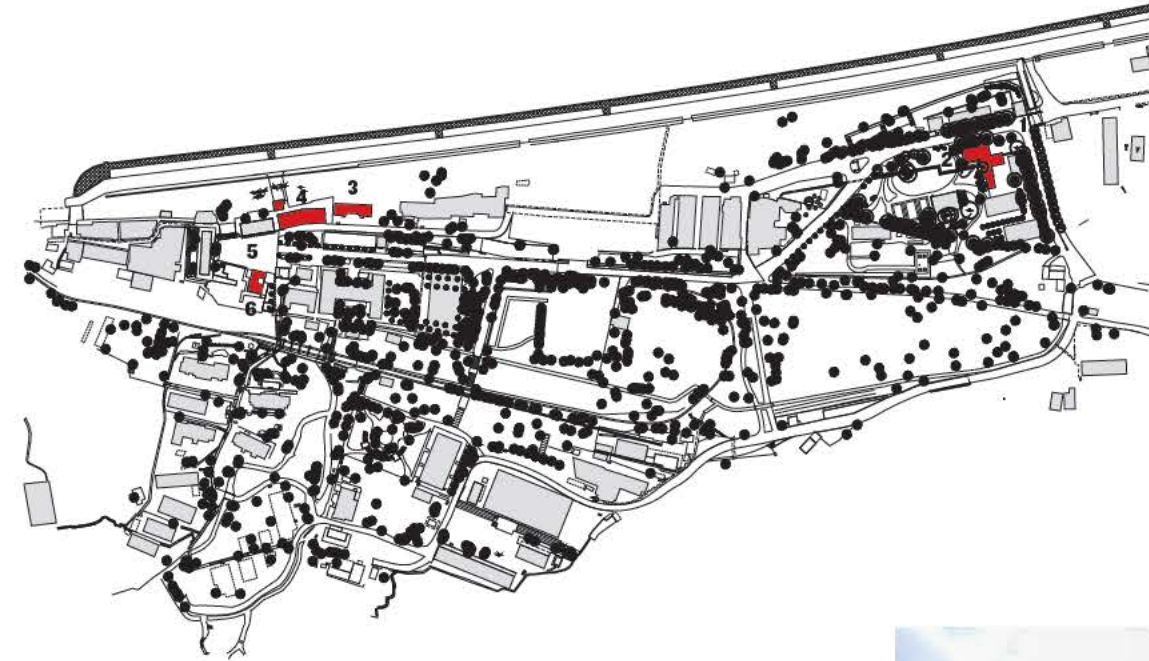




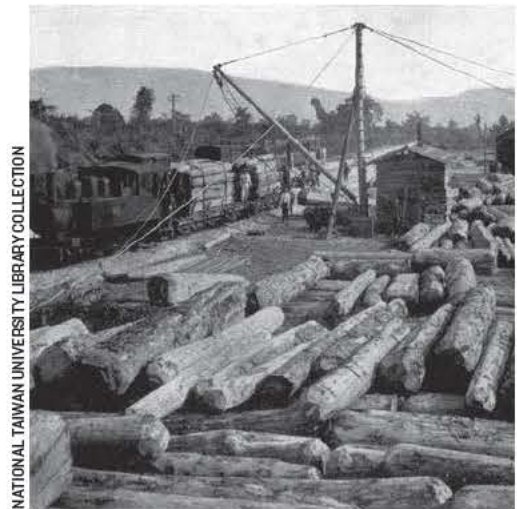
葉柏強

# Forest heritage

The conversion of Taiwan's former Lintianshan forestry town into a cultural park and visitor attraction negotiates the site's colonial history, writes *John Lin*



- 1 site entrance
- 2 charcoal factory converted into exhibition space
- 3 dormitories
- 4 canteen
- 5 town square
- 6 dessert shop



NATIONAL TAIWAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY COLLECTION

During the Japanese colonisation of Taiwan, between 1895 and 1945, four large forestry sites were established on the island, including Lintianshan (top). Push carts were used to transport logs, with operators holding wooden levers to slow them down and avoid accidents (above left). Rail infrastructure (left) established by Japanese engineers connected the sites and enabled the shipping of forestry products back to Japan



