



Golden Ray

Text / Luo Jingmei Images / Courtesy of Sulwhasoo

The new Sulwhasoo flagship store in Seoul dissolves many boundaries — that of solid and void, indoor and out, softness and hardness, structure and furniture. Designed by Shanghai-based architecture and design studio Neri&Hu, the building eschews billboard-style garishness to instead offer an experience that is both intimate and highly sensorial.

With a scale that melds into the surrounding environment of low-rise, standalone buildings, its facade of dusty grey stone is equally understated. But woven through this rectilinear shell is a striking scaffolding-like lattice made of glimmering bronze rods. It flows in and out of the cutouts in the building's volume, creating intriguing moiré effects from many angles.

The lantern — a symbolic and literal guiding apparatus ubiquitous in many Asian cultures — was the inspiration for the building's

design, says Lyndon Neri, architect and co-founder of Neri&Hu. The original structure was designed by Korean architecture firm IROJE KHM, and Neri&Hu's lattice infill is a fitting renovation strategy. 'The lattice works functionally as a "signage" that you have arrived at the Sulwhasoo world, then it guides a customer through to different parts of the building for selling, wrapping, displaying, lounging, et cetera,' says Neri.

Inside, the lattice doubles as display shelving for the brand's beauty products. Custom lighting and mirror elements built into the structure are both functional elements for the ambling customer and devices for reflective play, deepening one's experience of the space. 'The main purpose of the building is to show off the brand in a way that allows women to think about beauty and skin care, and relating that cognition with Sulwhasoo,' explains Neri.

'We tried to achieve that through these mirrors all throughout, and complement them with small bronze display stands holding the products to further augment the commercial intention.'

As Neri intends, the bronze lattice unifies the sequence of spaces while performing a variety of other roles: it grants a lightness and shine to the cavernous, stone-clad basement, acts as a display-framing device on the middle level, and, anchored by pebble stones on the open rooftop terrace, it becomes a soft space divider, extending perspectives and blurring views with its gridded body that seems to diffuse into space and sky.

Throughout the interior, beige terrazzo flooring, oak floorboards and linen curtains serve as a tranquil backdrop, while curve-edged standalone counters and cabinetry based on the lattice grid contain historical objects that shine

a spotlight on the brand's heritage. In areas such as the counselling room and multimedia space, a more decorative screen element can be found, its patterns inspired by the Sulwhasoo motif of snowflakes and flowers. Streamlined by the Neri&Hu team, it reveals the completed motif only when different layers of screens overlap. Such details inject richness and liveliness to the experience, while bestowing a touch of femininity to the space that relates appropriately to the Sulwhasoo brand.

Through work grounded in strong conceptual rigour, single-minded intent, rich materiality, precise detailing and quality execution, Neri&Hu has ascended to the much sought-after practice that it is today. In the case of the Sulwhasoo flagship store, a new interpretation on the idea of beauty can be experienced — one that is not skin deep, but all-encompassing and inviting.



Previous page: An intricate bronze lattice infill designed by Neri&Hu injects new life into the otherwise dated, grey stone storefront of Sulwhasoo in Seoul

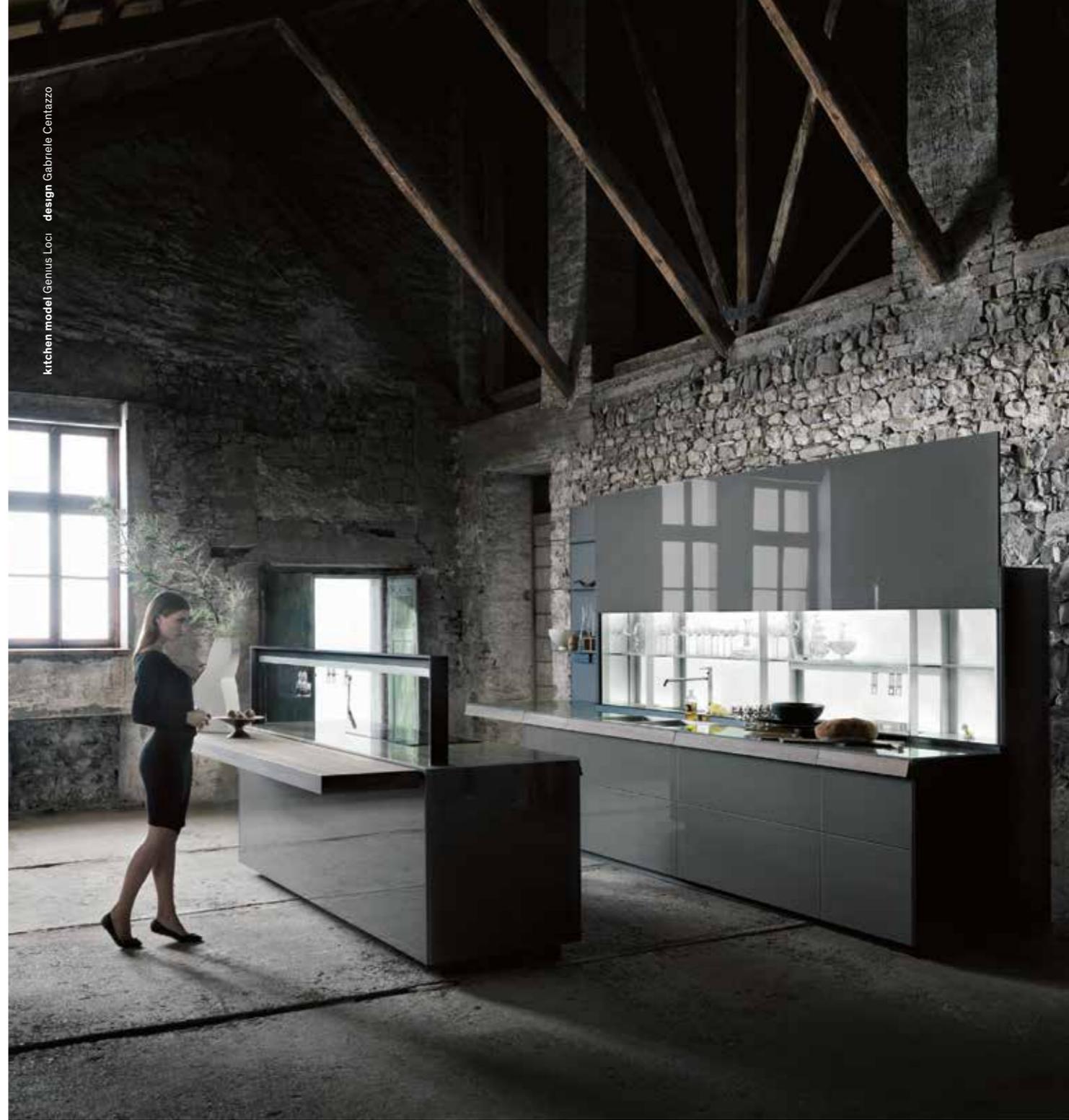


Facing page and this page: The store's interiors are a continuation of the exterior, with the bronze lattice acting as display shelving while also unifying the sequence

of spaces. The curve-edged standalone counters and cabinetry designs are also based on the lattice grid



Flowing in and out of the cutouts in the building's volume, the striking bronze lattice infill creates an intriguing moiré effect



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