

# Suzanne Merchant

*design/research/community activism*



# endgame

My hope is that my portfolio demonstrates my desire to be a designer. My work, after all, has been design in some variation or the other.

One of my firm beliefs is that design, no matter how beautiful or carefully thought out, will not save the world. Where hope resides then is the potential to do interdisciplinary work, which I hope my portfolio demonstrates. I am committed to this work because I am haunted by the looming systems crises in economics, climate change, and politics.

My initial design training was architectural and while I wish to further that training, I am concurrently seeking training in alternative community economic development. Over the last few years, I have come to the conclusion that the enforcement of debt-based currencies (such as the ones we use on a day-to-day basis) has a foundational impact on our thinking. The dangerous mindsets fostered by such "money" - cancerous expansion, austerity, and scarcity, as a few examples - prevents the development of alternative models of society and economy which represent both hope, and joy for humanity.

The hope I have for my design practice is that I'll be able to speculate, and then build both new economic systems, and the built environments they are bound to create.

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[ 1 ]

# mizu spa and water station

## Architecture

### Project Type

```
/ Individual  
# spa  
# water collection  
# water remediation
```

## Location

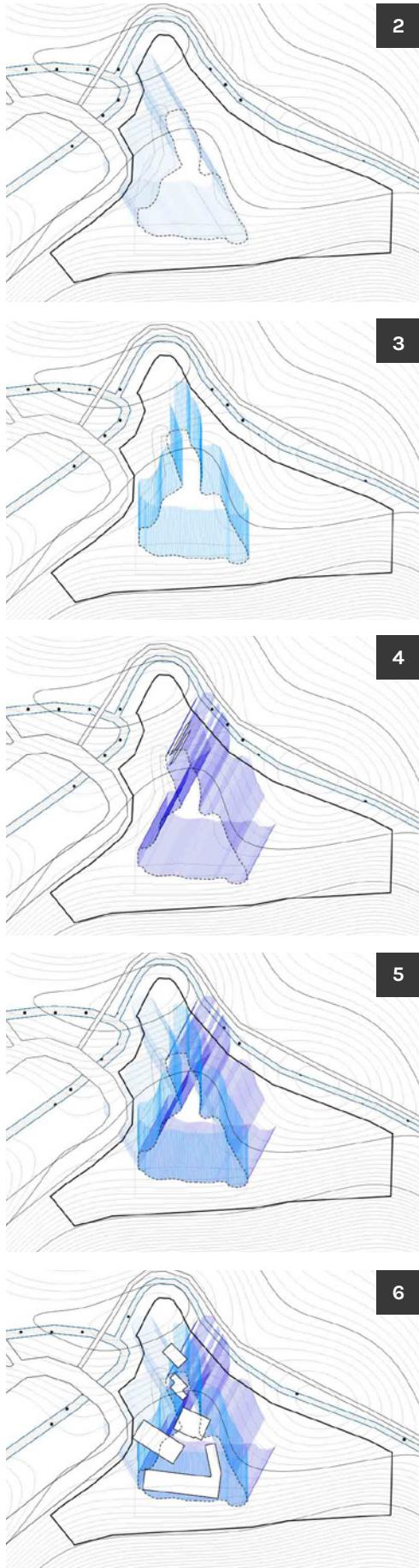
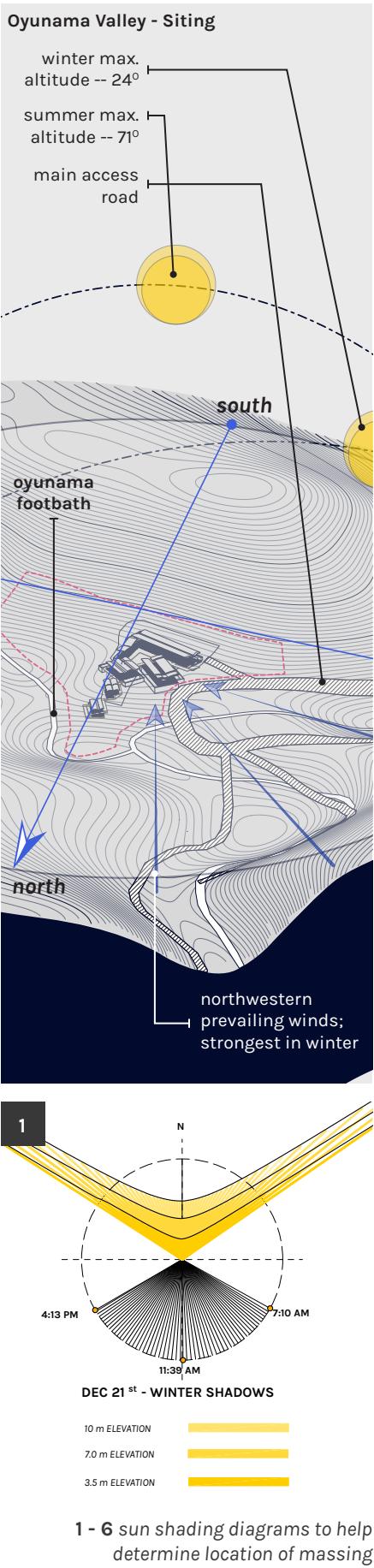
Oyunama, Japan

Year

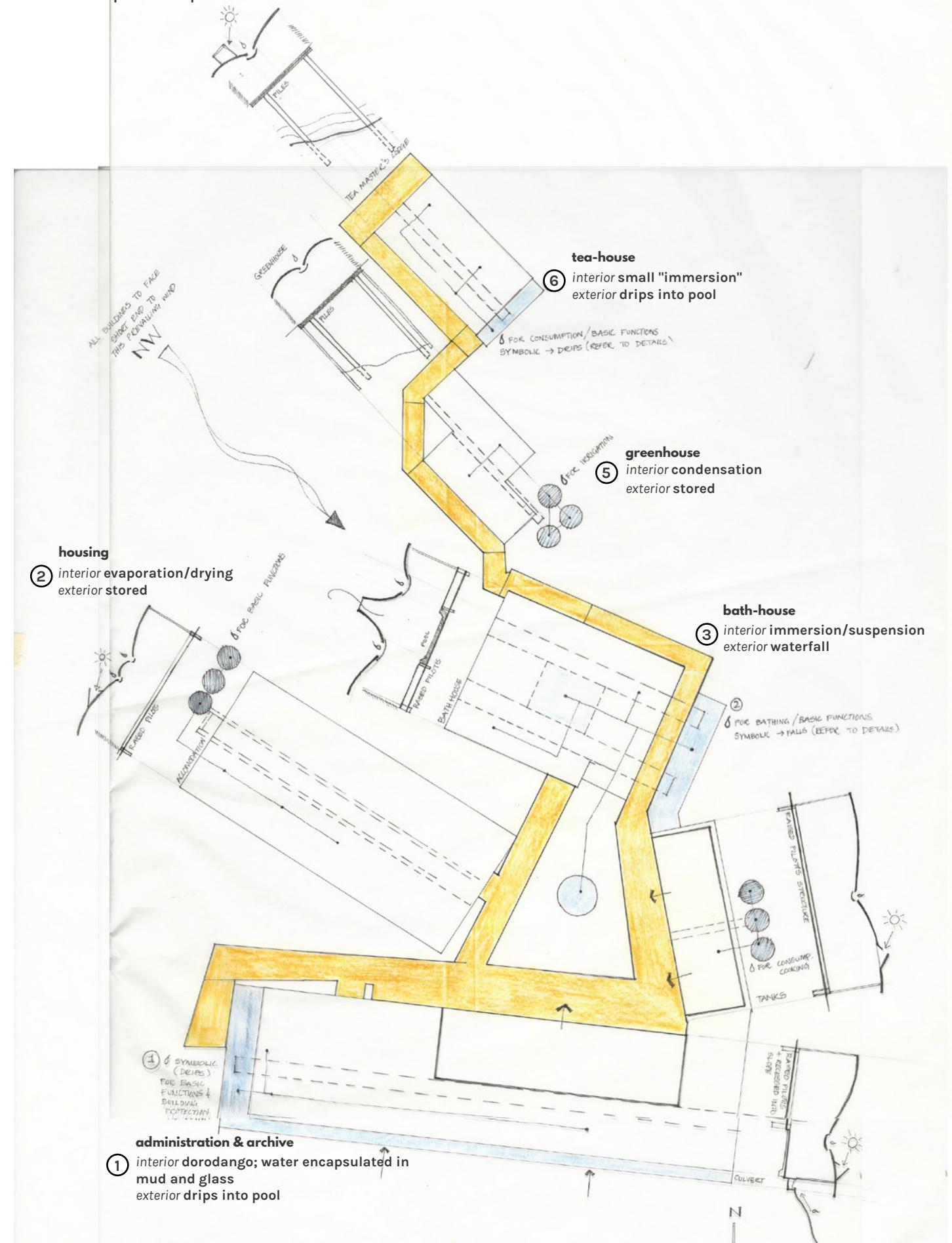
**Brief**

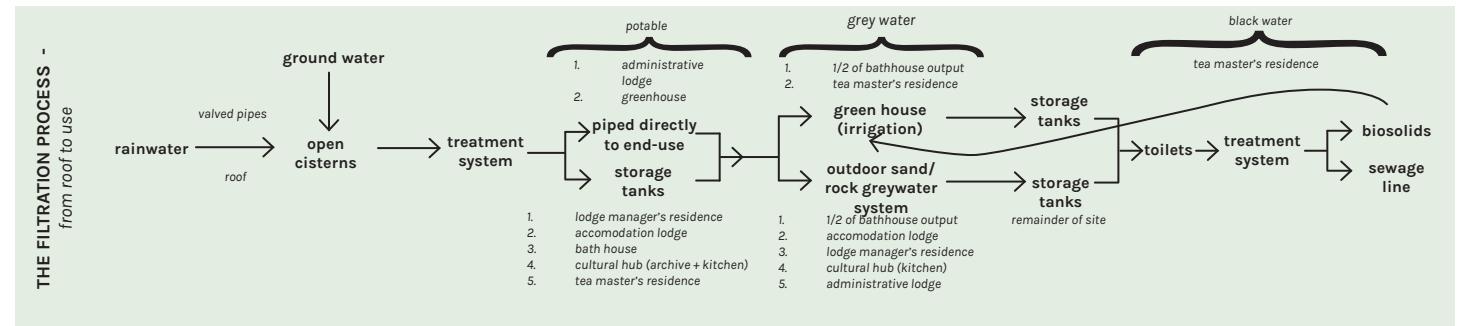
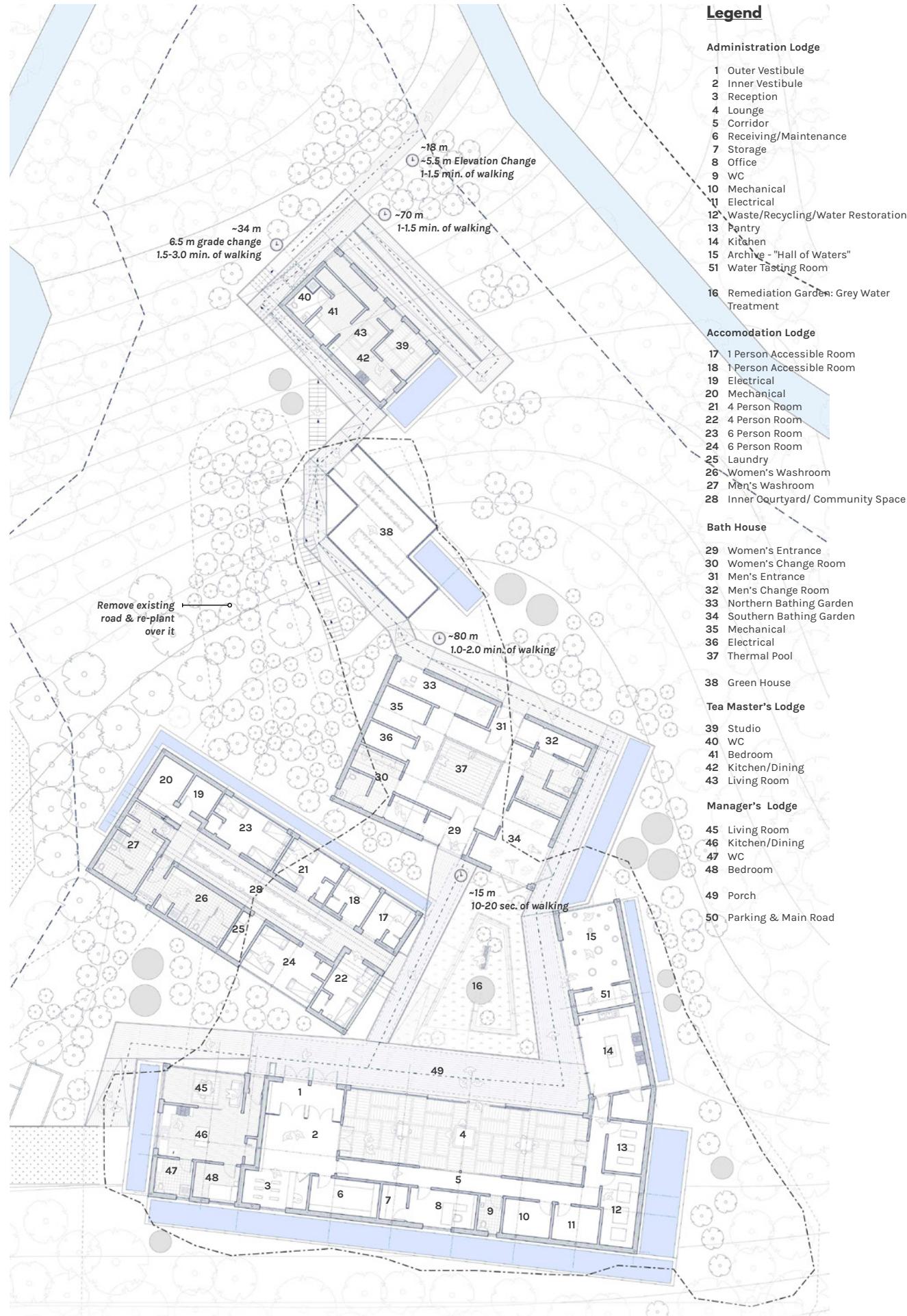
Water is essential to human life, but is also one of our planet's increasingly diminishing resources. Mizu Station has been blessed with plentiful water by virtue of its location, yet that is no reason to become complacent about how water is used within the site. The building has been designed to showcase both the immense practicality of water and its theatre. Its form and processes showcase water in many ways -- all as a method to get visitors to acknowledge the importance of water in their own lives. Through the architecture and systems of this station, one can meditate on its many processes with its elaborate system of roof-based rain-water collection, treatment and reuse. This re-connection with water and the many systems and activities by which we encounter it in our lives allows visitors to this spa to more meaningfully consider the place that water has in our lives.

