Death

is

not

the End.

Transforming Existing but Unfinished Structures:

The Case of Nana's Hotel
Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana.

Ayité Kwasi Adjavon
AAHM10

2nd Edition

“Memories of associated activities haunt architecture like a ghost”

(Leach, 2002)



LUNDS UNIVERSITET

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AAHM10: Master Degree Thesis
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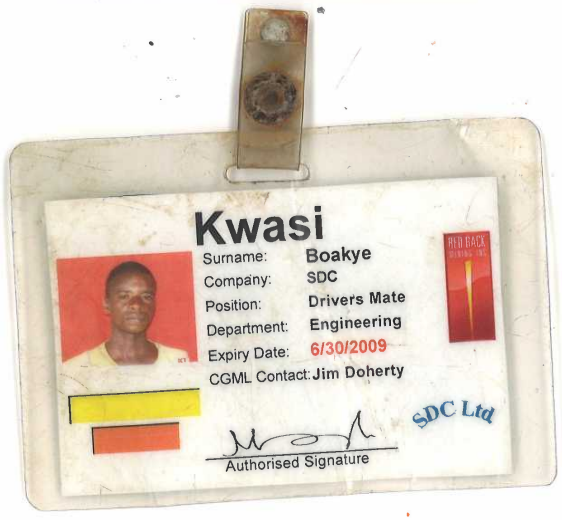
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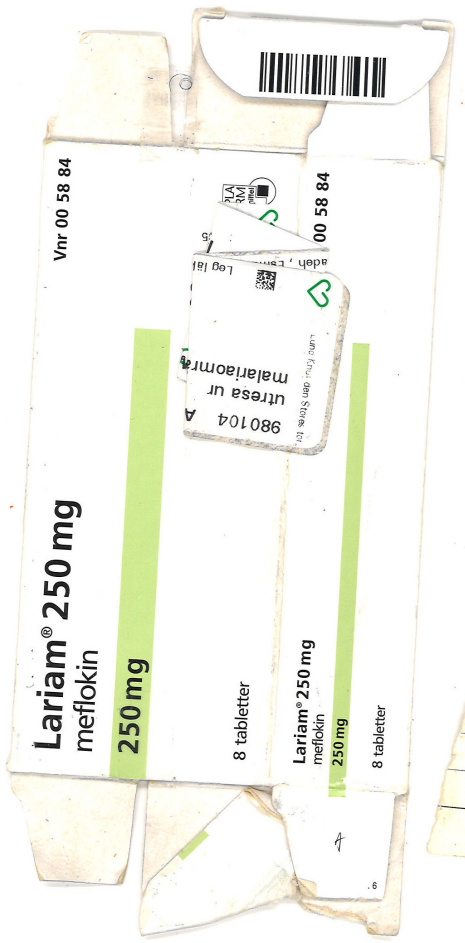
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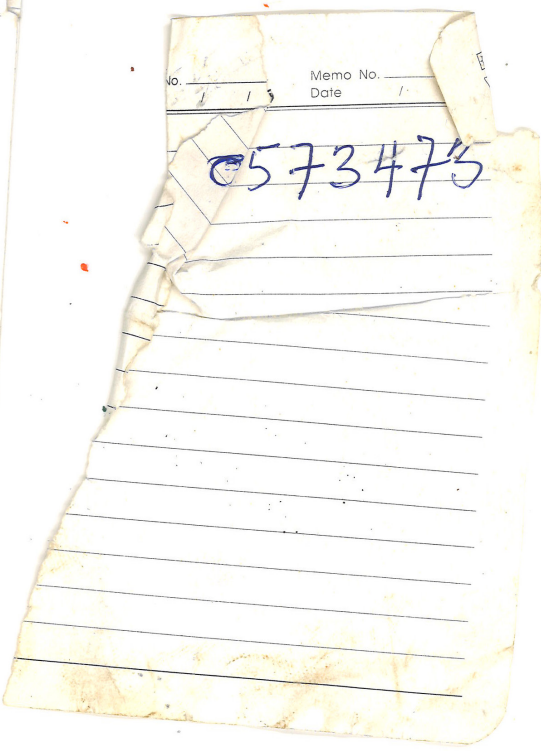
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Abstract

Transformation projects still tend to focus on buildings that once had life. This thesis aims to work with those that were never brought to it.

In today's world, there are an increasing amount of projects that garner a lot of attention and investment quite quickly. Some of these are taken through to the design stage and into development, only for them to suddenly not be viable. Development quickly stops. The project dies. But the scars on the land have already been left. Foundations poured. And in some cases, structures and walls erected. One such project belonged to my late Grandfather. A hotel in Sefwi Wiawso.

Sefwi has a beautiful way in which people build upon the built, born out of necessity, working with existing layers and frameworks, rarely starting from scratch, and opening up for business before completely finished. A complex and constantly shifting collaboration, fraught with delays sometimes stretching across generations. The benefit to us and our environment of working in this way, with what exists and what we have available locally, has long been established. These ideas serve as a point of departure for ways of working with the four structures that makeup the hotel complex. This proposal will focus on a phased development of the site, starting with the main hotel and pool house buildings. Inviting in the wilderness that has already started to stake its claim, interweaving traditional and local building techniques with contemporary needs. Reviving old rooms and adding new functions.

Having identified an existing grid, carefully working within it, space is left for the future. For another to build upon what is built.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express a boat load of gratitude to my tutor Paulina, who provided paramount guidance throughout this thesis, rain or shine, in sickness and in health. Jesper for trusting in my process. Maria for being a super star over the past two years and helping me to secure a grant. And my mother, for always being supportive of my architectural journey and giving me the idea for this project one day over lunch.

Much of this work was conducted abroad, and for that I would like to thank the Minor Field Studies Stipendium. Their generous support made this trip possible. And the trip was made fantastic thanks to my friends and family, new and old, across Ghana. Kojo, Justice, Paa Ekow and Uncle Daniel were all instrumental in making my two months in Ghana a (somewhat) smooth, and an exceptional adventure. I would be remiss in not mentioning the people of Sefwi, KNUST architecture school and the management of the traditional houses in Kumasi for sharing their knowledge and expertise.

This project was not done in isolation even once back at home, and I would like to thank all my friends and classmates, especially Tobiasz and Sanin, for their participation in spontaneous design reviews. And I would like to thank Sophie, for her unshakable support from day one, all the way until submission and beyond.

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An Introduction

Introduction
Purpose and aim of this project

The idea that we should value our existing built environment has been long established. The question of what is valuable keeps evolving. It is no longer only ancient places of worship or culturally significant spaces that we place value on, but other important factors such as quality of craftsmanship, embodied carbon and the social context of our existing buildings are increasingly being valued highly, independent of age.

But where transformation projects still tend to focus on buildings that once had life, I aim to find a way of working with those who were never brought to it.

In today's global south, there are an increasing amount of projects that garner a lot of attention and investment quite quickly. Some of these projects are taken through to the design stage and into development, only for them to suddenly not be viable. Development quickly stops. The project dies. But the scars on the land have already been left. Foundations poured. And in some cases, structures and walls erected. One such project even belonged to my Grandfather before he passed away.

As the project has been indefinitely put on pause, nature has started to reclaim the site. But I believe that this project, similar to many others across Ghana, can be brought to life by making use of the existing structure to serve a purpose, even if temporary, to the community and region it is located in.

My current studies of Cultural Heritage Buildings and Performing Theories at LTH, as well as my work on restoration projections at Levitt Bernstein Architects, has already provided a strong foundation of applied-knowledge. Bringing this experience to Ghana and combining it with the knowledge, ways of working and living that exists there, I aim to acquire an even greater level of theoretical and practical knowledge surrounding the transforming of existing structures in the global south. Then utilising said knowledge when visiting the site over an extended period, to study, draw and eventually propose a way of working with the structure. This will provide a framework for which I can carry out a design and in turn, provide a modus operandi for how such structures can be treated in other cities across Ghana, as well as various countries across Africa and maybe even several continents across our planet.

Furthering not just my own knowledge, but the whole sector's. Hopefully pushing the industry forward, however little, towards building a greener world.



Above: Star of the Black Star Gate in Accra. Visited during my first full day in Ghana.

Questions

Initial Ideas

Before setting off I had the following as initial questions I sought to explore:

How can we work with the reuse of modern existing architectural structures as a means of supporting sustainable urban transformation in the Global South?

Can one person's vision be transformed and made relevant to the current needs of a community in the realm of the built environment?

How can knowledge be transferred and applied between countries and cultures?

Can a successful framework be designed and established to help others utilise such spaces and buildings to aid in achieving global, as well as local, sustainability goals?

Can room be left for another vision and reworking of the building within its frame in the future?

During the trip, and upon arrival back home, these initial questions were refined. In part due to a change of scope. It became apparent that in the limited time that I had, tackling grand questions as to how abandoned projects across the whole global south could be used would simply not be possible. It also felt less appropriate and relevant.

The more time I spent intimately getting to know the place and its people, the questions I found myself having became increasingly niched. In turn, the answers also became highly contextual, relating directly to this place, Sefwi.

By using the initial questions as a point of departure, questions that now felt more applicable were:

How can the twenty year old structures be adapted to support a sustainable and sensitive transformation?

What can be learned from local good practice and building techniques to improve the current buildings on site?

Can the existing structures be optimised to achieve contemporary levels of comfort whilst implementing passive techniques?

Based off of local needs, what new uses, if any, can be proposed to the site?

Methods

A methodology

To attempt to answer these questions, I will first survey the site and buildings. Assessing its current state to find out what is valuable and viable. Speaking to the current stakeholders and the local community, to establish an updated proposal based on current needs and ambitions.

The research conducted will therefore both be quantitative and qualitative. Some examples of these are:

Quantitative:

Measuring of the existing structures.
Assessment of current environmental efficiency (if any).
Assessing quality and wear of existing elements.
Cataloging of relevant elements .

Qualitative:

Questionnaires on ideas of use.
Surveys on general feelings towards the project.
Valuation of existing structure in terms of aesthetics, memory, social and historical context.

Reflections

Early reflections on choice of topic

It is a timely topic. Though the structures may differ, every country has a stockpile of empty or disused buildings. For example, Malmö has its industrial heritage, which is currently being revived, and the first steps are being taken to bring new life to many structures from that era.

Learnings from working with the existing can be taken and applied across borders with some place specific tweaking, but the overarching principles remain the same.

This is especially important when considering global climate goals and the construction industry's major contribution to the issues we face today and tomorrow. The UN's climate goals speak of building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and fostering innovation (United Nations, 2024). Whilst Sweden's government hopes to provide development assistance. It is an important part of Sweden's engagement in the world. Development assistance should create preconditions for better living conditions for people living in poverty (MFA Communications Department, 2024).

Urban land use is an important discussion, especially in the global south where there is rapid growth. Cities in Nigeria, a relatively close neighbour to Ghana, are considering allowing the government to take over long vacant buildings (Devermont, 2021). These could then be transformed for the public's benefit or to provide much needed housing. Measures such as those proposed in this thesis could encourage governments to not demolish these structures, which causes a huge waste in terms of embodied carbon and materials, but to work with them. Saving themselves time, money and resources in the long-run.

On safety and ethical aspects

Depending on the current state of the project, the building might have some signs of decay or may be an inactive building site. Great care must be taken when on site, following standard guidelines and being supervised by the current owner/manager on site.

Having been born and raised in Sweden and the UK, there is the very topical issue of decolonialism to consider when designing in countries such as Ghana. Though I may have a specific familial connection to the country, having never lived there, I still face the potential to apply Western ways of thinking to a place where it is not suitable or even welcome. Thus, I think it is paramount that I arrive fully aware of my prerogative and with an aim to learn more than to teach, to share and suggest rather than to impose.

Why this? Why here?

My grandfather

Nana Nkuah Okomdom II, known in his private life as Mr. Samuel Appiah-Gyening, was born in Sefwi Wiawso on the 7th of July 1956.

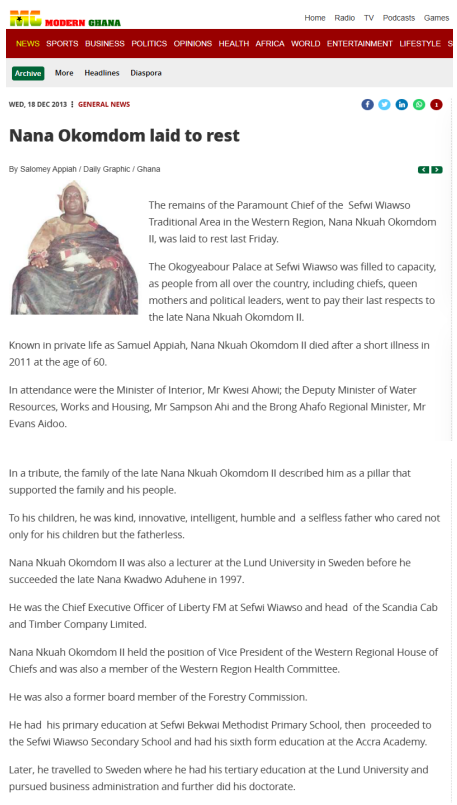
Between 1978 and 1984, Nana studied for diplomas in Swedish Language and International Freight Forwarding in Lund, Sweden.

Nana was in the process of preparing his final draft of his thesis when he was called to inherit the stool left vacant by the death of his brother, Nana Kwadwo Aduhene II in 1997.

Excerpt from Liberty FM radio station leaflet.



For my Morfar (Grandfather), a death brought about a new beginning. The year before I was born, duty called for him to leave the life he had built up in Sweden to return to Ghana, becoming paramount chief of the region Sefwi Wiawso.



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WED, 18 DEC 2013 | GENERAL NEWS

Nana Okomdom laid to rest

By Salomey Appiah / Daily Graphic / Ghana

The remains of the Paramount Chief of the Sefwi Wiawso Traditional Area in the Western Region, Nana Nkuah Okomdom II, was laid to rest last Friday.

The Okogyeabour Palace at Sefwi Wiawso was filled to capacity, as people from all over the country, including chiefs, queen mothers and political leaders, went to pay their last respects to the late Nana Nkuah Okomdom II.

Known in private life as Samuel Appiah, Nana Nkuah Okomdom II died after a short illness in 2011 at the age of 60.

In attendance were the Minister of Interior, Mr Kwesi Ahowi; the Deputy Minister of Water Resources, Works and Housing, Mr Sampson Ahi and the Brong Ahafo Regional Minister, Mr Evans Aidoo.

In a tribute, the family of the late Nana Nkuah Okomdom II described him as a pillar that supported the family and his people.

To his children, he was kind, innovative, intelligent, humble and a selfless father who cared not only for his children but the fatherless.

Nana Nkuah Okomdom II was also a lecturer at the Lund University in Sweden before he succeeded the late Nana Kwadwo Aduhene in 1997.

He was the Chief Executive Officer of Liberty FM at Sefwi Wiawso and head of the Scandia Cab and Timber Company Limited.

Nana Nkuah Okomdom II held the position of Vice President of the Western Regional House of Chiefs and was also a member of the Western Region Health Committee.

He was also a former board member of the Forestry Commission.

He had his primary education at Sefwi Bekwai Methodist Primary School, then proceeded to the Sefwi Wiawso Secondary School and had his sixth form education at the Accra Academy.

Later, he travelled to Sweden where he had his tertiary education at the Lund University and pursued business administration and further did his doctorate.

(Appiah, 2013)

Something similar was written also on the posters of youth's demonstration of 17th March 2006. The latter will probably be remembered as one of the most violent events of Sefwi, an area commonly regarded as peaceful. During the March strife, two people died and almost thirty persons were injured by the Police, and some buildings were damaged. The youth of the area met that day to stress once again their fierce opposition to the *Omanhene* Okumdom II. The demonstration was a culmination of a long period of dissatisfaction against the political elite of the area. The social order was the subject of discussion as the socialized ideology of abundance was contested. Paradoxically, however, not the youth, but the Paramount Chief, was the subversive factor. Indeed, he acted against the social order, the socialized ideology: the agreement between authority and subjects was threatened by the Omanhene who monopolized the wealth of the kingdom with the connivance of some politicians and civil servants. A thick web of power relations between apparently distant authorities was built to achieve individual aims.

Samuel Appiah Gyenin was installed as *Omanhene* of Sefwi-Wiawso on March 1997 with the traditional name of *Nana Nkuah Okogyeabour Okumdom II*. He was selected from among the royals of the *abusua* (royal matrilineage) *asankera* of Wiawso: Gyenin appeared to be the descendant of the late Nana Okumdom I, seventh Omanhene of Sefwi-

[10] Taken from a leaflet of the Sefwi-Wiawso Youth Association posted on the walls of Wiawso, fieldwork 2005/2006.

(Pellecchia, 2010)

Being in positions of power often means being put in a polarising situation. Decisions that benefit one group could be to another's detriment.

The excerpt written by a visiting student paints a certain image of Nana. The stories I have heard growing up paint another. But visiting his hometown now for myself, feeling the love and admiration that still exists for him - I spotted someone walking in traditional garments with a print of my grandfather on it - I get to paint my own picture.

And me...

Born in, and spending my formative years in Malmö, Sweden. Around the age of eight, my family and I moved to London and I subsequently spent the next seventeen years of my life, living , studying and working in the UK. In 2023 I moved back to Sweden to pursue a masters in Architecture in Lund, Sweden.

And so we have gone full circle. From Ghana to Lund. From Lund to Ghana and back again.



Nana's projects

More than just a hotel

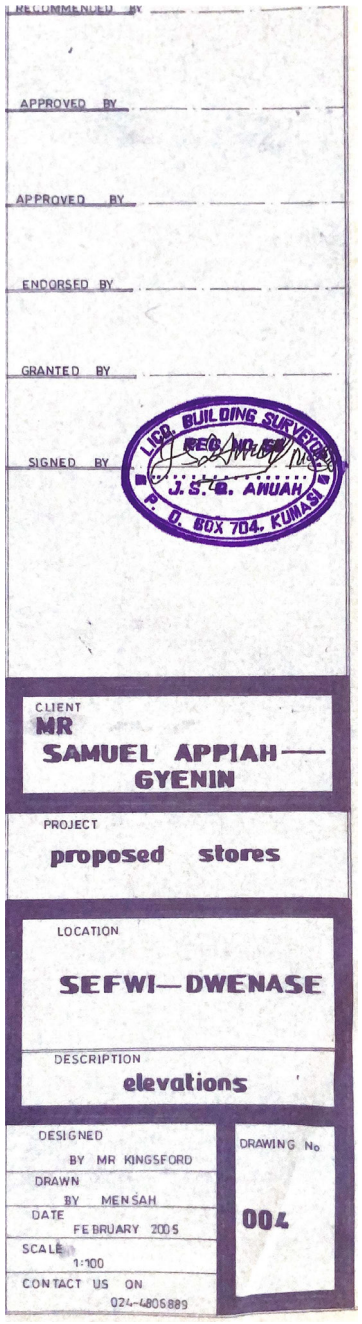
Nana had many plans for projects he wanted to develop. Although we could not find the drawings for the actual hotel, his brother, Daniel, had kept proposed plans for stores in nearby Dwenase.

In the plans opposite, there are many similarities in style to the hotel. Centralised circulation, a hip and valley roof construction, use of Doric/ Corinthian columns and a grand entrance.

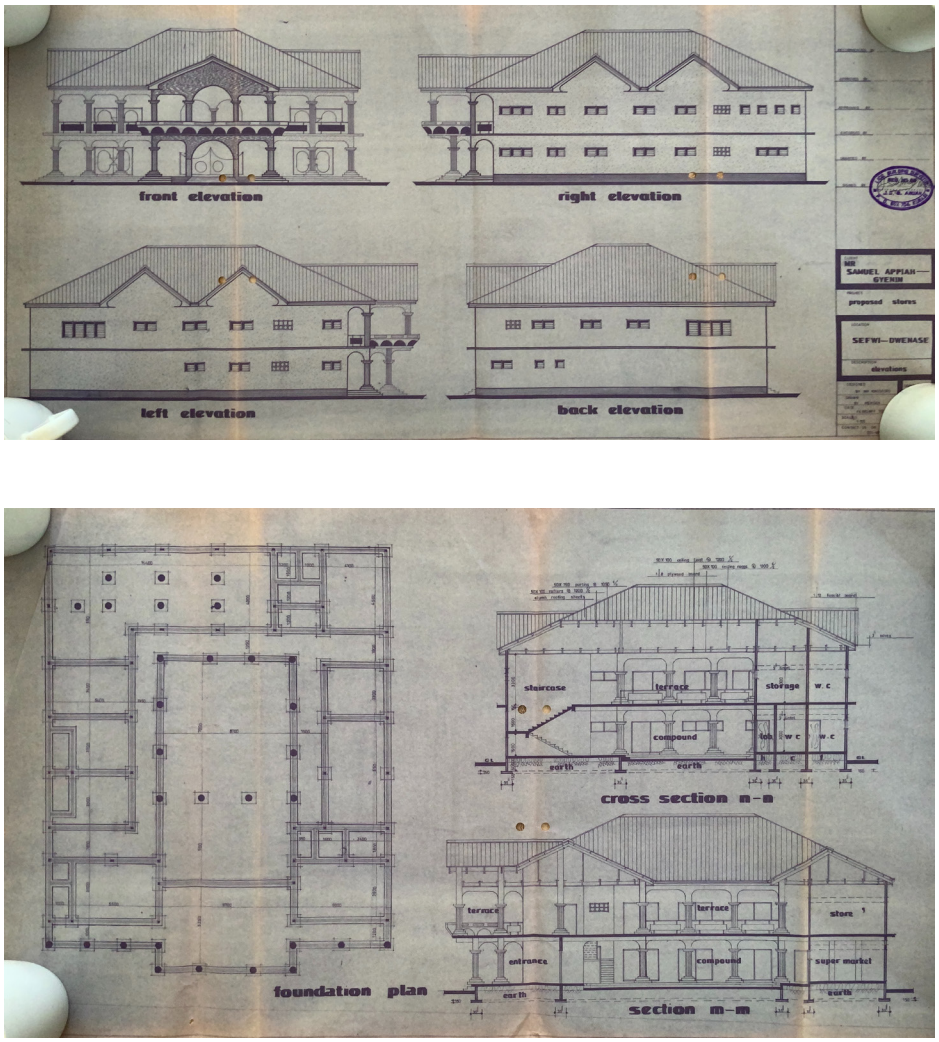
Where the two projects differ is the open courtyard. This intervention in the stores presents a great opportunity to deal with the deep plan, allow for natural ventilation, and by including a central tree, tie back to the traditional organisation of buildings in a symbolic way.

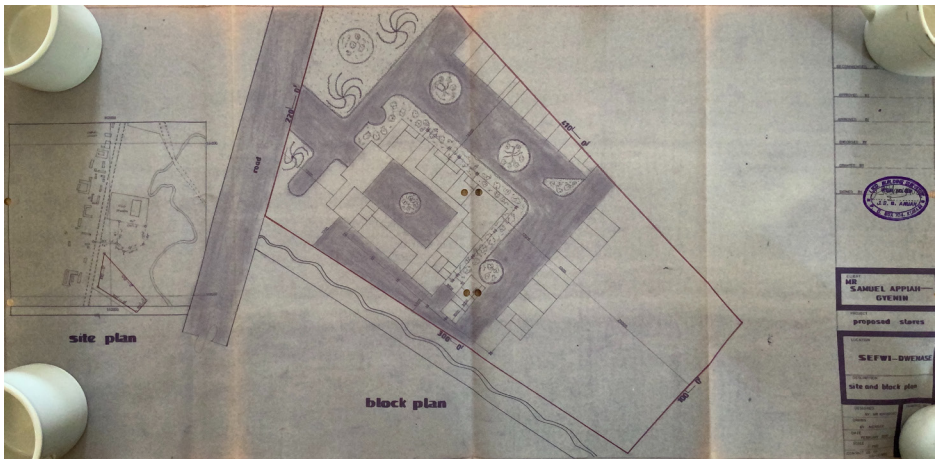
This has in turn highlighted how this openness is a missed opportunity in the hotel, and perhaps something one could learn from and apply.

What is also obvious from seeing these plans is that there was a want to make spaces that would be mutually beneficial for Sefwi and its people. Places of trade. Places for meeting. Places of exchange.



Above: Titles for proposed drawings of unbuilt stores project in Sefwi Dwenase.





Above: Proposed drawings for an unbuilt project in Sefwi Dwenase.

Hotels and hostels

An enduring place of refuge

hotel

ho·tel
hō-'tel

Noun

Borrowed from French hôtel, going back to Old French hostel, ostel "lodging, accommodation".

Middle English, "lodging, accommodation, inn, dwelling place," borrowed from Anglo-French ostel, hostel, going back to Latin hospitāle "guest accommodation" (in plural hospitālia).

e•fie

[eh-fEE-yeH]

Home

"Home" in Twi, one of the most common languages spoken in Ghana.

Hotels as we know them today have been a mainstay of many societies for centuries, providing hospitality and refuge. It can be read as a signifier that a community is integrated with a larger network, open to new visitors and engaged in the transformation of its social customs (Kacmar, 2023).

There is much debate surrounding when and where the first hotel opened its doors. In London, well- known early hotels such as Nerot's, which opened in 1775, are well documented in newspapers of the time. Writings such as "The hotel: or, the double valet. A farce, in two acts." written by Thomas vaughan in 1776 shows that they were probably well established typologies (Schmid & Sanders, 2023).

In the book Temples of Luxury: Volume I: Hotel, the authors discuss the emergence of hotels as a luxury item, stating that the idea of the luxurious hotel was not truly conceptualised until the second half of the nineteenth century. Before this, they were presumably a more humble affair, more in tune with the inn and guest house.

There is not only a connection to wealth and luxury in hotels, but also to art. The Chelsea Hotel in New York famously hosted many celebrities in the world of music, art and cinema. Starting of as an apartment cooperative in 1884, later becoming a nexus for bohemians and artists in the twentieth century, it still operates as a hotel today. The very presence of these artists has in turn made elements of the hotel in to pieces of art, or at least something valued in the same vain, with some of the original doors from suites being sold at auctions (Collins, 2023).

As many artists not only draw from their own travels and lived experiences, but also those of others, it is only natural that a hotel would be a great place to breed cross inspiration and fuel creative expression.

National and local examples



In cities such as Kumasi, hostels are big business. With KNUST, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, welcoming approximately fifty thousand new students annually, there is extreme demand for housing. Speaking to some of the students, this scarcity contributes to very high prices in sometimes sub-par accommodation.

Though not as extreme, this demand can be felt even in smaller centres. A quick search brings up at least nine hotels and guesthouses in central Sefwi Wiawso. Some of these, such as Kenroses, are also expanding, demonstrating good levels of profitability and an increasing demand for temporary accommodation.

The creation of additional hotels also ties in to the governments plans for the municipality. In their composite budget for 2024 - 2027 they write:

"The Municipality abounds in tourism potentials, which, if harnessed, could serve as the second employment source after agriculture. With the status of Sefwi Wiawso as the Western North regional capital, it is very imperative to develop these tourist sites to boost the local economy to create jobs. The potential tourist sites found within the municipality that are not developed include; The Tree of God (Nyame Dua), Okomfo Anokye Akoma, Abombirem Sacred Tortoise Forest and Ancestral Hole of Bosomoiso" (Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly, 2024).

Increased tourism results in increased demand for accommodation, which in turn justifies these developments.

Above: Kenroses Hotel, where I stayed for the duration of my time in Sefwi.







Above and Left: Golden Gift Hotel and Resort located in Punikrom, a short drive from Wiawso. It exhibits similar features and is of a similar scale to the hotel I am investigating.





Many of the local hotels double as something else. Resorts, sports bars, restaurants and convention centres. This does not only provide additional customers and income for the proprietors, but also creates a lively atmosphere and allows for spontaneous meetings between normal guests and day visitors.

Central to many of these events, and Ghana in general, is music. It is constantly heard somewhere, and more often than not, from giant speakers, such as the ones above, from a nearby hotel. The consumption of this art form is intertwined with the daily life and rituals of the region.

Above and left: Milly Jay Hotel and Event Centre located in Punikrom, Sefwi.







Above: Private student accommodation in Kumasi
Right Top: Private student accommodation in Kumasi
Right Bottom: Kessma Guesthouse, a hotel in Kumasi's student area.

Ghana's 'first' hotel

An abandoned jewel

"Sea View was the first hotel in Ghana built in Jamestown, Accra, in the early 20th century. The hotel was a historic site and a landmark which once hosted colonial dignitaries and governors in the Gold Coast.

The hotel was abandoned nearly three decades ago and was turned into a bar, an apartment building and then an open place for events and other activities. It was one of the sites to see when visiting the beautiful shoreline and the 17th century James Fort and Ussher Fort in Accra."

(Waweru, 2018)

It was something that I only stumbled across once I had returned home. I never had the chance to visit the Sea View Hotel. But had I attempted to, I would have been sorely disappointed.

It is named in a few articles online with many expressing its importance in the history of Accra. But in trying to pinpoint its location, I discovered that it had been demolished.

As an establishment for temporary accommodation for at least three hundred years, its walls, floors and dilapidated ceilings were certainly imbued with layers of stories. Now in exploring a hotel for this thesis, and as someone who is very interested in the cultural heritage of places, as it relates to the built environment, this hotel feels as though it could have been paramount reference. Being the first hotel, as we identify them now, in the whole country, it would have served as a template for everything that came after.

A strong example, exhibiting all that we have learnt and the changes in styles since the 1600's.

Built during a time almost defined by the transatlantic slave trade, a time in which many prospered from the unimaginable difficulty of others, the hotel would have served as a contentious place. Probably accommodating those who prospered from the aforementioned difficulty of others.

What this space looked like, what it felt like, how much had survived and just how much has changed, how much we have changed, how much we have stayed the same, our tastes and sensibilities, the feeling of this place. Most of this is lost when we choose to demolish. Which is why I am of the mind to try to keep and to work with the existing as much as possible, archiving what cannot be saved. So that more of our cultural heritage does not lay in ruin.





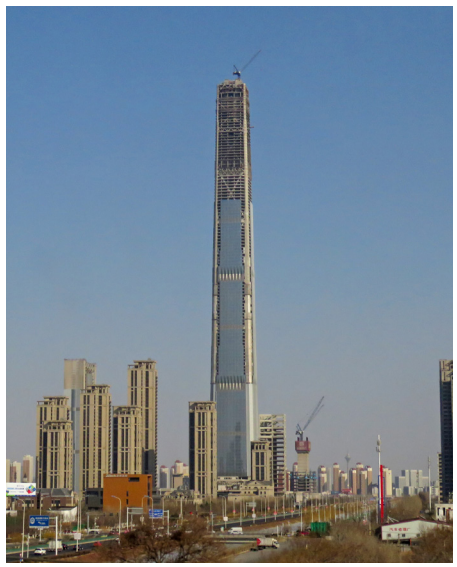
Above Top: Sea view hotel prior to demolition
Above Bottom: Sea View Hotel as it today
(Google Maps)

Abandoned projects

A worldwide and continental phenomena

Buildings are never intended to be, and surely never start of as, ruins. But across the world there are numerous well known and well documented abandoned projects. Structures that through their abandonment grow ever more ruinous.

One such famous example is the golden finance building which “Despite reaching its full height of 597 metres in 2015, the site was suddenly deserted shortly afterwards, and the project remains unfinished to this day.” (Cortese, 2021).



Golden Finance 117, China. Image: NF09FZ

In an interview with the journalist Kinley Salmon, Judd Devermont asks them to describe and explain this phenomenon in Africa.

He describes it as an issue that plagues many African cities, resulting in a landscape with “a whole array of buildings that seem to have been partly constructed and the construction is stalled for quite a long time. For example, a six-story apartment building all finished in concrete, but with no fixtures, paint, or windows put in...often that they’ve been there for quite some time, five or six years even.” They go on to discuss how the issue can be addressed suggesting “It’s difficult because someone normally has a claim on any given piece of land or any given unfinished building, even if they’ve not touched it for a long time.

The Nigerian government is planning to take over some buildings in the capital, Abuja, that have been sitting there for a particularly long time on the basis that there is a need to use the land more effectively given pressing social problems. I think that is worth thinking about, and clearly there needs to then be thought given to some form of compensation for people who, for various legitimate reasons that we’ve discussed, may have been unable to finish.

But at some point, when you see plots of land in prime urban locations not being used for half a decade or a decade, that becomes an issue of public concern. That same frame of “How do you optimize urban land use?” can be applied to questions of buildings that have sat there for a long time.” (Salmon, 2021).

It is interesting to frame this as a public issue. Maybe, the buildings that are then truly abandoned can be transformed to something that then becomes a public solution to other local problems.

Unfinished (not abandoned)

A local phenomenon



As I traveled around Ghana I got the overwhelming feeling that everyone is building.

Driving towards Kumasi, the second largest city, I am astounded by the sheer number of unfinished Buildings. ”There is at least a house for every Ghanaian!” I say. Kojo (my guide) laughs, agrees and shakes his head.

Mega projects such as the highway between Accra and Kumasi, as well as the controversial national cathedral are notable unfinished projects in Ghana. However, like many projects here, they are rather paused than unfinished and abandoned. A slow progression fraught with disputes and lapses in financing.

I am told that here are no policies in Ghana that force state projects to continue when a new government takes power. Therefore, each new government seeks to make a name for themselves with their own unique projects or wants a cut of the previous deals. The selection of new ministers can take up to a year, leaving these projects in limbo during this time. A detriment to the country and its people.

I initially thought that most of these projects were totally abandoned but traces of progress can be seen. In fact, my aim was to identify temporary or permanent potential uses within these spaces, but this is of course already happening naturally. Without interference from architects or politicians.

The same can be said for my grandfathers project. With his passing I assumed that the project had been abandoned. Five years ago, when my mother last visited, there was only a foundation and some structure. But little by little, someone has been maintaining it. Adding to it. Subtracting from it.

Above: Unfinished, but still used building in central Kumasi

A work in progress

As I travelled and spoke to people, I realised that very few projects that appeared deserted, at least to me, were actually in fact abandoned. Most were occupied by some sort of denizen. It was just a relatively rather slow work in progress...



Above: Unfinished, but occupied building in Sefwi Dwenase





The hotel that I resided in for the duration of my visit to Sefwi is itself a work in progress, its past and new layers proudly on display.

