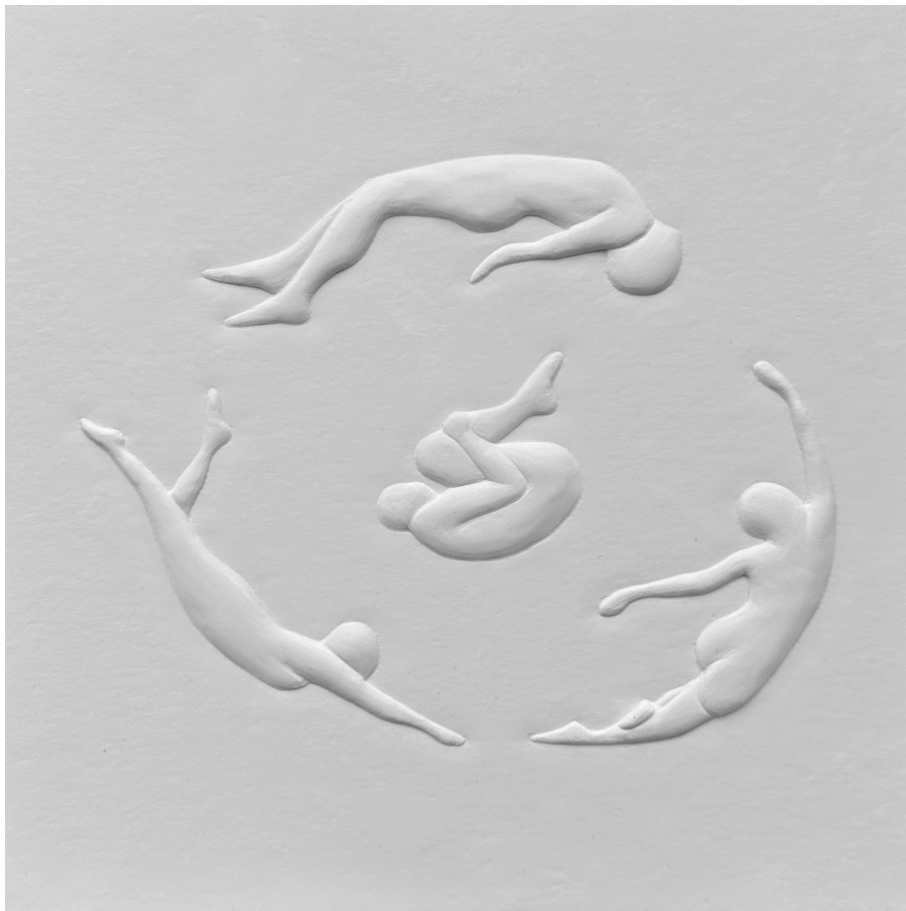


BATHING IN ARCHITECTURE

An exploration of the public spa as an architectural typology
supporting everyday well-being.



Chalmers School of Architecture
Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering

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2026

Examiner: Mikael Ekegren
Supervisor: Isabella Eriksson



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Figure 1. (front page) Swimmers. Plaster cast.

Abstract

The experience of bathing is deeply intertwined with the experience of architecture; it is a meeting between body, space, and material. Once a collective ritual and later a private necessity, the history of bathing reflects shifts in how people have understood health, the body, and society itself. In contemporary Sweden, public swimming halls are a place for exercise and are largely available. Meanwhile, spas devoted to mental well-being have become exclusive destinations, detached from the everyday.

This thesis explores the public spa as an architectural typology supporting everyday well-being. The design proposal is located by the river in Klippan, Gothenburg. Today, the site functions as a parking lot; but there are plans by the municipality to transform the area into a residential neighbourhood in the near future. The shared bath is integrated within the development plan to further enhance the site’s potential.

Through the study of light, materiality, and spatial configuration, the project investigates how the built environment can affect the atmosphere in a public spa. Grounded in literature and informed by built reference projects, the research applies design-based methods including model making and sketching.

The result is a public spa focusing on the experiences of the visitor. The journey from the outside to the inside and around the bath is composed of a series of spatial and light sequences, creating a rhythm of movement and stillness. A place where great care has been put into balancing the sense of seriousness with welcoming gestures - where the bathing ritual becomes a part of the everyday.

Key words: thermal bath, natural stone, waterfront, bathing ritual

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Introduction

Cleaning oneself- an essential part of the everyday. It can be a moment of peace, a ritual of self-care. But more often than not, it is simply a chore.

In the bathing experience one is as bodily close as possible to architecture. The feeling of the floor against bare feet, the railing in hand not to slip, and the embrace of water of the unclothed body. Due to the nature of water, bathing is a full spatial experience; float on your back and examine the roof, sit in a pool and eyes are at floor level. This calls for careful consideration and attention to detail.

The history of bathing takes us from social ritual to cultural taboo and back again. It reflects shifts in how people have understood health, the body, and society itself. Today, public swimming halls remain as intended in the mid-20th century and are widely available. It is a place dedicated to exercise and taking care of one's physical well-being. Bathing facilities benefiting one's mental well-being have, on the other hand, evolved into destinations, spas, often associated with exclusivity and couples-retreat.

Just as the maintenance of physical health requires continuity, mental well-being demands regular and accessible forms of care. It raises the question: what happens with the architecture of a spa when it caters to the everyday setting rather than to the occasional indulgence? This typology is hereby referred to as the public spa. Being a public space suggests the bathing facility needs to serve as a meeting ground for the community. A place not focused on the technical add-ons such as jacuzzis, experience showers, and red light therapy, but rather on the architecture itself as a meditative medium and as a space for interaction.

Aim

This thesis seeks to explore the public spa as an architectural typology connecting individual and collective forms of care through materiality, spatial configuration, light and views. A place where the architecture itself becomes an active part in the cultivation of well-being.

Thesis Question

How can the spa typology be reimagined as a public bathing facility that supports everyday well-being?

How does space, light, and material affect the atmosphere in a public spa?

Objective

The research is executed through a design proposal consisting of a public spa in Gothenburg, with multiple pools and saunas. Spaces with varying temperatures, proportions, light, and views. Supporting spaces including foyer, changing rooms, staff area, and technical facilities.

The results are presented through architectural drawings, images and physical models.



Figure 2. *What the Water Gave Me* (Kahlo, 1938). PDM 1.0.

Method

The main methods guiding the process are research by design based, including sketching and model making, used iteratively to communicate and evaluate results. Research for design is used in the early stage to gather knowledge and understanding of the history, culture, and theories related to bathing. It primarily consists of literature and case studies.

