

The Lucidity of Place

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty and Staff of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture

Pia Sarpaneva, Chairperson

William Brown

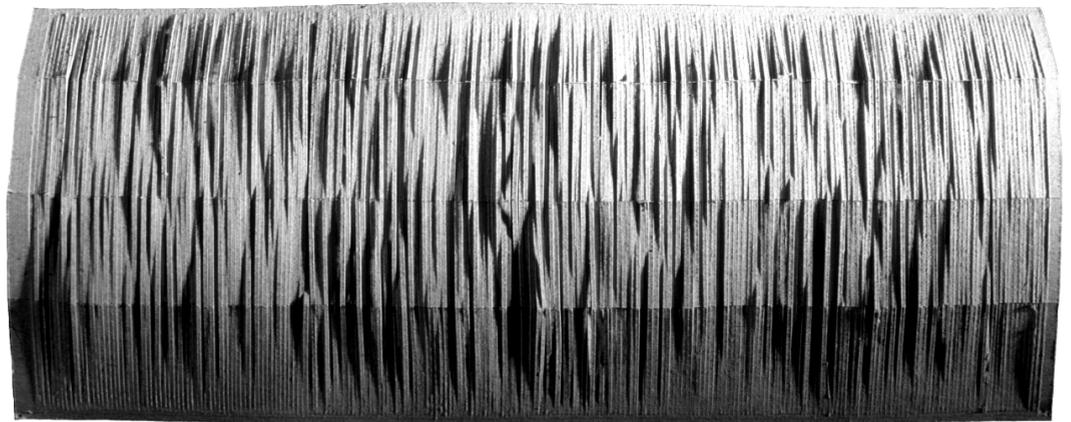
William Galloway

November 2001

Abstract

This project is a building in a town, for a town. Public, semi-public, and private spaces are designed on a narrow site. A simple, repeated form makes the building a container for filtered sunlight. A secondary form is inserted into this structure, a closed block in the open container. Three materials, concrete, stone, and wood, bring a greater clarity to these parts, defining places and engaging the senses.

*We have fallen into the place
where everything is music.*
Jelaluddin Rumi







Intention

A place . . .
of permanence and impermanence
for the community and the individual
of distinct parts
of light

A place to walk through, from one part
of town to another

A place to hear music

A place to study music

Downtown Blacksburg, Virginia, originally formed on a sixteen square grid, is a town of intentional streets and accidental passages. The site chosen for this project is part of a spontaneous network of alleys and parking lots people use to walk through the town. The project provides a pedestrian passage and a music school for a group of teachers who currently teach in their homes.

Blacksburg alleys

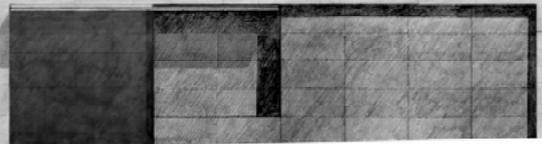




photograph of site, currently a bank drive-thru; siteplan showing alleys and site



Main Street Elevation

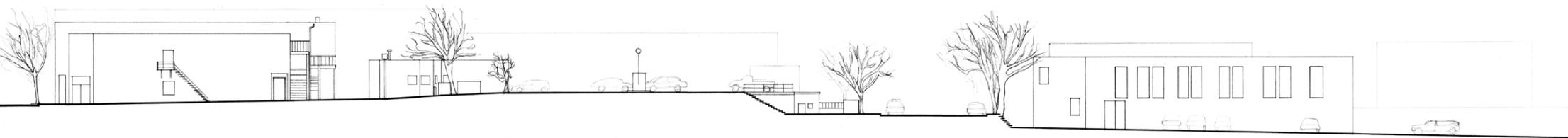




Progress Street

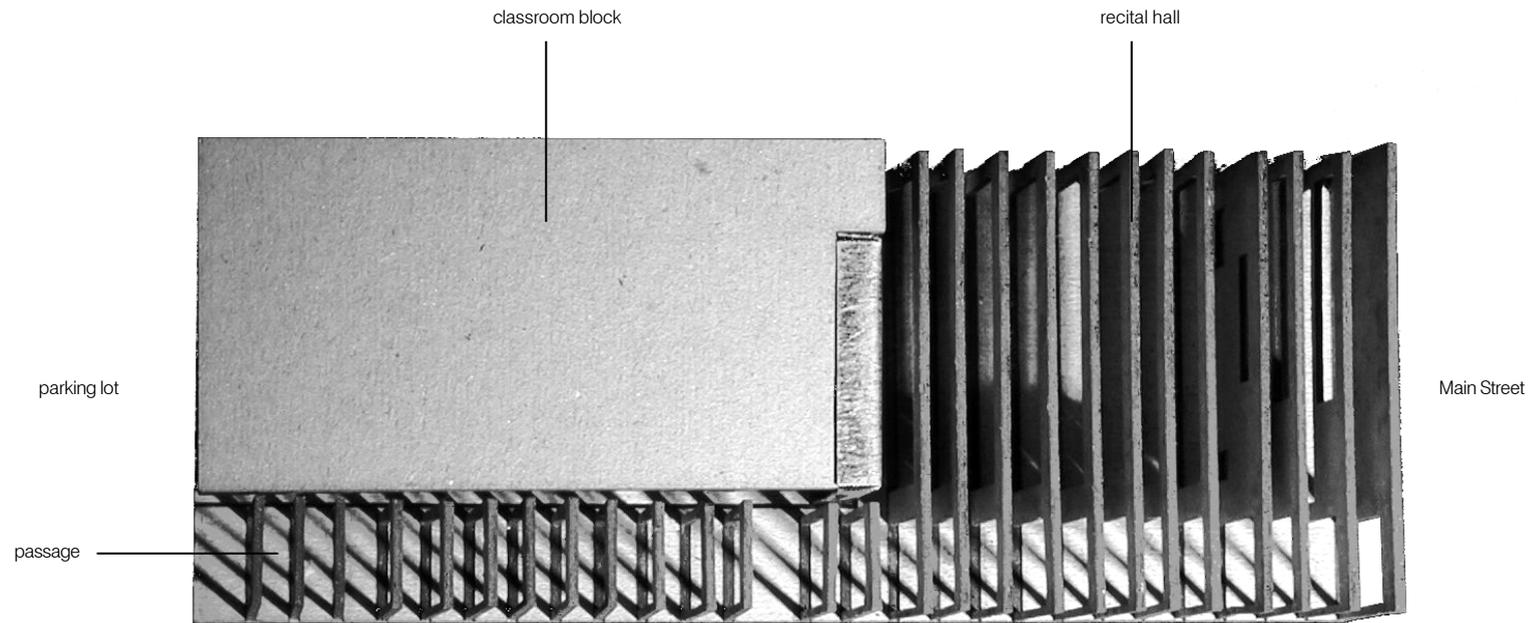
music school

Main Street



Draper Road

a pedestrian route connecting a residential neighborhood and the university, through downtown



