

CHARACTER

LANDSCAPES



W. REED PUTNAM



William “Reed” Putnam

914-246-7238 • rputnam@upenn.edu

Reed is a landscape architecture student at Penn interested in unearthing hidden histories to build new futures. In his free time, he is a music writer, runner, stand-up comedian, and occasional DJ.

You can find him at reedputnam.com or at his blog, reedputnam.substack.com.

PROJECT WORK

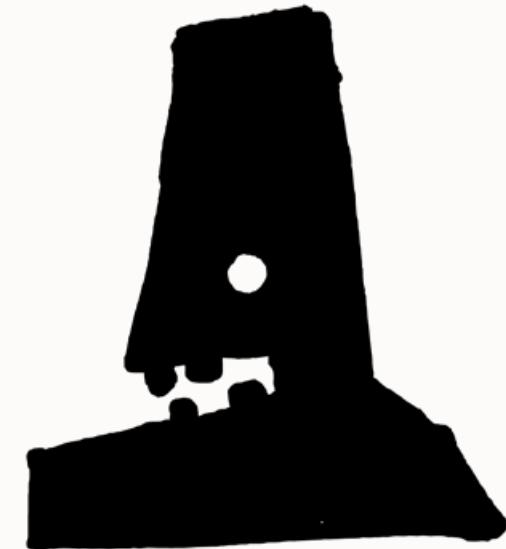
Refracted Ruins

[page 4-15]



Cutout Pier

[page 16-25]



Lot Garden

[page 26-33]



URBN HQ

[page 34-37]



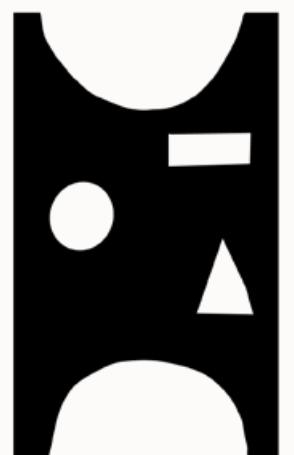
Slope Study

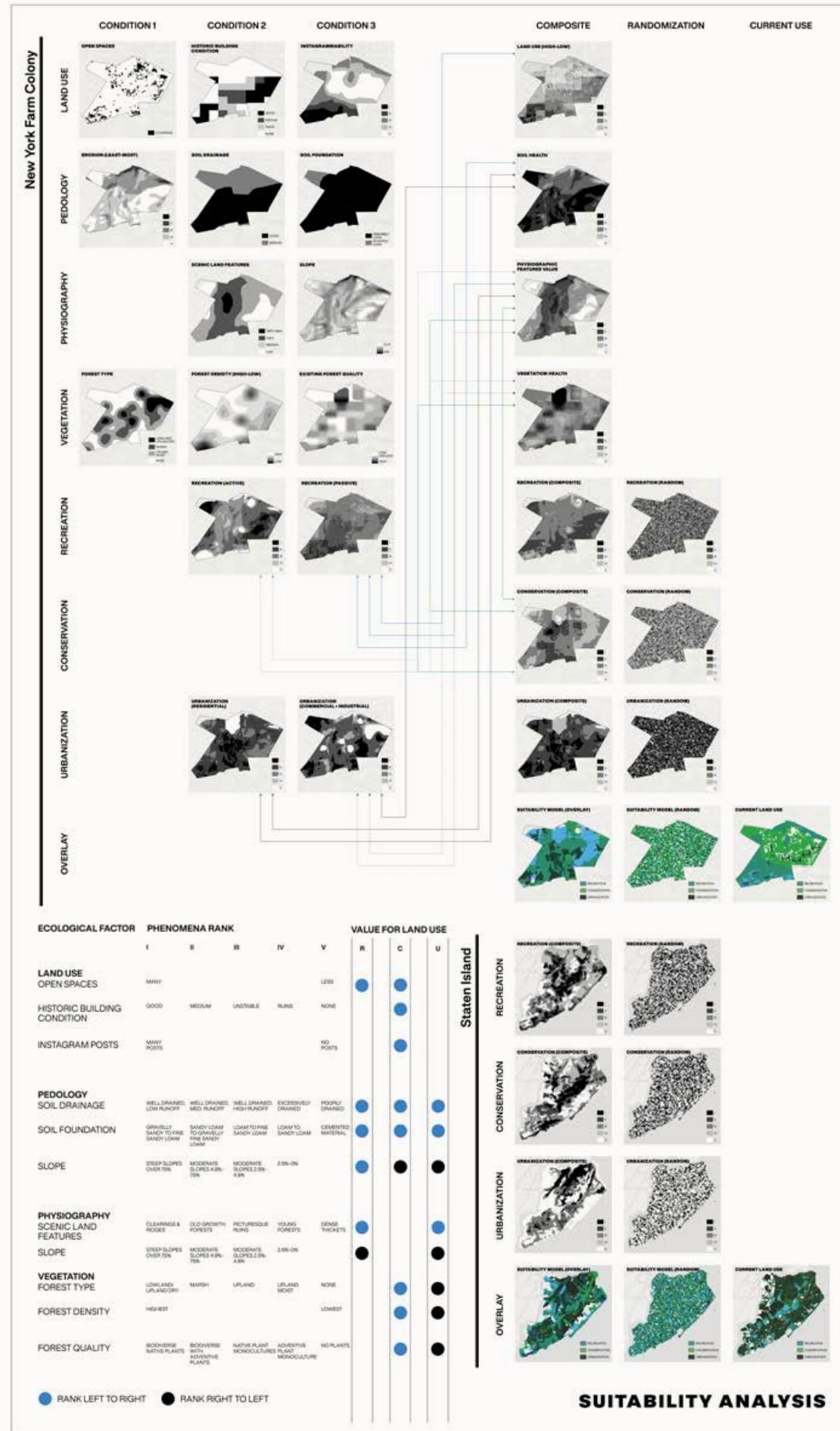
[page 38-41]



Architecture

[page 42-43]



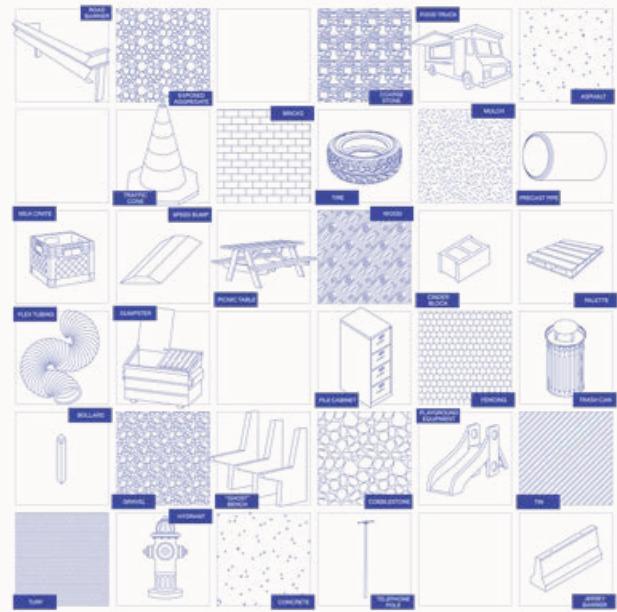
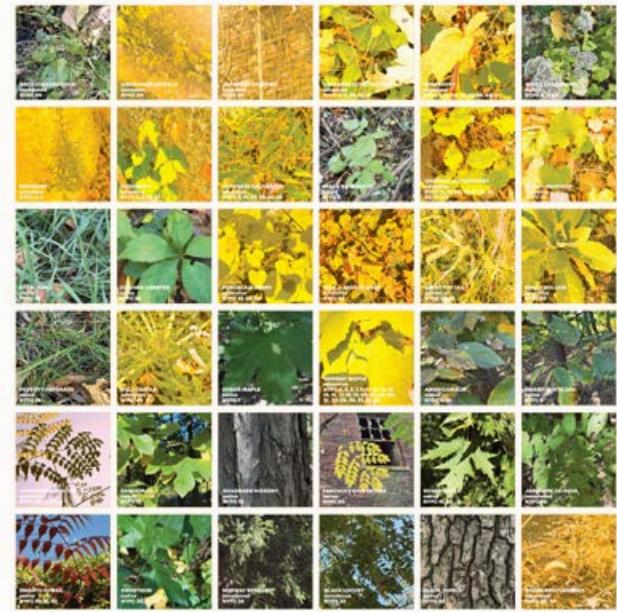


2025
REFRACTED RUINS

STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK CITY
Studio 601

In 1969, Ian McHarg published *Design With Nature* and crystallized the idea that land should be “suitable” for particular uses. McHarg’s detailed mapping processes integrated ecology, geology, and demographic data to identify areas where specific program could be, and was deeply influential to heavy-handed mid-century city planning projects. Yet, as much as McHarg attempted to read and understand land, his deeply analytical approach was guided by subjectivity about what is valuable – and what is not.

