

Revealing The Unknown: Revelation Chapel Brian C. Gore

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in
Architecture

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Abstract

This thesis studies how light, as a spiritual and symbolic element, cannot only uplift the human condition but also evoke the spiritual. The result can cause one to know what is unknowable without the presence of light and make one aware of what was unknown to them, as well as, revealing what is greater than themselves. The objective is to explore and design spaces that progressively lift the eyes of the observer with natural lighting techniques. Natural light is used to create a better sense of physical and spiritual awareness.

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General Audience Abstract

This thesis studies how light, as a spiritual and symbolic element, cannot only uplift the human condition but also evoke the spiritual. The result reveals what is greater than themselves. The objective is to explore and design spaces that progressively lift the eyes of the observer with natural lighting techniques. Natural light is used to create a heightened sense of physical and spiritual awareness. Using light, one is led on a staged journey through a series of reflection spaces. This thesis explores how light can be the thing that provides revelation and a deeper understanding of not only one's self, but the world around them, as well as, things greater than themselves.

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I would like to thank everyone who has helped and encouraged me on my journey.

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I would also like to thank my friends, colleagues, and XA family. I can call Virginia Tech home because of you. My time here at Tech would not have been the same. There are too many names to mention, but you know who you are. I have truly gained some life long friends no matter how far away we're scattered.

To my fiance soon to be wife, Kyra. Thank you so much for your overwhelming support over these last two years. I wouldn't have been able to make it through graduate school without your encouragement.

Lastly, to my family. Thank you for your support over these many years of school. Through all of the hardship you've still allowed and encouraged me to finish strong. Thank you for allowing me to take care of business.

We are finally finished fam!

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“Light is not so much something that reveals, as it is itself the revelation.”
-James Turrell

Introduction

“Architecture cannot teach per se, but it can provide markers to awaken consciousness.”

(pg. 6 [Seeking the Sacred](#))

How do we perceive architecture when we interact with it? What is our relationship with it and to it? What can we draw from architecture? Can it help us draw from something deeper or encourage discovery? I believe that it can. I believe architecture can be, and should be, used to not only protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public, and uplift the human condition. I believe architecture can be used to make one aware of one’s inner self and to discover something within that is not yet known. Or to remind one of something greater than themselves.

Light is the connection. Louis Kahn, in his “Silence and Light” speech said, “I sense light as the giver of all presences.” Without light we would simply not know and would not have a need for the things around us, because we are simply unaware until light reveals our needs to us.

To discover what is not yet known, light has to be present. To help us search and to be able to find, light is necessary. Architecture cannot be without the presence of light.

We cannot be, and we cannot become without the presence of light.

The key is light
and light illuminates shapes
and shapes have an emotional power.

By the play of proportions
by the play of relationships
unexpected, amazing.

but also by intellectual play
of purpose:
their authentic origin,
their capacity to endure,
structure,
astuteness, boldness, even temerity, the play
of those vital abstractions which are the essential qualities
the components of architecture

-Le Corbusier

From a child I've been drawn to light. I've always enjoyed the dialogue between light and shadow, for example my eyes are drawn to trees casting shadows or the contrast found in black and white photos.

In school, my first introduction to Louis Kahn grabbed my attention and forever changed my perspective. The first image I saw of him standing in the Yale Art Gallery with his gaze towards the tetrahedral ceiling. The play of light and shadow allured me to his work and it stimulated emotional and spiritual feelings within me.

I am a spiritual person, and I've attempted to incorporate light into my project so that others might experience a connection. From Tadao Ando's "Church on the Water," to Peter Zumthor's "Bath House," the light has always created an atmosphere to evoke the spiritual.

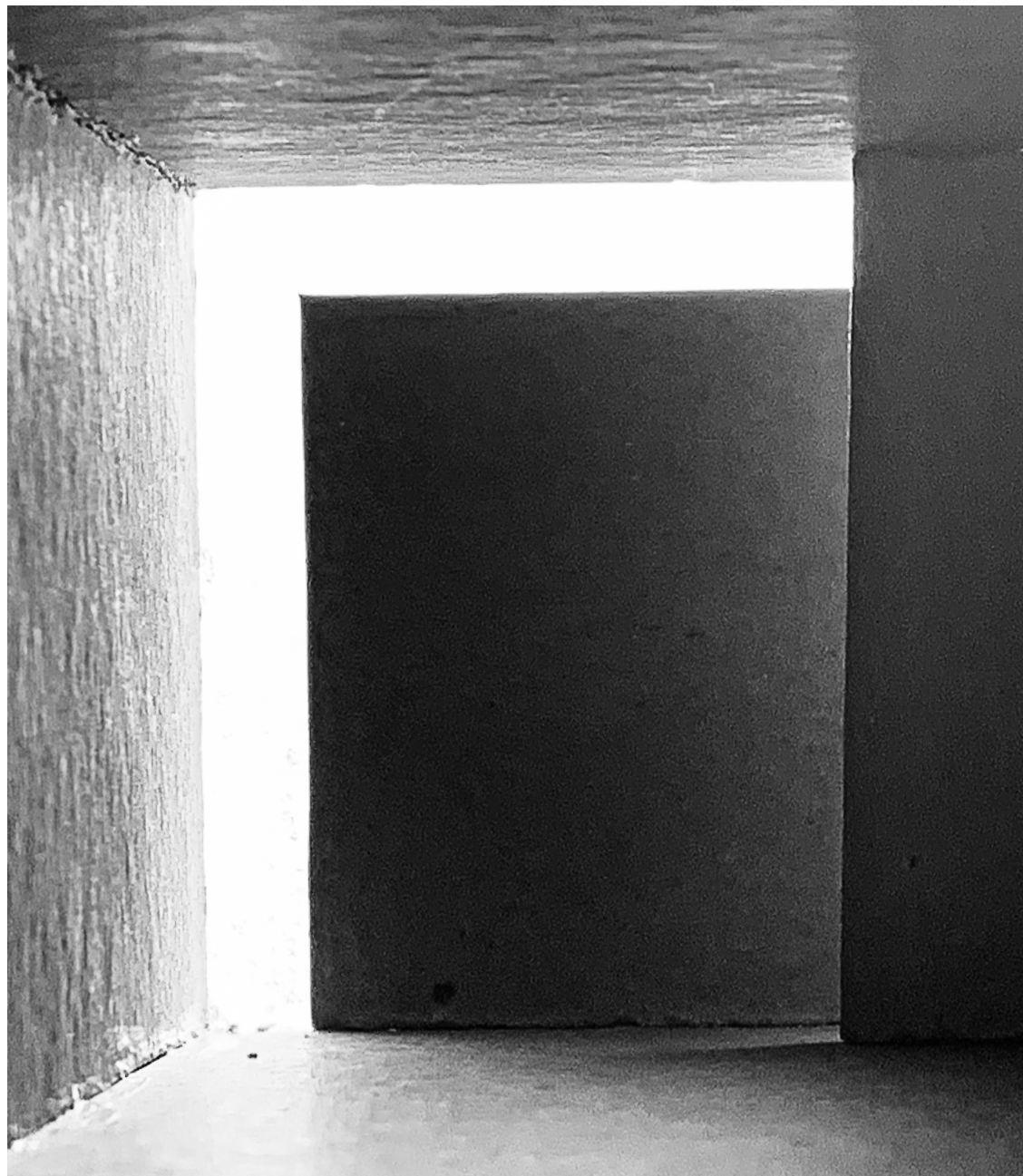
This thesis studies how light, as an archetypal element, can guide one to the spiritual by leading one to let go. Zumthor, in his book, Atmospheres, refers to this as "setting the stage, and directing a play." One can go on voyage of discovery of oneself and world around them.

Model Study

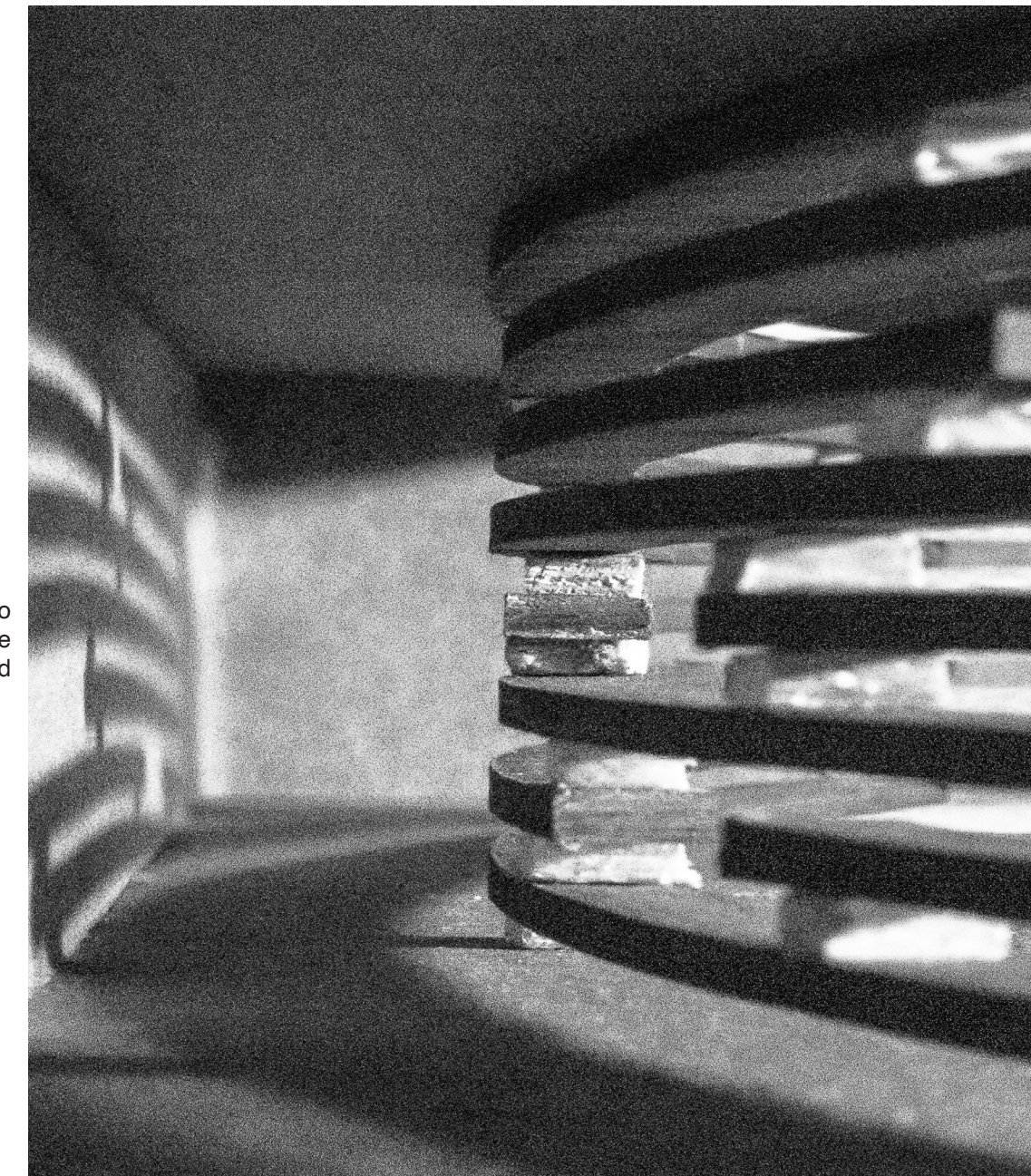
As I began to think about light, I started modeling different situations and photographing them. These models focused on how light draws the eyes to certain areas of a space, thus leading one through different layers of space. The model study directly influenced spaces within the project. The study also helped express ideas before they became influenced by the constraints of the project.

"Properties of light also provide the organizing concept for the Museum of the City we designed for Cassino, Italy. We attempted to model the light on the computers and quickly realized physical models were necessary."

(pg. 114 Parallax)



The image focuses on the primary and secondary sources of light from the layers of spaces. One is drawn by the bold "L" shaped opening, but then one notices the secondary source of light that sparks curiosity.



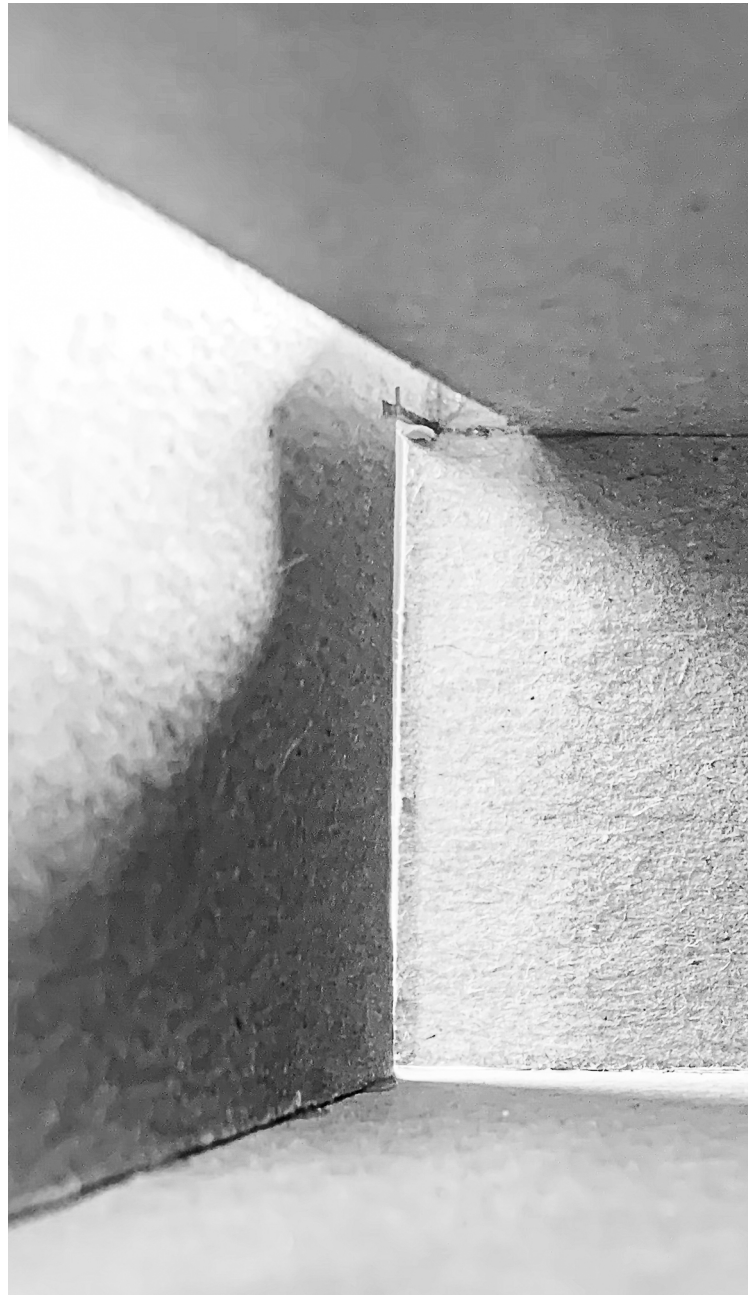
The image causes the eye to focus on horizontal light. The openings provide views toward a central point or landscape.



The “foundational” light of the image allows or creates a sense of mystery in the mind because of the lack of direct lighting. The shadows on the floor help to recognize one’s pace.



The light is something to be attained. There is a journey involved to be in the presence of this light.



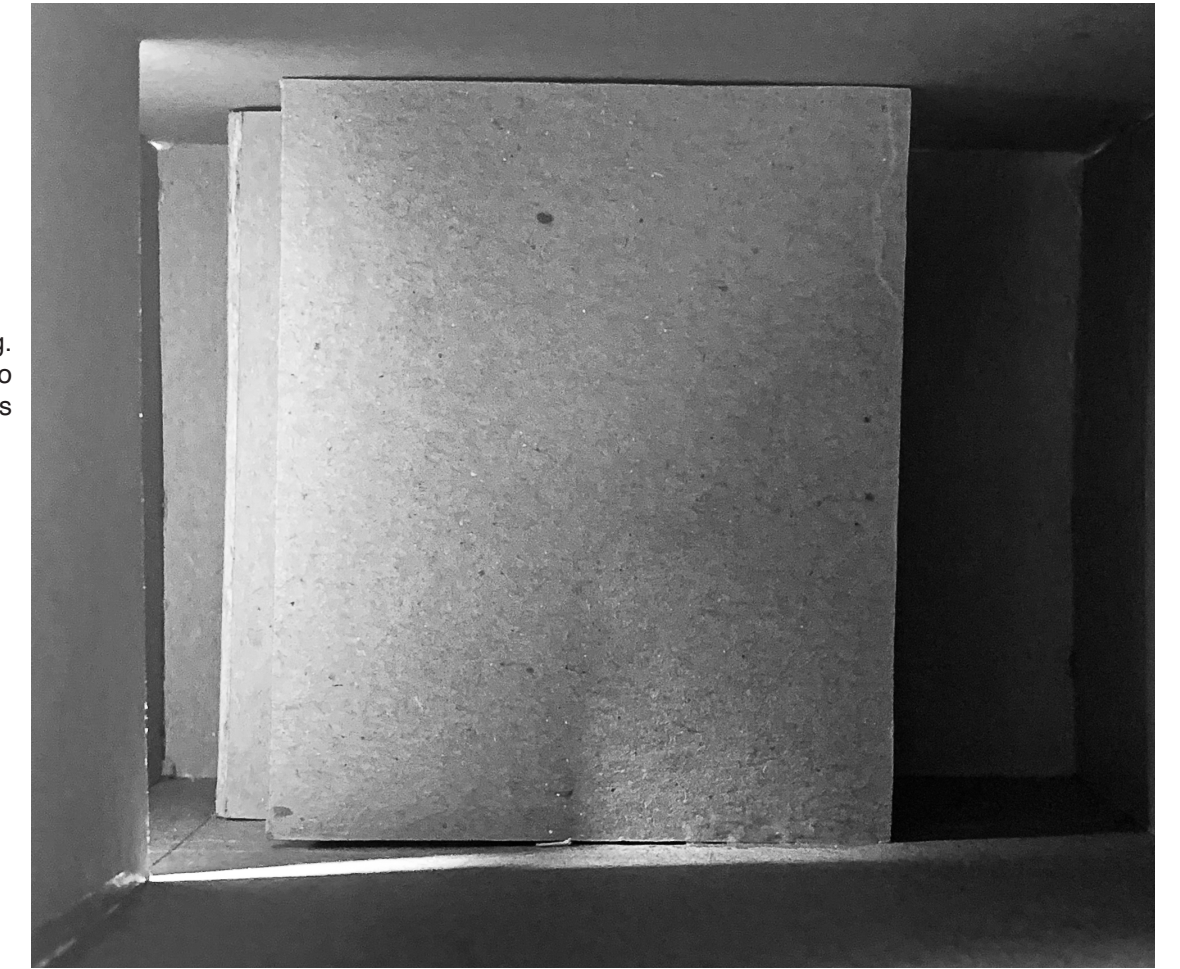
Light reveals the texture of a material as it pours over it, and It can also provide an awareness of time of day.



