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Yangliping Performing Arts Centre

Dali, Yunnan, China
Studio Zhu-Pei

Photography by Jin Weiqi, Zhang Yao

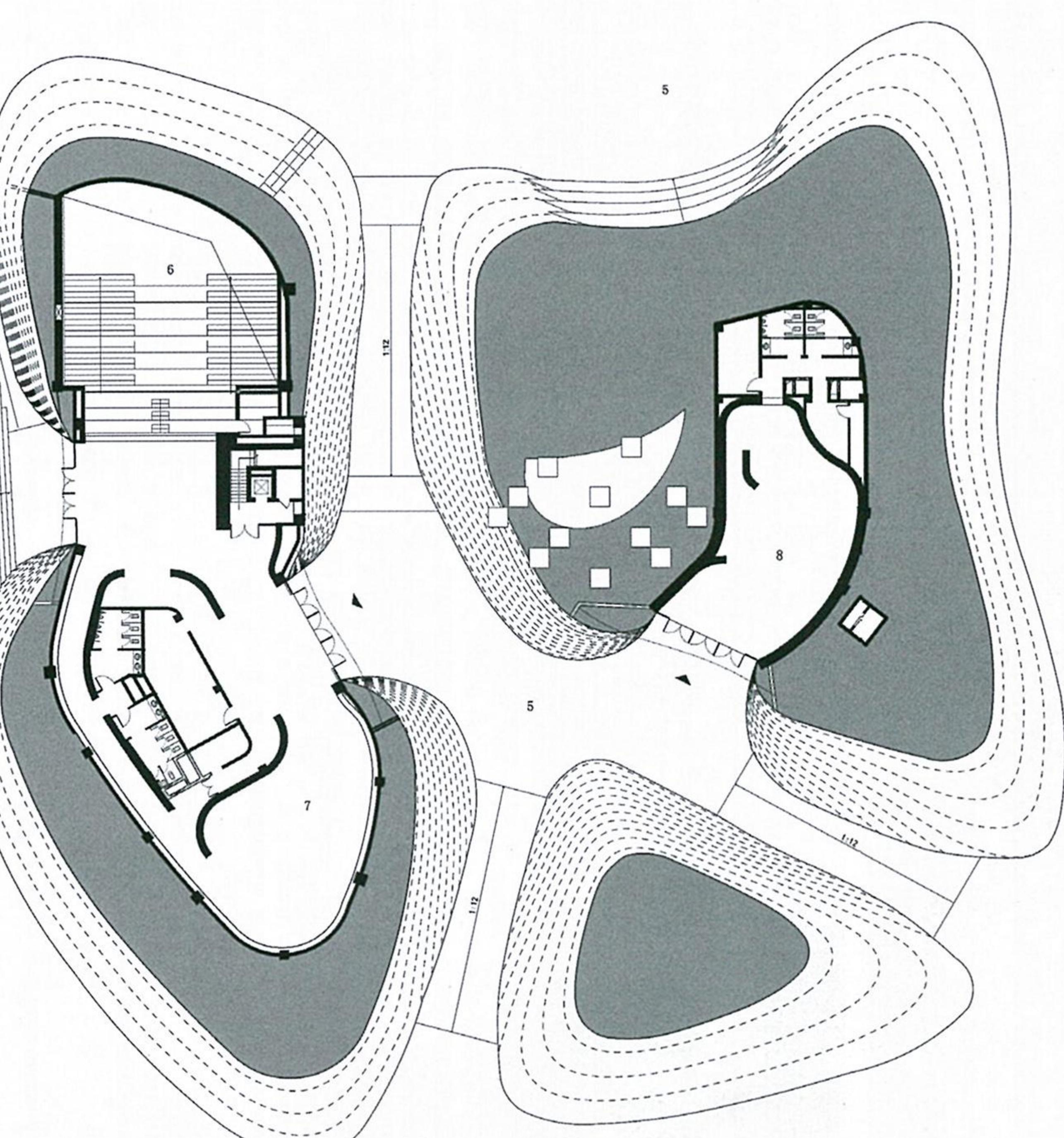
