

ROOTED ASSEMBLIES



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## HOUSING NOT AS PRODUCT BUT AS PROCESS 01

Site: W 128 Street, Harlem  
Core III Studio  
Instructor: Galia Solomonoff

*How can architecture extend beyond its footprint to actively participate in the life of the neighborhood?*

A building is not a home unless it participates in a neighborhood. These studies ask: How can thresholds be soft? Can windows look both inward and outward? *Can yards, hallways, and courtyards become not just spaces of circulation, but spaces of encounter?*

The block becomes both method and material. Walking reveals what drawings can't: a chair left out, a child's chalk map, a tree watered by many hands. These are clues—evidence of spatial practices that exist regardless of policy. *The question is: can design recognize them as legitimate? Can it amplify them without erasing their origins?*

Green space becomes a mirror of equity. *Who gets to plant something and see it grow? Who can pause under a tree without being told to move along? In neighborhoods where green is ornamental and locked behind gates, how do we restore its role as a shared right?*

*Design here becomes a mode of repair. It asks: How do people already use space, and how might architecture step back just enough to support those habits? How can domestic life spill into the public realm in ways that build safety, not surveillance?*

This is not a proposal for a singular solution. It is a call to stay attentive. To build slower. To see housing not as product but as process.

*Can community gardens stitch together housing and land?*

*Can rooftops become places of cultivation rather than exclusivity?*

*What forms foster belonging? What arrangements build trust?*

*What would it mean to build with care as a baseline, not a luxury?*





W. 128 Street

ROOF PLAN  
1/16"=1'-0"



W. 128 Street



GROUND PLAN  
1/16"=1.0'-0"

W. 128 Street



TYPICAL PLAN - FLR 3  
1/16"=1.0'-0"





Ground Level Corner Unit / Assesible Housing



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## DESIGNING WITH DIFFERENCE: A MASTER PLAN

02

Site: Guilderland, NY  
Advanced Studio IV  
Instructor: Todd Brown

*Building An Intentional Community for Families of Children With Special Needs*

What does it mean to design a community that begins with care? In a world where most built environments reflect normative assumptions about ability, family structure, and independence, the prospect of creating an intentional community for families and children with special needs opens up new possibilities—and new responsibilities—for architecture. I imagine a space where accessibility is not an afterthought but a foundational principle; where difference is not a barrier to inclusion, but a source of collective strength.

This is not merely about adding ramps or sensory rooms. It is about rethinking the relationships between privacy and support, routine and spontaneity, solitude and community. How might architectural form, materiality, and landscape respond to the diverse sensory, emotional, and cognitive needs of neurodivergent children? What spatial strategies allow for flexibility across the spectrum of physical and developmental abilities? How can architecture support both the care needs of children and the wellbeing of their caregivers?

In this studio, I explored how interdependence can shape space—how shared routines, moments of quiet, and mutual support can be built into the architecture itself. This studio is an opportunity for me to create an architecture of care—one that anticipates difference, accommodates unpredictability, and supports resilience, not just for individuals, but for the community as a whole.

*What does home mean for families navigating complex needs?*

*How can communal spaces support both structured routines and moments of respite?*

*What forms of collective governance, education, and recreation can foster inclusion and autonomy for all ages and abilities?*



**SPACES**

- Overstimulating
- Chaotic
- Unpredictable
- Crowded
- Inflexible
- Loud
- Cluttered
- Confusing
- Unstructured
- Harsh lighting
- Limited sensory accommodations
- Socially demanding
- High expectations
- Lack of clear signage
- Complex navigation
- Unwelcoming
- Exclusionary
- Unresponsive to sensory needs
- Overly stimulating visuals
- Overwhelming auditory stimuli
- Insufficient quiet spaces
- Inaccessible communication methods
- Lack of sensory-friendly features
- Inadequate accommodations
- Lack of understanding and acceptance
- Non-personalised
- No Privacy
- No options

**DOUBLE DISCRIMINATION**

- Misdiagnosis
- Neglect
- Discrimination
- Exclusion
- Stereotyping
- Lack of support
- Inadequate resources
- Underrepresentation
- Inappropriate interventions
- Racial bias
- Stigmatization
- Limited access to services
- Ignored needs
- Dismissal of symptoms
- Cultural insensitivity
- Educational disparities
- Bullying
- Social isolation
- Medical neglect
- Lack of understanding
- Disproportionate discipline
- Systemic barriers
- Lack of advocacy

**CORPOREAL DAMAGE**

- Historical injustices
  - Medical experimentation
  - Systemic racism
  - Tuskegee Syphilis Study
  - Racial bias
  - Misdiagnosis
  - Inadequate care
  - Lack of cultural competence
  - Lack of empathy
  - Disregard for patient autonomy
  - Unequal treatment
  - Healthcare disparities
  - Lack of representation
  - Stereotyping
  - Implicit bias
  - Lack of informed consent
  - Betrayal of trust
  - Neglect of symptoms
  - Underestimation of pain
  - Disrespectful treatment
  - Language barriers
  - Insufficient explanations
  - Limited access to care
  - Excessive use of restraints
  - Dismissal of concerns
  - Lack of transparency
  - Inadequate follow-up care
  - Medical gaslighting
  - Inequality in treatment options
  - Distrust of medical institutions
- EXPLOITATION**

**REFRAMING THE CITY THROUGH CARE**

*What happens when our cities are not designed for everyone to belong?*

This question lies at the heart of the project, which interrogates how built environments reflect and reinforce systems of exclusion—especially for families raising children with disabilities. Drawing from Leslie Harris’s essay “Erecting the Skyscraper, Erecting the Race,” the project begins by acknowledging that architecture has long served as a cultural artifact of power—elevating narratives of dominance, efficiency, and productivity, while erasing the needs and voices of those deemed non-normative.

