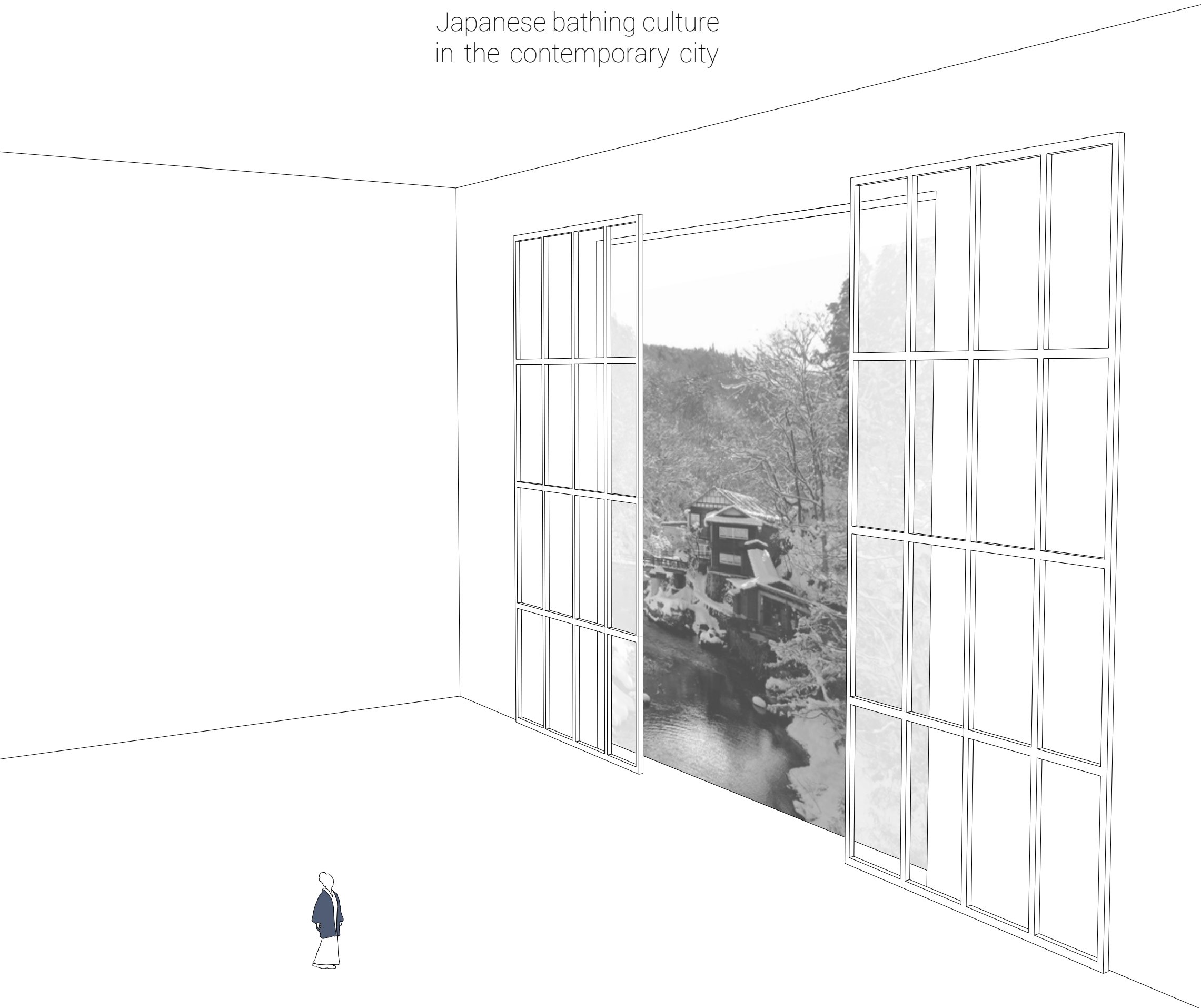


ONSEN

Japanese bathing culture
in the contemporary city



Onsen

Japanese bathing culture in the contemporary city

I love to wash
the dust of this world
in the droplets of dew.

Matsuo Basho



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AA 2016/2017

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Abstract

Japan has a long established culture of cleanliness permeating every aspect of daily life and culminating in the deep rooted communal bathing practices of *sentō*, public bathing establishments, and *onsen*, bathhouses served by hot spring water. These are considered almost a religious ritual, where bathing is more than just a way to cleanse from material dirt. Moreover, bathing in hot water, especially if enriched with the precious minerals contained in hot spring water, is scientifically proven to help relax and relieve stress and would constitute a great help in improving the lives of Japanese employees, notoriously subject to long and gruesome working hours. Therefore, *onsen* practices are just as relevant in contemporary society as they were at their origins. Nonetheless, the popularity of Japanese *onsen*, particularly the ones located inside the big cities, has been steadily decreasing in the past 50 to 60 years, due to a variety of factors, among which the widespread presence of private in house baths and the intense lives of the urban population.

Following these considerations, this thesis originally determined a series of ten eminent case studies, based on their historical importance, architectural relevance and popularity. These were then analysed in order to deepen the understanding of the process of traditional bathing and the sensory experience it involves. The research highlighted how a series of common features, ranging from the services available inside the establishment to the selection of specific colours and materials for the interior and exterior finishings, to the contact with the natural surroundings, were instrumental in the production of the specific environment of relaxation and intimacy that makes said case studies so effective in their activity. Urban *onsen* generally do not possess such characteristics and this is possibly one of the reasons their popularity

is considerably lower compared to their rural counterparts. In order to increase their success and attract a wider range of clientele, it could prove beneficial to include these features in the current establishments. While it's not always economically or practically feasible to modify the existing building, on some occasions, it is possible to juxtapose an additional construction to it. Therefore, this thesis develops the concept of "adding new features" quite literally, by annexing a small module to the existing bathhouse, in order to insert the functions that are missing while at the same time recreating the remote and traditional atmosphere that they are currently lacking. These additions should also attempt to involve the local community by including existing public space into the project or by opening private areas towards the neighbourhood.

This concept was then implemented on two different case studies of Tokyo bathhouses. In the case of Jakotsuyu Onsen, located in the heart of Asakusa's business district, the addition consisted in the creation of a capsule *ryokan* for workers of nearby office buildings.

In the case of Sasazuka Onsen, a neighbourhood bathhouse in the centre of a residential area, a small tea house and traditional Japanese garden were designed in order to attract potential passers by and benefit residents in the neighbourhood.

The final designs allow the definition of a prototype of a small addition that can be modified in shape, size and function according to specific needs and further applied on different existing establishments.

This solution offers a potentially generalisable approach that could be applied to urban *onsen* throughout the nation improving their current features in order to increase the well being of their patrons and consequently their popularity and success.

Part I: An enquiry

In the lonely mountain
water is overflowing over the tub
steam of this hot spring
is thicker than the mountain fog

Yosano Akiko





Communal



Takaragawa Onsen
Gunma



Yamashiro Onsen Soyu
Ishikawa



Hoshi Onsen Chojukan
Gunma



#09
Lamune Onsen
Oita



LaQua Onsen
Tokyo



Aqua sports & SPA
Tokyo



Busshozan Onsen
Kagawa



Moku Moku Yu
Yamanashi



#10
Nakamura Keith Haring Collection Onsen
Yamanashi

#03

Kinosaki Onsen
Hyogo



#01
Dogo Onsen Honkan
Matsuyama



Goza No Yu
Gunma

Sakuradai Hisamatsu Onsen
Tokyo



#08

Ginzan Onsen Shirogane Yu
Yamagata



Traditional

Contemporary

#02

Nozawa Onsen Ōyu
Nagano



#07

Ginzan Onsen Fujiya
Yamagata



Kaede No Shōja
Oita



#06
Hoshinoya Onsen
Tokyo



#04
Horai Onsen
Shizuoka

Amanemu Resort
Mie



Intimate

INTRODUCTION

Probably one of the most spotless megalopolis in the world, Tokyo has to thank Japan's long established culture of cleanliness for its well maintained parks and its immaculate public areas. Historians and travellers from all over the world commented on this people's cleanliness in the reports of their visits to the nation, starting from the Chinese in the third century, and its tidiness is apparent to anyone visiting the country¹. One of Japan's most rooted beliefs is the concept that one's living space is the mirror of one's soul, therefore maintaining bodies and environment clean is a way to keep minds pure and hearts taintless.

The Japanese seem to have an absolute horror of anything related to dirt and filth. Even their language follows the cultural belief that cleanliness is strictly related to godlikeness and dirt to evil. *Kirei*, the term for clean and neat can also translate with beautiful and fair. *Fuketsu*, dirty, also means impure. *Kitanai* means filthy and unclean, but at the same time vulgar and calculating.

Originating from its traditional religion, cleaning practices permeate every aspect of life in Japan. Shintoism, the intricate assortment of native beliefs and mythological elements that constitute Japan's most diffused religion, is largely centred around the element of water and includes a series of *harae*, rituals, involving the symbolic act of washing oneself or a series of sacred objects in order to achieve purity². Entering a Shinto shrine everyone is supposed to wash hands and mouth in water basins called *chōzubachi*, following the precise steps of *temizu* procedure, before approaching the altar to pray.

But *temizu* is not the only Shinto ritual revolving around water, a large number of shrines arise next to the sea and many religious festivals in-





clude the presence of water. One of the most famous ones is the *susu-harai*, a ritual consisting of a deep cleaning soot and dust in the shrine, traditionally on the 13th of December, as a way to thank the *kami* for all the good of the previous year and to purify the shrine before the beginning of the new year.

Cleaning also concerns people's belongings and the environment in which they live. Workers are expected to keep their offices tidy at all times and schoolchildren are in charge of the cleaning of their whole school after class. Employees are often seen wiping the floor of their office buildings and students substitute janitors in most schools, from kindergarten to high school, swiping floors and scrubbing bathrooms for thirty minutes every day after lunch. This also becomes a lesson on social responsibility and character shaping as well as team building and respect for each other.

A common practice across the country is *Ōsōji*, a deep cleaning of homes, schools and workplaces that takes place at the end of every year³. Almost a ceremonial practice, it is seen as the way to psychologically bring the old year to a close and start fresh on the new one. For many families, this chore requires several days and includes the moving of furniture and the scrubbing of all remote corners that get overlooked during normal cleaning routines. The same goes for schools of every grade, that require students to move desks and cupboards in order to properly mop and scrub behind everything.

However, it's the daily act of bathing the clearest symbol of these rooted traditions. Such a menial task for the western world has become almost a religious ritual in Japan, where bathing is more than just a way to cleanse one's body from material dirt. The act of *nyuyoku*, to wash



3.

oneself, is rather a metaphorical mean to purify the spirit through water. The second *kanji* of that word, the one indicating the syllable *yoku*, means at the same time "to bathe" and "to receive an honour".

Moreover, while in many countries people enjoy a jacuzzi bath while on holiday, the concept of a hot bath is secondary to the main activity. It is usually seen as a way to relax after intense physical exercise, like a long day on the ski slopes or a difficult hike.

However, not many other cultures consider the idea of a hot spring bath as the express purpose of a holiday. Countries such as like Italy and other European nations where natural hot springs are diffused, see hot spring bathing like an important mean to relax and heal from a series of physical ailments, but it's Japan where the elements of cleanliness and relaxation assume such a central position in the life of everyone.

Most Japanese people take at least one bath every day, generally at night, as a way to relax after a long day of school or work. Many young women bathe twice, at the beginning and at the end of the day, especially in summer, when the weather is particularly hot and humid.

The bathing custom, that developed its current structure in the Edo period, requires defined spaces and equipments and has remained nearly unaltered in a thousand years. Washing doesn't simply involve a superficial soaping and rinsing, but it is an almost ritualised procedure consisting of a series of precise steps that include a thorough scrubbing of the whole body before entering the hot tub.

Contrarily to western habits, the tub is exclusively intended for soaking and the rule is clearly explained to all foreigners entering a public establishment. Dipping in it before meticulously washing the body or tainting the water with soap or foam are seen as an incredibly impolite action, almost insulting.

Cover image: 長崎県小浜温泉のうぐいすや旅館(公式). (2018). 小浜温泉宿うぐいす屋の自慢の露天風呂. [online] Available at: <https://www.uguisuya.com/お風呂/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

5. Matteogiachetti.com. (2018). Japan. [online] Available at: <http://matteogiachetti.com/portfolios/japan/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

1. 圓光寺の紅葉 - 京都で定年後生活. (2018). 圓光寺の紅葉 - 京都で定年後生活. [online] Available at: <http://blog.goo.ne.jp/teinengoseikatukyoto/e/788117e63b105c559722fe50cad3d67b> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

2. Pinterest. (2018). Japan Travel. [online] Available at: <https://www.pinterest.se/pin/279293614367941242/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

3. Trekearth.com. (2018). Wajima. [online] Available at: <https://www.trekearth.com/gallery/Asia/Japan/Chubu/Ishikawa/Wajima/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

4. Alamy.de. (2018). Neon Signs Kabukicho Shinjuku Tokyo Stockfotos & Neon Signs Kabukicho Shinjuku Tokyo Bilder - Alamy. [online] Available at: <http://www.alamy.de/fotos-bilder/neon-signs-kabukicho-shinjuku-tokyo.html> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

In addition to the hygienic implications of *sentō* bathing, *onsen*'s nature introduces additional important health benefits as a result of the properties of the minerals dissolved in the hot water. Living and working in Tokyo, I learnt first hand how stress and overwork can weigh on people's lives and how relaxation techniques can be important in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. *Onsen* baths can be instrumental in improving the well being of the Japanese people.

References:

1. The Economist. (2018). Very clean people, the Japanese. [online] Available at: <http://www.economist.com/node/153179> [Accessed 13 Jan. 2018].
2. Sokyo Ono; W. P. Woodard (1998). Shinto: the Kami Way. Rutland, VT: Tuttle
3. realestate.co.jp. (2018). End-of-the-Year Deep Cleaning in Japan. [online] Available at: <https://resources.realestate.co.jp/living/end-of-the-year-deep-cleaning-in-japan> [Accessed 13 Jan. 2018].

Boyd, J. and Williams, R. (2018). Shinto Purification Rituals - Introduction. [online] Wwww2.kenyon.edu. Available at: <http://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Fac/Adler/Reln275/Shinto-purification-rituals.htm> [Accessed 13 Jan. 2018].

Following these considerations, the thesis originally started with identifying the fundamental principles of Japanese bathing culture and the basic structure these types of establishments required in order to be functioning correctly. From there, a series of eminent case studies were identified and the characteristic elements of their architecture were classified in order to deepen the understanding of the process of traditional bathing and the sensory experience it involves.

All analysed *onsen* seem to offer some distinctive components such as their basic structure. Nearly always consisting of three well identifiable spaces, they always comprise a changing room, a washing area and a hot water tub, following the structure defined in the Edo period.

However, these are not the only factors common to all cases. Most effective examples of bathhouses exhibit other recurring characteristics, especially rural establishments. The element of nature is recurrent in the majority of the analysed cases, and is a way to encourage a feeling of relaxation and inner peace. A choice of natural and generally rough materials, like wood and stone, conveys neutral colours and is often employed to recreate the rustic feeling that is typical in traditional establishments.

For the same purpose, the contact with the outdoor environment is often central to the most outstanding *onsen* designs. Almost all projects

4.



include some sort of carefully designed garden and most of them comprise an outdoor tub that allows to combine the hot water bath with the cooling effects of the fresh air.

On the contrary, most *onsen* in Tokyo don't have the possibility to benefit from the contact with nature, due to their location in densely built areas and the general lack of privacy these establishments are subject to. Moreover, large part of Tokyo establishments were originally *sentō* and were converted into *onsen* when the new drilling technologies allowed them to access underground hot spring water, in an attempt to appeal to a wider catchment area. Therefore, the majority of the town's structures have maintained the general ambience of *sentō*, characterised by a more efficiency oriented environment. They are easily identifiable by their tiled walls and floors and a lesser attention to the perceptions and feelings of bathers.

Despite various attempts by the owners to attract a wider crowd, a series of circumstances brought these type of establishments to steadily decline in popularity. The diminished necessity for public baths, due to the widespread diffusion of private baths inside the apartments, is the main reason *onsen* and *sentō* demand has been decreasing in the past forty to fifty years. In addition to that, the cultural revolution of the Meiji restoration (1868 - 1912) brought to Japan a series of western influences, principally a stronger desire for privacy, that didn't conciliate with the concept of communal naked bathing. Furthermore, the intense work schedules of the average Japanese workers don't allow enough spare time to dedicate to relaxing activities such as out of town *onsen* trips and *sentō* visits. Therefore, while they are still seen as a treasured element of Japanese tradition and a pleasurable escape from day to

day routine, *onsen* visits today are largely considered a worldly pastime rather than a way to improve health and living conditions.

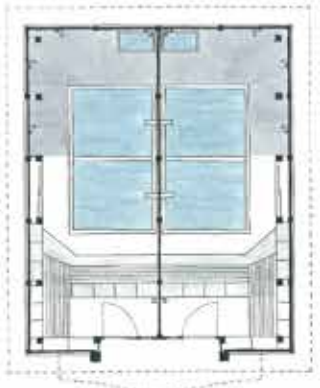
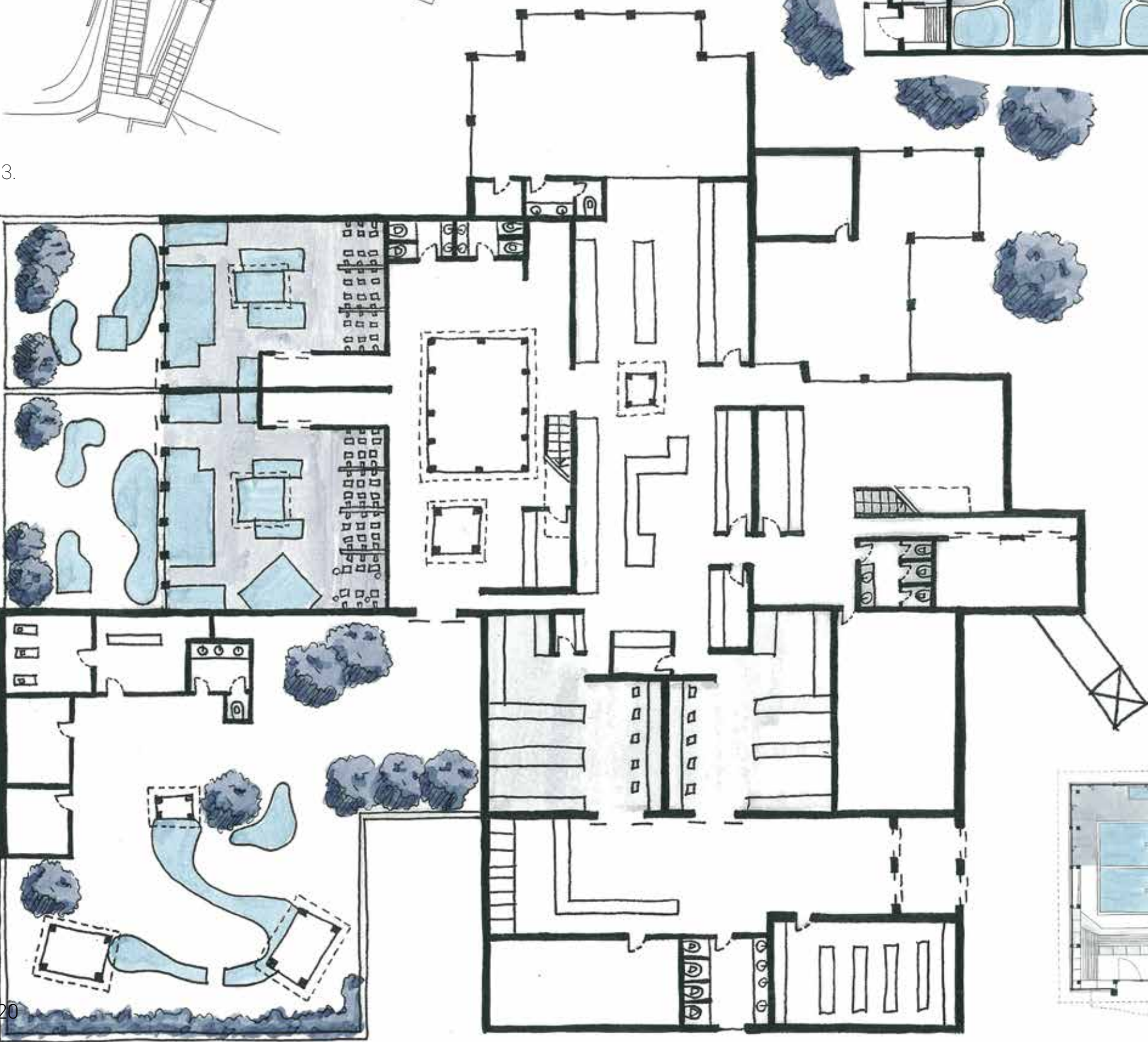
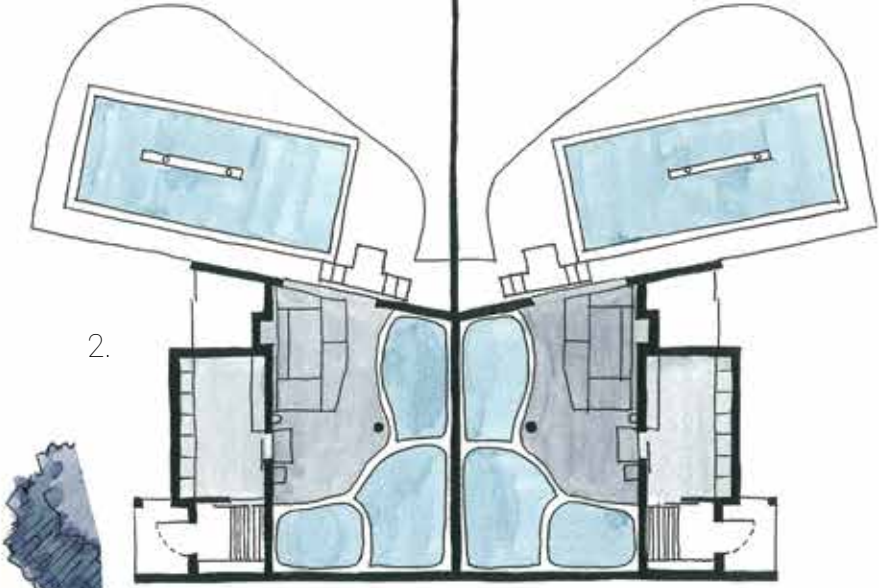
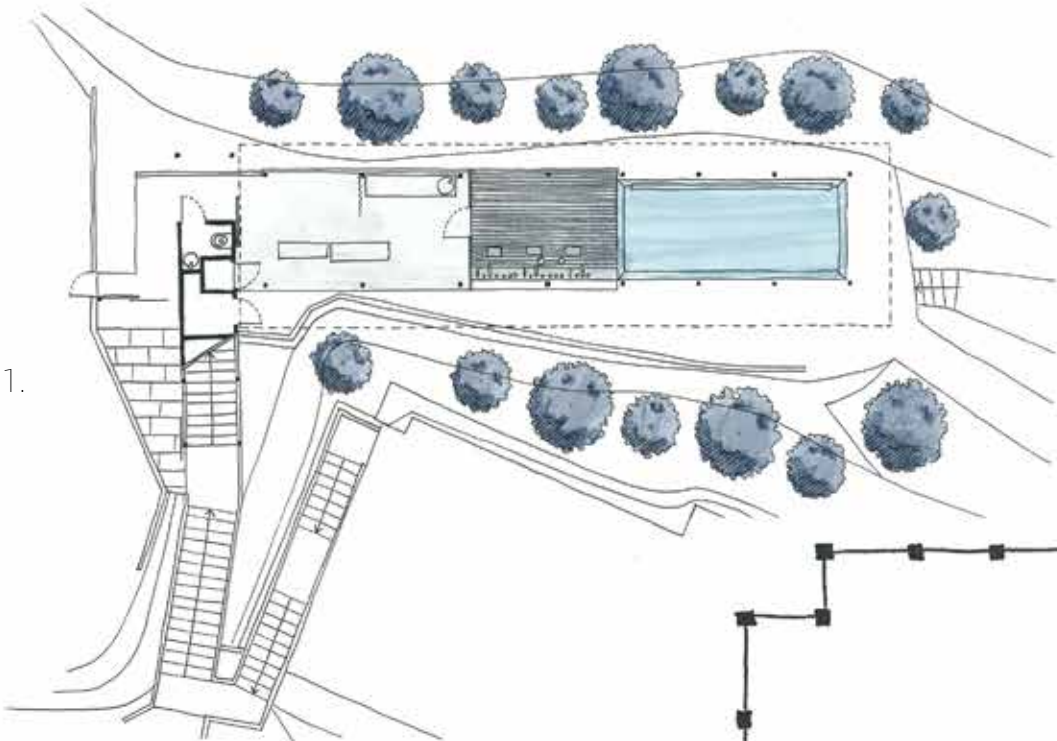
Nonetheless, I believe *onsen* still represent an extremely interesting challenge for architects in Japan, as well as an important historical heritage that gained its right to be protected and enhanced. Its millenarian tradition determined a rigid definition of spaces and functions that has to be maintained in its essence, while at the same time it requires a dose of innovation in order not to disappear. This establishes precise restraints to the design approach and represents a considerable limit to its modernisation, allowing designers limited room for manoeuvre. In addition to this, not many *sentō* and *onsen* owners can afford to undergo a long and costly renovation of their establishments, that would force them to close down for long periods of time and lose precious revenue.

Therefore, architects approaching this theme have to apply a contemporary approach while carefully balancing the traditional aspects of this historic institution. This will be the only way for *onsen* to stay relevant in an era where its popularity is at an all time low.



CASE STUDIES

	PROJECT	ARCHITECT	YEAR	LOCATION	TPOLOGY
#01	Dogo Onsen Honkan	Hachiro Sakamoto	1894	Matsuyama, Ehime prefecture	Public bathhouse
#02	Nozawa Onsen Ōyu	Unknown architect	1992	Nozawa, Nagano prefecture	Public bathhouse
#03	Kinosaki Onsen town	Various architects	1889 - 2001	Kinosaki, Hyōgo prefecture	Public bathhouse
#04	Horai Onsen	Kengo Kuma and Associates	2003	Atami, Shizuoka prefecture	Hotel communal bathhouse
#05	Oedo Onsen Monogatari	YOW Sekkei	2003	Kōtō-ku, Tokyo prefecture	Public bathhouse
#06	Hoshinoya Onsen Tokyo	Mitsubishi Jisho Sekkei, NTT FACILITES, Azuma Architect & Associates	2016	Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo prefecture	Hotel communal bathhouse
#07	Ginzan Onsen Fujiya	Kengo Kuma and Associates	2006	Obanazawa, Yamagata prefecture	Hotel private bathhouses
#08	Ginzan Shirogane Yu	Kengo Kuma and Associates	2001	Obanazawa, Yamagata prefecture	Public bathhouse
#09	Lamune Onsen	Terunobu Fujimori, Yoshiaki Irie	2005	Taketa, Ōita prefecture	Public bathhouse, museum
#10	Nakamura Keith Haring Collection Onsen	Atsushi Kitagawara	2007	Hokuto, Yamanashi prefecture	Museum with public bathhouse

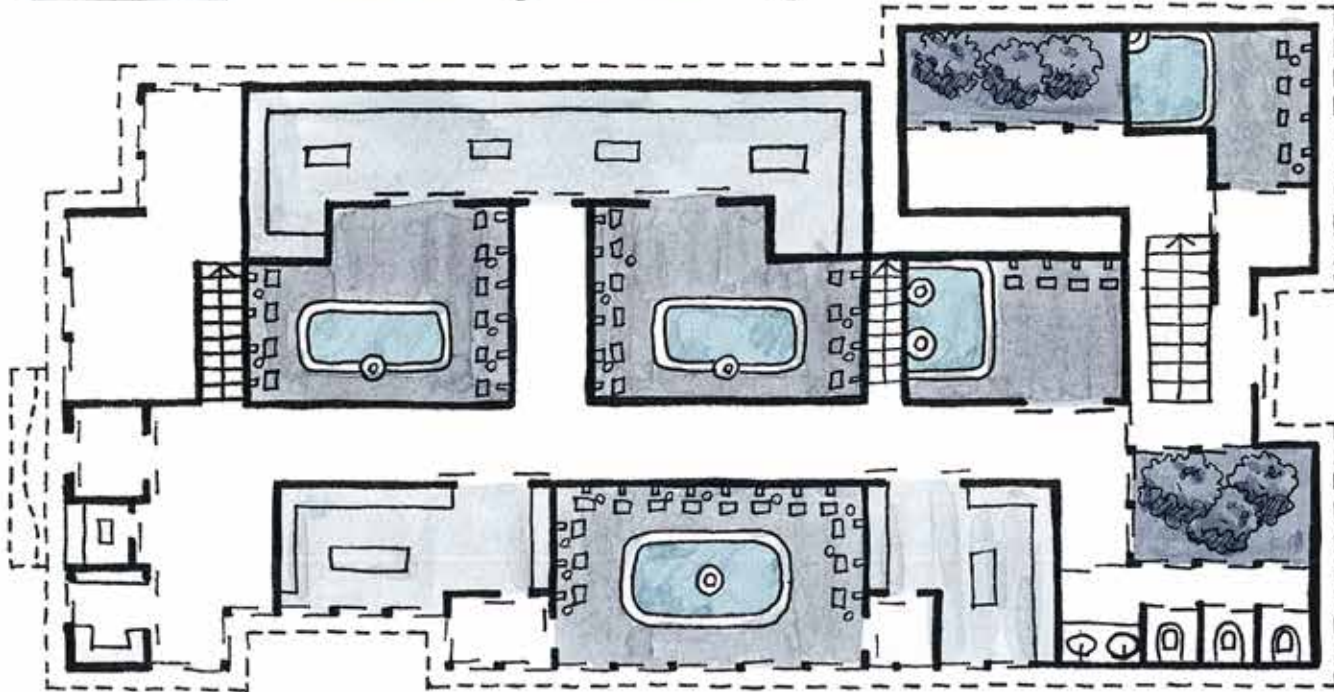
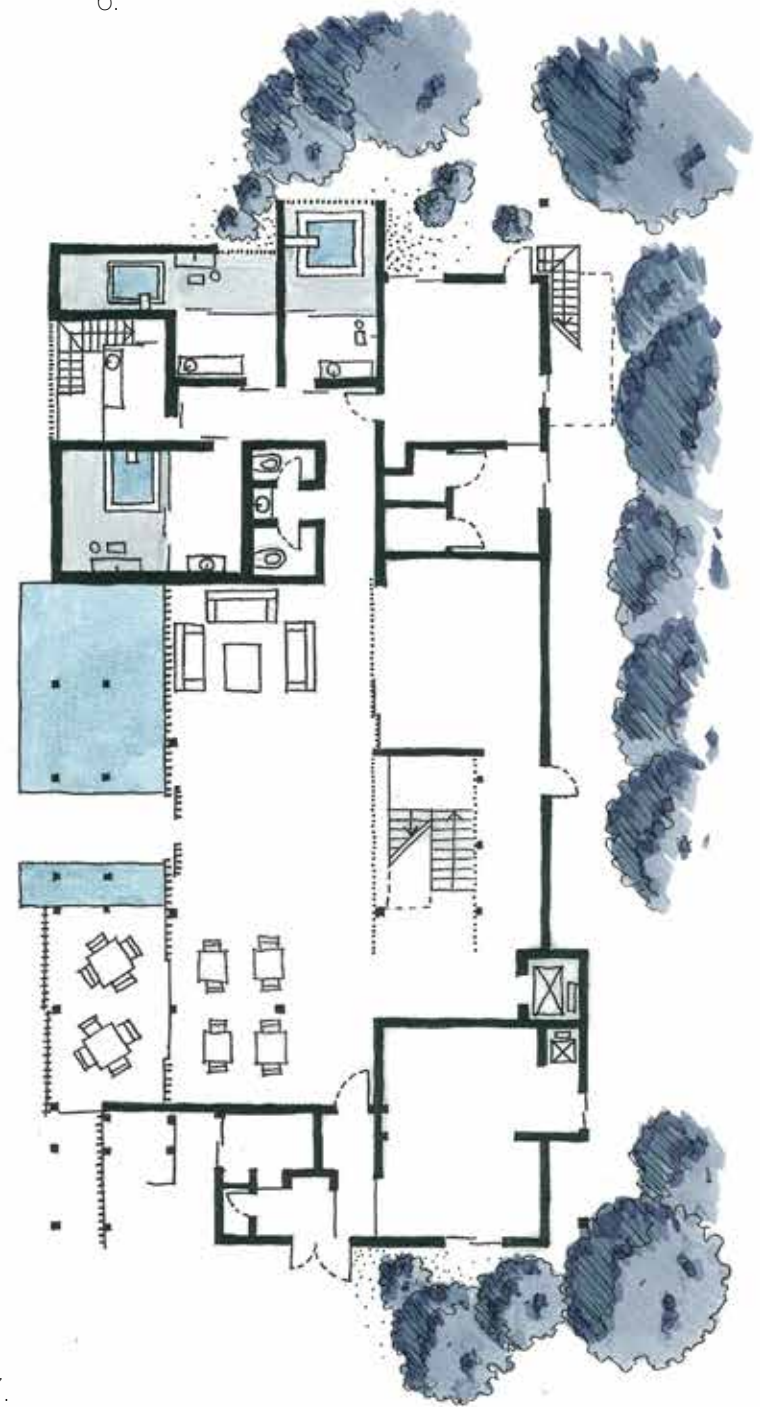




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1. #04 - Horai Onsen
2. #09 - Lamune Onsen
3. #05 - Oedo Onsen Monogatari
4. #02 - Nozawa Onsen Ōyu
5. #10 - Nakamura Keith Haring Collection Onsen
6. #07 - Ginzan Onsen Fujiya
7. #01 - Dogo Onsen Honkan
8. #08 - Ginzan Onsen Shirogane Yu
9. #06 - Hoshinoya Onsen Tokyo

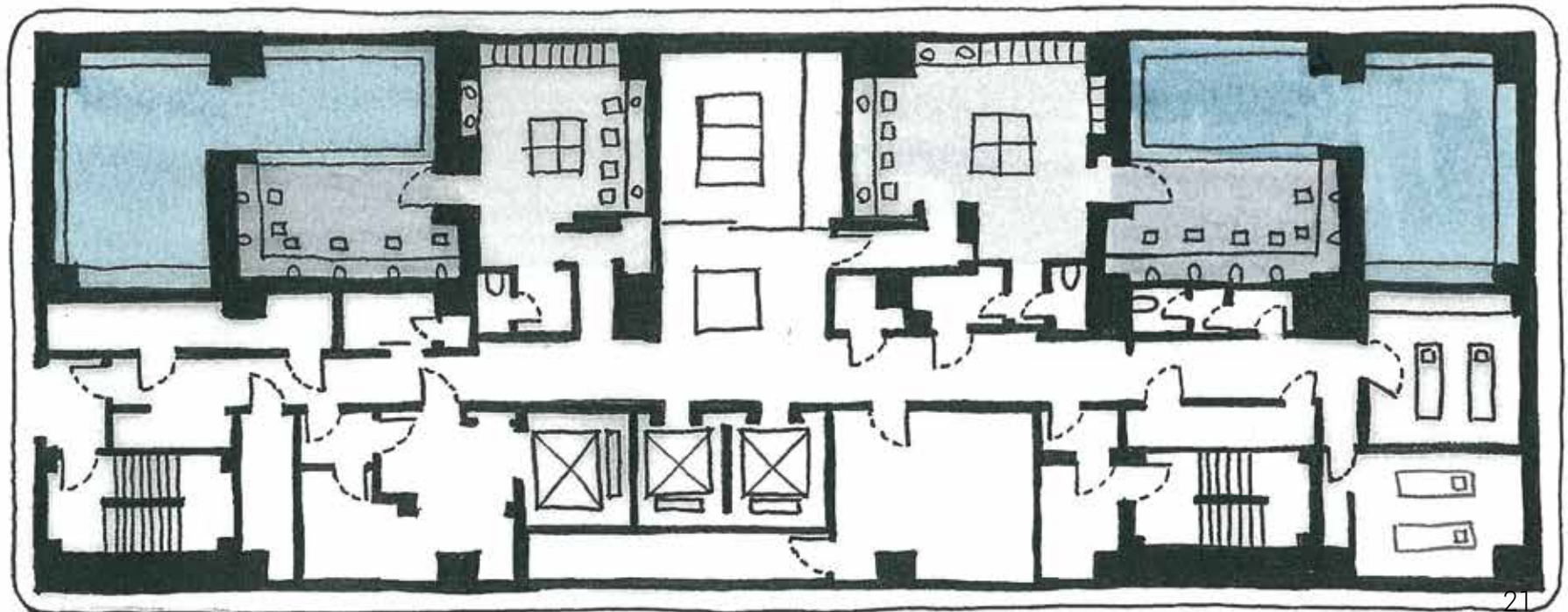
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BATHHOUSE PATH

1. #01 - Dogo Onsen Honkan, path to the male Kami no Yu, the larger bath

2. #06 - Hoshinoya Onsen Tokyo, path to the male rotenburo

3. #07 - Ginzan Onsen Fujiya, path to the three onsen on the ground floor

4. #04 - Horai Onsen, path to the only bathtub

5. #08 - Ginzan Onsen Shirogane Yu, path to the ground floor male bath

6. #05 - Oedo Onsen Monogatari, path to the male onsen, through the shoe lockers,
- the reception desk and the large central common relax and leisure area

7. #02 - Nozawa Onsen Ōyu, path to the male onsen

8. #09 - Lamune Onsen, path to the male indoor bathtub

9. #10 - Nakamura Keith Haring Collection Onsen, path to the male bath

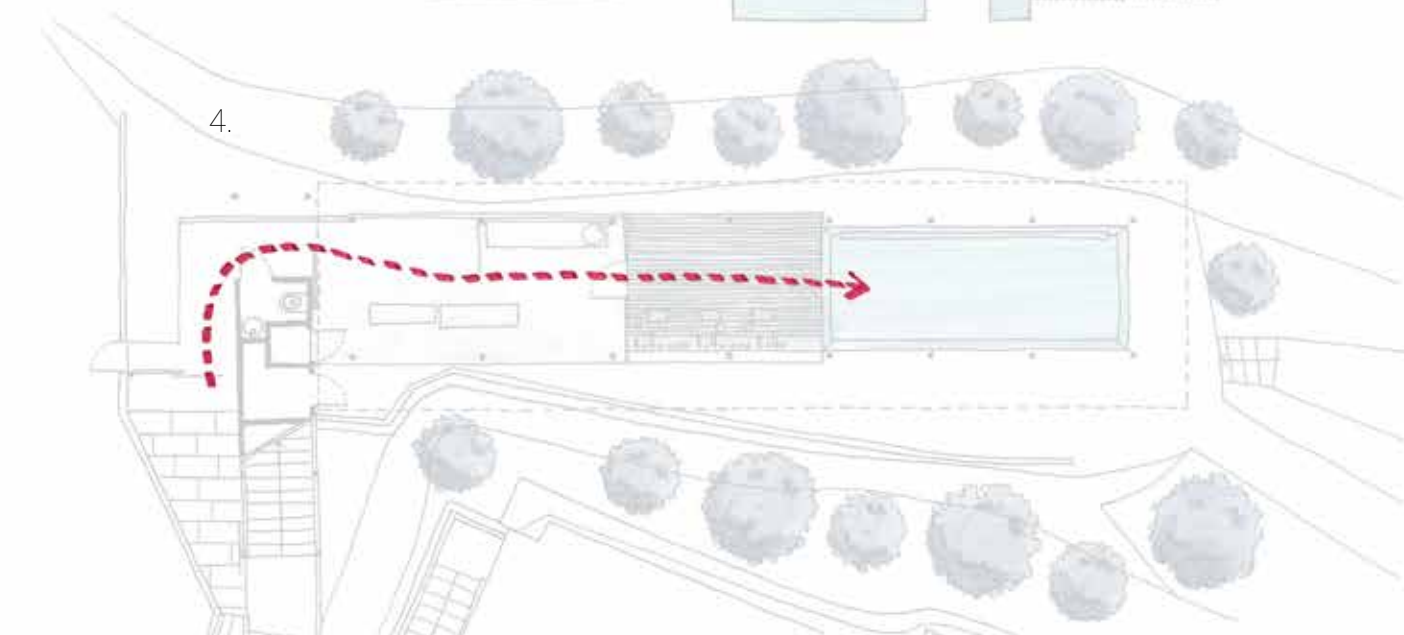
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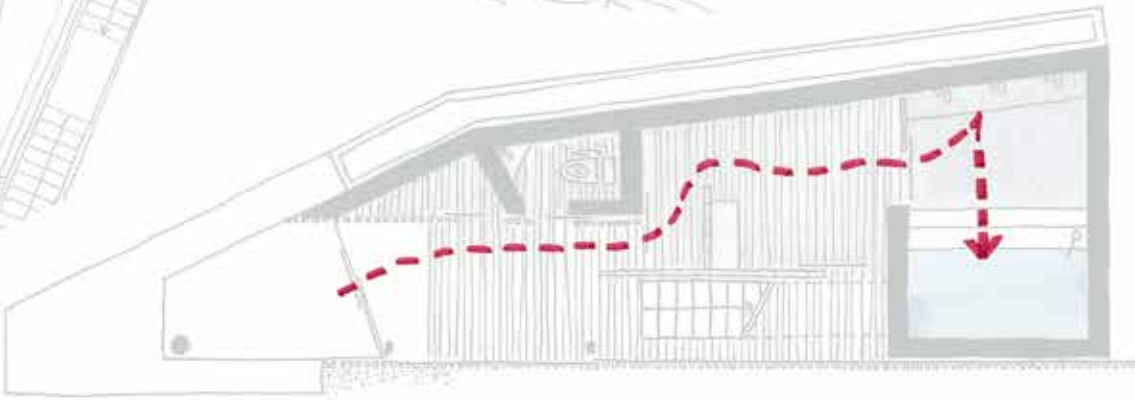
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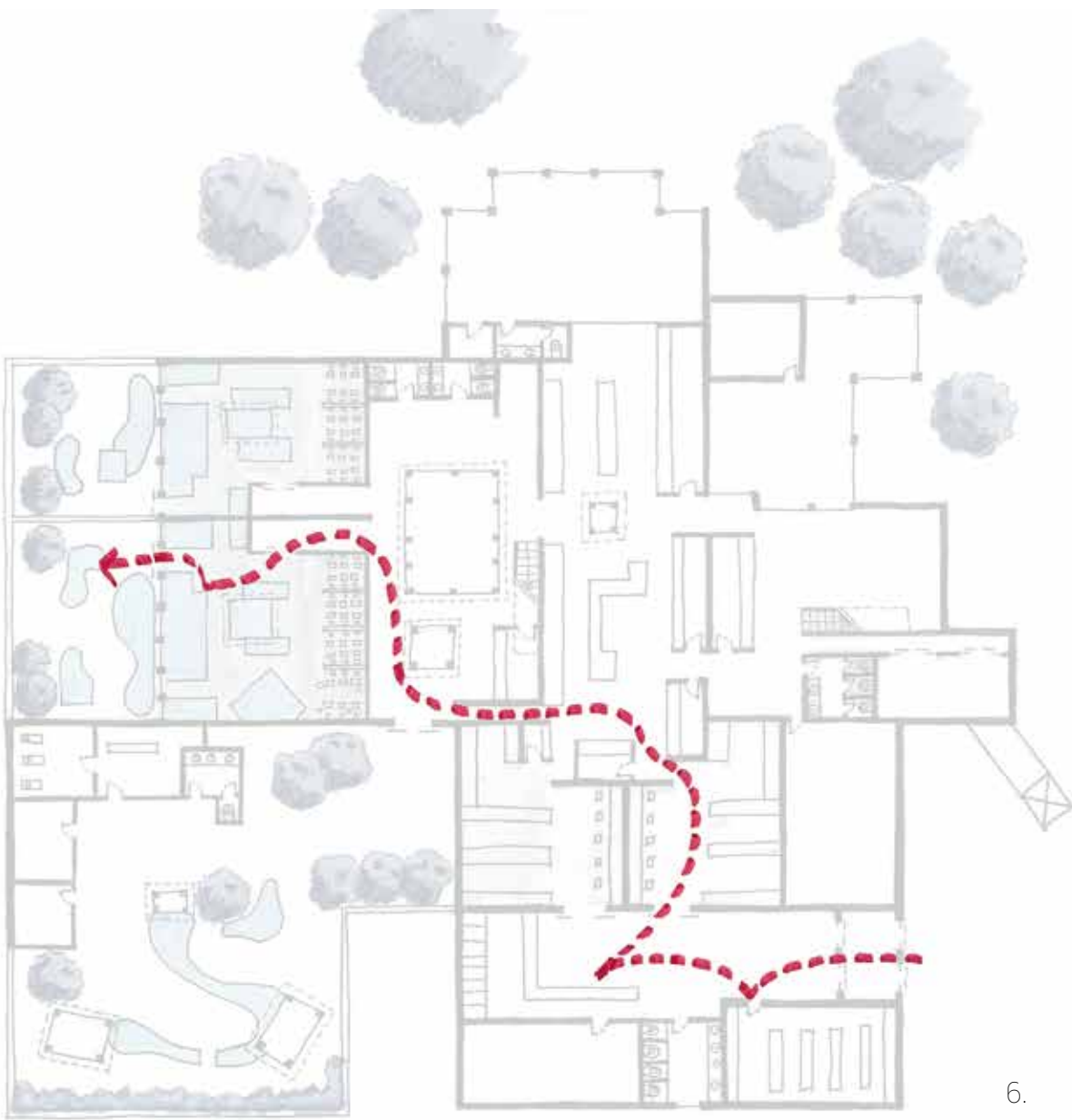


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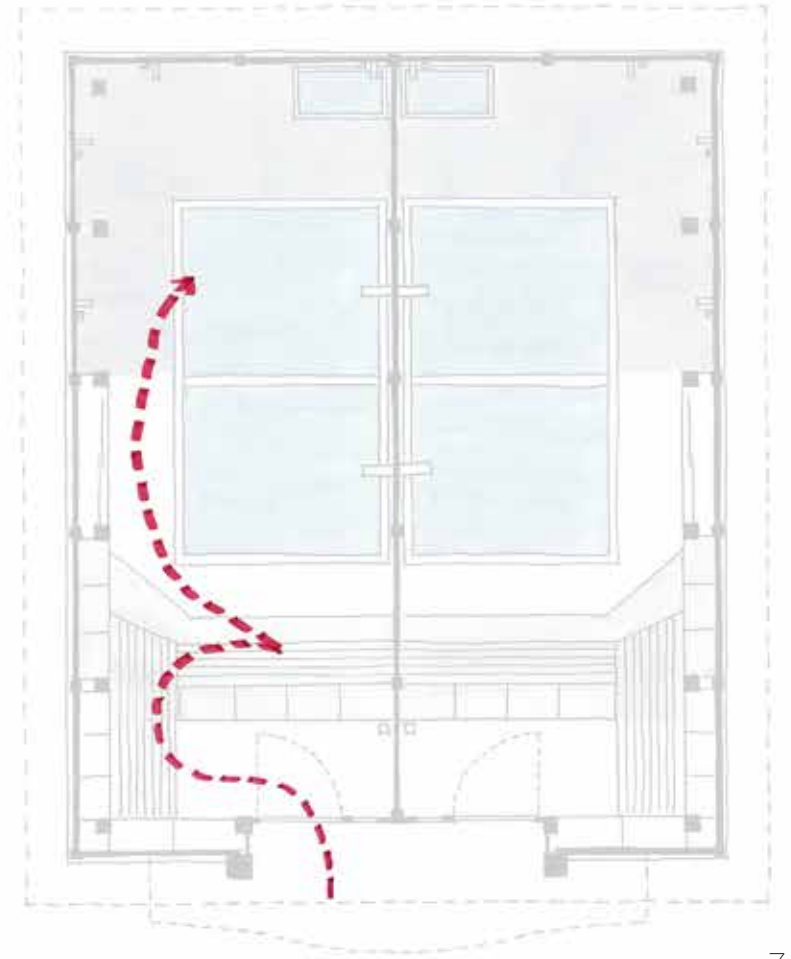


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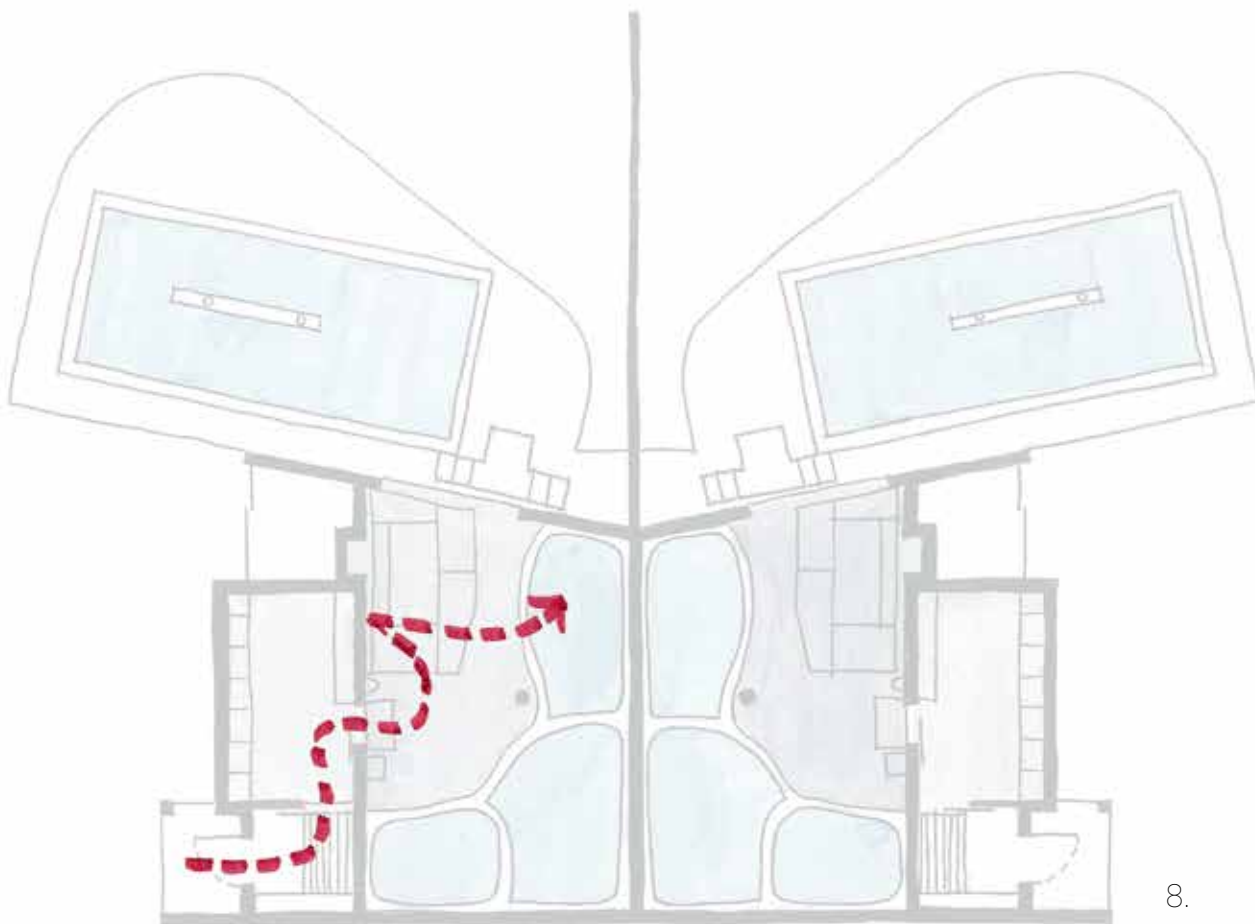




