

A Sauna House in Helsinki

by Cong Guo

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

Master of Architecture

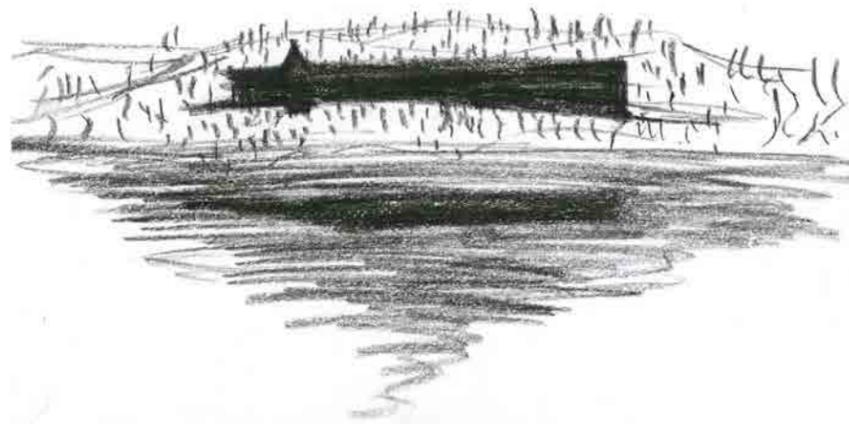
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Abstract

What is a serene place? What is serenity? While we have a common understanding of the term, its connection to architecture is almost directly operational, if we look at the Latin meaning of fair and above all clear.

What makes a place serene? Clarity of plan and “fairing” of walls, floors and ceilings, generally all surfaces, should provide an environment conducive to the mental, emotional state of serenity.

What kind of moment could possibly ease people’s mind? To be in peace, in place, at rest in such an environment should be the proper condition for a human being to let go of stresses and find, even if only temporarily, peace of mind.

People’s mind is like a receiver. The receptive mind will perceive such qualities in the environment and chances are that its response will be in concert with the intentions of the architect.

With these thoughts on my mind, I start to imagine a sauna house in the city of Helsinki by means of designing certain moments constructed by the interaction of physical elements and approach its design as stated above, in this case with clear and fair form, light, material and temperature. These elements, work together to create a space that can be pictured and memorized by visitors visually and in all other ways sensibly absorbed and will create a lasting memory of a period of tranquility and serenity.

Table of Content

Abstract

Table of content

List of figures

Chapter I- Memory 7

Chapter II- Initial Thinking 12

Chapter III- Sauna House 18

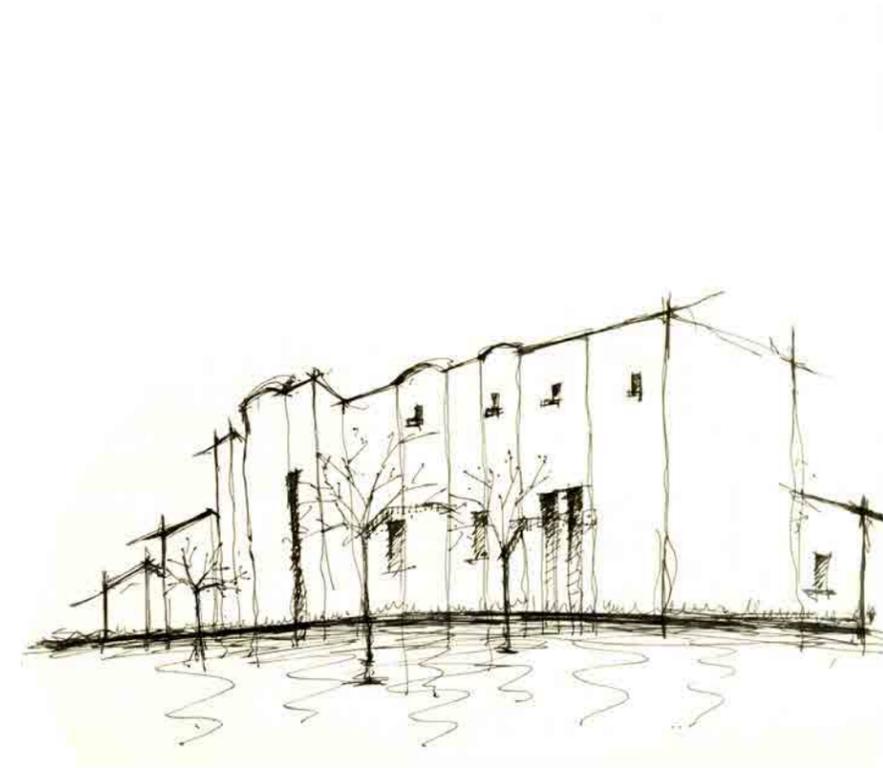
List of figures

pic.1	sketch drawing 1	ii	pic.24	detail section drawings of entrance corridor	23
pic.2	photo of St, Mark Church	3	pic.25	detail section drawings of entrance corridor	23
pic.3	sketch of St. Mark Church	3	pic.26	sketch drawing 3	24
pic.4	photo of St. Mark Church	4	pic.27	diagram 2	25
pic.5	photo of site	5	pic.28	rendering of plaza	25
pic.6	sketch of log cabin construction	7	pic.29	plan drawing of plaza	26
pic.7	initial section detail drawing	8	pic.30	detail section drawing of plaza	27
pic.8	initial material drawing	9	pic.31	sketch drawing 4	28
pic.9	initial section-material drawing	10	pic.32	diagram 3	29
pic.10	initial plan drawing	11	pic.33	rendering of sauna room	29
pic.11	site plan drawing	13	pic.34	plan of sauna room	30
pic.12	ground level plan drawing	14	pic.35	detail section drawing of sauna room	31
pic.13	-1 level plan drawing	15	pic.36	detail section drawing of sauna room	32
pic.14	-2 level plan drawing	16	pic.37	sketch drawings	33
pic.15	southeast elevation drawing	17	pic.38	diagram 4	34
pic.16	longitudinal section drawing	18	pic.39	rendering of the pool	34
pic.17	sketch drawing 2	19	pic.40	plan of the pool	35
pic.18	diagram 1	20	pic.41	detail section drawing of the pool	36
pic.19	rendering of entrance corridor	20	pic.42	detail section drawing of the pool	37
pic.20	diagram 1	21	pic.43	sketch drawing 5	38
pic.21	rendering of entrance corridor	21	pic.44	diagram 5	39
pic.22	detail section drawings of entrance corridor	22	pic.45	rendering of foot bath	40
pic.23	detail section drawings of entrance corridor	22	pic.46	plan of foot bath	41
			pic.47	detail of installation	42
			pic.48	rendering of sauna house	43

Chapter I

Memory

I was born in a coastal city where constructions began to take on everywhere 20 years ago. The city went noisy gradually after then. However, there's still some unforgettable moments when me and my friends rode our bikes heading to the shore area where things had not yet been affected by the city's rapid development. All you could hear were the sound from collision of spray and occasional screaming from seagulls. That was my early impression of serenity.



During a trip to Stockholm, I went to see St. Mark's church. It was an old church designed by Swedish architect Sigurd Lewerentz. What impressed me the most was the peaceful atmosphere conveyed by the confluence of dim diffused light casting on the red brick wall, with barely sound in the air. I was overcome with a sense of tranquility.

Was it a coincidence? Or was it the architect's intent to evoke those types of feelings in the buildings inhabitants? If it was indeed his intention, is it true that architecture is able to influence people's minds in the way it was influenced by its architect? In this case, I believe it was the subtle and precise control of the bricks and mortar on the wall, the fair and clear form of its roof and the diffused light from above that provides this sense of serenity.



St. Mark Church

Does that make you feel calm?

It found calm in me. The pipe pointed at me, showed me a direction, and found me at last after flowing through a twisting and curving shape.

The main body is distracting, but the pointed direction calms me in the end.



St. Mark Church

To me, designing a building is a process of recalling your memories. I believe those memories, even if they are fragmented, are the very initial factors in achieving quality in every building.

Designing this sauna house was a process of finding serenity through my memories. By interpreting and translating my memories into the physical factors of architecture, in this case form, light, materials and temperature, the building is granted meaning, creating a resonance that can be appreciated by both designers and visitors.

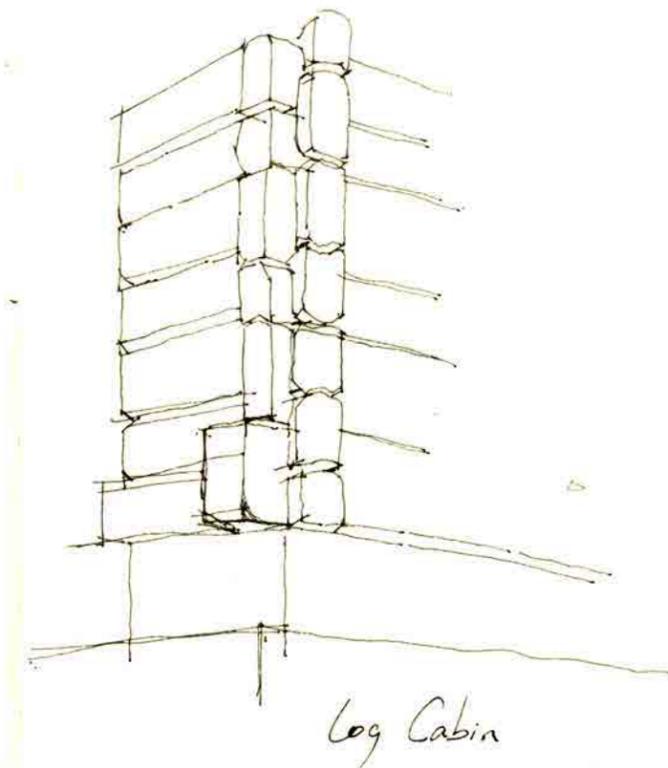


view from the site

Chapter II

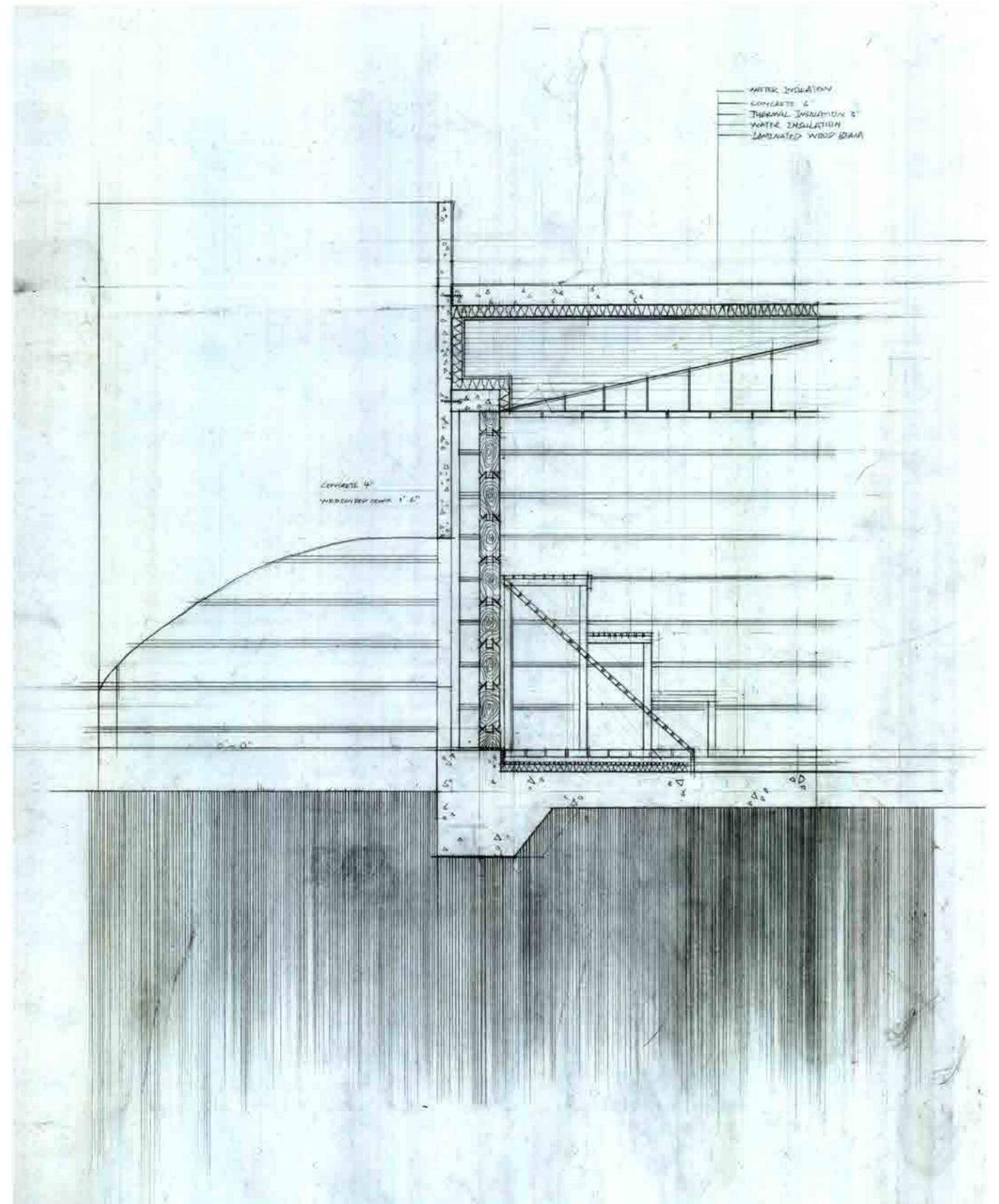
Initial Thinking

The sauna starts emerging with logs, which are considered the most basic and traditional building elements for local sauna houses. The log cabin is a traditional method of construction where logs are stacked up and interlocked end by end.



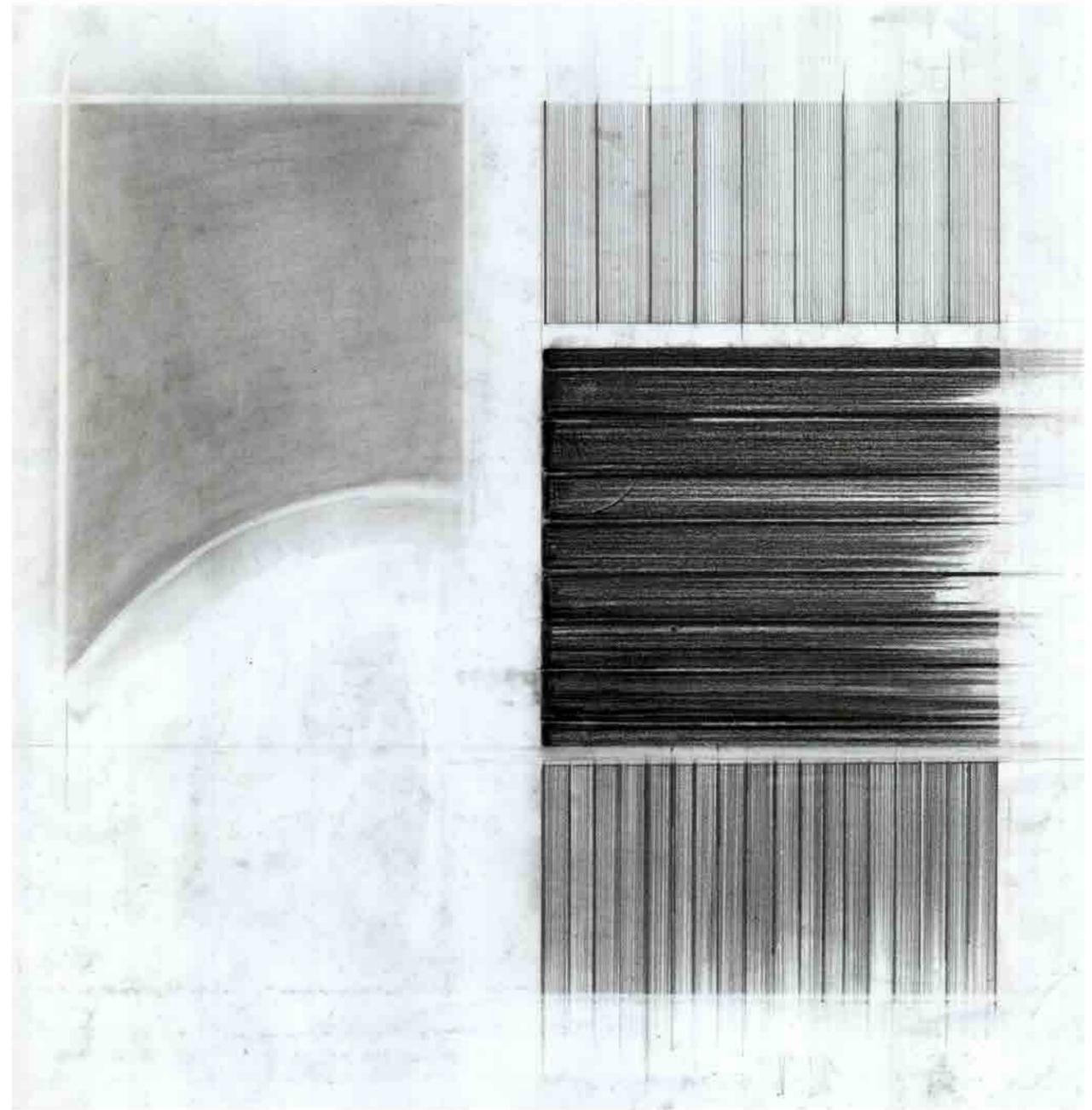
I started with drawing this detail section of a sauna room. With the lines and shading of my pencil, the image of a sauna room starts to emerge. It begins with a thin concrete wall with a curved end on the surface, revealing part of the logs behind it.