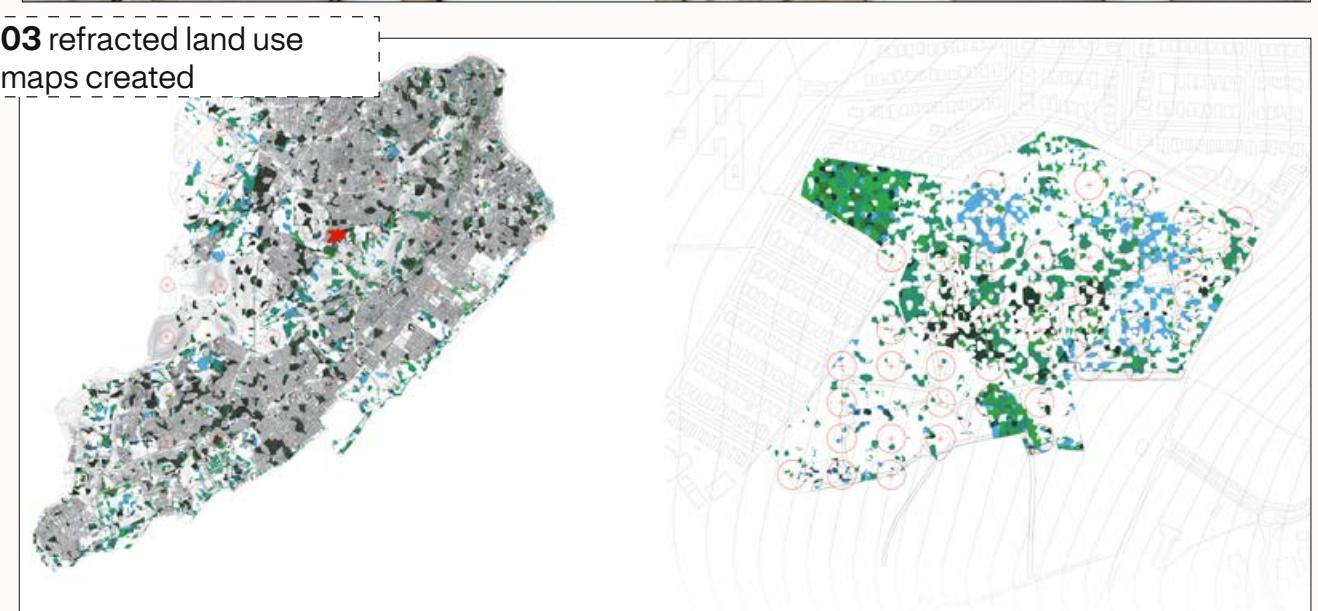
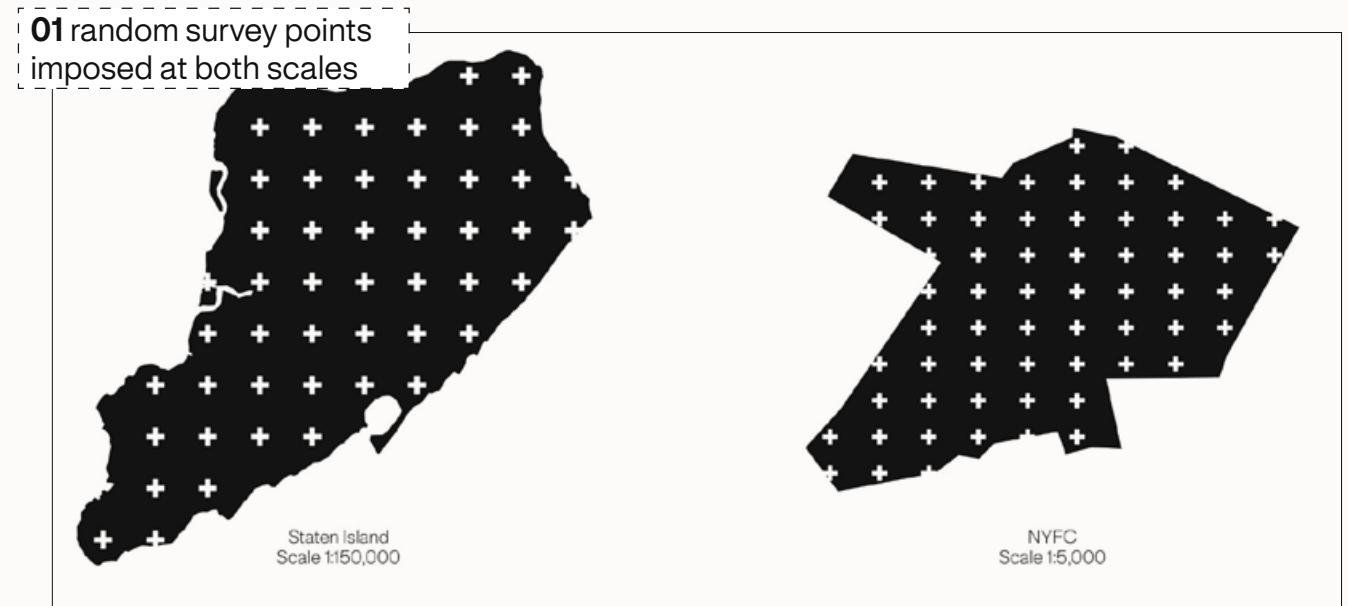
At the heart of Staten Island lies the New York Farm Colony, a welfare institution established in the 19th century – which is now a derelict, 45-acre site that has become a beacon for Instagram-savvy urban explorers, graffiti artists, paintballers, and adventive plants. It is a staging ground for counter-cultural activity, as Joanne Hudson writes: “through occupation [ruins] become spaces of use, performance, and attachment.” Its existence questions the car-based suburban monotony of Staten Island as a whole, offering an alternative narrative of what place can be.

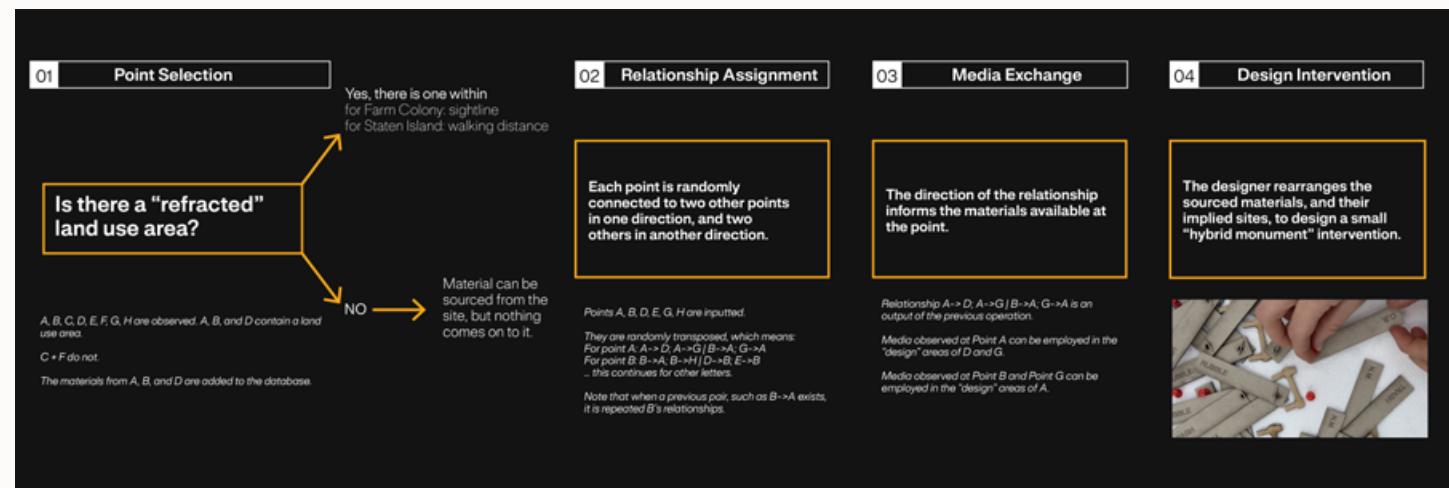


Observed plants + objects.

Gridded surveys of random points across Staten Island and the Farm Colony shaped a personal conception that the vernacular of the borough is meaningfully “ugly and banal,” a landscape of often decontextualized parts. The grid is not only observational but interventional. Each survey point is a source point for landscape-making media involving flora and materials and a place for deployment, according to a recontextualized, ‘refracted’ land use map, that is designated based on the following:

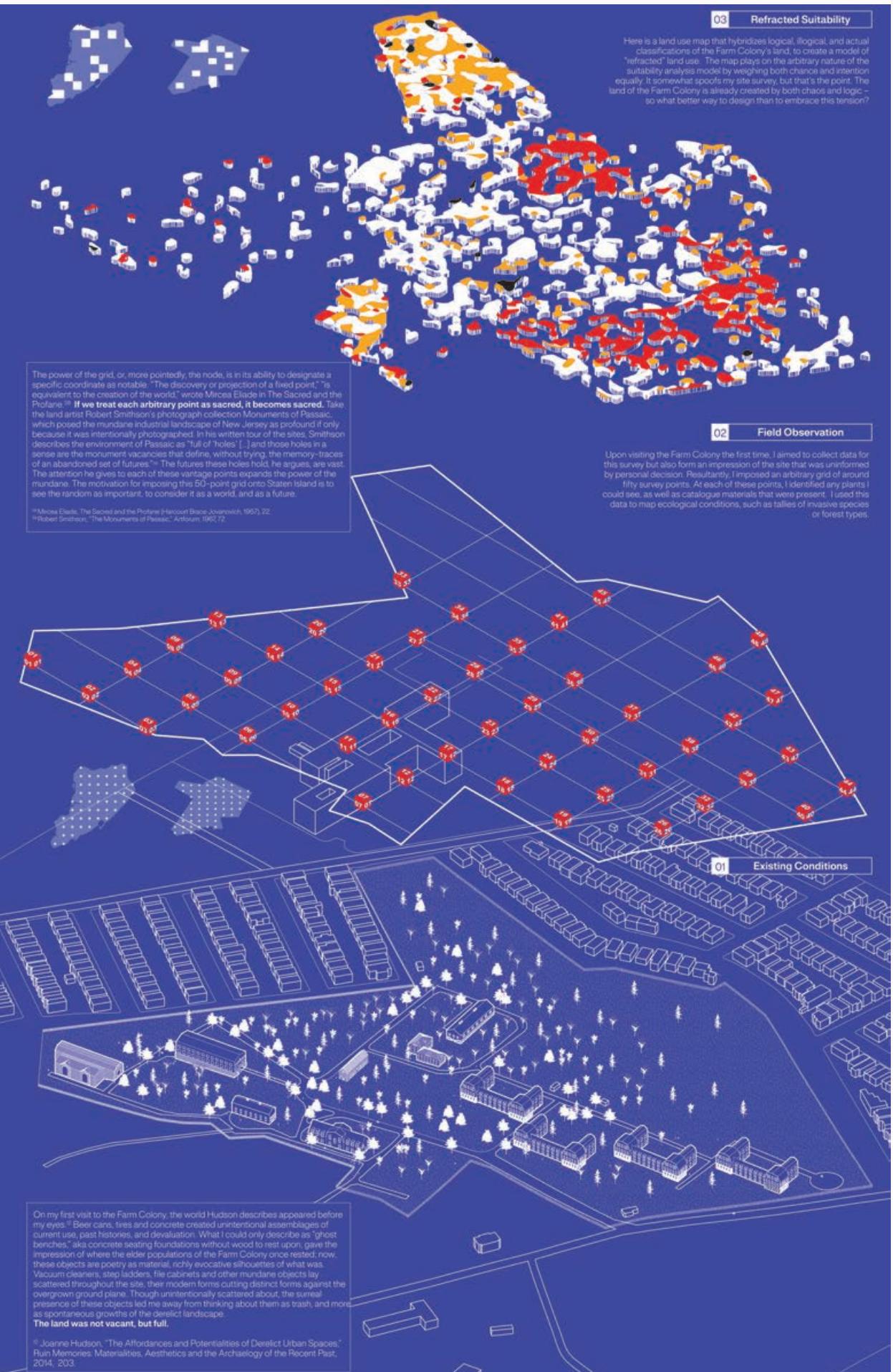
1. Where **SUITABLE** and **RANDOM** land use align, replace with **CURRENT** land use.
2. Where **RANDOM** and **CURRENT** land use align, replace with **SUITABLE** land use.
3. Where **CURRENT** and **SUITABLE** land use align, replace with **RANDOM** land use.

