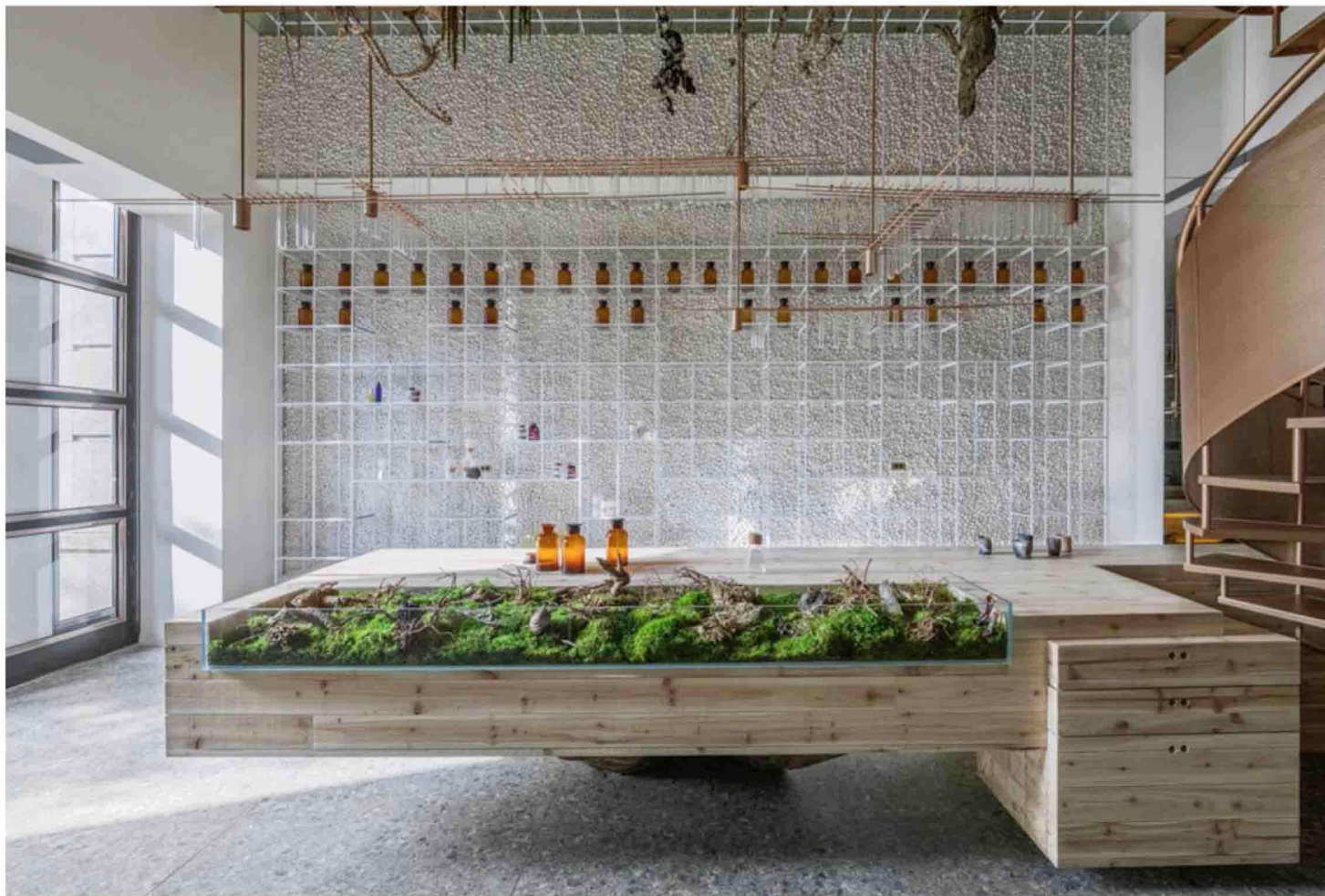


Kuomin Lee



## RETAIL

## WATERFROM rethinks the pharmacy in Taiwan

**TAICHUNG** – Few retail spaces are as uninspiring as the typical pharmacy. Display racks are crammed with phials covered with fine print, and once you've found what you need, you have join the queue at a counter to pay for your choice or pick up your prescription. Liu Yanbo is a third-generation pharmacist who resolved to create a better model. He called it Molecule, fusing the words 'molecule' and 'cure' to suggest remedies that emerge organically from nature, and he worked closely with Nic Lee of Waterfrom Design to realize his dream.

Lee founded his architecture and interior-design studio in 2008 after graduating from the Pratt Institute in New York. He shares Liu's love of nature. 'We don't rely on rulers,' he says. 'The designs I like are not purposefully neat and organized but have the freedom of natural contours.'

The challenge was to humanize a tall, narrow slot of space with a floor area of 120 m<sup>2</sup>, located near Toyo Ito's National Theater in the Taiwanese city of Taichung. A wood-block table, mounted on a century-old stump and incorporating a planter, occupies the centre of the front space, and it clearly announces that this is not your dad's pharmacy. Lee calls it the 'welcome desk'. As in an Apple store, staff circulate to answer questions and offer advice, while iPads on the table allow customers to do their own research while sipping a coffee.

To achieve a sense of intimacy, Lee inserted a spiral staircase at the midway point. It leads to a mezzanine gallery that wraps around the front half of the store and provides room for future growth, and to upper-level offices and storage at the rear. The stair is made of perforated aluminium, tinted a warm bronze to match »





Molecule eschews clinical pharmacy design through the injection of warmth — in both its materials and its hospitality-inspired service.



