

REVEAL HIDDEN **AURA**

RISD Contemplative Atrium

2018 RISD GRADUATE

Thesis

SHUYI GUO

REVEAL THE AURA
RISD CONTEMPLATIVE ALTRIUM

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Design in Interior Studies [Adaptive Reuse] in the Department of Interior Architecture of the Rhode Island School of Design

By
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2018

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Abstract

The built environment affects us on an emotional and psychological level; architecture can be as calming as meditation. Architecturally-induced contemplative states allow inhabitants to experience the benefits of meditation through space. Emotional well-being is essential to personal development and integral to the creative process. The Rhode Island School of Design campus currently offers counseling and psychological services for student and faculty. What is not offered is a space for students and faculty to seek inner peace in a relaxed way. In order to support the RISD community by creating a place for people to promote mental health in a consistent daily way, Memorial Hall, positioned in the central campus core, will become a contemplative atrium supporting architecturally-induced contemplative states by revealing aspects of the building's aura.

Aura is a special characteristic held by some architecture that can strengthen personal connections between space and visitors and encourage a spiritual experience. Aura, or the being of a place, can be revealed via respect for aspects of a site's past, through layering of physical changes to the structure over time, or palimpsest. The unique aspects of the place create a nuanced impression, shifting with each visit, even if the architecture remains unchanged.

Memorial Hall, former a place of worship, holds the spirituality of inner peace and already has a strong

hidden aura. Currently used as a painting studio, this thesis proposes to reveal the hidden aura of Memorial Hall. Just as aura is something that brings human emotion into close contact with architecture, contemplative space is somewhere for people to understand how they fit in the universe. The intervention programs will be based on 3 types of meditation that provide spaces of focused attention, open monitoring and loving-kindness to embody a new approach: addressing mental health issues before they arise through exposure to architecture design to calm and focus the mind.

Chapter 01

Introduction

My thesis is about revealing aura, which is a special characteristic held by some architecture. In order to provide a **Contemplative Atrium** for RISD campus, the Memorial Hall will be transformed into a space for people to calm and focus the mind.

RISD Situation

All college students face stress, but mental-health professionals say art students face particular, and particularly intense, kinds of stress that their peers in many other scholastic situations don't. And while crises may spur some art students to seek help, others incorporate therapeutic resources as part of their overall development.

RISD as a top art school in USA, the students are placed in a highly competitive environment. Everyone was the art star at his or her high school and everyone is striving to do unique work. But the students are also attempting to develop their identities and beginning to recognize that most of them in the fine-art realm are unlikely to be successful as professional artists. Even when the work they create isn't personal, many students still personalize the critique, taking the comments as criticism of themselves and not just of their art.

Student stress:

- mental/physical labour
- creative thinking
- competitiveness

Scientific studies show that certain disciplined exercises, kept up over time to produce changes that provide the practitioner with greater levels of awareness and deep knowing. Contemplative Practices can help you access transcendent wisdom and emotional balance. It can provide access to the inner silence - the inner stream of consciousness and what is sometimes called Spirit or Source.

So it is necessary to explore campus amenities desired to support RISD students. A contemplative atrium can be built in RISD.

Glossary

-Aura

Aura Is As Special Trait In Architecture.

The concept of aura first comes from Walter Benjamin's essay "Little History of Photography". From his essay, he said :

'What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be. ' 1

I find the concept of aura useful in my research on developing the quality of space. Aura is a special characteristic held by some architecture that can strengthen personal connections between space and visitors and encourage a spiritual experience. So that the unique aspects of the place create a nuanced impression, shifting with each visit, even if the architecture remains unchanged.

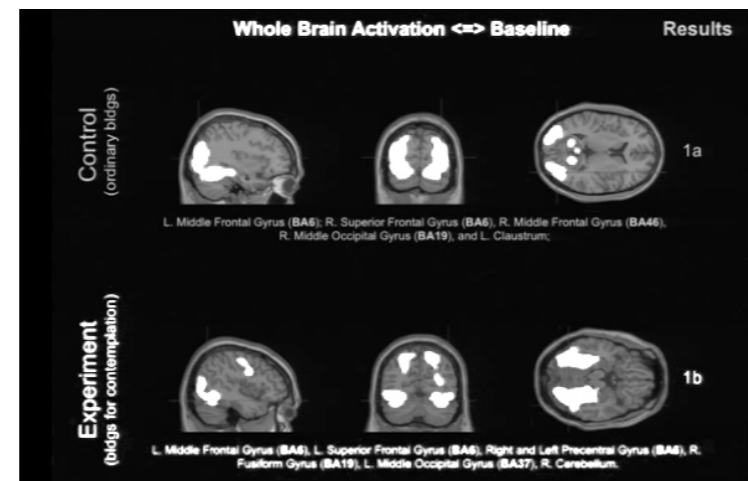
-fMRI Study of Architecturally-Induced Contemplative States

A recent fMRI study shows that better architecture can give us some deeper moments of personal reflection.

'Within the context of contemporary neuroscience and clinical research in meditation, this pilot study uses fMRI scans to gauge and compare the neurophenomenological response that contemplative and ordinary buildings elicit from 12 subjects. The result indicates not only that there are clearly different reactions to the two types of built environments but also, and more significantly, that the phenomenological and neural correlates of the architecturally-induced contemplation share many similarities with internally-generated meditation while displaying important differences that have more in common with peak/flow/aesthetic psychosomatic states than with meditative conditions.' 2

'A conscious experience of architecture is the result of physical, spatial, temporal, sensorial, and physical presence, rather than a pure inward intellectual act,' 3 explains by fMRI.

At the same time, the differences in viewing ordinary and contemplative buildings were significant, hinting that the quality of the 'architectural stimulus' itself does matter. 3



A still of brain scans from fMRI's presentation.

Spiritual Experience

Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or a power, whether you call it God or not, that is different from your everyday self?

Eight Major Types: (Spiritual experiences reported by over three-quarters of a large British sample) 6

1. 'Awareness of a patterning of events/synchronicity'
- 2 & 3. 'Awareness of the Presence of God' and 'Awareness of a Presence Not Named'
4. 'Awareness of Prayer being Answered'
- 5 & 6. 'Awareness of a Sacred Presence in Nature' and 'Awareness that All Things Are One'
- 7 & 8. 'Awareness of the Presence of the Dead' and 'Awareness of an Evil Presence'

Palimpsest

Pal-imp-sest: a parchment or tablet, reused after earlier writing has been erased (Oxford Dictionary)

'The land, so heavily charged with traces and with past readings, seems very similar to a palimpsest.' - André Corboz, *The Land as a Palimpsest*. 4



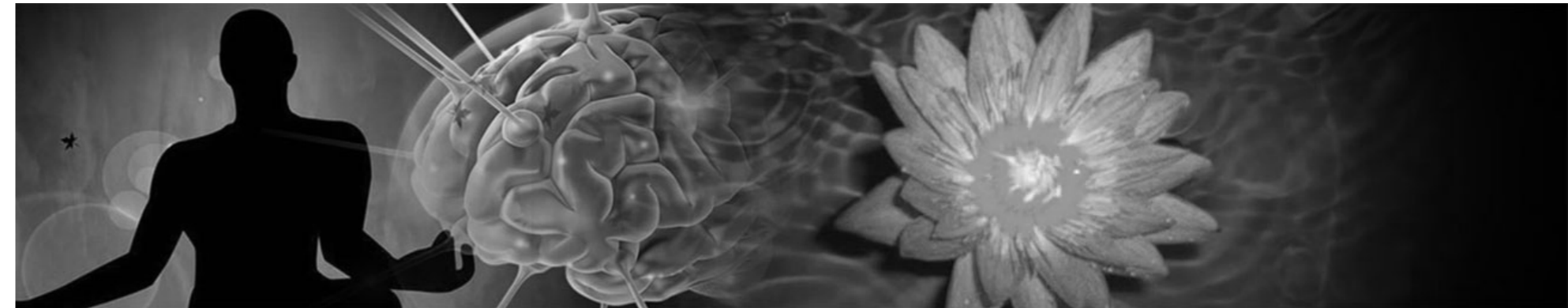
'Palimpsest, as a metaphor is relevant because the layering of things through time could be a method in bringing depth to buildings and places. It provides a way to engage in a dialogue.' 5

'In architecture a palimpsest is a building in which the traces of previous buildings are inscribed on its surface. The form of an object itself contains a record of its history. It drags around the past, sometimes apparent and sometime hidden just beneath the surface.' 5

Proposed Program

Contemplative Practice Experience

- Nurturing relationships with all beings (awareness, intention, ritual, prayer, communication)
- Cultivate compassion and gratitude for self and others (intention, practice, service and social justice)
- Recognizing the pain body (letting go of the pain matrix)
- Building framework (the healthy Yin state)
- Wisdom traditions, nature&contemplative neuroscience (seeking, recognizing and receiving guidance)
- Accessing quiet mind (stabilizing the mind and cultivating insight)
- Embodiment (movement, breath, relaxation, nutrition)
- Intentional living (aligning with intention as a practice)



3 Types of Meditation

-Focused Attention Meditation (FAM)

'In FAM, we concentrate on a specific object, thought, or phenomenon. It could be a candle flame, an external sound, internal imagery, or the sensation of one's own breath. We can also focus on other specific sensations in the body or a present emotion.

As long as we stay focused, our brains are building new connections that will help us be less distracted at work and at home. It also helps with convergent thinking, reining in your thoughts and staying focused on the task at hand.' 7

-Opening Monitoring Meditation (OMM)

'OMM asks us to observe our thoughts, physical sensations, emotions, and feelings without judgement. Mindfulness meditation is a form of OMM. When we practice OMM, our minds are engaged as we monitor our awareness instead of a specific object or phenomenon. We must continue in the monitoring state, paying attention to any experience, sound, or sensation that might happen without focusing on any of them in particular.

A regular OMM practice has been shown to increase our capacities for innovation, creativity and participants' ability to generate novel, yet useful ideas. In addition, a number of scientific studies have shown that meditation mindfulness can increase cognitive flexibility, help us perform better at work, and reduce stress.' 7

-Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM)

'LKM first helps you cultivate unconditional positive regard for yourself, then to those close to you, then to ever-further away and more contentious relationships. When we are kind to ourselves, we can then extend that kindness and acceptance to others.

LKM guides us through any negative associations that might arise, helping us replace them with positive ones such as empathy. LKM can not only increase activity in the regions of the brain responsible for social emotions and regulating the body's response to stress, but also actually increase the amount of grey matter in those regions. In addition, LKM can increase our body's ability to fight disease, and make us less likely to develop depression, inflammation, and even ulcers.' 7

Programmatic Goals

The intervention programs will be based on 3 types of meditation that provide spaces of focused attention, open monitoring and loving-kindness to embody a new approach: addressing mental health issues before they arise through exposure to architecture design to calm and focus the mind.

-Focused Attention: Meditation Space
Prayer Room (Multi-faith)
Painting/Writing Space

-Opening-Monitoring: Yoga Studio
Walking Meditation
Gallery for Meditation

-Loving-Kindness: Relaxation Spots
Hangout Spots

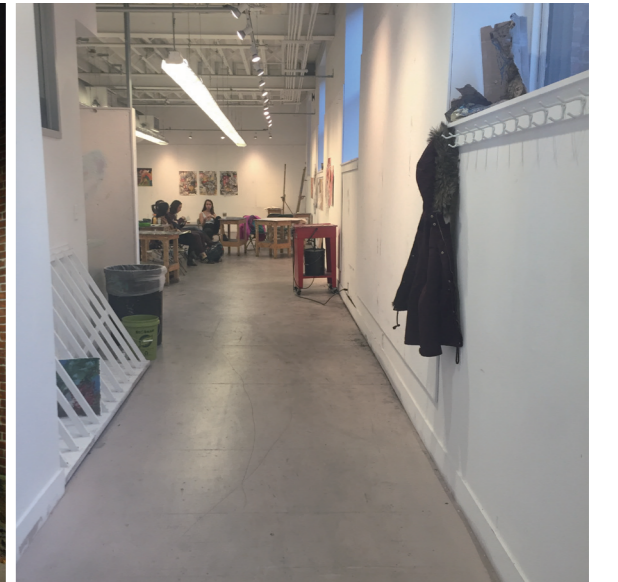


Chapter 02

Site

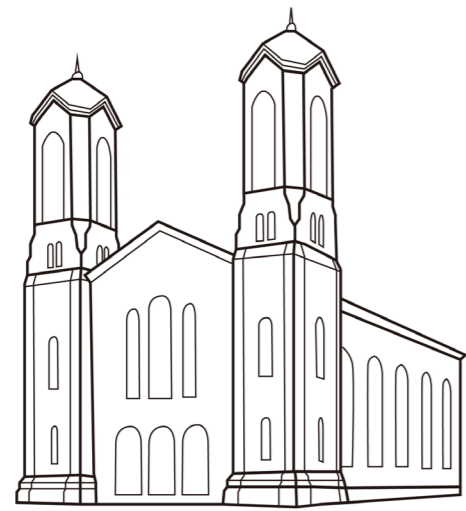
Memorial Hall Address

- Rhode Island School of Design
Address: 226 Benefit Street, Providence, RI
Local Historic District Zoning



Why Memorial Hall

Inspiration: Missing Spires (Missing Aura) due to Hurricane.

