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Investigations Into The Program and Typology of a Contemporary Public Thermal Bath House

Brian Schumacher

University of Massachusetts Amherst, bschumacher@art.umass.edu

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INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE PROGRAM AND TYPOLOGY OF A CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC
THERMAL BATH HOUSE

A Thesis Presented

By

BRIAN ROBERT SCHUMACHER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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MAY 2013

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Approved as to style and content by:

Kathleen Lugosch, Chair

Sigrid Miller Pollin, Member

William T. Oedel
Chair, Department of Art, Architecture, and
Art History

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To Kathleen Lugosch I give my greatest thanks, for making it all possible and for opening so many unexpected doorways; and to Sigrid Miller Pollin and Ray Kinoshita Mann I am indebted for their patience and inspiring sensibilities. Without Stephen Schreiber's steady support behind the scenes, my future would be a very different one than that which I now look gratefully toward- thank you, Steve. To A'dora, I give everything, for loving me in spite of all the reasons this didn't make sense; and to Sepha, I owe my conviction that it matters.

ABSTRACT

INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE PROGRAM AND TYPOLOGY OF A CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC
THERMAL BATH HOUSE

MAY 2013

BRIAN ROBERT SCHUMACHER

B.A. ARCHITECTURAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

M.ARCH, UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Kathleen Lugosch

This thesis presents an inquiry into the nature of and history behind public thermal bathhouses, as well as a design proposal for a new and uniquely site-based public thermal bathhouse structure, the form of which has been developed with an eye toward *typology*.

The research and writings of this thesis explore the topic of public thermal bathhouses, both as historic phenomena and viable places of congregation still relevant and of great importance to healthy and vital contemporary communities. An effort has been made to demonstrate that written histories, archaeological landmarks, and contemporary international urban communities throughout the world provide ample documentation in support of the notion that *public thermal bath houses* both served and continue to serve an integral role within healthy, vital and sustainable cultures.

The physical modeling, drawings and sketches of this thesis develop ideas about form and materiality, and explore and bring together discreet architectural phenomena into a singular, formal, proposal for a prototypical and new, contemporary public bath house typology, one whose program and form are well suited to a contemporary small town within the United States.

At present, the ritual of public bathing exists within the United States, at best, far outside main stream culture as a singular, sensational event such as a hot spring or a commercial, private day spa- neither of which retain any semblance of the core principals, typological rituals, degree of sensory immersion, or whole-body therapy that define the essence of a more traditional and timeless public bathing experience.

It is the intention of this thesis to present a compelling case for why a public bathhouse not only *could* exist on the current American landscape, but moreover why it *should*, and if so, what form it might take.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As citizens and professionals, it is incumbent upon those of us practicing within the field of architecture to share in the responsibility of bettering the human condition. How are we living, and why? How do we interact with each other over the course of the day? What forces play upon us, and what grants us relief? What elevates our individual and shared experiences of being alive? These questions, and others, should remain constantly at the forefront of our efforts. Whereas in the practice of medicine, though, where one might look toward not only the repair of the physical body but toward the more nebulous mind/body connection, or whereas in the practice of law where one might look toward not only the application of case-based precedent but toward what it means to be a good neighbor, so it is in the practice of architecture that we must look toward not only the practical task of making buildings, but toward the more metaphysical task of considering how our buildings shape and influence our broader and more enduring relationships to lived life. Toward the fulfillment of such imperatives, we, as professionals and citizens must continue to return to the question of *what could be* vs. *what is*, or rather, toward a wide spectrum of possibilities that as of yet do not exist.

Yet how can we know of that which does not yet exist, or for that matter begin to address the thorny question of what it means to “better” our human condition? In a sense, we are put to the task of solving problems not yet identified as such.

Are we better off today than yesterday?

What does it mean to be better off?

In a world of finite resources, what do we really need and why?

How do we define these parameters that establish our needs?

What is a luxury, and according to whom?

It is a complicated task to address any of these questions in simple terms, and far beyond the scope or intentions of this thesis to do so. With just such questions as these in mind, however, this thesis will put an ear to the tracks in the most empirical sense, to consider from the standpoint of personal experience where we are as people living together, and to suggest an attainable vision for how we as architects and designers can elevate this experience within the very trade we endeavor to ply- that of making buildings. To do so of course necessarily requires a definition of terms and a narrowing of parameters.

When the term “we” is used, for example, the meaning is dependent on context: the author may be speaking toward and about the entirety of any local community, as if within the forum of a public Town Hall meeting, or, at times, specifically to those in the audience who are architects and designers. The community in consideration for this thesis is the small town of Northampton, MA, in and around this year of 2013. The reason for limiting the address of this inquiry to this particular location, in this particular time, stems from the belief that it is increasingly important for all of us, in all the decisions we make, to be living locally, working locally, and *striving to thrive* locally and within existing conditions whenever and wherever possible—even if to do so seems less than favorable at first. To live within this edict requires an absolute condition of bounded locality, to the extent possible, both in context and site; which is to say, we must take it upon ourselves to use what we have already at hand, to transform what we have rather than import or seek elsewhere that which we don't.

Further, it is not the intention of this thesis to study or to delve into theoretical conditions, or to propose solutions that are not at once grounded in building solutions readily achievable within today's technological and material capabilities, within today's everyday work place. What can we do to make a better world today, as architects, members of the community who have been trained to assess the feasibility and potential of, to detail and specify, and ultimately to over-see the making of our built form? Drawing loosely from a wide berth of cultural and spiritual considerations, this thesis limits itself to that which is achievable in the daily routine of an architectural professional practice actively engaged in its local economy. Specifically, this paper will look toward the fabric of Northampton, MA, architecturally and typologically, with the intention of assessing a need—setting itself to the task of solving a problem as yet not identified as such—and proposing a solution.

How do we, as sentient beings, continue forward in time weighing decisions that will affect not only our future, but also that of our children's future, and their children's future?

In architecture there are of course physical considerations inherent to such a question—energy usage, air quality, security and others bear heavily—but there is the matter of the spirit, as well. How do we not only live, but also live well? What does it mean to live well? To answer these questions it is necessary to not only imagine what could be in the most abstract sense, inventing a future about which we know yet very little, but to look back and draw forward moments and forms and typologies from cultures past which have for whatever reason, unknowingly, deliberately, or unduly fallen away.

Such is the task of this thesis, to look at our existing conditions and consider not only what is but also what could be.

The written body of this work presents the fundamental attributes shared by most successful public bath house typologies in places such as Europe, Russia, Scandinavia, the Middle East, China and Japan, including but not limited to the universal and timeless rituals embedded in program, range and diversity within user-groups, formal architectonic expression, and others.

Precedent analysis demonstrates that while largely absent in the American mainstream *mindset*, that the notion of “public bathing” is not entirely absent from certain realms of both the American cultural *experience* and *desire*. Reasoning in support of this claim will be drawn from the following hypotheses:

- That there exists a universally shared desire to experience the unique qualities which are inherent to all public bath houses, in spite of fears or prejudices that might inhibit or preclude their existence;
- That there exists within all successful public bath houses a consistent and identifiable language of sensory experience, as manifest in the architecture itself, that is both as valid today as it was centuries and millennia passed, and sought out if not consciously, then unconsciously;
- That there exists a fear-based resistance within the United States to the concept of “public bathing”, that this fear is irrational and unfounded, and that this must be and can be overcome through a coupling of education about what “public bathing” is, in a historical context, with an inspiring work of architecture that is life-affirming and a joy to inhabit;

- That because of its sensual force and compelling presence as a timeless cultural edifice, the typology of a public bathhouse is uniquely situated to uproot deeply entrenched social attitudes, make way for inspiring works of built form that contribute in and of themselves to a greater and deeper sense of meaningful community.

To more clearly draw distinctions between that which is a *public bathhouse* in the traditional sense (sento, hammam, therme), and that which is not (day spa, hot spring, athletic club), and further, to begin to define the specific attitude that this thesis will take outside of historical precedent, this thesis looks directly and specifically at its targeted “user group”. This aspect of investigation and definition will be informed by the belief that in a civil and just society, universal access will prevail and basic care shall be provide to all. Can a public bathhouse serve all constituents of a community, including the homeless, the increasing multiplicity of genders, and other user groups outside of the mainstream? By the sensitive deployment of materials into space, and the development of an informed sequence of thresholds between public and private space, a program and architectonic form will be suggested that supports the widest swath of pubic access possible.

In general, the notion of sustainability weighs heavy in contemporary culture and architectural discourse, as it will here. The design solution presented here places particular emphasis on the idea that for a built work of architecture to be truly sustainable is for it to endure over time, and that to endure over time is for it to not only withstand the ravages of weather and occupant use, but to capture the hearts and minds of the people it serves and thus compel a continued and open-ended stewardship of its built form forward and into the future.

From a technical standpoint, the schematic solution will function successfully as an *unconditioned* public space but for the energy used to heat the core thermal bath components. The interior climate of the building will be regulated and influenced by the function of a thermal bath itself, that of a thermal, radiant heat source.

Though the initial impulse for this thesis was to explore the possibility of introducing the life-enhancing phenomenon of a *traditional* public thermal bath house into the civic core small-town America, it became clear in early research that there exists no uniquely American typology to inform such an endeavor; thus, the research and subsequent design of this thesis engages the need to *invent* just such a program and form. The results have manifest as a design proposal conceived of as a prototype for a new typology, a *public thermal bathhouse typology*, one that can and will situate itself well within a typical, undersized, under-utilized urban lot.

CHAPTER II
BATHING, RITUAL, AND MATERIALITY



Image 1: *Bather* (1654), Rembrandt van Rijn

A bit of personal history informing this thesis inquiry

For most of my adult life, and in hindsight perhaps even into the deepest recesses of childhood memory I have had an interest in and draw toward an empathy and understanding for the living presence of all things animate and not. As a child, objects as simple as stumps of string and wrapping paper from a stick of gum took on a personality and presence of a

living being, a living entity. Later, as a student of architecture, it was with great ease that I began to explore the subject of *living matter*, the nature of *dwelling*, and *the will of material* to take on its most suitable and appropriate purpose and form. “What do you want to be, Brick? And Brick says to you “I like an Arch” (L. Kahn).

This inclination and sensibility toward *materiality* and animate tectonics is nowhere more embodied than in traditional thermal public bathhouses.

The initial interest driving interest for this thesis to explore public bathing facilities, though, came not from exposure to such facilities themselves— initially— but by way of a tangential personal experience. While living in New York City during the late 1990’s, I had the opportunity to provide a terminally ill homeless man with shelter for eight months. He and I lived together, alone with each other face to face, day after day in the intimate confines of my small four hundred square foot one room studio apartment. Over the course of his stay, I came to understand that in the most painful terms bathing, keeping oneself *clean*, is both at once the most *difficult* prospect for the homeless and most *gratifying* and soothing when achieved- that to be clean, to have warm water coursing over ones body and soap and a clean towel was better and more comfort and healing than a good meal or a safe place to sleep, or the prospect of money or sex or the next bottle of liquor; that to choose to imbibe or partake in any one of the latter was only for complete loss of hope in the former. To be clean, to be bathed, was not only a necessity in the most basic sense, but tapped into the fundament of one’s most primitive animal and spiritual self; it healed, kept illness at bay, uplifted and provided hope to a hopeless condition. I saw first hand the very real difficulty keeping clean presented in absence of running water and proper bathing facilities; and moreover, I understood in no uncertain terms the difficulty, the veritable impossibility, of

staying *healthy* when no longer able to stay *clean*- in short, the more unclean one got, the more ones health spiraled; the more ones health spiraled, the more difficult it was to actually return to a state of healthy hygiene and cleanliness. It was a merciless cycle. Being clean was not a privilege but a right, a vital imperative in a civil, just and humane society. What developed over time, though, was a more sophisticated relationship to the notion of “bathing”—emerging from this elucidating and extreme experience—the possibility that our *spirits* can be homeless, impoverished, in need of rejuvenation. And though the research and final design presented in this thesis is intended to serve the general public, it remains a template in the eyes of the author for a program able to serve all of the public—homeless, transitional, or otherwise— the imperative for this underpinned by the urgency and truth I experienced first-hand in the presence of the struggling homeless: the deep sense of salvation that the touch of one’s body being immersed in hot water can bring to both the body and the spirit.

The influence of Junichiro Tanizaki

Junichiro Tanizaki’s small but deeply felt book entitled *In Praise of Shadows*, is a brief but memorable meditation on Japanese aesthetics, the beauty of “otherness” as experienced in patinas and imperfections, and a *crie de couer* against the pressures and presence of new technologies that threatened to subsume all things shadowed and primordial within traditional Japanese culture. It is a book that I have dwelt in for several decades over many evolutions of self, and its spirit pervades and informs many decisions and intuitions within this thesis. In his seminal work, Tanizaki returns time and again to the motif that from *shadows*- the shadowy reaches of the Japanese house, the fathomless liquid sheen of a black lacquered rice bowl- emerges a beauty particularly Japanese and without compare in the West. This beauty is a nuanced one, and fragile, existing only within the half-light and paper

stillness that define, in his view, the essence of Japanese sensibility. A bathhouse, in the traditional sense, embodies just such a nuanced, half-light paper stillness.

Though not an architect- nor by his own admission a particularly informed critic of architectural space and theory- Tanizaki in In Praise of Shadows brings a keen eye and sensitively observed reality to the varied and many layered experiences of architectural space by contrasting the modern Japanese home with its vastly different counterpart found in the traditional, pre-industrial Japanese home. In particular, toward the beginning of the book he speaks with reference to the internal conflicts and struggles he suffered in building (and necessarily appointing finishes to) his own home. Later, he extends his meditation to cultural references such as the Japanese No dancer and the increasingly tenuous existence of certain regional cooking eccentricities.

My first reading of In Praise of Shadows coincided with my early introduction to the subject of *phenomenology* in both architectural thought and practice, and more generally, to the human experience of the senses in context of materiality and space. In hindsight, I understand now that this interest cast a wide net for me at the time, reaching into very core of what it meant to be human, what it meant to be *alive*, what it meant to experience and aspire to create that which is timeless, enduring and silent. On page 39, when Tanizaki writes, “Yet of this I am convinced, that the conveniences of modern culture cater exclusively to youth, and that the times grow increasingly inconsiderate of old people,” he was for me then- and remains so- writing less from a place of particular empathy for old people in the literal sense (though I’m sure that was so), but from a place of commentary and lament about a general lack of consideration and sensitivity across all fields of cultural production. Tanizaki’s writings spoke from a place of empathy toward not only other

people, but toward the world at large, toward all things, toward the condition of being human, toward the condition of simply being, that of any and all things; and moreover, the inseparability of one from the other. His writings, as abstracted above, coincide precisely with the spirit of this thesis, and further, provide encouragement and support for the imperative to speak and do in an unapologetically sympathetic and straightforward manner.

