

A new form of Accommodation



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Reinterpreting the Past

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO URBAN TRANSFORMATION
IN HISTORICAL SUZHOU

A New Form of Accommodation

Master Thesis

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01 / Abstract

In this thesis, through the researches of the urban structure, architectural style and garden's space in combination with the analysis of the current situation of tourism in Suzhou, I made a proposal of an alternative form of a hotel that incorporates modern architecture to interpret the genius loci of Suzhou. While collecting the necessary information for my survey, I used traditional field research to analyze the characteristics of local architecture, the atmosphere, and spatial composition. I adopted the "Mat-building strategy" defined by Alison Smithson to establish an architectural framework using the traditional building scale. The internal space of the hotel will be filled by reinterpretation of the spatial composition and the atmosphere of Suzhou gardens. In this way, I obtained a two-story building that uses the local architectural scale as its bone, enriched by the feeling of the garden, the poetic life, and the local spirit of Suzhou and by the use of modern materials and techniques.

This new-style hotel building connects traditional and modern features, as well as connecting visitors' experiences to the surrounding context. I hope that through the new form, visitors can enjoy "slow traveling," experience the true Suzhou lifestyle, and the real feeling of "living the garden".

02 / Foreword

During this CUHK-POLITO Joint-Studio, I had the privilege of visiting and doing research in Suzhou with students from Hong Kong. The main topic of the workshop was exploring opportunities for tourism-related design in the region of Suzhou gardens.

I have visited Suzhou twice, the first time was at the end of December. The other students and I lived in the hotel in the ancient city. In fact, that hotel is the same any other hotel all over the world. I can find a hotel with the same aspect in Shanghai, Beijing, or New York. Sometimes I woke up in the morning at the Hotel and for a moment I had to think about where I was. Because this kind of accommodation has nothing to do with the traditional style of Suzhou.

The second time was at the end of March. We lived in an Airbnb house in the traditional neighbourhood near gardens of Cultivation. To be honest, that was not a new house but it was very clean and in order to enter the house, we need to go through a corridor enclosed by other houses. After a shared courtyard there is a patio and then we could reach the house. In the process, I experienced the rhythmic tightening and unfolding of the space and every time I could run across people who live in this courtyard.

I found that social interaction is also different from the "modern" society in term of use of public spaces. Even if the boundaries between public and private are not so clear in

people's mind, everything seems to be so harmonious, everyone seems to be affected by an invisible rule, subconsciously maintaining the lifestyle in the community. This kind of experience was quite strange for someone who is used to live in an apartment but maybe it is the real Suzhou taste which the visitors are searching for.

I visited the gardens many times in different seasons, every time the sceneries I saw was different and I could find something new. the only thing that didn't change is the crowd in the garden. I wondered how would the people who were living in the garden enjoy the

sceneries of the garden and how would it feel like?

Based on the experience of travel and other research we did later we found that there is an opportunity to re-imagine tourist accommodation and facilities in Suzhou using the concept derived from the context and surroundings.

The aims of this thesis are finding out tangible and intangible elements of Suzhou architecture including vernacular dwelling and gardens and reinterpreting it through mat-building strategies.



03 / Suzhou Tourism Background

FAST PACE TRAVEL

Recently more than 120 million people visited Suzhou. Its proximity to Shanghai determines that a large number of visitors come here just for "one-day trips." (Manley, A. and Silk, M. 2015) In order to allow visitors to visit as many places as possible in the shortest time, travel agencies tend to "pack up" all visits in one day so tourists visit the gardens and then rush to the next attraction.

In this kind of "Fast pace" tour, tourists have no time to appreciate the beauty of the gardens or comprehend the "slow life" of Suzhou and

the understanding of local culture is limited. Taking Suzhou gardens as an example, the original intention of the garden design was to let people escape from the world to enjoy the natural sceneries and a moment of tranquillity in the city. As a result of a large number of tourists frequented every day, the gardens become overcrowded and probably more noisy than outside. This is contrary to the environment that the designer really wanted to create.

INCOMPLETE EXPERIENCE IN GARDENS

"The Chinese garden excels in its suggestiveness, in the way in which a hill or a rock can evoke contemplation. An upright peak is a piece of abstract sculpture. The beautiful Woman Peak requires careful scrutiny before one can perceive the subtle resemblance. This is also true of the Nine Lions Mountain. The front and back beam frames of the Mandarin Duck Hall are in different shapes, but somebody has to drop a hint before you can realize that it contains an image of an affectionate couple." (Chen C. 2017)

visiting the garden is the transformation of function. As the garden was transformed from a private house into a public tourist attraction, it is only open to visitors during the day. Visitors can't experience roaming in the garden to enjoy the night scenes, moreover, some nocturnal activities could not be held. "But in ancient times night visits to gardens decorated with lanterns were great occasions, often described in poetry and literature. The lantern show was a great event." (Chen C. 2017)

Another factor that caused the incomplete experience in



SLOW TRAVEL

With the rise of the middle class in recent years, tourists are not satisfied with a superficial experience of "have been," but pursues a higher and deeper travel experience. This indirectly promotes the development of Airbnb and Guesthouse. Local residents refurbished their houses in the traditional neighbourhood and rented them to tourists to provide visitors with a more local, more authentic Suzhou lifestyle. Hotel industry also tried to break away from the "modern" style to use a typology that could represent the spirit of the place, derived from local architecture.

"Character is determined by how things are and gives our investigation a basis in the concrete phenomena of our everyday life-world. Only in this way, we may fully grasp the genius loci; the "spirit of place" which the ancients recognized as that "opposite" man has to come to terms with, to be able to dwell."(Norberg-Schulz, 1979)

Slow travel can mean renting a cottage or apartment for a week at a time and exploring your immediate surroundings on foot or by car. It can mean taking a bike tour from one village to the next, or driving along back roads instead of taking the highway. It can mean crossing long distances by train instead of air, so that you can see the scenery along the way. But no matter how you do it, the key is slowing down - and making the most of each moment of your vacation. (Sarah Schlichter. 2017)



Suzhou Night view

Photographer: MeneerDijk

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dijk/7456659970/>



Master of Nets Garden, Night view

ToutiaoSuzhou, http://www.sohu.com/a/253680858_349693

OPPORTUNITIES

Considering the requirements of local lifestyle from the tourism market and the incompleteness of experience in Suzhou gardens this thesis proposes a new project to reinterpret the Suzhou garden and urban spatial structure through Mat-building strategies to establish a spatial continuity between new buildings and surrounding neighbourhoods, rather than isolations.

The design process is aimed at going beyond a general idea of cultural memory to work with 3 specific kinds of memory: (1) procedural memory, i.e. the habits of local builders, (2) semantic memory, i.e. vernacular styling, ornaments, symbols embedded in local tradition and (3) allomnesia, how a new content or context can evoke past experiences. (Fung, S. 2017) Incorporating local residents in the design can be used to connect the city's past (traditional) and future (modern), allowing different characteristics to convert harmoniously.

The design is not to rebuild a Suzhou garden, but to refine its compositional technique and interpret it in a modern architectural language. This new form for accommodation as a container of the local spirit and memories could be a new typology applicable to both hotel design and residential design

Chinese gardens, with their buildings, landscaping and abundance of flowers and trees, are integrated works of art, lyrical and picturesque. The overall appearance, though man-made, should appear to be wrought by nature. What is the actual relationship between hills and waters in a garden? Briefly, when modeling on natural landscapes, parts of a particular scene should be chosen rather than miniaturizing an entire scene, and the principles of disposing the elements should strictly follow the original. (Chen C. Z. 2017, 8.)



Prosperous Suzhou

Xu Yang (1712-after 1777),

Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 35.8 x 1225 cm; Liaoning Provincial Museum, Shenyang

04/ Design Tools

MAT-BUILDING

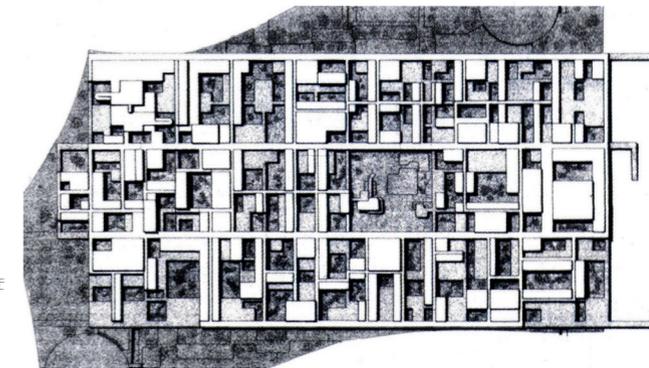
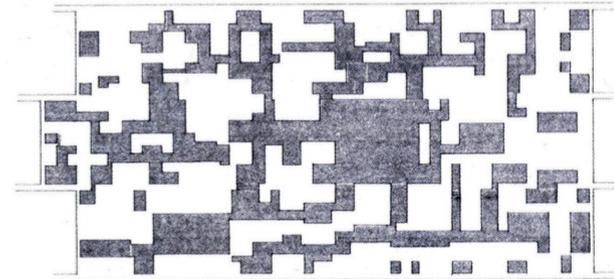
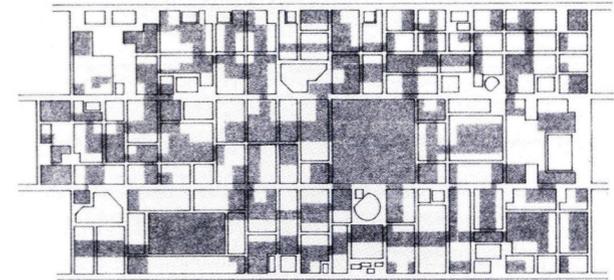
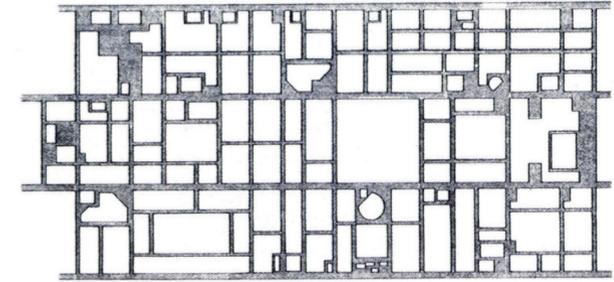
The word "Mat-building" is derived from 'How to recognize and read Mat-building. Mainstream Architecture as it has Developed Towards the Mat-Building' published by Alison Smithson in Architectural Design of September 1974. She defined this typology as "Mat-building can be said to epitomize the anonymous collective, where the functions come to enrich the fabric, and the individual gains new freedoms of action through a new and shuffled order, based on interconnection, close-knit patterns of association, and possibilities for growth, diminution and change." (A. Smithson, 1974)

Alison did researches on some projects between 50' and 70' including the Free University of Berlin, the design for Frankfurt, the Venice Hospital in Venice, and the design for Kuwait adopting a rewinding narrative order. By tracking back with some ancient cities' structure she found a series of common feature which makes clear how to read the signs of Mat-building. "However mainstream mat-building

A mat-building is a large-scale, high-density structure organised on the basis of an accurately modulated grid. A first look at any mat-building geometry shows a ground plan in the form of a regular grid that constitutes the general order. However, further analysis of the drawings reveals certain specific characteristics. (Calabuig, Castellanos and Abalos. 2013)

Original competition drawing illustrating the Free University of Berlin by Candilis, Josic, Woods and Scheidhelm

The Mat-building as a integration of functions and open space articulated through a grid of circulation.



Source: (The Strategies of Mat-building, 2013: 84)

became visible with the completion of the F.U."(AD January. 1974)

"Through the idea of Recognising and Reading Mat-building, the Smithsons presented a concept that deliberately sought to get away from any attempt of typological classification."(Roger Such, 2011) Based on this flexible theoretical framework, we can reread the Mat building with our personal interpretation. The article "The strategies of Mat-building" published by Calabuig D D, Castellanos Gomez R. and Abalos Ramos A. discussed how the 3 compositional principles: metrics, programme and place work in a mat-building.