Vertical light is the focus. These small openings cast beams of light. The beams make one aware of their own rhythm and cadence as they are traveling.



This model represents how a wall can hide openings. This makes the quality of light mysterious - as if there is something to be discovered.

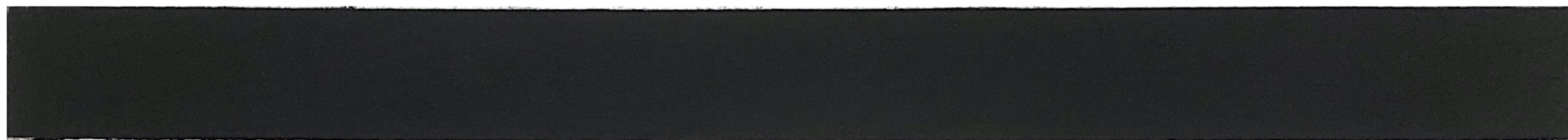


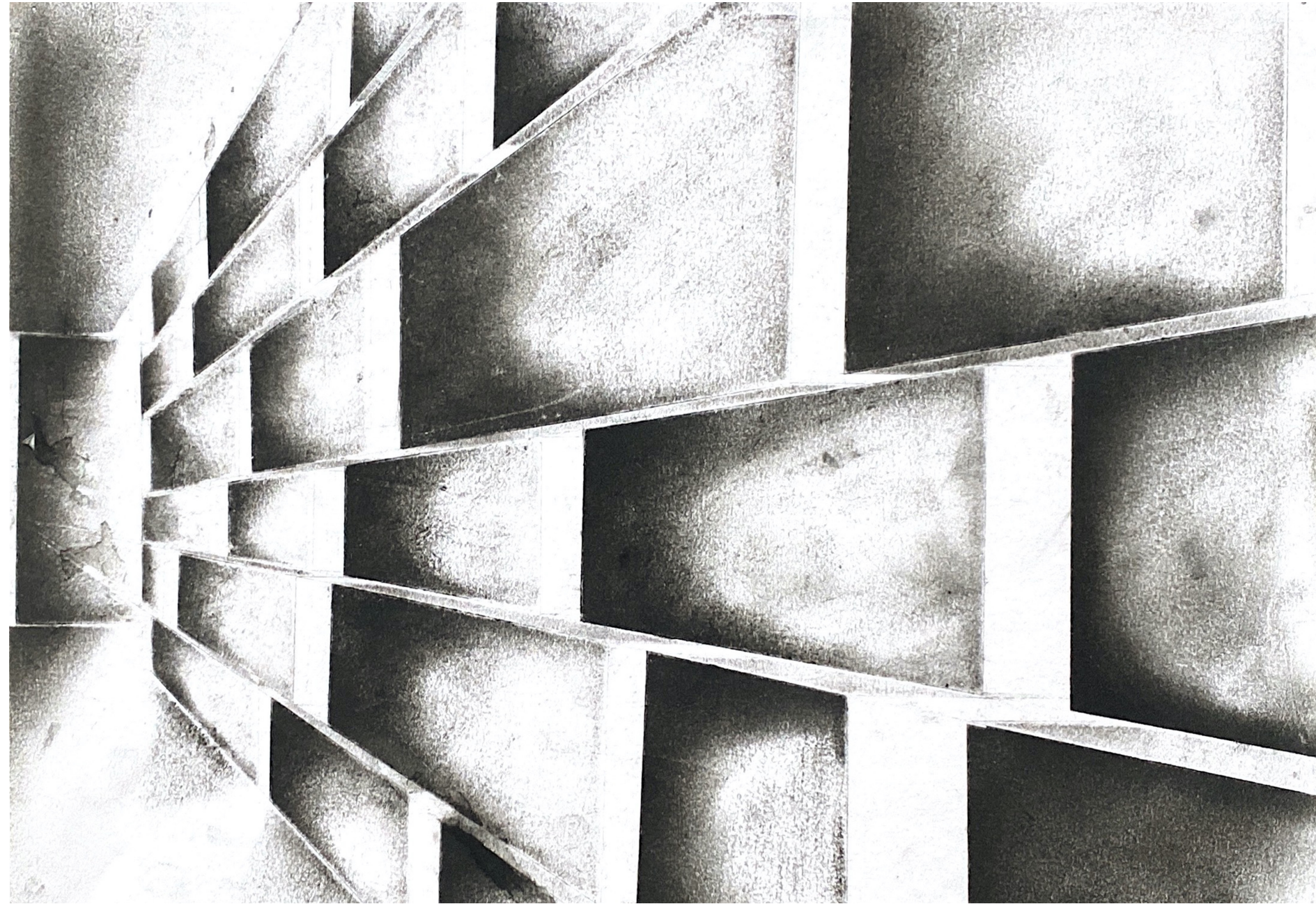
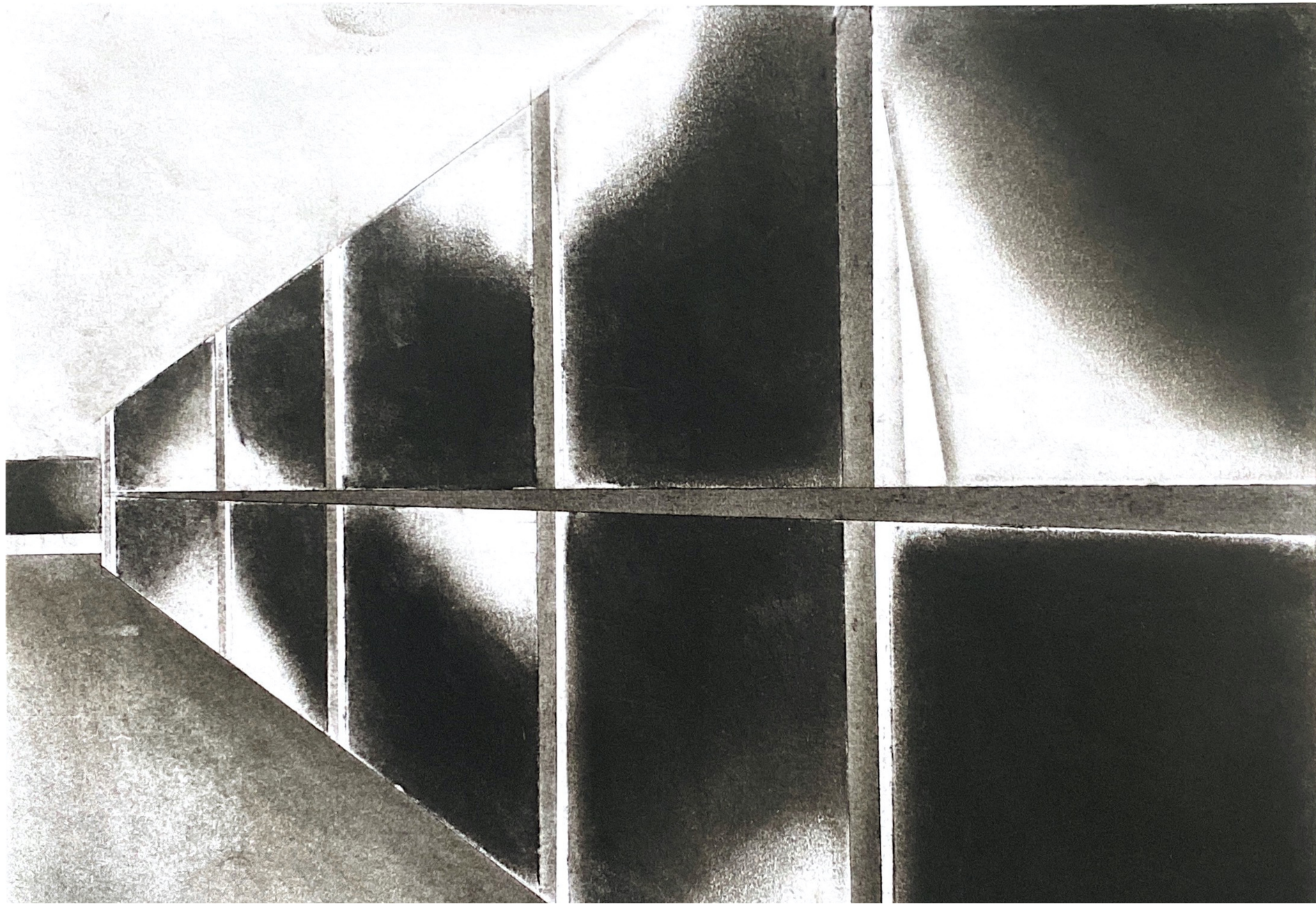
The light highlights the opening. The light is giving hierarchy to the opening while the darkness pushes you away.

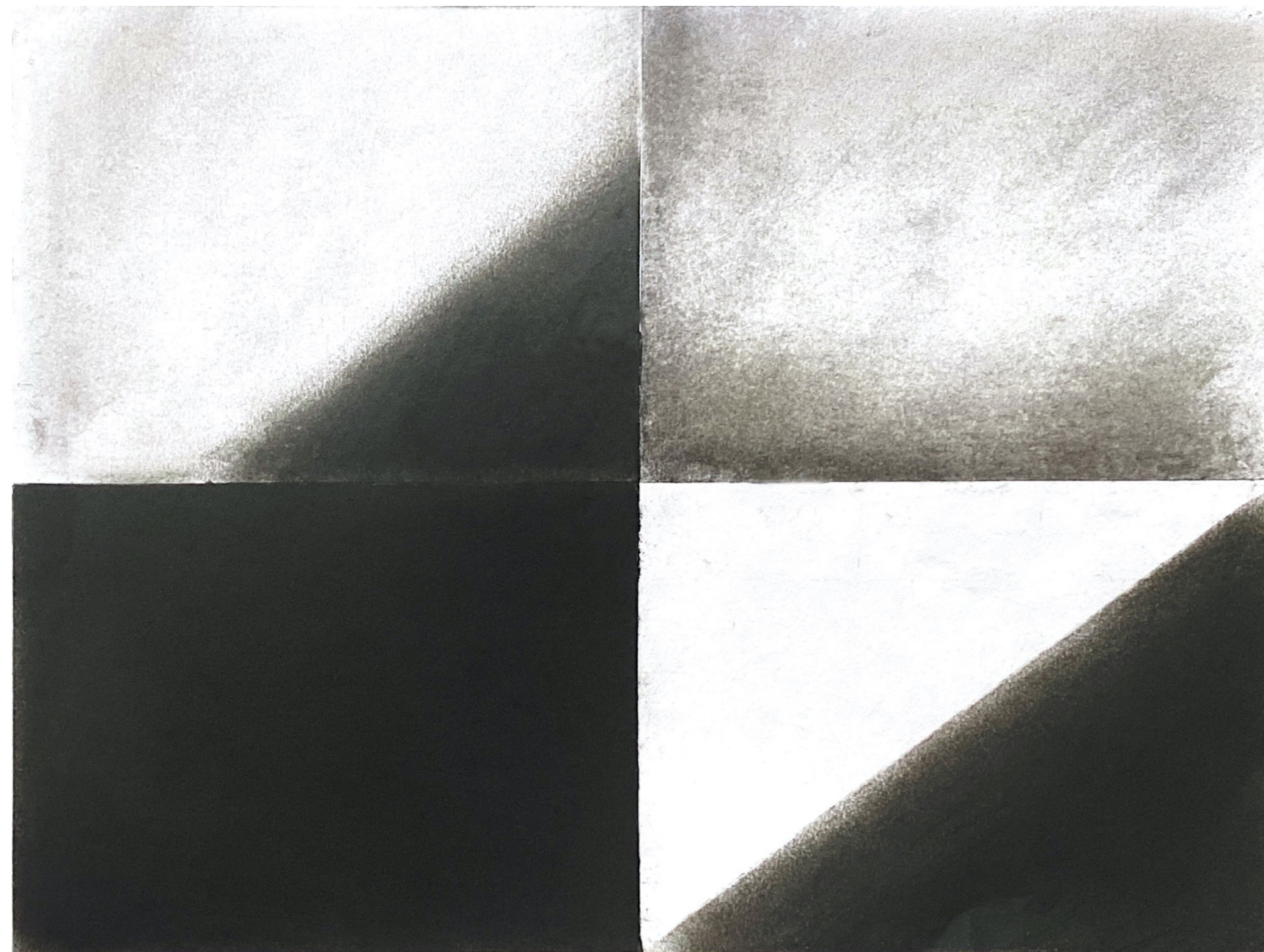
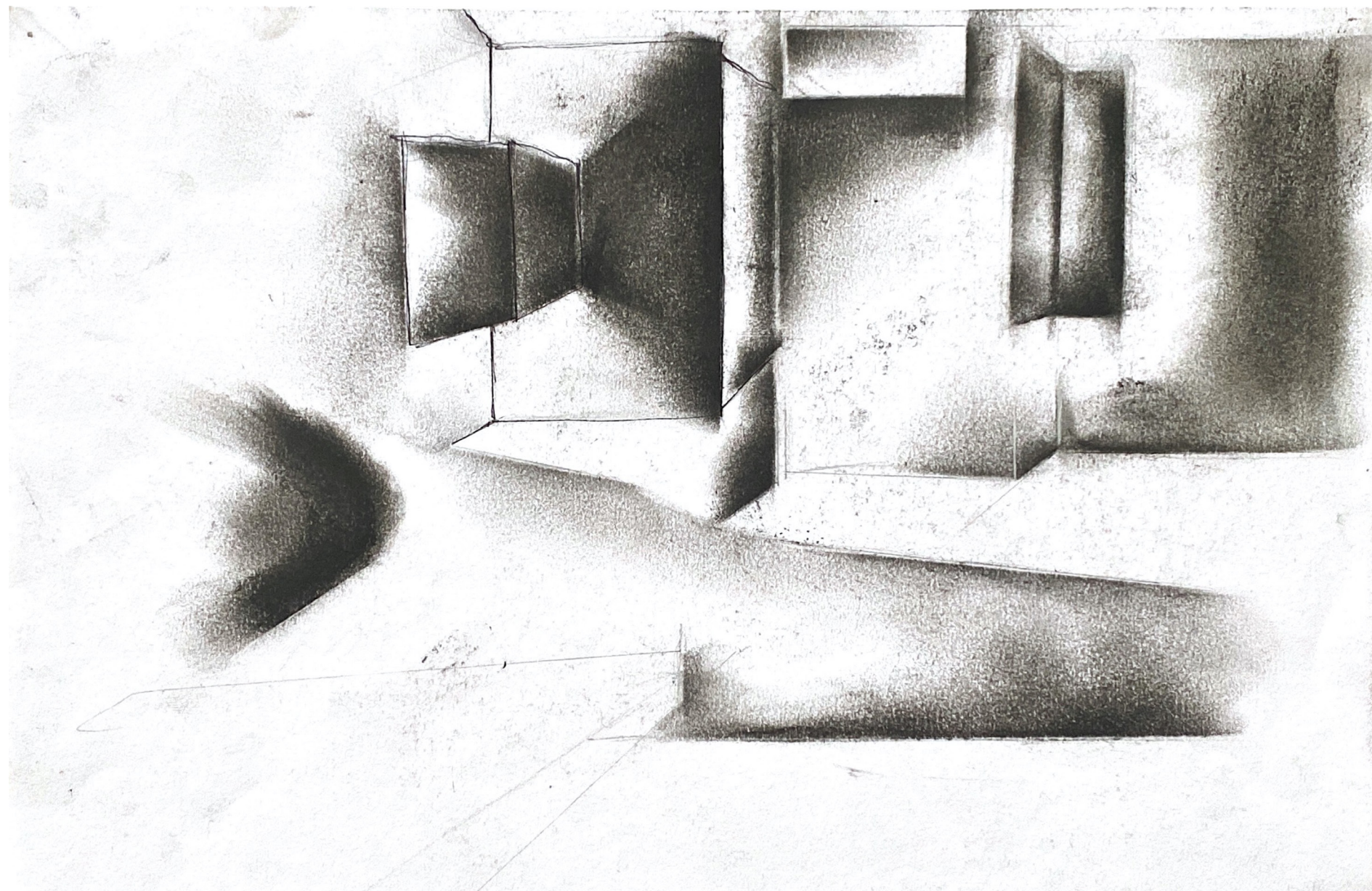
Charcoals Study

