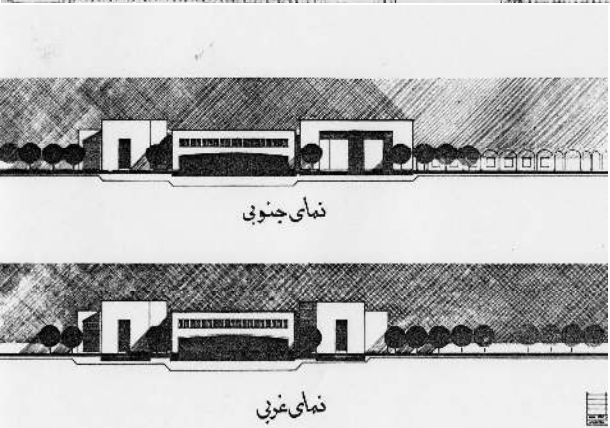
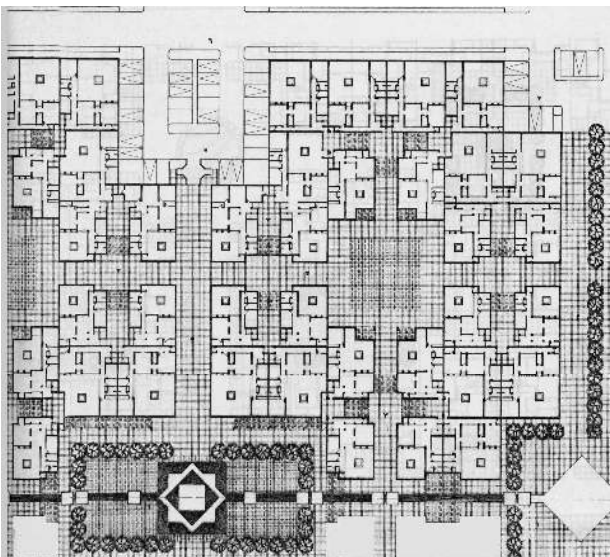




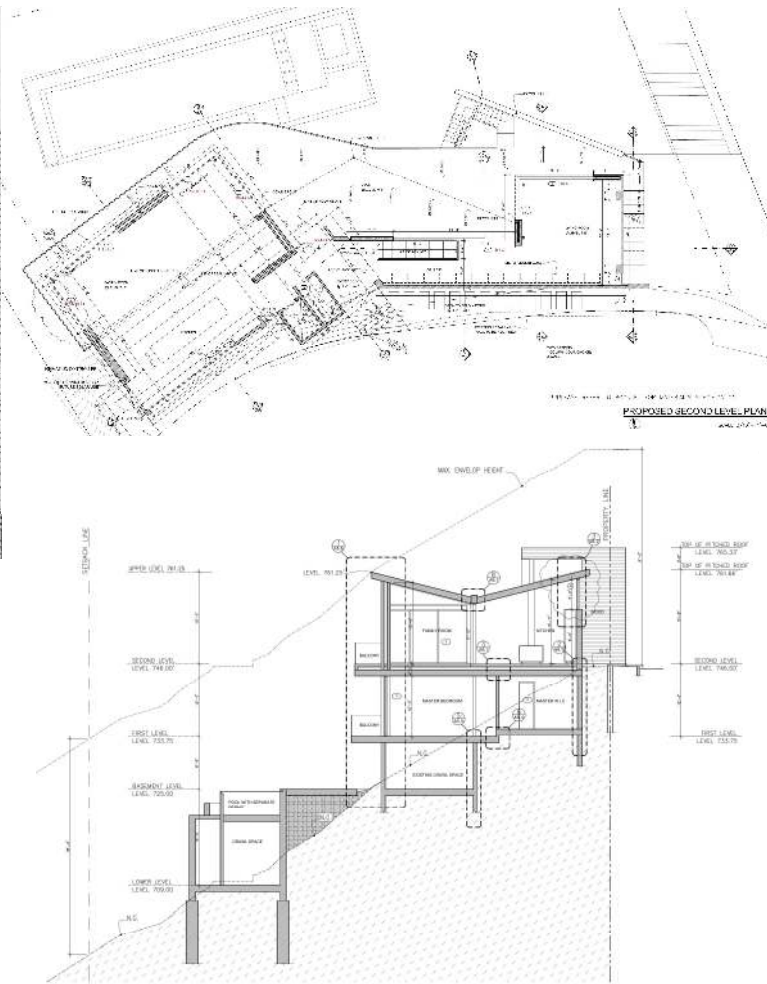
DESIGNING ON THE EDGE

From Hand Drawing to Artificial Intelligence
A Journey Through Design, Practice, and the Hillside

SHAHRAM SHOKOUFANDEH, AIA, SIAP
Architect, Builder & Principal of Group-S, Inc. | SIAP | September 24, 2026



HAND DRAWING — Discovering the idea
 “Drawing by hand taught me to observe the site and imagine space, movement, and proportion. The sketch was a way to think through the design.”

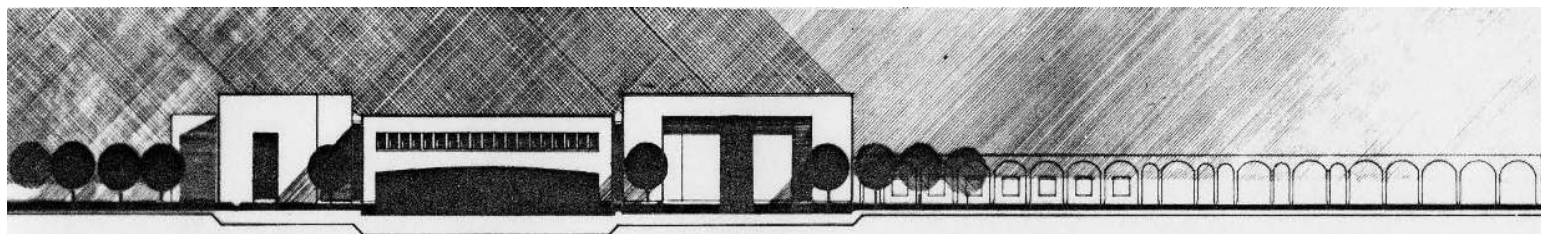


CAD PLAN — Testing the idea
 “CAD allowed us to develop the idea with precision. In the plan and section, we test dimensions, access, structure, and how the building meets the hillside.”

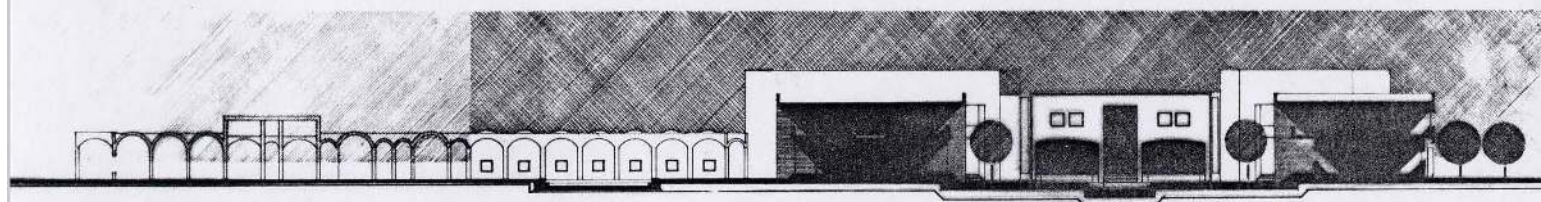
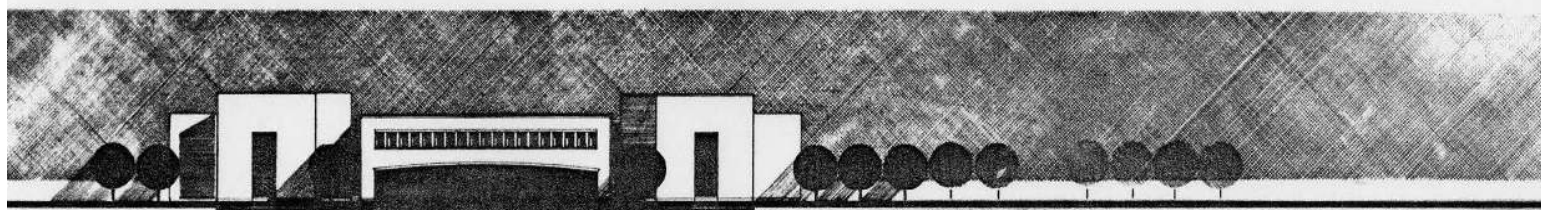
“The tools changed from hand drawing to CAD to AI. What connects them is architectural judgment.”



