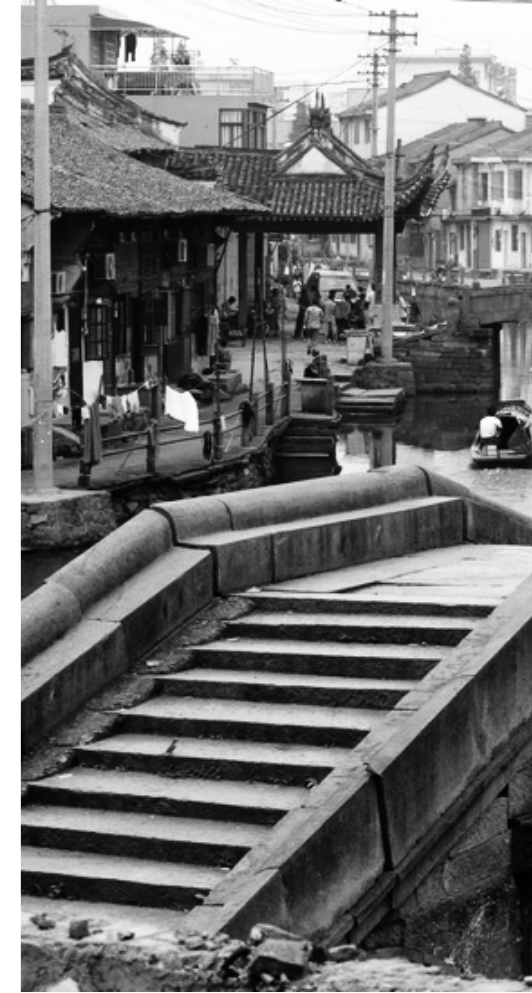


**RENOVATED
COMMUNITY CENTRE
WITH CHINESE
HISTORICAL PLAY STAGE**

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INTRODUCTION

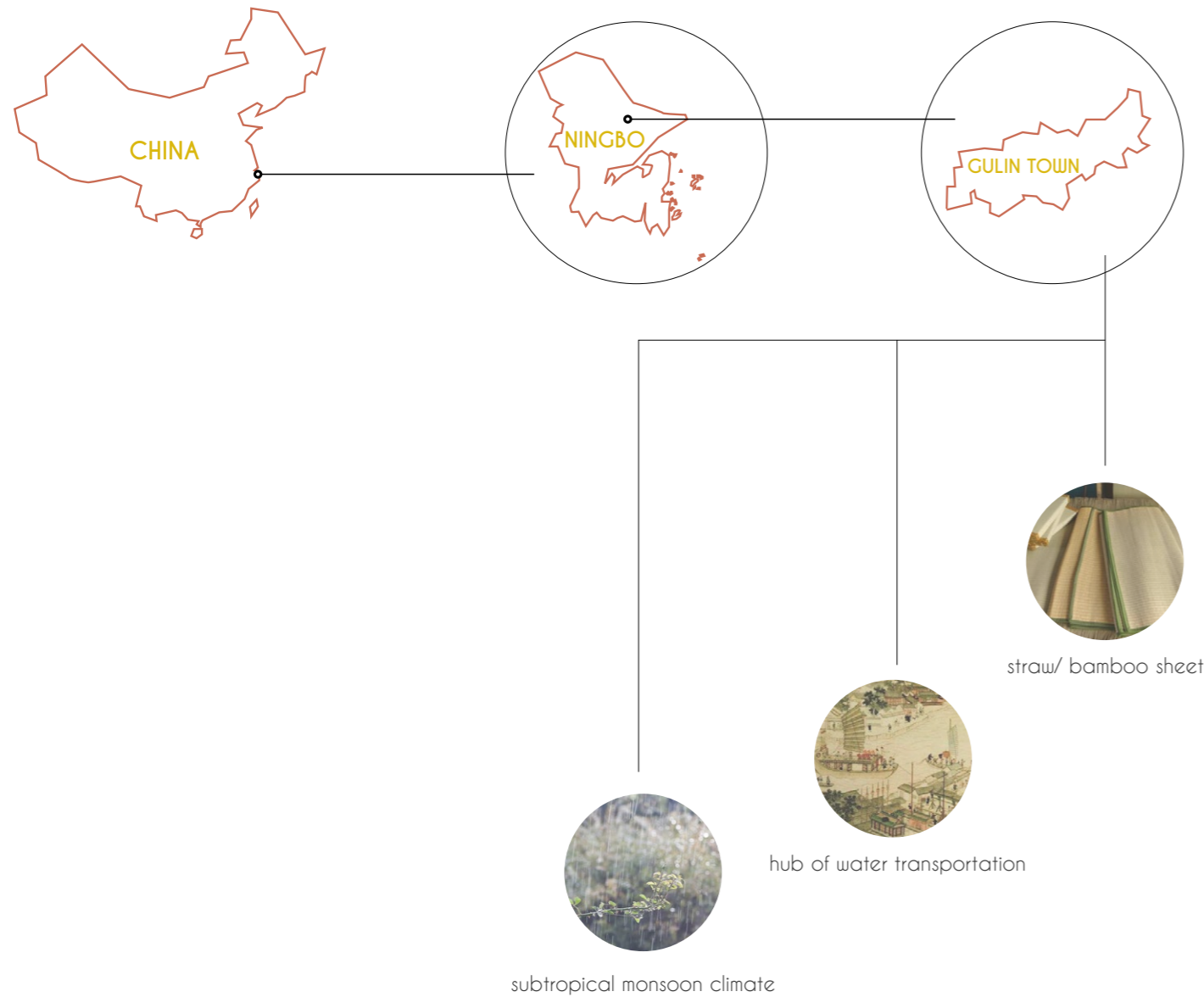
The traditional play stage once played a big part in Chinese architecture. They witnessed the most common public entertainment for Chinese people, and became a unique icon of traditional architecture, arts and urban life. In today's society, though the traditional play stage dose not seem to disappear thanks to the developing notion of architectural preservation, it still has to face the fact that its initial identity has been lost a lot.

In this project, I intend to explore on one well protected stage and its context, to seek the possibility of bringing back the spirit of traditional urban life to this particular type of architecture. To achieve this, I take advantage of two existing old buildings and a modern construction to become a whole site, by demolishing the poor designed modern part and restoring the historical part, creating a response and communication with the old play stage.

While work on the renovation in a very particular traditional and cultural context, it is always necessary to find the balance between the preservation of old and generating of new. This site locates on a peaceful small town in southeast China, where the skyline and architecture are almost original. That brings the challenge that what precisely can I inherit from the vernacular architecture, and to what extent should I blend it into modernism. The answer might be found in the end of this project, and yet requires more attention for traditional architecture restoration from the publics.

