

Creating Peace Through Space  
Ameya



The Moon That Doesn't Set

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The moon that doesn't set

## Acknowledgement

To my mum,

I have a lot to thank you for. However, embracing the Zen spirit,  
I'd like to especially thank you for teaching me... *nothing*.



## Preface

What do Neuroscience and Buddhism have in common?  
They figured out that pleasure is not happiness.

It's said that what keeps us suffering is the constant seeking of pleasure. From a neurobiological point of view, this is true. What pleasure is, is dopamine. And all dopamine wants is more dopamine. It's the molecule of more. It is never content. It is the primary driver of all addiction.

From the neurobiological perspective, seeking pleasure ends up not being about the pleasure itself but more about alleviating the pain and suffering that is born from the absence of it.

So, what can we do? We need to retrain ourselves to crave peace over pleasure; to enjoy the process over the result.

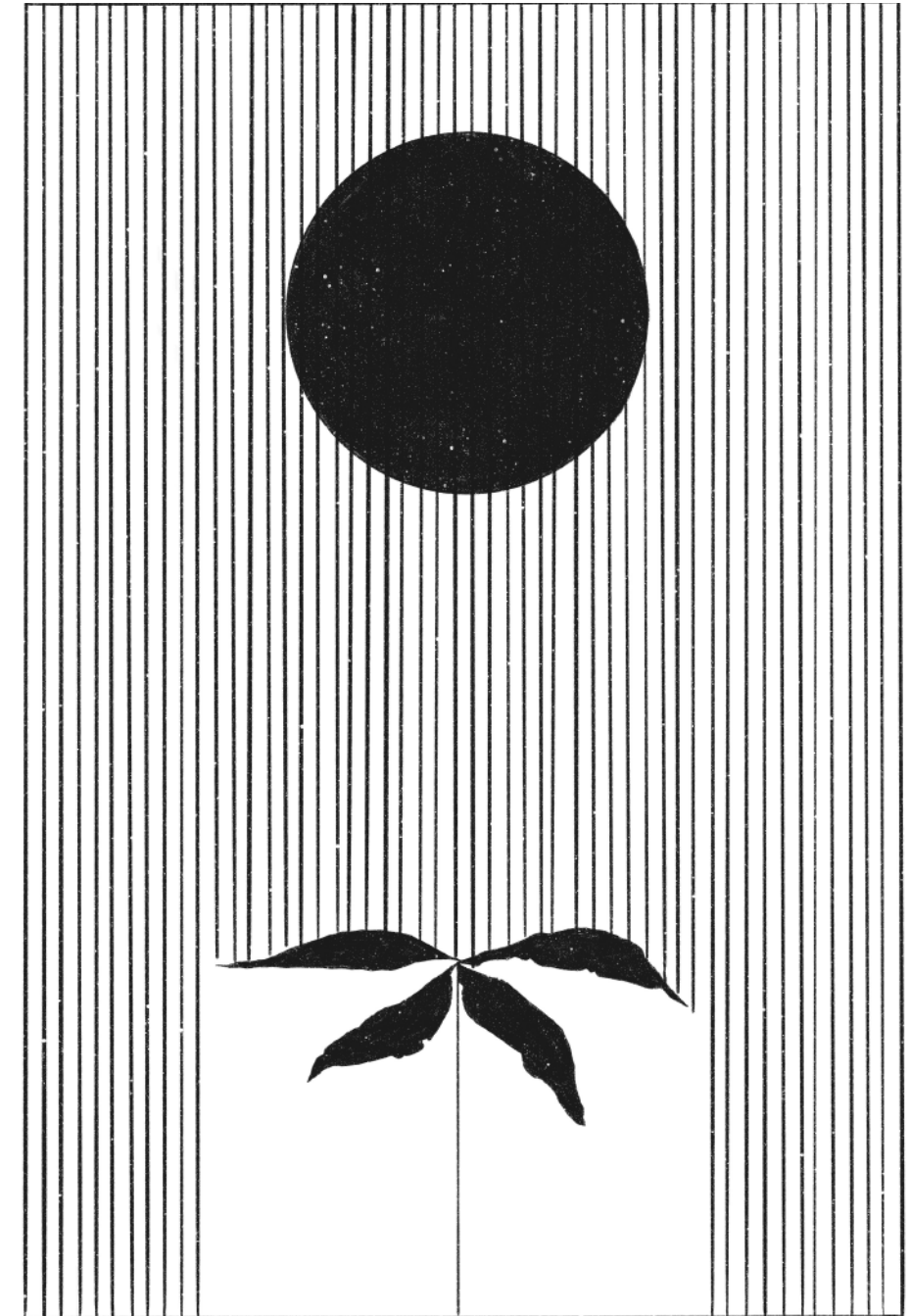
This is the philosophy behind my thesis.

We tend to have an “all or nothing” approach to concepts like this. Either practice like a saint, or not at all.

I admit, it is hard to not look for bursts of pleasure in life. It isn’t easy to be suspended in a bubble of peace while being bombarded with bills, deadlines and the general stresses that come with life.

When we push the body beyond its limit, we recognise its fatigue and recuperate. We take breaks, go to spas, detox. But, when the mind is tired, where do we go?

My goal was to create that space. A space that is like a spa, but for the soul.



## Abstract

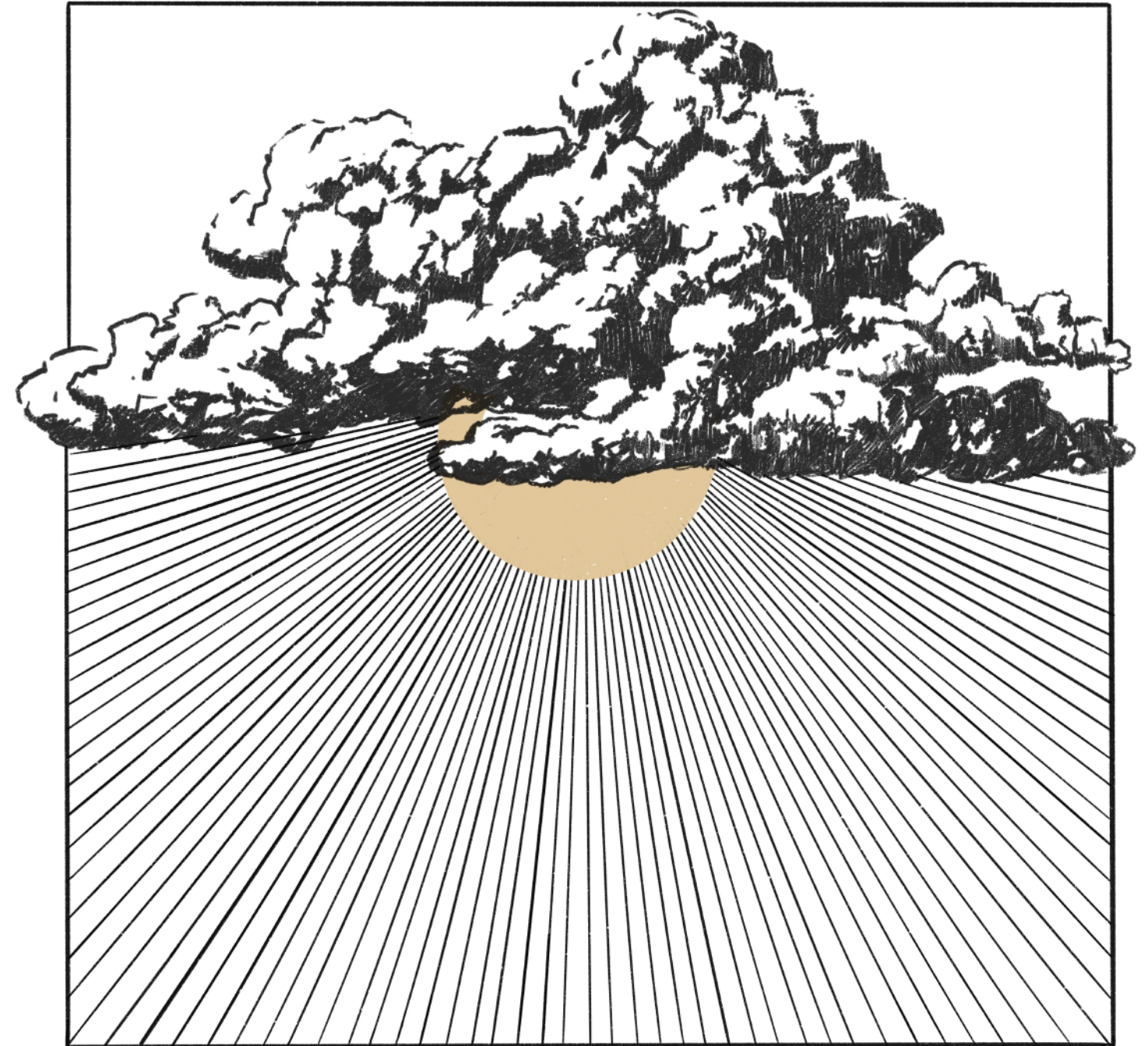
When a space is planned, two major factors come into play- function and feeling.

Function can be a very strong dictating factor in planning, especially in urban settings where space is in itself a luxury. This aspect of designing is rational and is based on regulations and standards that are established. The goal here is, “how can every inch of the space be optimised and work as intended?” It is tangible and scientific.




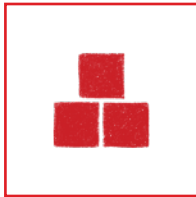


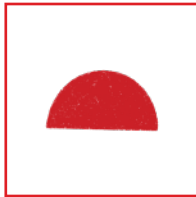

Feelings on the other hand are inherently abstract. When I say feelings, I mean design intent- *what do I want people to feel here?* This is an understated but powerful aspect to design. It is about the effect created by the interplay of varying elements- spaces, textures, light, materials, colours. The absence of hard and fast rules allows for freedom in creativity and expression.

What I want to do here, is to isolate the “feeling” aspect of design and bring it back to the foreground. I would like to explore how space can influence emotion.

I aim to create a space that stimulates peace. The concept is rooted in Zen philosophy. However, none of these intentions will be obviously indicated in the space.



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## Why Zen?

Having arrived at the goal of wanting to create a space which evokes peace through design alone - the next question is *how?*

While doing research on something this abstract, a lot of the material was very philosophical. The tricky thing about a lot of philosophy is that it is intricately woven around the concept of God. I want to actively avoid any religious connotations in my space, and was finding it hard to separate the philosophy from religion- until I arrived at Zen.

It was in contrast to most of the material I found. The lack of strict rules, weightage on scriptures, morality, right and wrong, dogma, and even the concept of God- was attractive to me. The vibe around Zen philosophy is that it doesn't take itself, and life too gravely. It takes this lack of seriousness seriously. It is a cut to the chase, skin in the game, spunky brand of philosophy.

This is why Zen.





## The Birth of Zen

I have to offer a disclaimer of sorts here. Literature around Zen and philosophy is largely based on stories, passed on through word of mouth. Unlike history, these anecdotes aren't fact, but are just one of several versions. This is my favourite version.

Zen was brought to China by the Indian prince turned Buddhist monk called Bodhidharma (also known as Daruma in Japan). He was the third son of a Pallava King from Kanchi in South India. As a young prince, he was exposed to philosophy, martial arts and politics as all princes were at that time. As he grew up, he grew more and more fascinated with Buddhism and eventually renounced his prince-hood and became a monk.

When I say monk, you might have the mental image of a serene, calm and smiling bald man, right?

Wrong.

Daruma was, to put it delicately- eccentric. He voyaged from India to China and created quite a stir fresh off the boat (literally). Hearing about his arrival, the emperor of that time, Wu-Ti, summoned him to his court.

Buddhism wasn't a foreign concept in China at the time, and Wu-Ti was a patron. He had made efforts to translate several Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Chinese. He had also ordered for the construction of several Stupas.

So when he called Daruma, he did so with an ulterior motive- to find out how much good karma he had accumulated.

He imagined that he would humbly ask the monk if he had perchance accrued any merit for all his good deeds. And the only response he could foresee from Daruma was a thumping "yes of course!". After all, he was the noble king who showed his people a path to enlightenment. That definitely counts as at least some supreme merit, right?

Wrong.

"You have no merit." Daruma replied plainly.

The emperor was taken aback and irritated. Nevertheless he tried to maintain his composure and asked the monk:

“Right. Um, can you then tell me what the essence of Buddhism is?”

“Empty, there is nothing.”

Visibly annoyed, Wu-Ti asked “Who are you?!”

“I don’t know.”

By this point, both were thoroughly exasperated with each other. The emperor- for the monk’s cryptic answers and complete invalidation of his good deeds; Daruma - for the emperor’s inability to understand what to Daruma was crystal clear. This concluded their spectacularly bad encounter and they went their separate ways.

Essentially the biggest takeaway for Wu-Ti should have been that he had done seemingly noble things for a selfish reason. He wanted to be validated for his selflessness and greatness by the monk. Daruma saw through the emperor’s facade of modesty. This was why the monk had said he had no merit, admittedly in a far less explicit way.

Daruma then wandered around China until he reached a Shaolin temple. The monks there were already aware of his eccentricity and refused to welcome him in. Unfazed, he then sat outside the temple staring at a wall and meditated for nine years. While staring at a wall may seem like a colossal waste of time, for *nine years* no less, it was a radical approach to meditation. It later laid the basis of Zazen (Zen meditation).

During the course of the nine years, the monks of the temple grew accustomed to Daruma. They were a little uneasy with the monk’s almost inhuman perseverance. The uneasiness grew into awe for the monk’s concentration and will power, and eventually they took him in.

The Shaolin monastery was in the midst of a forest and the monks largely spent their time hunched over tables transcribing texts. Daruma noticed that they were not in good shape physically, and couldn’t defend themselves against the wild animals and bandits that prowled the forest. The lack of physical discipline also translated to weaker mental resilience. Seeing this, Daruma decided to teach them exercises designed to

enhance *Chi* and strength- both physically and mentally. These exercises were based on what he had learnt as a young prince, and eventually evolved into what we know today as the martial art of Kung Fu.

One monk, Huike was particularly enamoured by Daruma. He begged Daruma to take him on as a student and Daruma eventually relented. When asked why he was so persistent, Huike admitted that he needed some help, he needed his mind to be pacified, as it had been troubling him.

“Bring me your mind and I’ll pacify it”

After considering it for a while, he said “I cannot find it”.

“There, I have pacified it!”

In that split second, he understood and Huike became enlightened.

Many years later when he was old, Bodhidharma asked four of his best students what The Truth was (the essence that Wu-Ti was asking about right in the beginning). Huike simply stood up, smiled and said nothing.

He became the second patriarch of Zen.



## What is Zen?

That is a question people a lot more qualified than me have been unable to answer. Someone had said “Zen is extremely easy to misunderstand”, and they were right. It is something that is done, an experience. Nevertheless, here are some characteristics of Zen.

Zen could be considered as a branch of Buddhism. It developed in China as a result of the fusion of philosophies from Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism which was popular in China at that time.

Zen isn’t a religion in the most commonly understood sense of the word. There is no God, no rituals, and no dogma. The focus is on the Self. They believe that the enlightened mind is the default state, and we need to get back to it. So rather than the common goal of ascending to a heaven, the aim here is to descend into oneself.

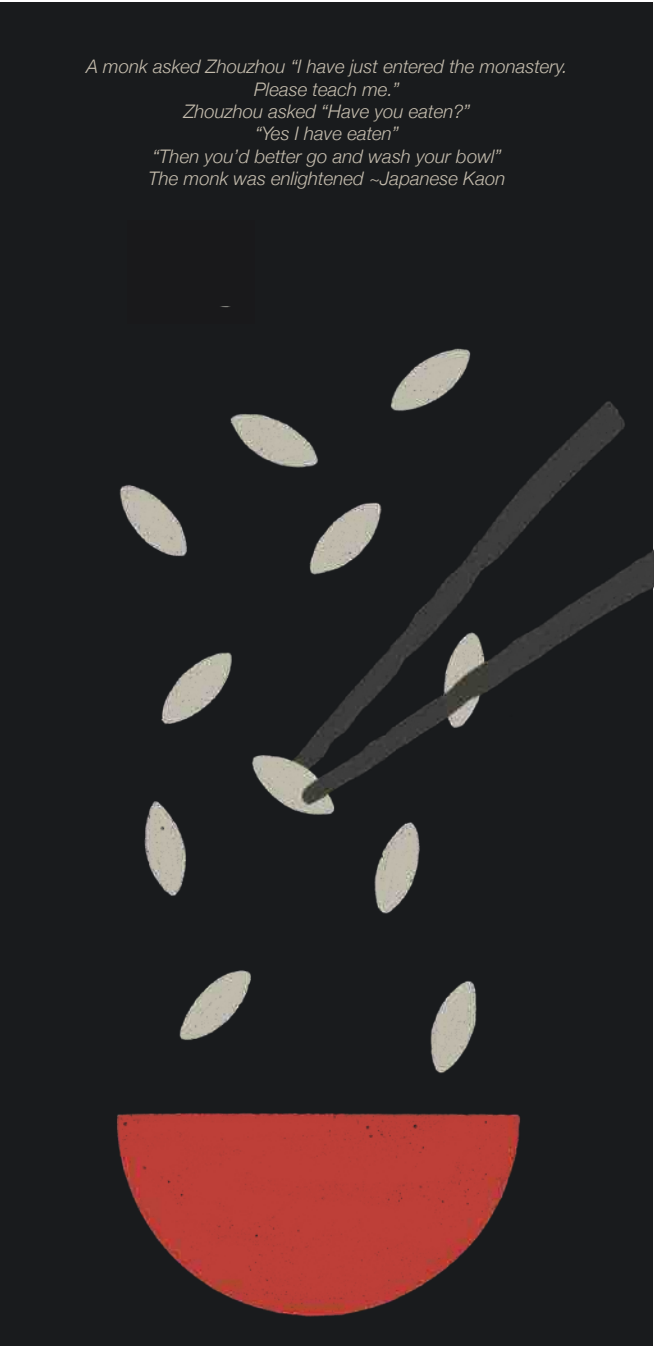
Written accounts and doctrines are not given importance, in fact they are largely rejected. As I had said, the core of Zen is an experience, a feeling. It is about the *oh* moment when suddenly everything just clicks. Communicating the experience simply just doesn’t cut it. Say you have never eaten a chocolate before, and you ask me how it tastes. I could say it’s sweet but also bitter, rich, melts in your mouth... But, in all honesty no matter what I say, cannot hold a candle to the experience of you, actually eating a chocolate.

There is a large focus on “nothing”. In a video I was watching, a Zen monk said in absolute seriousness “Zen is good for nothing”. That is the goal. To completely rid your mind, and reach a state of nothingness. *Who are you when you are not doing, feeling, and thinking about anything?* Doing nothing is not considered a waste of time but rather, an art form.

Zazen meditation aims to practice the art of doing nothing. The point isn’t to learn something new, but rather unlearn.

The nothingness philosophy is rooted in the Buddhist concept of emptiness or “Sunyata”. Emptiness here does not mean that nothing exists. It means that nothing exists independently and permanently. All phenomena are transient.

Take the concept of 0 for instance. The general usage of it denotes that something is not there, or lack of existence. But is 0 nothing? This concept was hard to grasp, which is why it took over a hundred years for the Greeks to adopt it. In the number system itself, 0 is the link and mid point between positive and negative numbers which go on infinitely.



## Learning Zen

We have established that the goal is to get enlightened, which is a state of nothingness. But, this is a personal journey and it looks different for everyone. Naturally, a rigid, structured course wouldn’t apply to “unlearn” the zen way.

