

Why Ren Chi for Public Space

In today's urban environment, the so-called "common ground" between objects is a sea of chaotic ideas and actions of its citizens, which shapes an invisible infrastructure of culture and society – the public space. Its symbolizes the conduits of energy exchange between different parts of the city, and a magic field that represents the spirit of place. The urban age is happening at a dizzying pace and with a scale, diversity, complexity and level of connectivity that challenges the traditional design paradigms. Building public space in such transformation requires ideas for more open, sustainable and inclusive city, and greater social considerations. Next generation city buildings have actively looked for innovative ideas from urbanization frontiers that are beneficial to other regions of the world.

The language of "Ren Chi" originated from one of the world's largest urbanizers, China, and describes the kind of contemporary urban space with a prominent quality of lasting vitality and life energy. Translated from Chinese characters 人 (Ren) means humanity, while 气 (Chi) means air, with an extended meaning of spirit, or life energy (in Daoist philosophy). Successful Ren Chi principles create magic public realm that is memorable, highly used and celebrating the Spirit of given context.

On the other hand, why have many designers and planners failed to create Ren Chi? The lack of liberal arts spirit and social science methodology in the thinking process creates obstacles. Secondly, prevalent professional and cultural tendencies of our age place emphasis on individual and isolated actions, and seldom address the shared ideas and continuity among different pieces and disciplines. As Holly Whyte once advocated in his sociology research for public space design, people should use "a new way of designing public spaces – one that was bottom-up, not top-down. Using his approach, design should start with a thorough understanding of the way people use spaces, and the way they would like to use spaces". In addition, the "once-popular" over-specification and formal layout tend to present a sense of power and grandness, but they are not flexible and adaptive systems to hold everyday life energy, which is spontaneous, non-institutional, and even disordered.

Acknowledging the Ren Chi effect of a strong public realm, how can the idea of Ren Chi be observed, measured and developed next? Should it be constructed as a critical theory, or a set of intuitional design guidelines? The theoretical framework of RENCHI Space would be built on the observations and theoretical arguments of sociology, environmental psychology, economics, policy making and many related disciplines. Once the DNA of the context is captured, visual forms need to work under such spirit in building an enduring physical "conduit" that is instrumental in holding the energy of the city, and expressive of life process in the most legible and intensive way.

COMPLEXITY

POTENTIALITY

DIVERSITY

INFORMALITY

Building vibrant public space requires a deep understanding of what creates the Spirit of a place, and working with a culturally specific framework to embrace the user's ability and attempt to shape their own city. Ren Chi does not merely glorify individual architectural icons, instead, seeking the "relationship" and "connection" between parts, and the "energy" radiated from people's activity. Examples of places with intensive Ren Chi are not necessarily constructed with the most expensive materials or perfect forms, but are highly successful in attracting people, and expressing the "spirit" of how different programs and people come together seamlessly. As Rem Koolhaas once pointed out at a vernacular traditional village in Taiwan, "From a design perspective, the first

