Wuxi is located in the Yangtze River Delta of China and is about 1 to 2 hours by car from Shanghai. It is a cultural and commercial city with a rich history dating back 3000 years. The economic development of recent years has consistently added great pressure on city planning. In order to preserve the existing urban fabric, the Wuxi government has decided to relocate the city center to an area near Lake Tai, the largest lake in the Delta and aims to develop Wuxi Taihu (Lake Tai) New City into a modern, sustainable city. The government has just recently completed a major restoration effort to clean up part of Lake Tai. The center of the new city is also set up around a newly completed wetland park called Shangxian Park with its waterway system connected to greater Lake Tai. The Civil Center sits north of the heart of Shangxian Park and the Central Business District is on the west. Our project, the Poly Cultural Center, is located east of the park.

The proposed Cultural Center is composed of four anchor buildings, a Performing Arts Center, a Library, a Children’s Activity Center, and an Art Museum. Each provides unique cultural activities. With added amenities like retail, restaurants, hotels and service apartments, the cultural center will join the family of other distinguished districts and become an important cultural component of Wuxi Taihu New City.

The cultural buildings are conceived as a single coherent block of program carved into four sculpted volumes whose design is governed by the site’s guiding geometries. These four buildings are independently located and yet related in form and materials.

The development combines several overlapping ideas to enrich the visitor’s experience and enjoyment including (i) clear pedestrian circulation connecting the four cultural buildings; (ii) a board wetland promenade in the shape of a parallelogram framing Qingxu Dao, a north-south road in the middle of the site, forming a landscaped axis to unify the main components of the development; (iii) a network of primary and secondary roads to provide vehicular, bicycle, boat and service access to the site. The result is a non-vehicular oriented environment, knitted nicely into the bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation System promoted by the city.

The river front design reflects the indigenous fabric of the water towns in the region. Other building groups on the site are organized into a network of spaces which are engaging and overlapping, allowing free ground movement and creating a sense of community.

Shangxian Park is arguably the most important planning feature in Taihu New City. The landscape of the Poly Cultural Center consists of two green belts and one waterway running east-west, extending and connecting its eco-system to the wetland park. The parallelogram-shaped wetland at the center of the site acts as a green lung; its wetland plant species help to filter and cleanse rainwater runoff. The formation of a circular cycle conducive to water flow keeps the water clean and creates a good habitat for organisms. A strip of forest planting along the northern and eastern edges of the site creates a buffer zone from the high speed roadways.
Top: View at river front
Bottom: Sustainable water system