PAZ JUNTOS
The reconstruction of the social fabric in Puerto de La Libertad

by mario RODRIGUEZ
The Reconstruction of the Social Fabric in Puerto de La Libertad

Mario Rodriguez

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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PAZ JUNTOS

The Reconstruction of the Social Fabric in Puerto de La Libertad

mario RODRIGUEZ
While some societies face problems of crime and gang violence and are looking into different solutions, very little research exists on what architectural design and building by the community can contribute to the reconstruction of the social fabric of a city. This thesis explores how various elements and factors of architecture can be applied to reduce crime and gang violence activity in the city of Puerto de La Libertad in El Salvador.

Through the design of a surfing youth center and the development of a master plan for the city, this document inquires the moral factor of architecture. This project benefits from the use of local materials and vernacular techniques—using bamboo as a building material that will generate a boost in the economy of the town—, the implementation of an architectural program that heals, the participation of the members of the community in defining their needs and using their own hands in the construction of the building, and finally from the feel of belonging and ownership this architectural piece will bring. Being one of the cities in El Salvador with a perpetual violence issue, Puerto de La Libertad has been chosen as the place to put this into practice. The role of the architect will be contested, as he orchestrates all the individual pieces for this project to happen and eventually, as other disciplines come together, obtain a decrease in crime and gang violence rates in the city.
El Puerto de La Libertad in El Salvador is one of the best destinations in Central America for surfing with its great swells of waves and beautiful beaches. But there is a consistent tone within the visitors and residents’ comments about the city: they don’t feel as safe as they want to.

The issue of insecurity and gang violence steadily increased after the Civil War in El Salvador ended in 1992. So, there have been different nation and city plans to mitigate the problem since then, but none has really aimed to inclusivity, most of them have been focused on fighting it with violence.

My thesis seeks answers within architecture to help alleviate gang violence in the city of Puerto, through the design and development of a city master plan that connects different facilities centered in the farming, harvesting and use of bamboo for construction, furniture making and crafting. This will allow a boost in the town’s economy and the reconstruction of the social fabric.

Finally joining the beauty of the blue of the ocean and the sky, with local materials and the hands of the members of the community for the design — and potentially building — of the Surfing Youth Center.
To mi doño for giving me the poetic view,
mi doñita for her divine perspective of things,
papachico, the first designer,
and to my people,
whose struggles increase the strength of my roots.

Mario Rodríguez, 2019.
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THORETICAL FRAMEWORK

THE RESEARCH

“ARE WE DEAD OR ALIVE?”¹
FALSE LIFE

“It is a condition of death of stupor of custom and accident, in which we do what we have not purposed, and speak what we do not mean, and assent to what we do not understand.”2

TRUE LIFE

“A force of assimilation which converts everything around him into food, or instruments, [...] a force] that puts gesture into clouds, and joy into waves, and voices into rocks.”3
In his understanding of telos, Aristotle shared the idea of the purpose that all living things have, the innate impulse within every living being that motivates their development. He applied Plato’s distinction being-becoming to the natural world: “every substance not only possess a form; one could say it is also possessed by a form, for it naturally strives to realise its inherent form. It strives to become a perfect specimen of its kind. Every substance seeks to actualise what it is potentially.”

I’m interested in a goal-oriented architecture with a defined purpose, an architecture that addresses human needs and impact human lives.
ANALOGY OF THE GARDEN

Consider a couple that moves into a completely foreign land in the middle of winter, with no friends and connections at all. They find a piece of property in the outskirts of the town. They neither speak the language. First few months were difficult without being able to go out much, brooding for their comfort system they had left behind and for that neverending feeling of strangeness. After awhile, snow melted and they came out to start working in their backyard. They replaced the sandy soil and kept hand plowing it for a few days. They started dropping seeds and watered them consistently. They built beautiful structures to hold the vines and also to recreate home. Day by day, their hands absorbed the tonality of the soil and gained calluses of pride for what they were doing. Their land began to flourish extremely, so tomatoes, zucchinis, peppers, were producing in handful. They began sharing with their neighbors and people around came to partake of the life that came out of the work of their hands.
ROBERT VENTURI on Modernists

“Mies, for instance, makes wonderful buildings only because he ignores many aspects of a building. If he solved more problems, his buildings would be far less potent.”