A multi-storey structure is being built behind the existing hotel, making way for new rooms and a large roof terrace. The small pink part of the hotel is to be demolished.

It was originally planned that the building would receive a second floor, evident in its reinforced concrete pillars that stand in waiting. It will all now be removed to make way for a pool. Or that is at least the plan...for now.

Sefwi is adaptable. Many, it seems, are very open to killing their darlings, happily taking on new ideas to get the best possible outcome out of a space. Allowing for these processes to take time. Not being too precious about what was, if it is not being utilised. Sefwi is adaptable and patient.





Above: Kenroses Hotel and its current development. Sefwi, Ghana.

A brief history

Red, yellow, green and black.

An extremely brief history of Ghana from independence until now.



Above: Photo of the Black Star Gate, Accra.

Ghana has a rich and complex history and I advise anyone to turn to the plethora of discourse cataloguing this.

A short summary in this thesis does not do it justice, but it felt pertinent to include a brief background for readers to have a base understanding of some important events. Namely, the struggle for independence and formation of Ghana, the republic we know today.

With the highlighting of this date, it is then important to note that the state of Ghana is relatively young in that regard and the story of reinvention of its post-colonial identity is naturally a continuous and ever-present dialogue.

The following timeline should be very matter-of-fact but it is taken from the BBC, a news outlet based in Britain. As Ghana was a former colony, it could be that there is a specific focus or one-sidedness to the dates and events deemed important.

A short timeline

- *1900 - Ashanti Uprising. British forces capture Kumasi. Ashanti lose their independence.*
- *1901 - British Gold Coast colony incorporates all the kingdoms and tribes into a single unit.*
- *1948 - Rioting after British colonial police kill three World War Two veterans during a protest march demanding compensation for their war service. It becomes a milestone in Ghana's struggle for independence.*
- ***1957** - Independence for the state now called Ghana, this unifies the Gold Coast, Ashanti, the Northern Territories, and British Togoland as one single country.*

  Ghana is the first country in black sub-Saharan Africa to shake off colonial rule, inspiring liberation struggles around the continent. Kwame Nkrumah becomes prime minister.
- *1964 - Nkrumah represses political opposition; Ghana becomes a one-party state, with Nkrumah as president for life.*
- *1960s - Nkrumah promotes the concept of Pan-Africanism, which merges the teachings of Jamaican politician Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement, the US's Martin Luther King and Ghana's WEB Du Bois, and plays a key role in founding of the Non-Aligned Movement.*
- *1966 - Army overthrows Nkrumah and establishes military rule. A series of alternating military and civilian governments, affected by economic instabilities rule Ghana from 1966 to 1981.*
- *1981 - Flt Lt Jerry Rawlings takes power. In the mid-80s he oversees economic and gradual political reforms.*
- *1992 - New constitution, multi-party politics is restored.*
- *1994-95 - Interethnic fighting in northern Ghana sees 1,000-2,000 people killed.*
- *2007 - Major off-shore oil discovery announced.*
- *2010 - Offshore oil production starts.*
- *2017 - Ghana and Ivory Coast set up a commission to implement an international ruling on a maritime border dispute involving oilfields.*
- *2024 - John Mahama re-elected as president.*

Source: BBC

Tropical Modernism

Development of an independence style

One afternoon, I visited KNUST in Kumasi to speak to the teachers.

There I met Obanahene, a lecturer and head of the cultural history course in the architecture program. Having read articles the night before that criticised the designs of the school, namely the work of Fry and Drew, I was in a mind that they (the staff) would also be critical. However, as we converse, it becomes obvious that there is an appreciation of the work.



Though it was not perfectly suited, mainly on account of the flat roofs struggling with the pressures of the rainy season, Obanahene explained that most do appreciate that an attempt was at least made to work with the local traditions. An attempt made during a complex time, a new age, a new Ghana.

With myself being a Western taught designer with roots in the country, trying to navigate a new context, the topic of tropical modernism has been very interesting.

It is easy to see how the allure of designing here was strong. The region's climate allows for a literal openness that would be unsuitable for buildings in most Nordic countries.

As the effects of the modernist movement are still felt all over Europe, the impact of Tropical Modernism can similarly be seen across Ghana. And just as in the West, the style is both loved, hated, and highly discussed in specific circles, and largely unnoticed by the general public.

There is much written discourse on this subject. This thesis does not focus on this as the buildings I aim to work with are not strictly characterised as modernist. But it does acknowledge it as a relevant 'layer', as they are undoubtedly influenced by it.

A short timeline

- *1945 - Maxwell Fry does national service in Ghana.*
  James Cubitt does national service in Burma.
  Leo De Syllas works in Jamaica.
- *1944–46 - Fry and Drew serve as town planning advisers in Gold Coast.*
- *1945–1950 - First Gold Coast school building program.*
- *1947 - CIAM Conference, Bridgewater, (Fry, Drew, de Syllas attend).*
  Village Housing in the Tropics published (Fry and Drew).
  James Cubitt sets up office in Gold Coast (1951).
- *1953 - Tropical Architecture Conference, University College, London.*
  Fry & Drew appointed Architectural Advisors in Chandigarh.
- *1954 - AA school of Tropical Architecture commences (Fry director).*
  Architects Co-Partnership (ACP) set up office in Lagos.
  Ove Arup sets up office in Lagos.
- *1956–1957 - Oil drilling commences in Oloibiri, Southern Nigeria.*
  Christ Church Cathedral School (Godwin and Hopwood).
- *1958–1960 - Ghana independence (1958) Nigeria (1960).*
  University of Ibadan complete 1959 (Fry, Drew).
  Co-operative bank Lagos 1959 (Fry, Drew).
  Bristol Hotel.
- *1961 - Elder Dempster offices Lagos (James Cubitt).*
- *1963 - Education building course AA Tropical School.*
  AA restructure Architecture course at Kumasi.
  University of Lagos staff flats & playground (Vaughan–Richards).
- *1966 - IDA, Education Project, Nigeria (1966–1977).*
  Coups d'etat Ghana and Nigeria.
  Nigeria-Biafra civil war (1966–1970).
  Oluwakitan House, Alan Vaughan–Richards.
- *1970 - AA Tropical Architecture School closes and moves to UCL with Koenigsberger to become Development Planning Unit.*
- *1972 - Oil crisis–Nigeria achieves short term financial windfall, non oil producers sink into recessionary climate, End of era.*

(Adapted from Le Roux and Uduku, 2003.)

(Uduku, 2006)

A collection of differing written opinions on Tropical Modernism

"They didn't, though, much engage with local traditions. Fry was dismissive of indigenous architecture, and his and Drew's engagement with west African culture didn't go much beyond the use of patterns abstracted from Ashanti ceremonial stools on their concrete screens.

It took a generation of African and Indian architects to develop approaches that belonged more to their countries. The Ghanaian president had an architecture school set up at his Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in order to achieve just that. The results included architects such as John Owusu Addo in Ghana…who took the devices of Fry and Drew and Le Corbusier and made them their own.

The geodesic domes of Buckminster Fuller, represented in the show by a silvery, softened version by KNUST students, was a popular influence. And then there was the untrained Chand, whose Rock Garden can be seen as a flat-out rejection of almost everything the Europeans stood for.

Modern architecture, in this intriguing exhibition, has many faces. In the later years of Nkrumah's increasingly authoritarian rule it became grandiose and oppressive, to make which point the show ends with one of the many statues he had made in his image, battered and torn down in the coup that deposed him. Tropical Modernism doesn't draw conclusions, but it gives glimpses of creative endeavours to make sense of some of the most dramatic transformations of the 20th century."

(Moore, 2024)

"The development and establishment of a Tropical Architecture movement in West Africa has a wide context.

There are the issues of independence and nation, and what that means in the physical built form. The issues of 'comfort', as perceived and measured in a warm humid climate, different from the temperate context, and finally those of building materials—in both technical and socio-aesthetic terms. These are seen in the context of the "them" (those being built for) and "us" (those who were designing the buildings) frame. Considering each of these contexts from a chronological perspective, one notes that the body of 'tropical' buildings in West Africa were all built within a specific time frame; the late 1940s to the late 1960s. The colonial style that had preceded this, establishing a recognisable post-vernacular architectural style.

By the late 1960s, the post-tropical era, had commenced, marked by anonymous generic corporate design aesthetic, that adopted the faceless banality of the glass façade and the bland utilitarianism of the breeze-block structure punctured with louver-glass windows and the ubiquitous air-conditioning unit."

(Uduku, 2006)

"To appreciate the 'tropical' response to architectural design in Africa one needs to consider the core relationship between local building use and their reading of the modern building.

Anthropologists long established that daily transactional life amongst West Africans occurred outdoors, with buildings only performing the function of shelter from more adverse elements such as rainfall, and as places to sleep at the end of the day. The need for appropriate passive cooling and environmental design could on the one hand thus be relevant to those who worked in the small formal Western sector, and not that of the masses, who were quite able to negotiate their own ideal comfort zone in day to day life; literally by sitting in the shade with a cooling breeze in the midday sun. When considered in relation to the knowledge that most vernacular architecture has adequate thermal insulation to provide comfort in the evening and early morning, when sleeping occurs, there is a question as to what this new form of environmental conditioning brought to everyday life. On a similar basis, Michael Grice...confirmed that none of the school buildings his firm built during their time in Nigeria, were able to be built within the specified budget. The brises soleils, or louvered façades, and reinforced concrete shells exact an economic as well as environmental price to pay. In some ways it could be said that the costs that were associated with the pristine nature of the tropical modernist architectural style helped to bring about its short period of popularity on a continent that could never really afford this investment in style."

"The "them and us" mode of thought, as touched upon when discussing building use, is central to the appreciation of tropical architecture's success, or otherwise in becoming integrated into the mindset and design aspirations of its receiving public. In the case of this early genre of tropical architecture in West Africa it seems that there is a level of disassociation in expectations and aspirations between those for whom the architecture was designed and those who produced the design.

Revisiting the example of Fry and Drew's Co-operative building in Lagos, one notes that since the mid-1970s the building has been fitted out with air conditioning units—despite its being designed to function as an entirely passively cooled building. Here, we have a direct conflict between user aspirations and satisfaction and known function. The key element to note here is the symbolic perception of the air conditioner, not as simply a machine to provide comfort, but as a status symbol—working in a modern office block, like driving a modern car (in tropical West Africa) requires air conditioning—even when the ambient temperature is tolerable.

It also gives another clue to the demise of tropical architecture in Nigeria particularly, where with cheap fuel costs in an albeit short-lived crude oil-financed economy, the pragmatic functionality of tropical modernism lost status to the high-energy steel and glass boxes from the USA."

(Uduku, 2006)







Above and Left: Buildings in central Kumasi.

Symbolism

Adinkra and its implementation

Below are some excerpts from an exhibition in one of the traditional houses in Kumasi:

"The most distinct feature of traditional Asante architecture, is the elaborate and intricate decoration of the walls. These can be divided into two main categories; those on the upper walls, and those on the lower walls.

The upper sections of the walls, beams, columns and lintels are decorated with a variety of designs in low relief. These show intricate geometrical designs, however depiction of objects is very rare."



"The decorations on the lower walls are executed on a plinth about 60 cm thick and about 1 m high. These are modelled, usually by barefeet using a large quantity of designs, which in sharp contrast include plant and animal and abstract designs. Here again professionals or amateurs, this time mostly women, execute these.

Many of the motifs used in decorating the buildings, especially on the lower walls, resemble Adinkra symbols. These were designed and produced with great skill and difficulty in Adinkra cloths. This, however, was not the case in producing the motifs for decorating the walls. These were executed in clay and painted. Whereas the motifs on Whereas the motifs on Adinkra cloths are mainly abstract and imaginative, those on the walls are usually linked to Asante proverbs (abstract representations of objects of nature, and man)."

"Proverbs played a prominent role in the life of the Asante as they reflected their beliefs, moral ideas and social values. The motifs on the walls therefore, could be said to disguise moral ideas.

...the Asante having had a long association with the Europeans. The Asante have always been very open to new ideas, and foreign clothes were frequently adopted and modified to blend with their own traditional designs.

Adinkra symbols occurred on many other objects of traditional material culture like the Asante gold weights, gold dust containers and Asante stools.

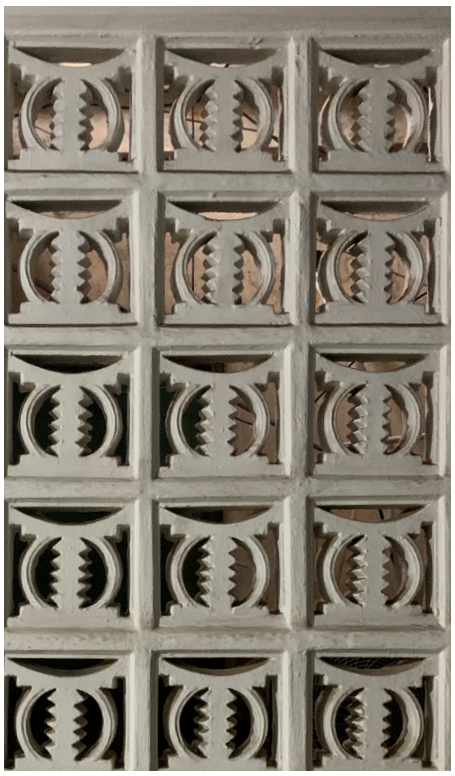
Unfortunately many of the meanings of these symbols are lost nowadays."

Excerpts from Asante traditional house information boards, Kumasi.









Above: Examples of Adinkra symbols being incorporated into buildings in Accra and Kumasi.

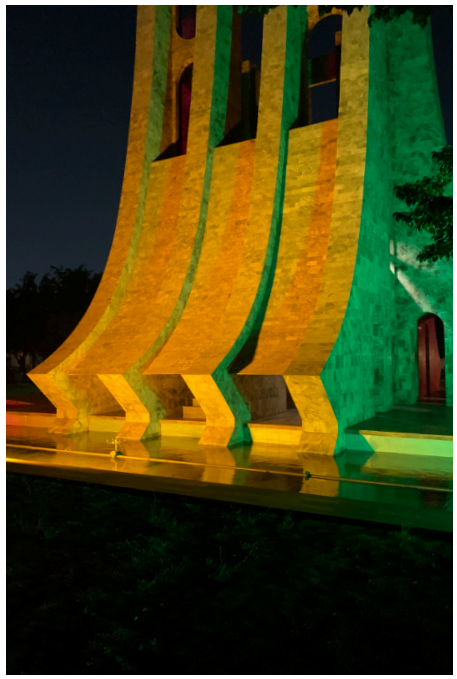
Colours

And their meaning to a country

One of the very first visits during the trip was to the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum in Accra. The central structure modeled after a sword with its hilt facing upwards; a symbol of peace.

Also interpreted as a tree stump, bereft of its canopy. A man and a movement stopped before they could fully flourish.

All the colours of Ghana present; red, yellow, green and black.



At the mausoleum I joined a guided tour. As we walked around and learned about the life of Ghana's first president, we were also invited to look closely at the structures and buildings that make up the museum and mausoleum. Everything steeped in symbolism and meaning.

Our guide described how the colours represented in the Ghanaian flag, lighting up the monument, all had a specific meaning, or rather, an association.

From their common associations, I went on to develop a list of related words. Being made aware of the importance of these colours and what they represent, it felt important to keep these in mind, building upon them and carrying them along to eventually create a grounded balance of not only colours and symbols, but the very ideas behind them.

Colours of the Ghana flag

	RED	YELLOW	GREEN	BLACK
Common Associations	Blood	Minerals	Vegetation	People
Additional associations	body	hard	growth	central
	natural	shiny	life	movement
	dark	standout	sway	joy
	fluid	rare	comfort	warm
	life	cold	calming	connected

Above: Diagram of word associations created from the base colours of the Ghanaian flag and their meanings as described by the workers of the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum.
Left: Photo of the Mausoleum, Accra.

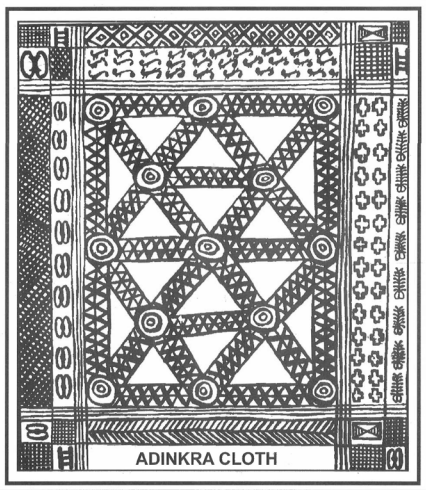
ADINKRA SYMBOLISM

Tradition has it that Adinkra, a famous king of Gyaman (now Ivory Coast), angered the Asantehene, Bonsu-Panin by trying to copy the Golden Stool. Adinkra was defeated and slain for an ensuing war. It has been suggested that the art of Adinkra came from Gyaman. It is also significant that Adinkra means farewell or good-bye, hence the use of the special cloth of funeral occasion(ayie), to say good-bye to the departed.

"Adinkra aduru" (Adinkra medicine), the stuff used in the stamping process is prepared by boiling the bark of "Badie" together with iron slags. Originally the printing was done on the cotton pieces lying on the ground. Today raised platforms with slack covering act as the printing table. The designs, cut on pieces of calabash with pieces of wood attached for handling, are dipped into the stuff, then stamped onto the cloth. Adinra clothes are not meant to be washed.

Prepared By Prof. Ablade Glover, Artists Alliance Gallery, Omanye House , Accra-Tema Road , P.O. Box LA 348, LA, Accra- Ghana, Tel/Fax 233 21 762379

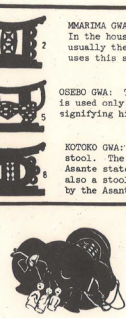
1. **GYE NYAME (EXCEPT GOD).** Symbol of the omnipotence and immorality of God.
2. **"FUNTUMFUNATU DENKYEMFUNAFU, WON AFURU BOM, NSO WOREDIDI A NA WOREKO"** Sharing one stomach yet they fight over food
3. **ODENKYEM DA NSUO MU, NSO ONNHOME NSUO, OHOME MFRAMA.** The crocodile lives in water, yet it breathes air, not water.
4. **BI-NNKA-BI.** Obi nnka obi (bite not one another).
5. **OSRANE (MOON).** "Osrane mmfiti preko nntware man" It takes the moon some time to go round the nation.
6. **KRAMO BONE AMMA YEANNHU KRAMO PA.** We cannot tell the good from the bad because of pretence and hypocrisy
7. **NSAA (A KIND OF BLANKET).** *"Wea onim nsaa na oto n'ago"* The one who knows the 'Nsaa' blanket is willing to buy one even when it is old.
8. **FOFOO.** Se die fofoo pe ne se gyinantwi abo bidie What the fofoo plant wants is that the gyinantwi seeds should turn black. Symbol of jealousy
9. **ADINKRAHENE (ADINKRA KING).** Chief of all the adinkra designs forms the basis of adinkra printing.
10. **DWANNIMMEN (RAM'S HORN).** "Dwannin ye asisie a, ode nakorana na ennya ne mben". It is the heart and not the horns that leads a ram to bully. (Concealment).
11. **MPUANNUM (NKOTIMSOFO PUAA).** Five tufts of hair. A traditionally fashionable hair style
12. **HYE WONNHYE (HE WHO BURNS BE NOT BURNED).** Symbol of forgiveness - turn the other okeek.
13. **NKONSONKONSON (LINK OR CHAIN)** We are linked in both life and death. Those who share common, blood relations never break apart. Symbol of human relations.
14. **OWUO ATWEDIE, BAAKO MMFO (CBIARA BEWU).** All men shall climb the ladder of death
15. **SEPOW. (KNIFE USED IN EXECUTIONS).** This is thrust through the victim's cheek to prevent his invoking a curse on the king.
16. **GYAWU ATIKO.** This is said to be the design shaved by Gyawu, a once Bantamhene
17. **SANKOFA (RETURN AND TAKE IT).** "Se wo were fi na wosan kofa a yennkyi". It is no laboo to return and fetch it when you forget. You can always undo your mistakes
18. **KRA PA. (MMUSUYIDE). GOOD FORTUNE. SANCITY.** *"Kra pa te se ora; okyiri fi".* Sanctity, like a cat, abohrs filth. Symbol of sanctity and good fortune.
19. **FIHANKRA** (the circular house or complete house). This signifies safety or security in a homd.
20. **NYAME NNWU NA MAWU.** (If Nyame -God-dies then I may die). Perpetual existence.
21. **OHENE ANIWA (IN THE KING'S EYE)** The King has lots of eyes and nothing is hidden from him.
22. **AKOMA (THE HEART).** "Nya akoma" (take heart) and take patience. Symbol of patience and endurance.
23. **BIRIBI WO SORO.** "Nyame biribi wo soro na ma embeka me nsa" (God, there is something in the heavens, let it reach me. A symbol of hope.
24. **NYAME BIRIBI WO SORO.** (If Nyame -God-dies then I may die). Perpetual existence.
25. **KRADO-MMARA KRADO.** (Seal of law and order). Symbolising the authority of the court.
26. **KODEE MMOWEREWA (THE TALONS OF THE EAGLE).** This is also said to be shaved on the heads of some court attendants.
27. **AYA (THE FERN).** This word also means 'I am not afraid of you.' A symbol of defiance
28. **OSRANE NE NSOROMMA (MOON AND STAR).** A symbol of faithfulness
29. **NYAMEDUA (AN ALTAR TO THE SKY GOD).** Altar- place of worship.
30. **NHWIMU (CROSSING).** The divisions done onto the plain cloth before the stamping is done.
31. **MFRAMADAN (WIND HOUSE)** House built to stand windy and treacherous conditions
32. **ABAN (FENCE).** Representing fenced homes. A protector. Double security. Safe and sound Fool-proof.
33. **"ANI BERE A, ENNSO GYA, ANKA M'ANI ABERE KOO"** Seriousness does not show fiery eyes, else you would see my face all red.
34. **OHENE TUO (THE KING'S GUN).** Defender and protector of the King
35. **AKO-BEN (WAR HORN).** Another significant version of the war horn which symbolises the call to arms.
36. **NKYINKYIM (OHEMMAA NNKYINYIN).** Changing oneself; playing many roles.
37. **WAWA ABA (THE SEED OF WAWA TREE).** Wawa is a hardwood used in carving hence its significance in Akan culture.
38. **KUNTINKANTAN (DO NOT BOAST).** There is need for humility and service.
39. **NTESIE - MATE MASIE** I have heard and kept it. "Nyansa bun mu ne mate masie" Symbol of wiscom and knowledge.
40. **"AKOKO NAN TIA BA, NA ENNKUM BA."** The hen treads upon its chicken but it does not kill them.
41. **EPA (HANDCUFFS).** *"Onii a ne pa de wo woa no, na n'akoa ne wo"* You are the slave of him whose handcuffs you wear.
42. **ANOTHER VERSION OF ADINRAHENE.** Unlike No. 9. this one is used as a symbol in itself for printing
43. **NNONNOWA (AHOMA)** Also called "oonno ntoaso" (the double donno drum). This is more symbolic than representational.
44. **DUAFE (THE WOODEN COMB).** One of the very few representational forms in adinkra patterns.
45. **KONTIRE NE AKWAM (ELDERS OF THE STATE).** *"Tiaro mmapa"* (one head does not constitute a council).
46. **MMARA KRADO. (SEAL OF THE LAW)** Symbolic supreme authority.
47. **OWO FORO ADOBE (SNAKE CLIMBING THE PALM TREE).** Performing the unusual or the impossible
48. **AKO-BEN (WAR HORN).** The sound of akoben is a battle cry; hence it symbolizes a call to arms.
49. **SUNSUM (SOUL).** Some Akans believe that the soul of a ruler inhabits a younger countrier
50. **BESE SAKA (A BUNCH OF COLANUTS).** Bese (Colanut) is the favourite of the Northern tribes.
51. **TABON (PADDLE).** Paddles are more common with the coastal tribes.
52. **PA GYA (TO STRIKE FIRE OR MAKE FIRE).** This is said to represent war
53. **DONNO(DRUM).** This is more lie the donno drum than does design No. 43.
54. **AKOMA NTOASO.** A symbol of agreement or a charter.
55. Another version No. 2 Ned for unity particularly where there is one destiny.
56. **ESE NE TEKREMA (THE TEETH AND THE TONGUE).** "Wonnwo ba ne se We improve and advance
57. **AFENA (A STATE CEREMONIAL SWORD).** "Afenna unini ko a, wobo a fena hye no safohene" The retiring great warrior always has no Royal sword to rest. Recognition of gallantry.
58. **SANKOFA.** Another "Sankofa" design (it could be a broken piece from the original design (No. 17)
59. **DAME-DAME (A DRAFT GAME).** A more traditionally popular game is the "Oware"
60. **PEPAMSIE (THAT WHICH WILL NOT CRUSH.)** Pempamsie se, bebrebe ahooden ne koroye. "Unity is stenth



First Published February 1969, Second (Revised) Edition February 1971. The Third Revise Edition February 1992. Copyright Reserved

Above: Poster purchased in Accra describing different Adinkra symbols and their meanings.

1. MMAA GWA: Women's stool. A man usually presents his wife with a stool when he marries (In recent times when she bears him a child).
2. MMARIMA GWA: The man's stool. In the household only the male, usually the head of the family, uses this stool.
3. PANTU GWA: The big spirit bottle (usually gin) bottle stool. This has an European influence, since the bottle is certainly European in character.
4. OBI-TE-OBI-SO GWA: Someone-sits-on-someone else stool. A proverbial stool used exclusively by top chiefs usually at state ceremonies.
5. OSEBO GWA: The leopard stool. This is used only by the Asantehene; signifying his power and influence.
6. ESONO GWA: The elephant stool. Also used exclusively by the Asantehene. Anyone who uses it challenges his authority.
7. OWO FOFORO ADOBE GWA: Proverbial. The snake climbing the palm-tree. Attempting the impossible.
8. KOTOKO GWA: The porcupine stool. The porcupine is the Asante state emblem. This is also a stool used exclusively by the Asantehene.
9. SRANE GWA: The moon stool. Also proverbial, and appearing in Adinkra symbolism, too. This stool may be used by both sexes.
10. MFRAMADAN GWA: The windhouse stool. The engraved designs appear also on temples. May be used by either sex.
11. ME FA ASA GWA: Half of me is finished (half my clan is dead). This is a stool used exclusively by females.
12. DAMEDAME GWA: The draught-board stool. This may also have an European influence. The draught is a game foreign to Ghanaian traditions.
13. MMAREMU GWA: The cross stool. Only with the permission of the Asantehene can someone else use THIS STOOL. The design is exclusively for him.
14. NNAMA GWA: The two penny stool; also known as the poor man's stool. It is simply carved and cost two-pence in the olden days.
15. NSEBE GWA: The amulet stool. The decorative sides represent the amulet ('sebe'), hence the name 'nsebe gwa'.
16. SAKYI DUA KORO GWA: The single centre support stool. Used exclusively by the priests and priestesses on ceremonial occasions.
17. KONTONKOROWI GWA: The circular rainbow stool.
18. KONTONKOROWI MPAEMU GWA: The divided circular rainbow stool.
19. MMOM GWA: The stool with only two supports (usually stools have four supports). Used by sub-chiefs.
20. ADENKYEM GWA: The crocodile stool. The croc has a fish in the mouth. Used as a shrine support, hence it belongs to the priesthood.
21. KRADO GWA: The padlock stool. Used by chiefs and linguists. It has a close resemblance to the Mamponghene's stool.
22. ATUDURO KWADOM GWA: The keg of gunpowder stool.
23. SANKOFA GWA: 'Return to take it'. One of the few proverbial stools. The bird also appears in both Adinkra and goldweight symbolism.
24. NYANSAPOW GWA: Wisdom knot (reef-knot). Only the wise can undo a wise knot.
25. EDE NKA ANUM GWA: Sweetness is not permanent in the mouth. Proverbial. There are both good and bad times. It is also the Dadesuabahene stool.
26. ADINKRA GWA: The stool of the ruler of Gyaman. Adinkra features a lot in Asante mythology. He might have given them quite a headache before his capture.
27. OWUO ATWERE GWA: The ladder of death Proverbial. We shall all go up the ladder of death. It is also the stool of the ruler of Wassw.
28. ATUMPAN GWA: Talking drums stool. This is sometimes carved with the drums lying on their sides. It resembles a donno drum and is also the Bechemhene stool.
29. NKONTA GWA: 'Nkonta' is the Y-shaped stick used for catapults. It is the stool for the head of the stool carriers.
30. OFFINSOHENE GWA: Used by the ruler of Offinso; each ruler adopts a new design sometimes.
31. BRAKANTE GWA: Brakante stool, Brakante was a chief of Akyem. The stool has the nyansapow symbol (24).
32. ASANTEHENE GWA: This is supposed to be the stool of the Asantehene, although every Asantehene adopts his own stool design.
33. AHEMMAA GWA: For the Queen mother. Notice the close resemblance it has with the Kotoko gwa (8). Perhaps this shows how close she is in rank to the Asantehene.
34. AHEMMAA GWA: Another Queen mother stool. There may be many since every queen mother adopts her own stool design.
35. AGONAHENE GWA: Stool for the Agona-hene. This may also change from time to time.
36. EJISUHENE GWA: Stool for the Ejisuhene. Ejisu, a village 12 miles to Kumasi, features prominently in Asante history.
37. KUMAWUHENE GWA: Stool for the Kumawuhene. Kumawu was the town Okomfo Anokye was setting (together with Kumasi) that failed.
38. MAMPONGHENE GWA: The stool of the Mamponghene, who deputises in the absence of the Asantehene. His ancestors featured well in the Asante wars.
39. TAFOHENE GWA: Tafohene's stool. Rather like the 'nyansapow' (24) without the middle knot.
40. JUASOHENE GWA: Stool for the Juasohene. It has the 'nkonta' design (29) with a straight instead of circular sides.
41. AHANTA STATE STOOL: A ceremonial stool belonging to the paramount chief of the Ahanta state. The top scene depicting a chief and wife playing oware with a guard holding a gun and a musician entertaining. The lower scene shows a linguist and a state sword bearer, each bearing his staff of office.
42. GA STATE STOOL: The symbol of the antelope standing on top of an elephant is a proverbial Ga state symbol, meaning the top is reached by wisdom, never by size. The Ga were one of the few of the coastal tribes that survived the Ashanti wars.
43. WENCHIHENE GWA: Stool for the Wenchihene. Resembles the Mamponghene stool (38).
44. ADONTINHENE GWA: Stool for the Adontinhene. (This may also change). It is also like the Mamponghene stool which is a reverse of the Osrane (moon) stool symbol (9).



STOOLS SYMBOLISM

45

SIKA GWA KOFI

Apart from their everyday use as furniture, stools play quite a significant role in social as well religious matters. In social affairs they act as mere seats or as a symbol of authority. These chiefs' stools usually become objects for worship. They are "fed" and "given drinks", usually annually during "Odwira" (Akan) or "Homowo" (Ga) festivals.

Symbols of stools are either proverbial or abstract, and represent the beliefs and aspirations of the clan and her rulers. The "Kotoko" stool of the Asante symbolises the Asante as a nation ready to strike from all angles at any time. The Ga 'Antelope on an elephant' stool symbolises the wisdom of the tribe.

The most famous stool, of course, is the well-known "Sika Gwa Kofi", the Golden Stool, which is said to have been conjured from the heavens by Okomfo Anokye, chief priest of Osei Tutu, the then King of the Asante.

The Golden Stool lies on its side (above) on its special chair in public.

There are as many stools as there are chiefs, and the symbols are infinite.

This chart shows only a selection of some of the most interesting forms and shapes that are available, hence this is only to introduce the subject to the student who aspires to delve into traditional Ghanaian symbolism.

PLEASE NOTE: The spelling of the STOOL in the vernaculars differ considerably. In Akuapem Twi it is GUA, (agua) and in Asante twi is spelt DWA (adwa).

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Above: Poster purchased in Accra describing different stools and their meanings.

Ghana and death

An end is a new beginning

"To the people of Ghana, West Africa, death is not an end, but a transition to the spiritual realm of their ancestors."

- From the National Museum of Funeral History
(NMFH, 2025)

In Ghana there is a different approach to death than what I am used to. It is not hidden away but on display in every village and city. Literally. On posters and huge billboards all over town. As a country where the extended family holds quite a lot of importance and there are tight knit communities, the death of a person is a busy affair, with many involved and in attendance.

I myself attended one part of a funeral arrangement with my Uncle. Funerals generally being a sombre affair in my experience in Scandinavia, this funeral in Sefwi was more of a celebration of a life lived. There was of course sorrow and tears, but also loud modern music paired with traditional dances. Speeches that made the whole crowd laugh. A nearly endless procession of people coming to watch and pay their respects to family and friends.

This lighter-hearted reckoning with death can be seen in the decorative coffins sometimes commissioned for funerals. Often referred to as 'Fantasy coffins', they have become a trend across the country. In Ghana they can also be called "Abebuu Adekai" or "Receptacles of Proverbs". Originally inspired by the figurative sedan chairs used during festivals for the transportation of chiefs, the first coffin of its kind was a cocoa pod meant to be used during a festival but the unexpected death of a chief led to his family wanting to bury him in it. Rather than to let it go to waste. Not long after, the maker of these coffins, Seth Kane Kwei, also experienced a loss. His grandmother had always dreamt of flying, so he made her an airplane shaped coffin so that her "spirit could fly away". (Bagnetto, L. A., & Mensah, K, 2025; Museum of International Folk Art, 2020).

I wanted this project to take the same approach as Seth Kane Kwei and his Abebuu Adekais. Not to create buildings steeped in sorrow or nostalgia of what could have been, but rather to embrace the new, celebrating my grandfather and the ideas that still live on. That they, would not just die, but transition, grow and develop.







Top: A funeral in Sefwi-Dwenase
Bottom Left: A funerary poster in Sefwi
Bottom Right: A person wearing traditional dress with prints of my grandfather on it.

A Context

Context

Location, location, location.

Sefwi in Ghana lies approximately 5662 kilometers away from Malmö in Sweden.