1. BACKGROUND





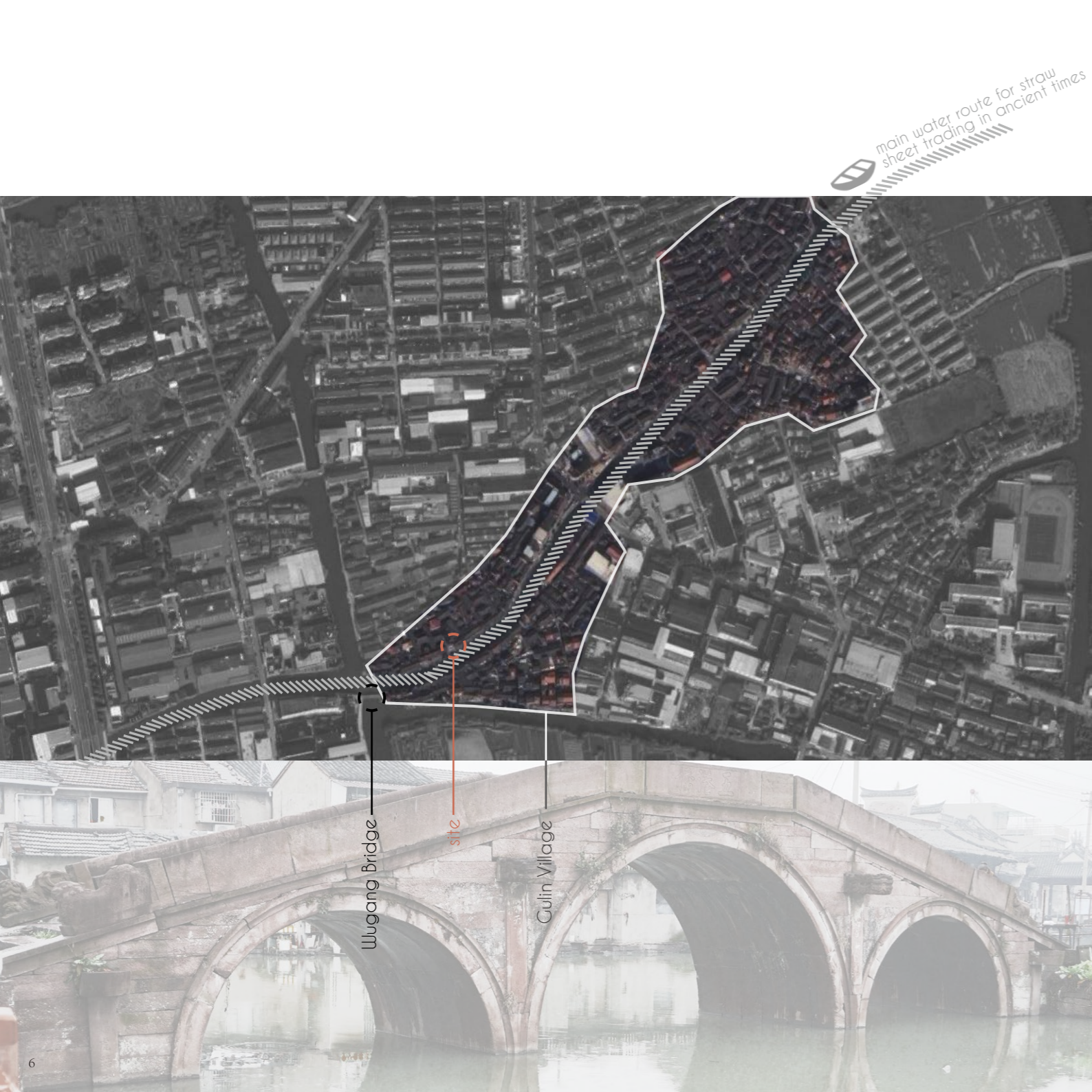
LOCATION

Where is the site?

The site locates in an old town named Gulin (古林镇), which is a small town of my hometown Ningbo, Southeast China. The town has a population of 100,000 by the demographics of 2010. The village of Gulin (古林村), where the site specifically locates at, has a population of about 1,770, and majorly keeps the original urban fabric and architectural features.

Keywords of Gulin

- Subtropical Monsoon Climate
Gulin has a typical subtropical monsoon climate feature because of its geographic location – low latitudes and at east coast of China. The temperature can be up to 40°C in summer and mostly above 0°C in winter. The high humidity all over the year makes the body sense to the coldness and hotness even stronger.



- Hub of water transportation
Due to the water-surrounded natural environment, boat became one of the most important transportation of this area since Song Dynasty (A.D.960). The importance of water to the site location was emphasized when the Wugang Bridge (bridge of five harbors) was built in Ming Dynasty (A.D.1464).

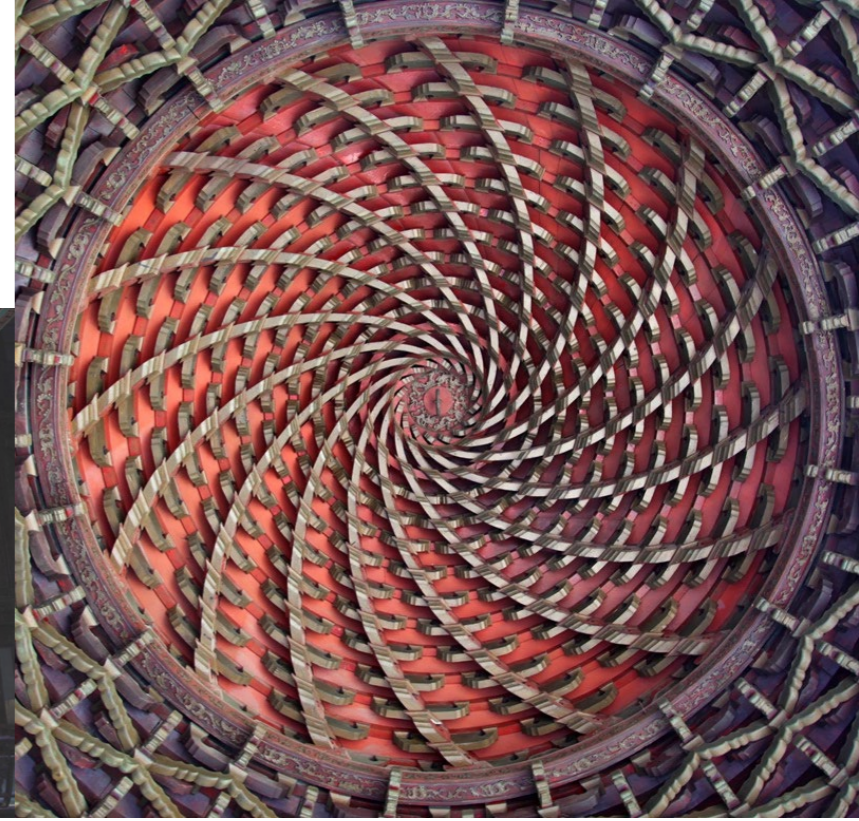
‘河分五港源流大，洞築三環月印圓。
波心倒映開金鏡，水面橫飛落彩虹。’

This ancient poetry was written to describe the special location and appearance of Wugang Bridge after it was built. It was said the bridge stands at the west end of South Gulin Street, right at the meeting point of five canals. The three big arches were made for varies size of boats going through.

- Straw/ bamboo sheet
Gulin was famous for the manufacturing industry of bamboo sheet back in old days. The canals brought trades of bamboo sheet to Gulin Town, at the same time the business brought dynamism into the canal and the waterfront area.



Chinese traditional play stage



PLAY STAGE

Traditional Chinese plays not only is a unique type of ancient Chinese architecture and art, but also displays the image of vernacular culture, economy and folk-custom.

The play stages are usually formed in two ways. One is 'flexible stage' which mostly built integrated with ancestral temple architecture. When no play is performed the stage becomes part of the hallway; or when the play is going to be showed, a slab will be elevated onto the stage structure for actors to stand on. The other kind is 'fixed stage' in which the stage platform is already built along with other part of the stage.

The traditional play stages are usually shaped symmetrically and in rectangular from plan. The iconic flying eaves are usually supported by four columns in order to offer good views for audiences from different angles. There is always a caisson in the middle of the ceiling which provides with a higher space for actors playing long stage properties such as spear and sword, and more importantly, giving nicer acoustic effects. The area underneath the roof is structured and decorated with sophisticated brackets system.



PERFORMANCE ON STAGE

The performance on the play stage are normally Chinese traditional opera. The kinds of traditional opera varies due to the folk cultures differ amongst different areas of this country. Some well-known types such as Peking Opera and Kun Opera are widely performed all over the country while the local operas are also popular within their own areas.

Actors usually wear traditional costumes and make-up to perform, and sometimes require stage properties, e.g. table and chair settings and spears or swords for actions. Musical instruments can be playing alongside in accordance to the opera type and plot.



2. SITE





the historical stage on the site



the memorial museum next to the site and the bridge in front of it



the modern construction which is going to be demolished in this project

The play stage on site was once the proof of the boom of this town. Unlike most stages around the country, this one is facing the water directly, and standing right in the middle of one side of the water banks. The audience seats are not fixed, yet amongst all the architecture and landscape in front of it, such as the water bank on the other side, the residential buildings across to it, and of course the boats on canal. Those unformal performances on this stage were mostly given by normal villagers out of personal hobbies, which did not necessarily stand for high quality as professional performances do. Therefore, a spot of local people gathering around and having entertainment gradually formed at this place.