林田山林業影像集 (LINTIANSHAN FORESTRY PHOTO COLLECTION)

Nearly 2,000 people lived and worked in Lintianshan at its peak, with the town providing facilities such as dormitories and canteens (opposite, bottom right) As Taiwan segued from an agricultural to an industrial economy in the 1970s, the demand for wood declined, and by 1988 logging had stopped completely. Today, the town is being transformed into a cultural destination. Many of its buildings are being renovated (top), and a new entrance welcomes visitors (right)





The social epicentre of Lintianshan, a small town in eastern Taiwan, is its dessert shop. Construction workers, landscape gardeners, government employees, and families on summer holiday all come here for locally made ice cream, served by Mrs Sun, who lives next door. There is a strong tradition of dessert-making in Taiwan – it is even home to the first Michelin-starred ice cream parlour. The shop in Lintianshan is among a clutch of newly renovated buildings that frame the central square of the town, forming part of a recent town-wide transformation led by Taipei-based Yen Partnership Architects.

The shop's facade and interior have been restored, and the delicate woodwork inside, characteristic of traditional Japanese *shoji* screens, is visible through the small-pane windows. Chairs and benches of various colours and styles

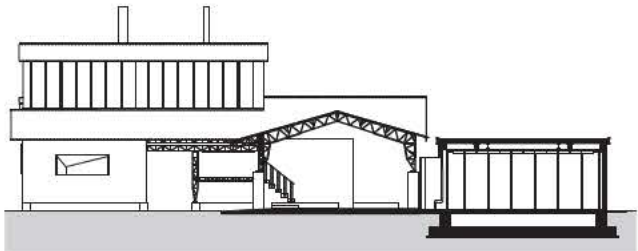
line up outside Mrs Sun's house next door; shoes are placed in front of the door underneath a worn wooden porch. The whole scene is a surprisingly personal and domestic arrangement within the town square. Mrs Sun was born in this house, originally built during the Japanese rule of Taiwan, between 1895 and 1945. She fondly recalls her childhood in the 1960s and '70s, when the former company town was full of activity.

Located in Hualien County, Lintianshan is a historical logging town. Industrial forestry began here in 1918, with felling carried out by the Japanese company Hualien Harbor Timber. Although Taiwan is much smaller in size than Japan, its mountains are higher in altitude, therefore producing harder, higher-quality timber – including the prized yellow cypress or *hinoki*, a durable and fragrant wood used in temples, shrines and traditional baths. During the Japanese occupation, Taiwan's

