

An architectural rendering of a modern building courtyard. The scene is viewed from a low angle, looking towards a multi-story building with large glass windows. Two tall, mature pine trees stand prominently in the center. In the foreground, a person is seen from the back, looking towards the courtyard. The ground is paved with dark stone, and there are patches of greenery, including ferns and a small waterfall feature. The lighting is soft, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

**SLOWNESS IN THE FRAY**  
ARCHITECTURE THAT ORIENTS TO NATURE

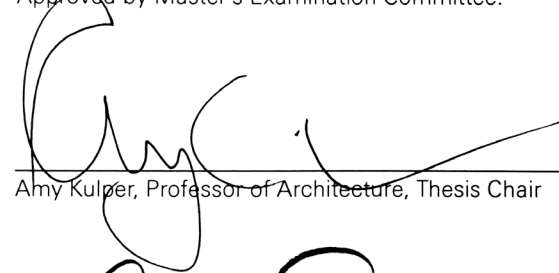
colin christensen

**SLOWNESS IN THE FRAY**  
ARCHITECTURE THAT ORIENTS TO NATURE

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Architecture in the Department of Architecture of the Rhode  
Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island.

By Colin Christensen  
2019

Approved by Master's Examination Committee:



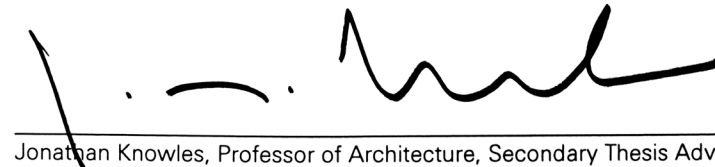
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Amy Kulper, Professor of Architecture, Thesis Chair



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Anne Tate, Professor of Architecture, Thesis Advisor



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Jonathan Knowles, Professor of Architecture, Secondary Thesis Advisor

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## PREFACE

My disposition stems from the combination of faith in Jesus Christ, an upbringing in the Pacific Northwest, and a lineage of farmers/do-it-yourselfers.

My faith has instilled in me that the natural world is Good, humility is essential, and meditation is necessary. Because of these core beliefs I slowly and quietly gather information before forming opinions or make decisions. I want these beliefs to manifest in my architectural approach through sustainable practices and design that is focused on inhabitability and functionality over form.

Being born in the Pacific Northwest, I have been deeply influenced by a culture that embraces quality over quantity through a celebration of craftsmanship and anything local. Elevating the culture of the handmade occurs in boutique clothing, craft beer, farmers markets, artists and furniture makers. I want to embrace this regionalism and devotion to craft in order to design site specific buildings that are influenced by local construction techniques and culture yet are modern and unique. The Northwest also sparked my affinity for wood and the landscape it comes from. With a desire to start my career in the Northwest, I also want to explore the possibilities of wood.

As a descendent of farmers and do-it-yourselfers, I have inherited the knowledge and skill of working with my hands. This passage of tacit knowledge is the foundation of my craftsmanship and has motivated a curiosity in the physicality of the environment around me. I am drawn to the subtle movement of natural light, the feel of different material textures, the effect of gravity on objects, and the volume and type of sounds that enter a space. I believe that it is these smaller details that create the mood or atmosphere of a space. Therefore, I want my design process to start with the study of visible structural loads, material textures, and movement of natural light so that these physical phenomena become the focus and then influence the overall building.

The following is a list of artists and architects that inspire me, and I believe produce work in-line with my interests and values.

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Andy Goldsworthy</b> | His connection to nature, obsession with temporality of materials, and his use of irregular materials to produce geometric shapes.                                  |
| <b>Kengo Kuma</b>       | His desire to be humble and create humble works, and his use of wood, and wood aggregations.  |
| <b>James Turrell</b>    | His immersive works, and the slow pace at which his work is experienced.  |
| <b>Peter Zumthor</b>    | The importance he places on materials, his use of local materials, an underlying theme of calmness in his work, and his desire to create experiential architecture. |
| <b>Steven Holl</b>      | His sensibility for light and appreciation of for materials.  |

## ABSTRACT

We currently live in a digital age that is marked by the rise of virtual reality and instant access to information and entertainment through smartphones. These technological developments are not inherently bad, but they have reduced our attention span and ability to focus on the world around us. This phenomenon is best stated by social scientist Herbert Simon, "In an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention..."<sup>1</sup> Thus, a new trend of digital detoxing has developed as a way to moderate technology use and focus on interactions with the physical world. A digital detox simply consists of refraining from the use of digital technology for an extend period of time. Most digitally detoxing is done on vacation, a retreat or in a natural setting away from the city because the general busyness and noise of the urban environment adds to the onslaught of digital media and advertisement. Spending time in nature is also proven to have numerous health affects like: lowering blood pressure, reducing mental fatigue, and improving a persons general mood. However, not everyone has the time or ability to retreat to nature, so this thesis investigates how architecture can slow us down by orienting us to nature in the middle of a city.

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<sup>1</sup> Simon, H.A. Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World in: Martin Greenberger, Computers, Communication, and the Public Interest. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971. pp 40-41

The thesis is tested on a site in Downtown Portland, Oregon, and must accommodate the busyness of existing food trucks while also creating public space for retreat. This is accomplished by utilizing the food trucks as a buffer between the existing three lane street and a new pedestrian street. The architecture then further slows people down by creating a threshold between the busyness of the city and the quiet calm of a courtyard that is full of northwest native evergreens and ferns. As visitors move up through the building they are elevated out of the street scape and into the tree canopy. A move further enhanced by constantly orienting visitors to the courtyard through the use of wood screens that distort and obscure the surrounding context, while framing and revealing views of the courtyard. Along with orienting visitors to the courtyard, each space within the building is designed to draw attention to the subtle shifting of natural light. CLT and Glulam wood construction is also used as the primary material because it is sustainable, native to the northwest, directly links back to nature and is proven to reduce stress levels.

## UNDERSTANDING SLOWNESS IN ARCHITECTURE

Slowness as a state of being is not easily defined because it derived from many definitions. I define slowness as the practice of being mindfully aware of ones surroundings and ones own mental, physical and emotional state. However, slowness is also the act of moving at a slow pace or accelerating at a slow rate of change. When discussing slowness in the physical sense, it becomes a relative term that must be determined in context. Carl Honore describes this well in his book, *In Praise of Slowness*. "The Slow philosophy is not about doing everything at a snail's pace. It's about seeking to do everything at the right speed." This thesis attempts to find slowness in the context of an urban environment and a digital age because both are realities for the majority of the human population.

*"Slow Space is a place you enjoy spending time in, where you feel relaxed, comfortable, calm and happy. Imagine it may be your bedroom, your church, a cozy cafe, or the New York Public Library. Slow Space is deliberate, meaningful space that has been designed and crafted for you and your experience. It calls out to all of your senses and leaves a lasting impression in your mind by way of your nose, skin, eyes and ears. It is not a place you pass through or an object building to look at, but a place to inhabit, linger and experience. It is the antidote to our busy, harried lives."*<sup>1</sup>

Using this definition of Slow Space by Aamodt and Plumb and my own definition of slowness, I studied architectural precedents that I felt allowed for slowness. I then produced drawings and models of key ideas. Through this process, I found that capturing moments of nature and obscuring the busyness of urban environments was a common thread among the projects.

<sup>1</sup> Slow Space Movement – Aamodt / Plumb  
<https://aamodtplumb.com/slow-space/>

## PORTLAND JAPANESE GARDEN: KENGO KUMA



Jeremy Bittermann. Portland Japanese Garden. 2018. Arch Daily.

SWISS SOUND BOX PAVILION: PETER ZUMTHOR

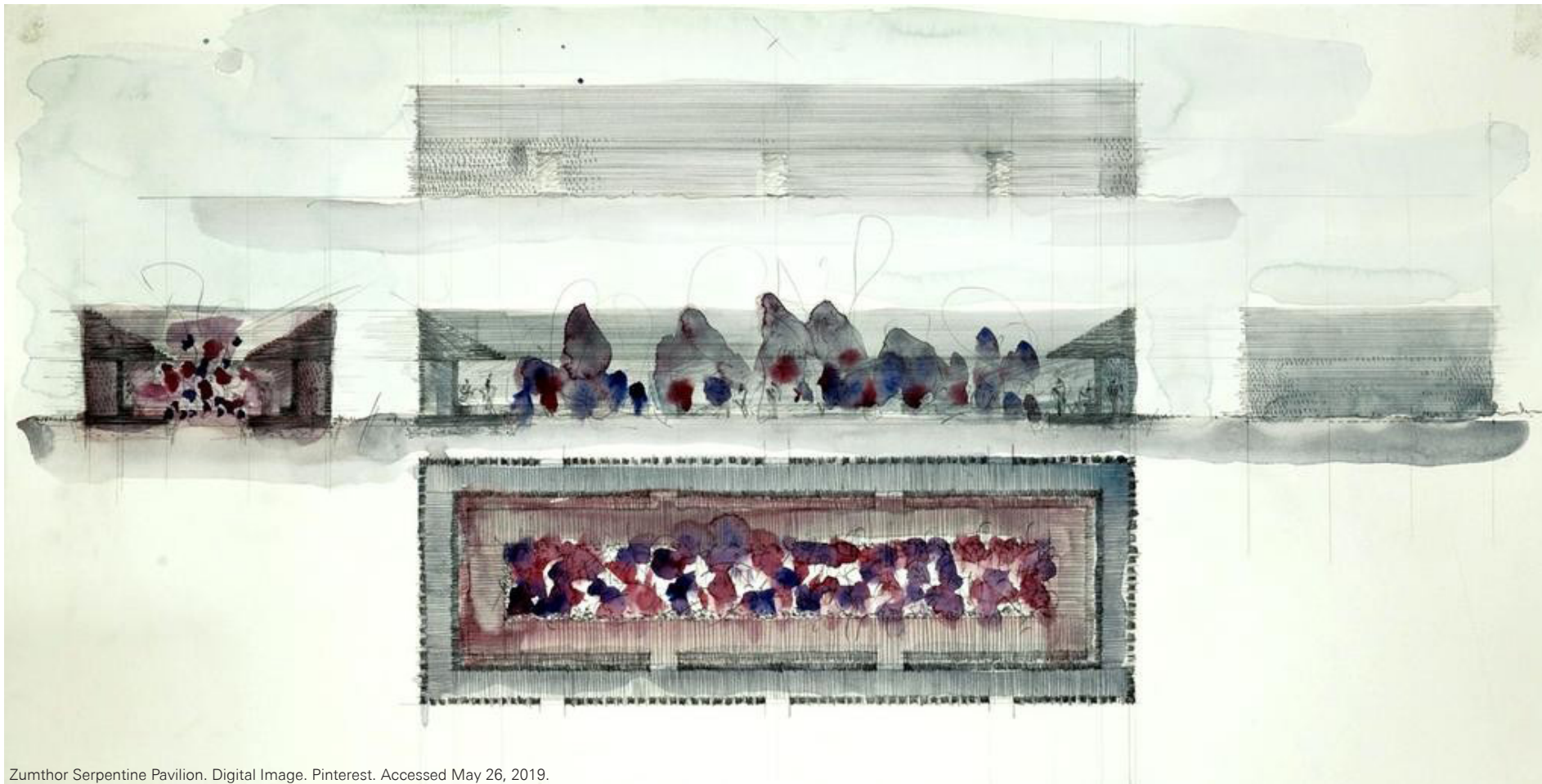


Both Images: Swiss Sound Box. Digital Image. Pinterest. Accessed May 26, 2019.

