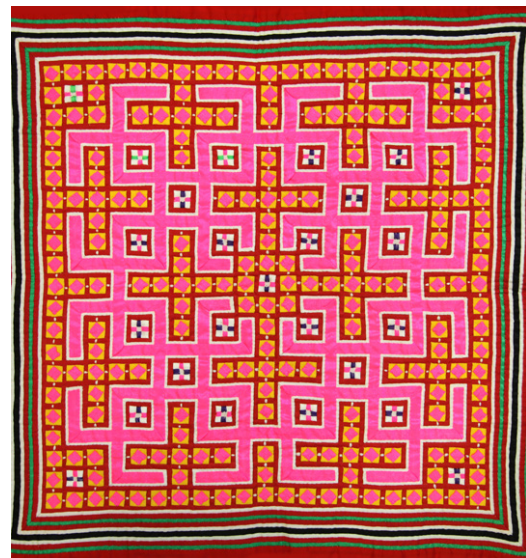


Hmong Funeral Rites and The Space Between



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Hmong Funeral Rites and The Space Between

A Design Thesis Submitted to the
Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture
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by

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for the Degree of
Master of Architecture


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Thesis Abstract

The sacred has always been a part of human life from the beginning of time. Religion and faith throughout the timeline has driven multiple major revolutions. They have answered questions that could not be answered, but now in this modern age, the need of the sacred seem to be diminishing with the discoveries of science and progress. The modern age may be calling for a new sacred, a sacred that is not related to religion and faith but a sense of understanding one's self. The deeper calling of the question we ask ourselves that may never be answered by science, the afterlife. Thus every culture has come to deal with it their own individual way. When an individual passes we perform the appropriate rituals to mourn, to commemorate, and sometimes to celebrate their transcendence beyond our world. As Hans-Georg Gadamer says "We could perhaps even say that this experience initiated the process of our becoming human. As far back as human memory extends we can recognize as an undisputed characteristic of human beings that they perform some kind of funeral rites." in his book *The Enigma of Health*.

As Jon Cannon from *The Secret Language of Sacred Spaces* states "The architecture might be intended to replicate the features of the sacred landscape in which it is set, or to represent a culture's deepest ideas about the ordered nature of the cosmos and humankind's place within it, from earthly life to the ultimate mystery of what lies beyond mortal death." Architecture in many senses has provided the space for these rituals, or maybe the other way around. These spaces has provide the opportunity for architecture. But we can't disagree that where there are these rituals there is architecture. In the past these spaces has always emitted a sense of holiness and transcendence. In the present time, in the Hmong community, these spaces have become dull and plain. It does nothing in educating the young and providing an aesthetic for such rituals. This thesis provides a sublime sacred space to educate and enlighten the younger and present Hmong generation. The analysis of precedent spaces will be used to engrain elements and concepts into the design. The study of people and such spaces will help us understand why these spaces are diminishing. The need to embrace one's roots and recognize one's descendants may be the answer to transcending one's self.

Narrative of the Theoretical Aspect of the Thesis

As living beings, we at our best can never escape the inevitable pains of death and loss. The departure of a loved one brings grief, horror, and many other undesirable emotions. The loss of a loved one can do a multitude of damage to a person physically and mentally. Suzanne Laba Cataldi, in the essay *Embodying Perceptions of Death* from the book *Chiasms*, states “We could not feel this way at all—so hopelessly dispossessed or deprived, of a side of ourselves, of our own flesh and blood, unless we are, as Merleau-Ponty supposed, existentially bound to significant others in the sensitive depths, the fabric, of our own embodied being.” The pain of losing a close one is no closer than losing a bit of oneself, as if a layer of our skin, the fabric that bounds the link to one another is severed.

A Jewish mourning custom called *Kriyah* does exactly this. The mourner rips the outer garment of their clothes to show that what is lost is just the body but what is left behind is a hole, the soul and the love of the deceased. The act of tearing of tissue is practiced in multiple cultures to express the pains of grief as Ethiopians may rip out their hair during the process of mourning to violently show their emotional pain. The only transitional cure to such pain is time and love, but there is no absolute cure as we cannot erase our memory of the departed as much as we can't willingly cut off a piece of ourselves. But what is important is exactly our memory, because without the memory of our loved ones they would truly be dead. As when we speak of the memories, we sometimes swallow that lump in our throat, or hear that crack in our voices, metaphorically they are actually still within us, constantly driving our uncontrollable actions and communicating with us through their own ways.

These emotions motivate us in commemorating the departed in our own individual culturally related methods. All people of all times have always done so to ease or to relieve the passing, we come to call this type of ceremony a funeral. Funerals help us honor, pay our respects, sanctify and remember the one who has passed. As in ancient Egypt and China, Pharaohs and Emperors, have always been buried with adornments of treasures, animal sacrifices and sometimes even human sacrifices to accompany them to the next life or the other world.

A ritual is usually done to produce one or more of these motives. The origin of rituals comes from the belief of causation, that what is wanted will be accomplished by doing a series of actions. As the Aztecs believed that the sun would not rise and the universe would not continue to naturally flow without the sacrifice of human blood, they continuously captured humans and ripped out their hearts to sacrifice to their god. In the past the solutions to problems has always been rituals, such as problems of death. Because death has always been unpredictable and momentous, as Henry Frankfort states in his book *Before Philosophy*, "... life is opposed to death. Thus accentuating the fact that life in itself is considered endless. Only the intervention or another phenomenon, death, makes an end to it." Rituals of a funeral differ from culture to culture, from simple burying burials to sky burials each have their own individual belief, but all have the same hope, to guide the departed and themselves safely and peacefully through their new journey, wherever it may be.

Many of the rituals that are done around the world, are performed in an enclosure of some sort. May it be a circle of people, a circle of rocks or a building, the ritual is always accompanied by a congregation of people, such as friends, family, and some type of holy person.

It can be seen in many existing temples around the world, as the Kailasa Temple in India, that required the vertical excavation of 400,000 tons of rock to be constructed around 756-773 CE and the Khao Luang Cave Temple that simply adopted into an existing cave in Phetbury, Thailand around 1850-1868. Both have infused their own culture and beliefs into the environment hoping to endow themselves with the holiness of the sacred landscape.

The pyramids of Giza in Egypt, built for the pharaohs of the Egyptians after their deaths so that they may join the gods above. Religious buildings has always been the bridge from the secular world to the spiritual world as Mircea Eliade states in *The Sacred and the Profane* "...a sacred space constitutes a break in the homogeneity of space; this break is symbolized by an opening by which passage from one cosmic region to another is made possible..." These spaces are the ladders to the realm which we so much are unknown of, our pursuit of the other world, the next life. Sometimes they become the portal of divine intervention and thus we bring ourselves to these spaces to find enlightenment, but they will always remain as our connection to the gods and spirits.

The deep history of religion and rituals is infinitely essential although in itself it manifested an opposite paradigm, the secular. One can say it is better to believe in nothing, and only oneself and their reasoning. As Mircea Eliades states “Modern nonreligious man assumes a new existential situation; he regards himself solely as the subject and agent of history, and he refuses all appeal to transcendence. In other words, he accepts no model for humanity outside the human condition as it can be seen in the various historical situations. Man makes himself, and he only makes himself completely in proportion as he desacralizes himself and the world.” No doubt technology and reasoning is just as important as religion and culture, both although seek the same answers, constantly exploring the unknown areas of our minds and environments. The sacred space seeks to unify the two, as it creates a portal, an open door to questions and answers, which require not just religious doctrines but logical reasoning.

The modern architect who chooses to design the sacred space, faces two ineffable risk as stated by Karla Cavarra Britton from her essay *The Risk of the Ineffable* in the book *Transcending Architecture*, “The resultant risk for the architect is twofold: on the one hand, he or she can risk a reliance on traditionally recognizable forms that retreat from an active authentic engagement with the diversity of the public sphere; or the architect can risk challenging the assumptions of what religious building ought to be, in order to suggest forms that are open to a wider range of projected meaning.” The risk of reliance on traditional outlines for sacred buildings, and the risk of challenging pre-existing ideas of the religious, each individual has their own paradigm of space, the imaginative powers of the user is powerful. Of course, the church has always been pre-ordered and outlined about why and where you need to place a space, but this in itself was also created by an individual or a group of people. Our society is full of ever changing generational minds, the past instils in us the lessons, but the present is for us to reinterpret and rediscover; the path of transcendence has never been monotonous and singular but sincere and individualized.

These spaces we have seem to have slowly disregard may help us answer the questions that truly matter, not the questions about the physical being but the questions about our inner beings and our desires and dreams. As the universe is as grand and vast, so is our mind, the millions of connections contained in our brains can be as equal and as wondrous as the universe.

Death is something we all have to experience in our life; it is a natural event. It is usually joined by a group of people (Friends and Family) and some type of holy person. But the most unique characteristics among cultures, of death, is where and how it ends, usually in a comfy home where you were born, sometimes outside ravaged by hungry scavengers, cremation and much more. Though there are many cultures we can look into, a specific one will be our focus, the Hmong people.

The Hmong people are hill people from China, who eventually immigrated to Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. But during the Vietnam War they became a target of genocide thus leading them to the United States, where a large percentage of them reside at the present time. When a person passes away in the Hmong culture, in the old times, the funeral would be held a few days after the person passes, in their home. The funeral usually last around three to four days depending on the family. The length of time it takes for the body to be buried and under the circumstance of no type of body preservation, the body would soon start to rot and it would become a sight nobody wanted to see or smell. In the United States, in the present time, these old traditions has become unwanted and impractical. So funerals were being held in funeral homes instead, where there is facilities for cooking and body preservation.



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Figure 03 | Hmong Women in The Fields #viet0277



© QT Luong / terragalleria.com
Figure 04 | Working in The Terraces #viet8273

Although conditions has become much better for these funerals, the buildings they reside in has become a simple box. It consist of three simple rooms: the casket room, the waiting room, and the kitchen. The casket room is where the body and casket is kept during the ceremony. The room also provides space for the ceremonial rituals that are required for the funeral. The waiting room is mostly used for eating, resting and waiting. The kitchen is used for cooking, receiving the meat donations and the storage of the food. These spaces are usually boring and dull, usually consist of simple foldable tables and chairs. Families are in charge of their own decorations of the walls and doors. The building is but an empty box, with a label for a funeral home.

Hmong funerals consists of many rituals they must go through, that is why three to four days are necessary. But the buildings say nothing about these rituals, it doesn't speak to people where these rituals are done. The elders teach the family who are in charge of the funeral but nothing is there to inform the visitors or participants. A huge problem in the Hmong community is how the young do not learn or embrace their culture anymore. Through design maybe there are possibilities to spark interest and educate the younger generations of the rituals and ceremonies. The space should help enhance the emotions and experience in the building and provide a sense of a sacred space to all users.

Figure 05 | Hmong Traditional Dance



Figure 07 | Hmong Boys Practicing Qeej (Bamboo Flute)

The funeral home is actually a pretty new adaptation to the Hmong culture, as funerals has always been done in the home of the family. The funeral home has brought many obvious positives but has missed a very important element, the sacred space through Architecture. The homes have become no less than a box, it tells nothing of the environment, the culture and the past. The pursuit is to find a way to express these lacking elements in the homes and to encourage interest in one's own culture. As there is the Hmong belief that the body of the spirt is just as important as the spirt itself, can it not be said about the building that shelters the body?

The newly designed funeral home will be the first ever building architecturally related to the culture of the Hmong. The need of a sensitively spiritual funeral home is just as important as the funeral itself. The commemoration of a loved one should be in a space that is beautiful and pure. For such a young and upcoming ethnicity in America, it is sad to see the gradual loss of culture, my hope is to preserve, educate and bring an awareness of the importance of roots. Because no matter what ethnicity or culture you are from, you must never forget your ancestral origins.

My thesis seeks to revisit the importance of sacred spaces and reinvigorate the need for transcendental architecture, I focused on one in particular group of people, the Hmong. My site is located in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the city has the second largest population of Hmong people and also one of the very first cities to receive Hmong immigrants 40 years ago.



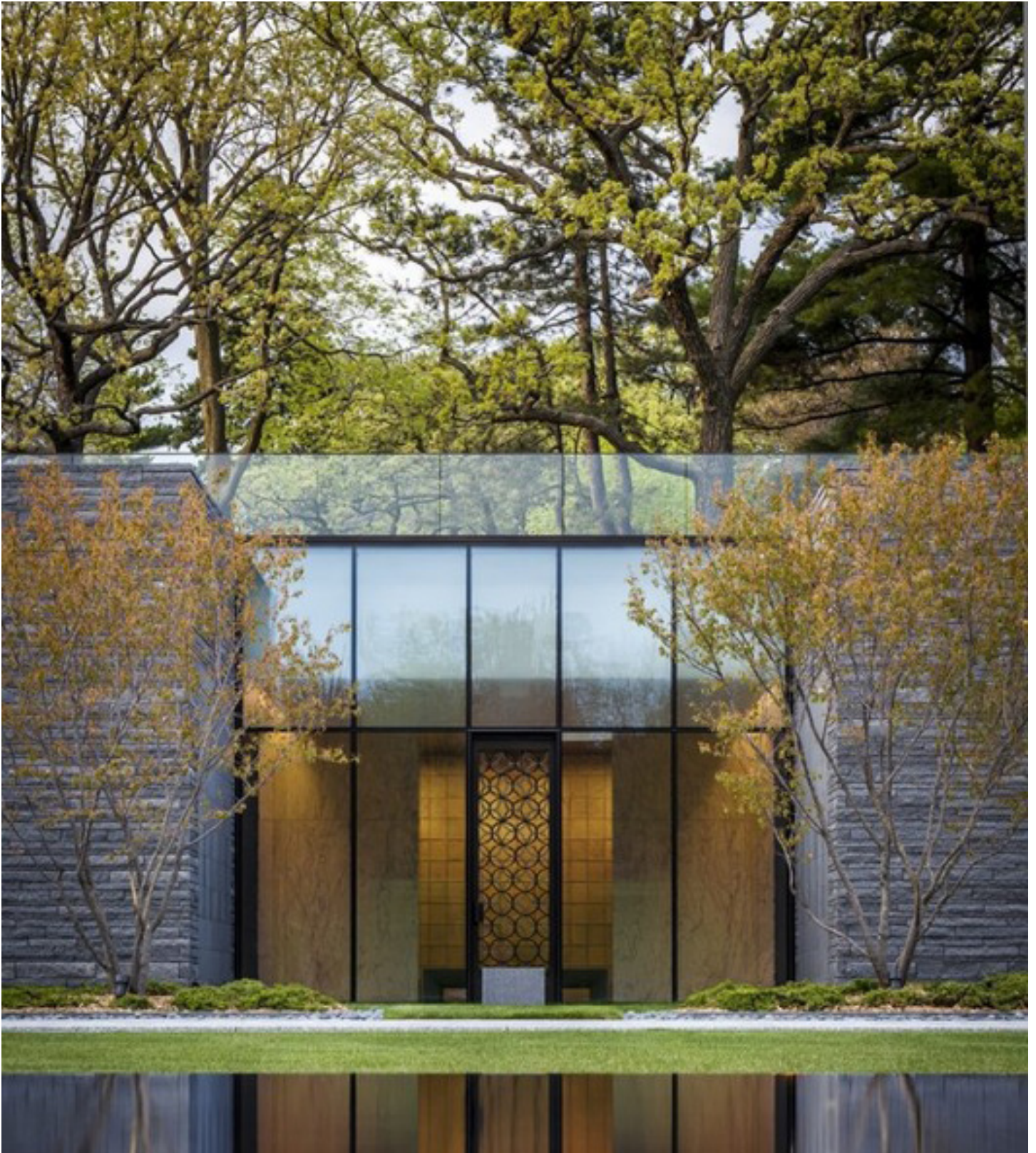
Figure 07 | Hmong Refugee Camp

Project Typology + Research

The typology of the project overlaps multiple typologies such as cemeteries, memorials, and funeral homes. These typologies have very close similarities, as they hold a space for ceremonies or gatherings for something that use to be and is missed. But the main one I will be focusing on will be a *funeral home*.