Literature studies

Study of relevant literature, including historical research about bathing in Sweden and other cultures, construction materials, and design strategies. The literature studies are used both to set the project in a context of bathing today and to help the design process.

Case studies

An in-depth investigation of built references. Gaining an understanding of how similar projects have been dealt with before and the consequences of design choices in them, even more so by visiting the project. Aiding the process of determining an applicable program, spatial sequences, and architectural qualities.

Sketches

Both by hand and digitally. It is used as a tool to evaluate and communicate ideas in early stages as well as later on. A sketch by hand can encompass more information than spoken word when working together to find what spaces can be composed of. Drawing digitally and iterating it leads to the final drawings presented in this thesis.

Models

Both physical models and 3D models are used to explore and inform decisions regarding volume, spatial qualities, materiality, and light. Site and volume studies are executed both digitally and physically, as a form-finding tool in the earlier stages and to present the result. The working model aids the process of analysing and communicating ideas in 3D to provide a deeper understanding regarding design decisions. Digital modelling is used to inform decisions on a detailed level, explore materiality, and simulate light conditions.

Site analysis

A comprehensive analysis of the chosen site, highlighting the architectural and historical context. A study of the broader context, such as the city also included. Executed through site visits, reading about the area, analysing adjacent buildings and geographical position.

Delimitations

The project is not chosen because there is a lack of spas or swimming halls, but rather an exploration of a lost atmosphere and typology for bathing. Financial aspects will not be taken into consideration, including socioeconomic ones.

The project will not investigate medical aspects of well-being nor include theories about evidence-based design. Well-being in this project refers to the feeling rather than the mental state.

Reading Instructions

The booklet is divided into three parts. The first one is the introduction including the aim and thesis questions, methods and theory, focusing on reference projects. The second one is the main material showcasing the research findings through a design project. The last and third part is the discussion including reflections and conclusions based on the design results.

Public spa refers to a spa typology catered to the everyday rather than occasional indulgence.

Well-being refers to the everyday feeling, not the mental state.

Atmosphere refers to the impact of space, further defined by Peter Zumthor in the book *Atmospheres* (2006).



Theory

Studying built projects is the main source informing design decisions, in addition to the book *Atmospheres* (2006) by Peter Zumthor and literature about the history of bathing in Sweden. The reference projects have been chosen for different reasons. Therme Vals by Peter Zumthor as a reference for the program and volumetric concept. Klockarebacken funeral chapel by Bernt Nyberg for the use of natural light from above. Varbergs cold bath house by Wilhelm Gagner and Koganeyu by Jo Nagasaka and Schemata Architects for the project's position in society and functions. Lastly a study visit to Hagabadet by Axel Kumlien for historical and present context of the city of Gothenburg.

Spatial configurations, functions and areas of Therme Vals, Andrum by Johan Sundberg, and Hagabadet have been analysed to inform decisions regarding the space program.

Figure 3. (opposite) *Sommar* (Zorn, 1887). PDM 1.0.

History of Bathing

In medieval Sweden (1050-1527), the bathing cottage was more than a place to wash away the dirt of everyday life. It was a social space where people met to relax, eat, drink, play music, and care for their bodies. For many, especially the poor, it was also a practical necessity to get rid of lice and other parasites (Berlin, 2024).

By the 16th and 17th centuries, however, the reputation of public baths began to decline. Many baths around Europe were linked to prostitution and with this came the rapid spread of diseases, especially syphilis. Physicians of the time misinterpreted the cause, blaming the water itself for transmitting illness. Such views contributed to official bans, and in Sweden the closure of public bathhouses was formalized in 1725. Over time, washing the body was no longer seen as a path to health but as a threat to it. Cleanliness came to rely instead on wigs, heavy makeup, and perfumes, while modesty and prudishness discouraged any form of nudity. By the beginning of the 19th century, the act of bathing had almost disappeared from daily life, creating conditions where disease spread rapidly (Berlin, 2024).

Yet new ideas about hygiene and health eventually began to turn the tide. Physicians such as Carl Curman reintroduced bathing as a vital practice, not only for cleanliness but also for well-being. Seaside resorts along the Swedish west coast became popular, advertising saltwater bathing as both fashionable and restorative. At the same time, swimming as a sport began to gain followers, particularly in Uppsala (Berlin, 2024).

The first Swedish public baths (folkbad) were introduced during the late 19th century, including Hagabadet (1876) in Gothenburg. These facilities are recollections of the Roman and Turkish baths with pools, saunas, and hefty decor. A beautiful and serene place to relax. Not soon after, by the mid-20th century, there was a strong political movement investing in public swimming halls and school swimming lessons; all unnecessary elements of the baths were removed. The place for relaxation and introspection becomes a sports facility, catered to children and athleticism (Knutsson 2021).



Figure 4. Hagabadet (1935). GSMHj:2300001. PDM 1.0.

Atmospheres

Peter Zumthor

2006

In the book *Atmospheres* (2006), architect Peter Zumthor writes about his approach to architecture and feelings evoked by spaces. He pinpoints nine strategies or categories of what creates the atmosphere of a place.

The Body of Architecture encompasses the presence of material elements in a building. It is the basic structure of the building, the insulation and the covering of these elements: all layers of the building.

Material Compatibility is about how materials act and how they interact with each other. The material qualities, weight, colour, form, and tactility play a role in architectural space.

The Sound of Space refers to acoustics. He describes the building as a sort of musical instrument, bouncing the sound between walls, amplifying or removing it. The shape and surfaces of the room will determine how the sound is perceived.

The Temperature of a Space does not only relate to the actual degrees Celsius in a space. It is how the air flows through space and how materials transmit energy to the body. There is also the preconception involved, how you think a place will feel, rather than how it actually feels.

Surrounding objects. Zumthor states it is helpful for him to imagine how the space he is designing is going to be used and which objects will be there. He claims the objects define the space they are in.

Between Composure and Seduction is about how spatial configurations affect the movement. Depending on the organization of spaces, people can be provided freedom to go where they please or “forced” to take a certain path.

Tension between Interior and Exterior concerns the transition from outside to inside and how architecture communicates to the surrounding world. How much of the inside is visible from the outside? What can be seen from the inside? What statements does the architecture make to the public?

Level of Intimacy has to do with proximity and distance. It includes size, dimension, scale, and the building’s mass in relation to the human body.

The Light on Things, the artificial but more importantly the natural light and its interplay with the architecture. The tension between shadow, light, and reflections on different materials and surfaces.