A mat-building is a large-scale, high-density structure organised on the basis of an accurately modulated grid. A first look at any mat-building geometry shows a ground plan in the form of a regular grid that constitutes the general order. However, further analysis of the drawings reveals certain specific characteristics.(Calabuig, Castellanos and Abalos. 2013)

MATRICES

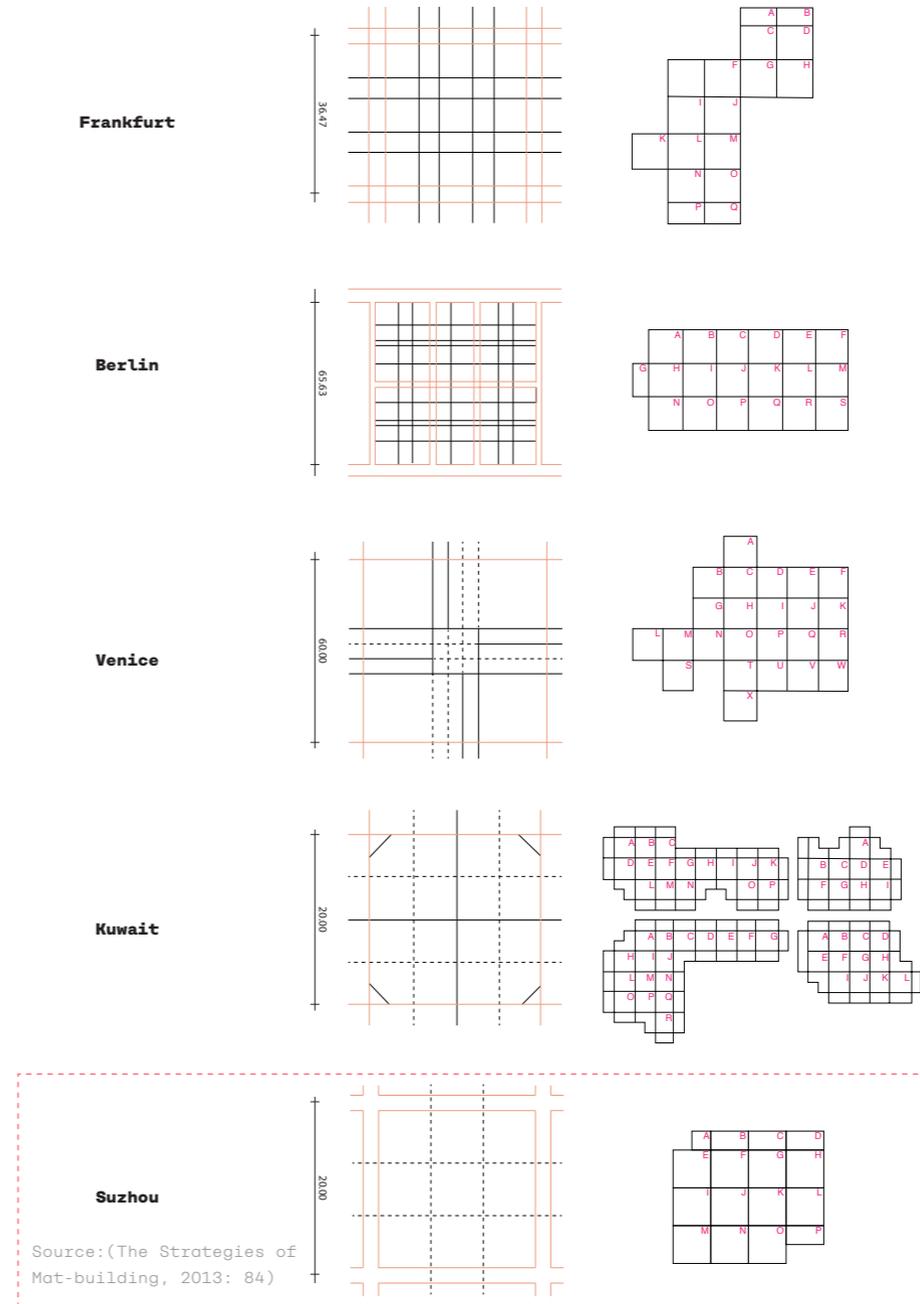
A mat-building is a structure organized by an accurately modulated grid. The module can be obtained in a different way. Whether the size of the module is based on the consecutive additions (Venice Hospital) or derived from the speed of walking (Free University of Berlin), the purpose is to create a rational and reproducible order in the structure.

This purpose-built grid is simply a framework or fixed base upon which a volume may (or may not) be built. It is precisely this ambiguity that enables compositional flexibility resulting in stratified and profusely perforated buildings.(Calabuig, Castellanos and Abalos. 2013) Along the grid, a system of the main route can be established, through which the functions are

connected to form a complete internal distribution system. Between the grid, space can be further divided for the building and open space.

Using this analysis method, I rethought the urban structure of Suzhou, from a macro perspective to an architectural level. The ancient city has a very stable urban structure that can be considered as a grid. The entire city was cut by the main roads and canals into small districts, and then each district was subdivided by alleys into various blocks of buildings. Each block is composed of the internal distribution system, housing, and open space. This kind of hierarchy of grids overlaying each other formed a huge urban structure similar to a Super Mat-building.

MODULES AND GRID



PROGRAMME

Based on the definition of Smithsons, the development of mat-building starts with the grid composed of modules and then based on dismantling the programme's functions every single module are enriched by different activities. The internal circulation connects each module to form a structure called functional hybridization.

This method of locating different activities in space to create different atmospheres was also used in the garden design. The interior of a garden can be seen as a large space composed of multiple small spaces interconnected. The spatial composition of each courtyard is formed by some basic elements such as buildings with a rectangular plan, corridors, and natural elements. As a consequence, the programme of the parts of the system is difficultly recognizable on the general plan. On the other hand, these spaces are connected by corridors, forming a complete circulation. Individuals should walk through in-person these courtyards to experience the different atmosphere derived by activities inside.

“the parts of a system take their identity from the system. if there is no order, there is no identity but only the chaos of disparate elements in pointless competition.”

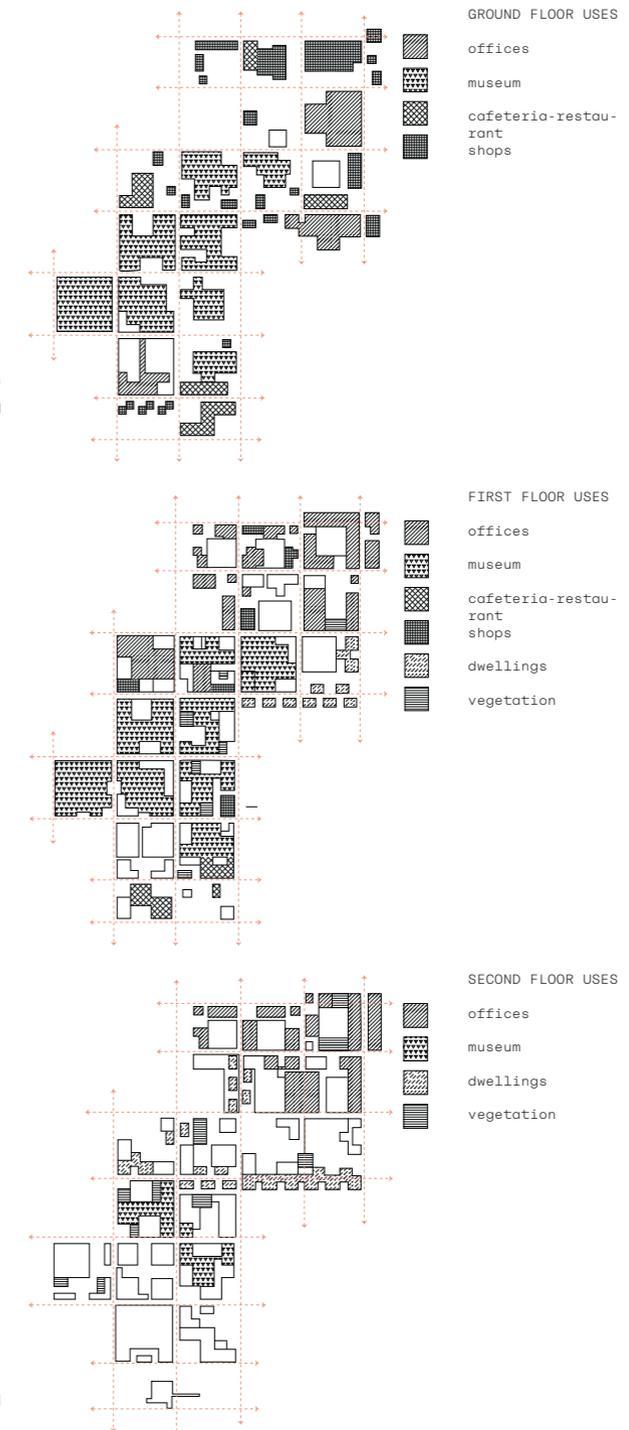
Given the discipline of a continuous system frame, functions may be articulated without the chaotic results which we obtain when we pursue only the articulation of function without first establishing a total order. Indeed it is only within such a frame that function can be articulate. the parts of a system take their identity from the system. if there is no order, there is no identity but only the chaos of disparate elements in pointless competition.(A. Smithson, 1974)

(Calabuig, Castellanos and Abalos. 2013)

Analysis of plans for Frankfurt, by Candilis, Josic, Woods and Scheidhelm

Though hardly distinguishable on the original drawings, different activities, such as offices, shops, housing and cultural facilities, enable the resulting mat-building to be seen as a living organism.(Calabuig, Castellanos and Abalos Ramos. 2013)

(Calabuig, Castellanos and Abalos. 2013)



PLACE

The city and the neighbourhood have their identical nature that should be respected and maintained. Dialoguing with the surrounding environment is necessary and at the same time, the designer should also understand the cultural identity. As noted above, the new project will use a module derived from the surrounding environment to create a new order, which establishes a connection between the new and old on the architectural level.

The building's facade will be open or close depending on the privacy requirements of the interior ambient. At the same time, some sceneries will be borrowed from the outside, such as the roofscape, the scenery of the park or the pagoda. On the contrary, the facade and roof of the hotel can be seen from the outside, as well as the plants exposed from behind the wall. Through this approach, the spatial and visual permeability has been established between the project and place.

Functionally, the hotel could be seen as a living room of the city for outsiders. The sharing of some functions makes it not completely private. Restaurants, spas, etc. are open to both tourists and citizens, in order to strengthen the relationship with the surrounding areas and promote the integration of local residents and visitors.

“Form did not follow function; on the contrary, there were no aprioristic forms but certain human activities that would eventually define them.”

