CUISUBA YI

Cultural & Visitor Center

Completed in March 2021, the building is conceived as a landmark to pay homage to the Yi people, an ethnic minority group mainly residing in the mountainous regions and rural areas of South-West China.



Yi dancer under the hanging courtyard
photo: Hongkai Peng



The center aims to become a wordless monument which stands alone resembling Yi culture through symbolism and in creating a ritual atmosphere

Plateau Bird Eye View
photo: Jingsong Xie

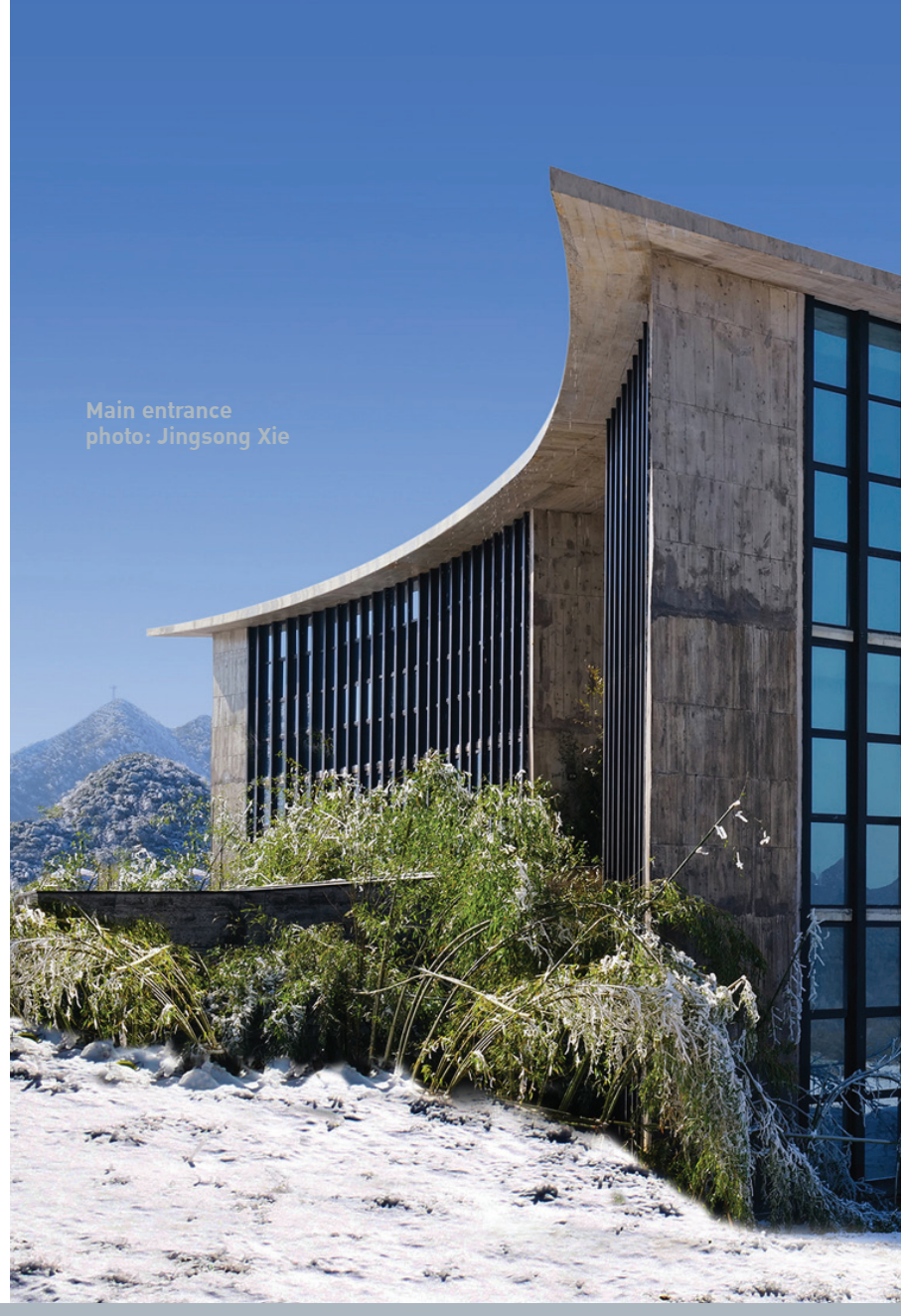
The practice's approach has always been characterized by deep research on the peculiar cultural aspects of a particular community, which can result in rites, fabrics, patterns, construction techniques, festivals and pictograms, in order to bring some of these unique features into the design, creating a strong bond with local culture and collective memory. Commissioned by the Dafang County Tourism Development Office in order to provide the basic structure to promote a sustainable tourism in the area, the center aims to become a symbolic landmark celebrating Yi culture.

LOCATION
grassland plateau

The cultural center grows from a slope with a maximum inclination of 20 degrees on a northwestern Guizhou typical plateau, placed at an altitude of above 2,000 meters in-between untouched grassland hills and mountains. The surrounding environment is ecologically sensitive and the thin soil layer only presents a small strata of exposed rock, where the 1,565 sqm site is located to encourage maximum recovery of vegetation.