Tanizaki wrote at a time when traditional Japanese culture was straining under the extreme pressures to adapt and change to a predominantly Western new world order- a tidal wave of post-Imperial, pre-World War industrial development and growth. Our stresses and strains in the early 21st Century are not so dissimilar. Additionally, Japan had just suffered what is now referred to as the Great Kanto Earthquake, which destroyed much of its historic architecture and culturally rich infrastructure, laying a general sense of sorrow and loss over the Japanese population. Though not having suffered natural catastrophe of similar magnitude, the United States perhaps more than most countries suffers from not so much a collapsed historic and cultural infrastructure, but the outright lack thereof.

The spirit of criticism that In Praise of Shadows continues to receive provides both a cautionary note and a guiding light toward the clarification of the design intent behind this thesis. In essence, the general criticism directed toward In Praise of Shadows speaks toward the view that it is nostalgic, over-weaning, and without substance. Perhaps one always risks receiving such criticism when writing from or creating from a place of sincerity and the urge toward simplicity of thought and action. Such criticism does indeed stand well as a reminder of the fine line that separates the simple from the mundane, the sincere from the saccharin or empty gesture, and the arcane from the timeless.

Wabi Sabi, shadows, and the 10th Street Baths



image #2: Entrance to The 10th Street Baths in New York City

The 10th Street Russian and Turkish Baths are a thriving cultural institution that has been in existence in Lower Manhattan since 1892. Located between 1st Avenue and Avenue A in the Lower East Side, the baths draw a wide range of users, from local regulars who attend on a daily basis to celebrities of all walks who travel great distances to participate in the timeless and primitive ritual offered inside the otherwise non-descript four story brownstone facade. The initial impulse to investigate the 10th Street Baths as a precedent came from my own personal experience of having lived in the Lower East Side and been privy to their vitality and allure: I had been one of those many fortunate locals who would eagerly organize their day around the early morning and late night operational hours of “The Baths”, as they were affectionately called by those who used them regularly. Over the course

of these many years of use, I came to understand intuitively what I have since come to find supported in historical texts and contemporary writings, that the presence of *steam* and *extreme heat* and *frigid cold*, as presented and orchestrated in a context of *repose* and *reflection* and *elemental, material simplicity* of the traditional Russian bath- and more specifically, the 10th Street Baths- provides for a dynamic, enduring and healing cultural edifice. It should be noted that this is not the exclusive purview of the Russian baths as such, and that the Japanese Sento, Turkish Hammam, and a wide range of other culturally distinct public bath typologies possess similar orders of magnitude in detoxifying and cleansing spirituality, sensuality, and materiality. In part, this thesis seeks to compare and contrast the most distinct and enduring of these typologies with the hope of arriving at a distilled program and palette from which design decisions can be confidently made.

A continued interest in the timeless ritual of public bathing

For whatever contemporary resistance there might be toward “public bathing”, the degree to which the 10th Street Baths remains a fully functional, highly populated, popular and enduring institution suggests that there remains yet for some known and some as yet unknown reasons a continued and significant interest in traditional bathing rituals and ceremony deep within contemporary American culture. Many of the qualities inherent to the traditional Russian bath, or *banya* as it is called in Russia, remain evident in the 10th Street Baths and serve as both programmatic and typological reference for the design portion of this thesis. The organization and typology of the Russian *banya* is a cultural tradition that has lived on in its present state largely unchanged since the early medieval times. And though there are indeed many architectonic and programmatic qualities that are uniquely specific to the 10th Street Baths, most that are significantly present and fundamentally influential to its constitution are in direct descent from any number of other

ancient and contemporary Russian baths of great repute and high regard found elsewhere around the world; rather, to study one is in essence to study them all-

Sensory delight or primal fear?

To look more directly at the materiality of space and place-making embodied within the 10th Street Baths and Russian bath houses in general, one of the most distinct attributes which sets the *banya* apart from other spa typologies is the presence of a *hypocaust*, or heated floor- a technology inherited from the Romans during their occupation of the European continent in the years around 400-500 AD, with the Romans themselves having inherited it from the Greeks. The notion of a hypocaust originates in early Greek thought, can be seen in most Roman *therme*, and remains to this day a traditional form of heating a space from below the floor deck. The word literally means, “fire beneath”, from the Greek *hypo* (below) and *kaiein* (to burn, or to ignite). (need footnote here) And though the 10th Street Bath does not have a hypocaust *per se*, it does have a large, wood fired oven in the basement, which serves a similar purpose and is kept burning through out the day from a constant re-stoking of cordwood. This oven, finished of gray, coarse and besooted, hand-applied mortar and fire brick, centrally located in a grotto-esque basement chamber called the *parilka* (Russian for steam room) serves also as the most hot, most distinct and charismatic space in the entire bath complex. Very few sensory experiences compare to sitting in the darkened shadows of this *parilka*, drenched with sweat, heady from heat, at the precise moment when the cast-iron door of the stove is cast open by one of the many robed masseuses, unleashing a wall of orange light and red hot heat into the room as if from an industrial blast furnace. Sensory delight, or primal fear? Herein lies another direction of inquiry to which this thesis will be directed.

Once inside the bath house and changed (or unrobed), it is the *parilka* to which most bathers both direct themselves straight away, and the space to which they return repeatedly as they pass through series of looping sojourns that progress in sequence from ice bath, to dry sauna, then relaxation room and back, several times over throughout the course of a stay. In the *parilka* of the 10th Street Baths, concrete block benches line three of the sides of the *parilka* two tiers high, the walls finished entirely of old tile and concrete parged block and brick. All else in the room is littered and replete with the earthen remains of active and intensive bathing: switches of oak leaves and thatch scrabble, branches, sticks, stacks of split hard wood to feed the fire, and standard issue garden-variety water spigots emerging at regular intervals from the stair kicks, each appointed with its own split and aged wooden bucket to provide users with the opportunity to douse themselves with cold water as they bake in the untouchable heat. One bare light bulb illuminates the otherwise dark and sultry cave.

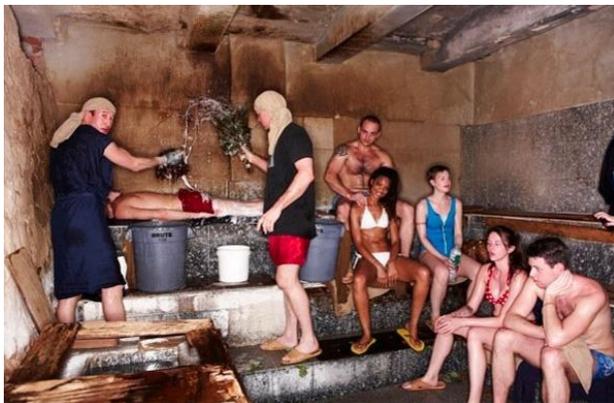


Image #3: a flash-illuminated snapshot inside the 10th Street *parilka*



Image #4: outside the *parilka*, a dousing with ice cold water

In so far as the wood fired steam room is the central hub and destination point of all who frequent the bath, and more over the very *element* which distinguishes the 10th Street Baths from other more hygienic and mainstream nearby spas, an inference can be drawn that

would suggest that having an intimate and first-hand relationship with the *elements* is in fact a key feature of a successful bath house of this sort. Indeed, history would suggest so, given the abundance of data available (footnote) that documents a desire for bathers to delight in and challenge their senses with exposure to extreme fluctuations of temperature, from ice and snow plunges to prolonged immersions in scalding ovens.



Image #5: fresh air on a snowy day outside on the deck

Image #6: a plunge in the ice bath outside the *parilka*

the Russian *banya*, heat, healing and health

To see prevail over the centuries the seemingly counterintuitive impulse to expose oneself to extremes in this way, it would be reasonable to hypothesize that such extremes are not only exciting and desirable for reasons having to do with sensory stimulation and thrill seeking alone, but that perhaps as Russian lore has held to be true, such rituals contain deep healing properties and impart a preventative-care regime in and of themselves.

“Give me the power to create a fever, and I shall cure any disease”, said Hippocrates .

Indeed, the ability of extremes of heat and cold to detoxify are well documented (footnote), and it is no coincidence that the 10th Street Baths are regarded as a sort of full-body homeopathic remedy by those who return to them time and again. In Russia, sweating and health remain virtually synonymous (footnote), and even today the attitude in remote villages where traditional folk medicine is practiced is that of the *banya* as a panacea. It is has been well established in western medical studies, for example, that over the duration of

a 15 minute sauna sweat bath, the body rids itself of toxins that it would otherwise take the kidneys 24 hours to filter out. (Michael Aaland, “No Sweat”).

Simplicity



Image #7: pine bough and cedar

The textures and materials that comprise the 10th Street Baths are simple and earthen and understated- wood benches, tile floors, stone walls, metal railings and linen drapery. This simplicity and earthen quality not only impart an elemental and understated essence to the space, but also create a durable, cleanable, and ultimately *hygienic* environment. Over the course of any given day, finishes are hosed down, scrubbed with bristle brushes, doused with bleach and other cleaners, with the materiality and special texture all the better and richer for the efforts- a case study, perhaps, in the sustainability and beauty of *wabi sabi* essence.

The program of the 10th Street Baths completes the exercise in simplicity through the orchestration of a sustained and repeated sequences of arrival and admission, each bather passing from one thresh hold or checkpoint to another, much like in the ancient Roman Therme whereby at any given moment— whether mounting the flight of fifteen stairs to the front door, or passing in front of the counter where entry fees are paid, or at the towel

dispensary when looked upon suspiciously by one of the many masseuses— individual occupants are screened and vetted for entry into the next and more intimate stage of cleansing and ablution.

Traditional vs. modern

In so far as the 10th Street Baths draw off of traditional programmatic organization and an inherited legacy of architectonic form, and in so far as we live in a culture that is at best *divided* between a very forward looking vision and an equally cautious and mindful vision with an eye toward historical precedent— the timeless dialectic between traditionalism and modernism— so too will this thesis need to reconcile these seemingly diametrically opposed platforms of thought and action. Programmatic development, design, and design development of this thesis hewed naturally towards a middle ground, or more accurately perhaps, a union of the two: the brackish landscape where historical precedent and pragmatism inform contemporary materials and methods—“traditional” perhaps in the most traditional sense.

The influence of Collin St. John Wilson’s “The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture”

With these thoughts in mind, coupled with the inherent charge of this thesis inquiry to draw forth from the past a typology rich with “traditional” and at times vernacular language, a careful reading of Collin St. John Wilson’s “The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture” provided much influence and inspiration to bring together the two terms— traditional and modern— both in theory and in application as it related to design decisions made regarding formal massing and materiality.

For architect and architectural critic Collin St. John Wilson, it seems apparent that conventional platforms of thought and lay dialogue would suggest that the notions of “tradition” and “modernity” be counterpoised, one set against the other. By the conspicuous pairing of these otherwise trenchant modalities in the title itself, no less, Colin St. John Wilson is setting his sails in the opposite direction, toward that which will become an observation of and appeal for “unification”: the long overdue unification of the meta-structures of classical and modernist thought, originating as they both seem to in orthodoxy and rigidity; and later, the unification of practice and theory in architecture directed toward a renaissance of the Practical Arts. The means by which he undertakes this course of action is through a methodological analysis of the historical context surrounding two schools of architectural thought far more similar than different: the late-19th Century Beaux Arts school of “classical” architecture as exemplified by that which was practiced in France, and the early Modernists as exemplified by Le Corbusier and those who followed and embellished his treatises set forth in settings such as the *Congres Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne* of 1928 (CIAM) and otherwise; both schools, he claims, share a fever pitch of rule-based algorithms much more akin to one another than to any semblance of true classical or revolutionary thought. Further, he suggests, the very nature of the similarities shared between both speak toward the bifurcated nature of the time in which they were born, separated as they were (as all disciplines were) from the rich inheritance of Greek thought that had to-date guided the best of architectural and cultural thought and practice. Adrift in a bounded, self-limiting reservoir of empty quibbles over “style”, such as they were, the very nature of their absolute, rule-based frameworks of thought cast them far and outside the reach of their own visions of and claims toward revolutionary and/or meaningful architectural discourse. In simple terms, that which was considered Classical, (and as such strongly allied and in service of the best and most timeless aspects of Greek

culture), and that which was considered Modern (and as such revolutionary and apart from Classicism), both, existed as rigid orthodoxies, lost sheep astray from their master- the thinking mind.

The narrative begins with Part 1 and the title, “What went wrong?” followed by this quote from the architect Alvar Alto: “The architectural revolution, like all revolutions, begins with enthusiasm and ends in some form of Dictatorship.” In so introducing the reader to the “historical context” of his thesis, Wilson belies no quavering lip toward the use of strong and unequivocal statement of opinion as fact. Though he writes with an authority that can come across as at once both convincing and objective, (indeed, “what went wrong??”), it is not difficult to find discomfort with his freely rendered rhetorical devices, chiefly the summary statement delineated by historical events and observations. When he says, for example, “The dominant (modernist) thinking was grounded in three impulses. Politically it deployed the tactics and terminology of the revolutionary... philosophically it was cast in the mold of Descartes... (and) architecturally it was to conform to the canonical “Five Points of Architecture,” we are left to take at face value the verity of this claim, while in point of fact it would be not impossible to find any number of other possible “grounding” factors in Corbusian thought: the impulse toward a pathological state of megalomania, for one; the urge to brand and market oneself as singularly unique and worthy of *investment* another. To use The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture in further thesis research would require a tight and conscious reading of other germane texts, checking one against the other.

Aside from this eccentricity of stylistic expression that Wilson demonstrates in his writings (and not always in its favor) depth of insight and scholarly erudition are evident throughout. As such, the text would be an invaluable asset toward current research- threads of

thought leading off into new directions of inquiry. I was interested, for example, to note Wilson's suggestion that there is a *core* departure point between contemporary thought (or modernist thought, as the case became) and Classical thought, and that this core departure point originates in the coming to be of a purely Cartesian vision of a "mechanistic explanation" of life which is at once "*deeply antipathetic to the Classical teleological account*" (my italics), and that which is based upon *the fulfillment of purpose rather than an elegance of performance*. I would like to understand the context of this claim more as it relates to my thesis research, with Corbusier on one side, and Haering and Alto on the other, originating as apparently they did early on in this debate with Corbusier as the orthodox modernist, and Haering (and later Alto) the less orthodox and dramatically soft-core modernists. Are these Wilson's summation and understanding of history, or are these views shared by many and merely summarized by Wilson to substantiate his point?

