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UNIFYING

West Campus Union, Duke University

Durham, North Carolina, USA
Grimshaw Architects

Photography by James Ewing



At the heart of a historical campus at Duke University is this new Grimshaw-designed student union building. It has instantly become the beating heart of student life, a place where hardworking students can kick back, grab a coffee or a bite, hang out with friends or study together, or get chores done. Student unions are at the core of college life in the United States, and this comely, distinctive building brings the type right up to date.

The building is not entirely new. In fact, the original structure, a lovely stone Gothic-styled edifice of stature, has been lovingly restored down to its gargoyles, and looks spanking fresh as a result. The extensive additions include delicate insertions of new steel-and-glass elements within the older volume, creating dynamic zones of overlap that straddle indoors and outdoors, often with glazed

roofs. Into these deliberately interstitial spaces fits the programme of state-of-the-art culinary offerings, with no less than twelve separate dining venues providing international and local cuisines, and created through collaboration with local vendors and F&B experts. Exposed kitchens showcase the activity and let students see what appetising creations are being readied. American college students may seem coddled to much of the world, but they pay handsomely for it, and West Campus Union shows it. This could pass easily for an upscale urban dining marketplace. No longer the dim, cavernous mess halls of old, with sleep-deprived undergraduates shuffling their plastic trays of bland food to laminate tables. West Campus Union is the kind of facility that will swing visiting high school students to make Duke choice number one.



Modern balconies and bridges span the voluminous, lofty spaces of the union, and produce delicious juxtapositions of elderly stone and youthful steel and glass. Spatial complexity provides a constant visual drama, whether one is browsing for food or sitting down to consume it; there are always other people moving around or overhead – the perfect people-watching theatre. Social interaction is virtually compulsory, and you can imagine teachers, students, alumni, staff and visitors hanging out here any time of day or evening. Aside from the eating areas, there are meeting rooms for gatherings, study or presentations, used by the college clubs and organisations. Multipurpose rooms can be booked by students for virtually any use necessary, from brainstorming to performance rehearsals. The internal space spills out to adjacent courtyards and terraces, with landscaping

updated along with the architecture. In North Carolina's benevolent climate, the comfortable seating is well utilised year-round.

Transparency is the theme here, and the sizeable pavilion sitting at the heart of the union is a superb glass cube, strapped with sleek horizontal frames against the glass enclosure. Vertical wood-toned struts add warmth, and a top-floor terrace enjoys views across Duke's lovely campus. By hewing to an almost-not-there glass pavilion approach, the confrontation between new and old is made gentle and respectful. And the new pavilion is genuinely attractive in its own right, with proportions and massing outline that are classical, helping it to fit right in. Grimshaw has made a building that is decorous and proud at the same time.

