

## Definition of a threshold

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

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Blacksburg, Virginia  
December, 1990

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Architecture and Urban Studies

(ABSTRACT)

This thesis explores the possible resolution of colliding autonomous architectural entities. The manifestation of this resolution occurs in the design of an art museum that utilizes the memory of the Victorian national spirit. The realization of this program underlies the author's continued pursuit to define the entities of boundary and threshold. This entire enquiry is presented through the utilization of photographs, drawings, and supporting text.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following:

My family, whose sustained trust granted me an ethic for learning and therefore life.

My committee, for their continuous pragmatic scholarship.

And [redacted], whose faith championed my dream.

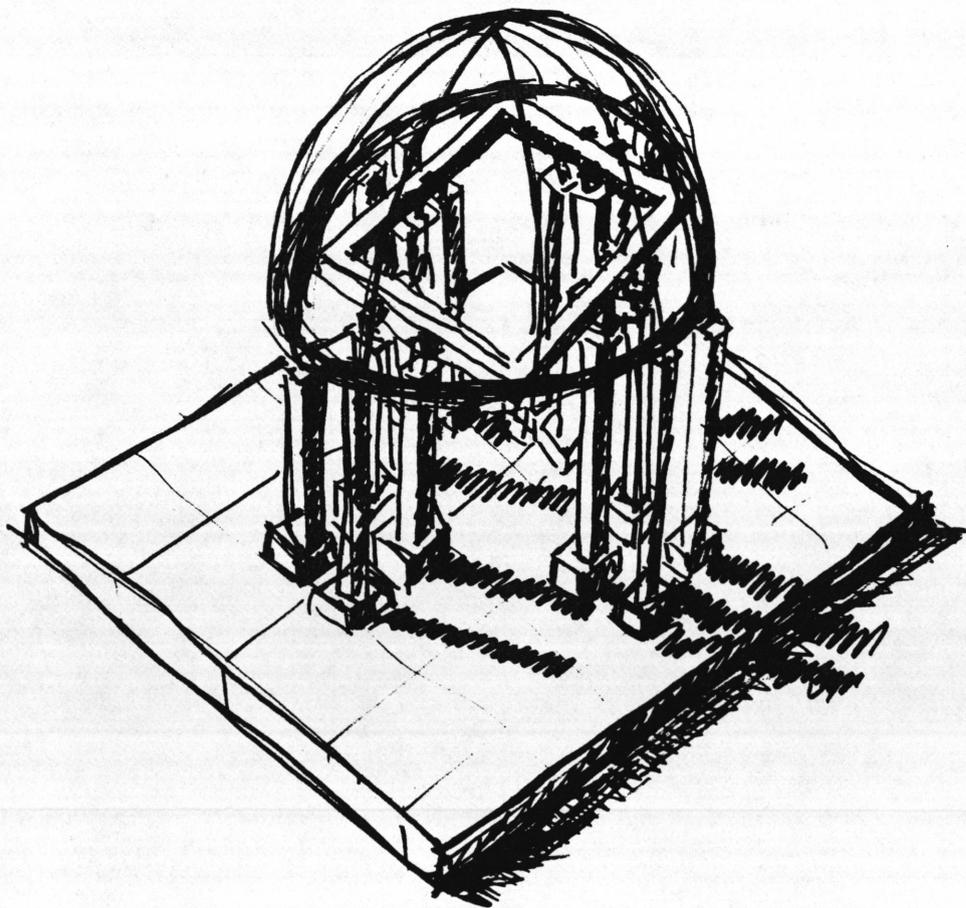
Dedication

To

whose monument lies in the hearts of all who knew you.

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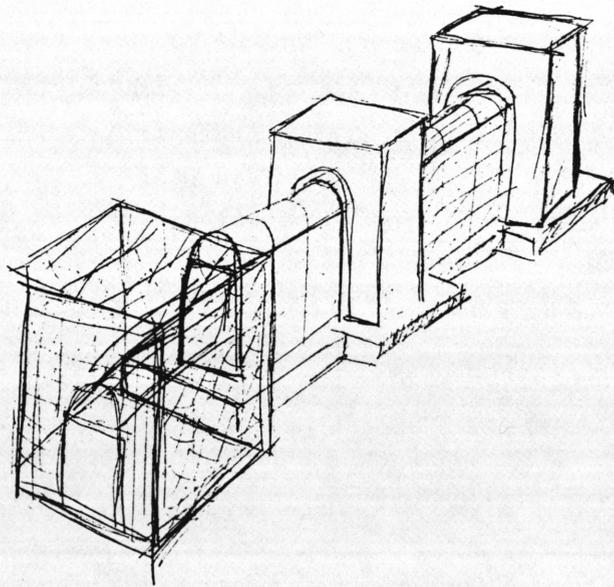
## Preamble

The act of architecture is a heavy responsibility.  
A federation of the abstract and tangible.  
The manifestation of the accord between  
a form and its "complex ambiguous aspect"<sup>1</sup>.  
This procurement demands discernment of the  
act and the consequence. Success may hatch and disseminate  
the sublime, while failure maligns the very vitality of the word  
Art. But the ramifications of  
this volition extend beyond mere provincial consequences.  
Architecture has the magnitude  
to propagate the very edict of an era. "Architecture is  
the will of  
an epoch  
translated into space,"<sup>2</sup> declared Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe. Thus

a nurturing of a cultural identity does allow a society  
to reap aesthetic sustenance  
and redefine a national spirit.  
To address this charge, an  
architectural proposition must be prepared  
that offers a national precedent.  
An edifice that exonerates the megalomania of  
the individual  
and basks in  
the prolific  
achievements of the Nation. But historic reconstruction is not  
the prognosis for this task, rather an  
arrest of its identity, a portal of faith  
to resurrect  
an allegiance back to a national spirit.

# Journey

Gossamer threads seep  
Backward, consuming the trail,  
Leaking possibilities.  
What is the beginning?  
Where is the end?  
The old man closed his eyes  
It had begun.



1.

## Definition of a threshold.

A threshold is an inherent phenomenon of neighboring states, an alliance between the tenuous dividing chord of a boundary and the resulting spiritual change as the boundary is crossed. But as intrinsic as this relationship is, the alliance must be understood through its collective parts to be implemented in the process of architectural design.

A boundary is a dislocation of adjacent realms, that produces wards of diversity. In this act of separation, veils of silk equate city walls, effecting the contrived against the indigenous, the inside versus the outside. Boundaries instigate realms whose essence manifests the sensual world. "A place is determined by its boundary" states Christian Norberg-Schulz "where architecture occurs in the boundary as an embodiment of the world."<sup>5</sup> Thus delineation is an intrinsic nature of man, as he attempts to organize, control and order the scale of his environment.

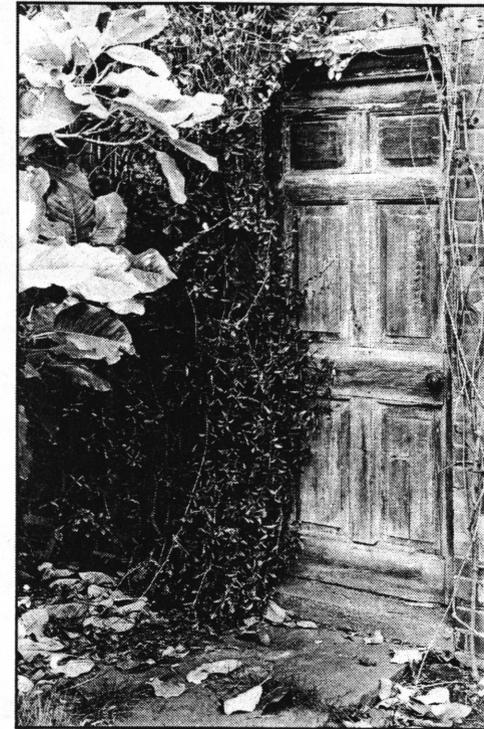
But distinction between realms is not an instantaneous act. Black to white covers a spectrum of grey, a dawn of awareness that ushers change slowly and unperceivably until the metamorphous is complete. This modulation is the act of threshold, an ephemeral architectural spirit that initiates the senses over a boundary, from one realm to the next.

"On may nights, when so many doors  
are closed, there is one that is  
just barely ajar. We have only  
to give it a very slight push, the  
hinges have been well oiled and  
our fate becomes visible"

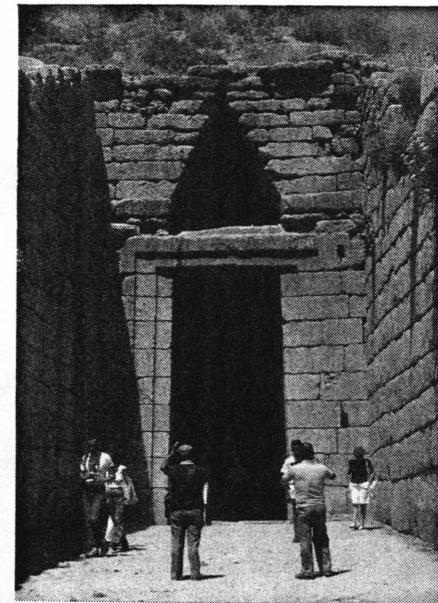
Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*.