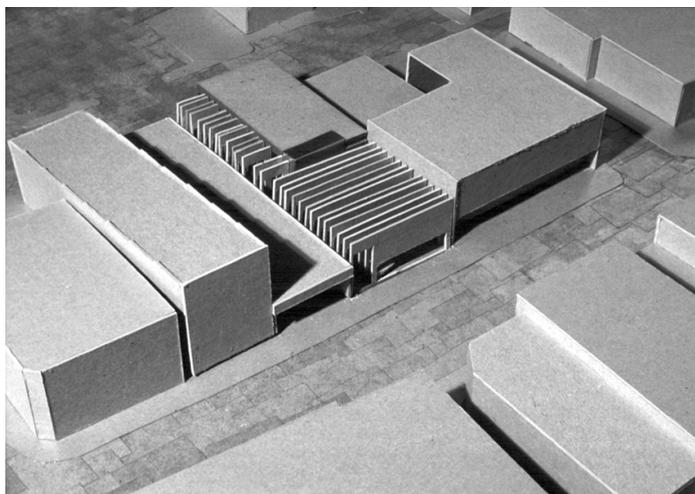
classroom block

recital hall

parking lot

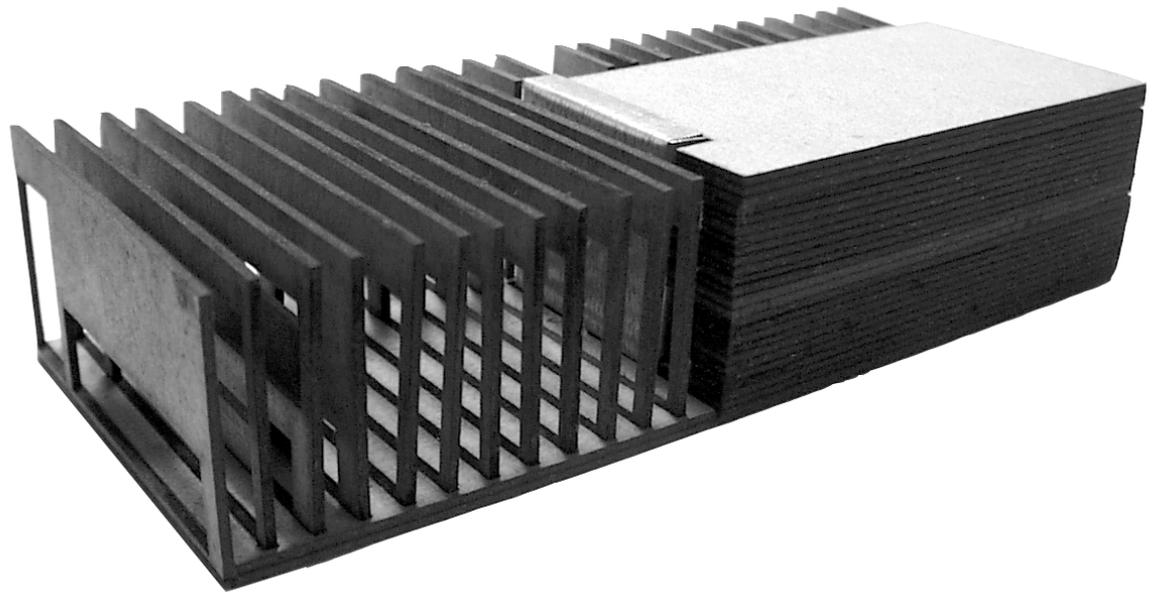
passage

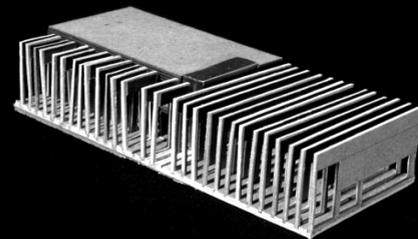
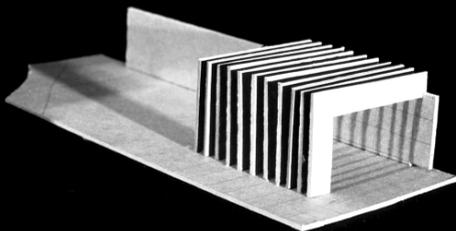
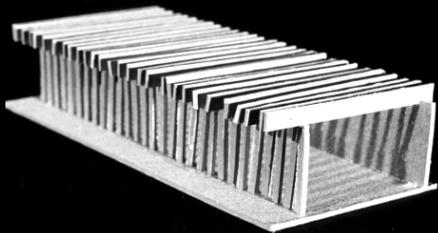
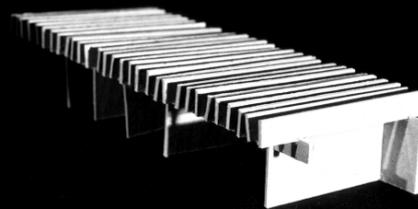
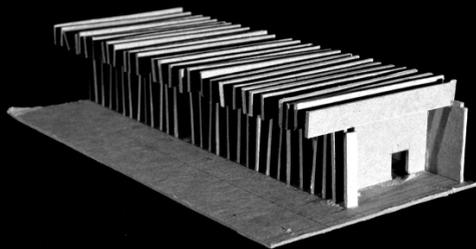
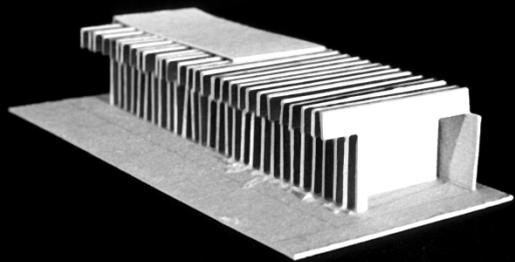
Main Street



Three spaces are differentiated on the site. A division perpendicular to Main Street creates a music school and a public pedestrian passage connecting Main Street with a town parking lot. The music school is divided transversely, providing a small recital hall on Main Street and a classroom block on the parking lot side.

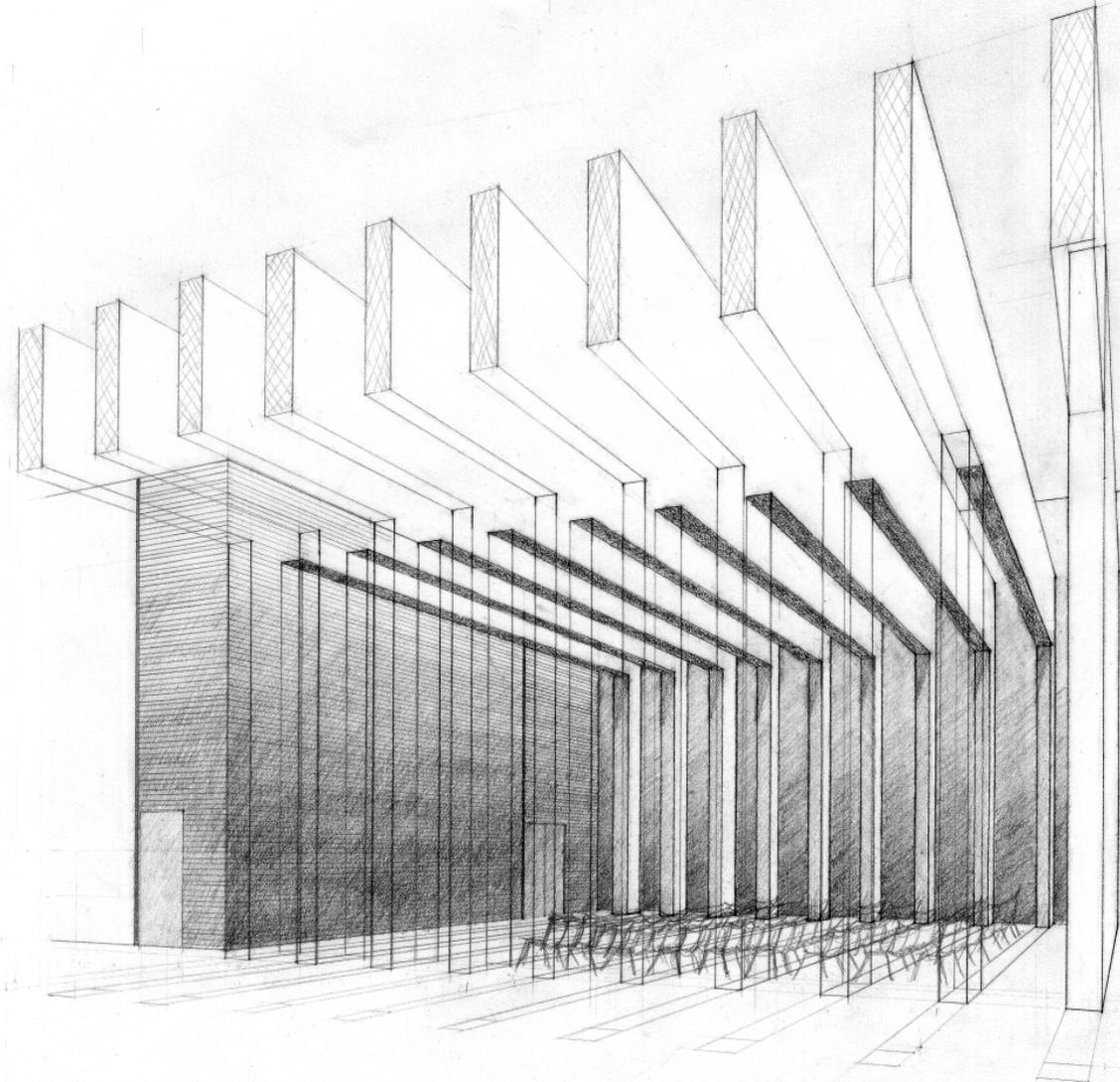
The site is a container for a series of walls standing parallel to Main Street and repeated at a regular interval through the building. Openings exist in the walls. The walls become frames, holding places within them. Within the container is a small, massive block.

