

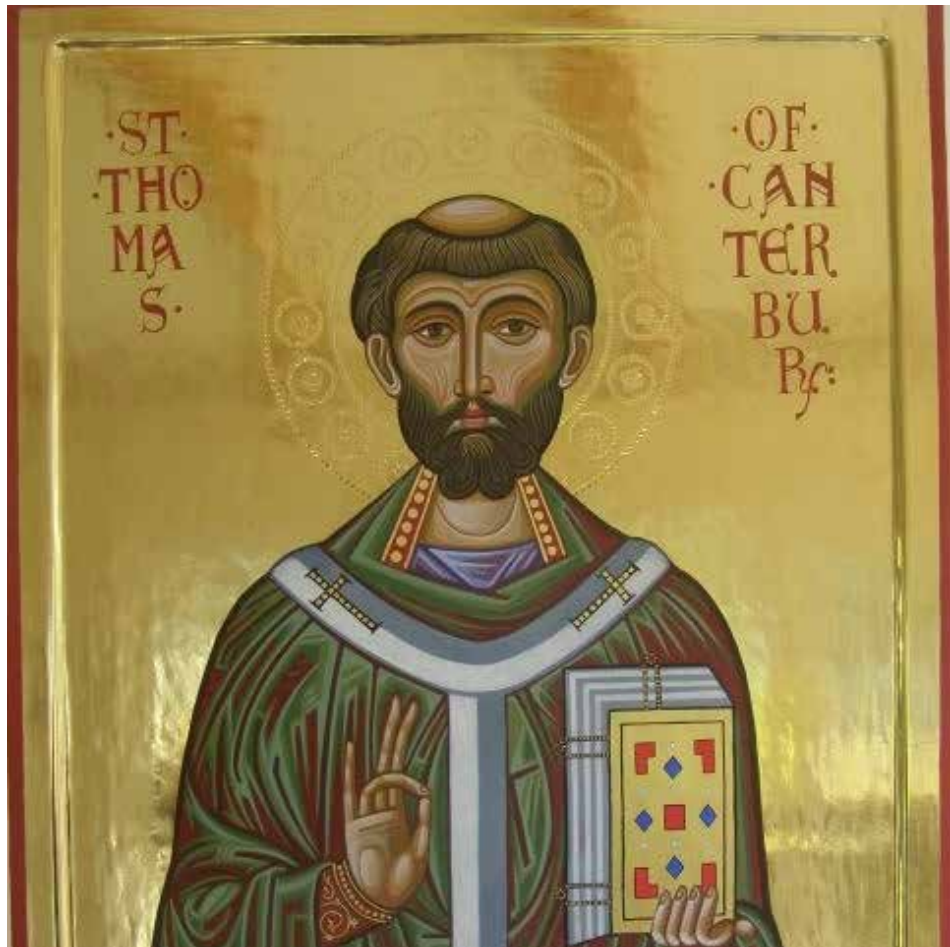
Kent Downs Pilgrimage Museum & Retreat

This thesis explores the notion of pilgrimage as a spatial and emotional journey, reinterpreted through a contemporary lens within the sacred and layered landscape of the Kent Downs. Rooted in the historic tradition of pilgrimage to Canterbury, this project reframes the journey as one not only of religious devotion but of contemplation, restoration, and collective memory. It proposes a sequence of architectural interventions that guide the walker across the site at Godmersham – a place shaped by its pastoral setting, its literary and ecclesiastical associations, and its geological character. The architectural proposal stems from a research-led understanding of the landscape's role in shaping human experience. The Kent Downs, with their chalk escarpments, ancient pilgrimage routes, and quiet expanses, provide both a literal and metaphorical terrain for this project. Initial mapping and site readings identified not just physical features, but atmospheres – misty mornings, dense foliage, long paths of quiet isolation – that influence how one might move, pause, or reflect.

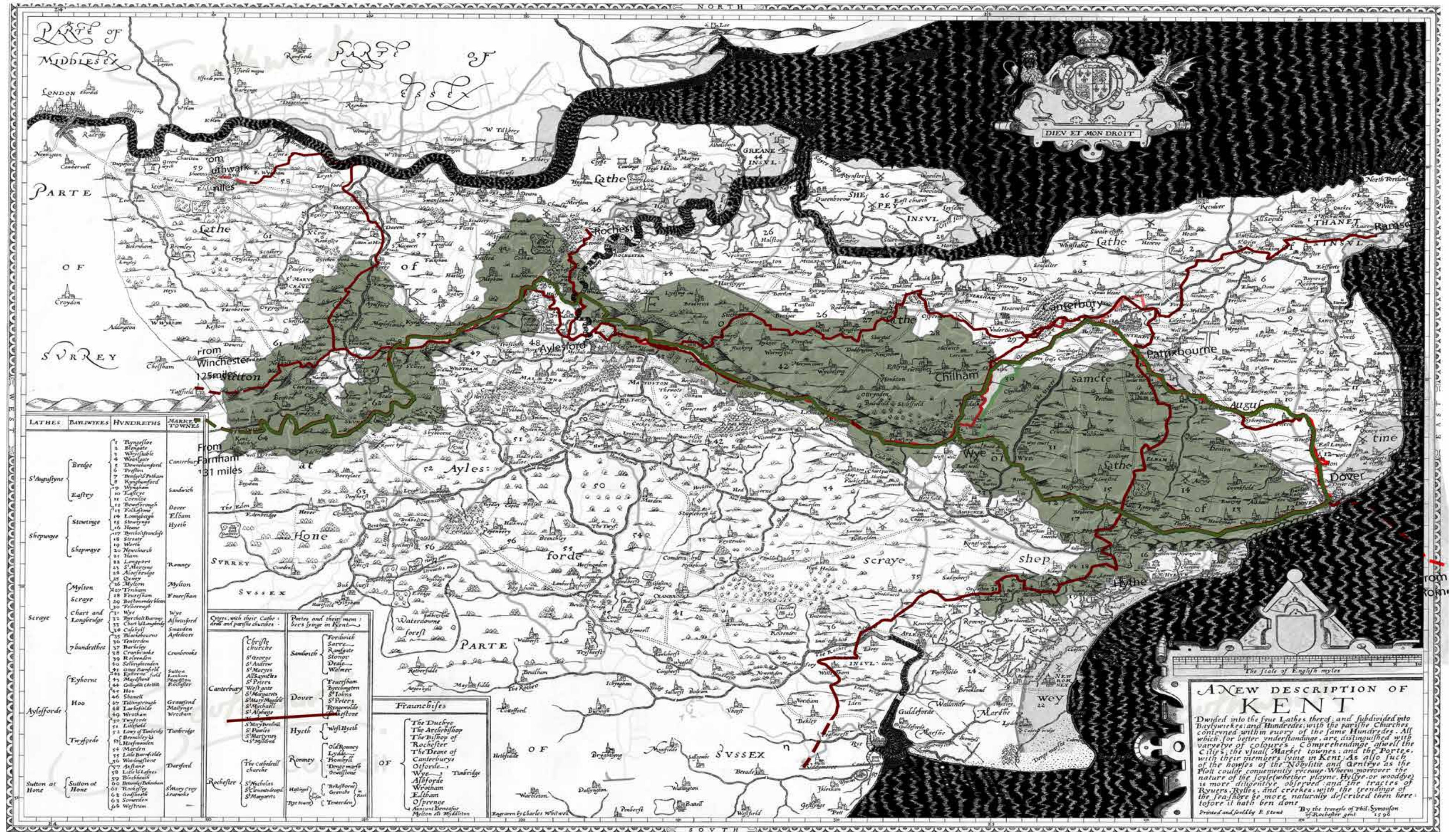
This led to the development of a journey-based design narrative structured around four moments: Departure, Threshold, Stay, and Return. Each moment is marked by an architectural response that builds on the conditions of the site and the needs of the pilgrim. The interventions are not grand monuments but calibrated responses – fragments of space that reveal, shelter, and amplify the experience of being in landscape. At the edge of the Godmersham estate, a Threshold Building initiates the journey. Conceived as a space of pause and ritual, it is largely subterranean, lit only by narrow skylights and defined by the weight and silence of rammed chalk walls. It serves as a spatial transition — a moment of stillness before immersion. From there, the path moves through the landscape to the Accommodation Block, which offers a place for retreat. The design balances communal and solitary experiences — from shared dining and bathing areas to private reading rooms and single-bed dormitories. A key strategy here is the use of curtain wall glazing, framing curated views outward while allowing the landscape to dominate inwardly. The architecture becomes porous, merging internal rhythms with external change.

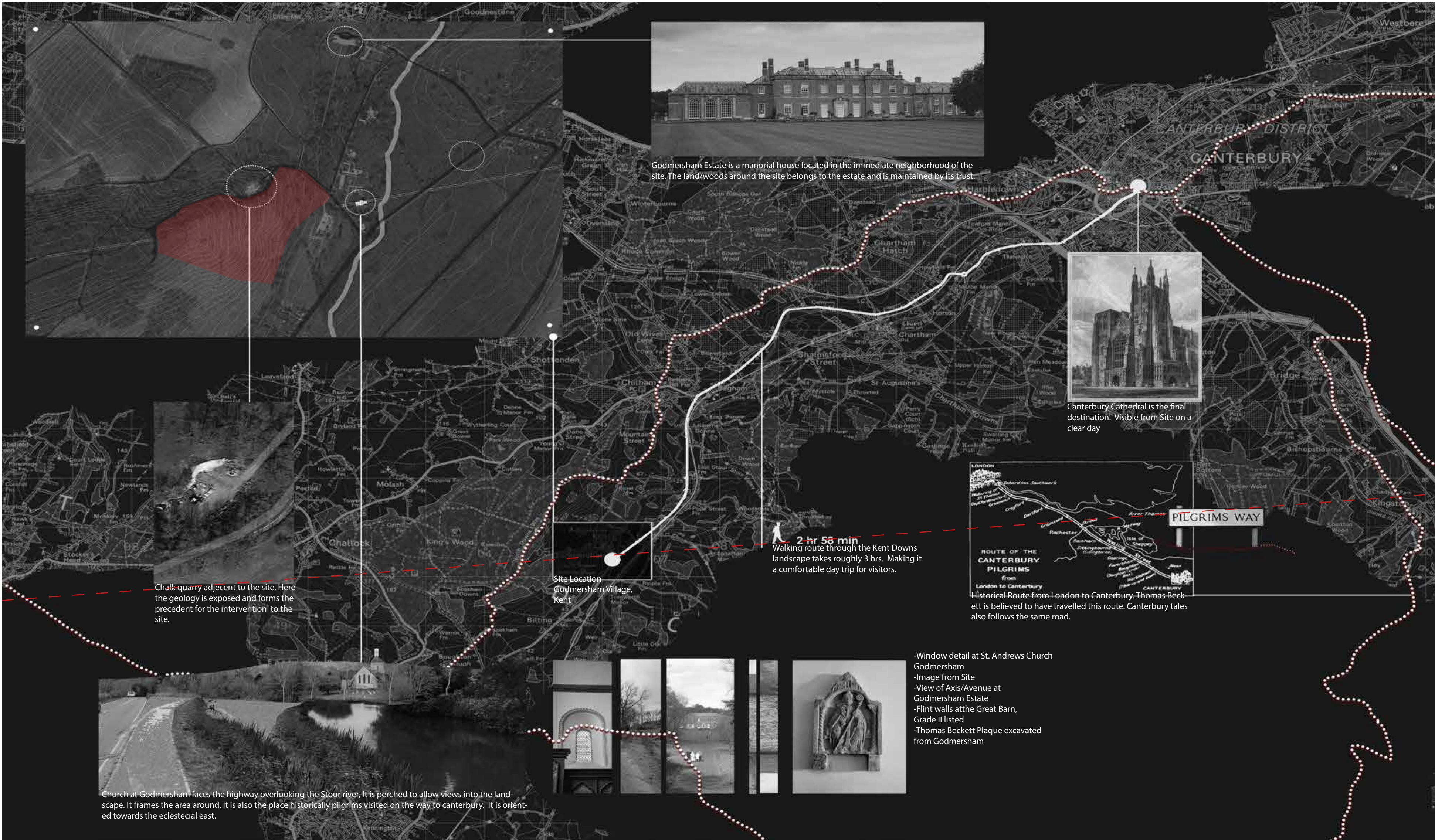
At the far end of the axis sits the Museum, the culmination of the pilgrimage. This final space functions both as a votive offering and a place of historical reflection. It houses artifacts and narratives relating to Becket, Canterbury, and the Kentish pilgrimage tradition. The architecture here is heavier — echoing ecclesiastical forms in section, but stripped back in material to rammed chalk and oxidized steel. Natural light is choreographed through narrow apertures and rooflights, drawing attention to objects and voids. The entire project was developed through a combination of analog and digital methodologies. Early iterations included walks, sketch studies, and material testing — particularly the performance of chalk and lime in compression and light absorption. Physical model making was key in understanding the spatial weight and sensory qualities of these buildings. Final outputs included a full site model, a set of exploded axonometric drawings to communicate programmatic layering, detailed sections that cut through key experiential sequences, and a curated set of renderings to evoke use and atmosphere. In execution, the architecture avoids spectacle in favour of quiet, deliberate intensity. It borrows from ecclesiastical typologies but translates them into contemporary needs. The project's success lies not in providing resolution, but in enabling presence — in offering a space where modern pilgrims can encounter slowness, silence, and the possibility of meaning. Ultimately, this thesis is both a critique and celebration of contemporary architecture's role in shaping cultural memory. It asks: how can design support journeys that are physical, emotional, and spiritual — and how might architecture itself become a pilgrimage?