It is at this point in his writing, to wit, that Wilson begins to suggest the possibility of a strain of modernism that has stronger ties, in both thought and action to what he would consider more of a true Classicism than anything remotely modern or revolutionary. Classicism, or classical thought as it originates in Greek philosophy and culture, is necessarily a system of *process*- a process of *thought*- which when understood and articulated renders then and only then *action and form*, built form, architecture. Just the notion that there could be a "classical style" spoke of ignorance to Wilson, the two terms being anathema one to the other, *classical* being that of process, *style* that of product (or finish). A classical style is by definition a contradiction of terms.

To address the "misconceptions" about Classical theory, and the ignorance embodied therein, Wilson returns to address in short hand the philosophy itself.

Though he reminds us that very little remains of original Greek writings, much can be surmised from fragments assembled here and there, in particular those of the ancient Roman scholar Vitruvius. It is to him that Wilson returns repeatedly by way of summarizing the Greek belief that architecture is necessarily a “practical art” and as such must serve an end unto something *other than itself*. Classical theory demands first and foremost “a clear apprehension of the ultimate end, or *causa finalis*...” Architecture’s first cause, its *telos*, is to realize some desirable end that building alone can fulfill. This concept of Inbuilt Purpose (*telos*) is closely related to the idea of Necessity (*anagke*), the outer constraint imposed upon the fulfillment of all things. These and other observations about early Greek thought underpin Wilson’s claim that all that is considered “classical” in contemporary thought, that which leans more on the *appearance* of Greek symbols (the orders and otherwise) and less on a historically informed *rigor of thought* (that which necessarily generates something other than that which we might consider “classical”) is in fact not “Classical” at all in the true and most meaningful sense. To pass “Classical” off as a formal and stylistic assemblage of antiquated details, as did the Ecole des Beaux Arts did in the middle 19th Century, is a tyranny of thought and practice whose time has come to be overthrown. It is an integrated conception of architecture as a Practical Art that will revive again all things good and great in built form.

Collin St. John Wilson’s particular analysis of contemporary architecture, his review and exposition of classical Greek thought and form, and his suggestion of the potential for a unified field of thought in architecture that draws from the earliest and most true theories of “tradition” will all bear strong influence on this thesis inquiry. As research and programmatic development progress, I will return to these writings again.

Therme Vals: bridging the gap between tradition and modernity

A careful reading of Wilson St. John provides a natural segue into the work of Peter Zumthor, specifically his recently completed thermal bath house in Vals, Switzerland, the project for which he is perhaps most commonly and most widely known. Referred to as *Therme Vals*, or more affectionately by some as merely “Vals”, it seems to stand in direct contradiction to many if not most current trends in architecture. To say it “seems to stand” is by way of acknowledging that I have never actually visited the project in person, and as such am qualified merely to *suspect* and to *infer* or *hypothesize* about the very qualities and aspects that are most uniquely embodied in the project- those of the phenomenological, or haptic domain, those for which many if not most of contemporary architectural achievements are bereft. It is enough for the scope of this project to infer, however, with deeper inquiry left for future research. I would suggest confidently, though, that Zumthor, particularly in *Therme Vals*, exemplifies a successful effort at bridging the gap between classical and modern sensibilities, unifying these apparent diametric oppositions in the true “classical” sense about which St. John Wilson speaks.

As a precedent, *Therme Vals* is included in this thesis research for the simple reason that thus far it exists for me as one of the few, if not the only, contemporary Western European bath house that both aspires to and succeeds in transcending otherwise mundane aspects of bathing, and this without condescending to employing but a handful of what I would consider to be the less noble, superficial programmatic elements and finishes that constitute much of contemporary spa culture, spaces replete with symbolically ornamented cliché’s, surface veneers and finishes that speak toward preconceptions of space rather than depth of experience through authenticity of materials and spatial intentionality.



Image #8: sensual cliché's



Image #9: scenographic stereotypes

Overcoming small-town provincialism

As with many of Zumthor's projects, the proposal for, inception and process of designing and building Therme Vals was riddled with resistance and challenges from both investors and the community of Vals at large. One need only compare the context of Vals with the vision of Zumthor and the final finish of Therme Vals to understand the origin of and basis for this conflict.

Vals: small, provincial Swiss town with a context of centuries-old gables traditional vernacular wood frame dwellings

Zumthor and Therme Vals: minimalist stone, contemporary modern "otherness"



Image #10: town of Vals



Image #11: Vals context



Image #12: Therme Vals exterior massing

On the subject of context, two points are notable and of direct relevance in support of the viability of this thesis proposal- particularly as it relates to locating a bath house in Northampton, MA.

1. That Therme Vals met with great resistance through out the processes of design and construction, though succeeded in achieving its unique purpose and vision
2. That the specific context of Vals, Switzerland is that of a small town, and as such very likely subject, to some degree, to the same provincial attitudes and resistances to that which is *new and different* that I anticipate encountering in Northampton

Regarding item number 1 above, it could be suggested that the causes for resistance toward Therme Vals, such as they may have been at any given moment would later become the very bedrock platforms upon which proponents for the project stood to marshal yet further support and sponsorship, thus propelling the project forward to its eventual, successful completion; or rather, by virtue of being *different* from its context, the design and intention of Therme Vals inculcated over time a sense of personal ownership and identification by those involved, from investors, town folk to trades people. Simply put, the very strength of vision and clarity of purpose intrinsic to Therme Vals seems to have been that which eventually drove the project through the turbulent waters of small town politics and preconceptions.

Item number 2 above suggests that in an effort to assimilate a *program* as unique as a thermal bath into the provincial fabric of Northampton, MA, it will not be necessary (perhaps!) to hedge toward feeling the need to adhere, to pitch, toward the local vernacular in form and tectonics, as exemplified in this spa in Florence, MA:



Image #13: Residential bungalow converted to day spa

As a precedent within this thesis research, Therme Vals indicates that somewhere in the making of a project of this nature precisely the opposite holds true, that it would be well advised to pursue a form and tectonics *authentic to bathing*, and moreover *public bathing*; to find success not in local vernacular, but in the timeless language of elements: earth, air, fire and water; stone, steel, glass, air, light, shadow, heat, cold- and in so doing to trust in the ability of authentic materiality and intentionality to command a feeling of safety, ownership, and occupancy over time.

The importance of looking toward traditional forms of programmatic sequence

In Therme Vals, Zumthor employs a programmatic layout similar to Roman thermal baths where occupants are led through an organized sequence of arrival, de-robing, acclimation, exercise, hot and cold immersion, relaxation/repose, return, re-acclimation, re-robing and exit. Where Roman baths seemed to serve as social centers, though, Therme Vals provides an environment more conducive to personal retreat, reflection and rejuvenation.

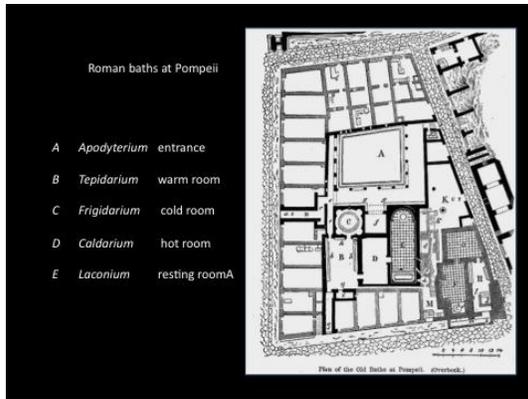


Image #14: Plan diagram of Roman baths at Pompeii

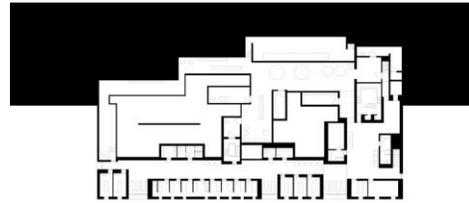


Image #15: Plan diagram Therme Vals, Switzerland

Similar also to Roman thermal baths which existed hewn entirely from stone, Therme Vals presents a skin of basic, primal elements: stone, glass, and steel.



Image #16: Therme Vals interior



Image #17: Therme Vals exterior pool

Surprisingly, Zumthor eschewed the use of wood and wood finishes almost entirely, perhaps in the service of most thoroughly conjuring a sense of *quarried* space, thermal pools caught in the spaces between natural stone clefts and crevasses. In particular, the stone veneer of horizontally laid, locally quarried *gneiss* imparts an unhurried sense of permanence, and an air of inevitability that such a program would exist in such place at such a time and for such a purpose ad infinitum.

It should not go without mention the risk of hedging toward the arcane or the mundane as we, as designers, head down paths that lead toward elemental simplicity. It is with a skillful,

knowledgeable hand that the such undertakings succeed or, alas, risk limiting interest and exposure to the “arcadian minority”. The architect Susannah Hagan in her book Taking Shape: A New Contract between Architecture and Nature, both defines and refers to this phrase frequently. From her first introductory remarks, Ms. Hagan, in this her seminal text, begins a careful analysis, dissection and reconstitution of the many bridges and barriers that divide and unite the domains of language and intention on one side, and practice and purpose on the other. Though she directs her inquiry, in overt terms, toward and around the subject of “environmental” and “sustainable” architecture, almost by definition her commentary finds itself within the larger theories and thoughts set at understanding the very nature of what it means to assess notions of purpose and beauty, worth and excess; in short, what it means to be human. “Do we, or can we as a people, share some semblance of universal understanding of or appeal toward that which is considered essential?” she seems to ask. She speaks here towards a *coming together of language* whereby as we approach and surpass increasingly critical thresholds of material consumption, nothing short of a shared vision toward that which is considered “truly essential” will suffice toward bolstering the legitimacy of anything whatsoever- architecture or otherwise- that lays claim toward environmental or sustainable frameworks of thought and action. Though Ms. Hagan’s writings echo thoughts that I have held of interest for many years, the formal constitution of them as such is directly germane to the spirit of this thesis. Essentiality. Economy. A coming together of shared experience and values.

The importance to this thesis of synthesizing architecture with building

In support of the design direction of this thesis “invention”, in the simplest of terms, it seems that in her book Hagan is making an appeal, much like Colin St. John Wilson, for stronger alliances within the broad and now fragmented fields of architecture and building.

Though while Colin St. John Wilson, in The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture, is arguably making a case for *unification* (of classical and modernist thought on the one hand, and theory and practice on the other), Hagan, in Taking Shape: A New Contract between Architecture and Nature, is making a case for *synthesis*- the imperative we face of needing to knit together two seemingly divergent paradigms, each with claim to the same or similar vision: chiefly, that of environmental sustainability. The two groupings of contemporary architectural production that Hagan juxtaposes are, on one side “the Arcadian minority”, as she refers to them- those who wish to, and in fact do practice, a return to a largely pre-industrial state of design and construction; and on the other, those who leverage environmentalism forward and into the future on the hygienic force of scientific innovation and our unprecedented ability to calculate and quantify performance based means and methods. The former draws off of historical context and precedent to direct efforts at establishing a symbiotic relationship between man and matter, this often in its most primordial form; the latter reaches toward that which is new and better- innovations born through technological advances, energy calculations powered by unprecedented computational capacities, and other metrics skillfully (if not blindly) employed as means toward defining the most “essential” and as such most “environmental” contemporary form and practice.

It would require little stretch of the imagination to find parallels between Hagan’s “arcadian minority” and “rationalist majority” on the one hand, and Wilson’s “classicists” and “modernists” on the other. Both bear heavily on the direction and content of this thesis. Hagan herself finds such comparisons apt when she states her own thesis as follows: “How this happened, when environmentalism is as much an engine of change as it is a protest against changes that have already occurred, is one of the central questions this book seeks

to address.” She carries her thought further by proposing “there is no reason why an interest in, and a respect for, the workings of nature should imply a conservatism of thought or architectural form.” Here is where she begins to find it necessary, and perhaps inevitable, to expand her field of discourse away from *environmental architecture* per se and toward the more distant, vast subject of *ideologies*, in this case the battle, as she refers to it, between *environmentalism* and *consumerism*- a necessary distinction she must make, it seems to me, to help better get at understanding why the subject of environmentalism seems to have such conflicting and shifting underpinnings. Here “presentation is everything”, she says- and she is referring to whether this vs. that wins over public perception; or rather, that which is perceived as regressive is at a disadvantage against that which is perceived as innovative, however *harmful* (her word, my italics) such an innovation may be. Each is in need of the other, she seems to be saying- a symbiotic check and balance.

A note about environmental architecture and bathhouse construction

Carrying further Hagan’s thought and writings, it is clear that it is “the rationalist majority” who, in her words, has come to “dominate the field” (of environmental architecture), refer here to the robust application of science and scientific research in the process of designing and constructing buildings- a force which has at its head such weighty and convincing matters as heat loss calculation, quantification of material thermal conductivity, photovoltaic technology, computer simulation of performance-based analysis, life cycle statistics, and so on. What sod roofed, cob dwelling could withstand the application of a blower-door test? Such is the state of contemporary “green architecture” and such is the challenge in moving forward with the programmatic development and design of a space- a public bathhouse- that could easily collapse under the weight of such technological industry. The design resolution of this thesis project will hew toward passive thermal

control systems, including substantial thermal massing, breathable wall cavities and whole-building stack effect.

In comparing Hagan with St. John Wilson, and in the service of achieving a better understanding of the theoretical context at the head of this thesis, it seems not insignificant to note the similar yet dramatically different terms used by each author to structure their notions of a coming together of divergent thoughts and practice. The reconciliation of the two is a paramount and driving influence in the final design resolution of both the programmatic layout and formal massing of this project.