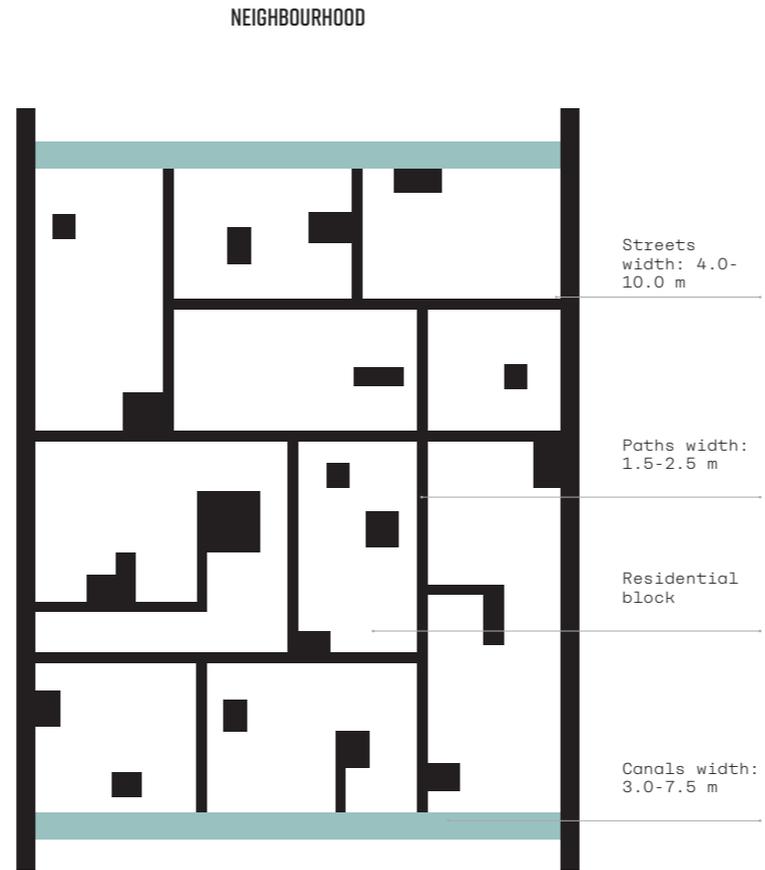
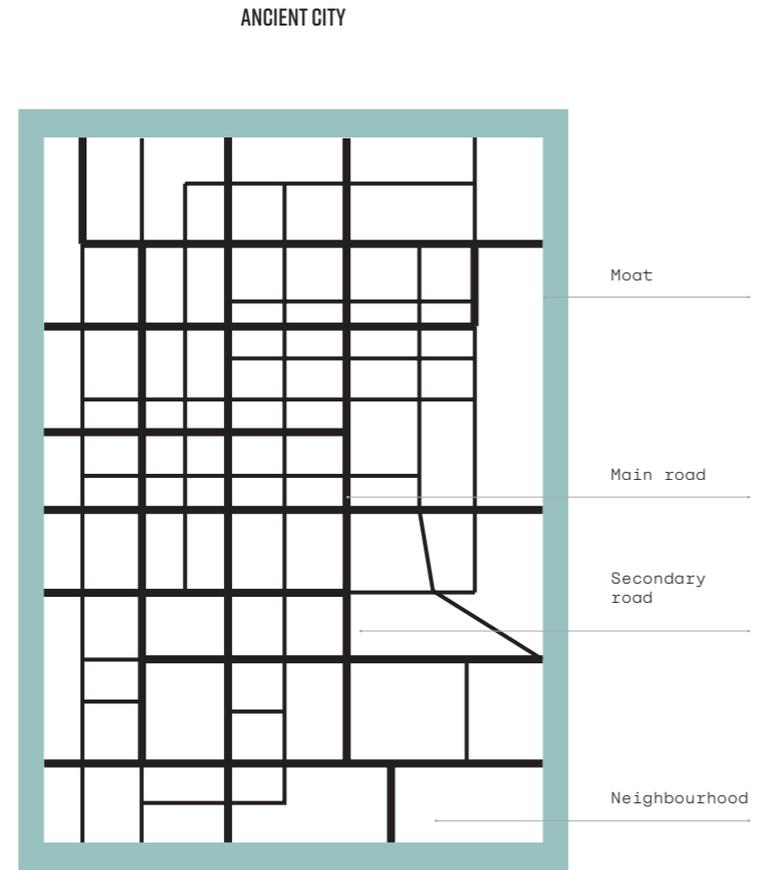
In skyscraper type buildings disciplines tend to be segregated. The relationship from one floor to another is tenuous, almost fortuitous, passing through the space-machine-lift. In a groundscraper organisation, greater possibilities of community and exchange are present without necessarily sacrificing any tranquillity. (Calabuig, Castellanos and Abalos. 2013)

(Calabuig, Castellanos and Abalos. 2013)

DIALOGUE WITH CONTEXT



URBAN MORPHOLOGY OF SUZHOU



A SEQUENCE OF VIEWS IN OLD NEIGHBOURHOOD



Residents dance in front of the Suzhou Museum
Photographer: Shengmao Wang



The grey space created by residents



The boundary between street and shared courtyard



The social life in the shared courtyard



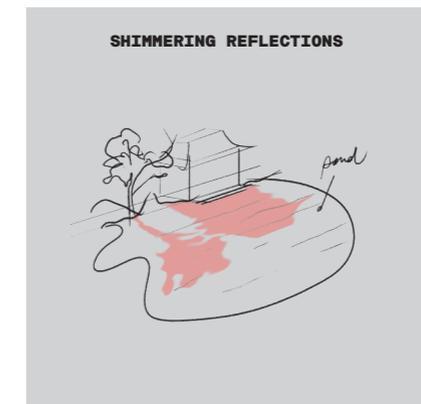
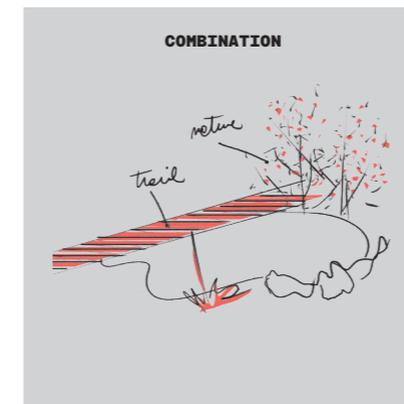
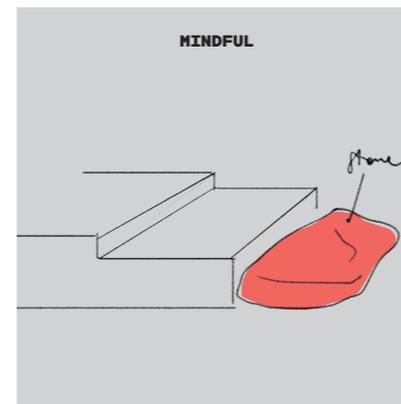
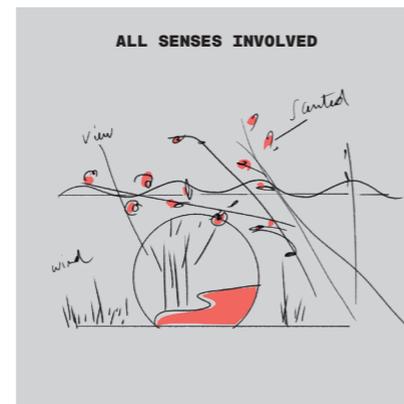
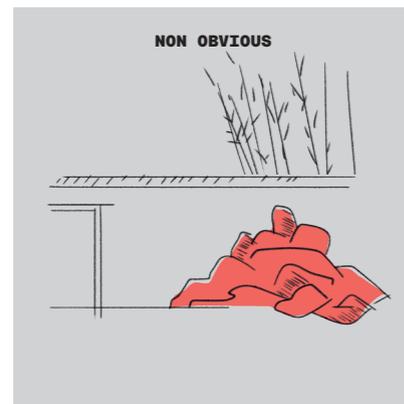
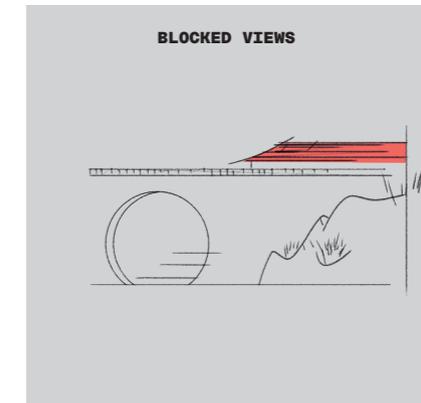
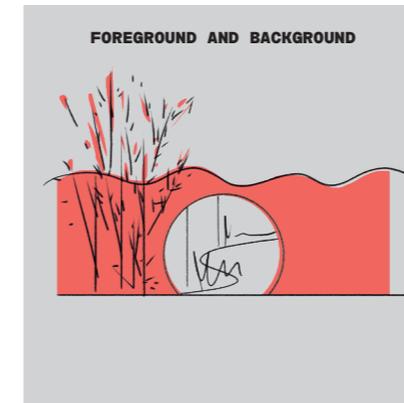
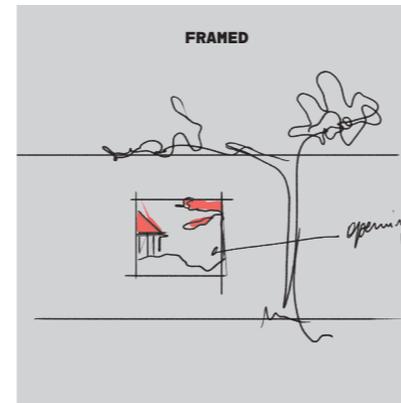
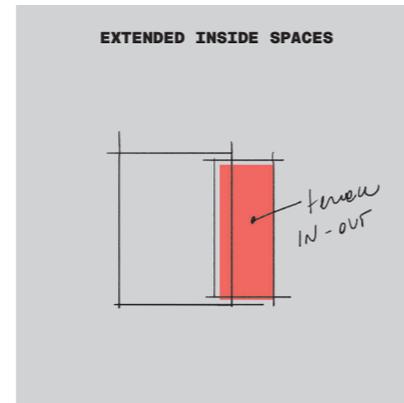
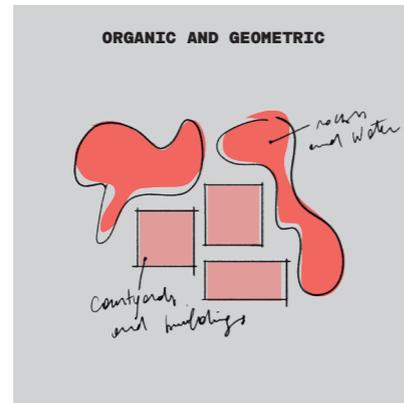
The daily life in a street



The hierarchy of space

SPATIAL COMPOSITIONS IN GARDEN

The 10 compositional principles derived from the Chinese garden as the instruments evoke the feeling of being in the larger natural world. Through these techniques, The inside space divided by grid will create a spatial ambiguity and collage effect. With the freedom of movement, the individual's view changes with steps.



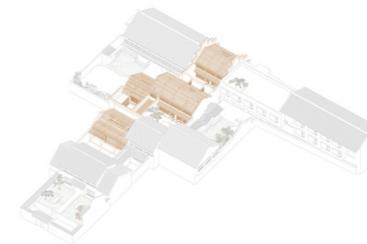
05 / Case studies of new rural architecture

HISTORIC HOUSE RENOVATION IN SUZHOU

- Architects** : B.L.U.E. Architecture Studio
- Location** : No29 Jinli Road , Gu Su District, Suzhou, China
- Lead Architectus** : Shuhei Aoyama, Yoko Fujii, Lingzi Liu, Liman Wei, Shiting Zhang, Guang Yang
- Area** : 2500.0 m²
- Project Year** : 2017

This renovation project aims to transform the historical house into a modern boutique hotel. The designer preserved the original structure of the building with the necessary reinforcement and restoration. Transforming the internal space and adding some facilities to meet the needs of modern daily life. Both the old and new buildings used the colour of traditional dwellings: black and white, to maintain the same aspect of buildings. Most of the space is used as the public space to provide a social place, and the guests will also have the whole garden as the extensions of their home where they can communicate with the others. The definition of the room boundary extends from the interior of the building to the outside.

