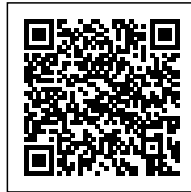




SUBTERRANEAN REVERENCE: THE UCCA DUNE ART MUSEUM

Posted on April 1, 2025 by Dima Fadel



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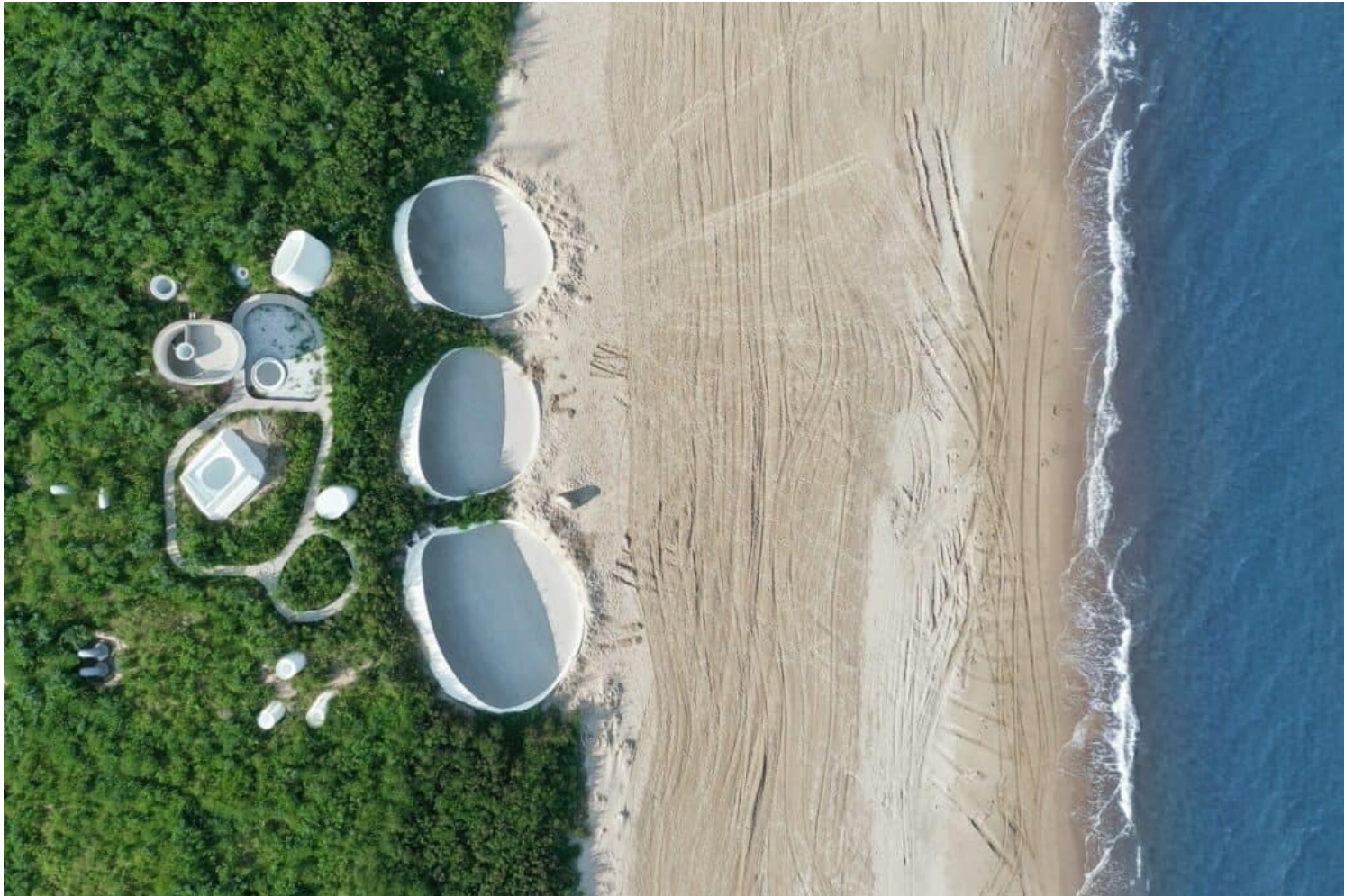
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Subterranean Reverence: The UCCA Dune Art Museum

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Nestled along a quiet beach on the northern coast of China's Bohai Bay, the UCCA Dune Art Museum is carved into the sand, where it gently disappears into the landscape. Shaped by countless years of wind, the beach's sand has formed a dune several meters high, stabilized by low-lying shrubs and other ground cover. The museum lies beneath this natural formation. Enveloped by sand, its series of interconnected, organically shaped spaces evoke caves—the primeval shelter of early humans, whose walls once served as canvases for some of humanity's earliest artistic expressions. Hidden between sea and sand, the museum's design is simple, pure, and evocative—a return to primal and timeless spatial forms.



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The decision to embed the museum within the dune arose from a deep reverence for nature and a commitment to preserving the delicate dune ecosystem, shaped over thousands of years by natural forces. Unlike many other dunes along the coast that have been leveled for oceanfront development, these dunes are now protected by the presence of the museum.

A sequence of contiguous, cell-like spaces accommodates various gallery sizes, a café, and ancillary functions. Visitors enter through a long, dark tunnel and a modest reception area, before the space dramatically opens into the largest multifunctional gallery, where daylight streams in through a central skylight, silently yet powerfully illuminating the interior.

Openings strategically placed throughout the structure frame views of the shifting sky and sea, offering museum-goers a dynamic, immersive connection to the surrounding environment. A spiral staircase ascends to a lookout atop the dune, guiding visitors from the intimate underground space to the expansive coastal horizon above. Beneath the surface, the museum unfolds as a hidden retreat—an intimate setting that invites quiet contemplation of both art and nature.

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The museum's complex, three-dimensional concrete shell was hand-shaped by local workers in Qinhuangdao, many of whom were former shipbuilders. The formwork—constructed from narrow strips of wood and, in tighter curves, more flexible materials—was left deliberately rough, preserving the irregular textures as a testament to the building's manual construction. Every detail, from doors and windows to the reception desk, bar counter, and bathroom sinks, was custom-designed and fabricated on-site. The café features eight unique tables, each shaped to match the floor plan of one of the eight main gallery spaces.

Numerous skylights, each differing in orientation and size, ensure soft, natural lighting throughout the year. The sand-covered roof reduces heat gain, while a low-energy, zero-emission ground

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source heat pump replaces conventional air conditioning—further aligning the museum's presence with its ethos of environmental harmony.



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