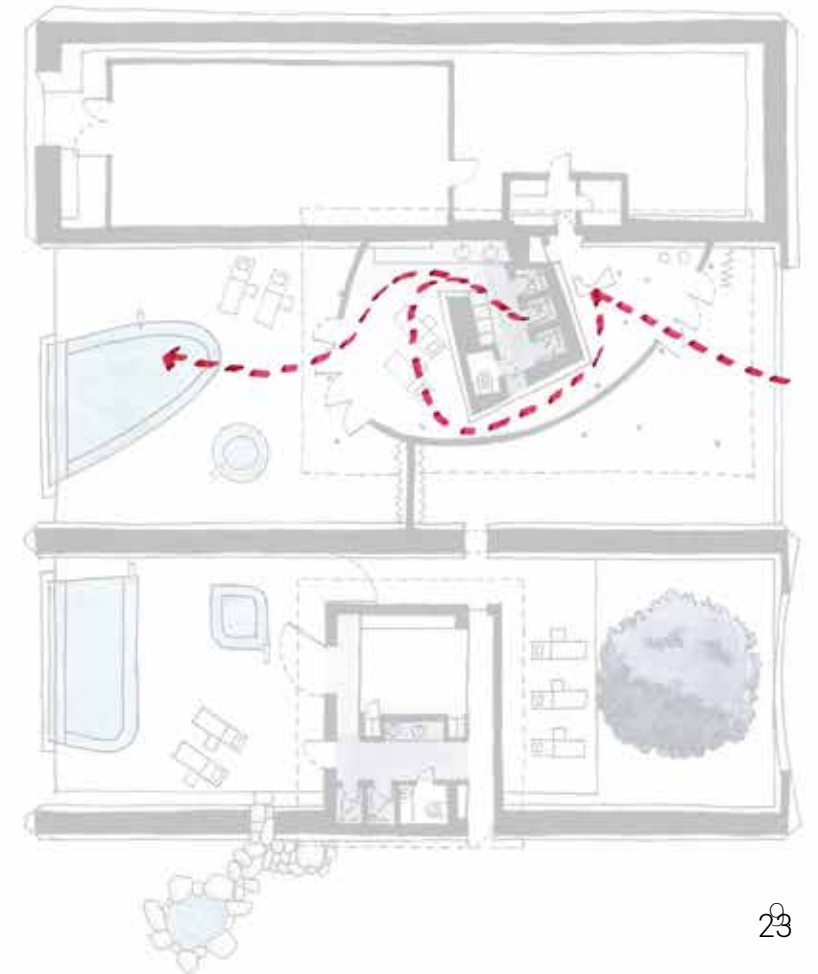
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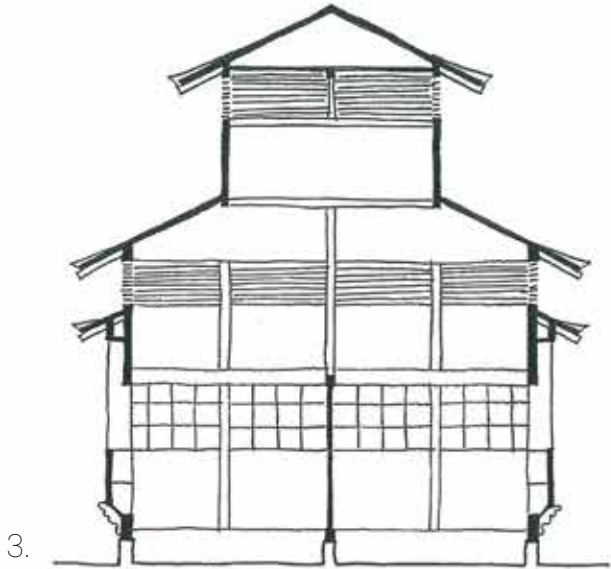
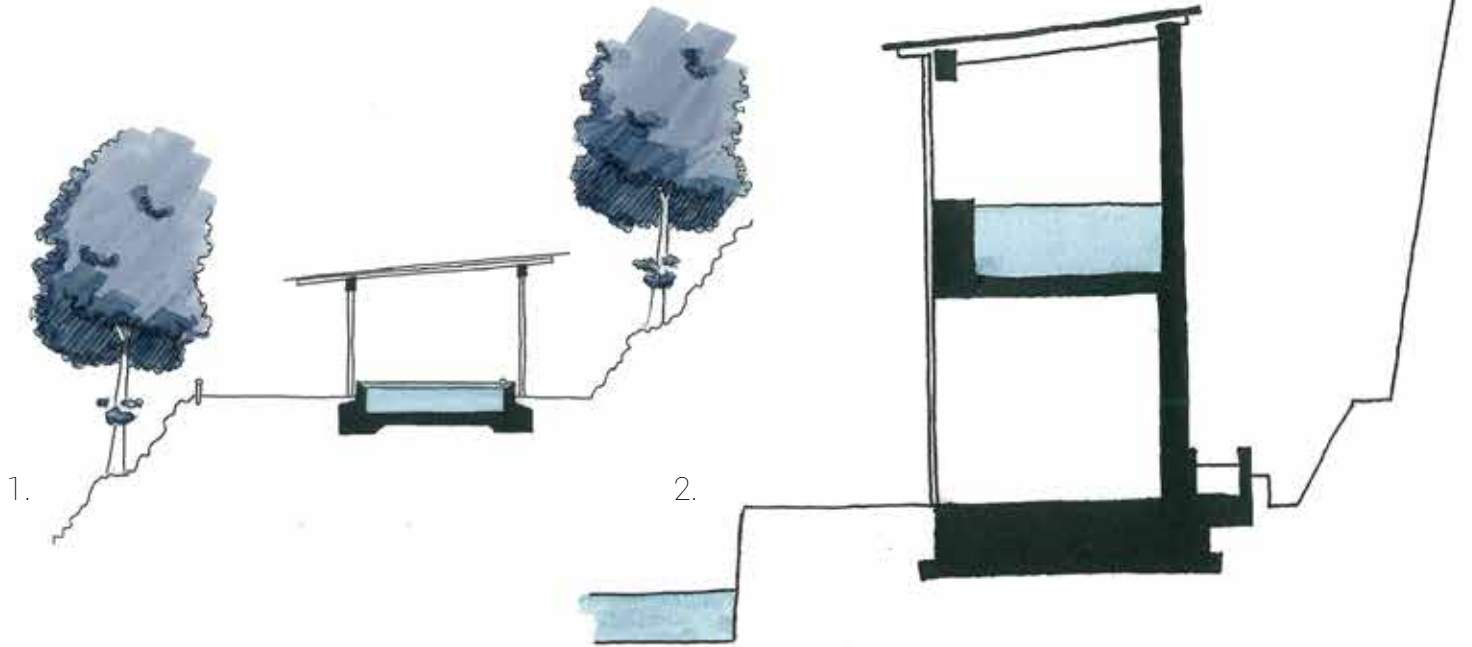
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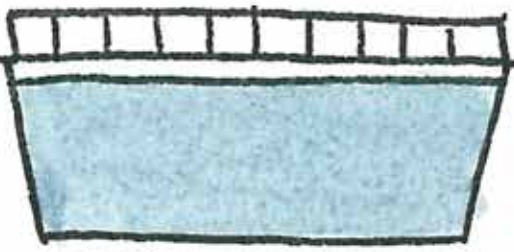
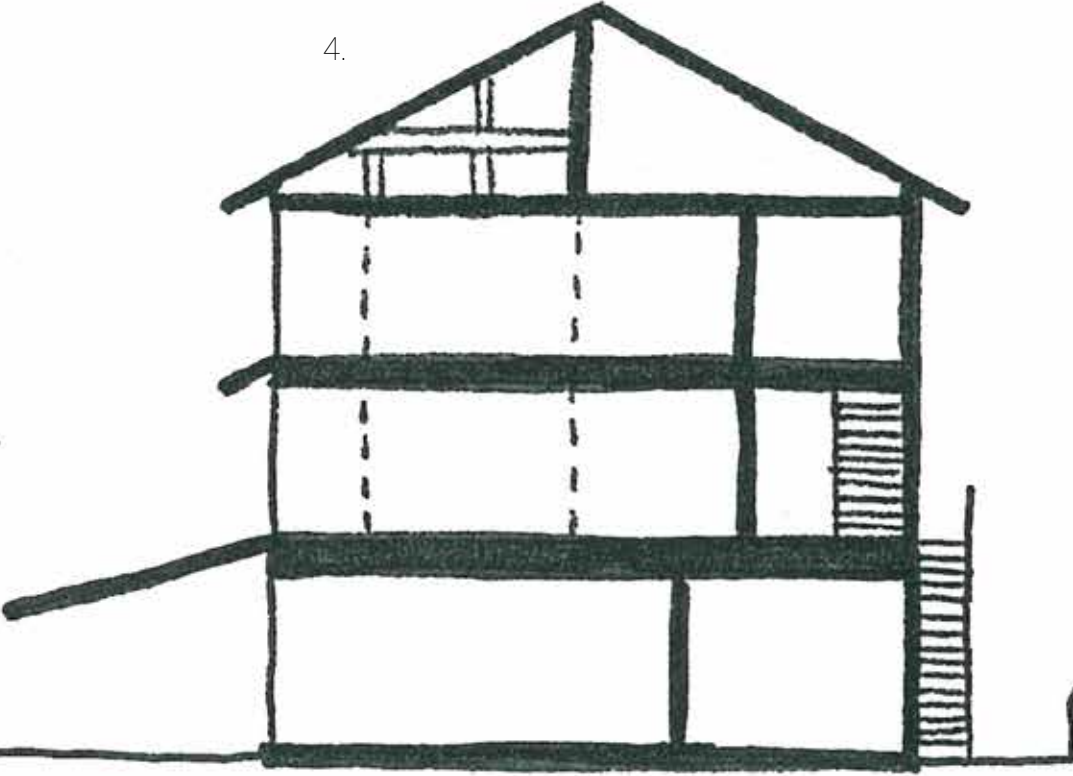
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TRANSVERSAL SECTIONS - SAME SCALE

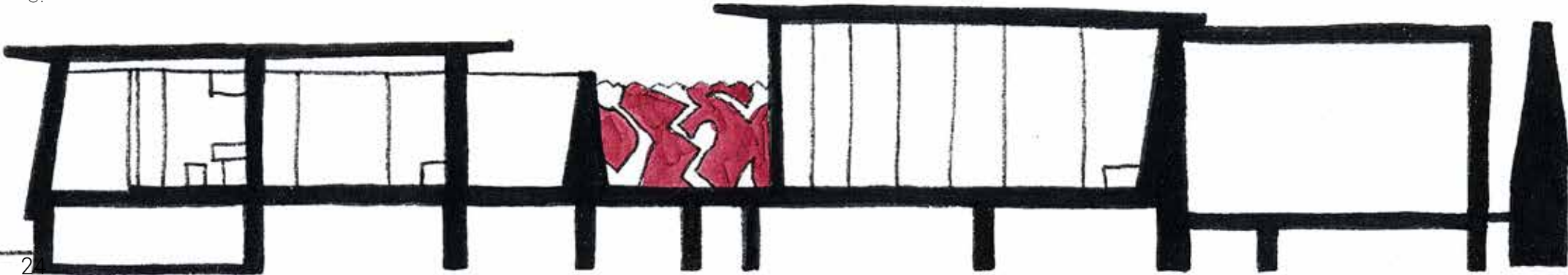
- 1. #04 - Horai Onsen, section through the bathtub
- 2. #08 - Ginzan Onsen Shirogane Yu, section through the ground floor waiting area and the first floor female bath
- 3. #02 - Nozawa Onsen Ōyu, section through the middle of the volume
- 4. #07 - Ginzan Onsen Fujiya, section through the front lobby and upstairs bedrooms
- 5. #10 - Nakamura Keith Haring Collection Onsen, section through the two main onsen buildings and the boiler room



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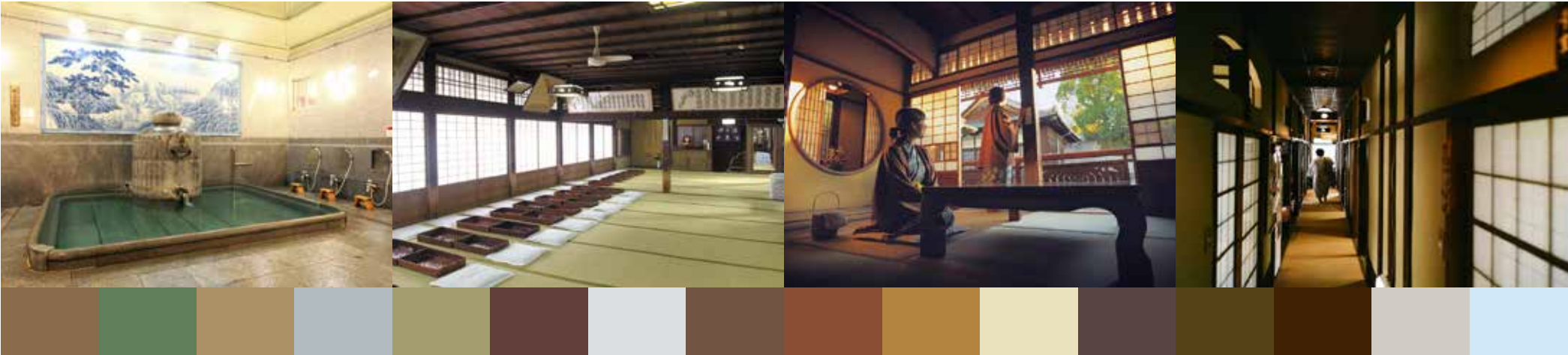


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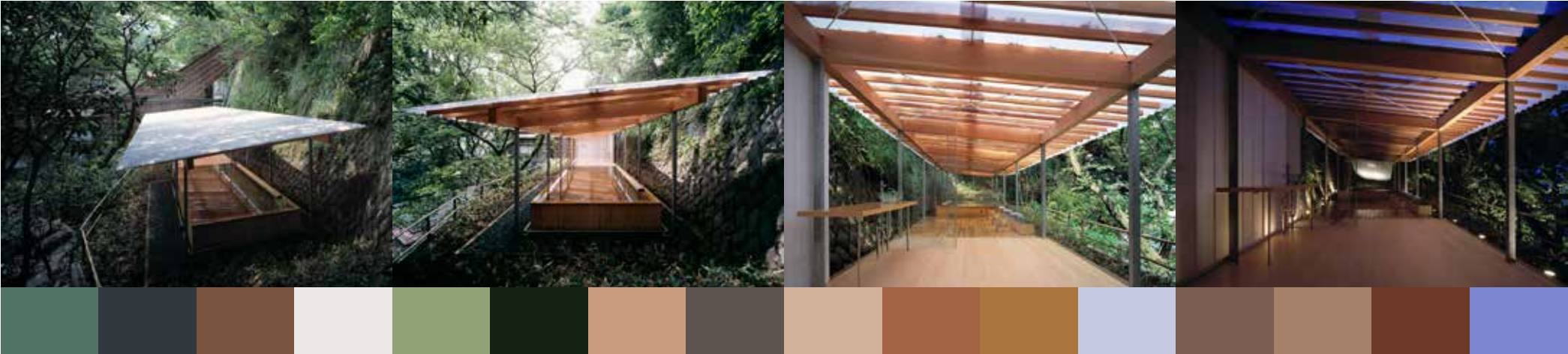


MATERIALS AND COLOURS I

#01 - Dogo Onsen Honkan



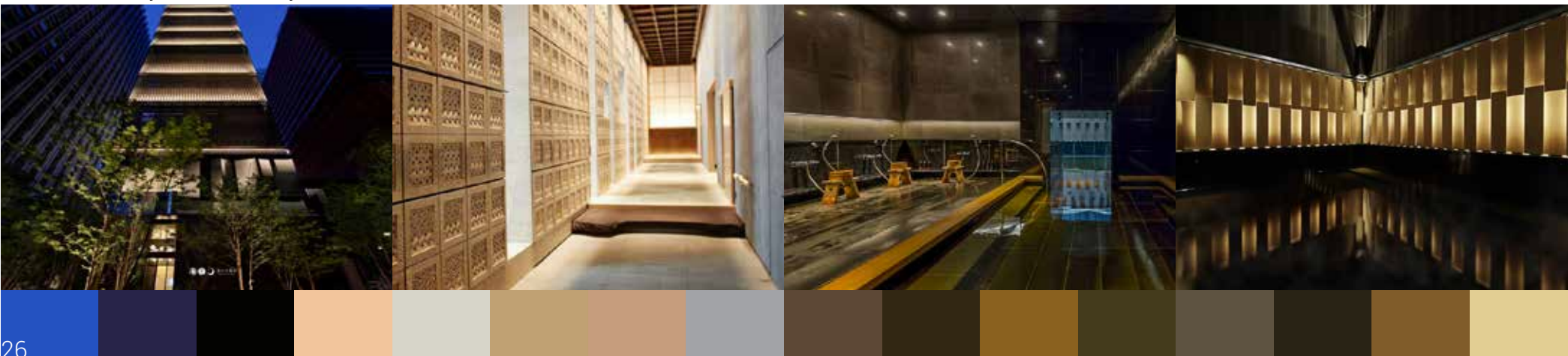
#04 - Horai Onsen



#05 - Oedo Onsen Monogatari



#06 - Hoshinoya Onsen Tokyo



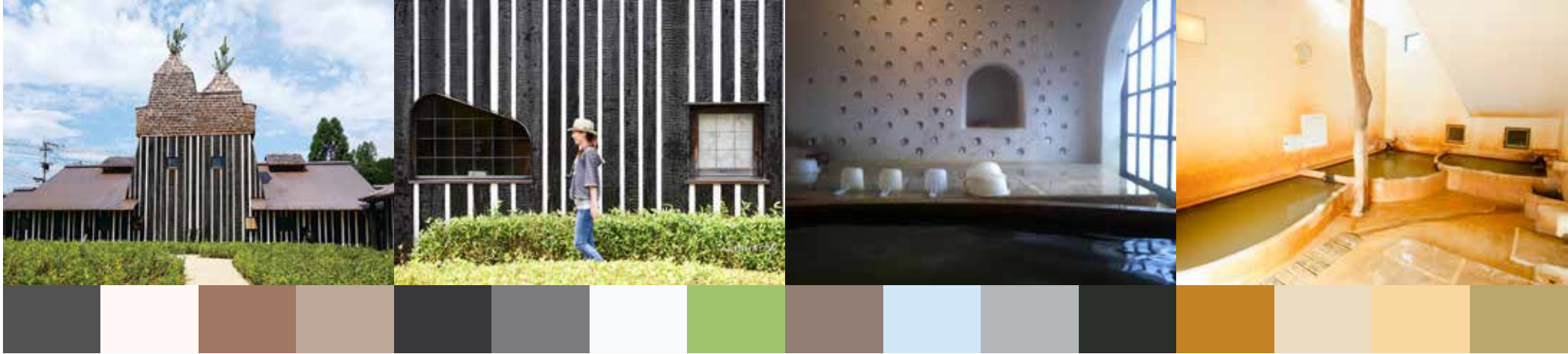
#07 - Ginzan Onsen Fujiya



#08 - Ginzan Shirogane Yu



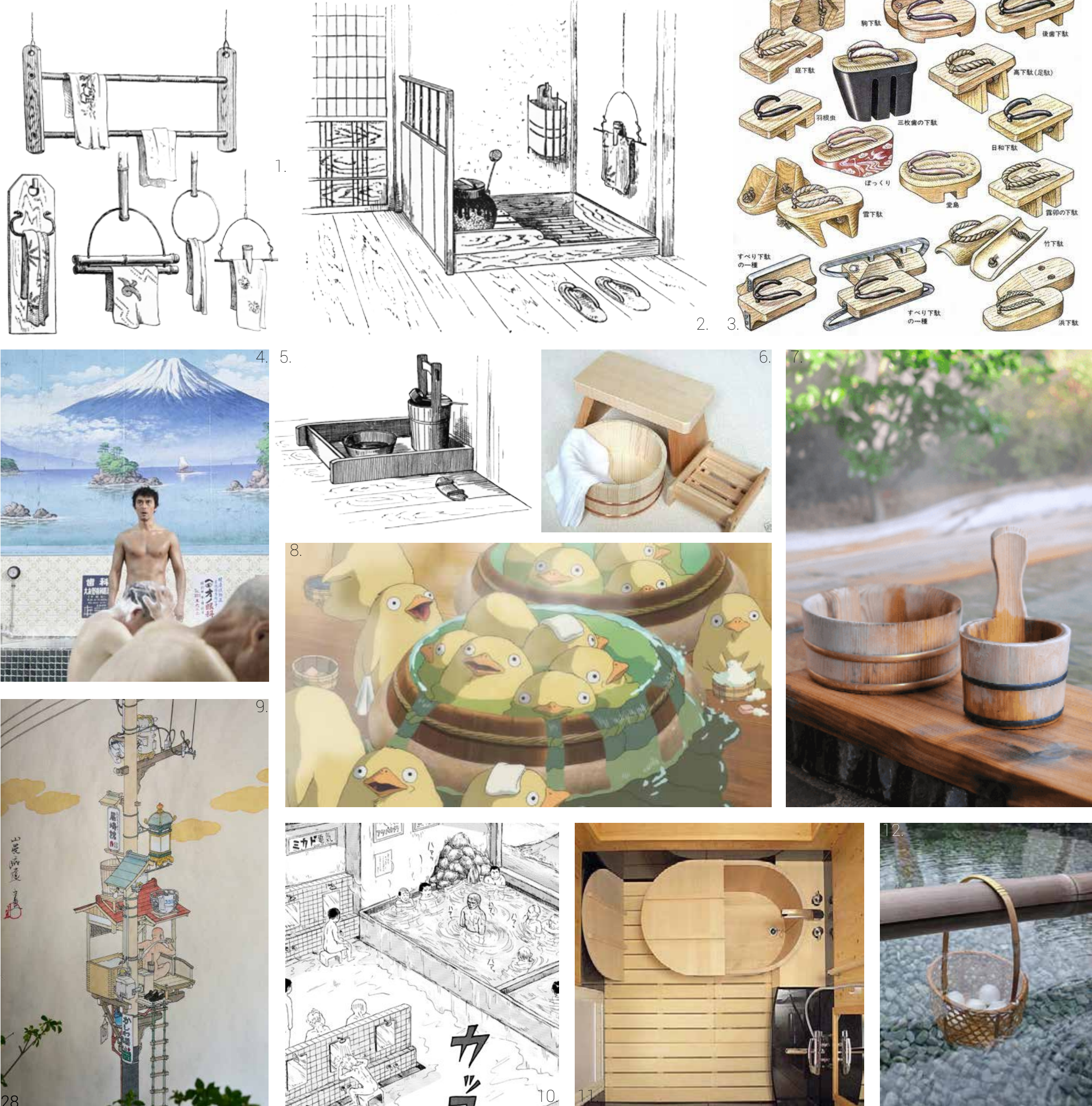
#09 - Lamune Onsen

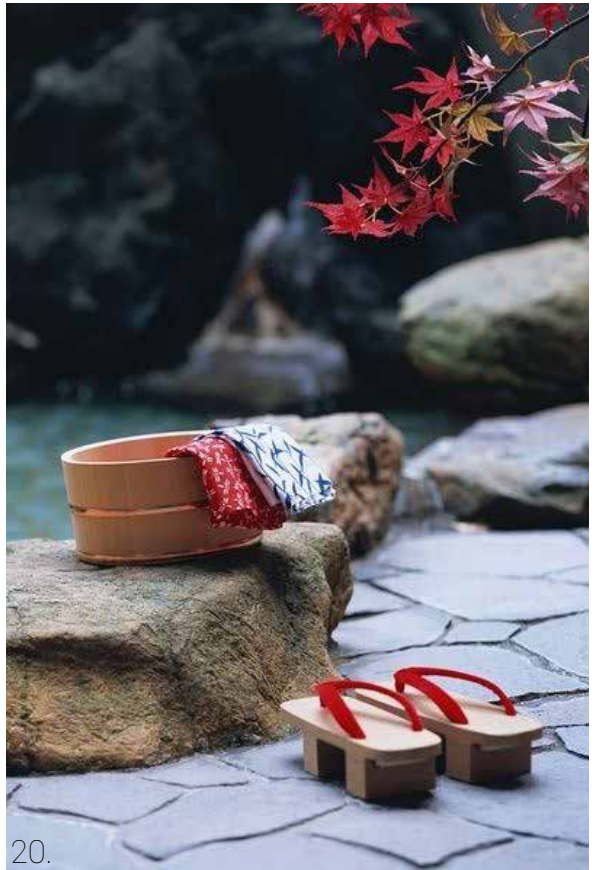
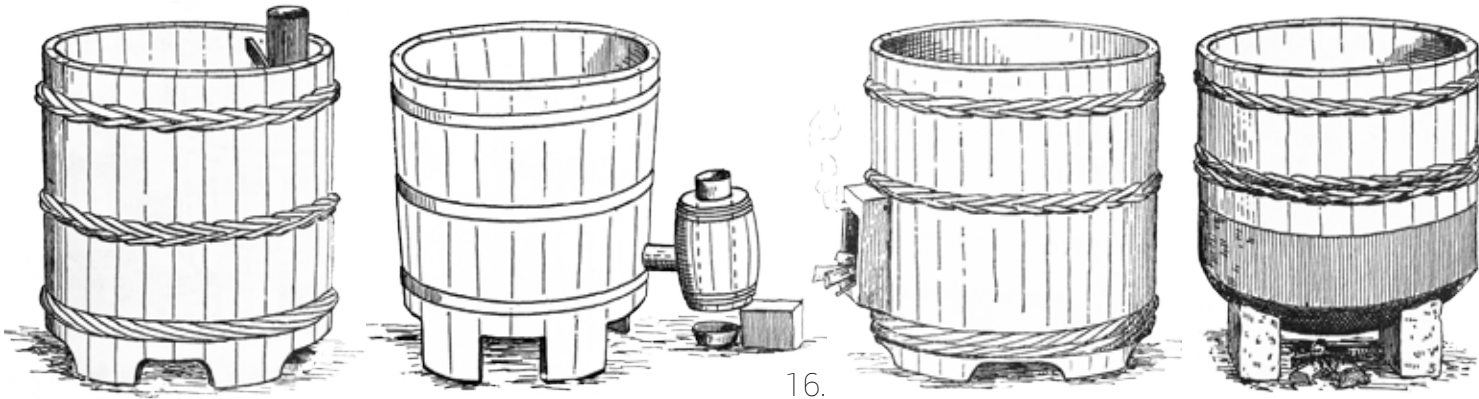


#10 - Nakamura Keith Haring Collection Onsen



BATHING ENVIRONMENT AND ITS COMPONENTS





1. Examples of traditional wooden towel racks, hand drawn by Edward Morse. An extremely accurate book by an American biologist visiting Japan describes with incredibly accurate details the characteristics of traditional architecture and offers a unique glimpse on 19th and 20th century Japan via accurate hand drawn sketches. This book was first-ly introduced to me by my now thesis supervisor during my Bachelor studies in Architecture and has been extremely treasured ever since for its accuracy in depicting details of Japanese culture and traditional life.

Source: Morse, E. S. (1886) Japanese Homes and their Surroundings, Charles E. Tuttle Company

2. A small chapter of the volume is dedicated to the description of baths and the traditional washing procedures, such as this sketch depicting a house lavatory he copied from an ancient book. Provided with a towel rack and a humble wooden basin, it originally was a simple rectangle carved inside a corner of the *engawa*, the verandah that run along the exterior walls of the house. Source: Morse, E. S. (1886) Japanese Homes and their Surround-

ings, Charles E. Tuttle Company

3. Different types of traditional footwear. Apparently only a mundane detail, these types of wooden thongs, called *geta* and *zori* depending on the model, largely influenced Japanese architecture. The rigidity of the material and the lack of cohesion with the foot translated in a peculiar way of walking and this, together with the use of tatami and the practice of kneeling or bowing out of politeness when opening a door turned in time in very characteristic architectural choices. Source: ブリタニカ国際大百科事典 小項目事典, 世. (2018). 下駄(げた)とは - コトバンク. [online] コトバンク. Available at: <https://kotobank.jp/word/下駄-59469> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

4. Scene from the movie "Thermae Romae", the popular comic that tell the supernatural adventures of the ancient Roman architect Lucius Modestus who travels in time to learn from modern Japanese bath-houses. Source: Kameyama, C. Et al. (Producer), & Takeuchi, H. (Director). (2012). テルマエ・ロマエ / Thermae Romae [Motion Picture]. Japan: Fuji Television.

5. A face and hand lavatory in a countryside *ryokan*. Much simpler than

the one in the previous image, this lavatory only consists of a wooden basin with its bamboo ladle and a bowl for the rinsing phase. Placed on a wooden tray, the items can be easily moved in order to be available for all inn's patrons. Source: Morse, E. S. (1886) Japanese Homes and their Surroundings, Charles E. Tuttle Company

6. Tradition inspired wooden bathing items: a stool, a water bucket and a soap container. The choice of wood as a main material for the realisation of bathing utensils, while initially due to its widespread diffusion and lack of artificial alternatives, is still a treasured element of Japanese bathing tradition. Therefore many traditional ryokan and contemporary high end hotels alike still prefer it to cheaper and more durable alternatives despite their large scale availability. Source: 吉粋. (2018). 北海道特産品 吉粋(きっすい) ホームページ. [online] Available at: <http://www.kissui.co.jp/cate/sobauchi/cutter/right/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

7. A very typical, and rather curious, bathing utensil is this small wooden bucket with handle, that allows a more comfortable rinse. Source: GOMAJI 夠麻吉. (2018). 北投-青礫名湯. [online] Available at: <http://www.gomaji.com/p154833.html> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

8. A scene from the 75th Academy Award winning animation movie "*Spirited Away*". While extremely surreal, the movie is extremely accurate in its depiction of *sentō*. Here chicks can be seen bathing with the traditional folded towel on their forehead. This is both a way to keep the towel out of the water while bathing and a way to mitigate the temperature difference between head and body. Source: Suzuki, T. (Producer), & Miyazaki, H. (Director). (1988). 千と千尋の神隠し / Spirited Away [Motion Picture]. Japan: Studio Ghibli.

9. A humorous drawing by painter Akira Yamaguchi depicting an improbable *ofuro* on an electricity pole. Source: Kyotobenrido.com. (2018). A4クリアファイル山口晃<丁字配行形柱>. [online] Available at: http://www.kyotobenrido.com/shopdetail/000000000686/pc_detail/ [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

10. A scene from the *manga* "*Thermae Romae*" from which the homonym movie was derived. Here the protagonist finds himself in a con-

temporary *sentō*, after an unexpected time travel under water. Source: Yamazaki, M. (2008). *テルマエ・ロマエ* / *Thermae Romae*. Tokyo, Japan: Enterbrain

11. Some bath producers sell wooden *ofuro* complete with contemporary reproductions of *hinoki* bathtubs. While extremely more pleasant than their modern resin counterparts, they can be quite costly and are only available to the wealthier. Source: Gifuproduct.jp. (2018). Introduction to Gifu Products | Product Information | WDF007303. [online] Available at: <https://gifuproduct.jp/english/product/detail/index/WDF007303> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

12. An extremely traditional practice in many *onsen* towns, it is quite common to find outside of a bathhouse a small basin where eggs are cooked in the hot spring water and sold for a few yen. Generally only soft boiled due to the relatively low temperature of the spring water, these eggs are a curious, but delicious snack after the bath. Source: Just One Cookbook. (2018). Onsen Tamago 温泉卵 • Just One Cookbook. [online] Available at: <https://www.justone-cookbook.com/onsen-tamago/> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2018].

13. Recoloured photo from 1873 of a samurai bathing in a wooden tub with the help of two women. This image offers a quite unique glimpse into the daily life of an ancient military nobility. Source: Commons.wikimedia.org. (2018). File: Samurai toilette Japan at the bas (dub tub).jpg - Wikimedia Commons. [online] Available at: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Samurai_toilette_Japan_at_the_bas_\(dub_tub\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Samurai_toilette_Japan_at_the_bas_(dub_tub).jpg) [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

14. Scene from "Spirited Away" showing the inside of the *sentō*'s washing room. It is apparent how both the interiors and exteriors of this fictional bathhouse were inspired by the Dogo Onsen Honkan building, in Matsuyama. Source: Suzuki, T. (Producer), & Miyazaki, H. (Director). (1988). *千と千尋の神隠し* / *Spirited Away* [Motion Picture]. Japan: Studio Ghibli.

15. A private bath, with a round stone bathtub and its wooden cover. Source: Dream of the Water Children: The Black Pacific. (2018). Bathing in Japan. [online] Available at: <https://dreamwaterchildren.net/2017/05/03/bathing-in-japan/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

16. Edward Morse's depiction of a variety of different wooden tubs and their systems for water heating. I found this a precious document for the understanding of old bathing practices. Source: Morse, E. S. (1886) Japanese

Homes and their Surroundings, Charles E. Tuttle Company

17. Apples being immersed in hot spring water in order to confer a peculiar aroma to it. This ancient practice is still widespread in rural Japan and different seasonal fruits are used. Source: Medium. (2018). Top onsens and spas in Japan to relax your day away. [online] Available at: <https://medium.com/@javonicoles/top-onsens-and-spas-in-japan-to-relax-your-day-away-921c207de4bf> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

18. A wooden faucet ensures a continuous flow of clean water inside most onsen tubs. Source: 네이버 블로그 | [어반네이처] 100% 천연 아로마테라피. (2018). 일 본식 욕실 인테리어. [online] Available at: <http://blog.naver.com/PostView.nhn?blogId=urbannature1&log-No=220248477094> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

19. A contemporary reinterpretation of the wooden stool for before and after bath scrubbing. Source: Matt and Jentry Home Design. (2018). Teak Shower Bench Wall Ideas. [online] Available at: <http://mattandjentry.com/teak-corner-shower-bench-design/teak-shower-bench-wall-ideas/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

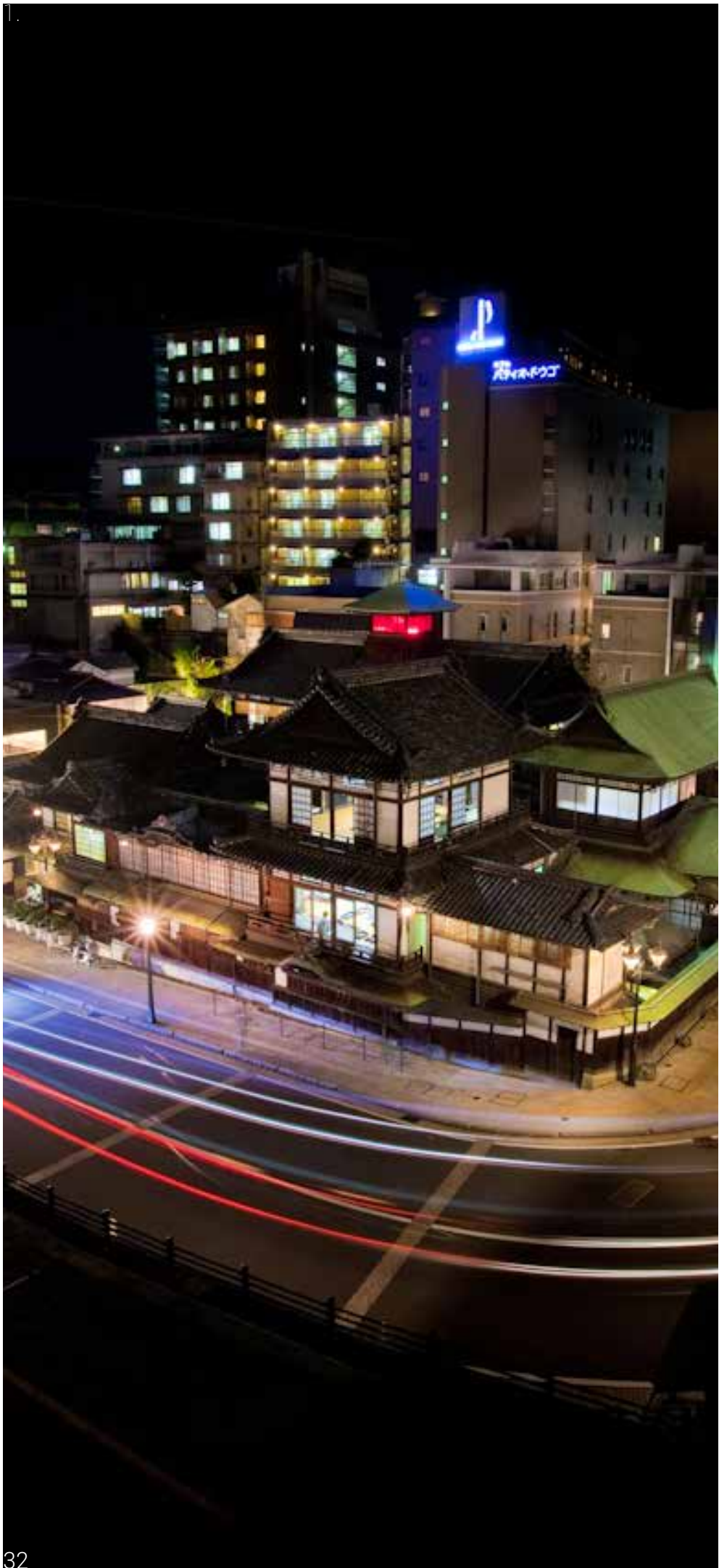
20. *Geta* and wooden bucket on the edge of a natural hot spring bath. Source: Article.japanican.com. (2018). Traditional Japanese Inns – Your Questions Answered – JAPANiCAN. com Blog. [online] Available at: https://article.japanican.com/en/culture-experience/ryokan/20090128ryokan_faq.html [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

21. Another type of contemporary *hinoki ofuro*. Source: Hinokisoken.jp. (2018). 檜の木風呂 檜浴槽・浴室総合プランナー 檜創建 株式会社. [online] Available at: <http://www.hinokisoken.jp/news/stei1.html> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

22. Another scene from "Therae Romae" by Mari Yamazaki. Here the architect deals with the very common experience of bathing in a small "unit bath", a stark contrast with the spacious Roman public *thermae*.

Source: Yamazaki, M. (2008). *テルマエ・ロマエ* / *Thermae Romae*. Tokyo, Japan: Enterbrain

23. While wealthier Japanese can afford the coveted *hinoki* clad bathtubs, the majority of urban apartments are generally equipped with the extremely popular prefabricated "unit baths", that consist of a completely waterproof small resin volume including toilet, bath and sink and functioning as a tiny *ofuro*. The presence of a "unit bath" or an actual *ofuro* can cause apartment rents to vary consistently. Source: Pinterest. (2018). ユニットバス リフォーム. [online] Available at: <https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/641270434411278862/> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2018].



6-8 Dogoyunomachi
Matsuyama
Ehime Prefecture

#01

Dogo Onsen Honkan
Ehime

Hachiro Sakamoto
1894



Private *soto yu* - whole building
Traditional timber structure, three stories plus the
Shinkako tower, onsen on ground and first floor



The building is located in the middle of the neighbourhood,
in a densely built area at the foot of the mountain



Simple hot spring,
colourless and odourless waters. 42°C



Five pools, rigorously separate at all times, all indoors:
three for male bathers, two for female bathers
About 10-15 people in each tub



Two large common areas and seven small private
rooms for relax after bath - sweets and tea available



Yukata are provided; towels, shampoo and other
items can be rented or bought inside the onsen



NATSUME SOSEKI'S "BOTCHAN" ROOM:
this lounge room, located on the
corner of the building, was
the private quarters of
Japanese writer Natsume
Soseki, who wrote his
masterpiece Botchan in there (1906)

KAMI NO YU REST ROOM:
the largest one of all,
this tatami room is
available to customers
of the Kami no Yu to
rest before or after
the bath. Snacks &
tea are available

TAMA NO YU REST AREA:
traditional tatami
room to rest after bath

MALE KAMI NO YU:
one large changing
room allows access to
two baths, both quite
large. The tub occupies
the centre of the room
while the washing
stalls are located
along the walls

MAIN ENTRANCE:
customers can purchase
tickets from a window on
the street before entering
the onsen through a large
door covered with a
traditional awning

←
SOUVENIR SHOP

→
TICKET
BOOTH

→
SHOE LOCKERS

→ SHINKAKU TOWER:

watchtower, highest element of the building.
it hosts a "taiko", a traditional drum,
that is played in order to indicate the time.
Closed by red glass, it resembles a lantern at night.
Topped by a heron, symbol of Dogo Onsen.

→ PRIVATE LOUNGE ROOMS:

on the top floor of the
building, smaller rooms are
available for rent at an
extra cost for more privacy

→ EMPEROR'S FACILITIES:

consisting of three traditional
rooms - a rest room, a changing
room and a bath.
Now open for tourists' visits,
but no longer in use.

→ DISPLAY ROOM for memorabilia
on the long onsen history

→ MALE TAMA NO YU:

in the heart of the
building, the "spirits' bath"
is rather quaint, covered
in grey marble.

→ FEMALE TAMA NO YU:

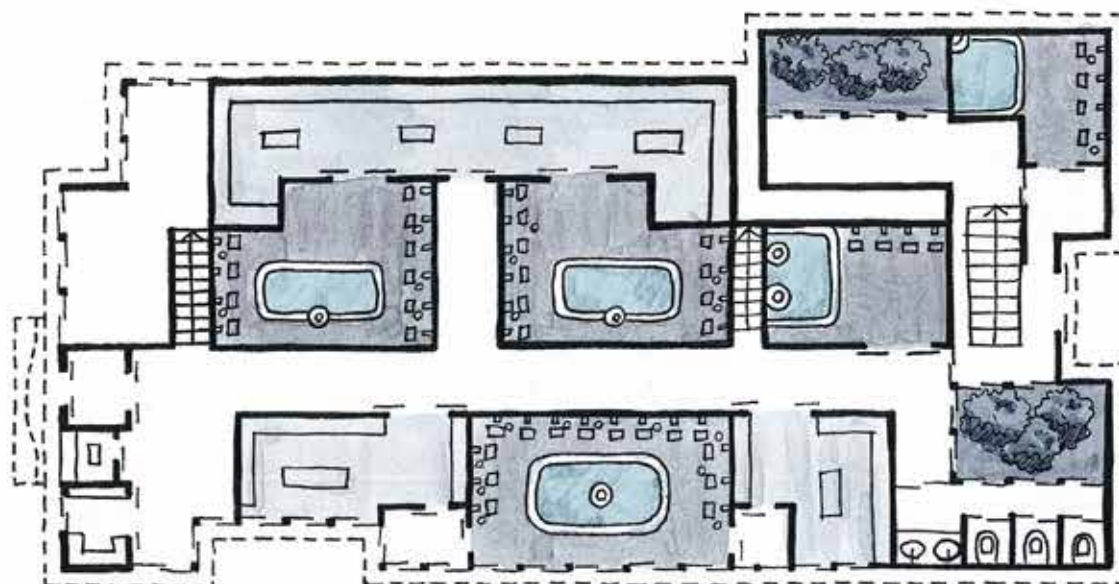
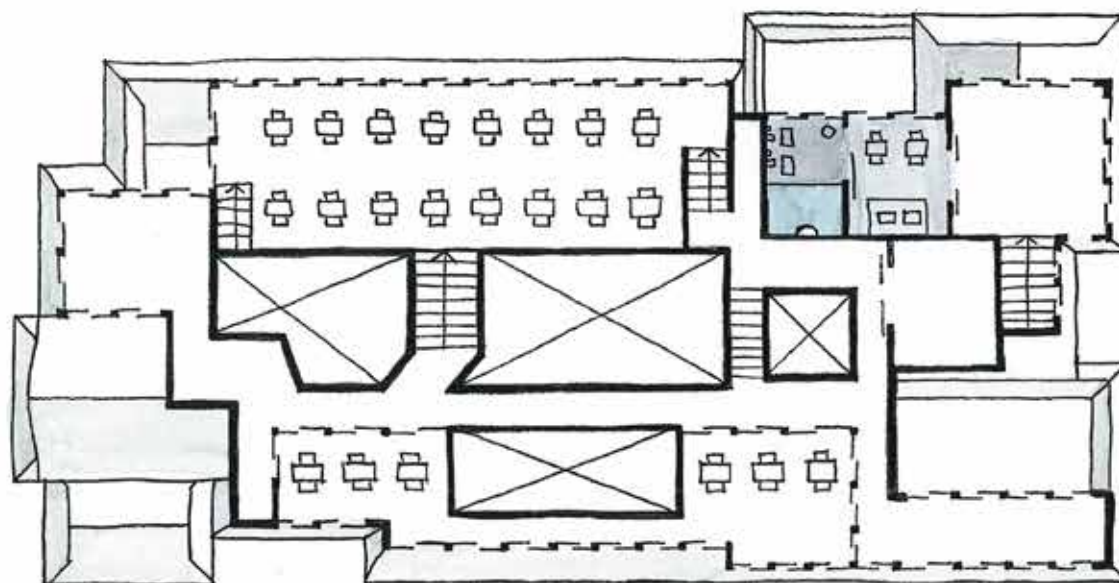
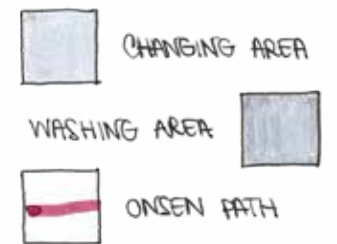
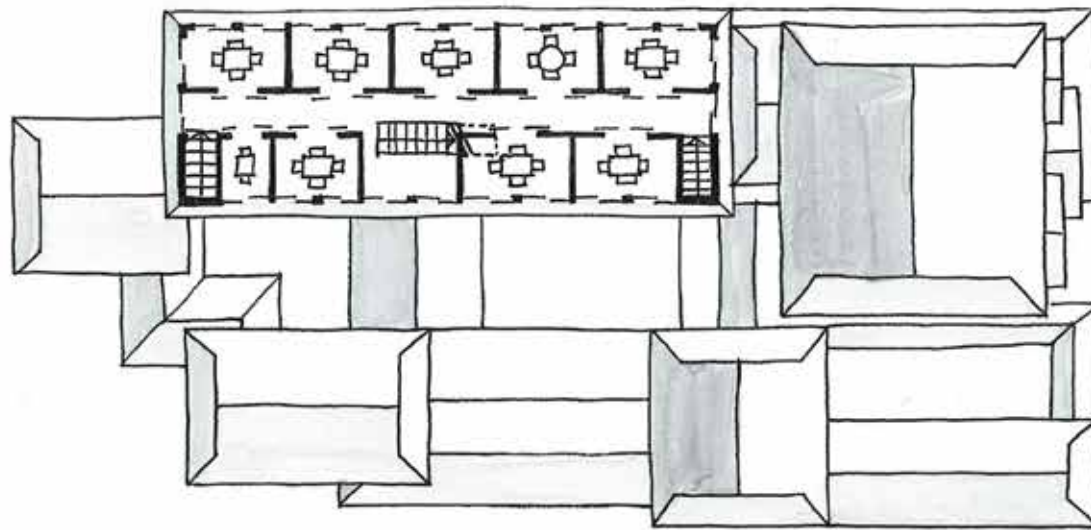
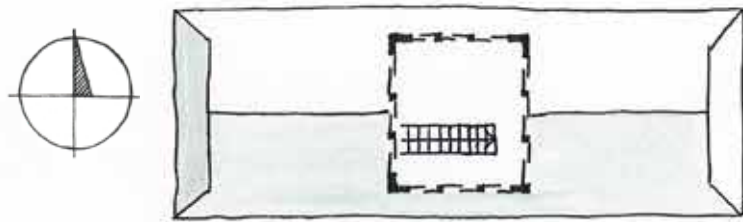
smaller, but more
luxurious baths.
Marble walls
(doesn't have a separate
changing room)

→ IMPERIAL ENTRANCE:

only allows access
to the imperial
facilities, on the
first floor of the
establishment.

→ FEMALE KAMI NO YU:

two small changing
rooms allow access
to the larger of the
two baths



Dogo Onsen Honkan is probably the most iconic bathhouse in Japan, so it's only fair for it to be the starting point of my enquiry on Japanese bathing culture. Established in 1894 and renovated numerous times over the decades thereafter, the various consecutive additions to its original structure resulted in a complex, labyrinth-like interior arrangement of hallways, rooms, staircases and in a gorgeous exterior that is an extremely coherent combination of different volumes and roofs belonging to architectural styles dating back to various eras.

Nestled in the outskirts of Matsuyama, the onsen finds itself at the foot of the hills while not being too far from Matsuyama castle, one of the main attractions in the area. The building is detached and surrounded by streets on all sides, allowing for its architectural elements to be appreciated from all sides. The main entrance faces a small pedestrian road, distinguishing itself and attracting customers thanks to a large canopy covered by an extremely traditional curved roof, helping clients to easily identify it in the aggregation of different volumes and constructions the building is.

While its extremely characteristic appearance is attributable to the skillful hand of Hachiro Sakamoto, who is also responsible for the design and realisation of the nearby Matsuyama Castle, the concept of building such an majestic and representative bathhouse has to be accredited to the long sighted vision of the town mayor at the time, Yukiya Isaniwa, who successfully managed to transform the small village of Dogo into a well renowned *onsen* destination. His project, while initially opposed strongly by his citizenry, proved extremely effective in the long term, so much that Dogo Onsen Honkan has become with the times the most recognisable and the longest running *onsen* in the country.

For this reason, its appearance also inspired the design of the bath-

house in the Academy Award winning movie "*Spirited Away*" by Hayao Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli in 2001, who depicted on screen both the external aspect and elements of the internal outline, such as its convolution of stairs. The architecture was also both the workstation and the setting of Natsume Soseki's well known novel "*Botchan*" and still has a lounge room dedicated to its author.

Contributing to the success of the bathhouse, together with the numerous literary and cinematographic appearances, as it is the case in many other historical onsen, a legend on the origin of the hot spring has been bequeathed from generation to generation. According to popular belief, an heron that was suffering from a leg injury bathed in the source gushing from the rocks of Dogo for a few days, leaving the town completely healed and becoming the symbol of Dogo hot spring and appearing multiple times in the decorations all over the building.

The construction is composed by volumes dating back to different times. The three storey main building containing the *Kami no Yu*, the dressing rooms and the main resting hall, together with the Shinkaku tower are the oldest elements of the complex, built in 1894 in order to substitute the old and outdated town bathhouse. In 1899 the *Tama no Yu* and the emperor's facilities were added, easily recognisable from the differently coloured roof, covered in copper instead of the traditional black tiles. This volume was designed by the same architect as the original structure, Hachiro Sakamoto, and has a separate entrance on the opposite side of the building.

The latest additions to the bathhouse are the south building and the monumental entrance, built in 1924, but perfectly integrating with the previous structures, so that the complex looks like an organic ensemble

2.







4.

of different volumes where the historical layers all blend together. Due to the multitude of choices between baths and lounge rooms, there are four ticket options the customers can choose from: starting from the cheaper one that only allows access to the smaller *Tama no Yu*, to the most expensive one that lets customers enter both baths, grants entry to a private lounge room on the third floor and warrants a guided visit to the Emperor's facilities.

The interior setting is rather unusual, with its maze of stairs and different levels that let the customers discover the building bit by bit while strolling along its corridors and hallways and walking up and down its squeaky wooden stairs. However, the basic structure is very traditional for a bathhouse, having a ticket booth right at the entrance, a locker room for the shoes and belongings next to the main hallway and separate rooms for changing and bathing.

The inside feeling is closer to the one of a *sentō*, rather than an *onsen*: its location in the centre of Dogo area and the position on a pedestrian alley infuse a sense of community and neighbourhood identity, even though today, due to its fame, it's rarely attended by locals and it's more popular with the tourists. Furthermore, the fact that all the baths are inside contributes to the feeling of being in a neighbourhood *sentō*, since most *onsen* usually have outdoor pools, but its location and structure don't allow the presence of a *rotenburo*.

THE ONSEN

The onsen consists of two baths on the ground floor, each constituted by two sex separate tubs, and two stories of lounge rooms, large common rooms on the first floor and a series of smaller private suites on

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5.

the top floor. The larger and older bath is the *Kami no Yu*, the "Bath of the Gods", consisting of two tub rooms and a large changing room for the men and one tub room and two smaller changing rooms for the women. Whereas the smaller and more recent bath, the *Tama no Yu*, the "Bath of the Spirits", has a more intimate feeling and is composed of two smaller tub rooms, one for each gender, and has one small changing room for women, while men have to get changed in the common space.

The path to the bath rooms is rather simple: from the ticket booth at the entrance, on the pedestrian street, where they can chose between a wide selection of different tickets for the various baths and rest rooms, the customers immediately access the shoe locker room, from which a corridor takes them to the changing rooms on its left and right, separated for men and women. Through there, once patrons are undressed and ready for the bath, they can enter the tub room, that is not accessible from the main corridor in order to keep the space private. The tub rooms are quite spacious, since they are designed for an average of 10-15 people at a time and, as tradition, they host both the bathing and the washing spaces.

The tubs are generally positioned in the middle of the room or against one of the longer walls, while the washing stations are distributed along the sides of the room, each equipped with a shower head and the traditional stools and water buckets. This creates a curious contrast between the single washing seats and the collective tub: the seats face the walls and feel almost isolated from each other - very much like most Japanese restaurants that have single seats facing the wall or the kitchen, while the tub is communal, making customers bathe all together and encouraging community spirit and conversation.

References:

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6.

The bath setup is not extraordinary, since it is quite standard, designed mainly to ooze a feeling of luxury rather than attempting to create a specific atmosphere, but it is the general environment inside the structure that is worth highlighting and that makes the whole bathing experience alone a reason to travel to Shikoku island.

All the materials have been accurately chosen in order to show wealth, rather than to create a specific interior environment, especially since it was designed in hope to host the emperor in private facilities provided, so the inside walls are upholstered with grey veined marble and stone and every bath room displays a large tile painting illustrating the heron legend.

Soap and shampoo are provided in each bathing room and *Tama no Yu* has a special soap made from *mikan*, Japanese oranges, for customers to savour.

OTHER FACILITIES

The upper floors of the establishment are dedicated to host the lounge rooms, spaces for the customers to relax in their *yukata* while enjoying a cup of hot *matcha*, finely powdered green tea, and *senbe*, typical rice crackers. The second floor is occupied by two relax areas: a larger one for the *Kami no Yu* customers and a smaller one for the *Tama no Yu* patrons, while the third floor is divided in smaller private lounge rooms, aligned in two rows on the sides of a narrow hallway, where guests can enjoy a more intimate atmosphere.

All rooms are extremely traditional, their timber structure is clearly visible and the rooms are separated from each other and from the corridor through classical *shōji* screens, made of thin wood and translucent

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washi paper. Moreover, all rooms have a narrow balcony along the outer wall, so that people can enjoy the view of the green hills from the back of the building and of the town of Matsuyama from the front. A wide variety of snacks and beverages are available at an affordable price to help relax and cool down after the bath, as well towels and *yukata* that are supplied to every customer for the duration of their stay, so the bath can be enjoyed also by more unprepared tourists. Moreover, while the management recommends consideration in order not to portray other patrons, lounge rooms are the only spaces where photographs are allowed.

Towering over the tallest building of the complex, a watchtower with red glass windows hosts a *taiko*, a traditional drum, that is played three times a day in order to tell the time.

In a corner on the second floor, a small lounge room has been dedicated to exhibiting historical documents related to the *onsen*, it is possible to see *yufuda*, pieces of wood that were used as old admission tickets, and elements like paintings and statues linked to the myth of the heron.

BOTCHAN ROOM

The most famous of the top floor lounge rooms, the Botchan room is dedicated to one of the most renowned novelists of the Meiji era, Natsume Soseki. The writer spent part of his career crafting his most famous manuscript in this room and inserted Dogo Onsen in the novel, so the bathhouse's management kept the room open for tourists to visit and named it after his best seller, "*Botchan*."

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THE YUSHINDEN - EMPEROR'S FACILITIES

Probably the most famous feature of the whole bathhouse, the Emperor's facilities are located on the second floor, on top of the *Tama no Yu*, and have their own private access on the opposite side from the main gate, in order to allow the Emperor's family their privacy and comfort.

The facilities consist of a private lounge room, a separate changing room and a washing room with a small stone bathtub, comfortable enough for two people and deeper than usual, so special boards can be used to allow the bathers to comfortably sit inside it. All the rooms are finely decorated with paintings and gold and silver ornaments and have carefully embellished coffered ceilings.

The last to visit the facilities was Emperor Hirohito in 1952, so at the moment the bathtub is empty and the facilities can be visited for an additional price on the ticket.

1. R'z project [アールズプロジェクト]. (2018). タイムラプスに癒されて……。 [online] Available at: <http://www.rzproject.x0.com/2010/0610215356/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].
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9-3-28 Toyosato,
Nozawaonsen-mura,
Shimotakai,
Nagano

#02

Nozawa Onsen Ōyu
Nagano

Unknown Architect
Edo period, renovated in 1994



Public *soto yu* - whole building
Traditional wooden structure
One storey



The building is part of a small onsen village, the surrounding area mostly consists of low rise independent *machiya* buildings and small businesses



Sulphuric water hot spring,
slightly green. Around 66°C



Four tubs, in sex separate onsen, all indoors.
Each onsen has a hot spring temperature tub and a lukewarm one - About 3-5 people in each onsen



The onsen does not provide any other services,
the use of the bathhouse is free



Towels and other bathing items are not provided



hot spring water
fountain for
drinking

three washing stalls on
each side, along the
perimetral walls - each
stall only consists of a tap
and doesn't provide a shower head

the wooden wall
structure incorporates
all the shelves &
cupboards needed
to store personal
belongings & bathing
items. A cupboard
on each side of the
biding stores the
stools & buckets
for the bath

two separate hot spring bathtubs
occupy the centre of the space.
One has water at the natural
onsen temperature, the other one
is filled with lukewarm water.

