

GRIND, MASH, DISTILL  
Deborah Josephine Kent, 2015

GRIND - MASH - DISTILL

Deborah Josephine Kent

Thesis submitted to the faculty  
of the Virginia Polytechnic  
Institute and State University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Architecture  
in  
Architecture

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Alexandria, VA

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time, change, embassy, whisky

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## ABSTRACT

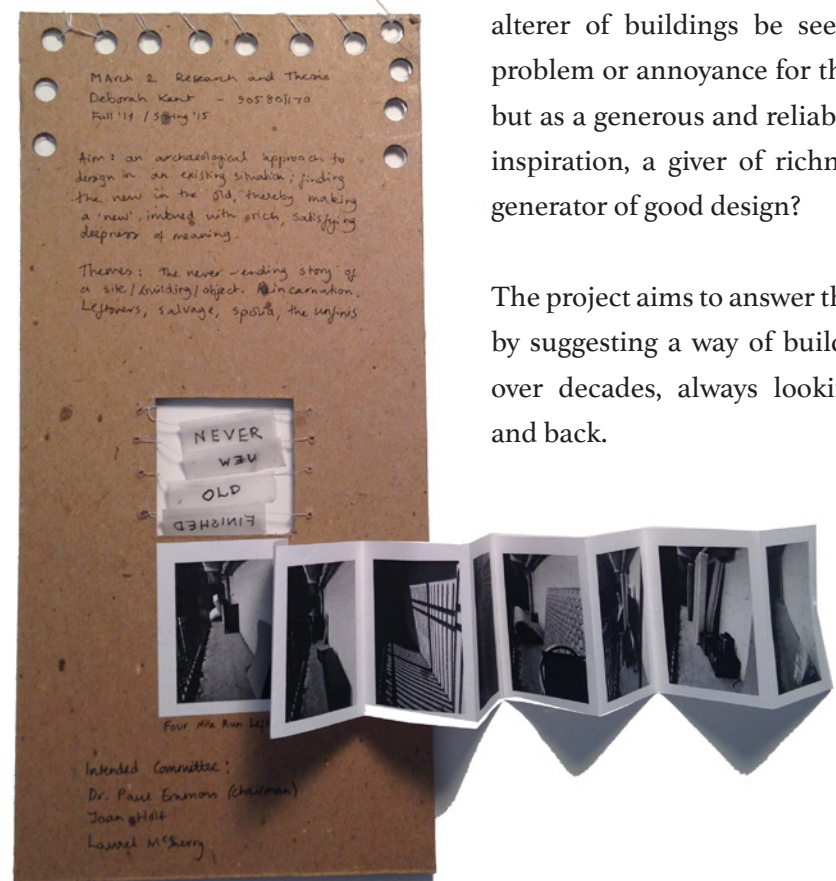
There never comes a point at which we can declare any building 'finished', and never touch it again; if we were to do this it would signal a sad sort of death and the end of the building's use, because it is by a continual process of revision that they fulfill our ever-changing needs and tastes.

However, acknowledging this dynamic aspect of the nature of buildings brings the role of the architect into question; how can we design a building, make drawings and reach practical completion on a building site whilst being aware of the looming future, with its eternal punch list of alterations? Or, how can an awareness of passing time as a gradual tweaker, weatherer, and alterer of buildings be seen not as a problem or annoyance for the architect, but as a generous and reliable source of inspiration, a giver of richness, even a generator of good design?

The project aims to answer this question by suggesting a way of building slowly, over decades, always looking forward and back.



Thesis proposal, September 2014



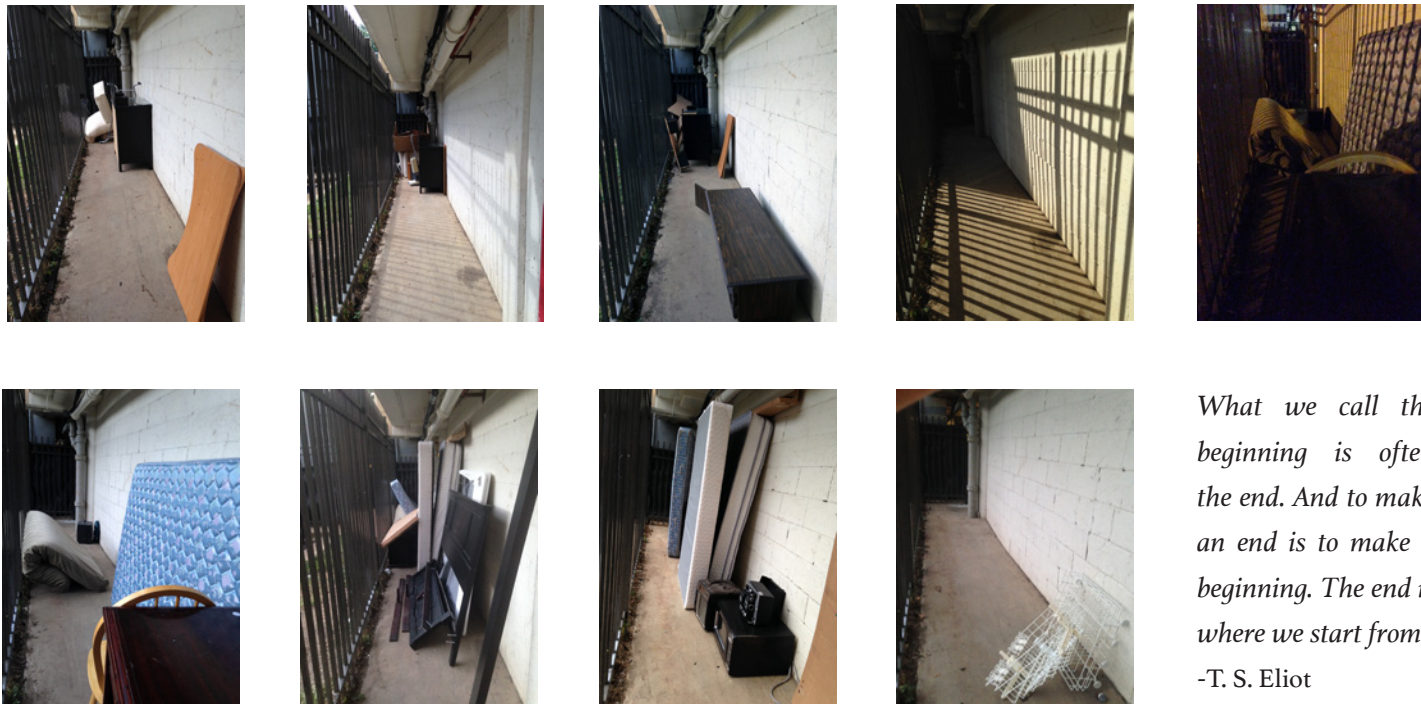
Alberti wrote in *De Re Aedificatoria* (1452):  
“The brevity of human life and the scale  
of the work ensure that scarcely any  
large building is ever completed by the  
same man as begins it”.

Undertaking a thesis project results in a  
similar sentiment; rather than reaching  
a definite conclusion, the question  
instead grows, becoming increasingly  
complex and evading capture by a  
single person. I hope and suspect that  
these investigations will continue for my  
lifetime; however this book marks a sort  
of conclusion, a static object born of a  
slippery process.

This could not have been achieved  
without the advice and support of Dr.  
Paul Emmons, Jaan Holt, Dr. Marcia  
Feurstein and Laurel McSherry, and the  
unlikely and miraculous atmosphere of  
the WAAC. A great debt of gratitude is  
also owed to my husband, Jon Broyles,  
tireless provider of reassurance and  
levity.

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*What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.*  
-T. S. Eliot



Top: Carlton Condominiums Trash Heap, provider of transformable objects.

Below: Adaptive reuse in Hong Kong, summer 2014.

## TO BEGIN

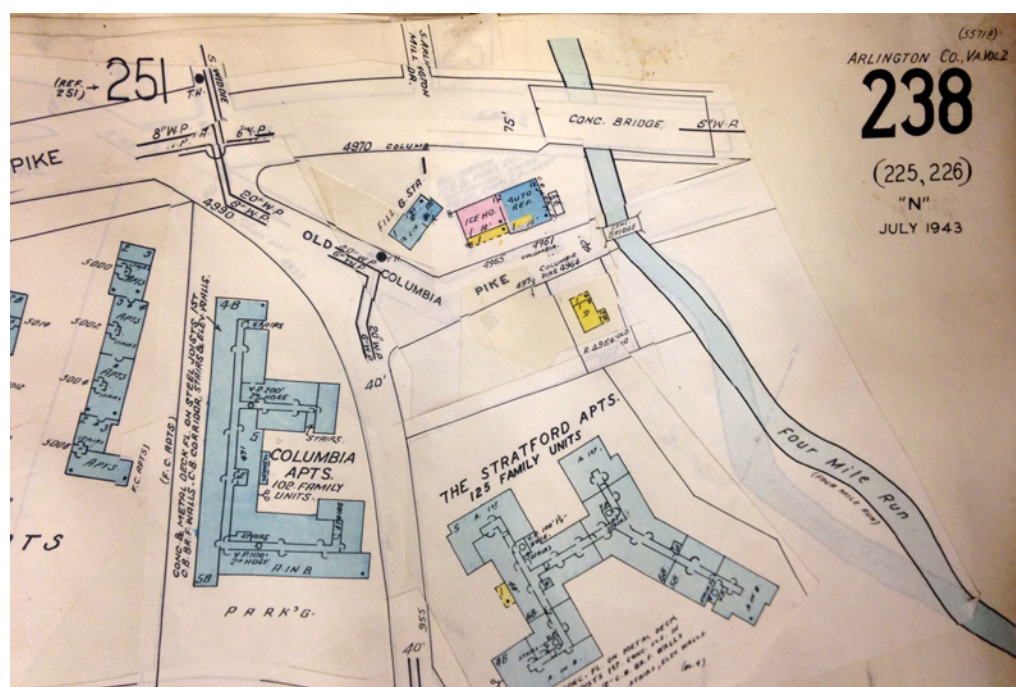
The thesis was born from a long-standing interest in how existing objects could become new things, through a reuse and remixing of their embodied characters, associations, and physical forms. A summer was spent in Hong Kong, and in this un-nostalgic and fast paced city where if something is no longer useful, it is turned into something else, one may constantly bear witness to examples of wily re-use of readily available items. 'Rebar' intended to be ensconced in concrete is instead used as non-slip addition to a sidewalk; an oil drum, once empty, is filled with concrete and used as weight for sign pole.

The most important part of these transformations seemed to be not only that the created things performed their new task well, but that they were imbued with a layer of extra meaning due to the memory of their previous use, making them both continuously useful and rich in terms of the story they had to tell.

In northern Virginia, this interest became focussed on a trash heap in Arlington, whose function is that of an exchange point for things people no longer need or want. Each week, 'fresh' objects appeared, and were either taken

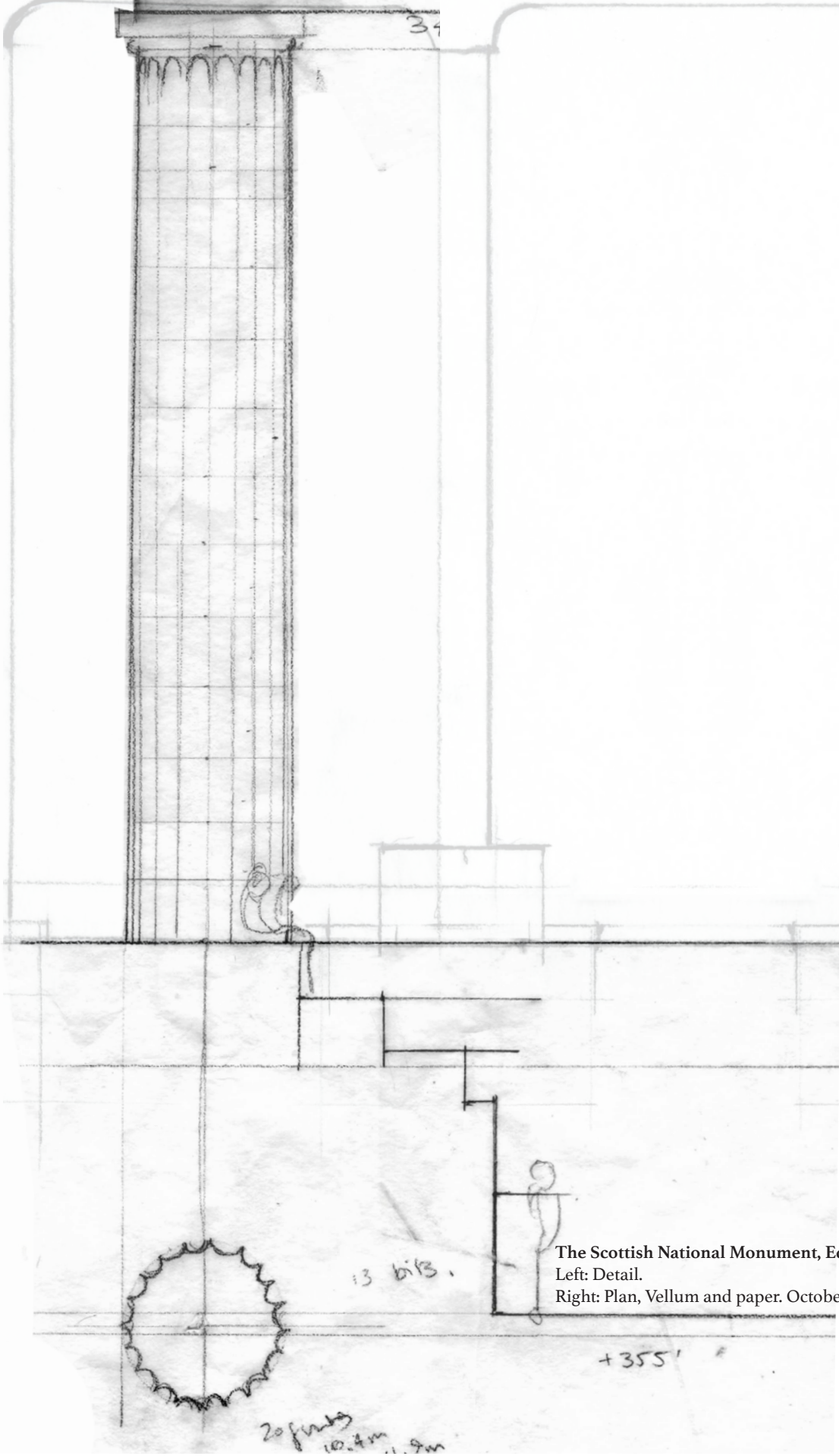
up by a new owner, or eventually sent to their final doom. As well as offering a plethora of exciting objects ripe for model making (all the models relating to the thesis originated from items found here), this place of recycling became the way finder for locating the site itself, when an adjacent area on the banks of the Four Mile Run, presented itself as being ripe for transformation, in a similar way to the objects of trash. This site seemed to have been 'finished with'; left behind in the wave of development along Columbia Pike, and, being set just below the busy road, appeared to be in a separate underworld.

My approach to the site was the same as to these found objects- what was this place used for in the past, what is its current form, and most vitally, what is it trying to become?



The Site in 1943, bounded by a High Road and a Low Road.  
Sanborn Fire Insurance Map

# SCOTLAND and ARLINGTON: together forever?



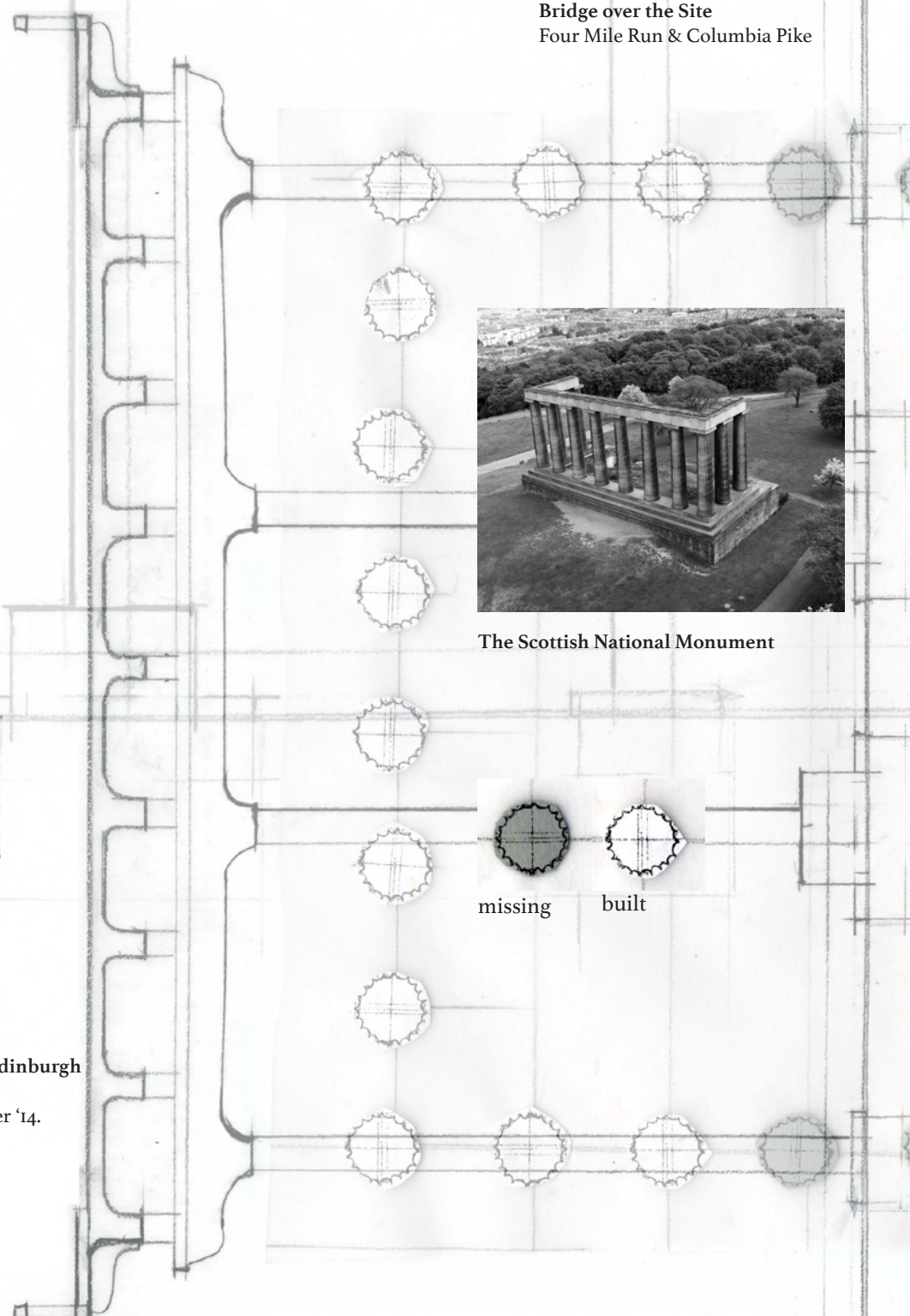
The Scottish National Monument, Edinburgh  
Left: Detail.  
Right: Plan, Vellum and paper. October '14.



Bridge over the Site  
Four Mile Run & Columbia Pike



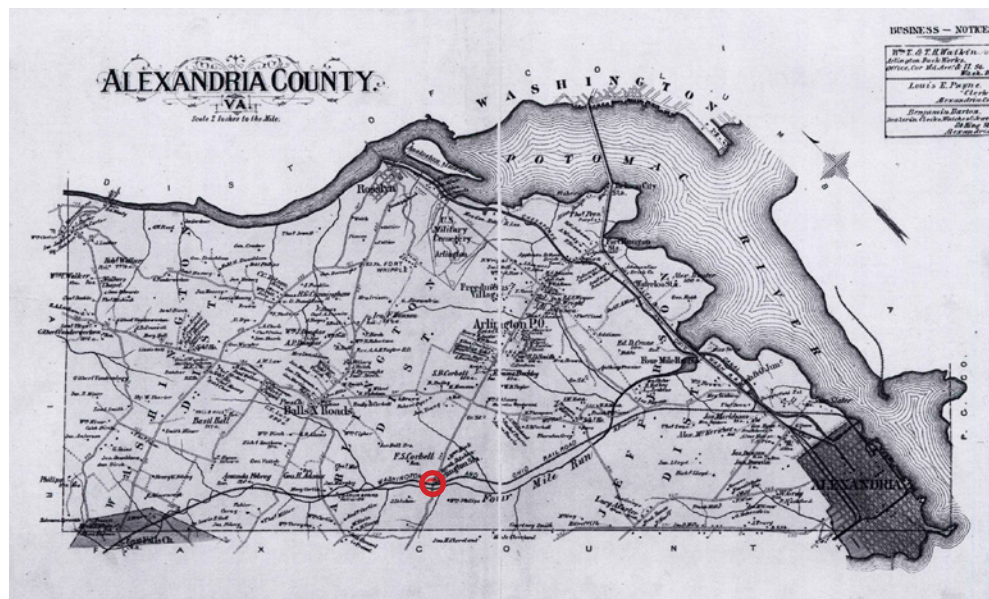
The Scottish National Monument







Forlani's Map of Scotland, 1558



Alexandria (now Arlington) in the 1880s.

#### A SIDE NOTE

The Scottish National Monument is revered and mocked. A partly-built replica of the Parthenon (halted in 1861 due to funding difficulties), it overlooks the city of Edinburgh and is the scene for protests, parades, fireworks displays and picnics. It may not be 'finished' in the originally intended manner, however it is 'completely' playing a role in the city; a role which had the remaining columns been erected, the hall infilled, the statues installed- it would be unable to fulfil.

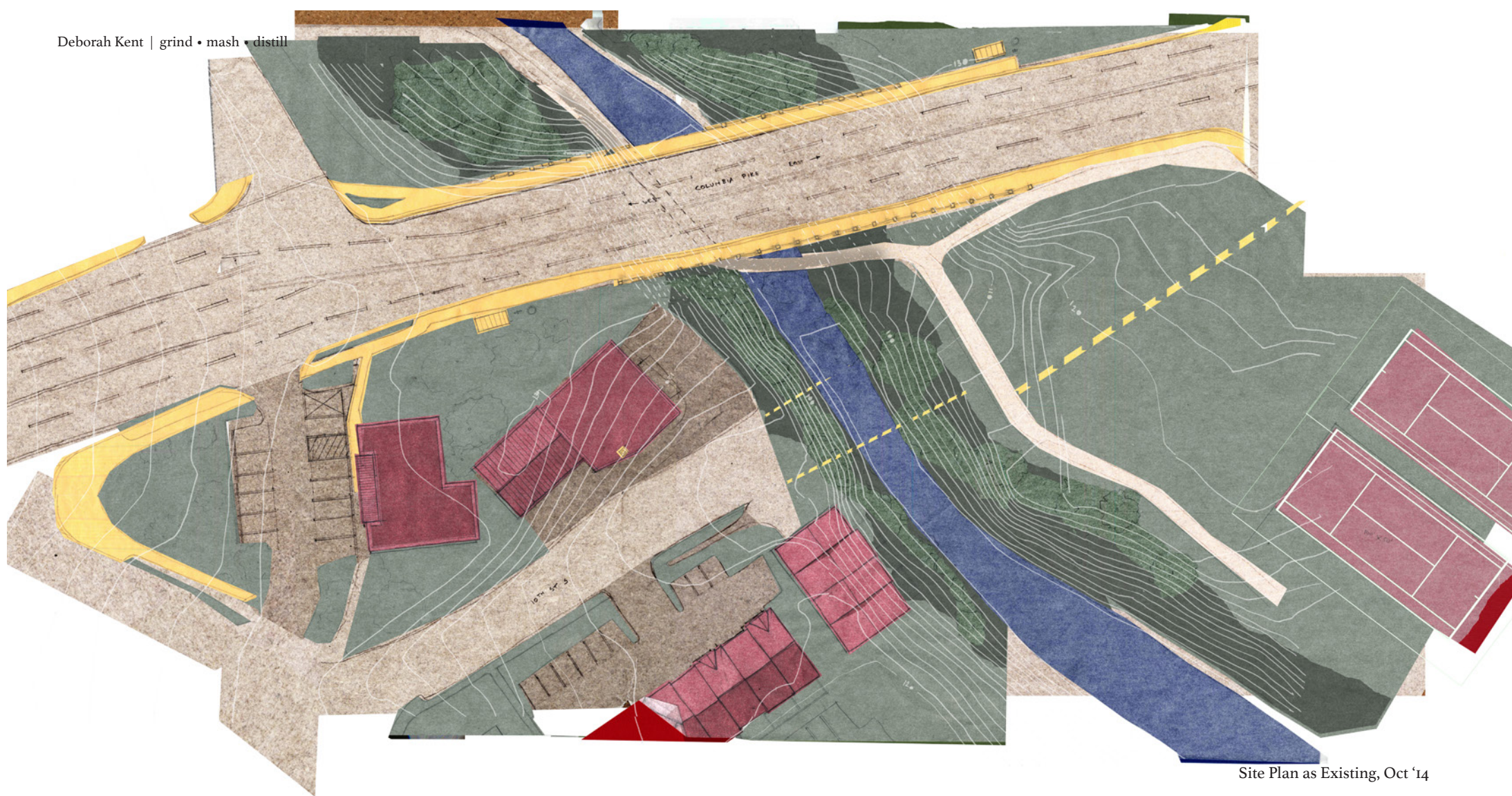


The columns of the Monument are oddly identical in height to those of the bridge carrying Columbia Pike over the site, which may need to be reinforced by new columns if a streetcar is introduced.

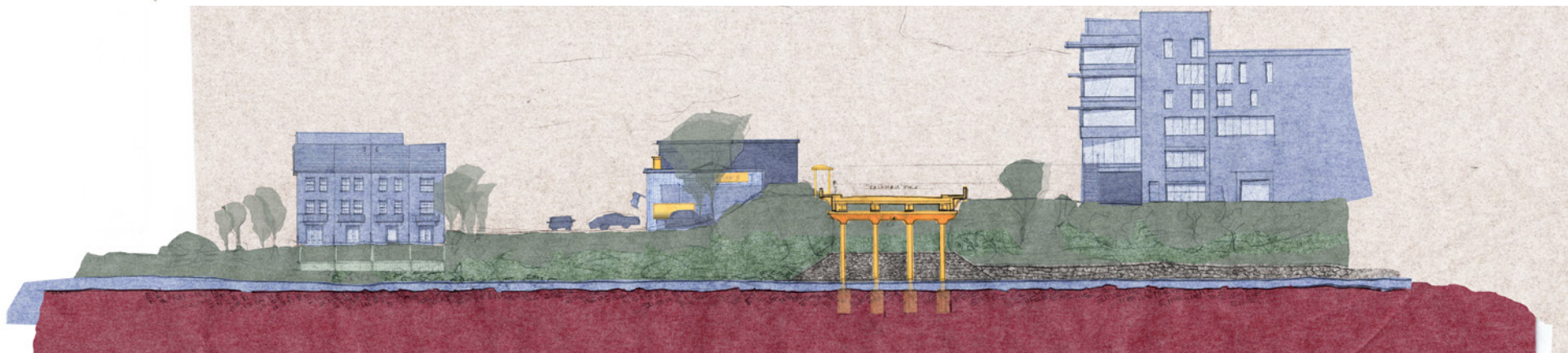
Where are the missing columns? Did those who emigrated from Scotland to Arlington take them onboard the ship? Where might they reappear one day, and what would this mean for the identity of the Scottish nation?

Many of the first landowners along the Four Mile Run were Scottish immigrants, and the Grist Mills which were built therefore quickly acquired distilleries alongside. One of these Mills (apparently without distillery) was located on the thesis site.

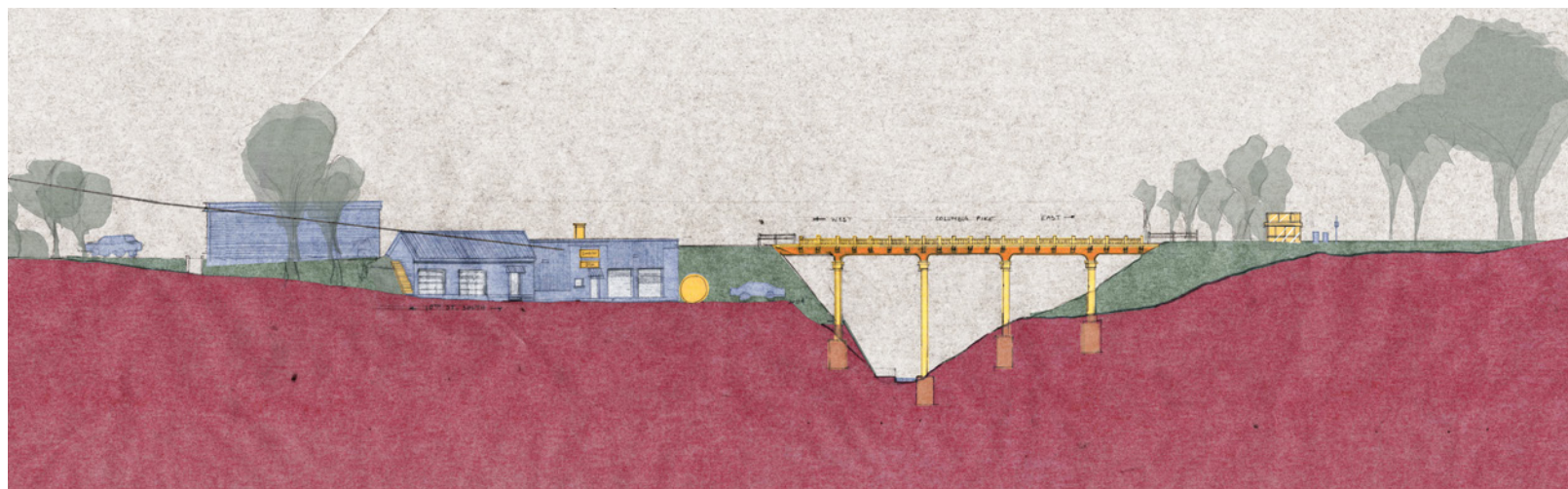
Above: Arlington Mill during the Civil War.



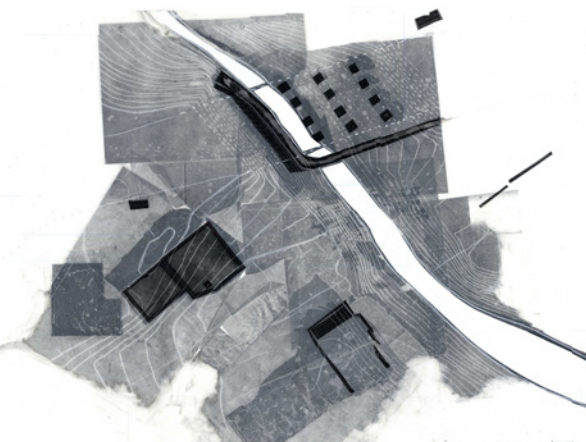
Site Plan as Existing, Oct '14



North-South Site Section as Existing, Oct '14



East-West Site Section as Existing, Oct '14





## GRIND AND MASH

In 2014, the site housed two seemingly unremarkable buildings; a 7/11 store and Jim and Danny's auto repair shop.

Coaxed out of the rubble underneath these humble structures, however, were tales of great significance in Arlington's history. One of the earliest in a string of Grist Mills along the Four Mile run sat for generations in the position of the current garage, and was said to have been linked to the Custis and Lee families. It was damaged in the civil war, burned by a spark from a railway track, and operated in some form until the 1920s. The only remainder of this mill is apparently the stone basement level, which currently sits underneath Danny's Auto repair shop, as a tantalizing material link to a past state, and an irresistible opportunity to anchor this site as something more rich and meaningful than the widespread hasty development currently appearing in the vicinity.

Among the tales dug up from the site, three had a pertinence: its role as the neighborhood's railway station area and general store, first in the early 1900s then 7/11 (a **community** hub); a place of **industry**, both as mill then as fuel and ice store; and thirdly the traces of the old alignment of Columbia Pike, and an old demolished bridge, which after the new concrete bridge was built in the 1940s, created for a while, a 'high road, low road' condition.