On the one hand, Wilson repeatedly uses the term “unification” to refer to among other things the long overdue re-uniting of classical and modernist thought. On the other hand, Hagan in like kind returns time and again to the notion of a unification of a sort, yet more specifically, that of a unification as *synthesis*, a making of something entirely *new*. While Wilson’s connotation carries with it a sense of tectonic pairing, or the situating of one element adjacent to another, *side-by-side* and perhaps even co-mingled yet distinct (where marriage, it could be argued, and by way of example, is the *unification* of two people, a coming together as one but not actually one), Hagan evokes the joining of one into the other where distinctions are lost and a new paradigm is born- a paradigmatic mitosis, if you will. Carrying the comparison further, Wilson speaks about Classicists and Modernists more as feuding brothers than replicated facsimiles, while Hagan speaks about the “Arcadian minority” and the “rationalist majority” as lame and lopsided parts of a larger whole, each incomplete and ineffectual without the other; the yin and yang of Western European state of sustainable architectural nirvana. These distinctions between authors bears witness to fundamental differences in outlook, to use Hagan’s own demarcations: those who tend to be

intellectually disposed to unity, order, continuity, ontology and stability (Wilson, in this case); and those who are characterized as 'avant-garde' (Hagan, as the case may be in this example)- these representing the dissolution of one or more things into the reformation of "the new."

Such dialectics illustrate the broken paradigm from which current design, design theory and works of architecture are born. In many ways it is a troubled time in which we live, but a time equally well full with potential for reconciliation and renewal and re-birth. Like the rich and brackish water of a river delta, it is the intention that the design of this thesis will situate itself precisely at the meeting point of these divergent sensibilities, capitalizing on the brackish comingling of salt and fresh water as the place where multiplicities of life form co-exist in abundance.



YMCA

The discovery of an unexpected precedent

Hampshire Regional YMCA

Location: Northampton, MA

For the purposes of this precedent study, the vast history and complex international structure of the YMCA organization as a whole will be set aside. Indeed, as a worldwide organization of more than 45 million members from 125 national federations, such and

undertaking would be far beyond the scope or interest of this paper. With that being said, chapter YMCA's, at a local level, embody both many similarities and congruencies with, as well as many notable differences between public bath programs and user-groups throughout history.

The reason for pursuing a local YMCA as a precedent for this thesis project is that for all outward appearances aside, it seems to successfully embody many of the programmatic elements that are present in most public bathhouses that this thesis aims to understand and emulate. Additionally, while there are many precedents to draw from that are more closely and literally in proximity to the direction of this thesis inquiry, none exist within the local fabric specifically of Northampton, Massachusetts. Moving forward into programmatic development of this thesis, and later into design and detailing, it is suspected that the Hampshire Valley YMCA will be a useful point of reference to help better understand local needs, inclinations, and eccentricities.

In spite of its insubstantial presence as an architectural landmark and its peripheral location to any central civic activity, the Hampshire Regional YMCA remains a vital social nexus for the local residents, a place of exercise and rejuvenation, and point of return and reference for a wide cross-section of families and individuals across the Hampshire Valley. It is a place where individuals and families convene, entertain, do business and otherwise while away hours of time sweating, laughing, negotiating, or silent and lost in the isolation of chamber ear buds, dumbbells, and exercise machines.

Of particular interest to this thesis is that "The Y", as it is affectionately called, provides a deep and primal sense of *belonging* to those who join its ranks. It is a place of membership

where participants are accepted and welcomed, return, and return again. Predictability. This particular type of belonging present in *the Y* is something that I believe to be an integral part of the long legacy of public bathhouses- they were, and are, *social clubs*, of sort- and it is this very quality that I hope to emulate in a Northampton Public Bath. As with most successful public, social ventures of this sort, (restaurants, clubs, bars, coffee shops), though, the reasons for such positive primal satisfaction are both complex and perhaps ultimately unknowable in a quantifiable and qualifiable sense; like a the sense of *kinship* with another person, we know it when we see it, and sense it when we feel it.

No small part of the reason for investigating the local YMCA as a precedent for this thesis research is to “triangulate”, in a manner of speaking, around this very subject: *the ineffable quality that makes something of this sort work*. Kinship. Belonging. Ownership. And this in a particularly unique, New England context for which no precedent exists. Certainly by most outward appearances, there would be little other reason to include the Y in such an investigation as this, existing as it appears to as an uninspired exercise facility that succeeds on the merit of its base functions and strong branding alone. It does *work*, though, which is no small achievement. People go. They commune. They exercise. They grow and are refreshed. It is safe and enduring, and clean. And people young and old coming day after day, year after year, growing, learning, detoxifying and refreshing in spite of the context and make-up of the facility itself or the spiritual and metaphysical handicaps inherent to such a utilitarian environment. It takes little effort to see and suggest other significant aspects of its inner structure and ethos that are ultimately key to its success as an enduring, safe, desirable destination for exercise, ablution, and community engagement; this in precise and meaningful kinship with the long lineage of public bath houses about which this paper sets itself to understand.

The mission statement of the YMCA states that its purpose is to “build health spirit, mind, and body for all.” It would be difficult to provide a more accurate description of the unspoken purpose of most public bathhouses through out history, with one exception: the use of the word “build” to describe *process*. Herein lies I believe the most significant and notable difference between the YMCA as a precedent compared with other bath house typologies, a point that I will return to many times over in different contexts of this study.



Image #18: “building” through Yoga



Image #19: “building” with free-weights

“Building” better minds and bodies?

To “build” is a linear, active, rational, and goal oriented undertaking, whereas to “bathe”, to cleanse oneself, to commune with others of like mind and spirit, is another thing entirely. The spirit of non-linearity and openness of experience is something I believe will be most difficult to achieve in the 21st Century cultural landscape of the United States.

By way of comparison, it could be argued that this very act of “building” as an active undertaking is at once counter posed to and largely anathema to the spirit and intensions of The 10th Street Baths, for example, and Therme Vals, and by extension most if not all of baths of antiquity and the recent past. For though a conscious act, and as such an *active* act, bathing has historically existed as a passive undertaking, a mode of relaxation and reflection

whereby even in the Roman Therme, which contained “exercise” rooms as part of the organized sequence of bathing and ablution, such *activity* was contained not to burning calories and losing weight but to arousing the senses and invigorating the body/mind connection. The act of *building* within the YMCA’s mission statement belies a certain deeply entrenched American utilitarianism that is in contradiction to the aims and hopes of this project.

Looking more directly at function and program, it can be quickly determined that most YMCA’s, including the Hampshire Valley YMCA, are composed with a similar spirit of utilitarianism. Occupants enter into a central hub, a main desk, disrobe in one of several strictly gender/family oriented “locker rooms”, then disband unceremoniously into the catacombs of the facility to lift weights, exercise aerobically, shoot hoops, and otherwise engage in an equally arrayed palette of sports and activities directed at physical exercise. Little sense of spiritual rejuvenation or relaxation exists, little *space between*, with the exception of the more recent introduction of Yoga and a handful of other more contemplative activities.

With this being said, though, there exist within the YMCA most if not all of the programmatic parts that comprise the most storied Public Roman Baths in history, as follows:

Entrance	<i>apodyterium</i>
Changing rooms	<i>tepidarium</i>
Pool	<i>frigidarium</i>
Sauna/steam room	<i>caldarium</i>
Lounge	<i>laconium</i>

(italics represent the equivalent programming in a typical Roman Bath)

The YMCA can in fact be looked at *quite directly* for programmatic guidance in the making of a Western Massachusetts public bathhouse, this only with a mindfulness toward the need to reconstitute and transpose, not the *what*, but the *why* and the *how* and the *when*; which is to say, the Hampshire Regional YMCA appears to have all the parts and the pieces, just not in the right order and scale and spatial and material assembly.

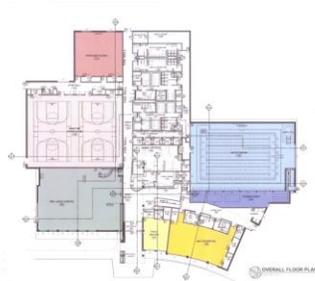


Image #20: typical YMCA floor plan A

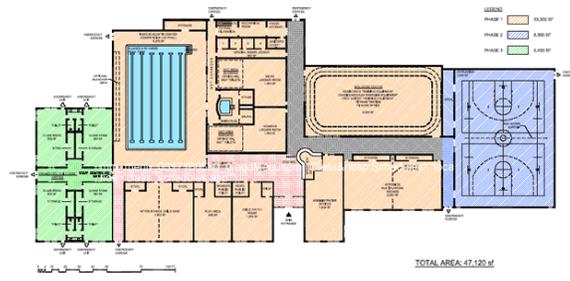


Image #21: typical YMCA floor plan B

In the most practical terms, it could be said that what works best about the YMCA is indeed its *program*. What keeps it from transcending itself and being able to achieve the more elevated state of a traditional thermal *bathhouse* has everything to do with the facility itself: scale, organization, form and space, materiality and location collide, disjoin and leave shallow an untapped potential.

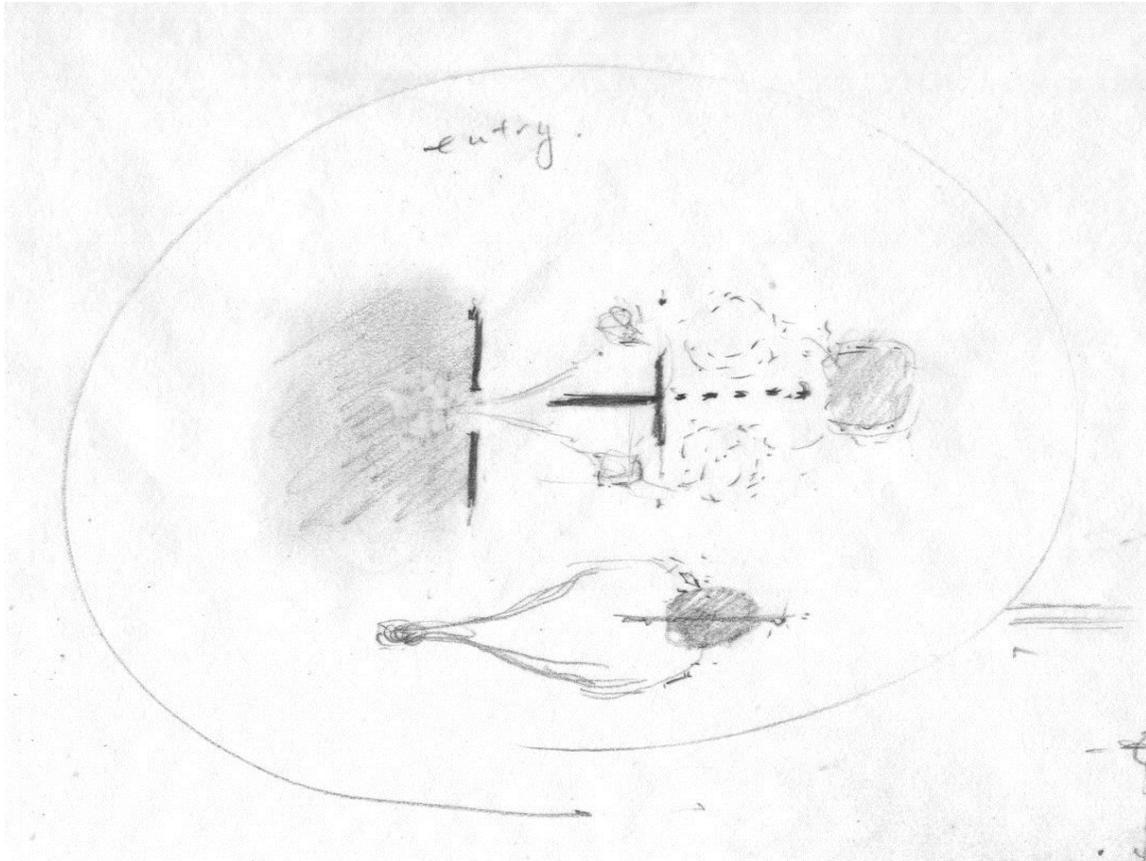
CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

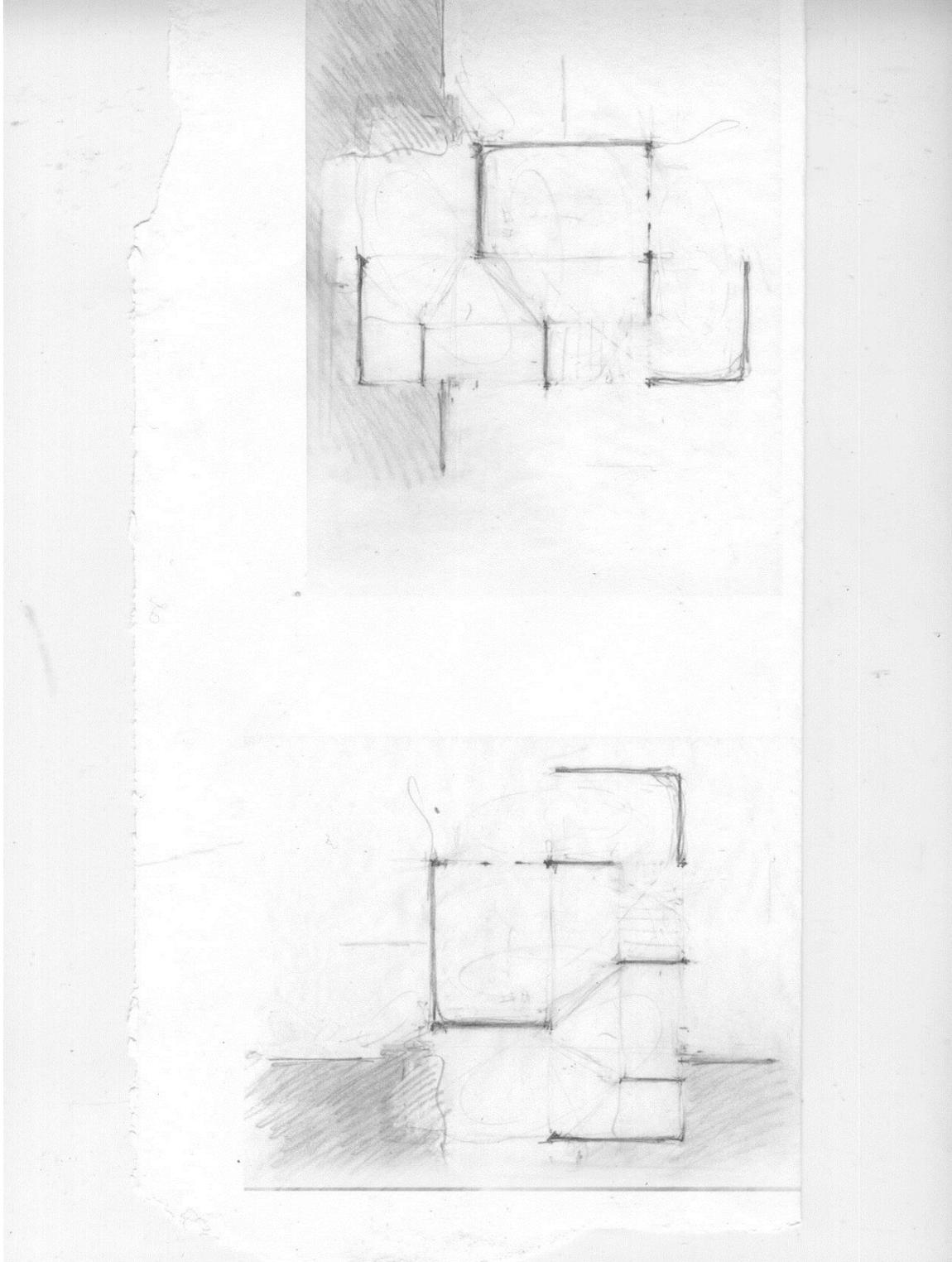
This moment precisely is where early inclinations gave rise to new form, the place where well-worn and inherited ideas met both new opportunities and new limitations. Precedent analyses, sketches that explore physical scale and proximity, joinery or materials and inhabitation informed early massing models which in turn evolved toward what eventually became not an exercise in bringing *a traditional building typology forward in time* and placing it in 21st Century American landscape, but an exercise in inventing an *all-together new typology*.

