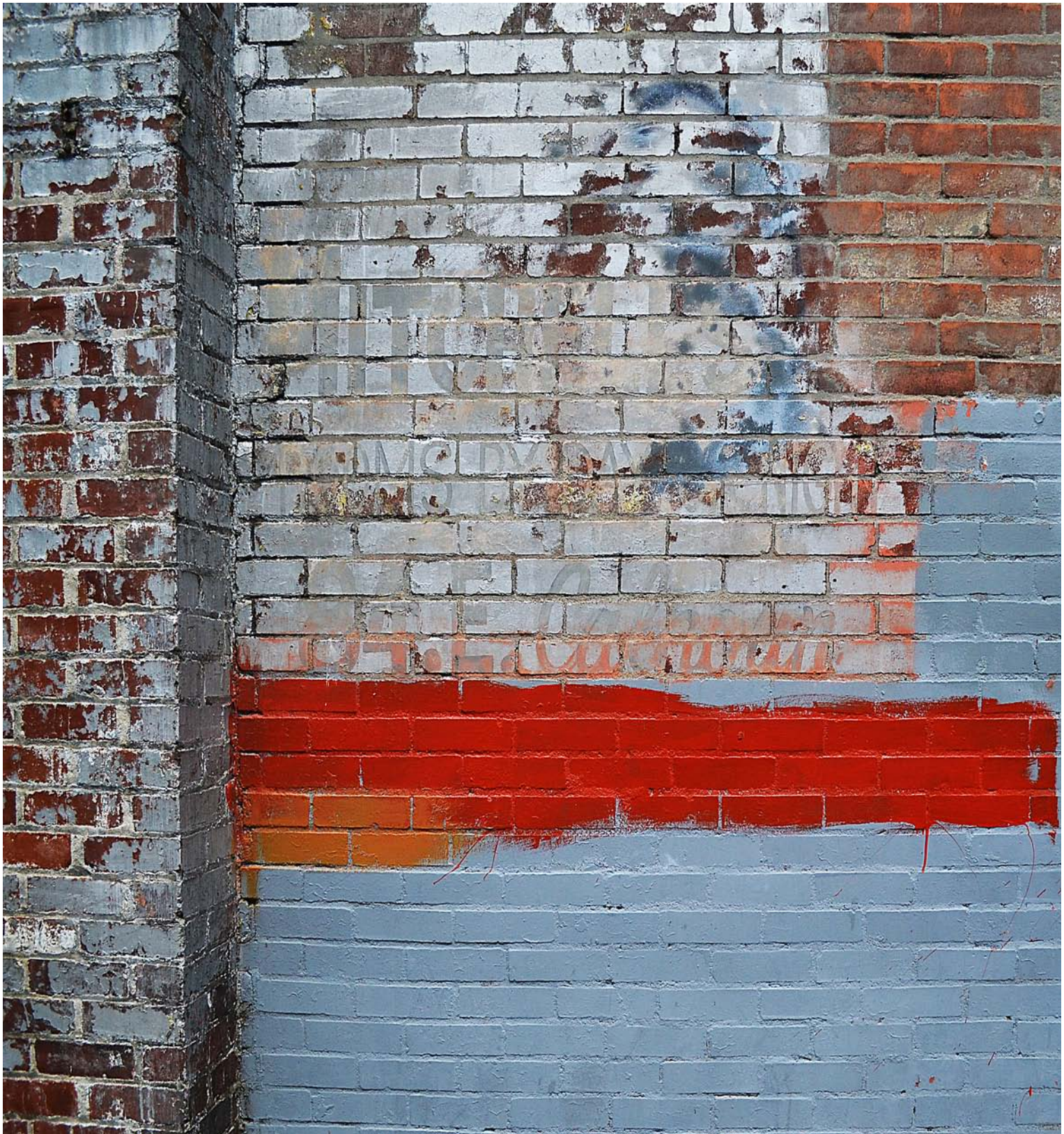


Redefining the Process: Overcoming Architectural Nihiliphobia and Inspiring the Creation of Place

The process of becoming an architect: the architecture student enters design school as an everyday participant within society, moving through and experiencing space, life, time as a very realistic part of who that student is as a conscious individual. Yet, as she makes her way through design school and out into the design world, that average participant in society has learned to remove herself so far from those conditions of who she is, and examine them as singular, separate aspects of life for the sake of the design process, that those very real aspects of life are lost in the collective design and experience of the built environment.[1] *Because of this many architects have lost the ability to create and understand place.*

1. Till, Architecture Depends.

Design Philosophy

People and architecture have a distinct relationship. Architecture gives us protection and solitude; yet it presents us with a powerful opportunity to create connection; connection to community, culture, history, the environment, our past, present, and future. Architecture allows us to connect who we are with who we can be as a society, it connects us with a symbol of who we are on a macro and micro scale; it is part of our identity, a connection to our physical self and our spiritual self.

