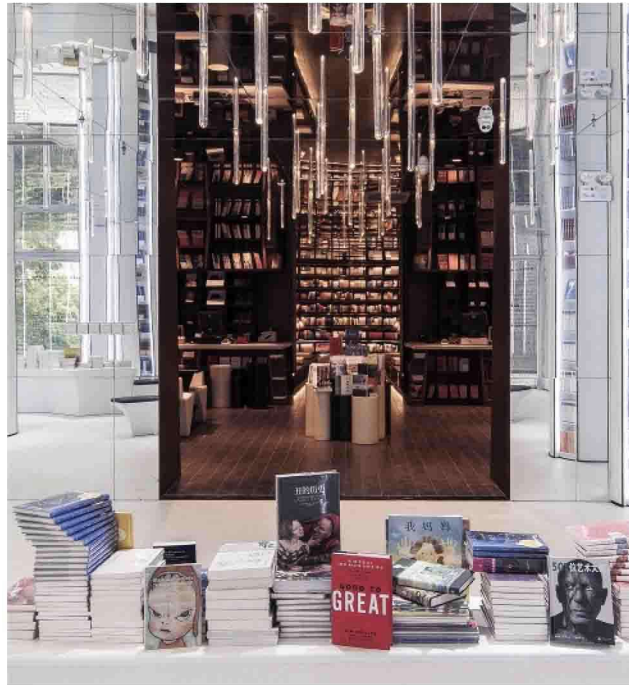




# Language of Literacy

Located in China's up-and-coming Binjiang District, the Zhongshuge bookstore leads visitors on a dreamlike visual journey.

*By Carly Hagedon, Managing Editor*



**THE FAMOUS BRITISH SCREENWRITER,** playwright, actor and author Alan Bennett is quoted as saying, “A book is a device to ignite the imagination.” While no sentiment could be truer of literature, for Shanghai-based Zhongshuge bookstore, it’s not only the books it houses, but its design that takes patrons on a whirlwind expedition of the imagination.

The Zhongshuge brand was founded by a former secondary school principal who became involved in the book industry. Recognizing the decline in bookstore relevancy, design firm XL-Muse (Shanghai) was tasked with creating a familiar destination in

an entirely new form for the retailer’s latest outpost, which opened in April 2016.

Located in the Star Avenue shopping complex in the Binjiang District of Hangzhou, the roughly 10,764-square-foot store aims to target several demographics: the “traditional generation,” which prefers printed books and collections; the “young readers of the post-’80s and -’90s,” who like reading at the store while sipping coffee from its in-store café; as well as children, according to Li Xiang, design director, XL-Muse.

While the finished product takes shoppers on a breathtaking excursion, a main challenge for the design team was the inability to adjust the ceiling



*Zhongshuge's "forest" area features mirror-clad columns and a mirrored ceiling, making the bookshelves appear endless and encouraging customers to browse.*

height upward, since the store is situated in a shopping mall. Columns throughout the space also created a hurdle. Most of these issues were mitigated by the striking mirrored ceiling the designers installed throughout, which visually expands and enhances the spaces. Most of the columns were also clad in reflective surfaces, making them appear less intrusive.

And though the various sections of the store differ wildly, the mirrored ceiling also helps visually pull the various sectors together, in conjunction with the product. "Books connect each theme, the only difference lies in the forms and colors of the bookshelves," Xiang says.

Four main zones demarcate the space. The corridor, a quiet spot for reading, is positioned like a dividing line between the mirrored "forest" area (where two main entrances are located) and the children's reading area, as well as a circular "stair" reading room toward the back. "Each area has its own meaning," says Xiang. "The transition from the white column forest to the dark [corridor] reading area is a metaphor that books are beacons which guide people to learn, from bright to dark."

Like its name implies, the forest is home to a bevy of illuminated and mirrored white columns with inset



bookshelves. The room itself is bright and airy, dotted with geometric seating arrangements that meander like a river through the columns, which represent trees. The corridor, a long hallway spanning the length of the space, also houses seating and bookshelves of varying shapes. The entrance to the circular stair reading room, directly across the corridor from the mirrored forest, has a theater-like feel, with staggered risers for sitting.

The children's area in the next room (also accessed through the corridor) is like stepping into a real life fantasy. This book-lover's playground features shelves fashioned to look like merry-go-rounds, hot air balloons and pirate ships, trains and Ferris wheels, while the main attraction is a faux-roller coaster housing product toward the center of the room. The floor doubles as an illustration of the solar system, and a range of props and fixtures helps bring the room to life.

"We hope people can be impressed by the design of this bookstore, which distinguishes it from other traditional bookstores," Xiang says. But beyond aesthetics, this space has a very simple goal. "[We want] people to come here to take a photo, drink a cup of coffee and buy a book." ▴



#### PROJECT SUPPLIERS

RETAILER  
Zhongshuge, Shanghai

DESIGN  
XL-Muse, Shanghai

FLOORING  
Shanghai Yanya Industrial Co.  
Ltd., Shanghai

FURNITURE AND PROPS/  
DECORATIVES  
XiangCASA, Shanghai

GENERAL CONTRACTOR  
Shanghai She Bao Decoration  
Design Engineering Co. Ltd.,  
Shanghai