Therme Vals

Vals, Switzerland

Peter Zumthor

1996

Integrated in nature, the volume appears to be carved into the slope. The surfaces of the building in locally quarried Valser quartzite enhance the sense of being inside the mountain and connect to the local context. The tactility of the rough stone adds to the atmosphere of the space and brings a sense of permanence and robustness to the structure.

Conceptually the bath is built of monolithic stone blocks, carrying a concrete slab. The spaces in between become passageways and framed views. Because of this, the organization of the bath becomes visible from the outside, especially prominent from the courtyard. It is not as obvious in the other facades due to windows being placed far out and the levels being merged together.

The architecture engages with the visitors' senses through texture, light, acoustics, and temperature. The bath contains several more intimate rooms of varying proportion, water temperature, and light, arranged around a bigger pool at the core of the building. The complex spatial layout invites the visitor to explore the space at their own pace. The movement is not designed as a strict sequence of events, allowing the visitor to roam freely. Architecture that stimulates one's curiosity to explore. The layout appears as an open floor plan with a room-in-room configuration in the drawing but the sequences of light and shadow, rhythm in movement and stillness, visual separation, proportions, and changing atmosphere create a richer spatial experience.

The stone walls continue seamlessly down into the water without interruption. Narrow slits in the ceiling cast rays of daylight onto surfaces and distribute a muted light in the space. Larger openings to the outside are strictly orchestrated.



Figure 5. *Therme Vals* (1999). CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

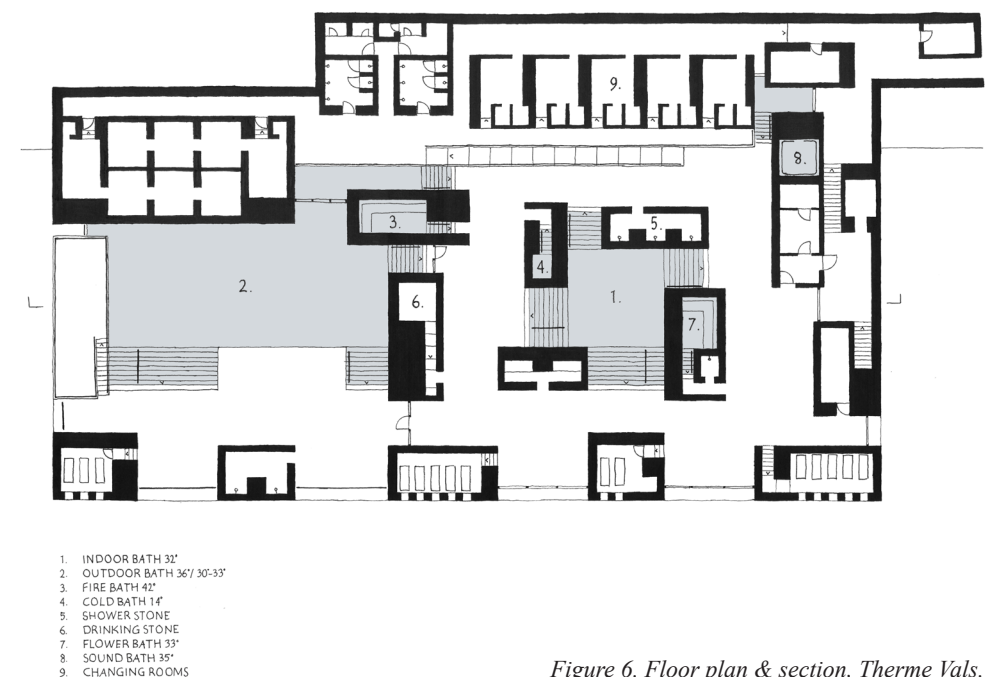


Figure 6. *Floor plan & section, Therme Vals.*

Klockarebacken Funeral Chapel

Höör, Sweden

Bernt Nyberg

1972

A funeral chapel where construction and materiality play a vital role in the design. Robust materials meet delicate detailing.

The ceremonial hall is a square framed by heavily mortared brick walls and a detached roof resting on separate steel columns, creating distance between ceiling and wall where light can shine in. The walls are stroked with light, exaggerating its tactility and rough texture, while the middle of the room remains muted.

It is an example of the use of skylights in a moderate way, and in so creating a bold statement and visual effect.

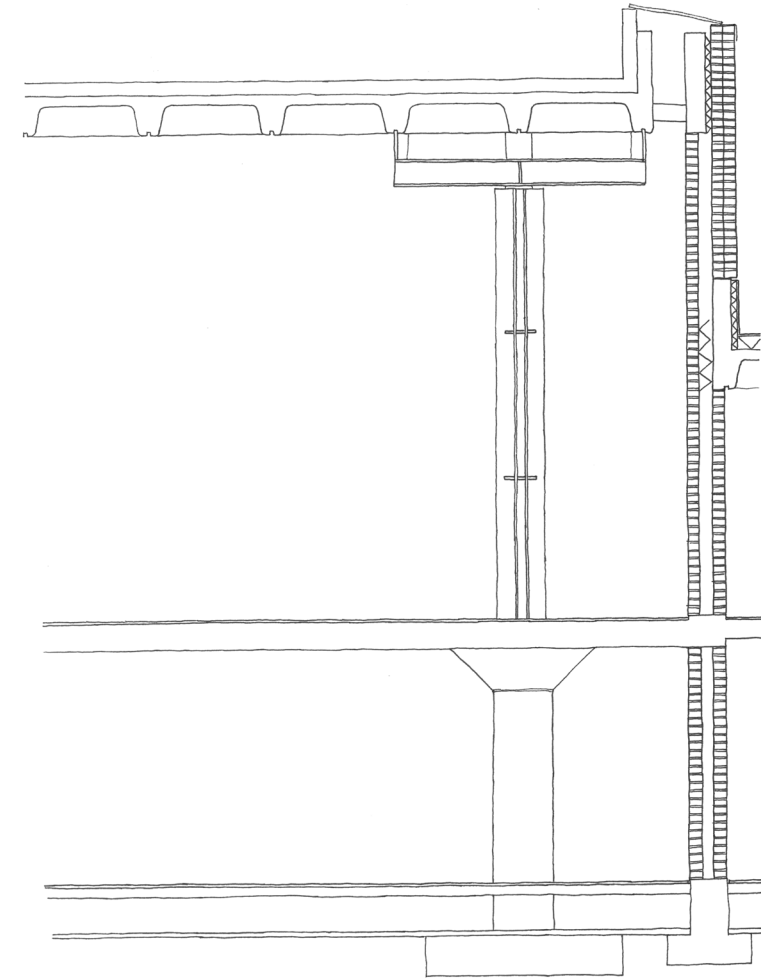


Figure 7. (opposite) Light slit detail, Klockarebacken funeral chapel.

