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Overview

Our Studio

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Baker Design Group takes an enlightened approach to design, offering clients a truly bespoke architectural experience. We offer design leadership to diverse, forward-thinking clients, leveraging an ever-restless creativity and multi-layered design thinking to develop environments that delight and fascinate people.

BDG provides comprehensive services that bridge architecture, technology design, interior design, branding, industrial design, exhibit design and planning. While our thinking is grand, our designs are intimate. Spaces have function and meaning. Advanced technology is intrinsic throughout, but transparent in every way. Obstacles are removed and deep connections are formed.

At the heart of our practice is a driving passion and joy for elegant problem solving, and we embrace unique and demanding projects. Your project can set a new benchmark for excellence in your industry. But the final product will be something that you inhabit. This is why we firmly believe in supporting your goals, ambitions and vision, not ours.

Through defining architectural forms, interior design finishes and furnishings, multimedia and graphics, BDG infuses spaces with unique brand personality. The resulting design engages the senses and tells a story that celebrates your organization's unique journey. At the same time, it supports and nurtures a highly functioning environment for today, while accommodating technologies and working styles as they advance well into the future.

BDG is a Boston-based firm that practices internationally, working with a global network of designers and engineers who support the needs of our multinational clients. We have successfully completed various type projects and delighted clients in the United States and 12 other countries around the world.

Scholar Stone

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In Cambridge, Massachusetts, no trip to one of the world's pre-eminent universities is complete without a visit to the iconic statue of the school's founder. Even though the bronze monument is dark with age, that statue's toe gleams from the touch of thousands of visitors who have rubbed it for good luck.

When the university asked us to design its first permanent education center outside of campus in Shanghai, China, we wanted to find something—a relic, an element—that could take on a similar status. After considerable review and evaluation, we realize that a Chinese Scholar Stone would be an ideal fit for this exciting new educational center.

Scholar stone appreciation

For more than one thousand years, Chinese culture has valued and treasured natural formations called "scholar stones," "scholar rocks," or Gongshi. These uncarved stones come in a multitude of colors. Some have patterns that evoke images from nature, such as a forest or meadow. Others are more sculptural, depicting miniature mountain ranges. Some are prized as abstract art. Scholar stones come in a variety of sizes, weighing hundreds of pounds or even less than a pound, and are traditionally set on a rosewood pedestal base uniquely carved to position and display each stone's beauty and character.

During the Tang Dynasty (618-904 CE) a set of four principal aesthetic qualities for scholar stones were developed: thinness (Shou), openness (Tou), perforations (Lou) and wrinkling (Zhou).

Over the centuries, many scholar stones were exported around the world. As China's prosperity has grown, there has been a new desire to return the great scholar stones from the collections outside of China. The scholar stone used for the university's Shanghai Center would become true a gesture of cultural appreciation, by returning home a piece of China's rich heritage.

A cross-cultural touchstone

Working with our long-time Feng Shui consultant, we set out to find just the right stone that could become the central feature for the university's Shanghai reception lobby. It needed to be nicely scaled for the lobby space and large enough for visitors to gather around for a group photo. The stone should meet the aesthetic criteria and, if possible, it would come from the Lingbi Region just outside of Shanghai, where the most prized stones are found.

After an extensive search, we found the perfect image of a scholar stone at a gallery that specialized in the rock formations. There was no address or phone number; we assumed the gallery might be in California or even China. A quick email requesting more information got a surprisingly quick response: "Would you like to just come to the gallery and see the stone in person?" We discovered that the center for scholar stone knowledge — along with the finest scholar stones in the United States — were located not in a retail gallery, but in a quiet suburban neighborhood just outside of Boston, at the owner's home. She and her father had written the definitive reference books on the subject of Scholar Stones.

Stepping inside, you're surrounded by a treasure trove of stones of all sizes, shapes, and description. Virtually all scholar stones found in private collections and major museums across the United States, including the large scholar stone that sits outside the main entrance of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, came from this very gallery. Despite the gallery's amazing array of choices, we decided that the original stone whose image we found not only met our design criteria perfectly, but also came from the Lingbi Region.

Good luck and good Chi

Once selected, we brainstormed with our Feng Shui consultant about how we might empower the stone with special Chi or energy. He suggested that we needed to find a way to place a soil sample from the university's famous quad somewhere on or near the scholar stone. This led to a very interesting discussion with the Head of Grounds for the university. After explaining our unique situation and opportunity, he offered an alternative: Rather than us digging around the base of the statue in the campus quad, his team of groundskeepers were sent to get us soil from the base of the iconic founder's statue.

The soil was placed in a small, engraved cylinder, which was then inserted into the stone's rosewood base. The hole was covered with an engraved brass plaque that featured a unique design motif created for the Center: Traditional Chinese symbols combined to form a new symbol that translates to "Prosperity from Earth to Heaven". The plaque is made from brass and left uncoated, so that it will naturally tarnish just like the founder's statue. Our hope is that the scholar stone and the plaque will become the touch point of good luck and good Chi for everyone who visits the center — and that the plaque will shine brightly for many years to come.