THE VIEW FROM HERE

AN ARCHITECTURAL WONDER OF A HOTEL THAT'S BOOSTING CHINA'S MODERN WAVE

ALILA YANGSHUO

An hour south of the well-worn paths of Guilin, against a dramatic backdrop of towering limestone peaks, deep-cut valleys and fishing villages, is a disused sugar mill coiled into a tight curve of the Li River. Its owner had a vision to turn it into a private house, but the plans got too big, and too exciting. Seven years on and with the help of Alila, a rather extraordinary hotel has opened; the cluster of Sixties buildings has been rescued and revived by Beijing-based Vector Architects and interior firm Horizontal Space Design with knockout results. A series of lofty public spaces and suites unravels over original brickwork and exposed beams, and an understated new-build slots seamlessly into its surroundings. Outside it's an essay on concrete, softened by dark pools of water. Perforated cement screens cast dappled light onto a clean-lined, tactile interior of recycled timber and contemporary furniture, with low-slung leather benches from Shanghai-based Maxmarko and PINWU Studio's rice-paper and beech bucket chairs. The art is staggering. An extensive collection – all Chinese, from every era, mixing traditional paintings and modern sculpture – rotates around the sunken reception and the restaurant. Perspex flooring covers the subtly lit old foundations, and Communist motivational slogans painted on the exterior walls have been immaculately preserved. At a time when Chinese design is blowing our minds, here's a hotel that's already ahead of the curve, where a stay is like being part of a most avant-garde installation. LAUREN HO

alilahotels.com. Doubles from about £145

PHOTOGRAPH: **SU SHENGLIANG/COURTESY OF VECTOR ARCHITECTS**