Precedents should be three of the existing among funeral homes around the metro area in Minnesota. There are three current buildings, used for the hmong funerals. But they are currently just boxes used to house the rituals, they pay no attention to design and aesthetics. I will be using instead precedents similar to my typology:

| | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Lakewood Cemetery Garden Mausoleum | Minneapolis, MN |
| Kailasa Temple | Ellora, Maharashtra, India |
| Thorncrown Chapel | Eureka Springs, AR |



Lakewood Cemetery Garden Mausoleum

Project Type | Mausoleum
Location | Minneapolis Minnesota
Size | 24,500 sq ft

The mausoleum was designed by Joan Soranno and John Cook of HGA Architects and Engineers. It was commissioned by Ron Gjerde, President of Lakewood Cemetery. The project's aim was to expand the mausoleum upwards and above ground, to provide burial space for ten thousand people, a reception space and multiple small contemplation spaces for visitors. The design also included a landscape design for the surrounding area to complete the project's exterior approach.

The design of the mausoleum down to the detail of the building is organized in an axial and centralized system. Everything in the building seems to be pointing at something beyond itself. The use of natural lighting is exquisite and beautifully executed.

Although this purpose of the space is not exactly similar to the other two case studies in the sense that it doesn't have an altar or a centralized platform. Instead it uses its benches and openings to create these elements.

The most genuine element about this building, is its ability to create such a private and quiet space even with its openings and exposure to the outside. As if the windows, doors, and sun roofs all are part of the wall. They are the artificial lights we are so used to. It's as if the heavens are looking upon you, as you visit your loved ones.

Figure 09 | Crypt Room 1

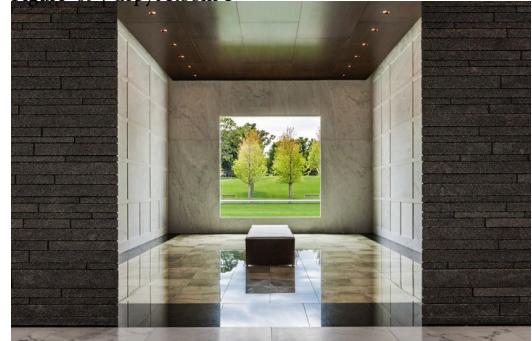


Figure 10 | Crypt Room 2

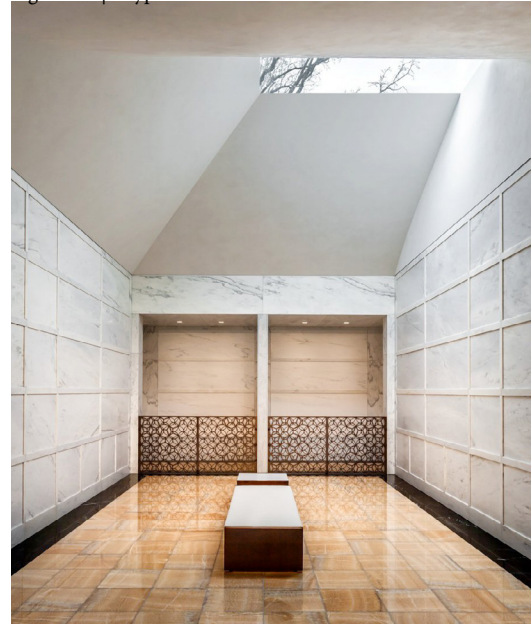


Figure 11 | Exterior Perspective

The mausoleum's floor plan is not exactly symmetrical unlike the two other cases who's floor plans are exactly symmetrical. Although, it still has similar organizations such as the hall way and raised platforms. These two characteristics and the use of stone help embody the sense of sacredness.

The building is a great example of a space that facilitates the rituals. It provides for all the senses, as natural light pours in and its use of stone and wood to mimic the earth.

The building not only serves a purpose for its users but it creates emotions and experiences where you can't feel anywhere else. The spaces it has, are purposed for one exact purpose. It isn't an empty room, made for anyone to do what they please with it. Everything is well planned and it provides at most a great space for contemplation and relaxation.

Figure 12 | Flor Plan

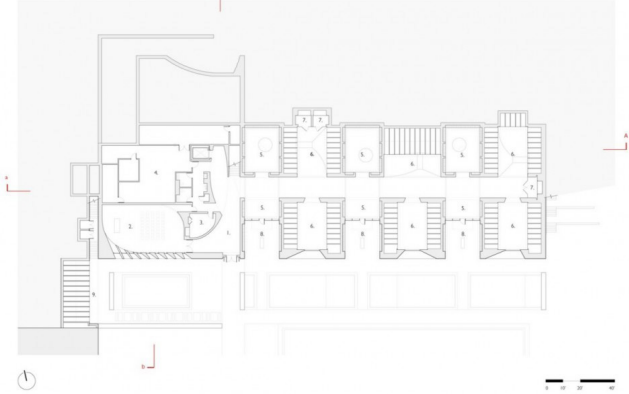


Figure 13 | Longitudinal Section

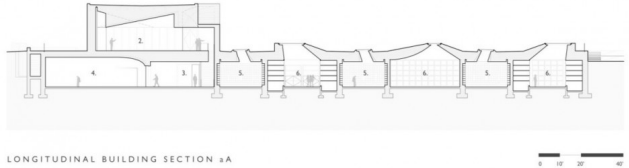


Figure 14 | Traverse Section

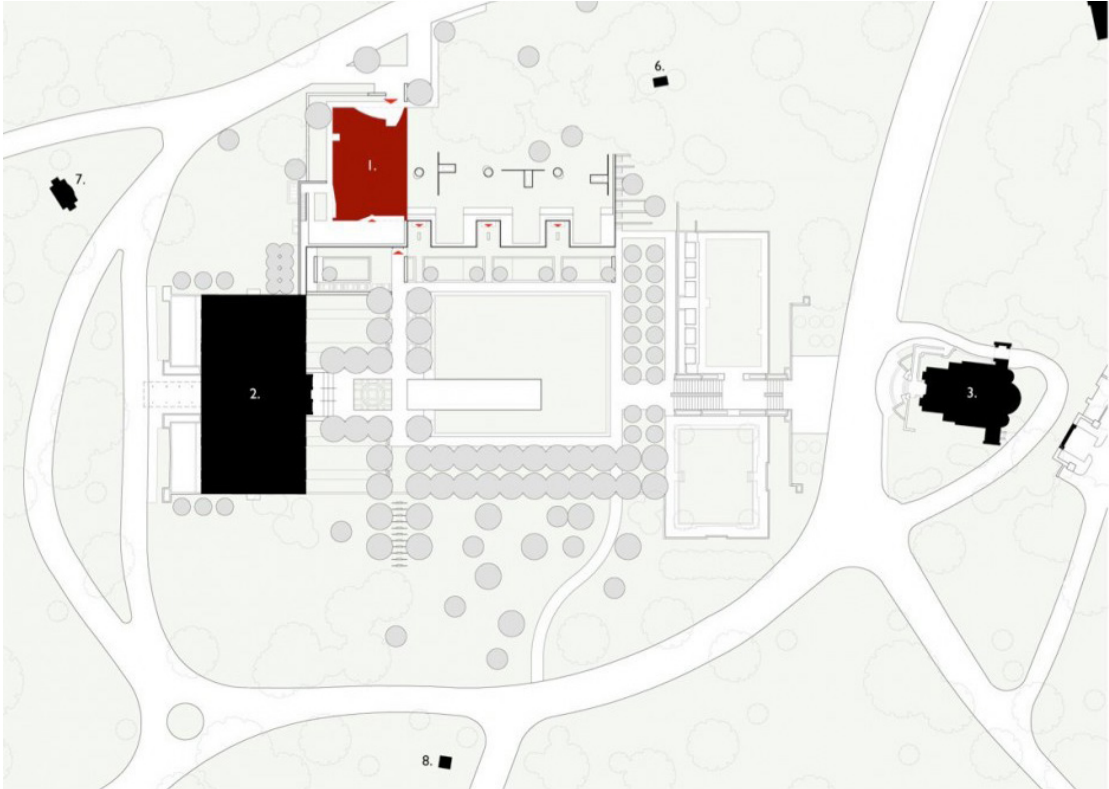
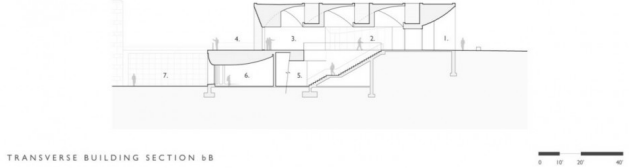


Figure 15 | Site Plan



Figure 16 | Kailasa Temple

Kailasa Temple

Project Type | Temple

Location | Ellora, Maharashtra, India

Size | 18,300 sq ft

Figure 17 | Temple Wall



Figure 18 | Front Perspective



The precedent is one of many rock-cut Hindu temples out of 34 temples and monasteries. It was built in the 8th century by the Rashtrakuta King Krishna although the architect is unknown. It is still extraordinary in its size and detail. The case is different from the other buildings because it itself is built from material that was not moved but created on-site. It made something that was already sacred, usable by humans. What it does have in common with the other two buildings is, its axial and centralized organization, and its main reason, to facilitate the rituals. The program of the space is similar to the chapel as both have a hall directly from the entrance into the altar. It encloses the users inside of space with scriptures and structures to teach and exemplify the holiness of the space. Environmentally, it is impossible to do what this case has done during this time. But its response to its environment is beautiful in its own sense, as it uses nothing but its environment. The underpinning concepts of the case is definitely its ability to be able to be one with nature. Usually temples are built upon mountains or cliffs. Its detail is also far more complex than the two other temples. The walls tell a story and educate its users. As seen in the figure above, the figures move with the wall and become a book. The building becomes the teacher and the mother of their faith.

The building shows us the need for scriptures and sculptures, that a sacred space is not just about light and volume but about detail and visual cues. These things help us understand our roots and the stories that come with our society. Maybe the reason why people spend so much time on their phones is because there is really nothing to look at. There is nothing for us to contemplate ourselves with as we sit and wait. These things bring us more than just bewilderment, but it gives us a reason to think and to wonder about our world.