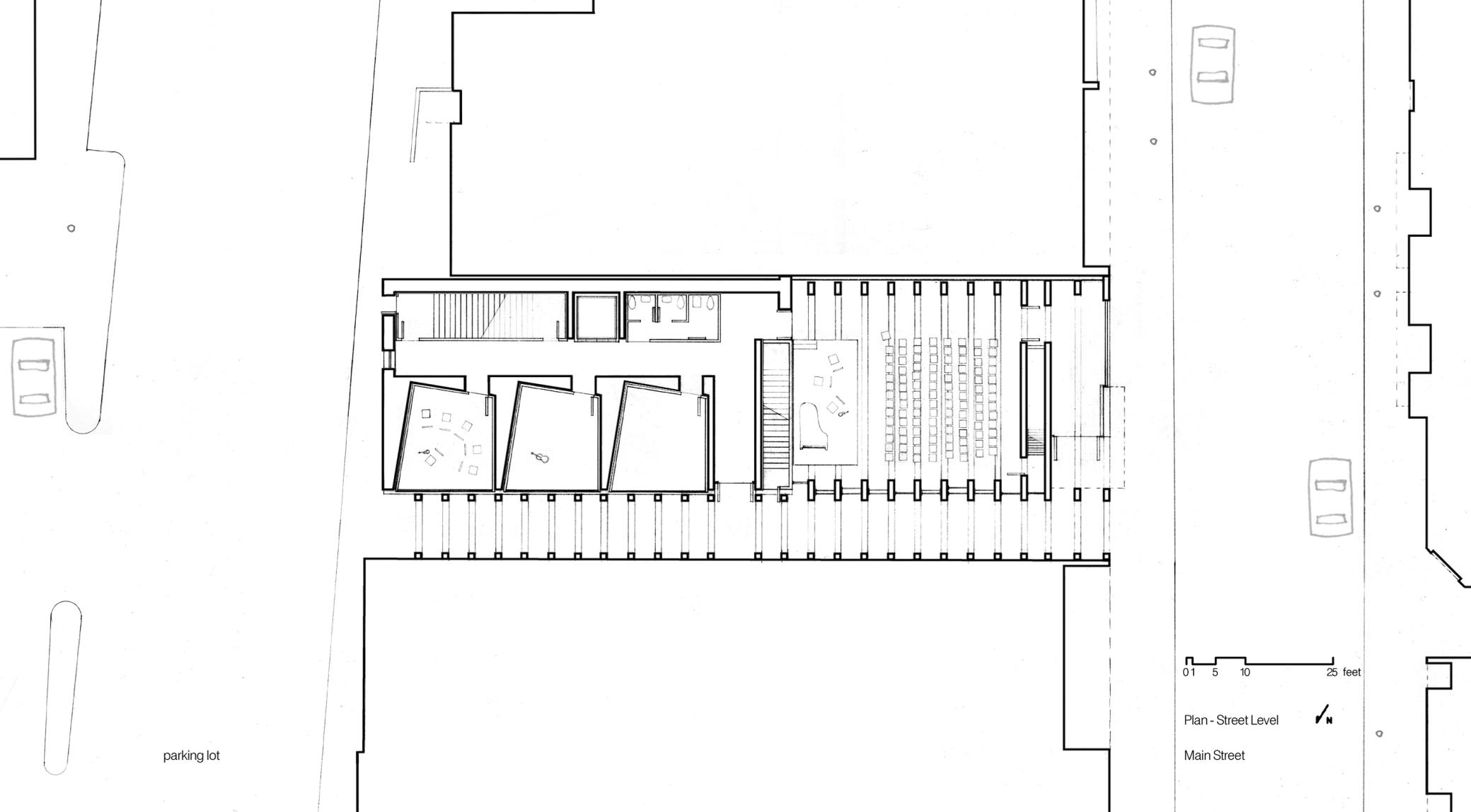




studies of form and structure, in which the passage is an extension of the building. In the final form, the passage is an integral part of the building.