COFFEE SHELTER

Shenzhen Maoshuli Cafe

Shenzhen, China

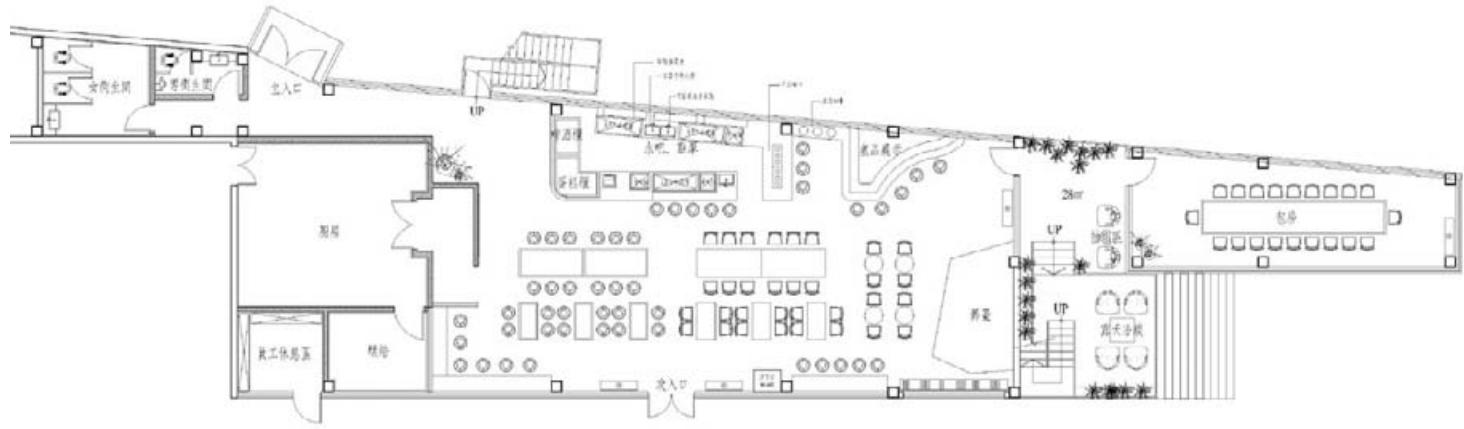
Philip Fung/Elsedesign

Photography by Bai Yu



Perhaps what is most interesting about this new cafe at Shenzhen University, is its site. Located just outside the West Gate of the institution, amid blocks of residential flats occupied mostly by students and teachers, the steel-and-glass cafe cleverly inserts itself beside and overtop a standard ramp that descends to underground parking, as well as between and around mature trees on the site. The response appears in some ways to resemble an older structure that's been there for years.

Created by a guest lecturer at the university who also built an office space for himself nearby, the cafe was intended as a proper business in its own right, but additionally as a space that could act as a creative business hub, where visitors could share ideas for projects and interact with potential investors. To that end there are a variety of spaces within the cafe, and outside it. A large casual space lined with a glass window wall features a coffee-service bar, concrete floors, timber tables and chairs, and various styles of seating, from



chairs to sofas to bar stools, in upholstery fabric, leather and thermoplastic. Other materials found in this area include Corian, bricks, plywood, and metal mesh. There is a lounge zone with bookshelves and soft chairs, and a bar section as well. A painted-out black ceiling is exposed overhead. Because of the abundant greenery on both sides of the structure, the room feels like a garden pavilion.

At the centre of the plan, more or less, is a terrace courtyard space carved out to accommodate a large mature tree. Across this space sits another steel-and-glass pavilion that acts as an annex to the main cafe, specifically as a private dining room or a meeting or presentation room for clients. Outdoor terraces

step up between these two main structures, and ingeniously span across the top of the parking ramp to one side, with a small but practical platform of stepped seating. This creates a wonderful outdoor presentation space under the canopy of the leaves. On top of the roofs proper are more outdoor-lounging areas. The 'hotchpotch' arrangement of parts may have been a response to unavoidable site conditions, but it results in an atmosphere of casual treehouse, or vernacular accretion, rather than a single design proposal by one architect. This gives the Maoshuli Cafe much of its charm, and it was wise not to oppose that with overly refined details or materials. The place seems ideal for young intellectuals to hang out and relax, and share exciting ideas in.

CUMULUS

Cloud Pavilion

Shanghai, China

Schmidt Hammer Lassen Architects

Photography by Peter Dixie

On the banks of Shanghai's Huangpu River, looking across at ever-rising Pudong district, this wispy, almost-there pavilion is set in a new public park. It is to house an exhibition of art along the riverside promenade, and will remain there permanently. But it looks ever so fragile.

The idea of making 'buildings' that are ephemeral – or seem so – has tantalised practitioners for years. Ever since new technologies have allowed, designing for 'invisibility' has been awfully seductive. It's rather like a chef making food that doesn't fill you, or perhaps a musician making sound you cannot hear. Danish office Schmidt Hammer Lassen joins the fun.

