The Location

THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE ON CHINA IN THE WORLD is located at the heart of the campus of The Australian National University. It looks north to Black Mountain and is enfurled by the ‘dragon vein’ of the university, Sullivan’s Creek. At a crossroads between the humanities and sciences, student accommodation and learning facilities, the building features elements of both Australian and Chinese design. The Centre reflects aspects of the vernacular architecture of Australia while achieving a sympathetic engagement with the underlying design principles of the national capital as envisioned by Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahoney over a century ago. It reinterprets, synthesises and transforms Chinese architectural forms and elements into a language particular to its environment.

The Architect

THE BUILDING WAS DESIGNED BY GERALD SZETO 司徒佐 of Mo Atelier Szeto Architects, Beijing. For over twenty years Gerald worked with the internationally renowned architect I.M. Pei on such iconic structures as the Bank of China Tower in Hong Kong, the Bank of China Head Office in Beijing, the Suzhou Museum and the Chancery of the People’s Republic of China in Washington DC. Gerald’s work with Mo Atelier Szeto includes the creation of academic buildings, offices, museums and hotels, as well as the interior design of commercial, hospitality, retail and residential projects. Recent designs include the Stanford Center and the Yenching Academy, both at Peking University, and the United World College in Changshu, Jiangsu province. Originally from Hong Kong, Gerald received a degree in architecture from Cornell University.
Mountains of China or Wuyue with the location and relative heights of the Five Sacred

The five rocks in the forecourt were found on the site of the Centre. Originally moved here from McKellar, a suburb in Belconnen, these granite rocks are positioned to accord with the location and relative heights of the Five Sacred Mountains of China or Wuyue (北、南、西、东、中) written in the last year of the monk's life.

A Spirit Wall is used to shield an entryway in traditional Chinese architecture. It originates in the belief that noxious spirits travel in straight lines, and cannot move around corners or jump. A Moon Gate is built into the Spirit Wall. Moon Gates feature in Chinese gardens. The circle in a square that forms the Moon Gate is a reference to the idea that Heaven is round and Earth is Square. The circle/square pattern is repeated elsewhere in the building.

The fan-shaped terraced garden leading to the main entrance of the Centre represents the four seasons. The first terrace features Spring with Flowering Peach, Hebes and Bergenia. The next terrace is emblematic of Winter, with Japanese Black Pine, Dogwood and Liliflora. You will see Maples, Azaleas, Abelia and Box in the Autumn terrace, and for Summer a Pine, Dogwood and Lilyturf. You will see Magnolia 'Vulcan' provides the focus, surrounded by Daphne, Abelias and Box in the Autumn terrace, and for Summer a Pine, Dogwood and Lilyturf. You will see Maples, Azaleas, Abelia and Box in the Autumn terrace, and for Summer a Pine, Dogwood and Lilyturf.

The building features two window patterns: The Plum Blossom (南) and the Pinwheel (北). The plum blossom design, inspired by the carved windows found in dividing walls in Ming and Qing gardens, the Plum Blossom Windows (two on the Executive Floor and one in The Plum Blossom Room) frame a cracked-ice pattern 冰裂花窗. This design originated in the seventeenth century and was used widely in window and door panels. The pinwheel is another traditional motif. Normally it is seen on a smaller scale, but in the window design it has been magnified. The colours used to frame the Pinwheel Windows are imperial red and traditional book-binding blue. The pinwheel design is also used in the screens surrounding The Lotus Hall of The Auditorium, The Library and The Reading Room (西), where it has been given an Art Deco inflection, making reference to Canberra's building heritage and the vision of the city's planners.

Lanterns

In March 2014, the Centre and the ANU School of Art co-hosted a visit by the Nanjing lantern makers Cao Zhenrong and Cao Hong. The Cao family has long been renowned for their handmade kites and lanterns. While in Canberra, the Cao produced lotus lanterns that are on display in the Centre. More lanterns of various sizes and designs are being made in Nanjing and will also be displayed in the building.