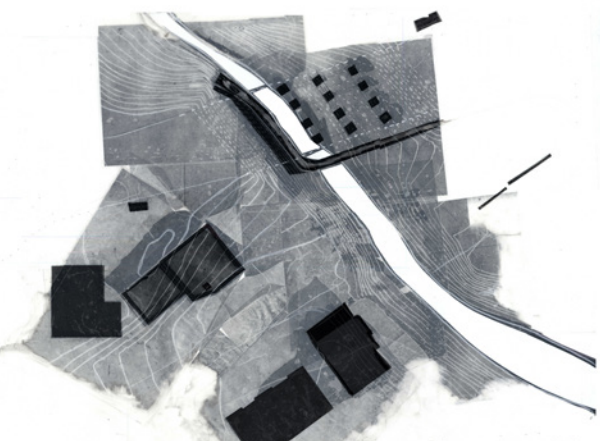


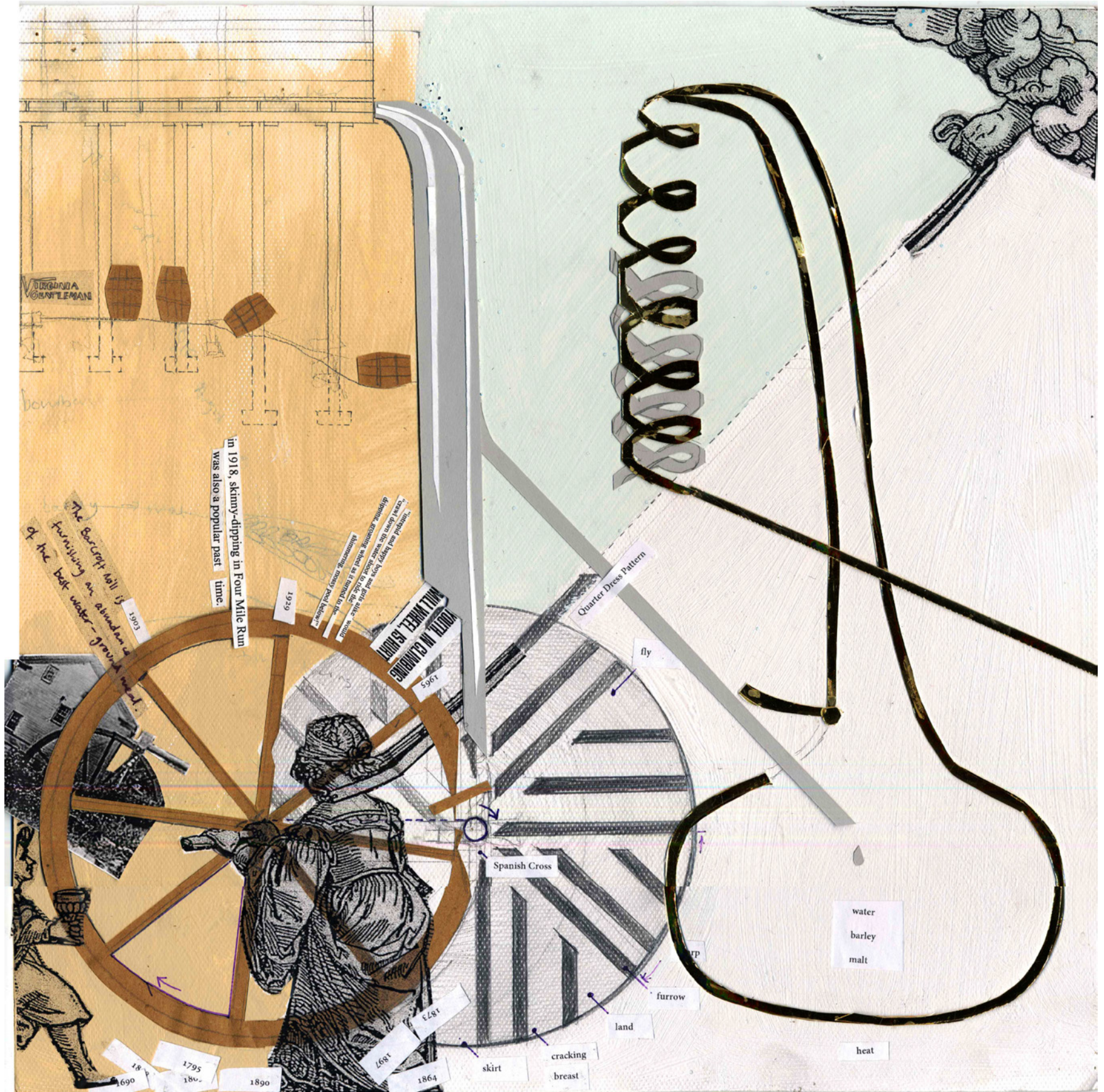
'Embassy Architecture' Collage, October 2014

No frieze of abandon, goat-thigh, willow. And no  
Classical sea. Just grave, husbanded power-like middle age,  
Thought he tan facing and the brown steel and glass  
Glowed in the day, which was pale green, bright green,  
Yellow, and marine blue. The building  
Made you desire, somehow, to die young. Desire  
Dark oak smothering in ivy, and pines  
Shredding sunlight in the early damp, the cults  
Of dead Bacchus, Antony, Malcolm X.  
The state built its face as a blank wall to affirm  
No mystery, and not to keep secrets, but because everyone,  
Everyone, was inside. To die undoing the world's way,  
Said the clean-shaven wall, also is the world's way,  
And to deny me becomes mine. Then, its weight fell  
Forward, but the turned backs of the dead heroes held it up.  
Their strange dying seemed an uncaring seasonal response,  
Query, or offering to those brown rectangles:  
Flat, the official Gods of the Senate, stones deathless  
And bathed unliving in the blood cults, like white villas  
That merge, while southern days close, with stone  
Cliffs grown redder than tile, sun redder than stone.

-Robert Pinsky, 'Embassy Architecture'  
Poetry magazine, September 1969

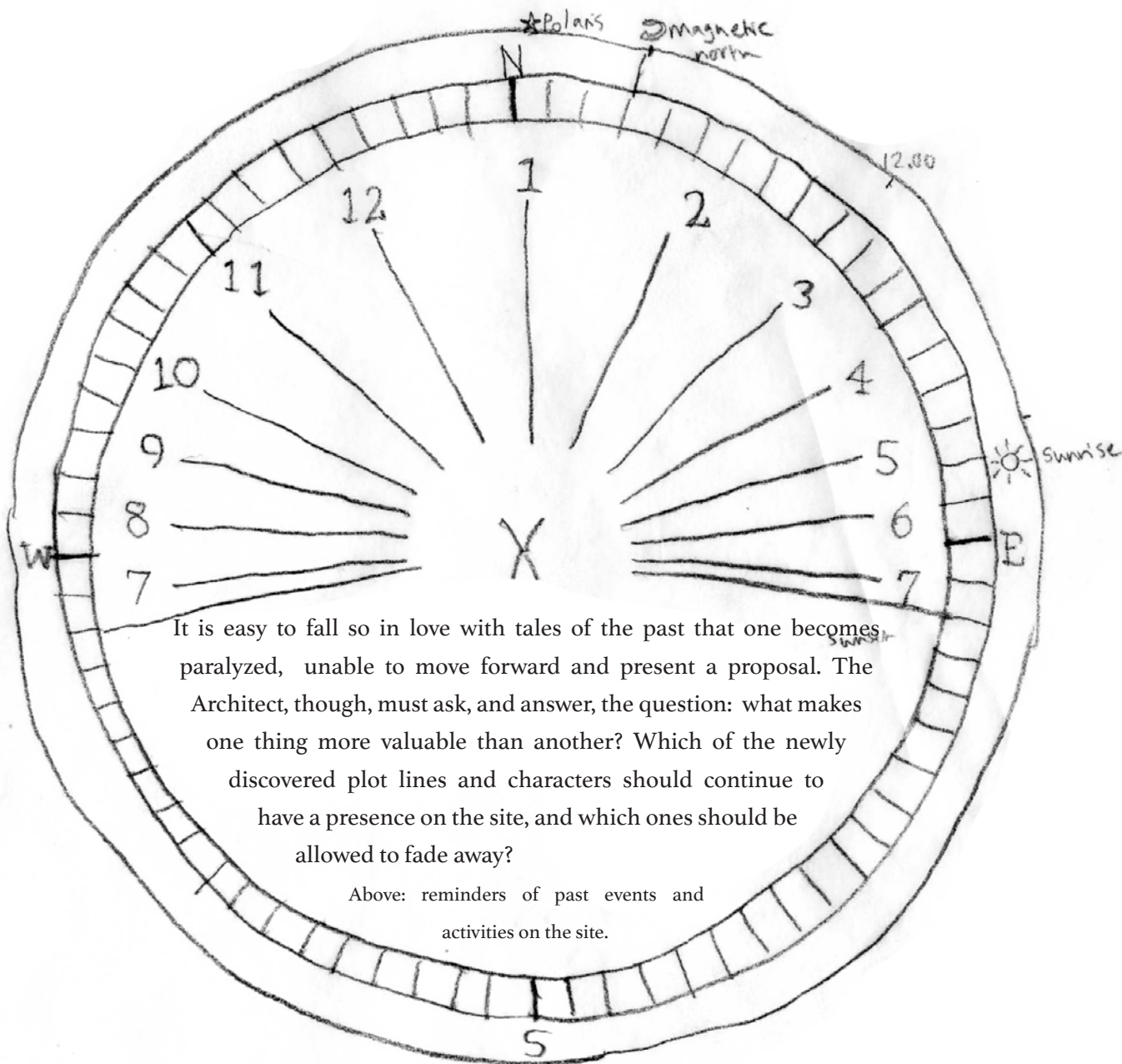
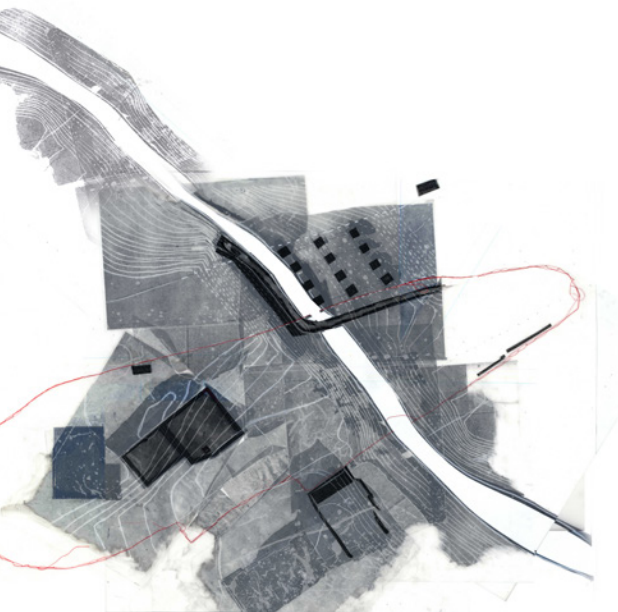
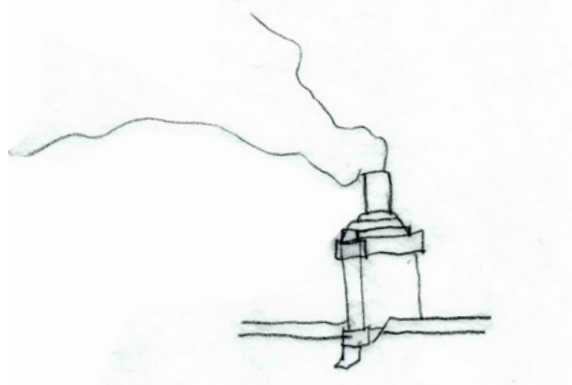
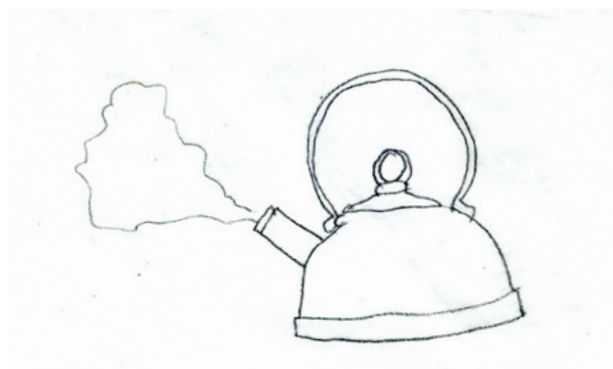
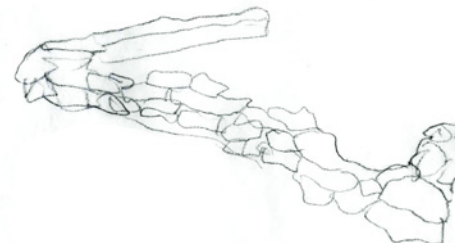
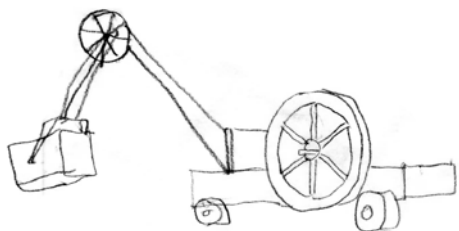
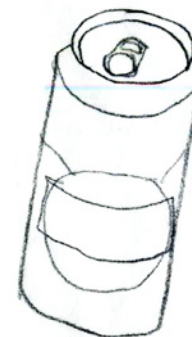
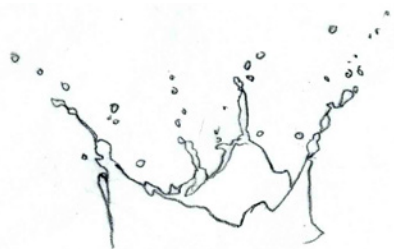
Alongside the site, studies of Alchemy and whisky-making were carried out, yielding themes of Long maturing processes, and slow transformation.

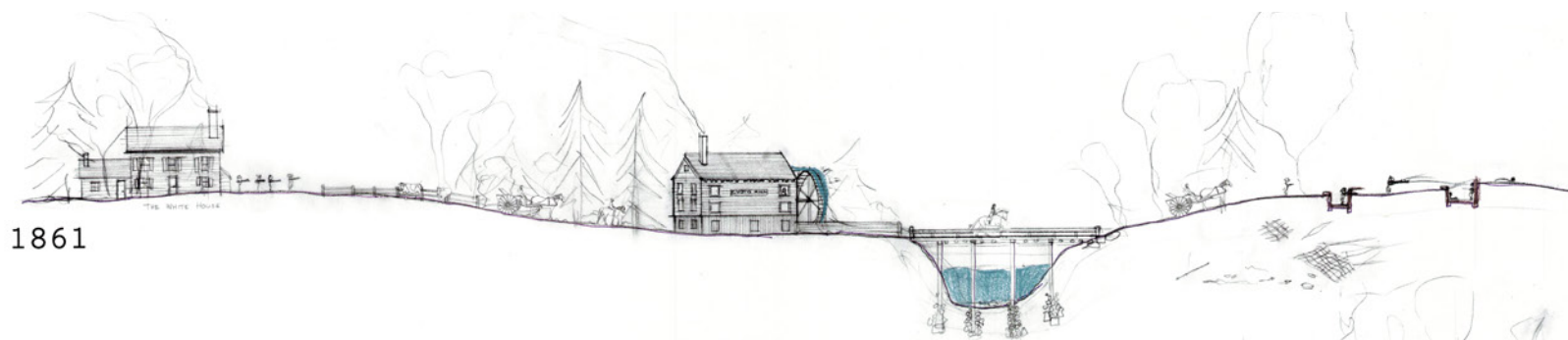




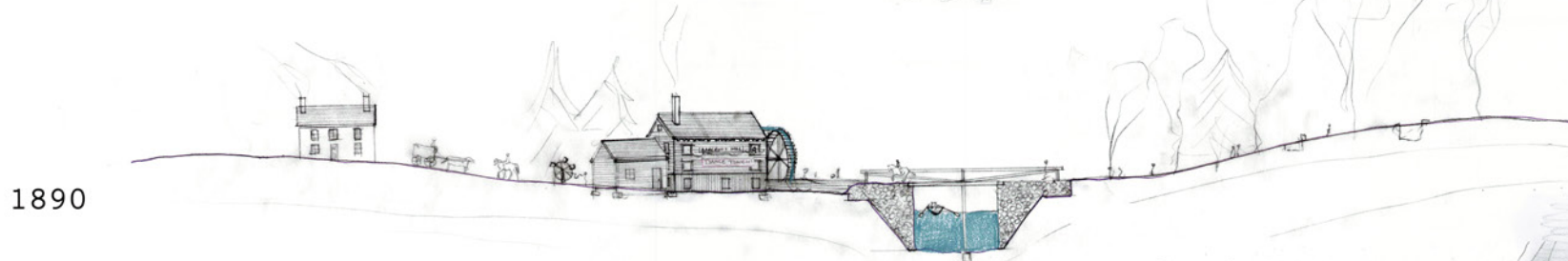
"The (mill) Wheel of Fortune"  
Card, paper and paint, Oct '14.



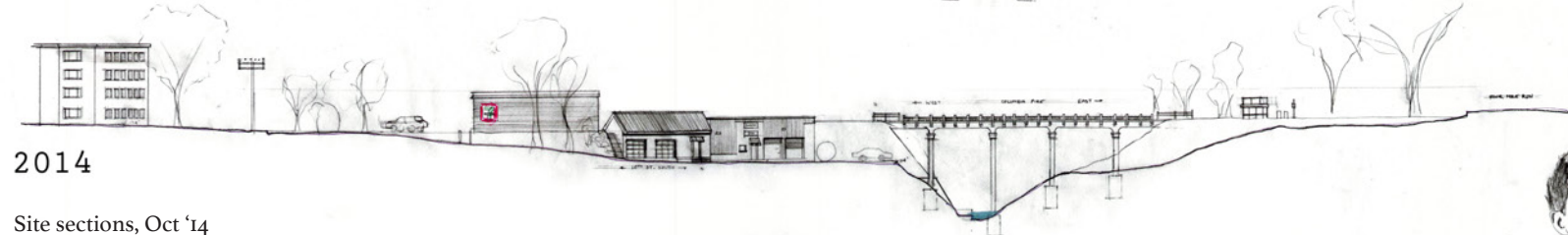
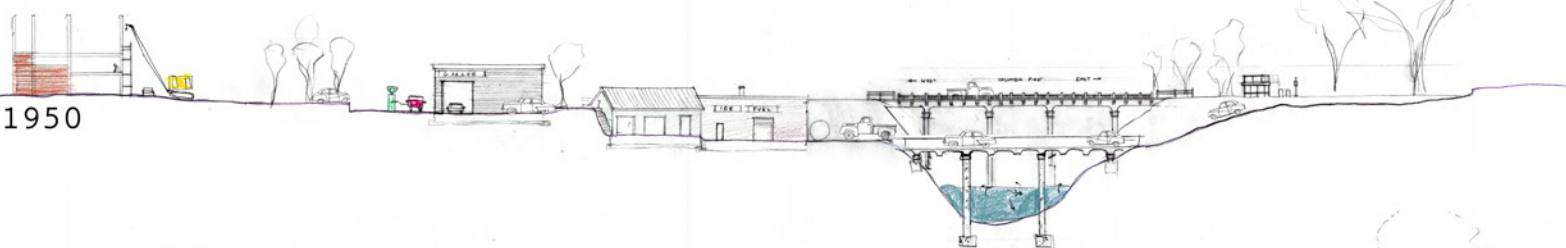
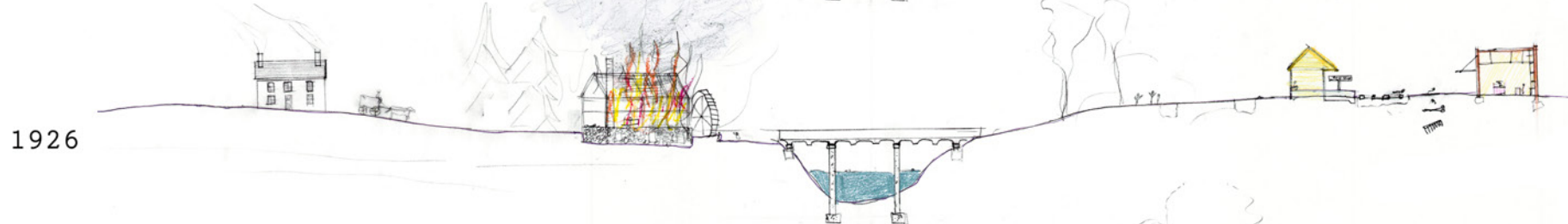
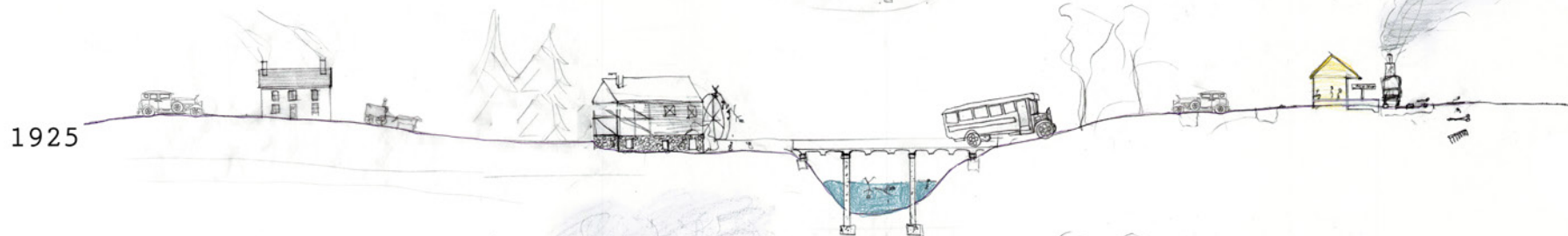




GEORGE WASHINGTON CURTIS LEE



DR. BERKOFF

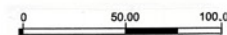


JIM



DANNY

Site sections, Oct '14









Kitchen mixer and dresser drawer found at trash heap adjacent to site.

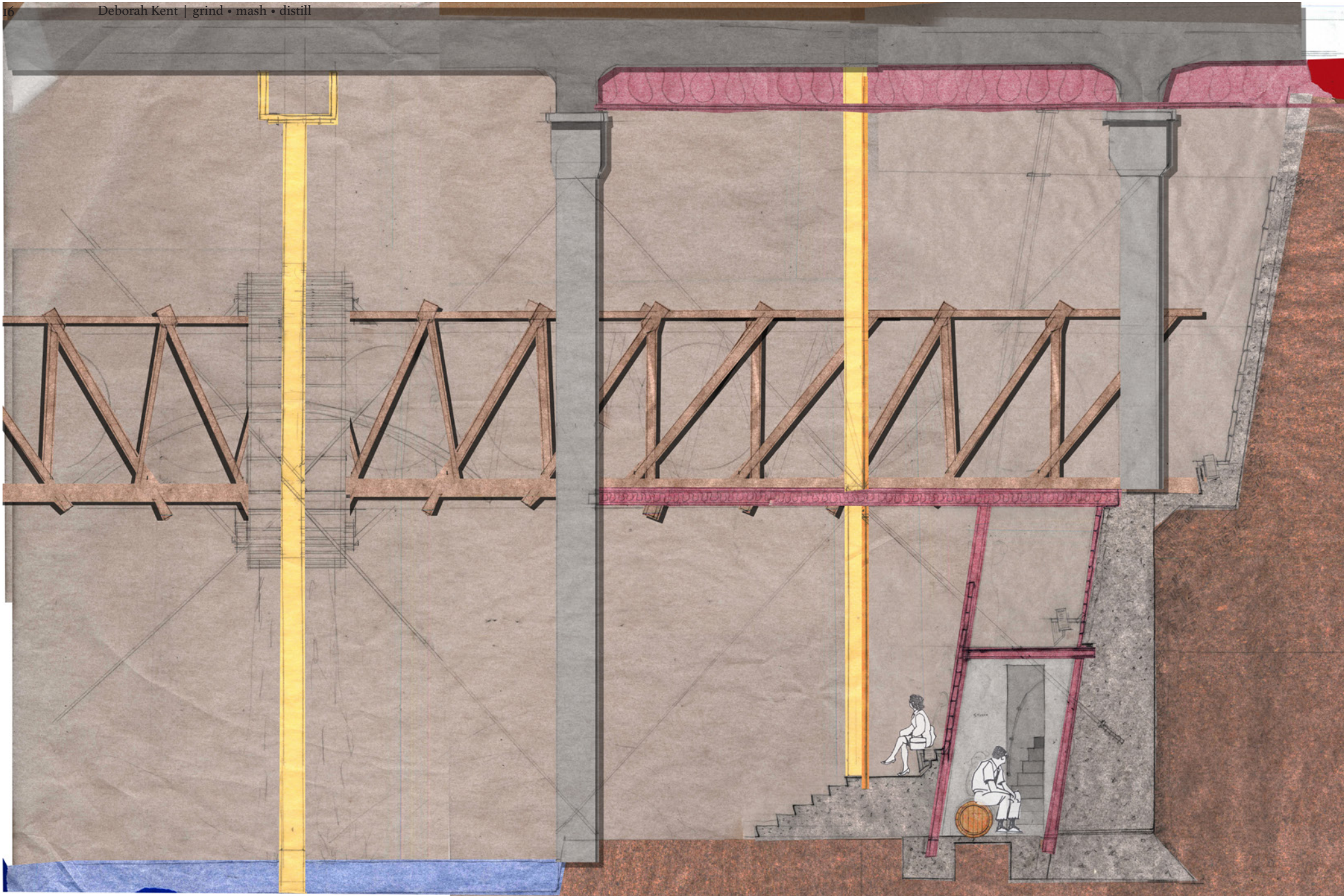


## MODEL I: GRIND AND MASH

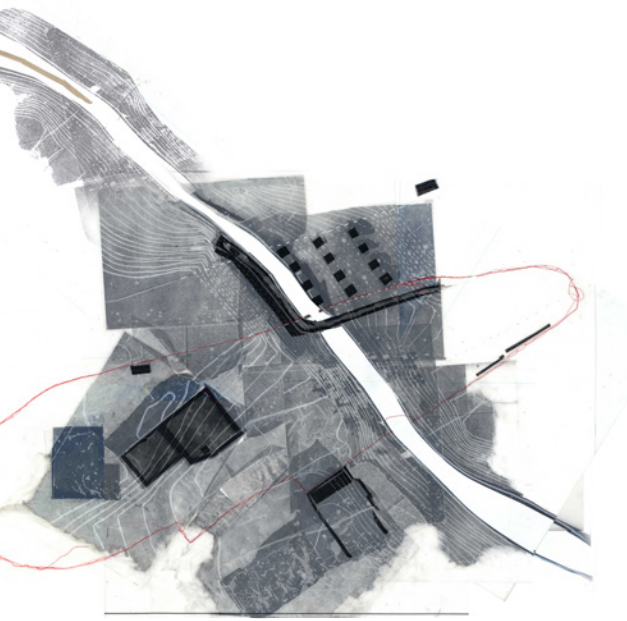
In order to clarify the 'jist' of the site's plotline going forward, stories from the site's past were extracted and visually depicted, divided into categories of air, water, earth and fire and attached to a mixing machine.

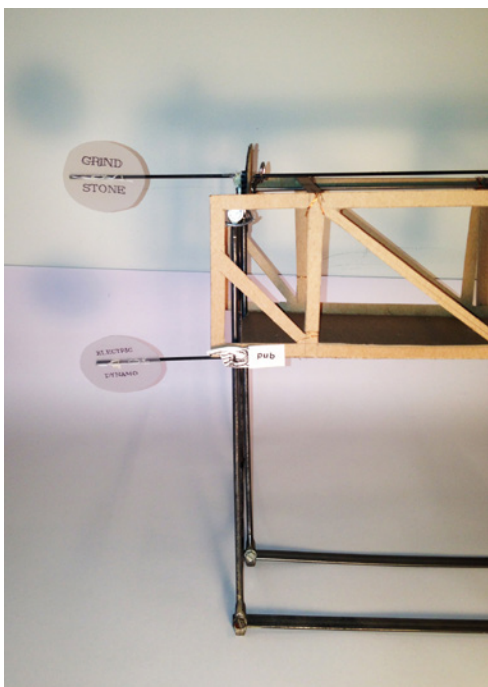
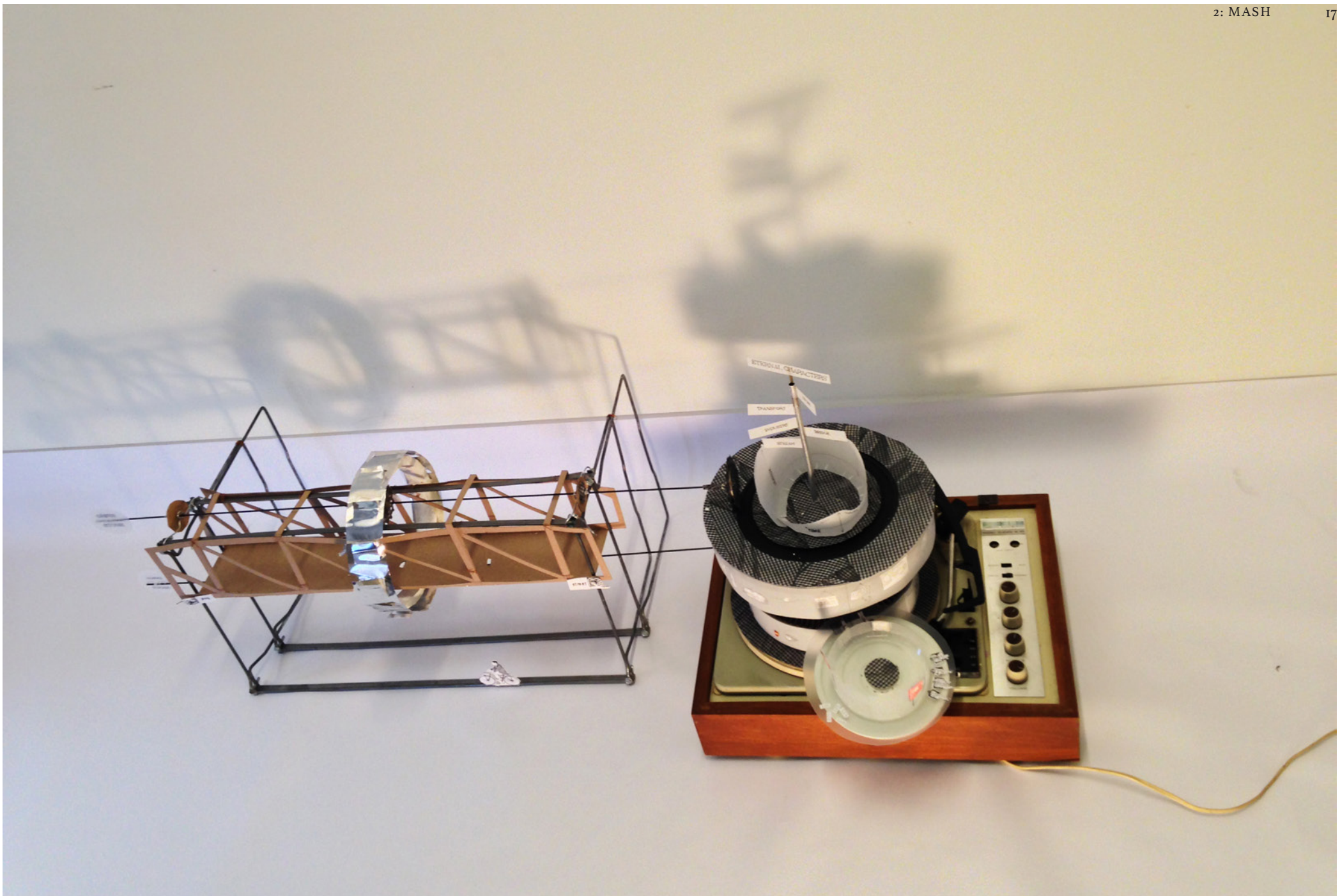
The result was a tool for dividing the historic tales into categories, and creating new unexpected combinations across gaps in time (example: neighborhood dance from 1890, wood railway sleepers from 1950, and hairdressing tools found in the dirt after a railway accident in the 1920s). The machine can be stopped at will to present endless possible combinations of new plotlines.