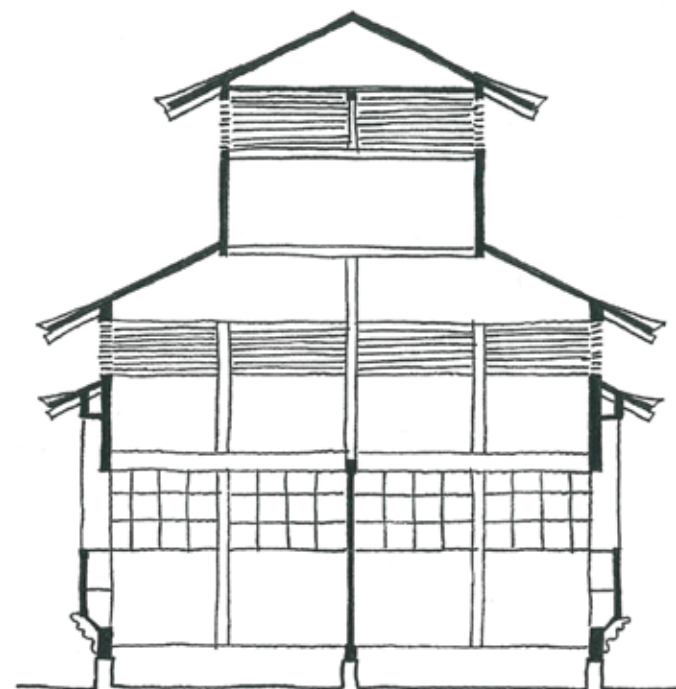
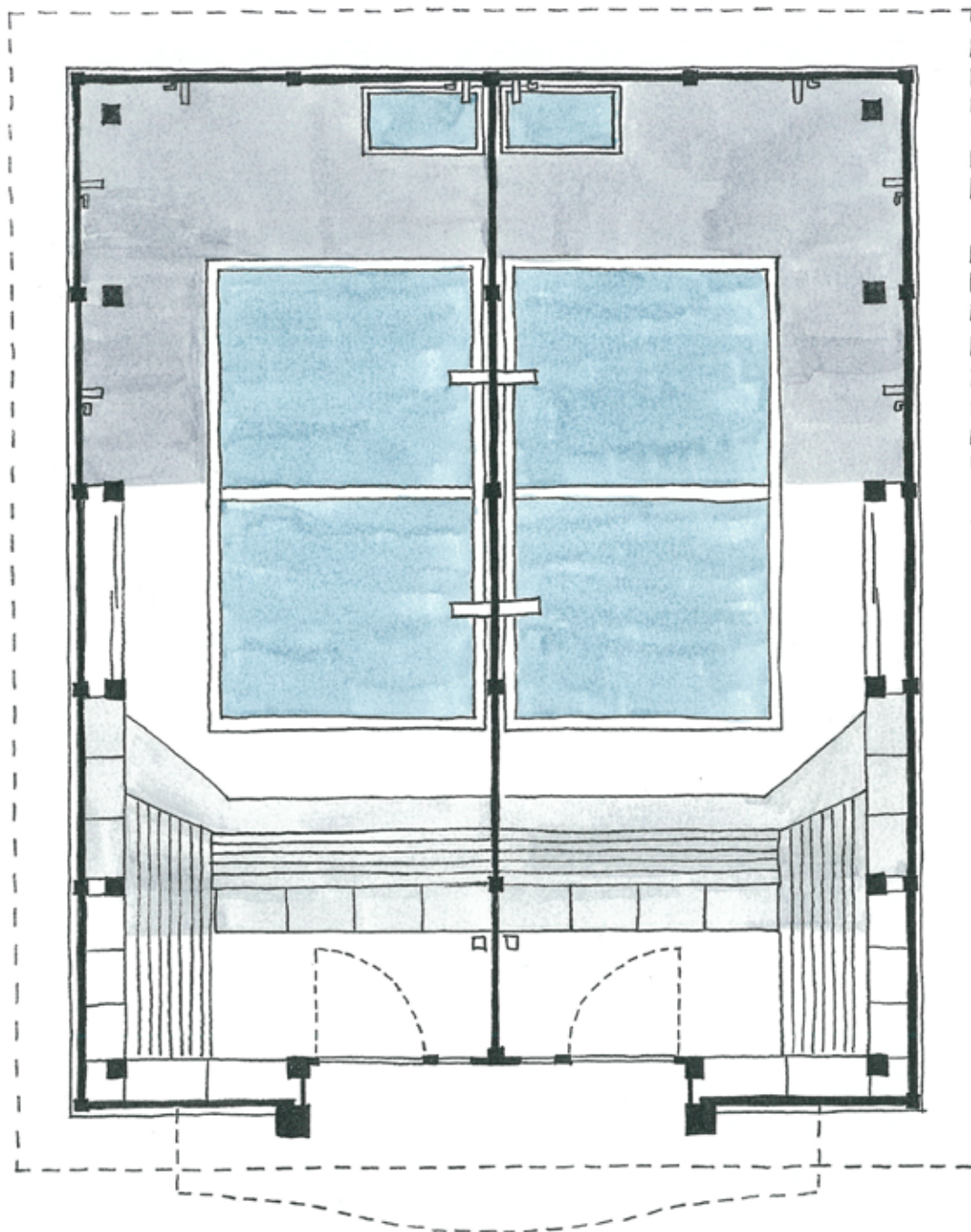
key lockers allow storage of patrons'
personal belongings & create a separation
between the entrance & the changing
area, in order to conceal the latter
from the outside view.

the structure is
entirely wooden
& follows the
architectural style
of the Edo period.
- a thin wooden
board wall encloses
the construction
- the load bearing
structure is composed by
pillars, slightly set back
from the perimeter

shelves for shoe storage run along
the external walls at the entrance.
According to tradition, shoes have to
be taken off before entering almost
any building. Due to the limited size
of the establishment, areas are
limited by different flooring
- stone flooring in the whole structure
- the changing area is covered by
wooden decking

the building has two separate
entrances, men on the left & women
on the right. A light wooden wall
separates the two spaces. The entrance
is marked by two steps & a traditional
Edo wooden awning, covered by a
curved gable

A long window surrounds
the top sector of both
the lower & top volumes,
allowing for natural light
to enter the onsen &
dispersing the excess steam
produced by the hot water







3.

In the heart of Nozawa, a small *onsen* town in the northernmost part of Nagano prefecture, is *Ōyu onsen*, a little wooden gem of Edo architecture. This small independent bathhouse, renovated twenty years ago following the original Edo project to the letter, is the most remarkable of many small bathhouses scattered around the town.

Its appearance is the first element that catches the eye when walking around the narrow streets and alleys of the village, making it stand out from the surrounding buildings, that mostly have a more contemporary architecture. The structure is completely wooden, consisting of thin pillars and walls made of large planks of wood, laying on a foundation composed of large local stone ashlar. Characteristic is the double layered pitched roof surmounted by a roof lantern, itself covered by a four gables roof. The entrance is marked by a traditionally shaped portal, covered by a curved canopy.

The rest of the village also maintained part of its ancient flair and original atmosphere. Even though the buildings have mostly been replaced in time, the narrow streets and alleys are still studded of small local businesses that have serving windows directly towards the street, through which passers by can purchase freshly made snacks while strolling around the village between visits from bathhouse to bathhouse.

The town, aside from the privately owned *ryokan*, has thirteen different public bathhouses, located along the main streets and free of charge.

THE ONSEN

With the building being so small, its layout is extremely simple. The rectangular floor plan is divided in half with a wooden wall to create two sex separate spaces. Each can be accessed through a door on the

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main street, allowing the entrance to the only room. There, a wooden wall forms a narrow corridor that creates a zigzag path and protects the view of the tubs from the outside. At the end of the short path, customers can find shelves, built in the external wall, where they can leave their shoes, as tradition, before stepping in the bathing area.

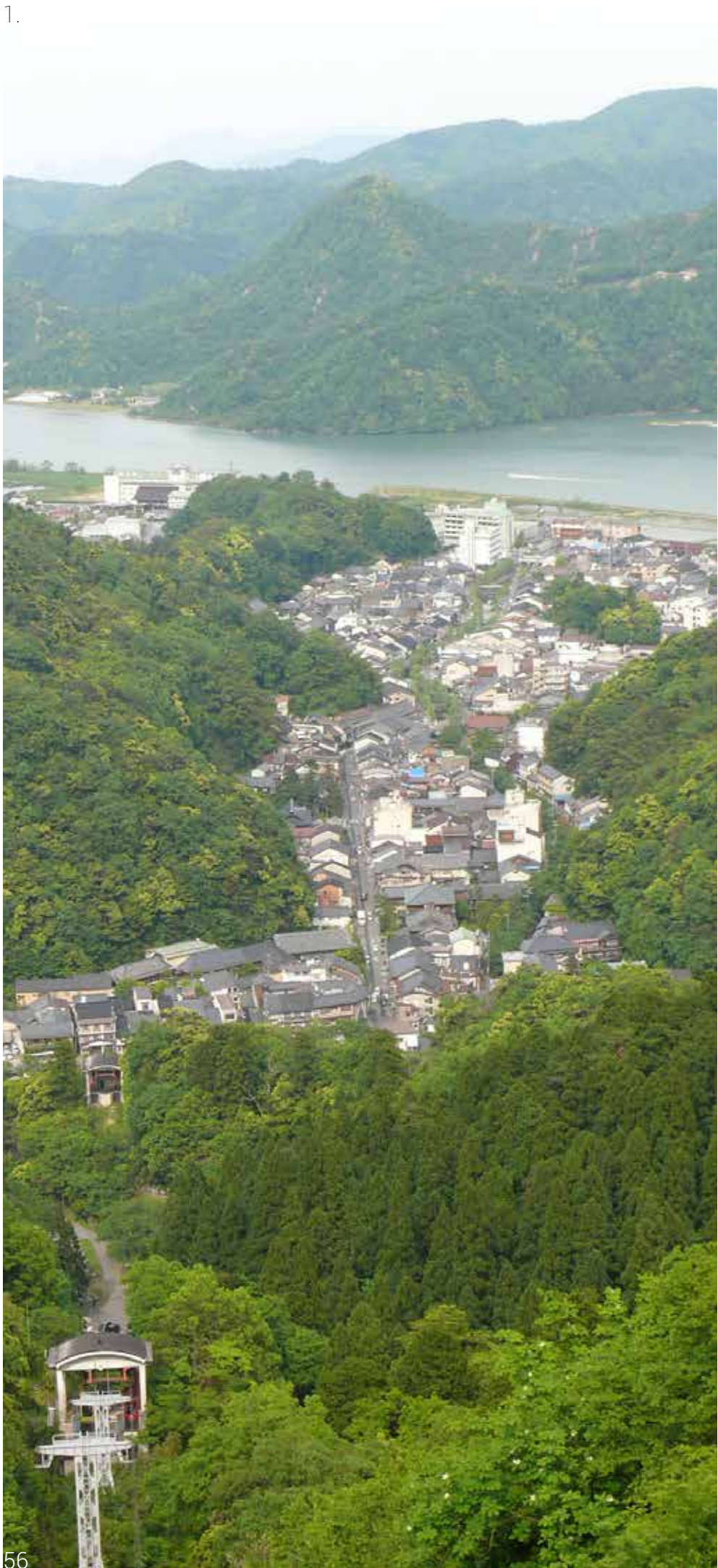
Contrary from the standard *onsen* model, the small dimensions of this bathhouse do not allow to create an appropriate separation between the changing area and the bathing area, that are generally located in two distinct rooms. Therefore, behind the wall that covers the entrance, a space is created to get changed and prepare for the bath, protected from the outside view thanks to the wooden wall. More built in shelves allow to store clothes and belongings and wooden planks are placed on the stone floor in order to guarantee that the area stays dry for customers while changing. Along the perimeter walls water taps are placed to allow washing the traditional way before bathing.

But it's the bath that takes up most of the space: the wooden tub is divided in half in order to create two separate compartments with water at different temperatures. While one is filled with water straight out of the hot spring at 66 degrees, the other one has cooler water to allow the less experienced bathers to equally enjoy the soak.

Remarkable is the inside view of the wooden Edo architecture. The double layered roof and the roof lantern form a tall and extremely evocative internal space while also allowing the natural light to filter from the tall windows between them to create an intimate atmosphere, as the whole higher portion of the external perimeter is glazed with frosted glass.

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Kinosakionsen,
Toyooka,
Hyogo

#03

Kinosaki Onsen
Hyogo

Various architects
1889 - 2001



Public *soto yu* - whole buildings
Various building techniques,
from wood to reinforced concrete



The buildings are located along the main streets of the village, nestled along the Maruyama river, at the foot of a mountain area not far from the Japan coast



Water rich in sodium, calcium and chloride,
colourless and odourless waters.
80°C at the source, 42°C in the baths



Various pools, sex separate, mostly indoors
About 10-15 people in each tub



The larger onsen are provided with common areas,
the smaller ones only offer the bath



Towels, shampoo and other items can generally
be rented or bought inside any onsen



MANDARA YU:

set back from the main road, was reconstructed in 2001.

Right against the mountain side, can be accessed through a bridge over the canal

7.

GOSHO NO YU:

newest one, despite the traditional look. Large front porch & pond in front of the entrance, access through a narrow bridge. Has a rotenburo facing a waterfall

5.

ICHI NO YU:

traditional look, but renovated in 1999.

Has a cave inside the mountain side, hosting a rotenburo

4.

YANAGI YU:

smallest building, located on the main road, squeezed between two much taller buildings. Entrance enjoys a beautiful view of the canal & willow trees

3.

Jizō YU:

only onsen with a contemporary exterior, resembling a Japanese laundromat with diagonal windows. Concrete structure, quite large. Slightly set back but well visible from the main road

2.

Cable car to the Onsenji Shrine & to the top of the mountain

6.

MANDARA NO YU:

set back from the main road, classic, traditional look. Against the hill, offers a very peculiar view from the onsen

- * 7 public bathhouses scattered through the onsen town
- * the town has put laws in place for preventing an excessively modern development of the town, in order to maintain its peculiar atmosphere of old onsen village as it was 100 yrs. ago.

while generally the area around the onsen doesn't have to follow the same regulations as the building itself, here the roads & buildings all remain faithful to the original feeling.

people walk from onsen to onsen in their yukata & zori along the canal

SATO NO YU:

very traditional outside, contemporary interiors
- includes samas, jacuzzi, hammam ...
- both Japanese & roman style, alternating between sexes during the week

KINOSAKI ONSEN
TRAIN STATION

1.





Kinosaki Onsen is a rather peculiar hot spring town and differs from all other case studies, so I considered it worth of attention even if none of its bathhouses struck me as deserving of an in-depth analysis in itself. The *onsen* village is said to date back to 717 A.D. when, according to popular belief, the Buddhist priest Douchi Shonin received a vision from an oracle suggesting him to pray for his people's health for a thousand days. At the end of this period of prayer, a hot spring came gushing out of the ground creating the *onsen* we see today.

Clearly, this is just a myth, but the popular folklore surrounding the village of Kinosaki adds to its distinctive ambience and antique architecture style and brings the visitors back in time to an era where the *onsen* town was a beloved destination for relaxing and pleasurable holidays.

The village's nostalgic atmosphere greets the visitors as soon as they step off the train in its station along the river. While the station itself is rather contemporary, the same cannot be said for its surroundings. Aligned along narrow and tortuous alleys, the village buildings are in the traditional *machiya* style: mostly wooden, rarely more than three storey high and developing vertically on very narrow and long lots of land, allowing no more than a metre between one building and the next, perfectly rendering the feeling of an historic Japanese village from the past.

While the structure of the village and its architectural style might date back many centuries, its buildings are far more recent: the town's official website, "Visit Kinosaki", reports that the whole village was devastated and then burnt to the ground by the great Tajima earthquake and subsequent fire in 1925. Following these calamitous events, the population faced a very important decision when it came to rebuilding the town: adhere to the popular trend of building large concrete contem-

porary hotels that provide their customers with all they need or remain faithful to the historical roots and reconstruct, according to tradition, small buildings, local shops and neighbourhood *ryokan*. The result to the town's decision, that chose to preserve its traditional setting and atmosphere, is likely the main determinant to today's Kinosaki's fanciful and relaxed ambience, that outdistances it from other *onsen* towns, more touristy and less genuine.

Thanks to arrangements and regulations that were put in place after the earthquake in order to maintain the city's characteristic ambience and prevent the savage and disorderly development of large modern constructions, the "new" Kinosaki arose from its ashes just the way it was before the fire that devastated it, with more than eighty small *ryokan*, its narrow sinuous streets studded by small hot spring fountains and local neighbourhood businesses. The village has therefore created the familiar feeling of being one large unique *ryokan*, where the station is the entrance, the inns are the guest rooms and the streets are the hallways, through which visitors can sluggishly stroll while indulging on local snacks or souvenirs bought from the shops along the way. Wandering through the town, that develops along a willow lined canal, wearing the *yukata* that every *ryokan* provides, visitors cross over stone bridges lightened with the soft light of paper lanterns in an undeniably whimsical and cosy atmosphere, filled with the culture and tradition of ancient Japan.

In most *onsen* towns, large hotel complexes provide the visitors with everything they need, from the hot spring bath to the restaurant and the souvenir shop without ever having to leave the building. While this is a particularly convenient formula for the lazier guests who don't want to





4.

go far in order to search for what they need, it doesn't pose any advantage for the town that hosts the hotel and it doesn't allow the patrons to experience the village they are visiting. I consider the case of Kinosaki Onsen a success in this sense because, thanks to the regulations that were put in place to prevent the construction of these large new hotel complexes, it differs from all newly developed *onsen* towns. Its policy of averting over development and sharing resources allows its visitors to actually experience the lively and energetic atmosphere of the old hot spring village as if it were never destroyed, while at the same time not being a fabricated reconstruction of the original town.

Adding to the *ryokan* experience, while nearly all inns already provide in house onsen baths, included in the room there are also tickets to access freely the seven public bathhouses, so visitors can walk from bathhouse to bathhouse indulging in total relaxation in the largest *ryokan* they will ever visit.

During the day, bathing, while being the main activity, is not the only attraction to the village: Kinosaki's fame for being an influence on many writers and poets of the past led to the institution of many monuments dedicated to the intellectuals who visited in search for inspiration. These can now be visited through a guided walking tour of the town that starts from the very central Bungeikan museum, devoted to the village's literary influence.

For the hiking lovers, thanks to Kinosaki's location in a narrow valley in the heart of the Mount Kuruhi region, there are plenty of hiking paths and walks from which it is possible to enjoy the beautiful surrounding landscape. The most famous one is the path that leads up the mountain to Onsenji temple, erected in honour of Douchi Shonin to thank him for bringing health and prosperity to the region with his payers. In the old days, visitors had to pray at the temple in order to gain admission to

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5.

the town's holy waters and the spot remains one of the favourite destinations for most visitors up to this day. In order for it to be easily accessible to everyone, a rope way departs from the temple gate in front of Kō no Yu and takes tourists to Onsenji's main hall and then continues to the summit of the mountain, where an observation deck allows for an unobstructed view over the town.

This small countryside village remains rich of appeal even at night, when from the early evening visitors start leaving the public baths looking for a meal in one of the many traditional venues, that range from the famous *Matsuba crab*, a winter crab that can be found at Tsuiyama Port between November and March, to Japanese all time favourites like *soba*, the buckwheat noodles, and *sukiyaki*, a traditional dish where beef and vegetables are cooked in a sweet soy sauce base broth. After a pleasant meal, it is possible to spend some time at the nostalgic game arcades scattered along the canal street, where they can try vintage games like *pachinko*, the Japanese take on the classic *pinball*, and different target shooting games.

THE ONSEN

While there are plenty of ryokan with their own private or collective *onsen*, Kinosaki also equipped itself with seven public bathhouses scattered around the small town. They are all independent buildings and each has its very own style and flair, in order to provide the visitors with the most complete experience they can possibly hope for. Almost all *ryokan* provide their guests with a free pass to enjoy the therapeutic waters at all seven hot spring bath houses, but prices are extremely affordable either way.

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6.

Sato no Yu is the first onsen everyone encounters when leaving the train station. It can be easily recognised thanks to the large pyramid roof that covers the small square construction containing the entrance, topped with a small roof lantern. Built in 2000, it is a contemporary reinterpretation of Japanese traditional architecture. While not being the most stunning *onsen* building I have seen, it is worth visiting for its particular styles of baths. Its interior is separated into two baths, a traditional *onsen* and a Roman style *thermae*, that rotate on a daily basis between men and women, so it should be visited more than once, on different days, in order to experience both of them. It includes indoor baths, two *rotenburo* and a wide variety of other services, from waterfalls and mist rooms to steam rooms and both hot and cold saunas.

A short walk from the first bathhouse, *Jizō no Yu* is the most contemporary looking *onsen*, named after a Buddhist deity that watches over children, its design recalls the appearance of a traditional lantern, with its monolithic parallelepipedon shape, concrete structure and hexagonal windows. Its waters are believed to bring safety and prosperity to the people who soak in them and its modern interiors feature sex separate bathing facilities with high ceilings.

Recently renovated without losing its traditional flair, *Yanagi Yu* is Kinosaki's smallest public bath house and my personal favourite. Beloved by both tourists and locals alike thanks to its traditionally looking wooden structure and to its location, it finds itself right in the centre of the town. Adding to its flair, the building faces the canal in the middle of Yunosato *dori*, the main street, lined with the weeping willows from which it takes its characteristic name. I was completely charmed by this tiny wooden building for its appearance, a one storey construction with an even smaller attic on top of its pitched roof, seemingly getting

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overwhelmed by the much taller volumes on its sides. Its interiors live up to the expectations of its adorable exteriors, from the hand cut timber of its structure to the wooden bathtubs, its traditional flair couldn't be any more inviting. Before entering the baths, customers can dip their feet in the *ashi yu*, the foot bath, on the side of the street while enjoying the view of the willow leaves floating on the surface of the river.

Last renovated in 1999, *Ichino Yu* is the only public bath that also provides private family *onsen*, available for an extra charge for a period of 40 minutes. Located near the centre of the town, only a few metres away from *Yanagi Yu*, the bathhouse can be easily seen from every direction thanks to its position, in front of a large bridge over the canal. Its indoor baths are very contemporary, clad with granite, and the structure also includes outdoor baths located inside a cave.

Further up the hill, *Gosho no Yu* can be easily recognised by its unique exteriors that justify its name, that can be translated as "Imperial Palace bath". A wooden column portico, covered by a very traditional black tiled pitched roof, demarcates the main entrance of the newest bathhouse of Kinosaki, where it is necessary to cross a small bridge over a pond filled with *koi* fish and lotus flowers in order to enter the baths. Inside, spacious indoor baths for both genders greet the visitors, before they move to the highlight of the onsen, the multi layered outdoor pools, that look over a natural waterfall gushing through the rocky mountain side.

Set back from the main road, *Mandara Yu* instils right at first glance the idea of relaxation and quiet that are going to be felt on the inside.

Its waters are said to bring prosperity in business and agriculture and its architecture, though rebuilt in 2001, mimics the traditional Edo buildings with its double layered gabled roof covering the entrance volume. Thanks to its location, nestled at the foot of the mountain, and its enticing *rotenburo*, it is said to be the most beautiful bathhouse of Kinosaki, even though I find its reconstruction to be a little too artificial.

Kō no Yu, the most remote of the seven public bathhouses, is also said to be the oldest, discovered, according to popular belief, when to an oriental white stork was observed healing its wounds in the waters of the source.

Located at the end of the village, in front of the station for the cable car that leads to the top of the mountain and a few steps away from the Onsenji temple gate, it is said to be the most eccentric of all onsen, due to its impressive outdoor facilities, that are considerably bigger than usual and can be used all year round thanks to their wood and glass roof.





7-50-6 Izusan,
Atami-shi,
Shizuoka



#04

Horai Onsen
Shizuoka



Kengo Kuma and Associates
2003



Independent construction, *uchi yu* annexed to
a hotel building
Light steel structure, one story building



The building is located on a steep slope, hidden
in the forest, with a view on the nearby sea shore



Calcium, sodium, sulfate, chloride hot spring,
transparent colour. Around 38°C



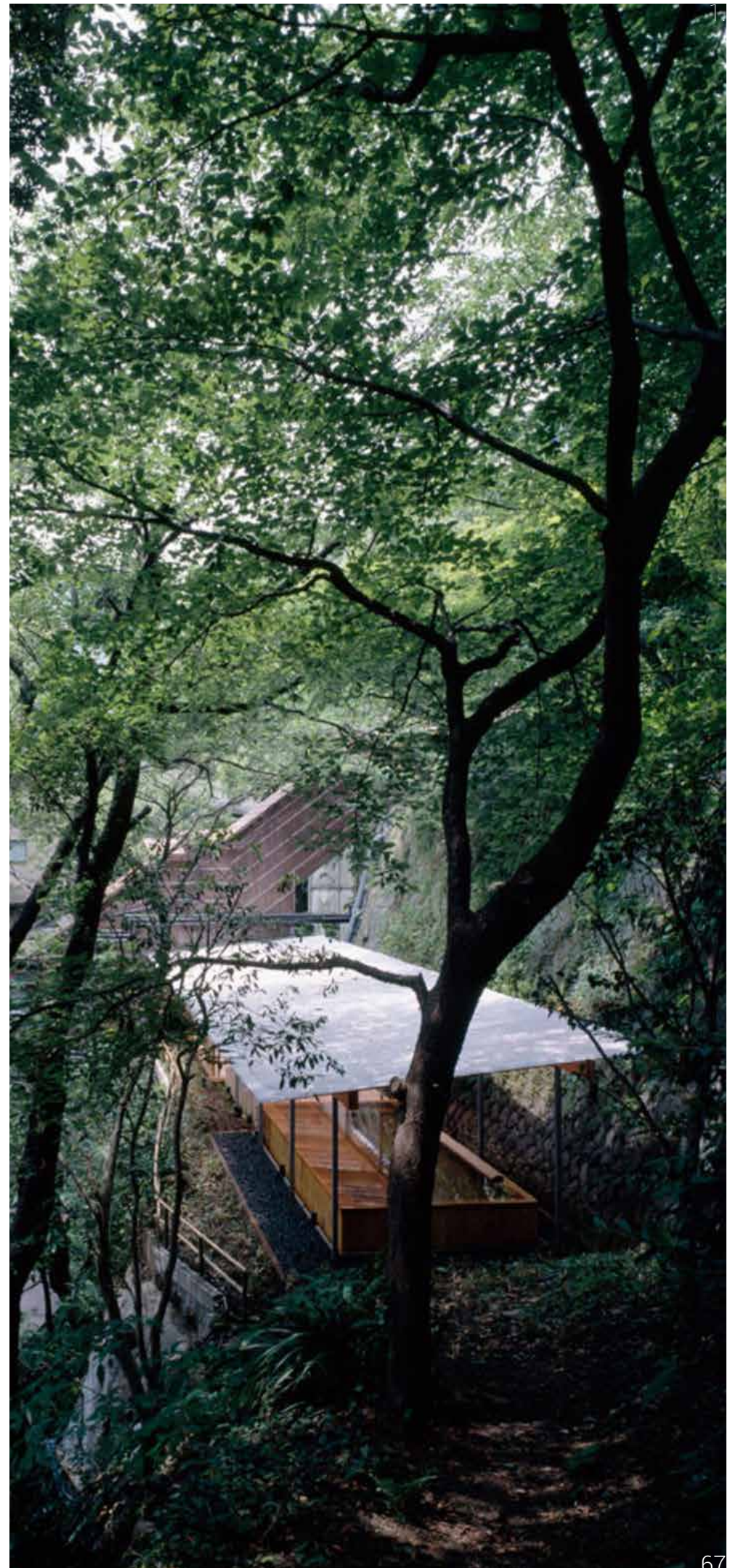
Only one small pool, outside
About 4-6 people



The hotel has a restaurant, reserved for the its clients



The hotel provides towels and other bathing items
for its clients





The whole design of the building is based on the constant contact with nature - hence the construction is almost inconsistent & transparent. Changing - washing - bathing are organised along a continuous horizontal line, the more one moves through the building, the more the construction seems to dissolve in the landscape.

- the changing area is enclosed by transparent glass & sliding plexiglas panels
- the washing area & the hot water tub are completely outdoors

The choice of materials & typology of structure further the illusion of a dissolving architecture. Wood is the main element (hinoki, Japanese cypress), used on the floor, for the washing stalls, the tub & roof beams. Every other element is either transparent (glass, plexiglas) or extremely thin (steel pillars)

While the design & choice of materials harmonise with the nature, the floor plan consists of straight lines & sharp angles

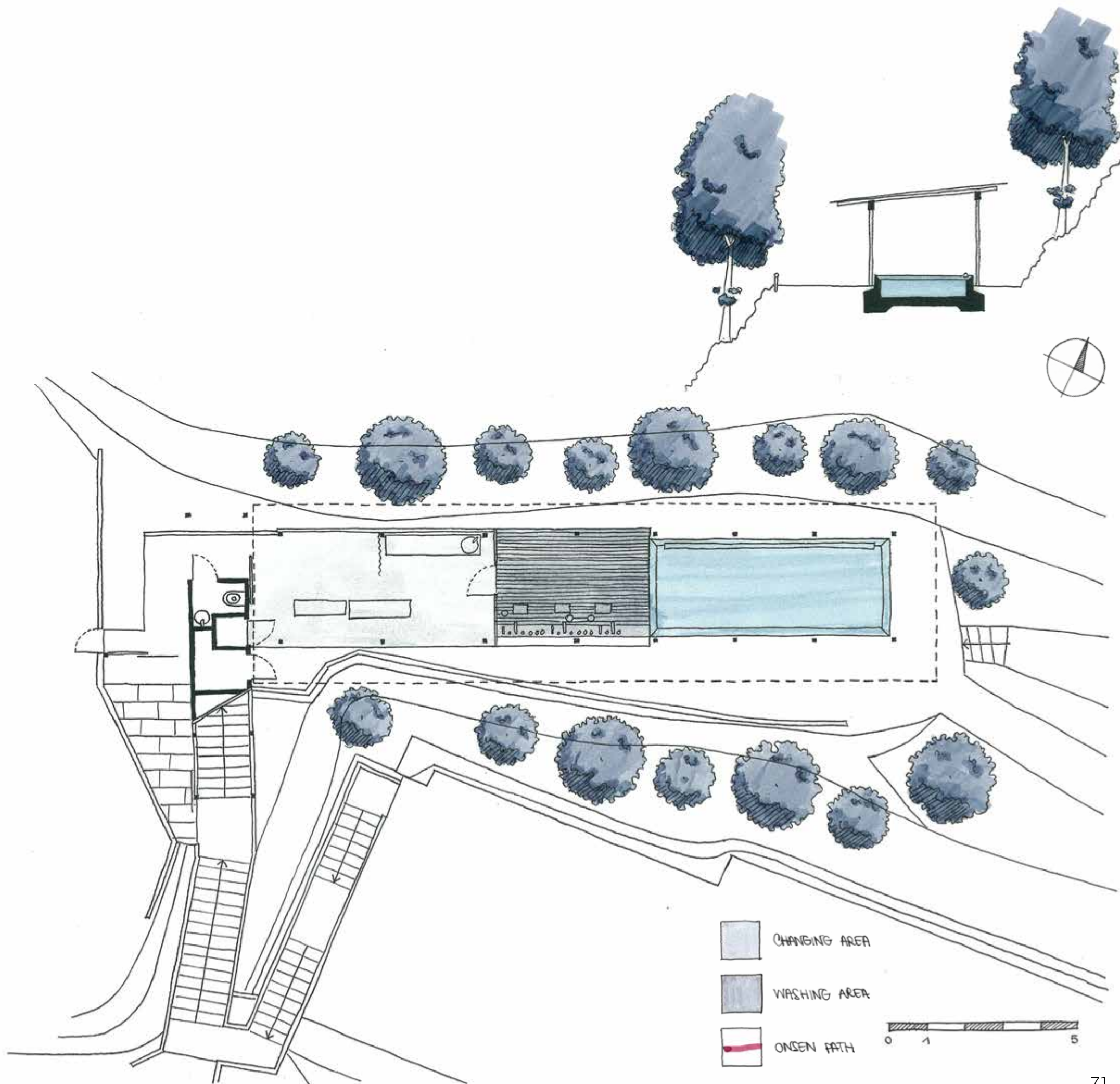
the site is covered by a light plexiglas roof. The transparency of the cover lets bathers enjoy the natural environment while being protected from the weather

The separation of function is marked by a change of flooring

- parquet for the changing area
- rustic wooden deck for the washing area

the onsen is surrounded by vegetation on all sides, hiding from the surrounding buildings (including the hotel it belongs to) while allowing for a view on the nearby ocean coast.

a private, enveloped staircase allows access to the onsen directly from the hotel through the greenery



Located along the coast of the Izu peninsula, roughly a hundred kilometres south of Tokyo, this small *onsen* is a peaceful retreat surrounded by the forest on every side. Furthermore, its location on a steep rocky slope, allows it to overlook the Pacific Ocean.

The onsen facility is part of a traditional *ryokan* located a few metres away, however, thanks to the abundance of vegetation that hides almost completely any other construction, it feels very secluded from society. It can be reached thanks to a long and sinuous staircase that zigzags through the woods, giving the feeling of leaving the urbanised Atami village for the deep forest.

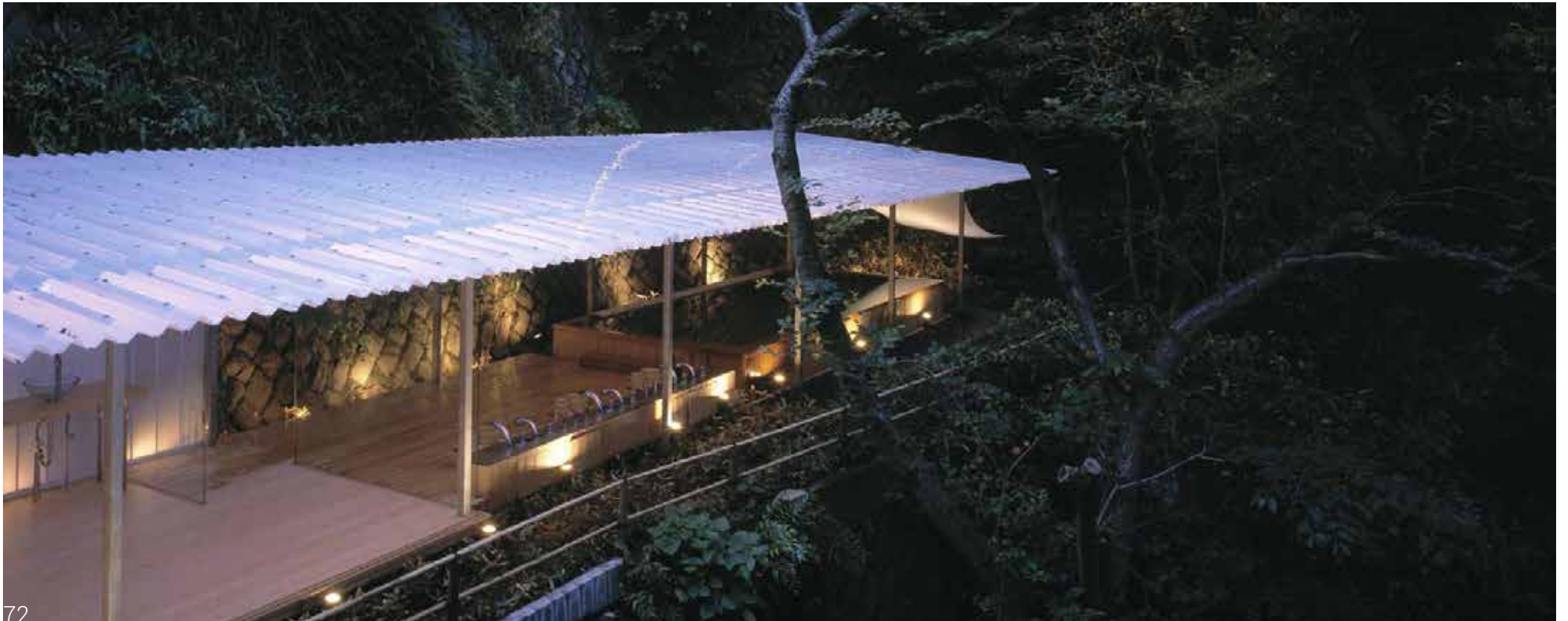
It is composed of a little enclosed space and of a long deck, covered by a semi transparent roof and develops linearly from the entrance towards the forest on a thin rectangular site perpendicular to the slope. The site is divided in three areas, less and less built the further from the entrance, so the architecture seems to slowly dissolve, step by step, the closer one gets to the hot tub.

THE ONSEN

The building itself is very minimal, as it only hosts the toilet room, and the whole facility is located on the outside. Leaving the entrance space, enclosed by glass walls, bathers find themselves on the wooden deck, paved with wide Japanese cypress boards, in a first area that has a semi transparent polymethylmetacrilate wall and functions as a filter to the actual washing space. From here, through a transparent glass separation, it is possible to access the last area, consisting of three washing stalls, all facing towards the ocean and equipped with the traditional wooden stool and bucket, and the hot tub. The bath occupies the whole

All photographs of this project - Ano, D.
(Photographer). (2003). [digital images].
Retrieved from <http://kkaa.co.jp/works/architecture/horai-onsen-bath-house/>

3.





4.

width of the site and also faces towards the ocean, giving bathers the illusion of a continuity between the tub water and the sea.

The whole onsen is open on all sides but covered by a light, almost horizontal roof made of semi transparent corrugated plastic and sustained by a extremely light steel structure and a wooden framework. This kind of covering, while sheltering from unpleasant weather and the occasional fall of leaves in the bath water, allows for the natural light to filter and appears vague, indefinite, almost impalpable, furthering the idea of ephemeral architecture that is Kengo Kuma's signature style.

To enhance this concept, all the elements of this building are either transparent and semi transparent or wooden, to easily dissolve in the landscape of the forest, therefore the prevailing colours are the ones of the environment.

The choice of the *hinoki*, the Japanese cypress, for both the decking and the roof structure is both a reference to the woods among which the *onsen* is located and a mention of the tradition, that saw the aromatic wood variety as the main constituent of the time-honoured baths, while the rigorous straight lines and the transparent materials are a modern touch that keep the design innovative.

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2-6-3 Aomi,
Koto-ku,
Tokyo

#05

Ōedo Onsen Monogatari
Tokyo

YOW Sekkei
2003



Independent *soto yu*, theme park
Concrete structure
Two storey building, onsen on the ground floor



Standalone building in Odaiba,
artificial island in Tokyo bay



Sodium chloride water hot spring,
slightly milky white. Around 36.5°C



Sixteen pools of different sizes, sex separate,
both indoors and outdoors
5 to 50 people in each *onsen*



Common relax area with choice of souvenir shops and
food stalls in the centre of the building



The *onsen* provides a various choice of *yukata* for the
clients and two towels, other items can be purchased



* EDO ONSEN MONOGATARI → great Edo onsen history
 - defined as "onsen Disneyland" or a
 bathhouse amusement park

The large washing areas also host a
 large number of bathtubs, each different
 from the others - different water temperature,
 jacuzzi, different shape tubs... in order to
 make bathing more interesting.

Washing stalls provide all commodities,
 stools & buckets as tradition improves, but
 also shower heads, temperature regulation systems
 & a variety of free beauty products

Both bathing areas also
 include outdoor gardens with
 multiple rotenburo and a
 large space for relaxing walks
 after the bath, allowing to chill.

the central space of the building is
 the most interesting element of the onsen.
 Set like a miniature reproduction of the old
 town of Edo (the ancient name of Tokyo),
 this space is composed of many small stands
 selling food and souvenirs, hosting popular
 traditional games and allowing for
 relaxing activities. Services like massages,
 tarot readings & other activities are also provided.

TATAMI
 RELAXATION
 ROOM

a reproduction of a
 traditional eboshi tower
 stands at in the middle
 of the central covered
 courtyard

facing the outside garden,
 a traditional Japanese
 restaurant provides
 full traditional meals
 such as donburi, tempura
 dishes & ramen bowls

a larger & more luxurious
 hotel is located on the second
 floor of the building

TATAMI RELAXATION ROOM

CAPSULE HOTEL for
 customers who want
 to spend more than one
 day at the onsen

six separate changing rooms
 provide lockers & beauty
 products for before & after bath

→ SHOE LOCKERS

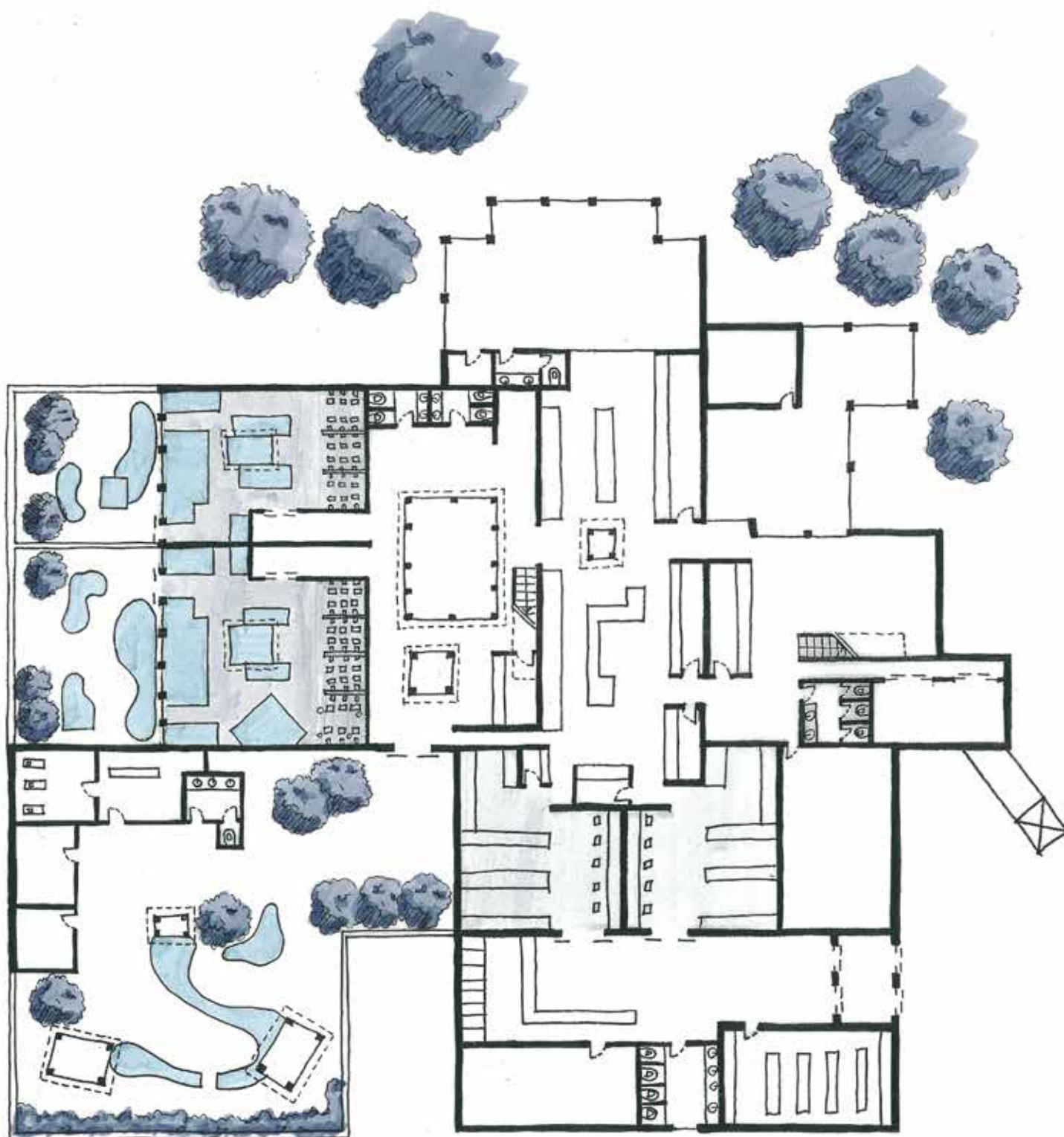
STONE SPA &
 RESERVATIONS

large garden where
 clients can relax
 & walk around in
 yukata under the
 shade of large
 trees. A long shallow
 water basin allows
 for hot spring foot
 baths in the greenery

YUKATA:
 customers can choose one
 among different patterns

TICKET DESK:
 patrons receive a bracelet for
 in-onsen purchases & pay at the exit

- CHANGING AREA
- WASHING AREA
- ONSEN PATH



0 1 5 10





3.

Rather than bathing structure, Ōedo Onsen Monogatari is an *onsen* themed amusement park, as widely advertised by both the management and by the designers of the facility. This was the primary intent of the building since its construction in 2003 and it revealed to be an extremely successful business model, so much that it has been imitated, in different ways, by many other facilities trying to relaunch their image since it has opened. While the architecture itself is not particularly noteworthy, being a small scale replica of the old Edo, the ancient name of Tokyo, the services offered and the type of environment that is created are definitely remarkable. First of its kind, this *onsen* does an impressive job in relaunching the whole Japanese bathing culture both inside and outside Japan, in a time where the daily visit at the local *sentō* is a long lost memory and *onsen* trips are mostly seen as a once every now and then holiday for the elderly, opening doors to many other experiments of this kind, the last and most extreme of which just opened in Beppu, on the southern island of Kyushu, featuring a hot tub roller coaster.

"In planning a new amusement attraction in Odaiba, we racked our brains on how to attract middle-aged and older patrons," said Kazuhide Kimoto, president of Oedo Onsen Monogatari Co. in an interview for the *Japan Times*.¹ "We decided that an *onsen* resort was the answer. The Edo theme came about," he said, "because the popular custom of going to bathhouses is believed to have started around the *Edo* period (1603-1867), along with other cultural staples such as *sumo*, *kabuki* and *sushi*." Clearly, the strategy is proving to be successful, as it typically draws 3,000 to 4,500 visitors on weekdays and more than 4,500 on weekends — reaching a peak of 9,000 a day during Golden Week holidays.¹

The literal translation of its Japanese name is "*Great Edo hot spring sto-*

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ries” and its aim is to revamp Japanese bathing culture in an era where its popularity is consistently decreasing. The structure, designed to attract both the locals and the foreign tourists of any age, is a contemporary reinterpretation of traditional *Edo* architecture, where the reference often results in a carbon copy of the original.

It is often referred by local people and more traditionalist Japanese culture connoisseurs as a tacky and tasteless rendition of the real *onsen* experience, compromising it in order to appeal to a wider audience. However, from my personal experience, it is a very good way to introduce even the shyest of tourists to a culture that is so much different from the Western one, allowing them to a “soft entry” into the world of Japanese style bathing and encouraging them to maybe explore it further, trying a real *sentō* or *onsen* later on.

Of course, on the other hand, this watered down and hyped up “*onsen Disneyland*” experience can have the opposite effect on some tourists, leaving them disappointed at the sight of a more classical and austere bathhouse.

The entrance, marked by a very typical patio covered by a curved roof, is occupied by the reception and shoes lockers because, as tradition commends, everyone’s shoes have to be taken off immediately inside the door.

The different typologies of tickets all include the use of two towels and a *yukata*, that can be chosen between a wide range of patterns for women, men and children, allowing even the most unprepared tourist to enjoy the experience without the worry of bringing anything. Moreover, picking the perfect *yukata* motive is the first step to immerse oneself into the atmosphere of the old *Edo* and lending the traditional garments to all customers is both a reference to traditional *ryokan* practices and

a way to strengthen the illusion of travelling back in time, as everyone outside the changing rooms will be dressed according to Japanese tradition.

The very well equipped and spacious changing rooms are the last bastion of modernity the users will see until they leave the premises. Here they can take off their clothes, that can be stored in the provided lockers, and wear their *yukata*, before exiting on the other side to be reunited together in the communal area in the centre, where they can find numerous activities, all in separate little wooden constructions mimicking the vibrant townscape people would have seen when walking in Tokyo’s *Shitamachi*, downtown, in the XVII century.

THE ONSEN

From the central “town square” is then possible to access the sex separate *onsen* facilities that, according to tradition, consist of a single space for both washing and bathing. These, while being really modern in the choice of finishings and technologies, provide a various range of bathtubs. Designed to remind of the tradition, these allow bathers to dip in numerous baths at different water temperatures, some equipped with massage jets.

Before the bath, customers can wash themselves the traditional way in one of numerous stalls, provided with the standard stool and bucket as well as shampoo, conditioner and bathing gel. The stalls are aligned in rows and provide a little more privacy than it is normal in a bathhouse, allowing even the more uncomfortable tourists to ease in and relax before dipping in a bathtub with naked strangers.

The two main baths are filled with 100% hot spring water, pumped di-

4.





5.

rectly from hot springs 1,400 metres underground. All the bath areas are covered in stone tiles in earthy shades of grey and beige, making the space relaxing while at the same time ensuring it is immaculate and well maintained.

Every *onsen* also has access to a garden with different types of *rotemburo* and a carefully designed landscape that mimics the traditional Japanese gardens through which bathers can stroll and refresh themselves in between dips. The gardens are surrounded by a tall wooden fence on every side, partly hidden by plants, in order to guarantee the needed privacy and to isolate the whole bathhouse from the surrounding environment, giving it the atmosphere it would have if it were located in the countryside instead of Tokyo's busy harbour area.

One of the outside baths is covered with an overhead roof to ensure its use even on rainy days, even though part of the autumn and winter experience is to enjoy the cold rain or snow while bathing in the hot water. The full height glazed façades that face the outdoor baths allow plenty of natural light in as well as for the bathers inside to look at the beautifully landscaped garden, having the feeling to be far away from the busy metropolis.

OTHER FACILITIES

Being an *onsen* themed amusement park rather than the everyday bathhouse, Ōedo Onsen aims at providing a wider range of activities, in order of becoming a whole day experience rather than only taking a couple of hours. Therefore, after soaking, guests can return to the real cornerstone of the establishment, the village square area, to enjoy the wide range of additional features, from *tatami* clad relaxation rooms, souvenir shops and restaurants, carnival style games or a fortune tell-

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ing booth to a variety of massage services, sand baths and rock slab baths available at an additional cost.

The *onsen* also has a large shared garden, landscaped with the same care as the smaller ones, crossed by a sinuously shaped foot bath, where customers of both genders can stroll together wearing their *yukata* and enjoying the lukewarm water on their feet. This space also has a stone spa and a fish therapy foot bath, both available for an additional cost on the entrance ticket.

None of the extra costs have to be covered on the spot though, allowing clients to leave their wallets safely stored in the changing rooms lockers. Every extra expense is charged on the locker key, so that no cash has to be carried around with the danger to be lost or stolen and with the discomfort of having no pockets in the *yukata*. This way clients only pay the total sum when handing back the towels and locker key.

For out of town customers, it even provides night accommodation, in the hotel located on the second floor or in the smaller capsule hotel near the entrance.





1-9-1 Otemachi,
Chiyoda-ku,
Tokyo



#06

Hoshinoya Onsen
Tokyo



Mitsubishi Jisho Sekkei, NTT FACILITIES
Azuma Architect & Associates for the interior design
2016



Uchi yu, 84 rooms hotel
Concrete and steel structure
Eighteen stories, onsen on the top floor



The building is situated in a densely built area of Tokyo's
Otemachi business district, next to the Imperial Palace



Sodium chloride water hot spring, clear.
Around 36.5°C



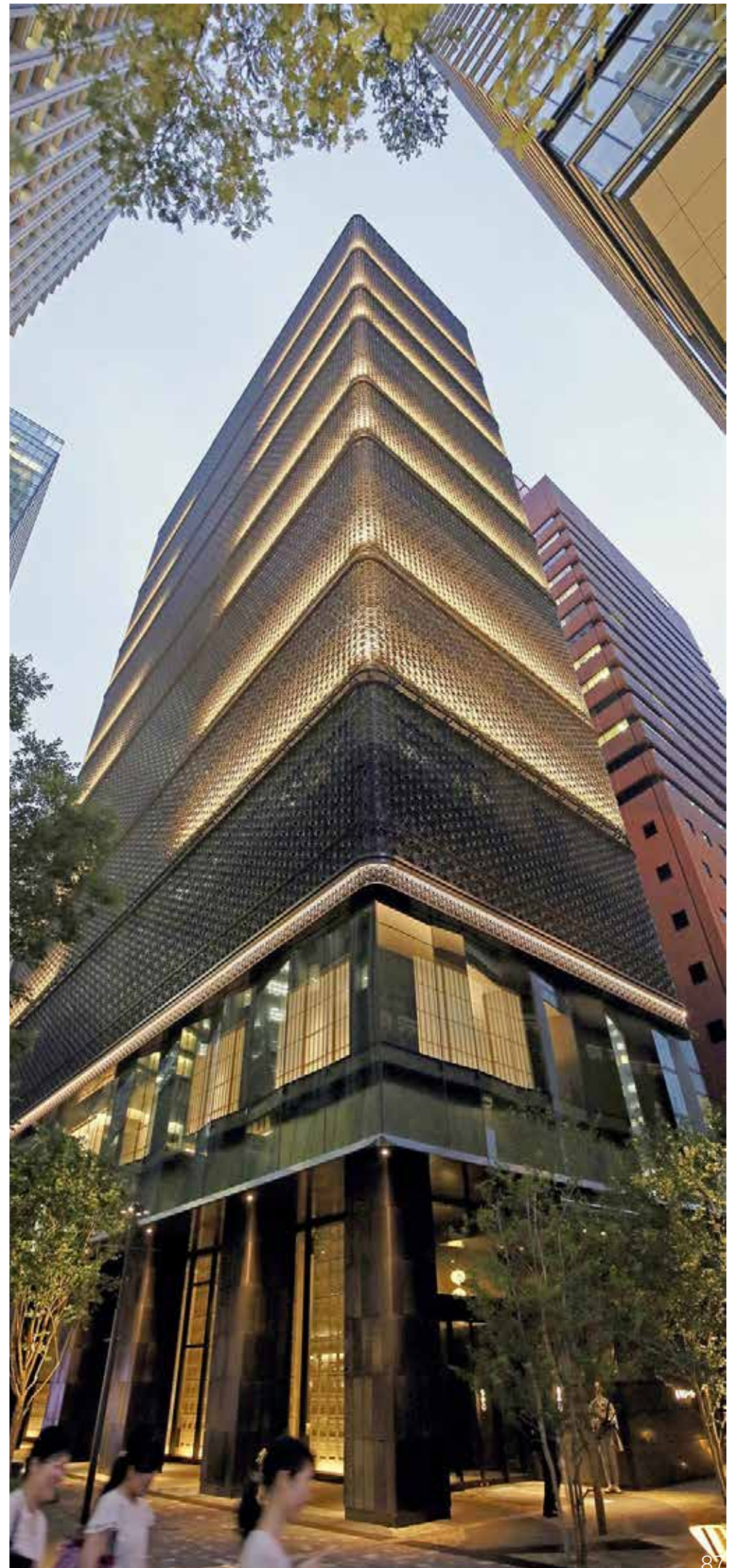
Two large pools, in gender separate *onsen*, part indoors
and part outdoors, allowing view of the sky.
About 6-8 people in each *onsen*



The hotel has a restaurant in the basement and traditional
tea rooms on every floor, reserved for the hotel clients



The hotel provides cotton *yukata*, towels and other
bathing items for its clients





the onsen, withdrawing hot spring water from room underground, consists of a changing area and an indoor bathing room with 6 individual stalls. From there it is possible to access the hot tub. The onsen has no windows, cutting the links with the busy town

SAKURA ROOM, standard (4 on each floor)

YURI ROOM, corner room

the glass facade is covered on the inside by square bamboo lockers for hotel clients shoes - at the same time it works as shading from the outside

the ground floor is entirely dedicated to the entrance of the hotel & for technical spaces.

