

# catalogue

Inclusive Urban Renewal: A Human-Centric Approach to the Blikfabriek  
Site

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## Introduction

This research catalogue accompanies my architectural project: a community theatre and drama school located in Hoboken at the former site of the Blikfabriek. At its core, my research explores the transformative potential of architecture when it places people and their needs, behaviors, and relationships at the center of its design process. This is what human-centric design means to me: designing spaces that are shaped not just for people, but with an understanding of how people connect, interact, and feel within these spaces.

Initially, I conducted interviews with teenage girls in the local neighborhoods to better understand their experiences, their relationship to the public realm, and what they felt was missing from their environment. These conversations offered me valuable glimpses into their lives and needs, but I found that engagement was limited and concrete architectural strategies were missing. As my design developed into a space meant to serve the wider community, I felt the need to broaden both my scope and methodology.

I shifted toward a more observational, intuitive form of research. Instead of structured interviews, I visited existing public spaces that felt socially alive. For this I looked at spaces where people lingered, had longer conversations, and formed relationships. I sketched what I saw, focusing on interactions that went beyond the superficial: recurring users who clearly knew each other, spontaneous conversations, or people simply sharing a space in quiet coexistence. These sketches became a tool to understand how spatial elements can contribute to making a place feel welcoming and communal.

Through this method, I came to see that successful social spaces do not merely accommodate interaction; they invite it. My spatial analysis, based on both sketches and floor plans, mapped these patterns of connection. In the final phase of the research, I juxtaposed these observations with drawings from my own design, illustrating how the insights gathered shaped my architectural choices.

This research process has deepened my belief that architecture can be a catalyst for community-building. By centering real human behaviors and relationships in the design process, we can create spaces that not only serve a function but also create a community.



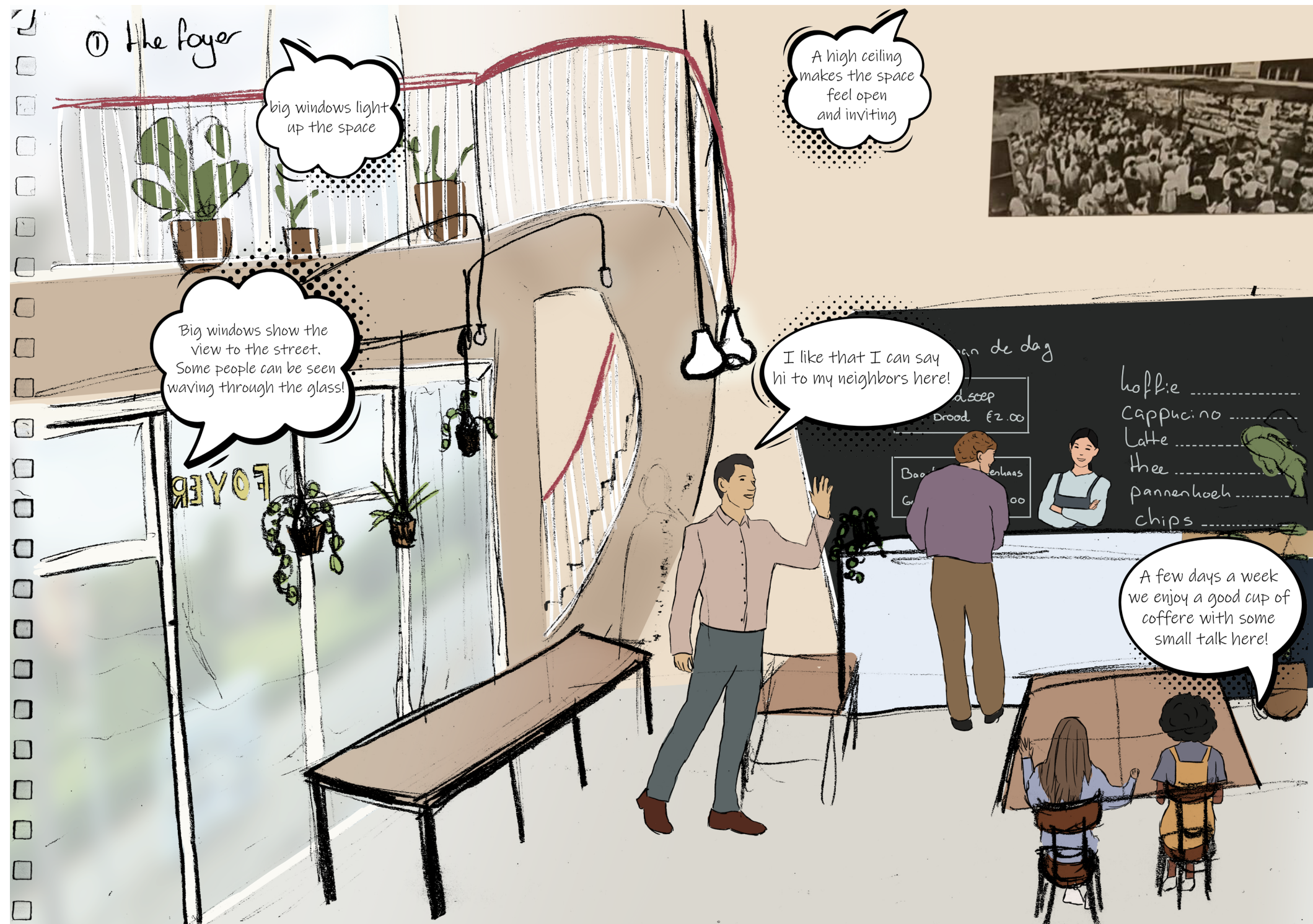
When interviewing the teenage girls of youth center Scratch in Kiel, they told me about the places they did not visit. The places I collected in this collage, with added comments that the girls made during the interviews. Most of the places they did not like or visit were outside.





