



The Space in Between

Project by Ginger Kant
Graduation Report

A Matter of Scale Graduation Studio
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FOREWORD

For as long as I can remember, I have been drawn to spaces that affect perception and emotion. Some places comfort, unsettle, or linger in memory, often without an immediately reason. It makes me wonder, “why does this space make me feel this way? ”

During my architectural education, this question evolved more toward: “How can architecture be designed to evoke such experiential qualities?” At the same time, I learned that buildings with such qualities are becoming more rare. Most of the buildings constructed nowadays have to be functional and efficient, neglecting the ‘magic’ that can transform a building into an experience machine.

This led me to approach architecture not merely as a technical or functional discipline, but as a cultural and experiential practice. I became interested in identifying and understanding the architectural elements that make part of atmospheric quality, with the aim of applying them through design. Architecture reduced solely to functional performance risks neglecting essential aspects of human experience and well-being.

Within this project, particular attention is given to spaces of movement; The Space in Between. The project explores how spaces of movement can become spaces of presence. Through design, it investigates how openness, sequence, and unprogrammed space may contribute to architectural quality, and how circulation might be understood not as leftover, but as formative. The project that follows is an attempt to give architectural form to this fascination.

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PART I

Introduction

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IMAGE OF ESTONIA

The two sides

A quick search on the internet about Estonia tells you promptly that the country is pioneering in digital innovation and that they are very proud of that. The government website E-estonia gives all information about how the e-services work and are set up.

Estonia grew to become a digital nation after their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Instead of rebuilding heavy analogue bureaucracy, Estonia decided to grow directly into digital systems. In 1996 they launched Tiigrihüpe (Tiger Leap), a national program to modernize schools with computers and internet, and make digital literacy universal. This created an entire generation with high digital competence and acceptance of technology as a normal part of life.

As result of this, there was a big-bang effect of Estonian digital/tech start-ups. They have the highest start-up density in Europe. Being Estonian almost means being digital and innovative.

“Estonia is the most digitally advanced nation in Europe.”

Invest Estonia, 2024

There is also another topic that Estonia is known for and has been described in many articles; religion. Estonia is known for being the least religious country in Europe with 58% not affiliated with any religion. This partly has to do with the Soviet past, where the suppression strongly discouraged religion and was restricted institutionally. Churches lost power and families avoided religious participation in order to stay safe and out of trouble. After Estonia's independence, religion did not have a 'bounce back.'

However, it is important to know that deep cultural patterns already leaned toward non-institutional spirituality in nature, even before the Soviet times.

“Estonia is the least religious country in Europe.”

Eesti Statistika, 2021

THE FULL DIGITAL NATION

VIOLAINE CHAMPETIER DE RIBES
JEAN SPIRI

**ESTONIA:
A BREAK
IN THE GAFAM
WALL**

[10]¹⁴

SPIRITUALITY IN ESTONIA

A personal framework

There is a big 'but', to the statements of Estonia being the least religious country in Europe. If you ask them the question; 'Do you believe in an spirits or life force?', over 50% will say 'yes.'

We perceive religion as the main beliefs such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism. If we search for the morphology of the word 'religion', we find out that it comes from the Latin word 'religare', a compound of re- ("again") and ligare ("to tie"). It suggests that religion is a binding force or a reconnection with the divine.

Interpreting religion through this lens, we can question if the previous statement about Estonia being non-religious is correct.

For hundreds of years Estonian culture has been tied to nature and introspection. Many Estonians have a personal connection with nature in places like forests, bogs, places with stones. They also have interest in meditation, sauna, and holistic wellbeing. Their relation to religion is more personal, introspective and nature-based spirituality.

Paganism has had a place in Estonia for a long time. There is a spiritual practice called 'Maausk' that worship nature, local gods and *hiis*. The faith identifies the divine with nature itself. Hiis are sacred places where rules should be followed such as; be washed, wear clean clothes, do not speak, do not think negatively,... There is also the ritual of hanging red ribbons in trees, as a way to exchange energy with nature.

Nowadays, Estonians rather establish their own belief system and spiritual practices, than believe institutional belief systems. This way, they find what works for them individually.

To conclude, we can say that Estonians are rational people that carry a strong sense of nature-based, personal, and inward-looking spirituality rather than institutional belief. They are typically quiet, modest, and introspective, valuing personal space, sincerity, and a deep connection to nature. Their culture prizes practicality and independence, with a preference for calmness over display.

"Over 50% of Estonians say they do believe in spirits or life force."

BBC News, 2011



*Images taken during
site visit to Hiis*

OBJECTIVE

The project is transforming a medieval monastery into a contemporary one. In modern times, just like in any other moment in history, there is a need for meaning, a spiritual connection and finding one's own answers to questions such as 'what is the meaning of my life?' However, there is the acknowledgement that society, as well as the way people spend their day to day lives, has changed tremendously compared to even 50 years ago.

If we think of spiritual buildings throughout history, like churches, monasteries, temples,... You get a sense of enclosure by thick and heavy walls, that let in little light and sound. It isolates in order to turn inward. This makes sense for the users of the building, often people that devoted their lives to spiritual enlightenment and separation from society.

Nowadays, we live in an achievement society, governed by positivity ("Yes, we can"). Individuals are no longer obedience-subjects but achievement-subjects, entrepreneurs of themselves (Han, 2025). We are overwhelmed by communication, stimulation, and information. There is no real opposition or resistance. The dominant illnesses of the 21st century are neuronal and psychological: Depression, Burnout, ADHD, Exhaustion. When life lacks deeper meaning, we compensate

through: Constant work, Production, Acceleration. Instead of confronting mortality, we flee into productivity.

There is a strong need for people to repel all those stimuli and be able to have a clear mind and not feel overwhelmed. People need a higher meaning in their life, other than just being productive at work. Finding that meaning sometimes needs guidance or a different environment than what we are used to.

This is the reason why the project is rethinking what a monastery should be in the 21st century.

It is not trying to imitate the history, but offering a new way to practice and find spirituality.

The existing structure of the monastery, existing mostly out of very thick limestone walls, functions as the host for the new interventions. How exactly and where to intervene are important questions to ask and researched in depth in the design part.



Therme Vals, P. Zumthor | Bruder Klaus Chapel, P. Zumthor | Windhover Contemplative Center, Aidlin Darling Design | Neues Museum, D. Chipperfield

RELEVANCE

The project is relevant on two current architectural themes.

The first one is that contemporary society is characterised by an unprecedented pace of change, largely driven by processes of digitalisation and technological innovation. While these developments have increased efficiency and connectivity, they have also contributed to a growing sense of acceleration, fragmentation, and impersonality in everyday life. The constant pressure to perform, adapt, and remain continuously connected has led to a condition in which individuals are increasingly mentally exhausted rather than physically constrained.

Human psychology, however, requires time to process and internalise change. The rapid transformations that define contemporary life often exceed this capacity, resulting in feelings of disorientation and instability. Emerging studies on mental health indicate that such conditions contribute to stress, anxiety, and burnout, particularly among younger generations. Within this context, there is a growing need for spaces that offer refuge, places where individuals can withdraw from external pressures and reconnect with themselves. A counter-space.

This need is not only theoretical but also observable in everyday experience. Many individuals appear to search for moments of stillness or

grounding within an environment that is otherwise dominated by constant stimulation. The constant presence of digital devices and virtual platforms, almost forces you to constantly engage with them. Without conscious awareness, this can gradually overtake autonomy and well-being.

For architecture, this raises an important question: how can space respond to these societal conditions?

Secondly, since the project is carried out within an existing historic structure, there is the requirement to strongly consider which way of intervening works best for this specific context.

The existing site is not of great aesthetic value and it partly is a state of decay. Its historical, cultural, material and atmospheric value however, are high. Various heritage institutes have formulated their opinions of how to treat heritage and in what way to intervene. There is a task to within these opinions, carefully formulate an own opinion that is carried out in the interventions. The project indicates a contribution to the heritage transformation discussion.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ① *How could we reconsider the architectural principles of the monastery for the 21st century?*
- ② *What should happen to heritage that has already lost part of its original completeness, function or meaning?*

SITE-VISIT OBSERVATIONS; OLD TOWN

Unique characteristics

Walking through Old Town made me try to grasp what the small scale of this area can facilitate, that other scales surrounding the Old Town cannot. What are the qualities of this smaller scale?

First of all, there is a sense of exploration and imagination. You, as a visitor are very up close to the buildings and can observe them with detail. This gives a stronger sense of experiencing, using the human senses. You can

find clues of the past; materials like limestone reveal themselves as and whisper some history. The scale in the city are best proportioned for the human body; and not for its creations. It makes you feel like an individual, with your own thoughts and unique experience. Corridors cut through building blocks and in a sense teleport you through walls into a different street. They are darker and make you feel like you have to watch out for your head. There is

rapid change in what you can observe, just by walking. You have to be careful though, about where you step due to the uneven ground made out of different size rocks. The scale allows you to imagine about what you see, but not drift away in thought.

By analysing the spatial structures of the old town, we can recognize elements that contribute to these sensual experiences and present atmosphere.



No place to stay

During the excursion in Tallinn it soon became clear that the city is dealing with a problem; the depletion of people in the historic Old Town.

Walking through the Old Town gave a strange feeling that it was way emptier than it should be. There are very little people on the streets and you don't see

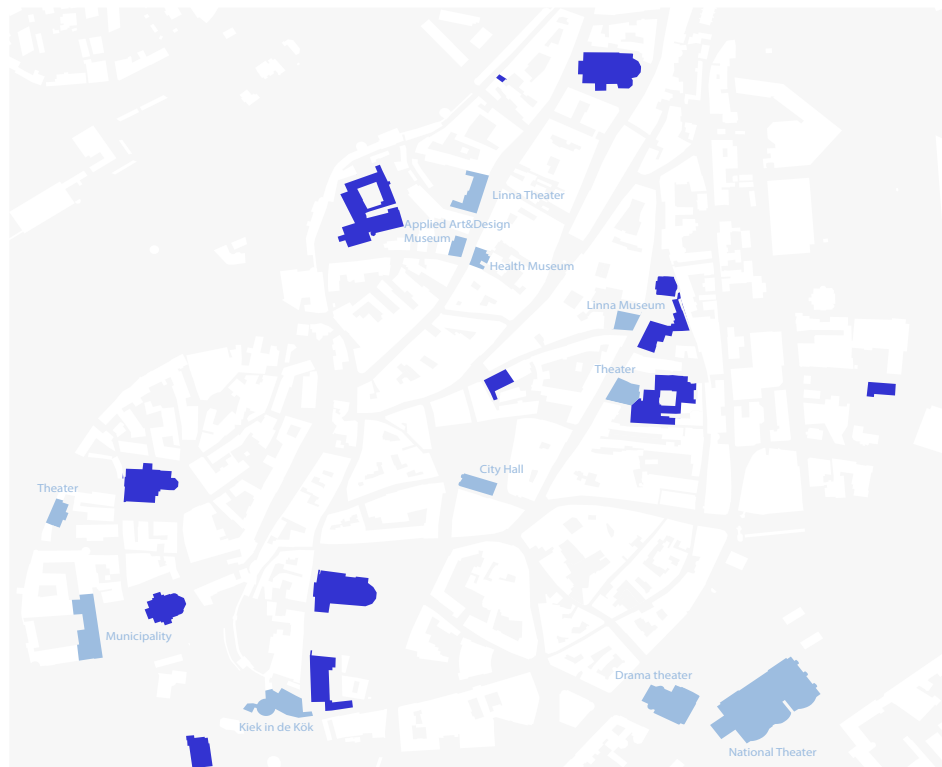
many lights on in the apartments.

Talking with students from EKA, they told us they feel like they have no place in the old town. There are no activities for them to enjoy and prices are high due to tourism.

The city architect of Tallinn explained that the city is dealing with an

'airb&b plague' that is occupying a lot of homes and in combination with the lack of functions (supermarkets, kindergartens, leisure,...) it has become an unattractive place to live for Estonians.

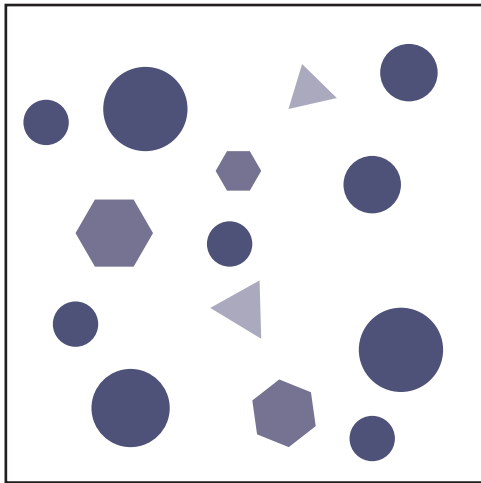
The maps displayed show the lack of functions present in the old town.



Map showing religious sites (dark blue) and publicly accessible buildings (light blue).

CHANGES IN FUNCTIONALITY OVER TIME; OLD TOWN

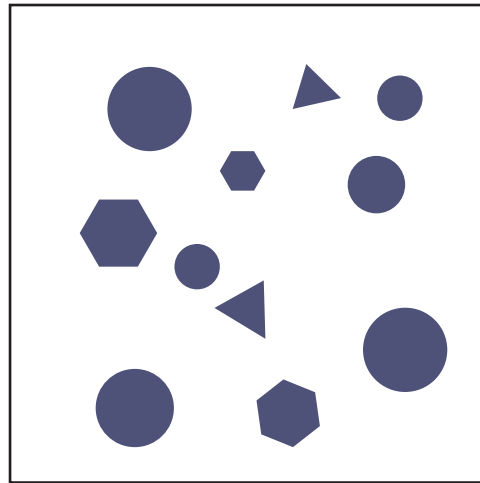
1900-1940



Mixed functions / Living

Tallinn Old Town (Vanalinn) was still a normal, densely inhabited neighborhood with craft workshops, small merchants, warehouses, schools, and institutions mixed through the medieval fabric.

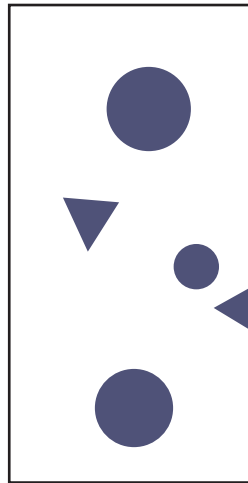
1940-1970



Decline + Institutionalisation

Due to the war Many buildings were damaged or confiscated; Wealthier families moved out; lower-income families were allocated apartments through Soviet housing agencies. Soviet administration used many medieval buildings as offices, archives, police, military administrative spaces. Shops became standardized Soviet trade points.

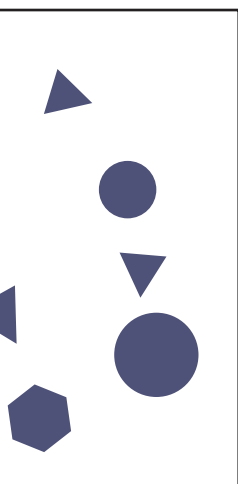
1970 -



Conservation and reprogramming

Old Town regained its status and started to become a cultural and institutional center. Large-scale restoration projects were initiated. Motivated partly by the need for Tallinn's 1980 World Capital events. State investment increased but with decreased density.

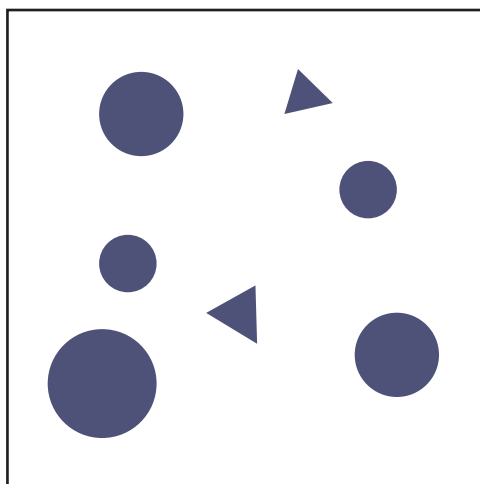
- 1990



**on + Cultural
ramming**

ains protected
ts its transition
d tourist center.
oration projects:
by preparations
Olympic regatta
stitutions remain,
asing residential

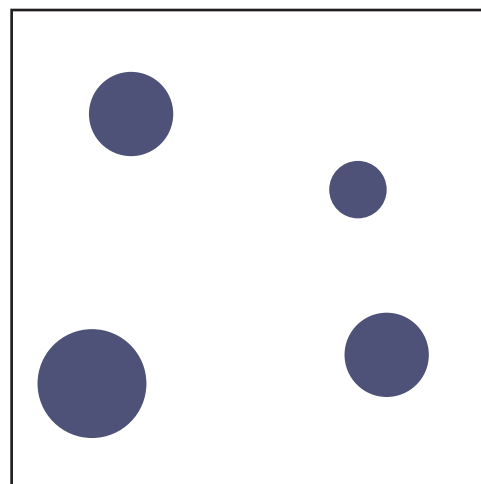
1990-2010



**Privatisation +
Commercialisation + Education**

Privatisation of properties made many residents, unable to maintain expensive medieval properties, and sold them. Restaurants, bars, souvenir shops exploded, due to tourism. Emergence of higher-education functions: in need of temporarily placed small departments or studios in Old Town buildings due to lack of space elsewhere. These brought student life, workshops, and public events.

1990-2010



**Monofunctional
AirB&B town**

Universities gradually relocated to modern campuses. Their departure removed daily users, replaced by seasonal tourists. Cultural institutions remain but mostly as museums or performance venues, not everyday community services. Now, there are very few public functions and highly dependent on tourism.

DOMINIIKLASTE KLOOSTER

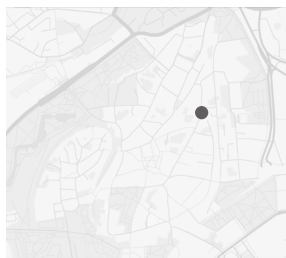
The choice for the selection of the site, the Dominican Monastery, became definitive quite quickly after visiting the site in person. Even though I was not able to see the full interior of the monastery, I was already mesmerised by the parts that I could see (the courtyard and the cloisters).

There was a very heavy atmosphere orchestrated by its long history, its heavy materials (mostly limestone), and the fantasy like state that it was in due to poor maintenance.

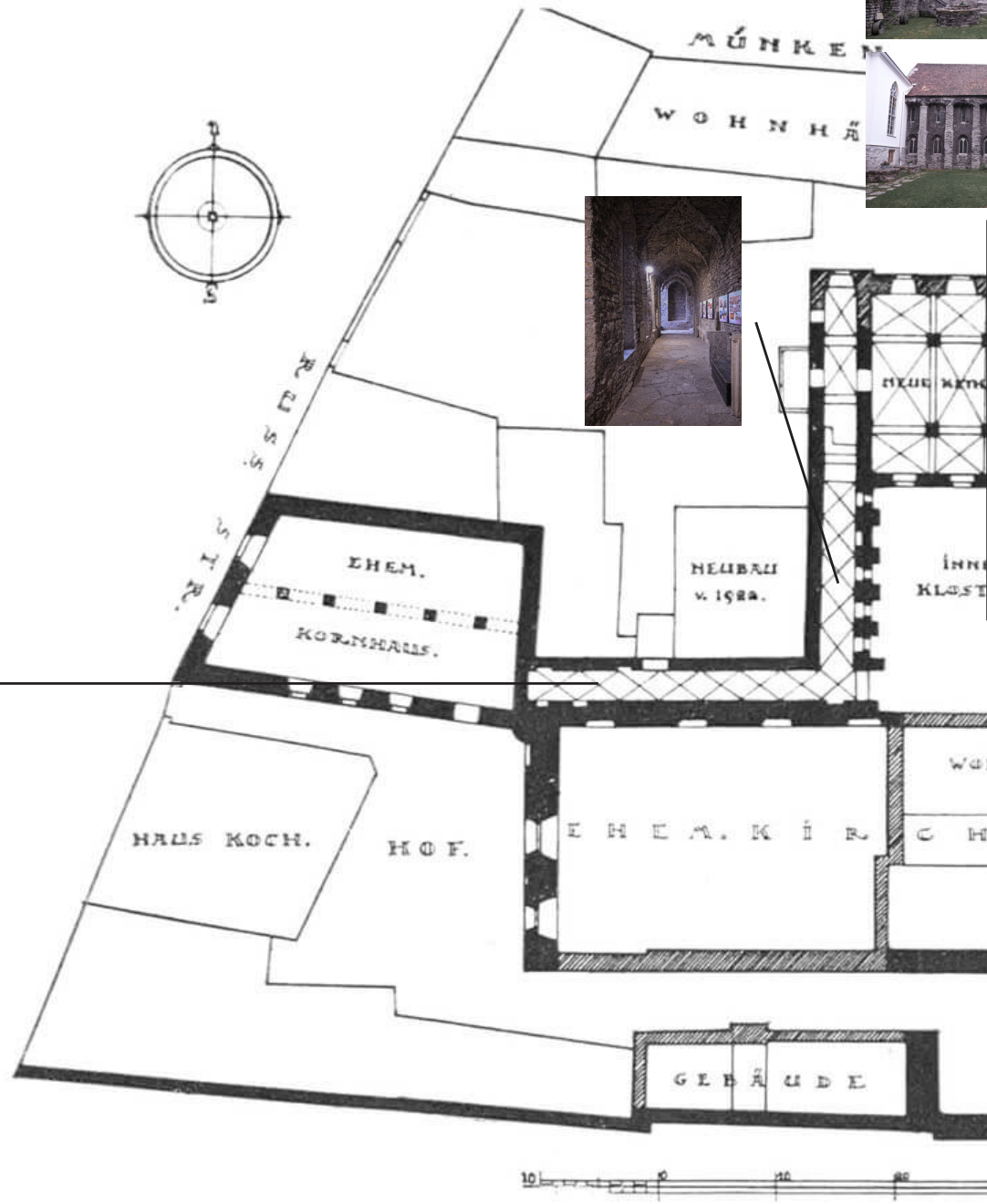
I felt it as a chance that I had to use to make a design that would restore the monastery as a functional place and

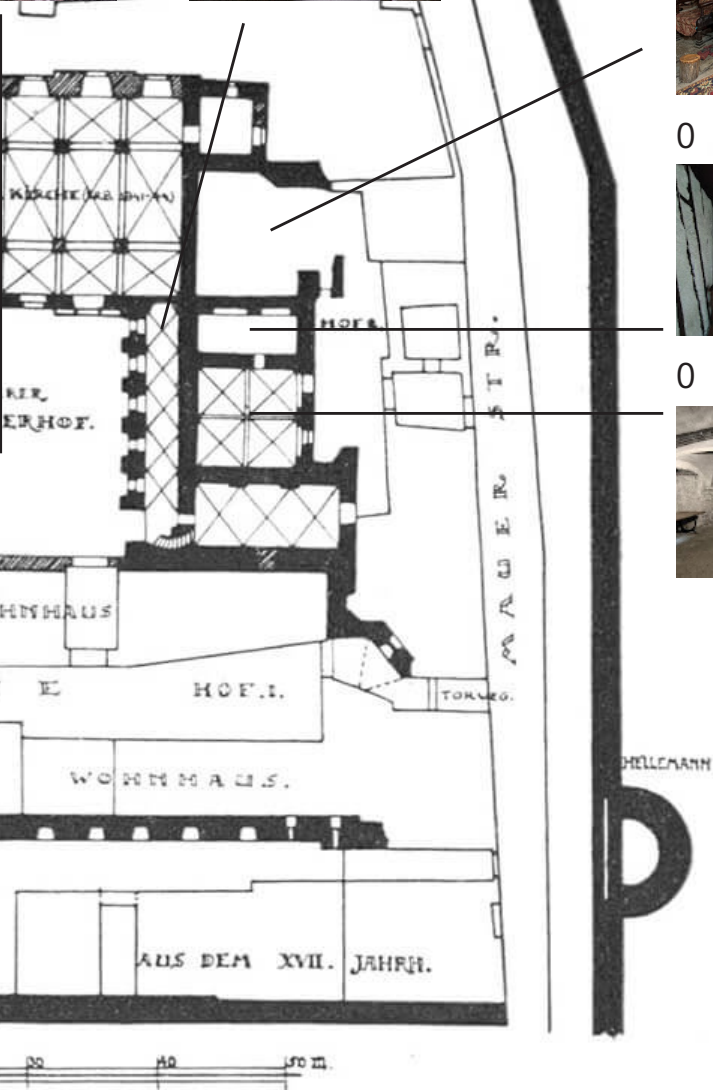
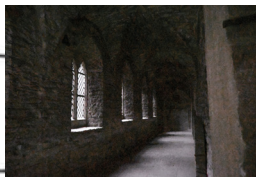
open it up for more people to see. For the type of project I want to realize, it made a lot of sense to use the already existing atmosphere of the location to build upon and design with. Such heavy atmospheres are difficult to create from scratch.

Transforming an existing, unused site in the old town and turning it into a space that can be used by the residents, makes the project serve as an example of how Tallinn can re-imagine its future as a multi functional city center with sustainable heritage.