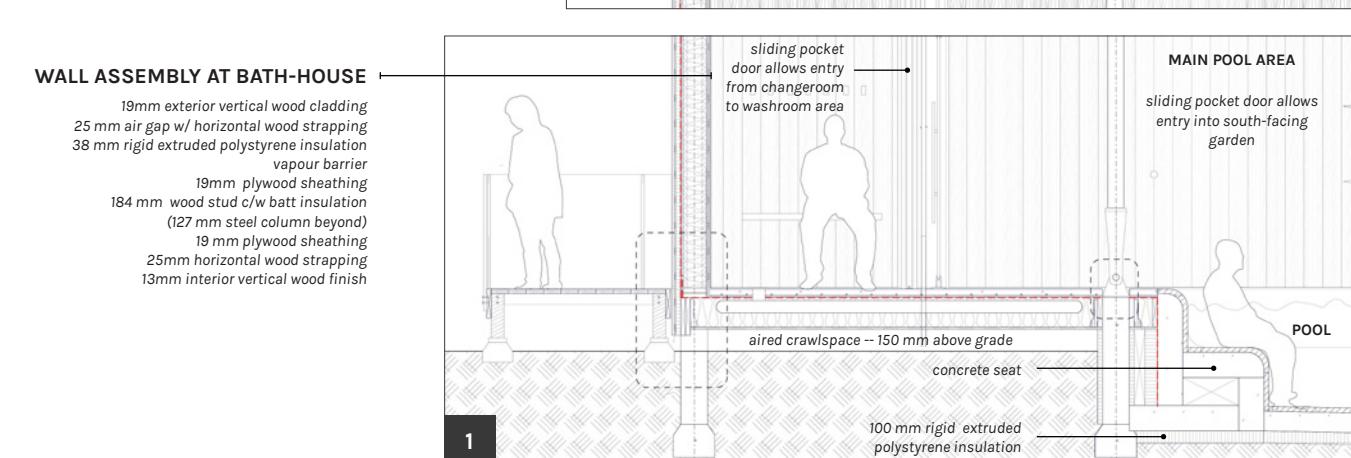
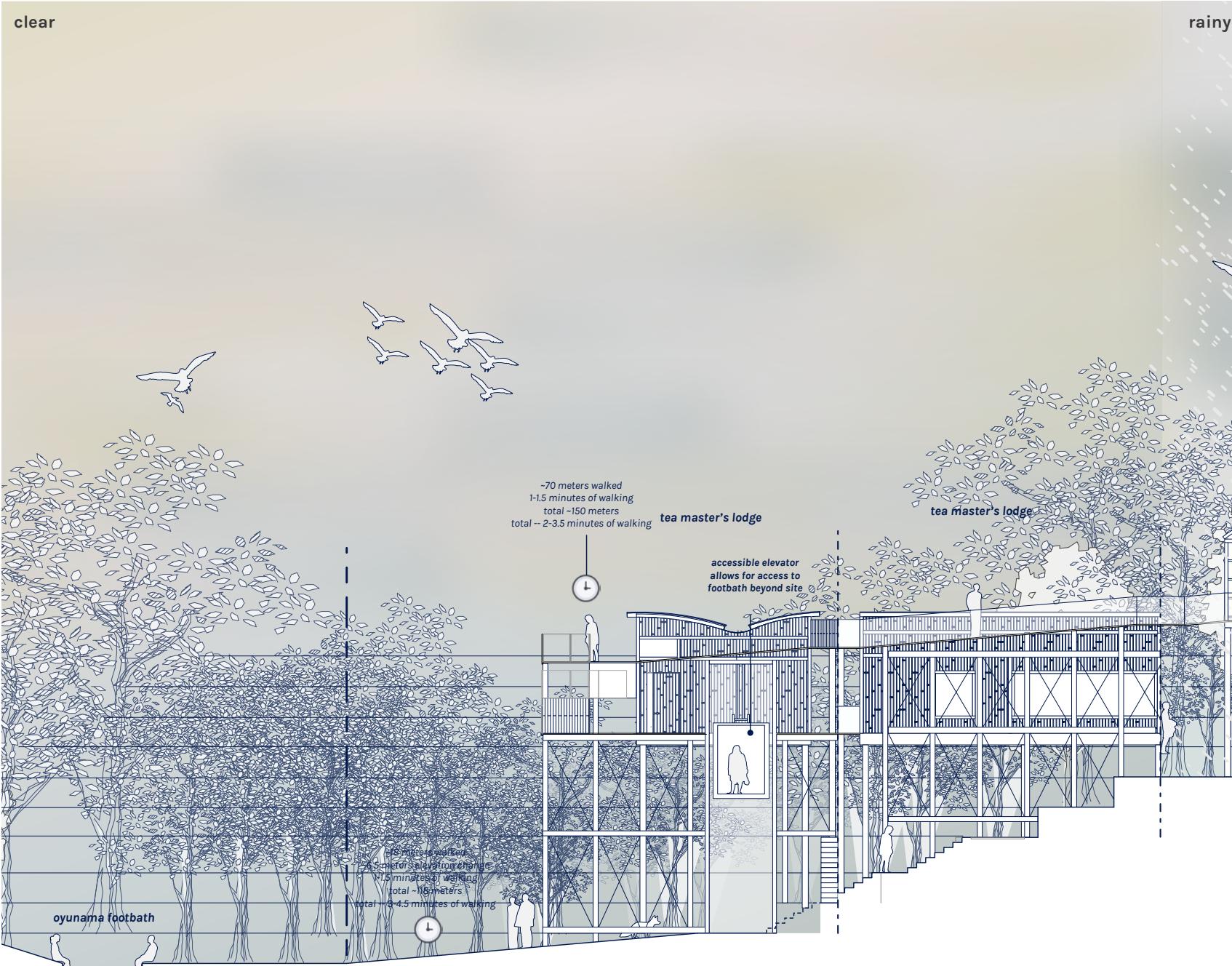
**1 - 6** sun shading diagrams to help determine location of massing

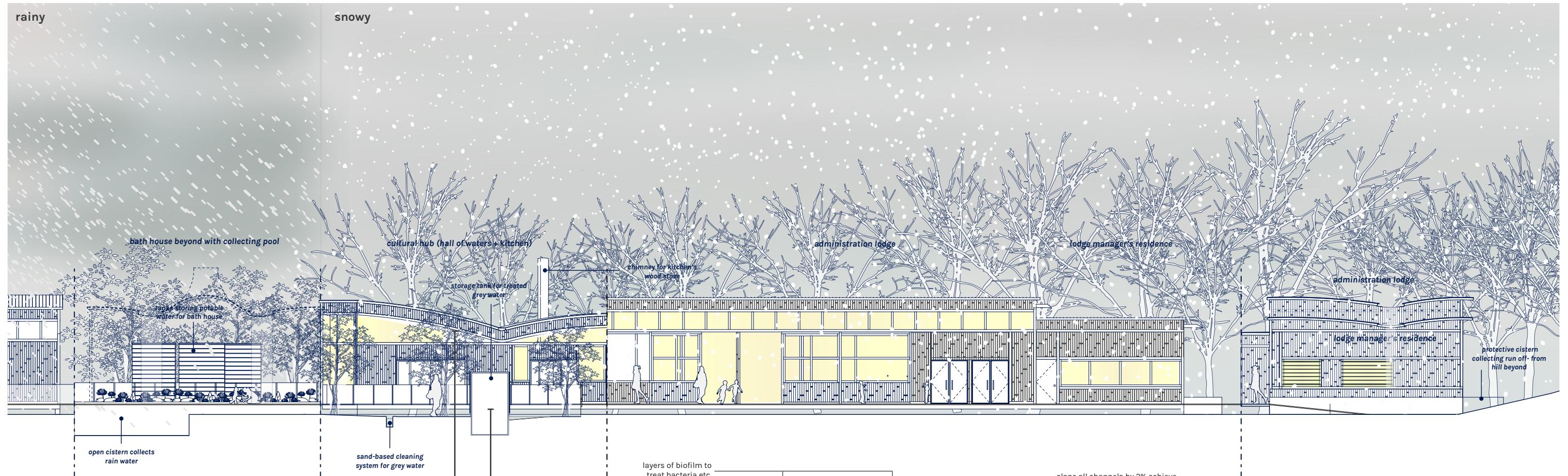


## hand-drawn parti & experiences









## Experiential (partial) site sections & elevations



## 1 experiential view of water falling from scupper

## **2** section of scupper with lily tank

**3** view of hall of waters; an archive of waters and types of waters from around the world

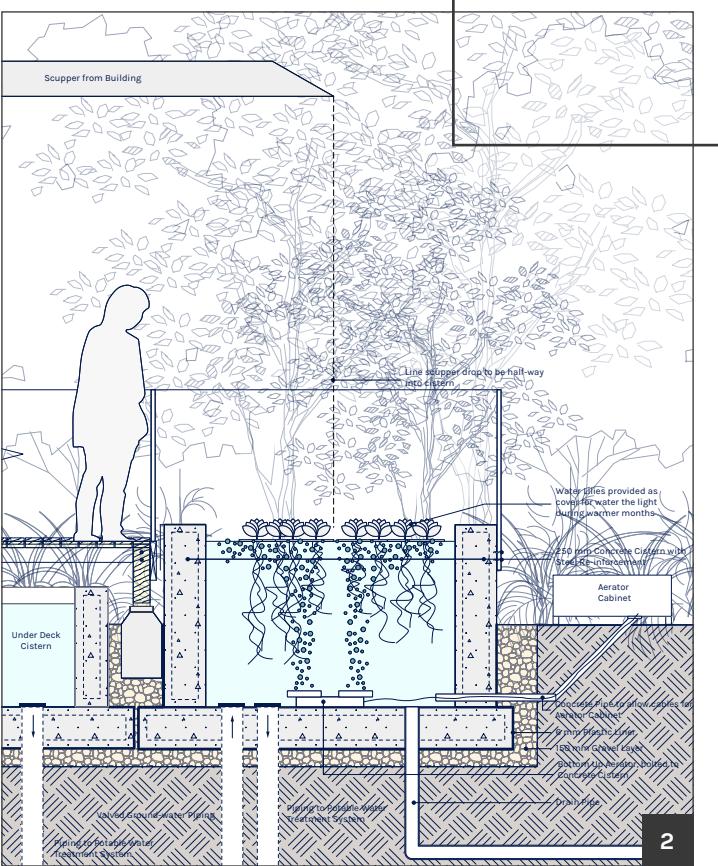


Diagram illustrating the five stages of a greywater treatment system:

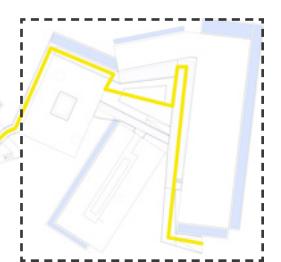
- A:** Grey water input pipes enter a concrete channel with a diffuser plate. The channel has a screen to allow for acoustics. A 150mm concrete channel with a screen to allow for acoustics is shown.
- B:** The water passes through a fine sand filter.
- C:** The water flows into a planted mini-swale. An arrow points to a 13 mm metal strip to cover piping between channels.
- D:** The water moves into an open culvert.
- E:** The treated water exits as treated greywater.

Key components labeled in the diagram include:

- grey water input pipes
- 150mm concrete channel with screen to allow for acoustics
- diffuser plate to slow water down
- layers of biofilm to treat bacteria etc.
- fine sand filter
- slope all channels by 2% achieve proper water flow
- planted mini-swale
- open culvert
- gravel and pebbles



## Remediation Garden Key Plan



## Key Plan

[ 2 ]

# socialis cibum

## Architecture

**Project Type**  
/ Individual  
# food  
# integration  
# economic opportunity

## Location

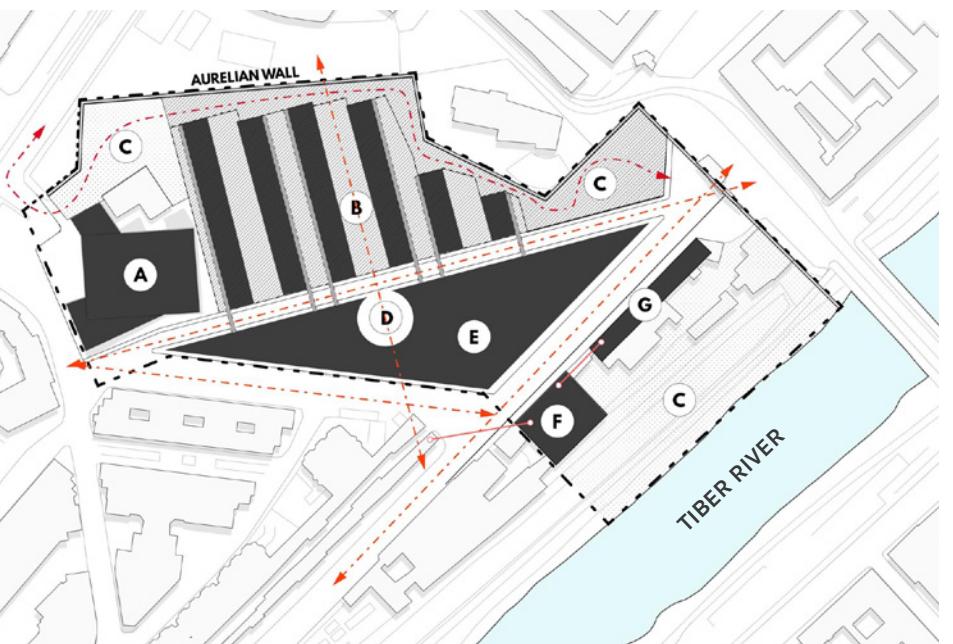
Trastevere, Rome

**Year**  
2017

## Brief

The city of Rome has long struggled to (circa 2017) integrate those it (via government policy and general attitude) has deemed the "others". In this case, namely immigrants, refugees, and other groups such as Romani peoples. This studio project, which is located in the Roman neighbourhood of Trastevere, attempts to explore what methods could be used to design environments that support those often in need. How could design connect/re-integrate them back into the fabric of the communities that already exist? Speaking from personal experience, one of the best methods of connecting people is through food.