To orchestrate the manifestations of the act of threshold, a precise language of precedent is required, a vocabulary in whose order resides a symbolic constitution of initiation. The portal to the Treasury of Atreus (photograph no. 3) and the entrance to the Circus in Olympia Greece (photograph no. 4), both provide congenial emblems that symbolize this initiation.

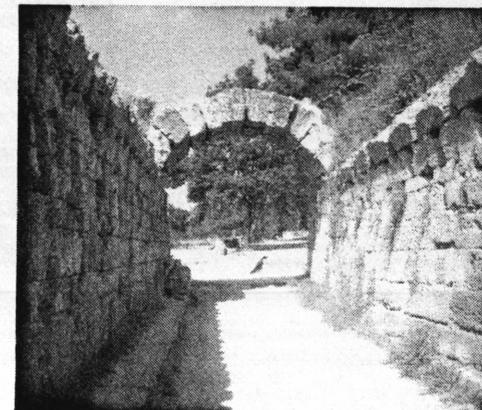
Threshold is a phenomenon that depends on a perception of another place, another realm, the possibility of existing somewhere else. But to fully implement the act of threshold, a continued conjunction of the spiritual and tangible aspect of architecture must occur, a collaboration of the threshold and its boundary.



2.



3.



4.

## A Resolution

A Young Mind filled early  
With Victorian images, red  
Bricks patterned with confectionery  
Trimmings around the core,  
The nature of which must be built around.

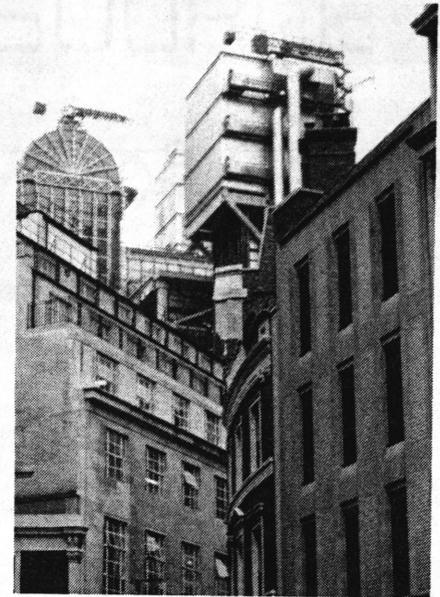
Not the aluminum skeletons punching  
Their steaming fists through the damp, chill  
Air, coiling their silver weed like systems  
Around the monument to the Master Builder,  
Denying his order, choking the Life out of the dome.

These are but arrogant, painted stumps  
Preening their shinning sides before dark, then  
Stripping unmercifully to their spines.  
Whores raped in an attempt to acknowledge their existence

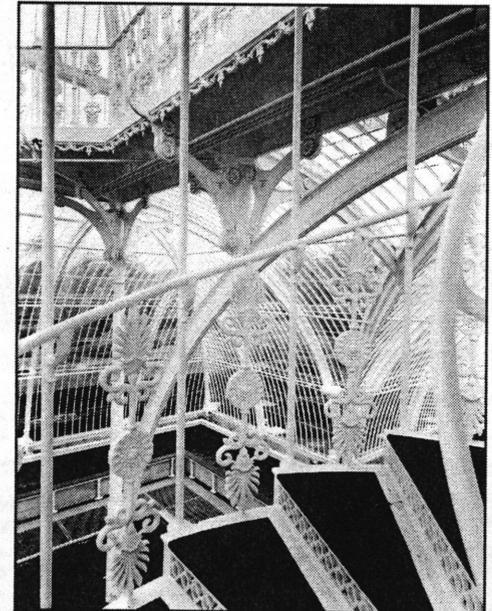
Where is the a priori? Certainly not here,  
Perhaps wrinkled in some studio corner  
Patiently waiting to be released from its  
20 x 20 cell, ready to take breath and  
Reach out into the destitute wasteland called The City,  
Touching if only a few with the gift of the precious bauen.

This is the young mind's World,  
An aggregate of precious seeds compiled in the perfect  
Ensemble, intuition through the analysis  
Of what went before and what could follow,  
Beauty through order, sensibility through understanding.

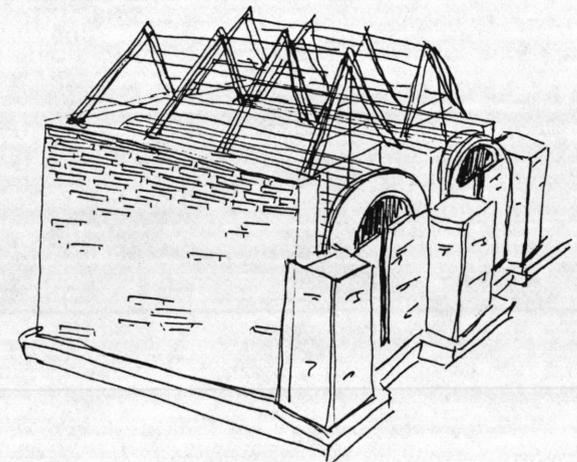
In this vision there resides a solicitation  
To propagate the followers and  
Extradite the Corporate Cancer from its Lair,  
For germination of this dormant milt  
Will surely impregnate the runneled  
Metropolis into a  
City once again.



5.



6.



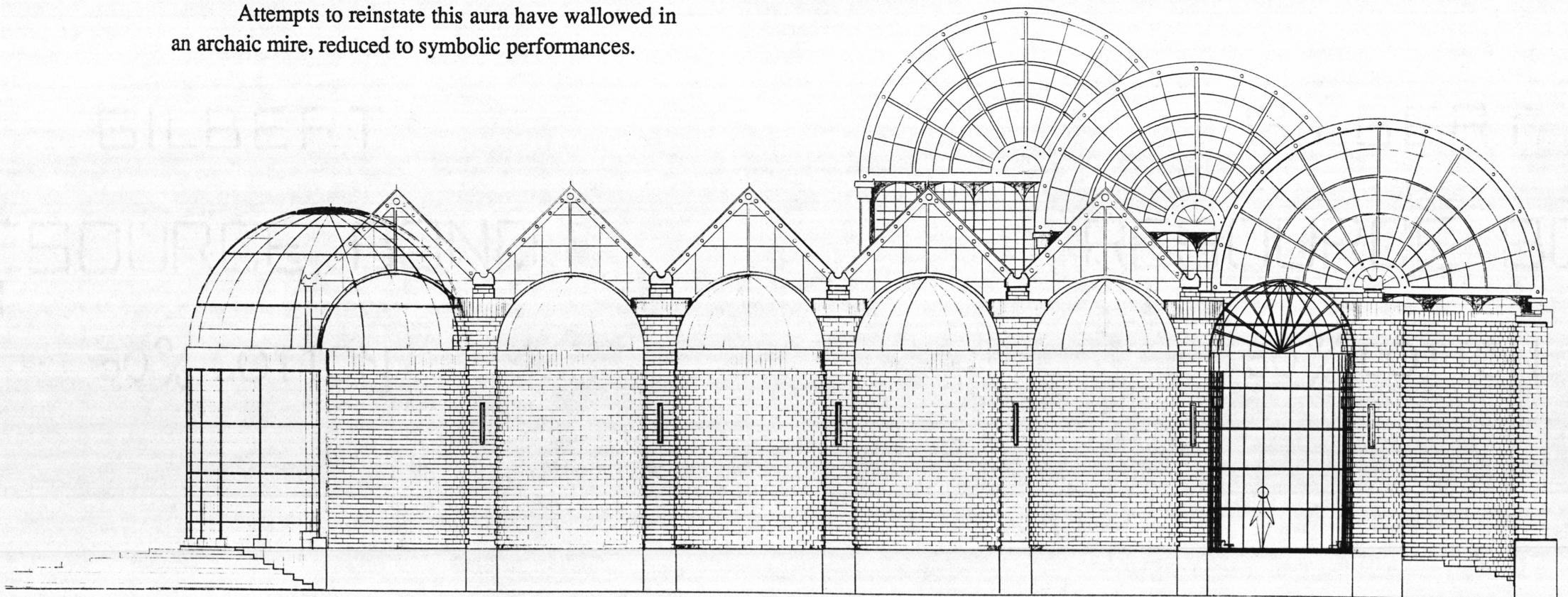
## Spirit

A candle is burning. A bright, steady sceptre in memory of the squandered national spirit of Victorian Britain. The flame is a token, a symbol of hope to renew the fortitude of a unanimous vision and so weave the virile thread of pride back into the national fabric.