The objects we perceive have no message for us, they are simply there. Our perceptive faculties grow quiet, unprejudiced and unacquisitive. They reach beyond signs and symbols, they are open, empty. It is as if we could see something on which we cannot focus our consciousness. Here, in this perceptual vacuum, a memory may surface, a memory which seems to issue from the depths of time. Now, our observation of the object embraces a presentiment of the world in all its wholeness, because there is nothing that can be understood. There is a power in the ordinary things of every life.[1]

The places we create are images of us. But we must make them and inject meaning in them. Without us, our places mean nothing.

People and architecture have a distinct relationship. Architecture gives us protection and solitude; yet it presents us with a powerful opportunity to create connection; connection to community, culture, history, the environment, our past, present, and future. Architecture allows us to connect who we are with who we can be as a society, it connects us with a symbol of who we are on a macro and micro scale; it is part of our identity, a connection to our physical self and our spiritual self.

But this connection is only made when we are invested and inspired. If there is no value and no motivation, we are unable to create a place. Architecture is the catalyst for this inspiration. Architecture sets the stage for the activities of our lives; it creates the setting for our everyday lives, and in this lies the beauty of our existence, and our connection with Architecture.

Our lives are dependent on a collection of symbiotic relationships. This is the type of mutualistic relationship that exists between architecture and people. As much as architecture can influence a person, a person can equally influence the architecture. An understanding of the connection of the system of relationships that exists between the architect, the architecture, and the people is a vital achievement in restoring our place.

1. Zumthor,Thinking Architecture,17.

I have many fears.

The fear of snakes.
The fear of darkness.
The fear of the open sea.
The fear of heights, or more specifically,
The fear of falling.
The fear of flying,
The fear of failing.

But of all my fears one stands out in sharp relief.

The fear of creating nothingness.

Manifesto

I have many fears.

The fear of snakes.
The fear of darkness.
The fear of the open sea.
The fear of heights, or more specifically,
The fear of falling.
The fear of flying,
The fear of failing.

But of all my fears one stands out in sharp relief.

The fear of creating nothingness.

Not of never creating anything, but of never creating anything of value; of creating something that moves into the realm of insignificance to individuals, groups, society, culture. Something so far removed and disconnected from the people that it would waste their energy to even carry it with them in a memory.

A sort of Architectural Nihilophobia.

These fears listed above are typically classified as "irrational" and have a series of cognitive and behavioral exercises. But Architectural Nihilophobia does not exist within the realm of psychology, and therefore has no ten-step cure or therapy to ease the symptoms.

I am searching for relief.

Because as an architect, creating places of significance is, in the simplest terms, my public service, my obligation to the profession, my talents and abilities put to their best use, and in the most complex terms, my passion.

And the relief relies on three objectives:

1. Reconnect

It is a problem of creation, and equally one of perception.

We interact with our built environment constantly. In fact, so incessantly that we blindly move through it, unaware of the impact it is having on our psyche, on our physical and mental well-being. Many things fight for our attention, and our environment blends into the background. We are consciously disconnected from our places, yet sub-consciously perpetually connected.

We know the relief of walking through the door of our home after a long, hard day.
We know the familiarity of walking into our favorite coffee shop.
We know the excitement of the bleachers shaking in the stadium when our team scores the winning point.
We know the spirit of sitting in silence with a single band of light in an otherwise dark room.

We create these places, and try to inject them with a sincere attempt at a design of place. But the greatest realization of the architect is that the connection of people, and a connection of people and architecture, create a place.

Without this connection, you have created nothingness.

This is a connection to the people, to the community, to the larger idea for the society, to the collective identity of a people. This goes deeper than history or style, deeper than materials or budget, deeper than the surrounding context or political environment.

It is about the everyday lives of the people that live there, the beauty in the [illegible]

2. Reconstruct

It is a problem of our collective idea of a life well-lived.

