

houston
CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

MODEL

SAN JACINTO STREET

MODEL



B

C

BINZ STREET

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
College of Architecture and Urban Studies

Washington Alexandria Architecture Center

The Houston Center for Photography | Houston, Texas

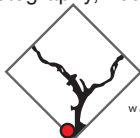
Alec Anh Luong

thesis submitted to the faculty of the virginia polytechnic institute and state university in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of masters of architecture in the college of architecture and urban studies.

Susan Piedmont-Palladino [committee chair]
Paul Emmons [committee member]
Marcia Feuerstein [committee member]

defended on the 11th of may, 2009, in the red room of the washington alexandria architecture center, alexandria virginia.

keywords [photography, houston, framing, people, museum, portrait]



VirginiaTech

washington-alexandria architecture center

this entire work, including all parts, is protected by copyright. no part of this publication may be used without the prior consent of the author including all texts, images, and graphics - digital or paper.

Copyright © 2009 Alec Anh Luong

THE HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

to my parents - for without them, none of this is possible.

i know that the accident of my being a photographer has made
my life possible.

richard avedon



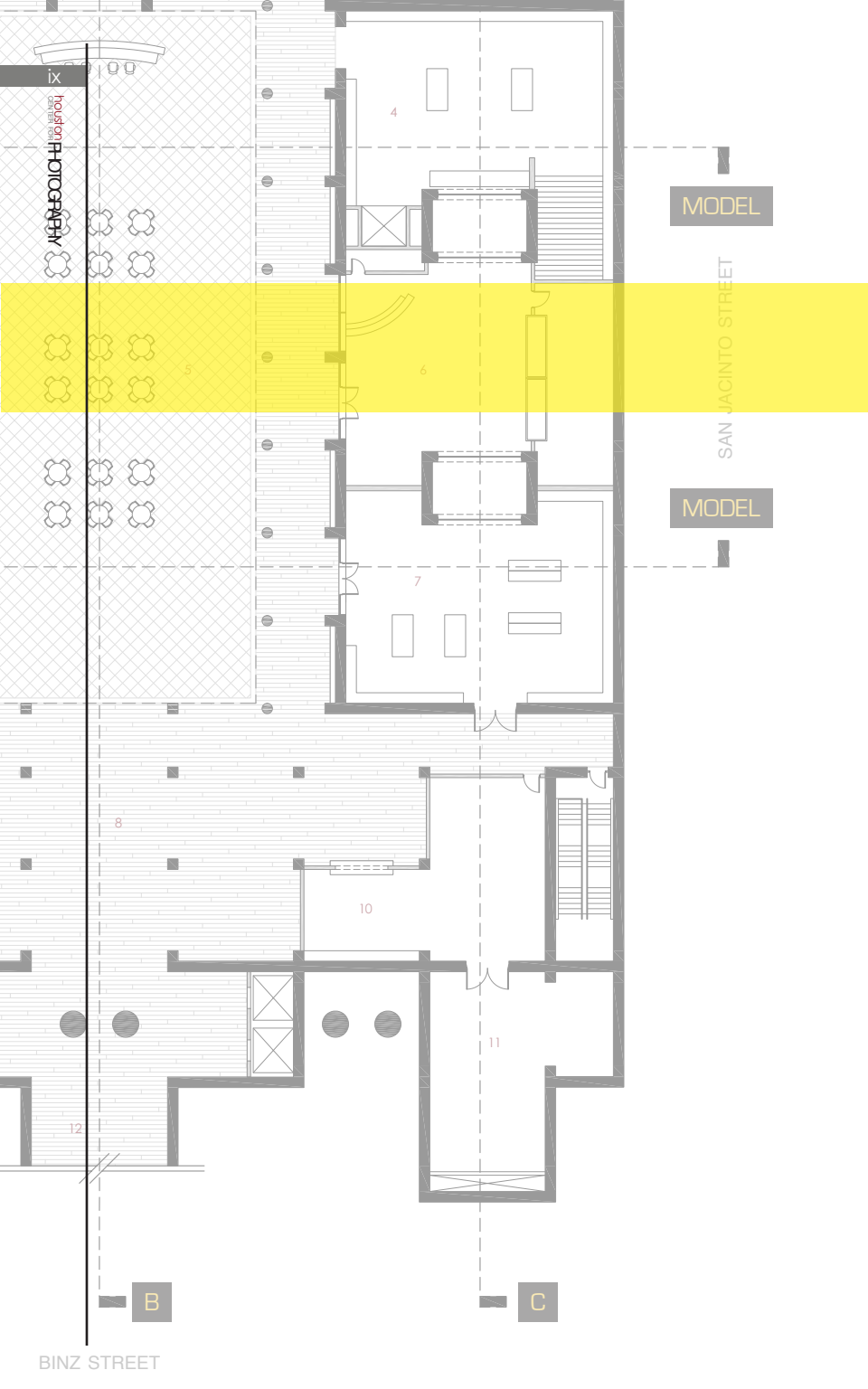
susan piedmont-palladino



paul emmons



marcia feuerstein



IX
Houston PHOTOGRAPHY

MODEL

SAN JACINTO STREET

MODEL

B

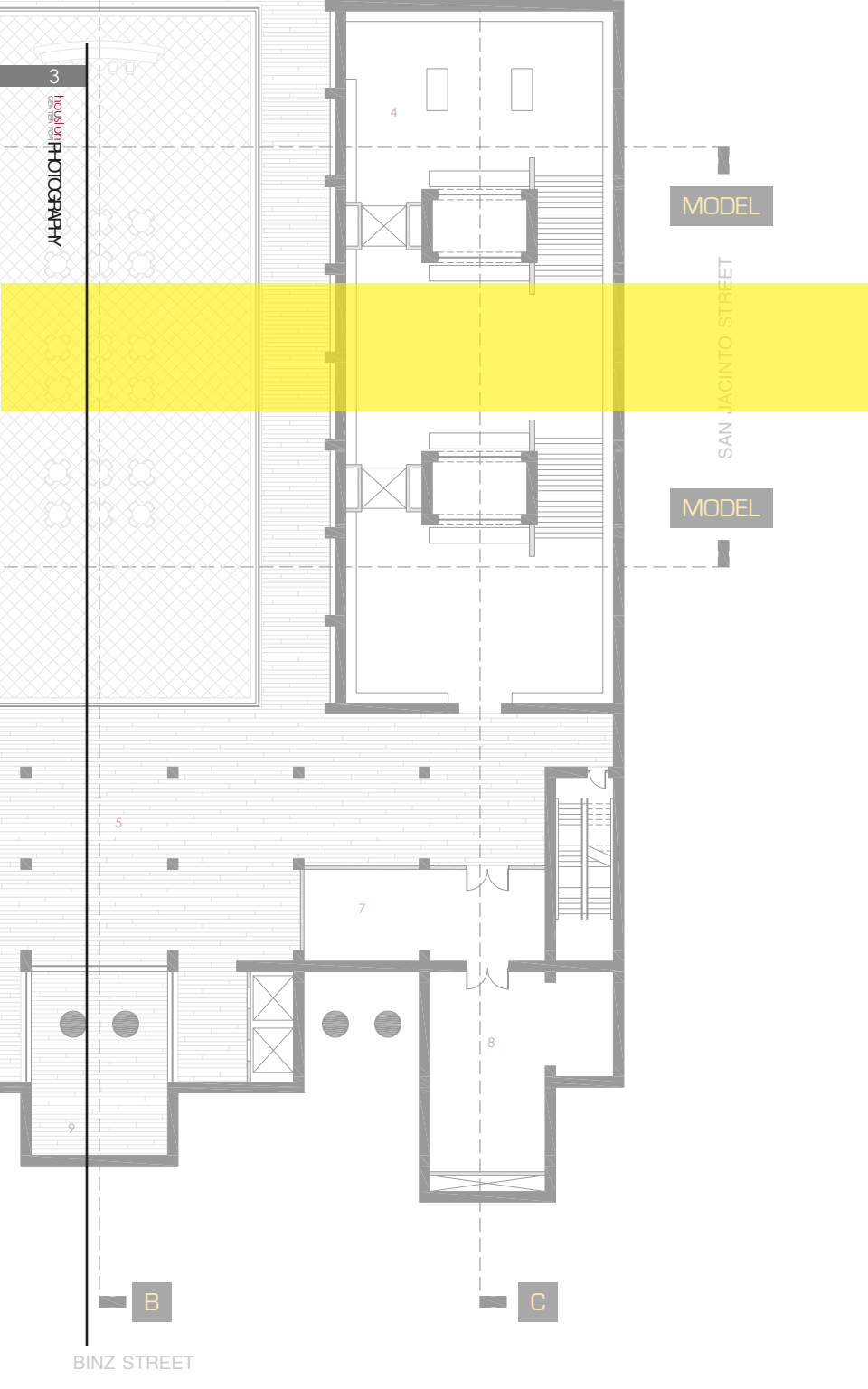
C

BINZ STREET

contents



thoughts.....	4
[abstract]	6
[the people]	7
[introduction]	10
work.....	12
[site]	13
[sketches]	15
[analog v. digital]	20
[early concept sketch]	23
presentation.....	28
[site plans]	30
[floor plans]	34
[roof plan]	44
[sections / elevations]	45
[interior renderings]	54
[model]	61
[detail wall sections]	68
acknowledgements.....	72
selected readings.....	76



MODEL

SAN JACINTO STREET

MODEL

B

C

BINZ STREET

thoughts



abstract

this building is about the moment. it is about the moment when the image and the viewer begin a dialogue of existence. it is about the moment when a photographer and a model begin a relationship that is as intimate as that between a mother and child. it is about the creation of space to house those moments. it is about the creation of the image from light to negative to print to viewer.

this building is about light. it is about the way light is framed. it is about the way photographs are records of light. it is about how humans see light and experience light and live in the light. it is about controlling and channeling the power of light. it is about harnessing the awesome power of light.

this building is about growth. it is about a place from my past growing into an idea for the future. it is about my own growth as a person - physically, intellectually, + professionally. it is about the growth of a passion for photography + architecture in a way that i can share.

the people

“the people” represents the culmination of my portrait work. in each image i have tried to capture the essence of the person or people in such a way that is immediate and powerful. throughout the work i paid special attention to the faces and body language of each subject to bring the audience to a direct relationship with the photograph. in some cases that means placing the viewer in the crowd, to watch the subject move and play, while in others it means bringing the viewer face to face with the subject, to demand the attention of both. while working on this collection i learned to incorporate the portrait attitudes of richard avedon [demanding the intimate nature of interaction], diane arbus [introducing the dynamic and bold], and irving penn [controlling the grace and beauty in the pose].

most of the work you see is made in a darkroom, but not exclusively. some of the images are the product of my faithful 35mm nikon fe, others are from my digital leica d-lux 3, and most are from my medium format mamiya 645. i expanded the range of my skills through different cameras and camera formats to truly appreciate the demands and capabilities of each. the camera for me is not merely a tool but an extension of my vision into the world. as for the prints, whether in the darkroom or in photoshop, each has been made with the understanding that the final image is an object of art itself, both in its context and craft, and is treated with the utmost care.

all of the photographs in this book have also been a key element in my master of architecture thesis. through the exploration of portraiture and architecture, i have been able to synthesize both ideas into a project that has the depth and scope of my best images. photography has been analogous to sketching for me during the last year. as i generated design concepts to control the human experience within my building i would experiment with different ideas to present the essence of a person to an audience through photography. for me there

is no difference between what you see in the working photographs and what you would find in my sketchbook. each medium - graphite, ink, digital, + silver, has led me to the final design of my thesis. i hope that you will enjoy the photographs in this thesis as much as i have enjoyed creating them and giving them life.