Places that these girls did like to visit were also put together in a collage. They liked to visit places where they could take part in activities and meet their peers. In almost all cases these places were inside a building.





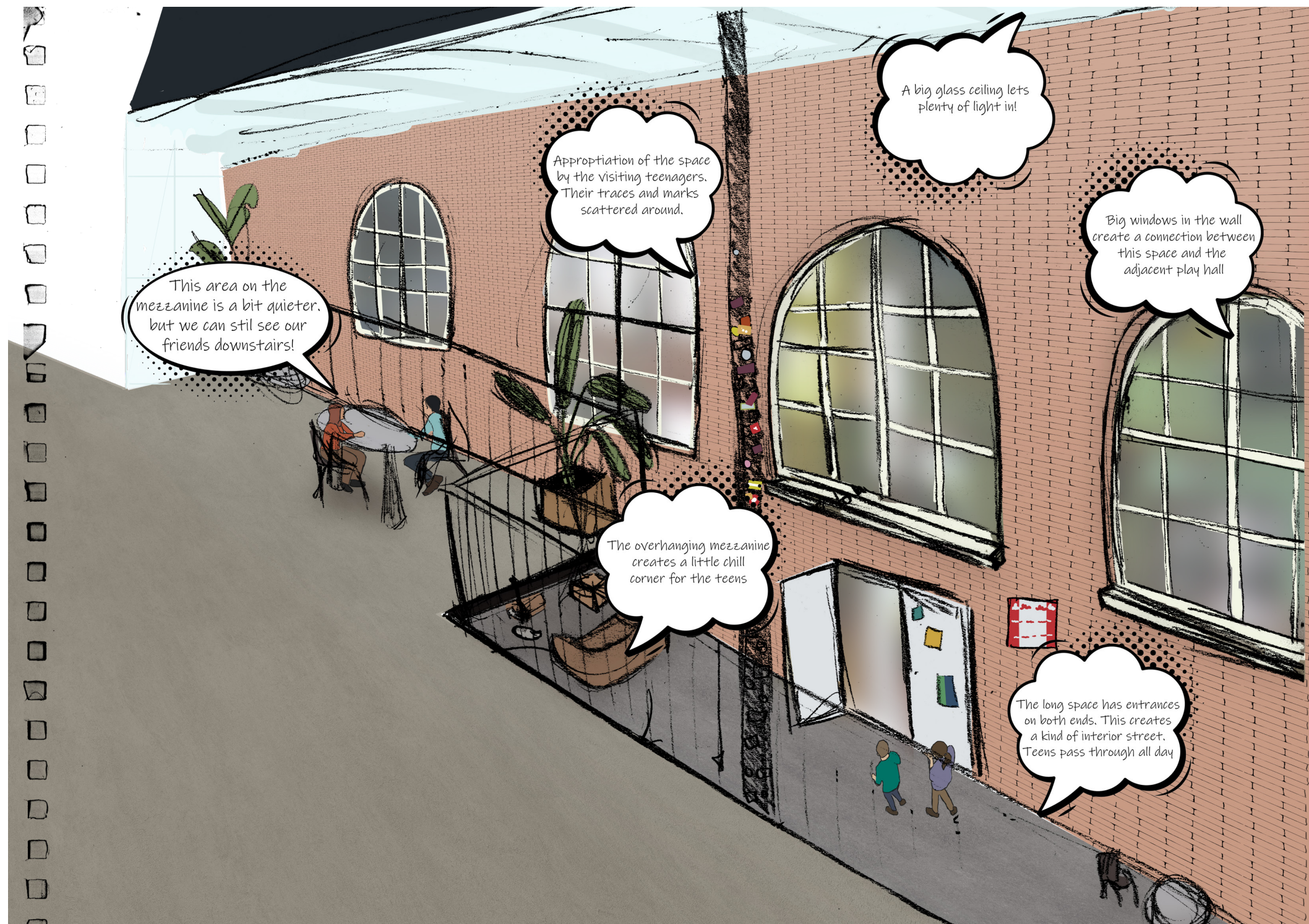
Located near the Blikfabriek, Theater Nova is a small community theater that serves as a lively social space. It's a welcoming place where people gather before performances, enjoy a coffee or an affordable meal, or simply drop by for a chat. The theater café is open and inviting, with a bright, spacious feel that encourages spontaneous conversation and a strong sense of community.