The Victorian spirit emanated from a desire for humanitarian accord, an affiliation to the Arthurian Legends "for sovereignty, for national spirit, for gentlemanly virtue."<sup>3</sup> This essence was embodied in the Great Exhibition of 1851. A gardener's crystal vision that became a national icon, a palace of light magnifying the achievements of the state. Alfred Tennyson captured this spirit in his 'May-Day Ode' (1851)

"A Glazing arch of Lucid glass  
Leaps like a fountain from the grass  
To meet the sun!"<sup>4</sup>

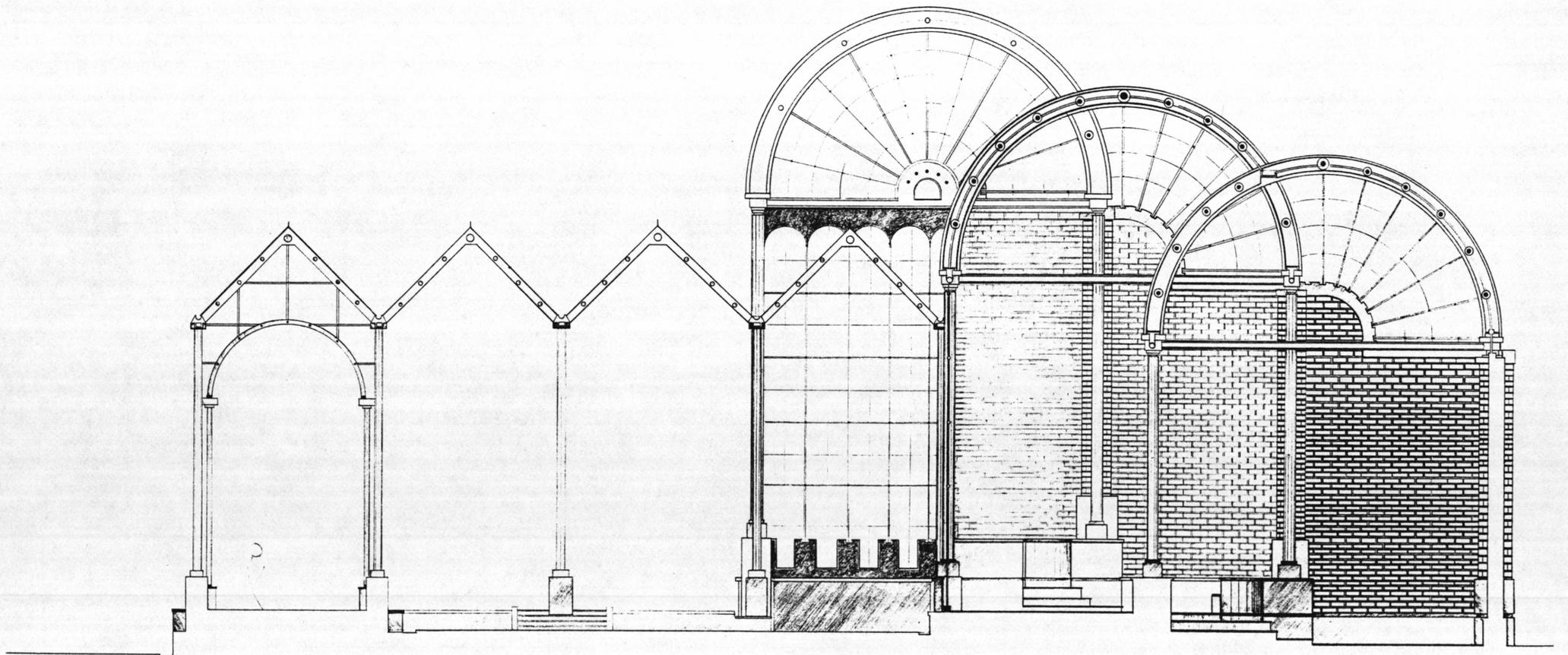
Attempts to reinstate this aura have wallowed in an archaic mire, reduced to symbolic performances.

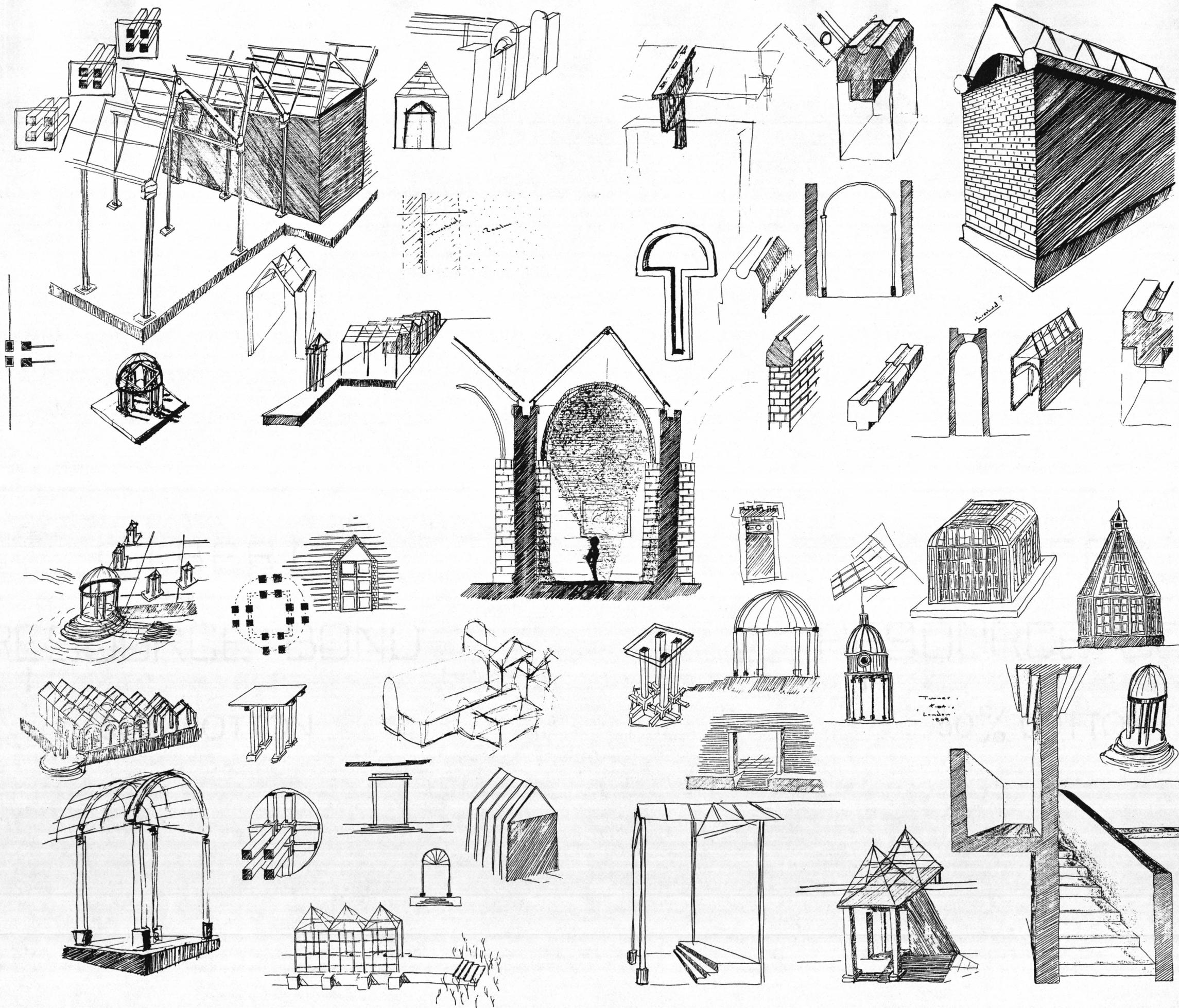


These reconstructions mitigate to "taste" and "style" with their rejuvenated form, creating a perdition of spirit, reburying the essence in a tomb of pastiche imagery.