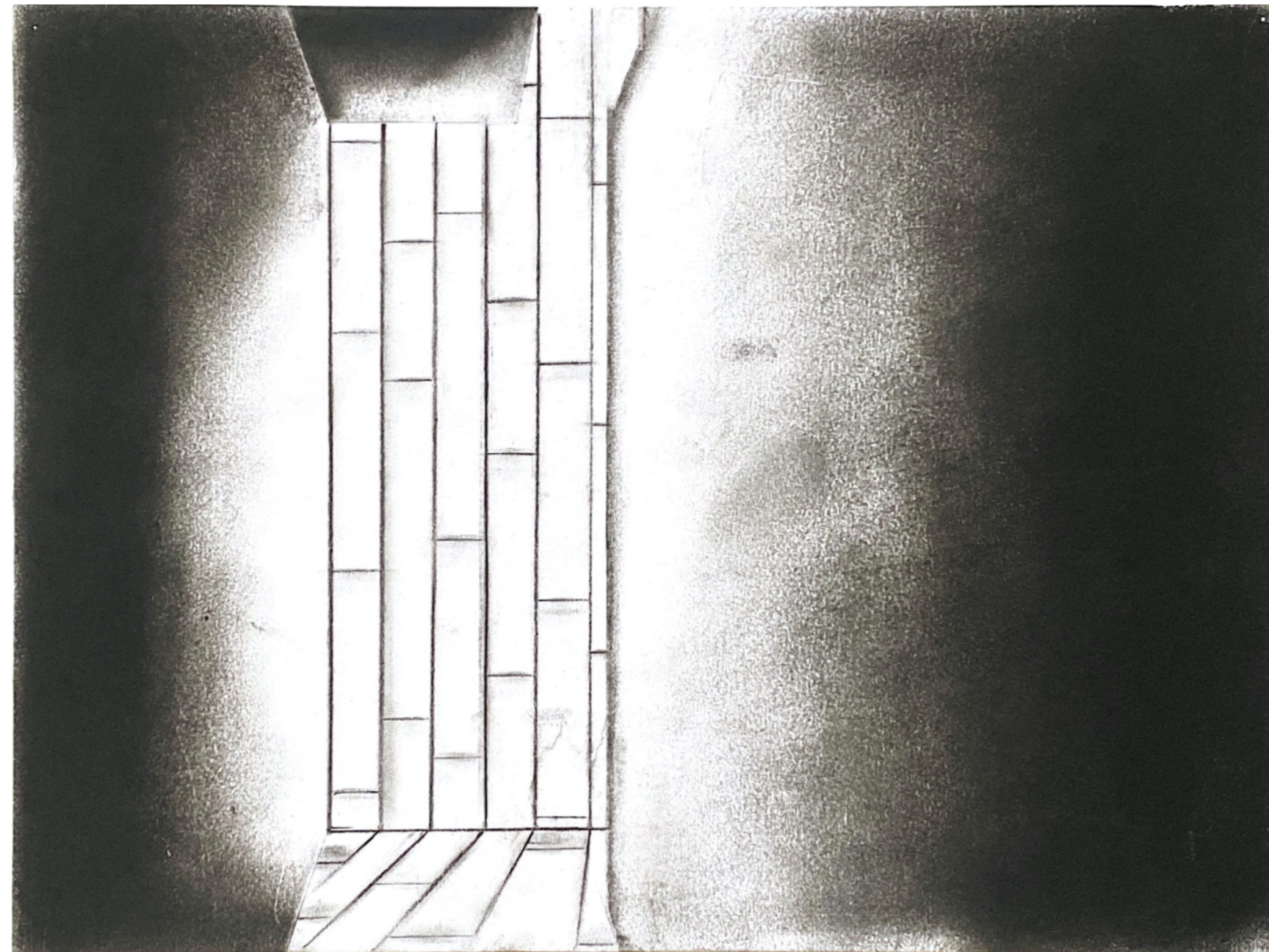
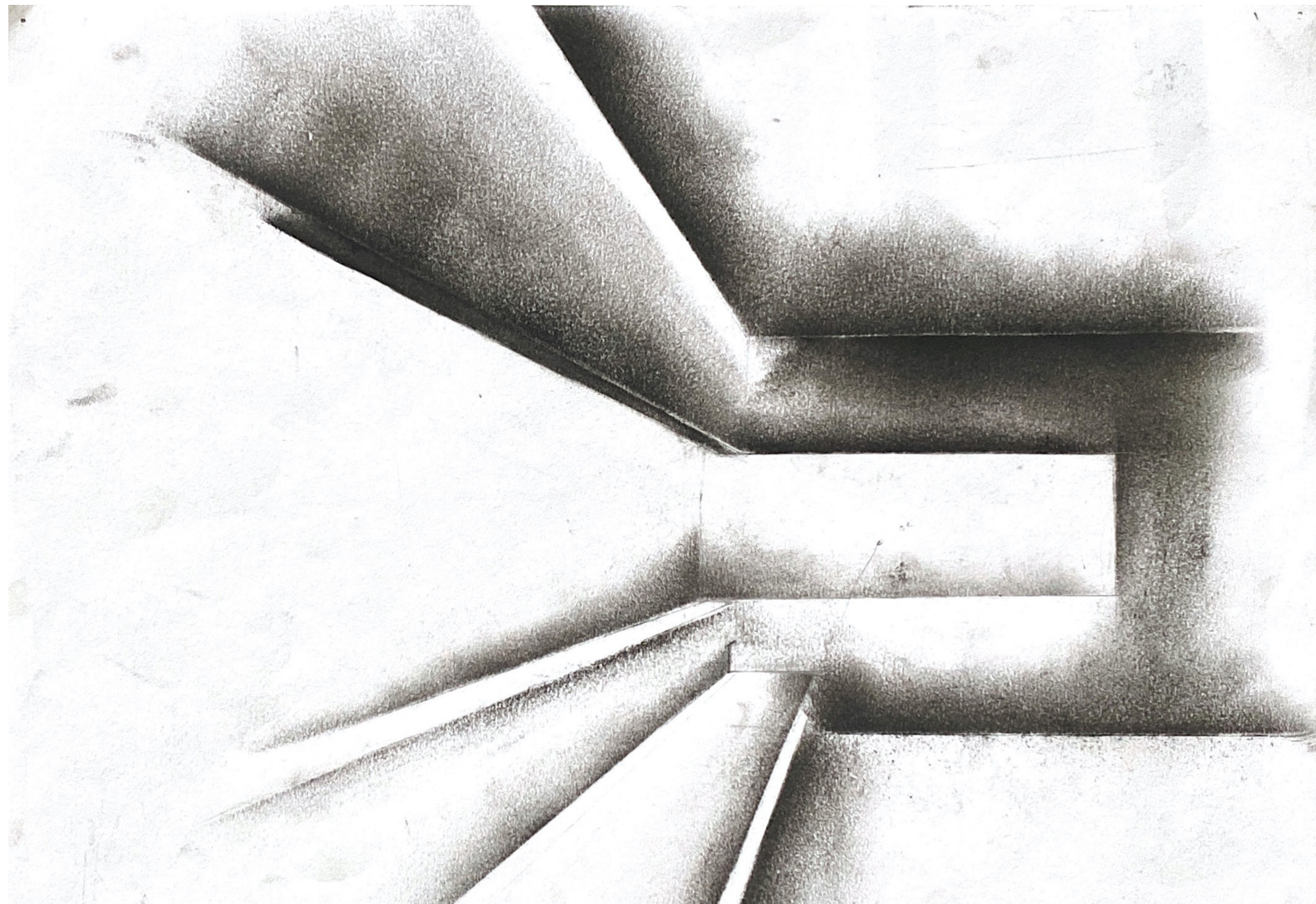
These studies helped me quickly produce ideas related to my thoughts and view of light. These productions are mostly abstract, but there are some showing a perception of space so that the most fundamental ideas can easily be recognized as you view the studies. The ideas are almost immediately present.

The charcoals were drawn simultaneously with the model; thus, creating a catalog which gave me a “score” or a “key” to choose from to design spaces.









"I don't understand light. It gives me the feeling there's something beyond me, something beyond all understanding."

-Peter Zumthor, Atmospheres

Project

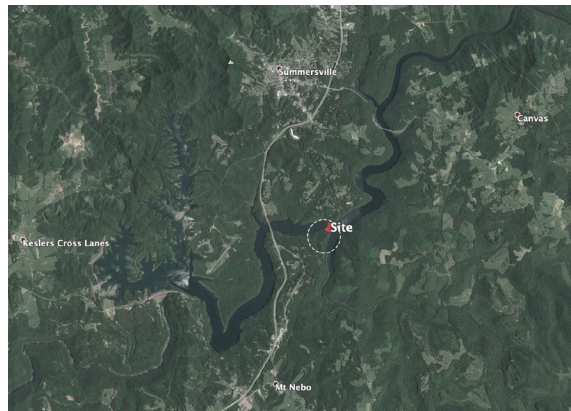
"If we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place." (pg. 7 Seeking the Sacred)

Sacred spaces like churches, chapels, and temples have been designed for centuries as axis mundis (axial pillars) or centers of the world. Hoffman's book, "Seeking the Sacred," states, "The making of a sacred place is, for humans, critical - yet otherwise unnecessary. Sacred place is a human construct, not a divine one." The point is argued that sacred spaces aren't for the divine, but for us humans.

Can one create a space not for the appeasement of the divine nor as a monument for the mortal, but as a place to gain a deeper understanding? Through a journey using light, can one be led to spiritual enlightenment?

The project is to create a series of sacred places that connect humans to the divine. Using light, one is led on a staged journey through a series of reflection spaces. The light being the thing itself that gives revelation and a deeper understanding of not only one's self, but the world around them, as well as, things greater than themselves.

Site



Site a large

The site is located a few miles from Summersville, West Virginia, on a ridge right off of Summersville Lake. The site has easy access to the public, within a mile of Rt. 19, one of the most trafficked routes in southern WV. The project is located on a ridge overlooking the eastern part of the lake. The site can be seen while crossing the bridge over the lake on Rt. 19.

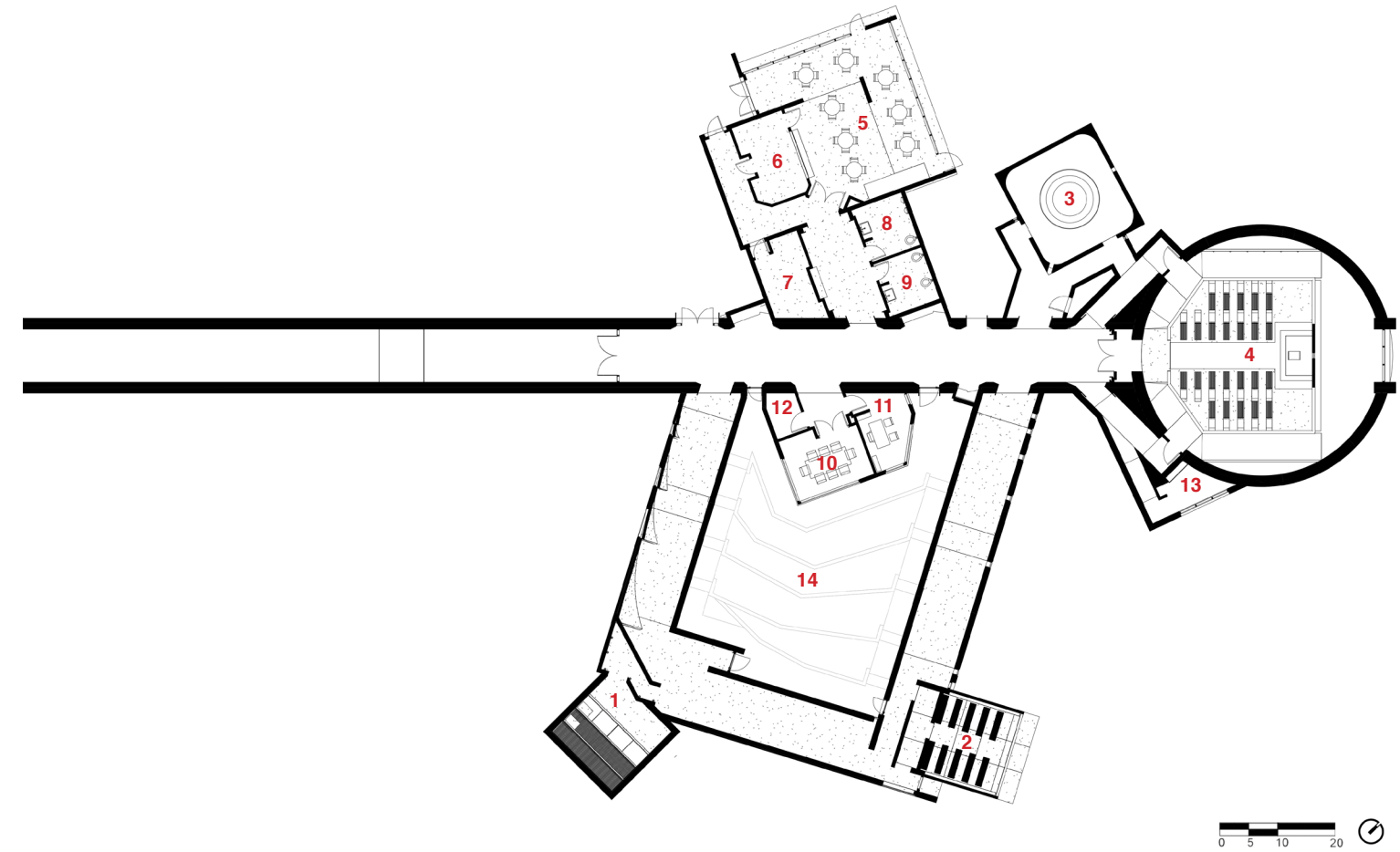
The position of the building on site is such that it captures more of the morning sun, while the reflection spaces capture as much of the sun during the day as possible while still being integrated into the site.

It was very important to use the site to the building's advantage, while disturbing as little of it as possible. This is achieved by using the peak of the ridge to hide as much of the building from the view until it is revealed by the staged path.





Plan

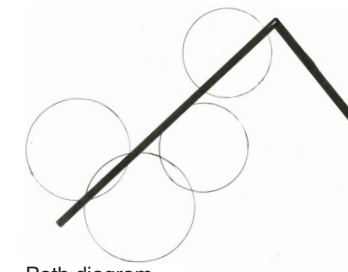
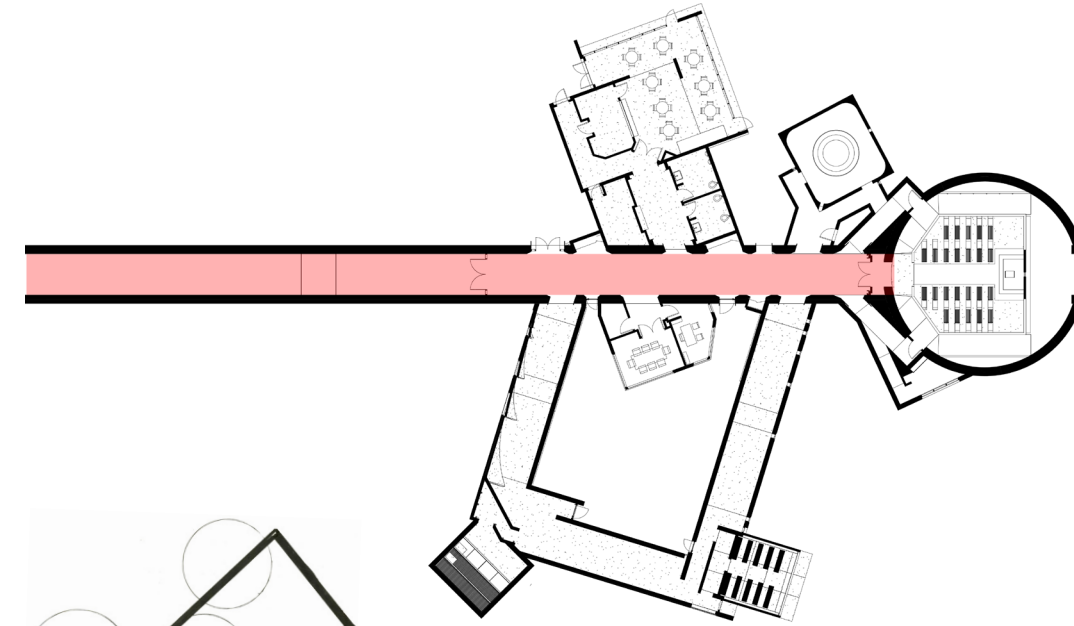


The plan is meant to be simple. The main corridor is the datum to everything in the building with the main gathering space at the end. The other spaces respond to site conditions such as a particular view.

The reflection spaces are situated in a way to capture a maximum amount of light. Note, reflection 2 looks out towards the center of the lake.

The auxiliary spaces were designed by pulling apart a rectangle and shifting it in away to create the necessary spaces out of the shape.

Path: Datum



Path diagram

“The path represents the journey from initiation to transformation. It provides a way to gain knowledge and, perhaps more importantly to awaken consciousness.” (pg.23 Seeking the Sacred)

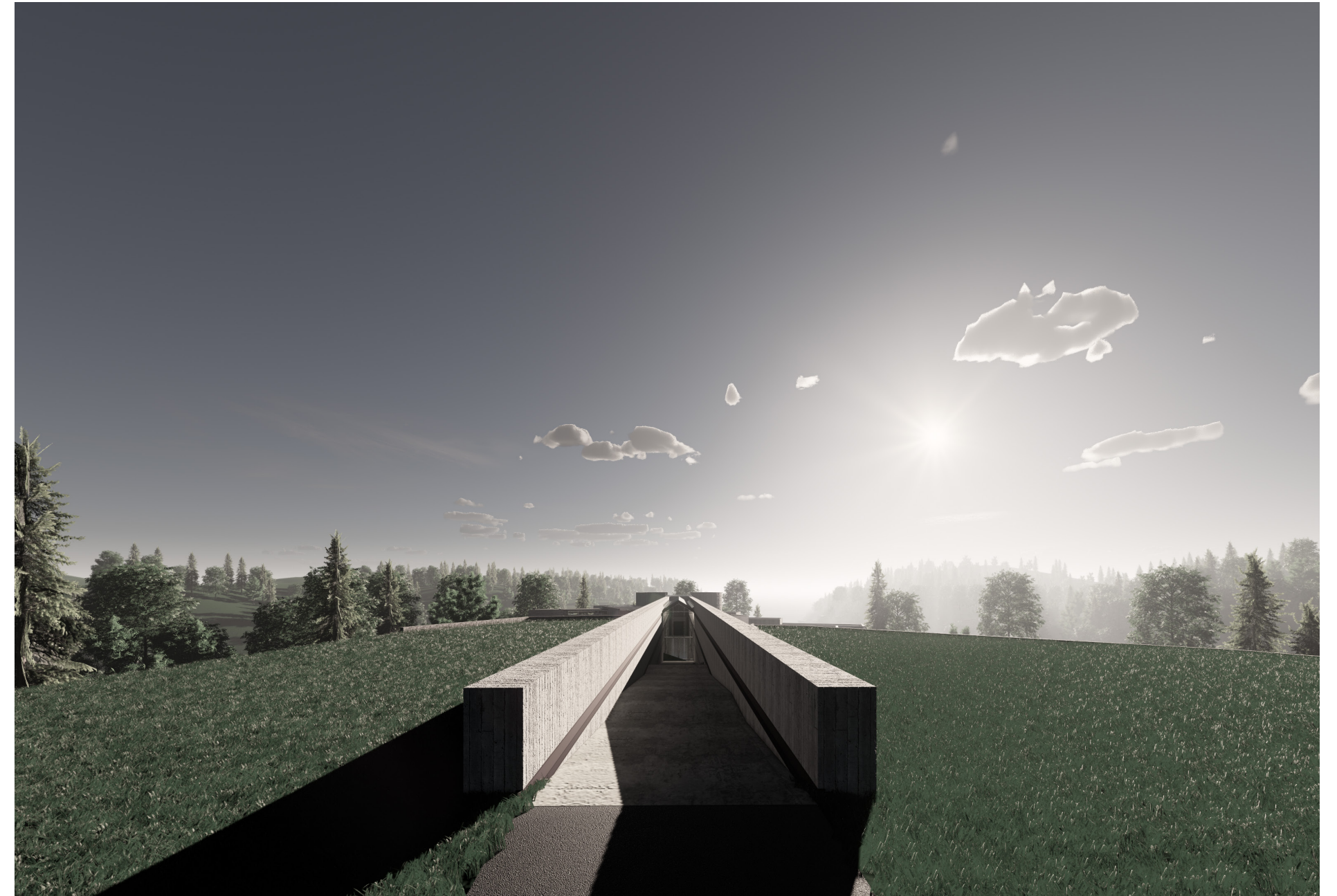
The path is the datum that ties and anchors all of the elements together. It draws one through the building while allowing a flow of movement from room to room.