Wheel and Bridge Collage, Nov. '14

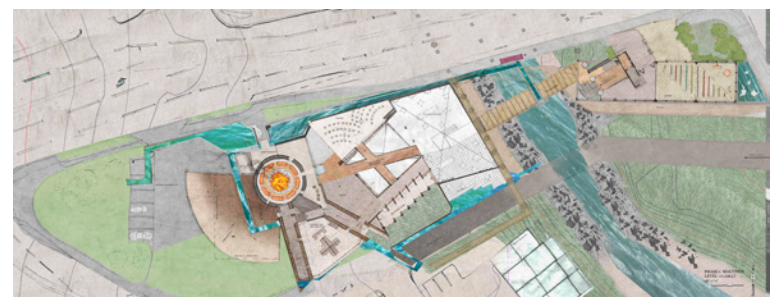


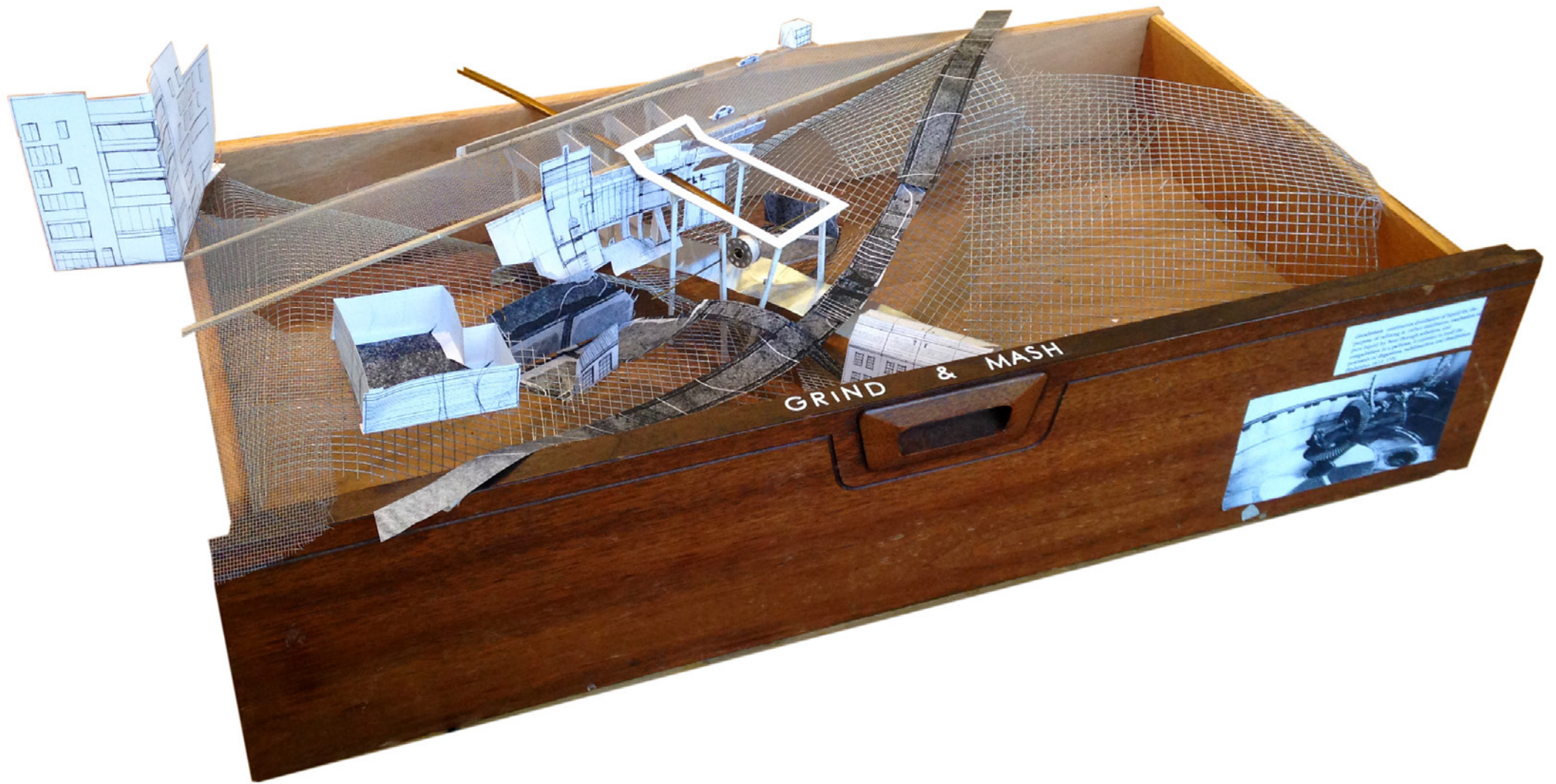


## MODEL 2: EXTRACTION

The second model divides the characters into 'main' and 'cameo': the main ones will reappear in the design, perhaps in disguise, to be revealed over time.

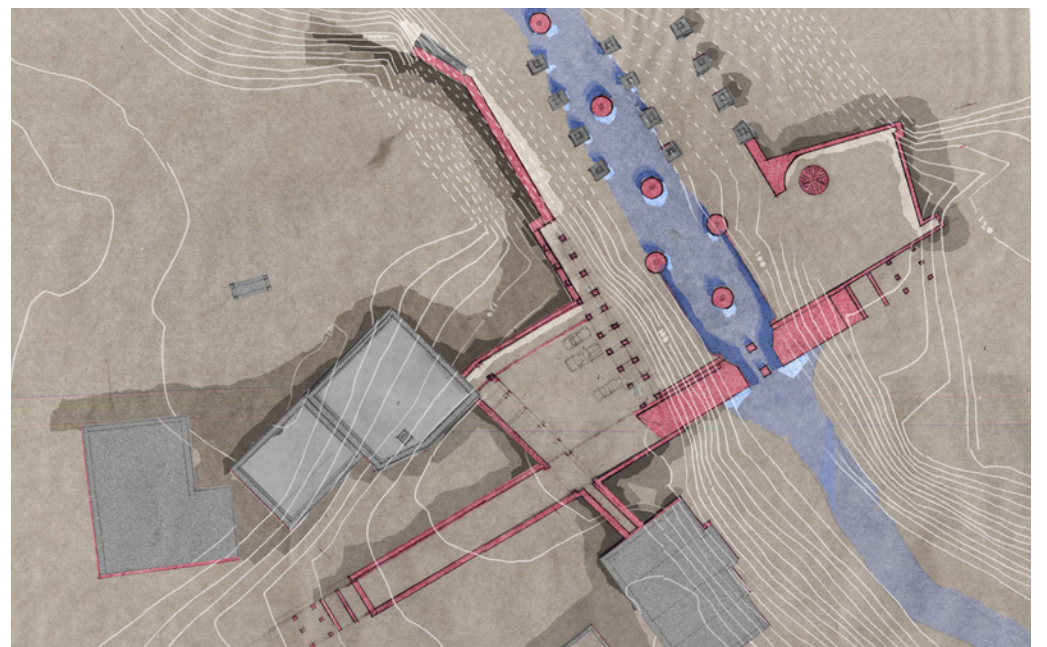
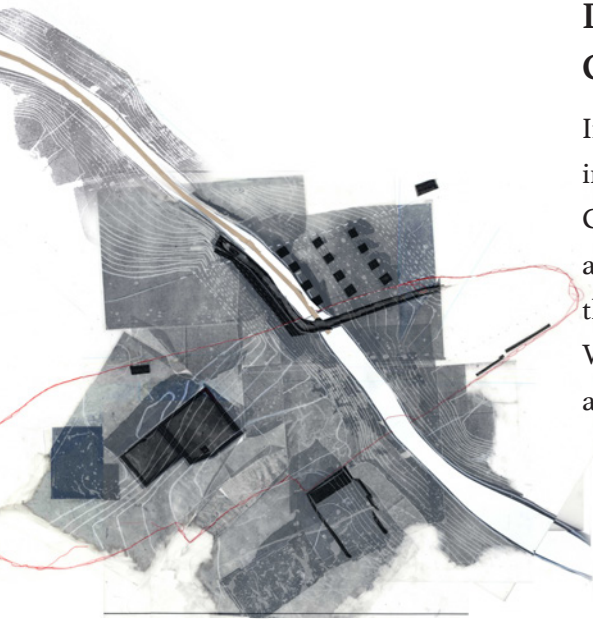
The phonograph represents a grind stone, linked to the silver Mill Wheel through which a footbridge passes. The small discs are changeable, to represent phasing and change of building use over time.

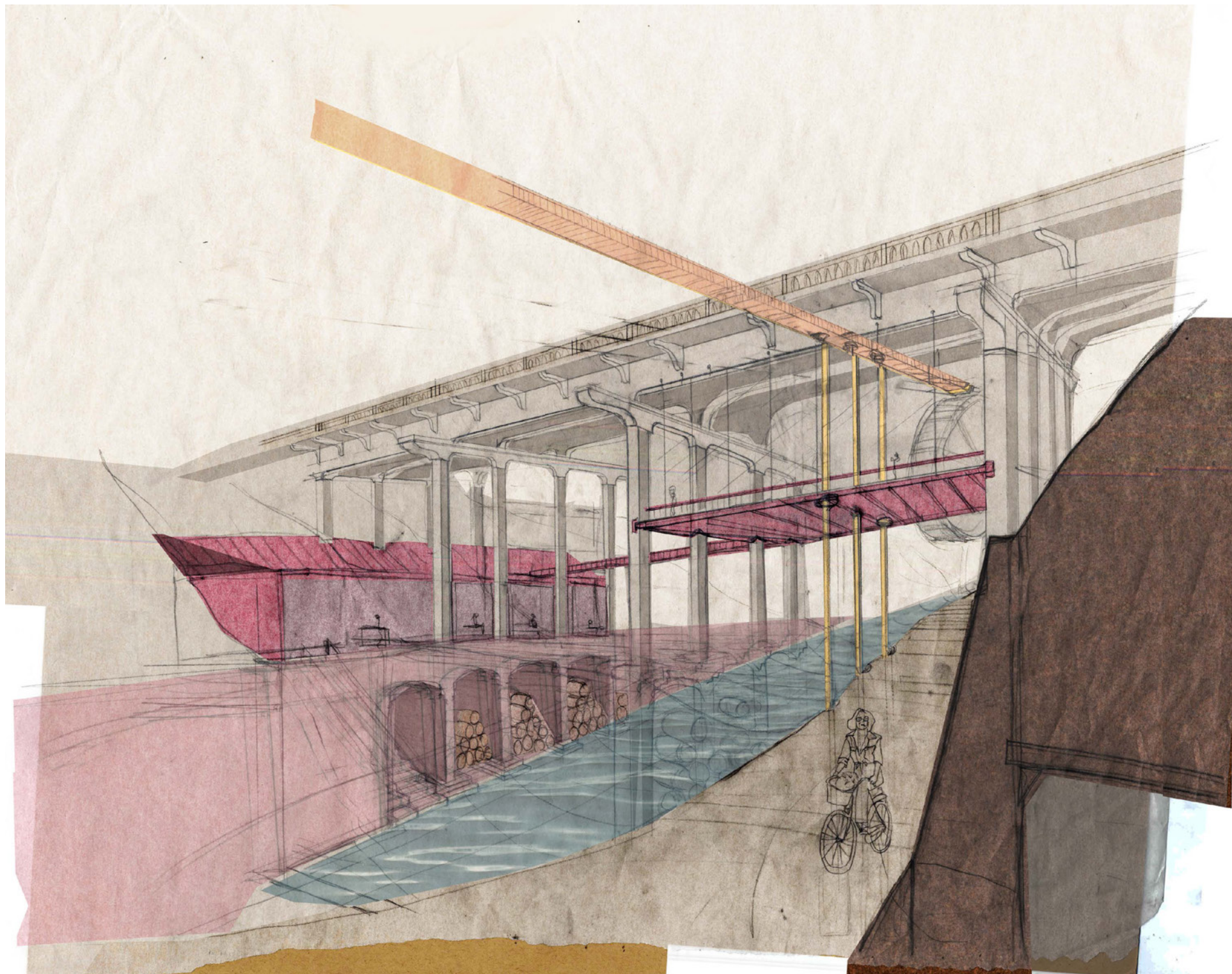




### MODEL 3: DRAW(E)RING CONCLUSIONS

Initial desires for the future of the site, including a raised walkway from the Columbia Pike bridge, reinstatement of a low crossing further downstream, and the use of the stream to power a Mill Wheel, came into being in the drawer and in drawings.





'Bridge and Barrels' Collage, November 2014



Measuring Possibilities in Pink. November 2014.

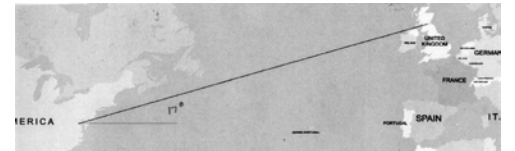
## BUILDING FOR WHOM?

In 2014, Scotland held a referendum to ask the citizens whether they wished to become an Independent Nation, breaking away from the United Kingdom.

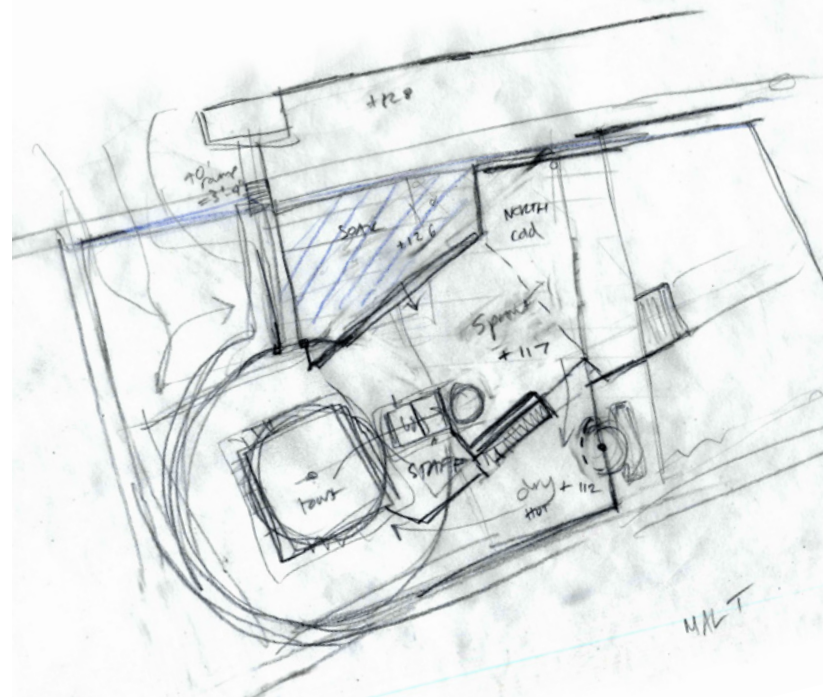
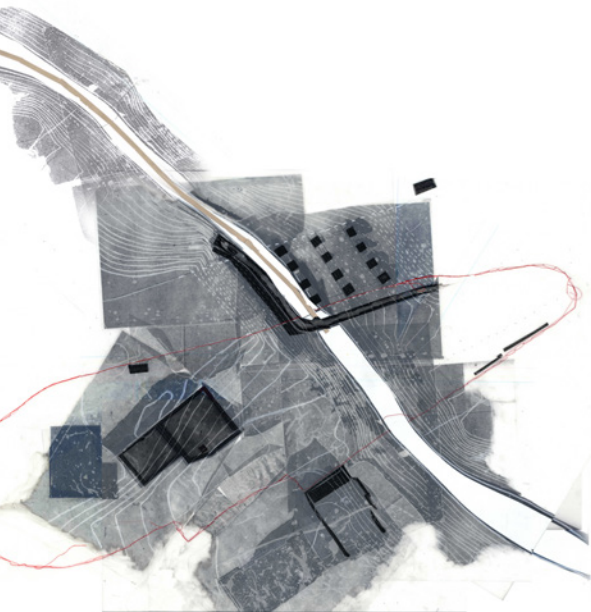
There continues to be a prominent Scottish presence in Alexandria and Arlington, and, as there is very little space left in 'Embassy Row' on Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, D.C., the idea of housing a Scottish Embassy on the Four Mile Run site seemed appropriate.



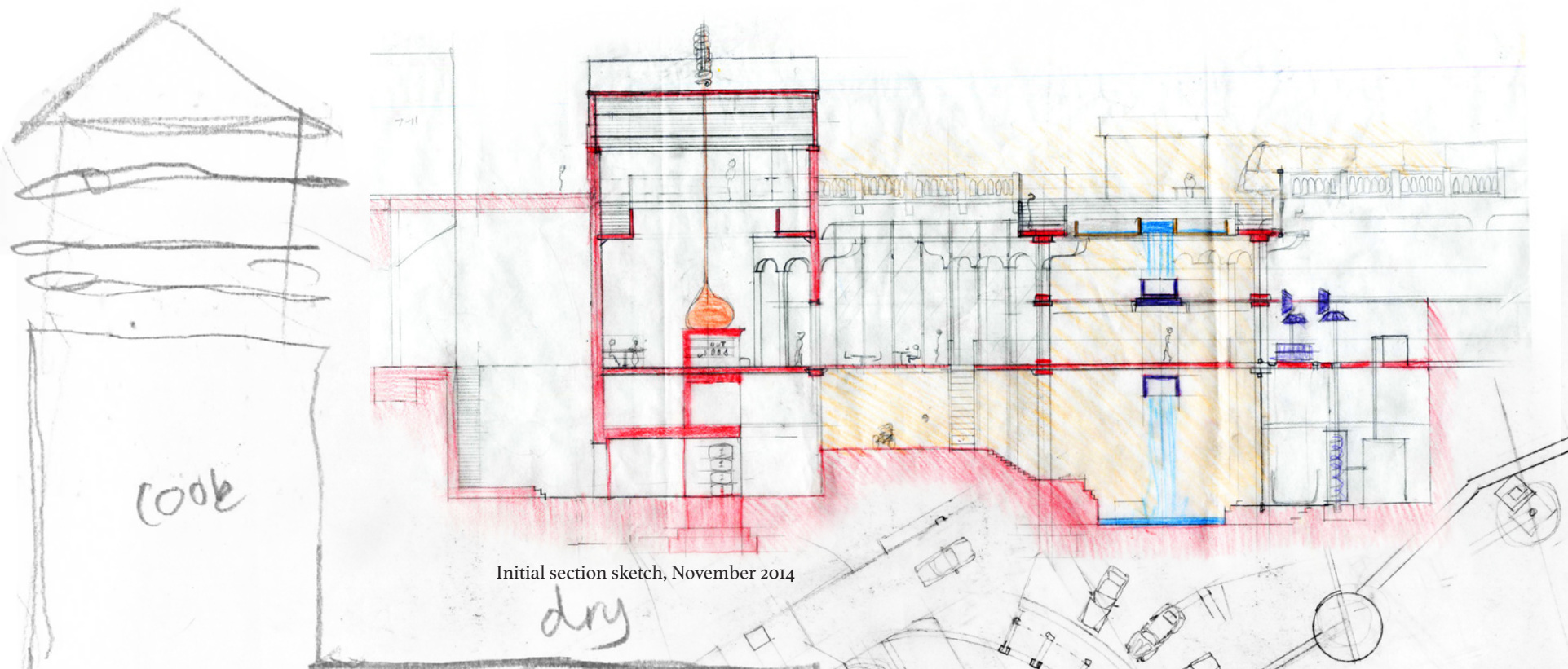
As the Finnish embassy has a basement sauna, the Scottish embassy should incorporate a distillery, and tasting room. The process of making whisky, with its tantalizingly long years of maturing, has definite parallels with how I intended to approach the building and the site, as subject to a constant reaction, always leading to something richer and more valuable.



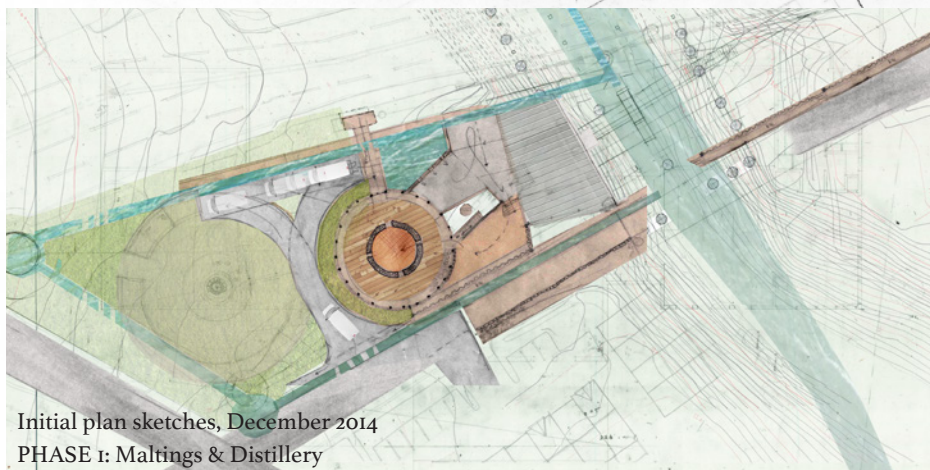
Plan sketches, December 2014



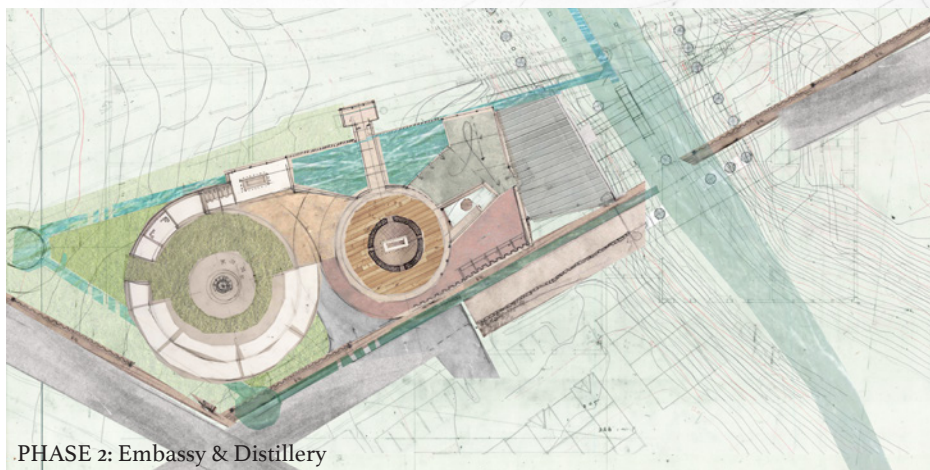
Although the result of the vote last year was 'no' for Scottish independence, the possibility of a future vote and split remains in the political air- and the question of how, logistically, Scottish embassies could be built quickly enough if it happened, is certainly out there in the real world. But it hasn't happened yet- therefore, in its first Phase, the building, as well as being a fully functioning maltings, distillery and tasting room, should covertly be a placeholder for this possible future embassy. To the casual passer-by it will be part of the growing trend toward craft distilleries and breweries, attracting custom from the growing young population of Columbia Pike, but and if, or when, independence happens, will be waiting, prepared, to ease the transition to newborn nation.



Initial section sketch, November 2014

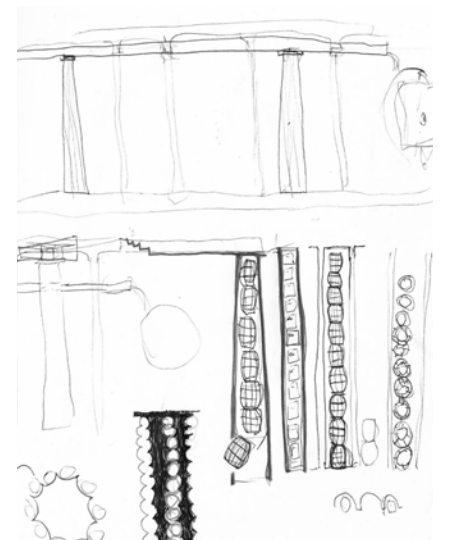
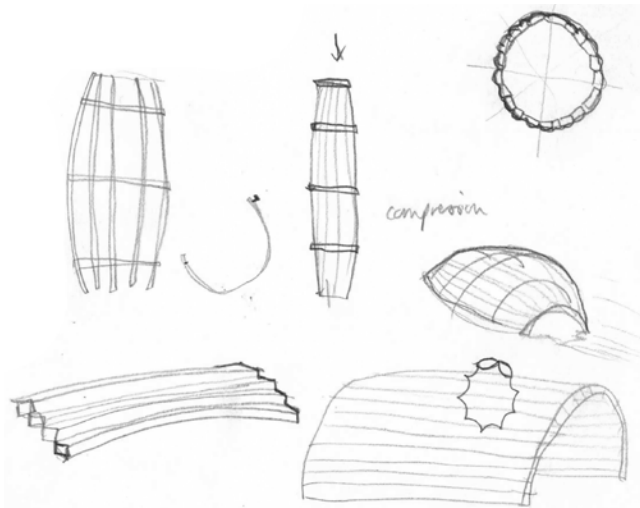
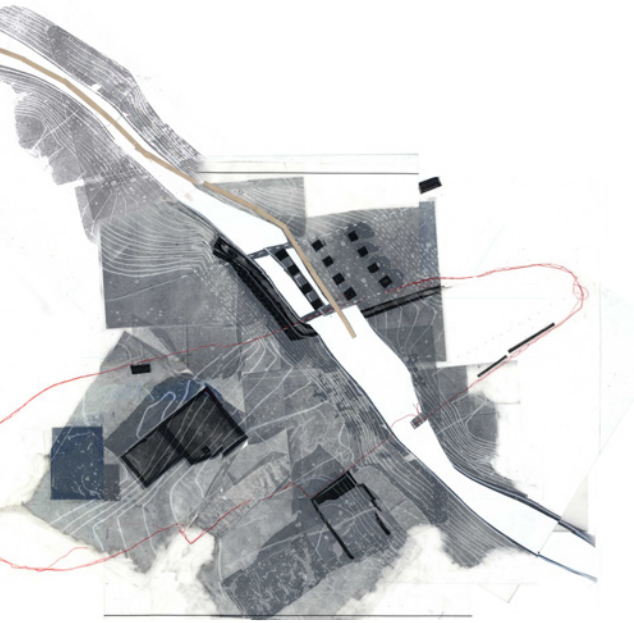
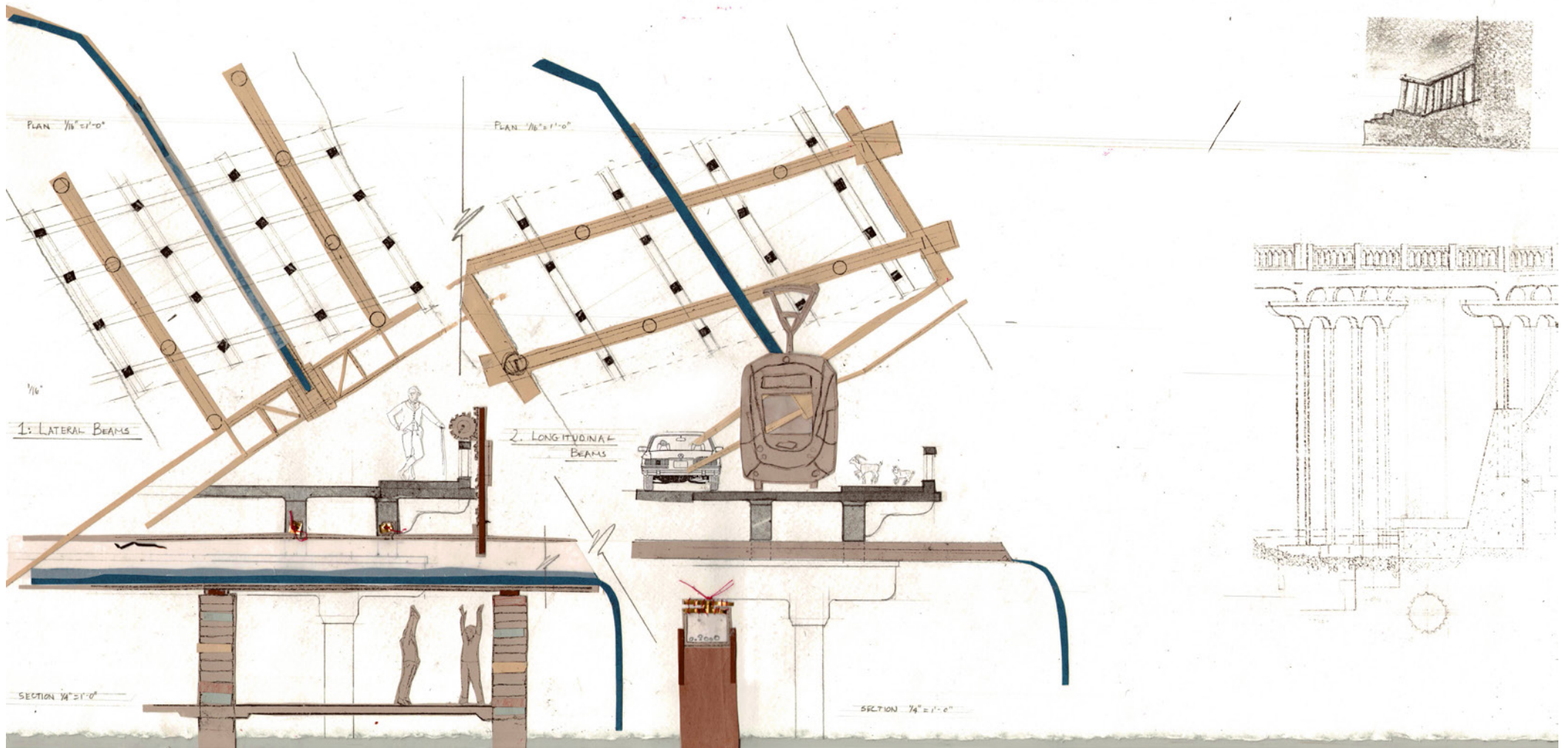
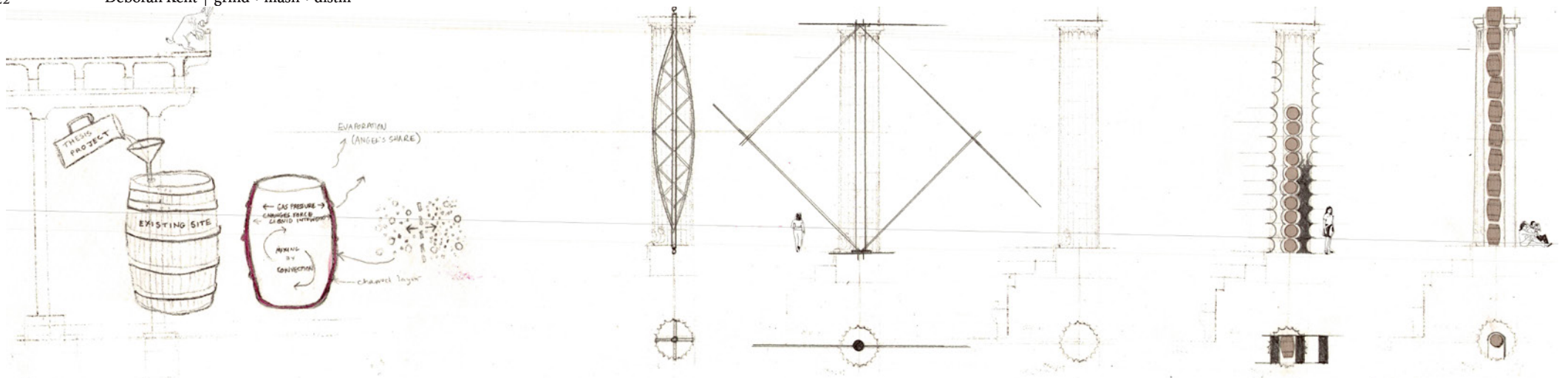


Initial plan sketches, December 2014  
PHASE 1: Maltings & Distillery

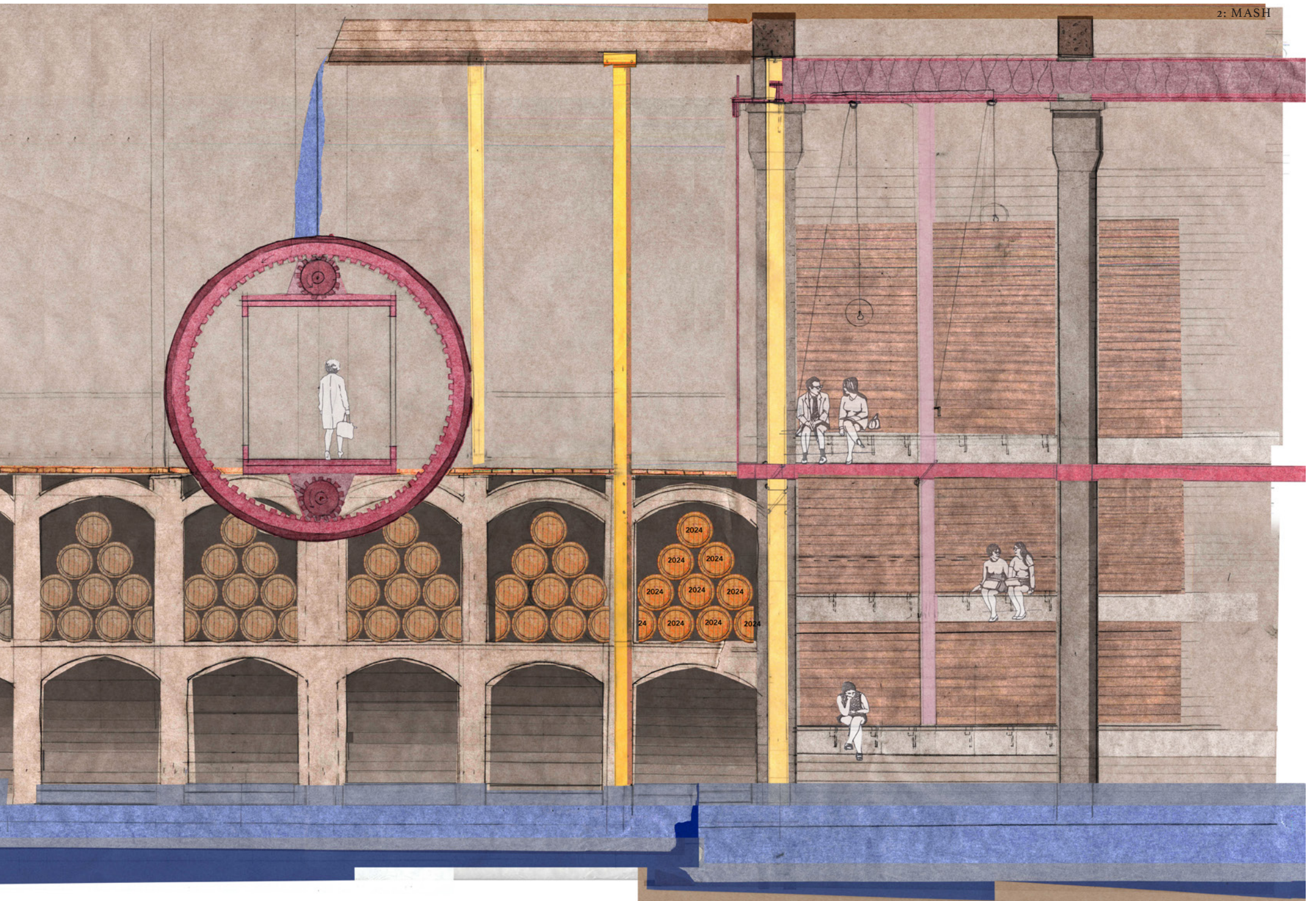


PHASE 2: Embassy & Distillery





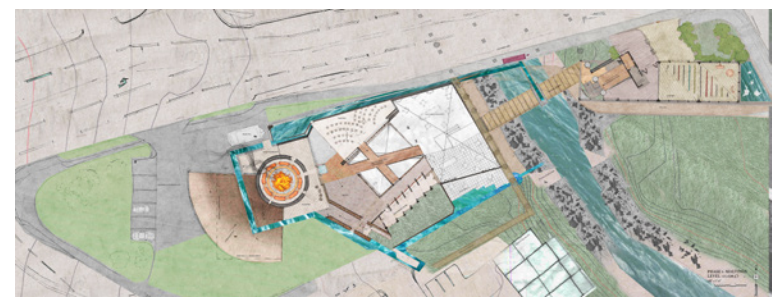




## BARRELS & COLUMNS

The maturing whisky should sit in a cool, still place, such as within the shady banks of the Four Mile Run.