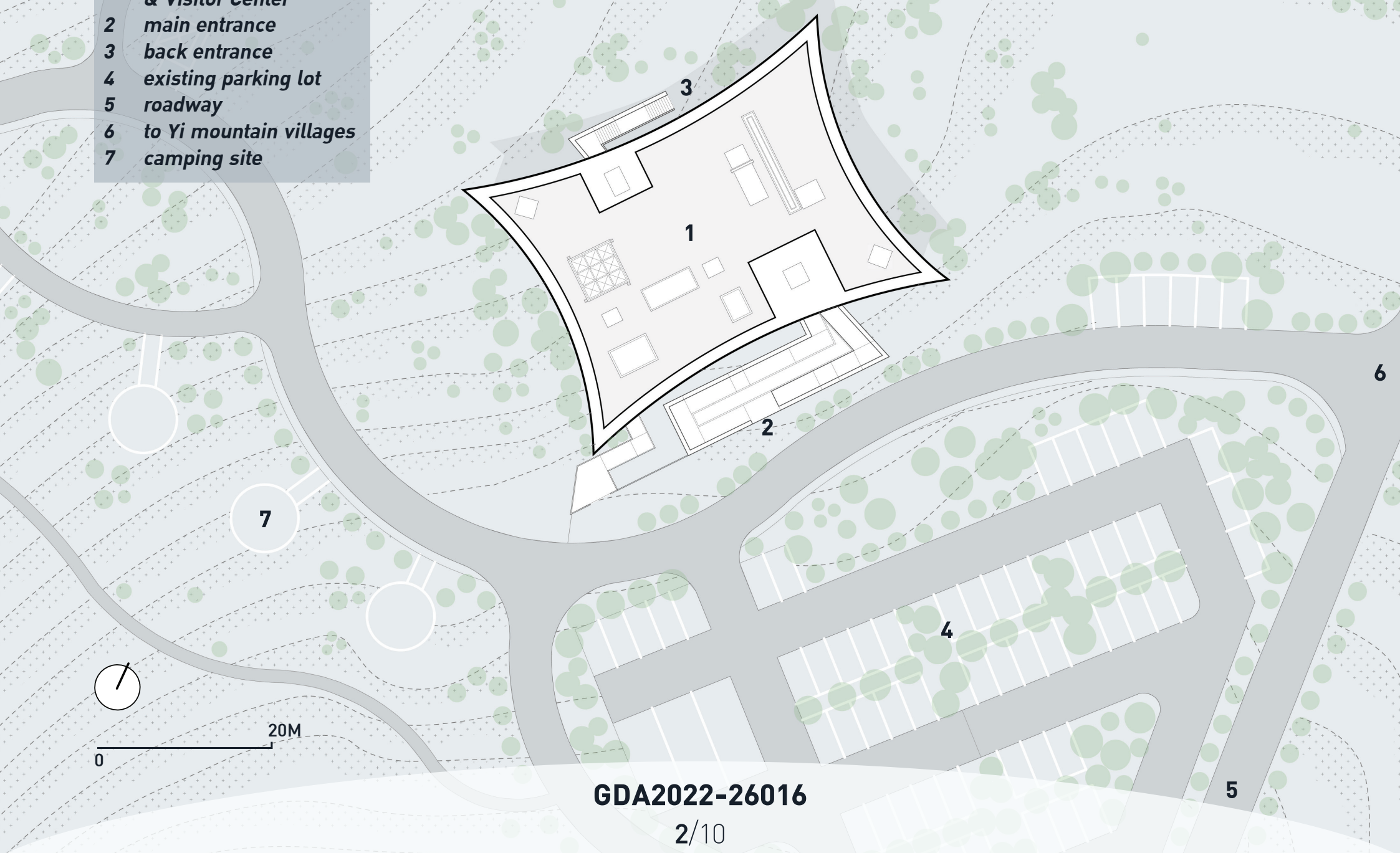
Completion: March 2021
Site Area: 1,565 sqm
Building Area: 2,569 sqm
Floors: 3

Snowy plateau - back entrance
photo: Haobo Wei


Main entrance
photo: Jingsong Xie

The center is built with locally resourced materials and inspired by Yi culture unique features and the highland peaks surroundings

1 *Cuisuba Yi Cultural & Visitor Center*
2 *main entrance*
3 *back entrance*
4 *existing parking lot*
5 *roadway*
6 *to Yi mountain villages*
7 *camping site*



SITE+RITE

»How Designers Think«

After a long-term observation and research of the local subculture circle, the architects have established a special WORKING METHOD which aims to effectively protect and regenerate the rural habitats' environment introducing a mnemonic system which reflects the vernacular sacred world.

TORCH FESTIVAL



Torch Festival procession over the hills

From thousands of years the Yi people have been considering the plateau a sacred place where to worship heaven and earth and celebrate the 'Torch Festival', one of their main holidays. The festival commemorates a famous Yi wrestler who used pine tree torches to stop a locusts' plague.

GENIUS LOCI

Architects consistently search for a restoration of a 'broken' genius loci in peripheral southwestern China, where too often a rapid urbanisation processes does not take into account the embedded place-memory and traditions.
Architects' practices mediate a universal modernity with a reinvention of the regional built traditions. They have been put in practice after many years of social and architectural investigations on local vernacular architecture, which was built by, and for, ethnic minority communities.

SACRED SITE

The building takes the tourism development of the area as an opportunity to preserve and showcase local culture. By putting an established theoretical system into practice, developed through long-term observation of local ethnic communities, settlement topography and collective historical inheritance, architects aimed to create a wordless monument which resembles Yi culture through a strong symbolism.

WORKING METHOD OF 'NOSTALGIA'

COMMUNE BY REGIONAL TIE

This method combines the mnemonic of the 'RITE' with the order of the 'SITE' by the atmospheric reproduction of the genius loci, in order to find some directional breakthrough for the current architectural practice in China's rural regions.