-1



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0



+1





PART II

Approach

Methods

Theoretical framework

RESEARCH AND DESIGN METHODS

Strategy

The graduation project transforms a medieval monastery in the Old Town of Tallinn into a contemporary monastic environment. The approach combines theoretical research with iterative design exploration, aiming to translate the concept of atmospheric architecture into spatial form. The project is strongly architectural, with a particular emphasis on interior experience and sensory perception.

The research phase began with an extensive literature study on atmospheric architecture. This included writings by architects as well as broader philosophical texts addressing perception, atmosphere, and the human experience of space. The purpose of this research was to develop a conceptual framework that could influence design decisions. In parallel, case studies of relevant architectural projects were analysed to identify spatial strategies and elements that contribute to atmosphere, such as light, materiality,

proportion, and sequencing.

Additional research focused on the historical development of the Old Town of Tallinn and the typology of monasteries. Typological research clarified the spatial organisation and symbolic qualities associated with monastic life and distinguished the different focus points of various monastic orders.

The design process developed iteratively and was closely intertwined with the research. It began with a site visit, which allowed for a direct sensory understanding of the existing monastery and its surroundings. Insights from literature and case studies were then translated into a conceptual approach, forming the basis for the initial design. These early proposals were tested and critically evaluated, leading in some cases to the complete rejection of earlier schemes. This process of discarding and redefining ideas was essential in refining the project's direction.

Both physical and digital models played a central role in the design methodology. Physical models were used extensively to study spatial qualities, particularly the interaction between light and space, which is crucial for atmospheric design. Digital models complemented this by allowing for more precise spatial development and testing. In addition, hand sketches were used to explore interior perspectives and to articulate the intended experiential qualities of the spaces.

The project evolved through continuous iteration, moving back and forth between conceptual thinking and material testing. Evaluation was an ongoing process, primarily informed by feedback from the design tutor. These moments of reflection played a role in identifying weaknesses, challenging assumptions, and guiding the project toward greater coherence between concept and architectural expression.

Overall, the approach can be understood as a synthesis of research and design, in which theoretical insights are actively tested and transformed through spatial experimentation. The iterative process, combined with constant evaluation, allowed for a design that is both conceptually grounded and experientially driven.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Initial literature

The theoretical framework of this project was developed through an extensive review of literature from a range of disciplines, including architecture, philosophy, and theology. This interdisciplinary approach enabled a broader and more nuanced understanding of the central theme of atmospheric architecture and its relation to human experience. The insights derived from these sources were concluded and articulated in a reflective text, forming the first conceptual foundation for the design.

Conventional library spaces are typically characterised by openness, visibility, and collective use. Such environments often create a sense of exposure and social pressure, aligning with the notion of “the Study” described by Alison Smithson; a functional, efficient space embedded within the city. In contrast, this project draws on the idea of “the Grotto,” which supports introspection, reflection, and a more personal engagement with knowledge. This shift reflects the ambition to design architectural “counter-spaces” that respond to the fast-paced nature of contemporary life.

Understanding is approached here as an experiential process. As argued by Aldous Huxley, understanding is a mode of seeing rather than thinking, requiring a connection to lived experience. The design therefore seeks to communicate through spatial and sensory qualities, engaging users on an emotional level.

An important precedent is the Laurentian Library by Michelangelo, where movement through space becomes an experiential sequence. This idea is reinforced by Gernot Böhme, who emphasises the importance of atmospheric sensitivity in everyday environments.

Finally, the phenomenological perspective of Maurice Merleau-Ponty highlights the active relationship between body and space. His concept of the body schema informs a design approach that considers movement, perception, and spatial sequencing as central to architectural experience.

Together, these theories establish a framework in which architecture is understood as a medium for sensory engagement and reflection.

Literature read:

- St. Jerome - Allison Smithson
- Knowledge & Understanding - Aldus Huxly
- Building Atmosphere - Klaske Havik
- Gernot Böhme
- Perception - Maurice Merleau-Ponty
- The Plastic Number - Richard Padovan
- Promenade Architecturale - Le Corbusier
- Raumplan - Adolf Loos
- Served and Servant space - Louis Kahn

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Atmospheric elements strategy

In the book 'Atmospheres', by Peter Zumthor, he describes 9 elements that take part in the creation of atmosphere. The elements are listed below. I took these elements as points of analysis for case studies. By doing these case studies, I learned practical implications of the elements in existing architecture which gave inspiration for the design later on. The next slides showcase 1 of the case studies.

1. Bodily Architecture

Mass, scale, proportions

2. Material compatibility

- texture
- smell
- weight

3. Sound of a Space

muted, soft rooms ;resonant, echoing spaces; quiet thresholds

4. Temperature of a Space

5. Surrounding Objects

Furniture, Objects

6. Between Composure and Seduction

Balance clarity with emotional pull

Too much order is dead; too much seduction is theatrics

Atmosphere emerges from tension

7. Tension Between Interior and Exterior

Thresholds, windows, transitions, and mediated views

8. Levels of Intimacy

- open and public
- semi-intimate
- deeply intimate

9. Light

Light reveals the materiality of things, sets rhythms, and makes space legible

Precedent projects analysed:

- Laurentian Library - Michelangelo
- San Carlino alle Quattro Fontane - Francesco Borromini
- Abbey Sint Benedictusberg - Hans van der Laan
- Therme Vals - Peter Zumthor
- Neues Museum - David Chipperfield
- Various projects - Adolf Loos

One reference analysis is shown below as example.

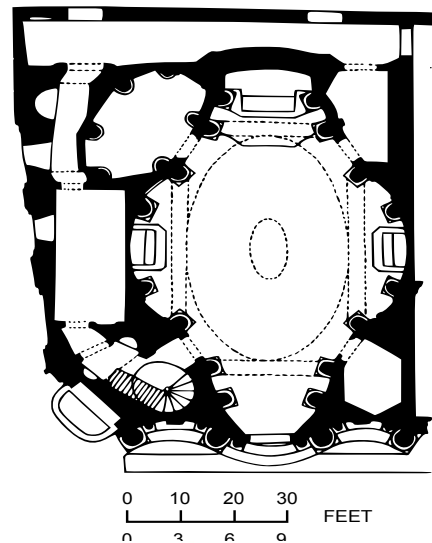
San Carlino alle Quattro Fontane

Location	Rome
Period	1585-1590
Architect	Francesco Borromini
Function	Church

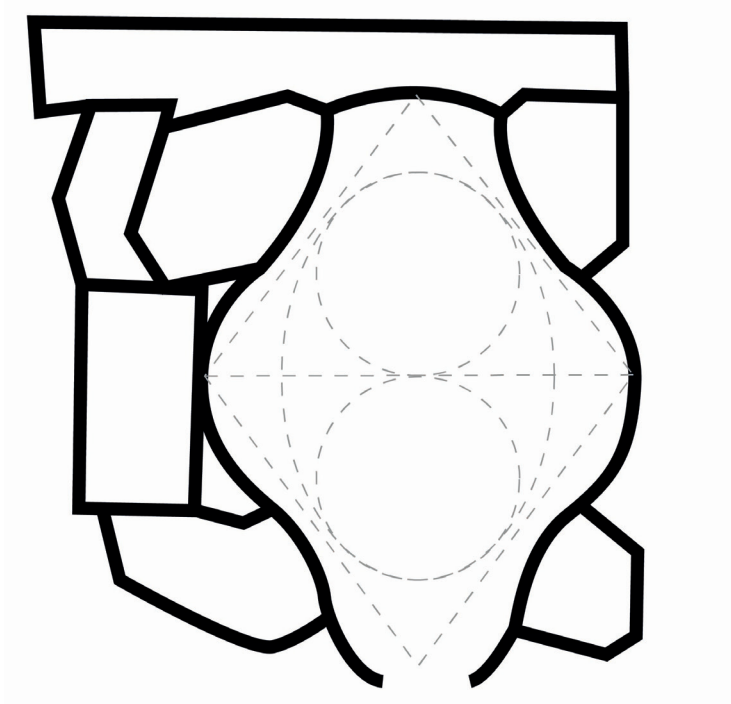
The church's plan is neither a traditional Latin cross nor a perfect central space but rather an elongated oval subtly distorted by concave and convex recesses. This fluid geometry rejects the static clarity of Renaissance symmetry, instead evoking a sense of movement that directs the eye along a continuous architectural sequence.

The interplay between curvilinear walls and a centralized space creates a dynamic interior that feels paradoxically expansive despite the building's modest footprint. Much of Borromini's genius lies in how he constructs architectural experiences much like a carefully paced narrative: each curve, recess, and shaft of light unfolds sequentially, guiding the visitor through moments of anticipation and discovery

Instead of relying on a heavy structural drum, Borromini manipulates hidden openings that allow natural light to flood the space, dissolving the material weight of the dome. The effect is one of ethereality, where the ceiling appears to float, reinforcing the church's spiritual function as a gateway between heaven and earth

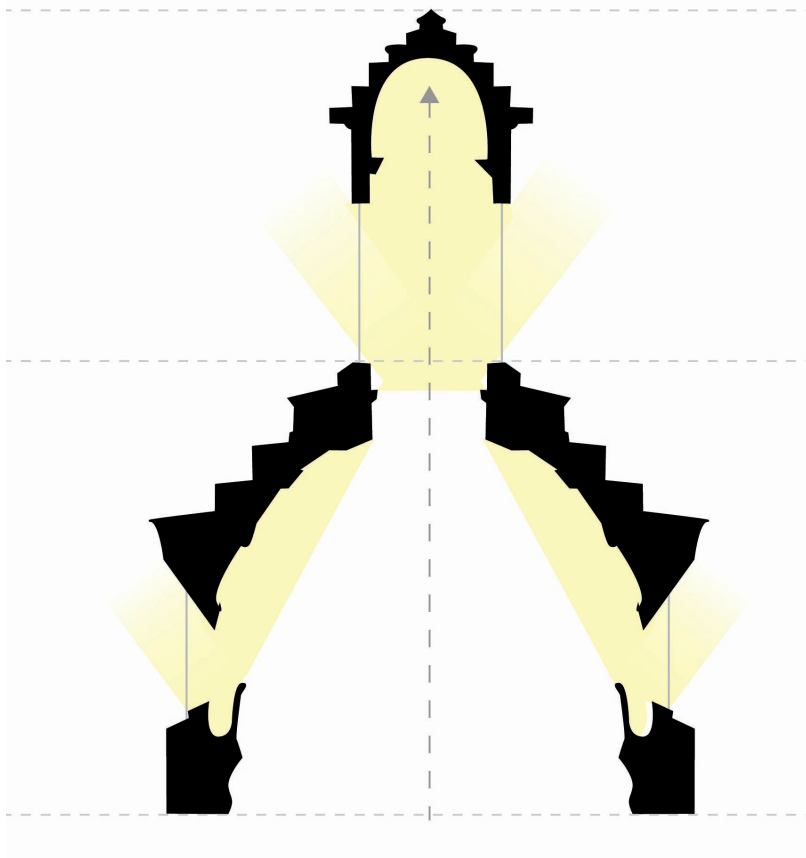






Symmetrical chapel

Based on geometry



Hidden windows

Sea of light inside
of the tower

Hidden windows

Diffused light

Optical illusion for
perceiver

The floor plan consists of multiple shapes; curved, rectangular, hexagonal... It is not symmetrical everywhere. The chapel is designed using geometrical shapes. There are four main corners. Across the entrance is the main altar, with two other altars on the two sides.

The diamond shape can be subdivided into two triangles, with each fitting a perfect circle inside. From these two circles can be made an oval shape. This shape is the base for the dome.

The tip of the dome is tilted off from the main structure in order to let more light in the top. This functions as a sort of optical illusion for perceivers standing underneath. It is unclear where the light is coming from, but it lights up the trinity dove emblem situated at the tip of the ceiling.

The main part of the dome also lets in light unnoticed. The windows bring in light that is diffused by ditches in the side. This lights up the dome underneath in a 'sacred' way.

Zumthor elements:

Bodily architecture
Sound of space
Temperature of space
Light

Conclusion

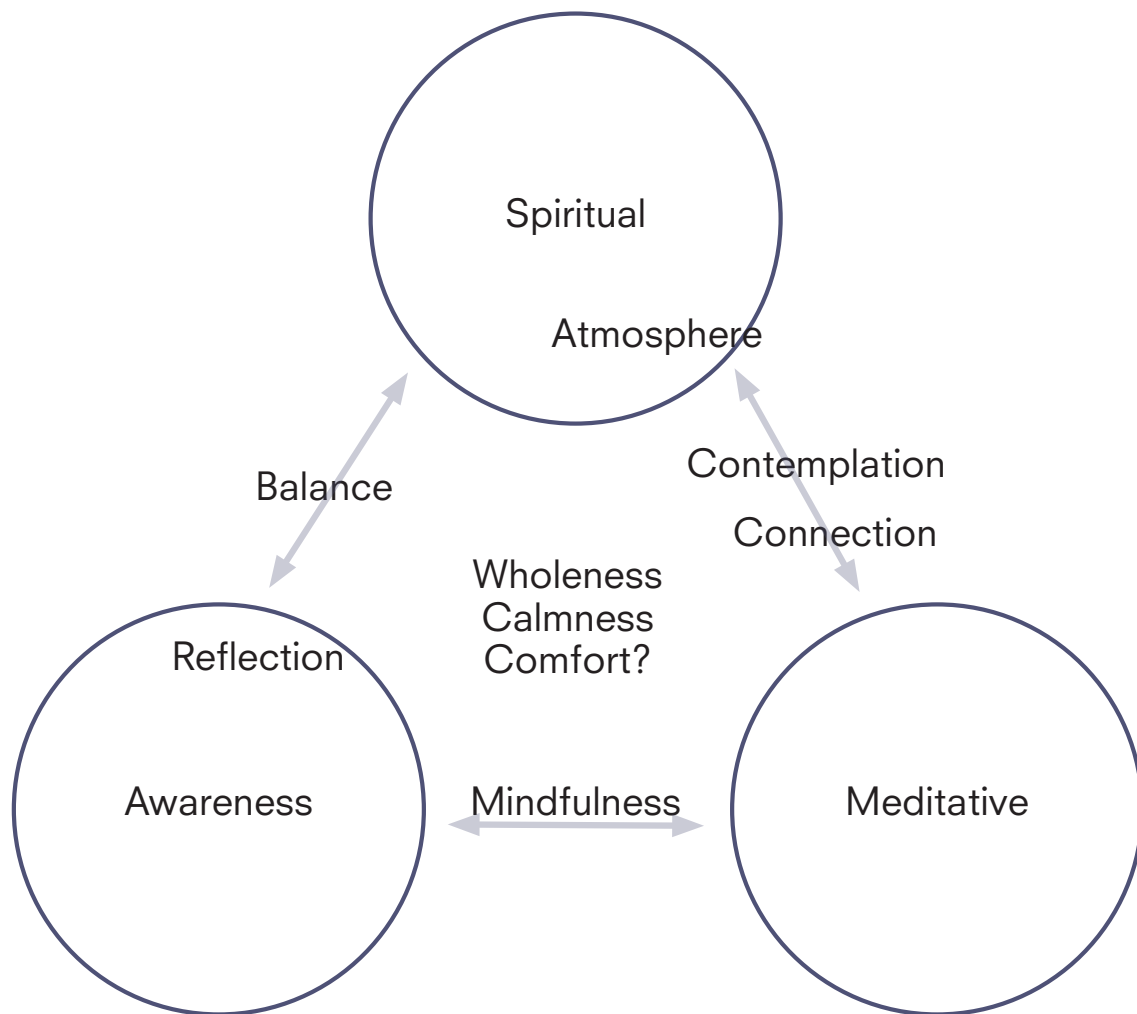
In order to make spaces feel 'correct', a certain understanding of geometry is needed. Proportion is an important factor within geometry.

Light is a tool with which you can shape things the way you want it to be perceived (illusions). It can strengthen elements, or hide them.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Clarity of words and concepts

This spread displays one of the initial diagrams that I made, placing the concepts of spirituality, awareness and meditation in relation to each other. It helped me a lot to clarify concepts to be able to distinguish between them.



Scheme showcases the relation of the words by definition.

Soul

Spiritual

A sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves, and it typically involves a search for meaning in life. As such, it is a universal human experience, something that touches us all. People may describe a spiritual experience as sacred or transcendent or simply a deep sense of aliveness and interconnectedness.

Mind

Awareness

When we are aware, we are observing from a distance. Being aware means that we take a step back from the actual experience, the thoughts and the emotions we express and read how they are affecting the quality of our organism. We can observe directly how one string of thoughts makes the organism react, what emotions arise and how the quality of the experience is influenced.

Body

Meditative

Meditation is a mental practice involving techniques to train attention and awareness, focusing the mind on a specific object, thought, or activity (like breathing or a mantra) to achieve mental clarity, emotional calmness, reduced stress, and heightened self-awareness, often leading to spiritual insight or relaxation. It's about training in awareness and getting a healthy sense of perspective.

Are awareness and reflection the same thing?

Awareness is noticing your internal state (thoughts, feelings, actions) as they happen, while reflection is the deliberate, analytical process of looking back on those experiences to understand their meaning, causes, and impact for growth.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The traditional monastery and what to take from it

I did research into the typology of the monastery and how they differ by order. In each order, monks/friars/nuns lived their lives according to religious principles, for which they believe they can best devote their lives to God. The four order researched were; the Cistercians, the Cluniacs, the Dominicans and the Franciscans.

I identified that orders can be put into two categories; the contemplative orders and the active orders. From each I analysed 2 orders and their architecture. For the contemplative ones; the Cluniacs and the Cistercians. For the active orders; the Franciscans and the Dominicans. (Analyses can be seen in the logbook)

I want to focus mainly of the dominicans and the franciscans. They were friars that did not live solely in isolation. They went out of the shell and into town to later return and find prayer and contemplation within the monastery. They has separate focus points.

The dominicans focussed of study, reading and discussion. The importance is in spreading the truth and growing intelectually. Study can be a form of contemplation on God's creation, or even a contemplation on God wholly. Moreover, as it so often is for Dominicans, study can be used

for others: to teach, to expand other's conceptualization of the world around them, and to alert others to the very presence of God.

The franciscans focussed on poverty and living like Christ; entering into human nature in all its limitation, weakness, and suffering. They did not put their trust in earthly things, whether they possessed them or not. They had very emotional contemplation with a relation to christ.

The question for me arises;

What can we take from this if we had to create/describe a contemporary monastery?

-Engaged urban spirituality.
Withdrawal without abandonment of the world.

- Having intellect to collect knowledge and be able to debate it.

-Having moments where you reflect upon your behaviour and improvement.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The elements of a monastery

After researching the typology of a monastery and distinguishing between different orders and the organization, I could understand each meaning of function for a space.

The Church

A place for ritual



The Scriptorium

A place for work (writing)



The Cloister

A connecting place for thoughts



The Library

A place to read and learn



The Courtyard
A place for calm and peace



The Cells
A place for turning inward



The Chapter House
A place for gathering and collective spirituality



The Refectory
A place for eating



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Burnout society

I read the book 'The Burnout Society' by Byung-Chul Han which was a good addition to my existing conceptions about this topic, because it confirmed some of the thoughts I already had or gave me the words that I needed to describe why I feel it is important to design for the symptoms mentioned in the book. Underneath, I describe which symptoms those are.

Disciplinary Society to Achievement Society

We now live in an achievement society, governed by positivity ("Yes, we can"). Individuals are no longer obedience-subjects but achievement-subjects, entrepreneurs of themselves. There is no external oppressor; instead, we internalize pressure to maximize productivity. We become both exploiter and exploited.

Excess Positivity

claims that contemporary society suffers not from repression, but from excess positivity. Otherness is disappearing. We are overwhelmed by communication, stimulation, and information. There is no real opposition or resistance. the dominant illnesses of the 21st century are neuronal and psychological: Depression, Burnout, ADHD, Exhaustion.

Depression as Self-Aggression

The depressed individual:
Feels they are not enough. Is tired of "having to become themselves."
Cannot measure up to internalized expectations. Depression occurs when the achievement-subject reaches the point of "no-longer-being-able-to-be-able." Because there is no external enemy, aggression turns inward: Self-reproach, Self-blame
Auto-aggression. Depression becomes the pathological expression of late-modern man's failure to become himself.

The Loss of Negativity

Negativity; the ability to say "no," to pause, to resist; is disappearing. We lack:
Interruptions, "Between-times",
Spaces of reflection
If we only possess the positive ability to act, perceive, and think — but not

the negative ability not to act, perceive, or think, we fall into hyperactivity.

Without negativity:

Attention becomes scattered. Thinking cannot deepen. Reflection becomes impossible.

Spirituality and contemplation require the ability not to respond to every stimulus.

Vita contemplativa: Resists intrusive stimuli, Creates depth, Allows reflection, Restores meaning. Modern society, however, absolutizes vita activa (the active life). Restlessness counts for more than reflection. This leads to hysteria, nervousness, and a new barbarism.

Acceleration and Denarrativization

denarrativization" intensifies hyperactivity. When life lacks deeper meaning, we compensate through: Constant work, Production, Acceleration

Instead of confronting mortality, we flee into productivity.

Tiredness

Two forms of tiredness;

Exhausted tiredness ; the result of excessive positivity and productivity. Contemplative tiredness; a calm, serene not-doing that opens space for experience. In true tiredness, everything becomes extraordinary. It allows stillness and depth; something hyperactive society cannot tolerate.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Variations of Identity -Carlos Marti Aris

In *Variations of Identity: Type in Architecture*, Carlos Martí Arís describes architecture as a continuous transformation of typological principles rather than a sequence of stylistic changes. Architectural types are understood as adaptable structures that evolve as a consequence of shifting cultural and technological conditions.

A key insight from this study is the changing role of enclosure in architecture. Historically, buildings were defined by thick, solid walls that clearly separated space, with openings that functioned as controlled transitions. In contrast, modern architecture often replaces these clear boundaries with more layered spatial conditions, creating fluid and interconnected environments.

This distinction is particularly relevant for the transformation of a medieval monastery. The existing structure is characterised by solidity and enclosure, while the project seeks to introduce a more continuous and atmospheric spatial experience.

Through Martí Arís' concept of typological evolution, the project positions itself between past and present, using type as a tool to mediate between historical context and contemporary architectural expression.

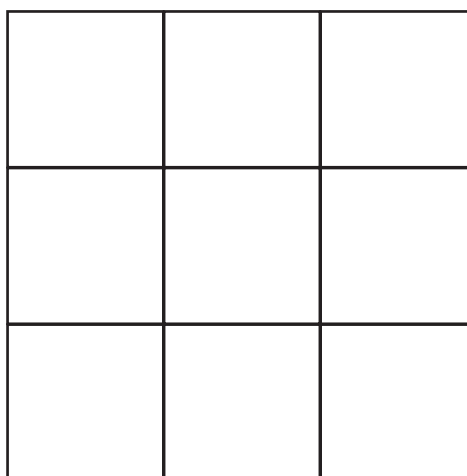
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The 9-square grid

The nine-square grid, as explored by John Hejduk, is more than a simple compositional device. It is a conceptual framework through which architectural thinking is disciplined and revealed. The grid divides space into a 3×3 matrix, offering a neutral and ordered system. However, for Hejduk, this neutrality is deceptive. The grid opens a discussion about the ratio between solid and void, structure and space, center and periphery. The grid has been used as an exercise for students, where they were asked to manipulate this system through a series of controlled variations, testing how minimal changes could produce fundamentally different

spatial conditions. The exercise foregrounds the role of rules in design, demonstrating that constraint is not a limitation forces invention.

It is good to be aware that the nine-square grid carries historical weight, rooted in modernist concerns with order, proportion, and abstraction. To adopt it uncritically risks treating it as dogma; to engage with it critically is to confront its theoretical and historical implications. In this sense, Hejduk's grid is both a tool and a discourse, requiring architects to navigate between formal rigor and interpretive freedom.





PART III

Results

Process
Research and design results

PROCESS DESCRIPTION

A dance between research and design

Throughout the whole process, there has always been switches back and forth between designing and performing research. Research can be done in different ways; via literature research or via designing in explorations. Research strongly influences design decisions and can support them. Which exact research has been carried out, has already been discussed in depth in part II. In part III, I would like to discuss how this has influenced decision making and thus the design. On the right page is a diagram that describes the types of research that has been done and followed by what design effect it has had.

The setback and the eureka moment

I have experienced the whole process as a wave that has ups and downs. There are moments where I felt very confident with the design and I was motivated. However, there were also moments where I felt stuck and not confident with what I had designed. Within the whole process I can highlight one moment where a deep down was followed up with a steep high. This moment was between the A1 and A2, where I was still searching for a clear floor plan for the design. The problem that I was having is that I was constantly thinking within the same boundaries. I was making design iterations, but with the same properties. This was pointed out by my tutor. At that moment I felt very slapped down and stuck. I understood the feedback, but I did not know how to move forward. Luckily, I did receive a few good tips and dove into some literature about different ways of designing throughout history which made me realize and be able to escape the loop that I was thinking in. Quickly, I was able to make new designs that were better and more versatile in terms of design tools. I landed on the use of a 9-square grid as a system to design with and carry out my concept strongly. I felt very confident with my progress.