introduction

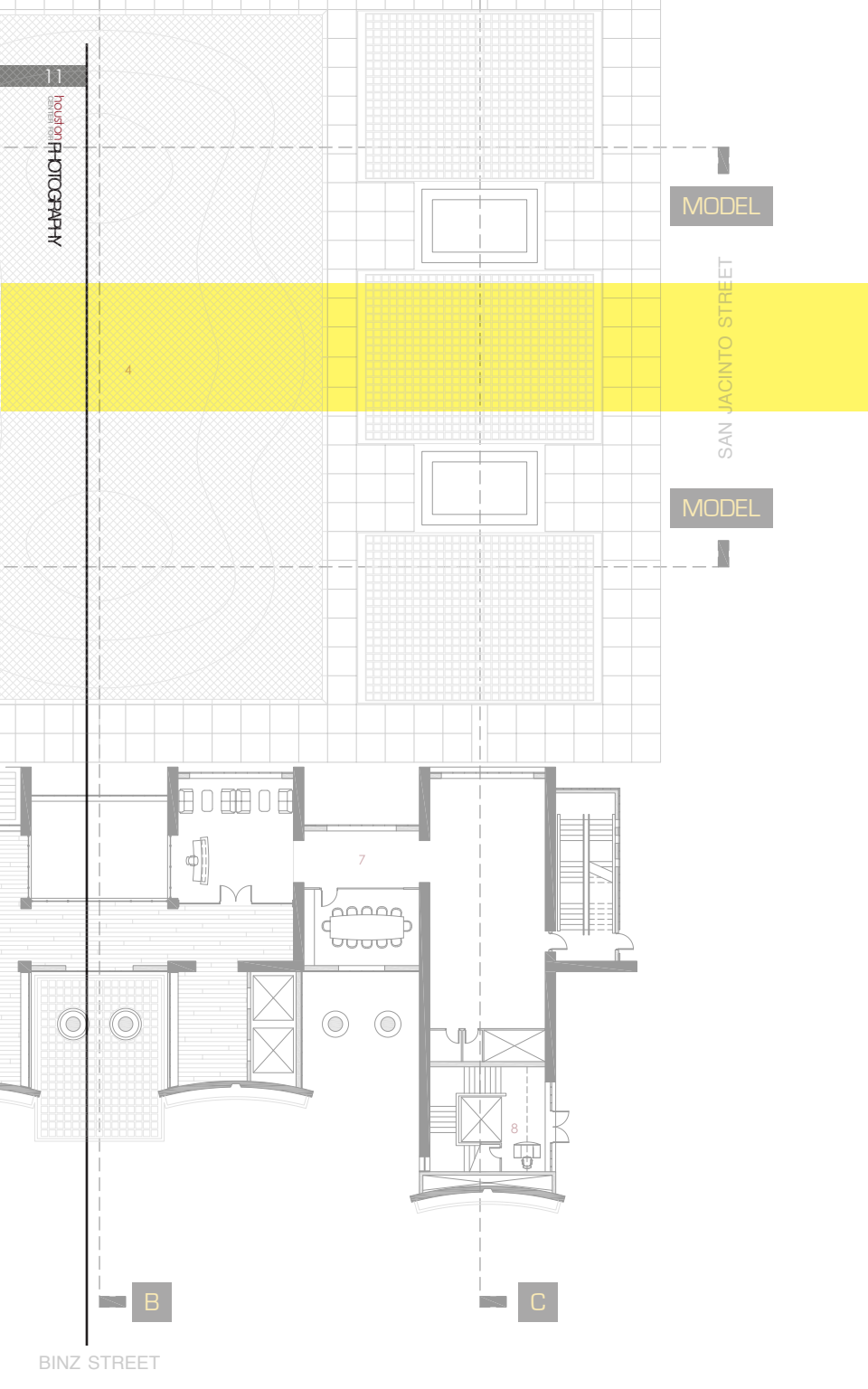
they always say that to succeed in architecture you have to be able to separate professional criticism from personal criticism. i think thats nonsense.

design, for me, has always been an outward expression of myself. every line that i draw, every photograph that i take, every drawing i produce is me, put out in front of the world to see and react to. this thesis is no different, it is a part of me that i put to the world to interact with and learn from in a way that I myself could never achieve.

this thesis began with where i came from, houston, texas, and expanded to include my own questions about the place of light + photography in design. i wanted to create a project that included photography in the city of houston in a way that addressed the needs of the city and its people, while answering the questions of how we approach light and the record of light - a photographic image.

the houston center for photography is meant to be a professional nexus for photographers in the city to come and display their work in a qualified space and archive the photographic record of the city. its second purpose is to be a school of photography, dedicated to teaching the art of seeing in the traditional silver manner as well as the digital form. its third role is that of a civic space for the museum district, and more importantly for the preservation of outdoor congregation space for the two adjacent churches.

my thesis is an attempt to rectify the complex programmatic demands of such a building while answering questions about the nature of light and shadow, specifically for the display of photographs both digital and silver, into a massive modern museum benefitting the city of houston.



MODEL

SAN JACINTO STREET

MODEL

4

7

8

B

C

BINZ STREET

work

site

the site that i chose sits on a parcel of land that is currently a parking lot for the methodist cathedral across the street. the site sits in the museum district of the city of houston surrounded by the museum of fine art, the natural history museum, the holocaust museum, and is a short drive from the renowned menil collection. the site sits between two of the busiest streets in houston, fannin and san jacinto, which also carry the city's only means of mass transportation - the red line of metro light rail. the area is primed for redevelopment as the city has become inwardly focused to combat the suburban sprawl that it is known for. in recent years large multi-family developments have replaced smaller shotgun style homes in the area and has led to an urban revival with the addition of the metro light rail. with that in mind, very few city blocks have retained their stately live oak canopy and are destined to become a never ending concrete patio.

my thesis takes into account all of these factors to create a building that gives back to the community through its large shaded plaza, add to the reputation of the museum district as a premier location for the arts and sciences, and reign in on the dominant car culture of the city by promoting easy metro access.



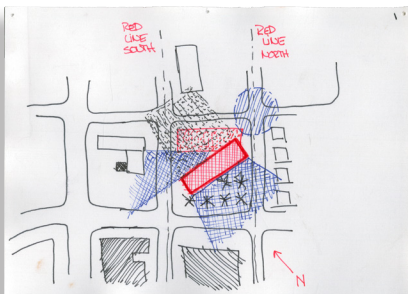


houston [1913]



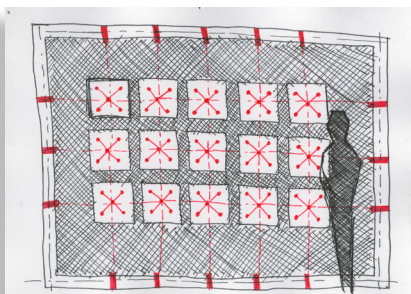
site panoramic [east - west]

initial massing study

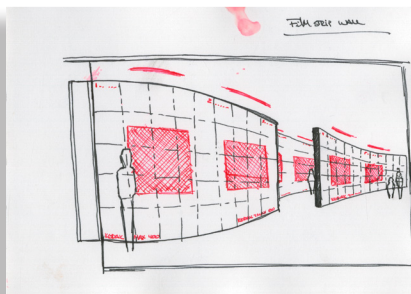


this sketch was an initial step looking at what the best massing form was for the building. of paramount concern was creating shade on the site. in this part there are two buildings, one taller to the south of the site, and one shorter to the north arranged in a “v” shape to create a small interior courtyard entrance. this site depended on the southern building being significantly taller (almost 10 stories) to create enough shade for the shorter northern building. this was eventually scrapped due to program requirements.

hanging frame system

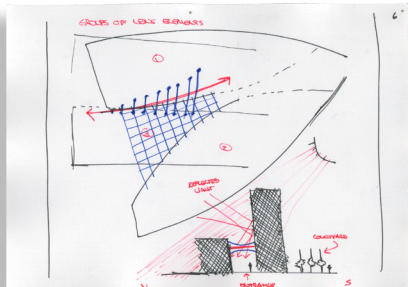


an early concept of how to display silver prints in a 3x5 hanging matrix. this system was meant to be a portable free-standing installation used to define larger open spaces like atriums or large corridors. part of this idea was later recreated in the design for the WAAC exhibit at the AIA convention in Richmond later in the fall semester. Between the frame is a stretched translucent membrane to show the shadows of other visitors opposite of the viewer. each image was suspended in a metal frame web from the posts of the main structure.



[film strip] wall

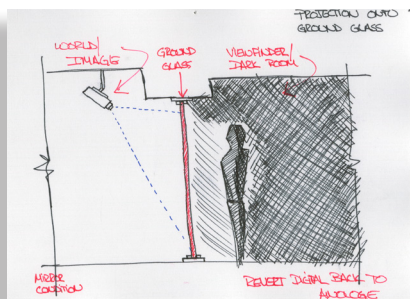
the wall in this design was for digital projections of photographs along a curved facade. the curve of the wall is inspired by the natural curve of film after it is processed in a dark room. i wanted to relate the digital projection world into the analog tangible world. each image was displayed in a marked section of the wall so that when all the projectors were turned on they would scroll along while the visitor walked. the description of the image is also projected on the top and bottom of the wall to mimic the manufacturers labels on film.



sun study massing

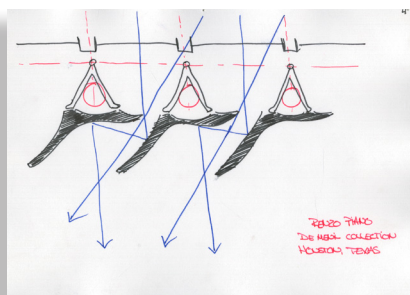
this is a detailed sketch of the concept from the initial massing study. this is the first sketch where i introduced a gentle curve into the building. between the two buildings i envisioned a glass translucent canopy spanning the distance. this was to be the entrance of the building, creating a forced perspective between the two curves to animate experience. unfortunately this part led to too much dead space on the site that would have underutilized. it also did not fit very well into the existing fabric of the neighborhood.

digital projection gallery

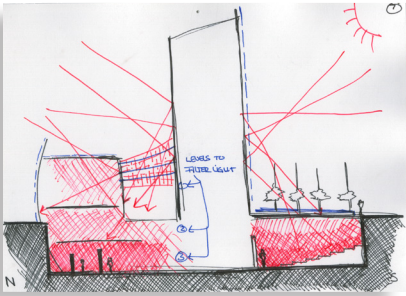


here i started to look at the idea of a digital “camera obscura” to display digital images on a projector. the visitor entered into a dimly lit room that had a light tight corridor running down the center. ground glass was placed along the edge of the corridor while images were projected onto them. this was to give the visitor a “behind the camera” view of the image, something similar to going under a dark cover while using a large format camera. the visitor would walk along a series of these booths to see all the images.

renzo piano study

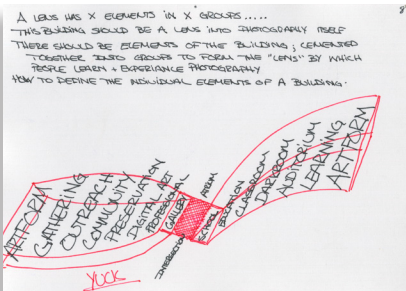


at this point in the thesis i wanted to understand precedence for dealing with high intensity sunlight. renzo piano had designed the menil collection in houston with a spectacular louvre system though out. each was cast in ferro cement and hung on steel rods from the ceiling structure. the gentle curve of each one supported the sun shading of the next and so forth, creating a wonderful space with diffused lighting that is perfect for the african art. i wanted to somehow recreate this effect in my building for displaying the photographs.



basement alignment

this sketch looks further into the two building “v” parti. i wanted to get an accurate understanding of the sunlighting conditions on the site. here was the first step towards putting critical program functions underground to preserve street level space for public use. the larger tower still shades the shorter one, but was becoming too tall for the program to support. with the larger tower centered on the basement level the parti began to stretch too far horizontally as well pushing key functions towards the extremities.



lenses + groups

in an effort to preserve the “v” parti, i tried to come up with a more poetic approach to the building parti starting from the top and working down. i wanted to think of the buildings and how they interacted with the surrounding neighborhood instead of individual objects. after this i decided to abandon the parti and move towards a more uniform approach to the site. the building needed to be shorter, and should use the site in a more positive manner that would create a better public space at ground level.

the democratic party



the republican party

plasma television



early american tube television

laptop computer



e.n.i.a.c.

smart car



1957 chevrolet bel-air

apple mighty mouse



drawing compass

microwave oven



electric range

apple iphone



rotary telephone

digital hand camcorder



antique movie camera c.1935

apple ipod



phonograph

inkjet wide format plotter



printing press

the cable news network



print newspaper

nikon d200 digital slr



leica rangefinder camera

digital all in one clock



round analog clock

table p.c.



reference books

satellite radio



transistor radio

analog [v] digital

part of the initial investigation into my thesis dealt with a study of the relationships between analog technologies and their digital evolution. there is always a perennial question about whether to do a "hand drawn" thesis with pen, pencil, and paper, or a digital thesis using a computer and printer. its a rather ironic statement seeing as both manners of design, analog or digital, use the same basic components of line, field, color, and paper but are somehow distinctive enough to create two production approaches.

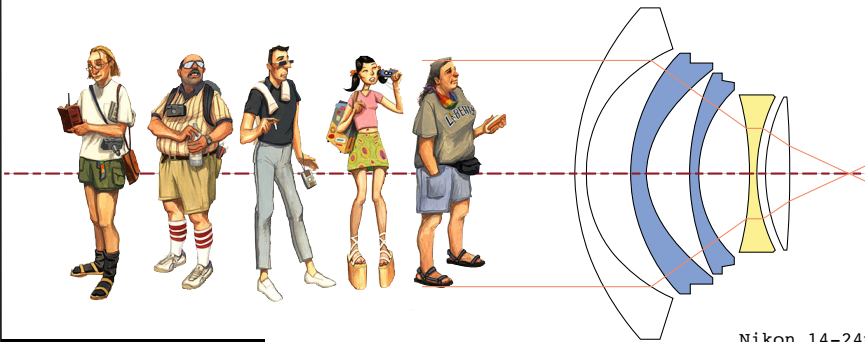
this question of analog and digital also rages in the design world. what will become of all of the "old" silver technologies as digital cameras continue to evolve and garner a more widespread following. is there any more value in silver photography if you cant tell the difference in the final print between the two? digital - in all of its inclusiveness - really only corresponds to the compact and 35mm world of photography. by and large most professional shots are still done using silver cameras, and that is simply because they do not make digital sensors the size of a large format print.

this was a curious correlation in my mind. what else had changed in essence but not substance? and more so did it really matter. i came to the conclusion that if you really understood the underlying principle of the analog method, then the manner in which you express that principle didnt matter. a pen makes a line, and that line has a weight - the principle is that a pen can make more than just a line, but a cut in the earth or a plane in the sky. the tool is the method by which ideas come to reality. a mouse and a computer do the same thing. and if they are understood as that, then the final product should, in theory, be the same.

continued on page 21

but we know this is not true. there is a life to a drawing done by hand that show the scars of the artists mistakes and the rich layers of energy that went into creating it that an autocad plan can never have. silver prints have a life to them because you know they were touched by human hands and created with sweat. a pharmacy print does not have that. they are cold, literally, with no human input.

it dawned on me that was the answer. the real value in any art is the human experience of it. it was not an argument between the tools, because in the end analog and digital is just that, a tool. it was the effort, the love the sweat the tears that went into a print or a drawing that gave them life.