From Malmö Sweden to Accra Ghana

Equator

Equator

World Map

Africa and Europe

1 : 50 000 000

0 800 1 600 2 400 3 200 4 000

Kilometres

Burkina Faso

Mali

Guinea

Benin

Togo

Ghana

Cote d'Ivoire

Liberia

Accra

Kumasi

Sefwi Wiawso

Ghana

and the West African States

1 : 5 000 000

0 100 200 300 400

Kilometres

Sefwi - Wiawso

The village on the hill

"It is not known for certain when the name Sefwi came to be applied to this area. The etymology of the word 'Sefwl' indicates that the state is of comparatively recent creation.

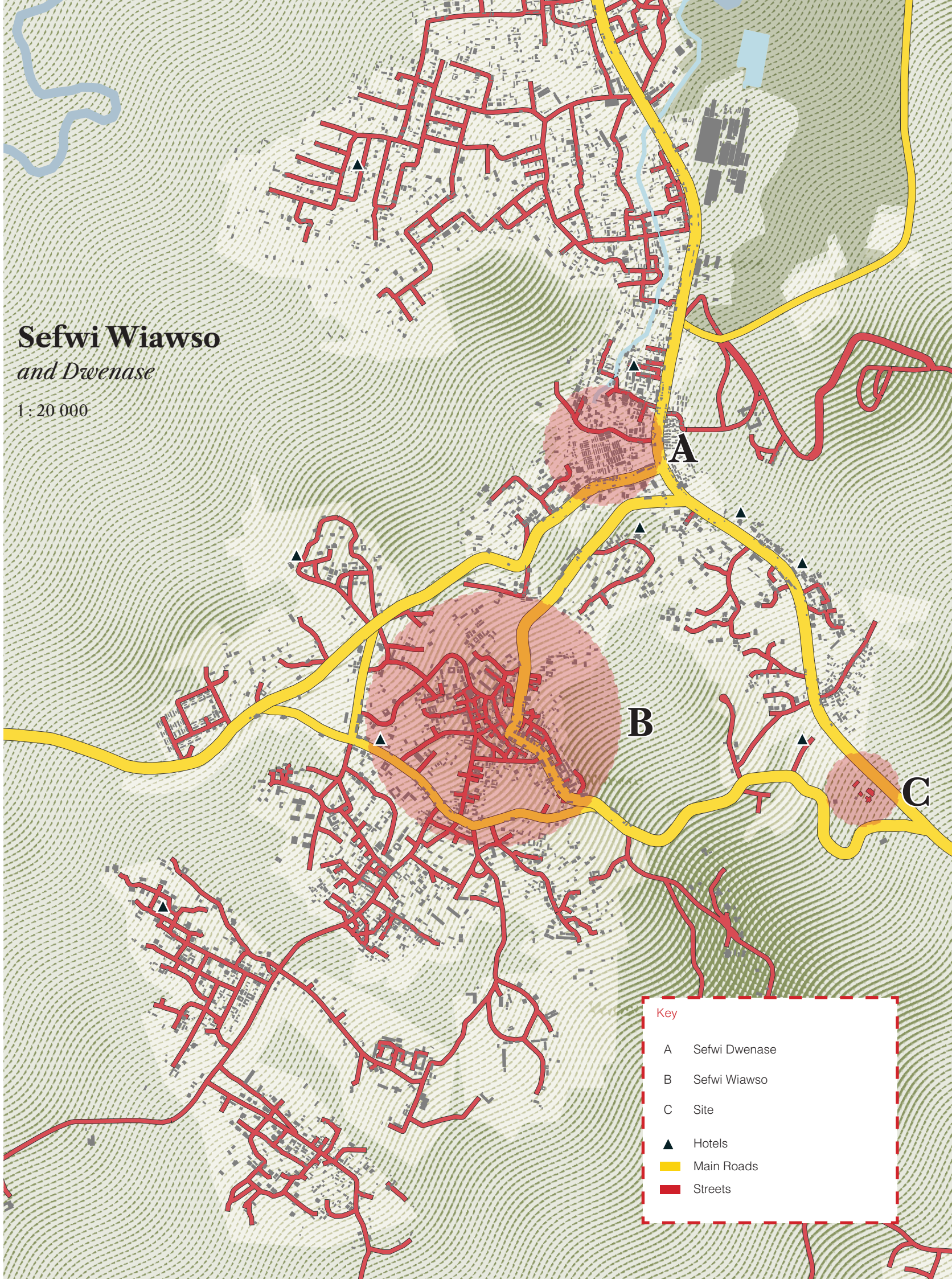
*Sefwi is said to be the contraction of the Twi phrase, *Esa awie or 'Esa hie meaning 'War is over'."*

(Daaku, 1971)

"Since the middle of the Seventeenth century this vast stretch of territory has served as a centre of refuge for people escaping from the political centralization policies of their neighbours to the north and east. Refugees from Bono-Takylman, Wench I, Adanse, Denkyira, Assln and Asante found ready welcome In this territory.

It appears that the Awowln rulers who formerly controlled modern Sefwl territory adopted an open door policy as a measure to Increase the population of their state. Nor has the Influx of people into Sefwi ceased up to the present day. Its virgin forest serves as a bait for cocoa farmers and timber merchants from all over Ghana."

(Daaku, 1971)



A local palette

Life in colour

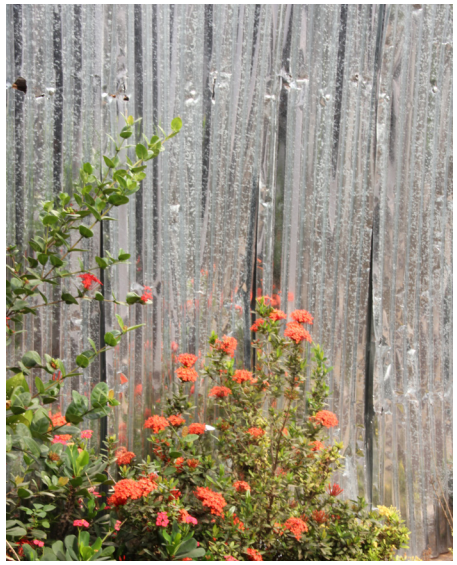
I find Sefwi to be a wonderful place. Calm, yet vibrant. It is filled with beautiful textures and colours. From the first crow of the roosters, the whole town is flooded with music and the smell of food, freshly harvested, freshly cooked.

From clear blue skies, to silent red thunder storms, the weather can change in an instant.

What feels like its always been there contrasted against a backdrop of the new. Man-made and natural side by side. Patterns are found everywhere.

























Above, Left and Previous: Photos of Sefwi Wiawso





For eight weeks, I traveled, photographed, measured, drew and ate my way across Ghana. From Cape Coast to Tamale, visiting a plethora of different people and sites.

Four of the eight weeks were spent in Sefwi Wiawso. A lack of existing drawings meant measuring and photographing everything, with some help from new friends and family. This extensive documentation led to a lot of discoveries that ultimately made the project much more personal. A closeness to the materials created a want to highlight them, rather than to replace.

"The Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly is one of the nine (9) MMDAs in the Western North Region, Ghana. The Sefwi Wiawso Municipality is located in the North Eastern part of the Western North Region and has Sefwi Wiawso as its capital town which also doubles as the regional capital of Western North Region.

The Municipality has a total land size of 1,280 sq. Km. It is bounded to the west by Juaboso, Bodi and Sefwi Akontombra, to the east by Bibiani-Anhwiaso- Bekwai, to the south-east by Wassa Amenfi West and to the north by Asunafo South in the Ahafo region.

The population of Sefwi Wiawso Municipality is 151,220. With a population growth rate of 0.8% from the 2021 PHC and all factors affecting population changes held constant. It has a population density of 118.1 person per sq.km

The high pressure on existing socio-economic infrastructure and the constant demand for the expansion and provision of basic infrastructure coupled with regional capital status is critical fallout of this population phenomenon."

(Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly, 2024)



Above and Left: Sefwi Wiawso

Materials

The Forestry Commission

17.03.25

Conveniently, the Kenroses hotel is located right next to the Forestry Commission of Sefwi-Wiawso, so I pay them a visit.

A member of the team at the Forestry Commission was kind enough to sit down with me between trips into the jungle. I wanted to know more about the local species', their maintenance and their structural capacity. I was also interested in finding out current trends, which were the most sought after for construction projects.

As I understood it, the following were the species of trees that they preferred were used in construction projects as they were not currently endangered:

Dahoma	(Popular)
Esa	(Common, Redwood)
Dante	(Hardwood)
Esa	(Hardwood)
Ofram	(Softwood)
Emre	
Edinam	(Redwood)

For Finishes, Chen Chen, Sapele or Syba Veneer was recommended.

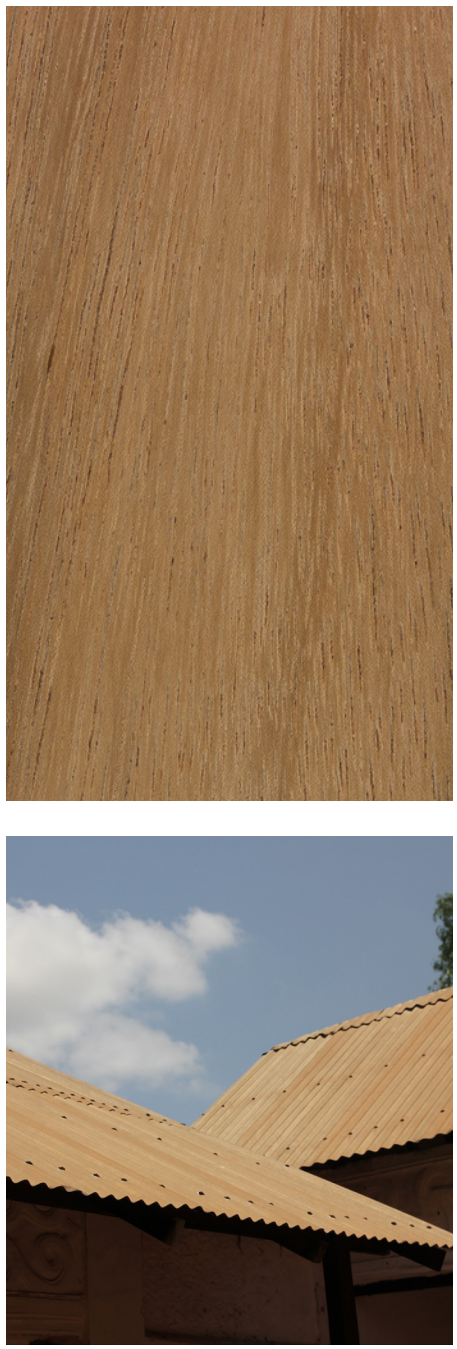
The timbers that are currently endangered and/or banned in the region are:

Hyedua	(Endangered)
Rosewood	(Banned)
Papao	(Endangered)

Following our discussion, I have decided to go forward with Dahoma for structural elements. It is a popular and quality local timber. For finishes, Sapele will be used, for much of the same reasons, as well as for its lovely deep colour.

Chosen materials to work with





Selected Materials

Top Left: Sapele timber typical texture and colour
Top Right: Dahoma timber typical texture and colour
Bottom Left: Clay from the site
Bottom Right: Corrugated Metal

The traditional

Indigenous building techniques and their conservation: A visit to the traditional Fetish (Bosom in Twi) houses of Kumasi





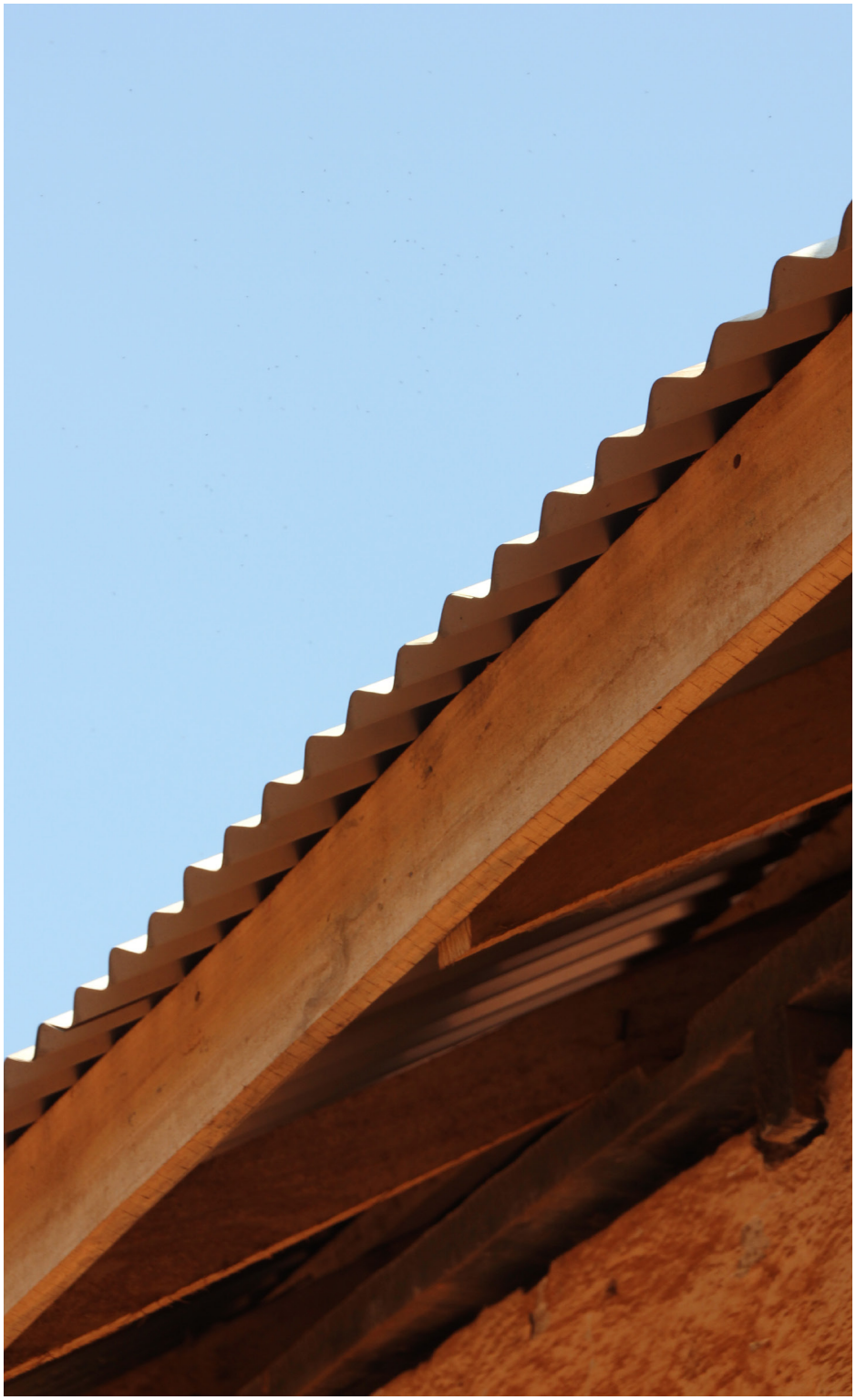








Above, Left and previous: Details from various Kumasi traditional Fetish (or Bosom) houses.











Above and Left: Details from various Kumasi traditional Fetish (or Bosom) houses.





Above and Left: Details from various Kumasi traditional Fetish (or Bosom) houses.

Courtyards

Details and layout

28.03.25

I visit a few of the remaining traditional buildings in Kumasi, guided by Kwame, a manager of the sites.

He informs me that the courtyard is central to life and customs. Ornate decorations were saved for special buildings but could be applied to public ones.

There was a different shrine per family and per deity. The bigger the family, the bigger the compound.

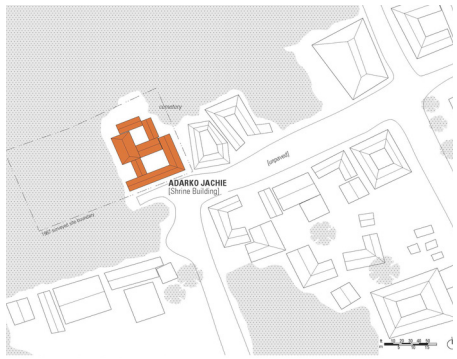
What I also notice is that the walls are significantly thicker than those constructed today and are all clad in clay. I am told that this helped with maintaining cooler temperatures and that could certainly be felt. It was a pleasant climate in the courtyard and buildings, much more temperate than the modern buildings I had stayed in thus far, with significantly thinner walls.

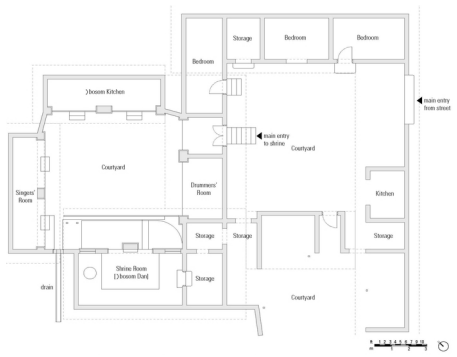
Each shrine also had a different tree, shrub or flower in their central courtyard.

The roofs of the compounds sloped inwards and outwards. Removing rain whilst also letting it in, watering the vegetation within.

As shown in the plans on the right, there was a place for everything in this buildings, each had their own. These are all ideas from rare surviving examples of traditional architecture (Haney, 2013) that could be applied to my site.







Top: Tree or shrub found in courtyards of typical Bosom houses

Middle: Site Plan of the Adarko Jachie Bosom house by Community Consortium

Bottom: Plan of the Adarko Jachie Bosom house by Community Consortium













Above: Details from various Kumasi traditional Fetish (or Bosom) houses

The contemporary

Contemporary building techniques: A visit to a current residential building project in Kumasi









Above and Left: Details from a current project in Kumasi designed by Paa Ekow.

Precedents

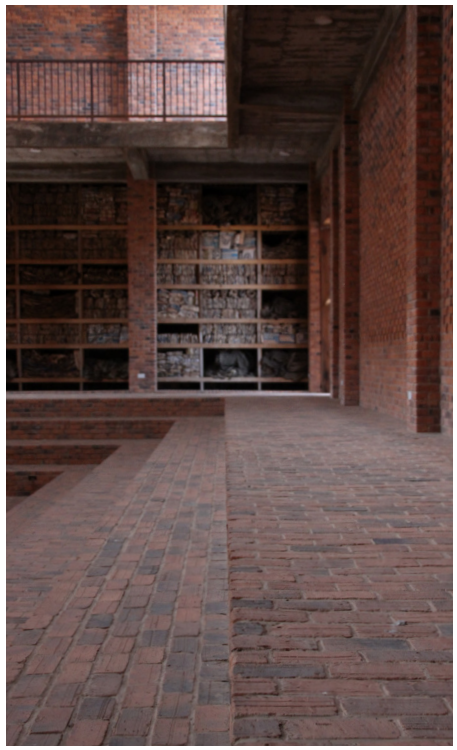
Red Clay Studios

My visit to Red Clay Studios on the outskirts of Tamale was incredibly inspiring. It took place well into my time in Ghana, when I had come quite far with my design. It confirmed the viability of many of the ideas that I had developed.

Red Clay is comprised of several exhibition halls and a studio that are all already up and running. A restaurant and residency were being constructed. Thus, it is a successful example of a large new art hall on the edge of a town, engaging locals and tourists, naturally ventilated and open before being finished. All traits I hoped to include in my own project.















Above and Left: Photos from visit to Red Clay Studios.

Precedents - continued













Above and Left: Photos of various buildings and details Accra, Cape Coast , Kumasi and Sefwi.

A Survey





Flora

Above, a display of gathered plant life from in and around the site. Pressed and kept in books and journals for the duration of the trip.

Arrival

Nana's hotel

Excerpt from journal:

Hard to not get excited as we drive in a banged up taxi to the hotel. Don't want to get excited to be disappointed. But the backdrop alone. Up high with the jungle below. A small village. Semi-sleepy Sunday. People laying low like the early morning heat. Slowly stretching across the land.

My tripod broke. Quick stop at liberty fm 92.7. The giant of the west. I get to borrow their mega tripod.

Everyone knows someone. We all help each other. Pass it on.

30 degree hot survey.

Not having seen any photos of the site or building prior…

The building I am met with is a complex mix of styles.

A typical large pitched roof. A complex shape for me to understand but one that is seen on many other buildings around. Doric and Corinthian columns. Concrete and blockwork. Timber roof structure. Arches and squares. Tiled pool and Jacuzzi.



Above: Sketch of the hotel as I first came across it.

Measured survey

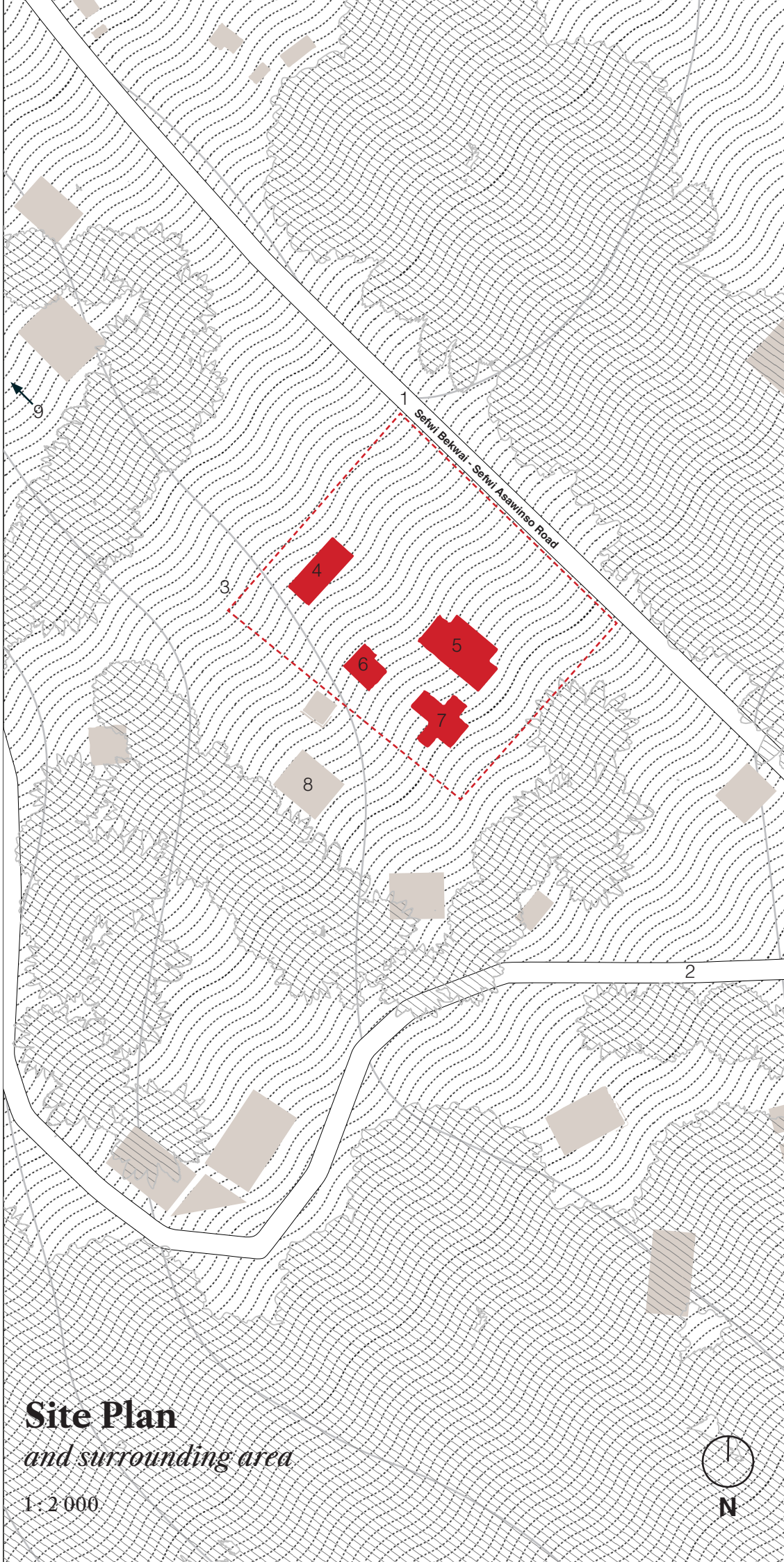
The Site:
A hotel, a restaurant, a laundry building and a pool house

Key

1. Main road to Dwenase
2. Road up to Wiawso
3. Assumed site boundary
4. Building one
5. Building two
6. Building three
7. Building four
8. Abandoned project
9. Towards Hotel Queen Elizabeth

Site buildings

Other buildings



Site Plan
and surrounding area

1: 2 000

Sammy and Kaykay to the rescue

Due to the sheer size of the plot and buildings, my Uncle enlists the help of our relative; Kaykay and a local jack-of-all-trades, Sammy (also goes by Kwabenah).

With their help I start to undertake the task of measuring and photographing all of the four structures. There are no existing drawings to available.

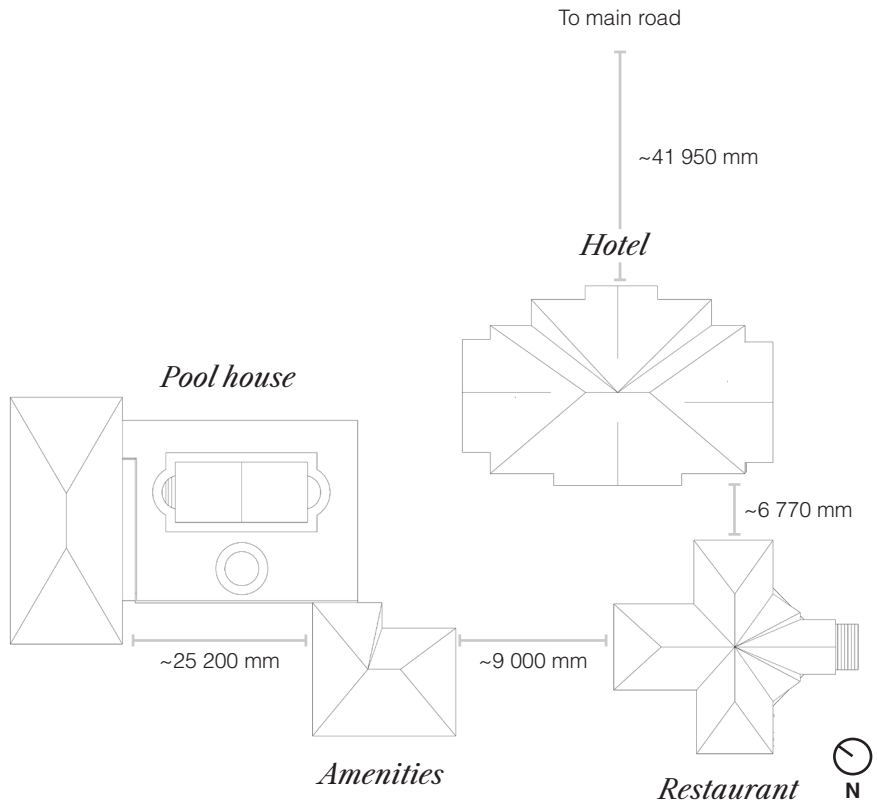




Existing roof plan

The roofs of the existing buildings are of a more complex roof structure.

Below are their assumed forms based off measurements and elevation photographs, as well as their distances from one another.

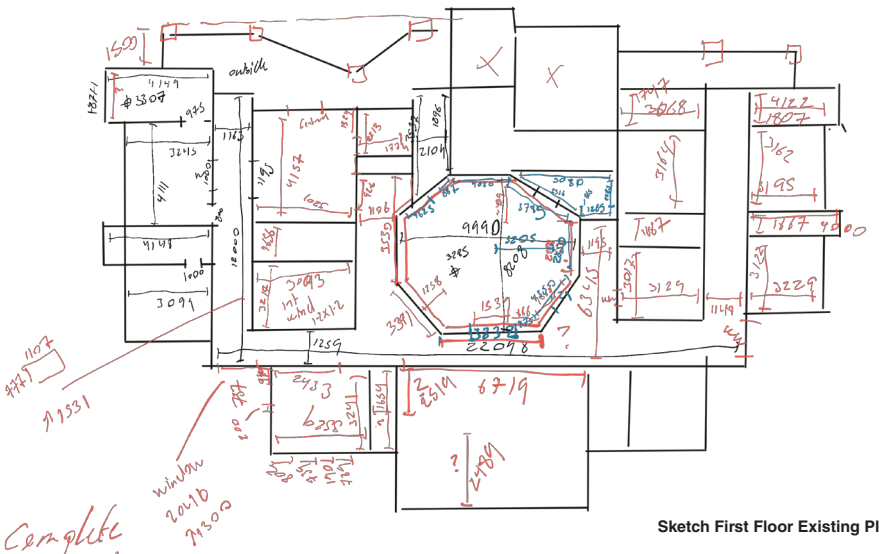


Left: Kaykay and Sammy helping on site.
Above: Roof plan and distances of buildings to each other.

The hotel

Survey

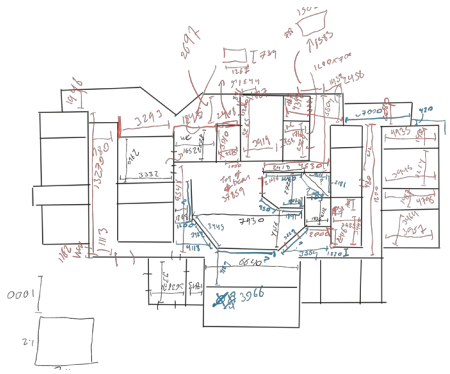
Sketch plans and descriptions



Sketch First Floor Existing Plan

The hotel consists of two floors and approximately 20 hotel rooms and approximately 54 individual rooms. A centrally enclosed core inside the building is very dark and houses the only staircase.

There are three large terrace balconies.



Sketch Second Floor Existing Plan

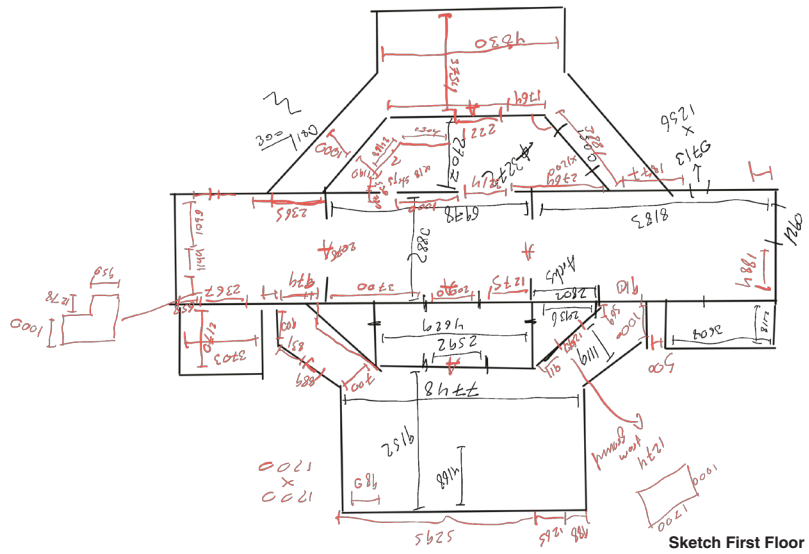


Photogrammetry captured of Hotel building to assist in modelling.

The restaurant

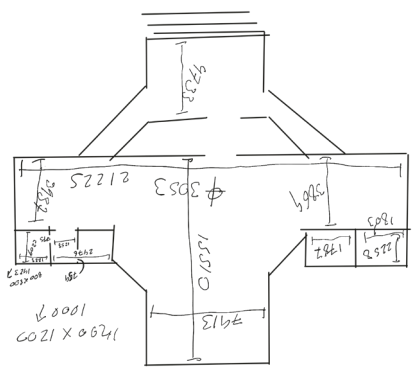
Survey

Sketch plans and descriptions



Sketch First Floor Existing Plan

The restaurant also consists of two floors and approximately 14 rooms. Similarly, a centrally enclosed core inside the building is very dark and houses the only staircase.



Sketch Second Floor Existing Plan

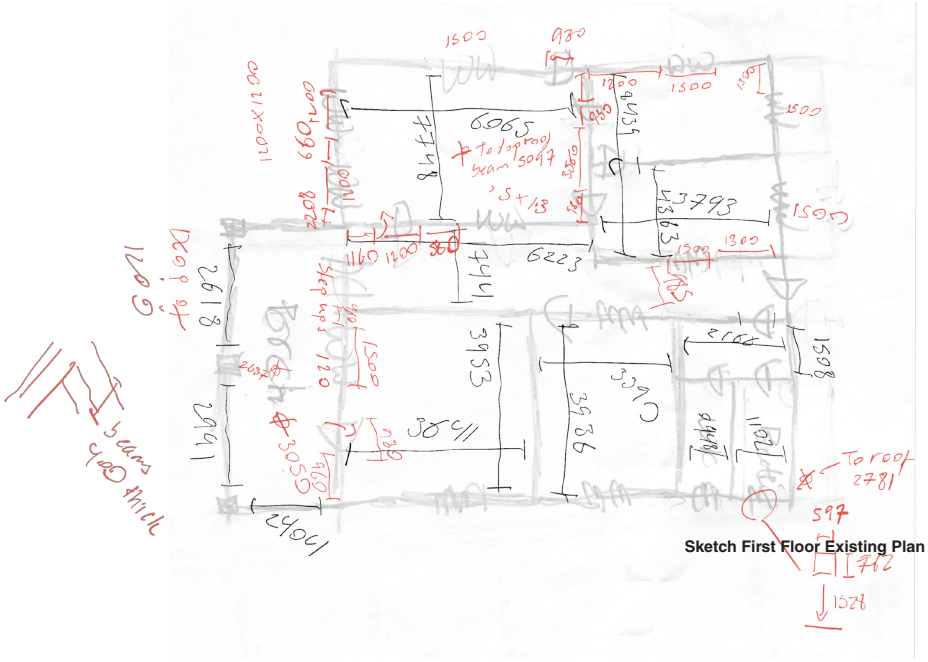


Photogrammetry captured of Restaurant building to assist in modelling.