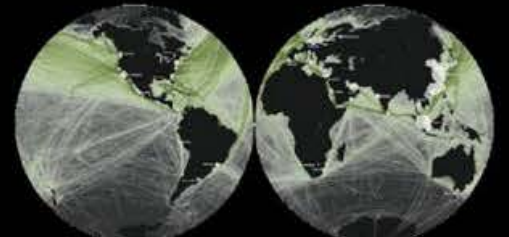


DENSITY

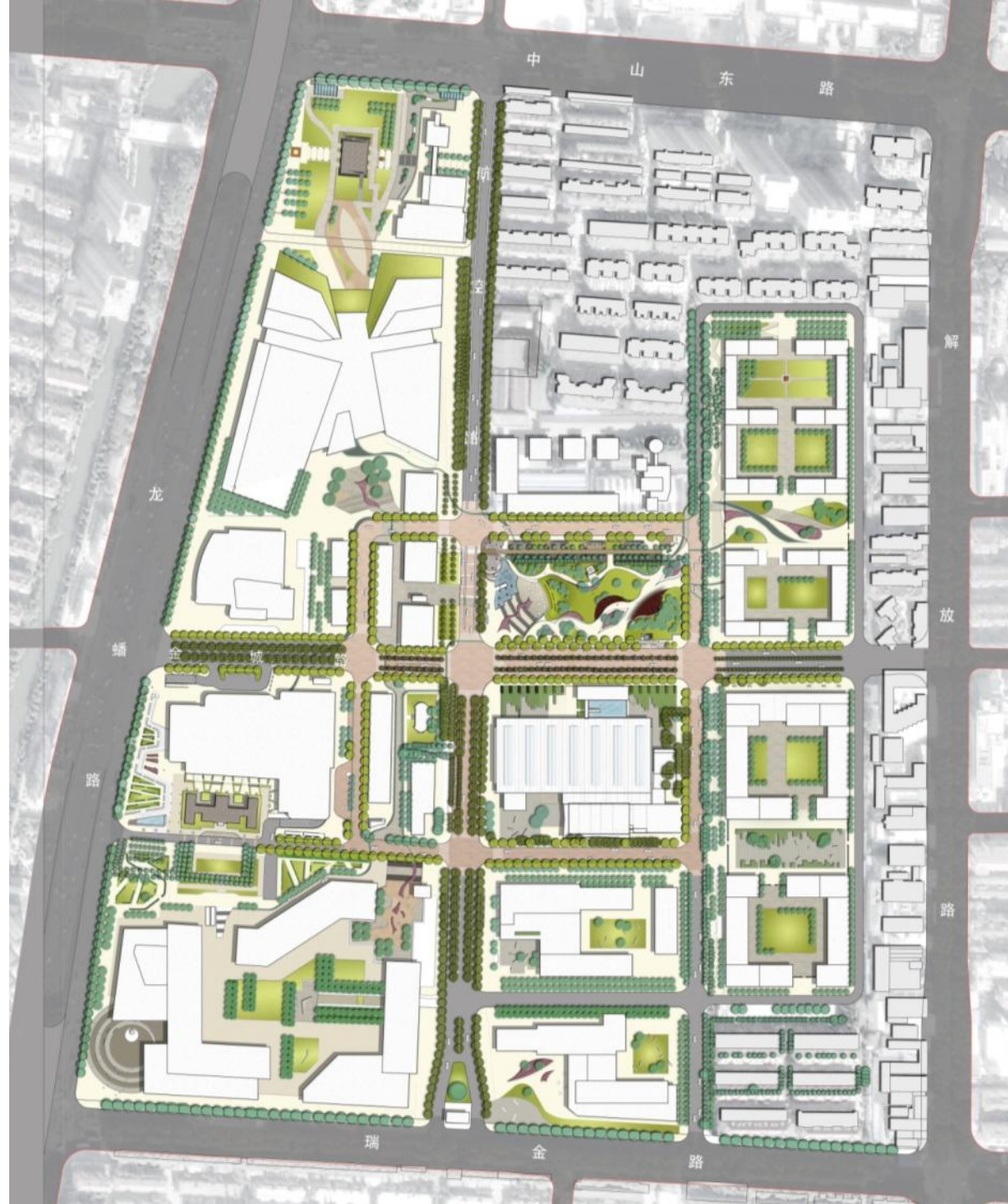
FLEXIBILITY

COMPLEXITY

CONNECTION WITH NATURE



PUBLIC RENCHI SPACE



**NANJING AVIC
TECHNOLOGY CITY**

2011-2013



绿植篇 ▲

项目中大片原有的绿植奠定了景观的框架和基调，但新建道路和建筑地下空间的引入使得很多树木需要移除，我们细致地研究场地上每处的情况，平衡各种考虑后得出一个兼顾保留、新建和移植等策略的最佳方案，使得场地的“记忆”可以在城市的“生长”过程中留有清晰的痕迹。这种做法最大地保证了关键的现有绿植资源的保护，保持了场地生态系统的延续性。



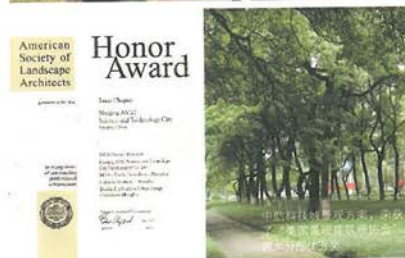
中央公园篇 ▲

中央公园是中航科技城的绿核与人气中心，也是大量场地移植的林木“安家”新场所。其规划和设计充分考虑了场地各个地块与公园的步行和视线之间的联系，以塑造一个集中体现人文和场地特色的公共空间。景观着力打造的是一种“Stylish nature”（新创风格的自然），以风格耳目一新的景观小丘、艺术花坛、音乐喷泉、下沉广场以及休闲广场等将公园绿地和地下商业两个部分流畅地串联起来，并使得移植的林木坐落一个极强艺术造型感的空间中，完善“城市森林”的概念。公园的设计加强了社区人群和商业来访者对于社区核心区的精神体验，并可以在公园中充分享受各各时段、各种目的的休闲活动与事件，形成了一幅生生不息、动静有致的城市生活画卷。

中航科技城大厦商业花园篇 ▼

中航科技大厦作为项目的首期开发，充分体现了商业开发与历史保护的结合，总体景观设计理念在“寸土寸金”地块中实现。如何才能在竞争激烈的今天，打造一座档次不凡的商业景观环境呢？

SWA倡议了一个绿色的城市花园休憩空间，使得广场层面的人们可以在购物用餐之余漫步在广场周边，享受花园的宜人环境；而高层办公区的人们也可以眺望到地面上“图案醒目”的花园植栽。从设计师的视角来看，人的活动会吸引注意力，进而吸引更多的人参与到活动中，城市花园会为商业的运作吸引人气、增加价值。在“人文价值”观居首位的今天，一个高档次的城市开发项目会通盘考虑新建场所给社群、商家和访客带来的综合利益，其实也就是通过“场所的营造”形成极具吸引力的地标，最终会大大地推广品牌效应。中航科技大厦的景观设计旨在将“写字楼”、现有树林以及现代感很强的新建酒店、写字楼有机结合，打造一处吸引人气、令人印象深刻的城市景观空间，成为展现中航科技城整体开发理念的一个窗口。