Design exploration through
sketches and model making

Literature on human spirit

Case studies

Design definition for architectural goals

*Study on the typology of the
monastery*

*Literature on the burn-out
society*

Definition on design concept (Mind-Body-Soul)

*Literature; on Carlos Marti
Aris*

Rethinking the architectural goals

Literature on the 9-square grid

Set (general) plan and concept

Elaborate concept into refinement and technical drawings

A1



A2

A3

INITIAL RESULT

The first design

The first design was an attempt to make sense of all the literature that I had read, examples that I had studied and own ambitions that I had set. A clear concept was missing and I went straight for the design of individual spaces as strong atmospheric environments. I had also established archetypes that I described as a combination of ingredients that go well together. With these archetypes, I designed. I also defined the concepts of spirituality, meditative and awareness. I related this to 3 types of spaces; the sanctuary, the meditation space and the library.

Describing the design; I made a clear distinction between the positioning of the 3 spaces described above. On the left side are the meditative spaces; silent room, cells, yoga space, lecture space. The structure seems more straightforward. In the middle is a big open and high hall, which works as a chapel. On the right side, there are the library spaces; reading halls, book racks. The rooms are organized in a more random way in order to disorientate and create mystery.

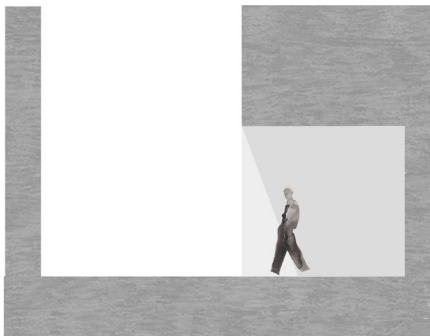
Threshold
Compression and Detachment



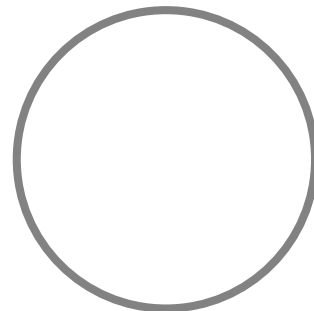
Procession
Rhythm and
Anticipation



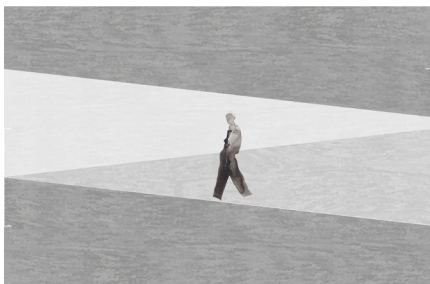
Luminous Void
Clarity and Contemplation



Pause
Stillness and
Presence



Ascent
Release and Awareness



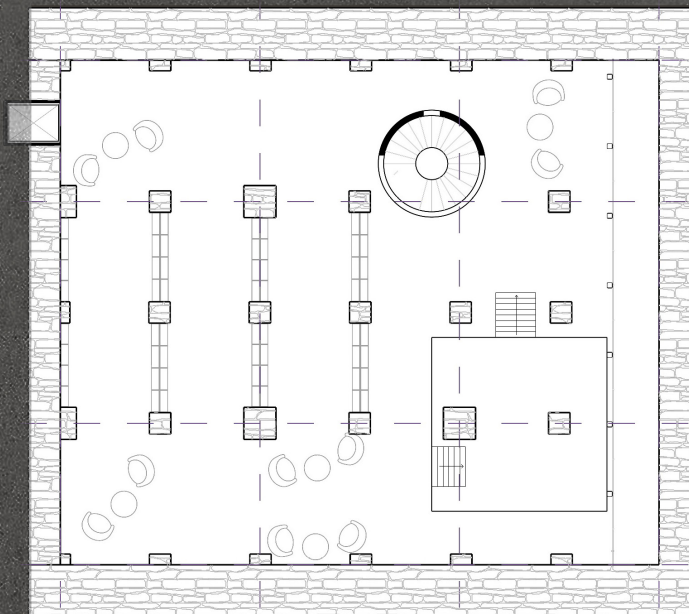
Enclosure
Shelter and Intimacy



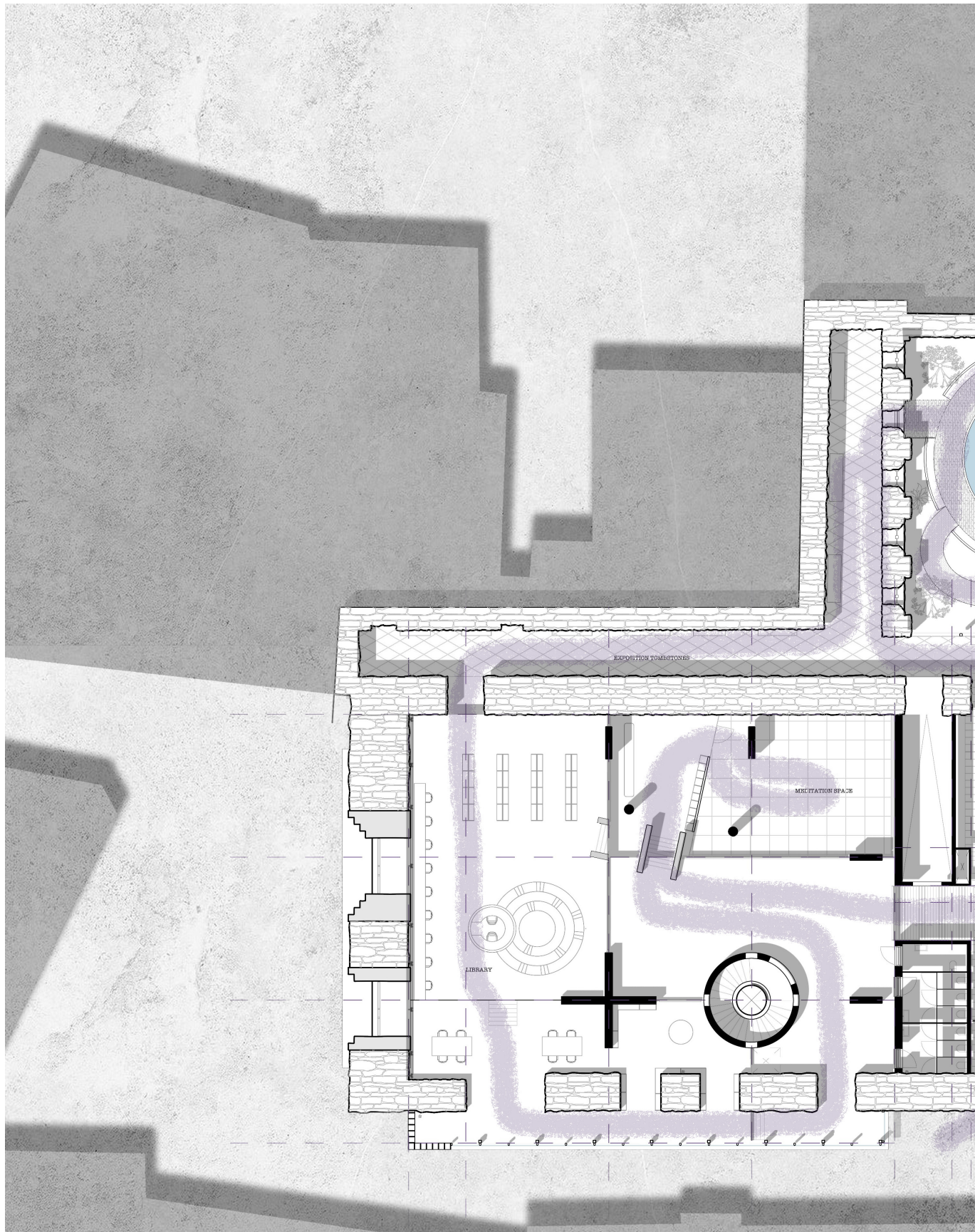
THE FINAL DESIGN

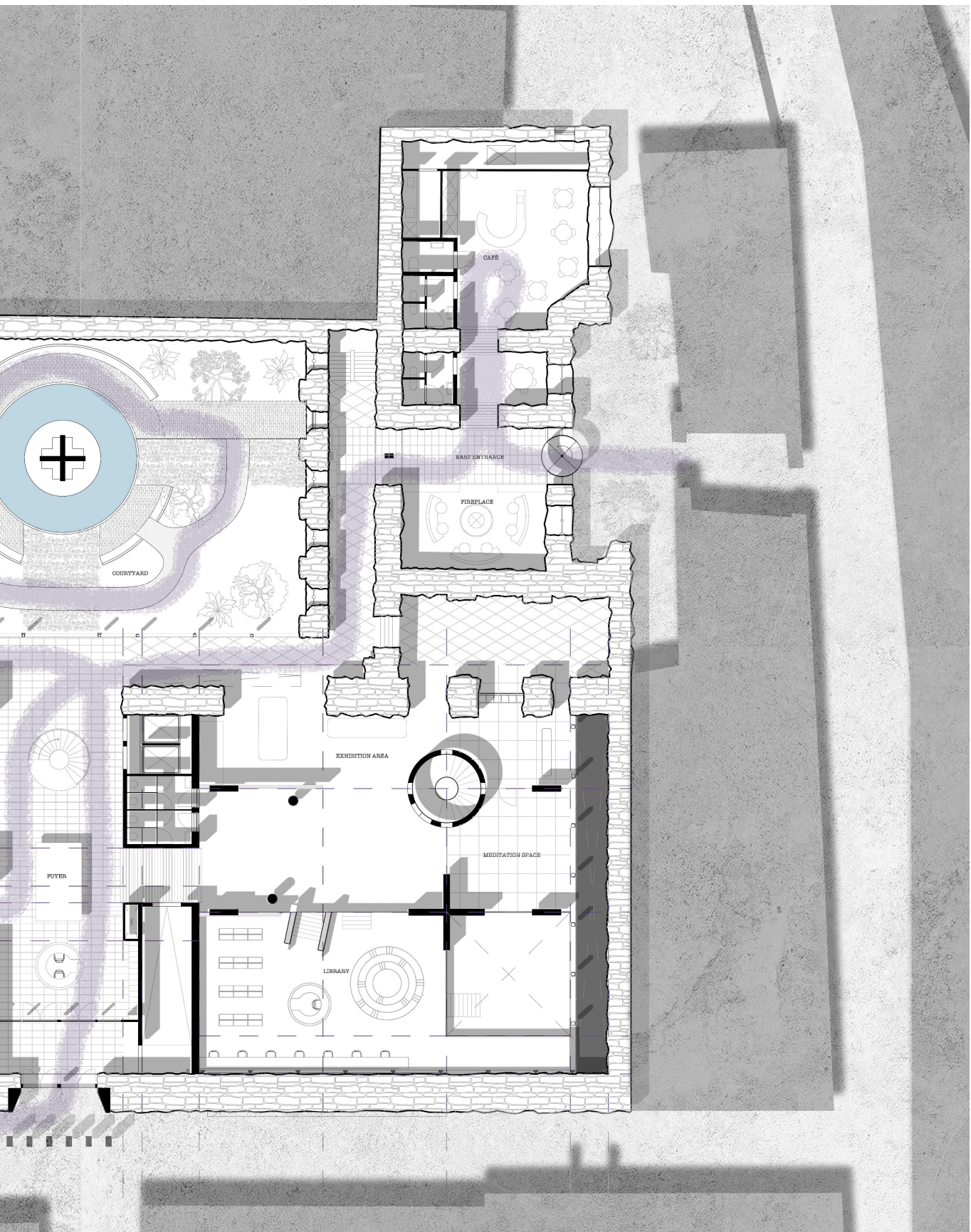
FLOOR PLAN -1