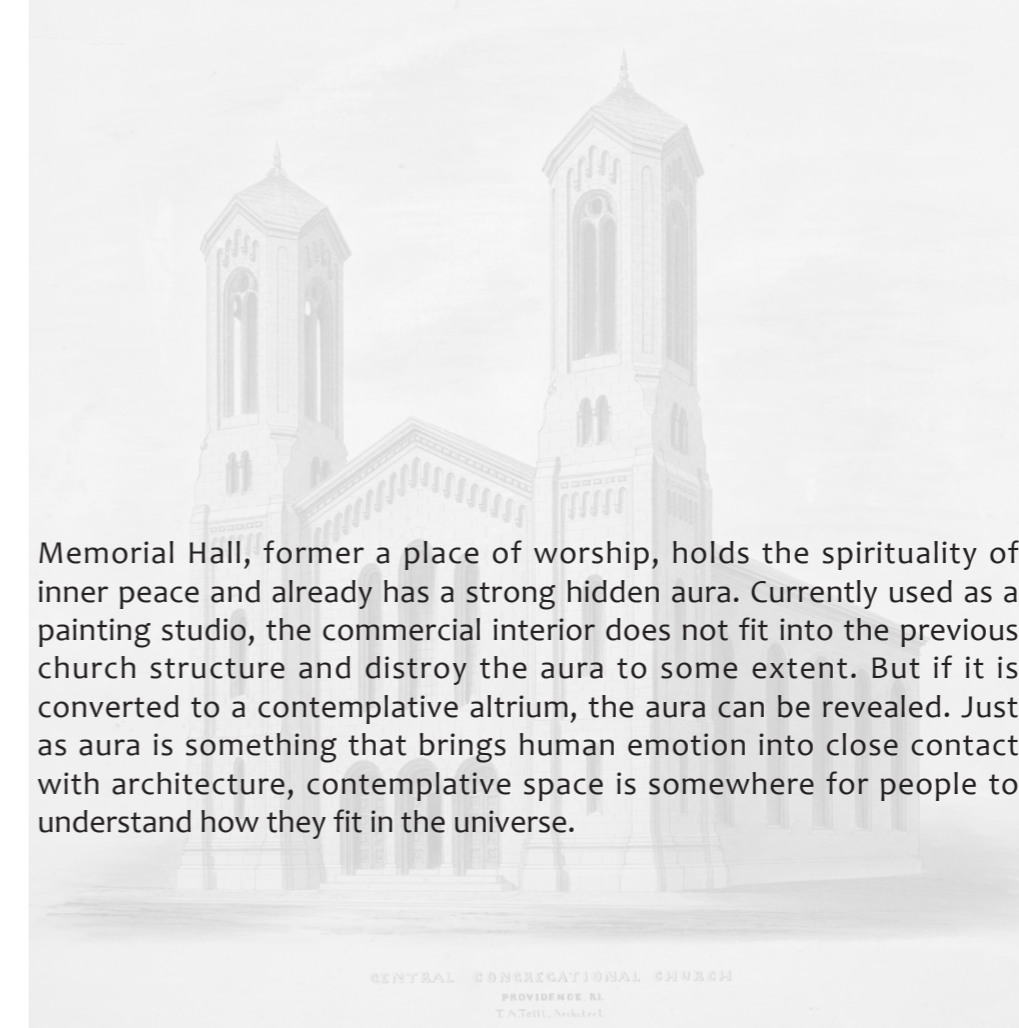


1852



1938

Spires are a common element of religious architecture worldwide and are generally viewed as attempts to reach skyward toward heavens and the divine.