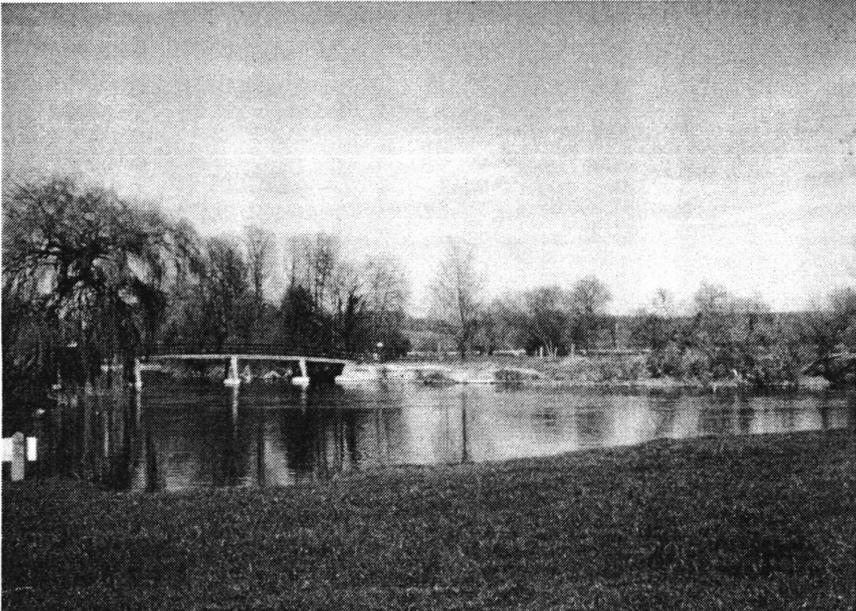
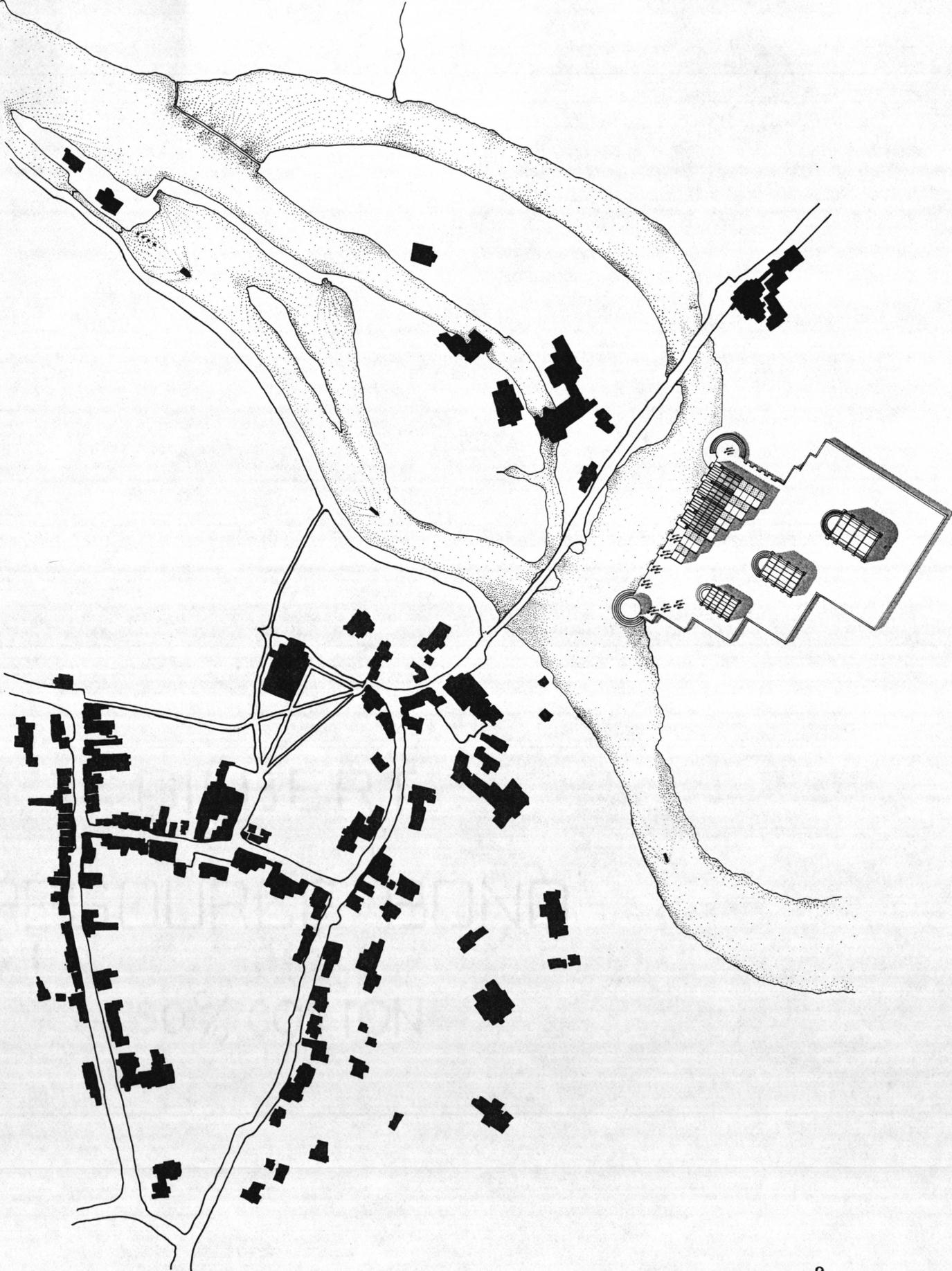
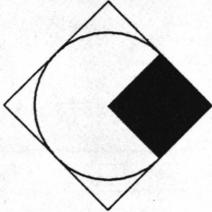
The true resurrection of this spirit does not reside in reconstruction, but in its scope and scale. A national spirit demands a national architecture, with a scale proportional to the aspect of a state. Victorian art and architecture proposed an essence of the infinite. Joseph Turners Landscapes proposed an immense billowing world reaching to the horizon, while Tennyson lifted the mind into poetic flights of hallucinatory visions. These artists represented the essence ingrained in the aesthetic vision of the Empire.

The flame still burns. Not for facsimile, but for truth. A restoration of architectural scale uniting the nation, fortifying the dream.





Proposed site of Sonning on Thames

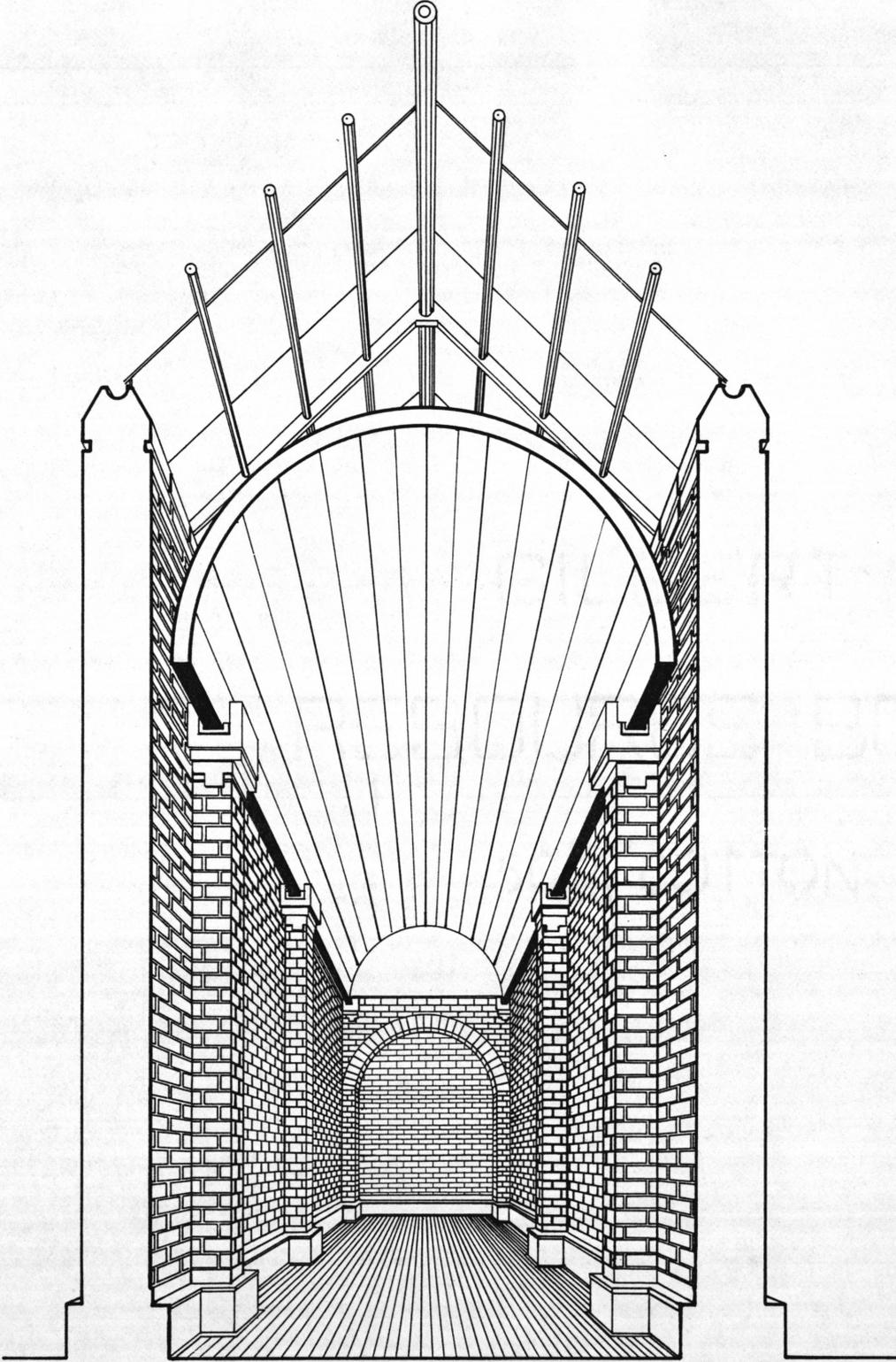


7.



8.

