



ROBIN LEE ARCHITECTURE

PRESS ENQUIRIES

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PRESS RELEASE

CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE FOR IRELAND**02/2019**

Construction of the first custom-designed Confucius Institute, part funded by the Irish Government and the Chinese Government, is now complete, and students of Chinese language and culture will settle into their new home on the UCD campus in Dublin.

The design by Robin Lee Architecture was selected following a 2013 competition organised by the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI), and the construction value of the new building is €8 million.

Modelled on institutions such as the Alliance Française, British Council and Goethe-Institut, Confucius Institutes are designed to promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries. Since 2004, over 500 have opened on university campuses around the world. The UCD Confucius Institute for Ireland has operated since 2006 and aims to strengthen cultural and business links between Ireland and China. It attracts students from primary and secondary schools, members of the public, as well as university students and exporters who wish to tap into the Chinese market.

Openness underpins the design. The ambition has been to create a building that is timeless in its design, and inclusive and belonging to eastern and western cultures to facilitate cultural sharing and exchange.

The design is influenced both by Chinese courtyard buildings and by cloisters found in western architecture, where learning and contemplation are linked with the ritual of walking, and student wellbeing is enhanced by proximity to nature.

Located on a greenfield, lakeside site at the heart of the University College Dublin campus, the 2,059m² building takes the form of a tiered glass pavilion in the landscape, designed to complement the scale and character of the existing campus while making subtle reference to forms and treatments associated with Chinese culture.

The external form consists of a series of square floor-plates stacked vertically, each one progressively smaller than the one below, creating a ziggurat form analogous to traditional Chinese building forms. This arrangement makes each floor legible and creates an open, generous ground floor level while delivering a human-scaled building linked to its surroundings – a series of four gardens inspired by Chinese landscapes.

The building is organised over three levels. The ground floor is occupied principally by collective and social spaces required for the Confucius Institute, such as the 100-seat auditorium, display galleries, library and restaurant. The arrangement allows these functions to be used independently of the dedicated teaching and research spaces on the first floor, and administration and conferences spaces on the second floor.

The ground floor is conceived as an open forum, planned in a clear orthogonal manner associated with traditional Chinese typologies, such as courtyard houses (siheyuan) and larger palace complexes like the Forbidden City. It is expressed sculpturally with faceted exterior panels of sandblasted Jura limestone, creating tectonic portal frames with expansive glazing which showcase the public activities inside, drawing people into the building in a gesture of openness. Slabs of the same stone, carefully selected from limestone quarries around Dietfurt in Bavaria, are used throughout the ground floor, creating a seamless transition from outside in. The tiered form gives weight to the building, anchoring it on the south elevation to a formal terrace with stepped access, which is in counterpoint to the informal network of paths and routes around the campus.

The two upper levels are extensively glazed and detailed throughout with gold-anodised aluminium, which creates a shimmering appearance in the daylight hours and animates the building like a lantern at night and during the winter months. In contrast to the ground floor, which has expansive flush glazing, deep aluminium mullions on the upper levels provide shading, privacy and a finer scale to the study areas, meeting rooms and offices. Ventilation openings are concealed behind fixed perforated panels, giving the building a uniform elevational treatment. The panels are detailed with a lattice pattern abstracted from traditional Chinese motifs developed following research visits to Beijing and Suzhou.

At the centre of the plan is a European oak-lined atrium rising up through three storeys and capped with a timber lattice structure, which floods the middle of the building with daylight. The atrium serves as a legible wayfinding space from which all activities can be seen and accessed. It punctuates the building, imparting serenity to the heart of the building and delivering daylight and natural ventilation to a spacious ground floor. A composition of columns occupies the ground floor, creating a forest-like experience around an open central space suitable for gatherings, performances and cultural events.

The first floor accommodates education spaces (classrooms, tutorial rooms and seminar spaces) to meet the needs of the Confucius Institute teaching programme. An elevated and outward-looking aspect with views across the adjacent lake and wider campus encourages an awareness of the surrounding landscaped environment as a backdrop to the learning activities.

On the second floor are directors' offices, visiting teachers' offices, administration spaces and a 30m² conference room which can function as a hospitality space in conjunction with the directors' activities. The stepped-back position combined with tall glazed panels creates generous, light-filled spaces which command fine open views of the campus.