The existing concrete bridge will be reinforced with new columns- initially conceived as steel, these became solid cylindrical concrete in the 'final' design, echoing the form of the 'missing' columns of the Scottish National Monument.



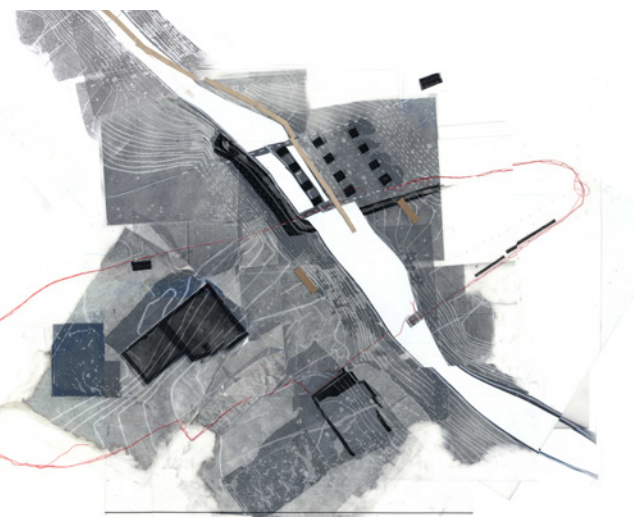


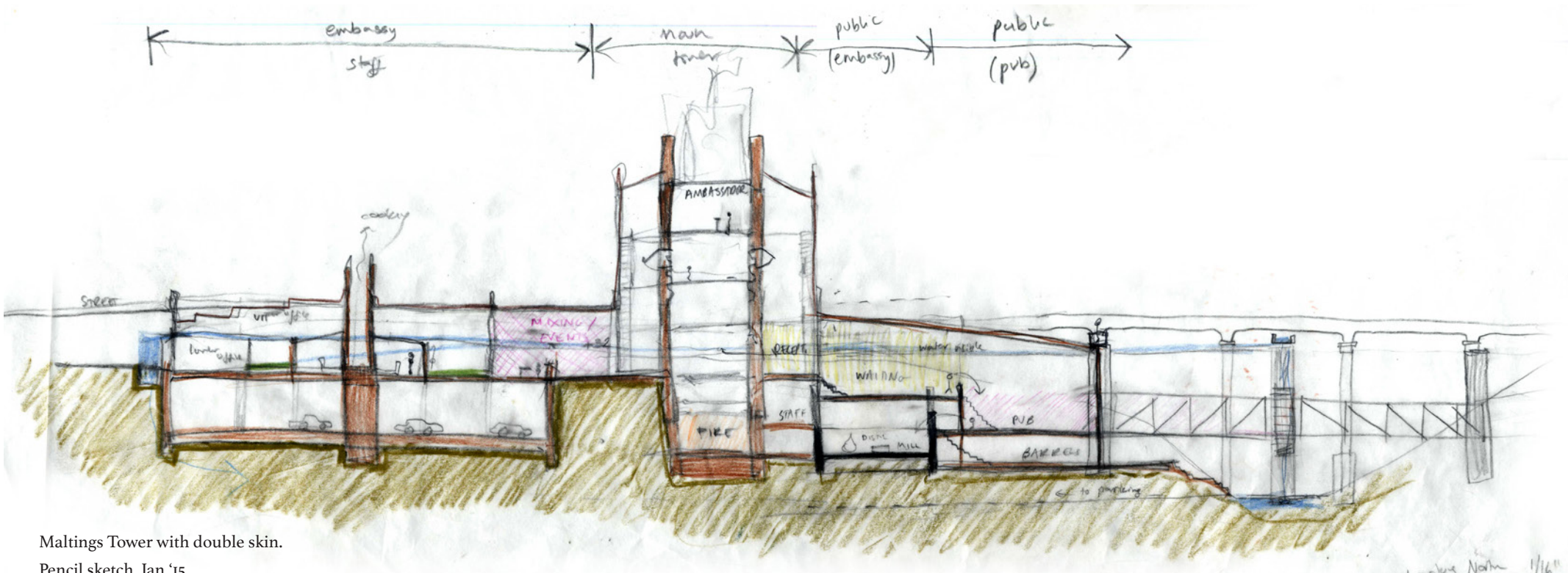
In the highlands and islands the porridge was poured into a drawer in the kitchen dresser or cabinet and left to set. A slice or two of the porridge from the drawer was taken to the workplace, usually out in the fields attending to the crops or animals.

Any babies born to these poorer families were put to "bed" in a drawer, usually above the porridge drawer, and the slow rising heat acted as a kind of central heating for the well-wrapped child. There was generally enough porridge in the drawer to last a whole week.

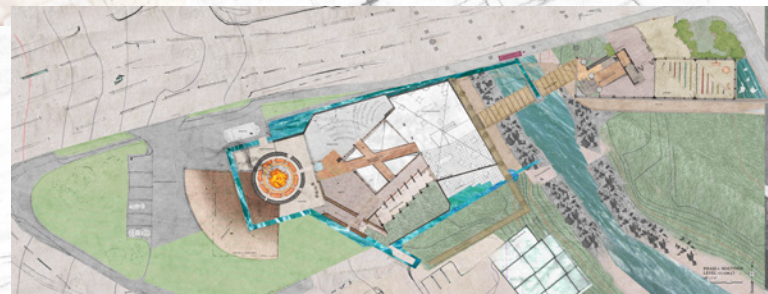
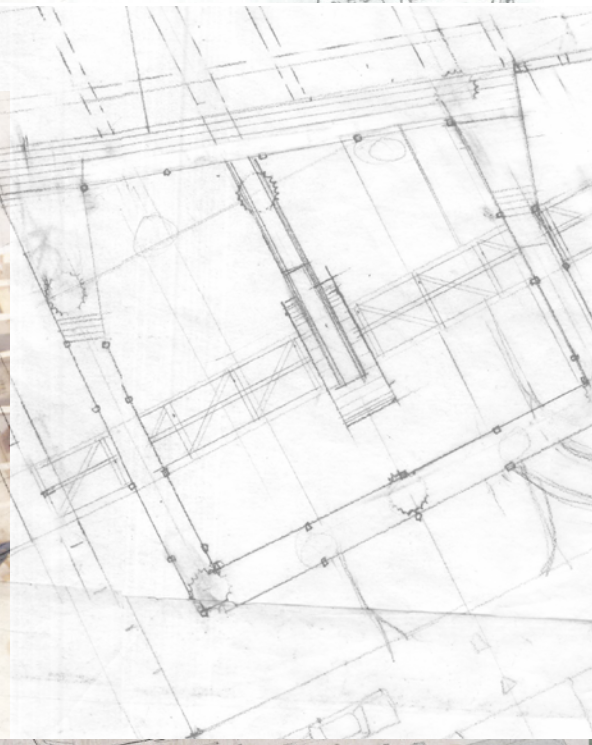
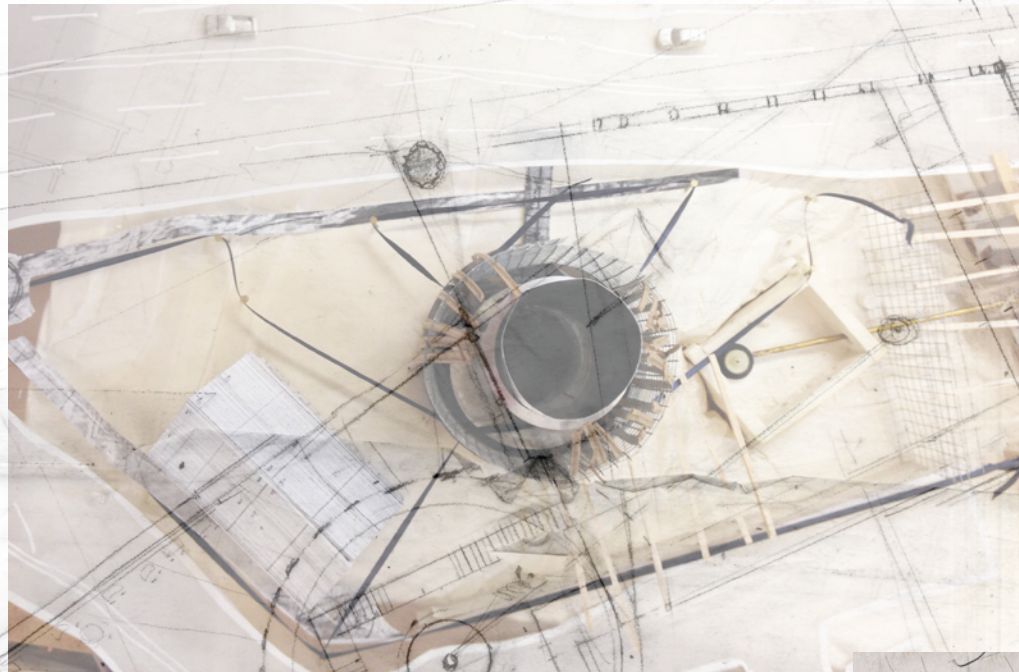
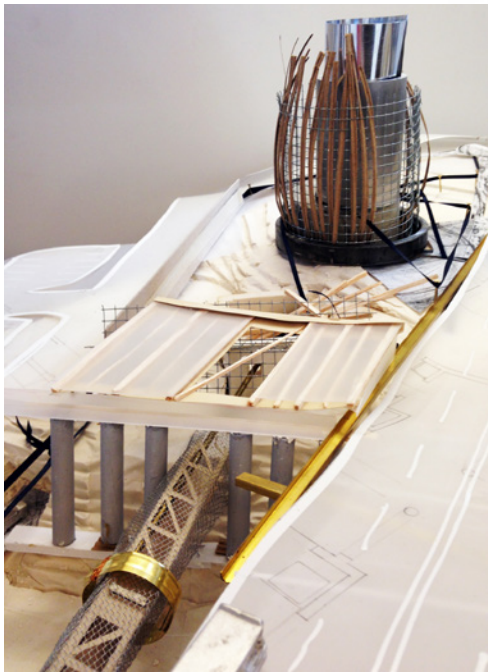
## MODEL 4: BAKING THE WORT

Porridge topography began to suggest building forms. Two discrete buildings linked by a footbridge would house a distillery with public bar on the south bank, and a convenience store/ entrance on the north bank. A central round tower begins as the maltings and remains as a permanent piece throughout all phases.

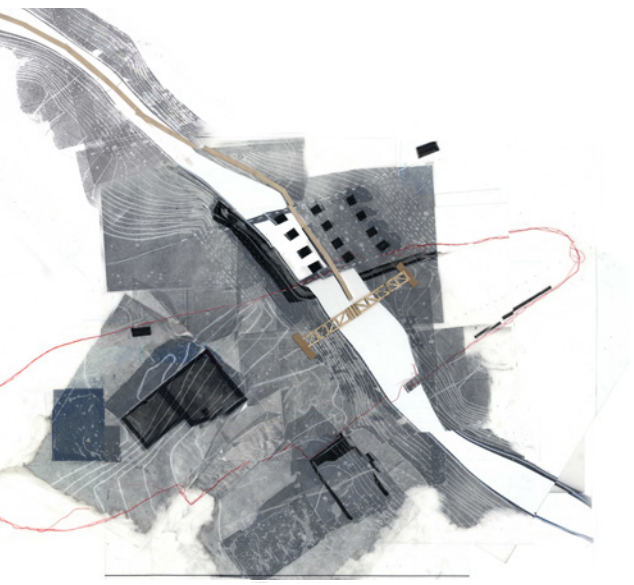
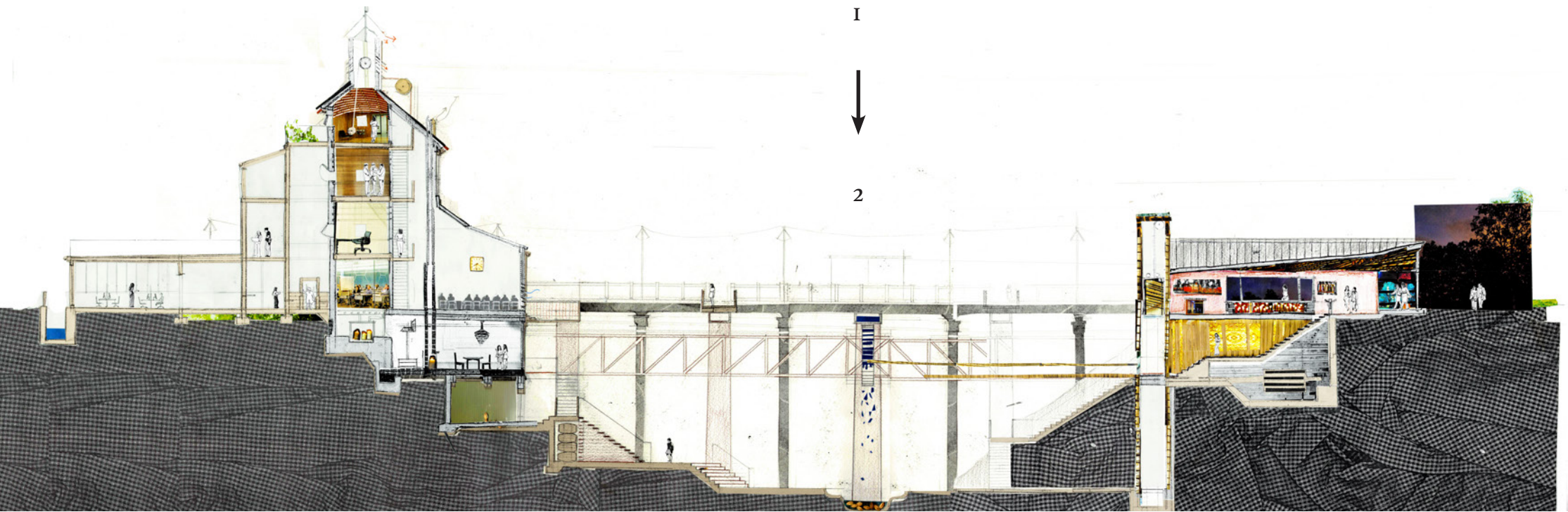




Maltings Tower with double skin.  
Pencil sketch, Jan '15

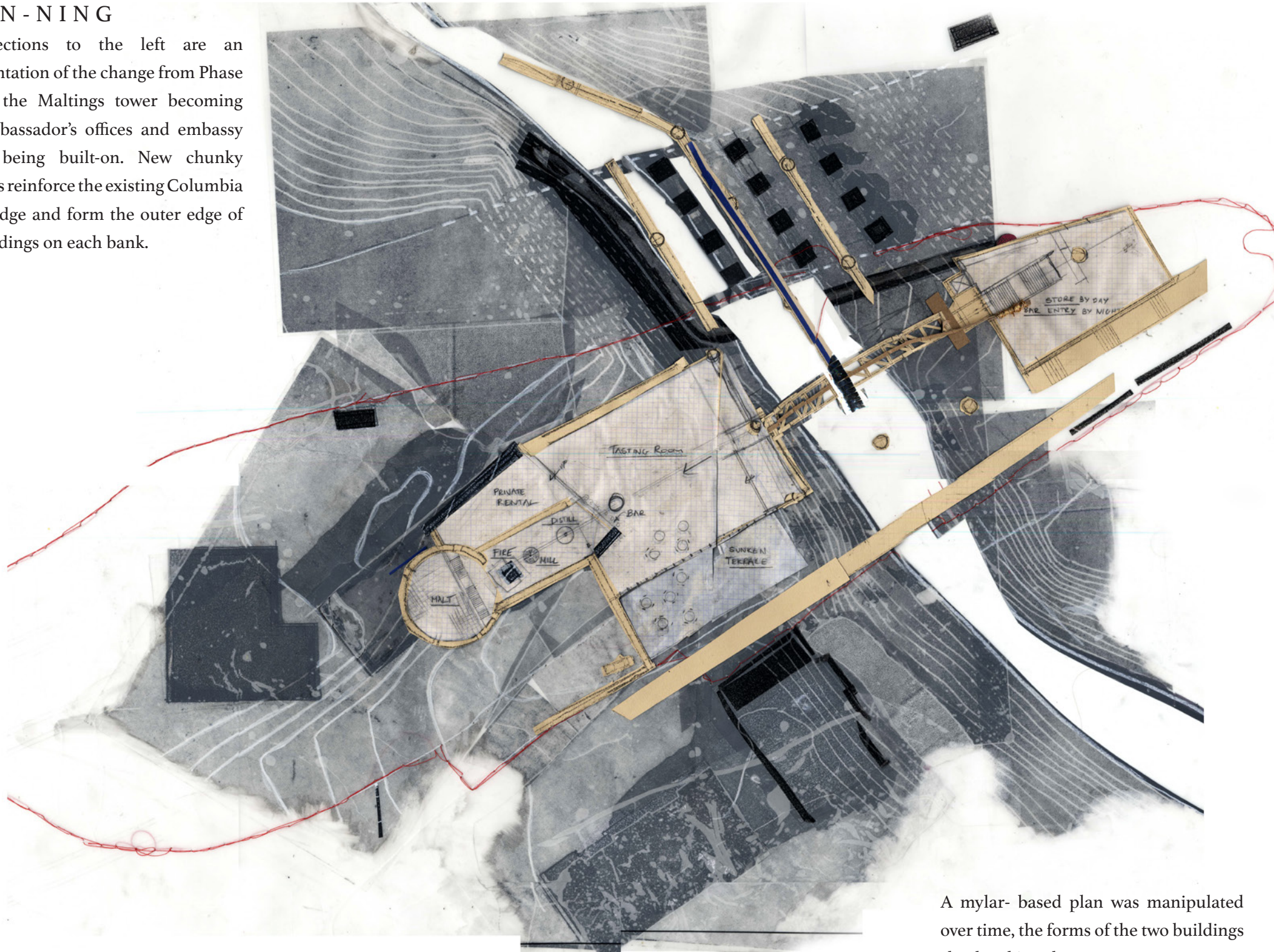


Model development, Feb '15  
The Tower begins to dominate; ribbons suggest radiating walls.  
The existing stone foundation sits to the east, below the new tower.

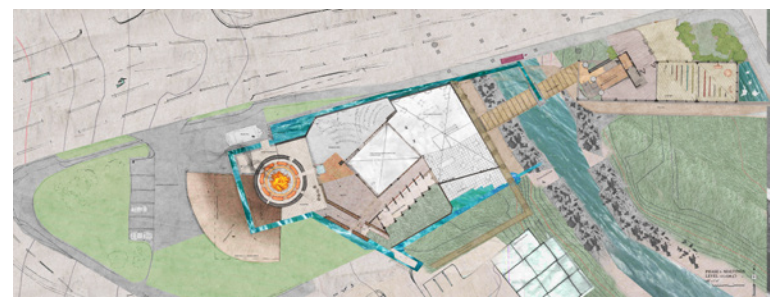


## PLAN - NING

The sections to the left are an representation of the change from Phase 1 to 2, the Maltings tower becoming the Ambassador's offices and embassy spaces being built-on. New chunky columns reinforce the existing Columbia Pike bridge and form the outer edge of the buildings on each bank.



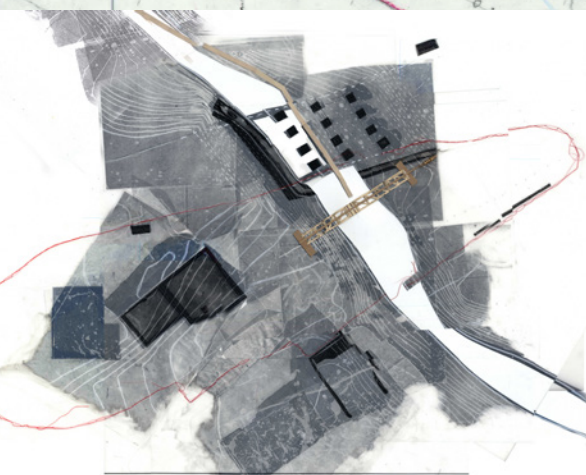
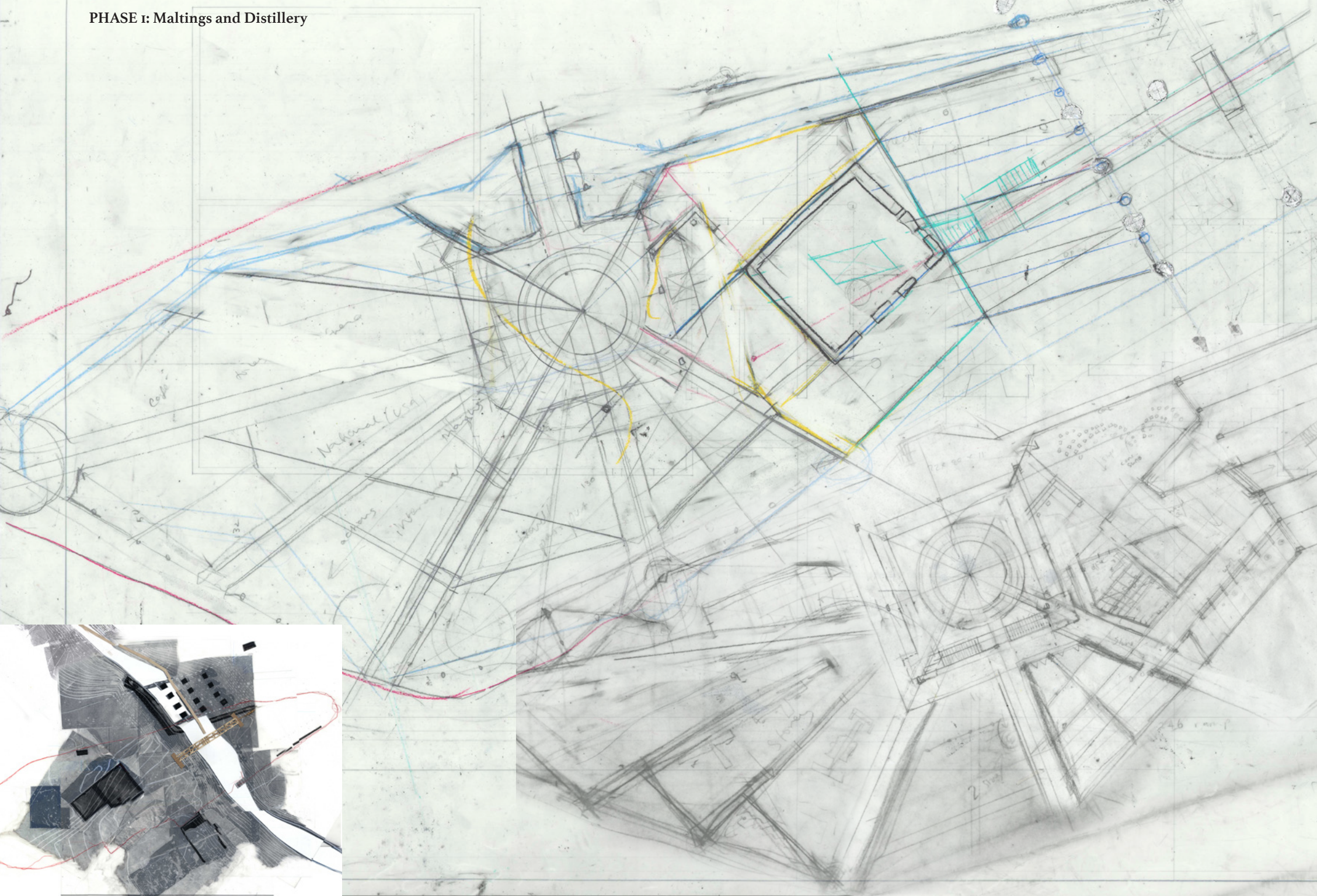
A mylar- based plan was manipulated over time, the forms of the two buildings slowly taking shape.

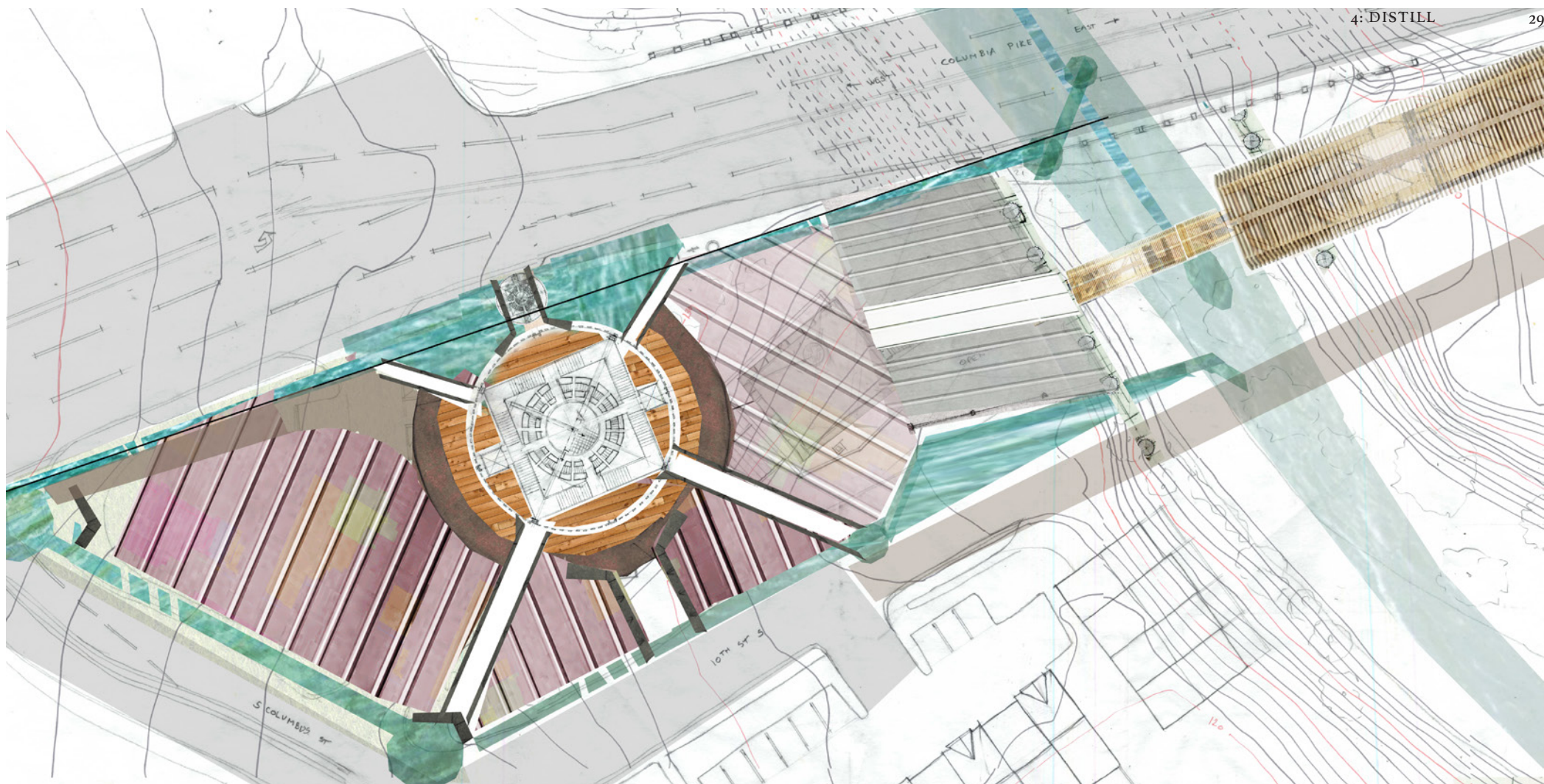


191 (16)



PHASE I: Maltings and Distillery

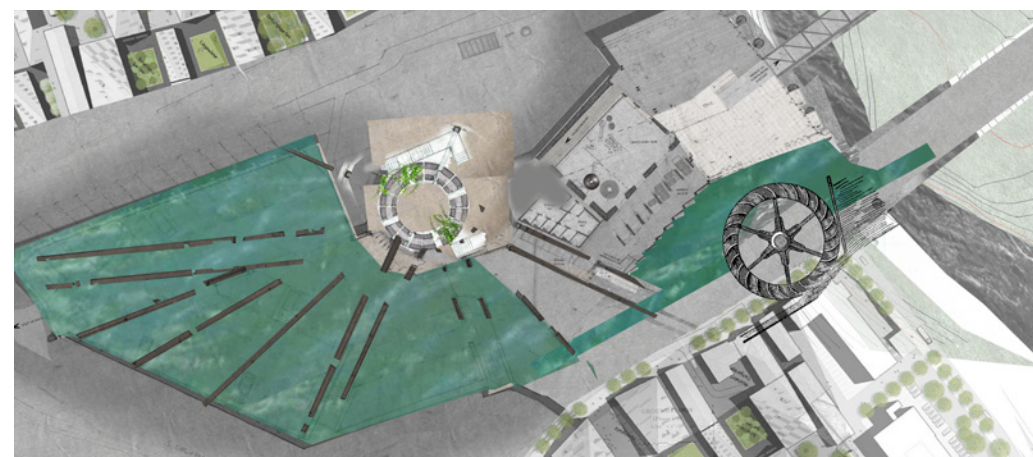




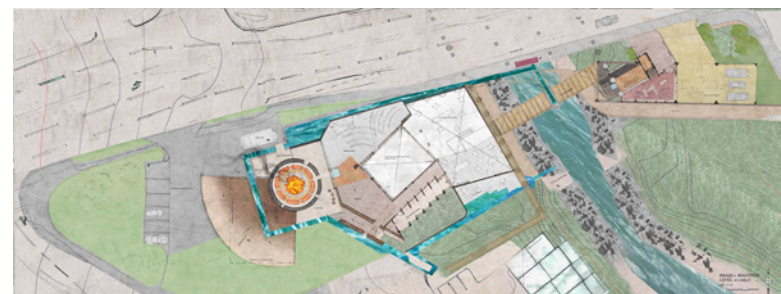
PHASE 2: Scottish Embassy with Whisky Tasting Room

## SALTIRE SCHEMING

As the plan develops, radial 'alleyways' divide up the embassy offices, and the 7/11 building shows signs of becoming similar in form to the footbridge which it links to.