Master disciple relationships are important in Zen teachings. The teachings here are of experiential and not intellectual knowledge. Masters may use cryptic language, give their students mundane and seemingly unrelated chores, or even distract their disciples to test their focus.

Another method some masters use are Koans or Haikus. They are paradoxical questions that the students must ponder upon. Many of these are almost nonsensical and unanswerable with logic.



## Zen and Space

A lot of the elements of zen we have spoken about thus far are abstract, philosophical concepts. But how do these concepts translate to a more tangible and physical way, in terms of space?

Stilling the mind is the central goal in Zazen. At any given moment we have thousands of thoughts splashing around in our head like fish fighting for bread, and the goal is to return to a placid state. In a space, stillness can be achieved through balance. Elements like light, texture, materials and colours can be consciously chosen to create a feeling of peace and stillness. This is not to be confused with lack of movement -here, we are talking about conscious choices of how each element is to be presented in the space. *How do we bring out the beauty of it, in the least complicated way?*

Emptiness in a space does not mean a literally empty space, just as emptiness does not mean nothingness. The way I'd interpret the concept of emptiness in space would be to maintain a focus on the essential. One way to do that would be through minimalism. Minimalism could be achieved through restraint in either form, colour, material or other elements; each creating a varying effect on the space. Visual monotony could also be another approach to this philosophy in terms of architecture-creating a space where clutter and over stimulation is avoided, and only the essential is illuminated. *Emptiness highlighted by spaciousness.*

Transience seems directly in contradiction with architecture. We look at architecture as permanent and unchanging-anything but transient. Transience can be introduced in space through nature. By bringing nature- plants, light and shadow, breeze we bring in an element of constant change and impermanence. I especially love when the borders of inside and

outside and blurred in space, and nature is welcome in naturally.

Koans and Haikus are unanswerable, seemingly nonsensical riddles. A school of thought believes that the point of these haikus is to make peace with the pointlessness of trying to solve them logically. Logic falls apart. In space, of course you could have unexpected elements which could be surprising like Koans. But, I have another take on this.

Today, we often see people trying to make the most out of their space. Almost like a desperation to use every single square foot of space for a functional purpose.

Someone I was showing my sketches to for this thesis argued that an element of my concept was a "dead space", and this opinion interested me greatly. The reason they felt so, was because this element was taking up space with no lucrative function. *Functionless space was equated to a waste of space.*

My outlook on this is a little different. I feel that while that element doesn't have any essential function, it isn't dead- it is alive in it's lack of tangible function. I believe that function alone cannot dictate how a space is designed, and this thought is the fundamental hypothesis I want to explore in this project.

This opinion probably can't be argued with logic, and might seem nonsensical, much like a koan though, right?





The most challenging part of my thesis, for me, lied in its inherent abstractness. Essentially my aim was to create a space that evokes peace and stillness through design.

This was the filter with which I chose my case studies. The spaces I have chosen have very different functions but all have the same design intent- one that aligns with mine. They have made conscious use of materials, textures, light, colours and other elements to bring about these emotions.

The aim of doing these case studies was, for me, to see how they have woven feelings in the fabric of the space, and how people have similar emotions in these very different spaces.



Case Study 1 **Zen House, Studio HA**

Hồ Chí Minh City, Vietnam.





Vietnam based Studio HA designed this monastery inspired home for a Buddhist family in Ho Chi Minh City. The owners wanted a private refuge of tranquility and peace amidst the hustle and bustle of the populous city.

The house is built like a typical “tube house” which is commonly found in Vietnamese cities. These homes have narrow and long footprints, owing to the lack of space in cities.

The plot is sandwiched between homes and offers no view to maximise privacy for the clients. The studio opted to design the house with very few external windows, as the site has no view to offer. Instead, the building has been planned around a central atrium, which is under a glass ceiling flanked by wooden louvers to let in ample light.

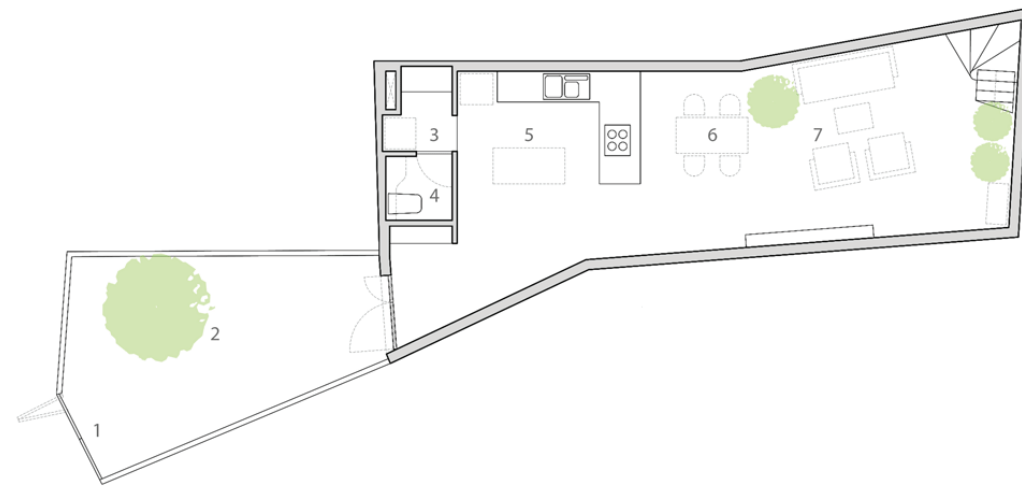
The atrium layout dictated the spatial planning largely. The communal living spaces are on the ground floor. The kitchen has a low roof, while the living and dining have an open to sky fee due to the sky light. The bedrooms and bathrooms are all contained in a block, which has been designed to look like they are seemingly suspended.

The windows for the bedrooms both face inward into the atrium which has the skylit roof. This enables ample natural light to stream in to the living spaces, while also solving the problem of lack of privacy. Traditional windows would have meant the residents would have the unsightly view of their neighbours home, and them into the private spaces of the family's.

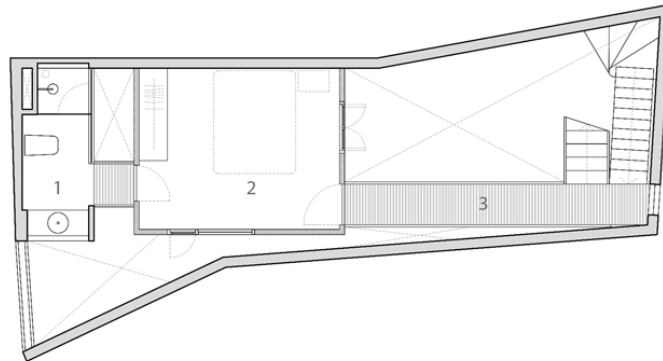
This plan is almost introspective, relying on the inside for light and beauty. The lack of windows does not translate to a claustrophobic space. Light, air and the openness of the sky are still brought into the home. *The aim in Zen too, is to descend into yourself.*

Additionally, traffic noises are blocked out, making the home almost feel insulated from the city, while being at the heart of it.

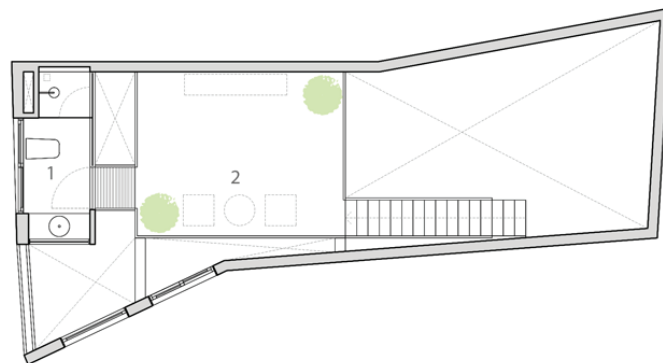




**GROUND FLOOR**  
 1. entrance  
 2. garden  
 3. laundry  
 4. toilet  
 5. kitchen  
 6. dining room  
 7. living room



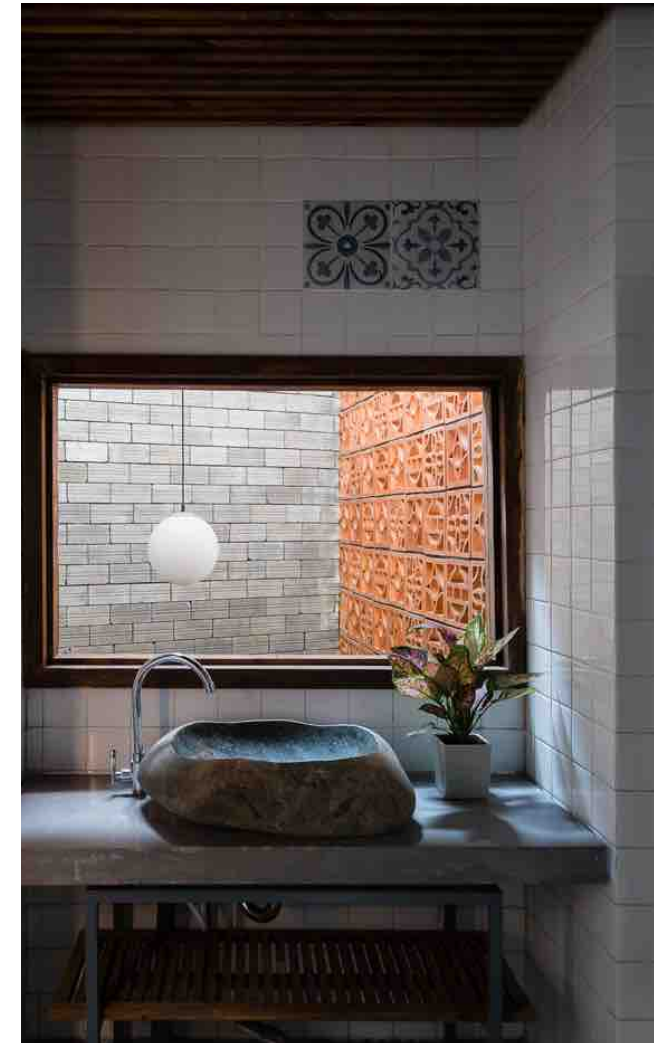
**FIRST FLOOR**  
 1. bathroom  
 2. bedroom  
 3. corridor



**THIRD FLOOR**  
 1. bathroom  
 2. altar

Material choices have played an important role in creating the feel that the clients wanted in their home. A central request of theirs was that the home should feel like a monastery. The material palette is minimal, natural and rustic, aimed at giving the space a raw and rugged feel. The materials used were consciously rough, unpolished and earthy. This was in a contrast to the shiny steel and glass facades we often see in modern architecture, amplifying the feeling of isolation and escape from the city.

Most of the walls in the house are of semi rough, concrete bricks. The stairs, railings and ceiling louvers are all made of wood, bringing warmth to the cool concrete home. The block of bedrooms is covered in white plaster and paint, amplifying the light the atrium lets in and making the house feel brighter. Clay and metal lattices have also been used in the smaller facades of the home near the entrance. They cast shadows on the concrete walls and break the visual monotony, as well catch the breeze.







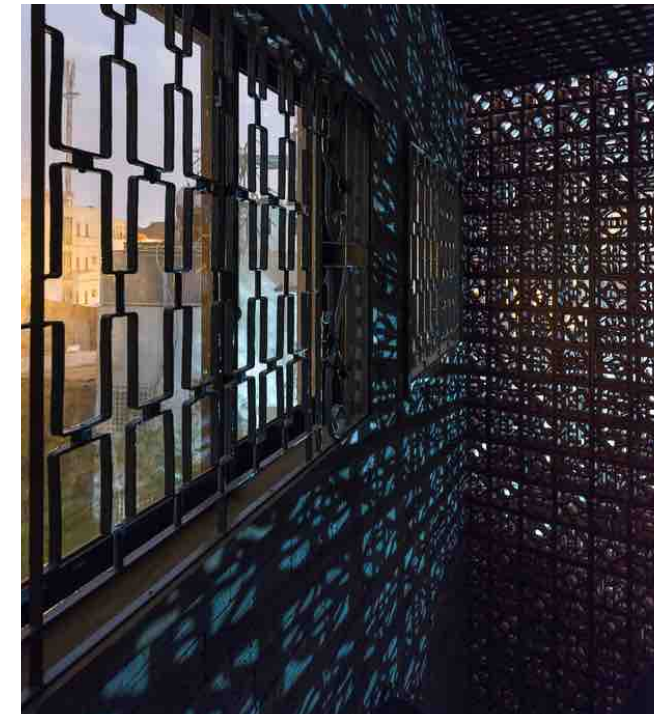
The louvers under the glass ceiling create shadow patterns on the concrete brick walls, and offers diffused light that softens the blazing afternoon sun. The light patterns change through the day, giving the building vitality, and a feeling of transience. Nature is allowed in and the sky feels like a part of the home. The view is in the infinite up of the sky.

The biggest challenge in a home without windows, is that it can feel stifling and claustrophobic if done without planning. The brief of the clients went a step ahead and required the home to feel open, monastic, and one with nature.

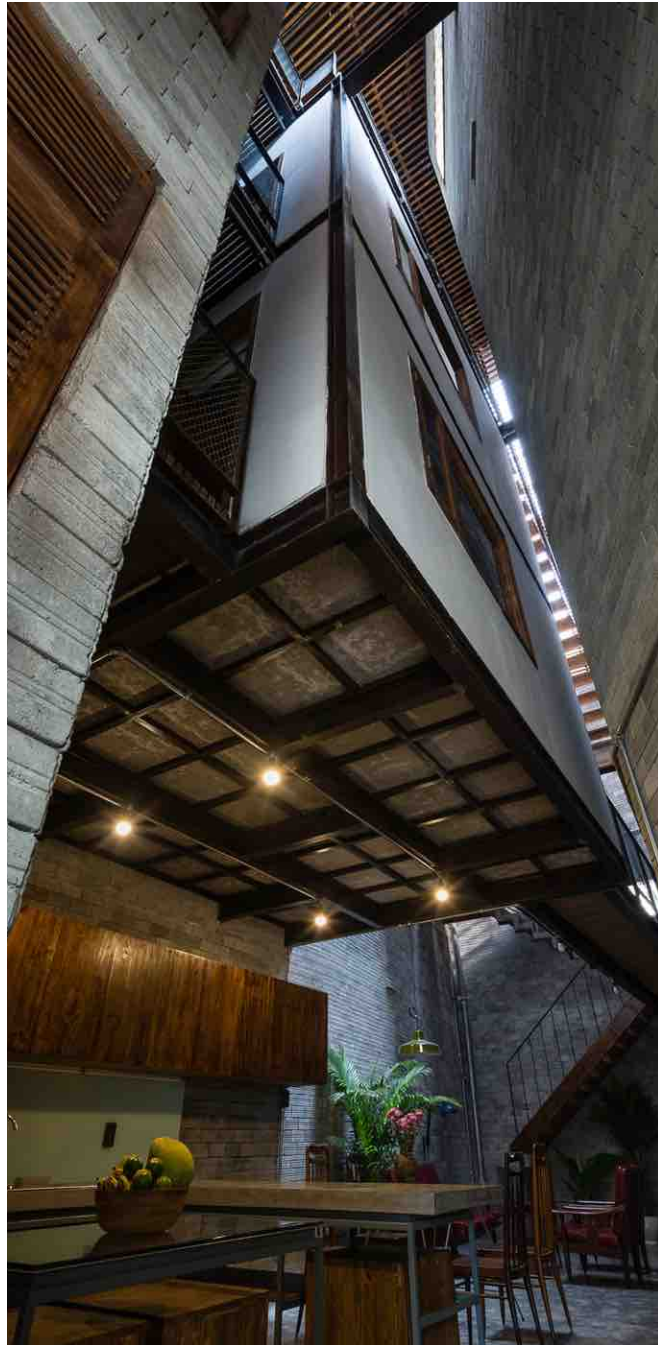
The design of the house has one natural element in abundance- light. The architects have played with it by texturing the light in different ways to give various moods to the same element.

The various textures have been created by playing with motifs, angles of diffusion and intensity of the light. We can see the light filtering through louvers in the atrium, creating stark light and shadow patterns. At the entrance, we see a kaleidoscope of geometric shadows created by light filtering through the gridded door and latticed front facade. Finally, you see very filtered light peeking it's way through the thin, delicate wooden bridges connecting the house's core block.

These patterns themselves are in constant flux, affected by nature, making the house feel like an alive being with varying moods.



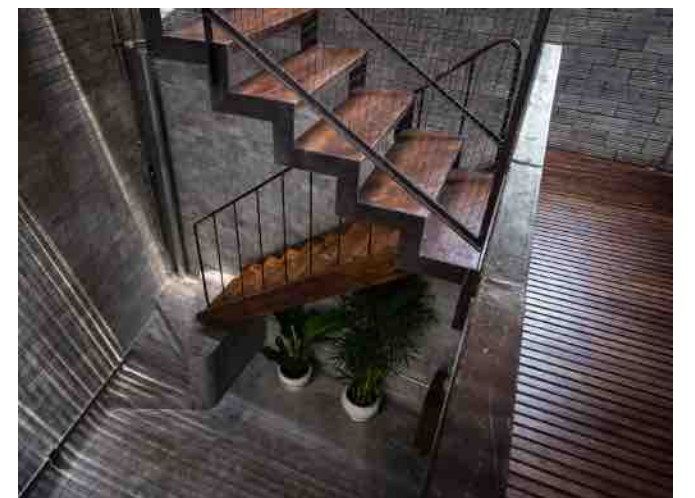




The block containing the bedrooms and bathrooms, the “living block” looks like it is suspended in air. These are the most private spaces in the house, and have windows overlooking the more social areas- the living and dining. Under the apparently floating living block is the kitchen.

The home has been designed to not feel as narrow as it really is. This has been done by keeping all the vertical elements airy and skeletal. Even the living block does not seem as bulky, because of the illusion of suspension that they have created. The atrium of the house which is open to the sky offers a vertical infinity, emphasising on the height of the space.

In contrast, all the horizontal elements have been made solid and heavy, giving a visually grounding effect.



Case Study 2 **Sapporo Cemetry, Tadao Ando**



Sapporo, Hokkaido Prefecture, Japan.





Japanese architect Tadao Ando was commissioned to work on redesigning the Sapporo Cemetery. In the midst of the cemetery was a 44 foot tall Buddha looming over the visitors and making them feel uncomfortable and uneasy. Ando proposed to conceal the Buddha in a hill he created, and reveal him as the visitor gets progressively closer to the statue. The space now feels more peaceful and serene.

The Buddha statue now sits inside a hill covered by 150,000 lavender plants with only the top of his head peeking out, allowing visitors to catch only a glimpse of him from the outside. Visually we see only grey concrete which allows the lavenders to stand out. During spring, the hill is a mound of lavender, in summer it turns green and in winter buddha is seated in snowy white.

Ando believes architecture is meant to be a silent canvas that enables nature to take the forefront. This is also the biggest charm of the cemetery- how well harmonised it is with it's surrounding landscape.

The sensorial masterpiece of this space is the rings of lavender plants on the mound. They change colour with the seasons, *transience*, and they also bring an olfactory aspect to the space. Lavender is one of the most calming scents, and one is overcome with the scent when they visit the site.

While the mound is man made and was constructed around the statue, Ando has ensured that it blends with the landscape seamlessly. The aim was to make it look like it belongs there, something that always was a part of Sapporo's landscape.



Now, seeing the Buddha is a process. First, visitors pass a still water garden at the base of the mound and walk past a 40 meter long tunnel to approach the statue.

The still water garden at the entrance is the precursor to the tunnel. It is a shallow pool surrounded by concrete walls. This space is meant to feel simple and still, almost visually underwhelming. The stillness and simple geometry of the space subtly highlights the curvilinear and organic fluidity of the tunnel.