Exploring a narrative of 'otherness', the Confucius Institute is conceived by the architect as a freestanding, autonomous structure not beholden to the scale or character of the surrounding buildings, yet anchored to its immediate setting. It is approached from the south, where a formal terrace at entrance level is reached by steps that extend the full width of the building. Along the east is a gravel garden; a suitable setting for installing Chinese artworks and curated artefacts. The garden has been planted with honey locust trees, positioned to create privacy and screening to the adjacent library. To the north is a grove of ginkgo trees, native to China, which are historically associated with the production of medicine and food. To the west is a linear garden densely planted with birch and bamboo, giving access to the lake.

Robin Lee, Director, Robin Lee Architecture, said:

"Sited on the UCD campus among a fine collection of 20th century modernist buildings, we were interested in a building language with a universal identity to allow the Confucius Institute to sit comfortably on campus, but we also saw it as a unique place offering a programme from another place; another culture. This allowed the design to attain another



kind of expression. We developed an interest in traditional Chinese typologies, many of them courtyard-type buildings, and it was through understanding the composition of these that we arrived at physical forms and arrangements of space that would allow the building to be culturally specific and expressive. We sought an identity that would be familiar to and connect with a Chinese audience, and conversely to introduce to a western audience idiomatic motifs associated with Chinese culture. In this way we sought an expression that would resonate with Chinese cultural sensibilities and traditions, and be respectful of history, typology and language.

Each elevation of the building is identical in length and height, giving the Confucius Institute a static presence at the heart of the campus, and creating a serene setting appropriate to the study of language and culture. To complement this, the building has an open expression, not overly focused on one point in history or one cultural perspective, but with an inclusive, layered identity.”

Liming Wang, Director of Confucius Institute, said:

“When seen across the lake, the new structure is a distinctive statement – an elegant pavilion in the landscape. With a clear and striking identity, it gives physical expression to the ideals of cultural sharing and exchange central to the Confucius Institute. The architects have creatively fulfilled all the objectives set out by the Confucius Institute, and the reaction from the public, students and the staff to the inspiring design has been overwhelmingly positive.”

FACTS AND CREDITS

Location	UCD Belfield Campus, Dublin, Ireland
Internal floor area	2,059m ²
Value	€8 million
Construction dates	Feb 2016 – Nov 2018
Client	University College Dublin
End user	Confucius Institute
Architect	Robin Lee Architecture
Architect of Record	Arthur Gibney & Partners
Structural engineer	AECOM
Services engineer	Varming
Fire engineering	Maurice Johnson & Partners
Façade engineering	Inhabit Europe
Access consultants	O’Herlihy Access Consultancy
Landscape architect	Mitchell + Associates
QS	Mulcahy McDonagh & Partners
Photographer	Donal Murphy Photography

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Robin Lee Architecture is a London- and Dublin-based architecture practice founded in 2002. The practice works across a range of sectors, with current and completed projects encompassing cultural, civic, heritage, arts and residential.

In addition to the Confucius Institute for Ireland, completed projects include: Kings Yard Primary Substation for London 2012 Olympics, 2010; Wexford County Council Headquarters in south west Ireland, 2011; National Sculpture Factory in Cork, 2012; a series of projects for Crispin Kelly (Baylight Properties) including Baylight offices and an apartment in west London, 2015; the conversion of a warehouse building in Wandsworth, 2016; the adaption of

a warehouse building to residential use within the historic Piper Building Estate in Fulham, 2018; and a collection of utility buildings in Eddington for University of Cambridge, 2018. Current projects include the restoration and conversion of the Grade II listed Carnegie Building to create artist studios and workspace in Erith, a brick double-villa in Herne Hill, and Biggin Hill Memorial Museum, a new museum adjacent to the Grade II listed St George's Chapel in the London Borough of Bromley, opening in February 2019.

The practice has been published nationally and internationally. Projects have been widely acclaimed with several RIBA Awards, Civic Trust Awards, RIAI Awards and AJ Small Projects Awards. The practice has been nominated for the EU Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies van der Rohe Award, and has twice reached the mid-list for the Stirling Prize.

www.robinleearchitecture.com



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