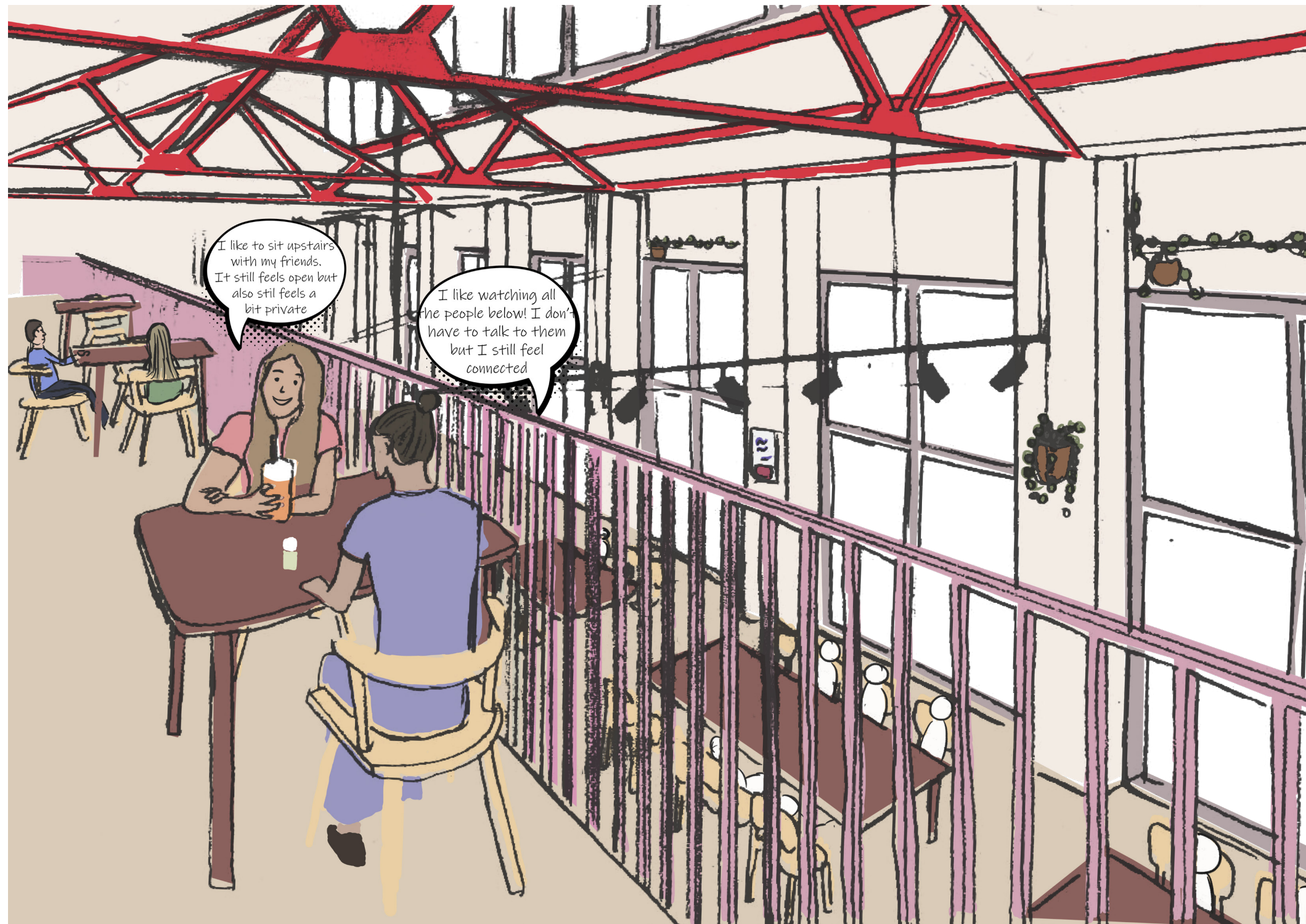
This sketch illustrates how I have incorporated elements from the Theater Nova case study into my own design. I translated key architectural features, such as the high ceiling, the mezzanine overlooking the main space, and the light colors of the space, into my project to encourage openness and interaction between different levels and people. Like Theater Nova, the space will remain accessible throughout the day, inviting people from Hoboken to drop in, enjoy a coffee, and connect with others.





