

LIVING LEGACY

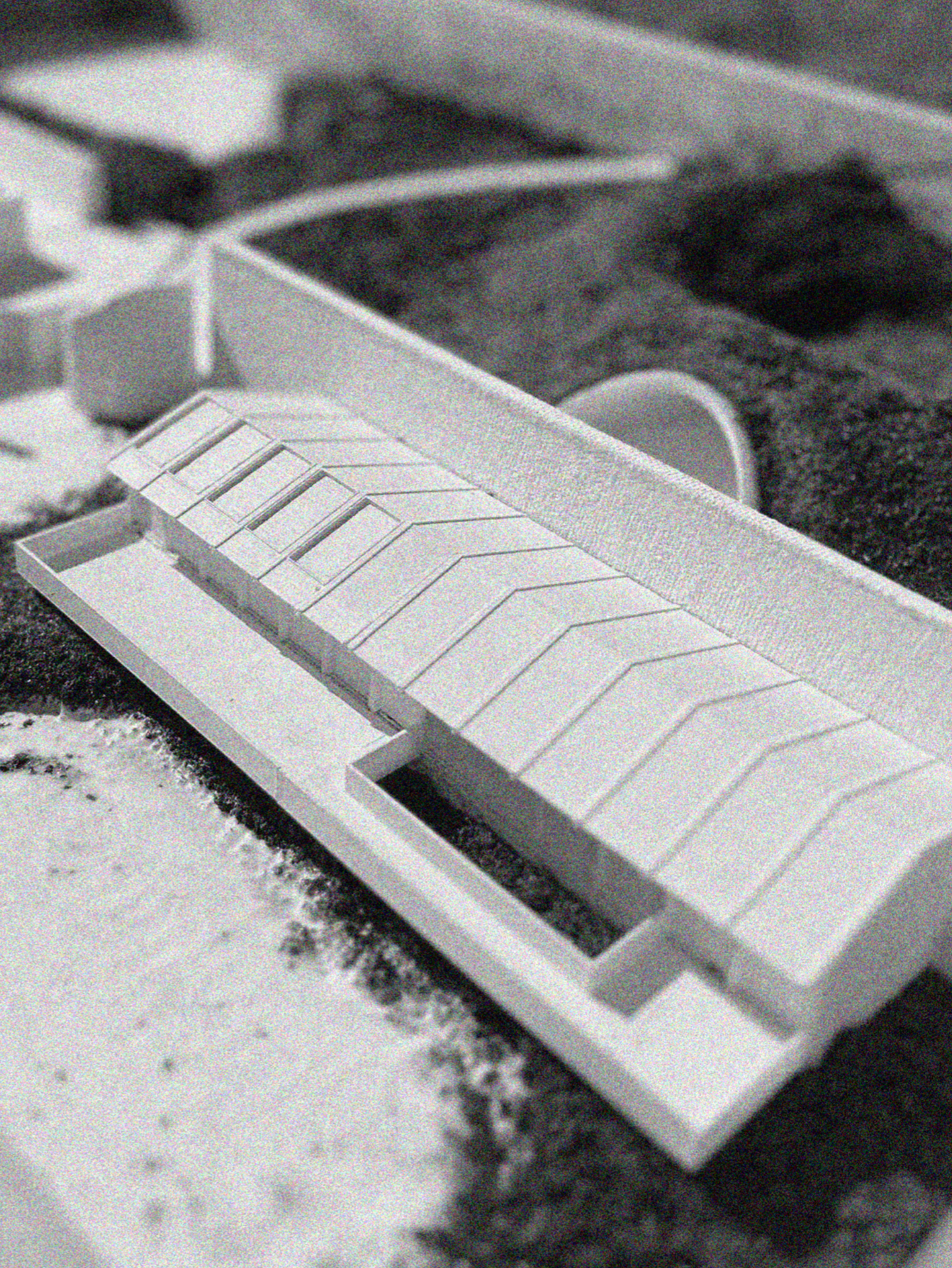
Rethinking architecture for contemporary transition into death

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Binder 01
Jetmir Vishi

Diploma fall 2024

Can unconventional architecture enhance the process of saying goodbye to loved ones, fostering new and meaningful rituals?



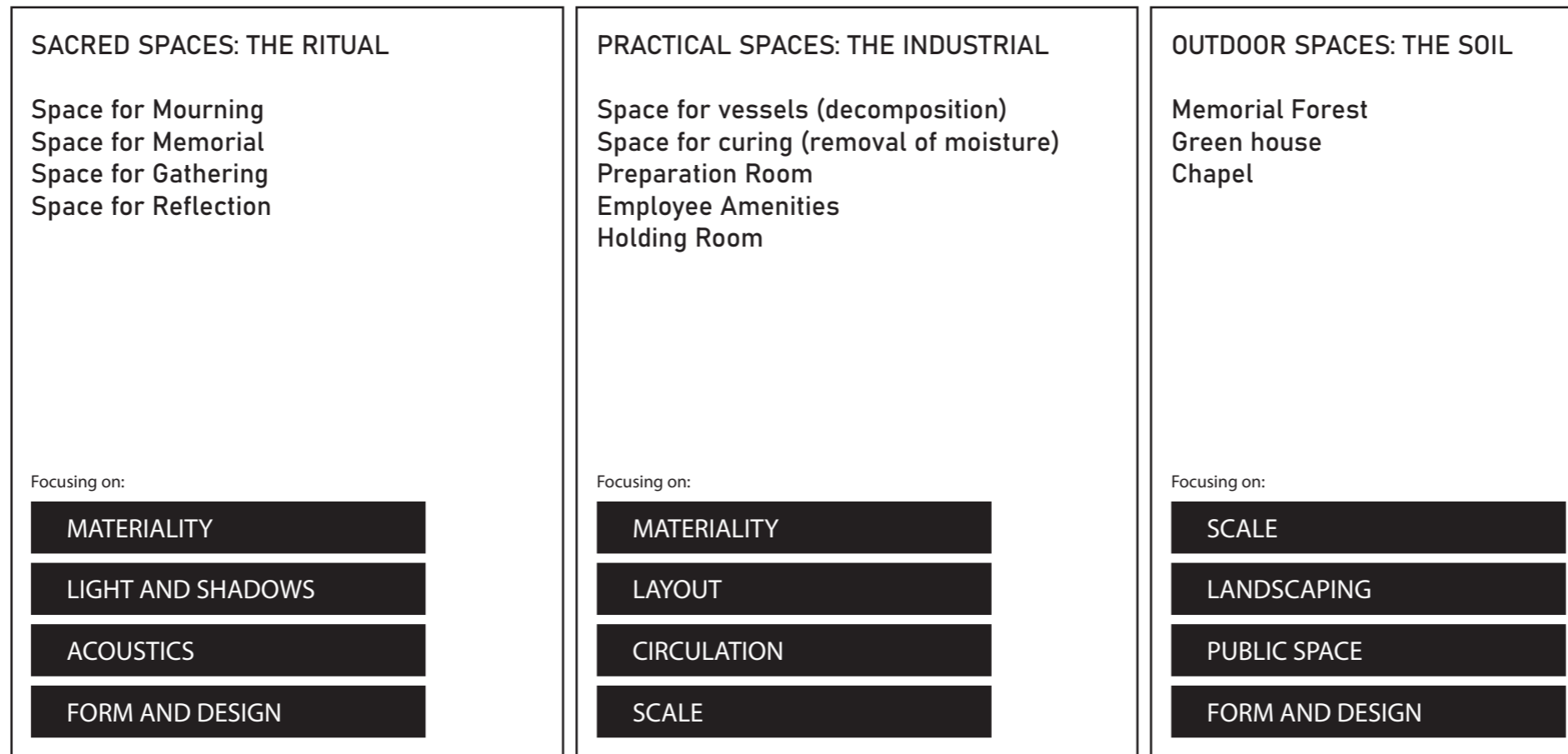
Abstract

This project deals with the creation of a comprehensive funeral home focused on a relatively new approach to funeral disposition called "Natural Organic Reduction," or, in simpler terms, human composting.

Using the inherent qualities of composting and the novelty of a new funeral disposition, this project will seek to question our society's existing options for dealing with the deceased and explore how architecture, spacemaking and ritualization could be used to redefine the contemporary farewell process. The intention is that by using the byproduct of NOR, which is soil, as an active component throughout the process of creating this funeral home, the bereaved can more closely connect the passing of their loved ones with the natural cycles of nature. In an attempt to meet their spiritual needs through spatial experience.

This process unfolds across four distinct visits, each designed to guide mourners through a journey of closure and commemoration. The first visit focuses on viewing and bidding farewell, followed by a celebration of life in the second. The third visit centers on a memorial experience intertwined with witnessing the cycles of nature, while the fourth visit involves the establishment of a living legacy.

PROGRAMS AND ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS





Introduction

In some ways, the general perception and understanding of death have remained relatively constant over the past couple of centuries. Death is still viewed as a natural part of life, and many cultural and religious beliefs surrounding death have persisted over time. However, this resilience might suggest a reluctance to explore alternative perspectives on mortality, potentially stagnating societal understanding and relationship to death. This stagnation has left us with two primary mainstream options in terms of funeral disposition: burial or cremation.

In recent decades however, there has been a notable shift in perspective regarding funeral dispositions, driven by several factors. Chief among these are growing concerns over the environmental impact of traditional funeral practices, prompting a push towards more sustainable options. Additionally, the rising desire for personalized dispositions that honor the individual's values and beliefs, reflecting a broader trend toward customization in modern life. Resulting in the creation of alternatives, such as using alkaline hydrolysis to break down the body into fluid, creating a greener alternative to cremation.

This project and exploration is primarily driven by one of these methods, namely Natural Organic Reduction. Being a relatively recent method of disposition, it was initially conceived by architecture student Katrina Spade in 2011. Subsequently, Spade established "Recompose" in 2017, marking the inception of the first Natural Organic Reduction facility in the world.

While she managed to establish her NOR facility, the spatial qualities of the funeral home stand in stark contrast to other established funeral practices. It was this disparity that initially sparked the conception of this diploma, driven by a fascination with the poetic nature of NOR and dismay at the absence of thoughtful design.

Natural Organic Reduction

In essence, Natural Organic Reduction (NOR) involves utilizing a specialized container, known as a vessel, to facilitate and regulate the natural process of decomposition.

Beginning with the placement of the deceased in a vessel containing organic materials, microbial activity initiates the breakdown process over several weeks. Temperature and moisture levels are carefully regulated to optimize decomposition while controlling odors and pathogens. Regular aeration ensures even decomposition, culminating in the conversion of the body and organic matter into soil. This final product can then be utilized for various purposes, providing a meaningful and environmentally conscious alternative to traditional burial or cremation methods.

WORKPLAN

January

Concept: Programs, Sequence, further research on topic

February

Grounding the project: Introducing life, scale, orientation, context and choosing a site for the project

Mars

The architectural project: Structure, design, model-making, diagrams, plans and sections

April

May

Delivery: Finalizing the project

Paper: Continue writing on NOR and the arguments for its implementation.