Hagabadet

Axel Kumlien
Gothenburg, Sweden
1876

A bathing and cleaning facility finished in 1876. The idea behind the facility was to promote and strengthen health and hygiene in Gothenburg. Since then, the building has undergone extensive renovations and reconfiguration due to a massive fire in 1903 and to comply with regulations and modern standards (Hagabadet, 2025).

Our visit took place on a cloudy Sunday afternoon in September as regular guests of the bath. From the lobby to the changing room through a narrow corridor with mixed flows of bathers, exercisers, and staff. After changing into bathing suits and locking in the belongings, it was time to explore. The changing room is on the second floor, so going into the spa, you first arrive on a balcony, overlooking the main pool “Ägget”. Via a spiral staircase, you access the pool shaped like an egg. The walk down is not only a space efficient necessity but also becomes a gesture of stepping down into the bath and mentally winding down.

All the smaller rooms have a similar general layout: one main pool with separate functions such as showers, scrubs, or cold buckets in the four corners of the room. The rooms are symmetrical with the oval-shaped pool being the focal point, with two separate stairs on opposite ends leading down to the pool. The edge of the pool is protruding, making the pool feel protected and slightly encapsulated. This edge reduces from the odd dynamic between the swimmer, with sight being at floor level, and the person walking along the poolside.

Throughout the building, the interior is heavily decorated with jugend-style ornaments. This together with the symmetry and generosity of the rooms clearly signal that this space, and therefore the activity of bathing is of great importance and dignity.

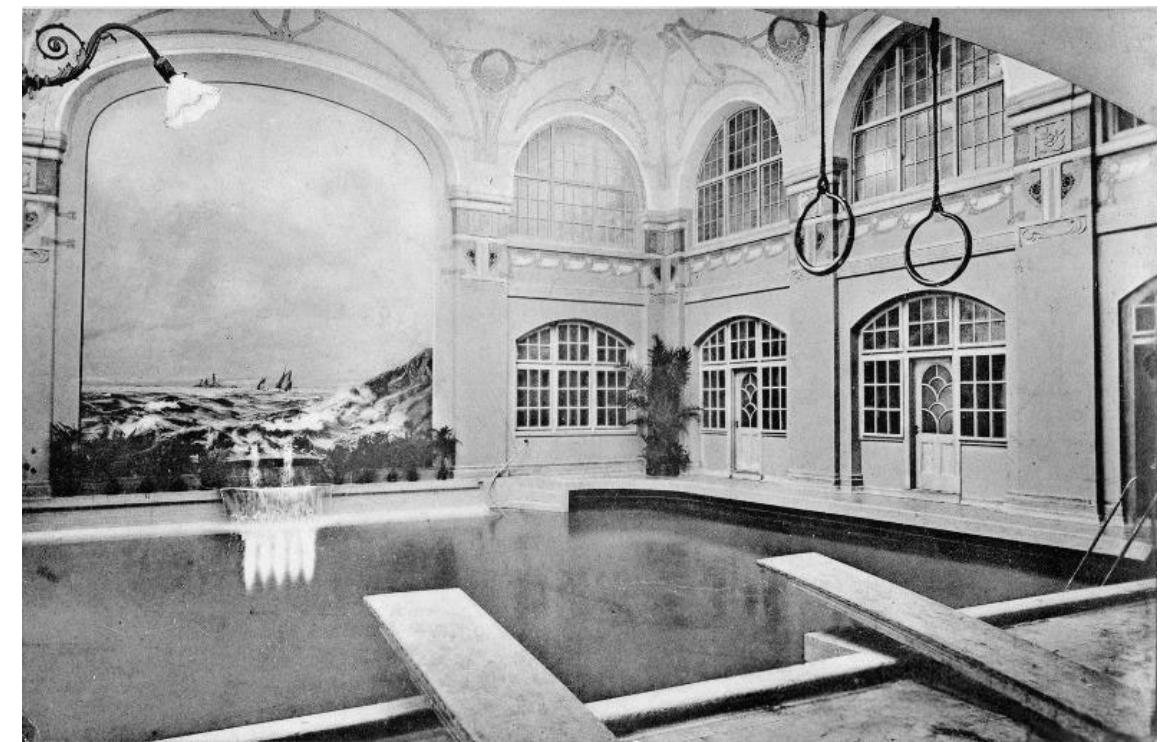


Figure 8. Interior, Hagabadet. GhmPK:2151. PDM 1.0.

Varbergs Kallbadhus

Wilhelm Gagner

Varberg, Sweden

1866, 1886, 1903

A cold bath house in wood standing proud on high piles in the water. The exterior is heavily ornamented, with decorative moorish domes and arches, expressing dignity. An architectural language which celebrates communal bathing.

The original bath house was built in 1866 when hygiene and well-being was once again fashionable and Varberg became a popular recreation resort. Due to its weather exposed location the building has been rebuilt twice, the latest in 1903 (Varbergs Fastighets AB, 2025)

The bath house is divided in two sections, the women's bath and the men's bath. In each bath the movement is centered around the main bath in the middle with changing rooms, sauna and showers surrounding it.

