

LINGER: CHINESE CULTURE CENTER

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ABSTRACT

How to better integrate urban texture, architecture, and culture organically, and use the architecture as a carrier to transmit more humanistic information?

In today's society, people have a variety of ways to explore the culture and understand the culture. However, the most direct experience is a personal experience. As the most important carrier of human activities, architecture cannot be overlooked. From the direct sensory experience and indirect behavioral patterns, architecture is involved in human activities and ways of thinking all the time. Therefore, the combination of culture and architecture organically will give people a better way and angle to understand the culture.

The relationship between local culture and local architecture is inextricably linked. However, how to integrate foreign culture into local architecture will be a very difficult problem. Directly transplanting buildings and cultural elements from a foreign culture to a local city will make the building incompatible with the original urban texture. It is not easy for local residents to accept this foreign culture from the aesthetic perspective or psychological perspective. In my thesis, I hope to design a cultural center that can match the texture of the local city and reflect the foreign culture through my thinking about the architecture and the understanding of the foreign culture: design a Chinese cultural center in Chinatown, Washington DC, to find out a reasonable way for cultural communication.

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ABSTRACT General Audience Abstract

With the convenience of information dissemination and the rapid trend of globalization, the distance between people has gradually shortened. However, the way to bring human distance closer together must be the deeper understanding and mutual recognition of each other.

As the most important carrier of human activities, architecture's ability to transmit cultural information is obvious. However, designing a foreign cultural center to enhance cultural communication based on the local urban environment requires consideration of more factors. Foreign buildings contain foreign cultures that make them unsuitable for being displayed too directly in the local urban environment. Therefore, how to deal with the relationship between foreign culture and local architecture more reasonably is the crucial part. It is necessary to consider the local architectural environment as well as think about the deep content of the foreign culture both in the design of the building and the site. This project will provide an opportunity to transform this conflict and contradiction to better integrate the site, architecture, and culture.

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I would also like to thank my other teachers and classmates at WAAC as an international student. Although the US is not my hometown, you made me feel as warm as home. When I have difficulties, you always help me unselfishly. Your help is not only in the field of academics, but also provides me with more perspectives and ways of thinking. This is the wealth of my life.

I can't list everyone here, but every one of your help to me, I will keep them in my mind. Thank you all!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	.....	IV
Acknowledgments	.....	VI
Introduction	.....	1
The Problem of Chinatowns in the US	.....	3
The Chinese Traditional Garden	.....	9
The Site	.....	19
The Design	.....	31
Postscript	.....	65
Image Credits	.....	67
References	.....	69

INTRODUCTION

Culture for people is a kind of deep feeling in the heart. Even in design, I've always used more or fewer elements of my country unconsciously. My country has thousands of years of history and vast land, the culture has been created and spread by generations and it's not something that I can express completely and shortly. The architecture design itself has strong personal thoughts and tendencies, which has become a way to express my feelings. So, when I think about what kind of project to do, the first thing on my mind is a cultural project. When I went to the cities in the United States, I will go to Chinatown and turn around, to experience the atmosphere of my homeland. What pains me, however, is that, in any China-town I've ever visited, the Chinese cultural elements surrounding me cannot touch my heart. Whether the Chinese characters, dialects and food, it seems to me that it's not the place where I can find my impressed Chinese culture.

It retains some of the Chinese cultures indeed, but these cultures cannot represent China, rather than saying culture, it is folk. So, I want to make a real cultural center in Chinatown. I can clearly see one thing, Chinatown is actually in a three-way intersection. From a place of living habitat to a place of cultural communication or a so-called Chinatown. Because of this, a place for propaganda culture should be established. I want to drive and change Chinatown's bad situation through this design, and really make cultural exchanges, not just a space that is isolated from the outside world. This is the original intention of mine, which built a cultural center in Chinatown, DC.



Chinatown, San Francisco. Photographed in August 2017. Personal photo.



Chinatown, Los Angeles. Photographed in January 2017. Personal photo.



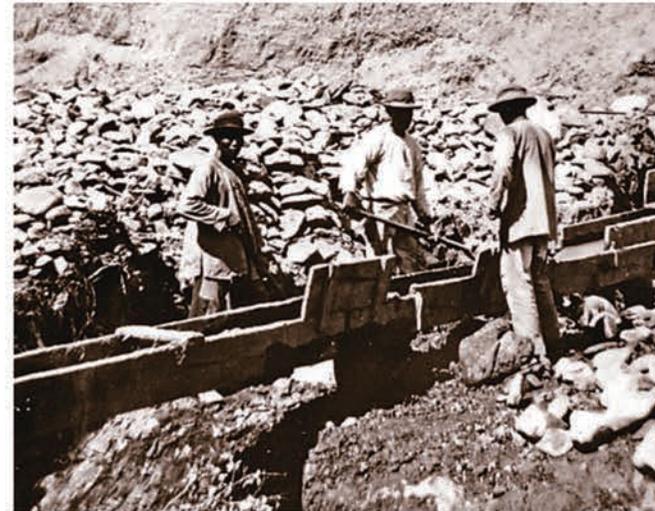
Chinatown, New York. Photographed in February 2018. Personal photo.



Chinatown, Washington DC. Photographed in November 2017. Personal photo.

THE PROBLEM OF CHINATOWNS IN THE US

The same feeling does not only appear on me alone. When I communicated with many friends who have been to Chinatown in the United States, they also expressed the same feeling. In order to figure out why Chinatown can't bring a sense of belonging to the Chinese people like us, I decided to go from history and developing, two perspectives to explore its reasons.



Chinese laborers who built American railways in the 19th century



Chinatown, San Francisco, late 19th century.

History of Chinatowns In the US

Seeking economic opportunity during the Gold Rush and the building of the transcontinental railroad, the first wave of Chinese immigrants arrived in the U.S. in the mid-1800s. The first Chinatowns sprang up on the West Coast and were, at the start, much like ethnic settlements founded by European immigrant groups.^[1]

San Francisco's Chinatown, nearing Grant Ave is often touted as "the most ancient" and "largest" East Asian region. In the United States, the earliest Chinese residents in San Francisco were attracted by the jobs here, or did business. Because of discrimination, and even the official "rejection" of the law in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it is difficult for immigrants to do anything except as a laborer in a railway or mine. San Francisco has attracted different Cantonese groups. Waves of new immigrants come from the current Guangdong Province and Hong Kong, China. In the 1970s, Cantonese Vietnamese refugees chose this area to settle. Although many of the descendants of the original Chinatown residents left San Francisco and settled in other suburbs, they will still return to the area on Lunar New Year and other festivals.

Rather than saying Chinatown is a starting place of Chinese culture in the United States, it is better to say that it was the initial gathering place of the cheap laborer that was smuggled or purchased from the backward mountainous areas of southwestern China in the last century. I don't mean to belittle them, because that's the truth. The vast majority of Chinese people who came to the United States in this way chose to leave their homes and seek their own lives just because they could not survive in China. They were poor, ignorant, uneducated, unable to be integrated into American society, so they chose to gather together to form the so-called "Chinatown".

Even though many years later, when I came to China-town, I had a kind of sense of restraint which was out of tune with the surrounding environment, a sense of disgust from the heart, not a kind of cultural sustenance. No matter how high the expectations I had, I would just walk past, leave, and never want to go back.

When I think about and read the related literature again, I find that this feeling is reasonable. It's full of survival feeling, not living. All kinds of signs advertising out of the building, dirty ground and graffiti on the wall make me sick, but the people who live here don't care, just like all these things have nothing to do with them. I know that Chinatown is the most direct way for most Americans to understand Chinese culture, and the funny thing is, as a Chinese, I can't see any culture here. It looks like the streets of China 50 years ago, or even 100 years ago, especially likes Hongkong decades ago. If I'm an American, I can only feel a mess of prosperity, without culture. However, in fact, China has a lot of beautiful things, these things are the essence of Chinese culture, not the suffocating Chinese elements shown by the Chinatown today.



"The street of the gamblers" in San Francisco Chinatown, around the turn of the 20th century.

Development problems of Chinatowns

"Chinatowns are turning into a sanitized ethnic playground for the rich to satisfy their exotic appetite for a dim sum and fortune cookie fix," says Andrew Leong, one of the authors of a recent report that charted gentrification in New York, Boston and Philadelphia's Chinatowns. Washington DC's version is little more than a collection of Chinese restaurants, gift shops, and an ornate arch.^[2]

One obvious thing is that Chinatown's only cultural and folk atmosphere and venues are being eaten by the business empire. Luxury apartments and stores have gradually replaced the residences and small commodity markets operated by the previous Asian population. In Chinatown, where the business atmosphere is getting stronger, the cultural atmosphere has become very strange. Even though Chinatown has been developing, its cultural carrying capacity is getting weaker.

This phenomenon is not what I want to see. I believe that any American who wants to go sightseeing in Chinatown must hope to see the most authentic and interesting Chinese culture, instead of being stolen by strange things under the "Chinese cultural cloaks". No one willing to waste time and money. It is unfair for the people who want to understand Chinese culture to accept this kind of clown-like culture wrapped in a strong commercial atmosphere, whether for American or Chinese. So, the problem is, how can we make the cultural atmosphere return to Chinatown and show its real and attractive side?

Linger bring about culture

Yingtai Long, a famous writer of China, once wrote a letter to his son to answer his son's question about the lacking of culture in Hong Kong.

".....When the purpose is completed, it will be scattered, just like a flash mob."

"Have you noticed that even in shopping malls, there are very few places where people can sit, rest and talk. Its design tries to let people move around, from one store to the next, that is, use space to force consumption. If there is a place for people to sit down and chat, the purpose of consumption will not be achieved. The places where you can stay are for tourists and passers-by, such as the bars of Lan Kwai Fong and the atrium of the Grand Hotel. However, they are really just crossing the road. The people who really live in this city have no place to stay. Home, too narrow to be a feast. Restaurant, you have to go after eating. Clubs, limited membership. Tourist hotel, too expensive. Where do people go to speak to each other and cultivate community emotions?"

"The problem is, if there is no community emotion, how to generate the cultural identity?..... Hong Kong has such a long coastline, but it does not have a true coastal culture.....France, Spain, the United Kingdom, and even Singapore have such coasts. You said that there is an Avenue of Stars in Tsim Sha Tsui. The Avenue of Stars is designed for tourists – everything is to make money, not to let local people live, hang around, and take root."

"This city even has no big squares where the masses gather. The gathering of the masses is the same as the chattering in the café bar. It is an extremely important *lingering culture* and is crucial for deepening cultural identity. However, Hong Kong is a city that has no idlers and *do not stay*."^[3]

Long Yingtai's words become the most important entry point for my entire design. How to use the architecture to allow people to stay and be willing to stay so that people could have time and opportunity to experience the culture and understand the culture. Under this kind of thinking, I easily come up with the Chinese traditional gardens.