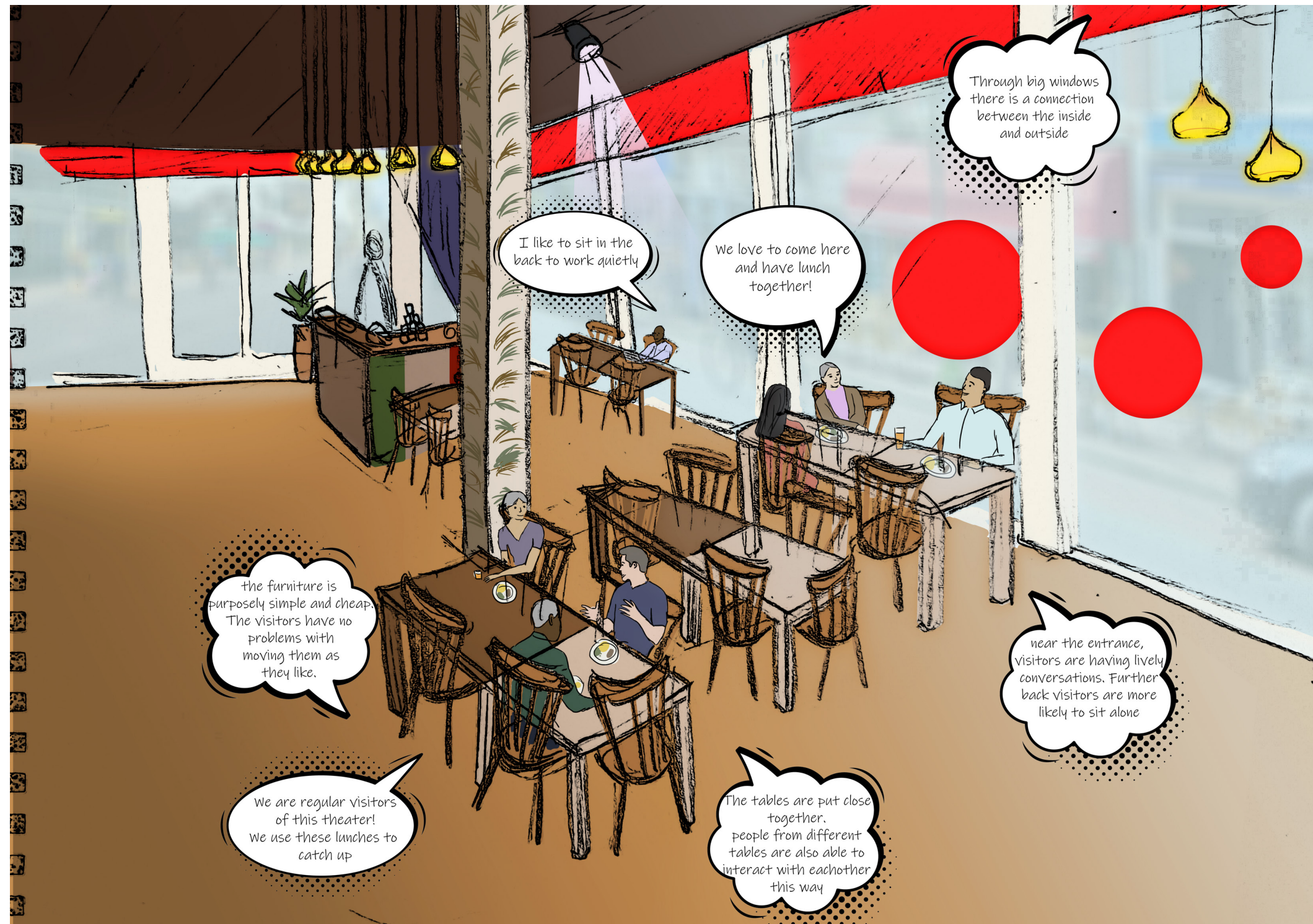
Located in the Kiel neighborhood near Hoboken, Youth Center Scratch is a popular spot for many local young people. Its street-like layout encouraged movement and interaction, with groups of friends constantly passing through. Although the central "street" was narrow, the tall roof gave the space a generous, open feel. A mezzanine provided a more secluded spot where some youth chose to sit. This was more of a place to observe the activity below without being in the spotlight themselves.