In Harris’s critique, the skyscraper is not merely a structure, but a symbol of vertical

advancement—of racialized success built atop layers of structural violence. Today, dense urban centers continue this legacy by projecting upward ambitions while neglecting the needs that exist at ground level. Families of children with disabilities, particularly those facing compounded marginalizations related to race, class, or language, are forced to navigate cities that are physically inaccessible, socially isolating, and emotionally disorienting.

These conditions—exploitation, corporeal damage, and double discrimination—are embedded in the spaces we take for granted: the overstimulating school corridor, the narrow subway entrance, the healthcare institution that lacks informed consent. Spatial exclusion manifests not only in what is built, but in what is omitted: spaces of quiet, of rest, of sensory variation, of dignified access. These are not

incidental gaps; they are the result of a design culture that has historically privileged spectacle over care, and optimization over relationality

*This project asks: What if the city centered care as a design value?*

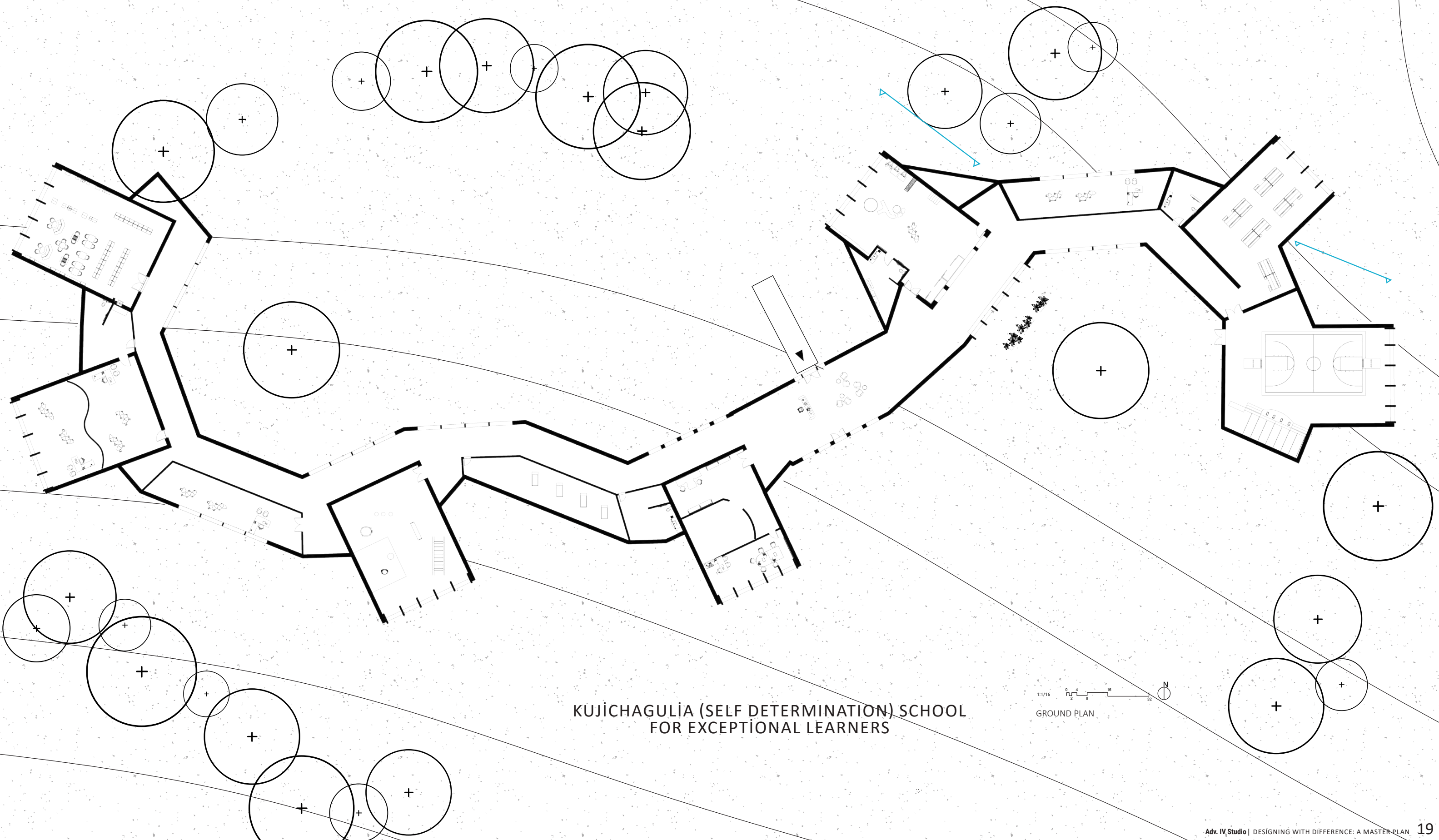
Informed by critical disability studies, spatial justice frameworks, and direct conversations with caregivers, this design proposal offers a counter-architecture. One that resists extractive models and instead proposes a city of interdependence —a city that listens, responds, and adapts.