Nikon 14-24

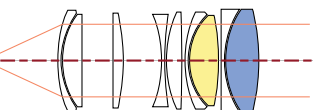
elements + groups

photographic lenses are comprised of elements and groups that distort and bend light to achieve the desired optical effect. an element is any single piece of glass while groups are any two elements cemented together. this infinite combination of elements and groups gives us the array of lenses that we use today. below is a diagram of a lens and the path of the light reflected off the image through the lens and into our eyes.

it begs the question about how we see the built world we live in. can a building we thought of as a series of elements and groups that somehow influence and define the phenomena of space? imagining how the visitor can approach a photograph and record the image in their mind became a significant concept after this montage.

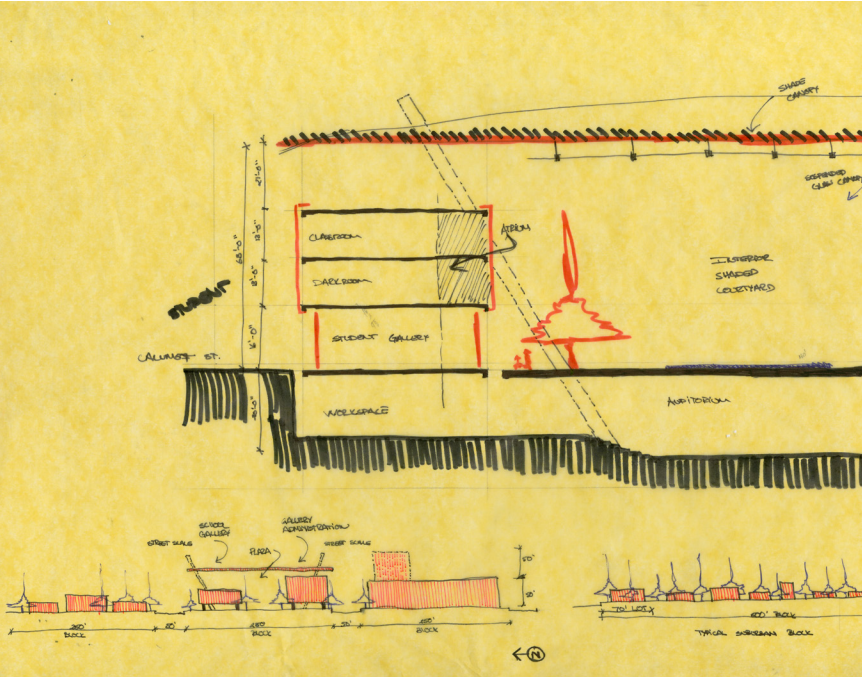


[Lens] **arch**itecture [record]

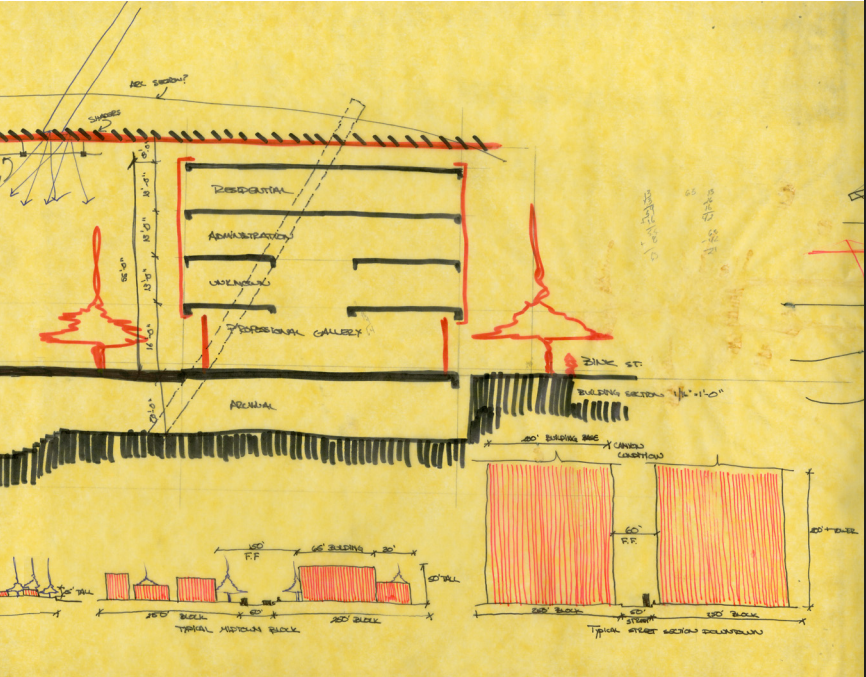


mm AFS f/2.8 G ED

early concept sketch



this early sketch shows the initial part of a large open plaza defined by two flanking buildings covered by a large sun shade roof. houston is notorious for its heat and humidity and punishing sun, so creating a shaded space between the buildings was a priority for making the space function properly. this sketch also shows the two buildings sharing a common basement that continues underneath the plaza - in the final design the auditorium was removed and all of the galleries were moved into the basement to free up space on the first floors of both buildings. At this stage of the design the primary entrance into the complex was on ground level and not into the basement at all.

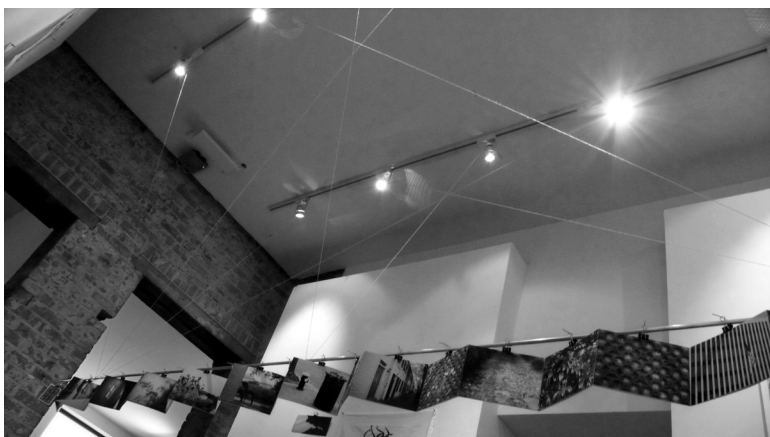


looking at the total volume of the space and how that fits into the existing street conditions is also shown here [the sections are taken along fannin st. from downtown to the museum district]. note the difference between the downtown street section and how the phenomena of the space changes as you head towards the site in the museum district. downtown is by far very cavernous with little green breathing space. i wanted to ensure that my building “fit” into the neighborhood. i decided that the building should not exceed 75’ in total height and should not be built such that it takes up the entire site on the ground level - hence the split building with a plaza and a functioning basement level.



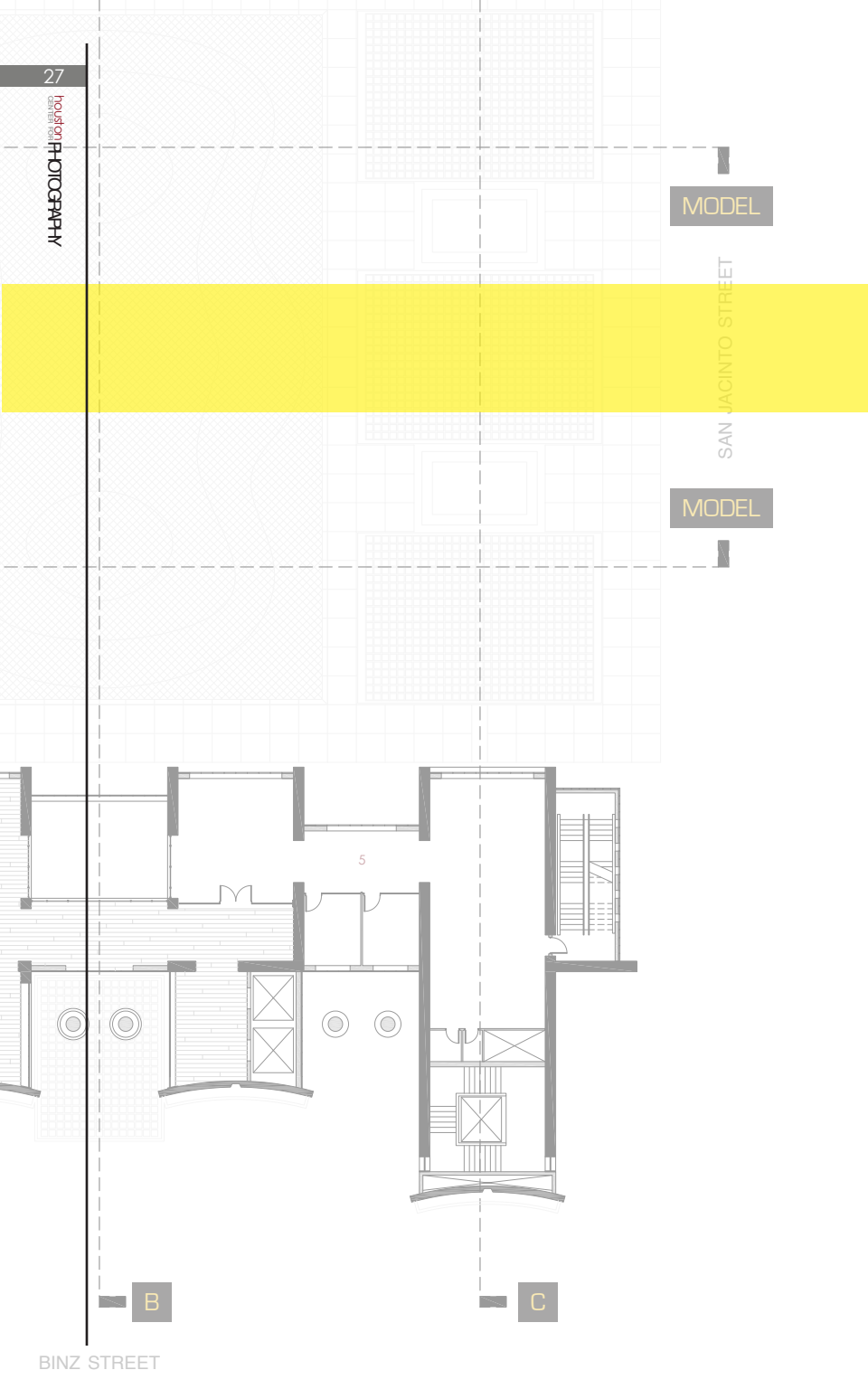
richmond aia convention installation

in the fall semester i was tasked with coming up with an installation for the WAAC for the richmond AIA convention. i took this as an opportunity to explore my ideas of how to display images to passing viewers. our installation consisted of 16 computer monitors controlled by 4 computers scrolling FLASH movies of student work from previous semesters. each monitor was placed within an individual cell in a structure made up of 36 cardboard boxes measuring 2' cube with a projector on a boom projecting a greeting movie on the concrete floor below. each monitor played an individual movie dedicated to a single student with 10 selected works out of their respective thesis books.



accordian photograph installation

also during the fall semester i was approached by a student to help her display an accordian photograph she had made consisting of 90 4x5 images taped together end to end. after surveying perspective spots in the building i decided the the best way to display this photograph was to create its own space. i hung a 1/2" diameter aluminum rod from the track lighting in the ceiling 5' off the ground and hung the 45' image along it using binder clips. the most interesting part for me was how to hang the rod. i strung it up by creating a truss out of string using the rod and both ceiling tracks as the main chords. the entire assembly hung in the main corridor of the school completely rigid. this inspiration would eventually lead to the design of the overall roof arc and truss assembly.