recital hall, from the passage





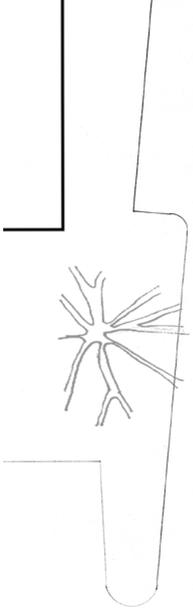
parking lot

0 1 5 10 25 feet

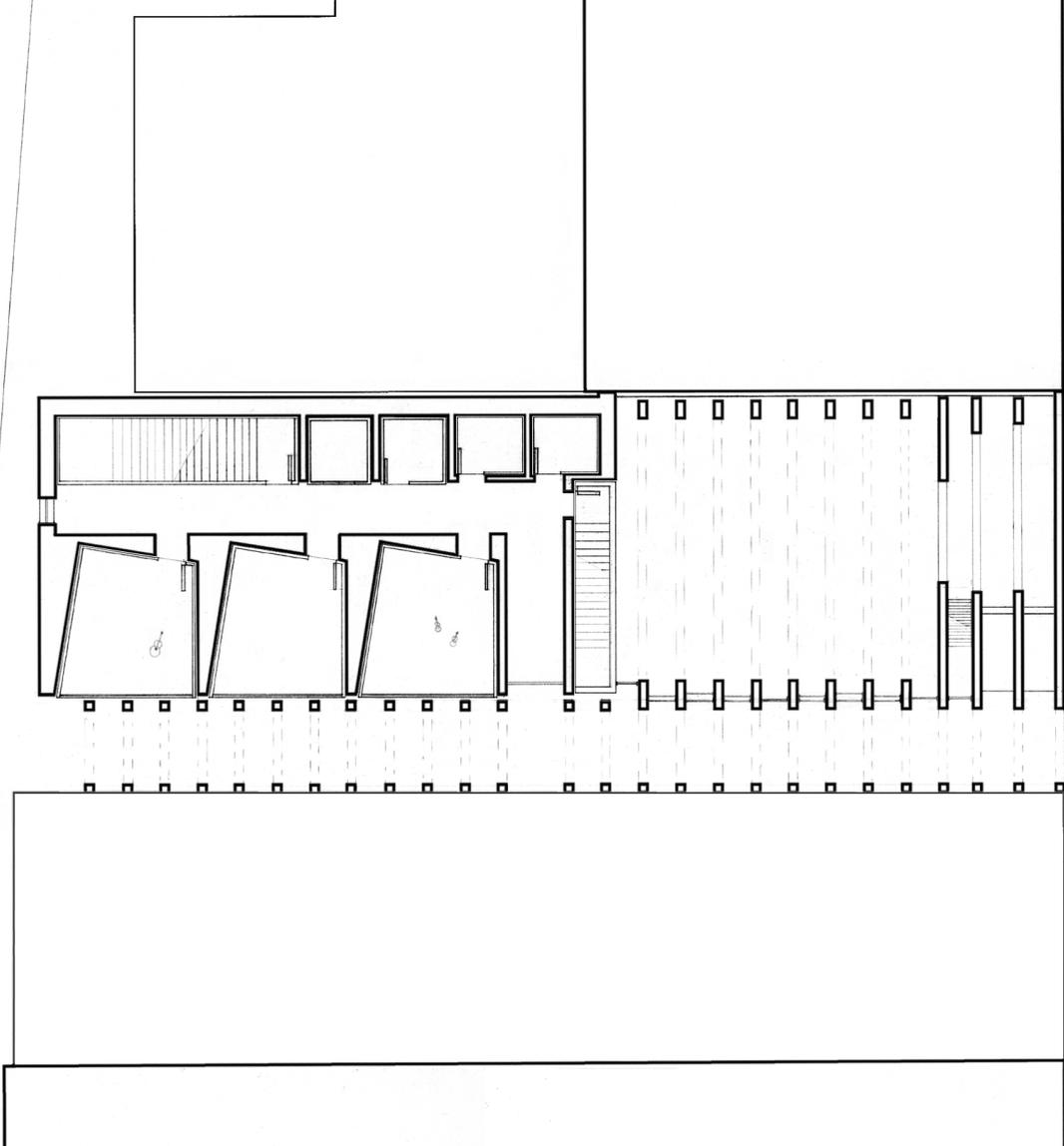
Plan - Street Level



Main Street



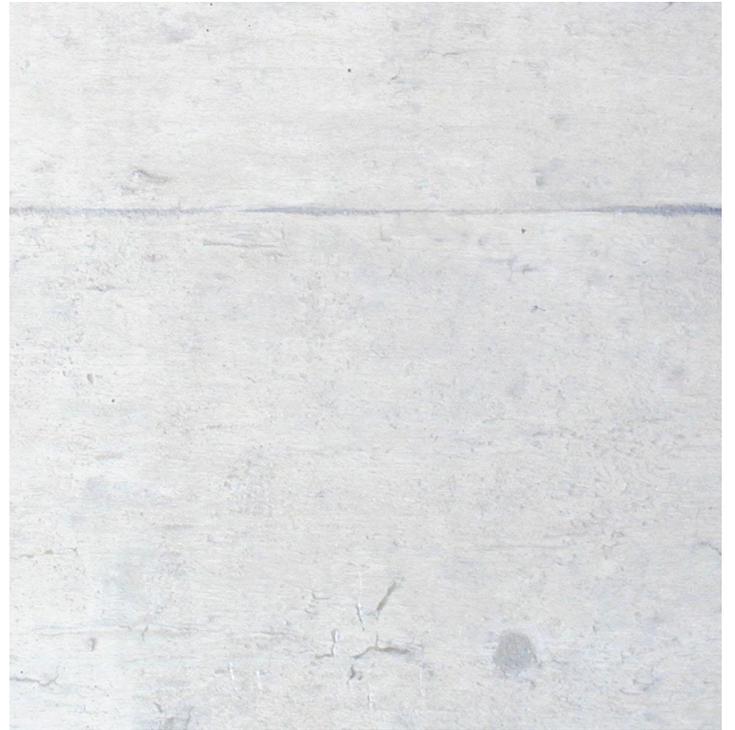
parking lot

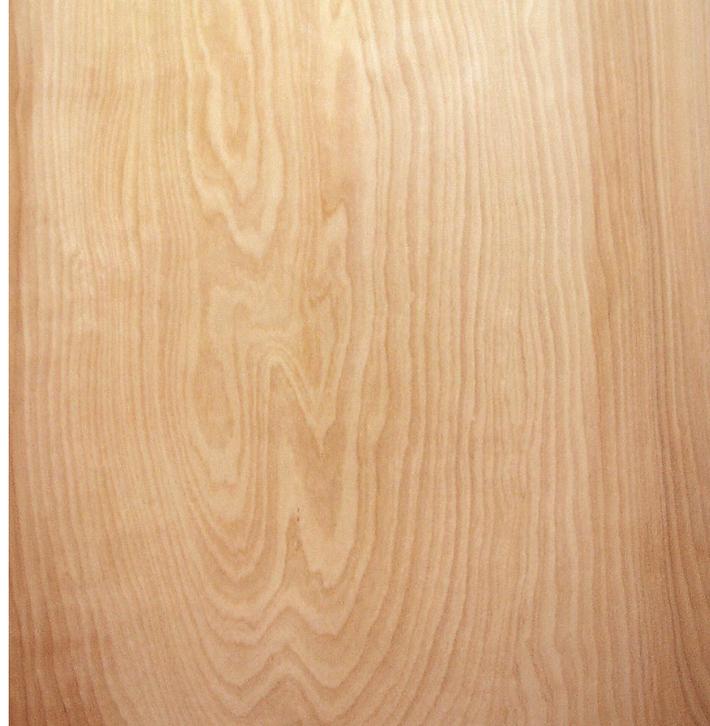


Plan - Second Level



Main Street





The contrasting qualities of three materials make tangible the different places in the building. The materials give distinct character to spaces and define places.

Primary materials

concrete: solid, coarse, neutral

stone: suspended, smooth, cool

wood: impermanent, yielding, warm

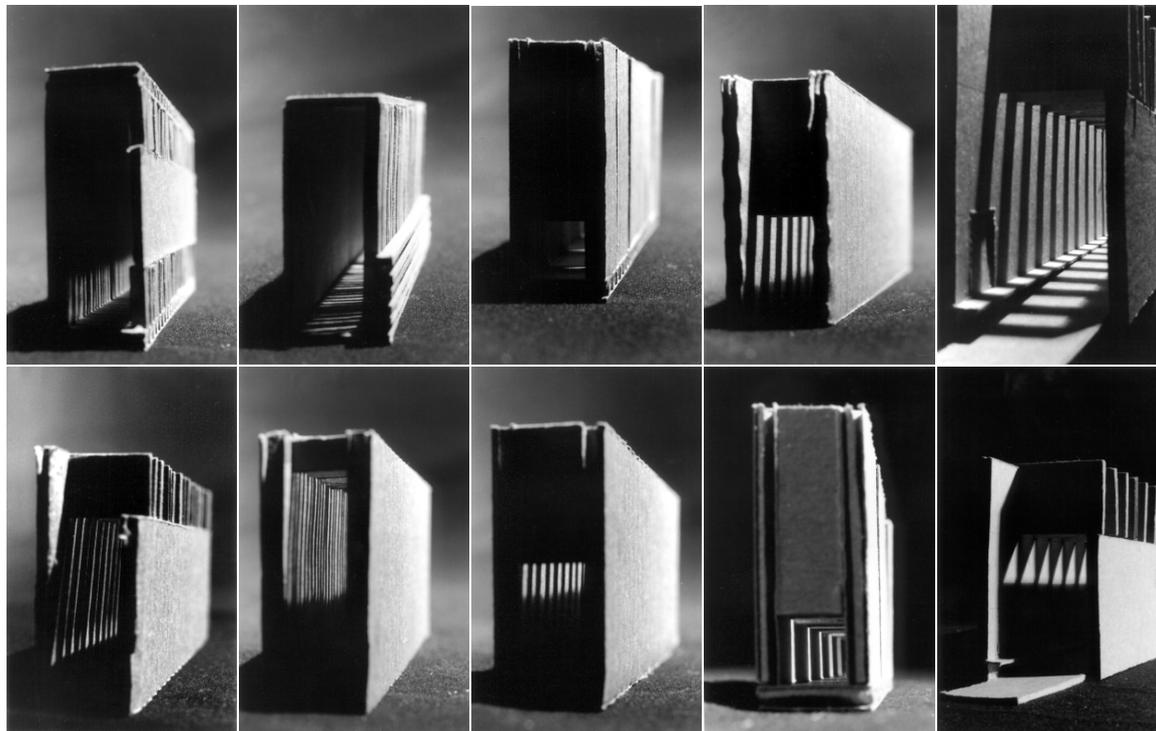
Secondary material

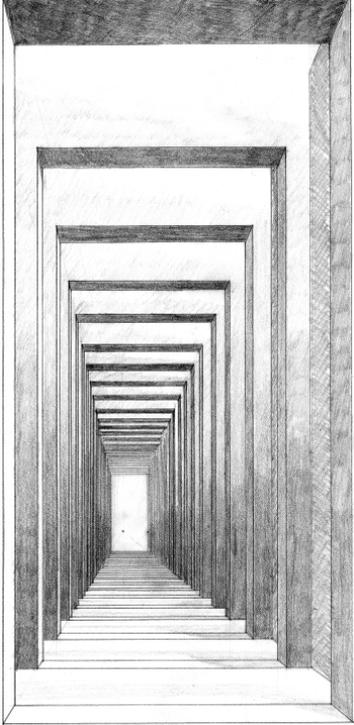
glass: invisible, indefinite

Passage

Sunlight plays with the repetition of a simple form, creating a constantly shifting pattern of light and shadow.

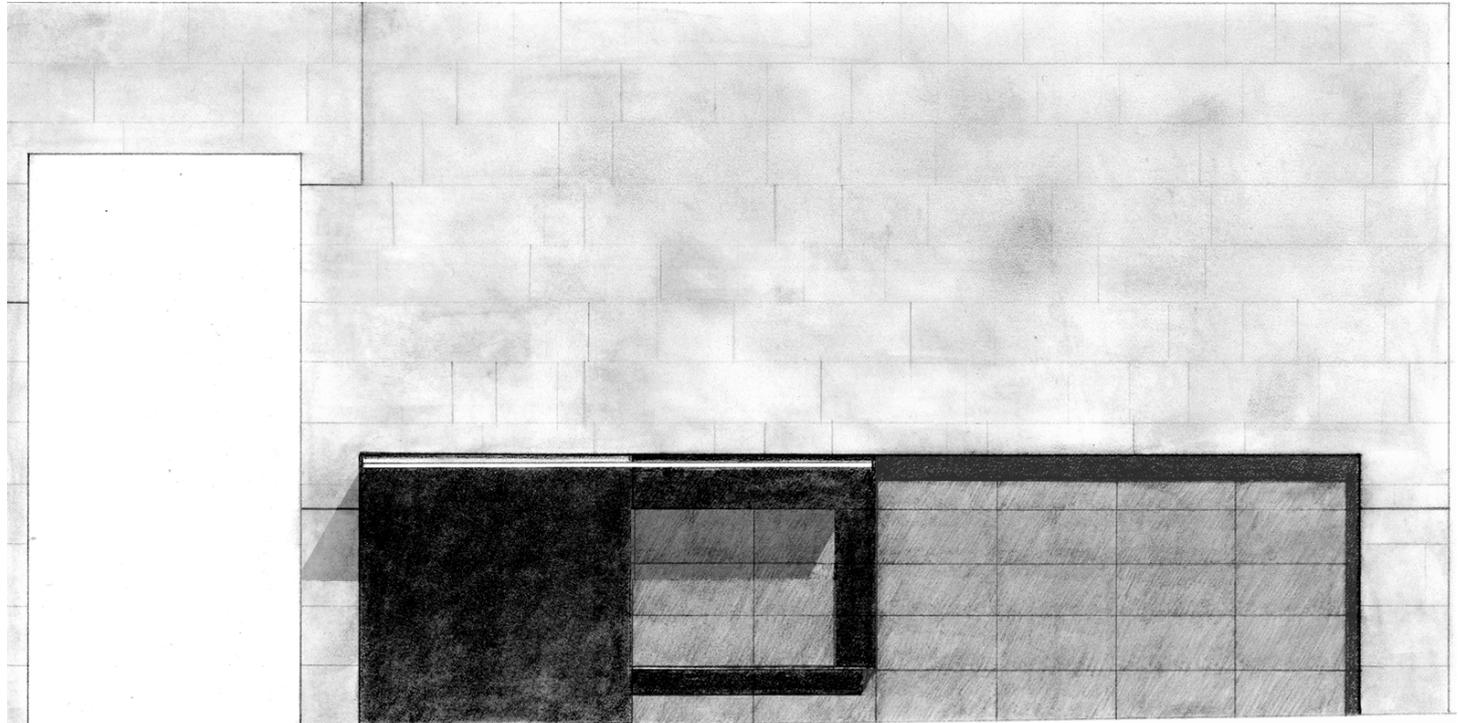
The structure is a container for filtering, moderating, combing, and reflecting light, and for making time and weather known.