It reimagines housing, schools, and public infrastructure not as fixed systems but as responsive environments. It centers dignified access, cultural competence, and relational care as foundational, not exceptional. Drawing

on indigenous village logics, topographical responsiveness, and biophilic strategies, the proposal builds horizontality—both literally and metaphorically—into the core of the design.

Architecture is no longer a tool of elevation, but a ground for co-creation and support.

Ultimately, this work envisions a shift in architectural practice: from designing for to designing with; from elevating the few to grounding and uplifting the many. It asks designers to rethink the values we encode into form—and to root our ambitions not in height, but in the depth of care we are willing to build into the city.



KUJICHAGULIA (SELF DETERMINATION) SCHOOL  
FOR EXCEPTIONAL LEARNERS

1:1/16  
0 4 8 16 32  
GROUND PLAN  
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### *What Does It Mean to Design for Difference?*

This inclusive nursery and kindergarten classroom is designed for children with special needs, integrating ADA-compliant elements like low tables, ample circulation space, and adaptive seating. Made from biophilic mass timber, the space supports sensory comfort and cognitive health with natural textures and light. Tactile walls and play features promote engagement for all learners. Above, a teacher's loft offers quiet observation and overlooks the man-made pond nestled in the surrounding forest.



### *What Happens When Everyone Gets to Play?*

#### **Inclusive Gymnasium Design for All Abilities**

This gymnasium reimagines athletic space as a shared ground for movement, rest, and connection. Designed with accessibility at its core, the layout features wide, ADA-compliant circulation paths and court-side areas that accommodate mobility devices, ensuring that all students—regardless of physical ability—can participate fully.

The bleacher system integrates multiple seating levels, with inclusive front-row access for wheelchair users, caregivers, and those who may not be comfortable navigating stairs. Warm mass timber clads the interior, enhancing acoustic quality while promoting physical and emotional well-being. This is not just a sports facility—it's a space for collective movement, rest, and belonging. Through thoughtful spatial design, the gym fosters physical activity and community connection for every body.

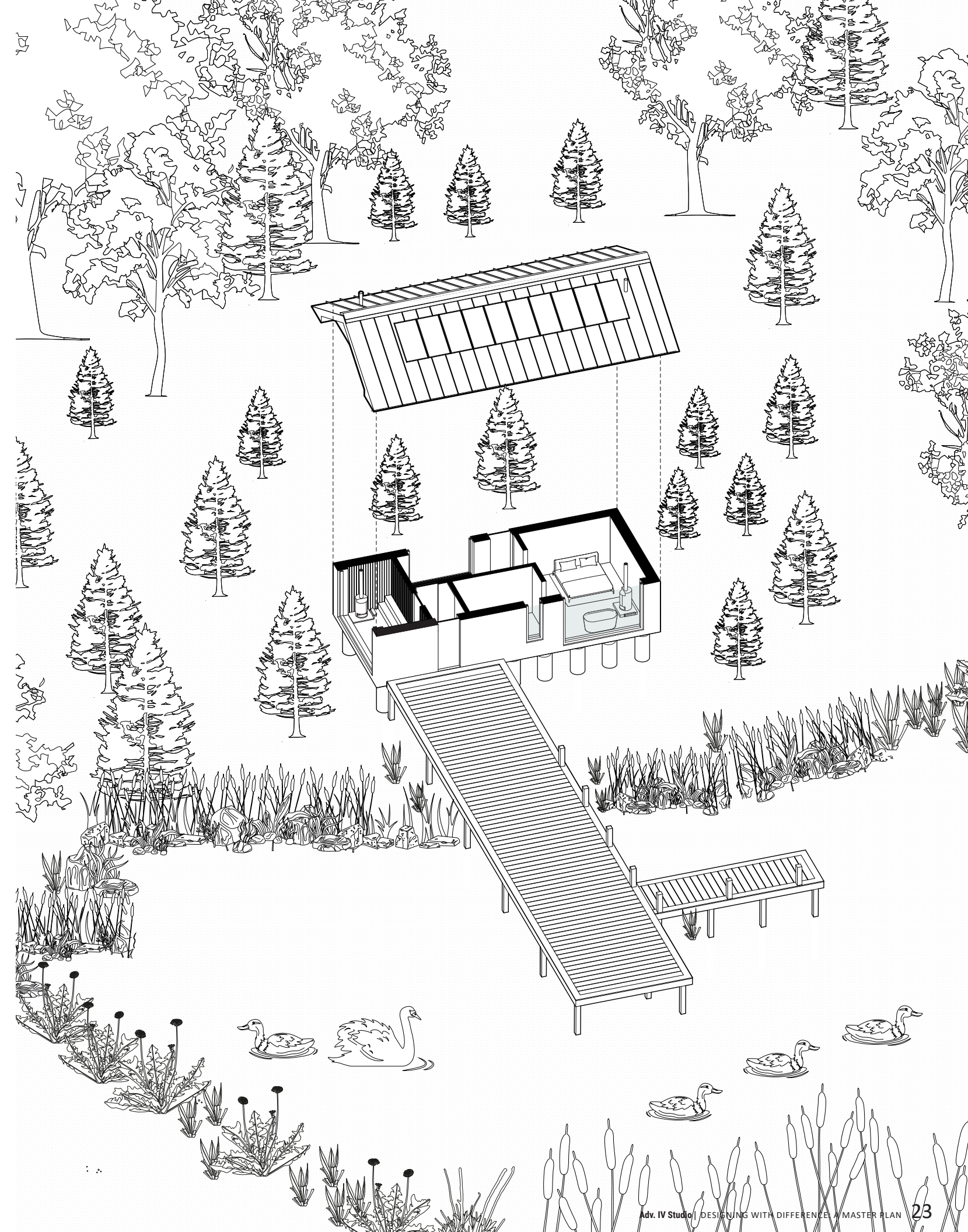
Here, the gym is not just a site of competition—it is a democratic space where bodies in motion, of all kinds, are seen, welcomed, and supported.