APPENDIX A

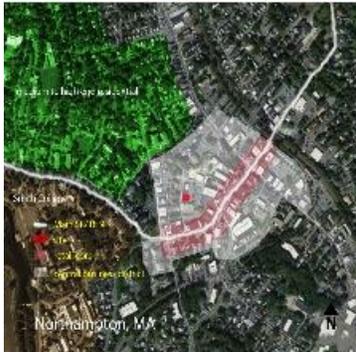
SKETCHES, DRAWINGS AND MODELS



Nascent abstract ideas about baffling and thresholds, inspired by precedent study and notions about the need to provide multiple layers of transition from public to private.

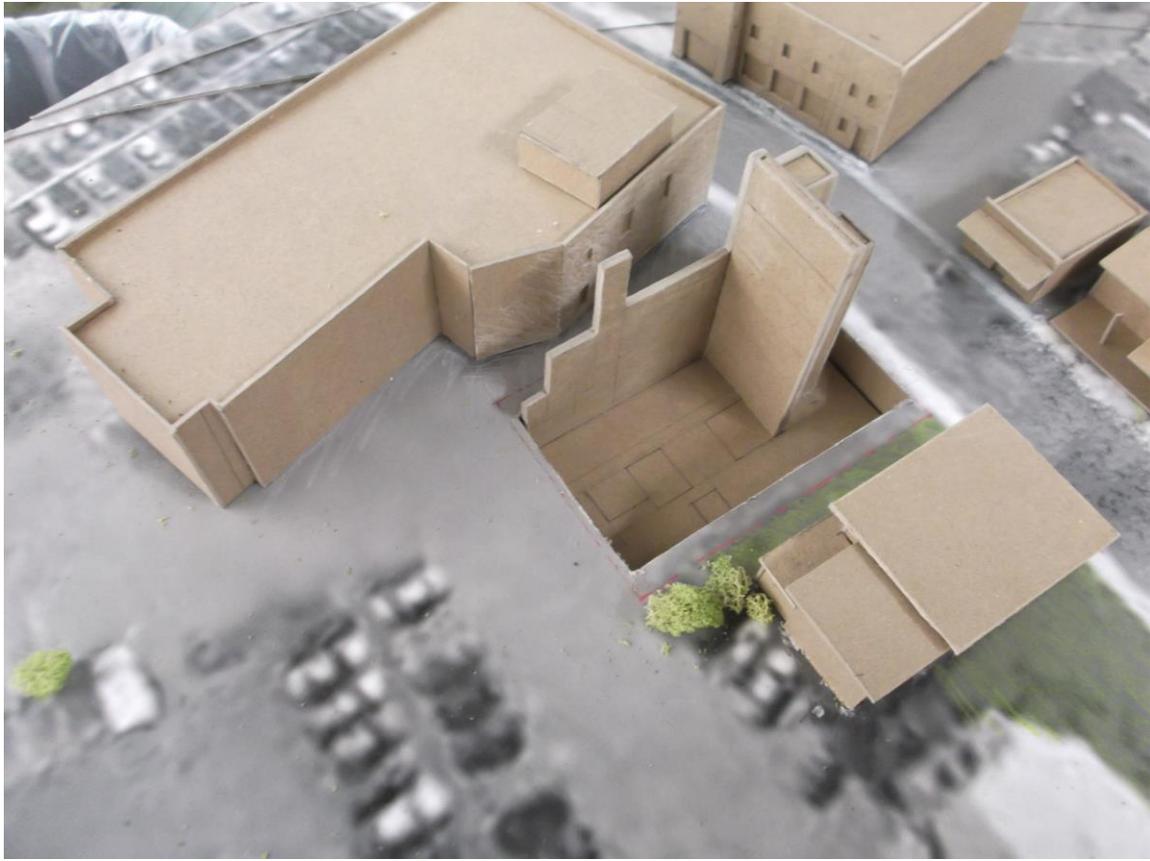


More developed sketches explore baffling and threshold, but with relationship to conveyance and ground plane.

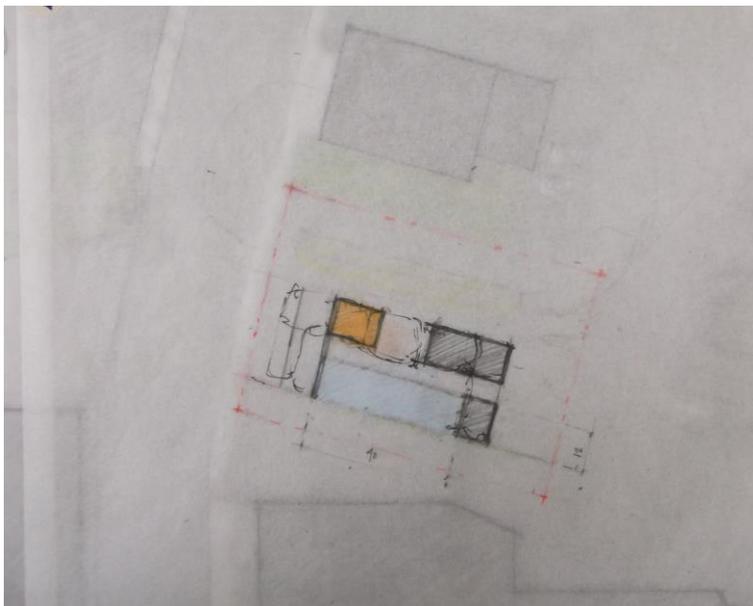


a study for a public thermal bath in small town america
the introduction of a timeless, civic monument to northampton, ma

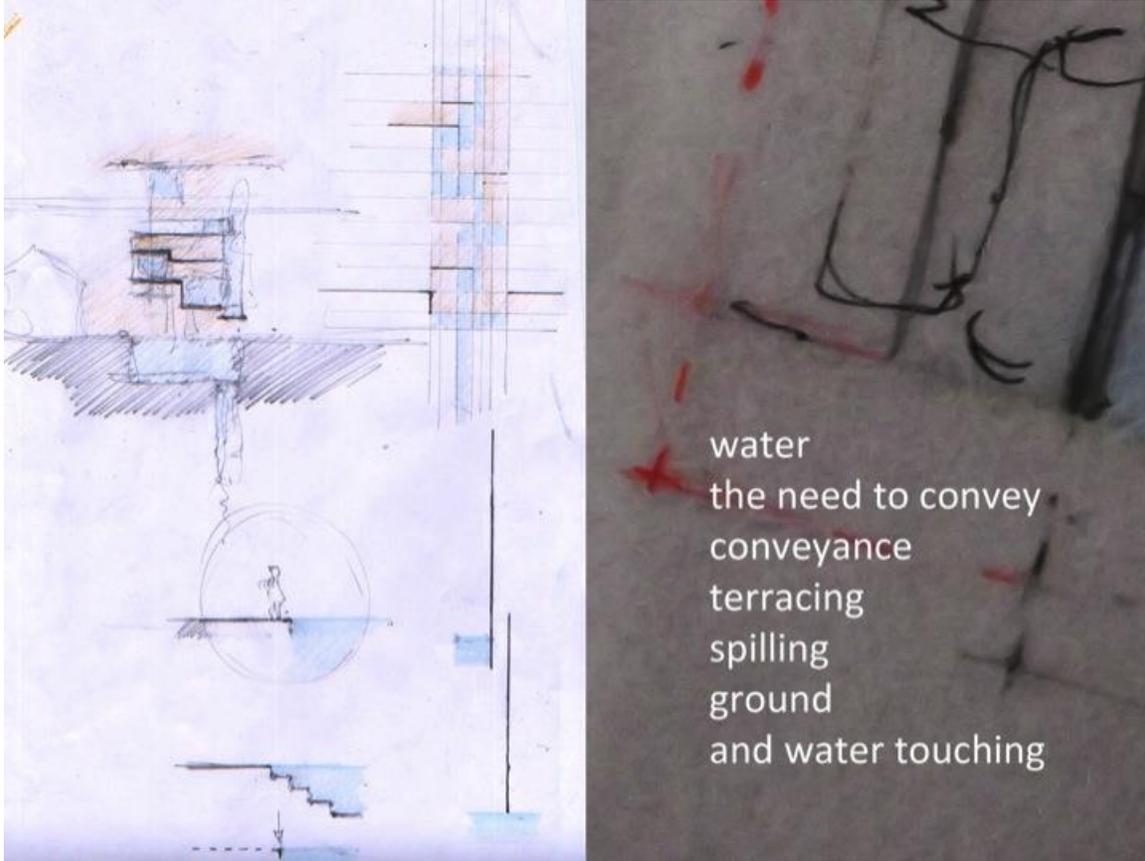
A local site is chosen for its central location and optimal proximity to diverse neighborhoods, commercial density and primary traffic routes.



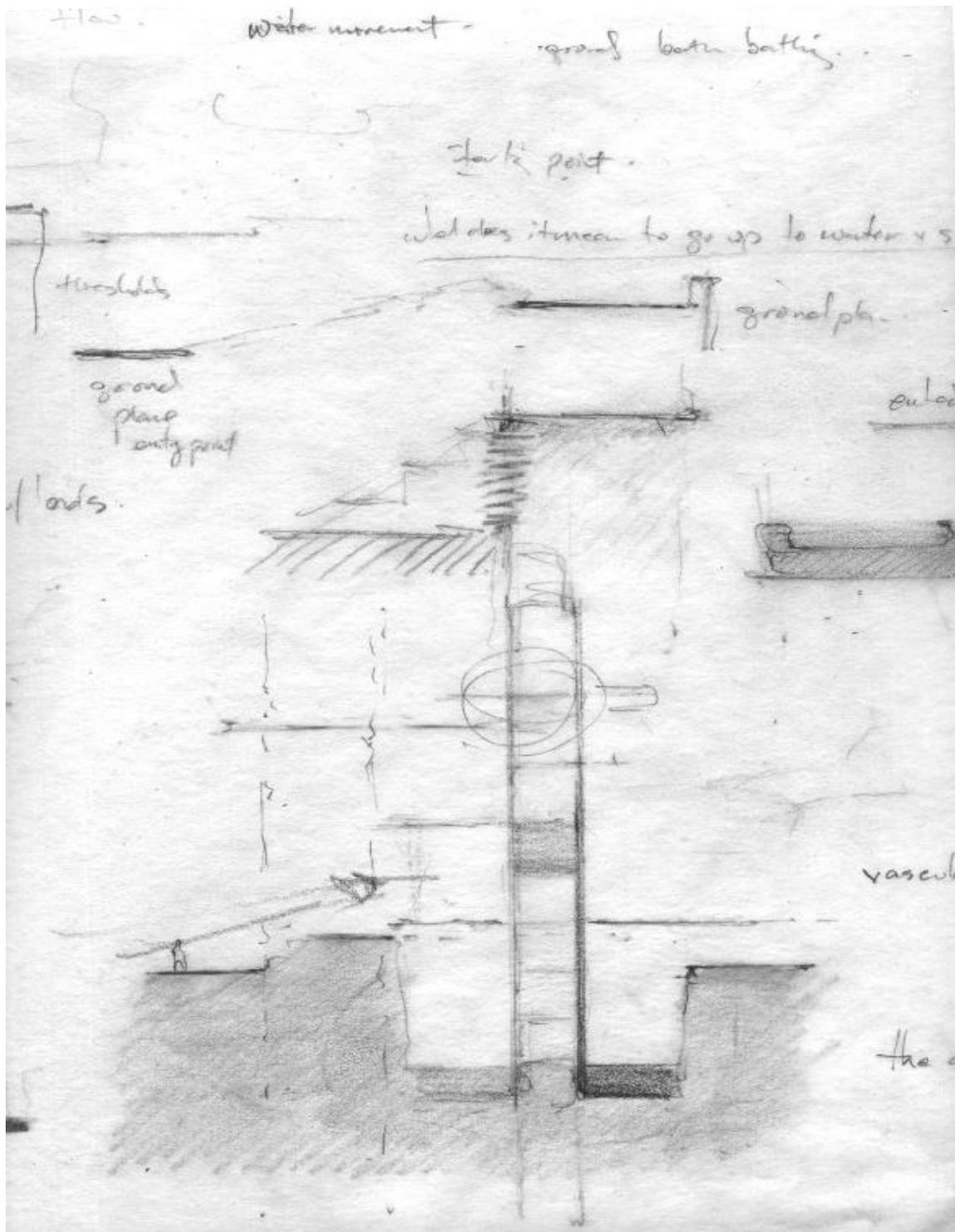
Ideas informed by historic precedent come to terms with the limitations of the site and the need to dig down as a first move toward accommodating a complex program that seemed, at first, too large for the chosen site.