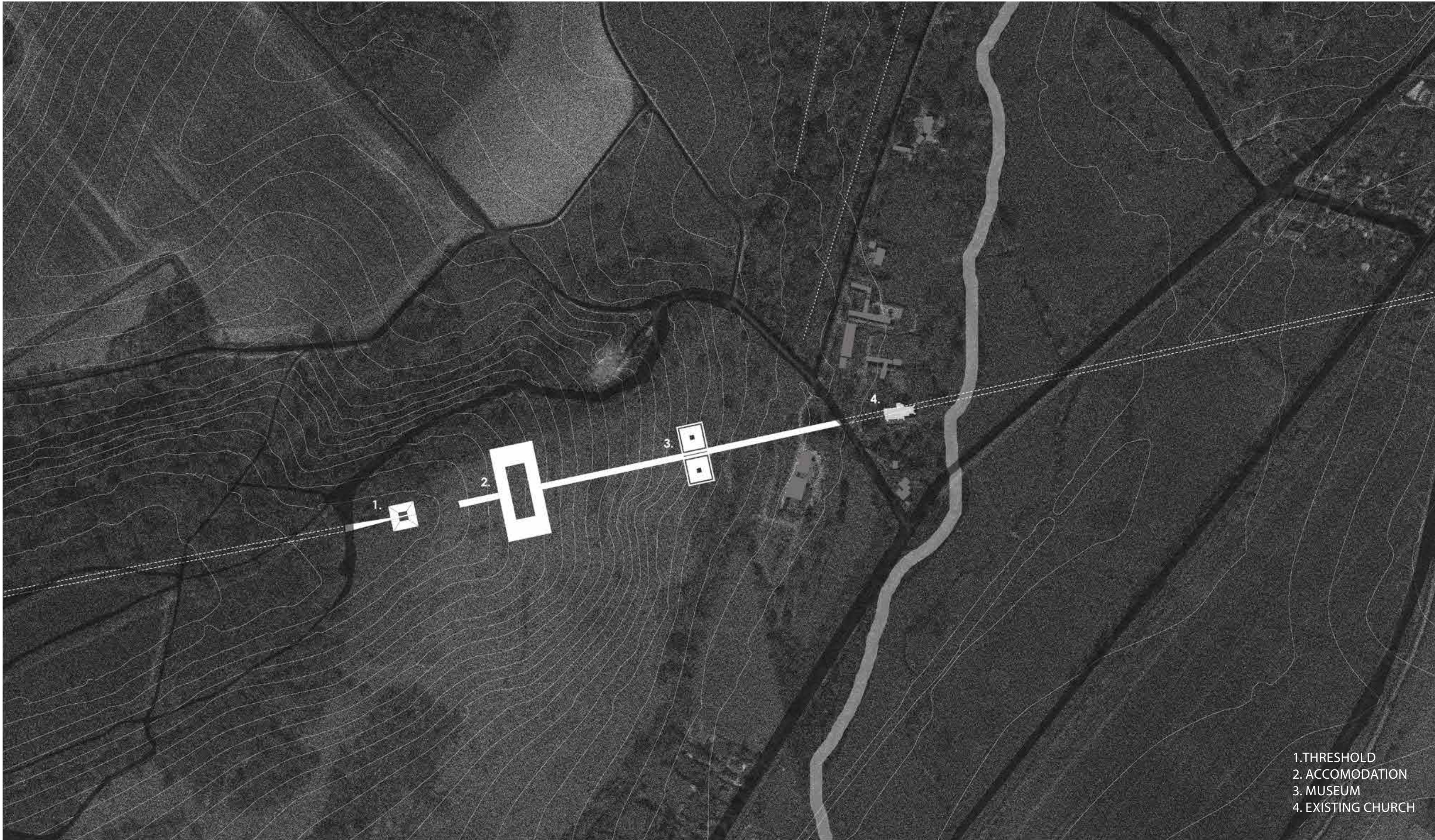




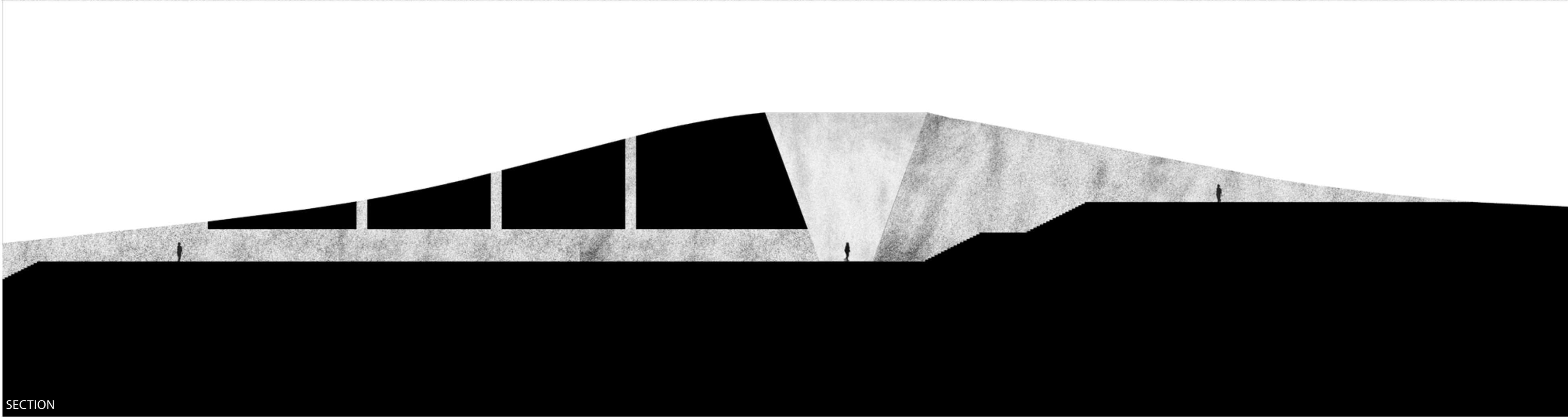
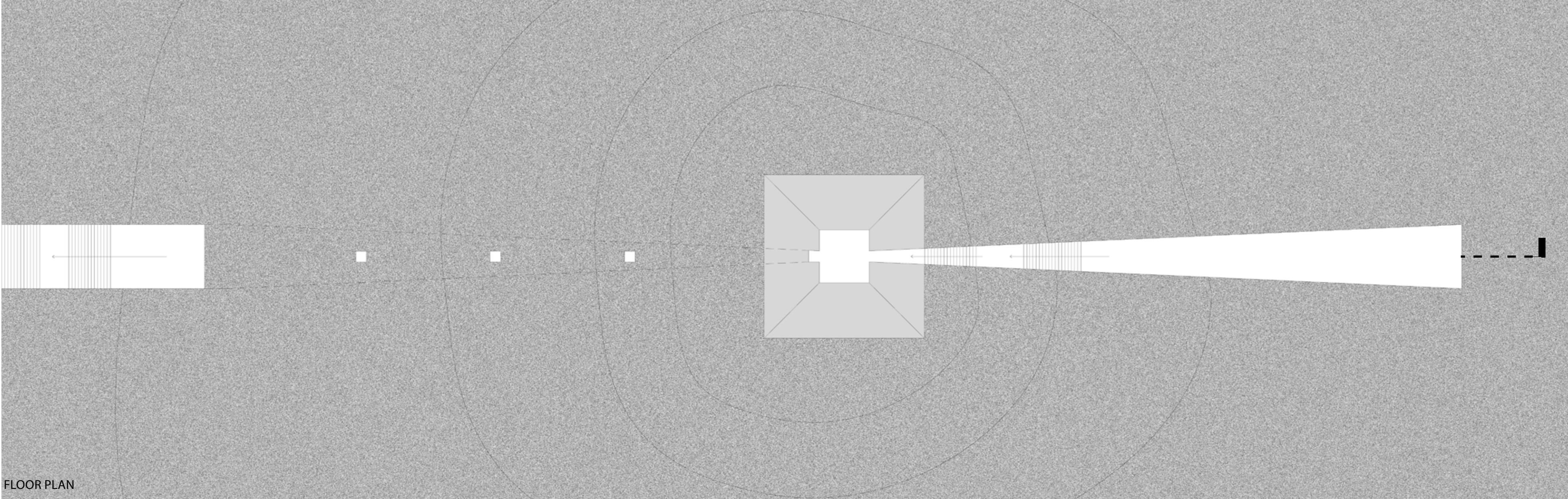
CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION OF PILGRIMAGE
Rooted in the enduring legacy of pilgrimage in the Kent Downs, this collection of images reflects both the historical precedent and the contemporary relevance of spiritual journeying. At the heart of this tradition lies Canterbury Cathedral, the destination for countless pilgrims over centuries, famously linked to the martyrdom of Thomas Becket. This is echoed locally in the Becket relief at Godmersham Church, situated near my site — a quiet yet powerful reminder of how pilgrimage has left its trace on even the most rural of parishes. Alongside these religious artefacts, I focus on the landscape itself as a spiritual actor. Paths carved by foot over generations, mist-laden views across chalk hills, and the erosion of well-trodden roads all speak to a journey not only across space, but through time, memory, and intention. These images depict the Kent Downs not as a passive backdrop, but as a medium of transformation — an immersive terrain that slows, focuses, and frames the inner journey. Several images hint at the material and atmospheric qualities I bring into the proposal — particularly the chalk geology,