The frames are formed of pre-cast concrete pieces lifted into place and locked together.

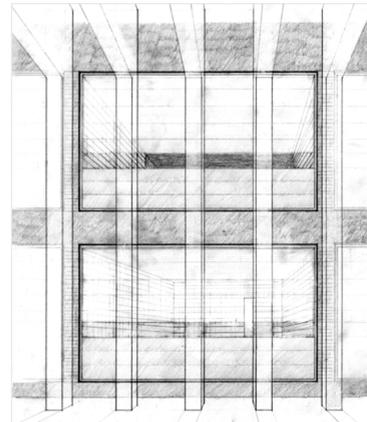
Traces of formwork joints create a pattern, or "grain", that continues across the surface of the frame.



Main Street facade of concrete and stone, with glass canopy







The structure of the passage extends through the recital hall.

A transparent boundary allows views of musicians in the hall.

A translucent boundary reveals movement and light in the classrooms.

At three moments, the boundary is physically permeable, allowing one to pass into the foyer of the recital hall, into the classroom block, or out of the fire stair.

classrooms, seen from the passage

study of frame spacing and fields of view for recital hall and passage, section and plan.
The view is controlled to allow interrupted glances of performances in the hall.

stair

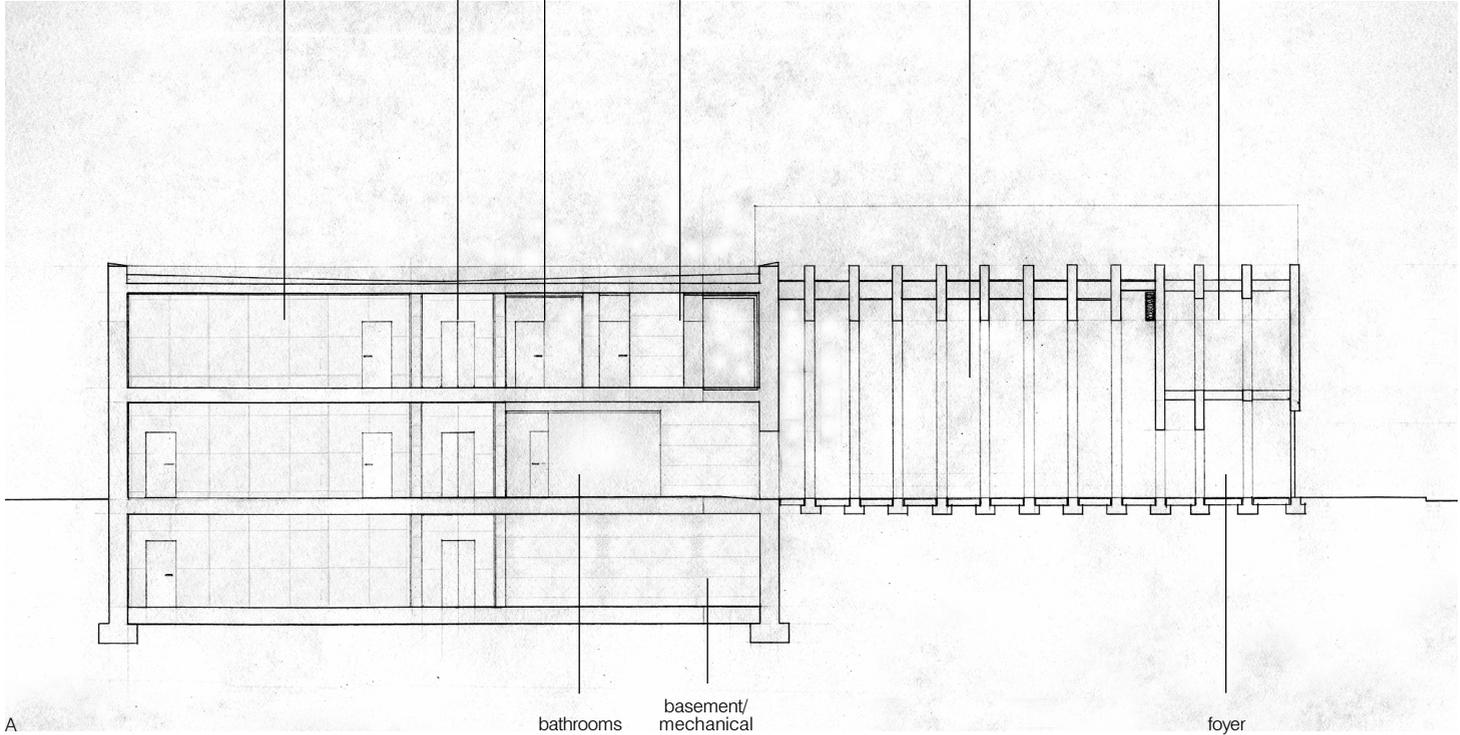
elevator

file room

solo practice rooms