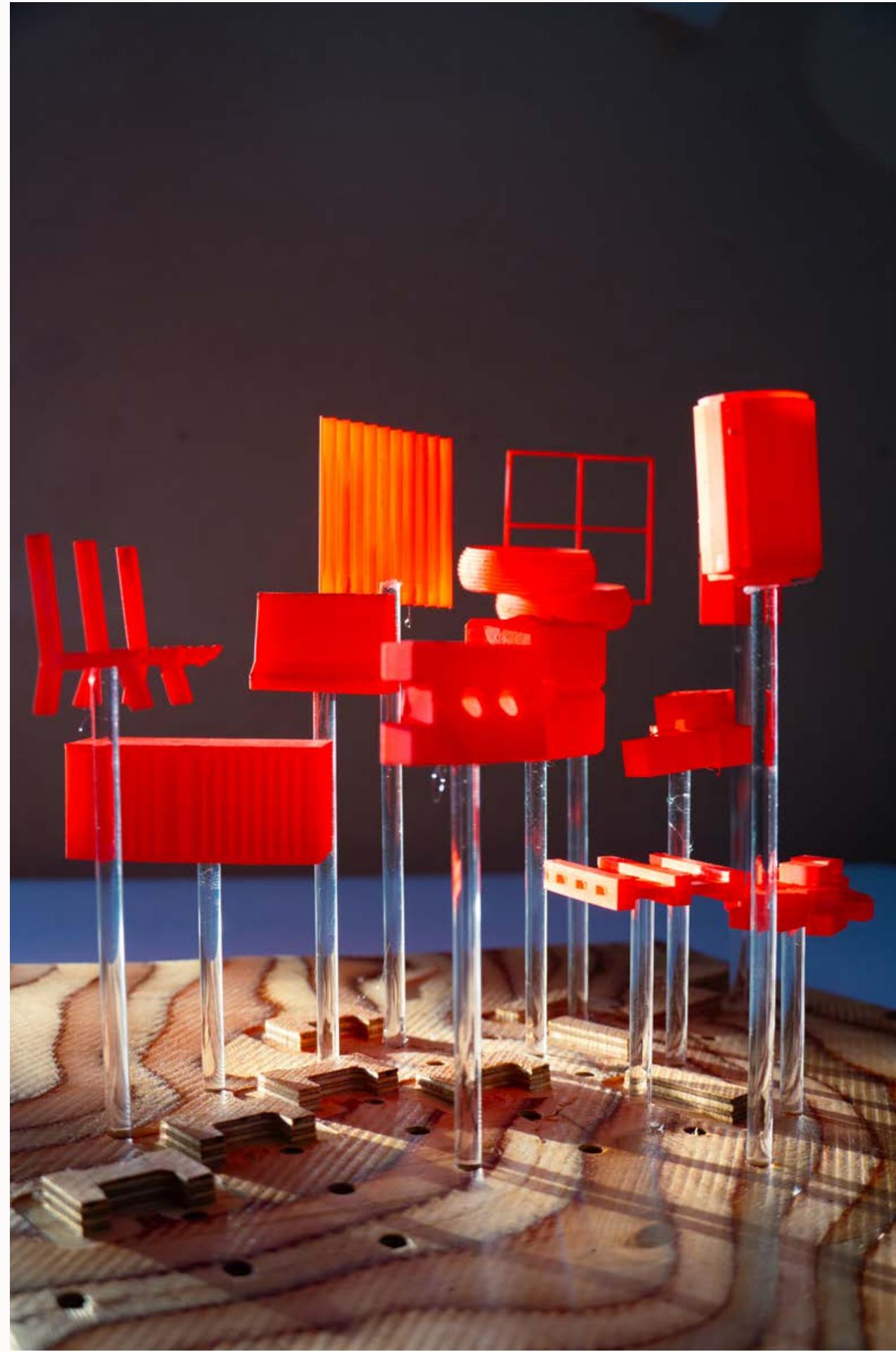




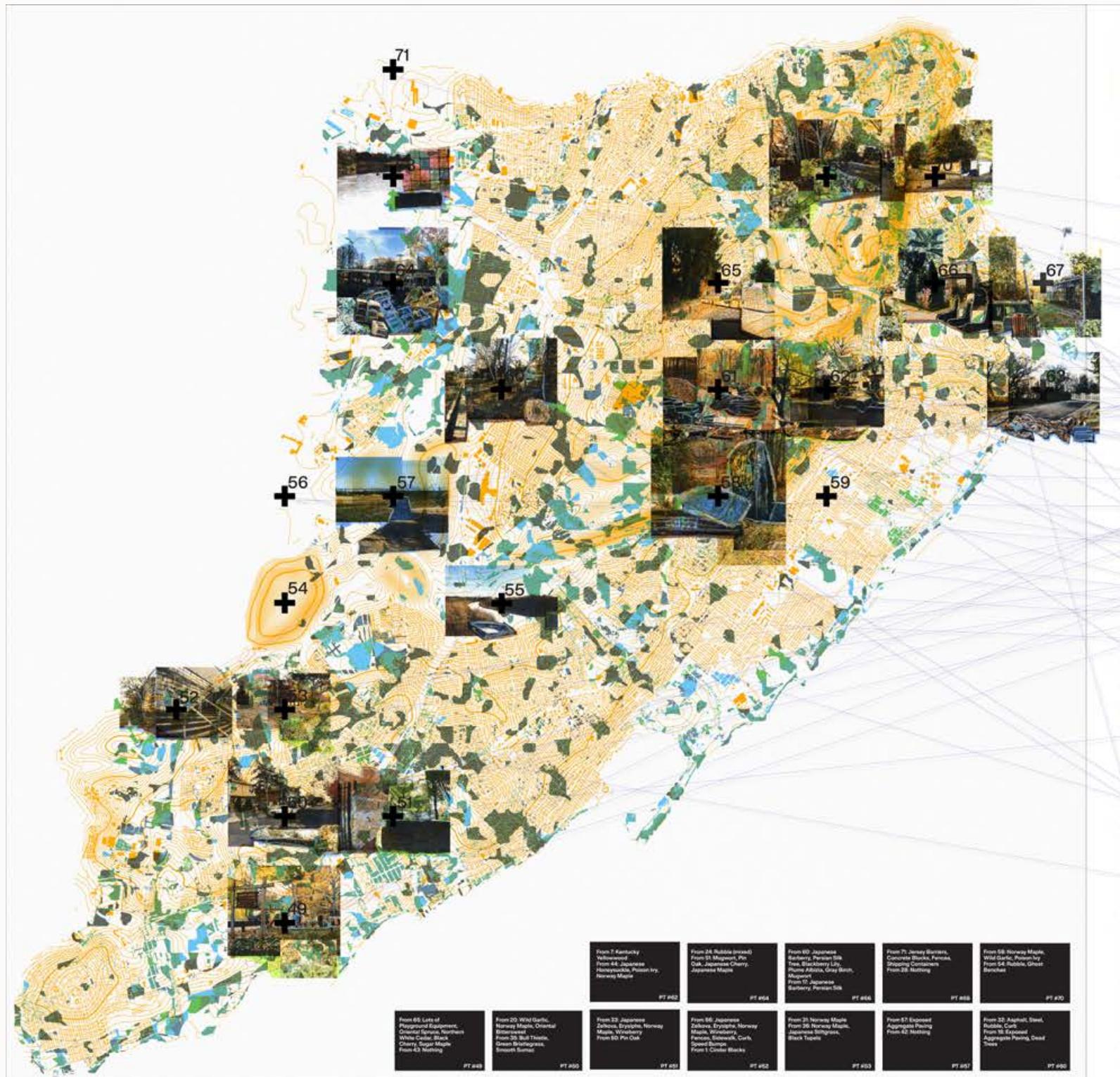
Operation instructions.

Resultantly, the project attempts to structure a landscape urbanist approach that values chaos as much as logic. Drawing from post-modern thinkers such as Bernard Tschumi, John Cage, and Robert Smithson, Refracted Ruins seeks to understand and contradict gridded, process-based approaches to design and artwork, but also stretch conceptions of place beyond site. Moreover, it critiques the dependability of the Suitability Analysis model through valuing moments across Staten Island that contradict the logic of what is or what should be.





Banal gallery model: baltic birch plywood, acrylic dowels, 3D-printed site objects.

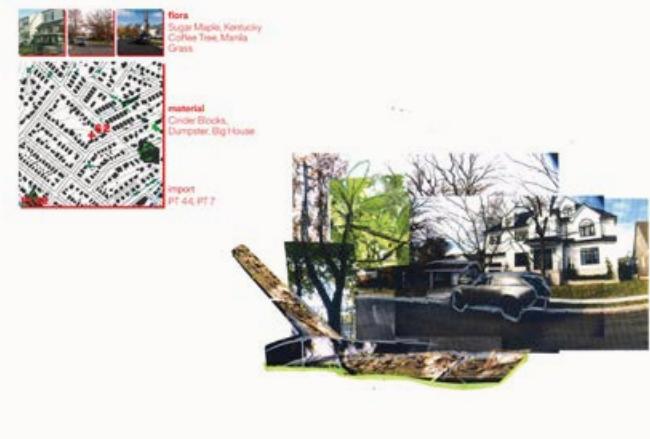
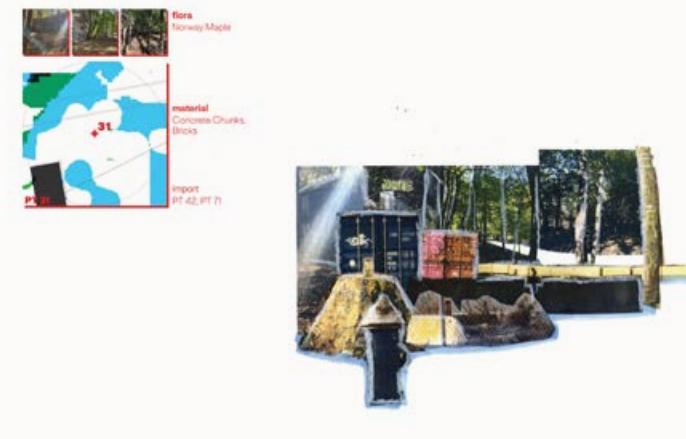


Most of the project is “means” but the “ends” are best captured by the 65 collages, which are made with site photos and crayon overlays. Speculating on what a Staten Island that values unpredictability, counterculture, and the “ugly and banal,” the project celebrates the many things land can be, and questions if it should ever be just one.

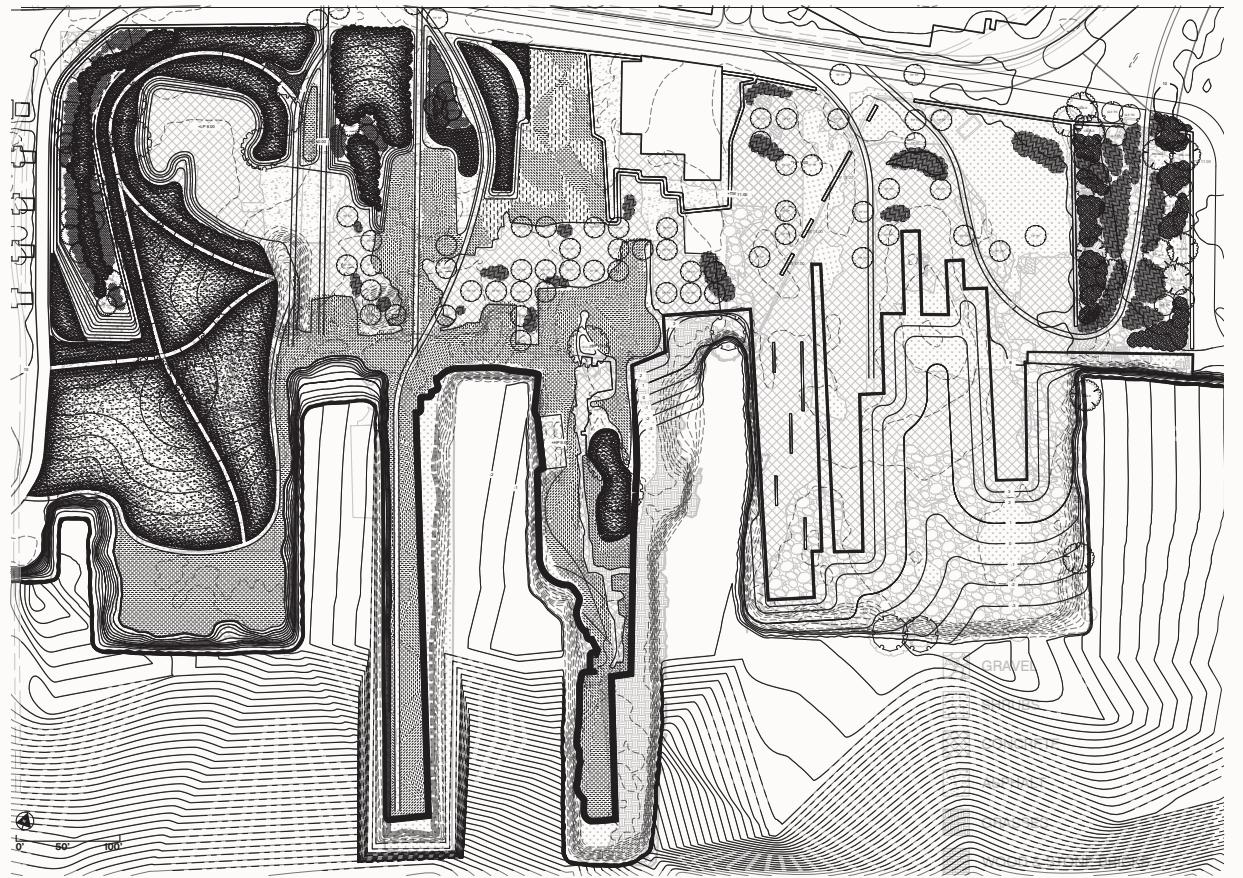


Collage Maps: site photo collages, crayons.