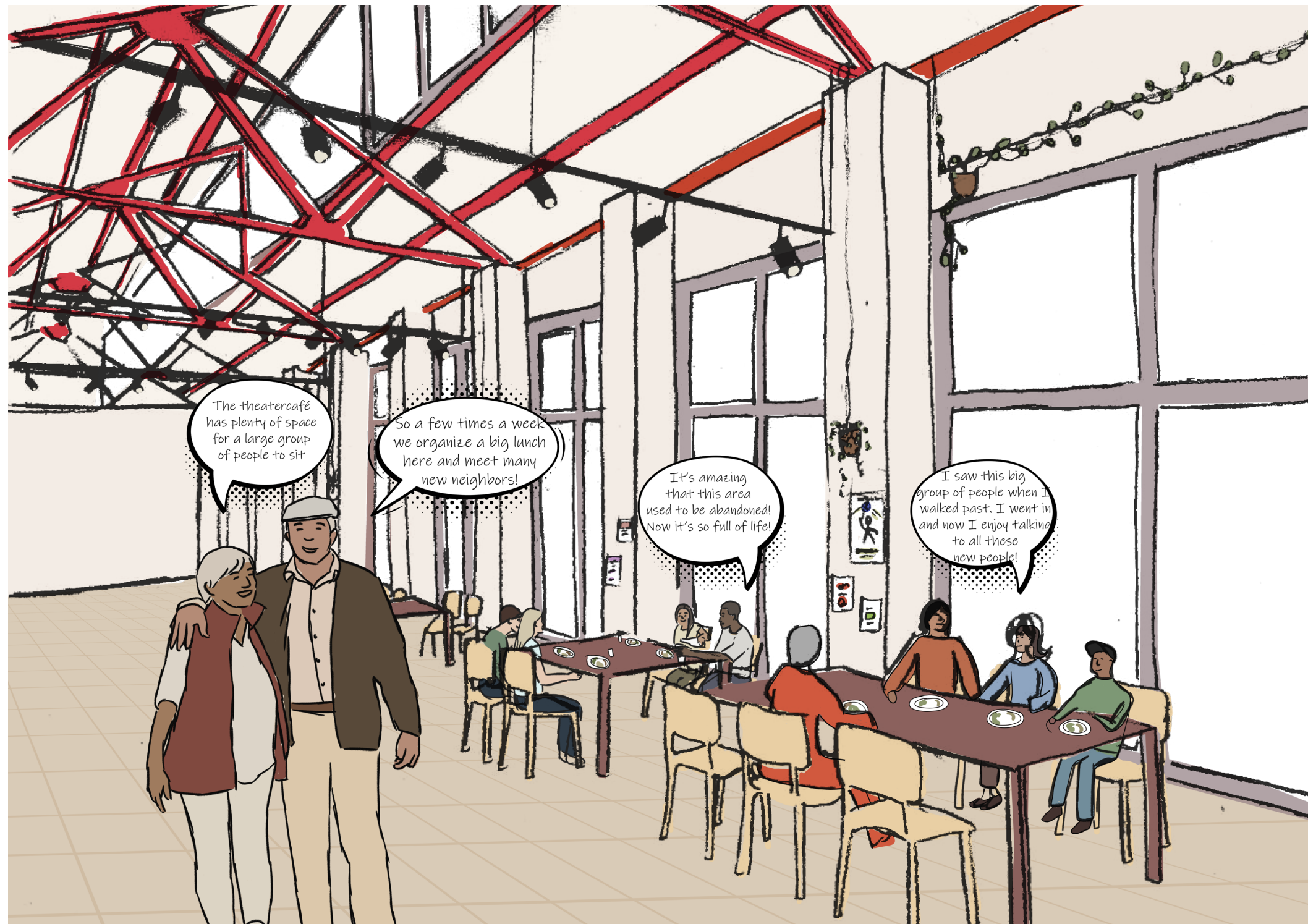
This sketch of my design shows the view from the mezzanine into the ground floor level of the theater café. This was inspired by youth center Scratch. It offers visitors to the theater café a chance to step back from the vibrant conversation below, while still remaining visually connected to the space and other groups around them. It balances privacy with a sense of community.