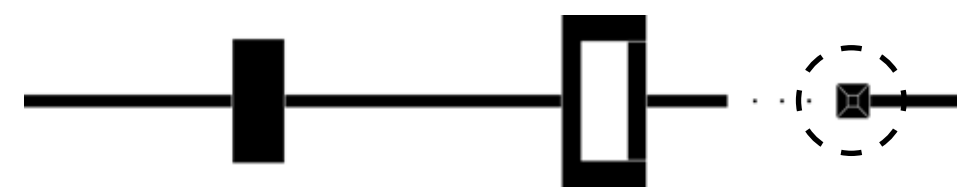




KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE & RETREAT CENTER // SITE PLAN



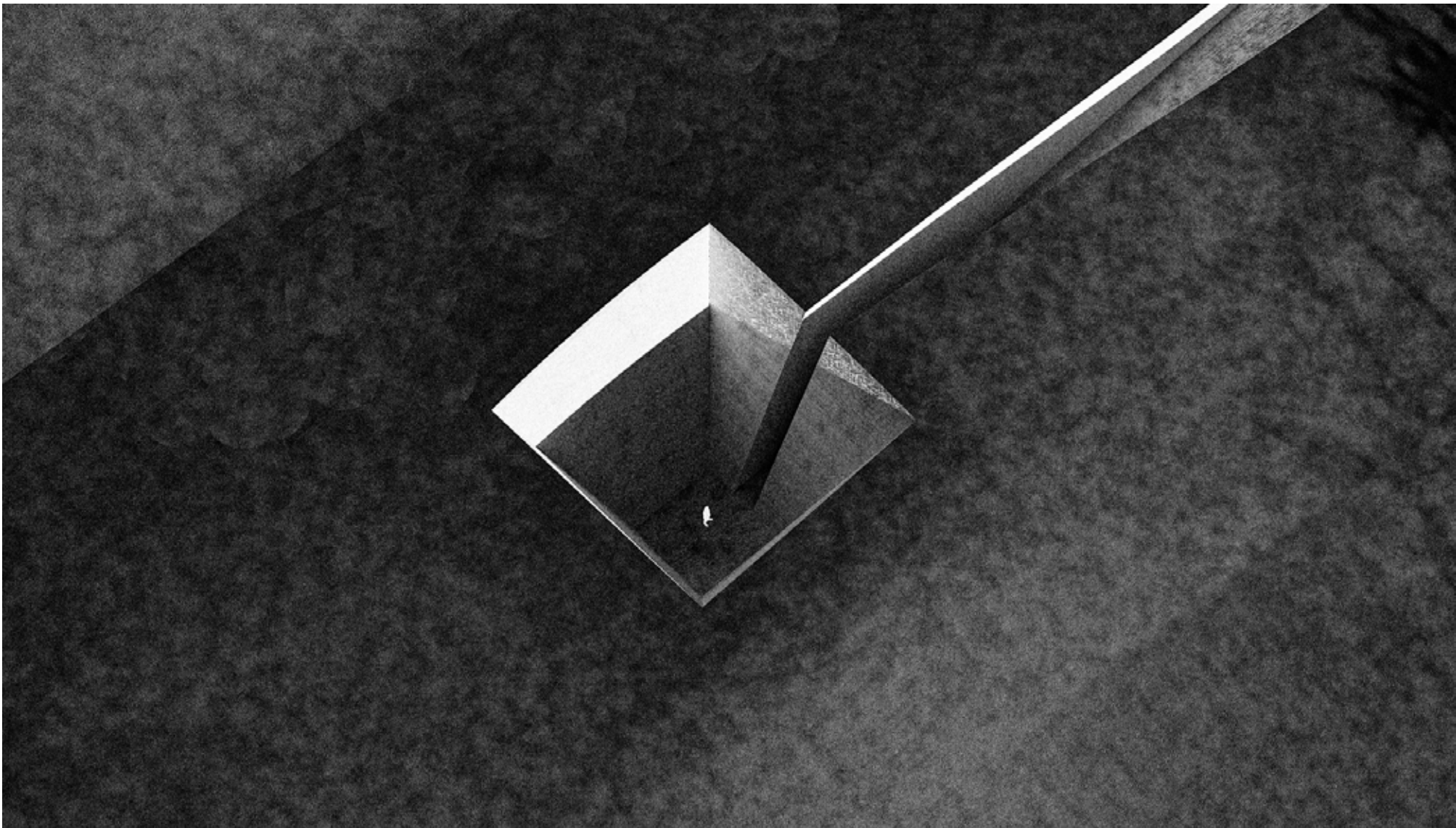
KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE MUSEUM & RETREAT // THRESHOLD PLAN + SECTION

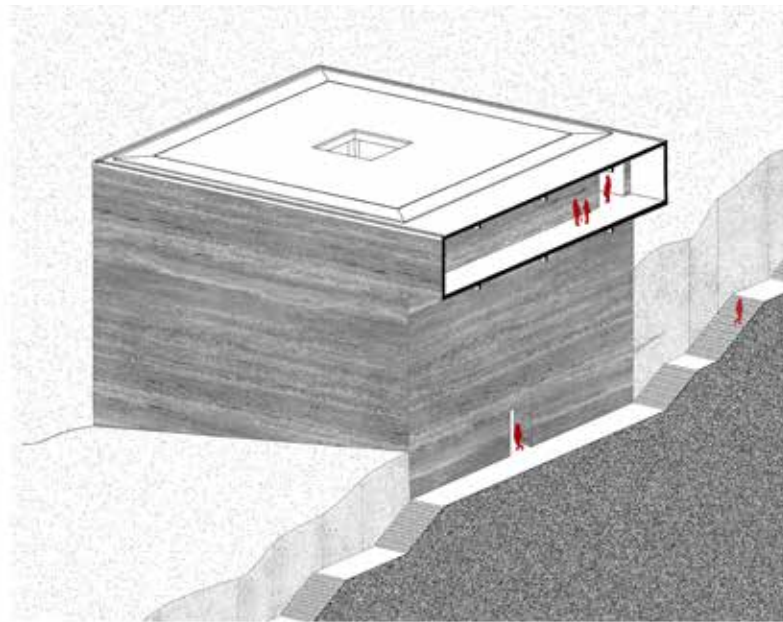


1. The Threshold

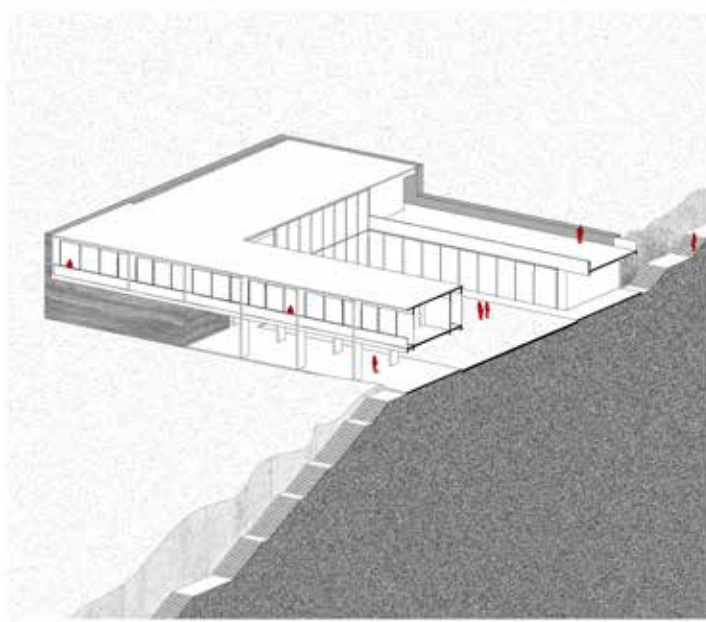
The Threshold is the first architectural encounter along the pilgrim's path. It serves as a spatial and psychological pause before the journey begins. Made by excavating chalk during the formation of the site's central axis, it becomes a cut in the ground, a hollowed mound that feels both rooted and sacred. There are two ways to enter. From the landscape, the walker approaches on foot, gently descending into a space that rises naturally from the earth. The rammed chalk walls create a solid frame, marking the beginning of something meaningful. From the road side, visitors enter through a low tunnel carved into the mound, stepping into quiet darkness. The interior is lit only by narrow openings above, where shafts of sunlight move slowly throughout the day. It is cool, still, and heavy with presence. The atmosphere encourages reflection.

At the heart of the space, visitors reach an open sky chamber. This room without a roof offers a moment of stillness, where the strict lines of the architecture give way to light and air. A set of stairs leads the visitor upward and back into the landscape. This movement of rising and emerging is essential to the experience. It offers a way to slow down, become aware, and step into the next part of the journey with intention. Both in material and in experience, the Threshold sets the tone for everything that follows. It links body, land, and ritual through the simple act of arrival and entry.