REFRACTED RUINS



Plans + Collages: site photos, highlighters, crayons.



2025

CUTOUT PIER

FISHTOWN, PA
Studio 502

Cutout Pier represents a democratic, collaged approach to park making. Situated along the picturesque, though somewhat overdeveloped Delaware River edge, the park seeks to bring the visitor into the present as well as the past. To respond to centuries of industrial waste and contamination on the site yet provide tree cover and shade in the concrete jungle of Fishtown, soil is mounded onto the site in vulnerable areas to allow for robust planting. Instead of pouring concrete or sourcing new materials, the site recycles itself, using its plentiful jersey barriers as retaining walls, and its unstable concrete edges as seating and topography. The planting schedule works similarly, with a significant portion of its flora being found on-site.



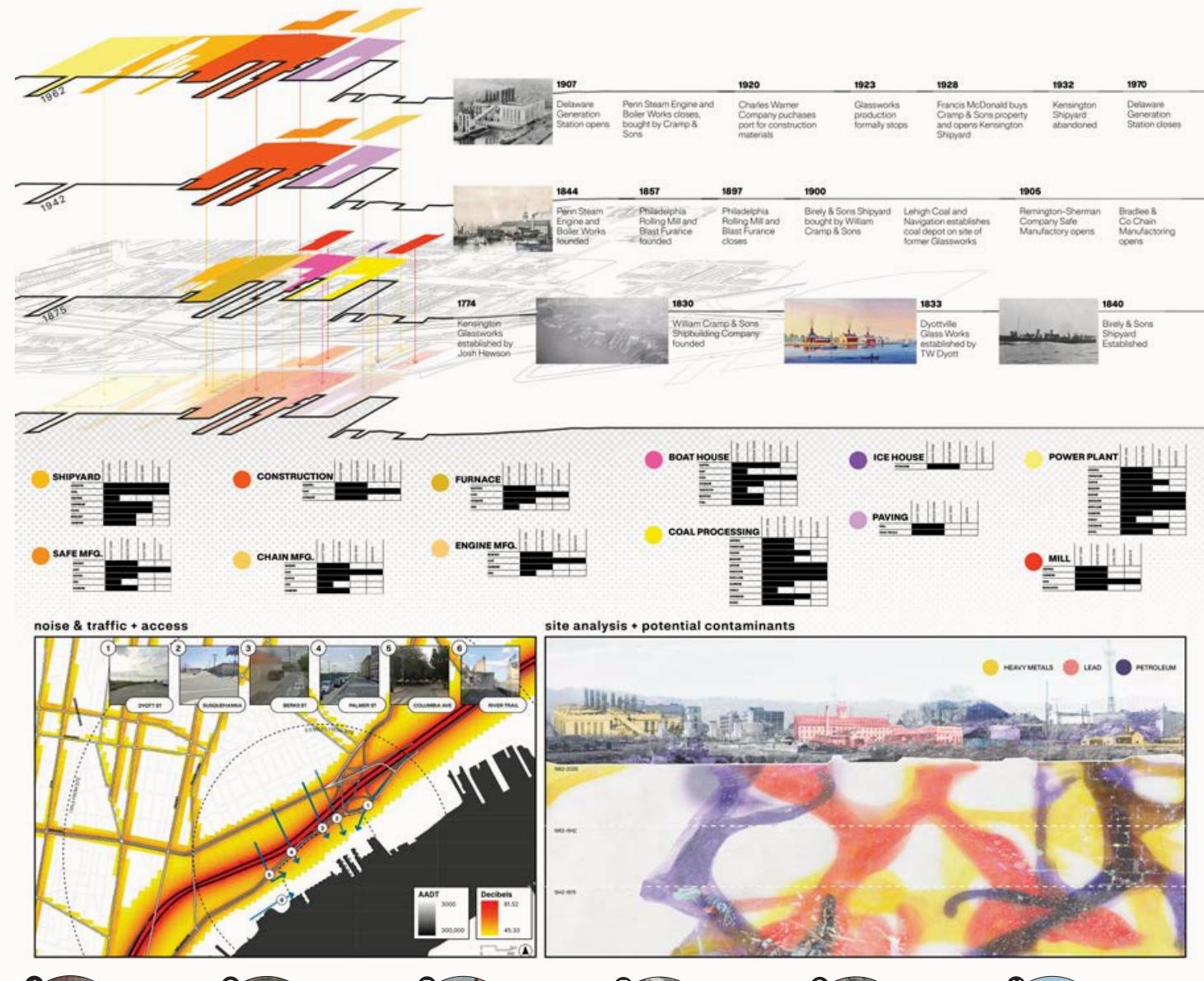
Top: layered plan (grading + planting + materials).
Bottom: crayon sketch plan.



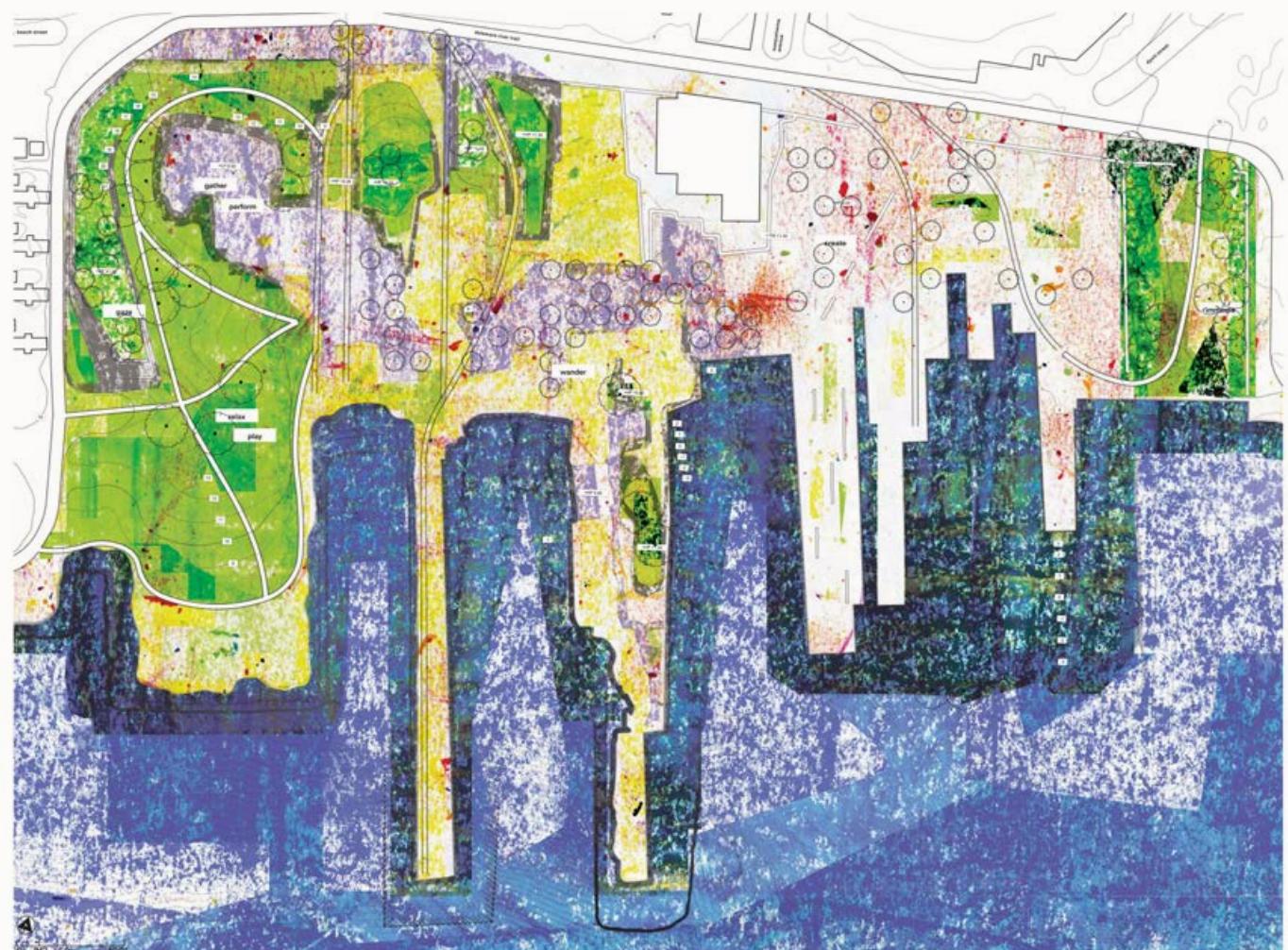
Planometric planting collages.