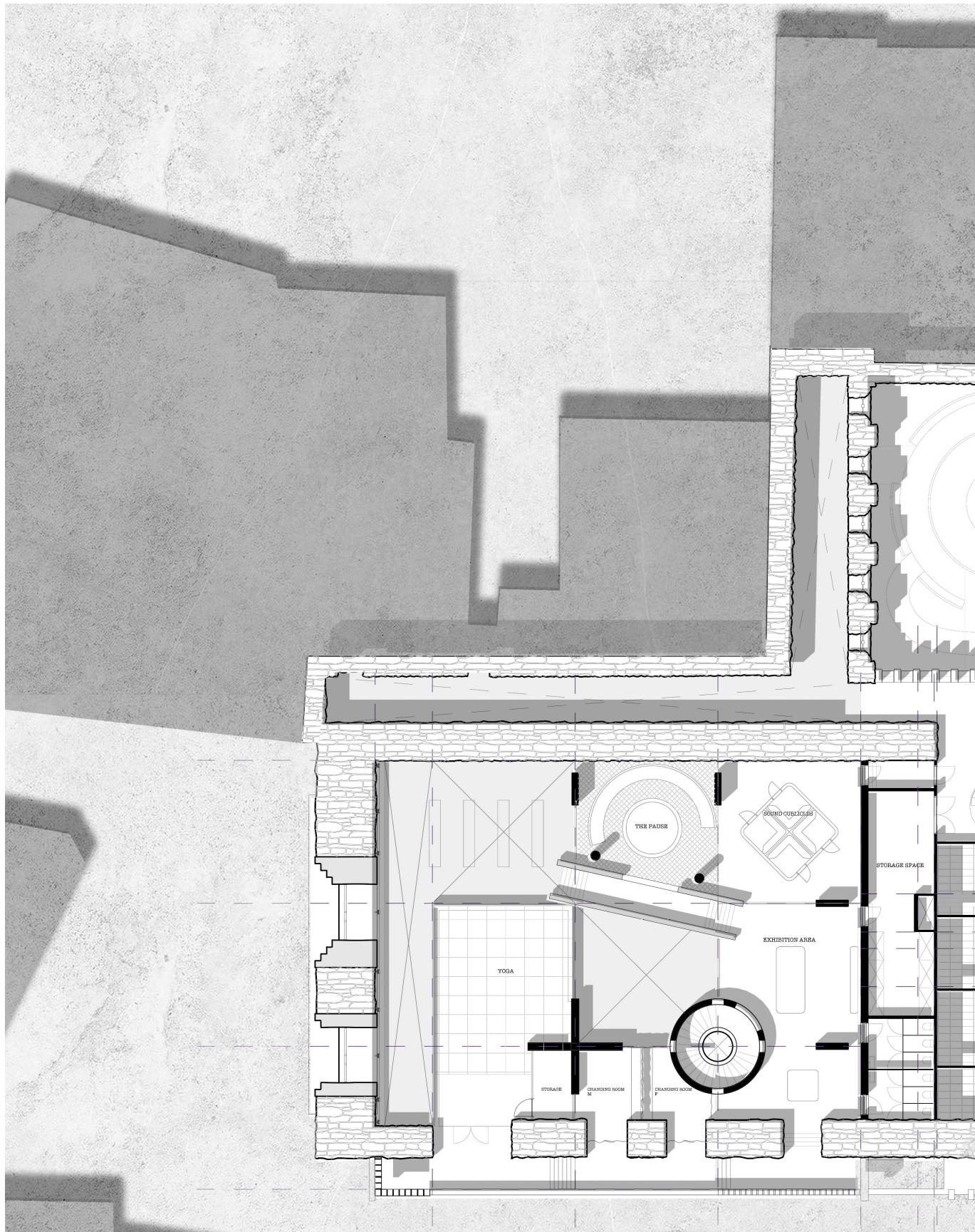


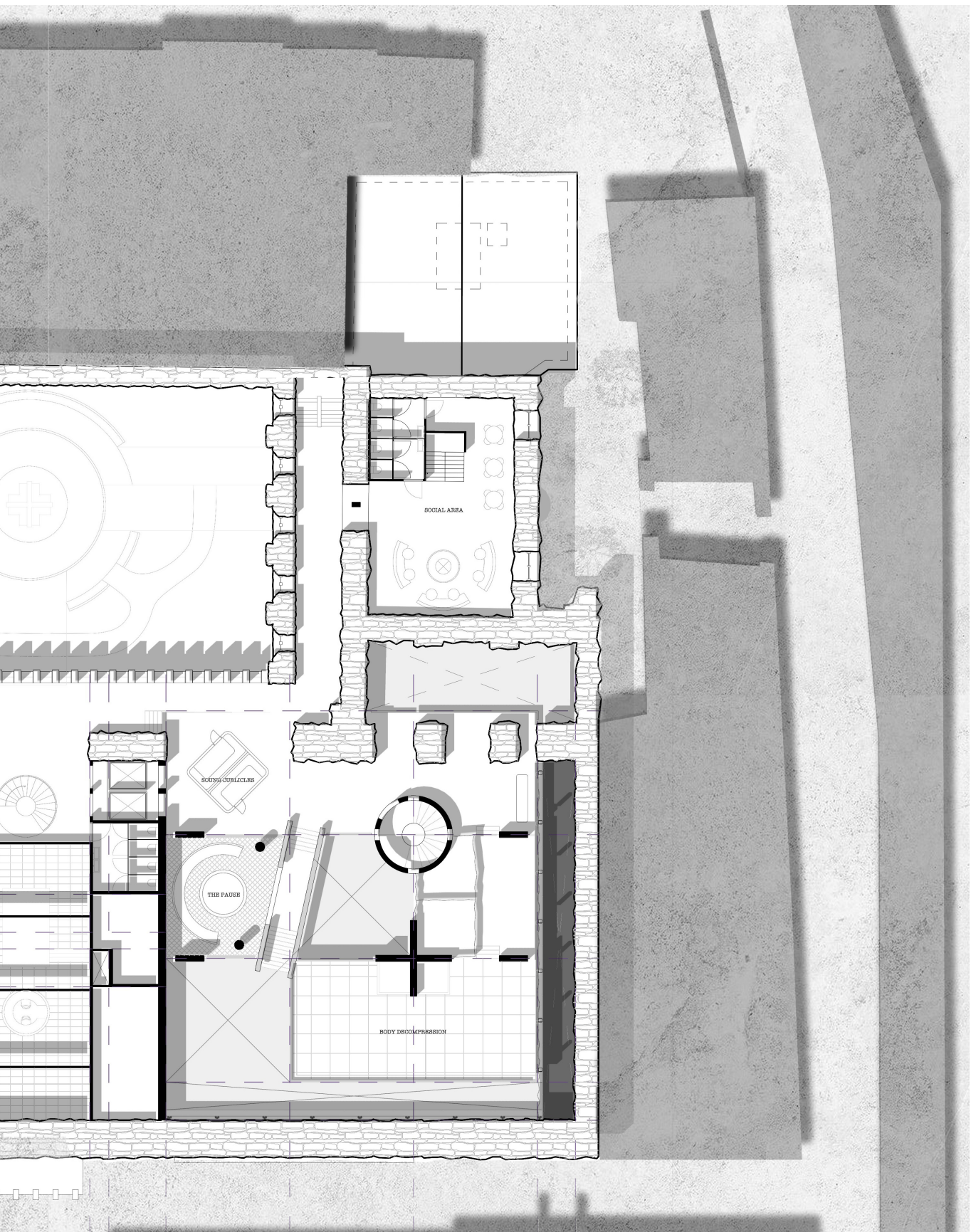
FLOOR PLAN GROUND FLOOR



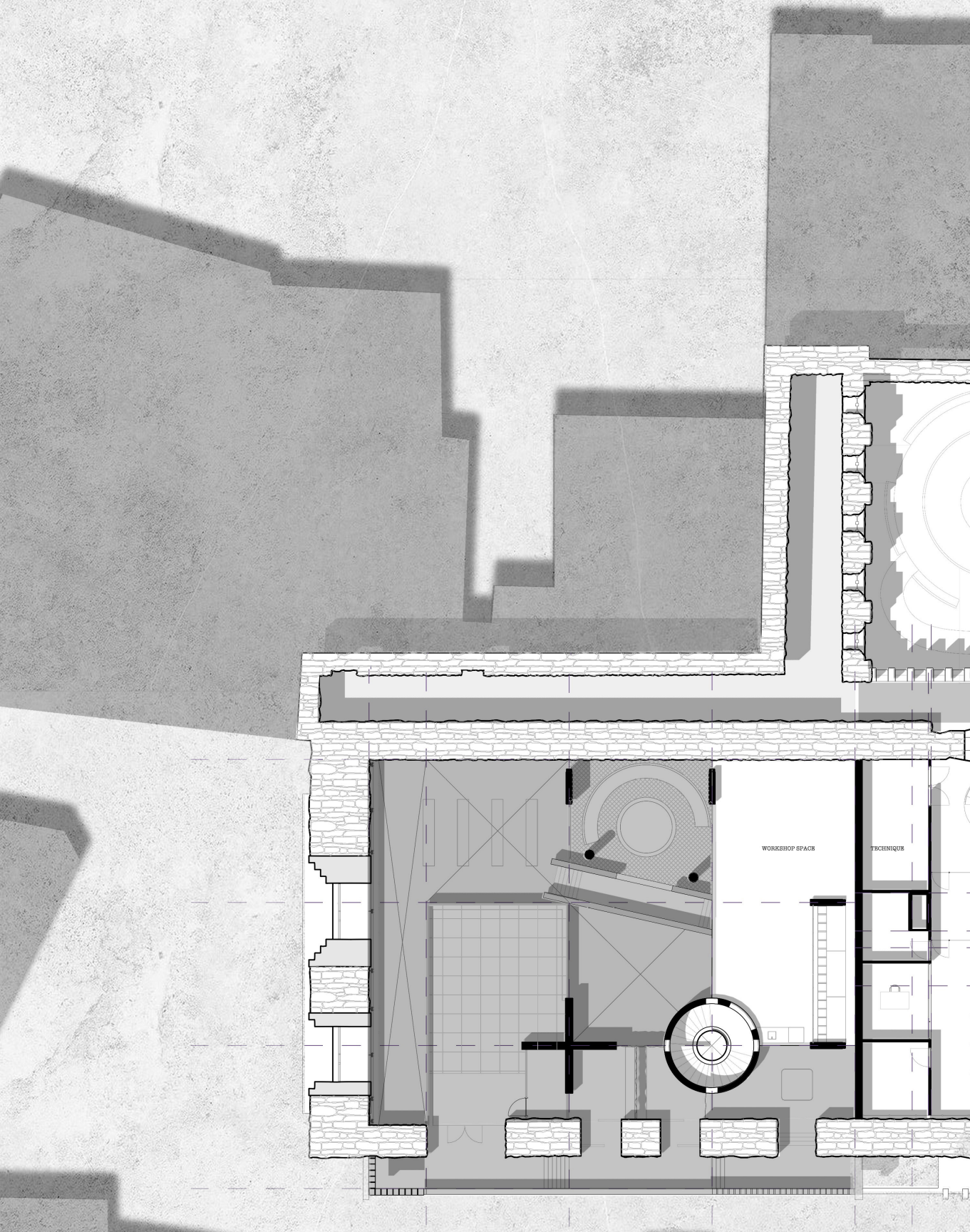


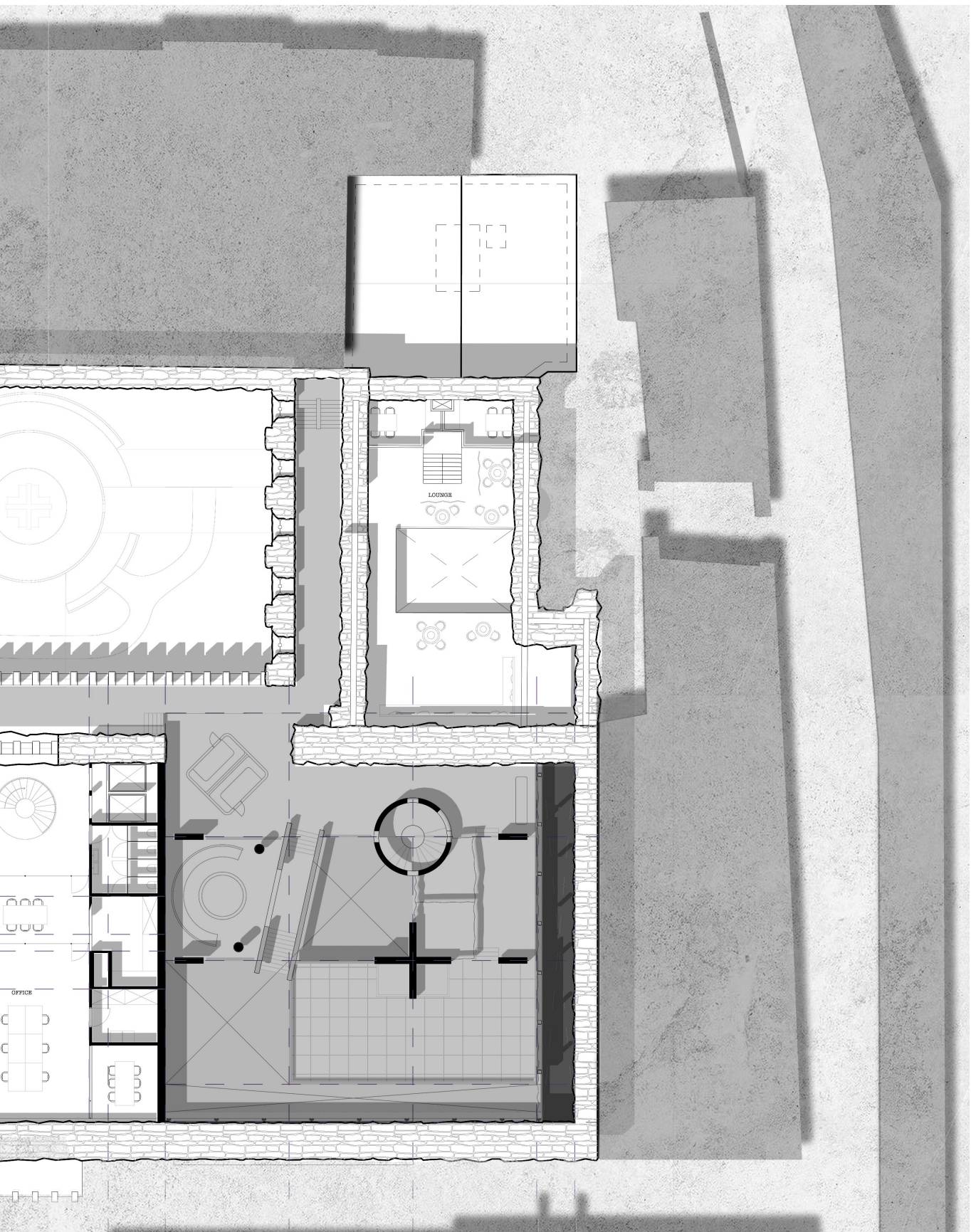
FLOOR PLAN +1



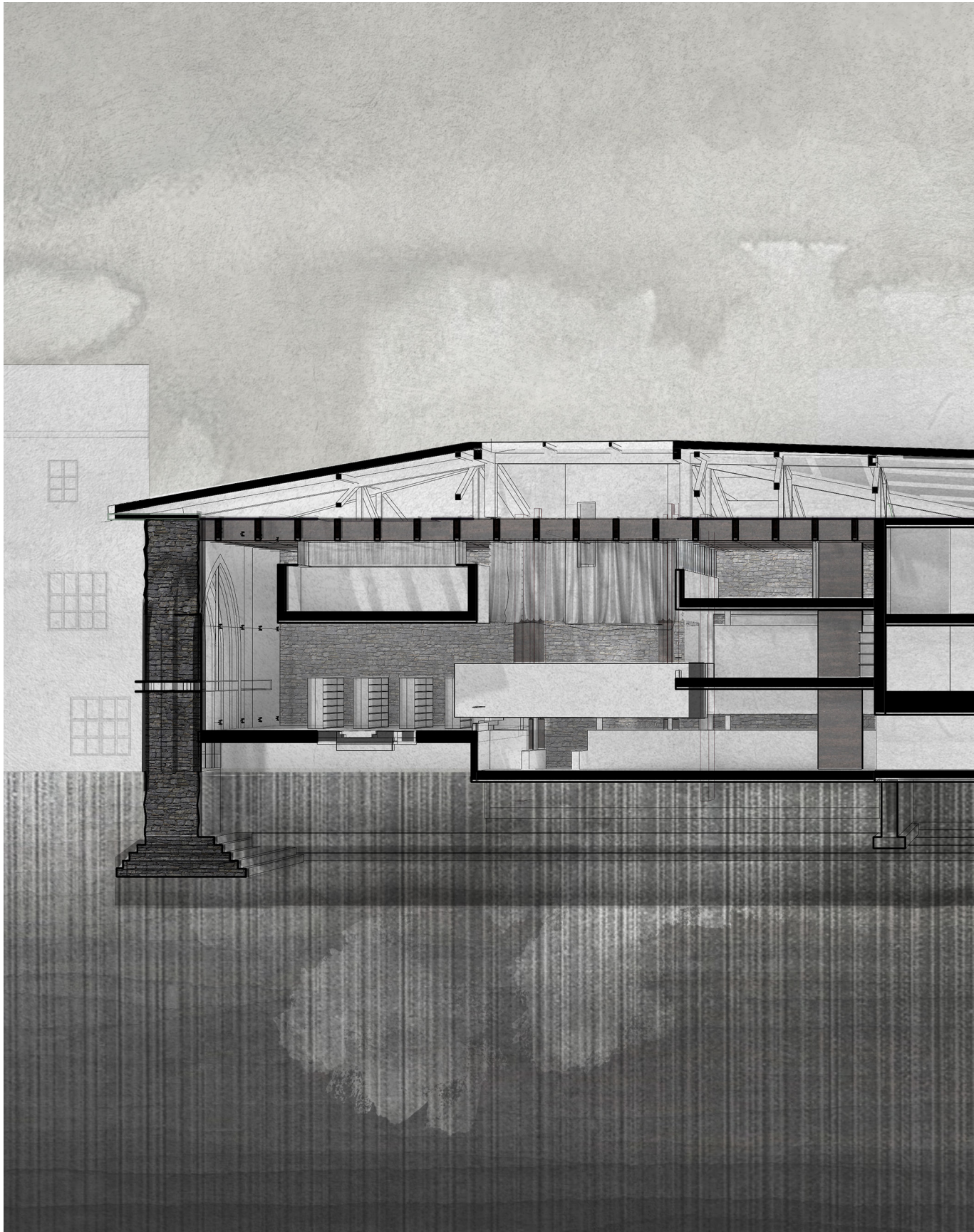


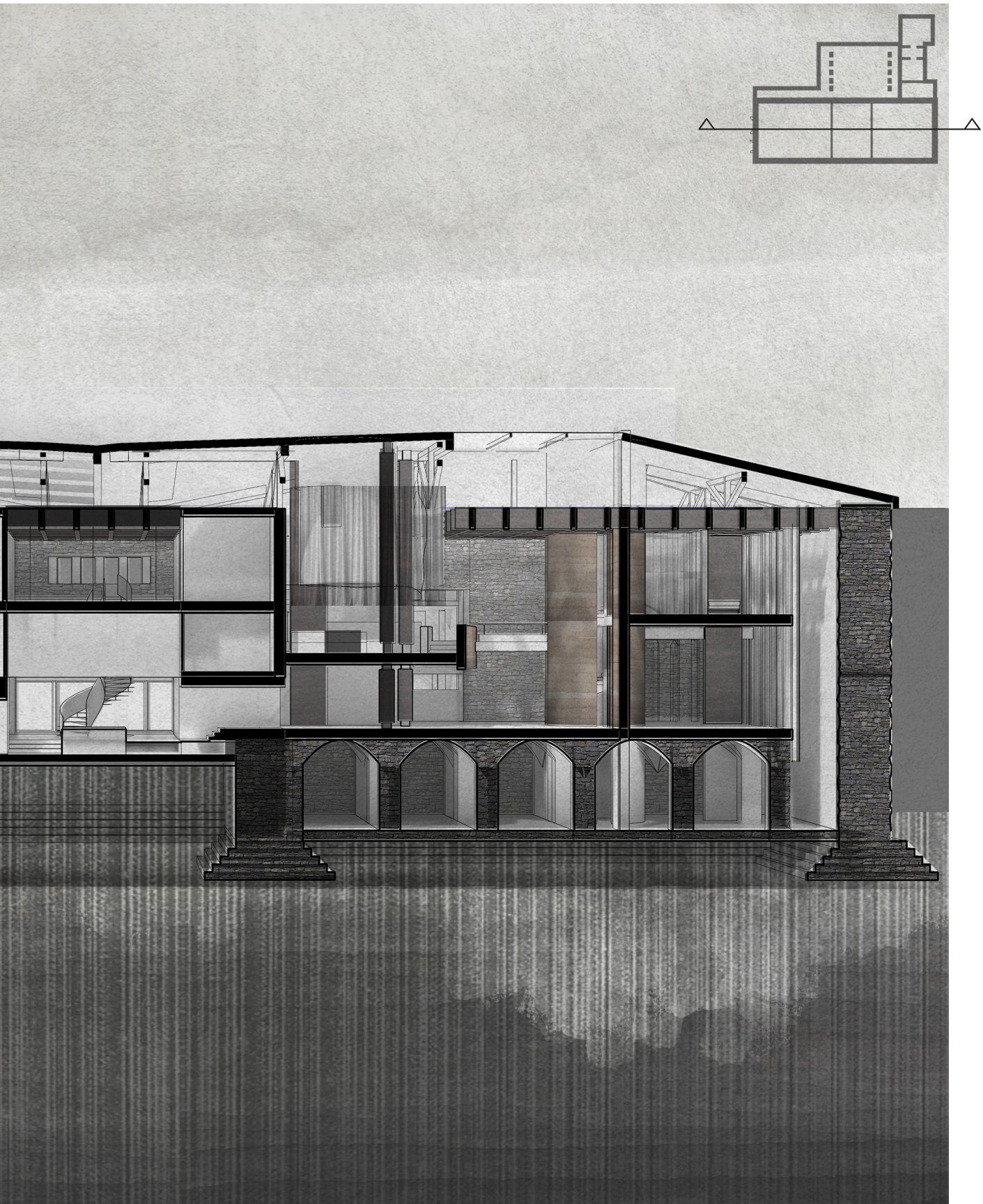
FLOOR PLAN +2



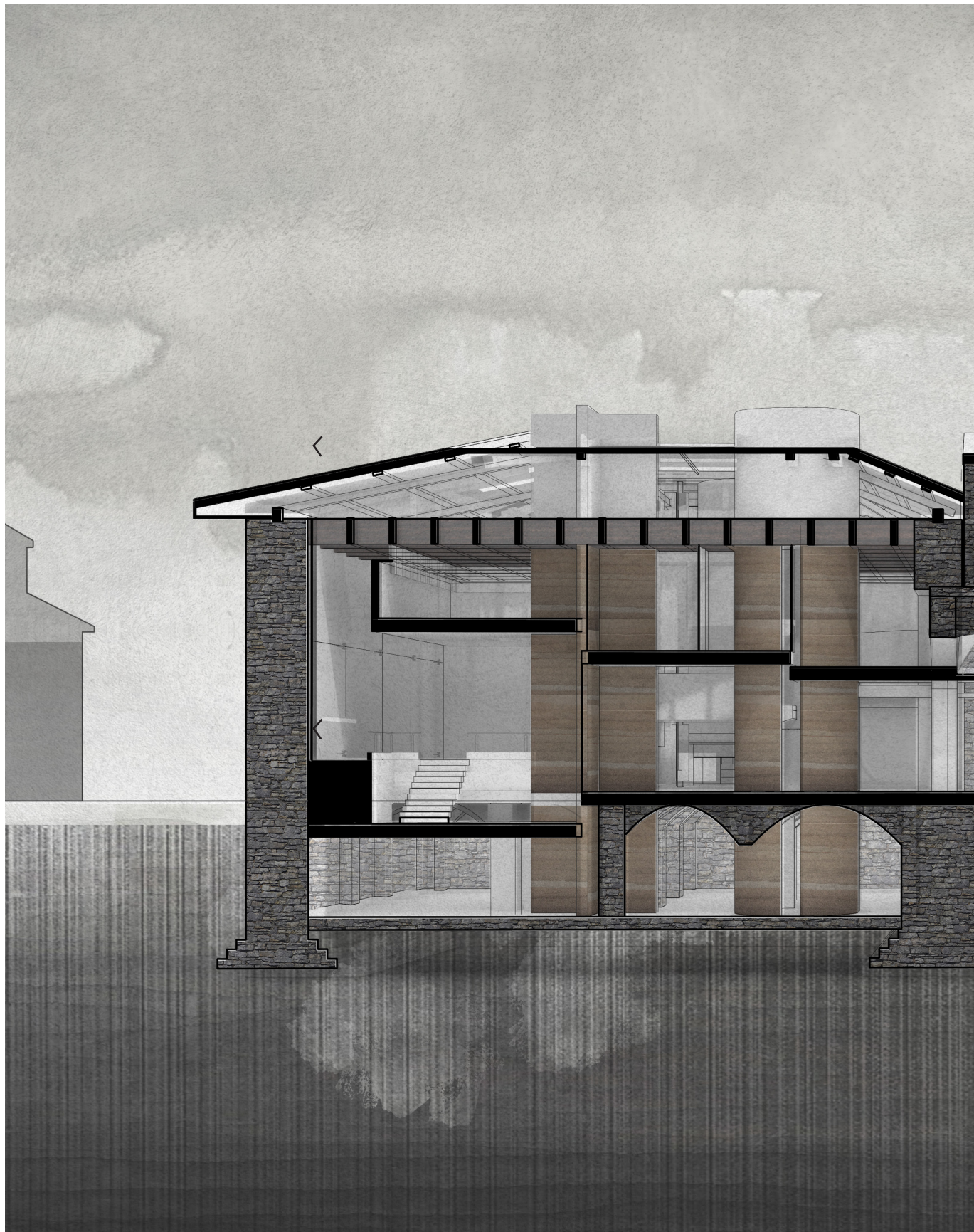


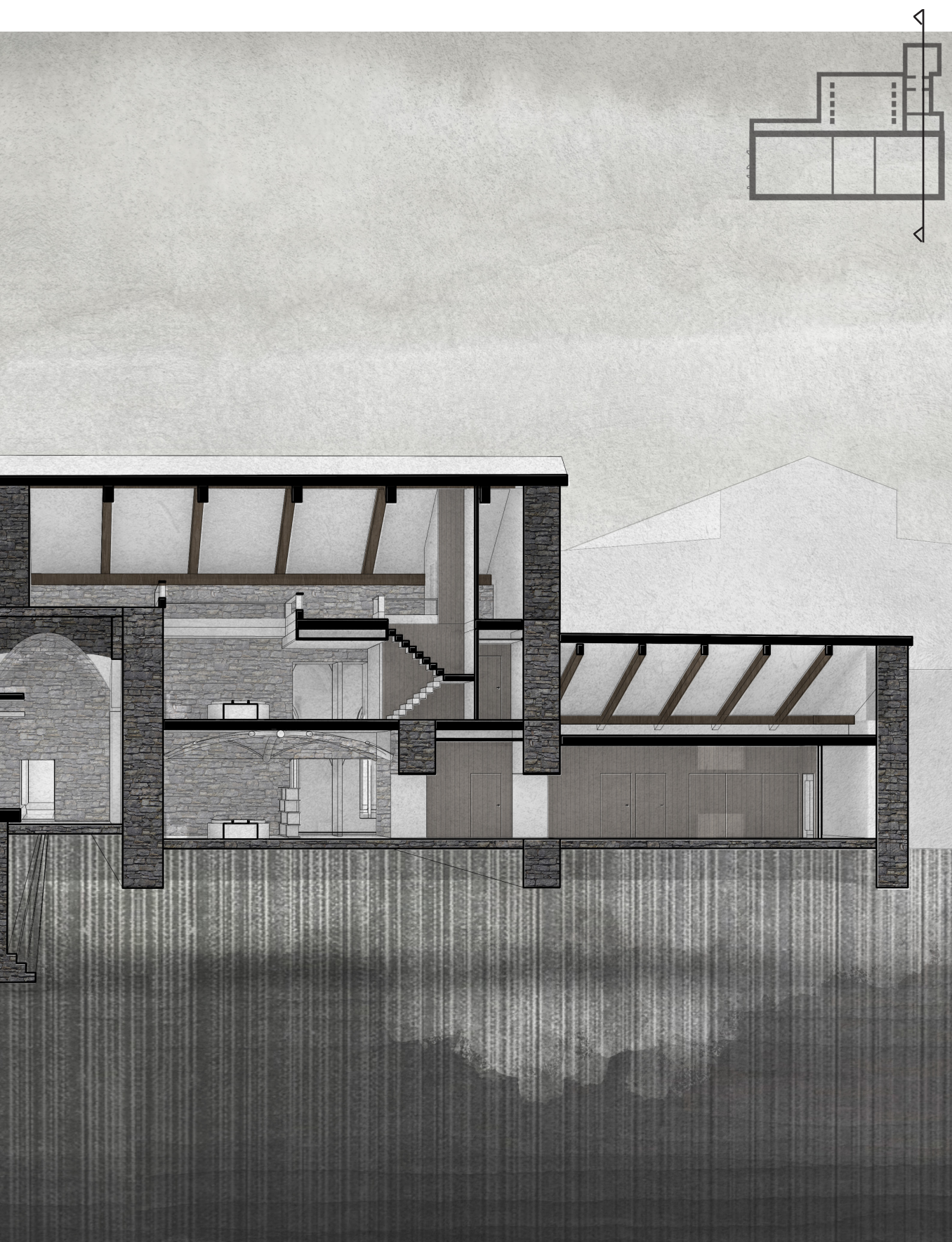
SECTION 1





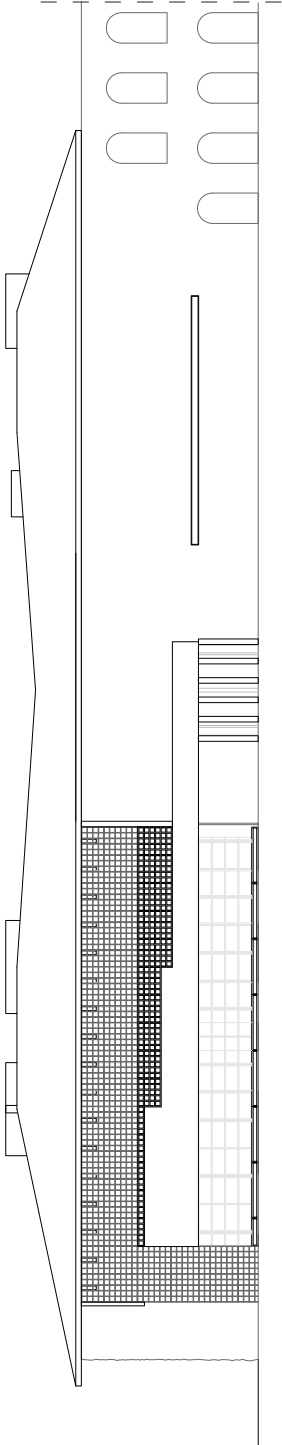
SECTION 2



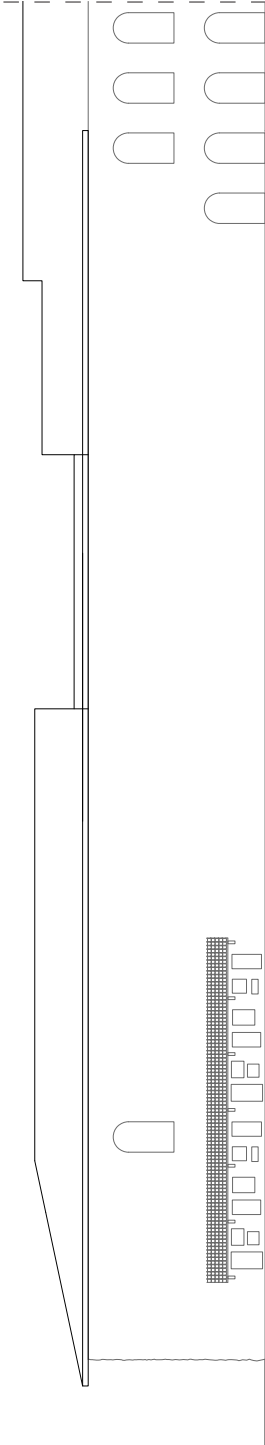


ELEVATIONS

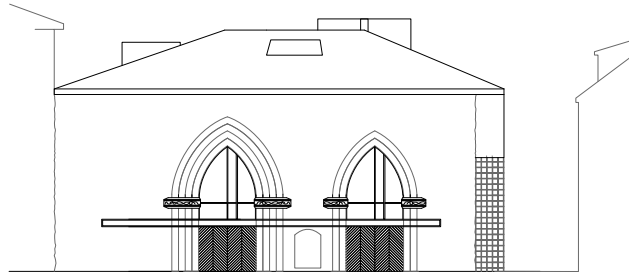
South facade new



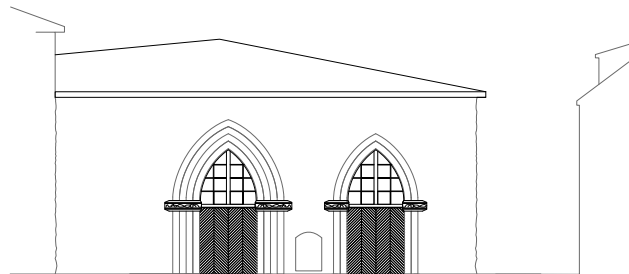
South facade old



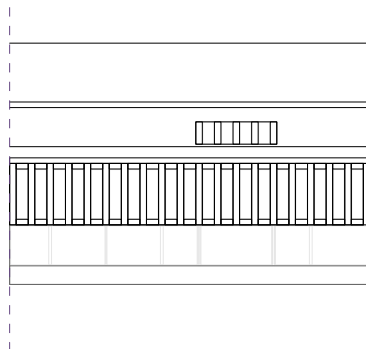
East facade new



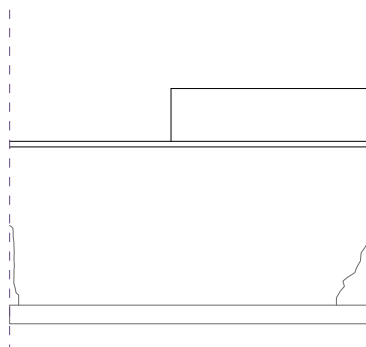
East facade old



North facade new



North facade old



THE FINAL RESULT

The Transformation & Design Strategy

The project is transforming an existing building with a long history, that is currently in a state of decay and is going through separation of its original extent. The first step was to analyse how this building became the way it is today and realize where the qualities in the current building are. This led to the transformation strategy where was decided; where to intervene, in what extent, what to preserve and what to add.

The existing building can be divided into three area's:

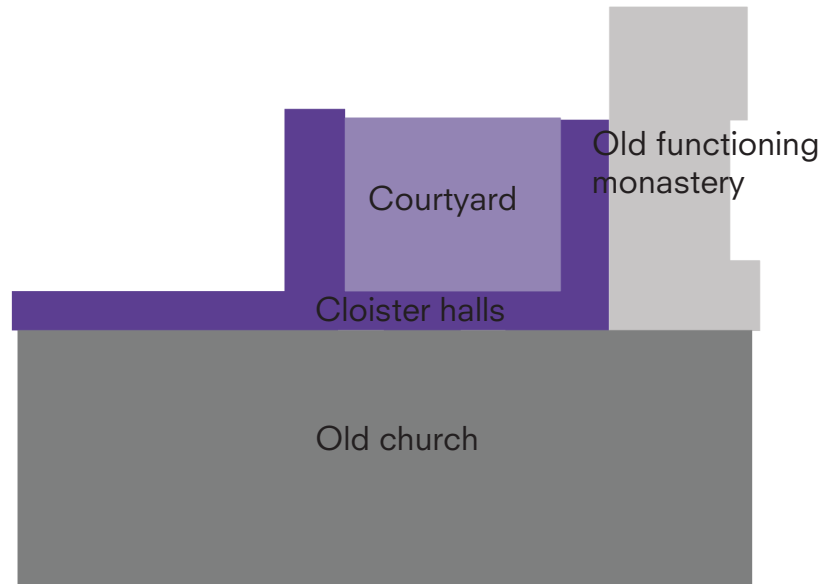
- The core; The part with the courtyard and old cloisters halls. This part remained the most in its original state.
- The old functioning monastery; The part on the east side of the cloisters with different floor levels and smaller rooms.
- The old church; The rectangular box shape. This part has changed the most from its original state and has been segmented into different parts over time.

The understanding of the existing context has been the palimpsest for the new design. The type of intervention that is picked for each area was a careful consideration to its condition and qualities.

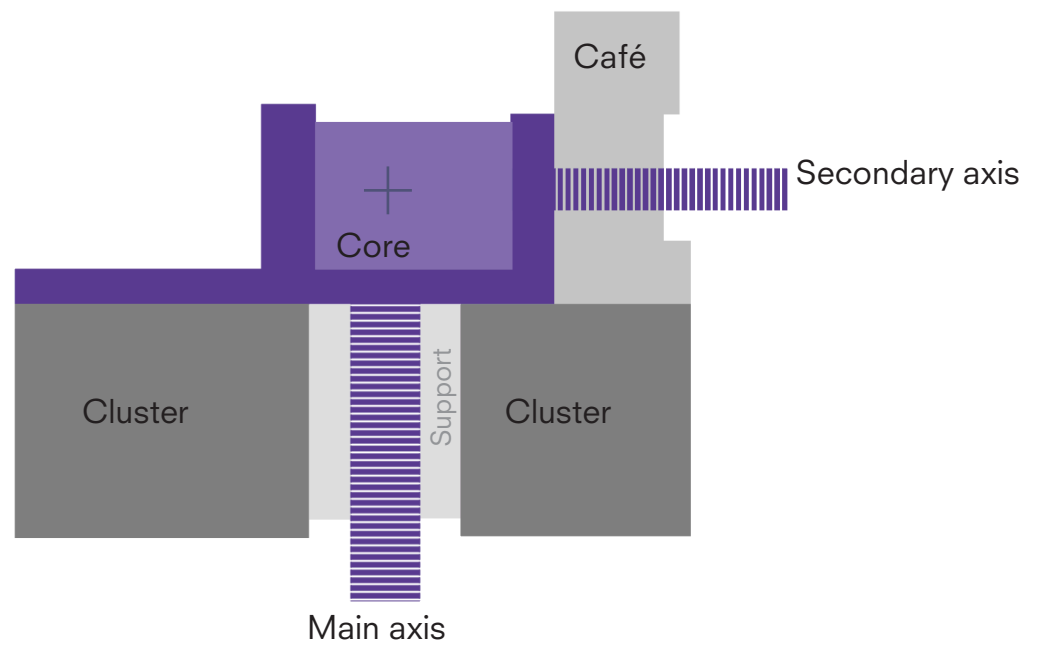
The Design strategy is a synergy of four components.