Site

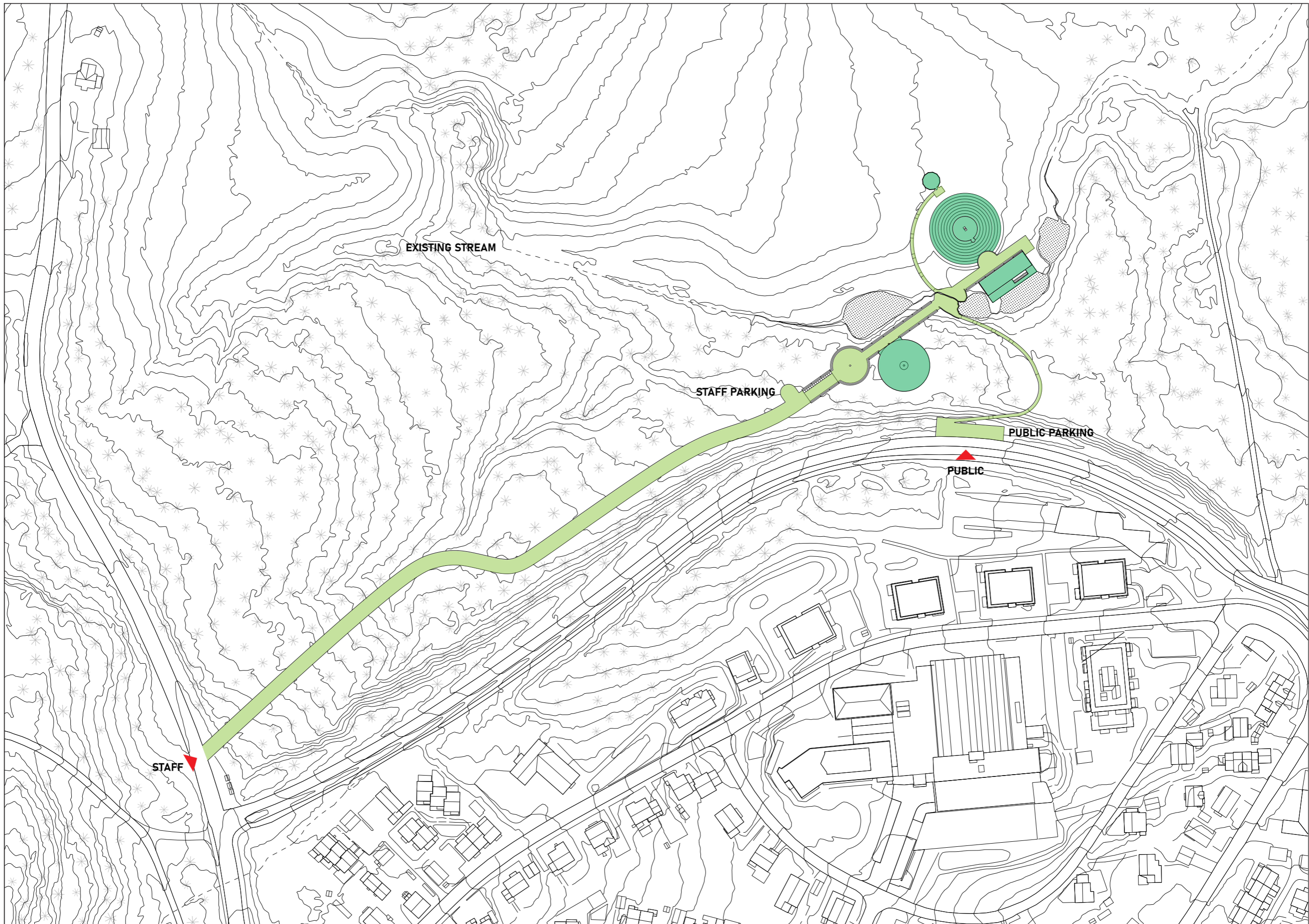
The primary intention behind the concept was to authentically capture the poetic nature of NOR. This led to a consideration of the potential site's characteristics, the historical structures associated with death, the components of death rituals, and the nuances of grief work.

Starting with the site, the project is situated in the northern outskirts of Oslo, adjacent to Nordmarka, in Brekke, Nordre Akre. The site's location holds traditional relevance by placing the cemetery on the outskirts of the city, generally done to reduce the risk of disease transmission to urban populations, it also provided a serene and natural setting for contemplation and remembrance, away from bustling city life.

The site also holds qualities and characteristics that opens up to exciting spacemaking. These include variations in topography, with level changes throughout the area. Moreover, the site encompasses both forest and farmland biomes, divided by a flowing stream and bodies of water. The stream dividing the biomes would serve as a key inspiration for the spatial concept of the project. Drawing from the fundamental contrast between life and death, the placement of the major programs on opposite biomes visually reflects this juxtaposition.





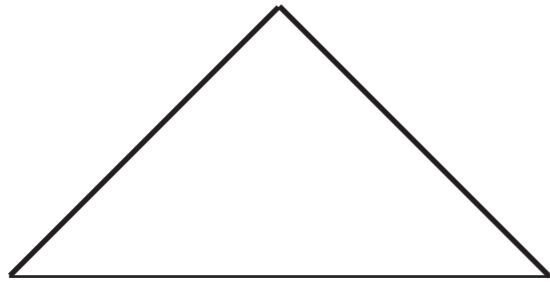


Historical Context and Spatial Concept

Structures designated for death have long served as focal points for cultural beliefs, rituals, and practices surrounding mortality. Across various civilizations and time periods, these structures have reflected the unique ways in which different societies conceptualize and engage with death. They often embody cultural values, religious beliefs, and social hierarchies. Such structures could range from grand mausoleums to humble graveyards. While structures associated with death are usually specific to their place and culture of origin, there is one primitive form that was extensively used regardless of geographic location.

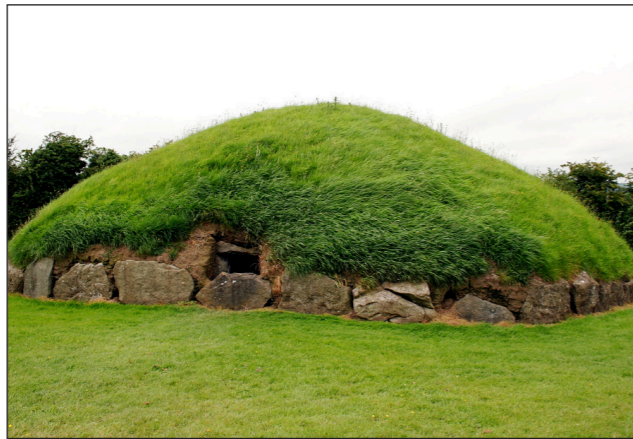
The earth mound, also known as the tumulus. A tumulus is a type of burial mound or barrow, typically found in various cultures and civilizations throughout history. It is a mound of earth and stones raised over a grave or graves, often containing one or more burial chambers. Tumuli are found in many parts of the world, including Europe, Asia, and the Americas. The tumulus universal usage, along with its reliance on soil as a building component, made it relevant to the idea of an authentic NOR facility.

The tumulus, soil, and the site's characteristics would form the main design elements, culminating in a structure resembling a tumulus designated for death (the NOR facility), juxtaposed with the negative space of a tumulus designated for life (Ceremony), and the transitional space in between.



TUMULUS

Space for death



Tumulus - Ireland

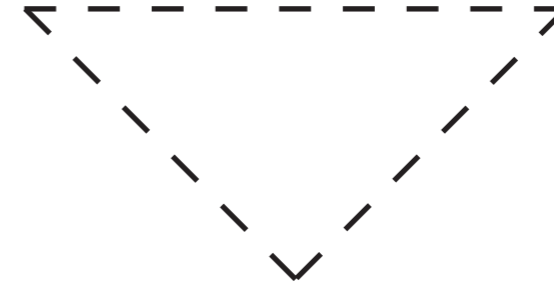


CONNECTION

Space for the in between



La Collina - Terunobu Fujimori

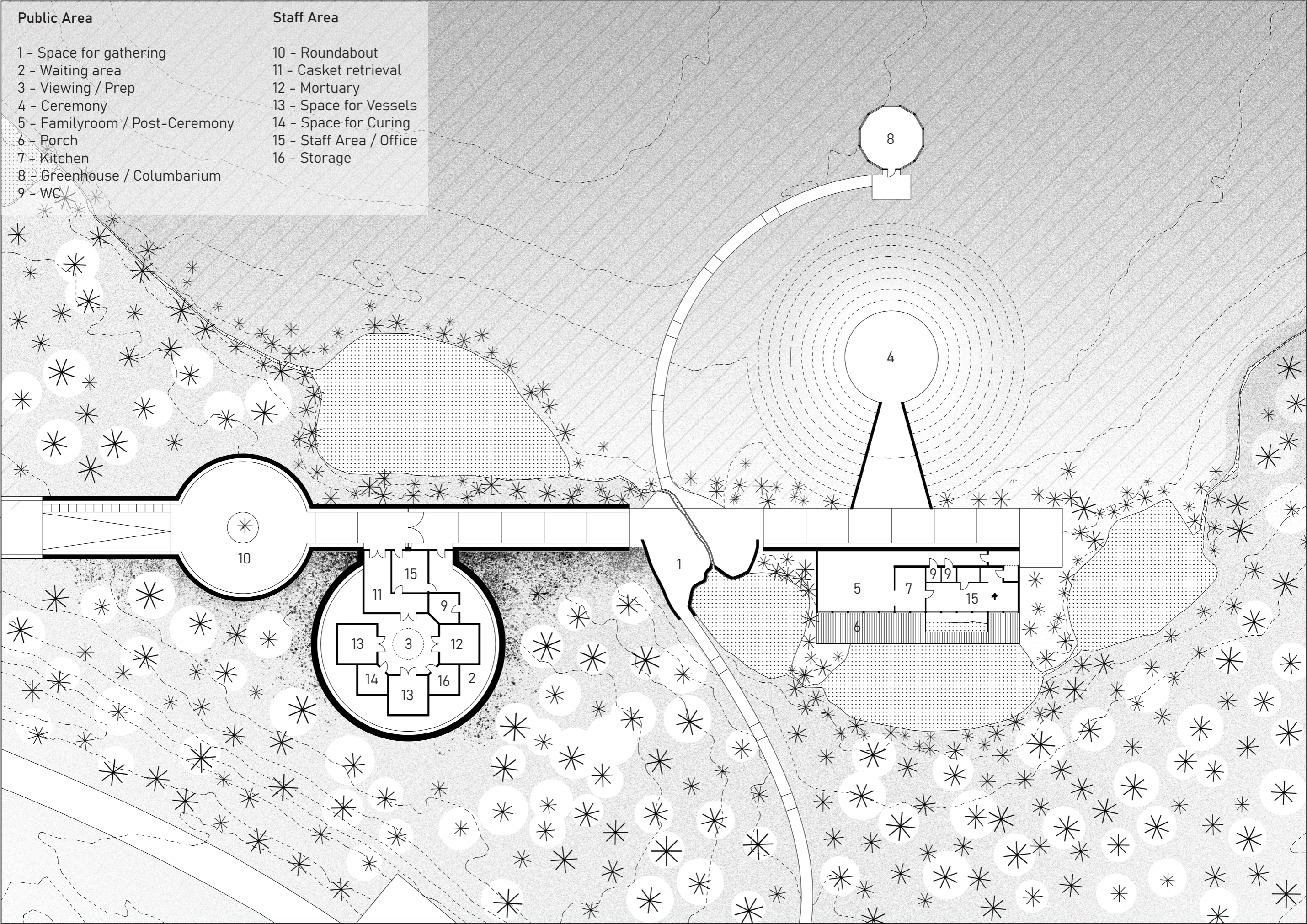


Negative space TUMULUS

Space for life



Irish Sky Garden - James Turrell



Public Area

- 1 - Space for gathering
- 2 - Waiting area
- 3 - Viewing / Prep
- 4 - Ceremony
- 5 - Familyroom / Post-Ceremony
- 6 - Porch
- 7 - Kitchen
- 8 - Greenhouse / Columbarium
- 9 - WC

