GUGA S'THEBE CHILDREN'S THEATRE

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The Guga S'Thebe Children's Theater is an expansion of the existing Arts and Culture Center Guga S'Thebe (by architect Carin Smuts) located in the heart of the Langa Community in Cape Town, South Africa. It attracts local children, adolescents, and artists, as well as international tourists. Referencing historic and cultural properties of the site, the rectangular building volume is rotated, creating an almost triangular square between the new theater and the amphitheater.

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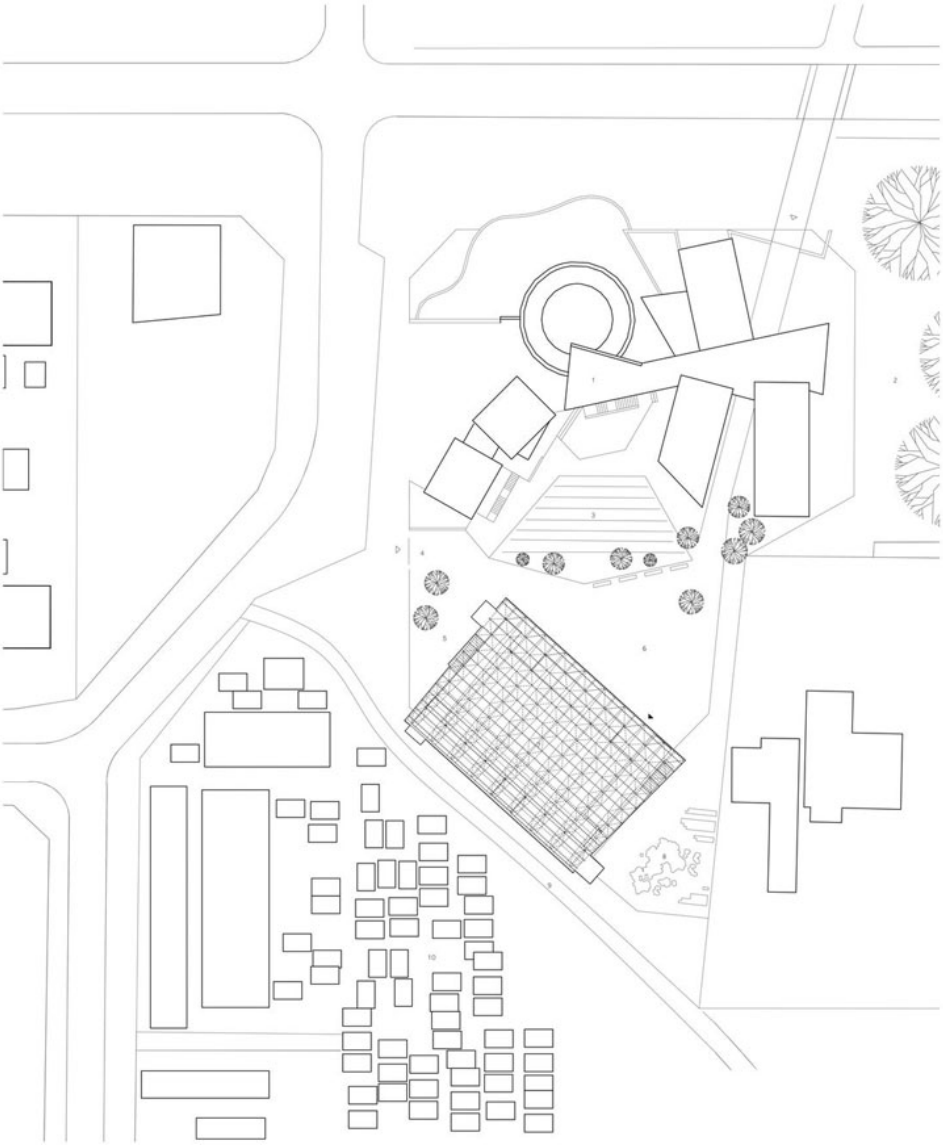