Figure 19 | Upper Floor Plan

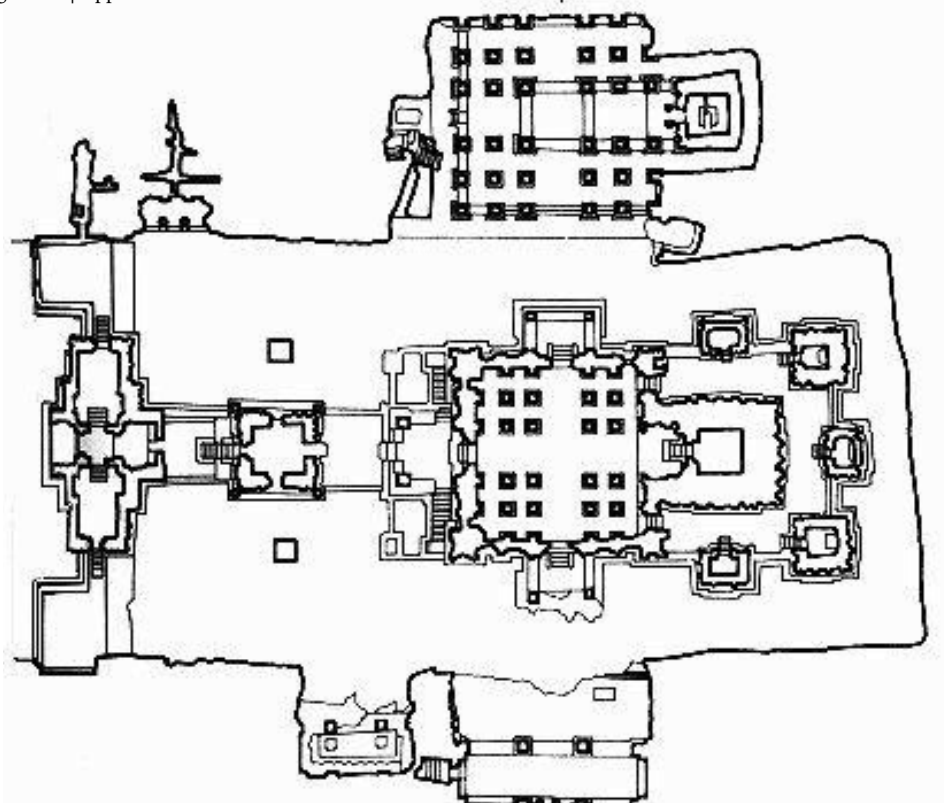


Figure 20 | Lower Floor Plan

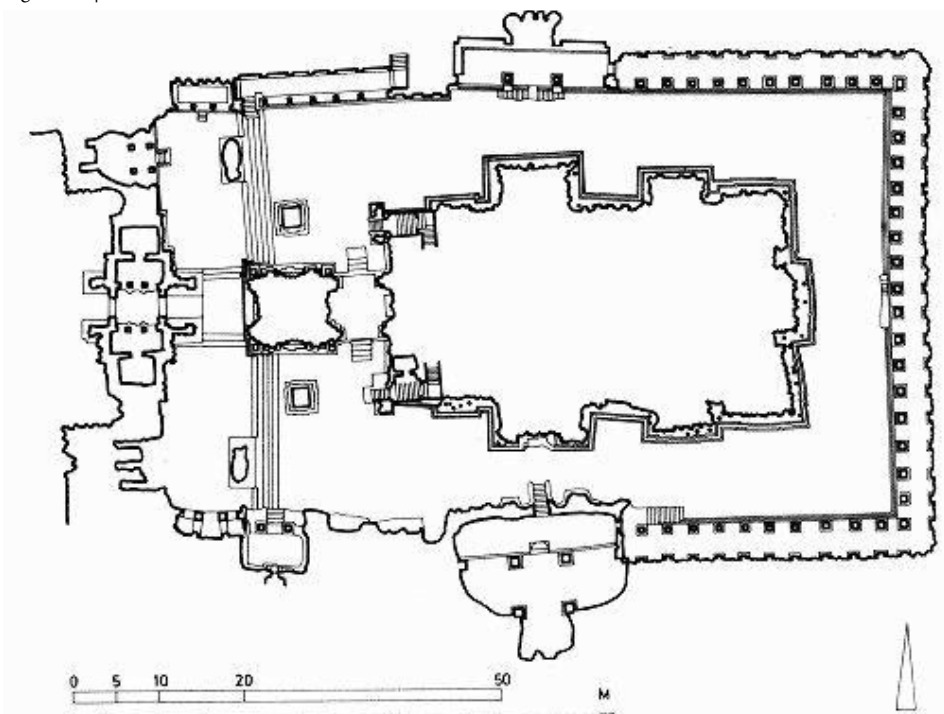




Figure 21 | Alter Perspective

Thorncrown Chapel

Project Type | Chapel

Location | Eureka Springs, AR

Size | 1,440 sq ft

Figure 22 | Night Perspective



Figure 23 | Bench and Mullion Detail



Figure 24 | Front Perspective



The Thorncrown chapel, the smallest of the three cases has a mere square footage of 1,440. It was designed by Fay Jones, who was a student of Frank Lloyd Wright. It was constructed in 1980 and received the Twenty-five year Award by the AIA on 2006. Although small, it has many aspects of the other two and its own. It is completely symmetrical and only has two spaces. The altar and the walkway with benches for people to sit upon. The structure, exterior membrane and its location is what makes this case so amazing. The structure becomes the scriptures and visual cues of the Kailasa Temple and the beams mimics the trees that surround it. It becomes one with nature, although not as close as Kailasa Temple, it still looks just as elegant and grandeur. The way the space takes advantage of natural lighting to emit the space completely in natural light. It's the balance of the mausoleum and the temple together. It does have its own unique elements, it's the only case built completely of metal and glass. It doesn't take the material around its environment into itself but vice versa. It's minimalist design represent how simple it is to have faith, to let light in, to allow oneself to be transparent, and thus one shall be transcended.

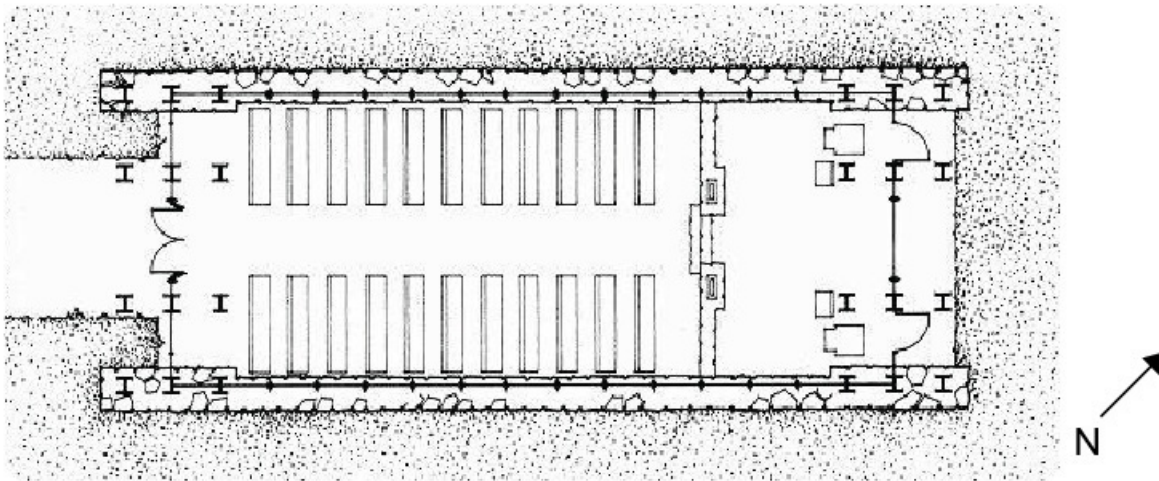


Figure 25 | Floor Plan

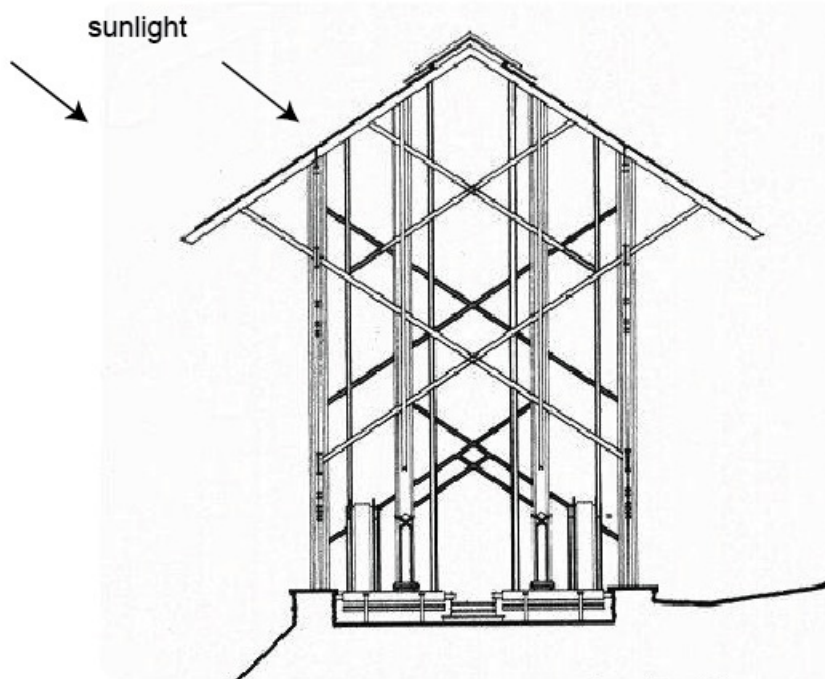


Figure 26 | Northwest Elevation

The transparency of the chapel is what makes it so grandeur. The big tall windows and the naked structure help create this serene space. The subtractive elegance of the design calls for very little material. The only thing about the case is that it only has one purpose, for prayer. The case shows how a simple rectangular box can become so beautiful if it's just critically planned. The sensitivity to its environment, the world, the site, and the people allow it to be more than just a box. It emits from within, even if it uses everything from outside. The case is only irrelevant to my thesis on one basis, that it really has no program. It only serves one purpose, to facilitate a space for congregation for religious reasons, but maybe that is what makes a sacred space, the minimal and the transcendent.

Typological Summary

The meaning of the sacred space has changed over time, from intricate detail to simple minimalist designs. My aim was to examine and analyze a range of cases from these two ranges, time and detail; to help me in my design to create a space for a younger generation being passed on from the older generation. The information I found throughout my analysis help strengthened my goal to educate and exemplify sacredness throughout the building. From the Kailasa temples who built storyboards and deities throughout their walls and spaces, and to the firm and the concrete minimalist stone cold walls of the mausoleum. The combination of these two elements would surely create an inviting and enlightening the young.

The main focus although throughout my case studies was to find a true meaning of a sacred space. Because in our time sacred does not always mean religious and faith, but I could not find them in architecture. As these cases shows how one can create a sacred space but how does one decide when a space is sacred. I would have to look more into books and in myself, ask the questions that require more than just reading. I think this focus is very important in my unifying idea because these spaces has not always been a subject of architecture. It has always been just known as religious spaces, people who built these buildings upon callings from a god. What is truly calling these people and where do they find their designs for the symbols and the intricate details.

Although I could not find everything I wanted to find, I believe I have found a sufficient amount of information to help me understand how to design a sacred space to accommodate for all ages. The need to design a funeral home that is not too cold and dark but naturally lit and intricately organized is a difficult task. These case studies will lead me in my path of the design of thesis. A funeral home of this caliber will bring into the community a sense of belonging. It will provide not just a facility for rituals but for teaching and learning.

Major Project Elements

Most Important

Entrance Hall
Casket Room
Waiting Room

These three rooms serve as the main three elements of the project. As most of the rituals and ceremonies happen in these spaces. They are most important and must come first.

Memorial Room
Garden Space
Acoustic Designs

These three spaces are the additions I will be adding to the project. In the past there has not been such a space but I believe these spaces are essential in the healing process.

Small Contemplation Rooms
Educational Spaces

These two spaces are essential but cannot be disregarded and only added if there is space and time.

Kitchen Space
Musician Waiting Spaces
Dining Hall

These spaces are necessary spaces, the reason why they are here is because they don't serve a mental purpose but a physical purpose. They only fulfill the needs.

Cadaver Storage Space

The cadaver storage space is only a maybe because it really isn't called for. Usually chemicals has already been applied to the body to reduce the decaying of the body.

Least Important

User/Client Description

The user of the building will be groups of all ages, usually owned by a private owner. The project is designed for the Hmong Community of Minneapolis/St. Paul area. The Hmong people are very easy going people, they require very little of the design of the building. They only wish to do the ritual as simple and quick as possible so the dead may go peacefully. But that may be because they have never had a building specifically designed for these ceremonies and rituals.

The amount of Hmong people in the Twin Cities area is approximately 66, 181 and 260,073 in the united states. The usually funerals are run by individual families which can range from 60-120 people per weekend. This is also throughout three to four days so the parking space should be enough to provide parking space for 90 cars. There are also times when you have family coming from far away, from other states and other countries.

For a long time, Hmong funeral homes has always been overcrowded due to big families and big communities. One of the goals of the project will be to find a site that is big enough to provide a large enough space to reduce overcrowding. This will reduce safety issues, air conditioning, and maintenance issues.

A funeral space for the hmong community will be a completely new design, the community may reject it but I believe there must be some type of change. They have had a ineffecient and underdesigned funeral home for a very long time. I believe if we truly respect the dead, we must provide a truly beautiful and reasonable space for such rituals.

Site Description

Figure 27 | Region Map



Figure 28 | City Map

Figure 29 | Site Close-ups



The site I have chosen is next to an existing funeral home called Glenwood Funeral Home, it is located in Minneapolis, MN between highway 94 to the east and Van White Memorial Blvd to the west. The site is fairly big and is split in the middle by N Bryant Ave. Downtown is fairly close visibly and physically. It is also in an area that is the transition from the neighborhood sector to the commercial sector. Just as a funeral home is the break between the spiritual world and the physical world, its placement is placed in between the home (the sacred) and the workplace (the physical). In hopes to create a bridge between the two and help people find the balance of both.

Project Emphasis

1. Sacred Space

As stated at the beginning of the thesis, the emphasis will be to design an architecturally sacred space. The space is required to speak and feel sacred. The use of a sacred space has become vague, my goal is to clarify architecturally, what really means inhabit a sacred space?

2. Incorporating the Hmong culture

The Hmong community have never had a space that is aesthetically sacred for their ritual needs. The goal will be to design Hmong funeral home, because the funeral is the most complex and demanding ritual.

Goals of The Thesis Project

1. Academic

Academically I hope to find and share the theoretical and physical elements of sacred architecture incorporated with the Hmong community. I want to achieve a qualitative and quantitative project worthy of a graduate level.

2. Professional

Professionally I want to understand the extensive research process of designing a specific social space for a specific type of culture. I also hope to use the project as a piece of my portfolio for future employers.

3. Personal

Personally, I want to find a deeper understanding of my culture through architecture.

Plan For Proceeding

Research Direction

1. Theoretical Premise/Unifying Idea

- Research precedent existing sacred buildings
- Disect the elements of the research from precedents
- Apply elements to the hmong culture
- Design an according building based on research

2. Typology

- Understand what typology incorporates the Hmong culture and sacred spaces

3. Histroical Context

- Examine how history effects the sacred
- Research how the Hmong culture has changed
- Research past Hmong funeral homes, to find if it has been attempted

4. Site Analysis

- Examine how can the environment provides to the sacred space
- Understand how the community will respond to the new space
- Research how can the environment enhance the sacred space

5. Programmatic Requirements

- Examine what spaces will encourage the young people to participate
- Research the appropriate design for particular spaces

Design Methodology

1. Mixed method quantitative/qualitative analysis

- Gather information through archival search
- Organize information into groups to help understand difference and similarities

2. Graphic Analysis

- Compare and contrast floor plans, sections, and elevations of similar typologies
- Analyze the elements in perspectives and find the unifying concept
- Whiteout unnecessary graphics from analysis

3. Search for opinions

- Ask for criticism
- Ask if a space does truly seem sacred
- Find a consent in social agreement and theoretical agreement