Magazine article

The Old and New, intertwined in Urban Place Making

As one of the capital cities of Imperial China, Nanjing is stepping up rapidly to become a dynamic metropolis in the Yangtze River delta, one of the biggest economic hubs of China. Nanjing AVIC Science and Technology City is envisioned to be one of the most innovative new communities in Nanjing's historic core area. With architectural remnants dating back to the Ming Dynasty (1300s BC), the Republic of China (1920s BC), and clusters of existing tree groves, the site presents a unique opportunity for the new development to capitalize on these invaluable features while creating an active new urban landmark with mixed use programs. At the same time, the high density new development and traffic planning really challenge preserving the scale and character of the historic landscape elements.

The design intent was to introduce a strategy that maximizes the benefits of having both “Old” and “New” coexist harmoniously in building a highly attractive urban destination, setting an example for similar cases in fast urbanization areas on incorporating culture and history into new city building processes that promote urban energy and dynamics while maintaining a strong sense of place.



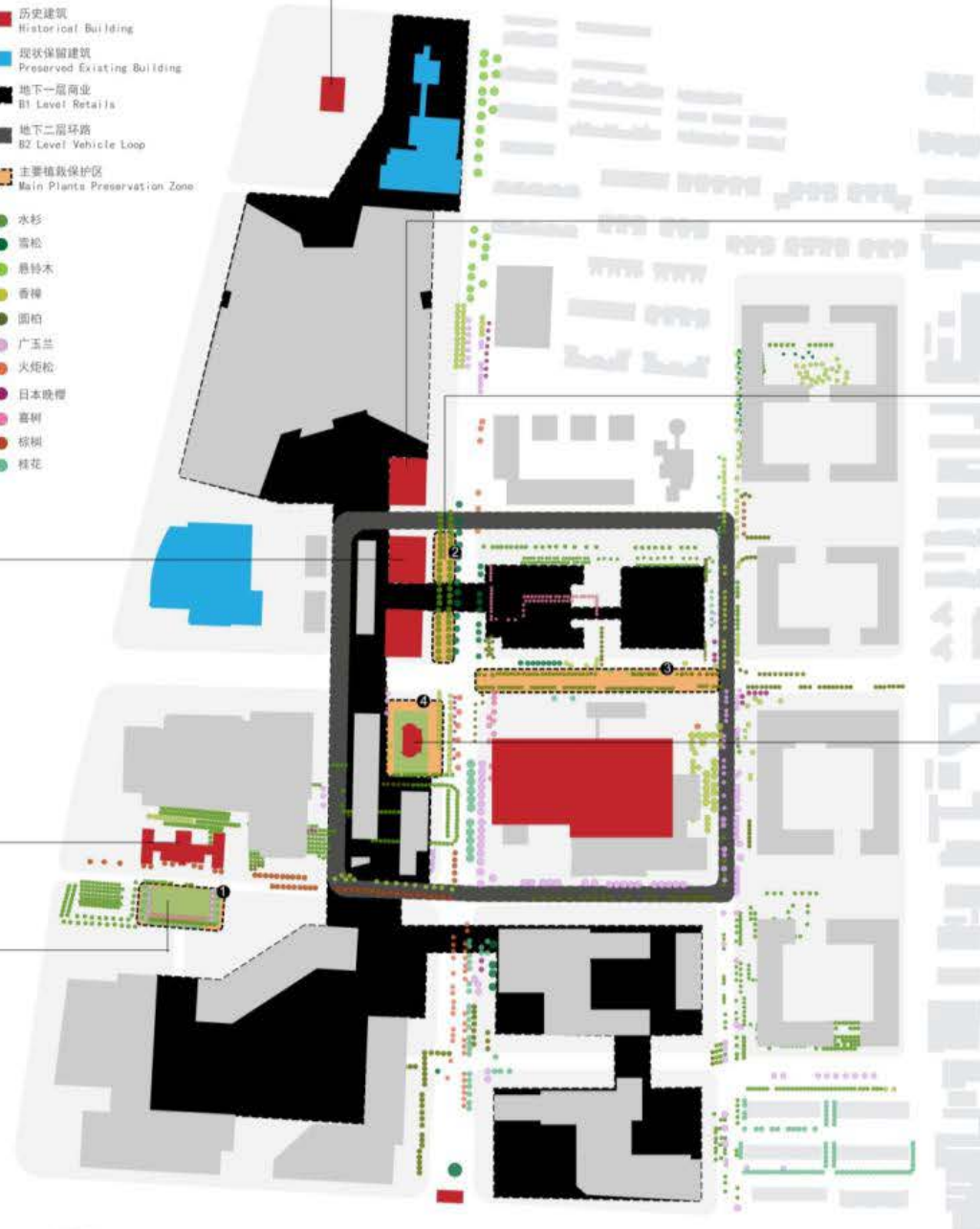
Existing vegetation

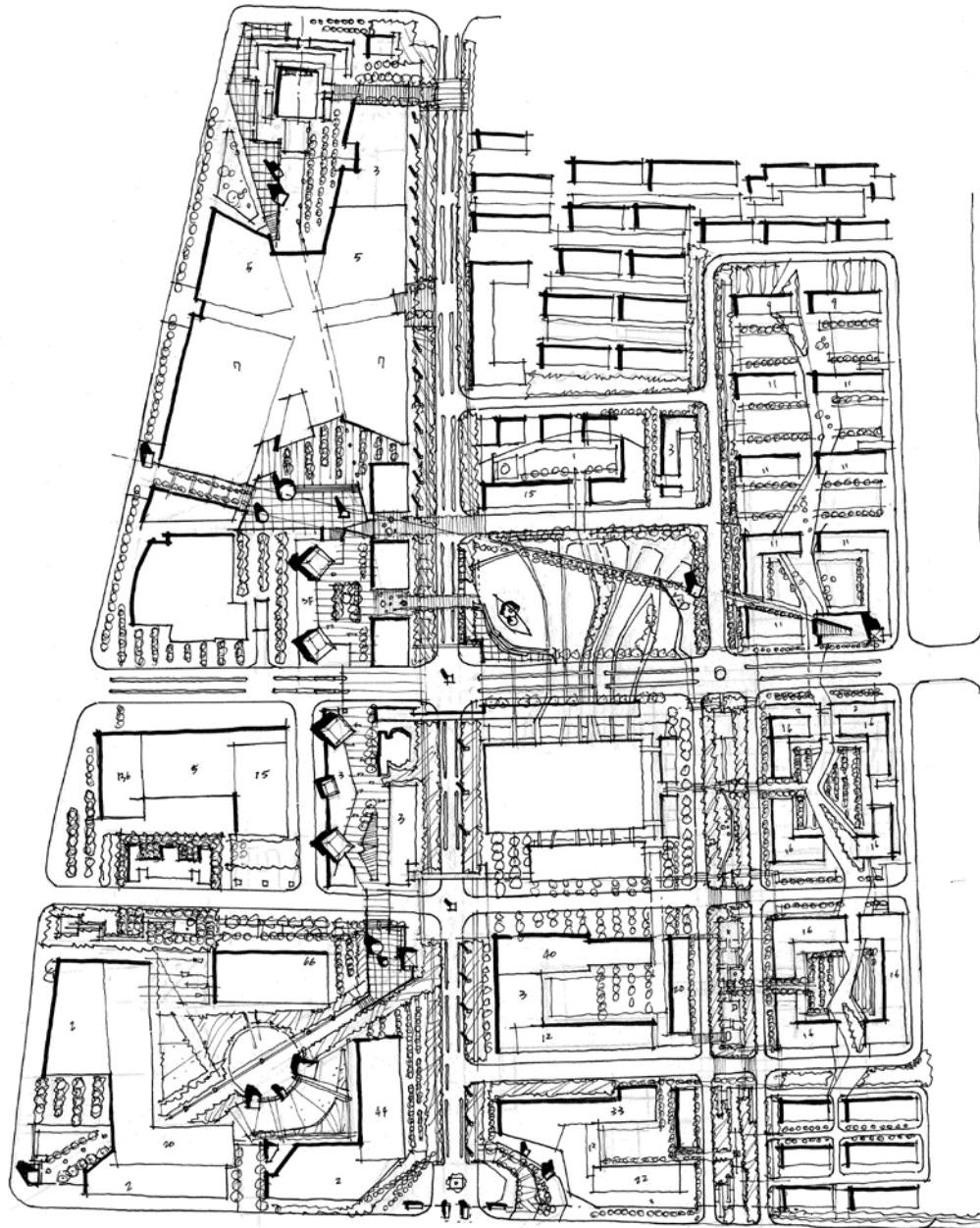
PRESERVATION DIAGRAM



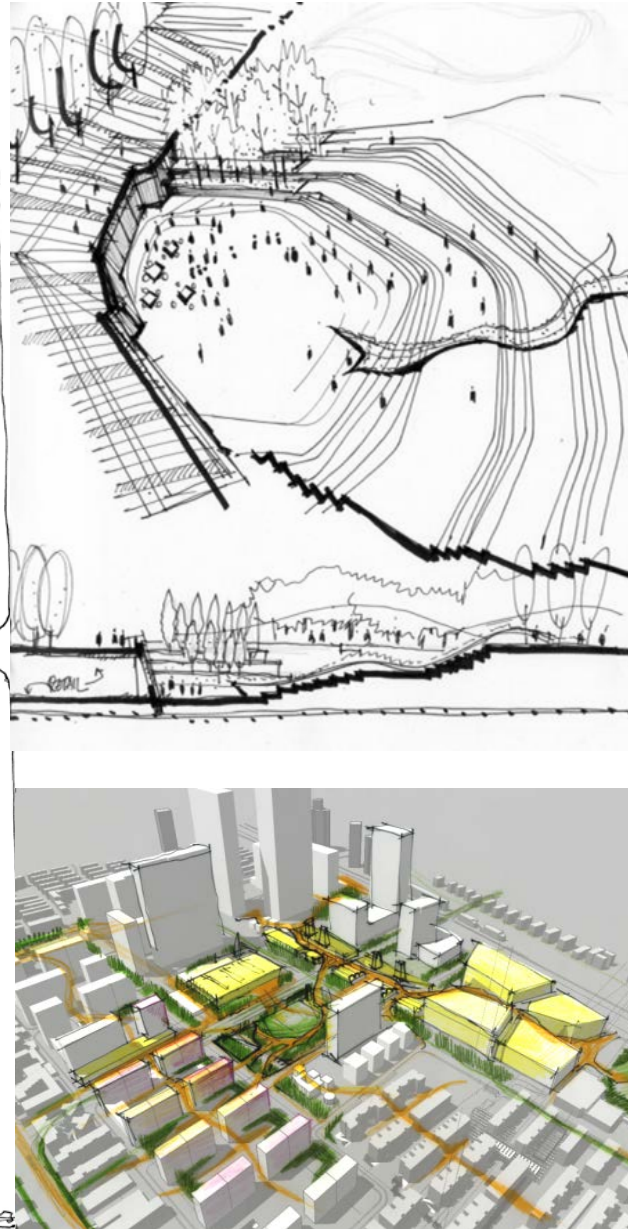
图例 LEGEND

- 历史建筑
Historical Building
- 现状保留建筑
Preserved Existing Building
- 地下一层商业
B1 Level Retail
- 地下二层环路
B2 Level Vehicle Loop
- 主要植被保护区
Main Plants Preservation Zone
- 水杉
- 雪松
- 悬铃木
- 香樟
- 圆柏
- 广玉兰
- 火炬松
- 日本晚樱
- 喜树
- 栎树
- 桂花





PROCESS SKETCH



Overall landscape framework:

Together with the owner, careful site investigations and analysis were conducted to fully understand the contextual setting, existing tree conditions, and the social and