1830
Central
Congregational
Church



1902
Acquired by RISD



1983
Auditorium
Museum
Camera club
Shared space



1998
Painting Studio
Gallery
Auditorium

Campus Analysis

RISD Network Campus zones

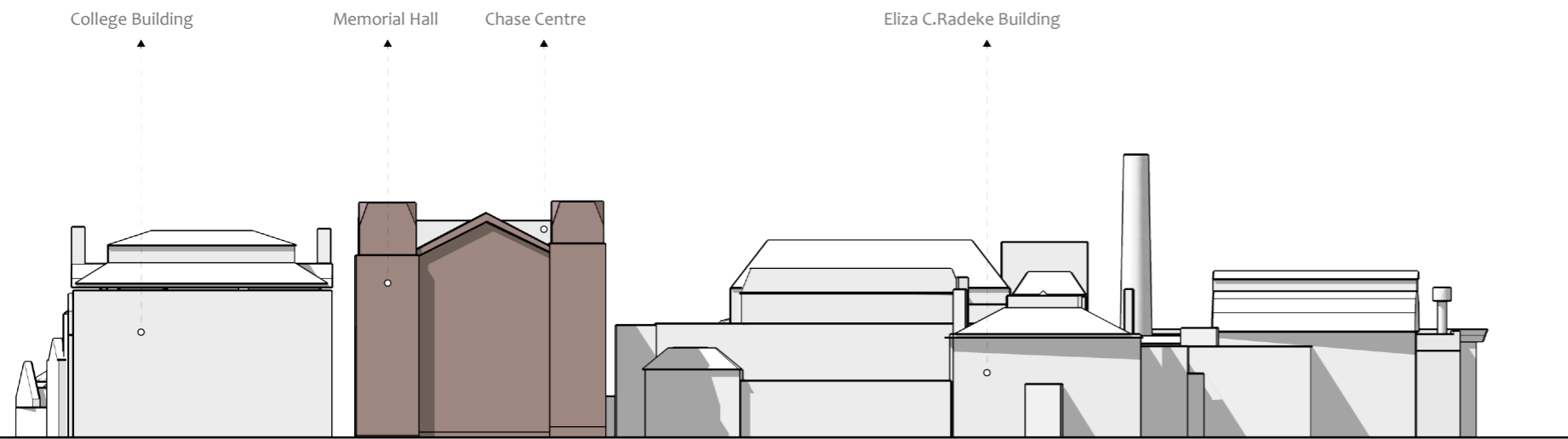


Primary programs by building

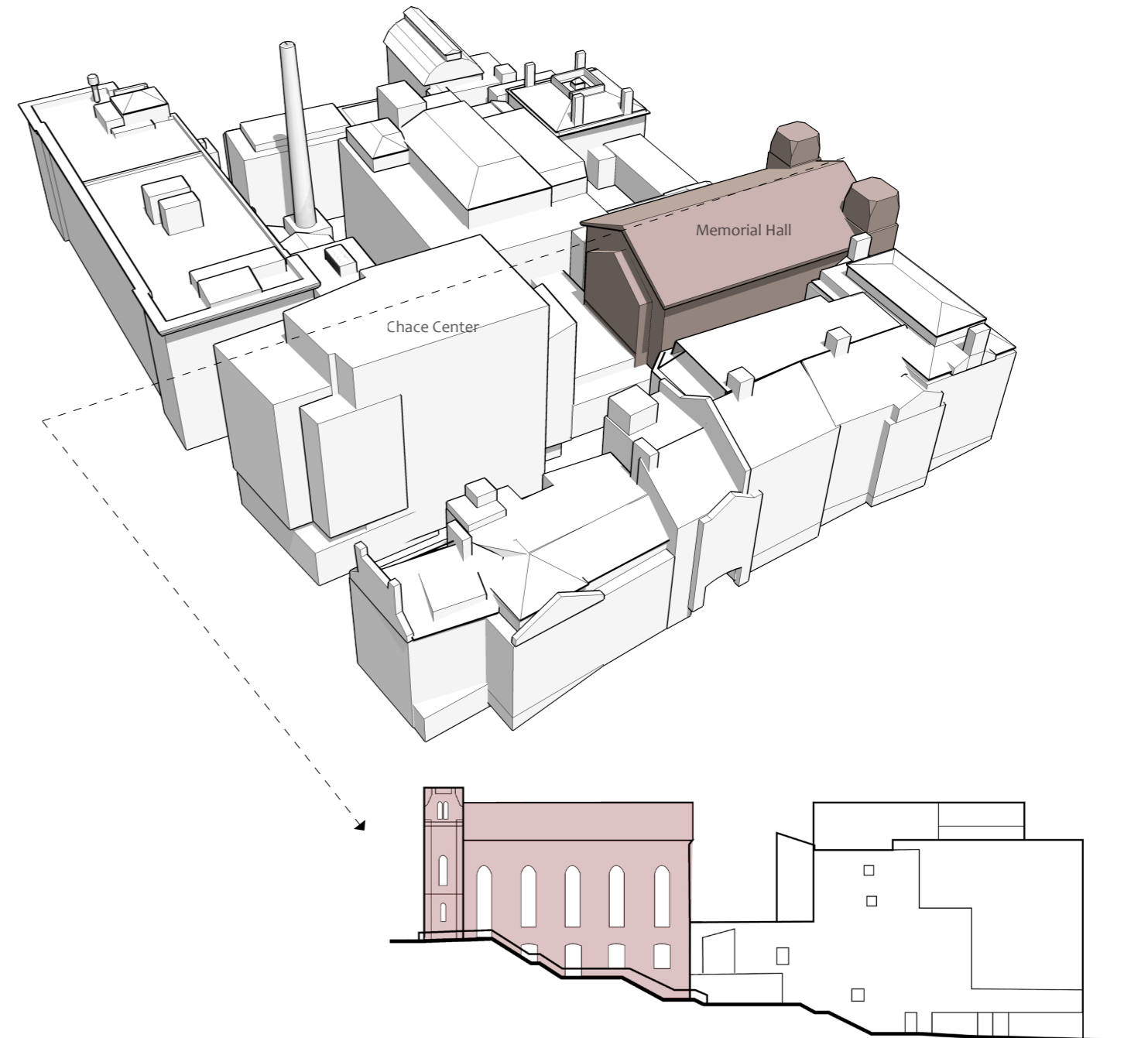


Building Analysis

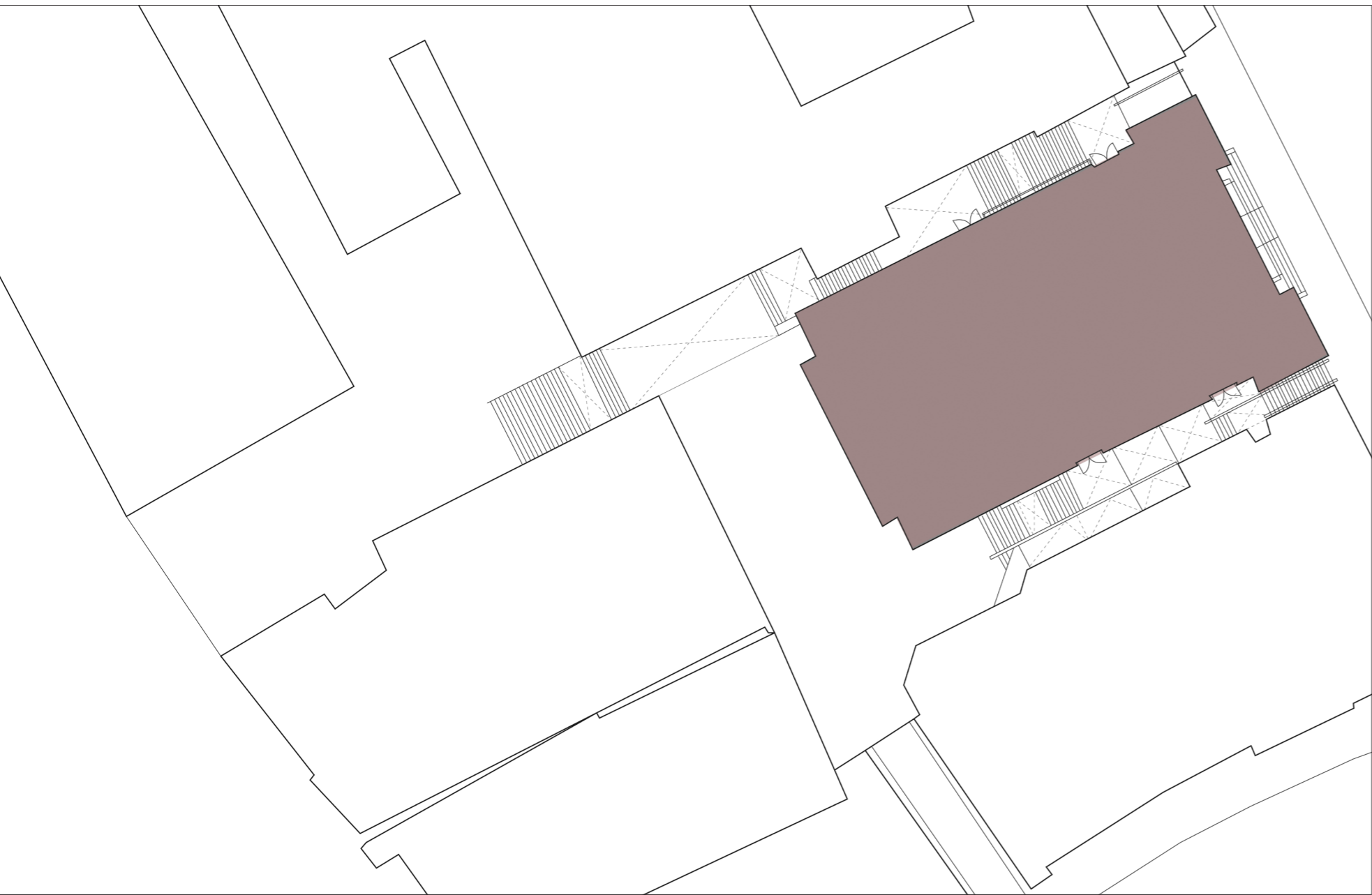
Surroundings



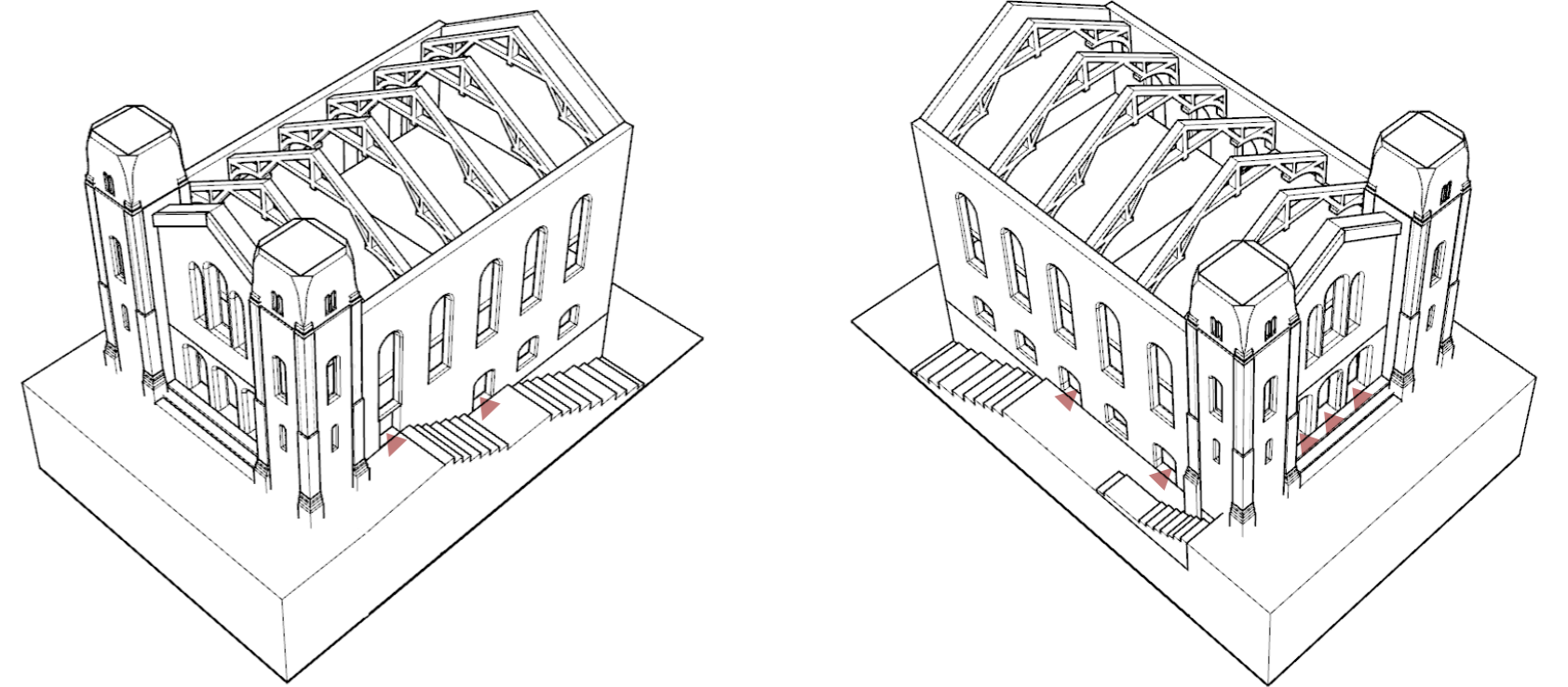
Connections



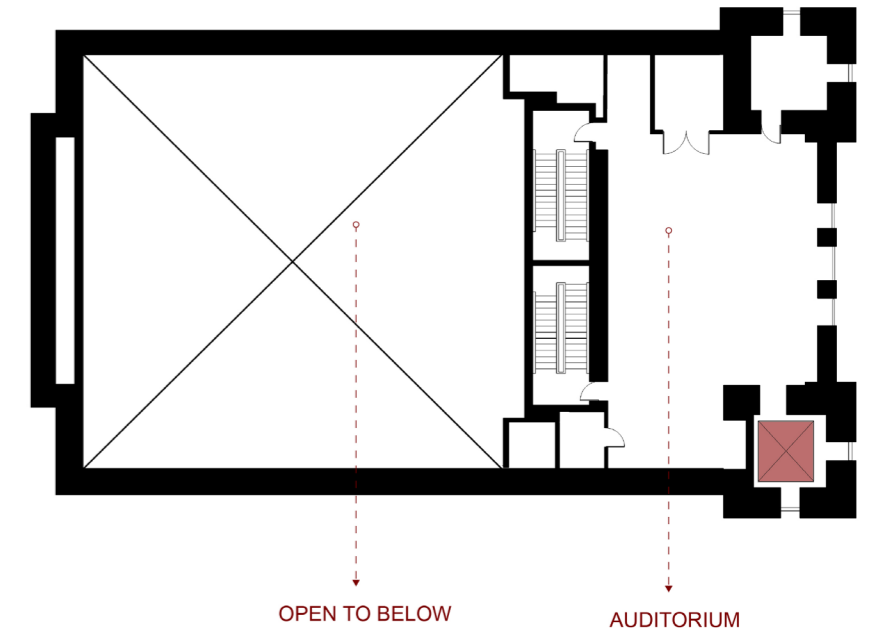
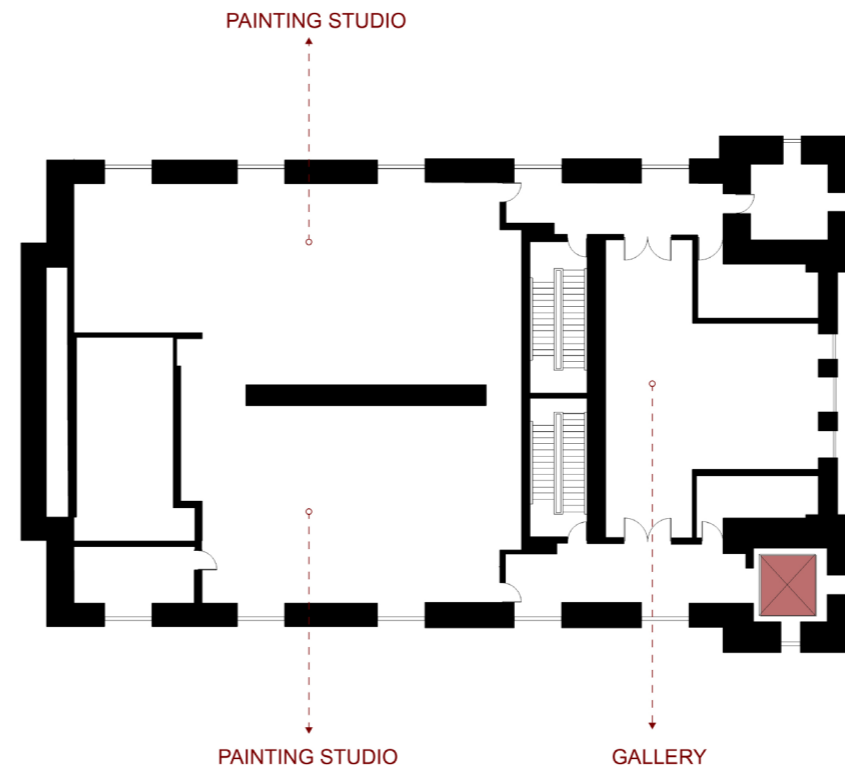
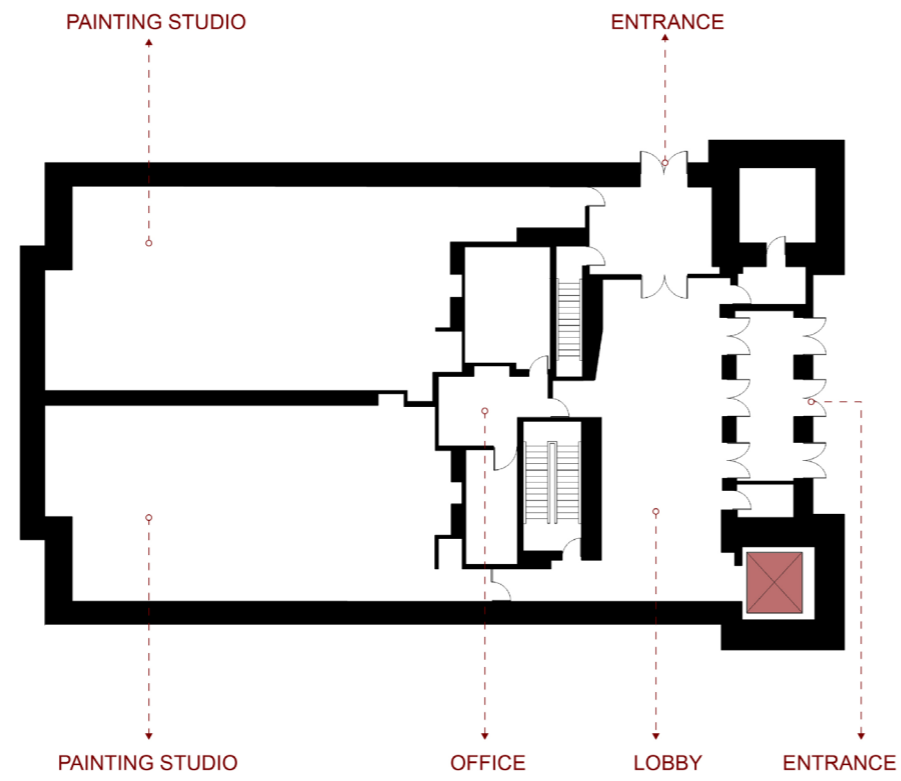
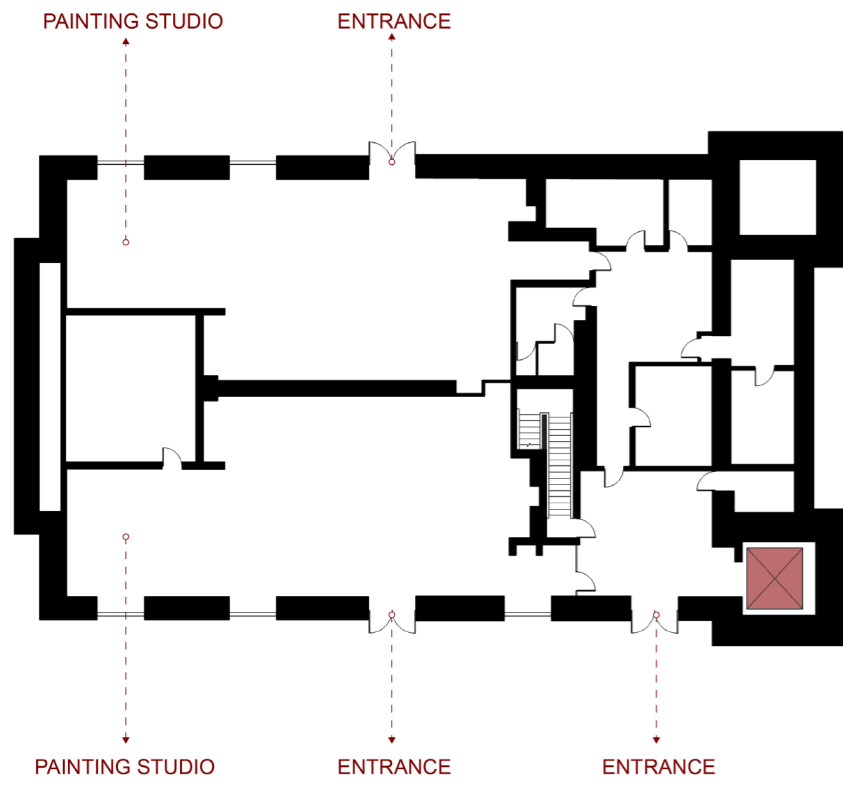
Site Plan