Documentation of the Design Process

1. Compiement

- Adobe Indesign
- Adobe Illustrator
- Adobe Photoshop

-Sketchup 2015

-Revit 2015

-Autocad 2015

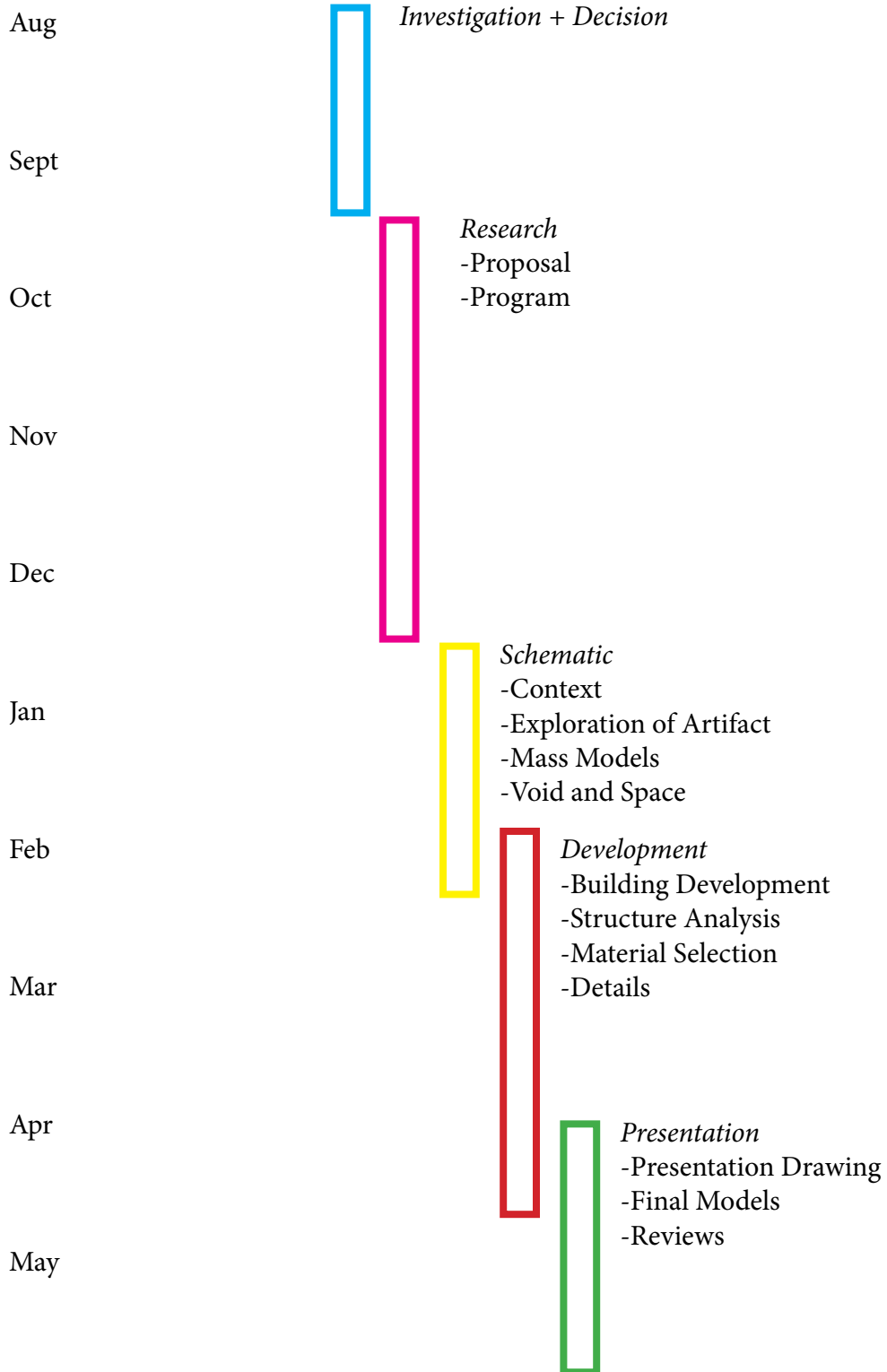
2. Preservation + Accessibility

- Printed graphics
- Printed documents
- Booklet
- Possible online journal

3. Presentation

- Booklet
- Adobe Acrobat (PDF)
- Model
- Presentation Boards

Work Schedule



Exploration of the Artifact

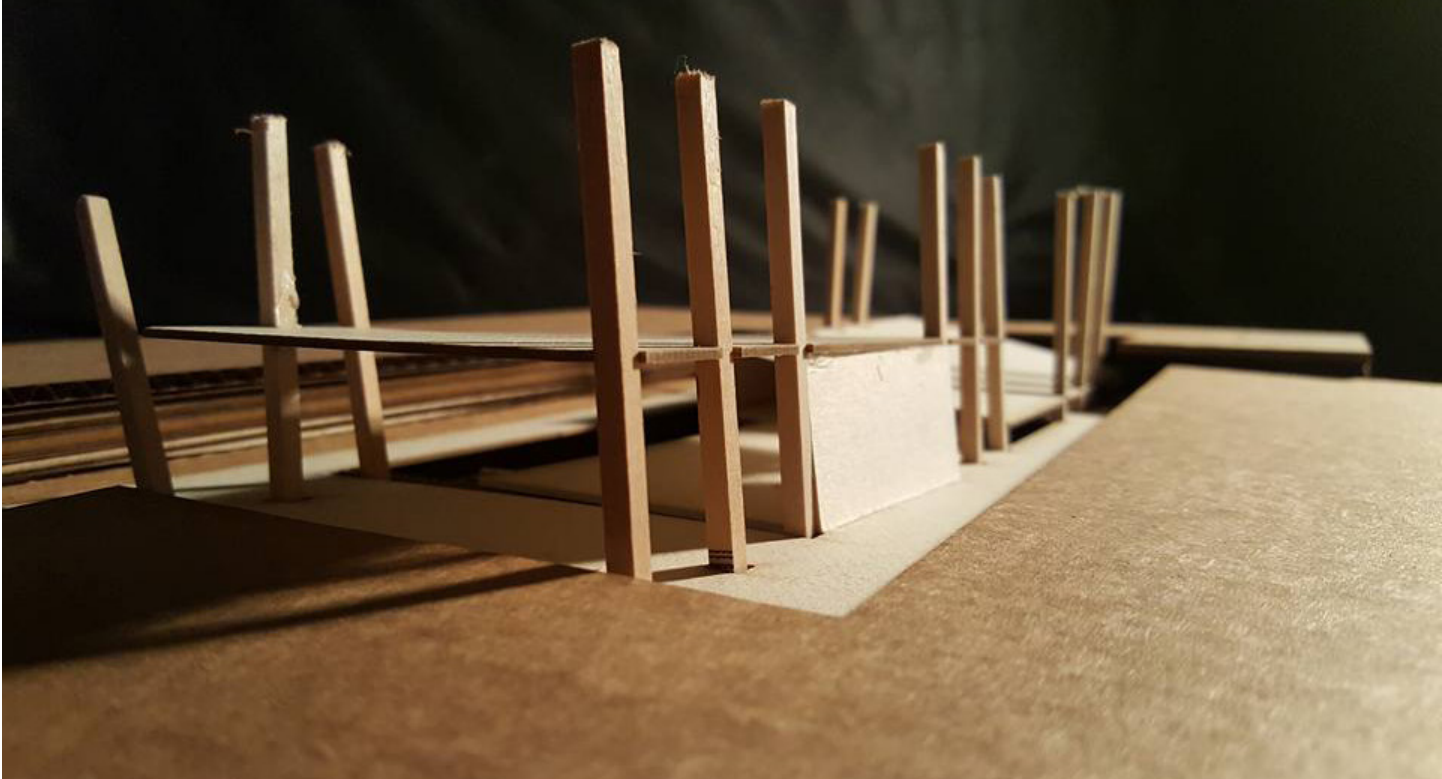
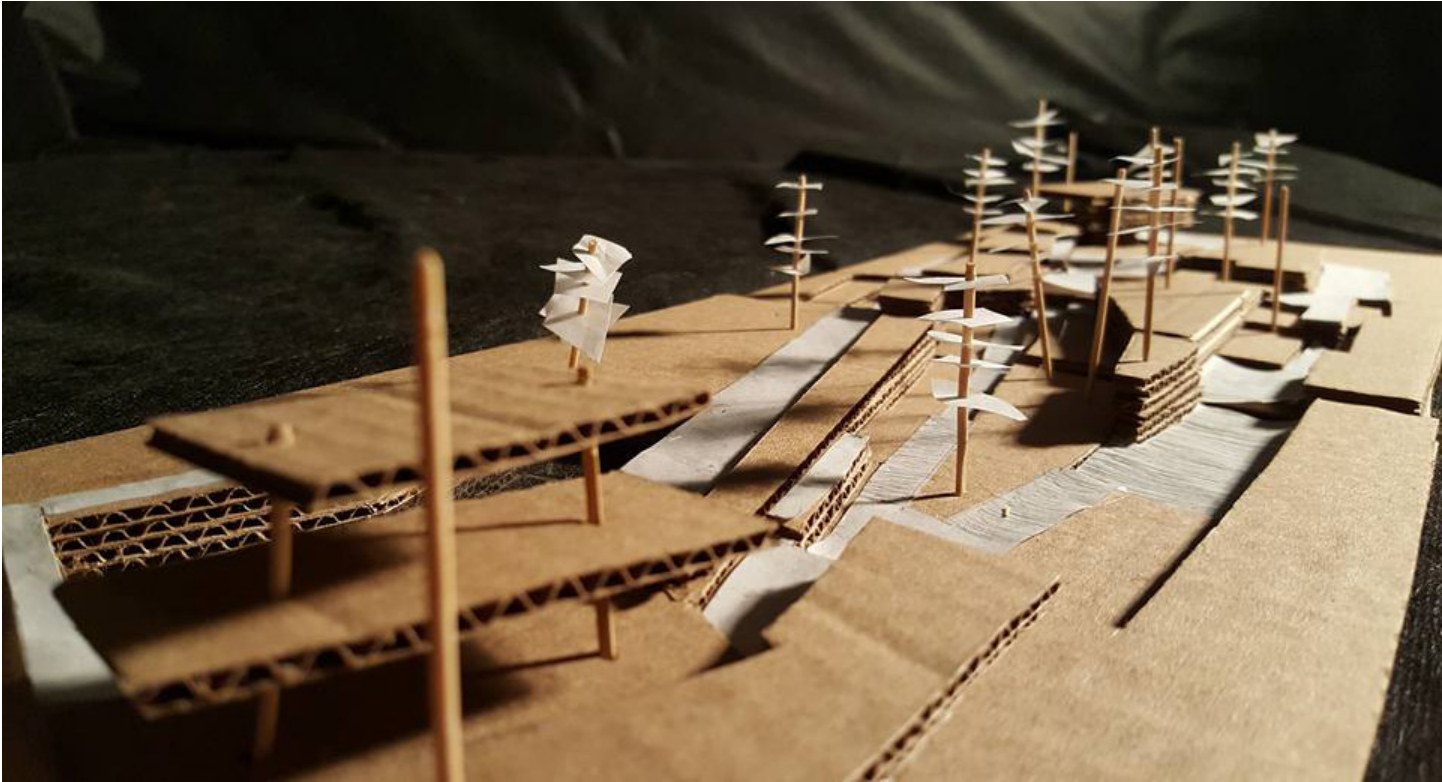


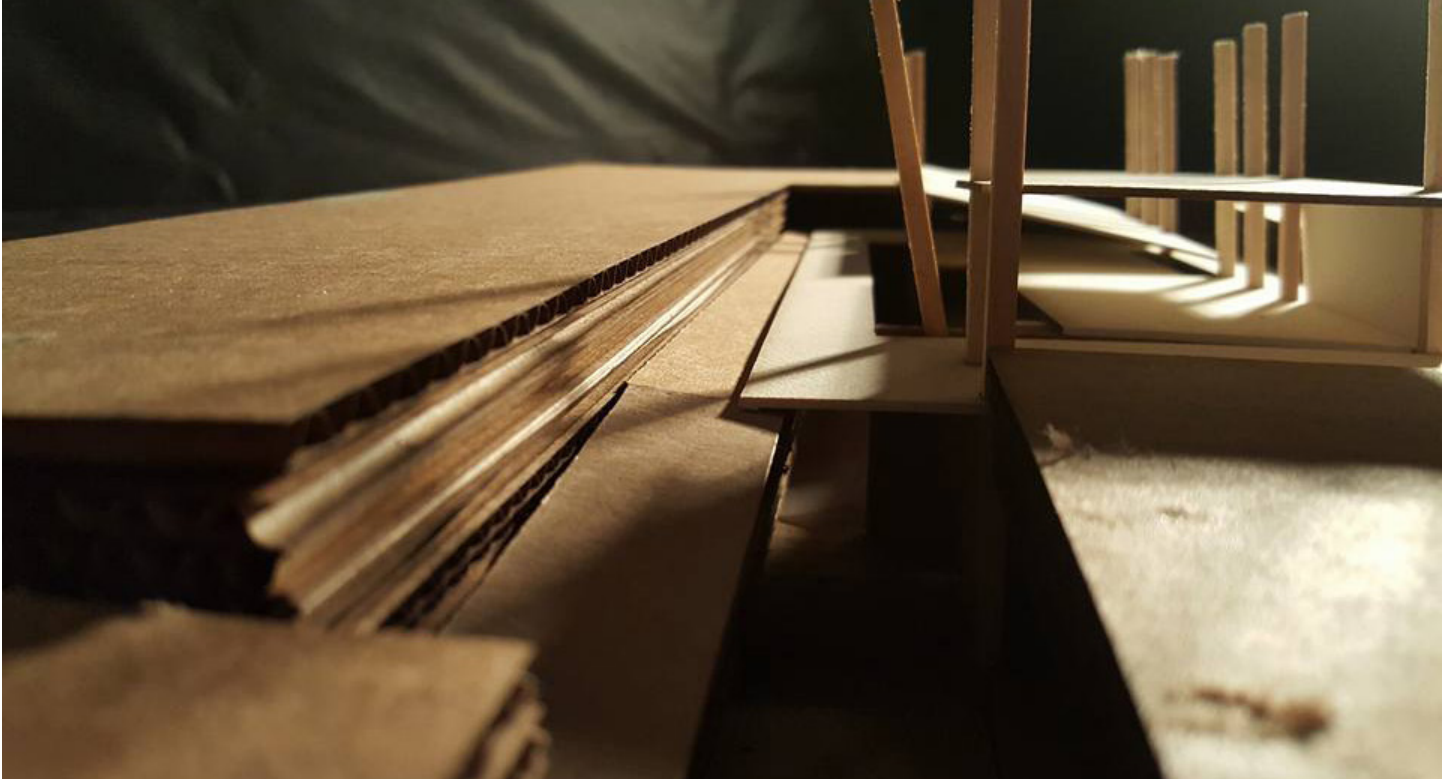
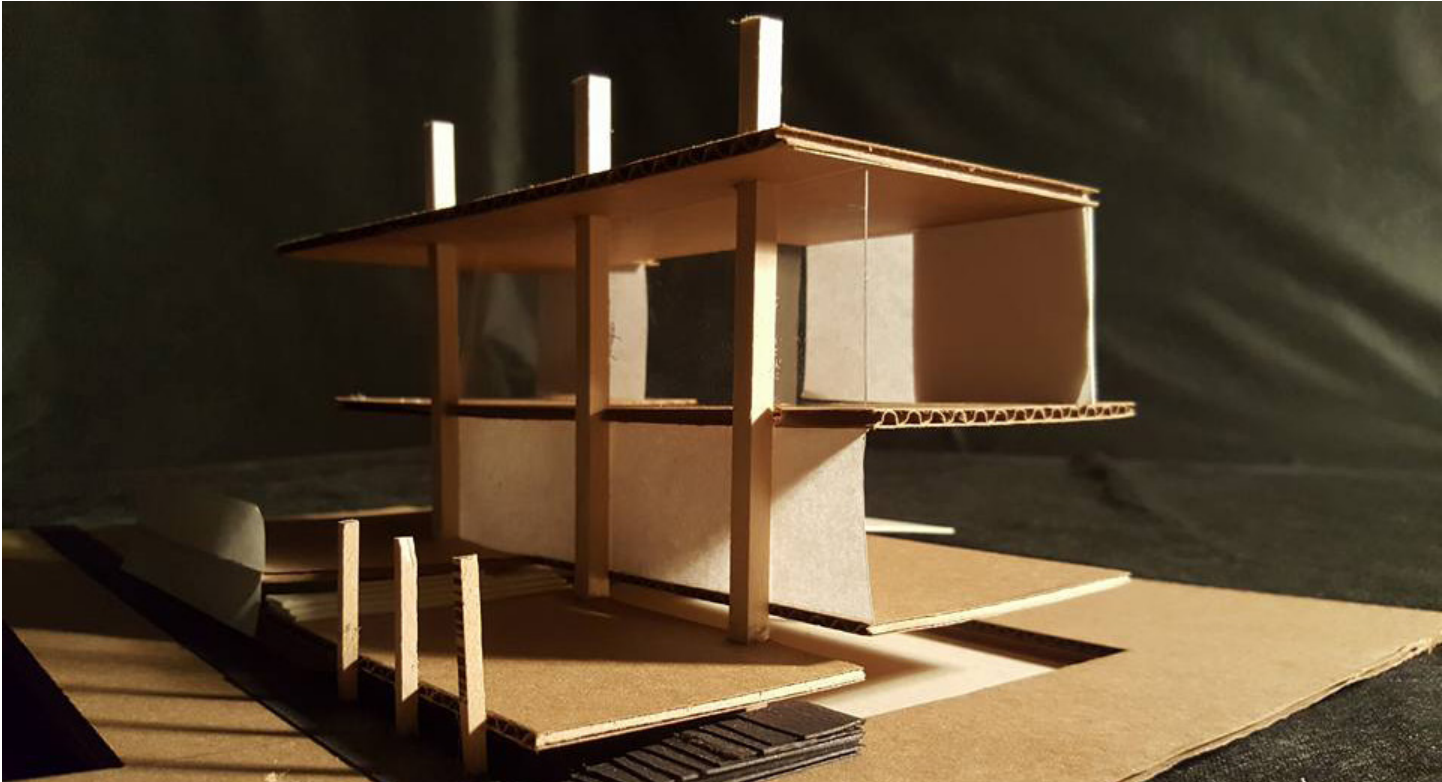
The existence of all thought has reversibility's, no one thought exist in itself, and there is always another pushing force. As Merleau-Ponty's reversibility thesis comes into play, there are always crossovers between two perceptions. As when the flesh of the dead is touched, in that moment of contact, no one can say who is really p`erceiving the other, if the living is giving life to the dead or is the dead giving death to the living. This overlap, this gap of the senses and perceptions brings us upon who we are as humans, always giving and taking unconsciously. The lantern that is lit for the dead, is no closer to the stars that are lit by the dead, it is hard to see who is actually really trying to communicate to the other, and we can only put our hopes in belief, what is essential is invisible.