# Gallery



GILBERT

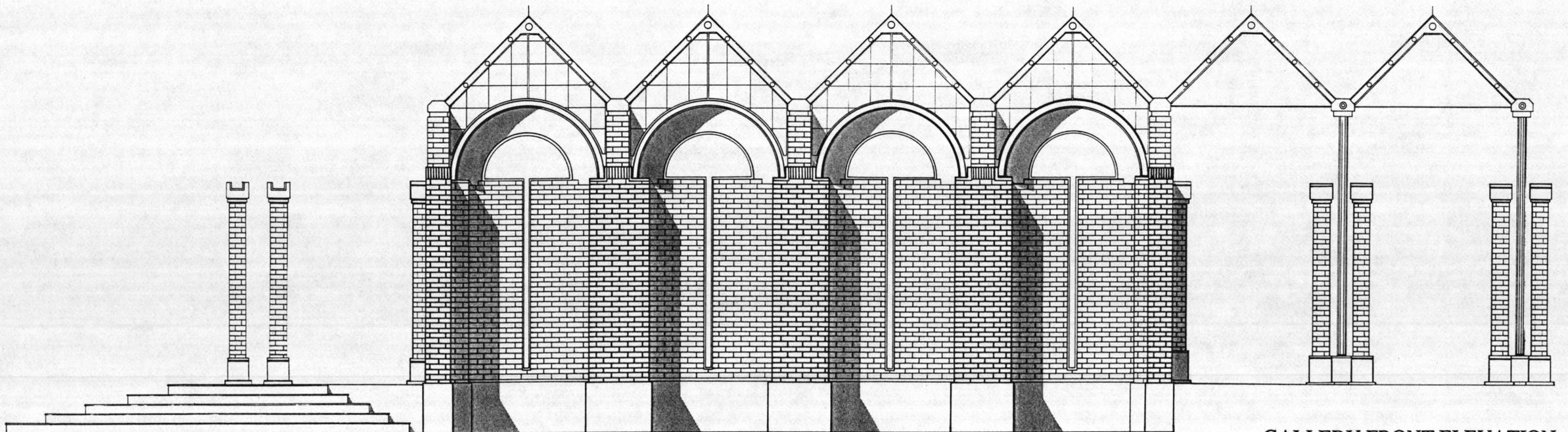
GILBERT

RESOURCE BOOK

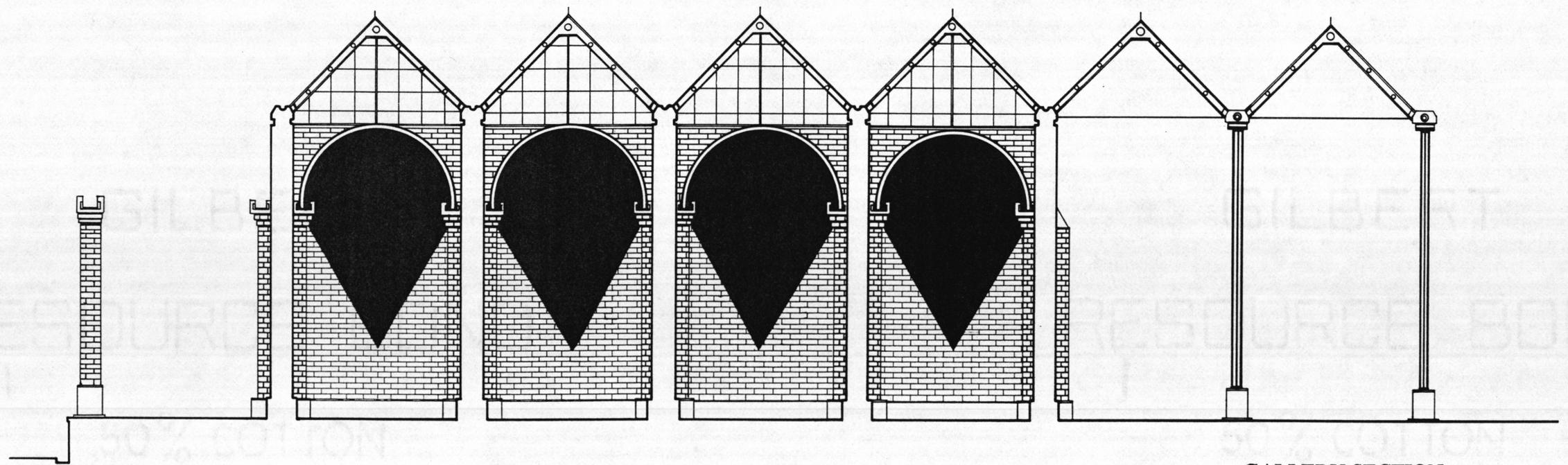
RESOURCE BOOK

90% COTTON

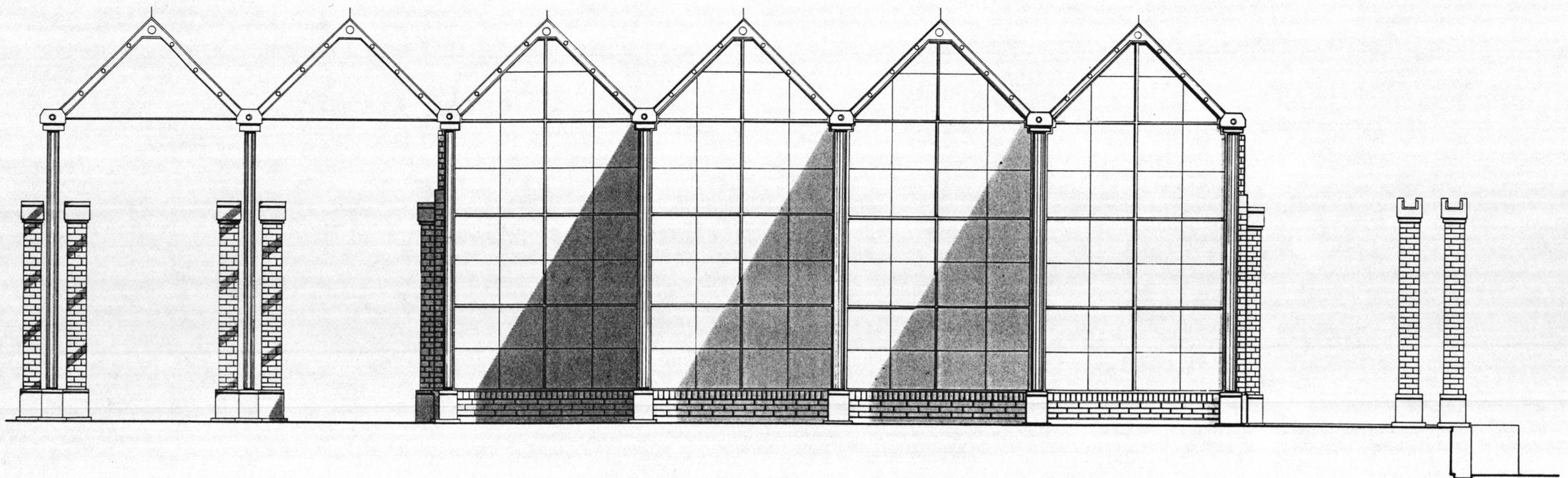
50% COTTON



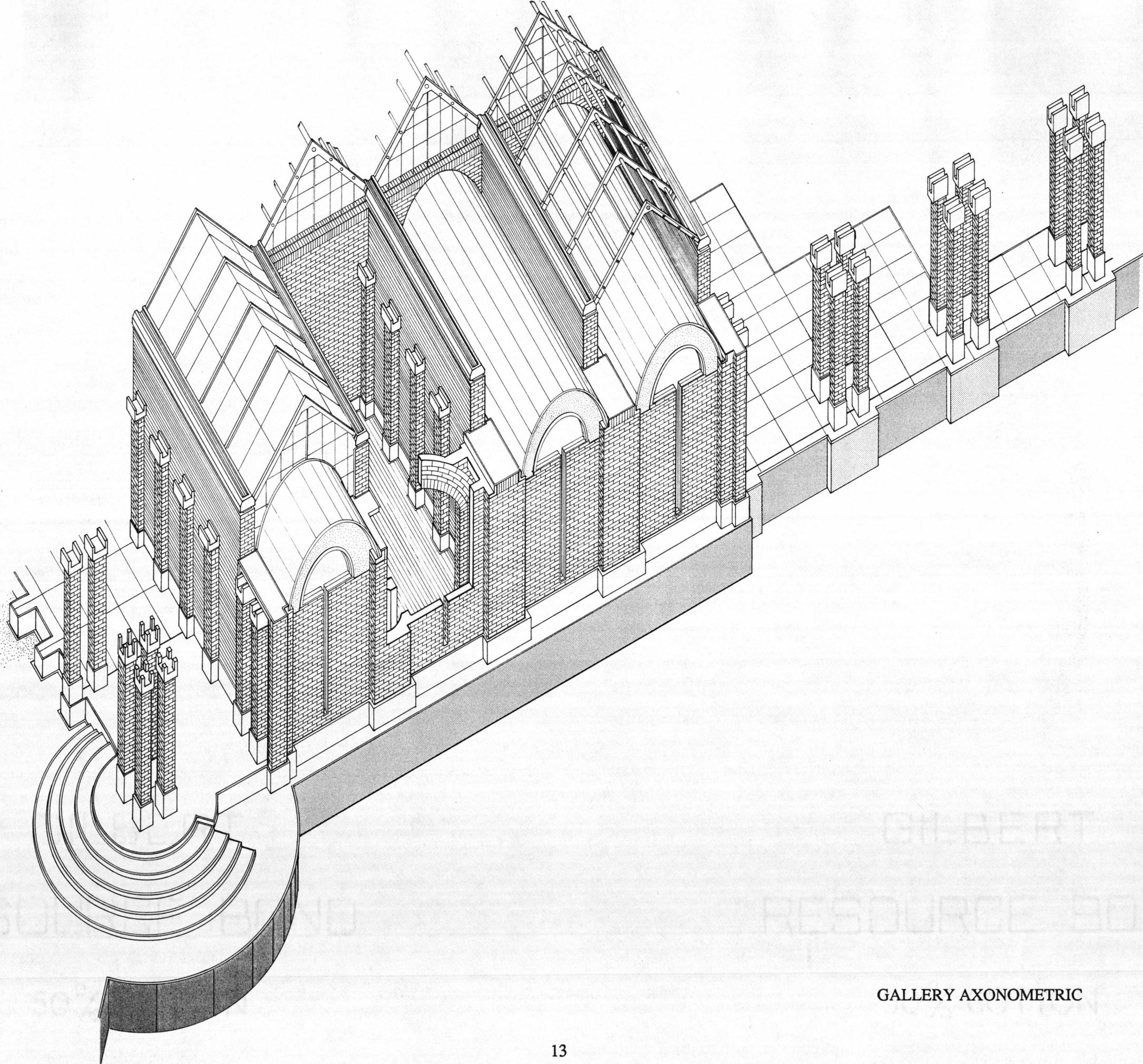