This redesign has created a vivid spatial sequence. Walking through the dimly lit tunnel, the biggest source of light is at the end of it, where one can see the feet of the Buddha. This creates visual anticipation, as none of the visitors would have been able to see the whole Buddha yet, and only catch glimpses of him.

It is only on reaching the end of the tunnel that the entirety of the Buddha is seen, from a worm's eye view. There is a stark, halo like lighting from above the buddha which is in blinding contrast to the dimness of the tunnel.



The tunnel is also texturally different from the rest of the construction at the site. While most of the built forms are smooth, flat concrete, the roof of the tunnel alone is made of folding semi circular arches. This visually slows down movement. Ando also said that he aimed to make the space feel almost “womb like”, wanting people to feel safe.

This concept is also paradoxical in a way- creating a womb like space in the midst of a cemetery. It echos Buddhist philosophies of rebirth, and cyclic time. It also was to make one feel like they were born again at the foot of the Buddha.

Light is one of the most significant aspects of this project. The Buddha is approached through a dark tunnel. The sharp halo spotlight above him contrasts with the dimness of the approach; almost like he is the light at the end of the tunnel. These elements are in contrast with the glittering light on the water garden which is a fluid element in an otherwise still space.

The material and colour palette are both very minimalist. The main material is Ando's classic monotone grey concrete. Pretty much the entire space is made of this material, and the forms are smooth and geometric, save the tunnel. The visual monotony of the space is broken by nature- light and landscaping, making them the star of the space.









Case Study 3 **Doosoogobang Restaurant, LimTaeHee Studio**

Suwon, South Korea





The ascetic lifestyle of Korean Buddhist monks influenced the interiors of this restaurant in Suwon, South Korea. The restaurant aims at creating a space that evokes a monastic humbleness through food and interiors. They serve Korean temple food, a cuisine that originated some 1,700 years ago in the early Buddhist temples in Korea.

The restaurant provides seasonal organic meals without the use of onions, garlic, chives, leeks and spring onions, authentic to the meals prepared for the monks. These ingredients were usually avoided by the monks and nuns as they believed it disrupted spiritual balance.

The restaurant is divided into different areas, with different moods. The first area has a more communal and spacious feel with hall-style seating. The flooring here is rough, with black tile flooring and the walls are plastered in pale grey. The finishes and textures are intentionally unrefined. Perfection was not the aim for the aesthetics, and natural organic forms are seen.



In monasteries, the central focus was not on eating and so, dining arrangements were made by simply pulling whatever chair was available or even sitting on the floor. To echo that, the furniture in this space don't match like a set. Some of the pieces are even repurposed chest of drawers or centre tables that are being used for dining. At the back of the room is a raised stone platform with floor seating.

The decor of the restaurant is based on the concept of 'Wabi-Sabi', which simply put, means finding beauty in imperfection. They have put on display unexceptional, everyday items rather than perfect or rare artefacts. Their normalcy, and the visible wear and tear is their beauty.

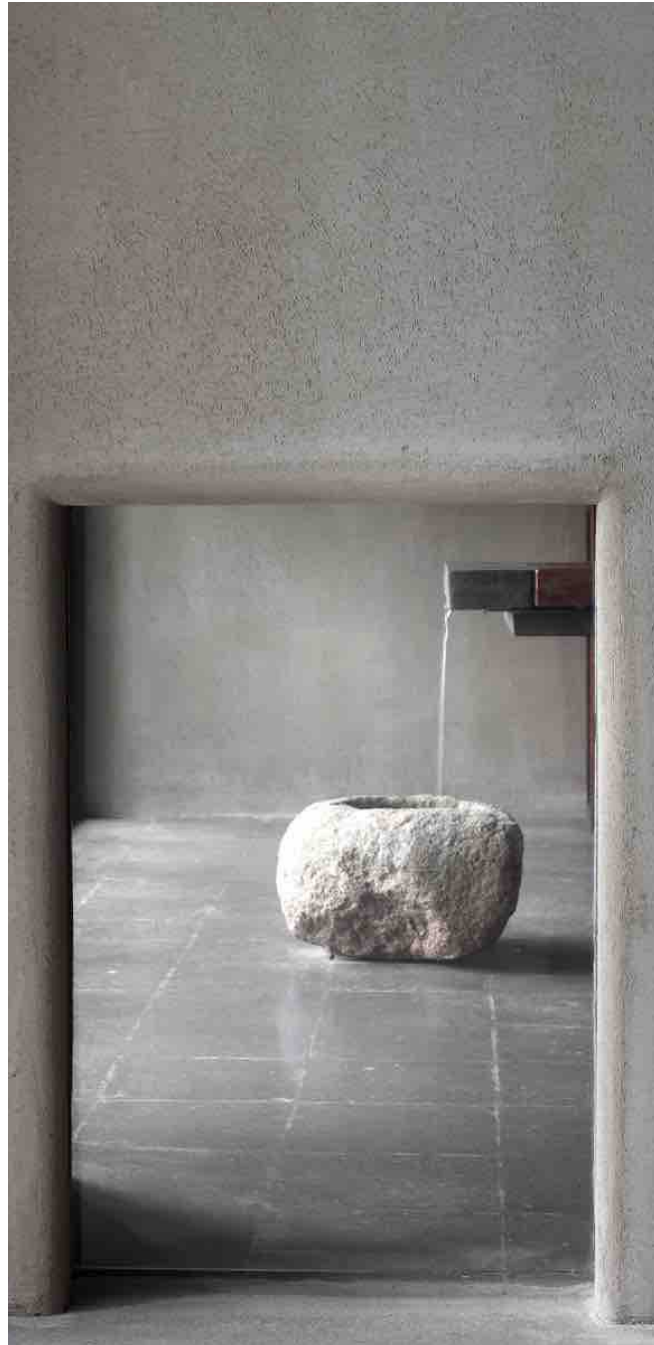
To create the spartan, temple feel they wanted to use natural, rough and raw materials. Unpolished stone, unrefined wood, and slate have been used. Decor items like stools, organic wooden planks, uneven stones enhance the feeling of the beauty in the natural.

Lighting in this space is secondary. The focus is not on the lighting but rather on what is illuminated. Think of a chandelier- a lighting accessory that grabs attention. The lighting in this space is the opposite of that. Understated lighting that doesn't disrupt the circadian rhythm have been mindfully chosen.





Most of these monasteries are tucked away in the hills surrounding the major cities like Seoul. The second area is more quiet and intimate, and meant to make you feel like you are up in the mountains. The centrepiece here is the timber inlaid dining table. It has a stream of water trickling into a rough stone bowl in the floor. The steady trickling of water is almost like white noise, and calms the mind. The bowl is almost framed by a small hole in the wall and can be seen and heard from the main hall.





The three spaces are functionally very different- a home, a cemetery and a restaurant. Yet, in a way they were very alike. All the spaces were designed with the intention to make you feel peaceful- a very spartan spiritual, kind of peace.

The aim of doing these case studies was to understand how they did this- how they wove this intangible feeling in the fabric of their space, in a very palpable way. By understanding this, I could have a better idea on how to do the same in my space. The intangibility was the hardest part of my thesis, and these case studies helped provide direction.

Minimalism was one commonality I noticed in all the case studies. In the Zen House, minimalism of material was seen, with the material palette being restricted to largely wood and concrete. In Buddha Hill, Ando has shown restraint in material, colour and even form, with the exception of the tunnel which was designed to create a change in the pace of the visitor. In DooSooGoBang, LimTaeHee studio has shown minimalism through the simplicity of the aesthetic they have chosen.

All three of the spaces resonate with an almost spiritual simplicity. Rough, natural and organic materials have been used most. Imperfections have been almost spotlighted rather than hidden. Nature has taken the forefront and is the star. In the home, the light flowing through the atrium is the star of the space, making the space liveable and bright. In the cemetery, light almost plays the role that sound effects play in a movie. It creates feelings of anticipation and awe. Landscaping is also a very alive and mood inducing element in that space. Lastly in the restaurant, light has been used to illuminate the organic imperfections of the decor.



Up until now, I have not defined the function of my space. *What is this space?* This is because function to me is secondary. Even my case studies were chosen not on the basis of function, but rather to understand something more intangible.

That being said, I do need to define the function. Since my topic is focused on something more fluid, I had the freedom to choose the functions of my space, as I pleased. I decided to create an experience that took inspiration from the way most people approach abstract subjects like Zen.

First would be the phase where you read up a lot. You'd consume a lot of literature, and want to know as much as possible. The focus here would be knowing about the subject matter as best you can. You may engage in various perspectives, and even form your own opinions. But, at the end of the day, this knowing is very surface level and you'd (hopefully) realise that only experience would make you understand what you have read.

Then would come the conscious unlearning phase, where you'd put down the books and start experiencing life around you. The focus would not be on accumulating cerebral knowledge, but on being aware of what is happening. The key here is awareness. *Some people feel the rain, others just get wet.* Now, start feeling the rain.

The last stage is the simplest, most unassuming phase. This isn't like a crescendo that builds up with an orchestra playing with full gusto. It is more like that satisfying, faint *click* you hear when you're assembling something. An *oh* moment when suddenly what you read in books make sense, but in an infinitely deeper way.

# Defining Function

Extrapolating from the phases I described, I arrived at the functions. The cerebral, knowledge oriented phase translated into a library. The library is u-shaped and is the precursor to the second space- the garden. The garden leads the visitor to the last space, the space that symbolises enlightenment, which is a tea house.

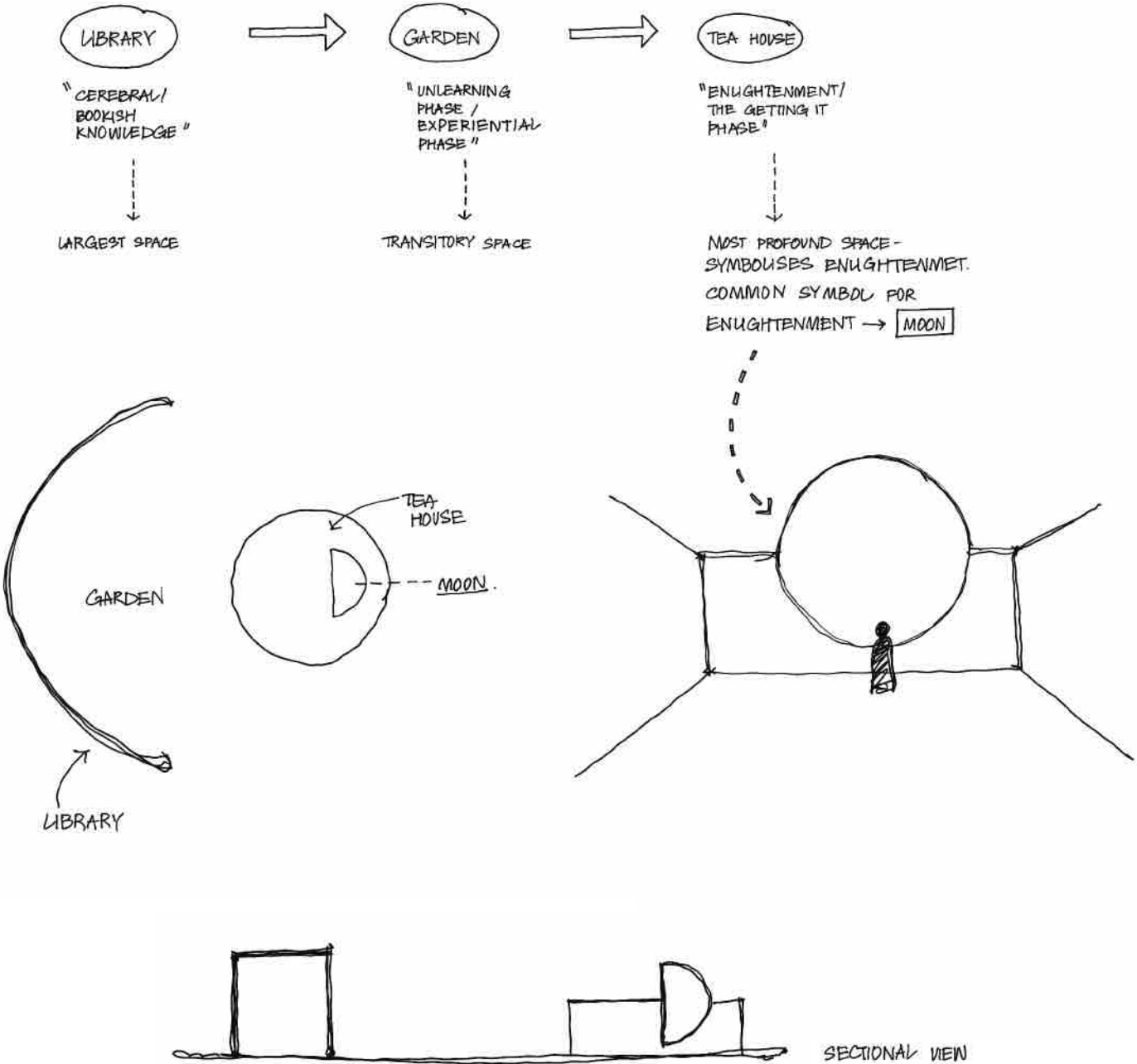
The thought process behind this was that I wanted the visitor to be unable to reach the tea house from the library without going through the garden. Book based knowledge alone can't lead you to the oh moment without going through the garden. Square footage wise, the library was to be the largest space of the three.

My vision for the garden was for it to have dense, tropical landscaping with tall, leafy trees. Several meandering pathways would all eventually take the visitor to the tea house. I also wanted to stimulate the olfactory senses by including more fragrant plants as one approaches the tea house. The closer you get to the final space, the sweeter the air becomes.

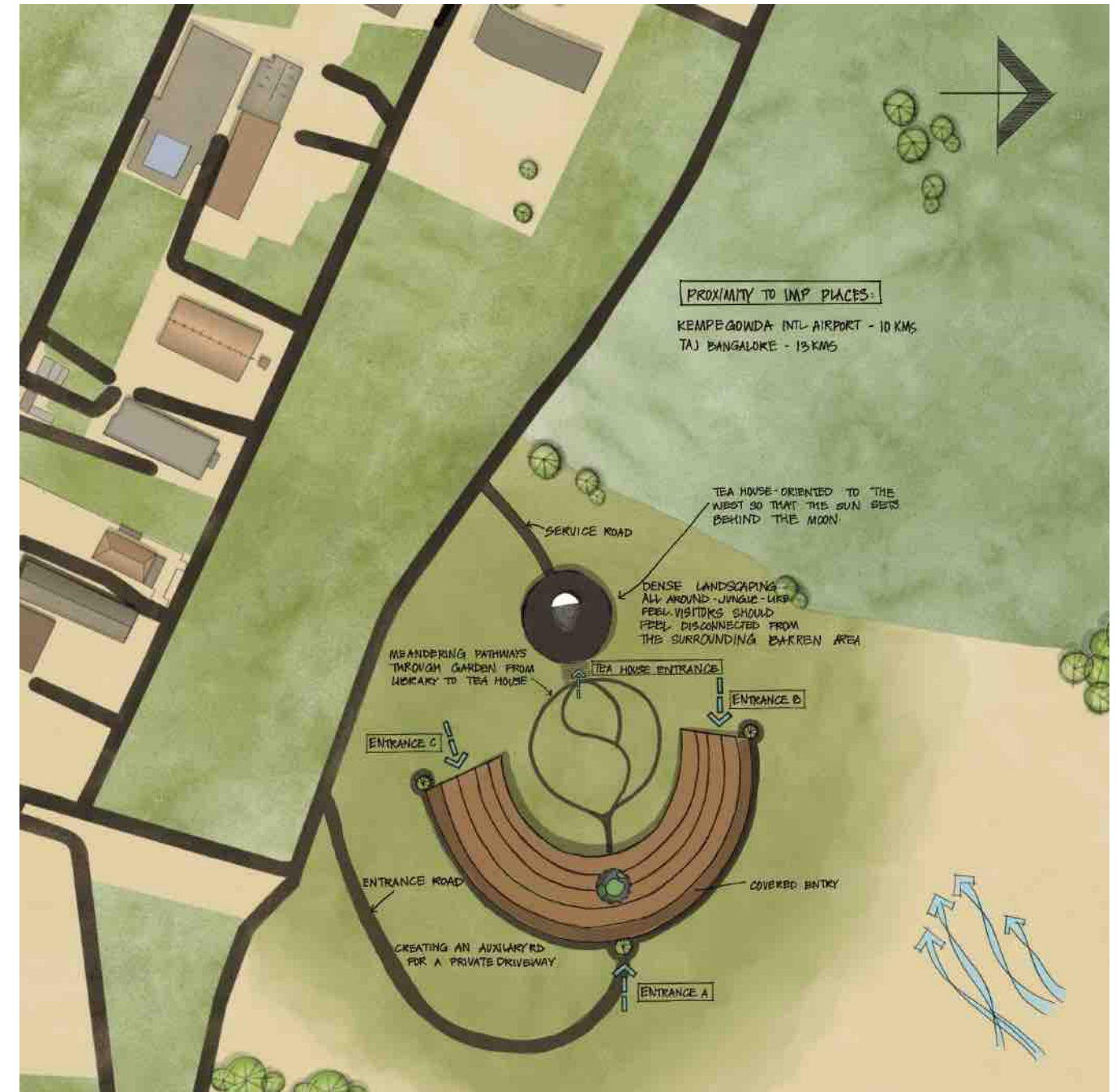
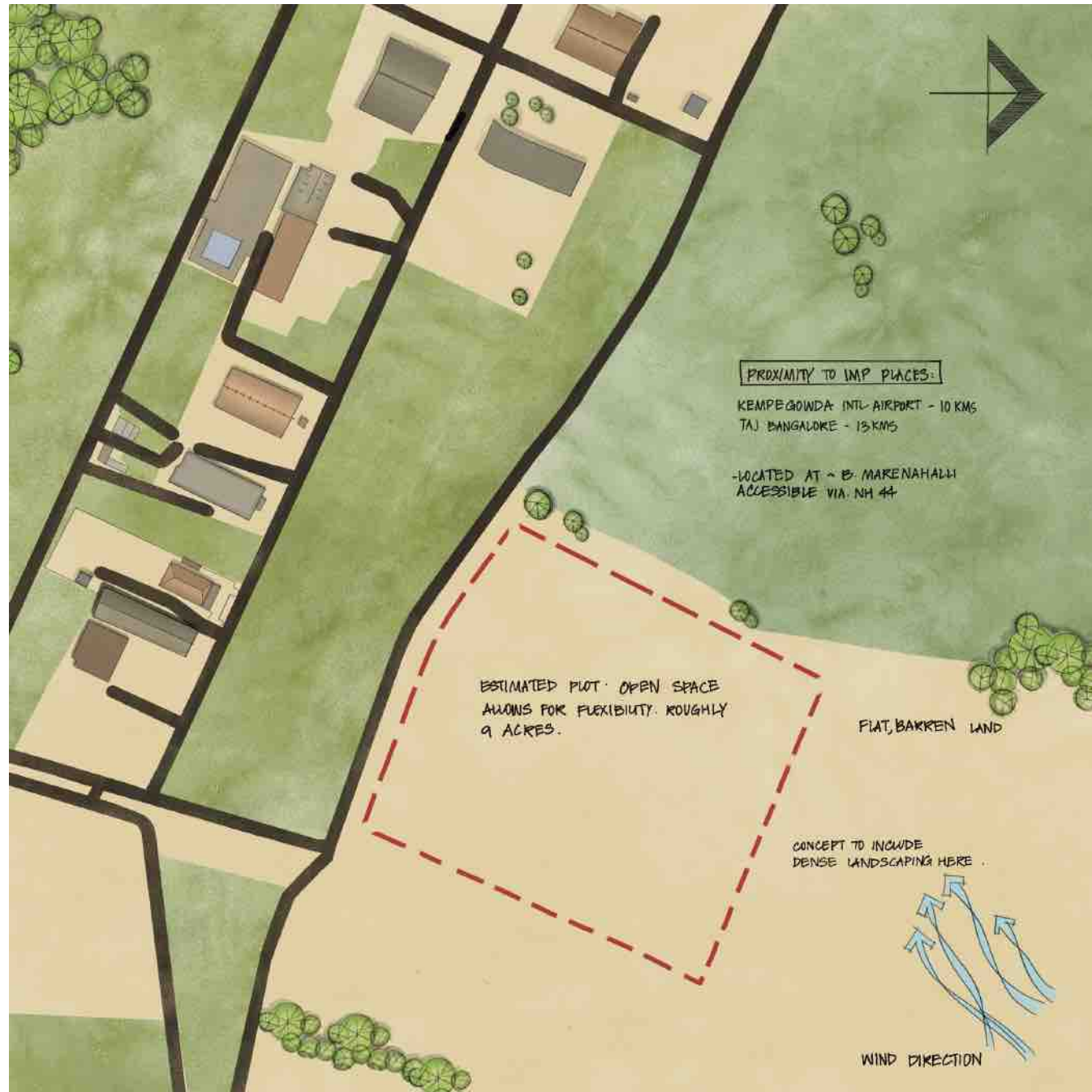
For the enlightenment phase, I chose a tea house. Zen and tea are proverbially connected. I wanted a space that was functionally simple but aesthetically awe inspiring. The simplicity of the space, a space that essentially serves tea, was to be presented in a way that people take notice. I wanted to bring back the magic in the seemingly ordinary.