The entrance is divided in three spaces

1. first entrance area, shoes on
2. second entrance area, marked by a wooden step - accessible only without shoes
- the floor is all tatami from there
3. traditional tokonoma with seasonal ikebana

TEA ROOM



TEA ROOM: each floor is organized as a small ryokan, with a common ochanoma

the hot water tub starts indoor, but then extends towards the corner of the building, where a hole in the roof allows view of the sky & the fresh breeze to enter, while covering the view from the other buildings around

* the top floor of the building hosts two separate onsen, a tea room and two SPA/manager rooms

SPA ROOMS

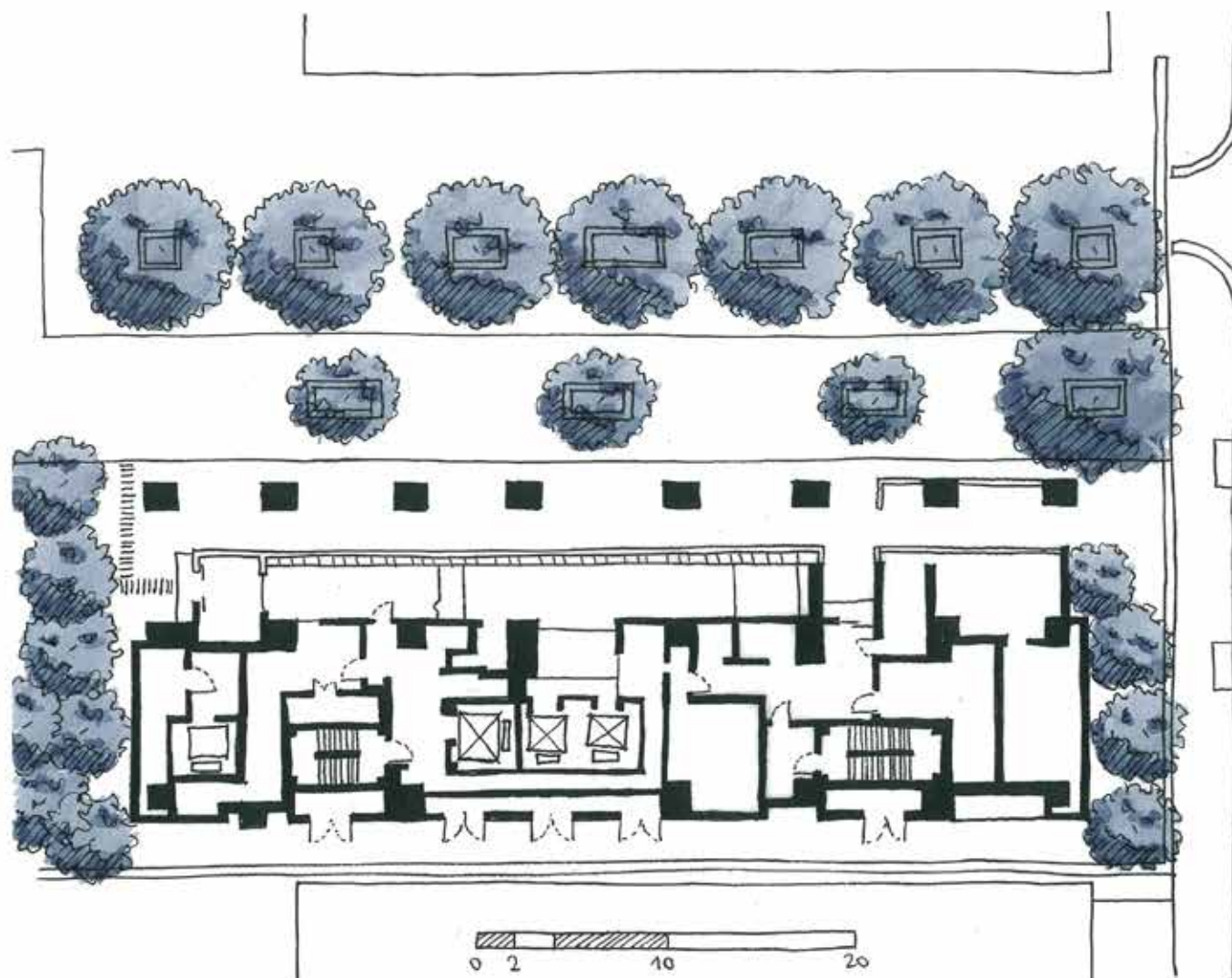
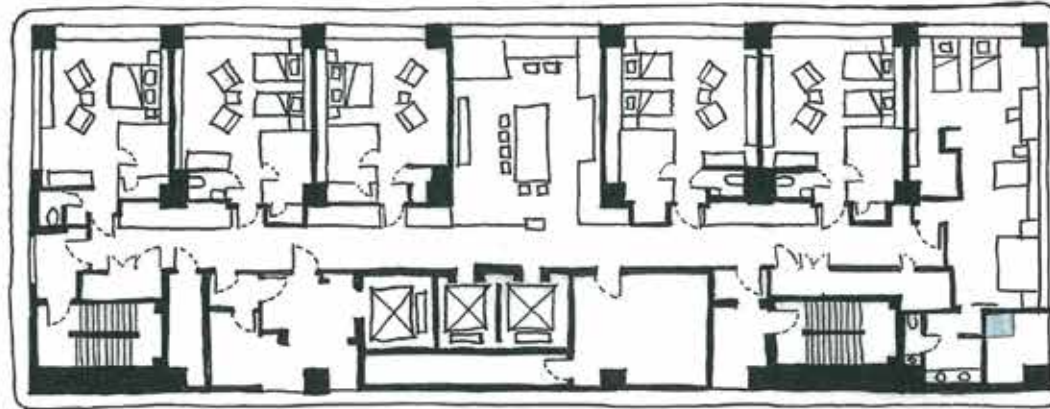
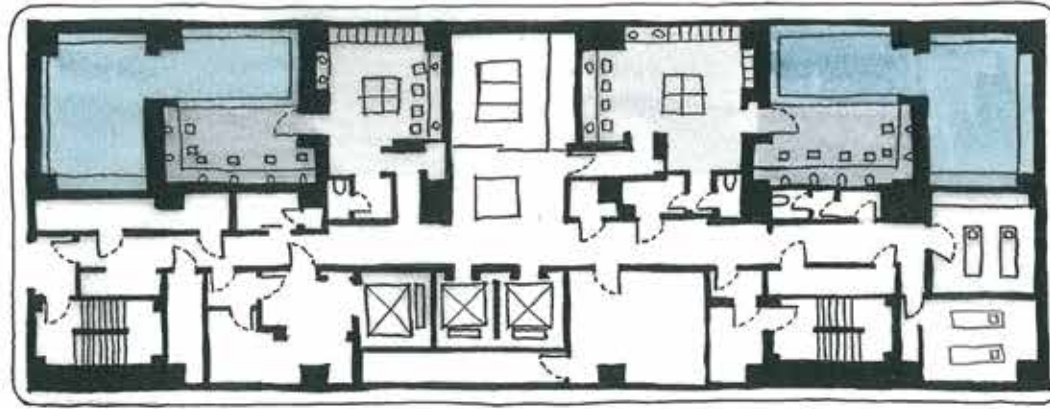
KIKU ROOM:

one on every floor, is the most luxurious suite. It consists of a bedroom area, a lounge room and a large private ofuro

* each floor (5-15) hosts 4 standard rooms, a corner room, a larger suite & an ochanoma - 84 rooms in total

two rows of small trees give the illusion of leaving the busy business district for a more secluded retreat

SOBA SHOP



-  CHANGING AREA
-  WASHING AREA
-  ONSEN PATH





4.

Hoshinoya Tokyo is the newest hotel of the Hoshino Resort Company, a pioneer of eco tourism and of the contemporary *onsen*. It has to thank Azuma Architects and associates for its innovative and incredibly tasteful interior design, probably the most outstanding element of the establishment. The firm was already known for designing the four other *ryokan* in the chain and is a leader in the field of hotel design. References to old Japan are integral to the project, just like in the previous hotels of the company. "We knew from the outset that we were going to design a traditional *ryokan*," Rie Azuma said in an interview for Interior Design magazine. "We wondered why Tokyo didn't have a top one when Kyoto has several."¹

Located in the heart of Tokyo's Otemachi district, the city's answer to Wall Street, from afar Hoshinoya Tokyo appears to be one of the many office skyscrapers in the area: the eighteen-storey standalone construction, with its dark metal siding and monolithic appearance, at a first glance blends with the surrounding architecture and from afar there's apparently little to reveal the delights that lie within.

Up closer, though, the building starts revealing its true identity, especially through the façade cladding. The seemingly continuous metal coat is actually a complex latticework that reminisces of the traditional *Komon* patterns found on Edo period's *kimono*, making up for the lack of panoramic views by turning the building into a "jewel box".

The ground floor, set back from a pedestrian street, leaves space for an artful cluster of trees in front of the main façade, allowing pedestrians to walk through it and partly hiding the surroundings, giving the illusion of leaving the city for a more secluded retreat.

But it is on the inside that the illusion is finally complete: stepping inside

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a discretely hidden side entrance, the visitor is immediately projected in the quintessential *ryokan* experience.

While usually, entering a hotel, the client is welcomed by a lobby and the ground floor is mostly occupied by reception functions and administration offices, here the whole space is destined to a grandiose *genkan*, the traditional Japanese entrance. A doorman with traditional Japanese sense of ceremony takes the visitor's shoes and stores them for the duration of the stay in one of the decorative chestnut and bamboo boxes that line the long corridor. Using natural materials was important to Azuma. "I like the randomness of nature, the different sizes and surfaces," she said to *Interior Design* magazine. "If properly looked after, natural materials only get more beautiful with age."¹

Welcoming them at the end of the corridor, the newcomers find a traditional *tokonoma*, a recess for displaying flower compositions, hand painted landscapes or *bonsai*. Traditionally the focal point of every guest room, it was the way the family would present itself when welcoming guests and nowadays it can still be found in some traditional houses and *ryokan*.

With the smell of *tatami* flooring filling the air, the seasonal *ikebana* composition in the *tokonoma* and the carefully designed suffused lighting, clients begin to feel at home in the warm embrace of the traditional *ryokan*.

HOTEL FACILITIES

Each floor is provided with a tea lounge that serves as a centre for guest activity and socialisation, where they can spend their time at a communal wooden table or on low sofas reading a book, doing some work or enjoying snacks and refreshments provided. The basement hosts



6.

a Franco-Nippon fusion restaurant with ten tables, but many guests prefer to take advantage of the in-room dining service.

THE ROOMS

In order to enhance the traditional ryokan feeling, each level is self-contained and seemingly autonomous from the others, composed of just six rooms that share a *ochanoma* lounge for Japanese style breakfast. This allows each floor to feel like a small independent *ryokan*, instead of one whole large hotel building.

The hotel provides three typologies of room: the standard rooms are the *Sakura* and *Yuri*, that can host up to two people on a surface of roughly 45 square metres. Each room's bathroom is provided with a large bathtub and a shower stall, while the toilet is situated in a separate space, according to Japanese custom.

Sakura rooms are furnished with either a twin or double bed, and are located near the lounge, allowing guests to enjoy a true ryokan experience, while *Yuri* rooms are situated in the north east corner and furnished with double beds, being more suitable for guests who wish to enjoy privacy and quiet.²

Kiku deluxe suites are much more spacious and are located on the south side of each floor, allowing clients to enjoy the sunlight filtering through the *shōji* screens all day long. They are twice the size of the other rooms in order to accommodate a lounge area, a dining table and a desk. They can host up to three people, in single-size beds located on the bed stand. The bathing area is also larger than the ones in the standard rooms, hosting a traditional *ofuro* equipped with a large window that can be opened to create the feeling of bathing outdoors.

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2. Tishgart, S. (2018). The Most Peaceful Place on Earth May Be in the Middle of Tokyo. [online] Bloomberg.com. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-01-19/hoshinoya-tokyo-review-luxury-urban-ryokan-and-onsen> [Accessed 13 Jan. 2018].
3. Demetriou, D. (2018). New inn style: Tokyo's first luxury ryokan | The Japan Times. [online] The Japan Times. Available at: <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2016/07/30/style/new-inn-style-tokyos-first-luxury/#.WX6j14jyhPY> [Accessed 13 Jan. 2018].

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Demetriou, D. (2018). HOSHINOYA Tokyo. [online] The Telegraph. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/asia/japan/tokyo/hotels/hoshinoya-tokyo-hotel/> [Accessed 13 Jan. 2018].



7.

Room furnishings are an elegant blend of traditional inspiration and contemporary comfort expected in a five-star accommodation, *shōji* screens are widely substituting curtains while bathrooms are enclosed by clear glass that becomes opaque with the flip of a switch. Instead of the customary *futon* mattresses on the floor, low beds guarantee Western standards of comfort while granting the same traditional atmosphere. Low seating and tables encourage the use of the floor and are custom-designed with weight-distribution elements to avoid damaging the *tatami* matting.³

THE ONSEN

Hoshinoya's 17th floor is entirely dedicated to spa and *onsen* services for the hotel customers. A tea lounge in the middle of the corridor marks the entrance to the two *onsen* areas, that are, as tradition, separate according to gender.

Through a wide changing room, clients can access the interior washing and bathing area, that is rather spacious in order to accommodate around 6-8 people at a time, incorporating the traditional aspect of communal bathing. The washing space has a traditional onset, with equipped with low wooden stools and buckets, and has shower hoses along the wall in order for the users to scrub and rinse comfortably before diving in the small indoor hot spring tub. From there is then possible to swim towards the larger outdoor open-air bath.

The *rotenburo* is enclosed by tall walls on all sides, ensuring guests their privacy from surrounding buildings while granting an unobstructed view of Tokyo's sky and allowing wind to drift in, perpetrating the illusion of having left the busy metropolis for a pleasant retreat in the Japanese countryside.

1. Japan News (2018). Tokyo hotels see construction boom. [online] The Guam Daily Post. Available at: https://www.postguam.com/business/tokyo-hotels-see-construction-boom/article_29ee4fc8-554c-11e6-8358-1f5a5889d2c6.html [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

2. One of the floor *ochanoma*. Interior Design. (2018). Hoshinoya Tokyo Spa Hotel by Rie Azuma Reinvents The Traditional Japanese Ryokan. [online] Available at: <http://www.interiordesign.net/slideshows/detail/9503-where-old-meets-new/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

3. In suite lounge area. JANET做自己. (2018). 星野東京HOSHINOYA Tokyo | 交通/大廳/LOUNGE免費吃喝/溫泉/SPA/健身房 - JANET做自己. [online] Available at: <http://janet.tw/hoshinoya-tokyo/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

4. Street front. Tishgart, M. (2018). The Most Peaceful Place on Earth May Be in the Middle of Tokyo. [online] Bloomberg.com. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-01-19/hoshinoya-tokyo-review-luxury-urban-ryokan-and-onsen> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

5. Genkan with its façade of wooden shoe lockers. Tokyo-marunouchi.jp. (2018). HOSHINOYA Tokyo | Venues TOKYO Marunouchi. [online] Available at: <http://tokyo-marunouchi.jp/en/facilities/764> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

6. In suite dining area. 星野リゾート公式サイト. (2018). 日本旅館『星のや東京』が 7月20日(水)開業。「塔の日本旅館」が東京・大手町に誕生いたしました。 [online] Available at: <http://www.hoshinoresort.com/information/release/2016/07/19510.html> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

7. Washing stalls in one of the two *onsen* areas. Myboutiquehotel.com. (2018). HOSHINOYA Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan. [online] Available at: <https://www.myboutiquehotel.com/de/boutique-hotels-tokyo/hoshinoya-tokyo.html> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

8. In suite ofuro with electrically oscurating grill walls. Pinterest. (2018). Hoshinoya Tokyo Spa Hotel by Rie Azuma Reinvents The Traditional Japanese Ryokan. [online] Available at: <https://www.pinterest.de/pin/374784000227439895/?lp=true> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

9. View from the *rotenburo*. 東 環境・建築研究所/東 利恵. (2018). 星のや 東京 | WORKS | 東 環境・建築研究所/東 利恵. [online] Available at: <http://www.azuma-architects.com/works/hotel-ryokan/星のや-東京/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

10. Indoor portion of the hot water pool and washing stalls. Zekkei Collection. (2018). Book Hoshinoya Tokyo Hotel, Luxury Vacation Rentals by ZEKKEI. [online] Available at: <http://www.zekkeicollection.com/en/property/hoshinoya-tokyo/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].





Just like the rest of the hotel's interiors, the bathing environment is designed with the customers' comfort in mind. In order to ensure the maximum relaxation, natural materials like granite, wood and hand applied plaster are combined with a thoughtful light design. The colour selection is also very natural, ranging from the earthy beige and browns of the wall plaster and *tatami* floors to the darker greys and blacks of the stone tiles that cover the inside of the bath and the walls surrounding the *rotenburo*.

The lighting, work of Illumination of City Environment design firm, replicates the warmth of the natural glare filtering through the translucent paper screens in the traditional *ryokan* baths through LED stripes carefully hidden along the indentation that runs along the walls of the bathing room. The same ploy is also used behind the clear stone tiles of the external wall cladding and, together with the choice of a checked rectangular arrangement, reminds bathers of *shōji* patterns, giving them the feeling of transparency and contact with the outdoors that the paper screens would ensure.

The tall walls around the outdoor bathing tub also allow the sounds of the city to arrive muffled and softened, protracting the illusion of being surrounded by nature, rather than office buildings and busy roads, having left the daily ordeals far away.

After soaking in the sulphurous water of the bath, the clients can then head to the end of the long corridor to take advantage of the spa treatments provided: aromatic oil massages that combine beauty needs with stretching exercises and muscles relaxation.





4-4-3 Ginzan Shinhata,
Obanazawa-shi,
Yamagata

#07

Ginzan Onsen Fujiya
Yamagata

Kengo Kuma and Associates
2006



Private *uchi yu*, part of a hotel building
Concrete and wood structure
Three stories, onsen on the ground and second floor



The building is part of a small onsen village lined
along the Ginzan river, the surrounding area is
mostly occupied by other ryokan and bath houses



Sodium chloride water hot spring, milky white
around 55°C



Four pools, in separate private onsen, all indoors
with a strong relationship with the outside
About 1-3 people in each private onsen



The hotel has a cafe on the ground floor,
in the lobby, reserved for the hotel clients



The hotel provides towels and
other bathing items for its clients



* SECOND FLOOR:

three standard rooms,
one large suite with
dining room and a
private onsen for
hotel clients

this is the largest suite,
consisting of an ofuro,
a bedroom area and a
large dining room. It is
the only room without
tatami in the hotel

* FIRST FLOOR:

two standard rooms
& two larger suites
with a private ofuro

this is the largest room of
the floor, consisting of
an ofuro, a bedroom area
and a large living room
with a tatami area

large windows open
on the Ginza canal
in every room, shaded
by thin bamboo
sticks panels, creating
an open air veranda

Three separate &
different private
onsen can be
booked by clients
for a while in
order to experience
the onsen atmosphere
in absolute privacy
- small, almost like
ofuro
- no separation between
changing & washing

the corridor faces the mountain
and can be completely opened
towards the thick greenery

the only onsen located on
a higher floor, this space
is almost outdoors, surrounded
by a wooden boards shading
instead of a wall on two
sides. It faces the mountain
at the back of the building
and it is surrounded by thick
vegetation on both sides

a central double height void allows
a view of the lobby from the first floor.
A thin layer of bamboo sticks surrounds it.

all standard suites
have a central tatami
area, like traditional
ryokan. This space is
used as a lounge area
during the day and
hosts the futon beds
during the night. These
are stored in a cupboard
when not in use

the hotel does not
include a restaurant,
but the front rooms and
the lobby host a
private cafe, for clients
& passers by

very traditional outside
appearance, due to the
fact that the new construction
followed the shape &
structure of the original
building it substitutes

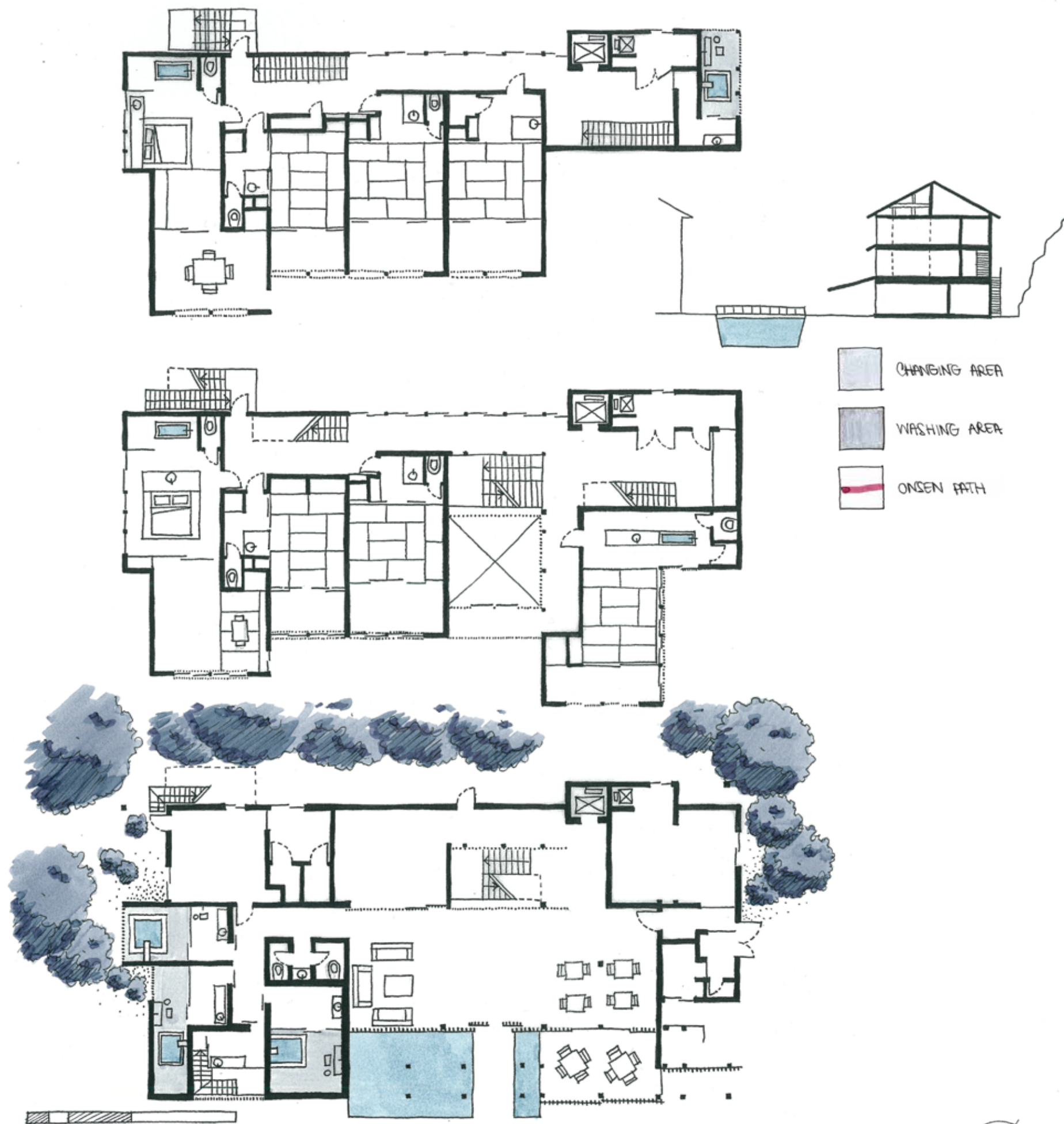
RECEPTION

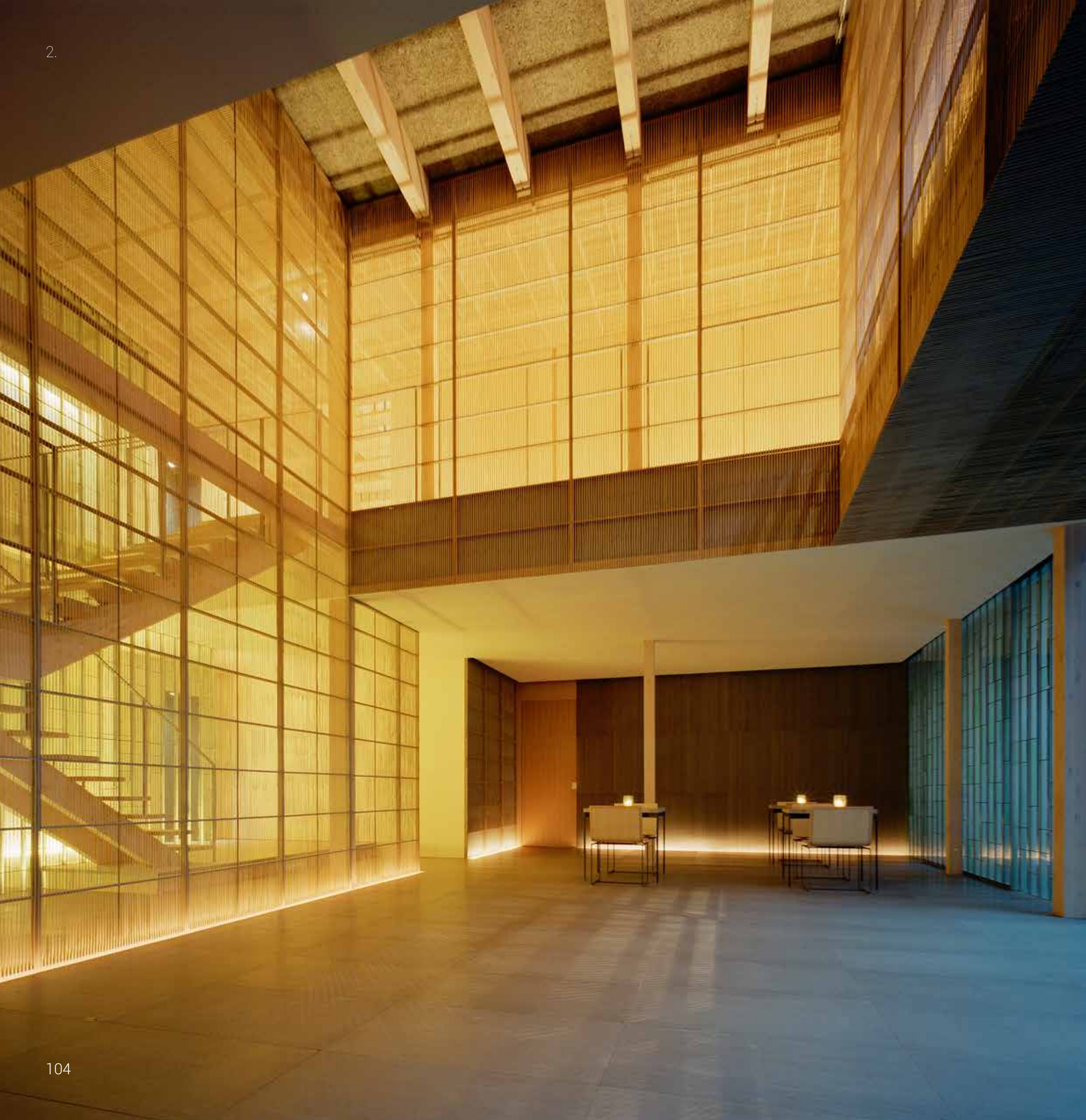
CAFE KITCHEN

LOBBY

concrete glass facade,
shaded by wooden screens

shaded by a wooden awning,
the large main entrance faces the
main street







1. View of the main front along the canal.
2. Inside of the large lobby with the café area.
3. One of the large suites inside the hotel.
4. One of the baths, with a large and evocative roof opening.

All photographs of this project - Ano, D. (Photographer). (2006). [digital images]. Retrieved from <http://kkaa.co.jp/works/architecture/ginzan-onsen-fujiya/>





415-1 Shinbata,
Obanazawa-shi,
Yamagata

#08

Ginzan Onsen Shirogane Yu
Yamagata

Kengo Kuma and Associates
2001



Public soto yu - whole building
Concrete structure
Two stories



The building is part of a small onsen village lined along the Ginzan river, the surrounding area is mostly occupied by other ryokan and bath houses



Sodium chloride water hot spring, milky white
around 55°C



Two pools, sex separate, all indoors with a strong
relationship with the outside through large windows.
About 3-5 people in each onsen



The establishment doesn't provide any other services
and is not equipped with lounge areas or cafés



No item can be purchased on site, but the bathhouse is
equipped with soap and shampoo for customers



the top floor is dedicated to the female onsen. Its elevated position allows for a large window towards the canal & the neighbouring woods, creating a pleasant atmosphere for bathers & allowing them to enjoy the fresh breeze - almost becoming an outdoor bath

thin dark wooden boards create the characteristic façade, softening the natural light coming from south

a system of translucent plexiglas boxes creates a separation with the changing room and doubles down as storage for personal belongings of the patrons during the bath

a small balcony at the top of the stairs offers a view of the Ginza canal & the small village - the window is covered by the same wood as the rest of the façade, resulting nearly invisible

the ground floor of the building is occupied by the men's onsen. Due to its position along the main road, the bath doesn't have any vertical windows, but it is well lit by a wide horizontal skylight over the whole washing & bathing areas

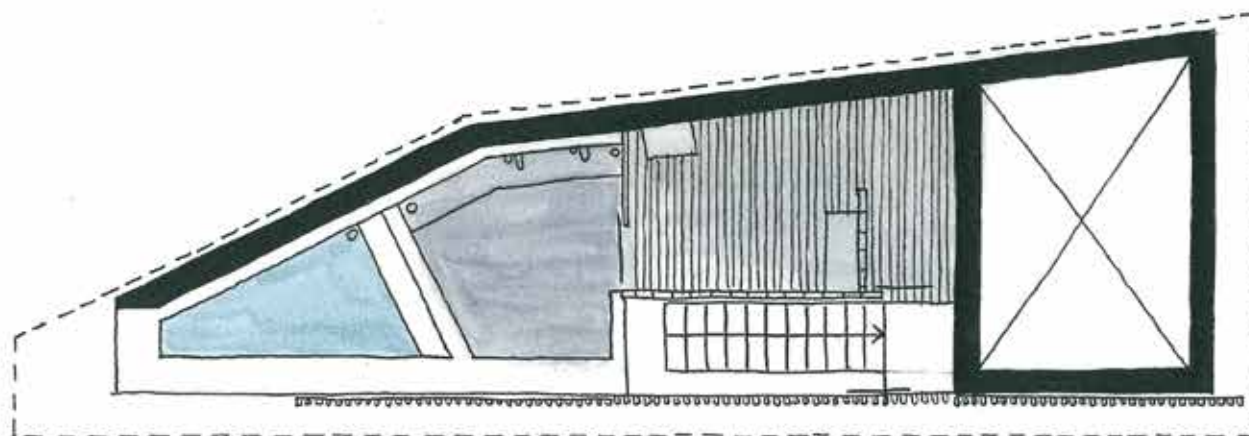


RECEPTION & WAITING ROOM

a translucent plexiglas wall separates the changing room from the common staircase, allowing for natural light to come in while preserving the patrons' privacy & creating a unique atmosphere

* the building is a Soto-yu, managed by the town, located along the main water canal & town road. It faces the road and is sheltered on the north side by the steep Mountain side

* while extremely respectful of its surroundings, the building is extremely contemporary in the choice of materials & in its sharp & edgy lines



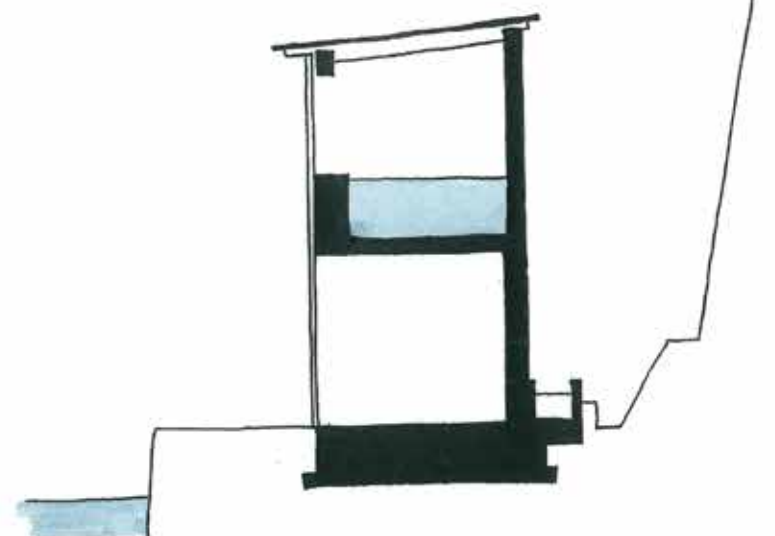
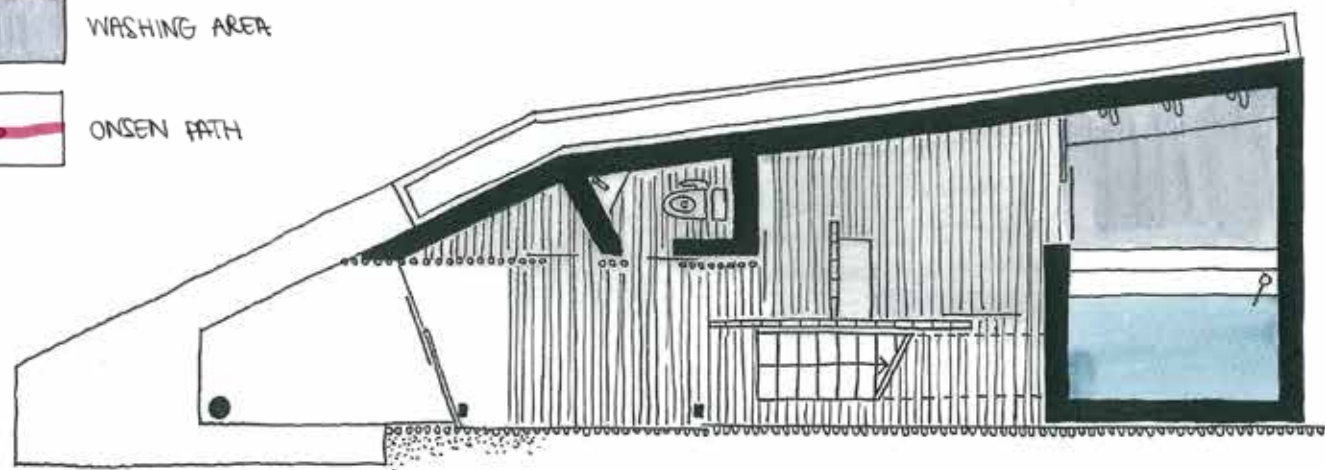
CHANGING AREA



WASHING AREA



ONSEN PATH







1. View of the building's main entrance. Odigo.jp. (2018). Shirogane-yu. [online] Available at: <https://www.odigo.jp/spots/7647-shirogane-yu-obanazawa-shi> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].
2. View from the first floor women's bath. Mitsumasa, F. (Photographer). (2001). [digital images]. Retrieved from <http://kkaa.co.jp/works/architecture/ginzan-bath-house/>
3. Side façade with wooden screens. Mitsumasa, F. (Photographer). (2001). [digital images]. Retrieved from <http://kkaa.co.jp/works/architecture/ginzan-bath-house/>

7676-2 Naairimachi
Ōaza Nagayu,
Taketa-shi,
Ōita



#09

Lamune Onsen
Ōita



Terunobu Fujimori, Yoshiaki Irie
2005



Private *soto yu* annexed to a museum - three buildings
Concrete structure
Single storey for the *onsen*, museum on two floors



The onsen is located in a loosely built rural area in the mountains of Oita, surrounded by fields and forest



Carbonated water hot spring, transparent and fizzy
32°C



Fourteen small pools, in common and private onsen, in-
doors and outdoors
3 to 30 people



There are no other facilities annexed to the museum and
onsen, the museum has a waiting and lounge area



The museum provides towels and other bathing items
for its clients





common bathhouse,
sex separate

lavatories

family baths

Museum & waiting room, only two storey
building of the complex.

- reception and waiting room
on the ground floor
- museum on the first floor

* **FAÇADE**: visible from the street, the complex is characterised by vertical bands of yakisugi - a traditional wooden cladding consisting of charred hinoki cypress wood. Alternating the black wood are bands of white mortar. The whole building has a very earthy feeling, given by its natural colours & curved lines, together with its choice of materials

a very eccentric statue of a dog in a tuxedo towers in the centre of the garden, visible from every side

* **AMUNE ONSEN** gets its name from a popular fizzy drink, due to the characteristic presence of carbon dioxide in the spring water

* **TERUNOBU FUJIMORI (1946)** is an eclectic Japanese architect & architectural historian, known for his eccentric designs & the characteristic use of natural construction materials

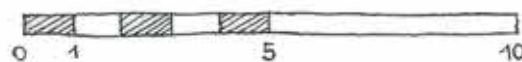
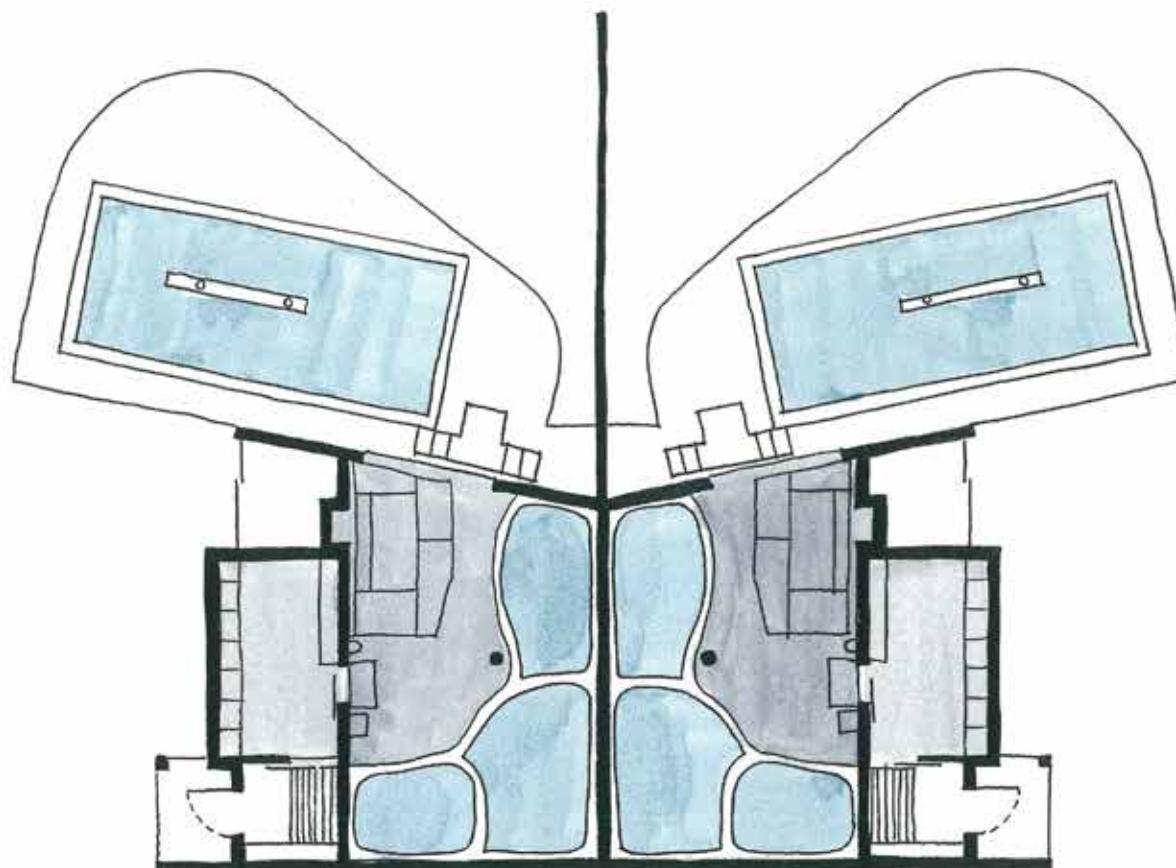
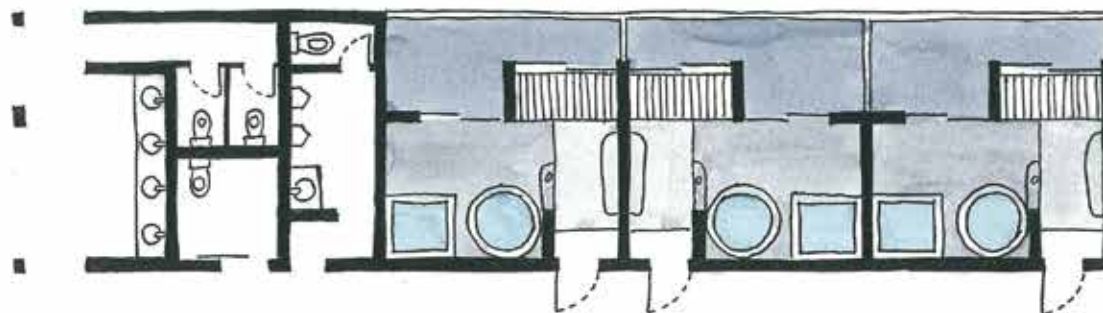
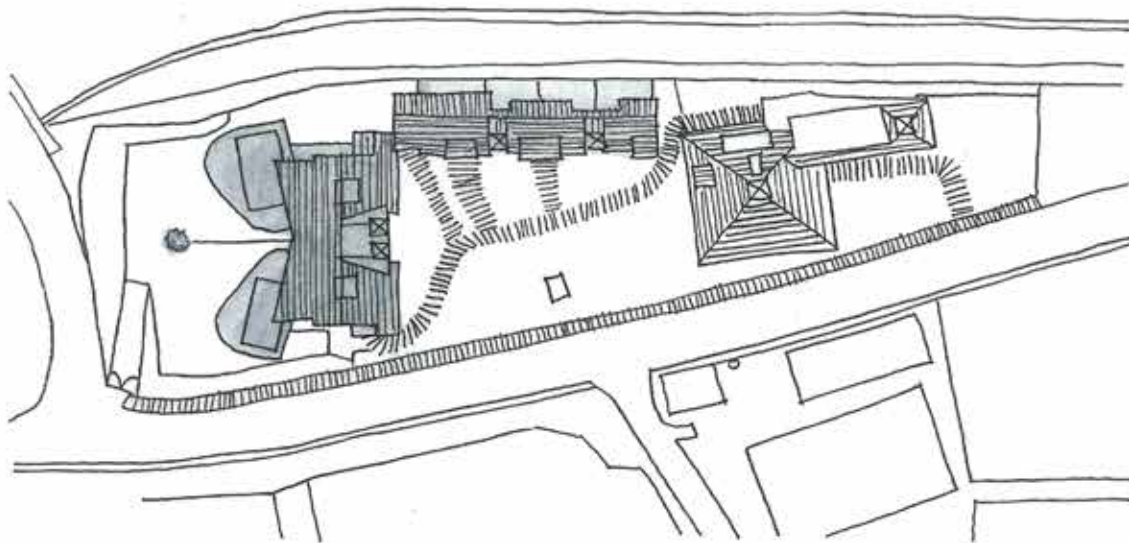
a very large rotenburo on each side of the fence occupies the centre of a garden. It has a wooden structure & is surrounded by a wooden decking on all sides, allowing not to step on the grass

lavatories

private family onsen allow for a more intimate bathing experience and can be rented for a time by families or couples. They consist of a washing area and two indoor tubs. They also open on a small, fenced private garden with a little rotenburo

two sex separate onsen are destined to the locals and tourists alike. Consisting of a changing room and a large indoor washing area with three tubs that look like modelled in clay. A large sliding door opens to a private garden

* every volume is covered by a steep gabled roof covered in either dark metal tiles or thin wooden shingles. At the top of every roof, a vase hosts a small tree, giving the building its innovative & eccentric appearance. All copper tiles are hand bent in order to look more natural



CHANGING AREA



WASHING AREA



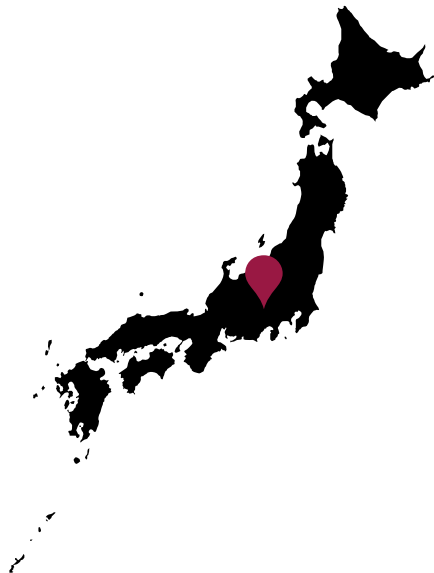
ONSEN PATH





1. View of the family baths building towers. Picssr.com. (2018). jacomejp's most interesting Flickr photos | Picssr. [online] Available at: <http://picssr.com/photos/jacomejp/interesting/page231?n-sid=96087095@N05> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].
2. Front of the main bathhouse building. 秘境温泉 神秘の湯. (2018). 大丸旅館外湯 ラムネ温泉館 - 秘境温泉 神秘の湯. [online] Available at: <http://www.hikyou.jp/detail.php?shid=30361> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].
3. Washing area in the main bathhouse building. Kawaii architecture. (2018). Lamune-Onsen / Terunobu Fujimori Architect. [online] Available at: <https://kawaiiarchitecture.com/2016/11/22/lamune-onsen-terunobu-fujimori-architect/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].
4. Indoor bathtubs. Oita (2018). おおい た風景写真集 | Oita Prefecture's Official Sightseeing Information Site. [online] En.visit-oita.jp. Available at: <http://en.visit-oita.jp/libraries/index/page:98> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

10249-7
Kobuchizawa,
Hokuto,
Yamanashi



#10

Nakamura Keith Haring Collection Onsen Yamanashi



Atsushi Kitagawara
2007



Soto *yu* - whole building
Annexed to a private collection museum
Concrete structure, one storey



The building is part of a rural *onsen* village in
the mountains of Yatsugatake



Sodium chloride water hot spring, light brown
42°C



Four pools, mixed, all outdoors with a view
towards the mountains
About 3-6 people in each *onsen*



Lounge room and stone bath, no food or
beverages provided



The *onsen* provides towels and other bathing
items for its clients





BOILER ROOM

STORAGE

the exterior walls are quite peculiar: polyethylene air packing (generally used for insulation) between transparent plastic sheets. Provides insulation & lighting & keeps the privacy of the inside areas intact

RECEPTION: a small space under the entrance roof, but enclosed by a semitransparent wall & directly connected to the bath

ENTRANCE: covered by a thin roof floating on a support of randomly placed steel pillars. It is surrounded by dark wooden walls

a terrace opens on the forest & includes one of the existing trees into the architecture

- * onsen annexed to the Nakamura Keith Haring Art Museum
- follows the eccentric style of the artist & his use of pure shapes
- in stark contrast with the natural environment that surrounds it, in the depth of the Japanese forest
- each block consists of a small 1 storey building, carefully placed in order to preserve the existing trees & is designed around them

ROCK BATH

two sex separate open air baths occupy most of the lot. Two natural hot spring tubs on each side & a large relaxation space with sun beds

CHANGING ROOM: contrarily to standard onsen layout, changing room & washing space are together & the washing stalls only consist of regular showers, no stools - European style

PARTY COURT

NAKAMURA KEITH HARING COLLECTION

KUROTEN ONSEN

OUTDOOR RELAX AREA/TERRACE

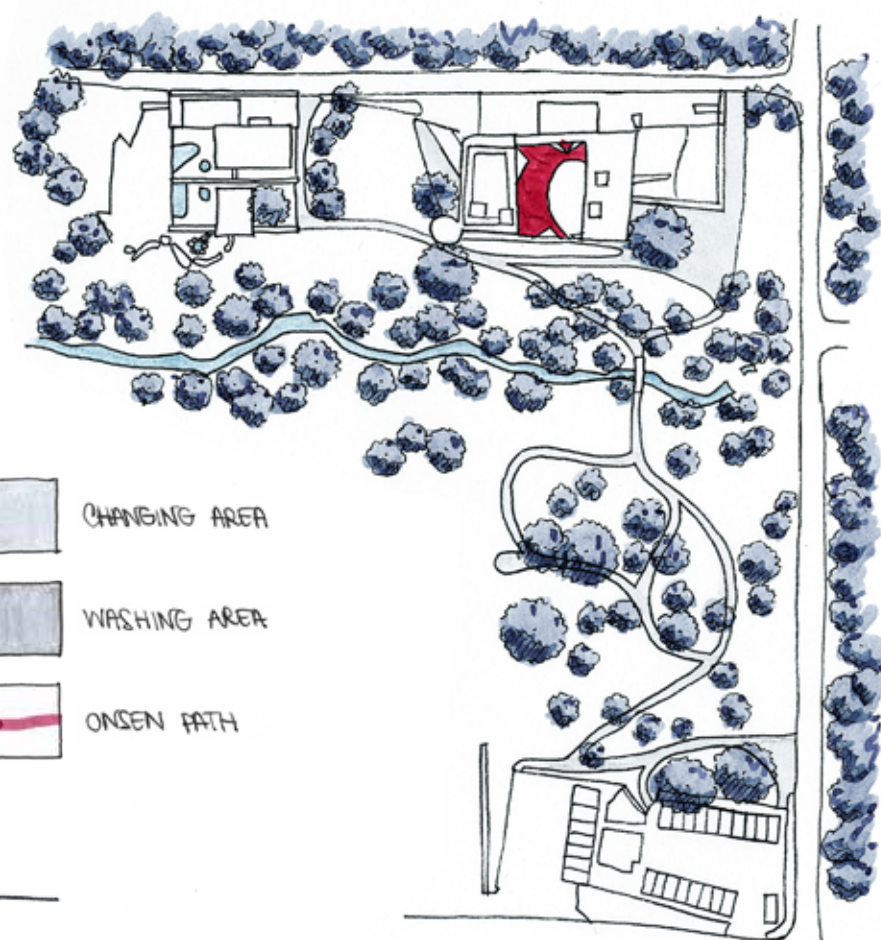
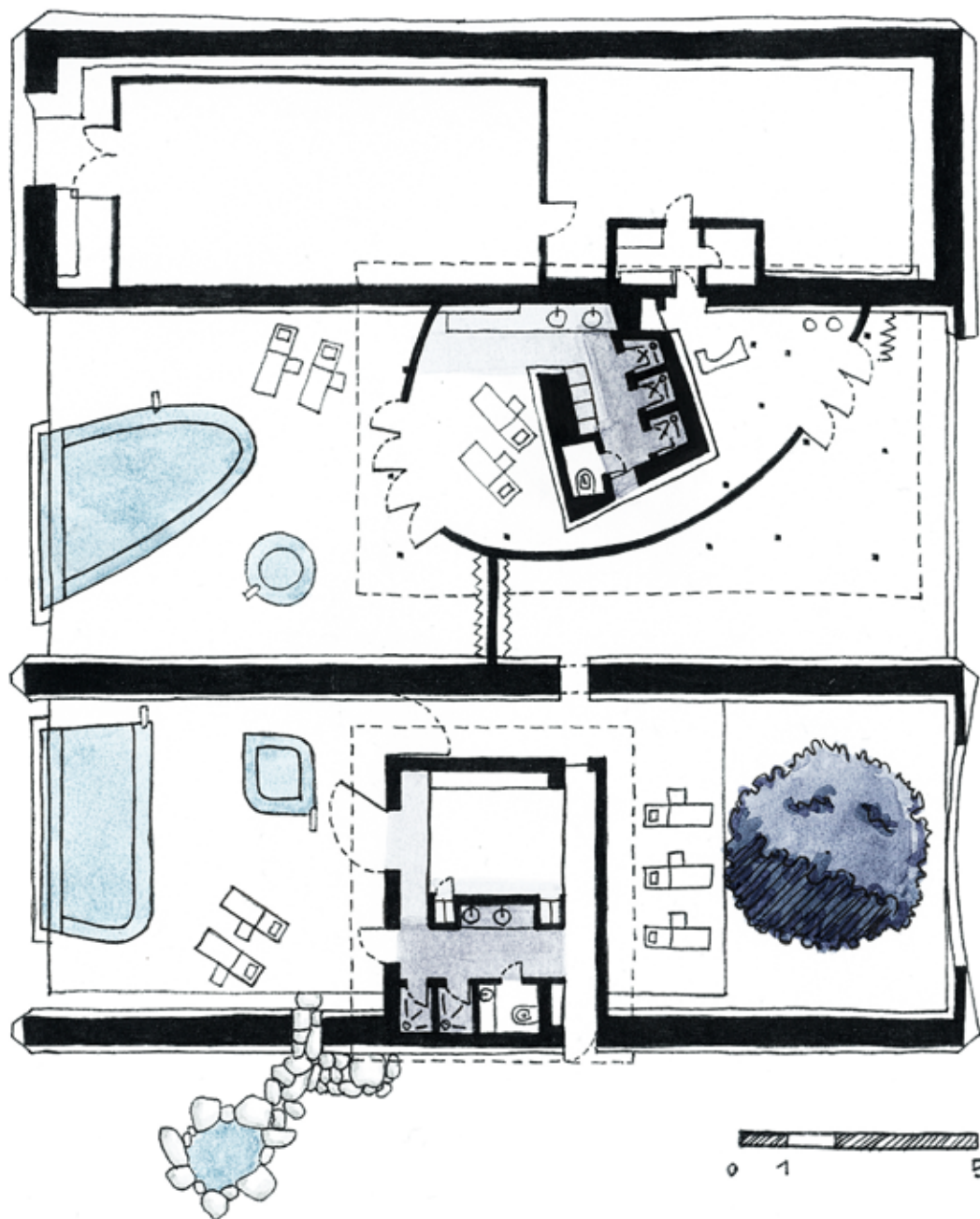
FEMALE CHANGING & WASHING AREA

LOUNGE ROOM

MALE CHANGING & WASHING AREA + LOUNGE ROOM

BOILER ROOM

PARKING LOT



-  CHANGING AREA
-  WASHING AREA
-  ONSEN PATH





4.