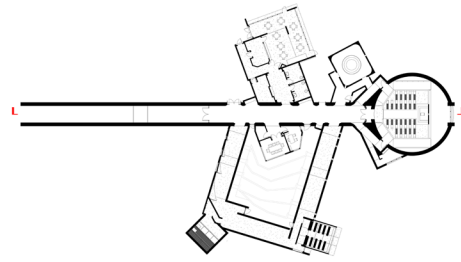
The experience of the building doesn't start inside the building, but rather outside. The path draws you in to it. It becomes not only the entry to the building but the threshold to all the spaces.

The thick concrete walls create a sense of permanence and monumentality. One should feel the weight of the walls as they travel to another space, hence it becomes the threshold and the initiation into the space.

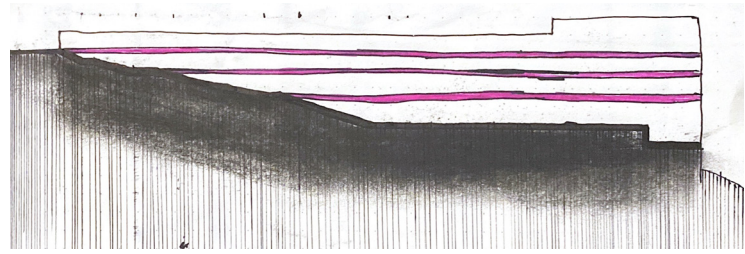
At the Apex of the hill, I'm opened up to the panoramic view of the endless landscape. However, my eyes are directed straight ahead to the building in front of me. The walls are drawing me in, calling me to journey into the depths of the building, while my eyes are still led by the walls out into infinity.

I follow the walls into the depths; but, I'm not focused on their height as I am led further down. Instead, the horizontal lines are leading me forward. The leading lines draw me to the landscape. As I continue to travel further down, another set of lines draw me to the roof line. A third set of lines show me the tops of every opening. Lastly, the fourth set of lines meet me at eye level. It is the last set of lines which bring me into the building.



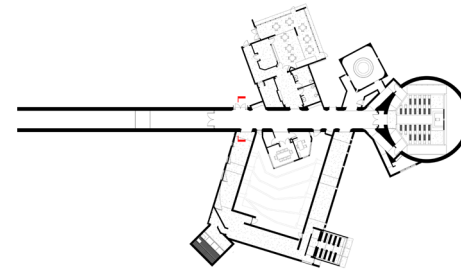
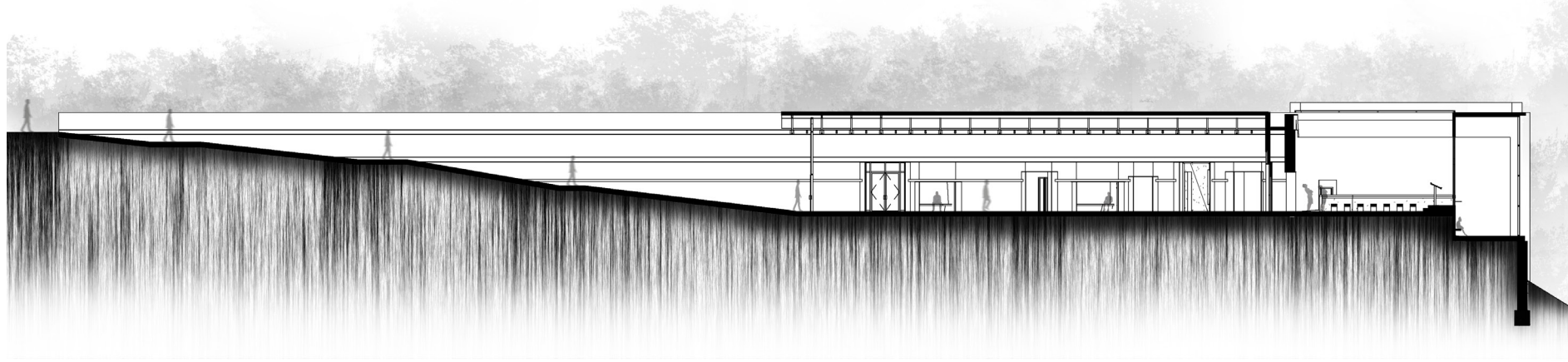


Mario Botta's chapel, Monte Tamaro, focuses on how the path extends one's eyes into the landscape. The walls draw your eyes forward and out into infinity. The project is making viewers aware of their presence in the world. This project becomes a primary precedent for the path in this project.

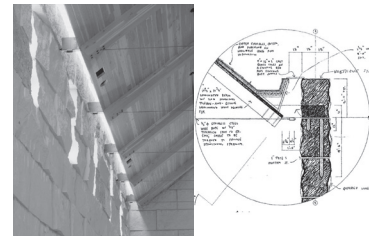


The path is essential to the building. It brings one from off the site through the whole building. As one descends into the building each landing provides a site line: the top of the wall out into the landscape; the structural connection of the roof line; the top of the openings; and, finally the one at eye level as one reaches the ground level. All of these site lines create a datum of water. To make one aware of their descent and the height of the walls.

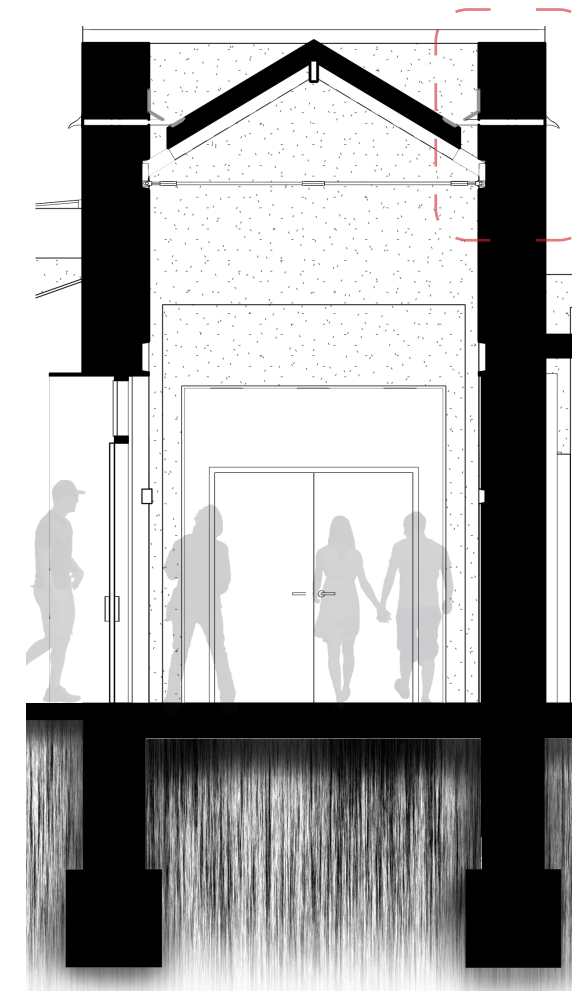
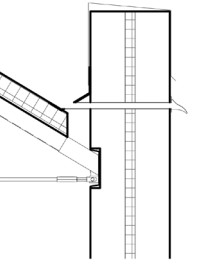
The descent is important for one to begin to let go of one's self. It is the process of being brought low in order to one day rise again. This is a long journey, and as represented, it can be as long as the building itself.



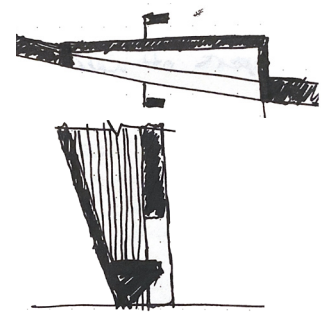
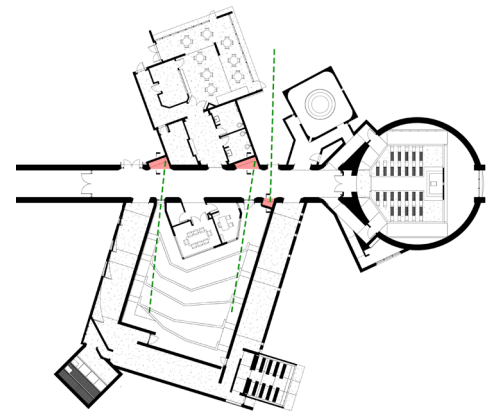
Cistercian Abbey Church, in Irving, Texas, emphasizes the importance of the walls by pulling the roof away from them and allowing light to be cast on them. The walls have a sense of monumentality, and the light reveals the texture and the seams of each stone block.



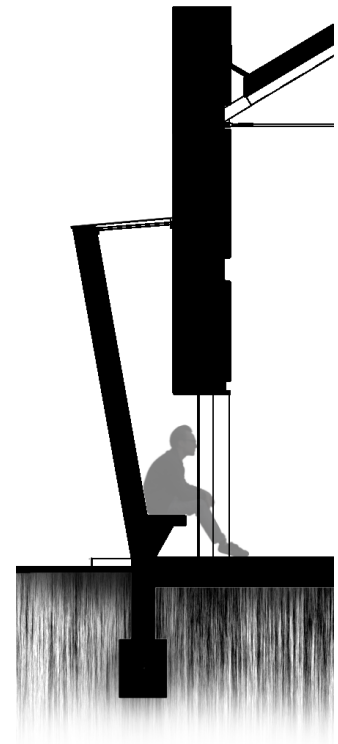
This is the detail of the connection between the wall and the roof. The gutter is raised higher on the roof and glass is used as a parapet cap; to allow for the light to enter into the space.



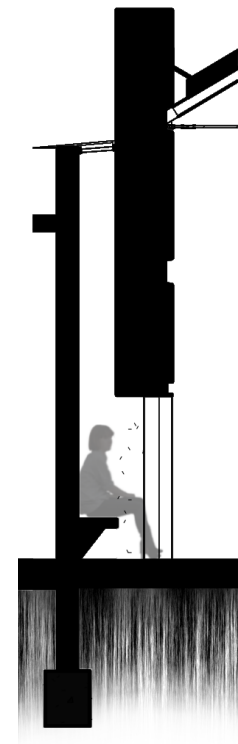
The corridor is enclosed by thick concrete walls to establish its permanence and monumentality. The roof is separated from the walls to highlight the importance of the walls, as well as, creating a guiding light as one walks through the space. The structure of the roof is not only to support it, but, to also create relief from the light entering the space. The structure creates shadows that make one aware of their pace as they travel to the end of the corridor.



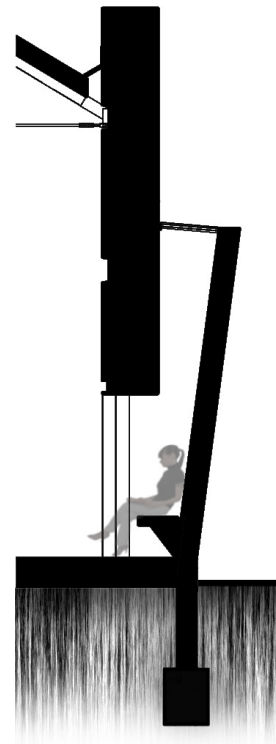
The nooks create an axis mundi while giving relief from the movement of the path. They frame the views of the sky, and the nooks show a horizontal view of the landscape.



Nook 1



Nook 2



Nook 3

Nook 1



Nook 2



Nook 3

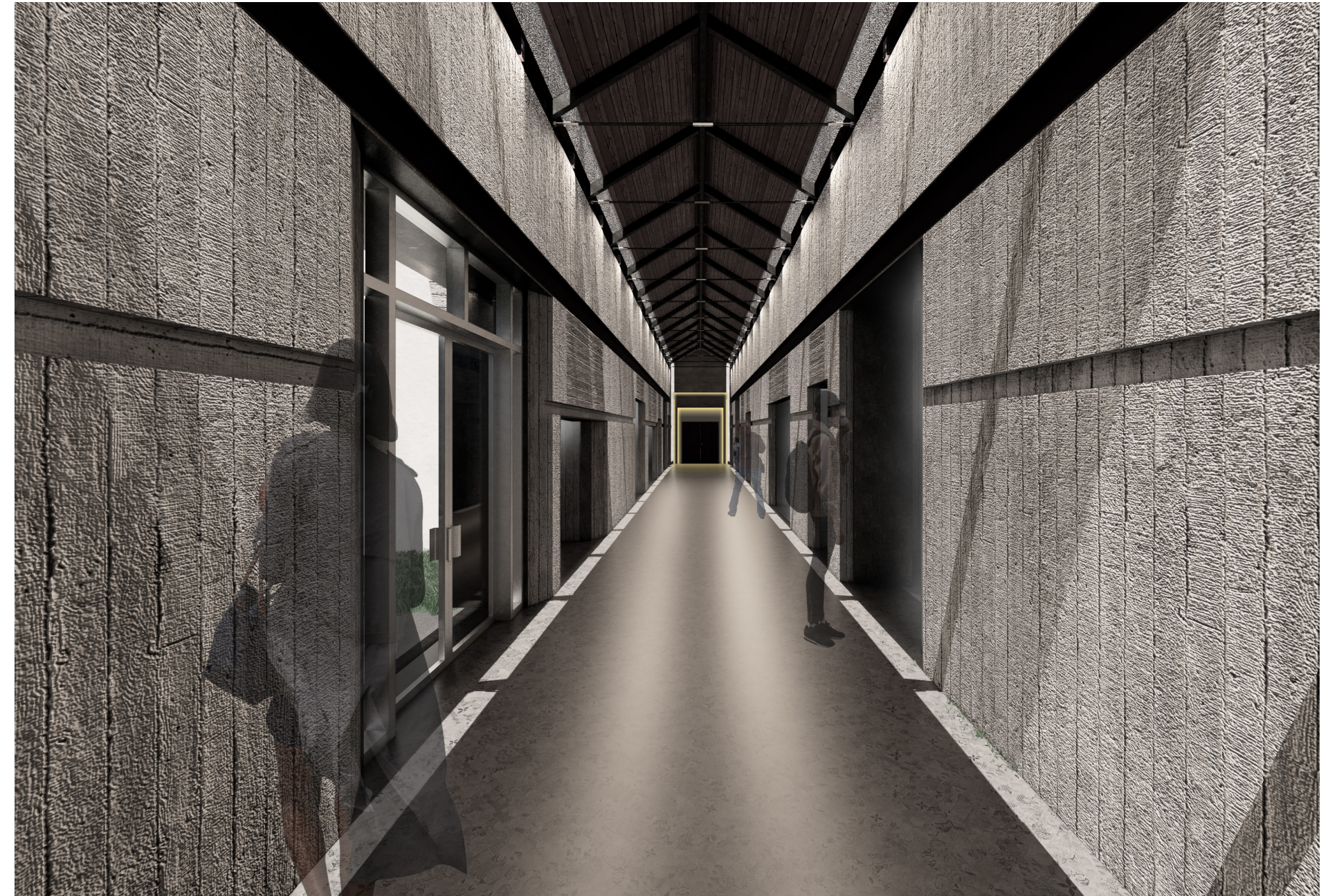


As I walk down the path, my eyes are guided by the channels within the walls. I'm being led to a destination to be revealed.

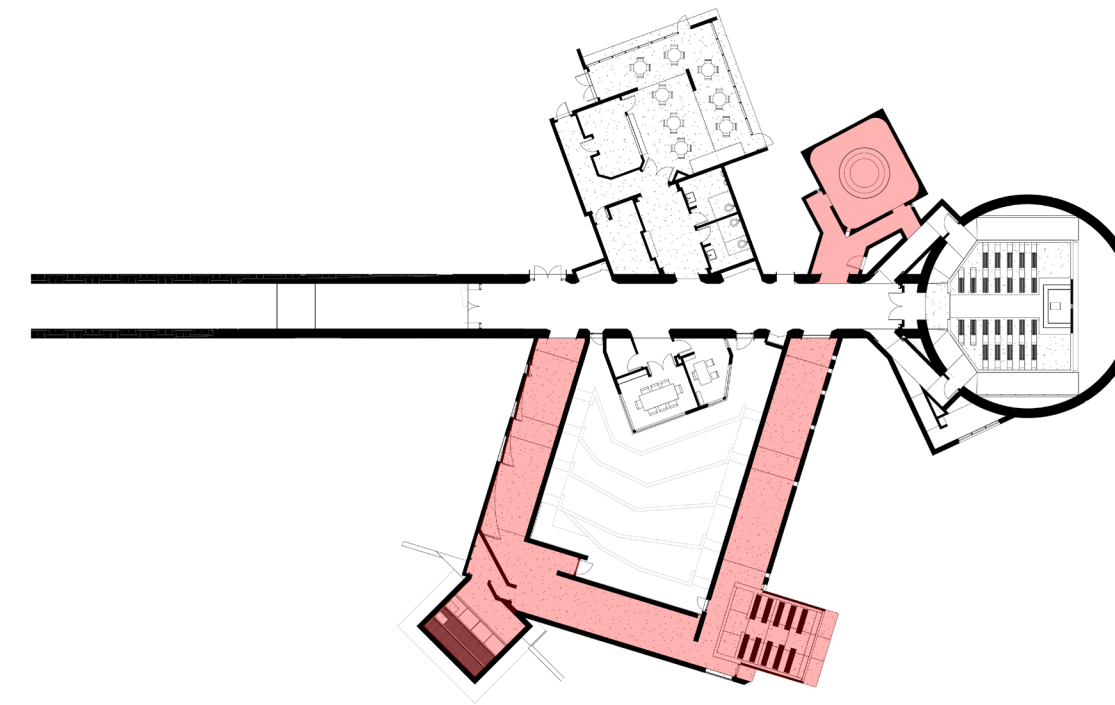
The texture of the walls is formed by vertical boards that guide me to the heavens. I notice the roof separated from the walls allowing the light to wash down the concrete; thus it is exposing the texture and the impurities of the formwork.