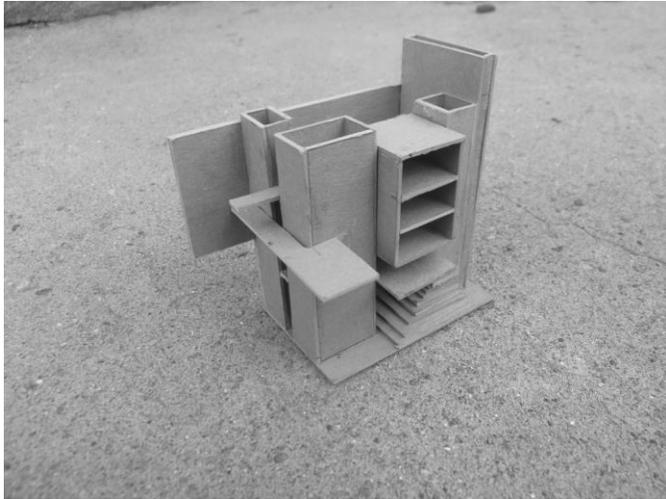
site diagram



Design investigations into scale and proximity to water emerge, continuing to grapple with the challenge that the site is too small, and as a result design will be heavily influenced by needing to consider first and foremost the vertical conveyance of both utilities and people.



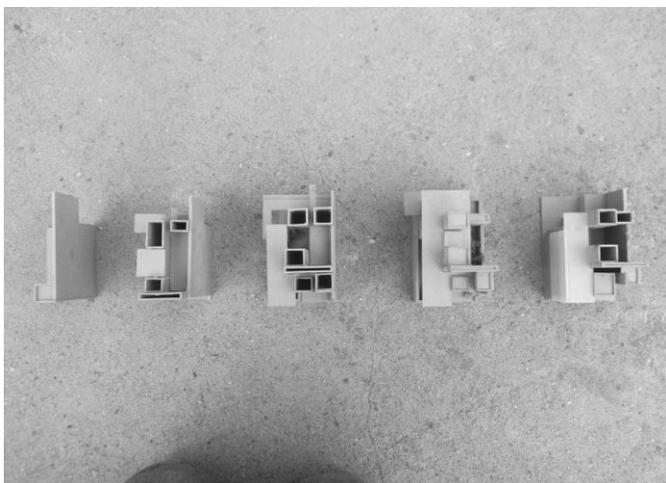
Iterated ideas about vascular flow and the conveyance of hot and cold water give birth to the concept of “thermal stacking” that will provide primary organization for the final scheme.



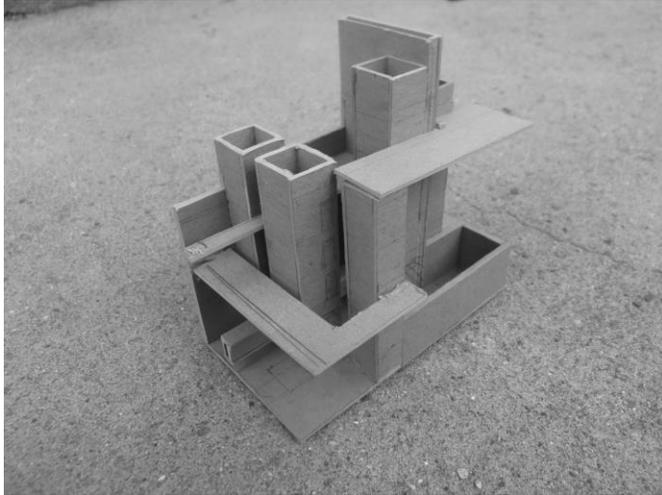
massing study 1



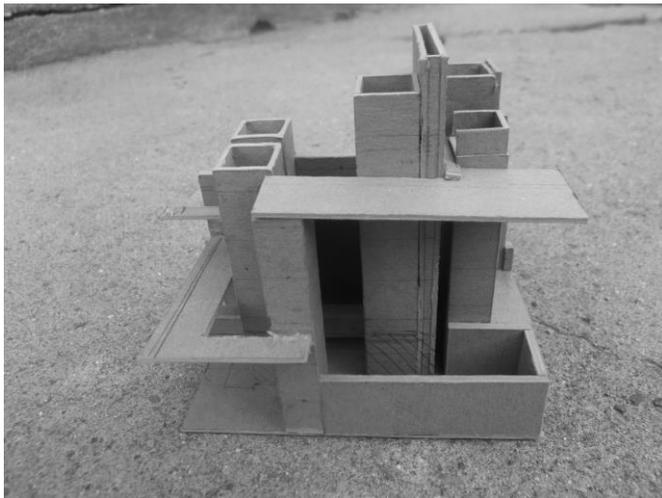
massing study 1



iterations generate new form



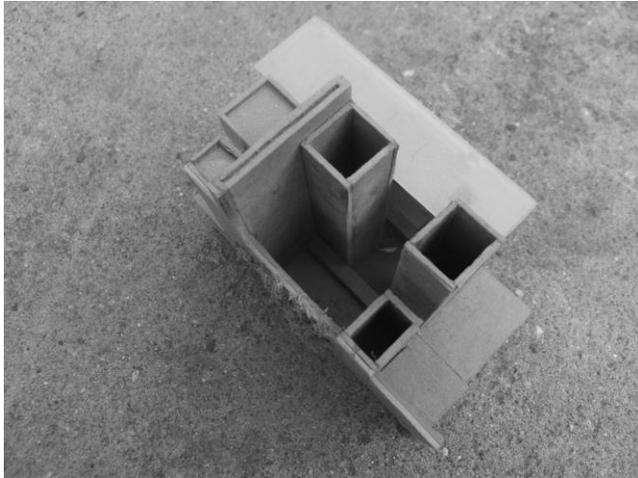
massing study 2



massing study 2



massing develops interiority



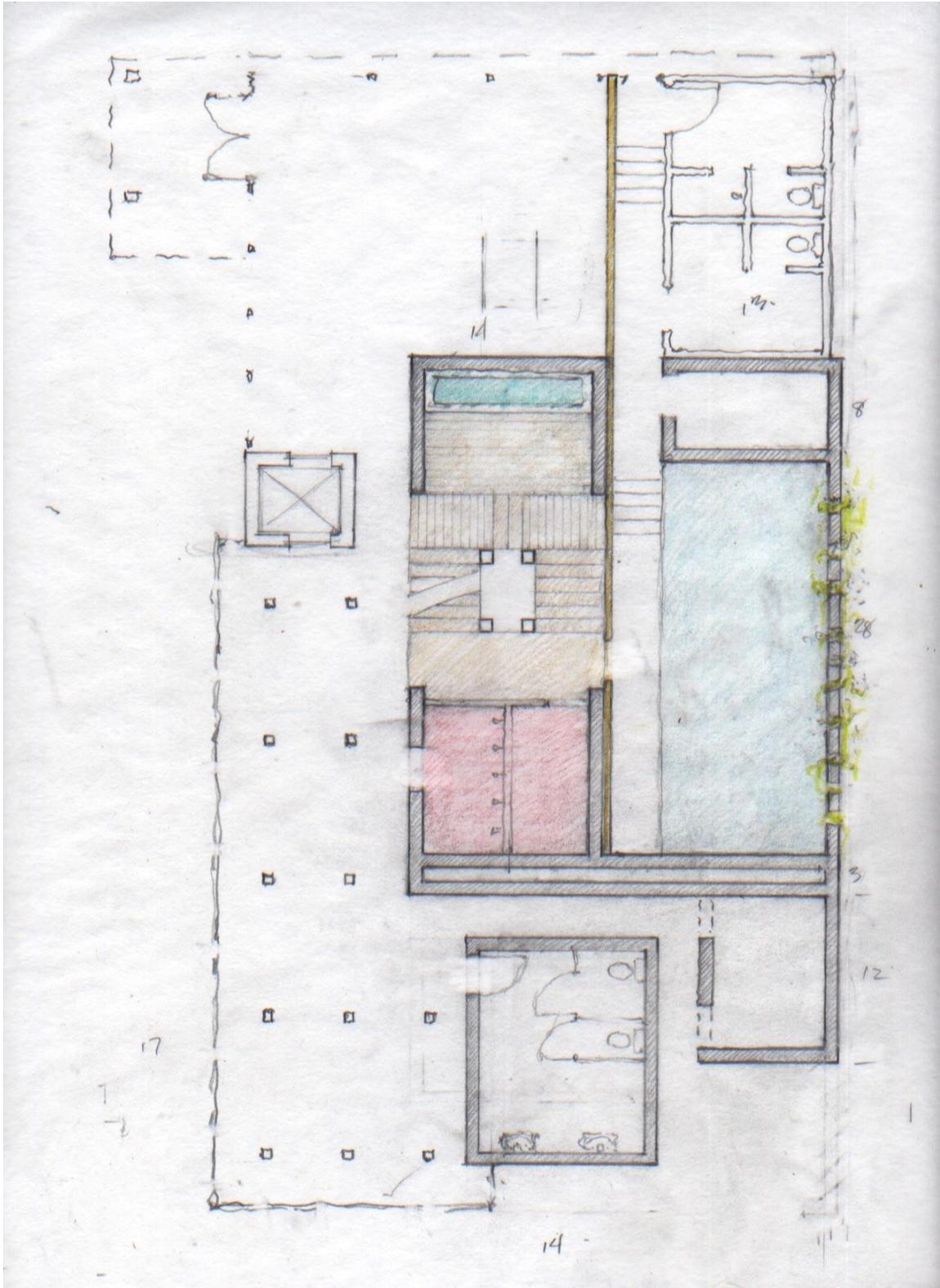
massing study 3



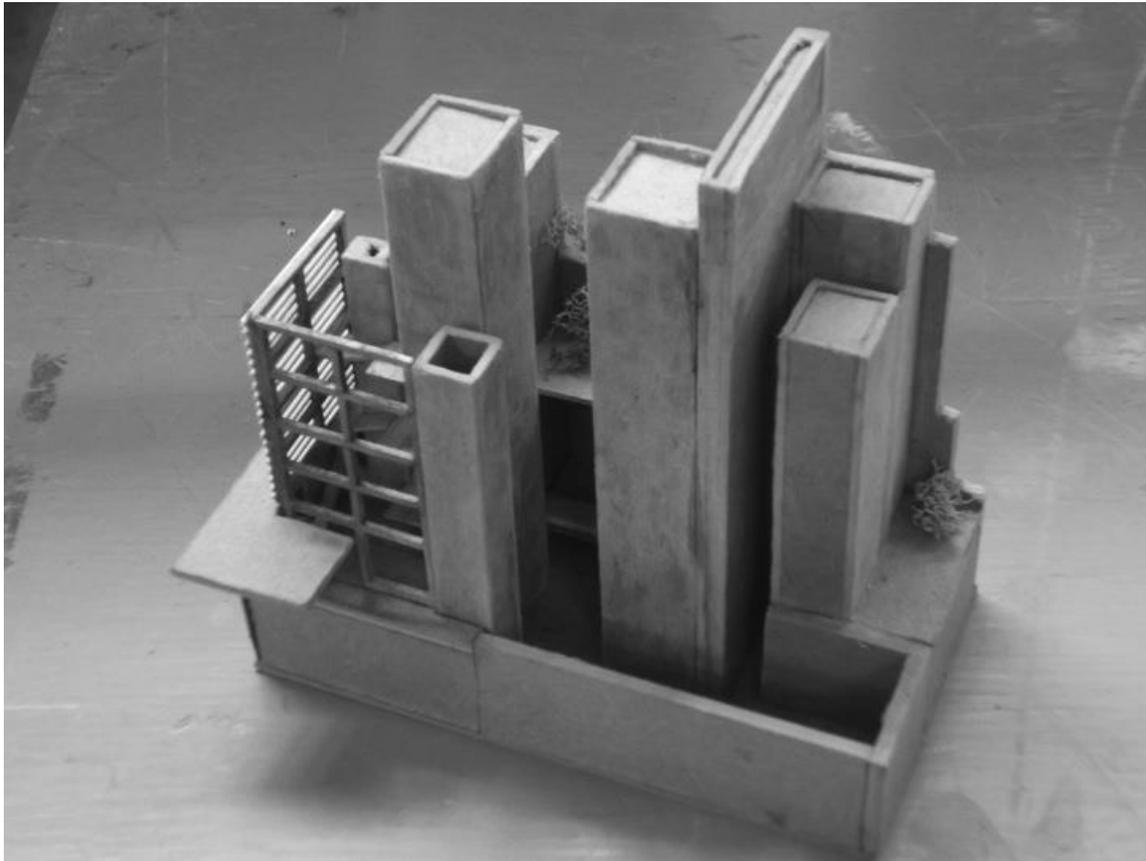
developing the interior



the inner sanctuary evolves

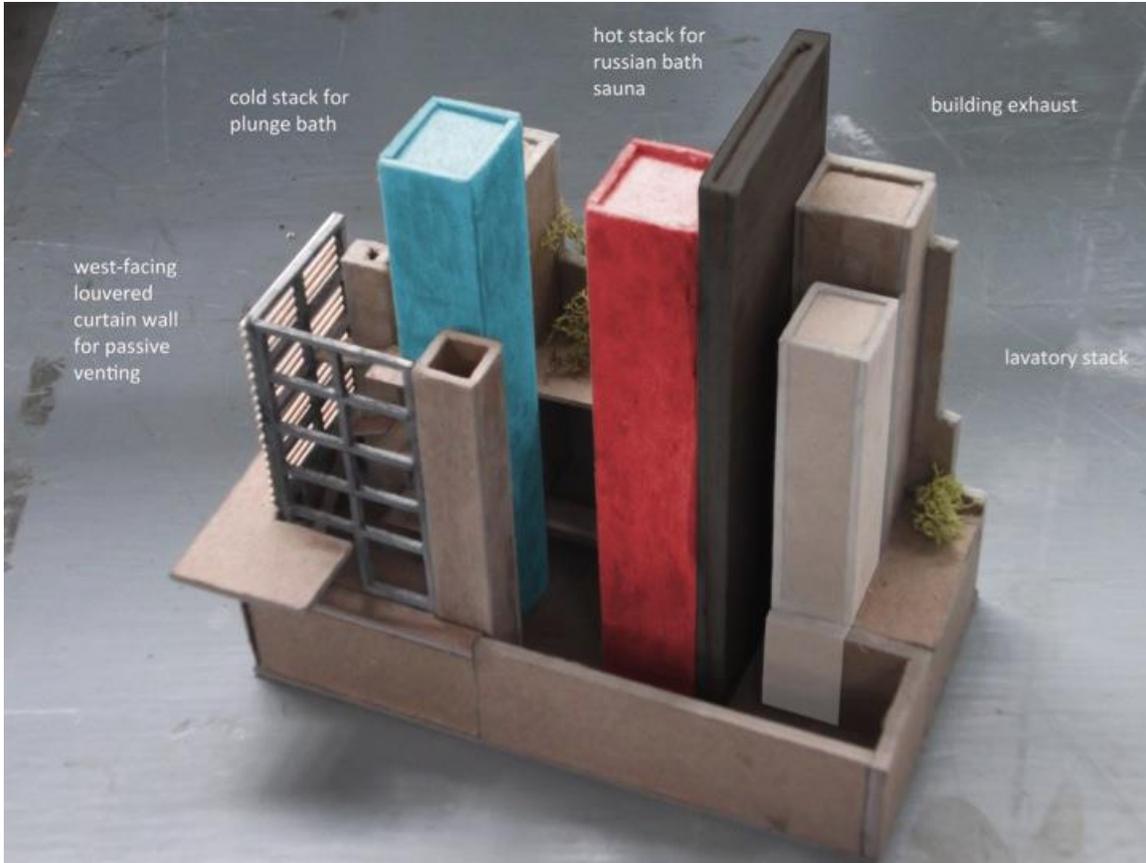


Massing studies become plan *vis a vis* program making peace with the limitations of the site.