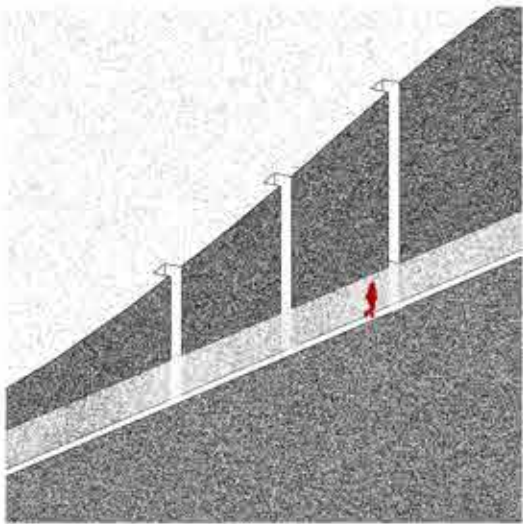
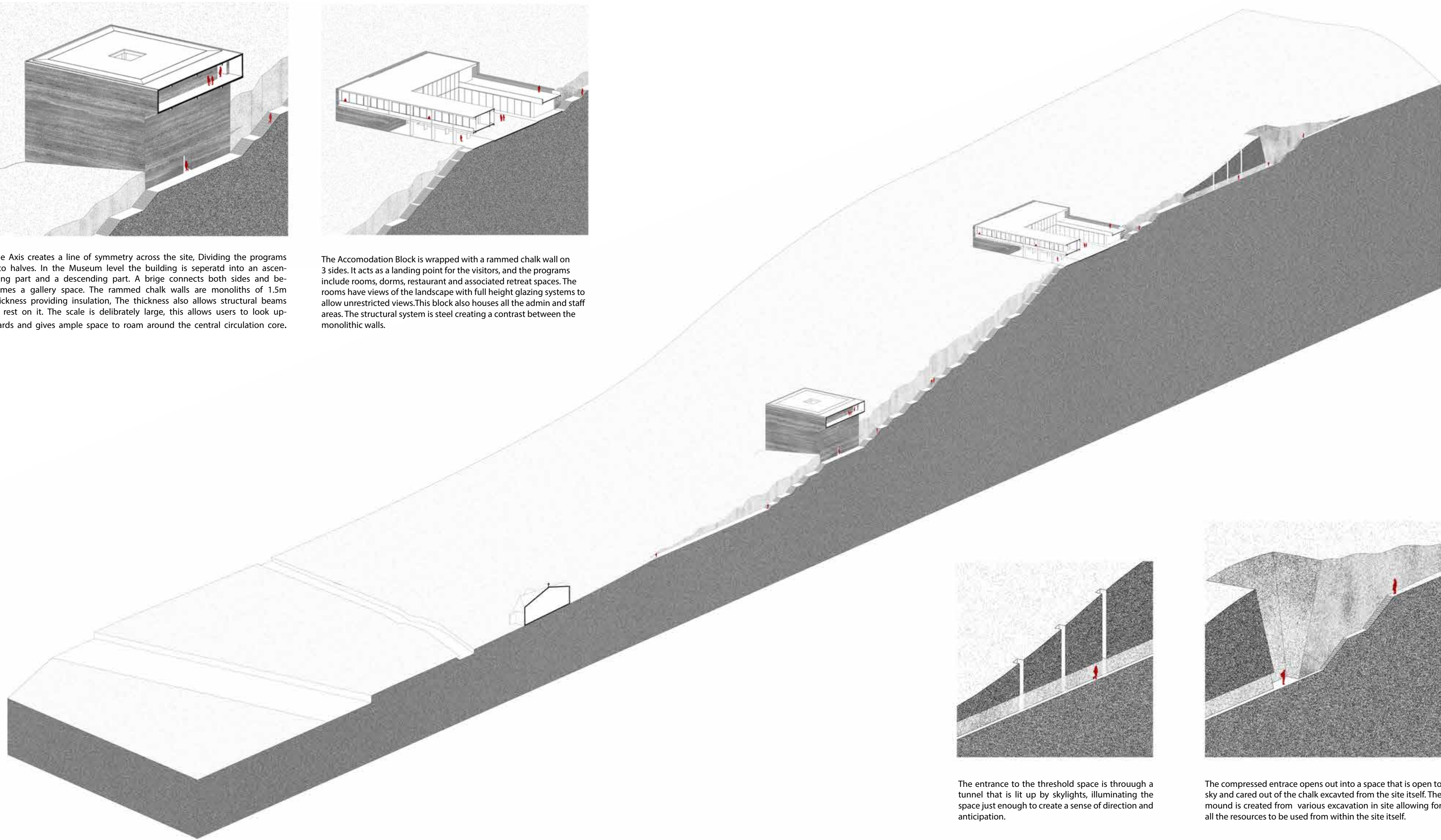




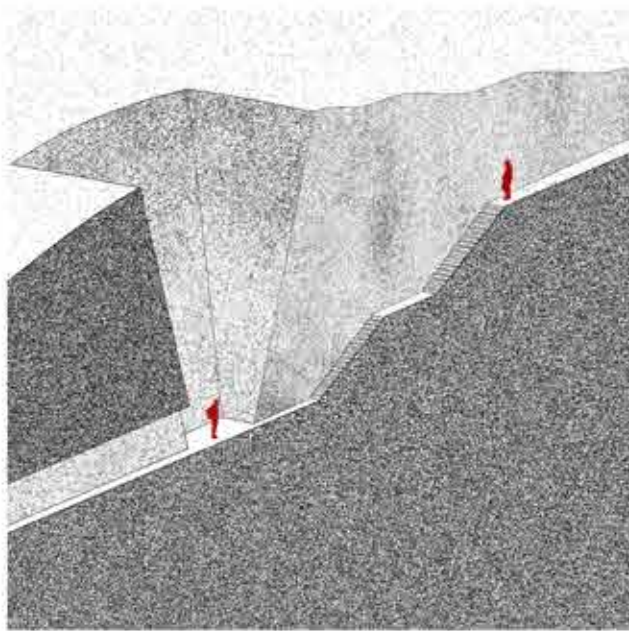
The Axis creates a line of symmetry across the site, Dividing the programs into halves. In the Museum level the building is separated into an ascending part and a descending part. A bridge connects both sides and becomes a gallery space. The rammed chalk walls are monoliths of 1.5m thickness providing insulation. The thickness also allows structural beams to rest on it. The scale is deliberately large, this allows users to look upwards and gives ample space to roam around the central circulation core.



The Accommodation Block is wrapped with a rammed chalk wall on 3 sides. It acts as a landing point for the visitors, and the programs include rooms, dorms, restaurant and associated retreat spaces. The rooms have views of the landscape with full height glazing systems to allow unrestricted views. This block also houses all the admin and staff areas. The structural system is steel creating a contrast between the monolithic walls.



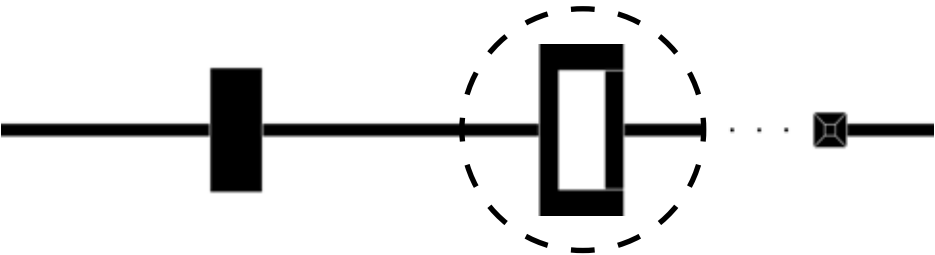
The entrance to the threshold space is through a tunnel that is lit up by skylights, illuminating the space just enough to create a sense of direction and anticipation.



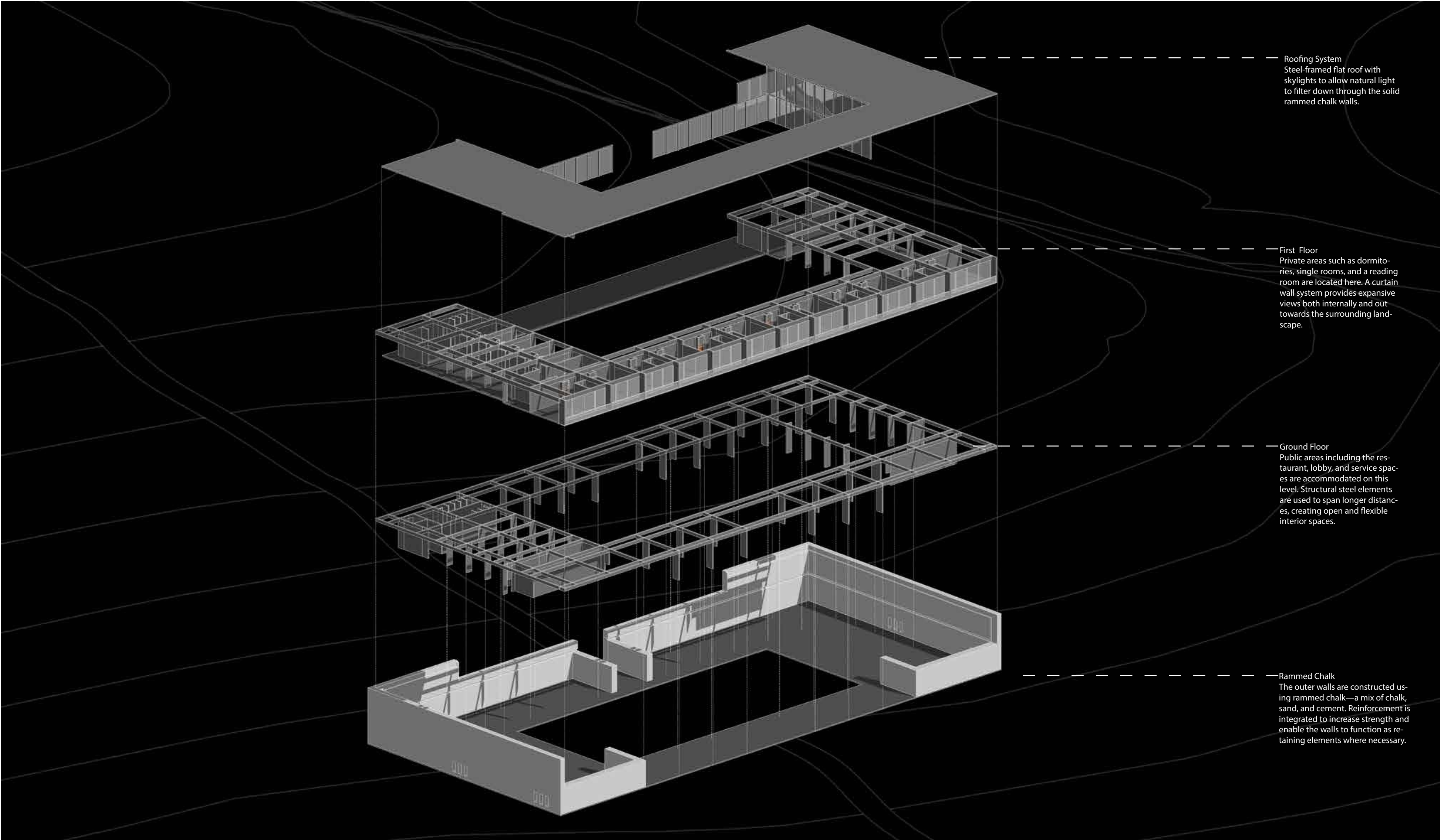
The compressed entrance opens out into a space that is open to sky and carved out of the chalk excavated from the site itself. The mound is created from various excavation in site allowing for all the resources to be used from within the site itself.