Sited on a little used void in the heart of Rome, this project proposes mixing some old ingredients such as social housing, economic opportunity, and outdoor spaces, spiced with a focus on food production. This is done by employing housing residents in the management of urban farming initiatives on a public roof, a new public food market which sells the food produced and latches the existing Porta Portese Flea Market. Also provided are rentable workshops, offices, restaurant, makerspaces and toolshares, libraries, dance school, and a community food centre.



above diagrammatic masterplan

A food, spice museum	D performance space	G rentable workshops
B housing	E public space; urban farming	
C park/greenspace	F maker space & tool share	

## Housing Precedents

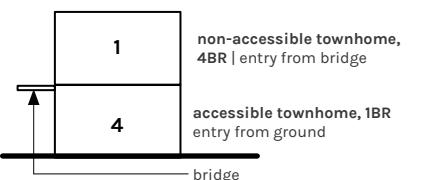


< Bouca Housing Project

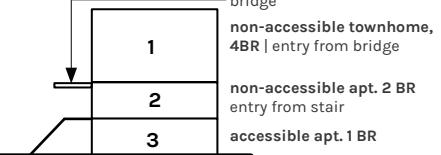
This project's housing is formally inspired by the Bouca Housing project by Alvaro Siza. While the Bouca Housing project is a series of single, four-storey townhomes, the proposed housing in this project is a mix of apartments, and townhomes. The ambition for this mix was to provide living spaces that accommodate larger, intergenerational families, many of whom have varying physical abilities.

There are 3 main access points: ground, freestanding stair, and bridge.

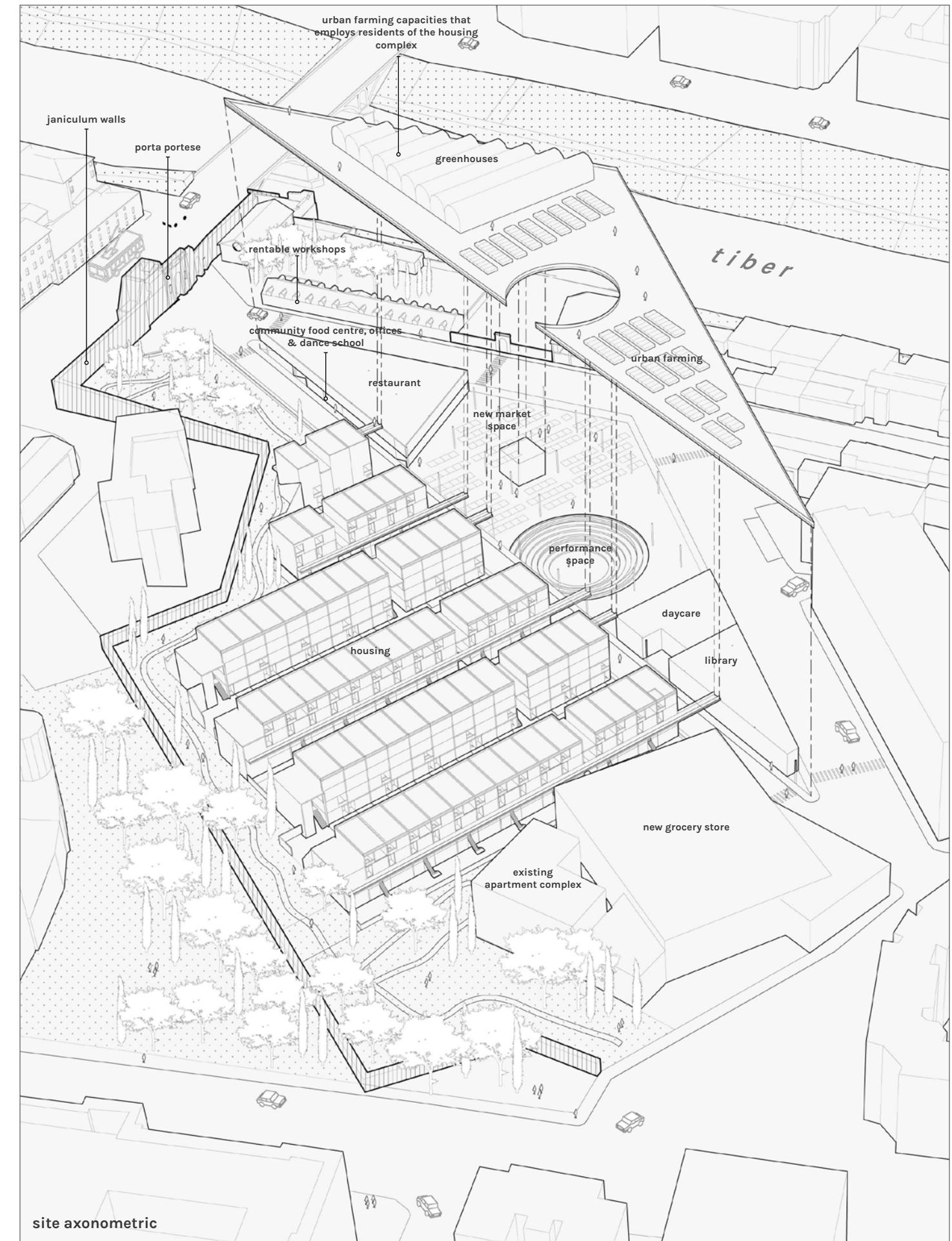
## Housing Block Mix A



## Housing Block Mix B

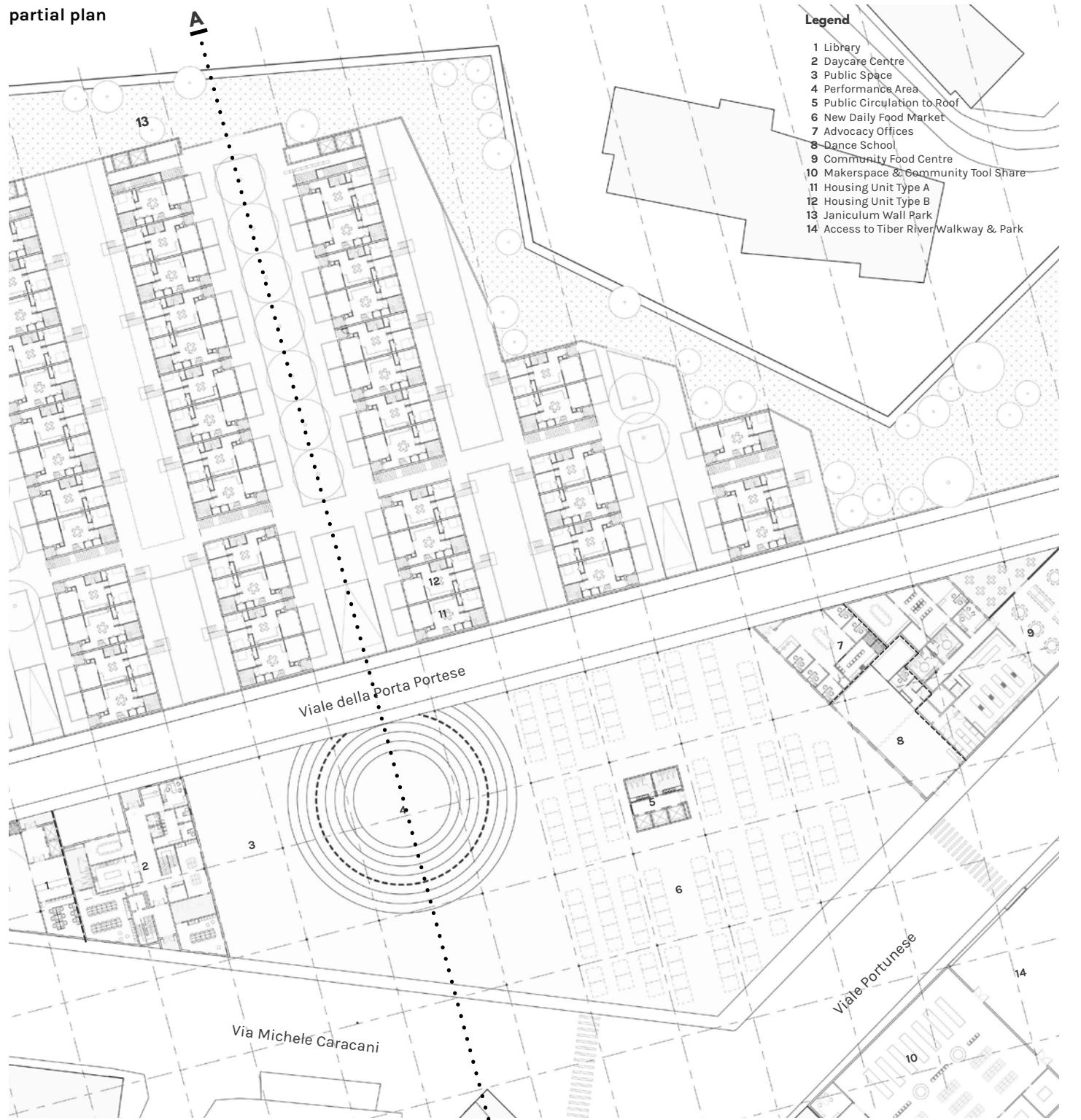


housing detail elevation

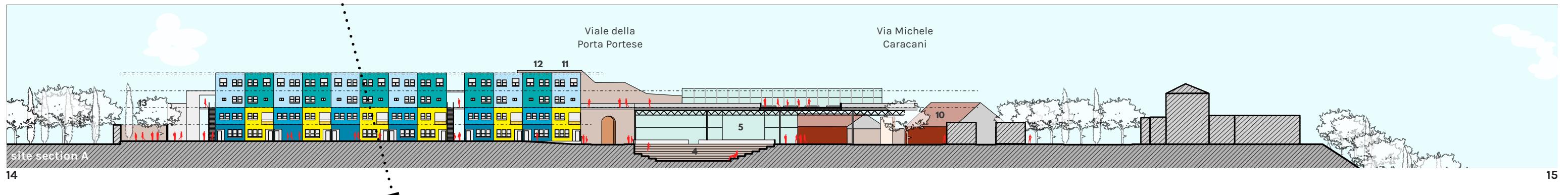
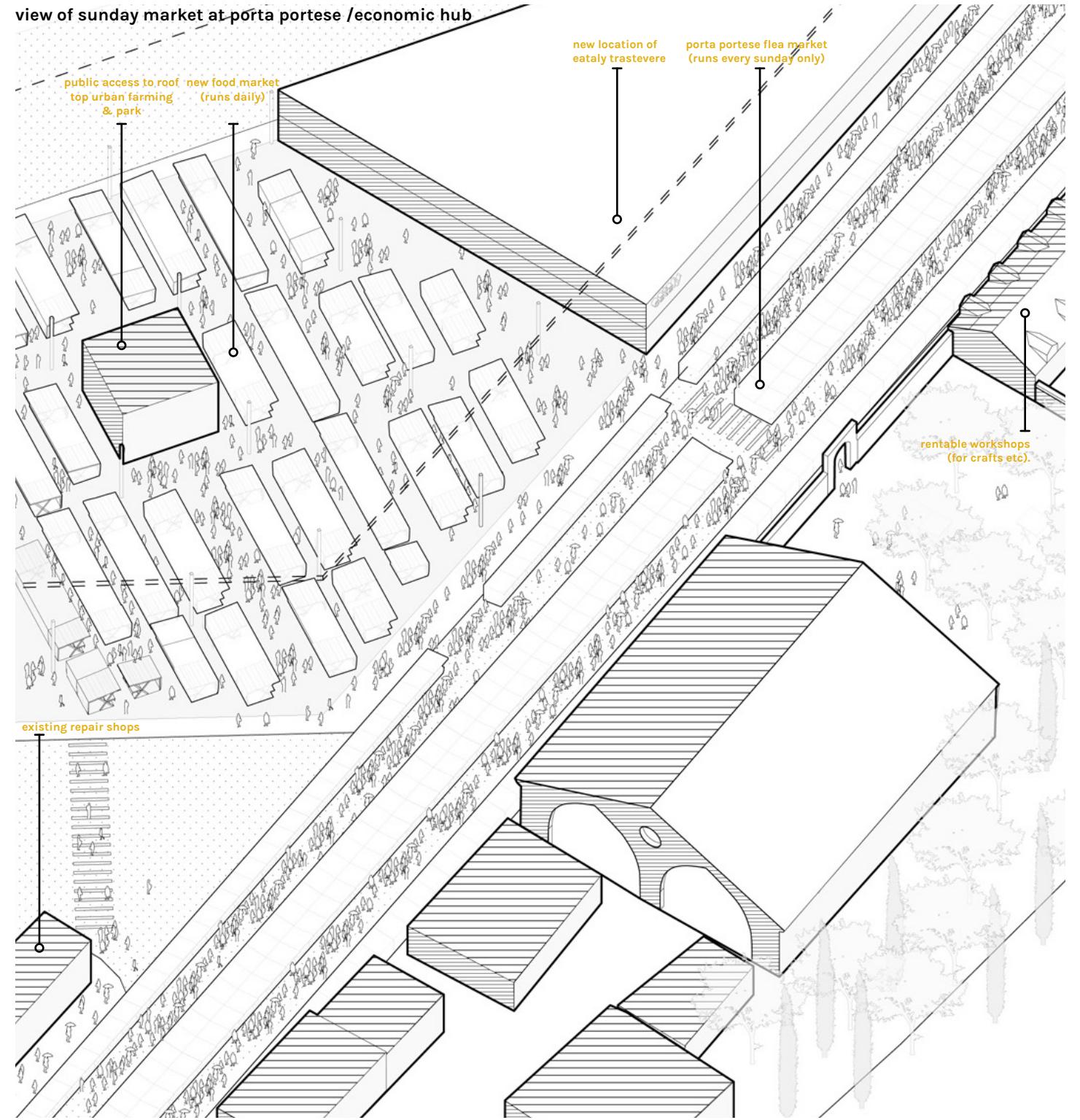


site axonometric

partial plan



view of sunday market at porta portese /economic hub



[ 3 ]