Staff Area

- 10 - Roundabout
- 11 - Casket retrieval
- 12 - Mortuary
- 13 - Space for Vessels
- 14 - Space for Curing
- 15 - Staff Area / Office
- 16 - Storage

A
B
E

A
B
E

C

D

C

D

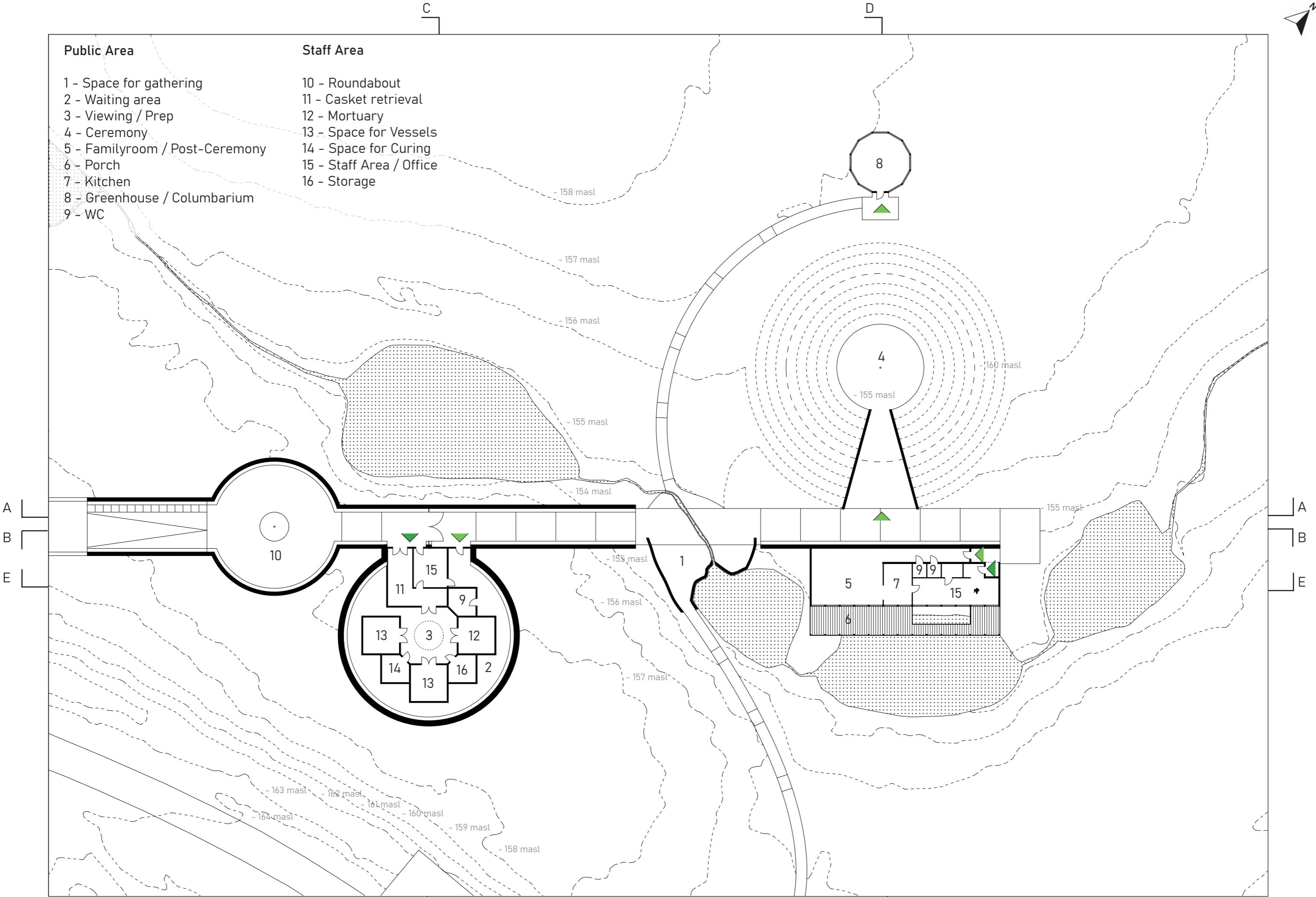


Public Area

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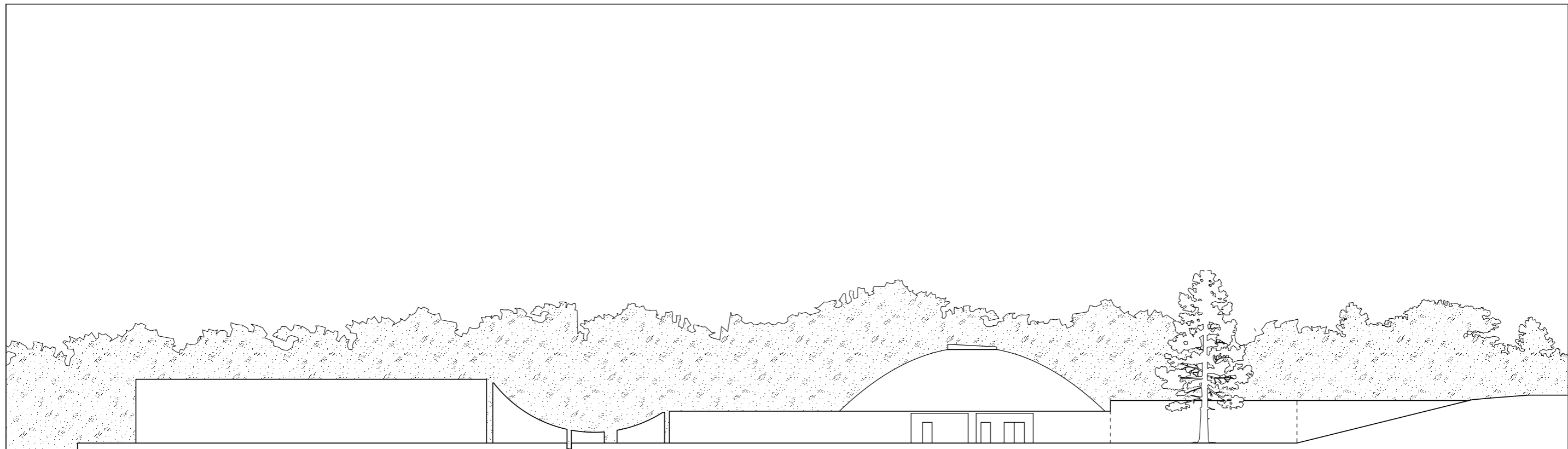
Staff Area

- 10 - Roundabout
- 11 - Casket retrieval
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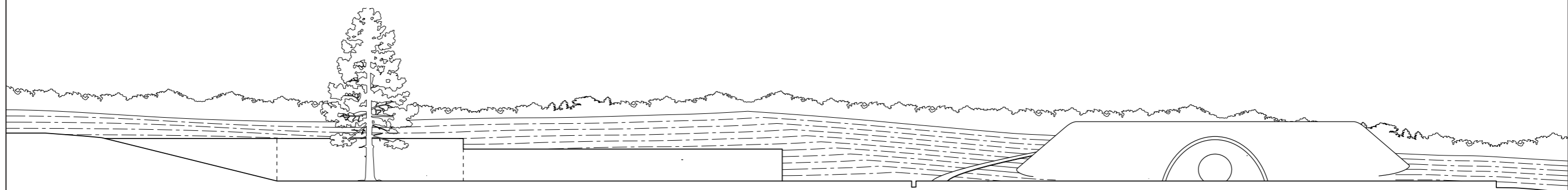