The laundry (amenities)

Survey

Sketch plans and descriptions



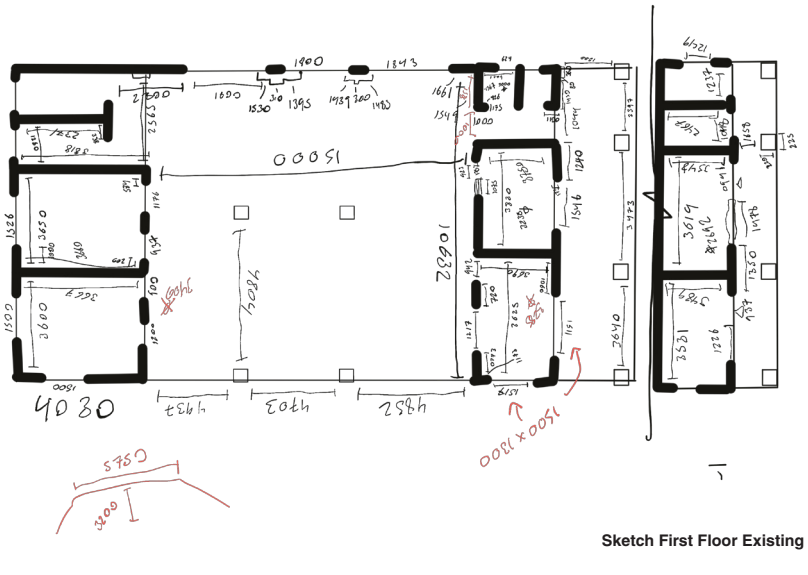
Sketch First Floor Existing Plan

This building features a porch and a large room that is connected to two others. There are a further two rooms as well as an assumed WC room.

The pool house and pool

Survey

Sketch plans and descriptions

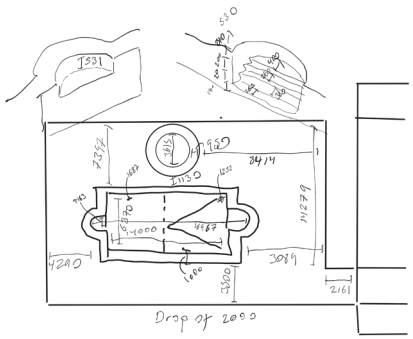


Sketch First Floor Existing Plan

The pool house consists of a large open space and four rooms. There is also a WC space and small storage rooms connected to a balcony.

Underneath, there are a further four rooms of differing sizes.

The pool area features a tiled pool and circular hot tub.



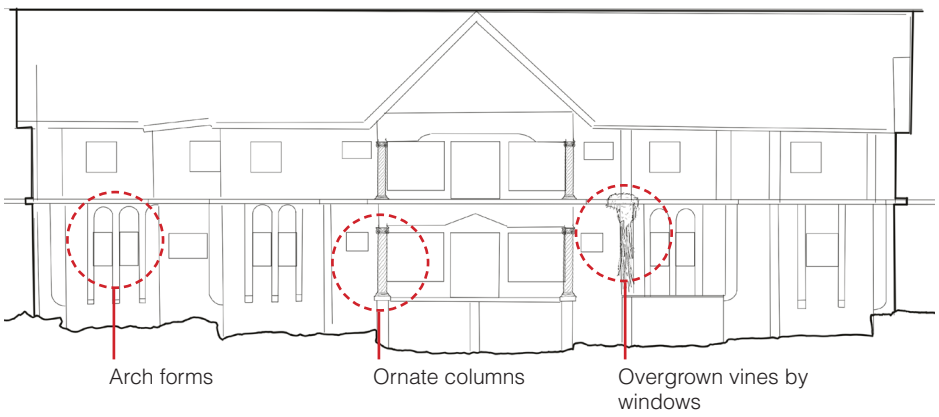
Existing elevations

Hotel

As it is the most complex, and the building I was most sure that I was going to work with, it is the only one that has the existing elevations included.

These elevations highlight the exterior details of the building, which will make it easier to compare what was kept and what was lost.

Some details that will be taken forward have been highlighted. Arched forms, ornate columns and vegetation outside of the windows.



North - East Elevation



South - West Elevation



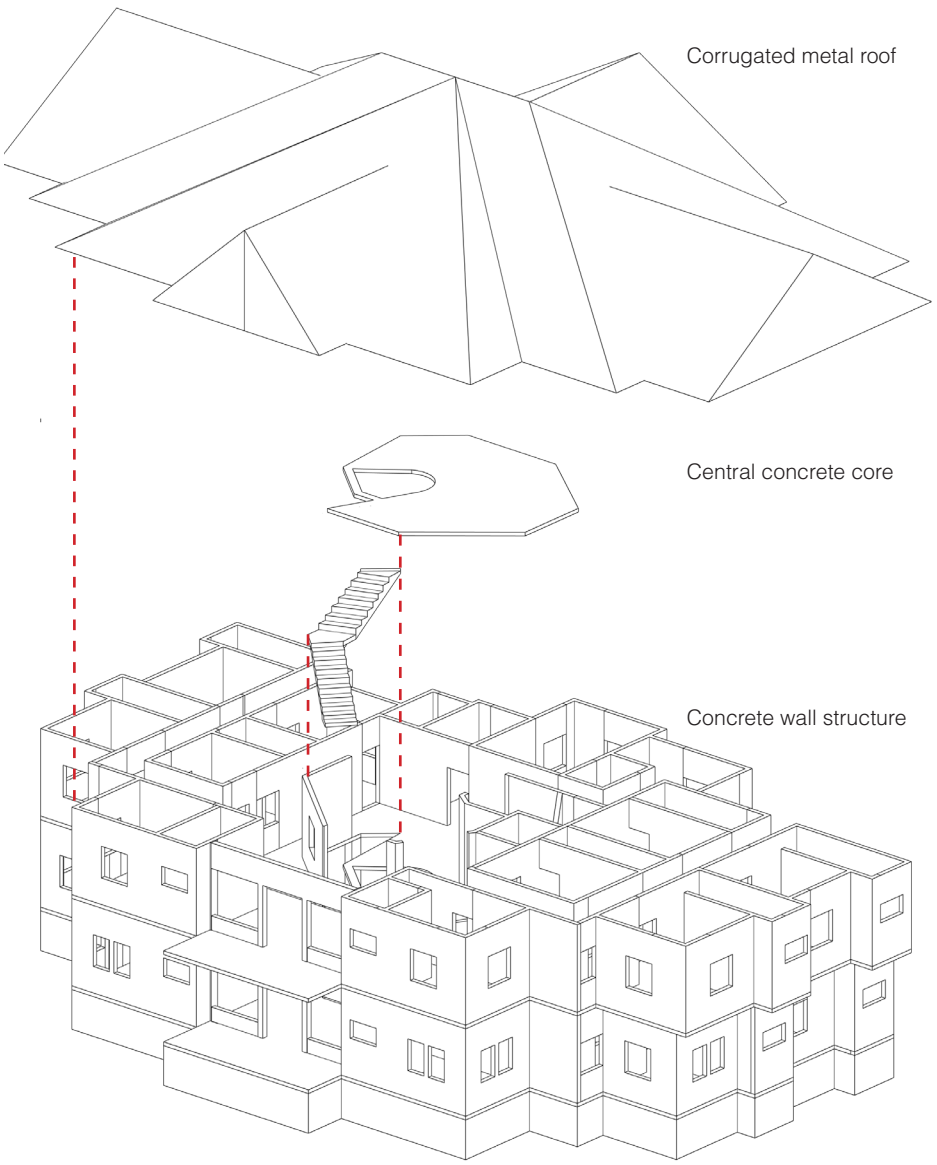
North - West Elevation

Above and Left: Existing elevations of the main hotel building.

Three dimensional models

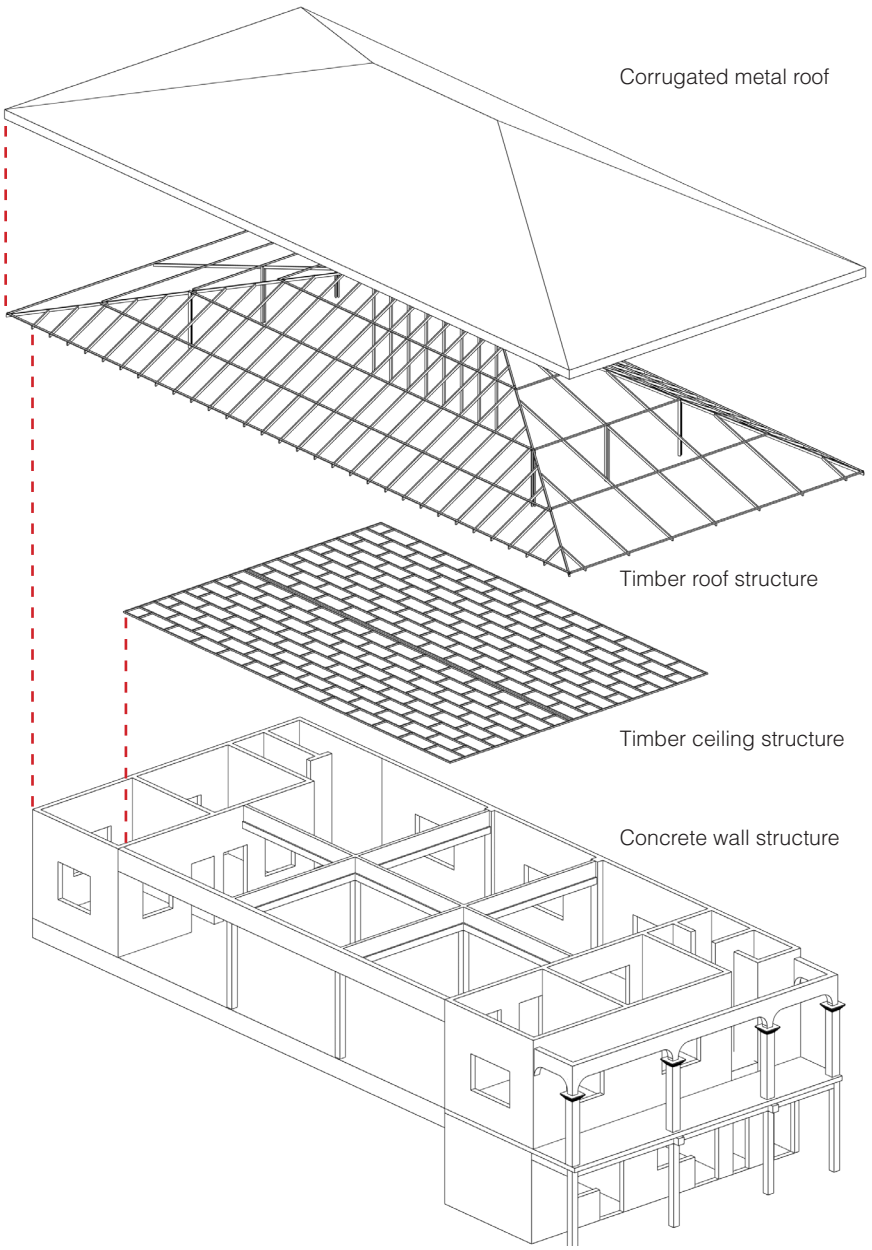
Hotel

Below is a simplified model of the existing hotel building.



Pool house

Below is a simplified model of the existing pool house as well as its roof structure, which is typical across all of the buildings on site.



Above and Left: 3D models of the existing structure of the main hotel and pool house buildings.

Details

Unique features and interesting details

Across the site there are numerous details that were picked up on. From the tilework, to the ornate columns. From the rich red clay soil to the dust patterns on the concrete walls.

A few such details are captured below.









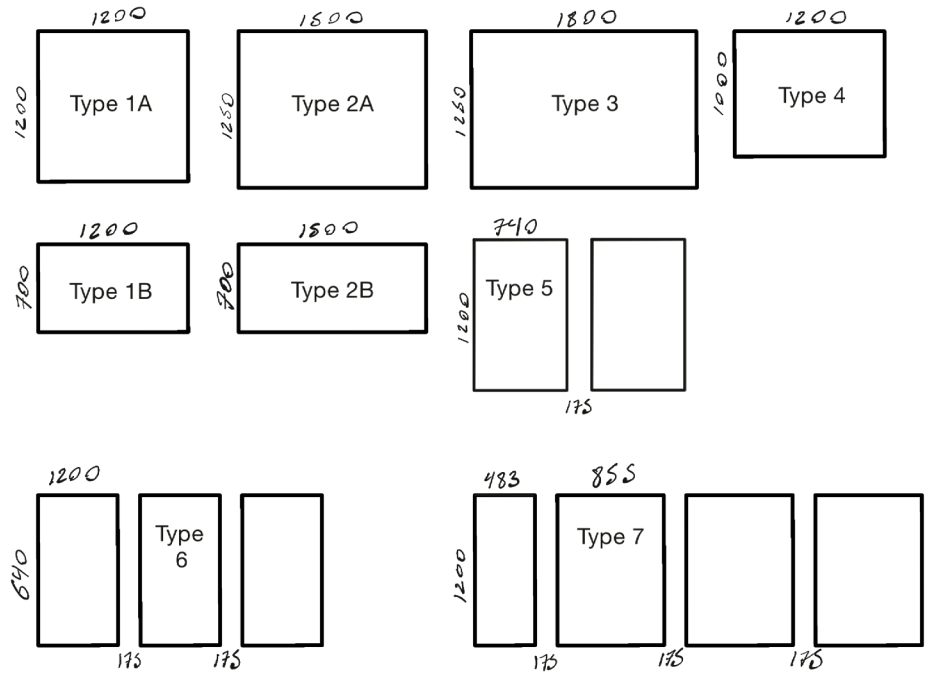




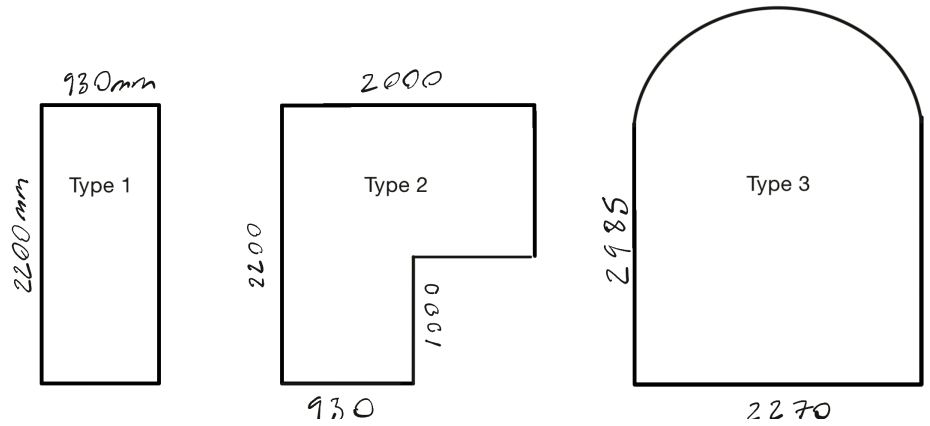


Schedules for openings on site

Existing window openings schedule



Existing door openings schedule

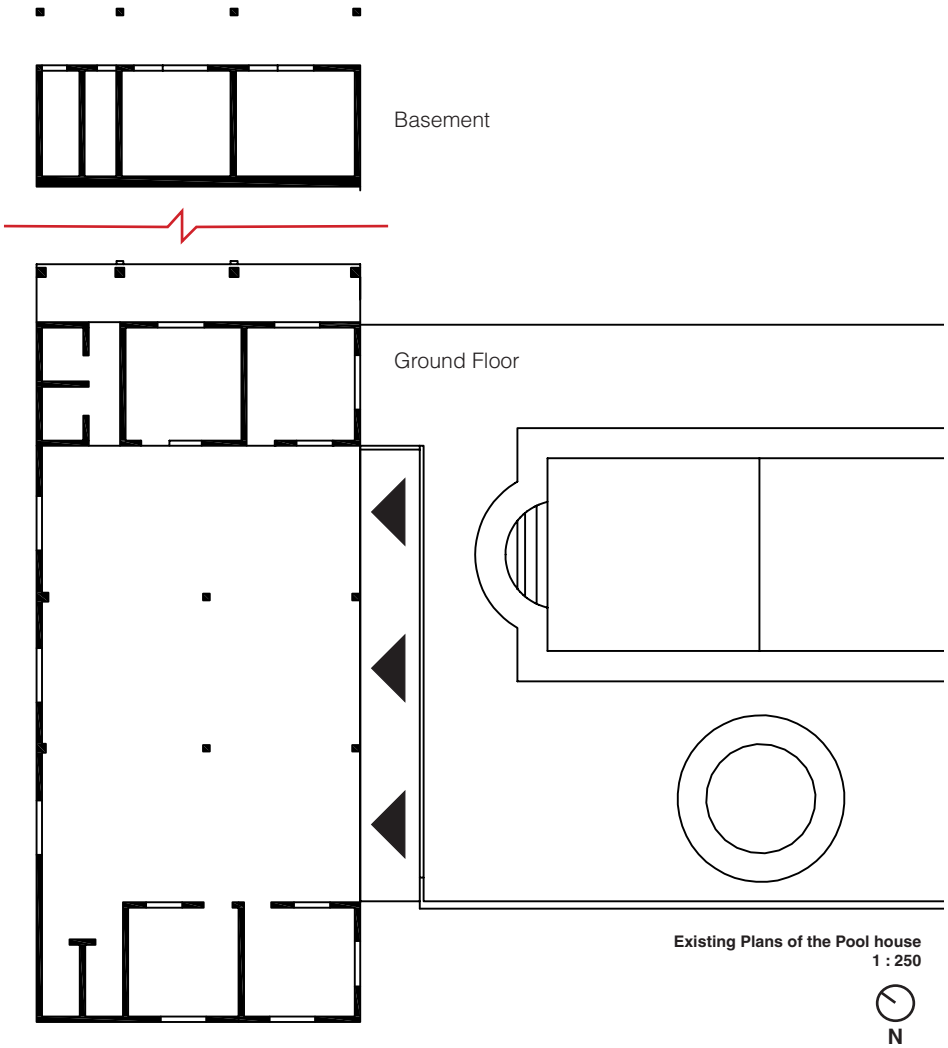


Above: Simple schedule of existing window and door openings.
Left: Details from the site.

Existing plans

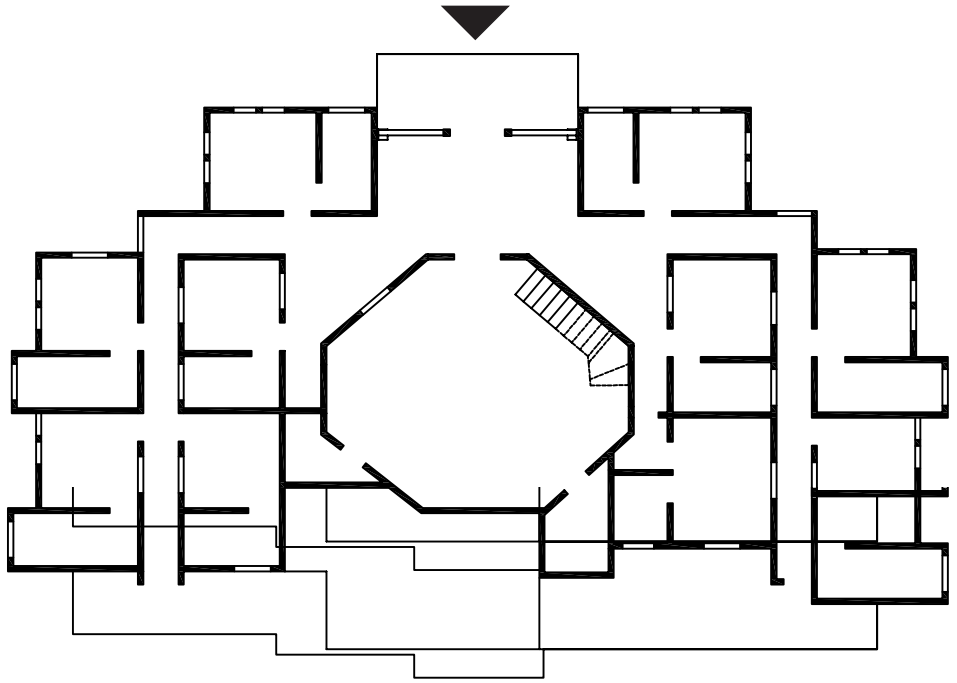
Hotel, Pool house, laundry and restaurant

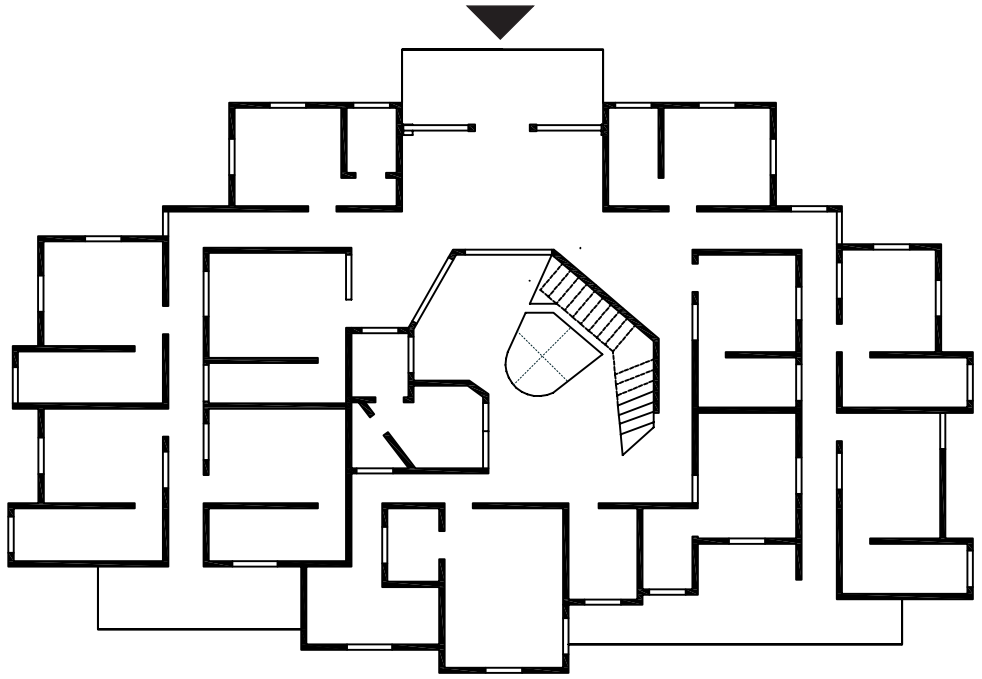
The following drawings show the four structures' existing walls and openings as they are today.



Existing Plans of the Pool house
1 : 250

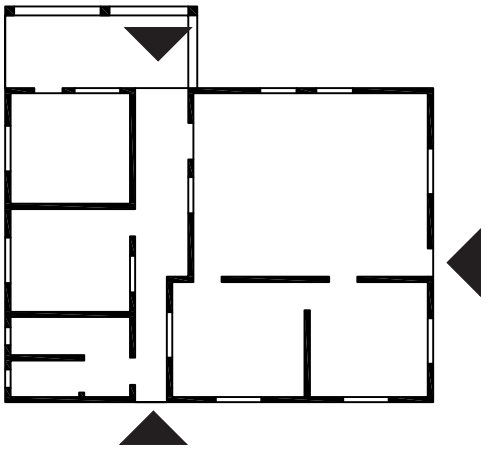
N

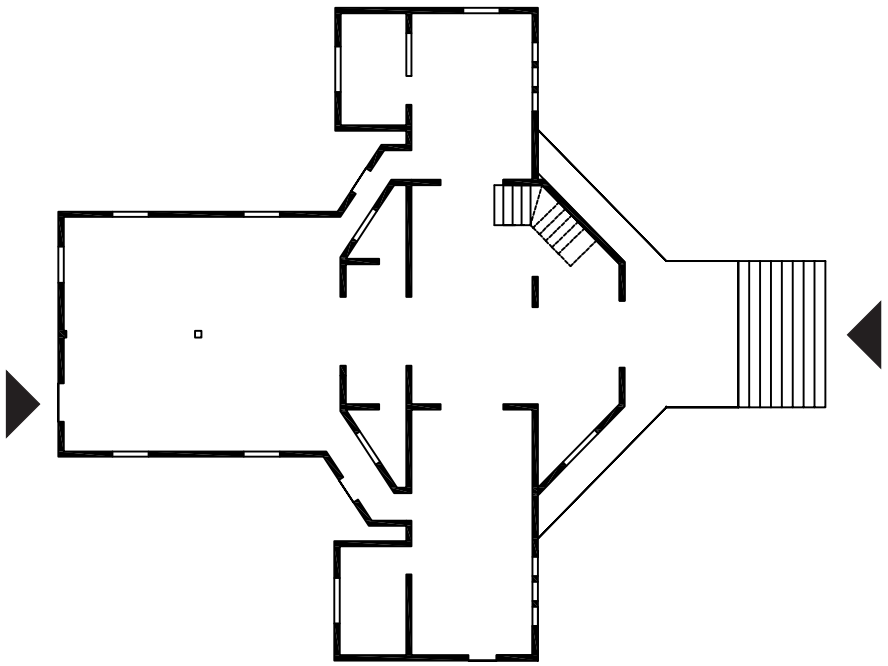




Existing Plans of the Hotel
1 : 250

N





Existing Plans of the ground floors of the Amenities and Restaurant buildings, respectively.
1 : 250

N

Photographic survey

Documentation of the project buildings and their surroundings











Above: Photos from the site.
Left: Photos from the main road on the site.







Above Top: Photo of existing amenities building.
Above Bottom: Photo of existing restaurant building.
Left: Photo of existing hotel roof.









Above Top: Photo of site from south approach.
Above Bottom: Photo of site from south approach.
Left Top: Photo of existing pool building.
Left Bottom: Photo of existing hotel building.







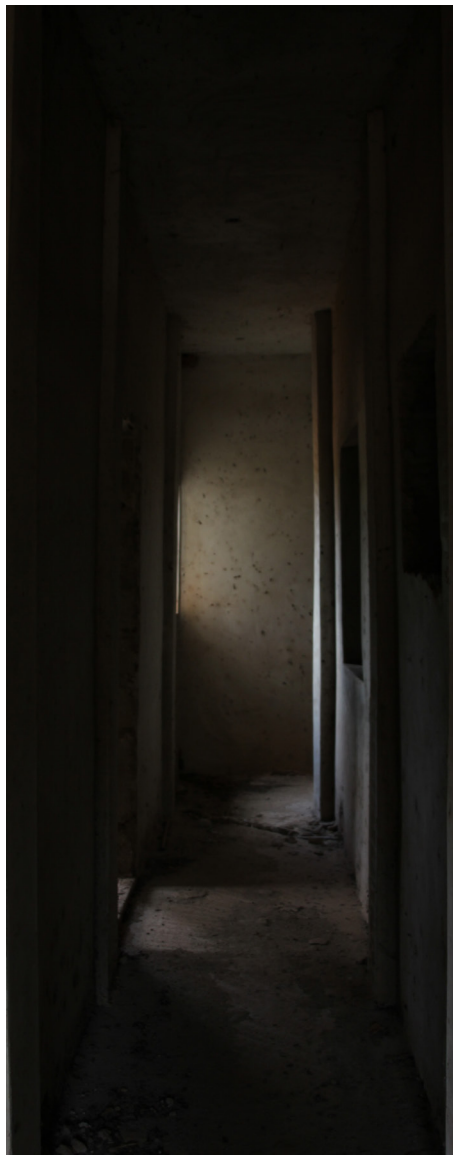






Above Top: Interior photo of existing hotel core.
Above Bottom: Interior photo of existing hotel core.
Left: Photos of textures, shapes and forms on site.









Photos of existing hallways in the hotel and pool house buildings.









Above Top: Interior photo of existing pool house.
Above Bottom: Photo of existing pool.
Left Top: Photo of surrounding jungle.
Left Bottom: Photo of main road on site.

Old ghost, new spirit.

Traces of life on site

Bird skulls, gin bottles, DVD's and Guano. All denizens leave traces. Traces of our lives. Of our tastes. Even at this semi-abandoned hotel on the outskirts of town, there are many archaeological finds to be had.

I pick up a keycard. Kwasi. Drivers Mate. Engineering. Expiry date 6/30/2009. Seeing that someone with my name stood where I stood at least 16 years ago reminds me that it does not take a long time for layers to build up. Layers that become historical layers. Historical layers that build a narrative, a legend and eventually myth. Stories we remember and ones that we make up.

When working with the existing, we are working with layers. Conservationists x-raying and peeling off the layers of a painting. Archaeologists scraping away layers of the earth. But the question arises of where to stop. Which layer is most important, the most impactful, the most valuable, and to who? Remove too much and you end up with a blank canvas. Nothing remains. It is a difficult balance to which there is perhaps no 'right' answer.

What then becomes important is the documentation and archival of these layers. For posterity to see and decide for themselves, even if it does not still exist in the physical.

Much of the early work undertaken on site was documentation. Hours spent photographing all the living and non-living elements I could find. Trying my best to also capture the immaterial. An eerie morning. The soft warmth of early evening.

Layers has become a keyword in regards to how one can read this project. Layers kept and layers lost. The layers of narrative. Things mentioned once but not brought forward. Spotted briefly and never seen again. The layers built for future denizens to uncover.









Above: Photos of the different denizens previously, and currently, using the site.

Valuation and evaluation of condition

Survey

The four buildings on the site are in relatively good condition. There are little-to-no cracks in the concrete structure and the timber roof structure did not appear to have succumbed to rot, however there was significant rust on the metal roofs.

Site Condition

The site is on a main road into Sefwi from the East, nested on a hill, slightly away from the road. Satellite imagery and discussions with family have revealed that, until recently it was overgrown with lots of trees lining the boundary and spread across the site. These have now all been removed but traces have been left, such as the stumps growing out of the pool.

The ground is made up of a rich red clay.

Structural and general condition

I am not able to confirm that the buildings are completely structurally sound. However, from spending time there, measuring and surveying, it appears that they are in good condition and could be worked with.

The roof structure, stairs in the restaurant, the stairs in the hotel, the pool and the hot tub would need to be replaced as they show significant wear.

Materials

All of the structures are mainly composed of concrete; a ~125mm inner made up of concrete blocks (likely a mixture of sand and cement), with a ~27,50mm cement finish on either side. This gives them a solid and robust feeling.

The cement finish gives a great texture and on the outside, dust has accumulated to create lovely, colourful patterns. These textures would be great to keep in some places.

The roof structures appear somewhat temporary to keep out the rain. They appeared to mainly be constructed of 2x4's.

On top sits corrugated metal roofs of varying shapes and complexities. A popular contemporary material used by almost all the neighbouring buildings.

Fauna

A wide array of animals were encountered during site visits, many of which had either made their homes within the buildings or often simply just passed through. These included, bats, various birds, cows, toads, dragonflies, snails and goats.

Whilst it would be difficult to keep a bats nest in the building, keeping the site open for the animals to maintain their routes through would be ideal.



Above: Photo of hallway from within existing restaurant building on site.

Conclusions from survey

From conducting the survey, my ambitions will be to keep, and to maintain, most of the existing buildings on the site.

This aligns with my belief in the importance in working with what already exists. Not only will this save Co2 emissions through the embodied carbon of all the cement produced to create the existing structures, but it will also challenge Ghana's outlook on building maintenance. After all, the greenest building is the one that already exists (Adam, 2019).

Most of the existing openings are quite generous and can be used without alteration. However, new openings may be introduced, but here the existing can be utilised. New doors can be placed where window openings once were, reducing construction waste.

As I traveled around, I saw many buildings, including ones that are culturally significant, in a state of disrepair. I am told that, in general, there is not a strong culture of maintenance and repair when it comes to buildings. There could be a number of contributing factors to this, but most are due to financing.

Difficult economical circumstances will naturally put building repair low on the list of priorities within a country. However, in many other areas of industry, this is not the case, especially on a local level. Everywhere, people were repairing and maintaining their goods. Mobile phones, laptops, windows and cars. As with anywhere, many of the objects we use daily are a significant investment and we strive to maintain them. In Sefwi, like in many villages across the world, there is a wealth of knowledge in terms of repair of goods, probably due in part to the distance to larger cities. This leads to a need for self-reliance. In terms of time and money, it is more financially viable to repair than to buy new. Needless to say, it is also much better for the environment.

The same should be said of our buildings. By showing that by working carefully with a somewhat dated building instead of demolishing it, may help to set a precedent in the area. Small interventions can be made to achieve significant gains in light, ventilation and pleasantness.

It will also demonstrate that the investment in the structures already poured, does not need to be lost, meaning there is now budget to invest in other important aspects, such as quality of finishing materials and landscaping.

The site, like its surroundings, seems to be fertile ground for local flora to grow. Here I will aspire to cultivate lush greenery that will provide habitats for the displaced fauna, create green spaces for locals and visitors to enjoy and help to maintain cool temperatures across the site.

Four important meetings

Though I met a whole host of people, the following interactions had a strong influence on the project and the direction it ended up taking.

Banahene

Lecturer at KNUST and head of the cultural heritage course



In this meeting we discussed the schools of thought concerning cultural heritage and the built environment, as well as the challenges involved in changing peoples perceptions as to the value of said ‘built’ heritage.

The school itself is an important part of the architectural history of Ghana. It was great to meet the teachers, students, and to generally get a feel for the direction architecture was heading in at the school.

Kwame

Management of Kumasi Traditional Houses



Kwame showed me around some of the remaining Traditional Asante Houses in Kumasi.

Here I learned of the lasting traditions in terms of organisation of space, the benefits of traditional building techniques and the difficulties in maintenance and in finding funding.

Emmanuel

Worker at the hotel Kenroses in Sefwi. Part-time artist and would be architect



Emmanuel and I spoke at length about hotels in Sefwi. How the Kenroses was growing and changing, current trends in styles and in visitors.

We spoke of his interest in architecture when he was younger, but that the family could not afford the fees. He still creates art and explained that many in the region of course share similar passions but, there is no outlet or economic benefit there, yet.

xxxx

Art student and volunteer at Red Clay Studios, Tamale



Unfortunately, I did not catch the name of my guide around Red Clay Studios, but they did a great job in conveying the ambition behind the Art space and its various rooms and halls.

It also proved that it is viable to create new art spaces, even on the edges of a town or city, that engage both on a local and international level. Blending local, traditional and modern styles.