In fact, Cloud Pavilion is sort of old already. Commissioned to design a series of pavilions for the West Bund Biennale of Art & Architecture in 2013, SHL devised the structure as two horizontal planes connected by 20,000 strings of white rope. Although meant to be temporary, the original was so popular that it remained on the site for two years. Now the same firm has been asked to reimagine it as a permanent structure for art and events. The idea was to enclose 100sq m of space, including a tiny kitchen and storage, but keep the original steel structure along with its spirit.

The new structure introduces curved glass into the mix, as well as a forest of steel pencil columns in a random layout. The plan of the interior space defined by the curved glass is a cloud shape in simplified form. By using highly reflective or mirrored surfaces on ceiling and posts, the solidity of the pavilion can be made nearly invisible, depending on light conditions or time of day. Pale wood flooring on the interior, and blond timber slats on the circular kitchen pod inside, are the only other materials. The bowed glass works very well against the grid of slender columns, with nine slightly thicker columns stained white doing the heavy lifting. Because the interior ceiling is white and can be lighted up after dark, while the exterior ceiling is mirror-finish metal, the 'cloud' itself reads particularly well after sundown. But its daytime aspect, as a little Modernist box near the water's edge, is alluring. And the delicacy of the components startles in contrast to Shanghai's standard, robust scale. It's as if a little alien spaceship had simply landed here, from a planet with awfully good taste.