“The doctrine ‘less is more’ bemoans complexity and justifies exclusion for expressive purposes [...] But if the architect must be ‘committed to his particular way of seeing the universe’, such commitment surely means that the architect determines how problems should be solved, not that he can determine which of the problems he will solve. He can exclude important considerations only at a risk of separating architecture from the experience of life and the needs of society.”

ALEJANDRO ARAVENA on Synthesis

“The power of synthesis is the task that the architect should offer as a service to the problems of the city. This capacity of synthesizing, that I understand as taking reality without excluding things, without reducing its complexity, but at the same time reformulating it in a very simple way to be able to manage it [...] This capacity of synthesis will finally be translated into a form, and I would say that this capacity, of translating the synthesized reality into form, is the work of the architect.”

“Ayça Beygo on FRANCIS KERE

Kéré’s projects carry with them the principles of reciprocity and solidarity, and the importance of extended family as well as community as the building blocks of the society. This participatory practice is connected to the idea of contributing (paying back) to the society from which a person is raised.”

ALFREDO BRILLEMBOURG on one of his projects

“Most of the buildable land in slums is claimed by housing, leaving minimal space for community facilities. [...] The gym’s base is superimposed upon an existing sports field or vacant lot, transforming the site into a safe recreational facility. More than a building, the Vertical Gym Chacao is a piece of social infrastructure that has reduced crime rates, promoted healthy lifestyles, and strengthened social capital.”
"And since our life must at the best be but a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away, let it at least appear as a cloud in the height of Heaven, not as the thick darkness that broods over the blast of the Furnace, and rolling of the Wheel."9

John Ruskin, The Seven Lamps of Architecture.

"Are we bringing life into our places with the architecture we create? Are we flourishing the land on which our buildings sit and allowing the soil to be nourished to produce more life around? Are we engaged in projects that possess that intrinsic heart beat in their walls and roofs? John Ruskin spoke that in men life has a two sides, energies that are living and the ones that are dead. True life “is a force of assimilation which converts everything around him into food, or into instruments”. It is a force that "puts gesture into clouds, and joy into waves, and voices into rocks."11 Is it possible to bring this type of life into our buildings? Clearly, whether it is a professional architect or a person with a different occupation, one can recognise the lifeblood of a space, where the human connects not only with what he sees —right in front of him—with his physical eyes, but with his poetic eyes, those that allow a connection of his soul to his past, to home or to others around him.

One can also identify a dead building, or at least find no pleasure in a space that doesn’t evoke any thoughts or feelings, a building that just stands as a fake prop for a building in a Hollywood motion picture. As a counterpart, Ruskin continues with his discourse, now addressing the false life side as "one of the conditions of death or stupor[...] of custom and accident[...] in which we do what we have much thinking —just making."15 He’d rather spend the day designing or working on his idea of a purpose that all living things have, on that innate impulse within that motivates their development. He applied Pla-to’s distinction being-becoming to the natural world, -the potential within:- "every substance not only possess a form; one could say it is also possessed by a form, for it naturally strives to realise its inherent form. It strives to become a perfect specimen of its kind. Every substance seeks to actualise what it is potentially."13 An architecture endeavours with a purpose that is full of life, it springs from an embryo in the mind of the architect, and it keeps developing throughout the design process and won’t stop when a building is finished, but then expands to other fields, impacting lives, economies and nations. As a pacifist and being influenced by the garden city movement, Bruno Taut proposed a city of glass in the altitudes of the Alps that would stop war with the making of beautiful architecture. Through a super-technology combined with the Geist, this city would make obsolete the rationalism and materialism that led to the war.14 Was Taut a dreamer? Probably. But aren’t we all dreamers? Does architecture not allow us to bring dreams, weather ours or our client’s, come true? Architecture bridges the power of realisation and the beauty of the idea. One instance of this is found in the works of catalan architect Antoni Gaudi. He believed in what over a century later, Francis Kéré insisted on, "the primacy of making. It happen[s] without too much thinking —just making."11 "Our cities seem to be lacking," he said. "I’d rather spend the day designing in situ, even sometimes arguing with the builders, than hiding behind a desk drawing his ideas. He found his ideal in a "standing tree" that spreads its branches, which in turn have twigs, which in turn have leaves. Each isolated part grows in sublime harmony, since the time of its creation by God the artist."16 This harmony was reflected in his architectural works, providing the social commitment in his project and in his working ethos. His ethos was to reproduce the creations of God in his architecture and, as a result, his architecture became the signature of the city of Barcelona that changed forever.