*"The play stage by the water? Don't know. Never heard."
"Ohh the gazebo you mean. There it is!"*

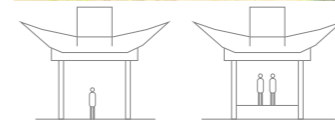
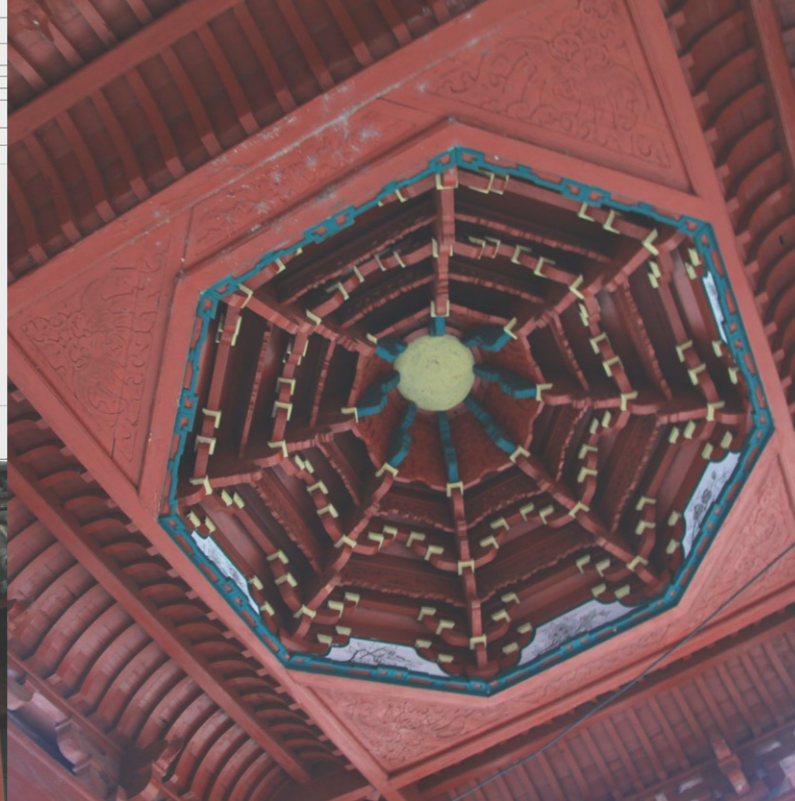
Modern society did not preserve this urban life unfortunately. As a matter of fact, the stage has not been used for decades, and its particularity was almost forgotten by this generation of local people. I came to site looking for this play stage and was caught into embarrassment from the conversation above. Today, local people have no chance to see the traditional performance on this stage again, and will not experience the circumstances where neighbors gathering together along the canal after dinner, while a random play is showing on the stage, having a bit of chitchat and sharing a sweet watermelon.

What's on the site?

The building complex on the west of the site is under construction and will become a memorial museum of a local historical figure. The façade of this complex is almost kept as it was, though some of the interior spaces have been redesigned and refurbished in order to meet the requirement of contemporary exhibitions. In the near future the museum is able to attract some extents of visitors to the site.

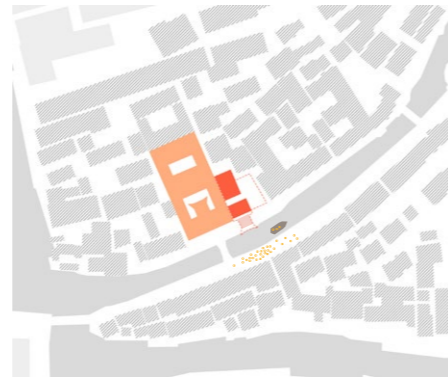
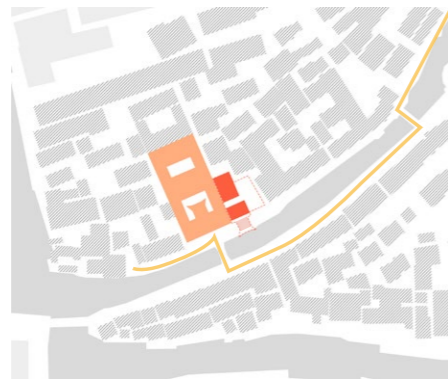
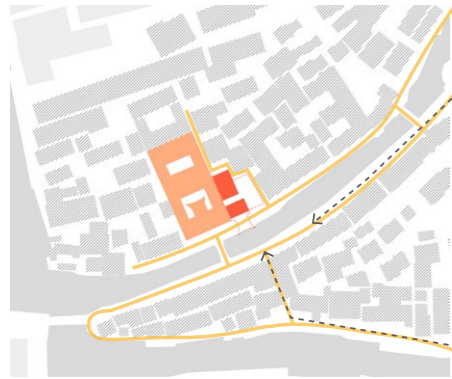
Since this waterfront play stage is on the list of cultural heritage, the stage itself and the building it depends on are all being well protected. A modern concrete building on the site painted in blue is built right next to the stage. This eye-catching architecture is currently for warehouse using and looks abrupt amongst the other buildings in the context. Thanks to its simplicity of structure and function, I plan to take down this block and design a new structure at this slot which is able to merge into the surroundings and help the play stage stand out again.





structure of the temporary slab on the stage

structure of the waterfront play stage on the site



— circulation around site
 - - - main route from downtown



— circulation when the performance is going on



••• audience seats

ACCESS

As the buildings in the context are almost kept original, the urban fabric of this area is basically as messy and unorganized as it was. There's hardly any vehicle access through the dense historical building area except for the water banks. Therefore, the most common approach to the site is by walking or biking through small alleys.

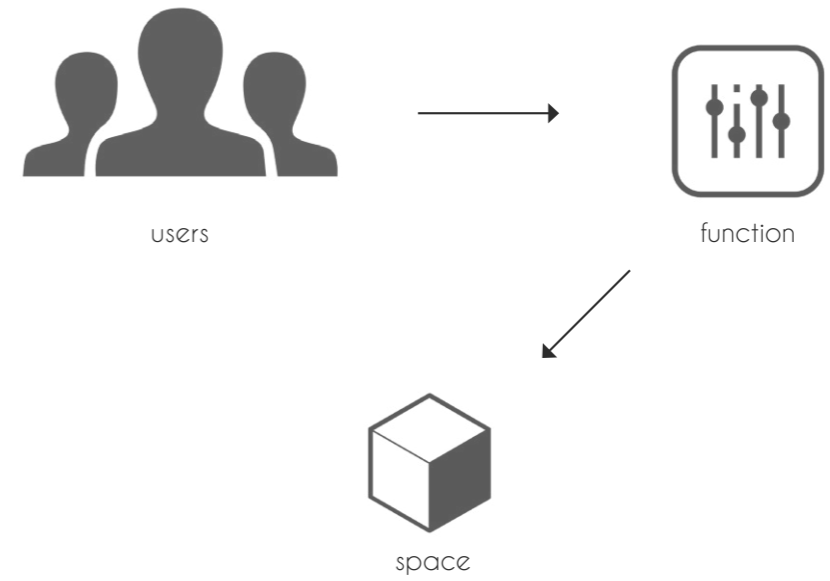
The position of the play stage leads to a practical problem of the circulation of that side of the water bank when the performance is going on, and the two bridges at both sides of the stages gives a solution. These two bridges make the access to both water banks possible and avoid the interdiction when the play stage is on duty.



TWO STAGES

Besides the waterfront play stage which is going to be mainly considered in this project, there is another stage in the memorial museum which is bigger, fancier and more famous. The initial idea building such two stages close to each other is to distribute the audience from the big stage to the small one when huge festival or celebration was hold in the ancestral temple (the former function of the museum building back in old days). However, due to the different space characteristics, the two stages are gradually distinguished with more particular identities. The big stage is more for exclusive performances, and only allowed to play Peking Opera for special occasions; and the small one is facing to a completely open space hence the requirement to the type or quality of the performance is not as strict.