THE CHINESE TRADITIONAL GARDEN

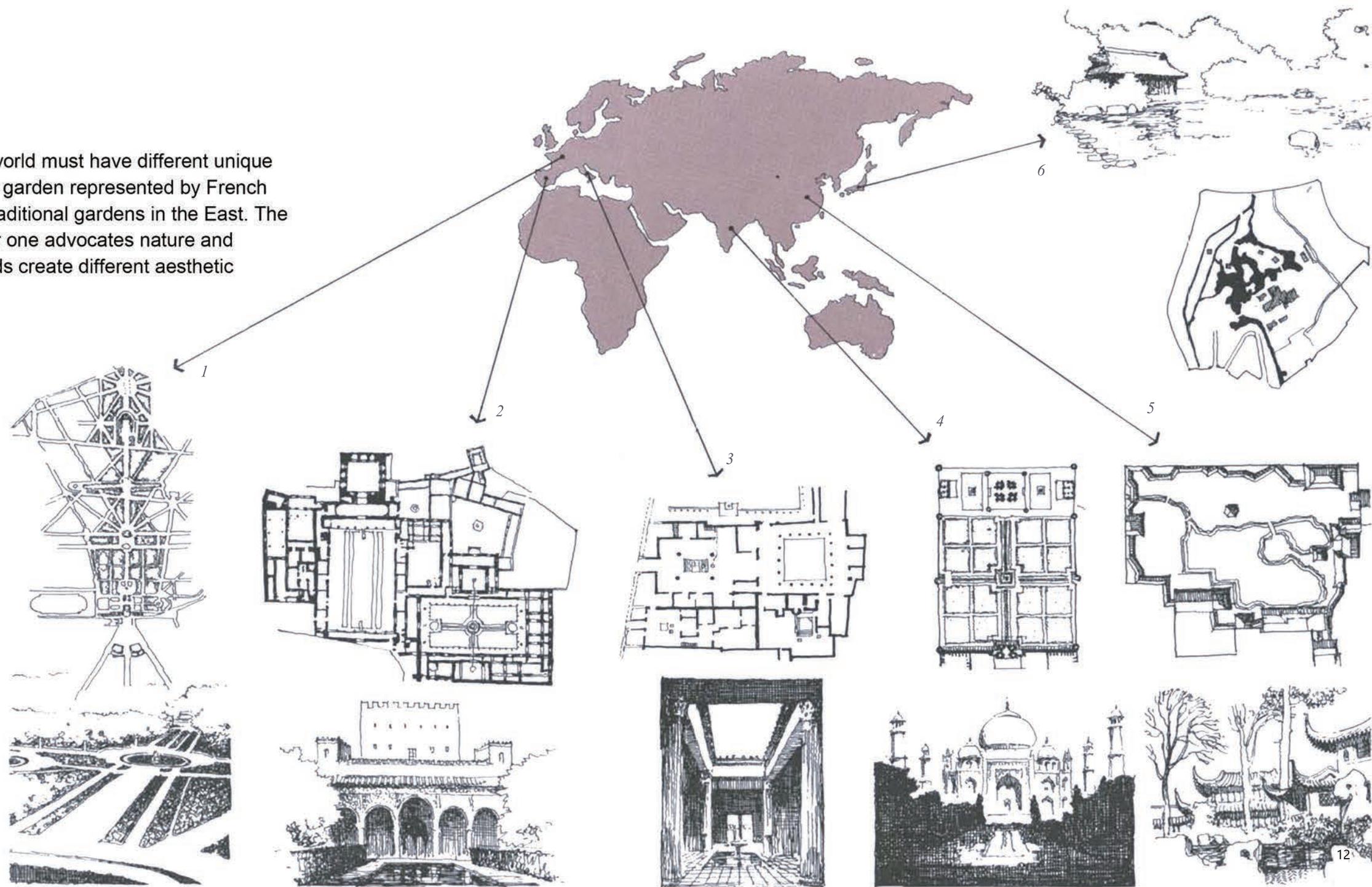
The Chinese garden is a landscape garden style which has evolved over three thousand years. It includes both the vast gardens of the Chinese emperors and members of the imperial family, built for pleasure and to impress, and the more intimate gardens created by scholars, poets, former government officials, soldiers and merchants, made for reflection and escape from the outside world. They create an idealized miniature landscape, which is meant to express the harmony that should exist between man and nature.



The Chinese traditional garden map

Different layout between the Chinese Garden and Western Garden

Because of the different cultural traditions, the gardening methods around the world must have different unique styles. In general, there are two styles that are most typical. One is a geometric garden represented by French traditional gardens in the West, and a nature garden represented by Chinese traditional gardens in the East. The former one emphasizes rationality, strong adjustment, and symmetry. The latter one advocates nature and emphasizes feelings and moods. The different cultural between these two worlds create different aesthetic tastes.

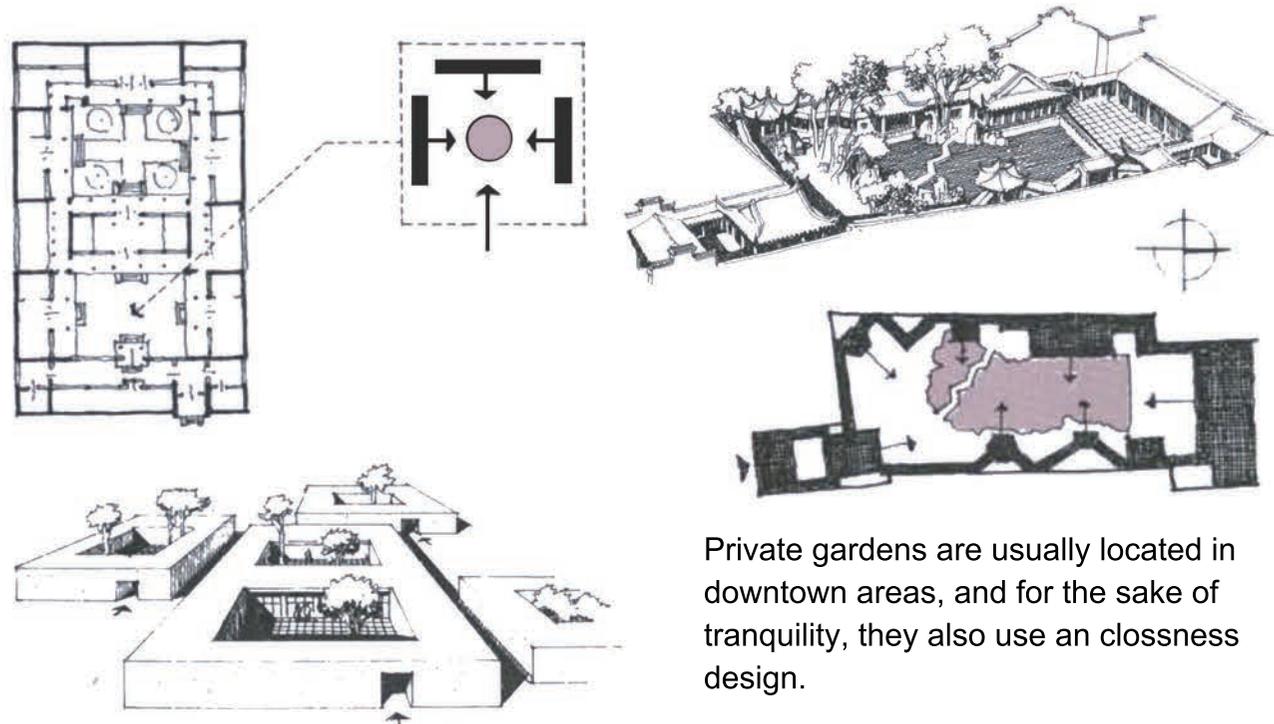


Two philosophies, two ways

1. Versailles gardens, typical European classical gardens. Geometric pattern.
2. The Alhambra, which includes two inner courts, presents a regular rectangular plane.
3. House of Silver Wedding in Pompeii, its patio and inner courtyard also present a regular rectangle or square.
4. Taj Mahal, axisymmetric, a plane of checkerboard layout.
5. Liu Garden, Using the irregular layout, combines the building with mountains, water, and stones to present a natural feeling.
6. Katsura Imperial Villa, a typical Japanese garden, is influenced by Chinese culture and pays attention to the beauty of nature.

Different spatial feeling

Traditional Chinese architecture is usually dominated by closeness layouts in group combinations. This is a very intuitive reflection of the Siheyuan used in many places. Same as most gardens, in particular, there are a large number of private gardens with small footprints (compared with royal gardens), these gardens are often centered on the pool, taking irregular planar shapes. It makes the enclosed space intimate, quiet, tortuous and varied.

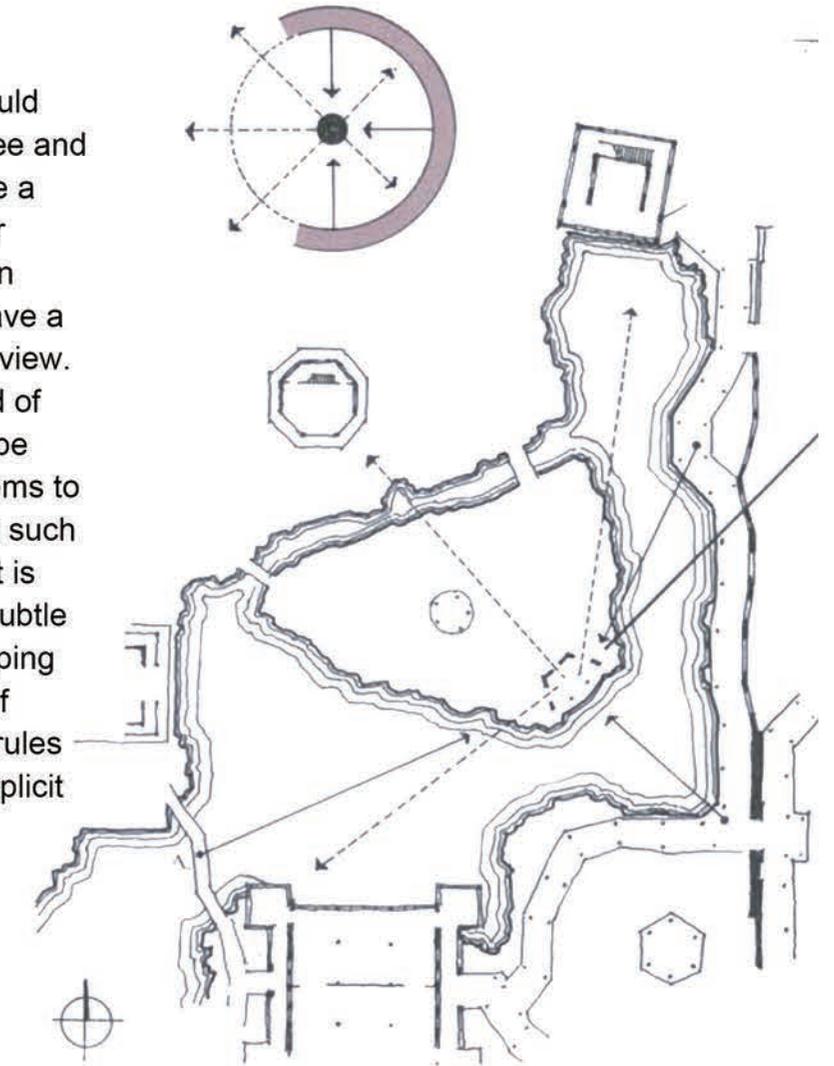


Private gardens are usually located in downtown areas, and for the sake of tranquility, they also use an closeness design.

Closeness spacial feeling in Chinese traditional architecture

See and be seen

The scenery in the garden should usually meet two conditions, see and be seen. First, it should provide a suitable angle for viewing other scenery. Second, it exists as an ornamental object and must have a beautiful landscape effect and view. Under the guidance of this kind of demand, although the landscape arrangement in the garden seems to have no geometric relationship such as balance symmetry, in fact, it is constrained by this deep and subtle rules all the time. This landscaping method contains the concept of Chinese culture for rules. The rules are contained in everything, implicit and profound.



Sight line relationship in Humble Administrator's Garden, Jiangsu, China

Gardening methods that I know and quoted here, just a small part of it. Whether as the treatment of space or the guidance and experience of human senses, it is very profound and complicated. However, it is very simple to say, everything is based on people's needs and feelings as the most fundamental starting point. People are part of nature from beginning to end, living in harmony with nature is the most important part of Chinese culture. People are like this, culture is the same, architecture and gardens are also identical. The culture itself is displayed in any detail, unpredictable, but ubiquitous. This is even more determined that I combine garden and architecture together in my design to show a more real and rich culture in my site.



THE SITE

Chinatown in Washington, DC is a small, historic borough east of downtown consisting of about 20 ethnic Chinese and other Asian restaurants and small businesses along H and I Streets between 5th and 8th Streets, Northwest. It is known for its annual Chinese New Year festival and parade and the Friendship Arch, a Chinese gate built over H Street at 7th Street.



History

The Chinatown area was once home to many Chinese immigrants. Chinese immigrants began to move into the area in the 1930s, having been displaced from Washington's original Chinatown along Pennsylvania Avenue by the development of the Federal Triangle government office complex. The newcomers marked it with decorative metal latticework and railings as well as Chinese signage.