## the shadow library

**Architecture**

**Project Type**  
/ Individual  
# transformation  
# water  
# alternative choices

**Location**  
Ronda, Spain

**Year**  
2016

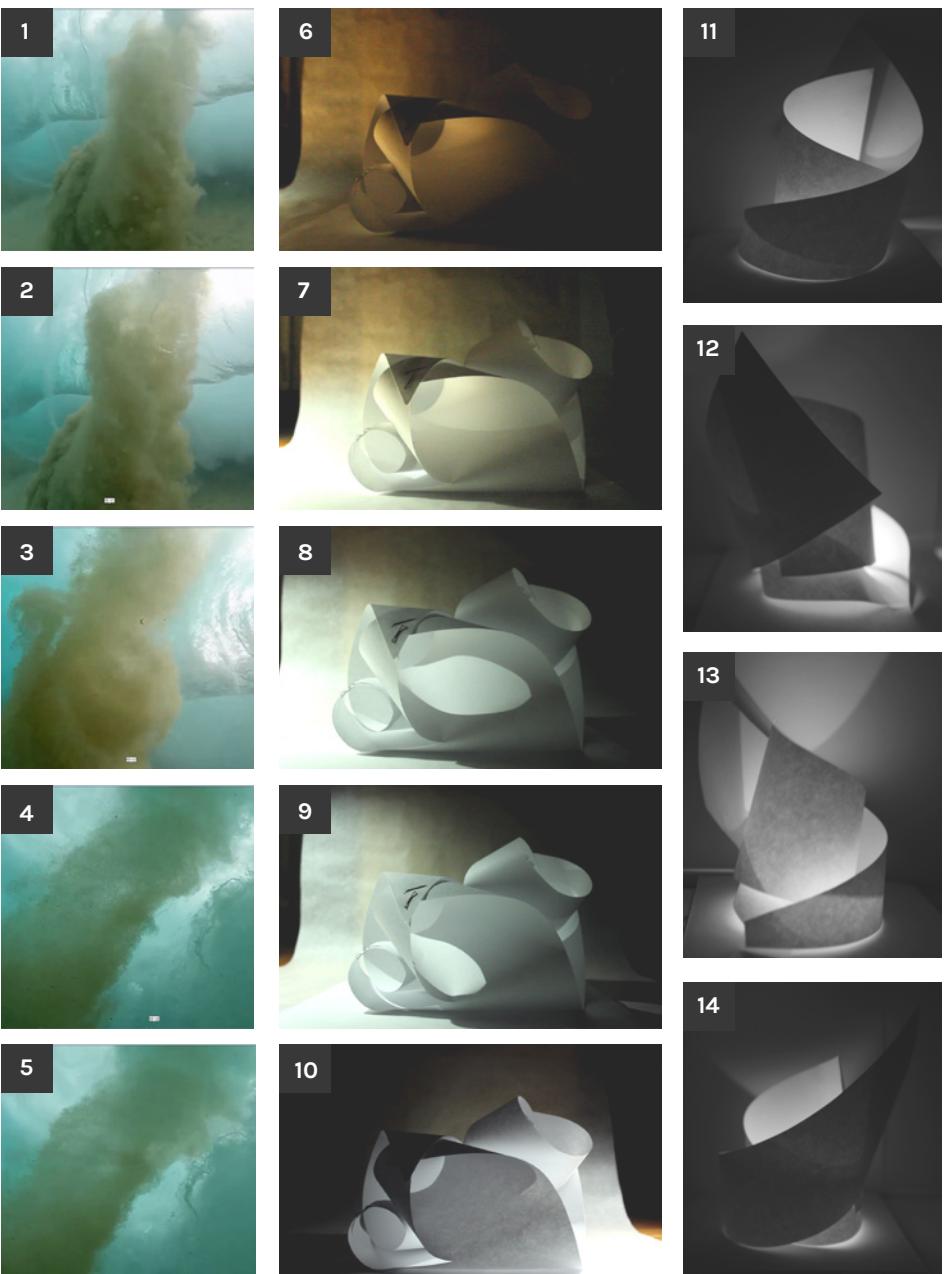
**Brief**

A strange phenomenon is taking place: a vortex is born underwater at the death of a wave.

Water, to follow Bachelard, is an element that "always flows" and is in "constant flux", and vortices have long been a symbol of transformation within the realm of the human psyche. These transformations are often characterized by their powerful and often turmoil-filled, nature. In the same manner, a library too can be transformative as books can challenge and transform the way in which a person thinks.

It is traditionally assumed that a library is a neutral space that is occupied democratically by both people and content but this is rarely the case.

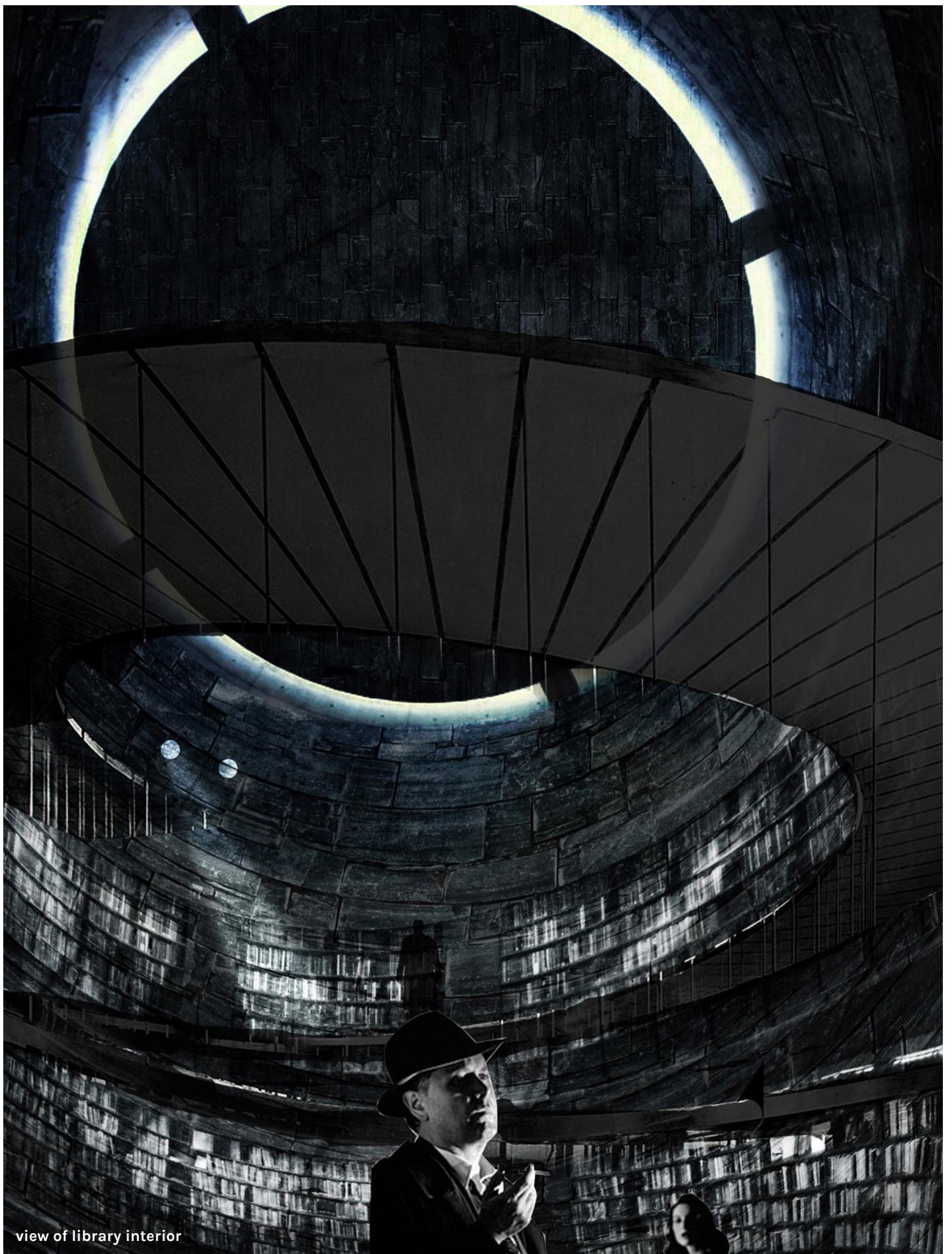
The Shadow Library aims to be the inverse of the modern public library. It will stock that which is lost, censored, challenged, and deemed harmful to public "morality". It will allow the reader/journeyer/searcher to tap into the darkest, most mysterious recesses of their souls/minds via the written, bring these elements to the forefront of their consciousness, and thus be able to come out of this building transformed.



1 - 5 the phases of vortex birth    6 - 10 vortex model and lighting - set A    11 - 14 vortex model and lighting - set B

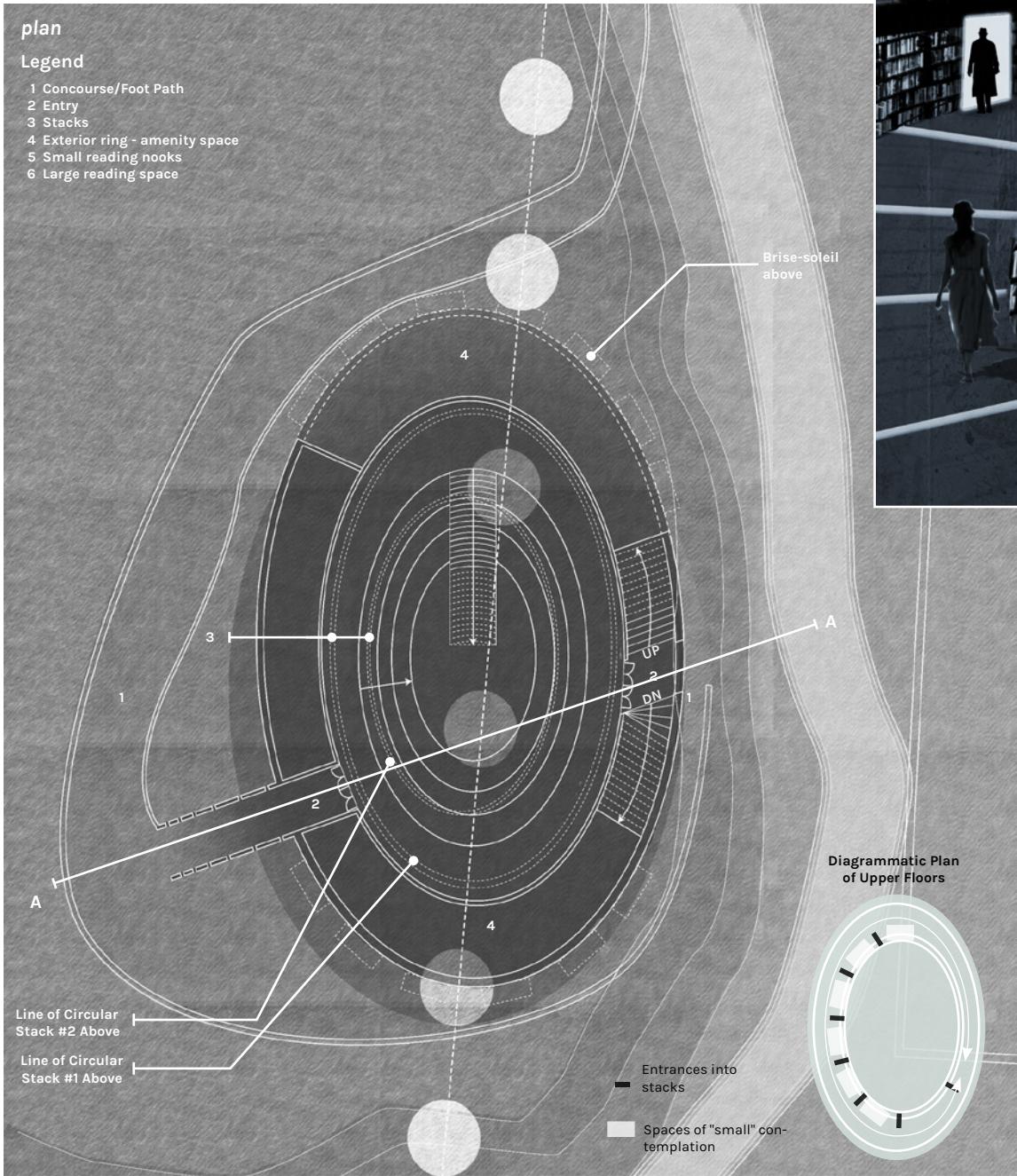


15 - 20 shadow film, dance and "dark" library precedents



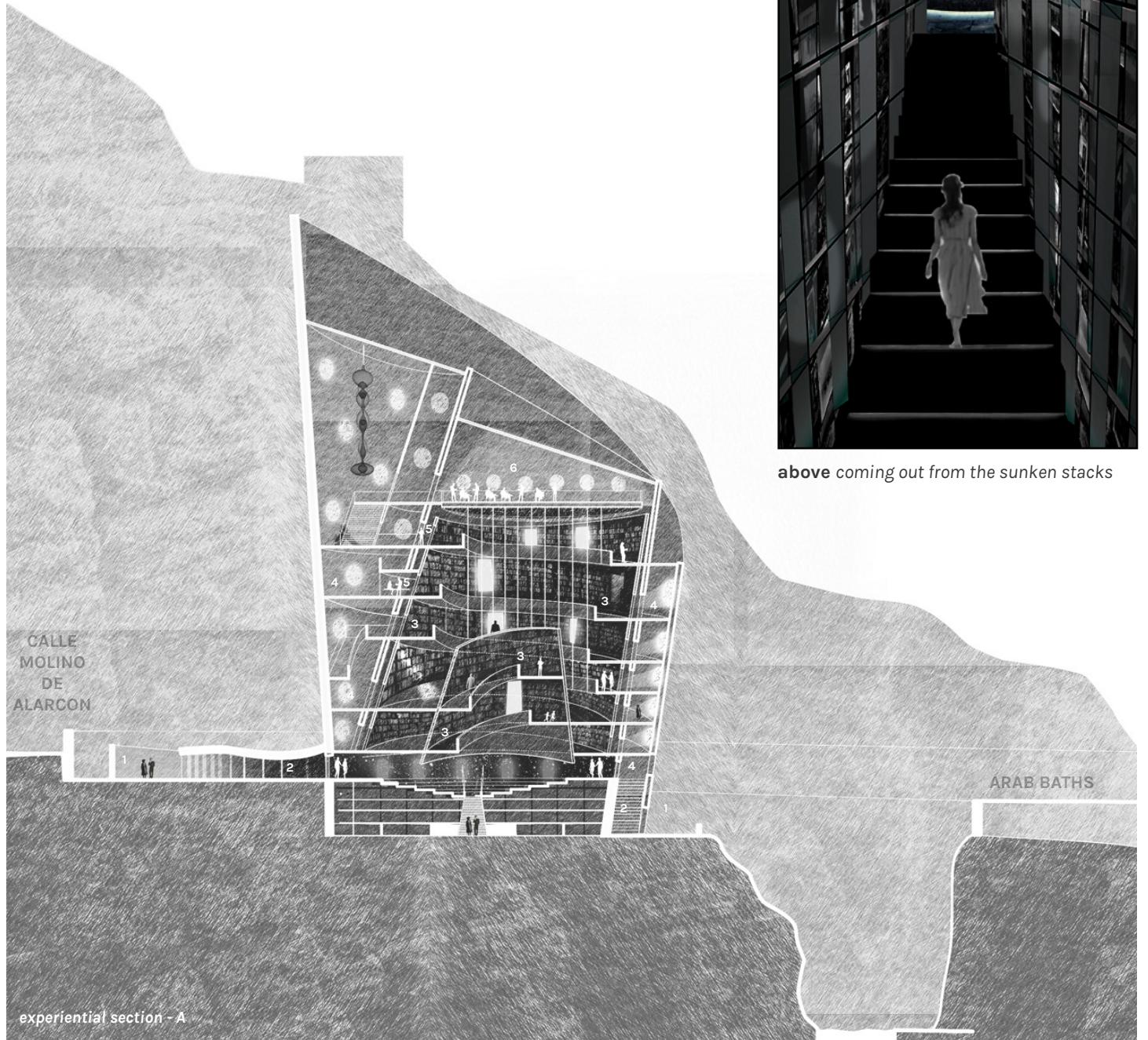
view of library interior

Every library both embraces and rejects. Every library is by definition the result of choice, and necessarily limited in its scope. And every choice excludes another, the choice not made. - Alberto Manguel, *The Library at Night*



above on the suspended circular stacks

Only when it is dark does the owl of Minerva take flight.  
- Walter Benjamin, quoting Hegel



above coming out from the sunken stacks



[ 4 ]