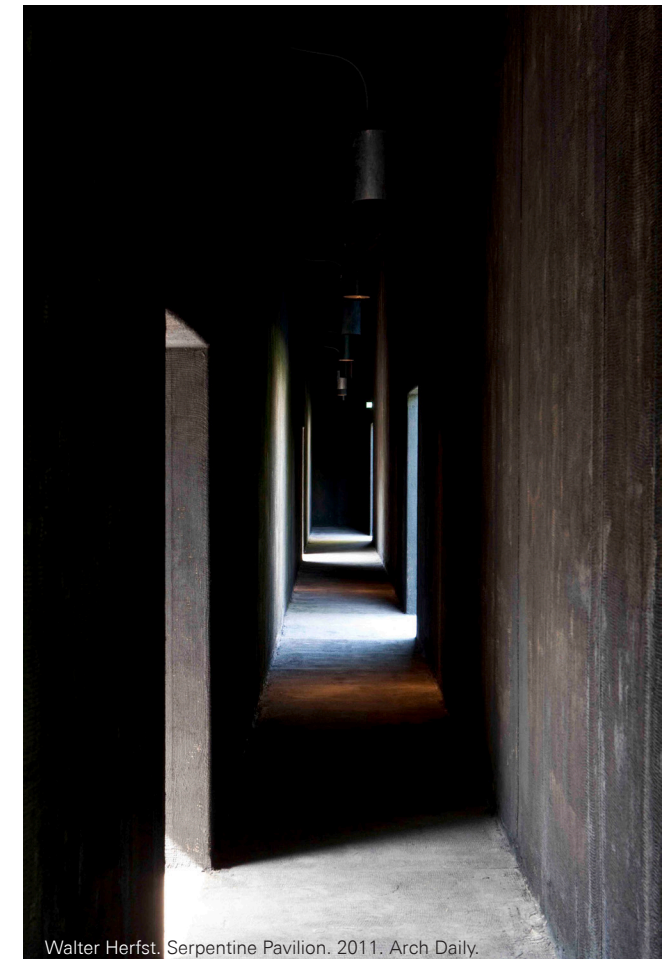
SERPENTINE PAVILION: PETER ZUMTHOR



Walter Herfst, Serpentine Pavilion, 2011, Arch Daily

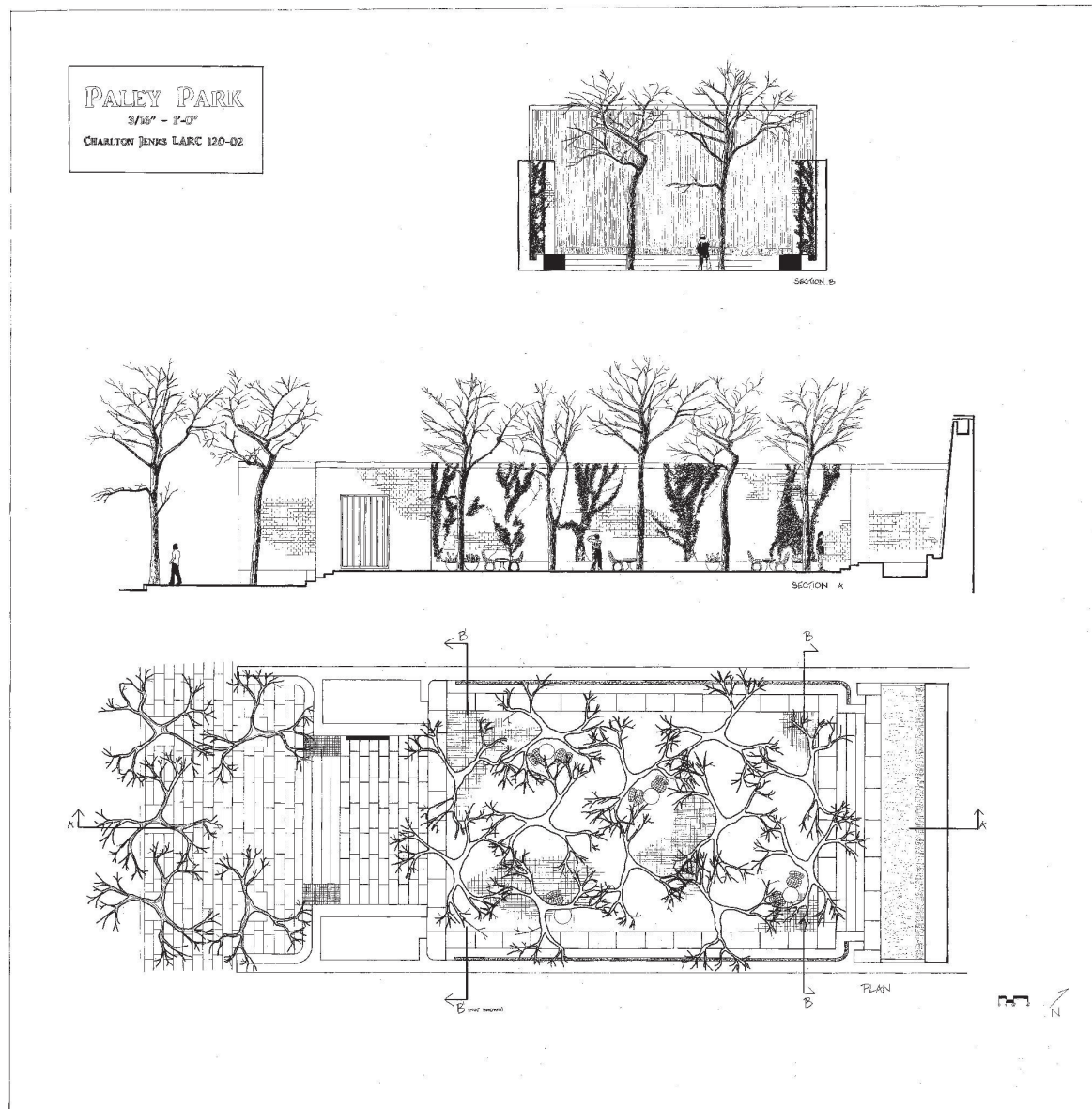


Zumthor Serpentine Pavilion. Digital Image. Pinterest. Accessed May 26, 2019.



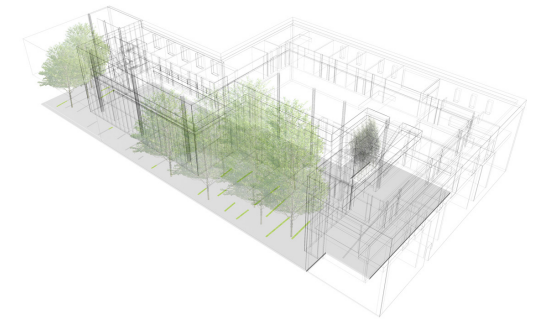
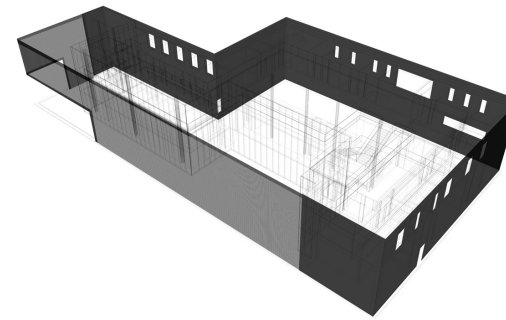
Walter Herfst, Serpentine Pavilion, 2011, Arch Daily.

# PALEY PARK: ROBERT ZION



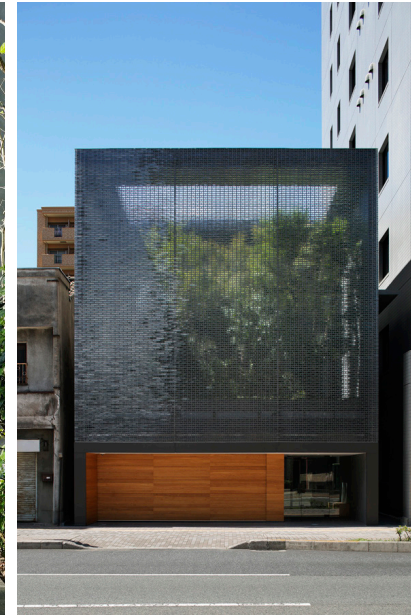
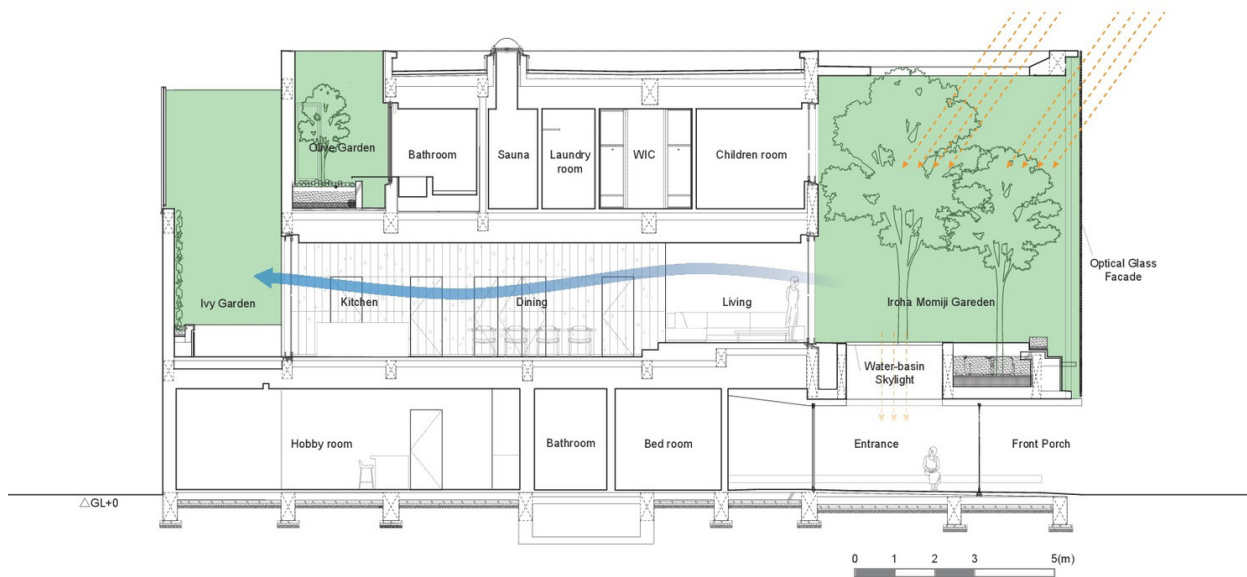
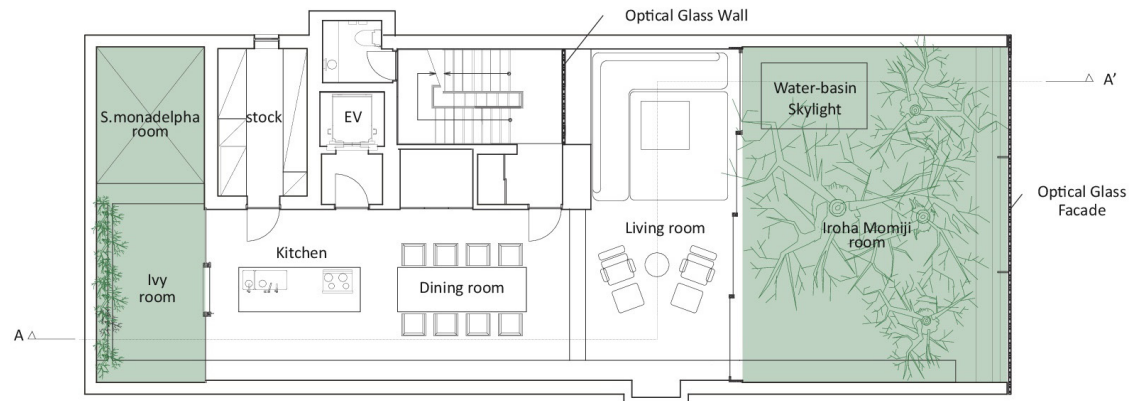
Aleksandr Zykov. Paley Park, New York. November 2, 2012 Flickr