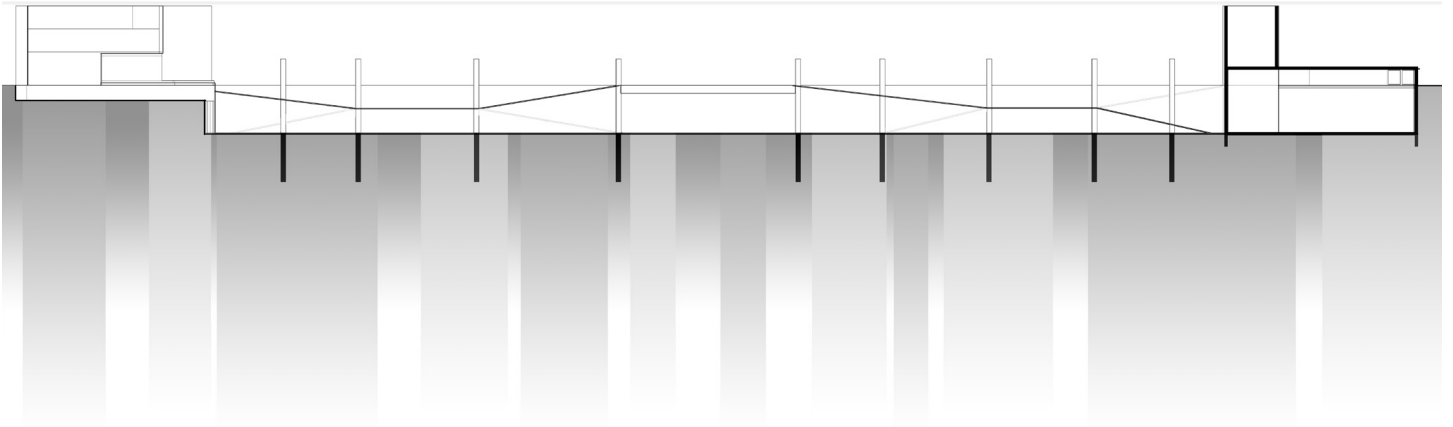


My artifact seeks to bring what is far close and what is absent present. The veil that covers the candles in the back lit by the candles in the front bring a sense of reminiscence. Throughout my architecture I attempt to create the space of in between. As my artifacts mediates the space between the dead and the living so does my architecture.

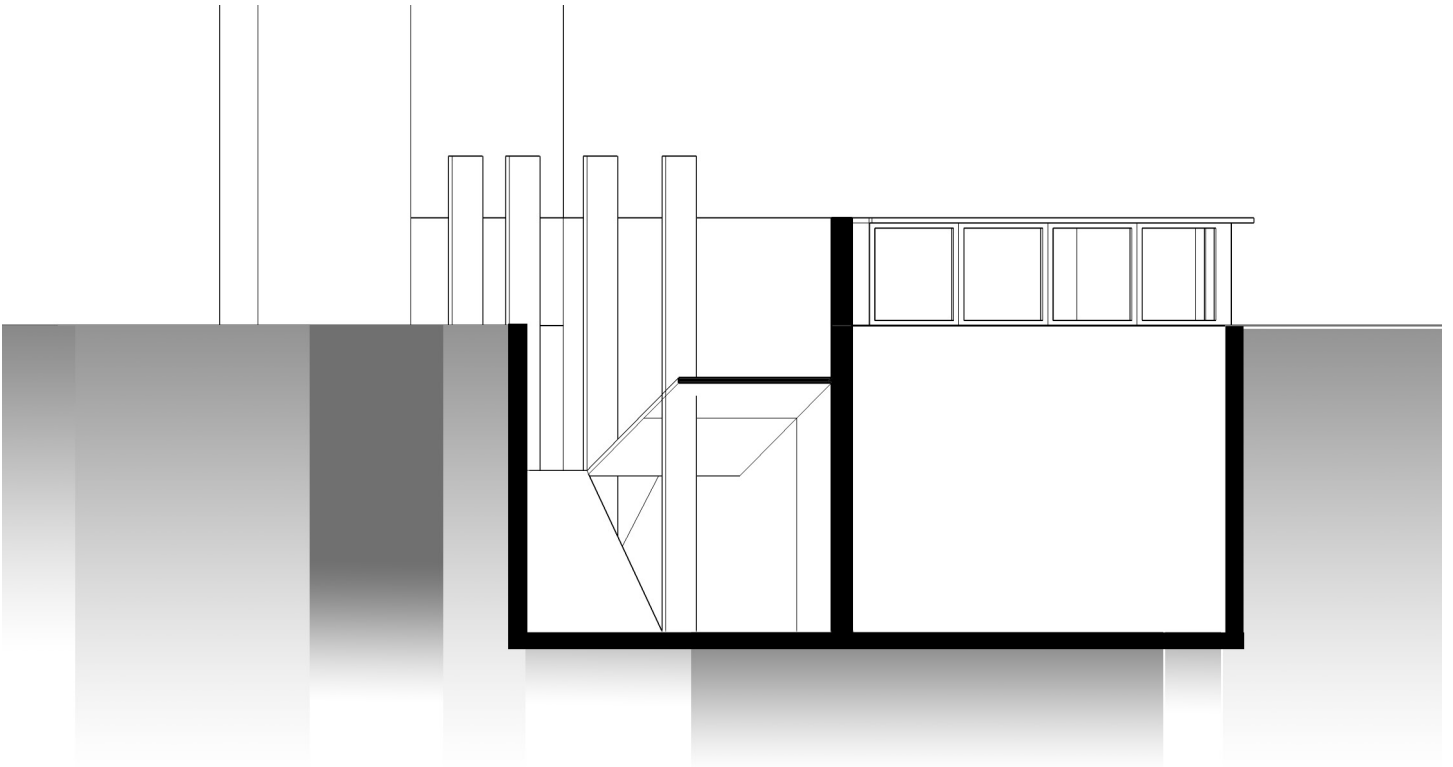
Exploration of the Models and Drawings

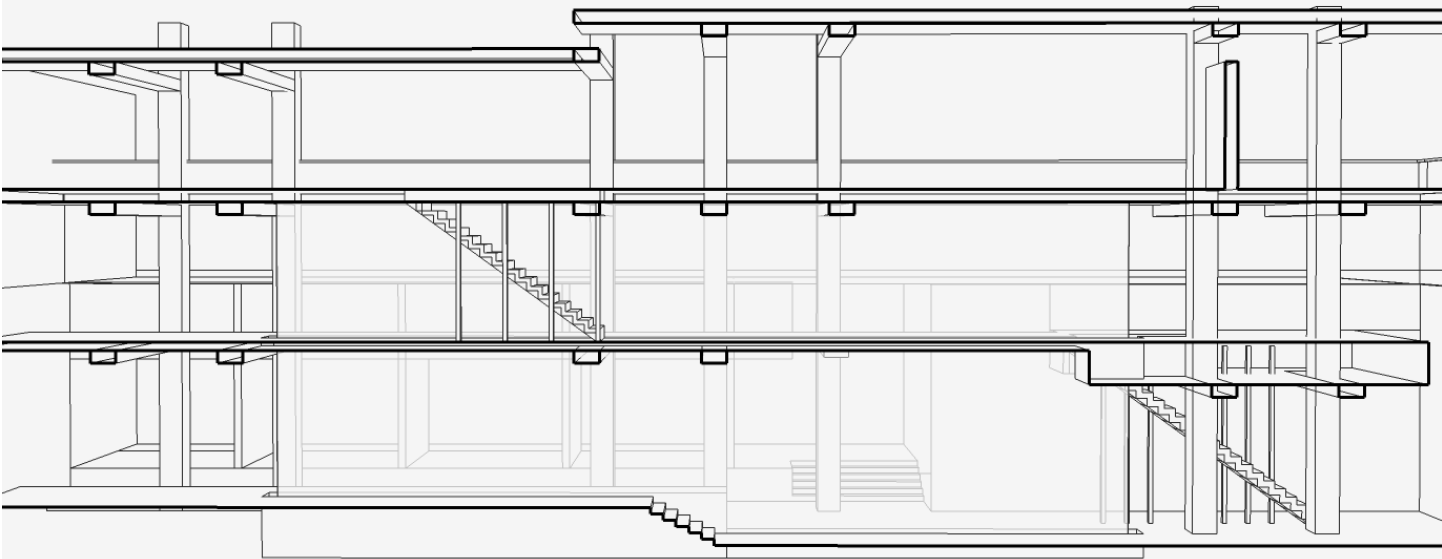
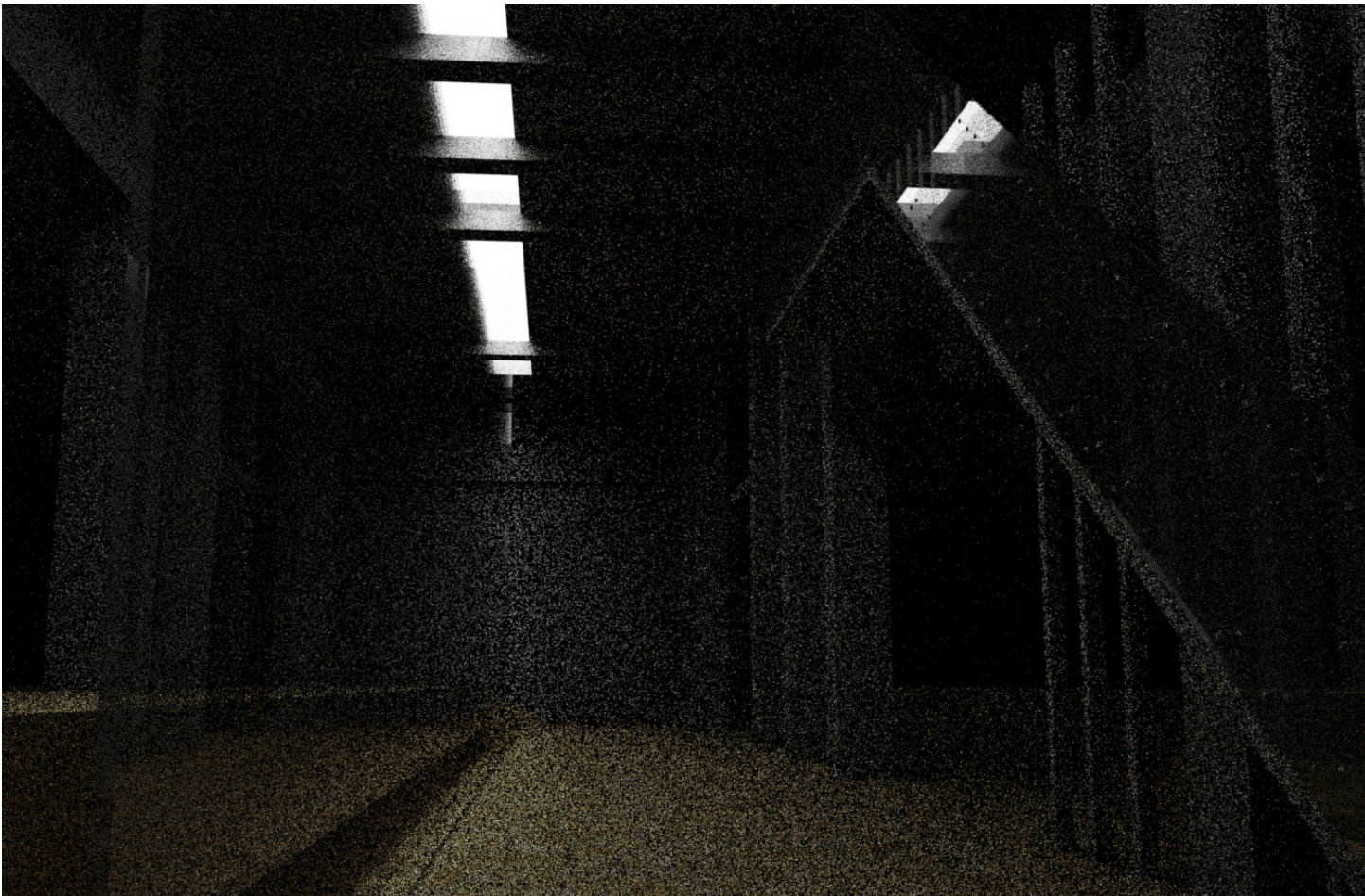




