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**Schools
of the 21st
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THE SCHOOLS OF THE 21ST CENTURY



Garden School | Beijing | OPE's Architecture

Branching Out

A sprawling high school on the outskirts of China's capital connects students to environment of leisure and offers a progressive approach to teaching.

BY CLARE JACOBSON

OUTSIDE IN
The school's
design and
environment
encourage
learning
to flourish
in a
garden school.



At Beijing's Garden School, students can sit on outdoor steps to hear lectures, gather for talks along an open-air corridor, and plant vegetables on the roof. "Students taught under trees, and their father taught his students on the lawn," explains Shuang Shuang, partner at Beijing-based SOOARCH Architecture. His designing of China's high school to promote an education teaching across a wealth of sites, varied building codes and a historically rigorous office model system typically produce standardized schools with a teaching block as the only outdoor space. But SOOARCH's comprehensive design, inspired by an enlightened administration, offers opportunities beyond the classroom. Garden School—officially Beijing No. 4 High School, Xuyihe Campus, a suburban satellite of the downtown Beijing No. 4—is named for the six gardens on campus that, building's many programs, each has its own character: one is a wide lawn edged by benches, another is a hot level space with a grove of bamboo. All sit atop pieces of the 400,000-square-foot building. To fit the broad program on an 18-acre site and adhere to tight restrictions, SOOARCH gave large spaces—cafeteria, auditorium, music rooms, dance studio and parking—priority in 2008. Subsequently, the space above assigned to the construction before. For example, one garden is supported with wooden seating with integrated glass panels that transmit sunlight to a basement greenhouse.

The largest green space is a vegetable garden on the building's roof deck. The school currently has only 100 of its planned 1,000+ students enrolled, but when it fills up, each of its 30 classes will tend their own plot. In the school's first months of operation, one class planted an experimental garden, and local farmers tended the rest of the plots. SOOARCH attention to the school's outdoor space does not come at the expense of its interiors. Abundant, the building appears as a lively composition of structure with a central atrium for circulation and eight levels for building, classrooms, labs, and administrative offices. Large wood-paneled spaces provide rooms for quiet and provide flexible spaces for relaxing and socializing. Similar proportions extend from a detached dormitory that houses the senior high school. The school is spatially dynamic. Its main lobby—paved from the street through a long, low gate and across a large plaza—may look coordinated in plan, but works well as a link to various stairways and levels. The classrooms themselves are simple boxes, but other spaces assume bold shapes. The library, for example, stretches out as a long, curving volume, while the cafeteria is an expansion, at one angled toward sculptural stairways made walking along white flights intersecting only the teachers can use the stairways. Details too are well considered, such as the simple doors and lobbies set in a hexagonal pattern and the mechanical equipment (HVAC coils) in 300mm-wide grates that cast a grid-like pattern on the central space, offering spaces for music, learning, and other activities.

Of course, it is one thing to design indoor and outdoor spaces with flexibility in mind and quite another for them to be used effectively. Garden School Principal Shuang Chen says that while it may be convenient for students to use environmental spaces, the unfamiliar can stimulate





The school's design is a response to the need for a new type of educational space. It is a space that is open, flexible, and adaptable. It is a space that is designed to be used in a variety of ways. It is a space that is designed to be used by a variety of people. It is a space that is designed to be used in a way that is both functional and beautiful.

DESIGNING THE OPEN SCHOOLS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

GARDEN SCHOOLS

creative teaching. It and his faculty are well equipped to do so. The school is an incubator for teaching, research, and learning. It follows the philosophy of its progressive model. It is a school that is designed to be used in a way that is both functional and beautiful. It is a school that is designed to be used by a variety of people. It is a school that is designed to be used in a way that is both functional and beautiful.



OPEN ARCHITECTURE

107