MODEL

SAN JACINTO STREET

MODEL

5

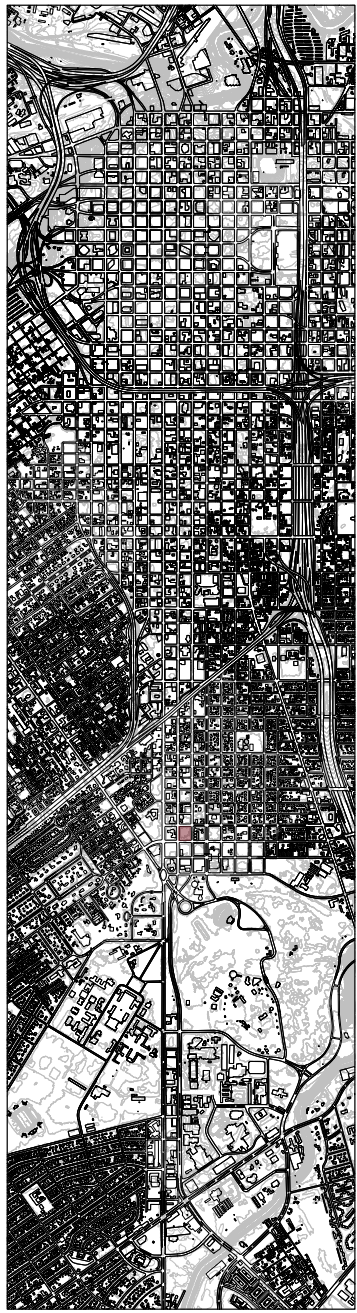
B

C

BINZ STREET

presentation





bagby
 smith
 louisiana
 milam
 hock
 math
 turnin
 sanjose
 carline
 oulin
 labouch
 crowl
 padon
 mcabee
 hamilton
 coastal
 emerald
 houston
 boating

buffalo bayou
 sunnys
 canal
 rutz
 commerce
 franklin
 congress
 preston
 prairie
 texaco
 capital
 rusk
 walker
 mckinney
 lamar
 dallas
 park
 clay
 bell
 leeland
 peace
 jefferson
 st joseph pathway
 pierce
 gray
 webster
 hodley
 mcherry
 mcgowen
 debbus
 luam
 orita
 rosedale
 elgin
 stuart
 francis
 hannan
 berry
 wirbern
 ababama
 huels
 libella
 cleburne
 eagle
 barbee
 wheeler
 rosewood
 ruff
 blackgett
 wertworth
 atlar
 rosedale
 whitlita
 southmore
 oakdale
 prospect
 calumet
 birz
 ewing
 herman
 n macgregor
 s macgregor
 brays bayou
 holdcomb
 wyrcide

downtown

midtown

museum district

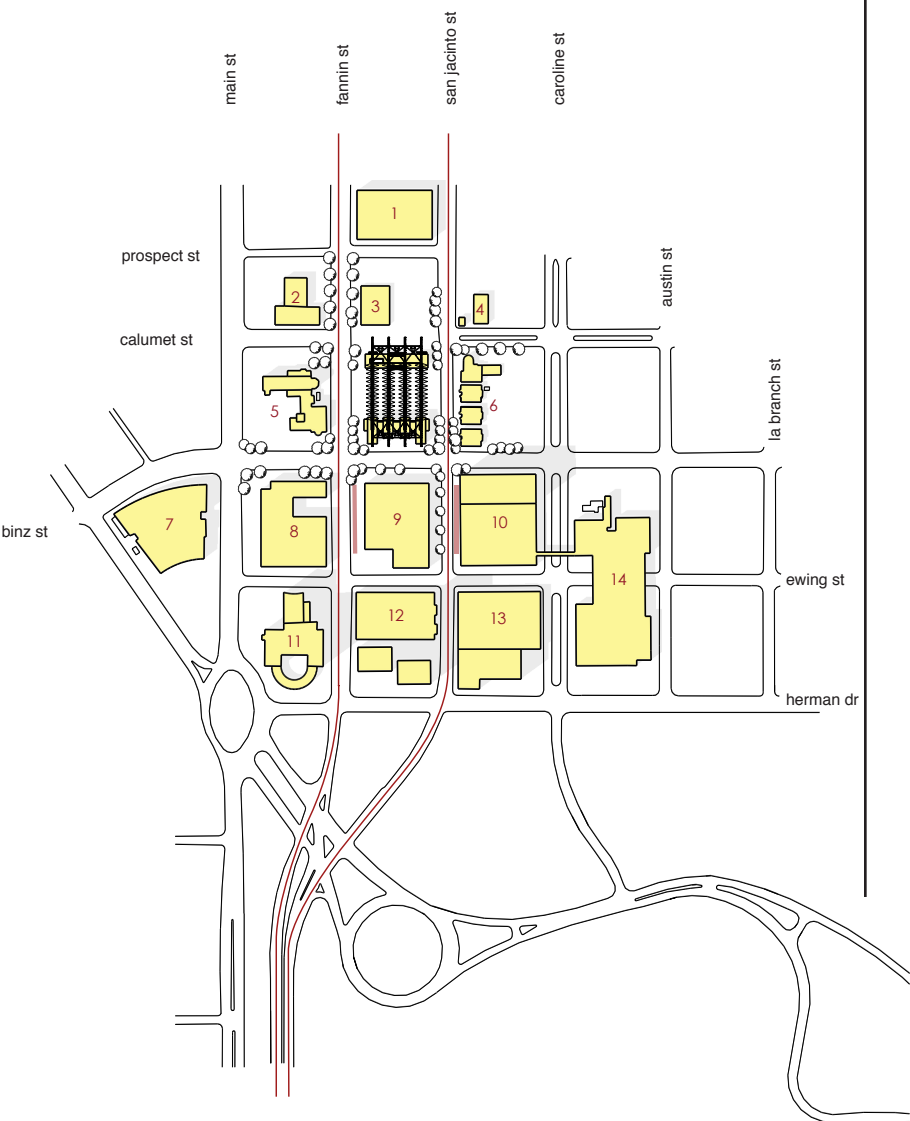
harman park

medical center

neighborhood site plan
 n
 SITE

presentation





1. midrise apartment complex
2. presbyterian cathedral
3. methodist community center
4. office building
5. methodist cathedral
6. office building
7. houston museum of fine arts

8. houston museum of fine arts - annex
9. parking garage
10. medical office building
11. wyndham warwick hotel
12. post towers apartments
13. medical office building
14. hospital

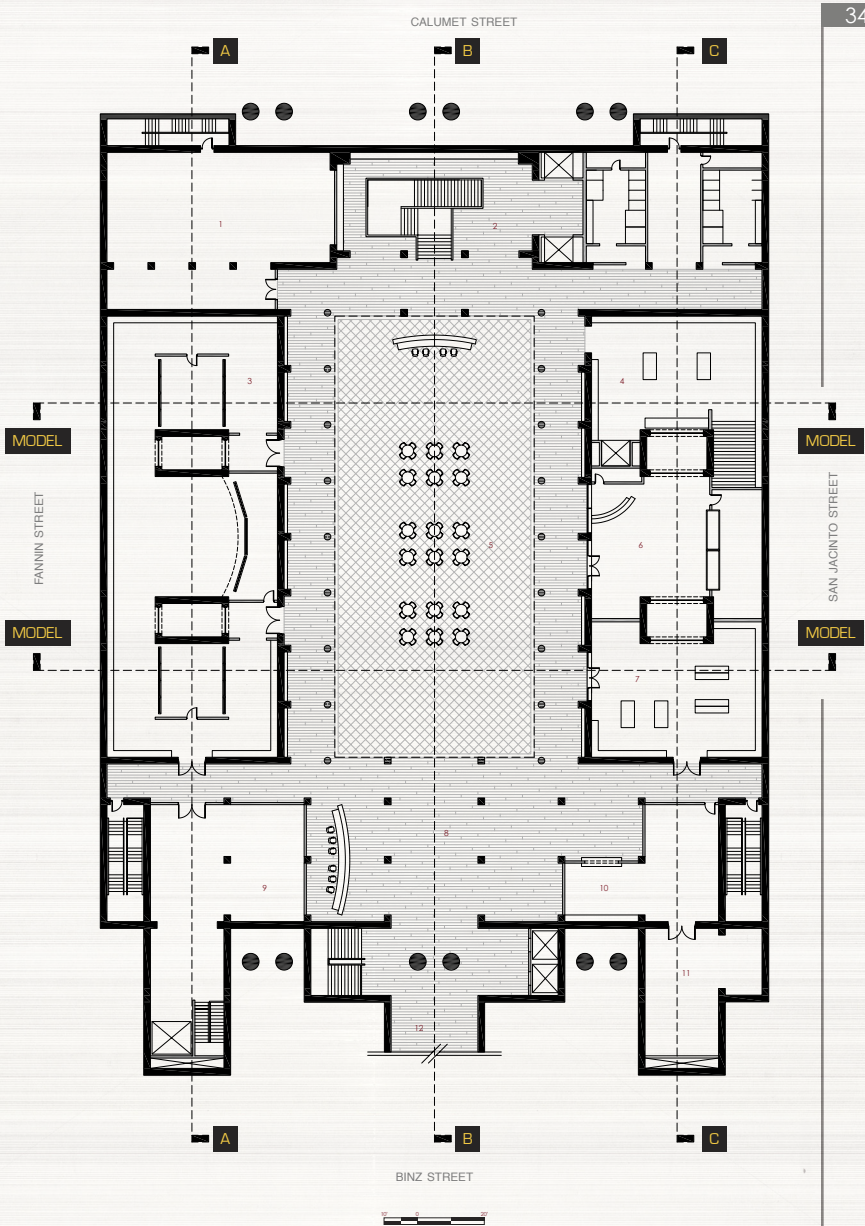
musuem district - vicinity site



SITE

presentation

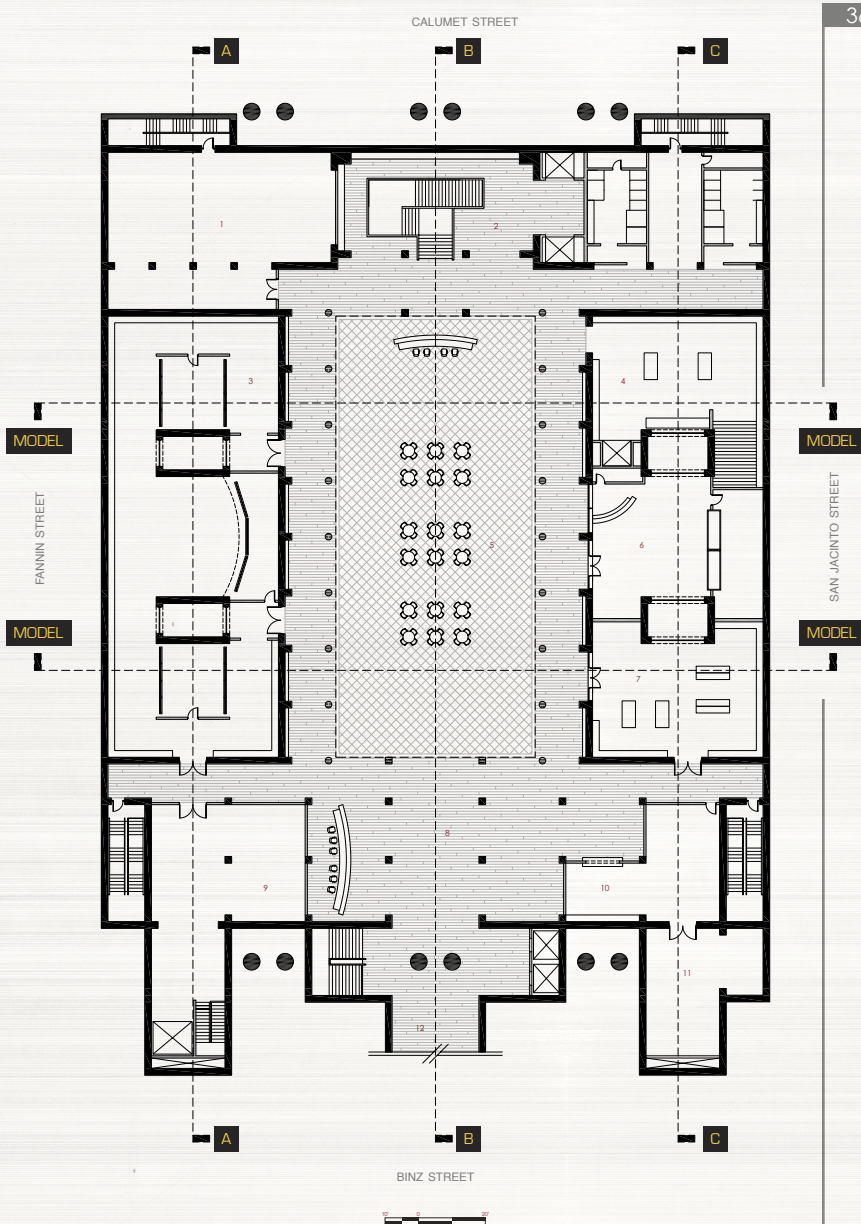




1. archives
2. north entrance foyer
3. digital galleries
4. analog gallery
5. main hall
6. cafe
7. bookstore
8. south entrance foyer
9. storage
10. coat room
11. mechanical
12. to parking garage

museum main floor
n
LVLOO





SAN JACINTO STREET

FANNIN STREET

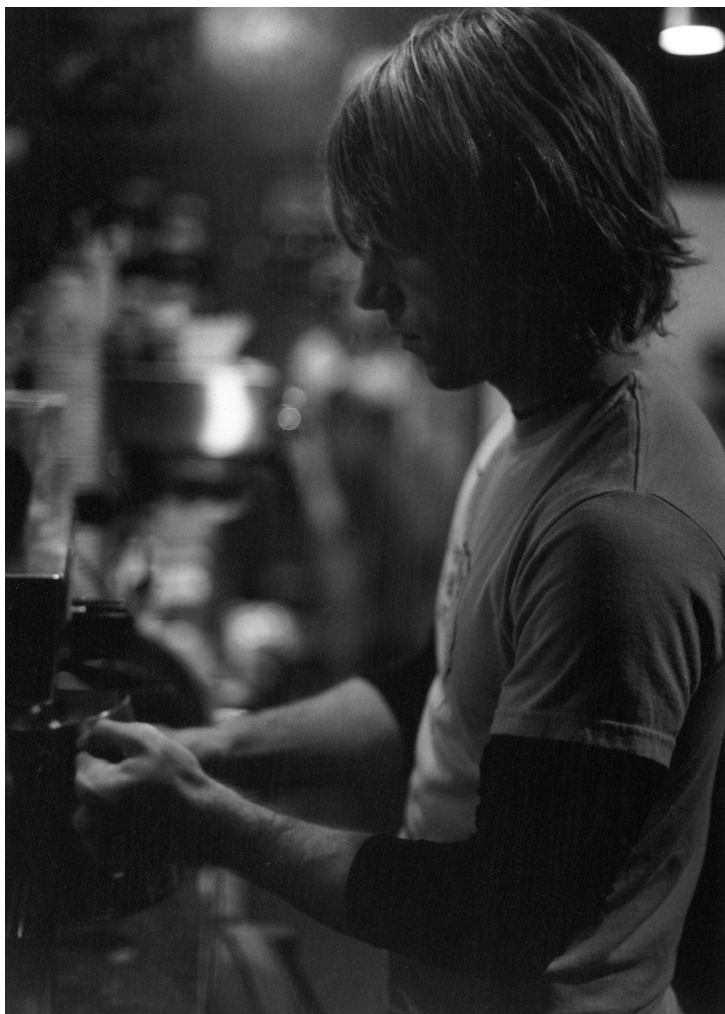
BINZ STREET

CALUMET STREET

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. archives | 6. storage |
| 2. north entrance foyer | 7. office |
| 3. analog galleries | 8. mechanical |
| 4. analog galleries | 9. to parking garage |
| 5. upper concourse | |