Picture the "American Dream:"
the family with a mother, a father, 2.5 children, a dog, a cat, a two-story house in the suburbs. The perfect middle-class family. The dream of the white-picket fence. A remnant of the 1950s American heyday.

Now, picture the feasibility of everyone fitting into this dream. The feasibility for our communities, for our cities, for our infrastructure, for our buildings, for our resources, for our places, and for our individuals.

It is flawed, yet it remains as the benchmark of a well-lived and prosperous life; the benchmark of success.

I am arguing for a reconstruction of this dream. To reconstruct is to rebuild or create anew something that has failed or fallen. In reconstructing our idea of achievement, we allow the contingency inherent in the 7 billion people on earth, and include them in our idea of success, allowing our architecture to adapt to those people and their ability to change, grow, and break the mold of what we have defined as a place. A collective reconstruction.

It is about realizing our time, understanding our people, and allowing for contingencies.

3. Redefine

It is a problem of defining our purpose and of the purpose of architecture.

Architecture seems to have many purposes:
Design buildings, spaces, objects; create inhabitable works of art; design for form follows function, or function follows form, or spaces with an organic nature.

Yet many of those disregard the idea of creating places for people. Places that are complete in design and complete in the way they inspire others to create their place within.

To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places:

to be human is to have and to know your place. The philosopher Martin Heidegger declared that "'place' places man in such a way that reveals the external bonds of his existence and at the same time the depths of his freedom and reality.[1]

It is a profound and complex aspect of man's experience of the world.1

This is invaluable in defining architecture as a vital aspect of identity, and allowing architecture to be a part of an individual, and a societal, communal, collective existence.

The architect is the facilitator of this journey of creating an identity or a sense of place. In this we are public servants.

And we are also experts in making good design of these places and this identity. It is not about forcing ideas or simply appeasing the client, but about creating design for all aspects of our lives, the good, the bad, and the in-between.

So within Architectural Nihilophobia, lies the fear of an ultimate failure of creating better, inspiring places for our people. Architects are faced with a lifelong struggle of trying to "get it right." But in this struggle we can begin to understand

1. Relph, "Excerpts from Place and Placelessness," 173.

a responsibility to the other

"the key ethical responsibility of the architect lies not in the refinement of the object as static visual product, but as contributor to the creation of empowering spatial, and hence social, relationships in the name of others."

contingency

it "calls for one to have a vision but, at the same time, to be modest and light-handed in the way one goes about realizing it in response to the circumstances. there is a call to not be simply persuaded by style or conventional wisdom, or to become comfortable in a routine of design, but to constantly look to each choice for its ability to inspire, and its ability to change.

needs

in our current architecture, there seems to be little focus on fostering a sense of self-worth and creativity, something that is often deeper within people, and more difficult to draw out. this need for self-expression, as seen through creative spatial interventions, is vital for the connection to self-worth and self-actualization.

phenomenology

as the phenomenologists state, "the timeless task of architecture is to create embodied existential metaphors that concretize and structure man's being in the world." to do this, one must emphasize the sensory experience of the human through space. choose rich materials, design the experience of light, hear movement across space, etc. in doing this, a richness of experience exists, which allows an individual to grasp the memory of place.

time

lll describes thick time as "a present that gathers the past and pregnantly holds the future, but not in an easy linear manner." thick time is essentially the culmination of every experience of time one has--past, present, future, imagined--acting simultaneously at any given moment.

storytelling

the power of narrative should not be dismissed; it is compelling in describing who people are as a collective and who they are as individuals. narratives position each individual within the larger collective of the motion of time; it is the individual representation of who each person is in time, and therefore who everyone is within space. sheldrake describes that "without a narrative, a person's life is merely a random sequence of unrelated events; birth and death are inexplicable, temporality is a terror and a burden, and suffering and misfortune incomprehensible." in the description people need narrative; it is a truly distinct, authentic, and natural method for telling others who they are and their experiences of the world.

place as identity

"quernicia, the Spanish word that 'refers to a place on the ground where one feels secure, a place from which one's strength of character draws,' and 'a place where one belongs.' Placemaking is important to this end. A place not because it is statically or universally understood as unique or even supportive, but because it is yours. It is intimate and known, cared for and argued about. Placemaking as a design activity and social practice creates the opportunity for quernicia. Placemaking is the way all of us as human beings transform the places in which we find ourselves into places in which we live."