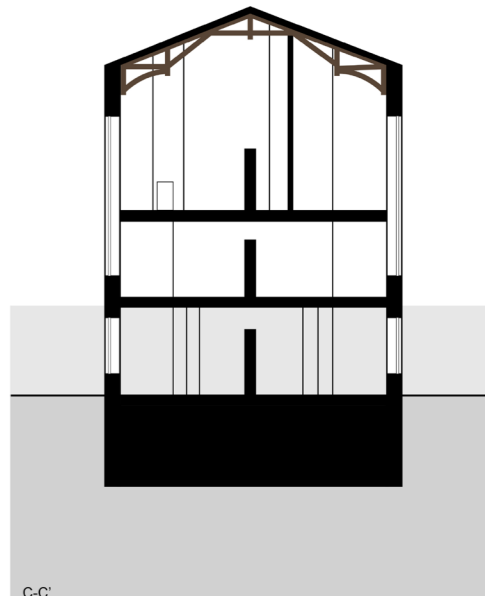
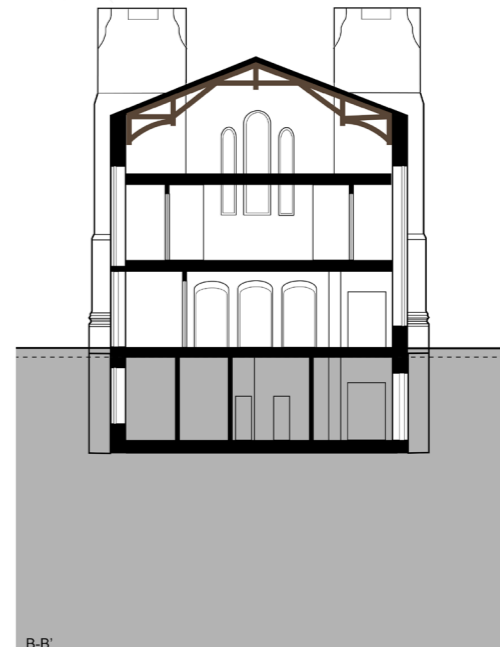
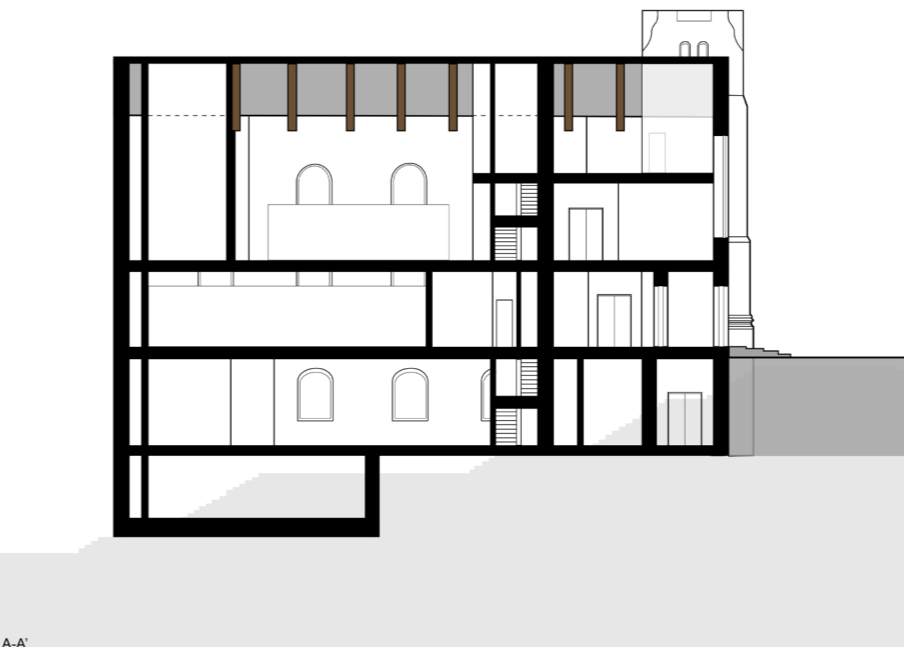
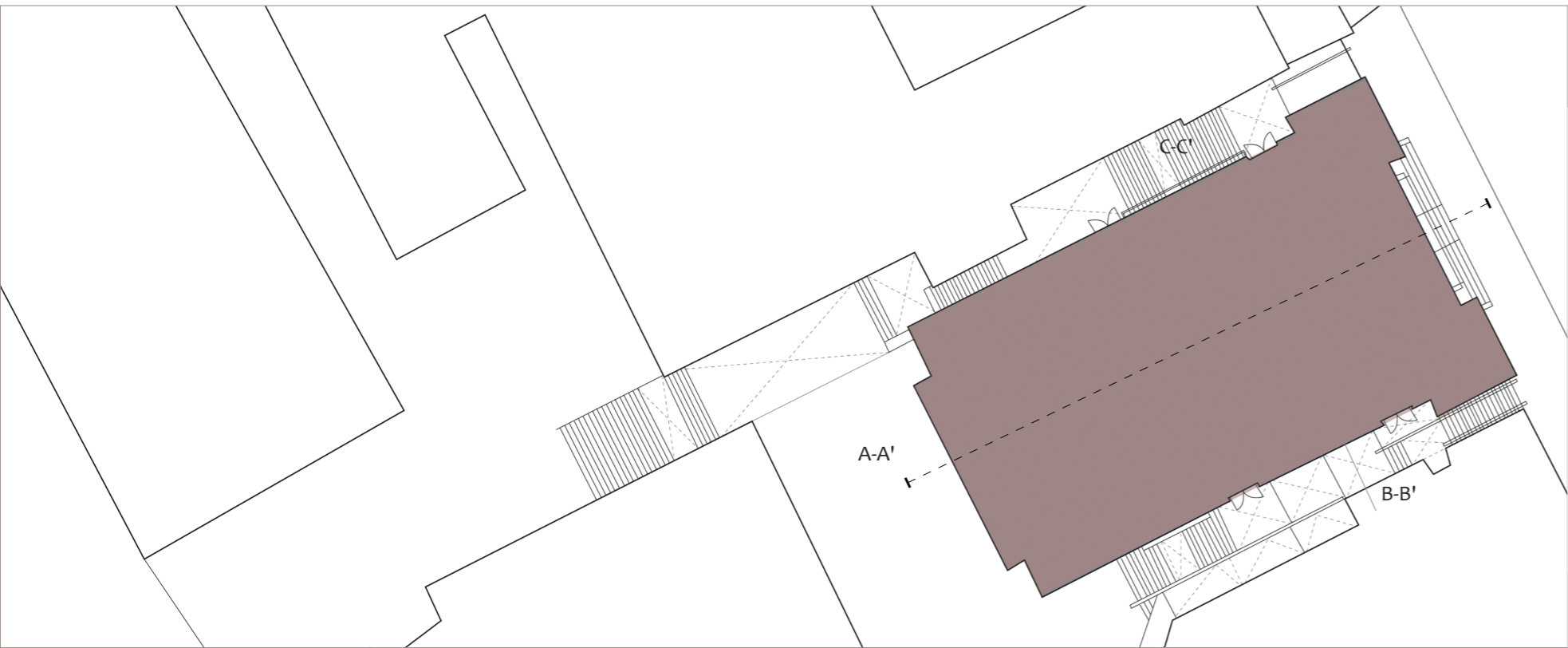
Access



