

in Alexandria, Virginia

Prepared by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Architecture

Approved by

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Alexandria, Virginia

I. Abstract

This thesis is an intimate exploration. A personal journey between here and there: what I left behind, what I always kept close to me and all the new things that I learned and experience during the last four years.

I just tried to put myself together as a person as well as an architect; taking from my personal experiences the inspiration and the tools to create a building.



II. Acknowledgements

Many thanks and regards to my Committee, family, friends and people from ParkerRodriguez for their constant support and understanding.

Special thanks to these wonderful guys:

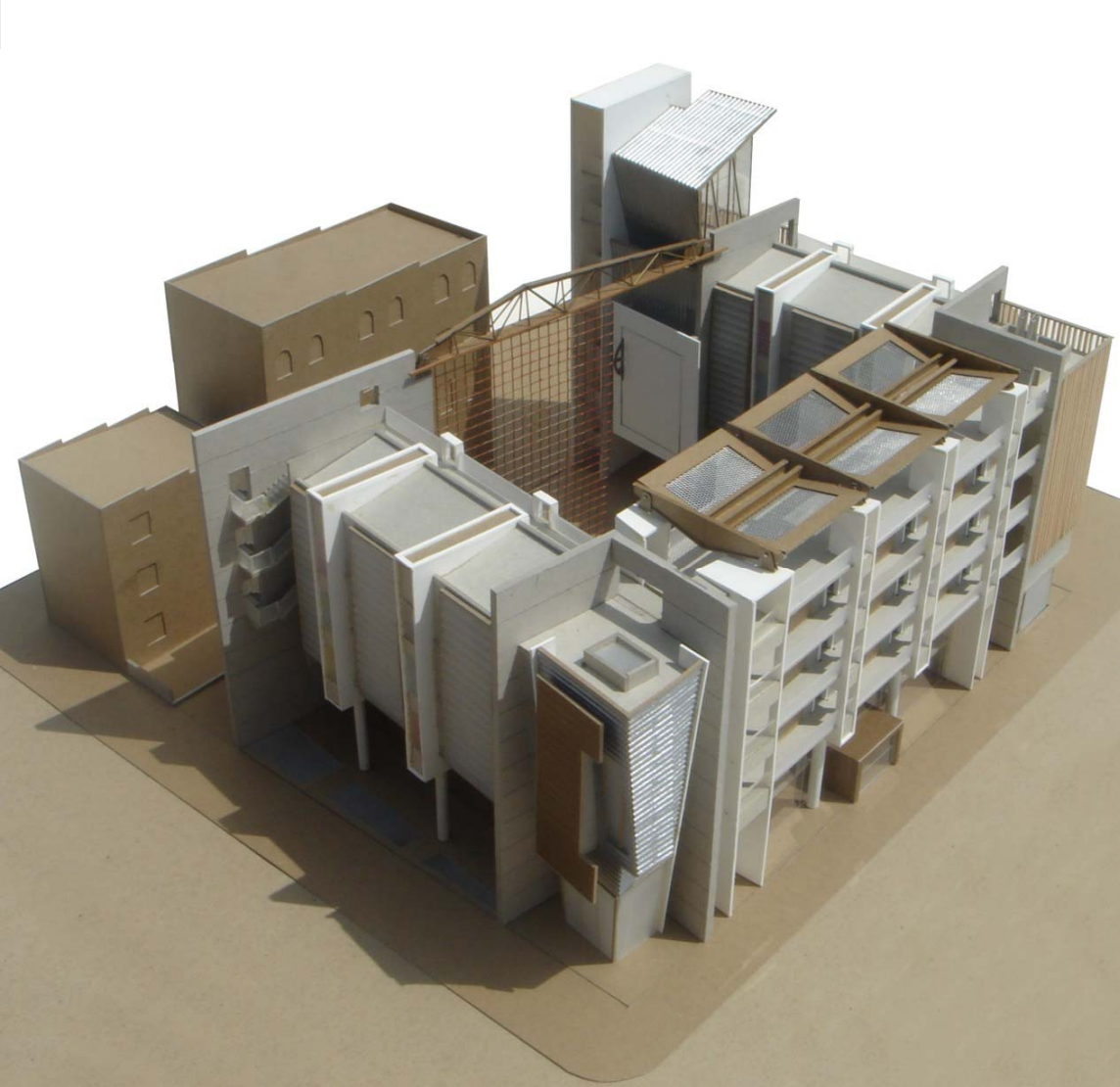
Adrian Oggero
Ana Zannoni
Ariadna Belmonte
Cecilia de la Vega
Eleonora Sanchez
Laura Croce
Magdalena Egues
Santiago Mosso
Soledad Pellegrini

... not only for helping me during the process of my thesis, the final presentation and this book, but also for the emotional support in that critical and very special moment of my life.

I also want to mention and thank my road trip partner Natalia Garcia. It couldn't have been possible without our reciprocal encouraging therapies.

And finally, thank you God for all your blessings.





Dedicado a mi mamá, Inés.

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IV. The Site

The Site occupies one of the corners at the intersection of King Street and South Patrick Street in Old Town, Alexandria. Both streets are major arteries of the city.

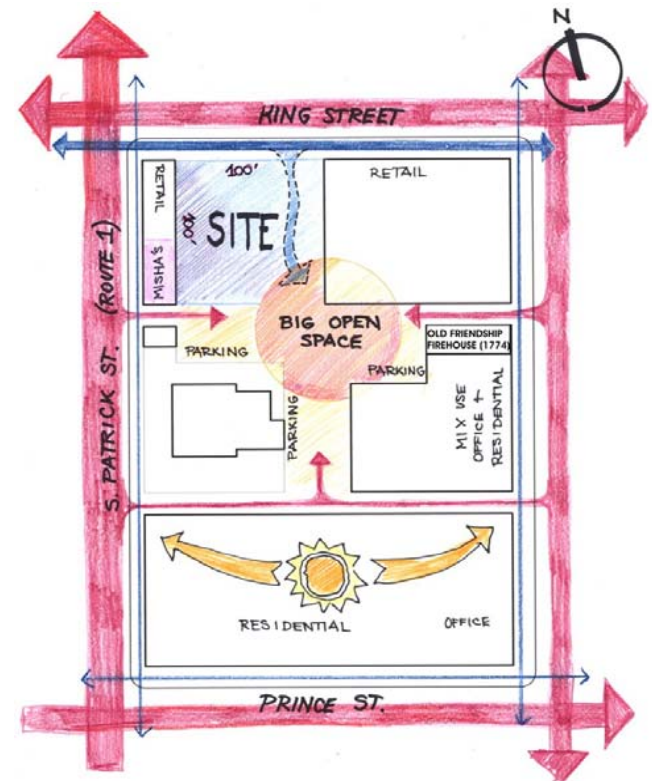
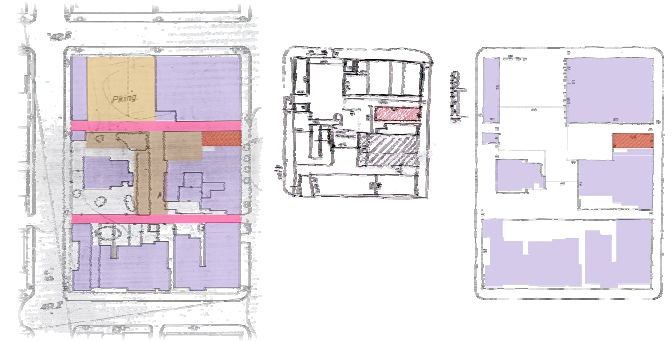
King Street constitutes the main west-east axis of Old Town and connects the Metro Station with the waterfront. Much of the commercial, recreational, financial and administrative activities of the city are along this street. Its historical relevance, architecture and pedestrian friendly nature take King Street out of the ordinary and make of it an outstanding example of civic quality in America.

South Patrick Street (Route 1) is a major south-north connector between Northern Virginia and Washington, DC. It's probably one of the busiest streets of the city in terms of traffic and consequently not very attractive for pedestrians. I think it's a street that doesn't work with the global spirit of the city. Cars go through Old Town without even noticing what they just passed. There are no significant elements or buildings working together to make South Patrick look more urbanistically consolidated.



The site covers an area of approximately 17,000 sq. ft., occupied mostly by a parking lot and two considerably small buildings on its west side, facing South Patrick Street. These structures are not architecturally and historically not relevant and are used for retail activities, one of them being a successful coffee house.

Other important aspects related to the site are the fact that it is crossed by a public alley on the southern part, and the presence of a nearby historic building, the Friendships Firehouse. The Firehouse was established in 1774 and was the first volunteer fire company in Alexandria. Today the building is used for the Friendship Firehouse Museum.





King St. streetscape



Public alley

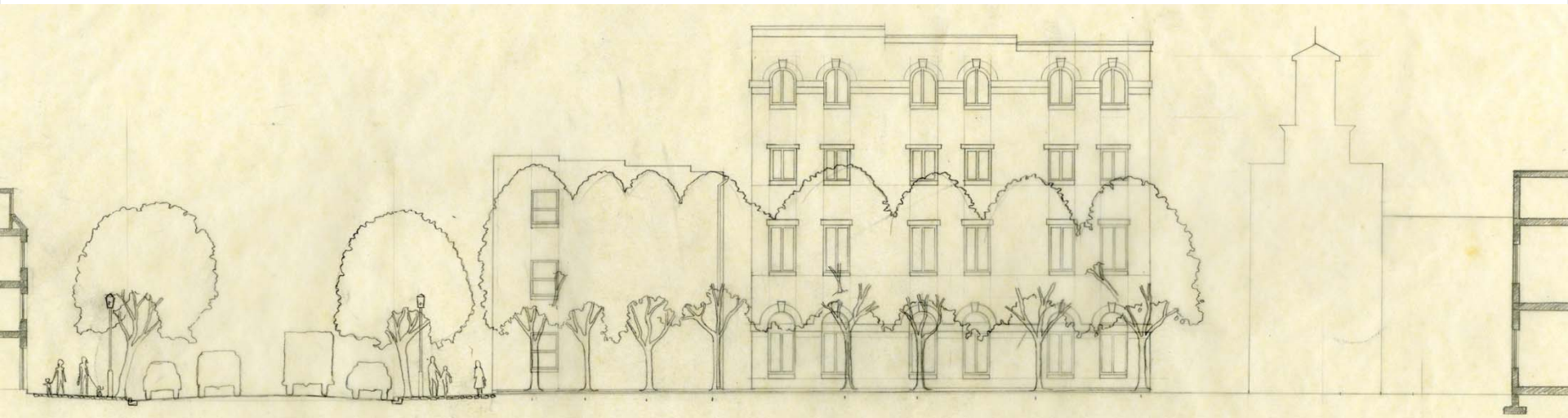


Friendship Firehouse Museum





360° view from the center of the site



East neighbor building elevation



900 block King Street elevations



V. Topics and Considerations

During the design process I was interested on exploring four different ideas:

Architectural Transformations: transformation of the space through the mechanical movement of some architectural pieces. The original idea was to create a building capable of changing its function by partially transforming itself. I discarded this idea early in the process due to its unnecessary complexity but decided to continue focusing on transformation with the objective of enhancing student's life.

Architecture and Civic Space: conceiving a building and an open space for civic use directly related to the building, not one conditioning the other but one as complement of the other. My intention was to create a gathering space for the inhabitants of the building and citizens.

Corners: because of the condition of my site and the possibility of developing a building in a main intersection of the city I decided to pay particular attention to the development of the corners of my building. I envisioned them as main protagonists of the urban landscape but at the same time I saw the opportunity for creating unique experiences for the students combining vertical circulation with domestic activities.

Sunlight and Shadow: creation of architectural elements starting from the understanding of the shadow they might produce. My objective was to understand sunlight, how it behaves along the day and during the year to be able to achieve effective use and optimal aesthetic effects in every single space of the building.



Early unfolded sections of the building: Subdividing vs. Assembling Volumes

“... I like very much the purity of a single idea, just as the pure expression of a single note can be very powerful, but things ought to get more complex. Complexity comes from a superposition of ideas in a coherent way. This means that, although each one of those ideas is capable of living independently, you can also put them one over the other...”

Santiago Calatrava ²

VI. Student dormitory for the WAAC

The building is orientated to American and foreign students coming to the metropolitan area of Washington DC to study at the Center and willing to take advantage of the opportunities of the city.

The idea was to create a building for civic adaptation, to educate and inspire students not only in architecture but also in civic life and prepare them to be responsible citizens.