1. entry lobby/waiting room
2. male care courtyard
3. assessment/exam room
4. advocate/administrative workspace
5. entry garden/foyer
6. female courtyard
7. meditation courtyard
8. community stair
9. open studio space
10. main street mural
11. roof garden
12. alley approach
13. elevator room
14. lobby
15. main street approach
16. dance/movement studio

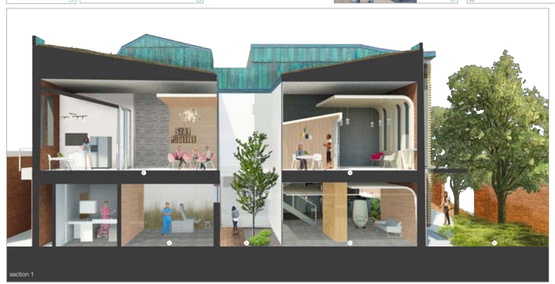
san francisco women's building

mural artist: rivoly rose freeman

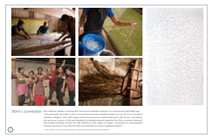
mural artist: emily gladdinger

the mural

patrick blanc living columns


section 1

section 2


Work | Live | Play

reclaimed wood

cellulose insulation

cellulose + cotton panels

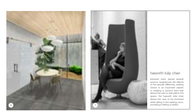
cellulose + sheep's wool

sanitary public library

MADE by GWC

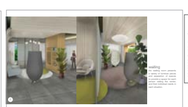
the shop

section 3


Haworth fully chair

Haworth work stool, space saving, ergonomic, and easy to adjust, is available in a variety of seat heights and styles. Its flexible design makes it ideal for a wide range of applications, including task, training, and multipurpose seating.

Haworth work stool, space saving, ergonomic, and easy to adjust, is available in a variety of seat heights and styles. Its flexible design makes it ideal for a wide range of applications, including task, training, and multipurpose seating.