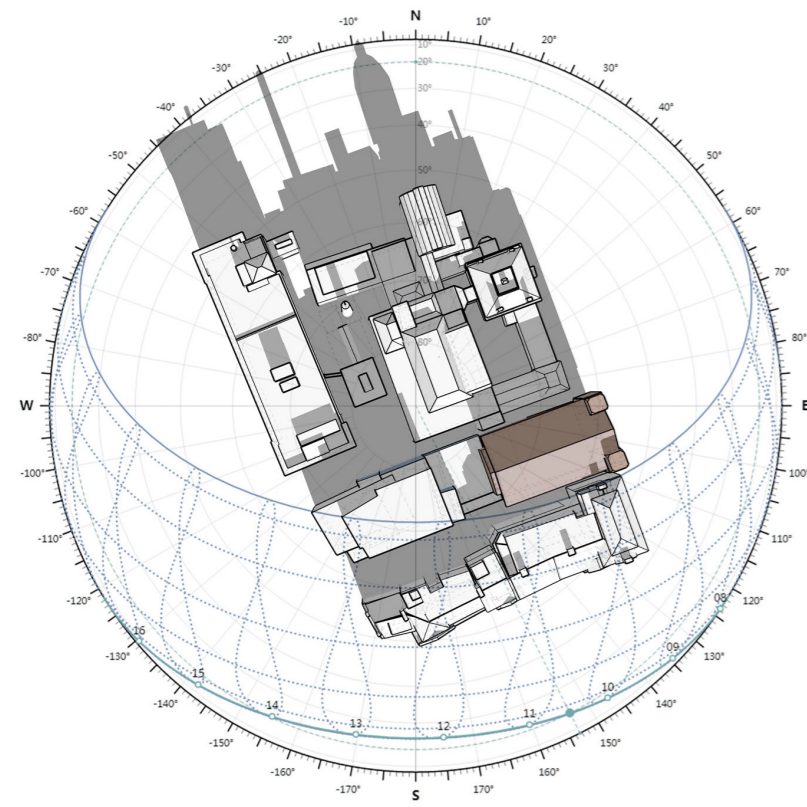
Plans



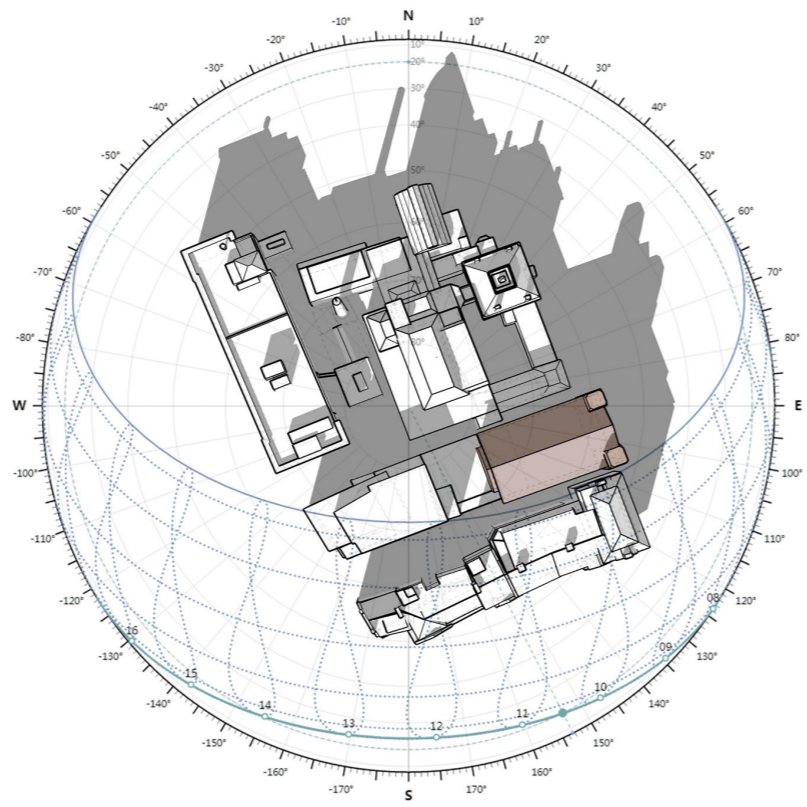
Sections



Sun Path
December

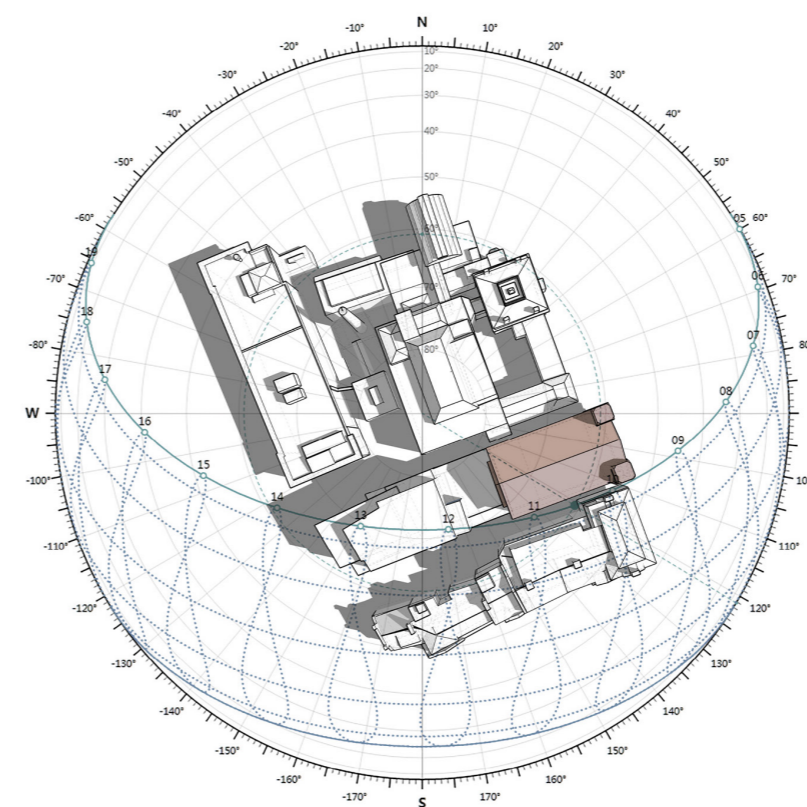


Morning

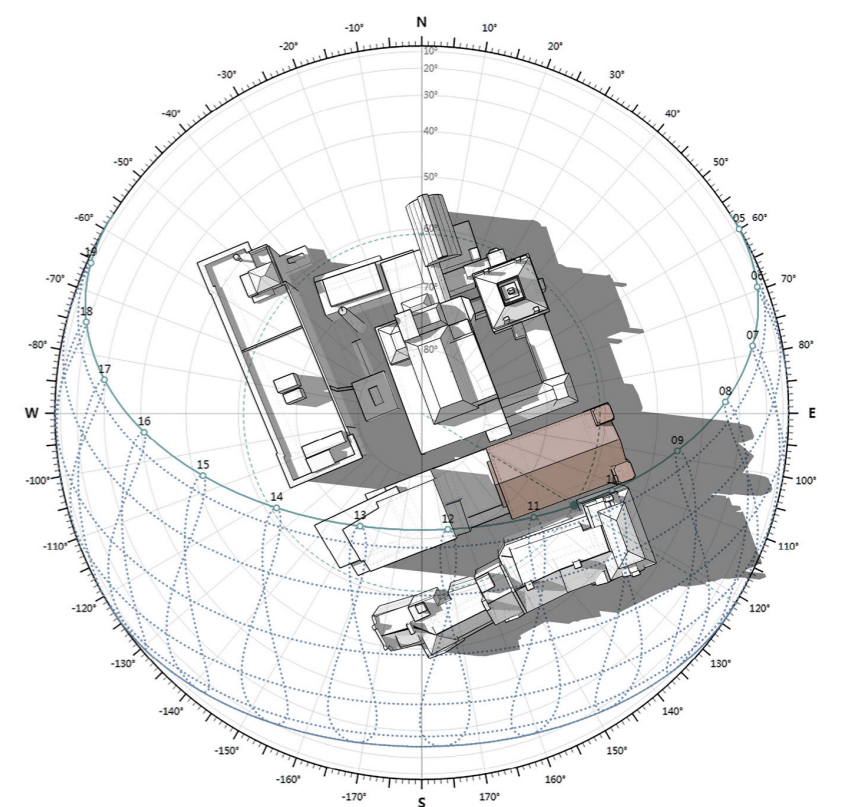


Evening

June



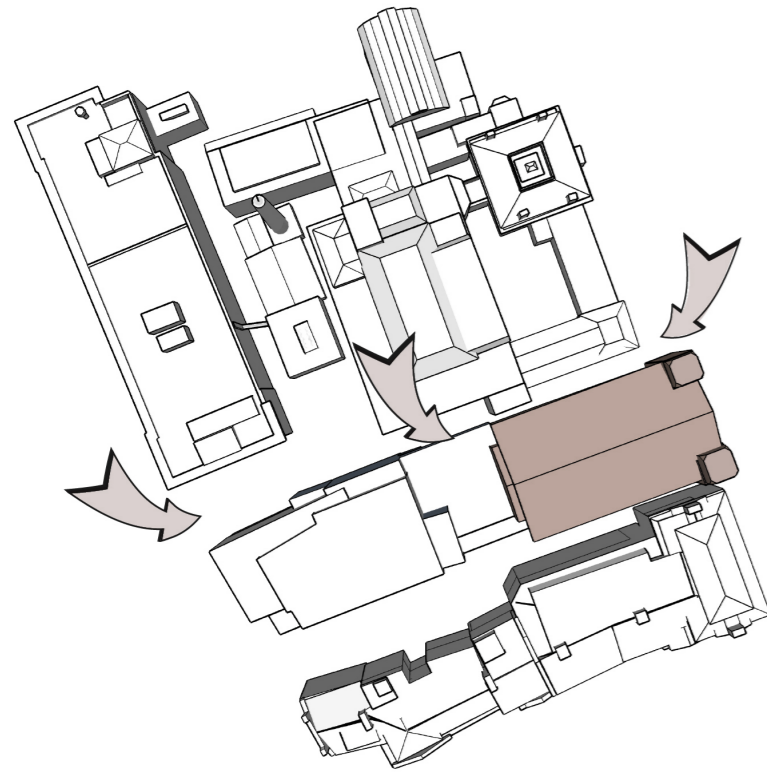
Morning



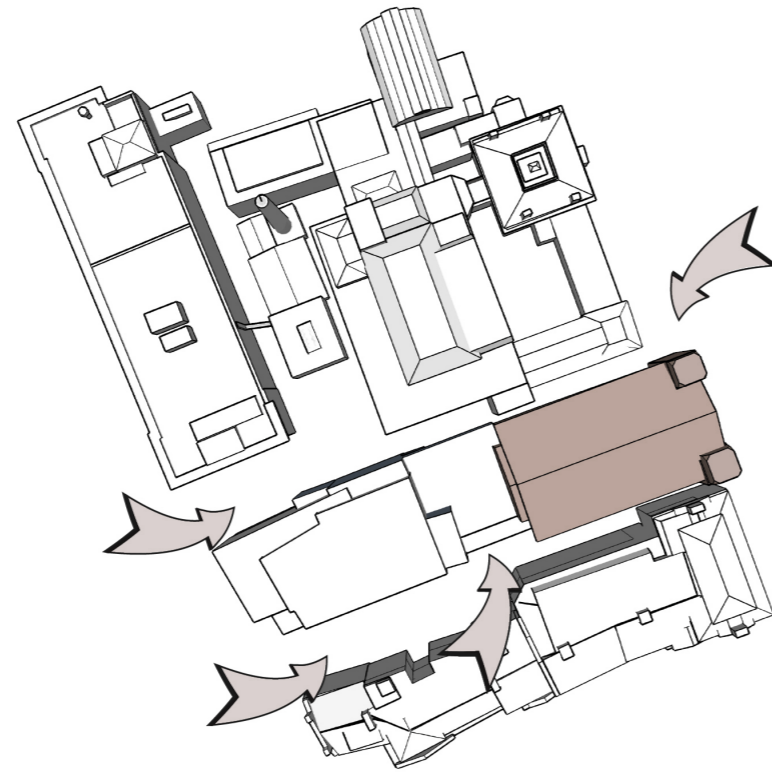
Evening

Wind

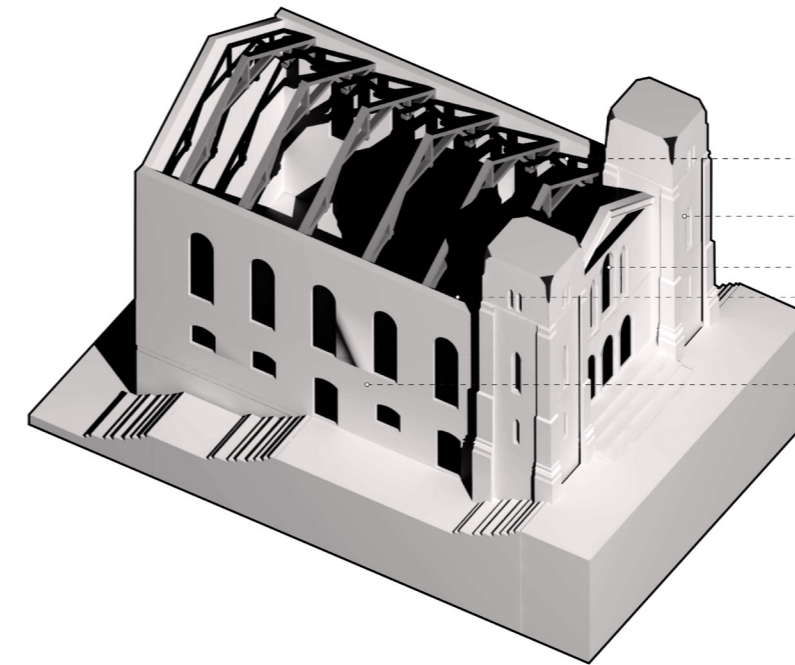
Winter Direction



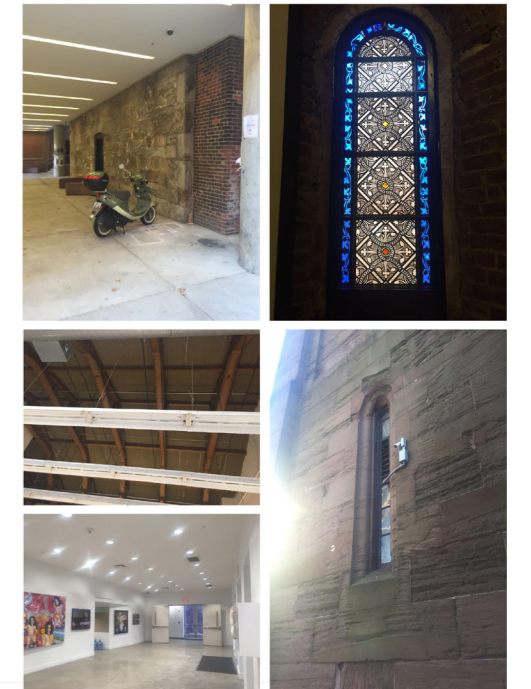
Sumeer Direction



Characters



- WOOD
- STONE
- GLAZING GLASS
- MARBLE&WHITE WALL
- RED BRICK



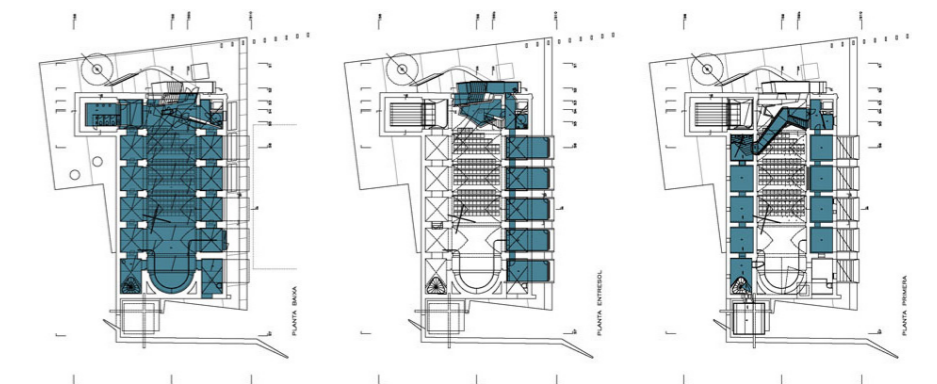
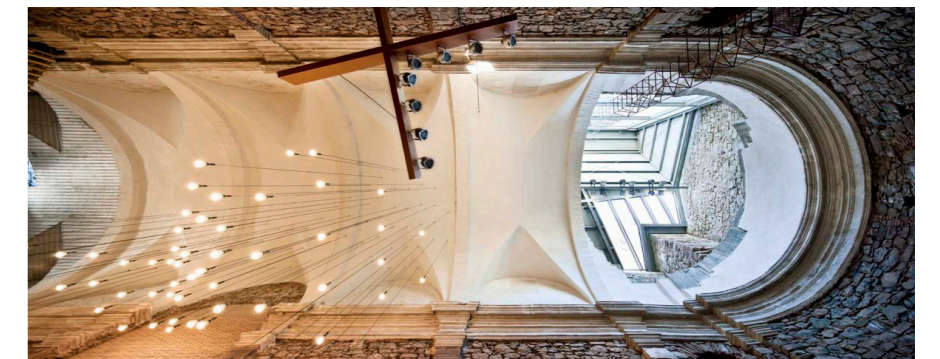
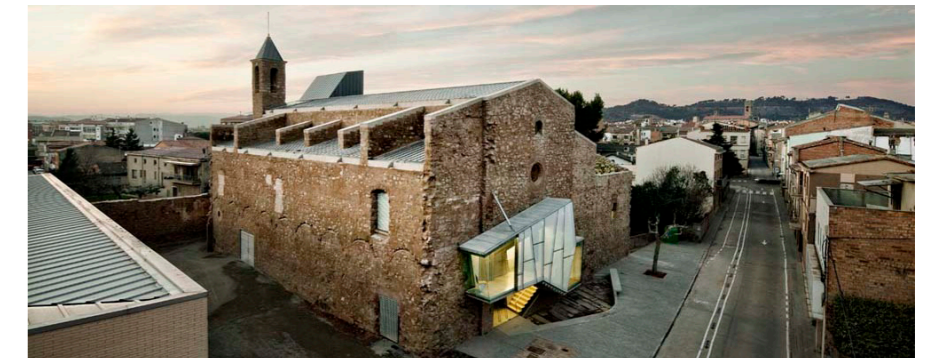
Chapter 03

Convent de Sant Francesc

The purpose of the intervention was to maintain the size, unity and spatial quality of the nave of the church and former natural light.

The renovation uses contemporary construction systems and languages to make a difference from the original elements of this historical church in order to preserve all aspects of the building's past, the intervention has not hidden traces, wounds or scars, visible depressions, holes and preserve the building's historic legacy by adding new values.

Some new volumes for programs are needed in this building. To preserve the sense of space and unity inside the church, the volumes are put outside the building to maintain the vision of unified space.



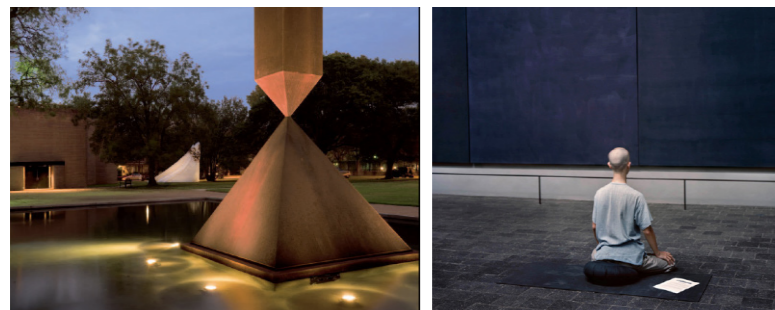
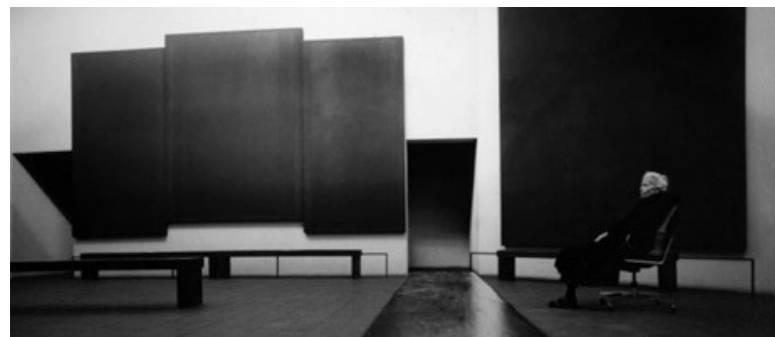
Rothko Chapel



This chapel was designed to create a series of transcendental and meditative forms of art in a non-denominational place of worship.