economic expectation of the development. A set of landscape planning strategies were developed to not only preserve the old, but also build a durable framework that allows new programs to fit into and grow over time. After studying the proposed architectural and traffic planning, landscape character zones and linear links were identified, which later informed a framework with a distinct transitional sequence, from historical-scaled landscape within the central loop area to more contemporary landscape at site perimeter. A north-south grand boulevard was proposed to become a signature spine with existing and transplanted camphor trees, newly introduced paving and furniture elements within its sidewalk zone. The corridor connects different programs and landscape zones and provides a strong legible linkage between “history” and “future” of AVIC city.



LANDSCAPE FRAMEWORK

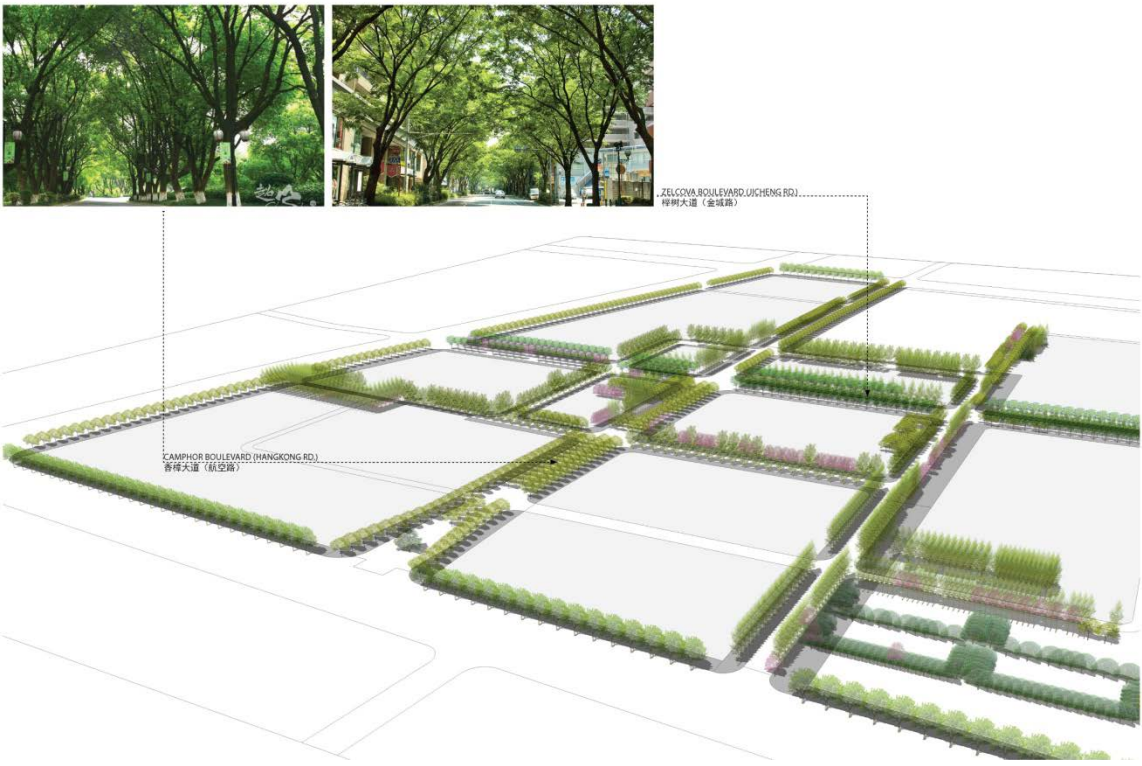
Open Space typology:

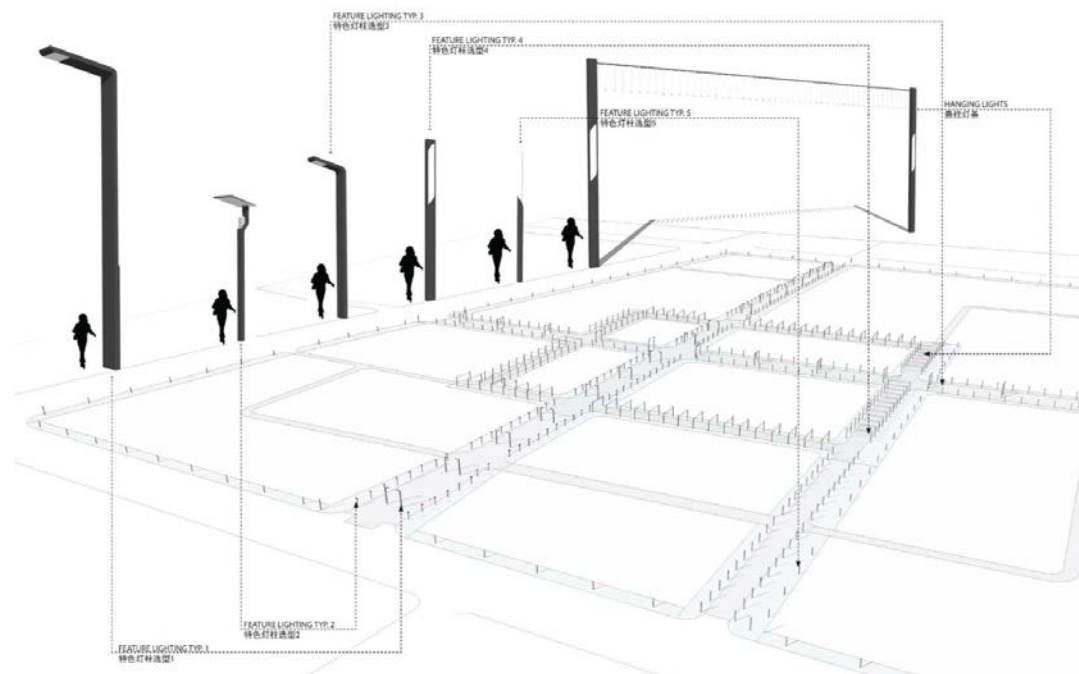
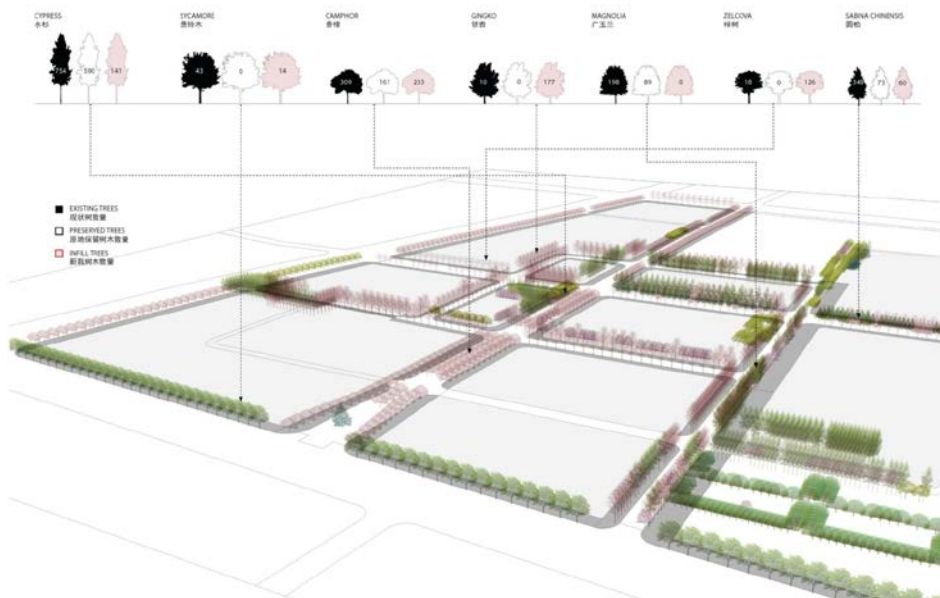
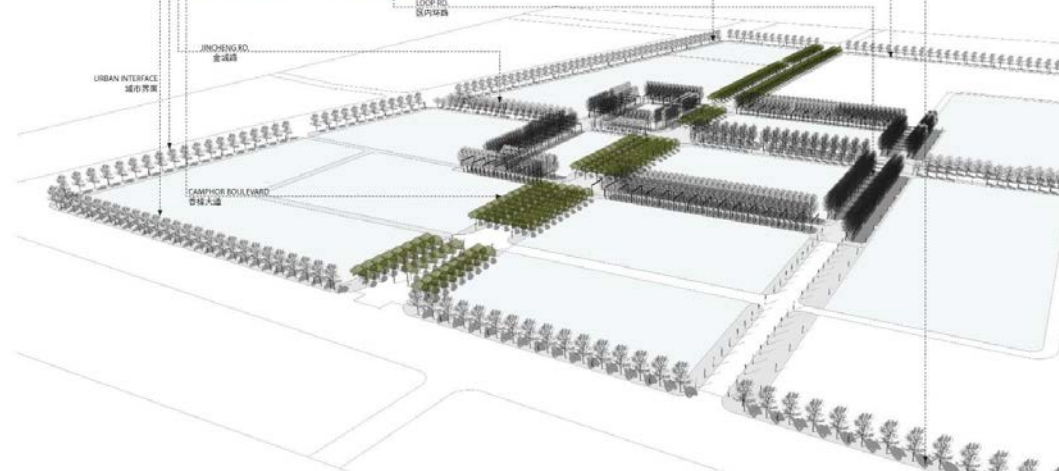
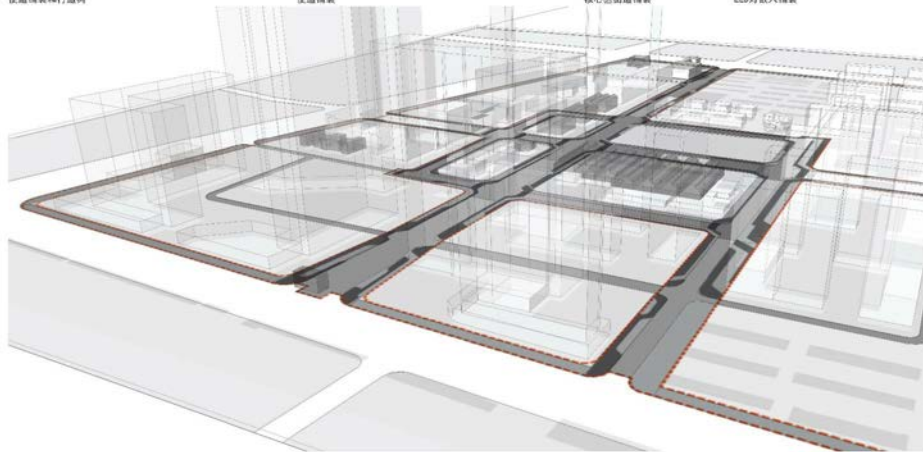
The team proposed a variety of urban public spaces with different usage typologies, and at multi elevations required by the complex architectural conditions, including underground level retail plazas, ground level parks and streetscape system. Major outdoor spaces including the central park, Camphor Boulevard, the residential promenade, neighborhood green spaces, and retail plazas are proposed to support adjacent programs. The system allows urban living, working, shopping and leisure activities to take place within walking distance from home and office and within distance of a major subway station at the north border. Depending on types and locations, different forms and materials were utilized to craft spaces, including an active and sophisticated urban plaza near new program areas to quiet and relaxing green gardens near the historical building. At the same time, a visually rich and consistent paving motif and lighting vocabulary were applied throughout the pedestrian network within the site area which effectively ties individual pieces into the AVIC specific open space network.



