# Architects favour modest, nature-mimicking pavilions as laboratories for craft and climate messaging



Architects are embracing a new kind of theatrical modesty: pavilions whose forms are less about monumentality and more about mimicry — of shells, fungi, umbrellas and the subtle geometries of coral. These small, often temporary buildings are proving fertile ground for experimental materials, local craft and environmental gestures, and they are increasingly programmed to do more than delight: to teach, to shelter, to amplify sound and to frame views. According to recent project write-ups and exhibition briefs, the impulse to translate natural morphologies into public architecture is as much about tactile experience and community use as it is about spectacle. (Sources: Dezeen, Kew.)

MAD’s mammoth reinterpretation of the Chinese oil-paper umbrella at the Venice Architecture Biennale is a good example of that blend of craft and contemporary fabrication. The studio describes the draped Xuan‑paper canopy as “a pavilion of shadow and glow”; the paper has been repeatedly coated in tung oil so that it resists moisture while retaining a soft translucency when internally lit. According to the project brief, the pavilion integrates responsive lighting and microclimate strategies and is sited in the China Pavilion’s garden to offer sheltered, reflective spaces along the Biennale promenade. (Sources: Dezeen, MAD project page.)

In rural Zhejiang, HCCH Studio’s compact Twisted Brick Shell library translates local red‑brick traditions into a double‑curved reading room conceived as a “spiritual shelter.” The practice outlines a construction method that combines poured brickwork set into perforated steel plates with high‑strength in‑situ concrete to achieve its twisting geometry; an oculus and small apertures admit controlled daylight, and twenty‑four acrylic domes display texts and images to connect the interior reading experience with the surrounding landscape. The result reads as a contemporary rural folly that deliberately marries digital fabrication and local craft. (Sources: Dezeen, HCCH Studio.)

Timber appears repeatedly as both structure and message. The Armadillo, unveiled during the 2024 London Festival of Architecture, was built from 42 prefabricated cross‑laminated eucalyptus panels arranged into six stepped arches; the project was described by its makers as a disassemblable, reusable stage that also functions as an acoustic chamber. Industry coverage highlights the use of eucalyptus CLT for its improved durability and water resistance compared with conventional softwood panels and notes the pavilion’s emphasis on circular‑design principles and festival legacy planning. (Sources: Dezeen, Archello.)

Not all projects rely on timber or masonry. Marc Fornes’s Nomad pavilion — commissioned for Louis Vuitton’s Objets Nomades programme — works as a computation‑driven object whose bulbous, coral‑like skin is formed from hundreds of perforated anodised aluminium panels. Reports differ on the precise panel count: one roundup describes the shell as composed of more than 16,000 sheets, while earlier coverage of the Milan installation records a figure of about 1,600 uniquely shaped panels. Both accounts, however, underline the pavilion’s delicate patterning and the way perforation and thin metal panels dissolve mass into light and shadow. (Sources: Dezeen, Designboom.)

At Kew Gardens, the new Carbon Garden uses pavilion design to stage a climate message. Mizzi Studio’s fungi‑inspired pavilion — a fruiting‑body form set within the planting scheme — is built from low‑carbon materials including glued‑laminated timber and a flax fibre composite canopy, and it incorporates rainwater capture to irrigate a surrounding rain garden. Kew presents the scheme as an accessible, educational landscape intended to communicate carbon science and nature‑based solutions to school groups and the public. (Sources: Dezeen, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.)

Elsewhere in China, DoDesign’s Drifting Stones project takes a quieter, site‑specific tack: a stepped sequence of stone‑like slabs and a mirrored pavilion nestle into a Chongqing valley to create panoramic routes and a concealed glass‑walled viewing room. The practice describes the work as combining steel frames coated with cement mixed with local stone powder and hand‑chiselling by local artisans so that the interventions read as worked geology; reflective surfaces dissolve edges and foreground the surrounding topography. (Sources: Dezeen, DoDesign.)

Taken together, these projects illustrate a few recurring preoccupations. Designers are privileging material honesty and tactility — from hand‑chiselled cement and tung‑oiled Xuan paper to flax composites — and pairing that tactility with computational techniques that make complex, double‑curved geometry buildable. Many of the interventions are explicitly commissioned to teach or to leave legacies: amplifying sound for performances, serving as community reading rooms, or acting as educational nodes about biodiversity and carbon. As Piers Taylor put it when discussing a Gloucestershire woodworking shelter, the supporting oak framework produces “a roof structure that had some of the delicacy of a tree,” a remark that underlines how these projects aim to blur the boundary between the engineered and the organic while remaining rooted in craft. (Sources: Dezeen, Archello, Kew.)