3F hanging courtyard
photo: Hongkai Peng

ORDER of the SITE + *MNEMONIC of the RITE*

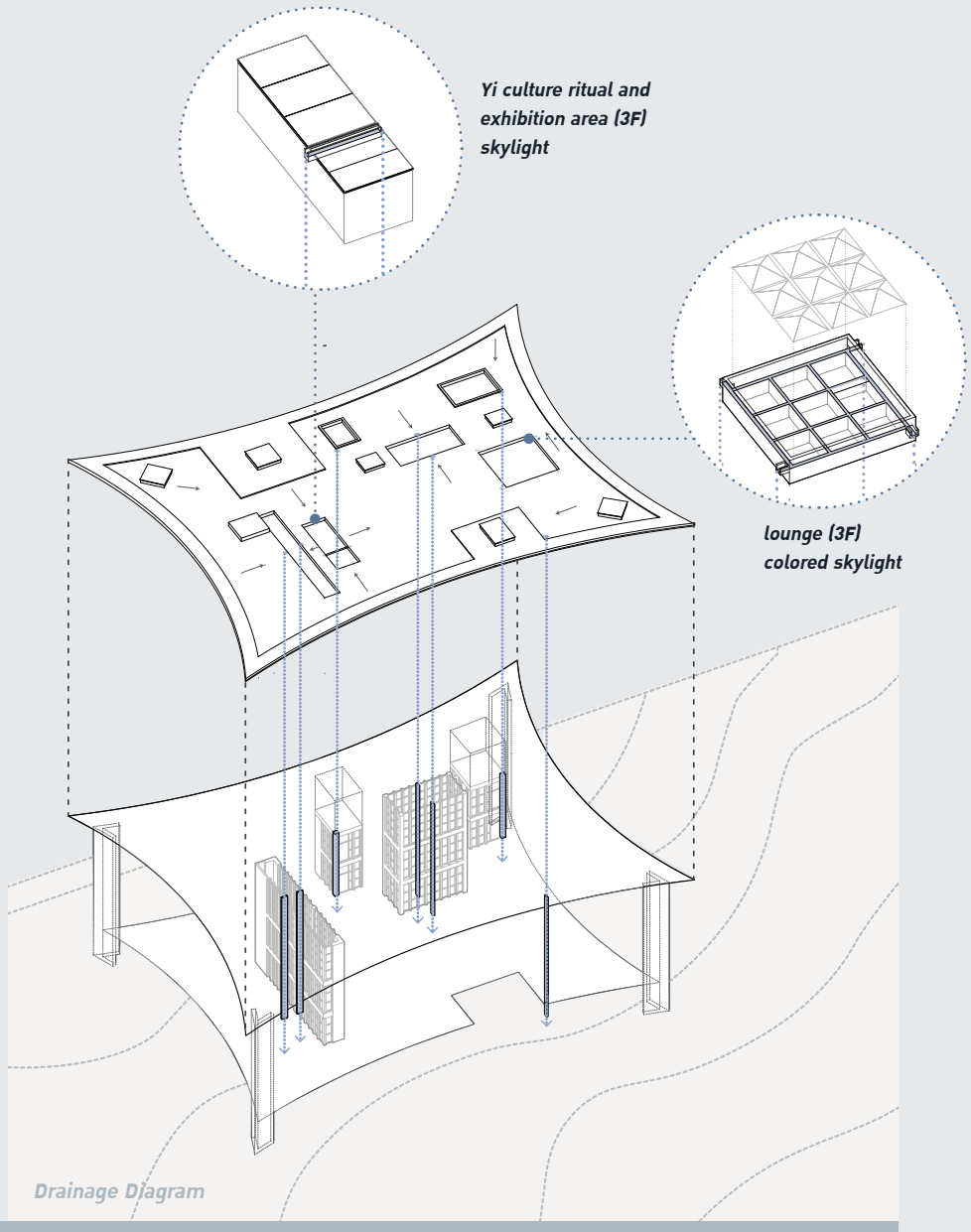
Qualities of the Highland Peaks
Peak - Grassland - Mountain

Mysterious Romance of Yi Culture
*Chasing Fire (**Torch Festival**) - Collective Memory*

SITE
VOLUME

The center not only opens a dialogue with the local ecosystem and economic development, but aims to preserve Yi ancient traditions, which are disappearing; for architects sustainability is strictly connected with cultural heritage and in this cultural center symbolism plays a central role.

The building mass resembles the traditional Yi sacrificial altar where the simple volume is characterized by an iconic roof consisting of a concave arc, which works as a rain water collector; the water vertically flows through the outdoor courtyards, creating a vertical connection of light and rain throughout the building.



Drainage Diagram

The drainage system works both in a functional and symbolic way, creating a connection of water and light within the building

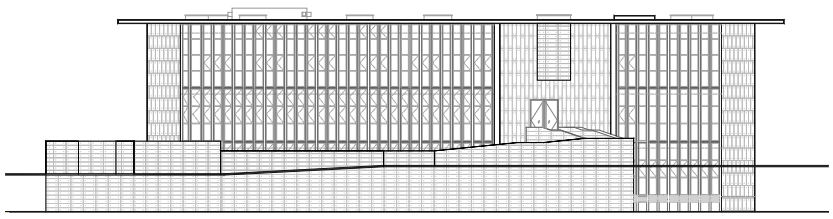


Bird eye view - main entrance
photo: Jingsong Xie

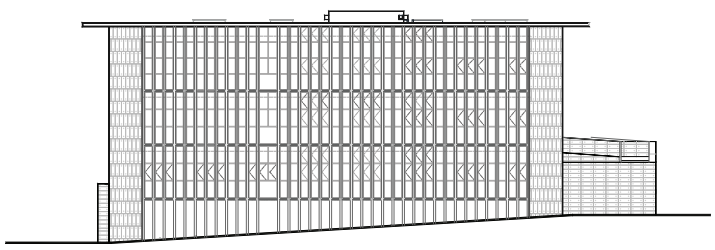
North-East View
photo: Jingsong Xie

SITE
LANDSCAPE

The grassland plateau is considered a sacred place for the Yi people and the building seeks a continuous relationship with the highland peaks. The rough concrete interiors together with the black metal window frames and ceiling help frame the outdoor landscape, making it the protagonist of the interior atmosphere.



South-East Elevation



South-West Elevation

The dynamic architectural promenade resonates with the hills beyond and the landscape enters in the building



3F outdoor view
photo: Jingsong Xie



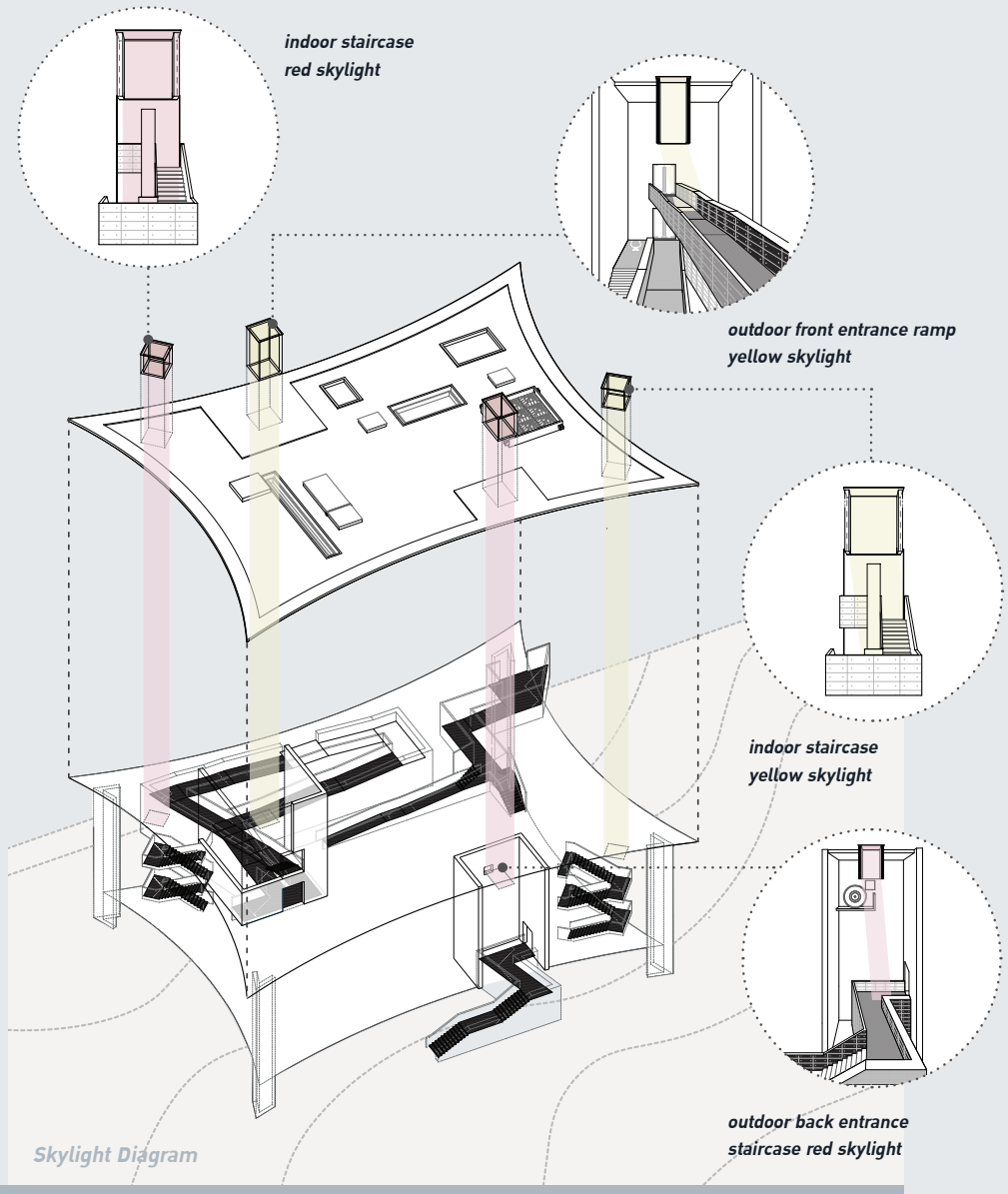
3F ritual & exhibition area
photo: Jingsong Xie