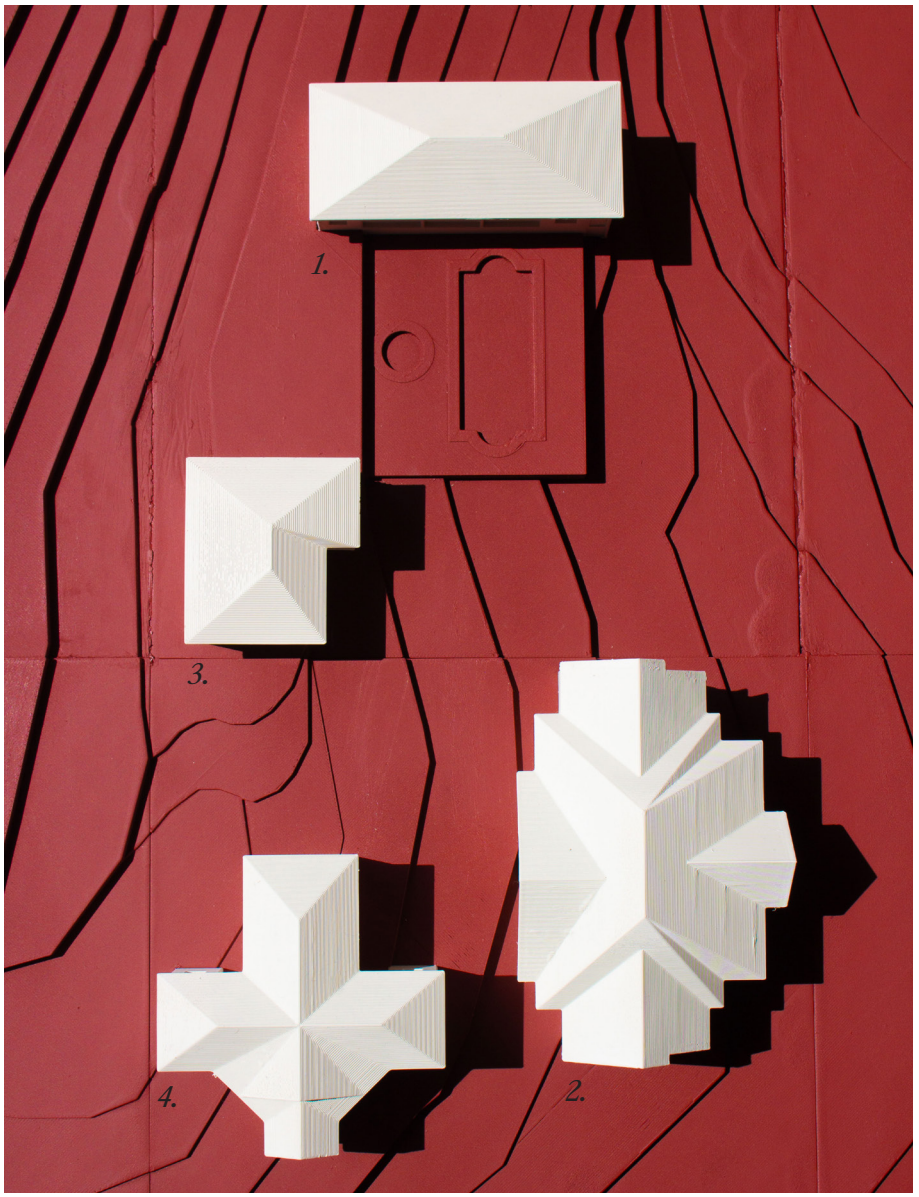
A Proposal

Proposal

Designs, concepts and development

Scope

The project focuses on three main areas. The hotel, the pool house and the access to the site. The other two buildings have been considered in conjunction with the site proposal and their connection to the other buildings.



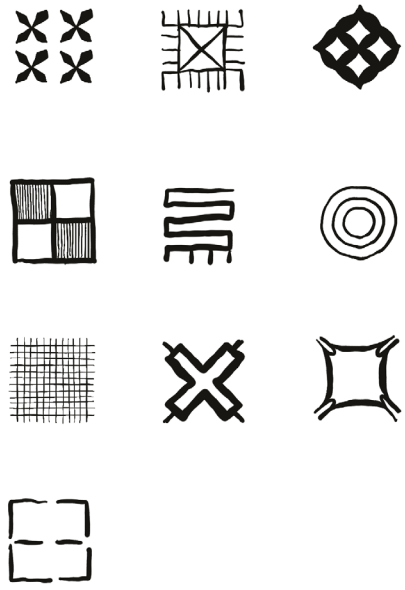
1. Hotel
2. Pool house
3. Amenities
4. Restaurant

Above: Physical model showing the existing buildings and slope levels on site.
Left: Terrain of the region

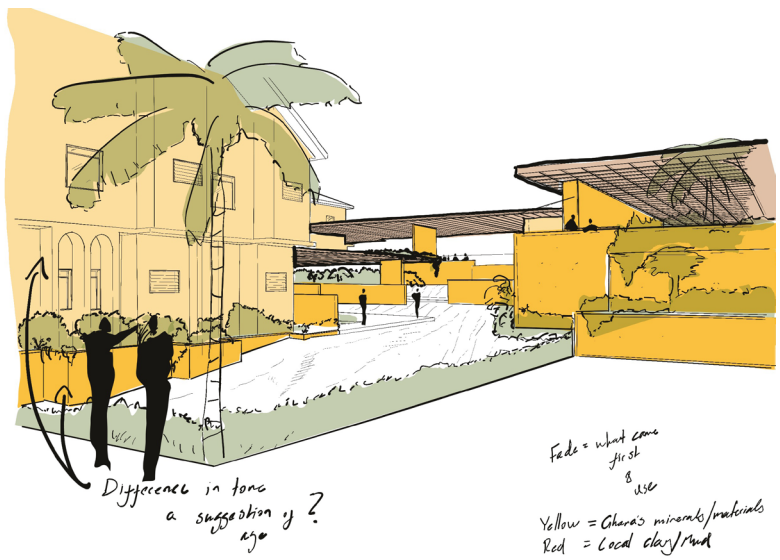
Site development

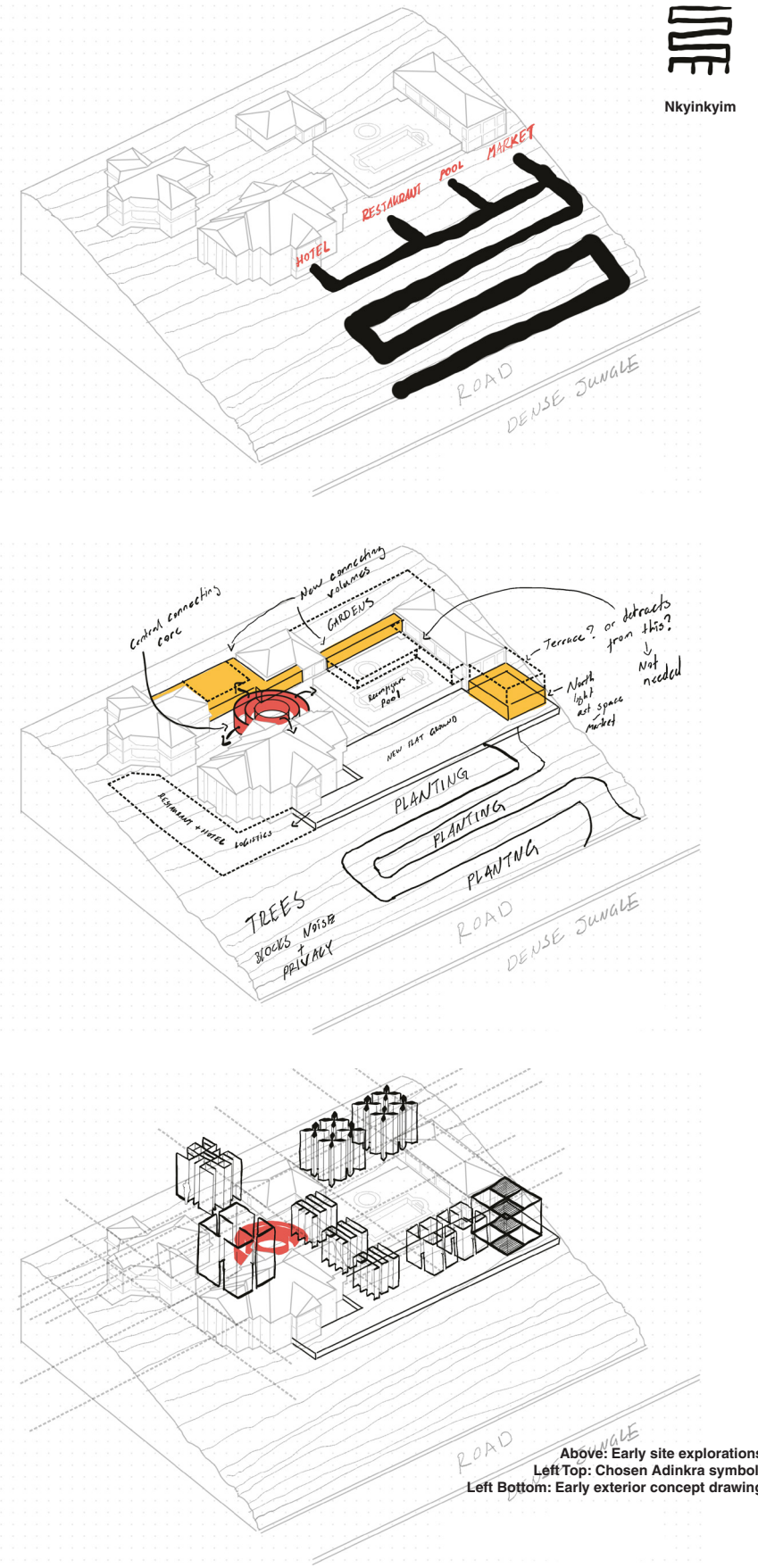
A symbolic movement

Adinkra symbols, their use and prominence, in the built environment across Ghana became an important point of departure for the project.



Although it is not uncommon for the symbols to be used in a most literal way - stenciled on to a building - the un-landscaped site provided an opportunity to try to use them in a different manner. Trying to think of their meanings and how that can relate to built form. On the right, the symbol 'Nkyinkyim' has been used to inspire the new entrance on to the site. The symbol relates to the twists and turns and various outcomes faced in life. Here as one arrives at the hotel from the busy city, the twists create a natural change of pace as one approaches the new proposal.





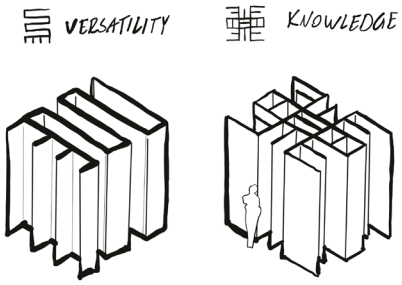
Above: Early site explorations.
Left Top: Chosen Adinkra symbols
Left Bottom: Early exterior concept drawing.

An existing grid

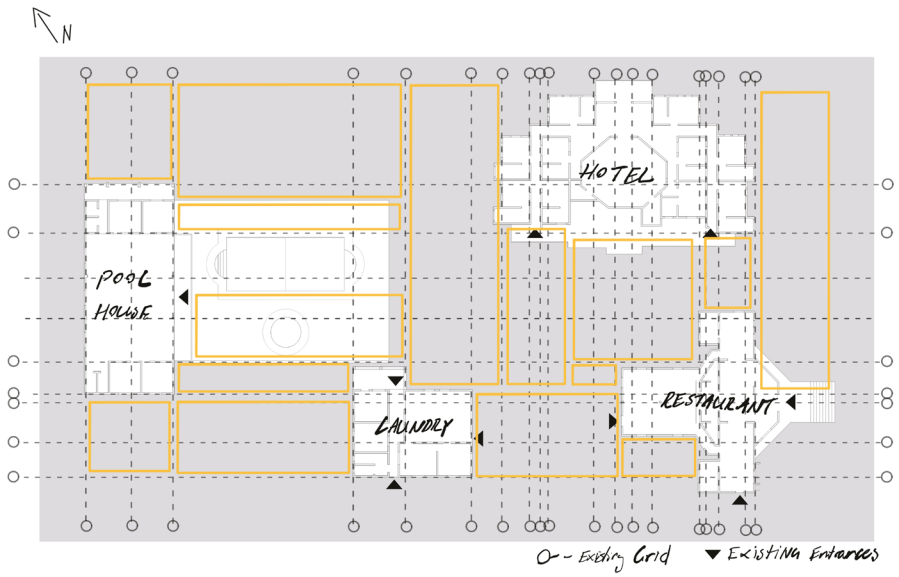
As it is a larger site with existing buildings, it felt appropriate to first understand their layout and rhythm. This was achieved by identifying and analysing an existing grid.

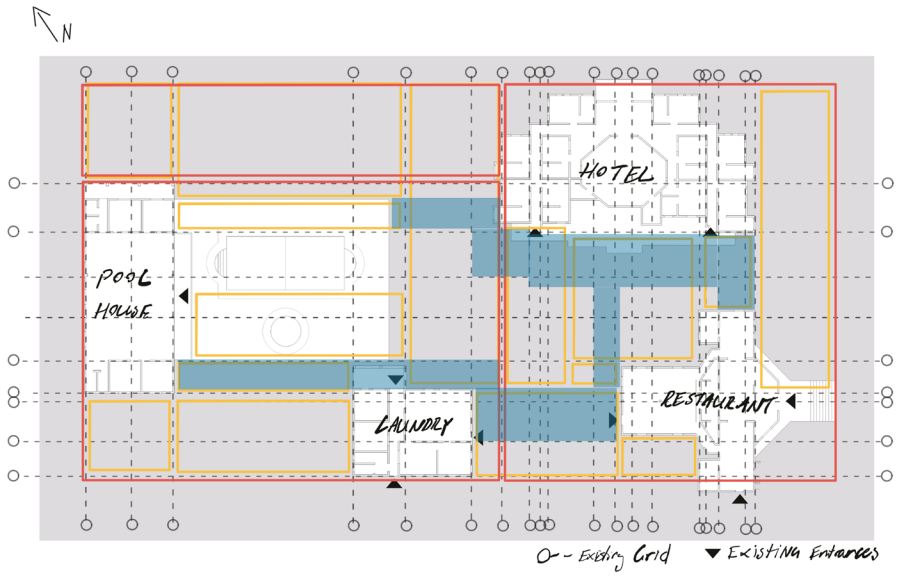
By drawing up an existing grid based off of structural elements, the spaces between became highlighted and of interest. It is within these spaces that links and new zones were explored, testing how one may want to get around the site as an average user.

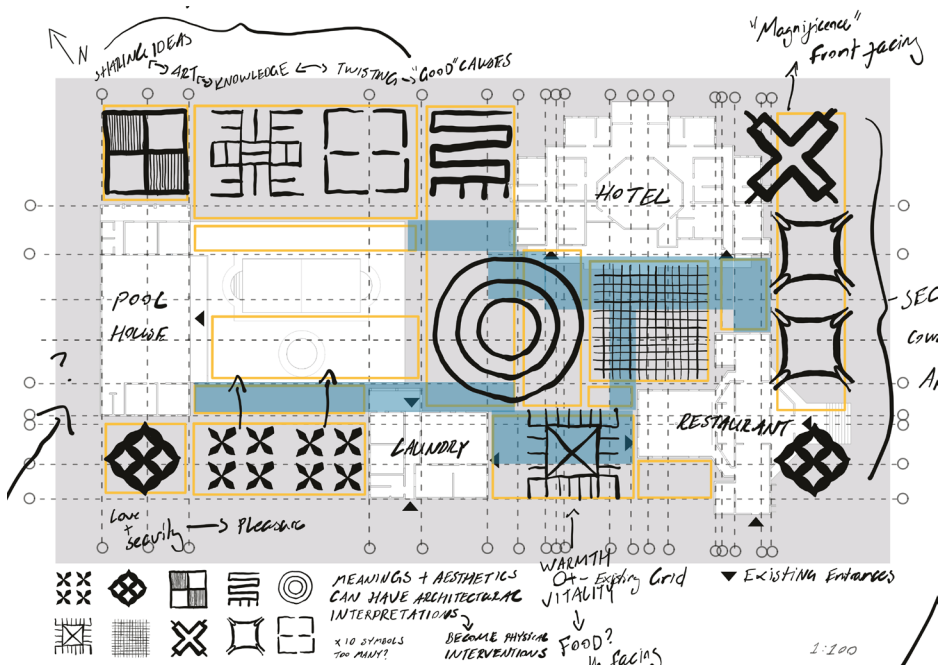
The symbols were once again brought forward to test how specific feelings and ideas can relate to these zones.



A three dimensional imagining of Adinkra symbols.







Above and Left: Concept plans depicting how one might divide and work with the site.

Site proposal

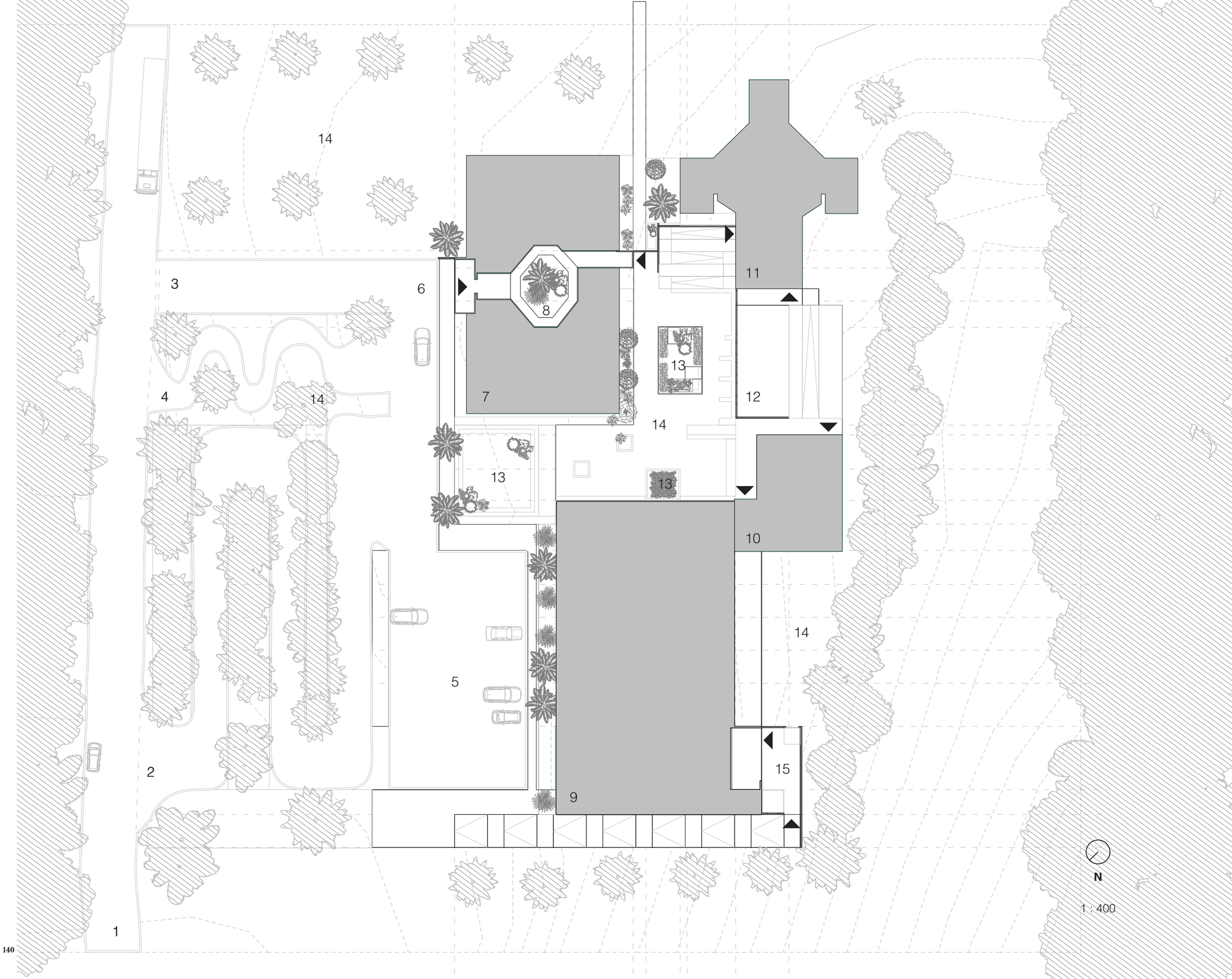
Making an entrance

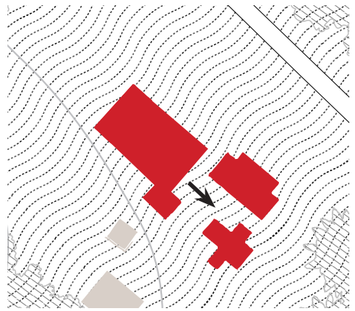
Key

1. Main road
2. Vehicle access (In)
3. Vehicle access (Out / Emergency)
4. Pedestrian access
5. Proposed parking area
6. Drop-off point

7. Hotel
8. Courtyard
9. Art house
10. Amenities building
11. Restaurant
12. Outdoor dining

13. Ponds
14. Garden spaces
15. Art gallery garden entrance





→ Location and viewpoint direction of render.



Above: Exterior render of the space between the hotel and restaurant. It has been imagined as a green oasis with pools providing cool air, and seating within coves allowing for solemn moments of contemplation and relaxation.

Future development

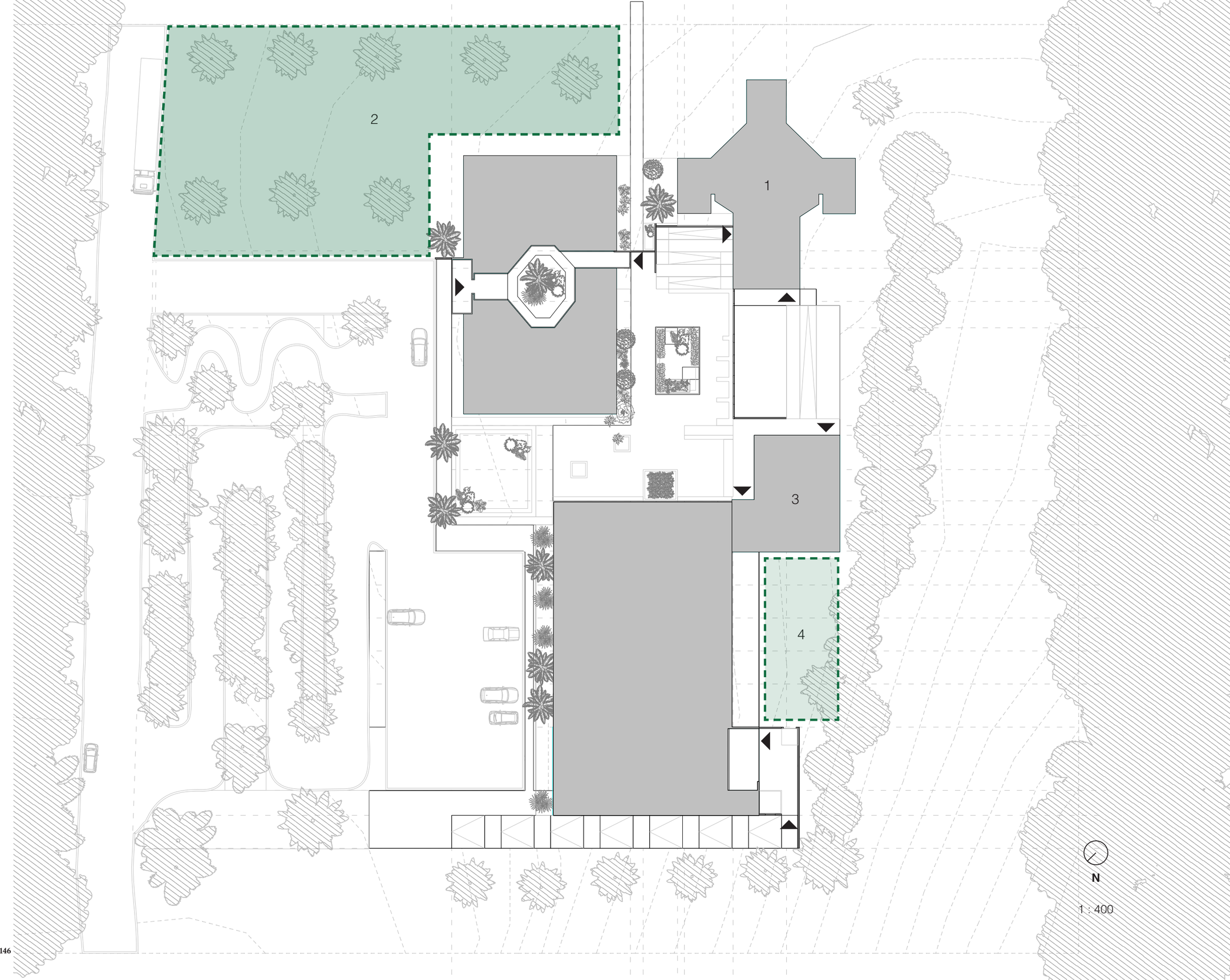
Key

1. Completion of restaurant
2. Potential growing spaces

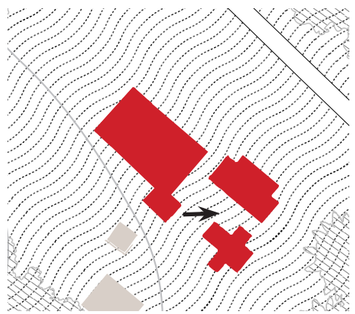
3. Bar / lounge / artist residency
4. Potential new pool areas

Although it has not been developed further in this project, the potential of the site is still recognised. The restaurant can grow a lot of its own produce and raise some livestock on the land itself. A new pool, which is attractive to visitors to the area, can be introduced close to the old pool. Making use of the underground pipes already in place.

In the true spirit of the area, this can be developed in a future phase, funded by the parts of the hotel that are already in use.







→ Location and viewpoint direction of render.

Above: Exterior render of the space between the hotel and restaurant. A larger central pool leaves space for the current flora and fauna to thrive. A calm, recluse area for guests, and visitors alike, to enjoy.

Sustainable ambitions

Sitewide opportunities

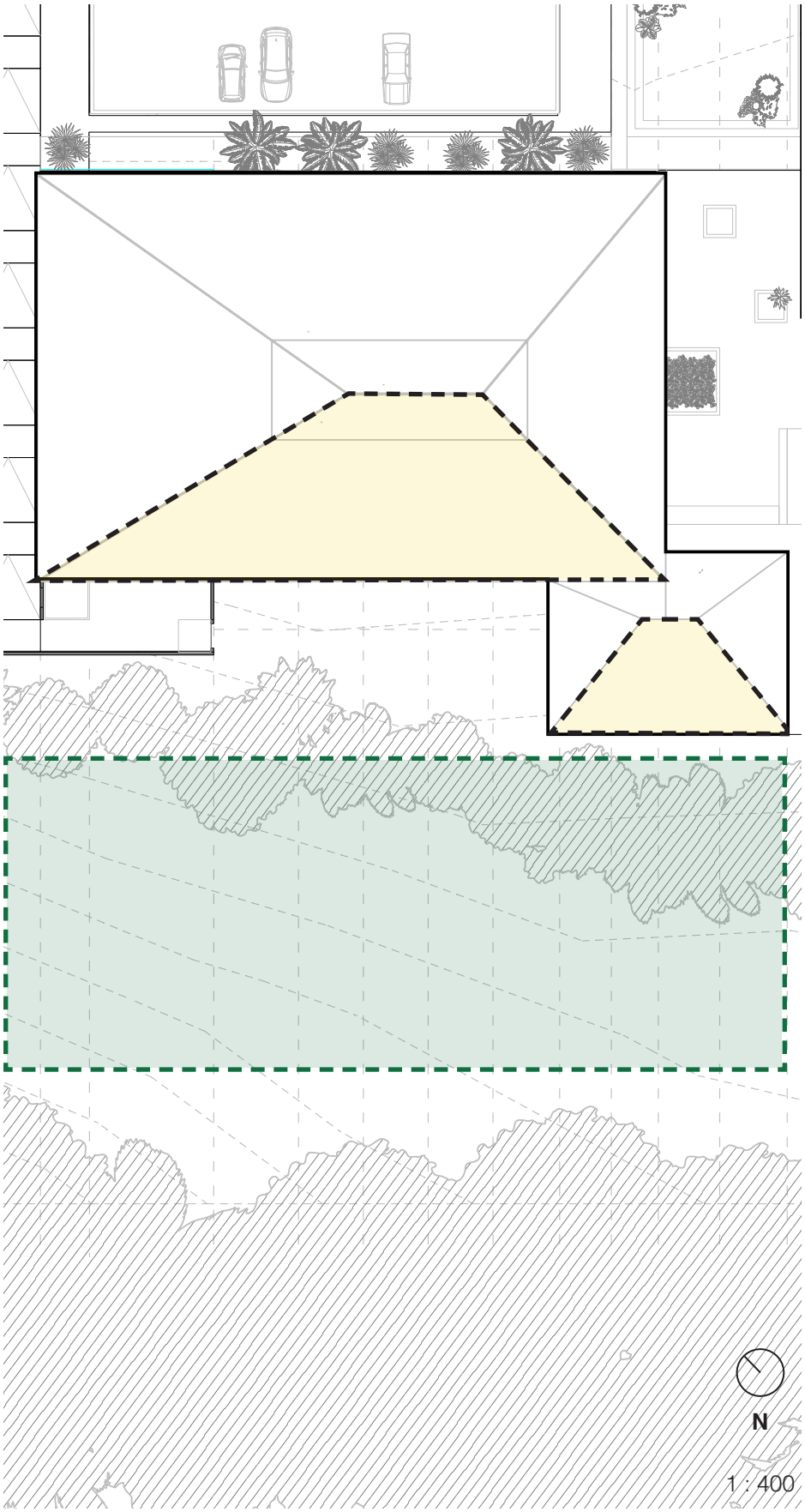
The sites orientation, scale and location, allows for specific site interventions that will provide great benefit to the environment, the project and its users.

With what becomes the ‘back’ of the site being towards the South, and most of the buildings having large roof areas, there is an opportunity to place PV panels to harvest solar energy. Whilst it is a big initial investment, it will provide long-term gains and an energy independence that is paramount to keep things running during “light-outs“. These are a semi-regular occurrence where there is a localised blackout. Those who can afford the luxury, then revert to a generator. By providing much of its own electricity, and relying mostly on natural ventilation, the buildings will not add to the stress placed on the electrical grid, but could rather help alleviate some of the issues by sharing extra energy. Other buildings in the area have already implemented solar panels.

The natural slope could also provide an opportunity for rainwater harvesting. Periods of intense rain would then provide much needed water for plumbing and farming.

Opportunities for PV panels

Opportunities for rain water harvesting

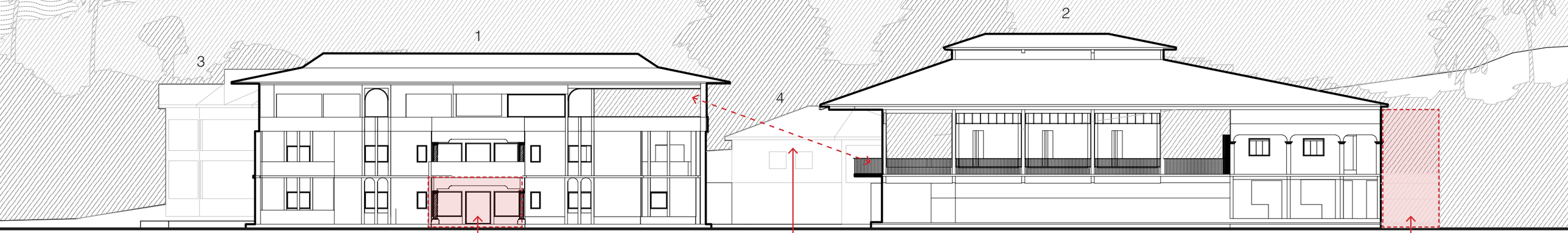


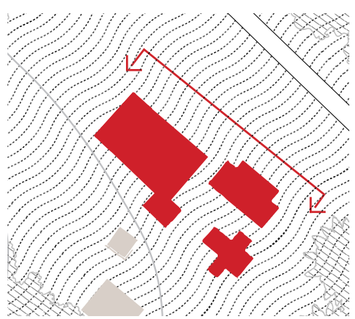
Site Elevation

South - West

Key

1. Hotel
2. Art Hall
3. Restaurant
4. Amenities





Location and viewing direction of section.

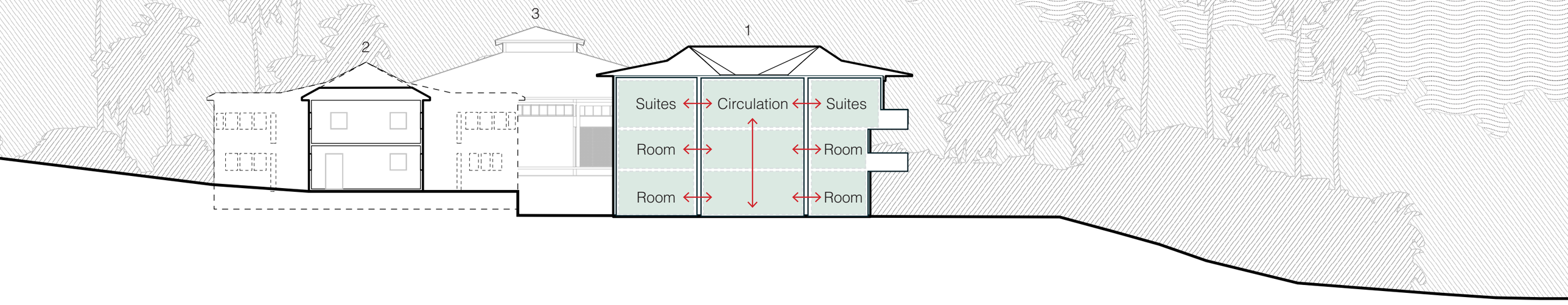
1 : 250

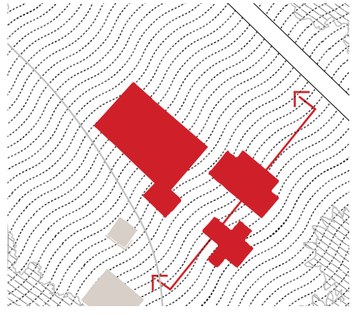
Site Setion

North - West

Key

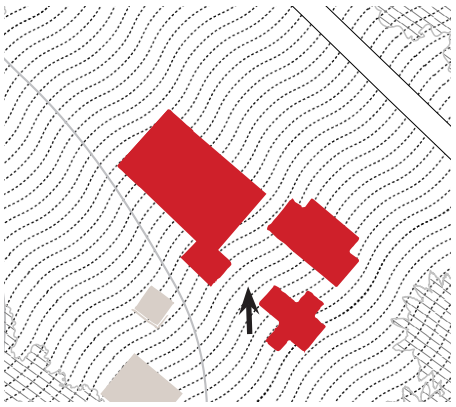
1. Hotel
2. Restaurant
3. Art Hall





Location and viewing direction of section.