- The core, which remains the same core as in the existing building, but restored where needed.
- The axes, which are axes that cut through the former church and monastery parts. The core and axes work as a backbone for the project.
- The Clusters, that are located in the former church part of the building. There are 2 clusters in total. The clusters are new insertions within the existing walls.
- The café and social areas, that are found in the former monastery part.

Analysis of current state



Design strategy



THE BACKBONE; THE CORE

Restoring with respect

The core refers to the literal core positioning of the courtyard as well as the old cloister halls within the whole monastery. They functioned as the spiritual heart of the complex, where there was space for quietude, thought, reading and recreation. During the visit, there was a strong presence of a heavy and old atmosphere. The fantasy like state of the walls and arches reinforced a feeling of respect and quietude.

The choice of intervention is to keep most of the original shapes and materials the way they are, but to clean and restore broken parts of the original limestone. This is done in a similar way that David Chipperfield architects restore heritage.

The process goes as following:

- Oxygen bleach for biological growth: To bleach out mold, mildew, or dark organic stains, use a stone-safe oxygenated bleach
- Heavy Carbon & Soot Removal: Utilizes alkaline pre-washes paired with restoration cleaners to dissolve crust without sandblasting.
- Deep Staining & Mineral Deposits: Mild, buffered acidic solutions formulated specifically for unpolished limestone avoid raw mineral etching.

A new facade that blends in

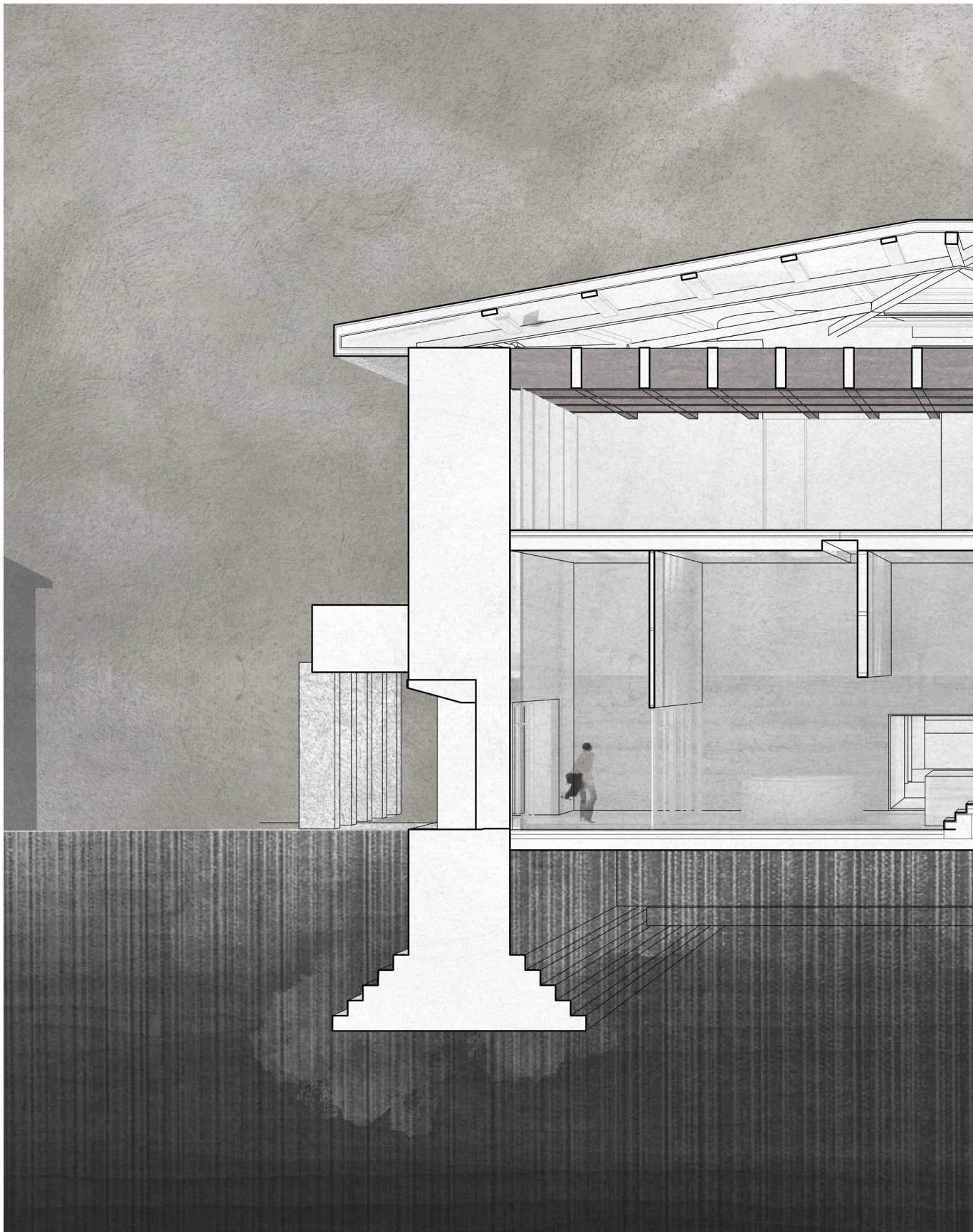
Research taught that the cloister halls lost a part of its facade over time. The design replaces the void and connects the two cloister halls, that had been separated, with a new facade. It aims to create a contemporary aesthetic, that has a feeling of monumentality through rhythm. The rhythm relates back to the

proportion of the distancing between the original pillars of the cloister halls. It does not copy the measurements, solely its proportion. This creates optical harmony between old and new.



render of the courtyard with new facade

Section over main axis



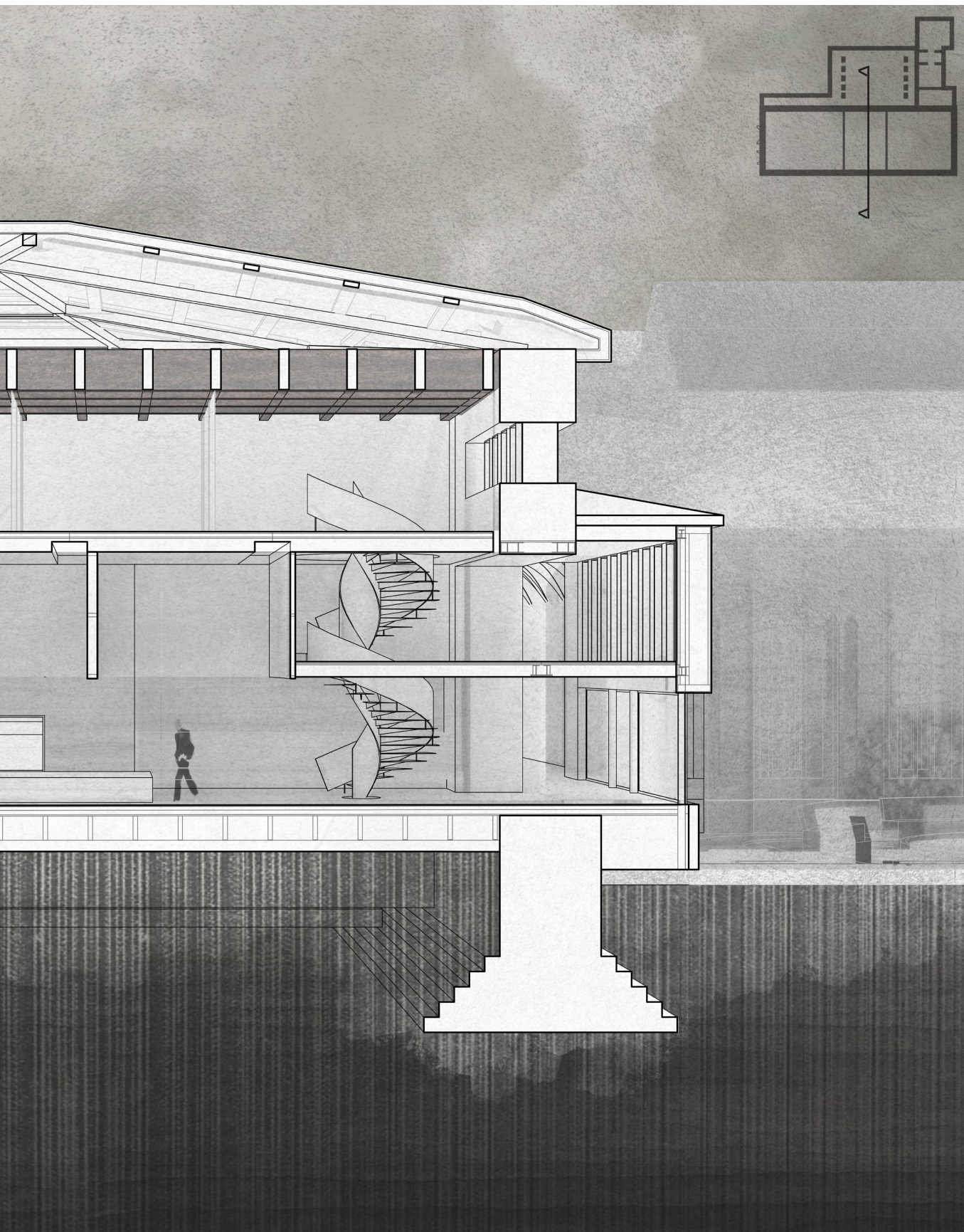




Image of the cloister hall as found



Render of the cloister hall after restoring

THE BACKBONE; THE AXES

Cutting through to the core

The axes are new creations of straight lines that are perpendicular to the courtyard. The idea is that the axes 'cut through' the old limestone walls of the complex and bring you from the outside world of the mundane daily life, into the quiet sublime historical oasis. The point where these two axes would meet, is marked inside of the courtyard with a monument and a water mirror surrounding it.

The axes are the entry points into the building. From the moment your step through the door, you can see in one straight line all the way towards the courtyard.

The main axis (that cuts through the

church), has a double height to create a feeling of a central circulation point. However, the spatial feeling should be focussed on the horizontality instead of the verticality. Therefore, there are partitioning walls that come from the ceiling to about halfway down the space.

In the middle of the space is a box that mediates circulation, as well as an elegantly designed circular staircase that goes up to the higher floors.

The central axis connects to the clusters. This connection is done in a way of a corten-steel threshold that marks the transition.





Render of the main axis

THE CLUSTERS

The main characters

Within the former church walls, two 'clusters' are inserted. A cluster refers to a space that is defined by a grid of 9 squares. Within the grid, there are various spaces with different functions. The spaces created by the grid are open and interconnected. It is avoided to separate these spaces from one another by enclosed walls. The goal is to achieve a playful framework of various engagements that have to do with the nourishment of the mind, the body and the soul.

Among the spaces are a library with reading spaces and bookshelves, a meditation (silent) area, sound cubicles, a rotating exhibition area, a yoga space and a workshop/ lecture room. Even though these functions are quite specific, the space itself with its composition and materiality also plays a role in the experience and nourishment of the mind, body and soul.

The nine-square grid

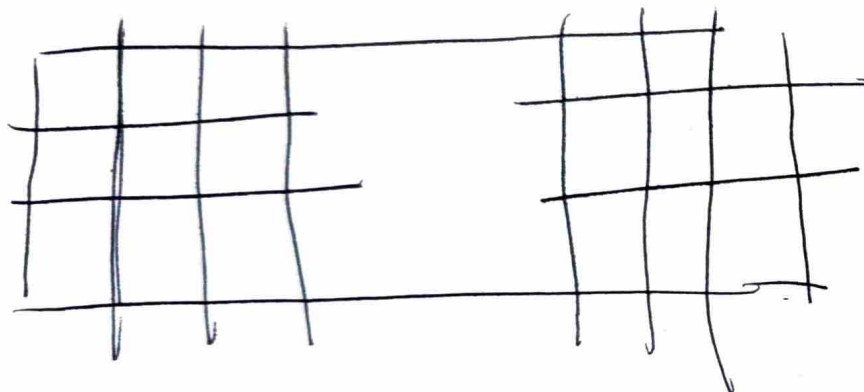
The architecture of the nine-square grid does not rely on either extreme openness or complete isolation, but instead works through gradients of enclosure, light, and level. Subtle spatial transitions, filtered light, and minor height differences create moments of inward reflection within the continuity of everyday movement. In this way, spirituality is no longer confined to a singular space, but becomes one within the spatial experience itself. Space allows people to withdraw inward, without being cut off the world entirely. Space can feel grounded but light at the same time.

By incorporating vertical circulation more explicitly into the project, movement becomes a three-dimensional spatial experience rather than a purely plan-based transition between spaces. Incorporating vertical circulation allows spaces to interact across levels, creating visual connections and a more dynamic spatial experience.

By positioning these various levels (floors) as steps that flow into each other in the way of a spiral, the movement becomes less interrupted and the experience can continue through vertical movement. There is a constant connection to other spaces. Movement is seen as a ritual.

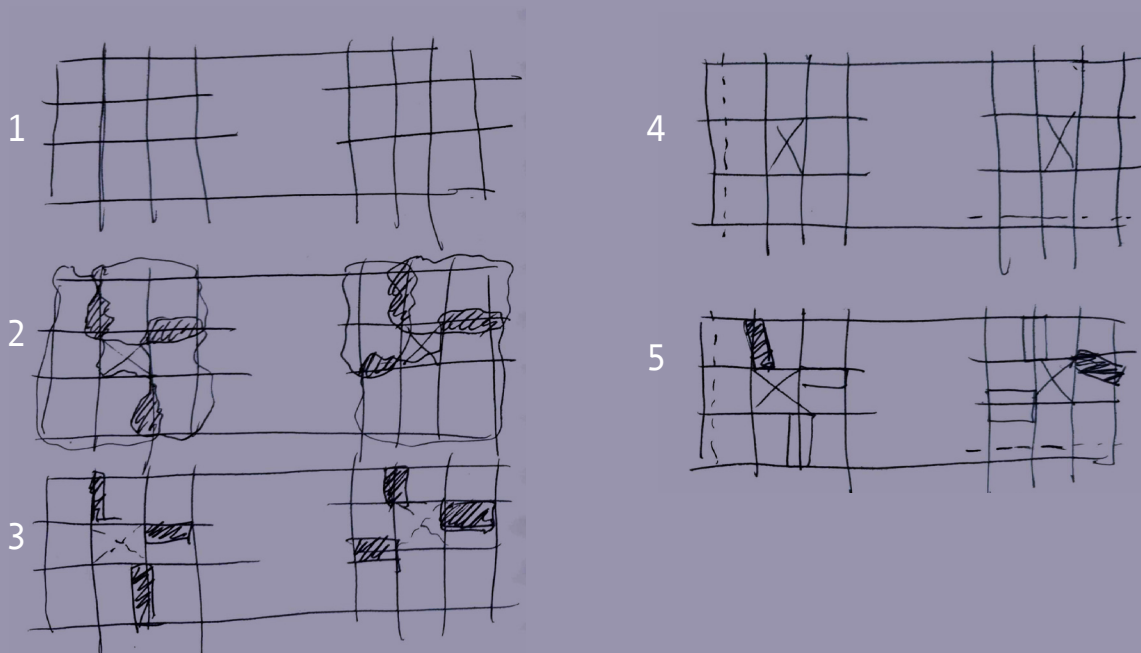
The central square was interpreted as an opportunity to introduce a void, allowing natural light to penetrate deep into the building. In contrast, the surrounding squares were used as spaces addressing different aspects of human experience.

The concept of Mind - Body - Soul is experienced as different spaces that are connected to each other and flow into one another while you are moving horizontally and vertically throughout the building.



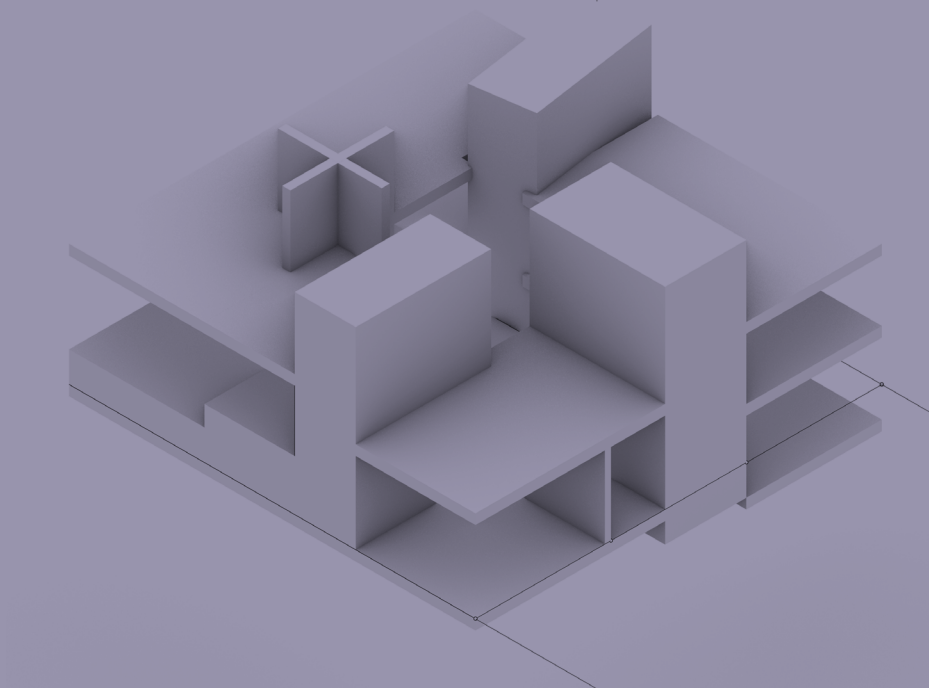
THE EVOLUTION OF THE GRID

Alternations on the nine-square grid

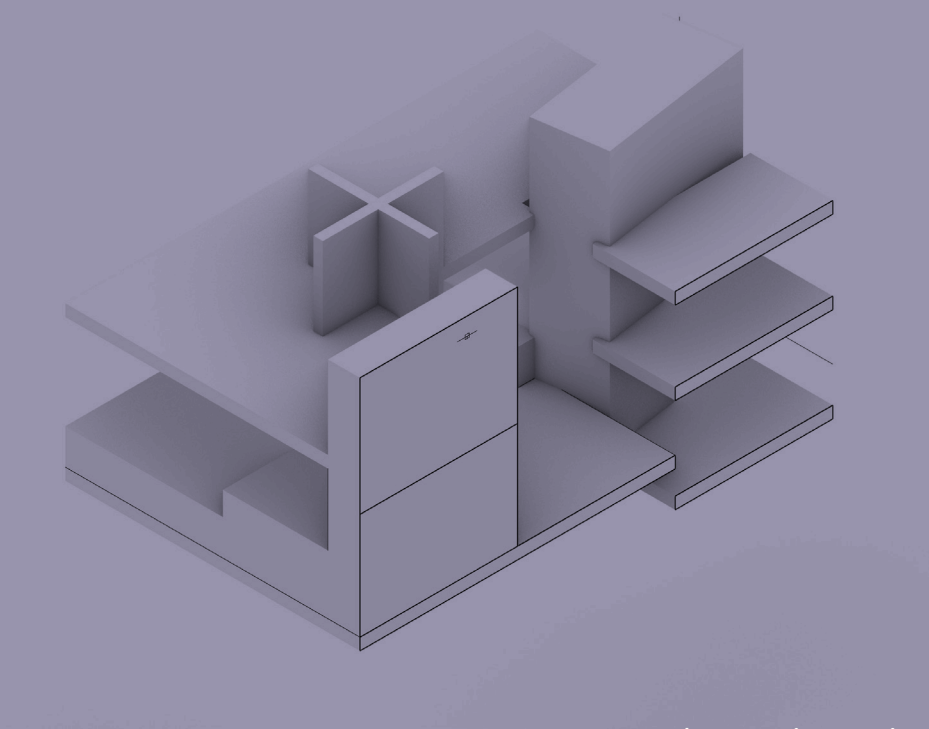


The nine-square grid was introduced into the project as an architectural answer to the thematic concept. The sketches above illustrate the how the concept developed closely into what the final set up is.

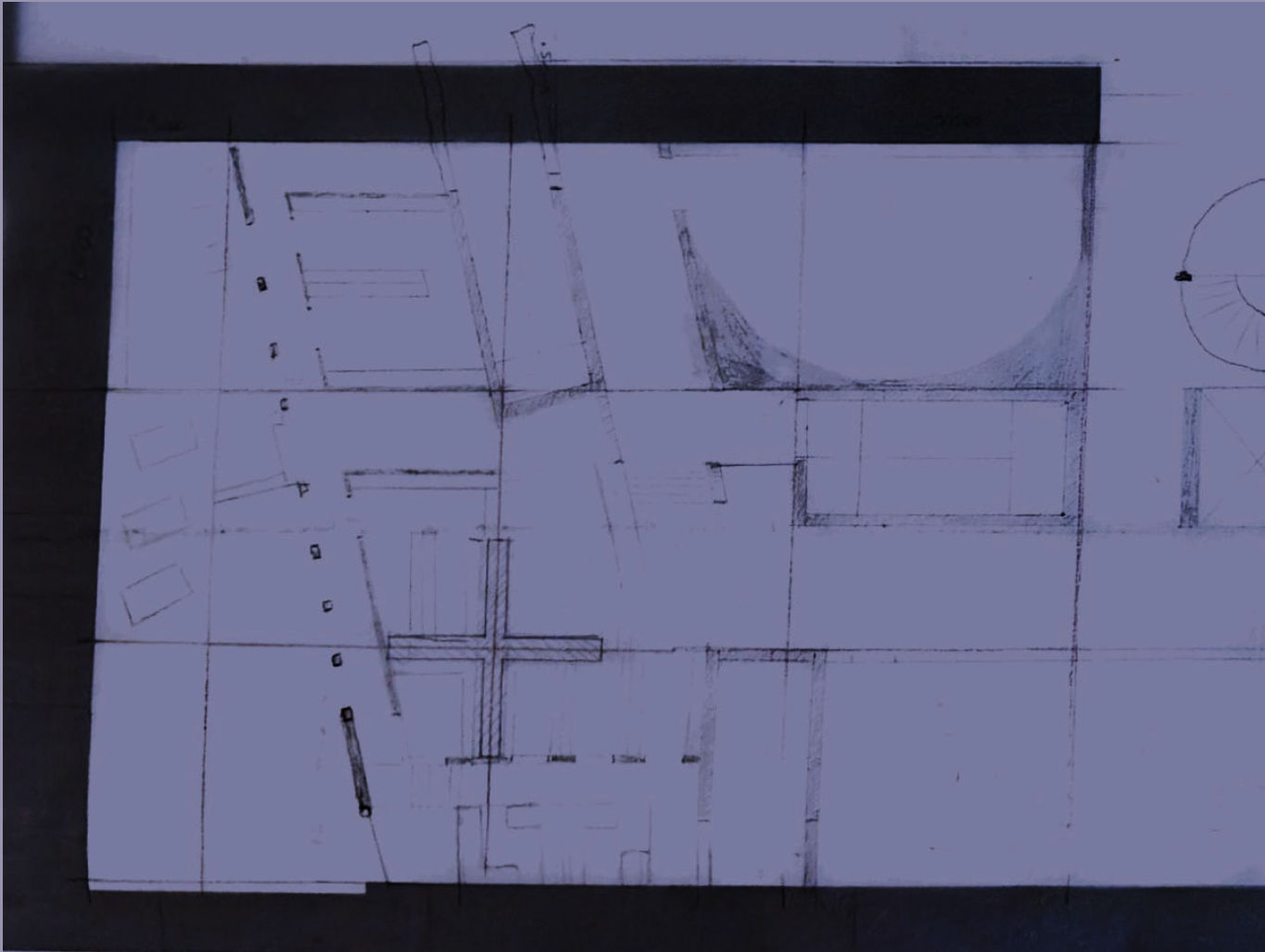
- 1) A grid made out of 9 similar squares
- 2) Identifying different zones
- 3) There are zones for a particular function, related to the Mind-Body-Soul concept, and there are transition boxes in between those zones
- 4) The middle square is an open void and extra strips are added where extra space is needed
- 5) Some of the 'boxes' and positioned at an angle to create an interesting spatiality and step away from the rigid perpendicular grid