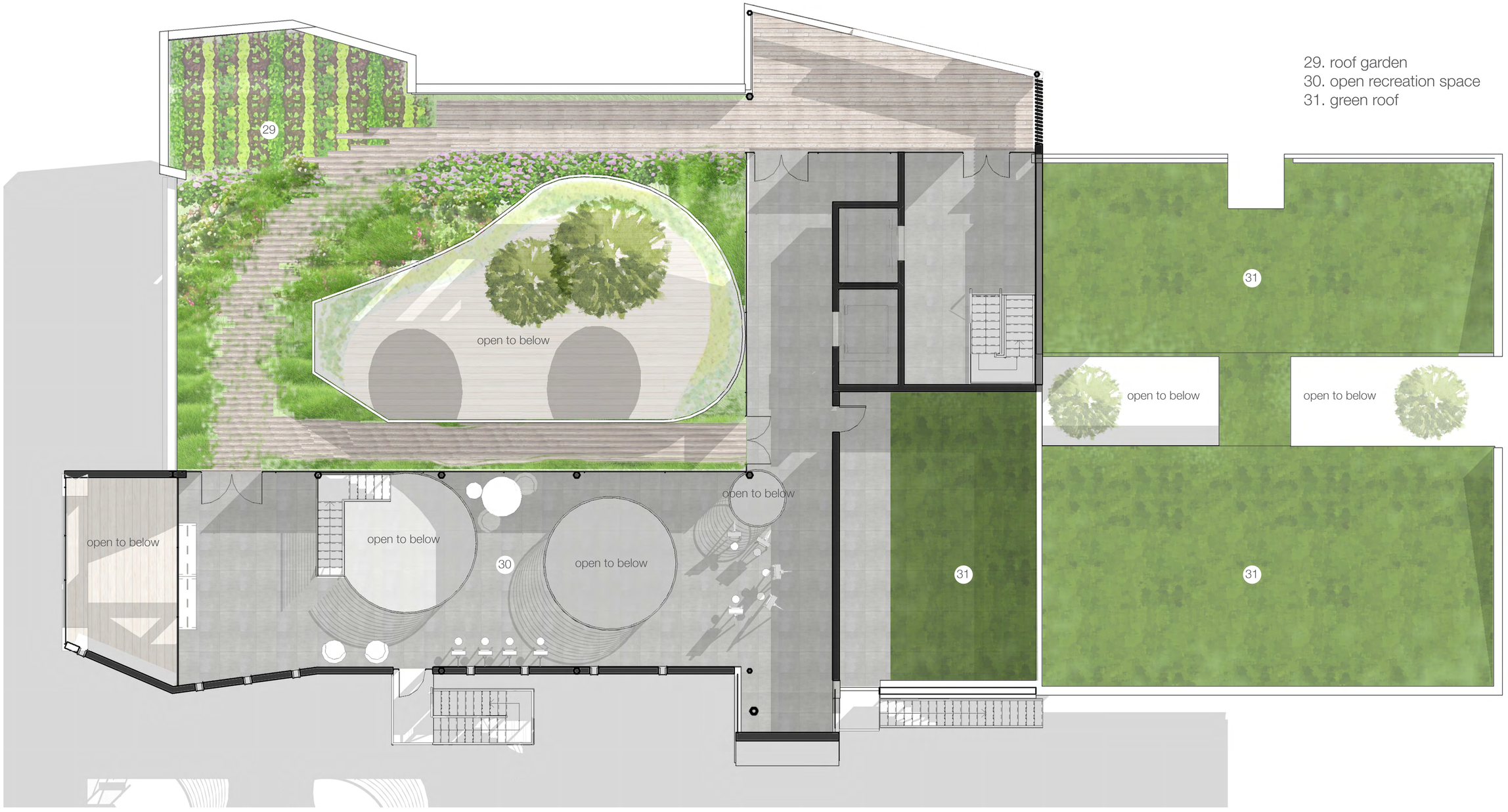

eames molded fiberglass chair

eames molded fiberglass chair

eames molded fiberglass chair

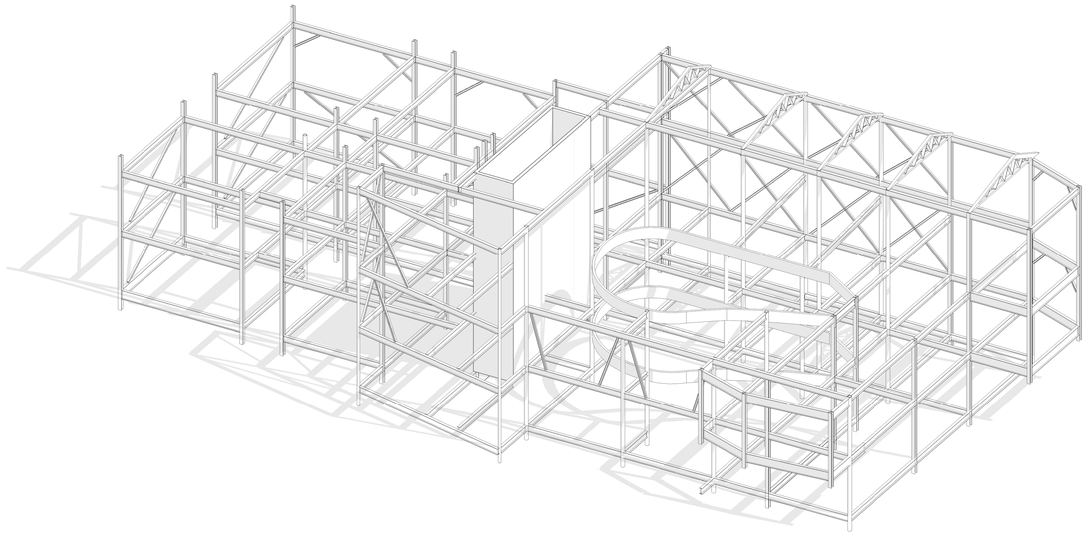
floor plan 1
scale: 3/16"=1'-0"