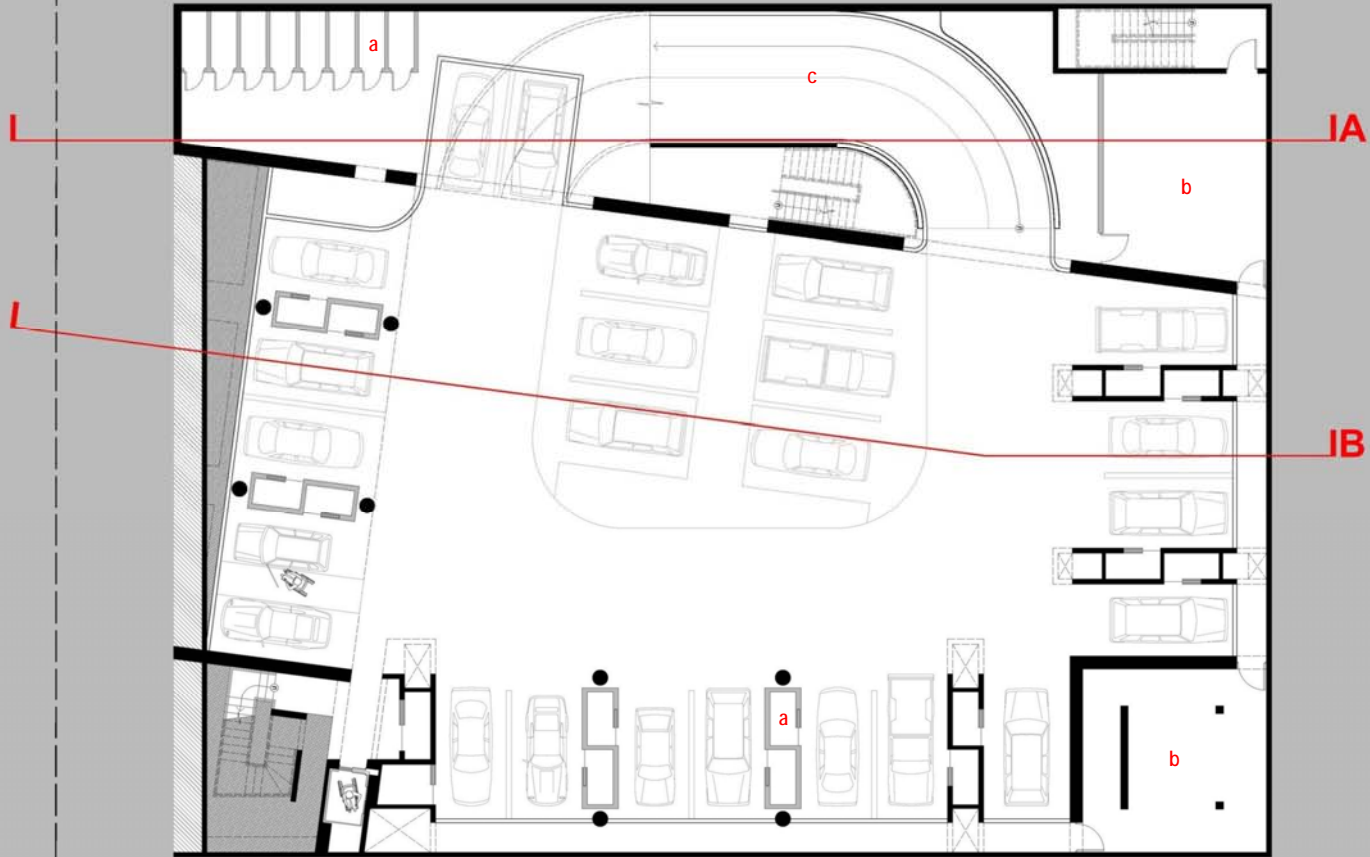
The dormitory was inspired by the friendly spirit of the WAAC with the intention of supporting the Center in its varied goals and enhancing its academic perspectives.

“... The dormitory residence as special housing type is not quite transient and not quite permanent. Social spaces must be planned to bring people together, provoking interaction, friendship, dialogue, etc....”

Steven Holl ¹



(a) student storage unit (b) general storage (c) vehicular ramp



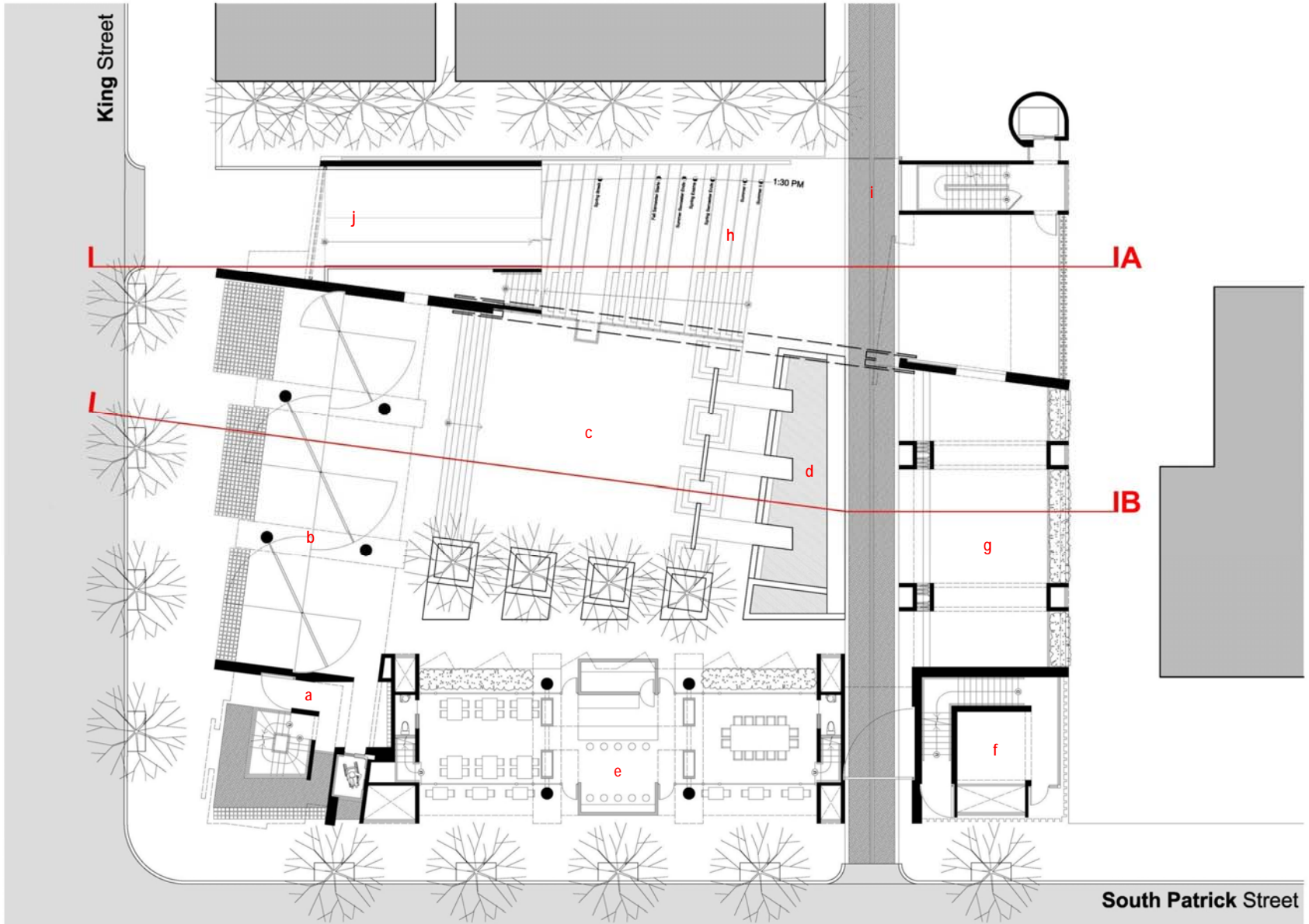
(a) student storage unit (b) general storage (c) vehicular ramp (d) retail space – lower level



P1

The complex block contains a red box with the text 'P1' on the left. To its right is a north arrow pointing upwards. Below the north arrow are two scale bars: one in meters (0, 1m, 2m, 5m, 10m) and one in feet (0, 1', 3', 5', 10', 20', 30').

(a) main entrance (b) plaza gates (c) plaza (d) fountain (e) coffee house (f) retail space (g) exhibition space (h) monumental stairs / theatre (i) alley (j) parking entrance



South Patrick Street

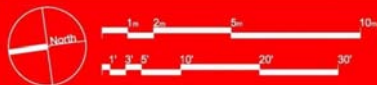
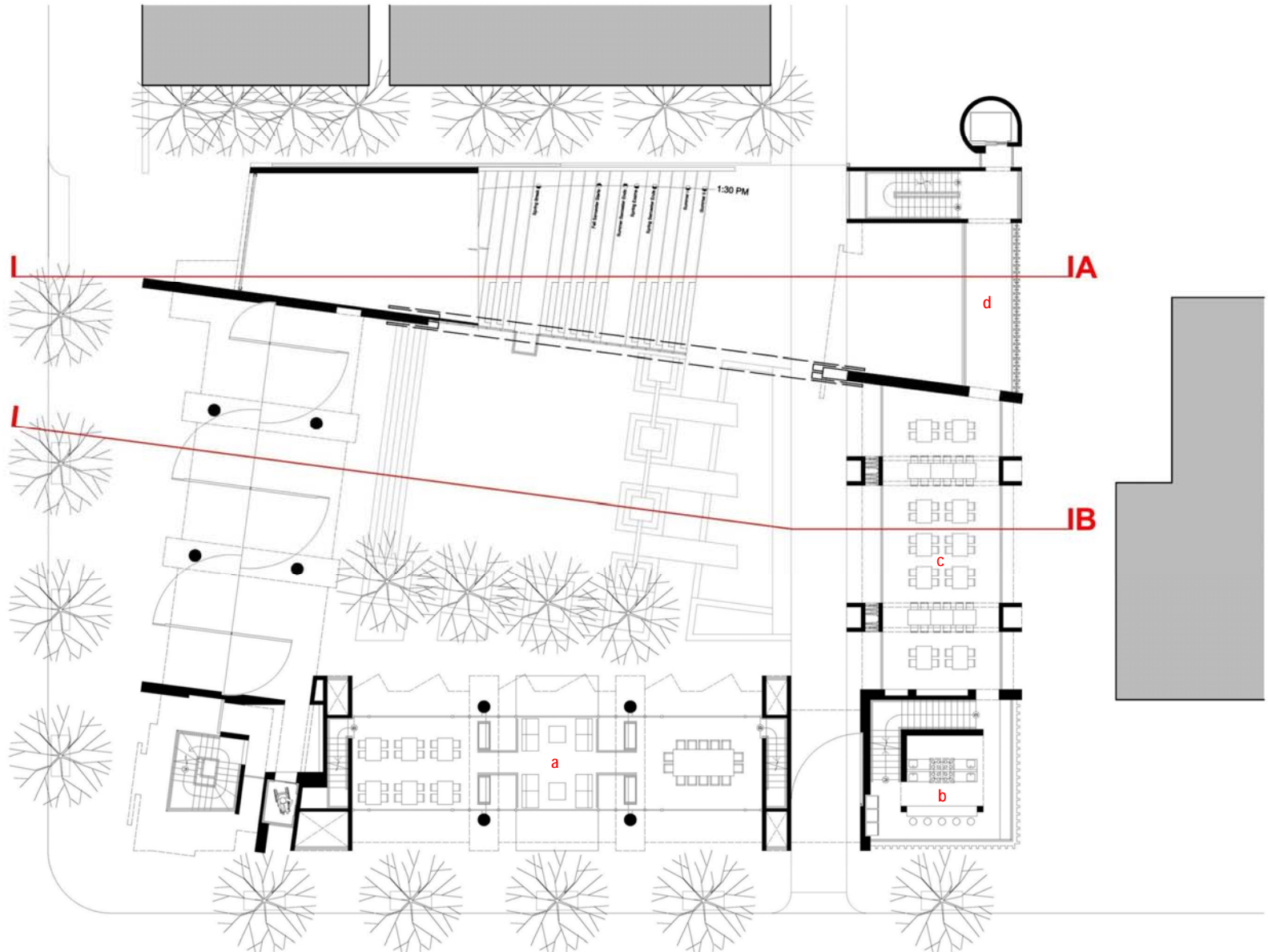
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North

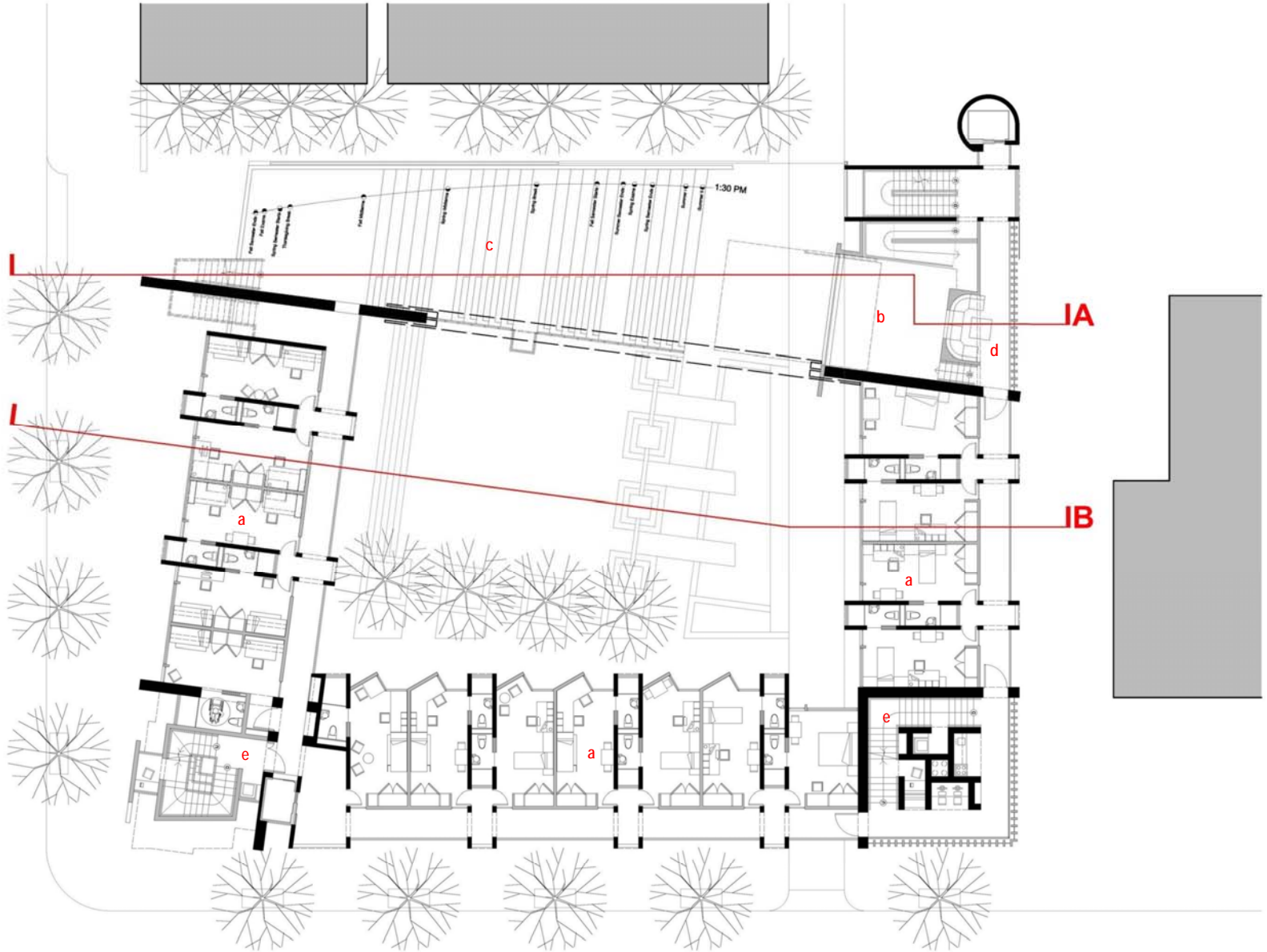
1m 2m 5m 10m

1' 3' 5' 10' 20' 30'