BUNKING

iHouse Dormitory & International Center

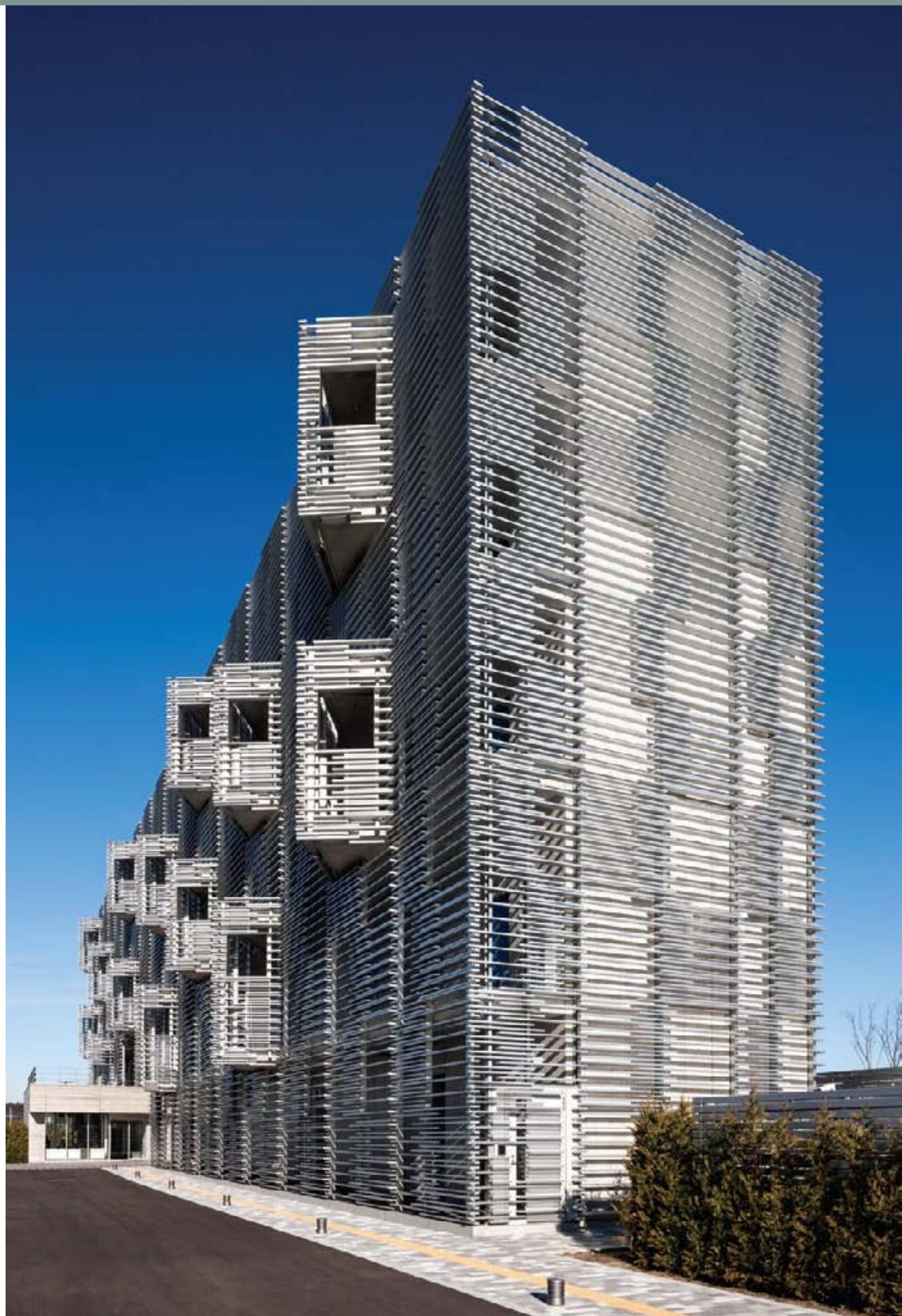
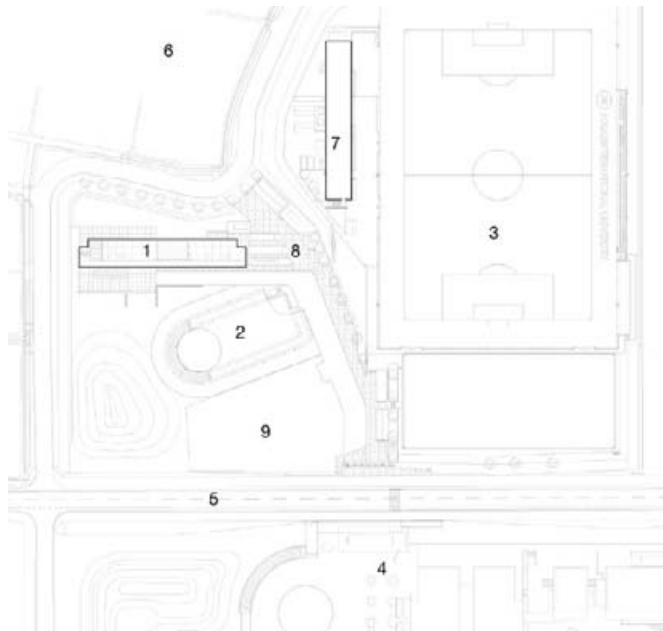