recital hall

control room

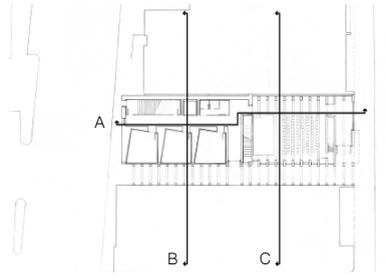


A

bathrooms

basement/
mechanical

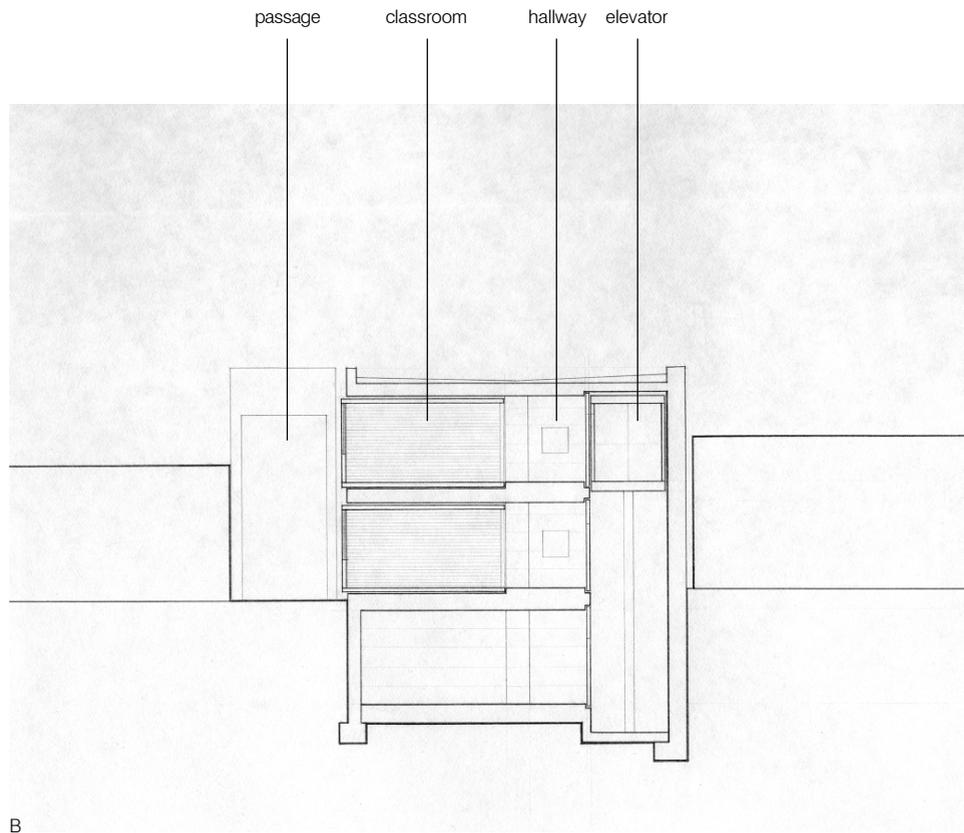
foyer



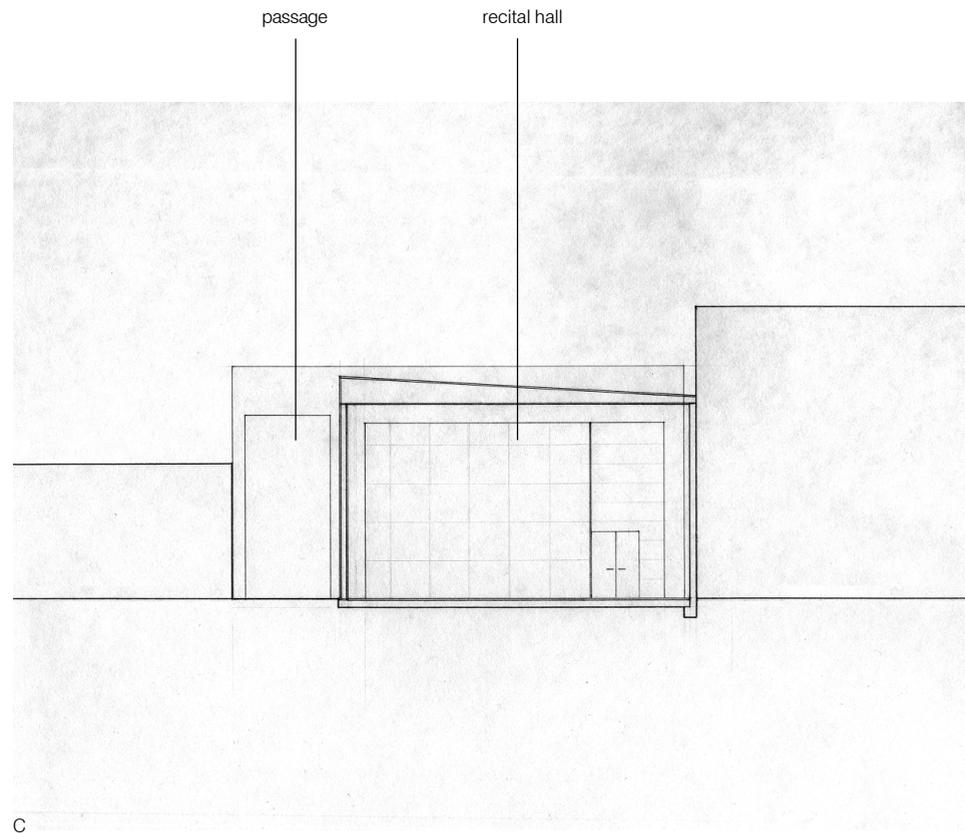
A

B

C



B



C





At night, the play of light and structure changes. The source of light is the building, and the luminosity of the hall spills into the passage. The front wall is dark but for light escaping from the foyer into the covered entry, and a faint light slipping through a crack in the stone wall. From the classroom block, the rooms glow an even, honey light as the walls and lights warm the small spaces behind the frosty glass.

Classroom Block

A block is inserted into the structure. It is constructed of concrete, poured in two foot layers.

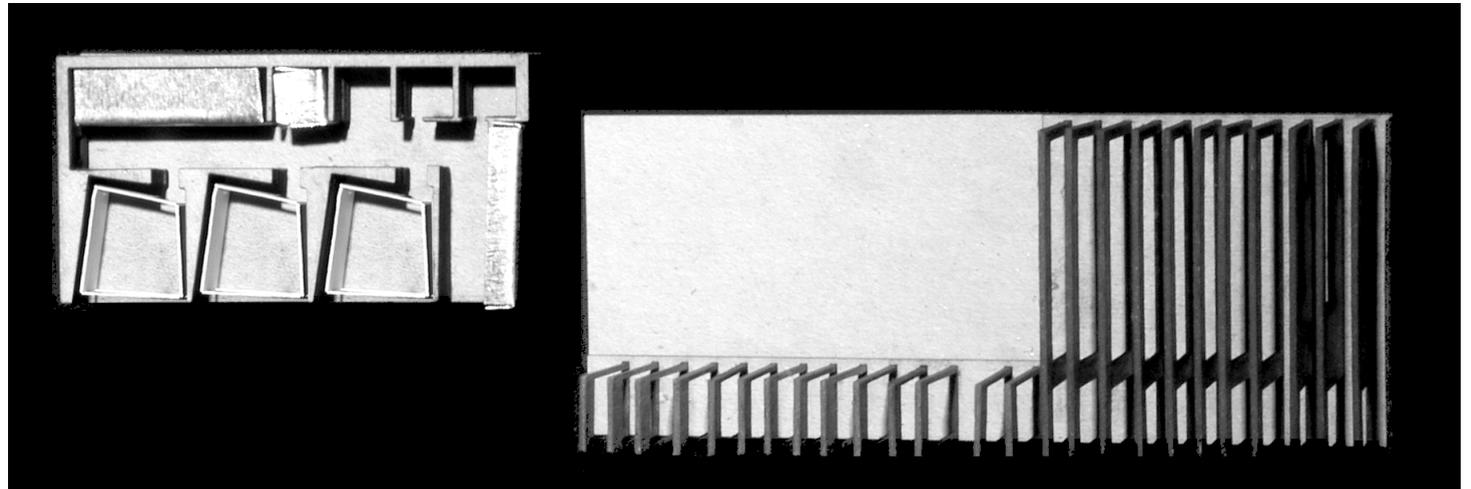
Voids in the concrete mass contain boxes.

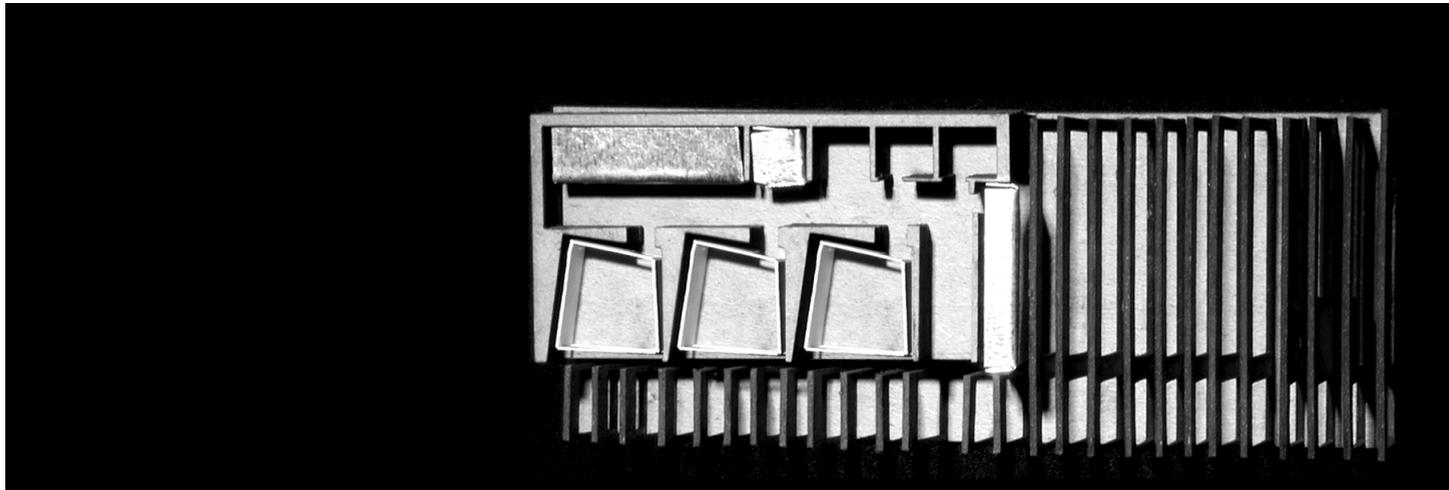
Wood boxes are rooms.

Stone boxes are transition spaces.