SHARED SPACE



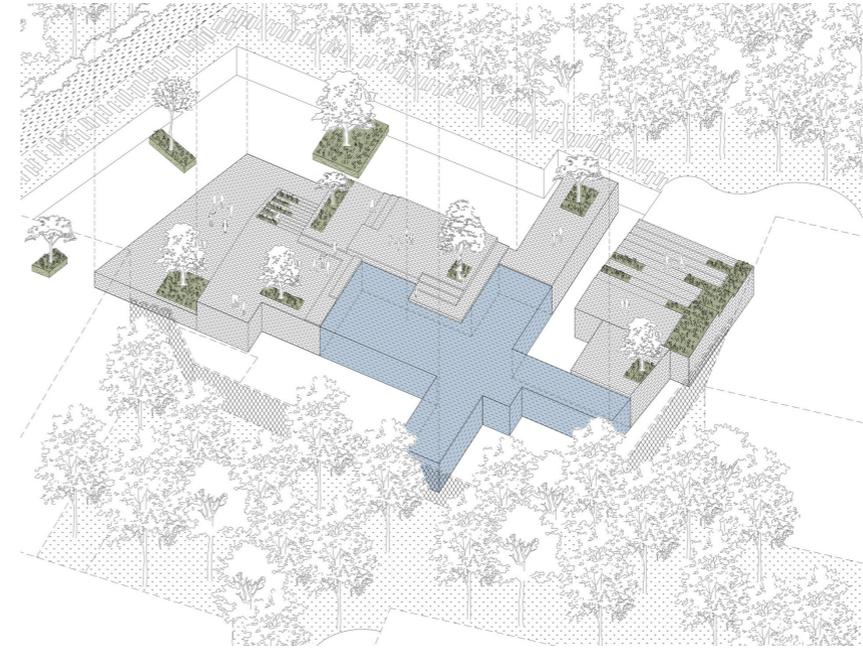
Photographs: Eiichi Kano

VERANDA COURTHOUSE

Architects : O-office Architects
Location : Guang zhou, China
Lead Architectus : He Jianxiang & Jiang Ying
Project Year : 2016

The architect attempts to reinvent the tradition prototype of Lingnan courtyard house which is built to respond to the local climate and spatial ritual. The surrounding buildings are connected by a circular corridor and the orientation of the building is mainly south facing.

The architectural elements of the traditional house are reinterpreted using modern materials such as concrete, steel, glass and brick. Using the combination of modern materials and geometric buildings the architect reinvented the traditional prototype, at the same time maintaining the spatial relationship of traditional houses.



Photographs:Chaos Z.

TSINGPU YANGZHOU RETREAT

Architects : Neri&Hu Design and Research Office
Location : 1 Baocheng Road, Hanjiang District, Yangzhou, Jiangsu, China
Architect & Interior Designer : Neri&Hu Design and Research Office
Area : 4200.0 m²
Project Year : 2017

The design brief called for the adaptive reuse of several of the old buildings by giving them new functions, while adding new buildings to accommodate the hotel's capacity needs. The architects used an approach similar to the Mat-building to handle the relationship between internal and external space within a grid structure. The grid structure establishes a hierarchy to the spaces, frames views through windows, integrates natural sceneries into architecture, and creates layers between interior and exterior.

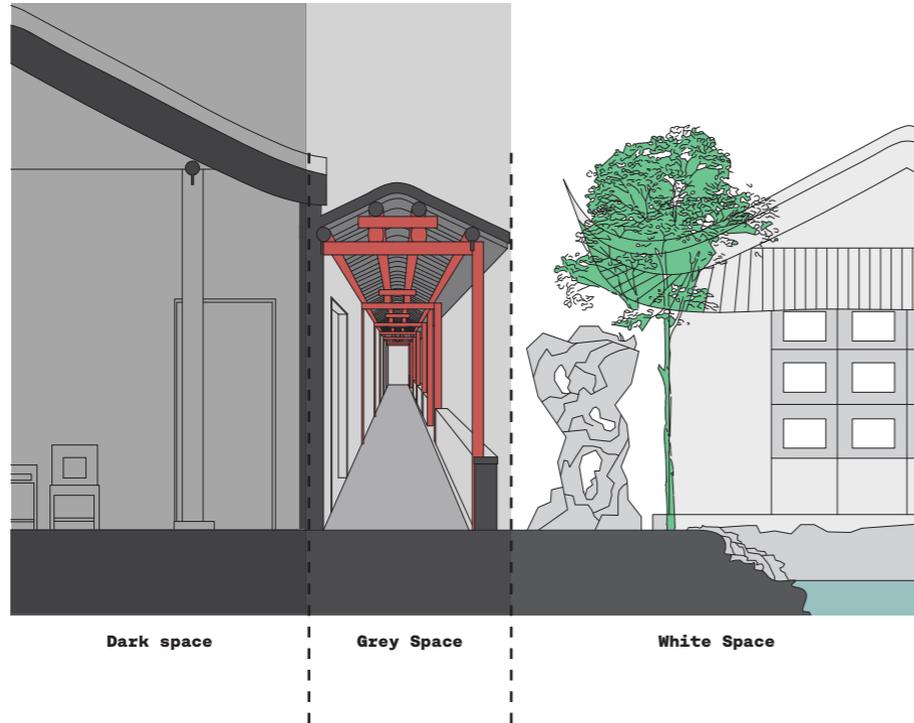


Photographs: Pedro Pegenaute

GREY SPACE

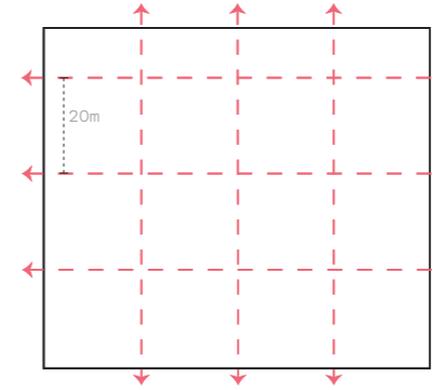
The buildings and courtyards in the Suzhou gardens are complementary and there is much open space between the buildings. In the design, The inner space of each block is an integration of architecture and nature. The building's facade is not used to separate inside from outside, but it plays a role of filter that regulates vies from each side. Moreover, the "grey space" used in the garden creates a transitional space between close and open space. This mixed space blurs the boundaries between the interior and exterior of the building to some extent, making the two an organic whole. The coherence of the space eliminates the barriers between inner and outer, giving a natural and flowing feeling.

Gray space within building proposed by the Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa is an important part of urban public space. If the space regarded as color, indoor space as "black", outdoor space as "white", then the transition space within indoor and outdoor will be called "gray space". Gray space is also the transition space from inside to outside of building and from private space to public space, which consisted of a series of architectural elements like garden balcony, building entrance, opening sided-courtyard and bottom overhead space.(C. Gong and c. Hu. 2017.)

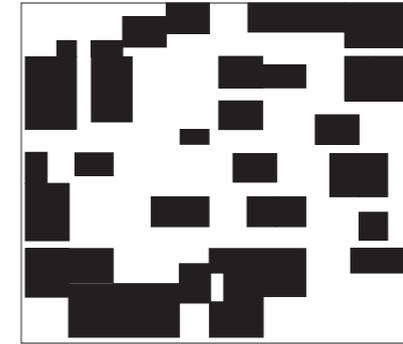


COMPOSITIONAL ELEMENTS

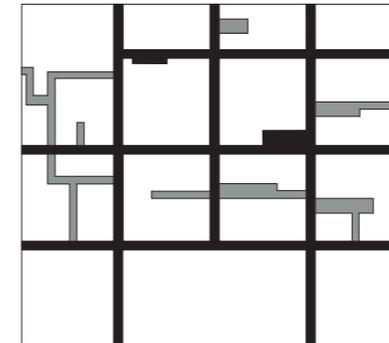
Grid



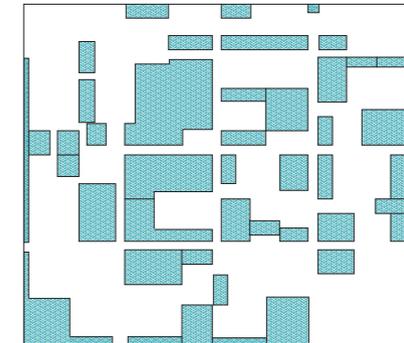
Buildings



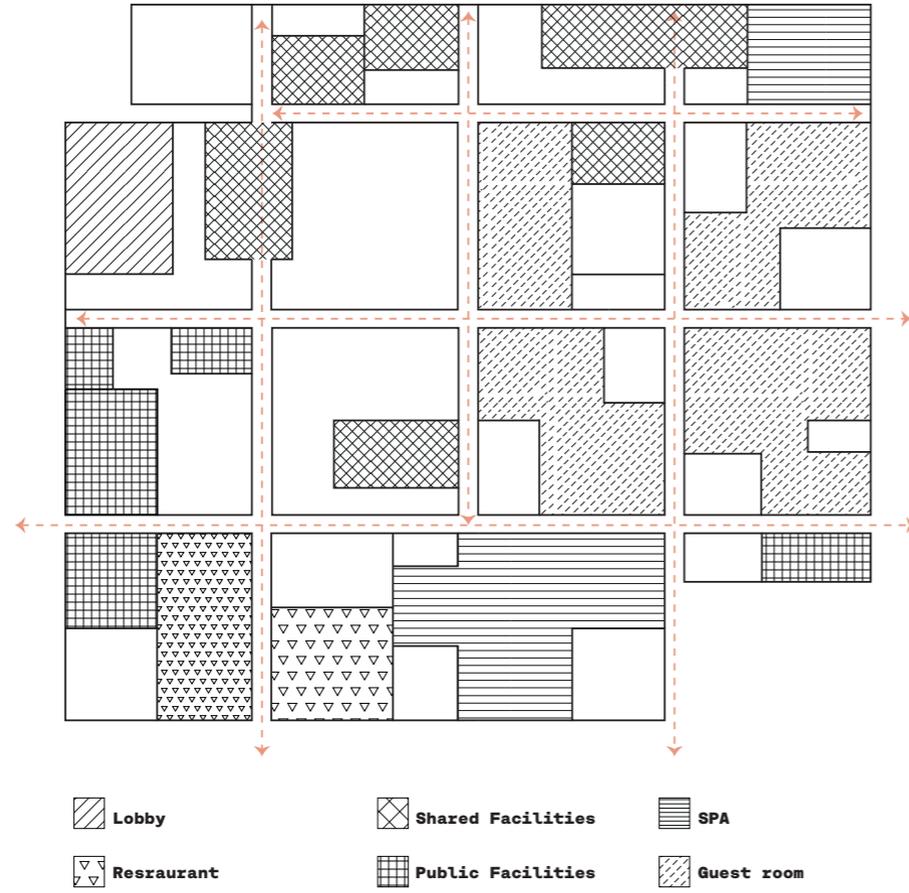
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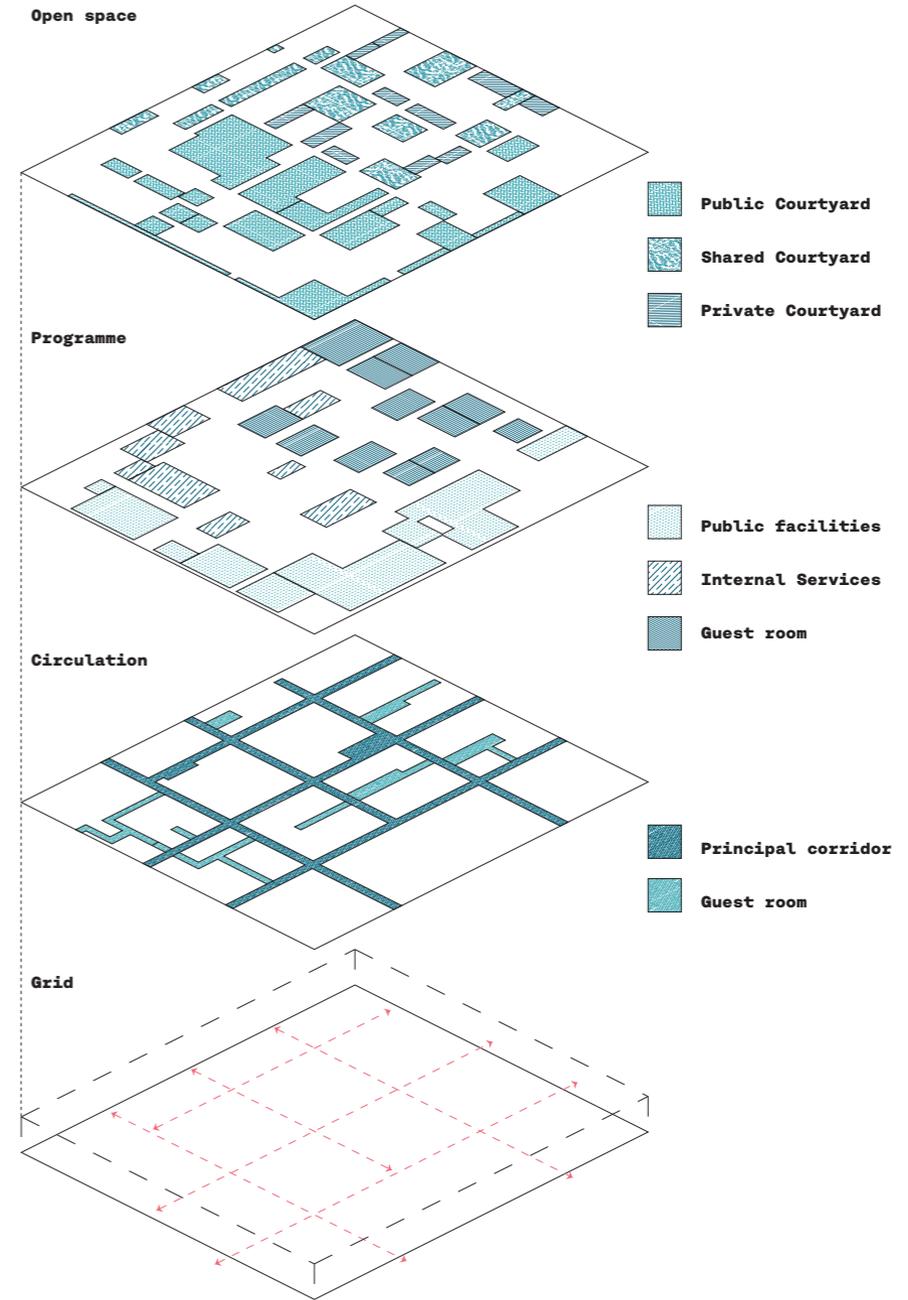
Open Space