POETRY FOUNDATION: JOHN RONAN ARCHITECTS

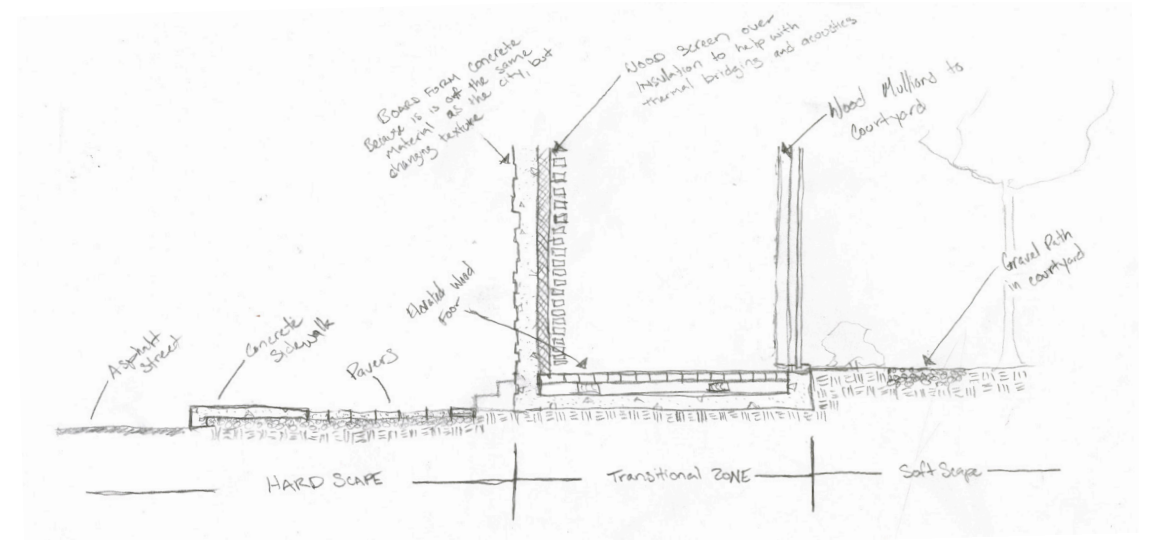
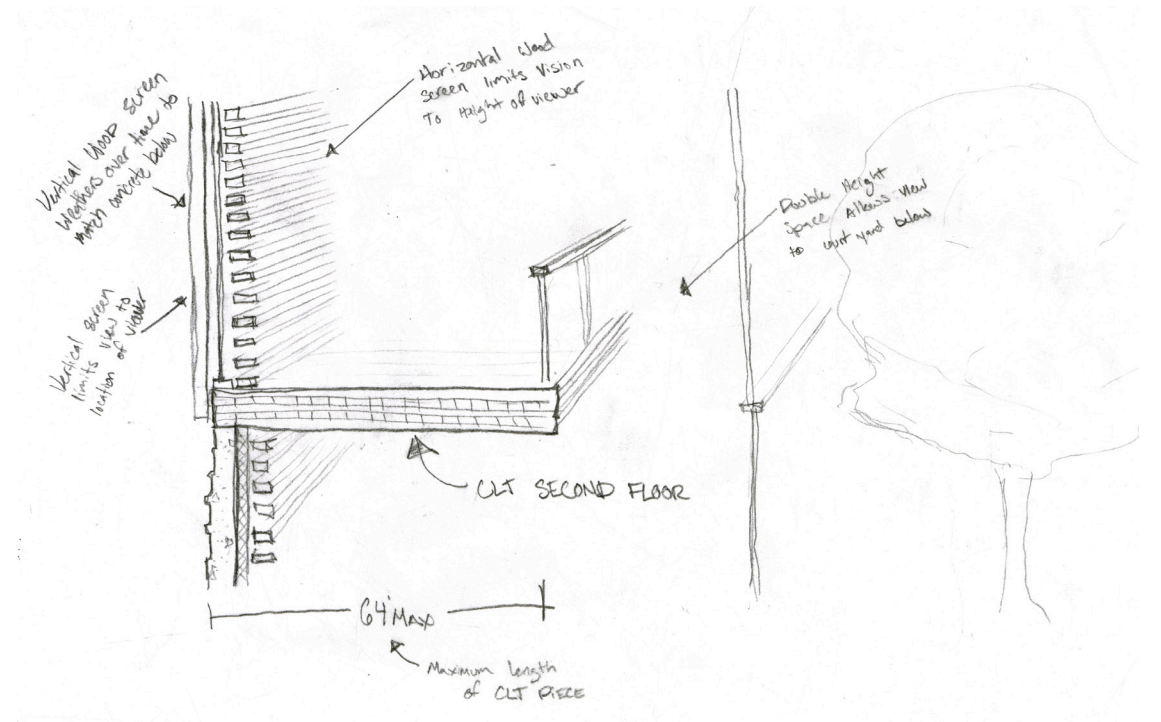
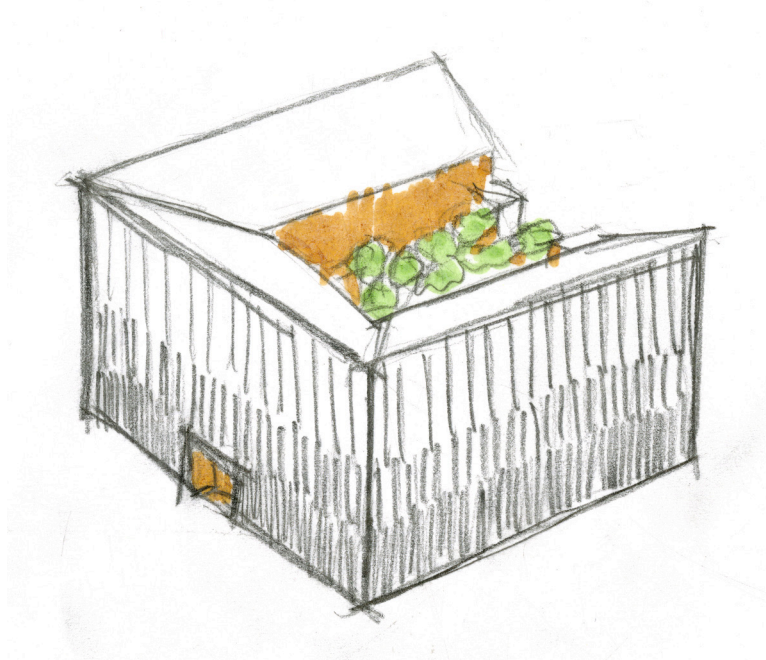


All Photos: Hedrich Blessing Photographers. Poetry Foundation. 2011. Arch Daily.

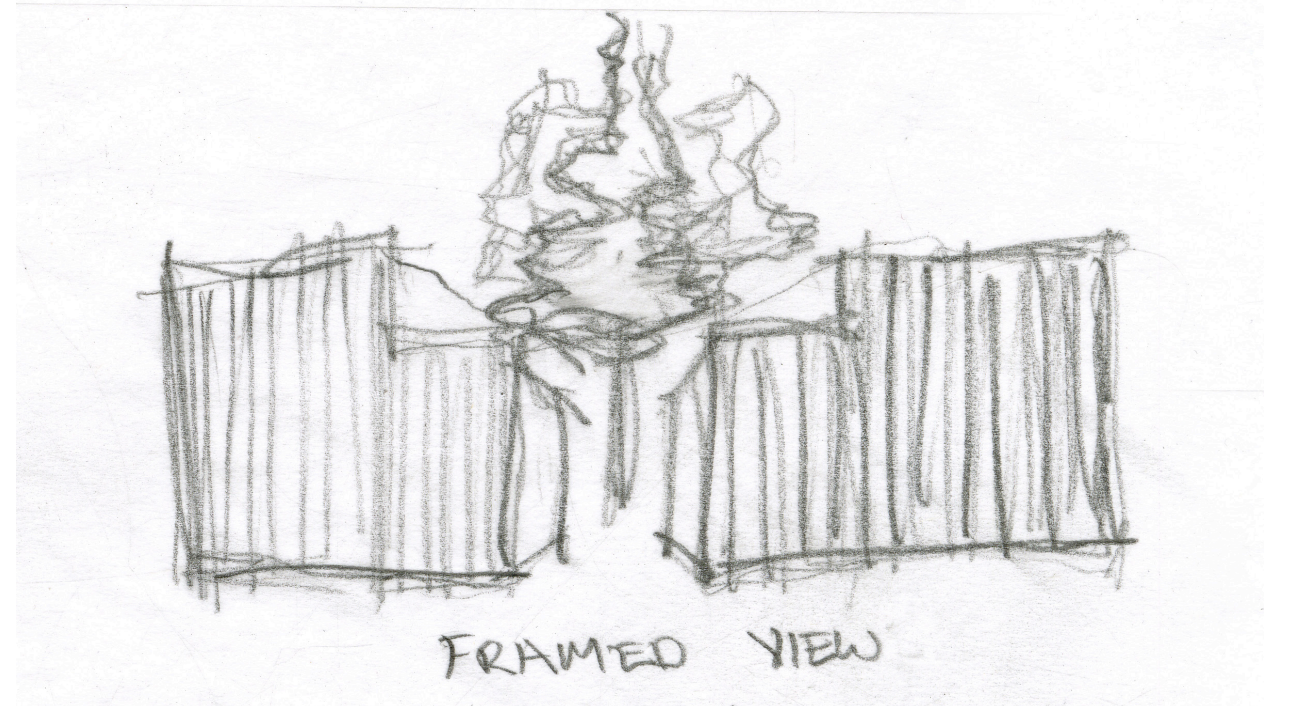
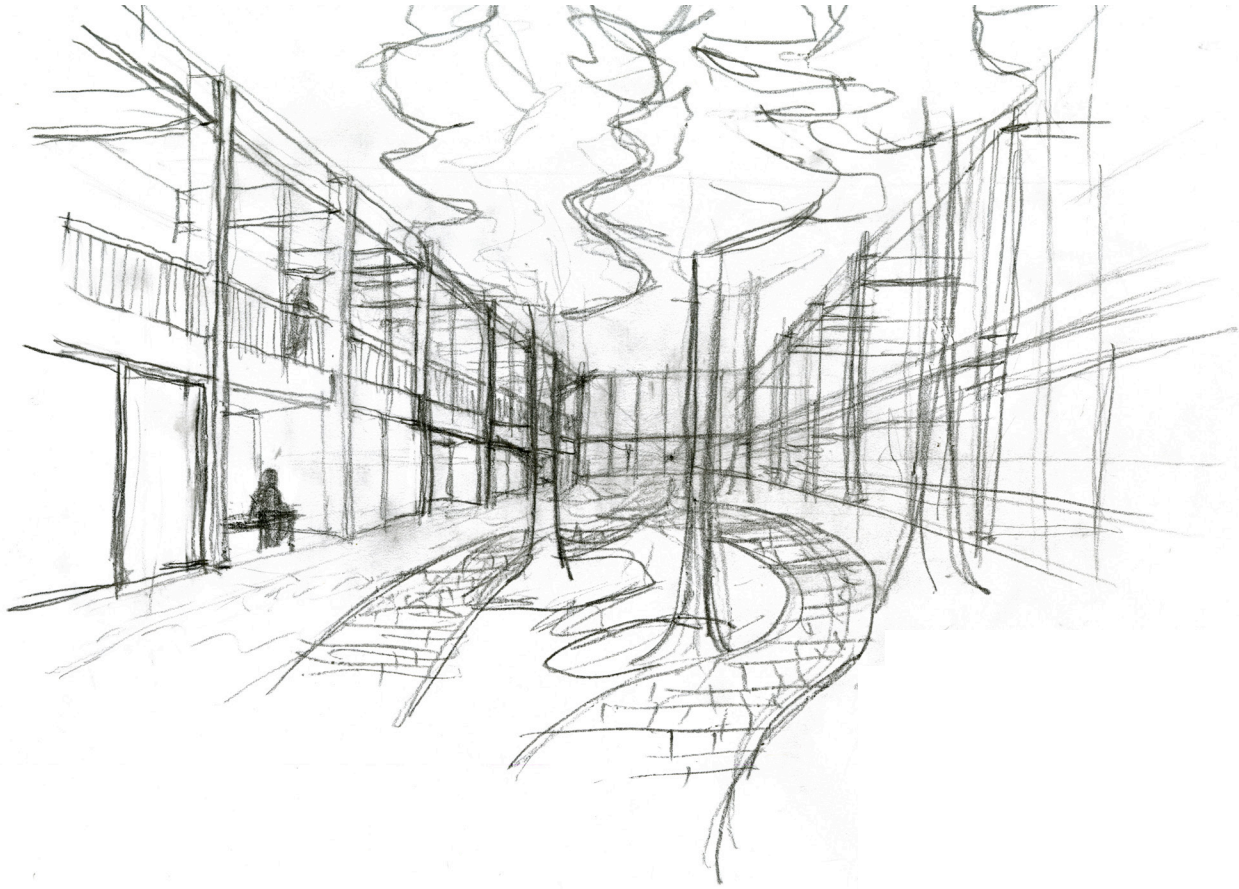
# OPTICAL GLASS HOUSE: HIROSHI NAKAMURA