museum second floor
 presentation
LVLO

presentation

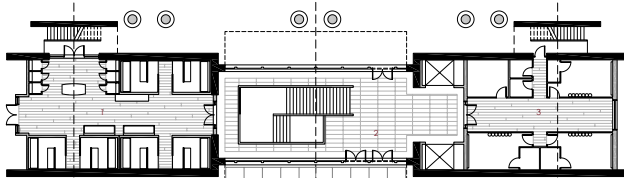


CALUMET STREET

A

B

C



MODEL

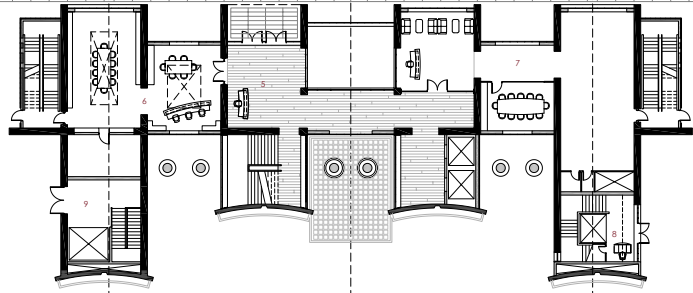
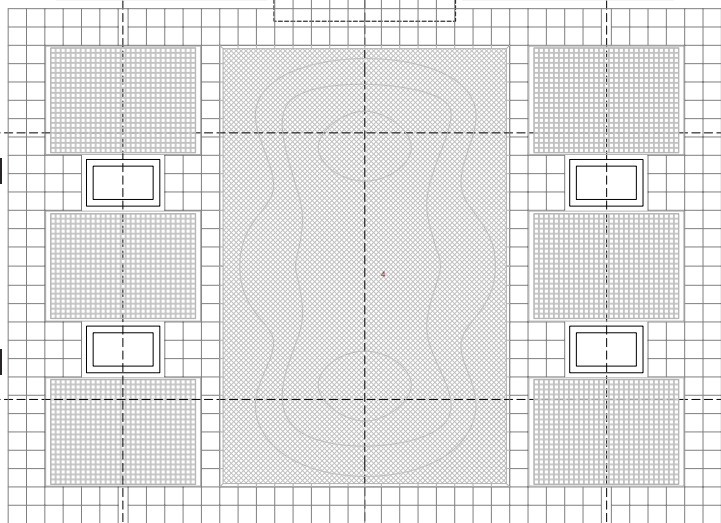
MODEL

FANNIN STREET

SAN JACINTO STREET

MODEL

MODEL



A

B

C

BINZ STREET



- 1. darkrooms
- 2. north entrance
- 3. photo studios
- 4. main plaza
- 5. school entrance
- 6. library
- 7. office
- 8. residential entrance
- 9. freight entrance

main plaza + school

LVL1

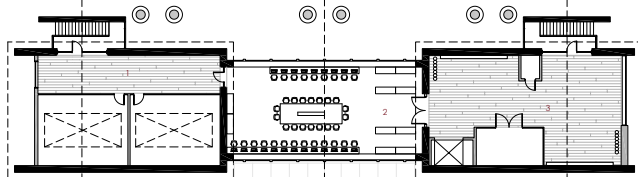


CALUMET STREET

A

B

C



MODEL

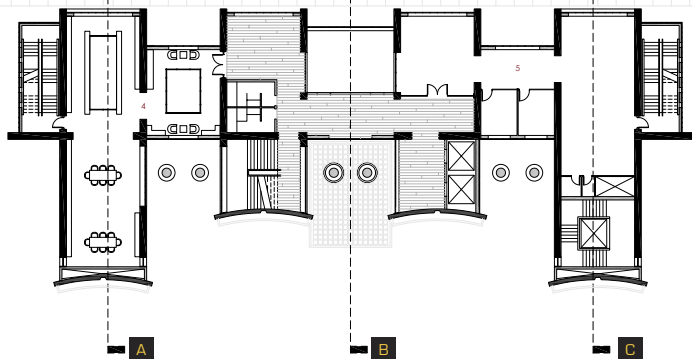
MODEL

FANNIN STREET

SAN JACINTO STREET

MODEL

MODEL



A

B

C

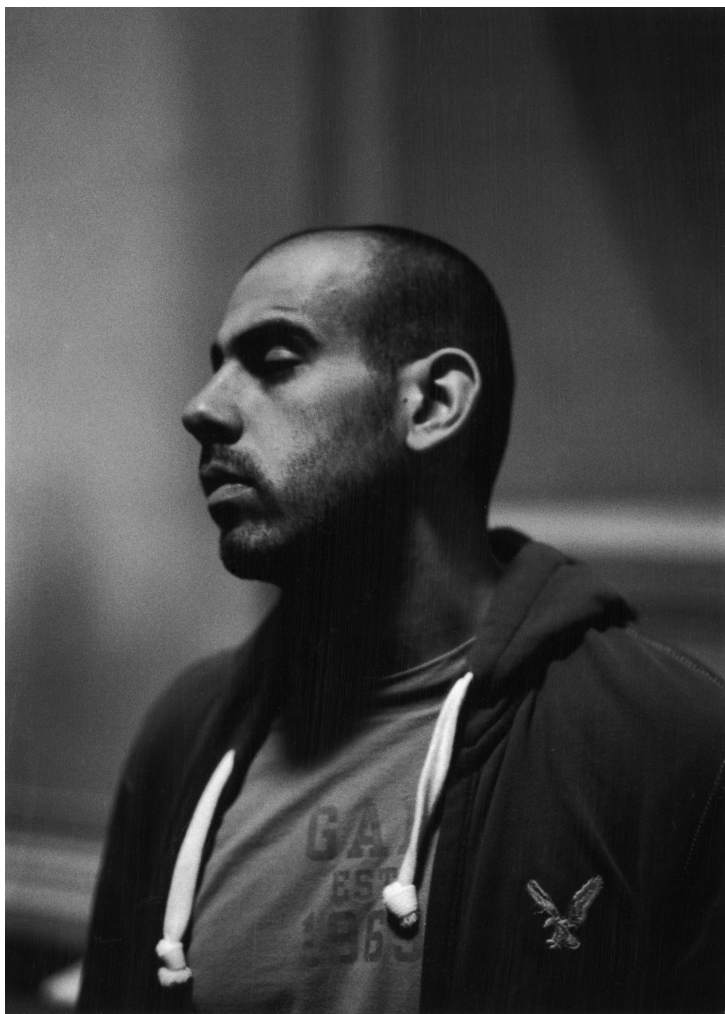
BINZ STREET



1. classrooms
2. computer lab
3. photo studios
4. library
5. offices

second floor school
 n **LVL2**

presentation



CALUMET STREET

A

B

C

MODEL

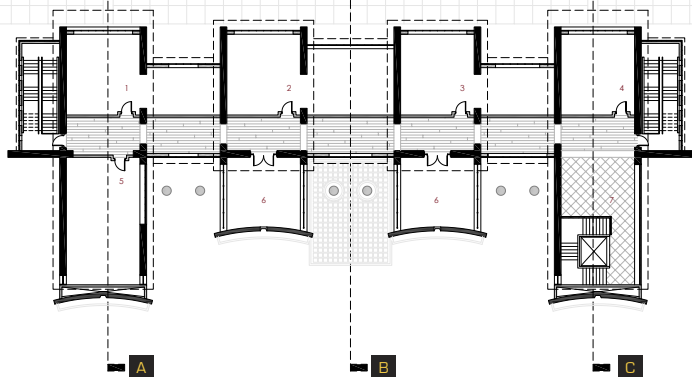
MODEL

FANNIN STREET

SAN JACINTO STREET

MODEL

MODEL



BINZ STREET

A

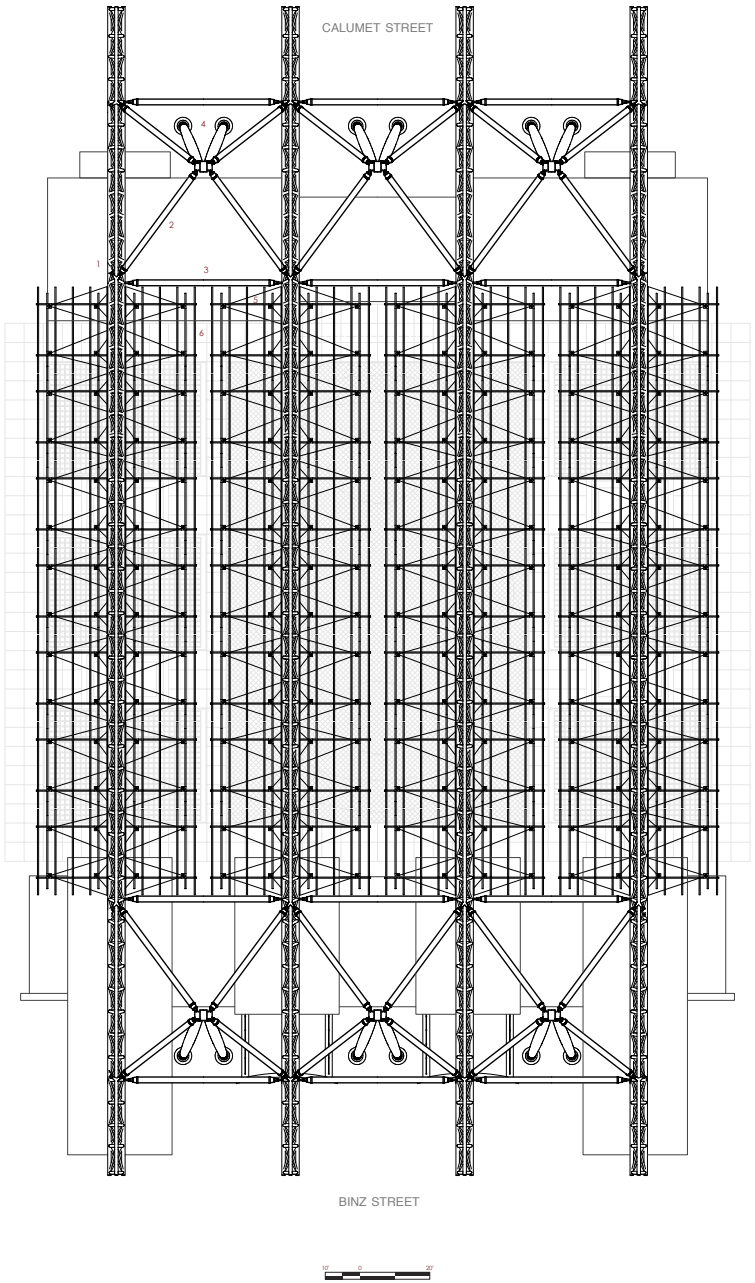
B

C

1. penthouse A
2. penthouse B
3. penthouse C
4. studio
5. penthouse D
6. roof deck
7. residence foyer

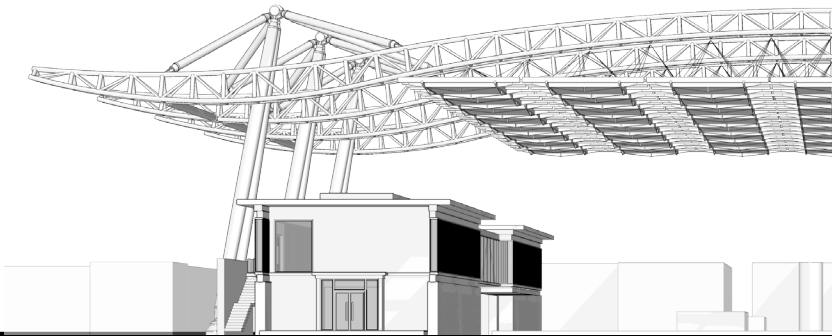
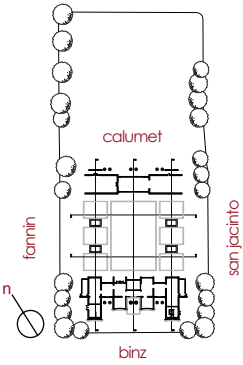
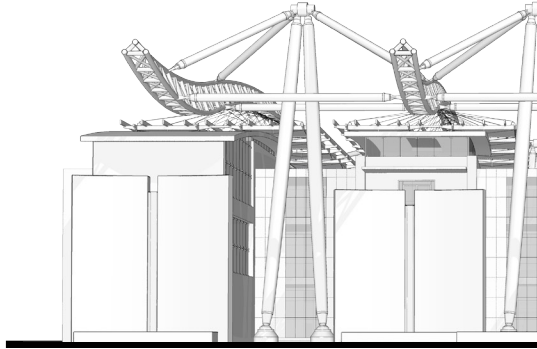
third floor residences
 n **LVL3**