1 : 250



Location and viewpoint direction of render



Above: Exterior render of the proposed outdoor dining area of the restaurant. Rammed earth walls create framed views out across the hotel, site and not-too-distant jungle.

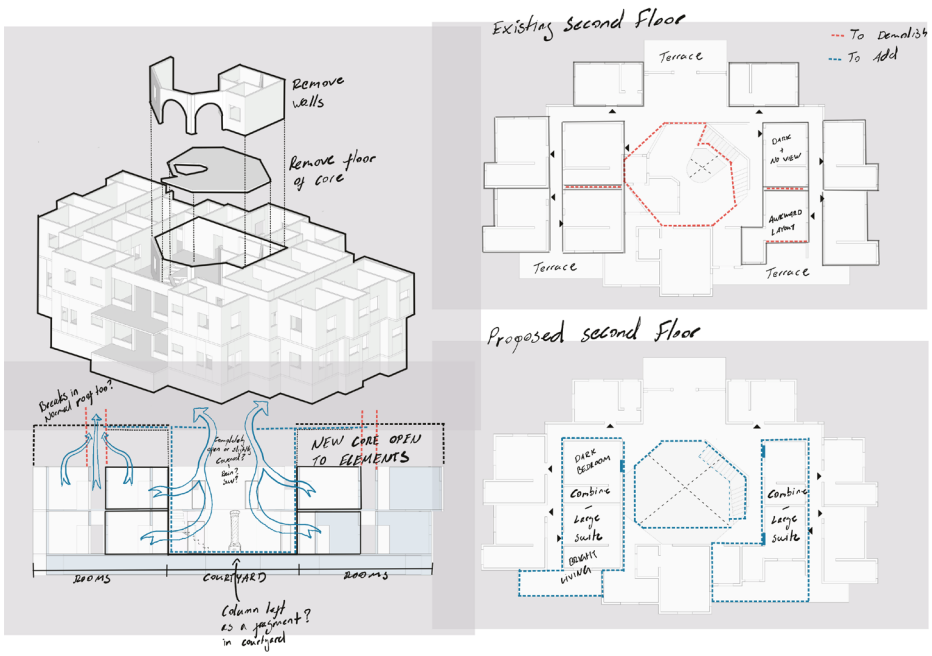
Hotel development

Time to open up

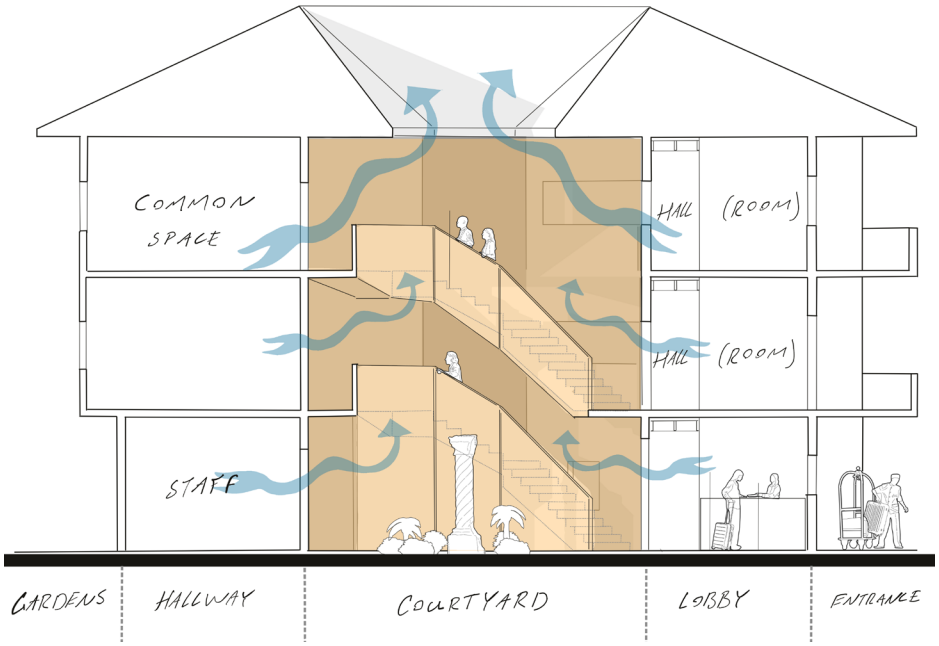
The ambition with the hotel was to keep as much as possible. With it being designed to be a hotel, it was somewhat already optimised in its organisation. Making it easier to fit the necessary rooms and amenities.

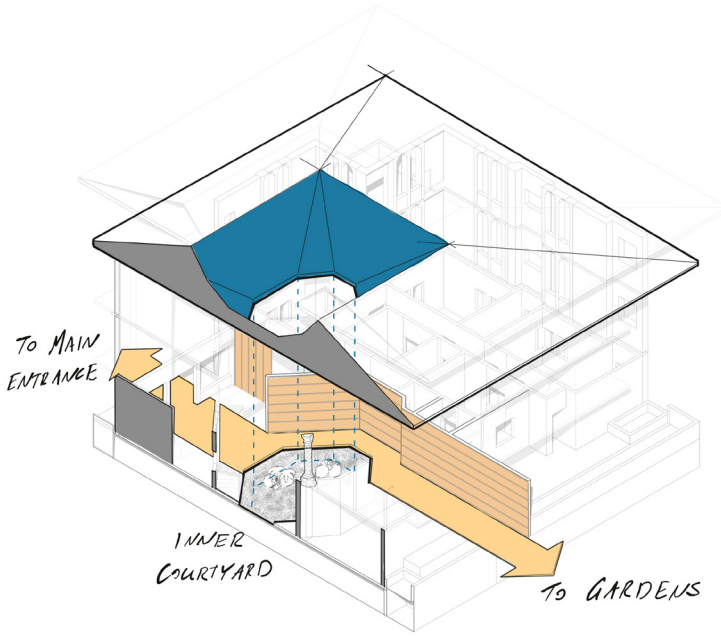
However, there is always room for improvement. The challenge then lay in enhancing its existing attributes and updating the rooms and layout to fit contemporary needs. A new rammed earth skin wraps around the existing. Inspired by traditional techniques and providing much needed thermal mass.

In a more global, tourist and business attractive, post-covid Ghana, people travel with their work. And just like in Europe, the work-from-home and subsequently, the work-from-hotel culture, exists and appears to be a mainstay of their society. Rooms that originally just had space for a large bed, have been extended to accommodate desks and more space for extended stays, which is common in the area because of various conventions, and visits from NGO's and locals' family members.



Above: Concept drawings of initial ideas on treatment of the existing parts of the hotel.





Above: Concept drawings of the hotel and its proposed circulation and layout.

Hotel proposal

Mekyea Wo (Greetings)



Above: Exterior render of the hotel entrance and facade.

Hotel Ground Floor Plan

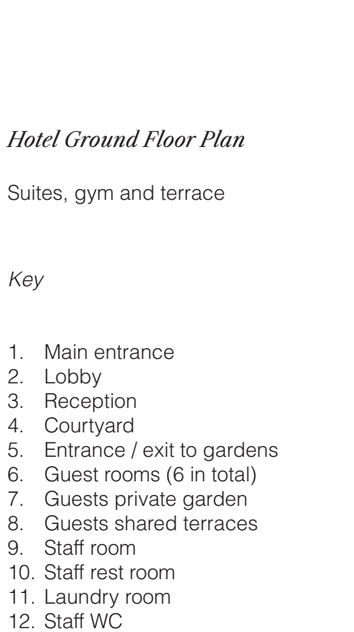
Suites, gym and terrace

Key

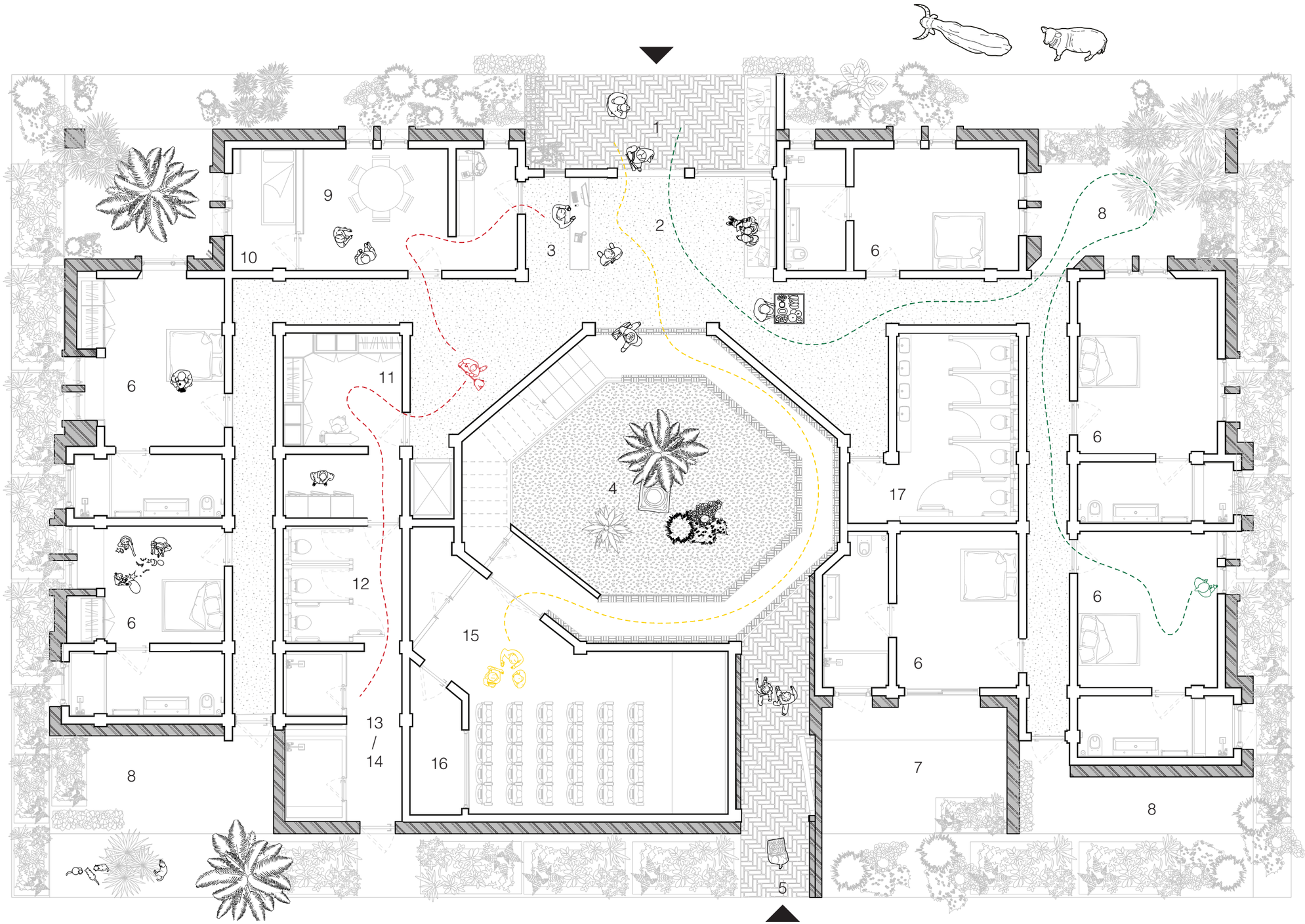
1. Main entrance
2. Lobby
3. Reception
4. Courtyard
5. Entrance / exit to gardens
6. Guest rooms (6 in total)
7. Guests private garden
8. Guests shared terraces
9. Staff room
10. Staff rest room
11. Laundry room
12. Staff WC
13. Staff shower
14. Staff changing
15. Cinema
16. Projector room
17. WC

Existing walls

New rammed earth walls



Approximate location of plan on site.



Staff movement

Visitor movement

Guest movement

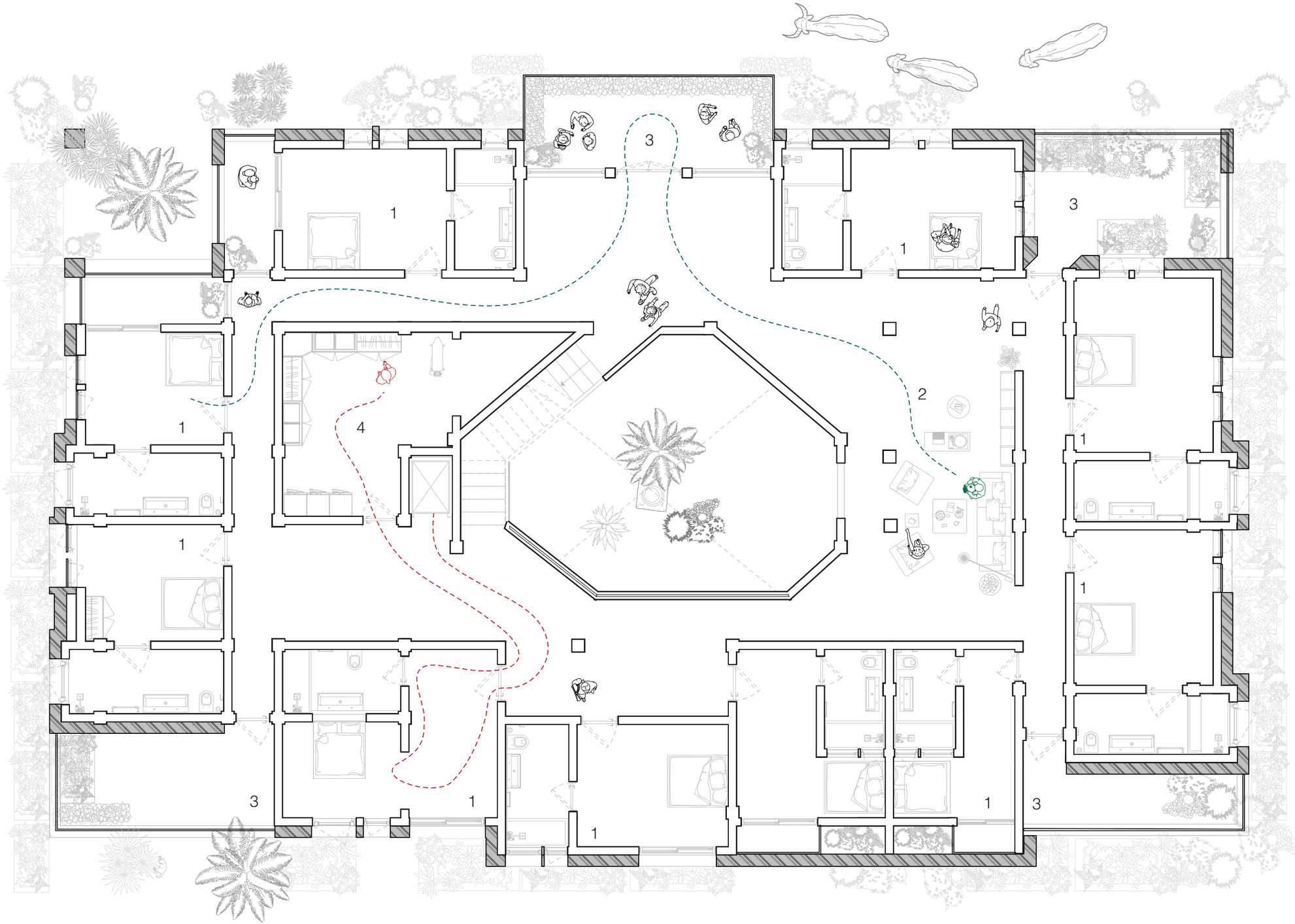
1 : 100

Hotel Second Floor Plan

Suites, gym and terrace

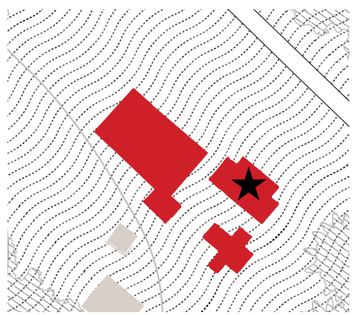
Key

1. Guest rooms (10 in total)
2. Library and lounge
3. Terraces
4. Staff room



Existing walls

New rammed earth walls



Approximate location of plan on site.

Staff movement

Visitor movement

Guest movement

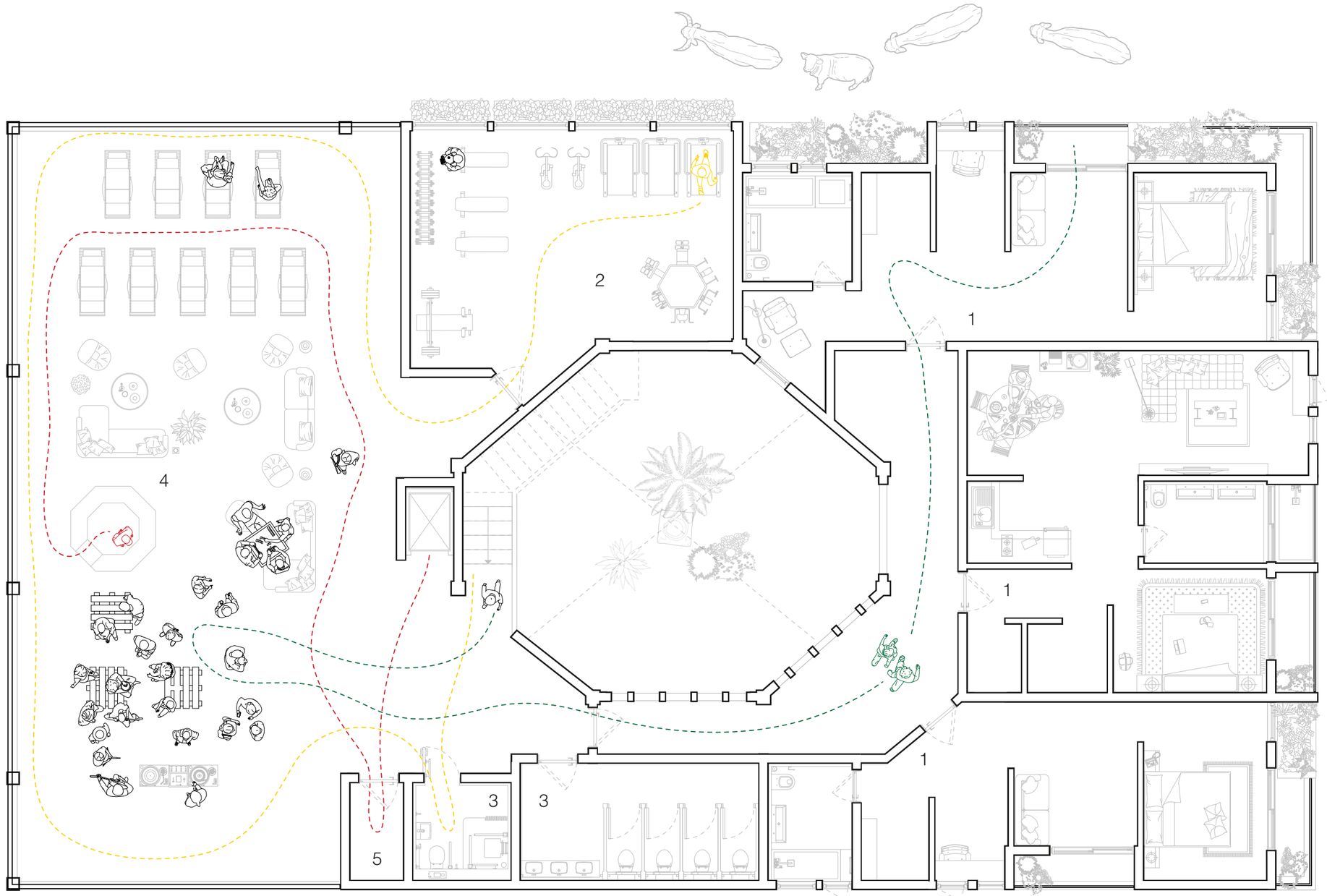
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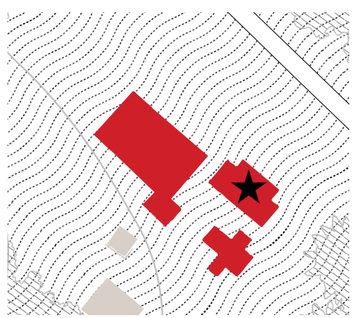
Hotel Third Floor Plan

Suites, gym and terrace

Key

1. Guest suites (3 in total)
2. Gym
3. WC
4. Roof terrace
5. Staff store room





Approximate location of plan on site.

Staff movement

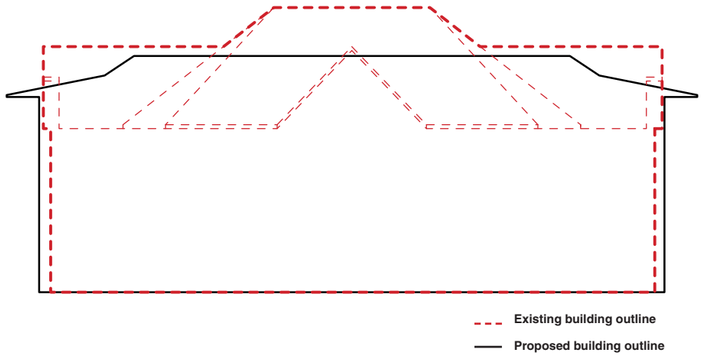
Visitor movement

Guest movement

1 : 100

Old Dog, new tricks

Relative size comparison of the existing and proposed hotel



Despite the introduction of an additional floor and a new roof, the proposed building's roof line has ended up lower than that of the existing.

As rooms that had no direct view out were repurposed for other uses, the number of guest rooms was reduced, however there are still a total of 19 rooms of varying sizes, for varying budgets.

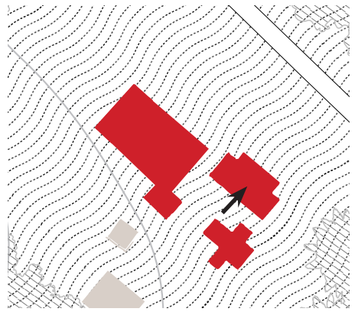
The existing roof has a level of geometric complexity that I found quite interesting. Other buildings in the area had similar forms, however the hotel was unmatched in its number of angles. It therefore felt appropriate when replacing the roof, to propose one with a complexity of its own, instead of just a flat roof. As I learnt from visiting KNUST, the flat roofs sometimes struggle with the heavy loads of the monsoons.

Now with the creation of a courtyard in the middle, having the roof also slope inwards was befitting. Not only was this seen in traditional homes, but many modern hotels had open central courtyards, allowing the rain in, rather than fighting against it. The courtyard keeps the existing central column that currently holds up the central section of the second floor.

This could all result in a dramatic display of water management within the building. Guests seeing the power of nature, the plants in the courtyard being watered, and perhaps the ground filtering the water before it is harvested below.



Above: Render of hotel courtyard approached from gardens.



Location and viewpoint direction of render

Typical Bedroom Layout - Plan

Make yourself at home

Key

1. Entrance
2. Built-in desk
3. Built-in wardrobe
4. Bookshelf or safe
5. Bathroom
6. Fridge and storage

Existing walls

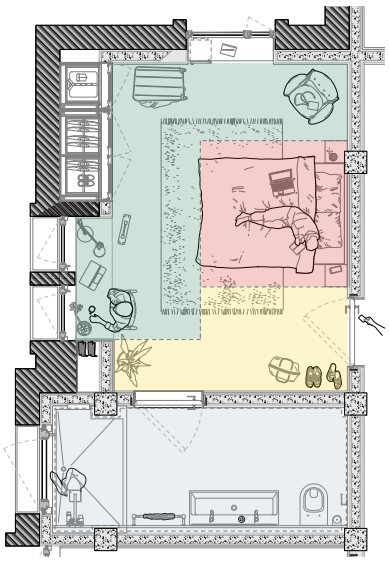
New rammed earth walls

Rest

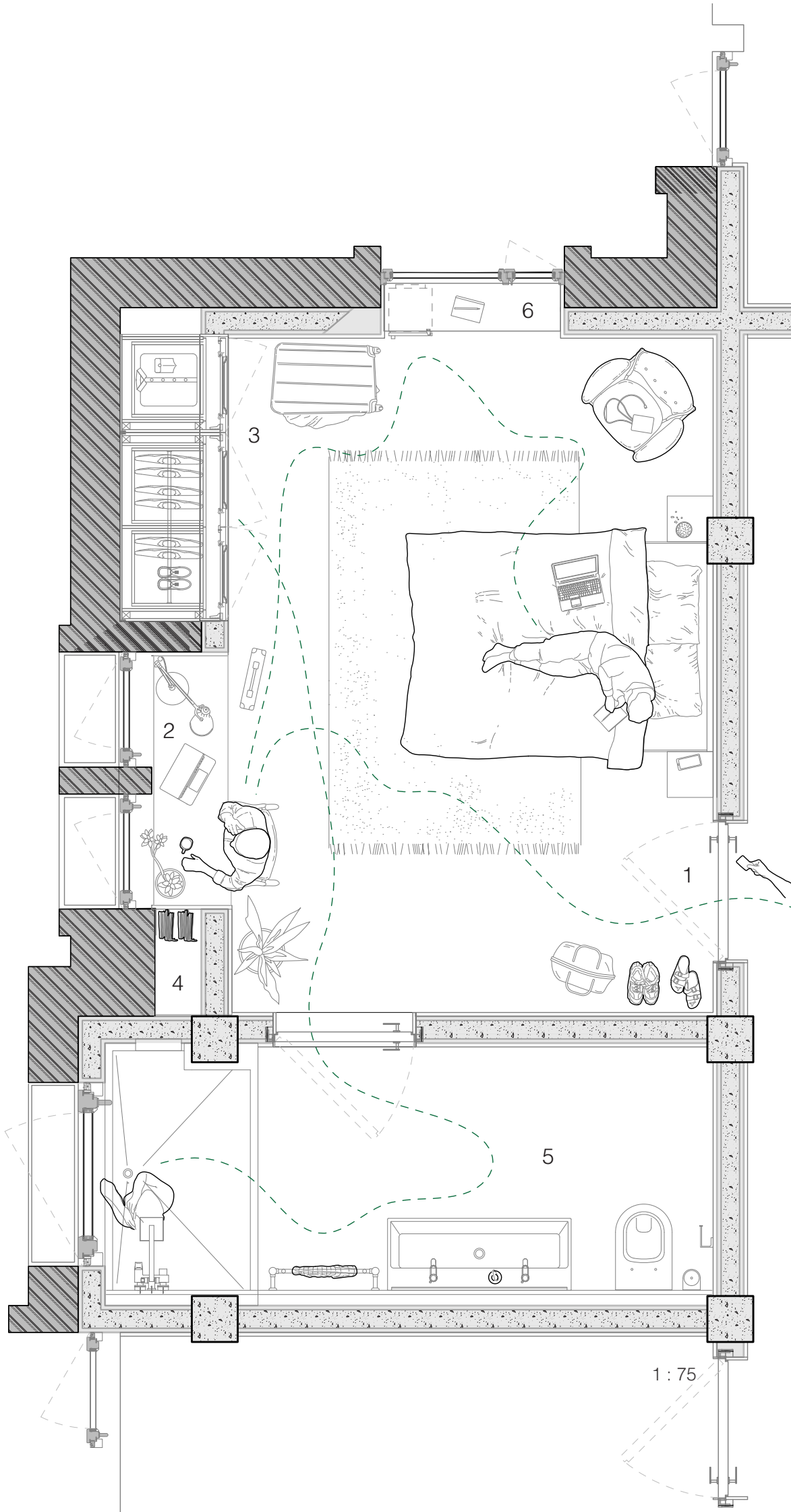
Activity

Buffer

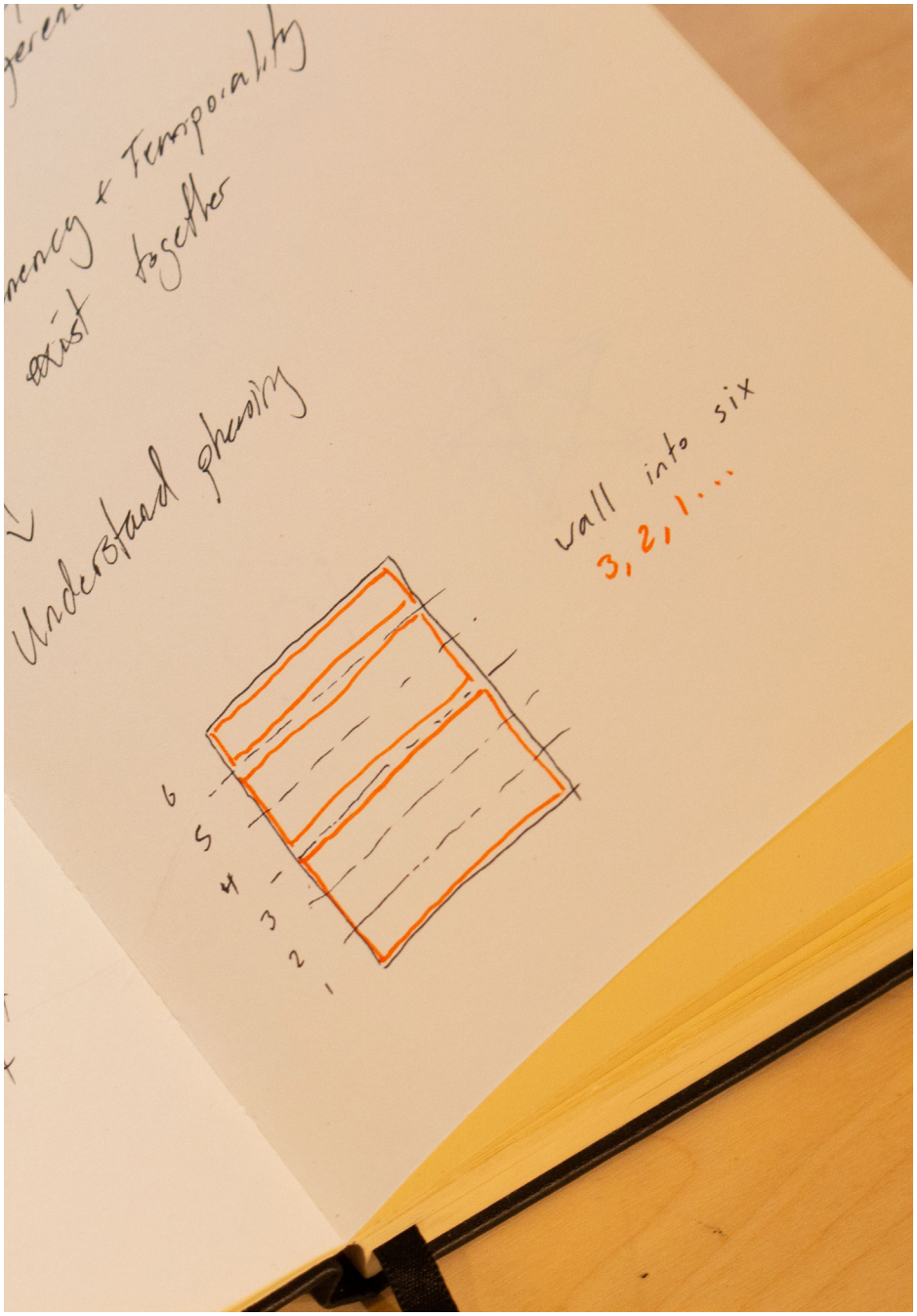
Utility

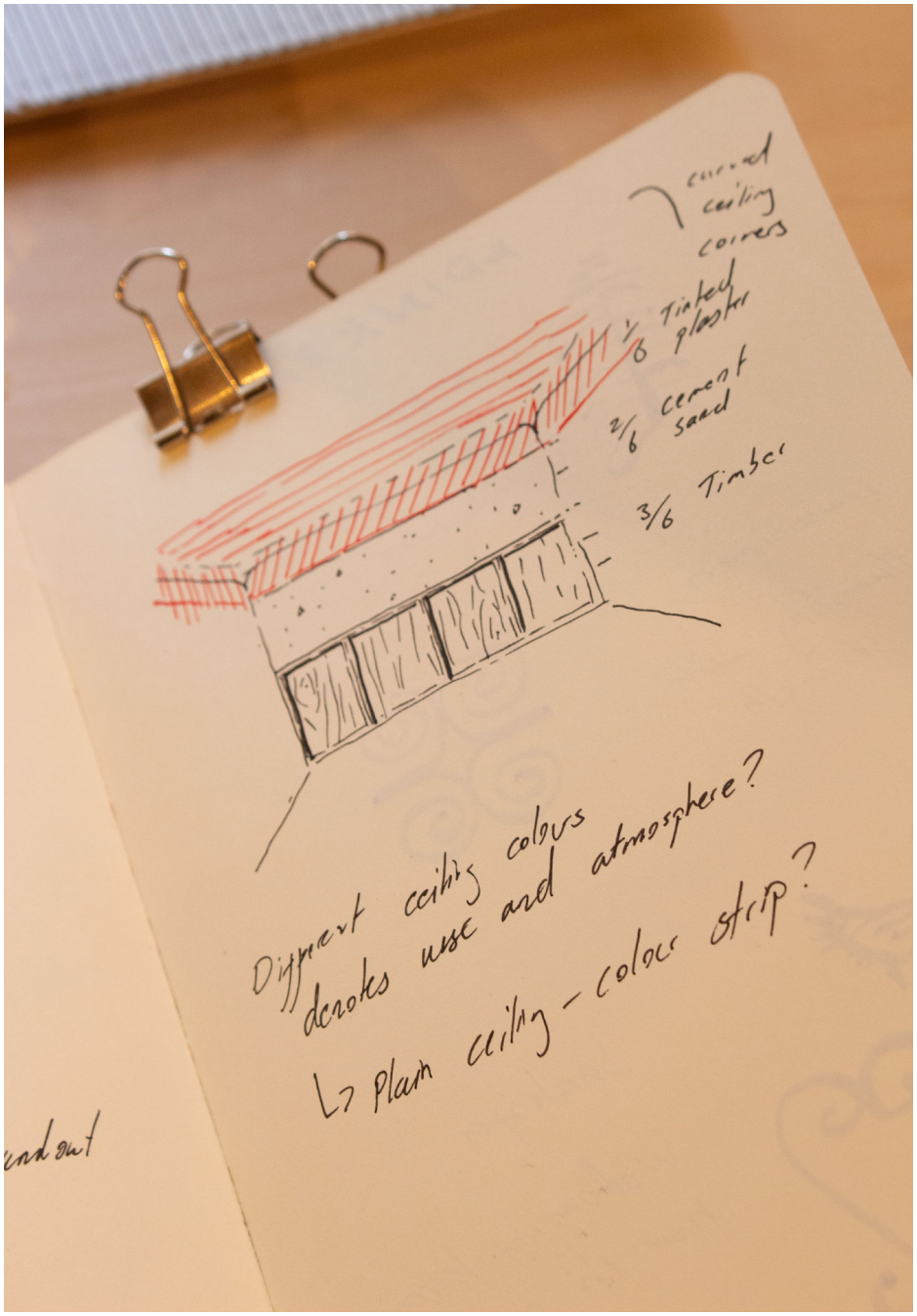


Typical hotel room zoning



Ideas born early on





Above and Left: Excerpts from travel notebook showing early ideas that were kept and developed throughout the project.