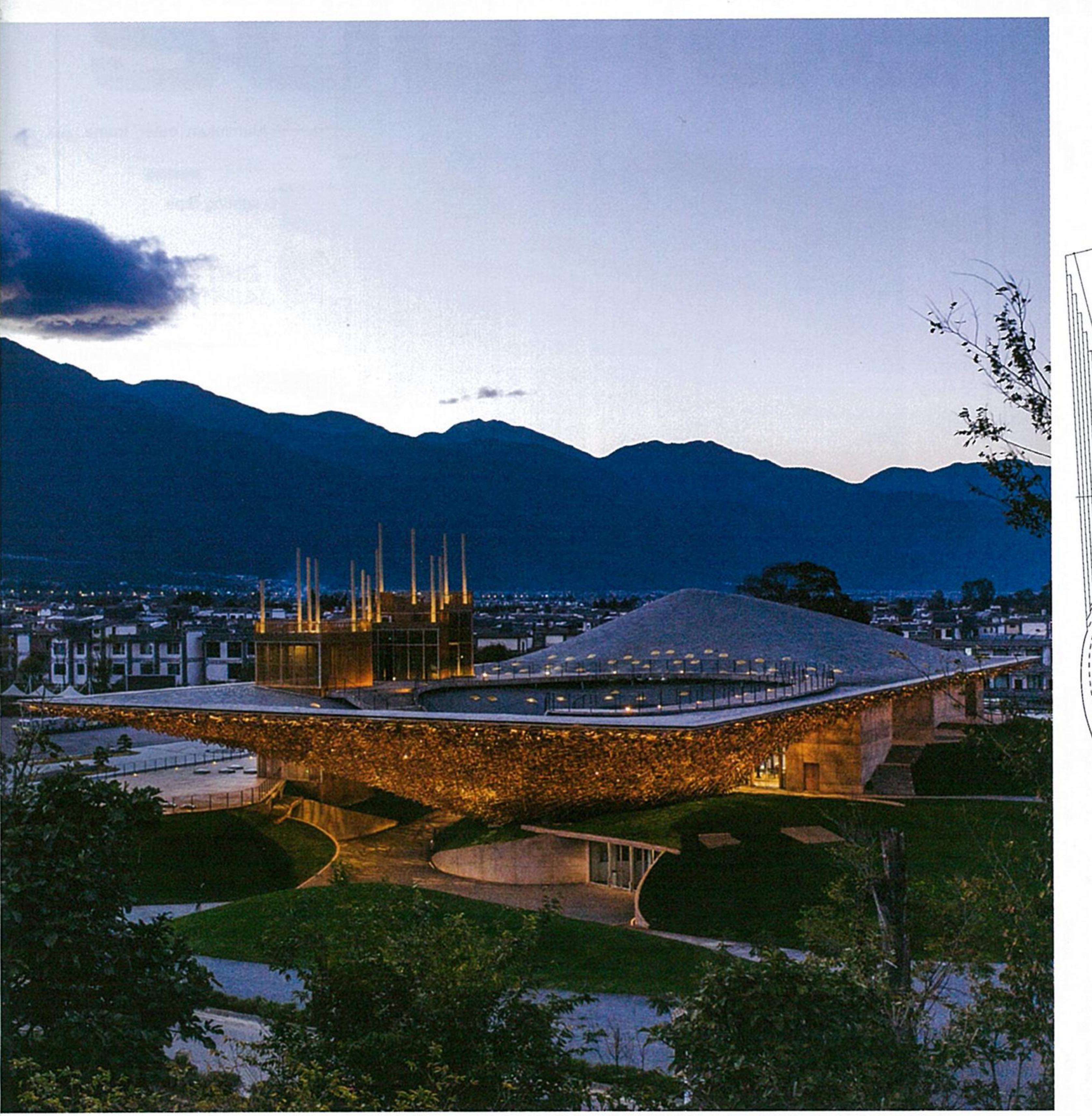
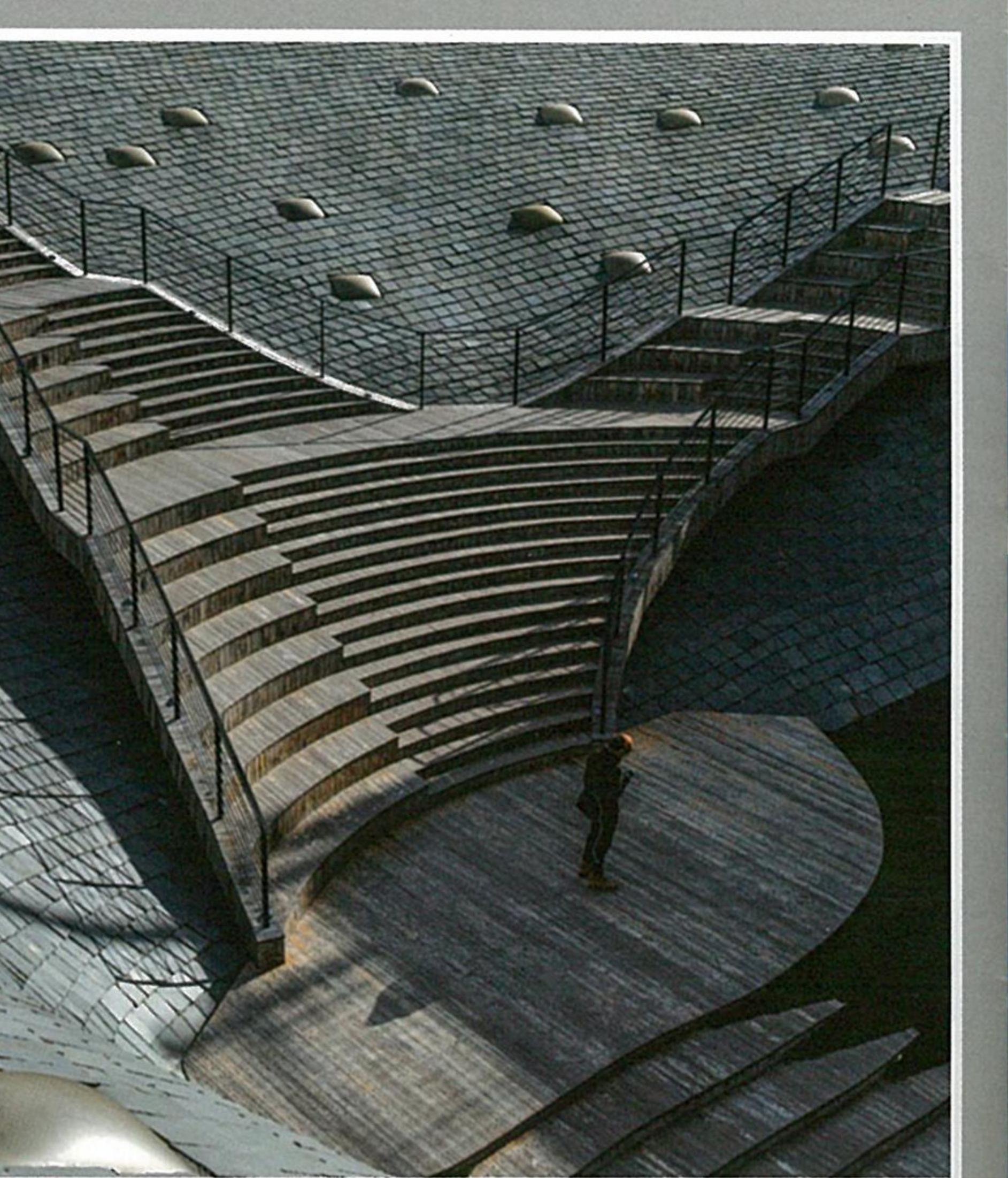