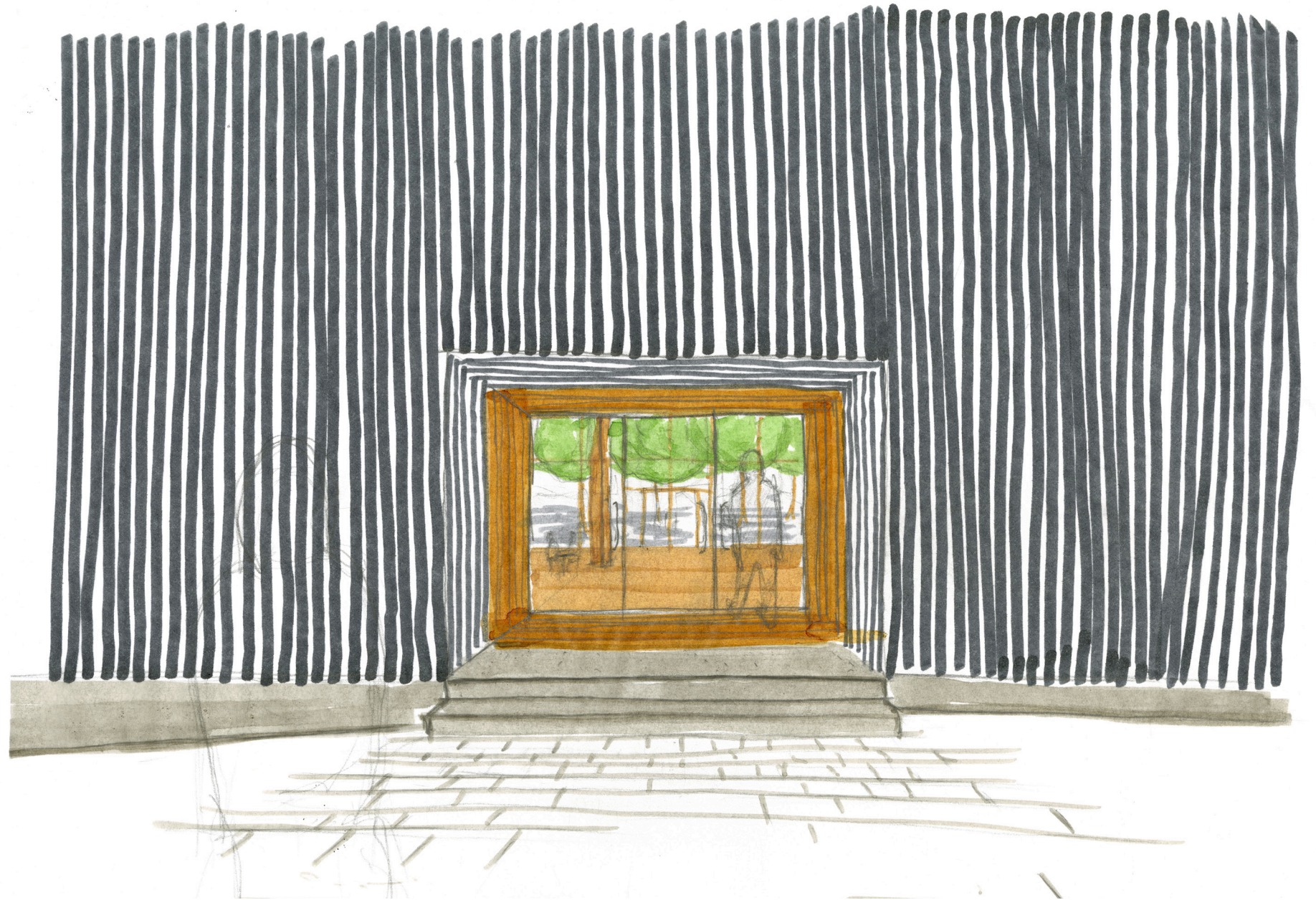
# MASSING AND MATERIALITY



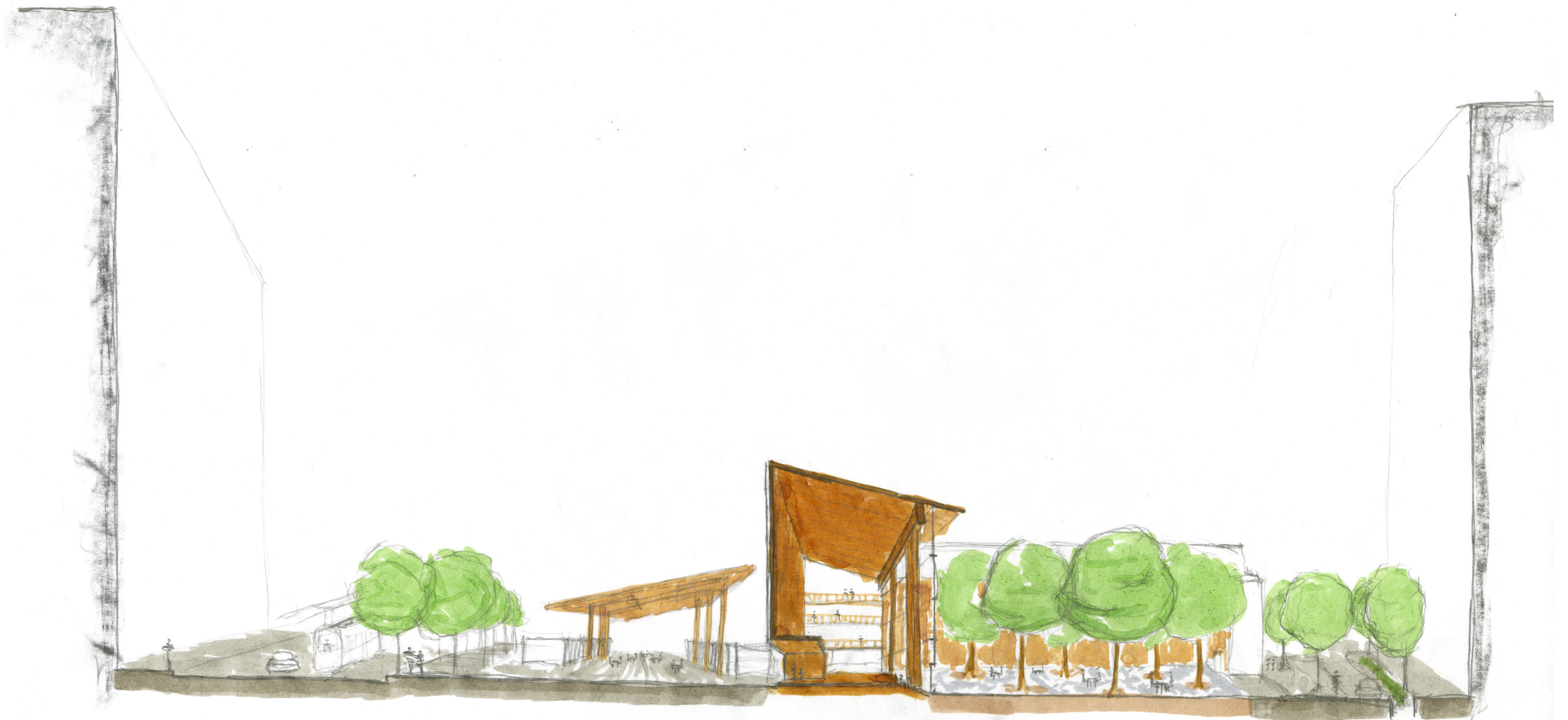
COURTYARD



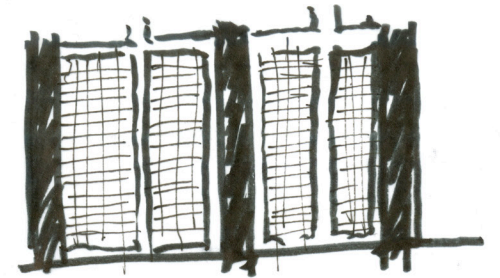
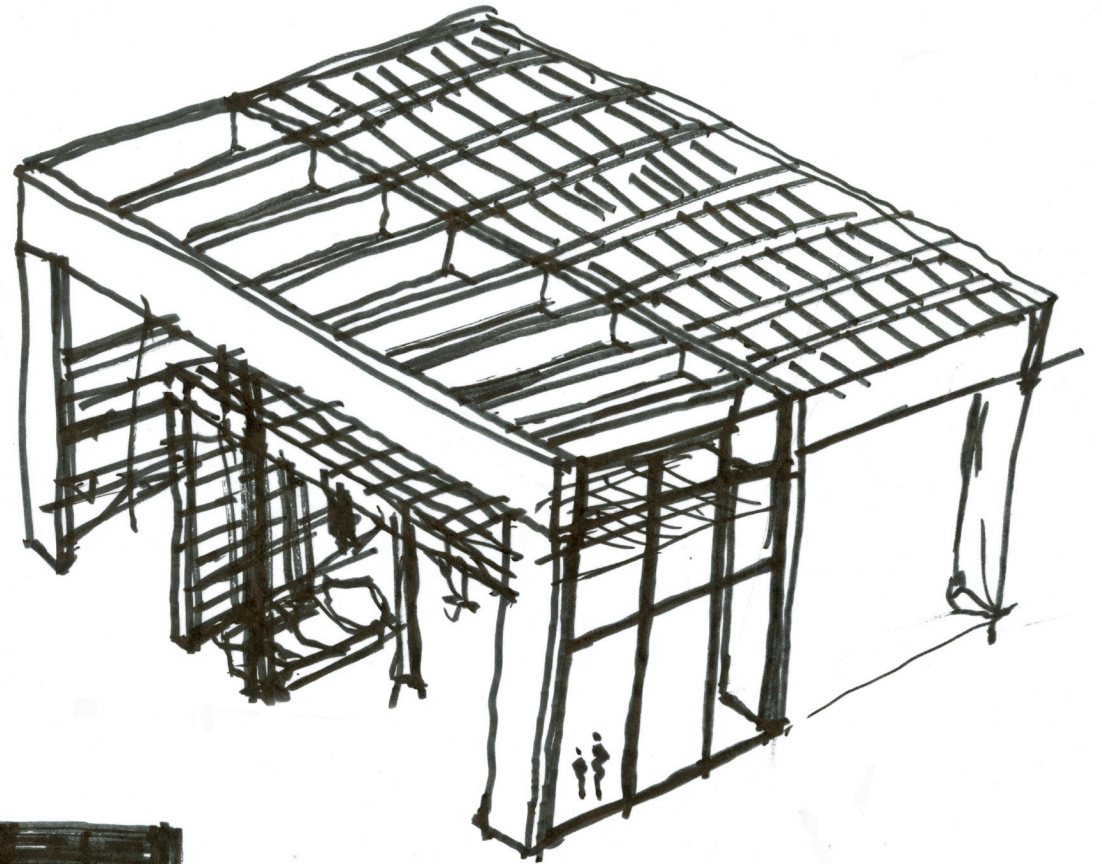
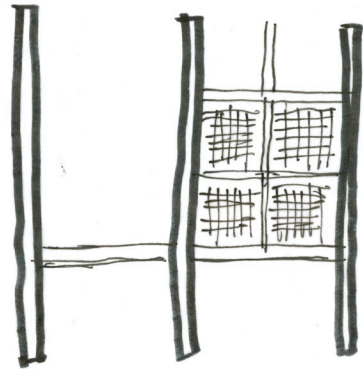
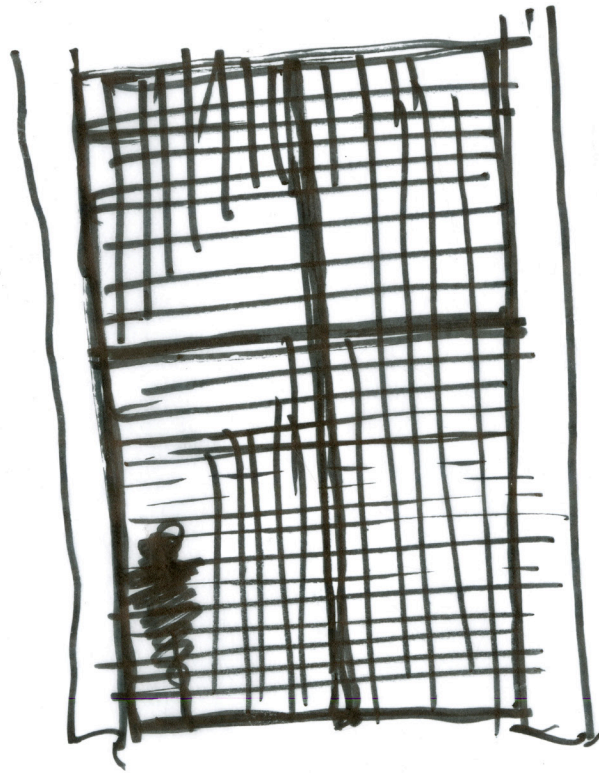
ENTRY