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* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dezeen.com/2025/08/10/whimsical-pavilions-supersized-organic-shapes-roundup/), [[6]](https://www.kew.org/about-us/press-media/carbon-garden-kew)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dezeen.com/2025/08/10/whimsical-pavilions-supersized-organic-shapes-roundup/), [[2]](https://www.i-mad.cn/projects/chinese-paper-umbrella)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dezeen.com/2025/08/10/whimsical-pavilions-supersized-organic-shapes-roundup/), [[3]](https://hcchstudio.com/bricklibrary)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dezeen.com/2025/08/10/whimsical-pavilions-supersized-organic-shapes-roundup/), [[4]](https://archello.com/news/unknown-works-creates-first-exposed-eucalyptus-clt-structure-the-armadillo)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dezeen.com/2025/08/10/whimsical-pavilions-supersized-organic-shapes-roundup/), [[5]](https://www.designboom.com/architecture/louis-vuitton-pavilion-marc-fornes-theverymany-bubbles-milan-design-week-04-20-2023/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dezeen.com/2025/08/10/whimsical-pavilions-supersized-organic-shapes-roundup/), [[6]](https://www.kew.org/about-us/press-media/carbon-garden-kew)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dezeen.com/2025/08/10/whimsical-pavilions-supersized-organic-shapes-roundup/), [[7]](https://www.designboom.com/architecture/dodesign-rhythmic-stone-path-reflective-pavilion-secluded-chinese-valley-03-17-2025/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.dezeen.com/2025/08/10/whimsical-pavilions-supersized-organic-shapes-roundup/), [[4]](https://archello.com/news/unknown-works-creates-first-exposed-eucalyptus-clt-structure-the-armadillo)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dezeen.com/2025/08/10/whimsical-pavilions-supersized-organic-shapes-roundup/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.i-mad.cn/projects/chinese-paper-umbrella> - MAD’s Chinese Paper Umbrella, installed at the 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale, reinterprets the traditional oil-paper umbrella at monumental scale. The translucent Xuan paper canopy is repeatedly coated in tung oil to resist moisture while allowing a soft, glowing light when illuminated from within. The pavilion’s draped, flower-like form creates sheltered outdoor spaces for visitors and integrates environmental systems including responsive lighting and microclimate strategies. MAD situates craftsmanship alongside contemporary fabrication, emphasising material ageing and tactility. Presented in the China Pavilion’s garden, the installation invites quiet reflection and offers a poetic pause along the Biennale promenade and celebrates cultural continuity today.
3. <https://hcchstudio.com/bricklibrary> - HCCH Studio’s Twisted Brick Shell Concept Library in Longyou County, Zhejiang, is a compact circular pavilion formed by two brick hemispheres linked by a twisting wall. Constructed by positioning poured bricks into perforated steel plates and filling gaps with high-strength in-situ concrete, the design mimics vernacular red-brick architecture while exploring double-curved geometry. Small apertures and an oculus admit controlled daylight; twenty-four acrylic domes display texts and images that connect interior reading with the surrounding landscape. The pavilion functions as a quiet, spiritual shelter and community reading space, blending digital fabrication techniques with local craftsmanship to produce a contemporary rural folly.
4. <https://archello.com/news/unknown-works-creates-first-exposed-eucalyptus-clt-structure-the-armadillo> - Unknown Works’ Armadillo pavilion, unveiled for the 2024 London Festival of Architecture, is formed from six stepped timber arches built from 42 prefabricated cross-laminated eucalyptus panels. Named for its segmented, armoured appearance, the structure was conceived as a disassemblable, reusable stage and acoustic chamber that amplifies sound naturally while preventing feedback. The eucalyptus CLT—developed with manufacturer Xilonor—offers durability and water resistance compared with typical softwood panels. Installed at Trinity Buoy Wharf before relocation to Houghton Music & Arts Festival, the Armadillo demonstrates experimental mass-timber fabrication, circular-design principles and innovation in timber acoustics for temporary cultural architecture and festival legacy planning.
5. <https://www.designboom.com/architecture/louis-vuitton-pavilion-marc-fornes-theverymany-bubbles-milan-design-week-04-20-2023/> - Marc Fornes / THEVERYMANY’s Nomad pavilion for Louis Vuitton debuted at Milan Design Week 2023, occupying the courtyard of Palazzo Serbelloni. The coral-like, bulbous structure is engineered from over 1,600 uniquely shaped, anodised aluminium sheets, some as thin as one millimetre, each perforated and patterned to create intricate shadow play. The lightweight assembly produces organic, cavernous interiors that host events and exhibitions for Louis Vuitton’s Objets Nomades series. Fornes’ computationally informed fabrication and bespoke panels create a nomadic architectural object that reads as both sculpture and shelter, emphasising pattern, permeability and the interplay of light and surface across Milan’s design circuit.
6. <https://www.kew.org/about-us/press-media/carbon-garden-kew> - The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, opened the Carbon Garden in July 2025 to illustrate carbon’s role and nature-based solutions. At its heart is a fungi-inspired pavilion by Mizzi Studio that rises like a fruiting body and is built from low-carbon materials including glued-laminated timber, larvikite stone foundations and a flax natural-fibre composite canopy. The pavilion captures rainwater for a surrounding rain garden and provides an educational, accessible space for school visits and community activities. Kew’s scheme combines planting, interpretation and sustainable construction to communicate climate science practically, aiming to inspire behavioural change and promote biodiversity-focused carbon sequestration and public engagement.
7. <https://www.designboom.com/architecture/dodesign-rhythmic-stone-path-reflective-pavilion-secluded-chinese-valley-03-17-2025/> - DoDesign’s Drifting Stones intervention in Chongqing comprises two elements—The Stacks, a stepped sequence of stone-like slabs forming a panoramic path, and The Hut, a mirrored pavilion beneath a cantilevered boulder. Constructed with steel frames coated in cement mixed with local stone powder and hand-chiselled to echo surrounding geology, the structures conceal a glass-walled viewing room and a small restroom pavilion. Mirrored and reflective surfaces dissolve the built form into the landscape while the artificial stone roofs reference local textures. The project balances craftsmanship with contemporary detailing to create a meditative retreat that dialogues sensitively with its valley setting and serenity.