The purpose of the chapel is to bring the people to a spiritual experience through transcendence of subject matter, also give a chance for people to be closer to consciousness state. It allows the people to approach the limits of experience and awakens one to the awareness of our existence.

There are fourteen large dark paintings. The impenetrable surfaces represents contemplation and the void needed to be found where people can explore a greater meaning to the questions they want to see them through.

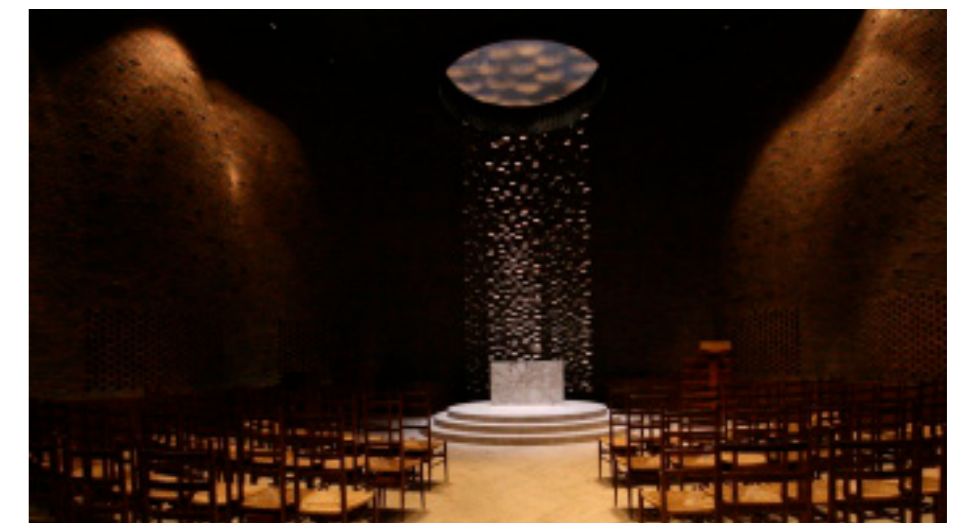


MIT Chapel

The Chapel is a simple cylindrical volume that has a complex and mystical quality inside to awaken spirituality for the people who want to pursue a spiritual experience.

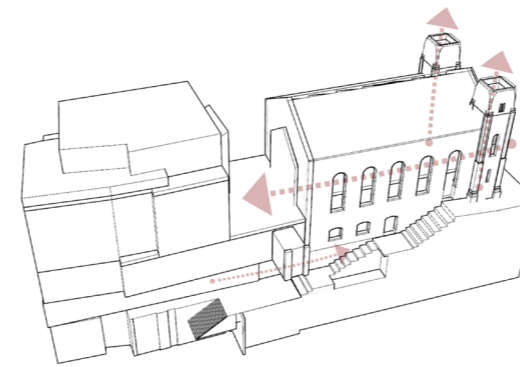
The internal atmosphere and qualities are enhanced by the outside natural light. There is a metal sculpture hanging from the skylight. It can reflect and bring the light into the interior of the chapel. The sculpture can be regarded as a cascading waterfall of light. It can enhance the experience, make changes and redefine the interior of the chapel.

The purpose of the chapel is to transform the spiritual space into a religious architectural experience which can not be fully predicted.

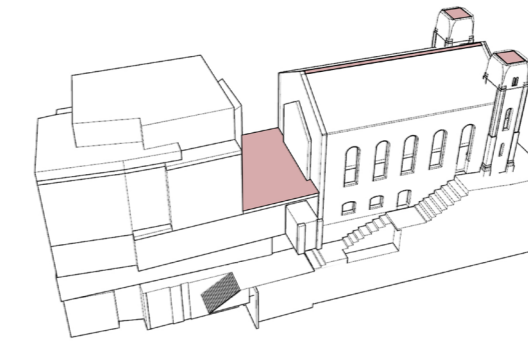


Chapter 04

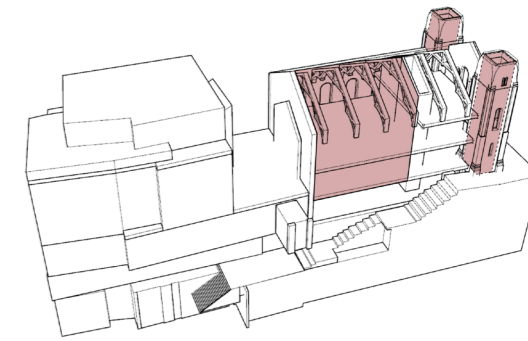
Intervention Strategies Overview



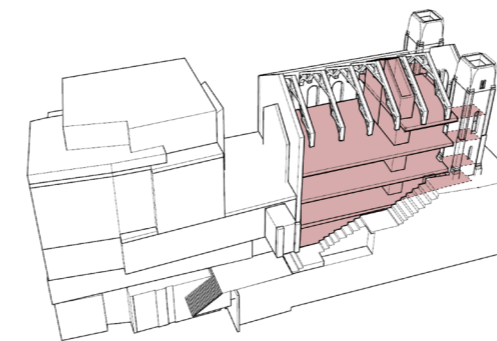
Extention
Mantain the unity and nave.



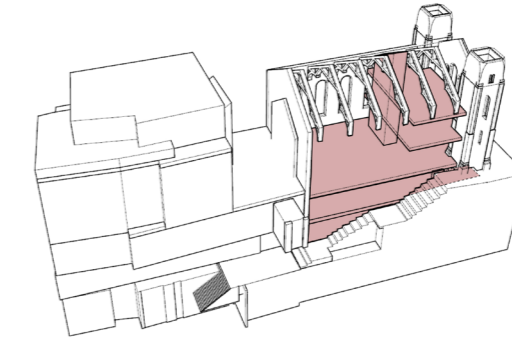
Connect to nature



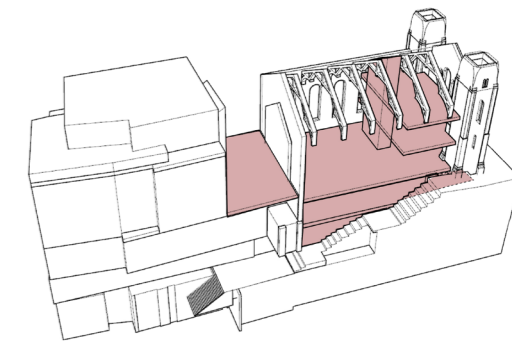
Reveal the existing frabric.
Maintain the dimension of the nave.