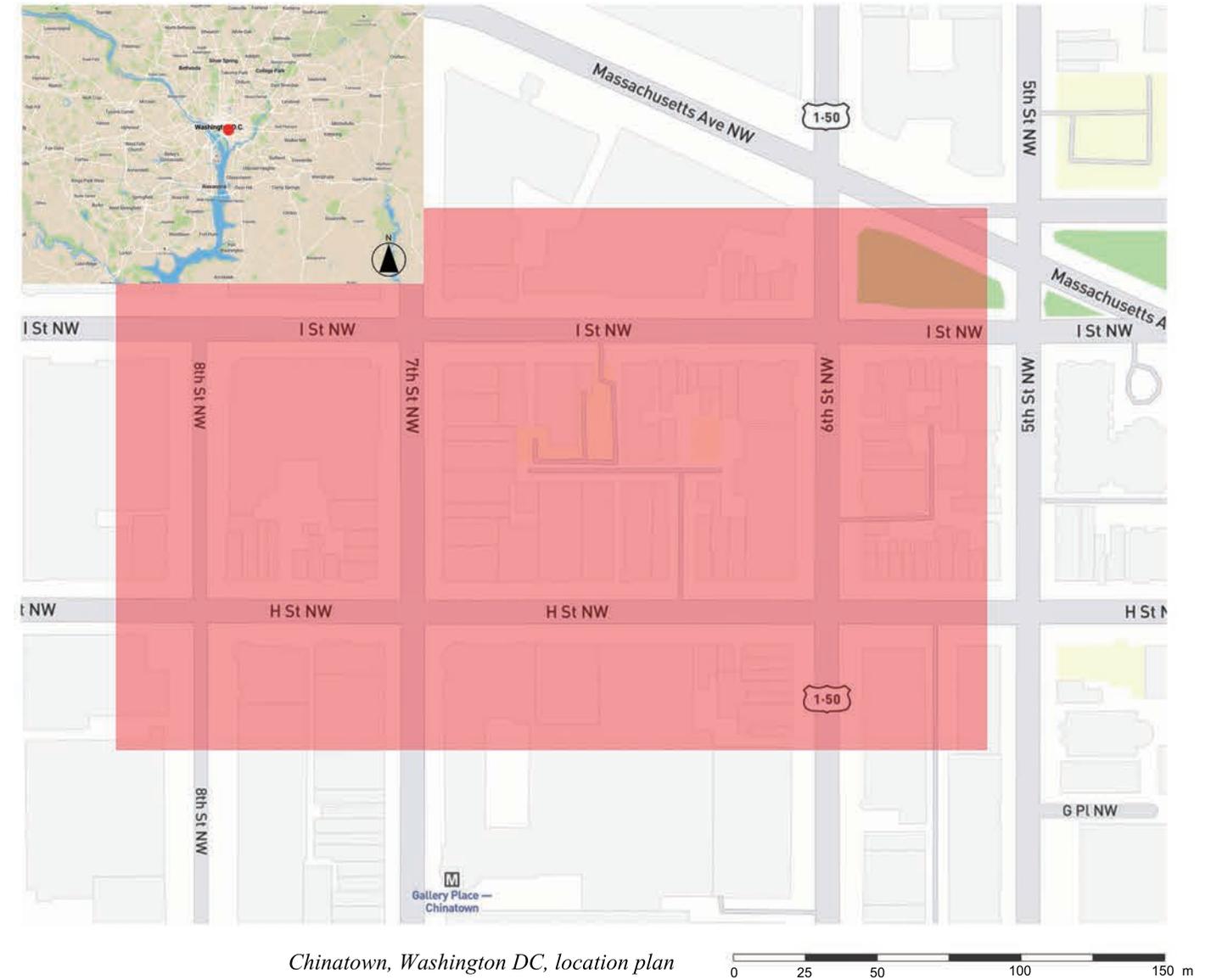
In 1986, the city dedicated the Friendship Archway, a traditional Chinese gate.^[4]

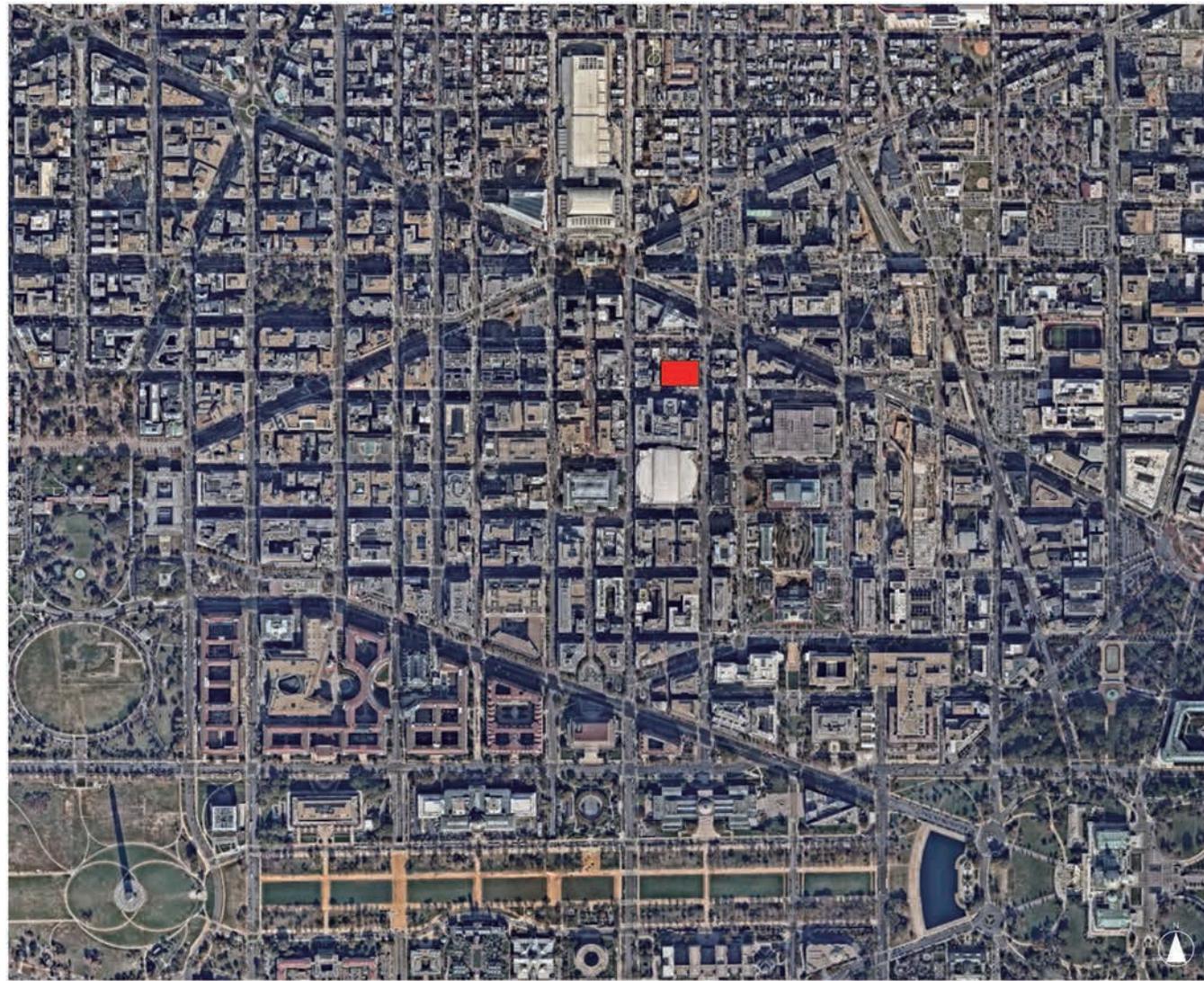
In 1986, the Metro station was given its present name: Gallery Place-Chinatown. The city constructed the Wah Luck House apartments at 6th and H Streets, NW, to accommodate the displaced residents in 1982. Designed by architect Alfred Liu, the apartment building introduced modern Chinese design motifs due to the red-paneled balconies.^[5]

The MCI Center was completed in 1997 (renamed Verizon Center in 2006 and Capital One Arena in 2017). After the construction of the arena, AsianWeek said in 2000 that the neighborhood "barely" remains.^[6]

In 2015, The Washington Post said that only about 300 Chinese-Americans remained in the borough, and many of them were being forced out by their landlords.^[7]

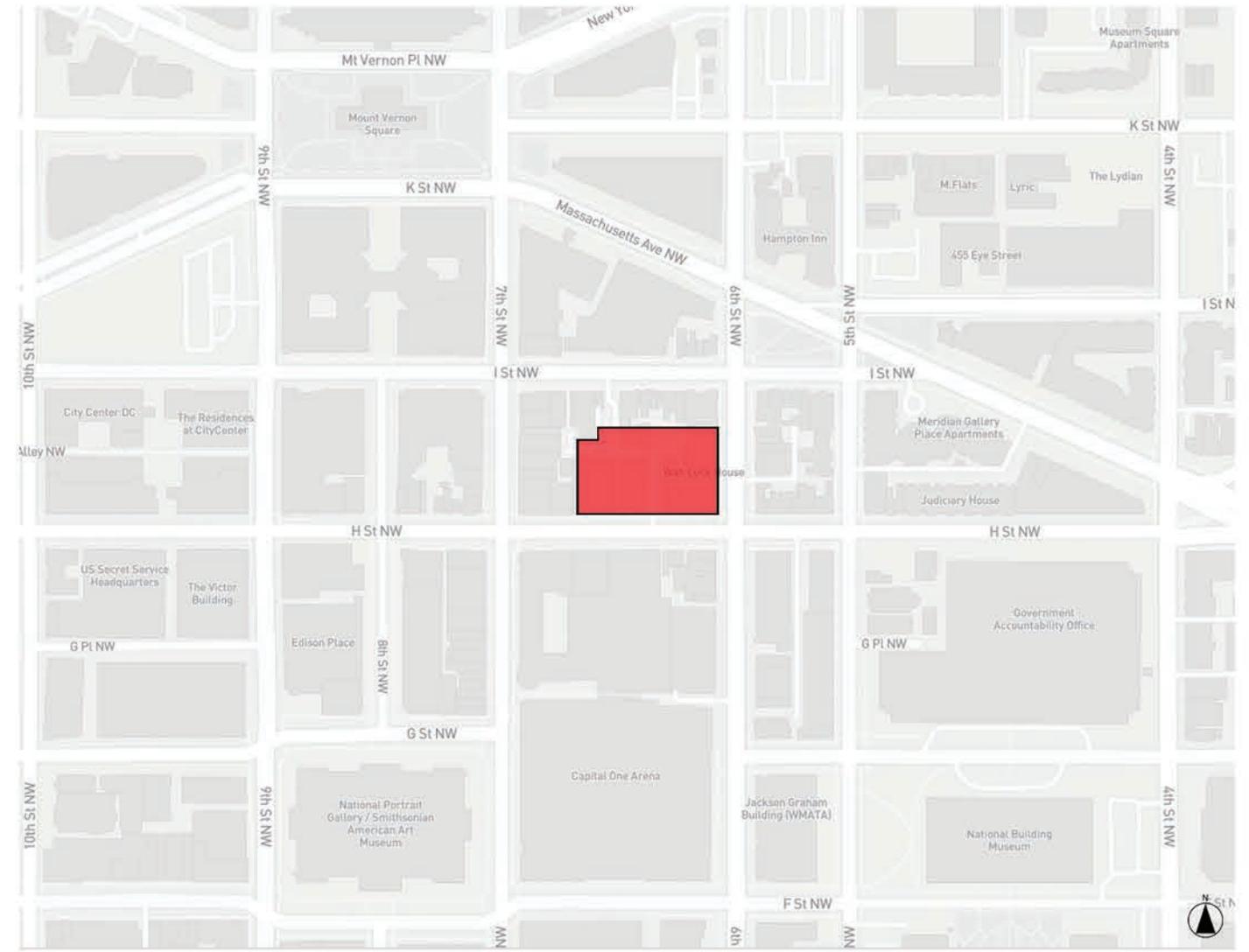
As I said, Chinatown has been devoured by the high-end business empire, The cultural atmosphere has gradually been replaced by a strong commercial atmosphere. In the long run, the Chinatown will no longer could be called the Chinatown.