masl - meters above sea level

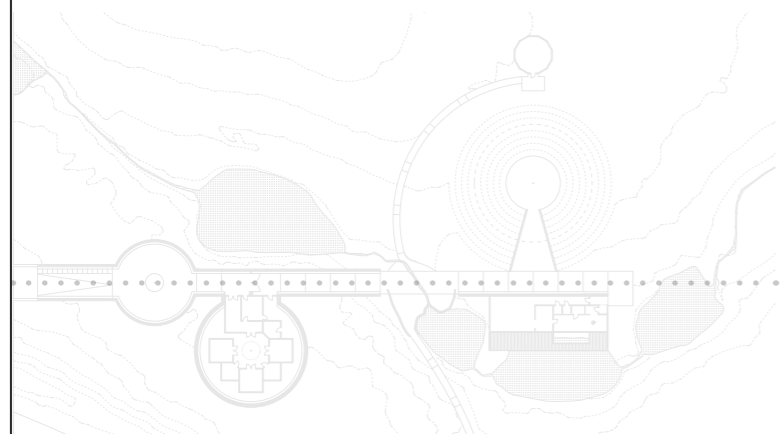
Plan with Topography - 1:400



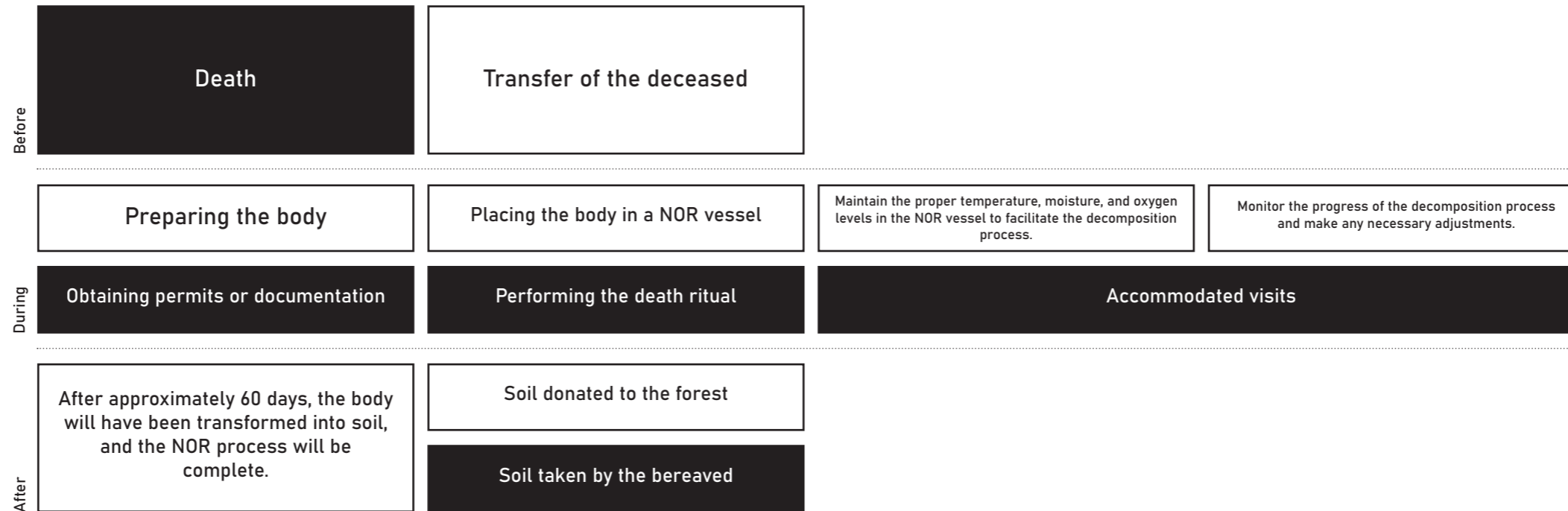
Section B



Section A



SEQUENCE



■ Sequence of the bereaved

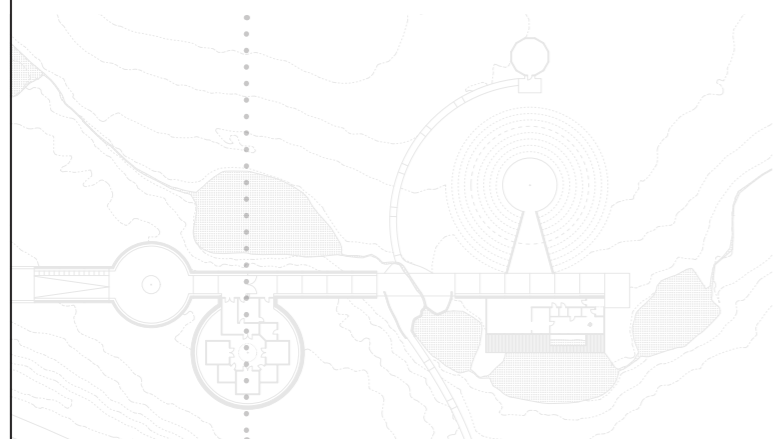
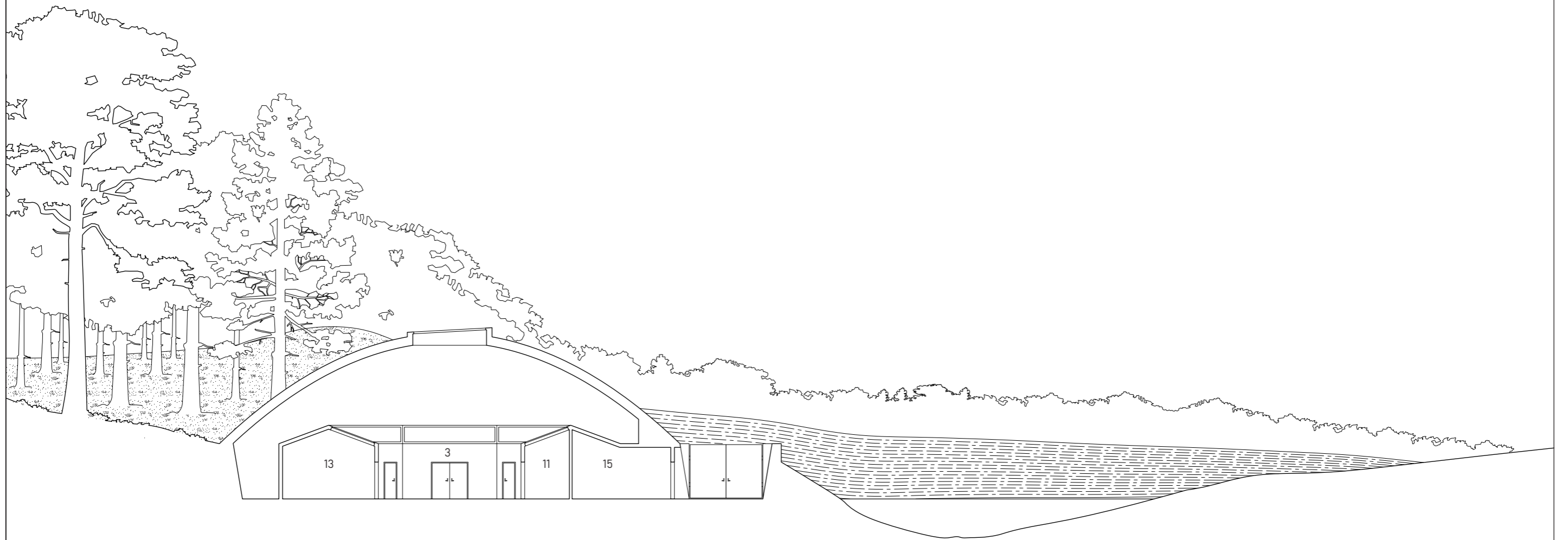
□ Sequence of the NOR Process

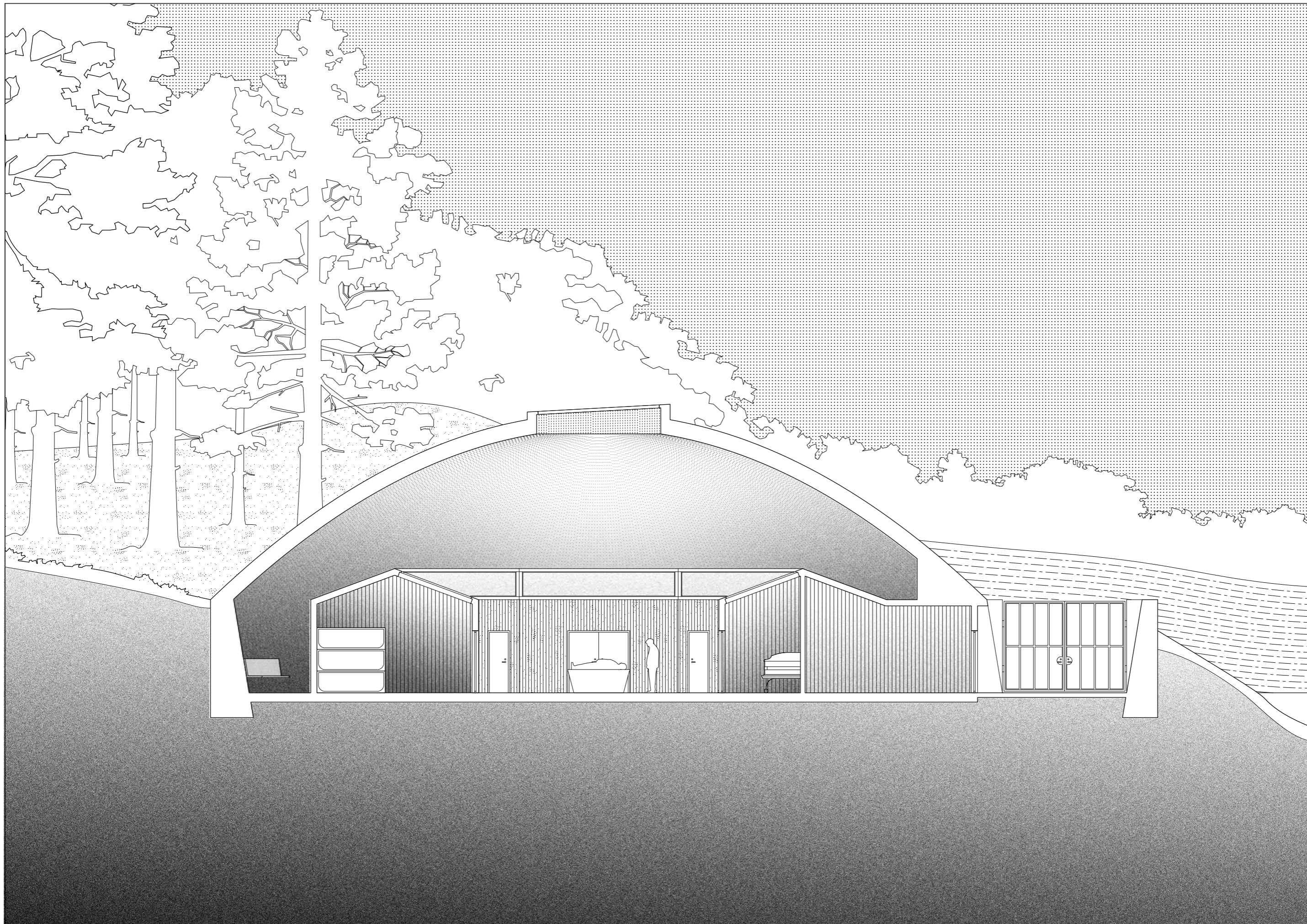
First Visit

During the first visit, which marks the beginning of the grieving process, the funeral home is contacted to arrange for the collection of the deceased. The body would be transported via a separate road, arriving from the west of the project to ensure privacy, before being placed in the mortuary. The bereaved follow an established road to a parking lot before descending a concrete cast footpath through the forest to reach gathering space (1). Within the Tumulus, retaining walls guide visitors into the bermed structure. Inside, timber constructions accommodate the NOR process at the central area. The bereaved wait along the periphery of the tumulus (2), gazing upon the light cascading down the 6-meter-tall concrete roof. When the time comes, they will be escorted to the viewing area (3), located beneath the oculus. This serves as their final farewell, as subsequently, the body will be placed into a vessel to commence the decomposition process.