Main entrance ramp
photo: Haobo Wei

RITE
SKYLIGHTS

The roof establishes a dialogue with the sky through the skylight system, which with its red and yellow hints, creates a holy atmosphere and a sense of ritual space. In a free space where different activities can take place, the skylight system helps the visitors' orientation by highlighting specific areas.



Skylight Diagram

The skylights' colors and patterns resemble Yi traditional fabrics



Indoor staircase - red skylight
photo: Hongkai Peng



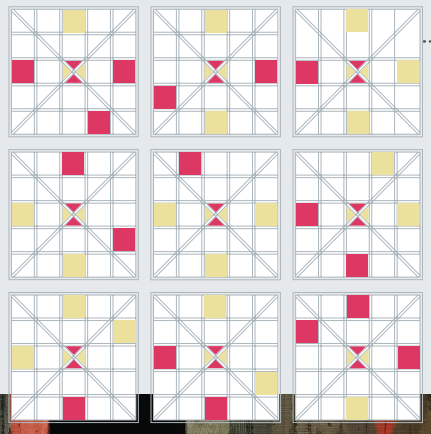
Indoor staircase - yellow skylight
photo: Hongkai Peng



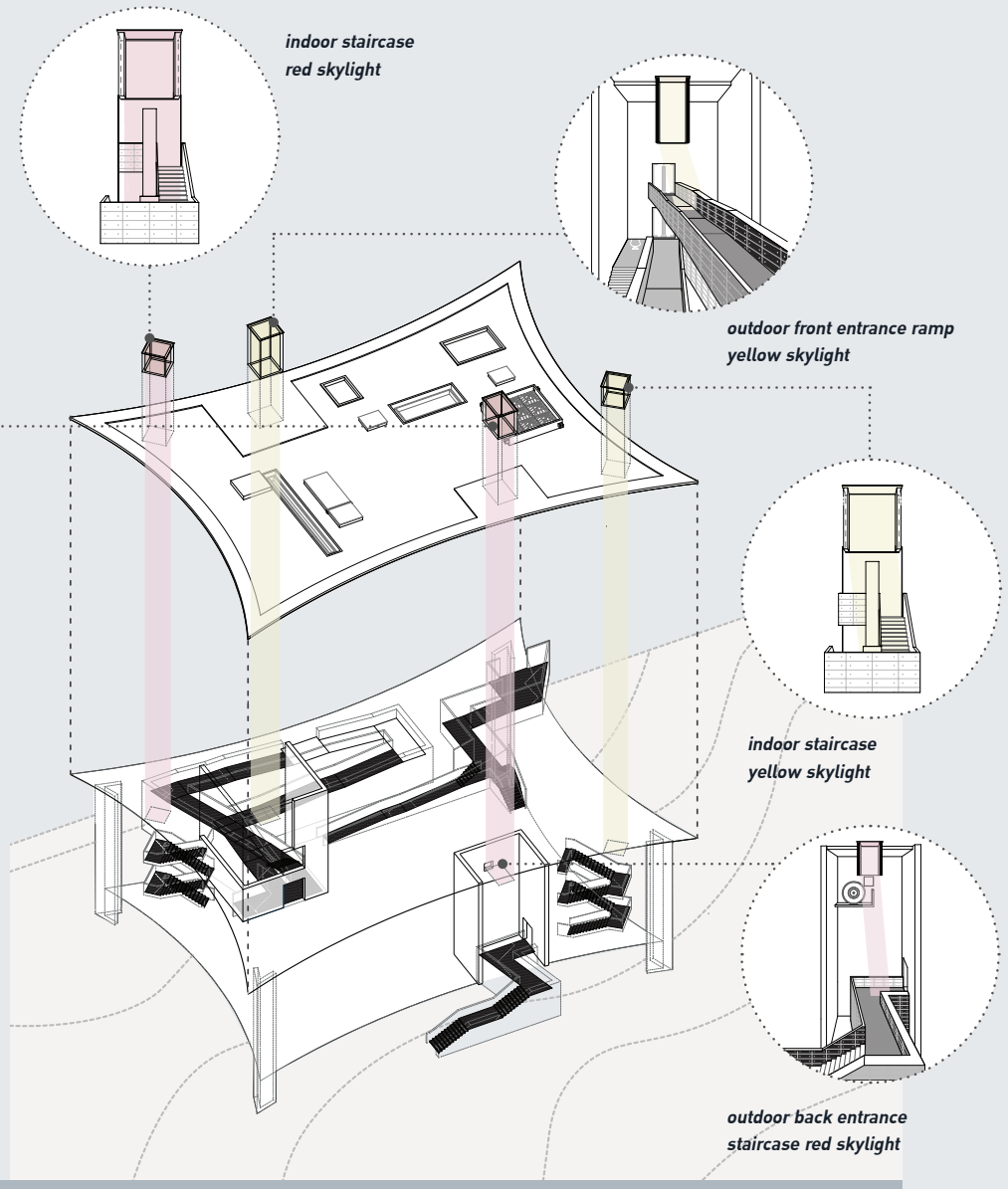
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hanging courtyard
red and yellow skylight