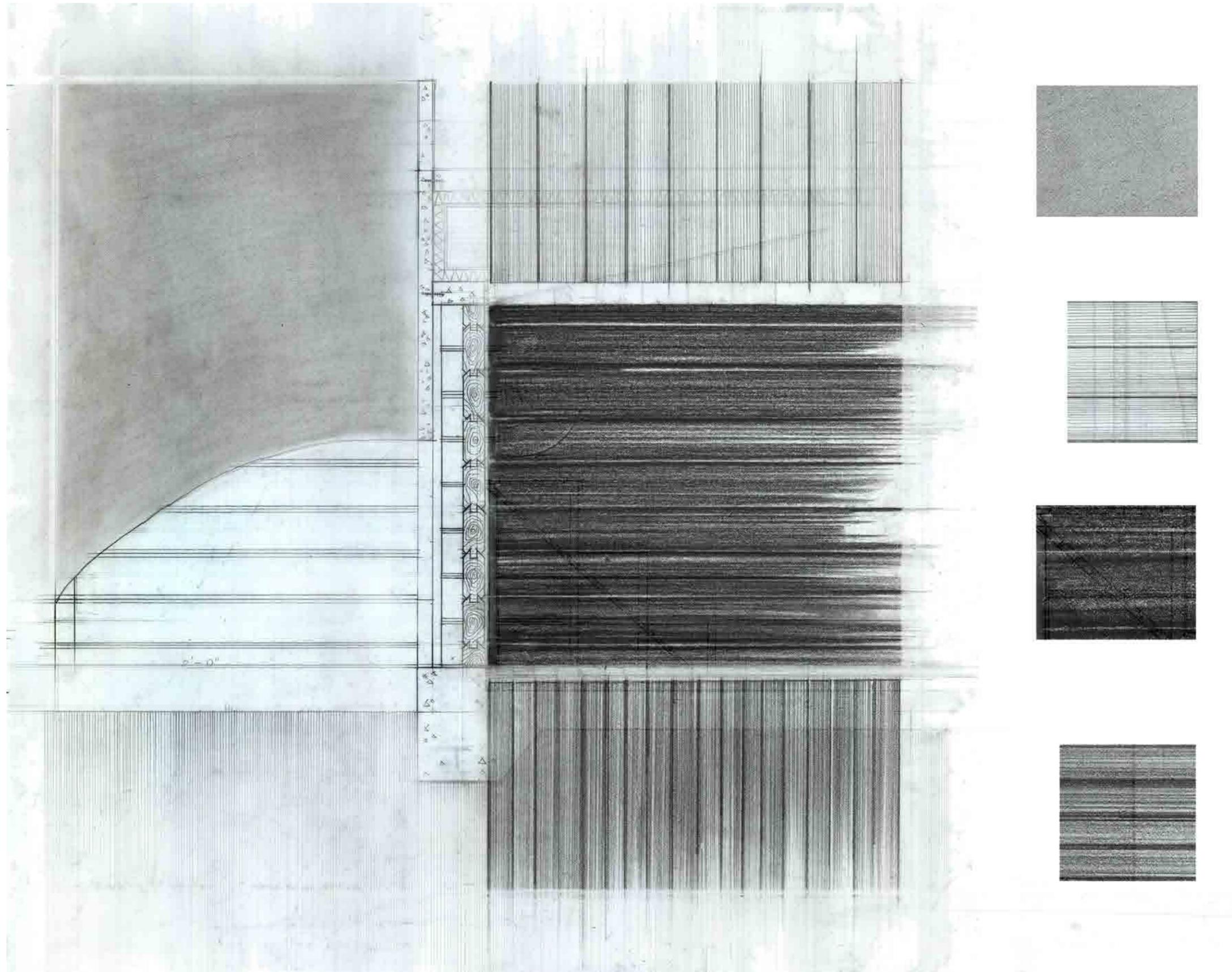
According to my research about smoke saunas, the most traditional type of saunas for Finnish people, the overall atmosphere within the sauna room should be dark and void of any sound. It calms people by diminishing distractions as much as possible.



Materials offer meaning to a space. I drew the materials inside and outside of the room, seeking a clarity of the feelings I could incite from the collaboration of these materials. The surface is concrete. The ceiling is made of white wood. The walls are stacked up by dark logs. The floor is dark wood planks.

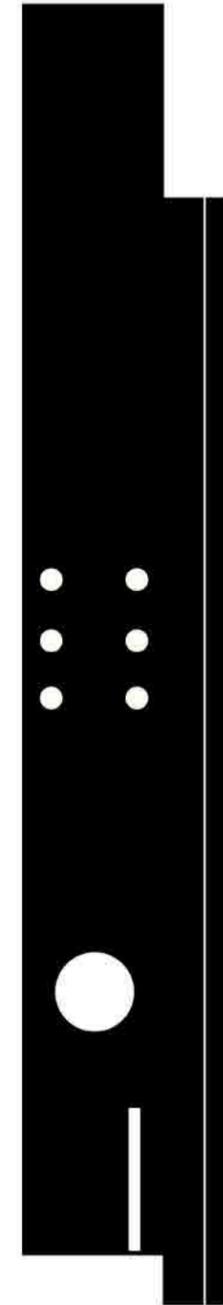
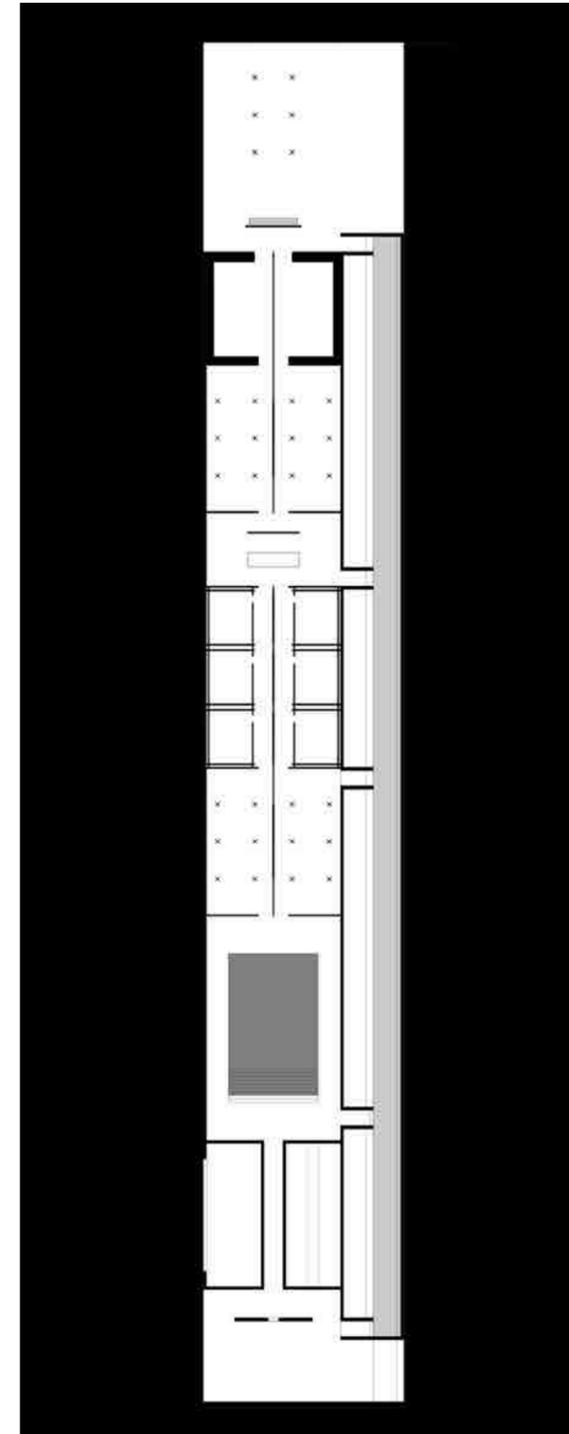
Drawing those materials brings me closer to the feeling of actually inhabiting that room.





I began to layout the initial plan of the sauna house by thinking about its sequence. I imagined myself walking into this bath house, feeling every step as I wander through every room. One thing is for sure: I want the enjoyment to be in an explicit sequence. It is very directional. People may have different experiences in different rooms but expectations are always unambiguous.

There are no side windows in this house. Skylights are the only apertures that make possible the dialogue between inside and outside. They can be seen occasionally, merging with the form, surface and temperature of each room with each creating a certain moment that can potentially influence visitors mind.