As I pass by each opening, the texture becomes horizontal. I imagine the weight of the concrete bearing down on the opening as the header distributes the load.

The harder materials make me aware of the sound of each step I take. I hear each footstep as they echo off the hard surfaces. With the dialogue between light and shadow, I establish a cadence and rhythm as I walk.



Reflection Spaces



There are three reflection spaces with a secondary path connecting them. The spaces use natural light to evoke contemplation within a person.

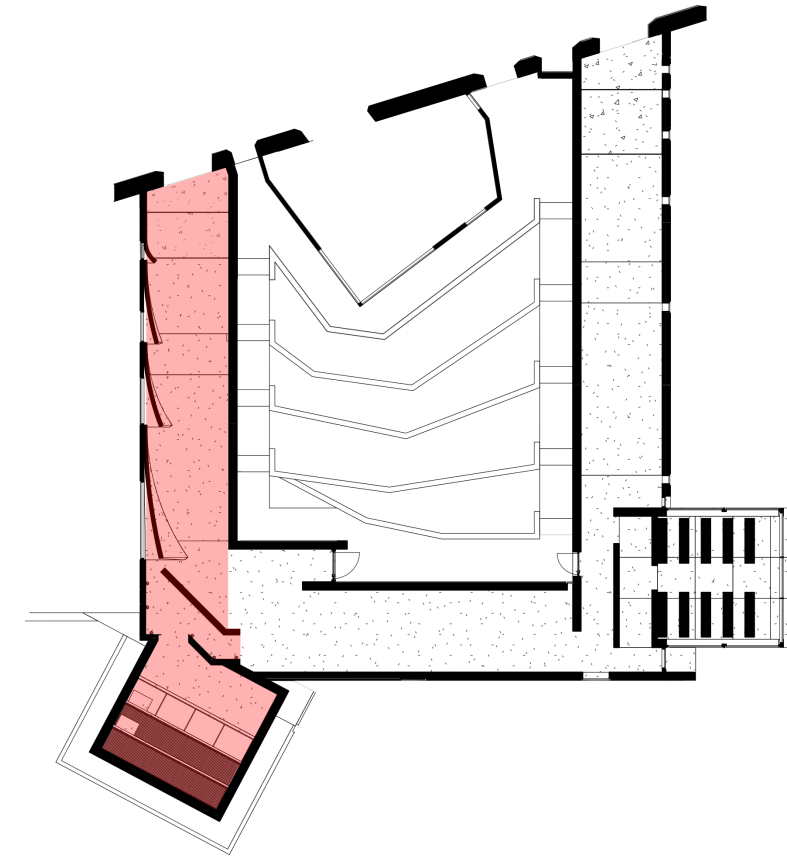
The purpose is to lead one to reflect on oneself, life, and things greater than themselves. This can lead one to full contemplation and revelation. The three spaces use foundational light, horizontal light, and vertical light. The spaces are used to gradually lift one's eye until your eyes are looking towards the heavens.

The path gives hints to the space to come. It prepares one to receive what is to come in the following spaces.

"Our thoughts do not travel to what we cannot see. The unseen for us does not exist."
-Jun'ichiro Tanizaka, *In Praise of Shadows*

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
-Psalm 119:105

Foundation Light: Reflection 1



Foundation light is that which is received from the ground. The light is meant to be indirect. Leading the eyes toward the ground. There is no direct relationship to the source of light and there is no sense of orientation or grounding of one's self.

One is meant to be brought low. However one can find a glimmer of hope and revelation, but within themselves.

This space is meant to focus on self awareness and self revelation because there is no direct relationship to the source of light. This encourages introspective progression. Looking to find one's self from within, while still longing for more.

Path

The path prepares one for the experience of the space to come. This is achieved by providing a hint to the spaces to come while slowly revealing light into the space.

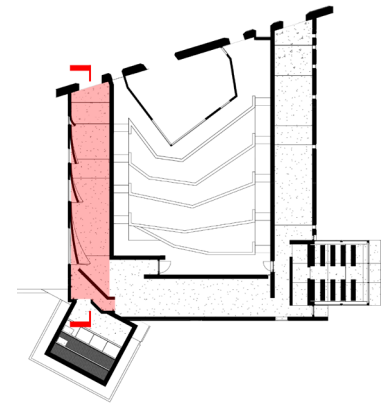
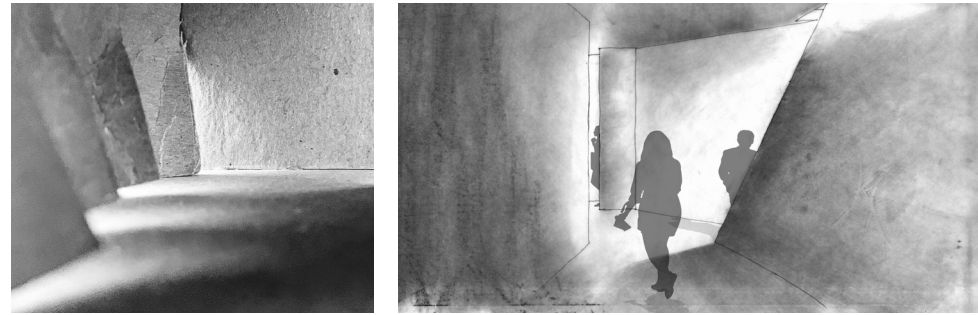
Light is slowly revealed by peeling the corner of the wall back gradually.

As more of the corner is pulled back, light is able to reach farther and farther into the space.

Each corner that's peeled gets bigger and bigger until the final opening is large enough to travel through.

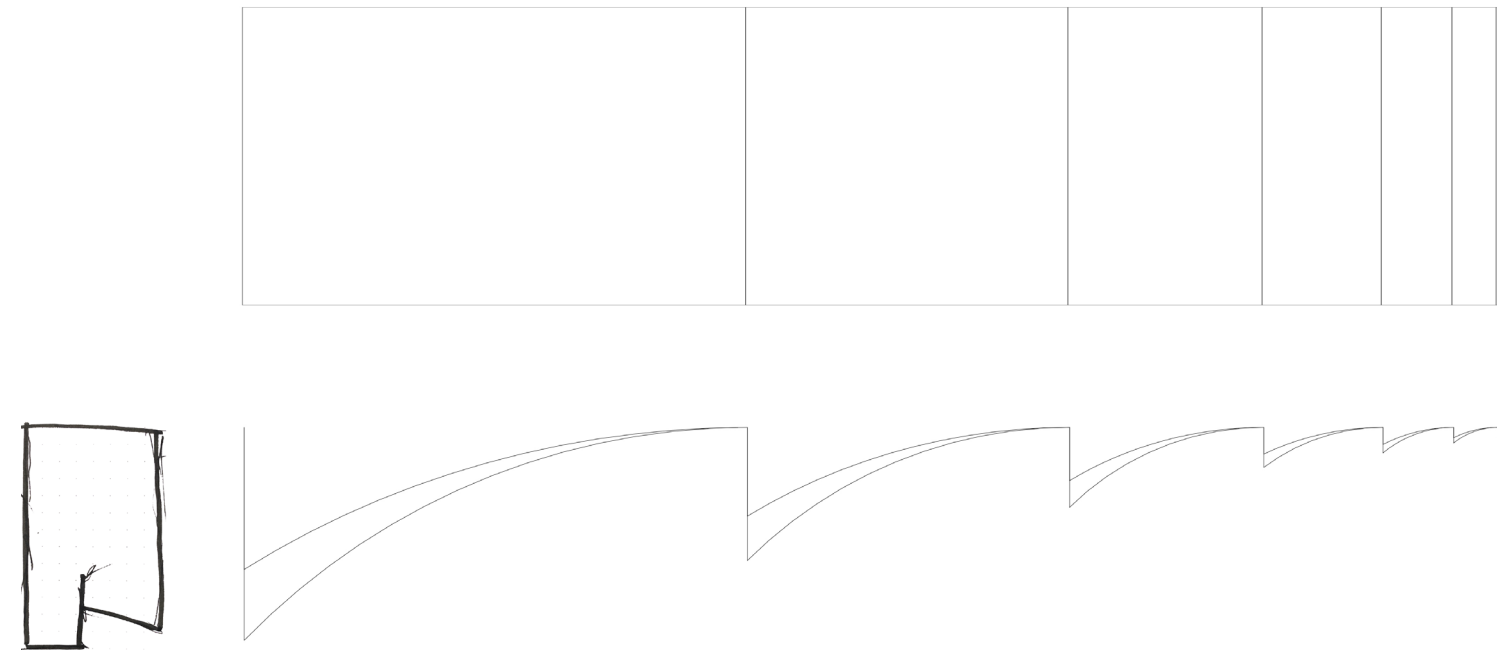
The path was inspired by this model on the right. Light comes from openings that were created by peeling the walls back and allowing the light to flood into the space.

In early iterations, only one large opening was created at the end of the path and it was wide enough to walk through. That changed to many openings that progressively got wider.



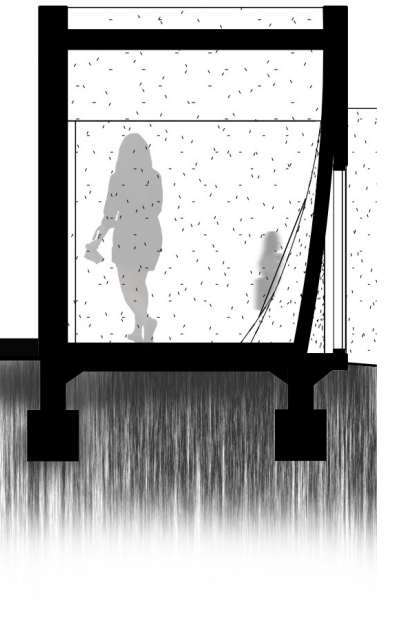
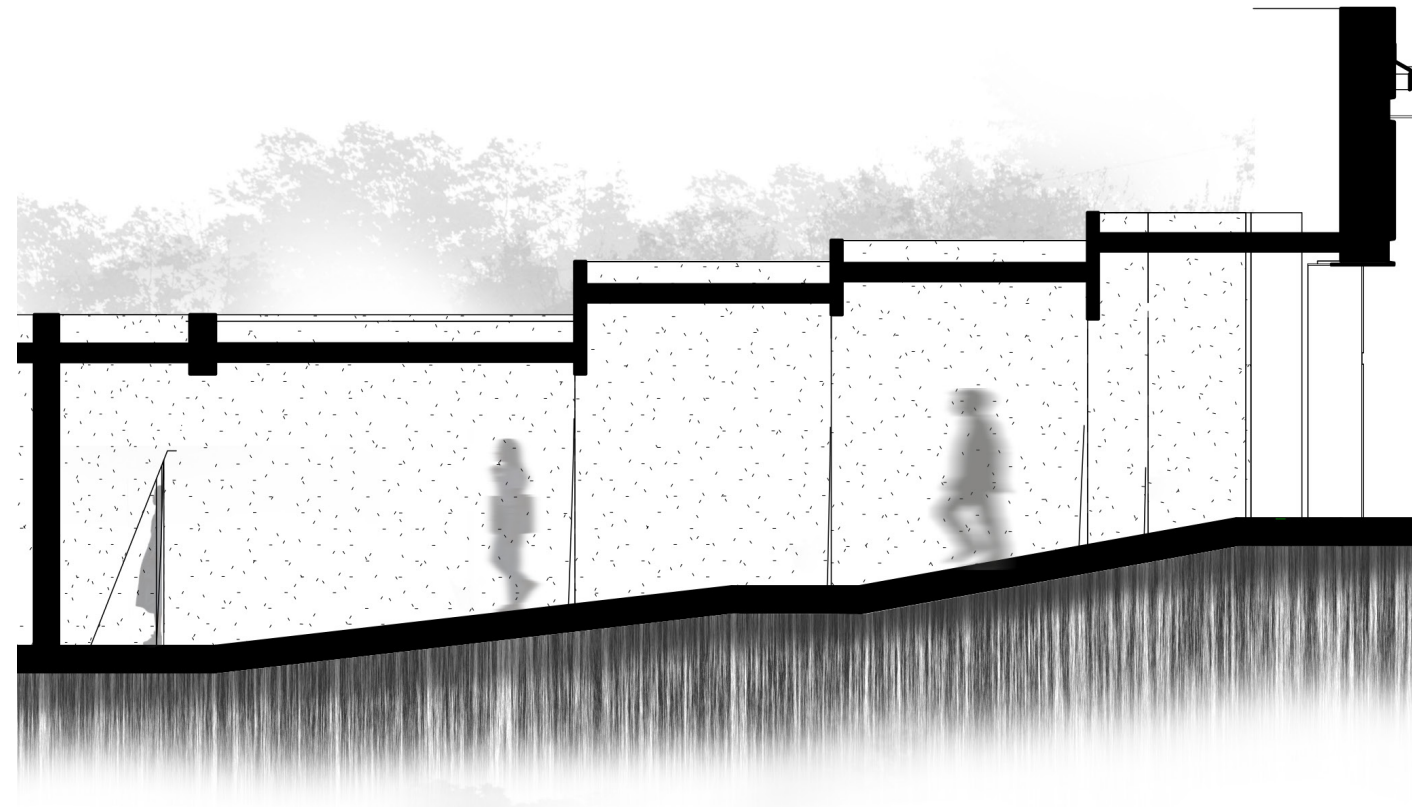
This section shows how the path slopes down the landscape, as well as, where the openings are located. At the end of the path is the opening where one can travel into the next space if they so choose.

The cross section reveals that glass encloses the space. There can be an inhabitable space once the opening becomes wide enough to travel through.



The images to the left show the progression of the openings. The golden ratio is used as an ordering system to establish rhythm as one walks.

The corners that are being peeled away reach deeper into the corridor. This pushes one's body out of the center of the corridor.



I feel the coldness of the path, and the light gives me hope. At first, the light is small, but as I travel down the path more and more light is being revealed to me. I notice the wall is peeled back, allowing light to reveal itself. It's small at first but the farther I travel the more the light presents itself. It reaches further and further into the space, and I feel the urge not to touch the light protruding into the space. Finally, at the end, the wall pulls back to flood the space with light, and I notice behind the wall an opening wide enough to travel through.



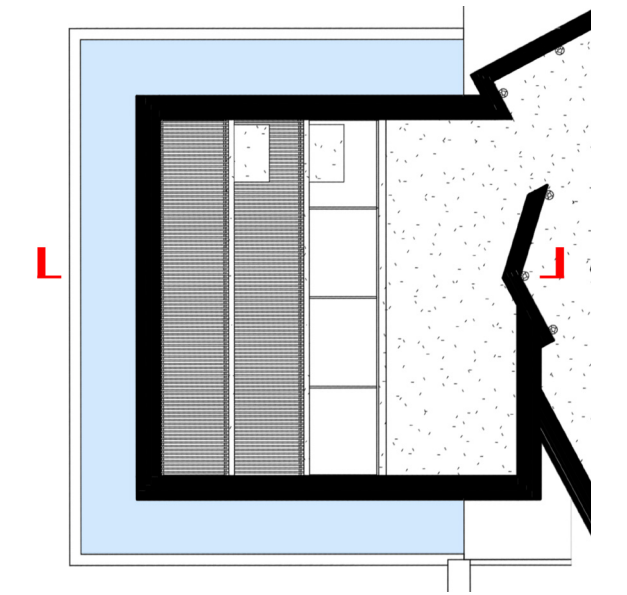
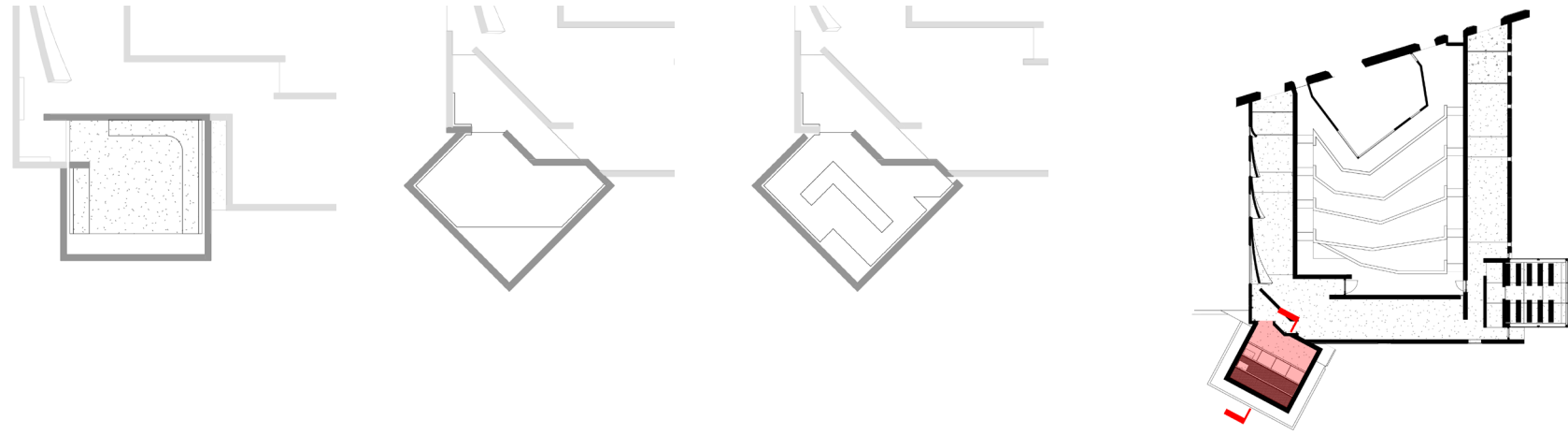
Reflection 1

Light reveals itself from below the “foundation” as one is in the space a person can sit on one of three tiered seating areas. They are tiered to allow more light to enter into the space.

