



GEHUA YOUTH AND CULTURAL CENTRE

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Gehua Youth and Cultural Centre
<https://urbannext.net/gehua-youth-cultural-centre/>

This pioneer youth and cultural center is located in Beidaihe, China. Surrounded by nature and away from the urban chaos nearby, the building was designed to be fully fused with nature. A rich mix of program is accommodated in this small building of 2,700 m²: theater, gallery, teaching spaces, DIY area, café, book bar, multi-media hall, master studio, staff dormitories and so on.



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The design is a thoughtful response to the client's needs for spaces that can accommodate the ever-changing programs of the camp, with an open and free spirit that is rare in conventional teaching facilities. The roof is flat to be used for landscaping and outdoor activities; the indoor ground follows the rise of topography, however, and is set at several different heights, which subtly divide the free-flowing spaces into different zones, all facing the sloped central courtyard with full-height glass. A brick paved path zigzags its way through the grassy courtyard connecting all different heights, providing both an accessible route and an interesting landscape element.

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At the lower end of the courtyard, the building façade is made by a giant pair of weathered bamboo-faced folding doors with slot openings inspired by the 'eyes' on the local poplar trees. Behind it, across a corridor, is another pair of folding doors of the same size but faced with off-white fabric that can serve as projection screens. When these two sets of folding doors are both opened, the small theater behind is left entirely open to the courtyard.

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Relatively small with only about 120 seats, the theater is nonetheless designed and equipped to host high-quality performances. Behind the heavy sound absorbing curtains at the back of the stage are the aforementioned two pairs of folding doors. When opened up, they dramatically transform the whole scenario, with the central courtyard all of sudden becoming part of the theatre. The spectators can enjoy a totally different kind of theatrical experience, novel and unexpected. In the summer nights, the courtyard is often used as an outdoor cinema with movies projected onto the surface of the inner folding doors.

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The center provides a place in sunshine and surrounded by nature for children to explore and discover. It is like a micro-society. It also acts as a cultural hub and is open year-round to the local residents, hosting various performances and cultural activities.

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