### *What Does Rest Mean for Resilience?*

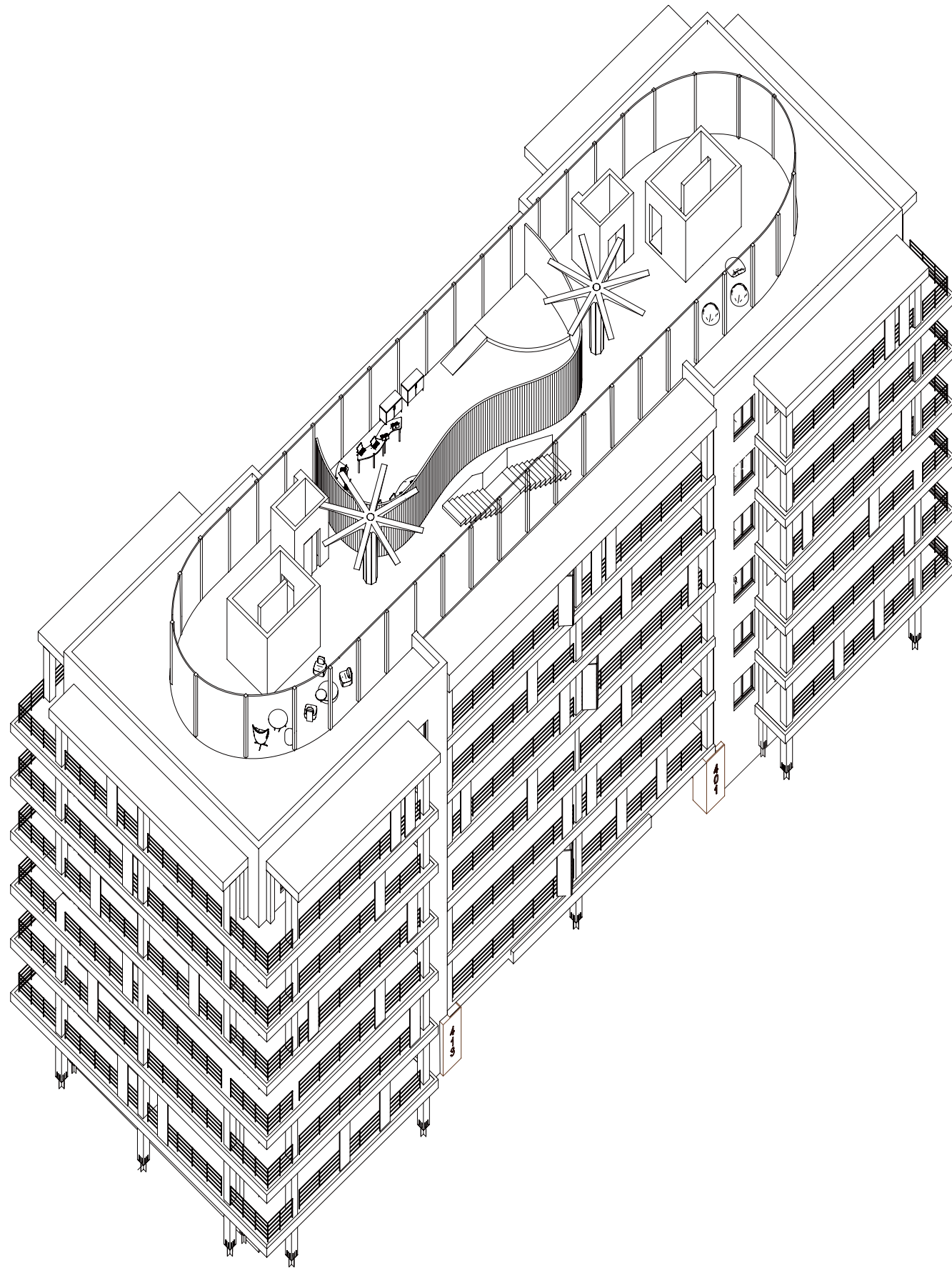
Respite care is a vital form of support for families of children with disabilities, offering caregivers the chance to rest and recover from the relentless demands of caregiving. These families often navigate intense physical, emotional, and logistical challenges, leaving little time for personal well-being. Without regular breaks, burnout and isolation can take a serious toll.

The **proposed** community-based respite retreat offers a much-needed pause. Designed exclusively for caregivers, the retreat provides a child-free environment for rest, reflection, and connection. Nestled in a quiet clearing, it overlooks a serene man-made pond and is surrounded by forest—offering a natural setting that invites calm and renewal.

While children are not present, the retreat ultimately supports their care by nurturing the resilience of those who care for them. It acknowledges that caregivers need space to breathe in order to continue giving. This retreat is more than a break—it is an act of community care and long-term sustainability.