Two stages aiming to different occasions and different groups of audience means that there is opportunitie for the small stage attracting people with its own specialty. That's why I consider the relationship between these two as collaboration rather than competition in this project. The fame of the big stage still works today which attracts visitors and local people, and make chance for the awakened waterfront stage being noticed again.



3. THE PROJECT

USERS



Who are the users?

Local villagers. Especially children and retired/elderly people

What do they need?

A place for gathering, leisure and activity

People keep the habit gathering around at the stage. Though the play stage has lost its original function today, its role in social activity is still played. Local people need a spot for daily socialization, and the architecture of the waterfront play stage offered the conditions: an identical appearance, a roof as a shelter, and a free access. Local people tend to relax on a shaded space because of the high temperature and strong sunlight in summer. In most case scenarios their leisure and activities such as chess and poker playing and casual chatting can be accomplished at wherever underneath eaves and roofs.

PROJECT AIM

In order to bring back the function of the stage and the energetic urban life, the key is to restore the attraction of this place. Therefore I try to design a community center for this neighborhood, which provides local people more reasons and opportunities to gathering and spending time together. The community center is able to make the performance on the old stage more reasonable in the context, and allows the rehearsal in the building and access to the stage with more freedom.

Estimated function

Enough indoor activity space
(for children story-telling session, ping-pong, small exhibition, etc.)

Workshop
(for teaching session of traditional handcraft, drawing, calligraphy, etc.)

Small auditorium
(for lecture, rehearsal, public speech, movie, etc.)

Reading room
(separated area for children and adults)

Office/administrative space

Reception lounge
(for visitors or staffs sitting, waiting, having tea, etc.)

Kitchen
(only for making tea and coffee, and store lunch in refrigerator)

Toilet and changing room

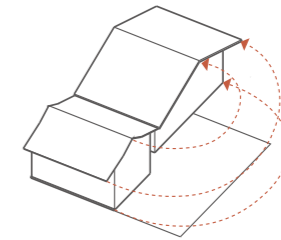
Green area/landscape

FORM INSPIRATION



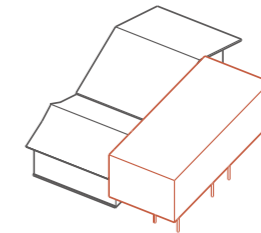
Hakka Round House

idea of combining the two existing buildings by connecting the roof spine



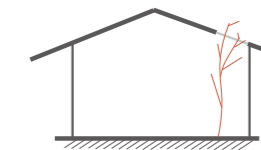
Dai Bamboo House

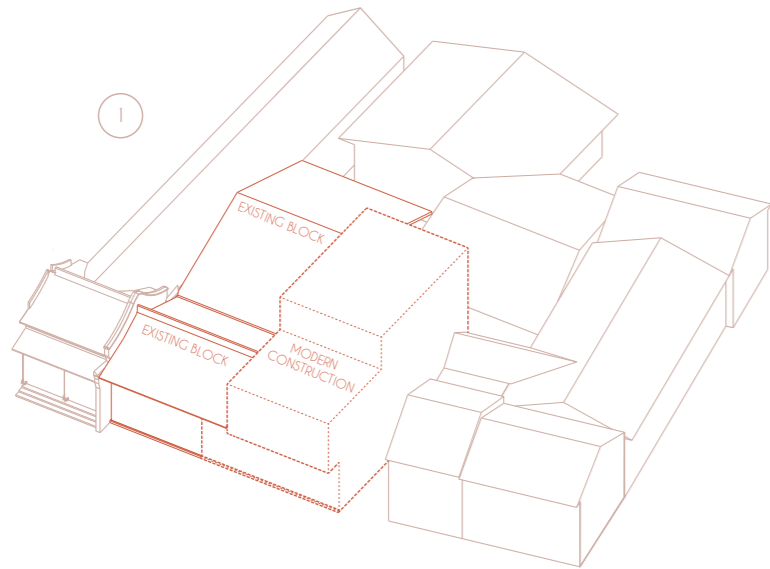
idea of the use of pilotis



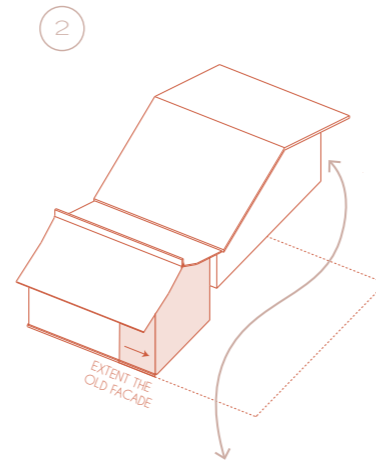
hole on the roof

idea of daylight and landscape

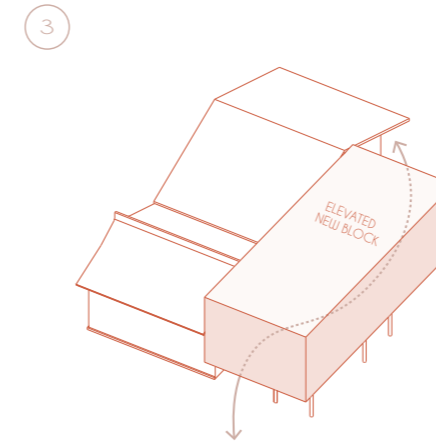




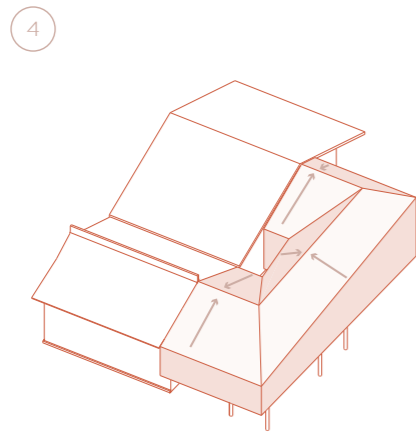
- original site



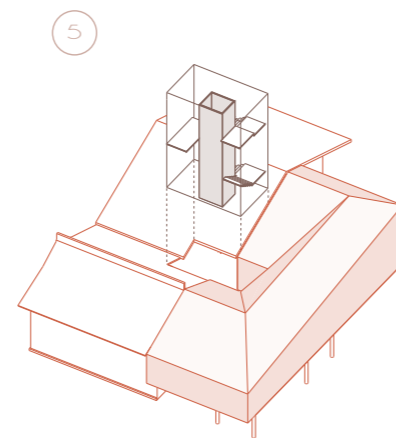
- demolish the modern construction, generate a wider and better circulation



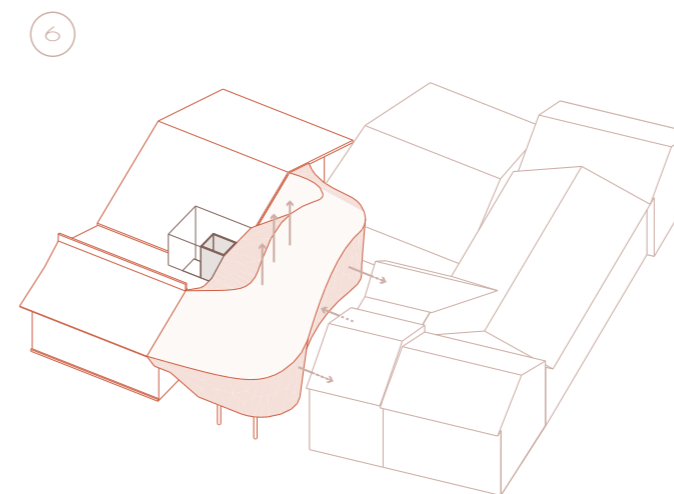
- elevate the new block and leave the ground floor open as a public space



- shape the new block, connect the roof spine, create a connection for the existing blocks.