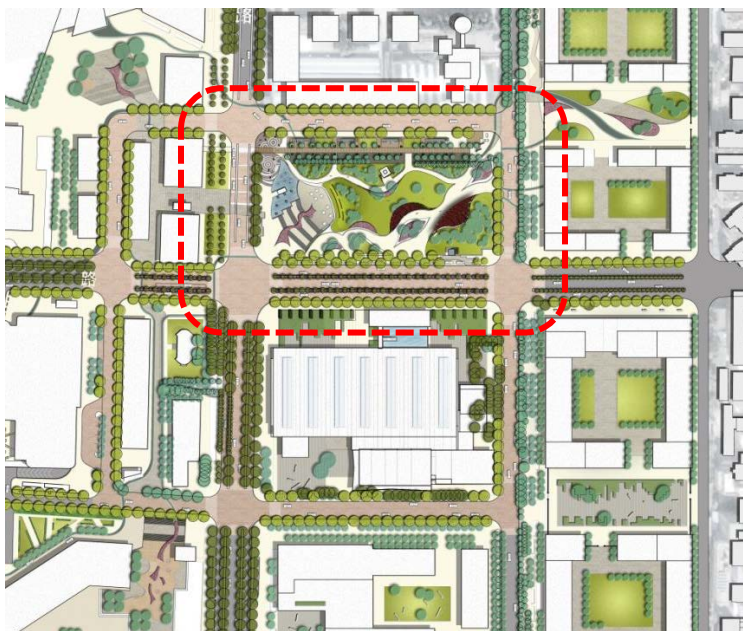
Tree preservation/transplanting:

One of the major efforts was to strategically preserve the existing groves and take full advantage of their ecological and visual value. Due to the high development density introduced, only certain key areas of existing groves could be 100% preserved on site, while many existing trees are planned to be transplanted to newly proposed central parks, street corridors or neighborhood parks based on their size, landscape value and available transplanting techniques. A series of workshops were conducted with the owner and other consultants to determine an optimum plan that comprehensively addresses a balance of “old and new” in the greenery system, and to define the character of major streetscapes.





identification strategy



CENTRAL PARK

Art park with preserved urban forest
and sunken retail plaza



Social aspect of making place:

On top of form and functions of landscape space, social and cultural considerations are carefully incorporated into making a “people oriented” open space that can be actively used all the time. The space design advocates for pedestrian only plazas, well designed site furniture systems, and sophisticated urban lighting elements that create desirable urban living rooms at AVIC city. Nanjing is traditionally known for a slow life style and leisure activities in its green parks, lakes and mountains. The future of its growth has clearly called for more energetic and dynamic urban centers that can make it internationally popular. The parks and plazas of AVIC will need to attract people from everywhere while keeping its most authentic characteristics for local residents to remember and enjoy. The old and new, active and passive in spatial characters and programs “collide and merge” at major landscape areas, including the Central Park in the core area, City Gate park/retail at the north border, and the City Garden at the western border.



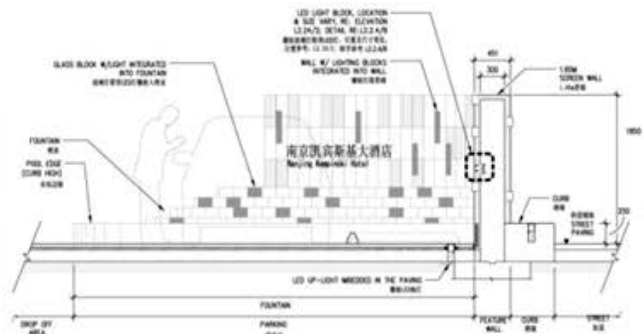
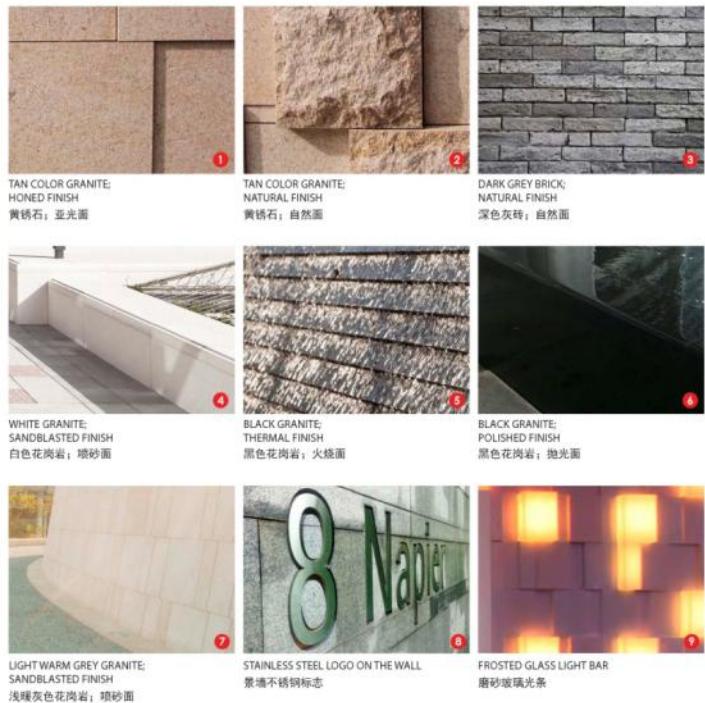
CITY GARDEN PARCEL

As the Phase I development, **City Garden** is a landscape space next to several new office and hotel towers. The site contains preserved historical buildings and an impressive cypress tree grove. While keeping the old building’s exterior and surrounding the structure with a steel edged lawn panel, a seamless transition from the old and new was achieved by introducing a nicely scaled pedestrian street bar, outdoor seating and quiet garden spaces between the historical building and retail floors under the tower. At the south and west retail entrance, the team proposed a parking -free urban plaza with a fresh looking garden environment that accommodates seating, planting and a reflection pool. It activates the space by attracting people to come and enjoy the garden from surrounding urban neighborhoods.



CITY GARDEN PARCEL





① LIGHTING BLOCK INTEGRATED INTO WALL 壁燈灯箱 ② COLOR GLASS LIGHTING BLOCK 玻璃燈灯箱 ③ COLOR GLASS LIGHTING BLOCK 玻璃燈灯箱示意图 ④ STEEL SIGNAGE REF. IMAGE 鋼制酒店招牌示意图