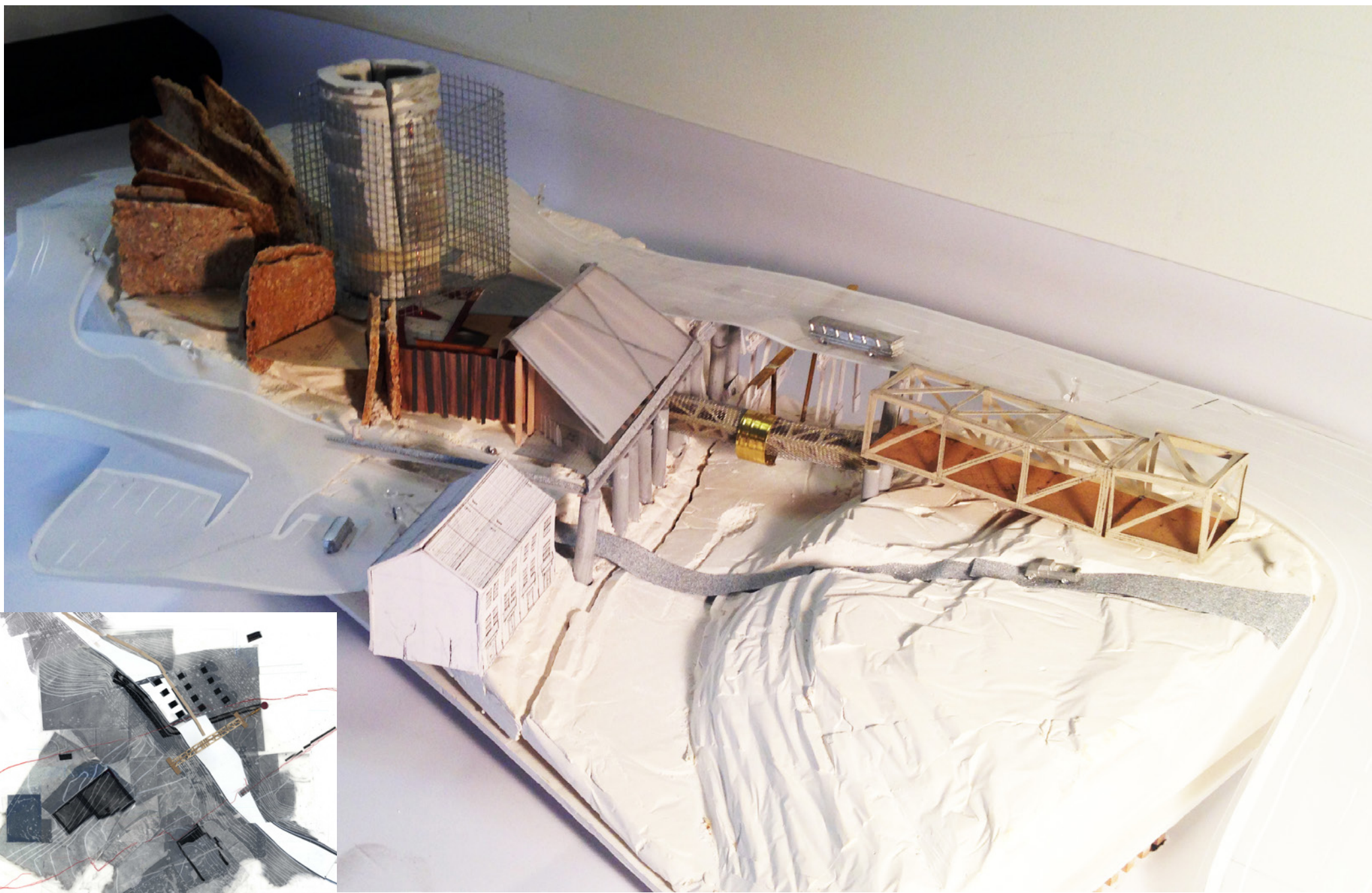
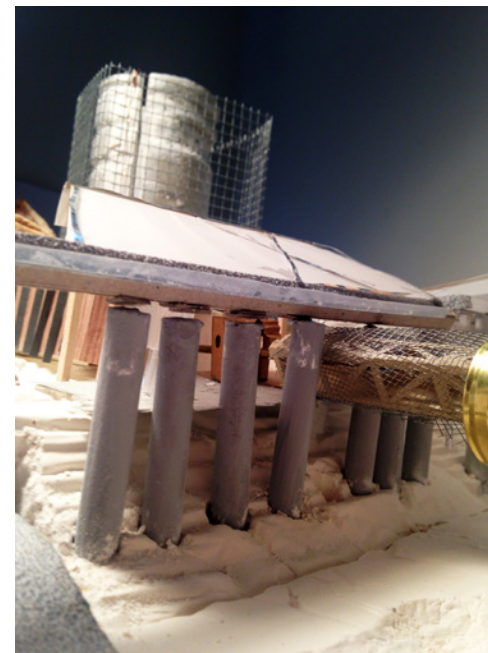


PHASE 3: Future Tidal Mill



## MODEL 5: INSIDE OUT

The drawer was finally used as a mould for plaster land. The porridge topography was remodelled into radial walls, forming divisions between the various embassy office departments. The North Bank, '7/11' building takes the form of a large truss cantilevering out from the bank.





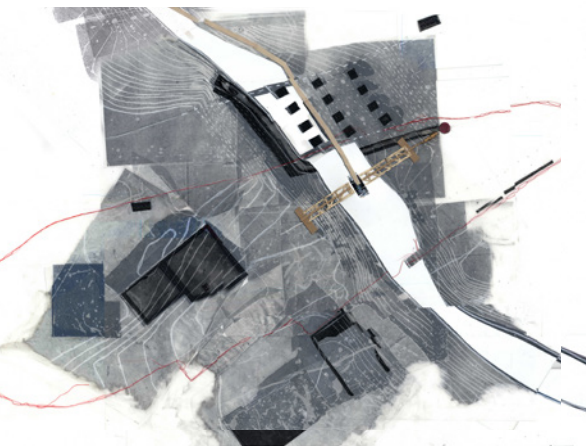
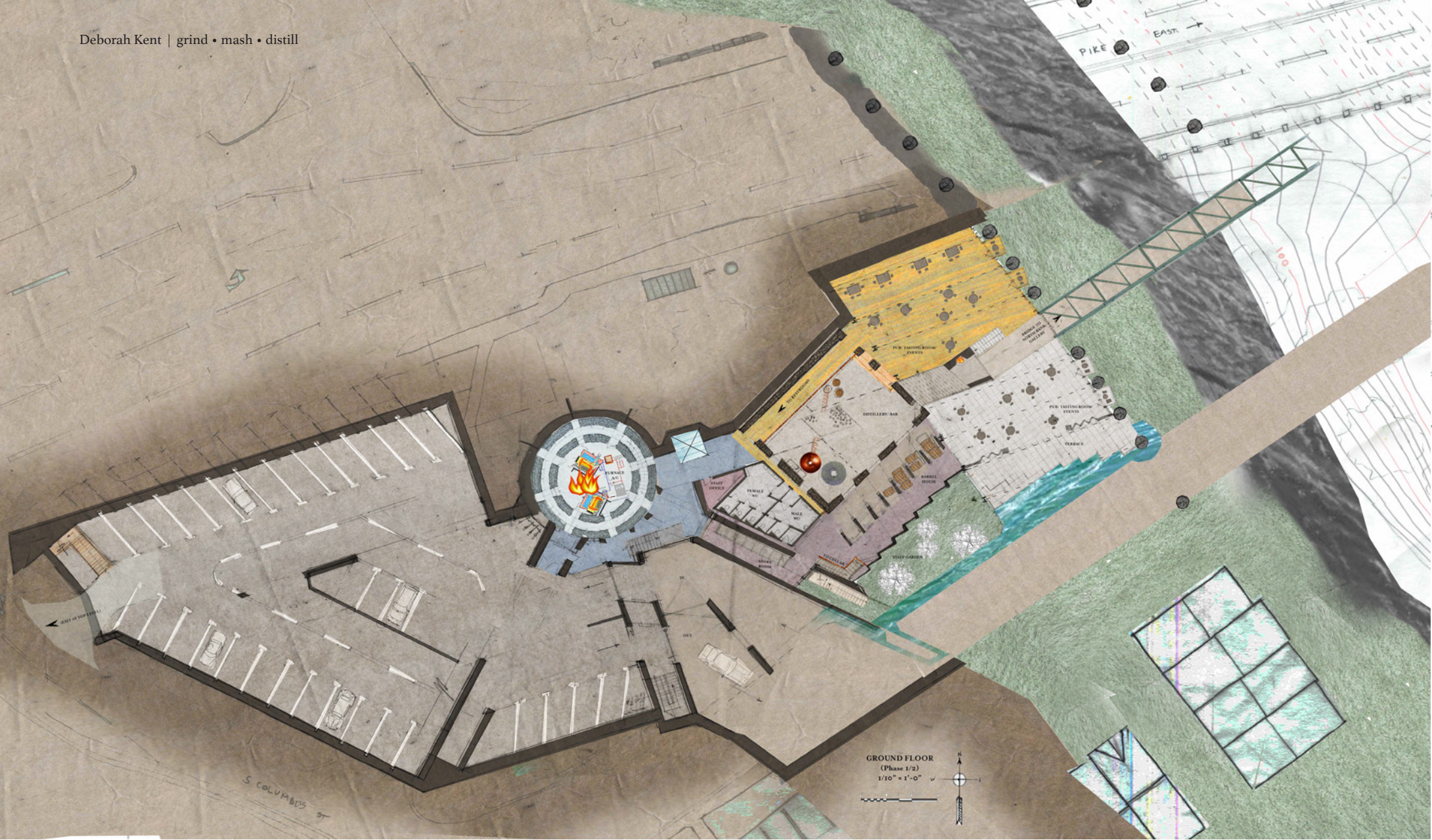


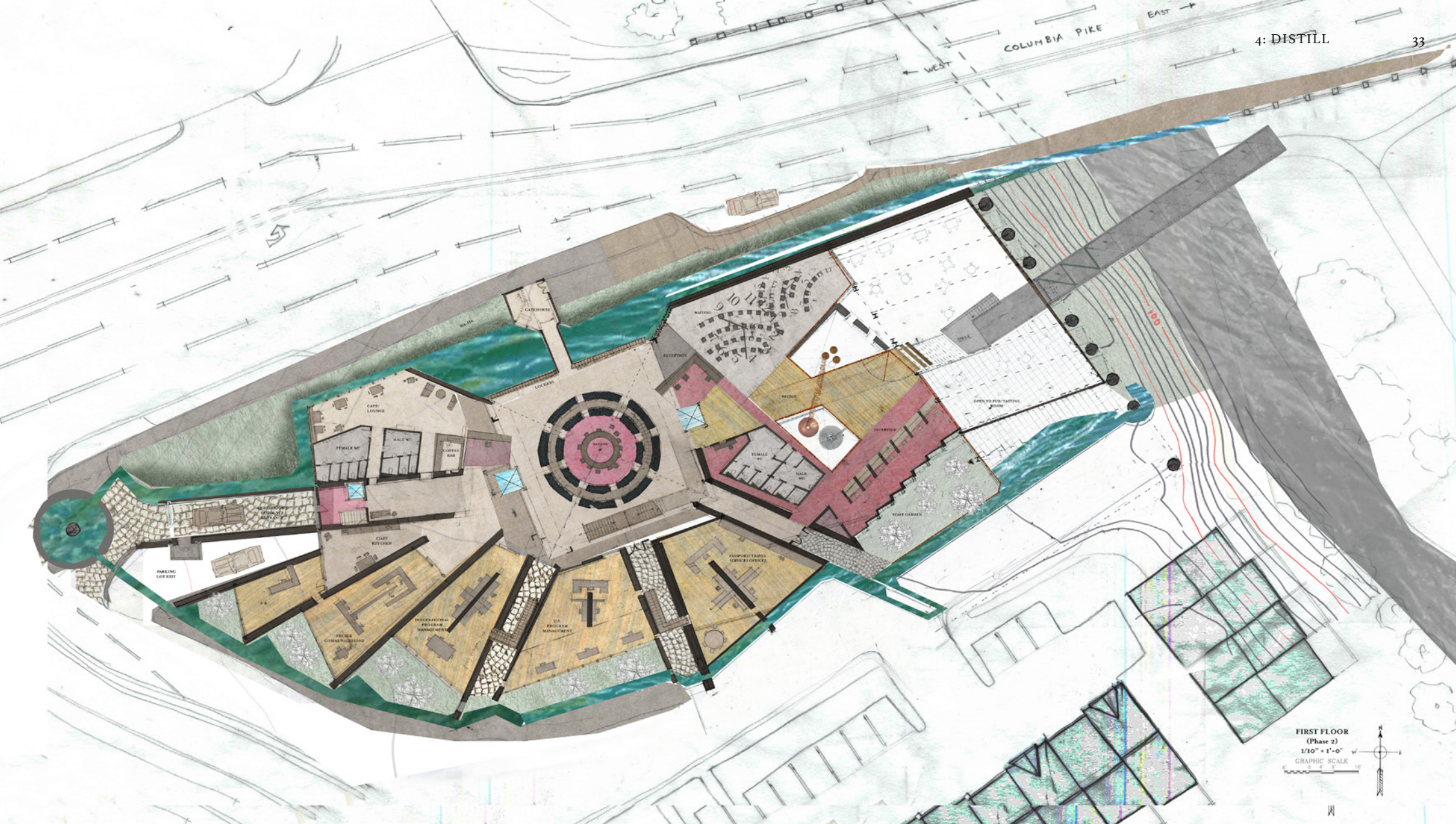
NORTH ELEVATION (COLUMBIA PIKE)  
1/14" = 1'-0"

## HELTER SKELTER?

The central tower has not yet found its ideal form; the parapet walls, angle, and joint with the radial walls demand further development. The Ambassador's dining room asks to be distinguished in some manner, but here lacks communication with the rest of the building.







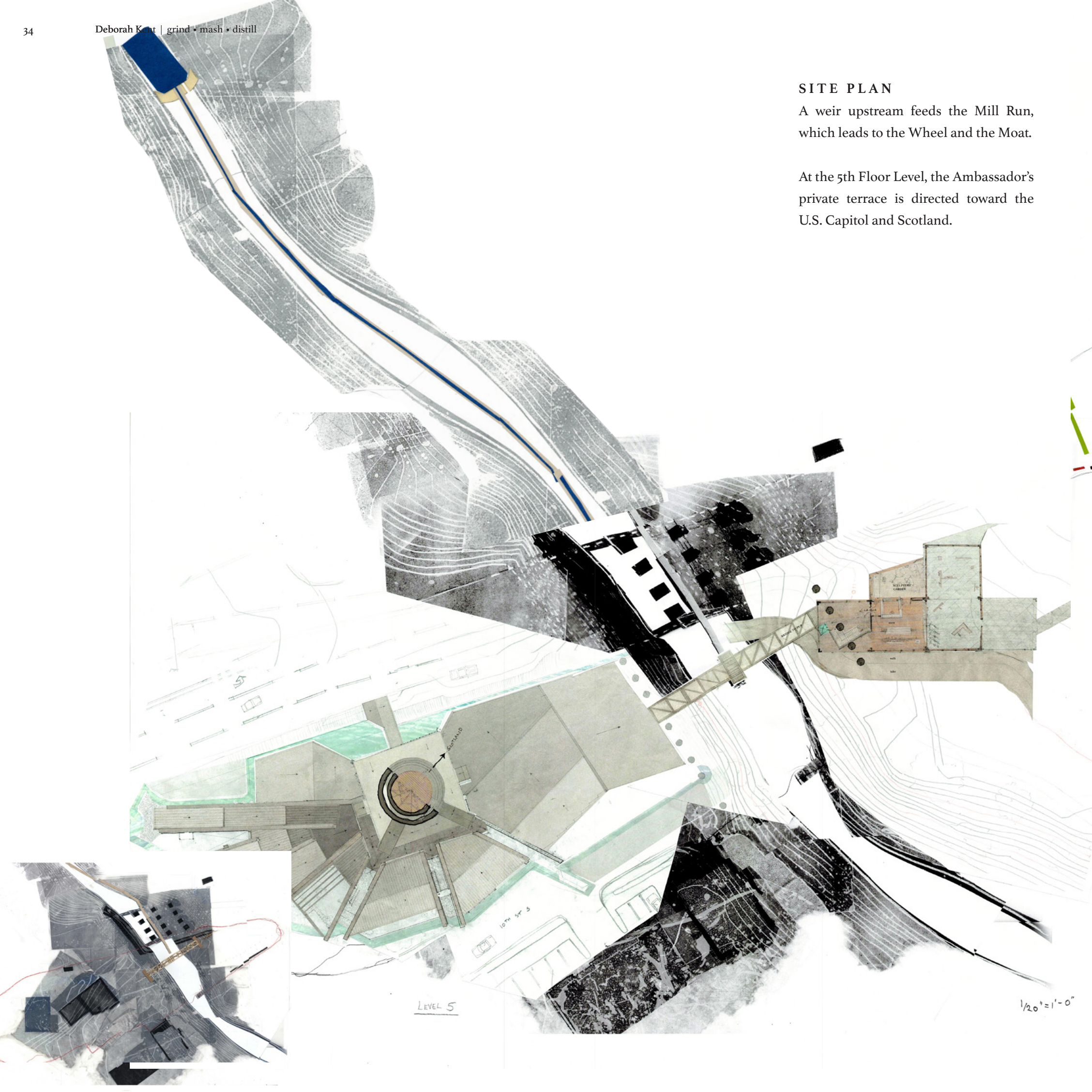
**GETTING THERE**  
 The first fully developed plan for the First Floor level (above) communicates much of the intention for the layout of spaces. The Parking Level (left), however, is still struggling to fully relate to the radial walls.



### SITE PLAN

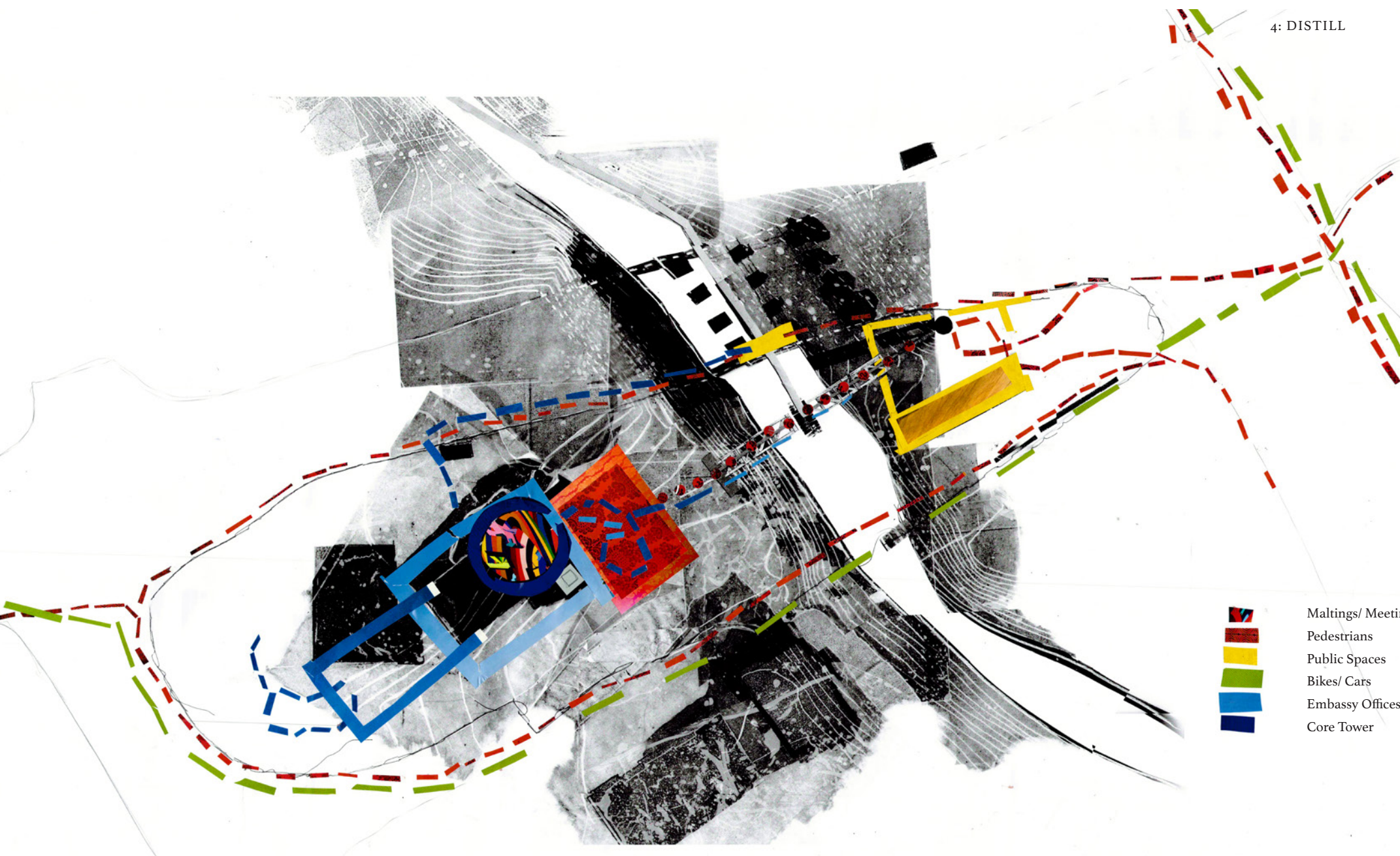
A weir upstream feeds the Mill Run, which leads to the Wheel and the Moat.

At the 5th Floor Level, the Ambassador's private terrace is directed toward the U.S. Capitol and Scotland.



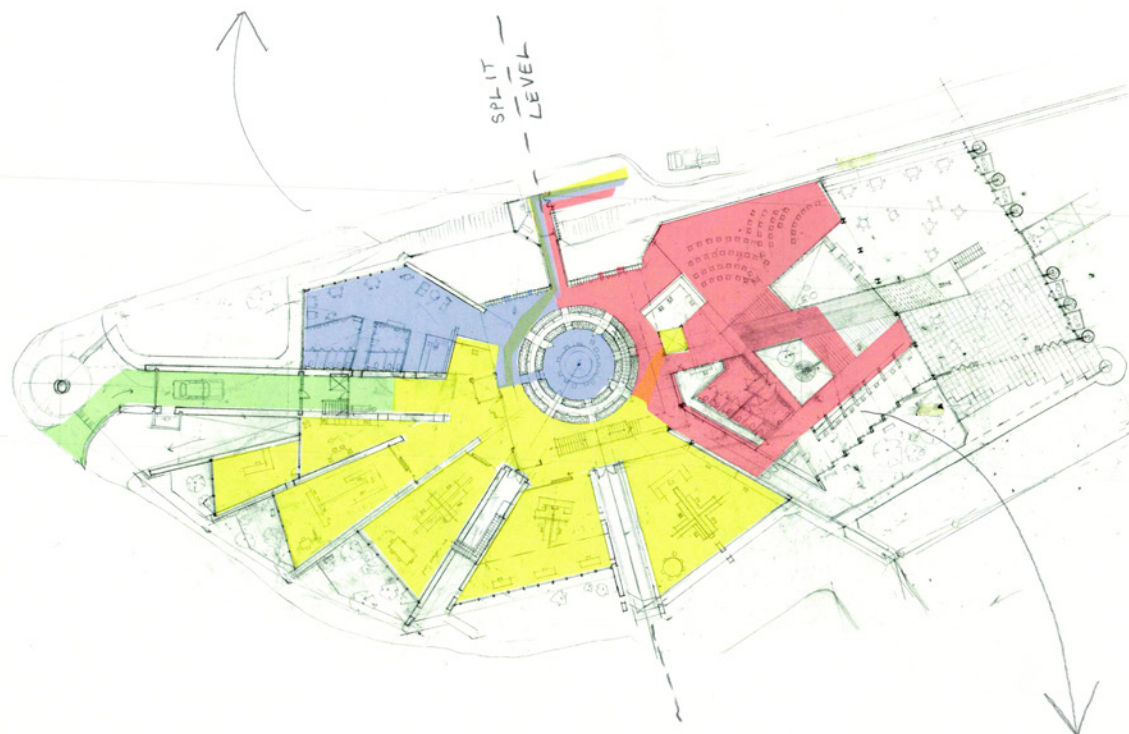
LEVEL 5

1/20" = 1'-0"



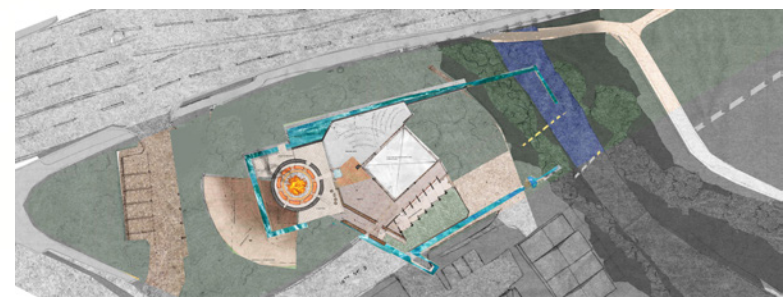
**PHASE 2: EMBASSY**  
who goes where?

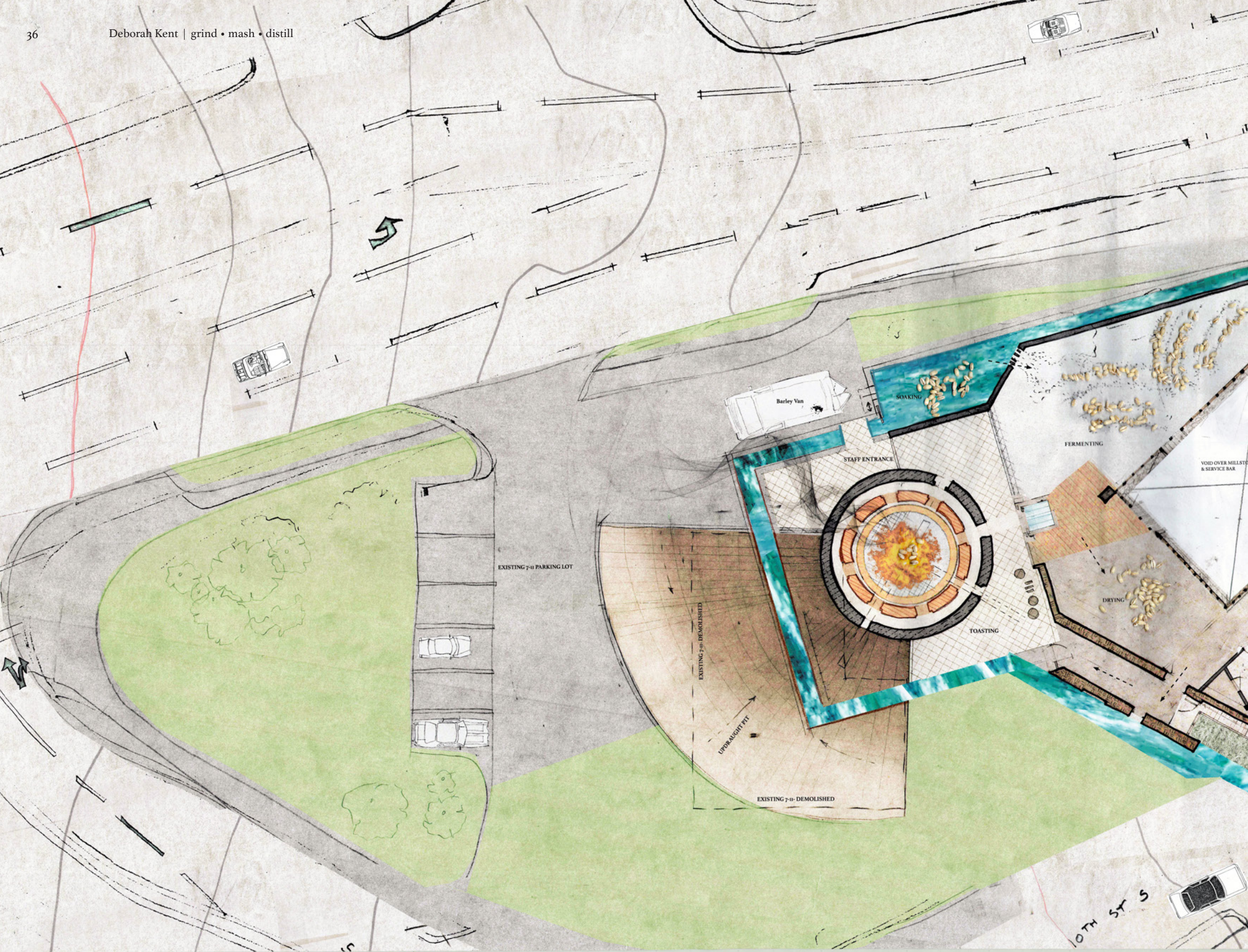
- AMBASSADOR
- STAFF
- EMBASSY SERVICES
- VISITORS



**LOGISTICS**

Diagramming movement and space divisions.

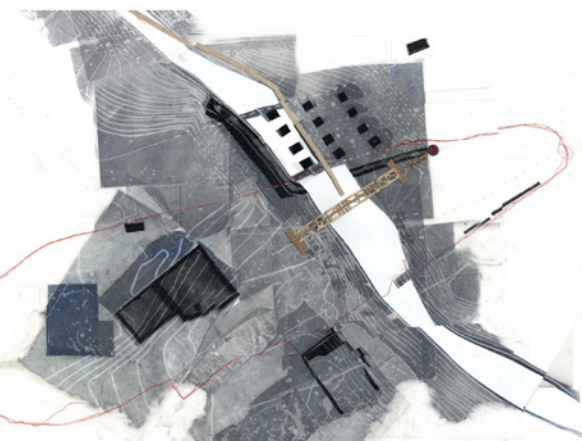




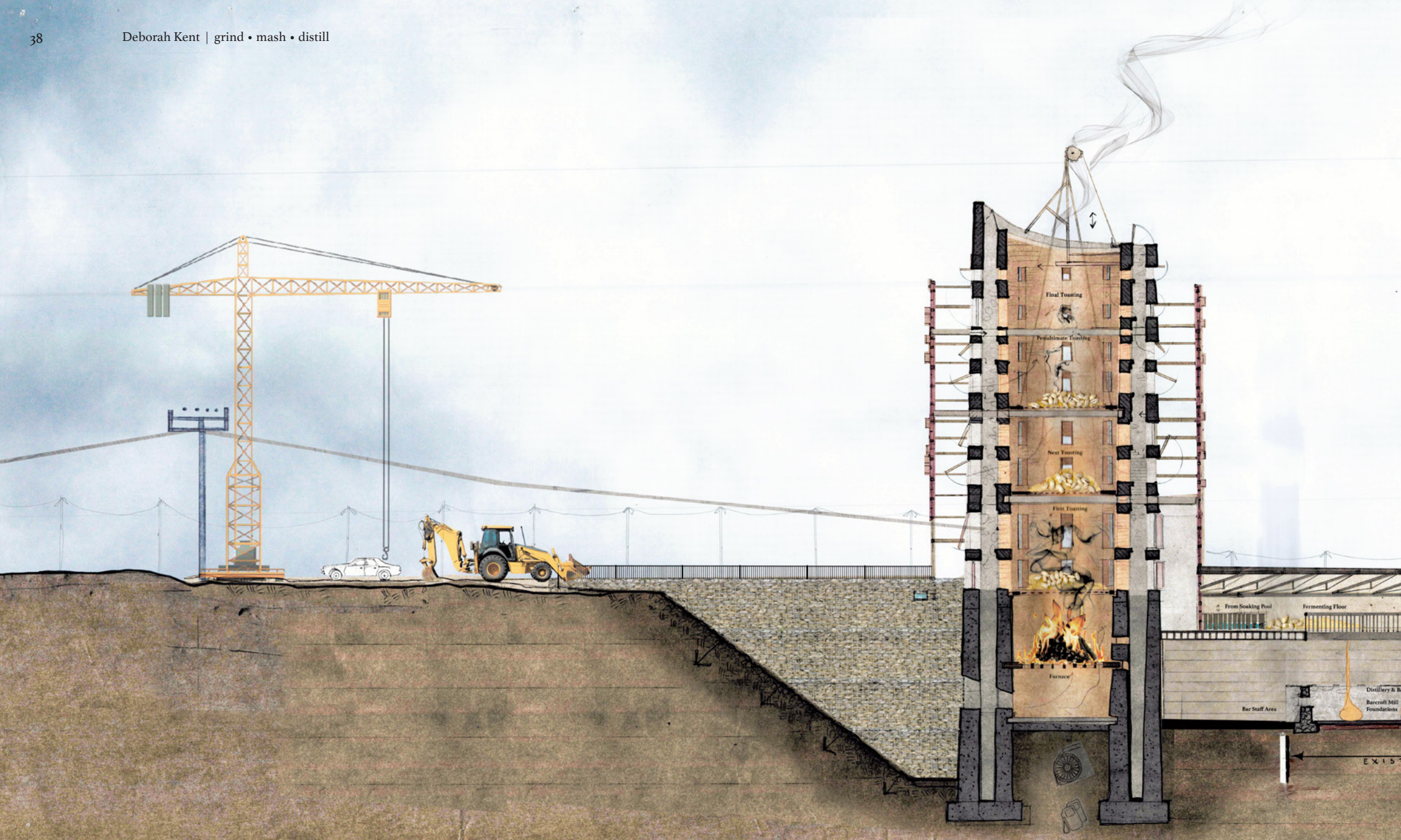
### PHASE I: FIRST FLOOR

The Maltings and Distillery are in operation, the stream-side Tasting Room producing revenue for the possible future embassy and the 7/11 serving those passing by on their way to the Streetcar stop. An extension of the mill run is brought to the south bank, to form a pool where the barley is soaked. It is then

fermented in a cool place with concrete floor, passed through to a drying floor, and finally toasted at several levels of heat before being ground. The parking lot of the demolished previous 7/11 is used for Distillery Staff and a walkway along the Tasting Room Columns links the neighborhood to Columbia Pike.