In my concept sketches for the tea house, you can see a half moon. It is a large, vertically placed dome like structure. It cuts through the roof slab and you essentially are left with a space with a quarter spherical vacuum.

The moon in Buddhism symbolises enlightenment and I wanted it as a literal element. The other half of the moon above the slab is surrounded by shallow water, mirroring the moon and giving the illusion of a moon that doesn't set.

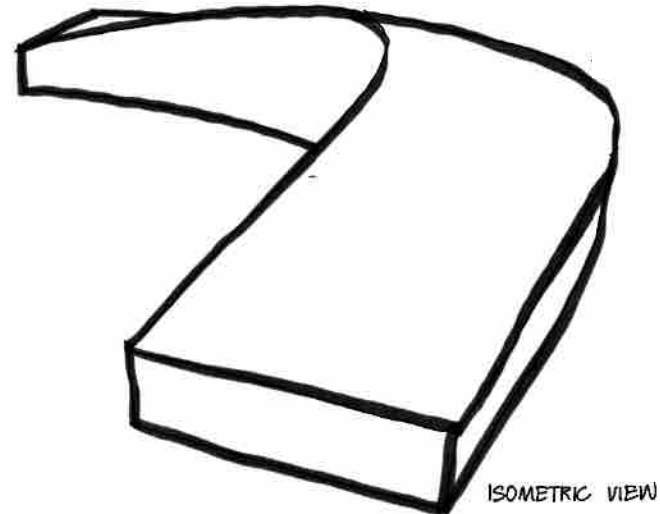
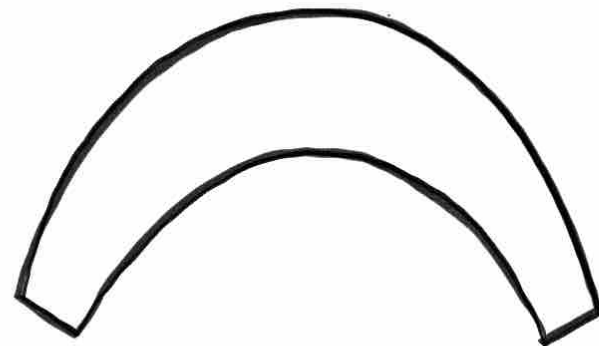
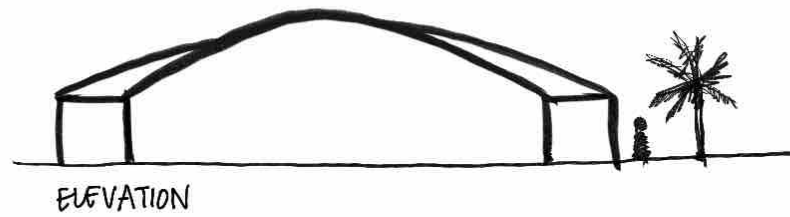
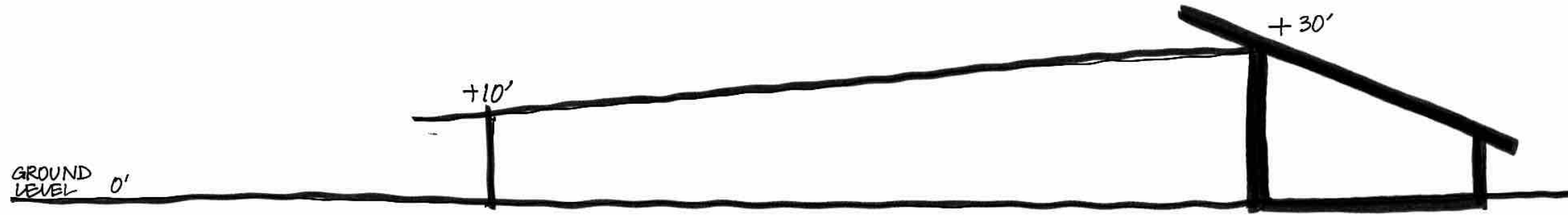








The library is the beginning of the journey. It is the place where you learn, and ultimately understand the limitations of your learning.



## Symbolism and Form

**T**he experience starts at the library, the space of cerebral learning. The symbolism that the library represents played an influential role in the development of its form.

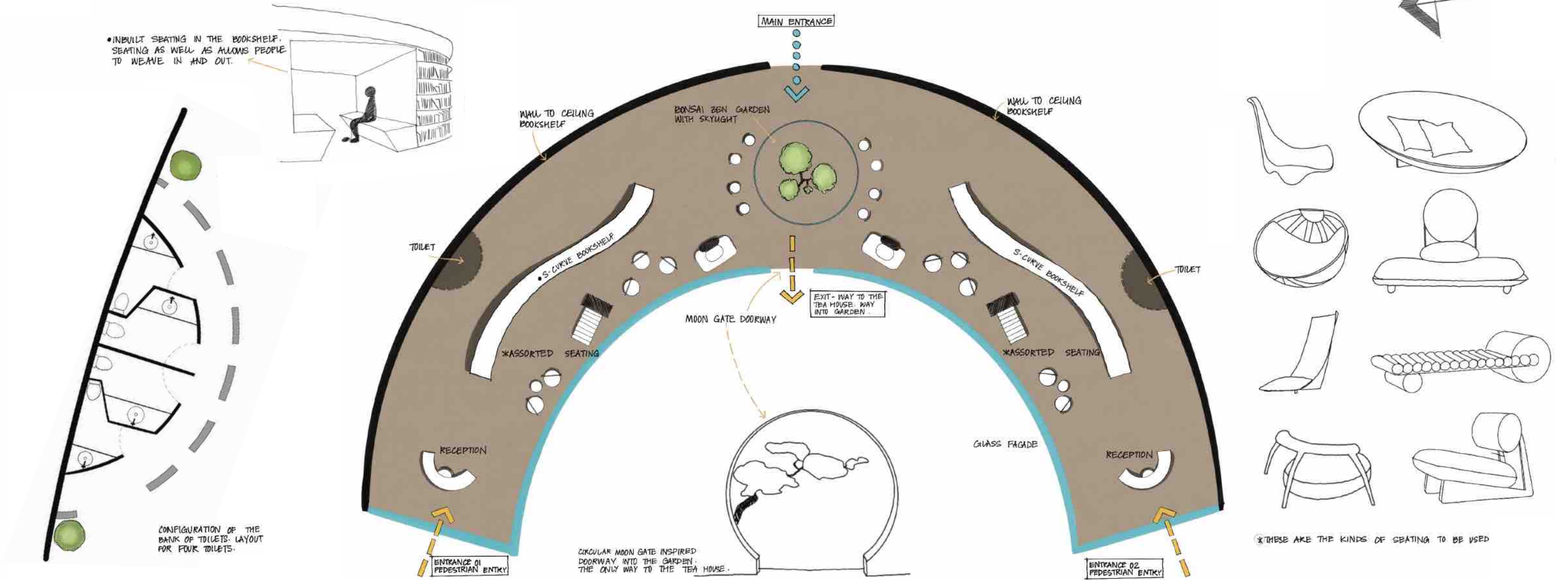
Intellectual learning alone doesn't lead you directly to the end goal, and neither does the library. The U-shape of the form enables the tea house to be visible from every part of the library, while being directly inaccessible.

The roof of the library is sloped, being highest towards the tea house. This was done for two reasons. Firstly, I want to direct the focus inwards, towards the tea house, drawing people into the experience. The high ceiling also allows for a large glass facade on the internal elevation, maximising the view as well.

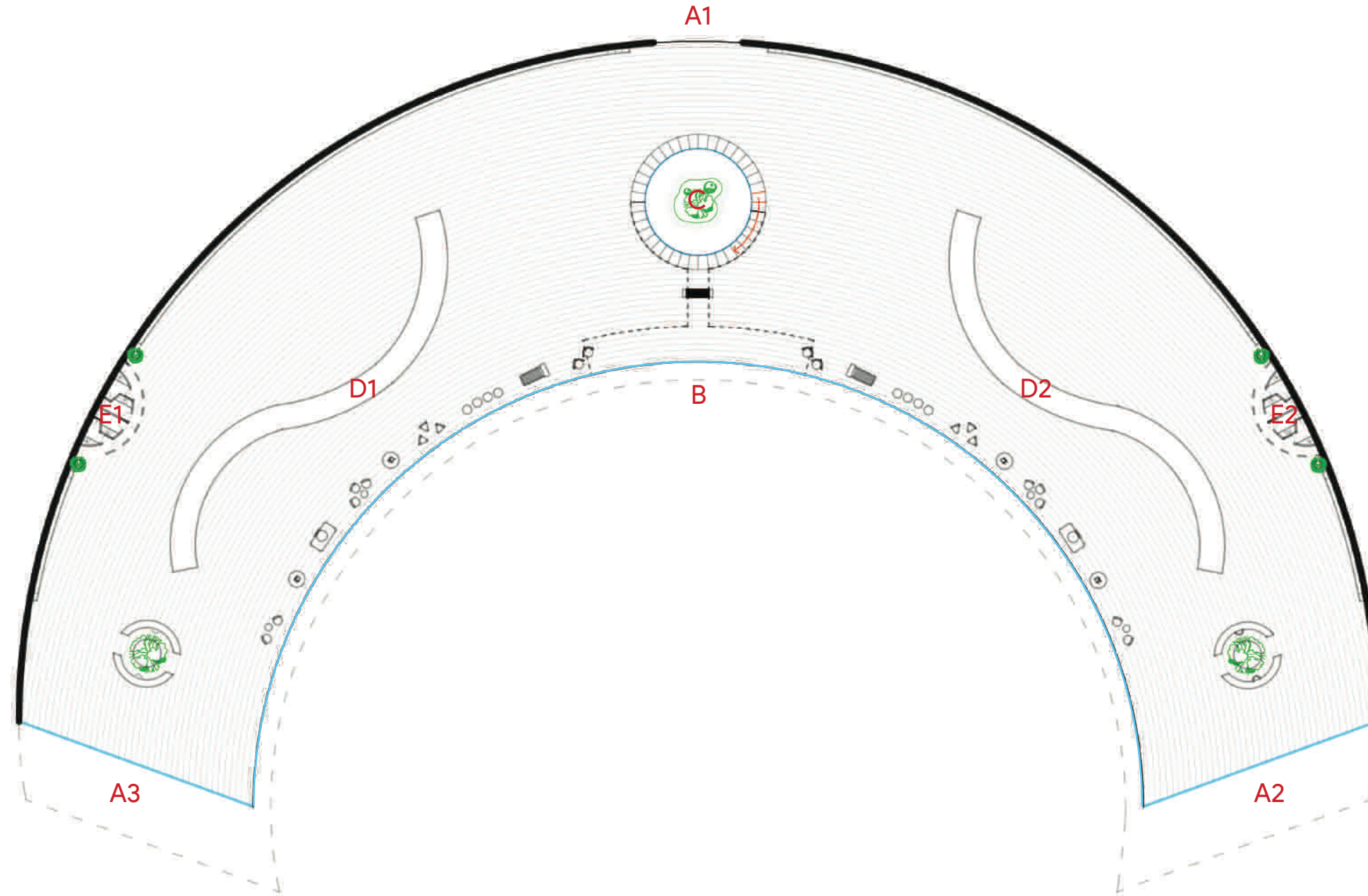
Secondly, people prefer higher ceilings. They are known to induce positive feelings in people as they promote visuospatial exploration while prompting us to think more freely. This has also been corroborated in studies like the one conducted by Joan Meyers and Rui Zhu. Across several experiments they found evidence that higher ceilings put their participants in a mindset of freedom, creativity and abstraction whereas lower ceilings prompted more confined thinking.

Essentially what I wanted to do was to increase positive feelings as one looks towards and approaches the tea house, making them associate it with calm, creativity and openness.





- A1- EAST ENTRANCE
- A2- SOUTH ENTRANCE
- A3- NORTH ENTRANCE
- B- 10' DIA MOONGATE EXIT  
FACING TEA HOUSE
- D1, D2- 7' WIDE  
BOOKSHELF WITH INBUILT  
SEATING
- C- 30' DIA SKYLIGHT WITH  
BONSAI TREE AND DRY ZEN  
GARDEN ENCLOSED BY  
12MM THICK GLASS PANES.
- E1, E2- 27' DIA  
SEMICIRCULAR BANK OF 4  
W/Cs WITH WASH BASINS



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



WALL ATTACHED BOOKSHELF  
RUNNING ALONG THE LENGTH  
OF THE EAST WALL

4' WIDE FLOATING WOODEN  
STAIRS

CENTRAL ATRIUM WITH DRY  
GARDEN

VERTICAL LOUVERED WOODEN  
PARTITION

GLASS DOUBLE SLIDING DOORS

WOODEN CANTILEVERED ROOF

GLASS DOUBLE SLIDING  
DOORS

24" WIDE WOODEN PLANK  
FLOORING

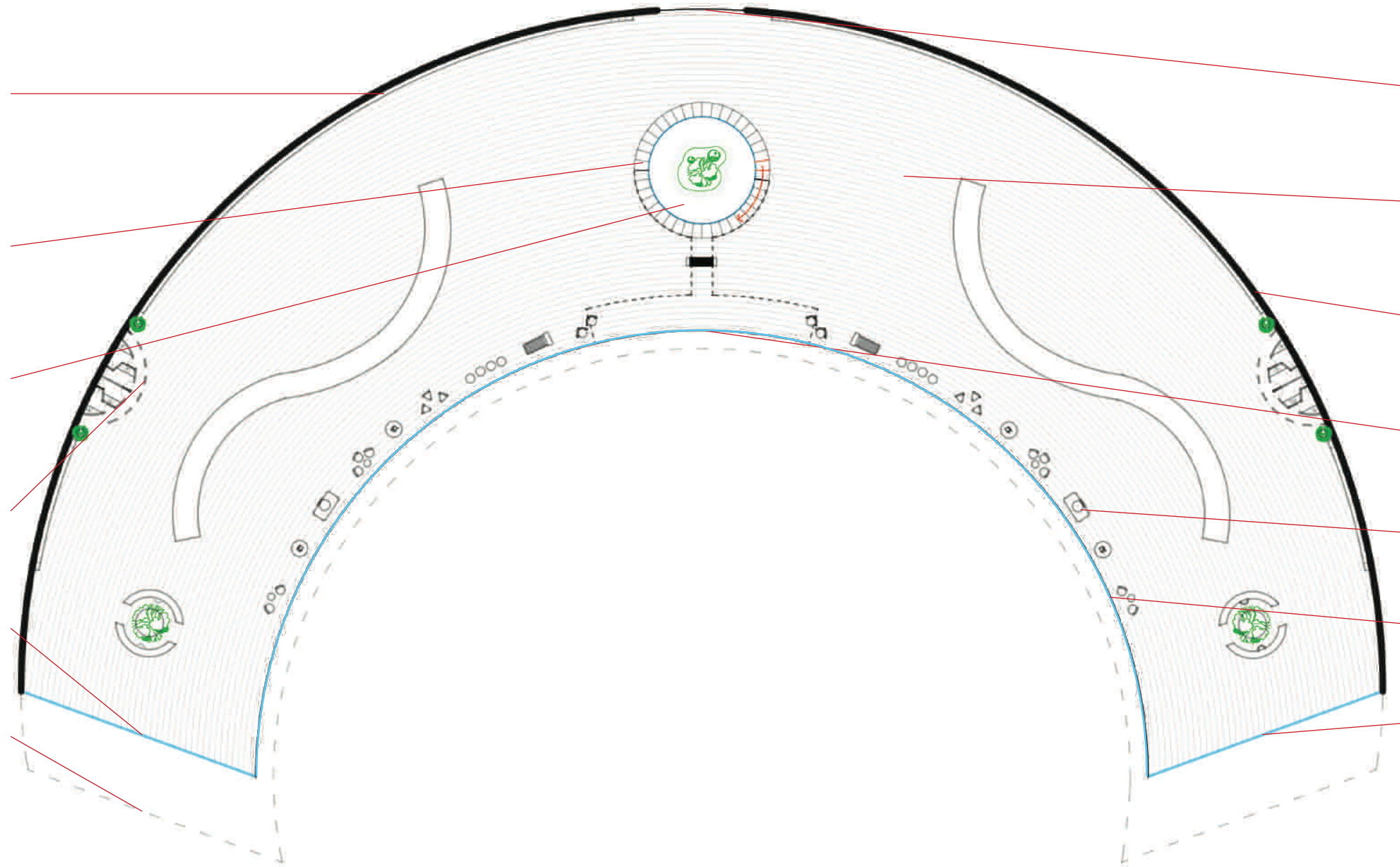
CONCRETE WALL WITH  
WOODEN VENEER CLADDING