Siteplan M 1:200

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Site Plan

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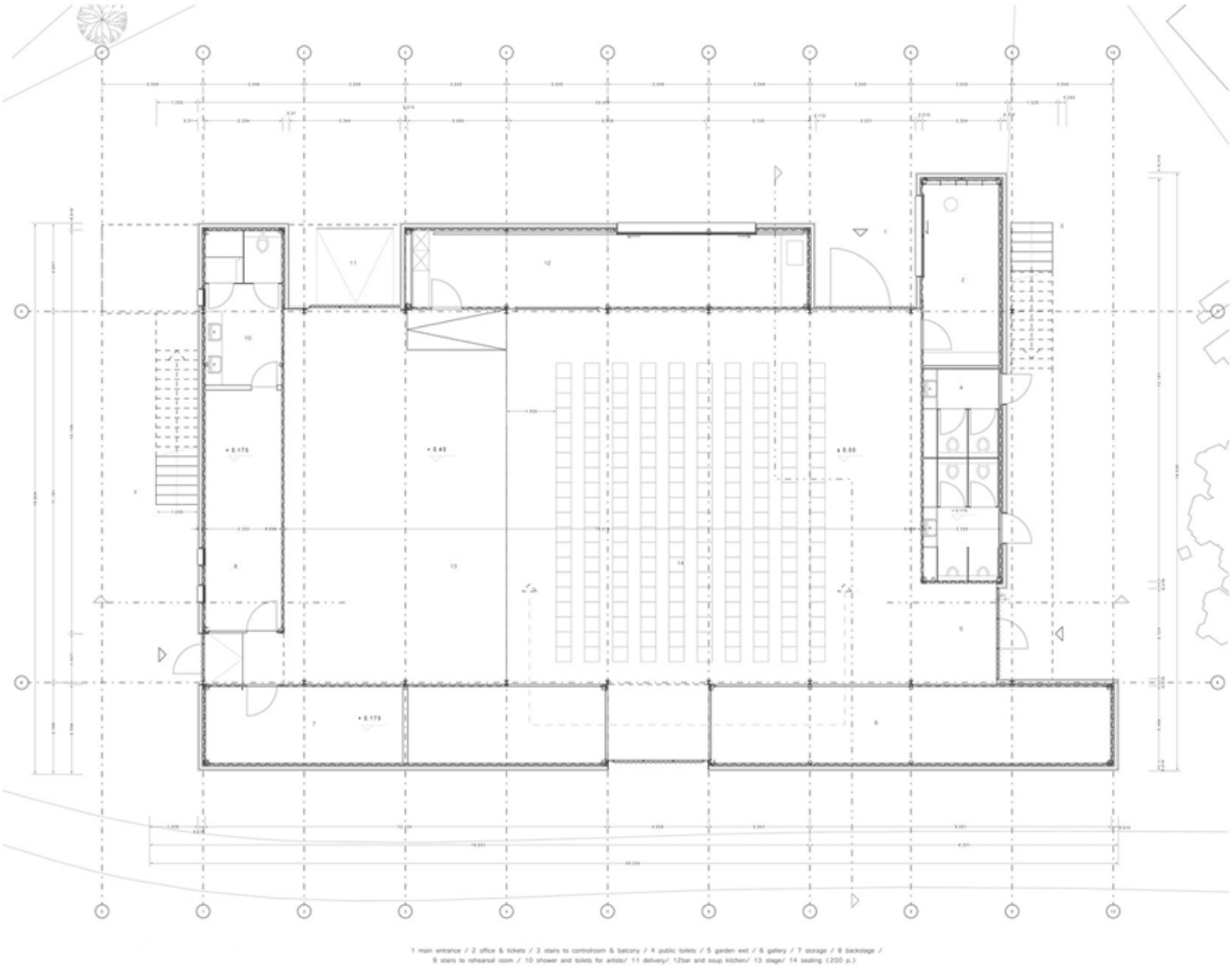

Floorplan Main Floor M 1:50

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Plans

The square serves as an internal courtyard and as an open auditorium for the exterior stage. Position and rotation of the building volume are based on an existing path, which was grown informally during the apartheid era as a connection between the former barracks and the post office. This pathway was and is an important space for informal exchange. Utilizing readily available and inexpensive shipping containers, the building's rectangular footprint is defined by eleven stacked and staggered used shipping containers. The two-level-high boundary of the container wall defines the interior enclosure of a multifunctional theater (seating for 200 people) with a reconfigurable stage and exterior spaces, such as an outdoor stage, children's play areas, and a garden. Numerous auxiliary spaces are contained within the width of the container wall, including backstage areas, a soup kitchen, a room for stage direction, a recording studio, workshops, and spectator balconies, creating a color pop as bright colors contrast against the neutral tones of the large corrugated acoustically diffusing surface wrapping the performance space. Local artists and textile designers collaborated and made a series of interior and exterior textile panels that act as screens, windows and acoustic quilts.