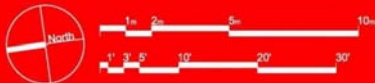
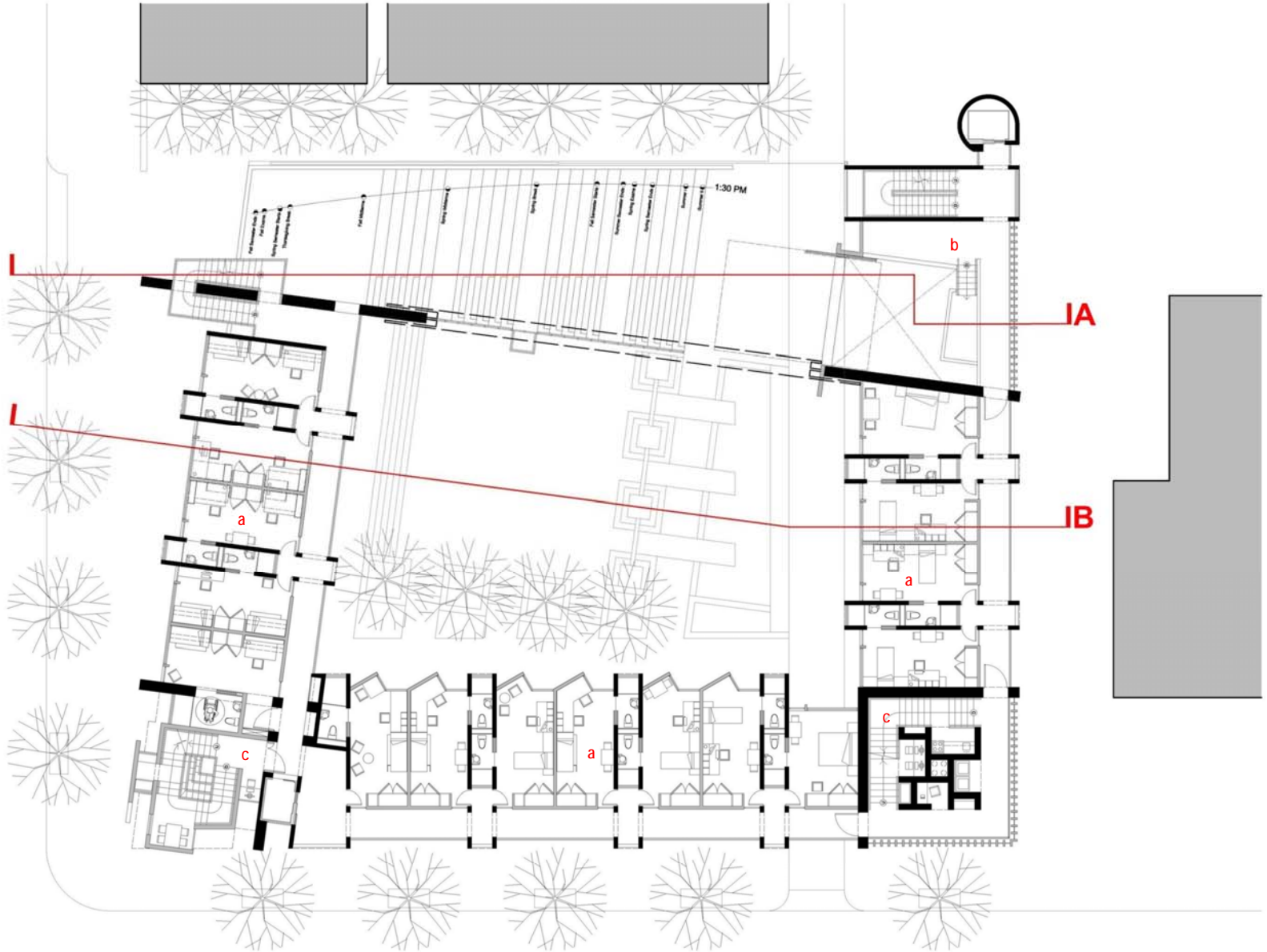
(a) coffee house – upper level (b) kitchen (c) dining area (f) bridge



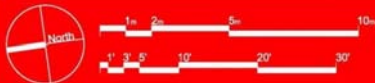
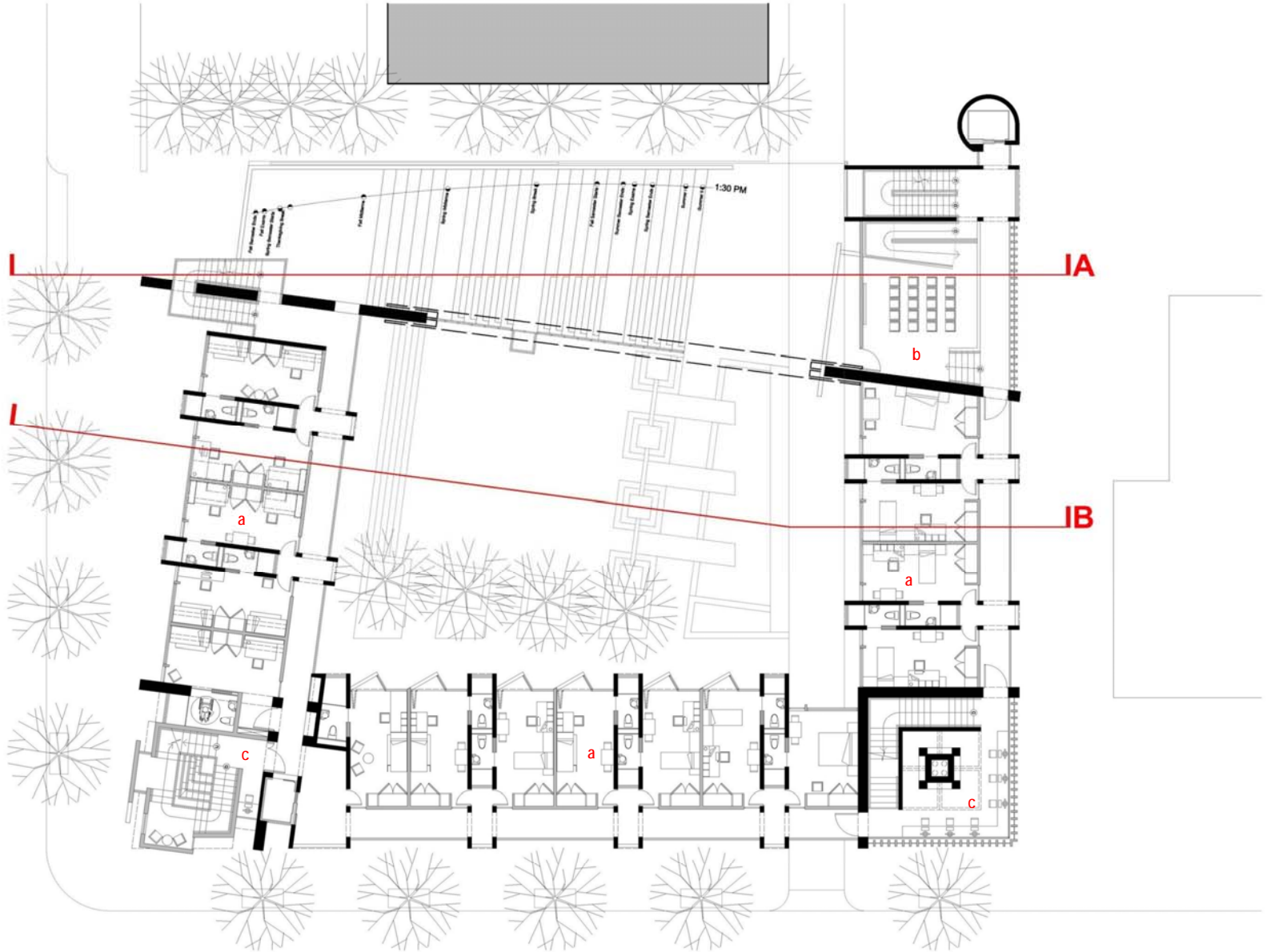
(a) student rooms (b) music rehearsal room / stage (c) monumental stair / theatre (d) seating area (e) stairs with services



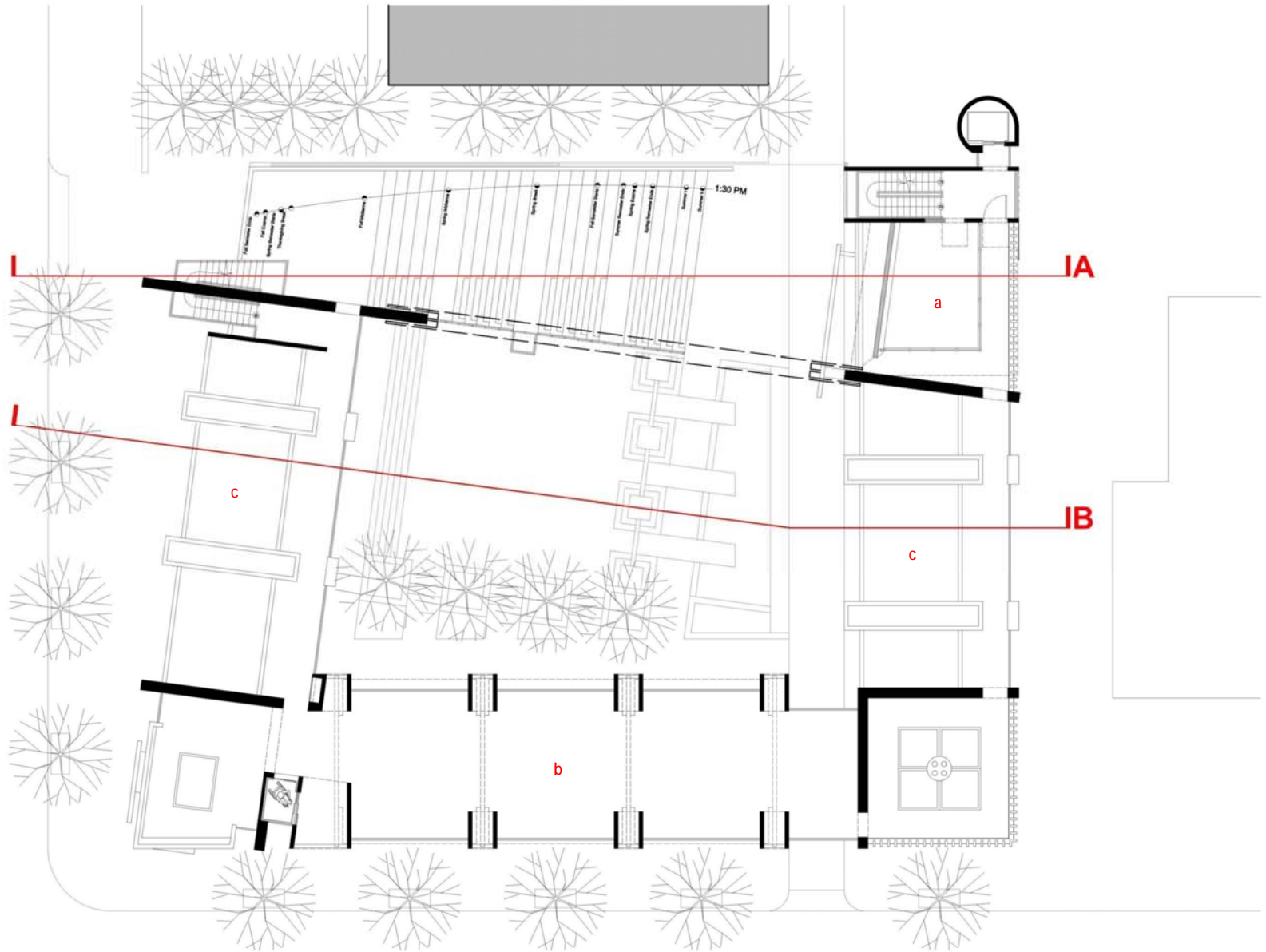
(a) student rooms (b) music rehearsal room –upper level (c) stairs with services