MOONGATE EXIT FACING TEA  
HOUSE

ASSORTED SEATING

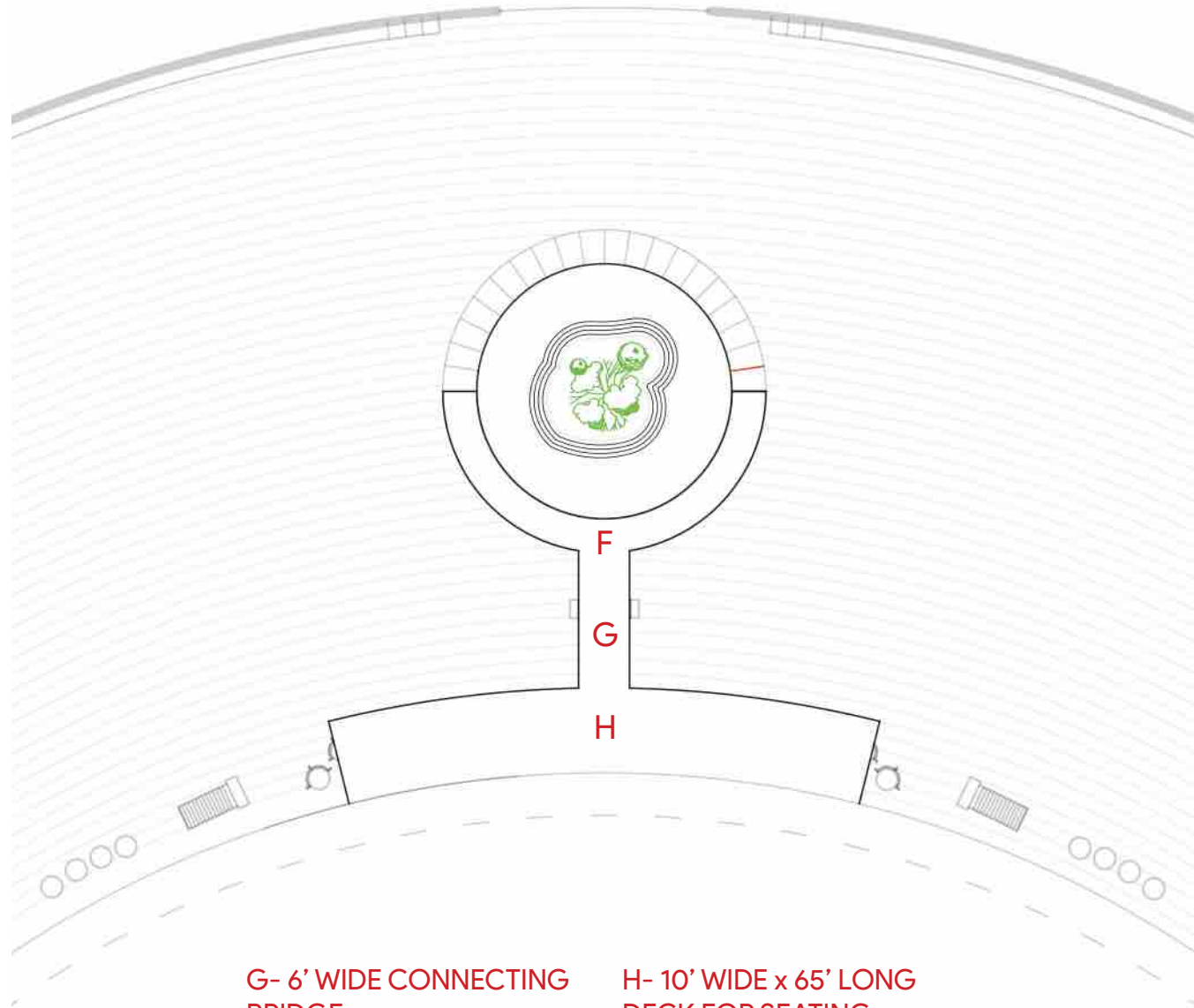
12MM THICK GLASS FACADE

GLASS DOUBLE SLIDING  
DOORS



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

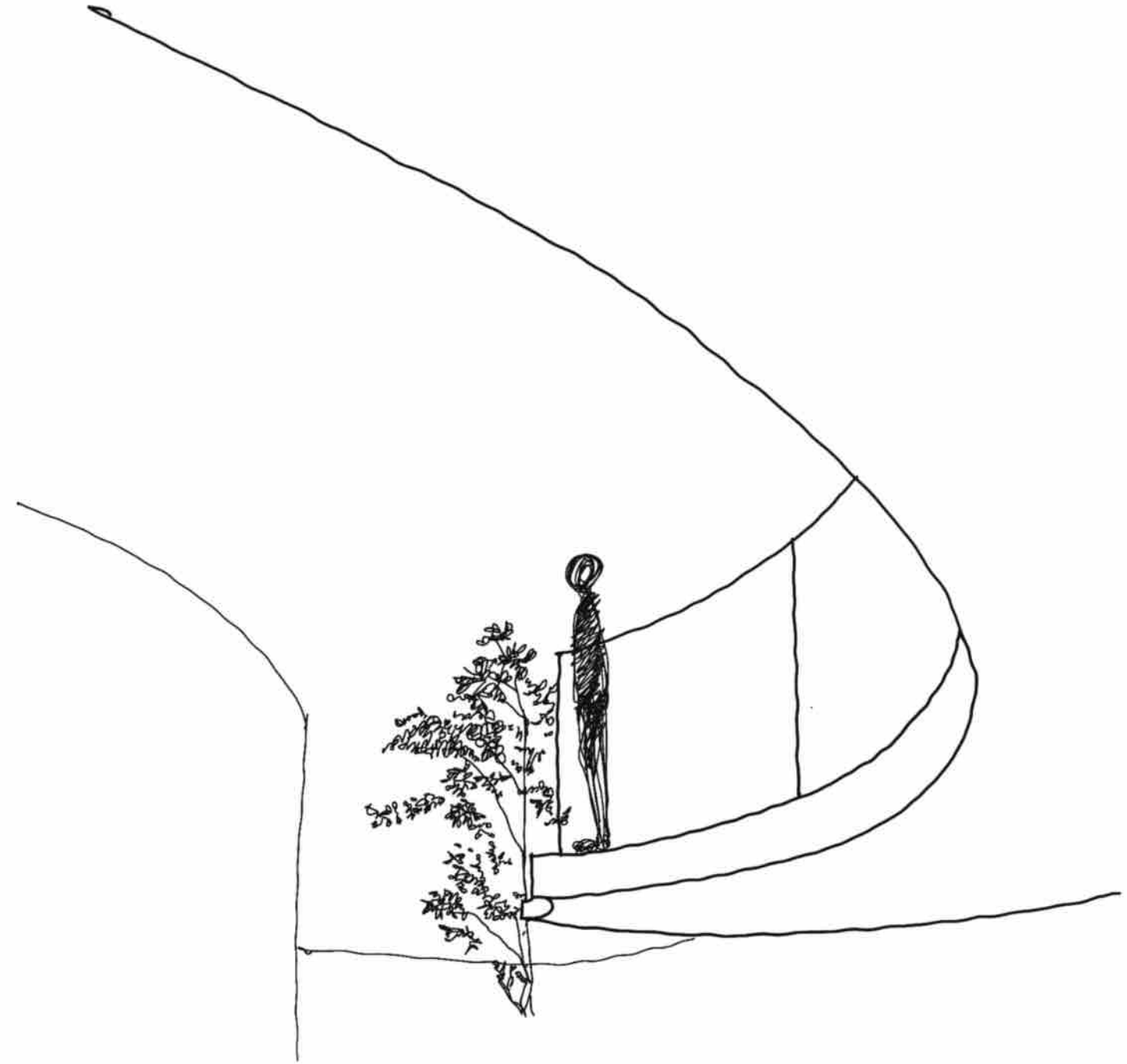
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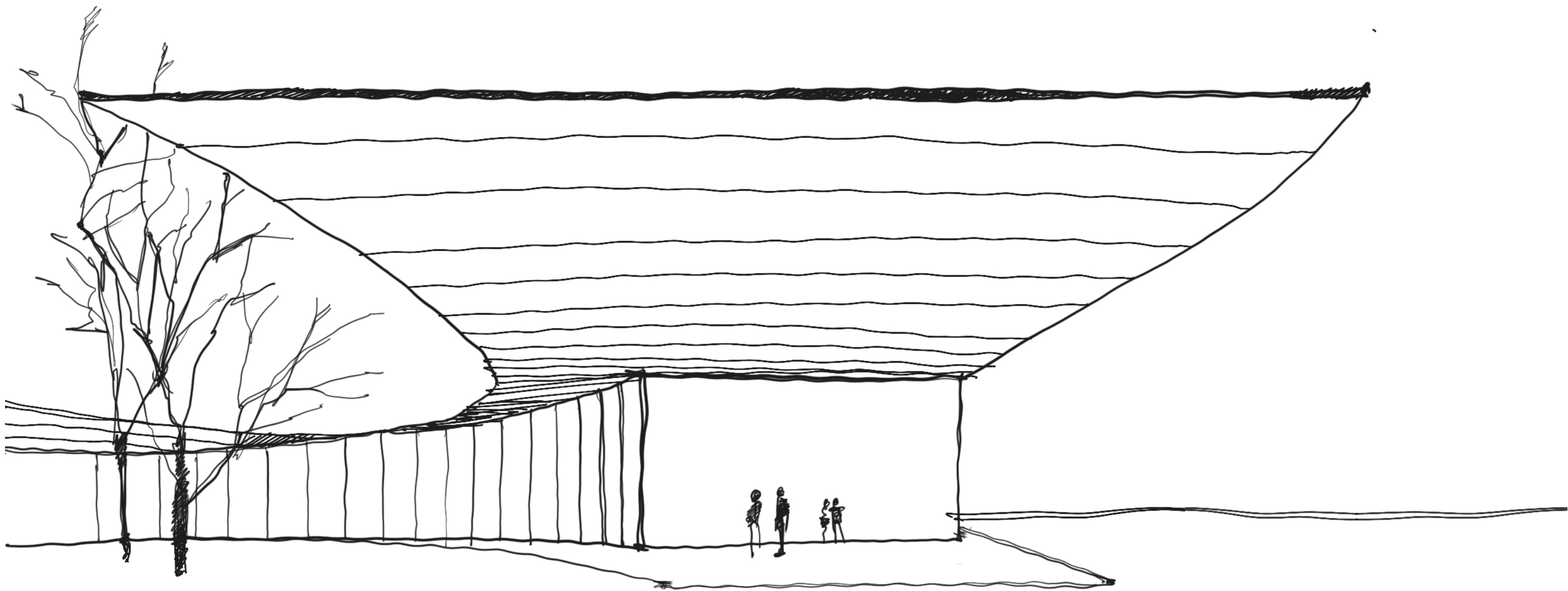
G- 6' WIDE CONNECTING  
BRIDGE  
F- 4' WIDE U SHAPED  
BRIDGE

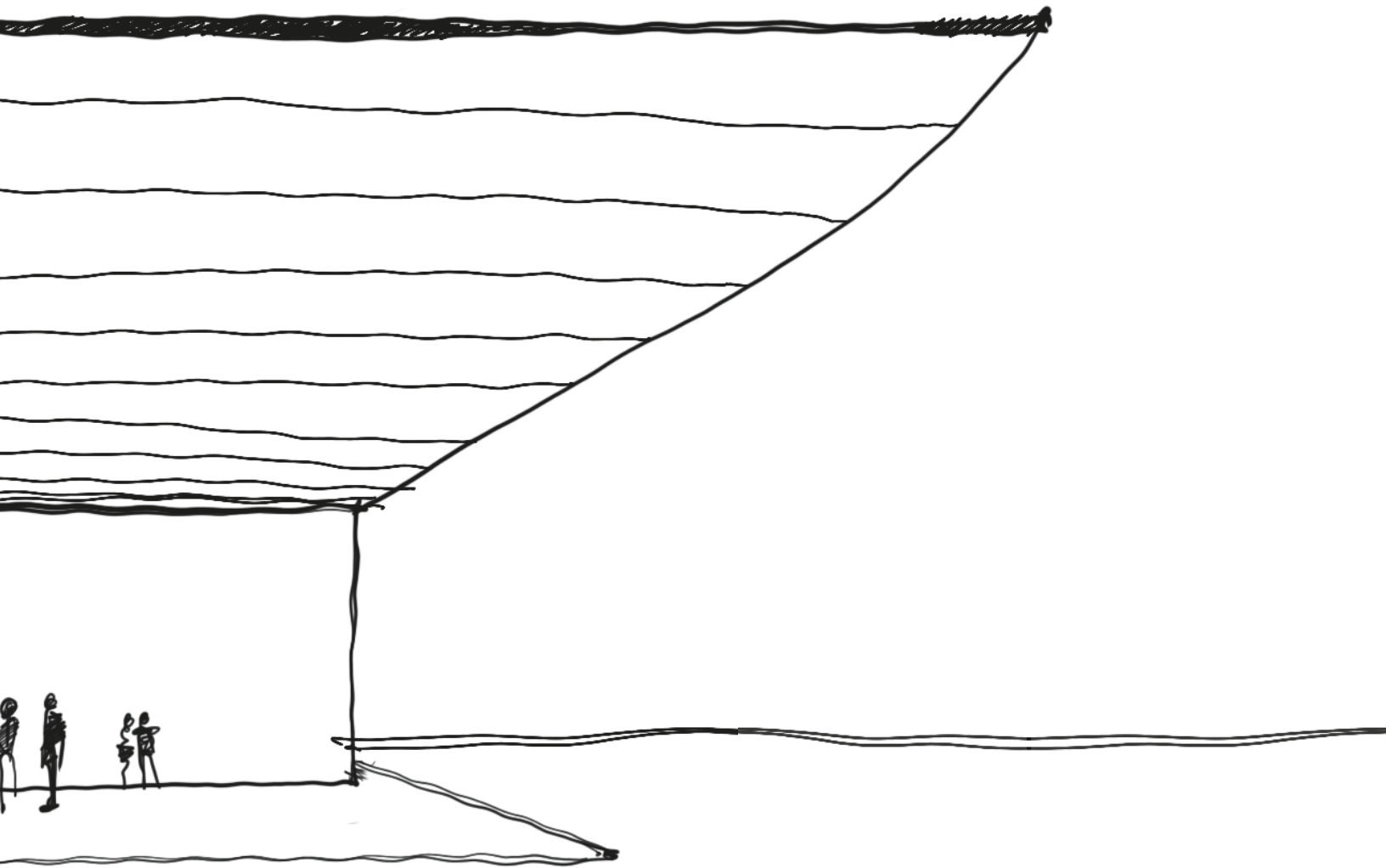
H- 10' WIDE x 65' LONG  
DECK FOR SEATING  
OVERLOOKING  
CENTRAL ATRIUM

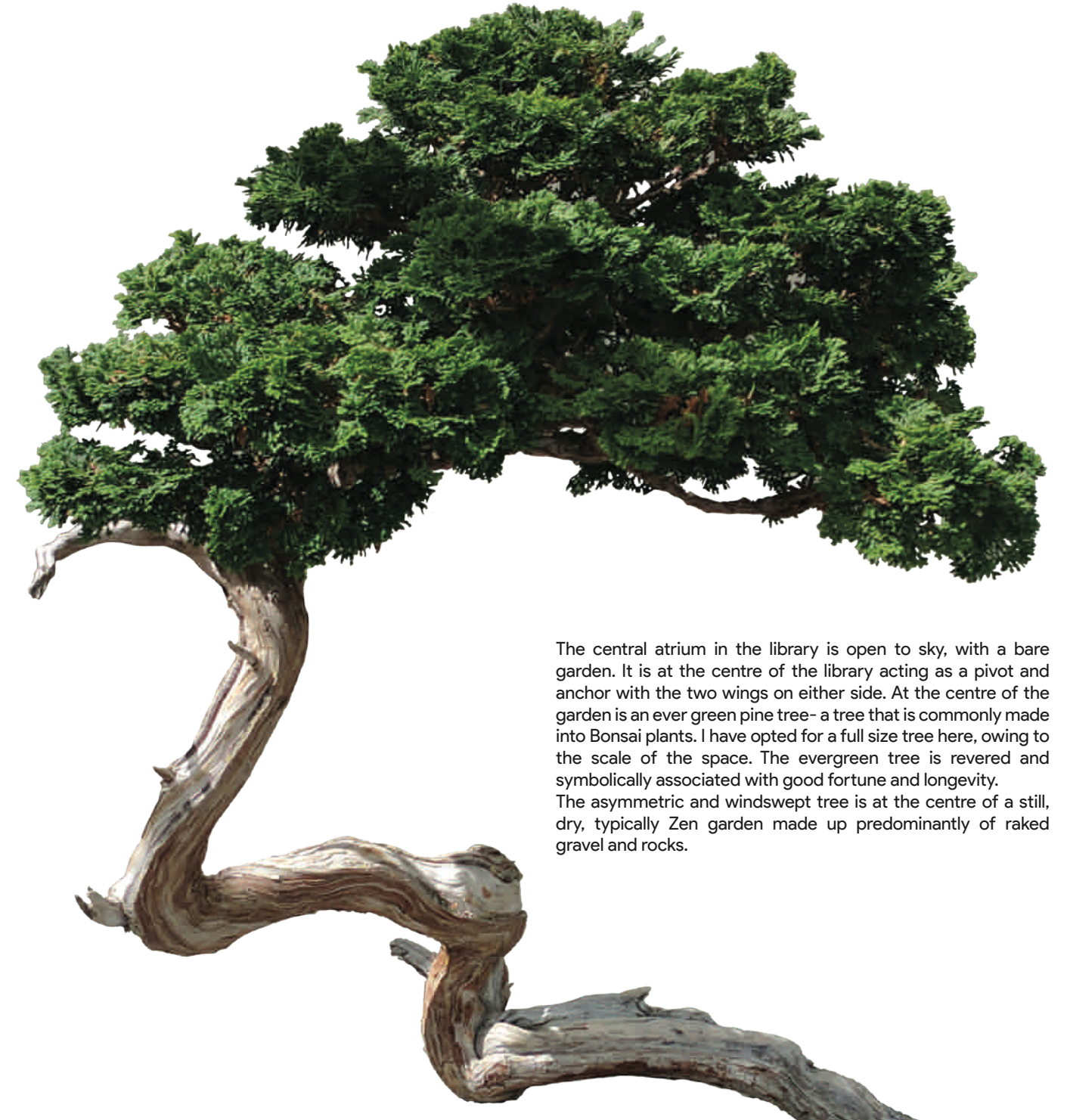
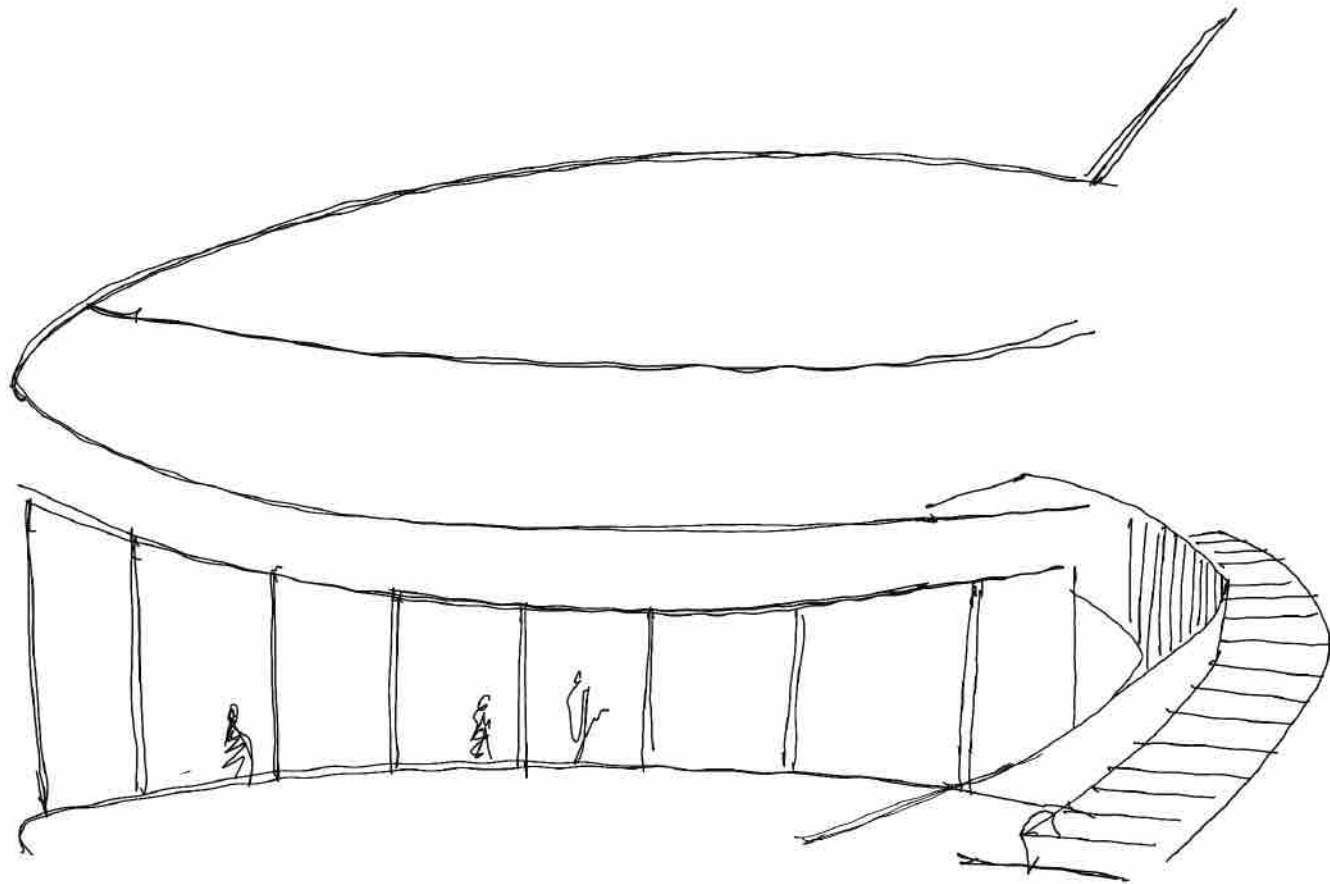
G+1 MEZZANINE FLOOR PLAN