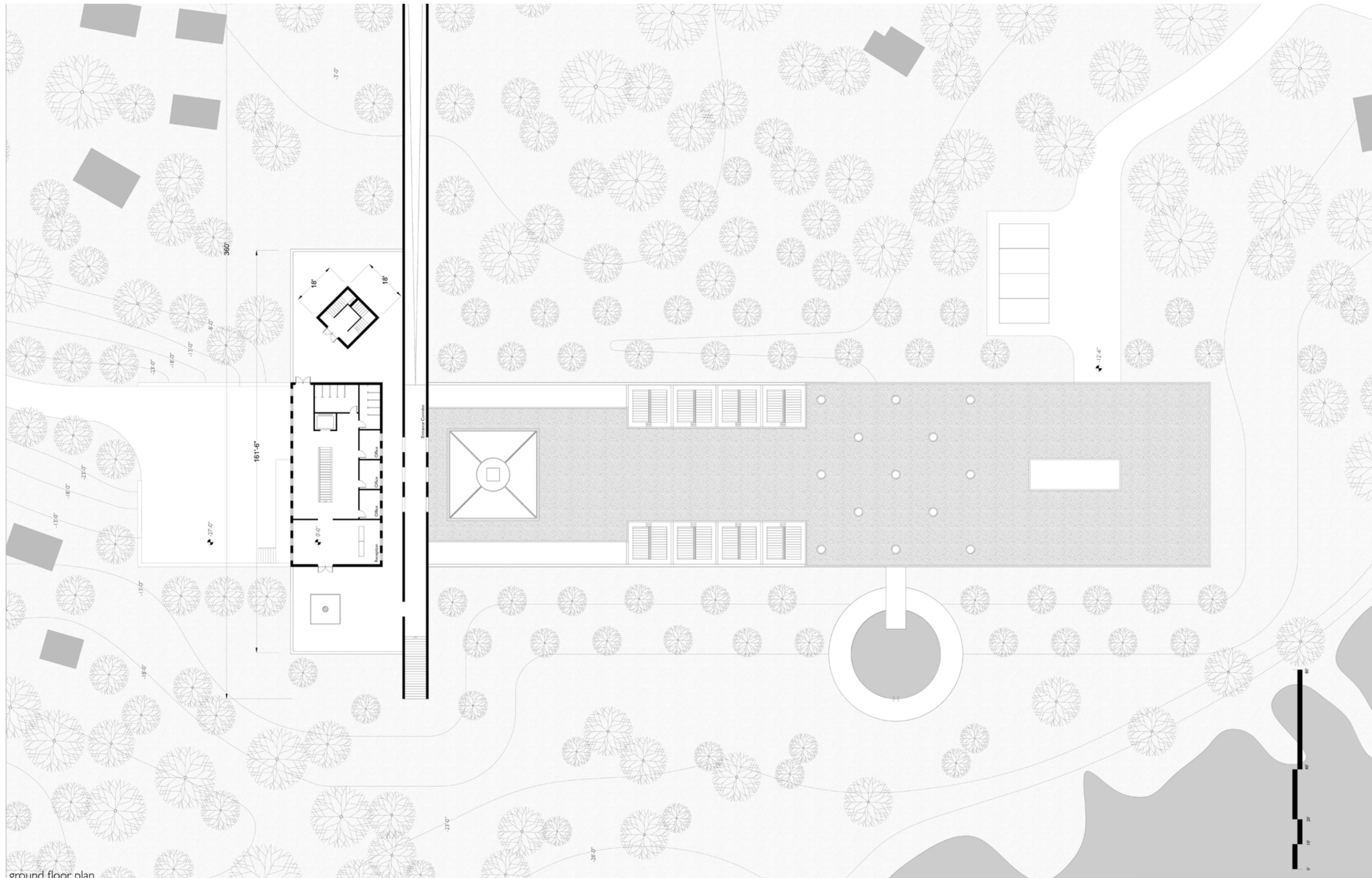


Chapter III

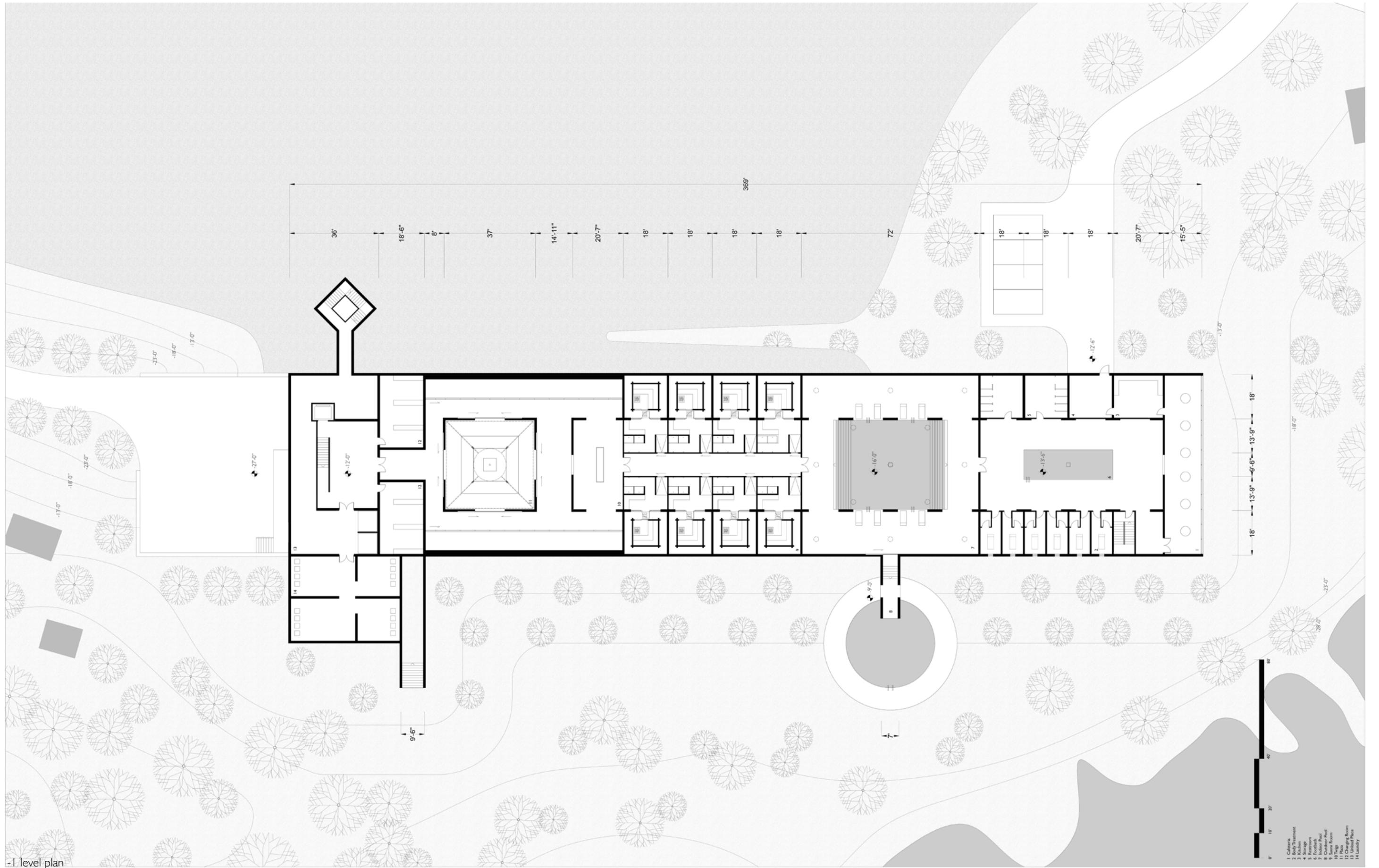
Sauna House



site plan

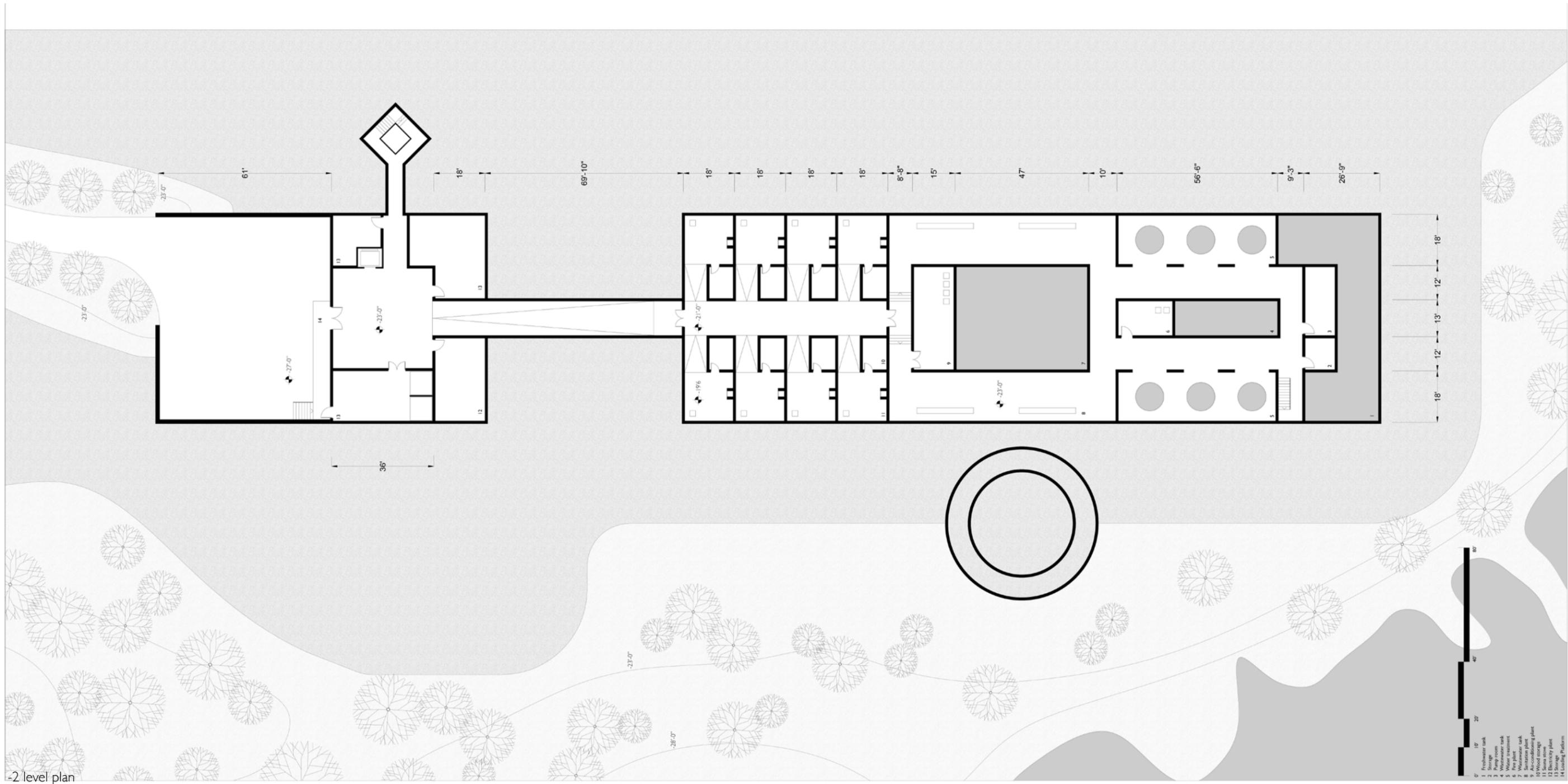


ground floor plan

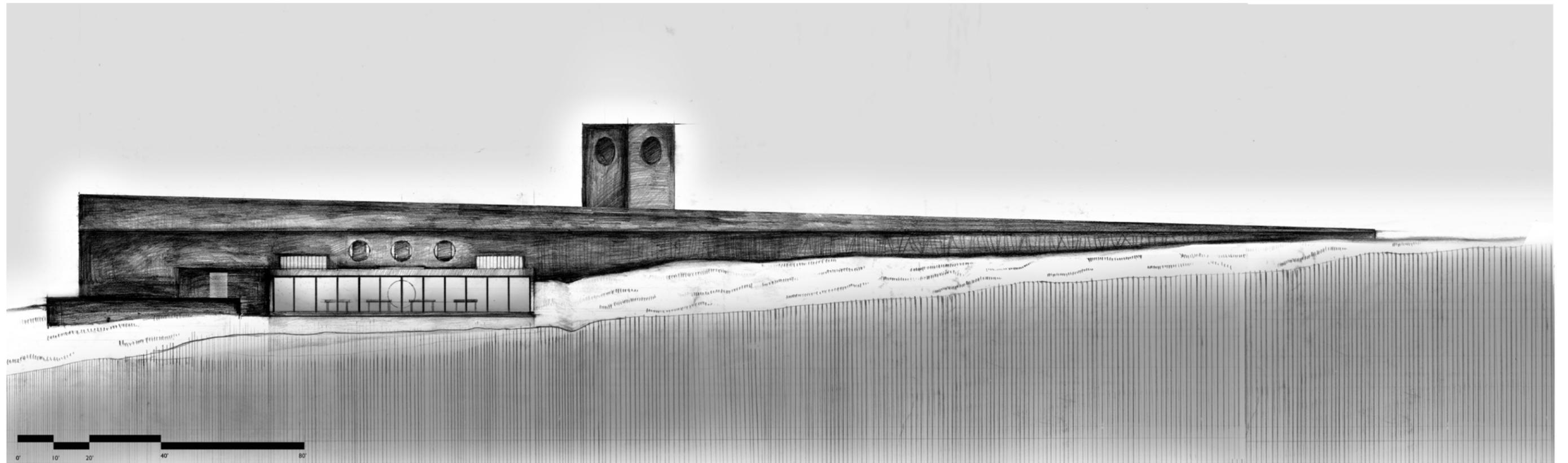


-1 level plan

- 1 Columns
- 2 Backyard
- 3 Kitchen
- 4 Storage
- 5 Indoor Pool
- 6 Frontyard
- 7 Indoor Pool
- 8 Dining Table
- 9 Kitchen
- 10 Dining Table
- 11 Dining Table
- 12 Parking
- 13 Office Room
- 14 Laundry



-2 level plan

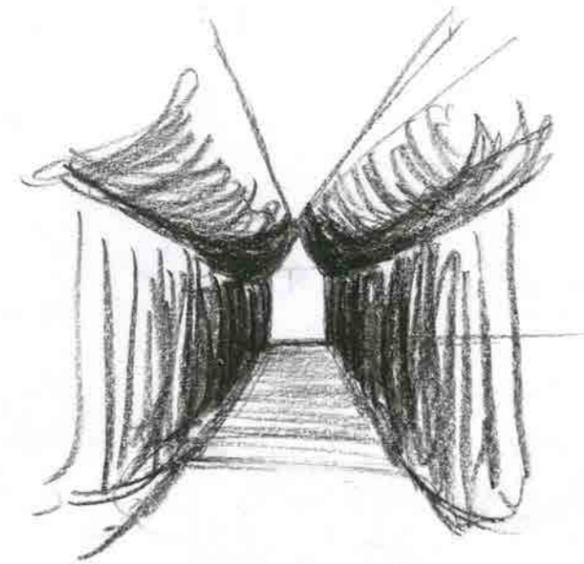


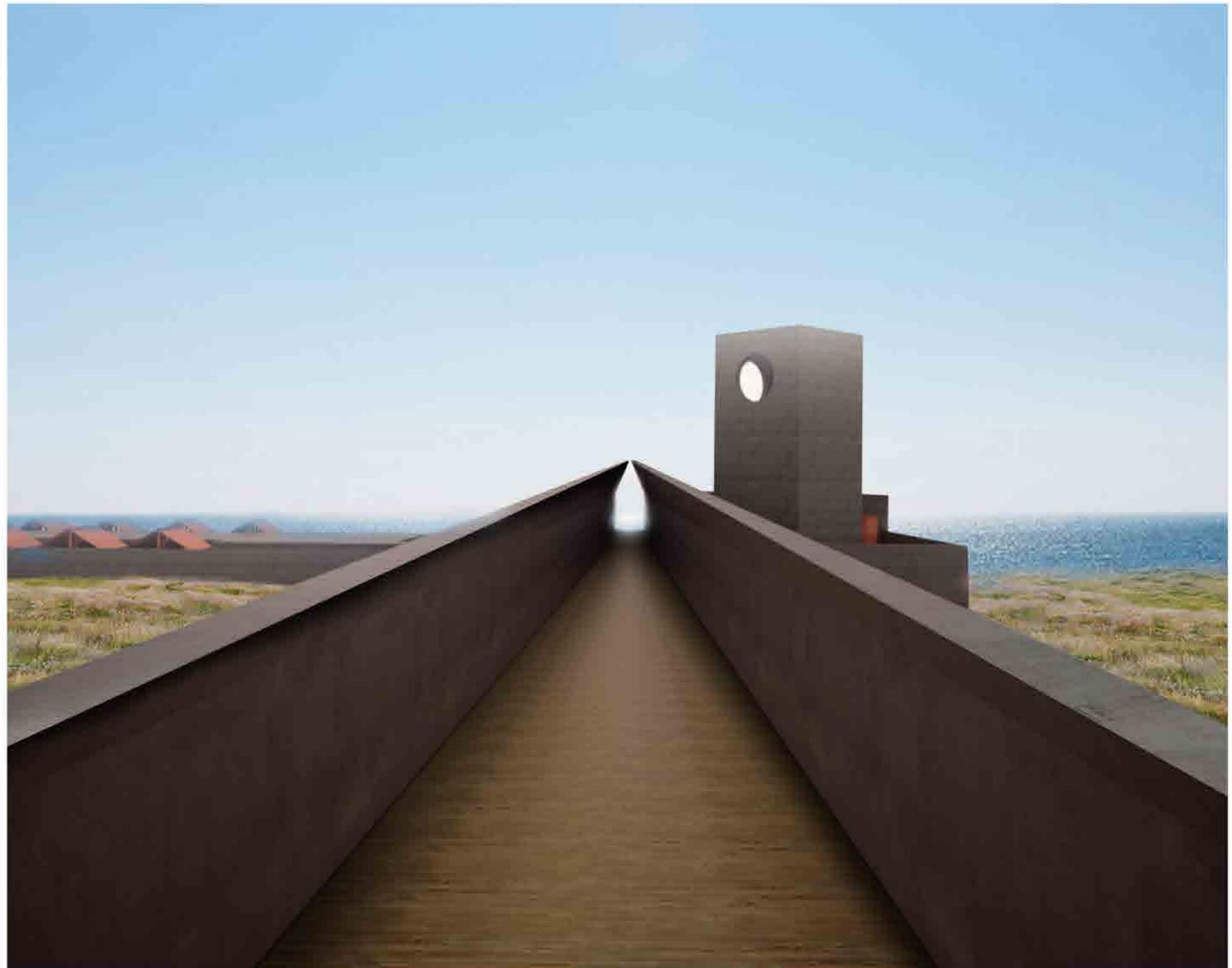
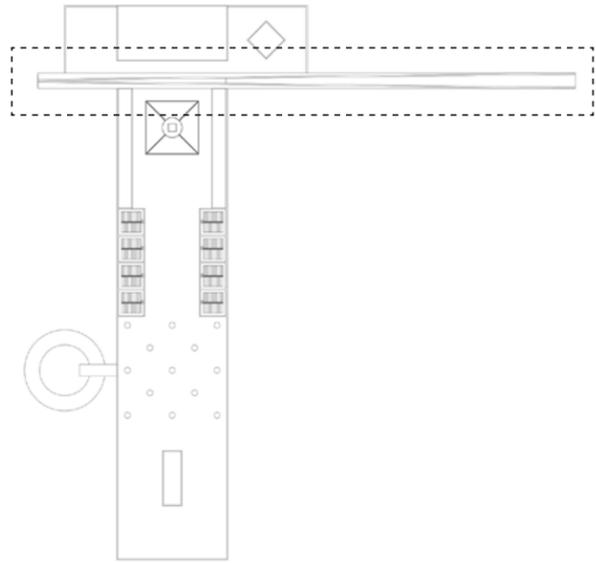
Southeast elevation