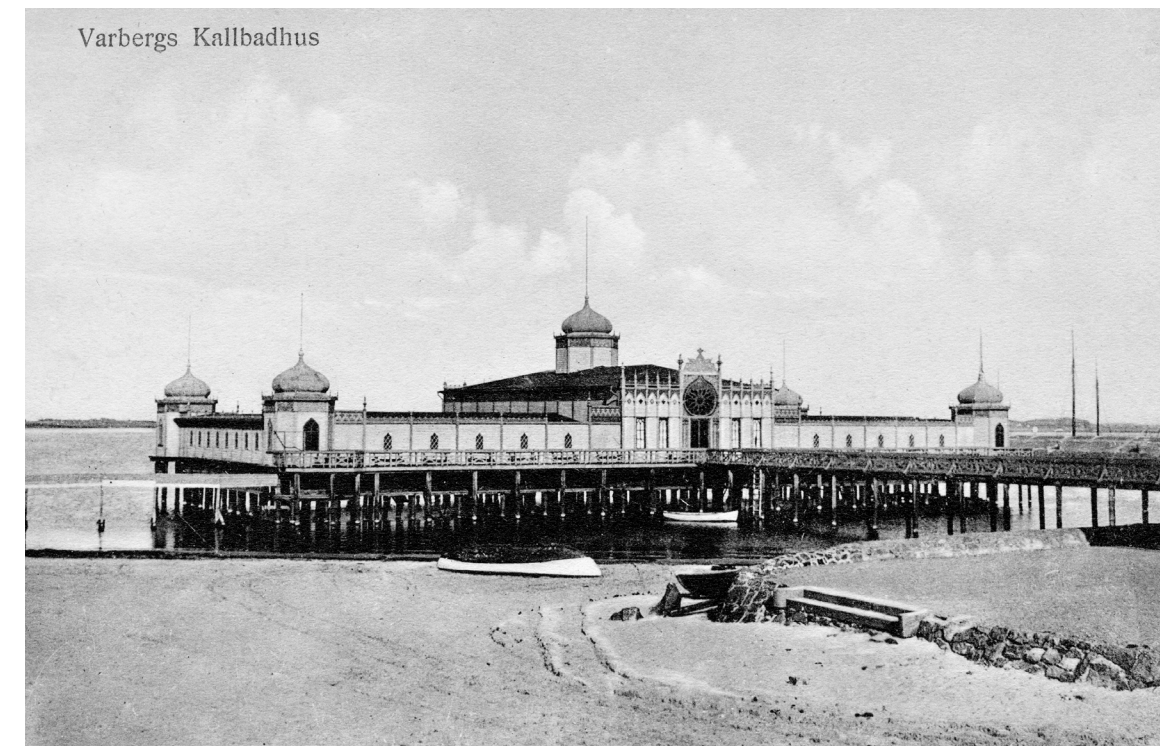


Figure 9. Varbergs kallbadhus. (Sörberg, 1910-1919). PDM 1.0.

Koganeyu

Tokyo, Japan

Jo Nagasaka / Schemata Architects

2020

A restoration and transformation project of a Sento (japanese communal bathing). The project reinterpretes the traditional sento-style in a contemporary way, keeping the original ideas behind.

Bathing together has been and is a cornerstone in Japanese society. Today most households have their own bathroom, but visiting a communal bathhouse is still a cherished choice for many people. It is a place to gather and relax as a community, a place where all are equal (Schemata, 2026).

A fundamental part of the Sento is the scrubbing station with individual stools, mirrors and shower handles. Buckets are filled with water, to then be poured over the body as a self care ritual.

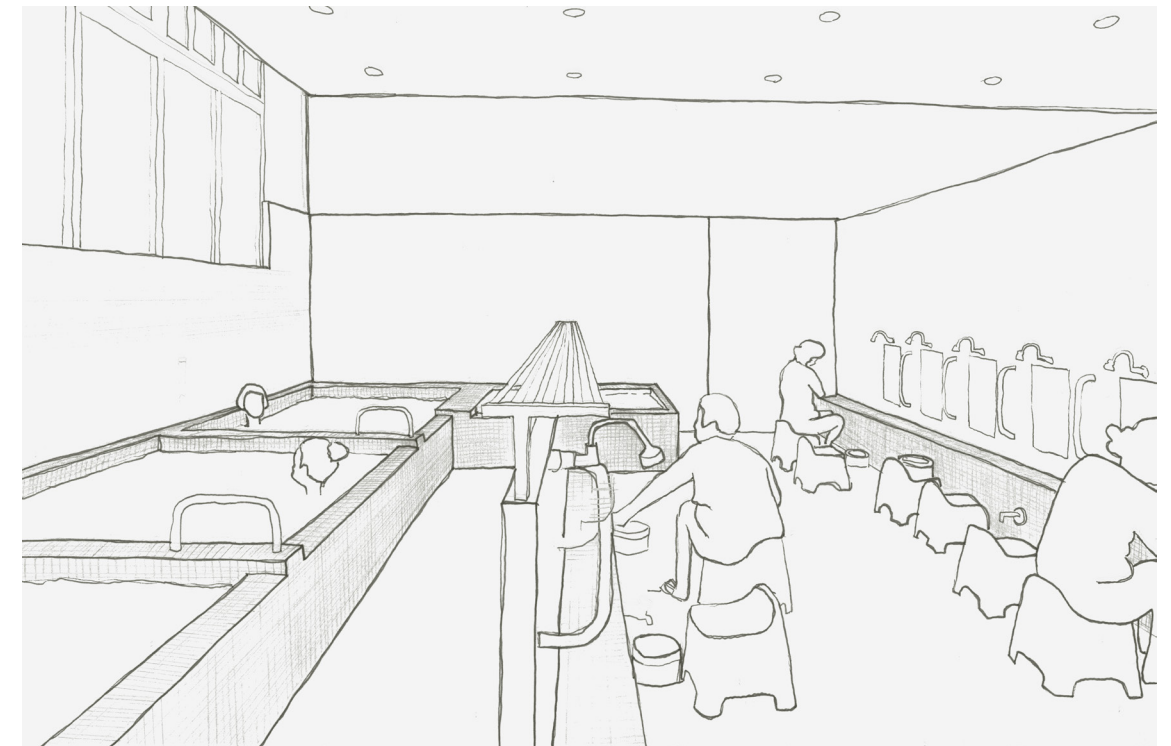


Figure 10. Sento, japanese communal bathing.

Oppdal Slate

Oppdal slate is quarried and processed in Sæterfjellet, in the middle of Norway (Minera skiffer, 2026). The majority of the processing can be carried out manually, by hand, which makes it a relatively easy material to work with for the craftsman. The stone is extracted by cutting out big blocks, but since slate is a foliated stone, layered, it can be split into sheets by hand using a chisel, sledgehammer and shims. To split the sheets into smaller tiles the surface can be scored and split by pressure, similar to how glass can be cut, making it easy to work with on site. In addition to being easy to cut, you get a nice raw finish of the edges blending more seamlessly when the edge of the stone is visible in corners (Minera skiffer, personal communication, 2026-03-12).

Oppdal slate is lighter and warmer in color than many other slate types and varies a lot in nuance. It is offered in different finishes ranging from the raw natural finish to smooth polished. The lighter, warmer color in combination with the smooth surface gives it a more refined expression than how slate is often perceived.

When choosing a natural stone that performs well both in the rough climate at the site and inside a bath the alternatives are limited. Oppdal slate is validated through documented testing to be both frost-resistant due to its low porosity and naturally slip-resistant. The slate can also withstand chlorinated water and can therefore be used inside of pools (Minera skiffer, 2026).