5.





1. Museum's main entrance. Ambitect. com. (2018). Nakamura Keith Haring Collection_中村キース・ヘリング美術館 - AMBITECT ARCHITECT DESIGN ATELIER. [online] Available at: http://ambitect.com/Architecture/Nakamura-Keith-Haring-Collection_ [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

2. Museum's rooftop terrace. Kikuchi, D. (2018). Keith Haring's urban art finds apt lodgings in Japan's countryside | The Japan Times. [online] The Japan Times. Available at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2015/08/29/style/keith-harings-urban-art-finds-apt-lodgings-japans-countryside/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

3. Museum lobby. Nakamura-haring.com. (2018). ABOUT | 中村キース・ヘリング美術館. [online] Available at: <http://www.nakamura-haring.com/about/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

4. View of the baths from the neighbouring forest. Judit, B. (2018). Judit Bellostes : entre el arte y la naturaleza – Nakamura Keith Haring collection art museum : Estudio de arquitectura. [online] Blog. bellostes.com. Available at: <http://blog.bellostes.com/?p=1009> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

5. View from the outdoot bathtubs. Kssk. co.jp. (2018). 中村キース・ヘリング美術

館. [online] Available at: <http://www.kssk.co.jp/result/view/47/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

6. Characteristic shape of the posterior corner of the museum building. Kob-art. com. (2018). - KOBUCHIZAWA ART VILLAGE - 小淵沢アートヴィレッジ. [online] Available at: <http://www.kob-art.com> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

Part II: Design idea

Children eat snow
soaking
in the hot spring

Kobayashi Issa



The case studies that were analysed in the earlier stages of this thesis belong to different designers and appertain to various historical and architectural periods, ranging from traditional Edo (1603–1868) era to the present day. However, their analysis highlighted how, despite referring to different contexts, most successful designs incorporate specific elements that tend to be repeated and reinterpreted by the architects from project to project, in order to guarantee a better *onsen* experience to patrons.

Whenever possible, all projects show an interest towards the contact with the surrounding nature. Therefore all rural *onsen* are provided with an outdoor pool or with large openings towards the outside, as we can clearly see in case #04 - Horai Onsen, by Kengo Kuma, where the architecture almost dissolves in its natural context. Whereas, when the building is located in a more urban context, its architecture completely isolates it from the outdoor environment, allowing guests the necessary privacy and disconnect from the town. Of this, good examples are case #06 - Hoshinoya Tokyo, by Azuma Architects and Associates, and case #07 - Ginzan Onsen Fujiya, by Kengo Kuma. In the first case the rooftop tub is completely surrounded by tall walls that hide the city outside, while in the second one, the pools are enclosed by wooden shades and very dense vegetation, successfully combining the screening element with the natural one.

Another important element that can be seen in nearly all projects is the use of natural materials, especially stone and wood. Most of the case studies that were analysed featured wood as the prevalent cladding for floors and walls, while, when necessary, most artificial materials are transparent, such as glass and polymethylmetacrilate. This is the case of #04 - Horai Onsen and #07 - Ginzan Onsen Fujiya, nearly completely constituted by wood in their interiors, but also #09 - Lamune Onsen,

where, while the outdoor cladding of the buildings is traditional blackened wood, the indoor of the baths is a very coarse plaster.

Due to the abundance of natural materials, the prevailing colours inside and outside most *onsen* generally range from the warmer tones of the brown and orange to the colder ones of the grey and beige.

Only a few *onsen* in this research, such as #08 - Ginzan Onsen Shirogane Yu and #10 - Nakamura Keith Haring Collection Onsen, represent an exception to this element. In these designs the architects chose a more contemporary approach, with the use of concrete and white plaster. However, the natural element still prevails over the architectural one, thanks to large openings towards the mountains in the first case and outdoor pools facing the forest in the second one.

Moreover, in the case of Nakamura Onsen, the choice of colours is not only dictated by the atmosphere that the architect wants to create, but also by the artistic style and spirit of the painter to whom the adjacent gallery is dedicated, therefore the use of more vibrant colours revealed to be necessary.

Moreover, the traditional component is almost omnipresent, with most projects either imitating, reinterpreting or carefully referring to elements belonging to Japan's rich historical architecture. The clearest examples are case #05 - Ōedo Onsen, an exact replica of Edo buildings, and #02 - Nozawa Onsen Ōyu, a reconstruction of the original Edo building. However, a more interesting application of the tradition is seen in case #06 - Hoshinoya Onsen. Here the references to the country's traditions are way more subtle and manage to integrate themselves perfectly with their contemporary counterpart in an extremely harmonious totality.

Lastly, they nearly all devote particular care and attention to providing lounge spaces for patrons after the bath, allowing them to linger inside the establishment for longer instead of leaving immediately.

1.





These basic principles, common to the case studies analysed here as well as recurring in nearly all other *onsen* throughout the country, convey an atmosphere of privacy and quiet to the thermal facilities and are likely to be the reason *onsen* culture rose to its popularity among national and international visitors.

ONSEN IN TOKYO

Mostly due to their origins rather than to their location, most of Tokyo *onsen* are missing some elements that are typical of their rural counterparts. The vast majority of the town's hot spring bathhouses was founded as a *sentō*. Later on, thanks to the technological improvements that now allow deep drilling in search of geothermally heated water and due to their rapid decline in popularity, many public baths decided to add a natural hot water source to their facilities and became *onsen* to appeal to a wider public.

This change of destination was rarely combined with a deeper renovation of the existing establishment, therefore the majority of Tokyo *onsen* still have the architecture and ambience of a public bathhouse. While these ex *sentō* usually have a very similar layout to other *onsen*, they rarely paid any attention to the creation of a particular bathing atmosphere, therefore both the design and the choice of materials are exclusively dictated by reasons of practicality and ease of maintenance. Here the ceramic tiles substitute the *hinoki* wood and grey stone, replacing the warm brown and beige with colder colours, such as blue and grey, and giving the ambience the typical atmosphere of a public bathhouse.

Moreover, being mostly located in densely built areas, these establishments are extremely inward-looking. They rarely have any win-

dows towards the outside and, when they provide outdoor pools, these are generally surrounded by tall walls and covered with awnings, resulting almost completely enclosed and losing the outdoor feeling that is characteristic of rural *rotenburo*.

Additionally, since *sentō* were not conceived as places to relax and spend a long time, most of these establishments do not include any lounge areas or tea rooms. Where such spaces were later added, they mostly only consist of benches or armchairs placed near the entrance, in order to allow patrons to consume snacks and beverages from the vending machines. The whole layout reminds more of a hospital rather than a bathhouse and is generally quite alienating, therefore neither the atmosphere nor the services provided encourage long stays.

Furthermore, some city hot spring baths incorporate new functions as a mean to attract a wider public, aiming at the younger population and at tourists, who don't always feel comfortable with the all nude bathing practices that are typical of traditional *onsen*. Therefore, many bathhouses are now offering services such as jacuzzi, saunas and massages. This makes them resemble European SPAs more and more and distance themselves from the typical *onsen* atmosphere.

Either way, the *onsen* loses part of its identity and traditional atmosphere that made it famous throughout the centuries.

DESIGN CONCEPT

The health benefits of *onsen* therapy are well proven: its favourable effect in releasing stress and providing relief from overwork have been confirmed by many peer reviewed scientific studies throughout the past few decades. Therefore, *onsen* baths after long days in the office could be an extremely effective way to improve the lifestyle and health

Cover image: Inside view of one of Ginzan Onsen Fujiya's suites. Savoie, J. (Photographer). (2006). [digital images]. Retrieved from <http://architecture.jonathansavoie.com/filter/Kengo-Kuma/Fujiya-Ginzan>

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2. Takashi Yasui. (2018). Takashi Yasui. [online] Available at: <http://takashiyasui.com> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

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4. A contemporary tea house pavilion. Mattmcvicar.com. (2018). Japanese Tea Ceremony | Matt McVicar. [online] Available at: <http://www.mattmcvicar.com/japanese-tea-ceremony/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

5. Traditional tea house hearth for the *matcha* preparation. Mattmcvicar.com. (2018). Japanese Tea Ceremony | Matt McVicar. [online] Available at: <http://www.mattmcvicar.com/japanese-tea-ceremony/>

mattmcvicar.com/japanese-tea-ceremony/ [Accessed 16 Feb. 2018].

6. Genko-an Temple. Kyoto, S. (2018). Genko-an Temple | Kyoto Travel Guide <Official>. [online] Kyoto Travel Guide <Official>. Available at: https://kyoto.travel/en/shrine_temple/139 [Accessed 16 Feb. 2018].

7. Part of a tea ceremony. Zhuanlan.zhihu.com. (2018). 文化 03 | 日本茶道入门, 读完这一篇就够了. [online] Available at: <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/27566803> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2018].



of salary men and women in town.

Concurrently, Tokyo's salary men and women could bring new flow of clients to the city's *onsen*, helping them regaining the long overdue boost in clientele, that has been steadily declining in the past thirty years. In order to create a positive environment for relaxation and stress release after a long day of work, it is necessary to improve the existing structures to include some of the functions and characteristics that give rural *onsen* their typical flair, so to allow Tokyo patrons to have the same bathing experience. Opening the bath towards the outside and adding a small garden can provide the contact with nature that is a defining tract of a pleasant *onsen* experience. Moreover, simply changing the choice of materials used for the interior finishing can make the ambience feel warmer and more intimate.

At the same time, though, it is not always possible to improve the existing structures without changing the whole interiors and exteriors of the building. Oftentimes, the surroundings do not allow for the same privacy and freedom that rural *onsen* have the opportunity to enjoy and adding an open bathing area is generally not an option. At the same time, this operation can prove extremely difficult for bathhouse owners as it can be prohibitively costly to renovate an entire building.

However, where the surrounding area provides small unused lots that allow for an addition, it could be more practical, and cheaper, to design a new small volume, adjoining or counterposed to the existent building, rather than modifying the existing structure.

This new small annexation could then become a standardised prototype that can be duplicated and adapted to different existing *onsen*, every time adding the functions and spaces that are currently missing in that specific establishment and improving the bathing experience of its patrons.

4.





From these preconditions, the development of the design idea then proceeded to identify a series of elements and functions that represent the essence of the *onsen* experience.

First of all, *onsen* villages always provide accommodation in the form of *ryokan* or *minshuku*, traditional family run inns where *onsen* goers can spend the night after their bath. This feature, especially in areas with a high concentration of office buildings, could prove extremely useful, as well as remunerative for the *onsen* owners, since many times workers are forced to work long hours and miss the last train home. In these cases, having a pleasant emergency lodging for the night and a relaxing bath in the hot spring water would offer a better option compared to the small anonymous capsule hotels or the costly high end accommodation.

Then, as previously mentioned, many hot spring bathhouses have a lounge room, generally in the form of an *ochanoma*, a traditional tea house, where owners can administer home made snacks and hot beverages to their patrons. This could be a quick and effective implementation for all *onsen* that currently do not provide a relaxation area or only offer pre packaged vending machine snacks.

When the surroundings of the existing building do not allow for outdoor baths for privacy reasons, green areas can still be included in the design as part of the lounge area. This feature would be particularly commodious in areas of the city where public green spaces lack and, where not strictly private for *onsen* patrons, it would bring a considerable benefit to all residents of the neighbourhood.

Lastly, some establishments offer a small public foot bath, usually in front of the entrance of the bathhouse. Particularly appreciated by passers by who might not have the time for a full body soak inside the bath,

6.



these small hot water pools also function as an extremely effective advertisement of the bathhouse and of the quality of its waters, while providing a clear benefit for the whole neighbourhood.

Depending on the characteristics of the existing bathhouse, the added module could include some or all of these features.

Once its functions are well determined, the volume should then be designed following the principles that were highlighted in the previous paragraphs. Scrupulous attention has to be aimed at the choice of materials and to the relationship with the outside, while particular consideration has to be destined towards the respect of the traditional Japanese practices.

In this thesis, two distinct sites were selected in order to give two different application of these principles to the design of a small addition for the existing bathhouses.

The first design case is Jakotsuyu Onsen, a bathhouse located in the heart of Asakusa, one of Tokyo's business districts. Founded as a simple *sentō*, it became an *onsen* a few years ago, but its basic structure and finishings remained unchanged. While being a very clean and orderly establishment, it is a rather cold and impersonal environment, despite many efforts by the owners to improve its interiors and exteriors, such as the addition of a rock cladding and a pond next to the outdoor pools. Its main shortcomings concern the lack of outdoor spaces, that are extremely tight and completely enclosed on all sides, and the scarcity of lounge areas. A small room at the entrance is dedicated to the scope, but it feels rather cluttered and impersonal, only consisting of a table and a few vending machines containing pre packed snacks.

Therefore, the addition of a green area and a small tea house could radically improve the existing building.

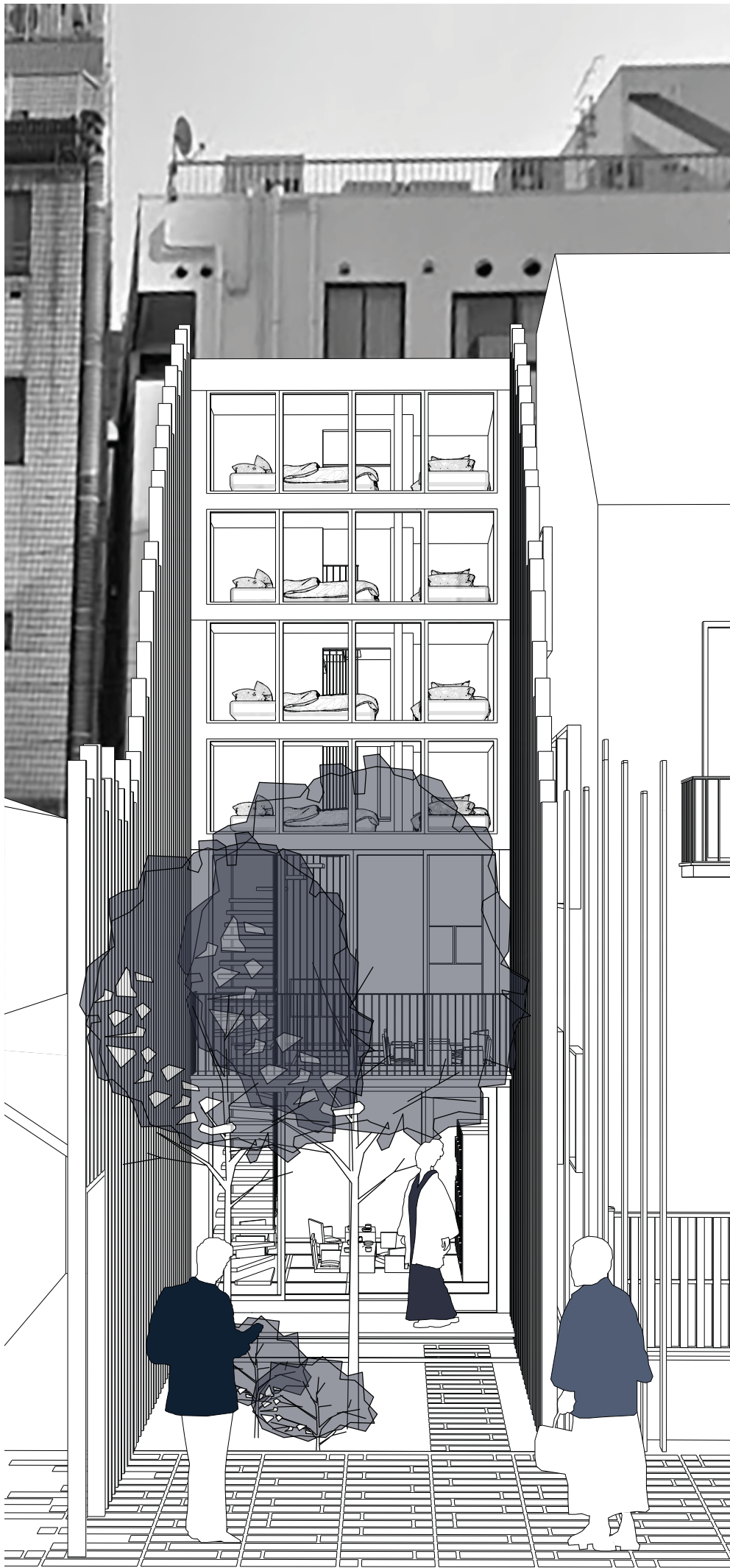
Concurrently, its location in a very central area of the business district offers the chance to include a small capsule hotel aimed at the office workers in the area, creating a sort of micro *ryokan* where people can rest for a few hours after work, before and after a relaxing bath.

The second design case is Sakae Yu, a small establishment situated in a quiet residential suburb of Shibuya ward. This neighbourhood is totally different from the previous case, characterised by office buildings and night life establishments. The area of Sasazuka is extremely calm and mostly constituted by modest two and three-storey apartment buildings, an elementary school and a few daytime local businesses. The area lacks public green areas and the apartment buildings generally do not have any open spaces. Therefore, also in this case, the addition of a small garden could prove extremely beneficial.

Moreover, similarly to the previous case, the bathhouse doesn't provide substantial relaxation spaces and services. The entrance area is furnished with benches and a few vending machines provide snacks and sodas, reminding more of a hospital waiting room rather than a hot spring facility. Furthermore, a small room enclosed by glass walls is dedicated as a smoking area, where the user seems to be confined in a fish tank. This establishment could certainly benefit from the addition of external spaces, to be located in the parking lot annexed to the building, providing considerable benefits to the patrons and to the residents alike.

Lastly, the onsen could improve its external appearance by arranging a foot bath on the front of the building, as a ploy to advertise its activity from the outside and persuade the casual passers by to enter the establishment.





1-11-11
Asakusa,
Taitō,
Tōkyō

#P1

Jakotsuyu Onsen
Asakusa, Tokyo

Unknown architect
~1970



On the ground floor of an apartment building
Concrete structure



One storey dedicated to the bathhouse, four storeys total

The building is located in a densely built neighbourhood,
in an active commercial and office area of Tokyo



Metasilicic acid and bicarbonate,
Brown waters, 18°C naturally, artificially heated to 42°C



Six pools, three for each gender, rigorously separate at all
times. Two indoors and four, covered, outdoors:
About 4-6 people in each tub



One very small common area at the entrance and two
massage arm chairs in each changing room,
vending machines sell snacks and beverages



Towels, shampoo and other
items can be rented or bought inside the *onsen*



a large washing area occupies most of the main room, holding almost thirty stalls, distributed against the walls & around a central low wall. They all consist of a tap & shower head. Two regular showers are also present at the entrance

each side of the bathhouse has two rotenburo, a hot spring water one and a cold fresh water one, used to cool the body after the hot bath

a slightly elevated entrance hosts the shoe lockers & the rest of the establishment is strictly shoes off only

an empty lot is located right across the narrow alley, in front of the coin laundry annexed to the bathhouse. It is surrounded by apartment buildings.

TICKET BOOTH & PORTER'S LODGE

a small lounge with a table allows customers to consume snacks & hot beverages purchased from the vending machines

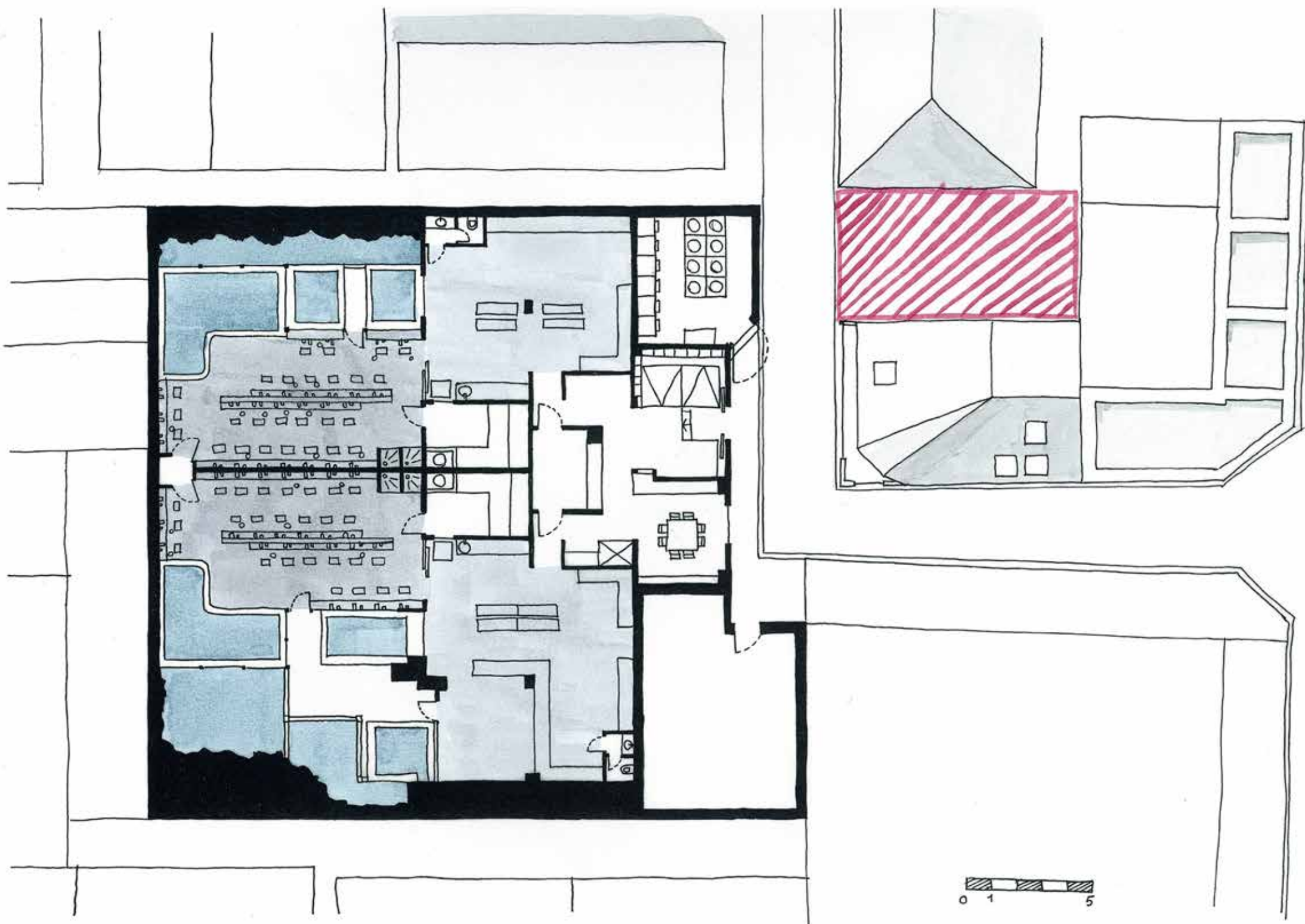
rotenburo face a large pond filled with koi karpis & local water plants

both onsen have an outdoor area, despite being located in a very busy neighbourhood of Tokyo, Asakusa. For that reason, these areas are surrounded by tall concrete walls. In order to convey a more earthy feeling, these walls are clad in rough stone.

a large changing area hosts a small lounge area consisting in two massage armchairs facing the rotenburo.

each side of the bathhouse also has a large sauna

* originally a sento, the establishment was linked to hot spring water in order to attract a higher volume of public. It maintains the sento feeling & characteristics & doesn't really convey the whole onsen experience to bathers



0 1 5

-  CHANGING AREA
-  WASHING AREA
-  ONSEN PATH





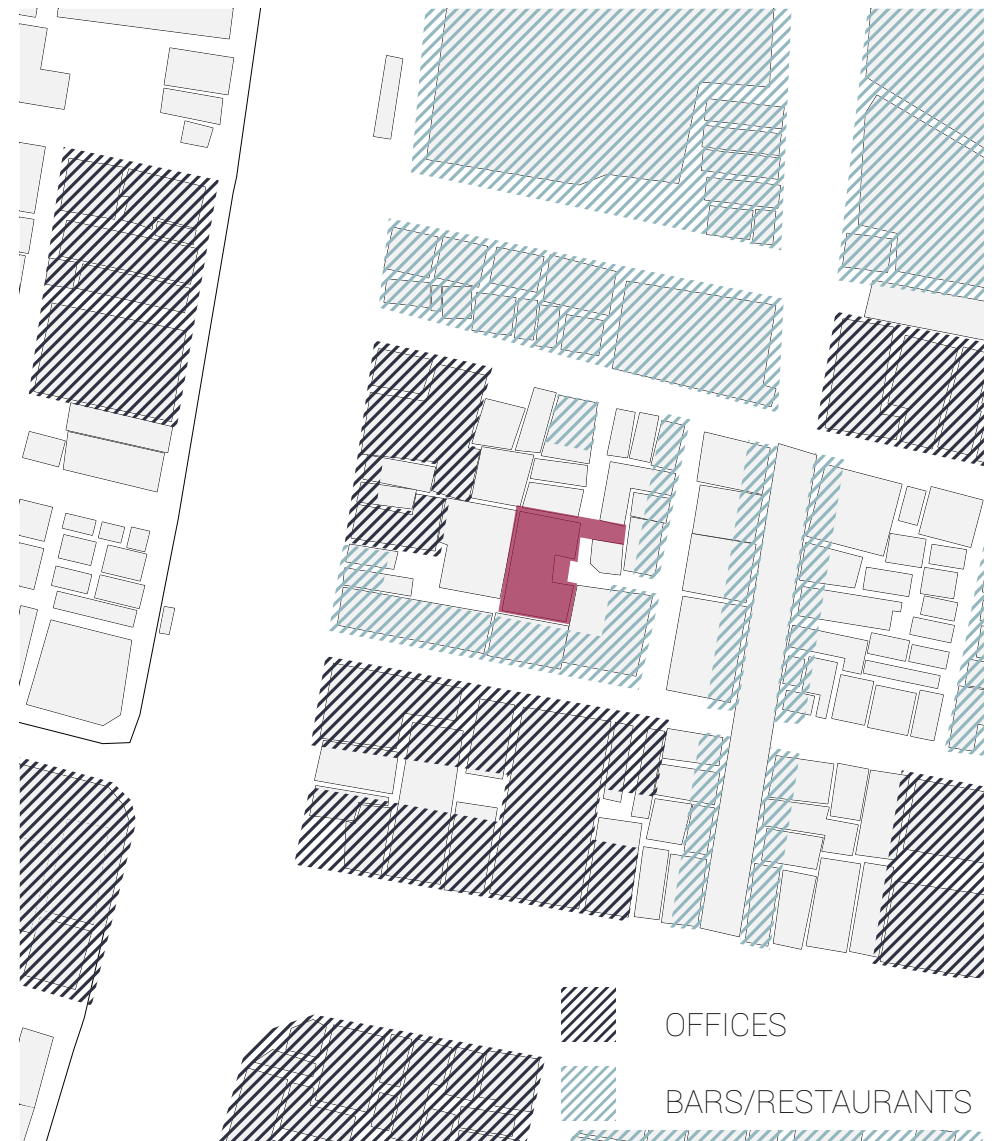
ONSEN LOCATION

Jakotsuyu Onsen is located in the popular Asakusa quarter, one of Tokyo's most active business and entertainment districts. A part of Taito ward, Asakusa is situated in the north east of the metropolis, at the end of Ginza metro line, and is the heart of the so called *Shitamachi*, or "low city", the lower area of Tokyo. Positioned along the banks of the Sumida river, the main watercourse of the city, it has historically been one of the main entertainment districts of Tokyo since the Edo period, only surpassed by the more colourful and popular areas of Shibuya and Shinjuku in more recent years.

The neighbourhood is mostly constituted by office buildings, large department stores and night life activities. Therefore it is regularly frequented by businessmen and large firms employees. Most of the commercial activities are operating during the evenings and nights, aiming at the salary men leaving their offices.

The bathhouse is located in the heart of the neighbourhood, sitting in between the world famous Senso-ji Temple and Kappabashi *dori*, the so called "kitchen town", that supplies nearly all restaurants in Tokyo and is most renowned for its realistic plastic display food compositions.

Right in the middle of a densely built block, the *onsen* finds itself at the intersection of two main arteries: Kokusai *dori*, that runs north to south, and Kaminarimon *dori*, that leads to Asakusa station and then to the other side of the Sumida river. However, its main entrance faces a narrow backstreet that strongly contrasts with the wide boulevards studded of tall modern glass skyscrapers that surround the block on the other sides. In Tokyo, due to the building regulations that allow large



and tall buildings only along the main roads, smaller side streets generally only accommodate two to four stories constructions. Therefore, as it often happens, this area doesn't really give the feeling of being in the pulsing heart of one of the highest density metropolis in the world. On the contrary, the immediate proximities of the *onsen* are studded with local businesses or small family run bars and convey the feeling of a lowered, more people oriented scale, as if walking through the suburbs or a small rural village.

The area is an extremely popular spot for the employees in the nearby office buildings as after work outing.

THE BUILDING

The bathhouse is located on the ground floor of a three stories apartment building and is provided with its own separate entrance on the road side. Originally established as a *sentō*, it was later transformed in *onsen* thanks to the connection to hot spring water from an underground drilling, that now substitutes the hot tap water in filling the three tubs on each side of the bathhouse.

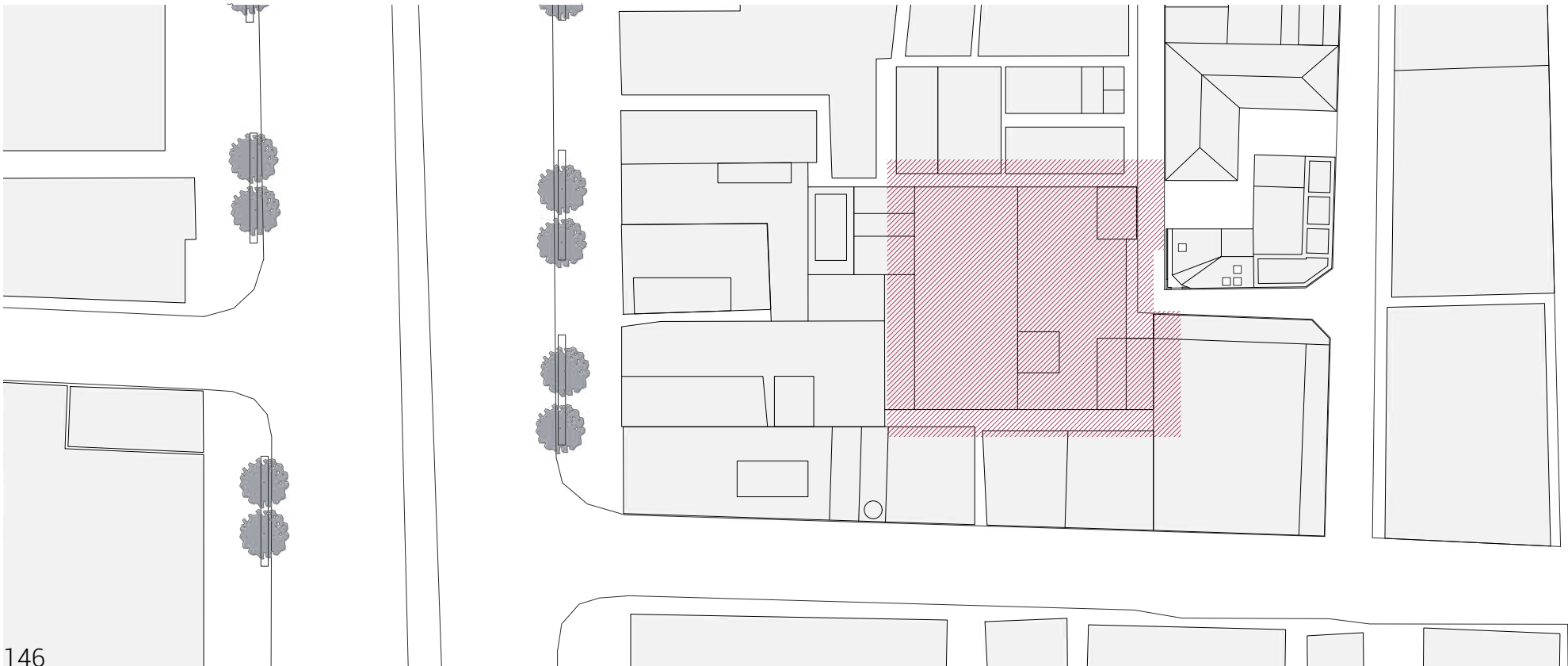
The entryway is slim and confined. A small *genkan* surrounded by coin lockers allows for the removal and storage of the shoes. From there, a narrow corridor runs along the reception desk where patrons can purchase tickets before entering the baths. On the left of the entrance a small room is dedicated to rest area, provided with a table and a few automatic vending machines selling pre-packaged snacks and drinks. The space is rather confined and cluttered with furniture, resulting in a quite impersonal environment. Paired with the lack of fresh food and drinks, it doesn't encourage patrons to linger for too long.

THE ONSEN

On the left and right of the reception desk, two short S shaped corridors lead to the changing rooms. Extremely clean and well organised, the changing rooms can accommodate around 30 to 40 people each. Each one of them has large glass doors that face the baths on one side and lockers on all other walls. A small space is equipped with two massaging armchairs that face the outdoor baths in an attempt to create a lounge area after the bath.

From the changing room, a wide glass door provides access to the spacious washing area, where stalls are lined along the perimeter and around a low division wall in the middle of the room. The washing stalls consist of two separate taps for hot and cold water, a shower head and a mirror. A small step creates a shelf to be used to place shower products, wash cloths and other items during the washing phase, as well as, originally, host the water bucket to mix hot and cold water while bathing. Two showers on each side are also available for a quick rinse before or after the hot tub soak.

A large tile painting depicting a view of mount Fuji occupies the upper part of the back wall and is visible from both the male and female baths, since the division wall between the two washing spaces only has an height of 2,5 metres and doesn't completely separate them. The Fuji depiction is a reference deriving from the tradition of *sentō*: due to their downtown location and lack of natural landscape views, many bathhouses started decorating their interiors with representations of rural sceneries, often portraying the most famous Japanese mountain, considered sacred by Shintoism. This is still a characteristic feature that can be observed in the quasi totality of *sentō* across the country and an



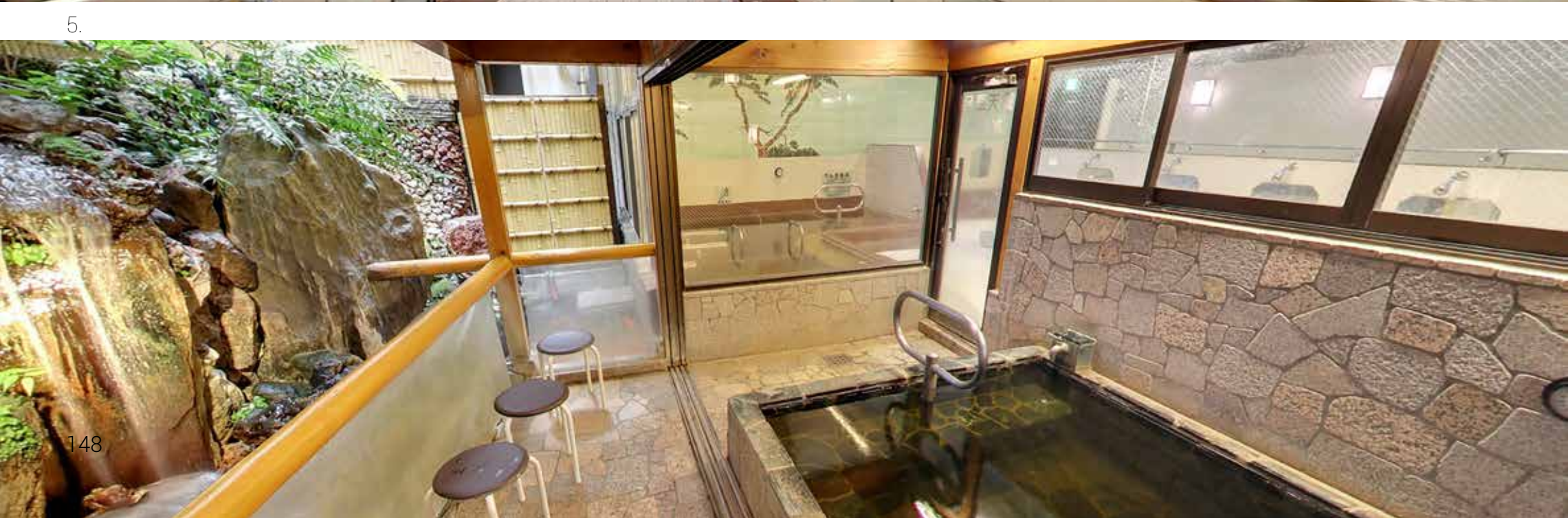
elite group of painters train for years under bathhouse painting masters in order to further the tradition to this day.

Next to the showers, a door opens towards a small wooden clad sauna. The bottom corner of the washing space is occupied by a large L shaped hot tub, filled with brown hot spring water. The corner area is carefully shaped in order to create sitting spaces equipped with a series of water jets. The exterior wall on the tub side is entirely glazed and faces the outdoor area, allowing bathers to see the small pond and the rock walls even from the inside.

At the bottom of the indoor tub, a door allows patrons to access the outside area, equipped with two, smaller but deeper *rotenburo*. Surrounded with tall walls and covered by an awning, the space feels rather enclosed. The impression of being outside is only hinted by the temperature, much colder than inside, and by the appearance of the perimeter walls. These are entirely clad with unrefined rocks and remind of the side of a mountain, in an attempt to recreate the outdoor landscape that is typical of rural *onsen*. To further this impression, a small pond with plants and *koi* carps is positioned along the rock wall.

While the effort is clear and quite appreciated, it is not completely successful. This area still feels quite confined and enclosed on all sides and would benefit from some stronger contact with the outside, even just through an opening towards the sky. Unfortunately, this is not possible due to the presence of apartments, on the upper floors and in the surrounding buildings, with balconies that face towards the outdoors pools. Even though the choice of colours for the interiors of the bathhouse is generally oriented towards the natural brown and beige shades, the selection of materials is mostly determined by practical reasons such as





ease in cleaning and maintaining the spaces. Therefore all interior surfaces are tiled or covered with parquet patterned PVC flooring, feeling less warm and intimate than real wood and stone would.

PROJECT SITE

Across the extremely narrow back alley that cuts through the block, squeezed between two apartment buildings, there is a small parcel of terrain that is currently unused. The lot is fairly regular and has the typical shape of *machiya* lots, a rectangle with the narrow side facing the street and develops towards the centre of the block. Extremely limited in size, the parcel measures nearly 5 metres in width and 10 metres in depth. The peculiar location in which the site finds itself offers a unique opportunity for the development of its lounging areas.

The narrow alley between the bathhouse and the empty lot is defined by the word *roji* in Japanese, a narrow backside walkway that represents the lowest step in Japanese street hierarchy. These spaces, still quite present in old Tokyo neighbourhoods, represent a characteristic example of public space that gets appropriated by private users. Being so narrow and intimate, these alleys often become an extension of the outdoor spaces of the houses that face them: inhabitants place potted plants and chairs in front of their entrance doors, while shops often advertise their activities with signs and banners. While extremely common in the past, just like the *onsen* and *sentō* themselves, these very peculiar public spaces are slowly disappearing from Japanese cities due to new building regulations that don't allow for such narrow alleys. This is the perfect site for an addition to the existing *onsen* building.

1. Roofscape view of Asakusa. Blog.biancasing.com. (2018). The Gate Hotel Asakusa Kaminarimon | Japan. [online] Available at: <http://blog.biancasing.com/the-gate-hotel-asakusa-kaminarimon-japan/> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2018].
2. Main entrance to the bathhouse.
3. View of the male changing room.
4. View of the male washing room.
5. Male *rotenburo*, with a view over the rock wall and the inside tubs through the large windows.
6. View of the empty lot and the *roji* that separates it from the bathhouse.

ble at: https://www.google.co.jp/maps/@35.7120257,139.7927269,3a,75y,103.48h,90t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sTAUI-B1UCykehwh7DCwNZFw!2e0!6s%2F%2Fgeo0.ggpht.com%2Fcbk%3Fpanoid%3DTAUIB1UCykehwh7DCwNZFw%26output%3Dthumbnail%26cb_client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26thumb%3D2%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D106.45259%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i13312!8i6656?hl=en [Accessed 16 Feb. 2018].

Images 2 to 6 - Google.co.jp. (2018). Cite a Website - Cite This For Me. [online] Availa-





DESIGN APPROACH

Japanese society is known worldwide for its focus on productivity rather than employees' well being, forcing workers into long and gruesome working hours. Therefore there are limited opportunities for the average salary men to leave the town for long holidays. However, for everyday unwinding, the numerous town *onsen* would offer an effective remedy. Nonetheless, in its current form, this establishment is not used for its relaxation purposes and only executes hygienic functions. In order to change this behaviour the *onsen* should lose its flair of pure functionality and gain new features, to be more inviting and relaxing.

Since the *onsen* practices are so rooted in Japanese culture, these new features should be consistent with its inherent traditional concept. A sensible addition to expand this concept, comprising a Japanese garden, a small tea house and a capsule *ryokan*, would allow clients to take micro holidays after a long work day.

The inclusion of an *ochanoma* and *ryokan* adds to the traditional experience by giving access to typical food and making the stay a whole evening micro holiday. This way the establishment satisfies multiple needs instead of just playing functional cleaning after work.

Building on this concept, as the adjacent street is almost private, the *onsen* can temporarily expand towards the alley, in order to also feature a communal experience. This would add value for the whole neighbourhood, making this *onsen* the centre of the area, developing old traditions and giving residents and salary men alike the often lost sense of community.

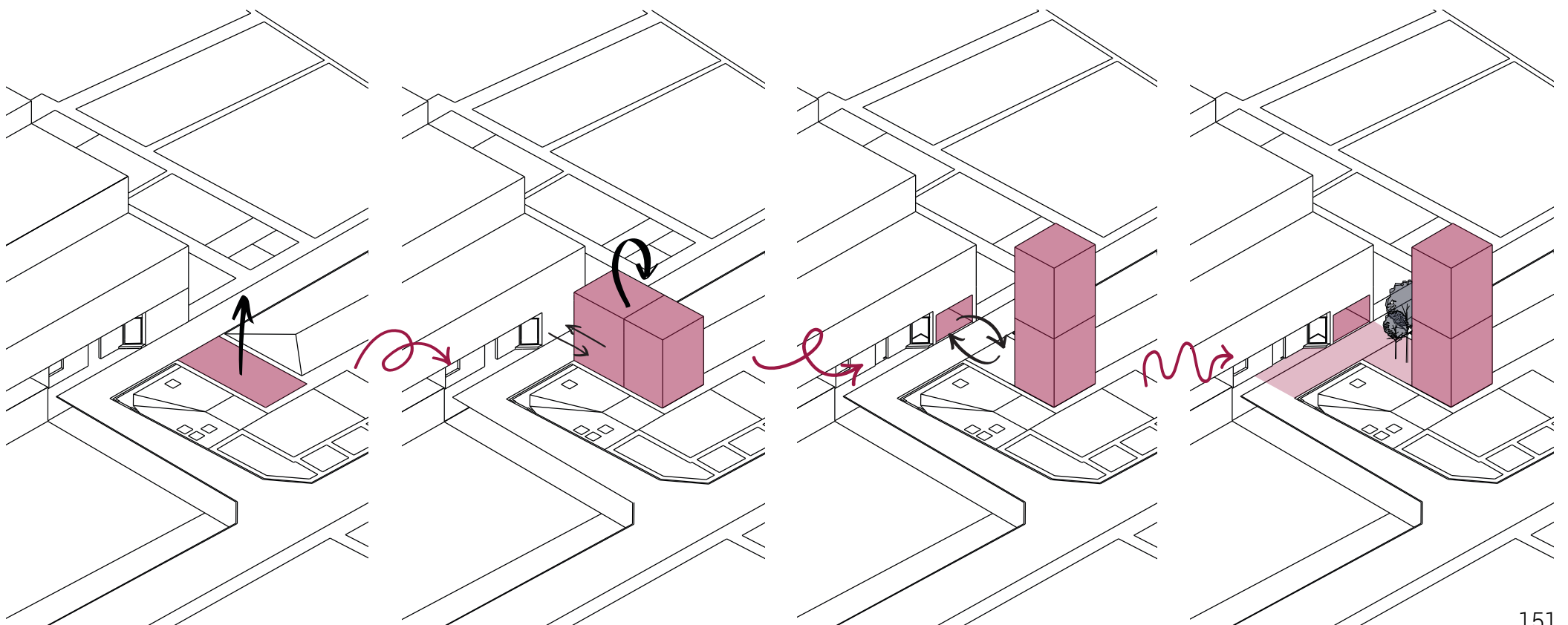
The coin laundry is moved to the empty shop at the corner of the street and its current location hosts another reading and relaxation space, fit-

ted with a full height sliding glass door that opens towards the alley and faces the Japanese garden.

The new addition area is enclosed by a wooden fence made with slim and deep planks of *yakisugi*, in order to allow view of the inside only from certain angles. This ensures a sort of privacy to the space, hiding the view of the busy town outside and allowing visitors to distance themselves from it. However, the fence can open during night hours, rotating in order to enclose the portion of the *roji* between the existing building and the garden. This allows it to appropriate part of the public space and involve the local community by creating one whole common space with the two *ochanoma* at the extremities. For this purpose, another similar fence is located on the opposite side of the bathhouse entrance. When both are open the space is closed off, if not for two small passages, and creates a more intimate environment inside the *roji*. This form of seclusion allows to recreate a miniature version of a traditional *onsen* village, where patrons can linger in their *yukata*, walking from one tea house to the other as it's customary in rural spots such as Kinohaki and Hakone.

The project develops in a series of layers, represented by the different levels of privacy. Just like inside the *onsen*, the more one distances oneself from the entrance, the more private the space becomes. From the centre, the road being the most public one, spaces get more and more intimate the further one moves towards the sides.

On the east of the road, the wooden fence determines the limit of the second layer, the garden, that appears more private while still being freely accessible through the sliding door. Beyond the trees and the small pond, the third layer, the *ochanoma*, welcomes customers in a





warm and intimate environment. Here they can distance themselves from the fervour and hurry of the surrounding district anymore and are free to relax while sipping some fresh *matcha* and eating little traditional specialties.

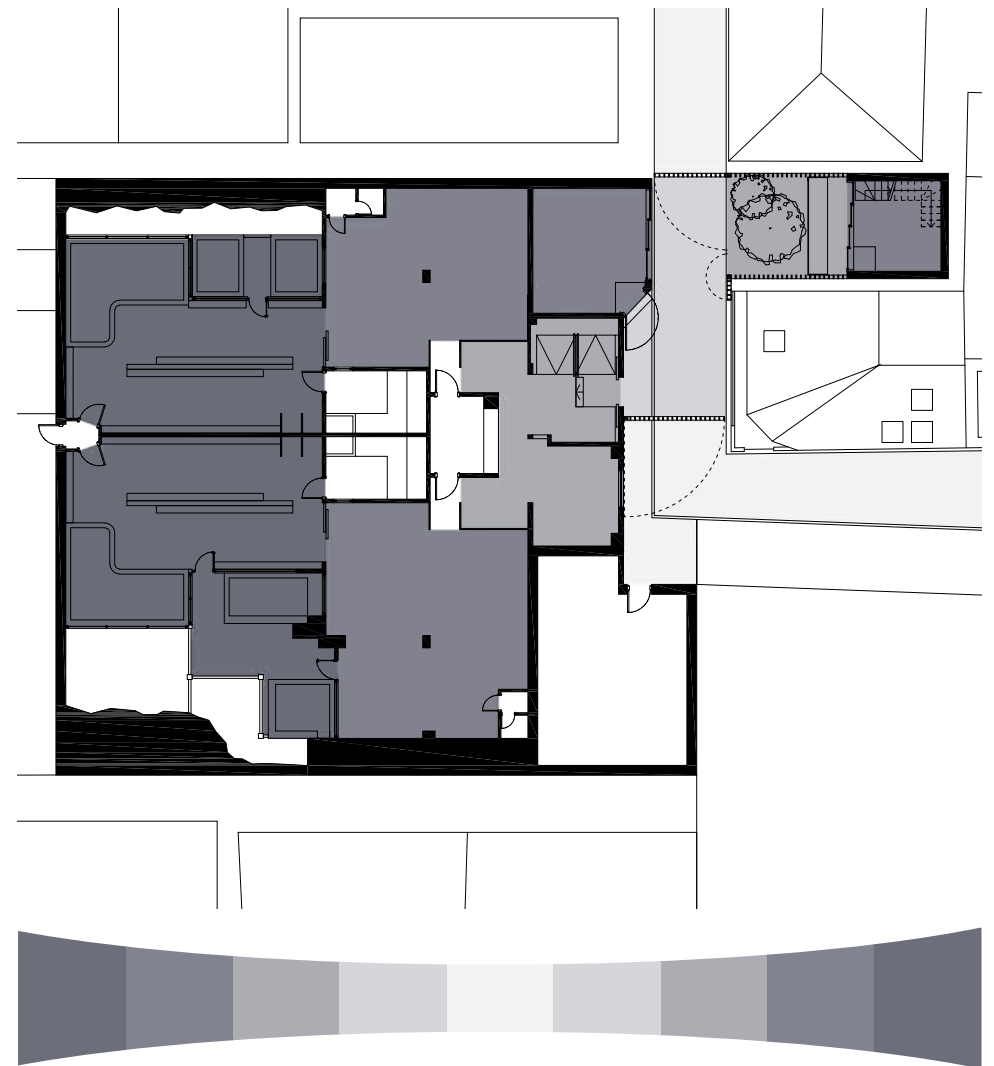
From there, a wooden staircase brings patrons to a more private tea room, consisting of smaller tables separated by light paper screens, and then to the heart of the building, the micro *ryokan*, where they can spend the night in a traditional and welcoming environment.

LAYOUT

A tall fence allows for the necessary privacy and creates a filter between the garden and the city, consenting to feel a clear separation from the busy working environment that lies a few steps away. However, the front portion can be completely open in certain times of the day. This allows the miniature garden to invade the narrow street, creating a connection with the existing building and the *ochanoma* across the *roji*. The front of the lot is occupied by a small garden where patrons can enjoy the fresh air and the contact with the nature. A green area and a narrow pond give the typical feeling of the traditional *ryokan* and allow for a few hours of relax after a long day at work without having to leave the town.

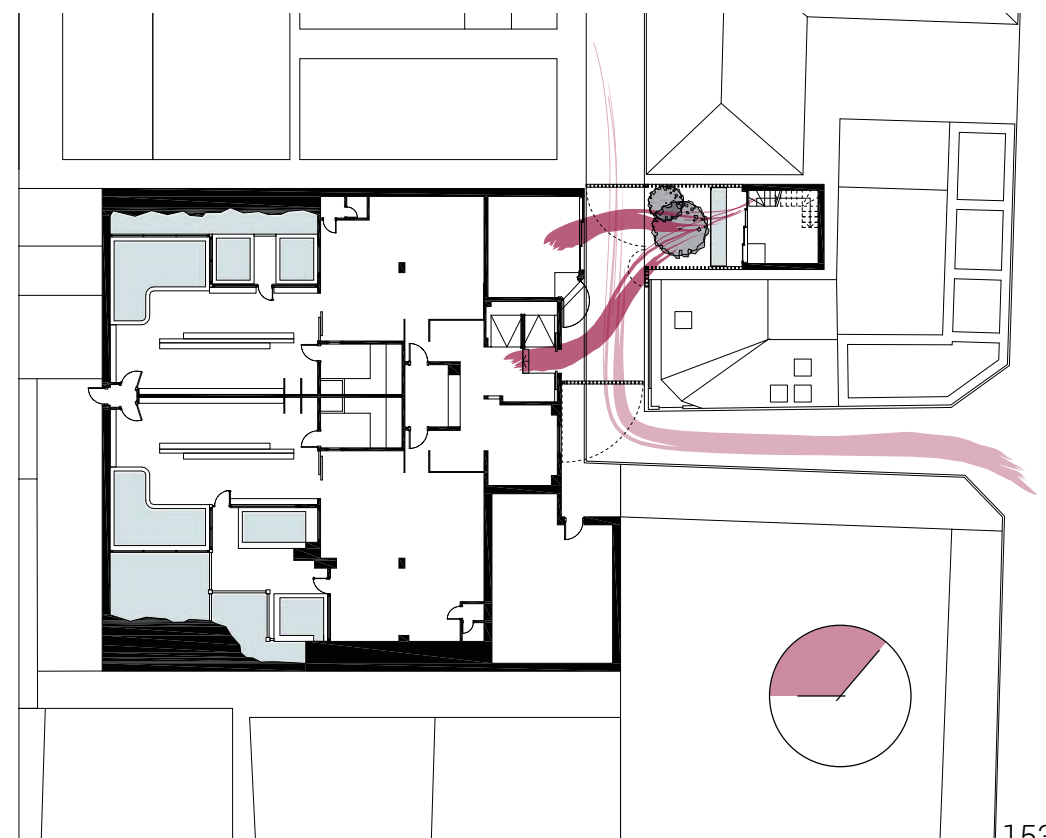
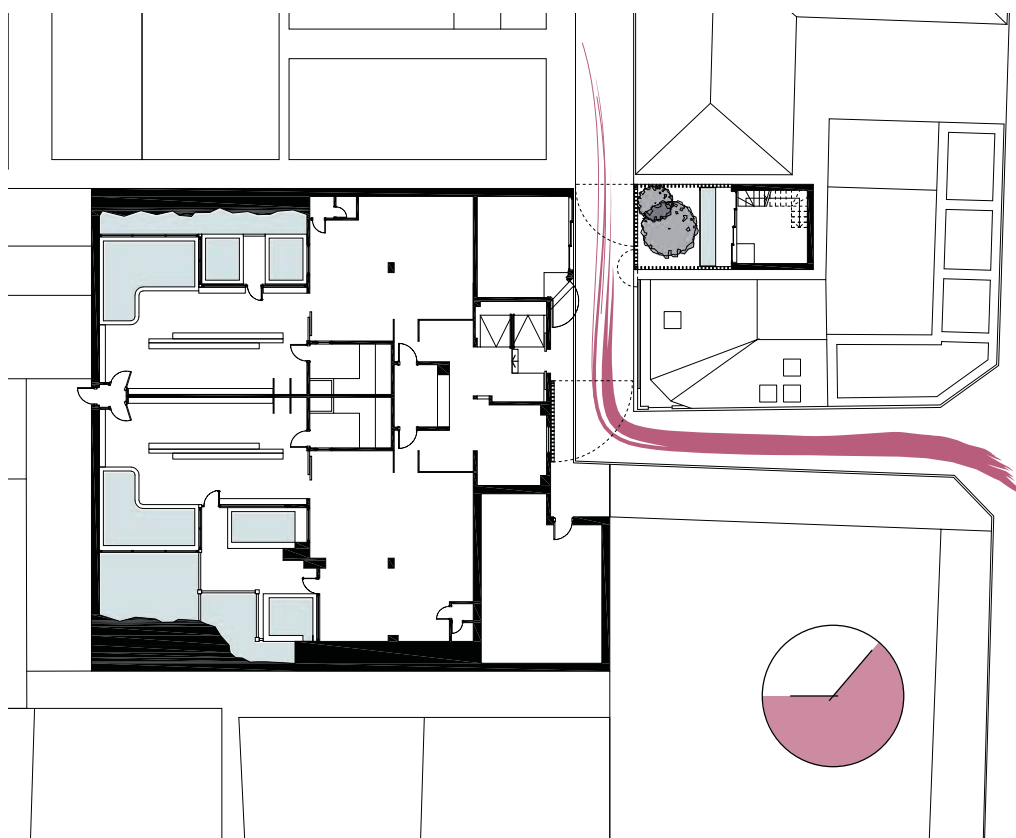
A narrow wooden *engawa*, the verandah that can be seen on most classic Japanese buildings, runs along the front of the volume and creates a buffer space between inside and outside that lets customers enjoy the view of the pond and the fresh breeze under the trees.