- 01 BIRCH GLADE
- 02 RAINBOW GRASSLAND
- 03 RAMBLE

CUTOUT PIER

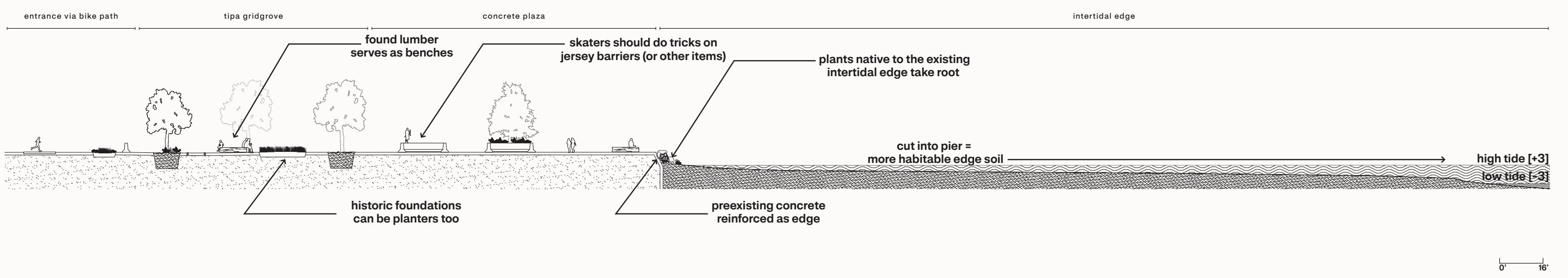
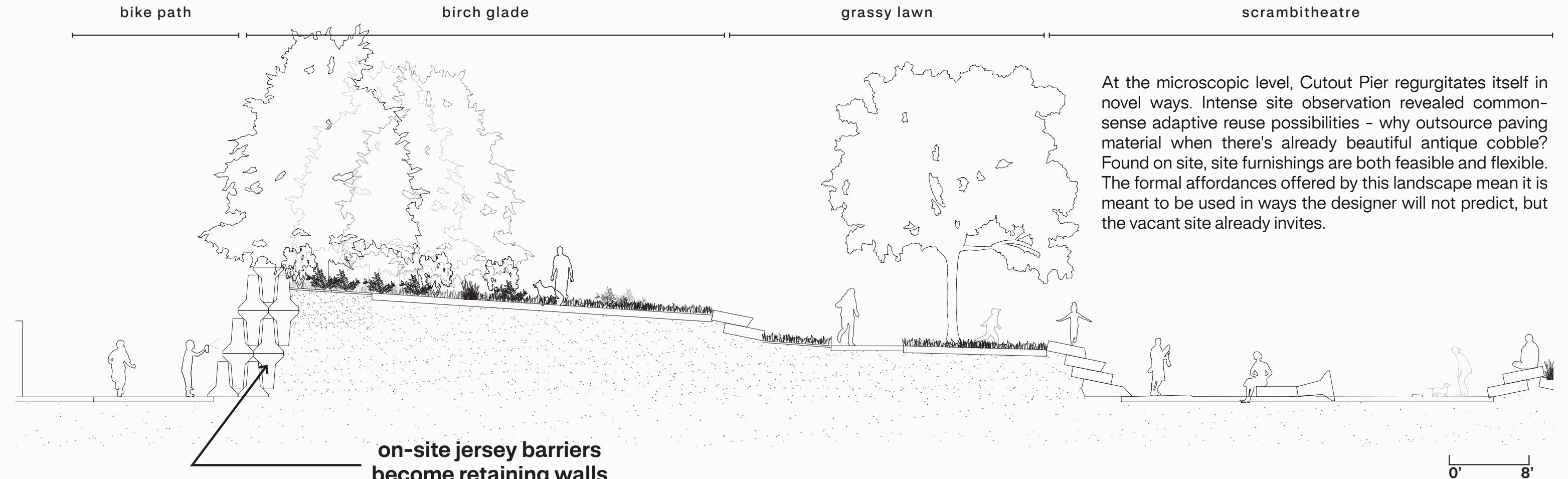


Site Research + Observation



Site Plan: AutoCAD + crayons + Photoshop.

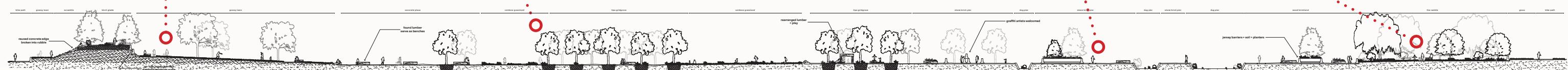
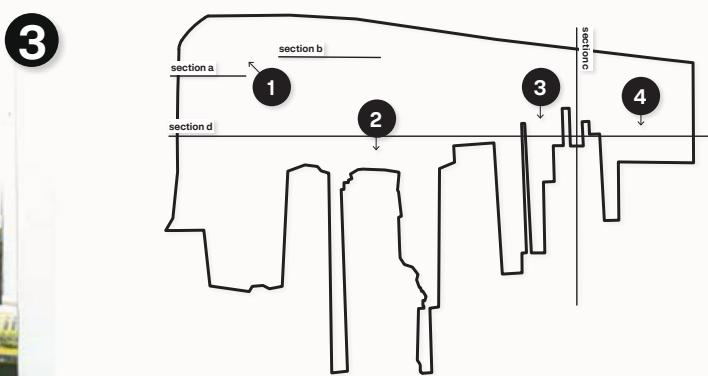
The park's footprint is molded by its history; seen in the unearthed or suggested railroad tracks and surface materials, like locust & stone bricks, exposed aggregate, and when foundations are dug up and used as planting implements. The pier acknowledges its present moment, too – its current proliferation of delinquency and graffiti is incorporated, and encouraged, into the shaping. The park is programmed for the people and will continue to be programmed by the people.



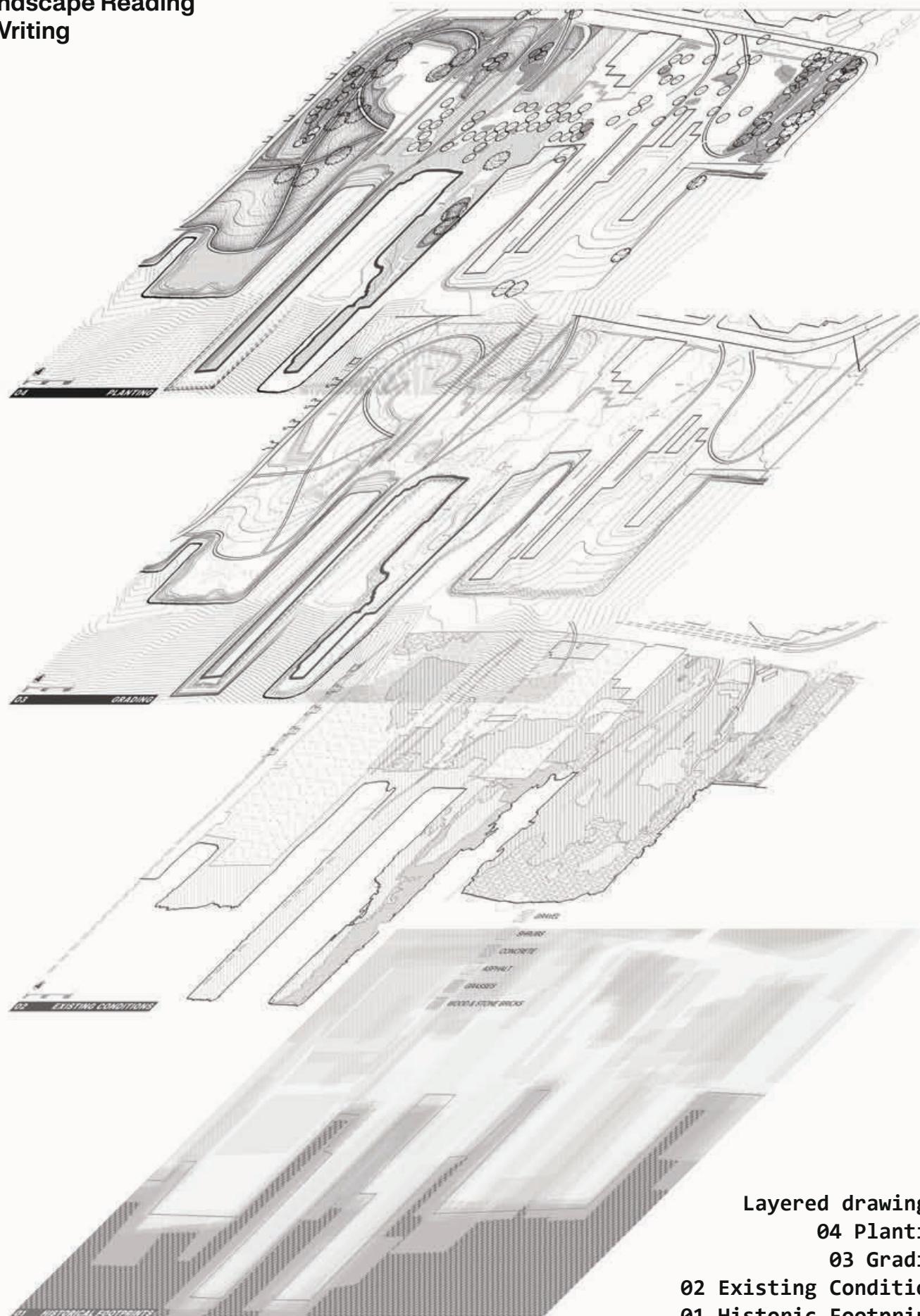
Annotated sections.

Park Experience

Views collaged with site photos, crayons, trace paper, pictures of cohort members.



Landscape Reading
+ Writing



Layered drawings:
04 Planting
03 Grading
02 Existing Conditions
01 Historic Footprints

Site Model



Laser-cut acrylic and crayon

Beyond mere form, landscape holds time incarnate. The site model seeks to depict the site history in addition to the intervention. The edge stability and pollution conditions discovered in historic mapping are revealed through layers of black and brown that are hidden below the layers of material above, accumulated from both the design intervention and the existing site conditions.

1. The Breach

Utilizes the existing stone walls and poplars to invite people in; compressed by two Hornbeams that shroud the entrance in mystery. As with the grass, rubble spills out in striations towards the trail.



2. The Alee

Continues the scaffolding of the Hornbeams in a staggered arrangement. The narrowed corridor amplifies the transitional feel of the existing Poplars, and the existing trees are preserved where grading permits.



3. The Lot

The rubble coalesces into a clearing that amplifies the found qualities of the site's existing bowl. Here, the visitor is presented with the opportunity to rest or explore the trails. Hollies - which were pre-existing on site, are planted throughout.