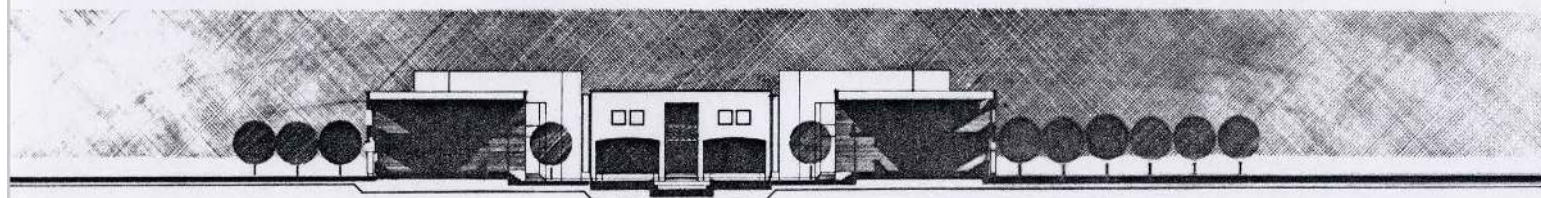
AI RENDERING — Experiencing and questioning the idea
 “AI helps us visualize possibilities quickly. But a convincing image must still be checked against the actual plan, section, materials, and site. The architect decides what is true to the project.”

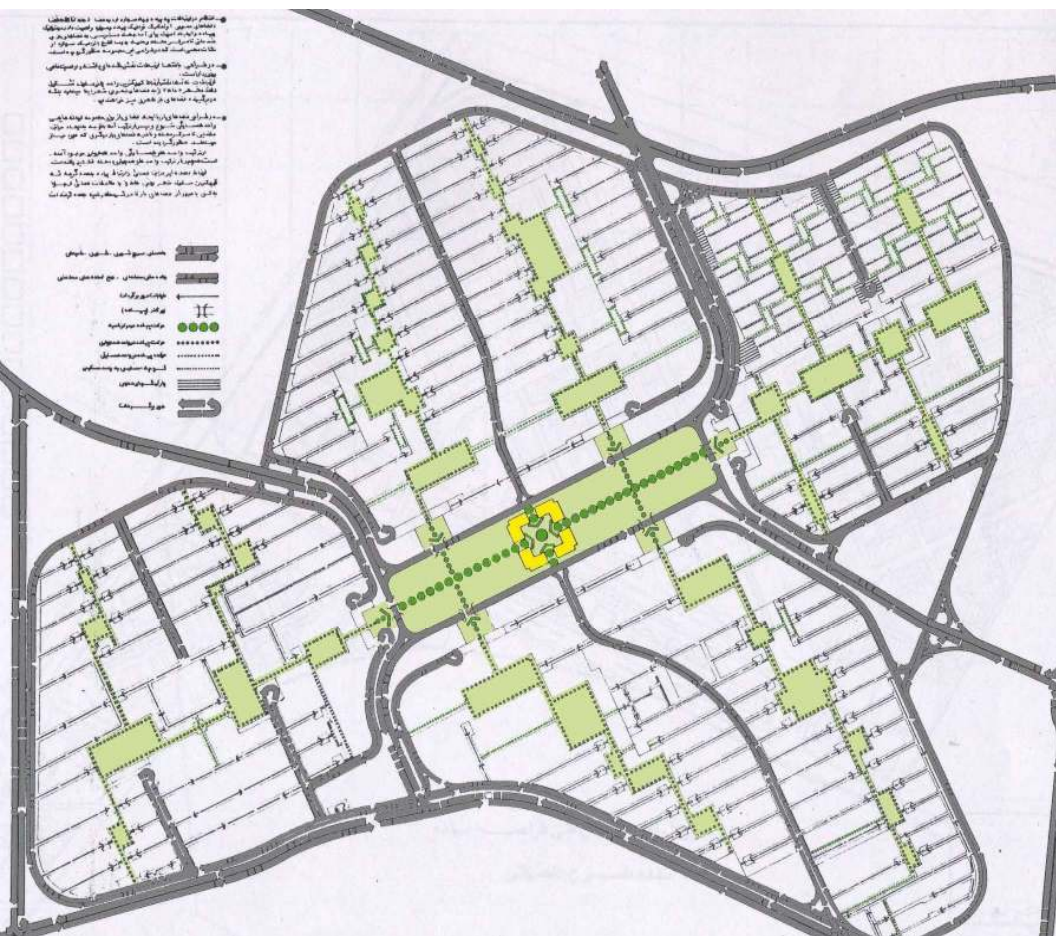


نمای جنوبی



برش الف.الف





“The city as a system of movement and meaning.”

“EARLY URBAN WORK.”

Hand drawing taught me to observe before deciding on a form.
I used it to explore movement, proportion, and the character of a place.
Those early questions still guide my work.

ROADMAP

The order we work in

1

Zone & setbacks

R1, RS, RE9-RE40, RA

2

Soils first

Geotechnical approval before design

3

Survey & slope analysis

Sets the maximum RFA

4

Uphill or downhill

Drives access and massing

5

Retaining walls

One 12 ft or two 10 ft

6

Slope setbacks

H/2, H/3 and deep foundations

7

Height

Envelope, natural grade, plans

8

Street & survey items

Substandard street, dedication, easements

Each step is followed by one of my own projects as a worked example.

Does the Baseline Hillside Ordinance apply?

Two tests, both must be true

- Single-family zone: R1, RS, RE9, RE11, RE15, RE20, RE40 or RA
- ZIMAS shows "Hillside Area (Zoning Code): Yes" and ZI-2415
- An "H" suffix on the zone (RE11-1-H) does not decide it
- Specific plans, HPOZs and hillside overlays can be stricter - check them first

2011

BHO adopted

Ord. 181,624, effective May 9, 2011. LAMC 12.21 C.10

2017

BMO / BHO amendment

Tighter RFA exemptions, grading under the house now counted, new R1 massing rules

Today

Plus local layers

Hillside construction regulation districts, wildlife and ridgeline rules where mapped

Before any design: the soils engineer's blessing

The geotechnical report decides whether the site can be built, where, and at what cost. Design that starts before it is a guess.

1

Is the slope stable?

Factor of safety of 1.5. If not, remedial grading or stabilization comes first.

2

What foundation?

Conventional footings, deepened footings, or caissons and grade beams to bedrock.

3

Where can the building sit?

Slope setbacks (H/2, H/3) and any geologic restricted-use areas.

4

How are walls designed?

Earth pressures, surcharge, drainage and temporary shoring for cuts.

Approval path: soils / geology report > LADBS Grading Division approval letter > conditions carried onto the architectural and structural plans.

The owner provides: survey and slope analysis

Slope Analysis Map - requirements

- Based on a survey of natural / existing topography
- Prepared, stamped and signed by a California civil engineer or licensed land surveyor
- Scale 1 in. = 100 ft or larger; contours at 10 ft max with 2 ft intermediates
- Slope bands shown in contrasting colors, with area, FAR and RFA tabulated
- City Planning signs the verification form before LADBS plan check accepts the project

What else the survey tells us

Lot depth and width

set the yards

Natural grade

sets the height envelope

Street width and paving

standard or substandard

Easements and dedications

reduce the buildable area

[illegible]

THE LEGAL DESCRIPTION, COMPASSES SHOWING TO BE FROM A SURVEY RECORD, WITH TOTAL PROPERTY MEASUREMENTS.

② EVIDENCE FOR THE "UNITY" INTERVIEWING AND MAP-TOWARDS: PHOTOGRAPH RECORDING IN BOOK-CELL, PAGE 242, OF OFFICIAL RECORDS

③ EVIDENCE FOR THE "LITELITE" PHOTOGRAPH RECORDING IN BOOK-CELL, PAGE 242, OF OFFICIAL RECORDS

④ EVIDENCE FOR THE "LITELITE" PHOTOGRAPH RECORDING IN BOOK-CELL, PAGE 242, OF OFFICIAL RECORDS

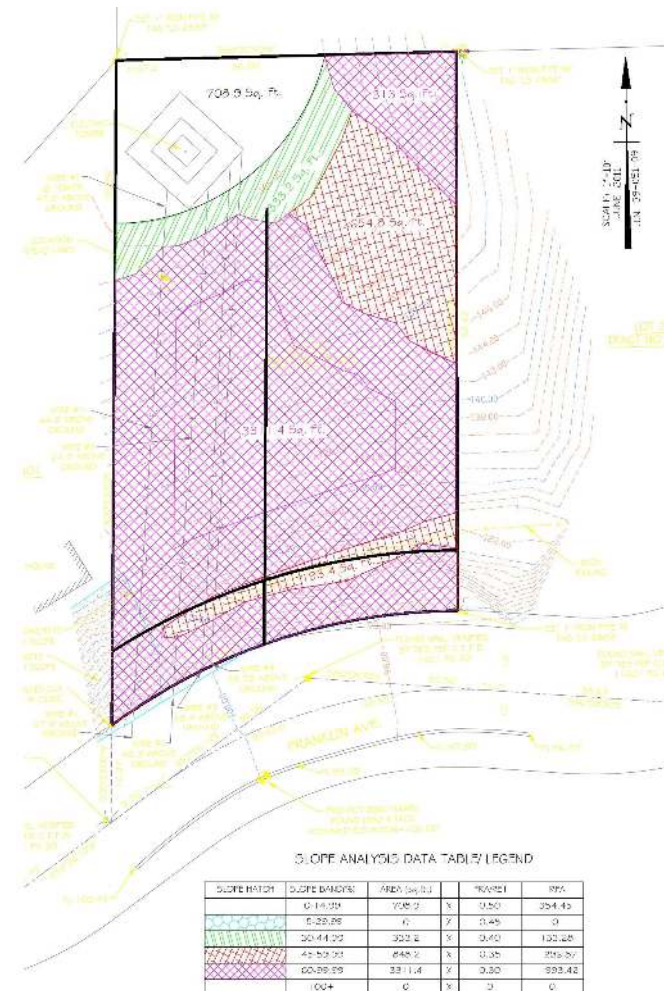
⑤ EVIDENCE FOR THE "LITELITE" PHOTOGRAPH RECORDING IN BOOK-CELL, PAGE 242, OF OFFICIAL RECORDS