Exisiting slabs



After renovation



Total area will be used

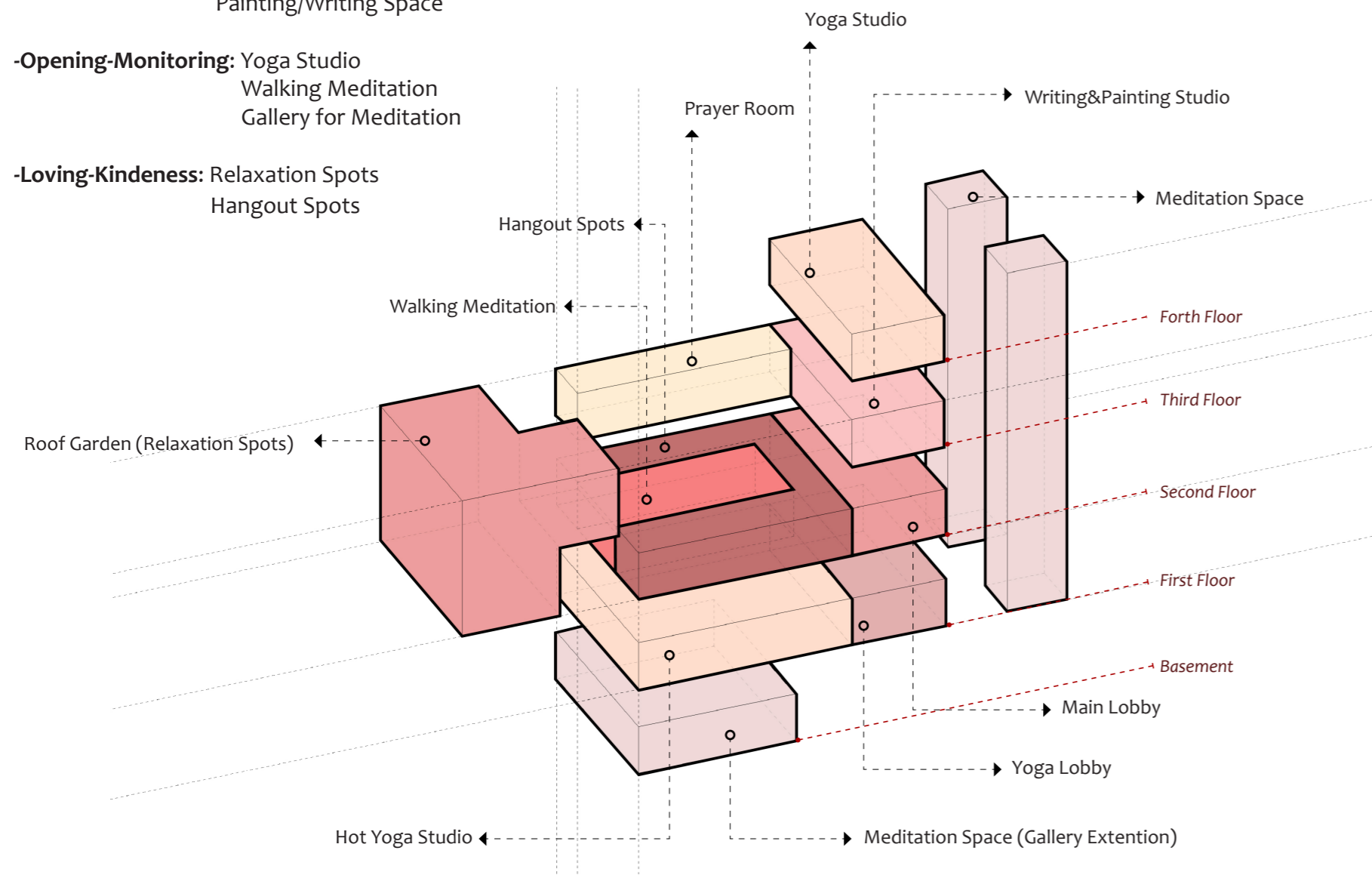
Program Stacking

Programs Stacking

-Focused Attention: Meditation Space
Prayer Room (Multi-faith)
Painting/Writing Space

-Opening-Monitoring: Yoga Studio
Walking Meditation
Gallery for Meditation

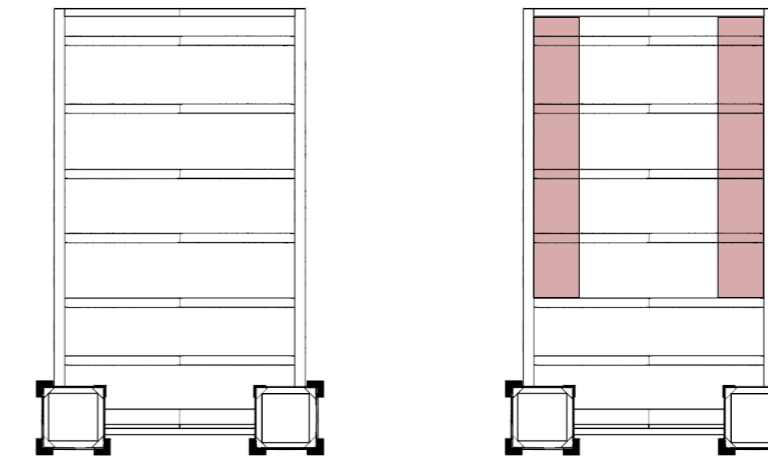
-Loving-Kindness: Relaxation Spots
Hangout Spots



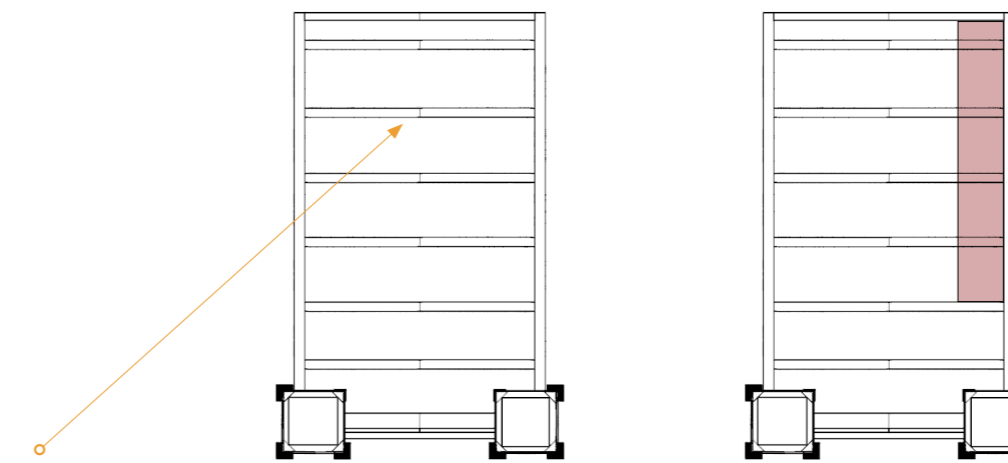
Design Strategies

Palimpsest

-Reveal the atmosphere of church liturgical space along the wall to mimic the cloisters and meet new function (prayer room & hangout spots).

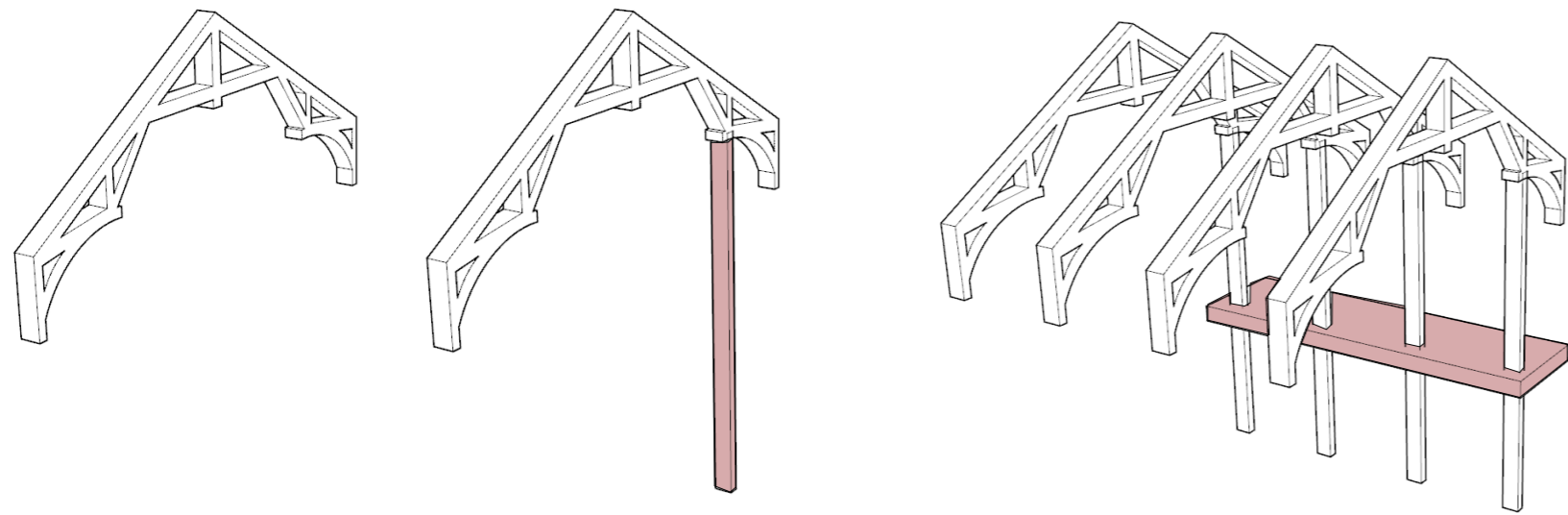


-Only use one side in order to maintain the important inputs of natural light.

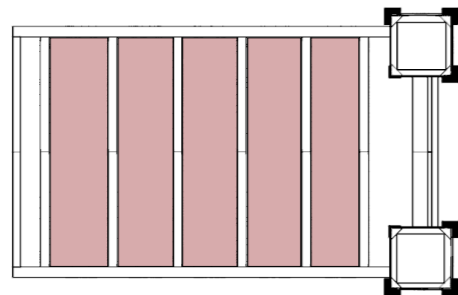


Palimpsest

-Extend existing timber trusses to be the columns for new intervention (floating prayer rooms).

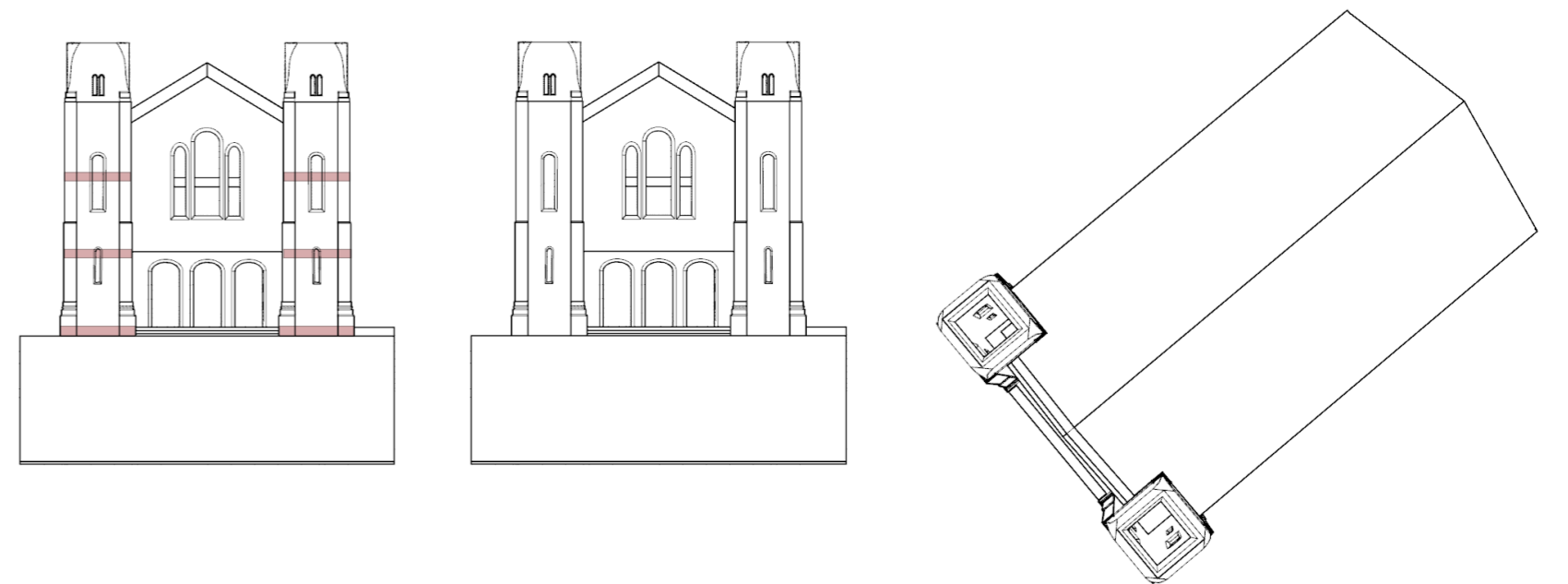


-Timber trusses effectively divided the interior into several sections. The rhythm of the existing counterpoints the new installation and function areas.