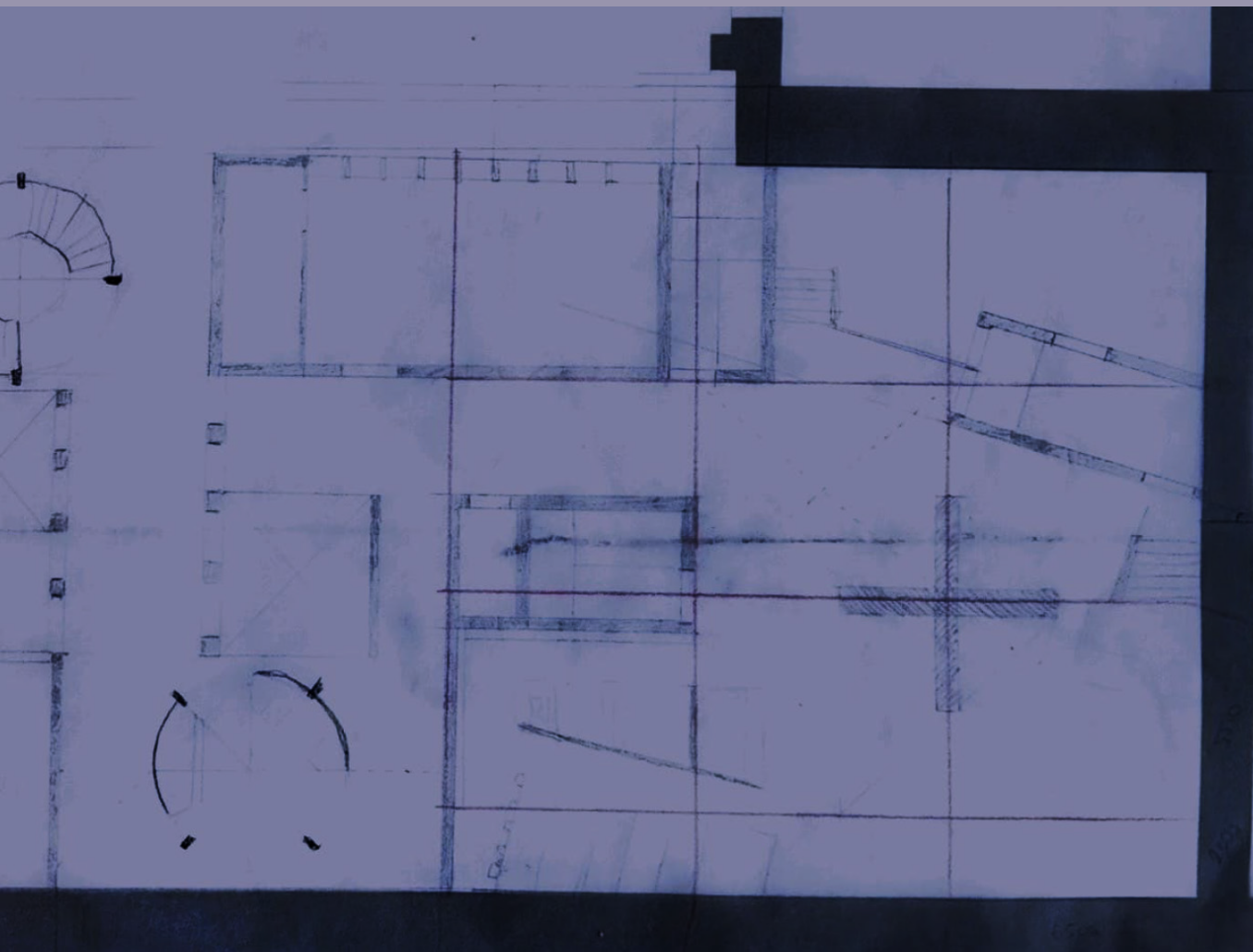


Isometric cluster



Isometric section





Plan drawing as per March 11

Modifications on the grid

A 9 square grid, might seem boring or very static, but it is quite customizable. It does not need to be a perfect 9-square grid. You can play with various widths and depths. It is even possible to make some widths wider than others. I played around to see how this would influence the spatial experience as well as the way you can organize space inside the grid. I am, however, somewhat restricted to size of the existing structure to build within. I had to think in a grid of up to maximum 25 x 25 meters.

What I did realize is that it would be helpful to have more space for some rooms than for others. For example, the library space needs more space than a meditation room. This is why

I introduced extra strips of 2 to 3 meters to one side of the grid. I later also started using extra strips as a way to let more light in on that side. I customized the grids to the proportions and functionality that would help my project the best.

The final proportions for the grids are; For the left grid = 3x7,5m by 3x7,5m, with a 3m wide strip on the left side For the right grid = 3x6,5m by 3x6,5m, with a 3m wide strip on the bottom side and a 2m wide strip on the right side.

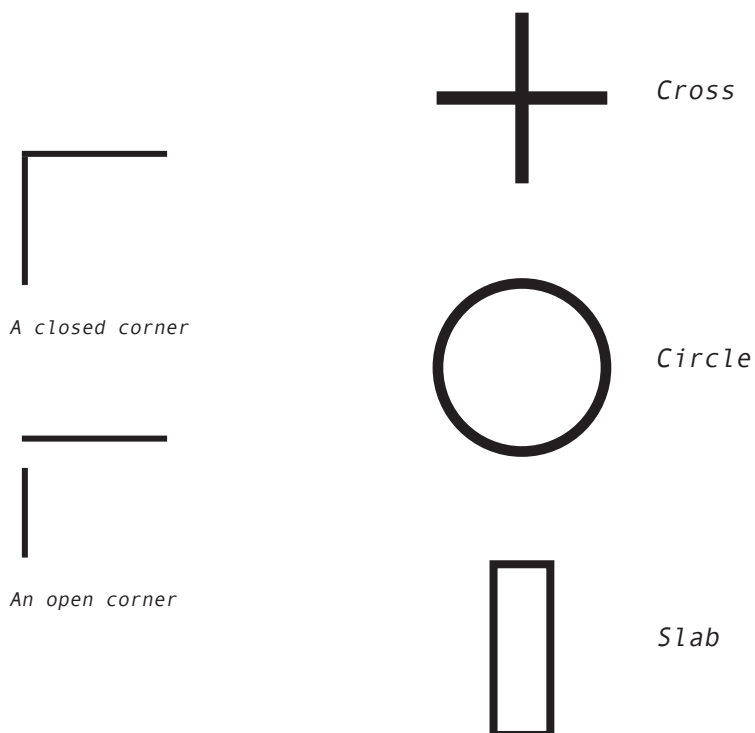
Clarity in composition

An important set standard for the project is that there needs to be clarity. What I mean by that is that spaces should be legible. This is also the case for floor plans and sections. Much of this has to do with the way the design is composed. Picking the nine-square grid as a design tool was the first step, but how to fill it in is the next.

As I wanted the spaces to feel subtle in transition and connected to each other, I decided to design with

elements that can shield of space, but not close it off. I did not want to design many closed off corners, but rather shield of a space by using to walls.

The main structural and hierarchical elements are; the cross, the circle and the slab.



Proportion

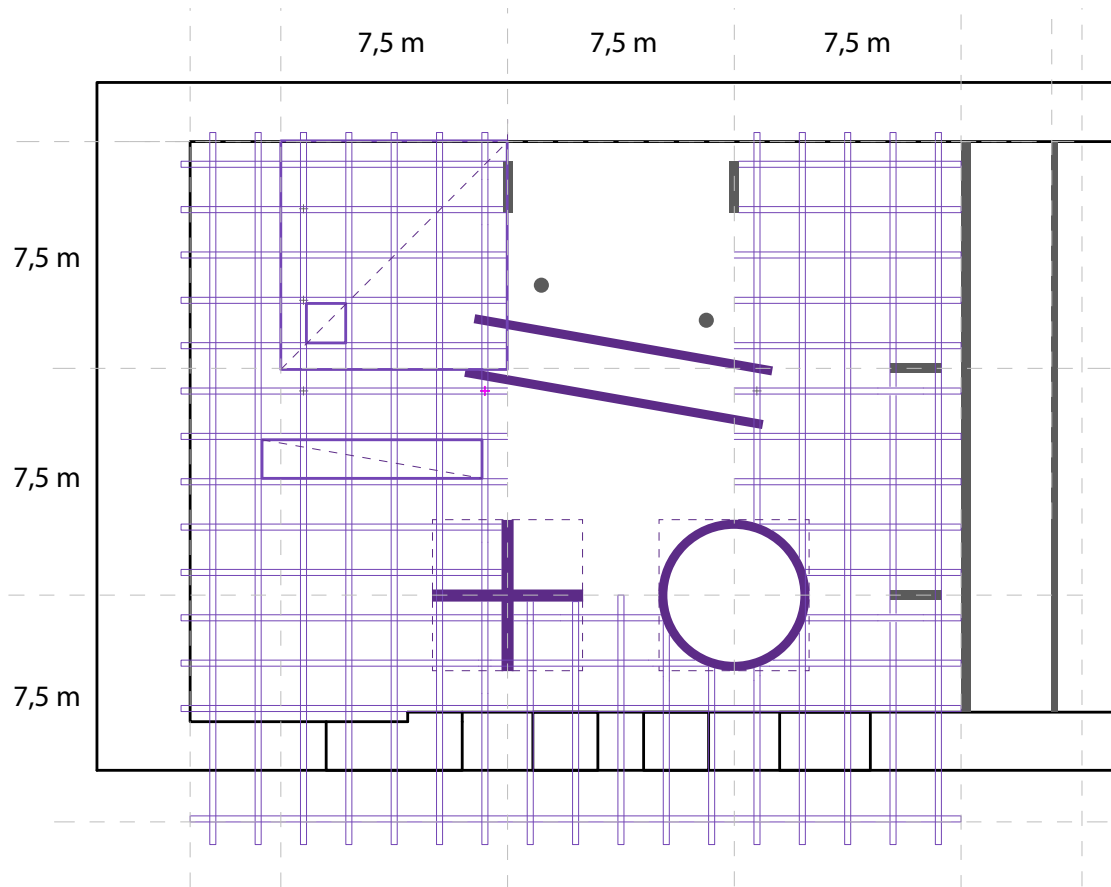
Proportion has been employed as a fundamental design tool to establish coherence and relational consistency throughout the project. By introducing a system of repeating ratios, different areas of the design are able to resonate with one another, generating a sense of harmony and unity. Even in moments where the spatial composition appears complex or unconventional, the underlying proportional system ensures that the design remains legible and cohesive.

The nine-square grid clusters reveal a predominant use of the 1:1 proportion. This ratio is embedded in the grid itself and is further reflected in key hierarchical elements, such as the cross and the circle, which reinforce the organisational logic of the design. Similarly, the roof structure adopts a grid configuration composed of cubic units (1:1:1), strengthening the spatial continuity and rhythmic order. In addition to this, the proportion of 1:5 is recurrent throughout the project, particularly in the dimensioning of slab elements, contributing to a consistent structural language.

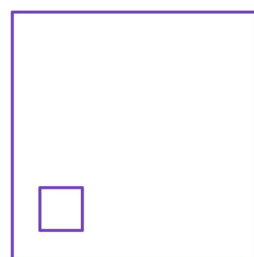
In the foyer, a distinct proportional system has been introduced to differentiate this space from the rest of the building. This variation allows for a shift in spatial experience while maintaining an overall coherence within the project.

Alongside proportional relationships, the concept of offset has been systematically applied. Certain elements are deliberately positioned at a fixed distance from others, such as columns placed 500 mm from adjacent walls. This strategy introduces subtle spatial articulation and layering. The use of offset distances has been standardised, with 500 mm applied to larger separations and 15 mm used for finer detailing, ensuring consistency across the design.

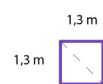
Finally, the human body has served as an additional reference system, particularly in areas involving direct physical interaction, such as stairs, railings, and seating. This approach draws inspiration from Le Corbusier's Modulor system, integrating ergonomic considerations into the spatial and proportional framework.



1:5



1:1

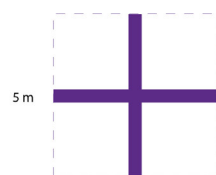


1:5



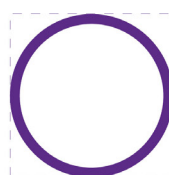
1:1

5 m



1:1

5 m



1:5

0,34 m



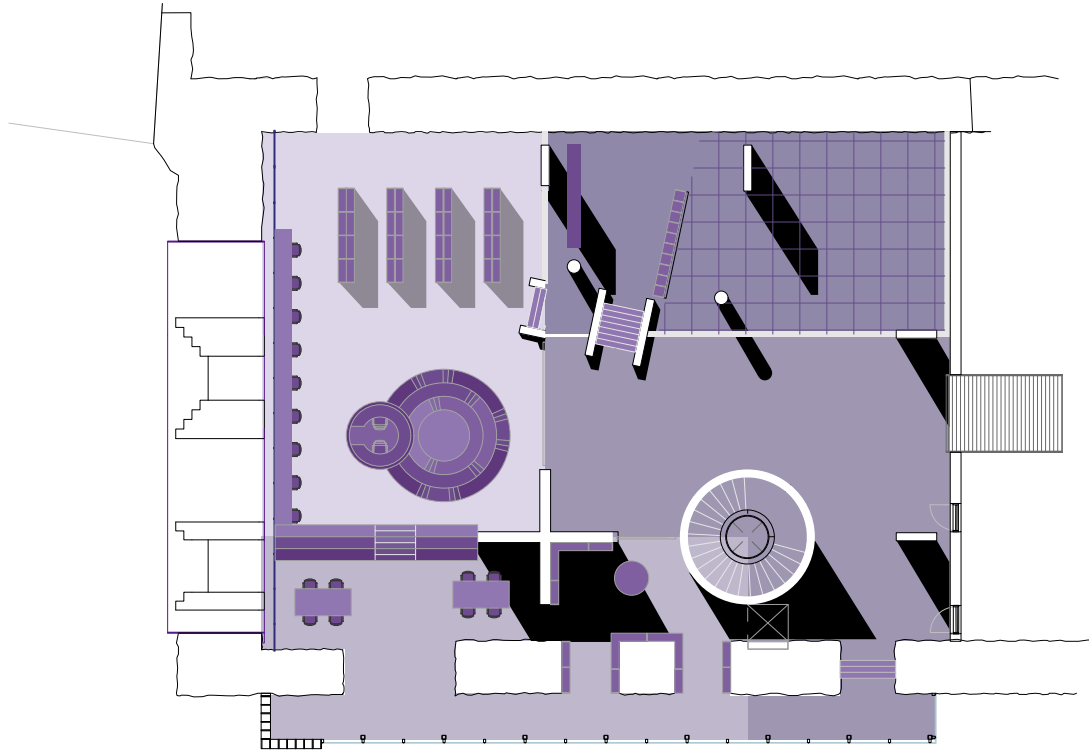
Use

The goal of the clusters is to achieve a playful framework of various engagements that have to do with the nourishment of the mind, the body and the soul. The various functions that are offered inside on the clusters are; a meditation space, a book collection and library space, a pause area, sound cubicles, an exhibition area, a workshop space, changing rooms and a yoga area.

Sometimes, the boundary between what is considered the building and what is the furniture becomes a bit blurry. Furniture are objects that are

designed for the human body to support activities or make a space comfortable. In a way the cluster insertions can feel like this big piece of furniture for adults to 'play' with. This idea can be linked to Johan Huizinga's concept of the Homo Ludens, where he describes the importance of 'play' being not just a kid's activity but a fundamental condition to step temporarily outside the routines and pressures of ordinary life, entering a side of the mind that is curious, wants exploration and imagine.





ANALYSIS OF EXCELLENT DESIGN EXAMPLES

Analysis that inspired design

SCARPA

- Details
- Joints
- Material dialogue

FLW

- Organic continuity
- Proportion and geometry
- Flow

CHIPPERFIELD

- Simple
- Clean
- Dialogue old and new

BARRAGAN

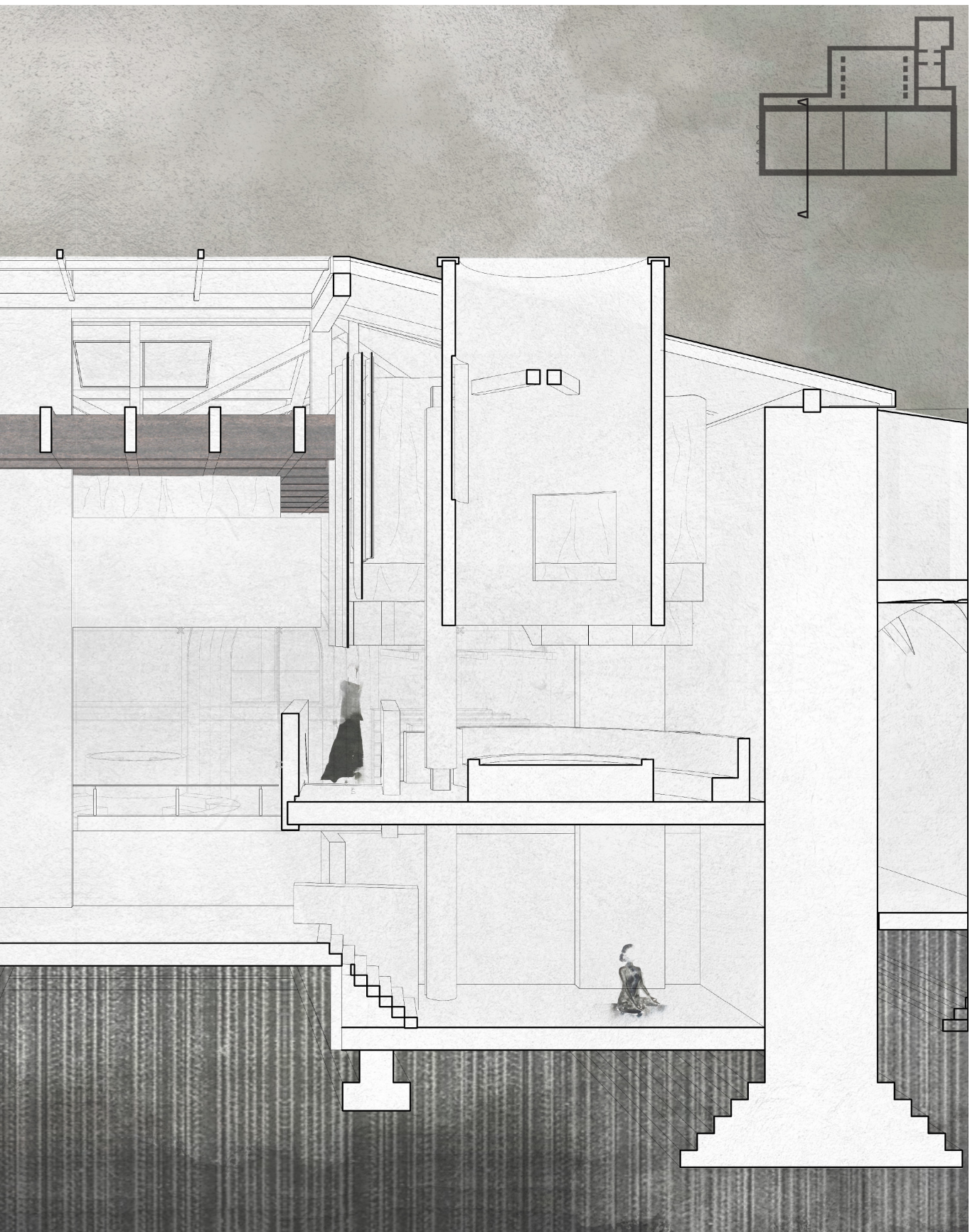
- Simple shapes
- Emotion through color
- Light

An important part of designing is being inspired, which can be done by looking at excellent work of other designers and learning from that. I analyzed four designers that I found very inspiring and that I resonated with for this project. Those are Carlo Scarpa, David Chipperfield, Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Barragan. For each I did an in depth review into their architectural style and tried to understand their design principles. Above, I compared the principles as a conclusion.



Section through cluster



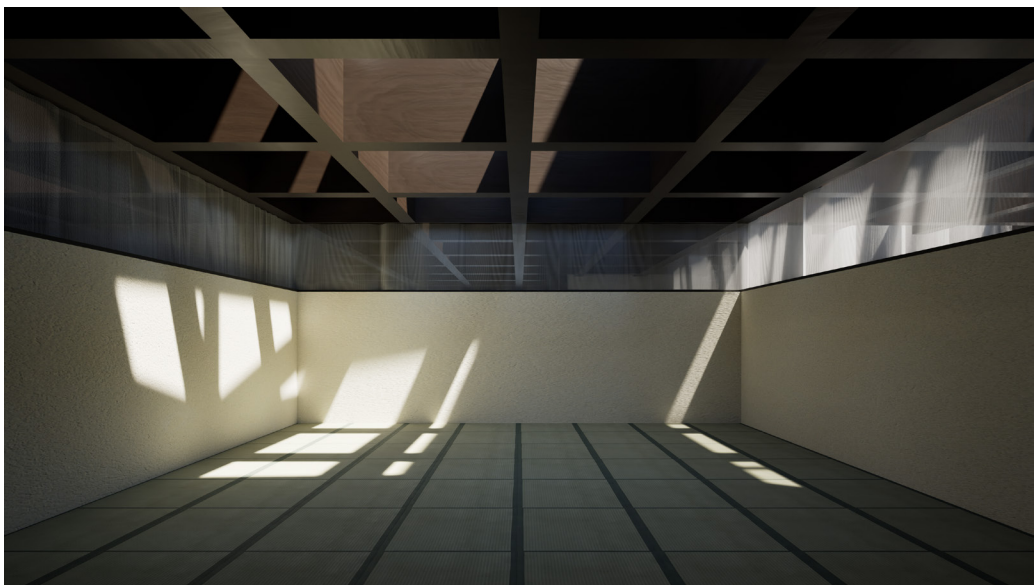


Materiality

There are two clusters within the project, that spatially have a very similar setup. Where they differ is in terms of materiality, colors, texture and reflectiveness. The reason to have two similar clusters, that are different in appearance, is the ability to compare them. While both clusters strive to achieve a feeling of belonging to the earth, one does so by implementing more reflective and smooth materials that by consequence create an extra layer of depth, while

the other implements more absorbent and textures materials, that by consequence let color speak more.

Materials can be divided among a range of hard and opaque to flexible and transparent. Among the latter, you can consider curtains. Curtains are used in the clusters as a way to shield off space or sound.











THE CAFÉ AND SOCIAL AREA

Intervening

This part of the project takes place in the former functional part of the Monastery, thus is divided into various smaller rooms, with thick limestone walls. Some of the rooms have beautifully designed cross arches in the ceiling.

In order to make the space serve the new function, adjustments in the layout had to be made by breakthrough of old walls, as well as insertion of stairs. For climate comfort, floor heating is added as well as radiators next to the outside walls, with a layer of carpet

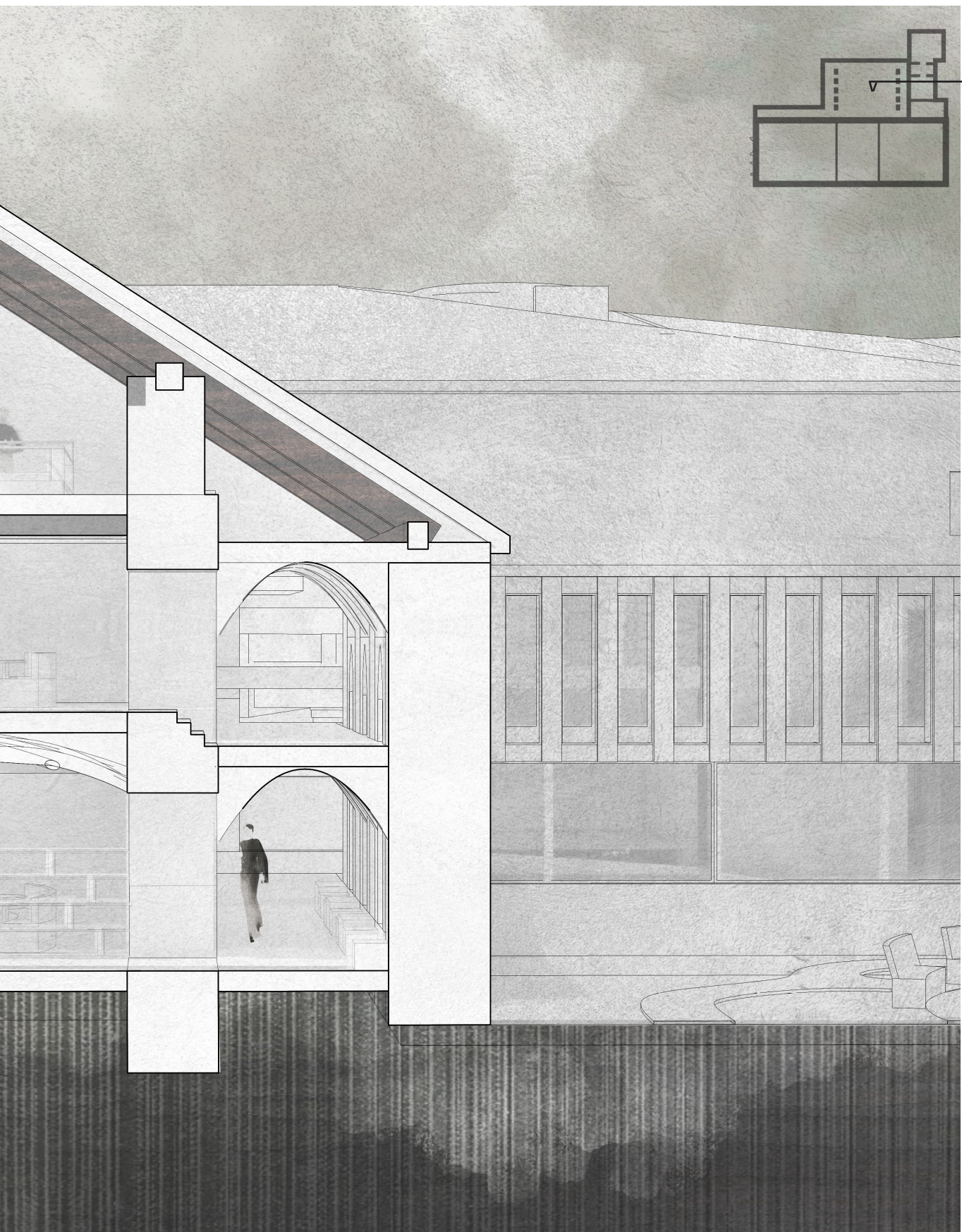
against the outside wall to keep the radiation cold away. A bio-ethanol fireplace is added to add a feeling of cosiness that also radiates heat.