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99	ADDITIVO	100	ADDITIVO

SLOPE (2008-09)	AREA (FT ²)	# OF TREES	# OF TREES PER ACRE
0.1-0.99	1751	8	880.2
1.0-2.99	991	8	880.2
3.0-4.99	696	8	880.2
5.0-9.99	303	8	880.2
10.0-19.99	78	8	880.2
20.0+	3	8	880.2

2
STREDFIRE ID NO. 14330019
NOT OR SEATED IN 645, E M CO
OR 645 AND 645 BUNCH MNR
P. 10/10/11 12:00 PM 07

DATE: 11-04-2012
 NAME: ...
 STREET NO: ...
SD-1



SURF HATCH	SURF BANDS	AREA (sq ft)		TRANS	REF.
	0-14.25	708.2	X	0.50	354.10
	0-20.25	6	X	0.45	0
	20-44.25	322.2	X	0.60	193.32
	44-50.25	648.2	X	0.35	226.87
	60-99.99	3311.4	X	0.30	993.42
	100+	0	X	0	0

MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE RESIDENTIAL FLOOR AREA sq.ft. 1,778.0

5015

THE (DI) HAS A CIA OF 2514 / 250000 FFL

3. THE PROPERTY IS LOCATED IN THE E-1 ZONE.

5. THE SLOPE ANALYSIS SHOWN HEREIN HAS BEEN CALCULATED ACCURATELY.

A possible 20% increase in hillside RFA

Select one of six design options for an eligible hillside lot. Confirm applicability for each project.

ELIGIBLE RA RS RE9 RE11 RE15 RE20 RE40							R1: EXEMPT
01	PROPORTIONAL STORIES						
Upper stories are no more than 75% of the base floor area. Flat pads only (slope <15%).							
02	FRONT FAÇADE STEPBACK						
At least 25% of the width steps back by 20% of building depth. Flat pads only (slope <15%).							
03	CUMULATIVE SIDE YARDS						
Combined side yards reach 25% of lot width. Each side meets its minimum.							
04	18 FT ENVELOPE HEIGHT						
Hold the maximum envelope height to 18 ft. Excludes a 1SS district.							
05	MULTIPLE BUILDINGS						
A building above 6 ft covers no more than 20% of the lot; one connecting breezeway ≤5 ft.							
06	MINIMAL GRADING						
Grading is limited by lot area and slope criteria; confirm calculations with the ordinance.							

Maximum RFA = base RFA × 1.20. One option per lot; the bonus changes floor area, not unit count.

Source: LAMC 12.21 C.10. Verify current eligibility and details before applying a bonus.

RESIDENTIAL FLOOR AREA | PROJECT EXAMPLE

3,904.60 SF

Base RFA from slope analysis

4,685.52 SF

Maximum with eligible 20% increase

$$3,904.60 \times 1.20 = 4,685.52 \text{ square feet}$$

The slope analysis determines the base allowance. The selected design option must qualify for the 20% increase. The project area schedule then tests the proposed building against that limit.

Source documents on the following four slides.

RFA SOURCE DOCUMENT 1 / 4

SCOPE OF PROJECT (MAIN BUILDING):

NEW TWO STORY BUILDING OVER BASEMENT & 2 ACCESSORY BUILDINGS:

	NEW	EXEMPT	TOTAL
GARAGE	737.18 S.F.	-737.18 S.F.	0.00 S.F.
BASEMENT	1939.22 S.F.	-1939.22 S.F.	0.00 S.F.
1ST FLOOR	2066.08 S.F.		2066.08 S.F.
2ND FLOOR	2334.13 S.F.		2334.13 S.F.
COVERD PATIO	495.96 S.F.	-250.00 S.F.	245.96 S.F.
CEILING >14'	117.61 S.F.	-100.00 S.F.	17.61 S.F.
TOTAL BUILDING AREA			4663.78 S.F. (NO CHANGE)

TOTAL AREA: (4663.78 S.F.) OVER (1939.22 S.F.)

BASEMENTS < 4685.52 S.F. ALLOWABLE F.A.R

MAX. FLOOR AREA BASE ON SLOPE ANALYSIS

SURVEY= 3904.60 S.F.

FAR=(3904.60 SF.)X1.20=4685.52 S.F.

ACCESSORY BUILDING #1: 178.85 S.F. < 200.00 S.F.

ACCESSORY BUILDING #2: 179.51 S.F. < 200.00 S.F.

RFA SOURCE DOCUMENT 2 / 4

OWNER NAME: MR. HASSAN AMIRSADEGHI

SCOPE OF PROJECT:

PROPOSED 2,401.08 S.F. NEW DWELLING UNIT, @ THREE LEVELS W/ 340.25 S.F. 2-CAR CARPORT

TOTAL RFA EXCEEDS MAX. PER "SBA" DUE TO ATTACHED ADU OF 426.90 S.F.

PROPOSED ONE RETAINING WALL: 1) 25'-0" LENGTH / MAXIMUM 8'-9" H. (SEE A5.3)

	NEW	EXEMPT	TOTAL
CARPORT	313.23	-200.00	113.23
UPPER LEVEL	1152.02 S.F.		1152.02 S.F.
MIDDLE LEVEL	485.50 S.F.		485.50 S.F.
LOWER. LEVEL	650.33		650.33
MIDDLE LEVEL / J-ADU	488.38	488.38	0.00
TOTAL			2,401.08 S.F.

20% BONUS "COMPLY WITH CUMULATIVE SIDE YARD SETBACK"

SIDE YARD REQUIRED— LOT WIDTH 119.58'X10% = 11.96' PROPOSED 13.96'

SIDE YARD REQUIRED— LOT WIDTH 119.58X15% = 17.94' PROPOSED 36'-0"

FAR— 2002.30 S.F. (SLOPE ANALYSIS) = 2,402.76 S.F.

FAR— 2002.30 S.F. (SLOPE ANALYSIS) + 20% BONUS (200.23 S.F.) =2,402.76

PROPOSED 2,401.08 S.F. < 2,402.76 S.F. RFA

RFA SOURCE DOCUMENT 3 / 4

OWNER NAME: MR. & MRS. KAVIANI RESIDENCE

SCOPE OF PROJECT: -MODIFIED APPROVED TWO STORY SINGLE FAMILY DWELLING OVER BASEMENT
 -TOTAL 7,412.17 S.F. APPROVED PLAN HAS CHANGED TO 7,420.78 S.F. (NEW PROPOSED PLANS)
 -ADDITION OF 344.50 S.F. TO BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN
 -FOR CHANGES SEE CLOUDED AREA ON PLANS:
 1-LOCATION OF ELEVATOR AND MAIN STAIRCASE HAS CHANGED
 2-DBL. HEIGHT AREA IN LIVING ROOM/FOYER DELETED
 3-# OF PARKING FROM 1-STANDARD & 4- COMPACT HAS CHANGED TO 1-STANDARD & 3-COMPACT

		APPROVED			PROPOSED		
		PERMITTED	EXEMPT	TOTAL	NEW	EXEMPT	TOTAL
BASEMENT	CARPORT	1423.70		0.00 S.F.	2230.00		0.00 S.F.
	BUILDING	2939.80	TOTAL -1,363.50	0.00 S.F.	4425.75	TOTAL -6,655.75	0.00 S.F.
1ST FLOOR		4028.34 S.F.		4028.34 S.F.	4371.10 S.F.		4371.00 S.F.
2ND FLOOR		2990.22 S.F.		2990.22 S.F.	2893.49 S.F.		2893.49 S.F.
COVERD PATIO		513.89	373.13 S.F.	140.76 S.F.	520.42	373.13 S.F.	158.29
CEILING >14'		352.85 S.F.	-100.00 S.F.	252.85 S.F.	98.89 S.F.	-100.00 S.F.	0.00 S.F.
TOTAL				7412.17 S.F.			7,420.78 S.F.

20% BOUNCE "COMPLY WITH PROPORTIONAL STORIES OPTION"

R.F.A. BASED ON (SLOPE ANALYSIS) =6218.93 S.F

RESIDENTIAL FLOOR AREA W/ BONUS =6218.93 S.F. (SLOPE ANALYSIS) X 1.20% =7,462.72 S.F.

TOTAL PROPOSED S.F.=7,420.78 < 7,462.72 S.F.