## genes and horticulture: a home

**Design/Architecture**

**Project Type**  
/ Individual  
# "the good life"  
# dna-rna-dna stairs  
# experimental garden

**Location**

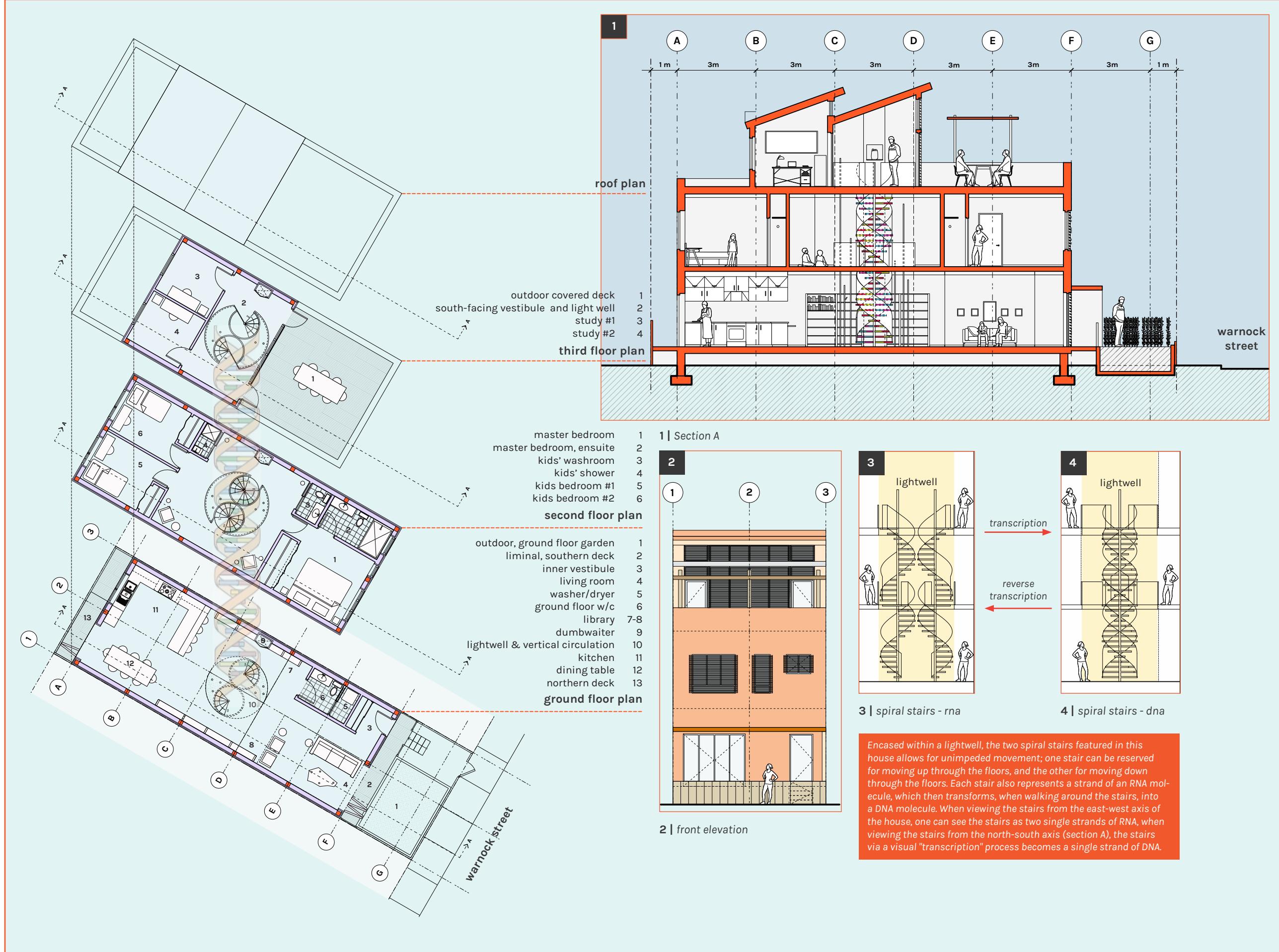
Cambridge, ON

**Year**  
2012

**Brief**

Homes are incredibly personal places, where we hope to see ourselves and what is most important to us. This project is a home for a geneticist, a horticulturalist and their two children.

The key programmatic elements of the house involve making the living room openable onto a deck and experimental garden, where the horticulturalist can grow the various species they work with. The geneticist is reflected through the stairs in the lightwell. These stairs display two key processes in the use of genes (transcription and reverse transcription). The lightwell is arranged to split the house in two and provide an opportunity for light to evenly permeate the spaces of the house.



[ 5 ]

# montgomery wood architect "eh - frame"

Professional

**Project Type**  
/ Team  
# a-frame  
# net-zero  
# off grid

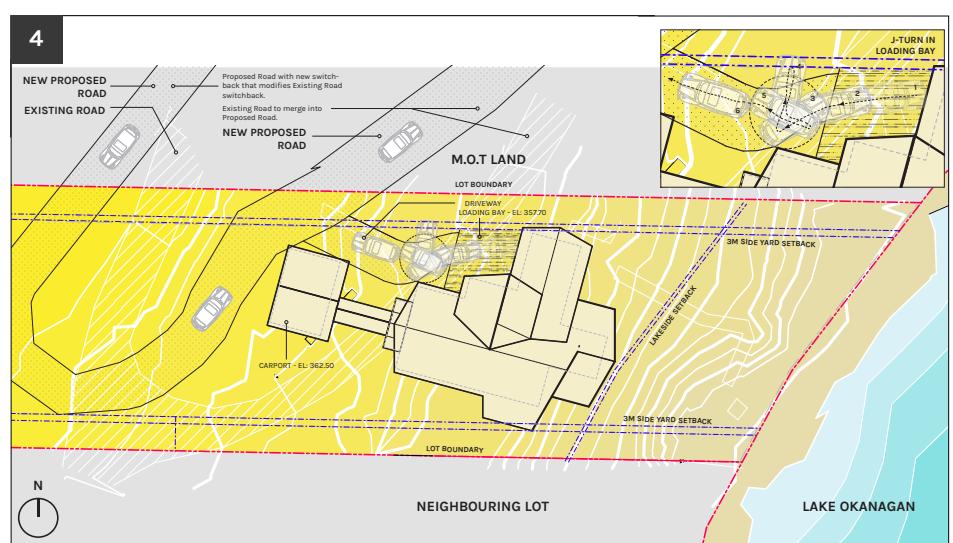
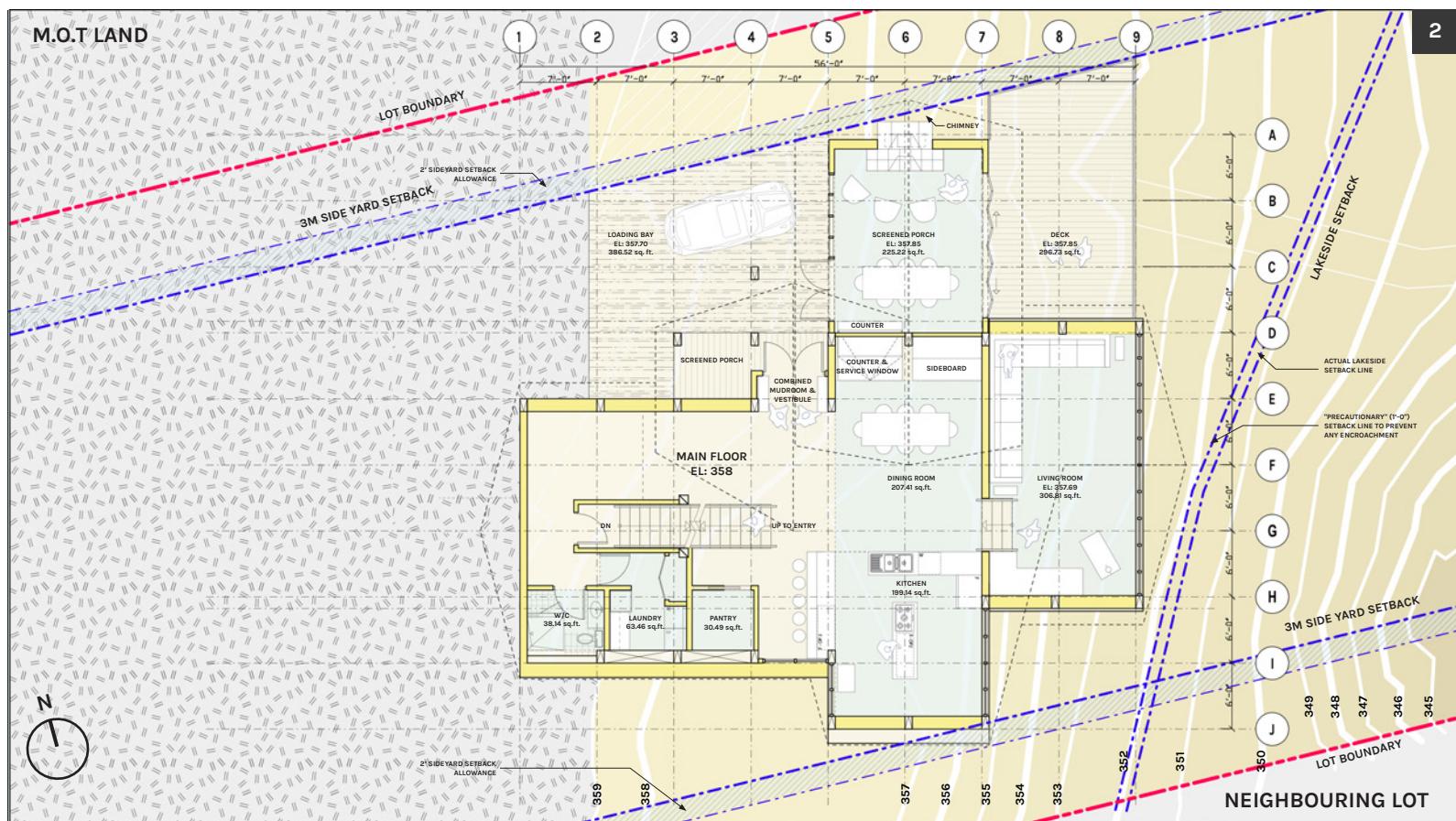
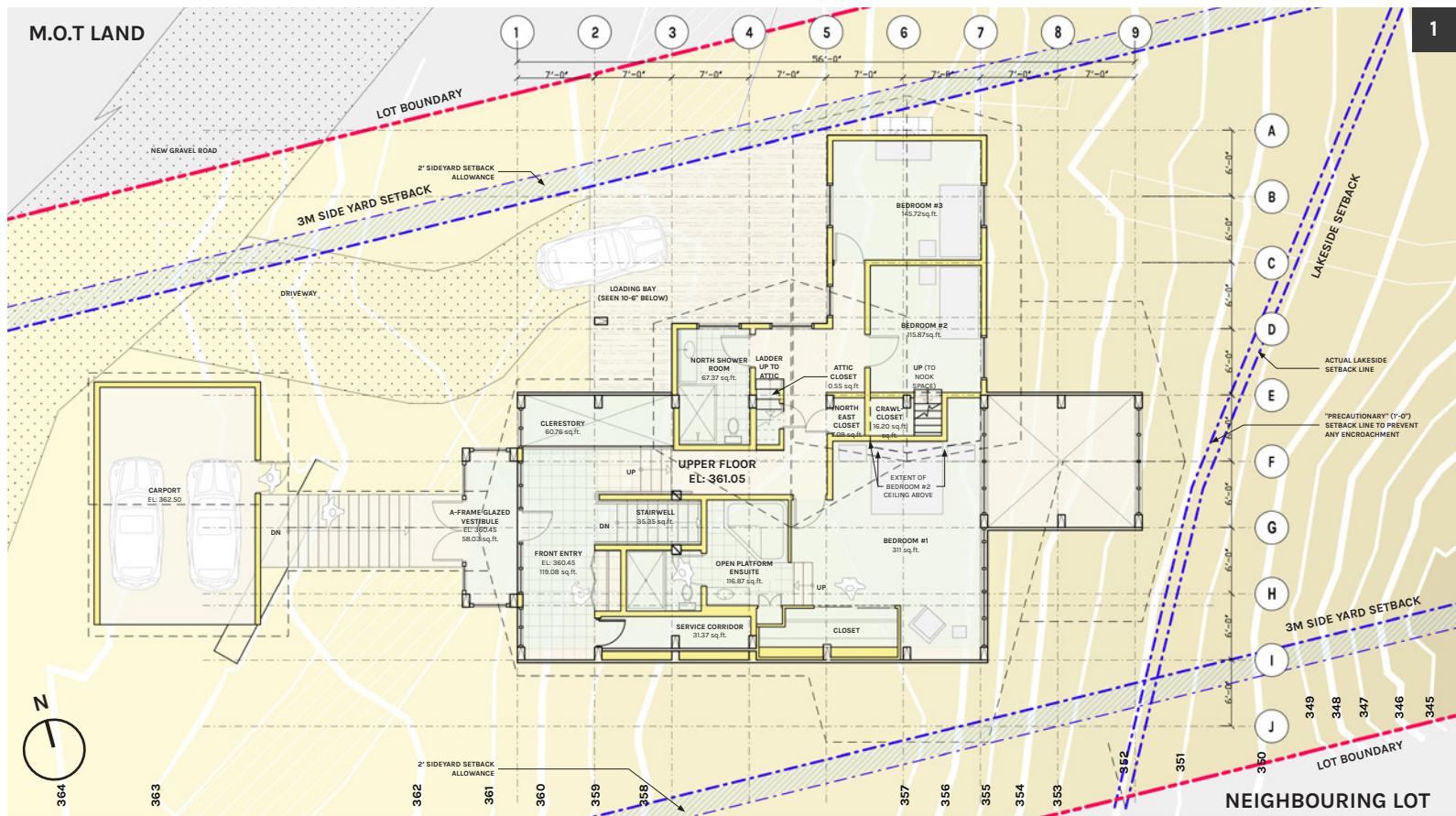
**Location**  
Kelowna, BC

**Year**  
2020 - Present

## Brief

This project is unlike any I've worked on before. It's an A-Frame situated on a very steep slope, a type of site contouring not typically well suited to the structural frame. The client has ambitions for this project to be a net-zero building. This building, due to site limitations, may also have to be off-grid, which is part of the current design we're working on. In addition, the clients are keen to have their home be future-proofed against the locality's extreme weather projections for the future (high risk for fire, extreme heat), and we intend on utilizing the new IBAMA frameworks developed at UBC in the design. While this project is currently at 75% Schematic Design, it is anticipated to move into working drawings in Spring 2021.