29. roof garden
30. open recreation space
31. green roof

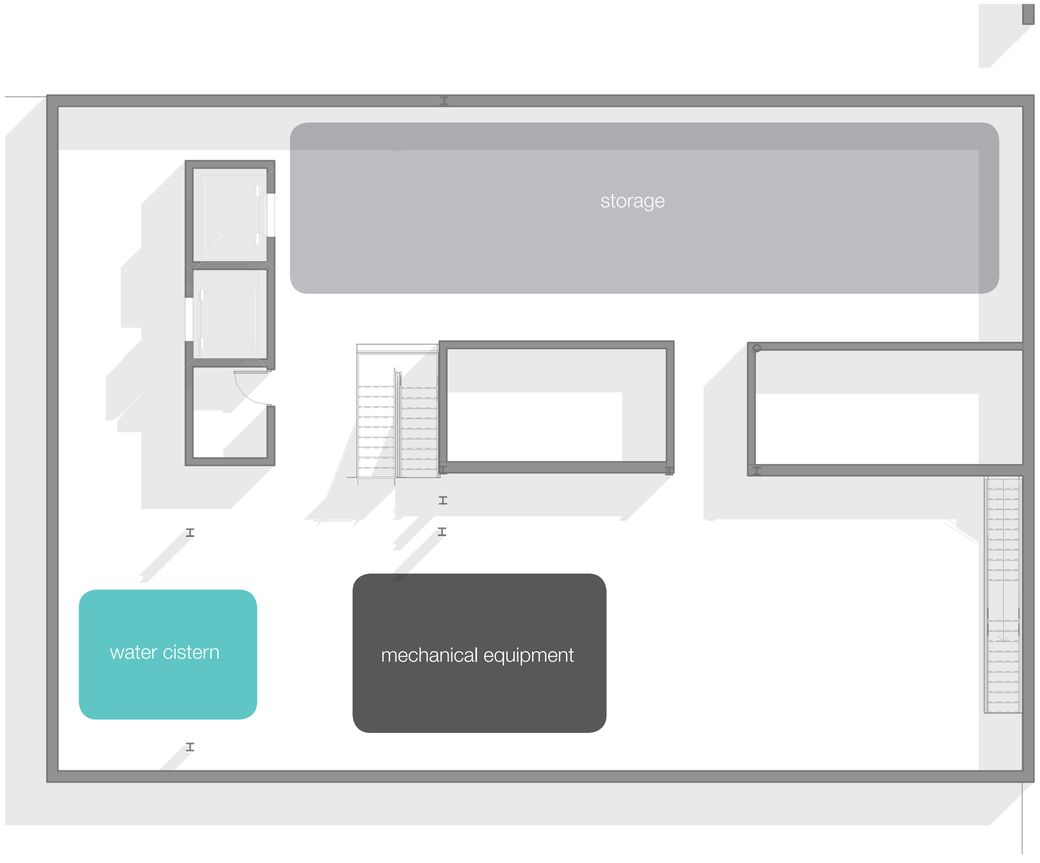


floor plan 3
scale: 3/16”=1’-0”