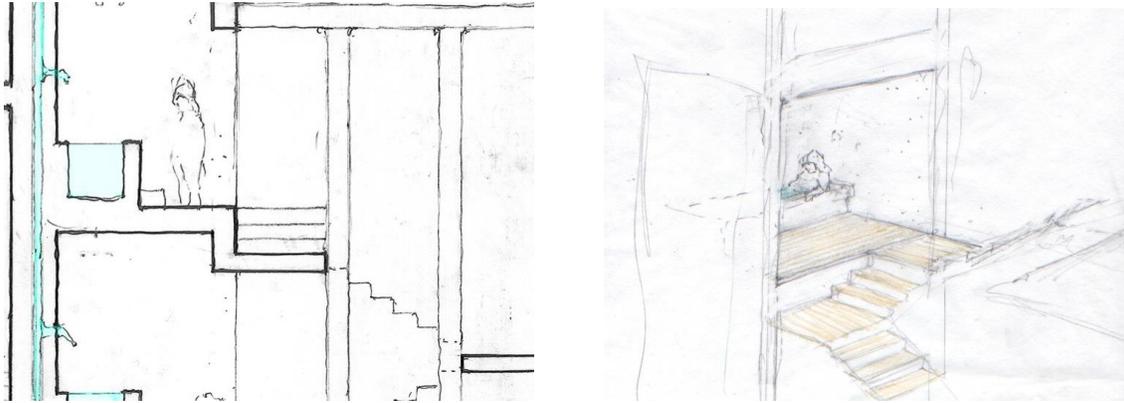


Massing studies, plans, program and the idea of vertical conveyance come together as “thermal stacks”— plank formed poured concrete thermal masses, each of which provides reference and place for a specific aspect of the bathing ritual.

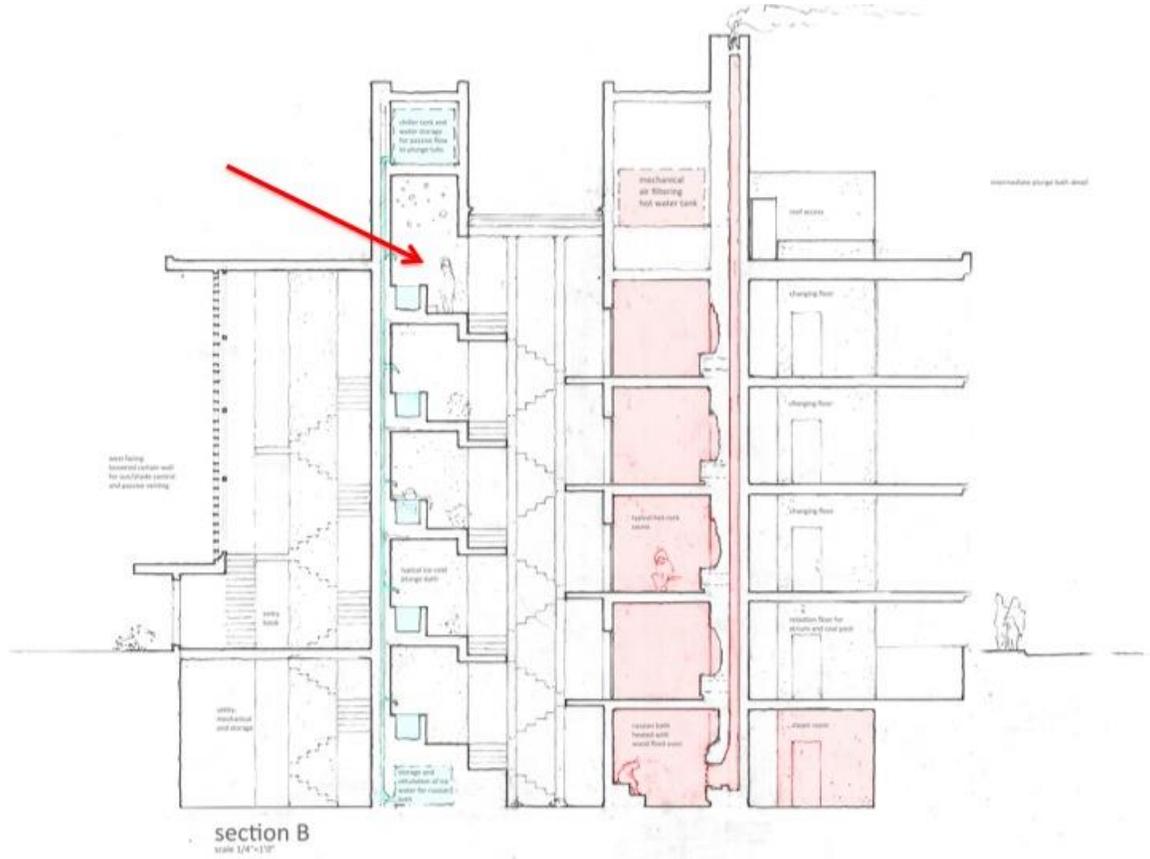
This vertical form is now a complete departure from the many and historically abundant precedents where thermal bathhouses as exist and function on one primary floor, organized horizontally through a sequence of thresholds, transitional sequences and labyrinthine chambers.



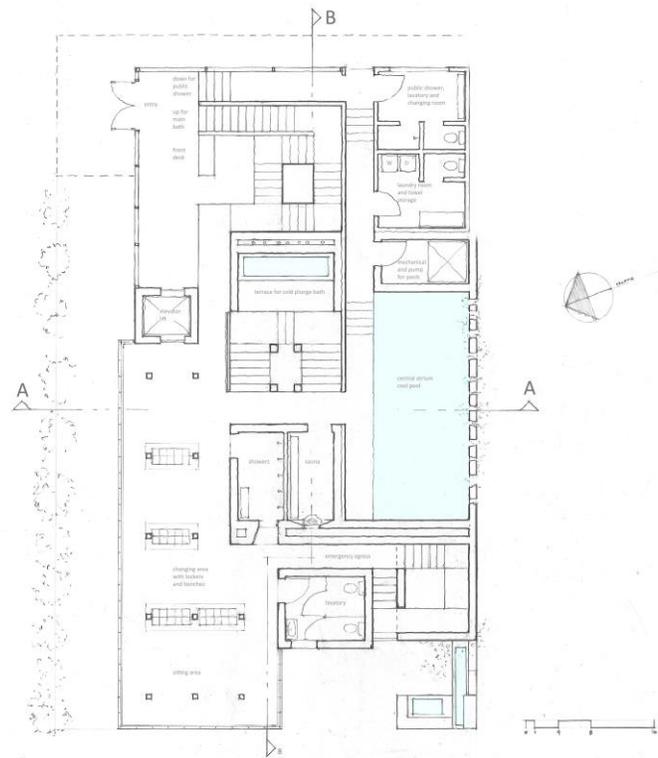
Programming for the “thermal stacks” illustrated for clarity.



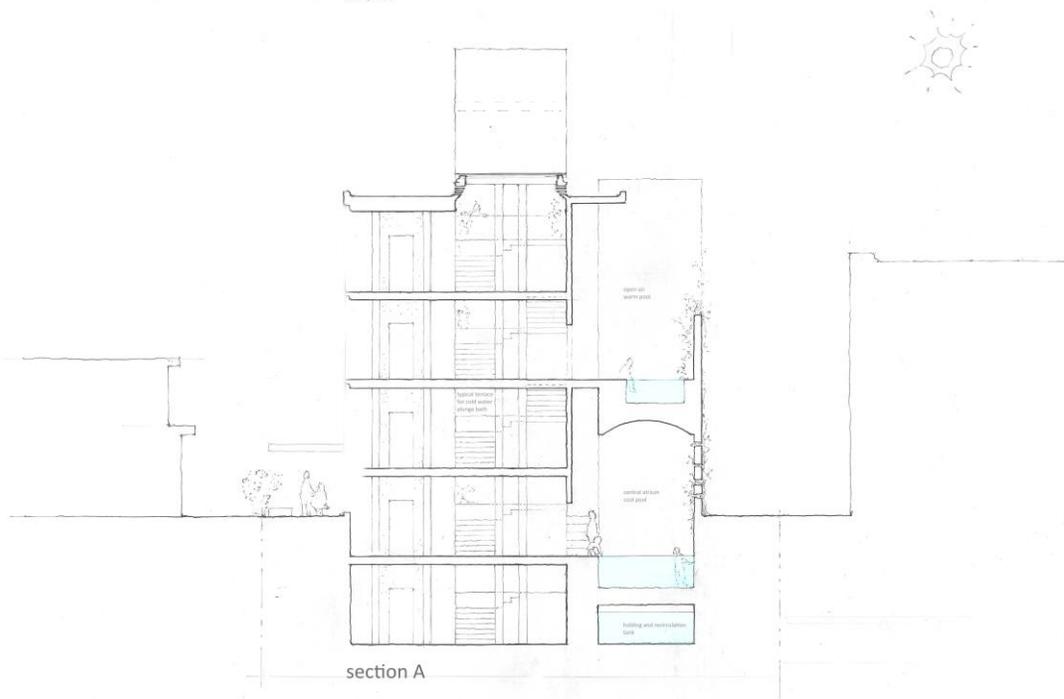
Interiority, several thresholds deep: a moment deep inside the sanctuary



Longitudinal building section showing vertical, stepped relationship between hot stacks chambers and cold stack chambers.



main floor plan at entry and atrium pool
scale 1/4"=1'-0"

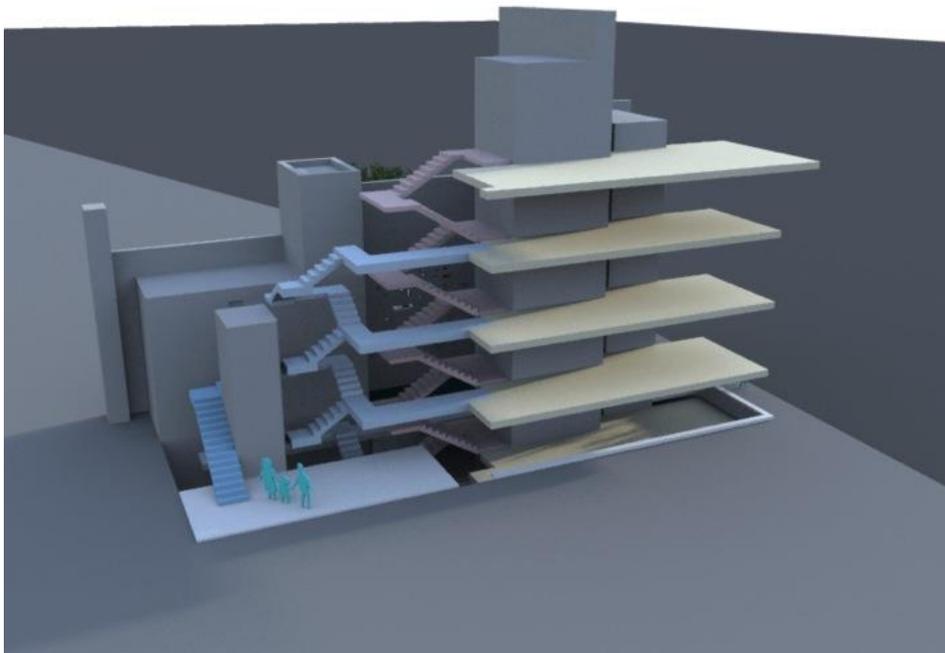


section A

Primary floor plan and building section illustrates sequence of progression from entrance to changing rooms to inner chambers.



Plan view of a model developed to study circulation systems as they relate to vertical conveyance, thresholds between private and public, and interiority.



Axonometric view of a model illustrating relationship between the primary entrance (blue), the semi-private changing room platforms (yellow) and the inner circulation core (pink).