I act as both draftswoman, and a junior designer on this project.



1 | Entry Floor

2 | Main Floor

3 | Cross-section through Living Room and partial elevation of main A-frame gable.

4 | Road Access, option #1

[ 6 ]

# muslim food bank & community services

## Professional/Community

### Project Type

/ Team, Volunteering  
# food bank  
# renovation  
# community service

### Location

Surrey, BC / Richmond, BC

### Year

2018 - 2019

### Brief

The Muslim Food Bank & Community Services is a community-based organization that was born out of a singular need: to provide food assistance to folks experiencing poverty who also have religious dietary requirements. Over the years, its mandate has expanded to include advocating for self-reliance by providing case management, emotional support, youth development and capacity building.

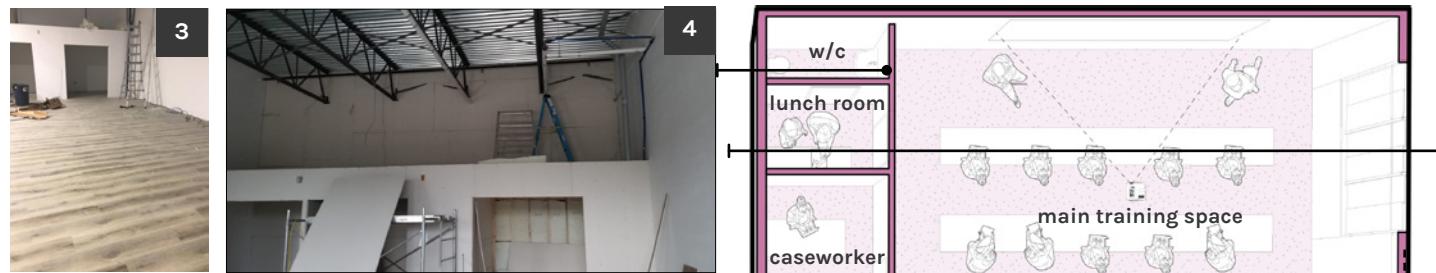
For a community organization that (while based out of Surrey) caters to an ever increasing number of families and individuals from all over the Lower Mainland, the limited space of the first warehouse (half the length of the new space) that the MFBCS had bought was proving to be a hindrance. A new space was bought and renovations, which called upon the various resources of the community were undertaken. As a volunteer during distribution day and a trained caseworker with the MFBCS, my role in the project involved acting as **owner's representative** and **assistant project coordinator** (reviewing the design drawings, co-ordinating the application for building permit, sourcing low-cost materials, creating budgets etc.).



1 & 2 | Warehouse on Distribution Days



2



3 & 4 | Construction of MZ Offices & Service Spaces

3

4

5

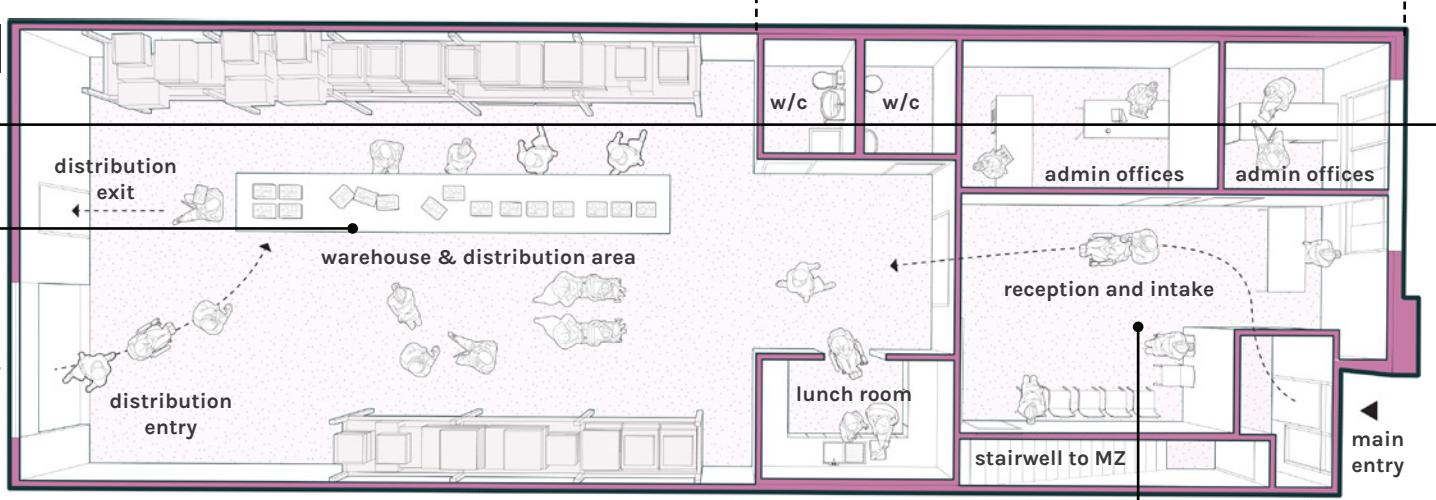
6

7

8

9

5 | View of completed Reception and Intake from Warehouse



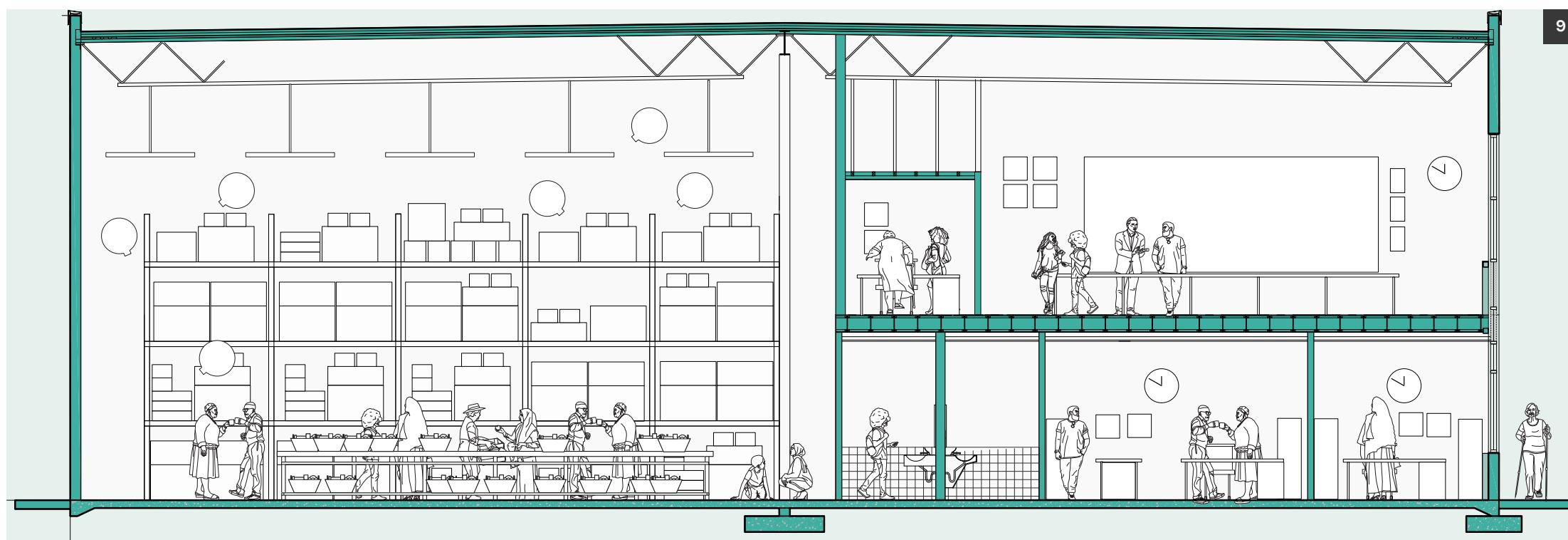
6 | Bird's Eye Plan of Mezzanine

7

8

9

7 | Bird's Eye Plan of Ground Floor



8 | Test Render of the Ground Floor Reception & Intake Space

9 | Section through Warehouse

[ 7 ]

# urban arts architecture: ufv library renovation

## Professional

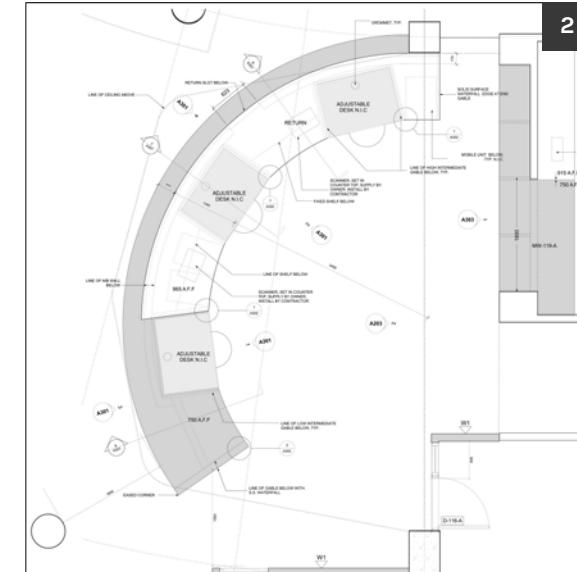
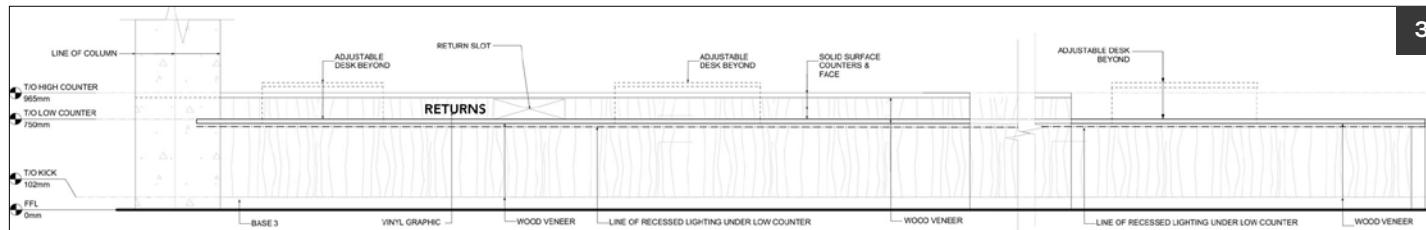
**Project Type**  
/ Team  
# library  
# institutional  
# renovation

**Location**  
Abbotsford, BC

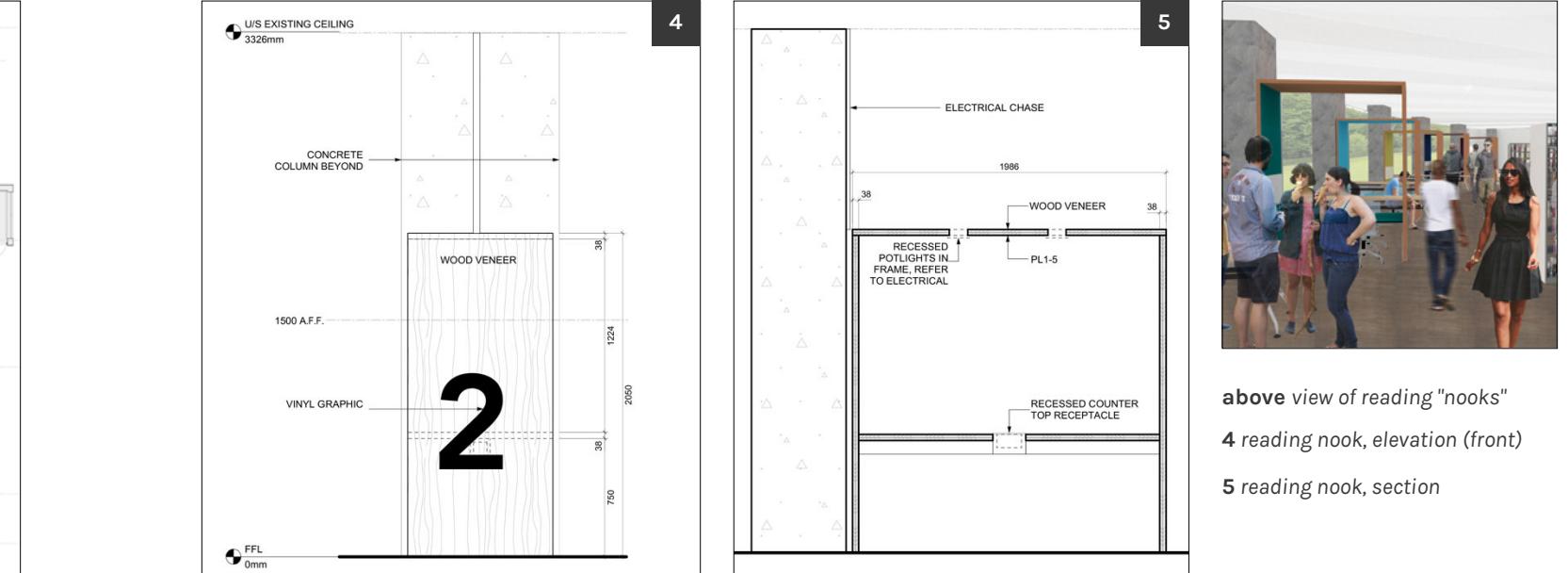
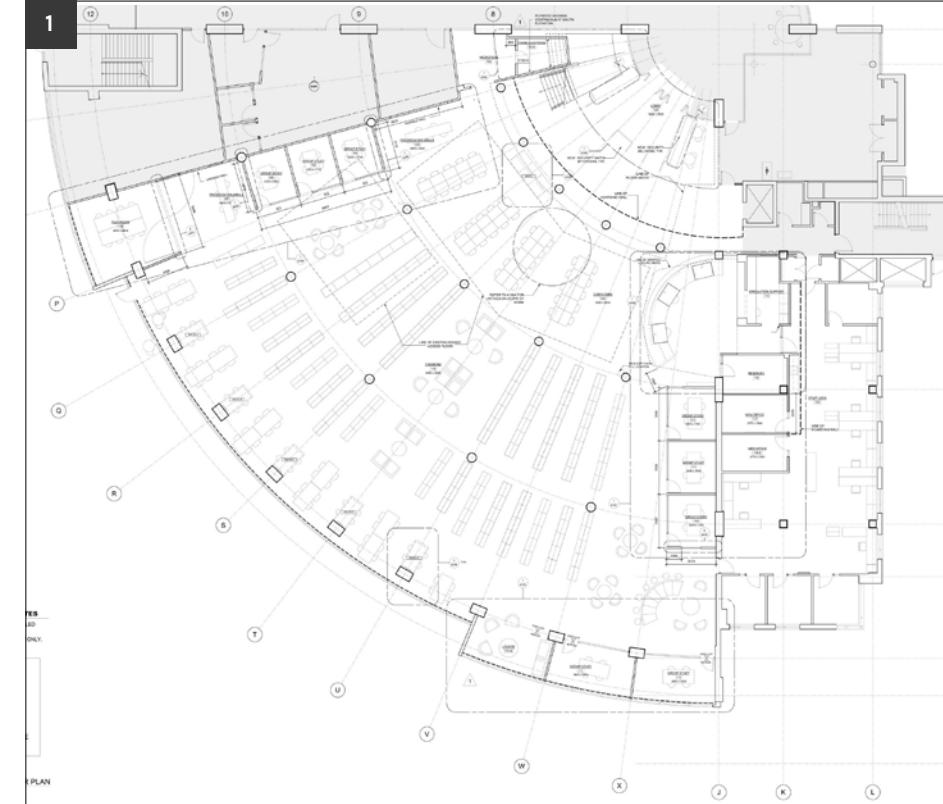
**Year**  
2017