Necessary spaces such as toilets, a kitchen and storage are added by inserting them behind each other, with a continuous wall finished with dark stained timber slats. This makes it clear that it is a part that was inserted later on, since it is clearly materially distinguishable from the existing limestone.



Section over secondary axis





TECHNICAL DESIGN

Design layers and their components

On the right side, the exploded axonometric diagram explains the build-up of the project.

Starting from the bottom, you can see the existing limestone walls, where cuts have been made out of where it was necessary. The break-throughs are realized by utilising a so called 'stamping' method. This way the limestone wall receives support from temporary steel beams, because the part needs to be removed is taken away. New facades are added to some parts of the building as well as an entrance and narrow window frames. The facade is made out of various materials that can be read in depth in the detail drawings on the next few pages. To summarize that, the main materials are oxidized copper sheets and glass blocks and window frames.

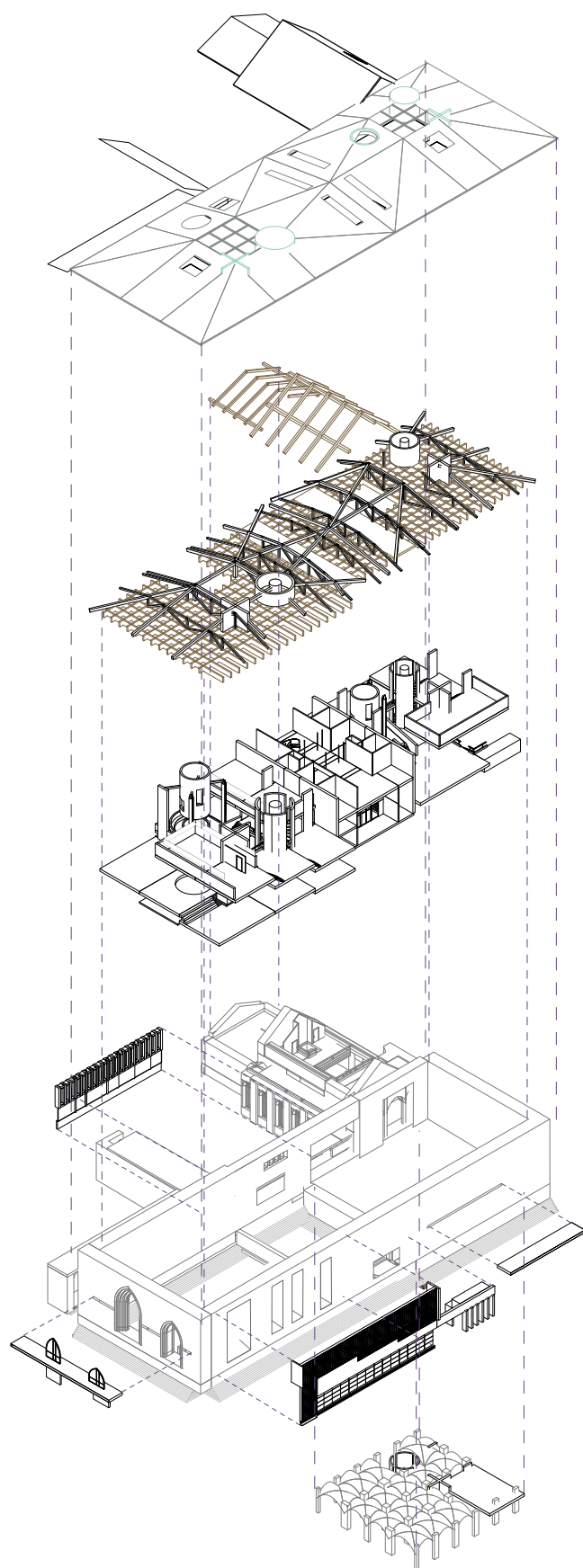
The next layer in the diagram consists out of the interior insertions. Most of the constructive elements are made out of timber, in the form of CLT. This way, the insertion remains light-weight. Direct connections to the existing limestone walls were avoided. That way there is a level of respect

towards the existing.

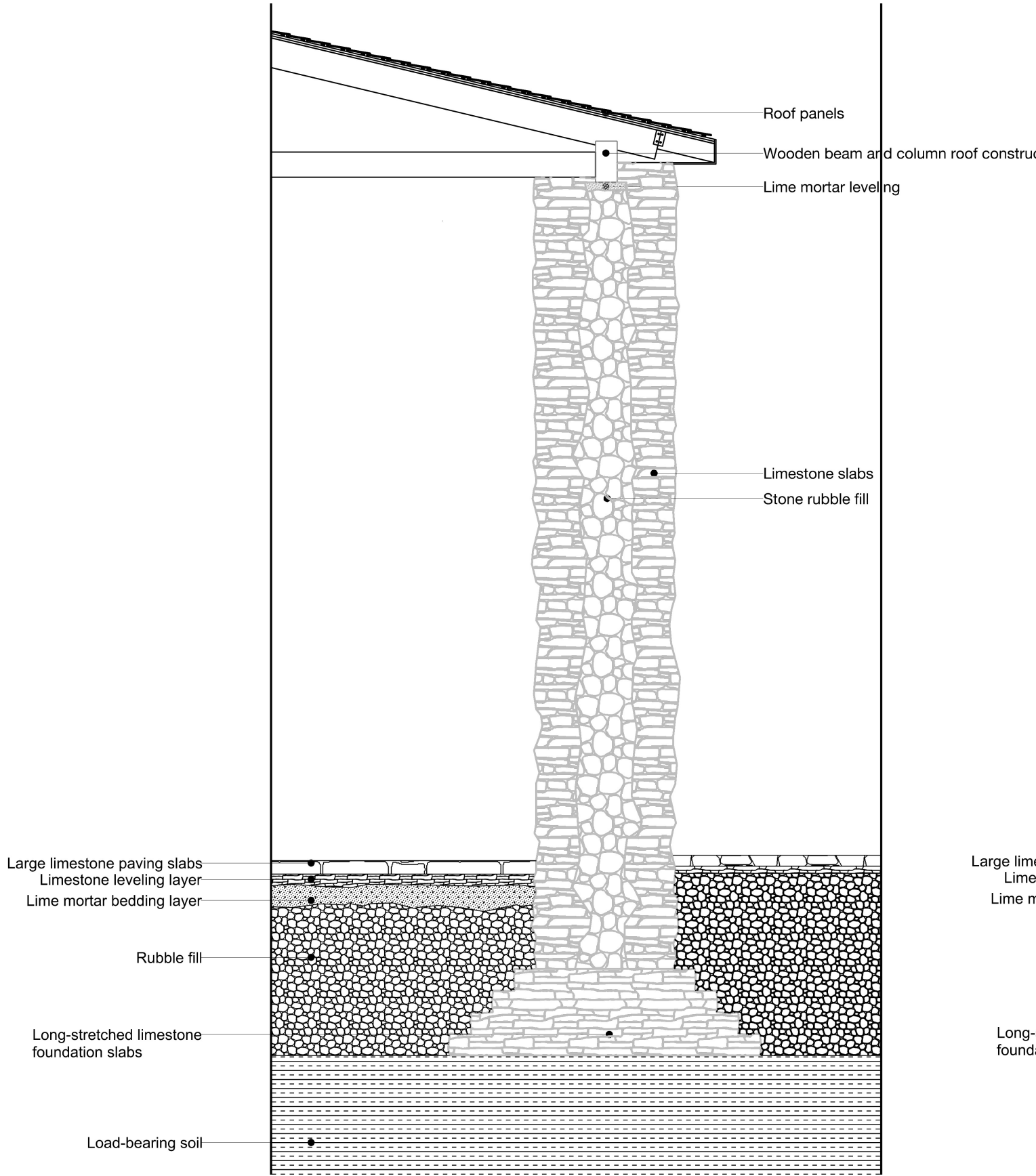
The layer above is the constructive ceiling grid. This grid is also made out of timber, in the shape of glulam beams. It is the main load-bearing structure to support the roof.

The layer above the grid, is a light-weight timber framing structure. This construction is directly connected to the grid underneath and works together constructively to support the roof. Its main function is to bridge the gap between the ceiling and the roof than needs to be higher for better rain-water drainage.

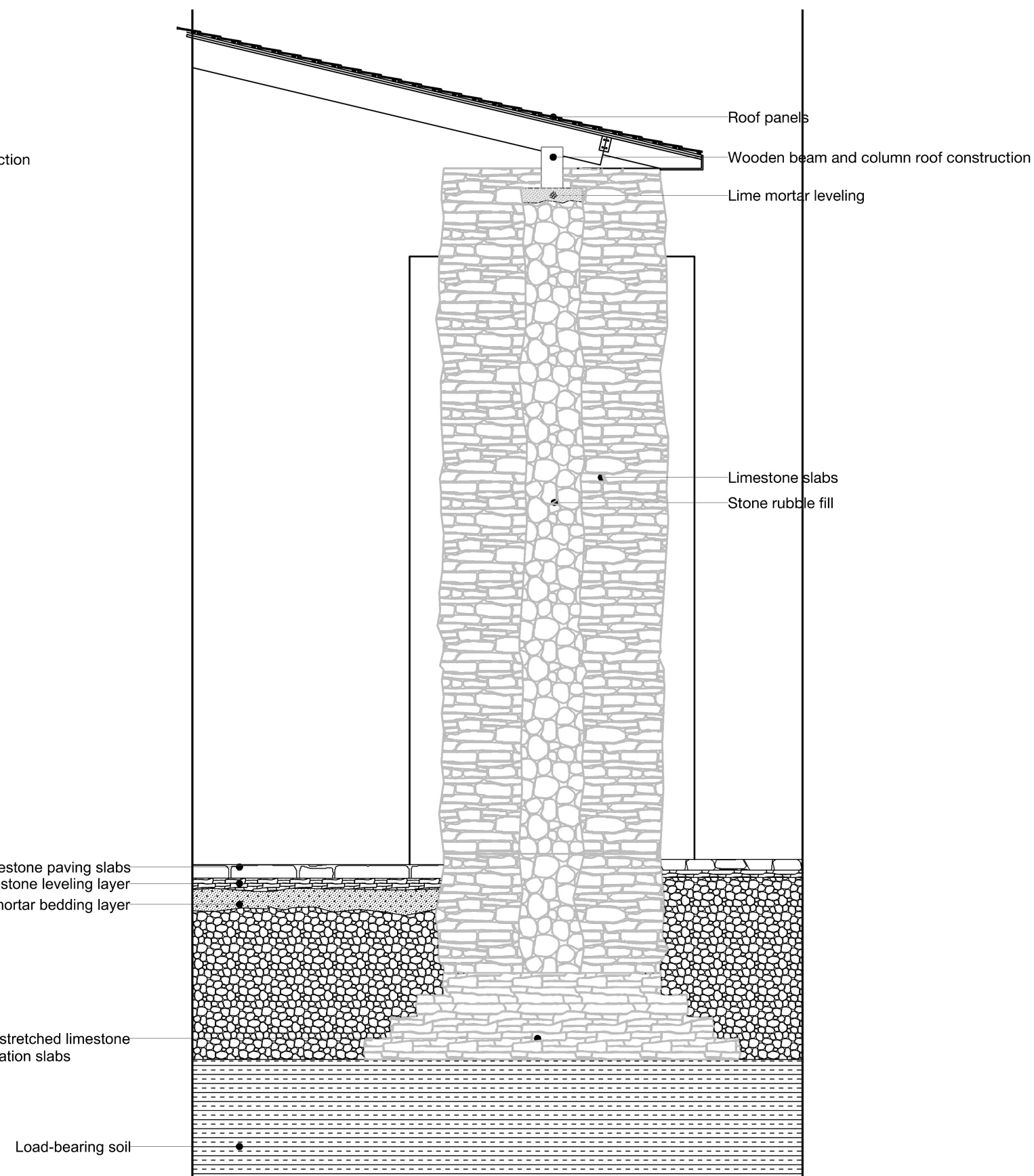
The last layer is the roof itself which is made out of sandwichpanels that are cladded with a timber framing to fixate zinc cladding.



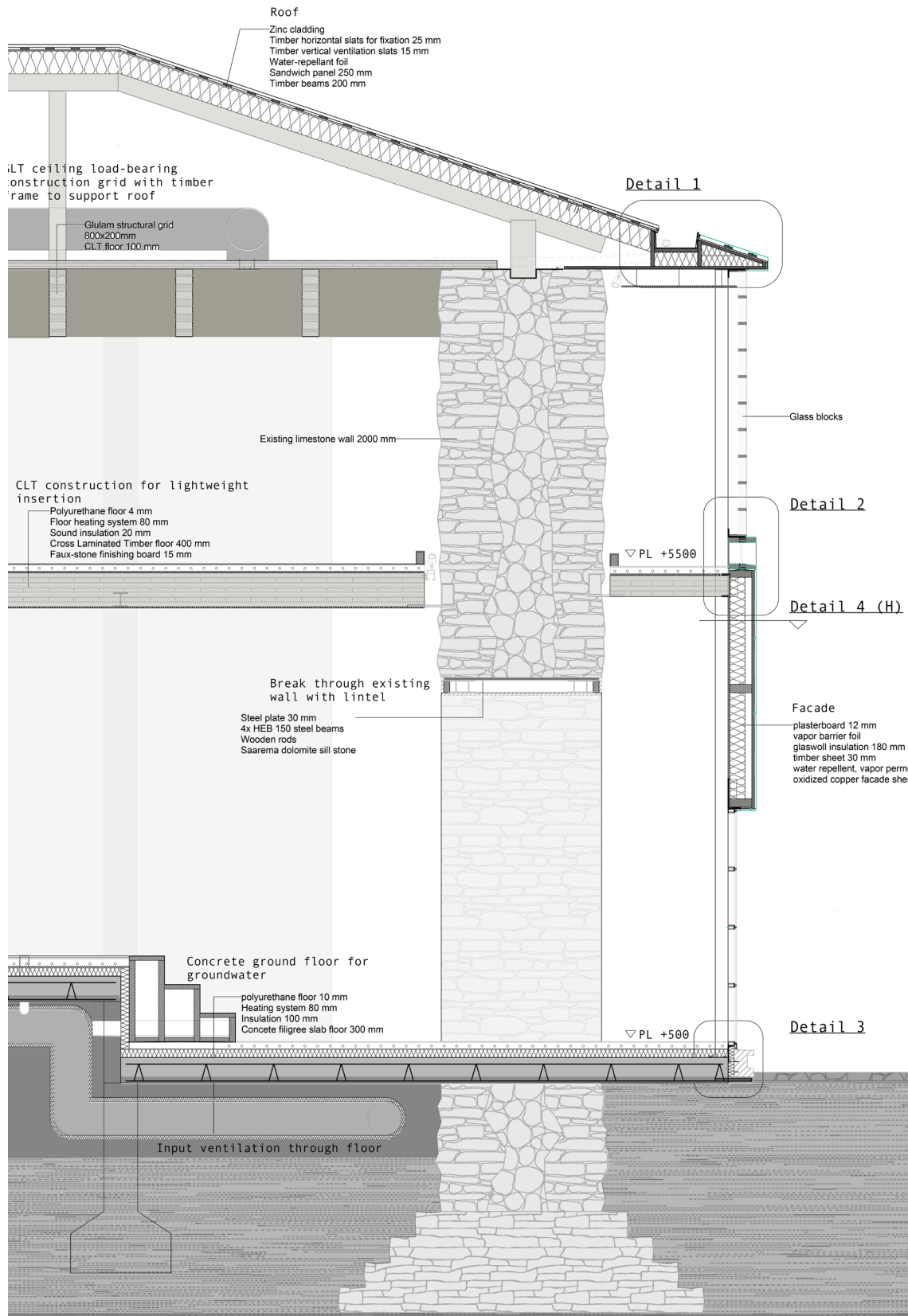
EXISTING SITUATION SECTIONS

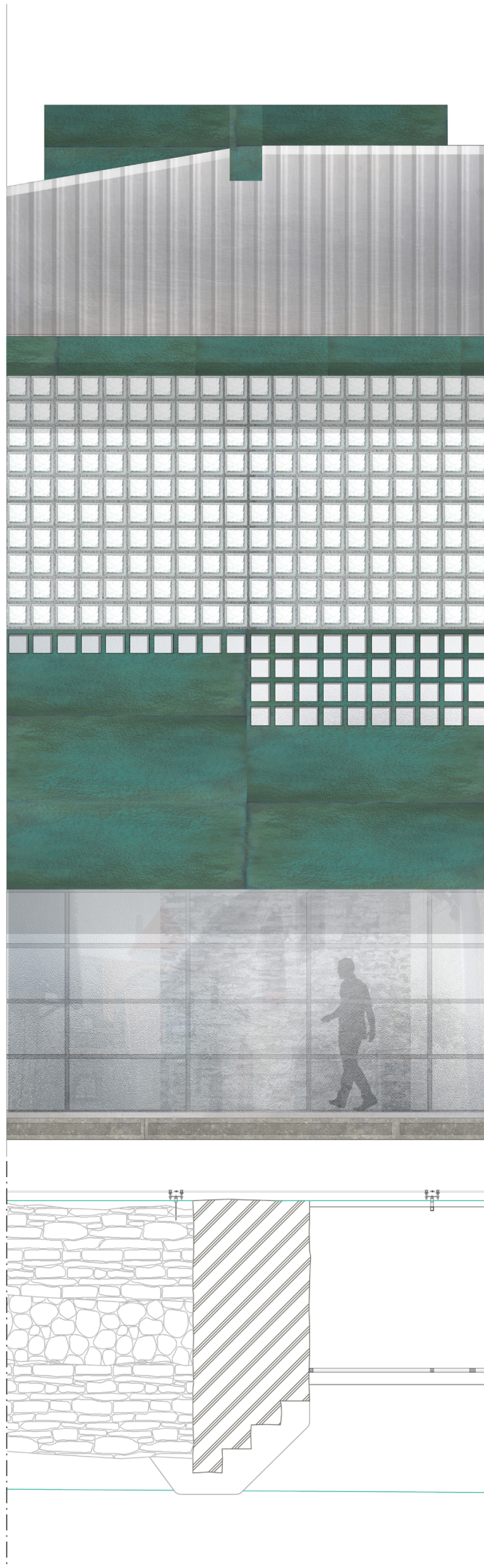


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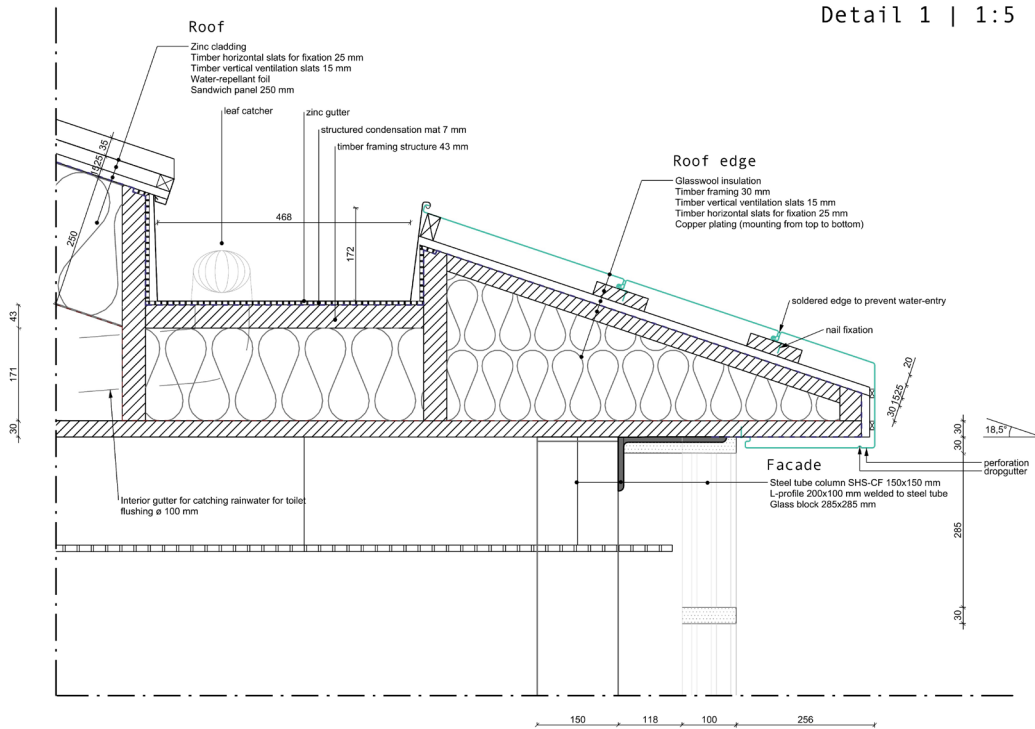