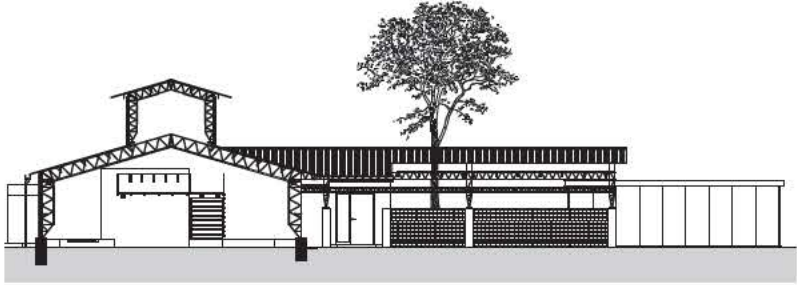


THIS SPREAD: LORENZO PIERUCCI

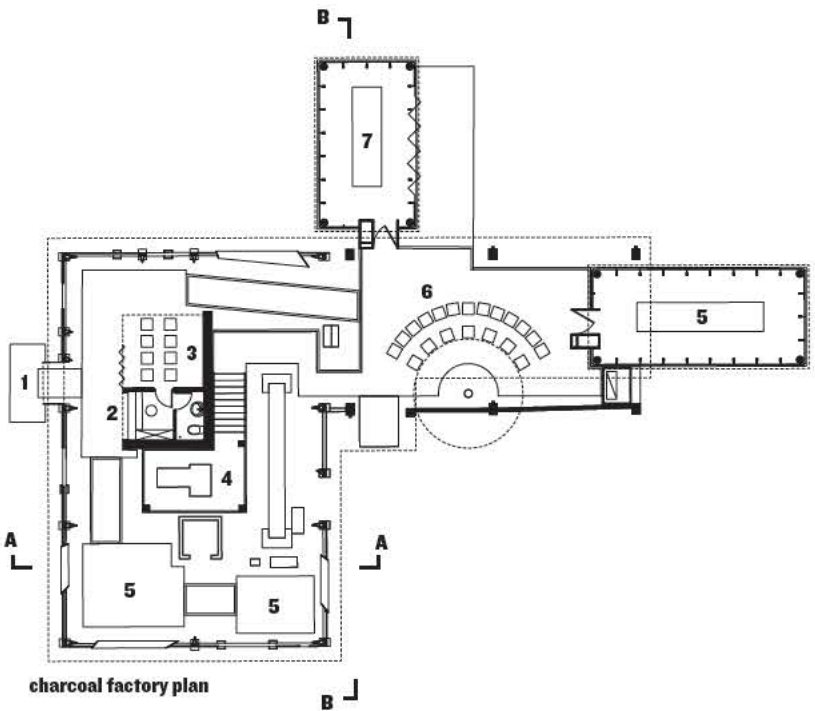
‘Visitors seem more attracted to the area’s natural sites than its industrial heritage’



section BB



section AA



charcoal factory plan

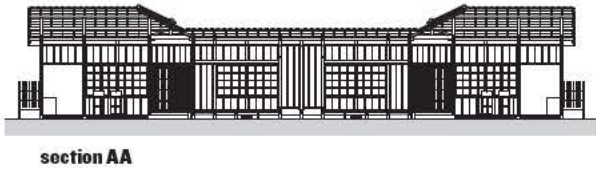


- 1 entrance
- 2 information desk
- 3 video corner
- 4 old production area
- 5 exhibition space
- 6 tour meeting point
- 7 multipurpose room

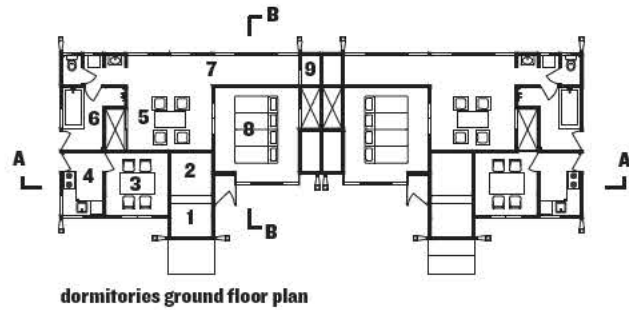


The old charcoal factory (opposite bottom) has become an exhibition space (this spread). Past the information desk (opposite top), a display explains the process of manufacturing sawdust charcoal briquettes. The new exhibition room presents objects that used to belong to residents and logging workers (above), while tour groups gather under the tree (top)



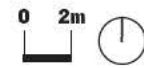


The former section chiefs' dormitories has been lightly renovated by Yen Partnership Architects (this spread). FANCA, the client, is still looking for an operator but aims to make it available for longer term stays



‘The ambition to preserve the community, not only the buildings, butts up against the realities of contemporary life in Lintianshan’

- 1 vestibule
- 2 entrance hall
- 3 dining room
- 4 kitchen
- 5 living room
- 6 bathroom
- 7 engawa
- 8 bedroom
- 9 storage



forests were heavily exploited. Four major logging sites were built, with Taipingshan to the north of Lintianshan, and Basianshan and Alishan further inland. Japanese engineers also developed the infrastructure to connect the sites to the coast by railway; most forestry products were shipped back to Japan.

The Lintianshan settlement included rail tracks, logging tools and machinery as well as offices, dormitories for the workers, schools and other facilities for everyday life. At its peak, nearly 2,000 workers lived here with their families alongside schoolteachers, grocers, doctors and craftspeople. The site changed hands and was placed under the management of the Taiwan Paper Company after the liberation of Taiwan in 1945. Eventually, in 1988, it closed following a major fire and governmental policy shift.