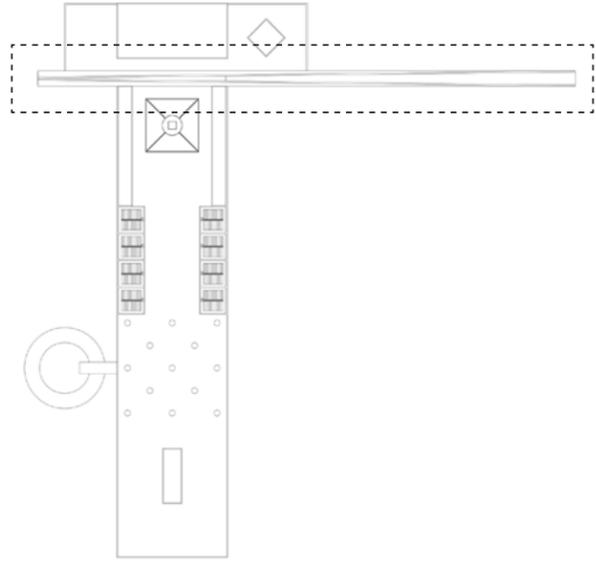
Longitudinal Section

corridor

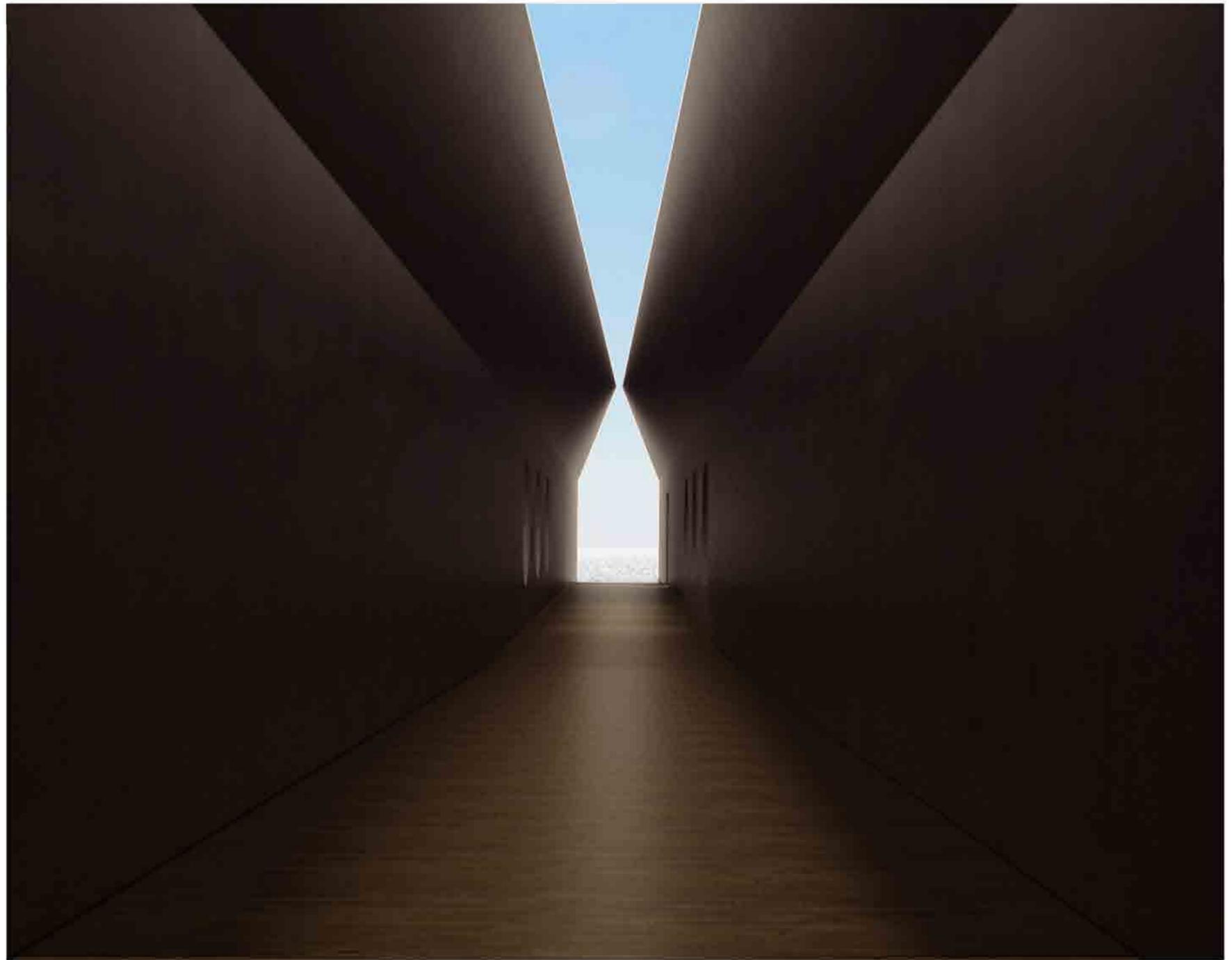


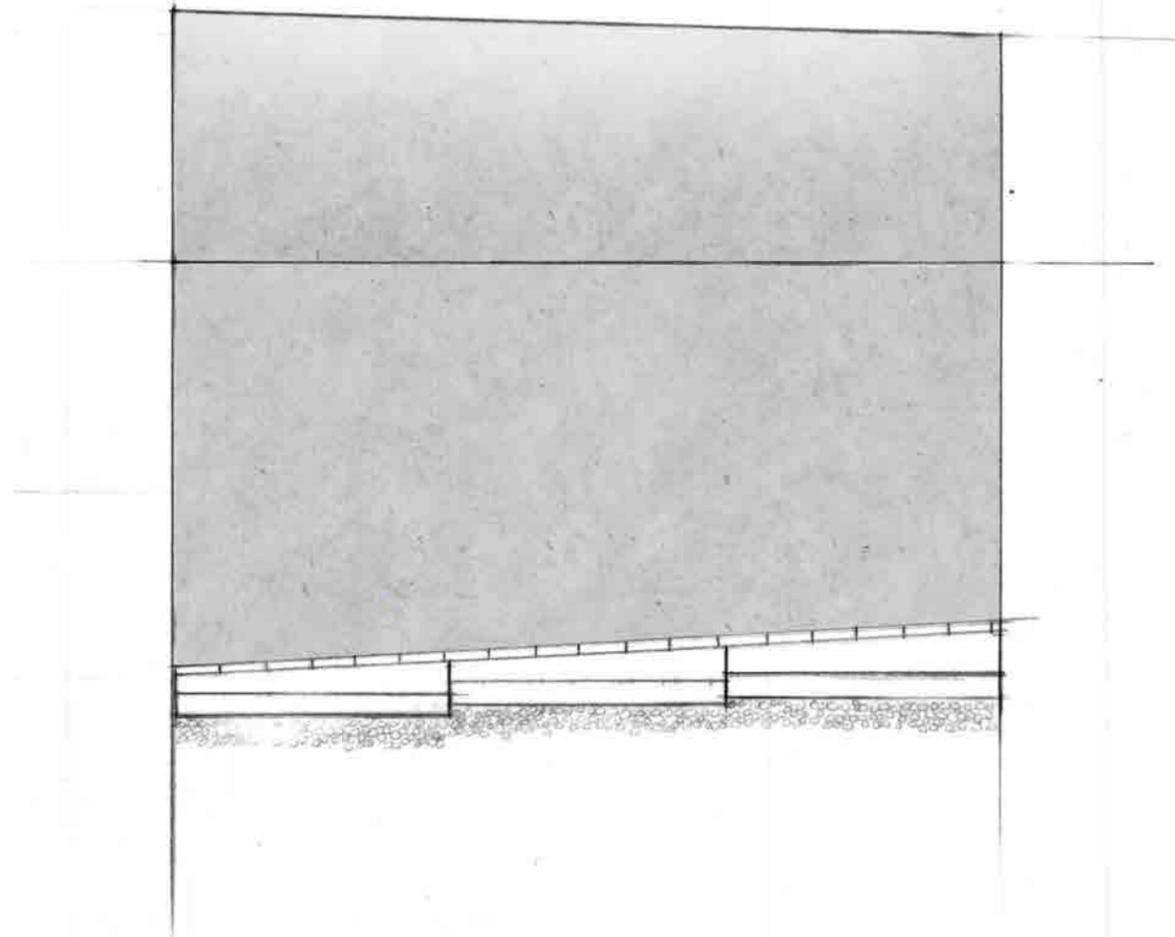
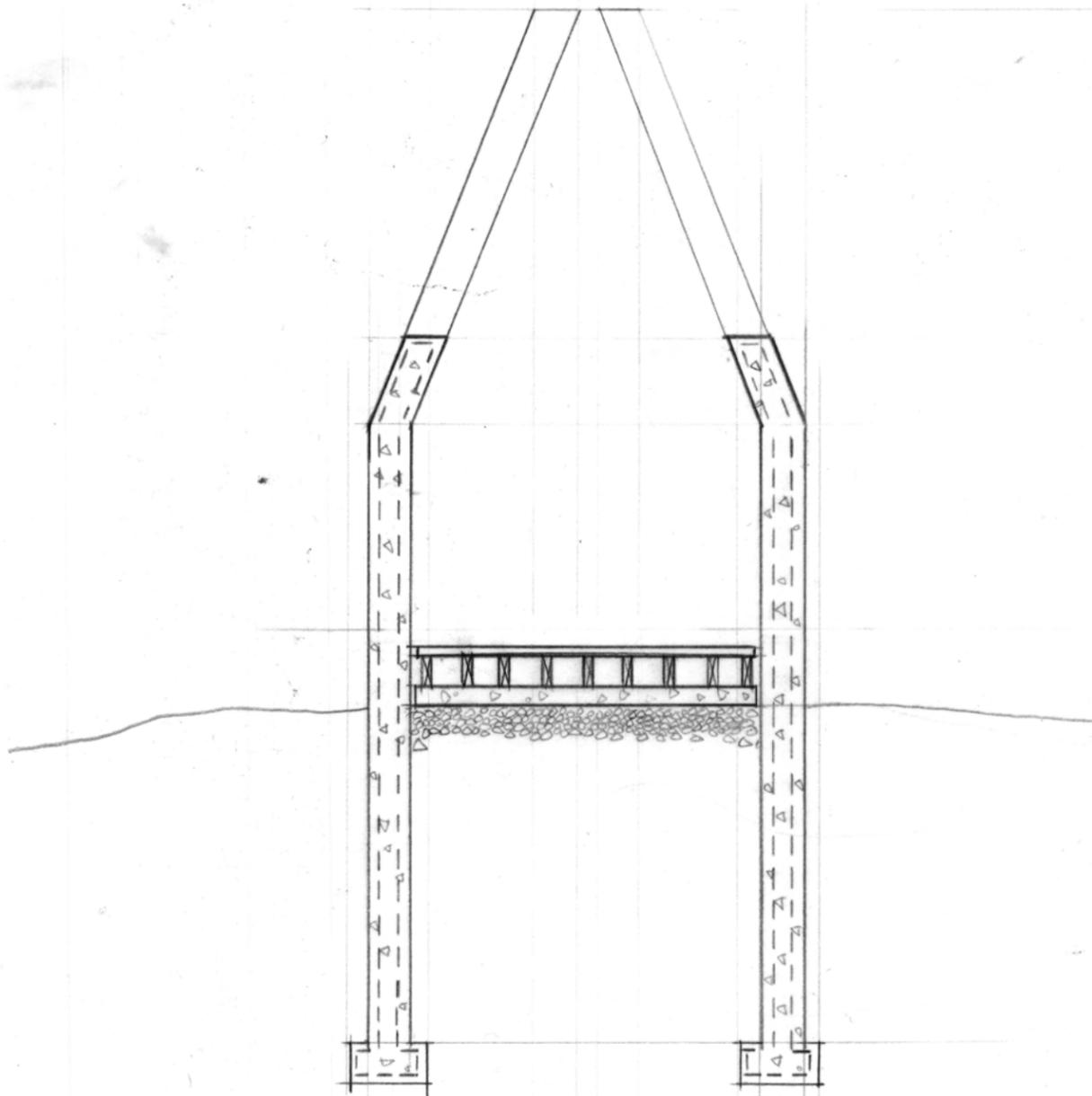


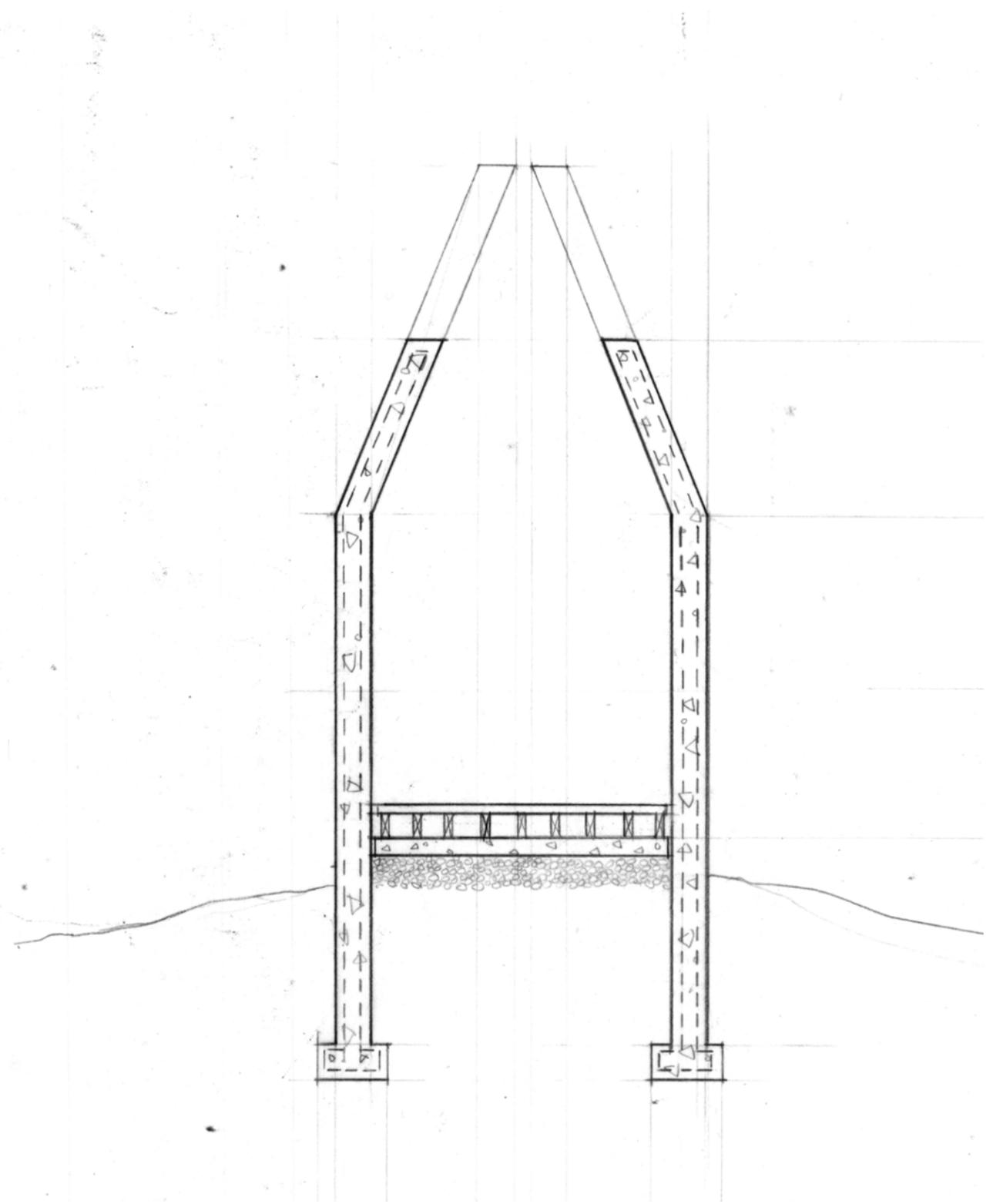
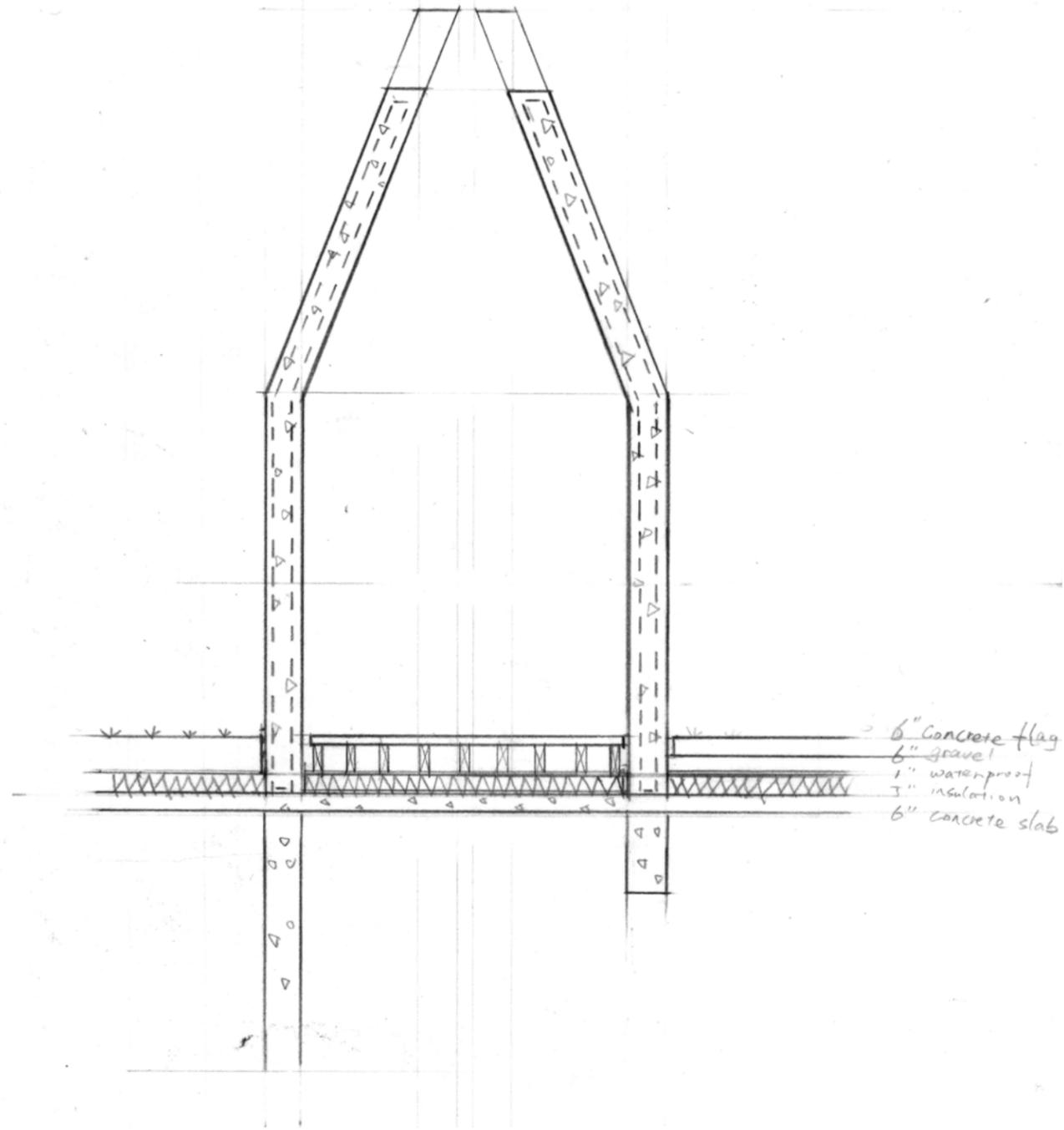
The journey starts with a wide open sight of a passageway leading downward.