Typical Bedroom Layout - Section

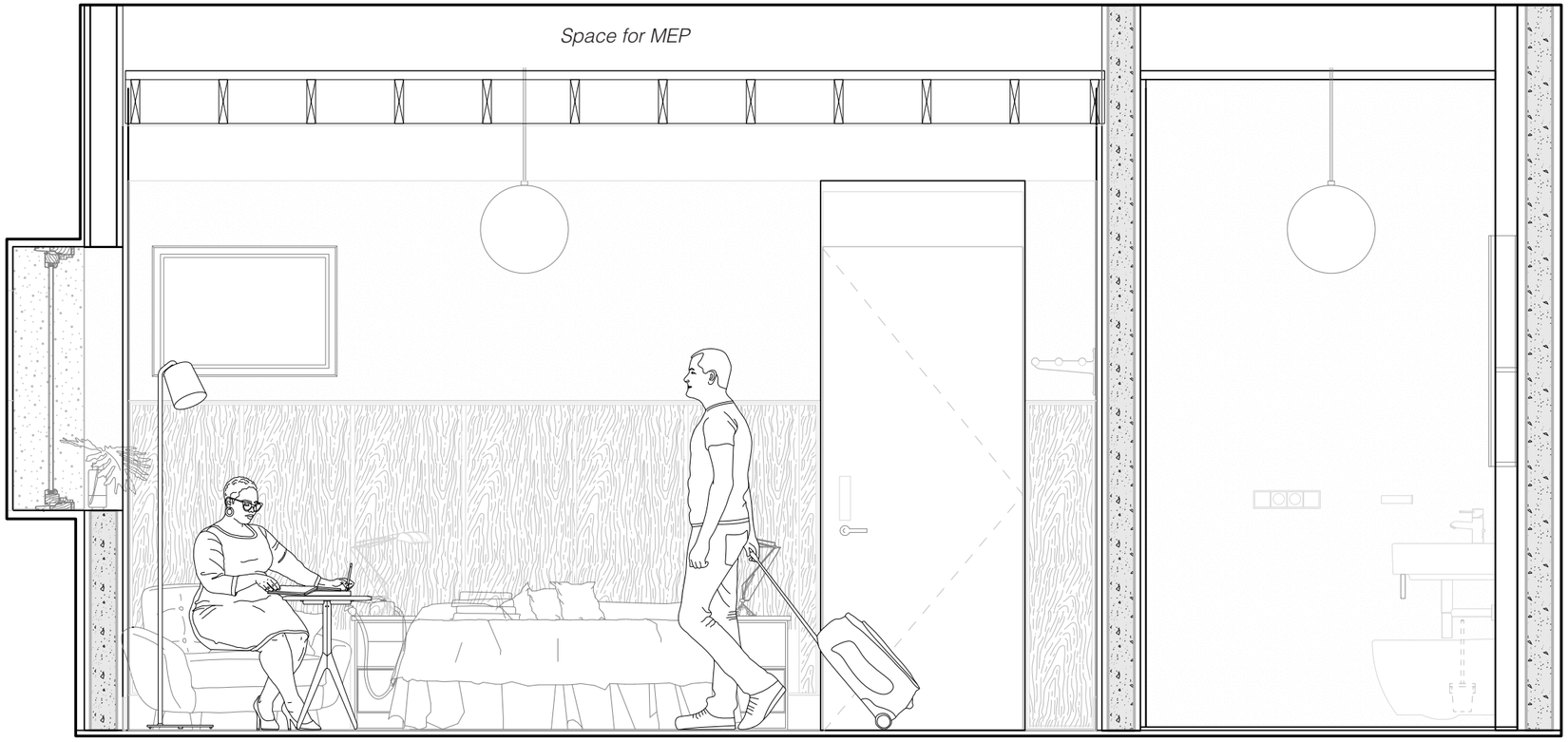
Simple division

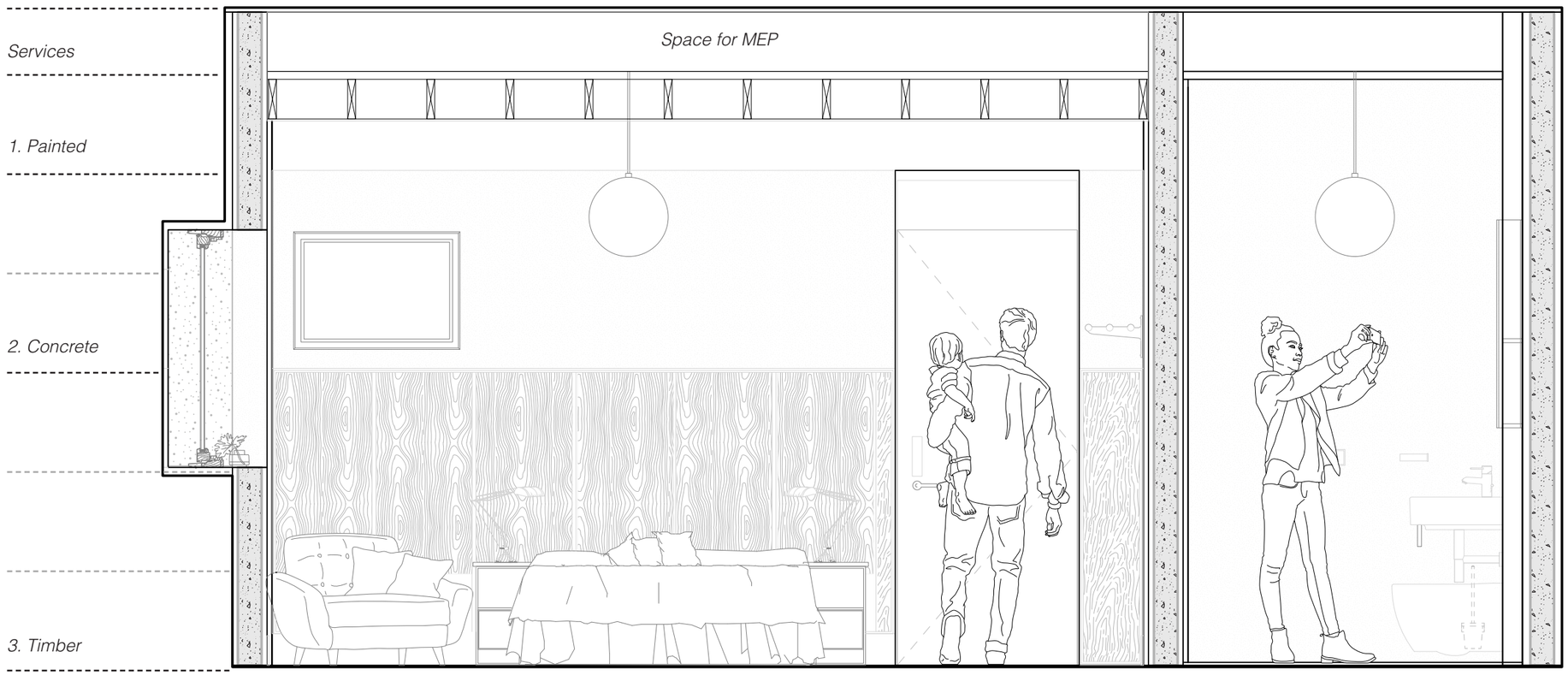
The rooms present a play on divisions. Reminiscent of the Rule of Thirds, decorations and, most often, trees in Ghana are painted, creating a clear expression of the division and intertwining of the synthetic and the natural.

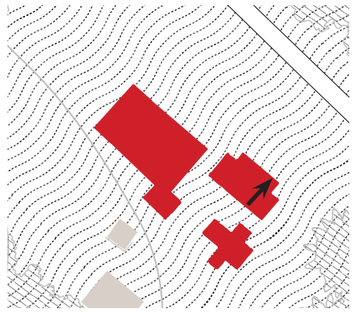
The existing ceiling height is approximately 3300 mm. By leaving 300 mm for MEP (mechanical, electrical and plumbing), a neat 3000 mm is then left to play with. Dividing this into six, one can then arrange the decoration in the rooms. Here is an example of giving the most space to timber panels, highlighting local materials and craftsmanship, as well as a softening of the concrete feel of the rooms.

Parts of the existing concrete wall is left uncovered, a relic of the past in every room. Finally topped off with a splash of colour to the gridded ceiling. In a lovely Ghana green, representing the new, the fresh, the future.

1 : 25







Location and viewpoint direction of render



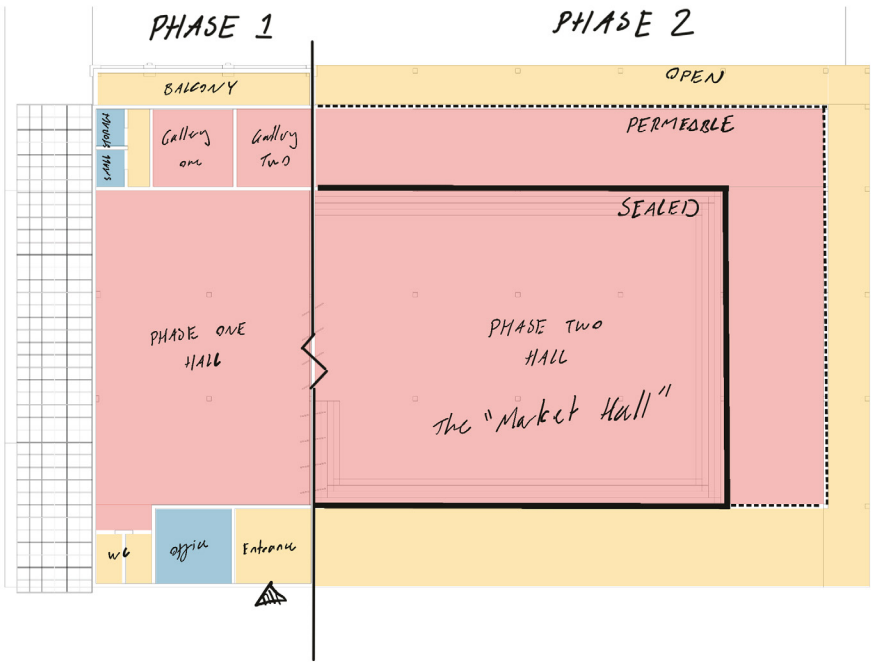
Above: Interior render of proposed hotel hallway.

Pool house development

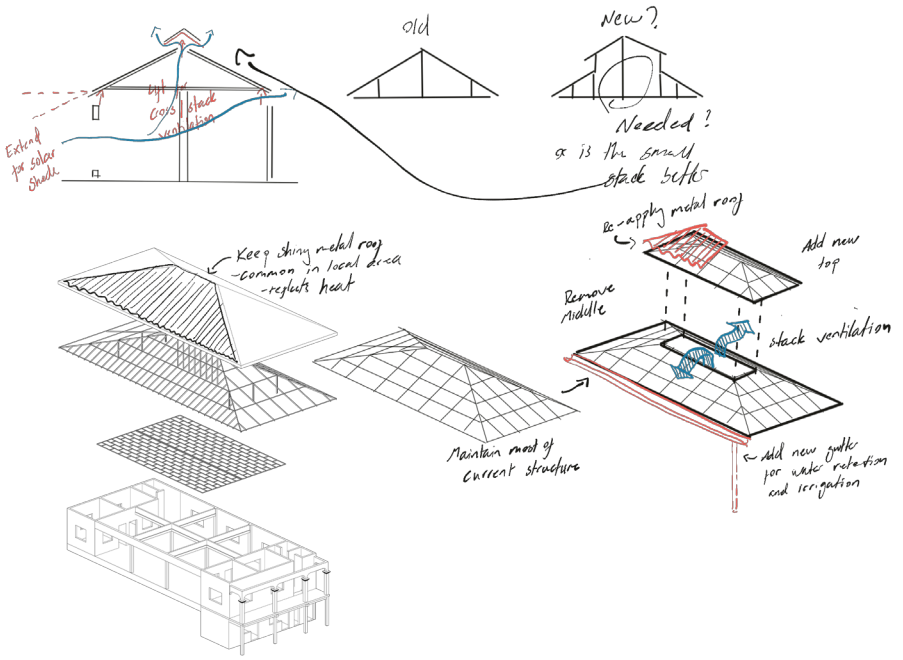
From pool house to art house. A phased plan.

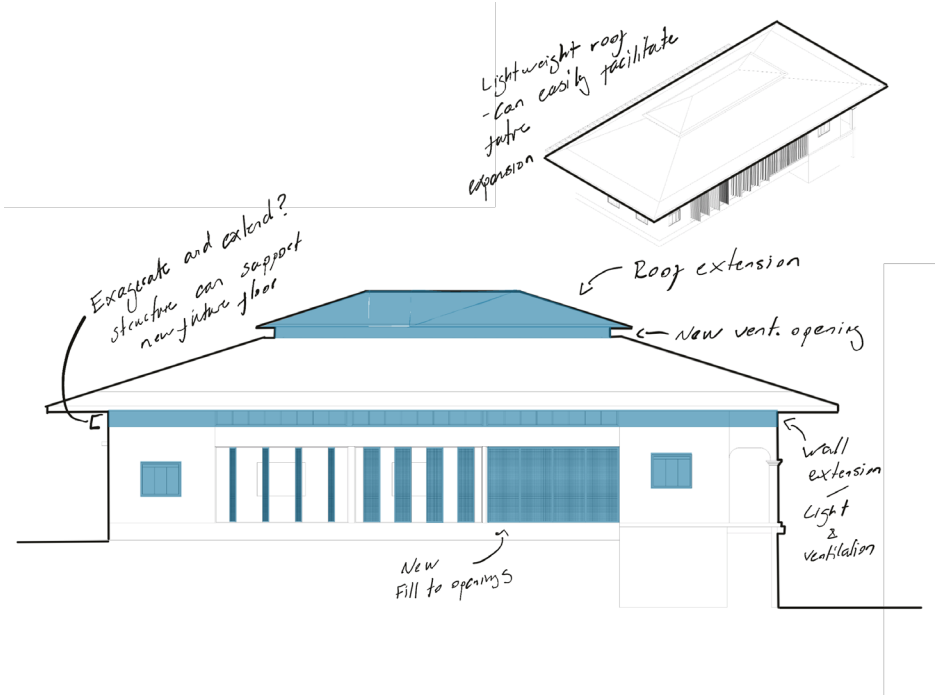
Sefwi has a lot of residents interested in making art, but the people feel that there is no space for it, let alone buyers. At the same time, there are lot of visitors to Sefwi. A new art hall, allows for the meeting of local artists and tourists or travellers. A new 'pool', still providing a space for reflection, gathering and leisure.

The market plays a big role in the lives of the people of Sefwi. A recognisable typology. A weekly converging place of trade, discussion and community. The proposed art 'market' follows much of this local language, both in form and organisation.



Above: Sketch proposed plan of the new art hall highlighting its phased construction.





Above: Concept drawings and development of the pool building. Optimising its existing structure to create a pleasant interior environment, with the use of local materials and natural ventilation.

Art house proposal

A different kind of market



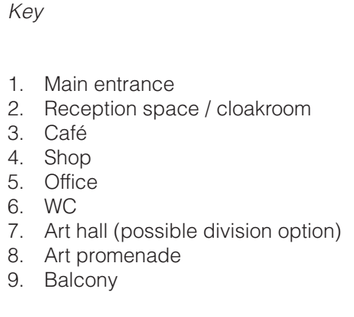
**Above: Sectional model of proposed extension to the old pool house.
Image: Form/Design**

Art House Ground Floor Plan

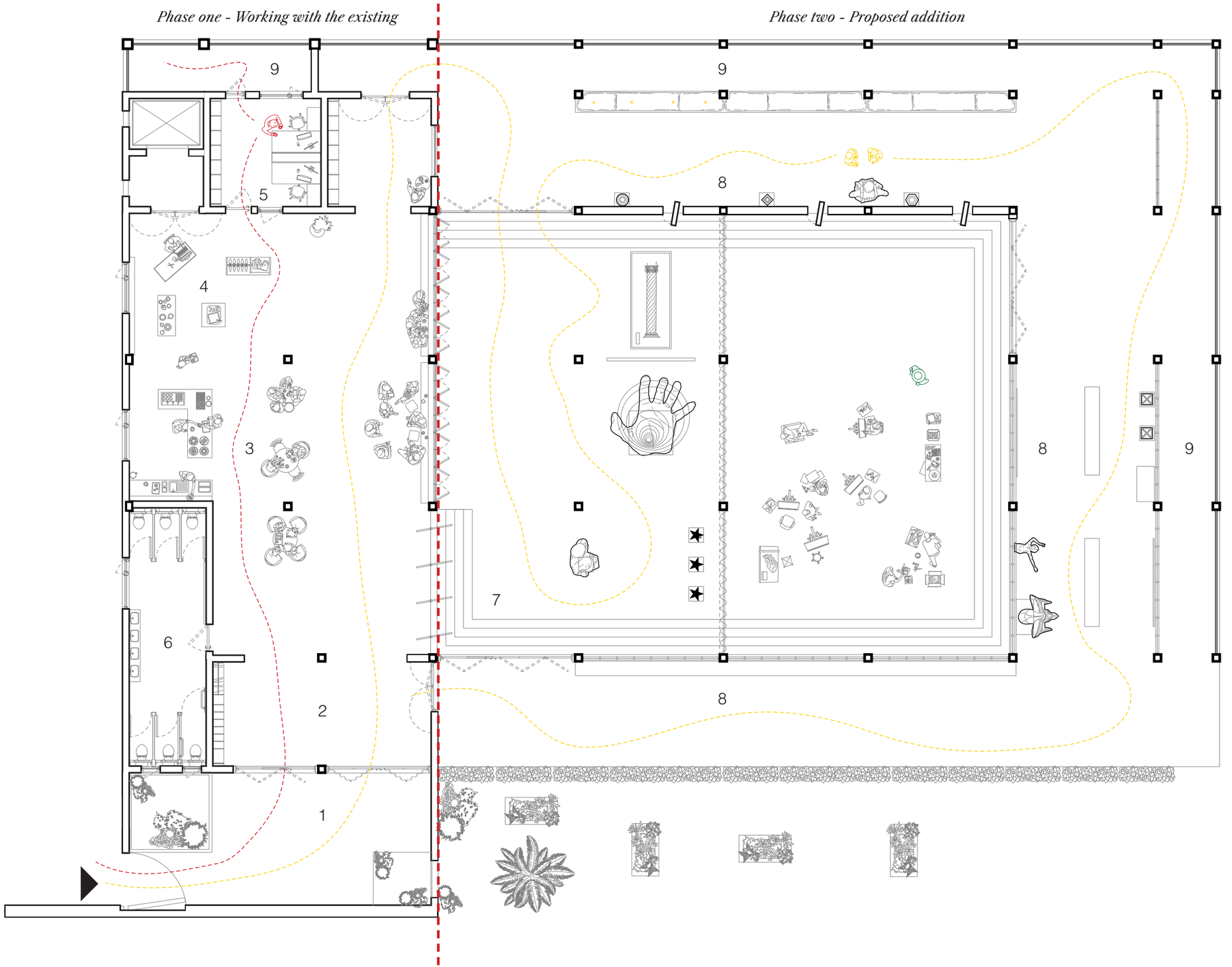
Art hall, gardens, café and shop

Key

1. Main entrance
2. Reception space / cloakroom
3. Café
4. Shop
5. Office
6. WC
7. Art hall (possible division option)
8. Art promenade
9. Balcony



Approximate location of plan on site.

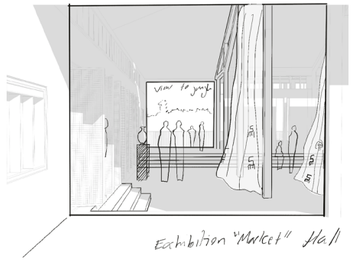


Developing a view



This photograph was taken during the first visit to the site. It was a view that stuck with me all throughout the project and one that I wanted to maintain and, possibly enhance.

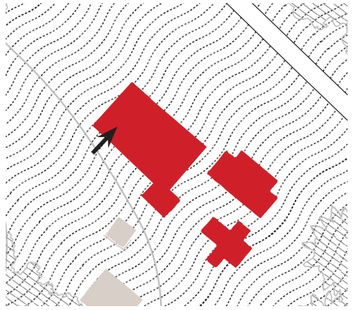
It shows a view out towards the jungle from the existing pool house. A beautiful sight in and of itself, but could be highlighted by being framed, so that even with the new addition, others can feel the same awe I felt upon my first visit.



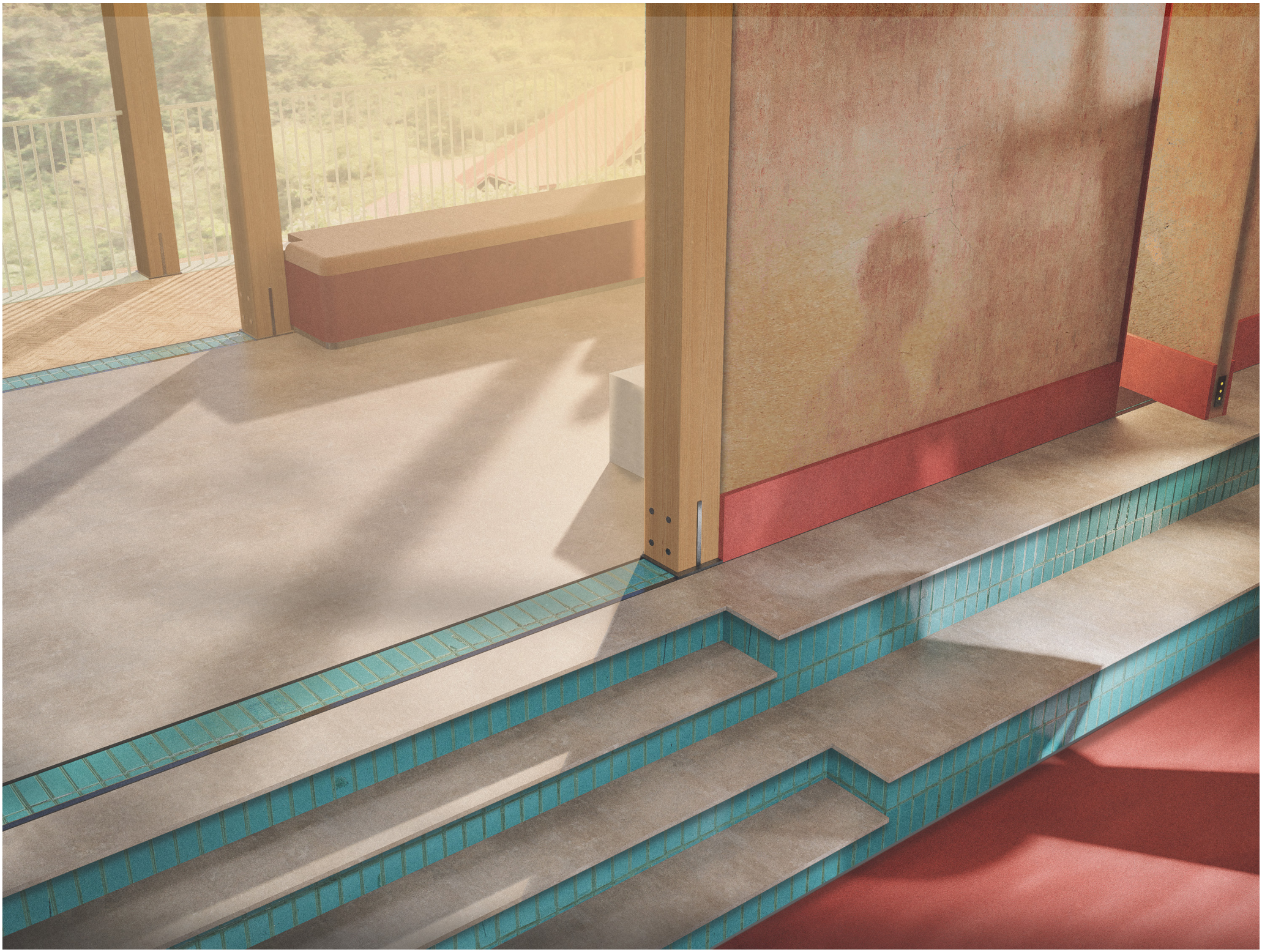
Above: Photo from site and concept drawing of the framing of a view into the art hall.



Above: Model showing the maintaining of a key view within the art house proposal.



Location and viewpoint direction of render



Above: interior render of the pool house. Depicting the different materials and various openings allowing for different levels of permeability.

Language development

Using what exists

The overall form reminiscent of a typical shopping block. The tiles, a tonal memory of a bygone pool.





Above: Photo of a typical building housing shops.
Left: Photo of tiles of the existing pool on site.

A familiar language

The symbolism extends inside the building. I myself taking on the role of an artist, creating a three dimensional interpretation of the Adinkra symbol "Mekyea Wo". The symbol for greeting and respect. Greeting new visitors. Reflecting the context.



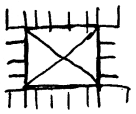
KURONTI NE AKWAMU
Democracy, sharing ideas
taking council

MEKYEA WO
"I Greet you"



– statue?

Greetings, recognition and respect.



MMERAMUBERE
Female cross
Wasmith, sunshine, vitality

NKYEMU

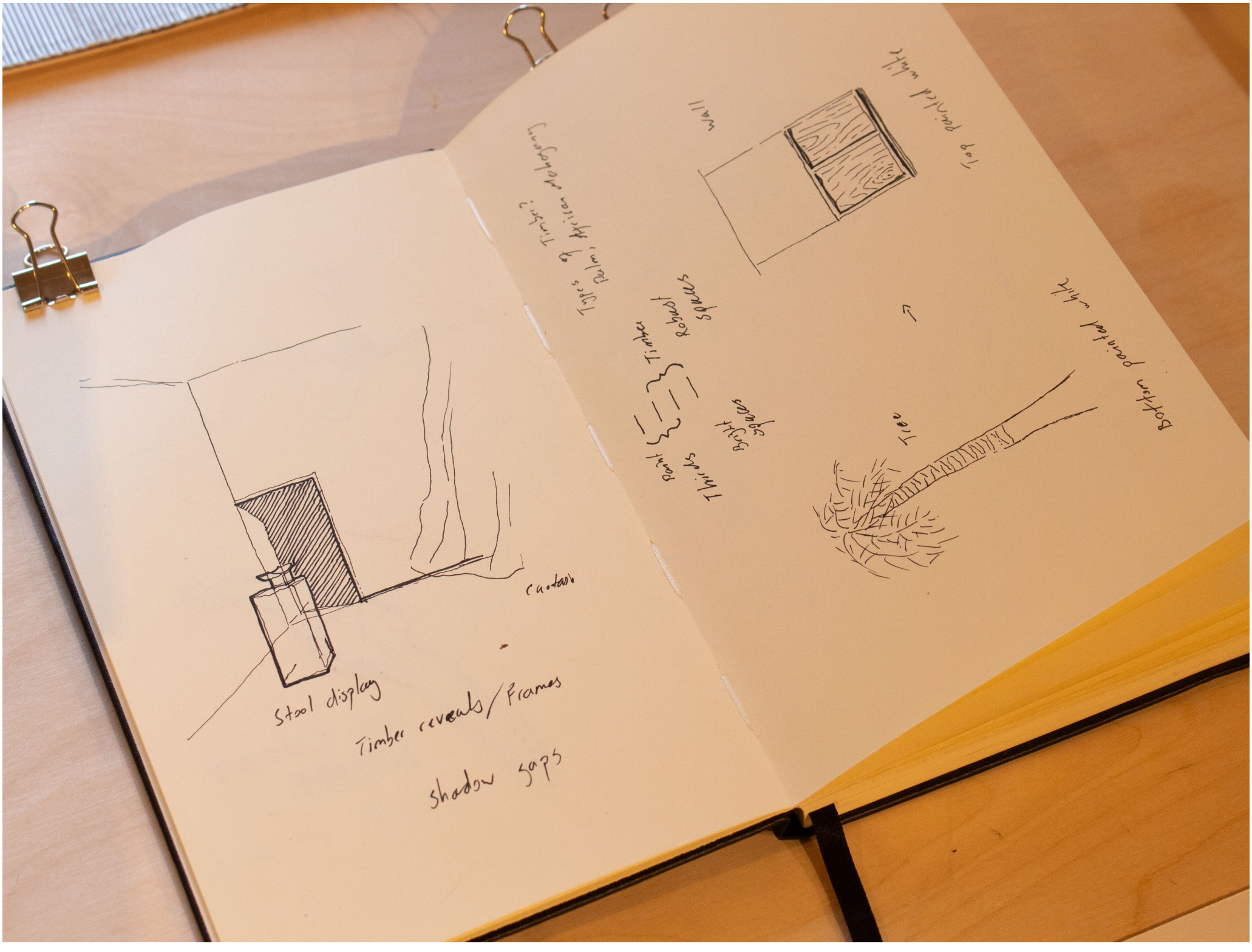


Divisions on Adinkra cloth
bygone stamping of symbols

Precision, adroitness, proficiency
Craftmanship



Above: Model of the interior of the proposed art hall extension. The sculpture is a three dimensional interpretation of the Adinkra symbol for Mekyea Wo.



Above: Excerpts from travel notebook showing early ideas that were kept and developed throughout the project.

Details

Everything comes from something

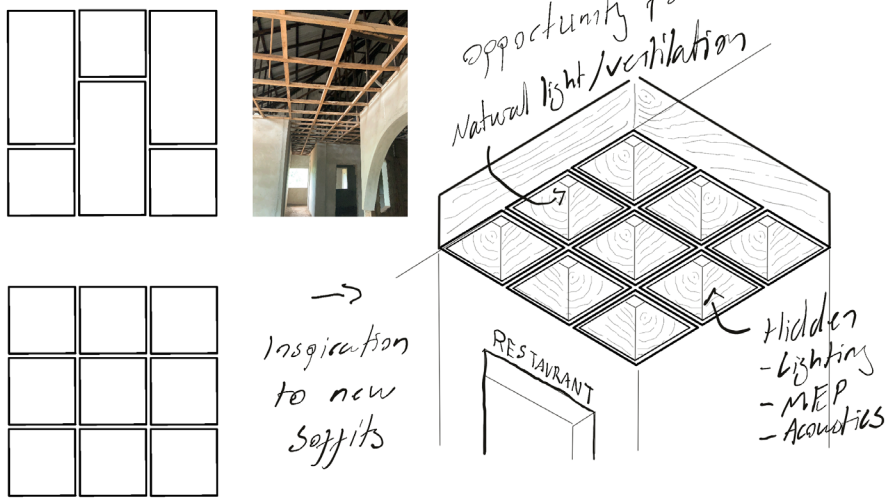
Almost all of the design decisions were inspired by the buildings surroundings.

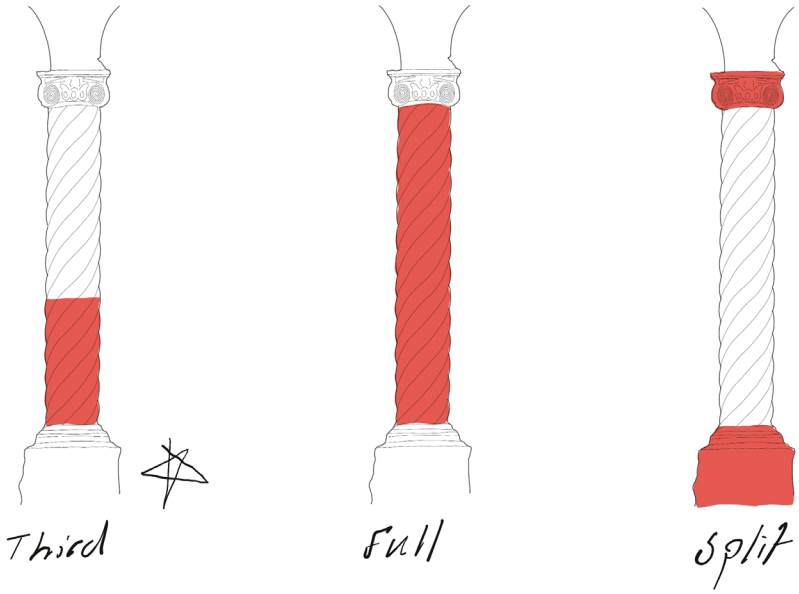
The new ceilings were developed by utilising the existing structural framework. Being extruded down, they can now act as nooks for lighting, ventilation and the necessary MEP. Acoustic panels could also be implemented to maintain comfortable noise levels in high traffic zones such as the lobby.