LIVING ARCHITECTURE
BY MARIO RODRIGUEZ

Mario Rodríguez
This impact in big scales, such as Gaudi’s architecture, can for instance heal and weave the social fabric of a city. Such is the case of the Surfing Youth Center—, members of the community will gather and climb the supporting cage, as the squash populates the backyard and grow their plant-building. As Ruskin pronounced: “but so long as men grow their plant-building, after his heart went with his work, all this will be in the right places.”22 Their hands will transform the city over and will bring pride to the product of their own efforts uniting them and healing the wounds of violence. Now, concerning the hands—those prehensile appendages of our body—weren’t only given to grasp, capture, catch or grasp. They are designed to be able to manipulate our creations and bring them into materiality; the hands are the ones that give the breath of life to the materials we transform; as their blocks of once for the And of Puerto de La Libertad, as Friedensreich Hundertwasser recognized the hands at the moment that they want to be fed. Later on, when they start learning to control their limbs, in that stage of great cognitive and emotional development, infants pro-
cure to connect with what they see with their hands; so then, when they’re given a piece of crayon, they attempt to reproduce what their minds dictate. In some cases, they’re just fascinated with the grip of the crayon and what they’re able to do while moving their hand. Those first zigzag lines are far to be perfect. In fact, they’re just lines, but carry with them the thinking process of a young brain, the surprising feeling of filling with lines a piece of blank paper, the unique touch of that one infant will ever have on that one paper. That is what demarcate the line between the hand-work and the machine-work. Living architecture is a reality, in its inception with the first ideas and the planning of each building element in on paper and in the making and placement of each building element in con-
struction; but, most importantly, with the life it brings into the com-
unity. It is the hands that—those prehensile appendages of our body—which a person is raised.”20 So in this way, we see that architecture can serve the purpose of extending the public building as a mega campus, involving existing private and public institu-
tions; all of them pursuing the same goal, same telos. On their contri-
bution for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1983, Mona Seragel-
tin and Francois Vigier understood the importance of a public building in the built environment; it “does four important things: it stands as a symbol of the family, in which citizens feel proud to have around and to gather. As Ruskin said: “a building must develop in a sense a sense center. The bamboo building and crafting skills, so when abundant material to harvest is ready, the first shop would be built in order to start rising the first bamboo buildings in the city. As part of the land, the grass buildings will rise as from the ground, just like tomato plants rapidly climb the supporting cage, as the squash populates the backyard and as the spinach fill the ground with green. This is an example of strong architecture, as Harries defines it, where “the architecture relates to the ground provided by the existing buildings and by the land, and to some ideal vision of the city of the future.”21 Change of heart and healing In the building process for each of these buildings —starting with the Surfing Youth Center—, members of the community will gather and experience a change of heart while together they work the bamboo and grow their plant-building. As Ruskin pronounced: “but so long as men grow their plant-building, after his heart went with his work, all this will be in the right places.”22 Their hands will transform the city over and will bring pride to the product of their own efforts uniting them and healing the wounds of violence. Now, concerning the hands—those prehensile appendages of our body—weren’t only given to grasp, capture, catch or grasp. They are designed to be able to manipulate our creations and bring them into materiality; the hands are the ones that give the breath of life to the materials we transform; as their blocks of once for the And of Puerto de La Libertad, as Friedensreich Hundertwasser recognized the hands at the moment that they want to be fed. Later on, when they start learning to control their limbs, in that stage of great cognitive and emotional development, infants pro-
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PUERTO DE LA LIBERTAD
THE CITY
KNOWN AS "RIGHT-HAND BREAK-POINT MECCA"25 IN THE SURFING WORLD
FIGURE GROUND