2024

LOT GARDEN

Wissahickon Park, PA
Studio 501

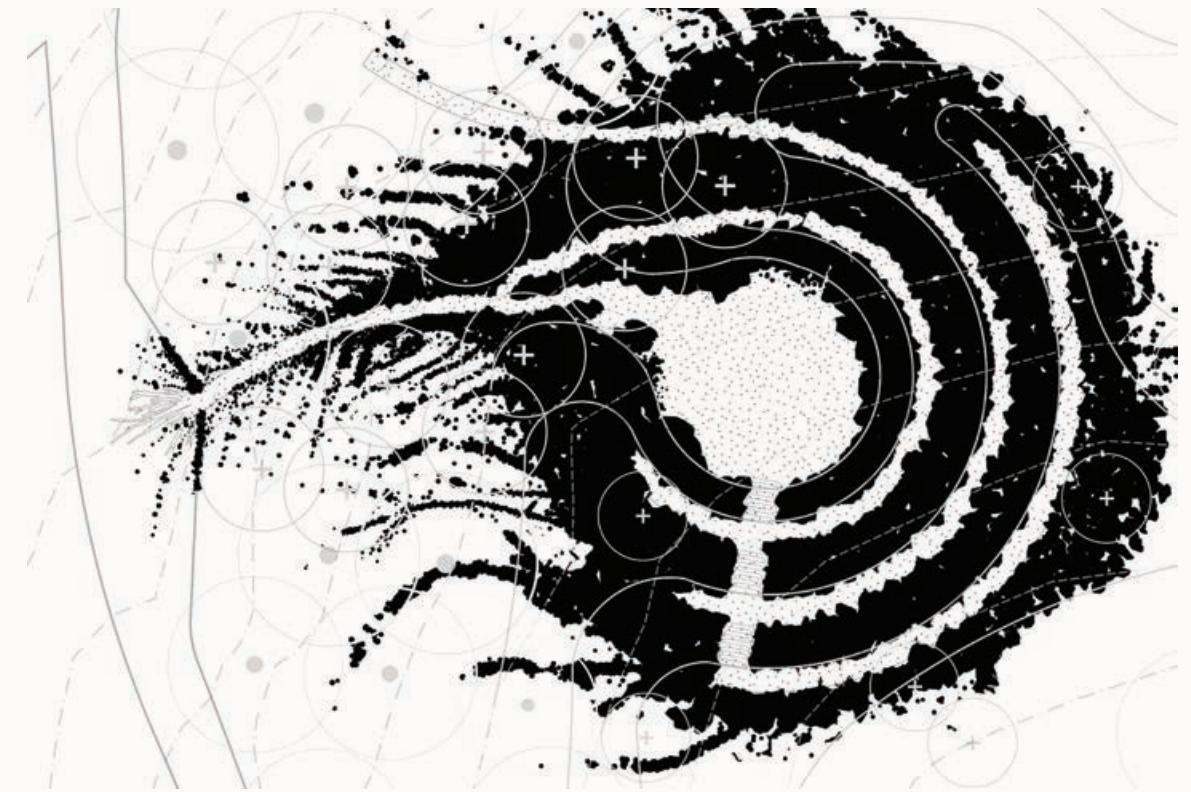


A hiker comes around a bend on Wissahickon Yellow Trail and they witness a breach in the adjacent hillside. Strands of bright green grass seep onto the path, offering an alternative route to the expected dirt trailways of the Wissahickon. An alee of low-canopy Musclewood creates shade and compression, tunneling visitors into an amphitheater of site-origin reclaimed brick and concrete rubble and circling grass paths. Here is the Lot Garden, a new landscape that posits: What if the material expectations of the Wissahickon were disrupted?



Photomontage.

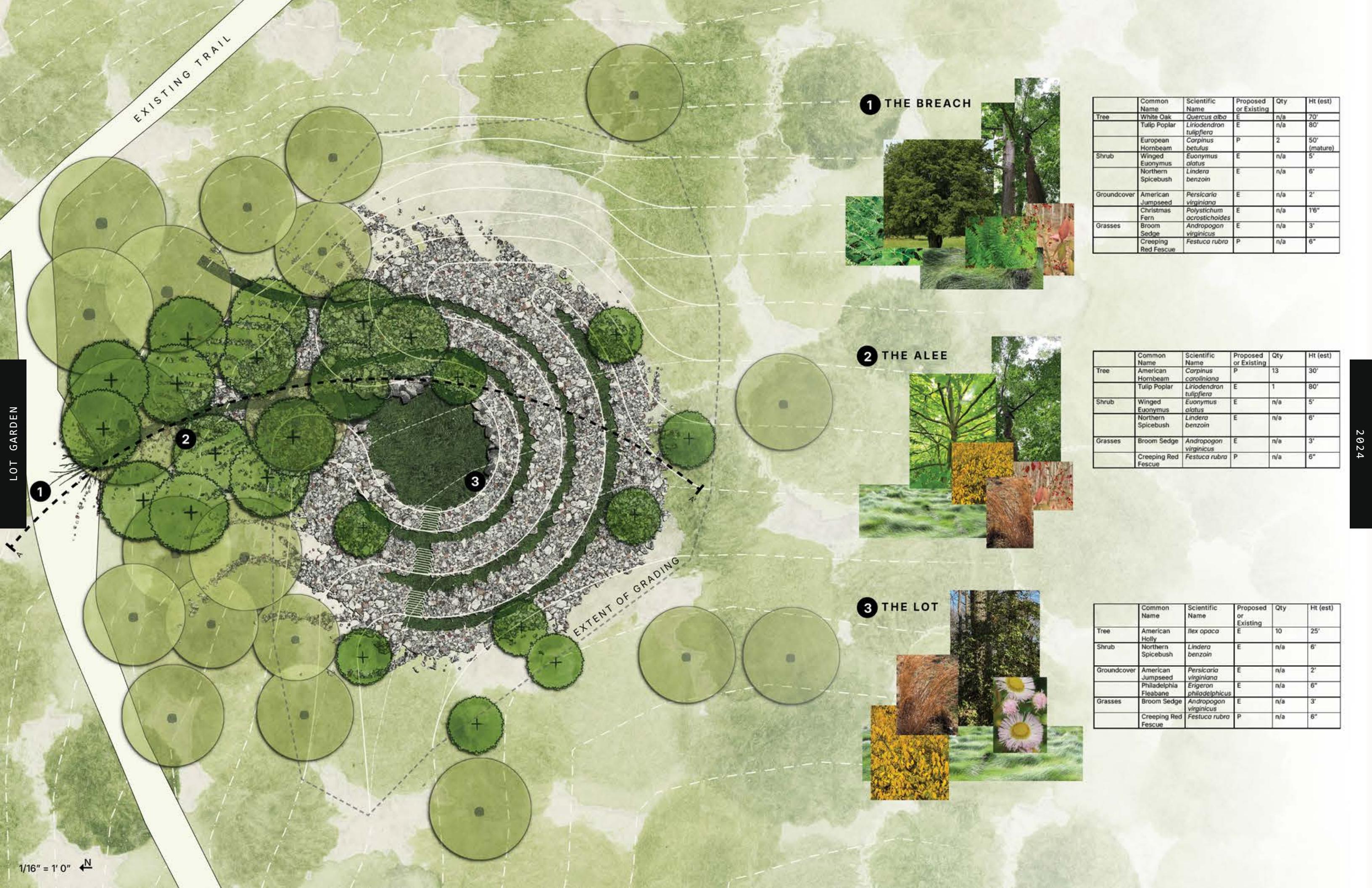
In the Lot Garden, detritus becomes topography, grass becomes trail, and trees become frames through which visitors can observe the Wissahickon for its ecologies, contexts, and eccentricities. In creating a simultaneously more manicured and more chaotic landscape, space for comfort, gathering, and wandering is tailor-made for the weirdos who happen to find it.



Parti Diagram.



Sketch Model: printer paper, trace, cardboard, styrofoam, dowels, t-pins.





Site Section: watercolor + AutoCAD.