RFA SOURCE DOCUMENT 4 / 4

OWNER NAME: BAHRAM FATA

SCOPE OF PROJECT: NEW THREE STORY BUILDING OVER BASEMENT

	NEW	EXEMPT	TOTAL	
BASEMENT	1046.26 S.F.	-1046.26 S.F.	0.00 S.F.	
1ST FLOOR	850.71 S.F.		850.71 S.F.	
2ND FLOOR	515.50 S.F.		515.50 S.F.	
3TH FLOOR	875.74 S.F.		875.74 S.F.	
MEZZANINE	90.48 S.F.		90.48 S.F.	
COVERD PATIO	147.97 S.F.	-250 S.F.	0.00 S.F.	
CEILING >14'	167.29 S.F.	-100.00 S.F.	67.29 S.F.	
TOTAL	3693.95 S.F.	-1294.23 S.F.	2399.72 S.F.	

TOTAL AREA: (2399.72 S.F.) OVER (1046.26 S.F.) BASEMENTS < 2401.2 S.F. ALLOWABLE F.A.R

MAX. FLOOR AREA BASE ON SLOPE ANALYSIS SURVEY= 2001 SF.

FAR=(2001.11 SF.)X1.20=2401.2 SF

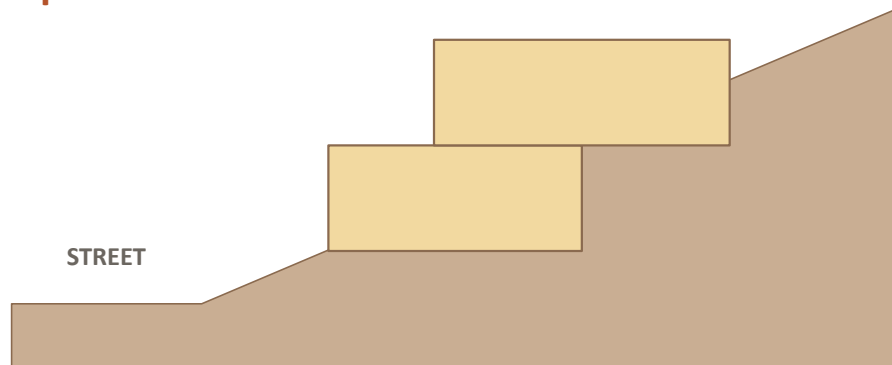
Before designing on a hillside, I study the soil, survey, street,
and slope.

They tell me where the building can sit and how people will
reach it.

The design begins with understanding the land.

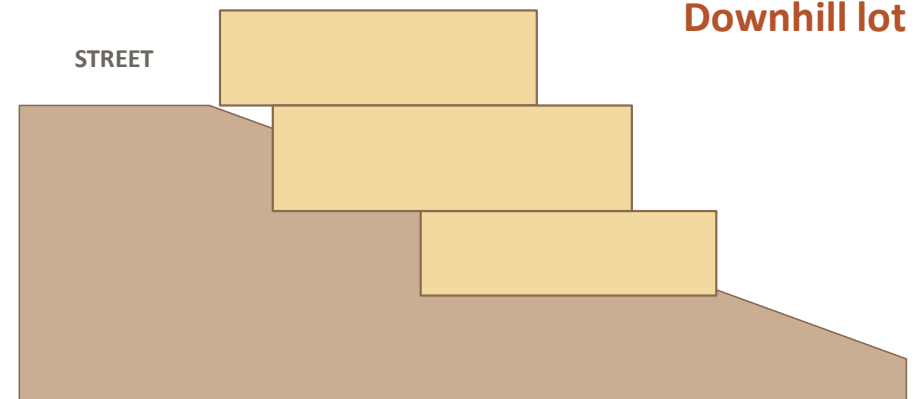
Uphill lot or downhill lot?

Uphill lot



- Street is lower than the rear lot line
- Garage and entry at the bottom; living floors climb the slope
- Big cuts into the hill: retaining walls, shoring, H/2 clearance
- Driveway walls and flat pad are the design questions

Downhill lot



- Street is higher than the rear lot line
- Garage at the top; floors step down below the street
- Footings near a descending slope: H/3 or deepened foundations
- Envelope height and the downhill elevation are the design questions



STEP 5 | RETAINING WALLS

Where, when and why we use the walls

1 Not counted

Walls that are part of the building - basement and foundation walls - and walls ordered by LADBS for repair. Put the big cut inside the house.

2 Create a flat pad

On uphill lots a wall turns unusable slope into yard, pool terrace or motor court. The added flat area can raise value by more than the wall costs.

3 Driveway on an uphill lot

The two side walls flanking the driveway to the garage and entry are treated as one wall. Confirm with the plan checker early.

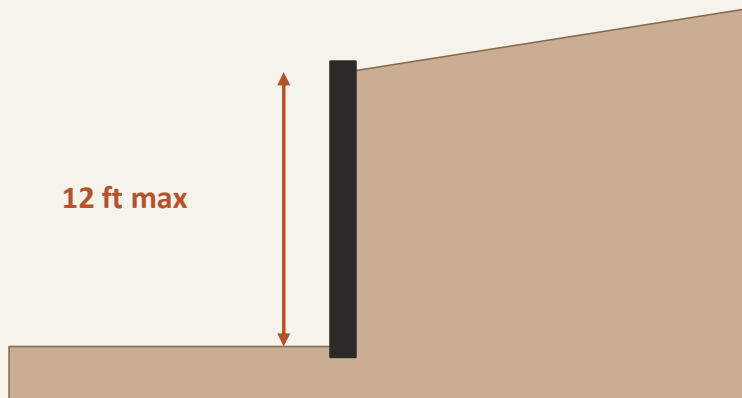
4 Pool near a wall or slope

Hold the pool 7 ft 6 in. minimum from the wall / toe of ascending slope (half of the H/2 clearance, 7.5 ft cap).

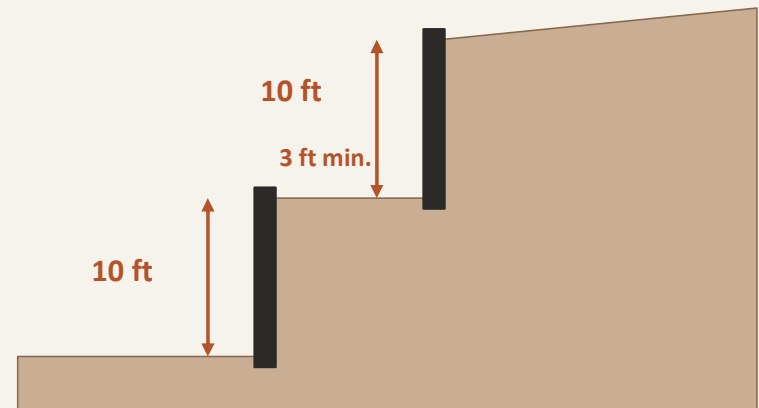
STEP 5 | RETAINING WALLS

Retaining walls: one at 12 ft, or two at 10 ft

Option A - one wall



Option B - two walls

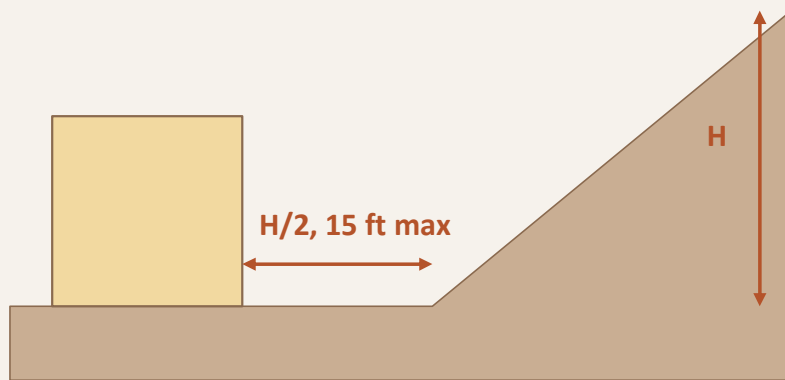


- Per lot, freestanding walls only: one up to 12 ft, or two up to 10 ft each (20 ft stacked) with 3 ft minimum between them
- Height is measured from the top of wall to the lower adjacent grade
- Walls 8 ft and taller must be landscaped to screen them; more walls or more height needs Zoning Administrator approval

STEP 6 | SLOPE SETBACKS

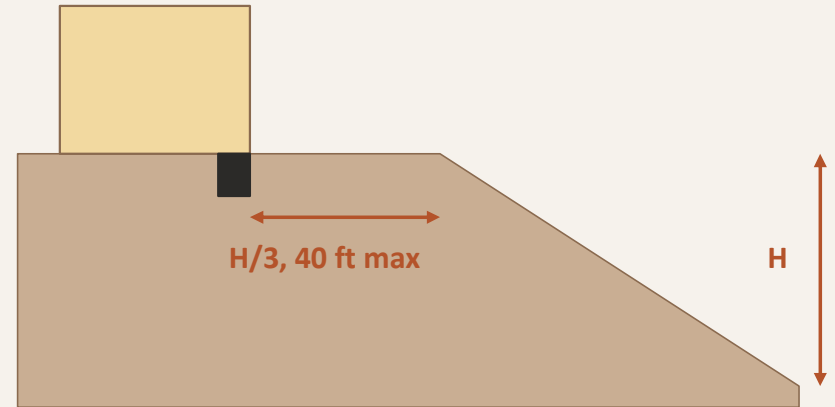
Slope setbacks: $H/2$ above you, $H/3$ below you