Even the treatment of columns was inspired by the treatment of trees across Ghana, often having their bottom section painted. Providing contrast, decoration and, some level of added protection.



Existing ceiling structures





Above: Diagrams of working with the existing.
Left: Photo of painted trees. A common sight in Ghana.

Continued....

The timber columns finished with a deep red stump.

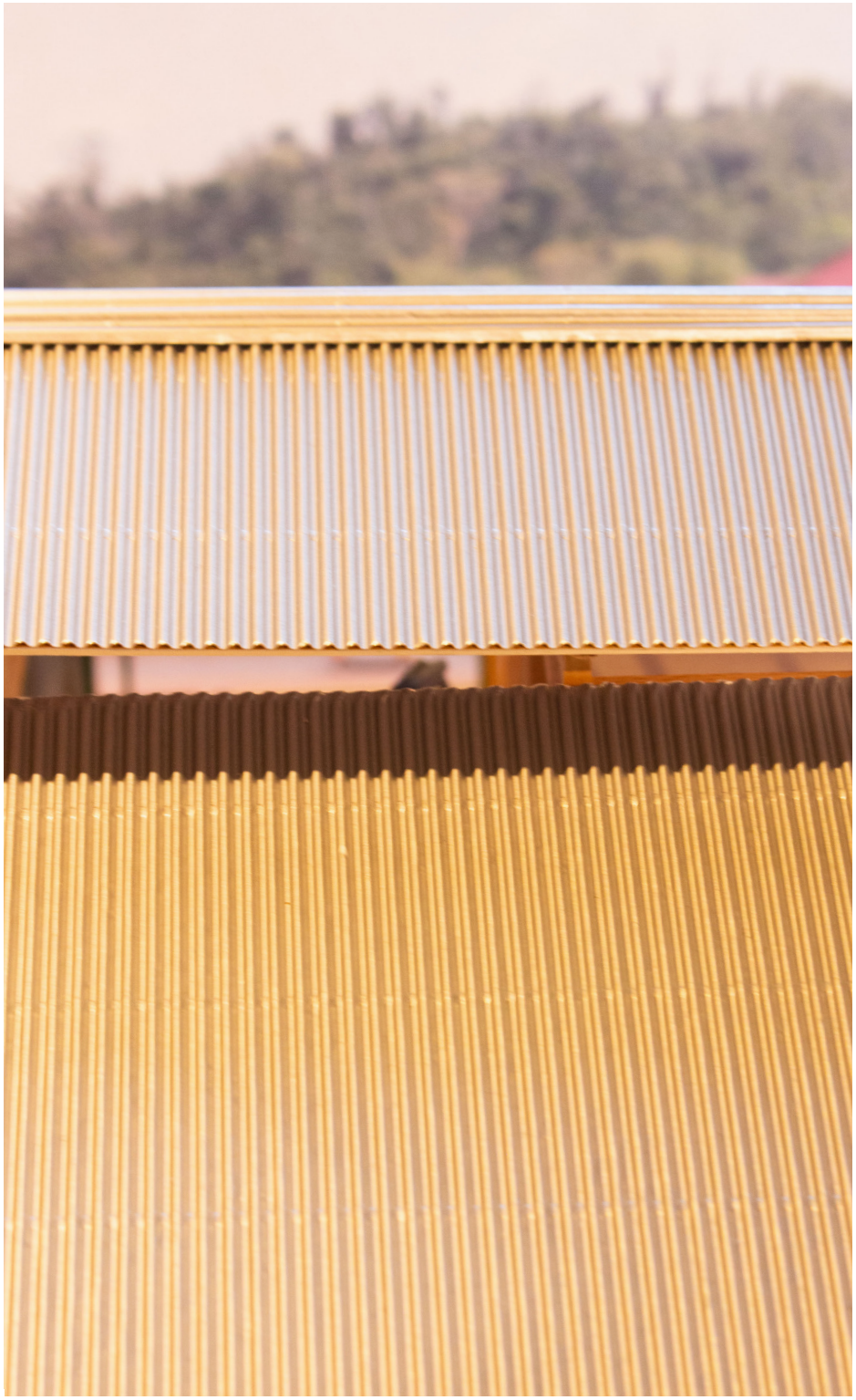
The red as discussed earlier can be interpreted to symbolise the blood of Ghana. Blood then being essential to life, it is akin to the soul of tha land.

It then seemed fitting to coat the floor and columns in this same red. The space being a physical manifestation of these symbolic meanings. A space in flux, ever-changing, constant movement, filled with life and soul. Art.



Above: Interior model of the exhibition space in the art house proposal.





Above: Model of roof material and texture.
Left: Sketch of a typical food stall found in markets and on pavements.

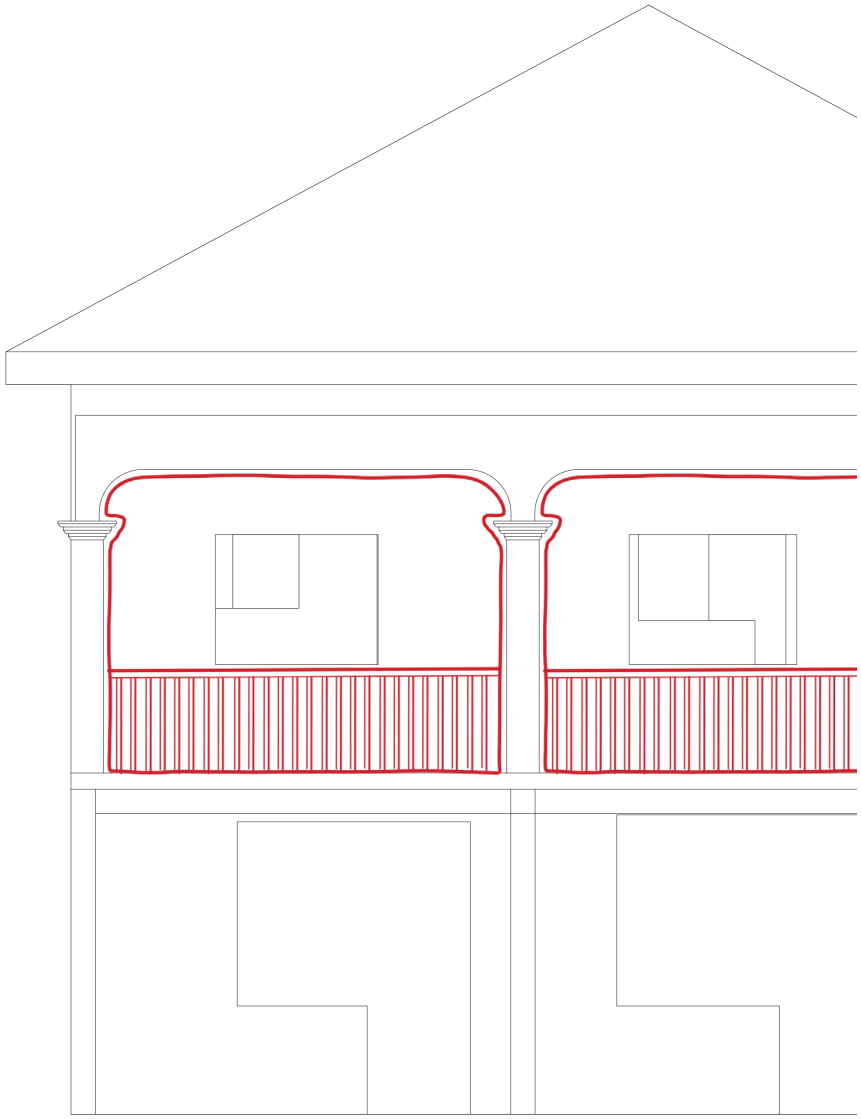
Highlighting and protecting

The highlighting and simultaneous protection of the columns has been developed even further.

Identifying the columns early on as a great representation of the style and taste of a specific time, and Ghana itself as a melting pot of ideas and cultures, these elements that may have been interpreted as pastiche in some contexts, felt at home here. Thus they became, much like the roofs, something to accentuate rather than to cover up and simplify.

Sticking to the palette of materials already selected, metal felt appropriate to provide protection. Slim sheets would be formed around the existing openings, creating a frame for the railings to sit on. This will mean one can avoid tampering with the structure whilst making a clear distinction as to what is new and what is old.

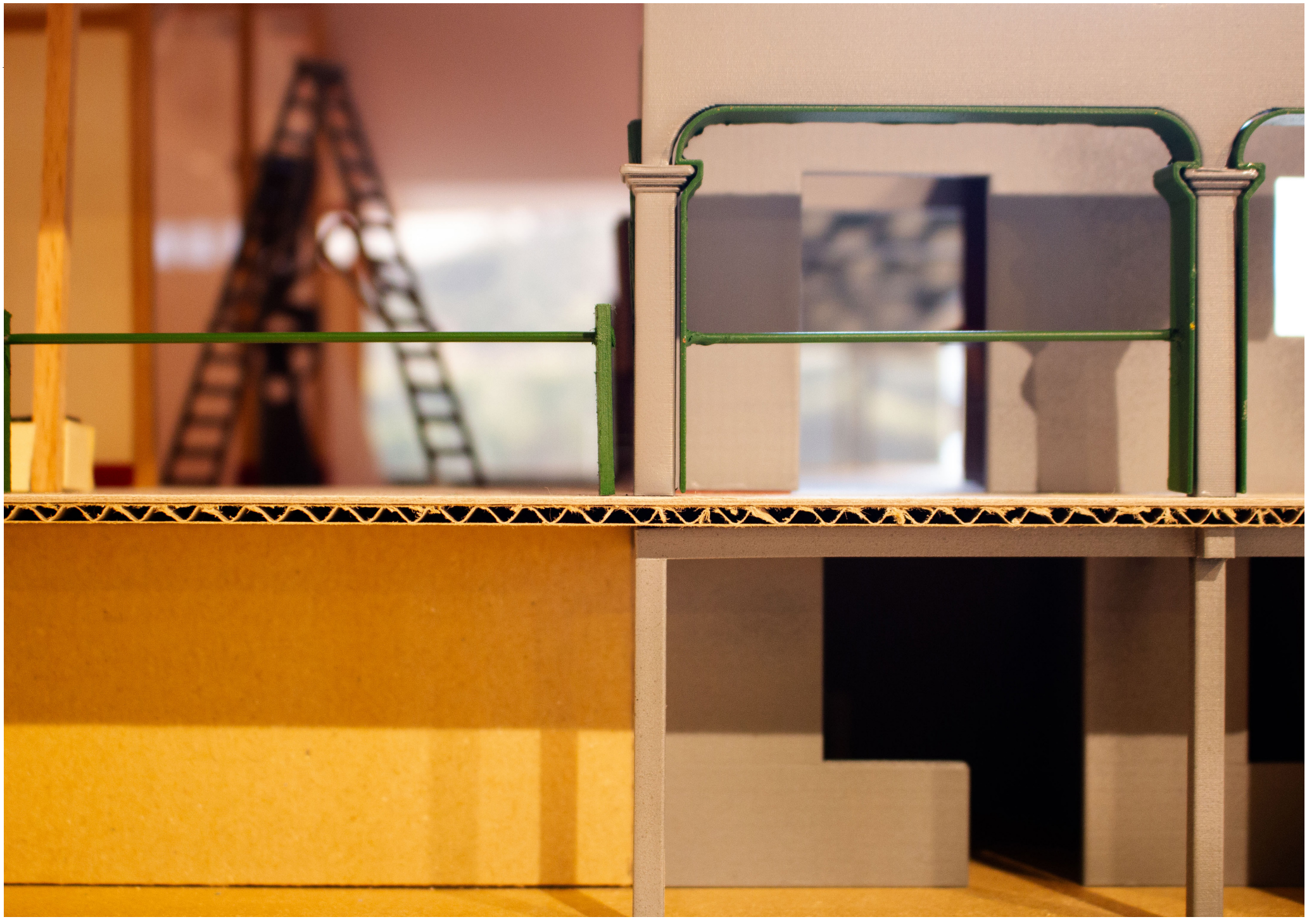




Above: Sketch of proposed railing system.
Left: Protection of existing elements concept.

Proposed

Existing



Left to nature

Storage beneath

Above: Model of proposed method of protecting existing elements whilst providing railings.

Space for heritage

Just as I archived findings on site, the gallery could also house objects of local interest.



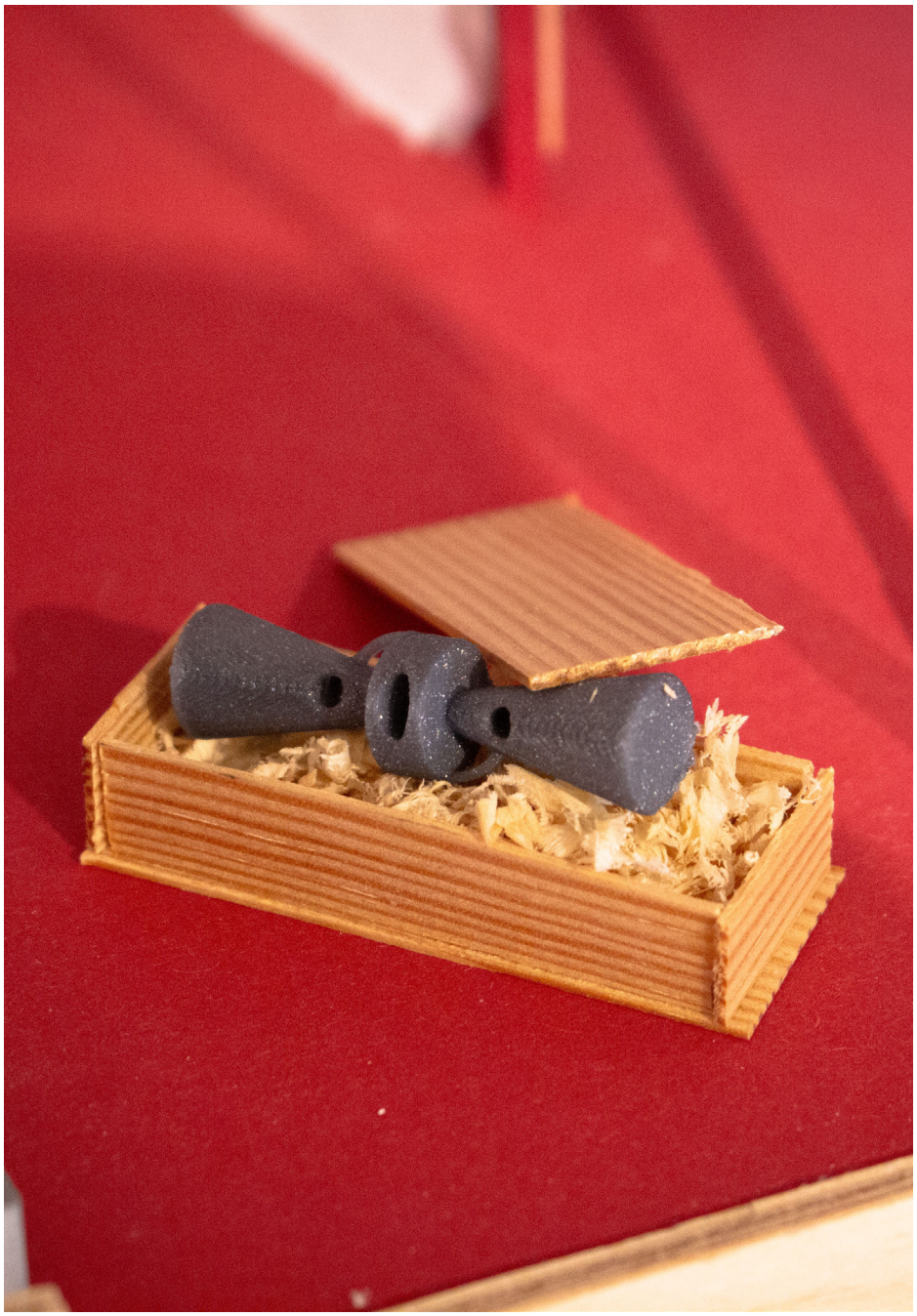
Above: Model of a drawer housing various objects found on site.
Image: Form/Design







Above Top: Model of shelving unit housing various elements in the art space.
Above Bottom: Actual found objects on site.
Left: Model of display cabinet in art hall proposal.

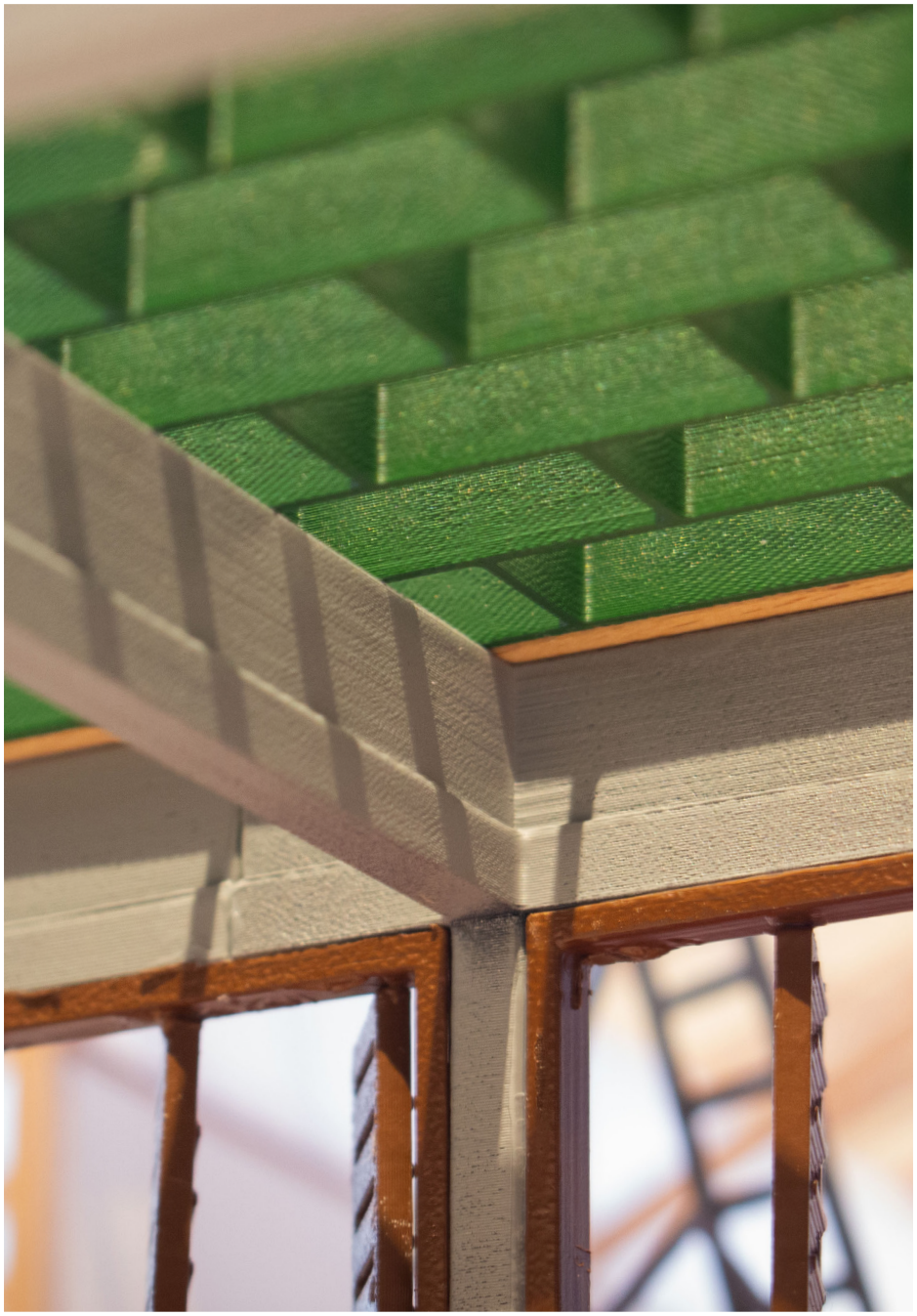




Above: Model of stools in proposed art promenade.
Left: Model of sculpture delivery in art hall proposal.

Working with the structure - filling in the gaps





Above: Proposed new ceiling using the same material and patterns of the existing.
Left: Photo of the existing ceiling.





Above: Model of interior of art hall proposal.
Left: Photo of a traditional house in Kumasi.





Above and Left: Model showing patterns of light formed by the sun, casting new shapes.





Above and Left: Photos of the model for the art hall proposal.



Above: Photo of the model for the art hall proposal.

Initial reflections

Post travel thoughts and analysis of relevant literature

To learn, we need a challenge. And to challenge, we first need a statement.

This project is my statement. A summary of my projections. To be challenged.

No one knows everything, but together we know quite a lot.

"All cultures need new ideas and incentives to maintain their vitality and growth. No culture can be perfectly integrated, and the process of infusing new elements, while necessary and desirable for the advancement and development of old cultures, is not a smooth one"" (Nnamdi Elleh, 1997, pp. 345–346)

"The trend that calls for replacement as a building tradition for Africa needs to be stopped. Replacing existing structures and styles with foreign styles results in compartmentalisation, which limits the newly imported elements within a certain segment of the society and is based on class" (Nnamdi Elleh, 1997, pp. 346)

It may be important to note that in the pace of today's world, what Elleh referred to as old and new in 1997 is different to what I would class as old and new now. Elements, styles and materials that were seen as new and inappropriate, inefficient and expensive then, may be so heavily implemented, and the production so streamlined, that they are now seen as an industry standard. Elements such the commonly used cement block. Now often mixed with local sand.

I have tried to be wary in my design decisions and especially in my writing. Though I have strong familial roots in Sefwi, I am still a foreigner and it is, thanks to our education here in the West, too easy to fall into neo-colonial thinking.

But as we within this field, naturally, put a lot of emphasis on the built environment and recognise its effect on us, it is important to remember that Ghana is more than its buildings, and its rich culture and history cannot be boiled down to a few walls and captured in a single building. And therefore I make no attempt to do this.

In this sense I did not come in search of an "authentic Ghana" neither do I attempt to present an "authentic Ghanaian design". Rather, to the best of my ability, I have learned how some people within Sefwi and those who visit (myself included) relate to their built environment here. What is appreciated and what is not. Using what already exists and proposing the use of what is available locally to create new additions. A response to people and climate. This then hopefully creates a space that is sensitive to its context as it is based on the context as described to me. This of course could be lost in translation or presented to me as one thinks I may want to hear it. But the benefit of family is that they can be honest without judgment.

Now with being back home, having a somewhat finished project, I am faced with an interesting feeling.

The look of the 'finished' buildings has almost become irrelevant. Of course, something that is visually appealing is important to me as a designer, and more importantly for the people of a place for whom I design, who want to be proud of their environment and what it represents. What became more important in the project is focusing on these people. I have already attempted to relate almost everything to the tactile, our relationship to space, even in my drawings to convince myself of the comfort I have hoped to create. The poetic way of relating layers and projection to our understanding of space is a great and fruitful exercise. But the travel, and everything I have learnt along the way, *that* is the best part of the project. Trying to dispel my own fears of neocolonoalism the only way possible by trying actively to engage with this environment in a meaningful manner *(Doherty, 2013, pp. 252).*

"...cultural identity, therefore, emerges as a complex field of operations that engages with - but is not defined by - cultural artefacts such as architecture." (Leach, 2002, pp. 128).

"All this helps us to reassess the relationship between architecture and cultural identity. The message is clear: we should focus not only on architectural forms themselves - for we would be wrong to dismiss these forms as irrelevant - but also on the narrative and performative discourses that give them their meaning. With time the specific features of architectural forms tend to lose their promenence, and slip into becoming part of an unnoticed and marginal background landscape... architecture plays a potentially important social role. The significant factor, however - beyond the nature of our architectural environment - is our engagement with that environment. Identification is a product of the consciousness by which we relate to our surroundings, and not a property of the surroundings themselves. Nor does matter - in Butler's terms - exist outside of discourse." (Leach, 2002, pp. 132).

I cannot totally escape applying western thinking but maybe that is okay. The building encompassing what may be seen as very 'African' elements, just as equally as 'European' ideas made up my very 'African' Grandfathers very identity. His whole life was dedicated to cultural exchanges. One not more valuable than the other, but the best of both worlds being shared. Drawing distinctions here is perhaps not necessary. The project can be a beautiful blend of both cultures.

The original ambition to create a framework that any architect could use as a foundation to work within was quite ambitious. But as I spent more time with the people and the place it became more obvious that this was not the best way to continue. It, this place, was of course, too complex and unique to do so. But to rather work intimately with this site and this context, creating something that would not be as appropriate anywhere else.

Further reflection

Final thoughts

Addition and subtraction

Whilst transformation projects, if to be successful, must take into account a whole host of various sensitivities, they in essence are a question of what do we keep and what do we remove? This is of course then connected to what is valuable and what is not, which is connected to what is the context and why was it built and so on and so forth.

This project, though not intentional from the beginning, tackled the issue of addition and subtraction in a somewhat binary and diplomatic way. With the hotel building being a testbed for subtraction and the pool house dealing with addition.

As one prepares to enter the “real world” where there tends to be little space for mistakes and regrets, it has been paramount for me, specifically, to have an opportunity to test, in these semi-realistic projects, what my limits are. How much I am willing to give and to take of the existing, whilst still maintaining a clean conscience.

And though it is difficult to measure the success of these make-believe interventions, the feedback received does corroborate that there has been a clear effort to design within the limits I set for myself, through research, and in a respectable way. That is to say, that in this world and project that I have created and all its boundaries, the level of intervention feels right. They are justified.

A matter of efficiency

The business of running a hotel was not the focus of this project but it does inevitably bleed into how successful the transformation, and hotel, could be. The aim, design wise, was to keep as much as possible of the existing walls and structure. What became evident very early on, is that by keeping too much, there would not be a reasonable amount of space left to provide optimal comfort. As there were no existing floorplans, assumptions had to be made as to the original intended purposes of each room. Judging by their layout, it became safe to assume that most rooms with certain dimensions, connected to a smaller room with pipework, were the guest rooms and private WC. But once drawn and modelled, looking at these rooms revealed that many of them were in undesirable places in terms of daylight, ventilation and circulation. The focus then shifted from an efficiency in demolition to an efficiency in movement, placing the people over the materials. Rooms that did not reach certain requirements that felt necessary for comfortable living in this environment, such as an open-able window with a view directly outwards, were to be transformed into other necessary amenity spaces.

This led to another balancing of needs and values. It was by studying and staying in over ten different hotels during my trip that I became more attune to what is needed to make one go around. Both from the guests perspective and that of the hotel owners, management and the

employees who are arguably just, if not more important, than the guests when it comes to considering the optimisiation of movement. Although improvements can always be made, the final plans aim to show clear and considered circulation, making the most of existing paths through the buildings and site, whilst carving new ones, not just for the sake of efficiency, but to allow for new light, new space and surprise. To bring wonder.

Practicalities

There were many practicalities to consider and tackle throughout the project, and not all could be covered in time. However, attempts were made to make the site and buildings feasible, rational and compliant. The movement on site was at first based on poetry and symbolism, and without losing that, certain practical elements were weaved in. For example, separate vehicle entrances and exits, with the exit being extra wide and leading directly to the buildings to accommodate emergency services.

The interiors also reflect this thinking with almost all new WC and kitchens being within the same region as existing ones, and being stacked to make use of existing openings and pipework. Instead of being a hindrance, these considerations of real-world practicalities helped to ground the project, pushing it further and furthering my own understanding of what needs to be considered when designing.

Another important element is the slope of the site and how one works with this. The four buildings were on varying levels, resulting in level changes that were mostly managed by a series of ramps, maintaining accessible routes across the site. These level changes were not a hindrance but were treated as an opportunity to create a variety of spaces. Nooks, crannies and viewpoints that each provide a different experience for the visitors.

Sustainability and the environment

As the project has mainly focused on restoring an existing building, the immediate benefits to the environment were clear, but there was still opportunity to push sustainability ambitions further, on both larger and smaller scales. Larger scale ambitions such as solar panel integration and rainwater harvesting have been outlined.

With more time, it would have been beneficial to explore how it would work on this site. Optimal placement of panels, the loads this would create on roofs, the space needed in the ground for tanks. Though this may bleed into the work of engineers and consultants, it is important to know as it would affect the arrangement of other elements on site.

What has, hopefully, been evident in the project is the focus on working with traditional methods to achieve climate resilience. Learning from visits to a plethora of buildings across Ghana, space has foremost been

organised to accommodate water and wind, naturally creating pleasant, temperate spaces without an over reliance on energy-heavy machinery.

This is seen through the various pools and many openings placed high and low throughout the buildings, all orientated to take into account the directions of the seasonal prevailing winds.

To focus on natural ventilation and cooling is not an option, but a necessity. I am told that this dry season is unusually long and hot. These are becoming all the more common. Coupled with air conditioning becoming more affordable and a staple of every household, the pressure on the electricity grid could be seen. “Light-outs” as the are called, were frequent, even in my hotel. We fortunately had a back up generator that would power the AC within minutes, but in buildings who are without, the change in temperature was immediate and drastic.

Therefore, it felt important being in Sefwi to design a building that could still provide reasonable comfort during a light-out. This being ever more paramount as these buildings host guests and artworks. Both known to be sensitive to unforeseen changes to their environment.

A question of appropriateness

In a place where there is a large disparity in wealth, it did not feel appropriate to propose a large energy draining luxury hotel right in town. But this also brings to question the appropriateness of the whole project. How does luxury fit into a place where many may not have access to ‘good’ facilities?

Whilst I do believe that many questions of access and provision of necessities have answers in regulations and with lawmakers rather than architecture, there are still important considerations to make as an architect when it comes to peoples welfare. Architecture does have a large impact.

The hotel was never intended to solve issues of poverty in the region, but in line with local government ideas, projects like these would hopefully kick-start a new wave of tourism and investment. Though this comes with its own set of issues, by working with land and buildings that are existing, residents are not being displaced and existing structures are not being as harshly disrupted. What is being provided by the hotel and art hall are much needed facilities for the development of tourism and culture, providing space for local art to flourish. Hopefully not causing a divide between local residents and visitors, or relying on trickle-down economics, but actually working as a catalyst for direct mutual benefit.

What then makes this project appropriate here is that it is not just made for guests, or for locals, but a space that is for everyone.

Process reflection

This thesis, with all its uncertainties and surprises, remained a simple traditional architectural project. With familiar parts; concept, research, survey and proposal. In its organisation and execution it does not differ from most projects, either in school or in the workplace. This has its many benefits in terms of legibility, feasibility and efficiency in constructing and communicating the project, especially with limited time.

As this process is very familiar, it was not met with too much criticism from myself or others, and whilst enjoyable and rewarding, the best part of the project for me was everything else surrounding it. The places I saw and the people I met. These interactions provided a strong foundation for the decisions taken throughout the thesis. But what could have been a missed opportunity is not extending these interactions later into the process.

It is normal to have public consultations at different stages but this also can become quite superficial, with the residents having little impact in the bigger scheme of things. Perhaps one could have tested a different way of working.

The early research and surveying stages of the project involved the people, site and materiality on a close and personal level. The project was read and described in terms of colour and symbolism. This sensitivity may have been lost in translation. Though the emphasis of highlighting how one actually lives on the site is illustrated through the populated drawings.

Though plans do not normally lend themselves to the representation of the almost anthropomorphic nature in which we describe certain elements. The rationalisation of the concepts, though necessary, may have diluted what could have been an interesting part of the project.

But the question of how one would build and show a project outside of these traditional rendering methods, is too large to have tested and answered without taking away from the rest of the project and the main aim of the thesis namely, ‘completing’ the hotel. It is however, a curiosity and idea that I will take along with me into practice. How to put people and sensitivity at the forefront of what I do.

What was lost? What was gained?
And what am I now bringing back?

The transactional summary of this project shows that not much was lost, but a lot has been gained. In exchange for a few demolished walls, new light and life has been introduced to a lonely space on the edge of a town. For myself, there has been a deepening of knowledge. How the old can meet the new and interactions between different materials. Most of this pertains to designing in a place with a radically different climate, where the extremes of hot and wet are felt annually. But these extremes are spreading, with European architecture desperately needing to adapt to more severe weather, especially the existing building stock. So the lessons learned in how to work with heat, water and wind 5662 kilometres away is still relevant here and now.

But what may be the most interesting takeaway is the way in which architecture was sometimes conducted in Ghana. The opening up before being finished. Businesses and people moving into one part, whilst the rest is still under construction. In this way, a building is invested in floor by floor. Less financial risk to stakeholders for a perhaps marginally greater risk to safety. But as the structure is all set before anyone uses it, and the fact that most buildings are not more than three or four floors, this risk to safety is relatively low. What is being left till last is mostly decorative, the walls, floors and fittings. By leaving this until the success of a place can be seen, one can then design in a way that responds directly to how people are already wanting to inhabit, rather than assuming beforehand on their behalf. Allowing for a more organic and from-the-ground-up approach.

Whilst this may at first seem very far removed from the strict health and safety centred and regulated approach adopted in Scandinavia, we see this way of working quite regularly, but in post. The aging housing stock here needs periodical maintenance on a large scale. During renovations, high rise apartments have new bathrooms, kitchens, pipework and walls all removed and put in whilst people are still living in them. Essentially conducting their daily business on a live construction site. My own apartment building underwent such a renovation during the writing of this thesis.

So we essentially are already equipped to work in this way, it is just the mindset that needs to be changed. And if it could be changed, and we challenged our current approaches, we could perhaps develop a new architectural language, one that is truly at the mercy of its users. Ghanaian style.

The death of my project

In all this, the world keeps spinning. My musings, sketches, collected trinkets and proposal. A layer. Adding to the foundations, the collective bedrock. Irrelevantly relevant.

The clay falls apart. The wood rots. The metal re-purposed. Revealing an empty shell. This time once filled with life. In all this ensuring that this building can continue to be rediscovered and reformatted. That even with this project, it's death, will not be the end.



Above: A traveller finding the overgrown development in the future, ready to measure, analyse and catalogue a new set of finds, discovering and setting their own balance of values, building upon what I have built.

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