GALLERY FRONT ELEVATION



GALLERY SECTION

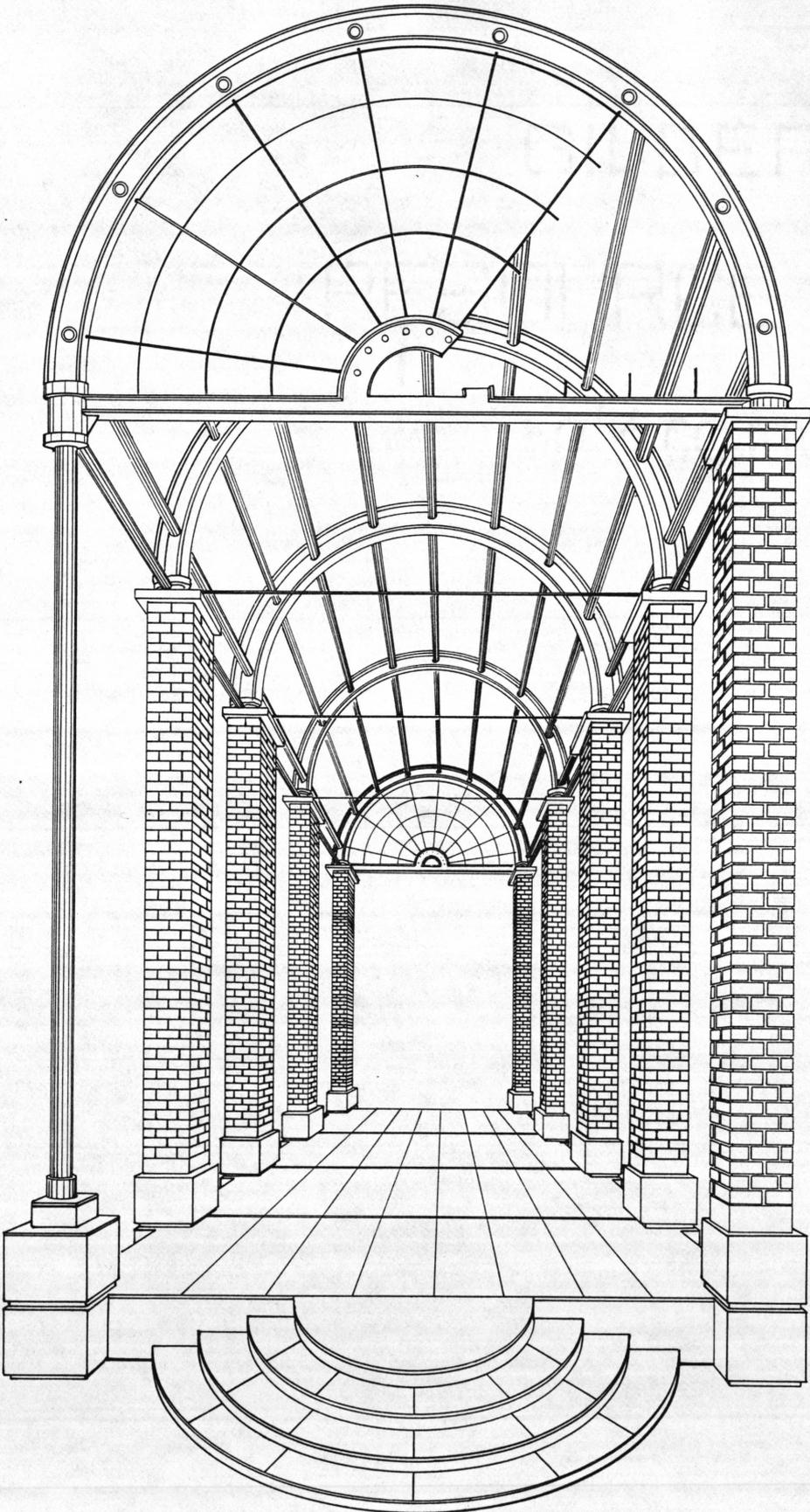


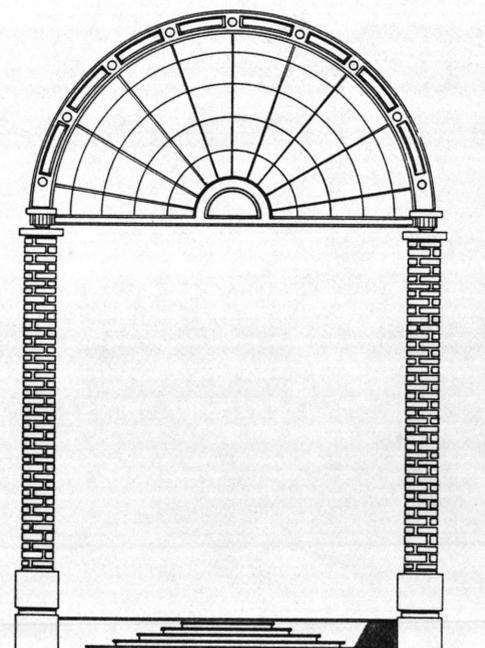
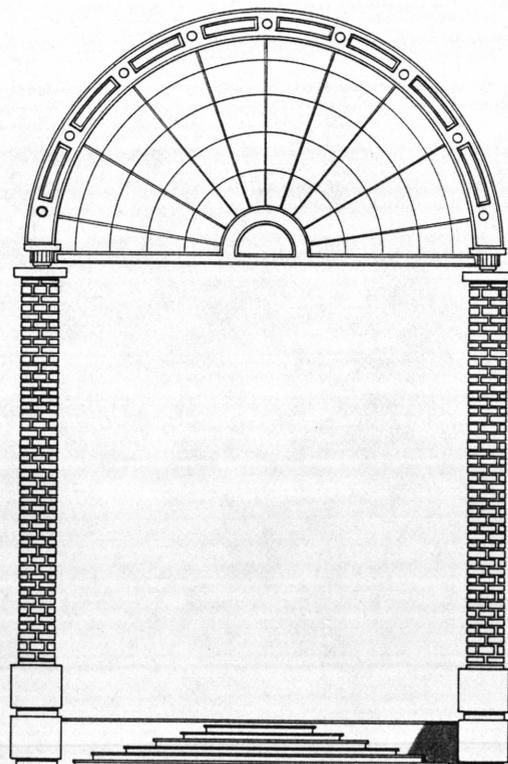
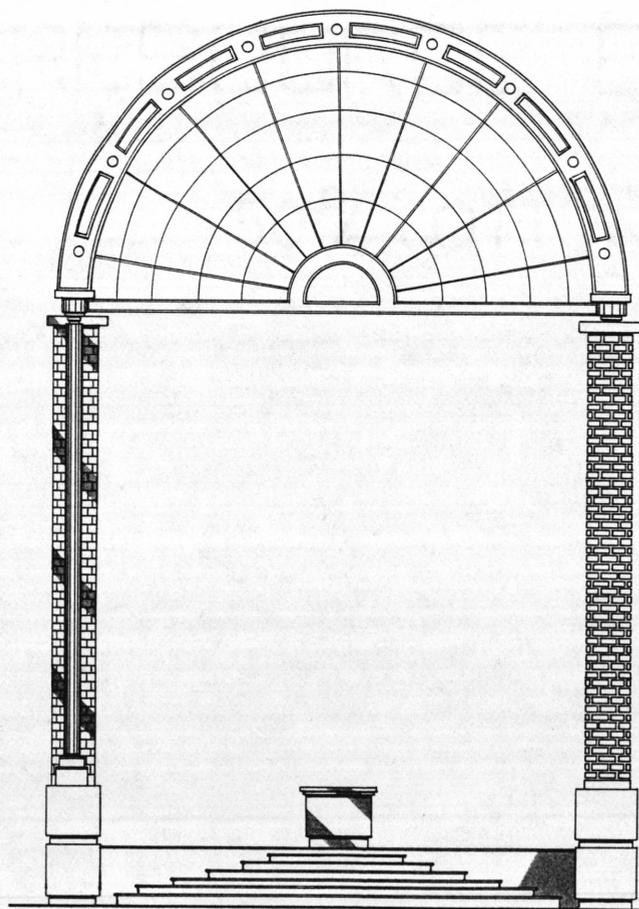
GALLERY REAR ELEVATION