Understanding the built environment of the city. The yellow was before man was.
Hills enclose the back of the city. Houses stack along the skirts of the hills. Roads get very narrow the higher they get.
Crowds here are non-existing away from the main towns and there is huge potential to discover spots that have never been surfed before.
Gang Violence

The Question

Can architecture alleviate and mitigate gang violence? Can it heal the victims and a whole population?
El Salvador went through a devastating civil war in the 80s that lasted 12 years. It was largely financed by the United States government in its fight against communism. Large amounts of people emigrated to the United States. A large number of them were youth that had seen the horrors of war. Once in the new country, they faced discrimination in Los Angeles, finding in violence the only way to strike back, thus forming gangs.

As the conflict was coming to an end in the early 90s, these gang members —already adults— were deported back to El Salvador, bringing all the American gang culture with them, but now feeling out of place after living in a different country for so long.

Most of them didn’t fit in their own Salvadoran culture. They found themselves in a decaying system back home, in a country struggling to recover from the civil war that wasn’t able to offer any better. Large waves of deported gang members just kept coming into the country every week.

What started in a foreign country —with groups of unfit teenagers— grew in strength and magnitude in El Salvador, making it very difficult to control.
Miguel Angel was an assassin and was assassinated by his gang companions. He was a member of Mara Salvatrucha. The nickname “Hollywood” came from the group he joined, “Hollywood Locos Salvatrucha”. He never went or lived there, but did the ones who founded that gang. These were ones who the Reagan administration deported at the end of the 80s. What combination of circumstances happened so this boy felt it was a good offer to join a criminal group at his 16? What did the country offered or not to him, so he had to choose joining a gang?

The story goes way back. In El Salvador there were coffee plantations. From the middle of the 19th century, the communal lands were taken from the indigenous people and were given to the big landowners, after the indigo cultivation had failed years before. They forced the indigenous to work in their lands with the creation of the vagrancy law. If someone didn’t work, that person would go to jail. These plantations were like kingdoms that paid with their own currency, valid only in that specific plantation. In these quasi kingdoms, there was a very important character, the foreman. He was the connection between the workers and the master. He would enforce the law within the plantation with extreme violence. This system marcelled the work ethics within the fields, still applied in the 90s when the Niño was just a child.

Niño de Hollywood was 10 when he first attempted to kill, because he was filled with rage at seeing—in between the wall siding slits—how the foreman sexually abused his 14 year old sister, as his dad exchanged her for guaro de caña (artisan alcohol).

Can we understand a glimpse of where these children are coming from? Is there anything architecture can do to offer children and youth like him a more inspiring path?
THE CASE ON BAMBOO

LOCAL RESOURCES

BECAUSE WE ALL HAVE THE NEED TO BELONG

Tools used on harvest day

PAZ JUNTOS
Collage inspired on the local resources and the work in community seeking out for each other.

Canvas for skylights

Palm trees for thatch roof
Traditional Salvadoran palm mat cover, that can be used for walls, floors and ceilings.

Ancient traditional adobe wall system with stucco. Adobe construction was found in the Joya de Ceren archeological site.

River stone gathered from the beach for walls, footings and foundations. This is some type of construction found in the Puerto area.