2. Accomodation

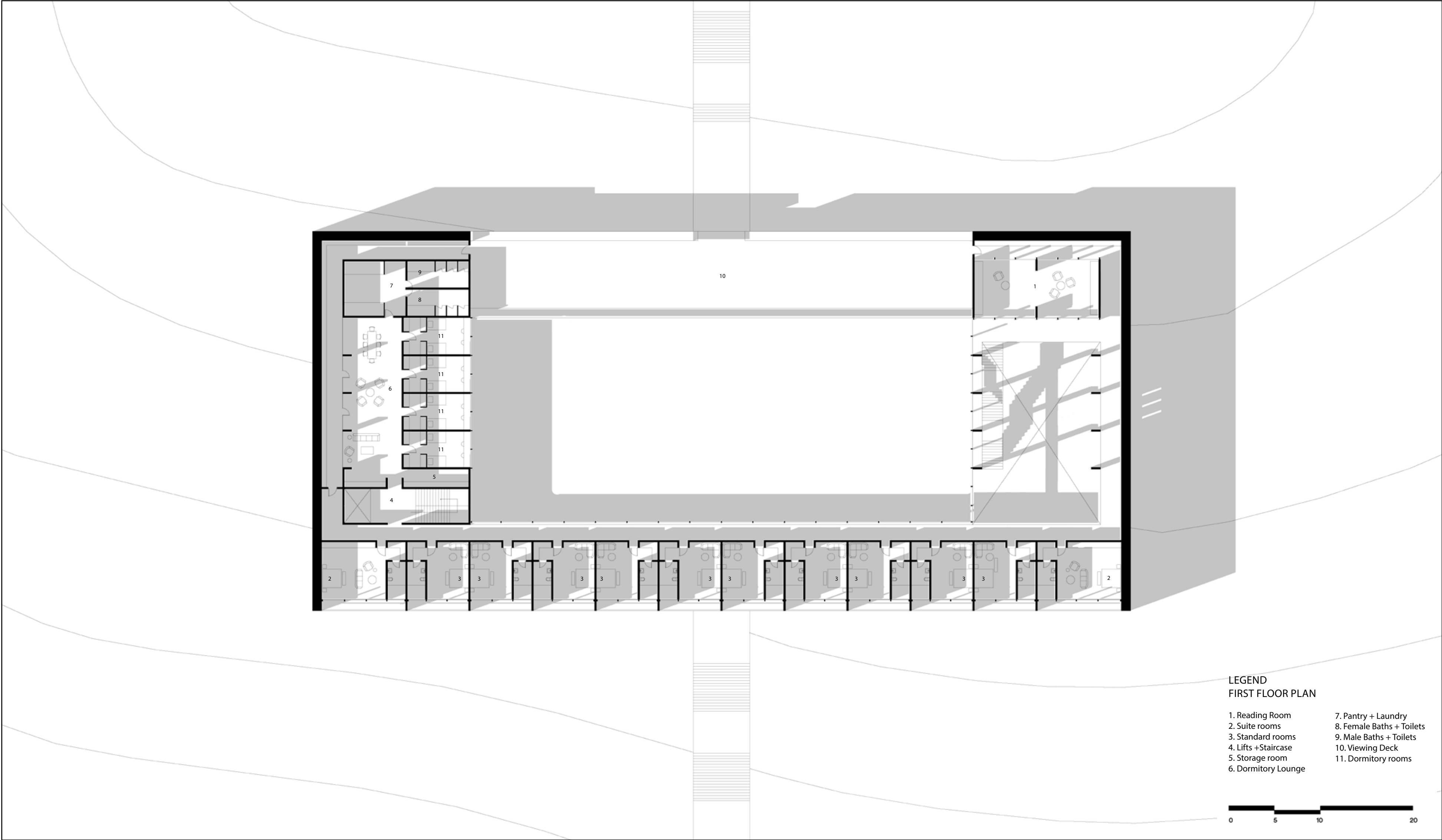
The accommodation building is designed as a place of rest and reflection. It welcomes both short term visitors and those staying for longer periods as part of a retreat or pilgrimage. The building offers a range of spaces that support different kinds of stay and use. Shared dormitories allow for group lodging, with rooms that accommodate four people comfortably. Individual rooms provide privacy and quiet for those seeking solitude. Alongside these private spaces, the building also includes common areas that create moments of collective experience. There is a reading room that faces out towards the landscape, encouraging stillness and focus. A restaurant provides nourishment and social gathering. Retreat rooms and meditation spaces allow for internal quiet and contemplation, reinforcing the spiritual and reflective nature of the project. Materially, the building is defined by its thick outer wall made from rammed chalk. This wall forms a protective envelope, grounding the building in the local geology and anchoring it visually to the landscape. All structural elements are made of steel, allowing for open spans and flexibility in the arrangement of interior spaces. Each room is carefully oriented to frame views across the surrounding site. Openings face the museum, the threshold space, and the distant church, allowing the visitor to remain visually connected to the full experience of the pilgrimage journey. The accommodation is not only a place to sleep, but a continuation of the reflective process — a pause within the larger movement through the site



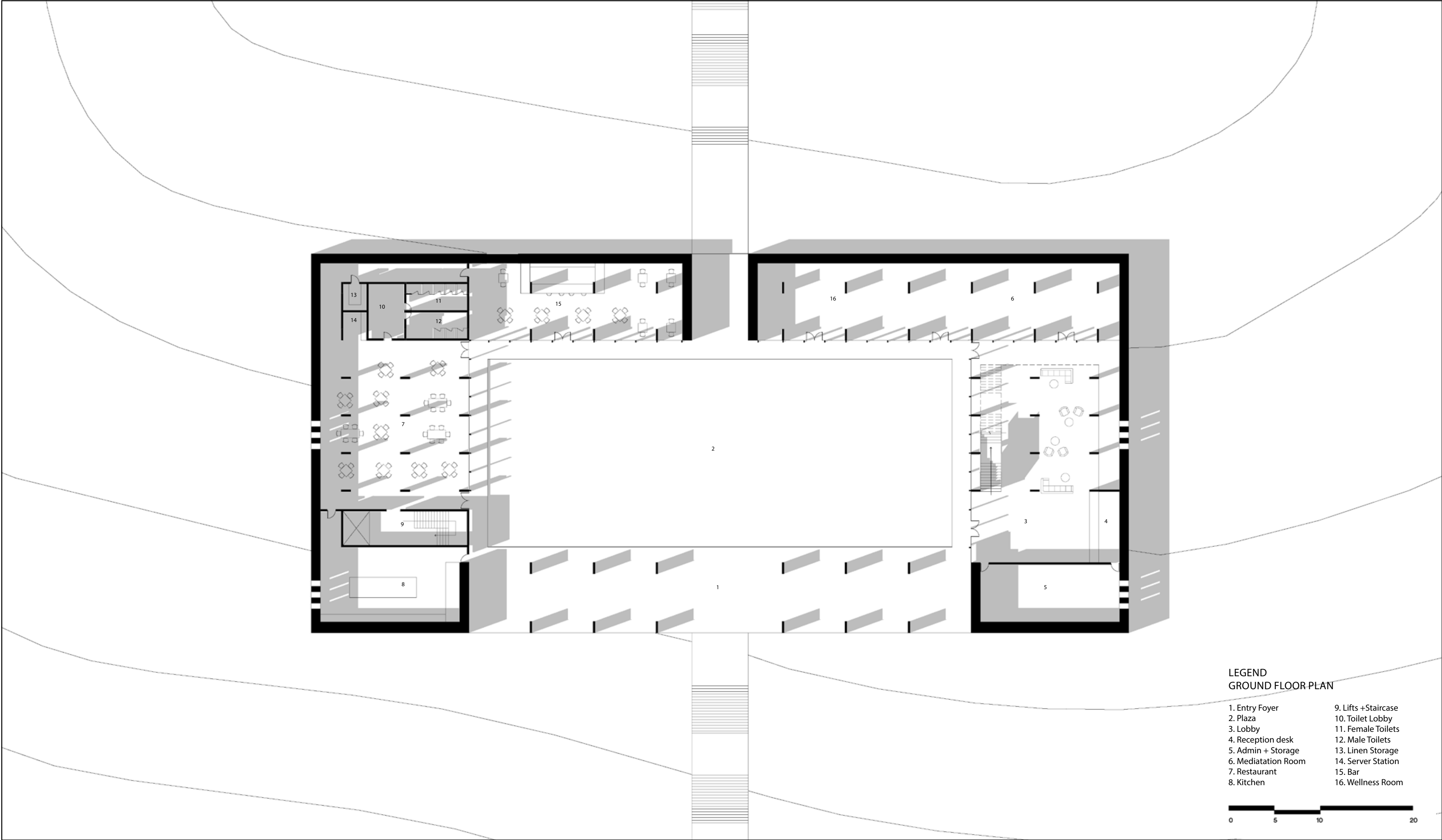
KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE & RETREAT CENTER // INTRODUCTION ACCOMODATION



KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE MUSEUM AND RETREAT // EXPLODED ISOMETRIC + VIEW



KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE MUSEUM AND RETREAT // ACCOMODATION

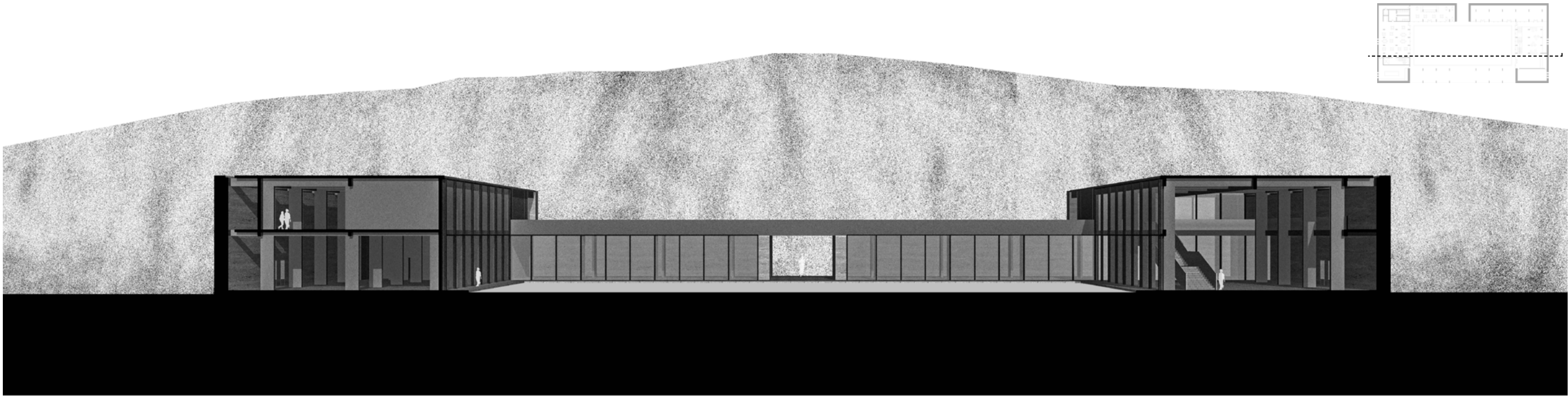
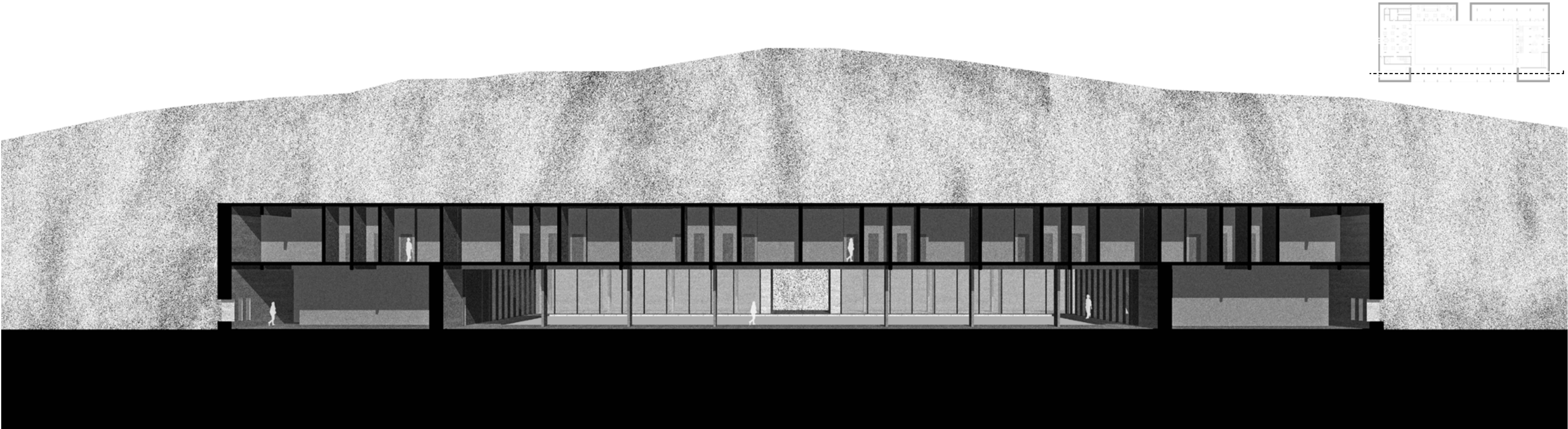


KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE MUSEUM AND RETREAT // ACCOMODATION





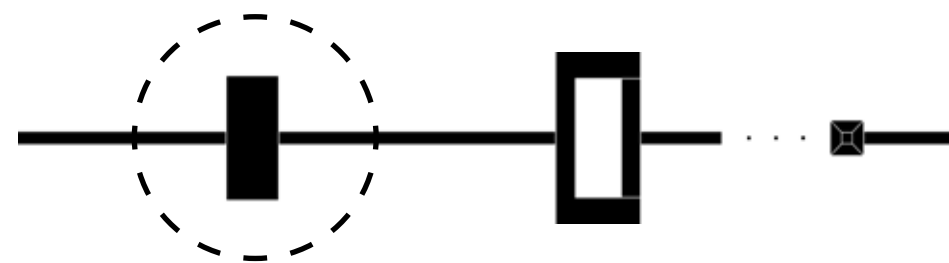
KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE MUSEUM AND RETREAT // ACCOMODATION SHORT SECTIONS



KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE MUSEUM AND RETREAT // ACCOMODATION LONG SECTIONS



KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE & RETREAT CENTER // ACCOMODATION LOBBY VIEW



3. Museum

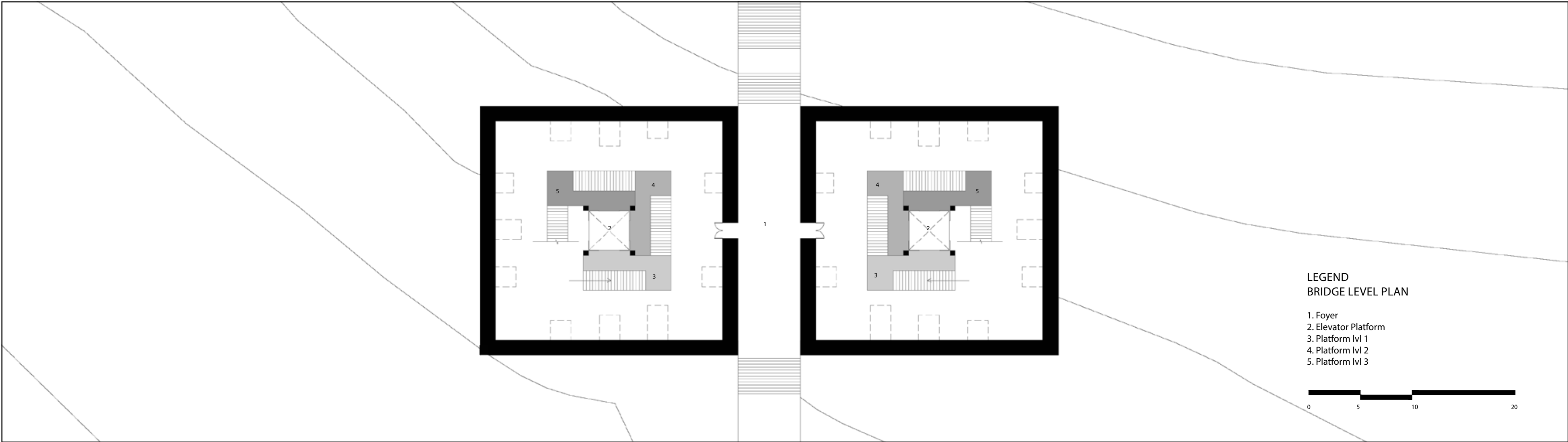
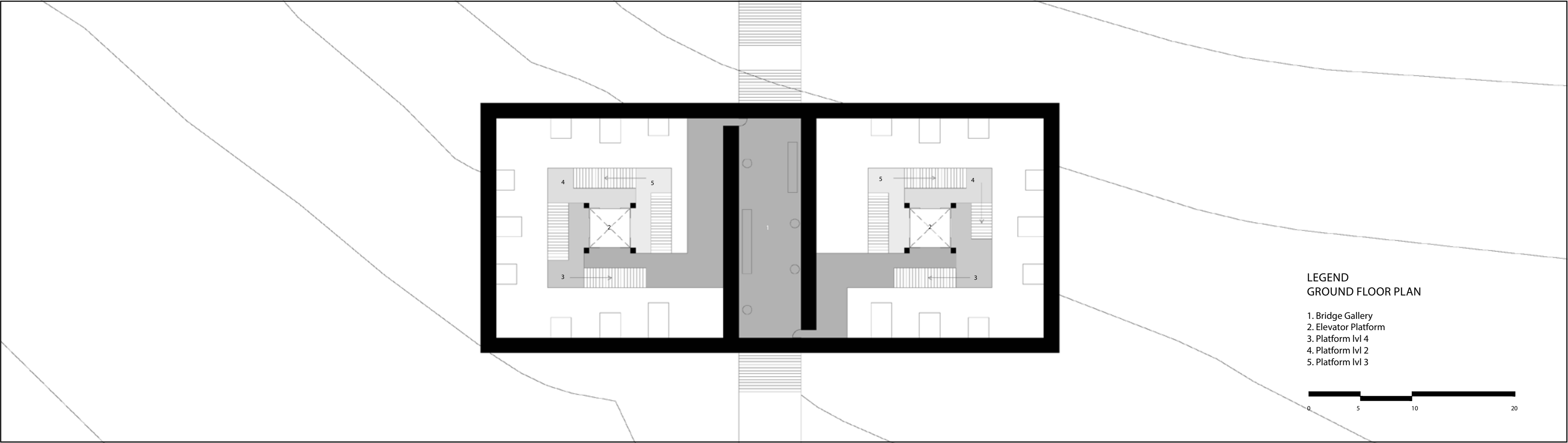
The museum is designed as a space of arrival and reflection. It marks the symbolic and physical culmination of the pilgrimage journey. The experience is structured around movement, taking the visitor on a slow and deliberate ascent through a sequence of levels. A continuous stair wraps around four thick rammed earth walls, guiding the visitor upwards. At the center of this vertical space is a platform lift, allowing access for all and reinforcing the sense of a collective and inclusive journey.

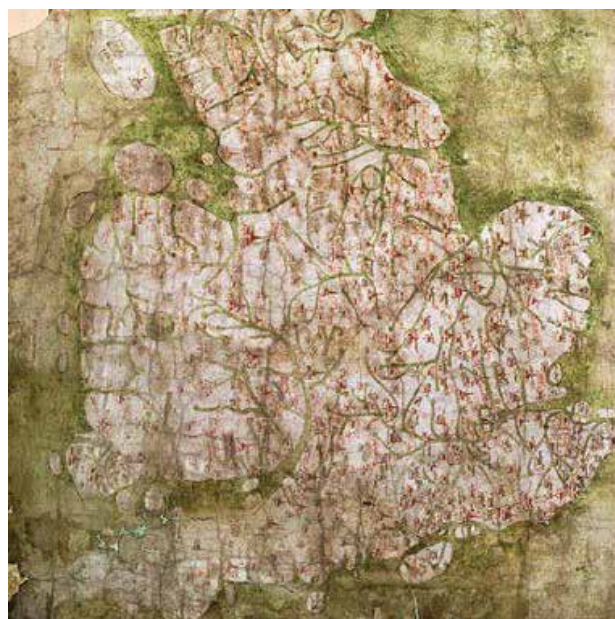
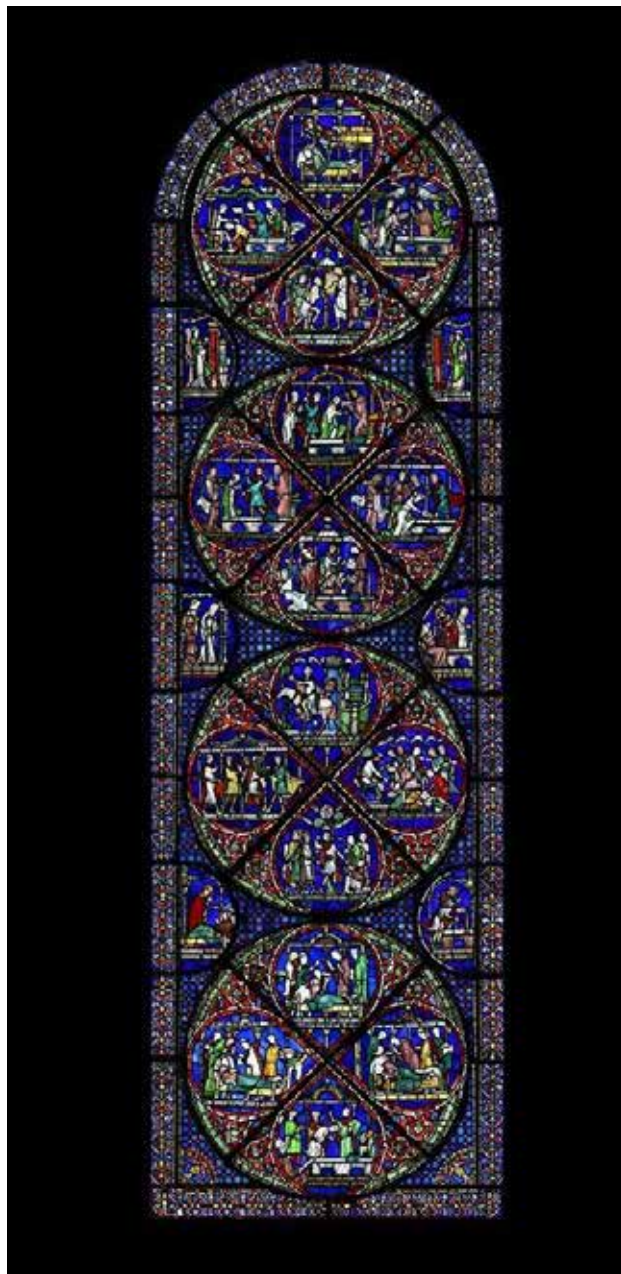
As visitors climb, they encounter artifacts displayed on ledges that project from the inner surfaces of the walls. These objects appear to grow out of the building itself, becoming part of the architecture. Each artifact reveals part of the layered history of pilgrimage and of Kent, inviting reflection at every turn. The light entering through narrow skylights washes gently down the rammed chalk walls, highlighting both the texture of the material and the objects placed against it. The chalk becomes a natural backdrop, grounding the story in place.

