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**JIANGSU BEISHA
KINDERGARTEN**
CROSSBOUNDARIES,
BEIJING



A VILLAGE FOR CHILDREN

BUILT TO A SCALE SUITED FOR CHILDREN AND DESIGNED TO MIMIC THE LAYOUT OF THEIR VILLAGE, THIS KINDERGARTEN IN BEISHA IS A PROGRESSIVE MODEL FOR RURAL EDUCATION.

WORDS
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PHOTOGRAPHY
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HAO HONGYI,
MINI LIU

Funing County in China's Jiangsu province sees a dearth of preschools, especially in its rural villages.

The local government therefore invited Beijing-headquartered Crossboundaries – an architectural firm that has much experience working with child psychologists to determine the best environments for preschools – to build kindergartens in two of the county's villages.

One of these is in Beisha, a village with a population that consists primarily of the elderly and young children.

There is no primary industry in Funing County, so parents there have left their villages to work in the bigger cities.

The population in many Funing villages therefore consists mainly of elderly grandparents and great-grandparents and their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The traditional farming work is carried out by the older generation with support from the children.

"There are many preschool-aged children in Funing who need to attend a kindergarten, so we built Jiangsu Beisha Kindergarten not just for the children living in Beisha village, but for more than 250 children from neighbouring Funing villages who also attend classes here," says Crossboundaries co-founder, Binke Lenhardt.

1. Jiangsu Beisha Kindergarten in China was designed to blend in with its rural village environment.







2. In Jiangsu villages such as Beisha, most of the adults are away working in the big cities, so the population consists primarily of young children and their grandparents and great-grandparents.

Most of rural Jiangsu, including Beisha, consists of flat agricultural plains that are sporadically interrupted by linearly arranged trees and two or three level houses with pitched roofs and brick facades.

Sited on a 9,648m² field that is almost completely open on three sides and set between a very loose configuration of basic village houses, the 2,815.4m² Jiangsu Beisha Kindergarten was designed as a cluster of 13 buildings set in a formation that imitates a Funing village layout.

"Along one side of the site runs the village road, where the user enters the kindergarten. It is meant to be perceived as a natural, integral part of the village," says the firm's other co-founder, Dong Hao.

"For us, it was crucial to enhance the existing qualities of the site and develop

a cluster of buildings with a strong relationship to the place.

"Beisha Kindergarten therefore functions as a smaller, slightly modified version of a village, something the children can directly relate to and which has a scale that gives them a sense of familiarity."

SEPARATE BUT CONJOINED

The architects allocated 13 different units for functional spaces, but kept these units connected through a circulation ring that links the upper levels of the units via a roofless outdoor platform.

On the ground floor is an inner yard that provides protected play areas.

On the second floor, the circulation platform provides lookout spots where the children can look down onto the yard or out