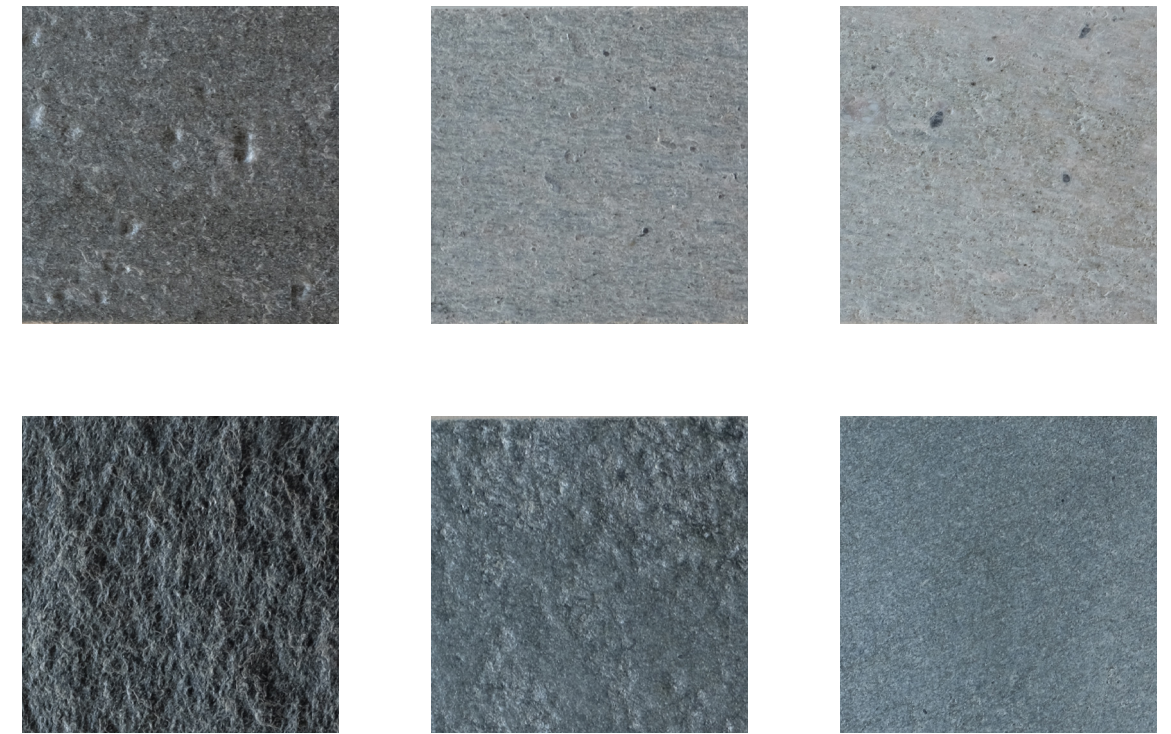


Figure 11. Oppdal slate. Natural, antique brushed, silk brushed.

Figure 12. Offerdal slate. Natural, antique brushed, silk brushed.

Main material

A public spa placed by the river of Gothenburg. The volume consists of monolithic blocks in light slate, carrying a concrete roof slab. The raw expression is softened by ornamental elements such as cast reliefs and the light color and the smooth polished finish of the stone.

The organization is structured around an off-centered axis with the foyer and main bath in the middle and changing rooms, and additional activities on either side. Focus in all of the spaces are on spatial sequences, view, light and materiality. Often in contrast to another to trigger the visitor's curiosity and create a variety of atmospheres.

The east side of the spa holds the more introspective activities. The spaces are darker and more intimate and also architecturally dramatic to support a quiet and calm bathing ritual. The west side, on the other hand, has a more cheerful attitude. The spaces are open and light, with views towards the river, inviting the visitor to have a more social approach to the bathing ritual. Both sides have the purpose of creating a dynamic experience, and with the main pool room in the middle functioning as a neutral space.



Figure 13. View from Sjömagasinet.

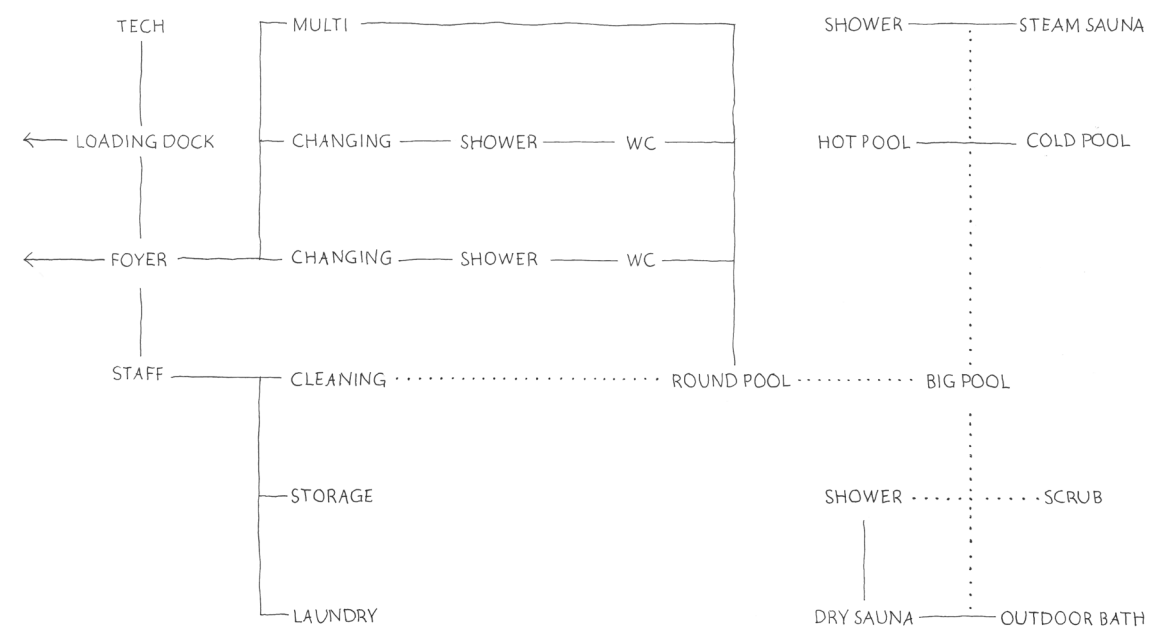


Figure 14. Space program.