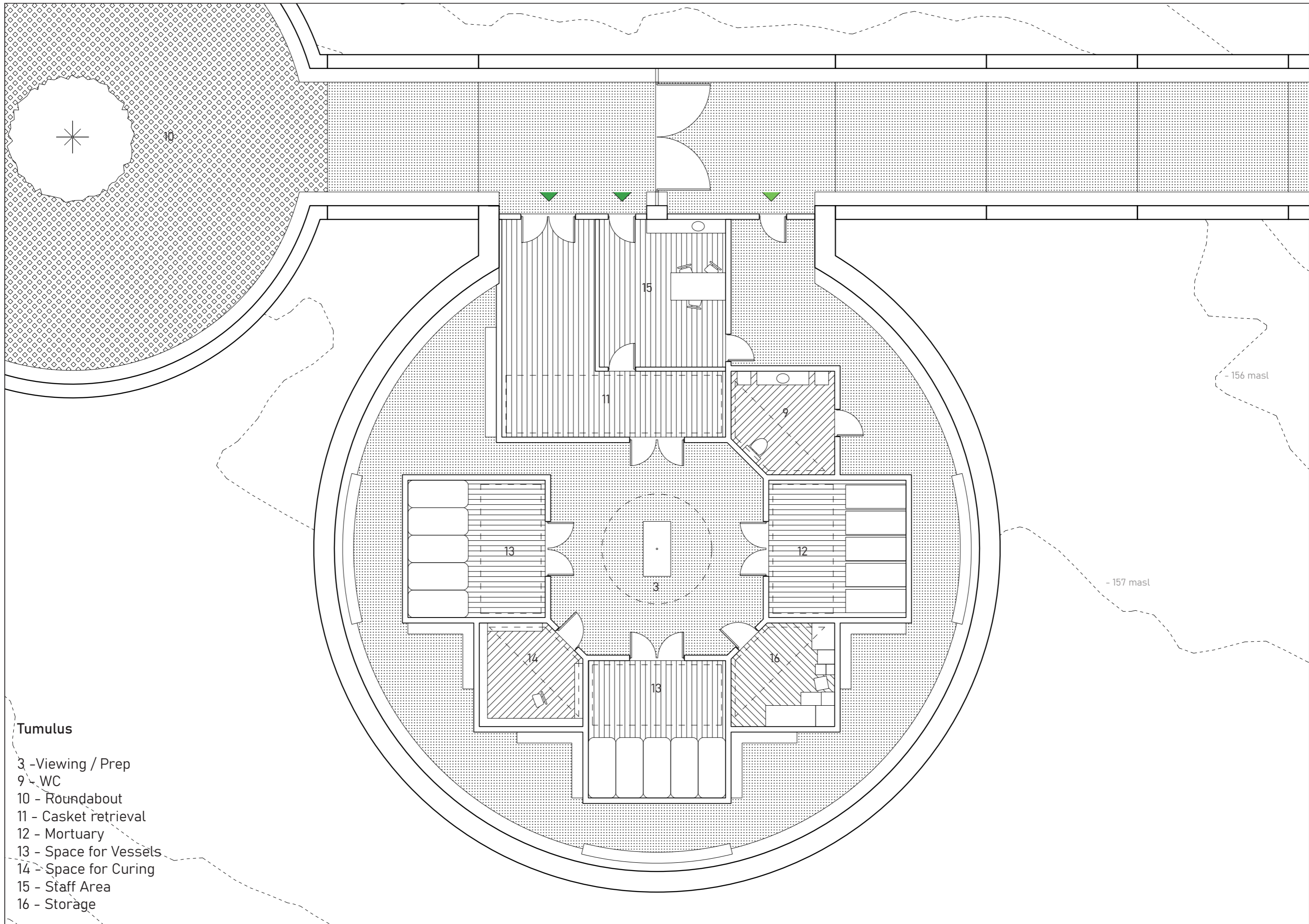
Tumulus

- 13 - Vesselroom
- 3 - Viewing / Prep
- 11 - Casket retrieval
- 15 - Staff Area





Section C - 1:100



Tumulus

- 3 - Viewing / Prep
- 9 - WC
- 10 - Roundabout
- 11 - Casket retrieval
- 12 - Mortuary
- 13 - Space for Vessels
- 14 - Space for Curing
- 15 - Staff Area
- 16 - Storage

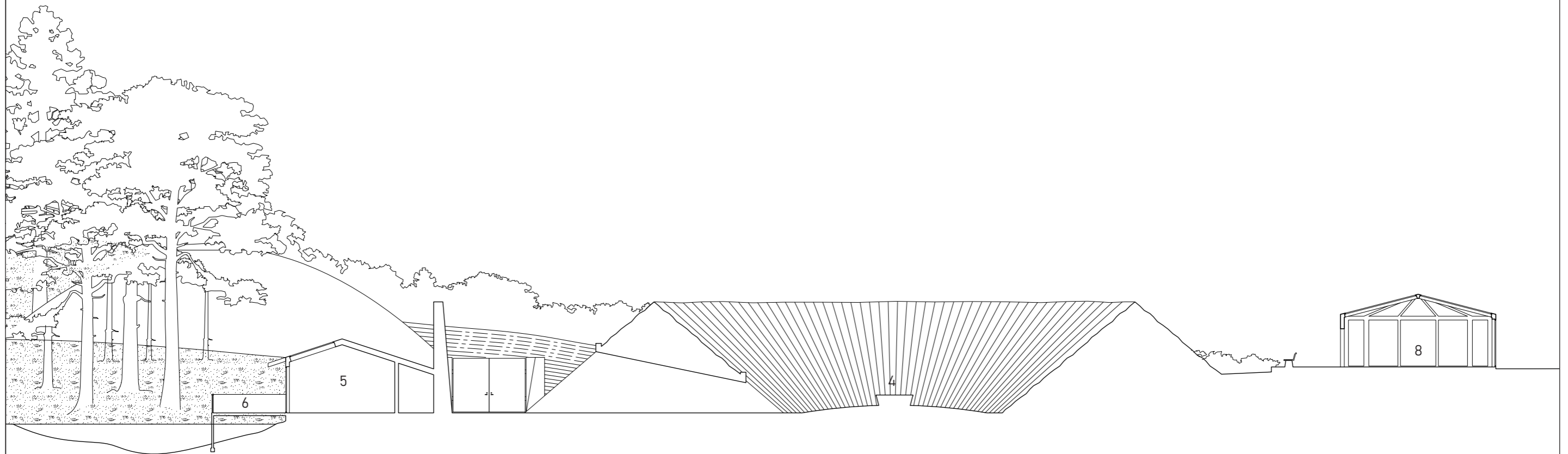
Second Visit

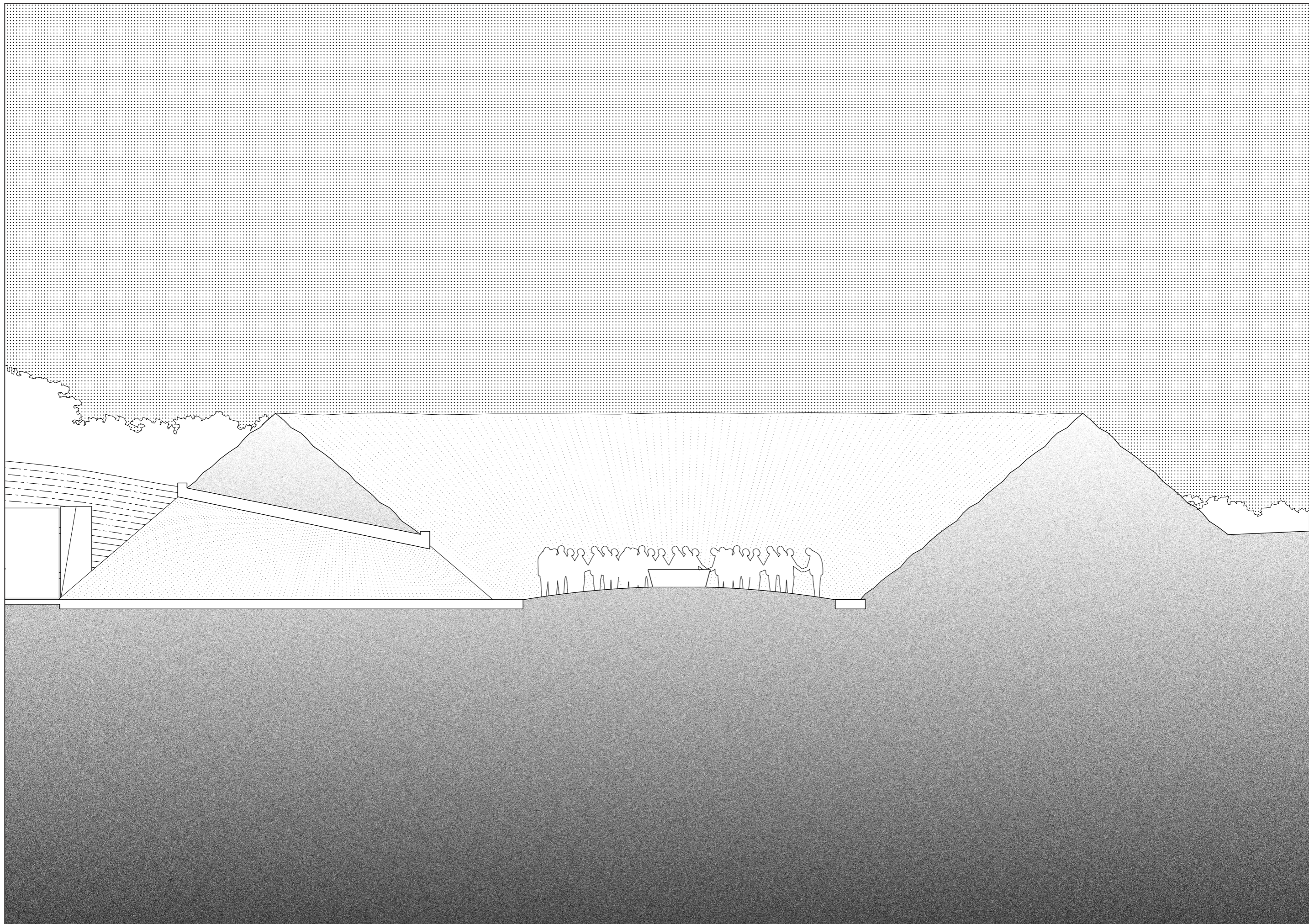
The second visit entail the celebration of life and is meant for the ceremony. The brereaved would again gather at the gathering area (1) before crossing the stream and entering the farmland, where a 6 meter tall concrete wall leads you to the entrance of the equally tall earth mound (4). Upon entering, the mound serves as a symbolic backdrop for honoring the deceased and reinforces the concept of the deceased transitioning into soil. During this ceremony, the bereaved will have the chance to plant a flower using the soil from their loved one's vessel. This fulfills one of the requirements for both the death ritual and grief work, providing a means for commemoration and establishing an enduring connection to the deceased.

After the ceremony, guests will have the opportunity to proceed to the family room (5), passing along and around the concrete wall. Situated in a conventional timber construction with views overlooking the forest, the family room provides a lighter atmosphere through its, visually signifying the release of grief and the joy of remembrance.