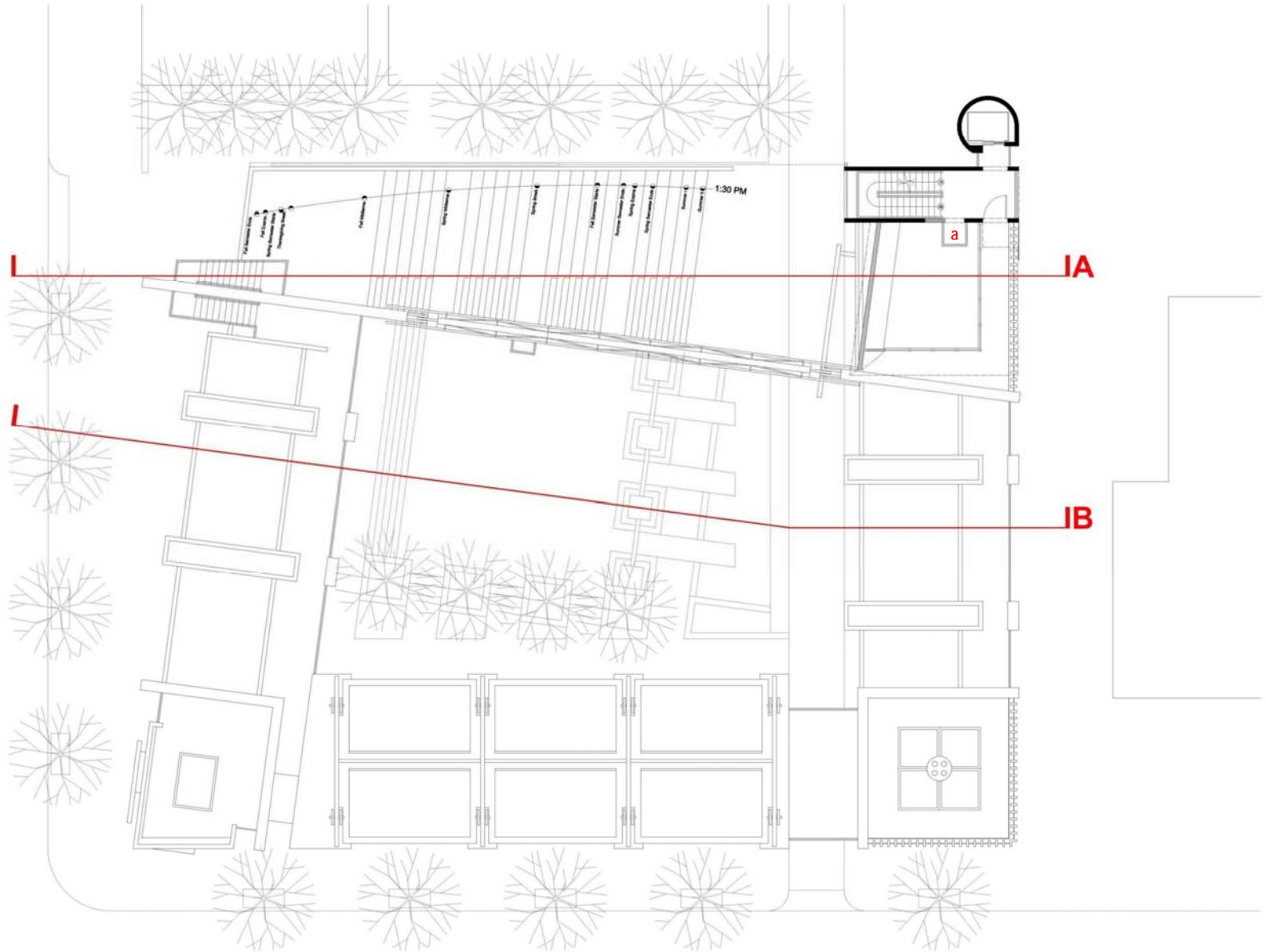
(a) student rooms (b) TV room (c) computers area - library