*What forms of listening can generate architecture that is rooted rather than imposed?*

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## CO-DESIGNING PLACEMAKING

03

Site: Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea Houses, NYC  
Advanced Studio V  
Instructor: A.L. Hu

*What forms of listening can generate architecture that is rooted rather than imposed?*

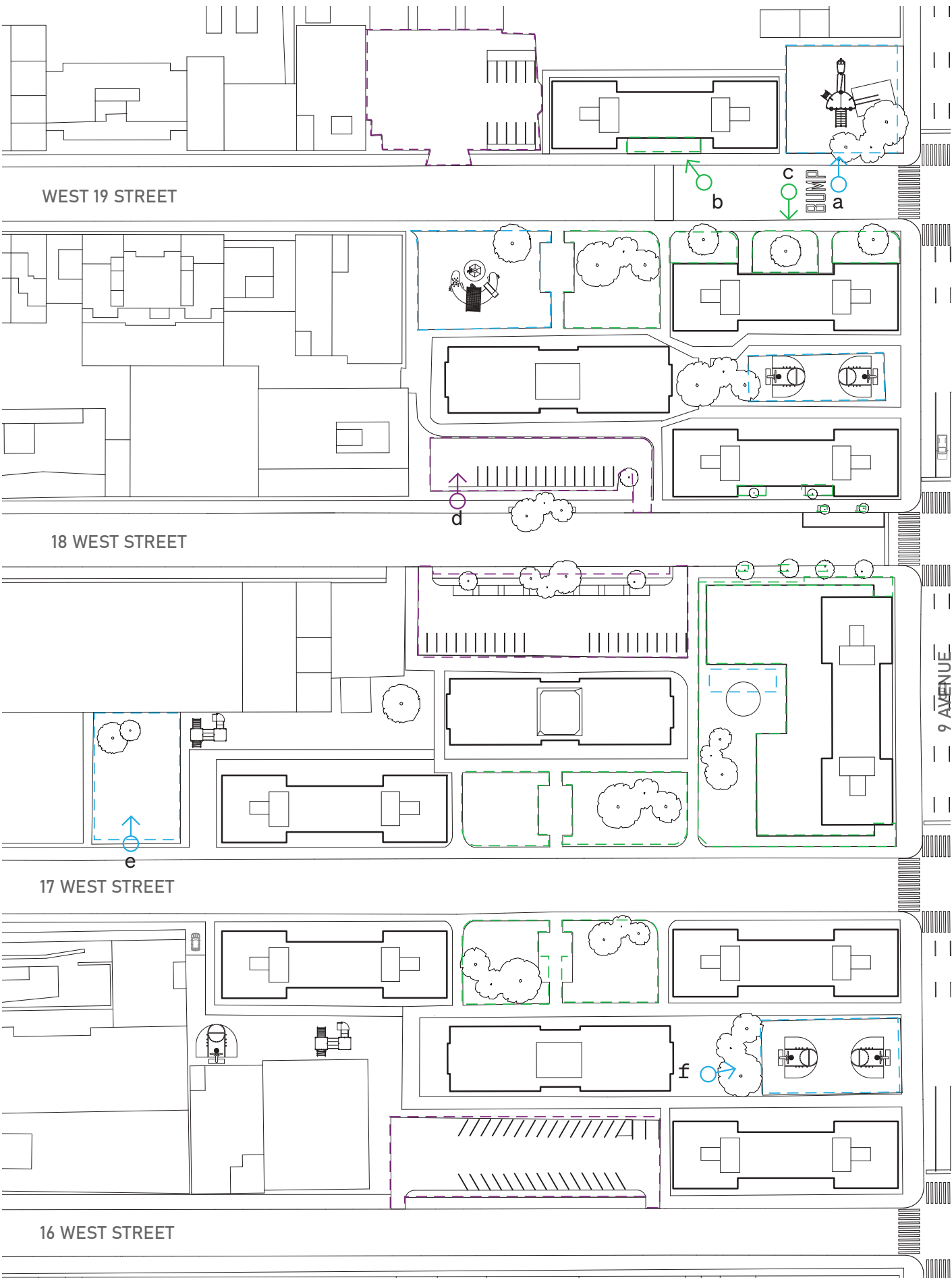
This project emerges through sustained conversations with a community engagement specialist and the resident leadership of Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea Houses, who have long resisted top-down redevelopment models that disregard their voices. Together, we explore a countervision: one that refuses erasure and instead embraces co-design as the catalyst for spatial, social, and political transformation.

This is not a design for the community. It is a design with the community—led by their priorities, rooted in their memories, and shaped by their aspirations for the future. In this process, the architect steps back from the role of expert and becomes a translator, a listener, and a future-archivist. Through mapping tenant testimony, informal spatial practices, and long-standing maintenance concerns, the project translates knowledge that often goes unrecognized into built form.