PROGRAMME

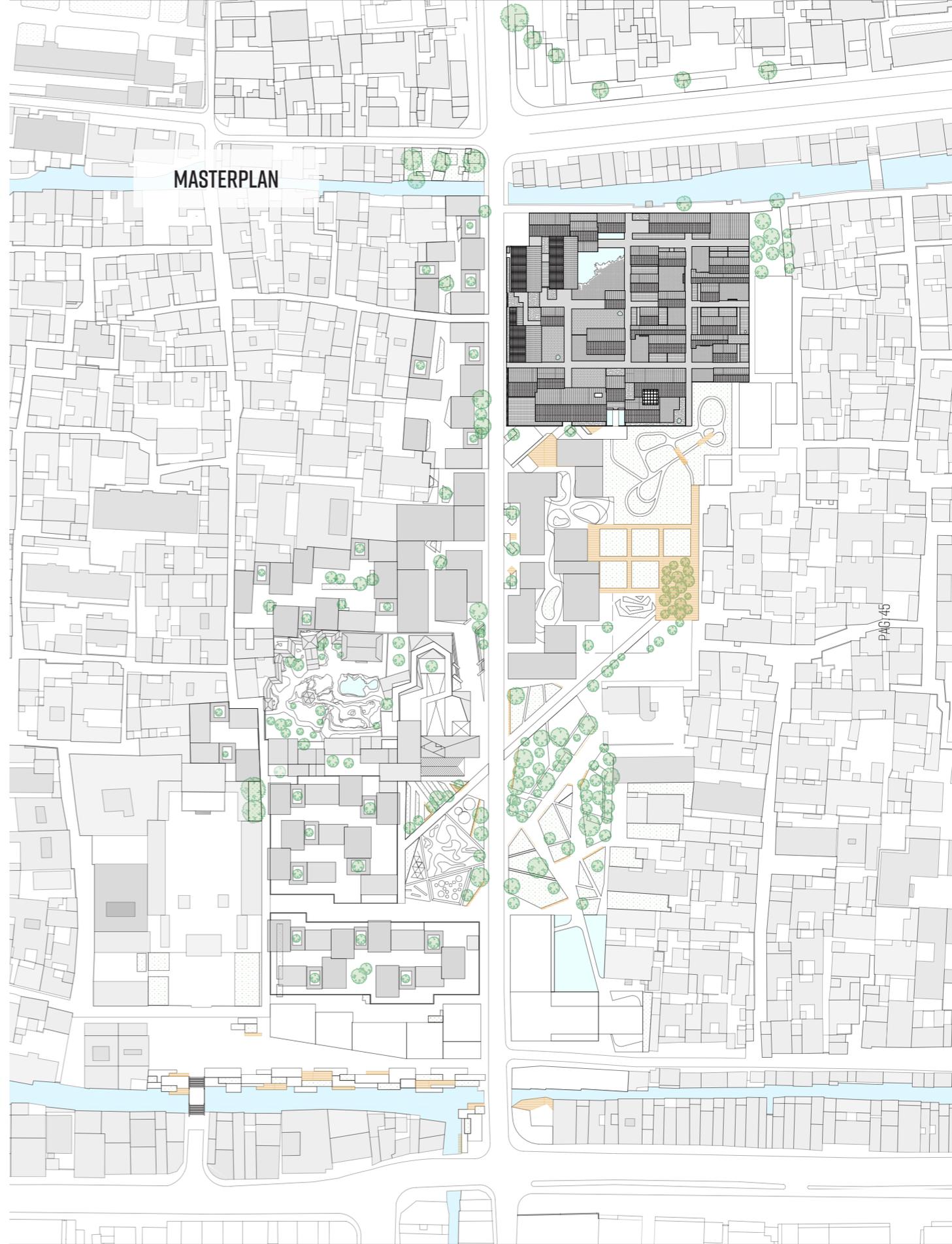


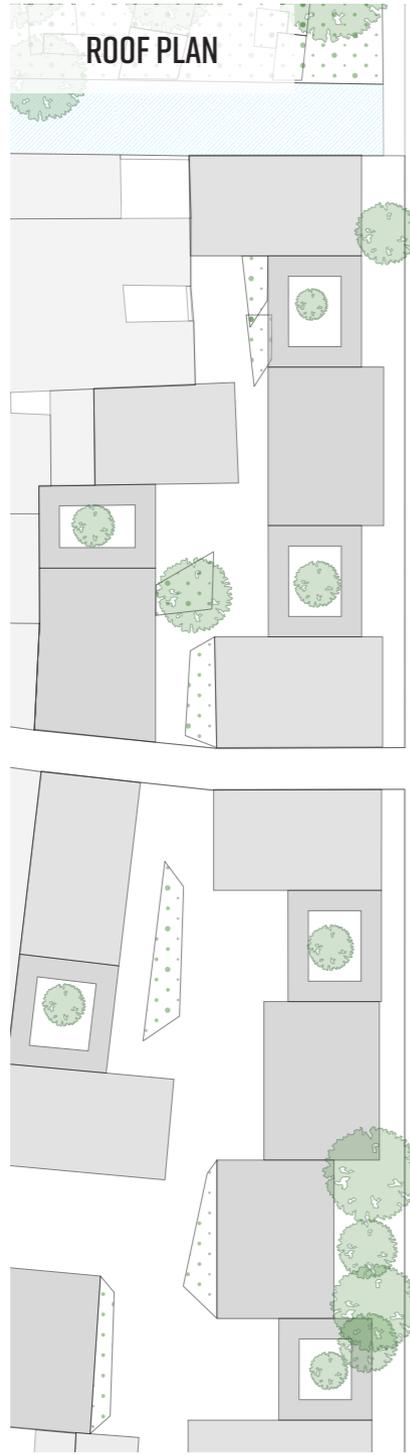
LAYERS

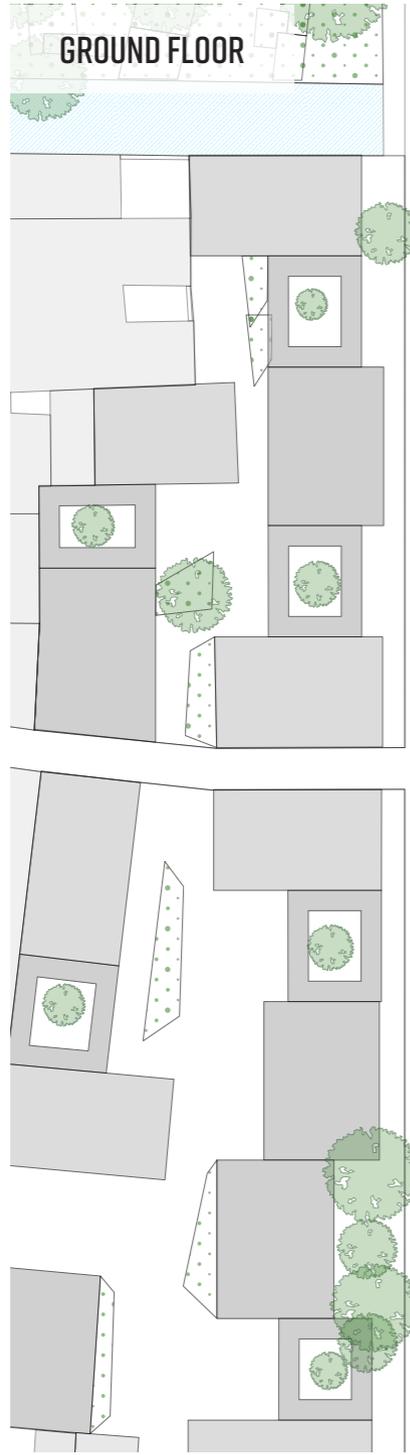


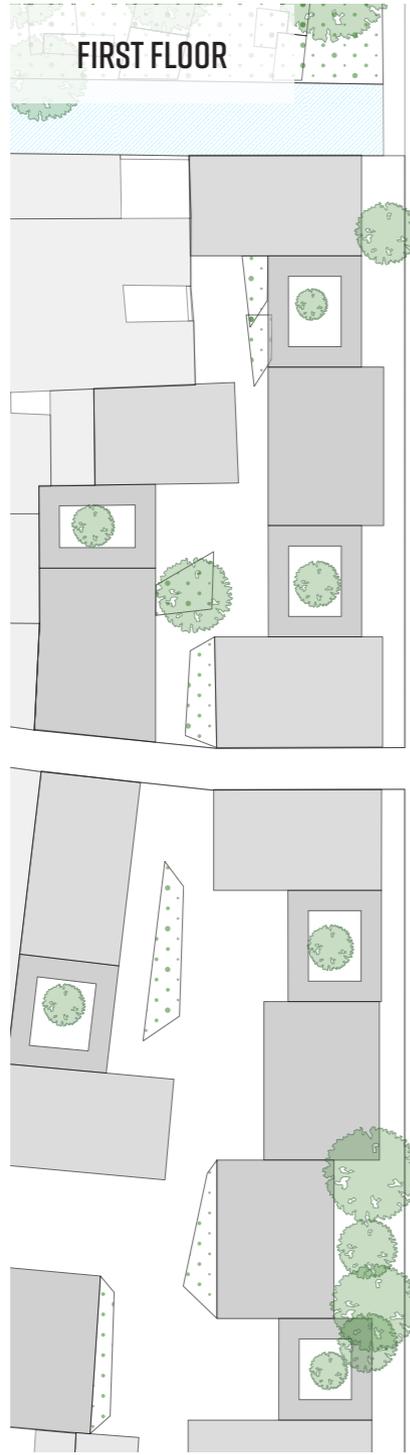
The grove stretched as far as the source of the stream, where the fisherman found a hill with an opening that seemed to be lit within. He left his boat and entered the opening. At first the opening was very narrow, barely allowing him to pass, but as he went on some dozens of paces, a wide view suddenly opened before him.