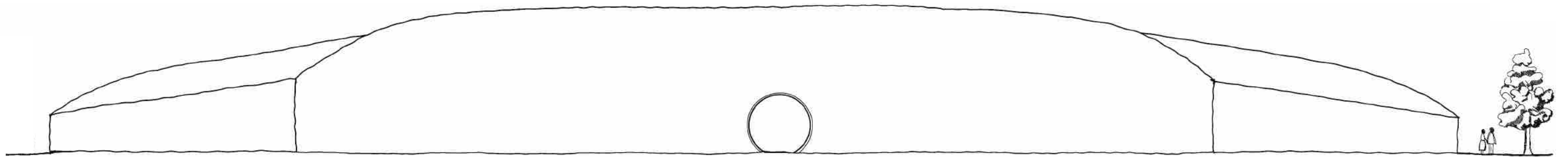


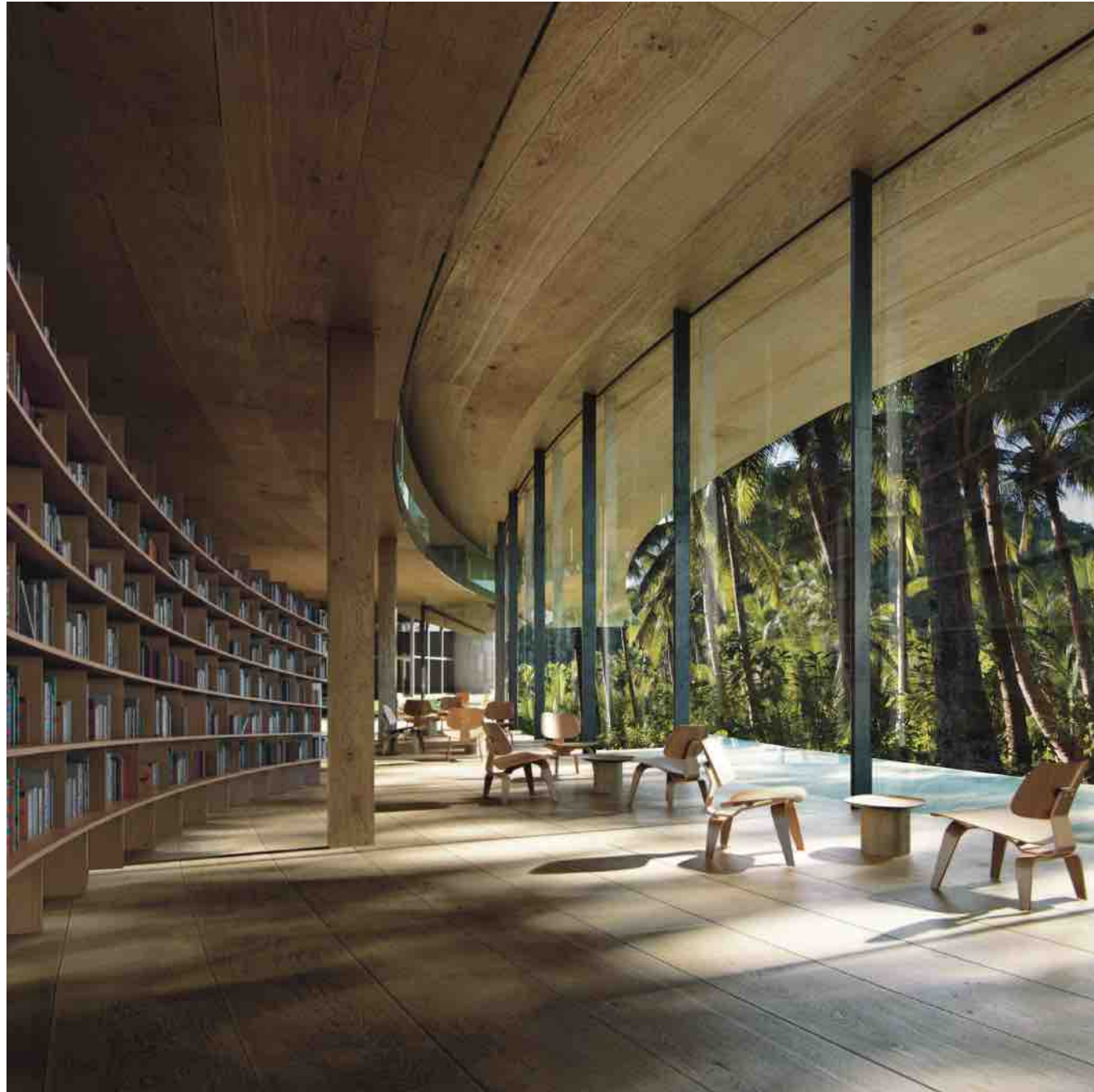




The central atrium in the library is open to sky, with a bare garden. It is at the centre of the library acting as a pivot and anchor with the two wings on either side. At the centre of the garden is an ever green pine tree- a tree that is commonly made into Bonsai plants. I have opted for a full size tree here, owing to the scale of the space. The evergreen tree is revered and symbolically associated with good fortune and longevity. The asymmetric and windswept tree is at the centre of a still, dry, typically Zen garden made up predominantly of raked gravel and rocks.







The library is your first point of entry where you walk in carrying the stresses of your daily life. The space should immediately comfort and relax you. The feeling I envision when you enter the library is similar to the instant comfort of entering a cool, dimly lit room after being out in the blazing sun. The relaxation is palpable.

The materials here are natural and earthy- predominantly being wood. Natural light is let in amply through the glass facades and the central atrium, and any artificial lighting is mindfully and discreetly used. Through the glass facade you see the dense tropical garden, instantly transporting you from the feel of the city.

The only way to the tea house is through the moon gate at the centre of the library, in front of the atrium. A moon gate is a circular pedestrian passageway, which was originally found in the gardens of the wealthy Chinese. They are thought of as portals between the inside and the outside- a portal into a new world. The moon gate leads you into the tropical garden, towards the tea house. From there one can see the moon of the tea house peeking from behind the trees, beckoning you.





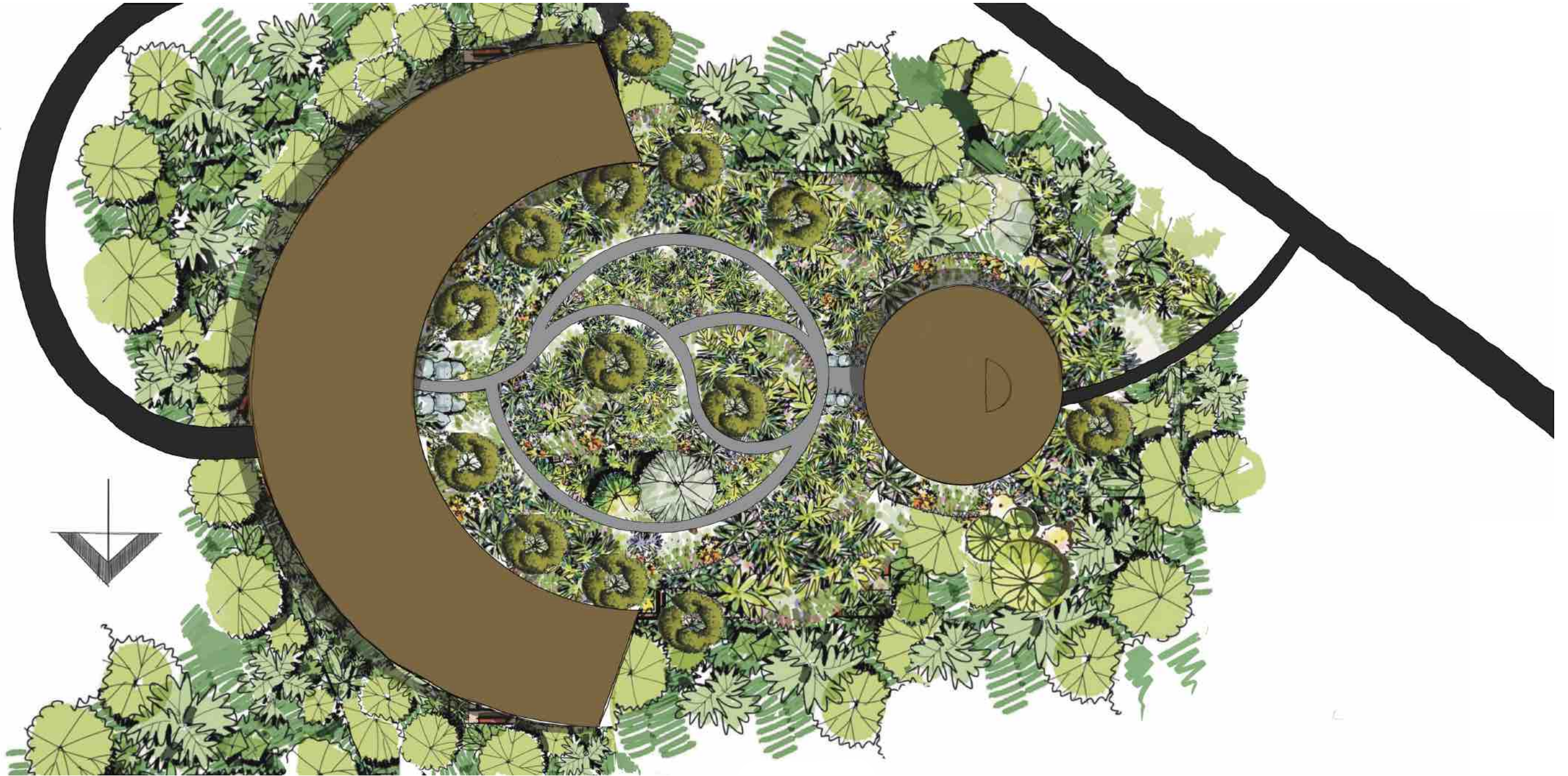


**T**he moon gate leads us into the dense, tropical, jungle-like garden; the space for unlearning. The garden is meant to isolate you from the city, make you feel like you have stepped through a portal into another world.

A handful of Japanese researchers set out to discover whether there was something special and clinically therapeutic about spending time in nature. Strolling in nature, a practice called forest bathing or *shinrin-yoku* was believed to lower stress, but wasn't proven. Since then a large body of evidence has shown that spending time in nature is responsible for many tangible, physiological benefits.

Studies at Chiba University showed that spending around half an hour walking in nature had measurably lowered the level of the stress hormone cortisol in people. This same lowering of cortisol was not observed when they walked for the same time in the lab. This indicated a tangible, positive, physiologic reaction in the forest.

The garden here has several meandering paths that all lead to the same destination- the tea house. As one gets closer to the tea house, there are more aromatic plants. This was to introduce an olfactory aspect to the experience. Psychologically, the aim is to make people feel happier and more at ease as they approach the tea house. Aromatherapy is also known to have some benefits in calming the psyche. The heady smell of the plants add another dimension to the experience.

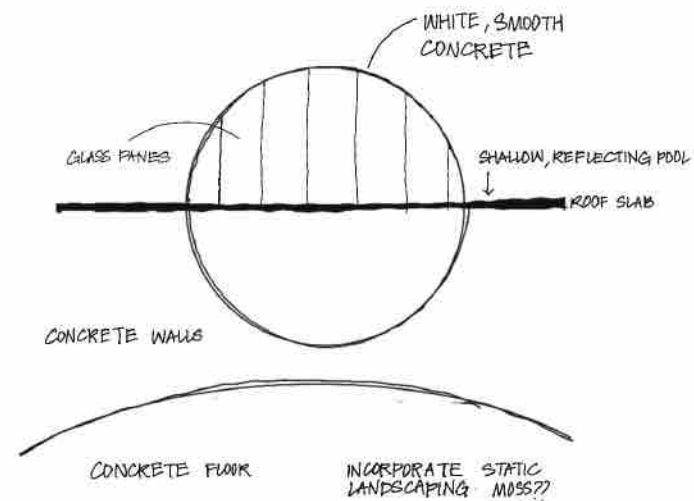
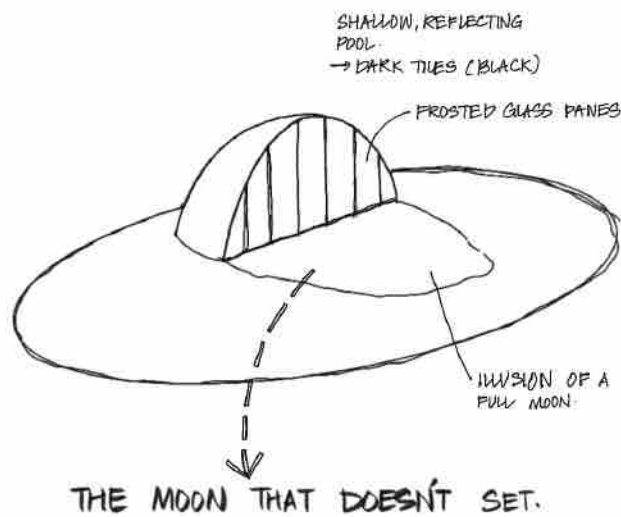
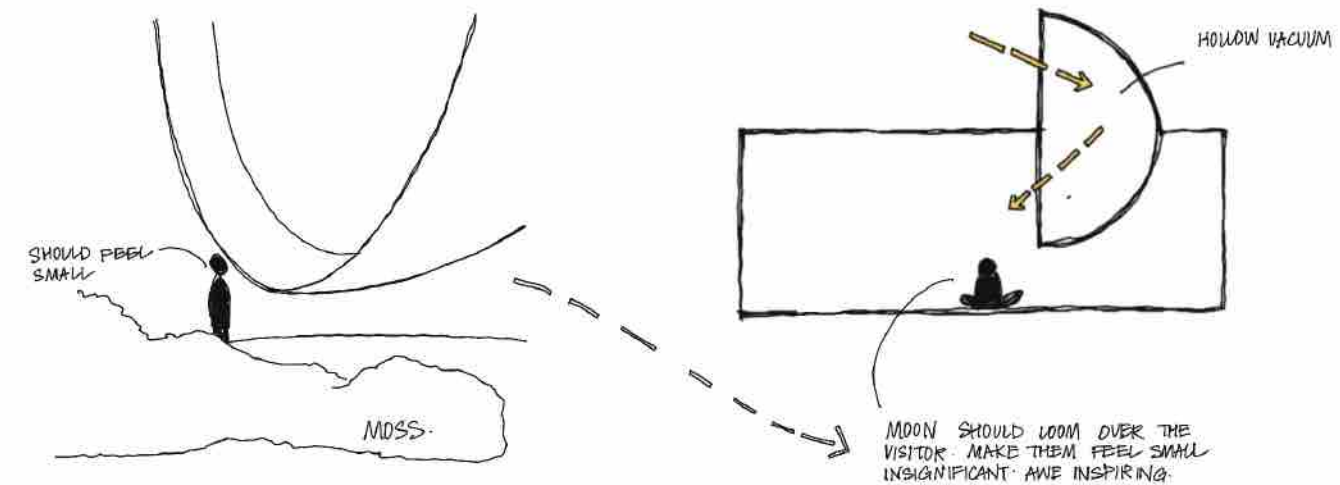






The tea house is the final destination in this experience. It is simple, unassuming and represents the “oh” moment.