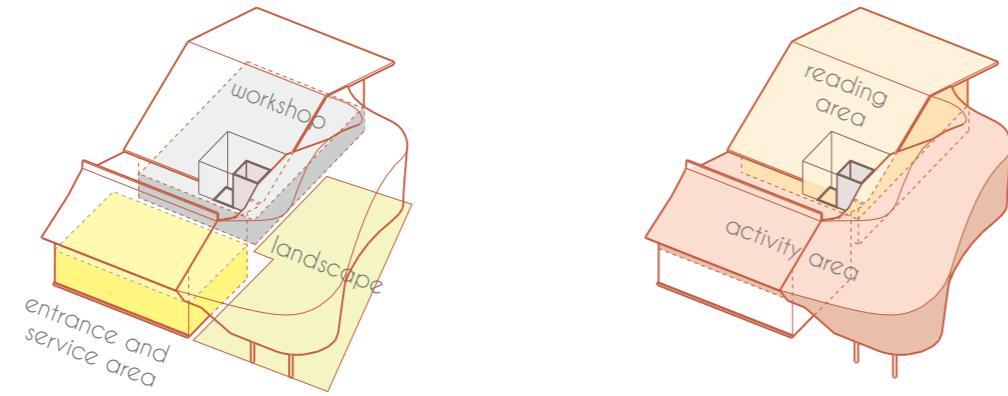
- put a vertical circulation core in the middle



- adjust the form, higher the roof to expand the space using, curve the elevation to soften the contact with surrounded buildings

PROCESS OF FORMING SPACE

PROGRAM

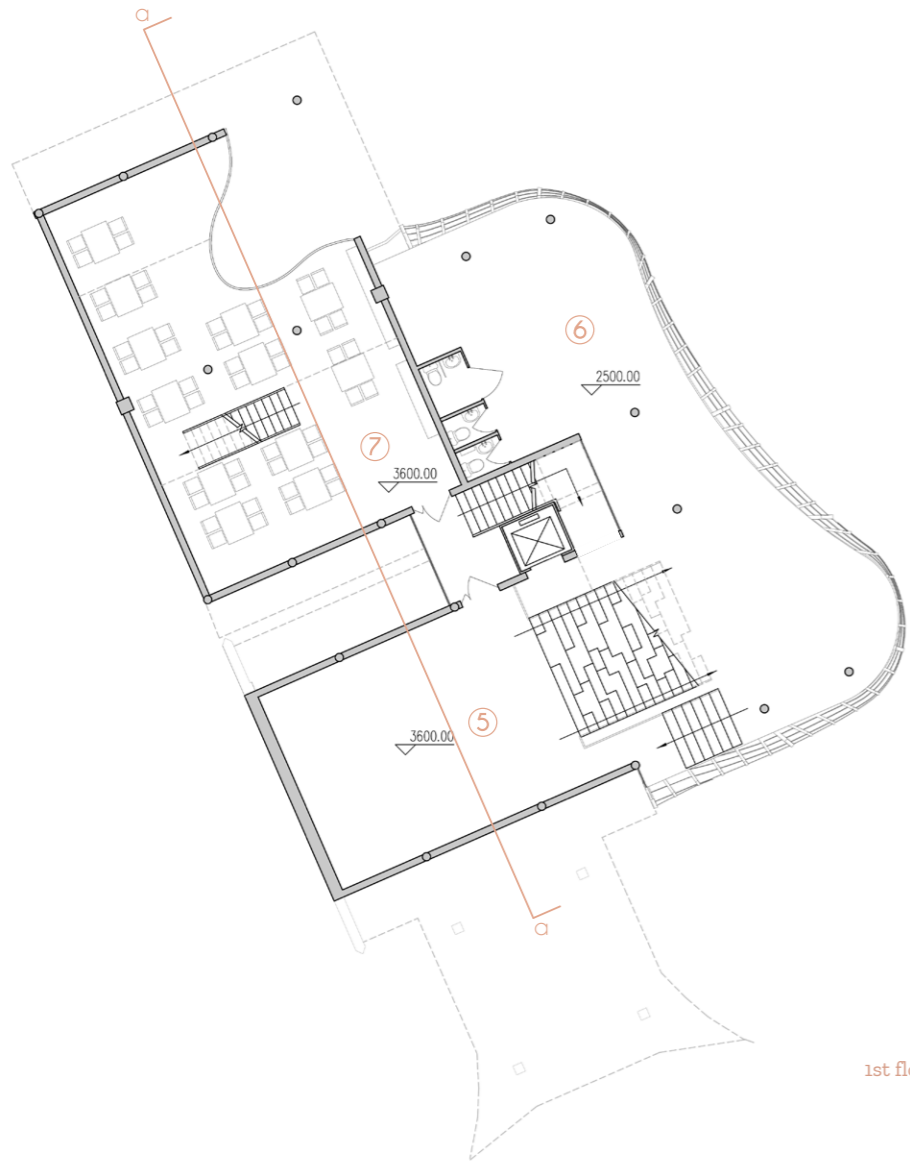


The different programs are tried to be put in the different parts of the old and new structures so that is easy to be distinguished and clear for users' access.