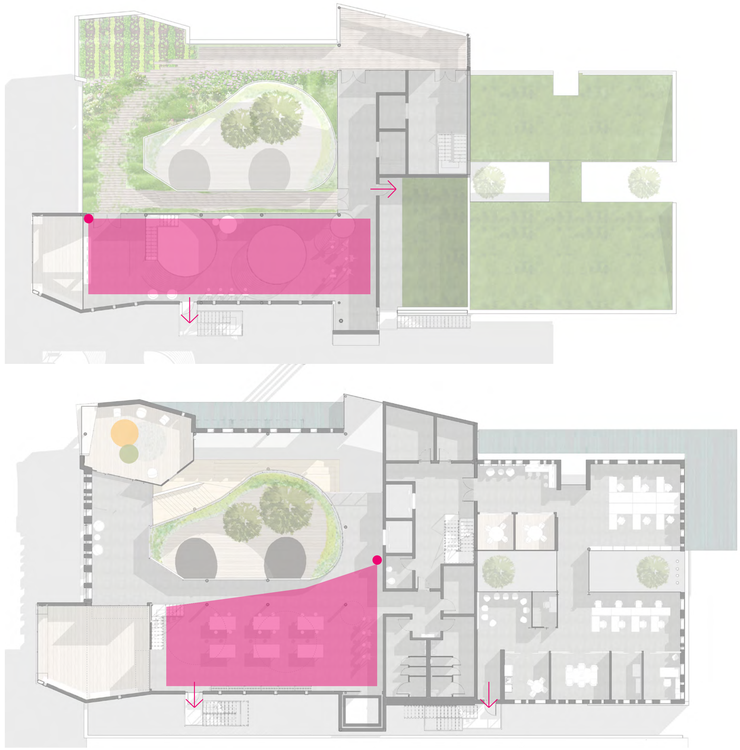
1 5 10

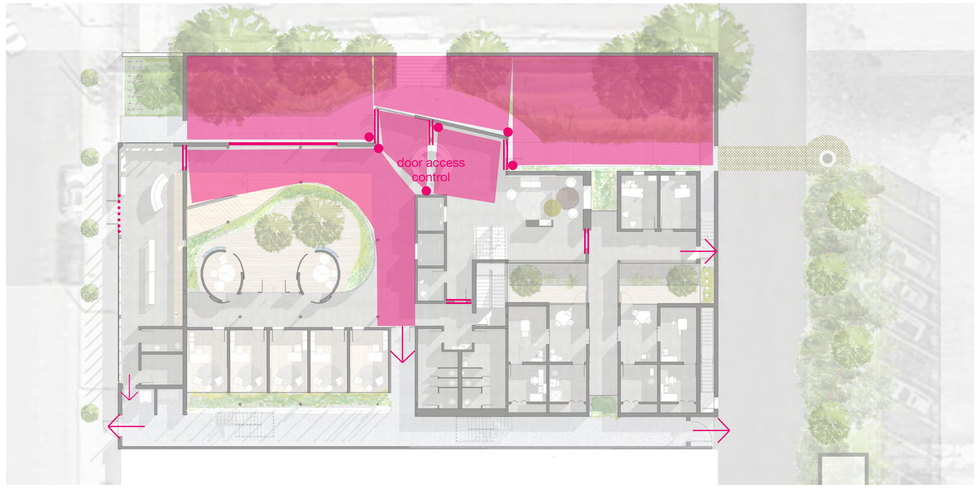


structural framing axon
nts



basement plan
nts

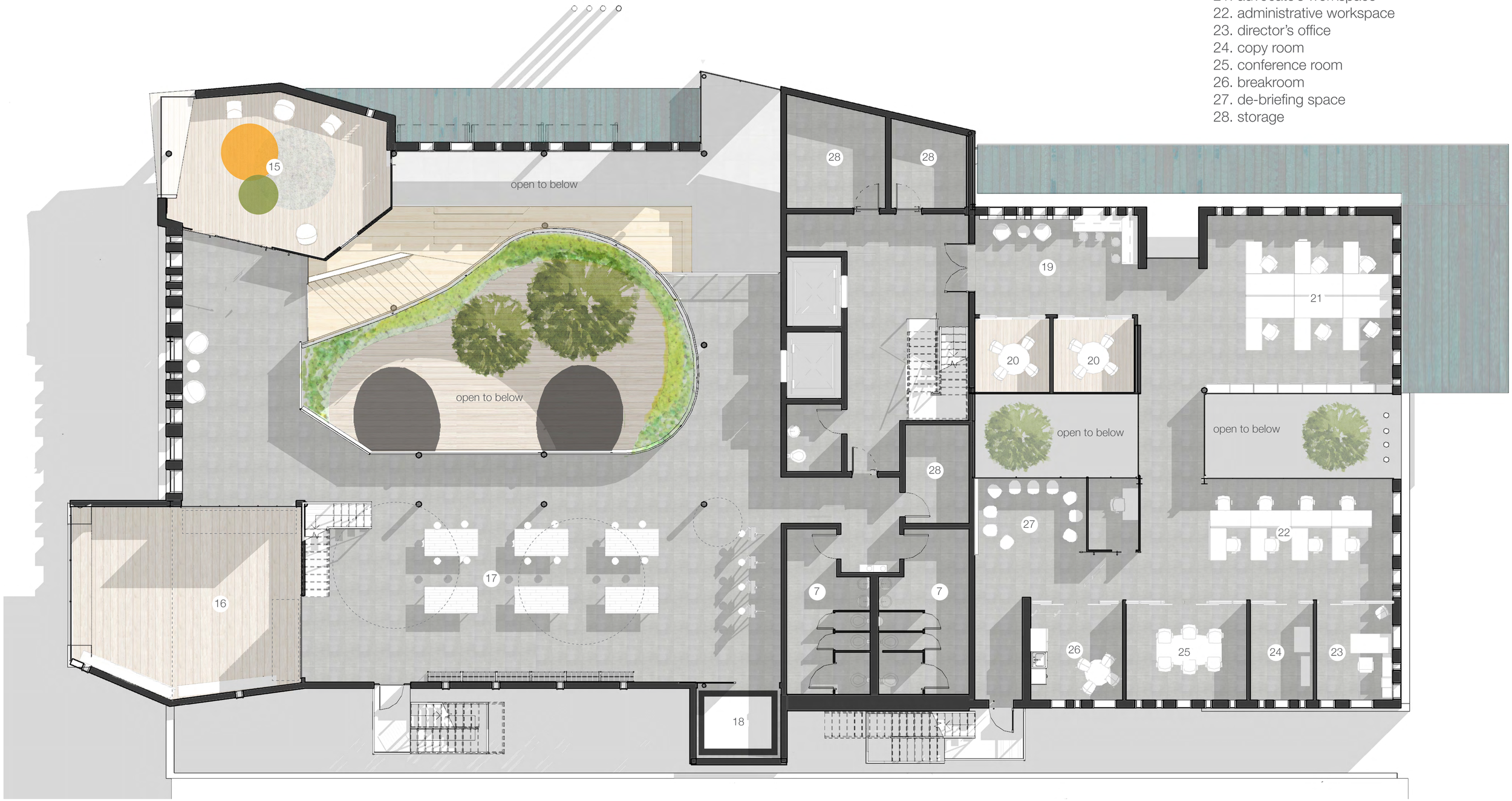




exit only:
public entrance:
controlled access:
open only for public events:
security camera:

security plan
nts

15. group therapy
16. movement therapy studio
17. art studio
18. kiln
19. waiting area
20. meeting room
21. advocate's workspace
22. administrative workspace
23. director's office
24. copy room
25. conference room
26. breakroom
27. de-briefing space
28. storage



floor plan 2
scale: 3/16"=1'-0"

1 5 10

gardens of soft grasses sweep along the path to the entrance of the center to soften this walk. these gardens lead to a bioswale along the north of the site

wood wraps along the crisis care entrance to soften the building upon entrance. this material leads up to the roof garden and is symbolic of the growth within the center

the form of the creative therapy spaces begins at the entrance. the entrance is symbolic of the first step of healing. this form then moves across the building and moves out and over main street, symbolizing a regaining of voice and an expression of this voice

the group therapy room is similarly symbolic and expressive on the exterior as it overhangs the walk to the wellness care entrance

north elevation

scale: 3/16”=1’-0”

1 5 10

while the expressive form is visible, it is not domineering upon entering

an art piece made from site remediation pipes greets visitors as they enter from the east. this piece casts various colors on the ground and the building as the sun moves throughout the day

an overhang shields visitors from the elements. if they are being brought by police, this is where the officer would park. this overhang follows visitors to the entrance

a butterfly garden is an additional attraction to visitors. the butterfly is also symbolic as something that goes through a change and becomes more beautiful

east elevation
scale: 3/16”=1’-0”

1 5

patinaed copper panels move along the form of the wellness care spaces. these panels present a complementary contrast to the red brick and additionally continue to age and weather