## The Moon Concept

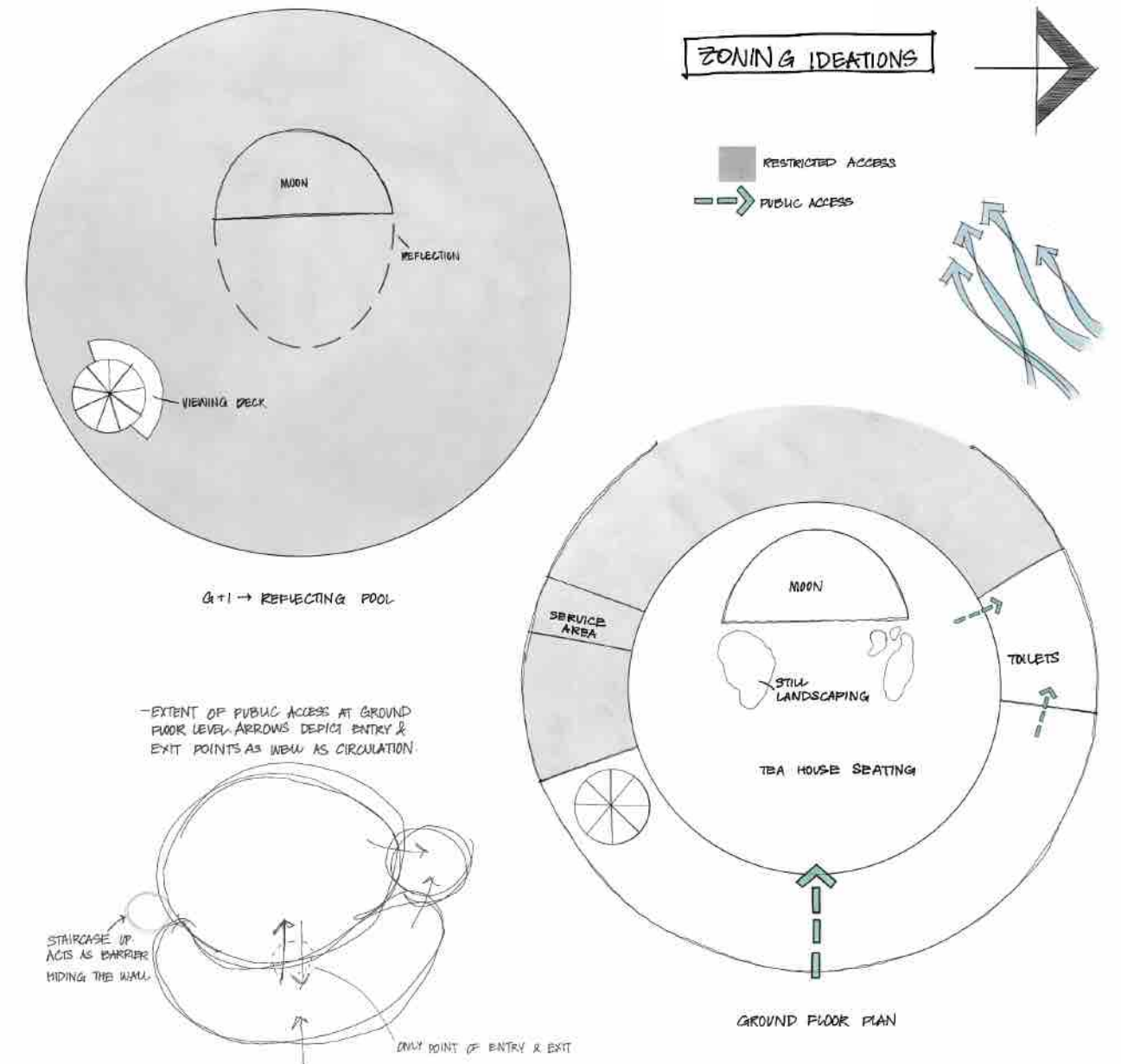
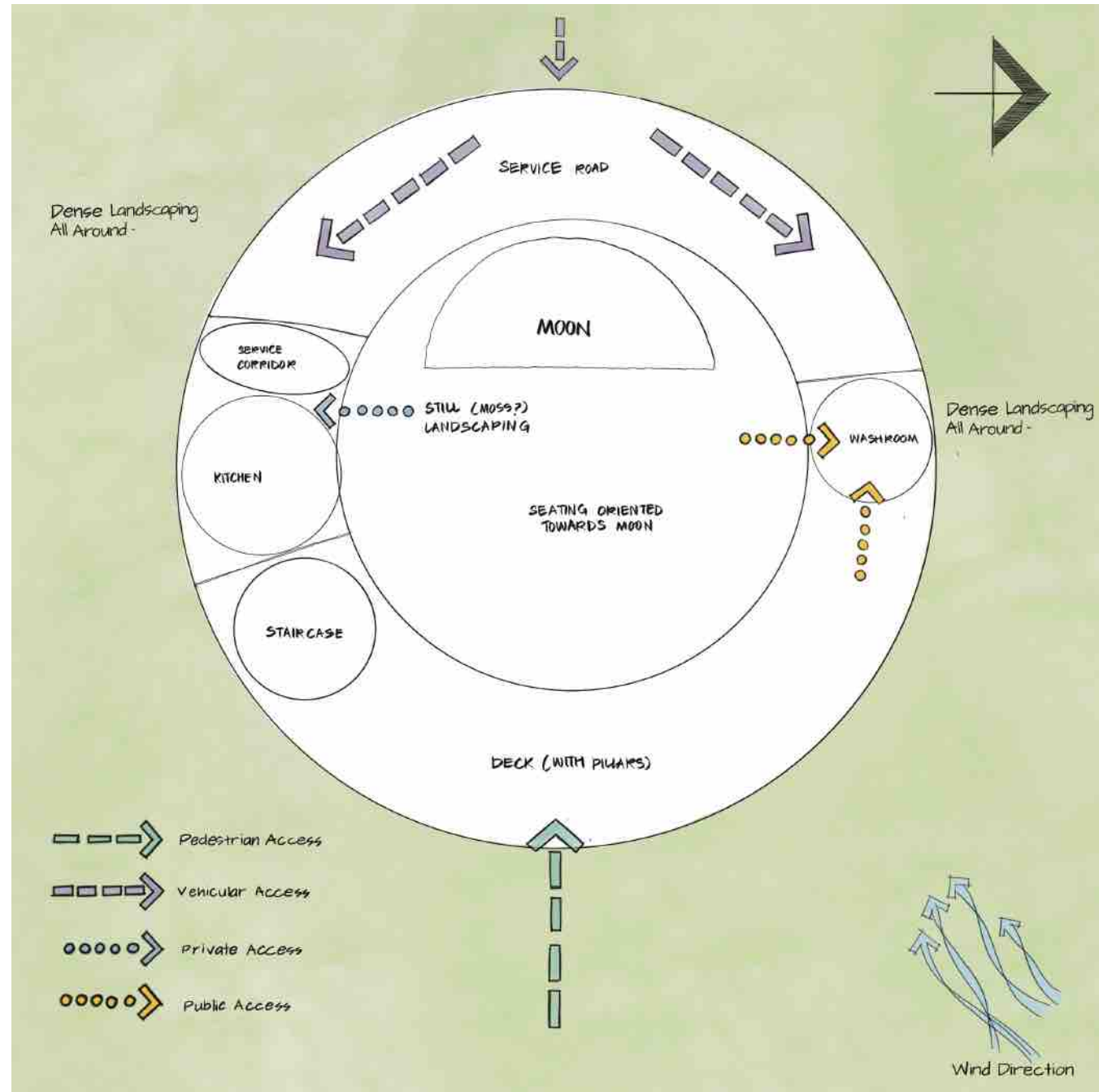
The concept for the tea house was built around the moon. The moon is a literal white, concrete, vertical dome. In Buddhism, the moon represents enlightenment and I wanted an identifiable symbol of it.

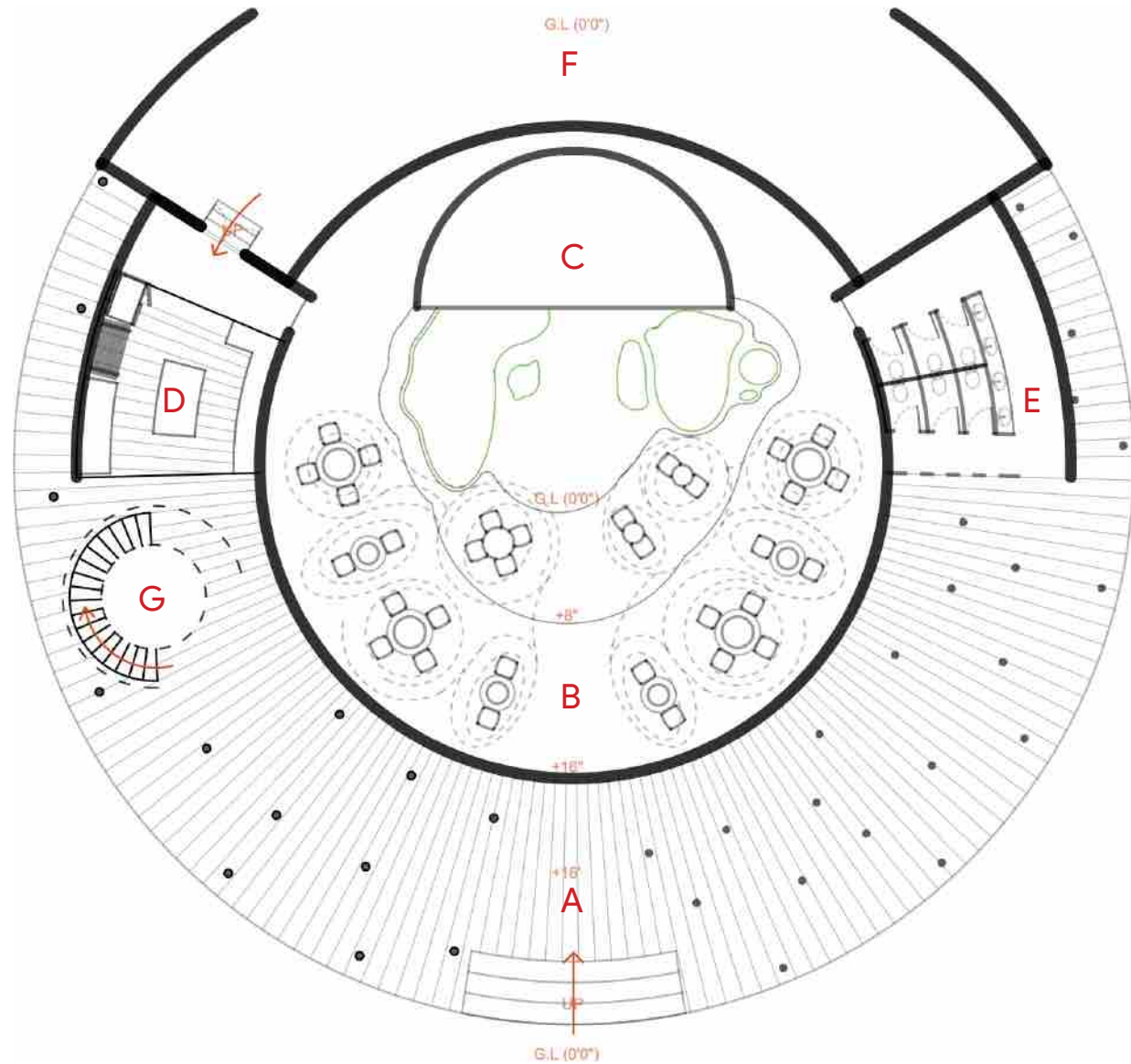
The moon is cut in half by the roof slab, having half the semi-sphere below and the other half above. At the ground level is the tea room. The circular room is made of exposed concrete walls and floor. The highlight of the room is the moon- the white dome which has light pouring in from above. The dome which is suspended five feet off the floor, rises fifteen feet high until it reaches the ceiling. In comparison, when a person stands at the foot of the moon and looks up at the vacuum of the dome, they would, and should feel tiny.

The aesthetics of this room is bare, and spartan. There is a visual monotony broken only by the moon. From the alive movements of the tropical garden, this space is still. There is not much to distract the eye, so the focus is almost completely on the moon. The landscaping of the room is also still- comprising of undulating moss forming a pathway of sorts as you approach the moon. This space is so focused on the essential it almost feels otherworldly. Futuristic in a very elemental way.

The seatings are at floor level, keeping people close to the ground. The aim here is to make people realise their smallness in the larger scheme of things. There are no partitions on the floor, as I wanted an unblocked view of the moon from the seats. Instead, I have opted to go for partitions on the ceiling. Thin slivers of bamboo have been woven to form sheets that hang from the roof in concentric patterns, giving some visual demarcations of space.

At the level above the ground is a viewing deck from which one can see the other half of the moon. The moon is surrounded by a shallow pool of water, with black tiles. This serves as a mirror and reflects the moon, giving it an illusion of wholeness- the moon that doesn't set.





A- 24" WIDE DECK WITH WOOD PLANK FLOORING

B- 60' DIA TEA HOUSE WITH GREY CONC. BLOCK WALLS & FLOORS

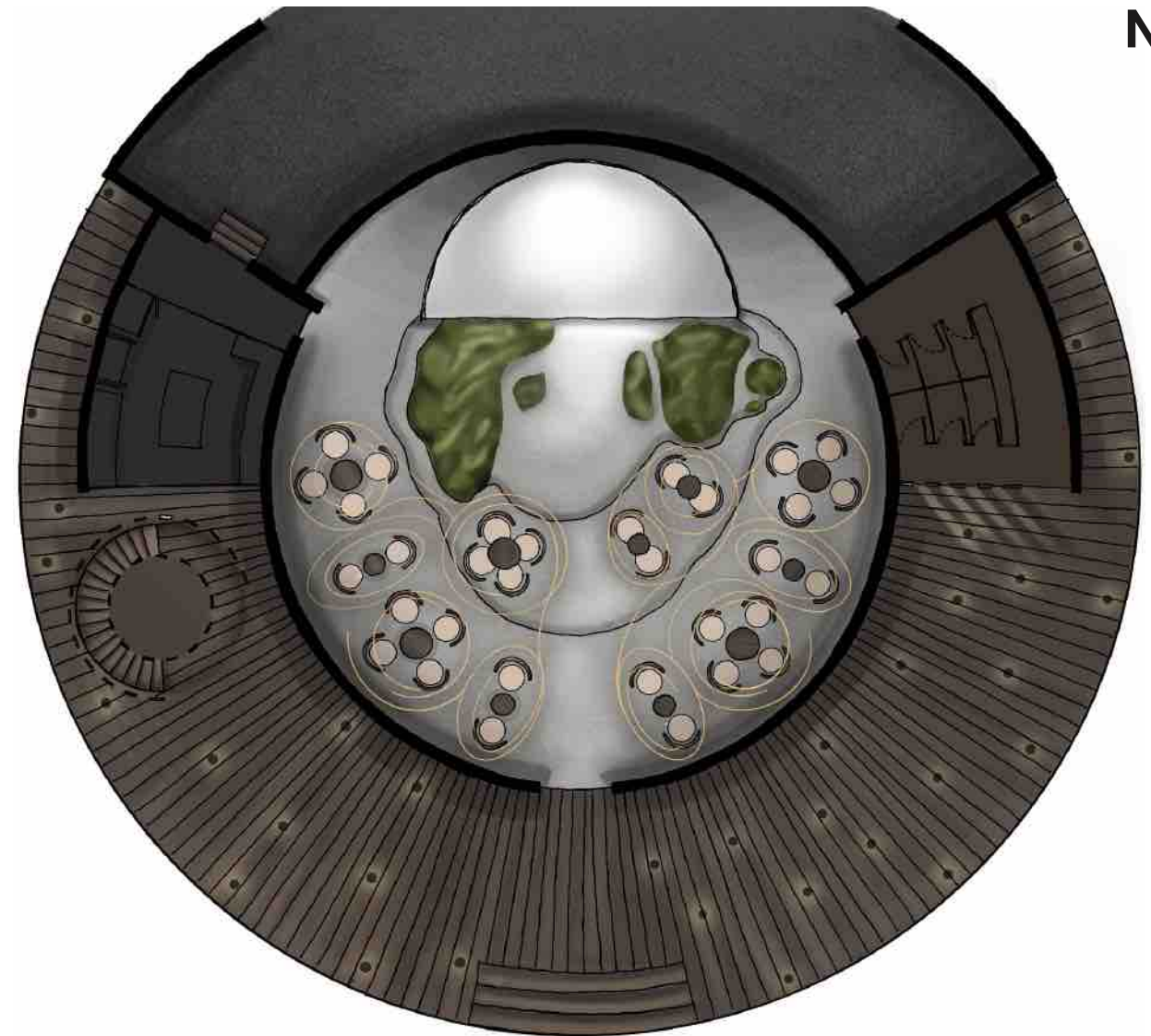
C- MOON. 30' DIA PRECAST WHITE CONC. DOME

D- KITCHEN

E- BANK OF TOILETS

F- 21' WIDE SERVICE ROAD ( AT G.L. - 0'0")