Ascending slope behind the building



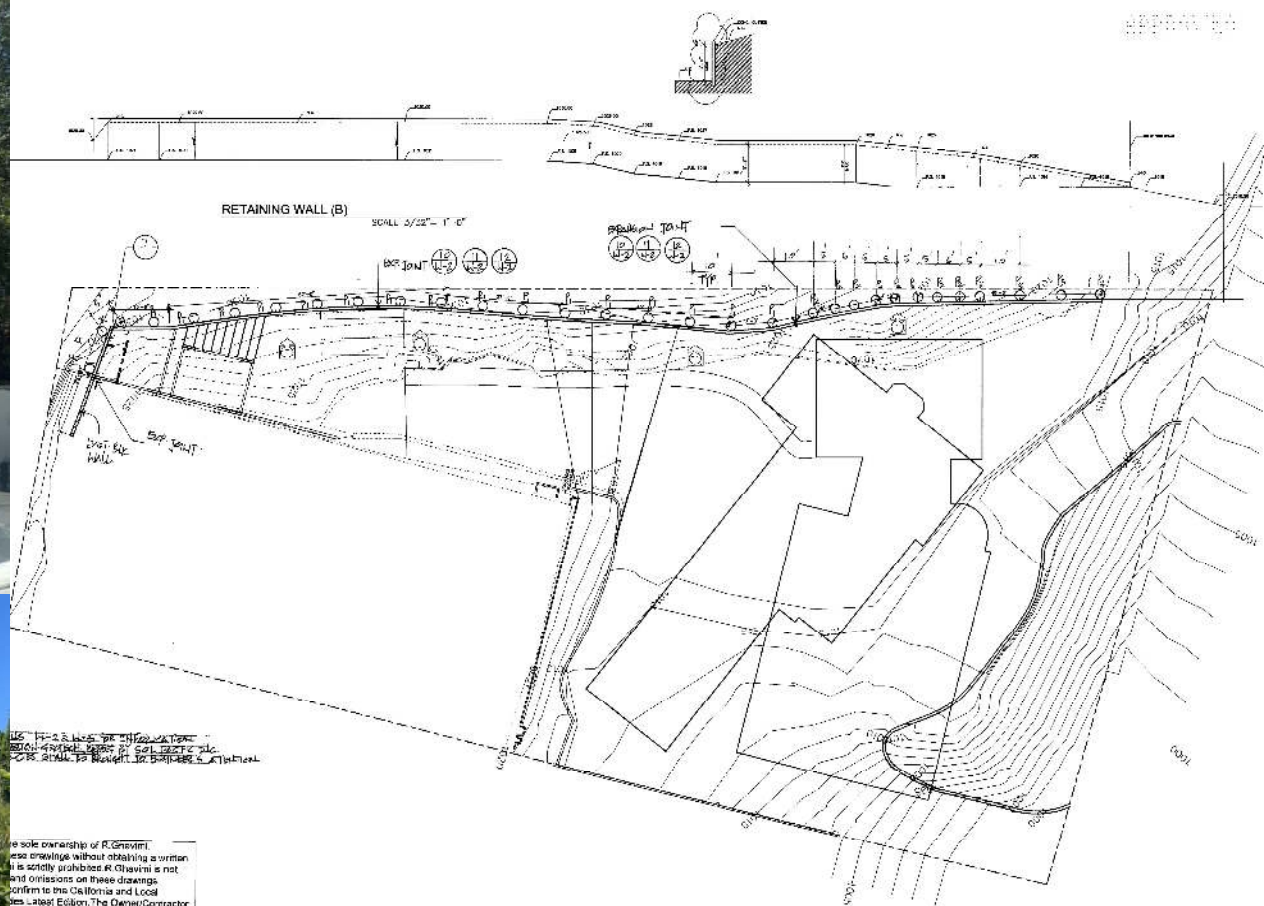
$H/2$ **never more than 15 ft**
Clear, level distance from the building face to the toe of an ascending slope

Descending slope below the footing



$H/3$ **never more than 40 ft**
Horizontal distance from the outside face of footing to the face of a descending slope

Source: LABC 1808.7 (LAMC 91.1808.7); LADBS Information Bulletin P/BC 2023-001. Slopes steeper than 1:1 are measured from a 45 degree line.



The site plan illustrates a proposed 100-unit residential development on a triangular lot. The plan includes several building footprints, parking areas, and setbacks. Key features include:

- Lot Layout:** The site is bounded by Lot 1 to the north, Lot 2 to the west, and Lot 3 to the east. The south boundary is Brentwood Grove Drive.
- Building Footprints:** The plan shows multiple building footprints, including a large central building and several smaller units. The buildings are arranged in a cluster, with parking areas interspersed between them.
- Setbacks:** The plan indicates setbacks from the surrounding lots and the street. A legend titled "PREVAILING SETBACKS" specifies setbacks of 10' and 20'.
- Access and Easements:** The plan shows access points from Brentwood Grove Drive and easements for utilities and parking.
- Topography:** The plan includes contour lines and elevation markers, indicating the terrain of the site.



Technical decisions become architectural decisions.

A retaining wall can create a terrace. A setback can shape a view.

The section and entry grow from these conditions.

STEP 7 | HEIGHT

How high? It depends on the roof and the zone

Roof slope 25% (3:12) or steeper

Roof slope under 25% (flat)

Height district	R1 / RS / RE9	RE11 - RE40 / RA	R1 / RS / RE9	RE11 - RE40 / RA
1, 1L, 1VL	33 ft	36 ft	28 ft	30 ft
1XL	30 ft	30 ft	28 ft	30 ft
1SS	22 ft	22 ft	18 ft	18 ft

45 ft

overall height cap, even with Zoning Administrator relief

5 ft

roof decks and open railings may project past the envelope horizontally

24 ft

within 20 ft of the front lot line on a substandard street, measured from the street centerline elevation

Source: LAMC 12.21 C.10(d), Table 5; (d)(2), (d)(5), (d)(6).

The height sections we answer to

LAMC section	What it controls	Design response
12.21 C.10(d)(1)	Maximum envelope height measured from Hillside Area Grade	Step the massing with the slope; show N.G. on all sections
12.21 C.10(d)(2)	Zoning Administrator may allow more envelope height; 45 ft overall cap	Check overall height from lowest point to highest roof
12.21 C.10(d)(5)	Substandard street: 24 ft max within 20 ft of front lot line, from street centerline	Keep the street-side volume low; taller mass goes behind 20 ft
12.21 C.10(a) Table 1	Side yards grow 1 ft per 10 ft of height above 18 ft	Use the highest envelope height to size both side yards
R1 side wall articulation (2017)	Side wall over 45 ft long and over 14 ft high needs an offset	Recess 5 ft deep x 10 ft long after each 45 ft run

R1 lots also have an encroachment plane above 20 ft (2017 amendment). Verify subsection numbering against the current LAMC before the talk.

Substandard street: one finding, many effects

Standard Hillside Limited Street

36 ft

right-of-way width

28 ft

paved roadway

Less than either one = substandard.
Bureau of Engineering decides, on the
Hillside Referral Form.

Front yard

5 ft minimum (or prevailing)

Height

24 ft within 20 ft of front lot line

Dedication

Half-street dedication before permit

Roadway under 20 ft

Zoning Administrator approval needed

Parking

1 extra space per 1,000 sq ft over 2,400,
up to 5

Fire sprinklers

Required for new dwellings

Haul limits

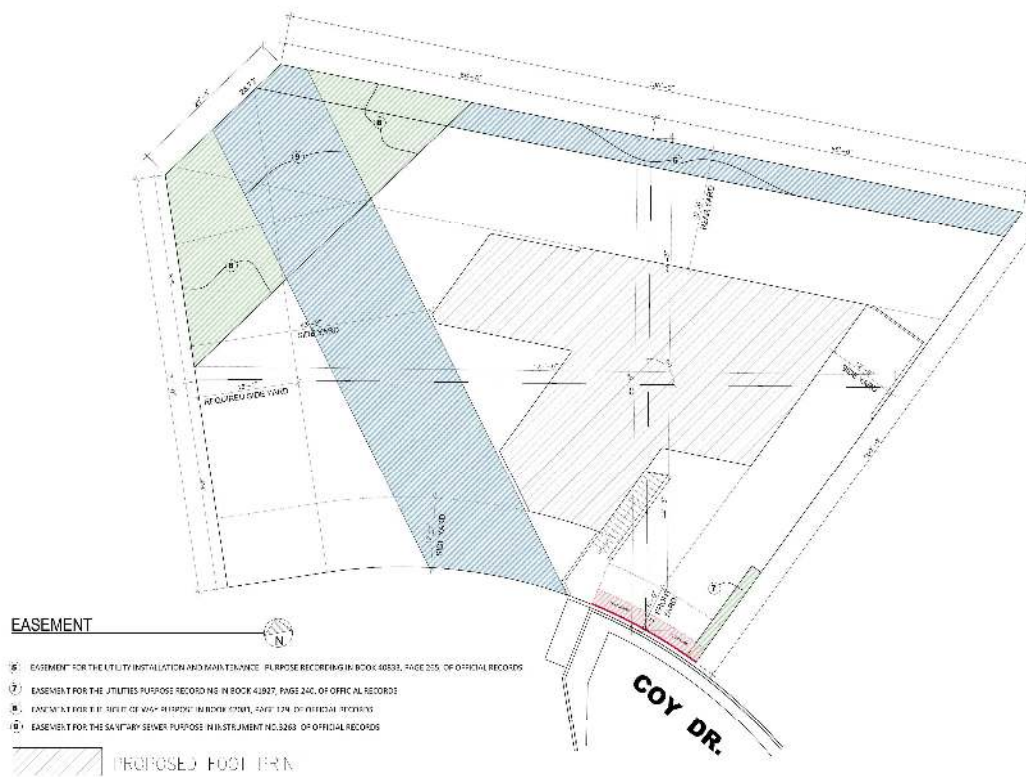
75% of by-right grading for import /
export