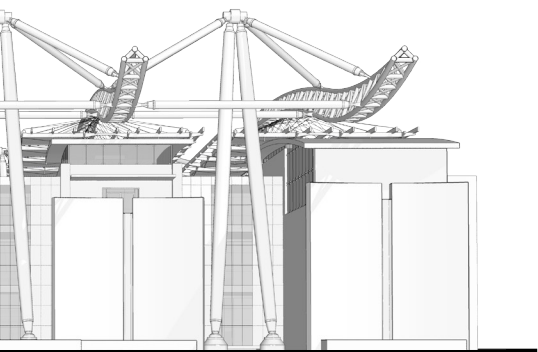




- 1. main truss
- 2. tension hanger
- 3. compression pipe
- 4. hanger legs
- 5. suspension cable
- 6. louvers

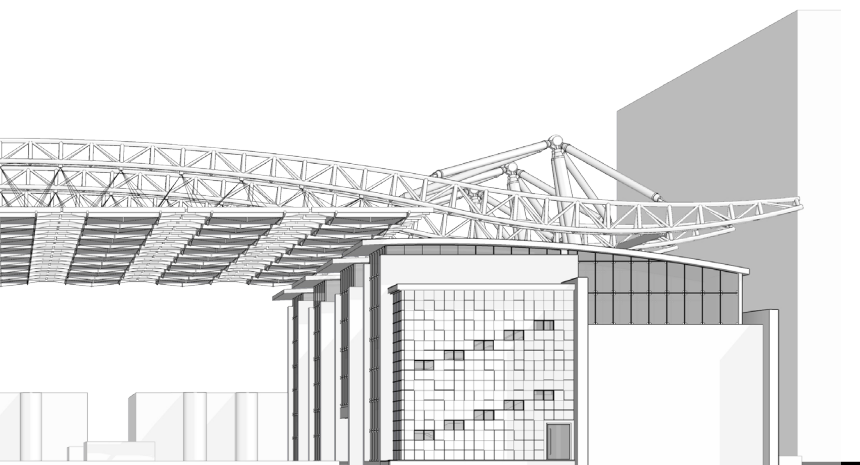
elevation perspectives





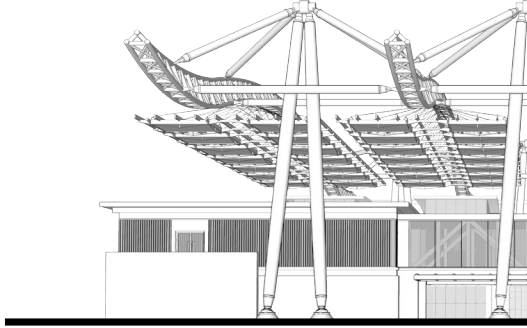
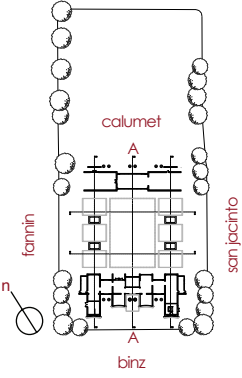
elevation perspective

BINZ ST

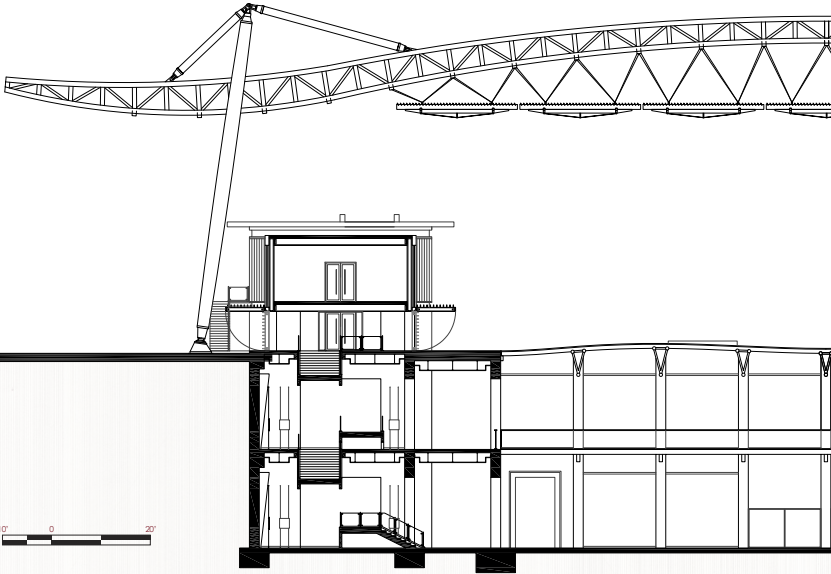


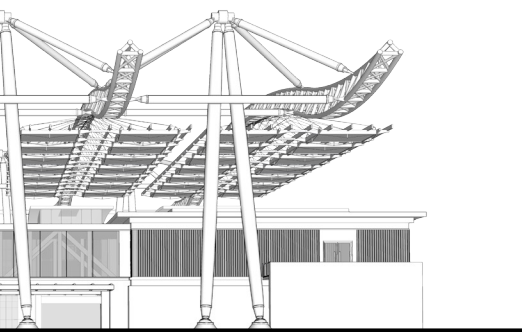
elevation perspective

FANNIN ST



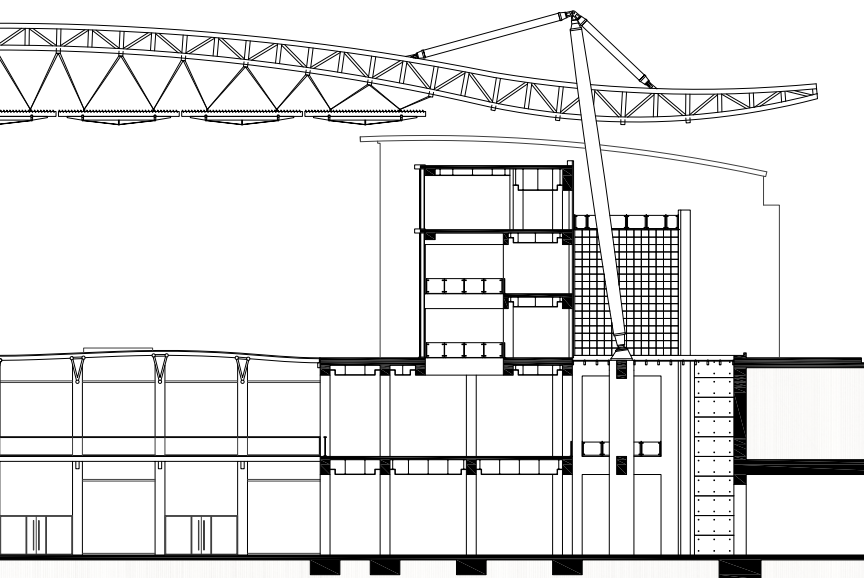
sections





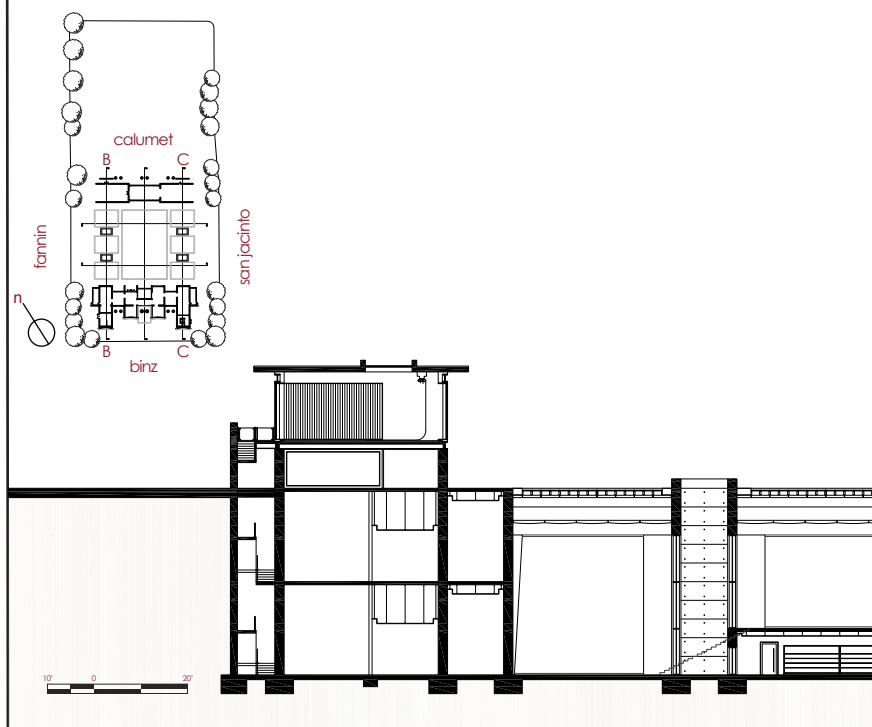
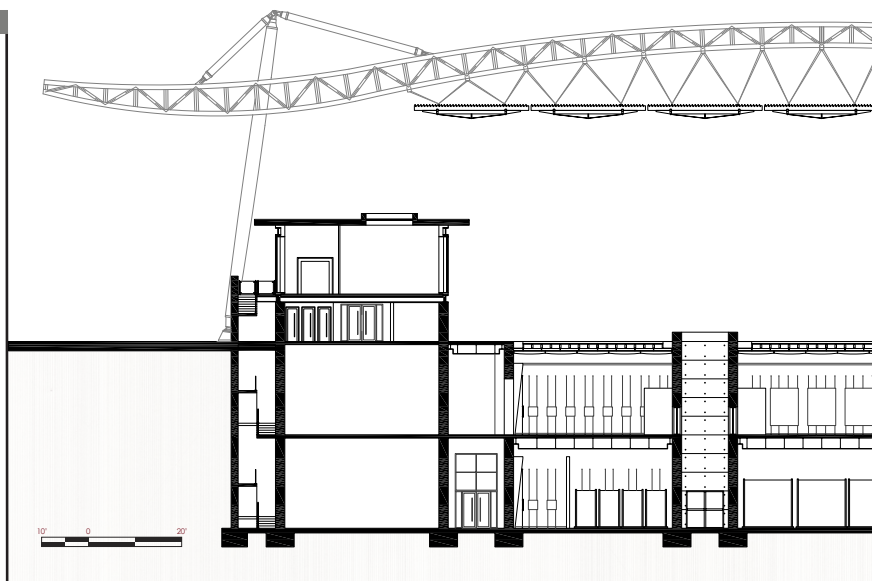
elevation perspective