a green screen shields the counseling rooms from the views of the alley and present a natural view for those receiving counseling

the form of the kiln space protrudes from the building continuing the symbolism of the expressive forms

sliver windows dance across the facade of both the wellness care and crisis care. the rhythm becomes more regular on the side of the crisis care for a more familiar pattern. on the wellness care form, the windows begin to move and shift more on the facade

south elevation

scale: 3/16”=1’-0”

1 5

the column support for the kiln room also serves as an exhaust pipe. additionally, the pipe is adorned in an expressive mosaic

the copper panels break at a point for a large mural. if entering from the north, a visitor will see this mural as an expression of the creativity and healing happening within the building

the primary brick form relates to the materiality, scale, and form of the buildings along south main street

a living wall wraps the group therapy room. this space is important to the healing of the survivor, as well as creating a community within. while it is expressive on the exterior, it also symbolically shields the survivors within.

a wall surrounds the primary entrances to the crisis care and wellness care spaces. this wall provides protection and privacy to those coming to the center

west elevation
scale: 3/16”=1’-0”

1 5

sexual assault: any type of
sexual contact or behavior
that occurs by force or witho
consent of the recipient of th
unwanted sexual activity. Fall
under the definition of sexua
assault is sexual activity suc
as forced sexual intercourse
sodomy, child molestation,
incest, fondling, and attempt
rape. It includes sexual acts
against people who are una
to consent either due to agr
lack of capacity.
nillion
I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,
When he beats his bars and would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings -
I know why the caged bird sings

hop
We need to be listened to.
You will not defeat

What hurts
one of us affects
ALL of us.
"I had to forgive myself"

I STAND WITH SURVIVORS because
STRONG
a woman in the U.S. has a 1 in 5
chance of being raped in her lifetime