The first and second floor of the new volume host an *ochanoma*, the traditional Japanese tea lounge, where customers can relax before and after the bath while consuming tea and snacks.



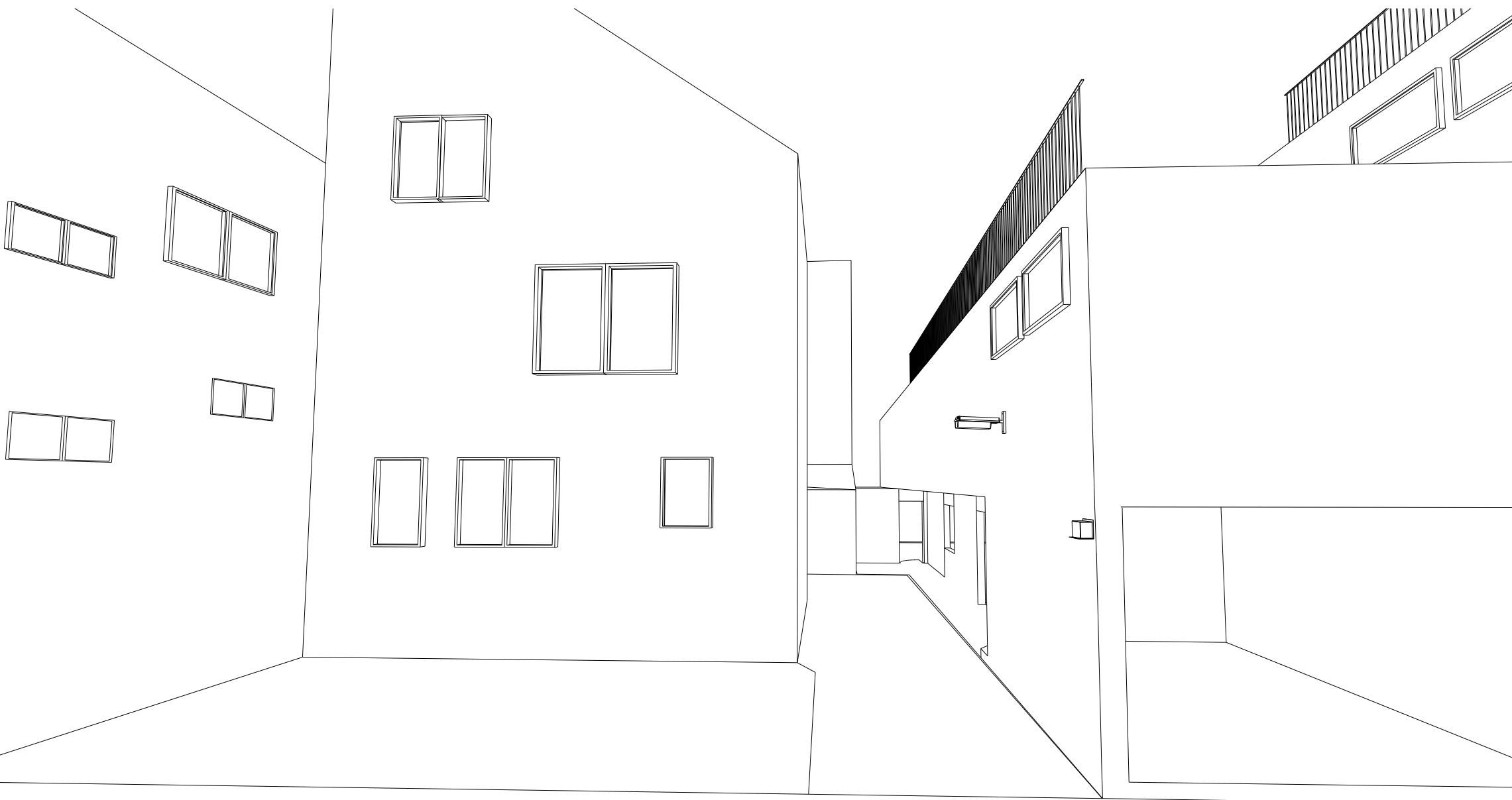
Above: privacy gradient in the existing building and the new addition

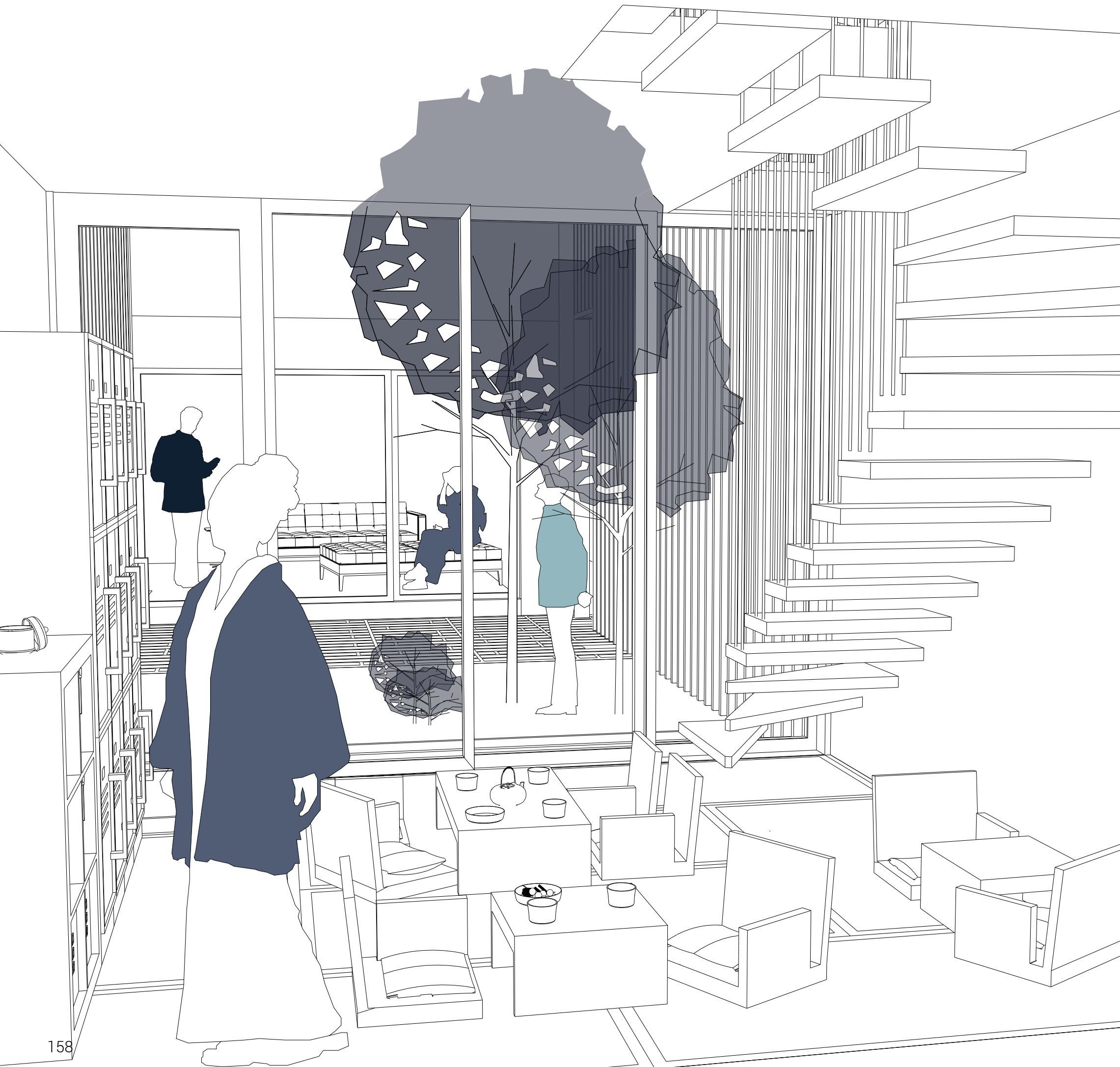
Below: pedestrian flux during the establishment's closing (left) and opening times (right)

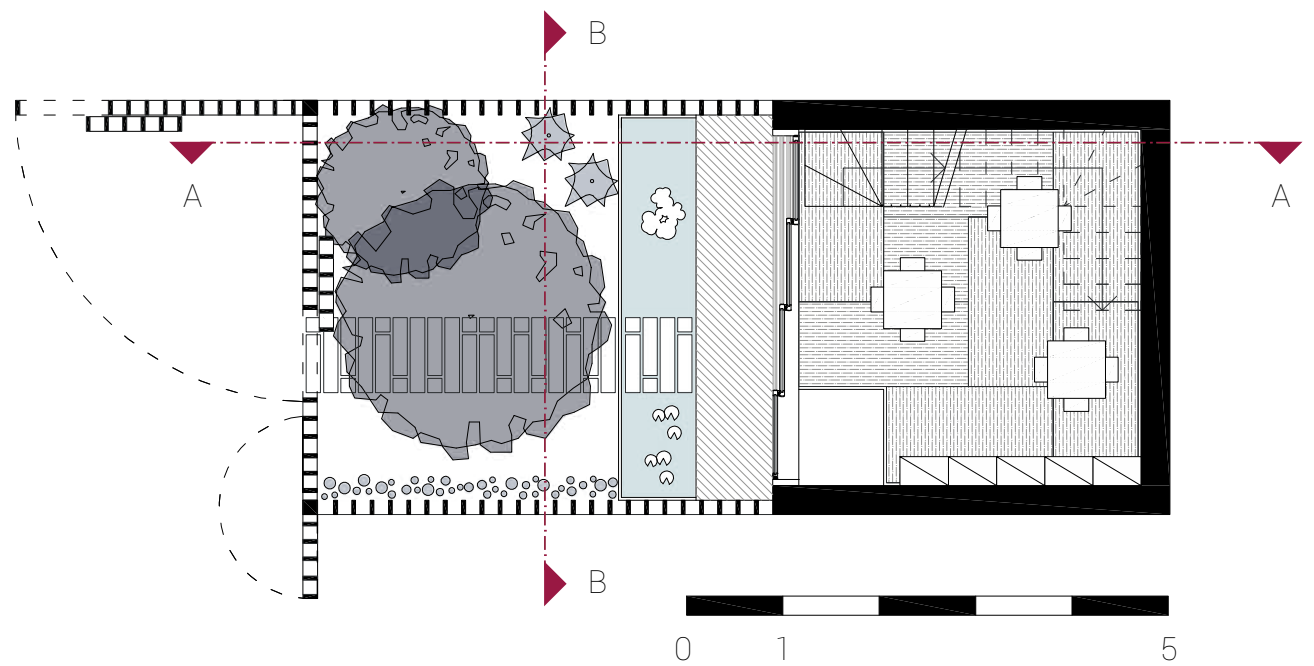








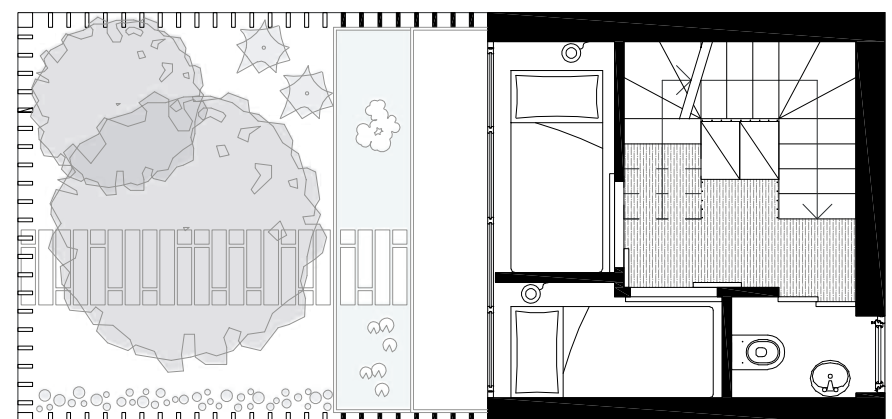
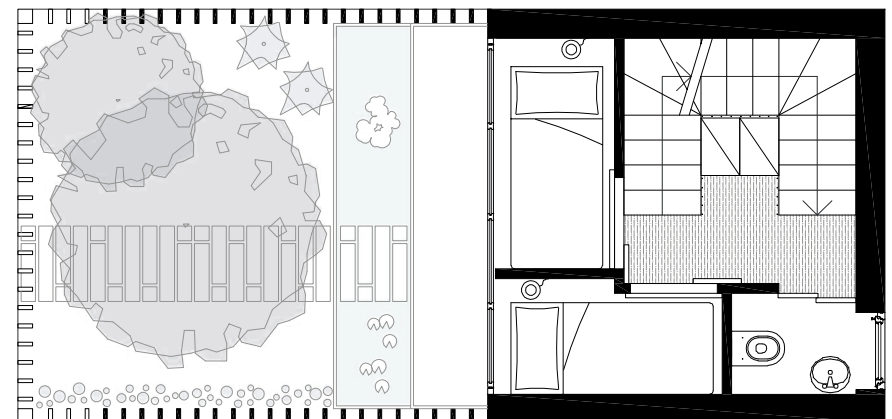
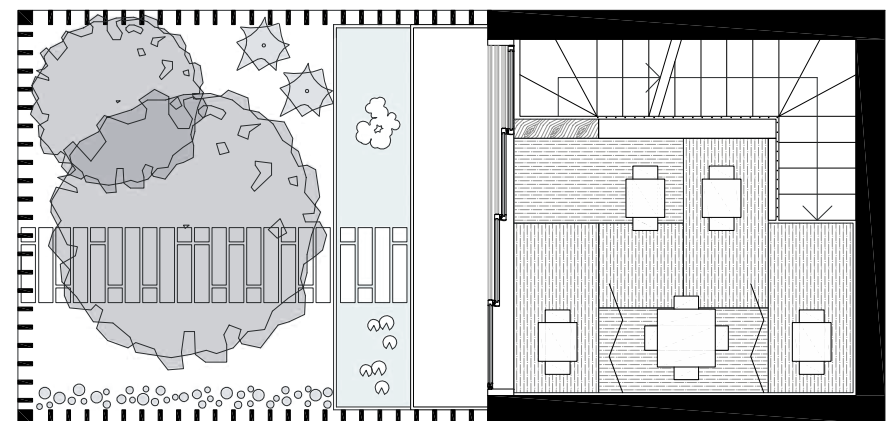




The upper storeys are dedicated to a small capsule *ryokan*. Divided by gender on the two floors, the hotel can host up to eight patrons, supplying a pleasant and intimate stay for the businessmen who remained late in the office and missed the last available train home. The coin laundry is transformed in a relaxation space, fitted with couches and bookshelves. This room is a more informal environment than the traditional tea room and allows for shorter stays, while still providing a view over the garden. Depending on the season, the full height and full width window can open completely towards the alley, creating one whole setting with the more public spaces of the establishment: the alley, the garden and the *ochanoma*.

LINKS TO TRADITION

The whole project is based on the idea that preserving the tradition is of paramount importance to the creation of a pleasant and effective relaxation environment. Therefore the choice of materials, colours and architectural elements focuses on the findings of the previous research and includes a variety of traditional references. The building's shape and size are based on the *tatami* module, the Japanese historical unit of measurement for surfaces to which nearly all traditional constructions relate. One *tatami*, the traditional woven straw mat, measures 88 x 176 centimetres, therefore the *ochanoma* has a surface of eight *tatami*. However, they are organised in a spiral and leave a paved square corresponding to 1/2 *tatami* near the entrance. This serves as a *genkan*, the entrance space where customers take their shoes off before stepping on the mats. Moreover the building's interiors follow the Japanese tradition. The choice of sliding rather than swing doors and windows originates



from traditional customs, just like the presence of paper screens instead of the more modern roller blinds to close the capsules.

On the outside of the *ochanoma*, the garden is strongly influenced by tradition. A stepping stone path allows people to easily reach the building, but it is also possible to walk around in the soft grass under the shade of the trees.

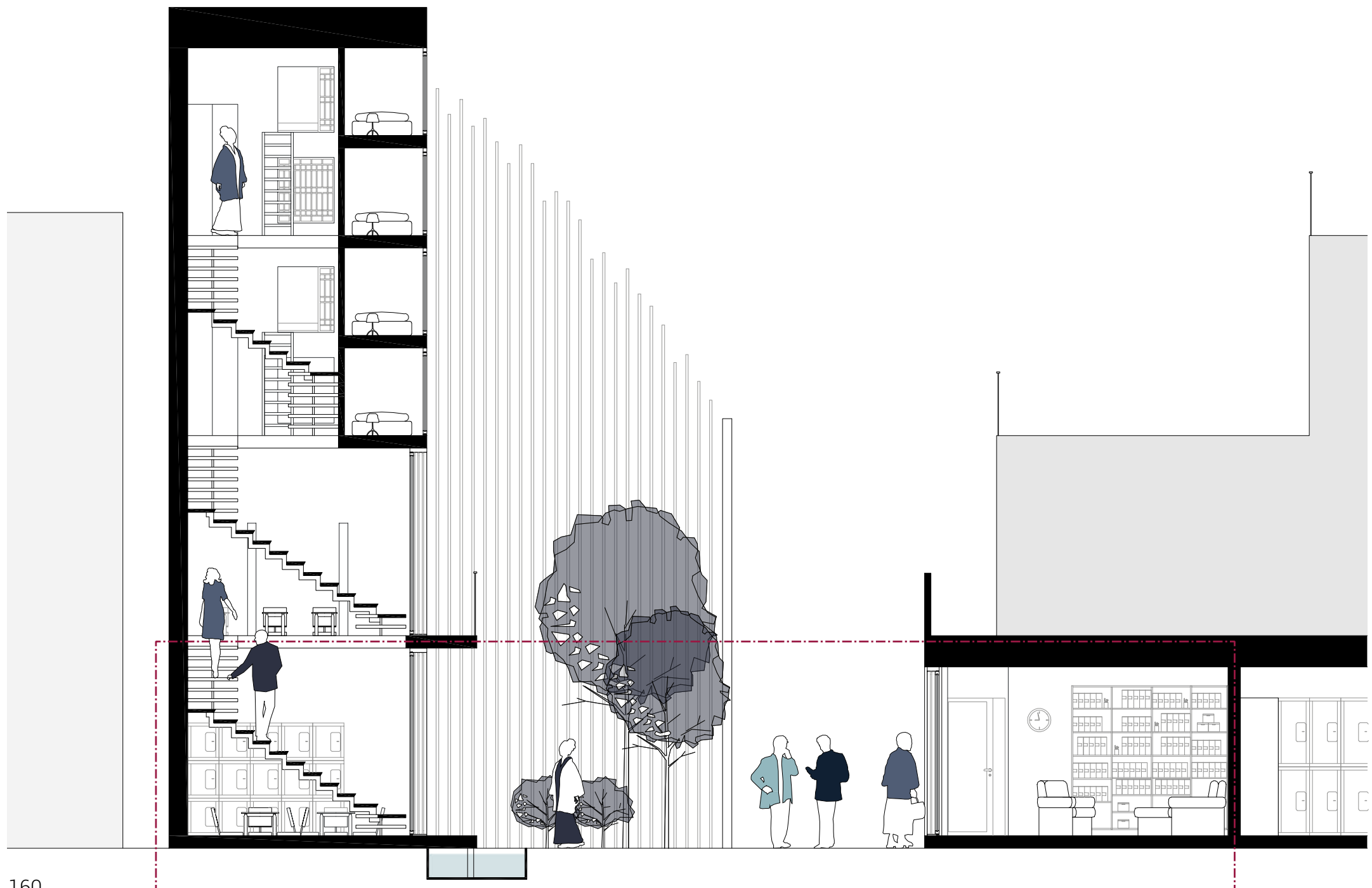
A choice of local plants such as ginkgo and Japanese maples ensure the contact with tradition while, at the same time, allowing patrons to experience the different seasons through the variation of the foliage.

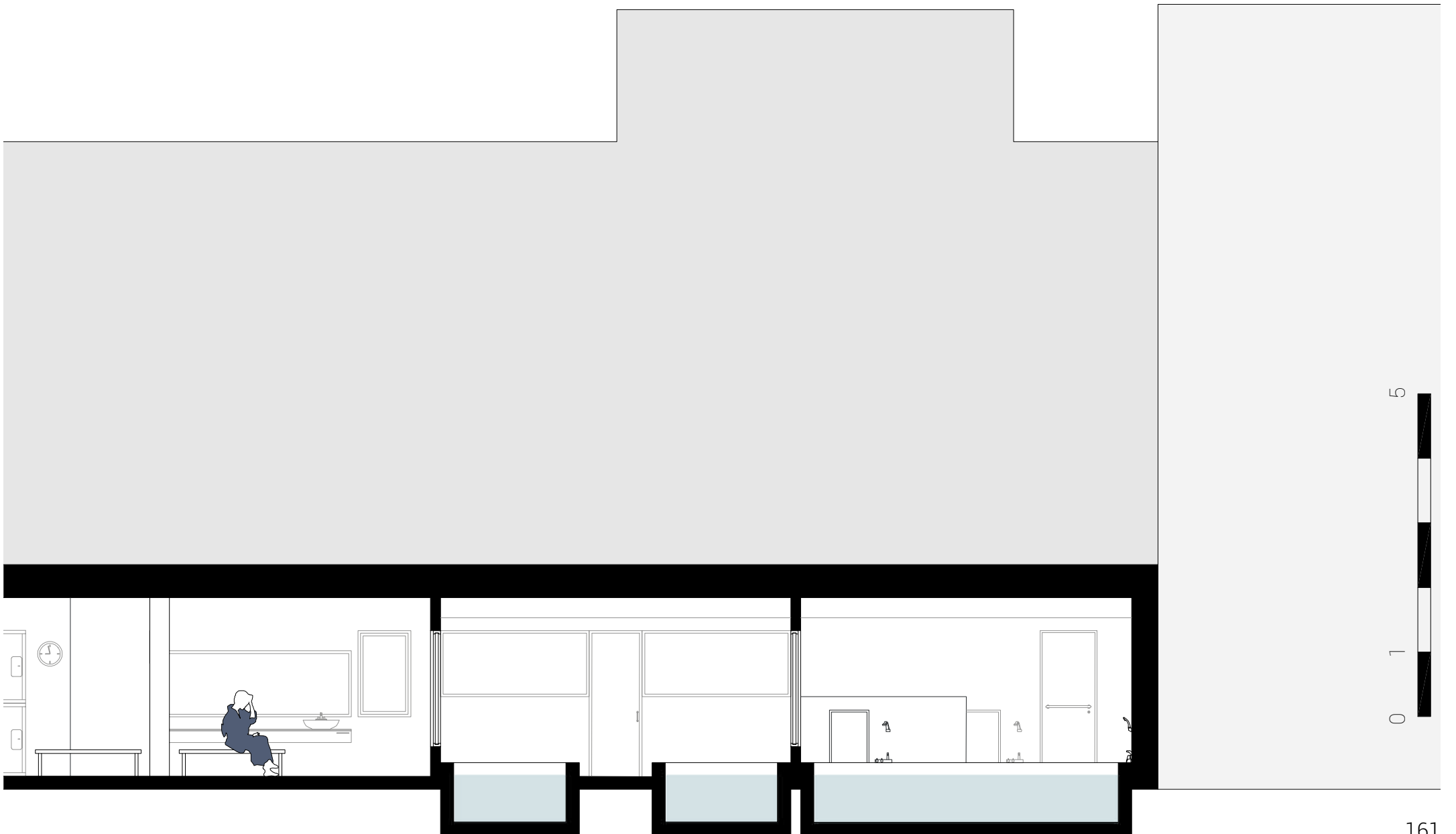
The front of the building is characterised by an *engawa*, a wooden verandah that connects the inside with the outside, allowing visitors to

relax while glancing at the pond, filled with lotus plants and colourful *koi* fish.

This space, covered by the balcony on the upper floor, creates a filter environment between inside and outside.

In order to ensure a better resistance and lesser maintenance, the fence is made with *yakisugi*, a traditional technique of burning the outer layer of cypress wood in order to create a protective covering that repairs it from the natural elements.











2-9-5
Sasazuka,
Shibuya,
Tōkyō

#P2

Sakae Yu
Sasazuka, Tokyo

Unknown architect
~1970



On the ground floor of an apartment building
Concrete structure



One storey dedicated to the bathhouse, five storeys total

The building is located in a densely built neighbourhood,
in an active commercial and office area of Tokyo



Simple hot spring,
Colourless and odourless waters, 42°C



Six pools, three for each gender, separate at all times.
Two indoors and four, covered, outdoors:
About 4-6 people in each tub



One very small common area at the entrance and two
massage arm chairs in each changing room
vending machines sell snacks and beverages



Towels, shampoo and other
items can be rented or bought inside the *onsen*



* the onsen is located in a very quiet residential area, set back from the main street in a maze of narrow and peaceful alleys, mostly traversed by the local residents.

* while there are a couple of public green areas in the neighbourhood, none is very close to the site and the residences of the neighbourhood show a lack of private green spaces.

On each side there is a large bath, equipped with jacuzzi nozzles on a side and built in seats. Another smaller tub is filled with cold tap water, allowing to cool down between baths.

most of the main room is occupied by the washing area, consisting in individual stalls, lined along the central wall & a lower separation wall.

They all provide a shower head and offer complementary beauty products.

both sides of the onsen have a rotenburo, even though, due to the location, the tub is surrounded by tall walls and covered by a wooden canopy, feeling like an indoor tub.
- it is the only hot spring bathtub

each side of the bathhouse also has a small sama

a small shack at the end of the lot seems to be abandoned

a large parking lot on the left side of the building, mostly unused, could host a new addition to the existing onsen

access to the apartment floors over the bathhouse

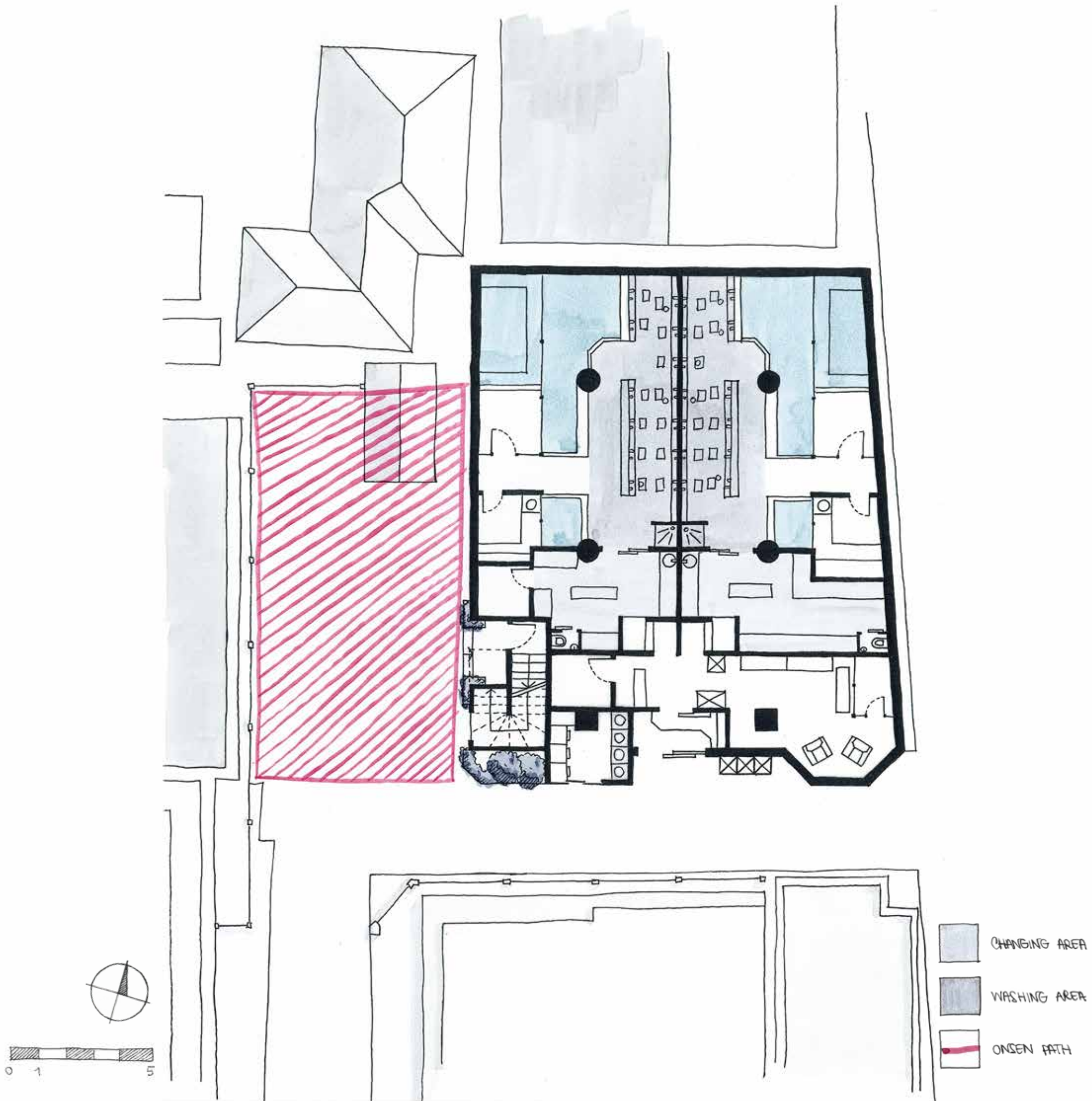
COIN LAUNDRY

RECEPTION & OFFICE

SMOKING AREA

a small lounge room consisting of benches & two armchairs is located at the entrance. The area is quite azyptic and doesn't really encourage clients to stop for long

* once again born as a sento, also this establishment was connected to onsen water in order to increase the clientele, but maintained the looks and atmosphere of its origins, resulting in a rather cold environment



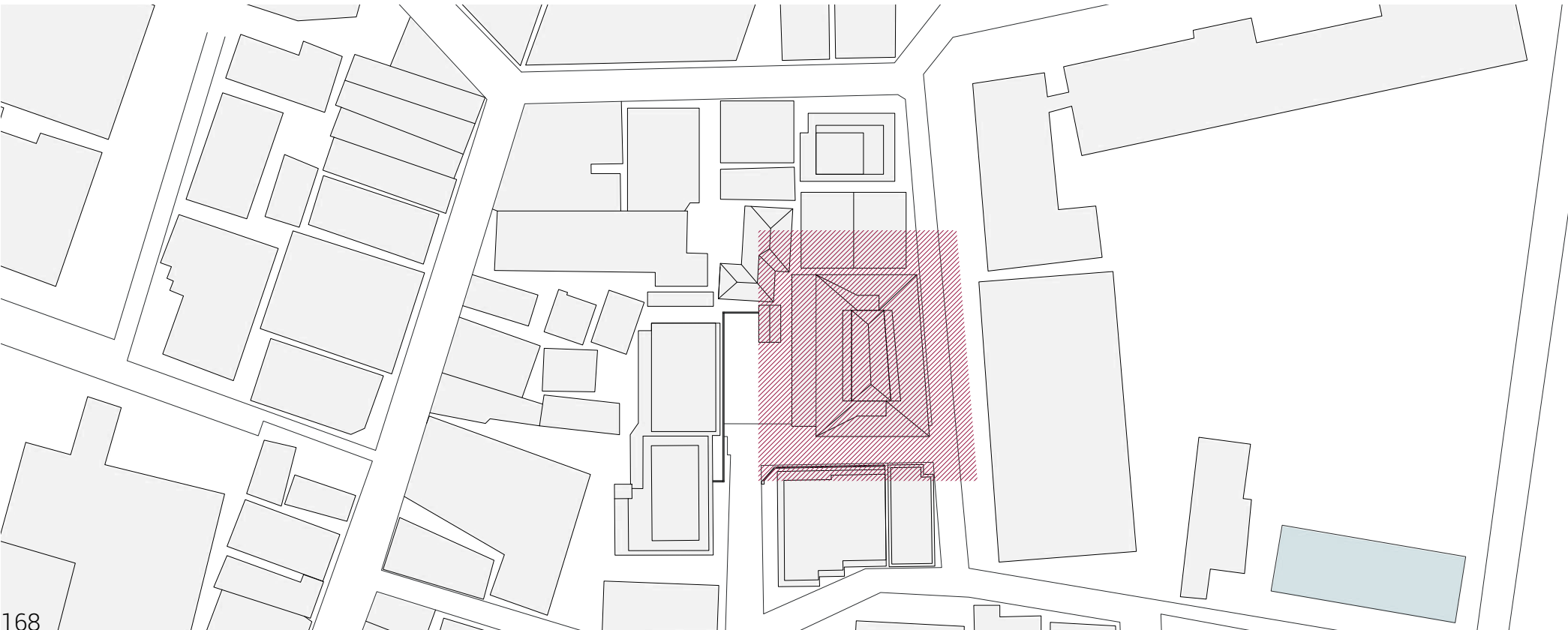
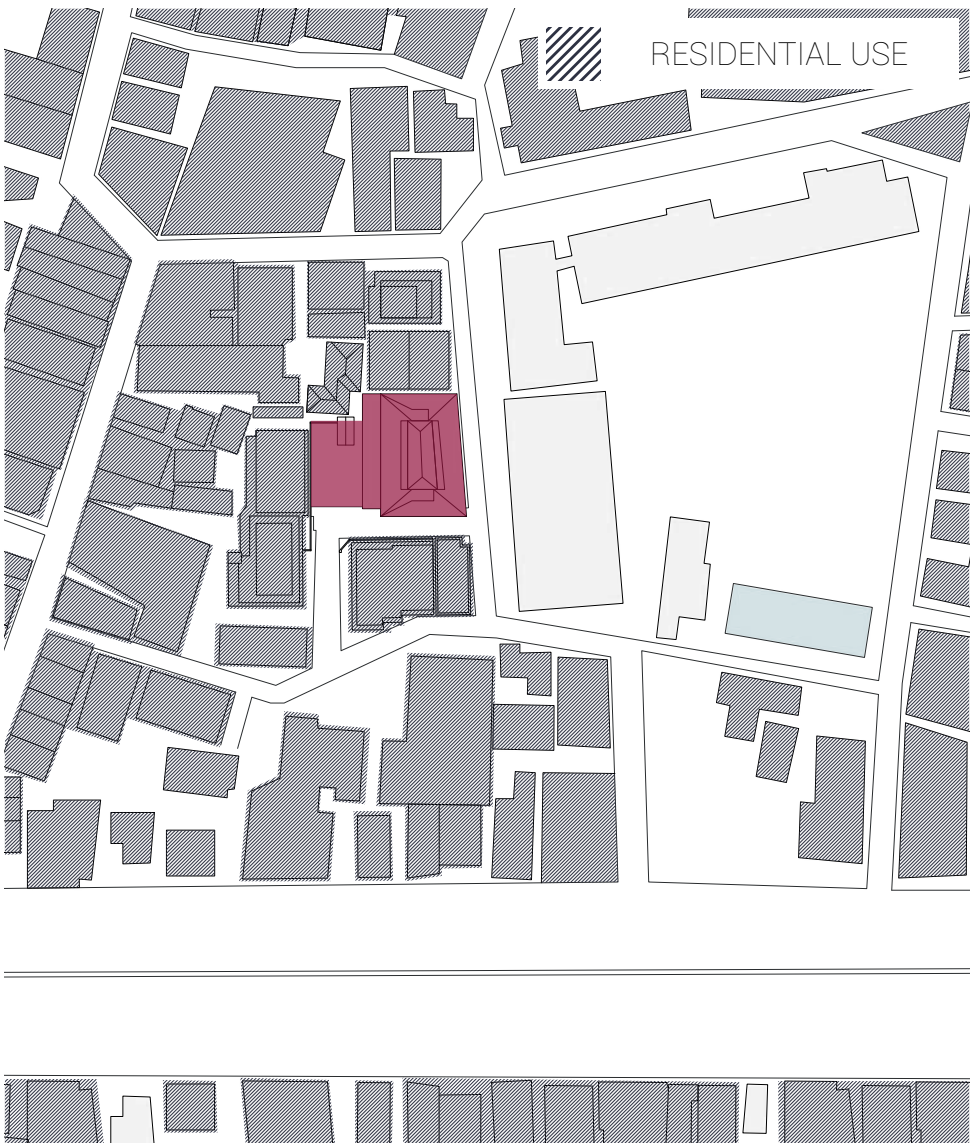
ONSEN LOCATION

Far from the frenzy and turmoil that make Shibuya a worldwide famous night life capital, Sakae Yu is located in a quiet area of the ward, mostly characterised by residential buildings and small daytime local businesses. In the typical fashion of Japanese residential neighbourhoods, small one to two family houses are scattered among larger eight to fifteen stories apartment buildings, creating a heterogeneous mix connected by a weave of narrow streets. A three storey elementary school with a large private garden, open air pool and running track occupies the whole block in front of the establishment and a middle school is located nearby, making it clear that this is a family oriented neighbourhood. A few small businesses, mostly family run shops selling daily necessities, convenience stores and local restaurants operating during the day occupy the ground floor of some constructions, while most of them are entirely dedicated to residence.

When compared to the modern buildings and skyscrapers of Shibuya - just a few kilometres away - the area largely consists of older structures and service concepts needed for daily life. The only night time activities and larger restaurants are located along the larger avenues on the south side of Sasazuka station, located a few minutes away. Even though the area is almost exclusively used for residential functions, parks and green spaces are largely missing.

The obvious lack of these vital features paints the whole neighbourhood in a rather rough and impersonal light, making it easy to envision life there being somewhat dull.

However, the fact that the area lacks the typical appeal that made Shibuya world famous can be seen as a development opportunity for the bathhouse, that could become a focus point for the neighbourhood.



THE BUILDING

Located in a narrow secondary alley, far from the large arteries, one might miss the presence of this small neighbourhood bathhouse at first. Similarly to the previous case, the bathhouse is situated on the ground floor of a three stories apartment building and started its activity as a *sentō* when it was first opened in the Seventies. At that time, the establishment, together with the adjacent coin laundry, provided vital functions for residents, as it was common for private houses to not be equipped with their own baths and washing machines.

With times changing, this necessity diminished for most, and only a few residents still rely on them today, resulting in a decline in the number of customers. As relief, the establishment was transformed into an *onsen* by accessing the deep thermal water streams underneath Tokyo, however business success was limited with this strategy. Subsequently, customer turn out is low, which can be attributed to the lack of genuine advertisement and the *onsen's* subdued profile, making it hard to find for new customers. While the front was recently renovated in an attempt to gain more visibility, it still only features a small sign and its function is not apparent from the outside.

The building complex features two separate entrances, the roadside one being exclusive for the *onsen* patrons and a second one, facing the parking lot, is dedicated to residents.

Entering the building, it becomes obvious that this is not a spacious establishment. After passing through the *genkan* with its shoe storage, the customers find themselves in a reception area that is comparatively smaller than the one in Jakotsuyu Onsen, with only a desk instead of the commonly used ticket booths. On the other end of the room, a fridge





for snacks and drinks is crammed next to a few wooden benches, while on the opposite side two massage chairs face the wall. Additionally, a glazed compartment for smokers is fit in the corner of the room. The reception and lounge area in its entirety is so confined that some of the vending machines have to be placed outside the building. While the attempt of creating a lounging space is apparent, the sheer confinement limits any relaxation possible in this room. It seems as if the spirit of the establishment is still fundamentally the one of a *sentō*, reducing the experience to pure functionality rather than leisure.

THE ONSEN

Right across the entryway, two traditional *noren* curtains cover the entrance of the sex separate changing rooms. A short S shaped corridor and a few steps lead to the two areas, that are quite confined, but well maintained. When entering the changing rooms, the spirit remains the same. The interior is old, but well kept, and the flair of a *sentō* becomes apparent through its functional layout. A central bench is surrounded by coin lockers along the walls of the room. Next to the entrance to the bathing area, a counter top with a sink and a large mirror serves as space for grooming and drying after the bath.

From there, glass sliding doors open towards the two bathing areas, that are mirrored and separated in three compartments. On the inner side, the washing stalls are aligned along the central wall between genders. More stalls are fit along a second lower wall in the middle of the room to accommodate additional faucets and mirrors. Each



stall consists of two separate taps for hot and cold water and a fixed shower head above a small mirror. A low step allows to place the bowl to mix water from the taps as well as shampoo and other items while washing. Near the entrance of the room, a shower allows for quicker rinses between soaks or after the bath.

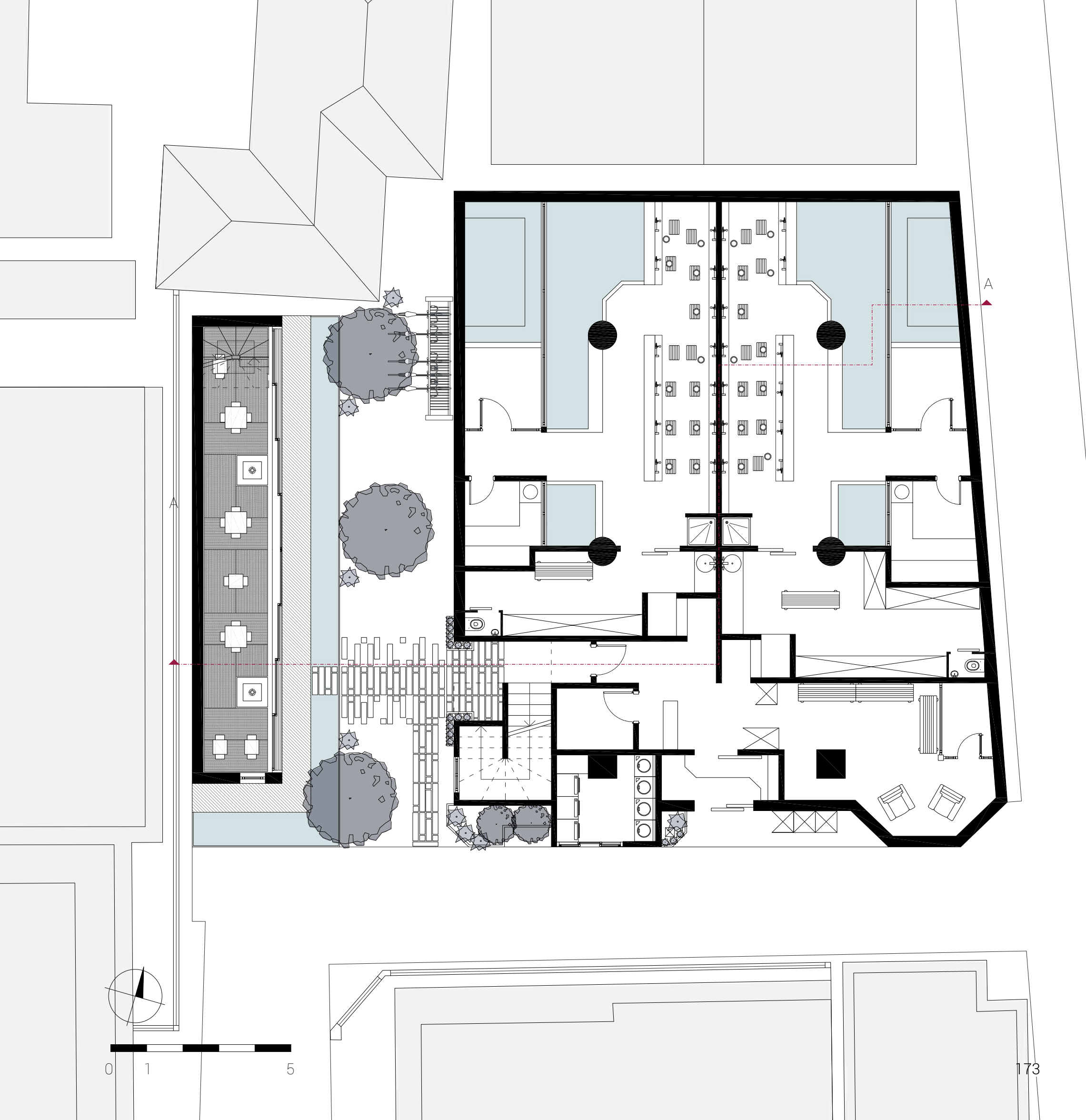
After completing the washing ritual, the patrons can move to one of the two tubs in each of the remaining corners of the room. A large L shaped pool on the farthest corner contains hot tap water and is fitted with multiple jet streams for massages. The other, smaller pool is filled with cold water, providing a possibility to cool down after the hot bath. A small bucket with a handle is provided next to the cold tub for patrons to quickly rinse without dipping completely inside.

The only hot spring tub is located on the outside of the building, visible from the inside through a large full height window along the side of the indoor pool, and can be accessed from the washing room through a glass door. Due to the bathhouse's location in a densely built neighbourhood, this tub is surrounded by tall walls on all other sides and is covered by a wooden roof, giving in fact the feeling of being still inside the building. In front of the *rotenburo*, another door leads to a small wooden clad sauna.

The general impression inside the bath is the one of a rather plain and dull environment, entirely focused on the practical aspect of washing and paying little attention to the relaxing and therapeutic components of onsen bathing. This is mostly due to the choice of materials and colours, combined with the lack of natural elements. Dark grey tiles cover the floor and the lower half of the walls and there are no other decorations, such as the typical murals showing views of natural landscapes.

4.





A

1. View of one of the neighbourhood alleys. IKIMASHO!. (2018). A walk around: Sasazuka, Tokyo. [online] Available at: <https://ikimasho.net/2016/01/19/a-walk-around-sasazuka-tokyo/> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2018].
2. Main entrance. Scheidecker, B. (2018)
3. Washing area. Sasazukasakaeyu.com. (2018). [online] Available at: <http://sasazukasakaeyu.com/shisetsu.html> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2018].
4. View of the parking lot next to the bathhouse and main entrance of the residential building. Bandolin, M. (2018)

PROJECT SITE

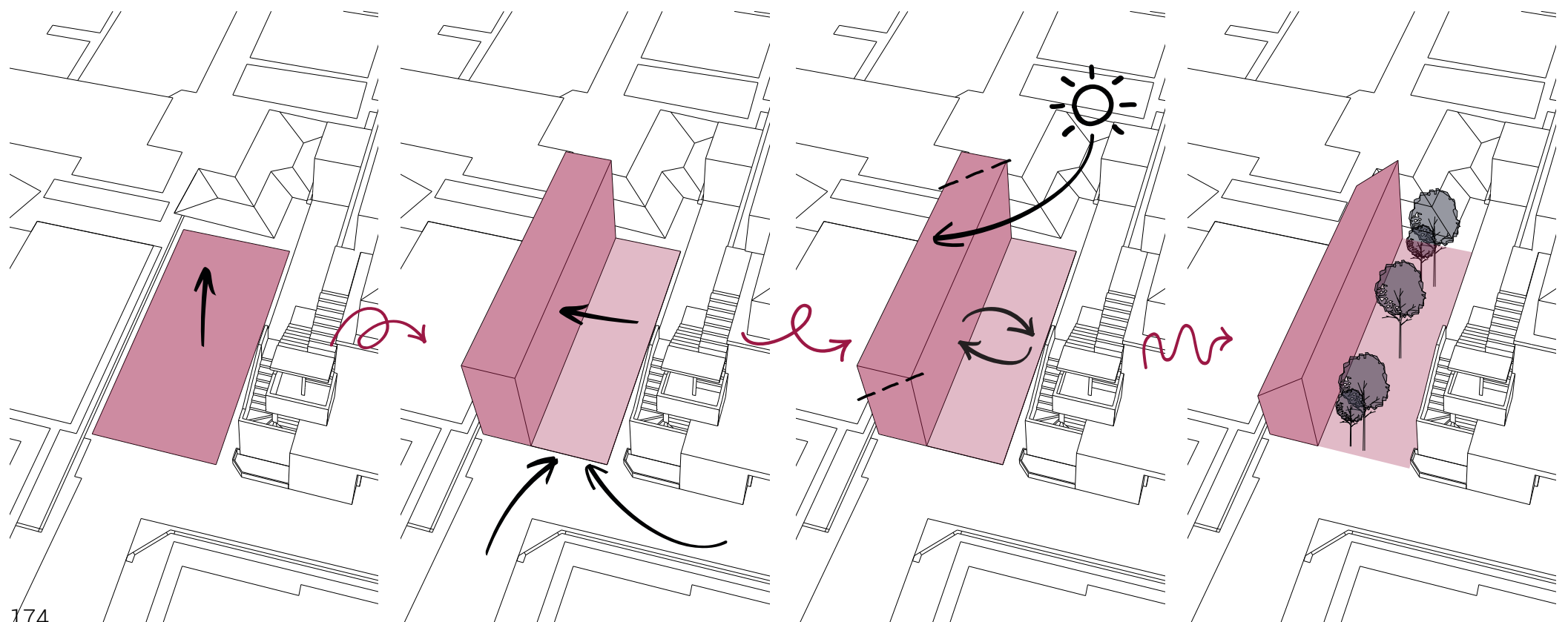
On the left side of the building, a narrow and deep parcel of the block is currently occupied by a three spaces parking lot. While the area is aimed at the placement of cars, the space is generally used to park bicycles, as they appear to be the preferred mean of transportation for the building residents. Measuring roughly 7,5 metres in width and 14 in depth, this lot sits at the corner of the small L shaped alley that cuts through the block and leads to the bathhouse. Its location offers the possibility of making the new addition visible from the neighbouring streets, becoming an attraction for the area.

DESIGN APPROACH

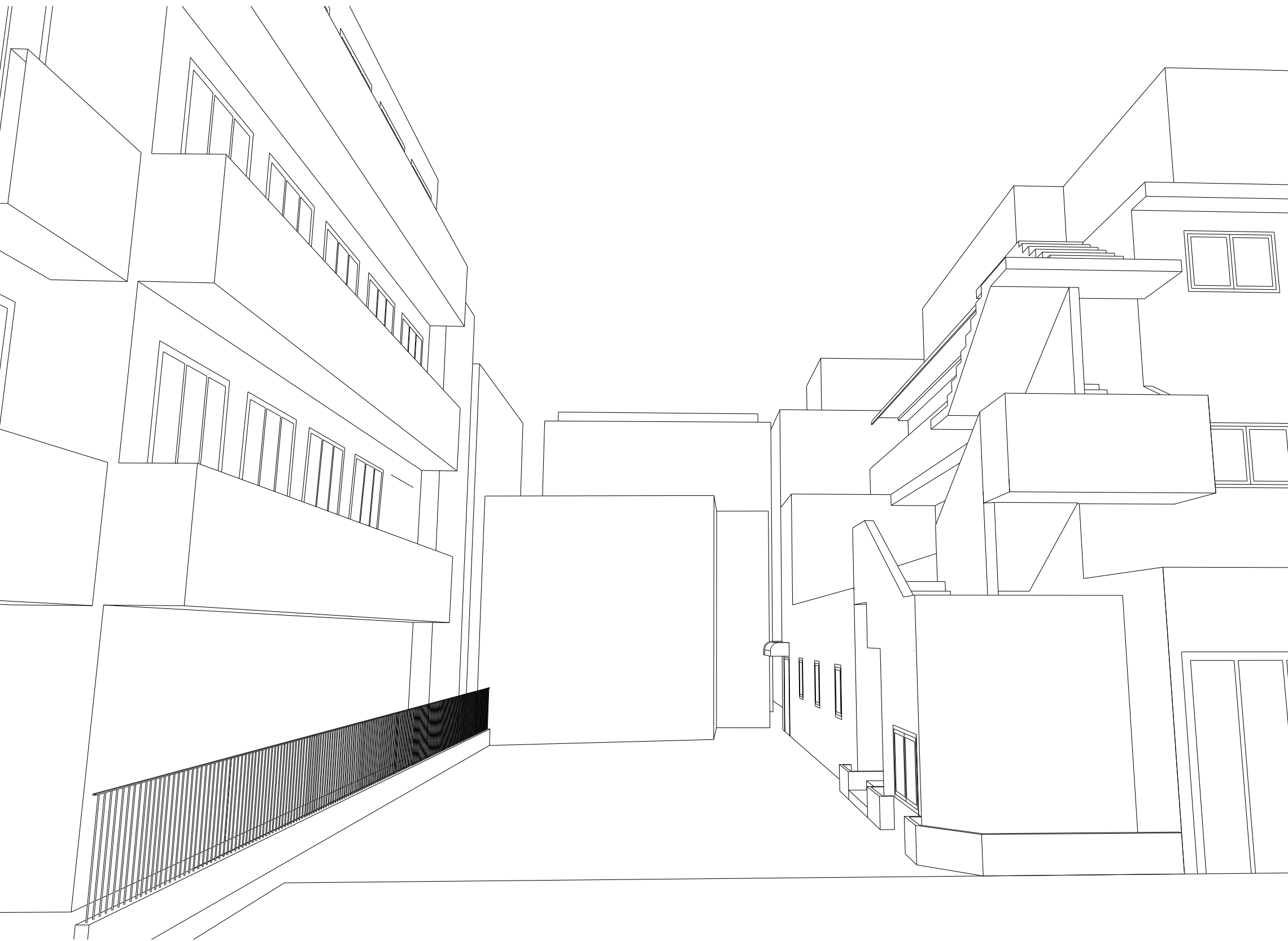
Sasazuka neighbourhood is almost exclusively a dormitory suburb, an area in which people come to sleep after carrying out all other daytime activities elsewhere. The lack of attractions in such a quiet and anonymous residential area represents a good opportunity for this *onsen* to exploit its public function for the benefit of the residents, while at the same time enhancing its business by attracting new customers.