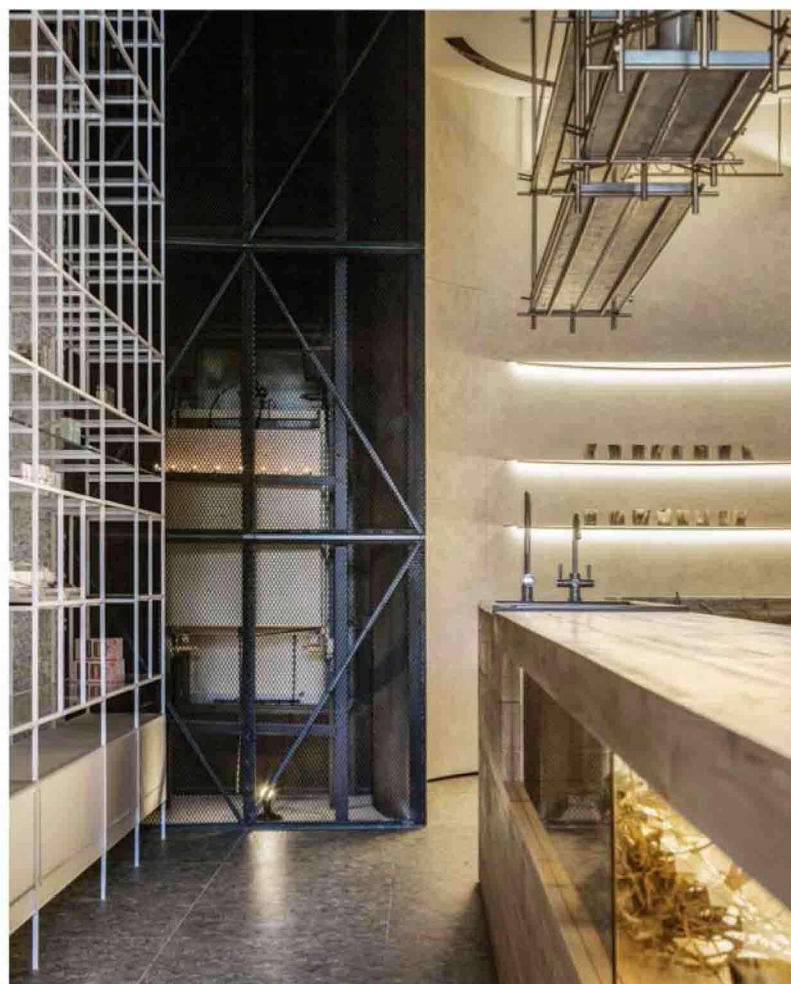
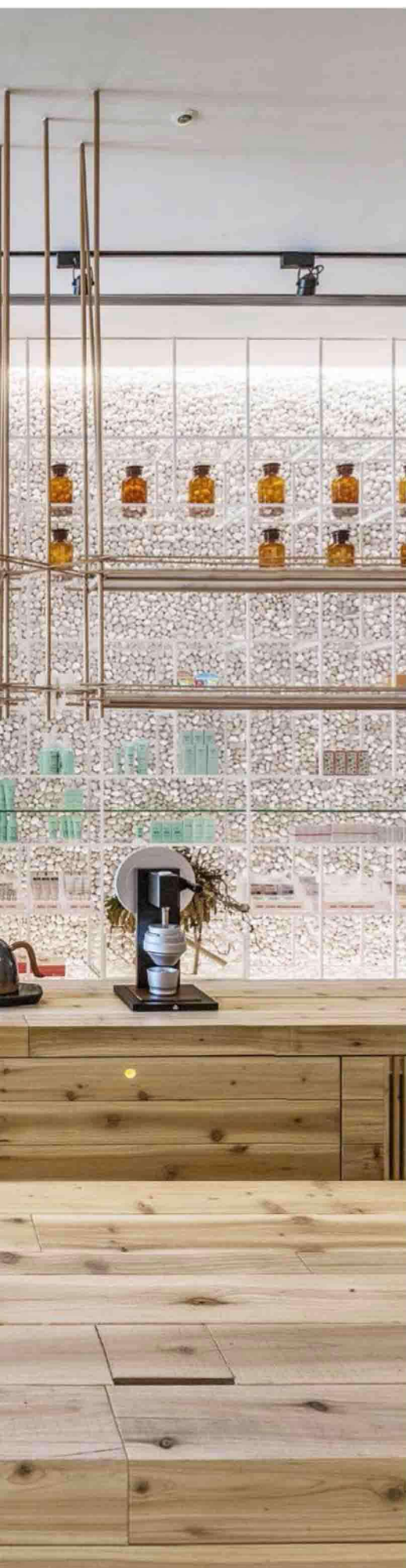








## As in an Apple store, staff circulate to answer questions and offer advice



Patrons can sit on stools at Molecule's drug bar while waiting for their medications to be prepared.

the suspended rods and light canisters that divide the space vertically. It evokes the double helix of DNA, and the laser-cut triangular openings generate dappled patterns of shadow. Behind the staircase are an open prescription counter and a drug bar, where patrons can sit on high stools waiting for their medications to be prepared – almost as agreeable an experience as waiting for a barman to mix a martini.

Side walls clad in rounded pebbles complement a terrazzo floor and a skeletal grid of display shelves that rise to the full height of the room. Though the upper levels of these display units are inaccessible, they provide visual continuity and express the idea of a molecule – a tiny building block of matter

that is itself an expandable cluster of atoms. Colourful jars serve the role of paintings, turning the grid of metal struts and glass shelves into an abstract art work. The sharp-angled structure also plays off the tree roots and branches that are suspended within the void.

In a culture that prizes herbal remedies and organic medicine, as well as products supplied by the pharmaceutical giants, Molecule's mix of order, tactility and the freedom to wander around is bound to appeal. It should also inspire fresh thinking in the West. – MW

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