Urban satellite imagery near Chinatown, Washington DC

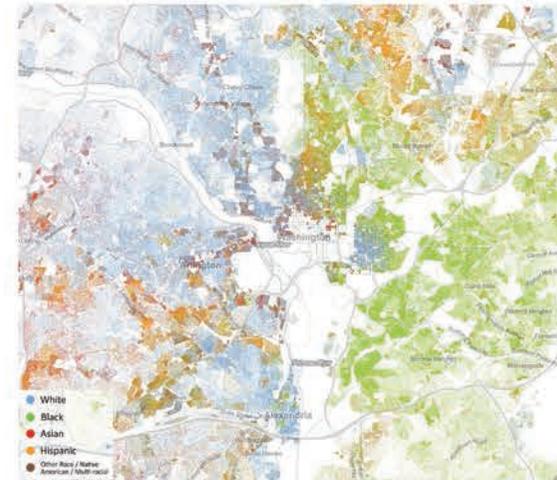
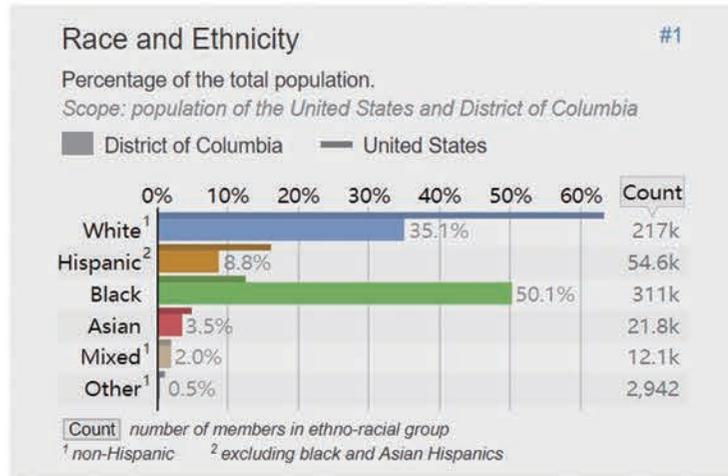
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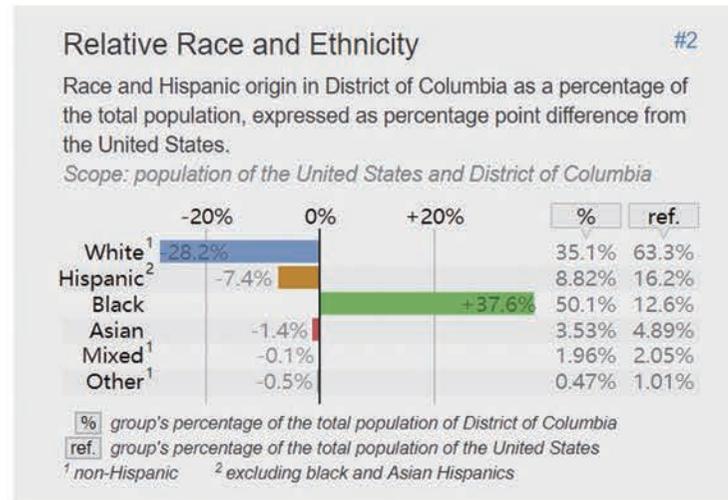
Site location

0 50 100 200 300 m

Human factors

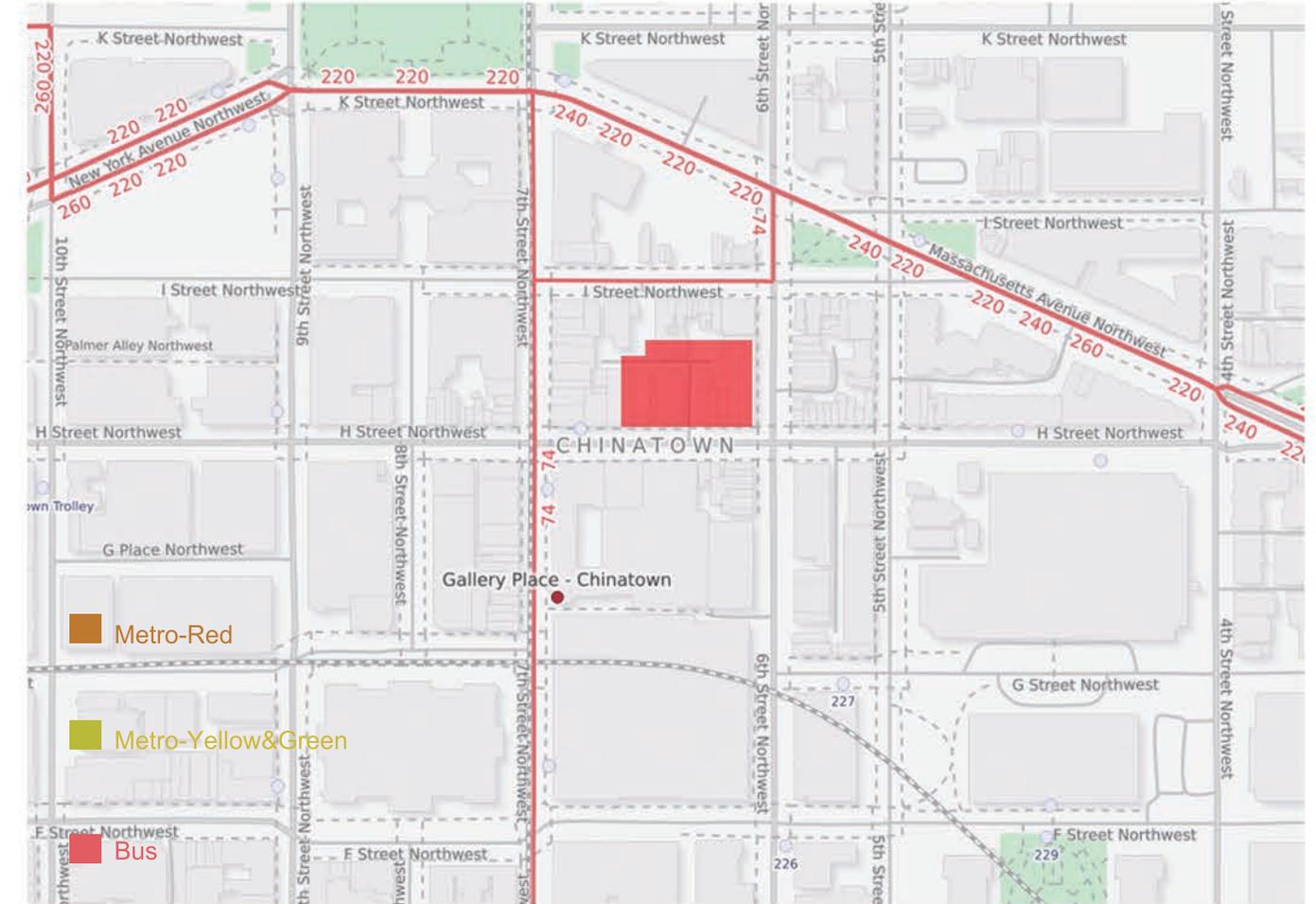


Dotmap of population, 2010



Population size and its relative in Washington DC

Asian-American residents make up 3% of the total population of DC. This includes 16,788 foreign born residents. The largest groups include 5,476 residents from China.^[8]

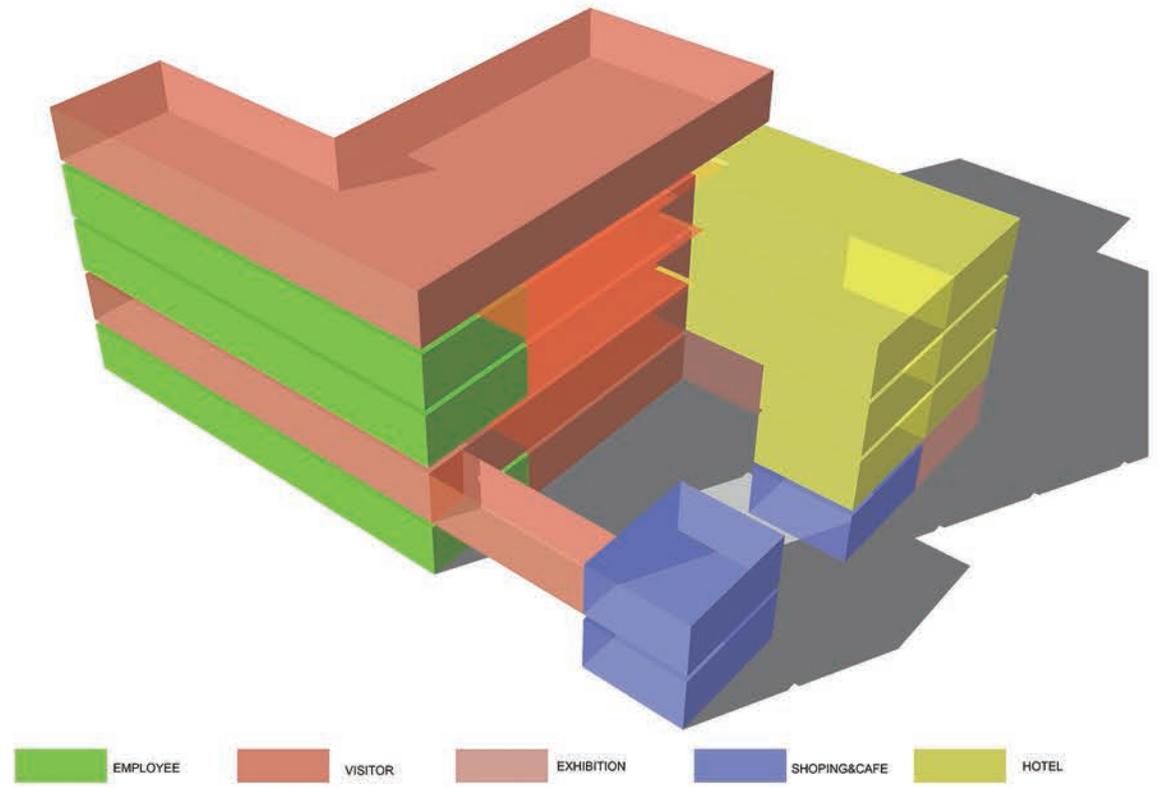


Transportation map. Chinatown, Washington DC

Fuction analysis



Existing building function of the site and its surrounding, Chinatown



Fuction analysis of Building in this project

Visual analysis

According to the situation of the site, DC's local architectural style is relatively regular.

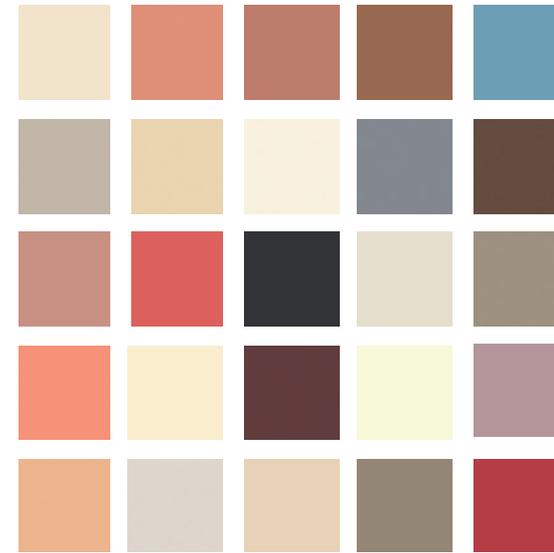
Therefore, the copying of the Chinese traditional architecture directly here is contradictory to the texture of the site. The most reasonable way is to change the shape of traditional Chinese architecture to other architectural forms in the DC city. By giving up the over-the-top large eaves, A regular building shape that is coordinated with the surrounding buildings should be used in this site. Therefore, due to changes in the shape of the building, the way of functional arrangement will be more inclined to the way of modern architecture, rather than the traditional Chinese architectural design.