FLOOR PLAN



Ground floor

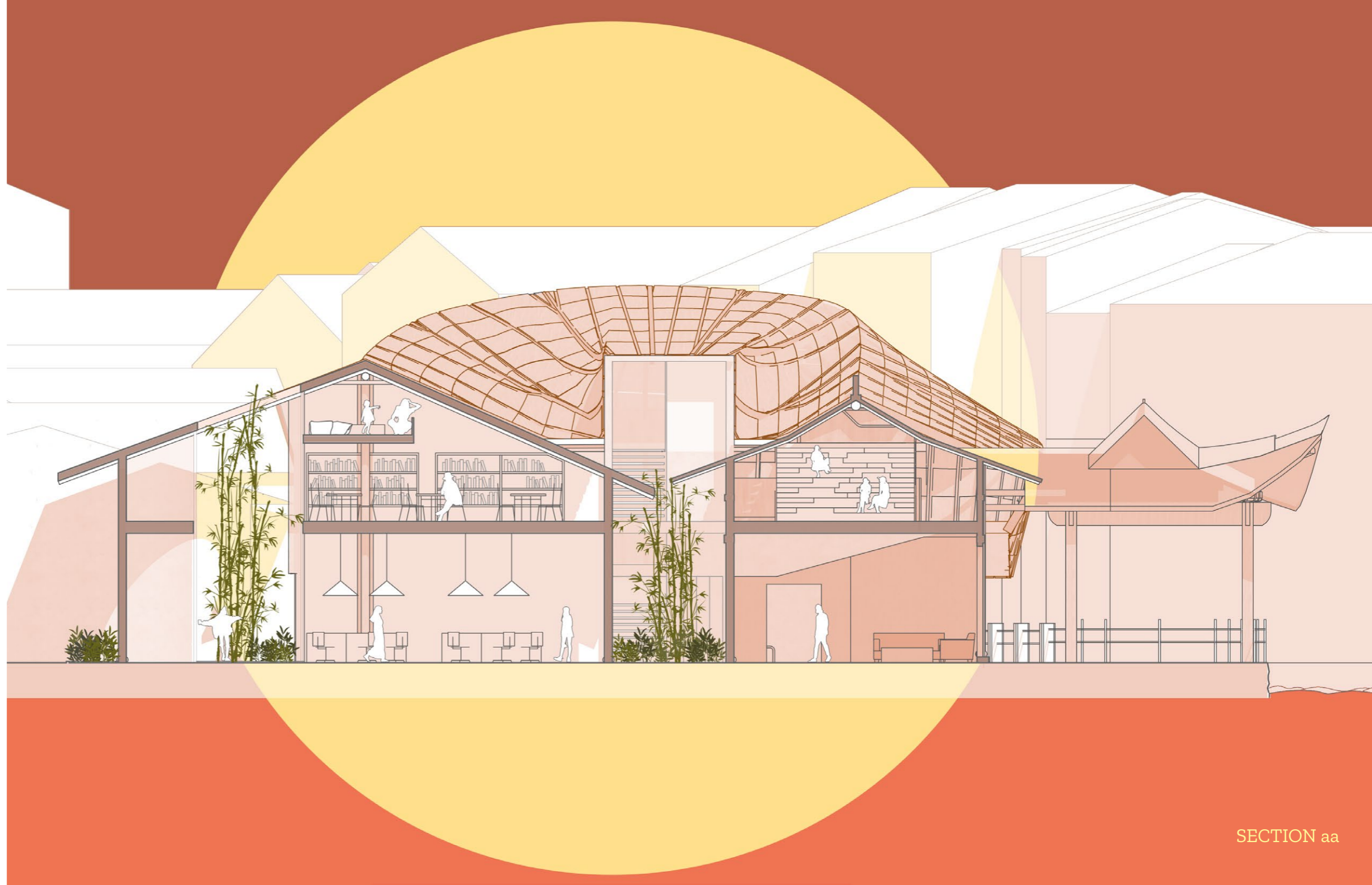


1st floor

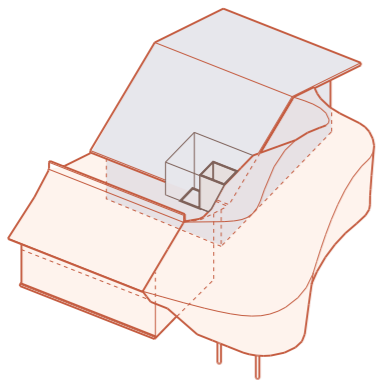


2nd floor

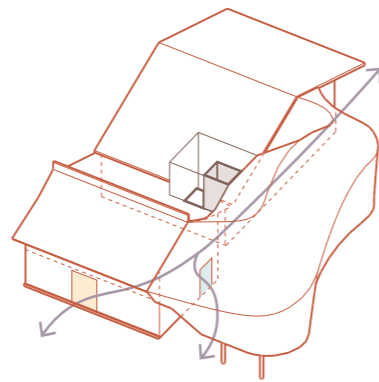
- ① workshop
- ② reception
- ③ changing room
- ④ kitchen
- ⑤ lecture/ rehearsal room
- ⑥ activity room
- ⑦ reading room