Projections

No open stairs or porches into front
yard

STEP 8 | SURVEY

Dedication and easements: read the survey first



Questions for the survey

- Is a street dedication required? On a substandard street, half the standard width must be dedicated along the whole frontage before a permit is issued
- After dedication, where is the front lot line? Yards, lot depth and the 20 ft height zone move with it
- Which easements are recorded - sewer, storm drain, utility, slope, access, future street? No structures over them
- Do lot area and slope bands need to be rechecked after dedication? Ask City Planning how RFA is counted
- Relief from dedication is possible through the appeal in LAMC 12.37 I

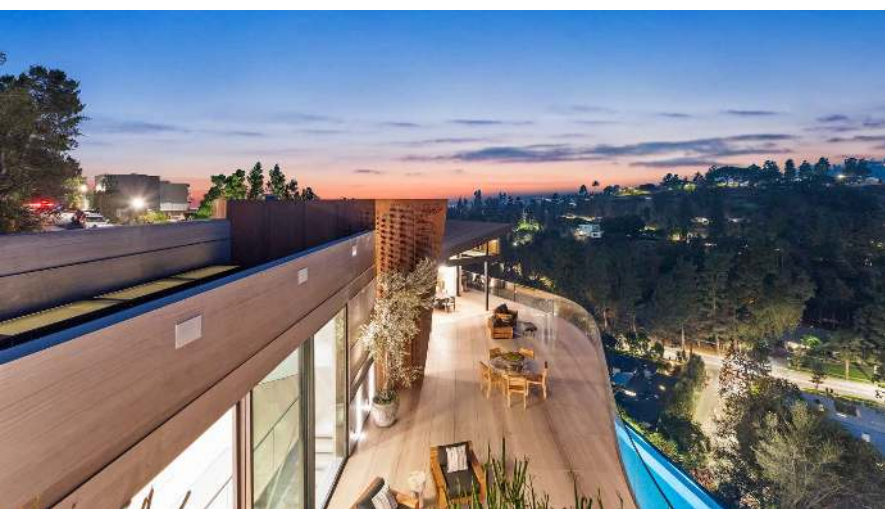
Each hillside asks for a different response.

The survey and code define a possible envelope. The design begins when we consider how to enter the site, follow its grade, and make space for light and views. In the next projects, I will show how those conditions shaped the architecture.







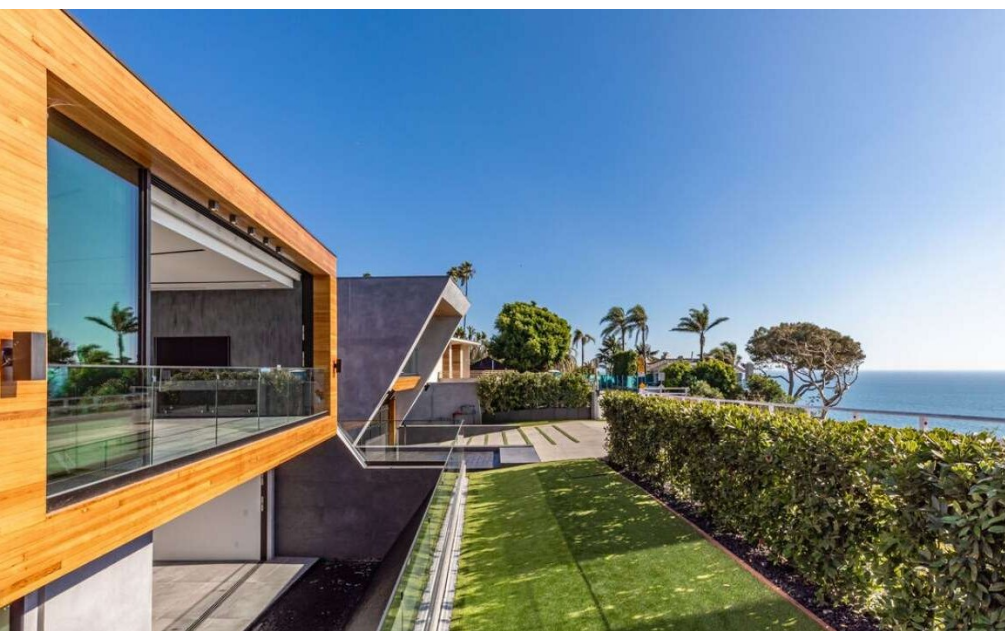


















MANHATTAN PLACE | 20 AFFORDABLE HOMES

With homes of about 400 SF, the café and gym at the entry connect daily life to a sky deck above and a shared roof deck.



JOSHUA TREE

Frame of Life

The design changes when the site changes.

In Joshua Tree, the open horizon, intense sun, and desert silence shape a long, low house. Shade and the passage between inside and outside become the main architectural experience.

“What gives an architectural form its meaning?”

Form and content must inform one another

DESIGN PHILOSOPHY



City of Culture of Galicia — Peter Eisenman



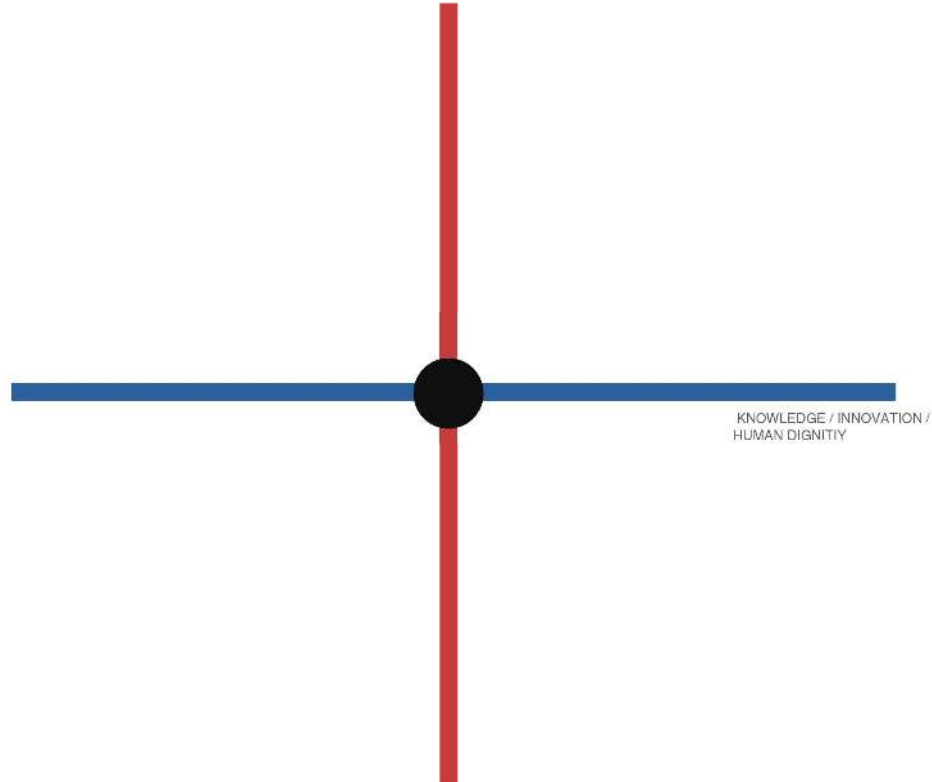
- *Seattle Central Library* — OMA / Rem Koolhaas

“AI offers possibilities. The architect tests them against the idea, site, section, and construction.”