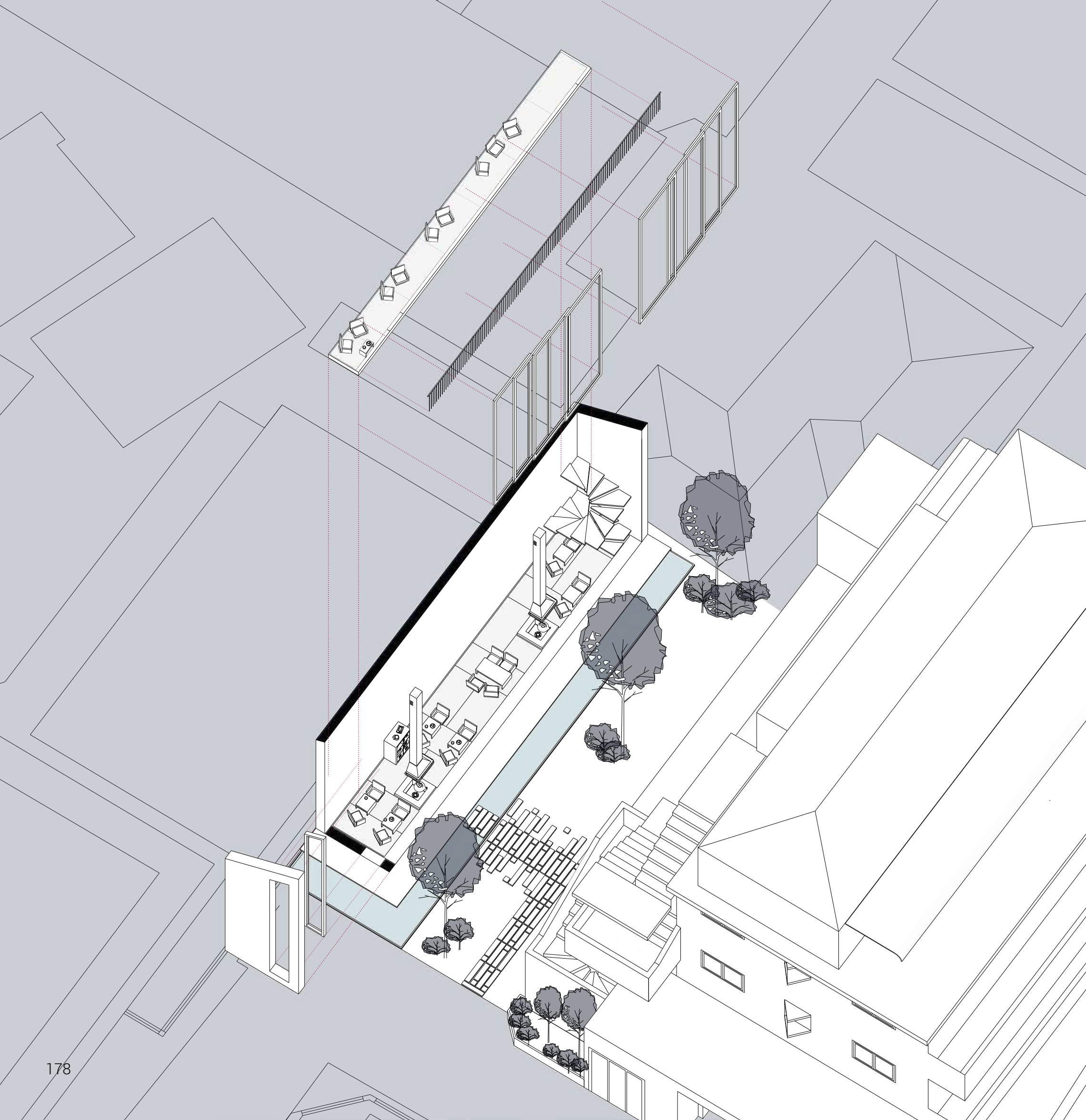
In order to capitalise on this element, the establishment should use the empty lot to gain visibility from the street by advertising its functions on the outside. For this reason the project mainly includes the addition of a tea house and a miniature garden that opens towards the neighbourhood. The *ochanoma* is clearly identifiable in its lounging function from the street thanks to the presence of an L shaped foot bath that runs along the two fronts and a full height glass façade.

Just like in most traditional *onsen* in rural Japan, this feature serves as a practical advertisement of the nearby bathhouse as well as a precious









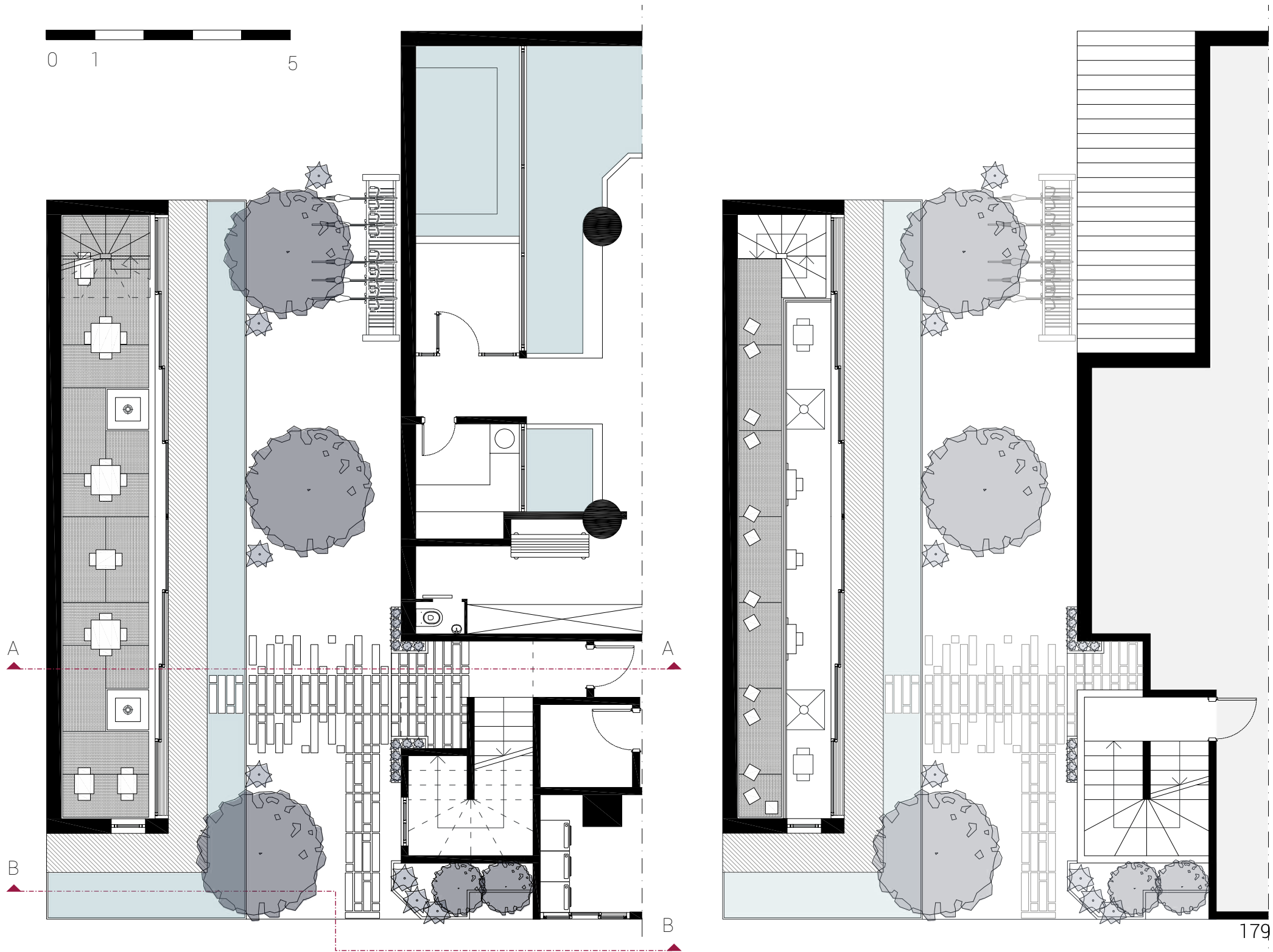
relaxation element for patrons and passers by alike. Therefore, unlike in the Jakotsuyu Onsen project, this space is not confined by a fence and remains accessible at all times. This creates a precious neighbourhood garden from which all residents can benefit throughout the day, as well as a lounging area for the bathhouse.

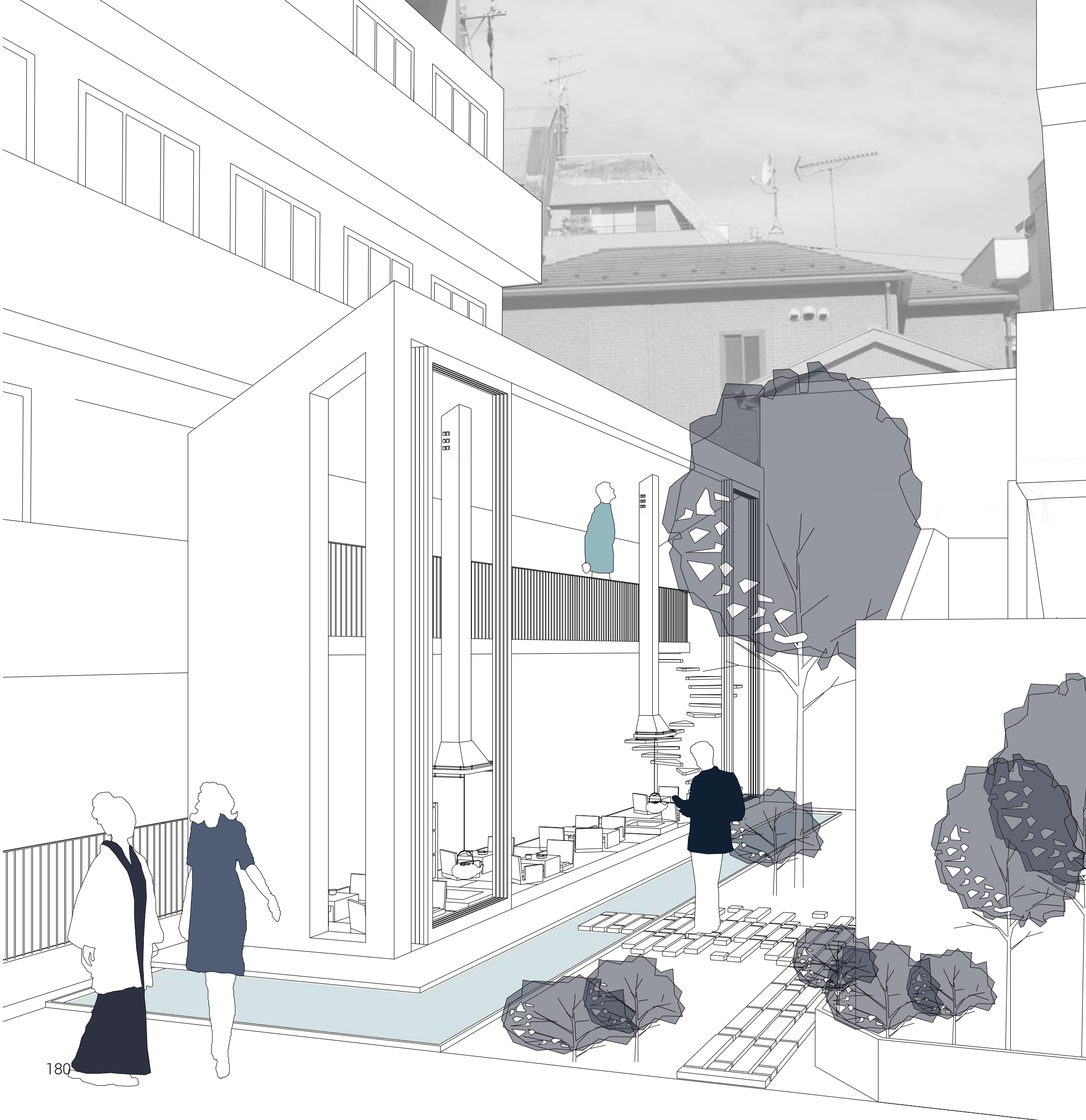
Thanks to the inclusion of the tea house and garden, new customer groups, such as families and senior citizen, can be accessed. These people have the ability to visit the *onsen* in other time slots than the usual evening bath, so they can increase the daytime customer flow of the establishment. Moreover, these new features allow the customers in the evening to extend their visit by giving them more space and attractions compared to the previous setup. This would improve busi-

ness and general popularity of the *onsen*, giving it the opportunity for future growth.

LAYOUT

The main sides of the empty lot are oriented towards the residential entrance of the *onsen* building on the east and the neighbouring apartment building on the west, while the shorter sides face the street on the south and the back of another, smaller apartment building on the north side. Inside the space, the new design features a narrow but long volume that maximises visibility of the intervention for potential customers from the outside by highlighting the construction while also









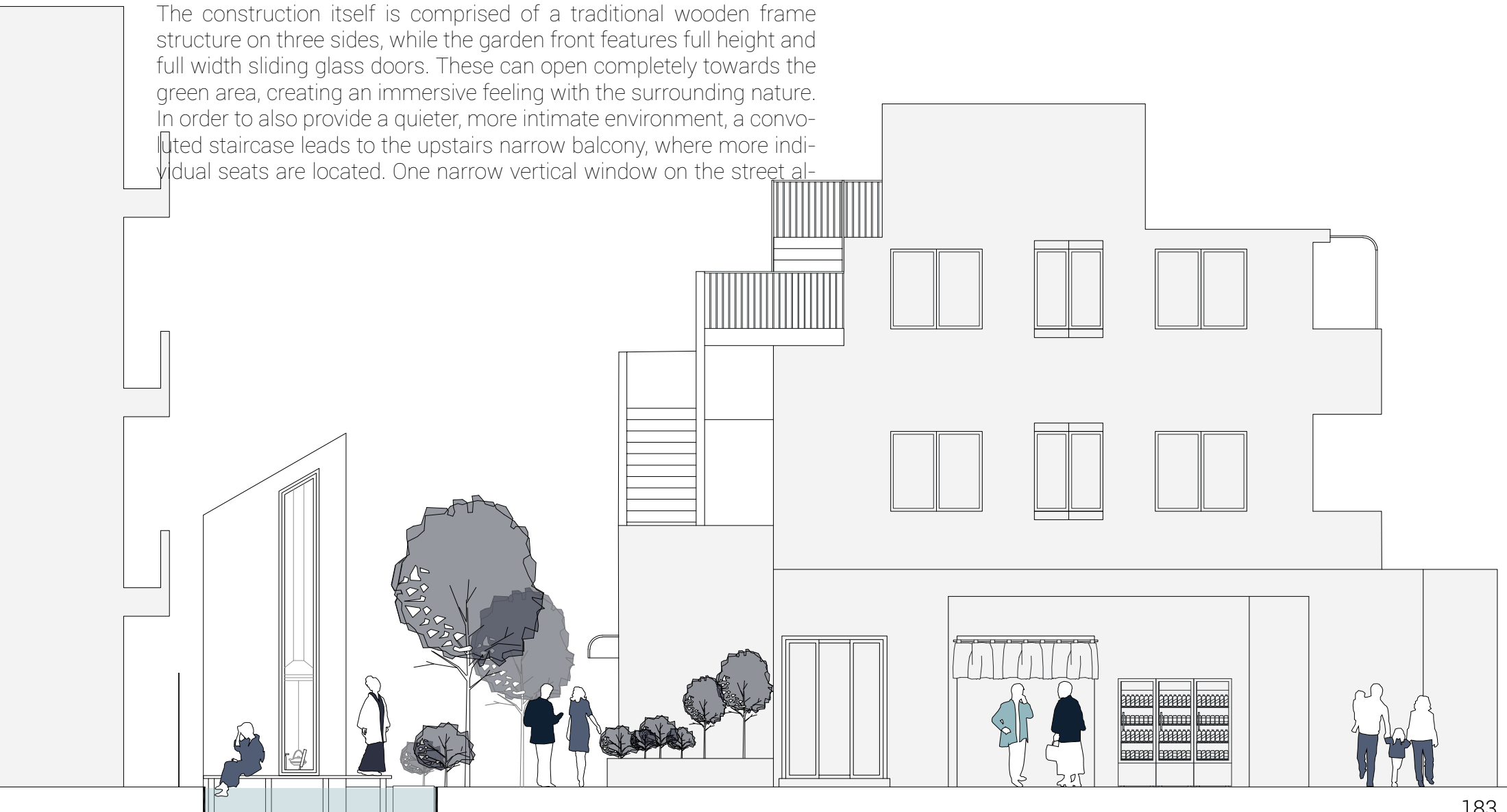
allocating space to the garden. Occupying the space previously used by the parking sports, the construction is fit on the left side of the lot, alongside the western apartment complex.

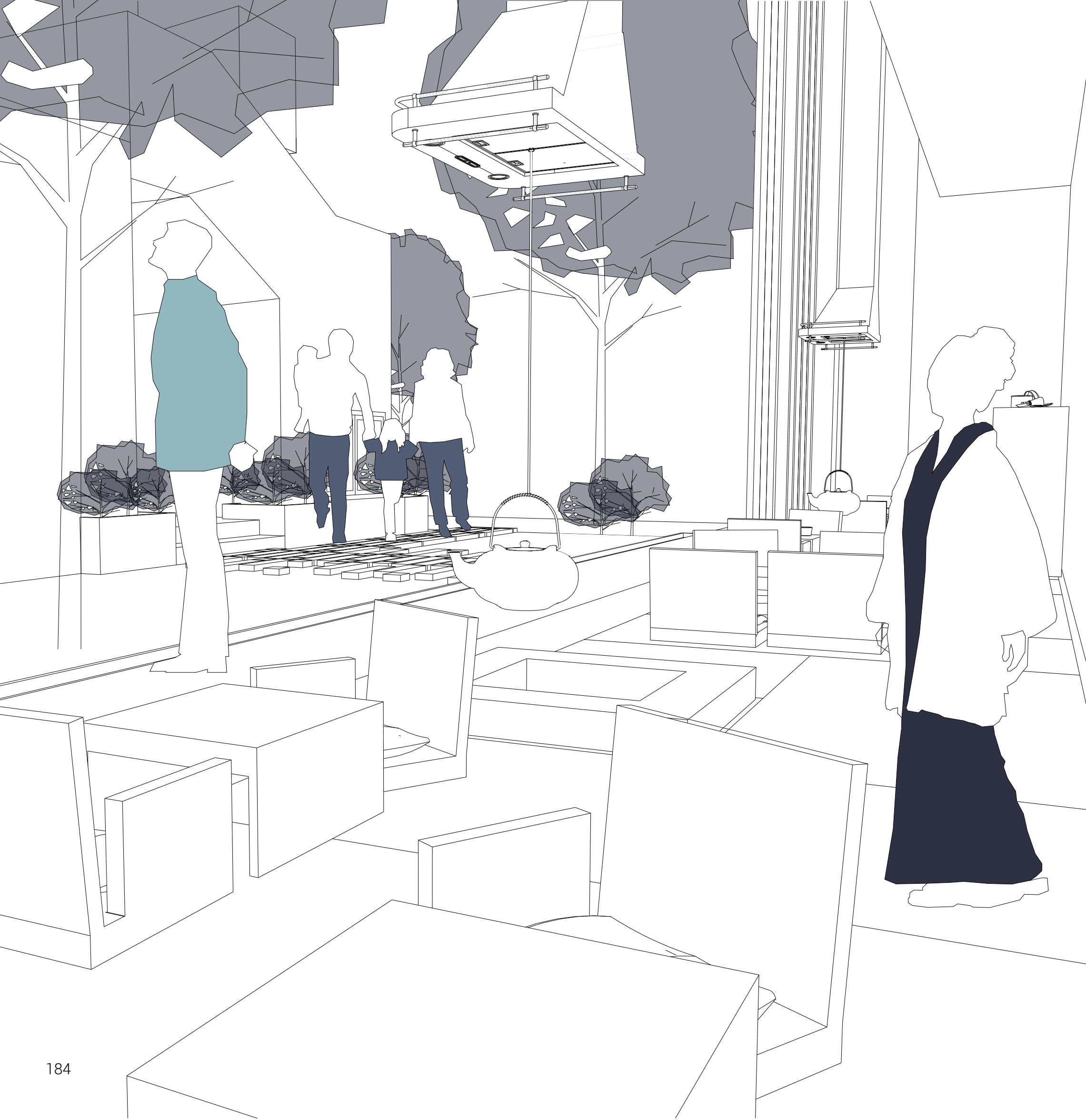
This layout leaves enough room for a spacious garden between the foot bath and the *onsen* while creating a direct connection between the bathhouse's reception area and the new addition. A passageway between the *onsen* and the garden is created next to the reception desk by slightly reducing the size of the women's changing room and opening a back door to the residential building's main entrance. This allows a more immediate relation with the addition, preventing patrons from getting out on the street in order to reach the tea house.

The garden provides a green and peaceful oasis of relaxation which can function as a customer retention tool for after the bath while at the same time serving as an individual attraction.

This setup benefits the neighbourhood residents - by enriching their entrance area - as well as the *onsen* - by expanding its capacity and features. With this space efficient narrow design there is also enough room for a bike parking at the back of the parcel, making bike storage easier and safer for residents. In this spirit it is imperative to make sure not to interfere with the current residents' personal space. Therefore, the roof of the construction is angled to ensure minimal obstruction of the incoming light for the first floor residents of the west side complex.

The construction itself is comprised of a traditional wooden frame structure on three sides, while the garden front features full height and full width sliding glass doors. These can open completely towards the green area, creating an immersive feeling with the surrounding nature. In order to also provide a quieter, more intimate environment, a convoluted staircase leads to the upstairs narrow balcony, where more individual seats are located. One narrow vertical window on the street al-





lows curious passers by to gaze inside the building. This, paired with the presence of an extensive foot bath on two sides of the volume, is part of an intricate advertisement strategy to allow the bathhouse to gain new customers. Similar approaches are often applied by rural bathing institutions, offering free foot baths as a practical promotion of the *onsen* and its waters' properties. In order to better take advantage of the foot bath, a long *engawa*, the traditional wooden porch, surrounds the tea house on two sides. This feature creates a sort of intermediate space between the inside of the *ochanoma* and the garden, while also serving as a bench for patrons and allowing its use also during the bathhouse's closing times.

While these features are mainly designed to benefit residents and *onsen* patrons, users of the coin laundry could obviously benefit as well, making their wait more enjoyable by offering them a pleasant pastime.

LINKS TO TRADITION

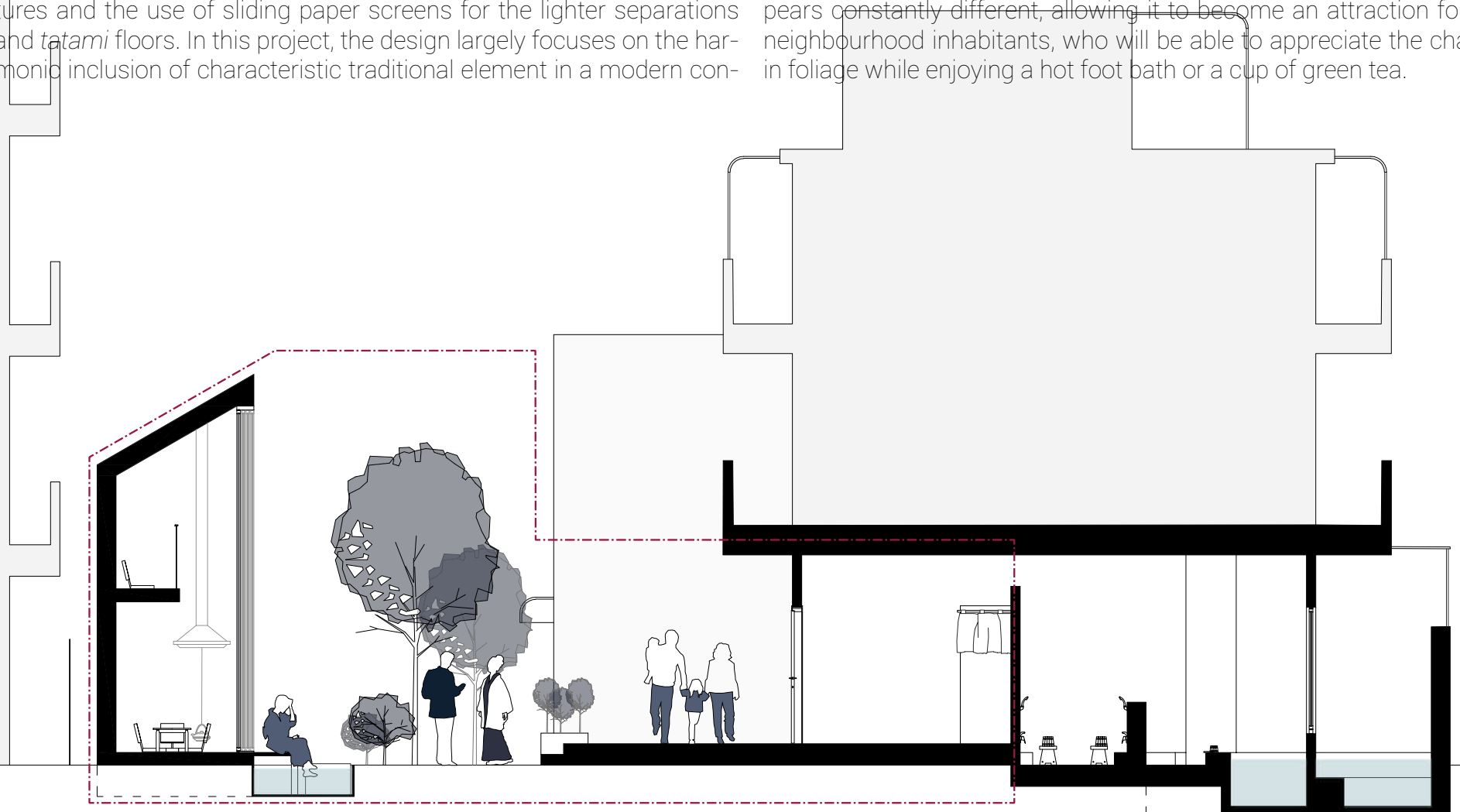
As per the previous case, this project aims to bring back traditional elements in order to improve the quality of the environment and the relaxation experience of the existing *onsen* by recreating the typical feeling of a rural bathhouse. This can be achieved by a careful choice of materials, colours and architectural elements.

Traditional Japanese architecture is largely characterised by minimalistic and understated elements in muted colours, mostly consisting of the earthy tones of brown, grey and beige. This is due to the prevailing use of natural materials such as wood and stone for the main structures and the use of sliding paper screens for the lighter separations and *tatami* floors. In this project, the design largely focuses on the harmonic inclusion of characteristic traditional element in a modern con-

text, bridging the gap between the *onsen* tradition's intrinsic historic architecture and the needs of the contemporary city.

The proportions and size of the volume are based on the *tatami* module, therefore the width of the building is 180 centimetres on the inside, in order to fit one transversal mat or two of them side by side. The internal surface is covered by 14 *tatami*, positioned following a traditional cladding pattern. Two *tatami* along the main front of the volume are divided in half in order for each to host a sunken hearth, used to heat the water kettle for the preparation of the tea. The first floor balcony - itself based on the width of a *tatami* mat and the feeling given by courtyard facing balconies in traditional houses - offers a more intimate perception of the indoor space by allowing a few discreet seats on a higher level. While the onset is definitely quite informal, the tea house presents all the characteristic requirements for the traditional tea ceremony, or *chadō*, a practice often paired to the one of *onsen* bathing for its ritualism and deep cultural roots. This element furthers the creation of a traditional environment oriented towards the idea of relaxation.

As previously stated, also the presence of a foot bath and *engawa* on the front of the building represent a clear reference to tradition. However, they are reinterpreted with a contemporary aesthetic by the use of a cleaner and more rigorous design. The same principle was applied to the conception of the miniature garden, a space that is aimed for the fruition of the local community as well as the building residents. Here a stepping stone path leads to the entrance of the tea house, while a choice of iconic Japanese plants creates an intimate while dynamic environment. This changes its aspect throughout the seasons and appears constantly different, allowing it to become an attraction for the neighbourhood inhabitants, who will be able to appreciate the change in foliage while enjoying a hot foot bath or a cup of green tea.



CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, the role and the development of Japanese hot spring bathhouses –the so called *onsen* – were carefully analysed in ten eminent case studies and furthermore two urban bathhouses. It was shown how the most successful onsen stayed true to their traditional roots in their evolution and contemporary development, by maintaining, recreating or reinterpreting traditional features of 19th century bathhouses. This research shows a common connection between most of those successful *onsen*. Elements, like the choice of traditional materials – namely wood and stone – as well as the usage of a muted colour palette is prevalent for most of these cases. Moreover, a close contact to nature seems to be characteristic for these establishments, especially found in rural areas.

While the cultural practice of onsen has been steadily declining over the past decades, its effects on health and well being are now more relevant than ever. With the generally hectic life in Japan, and the more and more intense working schedule of salary men in the country's large cities, this cultural bathing ritual could positively influence the quality of those lives. *Onsen* are scientifically proven to carry several health benefits, as well as provide the obvious relaxation of a hot water bath. This combination of health improvement and leisure could be a pleasant way of changing the daily lifestyle of Japanese salary men, which is infamous for being draining and exhausting. As bathhouses are still somewhat widespread regardless of their declining number, a network of these institution allows workers to enjoy their benefits both near home or work, making it accessible no matter the individuals schedule. However, this change in behaviour would need to be encouraged by

bathhouse owners, as visiting an *onsen* is currently seen as a multi-day trip outside the city, something for which most people don't have time. Instead, the concept of shorter, few hour-long breaks could be seen as micro vacations, helping reduce physical and mental fatigue by enhancing the provided relaxation of individual *ofuro* practices through hot spring materials and their health benefits.

In Tokyo, however, the *onsen* do not offer the same flair of peacefulness and relaxation that is commonly found in their rural counterparts. They most often are barely distinguishable from regular bathing establishments, the *sentō*. In order to combat this, some owners tried to appeal to more customers by adding new features and resembling western spas. Although this might appeal to some people, the institutions generally compromised their cultural integrity for only little benefit, while on the contrary, they should embrace their heritage and revert back to their roots by rediscovering the tradition revolving around thermal bathing.

However, many of the city *onsen* do not have the option to endure a lengthy and costly renovation, as this would force them to close for a longer period, adding lost revenue on top of the renovation cost. Meanwhile, some of these establishments have unused spaces in close proximity, allowing for the possibility of renovation by micro-extension of their property. This would make it possible to literally add the feature to the *onsen* without compromising the existing building.

For this concept, two areas inside Tokyo that would benefit from this type of modification were identified. The previously outlined principles were applied to the highlighted *onsen*, tailoring the design to their specific needs, as well as the ones of the community around them.

Initially, this concept was applied on the case of Jakotsuyu Onsen, in the business hub of Asakusa, Tokyo. Here, the area mostly consists of

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large office complexes and night time activities, therefore, its population is largely composed of salary men working in the nearby skyscrapers and hanging out after work in the numerous *izakaya* - traditional Japanese pubs - as well as restaurants and nightclubs. Not many of them decide to visit this very central onsen after work, even though it would greatly benefit their general health. For these reasons, the design aimed to attract customers by expanding the bathhouse's functions in order to include some features that could appeal to this specific part of the population. Since office workers very often have to work until very late hours and then face long commutes home, some end up missing the last train and are forced to sleep in one of the many cold and hospital like capsule hotels. Considering these factors and the current lack of lounging areas in the existing building, a small addition including a tea house and a micro *ryokan* was designed in the empty lot across the alley from the bathhouse. This allows the establishment to expand its functionality and to retain the clientele for a longer period of time, attracting employees and offering them a few hours micro holiday.

In order to involve the surrounding community, the addition features a wooden fence that, in certain times of the day, can be opened to extend the garden toward the alley and connect the existing building to the addition. This also allows passers by to walk among the garden, possibly inducing them to enter and take a rest in the warm waters of the onsen. Here, the addition allows the existing *onsen* to appropriate part of the public space in order to include the surrounding community into its functions and offer a better experience to its customers.

The second case study was identified in a residential suburb of Shibuya ward. Far from the popular and hectic centre of the ward, this area is almost exclusively residential and sees little to no activity outside the

apartment buildings and elementary schools that constitute the neighbourhood. Despite the clear differences between this *onsen* and the previous one, their struggles appear to be very similar: originally a *sentō*, both bathhouses shifted towards the *onsen* activity in a hope to increase their clientele. However, in Sakae Yu and Jakotsuyu alike, the interventions weren't particularly successful and brought little benefits to the businesses.

Notwithstanding, being a residential neighbourhood, the area presented different challenges when approached with the aim of expanding the existing bathhouse. Here, instead of creating a micro *ryokan* for hour long breaks after work, the intervention includes a small *ochanoma* inspired by the deep rooted traditions of Japanese tea ceremony and a fully open garden where patrons and passers by alike can linger after the bath or a walk around the area. The two main sides of the added pavilion feature a foot bath, also open throughout the day, representing a practical advertisement of the bathhouse and its hot spring waters' properties. This allows to aim at the families with children and elderly people who live nearby and find themselves strolling around the neighbourhood during the day, as well as to employees coming home after work, as a pleasant variation from in house *ofuro* practices. In this design, oppositely to what happened in the previous case, the public space expands towards the private areas of the onsen and its garden, for the benefit of the whole neighbourhood.

Both projects feature elements derived from Japan's long established bathing culture, its architectural traditions and its predisposition towards design choices that include natural materials and a direct relationship with nature. Therefore, they both incorporate a garden with the aim to generate a sensation of being in a remote rural area rather than

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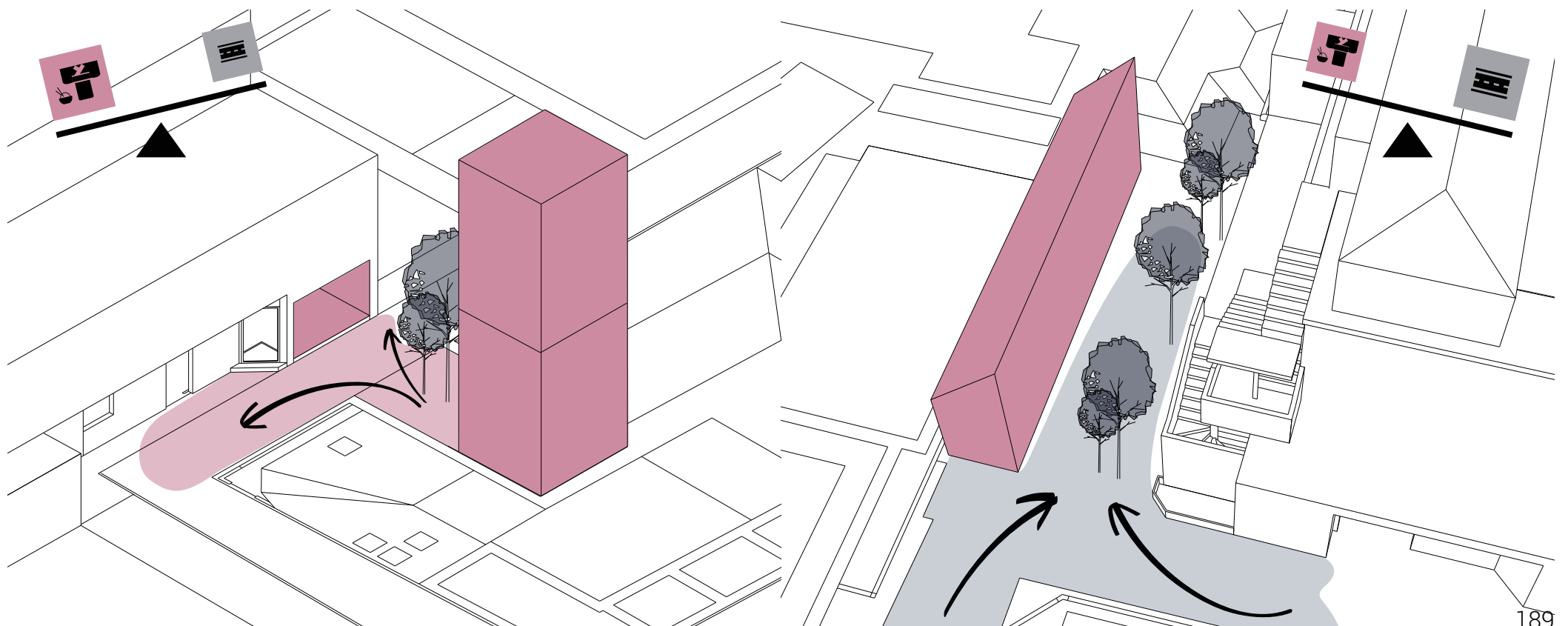
in one of the world's busiest cities. Moreover, wherever possible, they favour the use of natural materials, including wood in the structure, the fences and the window frames, in order to instil a sense of outdoors and adhere to the palette of earthy tones that was observed in so many other successful examples. This choice is paired with the careful inclusion of traditional Japanese architectural elements, such as sliding doors and paper screens, *tatami* floors and landscaped gardens.

In conclusion, these two projects show an inherent balance with each other. While one project focuses on the concept of opening private space to the public, the other one allows the temporary appropriation of public space to the institution. This shows the possibilities of different approaches to the modernisation of bathhouses by creating new spaces for the benefit of multiple parties. After all, the explicit goal is to revert those establishments back to their roots and bring them closer to their traditional role, that is servicing the community.

This design approach can be easily applied to more bathhouses in Tokyo and elsewhere in Japan, tailoring the intervention around the needs of each specific case. Through the changes generated by the concepts applied in those projects, as well as the addition of new structures that carry specific functions, the gap between the current services of the *onsen* and the ones offered in their rural counterparts can be bridged. This is especially important for bathhouses in financial precariousness, as shown by the success of more traditionally focused *onsen*. Thus, this study led to the development of a modular concept that can be prototyped and subsequently adapted according to the specific needs of other *onsen* in urban areas, in order to improve the environment - and subsequently its beneficial effects on health and well being - of urban bathhouses in disarray throughout Japan.

1. Hot matcha and traditional bamboo whisk. Pinterest. (2018). SU Photo - Food. [online] Available at: <https://www.pinterest.nz/pin/65443000812252497/> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2018].

2. Wagashi rice cakes for the tea ceremony. 每日頭條. (2018). 你造嗎, 他們都叫麻糬. [online] Available at: <https://kknews.cc/food/kx5pqr.html> [Accessed 16 Feb. 2018].



Part III: Japanese bathing culture

Tonight my skin
will miss the hot spring,
it seems colder

Matsuo Basho



GEOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF JAPAN

Japan is an archipelago consisting of almost seven thousand islands of volcanic origin. Located off the Pacific coast of the Asian continent, it stretches from the Sea of Okhotsk in the north to the East China Sea in the south, forming a diagonal line, from north east to south west, that follows the shape of the mainland. The largest and most central island is Honshu, where the old and new capitals of the country are located, followed by Hokkaido in the north, Kyushu and Shikoku in the south and Okinawa even further south off the shores of China and Taiwan.

Japan is located along the so called *ring of fire*, a horseshoe shaped geological formation constituted by an almost continuous series of volcanic arches and oceanic trenches that runs along the Pacific coasts of the South Asian islands and of the Asian mainland, cross the ocean along the coast of Russia and descends along the western coast of the American continent. This produces a nearly constant series of movements of the tectonic plates, causing frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

Due to its geographical location, the country finds itself on the junction of four tectonic plates: the Eurasian plate and the North American plate meet roughly in the centre of Honshu, while the Pacific plate runs along the coast of the northern portion of the main island and the Philippine Sea plate follows the southern portion of it. Therefore the islands are the result of ocean movements that occurred over hundreds of millions of years because of the subduction of the Philippine Sea Plate beneath the continental Eurasian Plate to the south and subduction of the Pacific Plate under the North American Plate to the north. The movements of these plates led in time to its characteristic shape and caused the

formation of a large number of volcanoes across the archipelago, more than a hundred of which are currently considered active.

While these volcanoes are distributed all throughout the archipelago, their location is not random: they mostly concentrate along the country's longitudinal axis, forming an almost continuous line that follows the one created by the oceanic trenches. The highest concentration of volcanoes can be found along the Japan trench, in the upper portion of Honshu island and the east coast of Hokkaido island. More volcanoes are located along the Izu-Bonin trench, where they form the Izu and Nanpō islands, and along the Ryukyu trench, in the southernmost area of the islands, where they form the Ryukyu arc, a series of archipelagos that stretches from Kyushu to the coast of Taiwan and includes the famous Okinawa islands.

The lifespan of a volcano can range from some months to several million years and they can appear dormant for centuries or millennia, therefore there is no general agreement on how to define an "active" volcano among the international volcanologist community. However, in Japan volcanoes are considered active if they had eruption history in the past 10.000 years or have active fumarolic activity. Hence, as of June 2017, the country counts 111 active volcanoes, representing around 10% of the world's active volcanoes. The list includes the famous Mt. Fuji, that last erupted in 1707 after a large earthquake in Osaka.

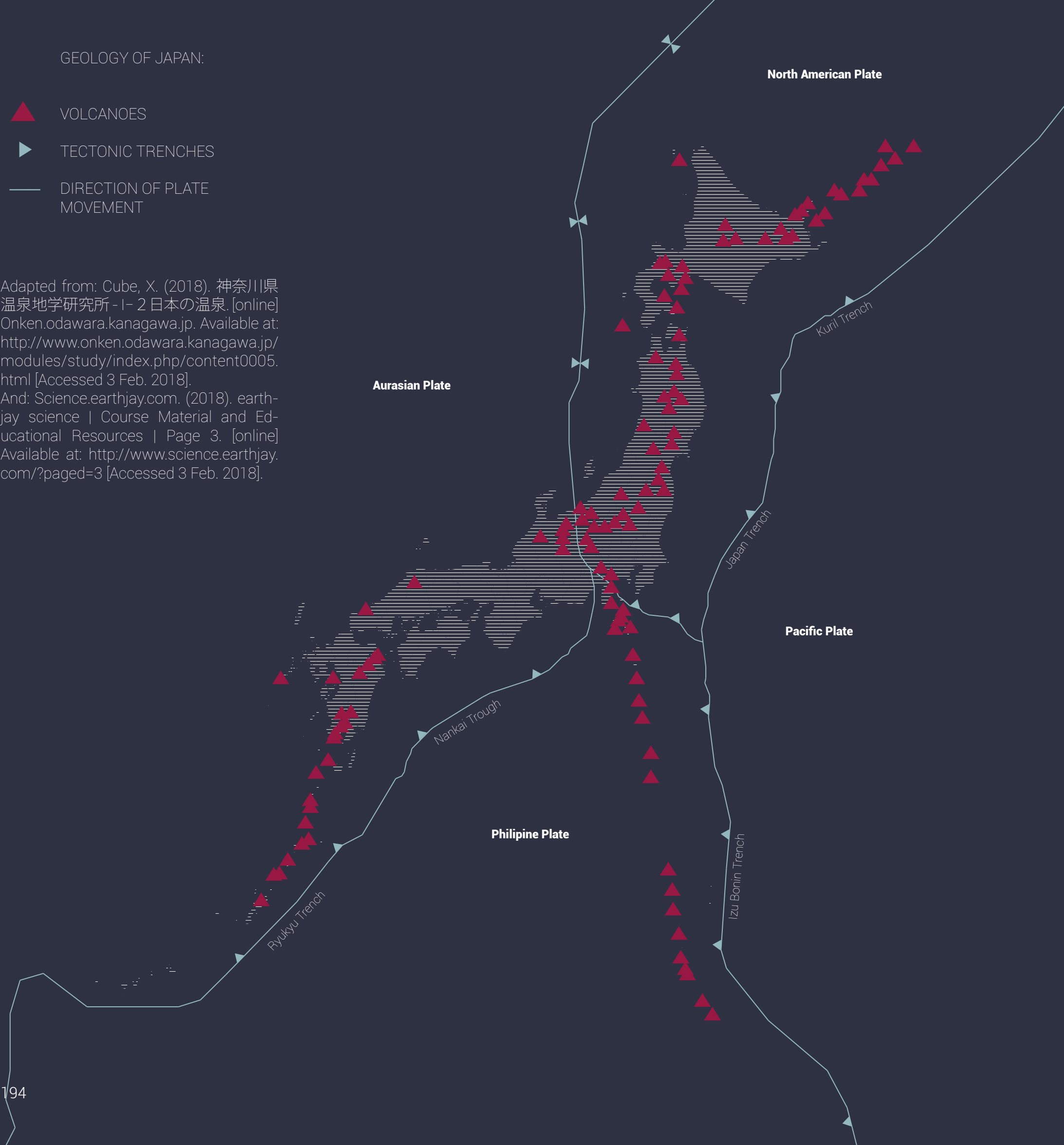
The activity situation of volcanoes is constantly monitored by institutions such as Japan Meteorological Agency and the peaks are ranked according to eruption risk, where rank A poses the highest risk and currently comprehends 13 mountains, including Mt. Asama, in Nagano prefecture, that has small to medium scale eruptions every 5 to 15 years, the last one of which was in June 2015.



GEOLOGY OF JAPAN:

-  VOLCANOES
-  TECTONIC TRENCHES
-  DIRECTION OF PLATE MOVEMENT

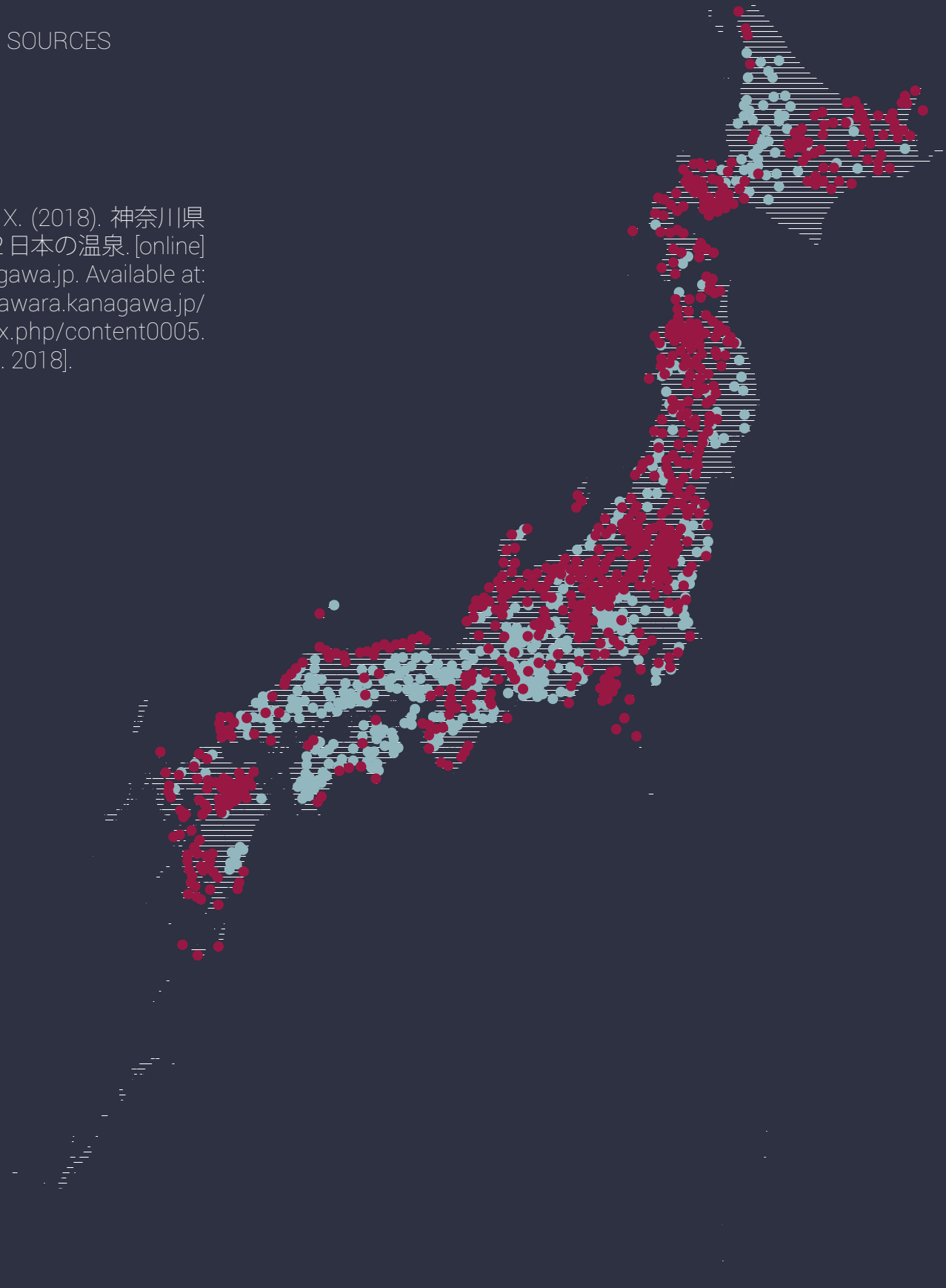
Adapted from: Cube, X. (2018). 神奈川県温泉地学研究所 - I- 2 日本の温泉. [online] Onken.odawara.kanagawa.jp. Available at: <http://www.onken.odawara.kanagawa.jp/modules/study/index.php/content0005.html> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].
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HOT SPRINGS OF JAPAN:

- COLD WATER SOURCES (<25°C)
- HOT WATER SOURCES (>25°C)

Adapted from: Cube, X. (2018). 神奈川県温泉地学研究所 - I- 2 日本の温泉. [online] Onken.odawara.kanagawa.jp. Available at: <http://www.onken.odawara.kanagawa.jp/modules/study/index.php/content0005.html> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].





HOT SPRINGS OF JAPAN - *ONSEN*

The abundance of volcanoes and the telluric activities caused by these peculiar geological conditions explain the presence of numerous natural springs gushing hot waters rich in various types of minerals across the whole country.

Japan has thousands of hot spring water sources, classified according to the so called "*Hot Spring Law*" n°125 of 1948¹. With this law, the Japanese government defines a "hot spring" as "hot water, mineral water, steam and other gases (except natural gas containing hydrocarbons as the main component) that issue from the ground with a temperature in excess of 25°C or contain more than a pre described amount of designated substances". Therefore, according to this definition, the water doesn't necessarily need to be hot to be classified as "hot spring": a cold mineral spring under 25°C can fall under the definition of "hot spring" if it contains more than a set amount of the designated substances. Volcanic gases and vapours may also be classified as hot spring. At the same time, a spring can be classified as an *onsen* even if it doesn't have any particular elements dissolved in its waters, as long as its temperature is above 25°C, taking the name of "simple hot spring".

The number of sources is constantly fluctuating because, while some dry out or get closed, other are found thanks to the improvement in drilling technologies, that allow to dig to a depth of 1.000 metres, where underground water is naturally heated by the inner core of the Earth. These types of sources are classified as "non volcanic hot springs". Hot springs are then classified either according to their natural temperature, osmotic pressure, pH or chemical composition.

Based on the temperature, a hot spring is defined “cold spring” if it is below 25°C, “low temperature spring” between 25 and 34°C, “hot spring” from 34 to 42°C and “high temperature hot spring” if it is above 42°C. Japan counts around 4.000 cold springs and more than 6.500 between low temperature and hot springs, while high temperature hot springs are the most numerous, accounting for more than 12.000 of the total hot spring sources. Since the ideal temperature for bathing is considered to be around 42°C, some source waters need to be reheated before being pumped into the bathing tub. Furthermore, a higher temperature allows a greater dissolution of minerals inside the water, making the water treatments more effective.

On the other hand, when the temperature is above 42°C, bathing can prove uncomfortable, so the *onsen* has to adopt measures to cool the water down. Some bathhouses simply add cold tap water, but that can dilute the minerals inside it and undermine the benefits of bathing, so other systems are generally preferred. In Kusatsu onsen, Gunma prefecture, where the water is naturally between 45 and 94°C depending on the point of extraction, the temperature is lowered using the traditional *yumomi* technique, that consists in stirring the water with large wooden paddles. This can still be seen today inside some bathhouses, where locals offer daily *yumomi* shows, incorporating dances and songs into the performance and inviting tourists to participate.

Another important classification of *onsen* water is based on the type of minerals and other chemical elements that are dissolved in it. The presence of different elements in the water is mostly attributable to the composition of the rocks with which the water comes in contact in its path before being collected. Therefore, the water quality can vary greatly across the country and even in the same prefecture depending on

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geographic conditions and soil characteristics. In order to be categorised as a "hot spring", the source water has to contain a defined amount of at least one of nineteen elements that have been identified by the Ministry of the Environment as characteristic of *onsen* water. These elements, measured per kg of water, are:

Carbon dioxide (CO ₂)	> 250 mg
Lithium ions (Li ⁺)	> 1 mg
Strontium ions (Sr ⁺⁺)	> 10 mg
Barium ions (Ba ²⁺)	> 5 mg
Iron ions (Fe ²⁺ or Fe ³⁺)	> 10 mg
Manganese ions (Mn ²⁺)	> 10 mg
Hydrogen ions (H ⁺)	> 1 mg
Bromide ions (Br ⁻)	> 5 mg
Iodide ions (I ⁻)	> 1 mg
Fluoride ions (F ⁻)	> 2 mg
Hydrogen arsenate ions (HAsO ₄ ²⁻)	> 1.3 mg
Arsonous acid ions (HASO ₂)	> 1 mg
Sulfur (S)	> 1 mg
Metaboric acid (HBO ₂)	> 5 mg
Metasilicate (H ₂ SiO ₃)	> 50 mg
Sodium bicarbonate (NaHCO ₃)	> 340 mg
Radon (Rn)	> 20 × 10 ⁻¹⁰ (> 74 Bq)
Radium salt (as Ra)	> 1 × 10 ⁻⁸ mg
Other dissolved substances (excluding gaseous ones)	> 1000 mg

Furthermore, in order to be categorised as a "medical treatment water source", the hot spring has to contain higher amounts of the previous elements or other components:

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Carbon dioxide (CO ₂)	> 1000 mg
Copper ions (Cu ⁺⁺)	> 1 mg
Iron ions (Fe ⁺⁺ or Fe ⁺⁺⁺)	> 20 mg
Aluminium ions (Al ⁺⁺⁺)	> 100 mg
Hydrogen ions (H ⁺)	> 1 mg
Sulfur (S)	> 2 mg
Radon (Rd,)	> 30 × 10 ⁻¹⁰ Ci (> 111 Bq)

As previously stated, “simple hot springs” are warmer than 25°C, but do not contain enough specific elements to be classified more accurately. Therefore these types of springs account for a large part of the total in Japan, concentrating especially in Gifu and Nagano prefectures and counting around a thousand of hot spring areas, that vary greatly from each other in their chemical composition. However, the most common hot spring waters across the country are chloride waters, that count more than 1.200 areas and are mostly found in Shizuoka and Atami prefectures, while definitely less common are hydrogen carbonate sources (515 areas) and sulphate springs (343), that can be found in Wakayama and Nagano. The rarest ones are the acidic and radioactive sources, diffused mostly in Hiroshima and Yamaguchi prefectures.