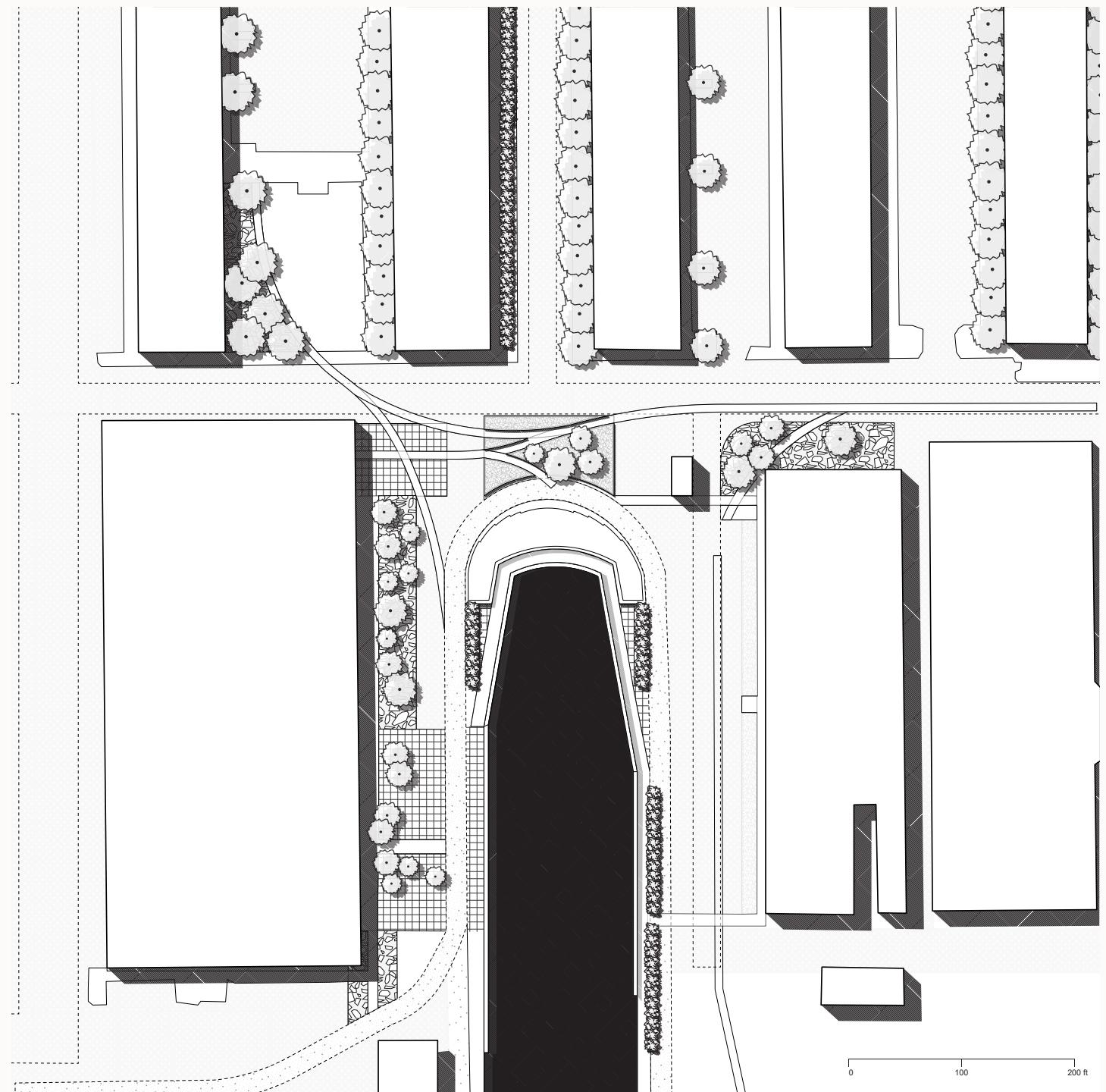
2024

GARDEN STUDY

URBN HQ, Philadelphia, PA
Studio 501



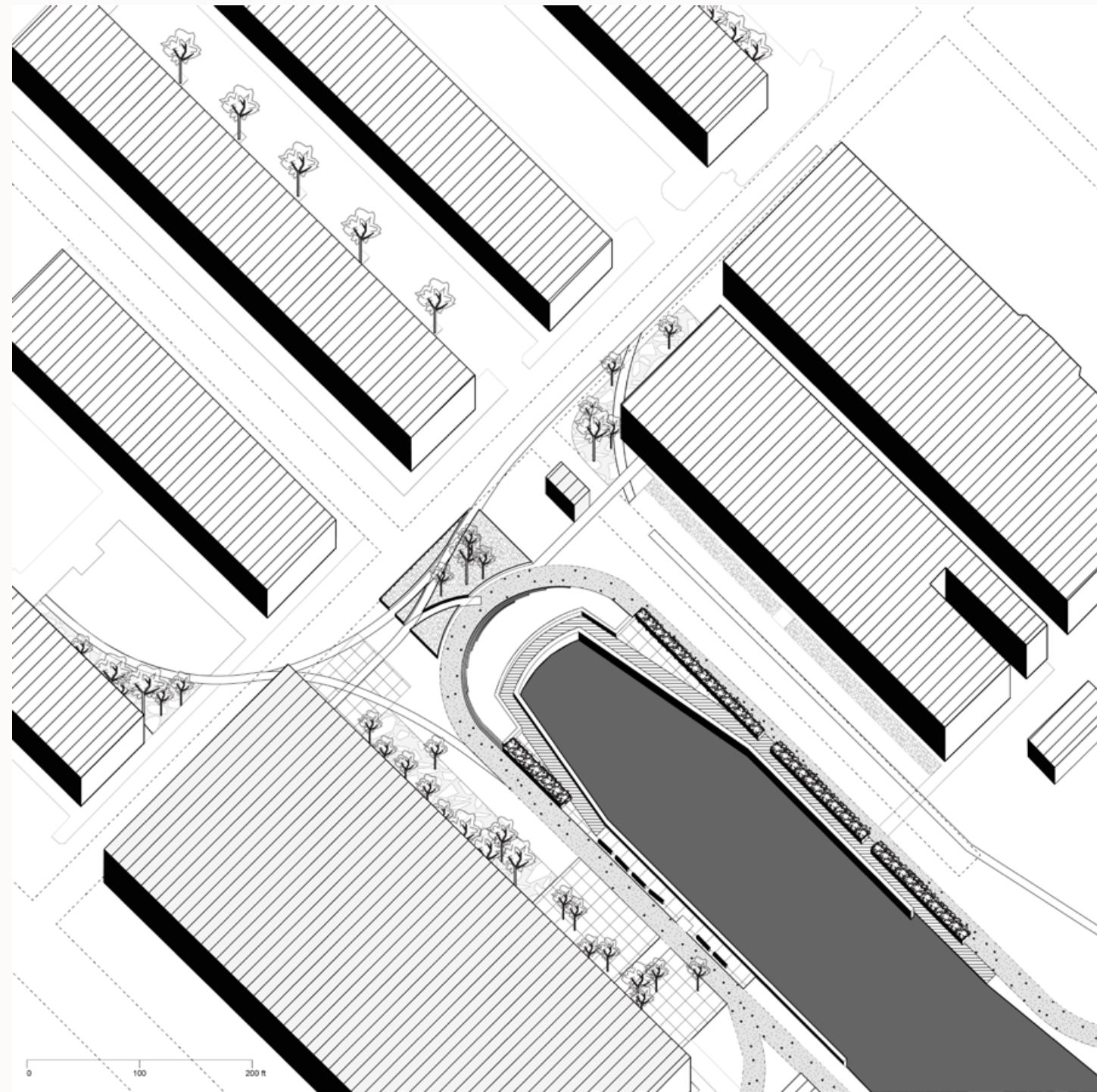
In a comprehensive study of D.I.R.T Studio's URBN Headquarters in the South Philly Navy Yard, I conducted site surveys in order to draw the site in axon and plan. Part of the study was a comic that found humor in the irony of the site: Julie Bargmann's plan used a lot of recycled material, and URBN produces even more waste from fast fashion. Lastly, I made diagrams to understand enclosure, composition, material, as well as the passage of time as understood by the site.



Site plan.



Diagrams: marker + Illustrator.



Site Axon.



"Upcycling," watercolor and ink on paper.

A simple model of flour, sugar, and water was traversed using dowel 'feet' by classmates, as demonstrated in the photo on the right. Split into a dry half and a moist half, the model revealed that the impact of footsteps on the wet slope were less severe on the integrity of the landscape. It follows that a healthy hill is likely not a dry hill: in the case of the Wissahickon site, measures should be taken to prevent further erosion.

The model was not invulnerable from disgusting mold, which unfortunately prohibited it from being displayed today.

Erosion Process Model, 2024. Wood, styrofoam, paper, plaster, flour, sugar, water.



Site Observations + Recommendations

2024

REFORMULATING THE SLOPE

Wissahickon Park, PA
Studio 501

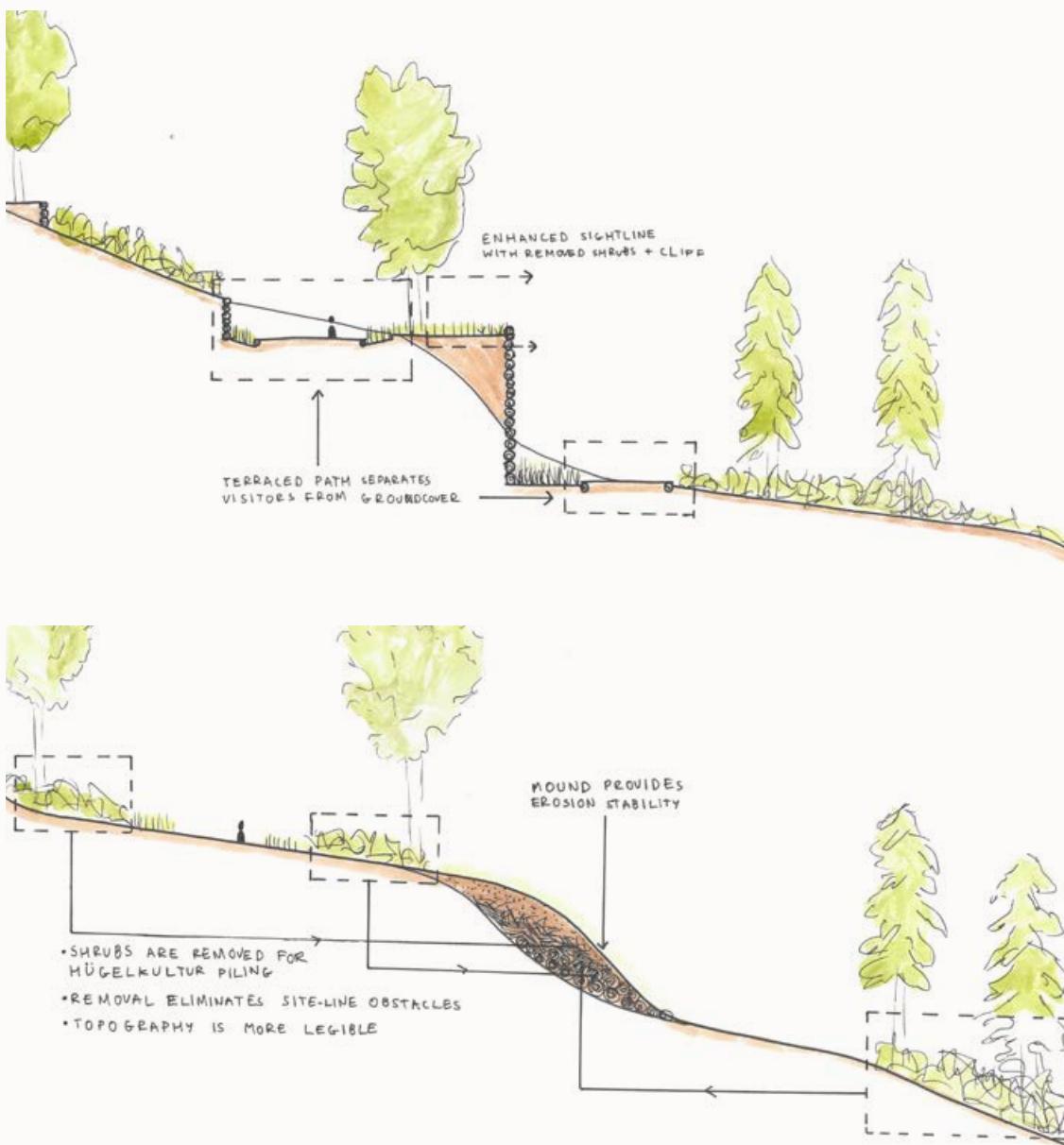
While studying the Wissahickon transect, my project partner and I faced the difficult task of climbing a steep slope to triangulate our trees and create an accurate land survey of the site. A thick layer of deciduous leaves covered the forest floor, and as we sidestepped up the hill, our footsteps pushed the leaves downward, revealing lightly colored dirt, indicative that at least the top layer of soil on our site's hill was quite dry. As I crawled up a particularly steep part of the hill, the very soil gave out, triggering a personal landslide, and I skidded down the hill.

This moment, while comical, came with the realization that the hill was unstable. If it cannot handle my body, what would happen if there was a significant weather event or fallen tree? Might the entire slope be at risk of eroding? Thus, the scope of my design intervention narrowed into an inquisition into the use of sustainable landscape operations to keep people off of vulnerable ground, and reconstruct the slope to properly sustain moisture and build structural integrity.