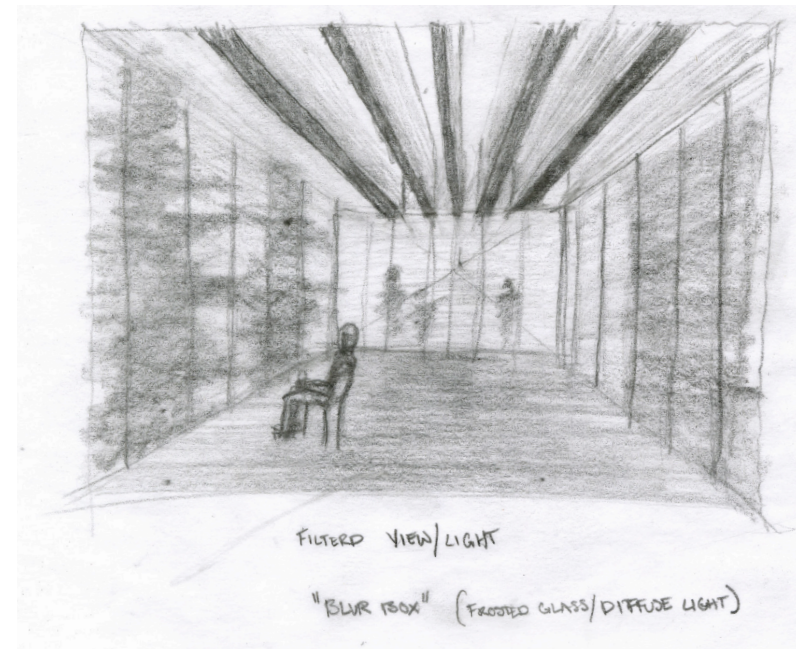
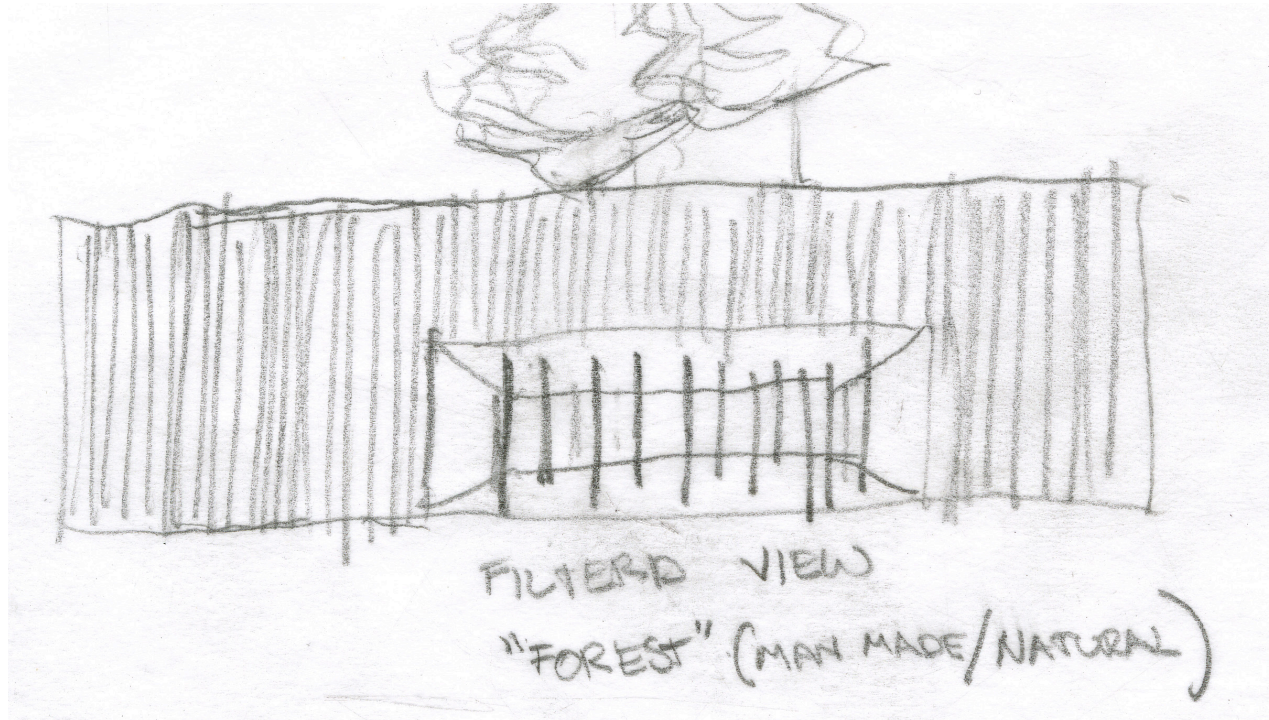
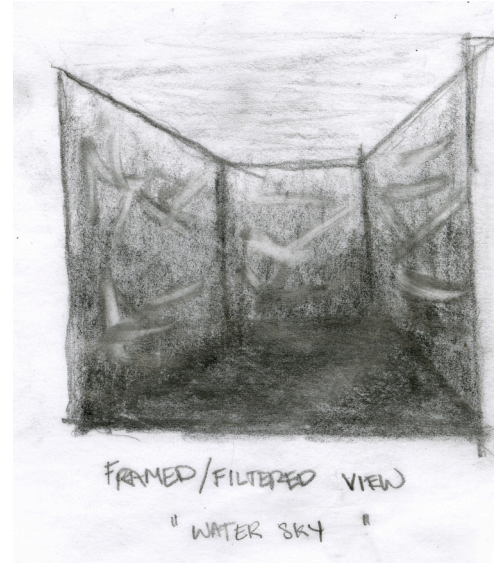
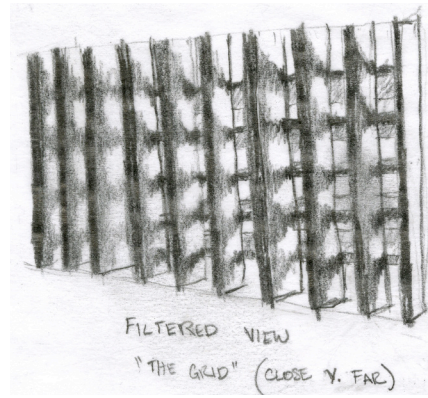
SECTION



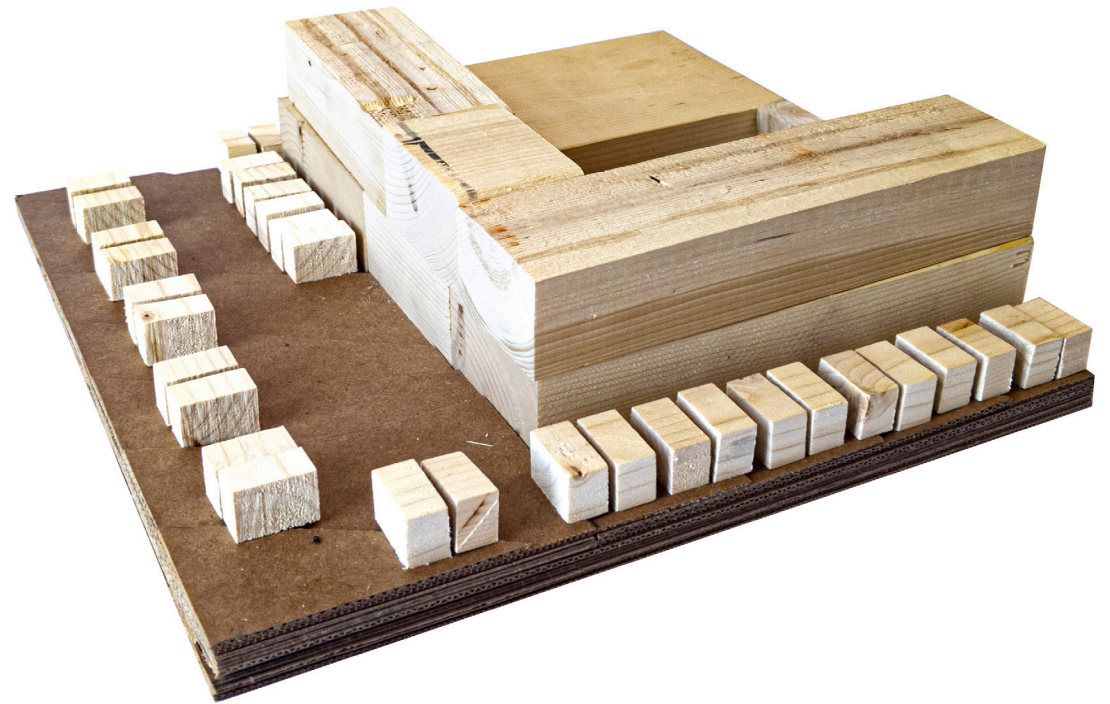
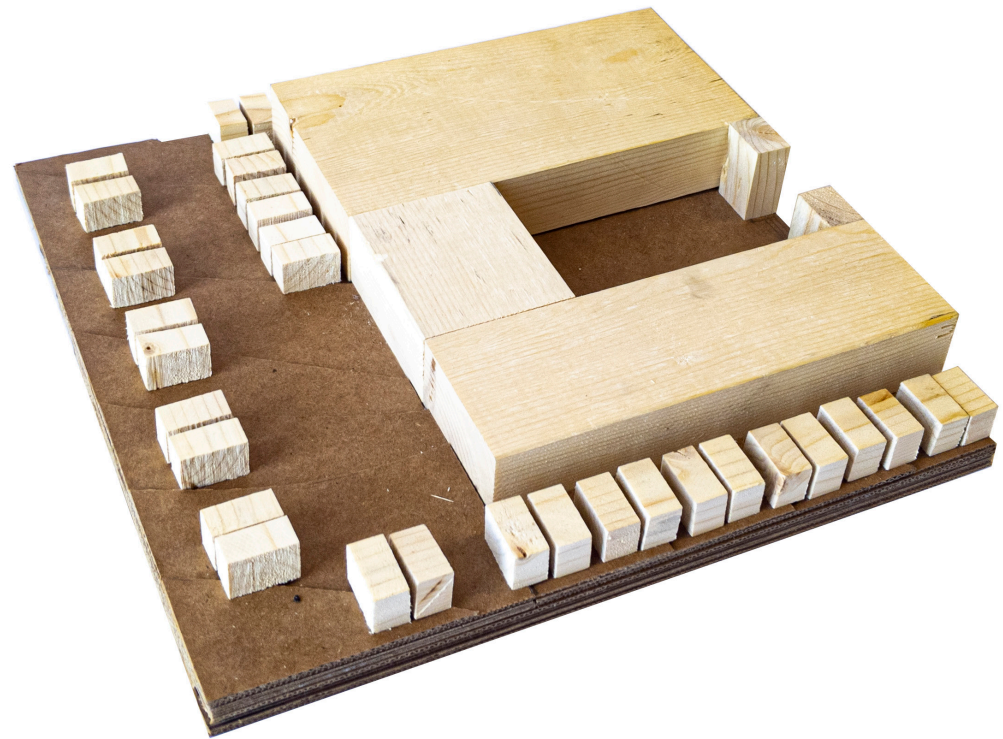
SCREENS



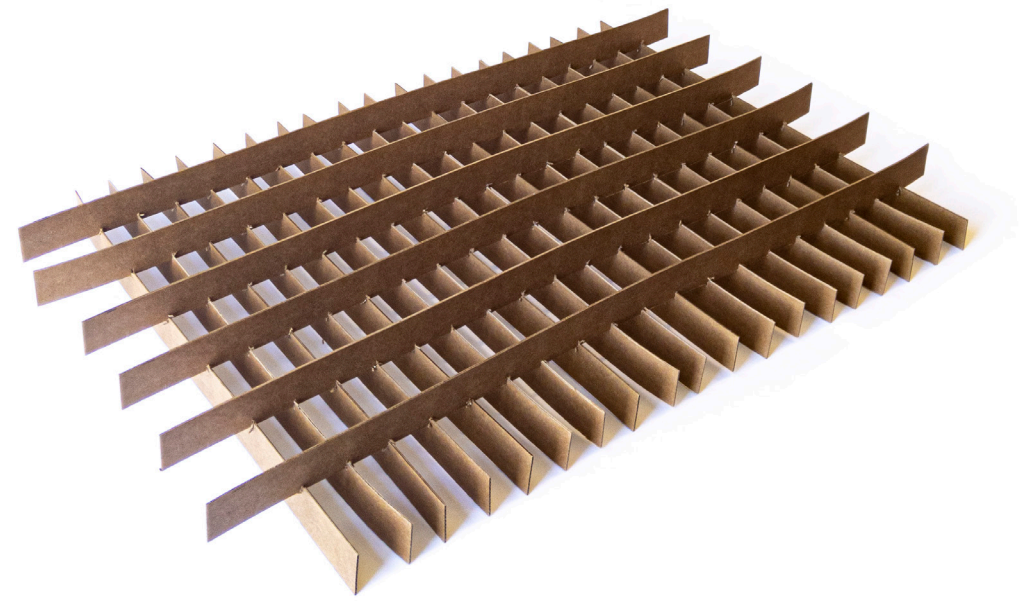
MOMENTS



MASSING MODELS



# SCREEN STUDY MODELS



FACADE SCREEN STUDY MODELS



## CONSTRUCTING SLOW ARCHITECTURE

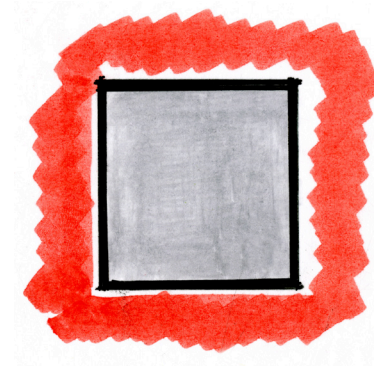
The thesis is tested on a site in Downtown Portland, Oregon, and must accommodate the busyness of existing food trucks while also creating public space for retreat. This is accomplished by utilizing the food trucks as a buffer between the existing three lane street and a new pedestrian street. The architecture then further slows people down by creating a threshold between the busyness of the city and the quiet calm of a courtyard that is full of northwest native evergreens and ferns. As visitors move up through the building they are elevated out of the street scape and into the tree canopy. A move further enhanced by constantly orienting visitors to the courtyard through the use of wood screens that distort and obscure the surrounding context, while framing and revealing views of the courtyard. Along with orienting visitors to the courtyard, each space within the building is designed to draw attention to the subtle shifting of natural light. CLT and Glulam wood construction is also used as the primary material because it is sustainable, native to the northwest, directly links back to nature and is proven to reduce stress levels.