As stated in the regulations of the Hot Spring Act (Article 18, Paragraph 1), an analysis of the water every 10 years is mandatory and a bulletin stating the composition of the hot spring has to be shown inside the bathhouse at all times, generally posted at the entrance of the dressing room. This analysis has to be carried out by an analytical institution registered by the prefectural governor and its results also have to be reported to the prefectural government.

According to the latest report from the Nippon Onsen Research Insti-

tute, based on data from the Natural Environment Office of the Ministry of Environment², published in March 2017 and referring to May 2015, the number of hot spring areas in Japan is 3.084, with a total of 27.201 hot spring sources nationwide, more than 17.000 of which are being currently exploited. These sources pour more than two and a half million litres of water per minute, almost two million of which are mechanically pumped to supply the surrounding *ryokan* and bathhouses with clean water throughout the day.

The richest prefecture, in terms of hot spring sources, is Ōita, in Fukuoka island. It counts 4.342 springs, 3.516 of which are currently being used to supply the local *onsen*, while the other 684 are not being exploited. These hot springs are also the ones with the larger water output, with a total output of almost 280.000 litres of hot spring water per minute. Despite having the highest number of hot spring areas (it counts 245 to this date), Hokkaido is only fourth when considering the number of actual hot water sources, preceded by Kagoshima (2.773 sources) and Shizuoka (2.263 hot springs). Hokkaido's hot springs are “only” 2.110, 1.266 of which are currently used. Despite lower number of springs, Hokkaido is the second prefecture in terms of water output: measured to be roughly 235.000 litres per minute, not far behind Ōita prefecture.

The prefecture with the lowest number of both hot spring areas (8) and sources (13) is the island of Okinawa, in the Ryukyu arc, with a total output of less than 4.000 litres of hot water per minute.

The report from the Nippon Onsen Research Institute also provides information on the number of lodging facilities related to the presence of hot springs and the visitors they receive annually³. Leading the rankings is Shizuoka prefecture with almost 1.900 facilities, that employ around 144.000 people and count more than 11 and a half million overnight



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stays a year. The record for *onsen* visitors is once again held by Hokkaido prefecture, that in 2015 counted nearly 14 million overnight stays, in a business that employs roughly 122.000 people, divided in nearly 650 accommodation facilities across the prefecture. In total, the visitors account for more than 132 million overnight stays a year, roughly 26% of the total of tourism across the country, employing almost 1.4 million people.

While the industry has seen a slight recovery in the past five years (in 2015 there were roughly 5% more visitors than in 2010) the business had been slowly but steadily declining in the previous twenty years. This downturn can be attributed to the decreased interest in communal bathing and to the increasing faith in conventional medicine over traditional practices, that caused a diminished appeal of *onsen* therapy.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF *ONSEN* THERAPY

In Japan, just like in other countries where natural hot springs are a common feature of the territory, a culture developed around balneotherapy, the therapeutic use of water, and bathing in natural hot springs has always been seen as both relaxing and healing.

The curative properties of *onsen* waters have been known for thousands of years and are widely recognised across the world as a mean to alleviate pain, relieve stress, bring benefits to the skin and more. Therapeutic baths are especially popular across Europe and in Japan, where they are seen as natural treatment options for various common ailments. The chemical composition of hot springs determines a range of specific benefits and different minerals are believed to improve certain medical conditions. While some of these benefits have been scientifically proven by research, a large part of the virtues of hot springs are

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owed to the properties of water itself and to its elevated temperature. The intense heat of the water, whether natural or artificial, can increase body temperature thus killing harmful germs and viruses, eliminating toxins, increasing blood flow and circulation and expediting metabolism. As a study published in the North American Journal of American Sciences⁴ show, the heat, combined with the pressure applied by the water, diminishes the perception of pain by blocking the pain receptors in the body. In addition to these effects, the experienced buoyancy reduces stress on muscles and joints, resulting in pain relief and an overall increased well being.

Therefore bathing in a hot spring, even one that doesn't have any specific property, can contribute to the reduction of issues such as neuralgia, muscle pain, joint pain, stiff joints, sprains, poor circulation and help with skin conditions and during the recovery from injuries.

Moreover, other elements found in *onsen* water are thought to contribute to the improvement to specific physical conditions. For example, radiation and carbon dioxide sources are believed to contribute to the cure of gout, arteriosclerosis, hypertension, chronic skin diseases, while sulphate springs are indicated for heart issues like arteriosclerosis and iron sources to soothe period pains in women.

DECLINATIONS IN THE JAPANESE BATHING CULTURE

In Western countries bathing is generally considered only as a way to clean the body and is usually carried out in a shower, quickly while standing, often in the mornings before work. By contrast, Japan has a sophisticated culture of bathing that can be traced back to the VIII century. The practice, generally carried out every night after work, requires

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time and involves a number of precise steps to be executed while sitting. This process, almost becoming a ritual, allows not only to cleanse the body, but also, according to the popular tradition, to purify the spirit and relax, taking a break from the daily struggles. Therefore, the public bathhouses (*sentō*) and the hot spring baths (*onsen*) are intrinsic elements of the Japanese bathing culture and tradition. The act of bathing has always been seen as a communal activity, to carry out with family and friends, where people would scrub each other's backs while creating lasting and intimate bonds. It was also a way for parents to spend some quality time with their children, asking about their days and connect with them while washing.

The origins of the Japanese bathing traditions can be traced to the Buddhist practices of Indian temples, from where they diffused to China and then reached Japan during the Nara period (710–784 A.D.). Therefore, originally these practices were mostly carried out for religious purposes and baths could be found inside or in proximity of religious temples. Initially only used by Buddhist priests, the venues generally consisted in steam baths called *mushiburo*. Slowly with time, sick people gradually gained access to the bathhouses as a way to soothe their bodies through spiritual healing, until in the Kamakura period (1185–1333) it became a routine practice. The first mentioning of a commercial bath house is in 1266 in the Nichiren Goshoroku⁵. Initially not providing any gender separation, these establishments were rather different from modern bath houses. Since there were no faucets inside the actual bath, the customers received a ration of hot water at the entrance of the washing space, that was designed with a very small opening and no windows in order for the heat not to escape, making the room very dark.

Cover image: SnowsportsCulture.com. (2018). Japan's Hokkaido ski resorts: Deep snow, nude hot springs - SnowsportsCulture.com. [online] Available at: <https://snowsportsculture.com/japans-hokkaido-ski-resorts-deep-snow-nude-hot-springs/> [Accessed 3 Feb. 2018].

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During the Edo period (1603–1867), while in the Osaka area the *mushiburo* were still the primary bathhouses, in Edo (the original name of Tokyo), a new type of building started to develop. Called *yūya* (hot water shop), they contained sizable and deeper pools. During this time, in order to pursue stricter moral standards, a sex segregation started to be requested by the Tokugawa shogunate through multiple provisions, even though none of these laws were imposed too strictly yet. Some bathhouses partitioned the bath rooms with light wooden boards, others set different bathing times for each gender or started allowing access exclusively to one gender. Together with the diffused practice of bathing completely naked, a reason to enforce morally driven legislations regarding bathhouses was the diffused presence of *yuna*, hot water women. These bathing attendants officially only had the task to help men bathe by scrubbing their backs, however, some of these women were engaging in prostitution after the closing hours of the bath houses.

In an era when knowledge of hygienic practices was not widespread and access to bathing facilities was not as easy as it is today, hot springs were a prominent solution to common health issues and *onsen* baths were routinely advised as a remedy for multiple diseases.

The Meiji period (1867–1912) brought a series of profound changes to many aspects of Japanese culture in an attempt to pursue a greater openness towards the rest of the world. Among these, also the bathing practices underwent considerable changes and, with them, the architecture of the bathhouses was noticeably modified. With the general improvement of technical building aspects and

the bathing setting orienting more towards the *yūya* typology rather than the steam bath, the previously very narrow entrance door was widened to a regular sized sliding door and windows were added, allowing for a more convenient access and a lighter setting. In order to further increase the comfort of the space, the ceiling height was also increased and the bathtubs were partially sunk in the floor to allow an easier access to the water. However, the interiors of both *sentō* and *on-sen* were still mostly wooden and individual faucets were not present yet, since tiles and faucets started to gradually appear only in Taishō period (1912–1926).

Furthermore, another law preventing mixed gender bathing was passed in 1890 and this time it was also enforced, allowing only children under the age of eight to access the opposite sex baths.

After the great Kantō earthquake and subsequent fire that devastated Tokyo in 1923, many bathhouses were destroyed together with most of the other buildings in town. This expedited the substitution and improvement of the buildings, that started incorporating the tiles and individual faucets that we see today. Differently from today, however, there were two faucets for hot and cold water and every station was provided with a bucket to mix the water and a stool to sit while washing.

At the same time, scientific research regarding the medical benefits of hot springs became increasingly more known thanks to the advancements in the field of analytical chemistry and the use of *onsen* emerged as more and more popular.

In the 1930ies hot spring therapy was being researched by six universities across the country, that also offered a certification in *onsen* medicine for their medical students, and Kyushu University established a research laboratory in Beppu Onsen, one of the oldest and most popu-



lar *onsen* areas. In the same years, the Japan Thermal Climatological Society was founded in order to oversee the academic research on onsen and its medical applications.

Similarly to what happened in the aftermath of the Kantō earthquake, great renovations and reconstructions were needed after the end of World War II, since substantial areas of the main cities were destroyed as a result of the bombings. This was the Golden Era for communal bathing, since the shortage of housing also meant a heavily diminished access to private baths. Temporary baths were built in order to meet the population's needs and were generally lacking roofs, due to shortages in available materials.

Reconstructed apartment buildings often also lacked private in house bathing facilities, mostly in order to reduce costs and building times in a period when resources were scarce, increasing the demand for public baths even further. This brought to a peak in the number of *sentō* across the country in the '70ies, that also started to be more and more advanced, including individual shower heads next to the faucets.

Onsen therapy was also increasingly popular as a treatment for many medical issues and was administered to survivors of the atomic bombings in order to help them heal from their wounds.

Private in house bath rooms became gradually more common from 1970, as the Japanese economy recovered from the War blow and resources were more abundant. Around that time, new constructions included a bath and a shower in every apartment, with the wealthier ones even consisting of a more comfortable *ofuro*.

The easier access to private facilities led to a swift decline in the number of customers who still took advantage of the public facilities and

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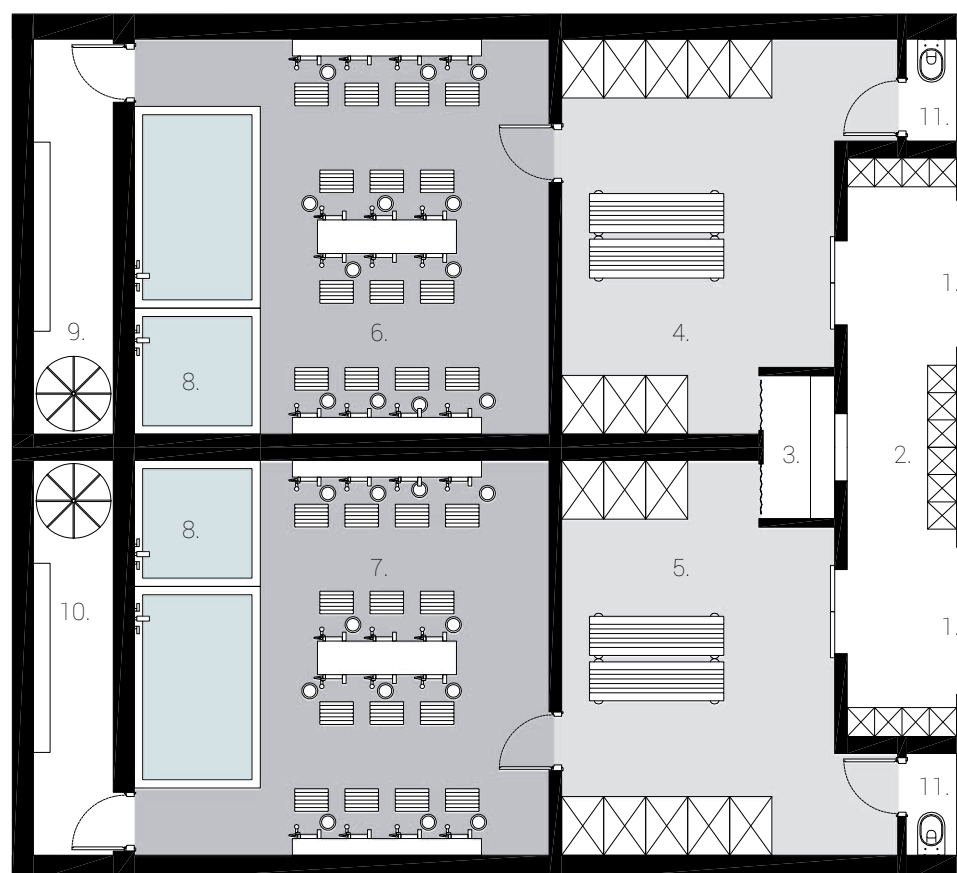
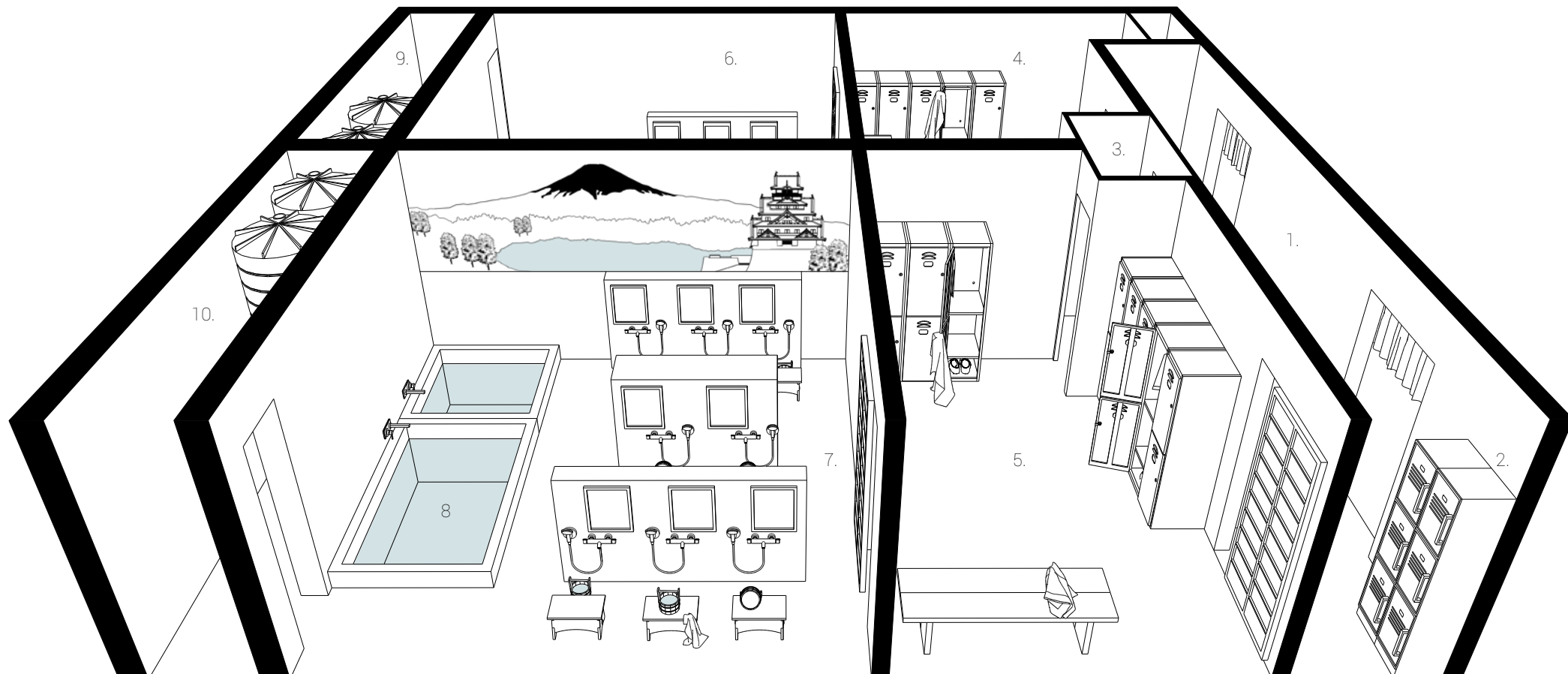


subsequently to the closing of many of them.

Today, *sentō* customers are mostly elderly people, who maintain their long established habits, while the younger generations, generally more prude and self conscious, are embarrassed by the nudity and don't really see the need for communal bathing, since private bath rooms are widely available.

In order to attract more public and appeal to different segments of the population, today's *sentō* and *onsen* have started to incorporate a wider selection of services, including saunas and massage services, and to resemble more and more to the SPAs that are seen in western countries, considerably losing the typical flair of traditional Japanese bathing.





BUILDING LAYOUT:

1. ENTRANCE
2. SHOE LOCKERS
3. TICKET BOOTH
4. MALE CHANGING ROOM
5. FEMALE CHANGING ROOM
6. MALE WASHING AREA
7. FEMALE WASHING AREA
8. WATER TUB
9. BOILER ROOM 1
10. BOILER ROOM 2
11. TOILET ROOM

- CHANGING ROOM
- WASHING ROOM



14.

SENTŌ

Sentō are communal bathhouses where customers pay a ticket to access. Equally common both in large cities and in rural areas, until a few decades ago they used to be the only available option for many people to bathe, since private in-house bathrooms were a luxurious comfort available only to the richest families.

Usually the facilities are privately owned, but benefit from local government subsidies, therefore they have affordable prices that are regulated per prefecture based on local committees. Smaller bathhouses in rural areas might be entirely public and not require the payment of a ticket. Being the only bathrooms available in the neighbourhood, *sentō* used to be an essential element of Japanese culture. While primarily used for hygiene reasons, they were also a meeting point for people to socialise, conduct business and learn the latest news, much similarly to the *thermae* in the ancient Roman Empire. *Sentō* were a crucial aspect of the daily life of Japanese people of every social class and were a time of unique social mixing where people from different upbringings could come together and material wealth and social status became undistinguishable.

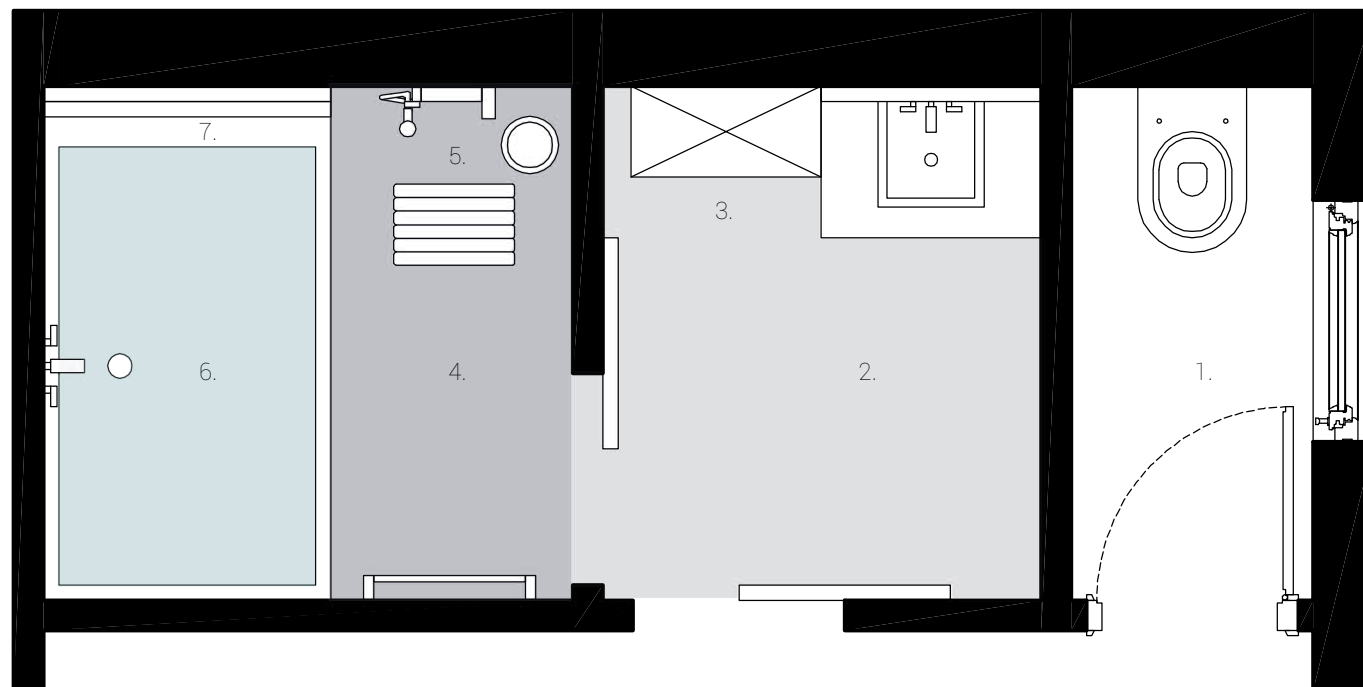
Since the *sentō* waters had to be artificially heated, the buildings often constituted an important landmark for the neighbourhood since their chimneys were visible from afar.

Due to the widespread presence of bathrooms inside the apartments, their use has been rapidly declining since the second half of the 20th century. According to a nationwide survey carried out in April 2016, *sentō* have gone from a peak number of around 18,325 in 1968 (when they were at the maximum of their popularity) to just 2,625 establishments today. Nowadays, they are still attended quite often by the old-

er generation and, less regularly, by people living in small apartments where the cramped bathroom doesn't allow for much comfort.

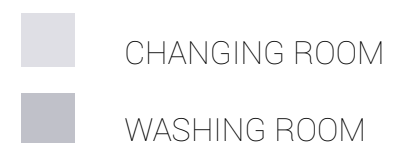
Its layout has remained virtually unchanged throughout the centuries: a common entryway equipped with lockers and a ticket booth allows customers to take off their shoes and pay for the entrance, then leads to sex separate changing rooms. There, it is possible to leave clothes and belongings, generally storing them in baskets placed on the shelves along the walls. From the changing room is then possible to move to the washing area, provided with single taps along the walls where to wash themselves before bathing in one large common pool. Due to their location, mostly inside densely built areas, these bathhouses generally don't have any outdoor pools, however some rural establishments might also provide an open space with a *rotenburo*. In order to put their customers at ease, paintings or tile decorations are generally placed next to the water tub, often portraying mount Fuji or other natural landscapes. This allows patrons to enter the illusion of leaving the busy town for a while and bathing under the mountain.

Due to the decline in customers, *sentō* owners had to find new and creative ways to avoid closing their establishments. While some simply organise different activities in order to attract the public or enter partnerships with neighbouring organisations, others add a number of typically Western features in order to offer a wider range of services. Commonly called Super *Sentō*, these new facilities offer a series of treatments, massages, saunas, jacuzzi and are becoming increasingly popular among the younger generations as they resemble amusement parks rather than traditional bathhouses, generally also providing meal and entertainment options for both youngsters and families and becoming all-day excursions for their visitors.



ROOM LAYOUT:

1. TOILET ROOM
2. CHANGING ROOM AND SINK
3. SHELVES FOR CLOTHES BASKETS
4. WASHING ROOM
5. TAP AND SHOWER HEAD
6. HOT WATER TUB
7. BATHTUB COVER





15.

OFURO

The traditional concept that bathing is an almost sacred activity is perpetuated in this miniature version of a *sentō*, consisting of two small interconnected rooms. The first setting is the vestibule: a space that traditionally only contained a sink and a shelf to store clothes before the bath, but now often also hosts other functions and can work as a laundry room.

The second section is the actual bath: it is completely waterproof and consisting of a shower space and a deep bathtub that can be covered with a lid in order to keep the water warm between uses and prevent evaporation. Traditionally, this space was clad with *hinoki*, the Japanese aromatic cypress wood, while nowadays it is more commonly prefabricated in acrylic materials, that are cheaper and easier to maintain. Since the room is entirely waterproof, there is no need for a separation of the shower and the whole chamber is used as a washing space, generally provided with the traditional stool and bucket in order to scrub while comfortably sitting down.

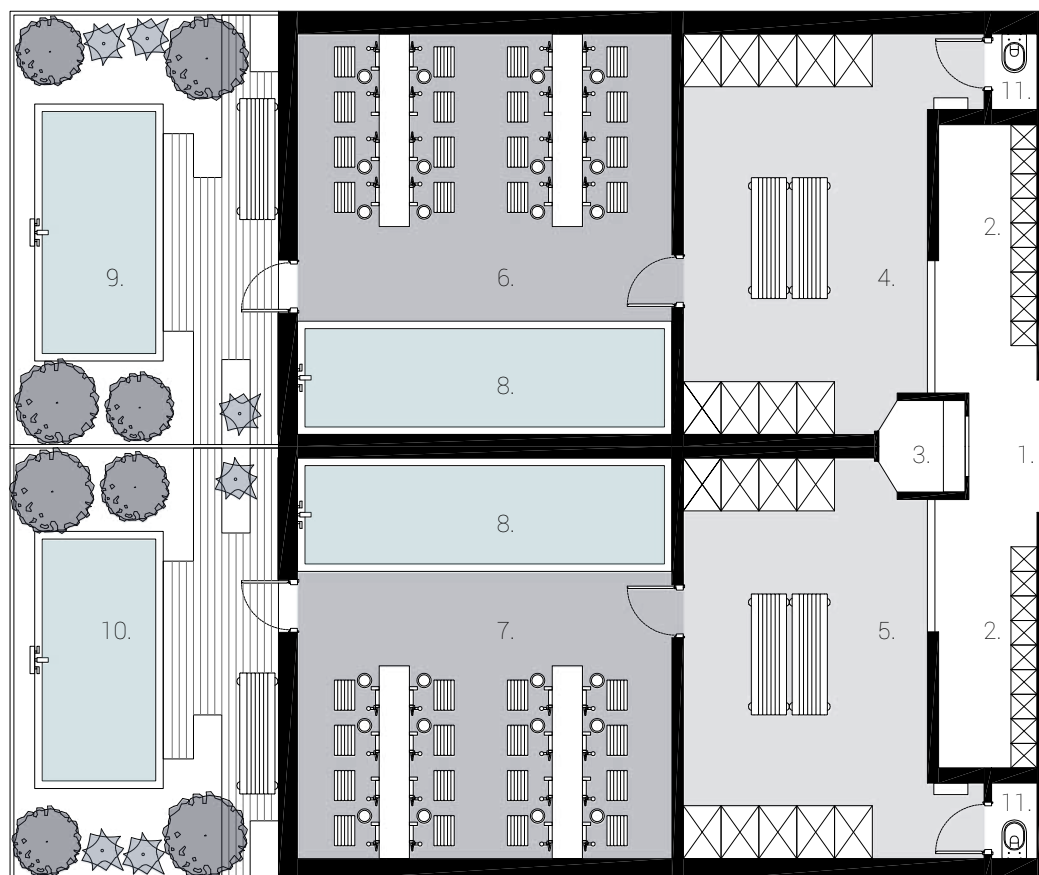
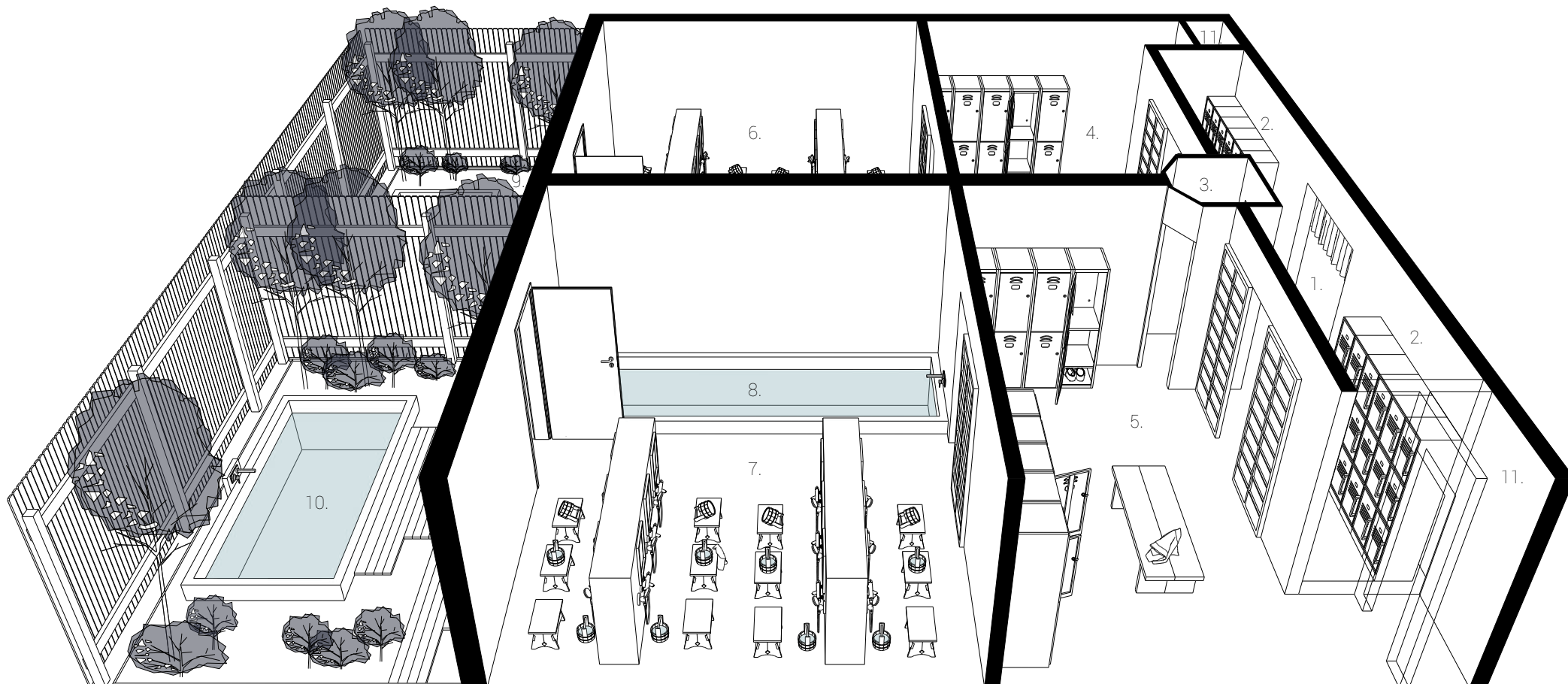
The tub is usually much deeper and requires more water than Western ones, therefore the same water is used by all the family members, in order of seniority, and can be recycled for laundry instead of being discharged when is no longer needed. For this reason it is imperative to carefully wash and scrub oneself before soaking in the tub.

While they initially only consisted of a deep tub, originally made of wood, nowadays they seem to become more and more technologically advanced. The more expensive *ofuro* today offer remote controls and timers that can be programmed to fill the tub at a predetermined time and maintain the temperature through built in heating systems, so that people can find the bath ready when coming home from work.

While Western houses commonly have one room for both the toilet and the shower or bath, Japanese households generally consider the separation between the toilet and all other functions of paramount importance, so much so that apartment prices can vary greatly depending on the presence of this specific element. First only popular among wealthier families living in larger homes, *ofuro* started to be more commonly diffused in the 70ies among smaller types of households and are nowadays customary even in the one or two room apartments, and have become almost a given standard of living.

In homes with larger *ofuro* it is very common for family members to bathe together, maintaining the tradition of bathing as a communal practice. As uncommon as it can seem from an European perspective, customarily children bathe with one or both of their parents, sometimes up until they are in high school⁵. Rather than an eccentric and unnatural habit, to the Japanese eyes this is seen as a precious bonding moment to develop what they call "*skinship*". *Skinship* is a pseudo-English Japanese word composed by the word "*skin*" and the last syllable of "*friendship*", commonly used to indicate the private intimacy acquired through close personal contact, both physical and emotional, with each other.

Traditional Japanese inns, especially in rural areas of the country, customarily offer the use of an *ofuro* to their guests; the room is generally communal and can be booked by patrons for a limited amount of time. However some more modern high end hotels offer private *ofuro* inside the room.



BUILDING LAYOUT:

1. ENTRANCE
2. SHOE LOCKERS
3. TICKET BOOTH
4. MALE CHANGING ROOM
5. FEMALE CHANGING ROOM
6. MALE WASHING AREA
7. FEMALE WASHING AREA
8. WATER TUB
9. MALE ROTENBURO
10. FEMALE ROTENBURO
11. TOILET ROOM

CHANGING ROOM

WASHING ROOM



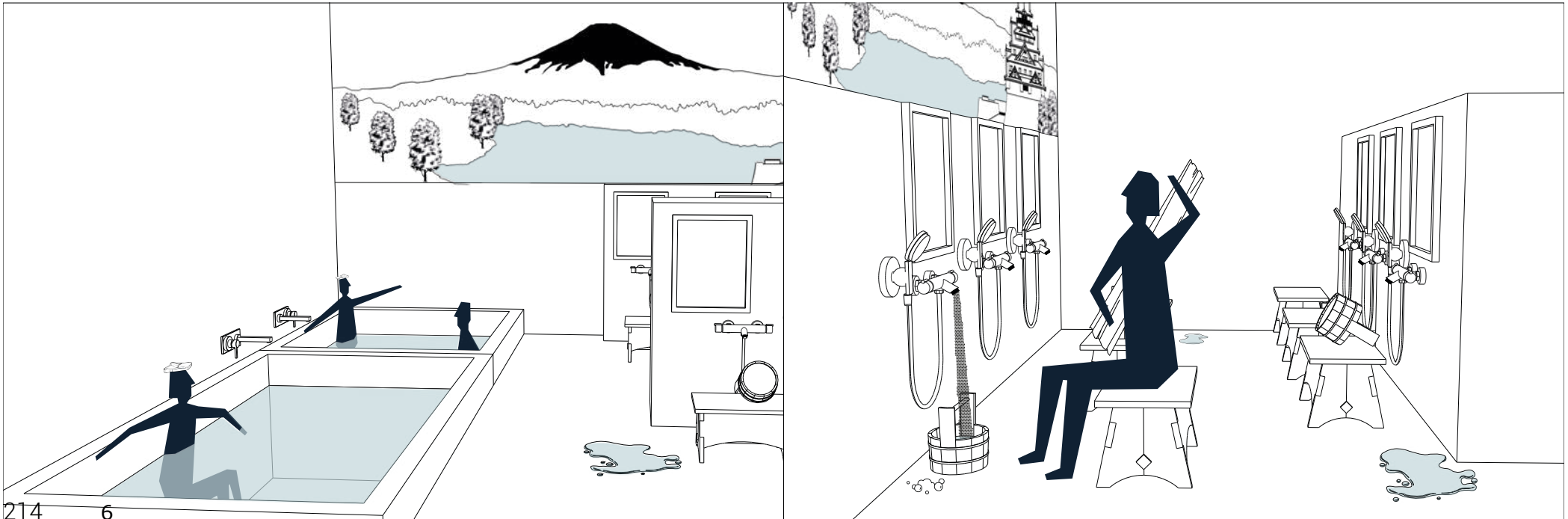
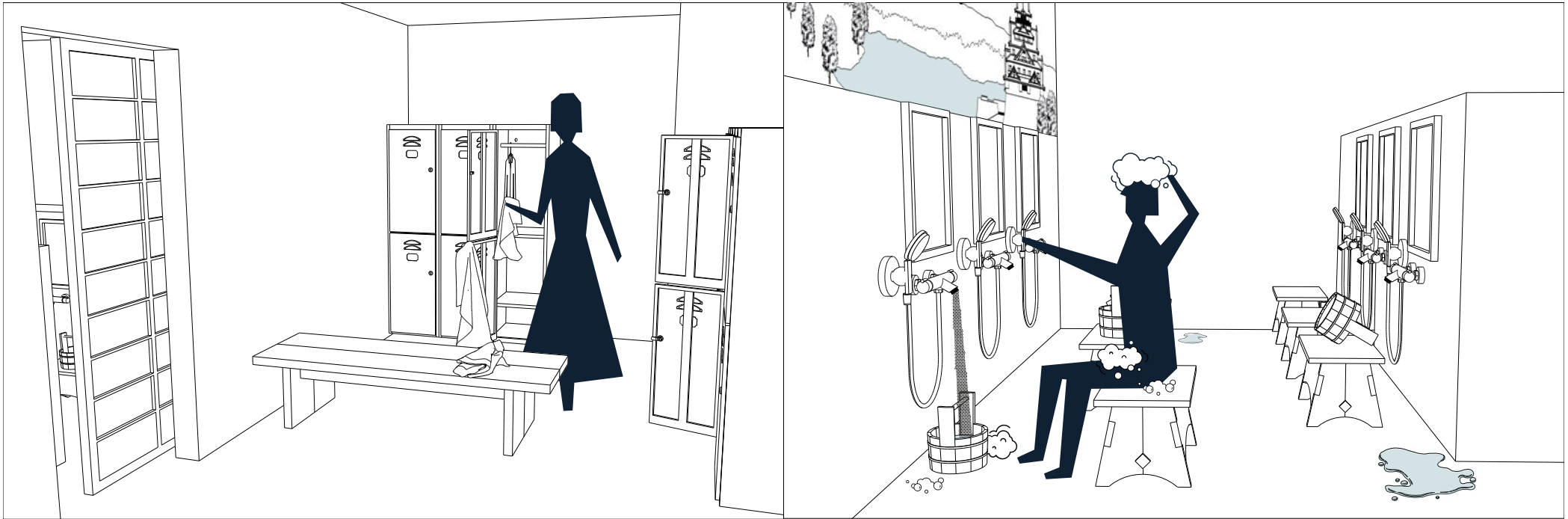
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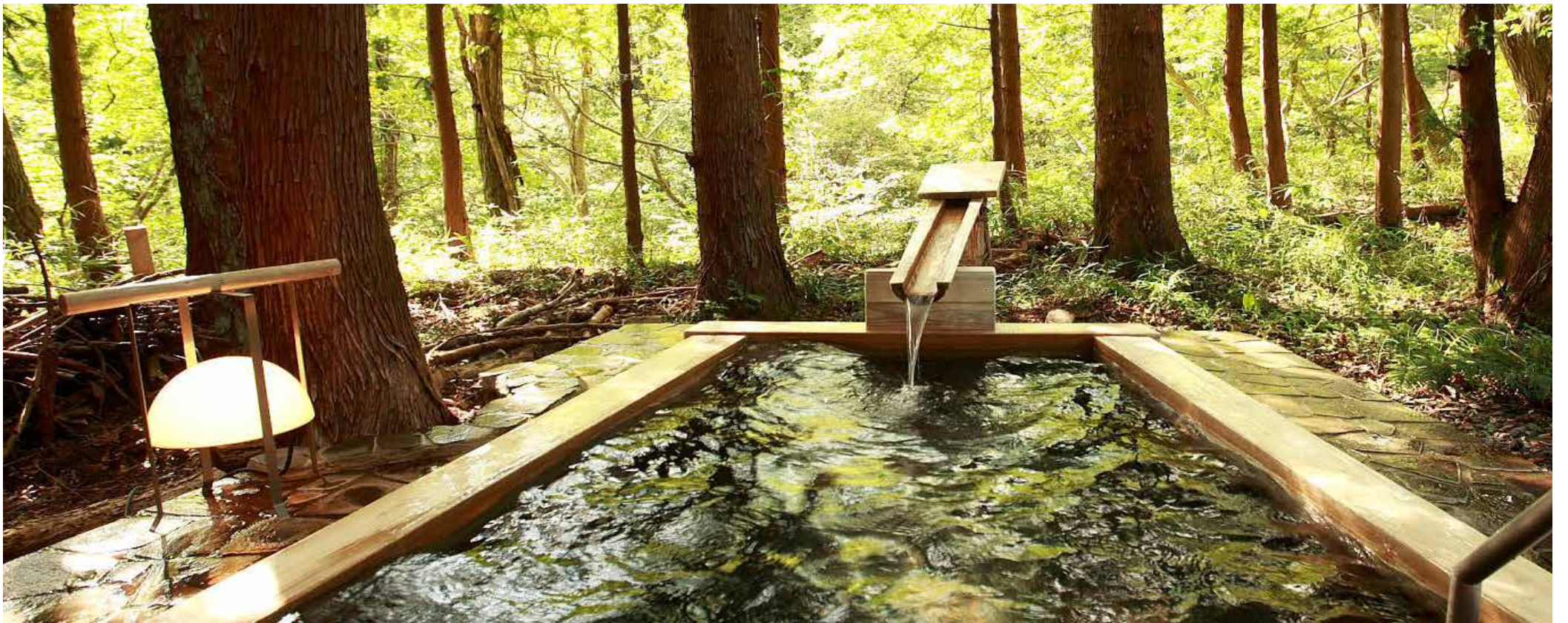
ONSEN

The Japanese word “*onsen*” is used to indicate both the natural hot water spring and the type of bathhouse that employs it. These establishments are located all over Japan in the more than 3,000 hot spring regions across the country, representing a considerable segment of the nation’s tourism destinations. However, due to the very particular characteristics of their waters, *onsen* have always been perceived more as a destination for recreational or medical purposes, rather than an element of everyday life. Therefore, while the building structure and layout might be comparable to the ones of a *sentō*, their target public varies remarkably. Traditionally located in rural and mostly mountainous areas of the country, *onsen* visits generally required for a longer stay, from a minimum of a couple of days to the average of one or two weeks. Consequently, they were customarily genuine holidays aimed for relaxation and stress relief, often aimed at healing physical conditions under medical prescription, not dissimilarly from European practices. Nowadays *onsen* can also be found in larger cities, thanks to the advanced mining technologies and machineries that allow to dig deeper to recover hot spring water without having to find natural sources. Therefore many *onsen* have opened in cities like Tokyo and Kyoto, removing the need to travel outside town.

As previously stated, their basic layout is comparable to the one of *sentō*, a common entrance with a ticket booth leads to sex separate changing rooms and to completely waterproof washing rooms equipped with individual taps and communal bathtubs. Being generally not in densely built areas, these establishments often have a *rotenburo*, an open air bathtub, where patrons can soak while enjoying the natural landscape and the fresh breeze on their skin.

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BATHING PROCEDURE

As previously stated, the whole process of bathing in Japan constitutes a form of ritual, consisting of a series of precise steps, that come in the same succession in all three types of bathing structure.

After taking their shoes off in the entrance space, usually equipped with shelves or lockers for storage, the customer moves in the first room of the building, the changing room. This setting is usually devoid of furniture, only containing shelves with baskets or coin lockers, depending on the type of establishment. Here, the customers take off all their clothes and get ready for the bath.

Once they are completely naked, they can move to the second section: a tiled room hosting the bath tub and the washing stations. These are almost always composed by a tap and a shower head and provided with the traditional stool and bucket to rinse more comfortably. Here the patrons can wash themselves thoroughly with hot water, carefully scrubbing the skin with a small towel. This is both a way to get rid of the sweat and dirt on one's skin and to accustom one's body to the warm temperatures of the bath.

When the washing ritual is complete, it is possible to move to the hot tub. Unless clearly specified, the bath has to be entered completely naked and nothing else besides the body should touch the water. Traditionally, a small towel is carried to the side of the tub and is wet with hot water taken from it. The towel is then folded and placed on the head of the bather as a way to average the temperature of the body without immersing the head under water.

While advised against when bathing in an *onsen* (it would wash off all minerals from the skin), in a *sentō* it is common procedure to wash oneself a second time after soaking in the tub, as the hot water eases the scrubbing.

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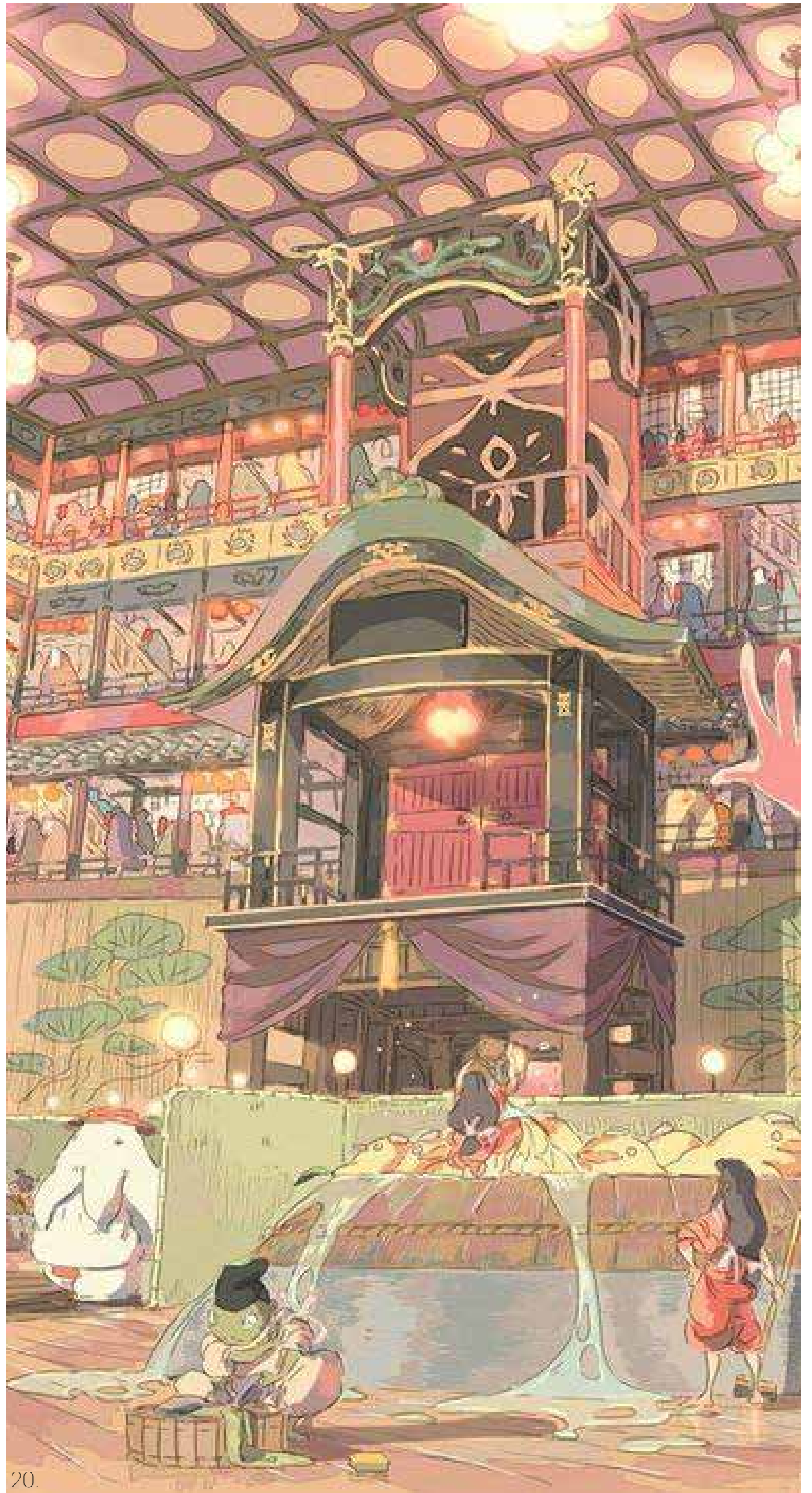


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20.



21.

MODERN CULTURE REFERENCES

While the attendance of onsen and public bathhouses has been steadily decreasing in the past forty years, the practice of bathing maintains an important place in the hearts of many Japanese that still view the tradition as part of their most intimate heritage.

Proving how heartfelt this element is in today's culture, *onsen* or *sentō* scenes appear in almost every movie, comic book or cartoon set in Japan. The most renown example is probably Hayao Miyazaki's movie "*Spirited Away*", that was awarded an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature in 2003 and is probably, to this day, the most famous Japanese animated movie. The hand drawn motion picture is set in a bathhouse inspired by the architecture of Dogo Onsen Honkan, in Matsuyama and carefully depicts the many settings of a working *sentō*.

Another remarkable example of narrative revolving around the theme of Japanese traditional bathing is "*Thermae Romae*", an extremely successful *manga* series that follows the adventures of Lucius Modestus, a *thermae* architect from the ancient Roman times who finds himself transported into a modern day *sentō* while searching for new design ideas. Even though they might not revolve entirely around the bathing theme, many other *anime* and *manga*, as well as acted movies, include scenes of bathing and carefully represent the concept of *skinship*. An example is "*My neighbour Totoro*", another Hayao Miyazaki movie, that shows the father bathing with his two little daughters. In this central scene we can see how communal bathing appears natural to Japanese families and it is a precious moment for family bonding and fun. A different example of *skinship* is represented by an issue of the popular *manga* "*Naruto*", where the main character are seen bathing together as a form of team building exercise. This type of activity is still common practice even today between schoolchildren across the country.

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Glossary

Ashi Yu: foot bath. A shallow tub, generally located on the front of an *onsen*, where customers can relax their feet in hot spring water.

Bonsai: ancient Japanese tradition of growing miniature version of large trees in vases, by cutting their branches and roots in order to control their size. Requiring an incredible amount of technique and care, these trees can take hundreds of years to grow according to a specific shape and are treasured from generation to generation.

Chōzubachi: water basins for temizu, ritual washing before a Shinto prayer.

Dori: large street, city avenue. The only streets to have names.

Engawa: strip of wooden flooring surrounding the perimeter of the house on the interior courtyard side. Located on the outside of the shōji screens, but inside the amado (wooden storm shutters) covered with a wooden awning, it creates a sort of in between space separating the inside from the outside of the house.

Fuketsu: unclean, dirty, impure.

Genkan: traditional Japanese entrance. Present in almost every building, whether it's public or private, it marks the limit of the shoes-on area, where everyone has to leave their footwear in order to proceed further inside. It is generally signalled by a change of pavement, from stone or wood to *tatami*, and often marked by a step, as the rest of the house is generally located on a higher level.

Harae: Shintoist ritual, includes a variety of different religious practices, upheld by either officiants or devotees.

Hinoki: typical variety of Japanese cypress.

Kami: spirits and phenomena that are worshipped in Shintoism, the life spirits that harbour inside everything.

Kanji: Japanese ideogram.

Kimono: long, loose robe with wide sleeves, secured with a large rigid sash tied at the back.

Kirei: clean, neat, but also beautiful, fair.

Kitanai: filthy, unclean, vulgar, calculating.

Koi: large and colourful Japanese carp.

Machiya: traditional wooden town house scheme, generally consisting of a narrow and deep independent building hosting a small store on the ground floor and its owner's residence on the above volume.

Mushiburo: steam bath, one of the first version of public bathhouse.

Noren: traditional fabric dividers, generally composed of two or three vertical slits, hung above the entrance doors of restaurants, shops and bathhouses. They generally display the shop's logo or emblem, serving as a store sign as well as protection from sun and dust. At the same time, they also show that the business is open and are always taken down at closing time. Inside bathhouses, they are placed over the entrance of the changing rooms.

Nyūyoku: the act of bathing, cleaning oneself.

Ochanoma: tea house or tea room.

Ofuro: private in-house bath consisting of a washing area equipped with a stool, a water tap and a shower head, and a hot water tub for soaking.

Onsen: hot spring source or hot spring bathhouse.

Ōsōji: ritual end-of-the-year cleaning. Common practice in private households, workplaces and schools, is a deep cleaning of all parts of the building, similar to the western concept of "spring cleaning". It is considered like a form of ritual to metaphorically close with the year that is coming to an end and start fresh the new one.

Roji: a narrow backside walkway between buildings inside a block. It represents the lowest step in Japanese street hierarchy. Slowly disappearing in Tokyo due to modern building regulations, it represents a characteristic element of traditional Japanese neighbourhoods. Being so narrow and intimate, these alleys often become an extension of the outdoor spaces of the houses that face them: inhabitants place potted plants and chairs in front of their entrance doors, while shops often advertise their activities with signs and banners.

Rotenburo: outdoor bathtub.

Ryokan: traditional family run hotel establishment. Both located in towns and rural areas, these types of inns were first established in the VIII century in order to serve as recovery for travellers. They were tradi-

tionally designed according to Japanese style architecture and generally featured *tatami* clad rooms, communal baths and usually provided yukata for customers to wear inside the public areas of the hotel and across the village. Difficult to find inside large cities, they are most often located in scenic forest areas, where they are a symbol of Japan's rural culture and habits.

Sentō: public bathhouse.

Shōji: sliding paper screens with a wooden frame.

Skinship: the custom of bonding through physical contact, often consisting of team activities and onsen baths. Common among school-children and sport teammates in order to build team spirit.

Soto yu: independent bathhouse, can be private (generally a family run business) or public, owned and managed by the city.

Susuharai: a cleaning away of soot and dust. Ritual practiced on December 13th by Shinto priests in order to give thanks to the kami for the blessings of the previous year and to purify the shrine for the new year.

Taiko: large Japanese drum. Used for a variety of functions, from military activities to traditional folklore, these drums are widely diffused across the country. Extremely traditional, their making process can take several years.

Tatami: traditional bamboo mats covering the floor of Japanese houses. They have a rectangular shape and set dimensions that constitute a module around which the whole house architecture is often based.

While the dimensions vary slightly from city to city, they generally recognised to be rectangles of about 88 x 176 centimetres, that are placed on the floors following precise and well established patterns.

Temizu: Shintoist ritual of washing one's hands and mouth before approaching an altar to pray.

Tokonoma: wooden recess inside traditional homes, usually in the entrance area or the Japanese style reception room. They hosted seasonal flower compositions, paintings and other significant elements belonging to the family and were a way to show its wealth to guests, as well as an element of decoration. Stepping inside the alcove is strictly forbidden, except for cleaning and display changes. During these times, a strict etiquette is required as a form of respect for the almost sacred space.

Uchi yu: indoor bath, a facility that is connected to a ryokan. Can be open to the public, but it is more generally only destined to hotel patrons.

Yakisugi: traditional method to preserve wood, consisting of burning with fire the superficial layer of the plank or board in order to create a charcoal coat that protects the inside from the attacks of atmospheric agents and insects.

Yoku: to bathe, to receive an honour.

Yu: hot water, bath, bathhouse.

Yufuda: originally a thin piece of wood that served as entrance tick-

et for many establishments, namely *onsen* and *sentō*. Nowadays the term often refers to a combined ticket for multiple *onsen* in a hot spring town.

Yukata: light cotton kimono, generally used before and after a bath or as summer light clothing.

Yumomi: practice consisting of cooling down the onsen water through stirring it with large wooden boards, in order to not dilute its mineral properties with the addition of fresh water.

Yuna: bath women. Originally women employed by the bathhouse in order to wait on the customers, prepare and clean the baths, help scrub the customers. Later on the profession was accused of prostitution.

Yūya: hot water shop, one of the first version of the modern onsen.

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Sunrays streaming through
Steam rising from the onsen
Shining morning bath

Anonymous author