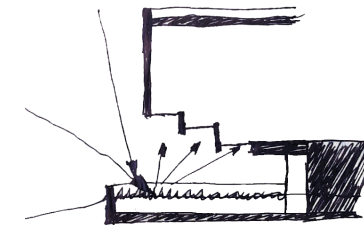
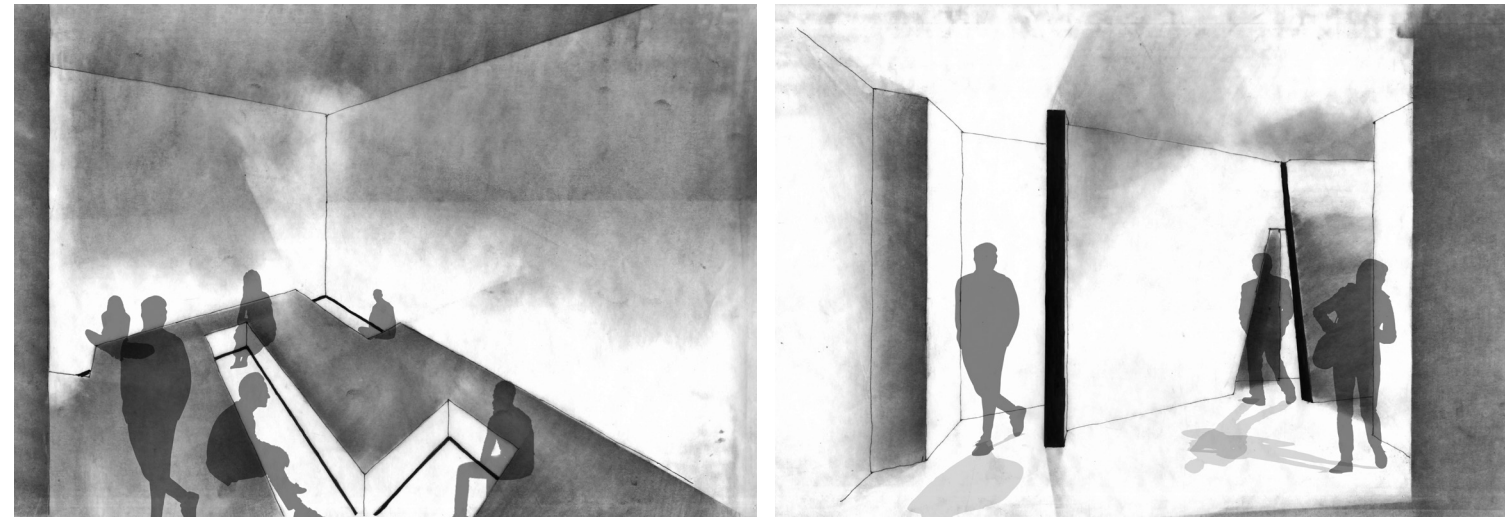
The space is aligned along the east/west axis for capturing the maximum amount of light throughout each day of the year.

A reflection pool is used to reflect more light into the space.

These are 3 early iterations that showed how light entered into the space. These iterations failed to capture the necessary light needed in the space.

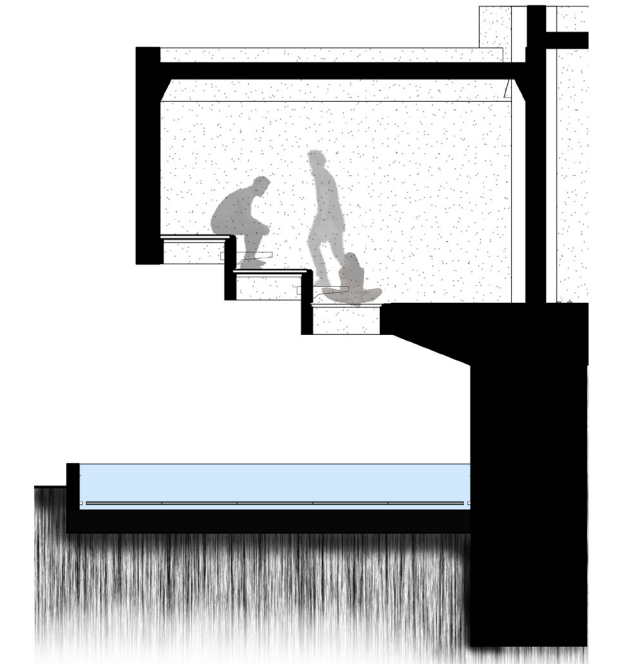


An early iteration shows cutouts within the floor which expose you to the light. The second image looks back at the reflection space. The viewer is able to see in full what was just experienced.



The final iteration shows the spaces stepping up to allow more sunlight to enter the space. As one sits on one of the tiers light reflects up onto their face.

The walls are structural and the tiered floors are supported by beams which are then supported by the walls.

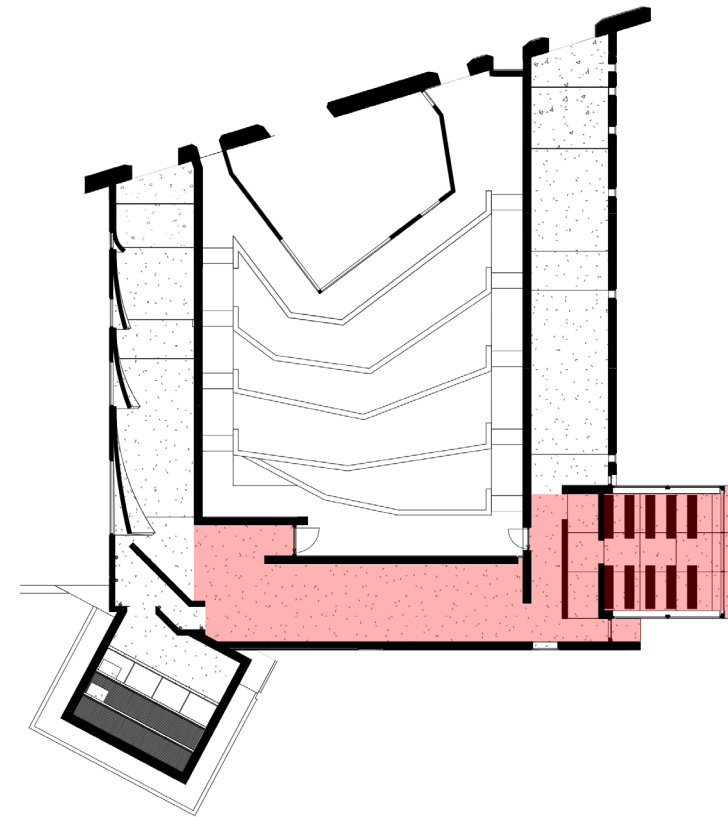


I walk through the widest opening and discover a room. Light is coming from the floor through wooden slats and it is washing up the wall. The walls are smooth with no texture at all. The room feels uncomfortable, except for the light that brings warmth. I see two stairs and travel up them. I find a place to sit on the wooden slats and my eyes are drawn to the light. It shines on my face and my body. I become self aware, and my thoughts become ever more present.



I lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help.
-Psalm 121:1

Horizontal Light: Reflection 2



Horizontal light simply focuses on the horizon. The purpose is to raise the level of one's eye from the foundation out into the landscape.

The goal is to gradually shift the focus from within to outside for the sake of within. The purpose is seeing oneself in relationship to the world around them.

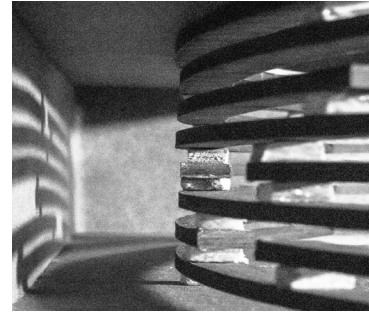
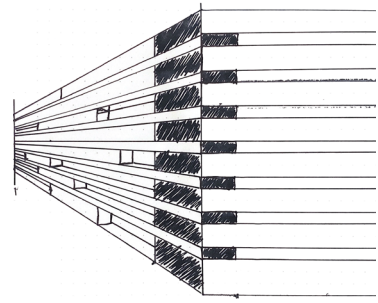
The path gives hint to views out into the landscape, but the reflection space opens one up to the landscape that was only seen in part.

Reflection Path

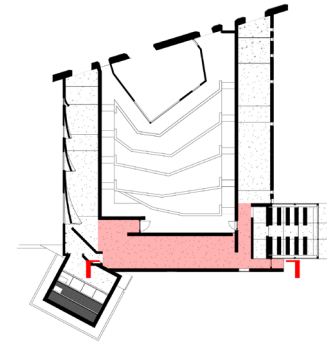
The path begins to reveal what is to eventually be seen in the reflection space. Views slowly begin to open up along the wall, giving the viewer hints to what is soon to come.

At the end of the path is a large opening. This opening invites one to look out. As one approaches the opening, they find a door into the next space.

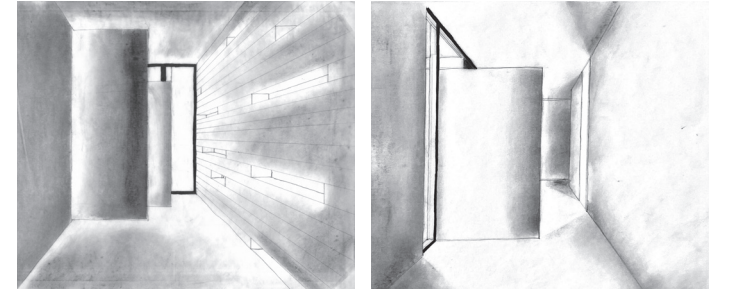
The two images to the right are early ideas of horizontality and opening up views to a landscape. The concept comes from ideas of solid and voids within a wall.



The section shows how the glass within the openings is embedded within the wall. The purpose is for waterproofing, and creating a drip edge for water to runoff.

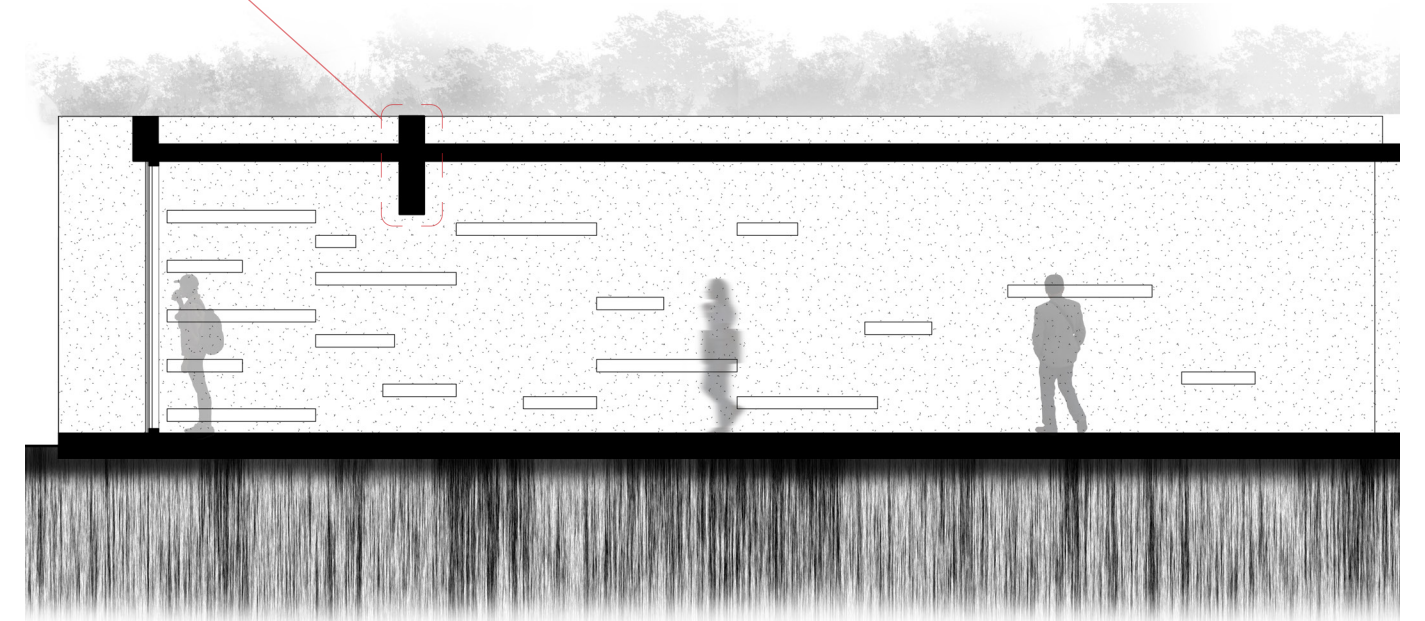
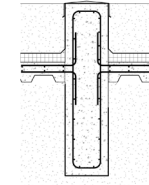
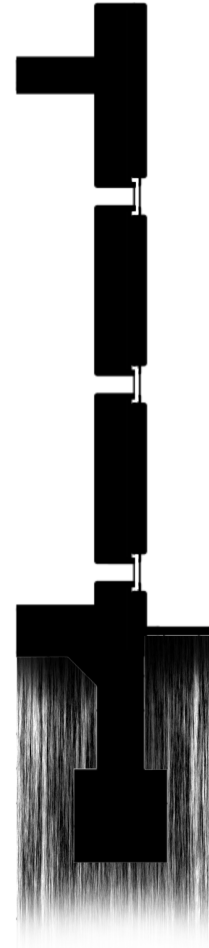


The sketches convey how openings would be present along the wall. The sketches also show how the large opening at the end of the path draws one in. Lastly, walls are located in a way to layer light and draw one into different layers of space.

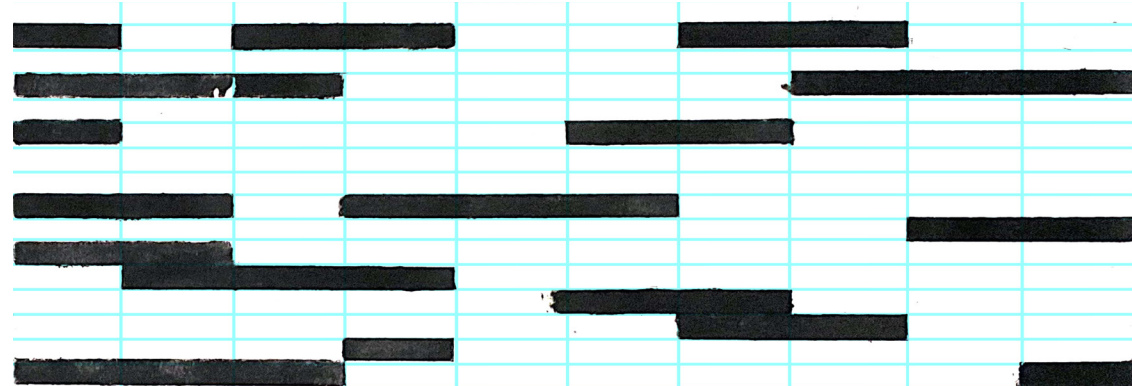


The section shows the openings are placed within the wall. From right to left, the openings become more dense to reveal more of the landscape.

The cross section, as well as the plan, shows the different thresholds created by walls which one has to pass through to reach the next space.



The drawing shows how the wall openings were laid out on the grid. An early iteration shows openings not only overlapping but also touching in some instances.



Coming out of the space back onto the path, I'm met with this warm beam of light that stretches the length of the corridor. I follow the light to the source, passing openings varying in size, which reveal framed views of the landscape. I come to the large window that the light is coming through. I can see the sun peaking through the forest on the rolling hills, as well as, the sunlight shimmering from the calm waters. I can only see the partial view but I long to see it in full.

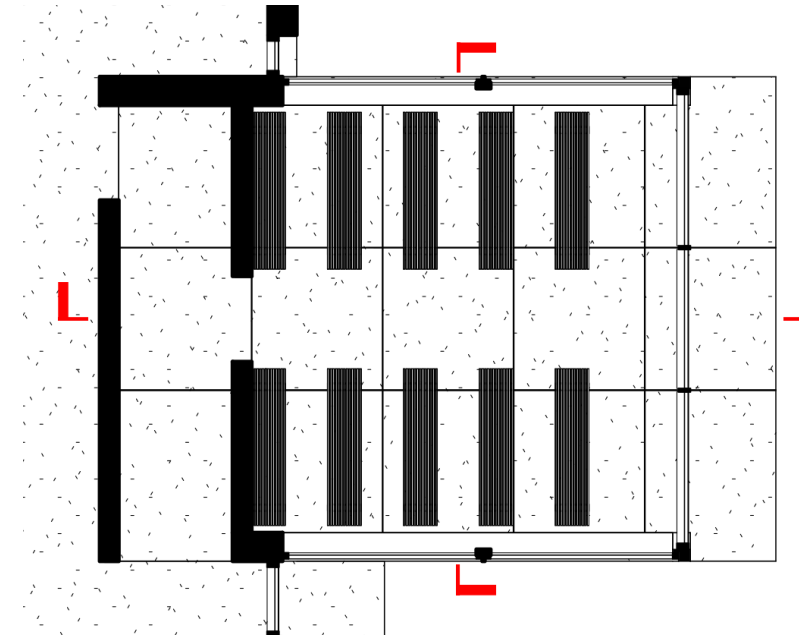
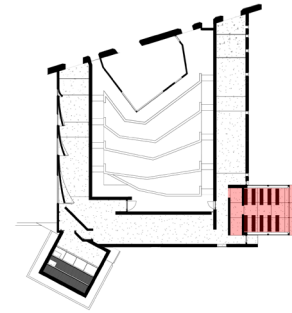
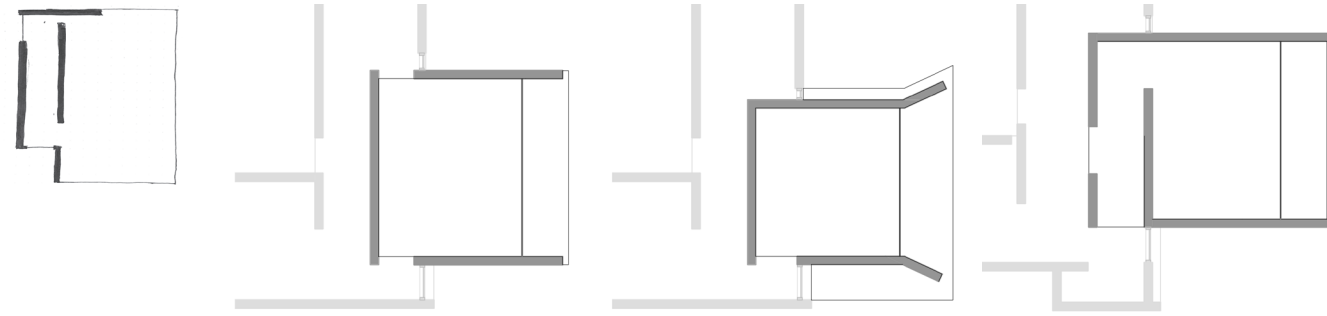


Reflection 2

This reflection space focuses on horizontality. The space is meant to draw one's eyes to the landscape. While focusing on the landscape, one is aware of their place within the world, which Tadao Ando calls "centrifugal force."