Rather than relying on demolition as a false symbol of progress, this countervision weaves together multiple strategies: infill development, adaptive reuse, and alternative programming that center public life, care, and cultural continuity. The goal is not to design a solution, but to open a space where multiple futures can be imagined collectively. This work asks:

*How can spatial interventions reflect the daily rituals and informal systems that already hold the community together? What design languages allow for intergenerational belonging, cultural expression, and ecological healing? Who gets to author the narrative of transformation—and whose values guide the process?*

*What does it mean for an architect to be a translator—and what must be unlearned to translate ethically?*









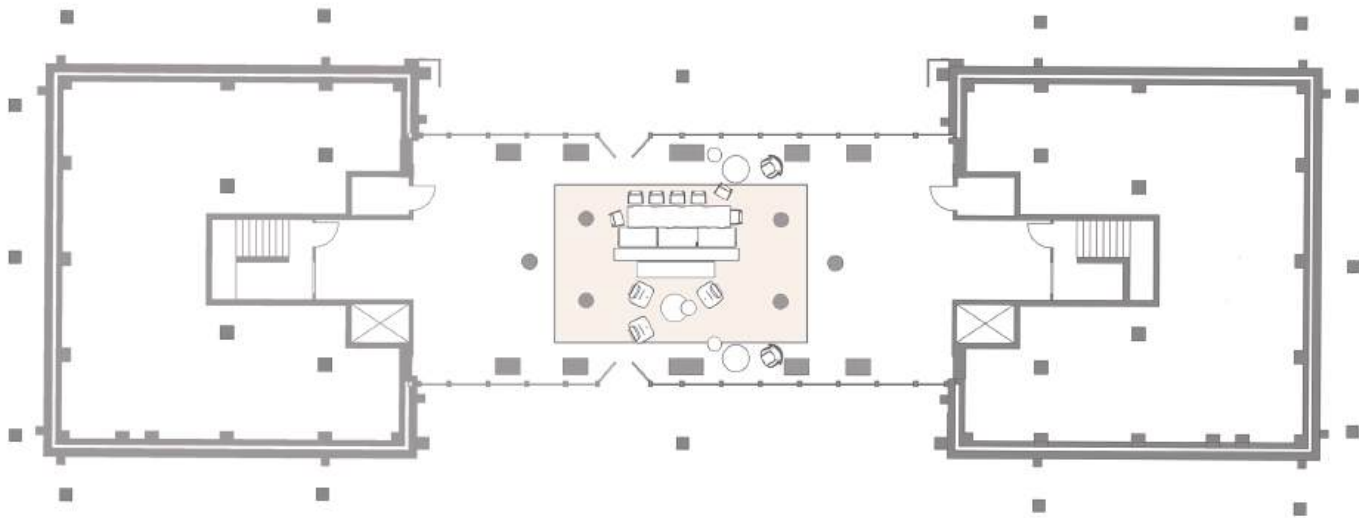
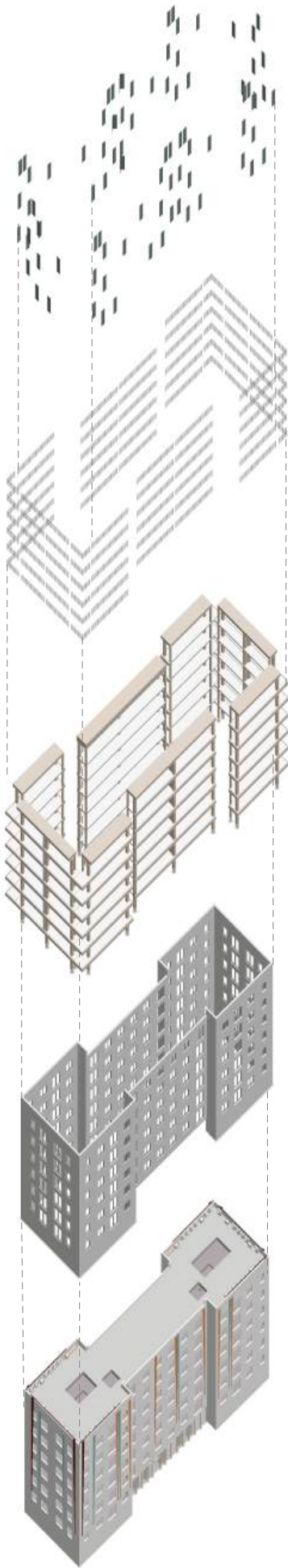
ROLLING SHADING PANELS