Mound

- 4 - Ceremony
- 5 - Familyroom / Post-Ceremony
- 6 - Porch
- 8 - Greenhouse / Columbarium



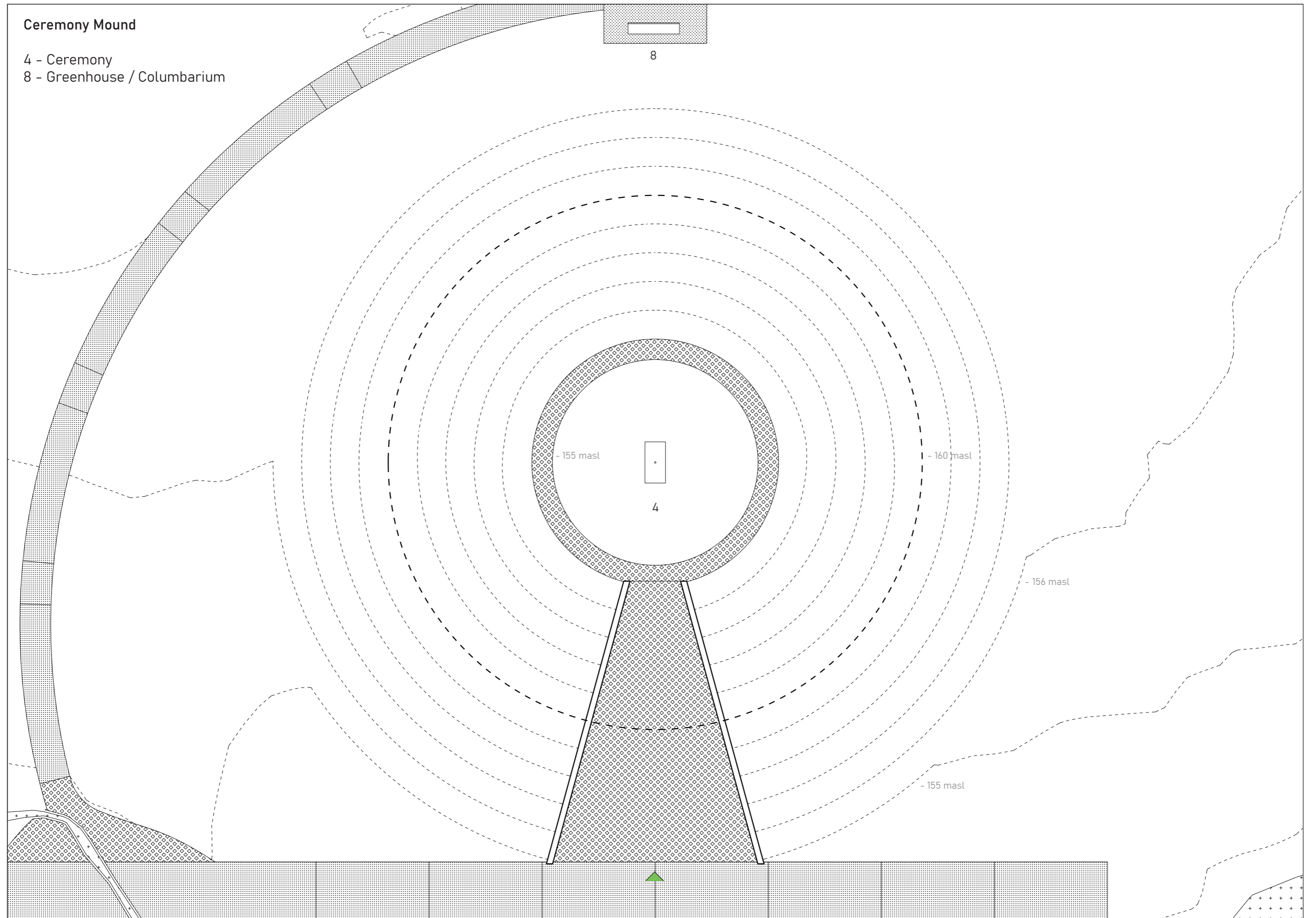


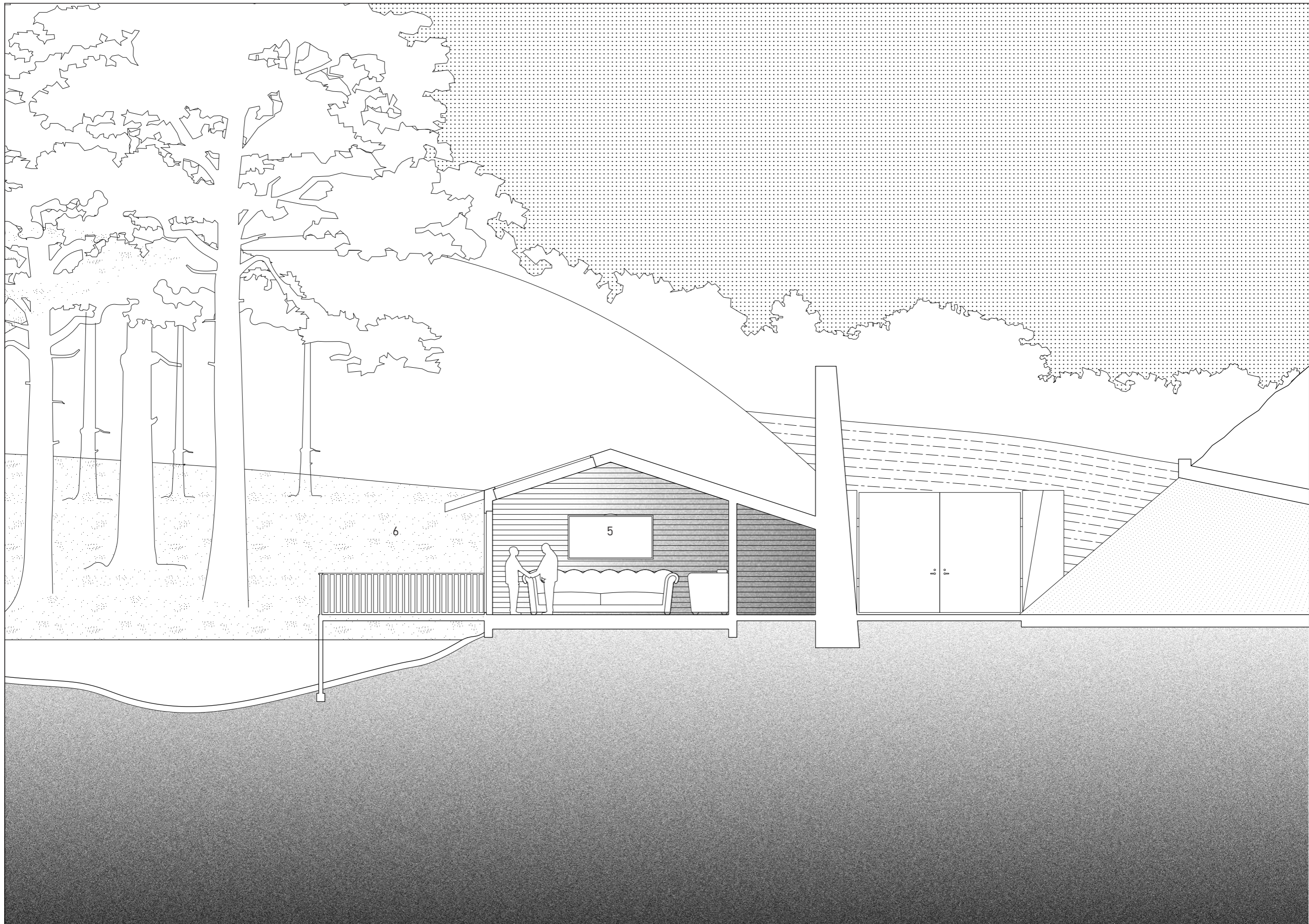
Section D - 1:100

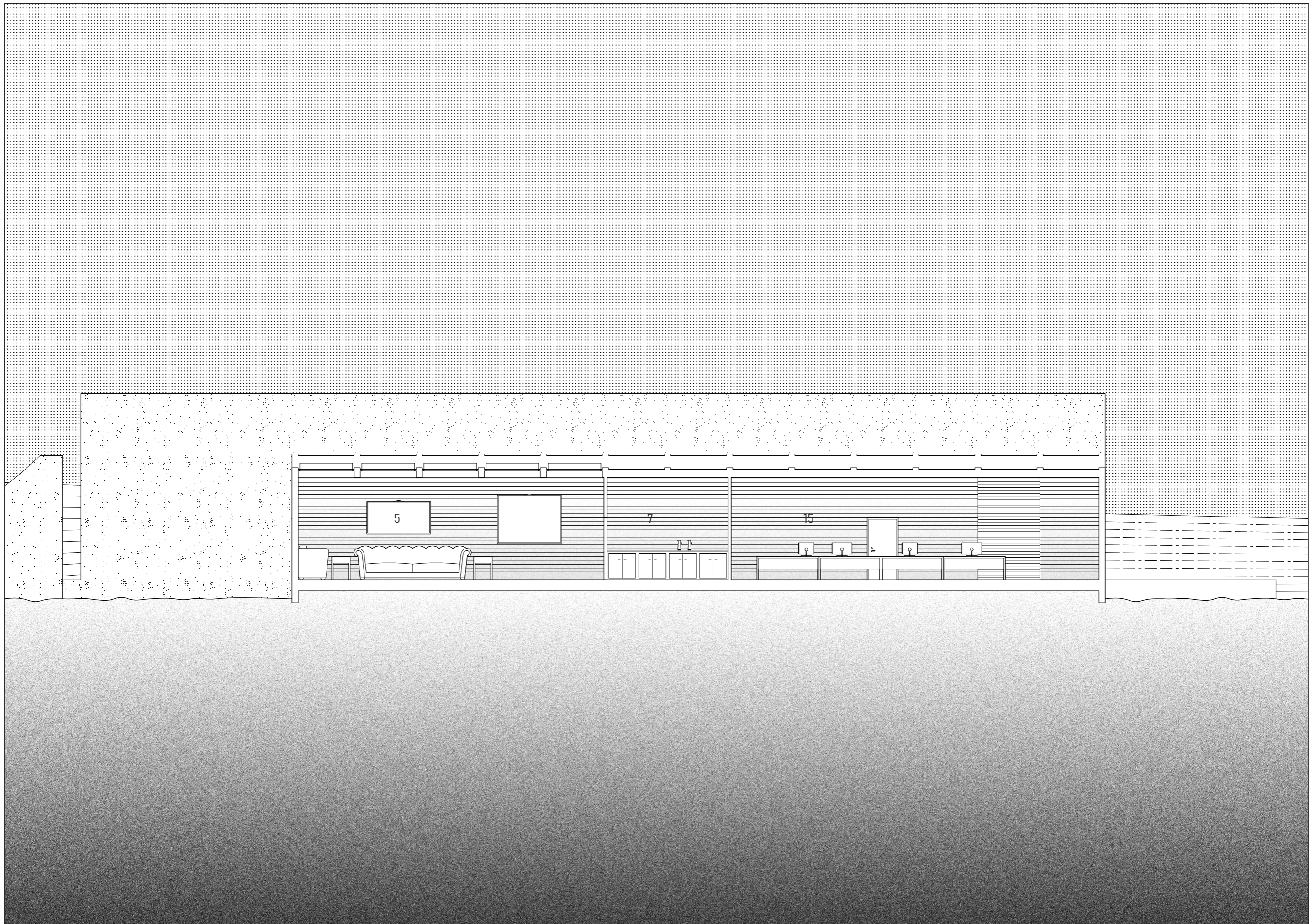


Ceremony Mound

- 4 - Ceremony
- 8 - Greenhouse / Columbarium



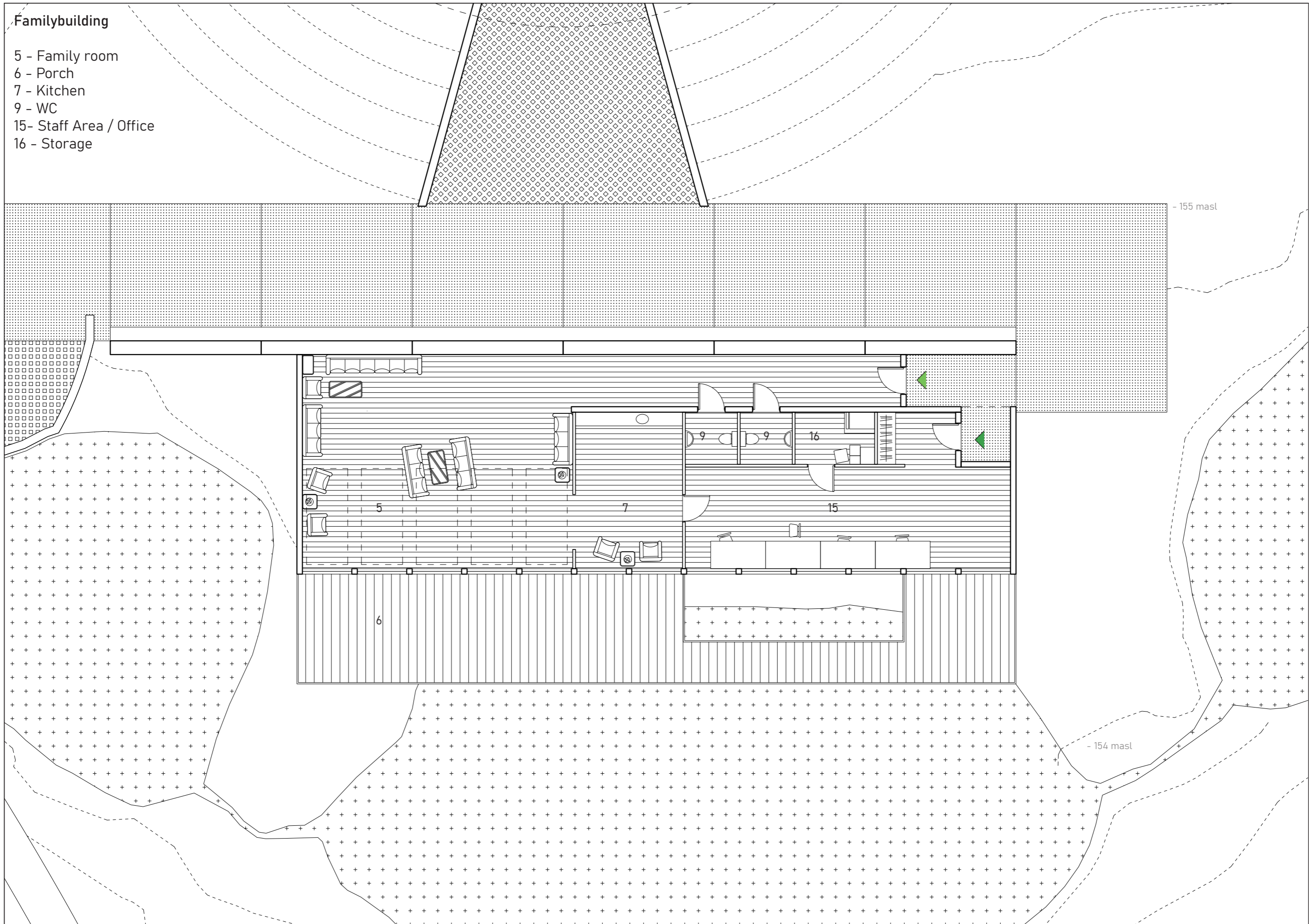






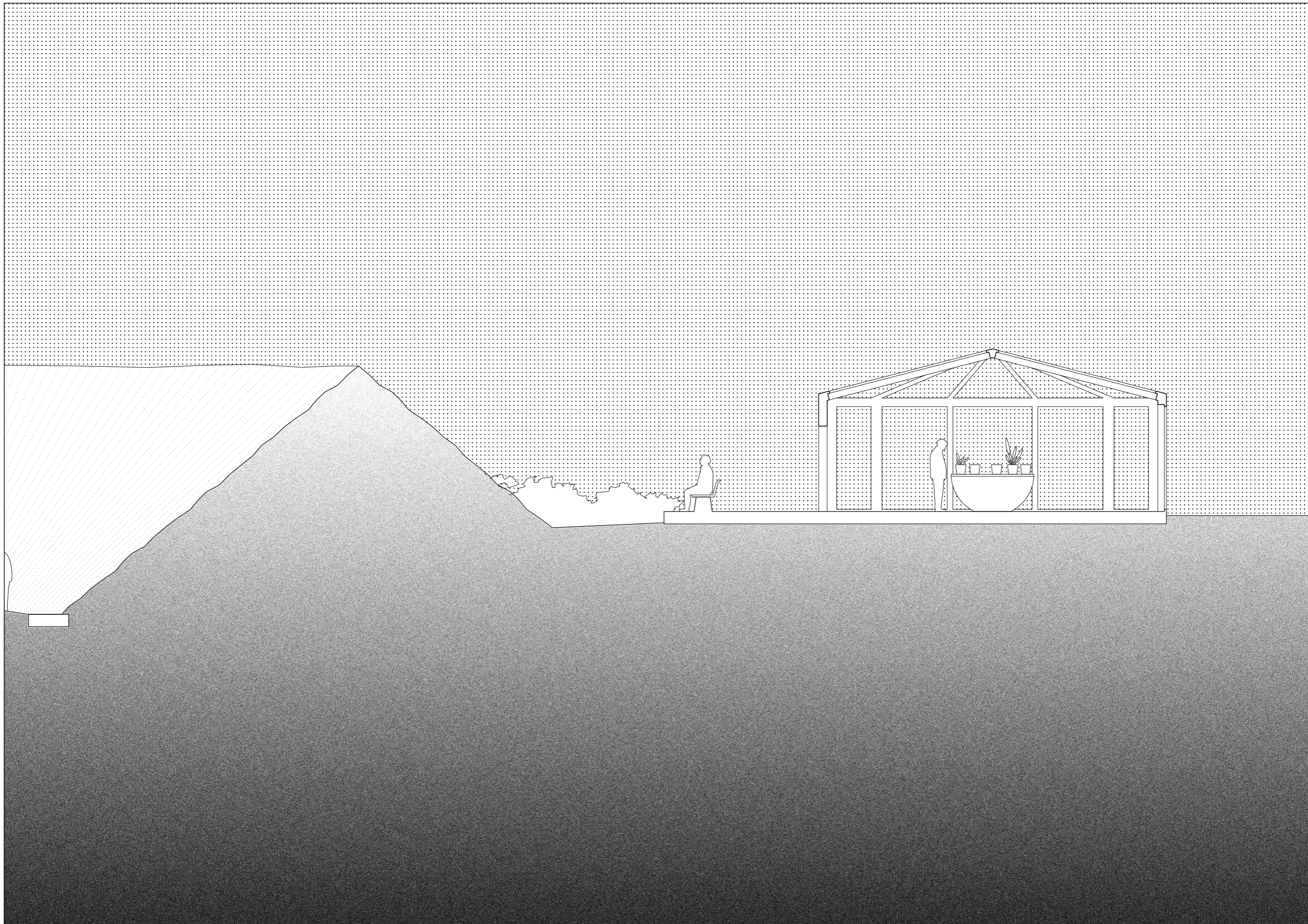
Familybuilding

- 5 - Family room
- 6 - Porch
- 7 - Kitchen
- 9 - WC
- 15- Staff Area / Office
- 16 - Storage



Third Visit

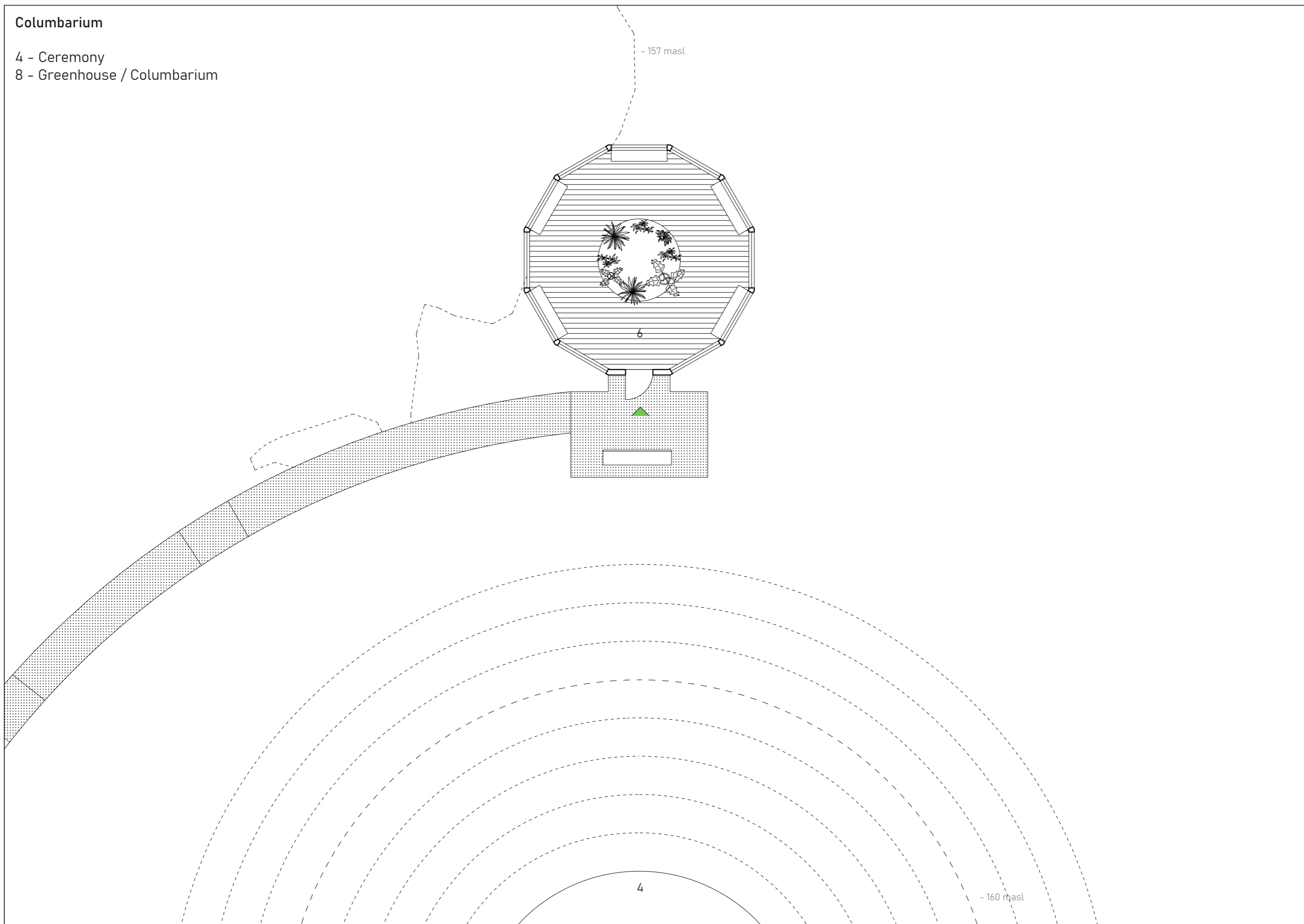
Following the ceremony, the body will undergo decomposition and curing for approximately two months. During this time, the flower planted during the ceremony will be placed in the columbarium/greenhouse (8). Concealed behind the ceremony mound, a concrete cast footpath guides the bereaved to the columbarium, where their plant will reside for the next two months, nurturing the enduring connection essential in grief work. Additionally, they will be able to observe the plant's growth throughout this period, further emphasizing the connection to the cycles of nature and aiding in the process of emancipation from the deceased.