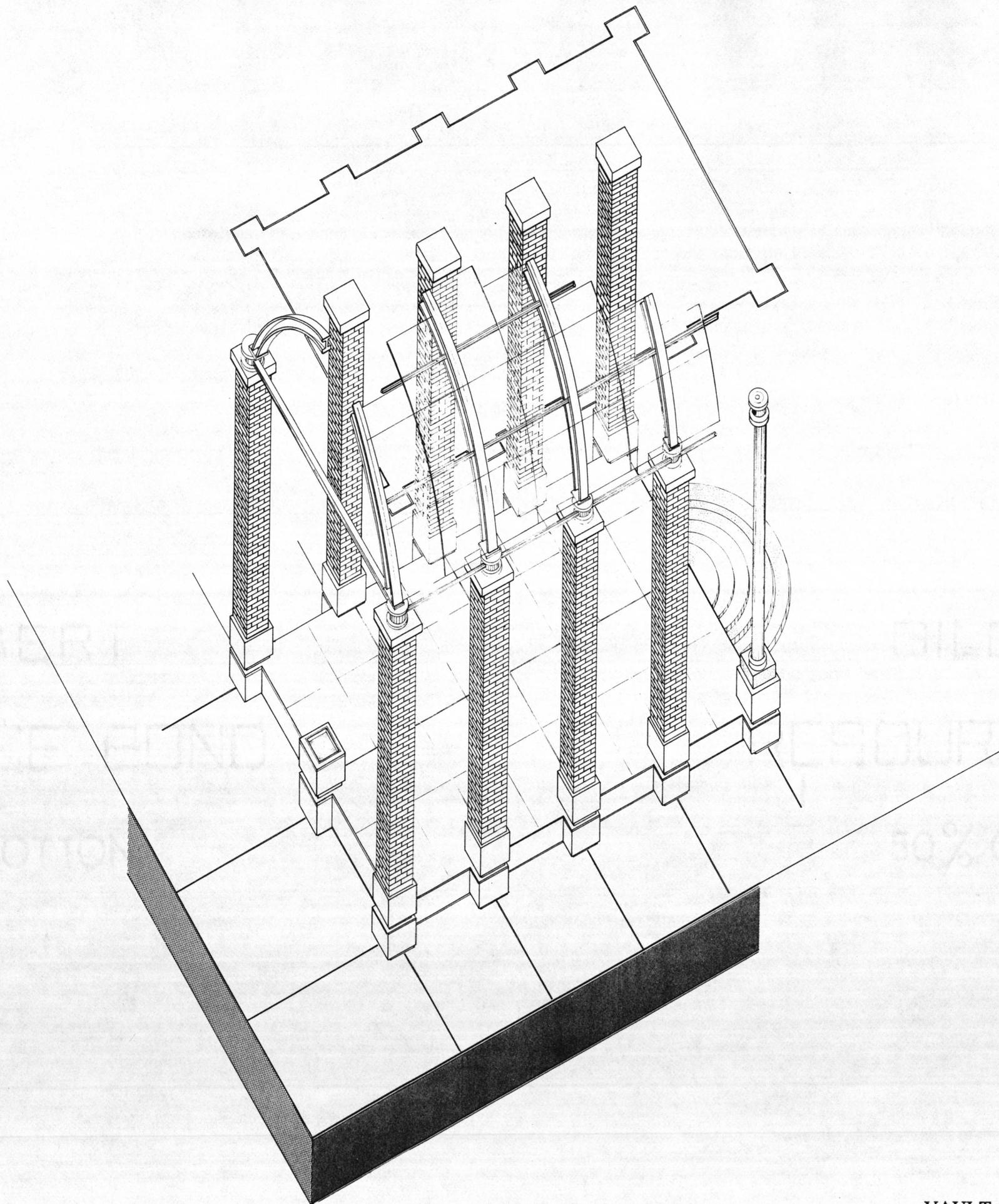
GALLERY AXONOMETRIC

# Vault

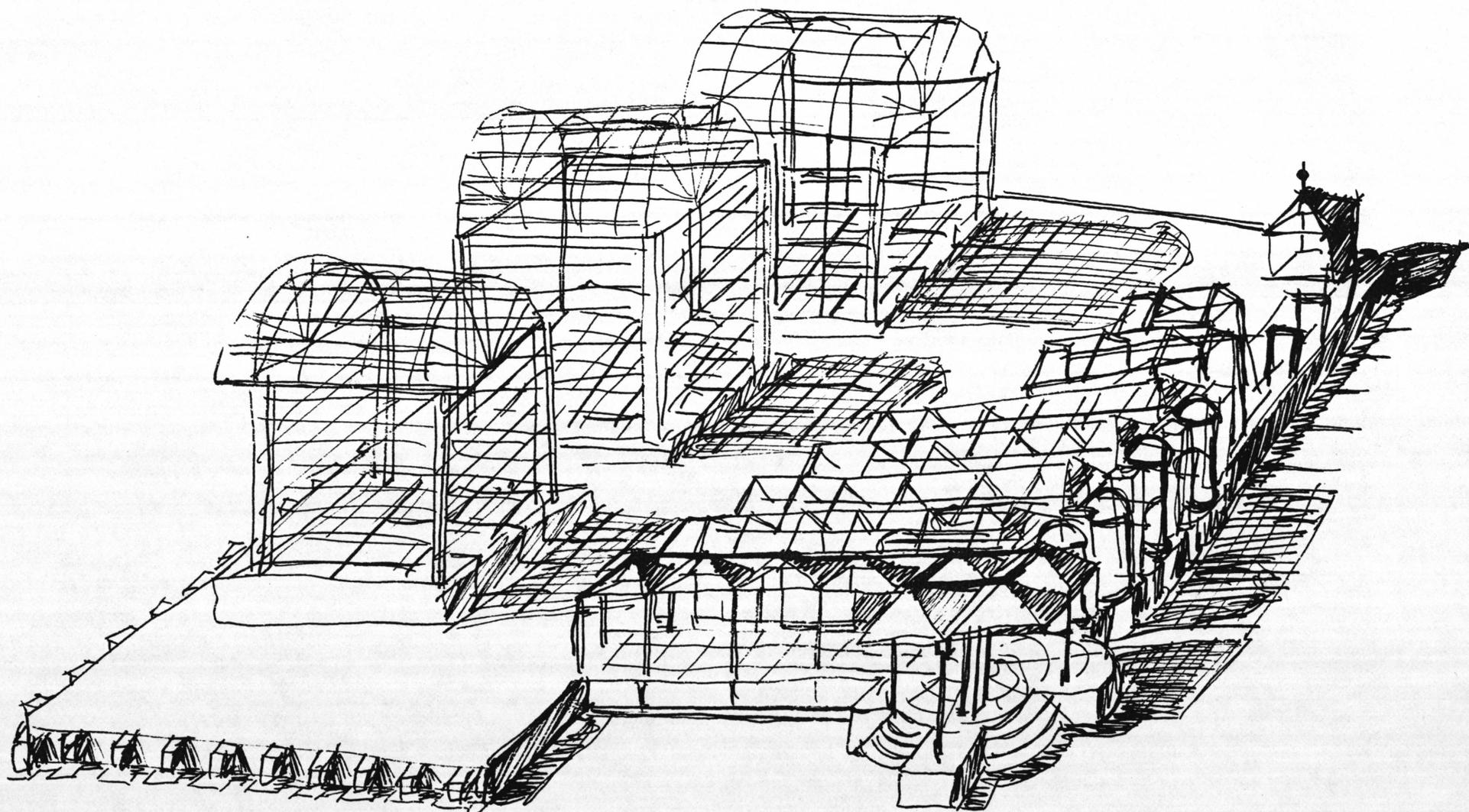


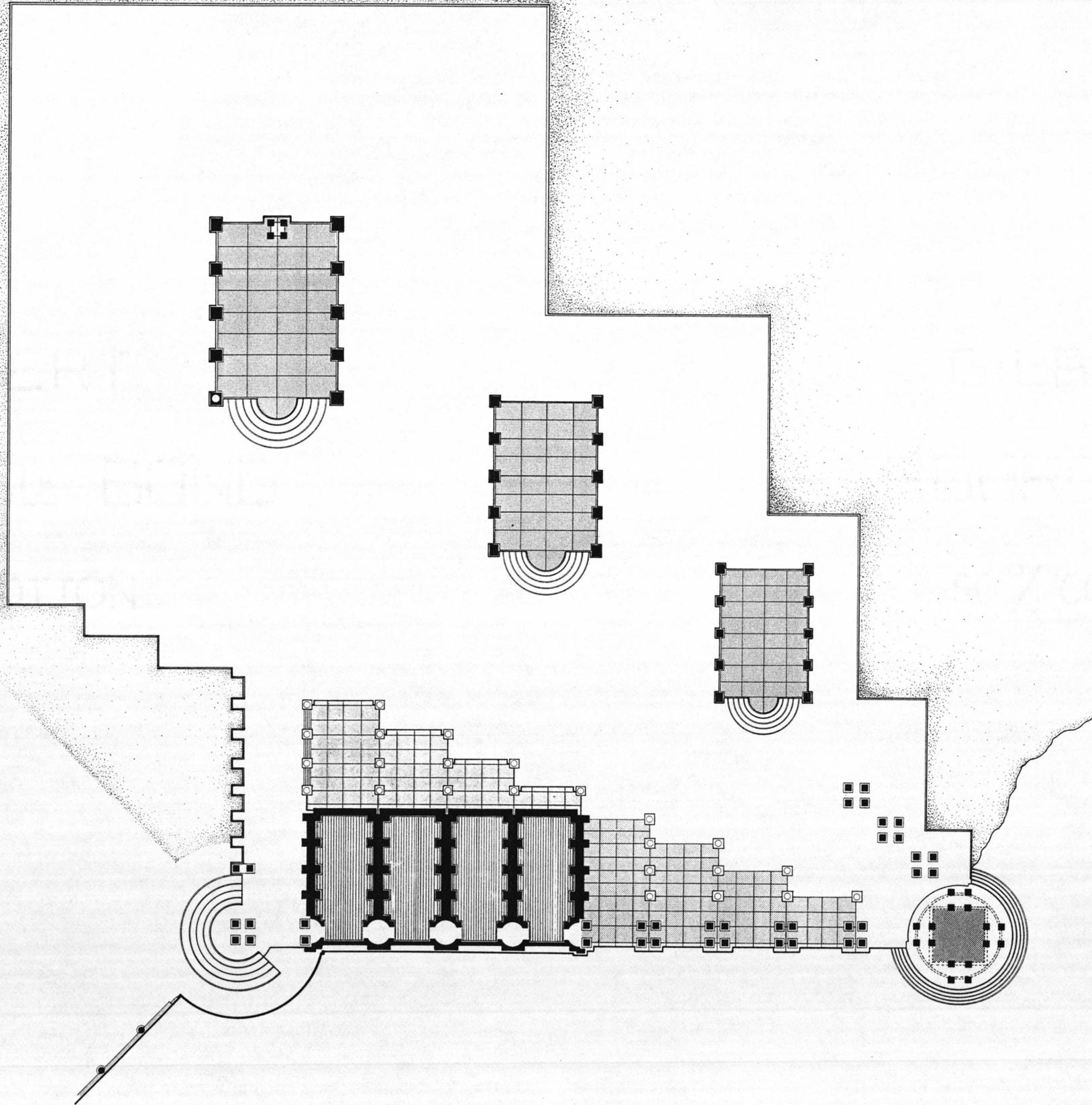


VAULT FRONT ELEVATION

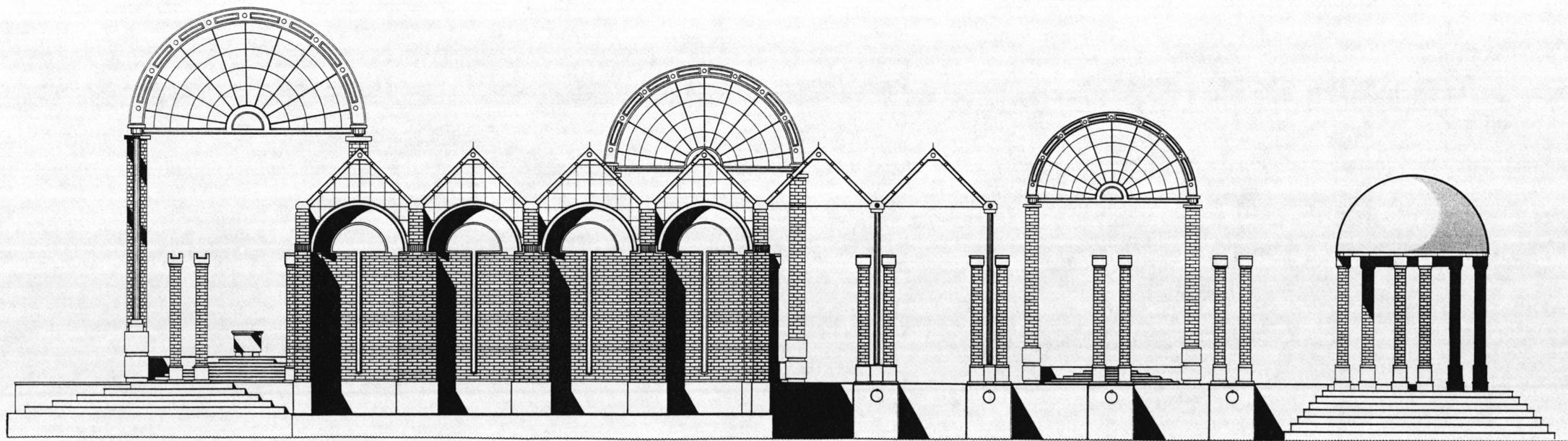


# Spirit





MUSEUM PLAN



MUSEUM FRONT ELEVATION

GILBERT

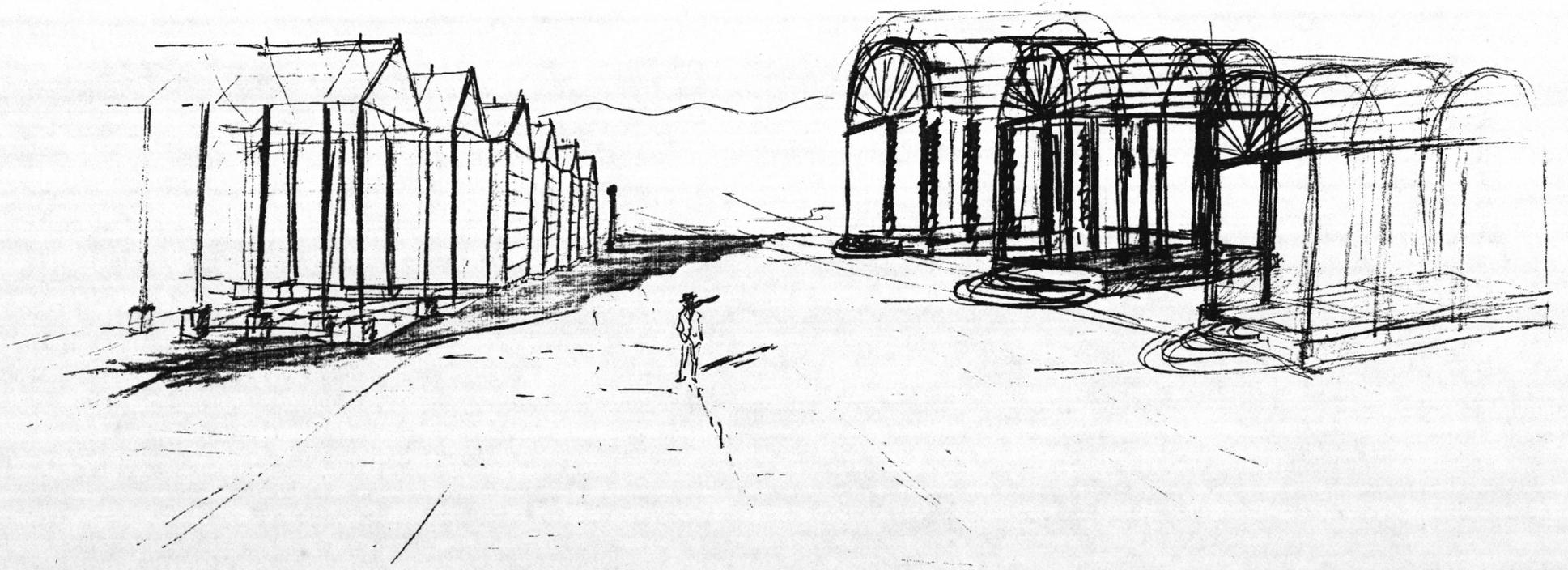
GILBERT

RESOURCE BOND

RESOURCE BOND

50% COTTON

50% COTTON



## Notes

1. R. Venturi, *"Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture"*, New York 1985, p. 20.
2. P. Blake, *"The Master Builders"*, New York 1976, p. 190.
3. D. Mancoff, *"The Architectural Revival in Victorian Art"*, New York 1990, p. xvii.
4. M. Woods and A.S. Warren, *"Glass Houses"*, New York 1988, p. 46.
5. C. Norberg-Schultz, *"Architecture: Meaning and Place"*, New York 1988, p. 46.

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