Lights' reflections inside the hanging courtayrd
photo: Yuanping Li

The skylights' colors and patterns resemble Yi traditional fabrics, bringing the mysterious romance of the Yi people into the building



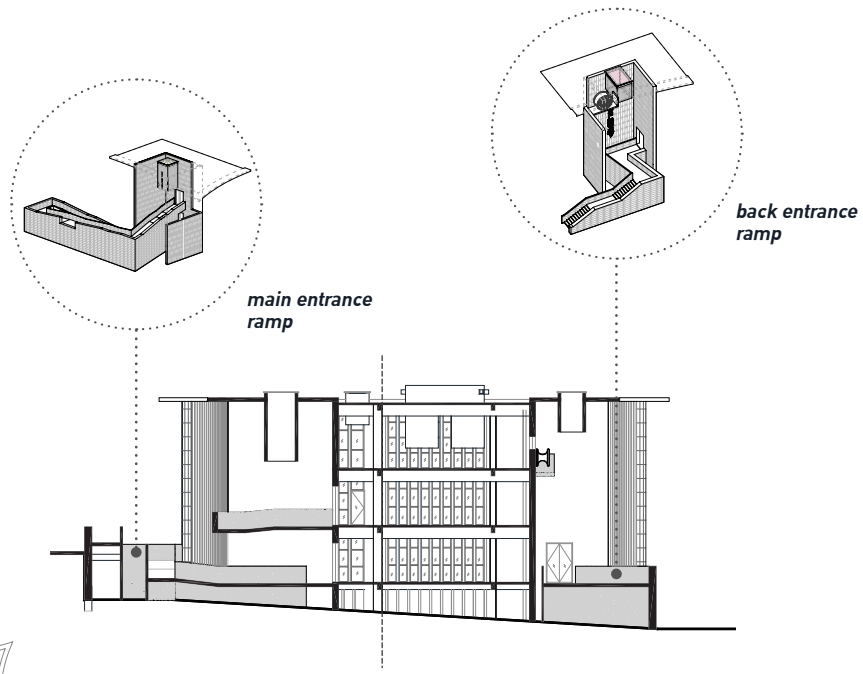
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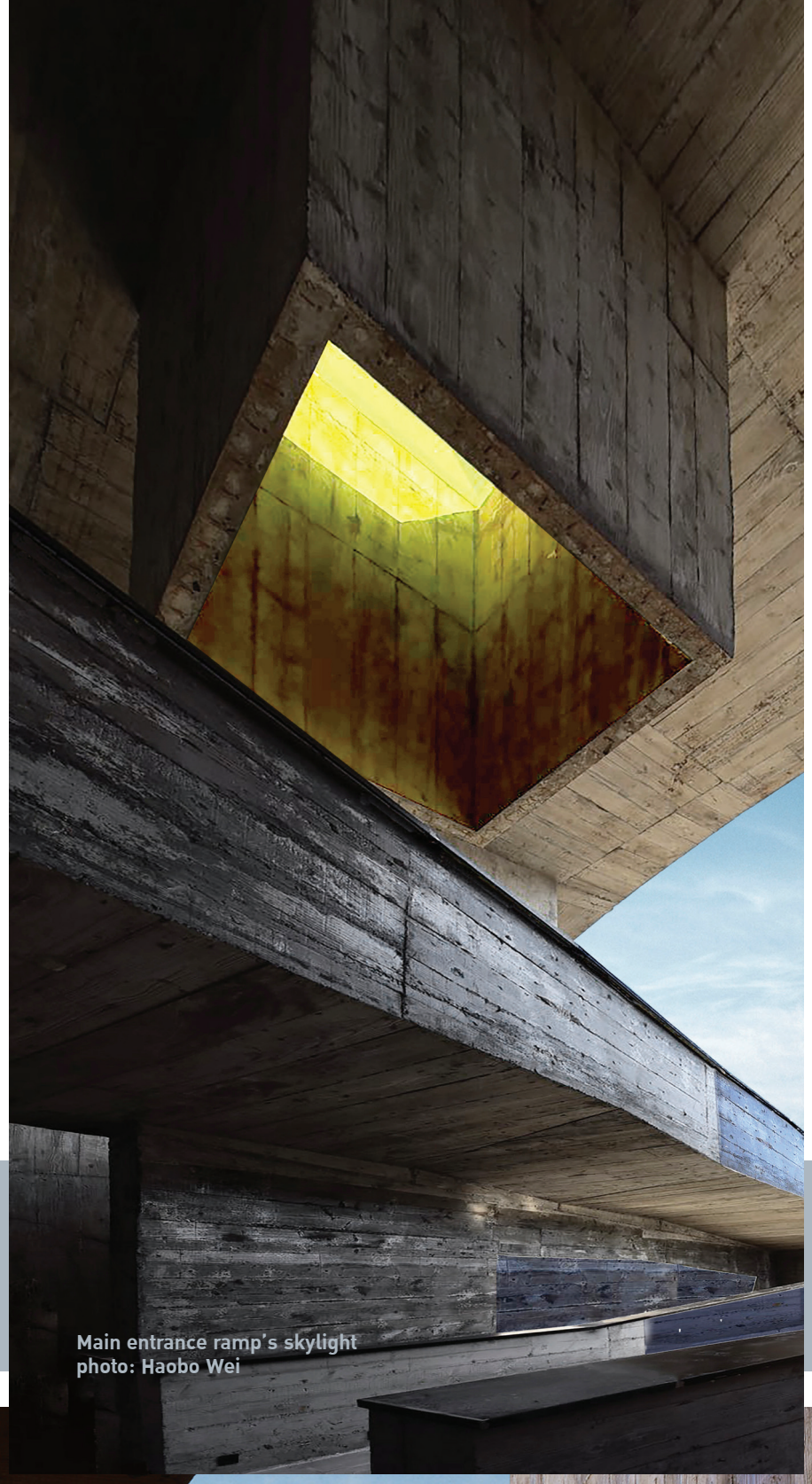
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photo: Hongkai Peng

RITE
RAMPS

The outdoor concrete ramps, which constitute the accesses to the building, break the simple volume creating colorful welcome niches, interacting with the outdoor grassland landscape.