Peach-Blossom Springs
Tao Yuanming





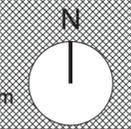




SOUTH ELEVATION



WEST ELEVATION



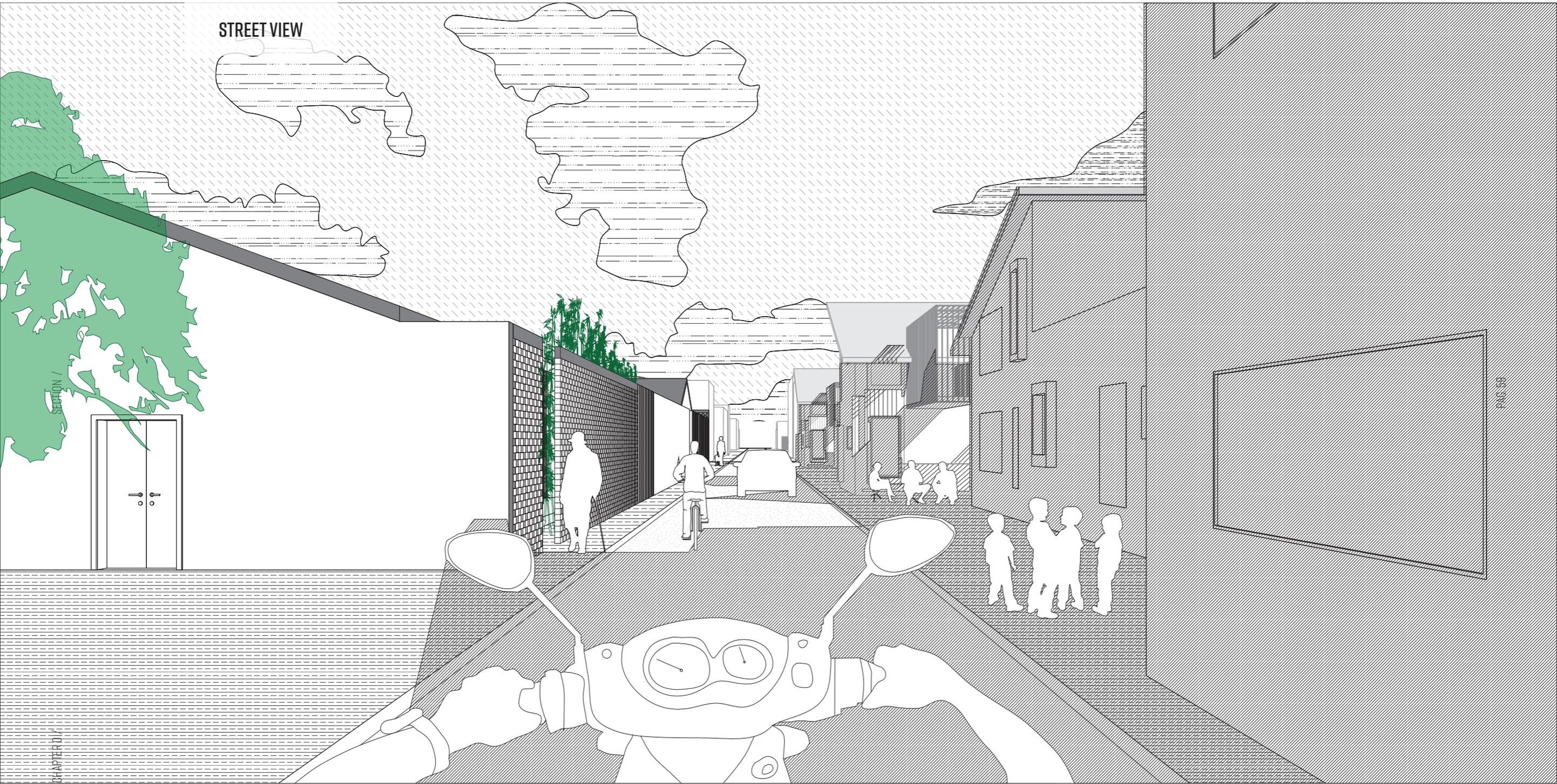
PERSPECTIVE SECTION



SECTION 7

PAG 57

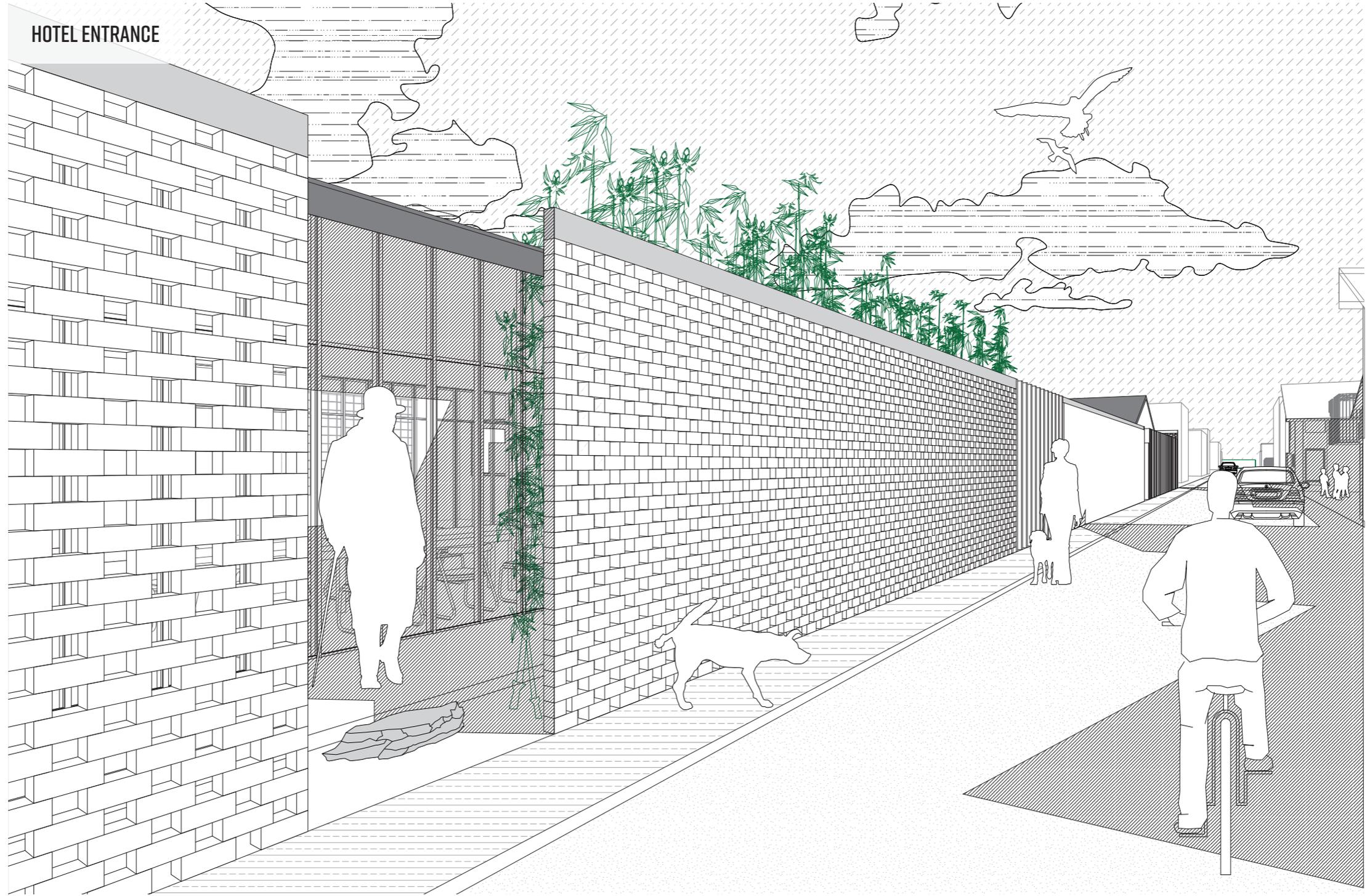
STREET VIEW



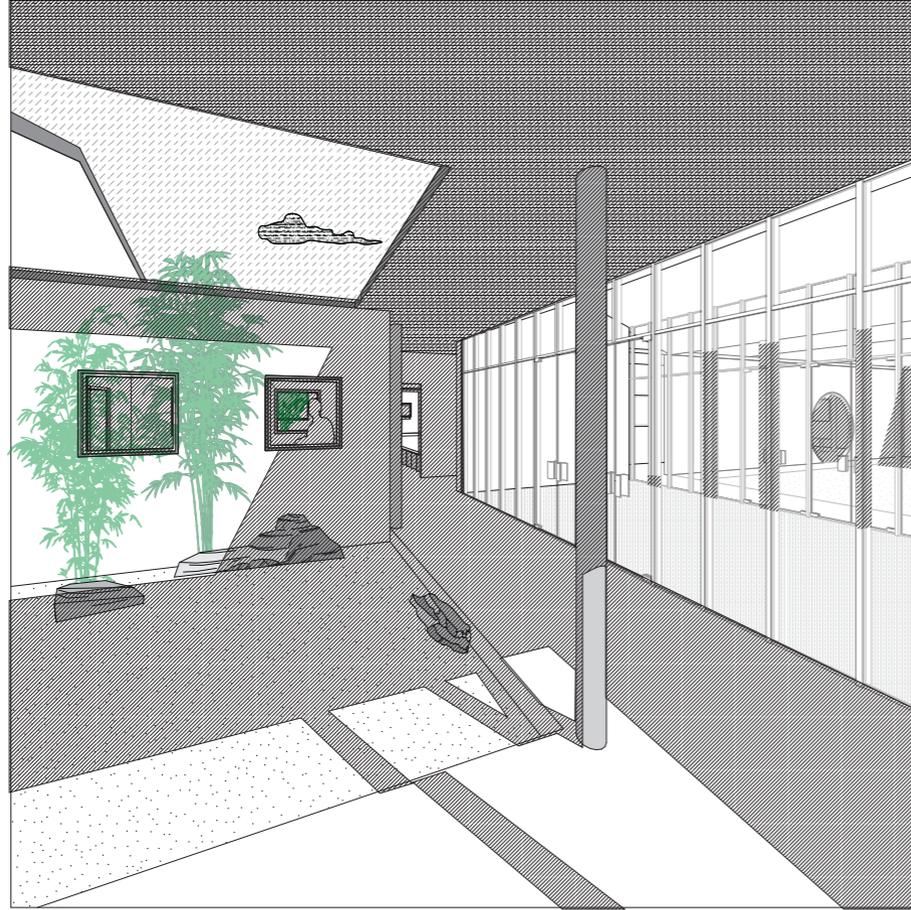
SECTION /

CHAPTER 01 /

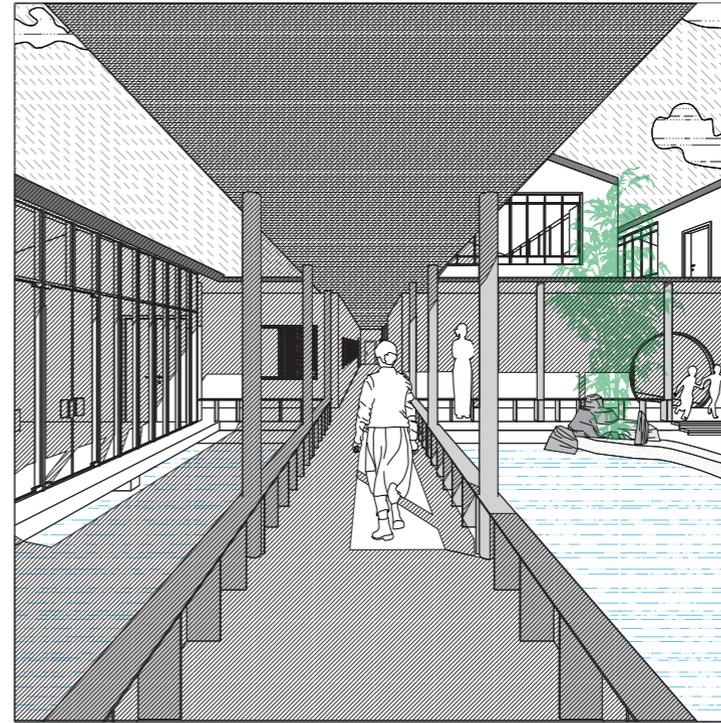
HOTEL ENTRANCE



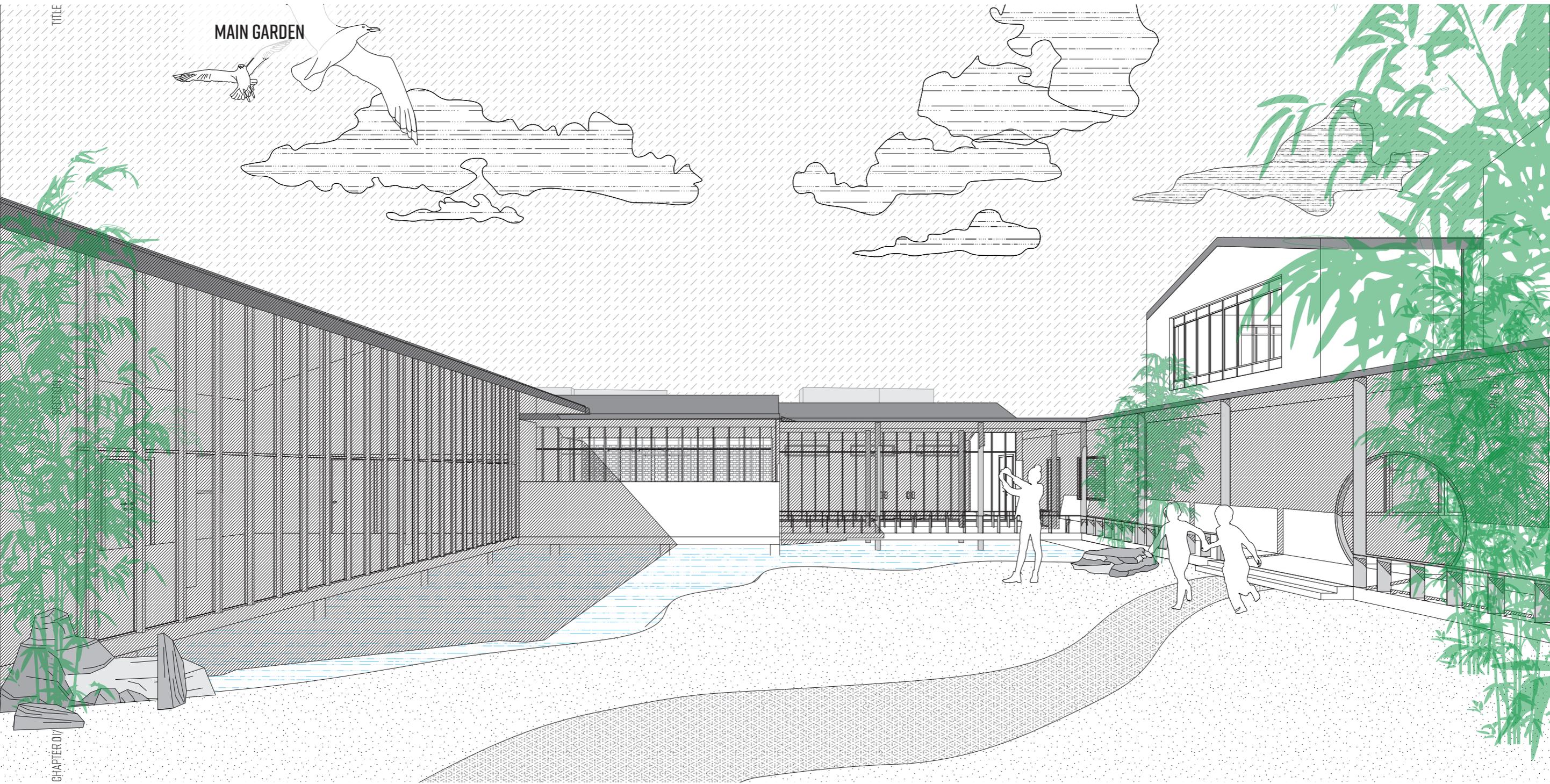
SINUOUS MOVEMENT



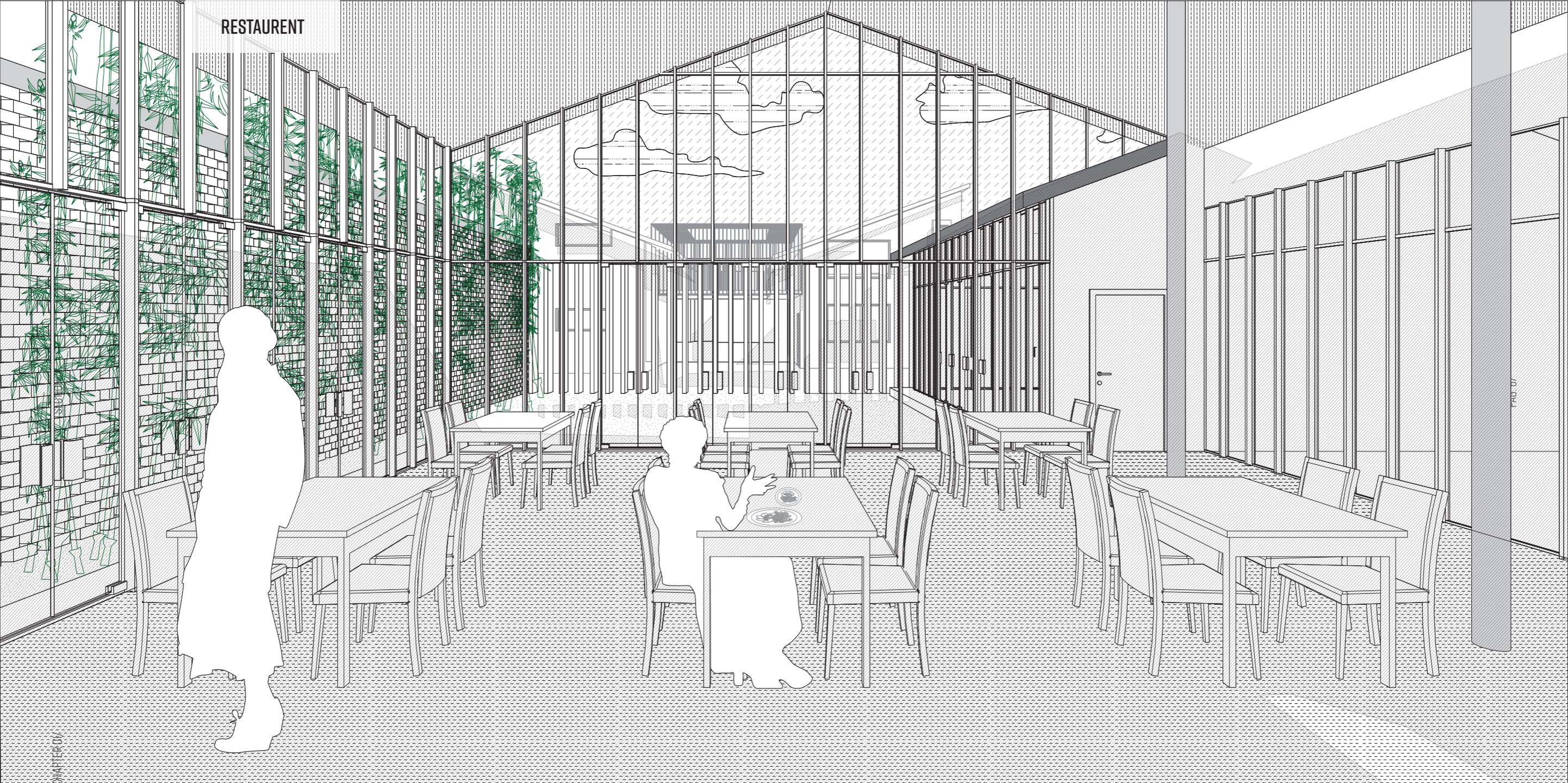
CORRIDOR VIEW



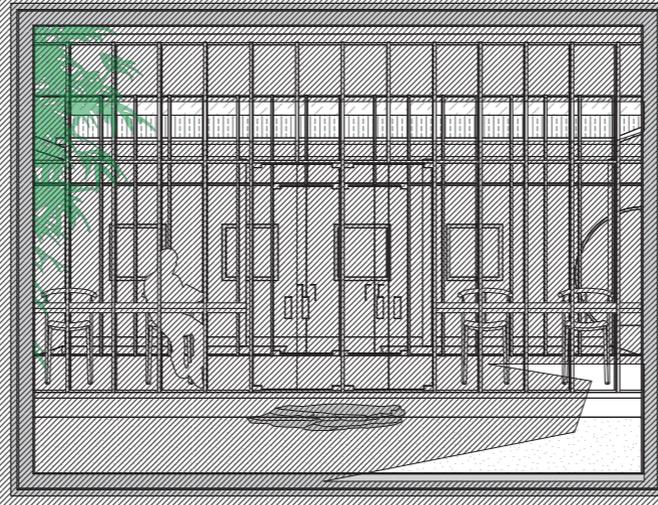
MAIN GARDEN



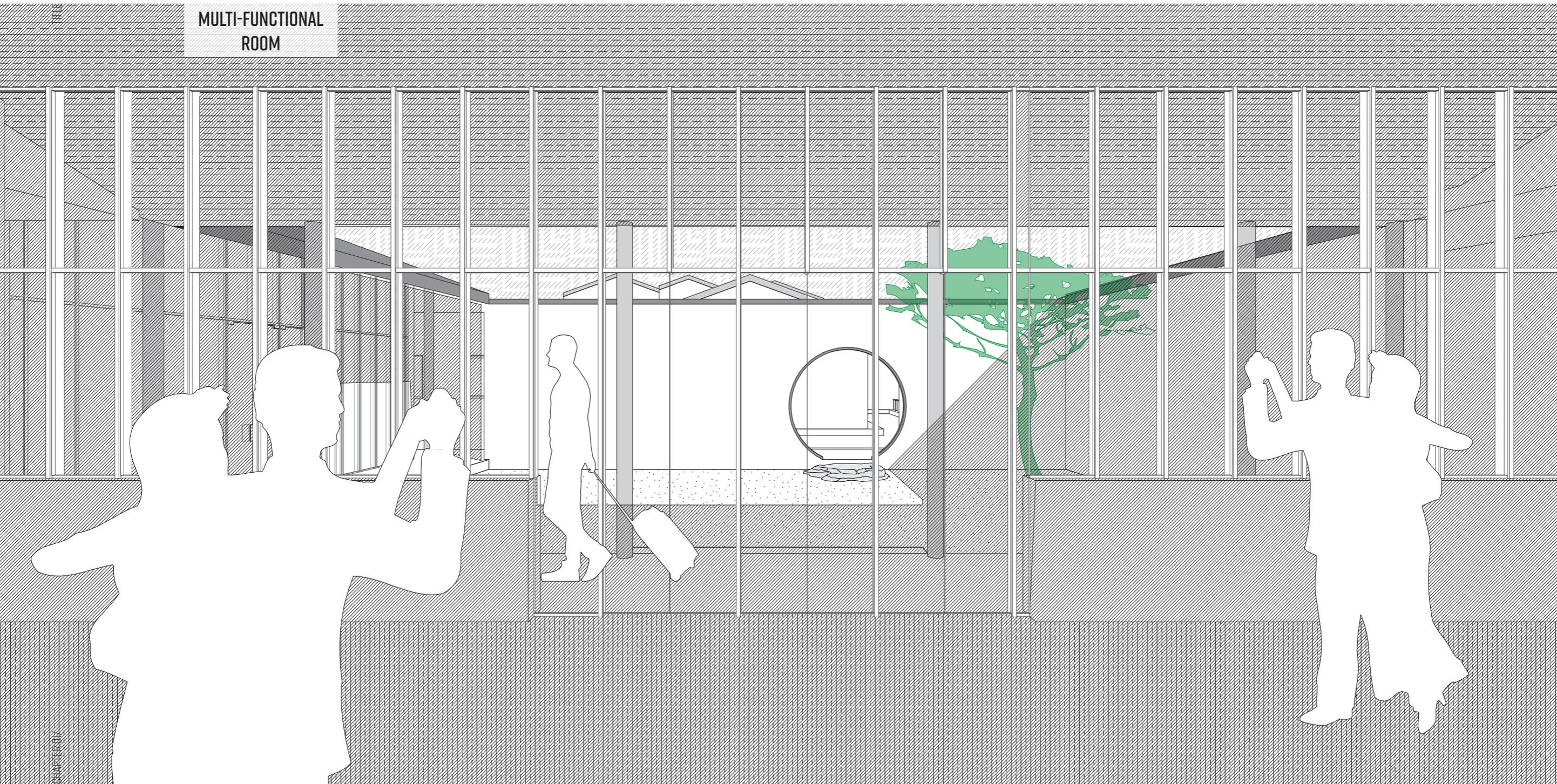
RESTAURENT



FRAME VIEWS



MULTI-FUNCTIONAL
ROOM

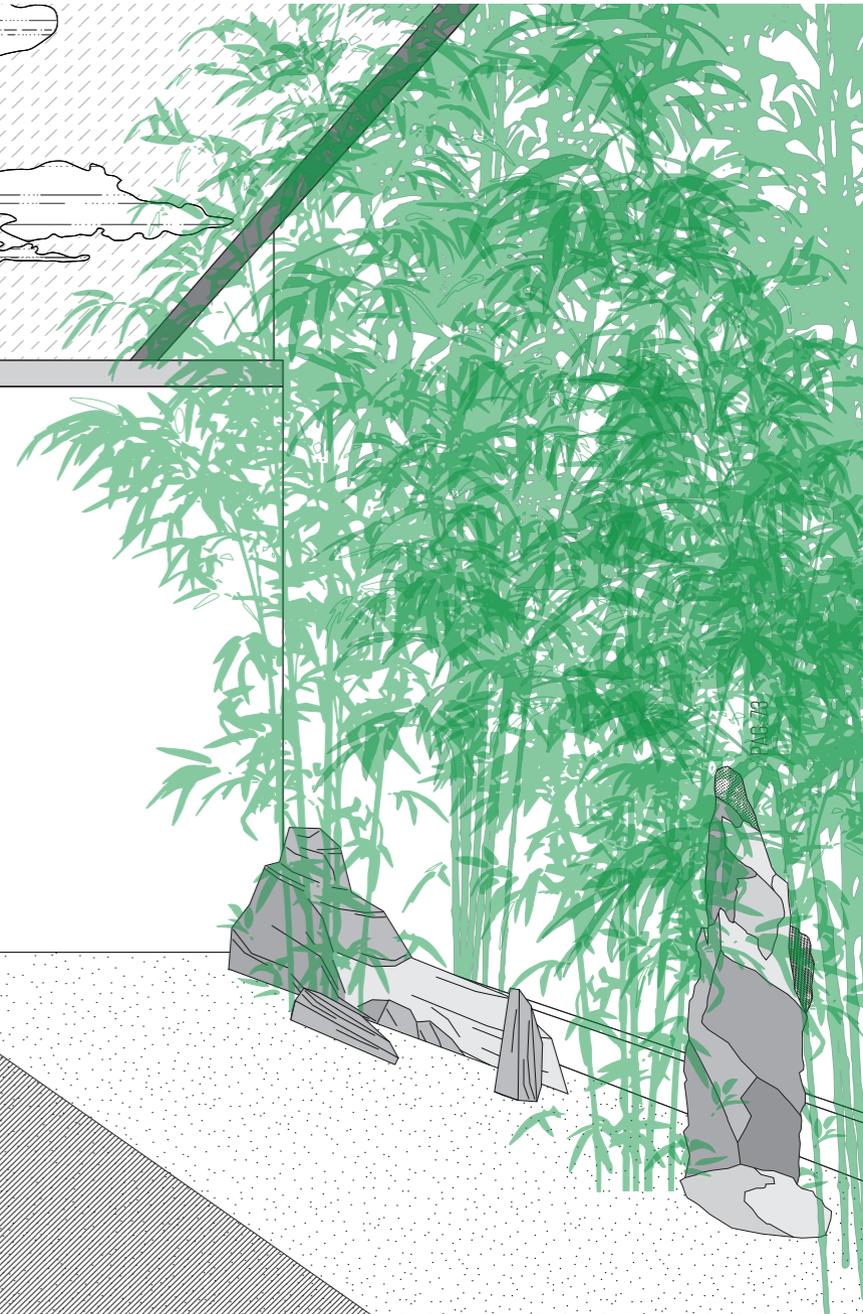
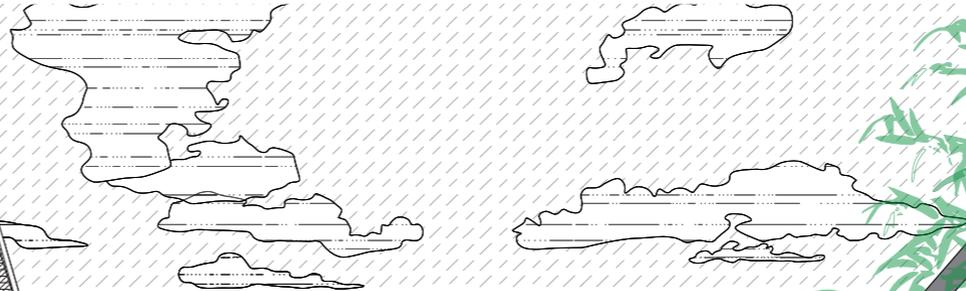
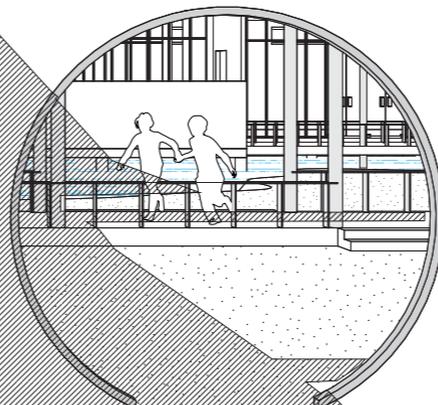
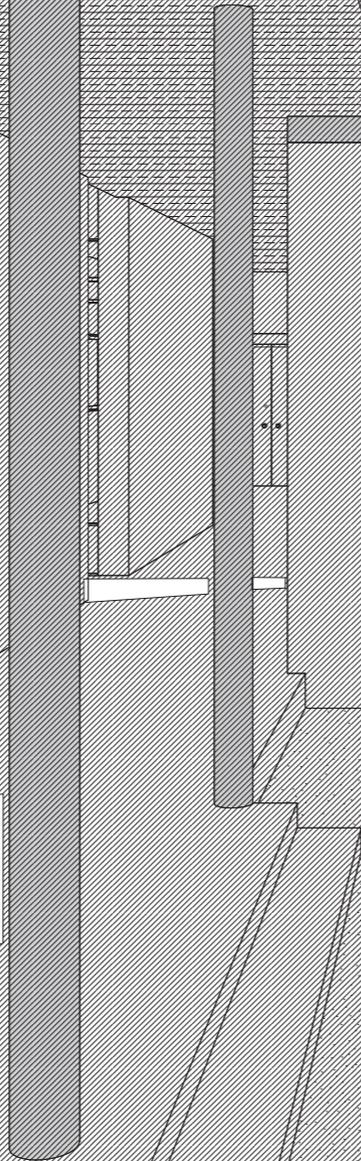