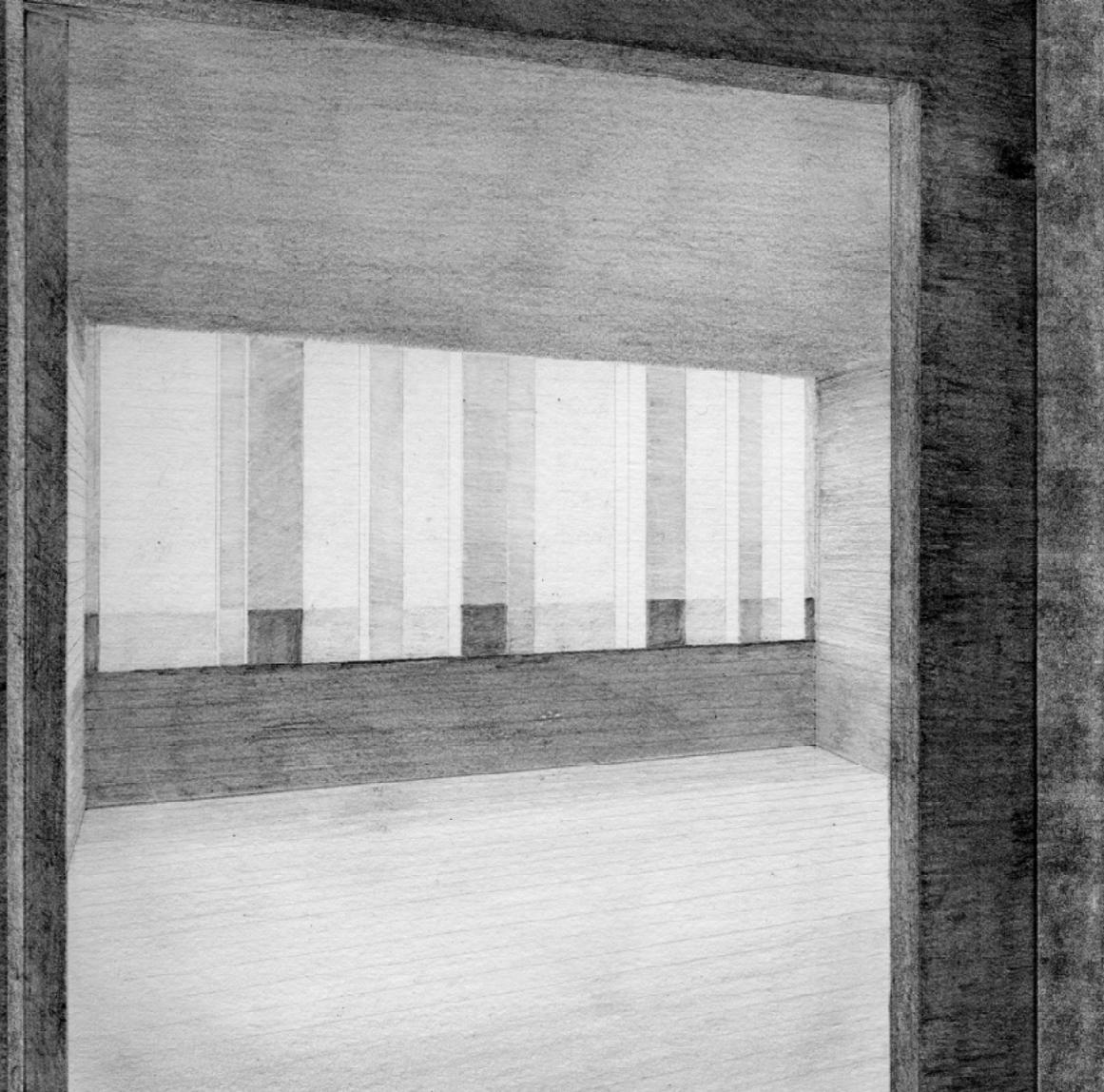
Section of classroom block hallway





Rooms are constructed of four inch wood slats on a frame, and translucent glass.

Transition spaces are clad in thin, polished, four feet square panels of stone, hung on a substructure.



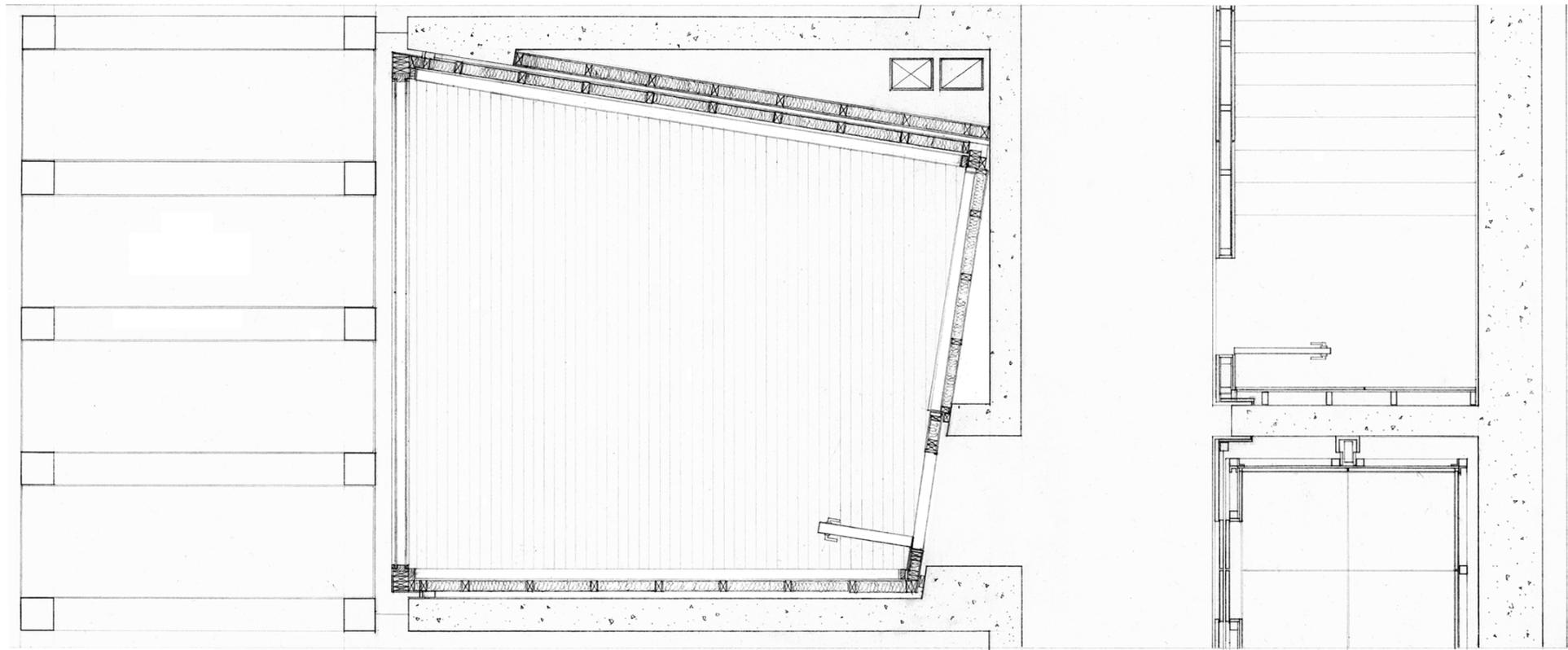
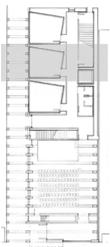
But the eye also touches.
Juhani Pallasmaa



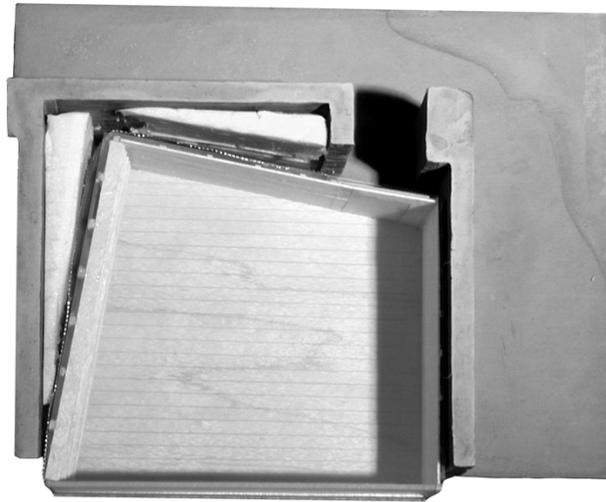
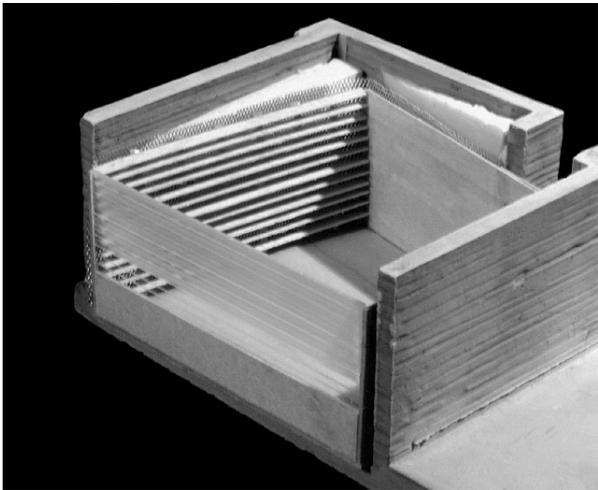
Classroom

In the classroom, the intimacy of a music lesson borders the publicness of downtown. One leaves the concrete mass behind, and steps into a delicate, wood box, an instrument-like room.