The idea is for one to begin to understand their relationship to the world around them. This space is not meant to make a person feel small; rather, it is to help one feel connected to something much greater than themselves.

Early iterations are mostly similar. All want to frame views out into the landscape. The changes attempt to create multiple levels of appropriate thresholds to enter the space which work together to slowly reveal the view.

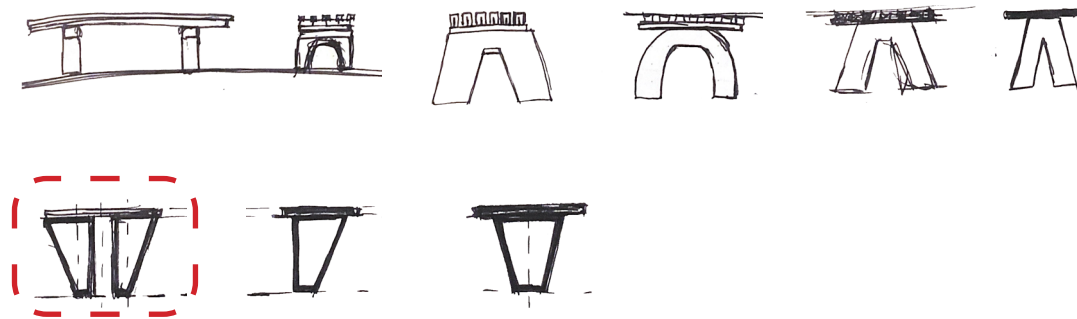


The long section reveals openings along the wall. This opens up the view allowing a person to be directed outward.

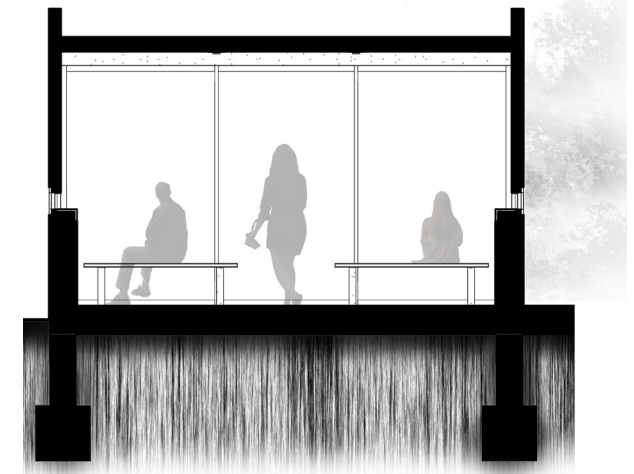
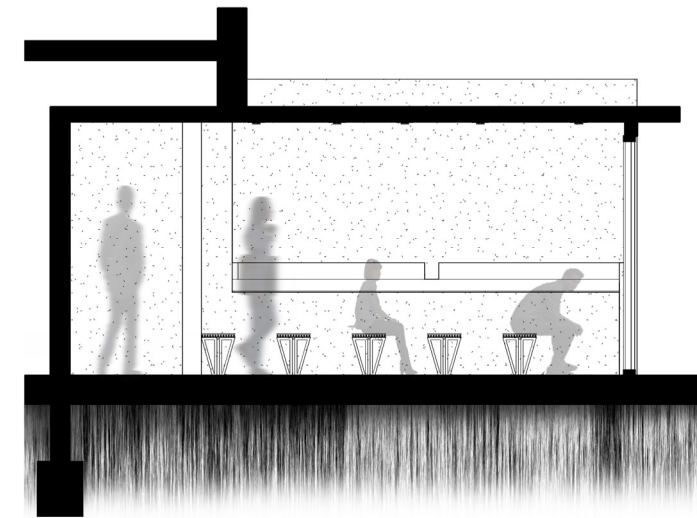
The openings along with the benches are important to the space because it creates another table or plane within the space. This is reminiscent of Thornycrown Chapel.

In the cross section, the walls above the openings are thinner to create the effect of another plane. The mullions on the storefront are along the same path as the leading lines in the concrete.

An important element in the space is the seating. Creating another plane that establishes a line out toward the landscape is key to leading the eye outward. It is also important for the seating to be as minimal as possible for the sake of not distracting. The main structure is made using concrete. The seat itself is wooden slats. The seat highlighted is the one chosen for the space.



The plan shows the simplicity of the space. It is really just a box with lines leading out into the landscape, as well as, several benches. It is in the sections that more about the spaces is revealed.

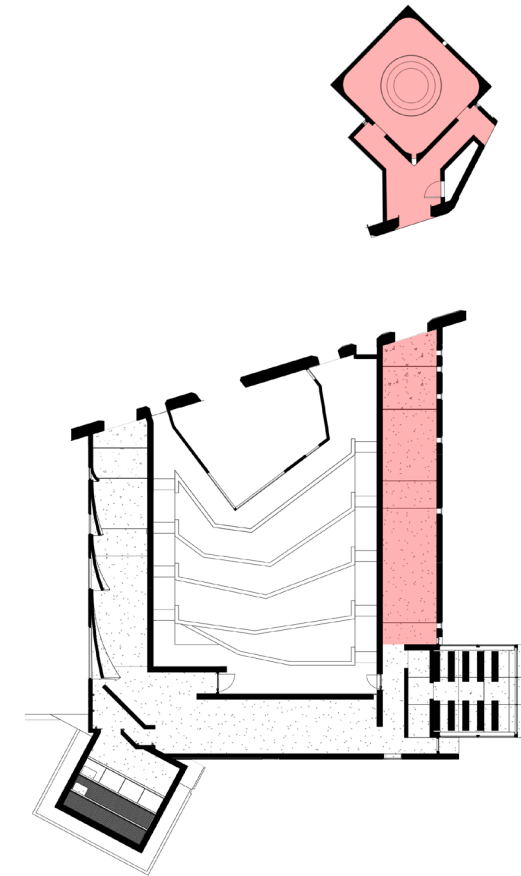


I stand at the window at the end of the corridor and see a door to my left. I enter the door and I see another to my right. As I enter the space the whole landscape is revealed. I sit on one of the benches and I contemplate the grand landscape, I become aware of myself within this world. I scan the space. As I do, the linear windows create a panoramic view and the spaces almost fall away. I begin to see my relationship to the things around me. At first, I feel small. That feeling starts to fade into this feeling of being connected.



Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.
-Psalm 123:1

Vertical Light: Reflection 3



The vertical reflection space focuses on lifting the eyes to the sky. As one has moved through the space, their eyes have slowly been lifted until now they are focused towards the heavens.

After one looks within themselves, then, they see themselves within the world around them, and finally come the realization that whatever one is looking for comes from above. This is the full completion, contemplation, and revelation.

With every step, the person on this journey is being prepared for the full experience of the final space.

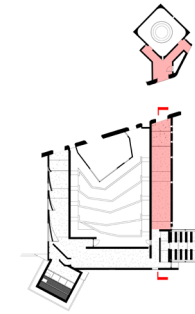
Reflection Path

This is the final sequence of the reflection path. It focuses on Verticality and raising your eye level to the sky.

Vertical openings begin to appear along the path and become more frequent. The openings allow beams of light to be cast on the floor and wall. They draw your attention making one aware of them as they are led through the space.

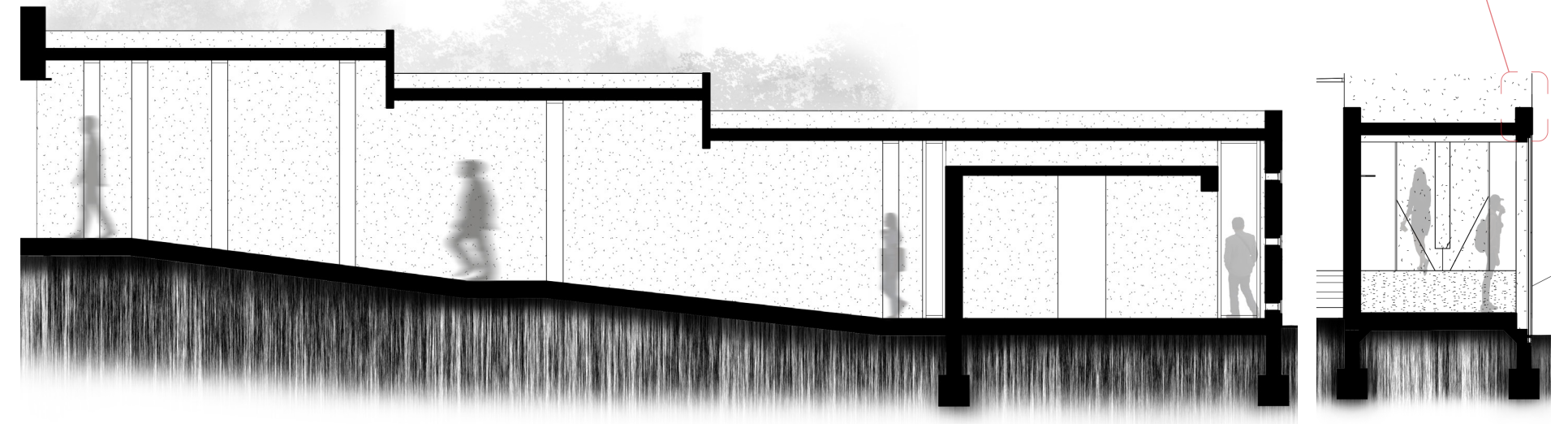
Looking ahead one sees a vertical opening to a space filled with light. A person is drawn to it. As one travels down the corridor, they are eager to experience what is to come in the next space.

One has to cross over the main corridor to reach the last reflecting space.



The section shows the openings becoming more frequent as you look from right to left. Golden ratio is used to position each opening.

The cross section shows the vertical at the end of the corridor. This opening reveals light coming from within the last reflecting space.



The model expresses how the openings could potentially be shown. Bold beams of light are cast onto the floor creating rhythm.



As I travel down the third and final corridor, it is dark; but, sharp beams of light are cast from the openings to the floor and against the opposite wall. At first there are just a few of them, and every beam of light is warm. As I approach, they become more frequent. My pace begins to speed up. I notice the beam of light at the end of the path. I'm eager to find out what is beyond the source of that light.

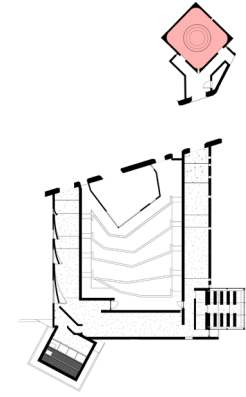
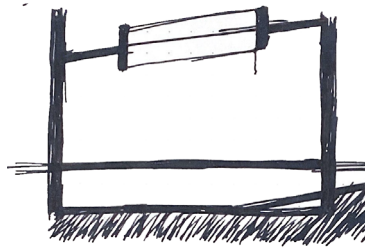


Reflection 3

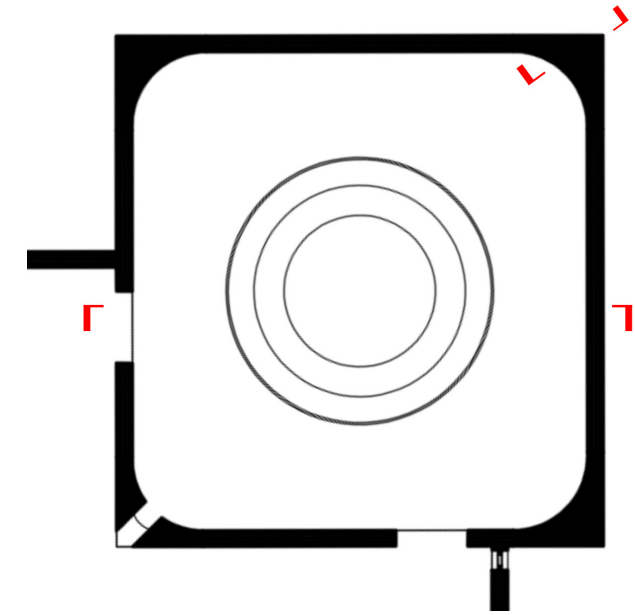
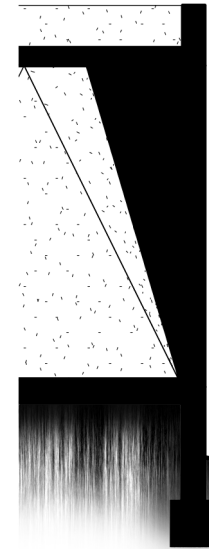
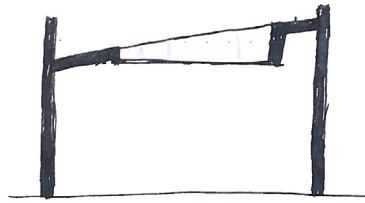
The last of the reflection spaces has gone through the most iterations to achieve the most appropriate space for its purpose.

It is a simple space taking precedent from James Turrell's, *The Color Inside*. The focus isn't on the space rather the sky. It is being framed and the space itself doesn't distract from that.

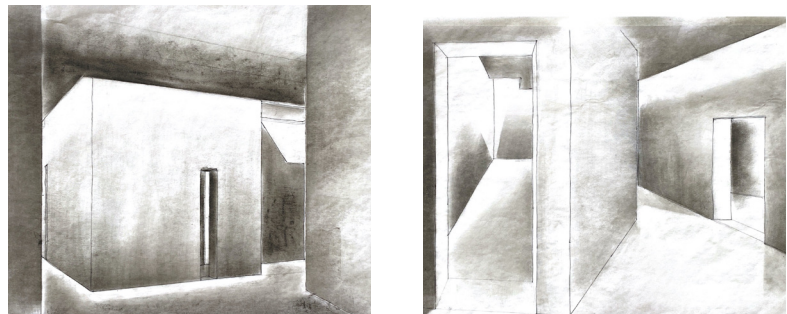
To the left are early iterations of the vertical reflection space. Both were similar, and focused on multiple levels of space before reaching the final inner room.



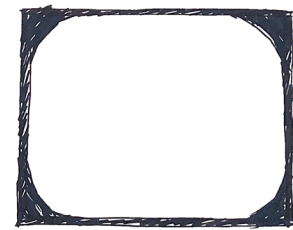
The section shows how the wall tapers at the corners to eliminate the squareness of the walls. Without chamfering the corners, the focus would have been on the room and not on the sky.



Early drawings show the skylight in the corner of the space. Light would wash down the walls. The reasoning didn't fit the intent of the space, so much consideration went into what is now the final iteration.

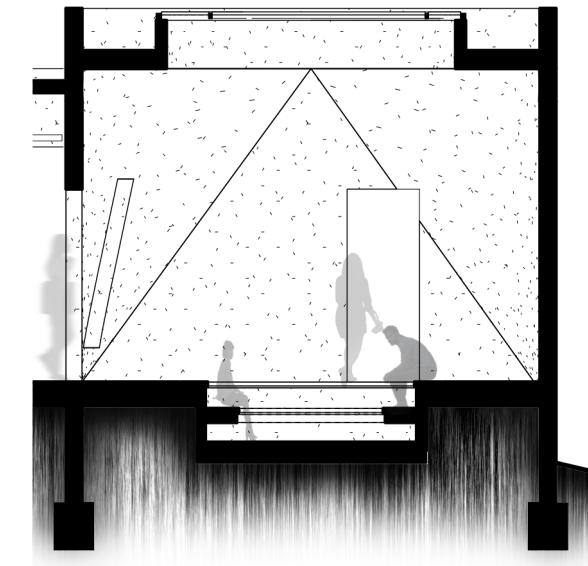


Three sketches to the right further explore the final iteration which incorporates a central skylight and rounded corners.

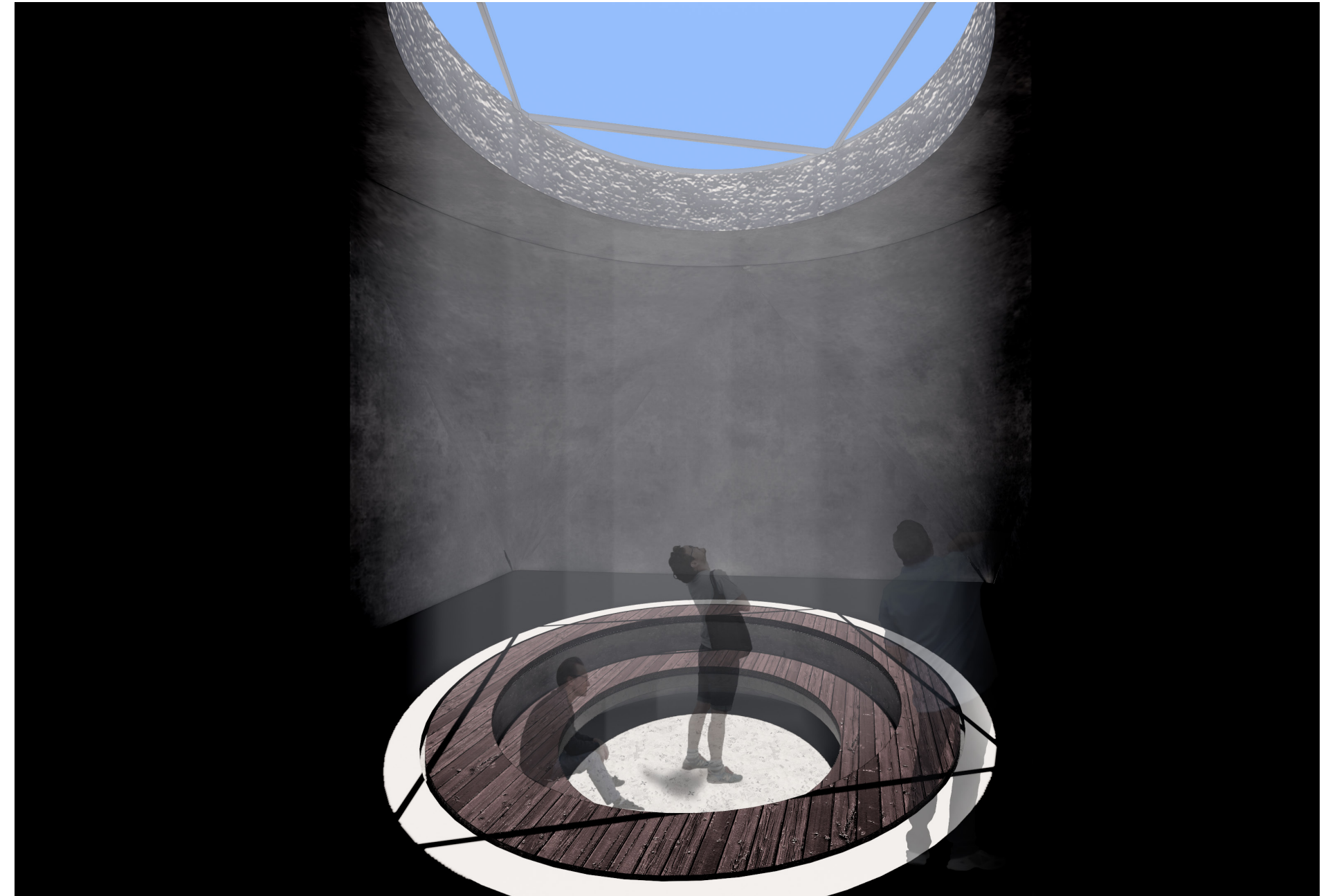


The plan and section show the seating in the middle of the space in relationship to the skylight.