CYRUS CITY

CITY OF FREEDOM

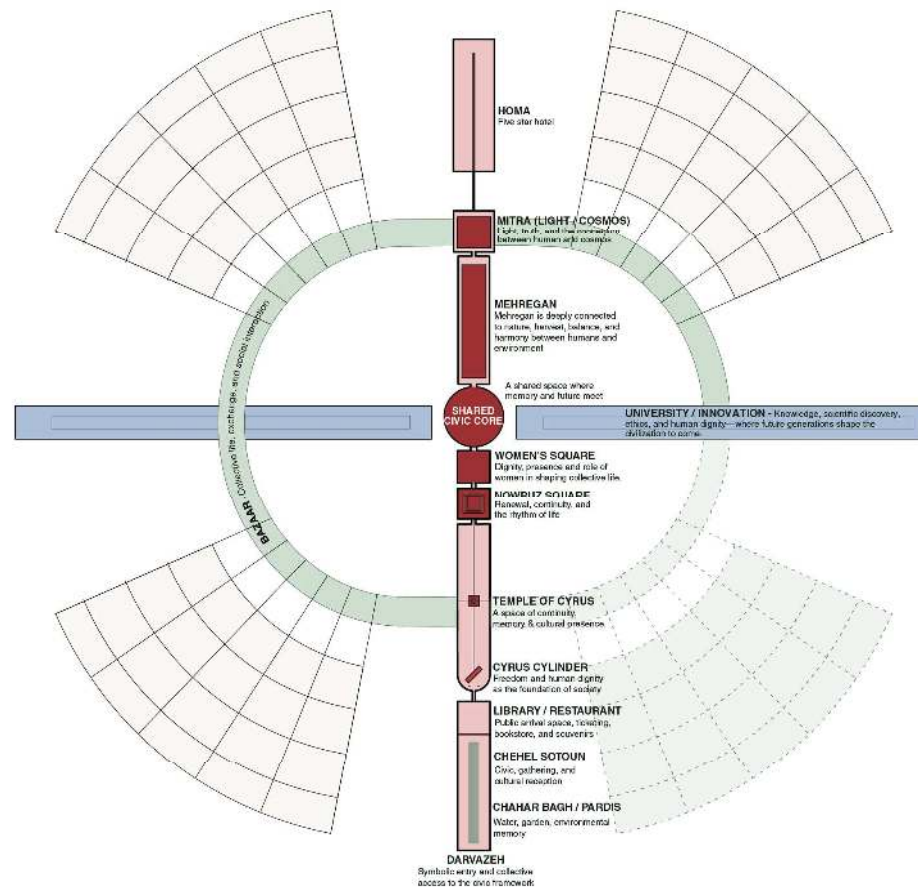
MEMORY / IDENTITY / CIVILIZATION



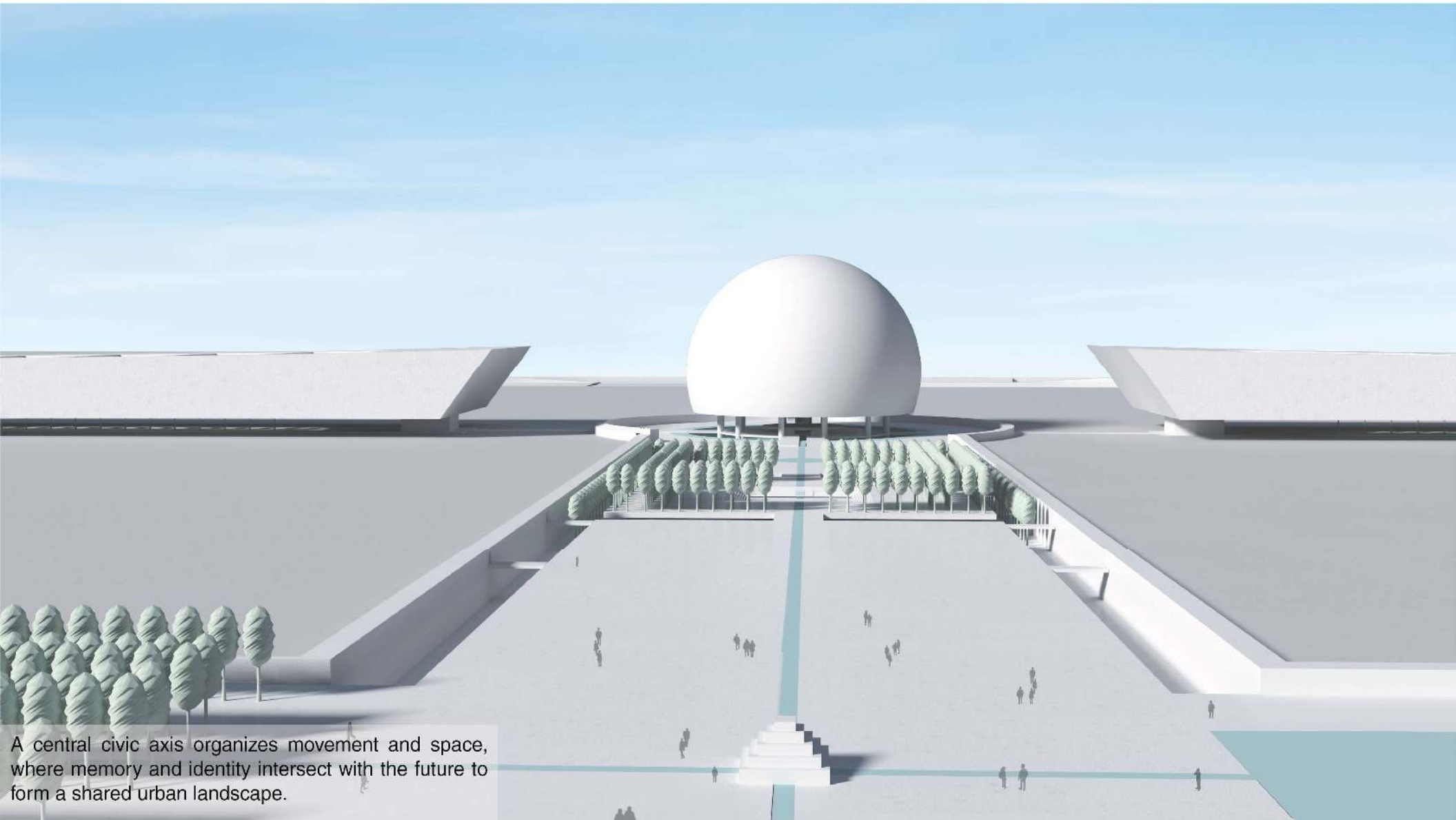
KNOWLEDGE / INNOVATION /
HUMAN DIGNITY

**Where memory, knowledge, and
human dignity intersect,
freedom becomes possible.**

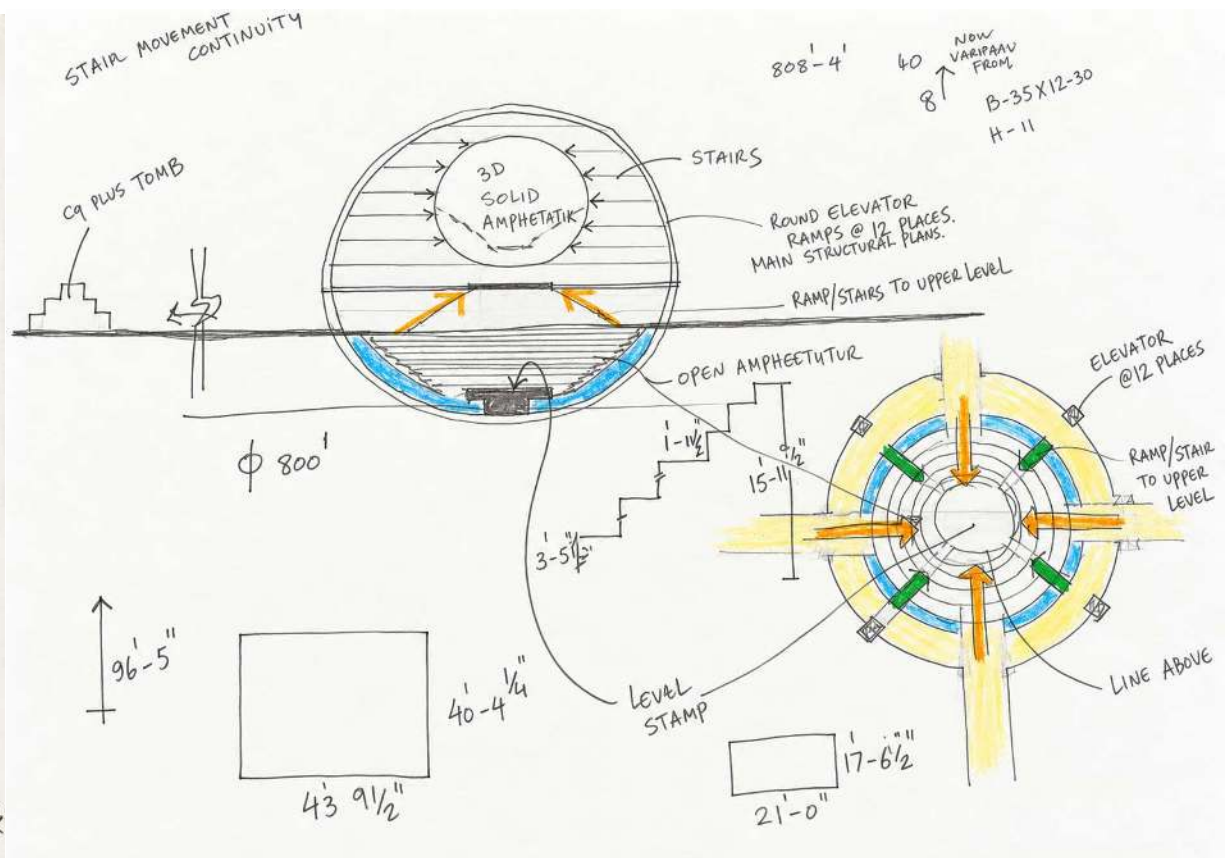
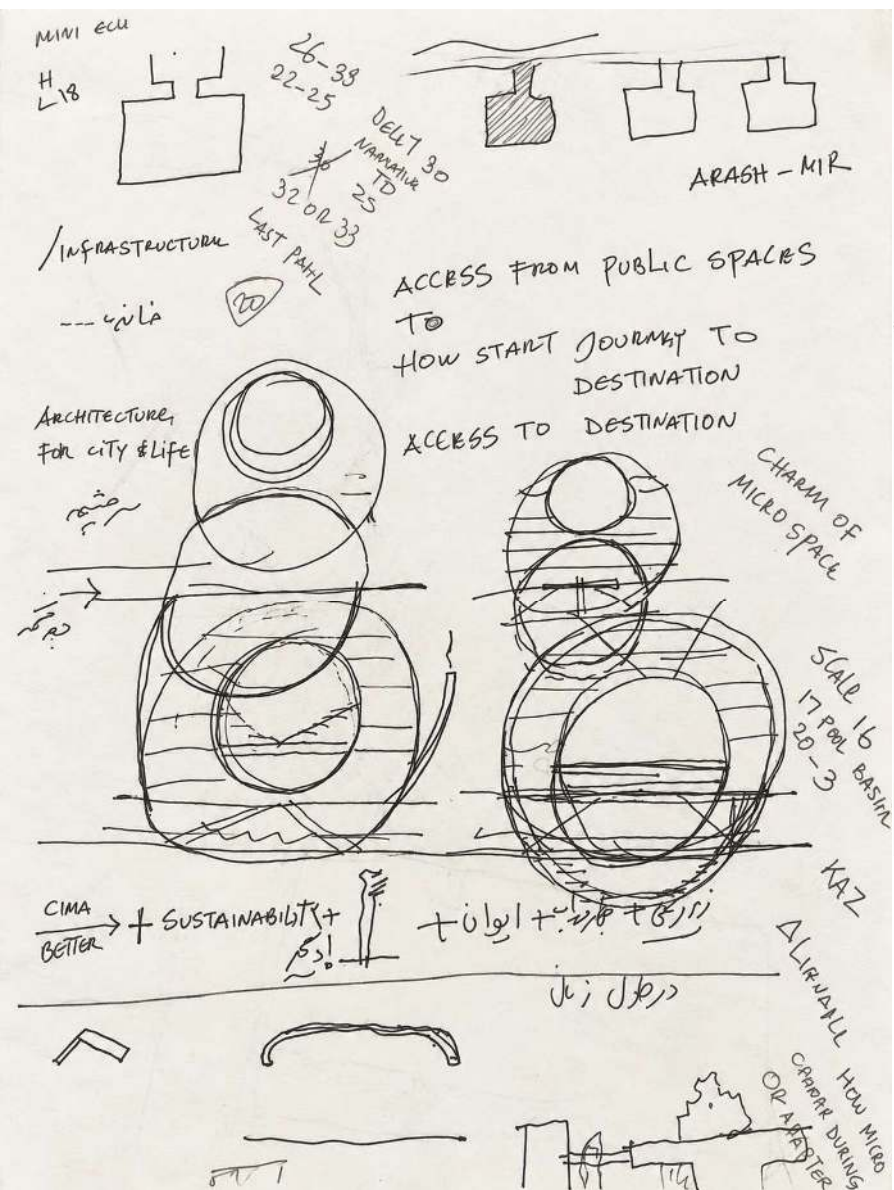
FROM MEMORY TO INNOVATION

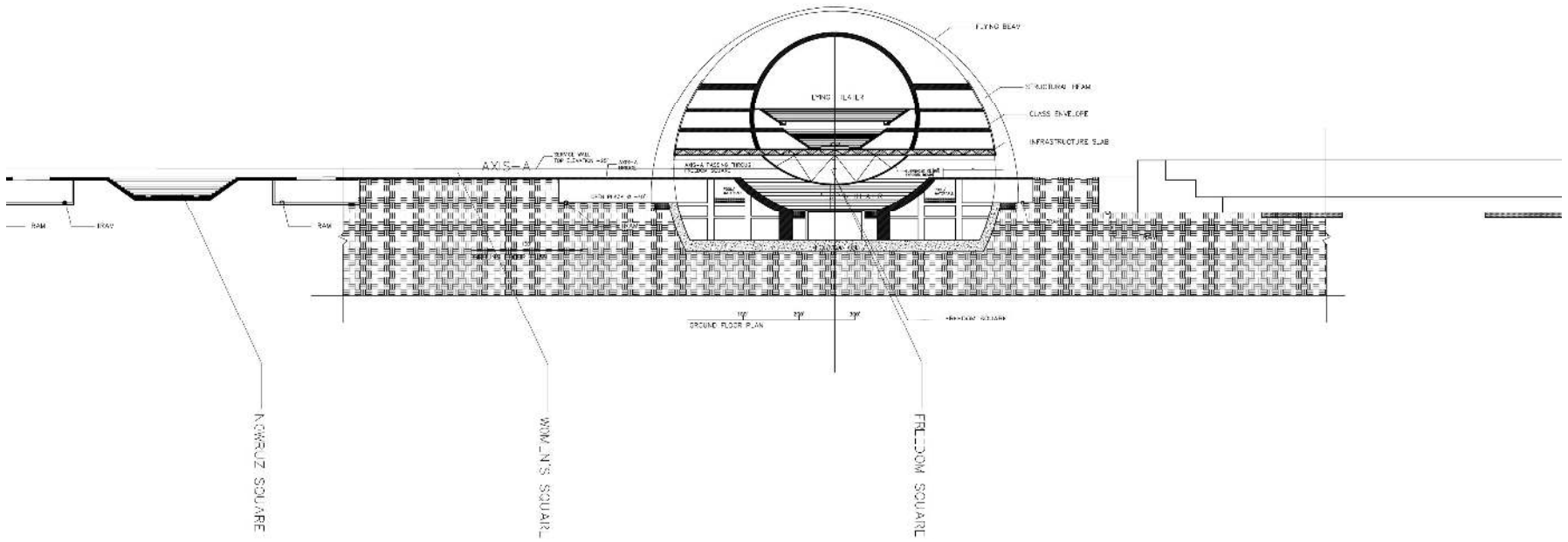
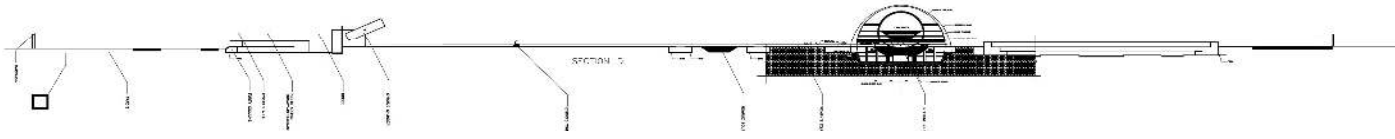
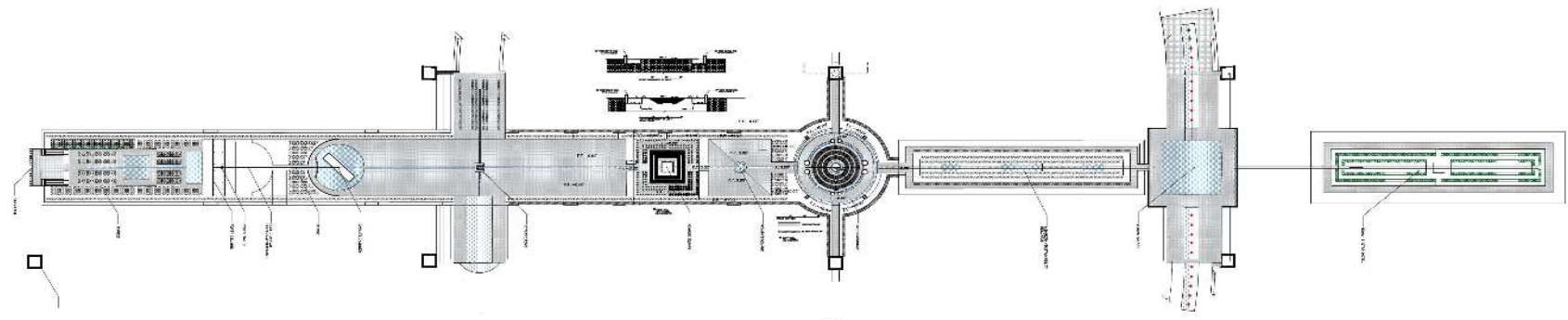


A city shaped by memory and meaning, where cultural values are not preserved as static symbols, but transformed into an active urban system. The intersection of identity and innovation creates a framework for freedom, knowledge, and collective life.



A central civic axis organizes movement and space, where memory and identity intersect with the future to form a shared urban landscape.









Hand sketches establish the idea. Drawings test its dimensions and construction.

Visualization helps us experience its scale, and AI helps us explore possibilities.

I check each image against the design and decide what belongs.

**THE FUTURE IS NOT
HAND DRAWING OR AI.**

It is judgment across every tool.

QUESTIONS + DISCUSSION