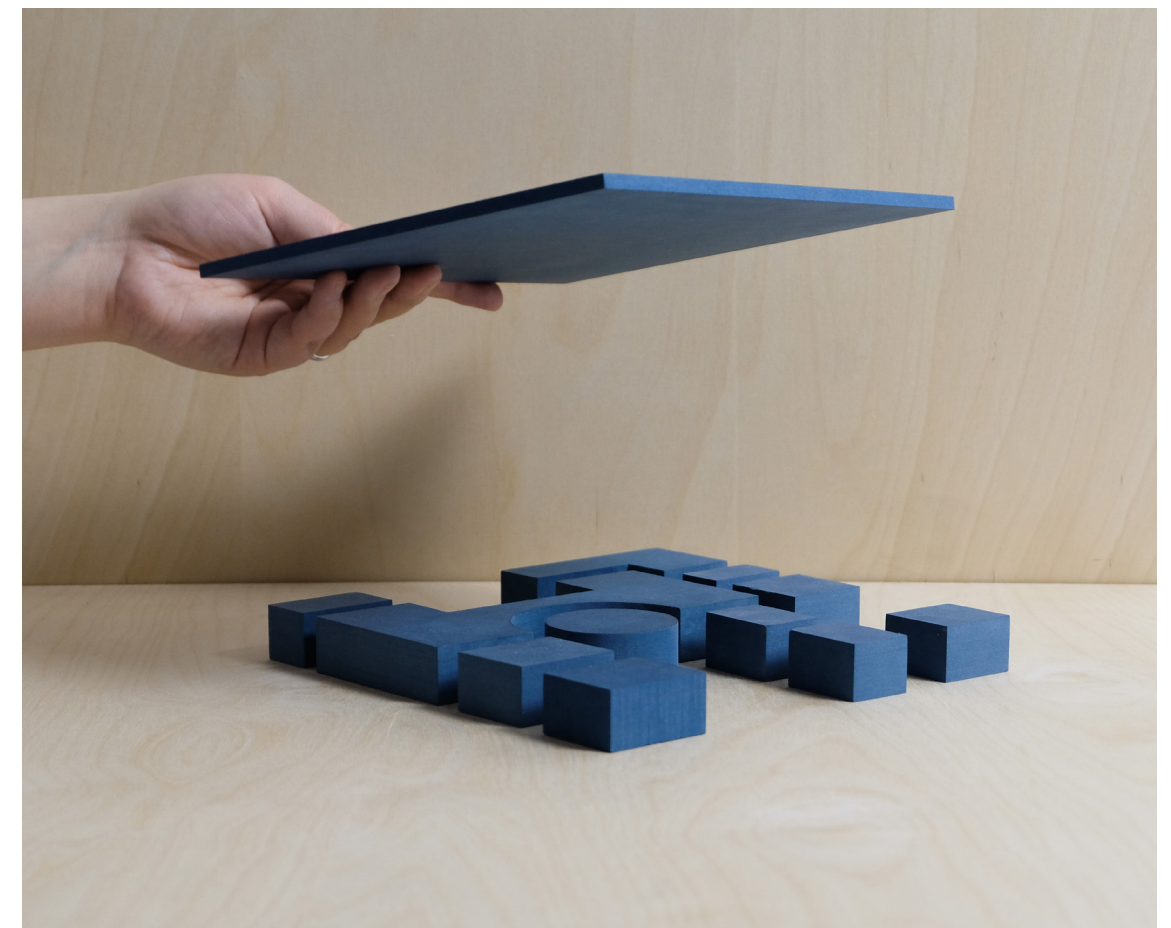


Figure 15. Concept model.

Site

An old industrial area located at Klippan, Gothenburg, today a popular spot for art and food. Many of the adjacent buildings are from the seventeen hundreds, but with some additions from the 20th and 21st-century. In the area and along the waterfront prevails an established tradition of individualistic and independent buildings standing strong on their own, and suggests another building of that kind can be added without disturbing the rhythm of the area.

Development proposal

Today, the site consists of a parking lot with river views but there is a design proposal for the development of the area (Göteborgs Stad, 2018). The proposal consists of residential buildings with restaurants and cafés on ground level and a new school. This thesis will consider the proposal as geometric volumes in site plan and section.

The spa is integrated within the site plan of the new area by removing two housing blocks. The reasoning is that it will benefit the city if more public spaces are added along the waterfront, making the area a more attractive and accessible spot for everyone to enjoy. The restaurants and cafés planned in the area can also benefit from adding a larger public building nearby.

Positioning

The spa is placed on the edge of the waterfront, creating undisturbed river views and visual privacy for the bathing guests. Views utilized in the spa are both towards Eriksberg in the north, and the small marina by Sjömagasinet and Älvsborgsbron in the west. The site has good communication with the rest of the city with the ferry stop on the site as well as a tram stop on the other side of Oscarsleden.

The entrance is located towards the main road, Adolf Edelsvårds gata, clearly visible for people moving in the area. The loading dock is located on the west facade, with visual and physical distance from the main entrance.