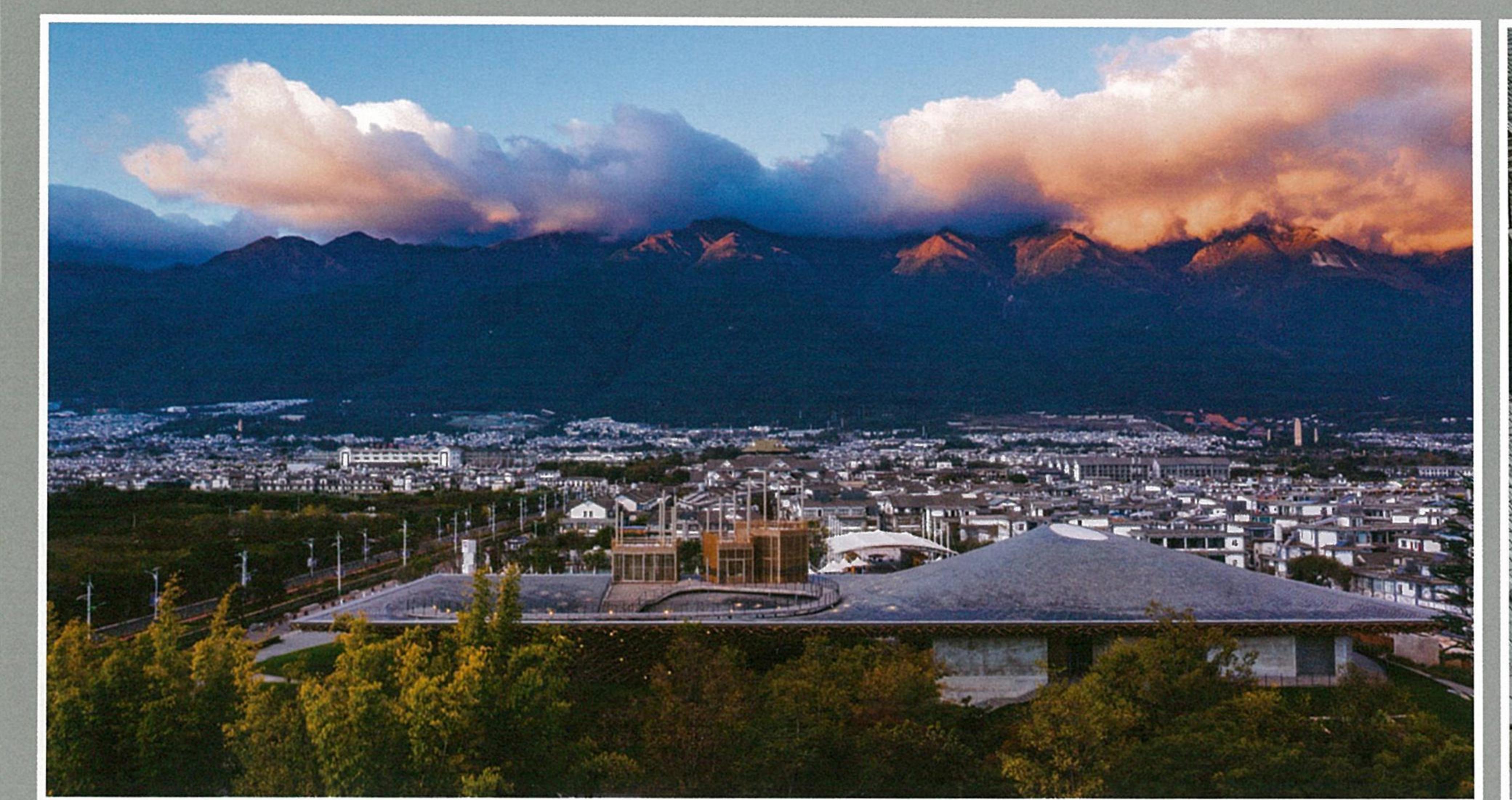
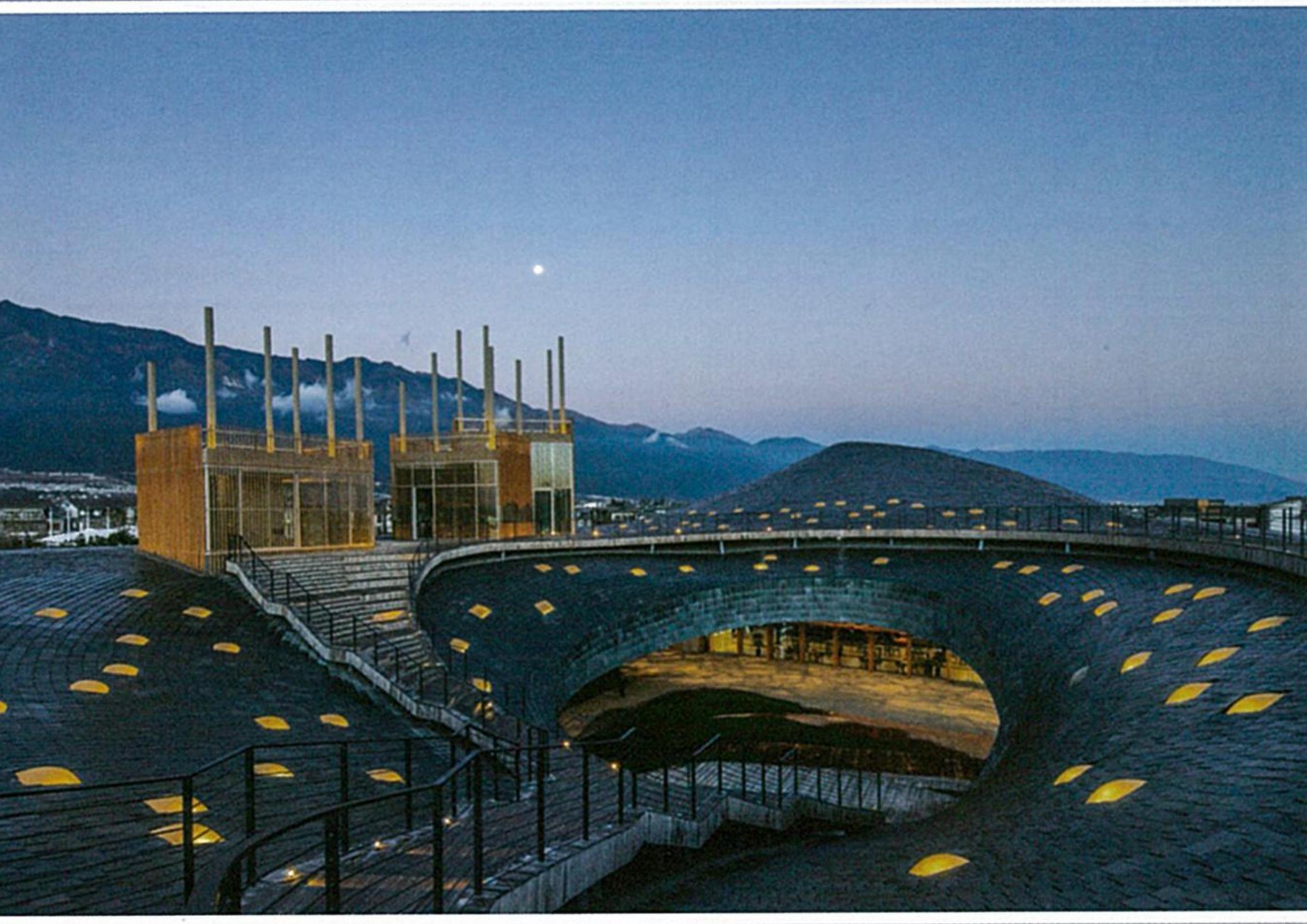