3. A circulation platform on the second level allows the children to observe their friends playing on the ground level.

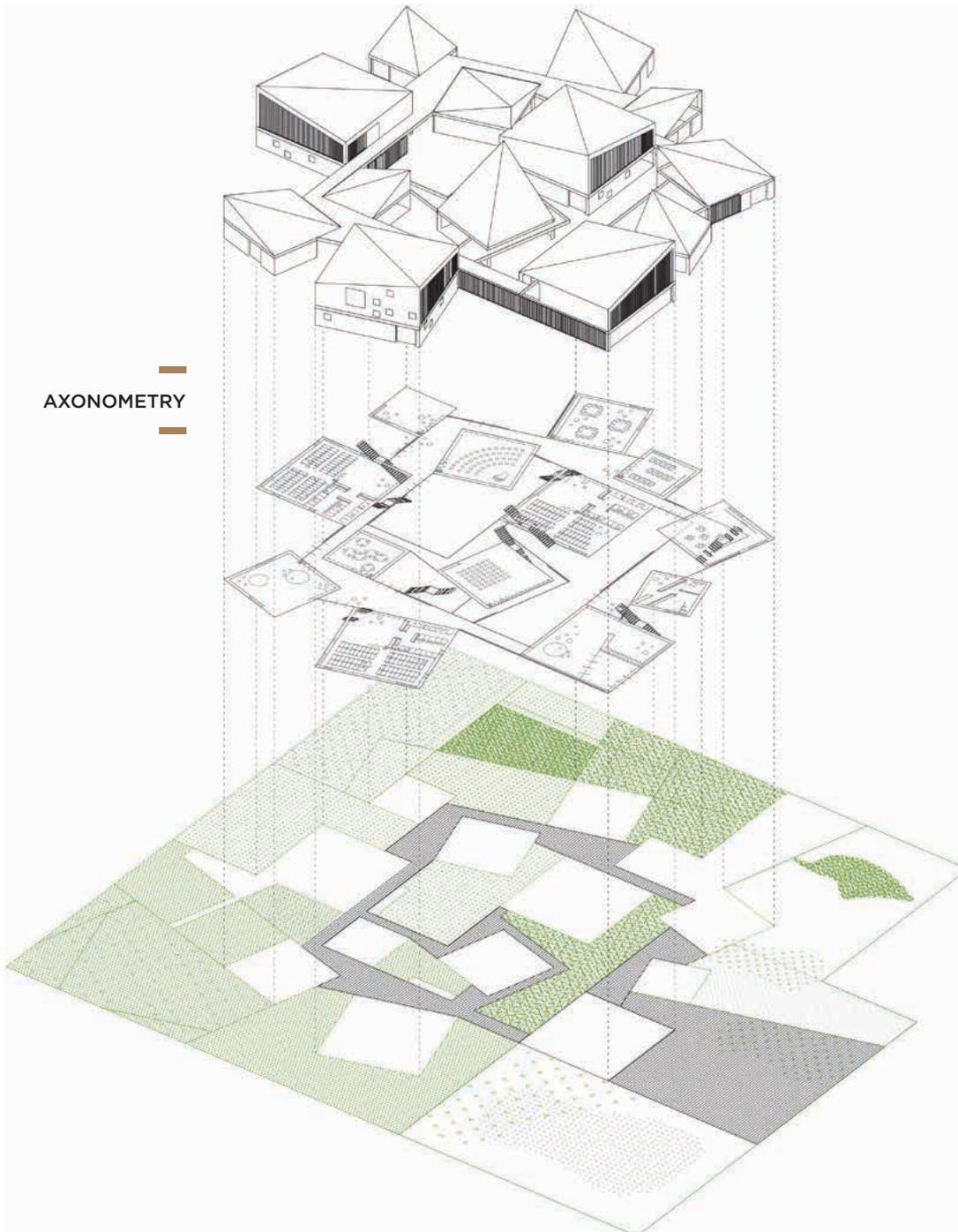


4. An inner yard on the ground level encourages spontaneous play.

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5. The scale of the kindergarten is aligned with the natural and architectural landscape of the village.





AXONOMETRY

**JIANGSU BEISHA
KINDERGARTEN**

LOCATION
Jiangsu, China

COMPLETION
201

SITE AREA
9,648m²

BUILDING AREA
2815.4m²

ARCHITECT
Crossboundaries,
Beijing

PARTNERS IN CHARGE
Binke Lenhardt,
Dong Hao

LEAD ARCHITECTS
Tracey Loontjens, Alan
Chou, Andra Ciocoiu,
Hao Hongyi

DEVELOPER
Municipality of
Yancheng Government

CONTRACTOR
Village local
contractor

C&S CONSULTANT
LDI (Local Design
Institute) Fu'ning
Design Institute

M&E CONSULTANT
LDI (Local Design
Institute) Fu'ning
Design Institute

QUANTITY SURVEYOR
LDI (Local Design
Institute) Fu'ning
Design Institute

AWARDS
Architecture
MasterPrize Honorable
Mention Architectural
Design/ Educational
Buildings

at the farmlands beyond, and feel a strong visual connection to their environment.

The yard in the centre of the site is where the children engage in group activities or ball games, while their peers standing on the circulation platform above can get a good view of the game.

The larger volumes consist of two levels. Three of these two-level volumes are used as classrooms, while one is used as a staff

office for teachers.

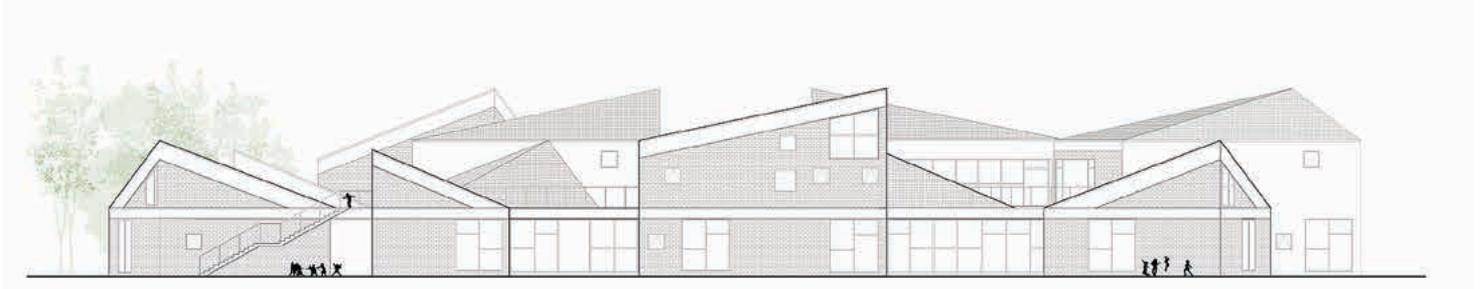
Another large volume, located in the centre of the cluster, houses a multi-purpose room that can be shared by all kindergarten groups.