## Brief

At Urban Arts Architecture, I primarily worked on a large-scale renovation of the University of the Fraser Valley's Library. I worked with the principal-in-charge on the schematic design which involved improving the existing layout of the stacks, creating new study rooms, new reading nooks, seating areas and an improved circulation space and back-of-house spaces for the librarians.



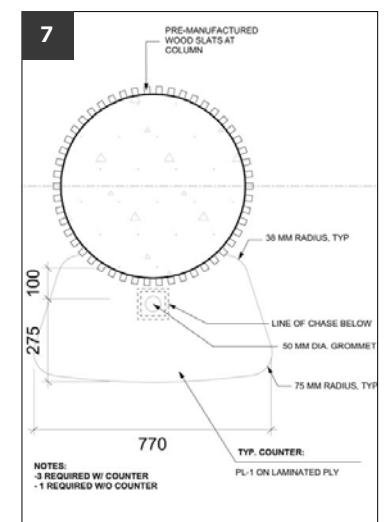
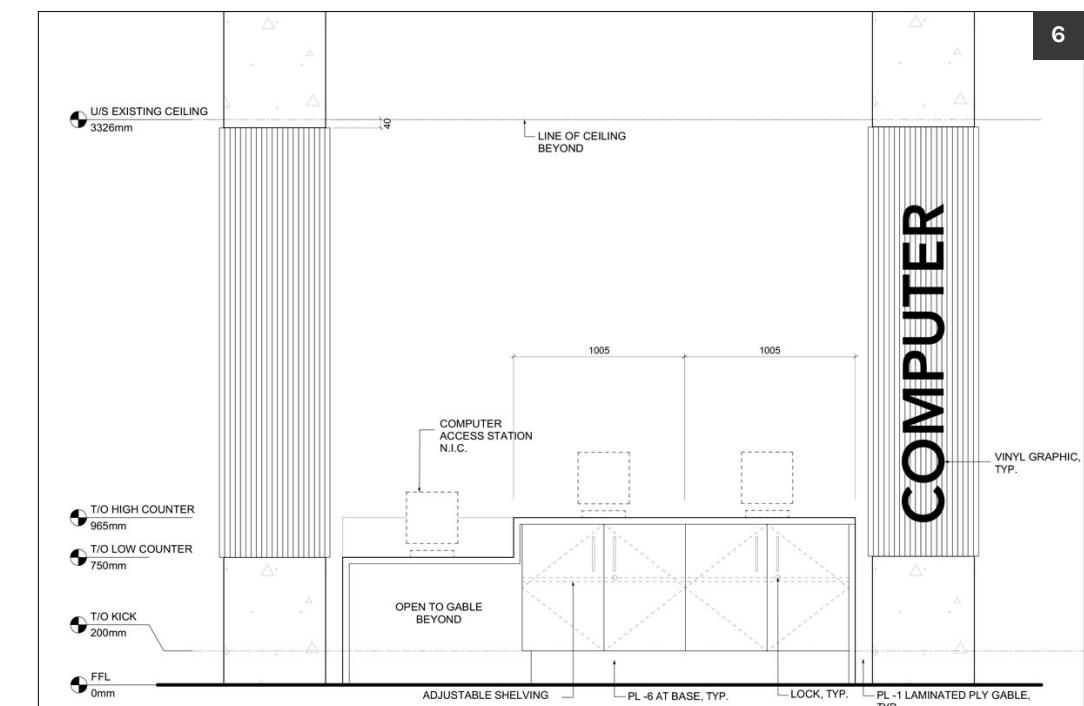
1 library - general plan  
2 circulation desk - millwork plan  
3 circulation desk - millwork elevation(s)



above view of reading "nooks"

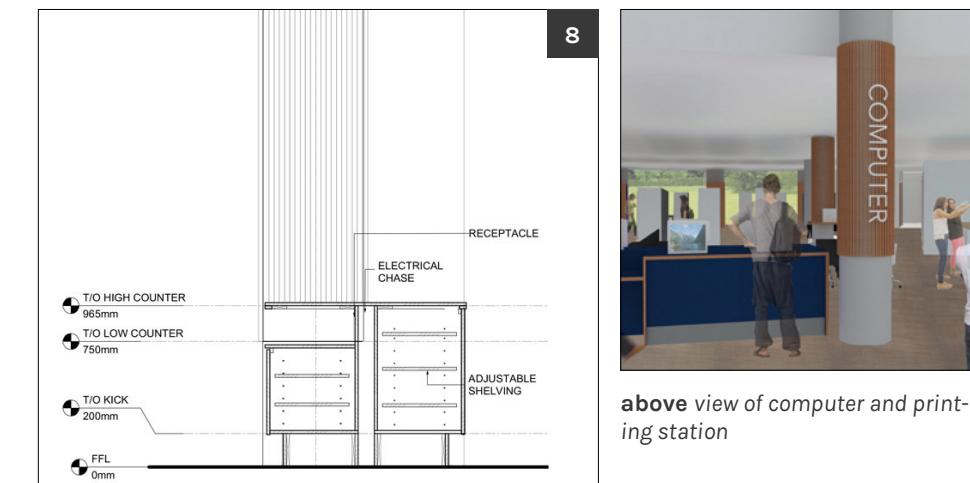
4 reading nook, elevation (front)

5 reading nook, section



6 computer and printing station,  
millwork elevation (front)

7 column millwork details (plan)



above view of computer and print-  
ing station

[ 8 ]

# 0% Interest Loan Guidebook

Community Activism/Research

**Project Type**  
/ Individual  
# free loans  
# alternative financing  
# peer-to-peer

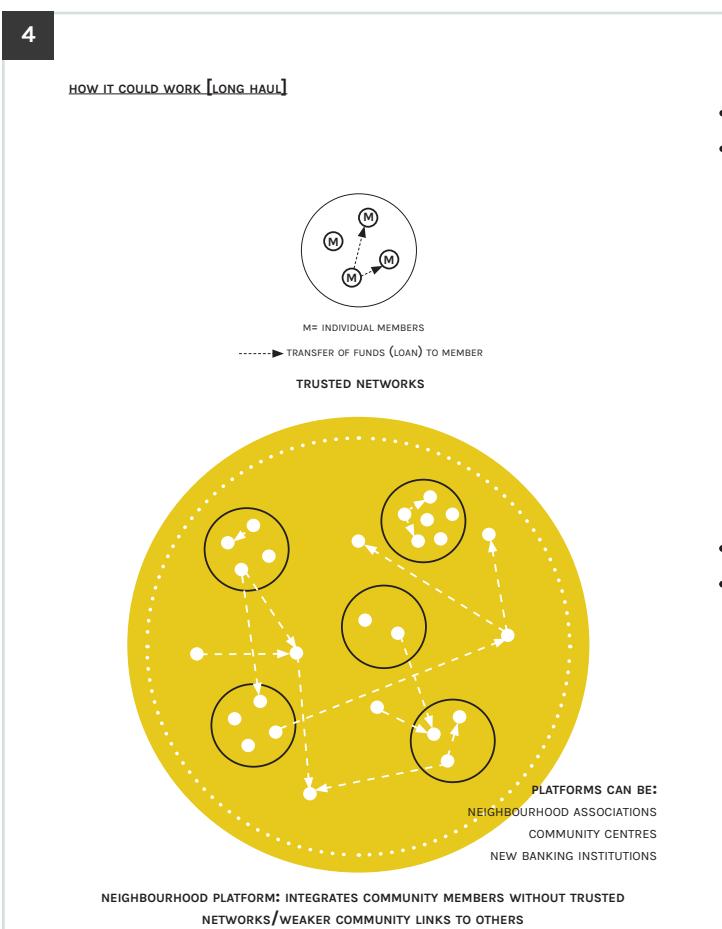
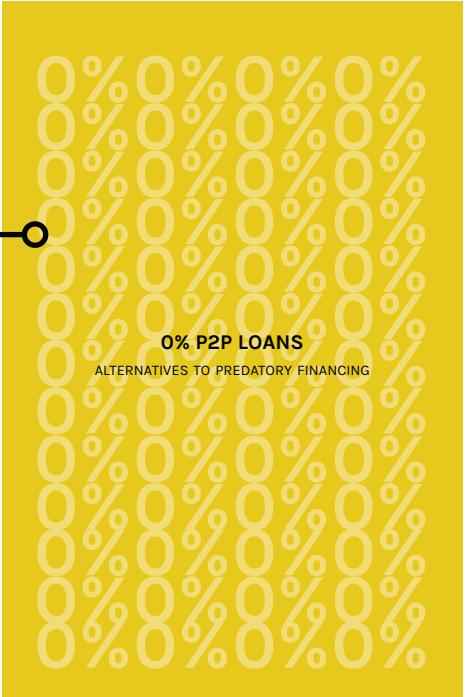
**Location**  
Vancouver, BC

**Year**  
2020 - Present

**Brief**  
This project began in March of 2020, right when the COVID-19 pandemic began in British Columbia, and the first lockdown occurred. While I started getting involved with another mutual aid organization in Vancouver, I also floated an idea on a few social media platforms I had, where I suggested making loans of larger amounts (\$250-\$1000) at 0% percent interest.

This idea received more interest than I had ever anticipated and I decided to explore it further as to how it could work etc., within this living and experimental document. The first iteration went out to interested community members for review. The second iteration is a zine with a small, limited distribution.

1 | 0% P2P Loans on limited distribution at Lucky's Books in Vancouver.  
 2 | Print copy, handmade and hand-bound.  
 3 | Cover Page and key spread showing a "draft agreement".  
 4 | A key spread showing diagrams of how this idea could potentially work, what kind of space it could take up within the frame of the existing city.



**VALUES ESTABLISHED BY NEW LOANS AND AGREEMENTS**

I HAVE DRAFTED A BASIC NEW AGREEMENT THAT I HOPE ACHIEVES PROVIDING AND ESTABLISHING THE VALUES OF CARE. IN THIS NEW AGREEMENT, OLD DYNAMICS OF LENDING ARE UPENDED AS THE BORROWER NOW SETS, WITH CARING NEGOTIATION WITH THEIR LENDER, THE DATES OF LOAN RETURN AND AMOUNT. IF THE BORROWER IS ABLE TO GIVE THE ENTIRE PRINCIPAL BACK AS A SINGLE LUMP SUM, THAT IS FINE. IF NOT, THAT IS ALSO FINE, BUT THE BORROWER SHOULD COME UP WITH AN ACCURATE SUMMATION OF THEIR BUDGET AND SPECIFY A LOAN RETURN AMOUNT. THE BORROWER SHOULD COME UP WITH A REASONABLE PERCENTAGE TO GIVE BACK PER MONTH. THE BORROWER IS UNDER NO OBLIGATION TO REVEAL ANY OF THE DECISIONS OR CALCULATIONS USED TO DERIVE THIS AMOUNT, UNLESS THEY SHOULD WISH TO.

FOR A LENDER TO ASK FOR SUCH INFORMATION IS IN DEFiance OF THE SPIRIT OF THIS AGREEMENT.

NOTE: "REASONABLE" IS DEFINED AS A PERCENTAGE THAT THE BORROWER CAN SET ASIDE FROM THEIR BUDGET TO PAY BACK WITHOUT EXCESSIVELY STRAINING THEMSELVES (EXCESS STRESS, MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH ISSUES) AND CAN ALLOW THE LENDER TO RECOVER THESE COSTS.

**LAST, BUT NOT LEAST: AS A LENDER PROVIDING A 0% INTEREST LOAN, I UNDERSTAND THAT LIFE IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT. I UNDERSTAND THAT WHILE THE BORROWER AND I MAY COME TO A CONSENSUS ON THE DATE AND THE AMOUNT THE FUNDS ARE TO BE PAID BACK, THAT THE BORROWER CAN ALWAYS COME BACK TO ME TO NEGOTIATE THIS DATE AND AMOUNT BASED ON NEW CIRCUMSTANCES.**

**ON CONFLICT & HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION**

TO LIVE IN COMMUNITY MEANS THAT WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT DUE TO OUR DIFFERENCES IN LIFESTYLE, WORLDVIEW, UPBRINGING AND IDENTITY, THAT IT IS VERY LIKELY THAT CONFLICT MAY OCCUR. WE BELIEVE THAT HEALTHY CONFLICT RESOLUTION IS THE ONLY WAY TO CONTINUE LIVING IN COMMUNITY.