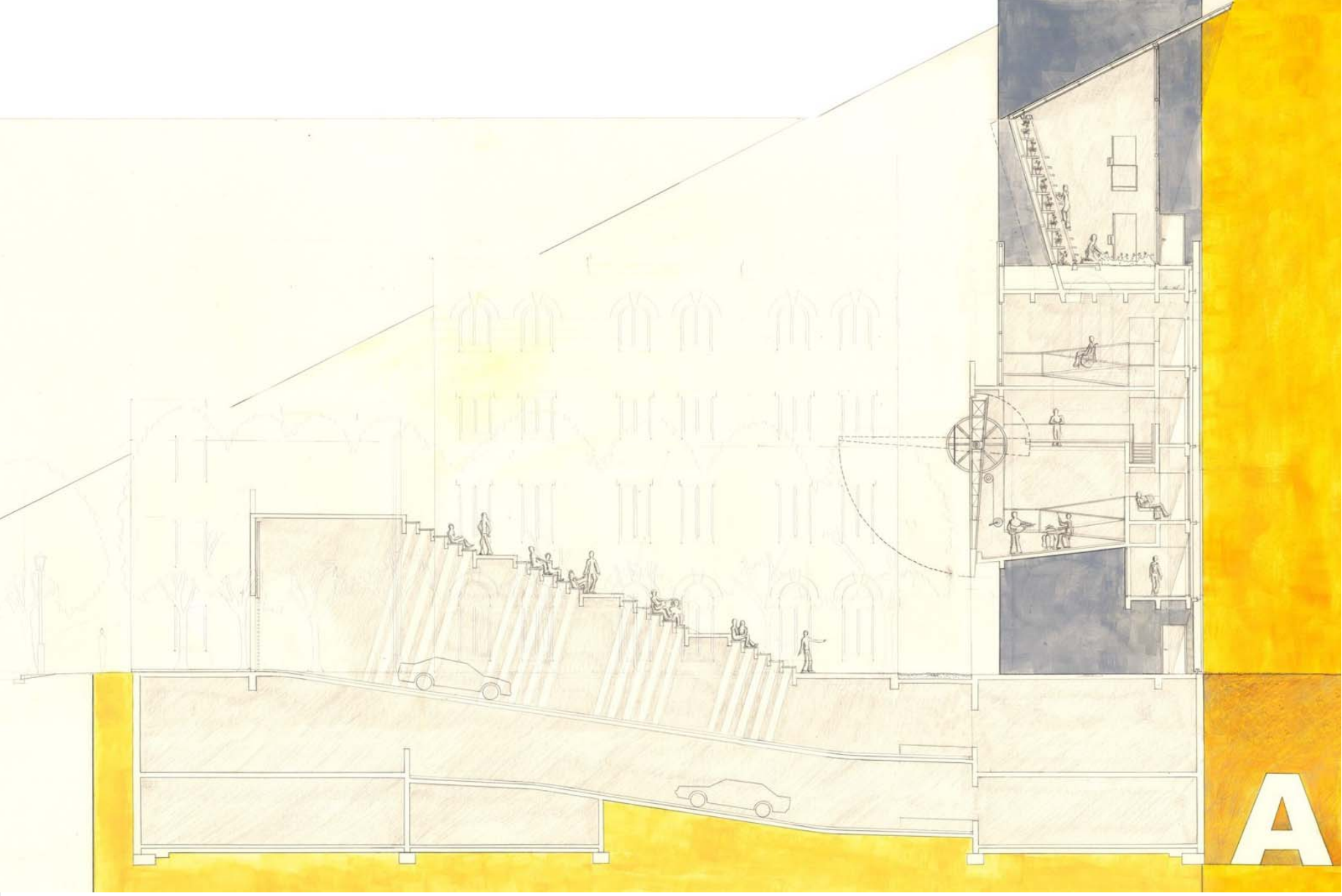


(a) winter garden (b) terrace (c) green roof

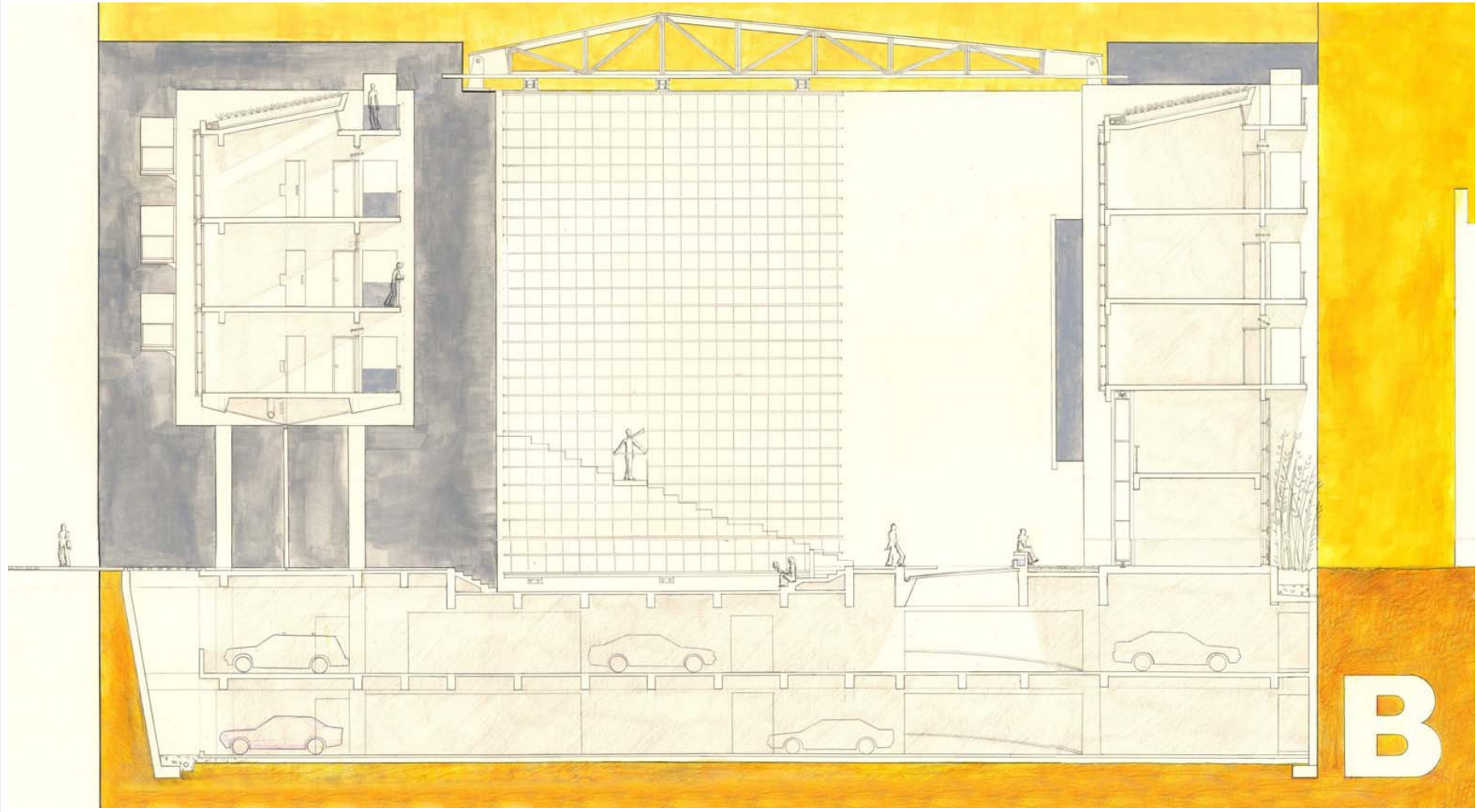


(a) winter garden balcony

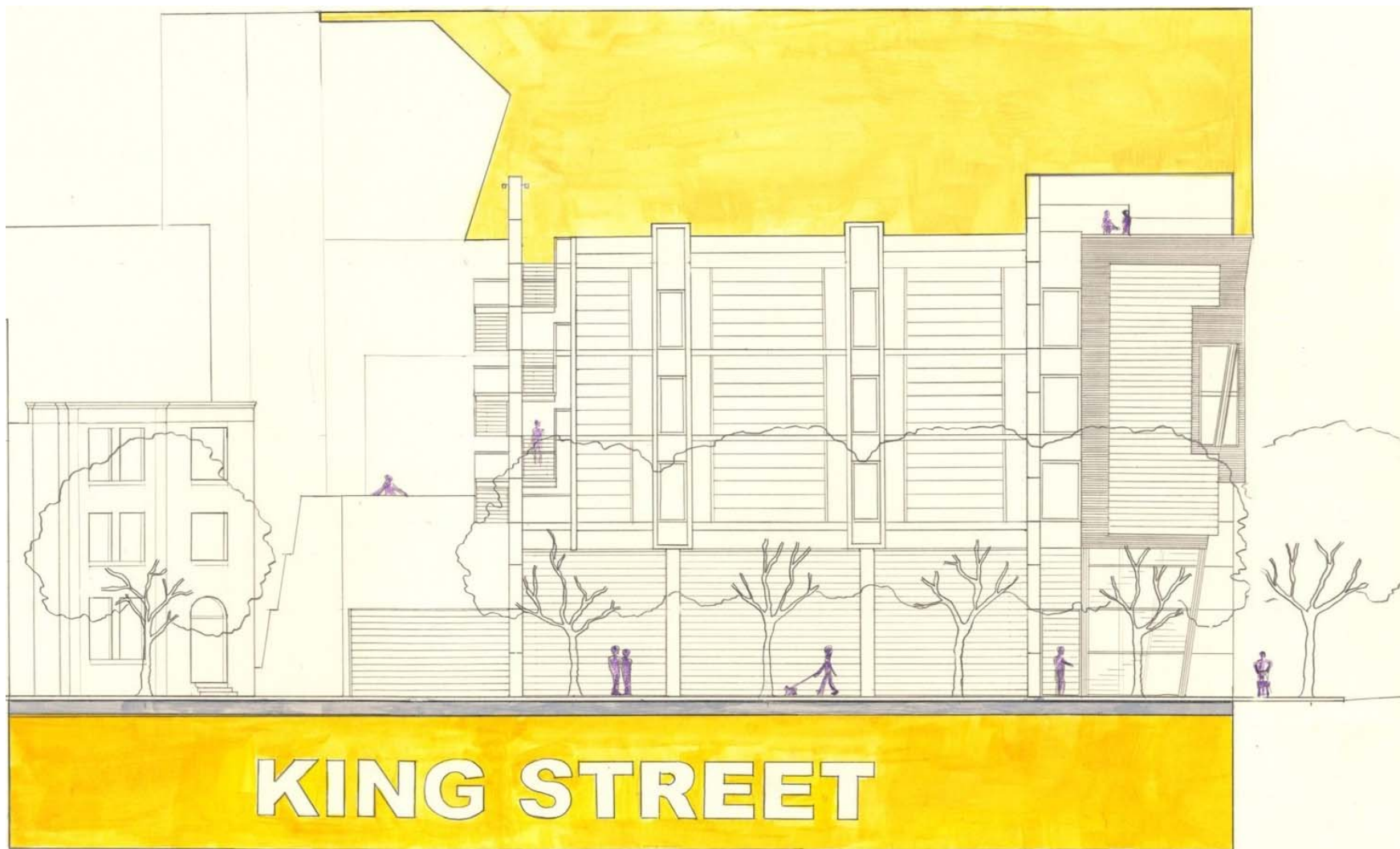




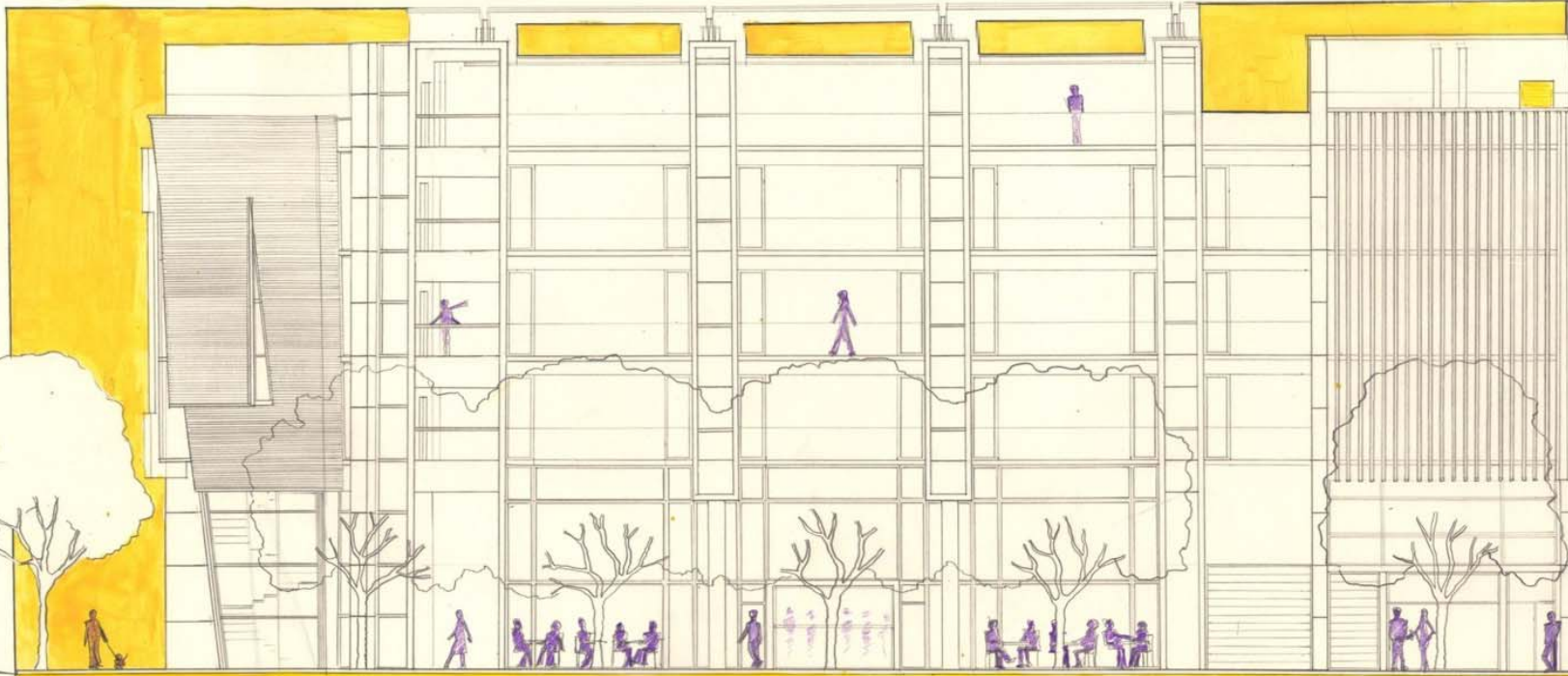
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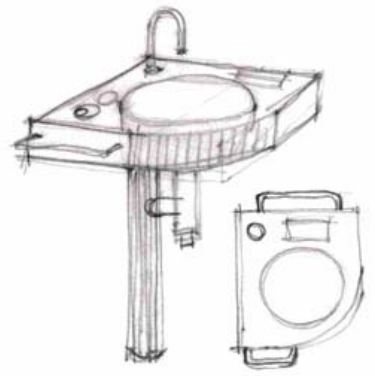
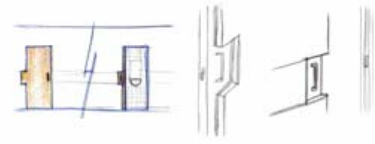
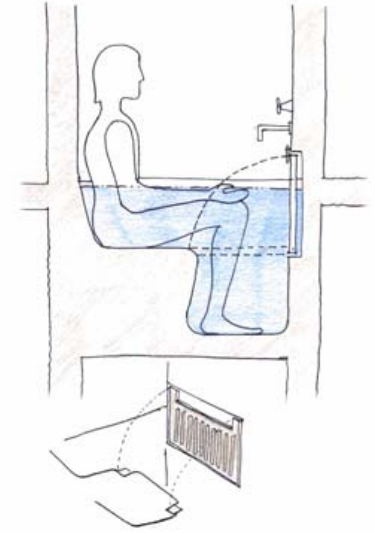
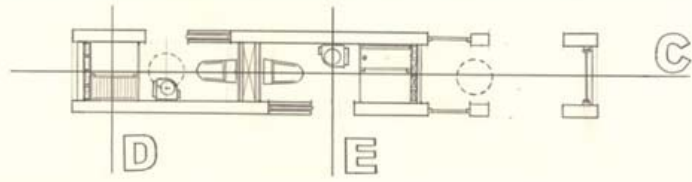
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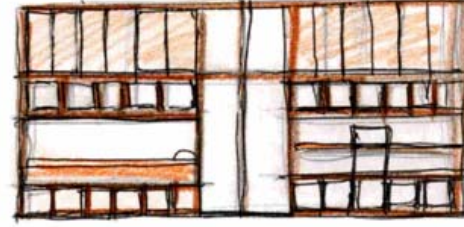
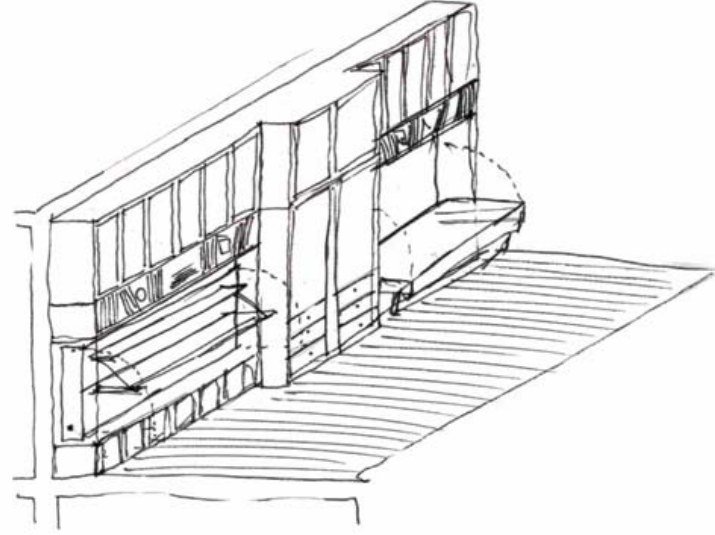
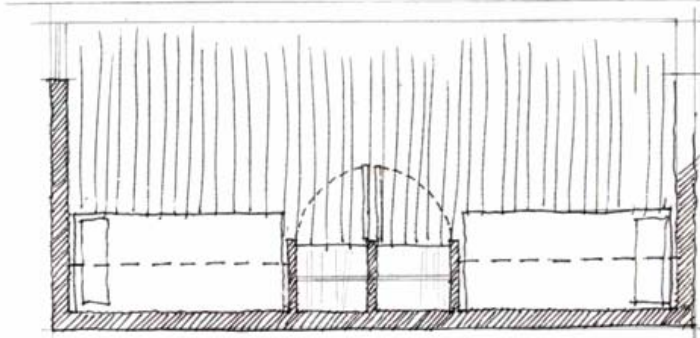
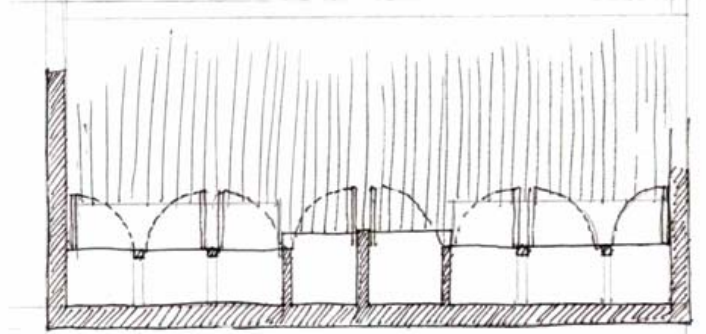
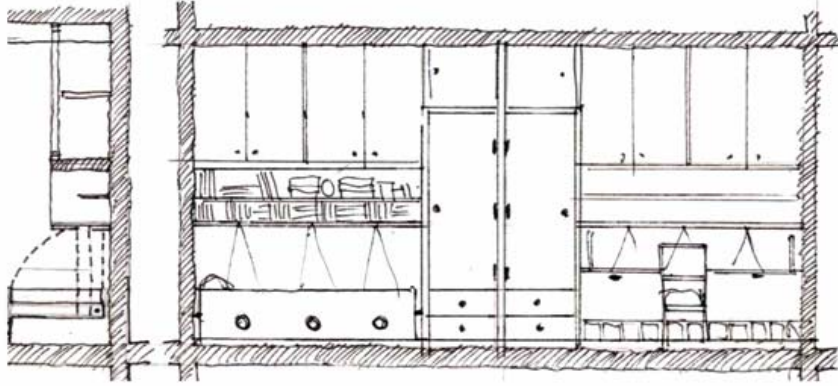