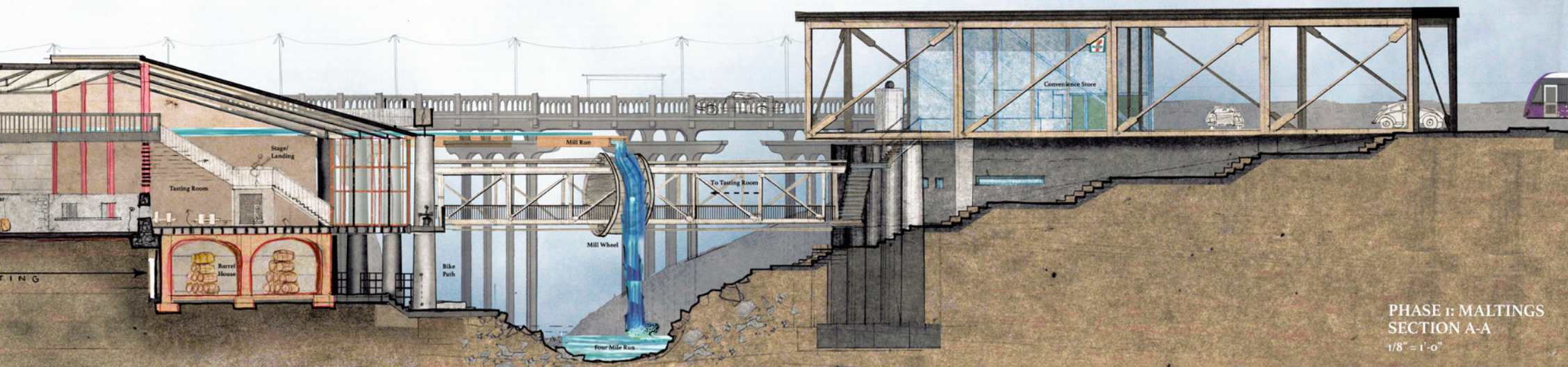
### PHASE 1: SECTION

The Malting tower is a massive structure, with inner layer of brick, and an outer skin of stone rubble, with lime render and limewash. To achieve the necessary heat variations for toasting the barley, the tower holds frames of wood with mesh, which are winched up and down, supported by beams which slide in and out. Window openings with shutters allow for adjustable air flow.

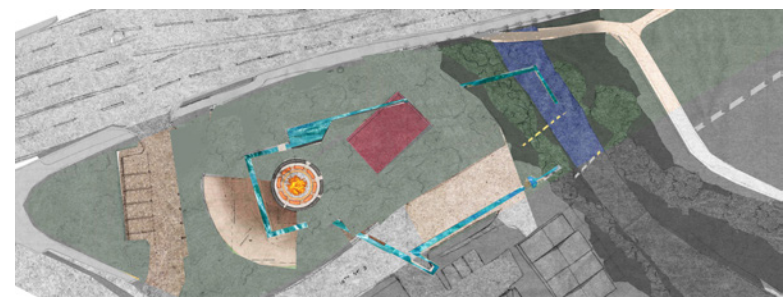
Excavation to the east provides an updraught, as well as being the initial move in the construction of the Embassy's underground parking lot. The grindstone and distilling equipment are housed in the still-existing foundation of the old mill, forming a division in space and directing the placement of the beams above, but not acting structurally.

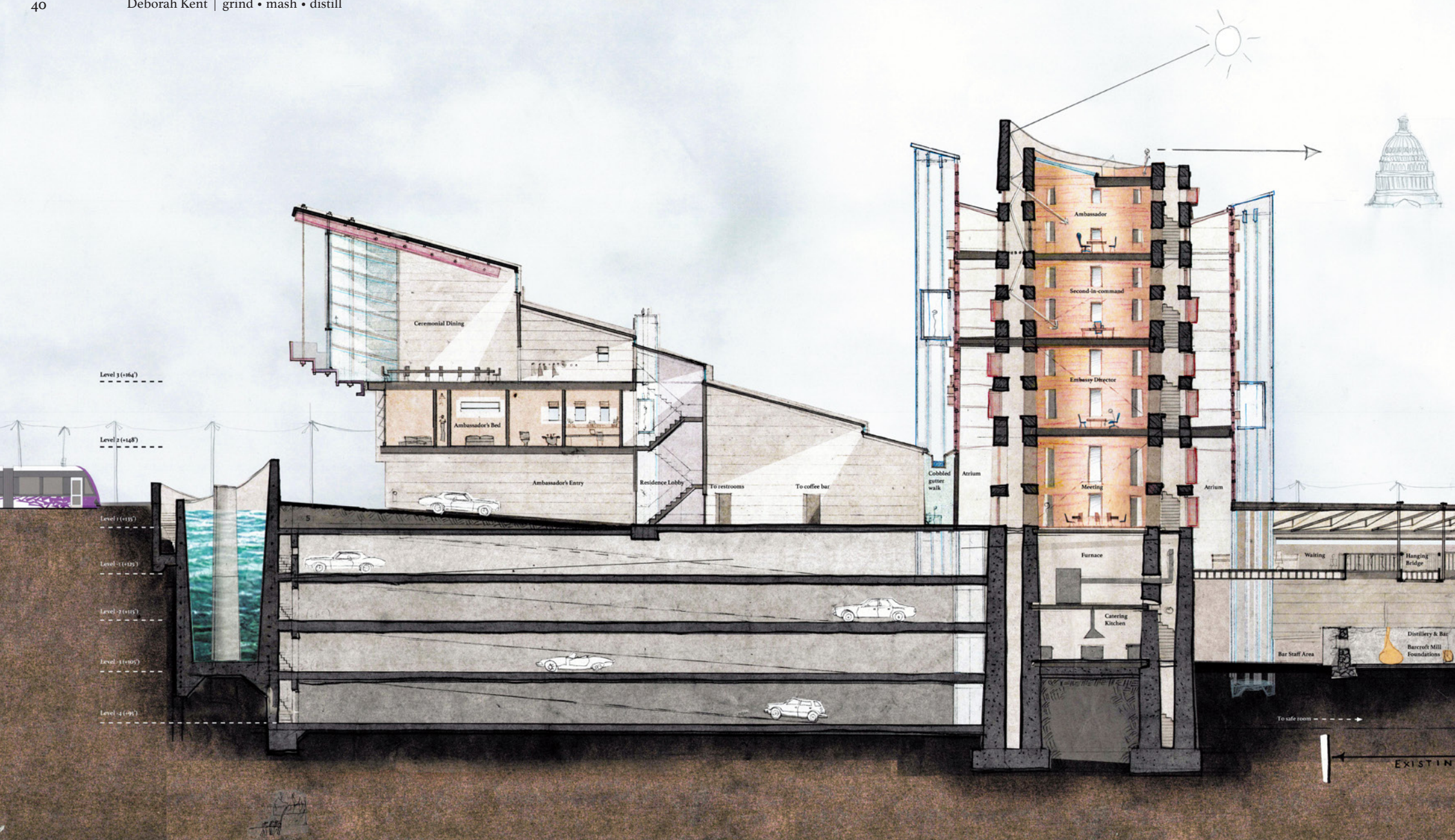






PHASE I: MALTINGS  
SECTION A-A  
1/8" = 1'-0"





## PHASE 2: SECTION

If an embassy is required, the malting function ceases, and the barley is brought to the site ready malted. The above ground soaking, fermenting and toasting stop, turn into the passport services where people are brought in,

Most of the offices of the embassy are grouped on the first floor with mezzanine second floors toward some of the outside of the site. The ambassador's house is nestled up on the 2nd and 3rd floors, the ceremonial dining room projecting out past the supporting wall.

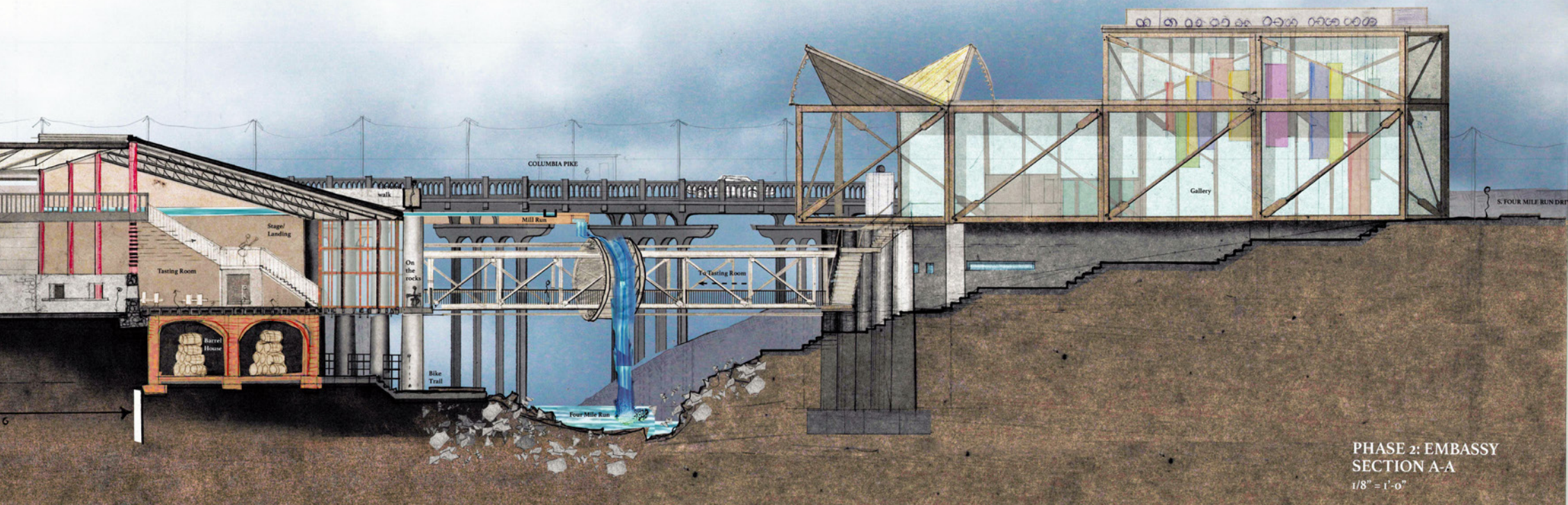
The moat is extended to encircle the site, and in memory of the barley, people cross this water as the first stage in entering the building. The kiln spaces, where the most intense, climactic part of the malting process took place, become executive offices, with the Ambassador at top and her deputies below.

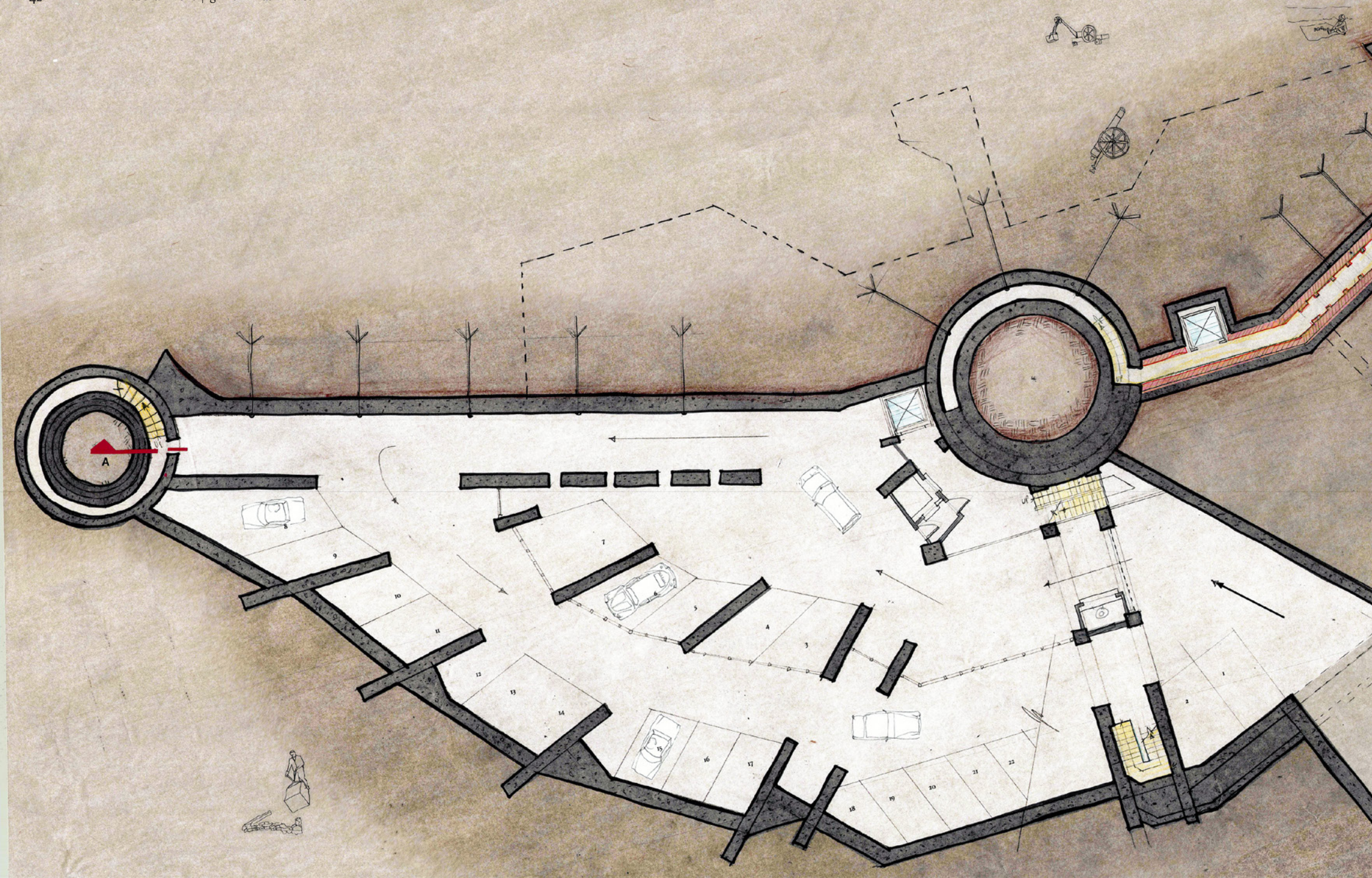
During the 7 or more years that the building is used as a maltings, preparations would be taking place for this diplomatic use; the tower walls would be toasted; the floor of the fermenting room would acquire raking

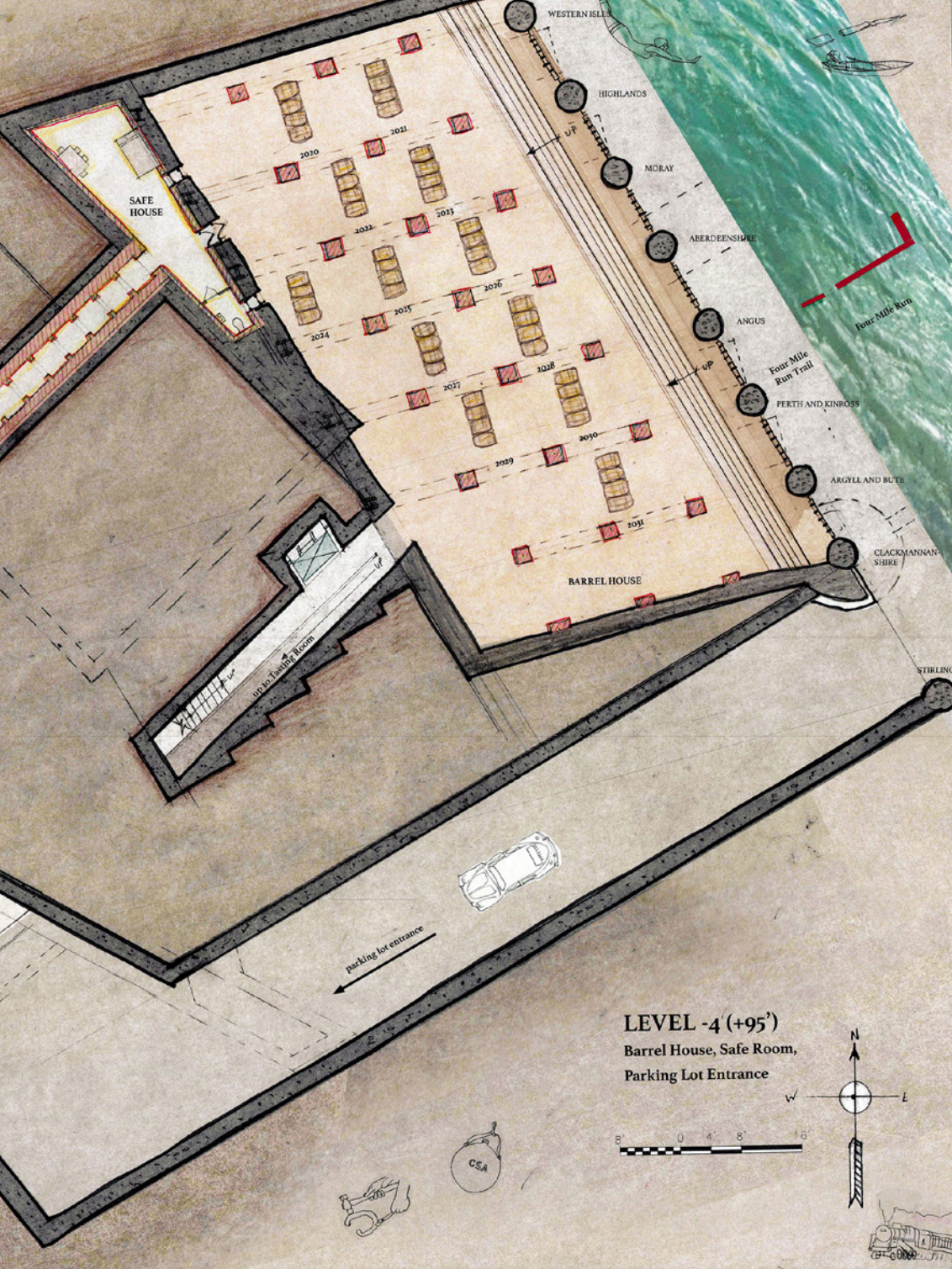
patterns which might suggest where to put rows of chairs in its new use as the waiting room. In the offices, shelves are placed in the grooves formerly used as toasting racks- all over, the building is imbued with a certain wisdom, having been tempered through use.

The 'high road' and 'low road' of embassy and tasting room meet visually over the mezzanine, and occasionally this link would be made physical by stairs which slide out and form a ceremonial route from the heart of the embassy out to the tasting room.





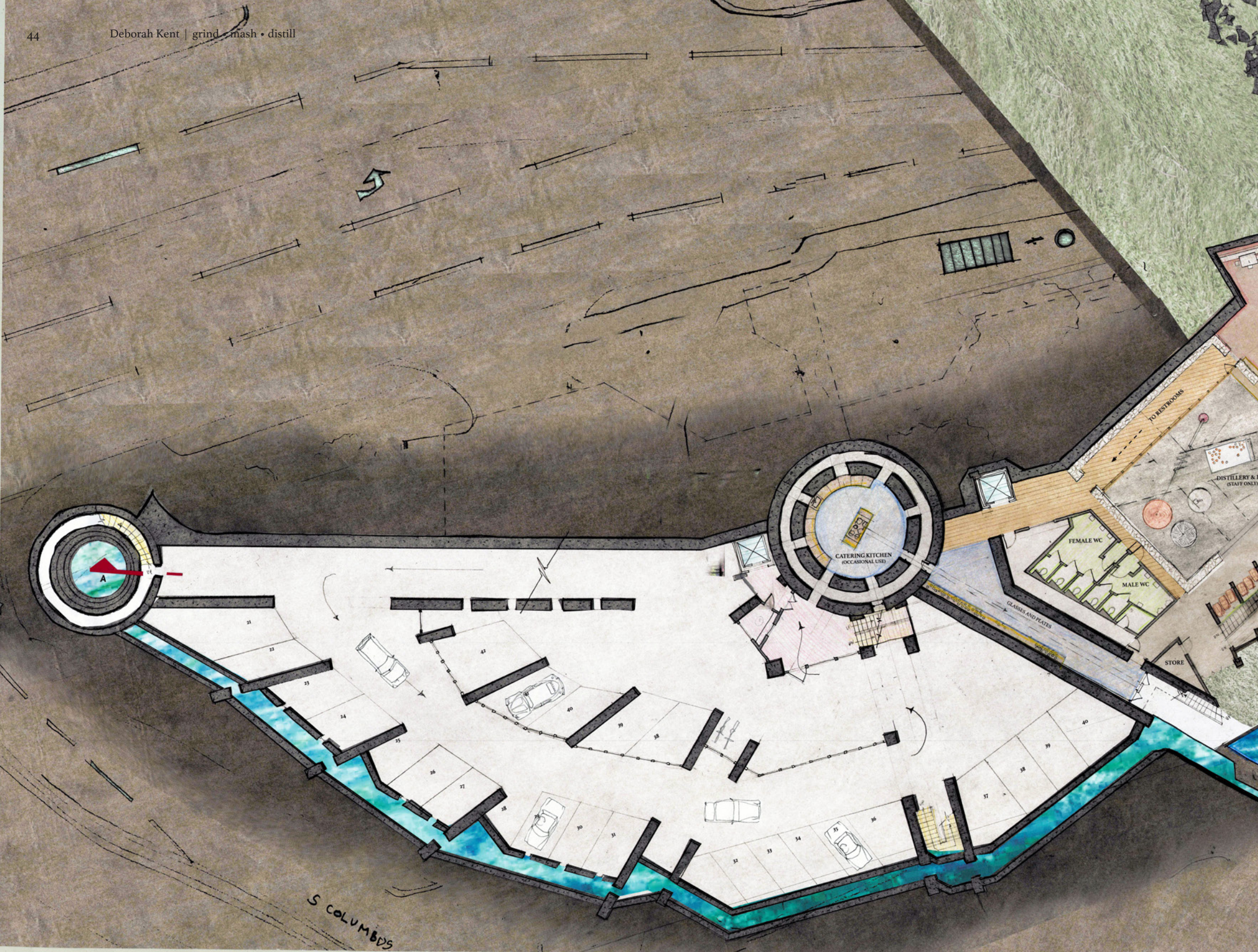




#### PHASE 2: LEVEL -4

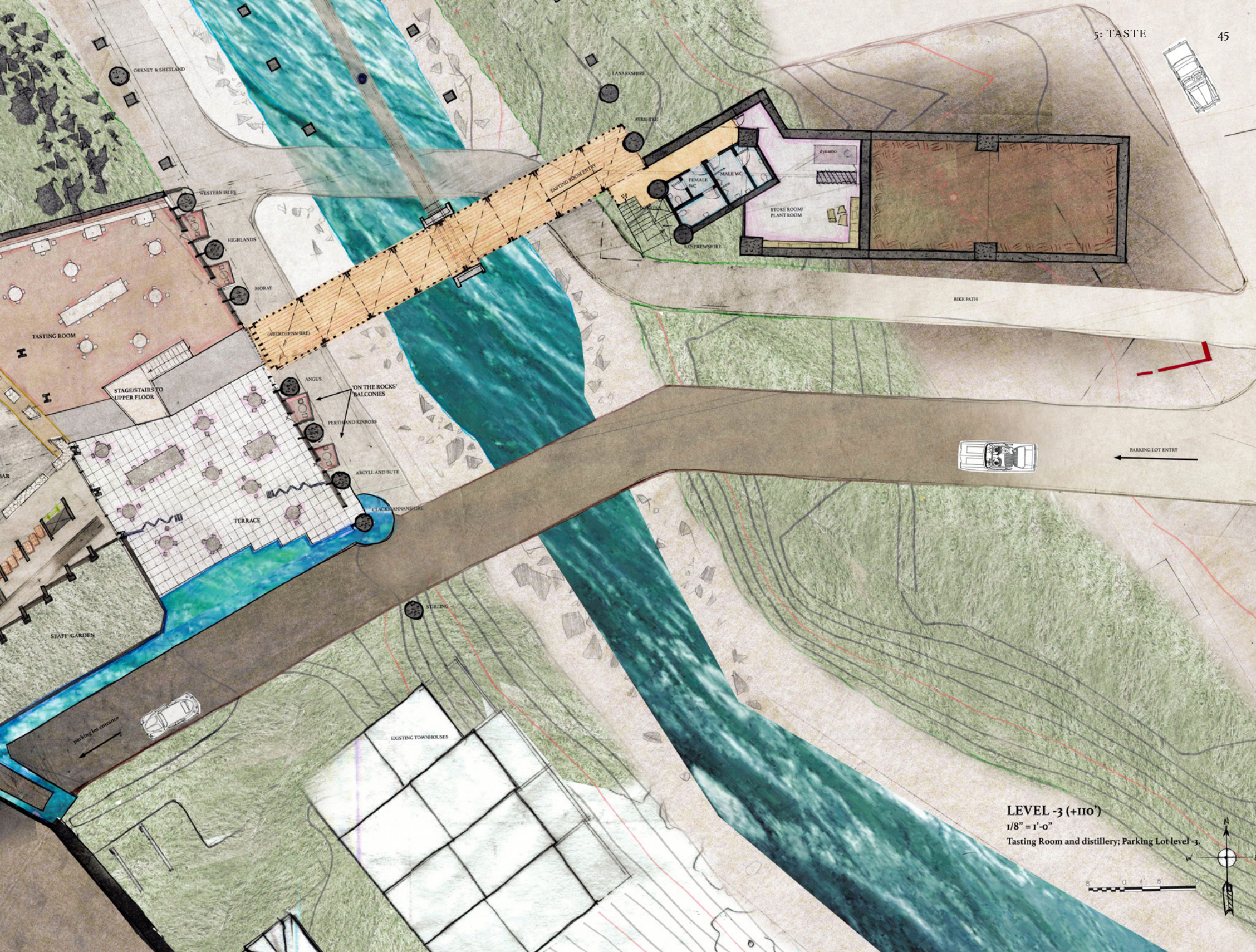
The barrels sit quietly beside the water, visible from the bicycle trail but protected by an iron fence. A hidden 'panic room' for the Ambassador is nestled behind the barrel house, and accessed via a brick-lined passageway passing under and behind the historic Mill foundation.

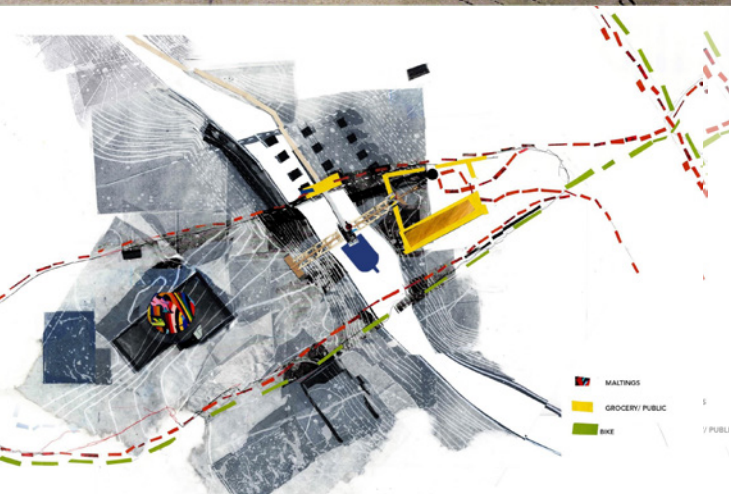
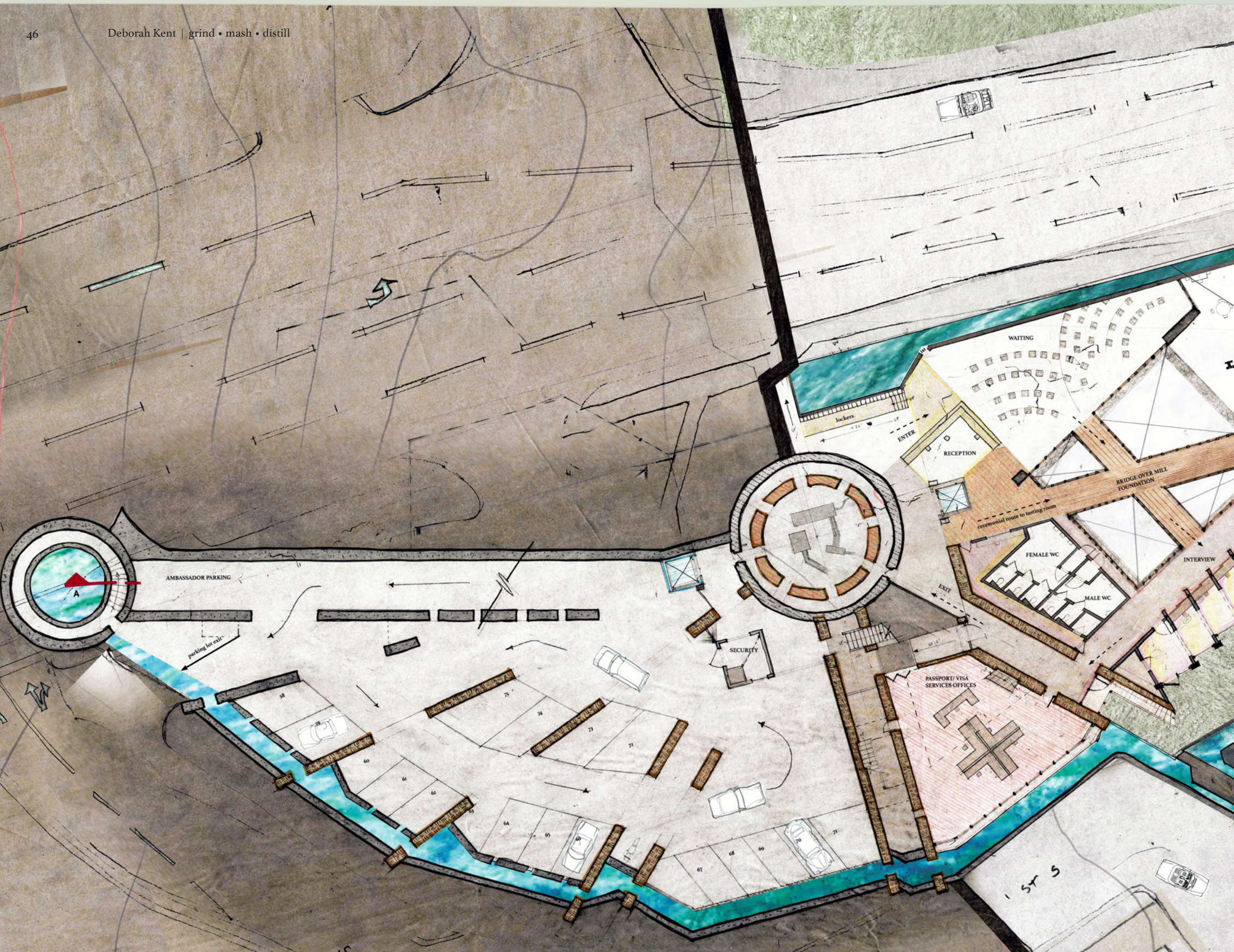




### PHASE 2: LEVEL -2

The Tasting Room, accessed via footbridge from the north bank, abuts the historic mill foundation, the windows of which serve as the bar. 'On the rocks' balconies allow the sound and sight of the stream to become part of the whisky tasting experience, and an outdoor terrace meets the moat just before it discharges back into the stream.