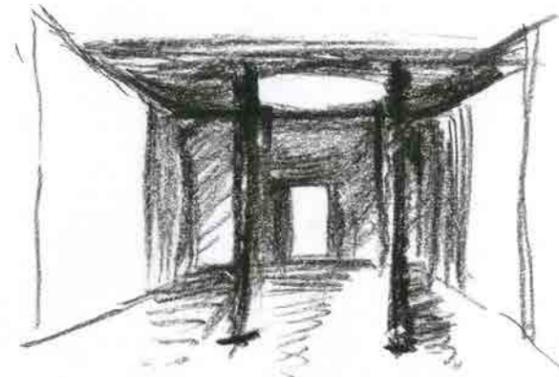
The sky above becomes higher and narrower as you continue down the corridor.

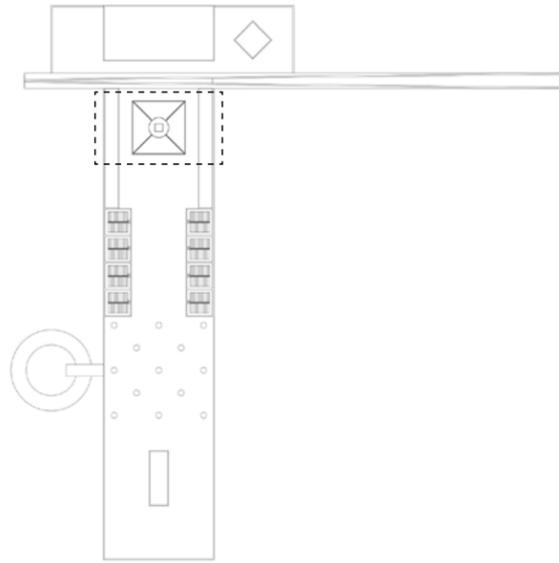






plaza

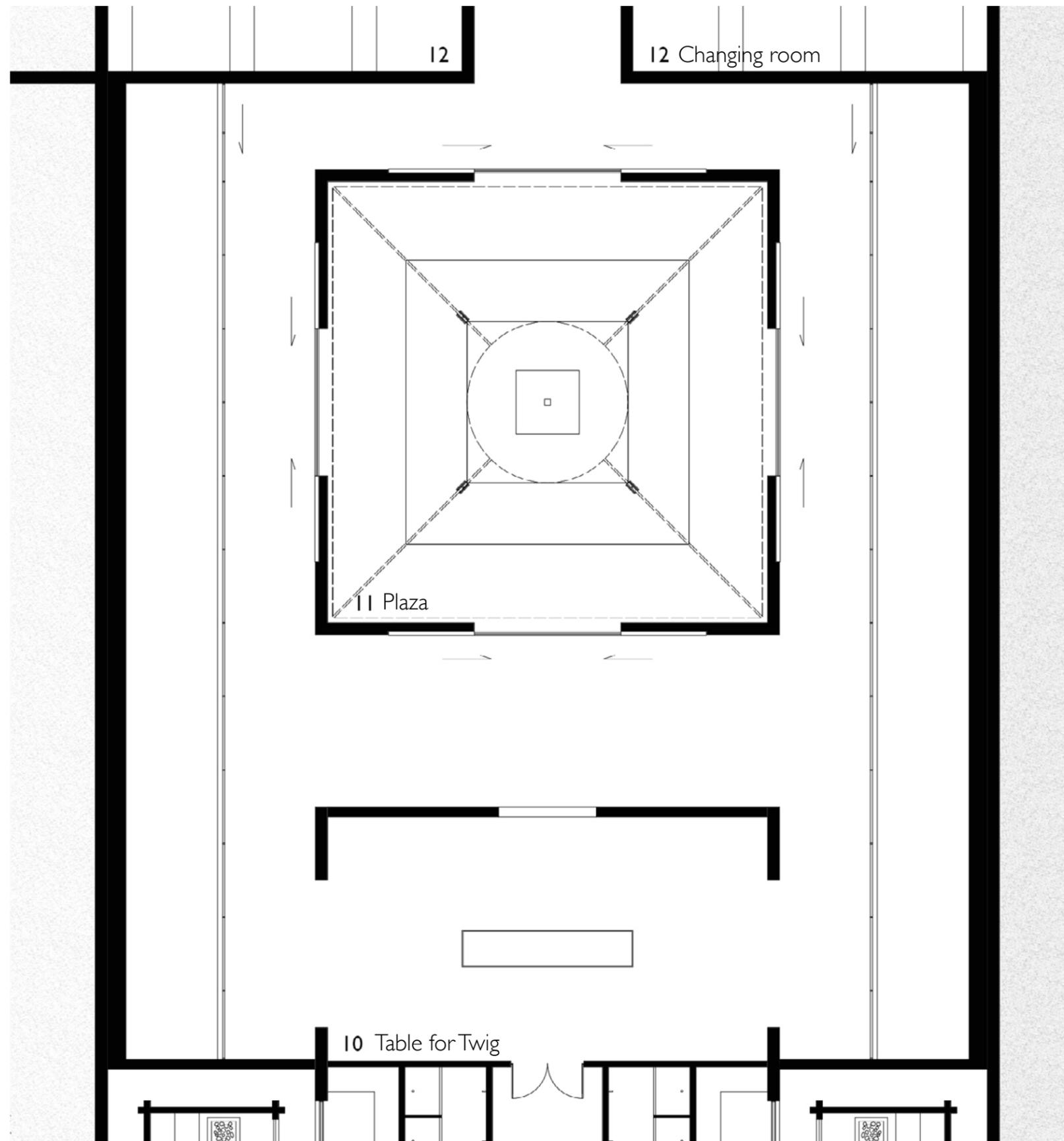


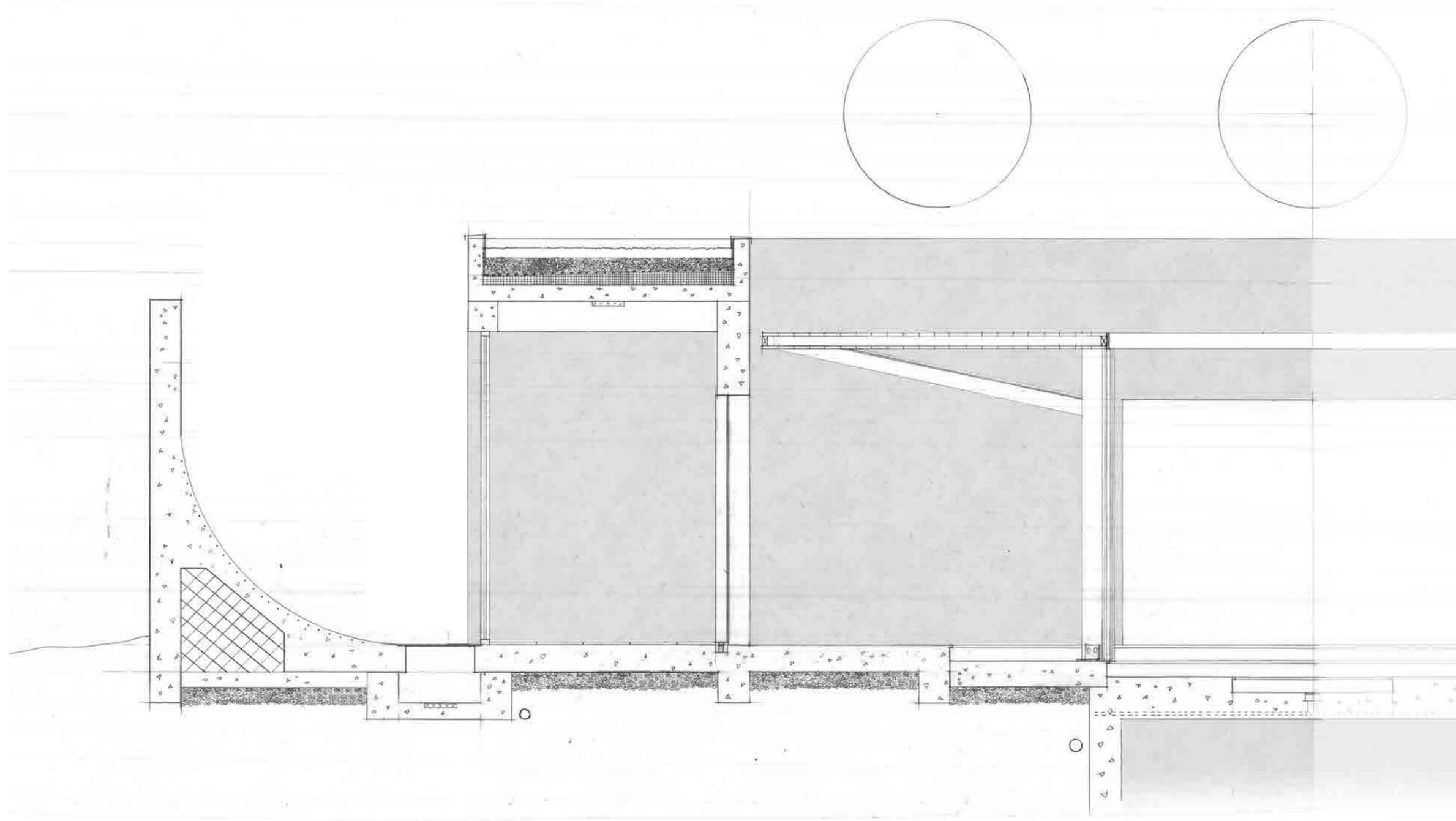


After changing your clothes, you walk into this plaza with a homocentric square descending to the center. The roof is wide open to the sky in the center, with dim light washing down around the edge.

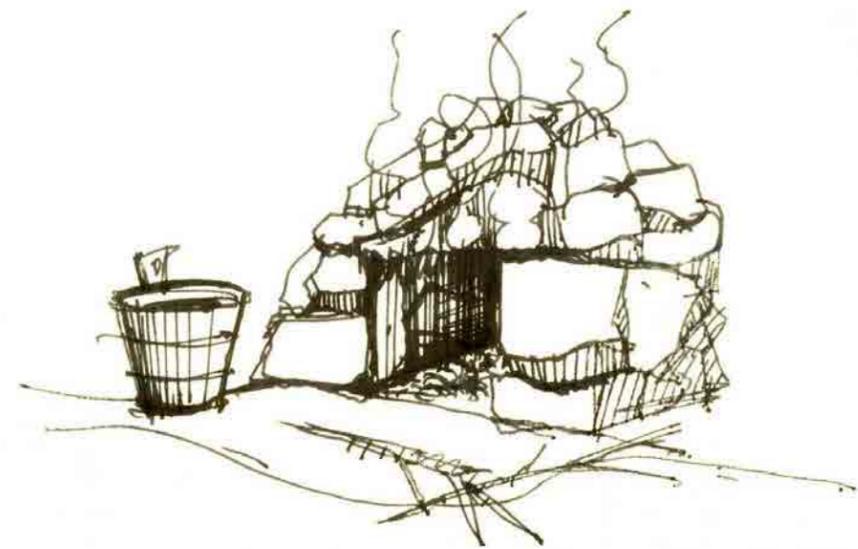


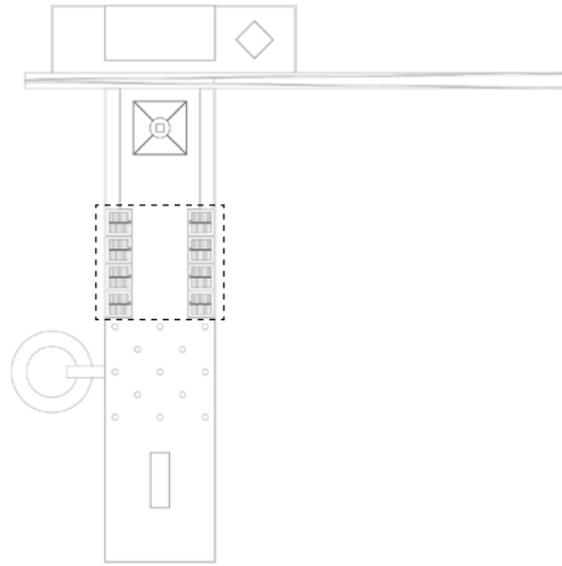
Sliding doors around the plaza help to keep conditions inside warm during the winter time. Opening them during the summer however provides an unhindered view.