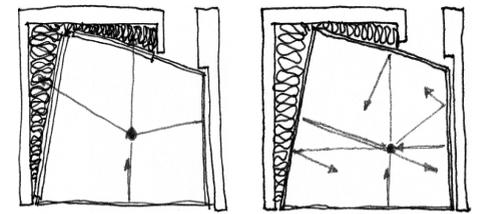
wood classroom held within the concrete structure,



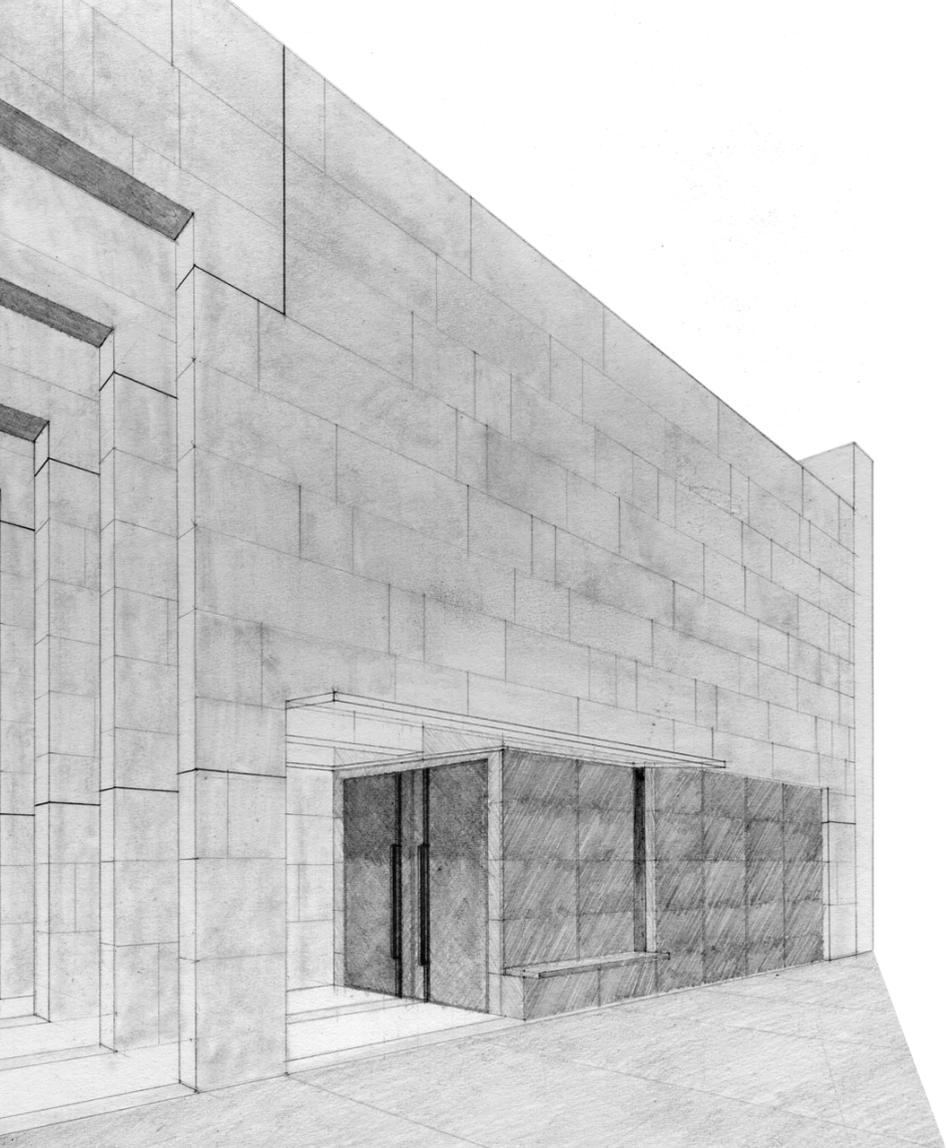
0 1 2 3 feet

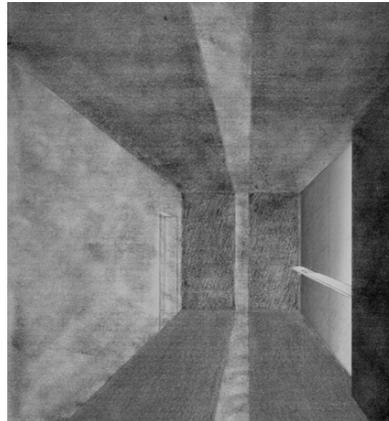


crete building, and is isolated from external noise. Louvered walls can absorb sound, or reflect sound, resonating like an instrument.



sound reflection when louvers are open, closed





Entrance

From Main Street, one walks under a glass canopy, through which light filters from above and falls at the door.

One enters a tight, dark foyer of concrete, stone, and wood, a place to take off one's coat and pick up a program.

Recital Hall

Heavy doors open to the large, bright recital hall.

Here, where the town encounters the students,
the materials meet in fluid concert.

Concrete frames

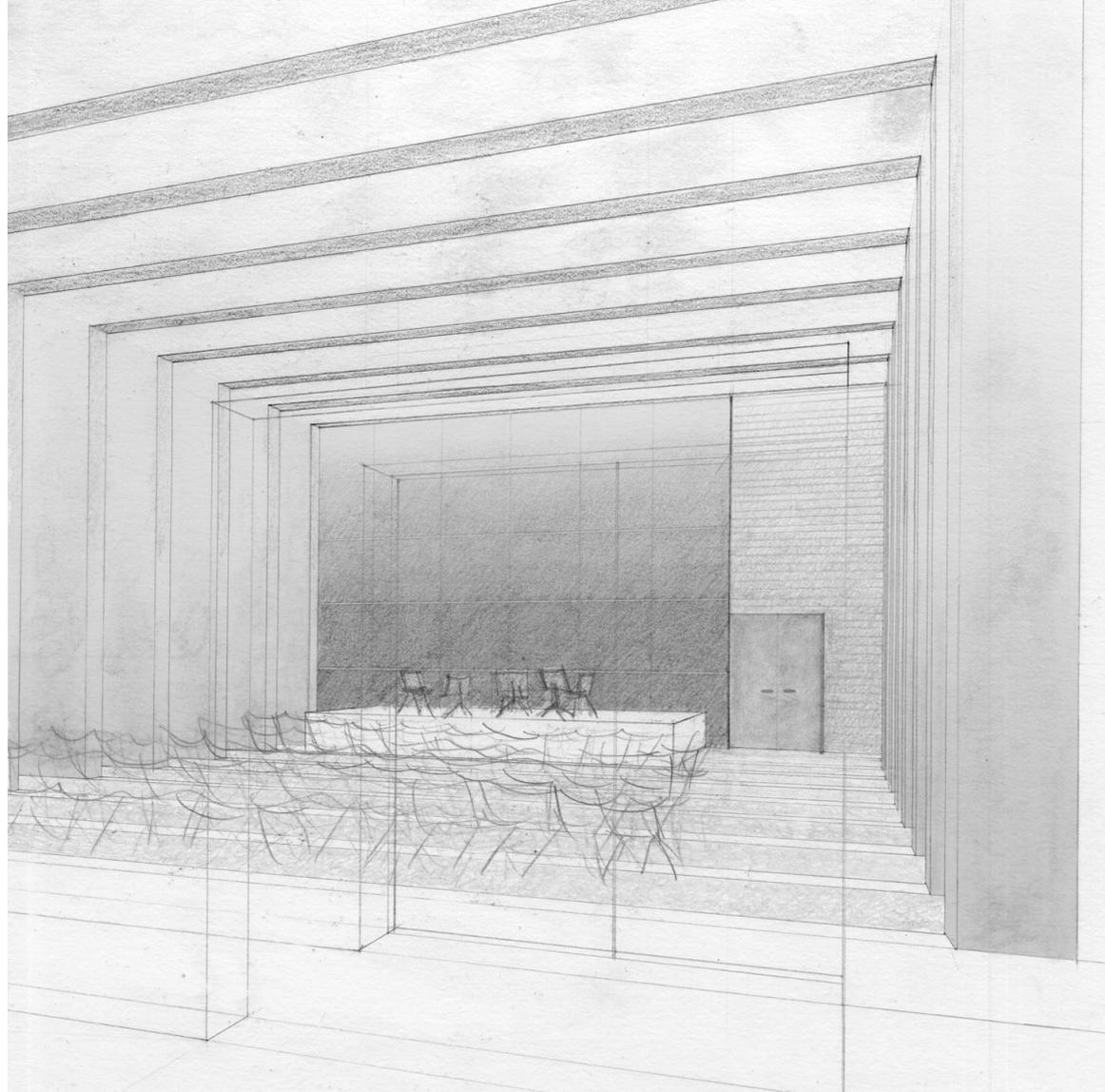
Wood infilled floor

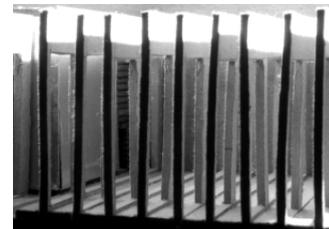
Stone front wall

Light reflected off the concrete surfaces above
illuminates the hall.

The music begins.







Credits

"We have fallen into the place where everything is music," Rumi, Jelaluddin, *The Essential Rumi*, Trans. Coleman Barks, (Edison: Castle Books, 1997), p. 34.

"But the eye also touches," Pallasmaa, Juhani, "An Architecture of the Seven Senses," *Questions of Perception*, (Tokyo: a+u Publishing Co., 1994), p. 34.

All photographs taken by the author.

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To my committee (and Mike O'Brien), my studio-mates, my dearest friends, and especially my family, thank you.

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