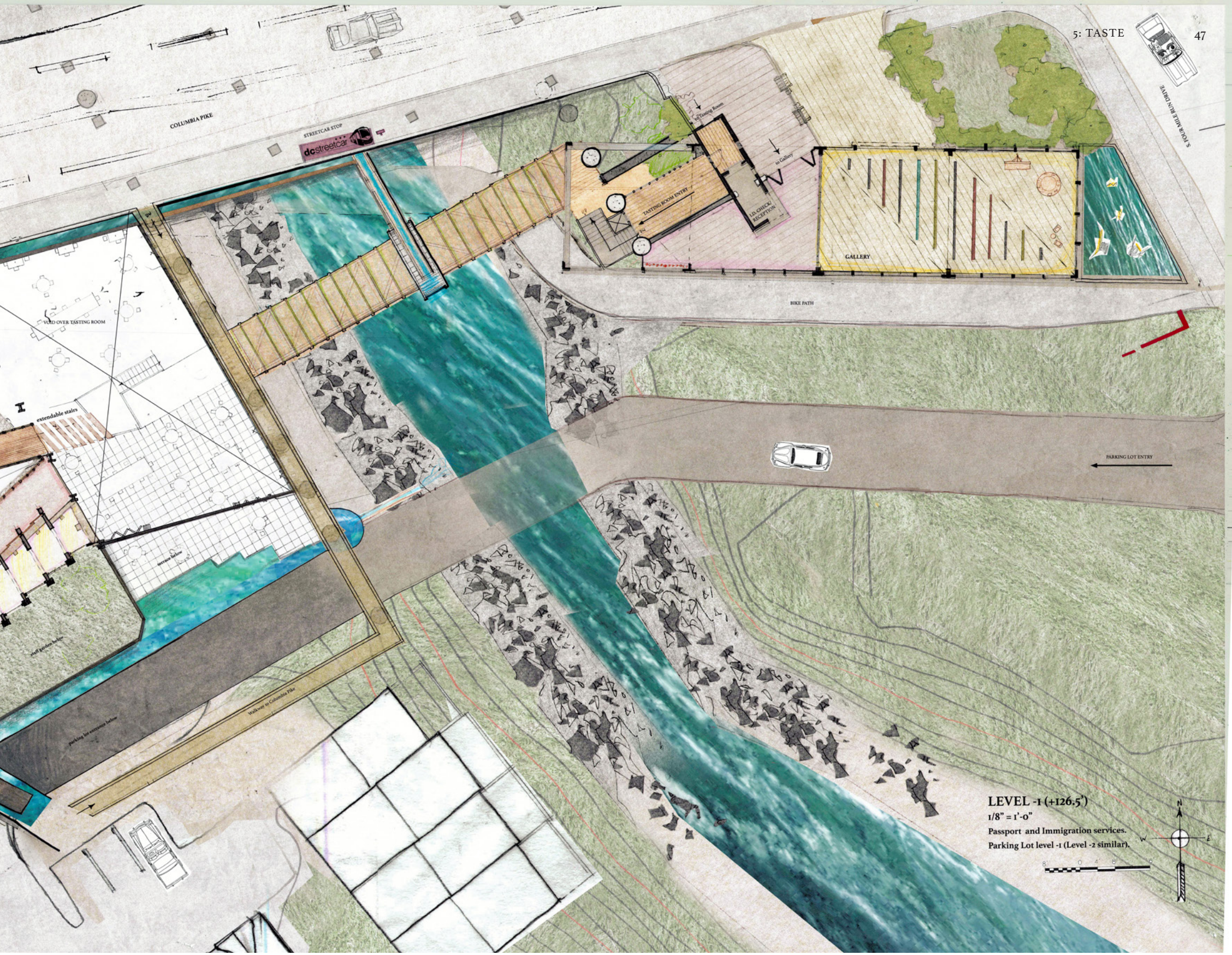




## PHASE 2: LEVEL -1

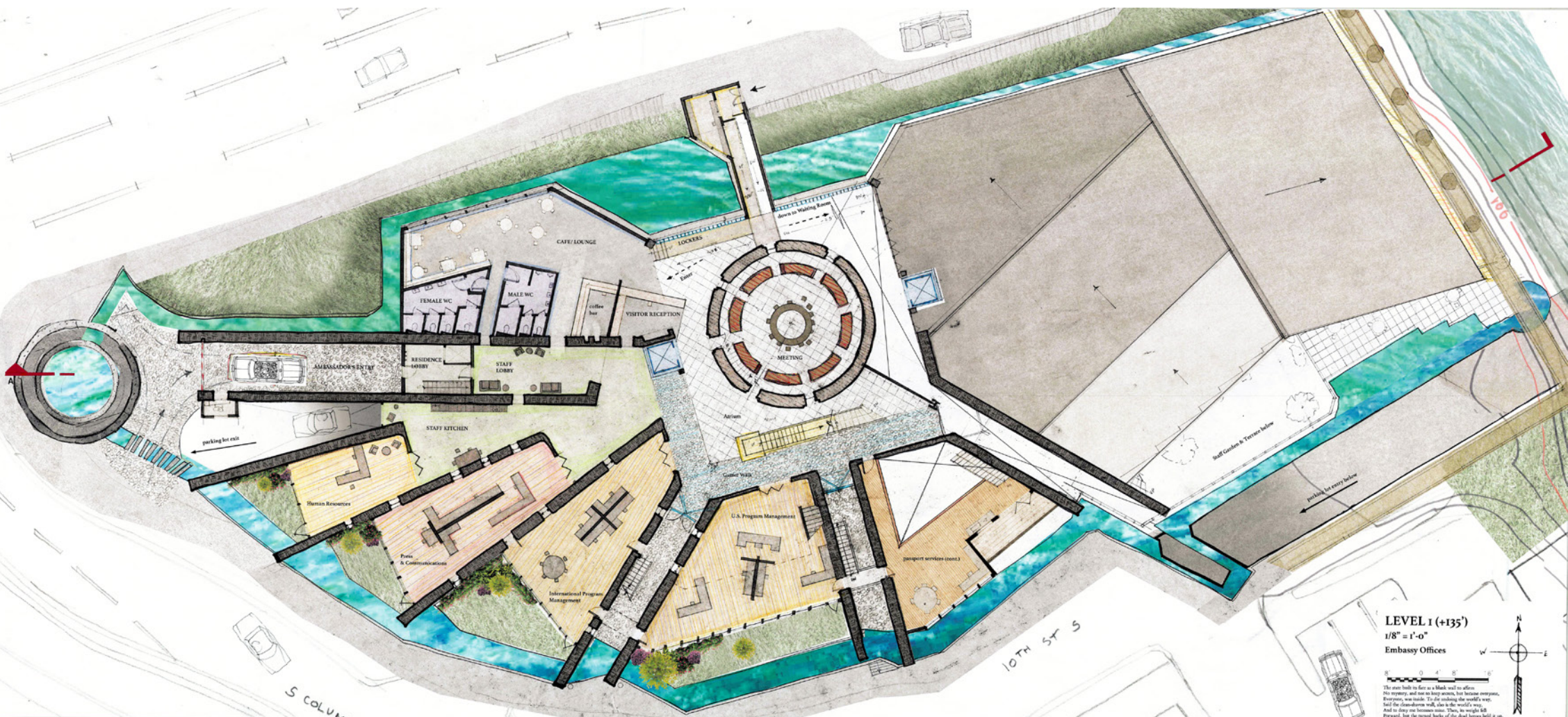
The former fermenting and drying spaces become the Passport and Visa services. A hanging bridge spans over the historic mill foundation below.





**LEVEL -1 (+126.5')**  
 1/8" = 1'-0"  
 Passport and Immigration services.  
 Parking Lot level -1 (Level -2 similar).

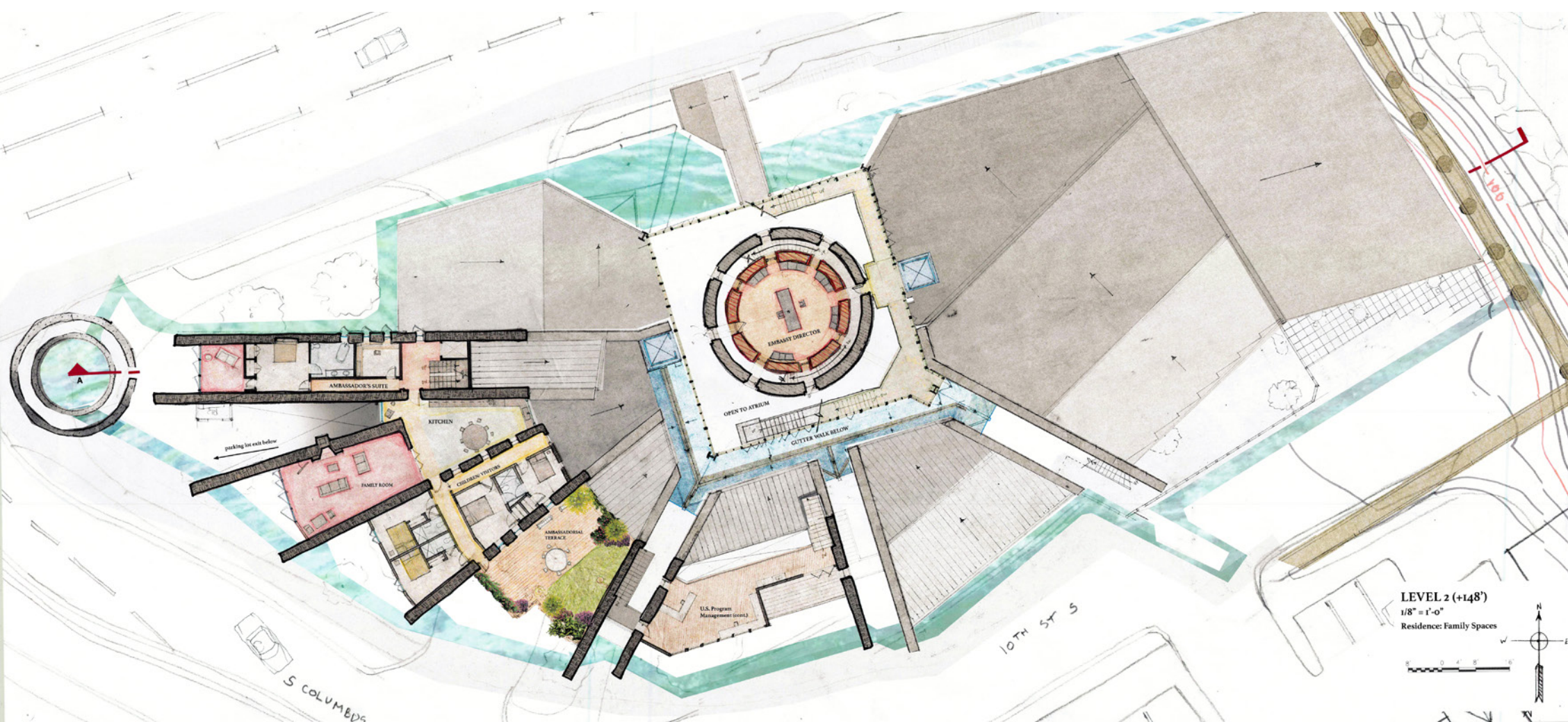




## PHASE 2: LEVEL 1

Embassy offices nestle within the rammed earth radial walls, some with mezzanine levels above. The Ambassador's private entrance at the eastern end is protected by a deep pool at the lowest point of the moat.

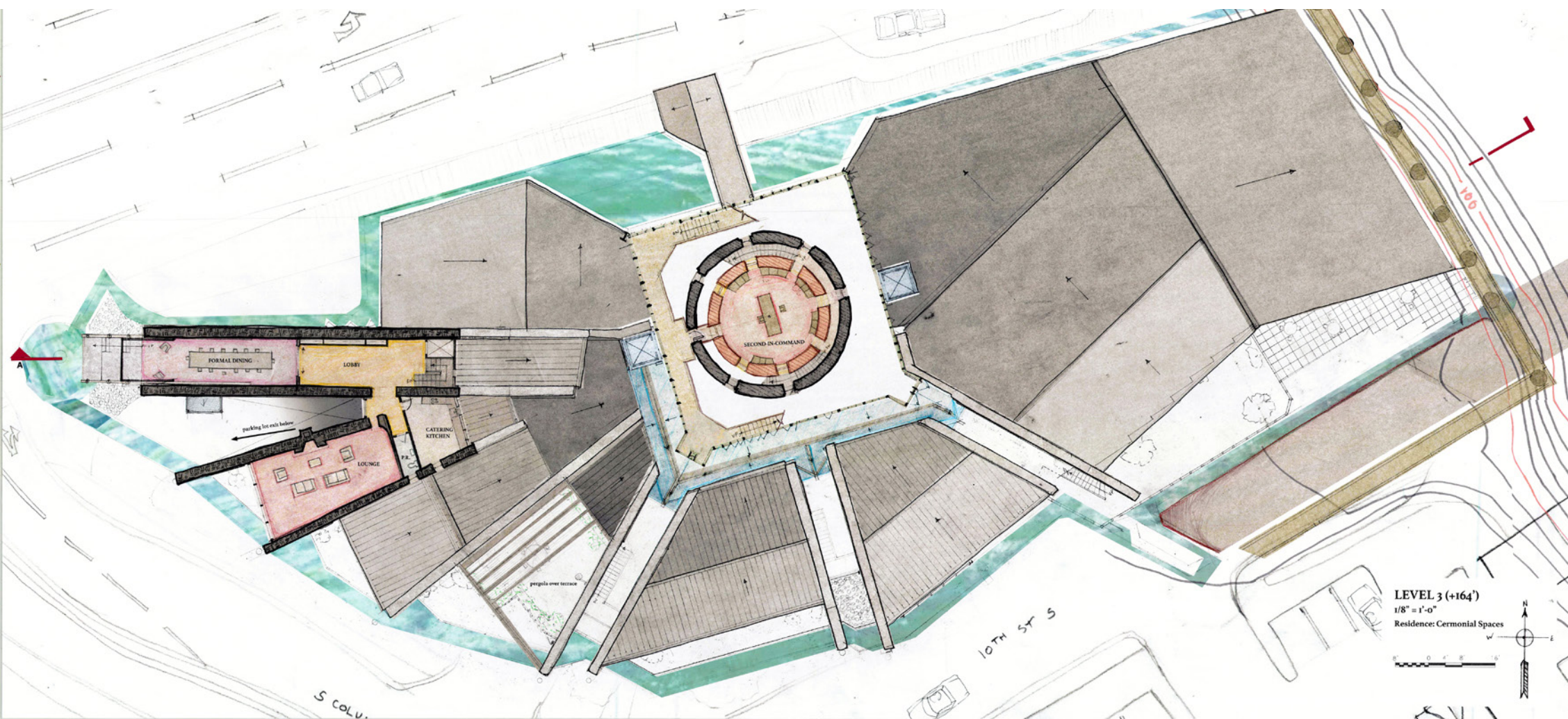




### PHASE 2: LEVEL 2

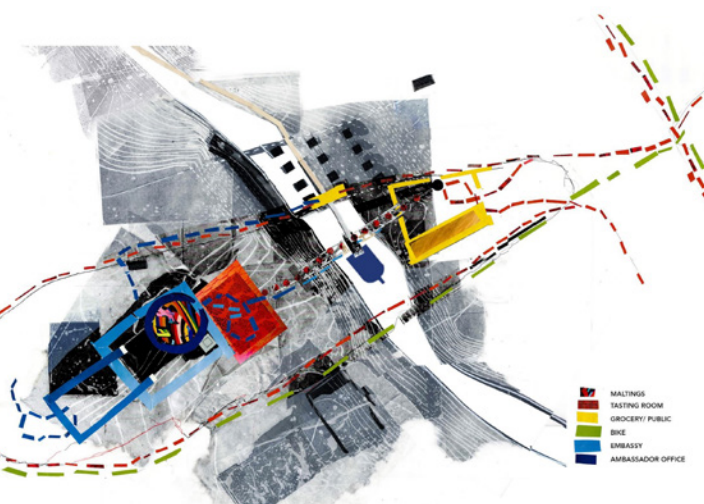
The Ambassador's Residence slots into the protected spaces on the quieter, southern edge of the site, with the Master Suite separated from Columbia Pike by the northernmost rammed earth wall, punctured with shuttered windows.

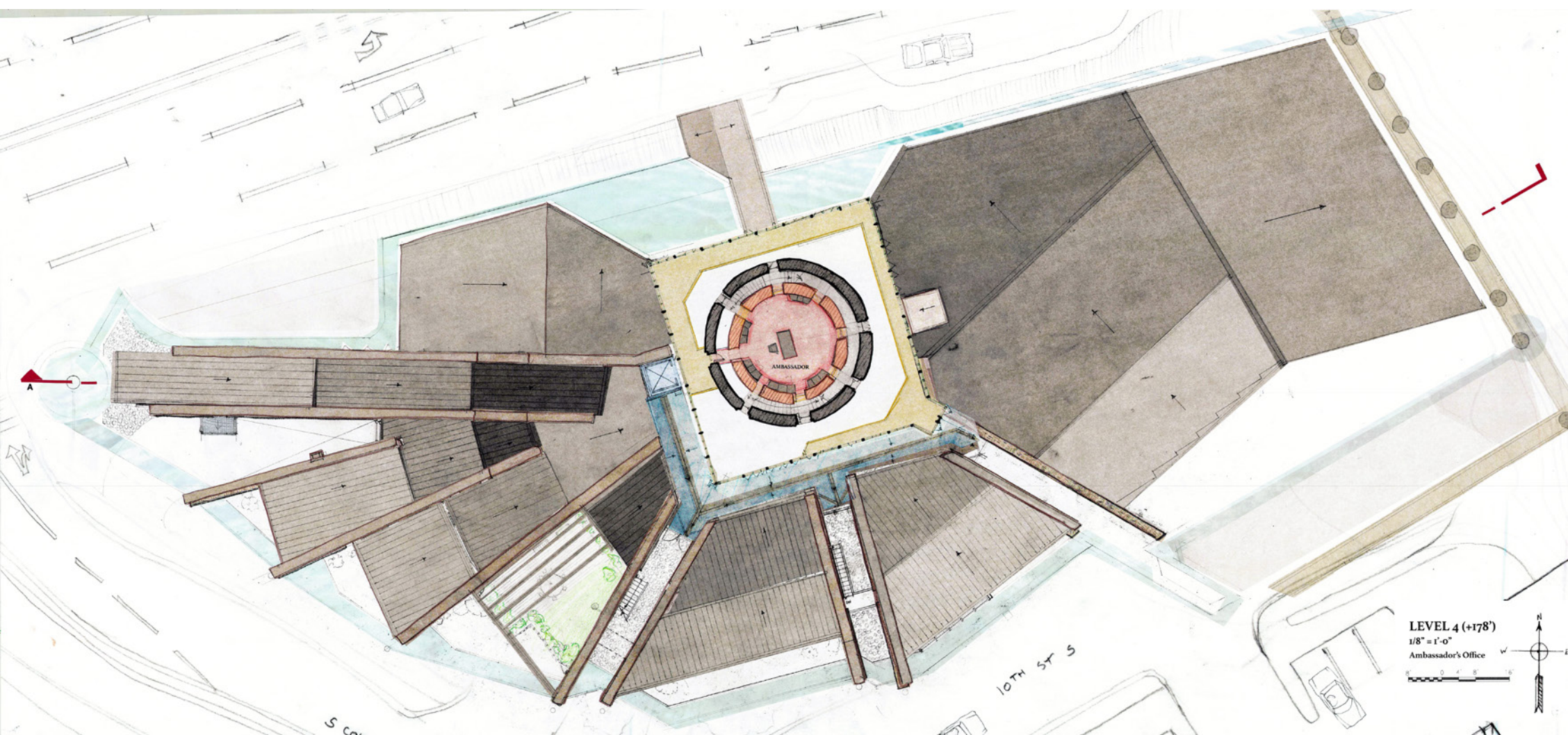




### PHASE 2: LEVEL 3

Diplomatic entertaining spaces perch high between the thick walls, the dining room distinguishing itself by being the only room extended beyond the end of the walls.

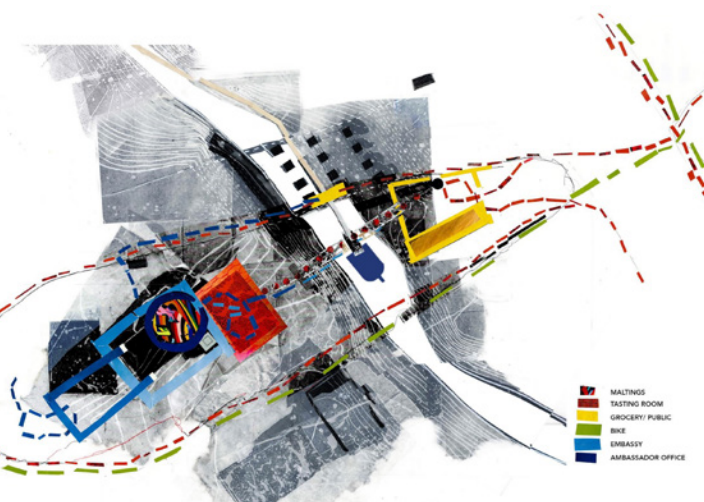


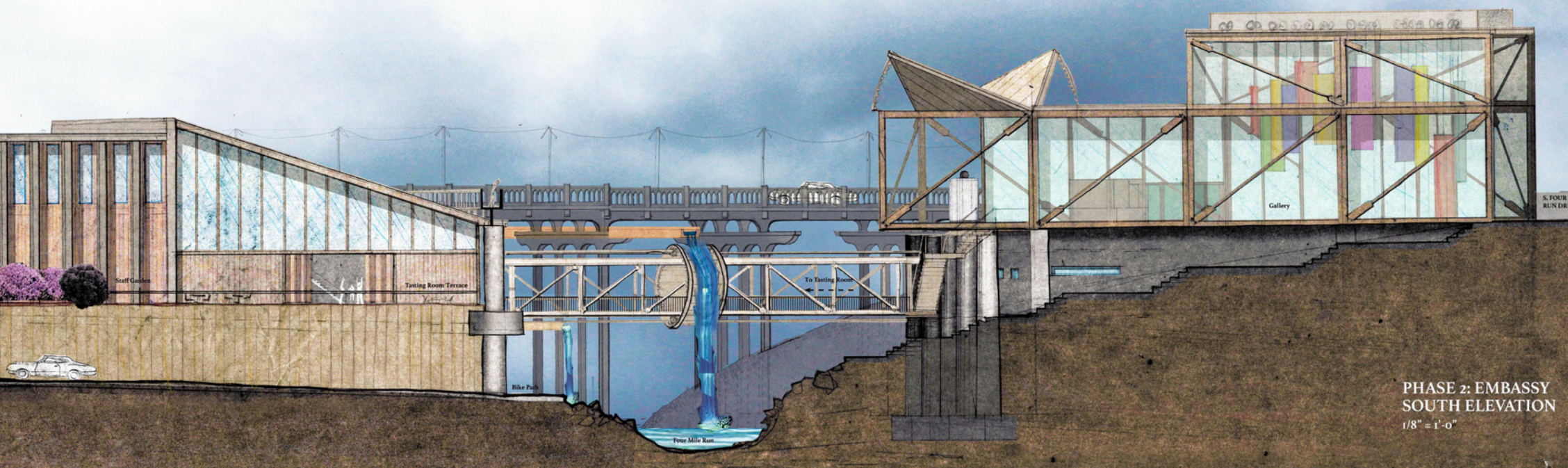


#### PHASE 2: LEVEL 4

The Ambassador's office, accessed either via the meandering Atrium staircase or the hidden spiral stair, overlooks the rooftops of the embassy offices.



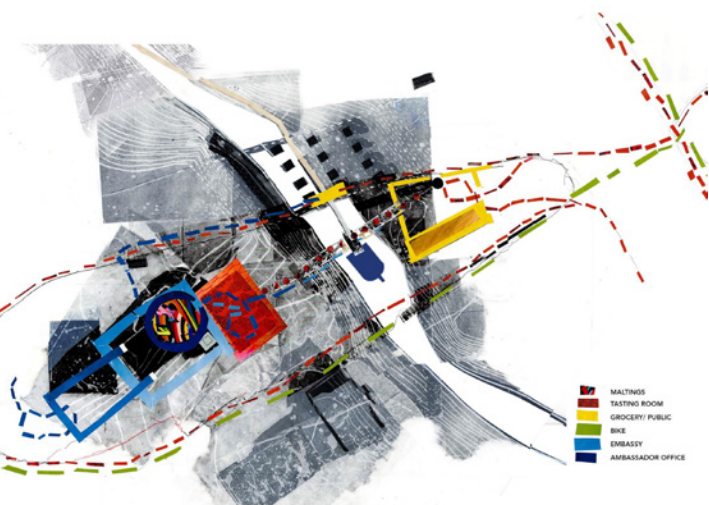




## SOUTH ELEVATION

In its second and 'fullest' phase, the various parts of the building find their ultimate calling and intercommunication. The former 7/11, now the Embassy Gallery, nods across the stream to the tower, and funnels people in to the tasting room, via the footbridge. The division between Embassy Offices and the distillery/tasting room is subtly signalled by a shift in roof forms and facade layout, the walls leaving their radial organization and instead following the line of the historic mill foundation.



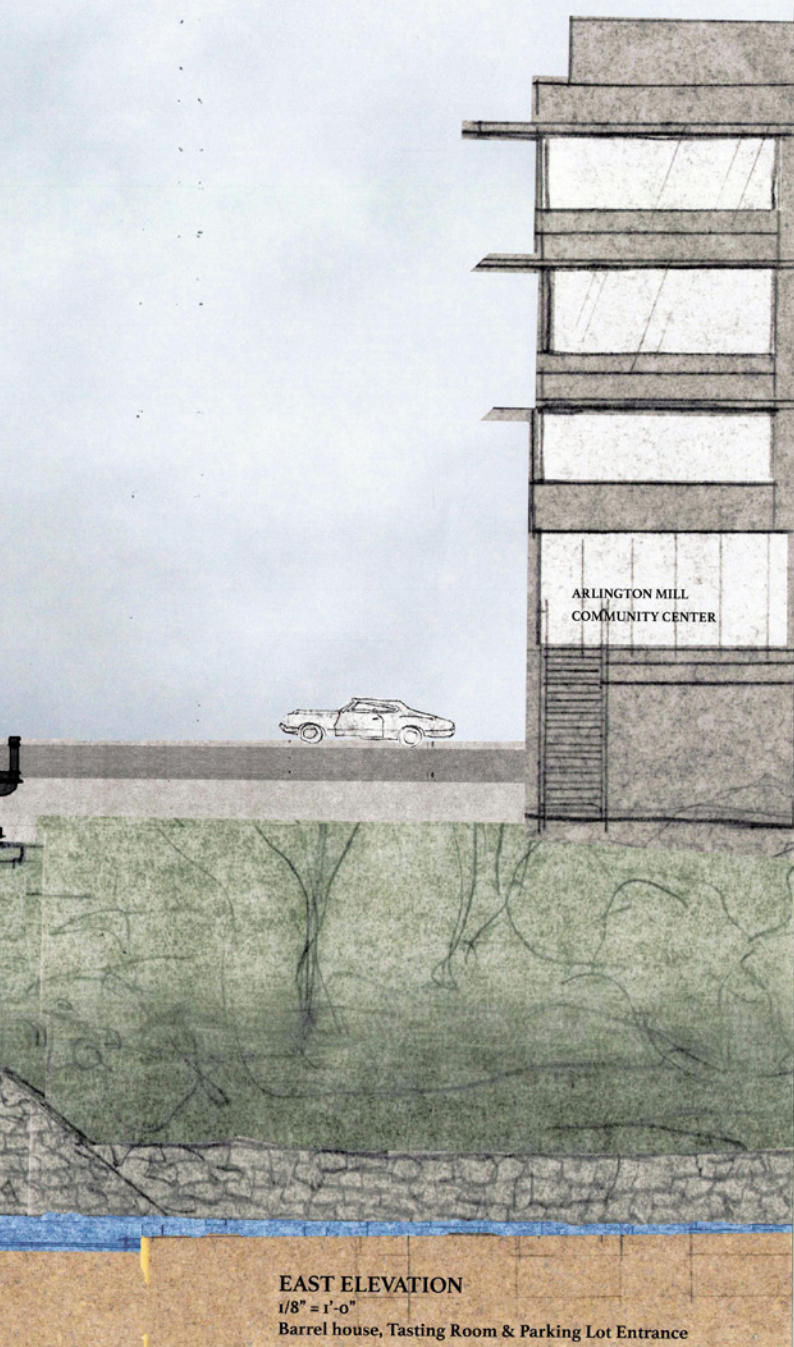


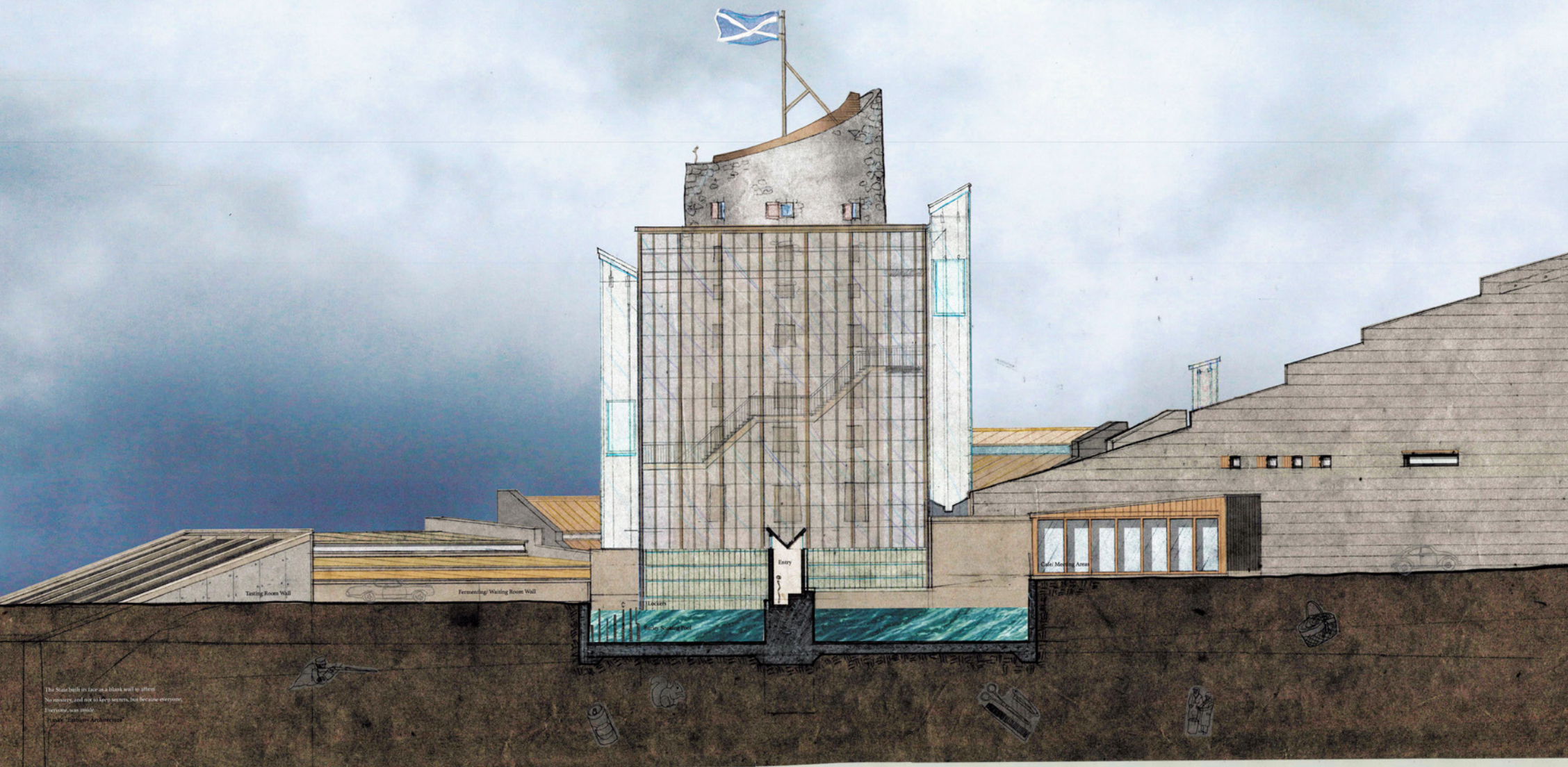


## EAST ELEVATION

From the Four Mile Run, marching columns, each representing a Scottish County, and collectively harkening to the incomplete Scottish Monument, form the facade of the Tasting Room and continue under the bridge, reinforcing it for the new weight of the Streetcar.

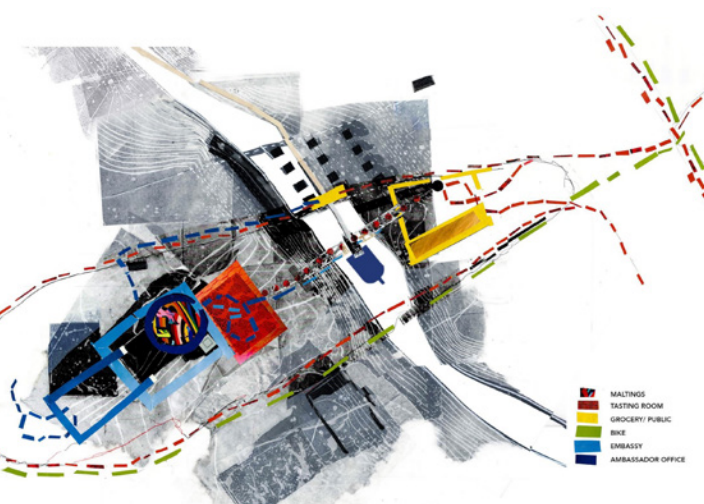
A car, having splashed across the forded access road, enters the parking lot, and the mill run/ moat discharges alongside, rejoining the water to its original source.

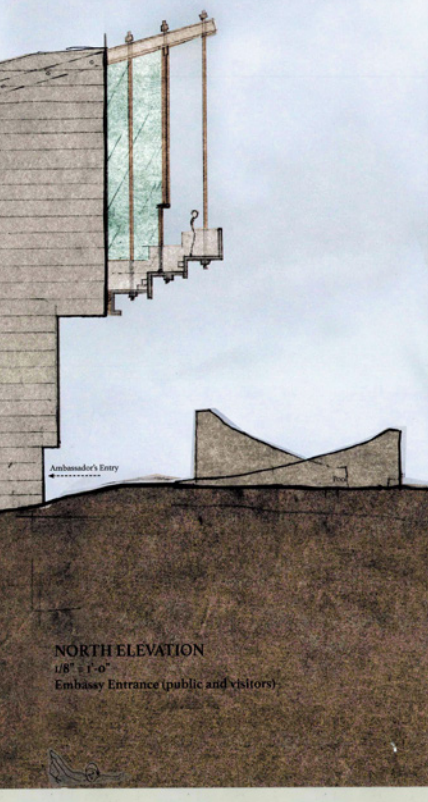




## NORTH ELEVATION

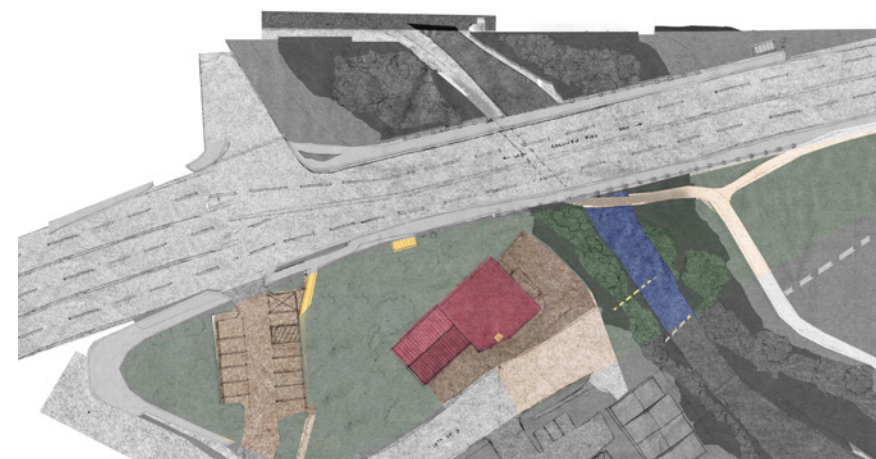
An austere facade meets the main thoroughfare of Columbia Pike, where a sentry box is the first point of contact for those entering the Embassy.