Also shown in the section is the opening that reveals the light coming from inside of the space.



I come to the final reflection space. Before entering the room I see a sharp beam of light shining from the skylight into the middle of the room. The rest of the space is dark, and it seems to lack corners. The base looks square, but the walls taper towards the skylight. From my seat, I look to the sky. The warmth of the light is raining down on me. I feel complete and whole. It comes from something far greater than me.

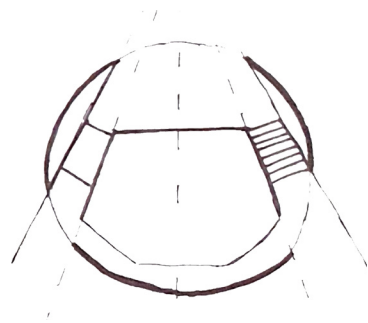
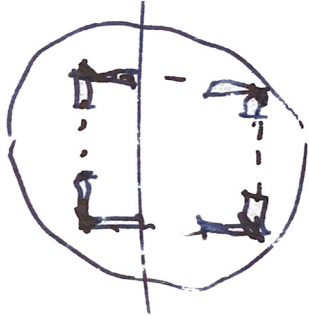


Gathering space

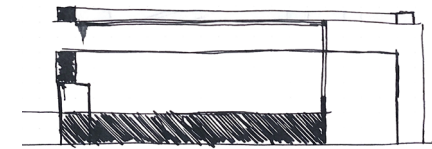
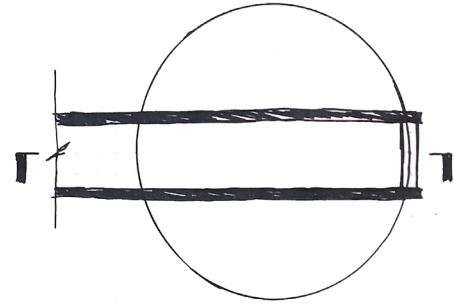
The Gathering space is the culmination of all of the reflection spaces. The space is a place of remembrance. To reflect and be reminded of the journey that has been completed.

The space serves a dual purpose. It is a space for a large gathering; but, where there is no surface, the lower space is used to view the lake and think about the journey.

The large gathering space is square while the path continues circularly around the gathering space to complete the circumambulation.

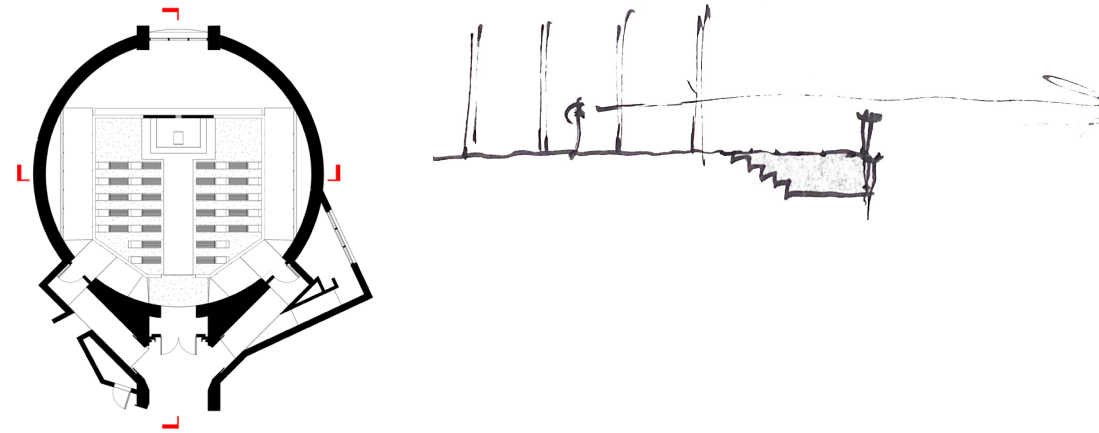
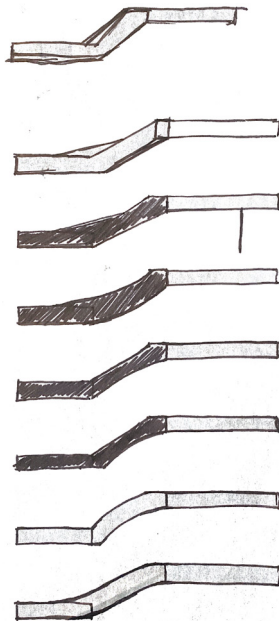


These sketches are the early ideas of the room within the room. The square space is the corporate worship gathering space. While in that space, one is still aware of the larger space around them.

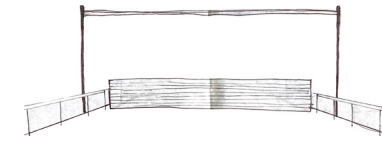
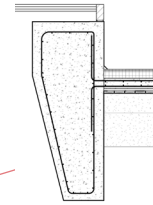
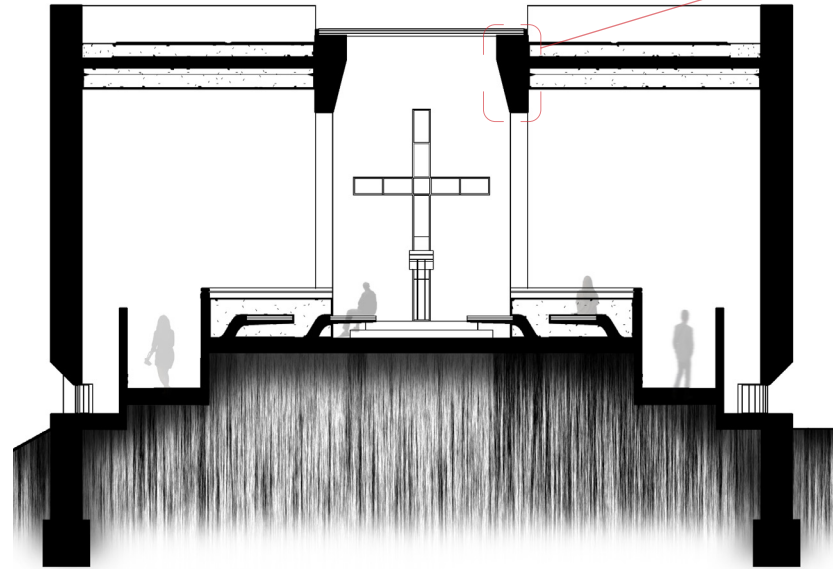


The two sketches show how the datum path connects the gathering space through the rest of the building. Walls from the path extend straight through the space and create the skylight.

These are iterations on seats for the gathering space. The ideas come from the benches on the NY Skyline Park. The purpose is to create another plane using the benches.

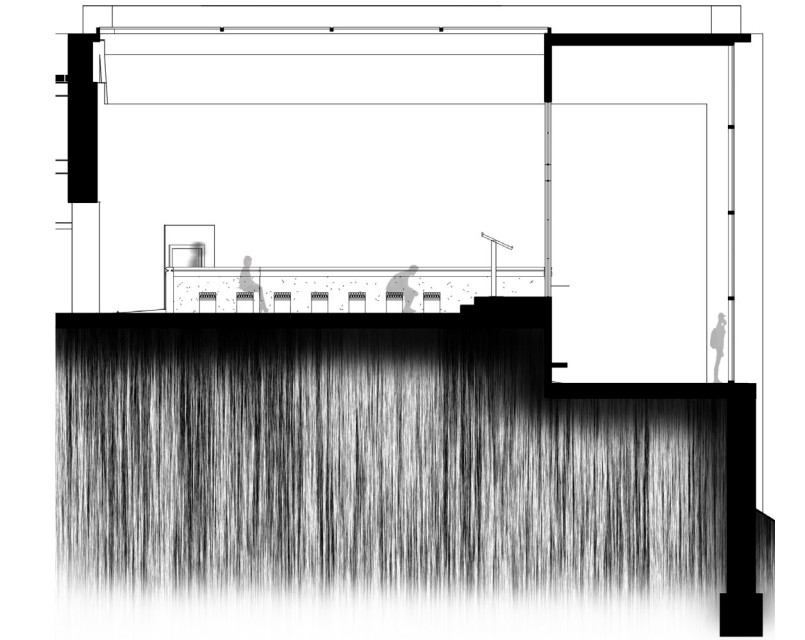


These sketches are the early ideas of the room within the room. The square space is the corporate worship gathering space. While in that space,



Cross section shows the skylight, as well as, the light wells on either side for foundational light throughout the day. On the inside of the light wells, there is a path to travel to the lower viewing space.

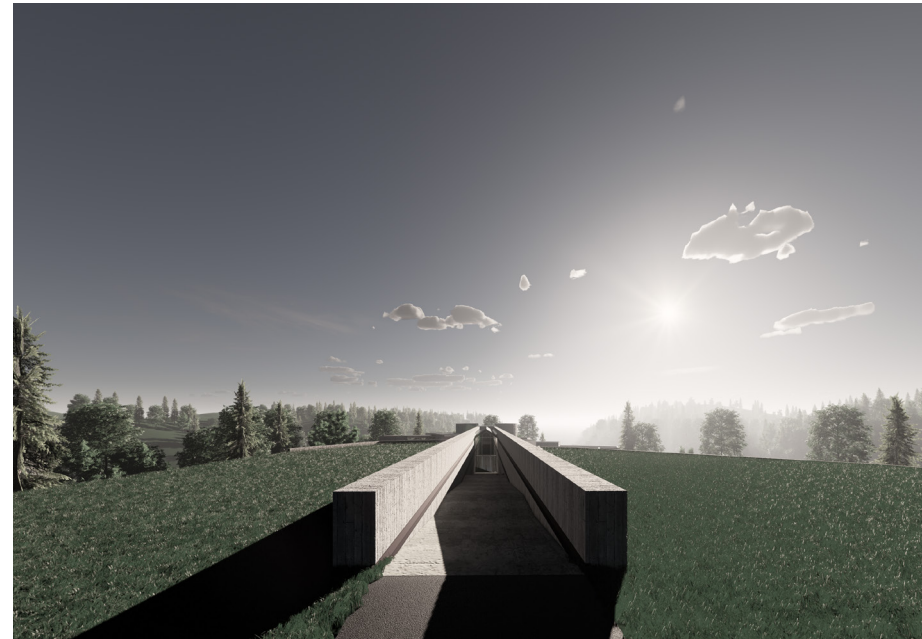
The long section shows the gathering space in relation to the viewing space below.

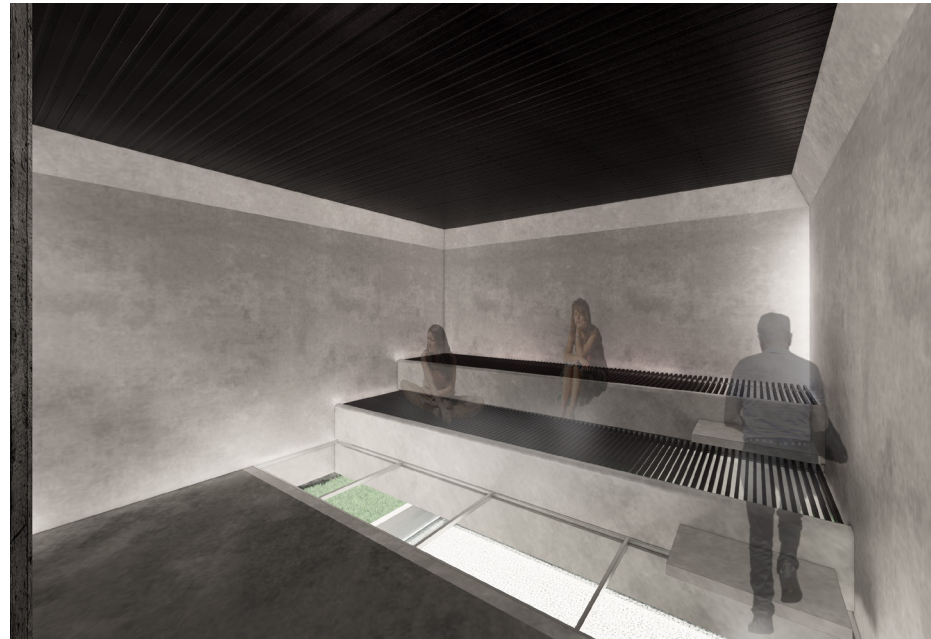
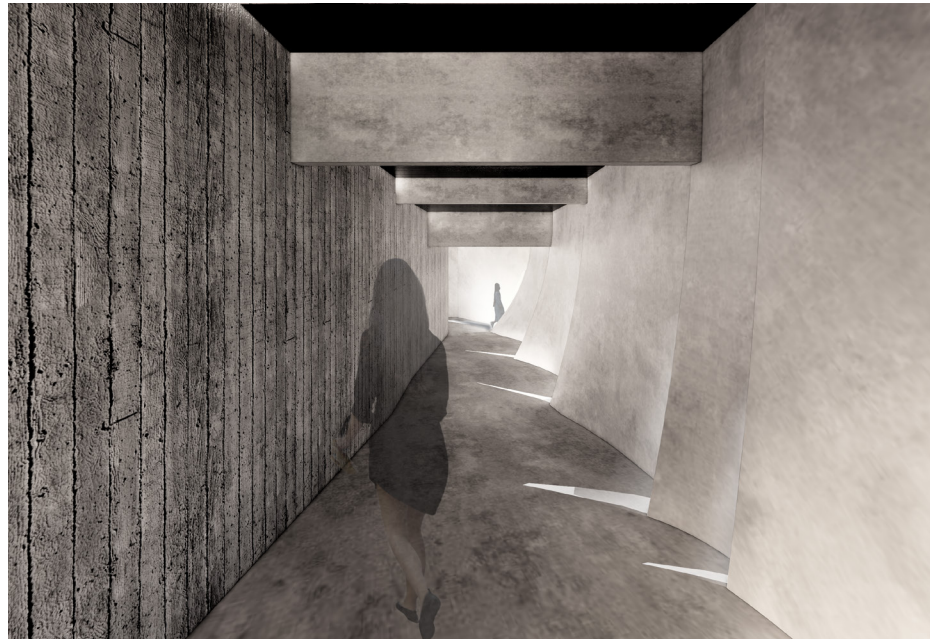


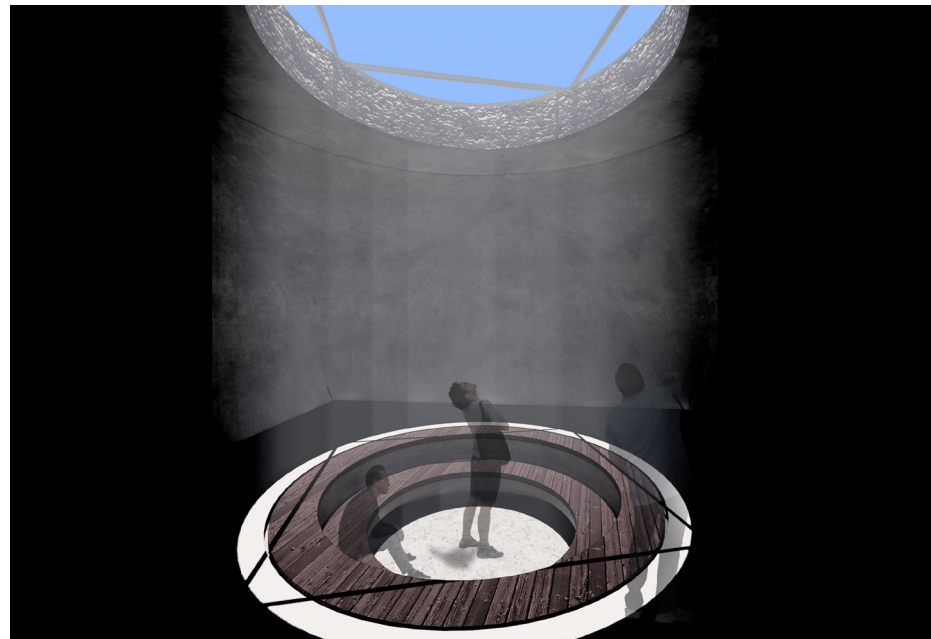
The gathering space is the final destination and the reminder of the journey I just completed. Before I entered this space I thought the journey was completed, but it wasn't completed until I stepped into this space. As I stand in the gathering space, I feel like I'm standing in two spaces at the same time. The place of worship is square but the space at large is circular. I'm also reminded of every reflective space I experienced. The skylight reminds me of the last space. The light shining through the cross reminds me of the second space, and the light wells against the wall allow light to enter into the space similarly to the first reflective space. I have a flood of memories that enter my thoughts by interacting with this space.



Conclusion







Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou dwellest in the heavens.
-Psalm 123:1



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