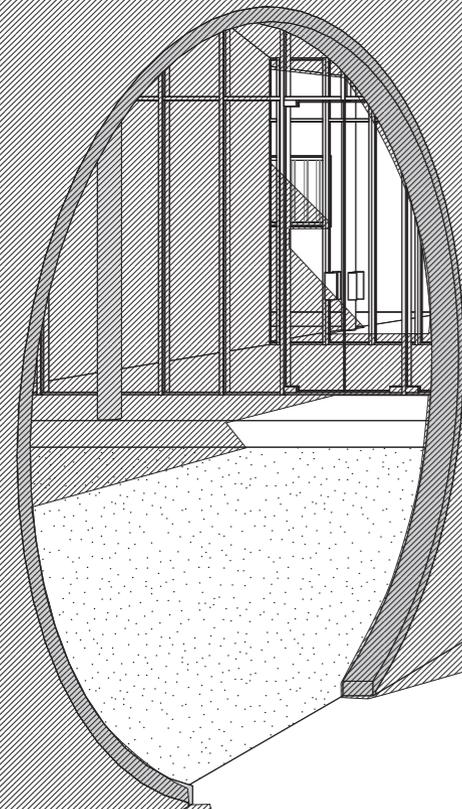


COLLAGE VIEWS

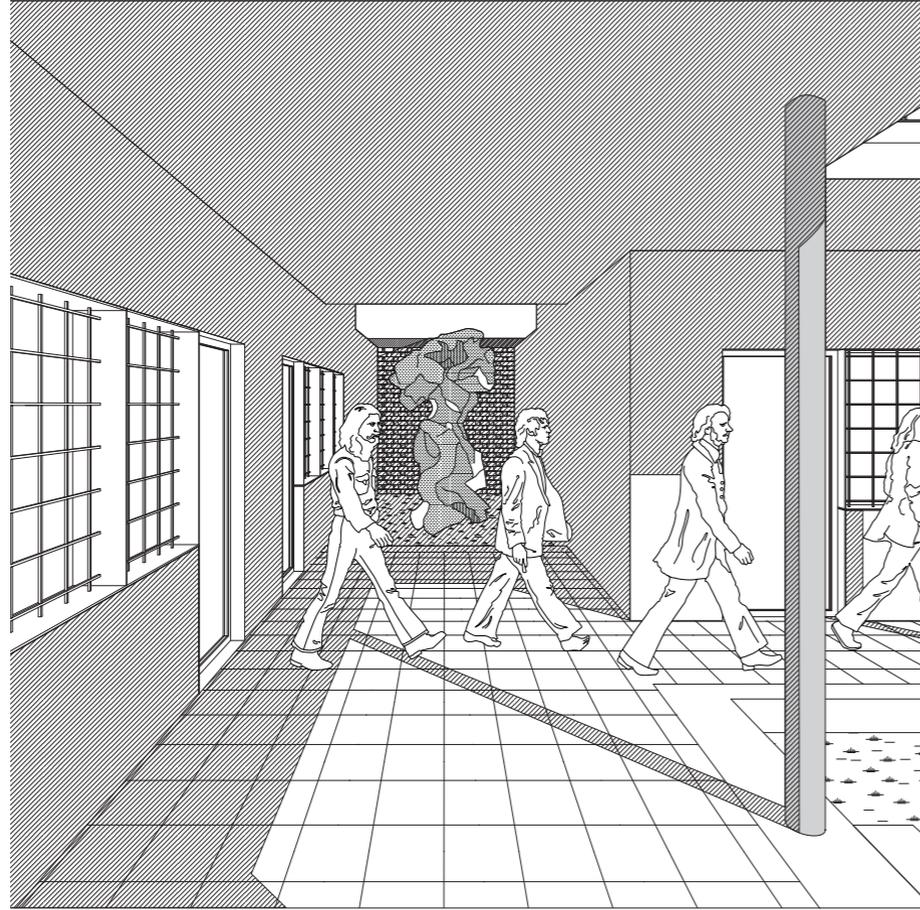
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SECTION 7

CHAPTER 07



SHARED CORRIDOR



SHARED GARDEN



07 / Conclusion

Analyzing the characteristic of spaces in the residential neighbourhood and Suzhou gardens, the project used the approach based on grid and layers to explain the relationship between different spaces. The new structure creates a new and shuffled order to reinterpret the traditional social life in a new accommodation.

This interconnected urban fabric permits individuals to obtain the freedom of action and the compositional strategies derived from garden design permits people to gain a perception of greater space and rhythmic spatial feeling within the limited space. This is the aim that the project tries to interpret in each part of building: the combination of different typologies of corridors, overlapping of frames views created by windows and doors and the invisible border formed by height difference or materials. Indeed the singles parts of layers are articulated within a disciplined system frame from which different parts take their identity. At the same time, the diversity of each part forms a variety of spatial experience in the building.

The project does not propose a defined form for accommodation but a new way to think about the relationship between traditional experience and modern construction. This kind of approach of mat-building provides a flexibility to adapt to different topographic condition and urban context and it opened a vast field for interpretation.

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