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Double-story steel columns line the interior of the container wall, supporting v-shaped pre-fabricated wood trusses and a metal roof that hover above and extend past the container wall suspending a plane of acoustic absorbers and lights. To improve the interior climate, the container walls were insulated with a layer of light clay panels, which were fabricated on site.

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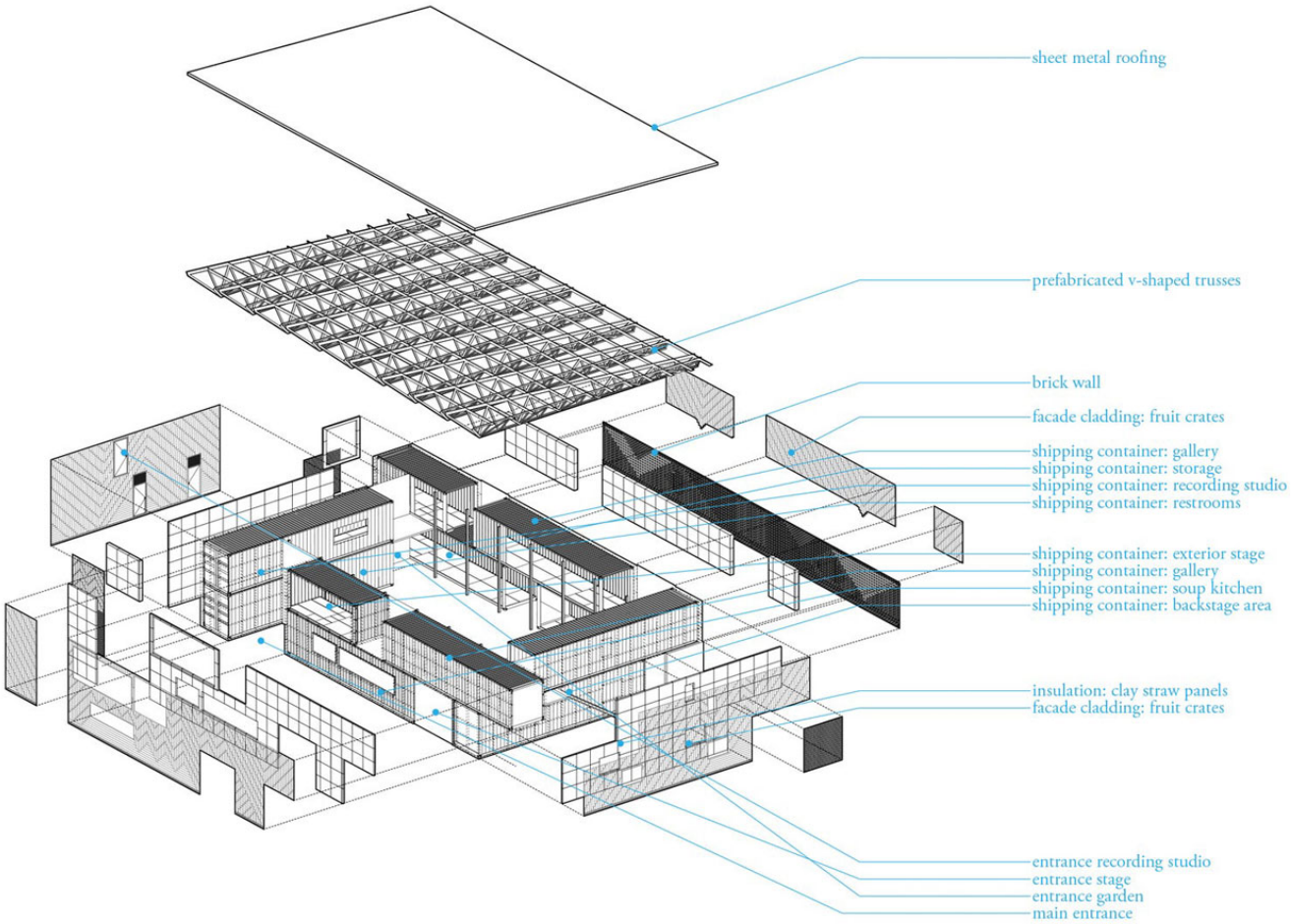

Diagram

The façade's unique patterning is derived from researching traditional Xhosa beadwork, giving systematic configurations that adapt to different orientations of the building and transitions to other materials – from wooden shingles (re-used planks from fruit crates provided by local agriculture) to brickwork facing the historic path.