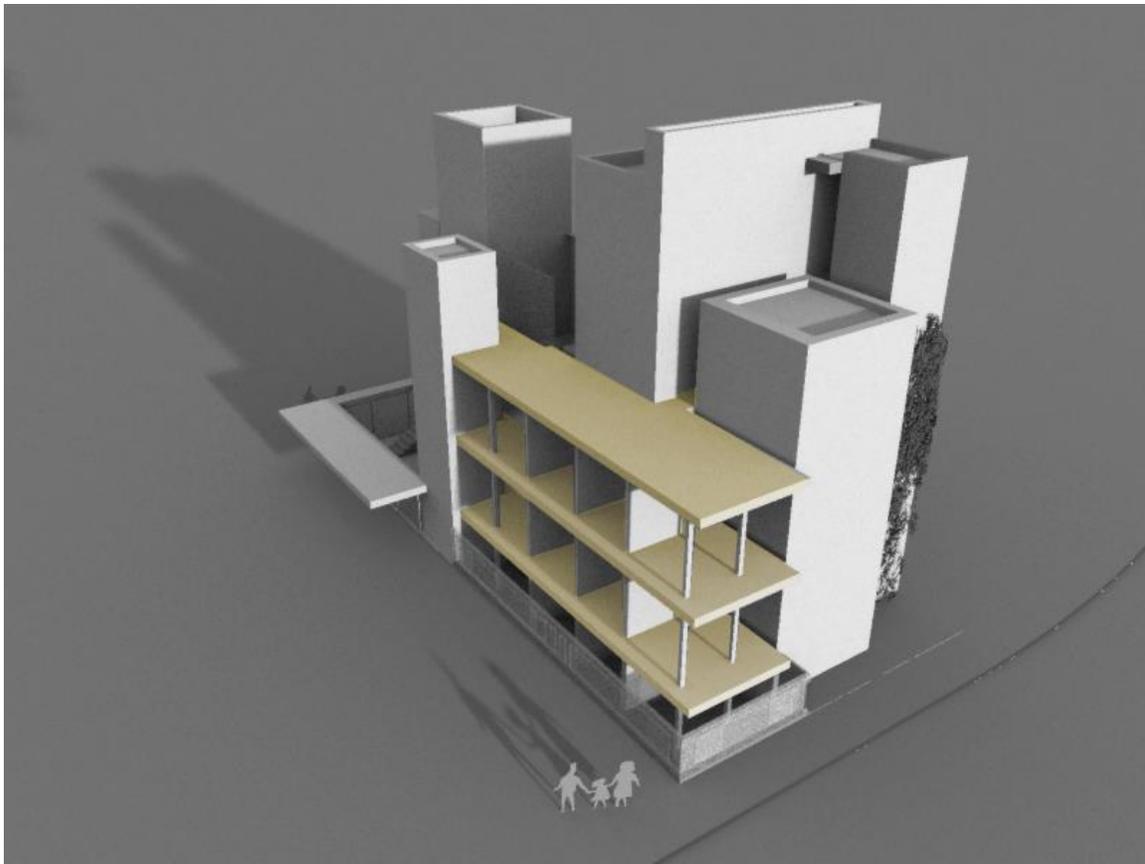
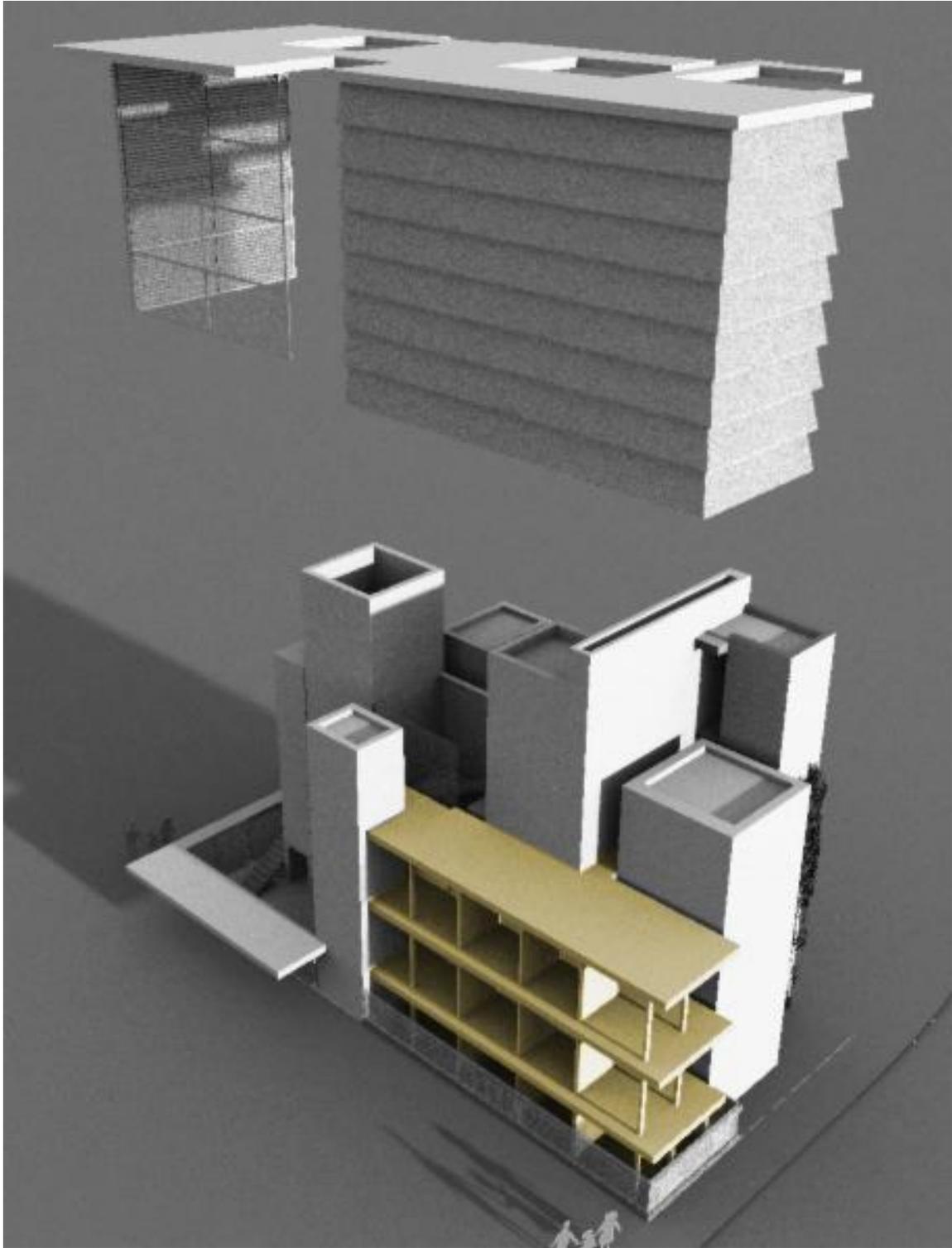


Diagram showing Cross Laminated Timber (CLT) infill for changing room platforms as they relate to plank-formed concrete vertical “stacks”.



Stacks, CLT infill, with beveled cast glass and louvered skin.

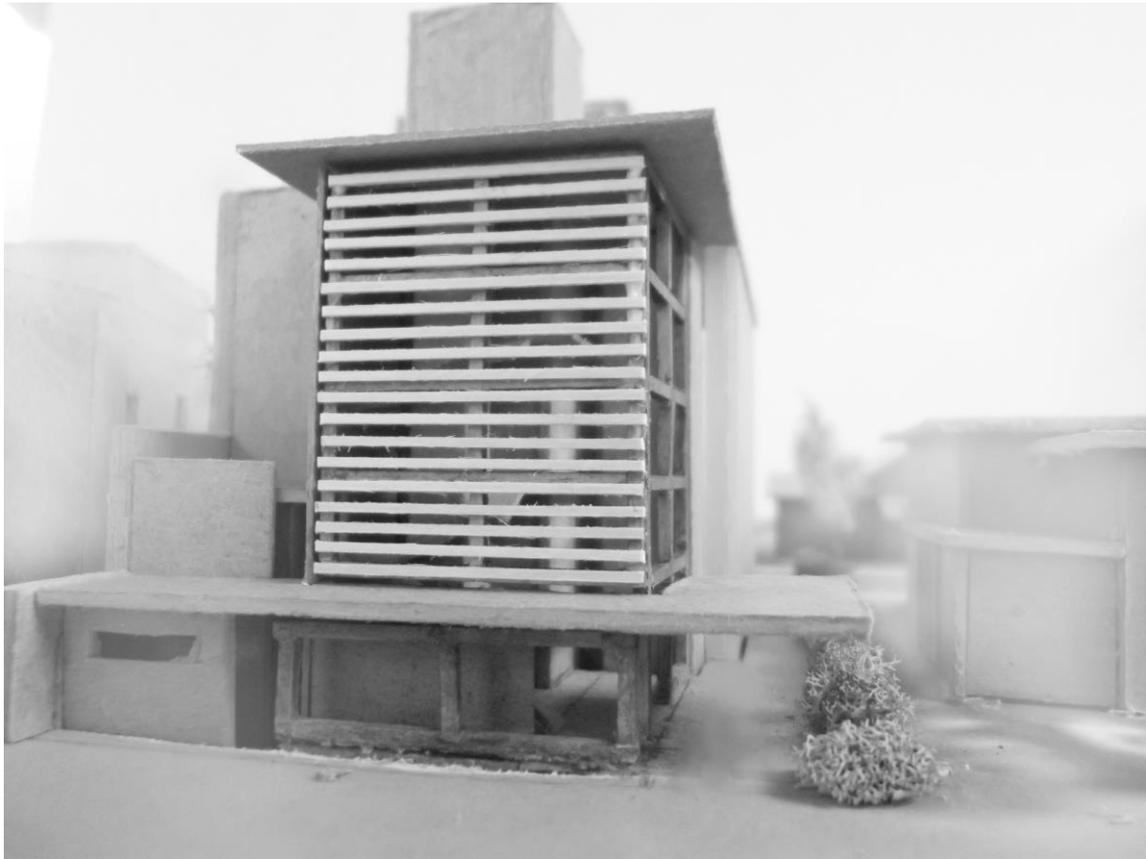


60 Masonic Street, Northampton MA

Smoke coming out of the Exhaust Stack is from the wood-fired wet sauna in the basement.

From the need to accommodate a site that is too small for conventional programmatic layouts, a new building typology takes form.

A precedent is set which affirms that conceptual strategies can be developed for adapting to a typical urban site which, while at first glance may seem too small, is yet in all other ways ideal.



Louvered west facing façade at primary entrance atrium.

The public enters under a cantilevered awning, exchanges their shoes for sandals, receives a towel, and proceeds to their respective changing floor to ready themselves for the inner sanctuary.

APPENDIX B

IMAGE AND THOUGHT ARCHIVE

Personal interests driving this Thesis

- * the phenomenological aspects of architecture
 - the haptic domain and other senses
 - what makes something special and unique?
 - what imparts that sense of “otherness” ?
- * simplicity and economy in form
- * cultural and physical sustainability, particularly as it relates to durability and longevity
 - what causes one artifact to be carried forward in time and others to be cast away?
 - where, or from what, is a sense of ownership over time sustained?



typical Onsen details
“onsen”
Japan



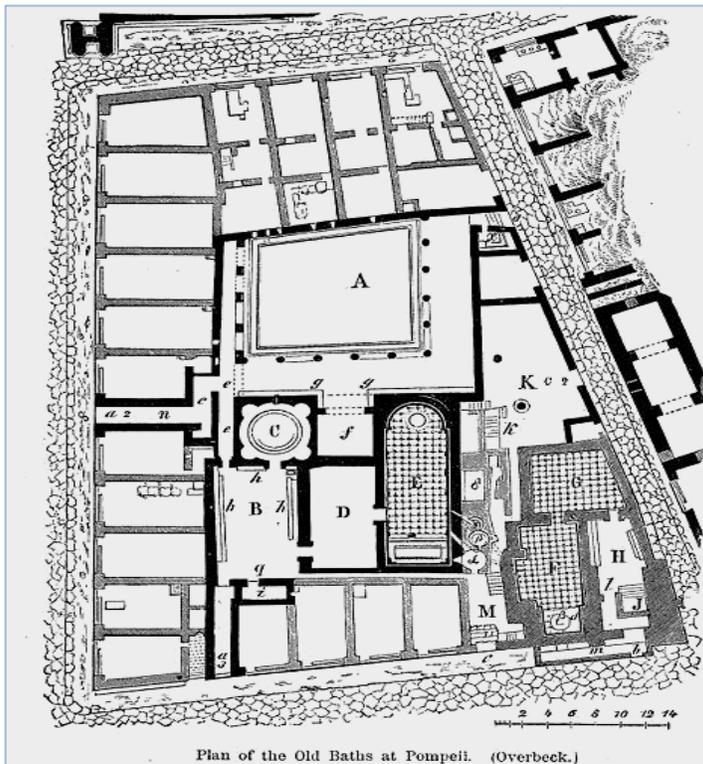
precedent: "sento"
Japan



precedent: "hammam"
turkey



precedent: therme vals/p. zumthor
contemporary interpretation of traditional therme



precedent: roman baths at Pompeii
to study program, sequence, threshold of traditional therme



precedent: 10th street baths
NYC

General success, longevity, livelihood, identity, diversity of user group



10th Street Baths
NYC

social milieu, demographics, user groups, contemporary attitudes

Practitioners to emulate, in manner and attitude, whose work endures over time

Those practicing attributes appropriate to bathhouses, and to all good architecture:

S. Fehn

C. Scarpa

R.M. Schindler

A. Siza

G. Walker

materiality, scale, substance in matter, positive detailing, tectonic language that exists in the domain of permanence and temporality (ref. FL Wright/Taliesen West/Anasazi ruins)



c. scarpa



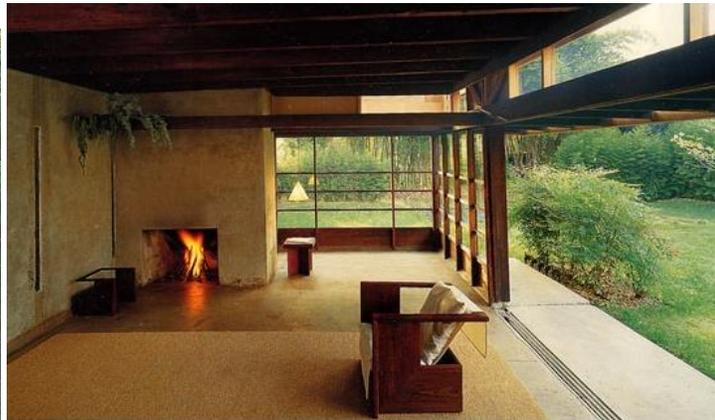
s. fehn



c. scarpa



r.m. schindler





a. siza program/ materiality



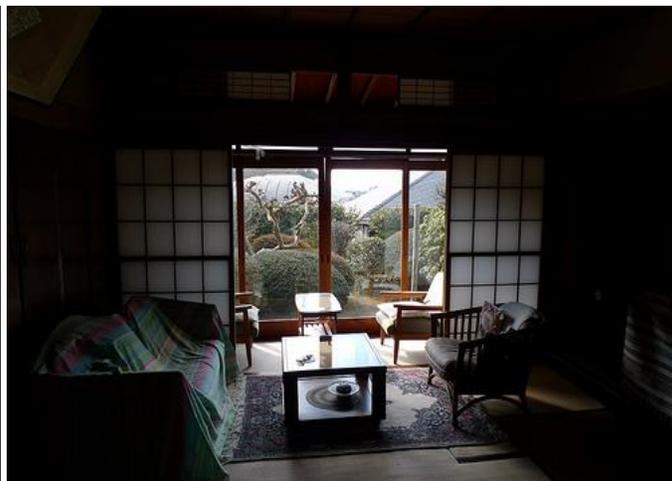
g. walker



g. walker



the subject of shadows and the importance thereof



a sensibility which informs durability over time



the timeless ritual

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Andrew Juniper, *Wabi Sabi: The Japanese Art of Impermanence*