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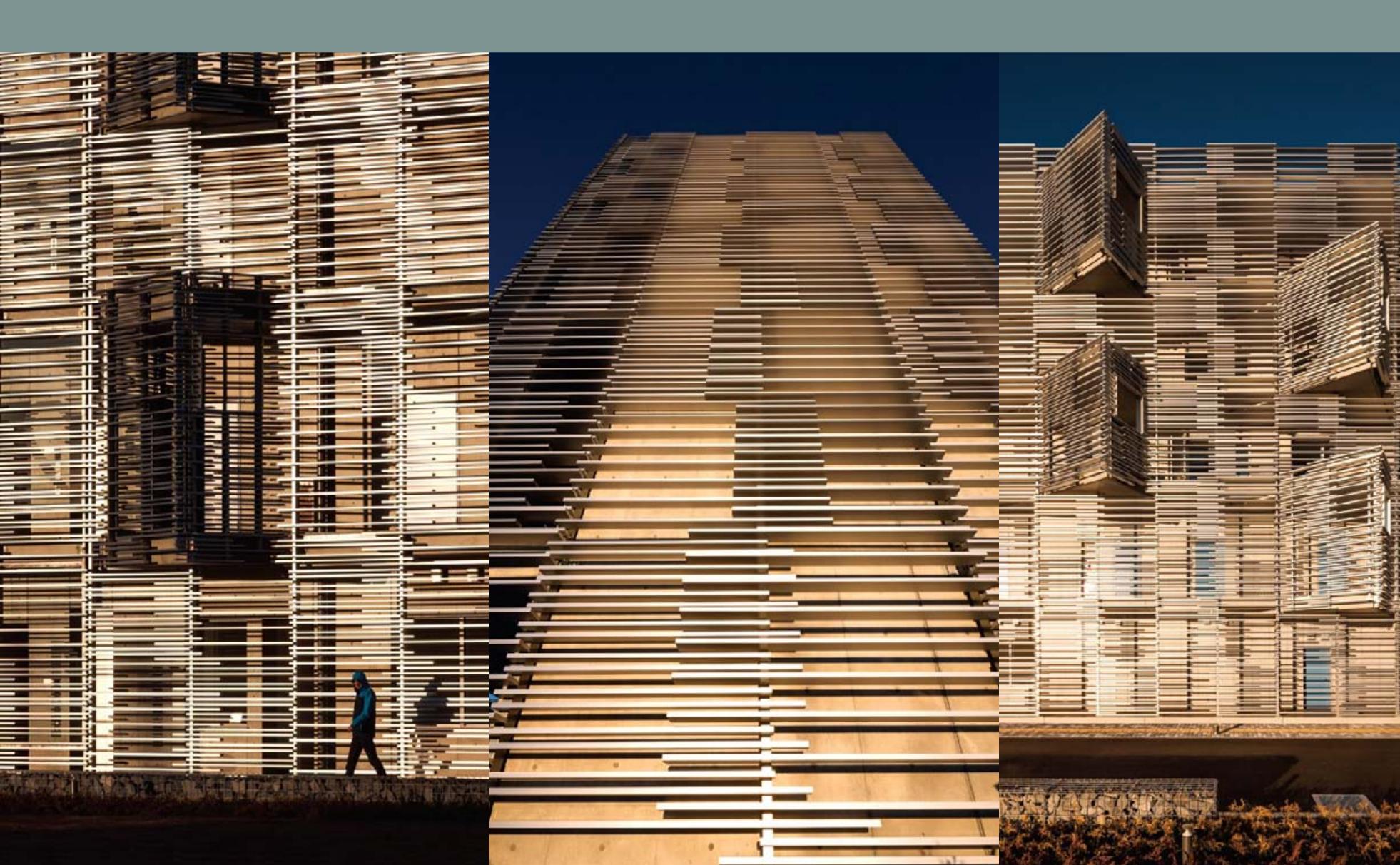
Photography by Kawasami Kobayashi Photographic Office and Kudoh Photography Ltd