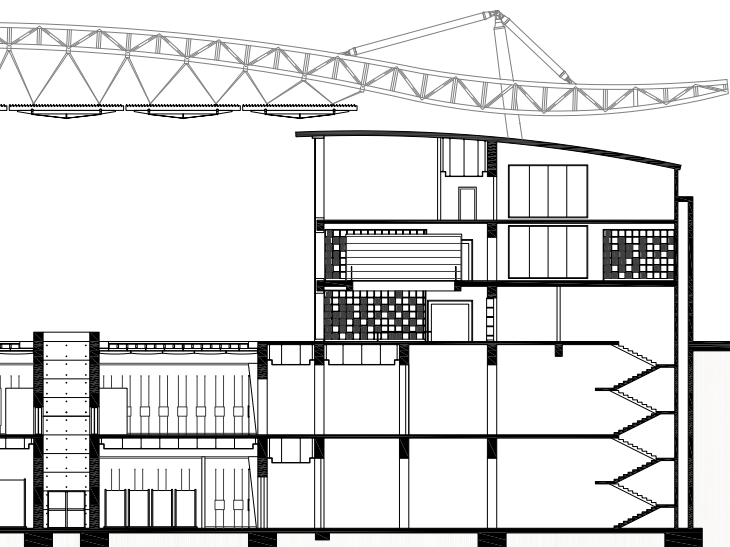
CALUMET ST



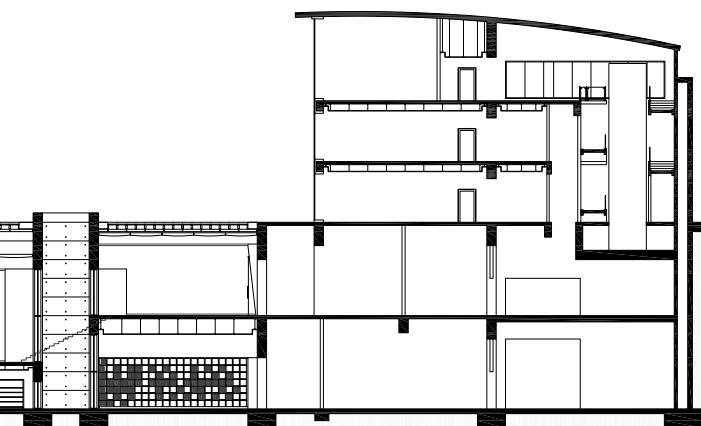
section
AA

presentation





section
BB

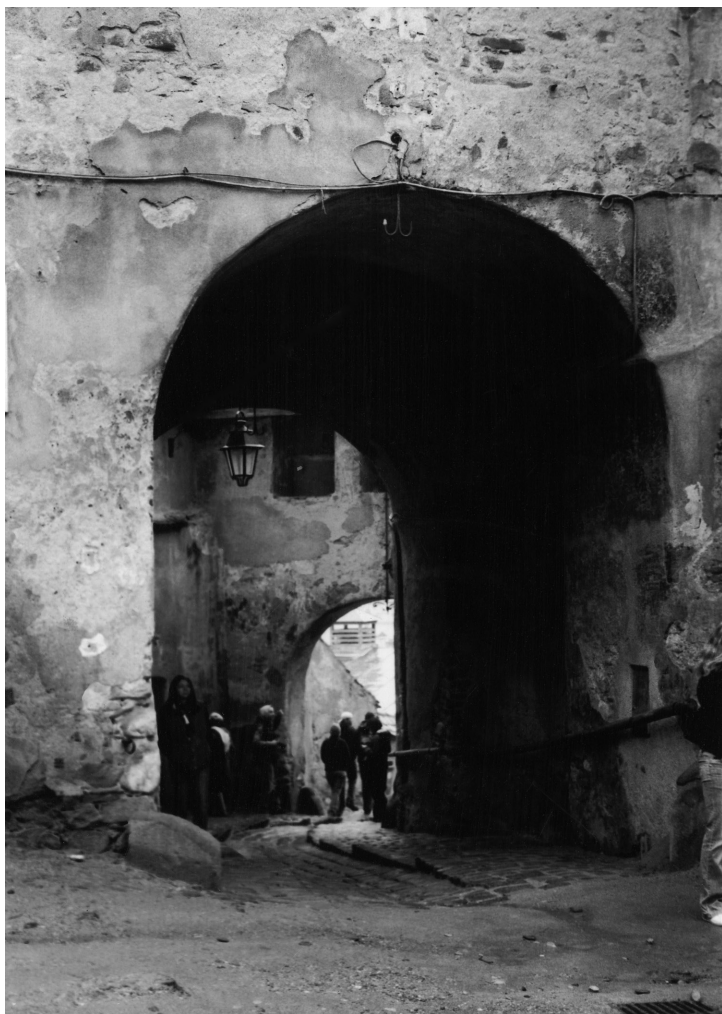


section
CC





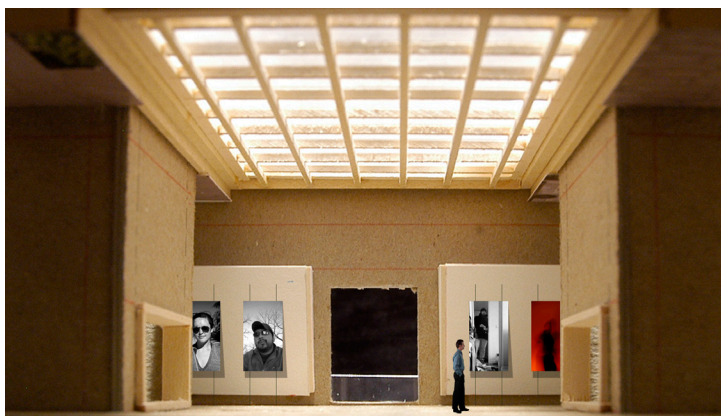
interior renderings





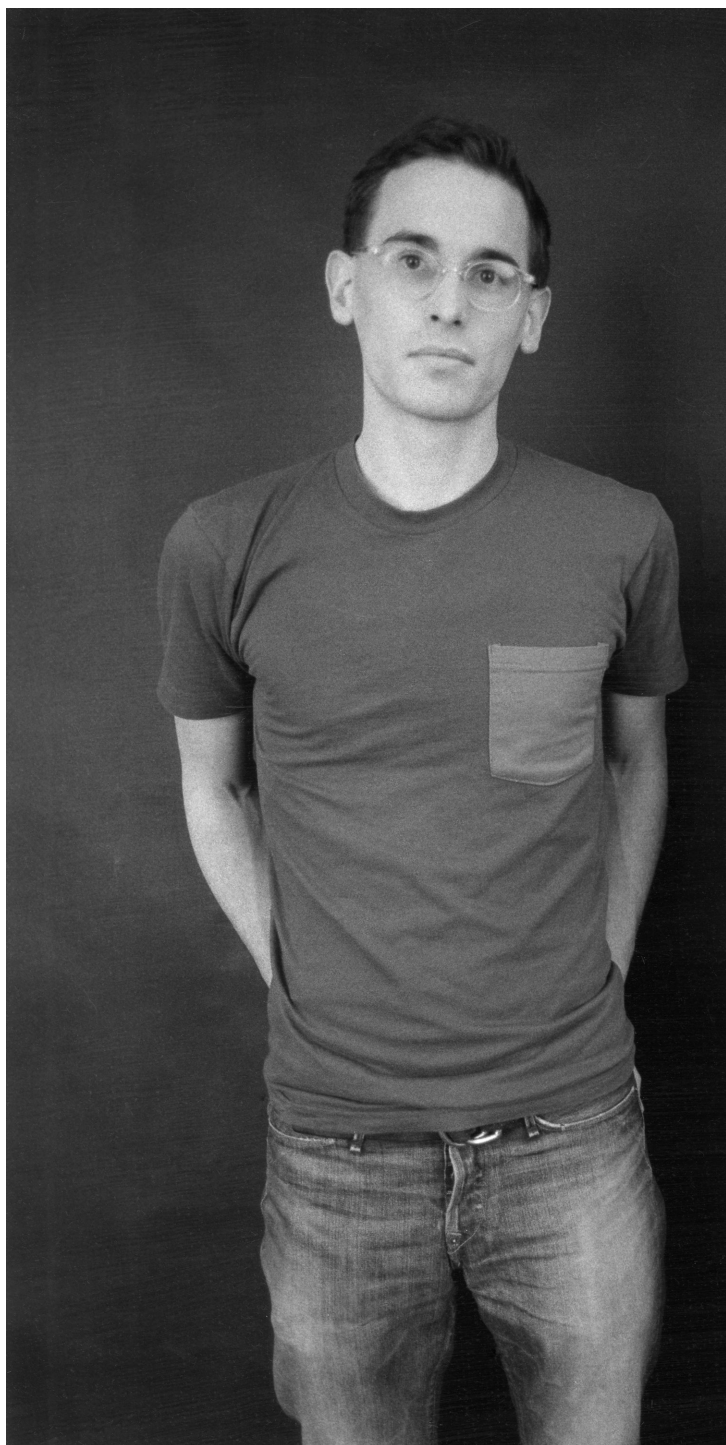
LVL00 - #4 analog gallery

30' floor to ceiling height center gallery for large format analog prints.



LVL0 - #6 analog gallery

standard analog gallery showing double flanked walls and skylight to plaza.









LVL1 - main plaza

plaza view looking across to san jacinto st. from fannin st with crape myrtles shown. note the gentle saddle curve of the plaza floor.



LVL00 - main hall

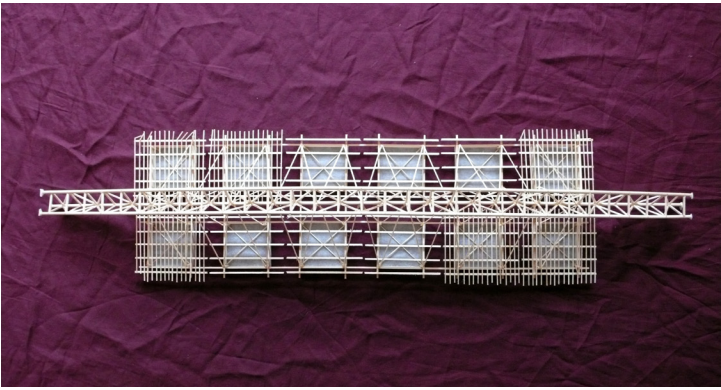
interior of underground atrium looking up towards plaza and LVL 0 balcony.





roof truss model

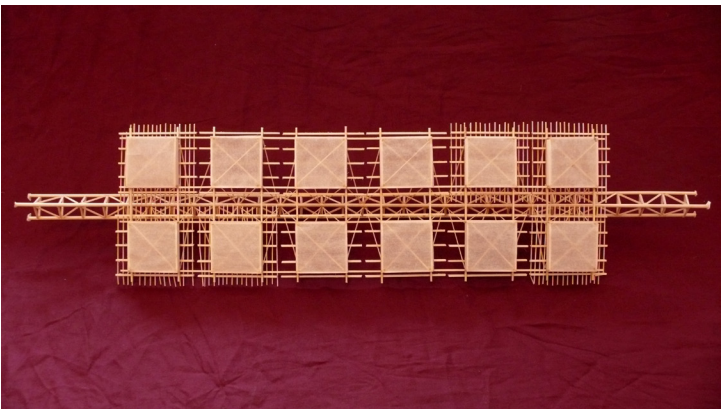




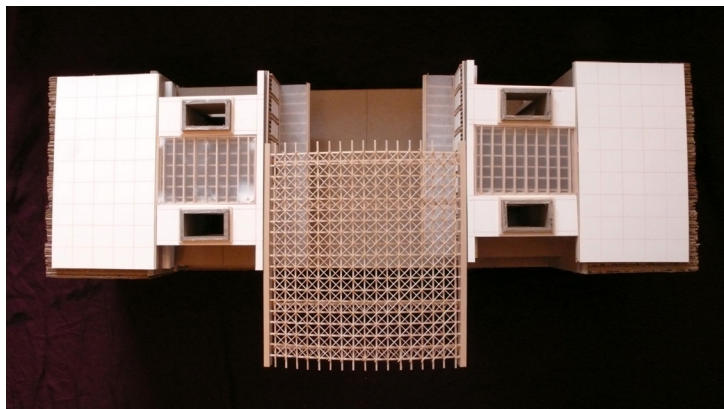
roof truss model from above
 model showing overall arc of truss and suspended modules hanging below.



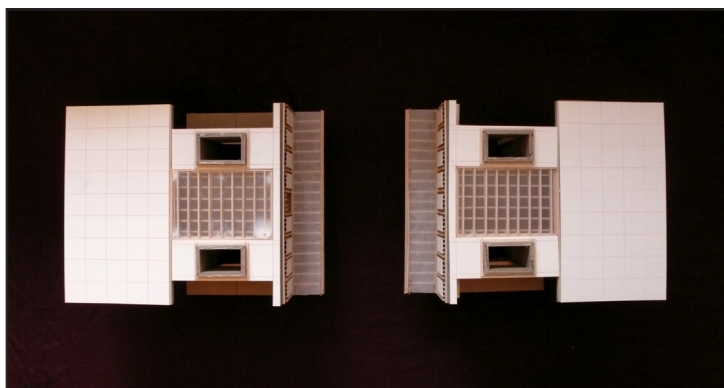
roof truss model from above
 model showing the cable lattice work that connects the arc and suspended louvers.



roof truss model from below
 model showing underside of suspended louvers and opaque "lights" of the structure.



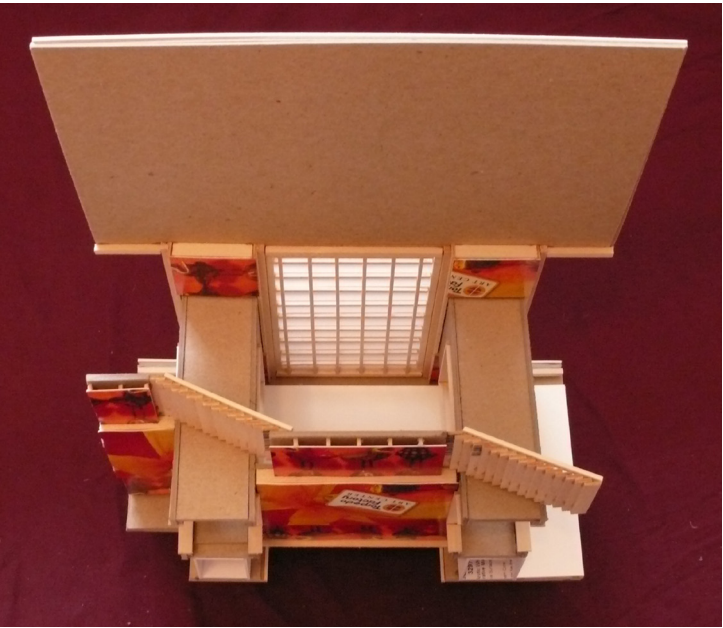
final model with removable plaza floor
four part final model cut through the center of the building.



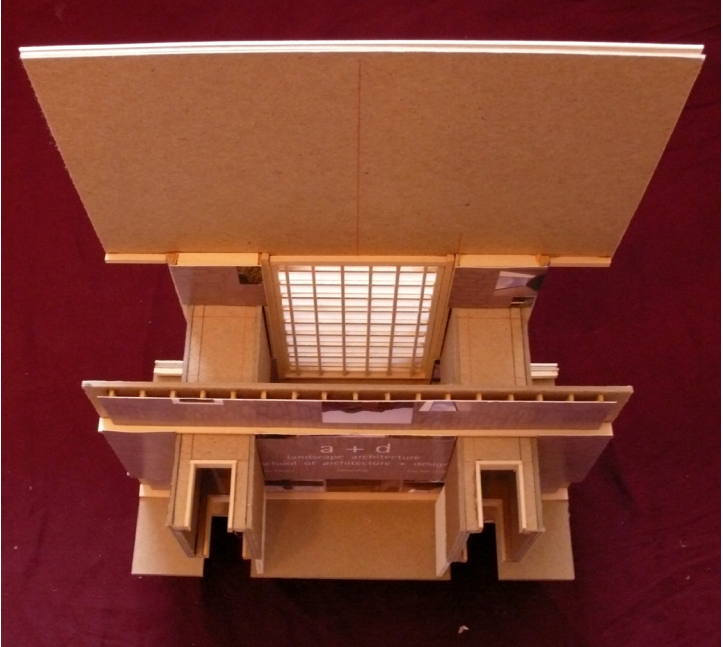
middle section of final model
independent modules for the model showing the difference between the galleries.