Theater Vaillant, located in The Hague, Netherlands, is a community spot where people gather throughout the theater's opening hours. The theater hosts events like affordable social lunches to engage the local community. Its large facade windows create a strong connection between inside and outside. This encourages interaction not only between visitors but also with passersby. During my visit, I observed conversations over lunch and friendly exchanges between those inside and people walking by outside. the furniture in the space was also simple and cheap. Visitors during the lunch would reconfigure the furniture to accomodate groups and conversations.





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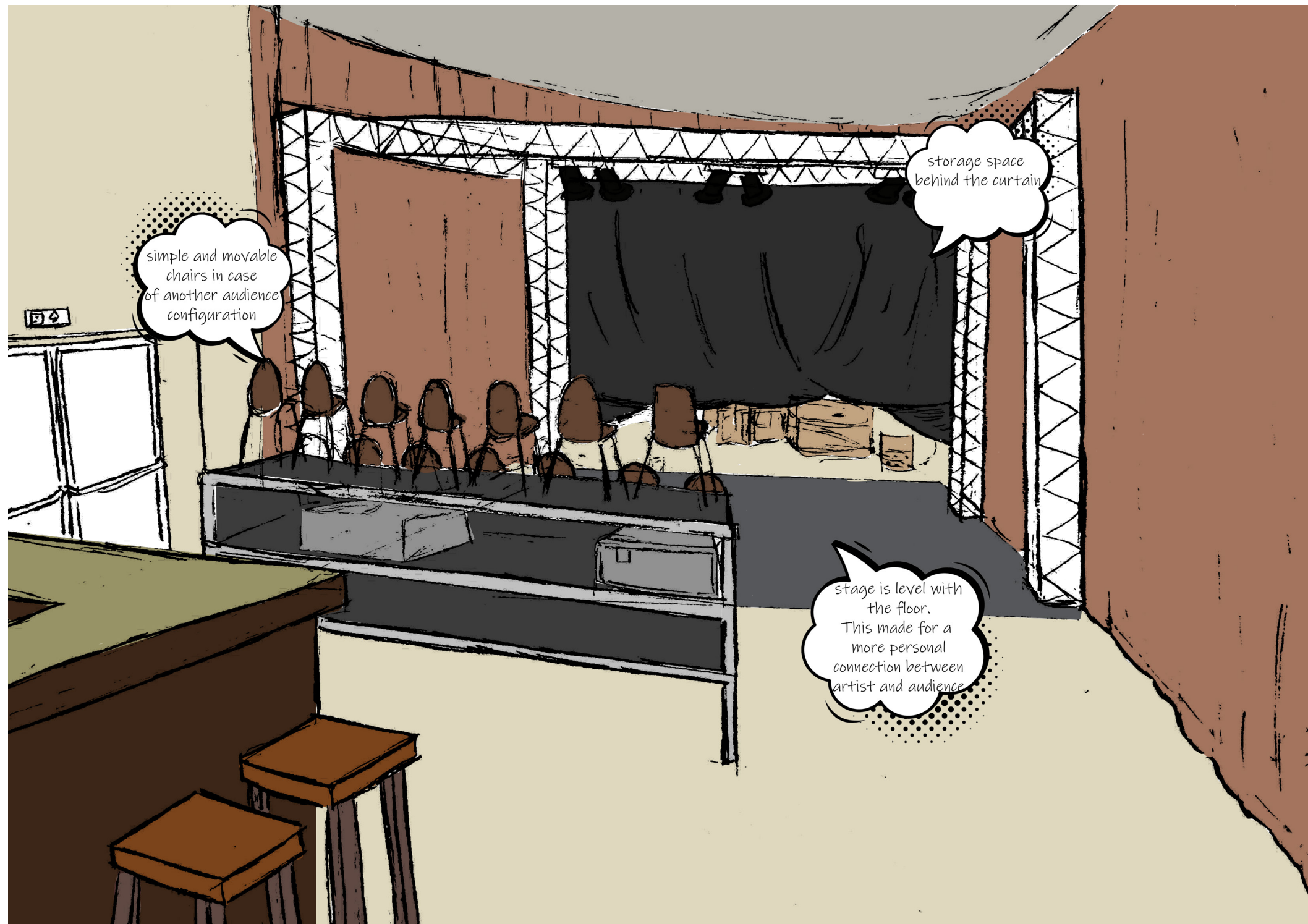
Theater Nova is a small community theater near the site of the Blikfabriek. It is a place where a community comes together and where visitors can enjoy a cup of coffee or a cheap meal. You can often find people just walking in and out of the theater café and talking to whoever is sitting at the tables. The space feel very generous and light.