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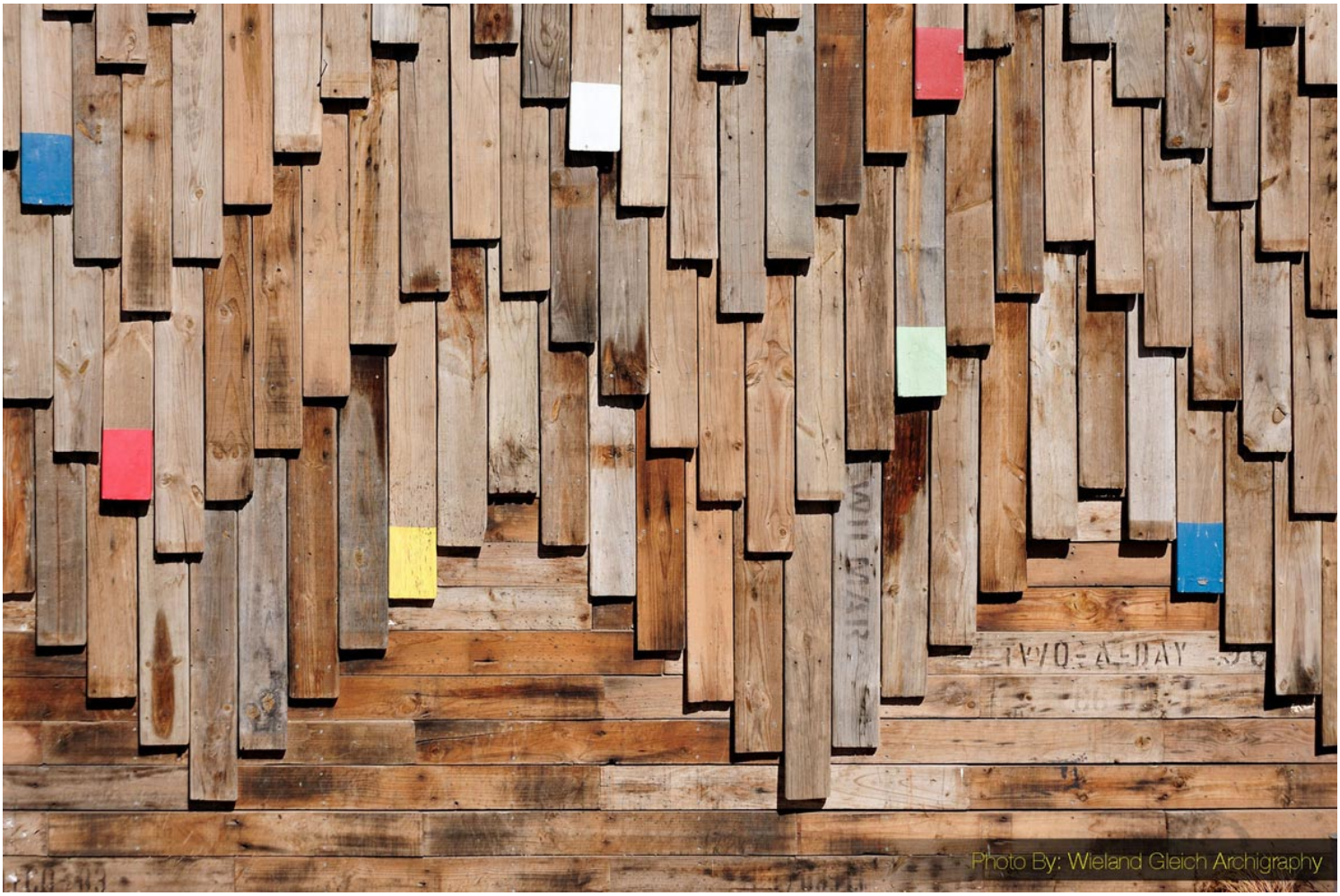

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Vernacular tradition's research in construction methods combined with industrial reused or recycled waste materials and naturally renewable earth materials define the design team's parameters for the Design/Build framework and pedagogical structure. Focused on full-scale prototyping and material experiments, architecture students from three international schools – the Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta), the Peter Behrens School of Arts (HS Duesseldorf), and RWTH Aachen University (Aachen) – embarked on an international collaboration to make impact through design. Participating students led all phases of design and construction. During the construction phase, students worked alongside members of the community, learning how to work with an array of construction materials and their specific applications while developing a strong awareness and respect for another culture and its surrounding environment. This pedagogy allows for an

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understanding of architecture as a social practice with all of its attendant cultural implications.

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The project was built thanks to an academic collaboration, the City of Cape Town and Langa neighbours.

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