With their folding and undulating movement the ramps evoke the ascension procession over to hills during the 'Torch Festival'


Main entrance ramp's skylight
photo: Haobo Wei


Main entrance ramp
photo: Haobo Wei

PLANS
group technology

The three floors are characterized by a free plan where two structural units combine all the main service functions, which include kitchen, restorooms, elevator, offices and courtyards. The rest of the floors is dedicated to the visitor and cultural center main functions: restaurant on first floor, tea house on the second, and a flexible 'ritual and exhibition area' on the third floor. This spatial production mode derives from the so called 'group technology,' typical of Guizhou mountain villages.

1 Outdoor ramp
2 Restaurant
3 Kitchen
4 Service
5 Tea Room
6 Exhibition Hall
7 Yi culture ritual and exhibition area
8 Hanging Courtyard
9 Office

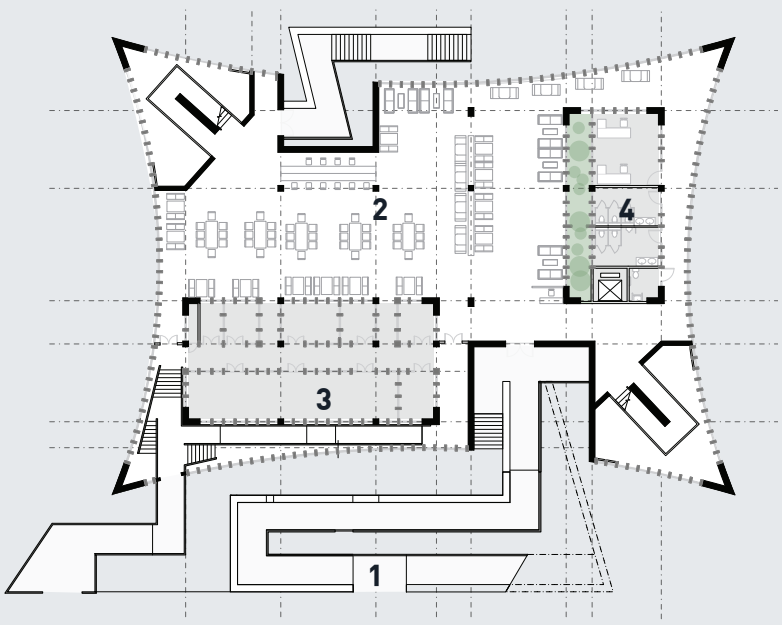


Into the core
photo: Haobo Wei

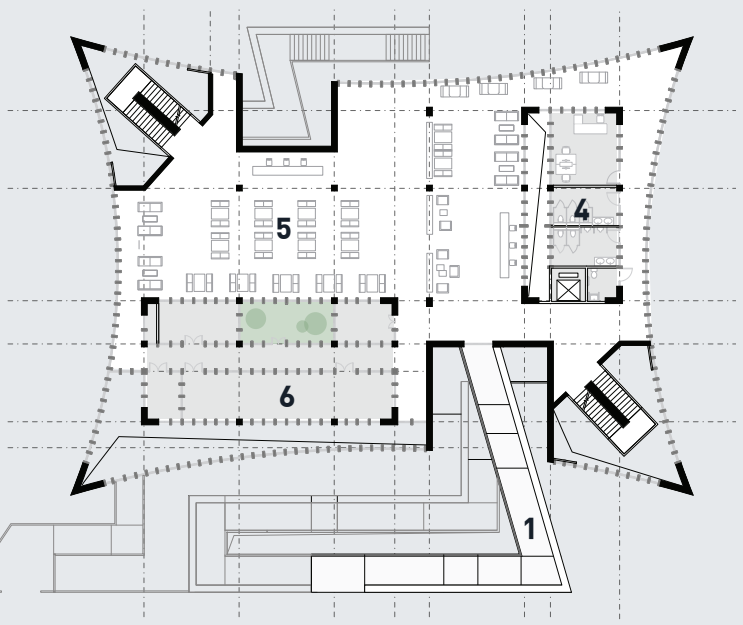


3F hanging courtyard
photo: Haobo Wei

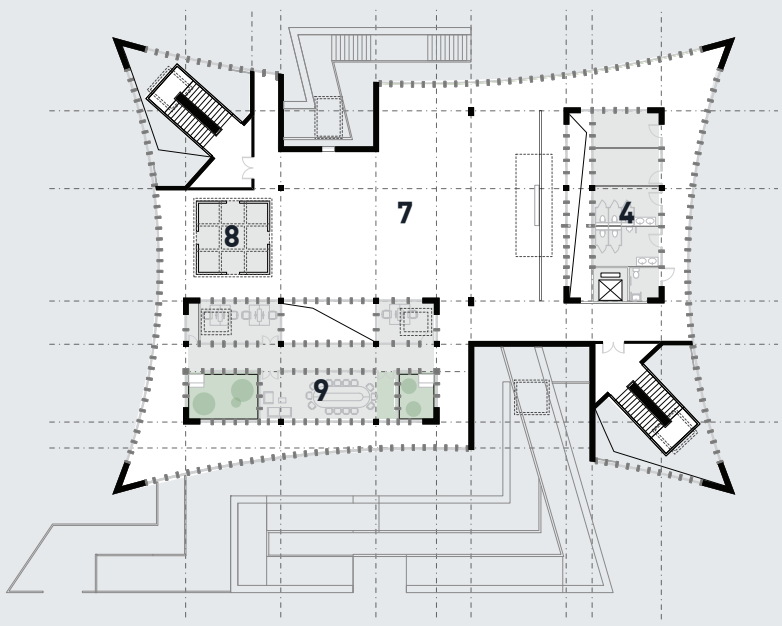
The indoor layout combines the ritual mnemonic structure with a contemporary functional system