“The smaller, single-level volumes contain special classrooms, for example arts and crafts, sports, etc., but can be also used as conventional teaching spaces. Another smaller volume was designated as a canteen and kitchen,” says Dong.

6. Small alleys and pathways mimic those found in the village.



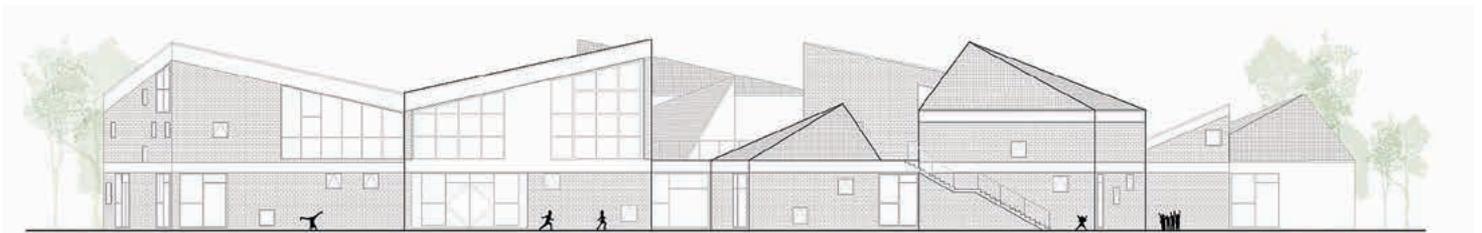
ELEVATION



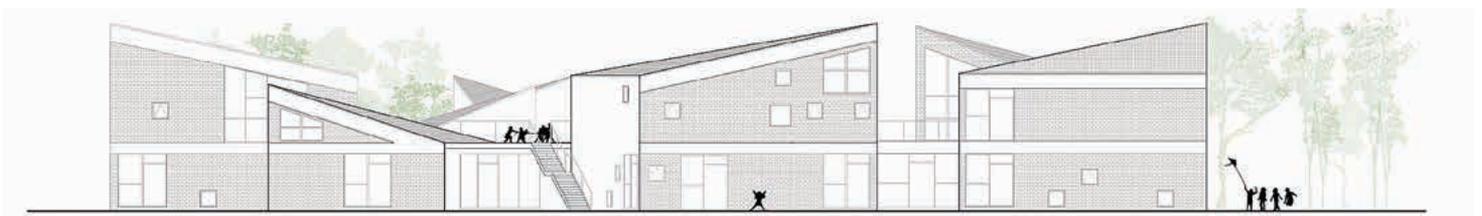
WEST ELEVATION



NORTH ELEVATION



EAST ELEVATION



SOUTH ELEVATION



A MINI VILLAGE

The layout was designed to encourage spontaneous play, which according to Lenhardt, is especially important for preschool-aged children.

"The kindergarten respects its rural environments and melds with its surrounding neighbourhood. It fits naturally into the southern Chinese countryside and is not an alien 'big' structure, so the user feels as if they are still within the village when they are inside the buildings," he says.

Designed with small alleys, pathways, squares and bigger streets, the children can meander in between the units and discover small, secret places tucked away from the main yard.

"It is a safe environment for outdoor learning activities and natural play that enables the children to move as they would in their day-to-day lives within the village," says Dong.

According to both architects, the main challenge with this project was working with a local construction crew that lacked technical know-how with regards to building on a flat, rural site.

To overcome this challenge, they simplified the design of the structures so the workers could deliver better quality construction.

"The kindergarten is designed to encourage exploration. Due to the rich contrast between the 'inner playscape' – courtyards, pathways and platforms – and the outer 'open landscape' – open plane, garden, field and playground areas – the children can easily find personal spaces that they like.

"The scale and spatial set up allows the children to identify and relate with the kindergarten and to feel a sense of belonging," says Lenhardt.

7. An arts and crafts classroom with skylights cut into the pitched roof is housed within one of the smaller, single-level volumes.