BALCONY RAILINGS

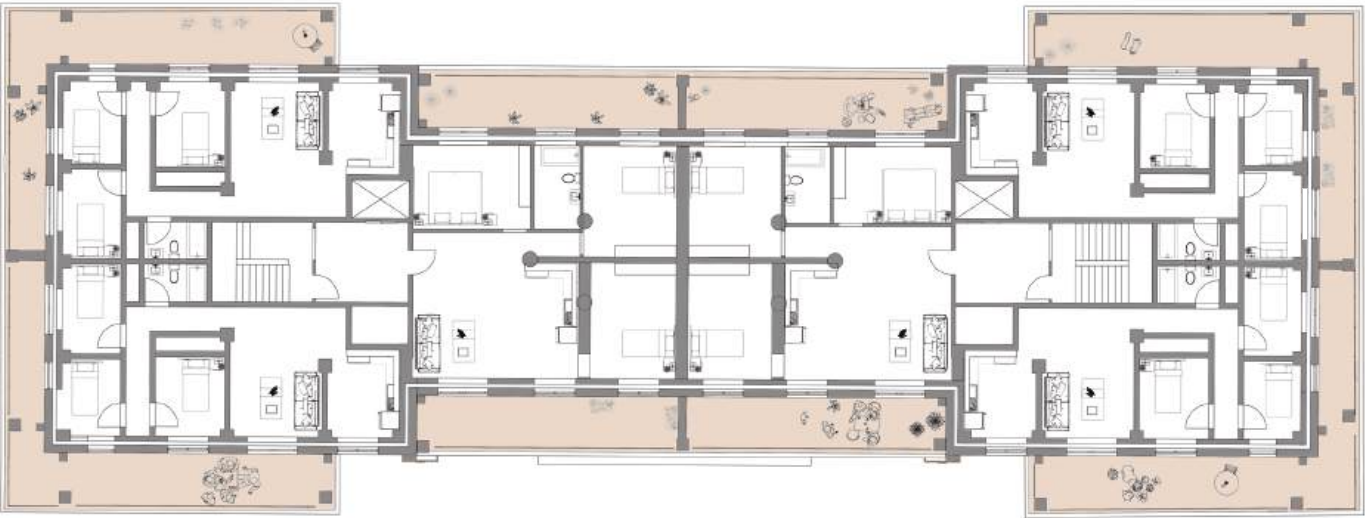
MASS TIMBER  
BALCONIES

AIR TIGHT CLADDING

NEW MEP  
Enclosed between existing brick  
+ new air tight cladding  
▪ New MEP on roof

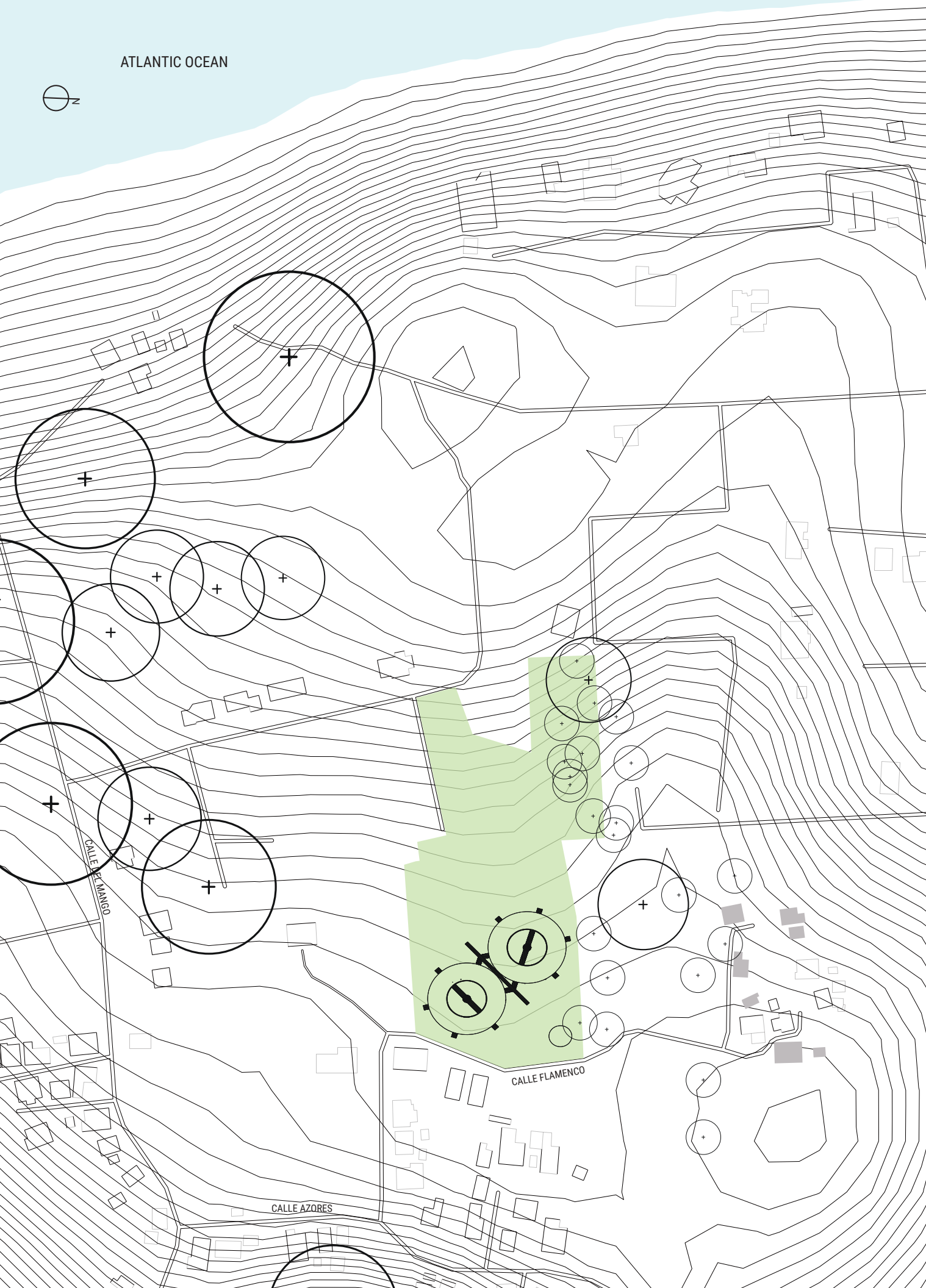


Proposed Lobby Floor Plan: Expanded lobbies at every lowrise building are welcoming and encourage socialization.



Proposed self-supporting balconies. Each unit has two access points to their private balcony.