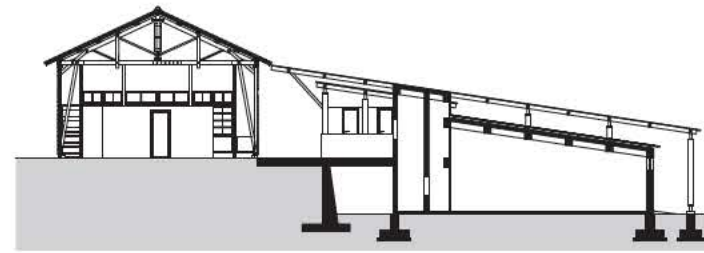
Lintianshan was officially recognised as a ‘historical village’ by the Hualien County

Government’s Cultural Affairs Bureau under Taiwan’s Cultural Heritage Preservation Act in 2006, and has since undergone significant renovation. A combination of government bodies, local authorities and grassroot organisations formed by members of local families have been working together to convert the old town and its surroundings into a ‘cultural park’ aimed at tourists. Lin Yu-rong, who was born to timber processing workers, went to school locally, and is now chair of the Lintianshan Association for the Advancement of Forestry Heritage, says: ‘We stay here as part of a culture and way of life that has disappeared in order to connect the past and present.’ Together with the Forestry and Nature Conservation Agency (FANCA, part of the Ministry of Agriculture, and known until 2023 as the Forestry Bureau), Lin’s association hopes to run package tours that extend to nearby villages and Indigenous lands, with a range