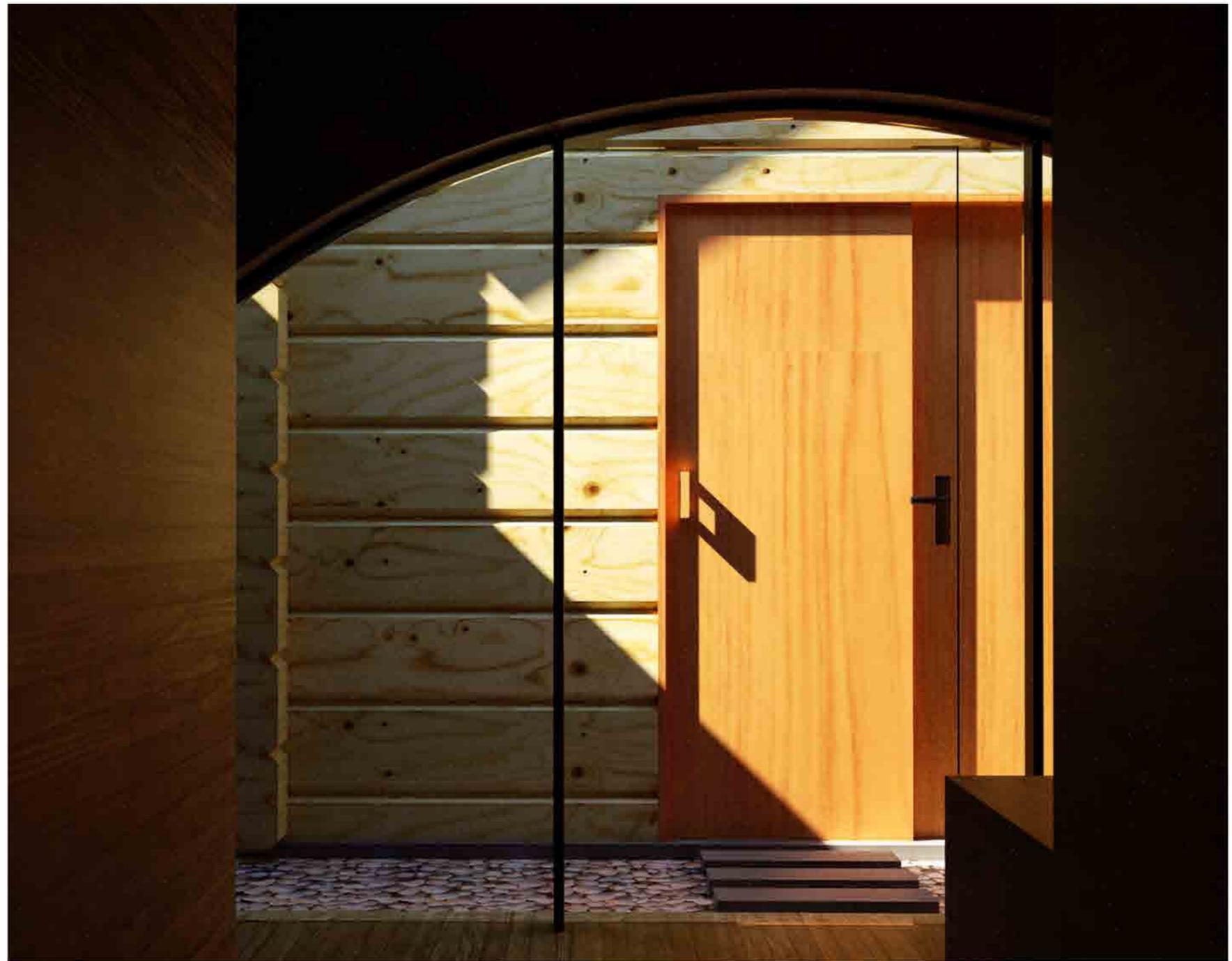


sauna

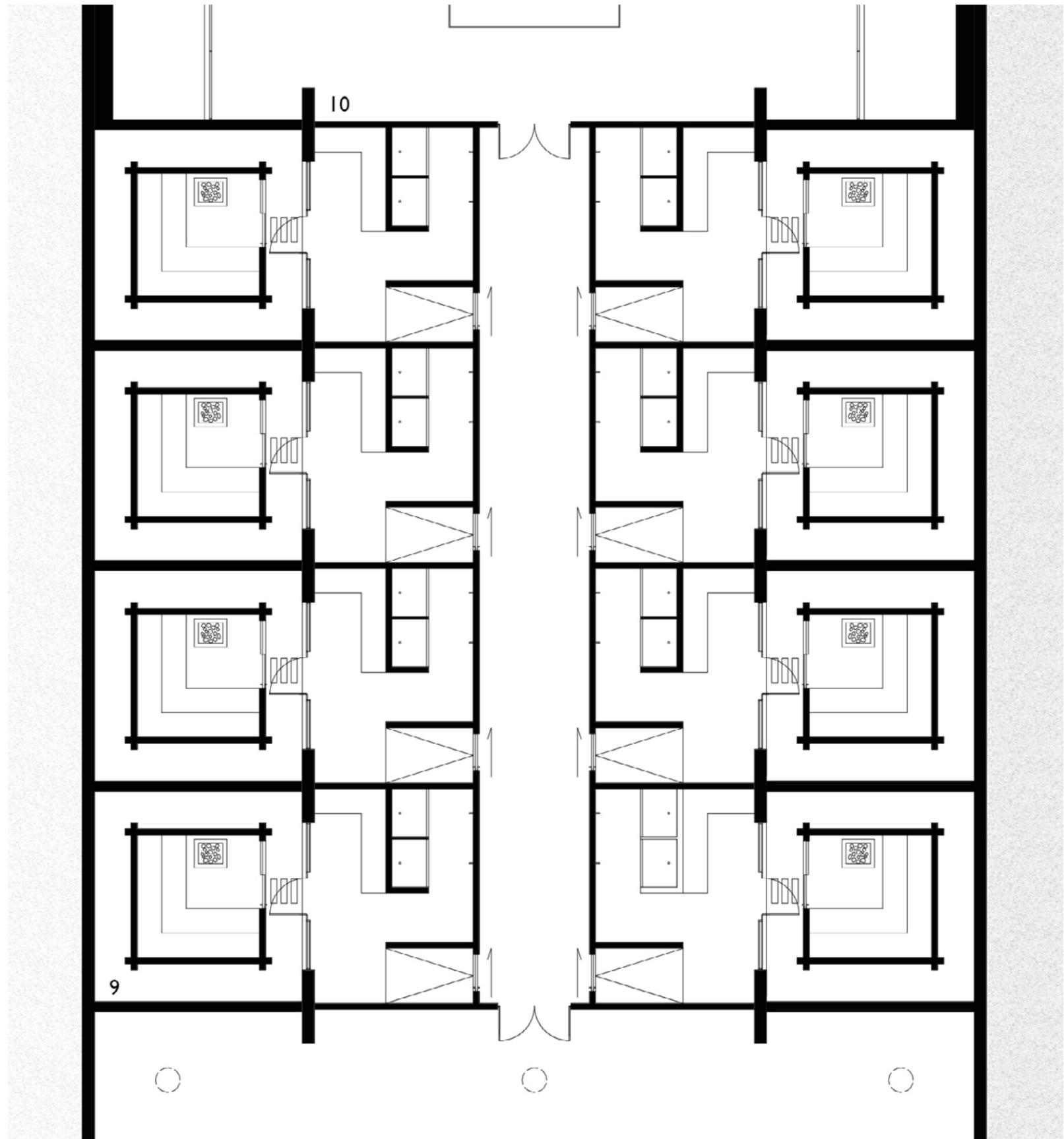


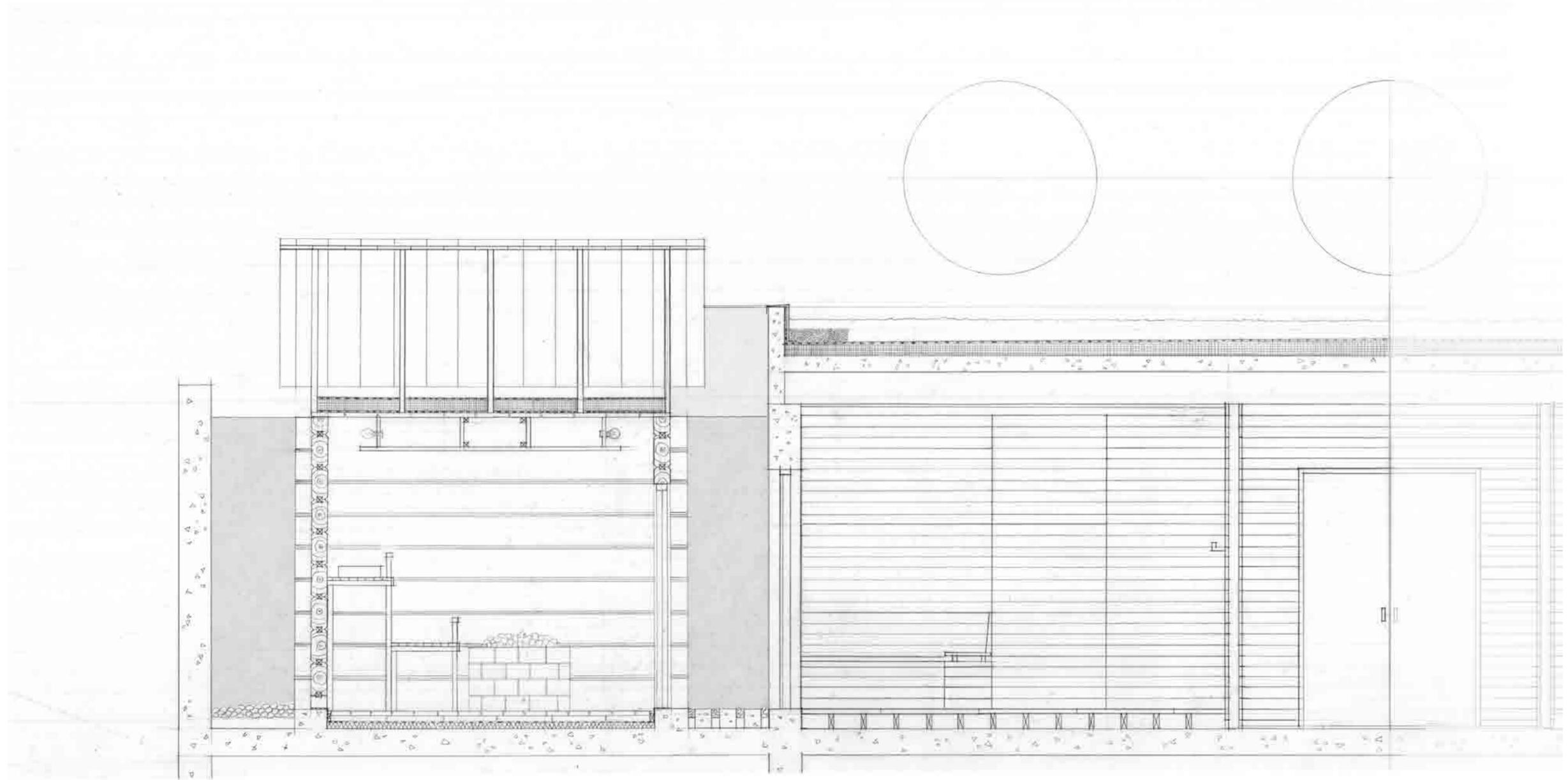


The sauna rooms are situated outside, with cobblestone surrounding them. From the curved opening, visitors can easily grasp the articulation of materials from inside the building.

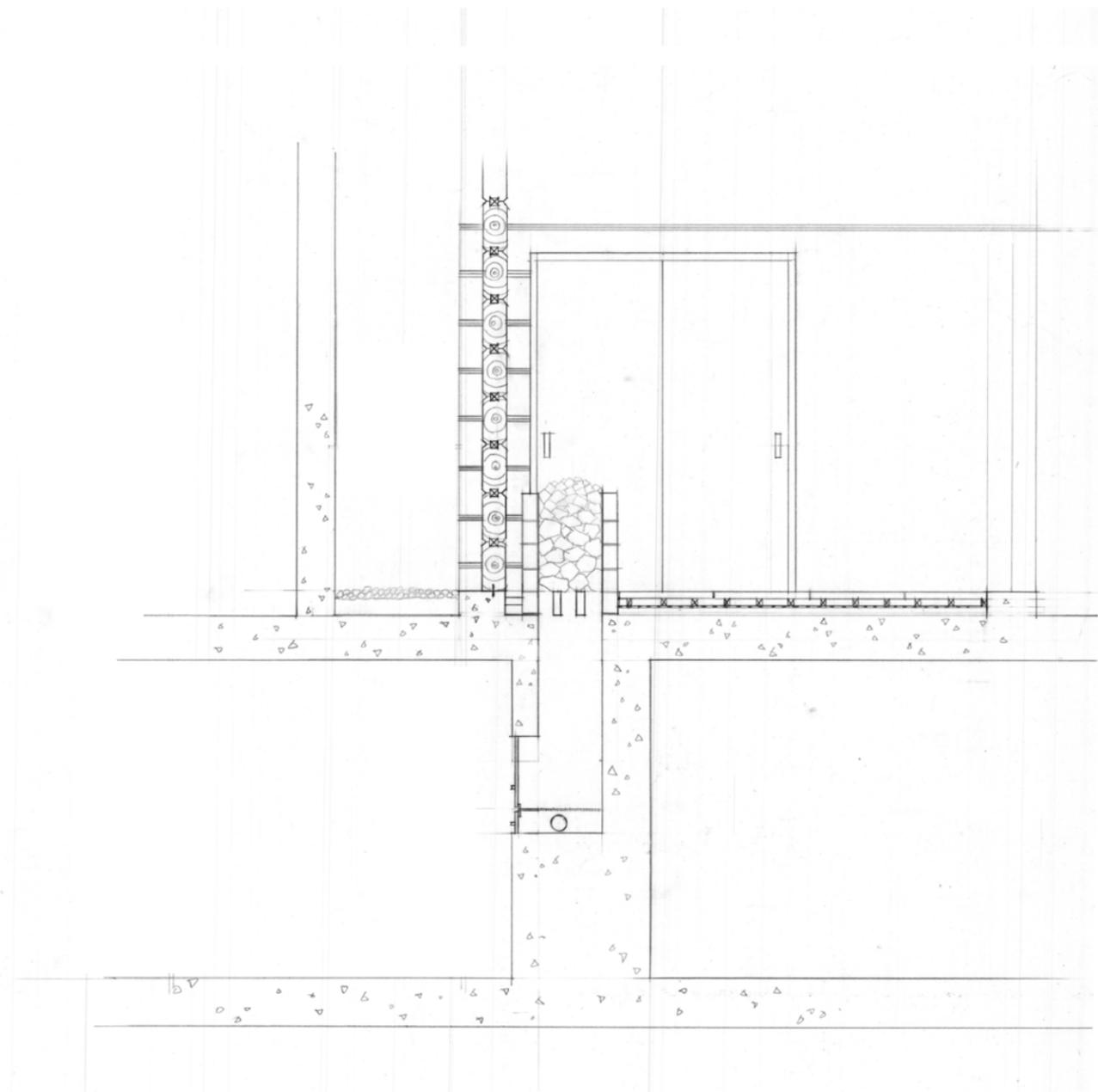


You walk into a corridor with sliding doors on either side before arriving at the pre-sauna rooms. They contain showers and resting areas.

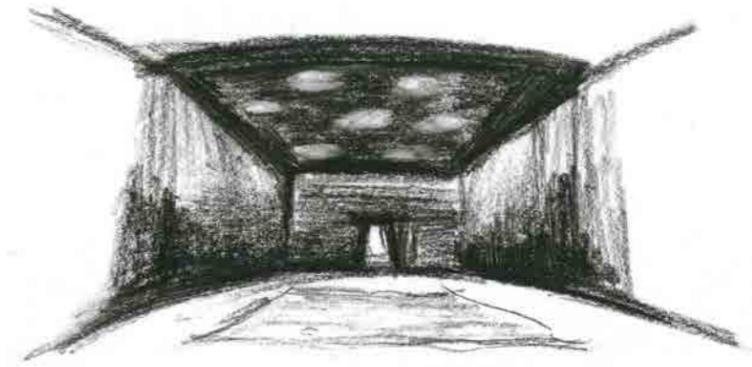


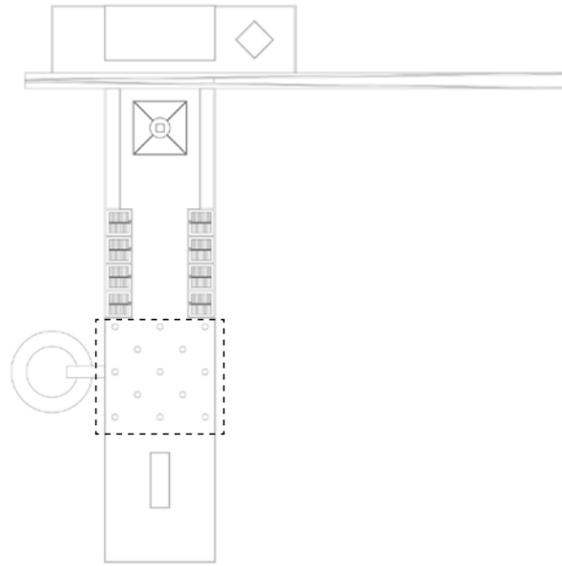


The sauna room is heated from lower level. Along with other service facilities down there, the stoves are segregated from the fair and clean space above.