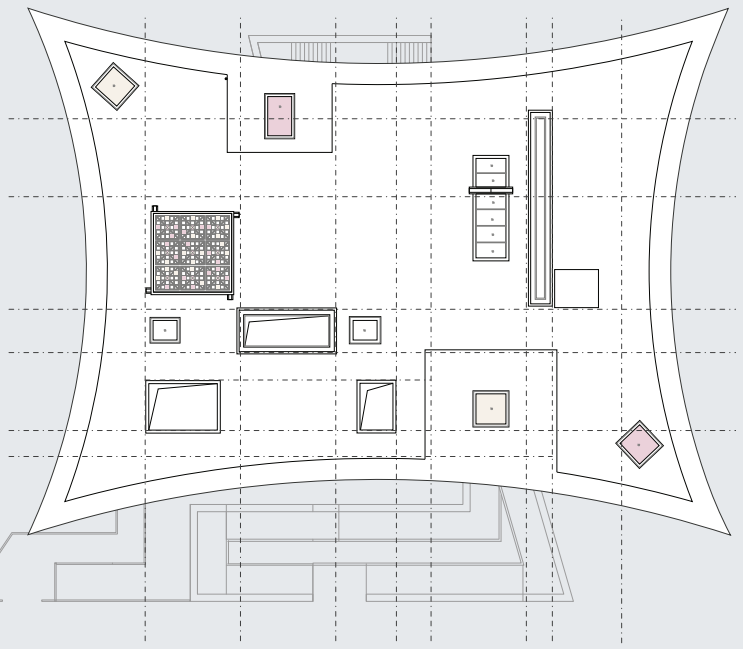
floor 1



floor 2



floor 3



rooftop

10M
0

POETIC
highlights

***** MISSING TEXT *****

FOCUS: mysterious romance of the Yi people
to provide info on how the the poetic and romance is brought into the building (light interaction / space creation / circulation ...) explaining how specific elements of Yi culture are transposed into the building.

The indoor atmosphere is kept dark on purpose so the outdoor bright scenery can stand out; visitors become silent wanderers of the wild grassland and are immersed in a suspended time as gazers of history.



Indoor staircase - yellow skylight
photo: Hongkai Peng



Main entrance ramp's skylight
photo: Haobo Wei

The architects collaborated with the local organization 'Dafang County Yi Studies Association' in researching Yi culture and heritage

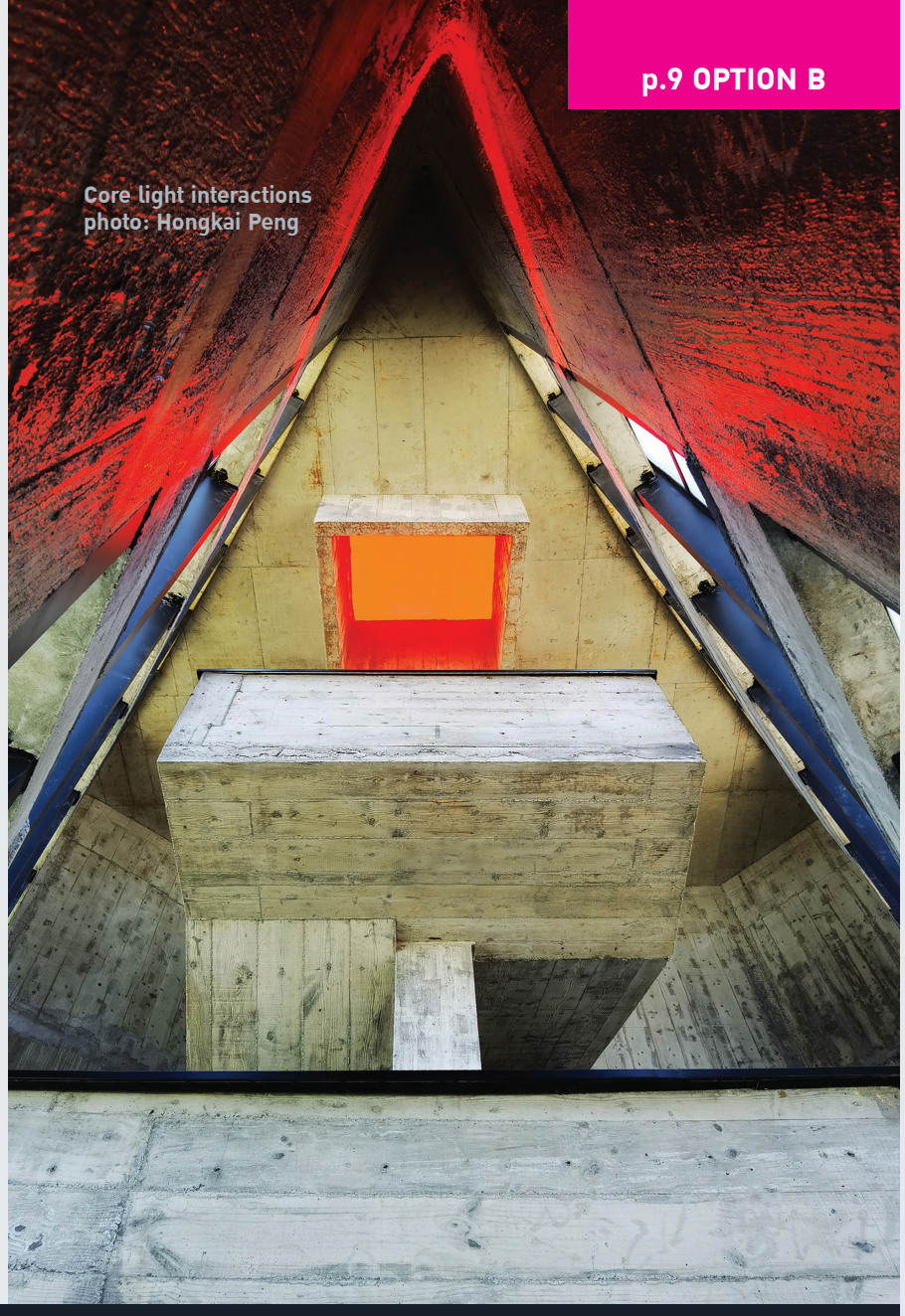
3F hanging courtyard
photo: Haobo Wei

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Core light interactions
photo: Hongkai Peng