SECTION BREAK-THROUGH AND NEW FACADE

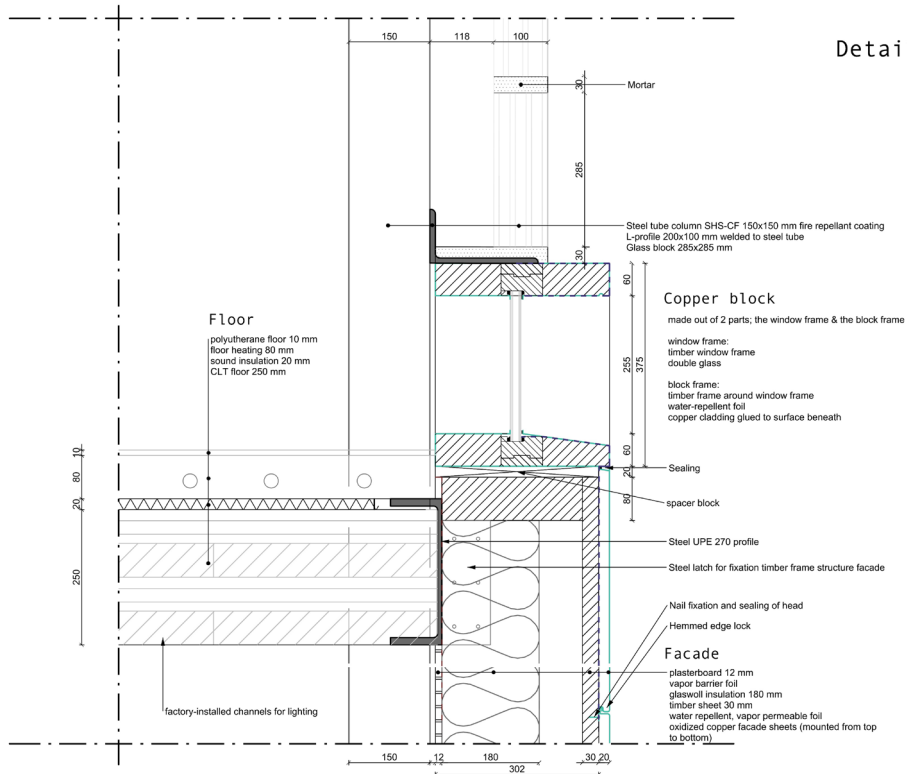




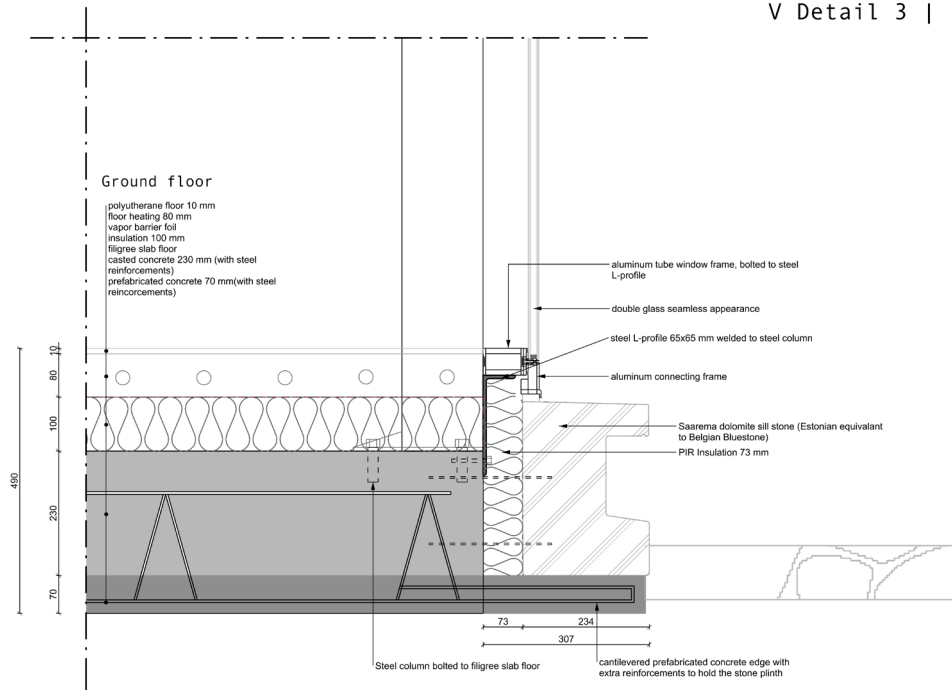
Detail 1 | 1:5



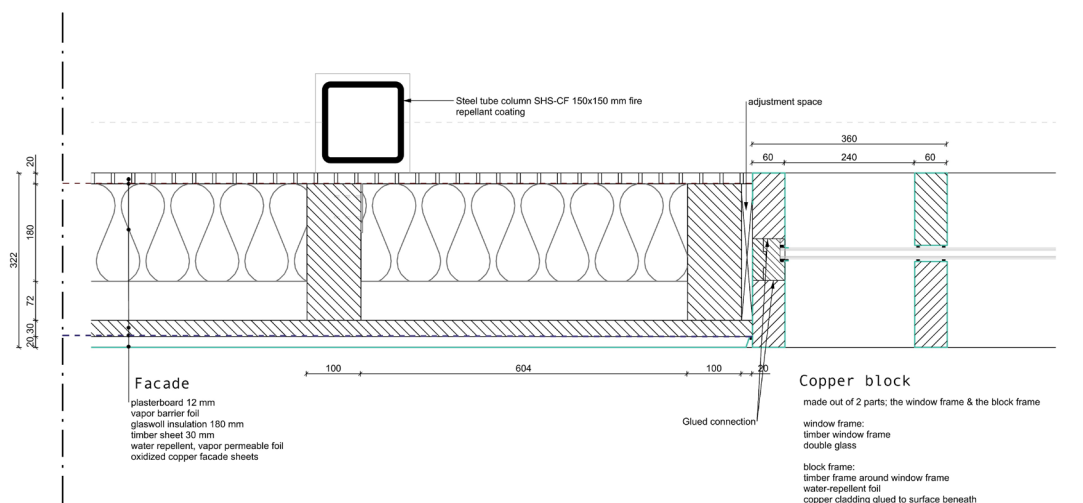
Detail 2 | 1:5



V Detail 3 | 1:5

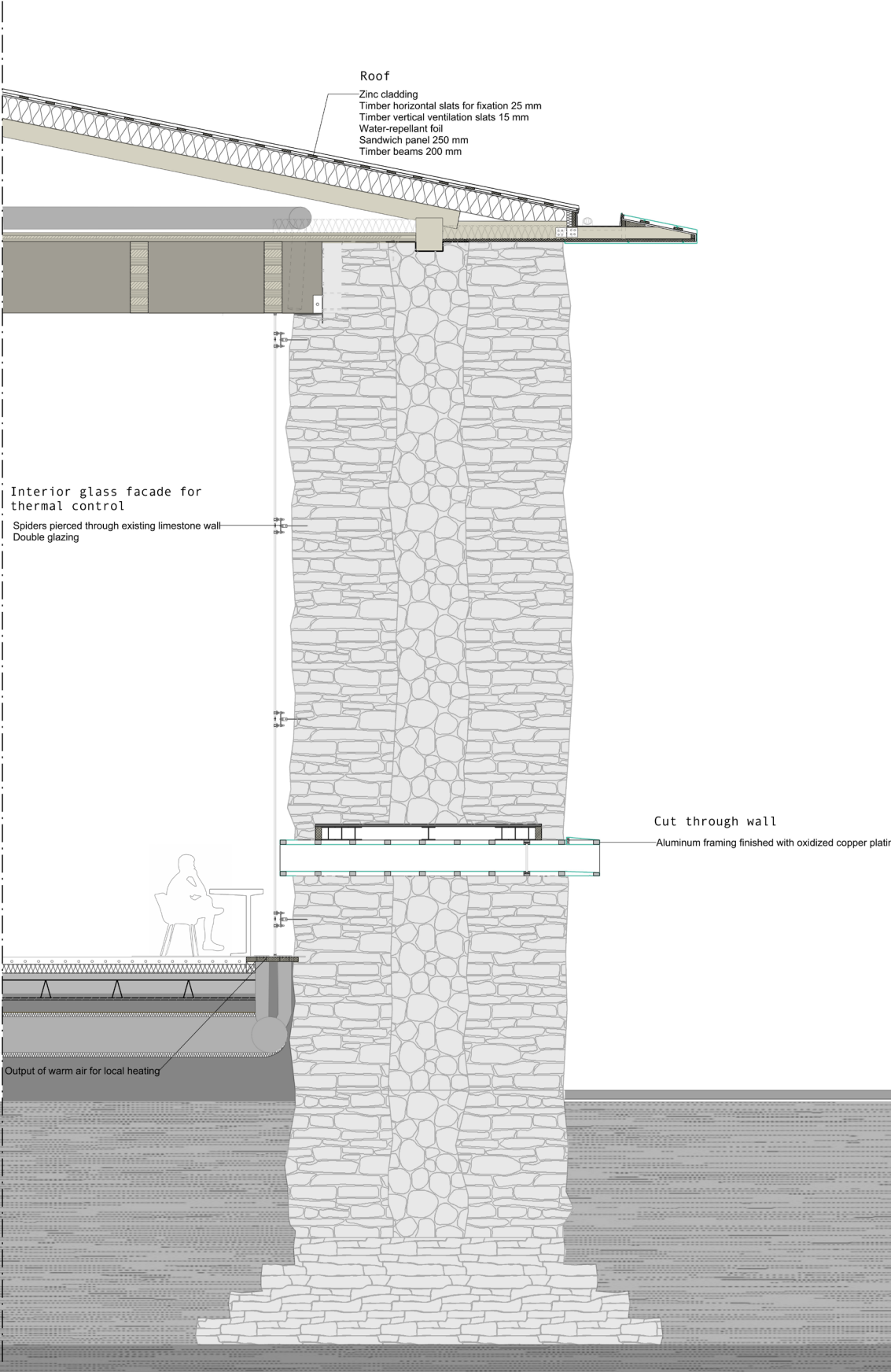


Detail 4 | 1:5



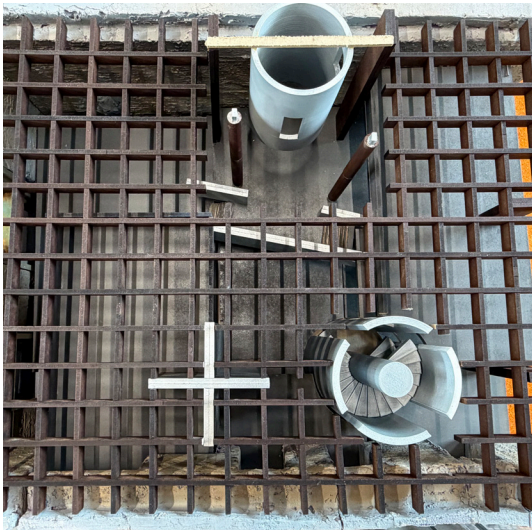
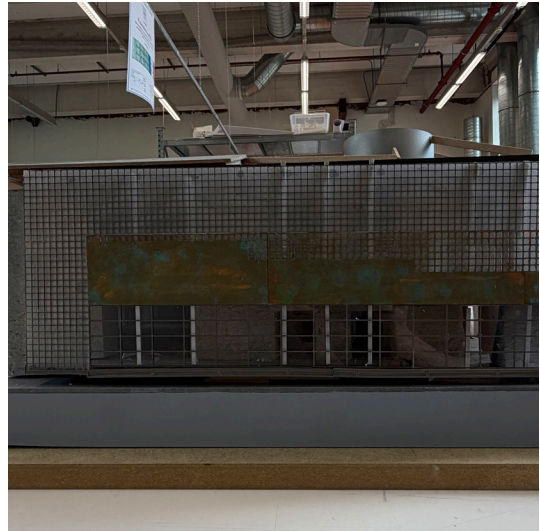
All drawings have been scaled to fit the page

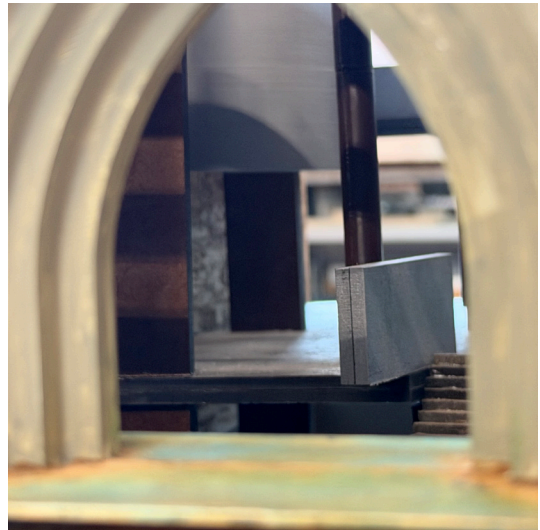
SECTION TRANSFORMATION CHURCH DOORS





PICTURES OF MODEL







PART IV

Conclusion & Reflection

Conclusion
Reflection on the process
Reflection on the result

CONCLUSION

Answering the initial questions

In the conclusion I would like to give an answer to the two main initial questions in the form of concise essays.

'What should happen to heritage that has already lost part of its original completeness, function or meaning? '

'How can we rethink the monastery in the 21st century? '

RECONSIDERING MONASTIC ARCHITECTURAL PRINCIPLES

Introduction

The text explains what we understand under monasticism and how it is linked to societal conditions. This is linked to architectural principles. The text ends with a discussion about what these principles should be for a reinterpretation of a monastery of today's society.

Traditional monasticism and a contemporary reinterpretation

Traditionally, monasteries functioned as places of withdrawal from the world. They are perceived as religious institutes, but they don't only serve spiritual practice. Monasteries were environments serving contemplation, learning, communal life and personal development. They provided structure in an uncertain world and offered an alternative to the average daily life of a person.

The social conditions that shaped traditional monasticism differ significantly from those of contemporary Western society. Medieval monasteries came forth from cultures where religion was the primary framework for understanding existence. Modern western societies changed to be more secular, pluralistic and individualized. This does not change the fact that there remains a need for reflection, which arguably has become even more important.

This could be proved by the rise of meditation practices, mindfulness movements, wellness retreats and intentional communities that offer moments of withdrawal and self-

reflection, whose demands are growing. These events show that the fundamental human needs historically addressed by monasteries remain relevant. What has changed is the form through which these needs are expressed.

Reinterpreting the monastery for contemporary needs, should acknowledge that it should solely reinterpret the monastic values rather than a being a revival of monastic institutions. It is not defined by religious doctrine, but by a commitment to intentional living.

Unlike traditional monasteries, the contemporary monastery remains connected to society. They do not require permanent withdrawal, vows of poverty or religious commitment. They offer places of temporary retreat, learning and contemplation. They provide opportunities for silence without the need of isolation.

Reason to adjust (Burnout-society)

In *The Burnout Society*, philosopher Byung-Chul Han argues that contemporary society has evolved into an achievement society. He sees that individuals that were constrained by external prohibitions, now are encouraged to continuously improve themselves, maximize their productivity and pursue personal success. The modern subject becomes both worker and manager, constantly evaluating and optimizing their own performance. This culture of self-imposed achievement creates a state of permanent activity in which rest, contemplation and inactivity are difficult to justify.

Digital technologies put extra pressure on that. Smartphones, social media and online communication have erased the boundaries between work, leisure and private life. People are constantly exposed to a continuous flow of information, notifications and expectations. This has consequences for diminished capacity for deep concentration. Things that used to be part of the daily life such as silence and boredom, have become more rare and avoided.

This trend not only has psychological consequences, but also immediate effect on spatial implications. Contemporary urban environments are largely organized around efficiency, consumption and movement, offering few places dedicated to reflection or withdrawal. As collective rituals and traditional institutions lose their central role, many individuals lack meaningful environments in which to reconnect with themselves and others.

The 'contemporary crisis' can arguably be seen as not only social or technological, but also architectural. If modern life is characterized by acceleration and overstimulation, there is a growing need for spaces that cherish attention, slowness and contemplation.

Discussion for the architecture principles for the 21st century monastery.

Contemporary spiritual places share similar principles as historical spiritual places, such as monasteries. However, they originate from different social, cultural and spiritual conditions. Thus, the architectural principles that create such places must stand open for reinterpretation. We can ask the question of what monastic architecture might become and which architectural qualities remain relevant today.

Traditional monasteries were characterized by a clear difference between the sacred and the everyday. This is noticeable in the architecture through enclosed rooms, thick walls and inward-oriented spatial organizations. The monastery functioned as an isolated world, detached from society. Life within the walls was arranged according to established religious routines. The architecture reflects discipline, order and stability that shows permanence and spiritual certainty.

Contemporary monastic architecture does not seek similar occupation. Spaces for contemplation are no longer necessarily tied to religious practice, nor are they exclusively occupied by dedicated communities. Today, temporary visits by individuals are more likely. They are in search for moments of reflection, concentration or escape from the demands of contemporary life. The goal is not to withdraw from society, but to temporarily disengage from these factors. The architecture of the

contemporary monastery is one that explores how it might facilitate withdrawal without complete separation, and reflection without requiring adherence to a shared belief system.

An important reconsideration is the balance between enclosure and openness. Historical monasteries often relied on enclosure and separation from the outside world. Contemporary interpretations may instead explore more nuanced transitions between public and private realms. Perhaps psychological distance may become as significant as physical distance.

A similar reconsideration can be discussed for relation to ritual. Traditional monasteries were organized to a religious structured daily life. Contemporary spiritual environments, on the other hand, frequently accommodate a plurality of beliefs, values and practices. Rather than prescribing specific rituals, architecture may provide conditions within which individual rituals can emerge. Spaces dedicated to meditation, reading, learning, movement or social interaction can offer opportunities for users to construct their own rhythms and experiences.

This idea of 'openness' toward interpretation can be linked to Johan Huizinga's concept of the *Homo Ludens*. He describes the importance of 'play' being not just a kid's activity but a fundamental condition of

human culture and development. Furthermore, he argues that play lets individuals step temporarily outside the routines and pressures of ordinary life, entering a side of the mind that is curiosity, wants exploration and imagine. It could be interesting to implement his idea into contemporary monastic architecture, in order to support exploration and self-discovery. It can be interpreted as a spatial framework that encourages experimentation, reflection and the construction of personal meaning.

Not all principles of traditional monastic architecture need to be reconsidered. Both traditional and contemporary interpretations of the monastery share an interest in cultivating attention and awareness. Design strategies with light, materiality, proportion and movement, architecture can shape experiences that heighten one's perception of self and surroundings. We should not abandon the traditional architectural principles, but reinterpret them in response to changing cultural and spiritual conditions. We should see the monastery not as something to replicate in the present, but how its underlying principles might inform new architectural responses to contemporary forms of reflection, community and retreat.

HERITAGE PRESERVATION

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN TO HERITAGE THAT HAS ALREADY LOST PART OF ITS ORIGINAL COMPLETENESS, FUNCTION, OR MEANING?

The question of how to deal with architectural heritage is complex in contemporary society, particularly in cases where buildings have lost its original shape and value. Many historic structures no longer function within the social or religious systems for which they were originally designed. This opens an important discussion about a difficult question: should heritage be restored to a previous state, preserved exactly as it is, transformed through new interventions, or allowed to slowly disappear over time?

Traditional preservation theory used to approach heritage as something that should be protected from change. International institutions such as UNESCO and ICOMOS, established guidelines for historical authenticity, material integrity and minimal intervention. Through these principles, monuments are valued by their ability to accurately transmit the past into the future. Interventions should remain limited and clearly distinguishable from the original structure.

This approach emerged partly as a reaction against historical reconstruction and stylistic imitation

during the nineteenth century. Preservation theory attempted to prevent the falsification of history through artificial recreations of the past. The existing material construction of a building became the main element for authenticity. Cracks, weathering and traces of age were not imperfections to erase, but evidence of historical continuity.

This theory was reconsidered and changed into acknowledging that incompleteness and decay can themselves possess cultural and spatial value. Thinkers such as Alois Riegl described the concept of "age value," where the visible passage of time creates emotional and historical significance. The perspective changed so that the ruin is no longer simply a damaged object waiting to be repaired, but a condition that reveals time physically through erosion, absence and fragmentation. The ruin carries a unique atmosphere precisely because it exists between presence and disappearance.

Contemporary preservation approaches therefore moved past the idea of freezing buildings in a single historical moment. Adaptive reuse

and transformation have become central themes within architectural heritage discourse. Rather than preserving buildings through isolation, heritage is preserved through continued relevance and occupation. Architects such as Carlo Scarpa and David Chipperfield show example of how contemporary interventions can coexist with historic structures without imitating them. There is a clear dialogue between old and new . Preservation becomes less about maintaining a frozen image of the past and more about continuing the life of the building through new layers of use and meaning.

This shift also introduces a new understanding of uncertainty within preservation theory. Heritage is no longer treated as static and complete, but as part of a transformation process. It is normal that buildings with a long lifespan accumulate traces, additions and modifications over time. Therefore architecture should learn to deal with adaptation in order to survive culturally and socially. Preservation therefore becomes an active negotiation between memory, present use and future possibility.

This idea can be projected onto heritage this is in a (semi) state of decay. The concept of loss and incompleteness is particularly interesting for these buildings. Parts may have disappeared entirely, while other fragments are affected and altered. These buildings linger between abandonment and occupation.

The monastery in this project existed exactly within such a state. Over time, the original complex became fragmented into separate parts that were disconnected from one another both physically and programmatically. Parts were converted into unrelated functions such as housing, cafés or storage spaces, while other parts remained abandoned and unused. The original spatiality and identity of the monastery gradually dissolved into different fragments.

We could, however, see this fragmentation as a potential to see its resistance to time in its layering that is shown in traces and erosion. That is not a failure, but an unfinished state capable of receiving new meaning. The absence within the ruin creates space for reinterpretation.

Formulating my position toward heritage preservation, I want to build upon the idea that architecture should not freeze in a nostalgic image of the past. Historical buildings were never static objects; they evolved throughout history according to changing social, political and religious conditions. To preserve a building by removing it entirely from contemporary life risks transforming it into a museum artifact detached from reality.

Within my project, the existing monastery is therefore not considered as an object that cannot be adjusted, but as a living thing capable of supporting new forms of spirituality. It is neither reconstructing the monastery exactly as it once existed, or erasing the traces of time that have build up for centuries. What it does want to do is accepts the incompleteness of the existing condition and works with it.

The existing structure acts as a host for the new intervention. Old and new reinforce each other; the historical walls, ruins and remaining spaces carry memory, atmosphere and material depth, while the new insertions introduce a contemporary layer of use and experience. Within doing so, it is importance to realize that the new insertion should not try to imitate or replicate the existing. There should rather be a contrasting dialogue between the two. Different periods are visible simultaneously, but

they seem in harmony with each other. This creates a layered coexistence between past and present.

The proposal introduces contemporary spaces for reflection, meditation, learning and communal experience within the historical monastery complex. Because this new program is added, the building regains collective relevance. This is important in the process of re-integrating the building into society again. The architecture becomes active once again.

Nonetheless, the project wants to avoid giving the image that it is in a final or complete state. There should always be taken into account the 'uncertainty' of the future and the possibility of transformations into the future. Adaptation should be seen as an inherent aspect of the lifespan of heritage, where there should be the acknowledgement that future generations may continue to reinterpret and transform the building further.

To conclude, my view on the value of heritage is that it is not only its ability to preserve what once was, but rather and maybe even more so its capacity to remain meaningful within the present and adaptable toward the future.

REFLECTION

The process

This graduation project began with a fascination for architecture that can affect perception and emotion. I was interested in spaces that radiate calmness, contemplation and presence. These spaces leave a lasting impression through atmosphere rather than through form alone.

Looking back at the process, it was not a straightforward progression from concept to building. At first I thought that the setbacks I had earlier on in the process made me delayed in designing and should have been avoided. However, I later realized and understood why I made those 'mistakes.' Throughout the Bachelor programme, the design process was taught pragmatically; integrating programme, functionality, construction and technical requirements within a clear concept. I assumed that a design focused on atmosphere and spirituality required a different way of designing. So, I began by studying atmospheric qualities through case studies and attempted to use the conclusions directly into detailed design. In retrospect, this resulted in a weak conceptual foundation to build upon. Luckily I realised that atmosphere should be the outcome of a broader architectural concept rather than its starting point. From that point I made big steps into a solid foundation in design as

well as in concept. By focusing on systematically composing space, I established a stronger framework that brought greater coherence and consistency to the project.

During these learning moments, my understanding of the existing monastery evolved as well. Early on, the building primarily functioned as the setting for the project. As the design developed, however, the monastery as heritage became an important consideration in the conceptual narrative. It raised questions about preservation, transformation and continuity. This led the project to be two things; an exploration of contemporary spirituality and the rethinking of a monastery, and an investigation into how heritage can accommodate new meanings and forms of use.

The most important thing I learned from doing this project is that architecture gains meaning through the relationship between concept, context and experience. I also learned that uncertainty and setbacks are an inevitable part of the design process, and should not always be considered as negative. What first seemed like mistakes, were really gaps in my understanding and eventually led to stronger decisions. I can conclude that this project not only shaped

my architectural proposal, but also influenced my approach to design. It taught me the importance of always starting off with developing a strong conceptual foundation and be attentive to the ways in which architecture can create meaningful experiences through space, atmosphere and context.

REFLECTION

The result

During the design process, I have been asked to describe the project in a single word. From the beginning, I chose the phrase 'The Space In Between.' First, it referred to creating spaces that offer moments of reflection and quietude in between the busy moments of everyday life. Later on I realized that the concept of the in-between became applicable for more aspects in the design.; in between rational modernist principles and poetic expression, between architecture and furniture, between the secular and the spiritual, and between enclosed and open spaces. Instead of choosing one side over another, the project seeks a balance between these seemingly opposing conditions that suggests that meaningful experiences come forth from through coexistence and balance.

In a way, the building reflects the challenges of contemporary life, and tells users to find balance.

A fundamental achievement is the design's ability to offer a dialogue between the existing monastery and the new intervention. The existing structure is not treated as either an untouchable monument, but as an active participant in the architectural experience. The fragmented condition of the monastery, that at first appeared as a challenge, became an interesting design aspect that shows how to

carefully position insertions, and reconnect previously disconnected parts while preserving the legibility of the building's historical layers. The result does not restore the parts that were lost, but it gives back meaning to the ruin and lets it re-enter society.

An aspects where we can discuss whether the project succeeds in that or not is the reinterpretation of monastic architectural principles and applying them correctly. The project proposes contemporary forms of retreat, learning, movement and communal gathering. The sequence of spaces offers a gradual transitioning of experiences. The architecture becomes less a collection of individual rooms and more a spatial journey structured around different states of engagement and contemplation.

The project also has aspects that remain unresolved. The project intentionally embraces openness and interpretation, where users can construct their own experiences and rituals. Offering flexibility is one of its strengths, but it also introduces uncertainty regarding how spaces may be occupied and understood. The consideration of balance between providing guidance and allowing freedom remains a delicate one. On a similar hand, the relationship between preservation and intervention cannot

be fully resolved. An alternation of the original existing will raise questions about the appropriate degree of transformation within heritage contexts.

I consider the most impactful result of the project not the design in itself, but the capacity it has to suggest different ways of thinking about architecture, with themes such as heritage and spirituality. The design is

an example to show that monuments can remain relevant into the future through valuable transformation and that spaces for contemplation remain relevant in modern society. It is important to not see the project as a set way of doing things, but to look at it as an example for future interpretations of adaptation and use.

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