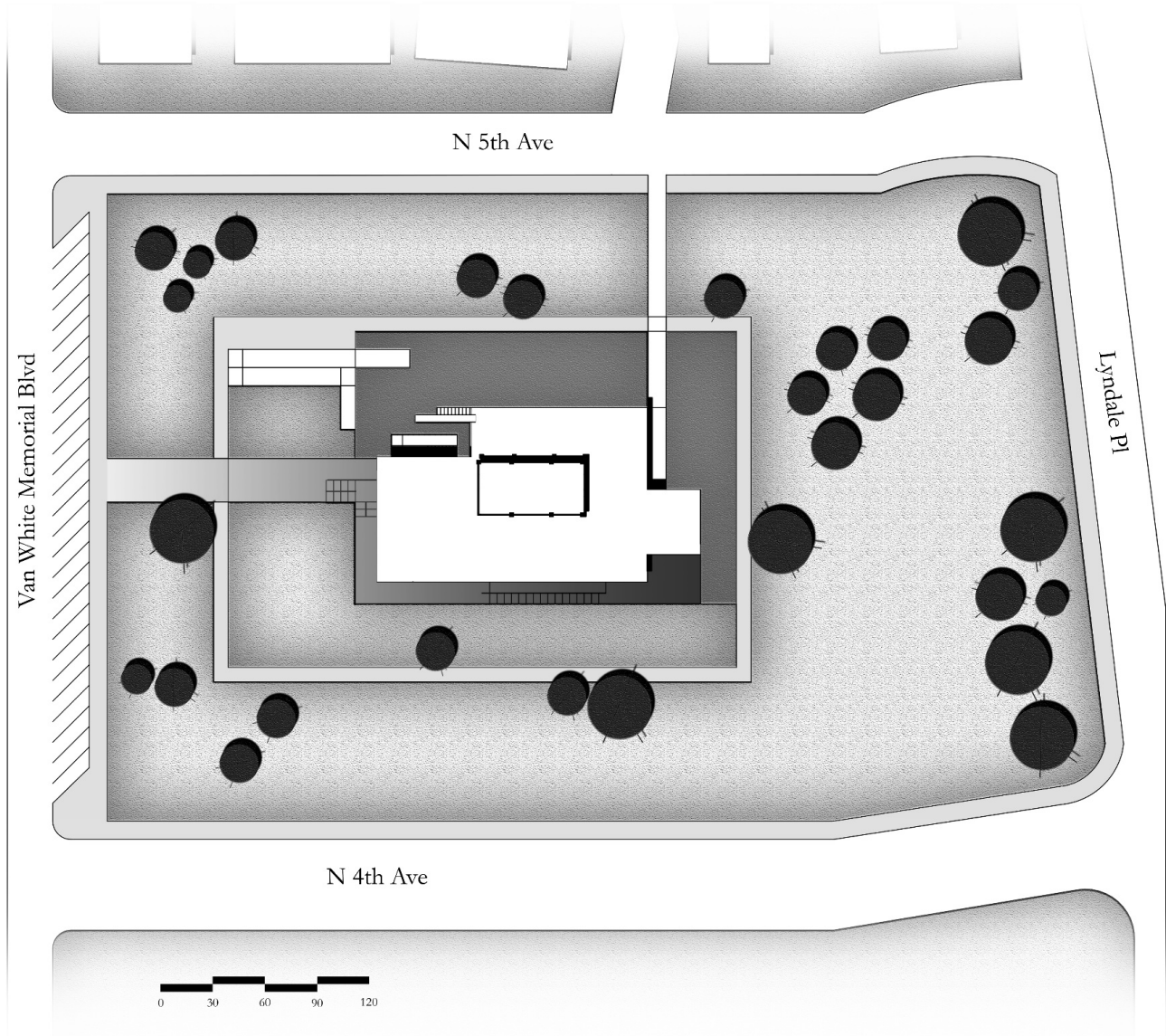


The preliminary drawings and models helped me understand the design of the building as a whole, the main elements are sunk into half-way into the ground. As if the building has become the in between space between ground and sky. The light coming ceiling skylights are emitted onto the veil and travel down into the spaces below to create vertical movement throughout the building. The circulation of the building is a procession more so than just a walk from space to space. As you circulate through the space in a circular and ritualistic manner, you become part of the ritual that the building embeds in you.





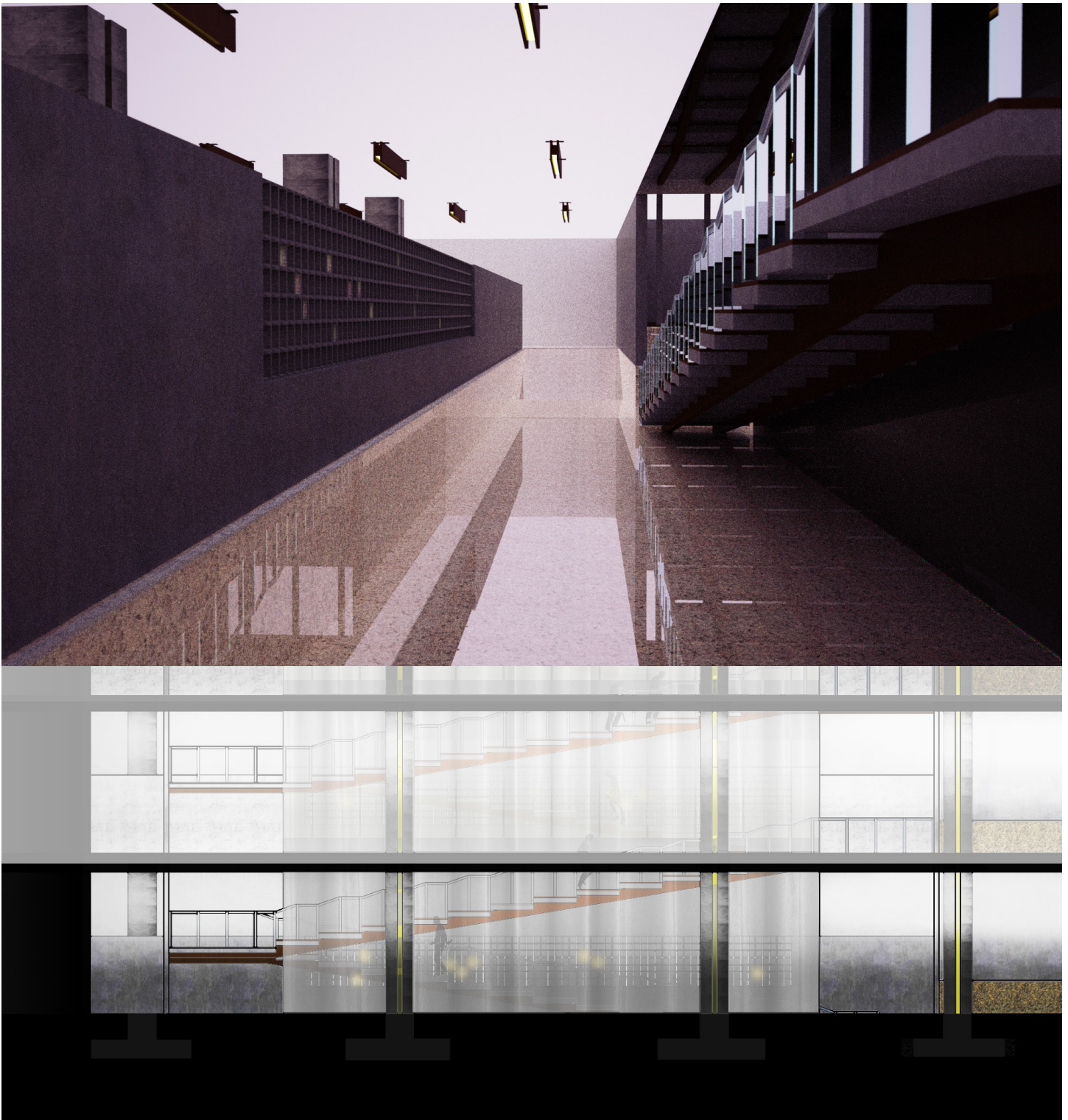
Final Drawings



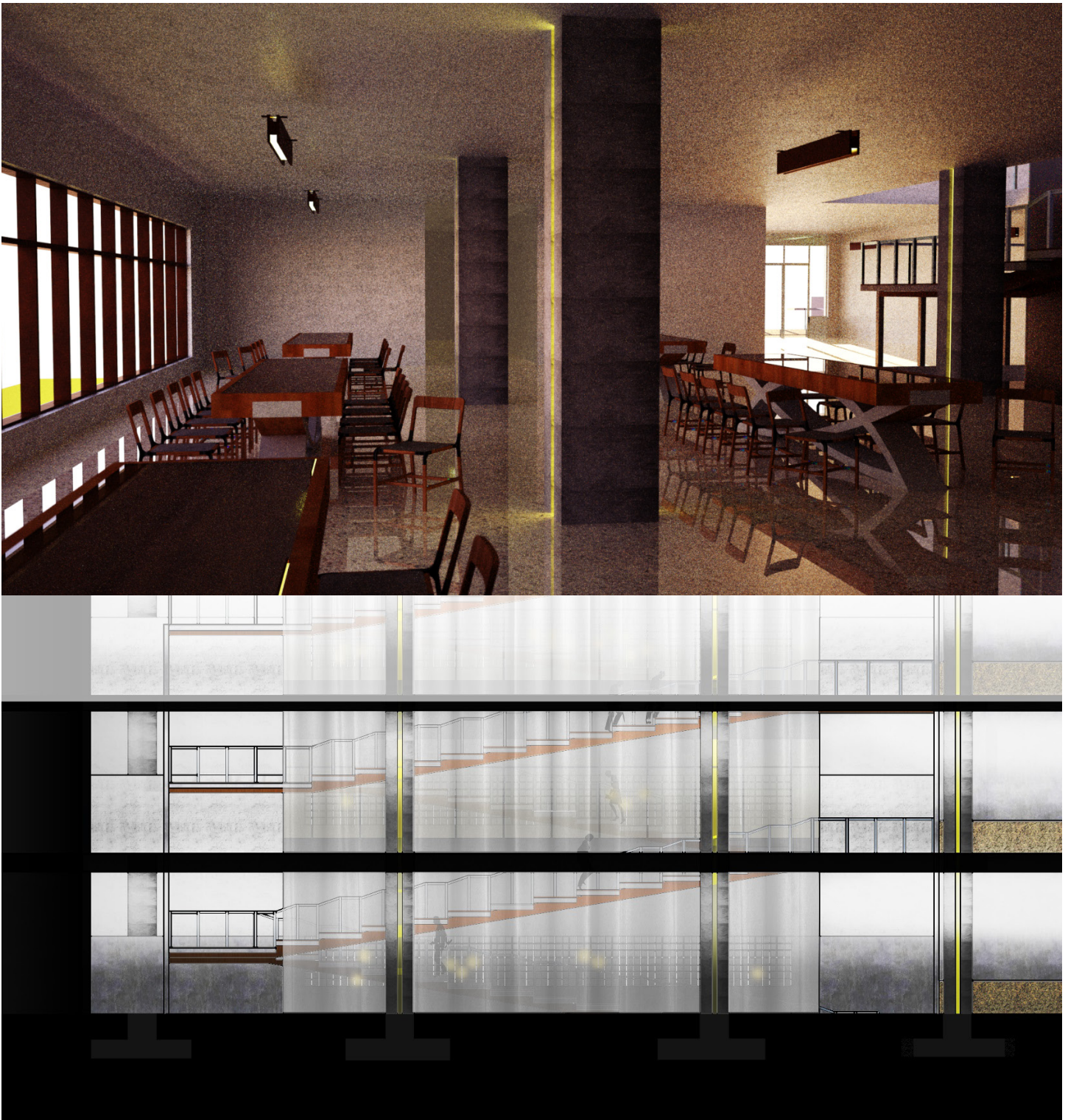
The site serves as a garden and a cemetery, allowing people to visit passed loved ones, in a space of meditation and contemplation. The site surrounds the building, transitioning from burials spaces to burial rituals.