The program for the building includes; food trucks, spaces for eating, a courtyard with local vegetation, individual spaces for reflection, group spaces for reflection, a large room for events and public restrooms. Each of these spaces is designed to have a unique approach to light and views in order to enhance the feeling of slowness. As mentioned above, views of the city are distorted through various wood screens and views of the courtyard are framed and unobstructed. Light is then screened in three different ways throughout the building to create the feeling of being a in a tree canopy and nature. The three types of screening light includes; breaking direct light into smaller fragments, diffusing light into indirect ambient light, and bouncing or refracting light with water.

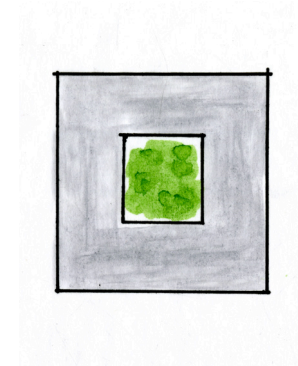
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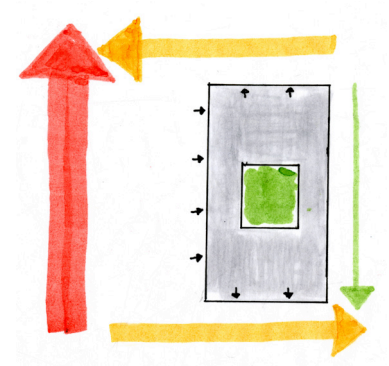
CONTEXT MAP