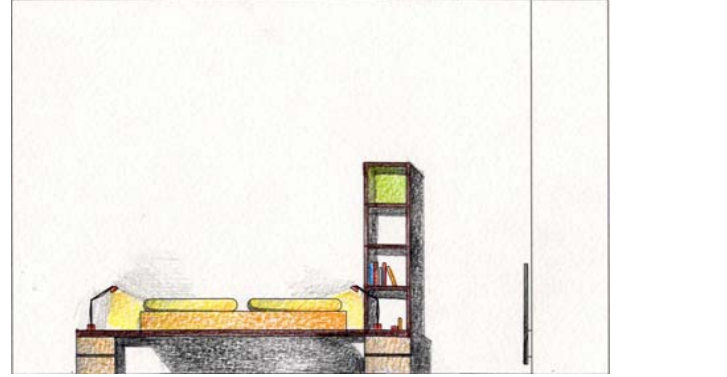
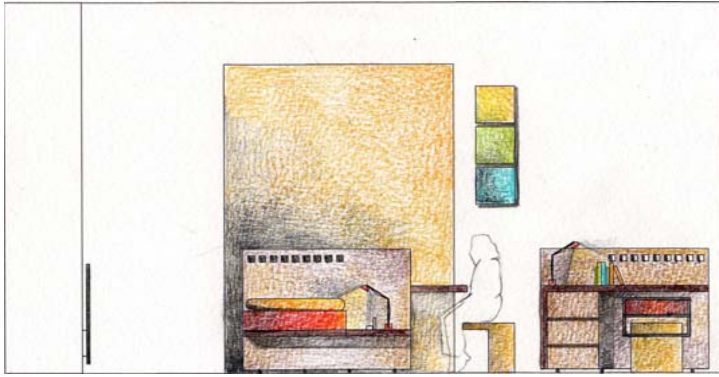
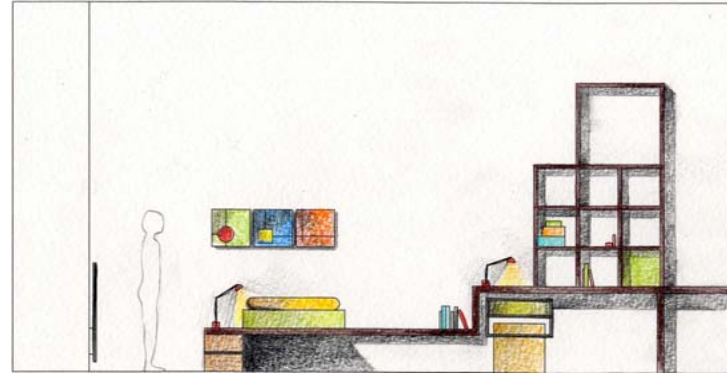
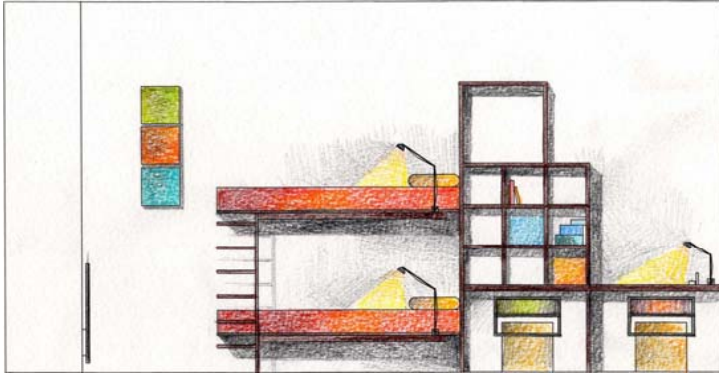
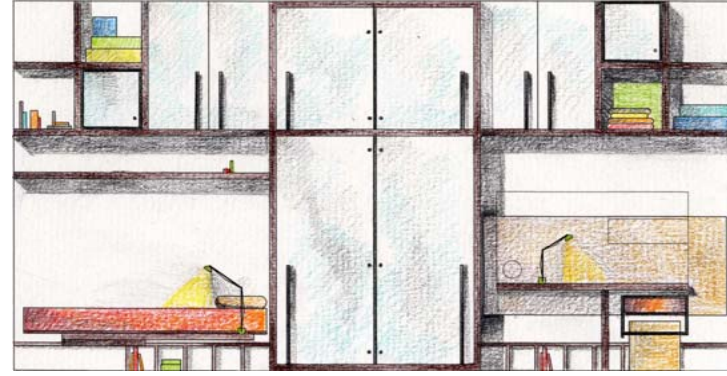
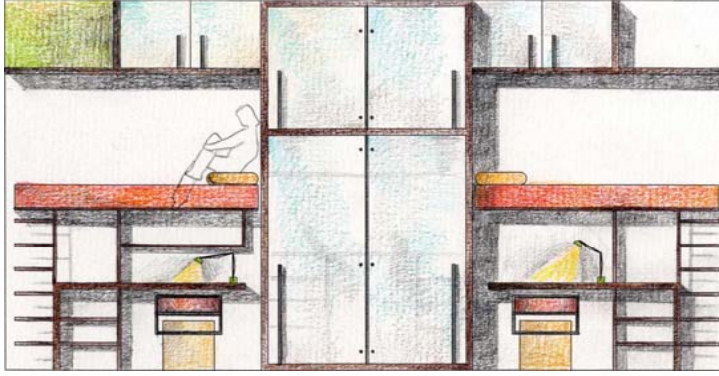
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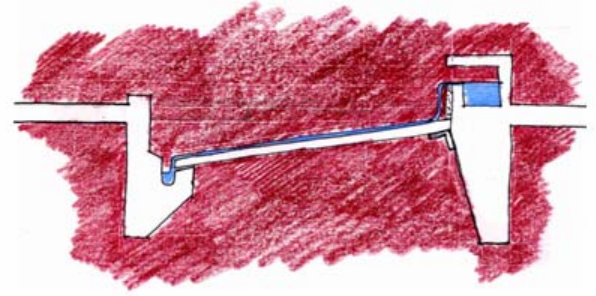
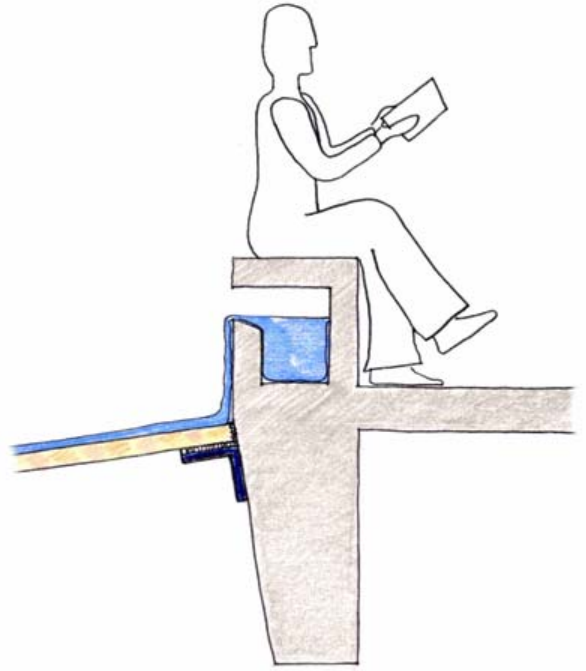
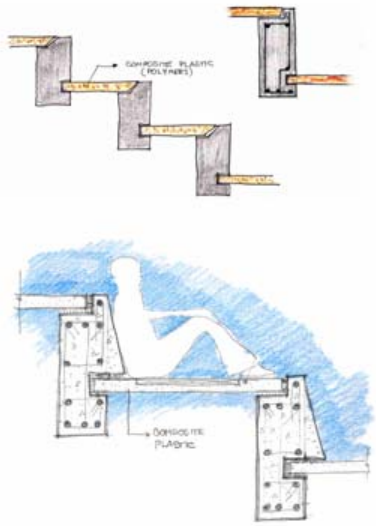
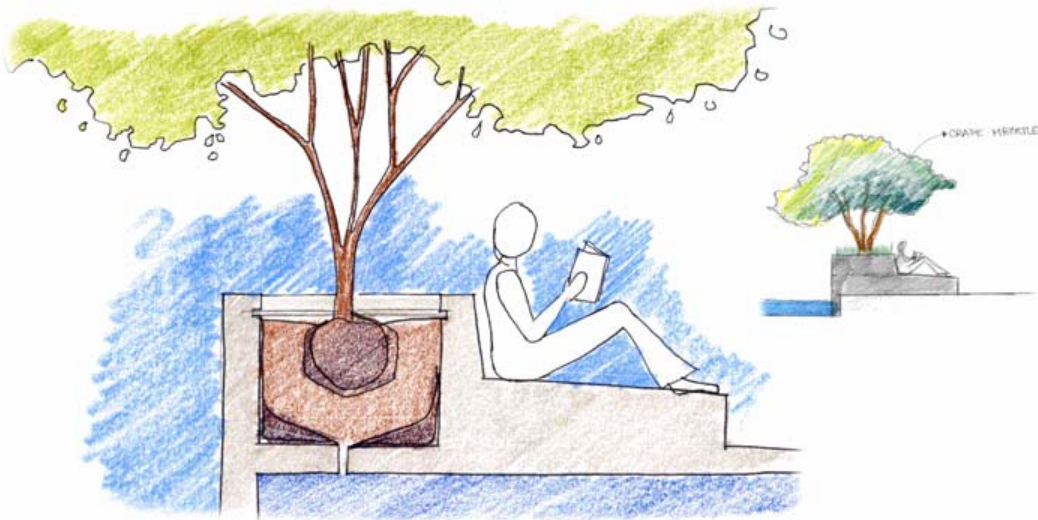


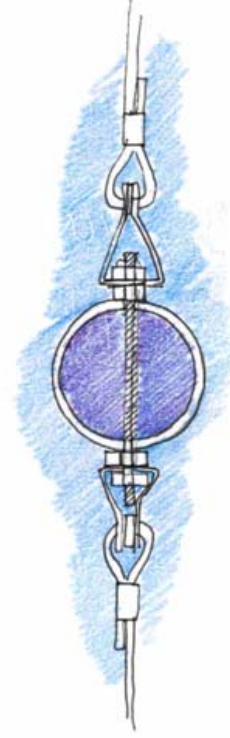
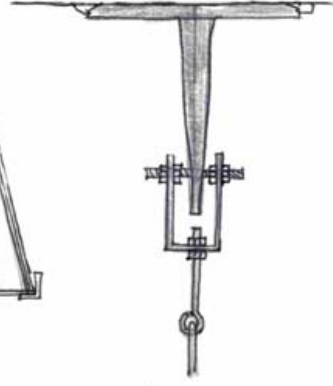
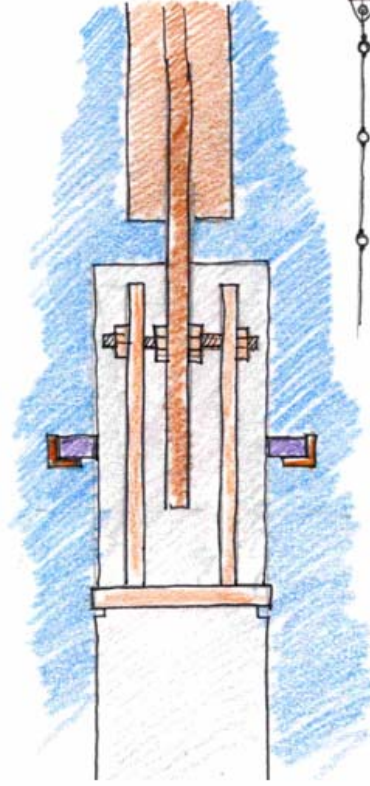
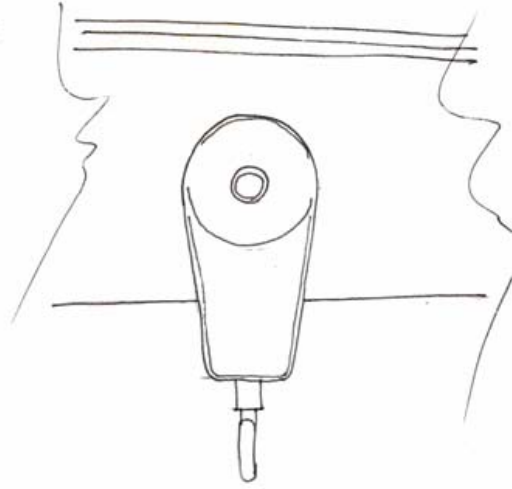
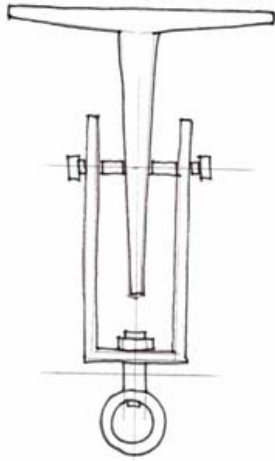
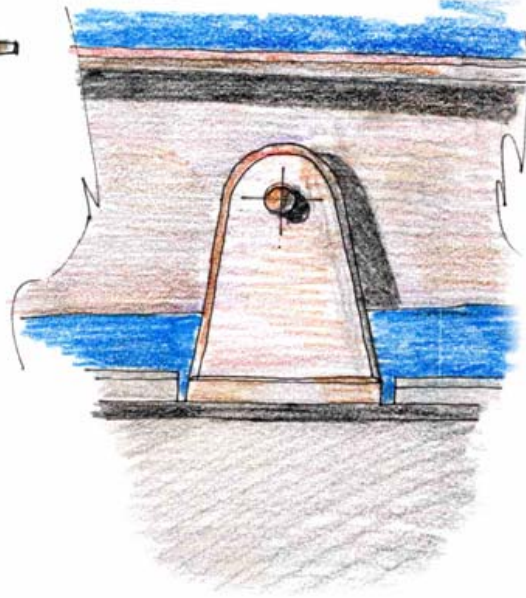
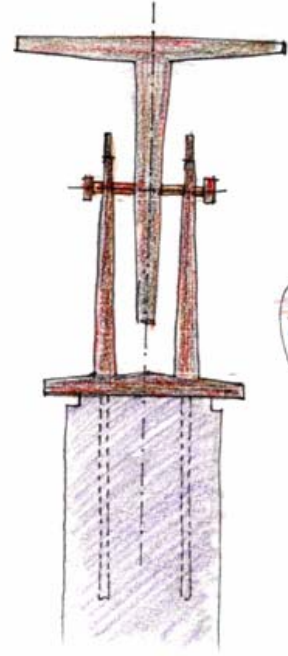
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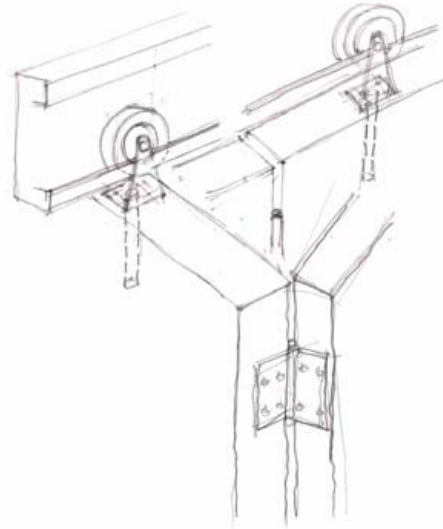
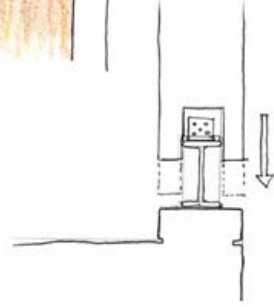
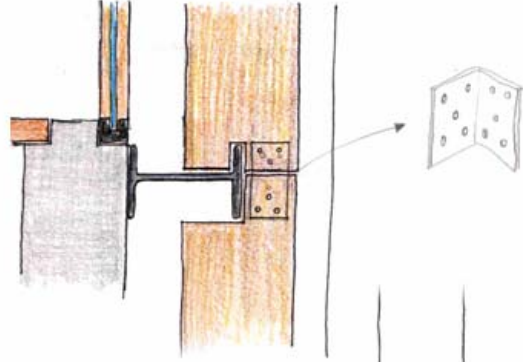
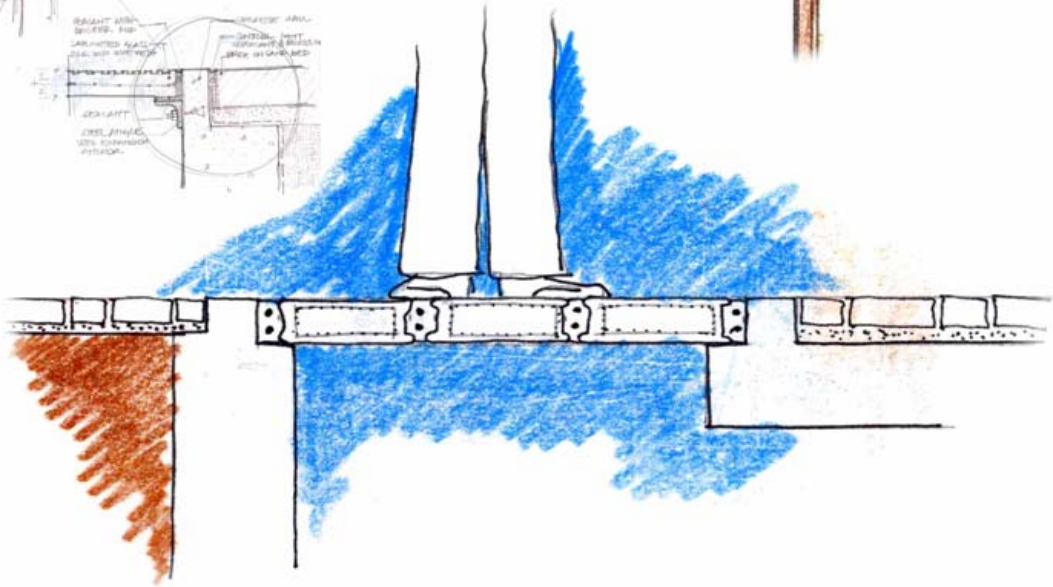
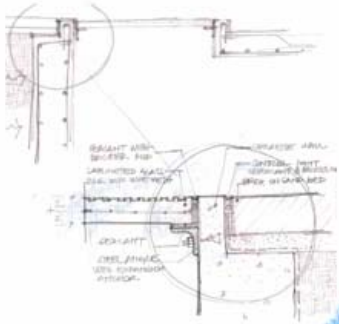
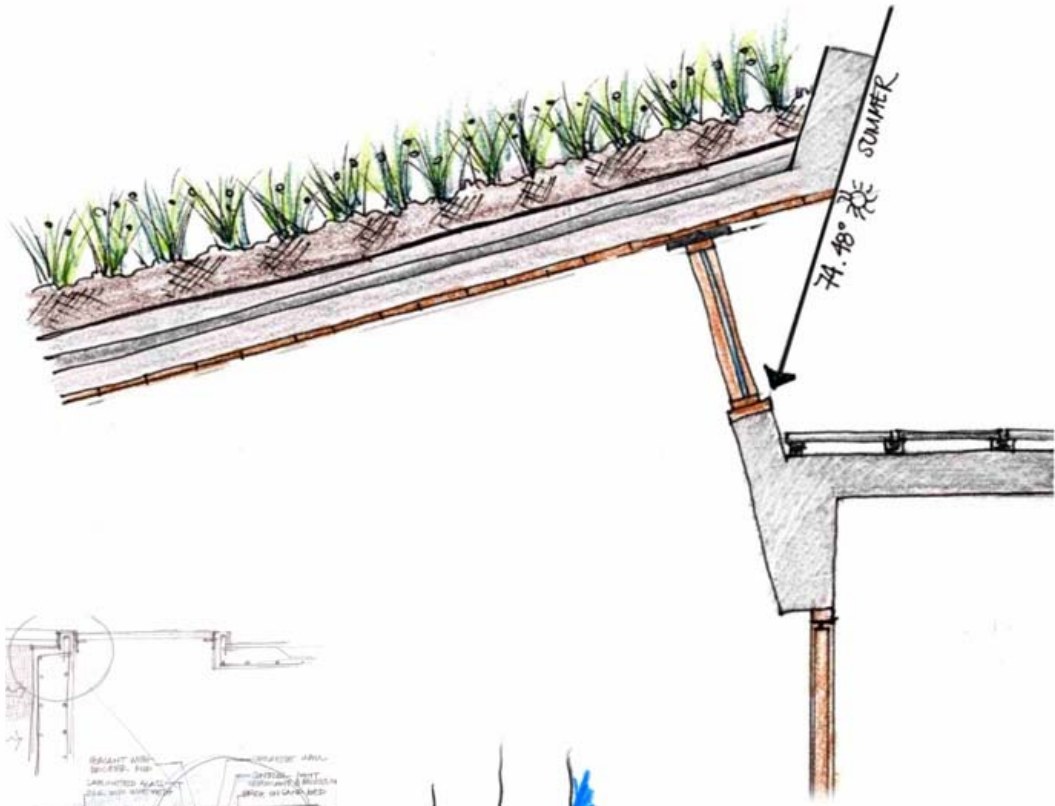




