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## ROOTED FUTURES: A COOPERATIVE NURSERY SCHOOL

*What Does It Mean to Learn in Relationship With the Land?*

04

Site: Aguadilla, Puerto Rico

Seminar: Designing Spaces For Children

Instructor: Anna Knoell

Team: Dori Renelus, Amora McConnell

This nursery school centers early learning around land, care, and collaboration. Designed as a cooperative, families engage directly in farming, food preparation, and market activities—building a learning culture rooted in mutual support and ecological awareness.

The architecture takes cues from Indigenous village formations, with clustered buildings surrounding shared outdoor spaces. Curved roofs echo vernacular forms while optimizing rainwater capture, channeling runoff into an underground cistern for irrigation and greywater use. A rainwater harvesting system connects children to local hydrologies and models sustainable living.

Constructed with cross-laminated timber and natural finishes, the school fosters a warm, healthy environment. Biophilic design elements—daylight, airflow, and proximity to the farm—promote physical and emotional well-being.

The structure is elevated on a seismic base isolation system, enabling lateral movement during earthquakes and protecting the building and its occupants in Puerto Rico's seismic zone.

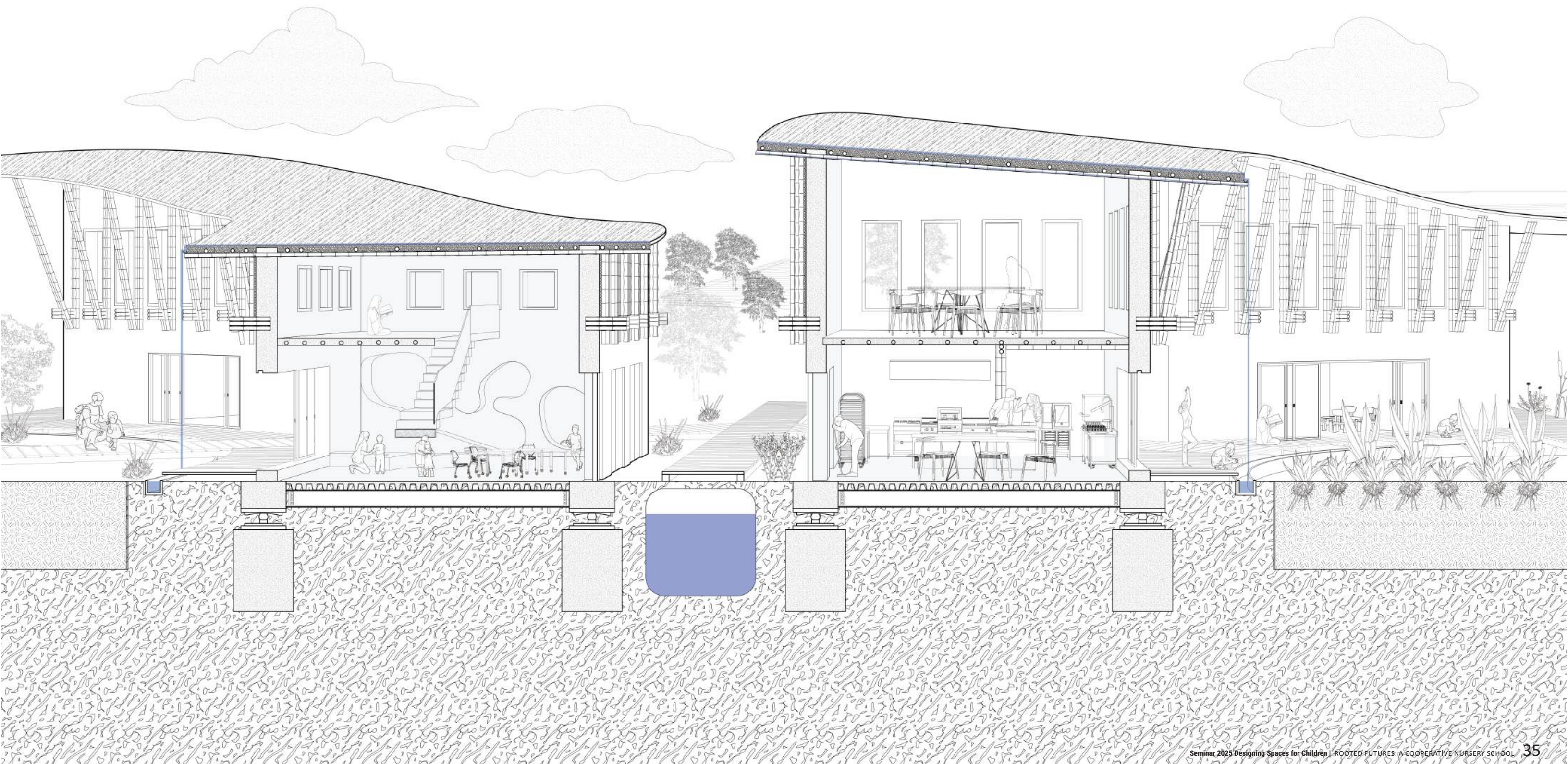
This is more than a school—it is a living system. Children learn not in isolation but in relationship with the land, their families, and one another. The design is both ancestral and forward-looking, preparing young learners to inherit and care for a world shaped by climate, culture, and collective responsibility.

*How Do We Design With, Not Just On, the Land?*

*What Does Resilience Look Like for the Next Generation?*

*What if Education Grew from the Ground Up?*







What remains unseen, unsaid, unbuilt ?

Dori Renelus