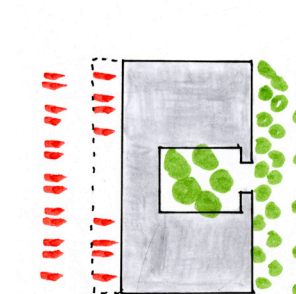
CITY BUSYNESS



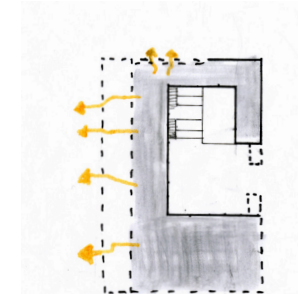
IDEAL SLOWNESS



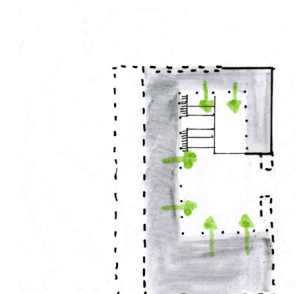
STREET BUSYNESS



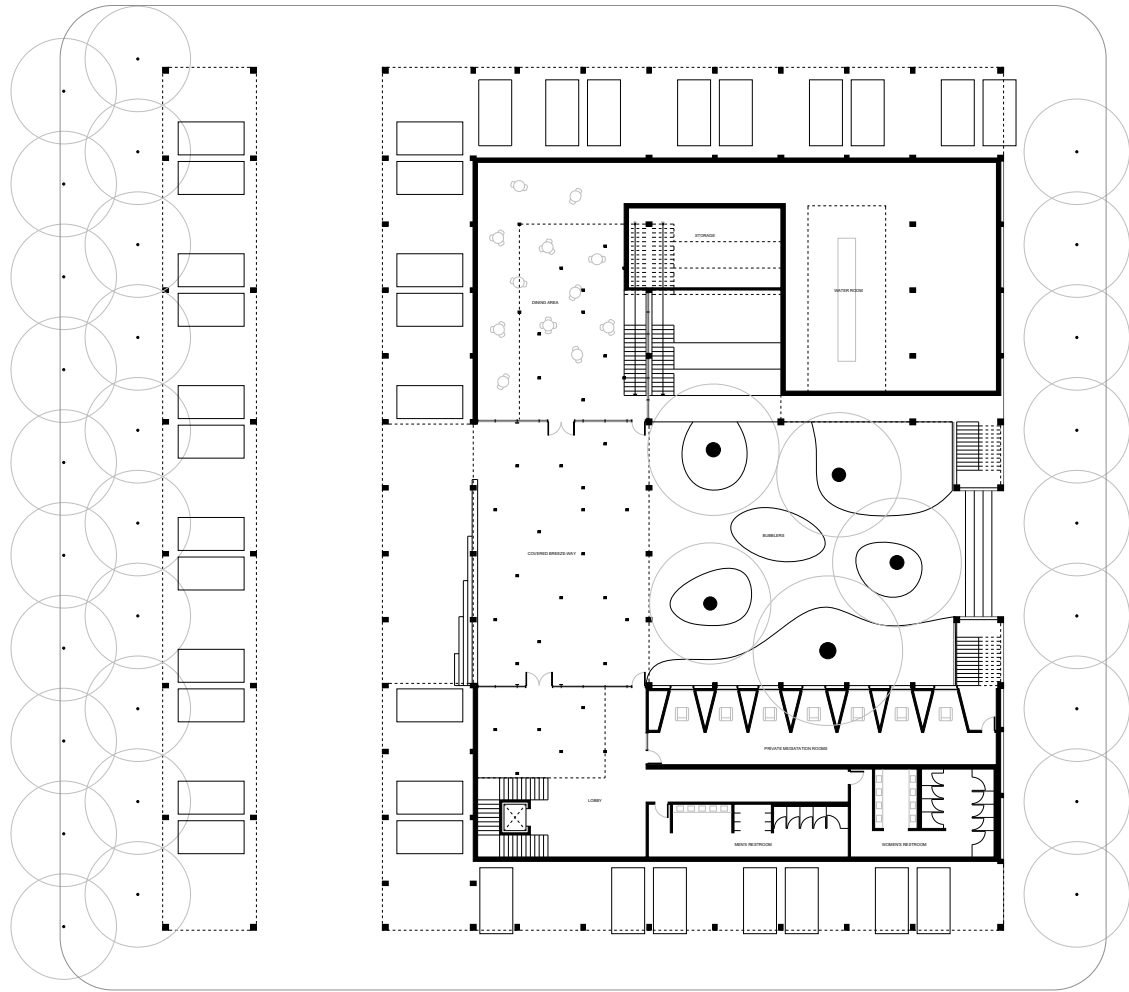
SLOW AND FAST



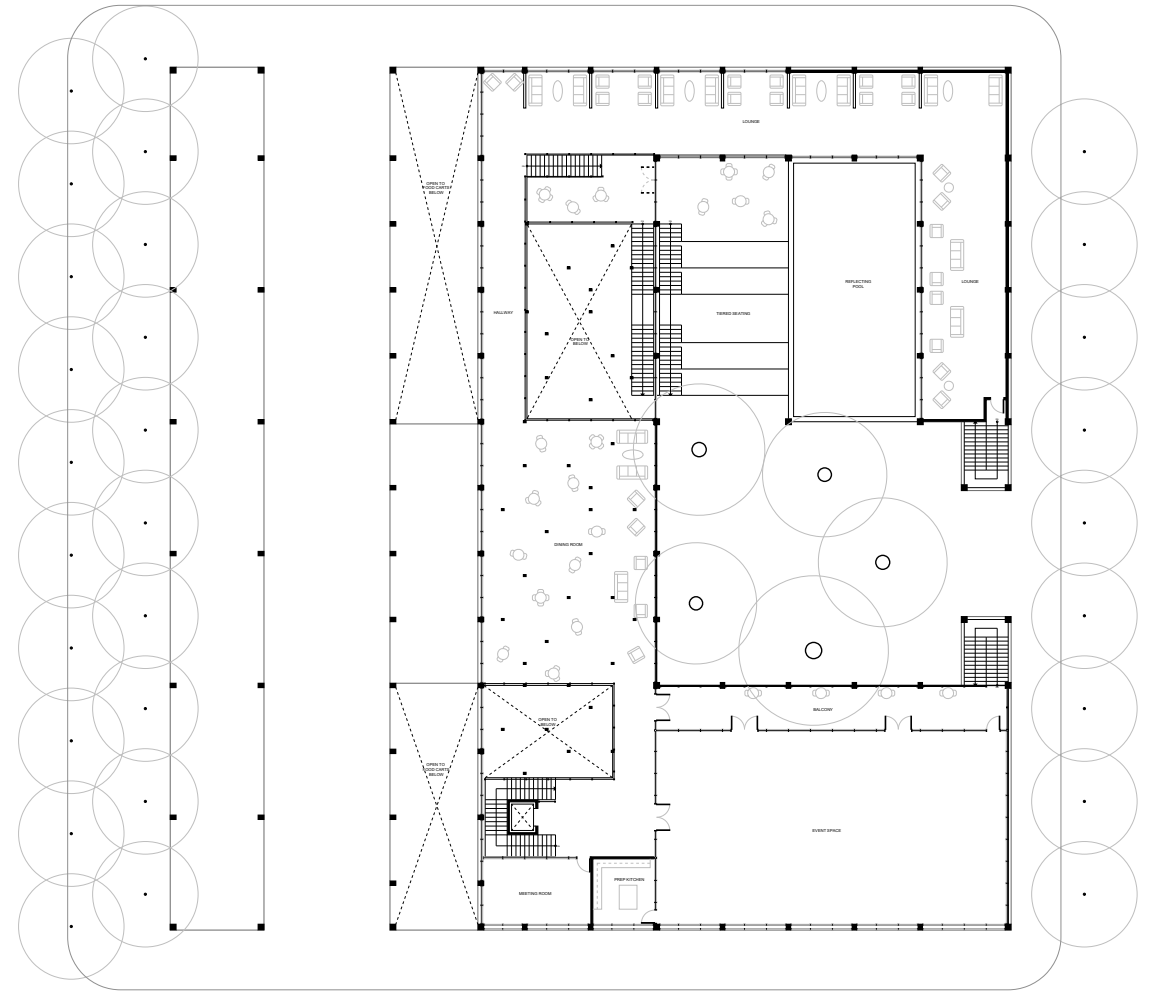
FRAGMENTED VIEWS



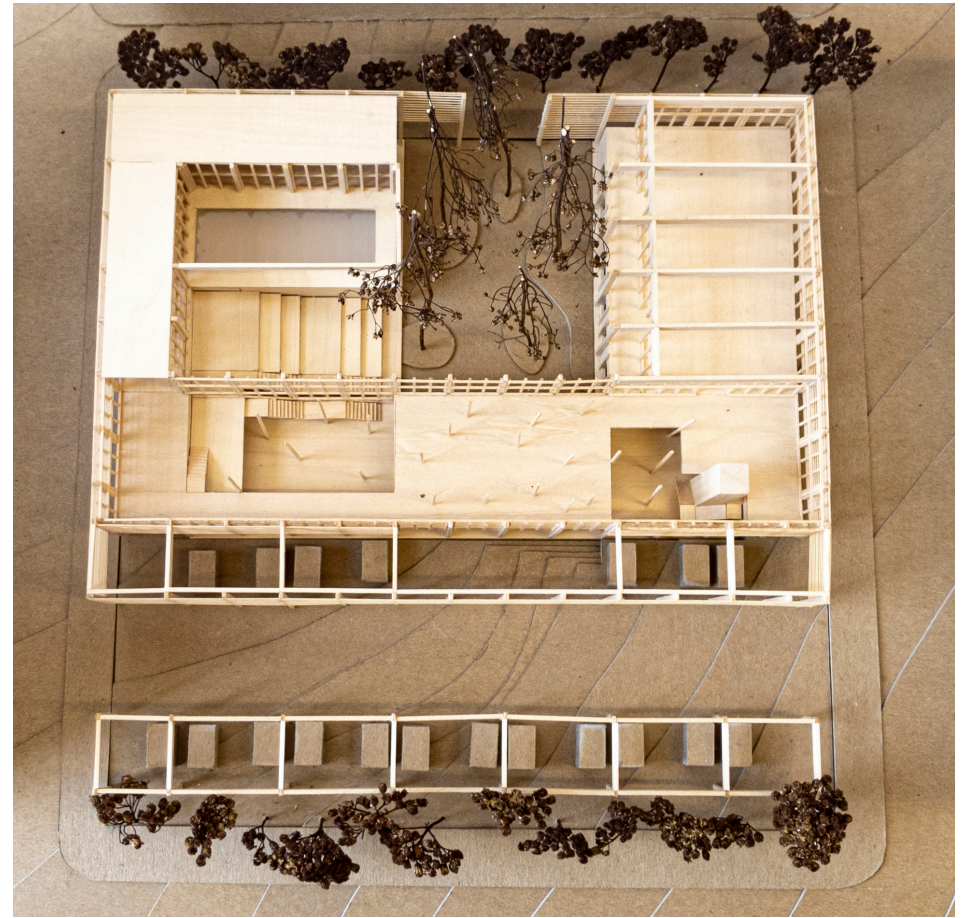
FRAMED VIEWS



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

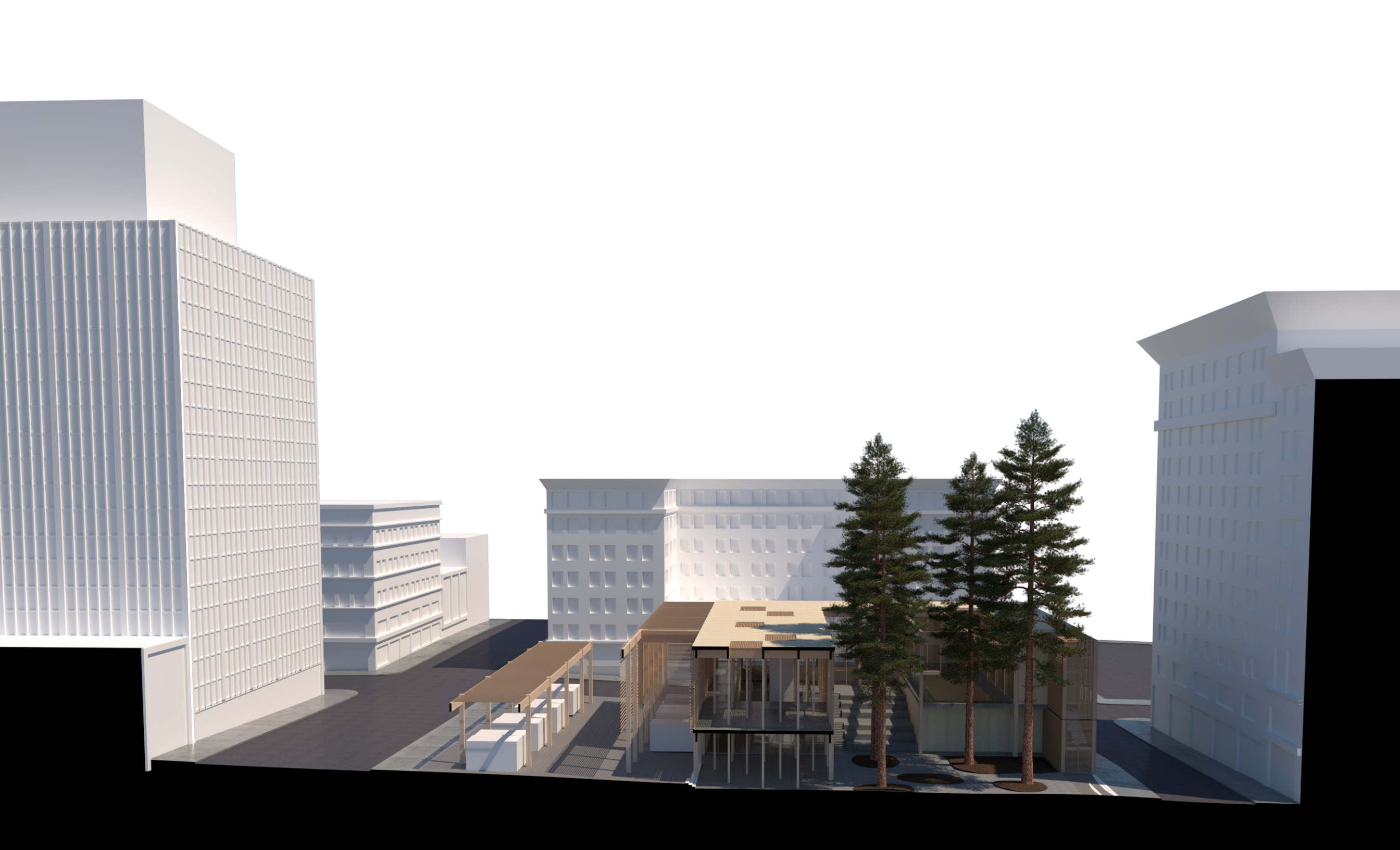


SECOND FLOOR PLAN





0 5 15 35



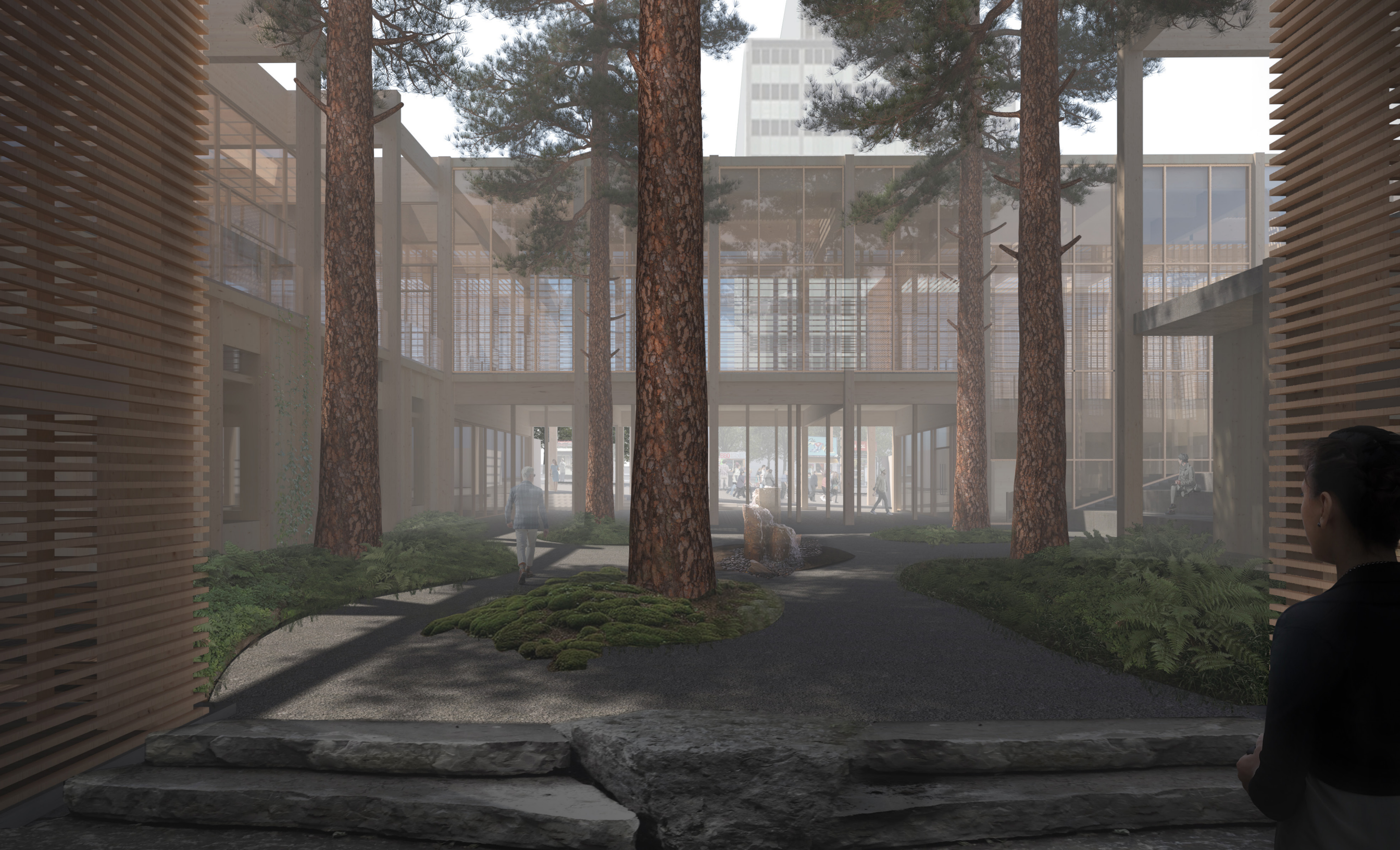






OPEN

WASABI SUSHI POX

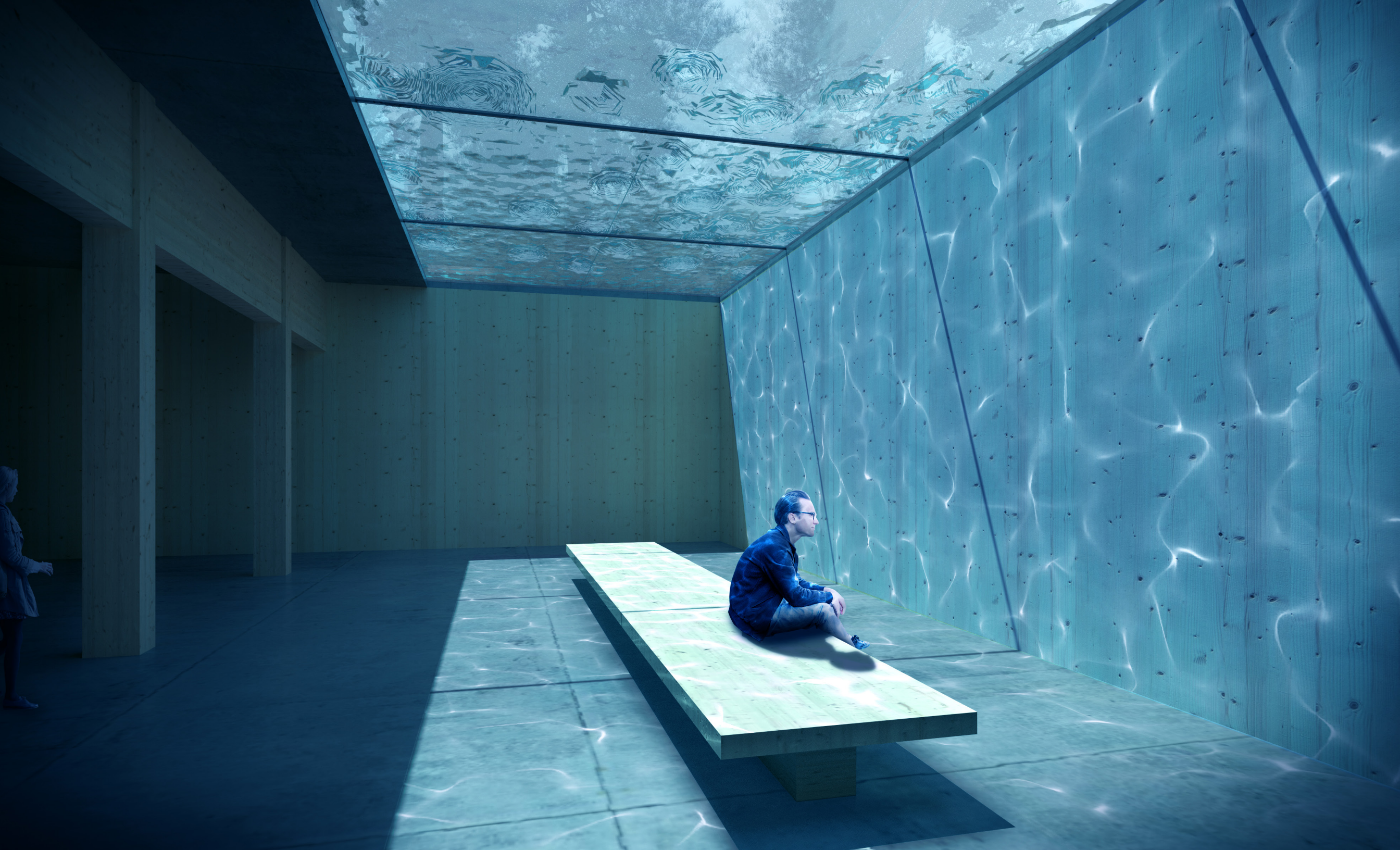












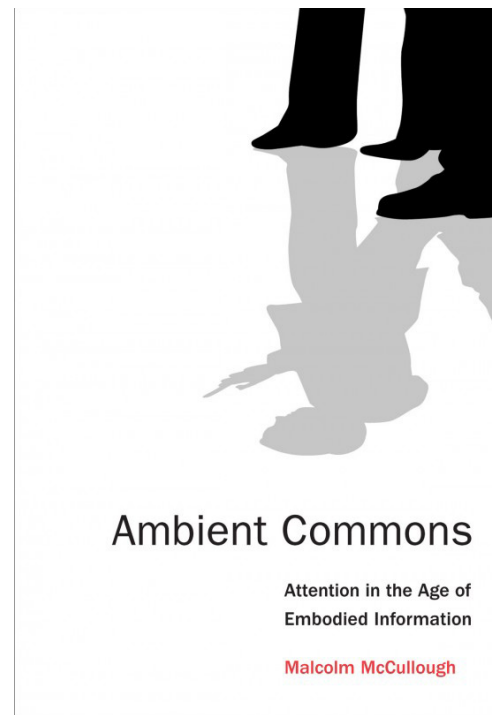
## LESSONS LEARNED

While I am proud of the design I produced in my thesis, the thing I value most from the project is the discovery of my interests and the specific ways in which I can begin to pursue them. I feel the project is successful in studying the affects of views and light on our architectural experience; however, I would like to further study sound, detailing, temperature and movement through spaces as other ways to create slowness in space. These areas of further study were apart of my initial goals for the project, but were set aside to allow more in-depth study of views and light. Focusing on detailing in particular was my initial desire in the project, but I quickly realized that I needed a project with specific goals that could be enhanced by detailing. Therefore I was very excited when this was brought up as a next step for my project.