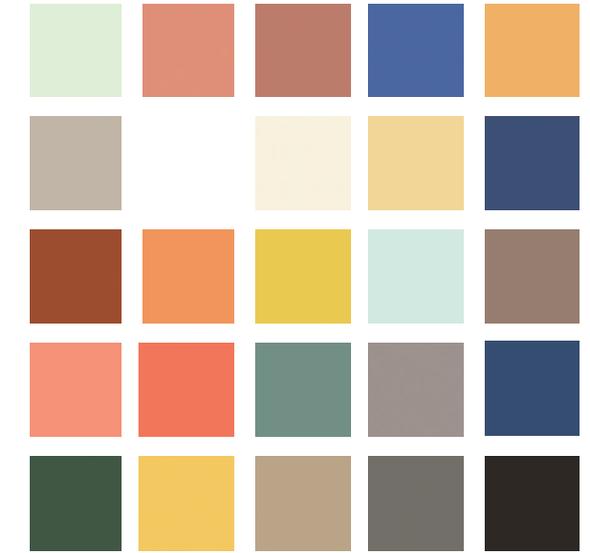
Site map



Views of the site's block, Oct. 2017, personal photos



Main color of the site



Secondary color of the site

The color is generally based on white gray and black. The special color such as red and yellow as the main color of the building in the site just because the existing buildings in Chinatown affect the overall urban color rhythm. Although this color has a certain cultural symbolic meaning (such as the red wall and yellow tiles of the Forbidden City), in fact, more original dwellings in China cannot use this color to decorate the building (Such as Beijing Siheyuan only use the white, gray and black). If the color adjustment is made, the black and white gray tone coordinated with the surrounding environment can also be used, and the brick and concrete can be used as the main building material skin, with the appropriate color modification on the surface.

THE DESIGN

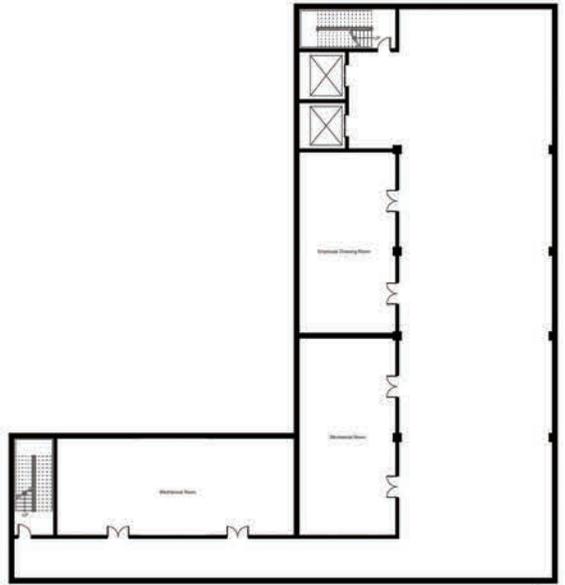
For a building plan that is re-planned at the original site, after having a given design direction and ideas, it is also necessary to pay attention to the functions of the removed building. In the new design, Besides the functions required by the design itself, it also needs to ensure that the function of the removed building is covered. As mentioned above, how to deal with the relationship between the new architectural form and the surrounding buildings, how to bring people's existing urban atmosphere into the cultural atmosphere designed by me is a very worthwhile question.

According to the functional analysis of the original site, the new design will include restaurants, hotels, shops, cafes to cover the original functions, while increasing the exhibition hall, teaching, and Chinese entertainment areas to increase the depth of use of the cultural center. The overall design will reduce the directness of the space, increase the indirect space and views, and add a large number of areas that can be used for rest and viewing to increase people's lingering time in the area. As Yingtai Long said, Linger can bring out the culture.



Since the most central road in Chinatown is located on the south side of the site, the main entrance of the overall site is located on the south side, providing two main entrances, one for the main entrance of the garden and one for the main entrance of the building to divert different people. The east side is the building, and the west side is the garden. The surrounding buildings are used to create a sense of closeness which enhances the privacy of the garden and enhance the visitor's feelings about the cultural atmosphere of the site.

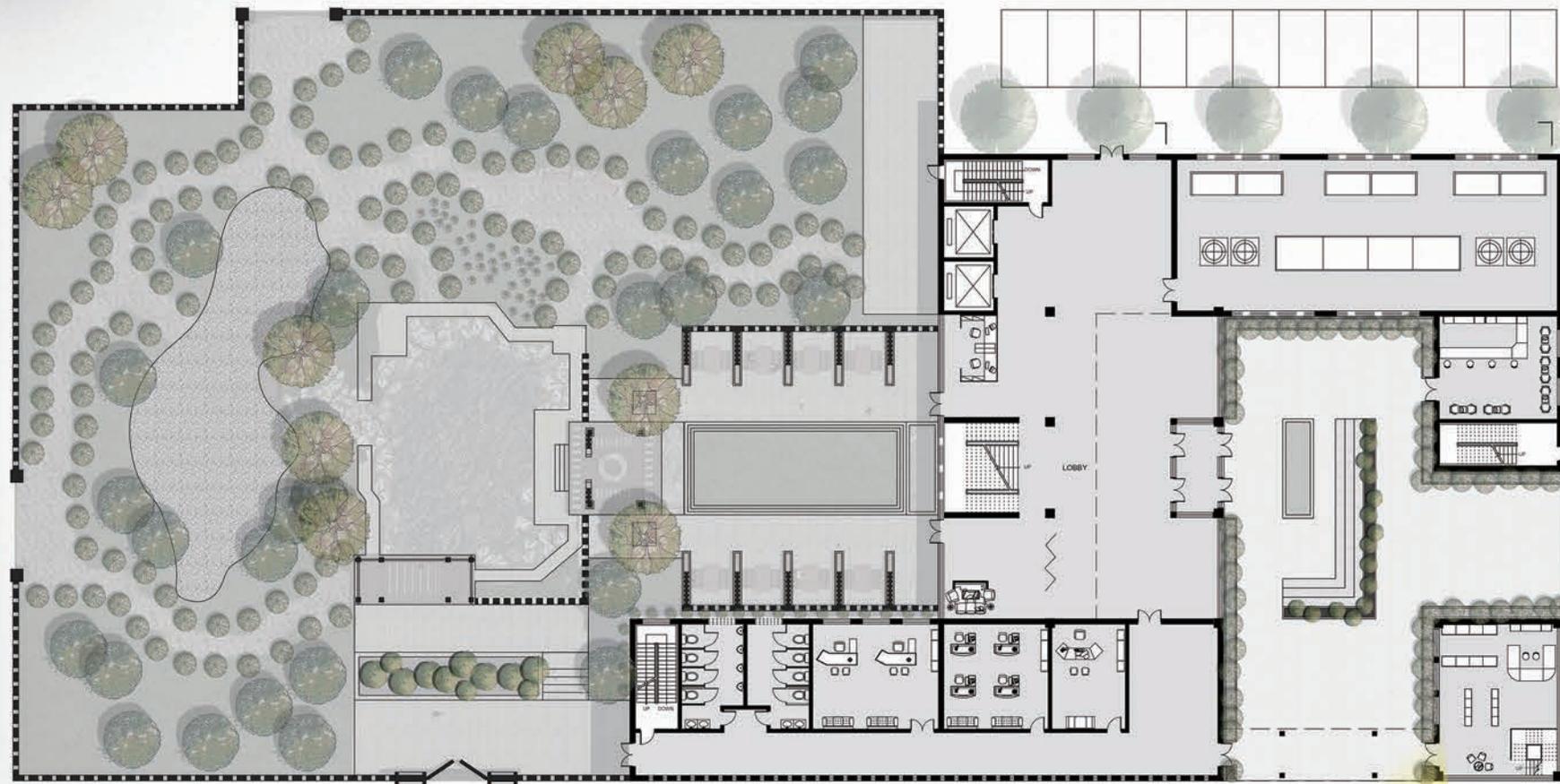
Because the northern part of the building is a residential area, a lane is added from the north side of the site to make it easier for residents to enter and exit. The whole building is higher in the southeast and lower in the northwest, to resist the influence of the northwest wind for the outdoor space in winter. At the same time, the light-receiving area of the building in the north is increased, and there is no building shelter on the south side of the garden to increase the amount of light received by the plants and enhance its activity.



Basement plan

General Layout





Ground floor plan

V1

V2

0 5 10 20 30 m

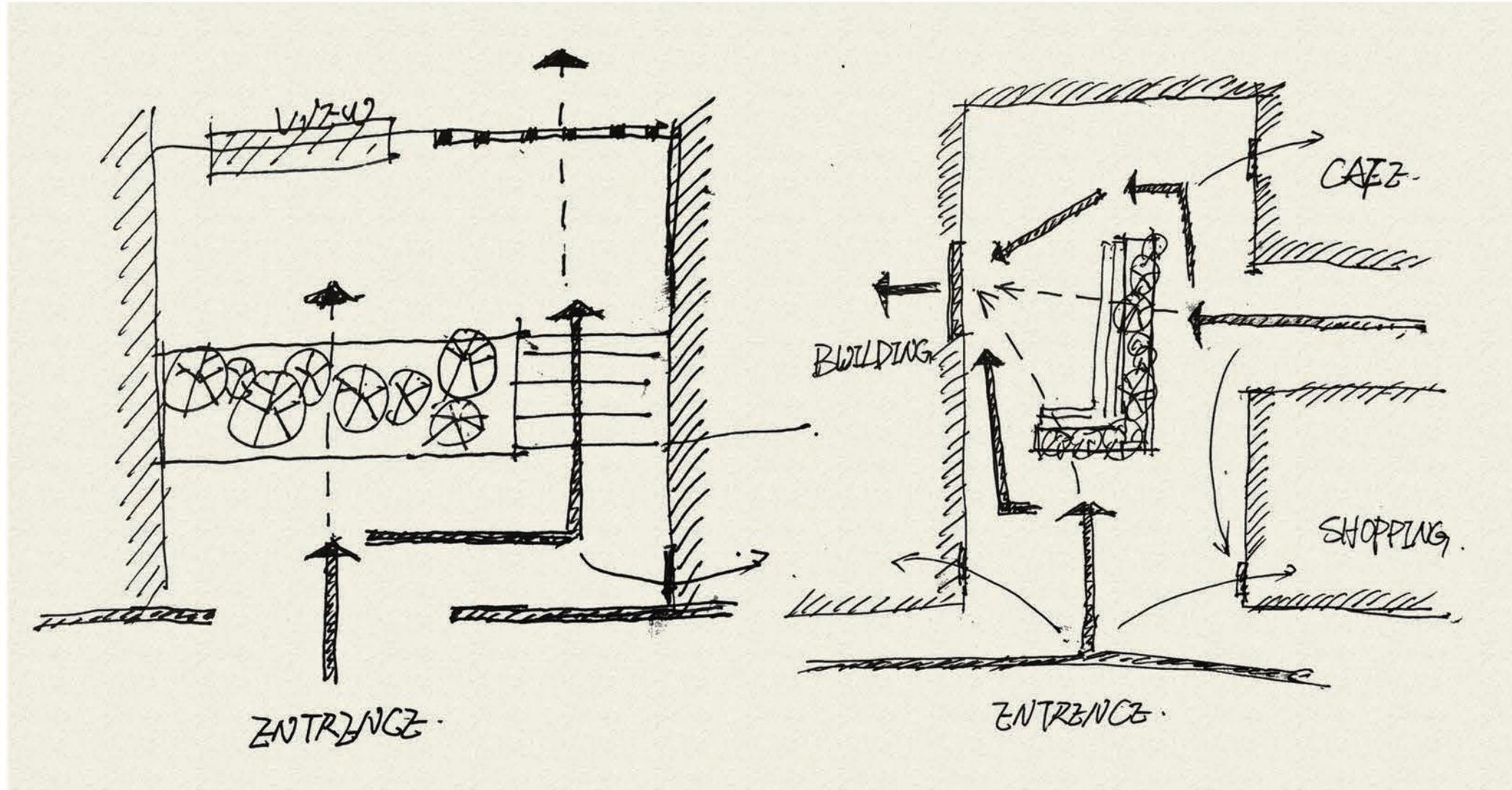
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V1: Garden entrance view