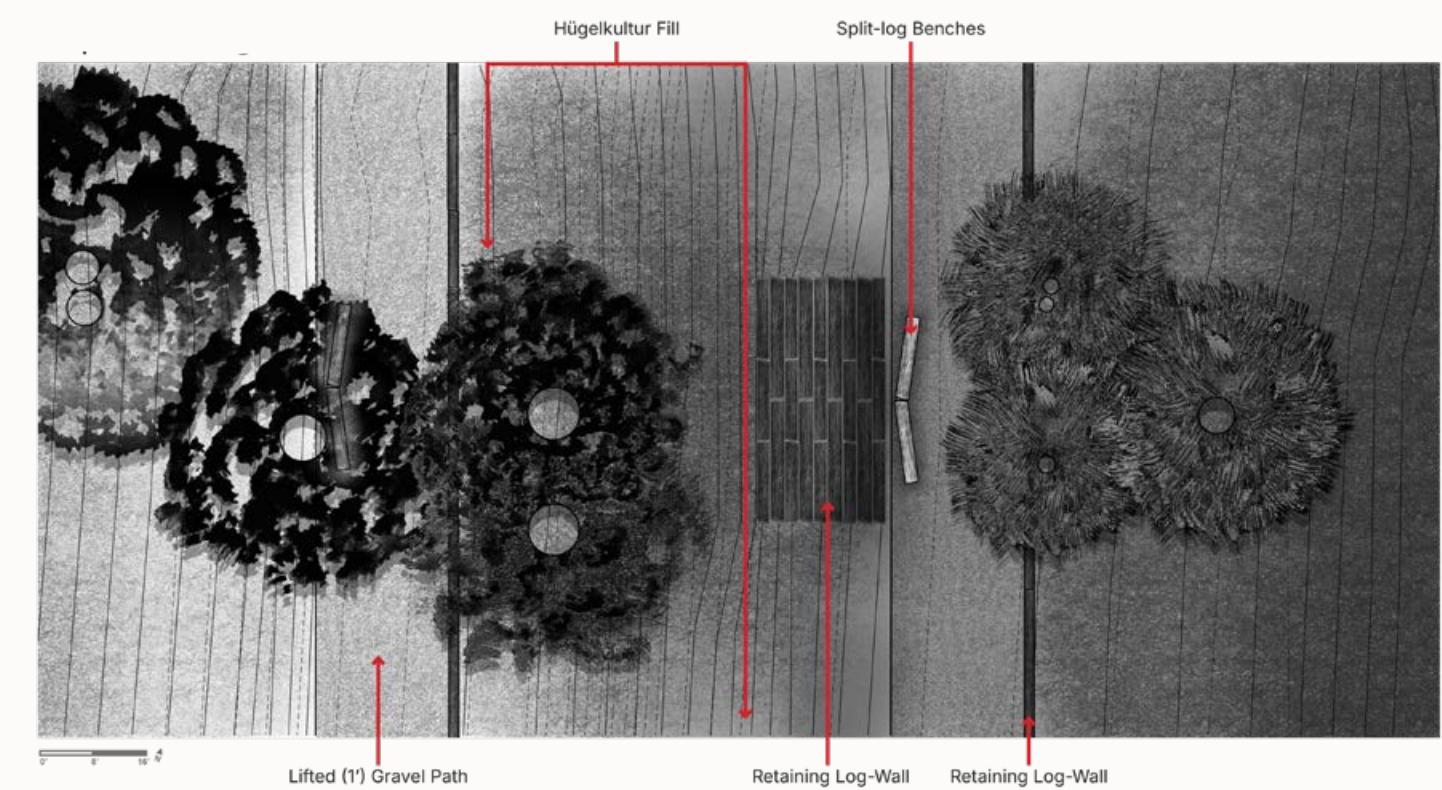
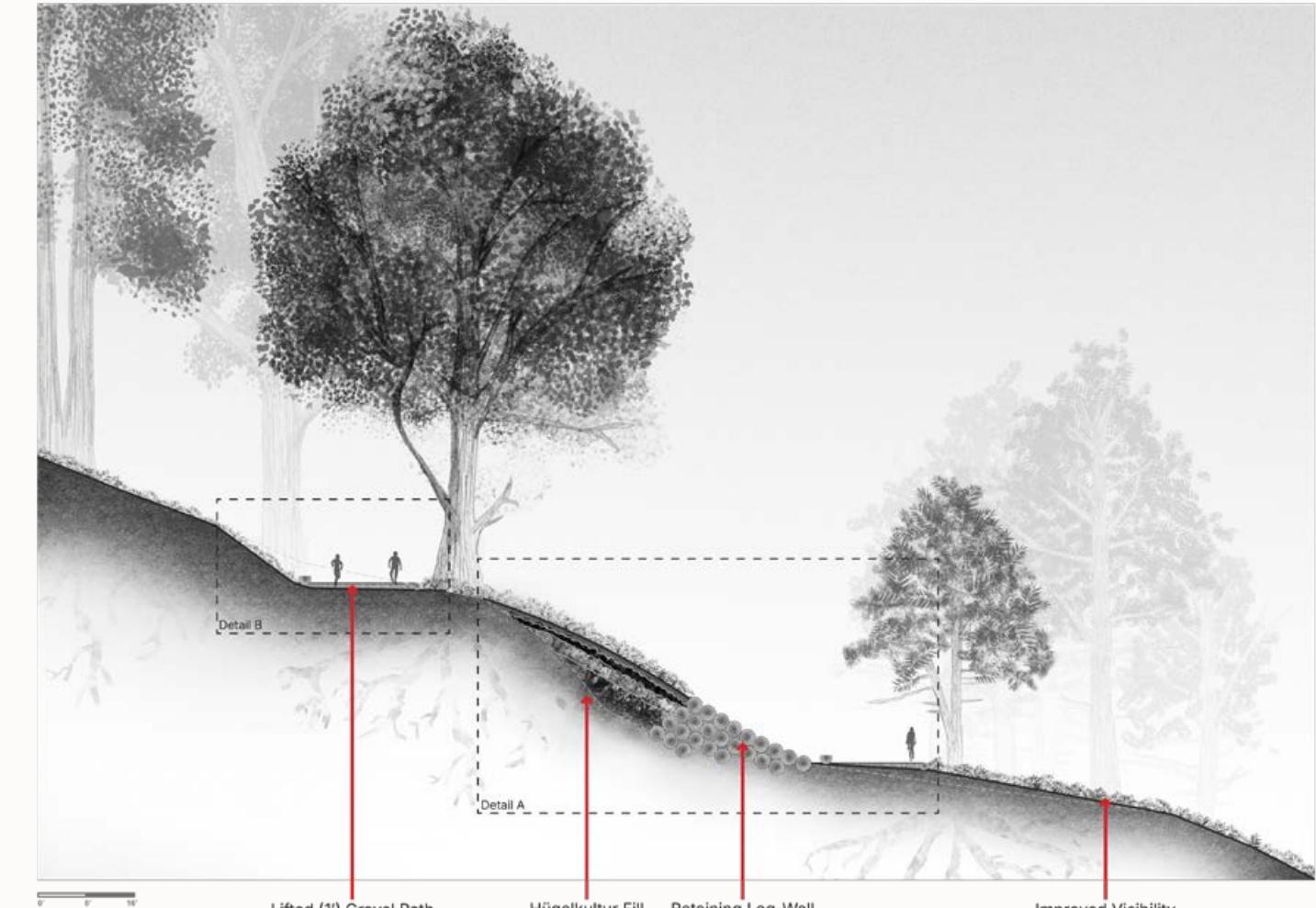


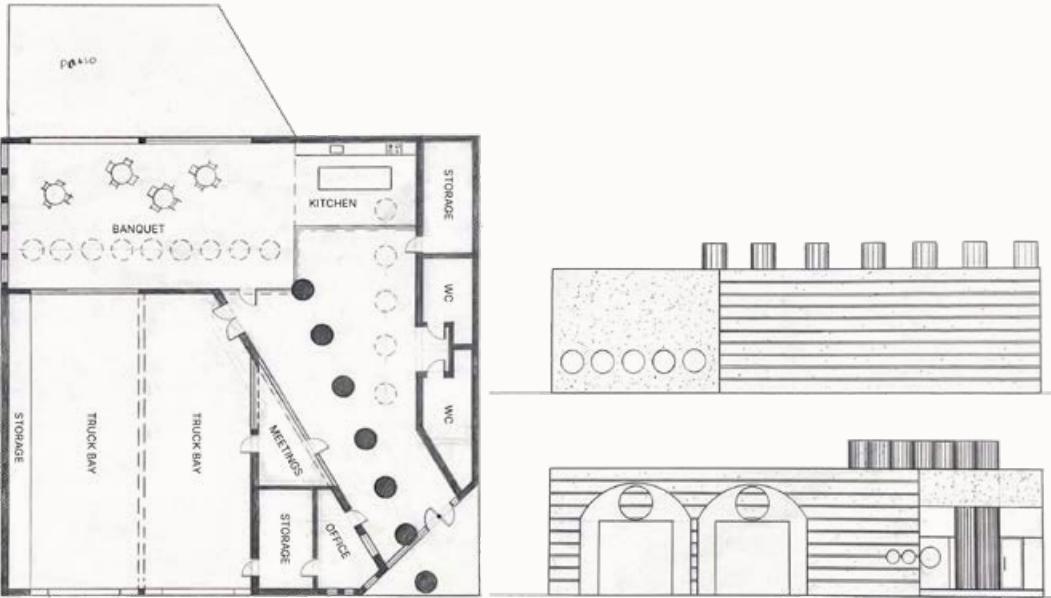
Design Process + Intent

REFORMULATING THE SLOPE



The designs uses Hugelkultur, a technique of creating 'hill cultures' of layered organic matter, to stabilize and moisten the eroding slope. In tandem, understory vegetation - which currently consists of invasives that block human sightlines and eliminate opportunities for diverse groundcover - is removed in three areas. A retaining wall of logs is implemented to hold the slope in place, and the slope is adjusted to be shallower. The site's parallel paths are subtly raised by just one foot to encourage visitors to stay on the trail while preserving current landscape use cases, and recycled log seating is added to enjoy the improved viewpoints throughout the site.



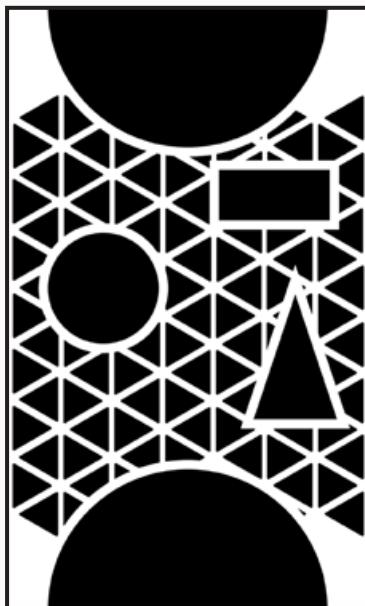


Firehouse:
mechanical pencil.

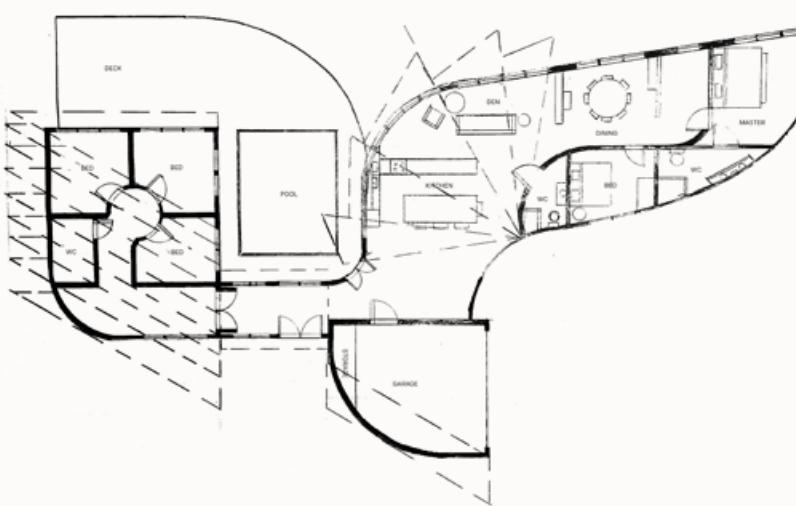
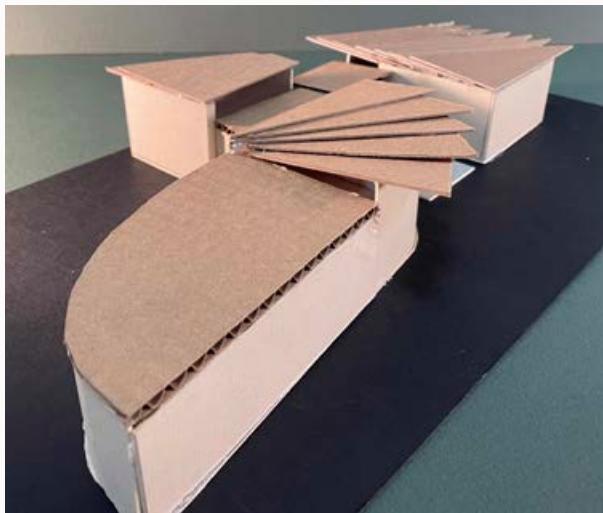
2021

EXPERIMENTS IN ARCHITECTURE

Work made at
Williams College



**Kahn-inspired
museum facade.**
Matboard +
plexiglass.



**Wheelchair-
friendly beach
house: cardboard +
mechanical pencil.**

In college I took two foundational architecture studio classes where I learned to hand-draft and make models.

In spring 2021, I drafted plans for a volunteer firehouse in Williamstown, MA. This concept was inspired by Louis Kahn's use of served/servant space.

For a fall 2021 assignment, I designed a museum facade that incorporated signature Kahn motifs, such as the tetrahedral ceiling from the Yale Art Gallery and the etched shapes from his National Assembly of Bangladesh in final facade.

Lastly, I modeled and drafted a house with an elderly wheelchair-bound grandparent in mind. The design is meaningfully accessible, with watchpoints to allow for the grandparent to supervise visiting family. Wide hallways and direct access points accommodate easy movement throughout the house.