I also discovered a deep interest in designing with glulam and CLT, as it is a rapidly developing area of the profession and provides many benefits for the environment and occupants of buildings. It is a discovery that I wish I had made sooner in my process as I believe it would have allowed me to push my project further. However, I am excited to look for places that are exploring the possibilities of these materials as I begin my career.

The research stage of my project also produced the desire to be a more well read student of architecture. Not only was it useful to find and study precedents that were relevant to my project, it was also helpful to find precedents that I disagreed with and theories or movements outside of architecture. Studying others has helped me to understand how my work fits into the field of architecture, but more importantly how it situates and impacts the world we live in.

## PROMINENT SOURCES



McCullough, Malcolm. *Ambient Commons*.  
Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015.

This thesis utilizes *Ambient Commons* as a basis for understanding contemporary culture of humans, technology, and the built environment.

### Critical Regionalism

*Frampton, Kenneth. 1983. Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance. [Essay]*

Critical regionalism inspired this thesis as a way to connect contemporary ideas with traditional and regional practices.



Stacks of Douglas Fir 2x4's

Wood is chosen as the material vehicle to explore tectonics because it has returned as a popular material in architecture. This revival of wood as a material is mainly due to the sustainability of wood and CLT's fire rating allows it to be used for high rise buildings. While CLT is pushing the boundaries of high rise wood construction, the most accessible form of wood remains the milled lumber. Therefore, this thesis explores the possibilities of milled lumber as a generator for architecture.



Downtown Portland Oregon

Portland, Oregon has been chosen as a site to test this thesis because it is a leader in the new era of wood construction. Portland has become a leader of wood construction because of its desire to be sustainable, wood is an abundant material in the region, and thus has a rich history in wood construction.



*Zumthor: Spirit of Nature Wood Architecture Award 2006. Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2011.*

This thesis is inspired by and strives to continue Zumthor's process of defining rules derived from wood properties and vernacular knowledge.

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Too Many Emails. Digital Image. Accessed January 15, 2019.



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Pallasmaa, Juhani. 2000. Hapticity and Time. Notes on Fragile Architecture. The Architectural Review. 207. 78-84.

"In each of my works, each material has laid down its own laws... Projects are born out of an idea, and in my case this idea is always accompanied by a material. I can't imagine a method of design in which the architect first decides on the form, and then on the materials"

- Peter Zumthor speaking about the Swiss Sound Box Pavilion.



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Menges, Achim, Tobias Schwinn, and Oliver David Krieg. Advancing Wood Architecture a Computational Approach. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.

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Rendering of Turkish Art Museum. Kengo Kuma Architects. 2012. Dezeen.com

*Frampton, Kenneth. 1983. Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance. [Essay]*



Hiroshi Nakamura & NAP Co.,Ltd. 2012. Hiroshi Nakamura & NAP. www.nakam.info

*Joy, Rick, and Michael J. Crosbie. Studio Joy Works. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2018.*



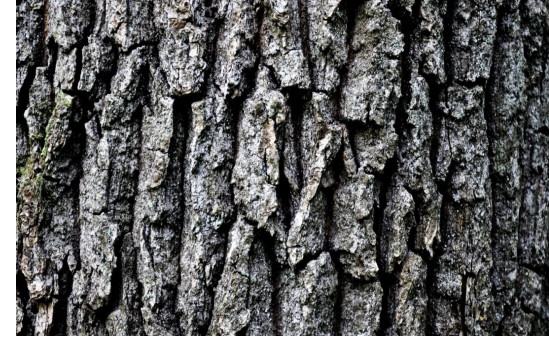
pep romero garcés. Swiss Sound Box 2000 Partial model, bar room, scale 1:10. October 2008. Flickr

*Norberg-Schulz, Christian. Architecture: Meaning and Place: Selected Essays. New York: Electa/Rizzoli, 1988.*

Riedelsheimer, Thomas, Annedore v Donop, Andy Goldsworthy, Trevor Davies, Leslie Hills, and Fred Frith. 2004. Rivers and tides: Andy Goldsworthy working with time. Burlington, VT: Docurama.

Berry, Wendell, and Norman Wirzba. The Art of the Common-place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry. Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2002.

Leaning into the Wind. Andy Goldsworthy. Directed by Thomas Riedelsheimer. Music by Fred Frith. Germany: Magnolia Pictures, 2017. Hulu.



Photos, Hakos. Tree Bark. Wallpapers Wide. January 16, 2019



Oregon Birch Trees. Wallhere.March 29, 2017

Christensen, Colin. Milford Sound Highway. October, 2016.



## INDEX

- Built Environment** The built environment can mean any human-constructed space. This thesis uses it as a synonym for buildings and cities in order to clearly define human made environments as separate from natural ones.
- Digital Age** Is our current historical time period. Also known as the information age, it is marked by pervasive access to information and entertainment through the internet and smartphones. Digital age is used over information age because it speaks specifically to the way we interact and access the information.
- Experiential Architecture** Architecture designed to connect inhabitants to the built environment by engaging multiple senses. Creating experiential architecture is the one of the goals of this thesis.
- Natural Phenomena** Observed occurrences that happen in nature, or without human interaction.<sup>1</sup> For example, sunlight moving across the ground. Used to describe a connection to the physical world.
- Orient** To familiarize, locate and create relationships between a person and their surroundings. One of the goals of the thesis is to promote orientation within the physical world.<sup>2</sup>
- Regional Architecture** Buildings designed to incorporate modern technologies with vernacular traditions, materials and aesthetics. Creating regional architecture is the one of the goals of this thesis.
- Vernacular Architecture** Buildings constructed with local materials and by local tradesmen, without design training. The buildings form is derived from a functional response to the climate and culture, with little thought of aesthetics. Used to help define regional architecture.<sup>3</sup>
- Slowness** A restful state of mind in which you are aware of your surroundings and are able to think critically without being distracted. It is similar to mindfulness; however, slowness is used because it is a physical action that is used to achieve mindfulness.
- Mindfulness** The quality or state of being conscious or aware of something. Or, a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, used as a therapeutic technique.<sup>4</sup>
- Tectonics** The art of building and constructing with lightweight, linear components. Aesthetically, tectonics refers to the visual presence of construction techniques, with emphasis usually placed on revealing the structural load path.<sup>5</sup> Tectonics is proposed as a way to create experiential architecture.

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1 "Phenomenon." Dictionary.com. Accessed January 29, 2019. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/phenomenon>

2 "Orient." Dictionary.com. Accessed January 29, 2019. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/orient>

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3 "Vernacular." Merriam-Webster. Accessed January 29, 2019. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vernacular>.

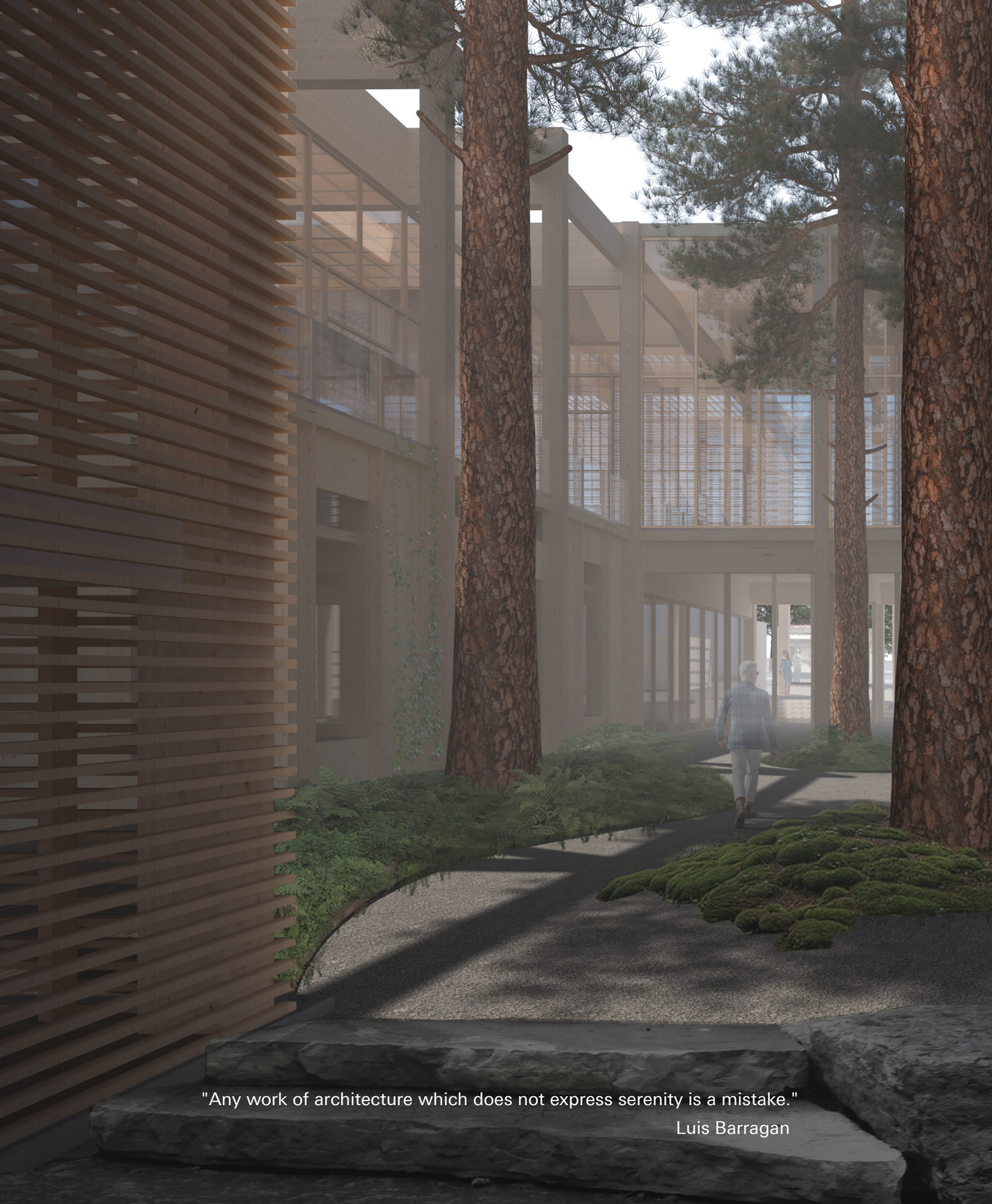
4 "Mindfulness." Dictionary.com. Accessed January 29, 2019. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/mindfulness>

5 Frampton, Kenneth, and John Cava. *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture*. Chicago, IL: Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, 2007. pp 3-5

## APPENDIX 01



Sense of touch is one of the most important bodily senses for our understanding of materials and the space around us, because it is hard to deceive our sense of touch. We can tell how sturdy or fragile an object is instantly upon touching it because over the course of our lives we gradually build up an understanding of materials and physics through touching things. This column was an exploration into how material can encourage an understanding of the use of a space through the sense of touch. Notches and handles were carved out of the column to encourage interaction and discovery of use.



"Any work of architecture which does not express serenity is a mistake."

Luis Barragan