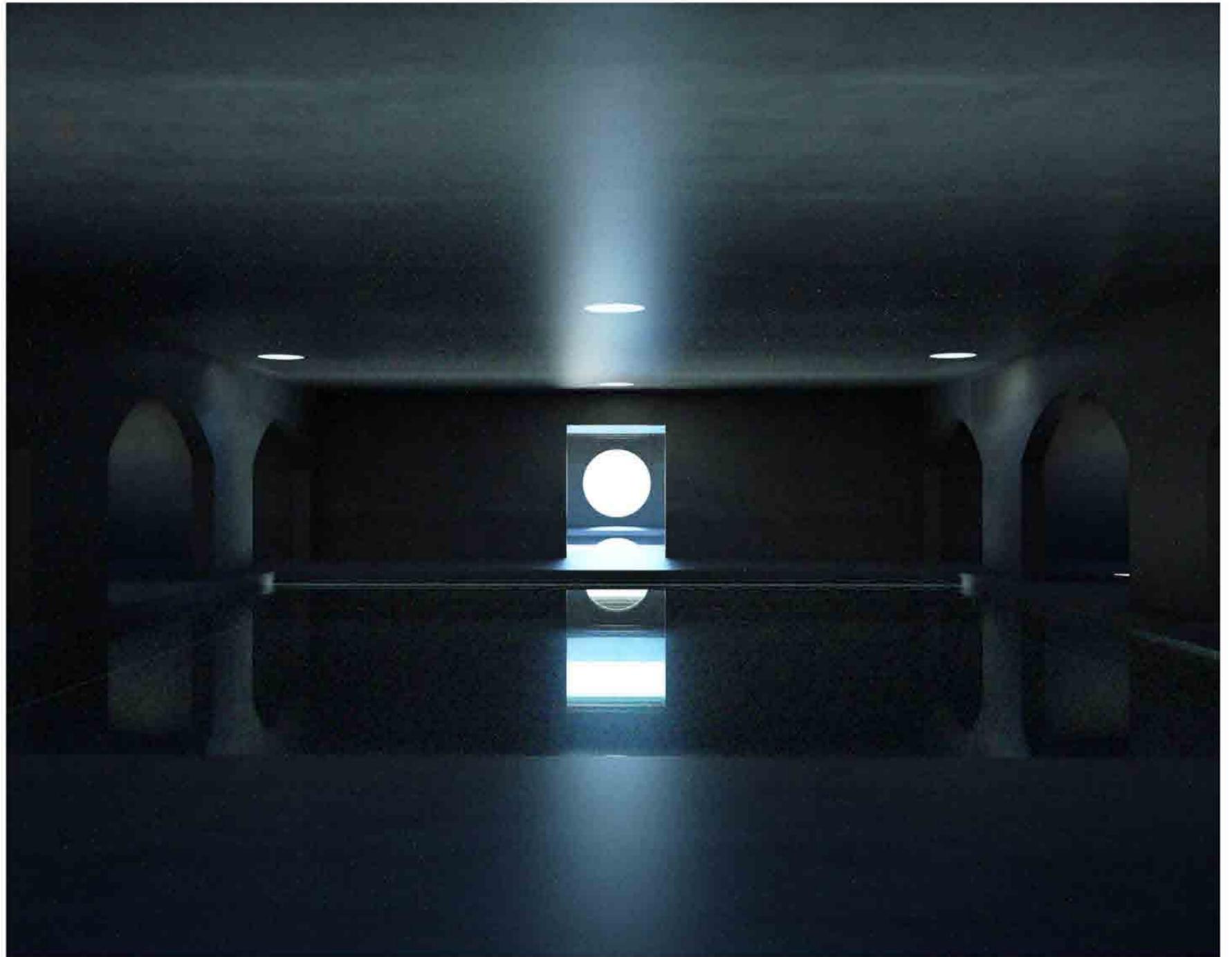


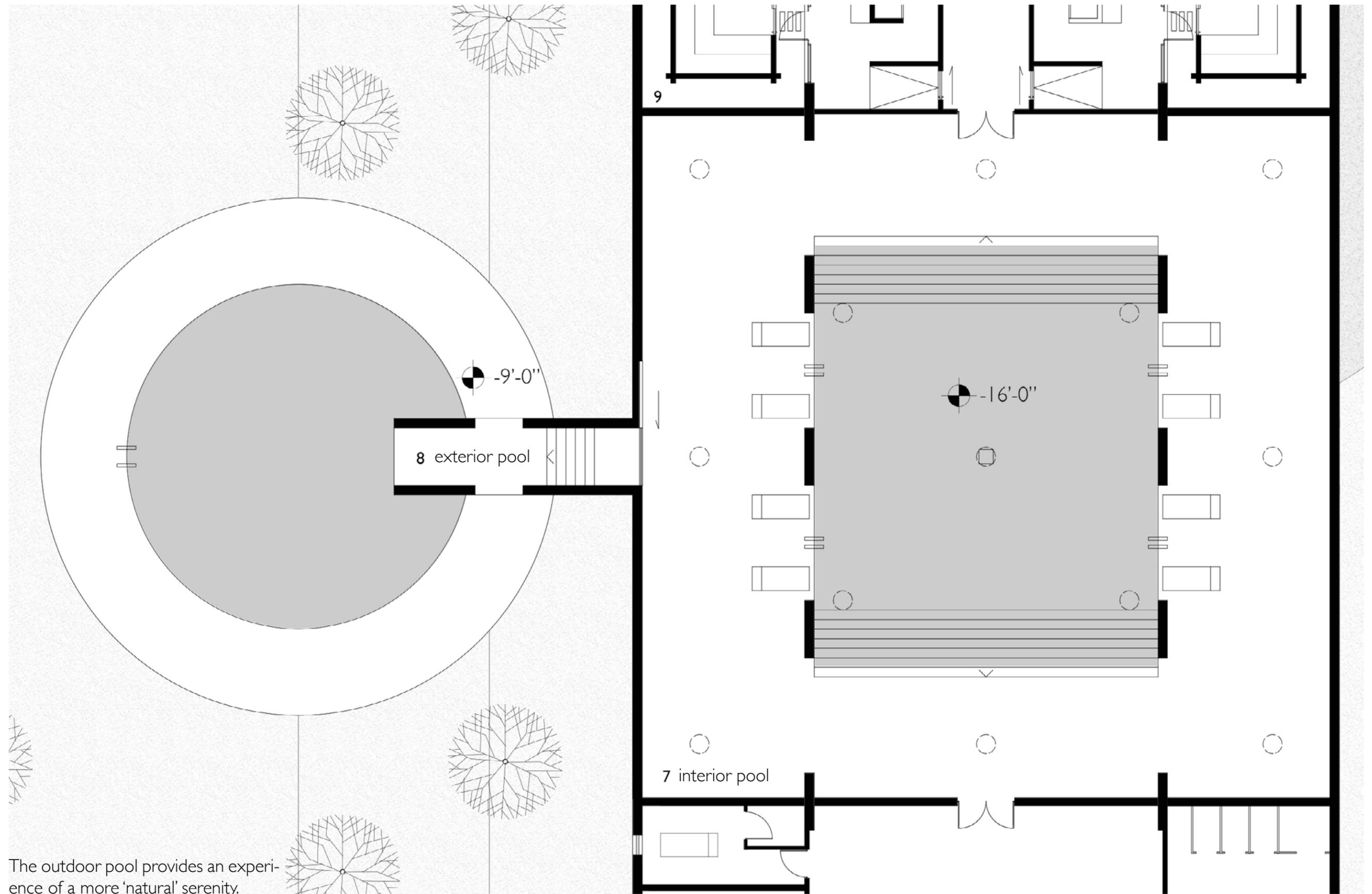
pool



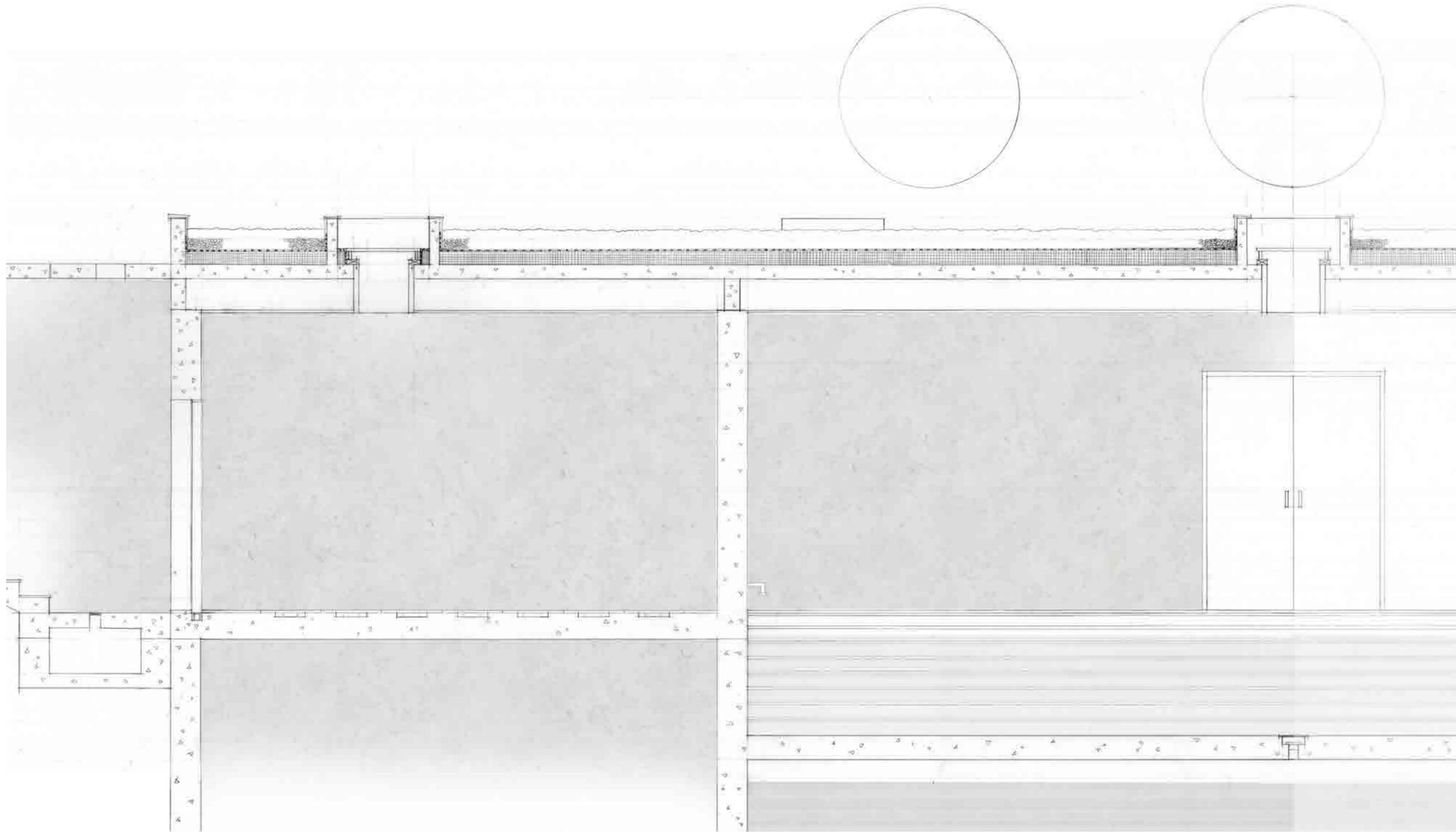


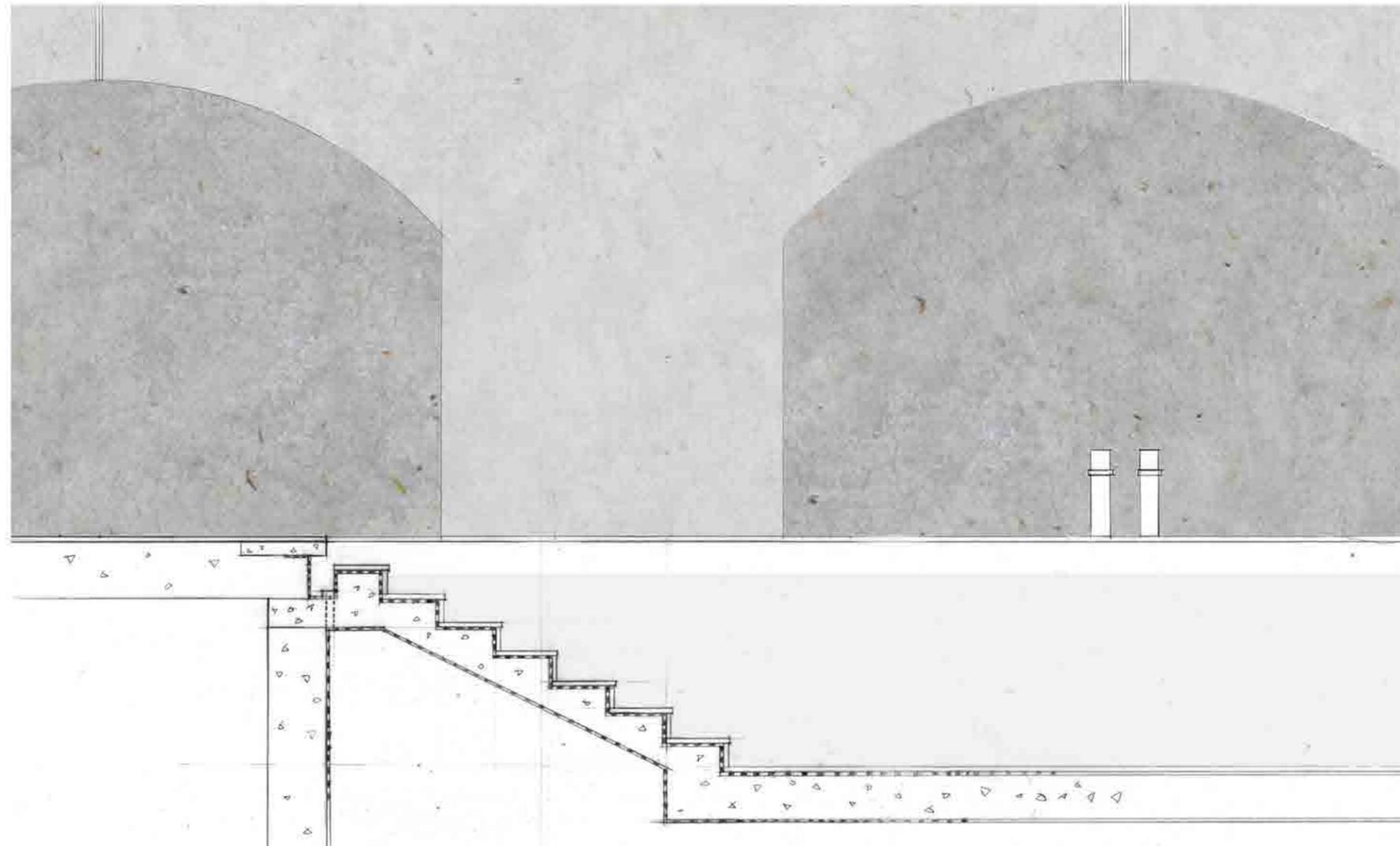
This room is a cold, static place. This is achieved by allowing dim light to pierce through from 13 small round openings on the roof. The overall atmosphere within the room is dark and still, void of all sound.