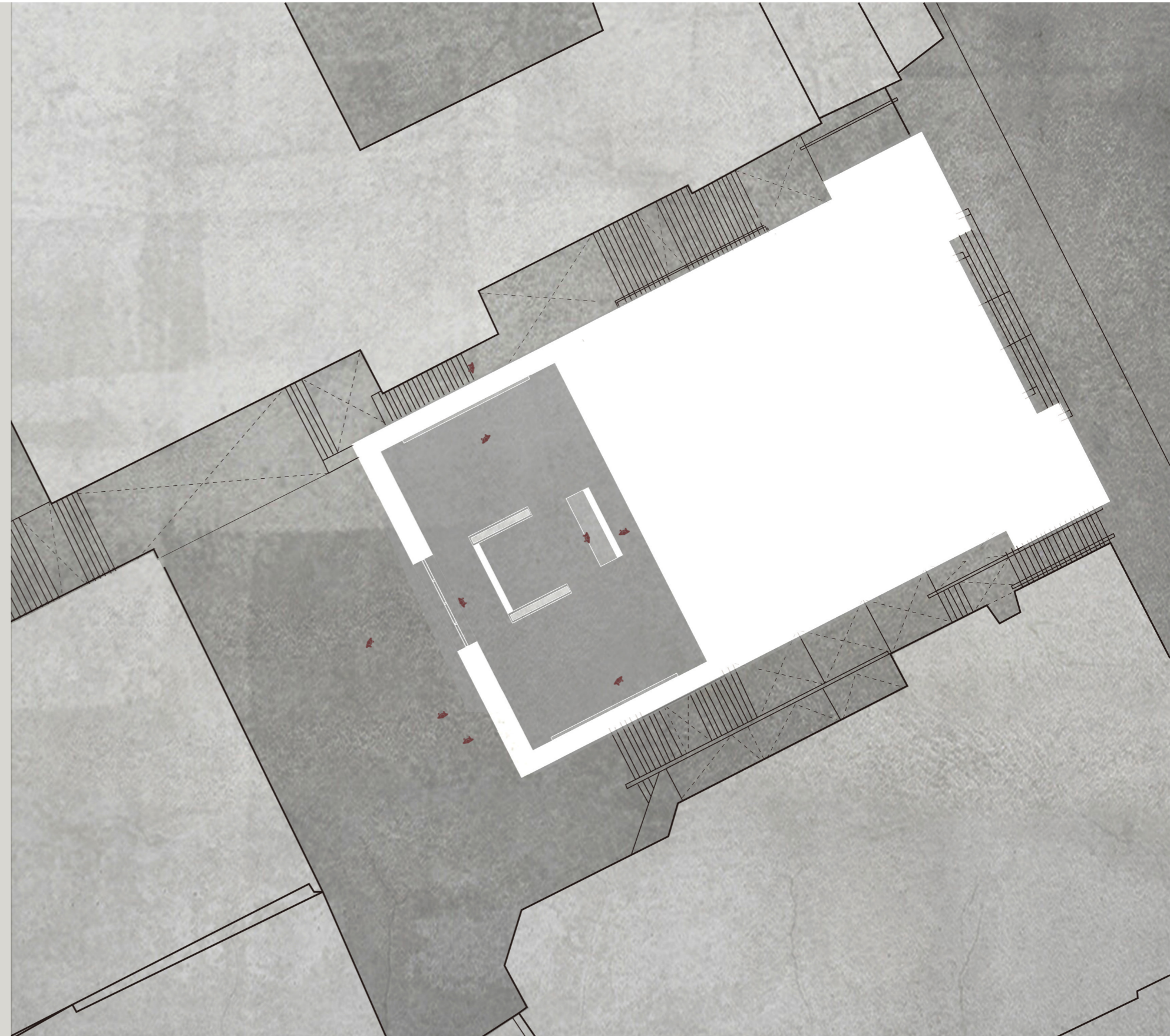


Palimpsest

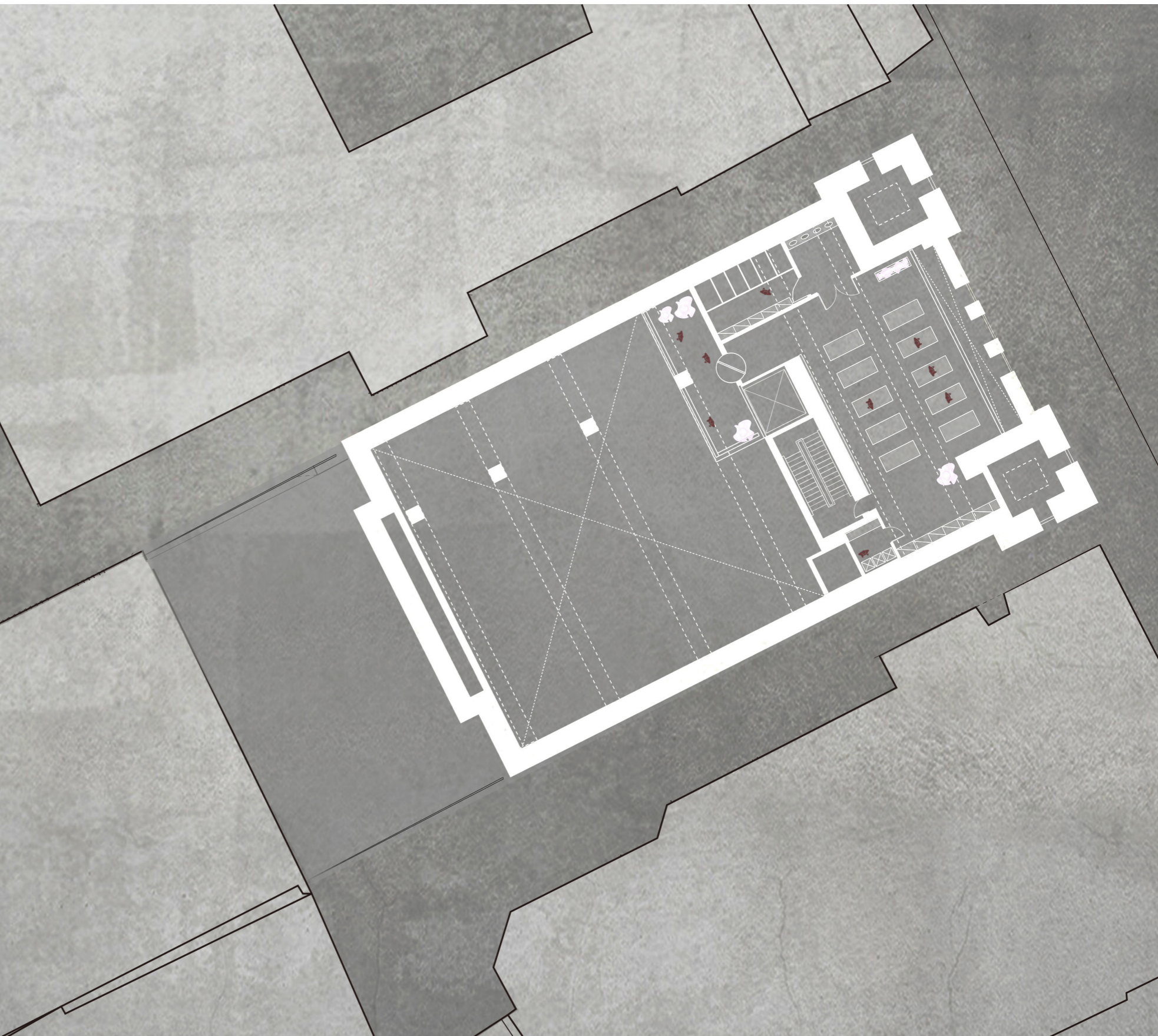
-Get rid of the slabs in the two spires to reveal existing fabric and the height of space.



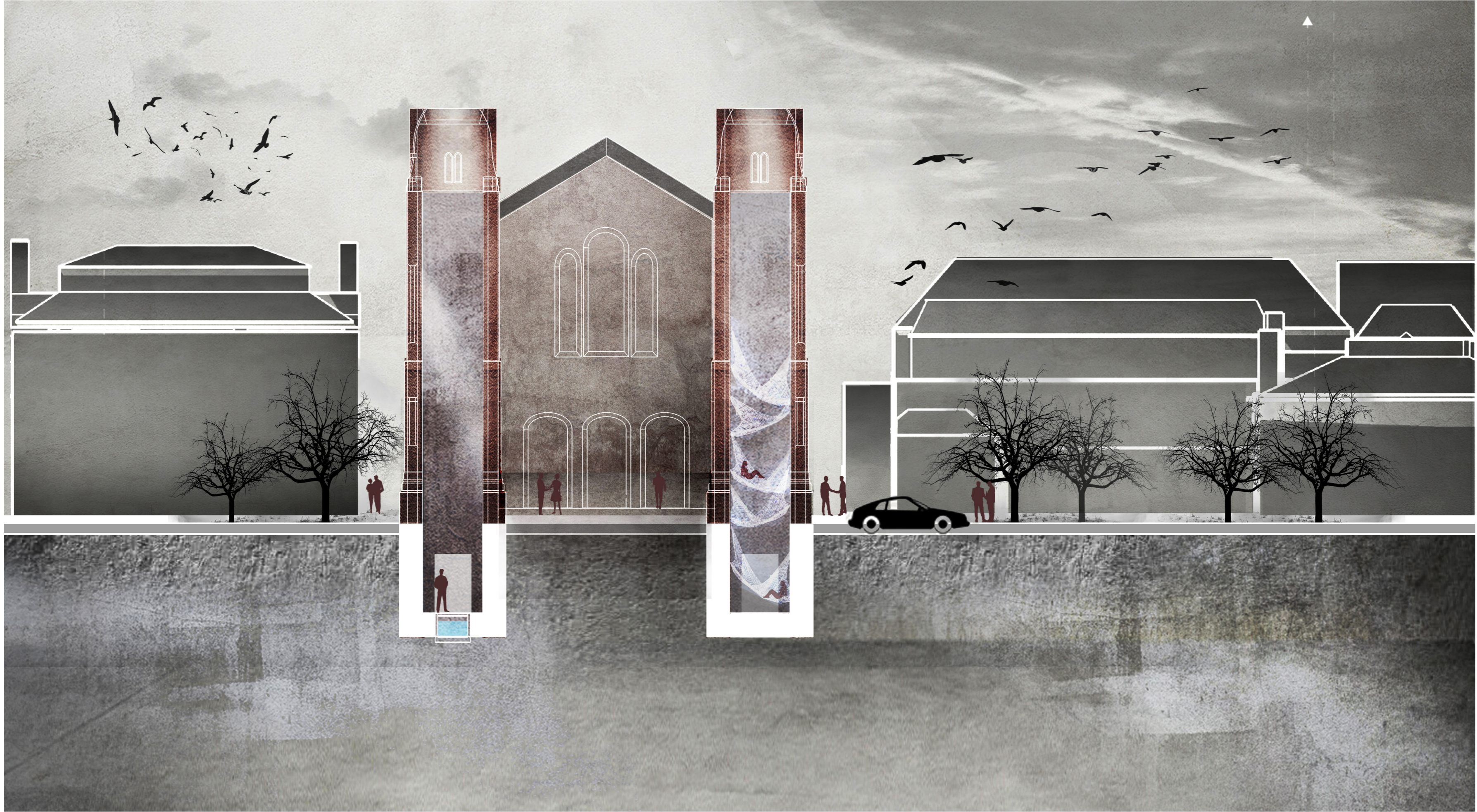
Chapter 05













RISD Contemplative Atrium







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I find the concept of aura useful in my research on developing the quality of space. It helps me to understand how to make programs fit in an existing architecture.

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