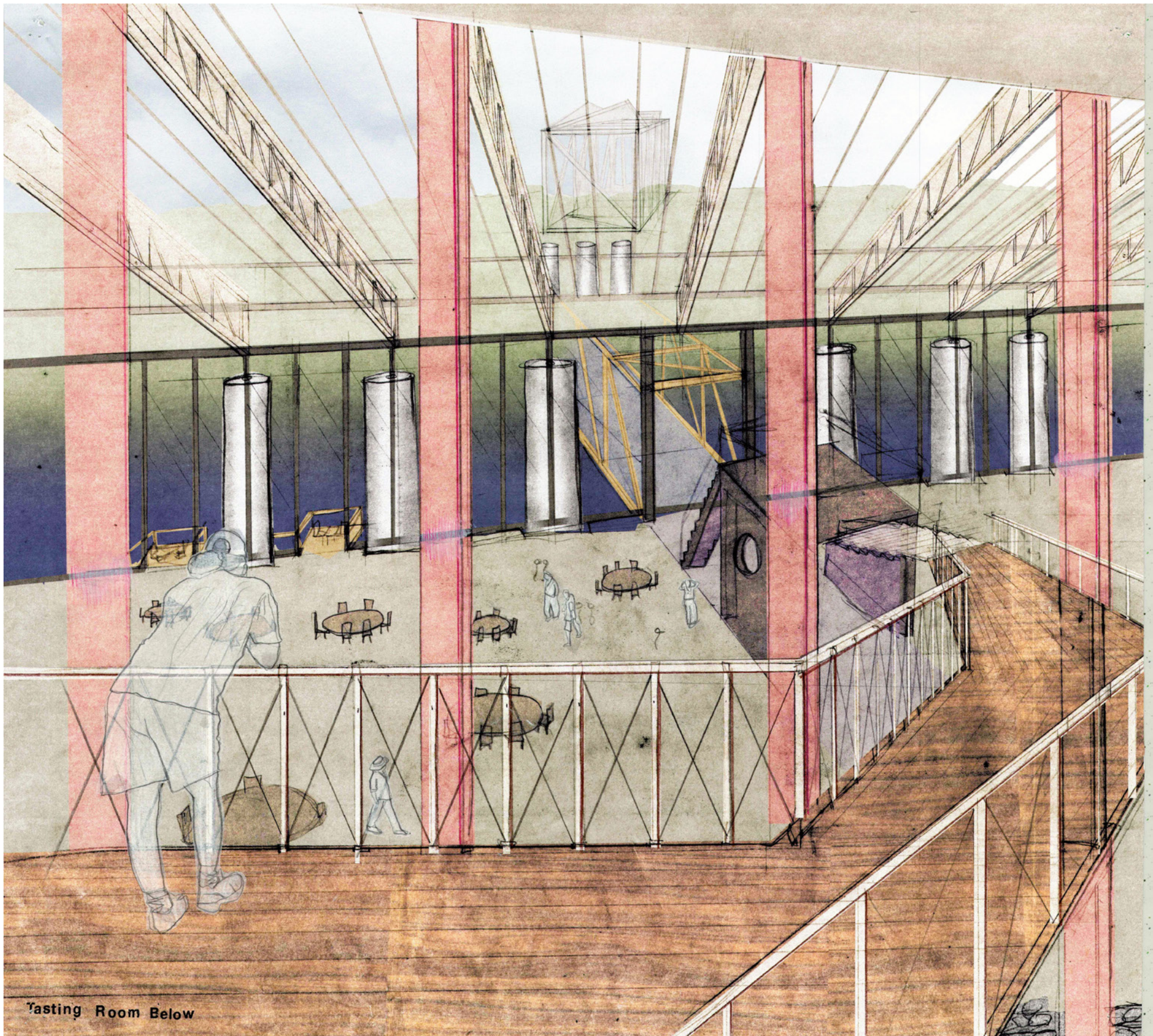




## WEST ELEVATION

Approaching from the east on Columbia Pike, the radial walls cluster around the tower, with the Ambassador's dining room projecting out overhead.

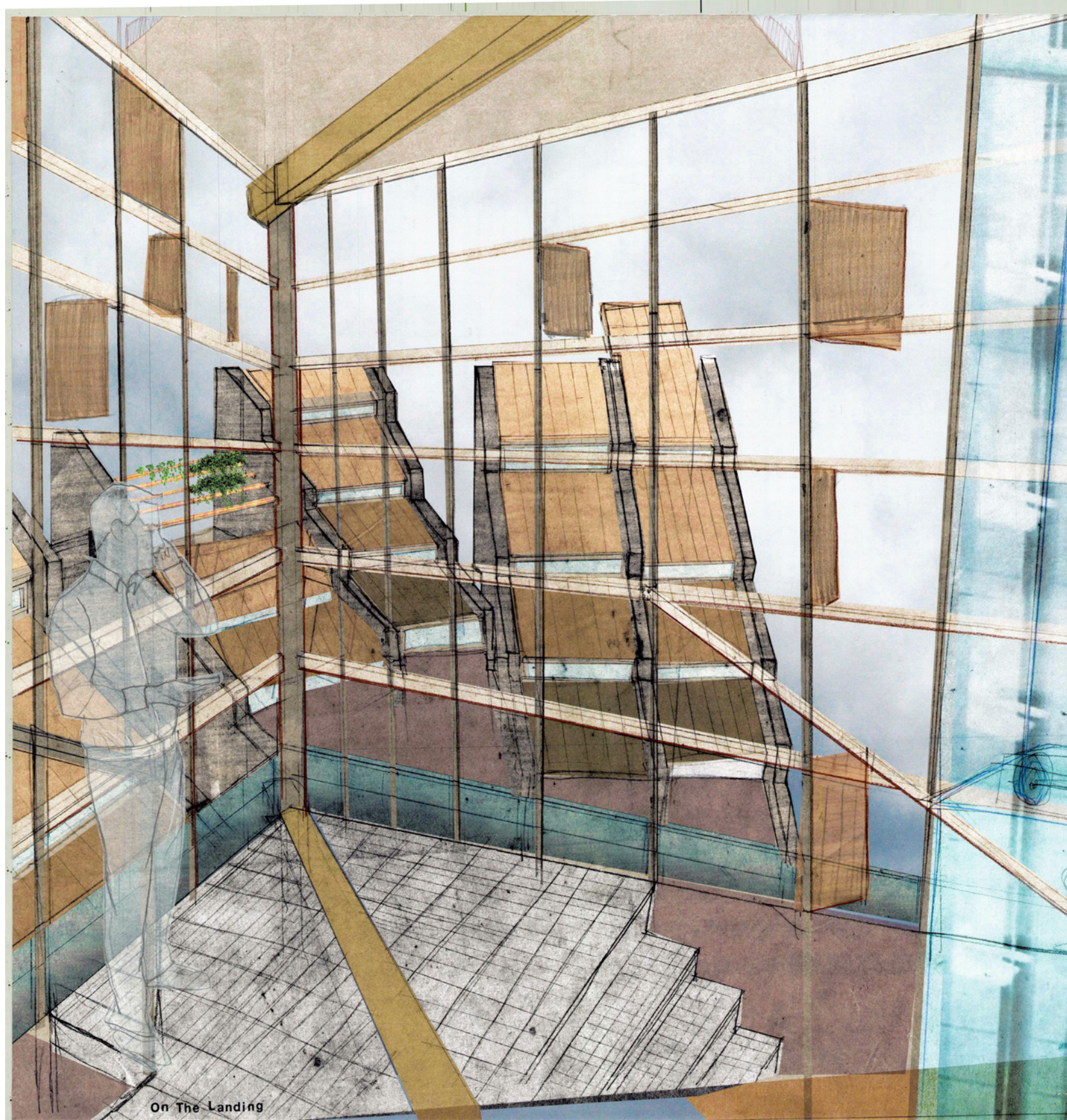




Tasting Room Below

## TASTING ROOM BELOW

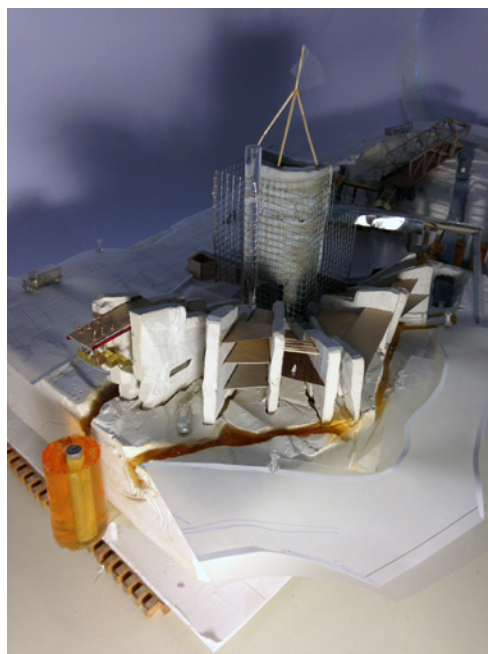
As he waits for his number to be called in the Passport and Visa Center, a gentleman gazes longingly down to the whisky-fuelled gaiety, which can be seen but not accessed (except on special occasions).



On The Landing

#### ON THE LANDING

The Deputy Ambassador pauses halfway up to his office to answer a phonecall, idly surveying the roofs of the offices below from the vantage point of the Atrium Staircase.

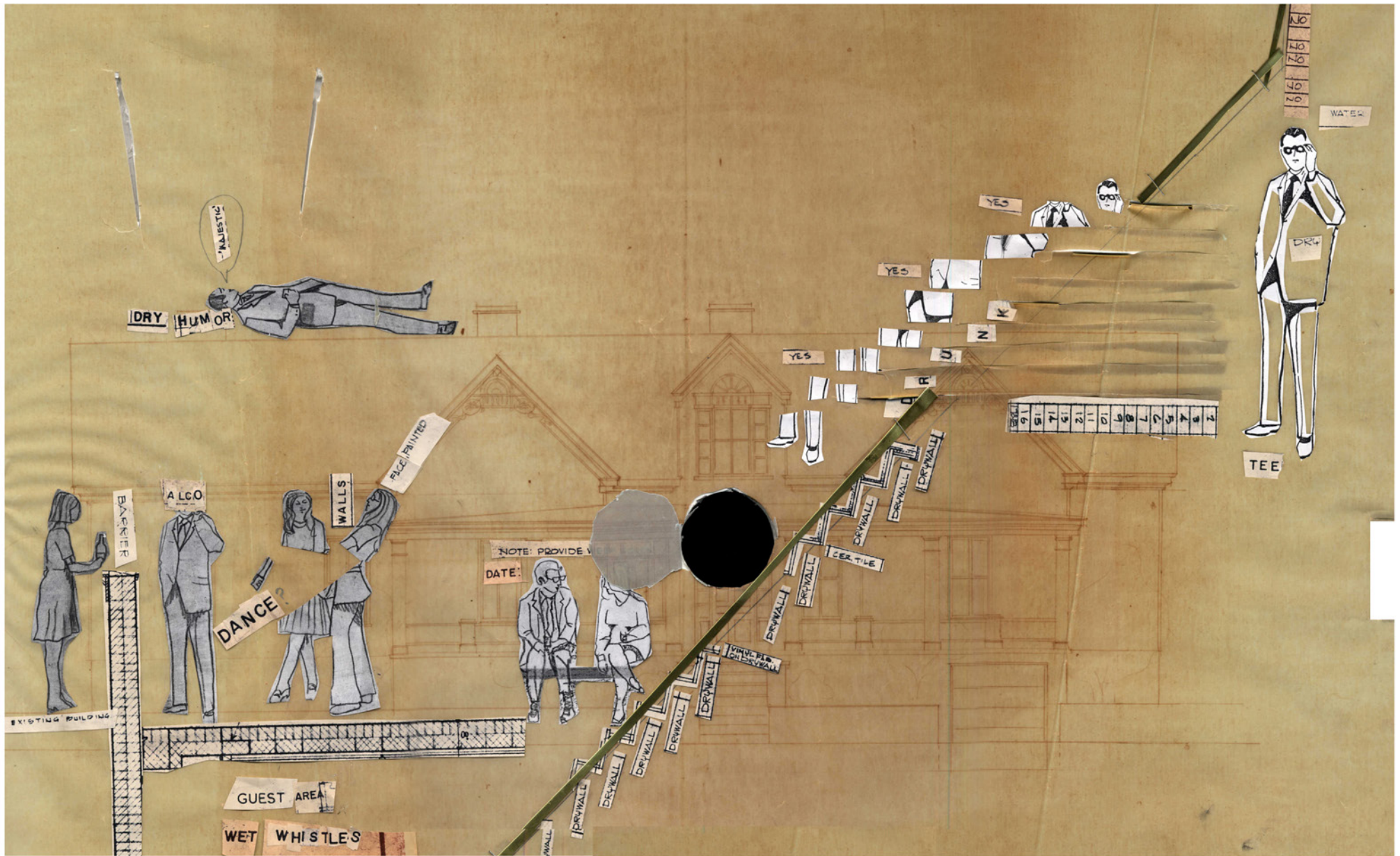


## MODEL 6: WHISKY RIVER

Plaster, card, wood, whisky jelly.

“When a place grows, and things are added to it, gradually, being shaped as they get added, to help form larger patterns, the place also remains whole at every stage...it leaves no mistakes : because the gaps get filled, the small things that are wrong are gradually corrected, and finally, the whole is so smooth and relaxed, that it will seem as though it had been forever. It has no roughness about it, it simply lies there stretched out in time.”

*-The Timeless Way of Building,*  
Christopher Alexander



## ADDENDUM: A BESTIARY

Certain areas within the building were subject to a more detailed analysis as part of a separate class taught by Berrin Terrim and Jodi La Coe in Spring, 2015. Each drawing involves a communication between Recto and Verso, and each is based around an elemental theme; Dry, Cold, Damp and Hot.





## D R Y

[Dry cough] In Arlington, Columbia Pike. Flowing under Columbia Pike, the Four Mile Run (it is not dry, but drier than before). Beside the stream is Danny's Auto Repair Shop [Danny dries his hands on a rag and goes home to dry humor from his wife]. Under Danny's Auto Repair, we are told, we read, local wisdom states, are the foundations of the wise ancient Mill which first (first? Native tents stood here? Wild boar scratched in the dust?) stood on this land. The first structure, at least, accepted as valid and permanent. Dry ground, as it were, in a sea of wilderness. It remained through many owners, a war, floods, a fire started

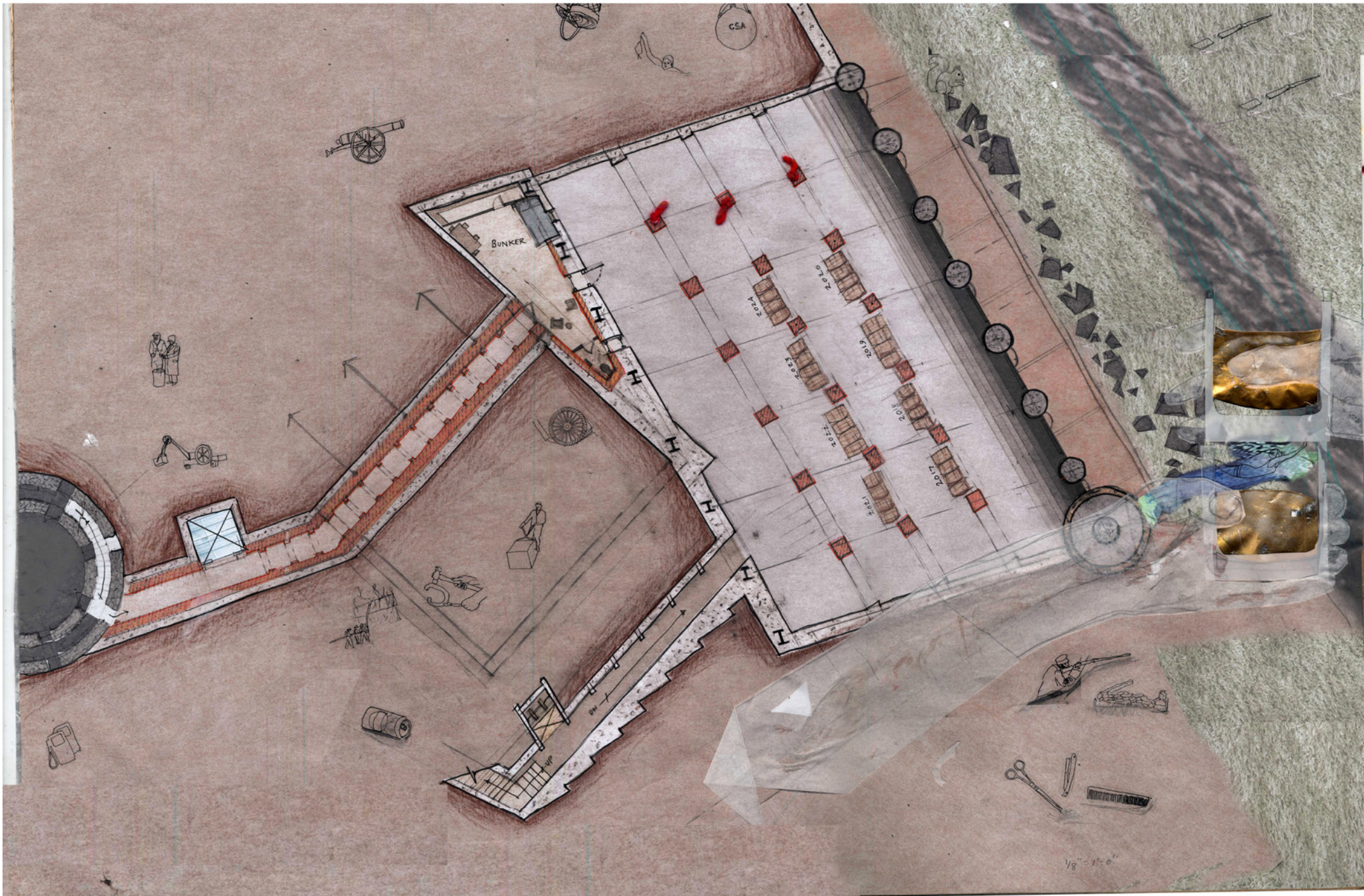
by sparks from the nearby Washington & Old Dominion Railway, and an accident beginning with a young boy climbing, fearless, on the wheel.

After this worrying, but not deadly, incident, local love for the Mill dwindled so far that the building was dismantled, following in the fate of the old bridge which spanned to its south side, now replaced by the beast of the new, more direct, concrete bridge to the north. The foundation remained, however (was this due to laziness or a sense of respect?) and has formed the literal base of all the buildings since constructed on the site.

This one is no exception; if not for the foundation there would be no distillery and bar, if not for the bar no customers, without the customers no drinking, no dry conversation, no tongues dry with burning alcohol, no profit, no prepared space for a glorious Scottish Embassy which will spring from the secretly prepared site. [Dry laugh] Well THAT's not very likely, is it?

But here it is, in apparent technicolour—the odd togetherness and separation of two worlds, above the stairs or under them; under the control of passport officers and a ticking clock, or under the

spell of whisky and the beat of music. All on one page, you say? These worlds in section made bare, flat and manageable, here on this single sheet of card? Dry your tears of disappointment and pop the roundel in your eye. Lose all sense of yourself and decide carefully what to concentrate on. We can't see everything at once. It's all a blur. Carefully, carefully, see the stones of the old mill. The light stair slotted in above, the occasional link between worlds. See your own hands, and in them a glass with golden liquid, or perhaps a ticket stating "A20. Please take a seat and wait to be called."



## C O L D

In the damp, silent belly of the building, peeking out onto the Four Mile Run stream, barrels do the opposite of barreling; they lie on their rounded sides, their weight borne on each other and on a deck, warding off the cool damp rising from the brick mass underneath. The bricks would like to meet the earth from which they came, but are denied by the concrete middle man. The assemblage is halted mere feet from the stream by the marching, fat and authoritative columns whose simplicity lends itself

to multitasking: they bossily present themselves as a facade, as a crutch for the crumbling Columbia Pike Bridge (a World War 2 veteran), as the supports for a high line walkway, and beyond these practicalities, they salute the 'Shame of Scotland', a parthenonic monument in the middle of Edinburgh, unfinished since 1863 due to money trouble.

The barrel house is the columns' most chilly customer. Above in the tasting room merriment is being made, people



make pretenses to whisky knowledge and eye up attractive others, but down here all seems frozen and sad. The barrels lie on this account. They are not cold, but burn inside with alchemy, distilled fermented barley displaying violent reactions to the hourly, daily, monthly fluctuations in humidity and temperature, imploding and slamming itself into the wood of the barrel, before being sucked back into the mixture with a new layer of oaky, smoky strains. Some gas makes its escape, through the

old, charred wood, past the steel straps, and out into the damp air. The Angels' Share; where it goes is a mystery, or a secret, but perhaps some winds up through the wool insulation of the floor above, between the gaps in the tasting room floorboards, past shoes, up legs, caressing hands holding glasses, and arrives in the nostril of a visitor, who all at once feels fortified, brave and full-spirited.

In his poem, 'Embassy Architecture', Robert Pinsky writes of "Pines shredding sunlight in the early damp"- this is the activity to the north of the barrels, where pedals turn, huffs are puffed and passers- by glimpse shadowy outlines and feel a draught, pausing to peer through the iron railing back into the shadows. The Bacchanal transformation of a drunken soul is mirrored in the moods and behavior of the building; revelry upstairs and the atmosphere of a tomb downstairs, confounding the

summer sporty types in their sneakers and sweatbands.

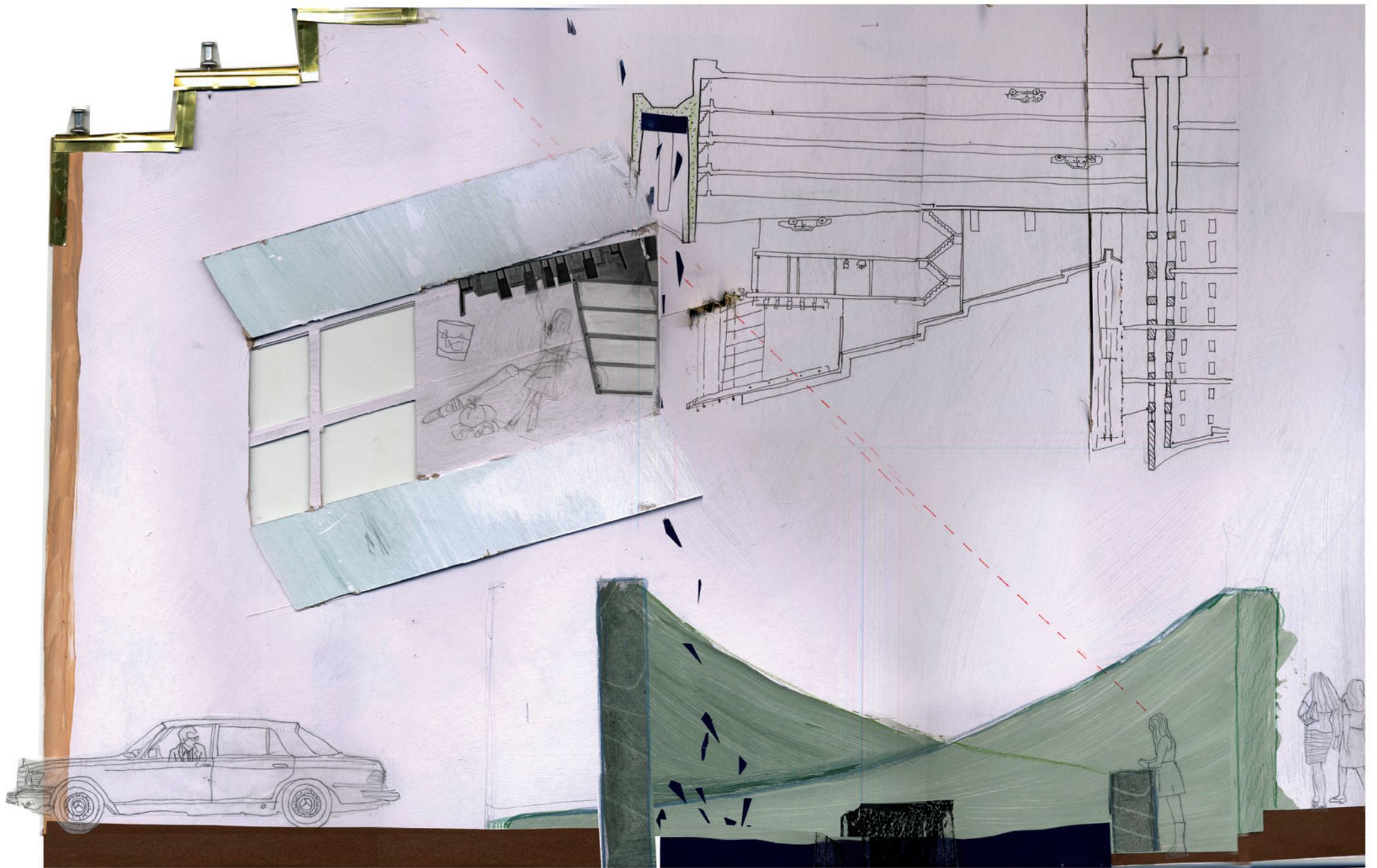
So the barreled spirits make their way, with years- long pauses, to a glass, on the rocks, by the stream, where they will complete the journey from earth to body, via seed, stalk, cutting, fermenting, roasting, grinding, mashing, distilling and aging. Joining with the tiny amount of alcohol naturally present in the drinker's physical makeup, it will turn her insides to gold.



## DAMP

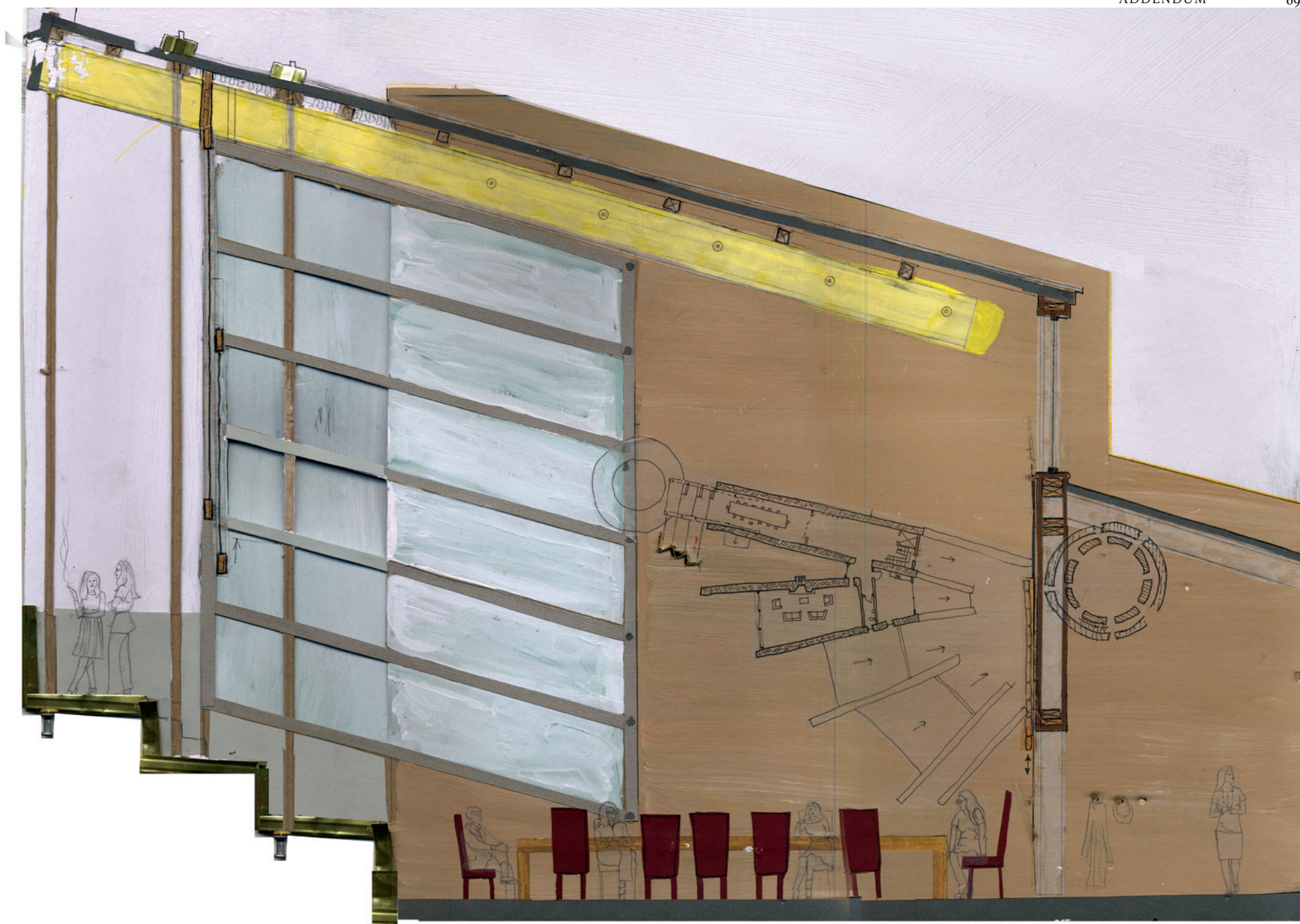
A 'gutter walk' between the Malting Tower and the offices is a place for hyper-awareness of the weather.





## H O T

The hot topic under discussion in the post-dinner haze is flag etiquette. Should it only be raised when the Ambassador is physically present in the building, or is being in the city, or the country, enough? If so, the flag will fly most of the time which might detract from its serious symbolism; but if it does not fly what definite sign is there that this is, indeed, the Scottish embassy? In the hot seat is the Ambassador herself, worn out from a day of diplomacy but valiantly hanging on to her vivacity for the benefit of the European Planning Committee currently present.



Although opinions on the 'flag issue' run strong and varied, and the Swedish Program Manager has exited to the balcony in a huff to smoke a red hot cigarette, taking the Treasurer with her, generally all is jovial and satisfied, as the dinner was a fine one. Cullen Skink (a steaming, thick broth of smoked haddock with potatoes and onions) had been served with warm rolls, butter involuntarily melting down the guests' chins and making the steamed linen napkins essentials. Then the Ambassador announced that, as she

had missed a real Burns' Supper on the 25th of January (the city had shut down in a much-anticipated but ultimately disappointing snowstorm), they would be eating haggis with neeps and tatties. As if her announcing this made it so, here appeared the scalding beast in its wrapping of sheep's stomach, a searing sauce of whisky and cream accompanying it.

The beer, being carefully imported and served as by a grumpy landlord in a gloomy pub, was on the warm side

of things, but served the purpose of reducing the temperature of the meat and vegetables, in the mouths of this esteemed crowd, to a tolerable one.

Until dessert (scalding sticky toffee pudding) the windows had remained closed, but now, after a comment from France's first lady as to the stuffiness of the room, a white gloved waiter hastened to hoist a couple of panes open to let in a breeze. And with this action, the whole room moved into the position formerly occupied only by the

smoking Swede; that of connection with the 'common down below'. Strains of the classical dinner music wafted down, accompanied with tantalizing whiffs of the pudding, and were picked up by little Miss Jones, passing by on her way home after her shift as a waitress down in the public tasting room. She stepped down two steps, leant forward and gazed dully into the round water pool, where cigar smoke, laughter, and secrets danced in the reflections.





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## C I T A T I O N S

### Images

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#### **Forlani's Map of Scotland**

Source: National Library of Scotland

#### **Map of Alexandria**

Source: Library of Congress

#### **Arlington Mill during the Civil War**

Source: Templeman, Eleanor Lee. *Arlington Heritage: Vignettes of a Virginia County* (1959).

#### **The Scottish National Monument**

Source: [www.eyenedinburgh.net](http://www.eyenedinburgh.net), 5th May 2015

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#### **Scottish Nationalists**

Source: [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk), 10 Sept 2014

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