At the top, visitors reach a bridge level that connects across the space. Here, they begin a mirrored descent along a second stair, echoing the original path and bringing them back to where they started. The form reinforces the cyclical nature of the journey.

The structure is anchored by central steel columns that support the flat roof. The stairs are constructed from raw folded steel plates, expressing both permanence and movement. The museum is not just a container for objects, but a spatial journey through memory, place, and transformation.

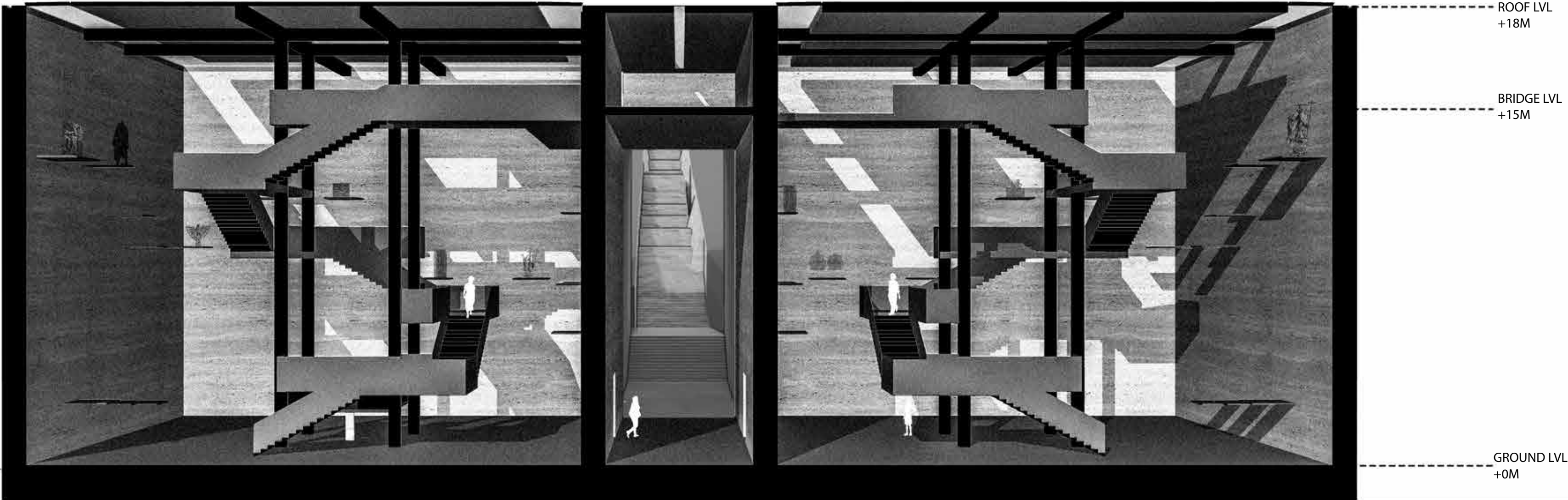
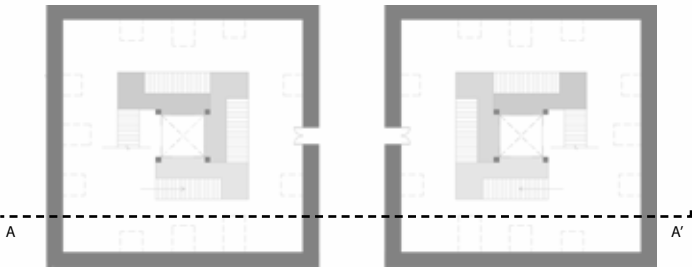




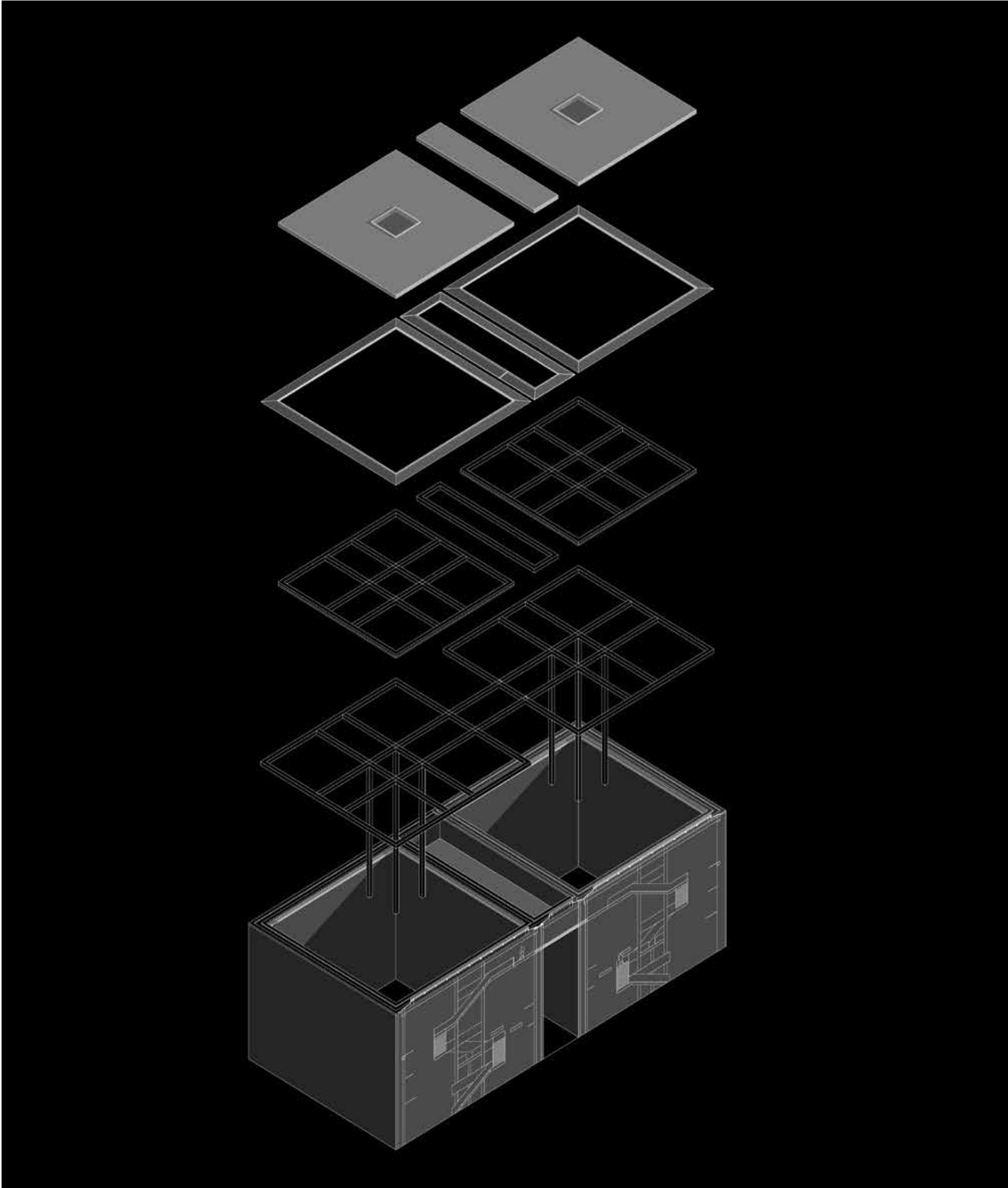


1) Alabaster panel showing consecration as Archbishop
2) Henri de Flammelle, Reliquary of St. Thomas 1666, Used in processions
3) Alabaster panel showing murder of Thomas Becket 1170 - 50
4) Ellesmere Chaucer's Illustrated
5) The Pilgrimage to Canterbury, Thomas Stothard (1755-1834), Cornwall Museum and Art Gallery
6) Costumes worn by Pilgrims
7) Pilgrimage Flask from the Shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury

8) Reliquary casket showing the murder of Thomas Becket, Limoges, France 1180-90
9) Pilgrim's Badge of the Shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury, Britain 1350-1400
10) Miracle window at Canterbury Cathedral
11) Reliquary pendent showing Becket as Archbishop
12) Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, William Blake, The British Museum
13) Gough's Map of England
14) Becket returning from exile 12th century



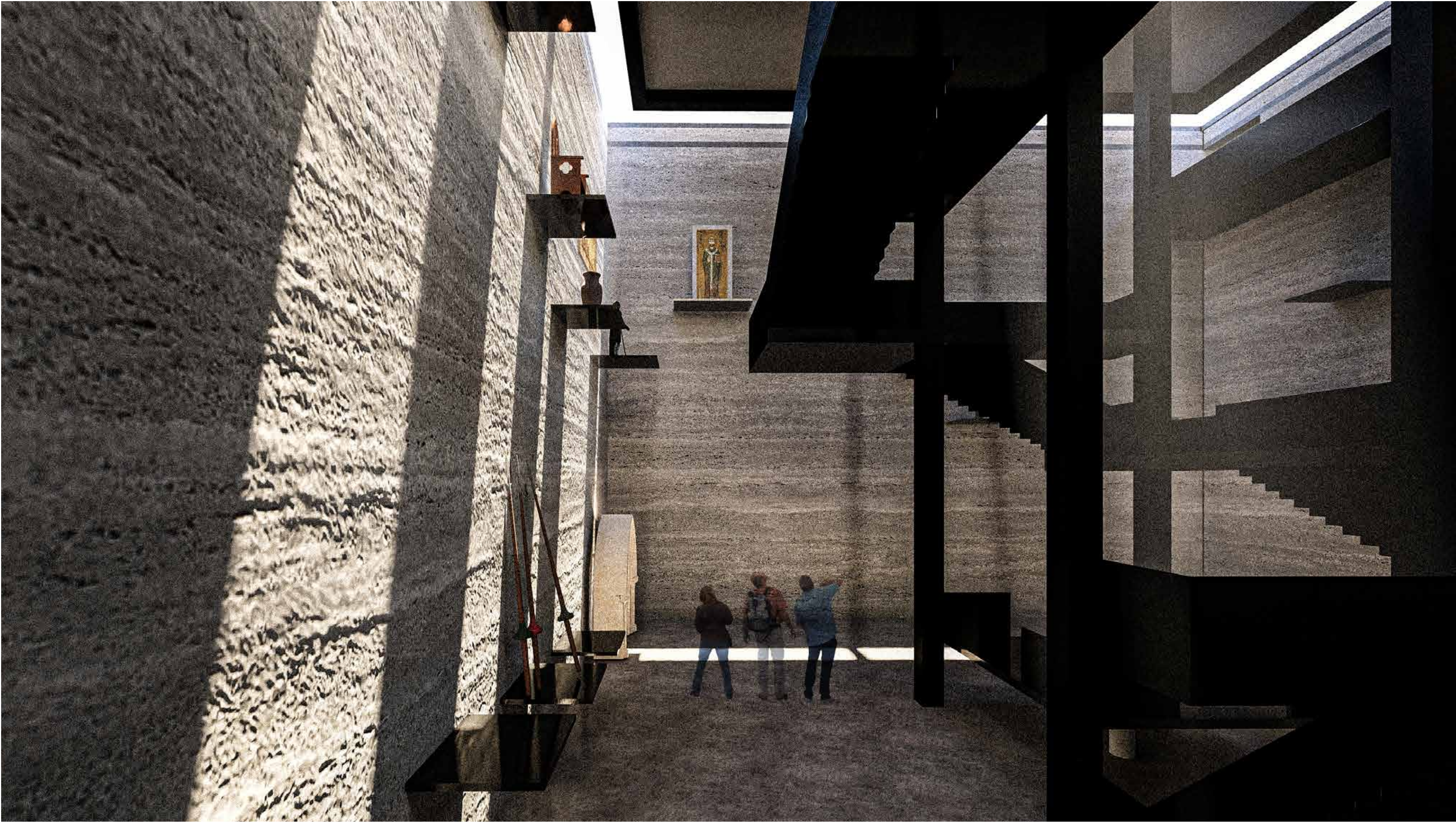
KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE MUSEUM AND RETREAT // SECTION AA'



KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE MUSEUM AND RETREAT // EXPLODED ISOMETRIC + VIEW



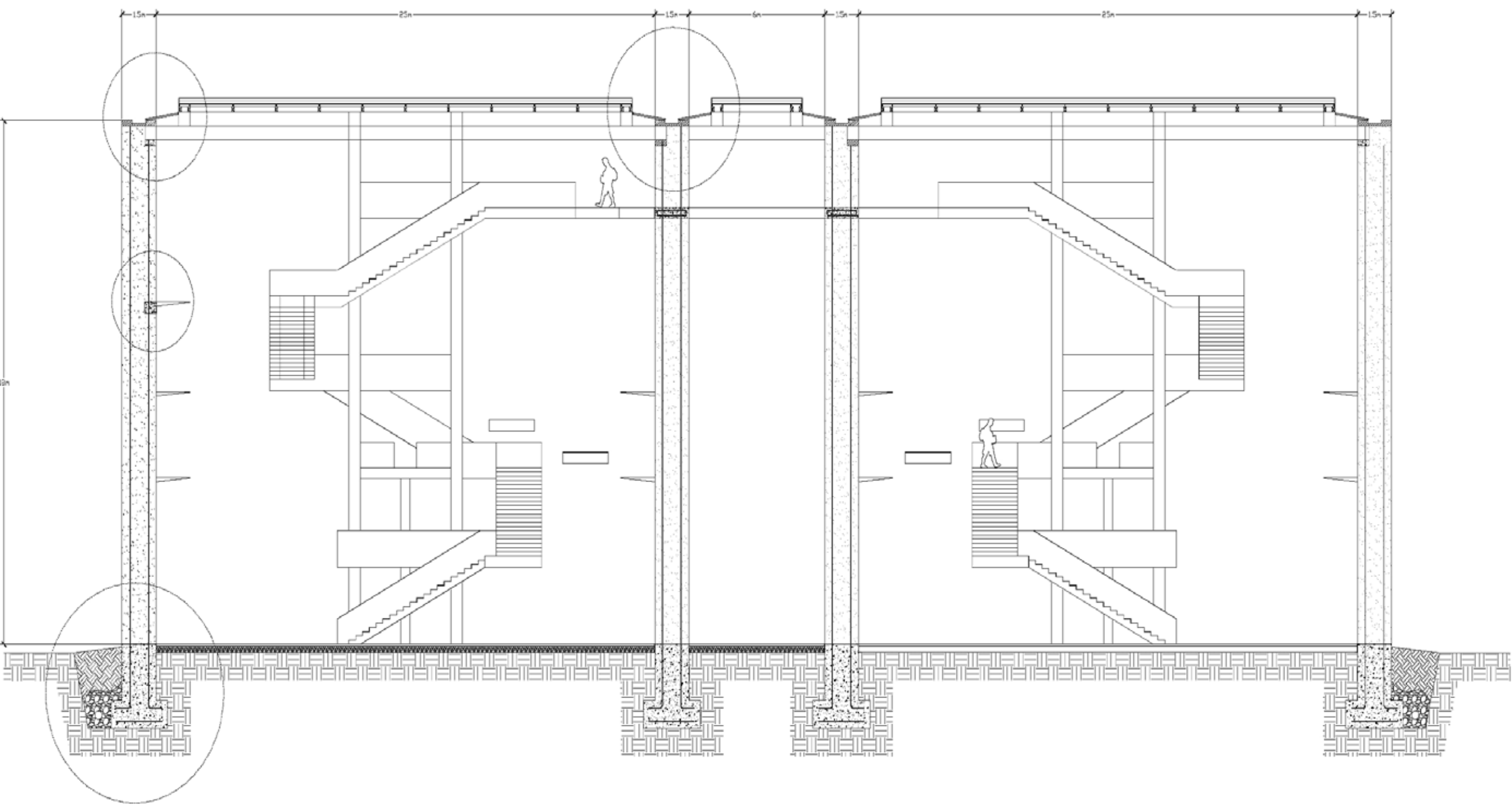
KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE MUSEUM AND RETREAT // VIEW OF MUSEUM WALL



KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE MUSEUM AND RETREAT // VIEW OF MUSEUM



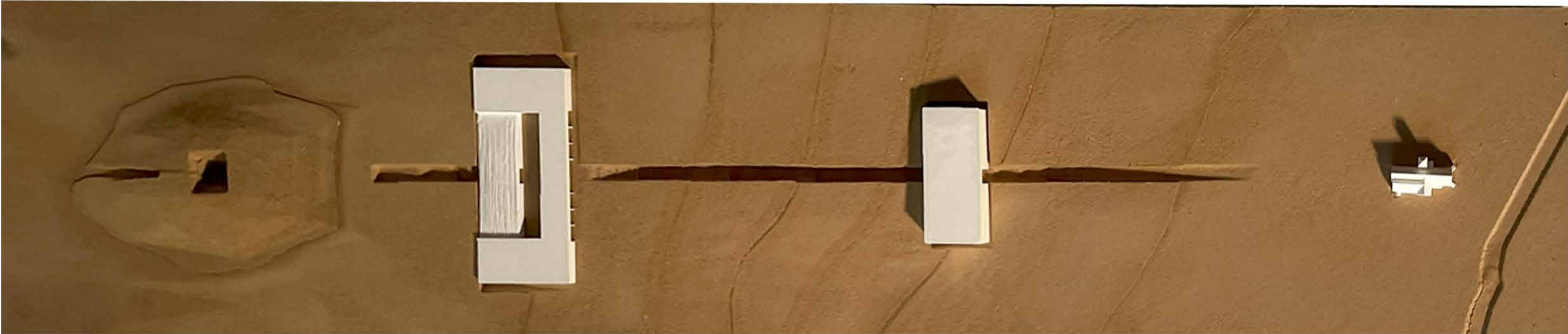
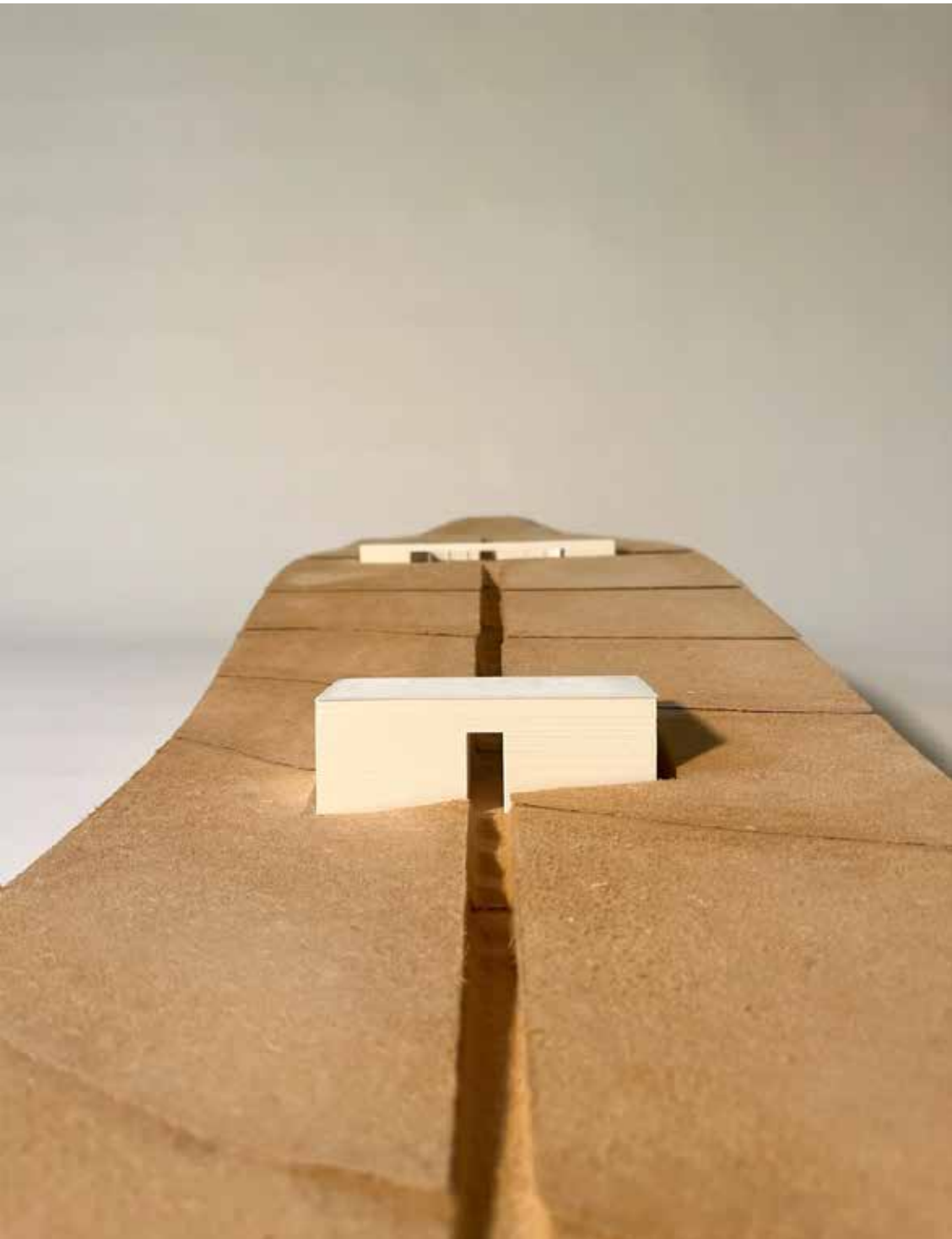
KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE MUSEUM AND RETREAT // VIEW OF MUSEUM



TECHNICAL DETAIL - SECTION AA' OF MUSEUM.



1:10 SCALE DETAIL MODEL OF SKYLIGHT



KENT DOWNS PILGRIMAGE MUSEUM & RETREAT // MODEL PHOTOGRAPHS