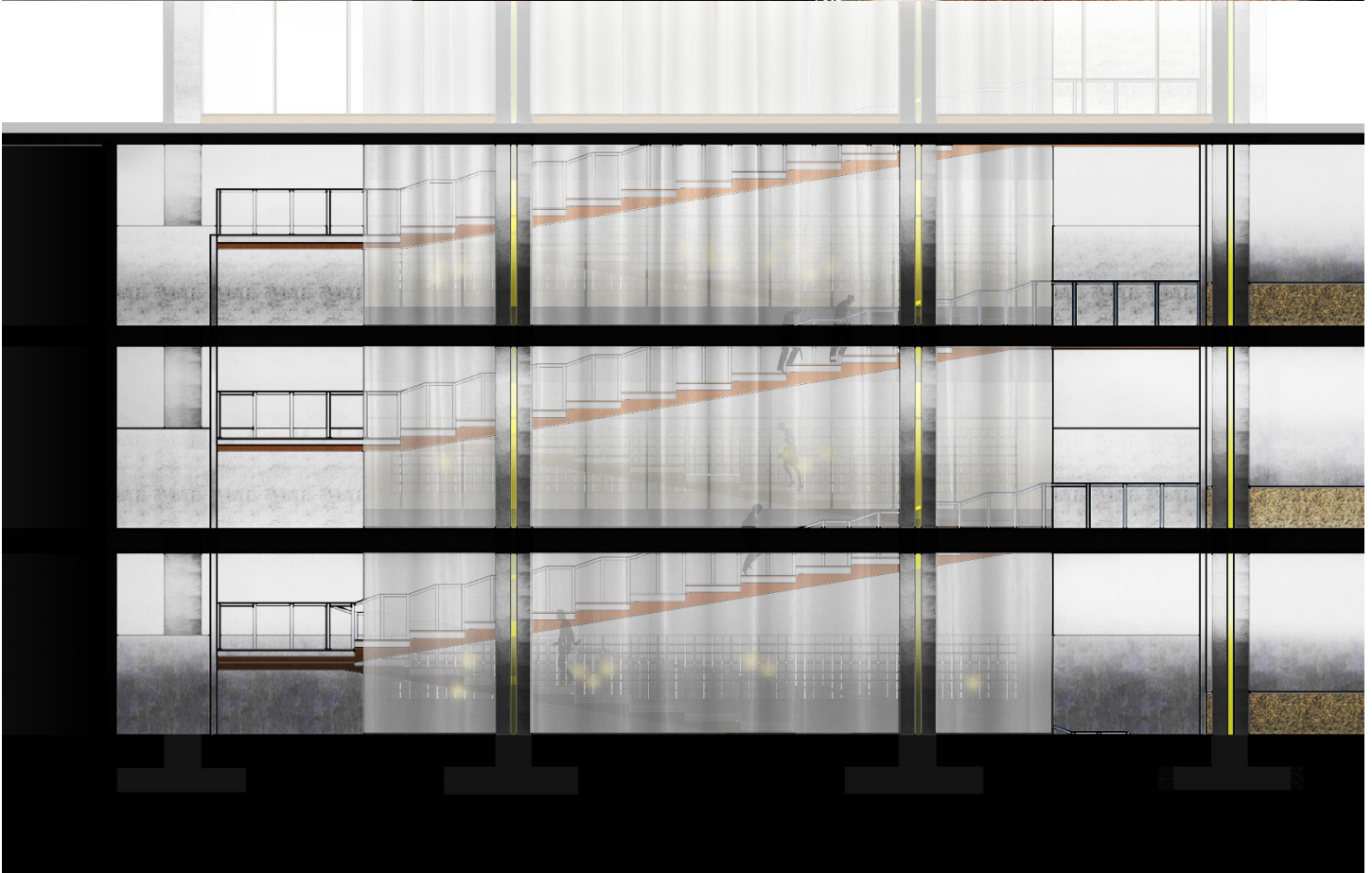
The entry way into my building leads you from the west side of the building towards the east side, and into the bottom floor. As you enter the building you are submerged in between two elements, the sleek polished concrete and the rough retaining wall of rammed earth, as if you are in between two dimensions one of the and one of the living.



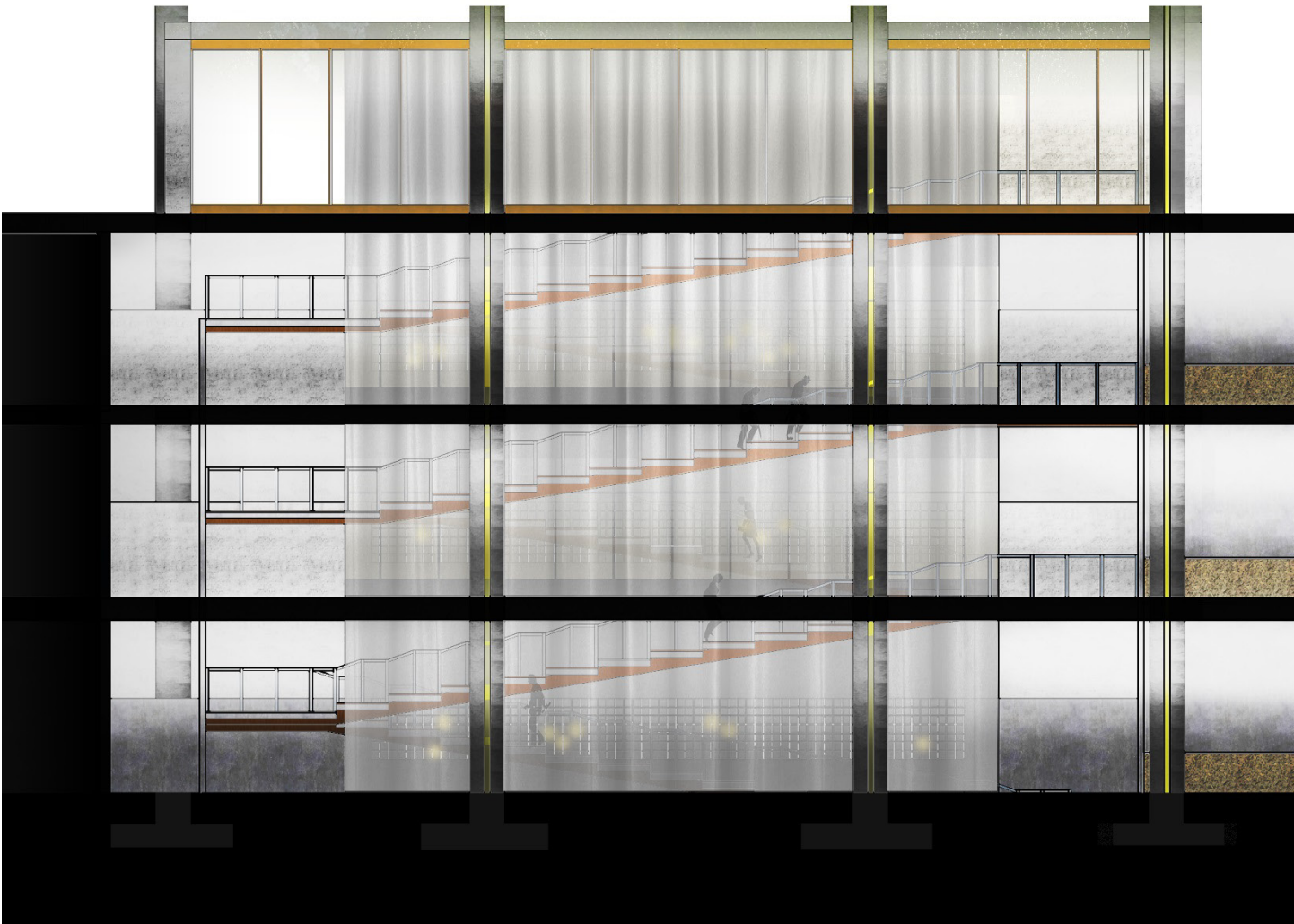
The building as a whole is designed to be a ritualistic experience throughout the three day funeral rites. The first day, the day of acceptance and cleansing of the body, is performed on the bottom floor, as you enter the transitional space in between the main stairs and the funeral space, you are brought through a candle-lit memorial wall into the funeral space.



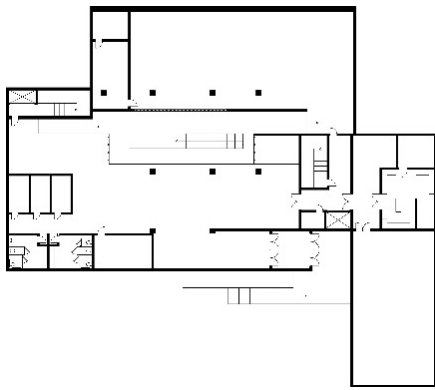
The second day, day of mourning, honored guest arrive through the door on ground level into the building through the transitional aisle, as the honored guest move through the aisle the candle-lit memorial wall projects shadows through the veil in-between the stairs into the dining space, expressive of the ephemeral permanence of the presence and absence one experiences during the passing of a loved one.



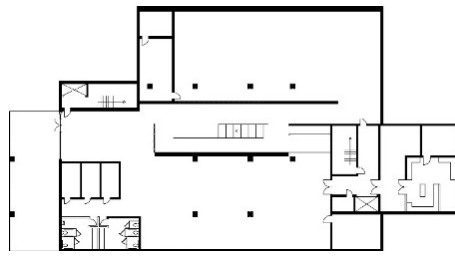
The third day, the day of blessing, songs are played and sung throughout the day to give the last messages of the dead to the living. The walls of the spaces are not completely closed off to allow music to reverberate and echo throughout the building, like voices of the past that constantly whisper in our ears.



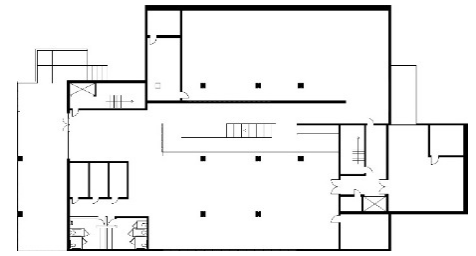
The final day, the day of burial, the veil staircase is revealed, the main element of the building, as the body is carried upward through the staircase throughout the three days, the stairs become the ladder of reincarnation from the ground to the sky, the portal to another life, the bridge between living and dead.



Basement Floor



First Floor



Second Floor

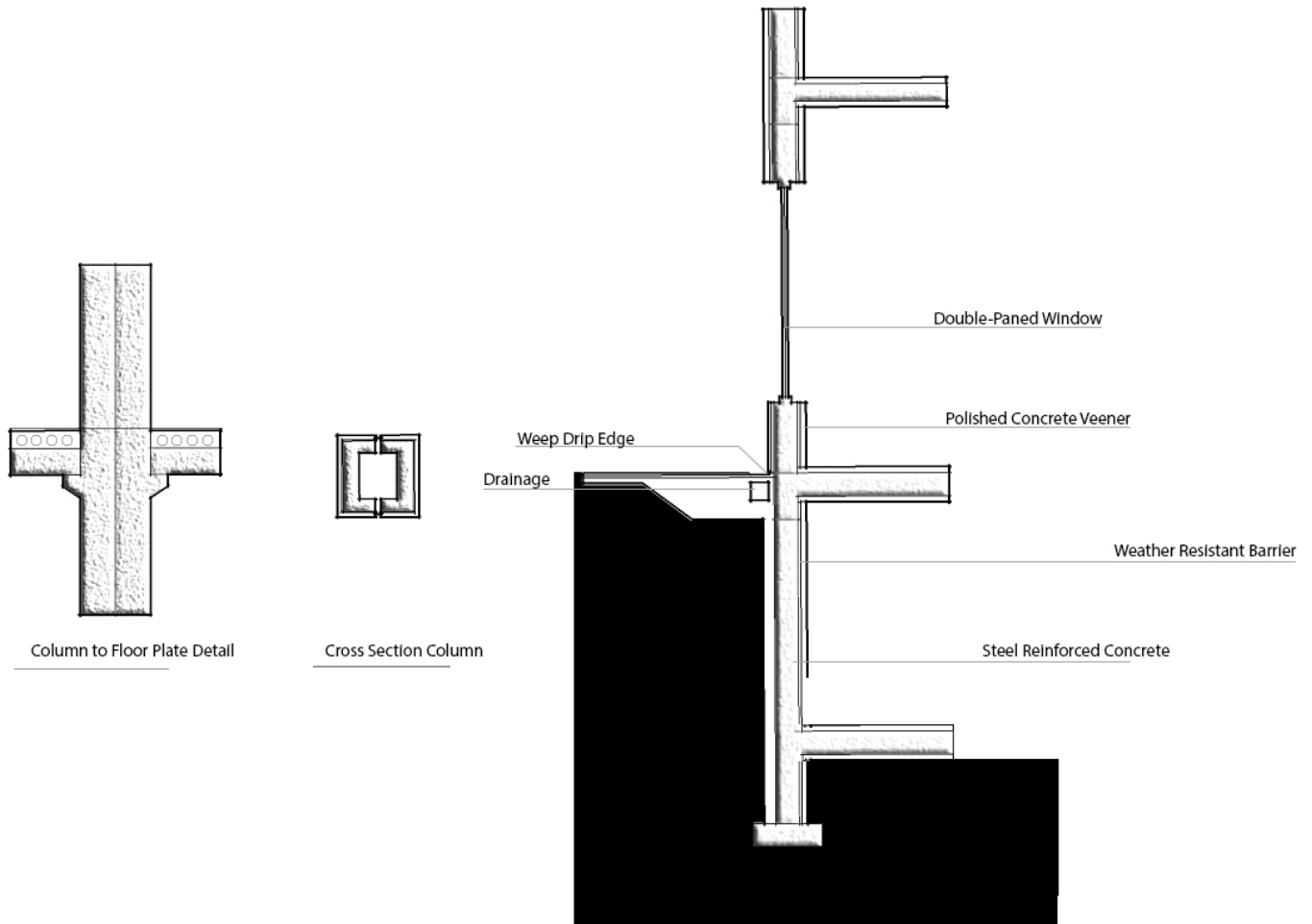
And finally brought up to the upmost floor where they will exit into the cemetery to bury the body or place the body into the crematorium to burn the body as one last candle, one last goodbye, one last message. The section shows the funeral space in each individual floor and day, from the first day being placed in the ground, as the body is placed half-way into the ground, because although the body is dead, Hmong people believe the soul is still within.



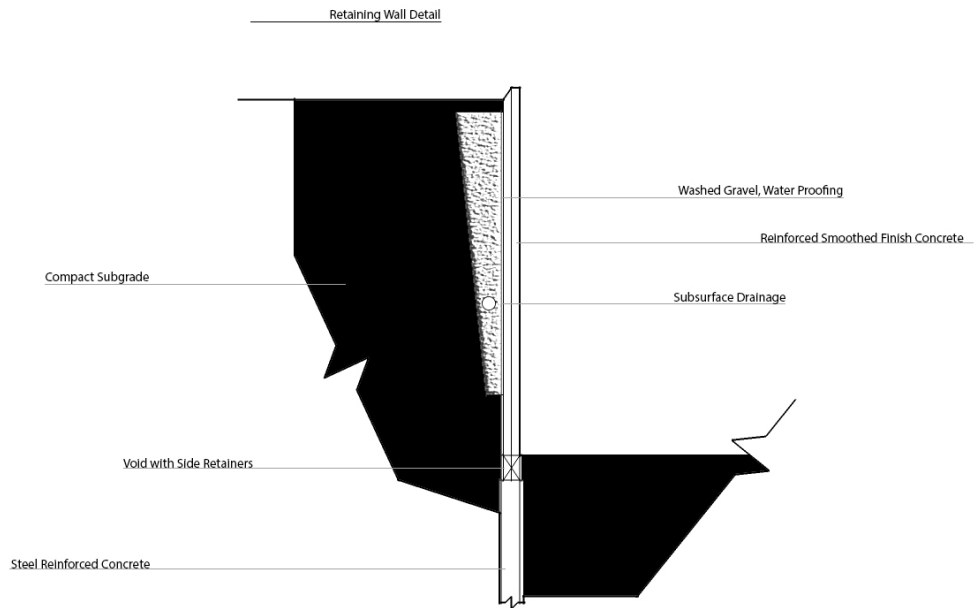


The ritual ends where it begins, at the entry way of the funeral home. The building brings you through the procession of the cycle of life and death, vertically through the stairs and horizontally through the circulative nature of the ritual.