V2: Building entrance view



Path and sight analysis of the entrances

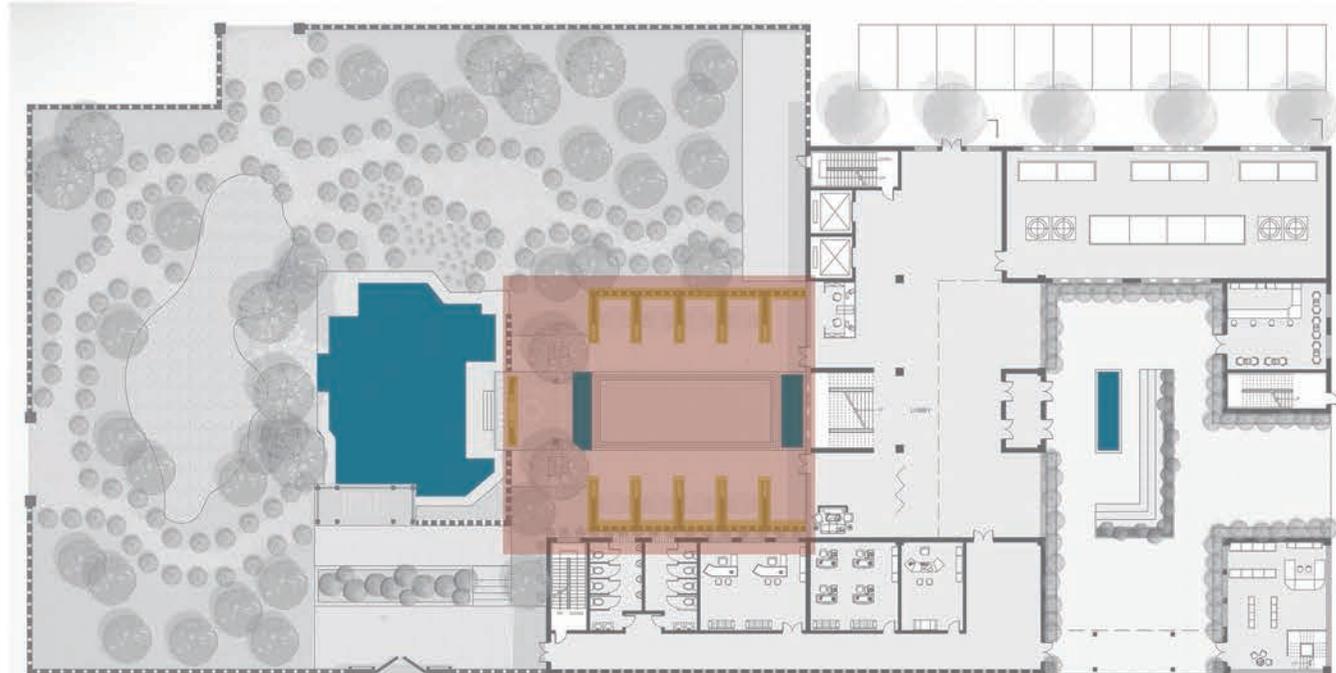


Both of these entrances achieve the purpose of changing the tour path by using a certain visual occlusion. In the garden entrance, visitors will see a bamboo forest after entering the gate. Through the bamboo forest, they can see the most central mountain and water features in the garden. However, because only the sight can pass, they need to pass through the stairs from the right side to see the whole scenery. The scenery that has just been completely visible through the

bamboo forest can be used to quickly bring visitors into the atmosphere of the garden from the atmosphere of the city, thus completing the transition of a space and the conversion of the atmosphere.

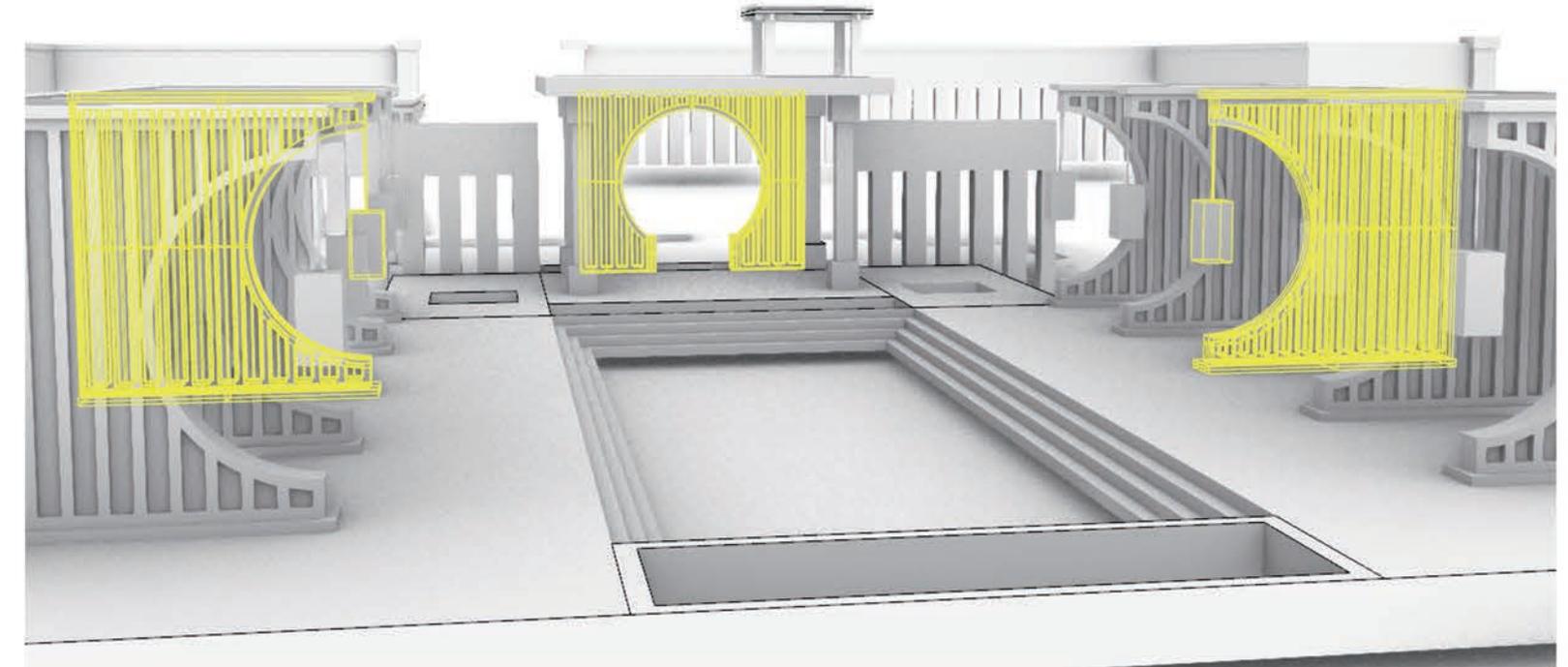
Similar to the method of the garden entrance, the building entrance serves as the main entrance of the building, which requires more regular site planning, and the line of sight should not be too dense, otherwise it will make it impossible for people to directly understand the main entrance of the building and thus lose the guiding role of the site. Both the line of sight and the path are relatively euphemistic, and the intensity of the entire transition space is lower than that the garden entrance. However, through the building itself, the conversion of the spatial experience of the next stage can be completed, and a relatively good atmosphere change can also be achieved.





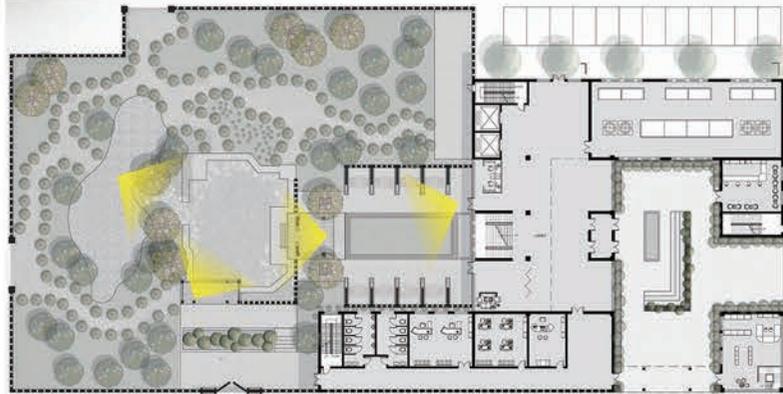
Use the water as an axis and put a hidden line to guide the viewing route for the visitors.

Water, as an inevitable element in Chinese traditional gardens, also plays an important role in this design. From the entrance of the building to the deep pool in the garden, water appears as a guiding element. First, this series of water can emphasize the axis, enhance the sense of the gravity of the building. Provide visitors with a hidden guiding. Second, from the initial rule rectangle to the final irregular water shape, it has the similar effect with the design of the entrance. With the gradual transition, visitors can more naturally accept the change of the site's atmosphere.



Use a repeating of the moon door shape to form a spatial sequence, focusing on the line of sight and the path of visiting

Because this space is located at the core axis of the site and plays an important role in transitioning Western-style modern architecture to Chinese traditional gardens, its design is crucial to the integral feeling of the site. Therefore, in the design, first of all, this area design is a Western design that tends to be regular, but in order to build a transitional effect, the wood is used as the main material as the traditional Chinese building did. The repeated superposition of the split of the moon door provides visual guidance for the area. The spaces created by the superposition provide the seat to leisure and play for visitors, and the seats could increase the lingering time to feel the cultural atmosphere. Lanterns provide lighting and decoration, and the shape emphasizes the geometric feeling in order to adapt to the overall design of this area.



Ground floor plan

From the right side to left side, the view named V1, V2, V3 and V4



V1



V3



V2



V4

V1. The exit behind the main stair, an important outdoor space from the building part to the garden part.

V2. A wooden pavilion decorated with moon doors, visitors can see the pond, the small mountains and plants through the moon gate. And they also can see the small waterfall formed by the water flowing out from the higher stone.

V3. Another wooden pavilion, can be reached through the garden entrance from the H St. NW. A good place to "see and be seen".

V4. A wooden pavilion hidden in the trees at the highest point of the garden. A silence place to enjoy the whole views.

After entering through the main entrance, visitors can reach the second floor through the core stair, and a prominent viewing platform is designed at the half floor to echo the outdoor area. At the same time, the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th floors are extended in the vertical direction of the entrance area to provide a more comfortable vertical space. The entrance to the building has a large number of glass curtain walls to increase the amount of light. The windows facing the garden side provide a good view for the visitor.

The garden part is enhanced by the height difference and the design of the water system. The sight and angle difference produced by the height difference also provide a richer viewing content for different viewpoints. By using the traditional Chinese gardening method, hide the Pavilion in trees, which makes people gain more imagination and feels like being in nature. It makes people feel like lingering in the true natural world and integrated with nature.