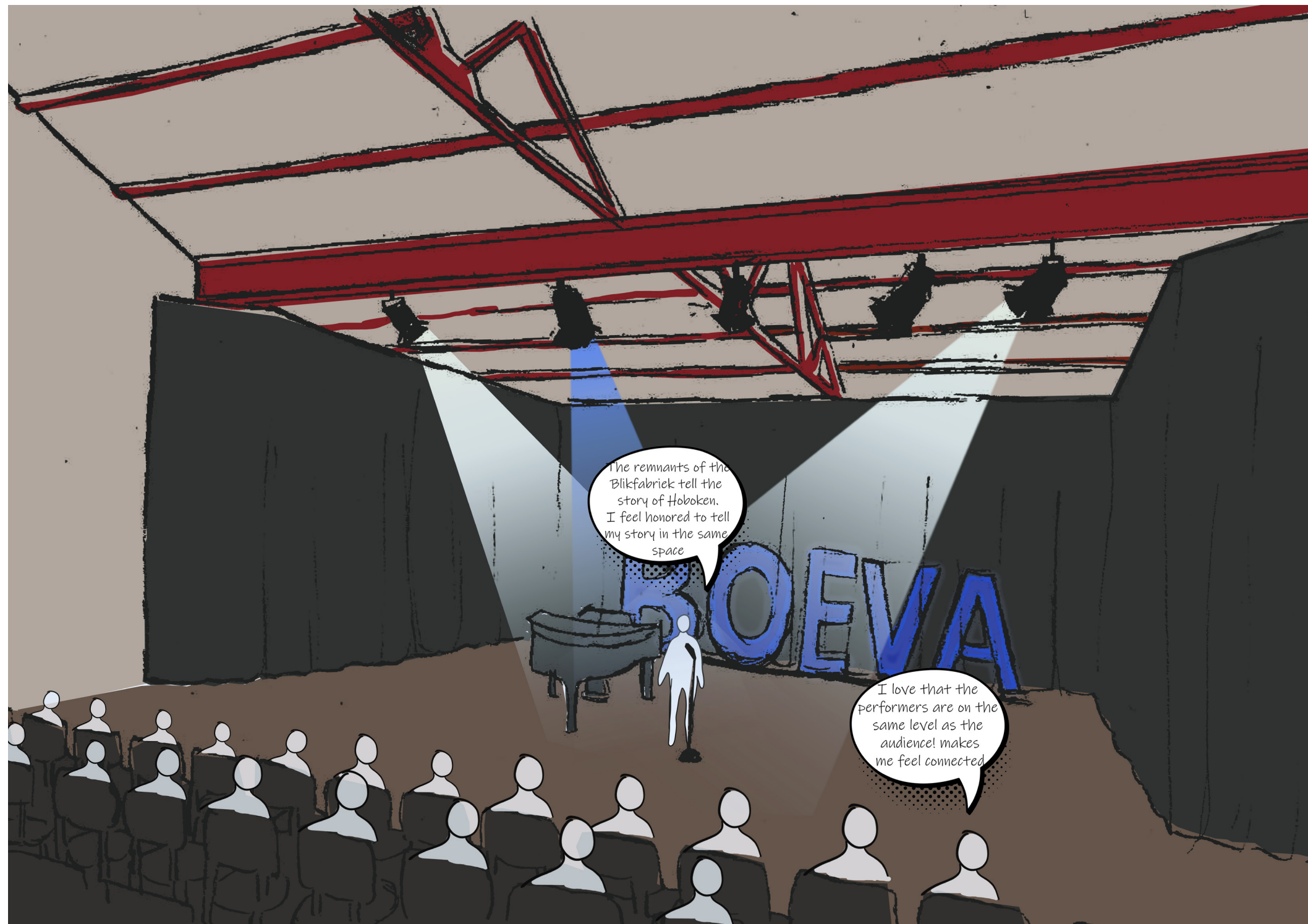
This sketch shows one of the small, sheltered spaces in my design. Inspired by the youth spaces in youth center Scratch, this space has heavier furniture and lower ceiling height compared to the theater café. This creates a more protected atmosphere. These nooks are intended as informal gathering spots for the drama school's youth.