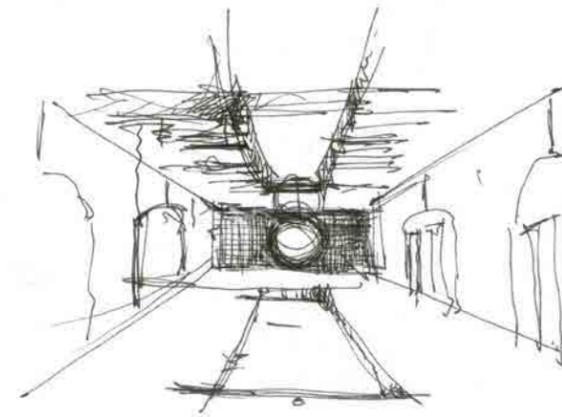


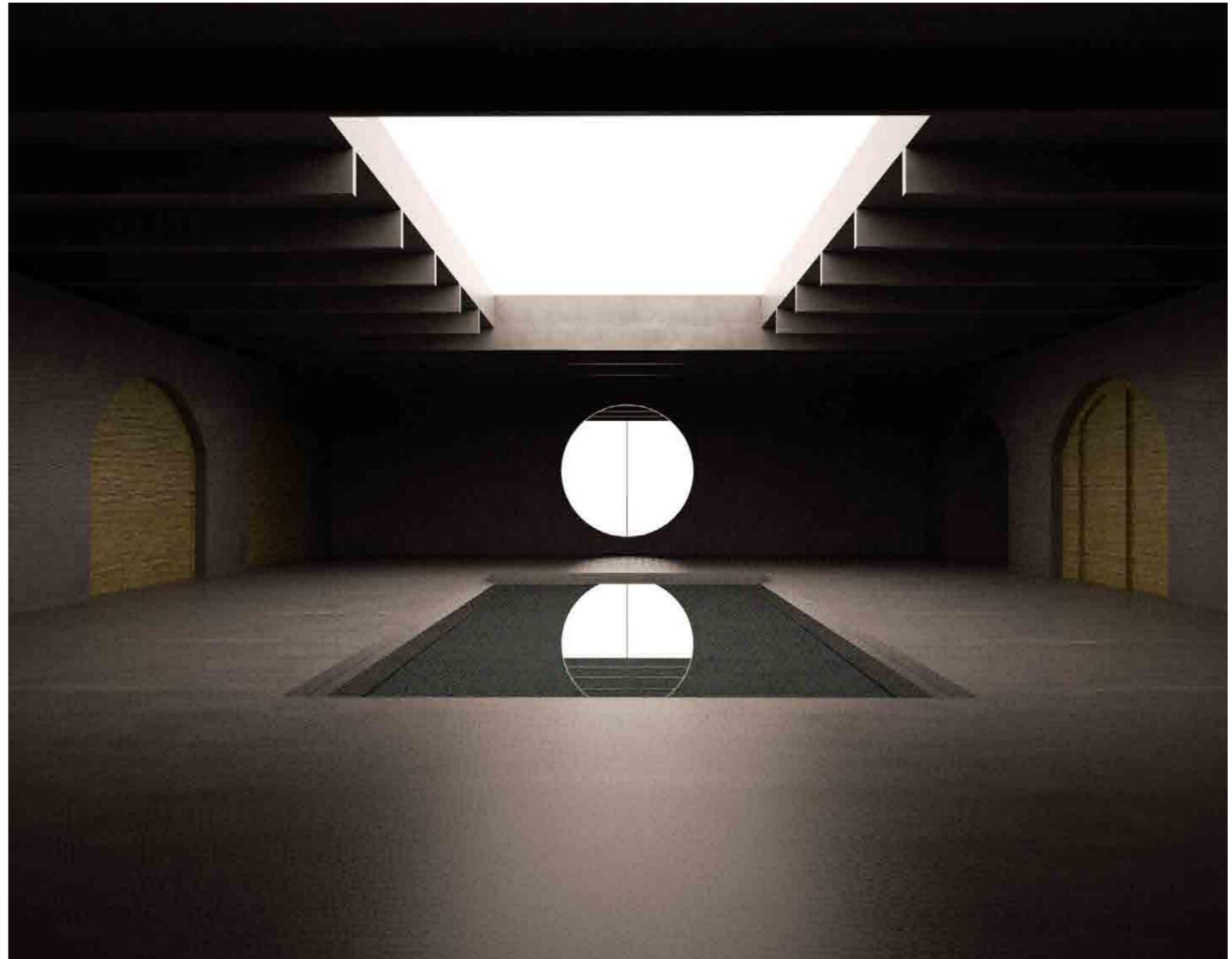
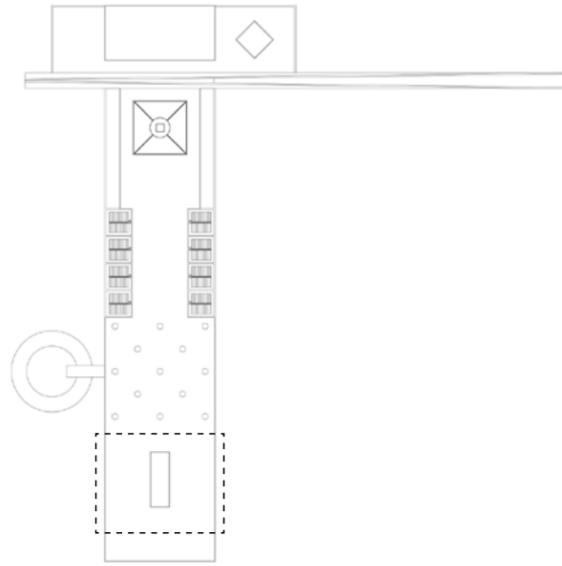
The outdoor pool provides an experience of a more 'natural' serenity.





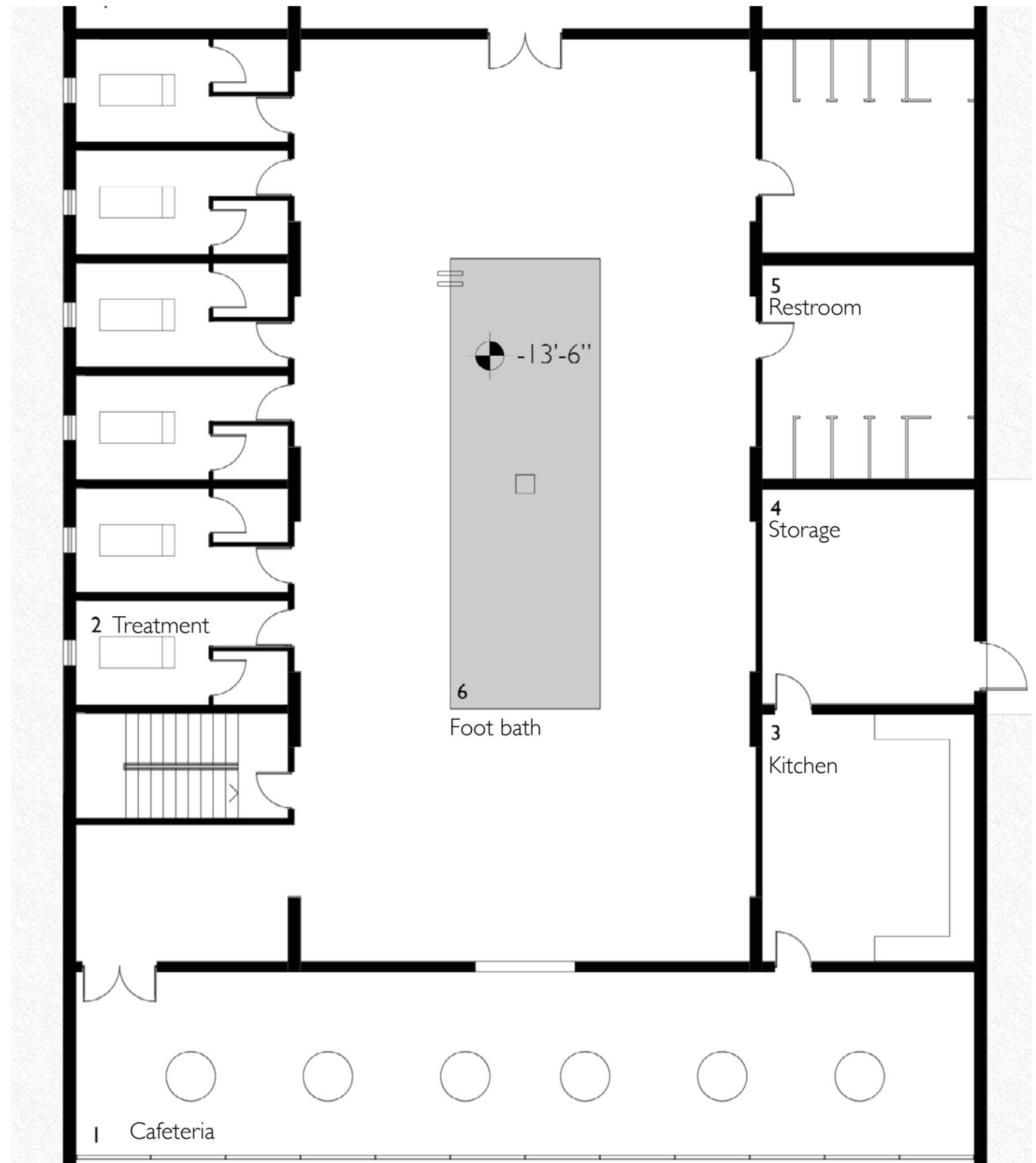
foot bath



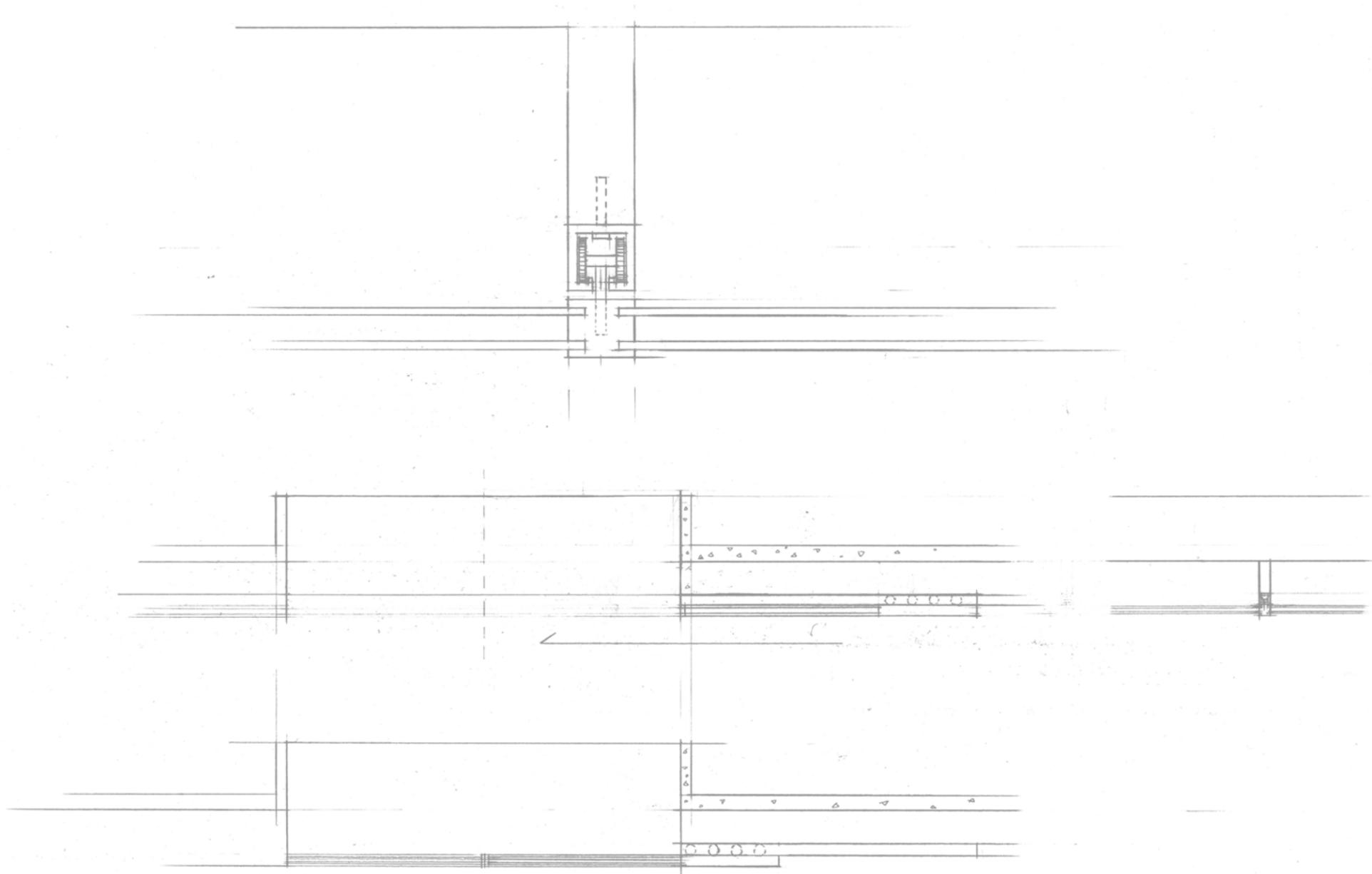


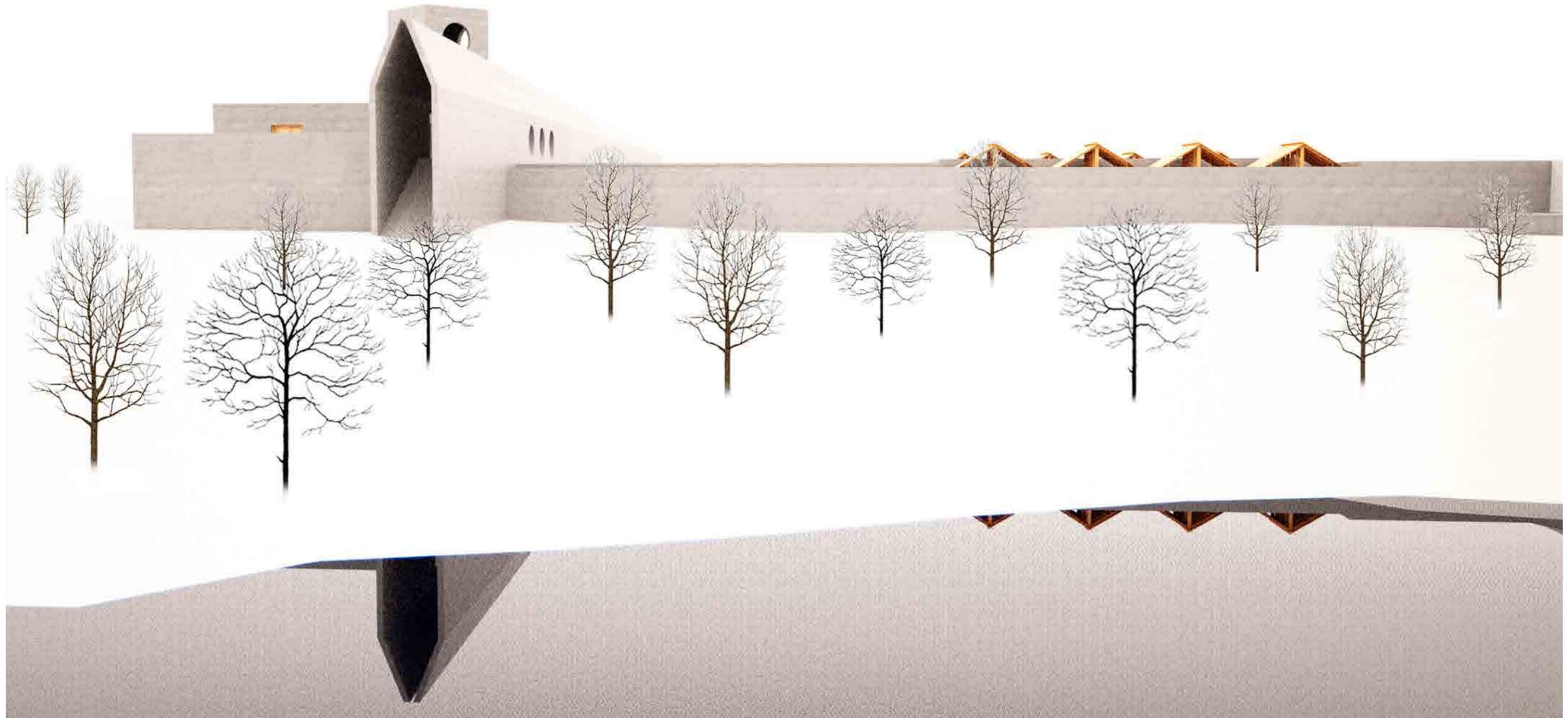
The journey ends with a foot bath following after the pool, with a cafeteria in front of it and four body-treatment rooms on the side.

Visitors can enjoy a wide open view to the sea from the cafeteria.



With convertible installation sitting on the beam, the house can still keep warm during winter time.





Bibilography

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Thanks for reading

Bye, Blacksburg