G- 16' DIA SPIRAL STAIRCASE WITH 3' WIDE STEPS



GROUND FLOOR PLANS



SERVICE ENTRY WITH RAMP

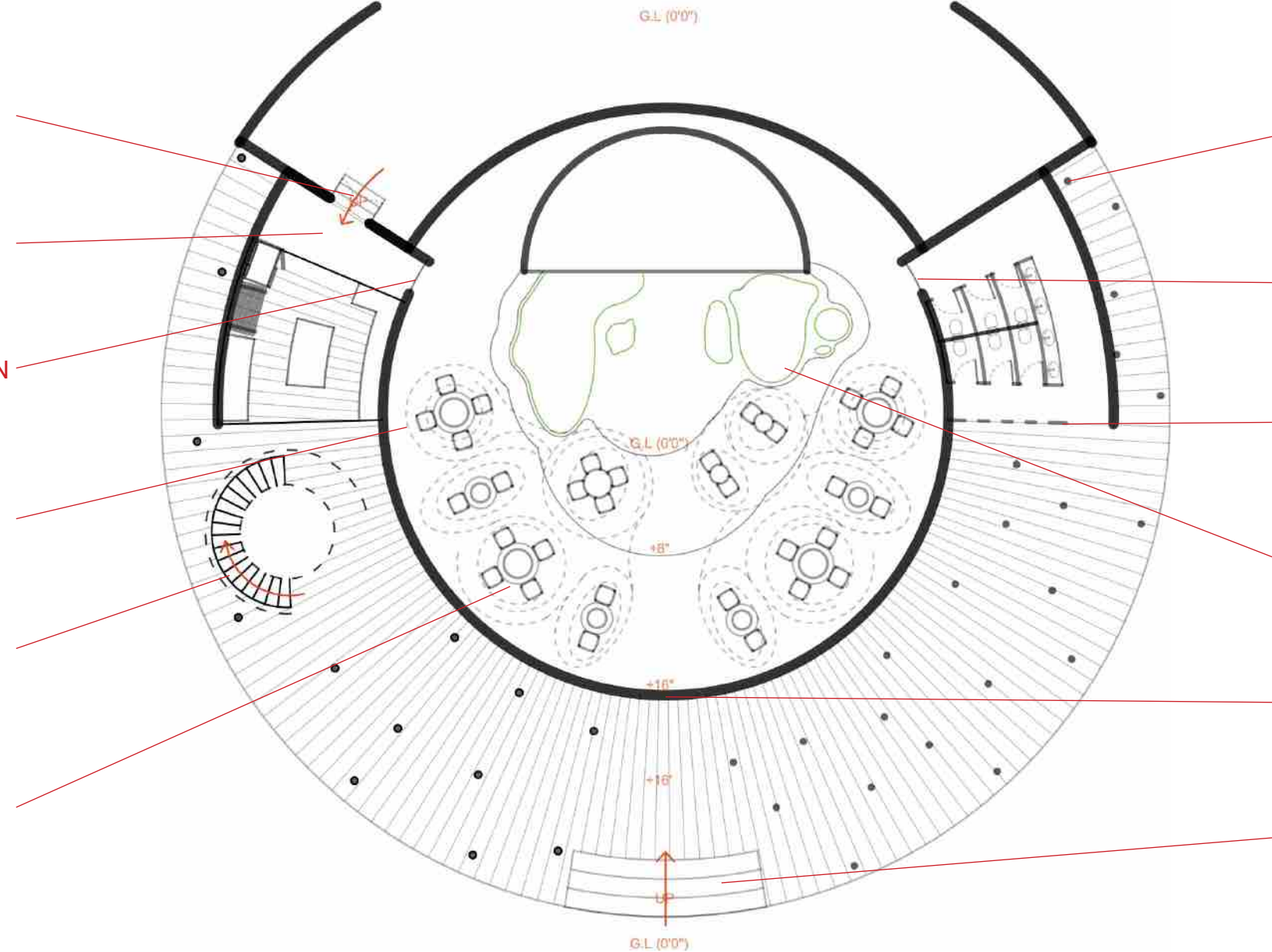
SERVICE CORRIDOR

POCKET SLIDING DOOR WITH SHOJI SCREEN

THIN BAMBOO SCREENS HUNG FROM CEILING

STAIRS LEADING UP TO DECK

LOW LEVEL FLOOR SEATING. LEVEL 1 SEATING TABLES WITH 8" DROP FROM FINISHED FLOOR LEVEL



9" DIA CON. PILLARS ENDING IN CEILING SHADOW GAP WITH COVE LIGHTING

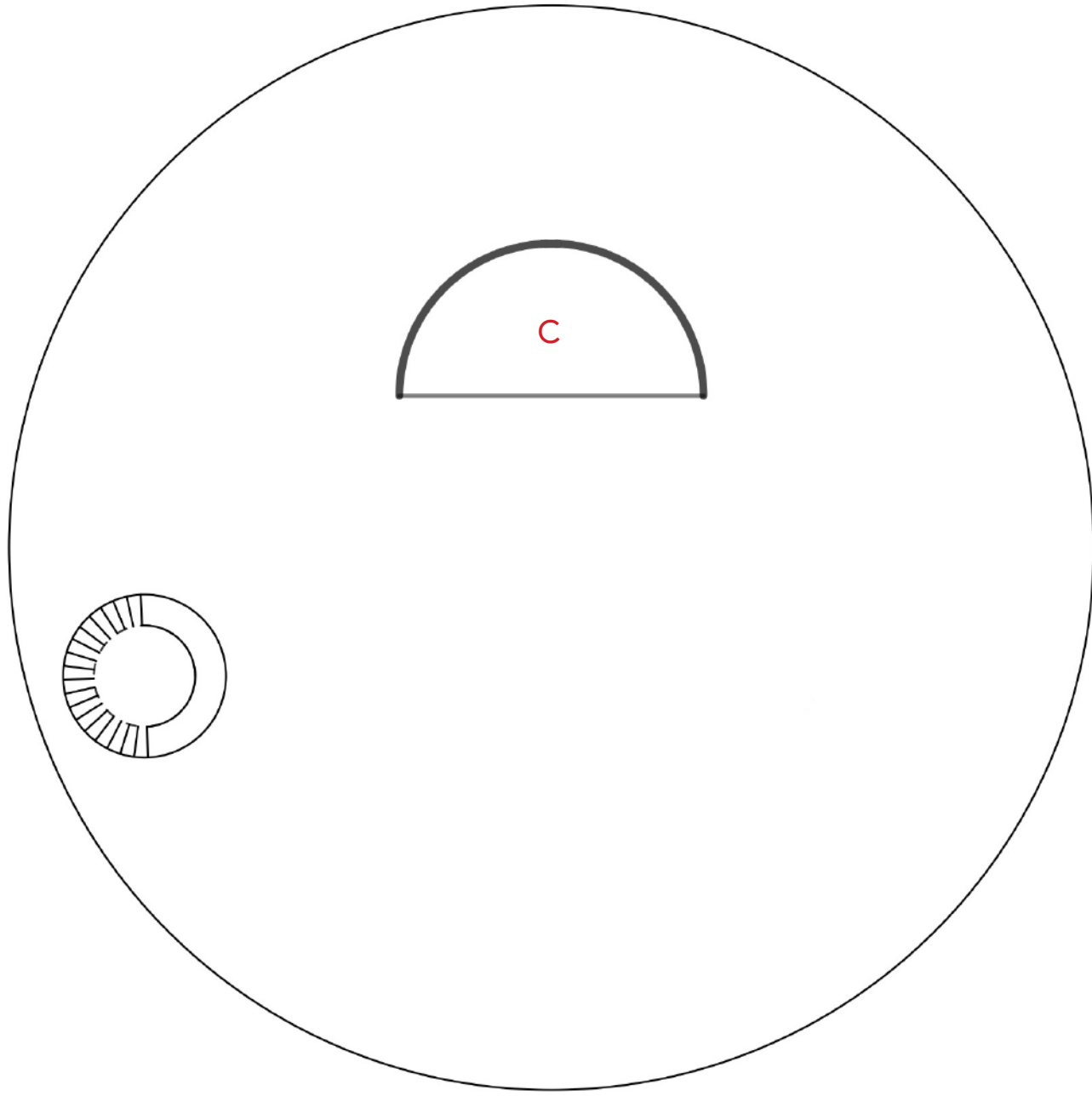
POCKET SLIDING DOOR WITH SHOJI SCREEN

VERTICAL LOUVERED WOODEN PARTITION

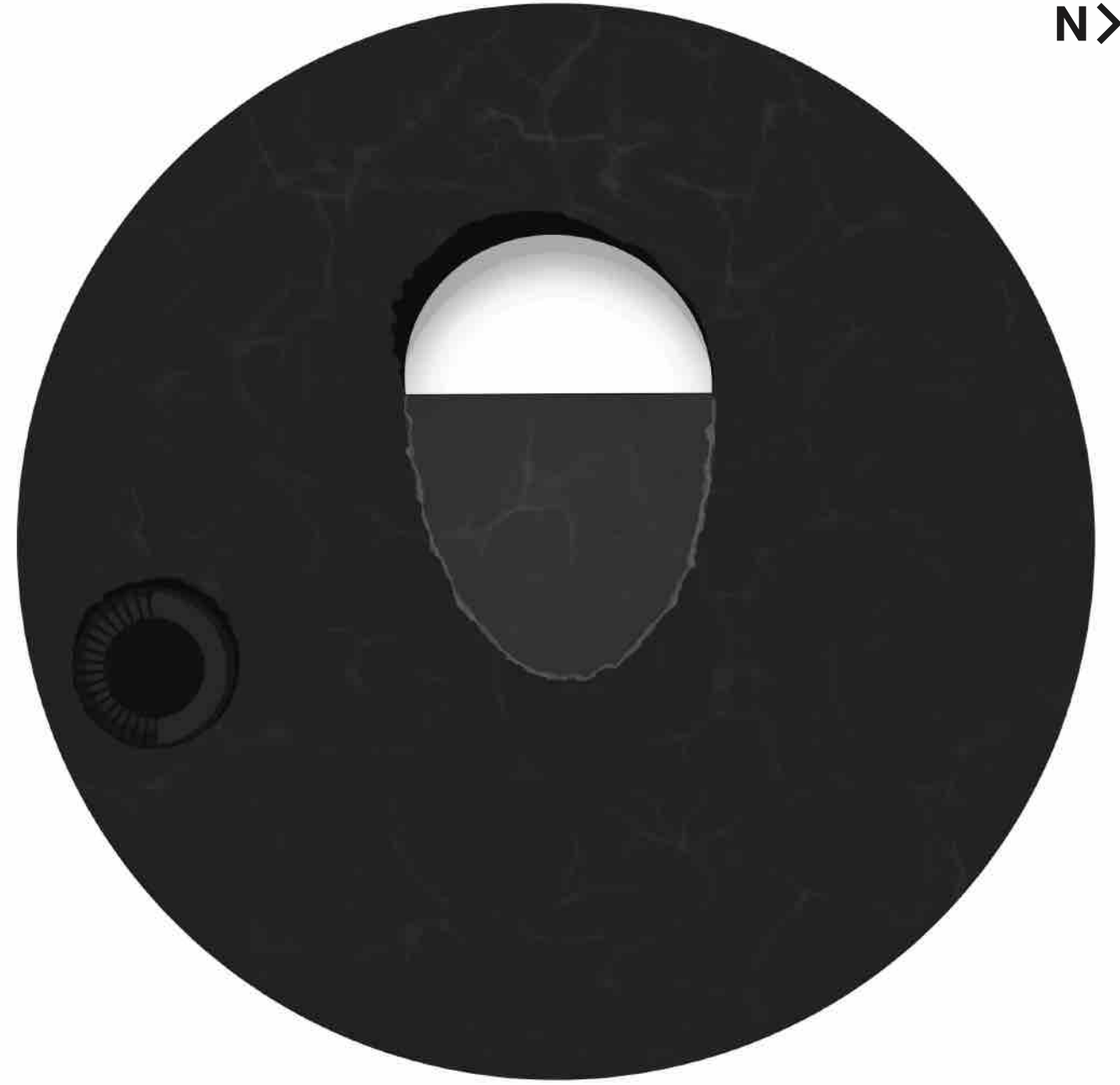
MOSS LANDSCAPING

MOON GATE ENTRANCE

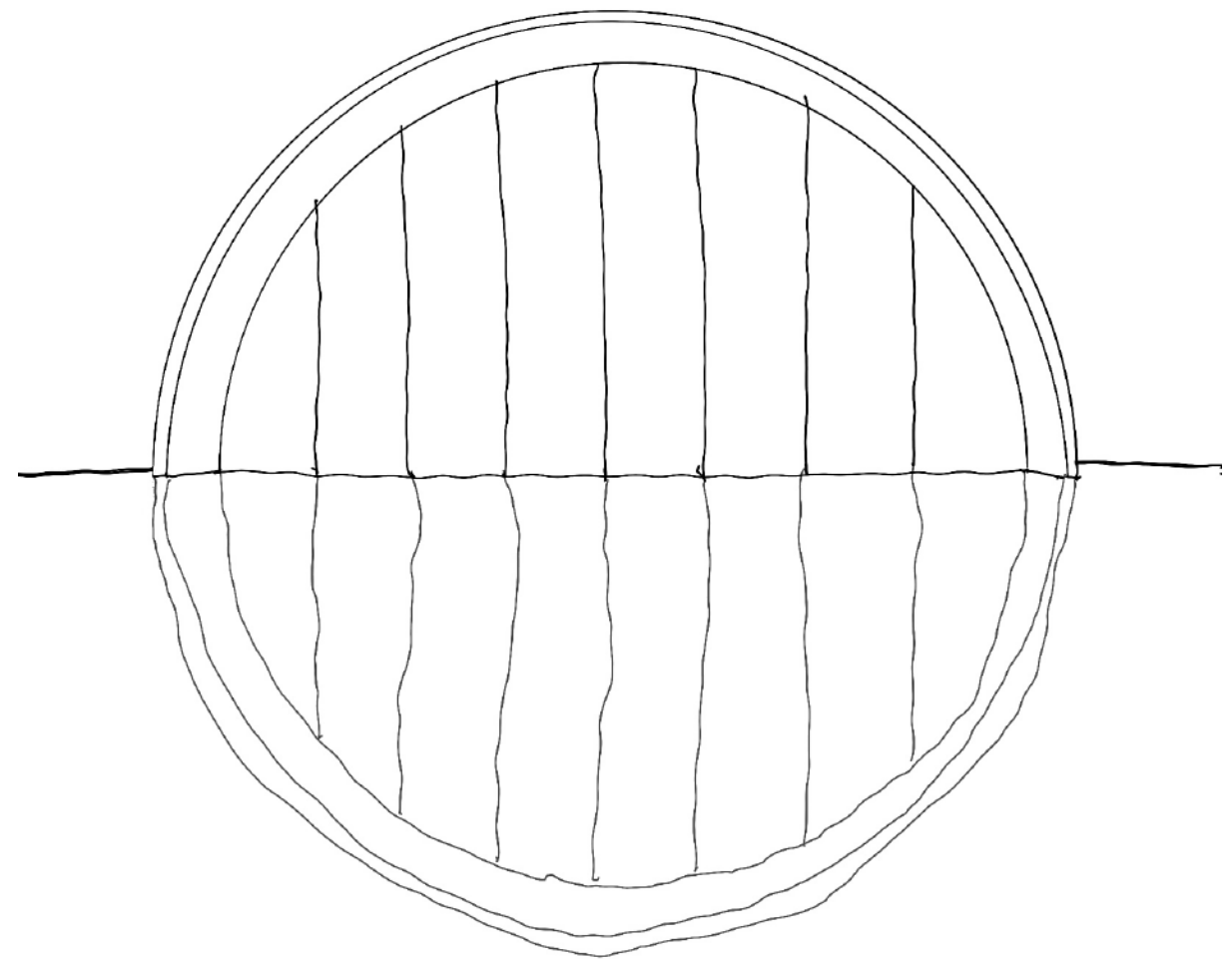
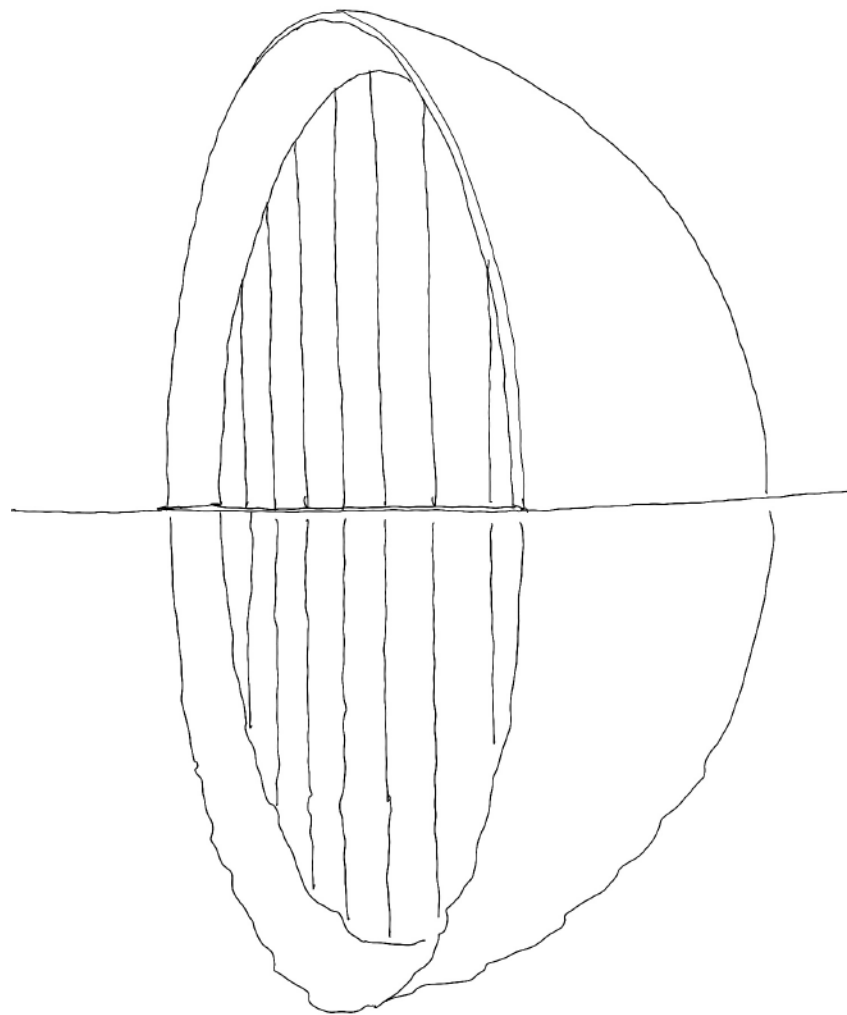
STAIRS UP TO DECK



C- MOON. 30' DIA PRECAST WHITE CONC. DOME



G+1- REFLECTING POOL PLAN









## The Awe Effect

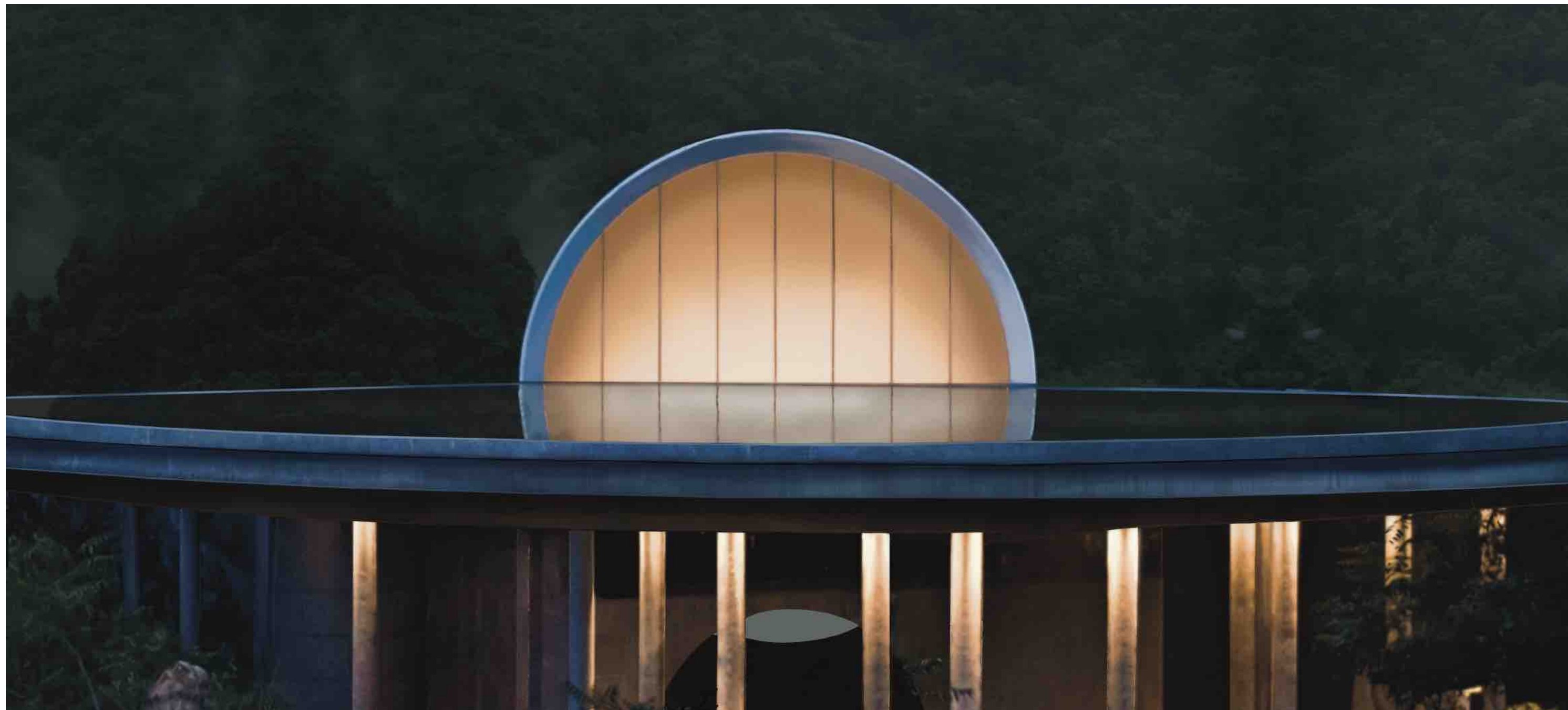
There is this phenomenon that scientists call the “*Awe Effect*”. What that means is, when we look at phenomenons in nature like sunsets, oceans or the starry sky, we experience awe. The reason that it is such a special feeling is because we feel tiny.

We feel insignificant. Not in a depressing way, but in a way where we feel like we are a part of something much bigger than ourselves. We feel not as a stranger in the world, or as something that arrived here by fluke. Rather, we are fundamentally a part of something, well, fundamental.

All of our lives today are so steeped in looking at things up close, hunched over screens, nitpicking at small details. The scale of the moon encourages you to look up, and feel the joy of insignificance.









The moon is fitted with semi frosted glass panes at the pool level. At night, a warm, diffused light can be seen from the inside of the moon. It almost looks like a beacon for people to come and see. The reflection of the pool breaks the otherwise static aesthetic of the rest of the tea house. The orientation of the site has been planned in such a way that the sun sets behind the moon, with the reflection of the shadow being its longest at twilight - the moon rises as the sun sets.







There is a distinction between surviving and thriving. Surviving just means we're alive. To do that we need food, clothing and shelter, and anything beyond this is superfluous. But what makes us different from other animals is that we need more than to just survive- we want to thrive.

Of late, there is a heavy focus on creating spaces that simply minimise the waste of space. How much can I get out of this? How many people can fit here? These are the function heavy questions that drive the creative process. Beyond this, deeper things like emotions are rarely thought of.

When you look beyond the basics, you start shaping an experience rather than just finding a solution. All you need to survive is a solution. A space designed with a higher purpose than simply problem solving becomes architecture, design.

Design can change the world. It can change the world in ways that might not be tangible, but can affect you deeply. We need to start looking beyond simply the base physiological needs and start appealing to the human psyche. It is then that a space is elevated from a place that enables existence, to a place that can influence emotions, provoke thoughts and even heal- a place where you thrive.

To survive, you do not need design. But when you look at society and culture at large, then design is deeply necessary. It is part of what it means to be human.

## Words of Citation

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*For me, this project was about giving deep meaning to space. I have attempted to create the feeling of peace through spatial progression- three spaces that lead you to the tea house. The shell and outer facade of the tea house has been inspired by the “Hometown Moon”, a wedding hall in China. While the facade does look borrowed, the similarities end there. The function is completely different, as well as it’s symbolism. I have interpreted the space in a more spiritual, Zen way and made it fit my concept. Moreover, with my degree being in interior architecture, the interior planning and layout has been changed completely.*

月が綺麗ですね？  
The moon is beautiful, isn't it?