Section 3





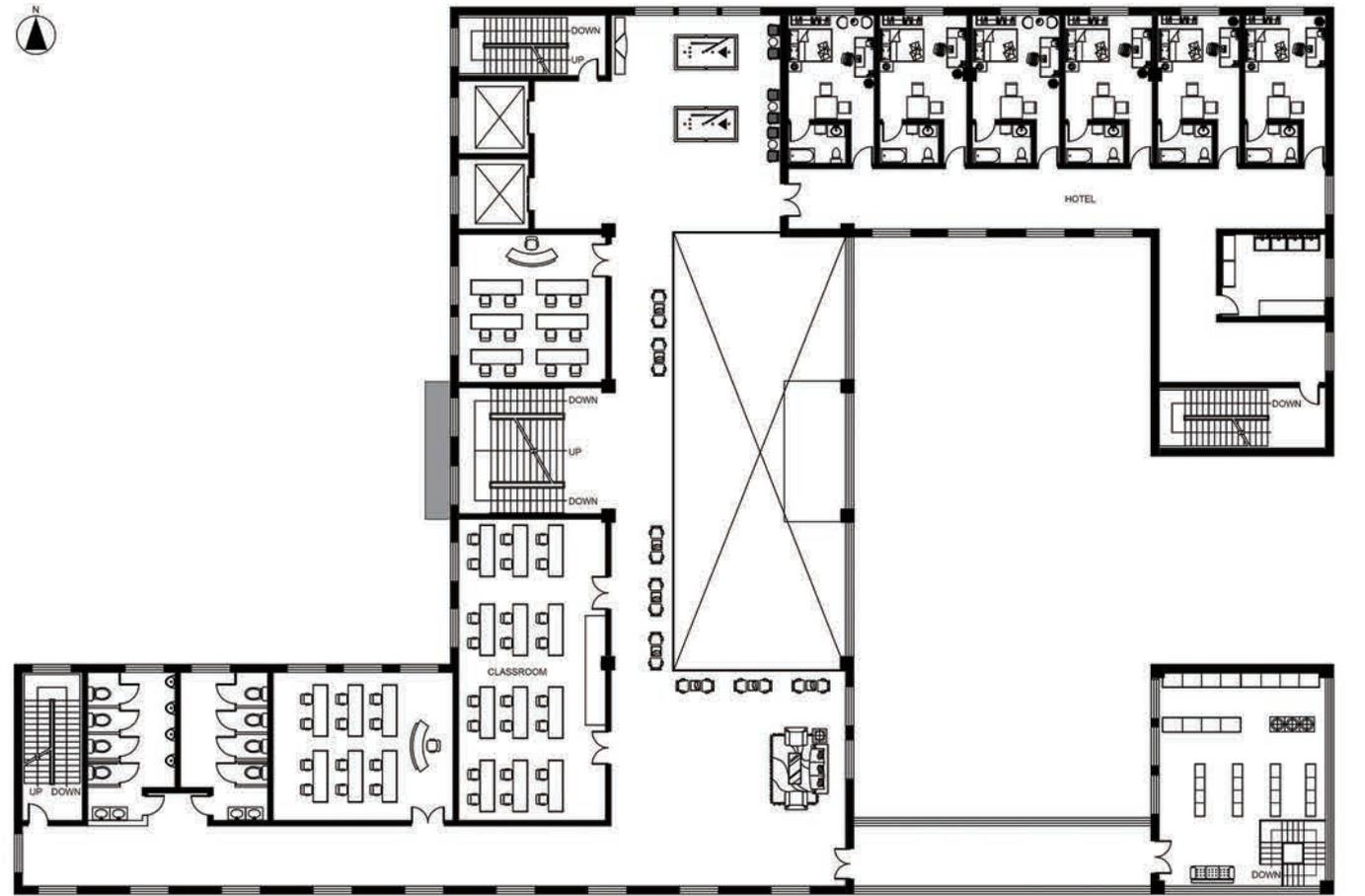
Section 1

0 5 10 20 30 m



Section 2

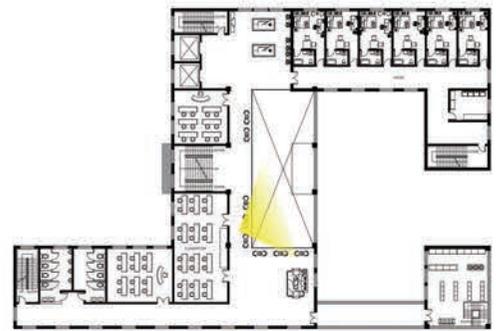
0 5 10 20 30 m



Second floor plan 0 5 10 20 30 m

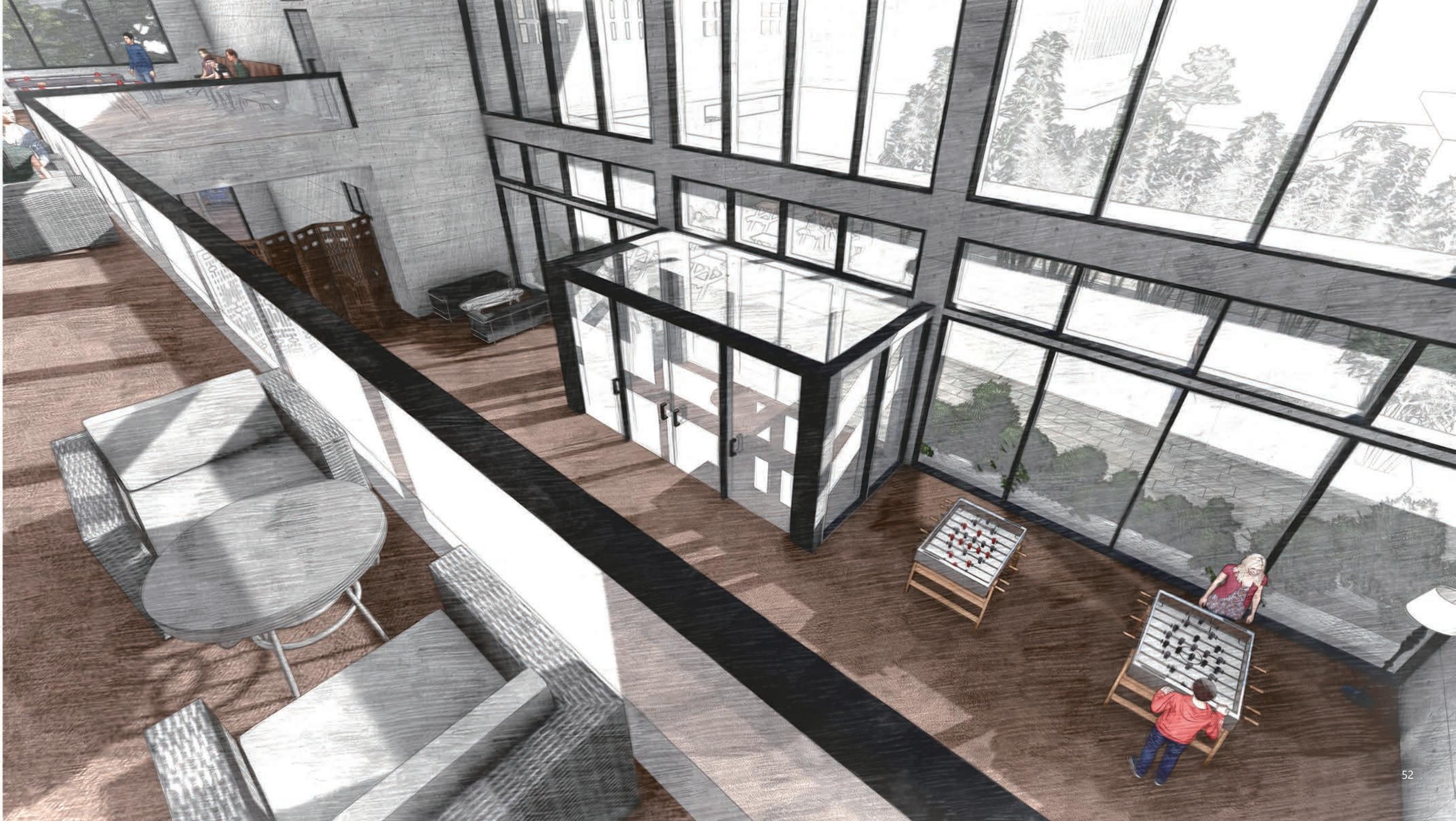


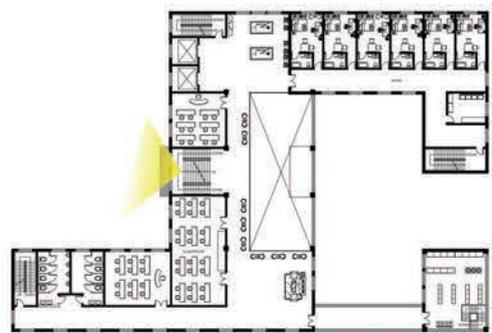
Third floor plan 0 5 10 20 30 m



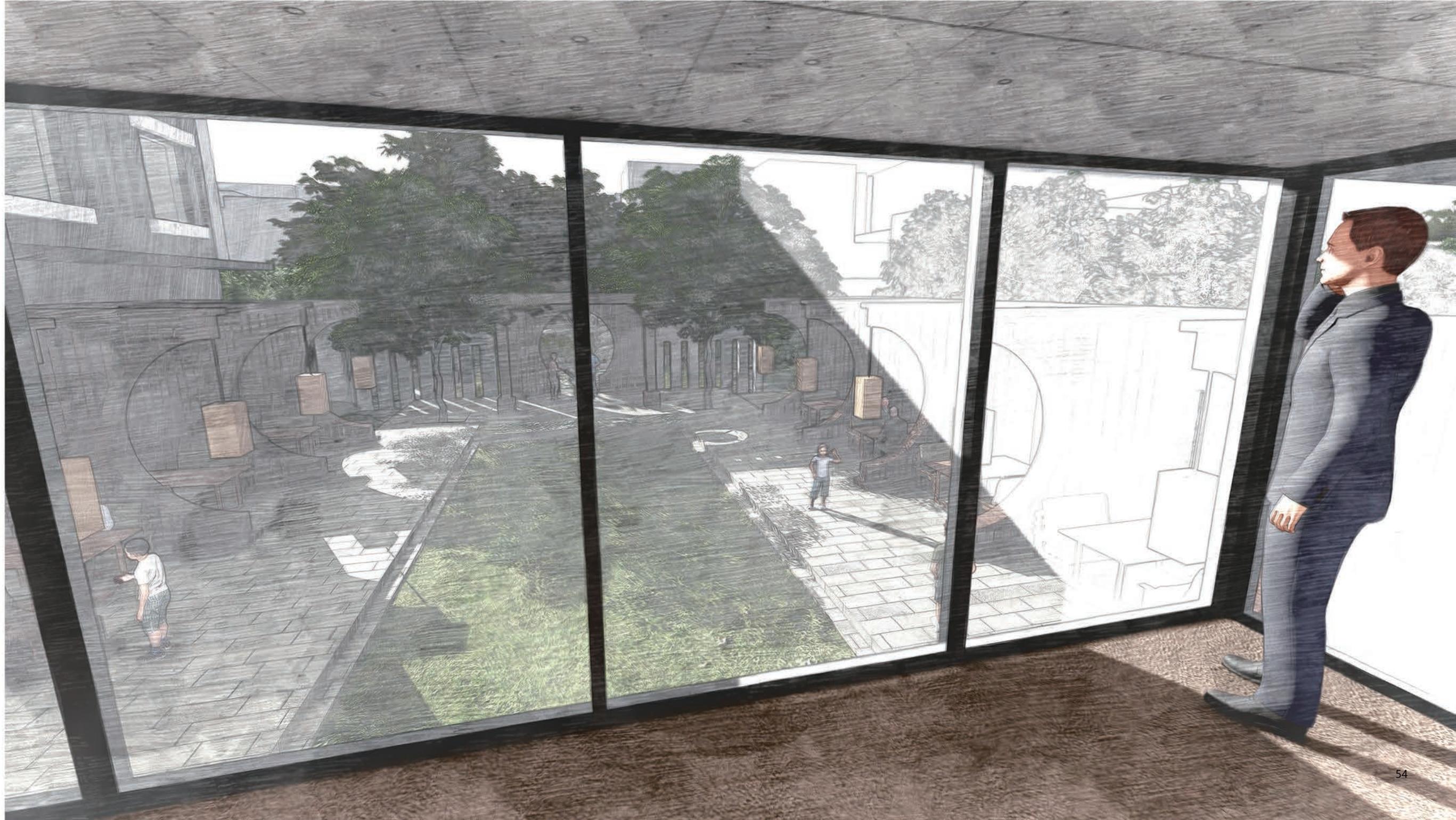
Second floor

Leisure space on the second floor

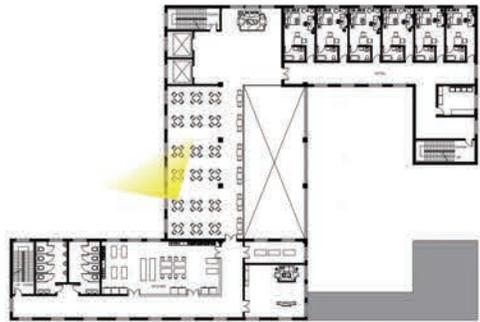




Second floor



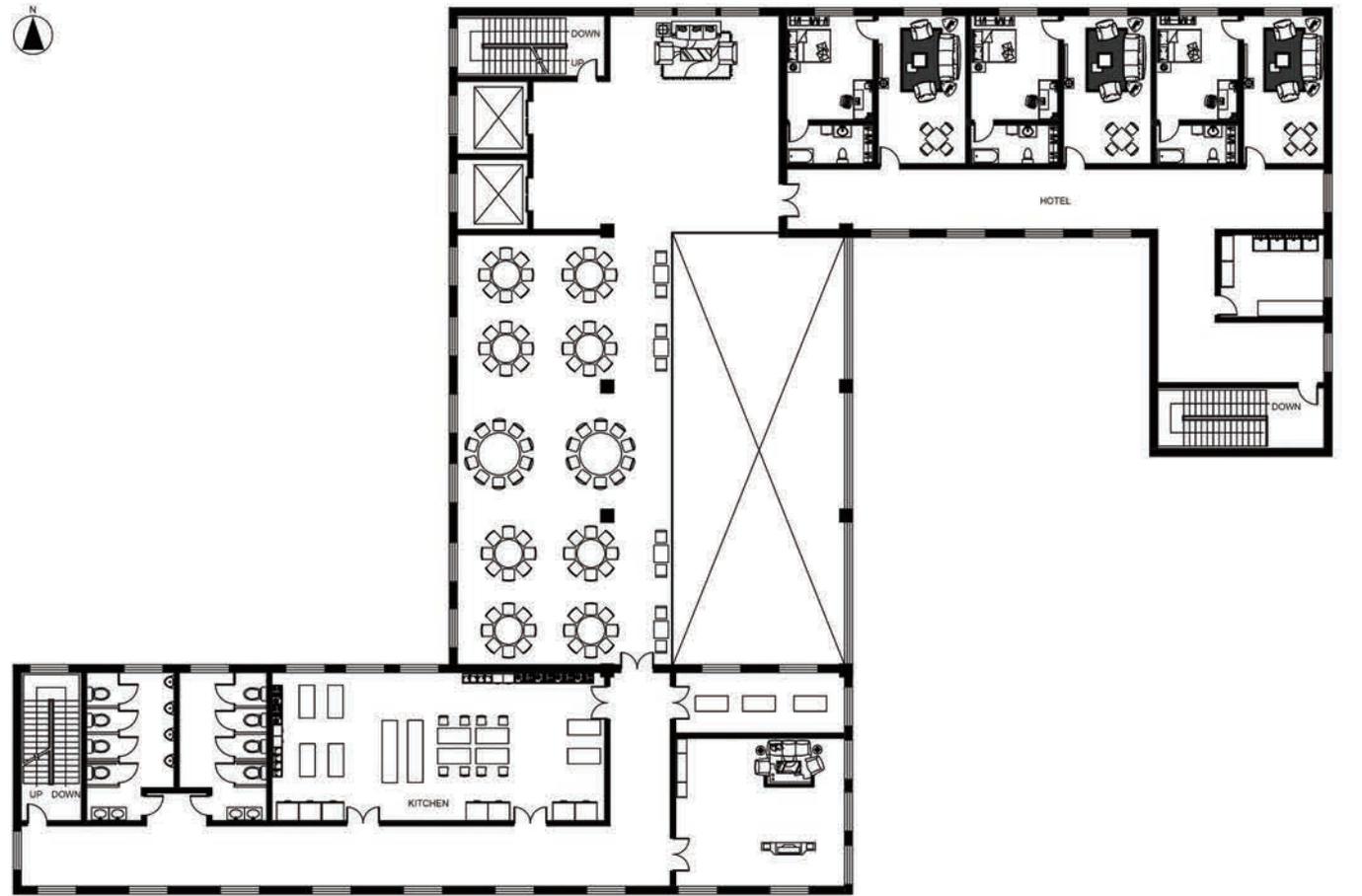
Half-floor observation space of the main stair



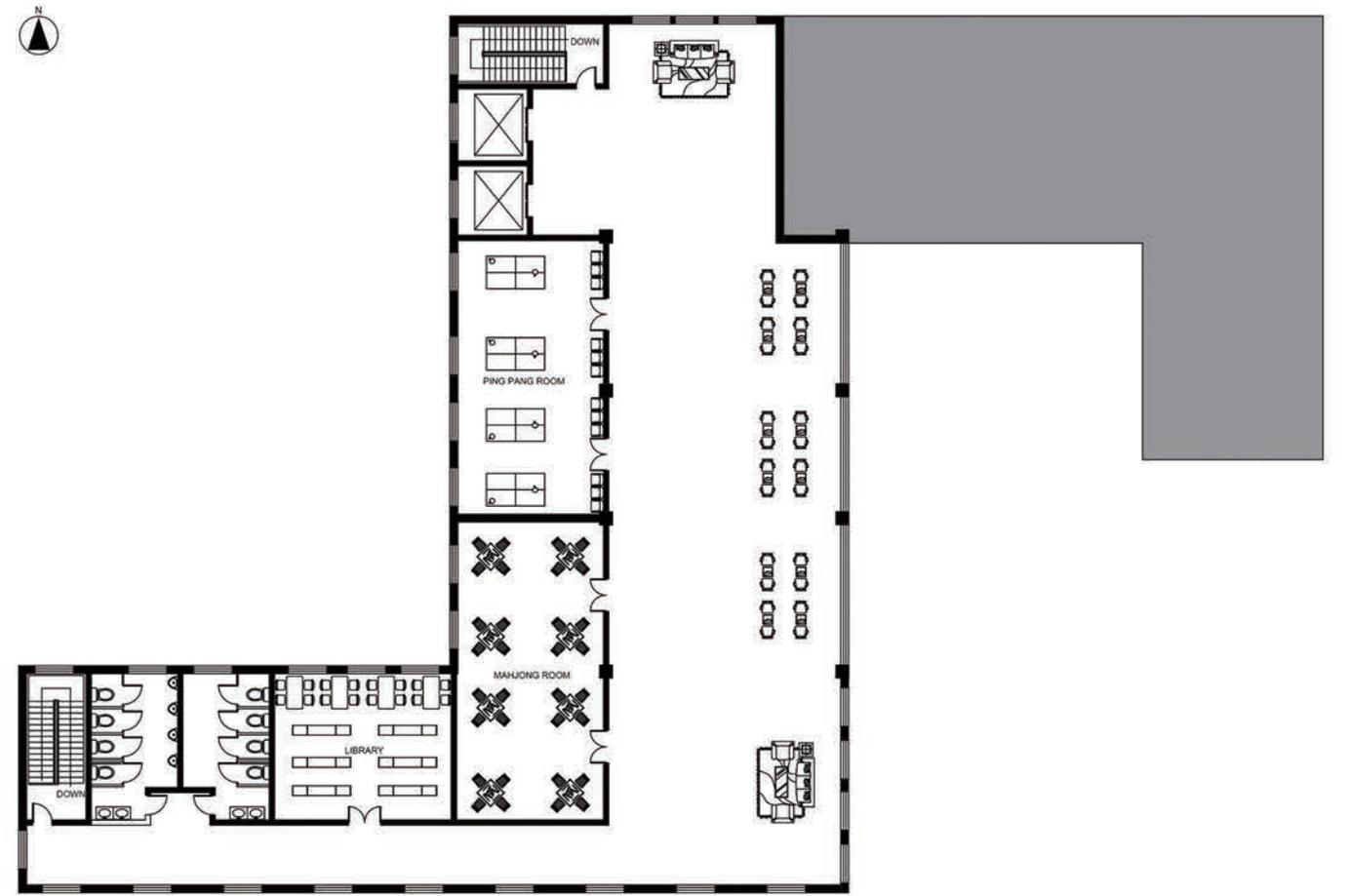
Third floor

Visitors can see the views outside through the windows beside the seats in the restaurant



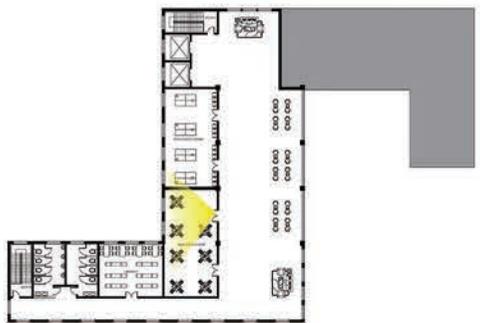


Forth floor plan



Fifth floor plan





fifth floor



Plant selection

In traditional Chinese gardens, the choice of plants is also a very important part. Many plants in Chinese culture represent different special symbolic meanings. However, this is only part of the appearance.

According to the materials, plants are a very important element and it is very important to have a relationship with people. so in the garden, I planted the maple trees as the taller part. The color of the leaves will change into golden or orange in autumn, it will bring people a visual enjoyment. At the same time, osmanthus trees are planted around the space where the crowds are more concentrated. This tree is full of aroma when it blooms, and people can relax when they are smelling this fragrance. Planting plantains near the pond, when it rains, people can hear the sound of raindrops falling on these huge leaves, and it makes people feel immersed in nature. This choice of interaction with human senses is full of poetic and vitality under the seemingly natural and random appearance.



Maple trees in autumn



Plantains with big leaves



Blooming Osmanthus



H St. NW elevation (South elevation of the site)



6th St. NW elevation (East elevation of the site)

POSTSCRIPT

In the defense, a guest once asked me a question. She asked me if my design took place in my country, what would be different from DC design? When I first heard this question, I subconsciously found out the differences between the surrounding environment, the urban context and the architectural texture to express that if a new place is made, the building itself will change a lot. However, for a moment, I suddenly realized why would I design a Chinese culture center to introduce Chinese culture to Chinese in China?

This is indeed a very interesting question, and it is also a question worthy of my profound consideration. When we are designing an architecture, we consider the impact of various environments on architecture, such as aesthetic requirements, zoning, code, material, structure. Even a simple visual deviation, will make a professional feel many differences. Therefore, the complexity and inclusiveness of the architecture make the seemingly free design full of limitations and challenges.

However, we still have to return to a problem. When we are tired of meeting various design requirements and putting our own design ideas into the design tiled or embedded, can we still return to our original idea? Can we still hold fast to our original design appeal for this design? Can we refuse to be confused by the complicated appearances and pursue the desire in our heart?