Local architecture for beach houses or restaurants are open to the exterior, like pavilions. This allows ventilation and views to the ocean.
BAMBOO IN EL SALVADOR

BAMBOO SPECIES:

DENDROCALAMUS:
- STRICTUS
- LATIFLORUS

GIGANTOCHLOA:
- VERTICILLATA

GUADUA:
- INERMIS
- ANGUSTIFOLIA

BAMBUSA:
- OLDHAMII
- VENTRICOLOSA
- DOLICHOCIDADA
- LONGISPICULAT

FOR CONSTRUCTION:

- GUADUA ANGUSTIFOLIA
- GUADUA INERMIS
- DENDROCALAMUS ASPER
- GIGANTOCHLOA APUS
- GIGANTOCHLOA VERTICILLATA
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Sub-Family</th>
<th>Location in El Salvador</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Uses</th>
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<tr>
<td>Guadua Angustifolia</td>
<td>Poaceae</td>
<td>Bambusoideae</td>
<td></td>
<td>Height: 25 m</td>
<td>Construction of buildings and handicrafts. It is a high quality material used widely in the construction of houses. Its bud can be edible and its root and branches can be used for crafts.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Crop Height: 400 and 1200 m over sea level</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Diameter: 2-10 cm</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tubular Wall: Thick</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Internodes: 12-40 cm</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maturity: 4-5 years</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dendrocalamus asper</td>
<td>Poaceae</td>
<td>Bambusoideae</td>
<td></td>
<td>Height: 20-39 m</td>
<td>Construction of houses, bridges, fences, water pipes, furniture. Capable of being used in laminated panels. Fast growth of knots (Aprox. 10-15 knots in 20 days)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Crop Height: 400 and 500 m over sea level</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Diameter: 20-30 cm</td>
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<td>Height: 10-20 m</td>
<td>Construction of houses, bridges, furniture and crafts.</td>
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<td>Crop Height: 1,500 m over sea level</td>
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<td>Diameter: 5-10 cm</td>
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URBAN MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL

“EYES ON THE STREET”28, MORE PEOPLE TO INTERVENE. A NETWORK OF PUBLIC SPACES
PAZ JUNTOS

PALM TREE PLANTATION

THE SITE

THE FORMAL AND THE INFORMAL.

THE NATURAL VS THE DESIGNED LANDSCAPE.
NENA’S STORY

Noises came from the other side of the brick wall. I felt that my bladder was going to burst at any moment, but mom had told me, if I heard that Rodolfo was drunk, to not leave the room and that I should take care of my two little brothers. At that precise moment, I just wanted to be like one of those tourists coming every day to surf, that even if they try, they do not understand our language. I did not want to understand what Rodolfo was shouting at my mom. The symphony in my belly began to sound and the oldest of my brothers curled up on the mat and rolled himself like one of those roly polys we see on the wet earth. Then I remembered I still had half of a bread and a few biscuits leftover from the bamboo pantry at the center —after I returned from the last waves in the afternoon. I only ate a couple of things, but I put the rest in the small bag of my backpack without thinking that at this late hour of the night it was going to save me and Pipo, my little brother, from starving. Some day when I grow up, I will have my own business at the beach and, with what I earn, I will buy a little piece of land for my mom and build a bamboo house where we will live with my brothers, so that I won’t have to deal with that Rodolfo who’s not even my tata.

I can’t wait for tomorrow. After getting out of school at noon, las cheras and I will go to the beach to explore with the bicycles up the hill by the bamboo farm. At the top of the hill, the breeze hits you in the face and it feels so nice, you can see the whole muelle and the immensity of the ocean. That grandiosity makes me forget all the problems I have and it calms me down. It makes me realize that there’s more than my little brick room, that there’s more than worrying about if I’ll see my older brother the next morning, that he would still be alive. Although the waves are helping him to no longer drink and no longer spend so much time on the street with those boys.