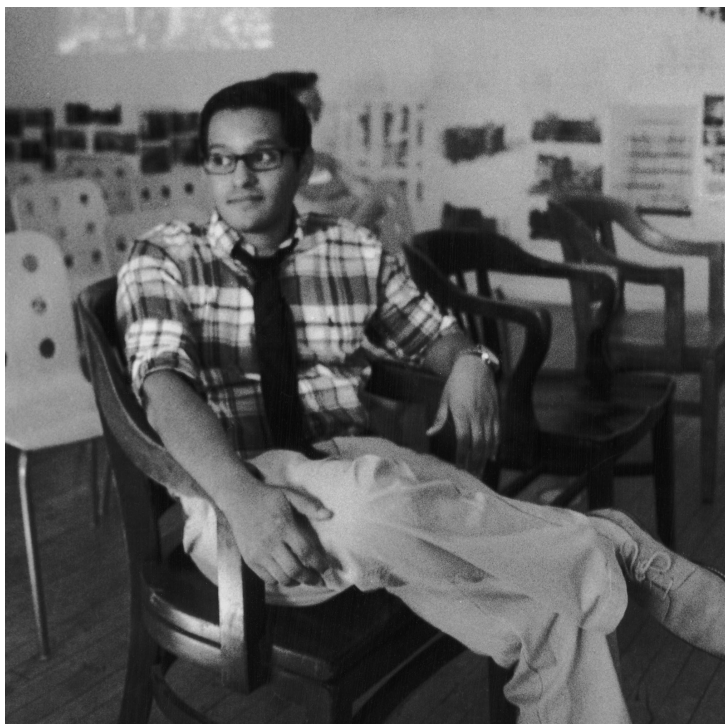
base of final model
base of model with "digital" gallery spaces attached.

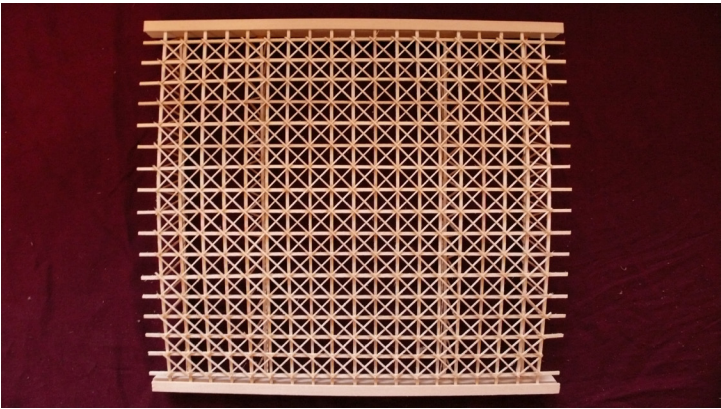


#4 analog gallery space
module showing connecting staircase between the three galleries.



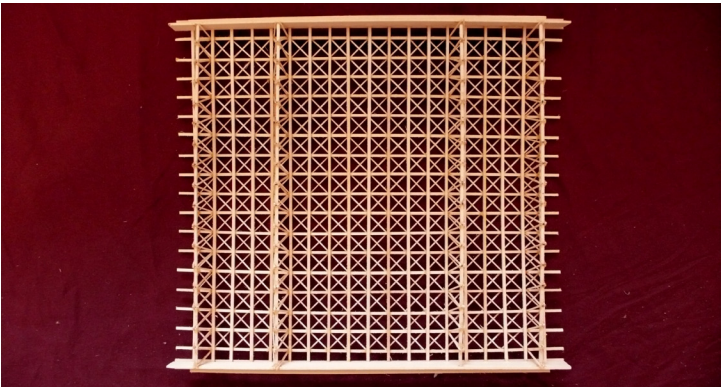
#5 analog gallery space
module showing lower light wells into digital galleries and upper plaza skylight.





plaza floor framing model

plaza floor with "saddle" curve model made of bass wood.



plaza floor framing model underside

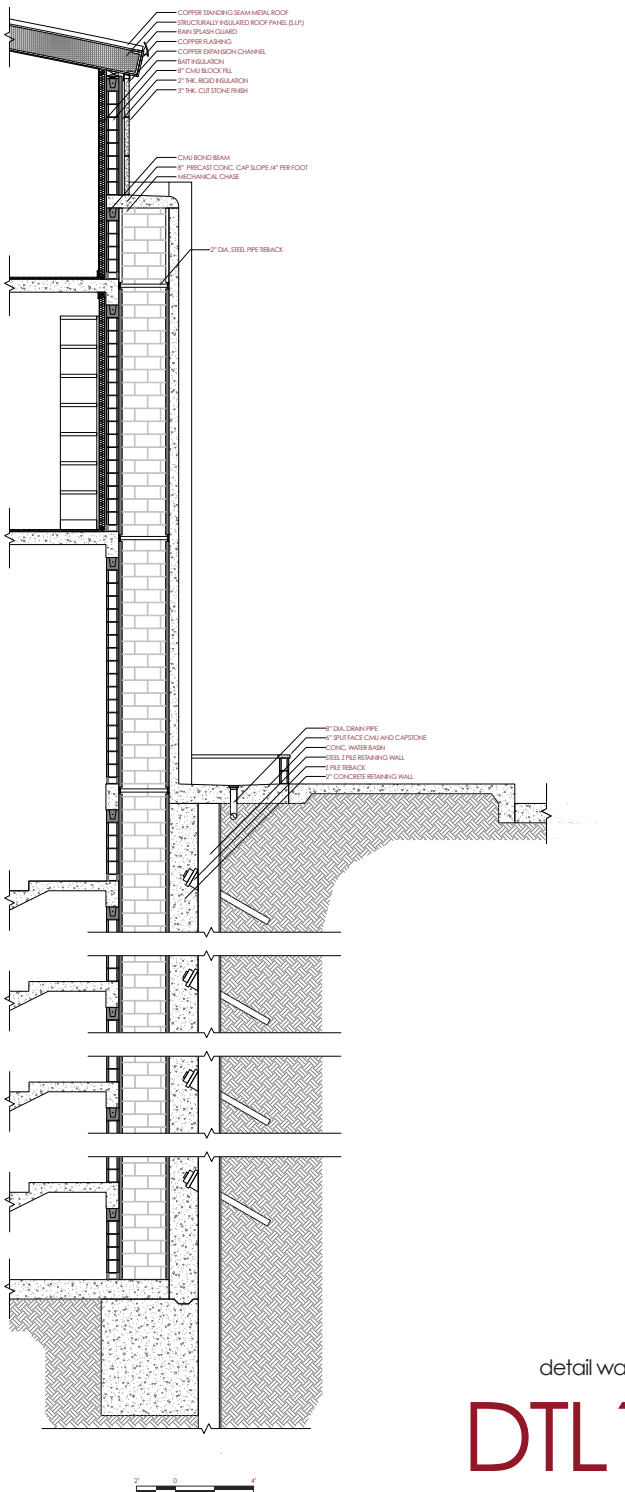
plaza floor made of 4 super truss members to support "saddle" curve.



plaza floor framing model

corner view showing "saddle" curve and underside truss components.



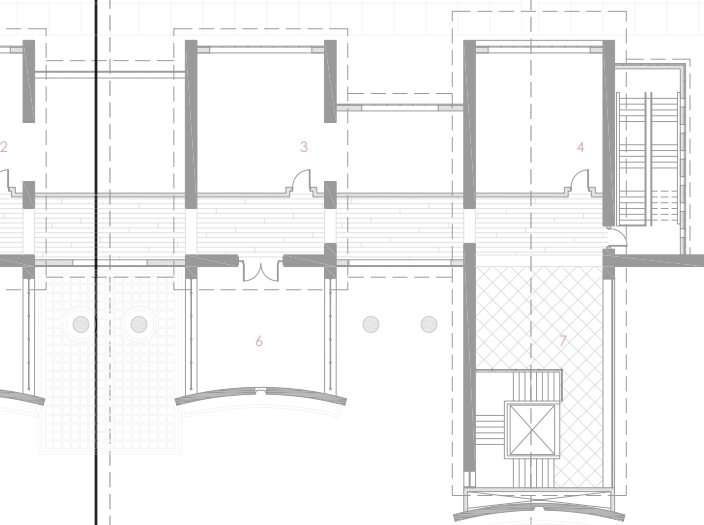




MODEL

SAN JACINTO STREET

MODEL



B

C

acknowledgments

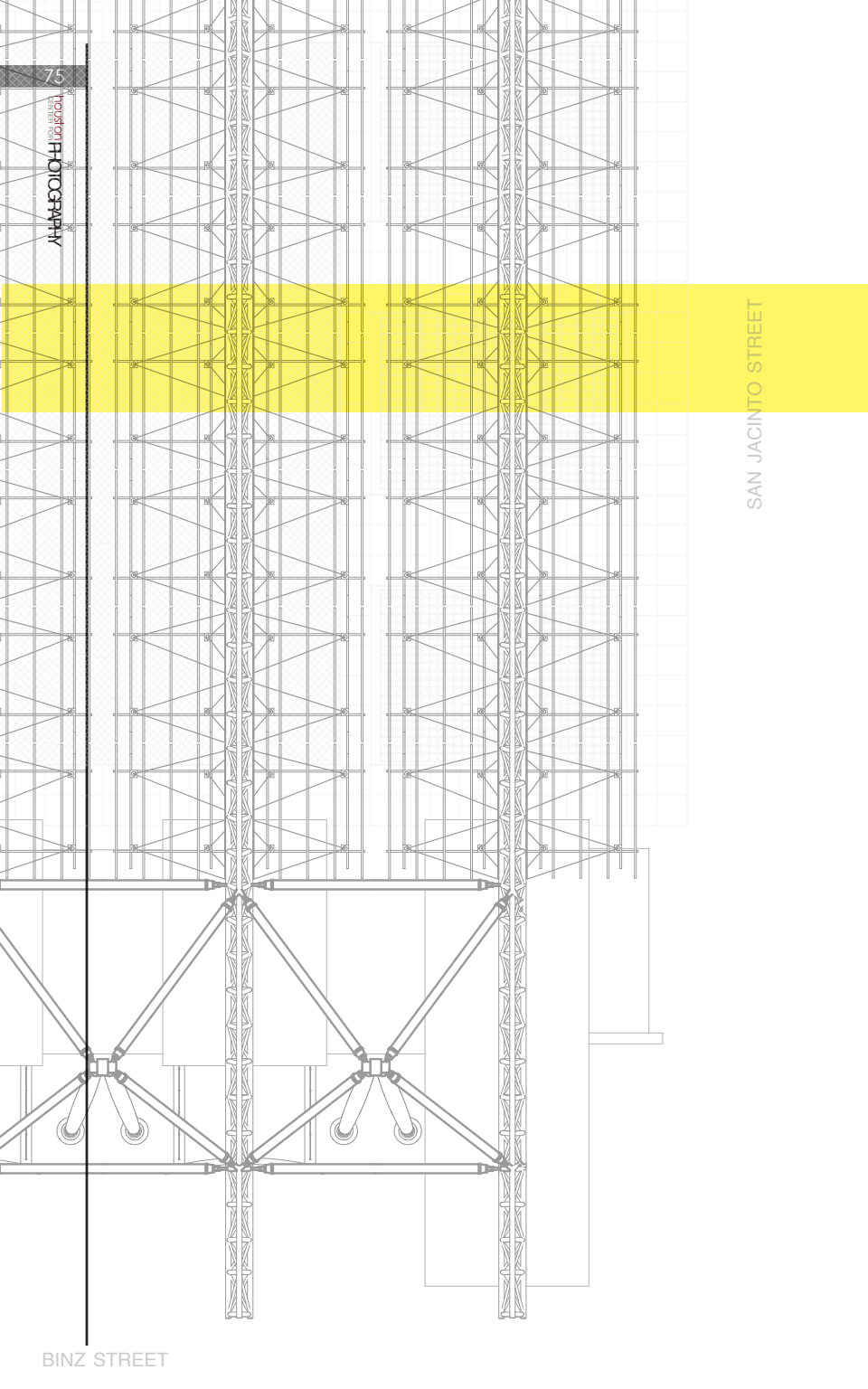


photograph by ben shealy

thank you

binh, laura, sara + kyle
eugene + alberta ducharme [in loving memory]
susan piedmont-palladino
paul emmons
marcia feuerstein
steve small
jann holt
henry hollander
mario cortes
dennis kilper
joe wong

emily chisholm
beth barrett
leslie golenor
allison thurmond
seth estep
kevin hanlon



SAN JACINTO STREET

BINZ STREET

selected readings

arnheim, rudolf. film as art. berkeley: uc press, 1957.

calvino, italo. invisible cities. orlando: harcourt, 1974.

diane arbus - revelations. new york: random house, 2003.

frederick, matthew. 101 thing i learned in architecture school. cambridge: mit press, 2007.

gladwell, malcolm. blink. new york: back bay books, 2005.

greenough, sarah. looking in - robert franks the americas. washington: national gallery of art, 2009.

kieran, stephen + james timberlake. refabricating architecture. new york: mc-graw hill, 2004

perez-gomez, alberto. architecture and the crisis of modern science. cambridge: mit press, 1983.

le corbusier. towards an architecture. trans. john goodman. los angeles: getty publications, 2007.

lynch, kevin. the image of the city. cambridge: mit press, 1960.

mccomb, david g. houston - the bayou city. austin: university of texas press, 1969.

powell, william dylan. houston - then and now. san diego: thunder bay press, 2003.

roman, antonio. eero saarinen - an architecture of multiplicity. london: laurence king press, 2002.

sontag, susan. on photography. new york: picador, 1973.

spector, tom. the ethical architect. new york: princeton architectural press, 2001.

steidl / corcoran gallery of art. richard avedon portraits of power. gottingen: steidl publishers, 2008

twombly, robert, eds. louis kahn - essential texts. new york: ww norton, 2003.