In fact, no design is perfect, any detail is worthy of thinking several times, any small node can analyze the reason and continue to polish. I used to want to design my project like a Chinese garden, surrounding the site by the building spread. However, this is incompatible with its urban context. This kind of design is too occluded and private in such an open space. I was actually suffering at the moment when I realized this problem. However, in the process of making changes and polishing my design, I found that as long as I kept my heart for my design, I can still balance the environmental constraints and achieve my original vision. I gave the depth of my innermost appeal to the cultural connotation to the site and the building to make it have the vitality it deserves.

I didn't let it go until this time. I realized that I have never given up my original appeal to this design in fact, and I also made this design achieve my original goal.

Remember the original intention, not only for the end of Thesis but also for the beginning of a new life.

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Chinese laborers who built American railways in the 19th century < http://news.163.com/photoview/6R2E0001/2281284.html#p=D2IOR3326R2E0001NOS >.....	p. 4
Chinatown, San Francisco, late 19th century. < https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/11/american-chinatowns-history_n_6090692.html >.....	p. 4
“The street of the gamblers” in San Francisco Chinatown, around the turn of the 20th century. < https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/11/american-chinatowns-history_n_6090692.html >.....	p. 6
The Chinese traditional garden map Created through the content of the book: Analysis of Chinese ancient gardens.....	p. 10
Two philosophies, two ways Analysis of Chinese ancient gardens, Image Chapter, page 3.....	p. 11
Two activities, two needs Analysis of Chinese ancient gardens, Image Chapter, page 5	p. 13
Garden villa model < https://www.blueprintmodels.com/scale-models-portfolio/scale-model-villa-and-garden-planning/#iLightbox[gallery-1]/1 >.....	p. 14
House painted on the brick, Han Dynasty Analysis of Chinese ancient gardens, Image Chapter, page 5.....	p. 14
Siheyuan aerial view < http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_143d0f0e50102vcew.html >.....	p. 14
Closeness spacial feeling in Chinese traditional architecture < http://www.som.com/ideas/research/timber_tower_research_project >.....	p. 15

Sight line relationship in Humble Administrator's Garden, Jiangsu, China Analysis of Chinese ancient gardens, Image Chapter, page 12	p. 16
Humble Administrator's Garden, Jiangsu,China < http://www.sohu.com/a/164483731_751938 >.....	p. 17
Friendship Arch, Chinatown, Washington DC < https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Washington_DC_Chinatown_-_a_-_Oct_2016.jpg >.....	p. 19
Chinatown, Washington DC, location plan <google maps service>	p. 22
Urban satellite imagery near Chinatown, Washington DC. <google maps service>	p. 23
Site location <google maps service>	p. 24
Population size and its relative in Washington DC < https://statisticalatlas.com/state/District-of-Columbia/Race-and-Ethnicity >.....	p. 25
Dotmap of population, 2010 < https://demographics.virginia.edu/DotMap/index.html >.....	p. 25
Transportation map. Chinatown, Washington DC <google maps service>	p. 26
Site map <google maps service>	p. 29
Maple trees in autumn < http://travel.ifeng.com/a/20160922/44456047_0.shtml >	p. 61
Plantains with big leaves < http://www.huitu.com/photo/show/20131015/175520848201.html >	p. 61
Blooming Osmanthus < http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4892298a01014ucz.html >	p. 61

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