The theater hall at Nova is small in size but features a generous ceiling height. The stage is set directly on the floor, creating an intimate atmosphere that draws the audience closer to the performer. This setup made the performance I attended feel personal and engaging. The space supported bigger productions as well as smaller, local artists, reinforcing its role as a community-oriented venue.





In my design, I aimed to retain the intimacy of Nova's theater by keeping the stage at floor level, allowing direct connection between performers and audience. This hall, set in a former factory, features three fully exposed original trusses after one another, which gives the space its distinctive character and inspired the spatial atmosphere of my own project.



## reflection

The research for this project focused on how architecture can create and support places where people from different backgrounds can meet, interact, and build connections. My process began with a strong interest in understanding how real people use space, especially those whose needs are often overlooked in urban design, such as teenage girls. In the early stages of my research I aimed to uncover the tacit knowledge this demographic by conducting interviews with teenage girls. At first, I used these interviews as my main research method, hoping to ground my research in personal stories and everyday experiences.

However, limited access and difficulty maintaining engagement with my intended demographic led me to reconsider my approach. This challenge marked a turning point in my research. I shifted from a personal and narrative-based method to a more observational one. I broadened my scope to include a wider demographic and began studying existing architectural projects that successfully supported social interaction.

I visited three built projects and observed their social spaces through sketching and spatial analysis. While on site, I created hand-drawn sketches that captured not only the layout of these spaces but also the way people used them in real time.

Over time, this method proved to be a powerful way to understand how architecture shapes social behavior. Drawing allowed me to slow down and really see the space: where people gathered, how they moved, and what architectural features seemed to encourage or discourage interaction. It became clear that certain patterns, such as visual connection between spaces, layered thresholds, or informal seating areas, had a strong impact on social dynamics.

This research not only helped me identify architectural strategies that support human connection, but also deepened my understanding of what makes a social space truly successful. Observational research—particularly when combined with drawing—became a way to bridge the gap between abstract social ideals and concrete spatial practices.

In a broader context, this research contributes to the ongoing architectural conversation about inclusion, community, and public space. It demonstrates the value of shifting methods when necessary, and of learning through direct engagement with built environments. It also highlights how architects can use careful observation and analysis to design more socially responsive spaces—even when direct access to certain user groups is limited.