Corners

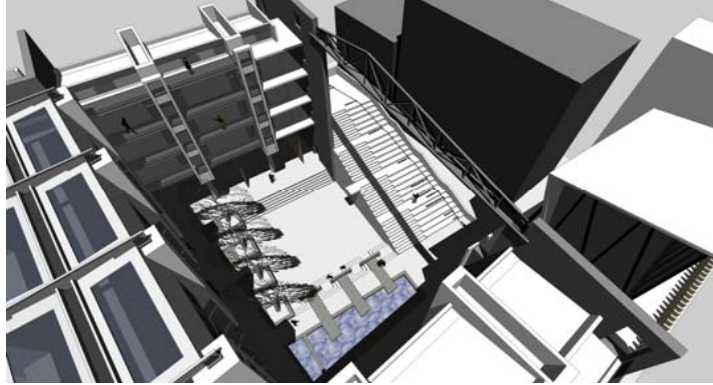
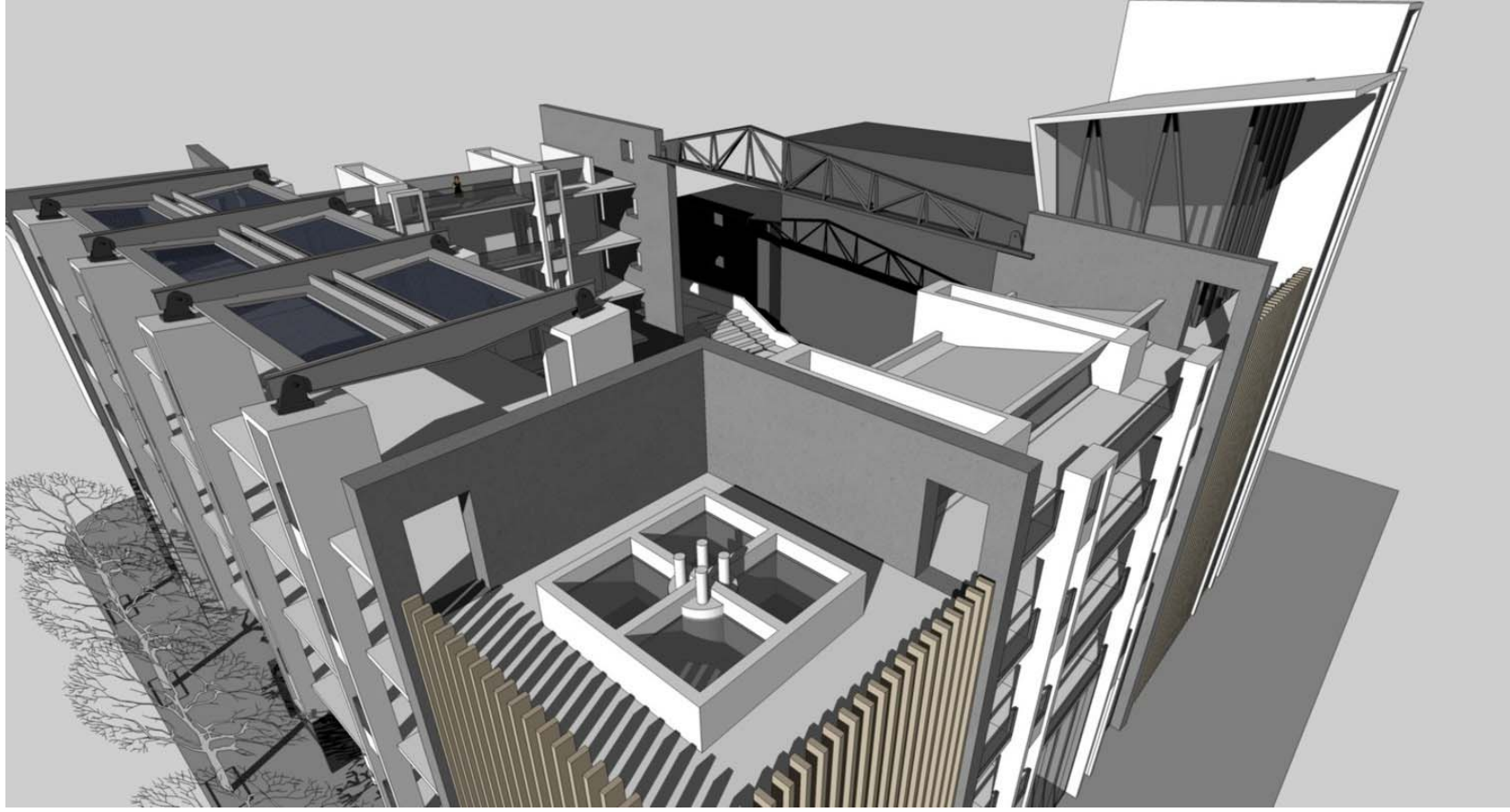