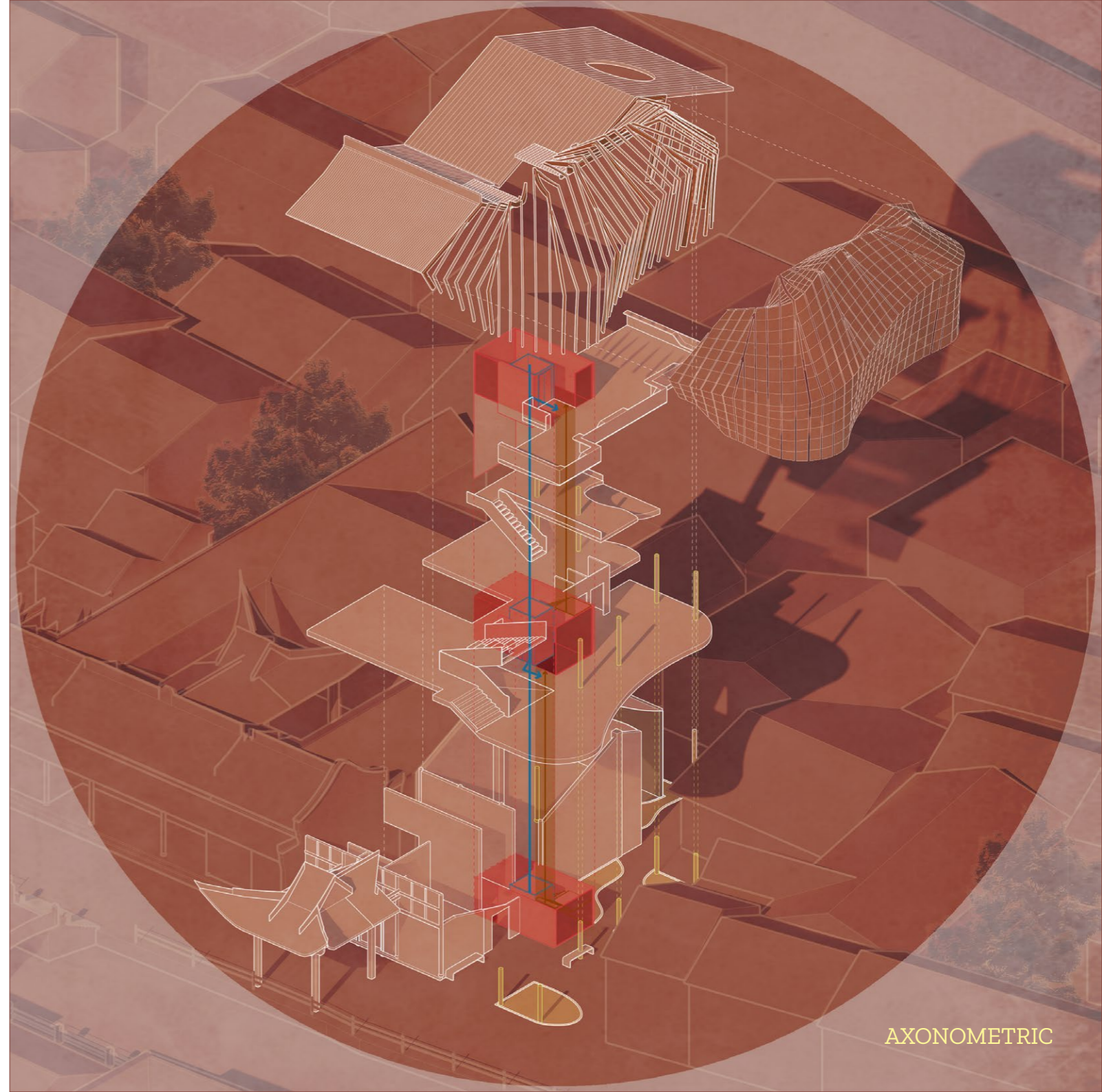
SECTION aa



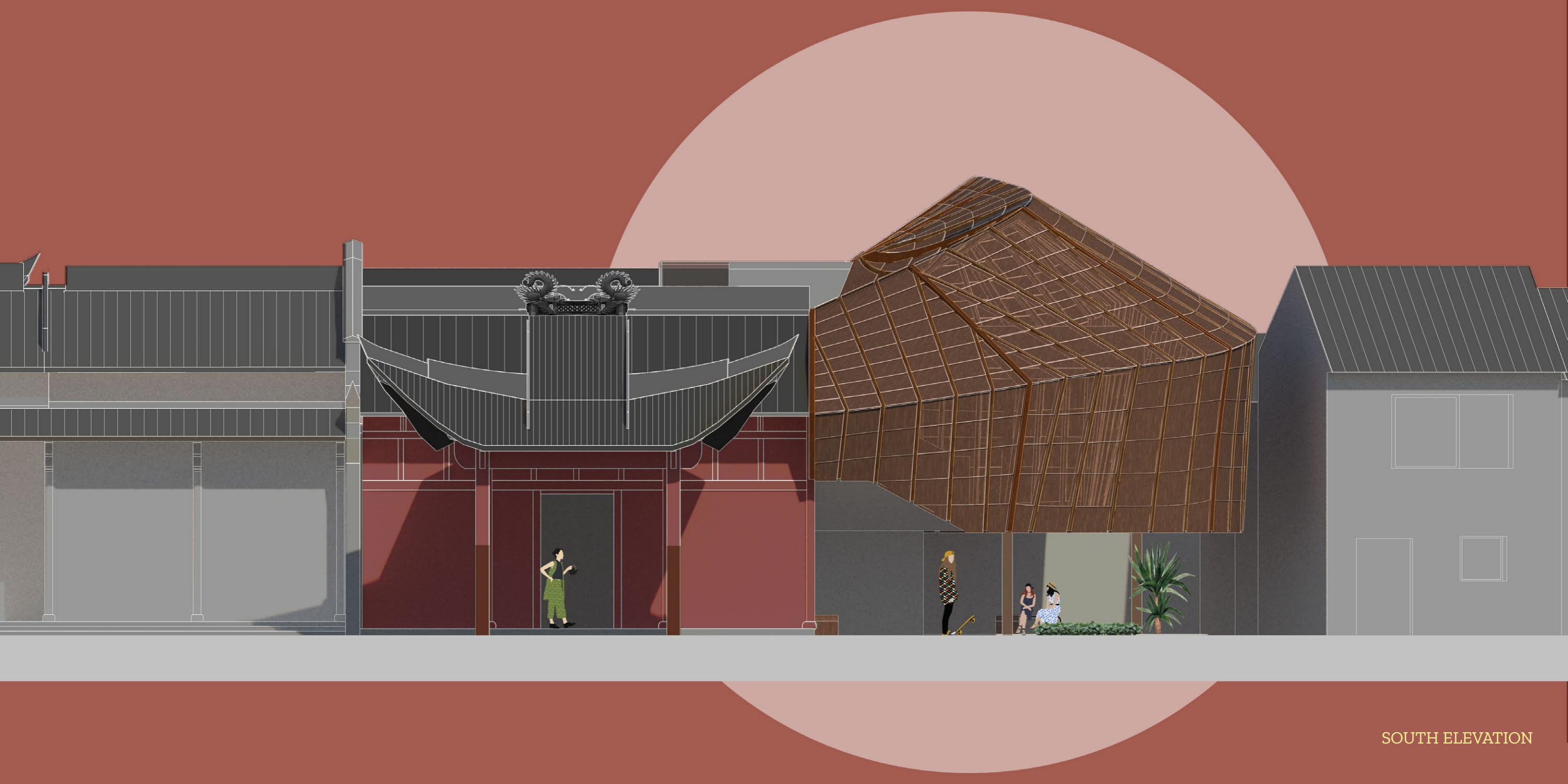
- quiet space
- busy/active space



- ← main horizontal circulation on ground floor
- main entrance closed when the stage is giving performance



AXONOMETRIC



SOUTH ELEVATION

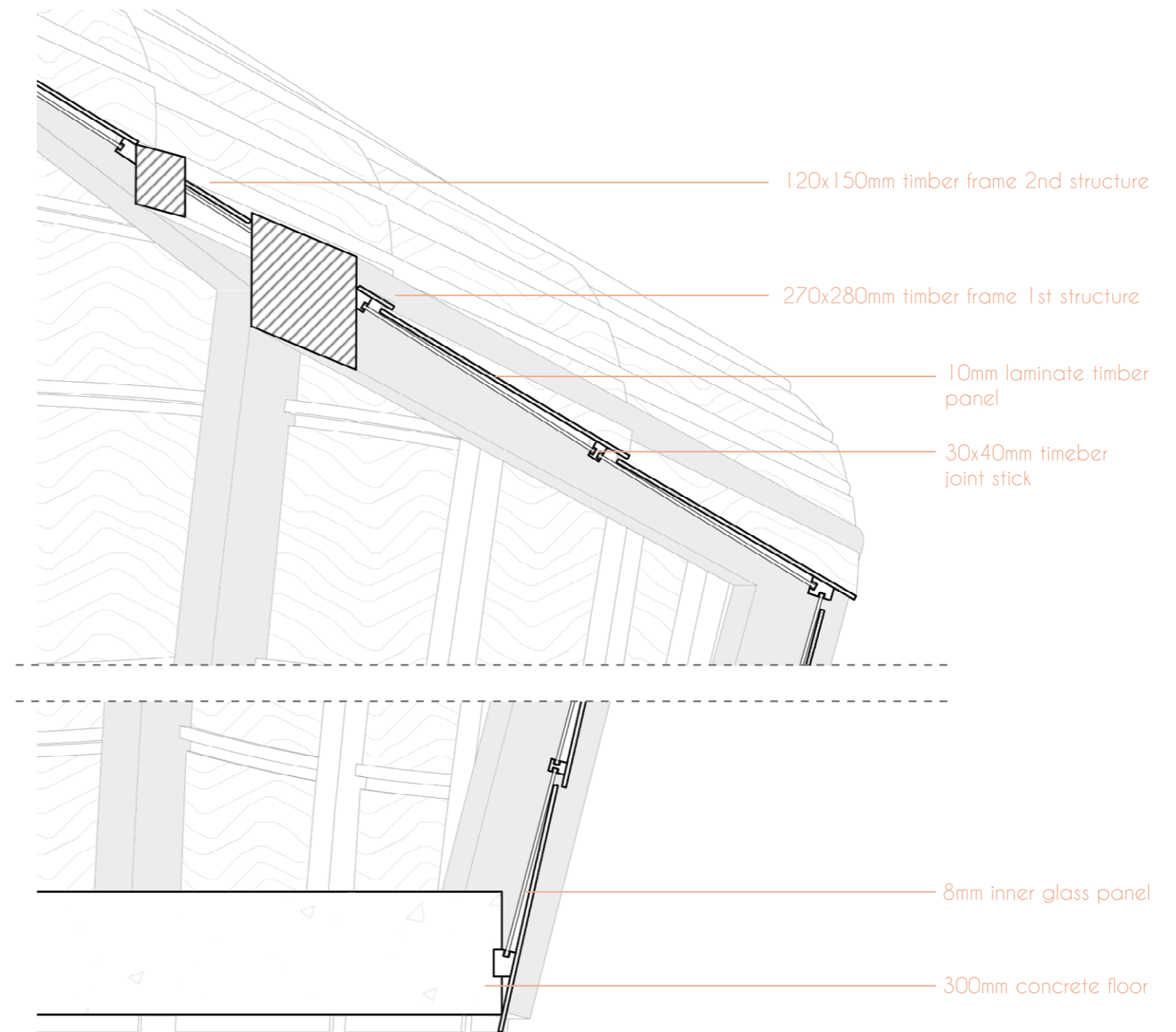
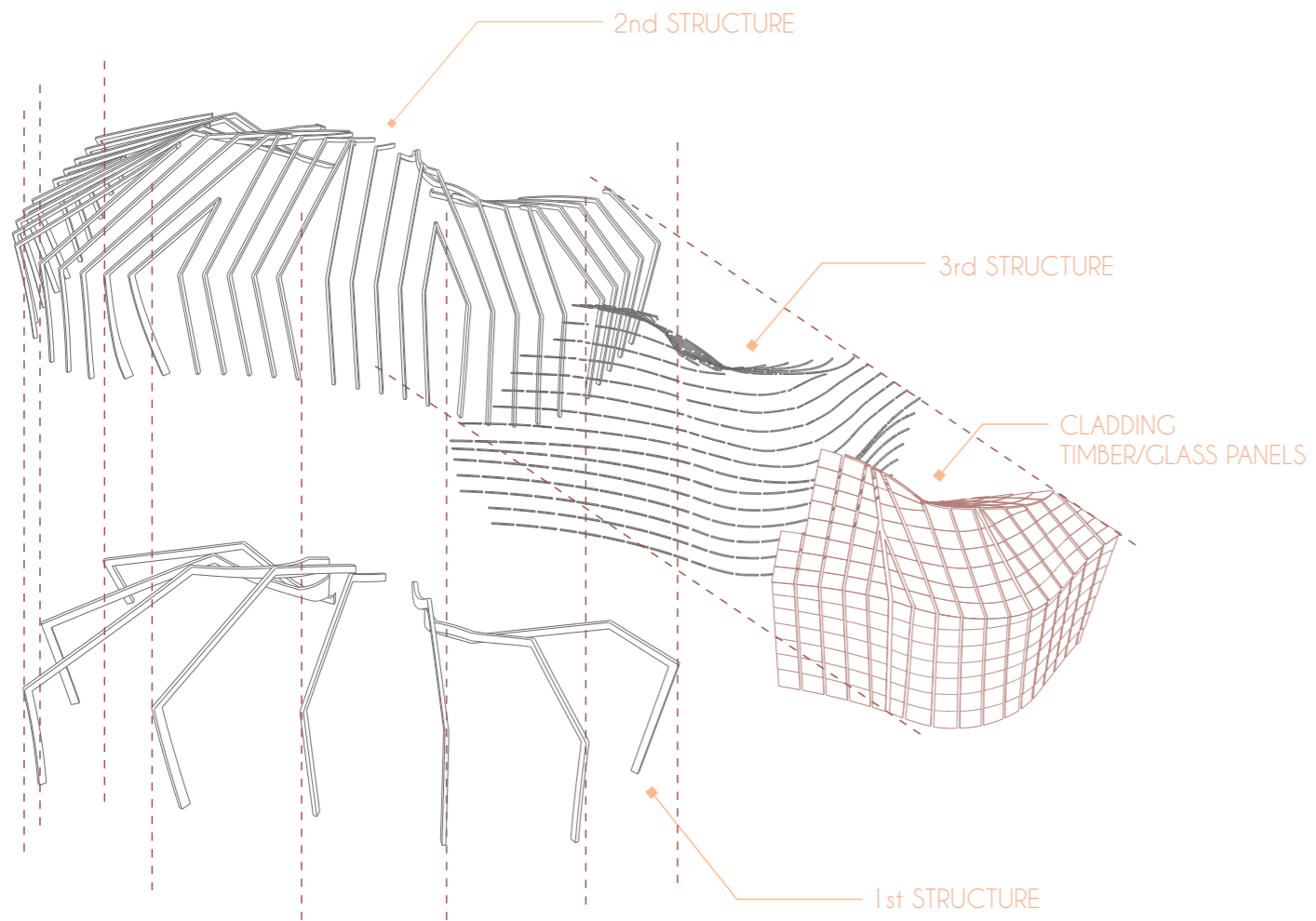
MATERIALITY