I wonder what’s beyond the horizon line of the sea? In the afternoon, when I’m working on my bamboo chair, I’ll ask Chabe, my meditation teacher. She has traveled all around the world riding the waves, even ridden the waves in Australia and the Arctic ocean. She says on the shore, instead of sand, there’s snow — like surfing inside a fridge. La Chabe tells me that if I continue training like I’m doing now, I’ll be able to travel around the world and make friends from all over. She tells me that the board can open doors for me in life; surfing is just the beginning. I could study the dolphins of the ocean — or as she calls it, marine biology — in any of the places the waves take me to.

Tomorrow, me and mis cheras will bike down from the top of the hill, pedaling across the bamboo bridges. Then we’ll go pick up Luis and Chepo. From there, we’ll go together to the bamboo school. Once we place the bicycles on the rack at the entrance, we’ll prepare the food, the vegetables we picked yesterday from the garden will be enough for a good meal. We can also get some mussels from the water. After eating, I’ll either go out for a walk or go rest in that spot on the third floor, that I love. There, I can still see the waves coming to the shore, watching whatever the guys do in the lower floors: some doing homework, others waxing their board, others coming in and out of the lockers putting their wet suits on, or simply resting taking the shade under the cocotal, others drawing, or reading books, books about the mist windy...
- Define and purpose to be achieved

1. Place a space for
   farming operations to be
   carried out in a way that
   ensures their impact
   minimally.

- Scenery to be preserved in the
  form that which is obtained naturally
  from the usual circumstances

- Trees and plants are simply
  insignificant if their quantity is made
  accessible and visible.

- Lines around the margins of scenes

- The demand and various
  meadows, the more
  fruitful

- Houses and continuous
  buildings are directly
  surrounded by the rural
  character of landscapes.

- Value of rural sites,
  counties, in various,
  not in disabling to creation of scenic
  plant and traces of tranquility,
  present in native plants.
SURFING YOUTH CENTER
THE PROCESS
MY CHANGE OF HEART AND HEALING
This series of quick action sketches, along with Nena’s Story, helped with the development of the program and defined the spaces within the site and the surfing youth center, by providing with the possible scenarios on how youth would use the facility.
Early on sketches were produced to develop the idea of the building being immersed within the palm tree plantation, as of being part of the landscape.
Bamboo skewers were used as a modeling material. Insulation foam resulted to be a perfect base to hold the skewers. Harvested bamboo from Bethesda was used to reproduce a full scale mock-up of the railing that would be in the project.
SURFING YOUTH CENTER PROPOSAL

“LET IT APPEAR AS A CLOUD IN THE HEIGHT OF HEAVEN”
1 welcoming area
2 bike racks
3 tube riding pathway
4 gathering/screening
5 equipment/boards storage
6 rising wave room
7 instruction/gym/parties
8 kitchen
9 dinning room/homework tables
10 mud oven
11 women’s lockers
12 men’s lockers
13 outdoor showers
14 first-aid room

first floor plan
third floor plan - west tower

23 counseling area
24 resting/napping area

third floor plan - east tower

section a-a

section b-b
The roof pitch helps to keep water out of indoor spaces and protect from wind. Architectural shape was inspired on the rising wave, as surfers face it right before they ride it.
Exploded axonometric drawing showing the different parts that make up the Surfing Youth Center building, from the river rock and cement foundations to the canvas skylights on the roof.
east elevation

promenade looking south
This pathway is a journey, from the welcoming area into the main areas of the school, preparatory to being introduced to the rising wave instruction room, where they see the ocean as the background. This pathway was inspired on the “tube” is formed by the water as the wave rises and prepares to whip its tail. This tube is what most surfers seek to ride where they’re completely embraced by the water and they caress the water as they surf through.
THE RISING WAVE

The shape in section of the main instruction room — serving as a flexible space as gym, performance area, acting practice space or rental space for weddings or parties — was conceived from the movement and forces of the water while surfing.
promenade looking north
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