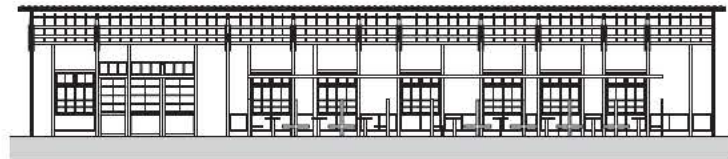
THIS SPREAD: LORENZO PIERUCCI



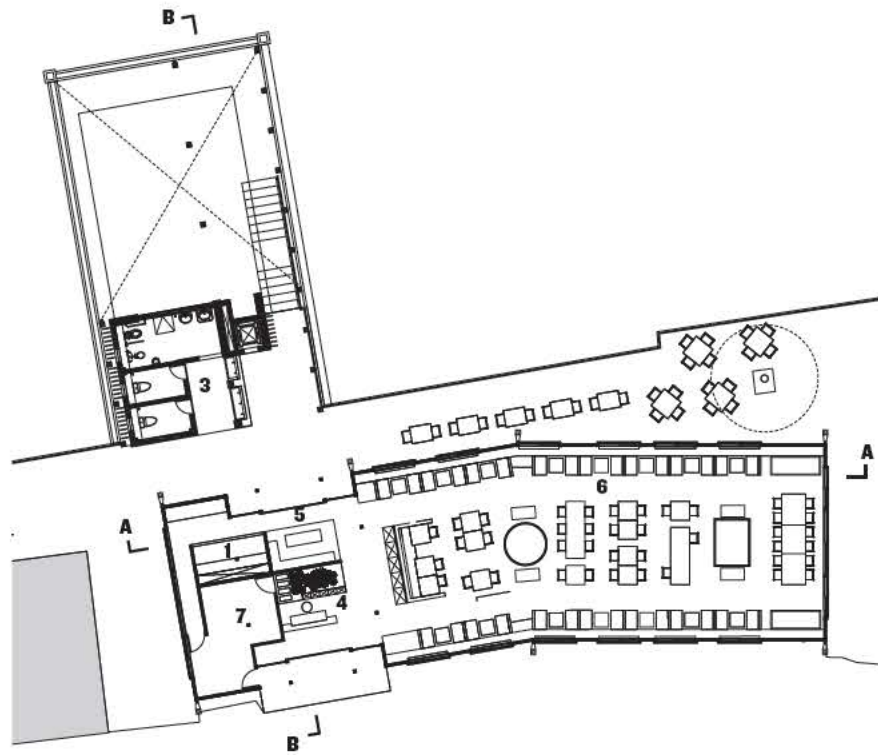




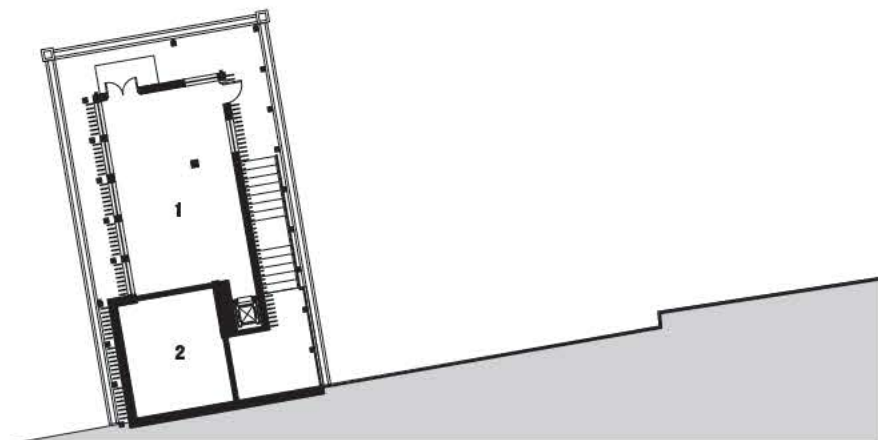
section BB



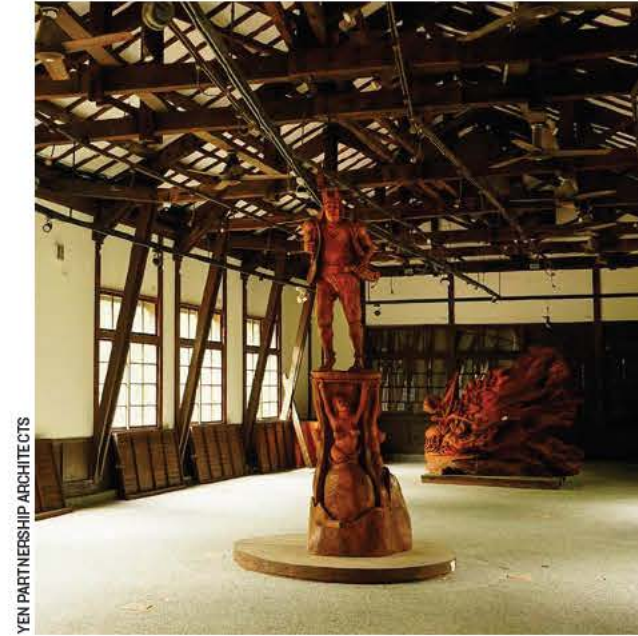
section AA



ground floor



canteen lower ground floor plan



YEN PARTNERSHIP ARCHITECTS



LORENZO PIERUCCI

- 1 kitchen
- 2 storage
- 3 toilets
- 4 reception desk
- 5 waiting area
- 6 restaurant
- 7 back-of-house



The former workers' canteen (this spread) has been renovated and extended (opposite) to provide additional facilities – including bathrooms and a large kitchen. This building (above) is destined to house a new restaurant, but, as the project is still in development, the client faces difficulties to lease. Currently, statues by local artists are exhibited inside the building (top)

of activities and workshops on offer.

With FANCA as the client, the Lintianshan Forestry Culture Park opened to the public in 2023 with a management office, exhibition spaces, leisure venues, places serving food and beverages, and others promoting local products. Dotted around are displays with mannequins presenting the site's forestry history to visitors. After winning the commission in an open competition, which is required for any government-funded project in Taiwan, Yen Partnership Architects renovated four of the town's significant buildings; in addition to the dessert shop, which is in operation from Wednesday to Sunday, they transformed the former charcoal factory at the entrance of the town into an exhibition centre. The other two buildings – one formerly housing dormitories and the other a canteen – cannot yet be visited as FANCA is still looking for an operator. With new phases under way, construction work,

landscape repair and tree planting continue in the town; as the project unfolds, meticulously restored buildings contrast with more dilapidated existing structures. Meanwhile, contemporary visitors seem more attracted to the area's natural sites than its industrial histories and heritage.