Columbarium

- 4 - Ceremony
- 8 - Greenhouse / Columbarium



Forth Visit

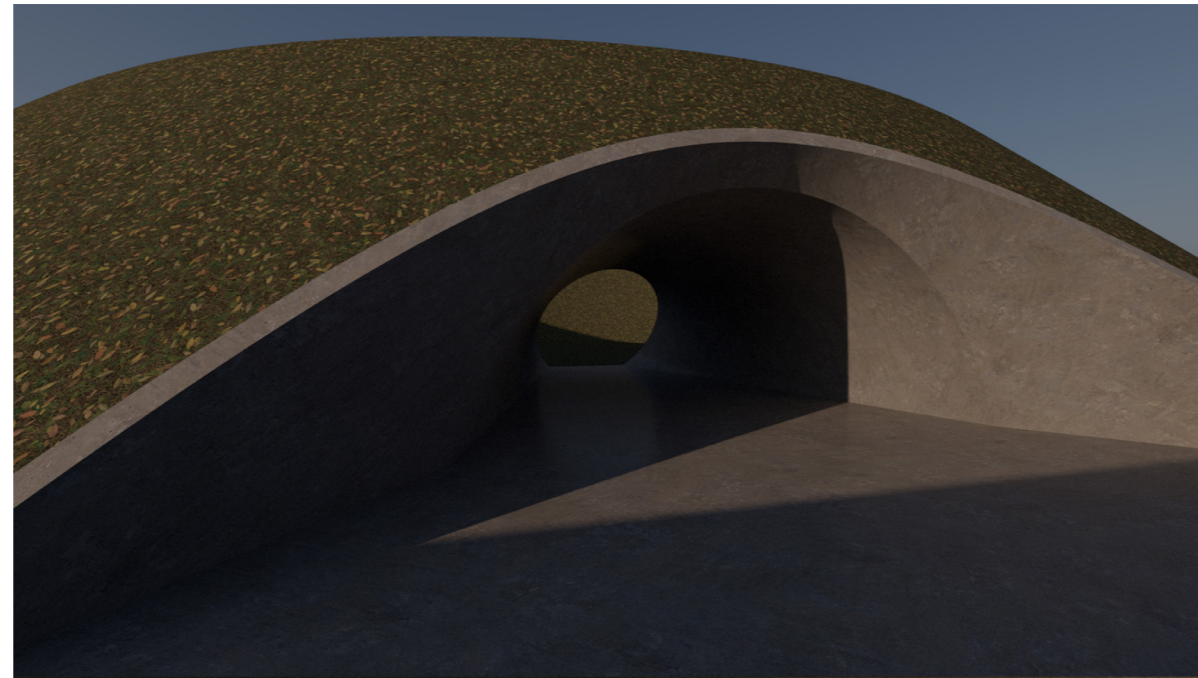
After the completion of the decomposition process, which typically spans approximately two months, the bereaved will be invited to return and collect the soil of their loved one. This moment marks a significant step in the grieving process, as it allows individuals to physically reclaim a tangible remnant of their departed family member or friend. The act of collecting the soil serves as a poignant ritual, symbolizing the completion of the natural organic reduction (NOR) process and the transition of the deceased into a new form. It provides a sense of closure and allows for the continuation of personalized memorialization, as the soil can be utilized in various ways according to the wishes of the bereaved. Whether it be scattering the soil in a meaningful location, incorporating it into their personal garden, or preserving it in a keepsake.

If the bereaved choose to donate the soil, the funeral home will utilize it to establish a new forest along the periphery of the project, within the farmland area. This initiative creates a living memorial, symbolizing the enduring legacy of those who have passed and offering families a meaningful way to positively contribute to the surrounding landscape. Furthermore, the establishment of this forest reflects the principles of natural organic reduction (NOR), highlighting the interconnectedness of life and death within the cycles of nature.

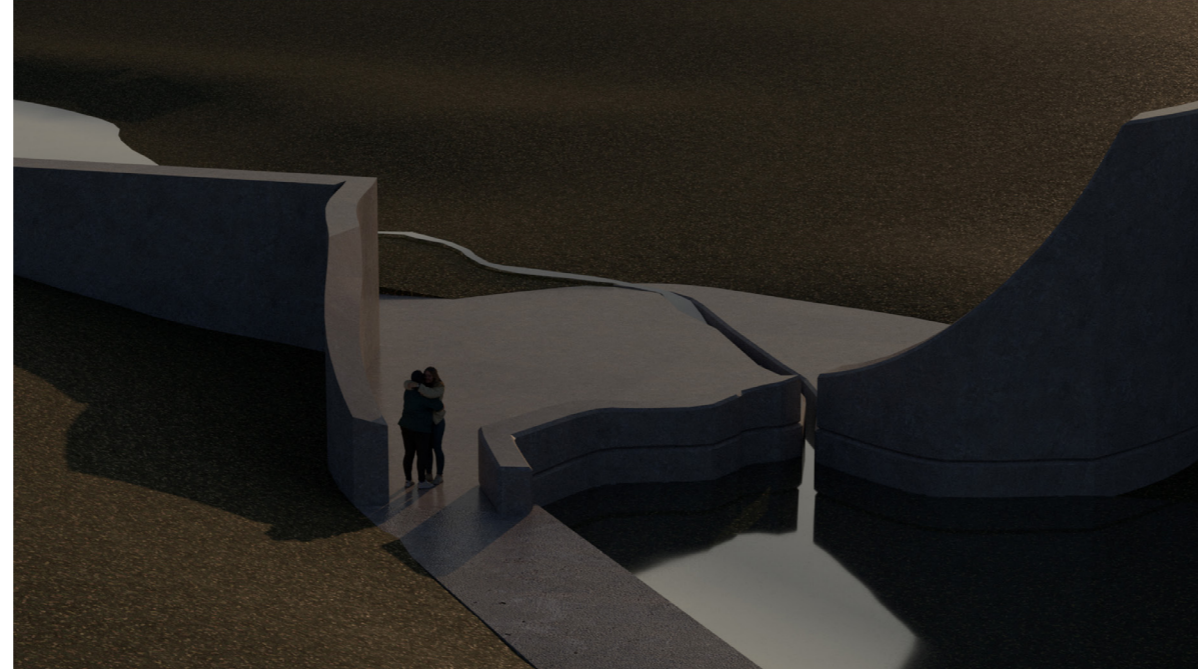


The establishment of a new forest

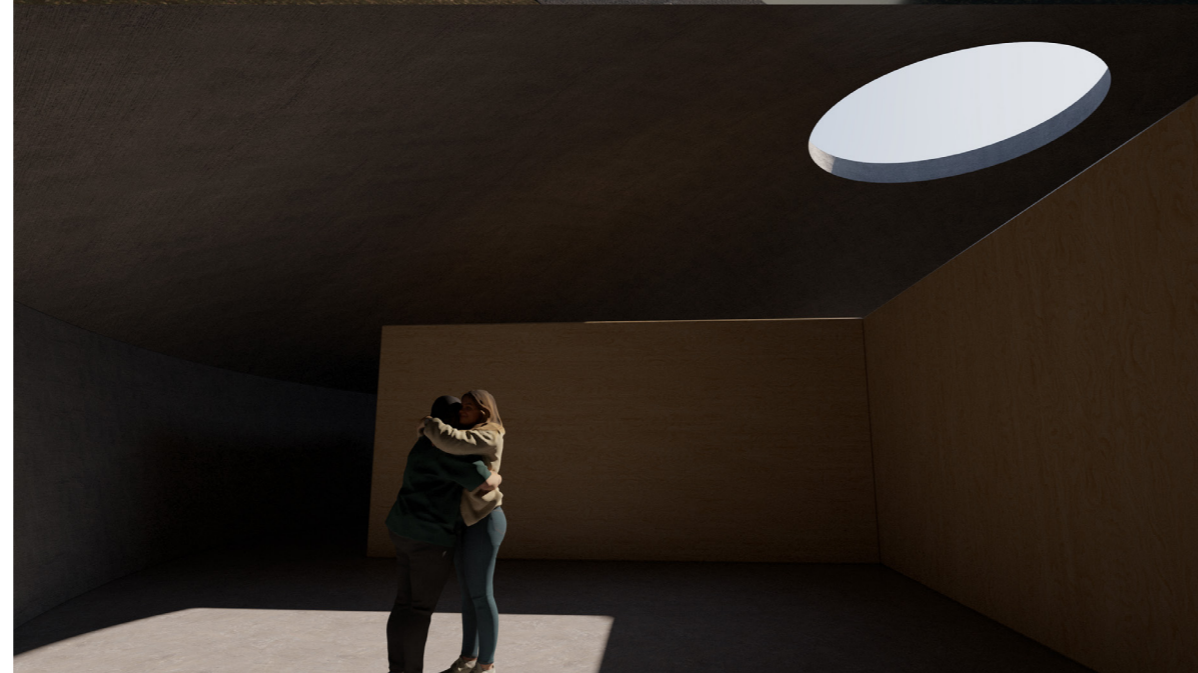
Establishet forest



Entrance to Ceremony Mound



Concrete path to gathering space



Inside the tumulus