Japan may be experiencing a declining population, but it remains highly attractive to foreigners, whether there as tourists or as students. This new student residence and centre is geared toward foreign students living in Japan. The demographics include a plethora of students from Asia and Eastern Europe, many of modest means, so the programme is designed to provide basic, modern accommodations at economical prices. There is a choice of private rooms with ensuite baths, up to shared ones for four, with communal services. The building can house as many as 140 people at a time. The mix of residents is wide: a meld of cultures, religions and political bents.

The site is located alongside an access road to the university, adjacent to rice fields. The building is 9m wide, a rectangle sitting atop the international centre at ground level. The rooms feature open views to the countryside. The International Center houses a reception area and gallery, an event space, a seminar room and an archive room. A void near the centre of the bar building marks the entrance, and separates the two programmes at grade. The residential floors are served by an interior single-loaded corridor and an exterior walkway parallel to this, which also provides balcony space in good weather.

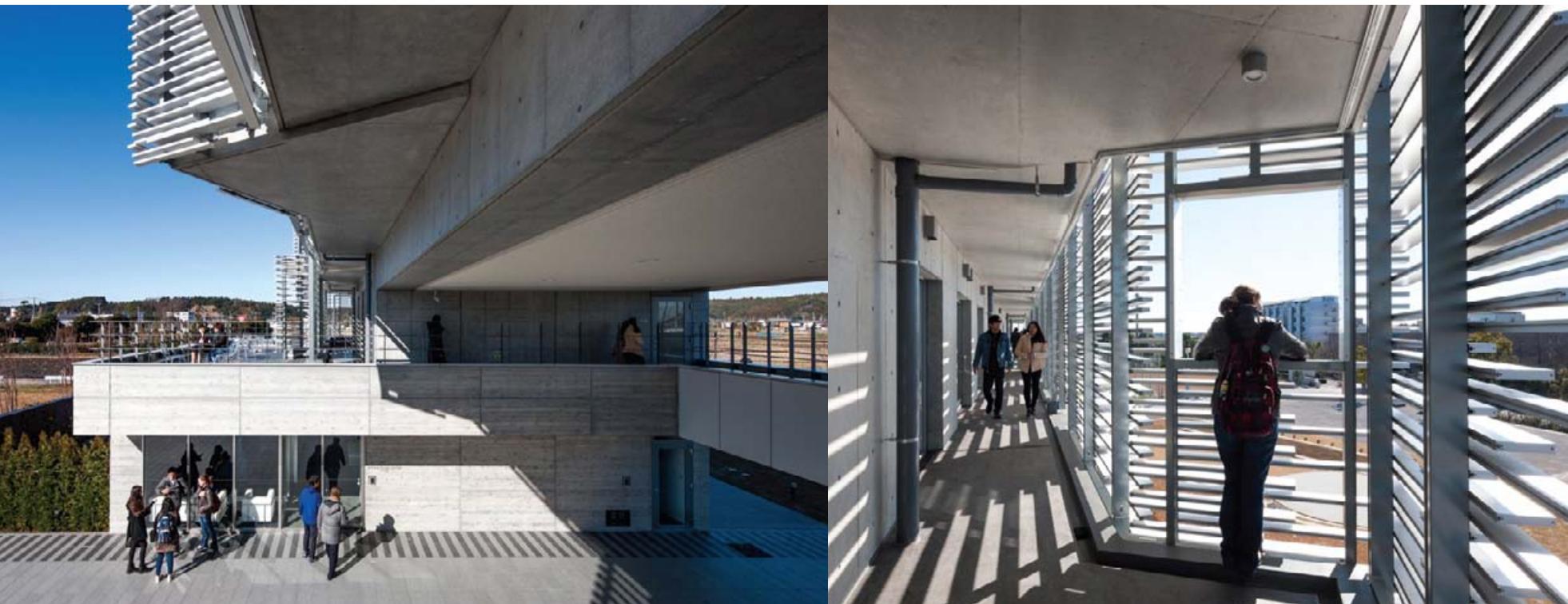
The elevations are what characterise the building. A system of aluminium louvres clad the principal facade, on the exterior of the outer hallway, lending the wall an odd, immaterial aspect. At





regular intervals the outer plane juts out in angled 'pavilions' which bring three-dimensional life to the building. This is important, as the silver-toned louvres are a bit relentless, and in bright sunlight make the building look somewhat like a giant cage. Luckily they are horizontally oriented, or else we'd be in prison territory for sure. But at night the dormitory glows with life, thanks to secondary light seeping through the colander facade. When seen more closely, the overlapping of the louvres reveals some varied patterning, and individual segments of the facades are quite interesting, viewed straight on. It is an economical way of dressing up a simple concrete slab.

The interiors are as expected: low-cost, practical, and to the point. The multi-bed rooms are smartly thought through, with comfortable bunk-beds atop wide desks for homework. Undoubtedly iHouse is a place temporary residents will feel at ease in, and its emphasis on social interaction and communal living seems ideal for students living far from home.



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