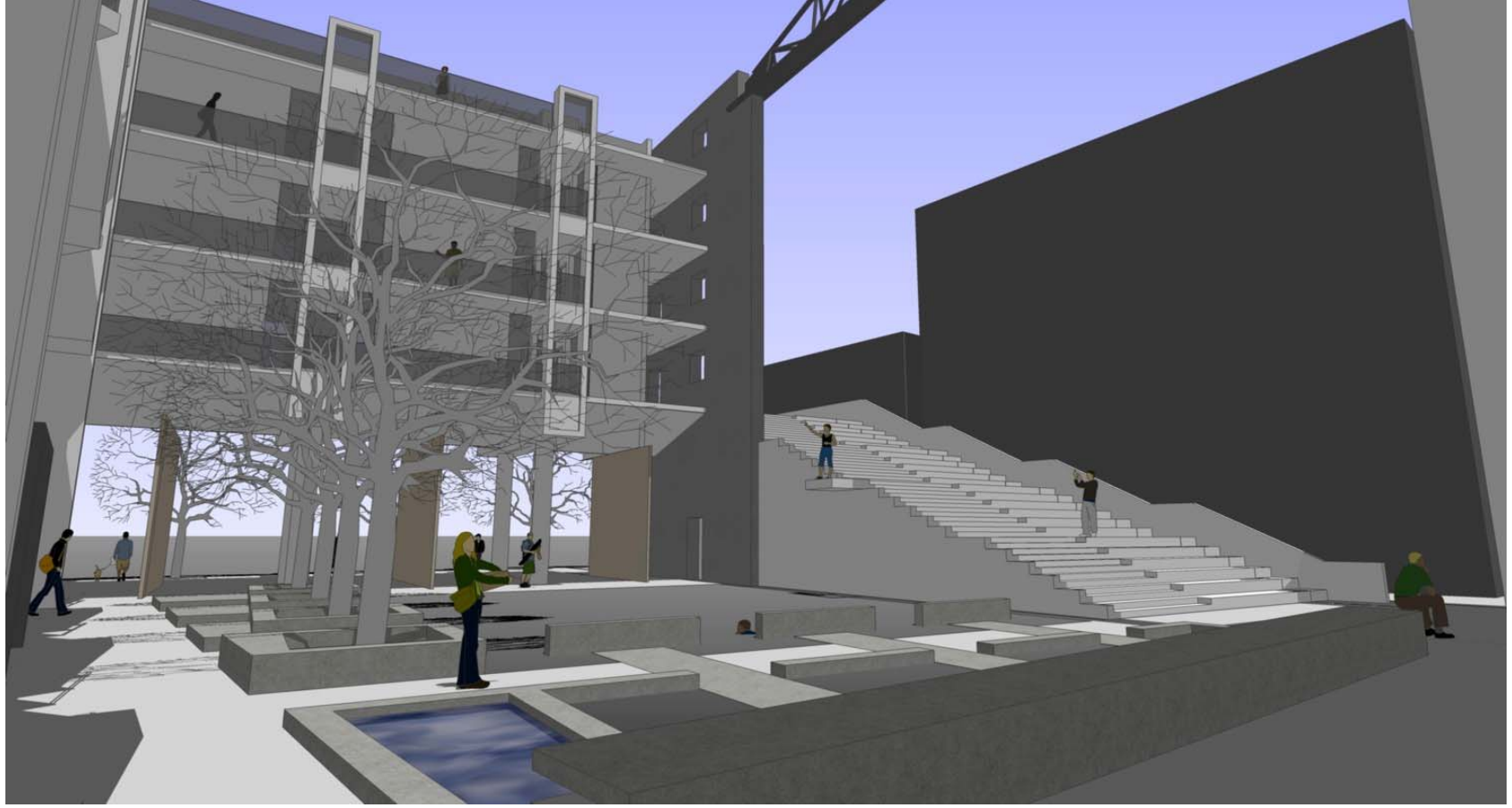


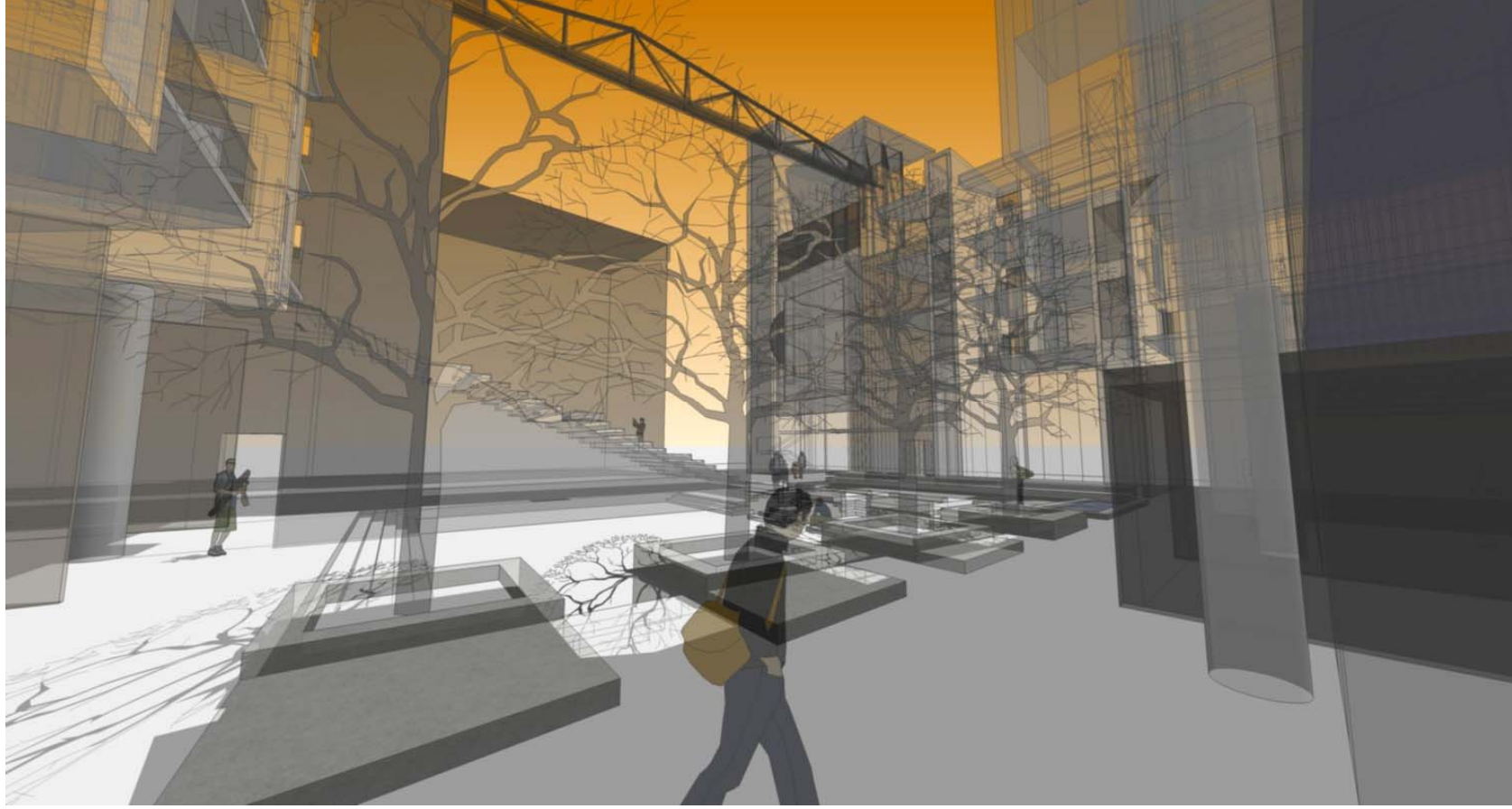


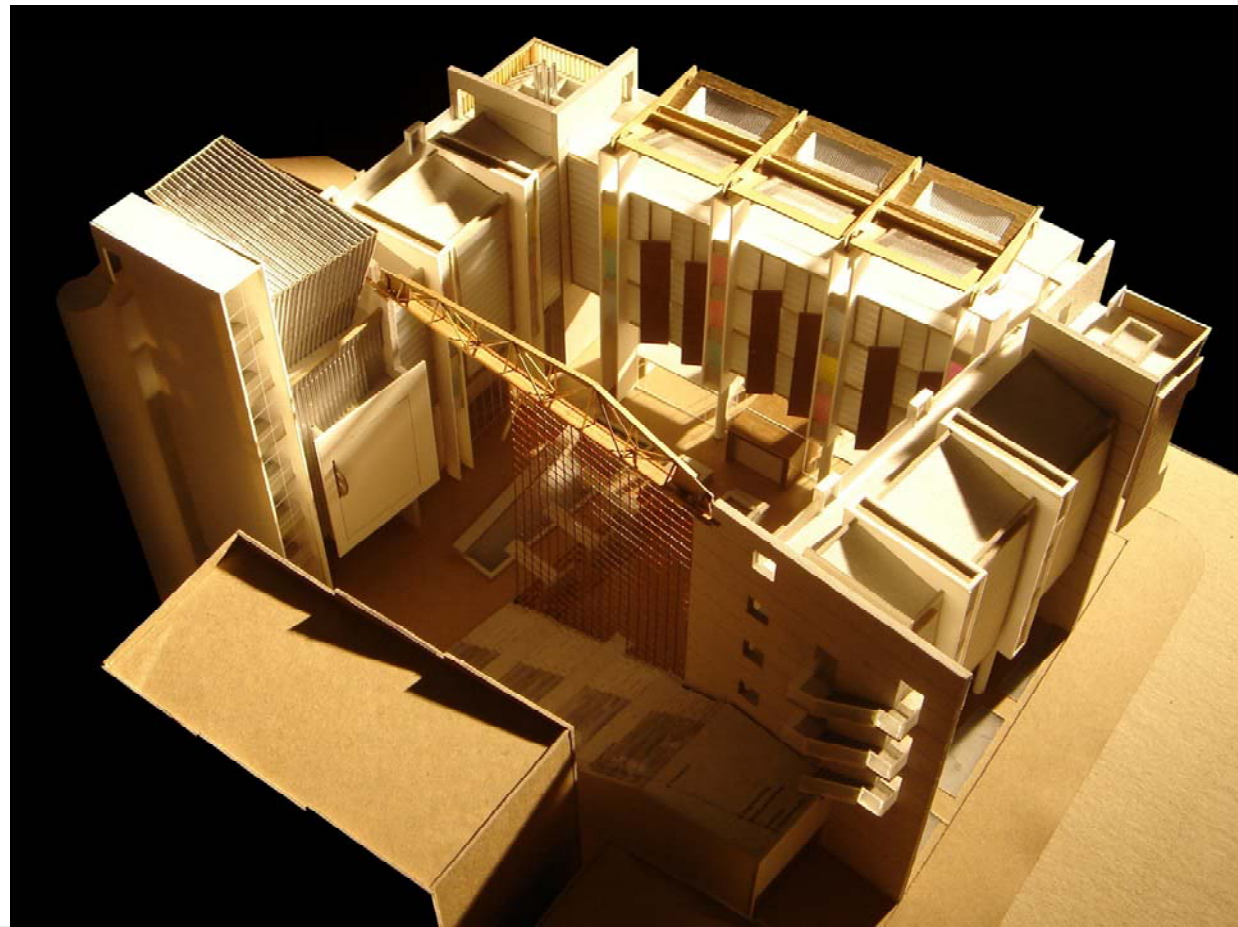








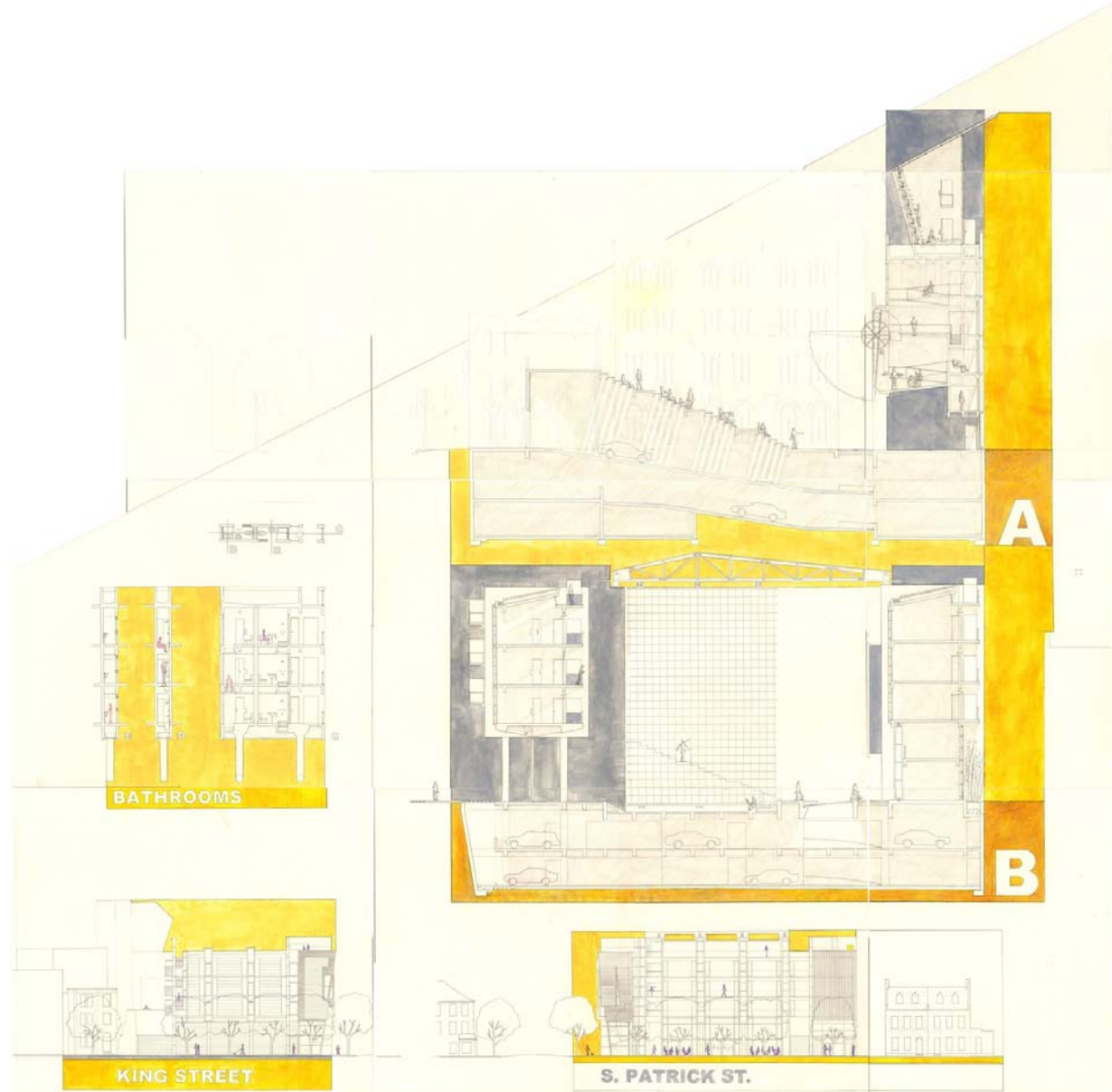




i. King Street Corners

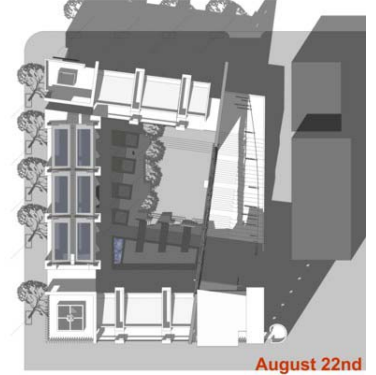
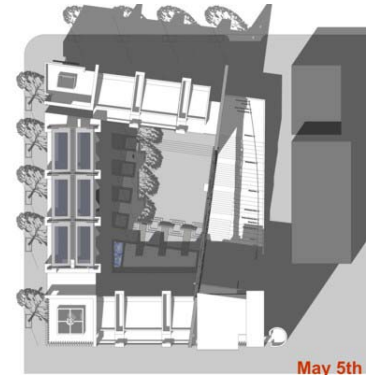








November 25th, 2005 - 1:30 pm



1. Gannon Todd, Steven Hall, Simmons Hall, Princeton Architectural Press, 2004.
2. Cecilia Lewis Kausel and Ann Pendleton-Julian, Santiago Calatrava: Conversations with Students, The MIT Lectures, Princeton Architectural Press, 2002.



Néstor Gabriel Cerami

Education

2006

Masters of Architecture

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

2002

Regional Planning Specialist

Universidad de Mendoza - Argentina

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Architect

Universidad de Mendoza – Argentina

Experience

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Adjunct Professor

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Intern

1999

Instituto Provincial de la Vivienda – Gobierno de Mendoza

Intern