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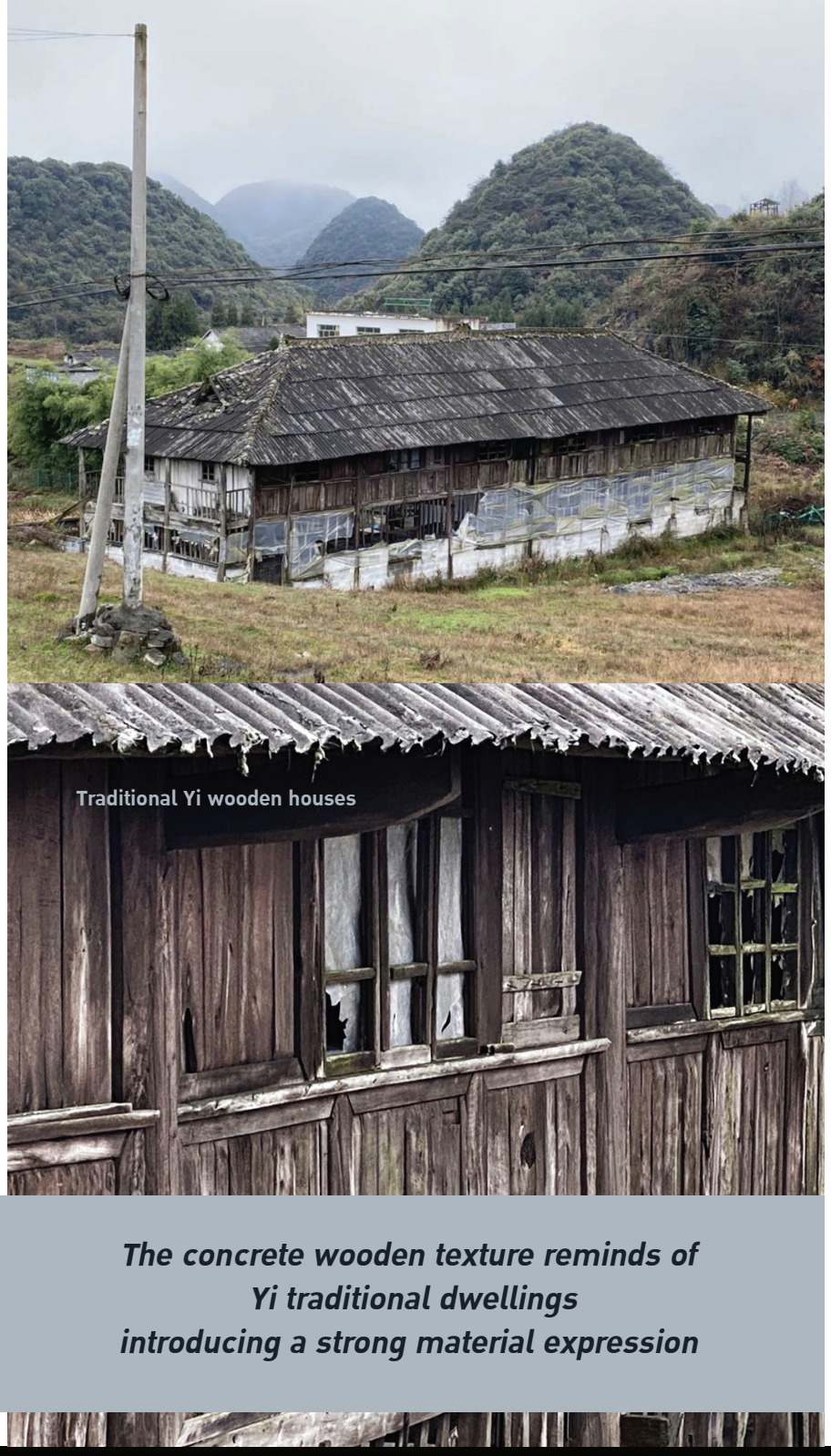
Indoor staircase - red skylight
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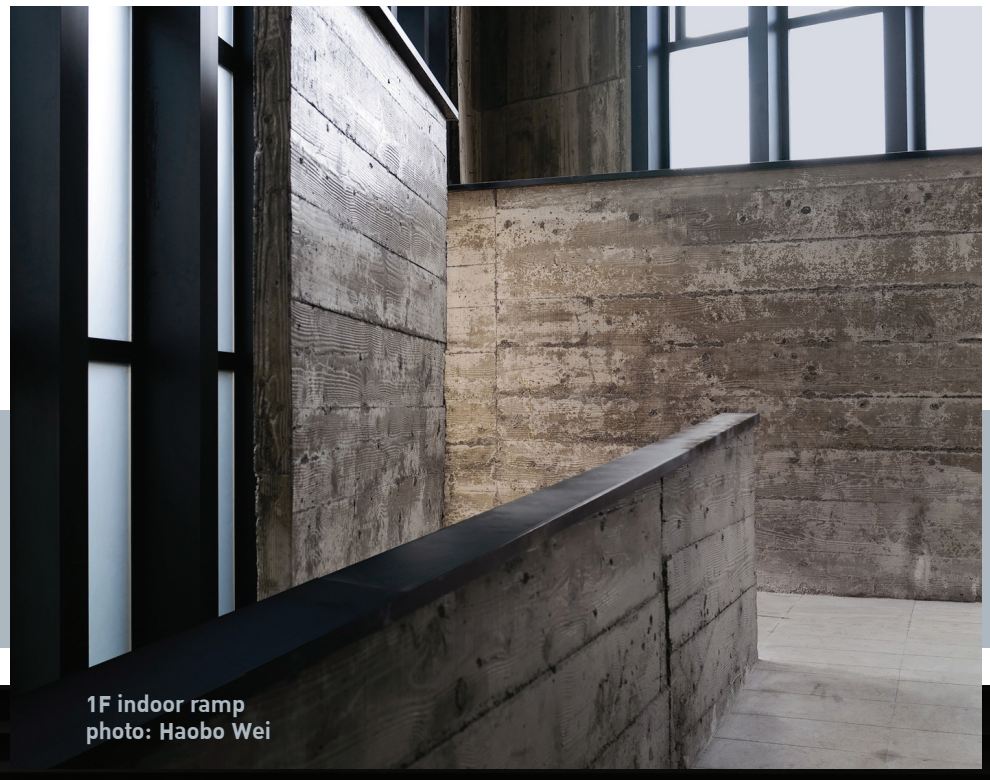
Core light interactions
photo: Hongkai Peng

TEXTURE
material expression

The construction system is based on concrete technology mixed with local sand and gravel, which help engrave the wooden texture given by the formworks, realized with recycled panels from declining Yi houses and local pine wood. By using a simple construction process and locally sourced materials, architects achieved a comprehensive low-carbon strategy, which at the same time guarantees a strong material expression through the use of exposed concrete marked by the a wooden pattern, which recalls Yi traditional wooden houses.



Traditional Yi wooden houses



1F indoor ramp
photo: Haobo Wei

The concrete wooden texture reminds of Yi traditional dwellings introducing a strong material expression



3F ritual & exhibition area
photo: Haobo Wei