It is not a simple matter to open up a theatrical venue to the outdoors, in part because of the necessary technical complexities of the building type. But outdoor theatre is a time-worn tradition as well; usually open-air and interior facilities are separated completely, or placed adjacent. One of the goals of the architects for this new cultural centre in Dali, was to evoke a relationship between interior and exterior, take in the urban and natural context, and exploit the local lifestyle's outdoor emphasis. The Yangliping Performing Arts Centre rests on a natural plateau situated between the Erhai Lake and the Cangshan Mountains. A huge canopy roof protects an open plaza that can be used in myriad ways by the public. This lends

the project its formal imagery. In effect, the scheme is the roof: a dominant horizontal datum that powerfully establishes 'above' and 'below' realms.

Below is the world of theatre and performance, and also of flexible public space. The roof rises up as an organic form, curves and bends and swells and wraps. A cluster of 'treehouse towers' pierces it near one end. The underside is a pickup-sticks cacophony of timber rafters. The upper roofscape that all this creates is a theatrical answer to the nearby mountaintops, as if the architecture is a miniature offspring of nature. The groundplane is then sculpted aggressively in planted mounds that hold service programme and interior spaces, but which also produce a lively landscaped park for the city. You





can meander through it, passing underneath the huge roof and, sometimes, witness a performance while at it.

The scale of the centre, plus the huge cantilevers involved in many parts of the mega-roof, guarantee reactions of awe. But often these kinds of constructions end up feeling

leaden and bloated. Not here. Studio Zhu-Pei has succeeded in keeping the building surprisingly lightweight in character; the roof does actually feel like it floats and swirls effortlessly, and the wood sticks do their part in this impression, concealing some of the actual structure and paling the tone. We aren't always a fan of these large iconic projects in China. This time we're clapping.