WE COMMIT TO BRINGING THE FOLLOWING VALUES TO OUR CONFLICT

-----

**DRAFT AGREEMENT**

3

[ 9 ]

# mutual aid: covid-19 coming together fund

## Community Activism / Volunteering

**Project Type**  
/ Team  
# strategy  
# accessibility  
# decision-making

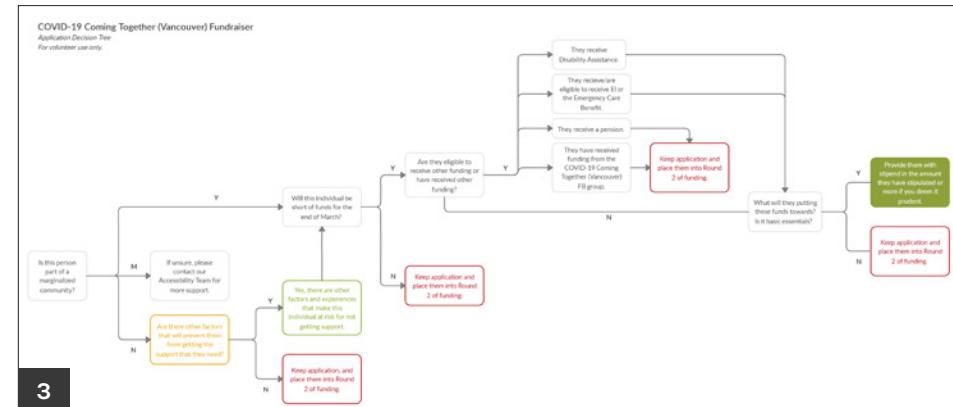
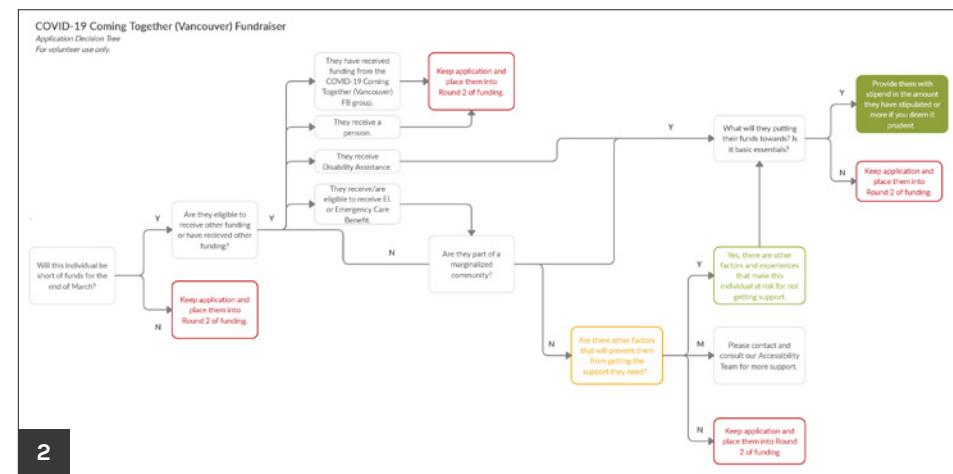
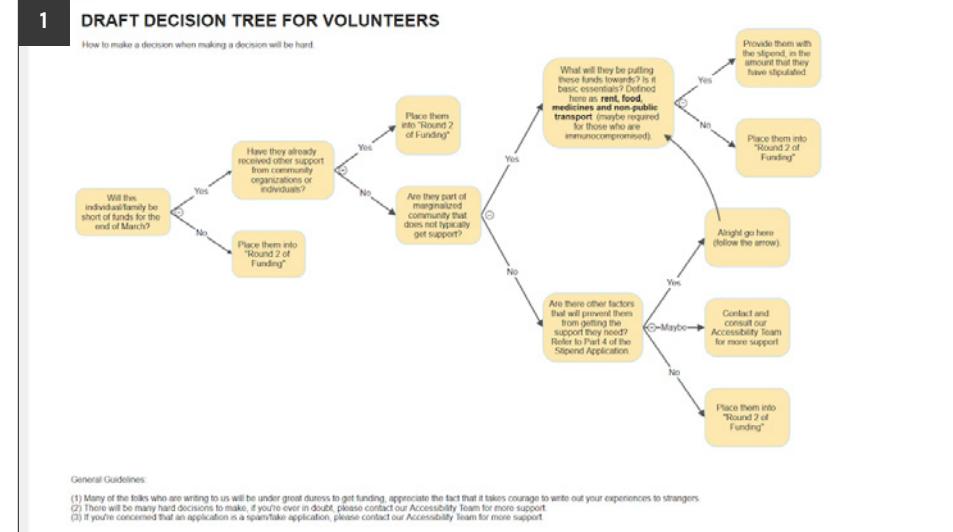
**Location**  
Vancouver, BC

**Year**  
2020 - Present

### Brief

COVID-19 Coming Together is a mutual-aid, volunteer-run organization that was formed in Vancouver's Lower Mainland as a response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

As an initial organizing member, my role in this group was to help develop decision making around how funds from our fundraiser would be distributed and to whom. To aid the team in our lengthy strategic discussions, which focused on how to prioritize and how to structure our application for this fund, I created a set of decision making trees. These trees helped us lay out what we were discussing. They also helped clarify what our evaluation metric would be, and how our general application would be structured.



1 Initial rough draft of decision tree

2 Option A; starting evaluation metric -- economic need

3 Option B; starting evaluation metric -- marginalized status; decision tree we started with.

[ 10 ]

# local economic development lab

## Community Activism/ Volunteering

**Project Type**  
/ Team  
# information design  
# accessibility  
# decision-making

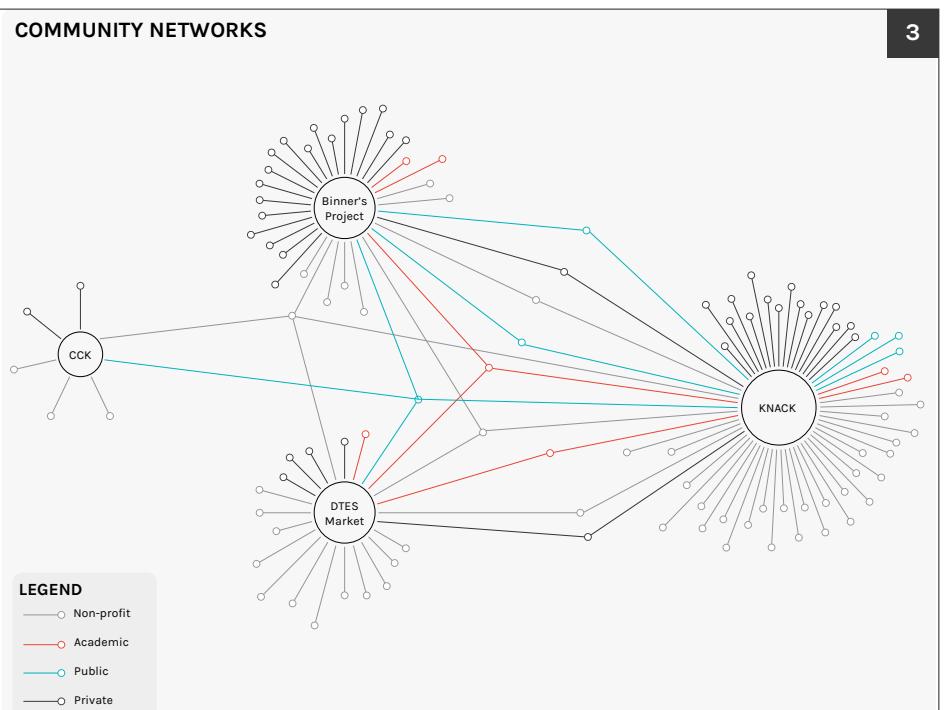
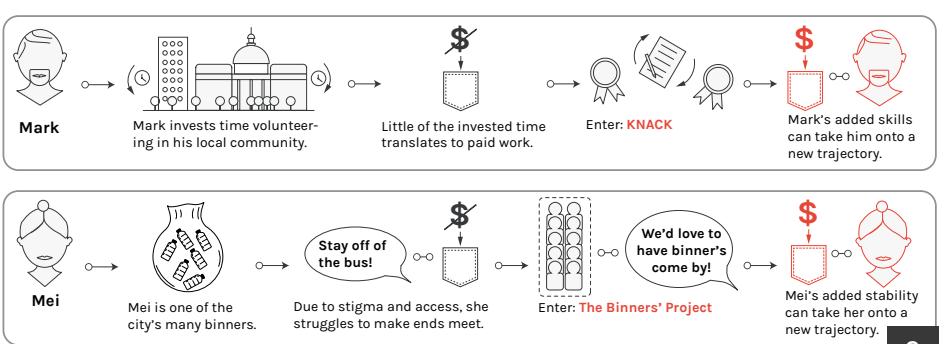
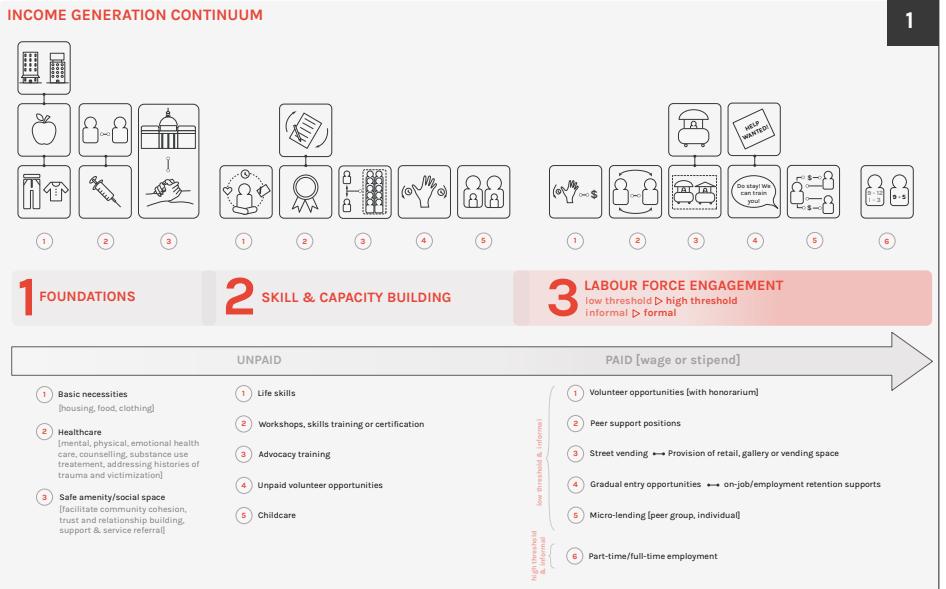
**Location**  
Vancouver, BC

**Year**  
2016

### Brief

My first introduction to alternative economics was in 2016, when I stumbled upon a two-year Simon Fraser University initiative called the Local Economic Development Lab. LEDlab, aimed to create new economic opportunities for the inhabitants of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside by developing and implementing programs that could translate existing skills and work done by lower-income community members into paid, salaried work. It was hoped that this framework/system could help in breaking the cycle of poverty.

I was tasked with creating various new graphics for their final research publication, which would demonstrate what their two-year program had accomplished.



1 Income generation continuum

2 Illustrated Income Generation Continuum: helps to explain how LEDlab's initiatives will impact the local community.

3 General Community Networks Map.

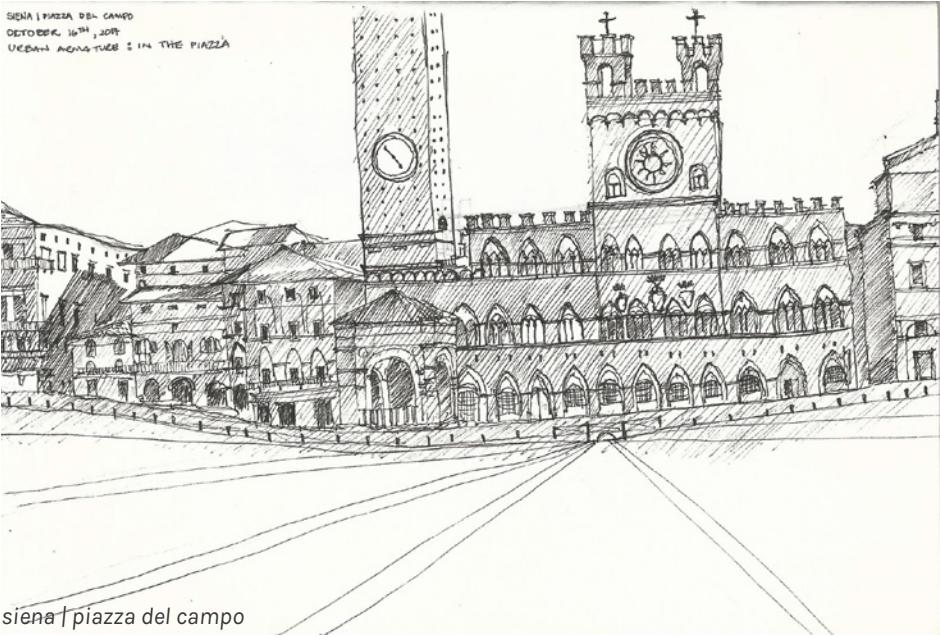
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## sketches



Personal

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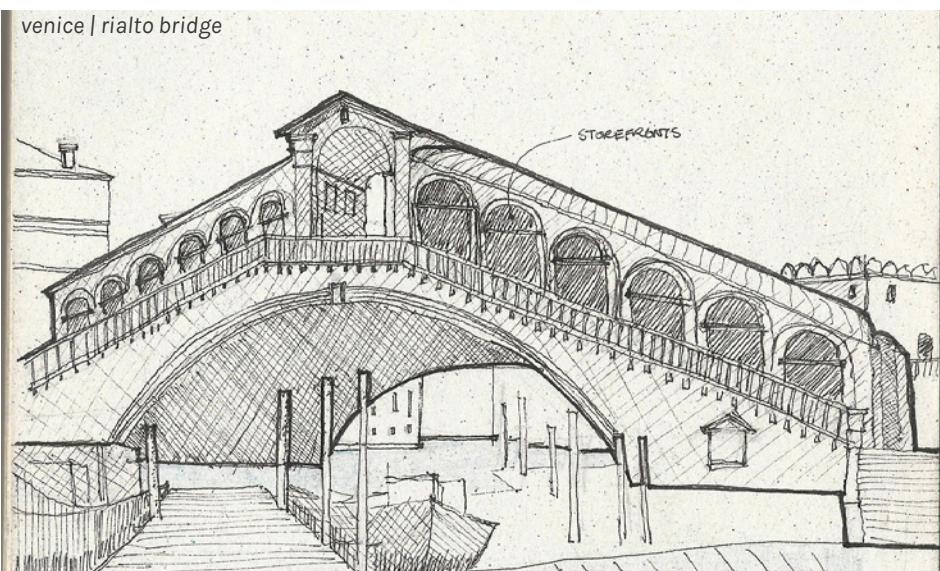
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masks galore



palms and oranges



## Portfolio 2020

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thank you for your consideration!