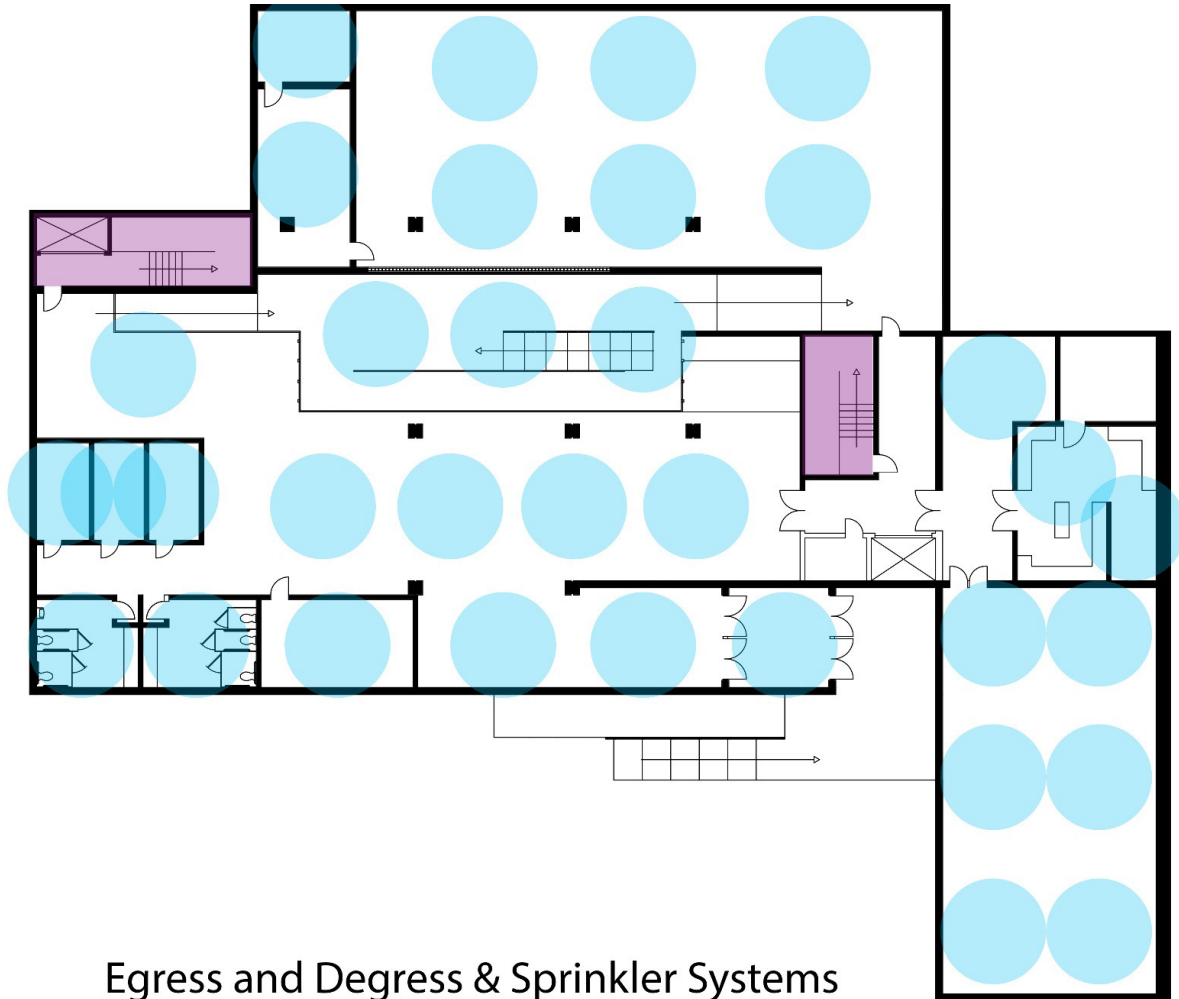
Technical Drawings



The structure of the building consist of concrete beams and columns connected by metal connectors. The walls towards the berm, are water retaining walls and load-bearing walls with column revealed and polished on the inside. The columns become more than just a structural system by becoming hollow and allowing the HVAC and electrical throughout the building vertically.

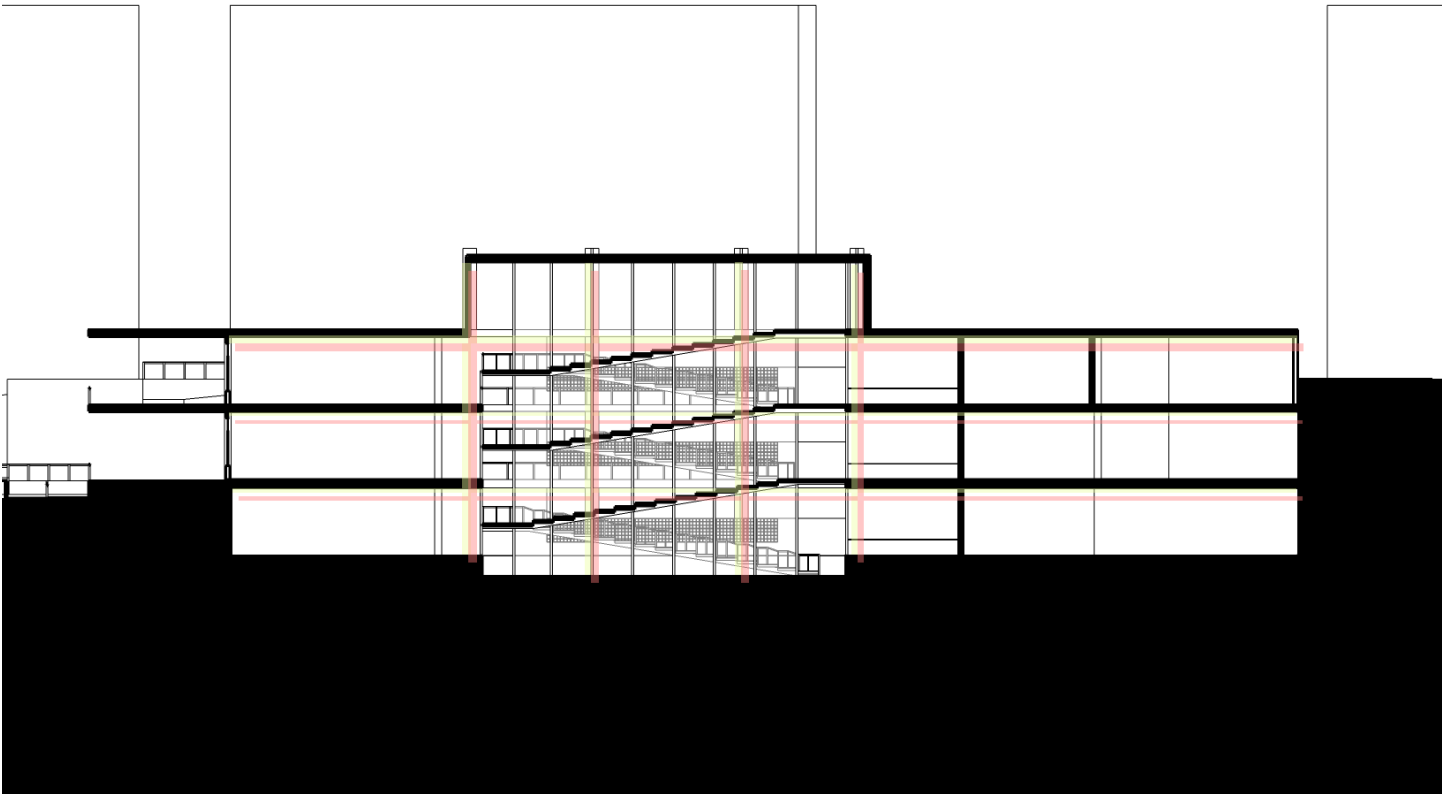


The retaining wall detail for the berm becomes the memorial wall as well as the placement of the dirt dugout from the ground to allow the foundation and the bottom floor possible.



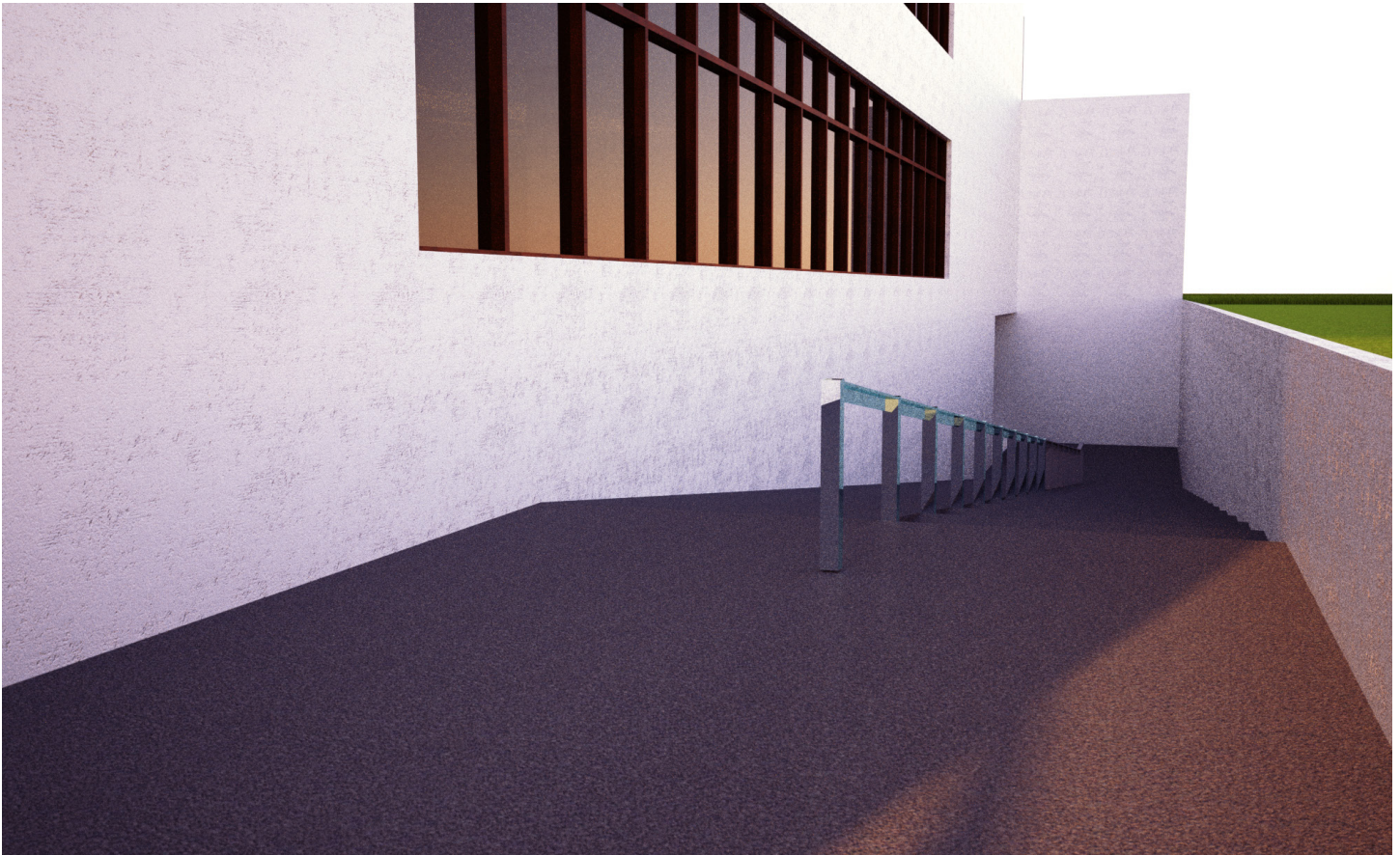
Egress and Degress & Sprinkler Systems

The sprinkler system covers the entire building and is repeated through the floors, the Egress and Degress staircases are located on opposite side of the building to allow people to exit and enter the building in emergencies safely.



The HVAC and Electrical ducts and wirings are all connected throughout the building through the floors and the columns to create a cohesive system between structure and HVAC and Electrical systems.

Conclusion



The final design of my thesis seeks to answer the question of the importance of sacred architecture in our modern age through the lens of the Hmong community. The architecture I have designed brings you in between and through spaces that coherently interact with one another through the movement of people. The transition spaces become the emphasis of the design, creating a portal or a gateway for the user. As if entering into a new space is a constant transcendence through the building. The building brings you up and down through the procession of time, through the four days of the ritual, which is manifested into the design of the building. Each floor plays their own part, in the building, revealing and concealing the elements of the building, as if the parts become the whole slowly throughout the ritual.

Natural light comes into the building through two specific spaces, the veil staircase and the dining space, both serving as a lighting system and a play of contrast between darkness and lightness throughout the building. The light from the candle wall shines through the veil to create ephemeral images of shadows that disappear and reappear into the dining space, reminding us of the short-lived happiness that exists in life and death.

I believe my final design attempted to answer the question of the importance of sacred architecture in our modern age semi-successfully. It focused on the elements of the sacred space from historical precedents but I failed to portray the importance of these spaces architecturally. Imitation is part of learning but to truly understand the importance of sacred architecture, I must be able to reinterpret it into my own design and somehow bring what is familiar into what is unfamiliar with the viewer. In that sense, I believe I have failed but the project was not a complete fail, I have learned many things from the project. The process of sensitively integrating research with actual design, requires you to immerse yourself into a different paradigm and mindset. Design is a perpetual discovery of one's self's and other's works, as a student and future professional we are never actually done designing.

Appendix

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Previous Studio Experience

2nd Year

-Fall: Darryl Booker
Tea House
Boat House

-Spring: Stephen Wischer
Twin House
Performance Center

3rd Year

-Fall: Paul Gleye
Downtown Moorhead

-Spring: Frank Kratky
Steel Building ; Steel Stilts
Concrete Building ; The Voice

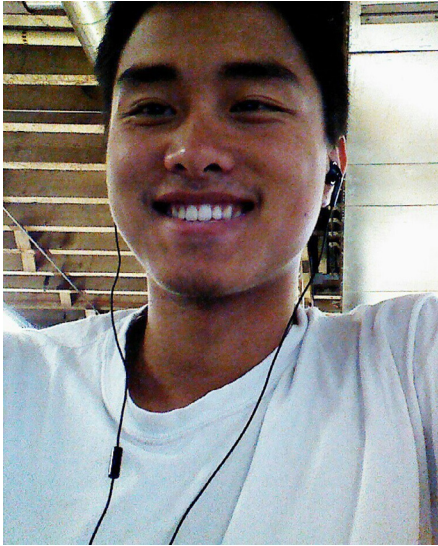
4th Year

-Fall: Bakr M. Aly Ahmed
Highrise

-Spring: Don Faulkner
Marvin's Window Competition
Uptown Renovation

5th Year

-Fall: Ganapathy Mahalingam
Research Project



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