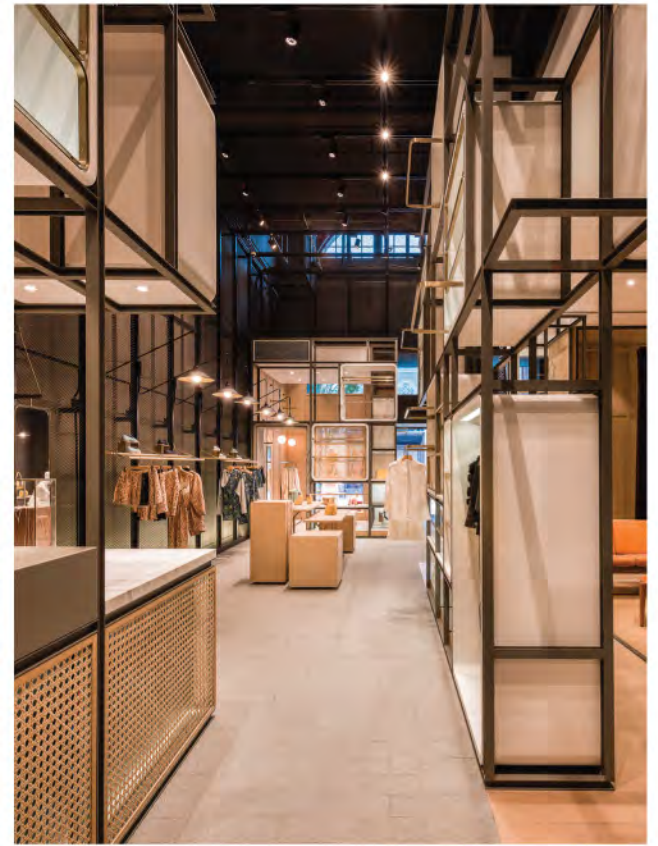
The display frames open onto narrow, stone-paved "streets" (opposite, right), which are complemented by plinths that evoke an urban streetscape vernacular (above). The austere installation utilizes three primary materials—wood, steel, and stone—in order to emphasize the garments, which hang from projecting rails in a manner that resembles laundry hung out to dry on washing lines (above, center).



Floor Plan  
 1 Entrance  
 2 Modular displays  
 3 Seating area  
 4 Dressing room  
 5 Cashier



**Modular Lilong**  
 Architect **Lukstudio**  
 Client **Value Retail**  
 Where **Shanghai**  
 What **1,500 square feet on one floor**  
 Cost/sf **Withheld at client's request**  
 For a full project source list, see page 84 or visit [contractdesign.com](http://contractdesign.com).



"Blaze a path" is a rough translation of *Chuang x Yi*, the name of a concept brand that provides a platform for up-and-coming Chinese fashion designers. The brand's new 1,500-square-foot retail space, known as The Modular Lilong, is a welcome addition to Shanghai Village, a mall in Shanghai that is the latest venture of Value Retail, an American company. Shanghai-based designer Christina Luk and her firm Lukstudio were tasked to develop a bespoke interior for The Modular Lilong within the otherwise bland mall context. Inspired by the winding alleys and tight-knit buildings of the city's older vernacular, Luk created an abstracted version of the *lilong*, the urban typology for these vibrant warrens of the old city.

A recent arrival in Shanghai, Luk grew up in Hong Kong and honed her design skills in London and Toronto before establishing her small studio. She describes her adopted city as "the New York of the Orient, a place that the Chinese look to for new ideas. And it has a culture of the custom-made—the talk is about where to get clothes or furniture made. Clients demand that everything be fast, economical, and have a 'wow' factor."

**Simulating an urban village**

Delivering on this expectation, Luk's design for The Modular Lilong fuses tradition and invention. Her client requested an interior that could be disassembled and transferred to another location. Within a double-height, 33-foot-tall space, Luk devised a lightweight structure of die-cast aluminum channels that are either bolted or welded together to create open frames simulating houses with beech





wood floors. These open onto narrow, stone-paved "streets." A round-cornered portal evokes the old stone gates that served as points of entry to urban villages. The same geometry carries over into the lacquered wood display cases, which are open-sided or partially enclosed with bamboo rattan, a material commonly used in traditional Chinese furniture. Clothing hangs from projecting rails like the laundry that is hung out to dry on washing lines in the *lilongs*.

This homage to the past serves a double purpose. Within the tall space, Luk created a sense of intimacy that enhances the impact of the clothes while reminding shoppers of a legacy that deserves to be cherished before it slips away. The simplicity of the installation's emphasis on three materials—wood, steel, and stone—is a foil to the varied colors and fluid forms of the garments.

#### Shopping as theater

"The conventional wisdom in retail is that any rack space that is out of reach has no value," says Luk. "So we had to persuade the client to let us extend the frames beyond the customary eight feet while

The displays feature lacquered wood cases that are either open-sided or partially covered by the traditional Chinese furniture material bamboo rattan (right). Accompanied by hanging racks, the display cases are varied in shape and placement (opposite, top). A beech-veneered lounge area with a low ceiling offers comfortable seating (below).



#### Key Design Highlights

Creating a conceptualized version of the winding alleys and tight-knit buildings of old Shanghai, the design incorporates a structure of die-cast aluminum channels, which open onto narrow, stone-paved walkways akin to streets.

Display plinths are positioned along the lanes to echo the street benches and scattered stools in older quarters of the city.

The lightweight structure can easily be disassembled and reinstalled if needed.

Open displays allow for a clear visual dialogue throughout the interior, while utilizing wood, steel, and stone to highlight the colorful fluidity of the garments.



staying within the budget. We were partially successful; the central frame rises to 16 feet, demonstrating that the clothes that are out of reach can serve as a backdrop and remain a part of the narrative."

The store's modular centerpiece, soaring into the void, is the most dramatic feature in a space that wraps itself around the shoppers like the clothes they've come to try on. Luk designed a diversity of scale, from a low-ceilinged, beech-veneered lounge area with comfortable seating, to plinths that echo the street benches and scattered stools in older quarters of the city. The shape and placement of the display cases are also varied to complement the racks.

In its raw immediacy, the interior resembles a black-box theater, allowing customers to feel as if they are actors navigating an open set. In contrast to the otherwise brash commercialism of Shanghai Village, The Modular Lilong offers a distinctive experience that is meticulously calibrated and crafted. e