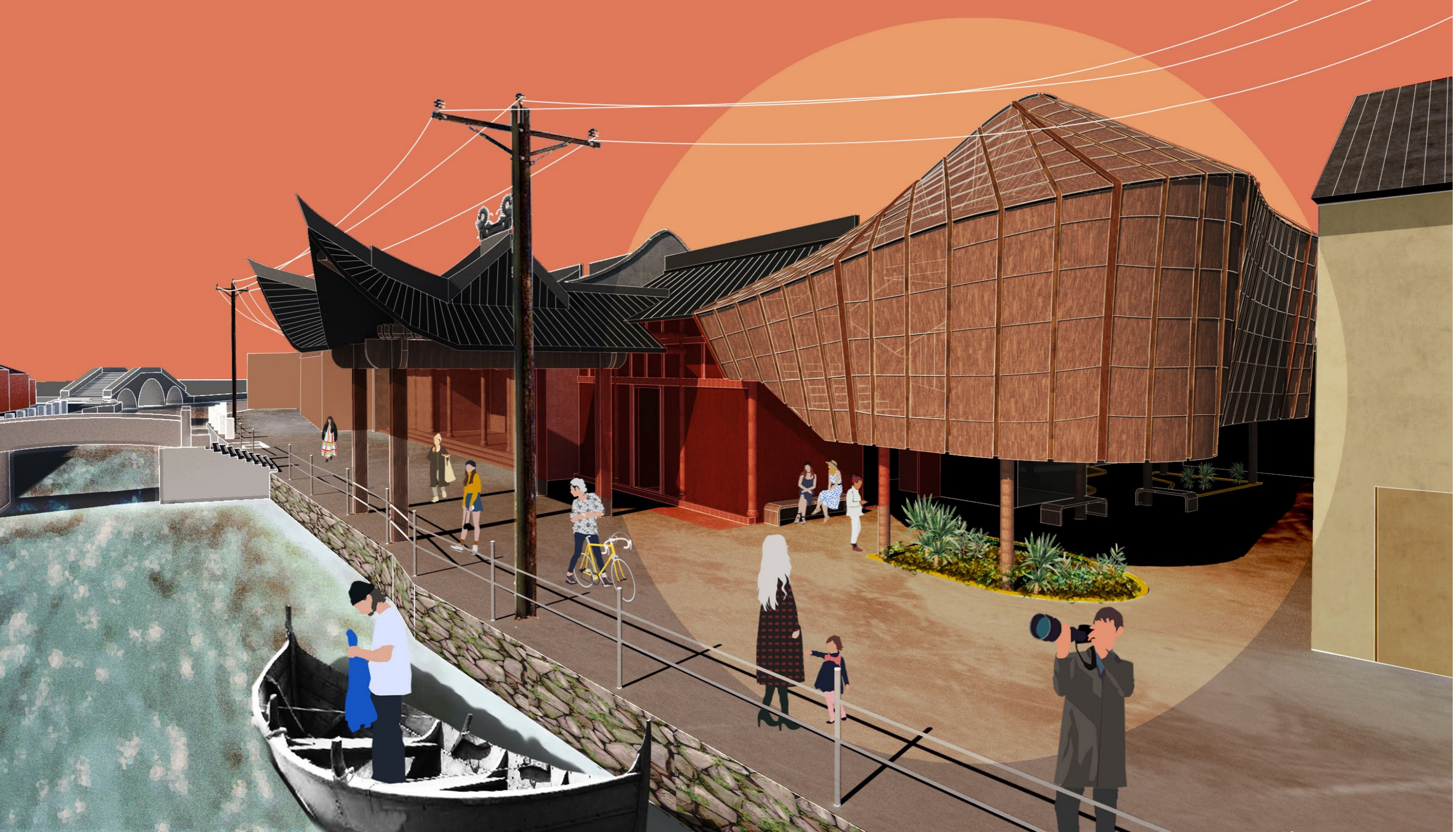
The materials for architecture in the context are basically from nature. Apart from the small part of refurbished modern facade which is made of concrete and steel, most of the original houses are using timber as façade and building structure, and ceramic tiles for roof. Bridges and water banks are made of stone.

In order to fit into the context, the main material using will stick to timber. As the configuration of the newly designed block already stand out from the surrounded traditional architecture, the materials choice on the elevation needs to stay low-profile and simple as much as possible so that not influence the harmony of the site and the visual effect towards the play stage.



material using on the design











CONCLUSION

This project was started from a forgotten historical architecture, and ended in a renovated traditional architecture integrated with a contemporary structure. It was a great joy when first looked into this context and comprehended this particular social ecology. It also brings me thinking of 'what should architecture do to preserve a cultural heritage'. The preservation does not only limited to the physical architecture, but more importantly, the flesh and blood of the real culture and life happening there.

Via this project I intend to awaken the notion of culture inheritance from the publics. Architecture may helps the restoration of a certain structure, but also creates space and function which respond to what the local users has missed. This community centre will get knowledge and spirit from the traditional culture on the site, and shall give back more with a dynamic and energetic urban life to the neighborhood.



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web image

[p.1] intro picture
http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_6c33acec010115cd.html by 龔國榮

[p.3] Kun Opera
http://forsxm.lofter.com/post/1f092b34_10f82386 by 施夏明

[p.6] Gulin Village map
<https://www.google.se/maps/place/Gulinzhen,+Yinzhou,+Ningbo,+Zhejiang,+China/@29.8281565,121.4302462,962m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m5!3m4!1s0x344d70a53e0b6665:0x77def2d24b15fc1c!8m2!3d29.83524!4d121.435704>

[p.9] Guangdong Opera House
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[p.10] performance on stage
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[p.11] performance on stage
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[p.24] site photo
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[p.27] Hakka Round House
<http://www.yuelvxing.com/post/732/>

[p.27] Dai Bamboo House
http://www.sohu.com/a/208188215_161335

[p.27] hole on the roof
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/348888302377884360/>