The goal has been to reclaim the site's easily identifiable history through the restoration of only its physical characteristics. But Lintianshan's history, and its inhabitants' relationship with the surrounding forest, is much deeper than the town's 20th-century logging infrastructure suggests. During the initial research phase, a taxi ride into town revealed to Yenling Chen, co-founder of Yen Partnership Architects, the site's connection to the Indigenous Taroko people, who inhabited the forest prior to the Japanese occupation. Though the Taroko were evicted from their ancestral

forest by the Japanese and resettled elsewhere on the island, many came back, in need of livelihood, to work for the forestry company – eschewing their previous way of life to reside in Japanese buildings. 'You can't recognise us without our facial tattoos,' said the driver to the architect, 'but we will live here forever.'

Taroko crafts have subtly informed the transformation of the town into a tourist site. The furniture inside the dessert shop was designed in collaboration with a local Indigenous artist, one of the few remaining members of the forestry community. Tables, stools and shelves are made with reused scraps of timber that are pieced and slotted together with traditional joinery techniques. Chen explains that under Taiwanese heritage regulations, Lintianshan falls under the 'group of buildings' category, as if individual buildings did not hold much value. Her intention is to help preserve not only the

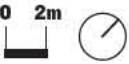
LORENZO PIERUCCI



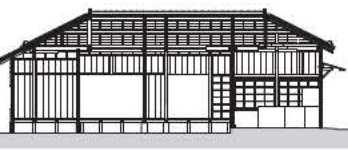


The dessert shop (this spread) was already popular in the heyday of the forestry town, selling mostly traditional Taiwanese shaved ice. Today it is widening its offering with drinks, flavoured ice cubes and gelatos as well as buns and puddings

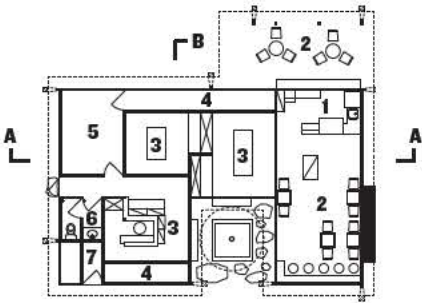
- 1 bar
- 2 seating area
- 3 shop
- 4 engawa
- 5 back-of-house
- 6 toilet
- 7 storage



section BB



section AA



dessert shop ground floor plan

physical structures but also the remnants of a community which continues to reside here.

This ambition to preserve the community, not only the buildings, butts up against the realities of contemporary life in Lintianshan. The families still living here have the right of abode but do not own the land or the houses that sit on it; both are owned by the government. Mrs Sun explains that her children are not allowed to live here; as a second-generation descendant of workers in the former forestry town, she cannot obtain the right of dwelling and will also be forced to leave when her elderly mother dies. Her house might look slightly run-down, but it feels well lived in. It is the current presence of such unrepaired homes, with their patchwork of self-built additions as well as the parked cars and bicycles, custom letterboxes, old appliances and washing machines, raucous plants and wandering

dogs, that contribute an air of authenticity to the site and give a sense of its past life, dispelling the overall impression of a newly polished attraction aimed only at tourists.

But this looks likely to change in future phases. The sense of community is slowly being eroded, despite the collaboration between the government officers, architects and those who still live here. In future, all of Lintianshan's buildings will be 'cleaned up' and renovated, and the residents slowly moved out, as the generations employed in the forestry industry die out.

Lintianshan is the first colonial-era forestry park in Taiwan to be designated as cultural heritage. Its richness lies in the layered identities and stories told through people's lives, demonstrating the possibility of weaving once conflicting histories into an open future. The ongoing project for a cultural park should seek to preserve – rather than flatten – these colourful layers.





**Meandering through the mountainous landscapes are the train tracks built under Japanese rule, with abandoned depots dotting the route. Despite being remote, the region's natural sites already attract visitors; the Lintianshan Forestry Culture Park aims to become a destination in itself**