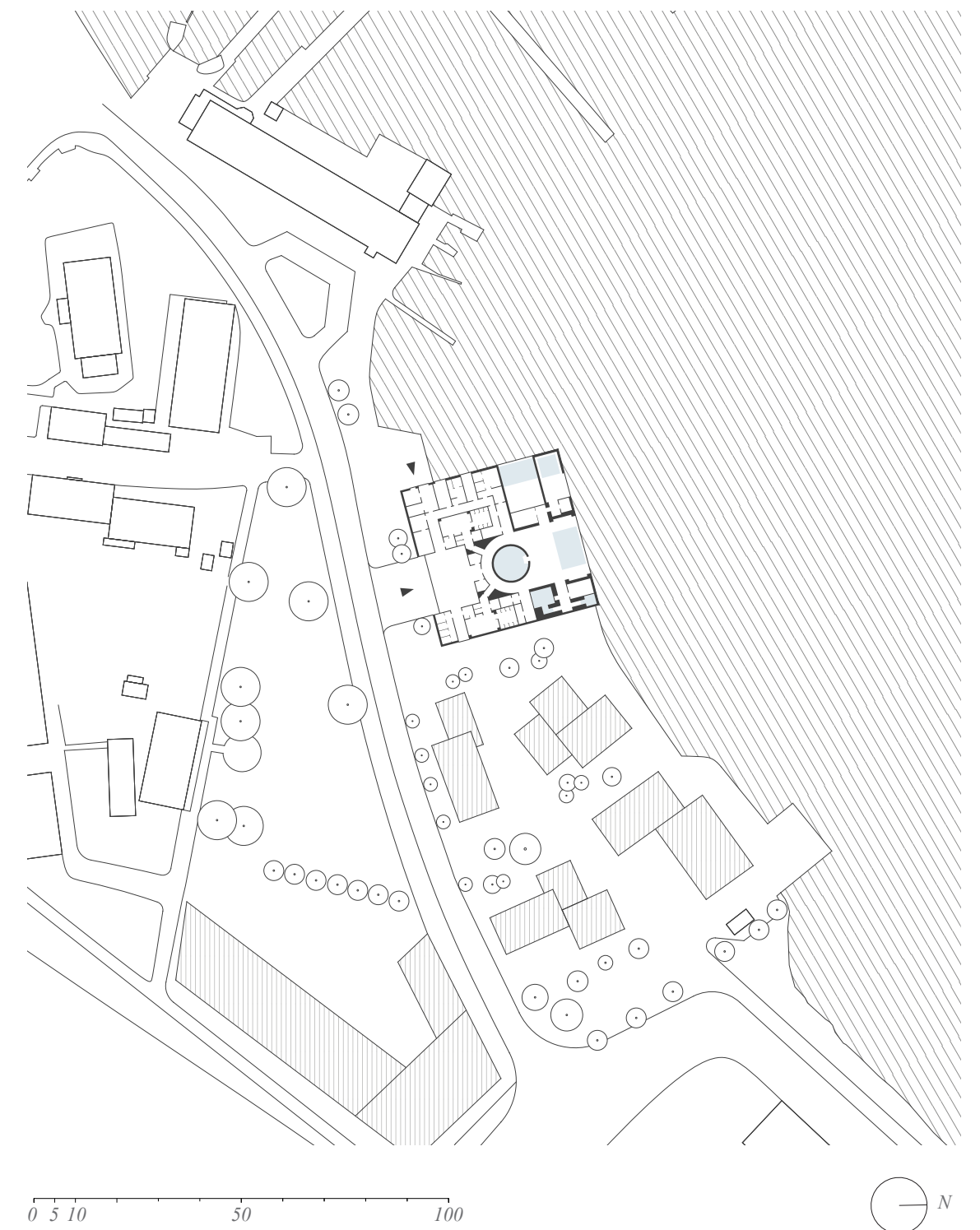


Figure 16. Site 1:1500.

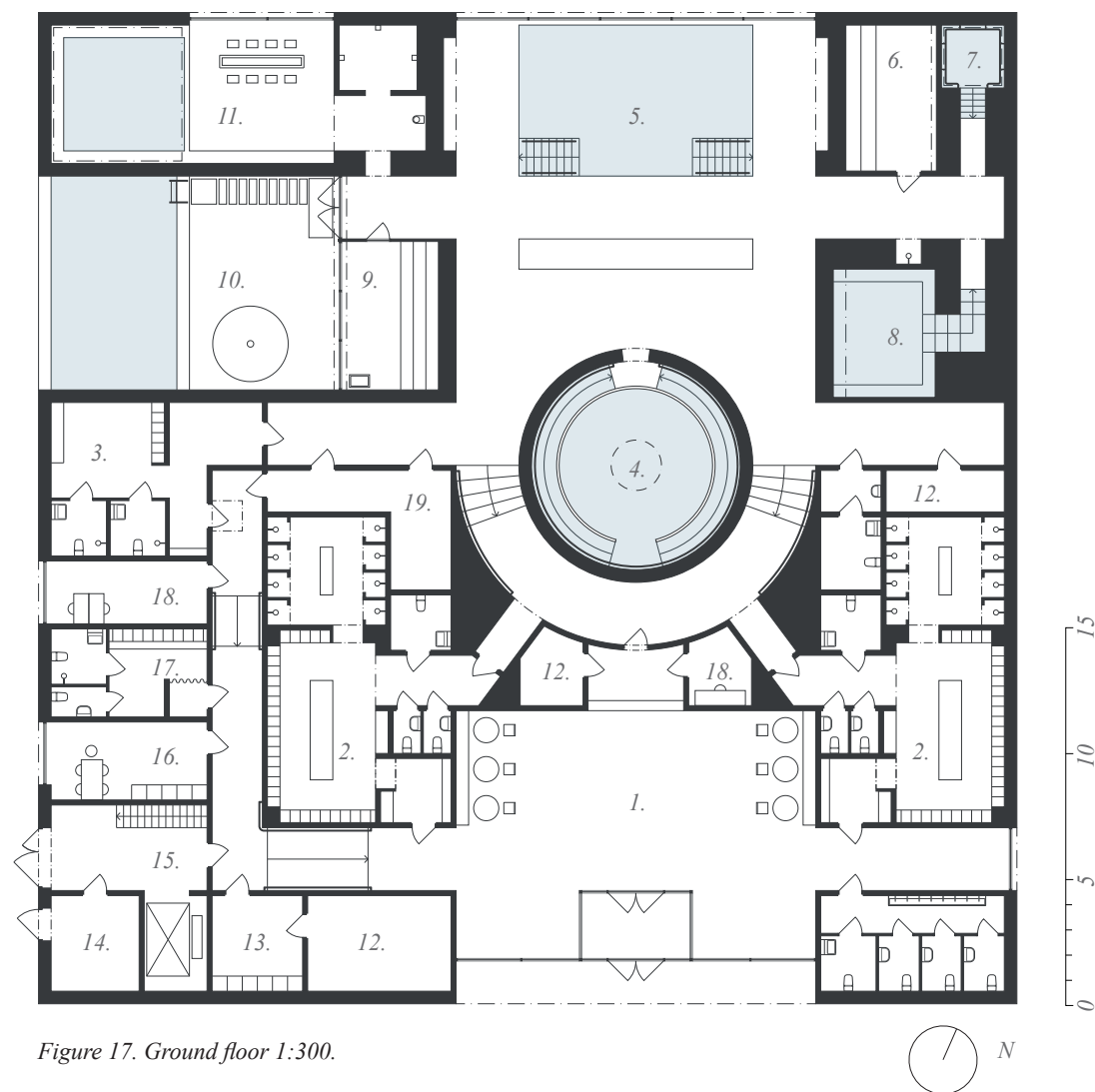


Figure 17. Ground floor 1:300.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Foyer 140m ² | 12. Storage 22+7+8m ² |
| 2. Changing room 80m ² x2 | 13. Laundry 14m ² |
| 3. Multi changing room 43m ² | 14. Waste 13m ² |
| 4. Round bath 54m ² | 15. Loading dock 21m ² |
| 5. Main bath 124m ² | 16. Staff canteen 19m ² |
| 6. Steam sauna 21m ² | 17. Staff changing room 22m ² |
| 7. Cold plunge 10m ² | 18. Office 16+7m ² |
| 8. Hot bath 27m ² | 19. Cleaning 19m ² |
| 9. Dry sauna 23m ² | |
| 10. Outdoor bath & garden 96m ² | |
| 11. Scrub room & showers 75m ² | |

GFA=1530m² x2

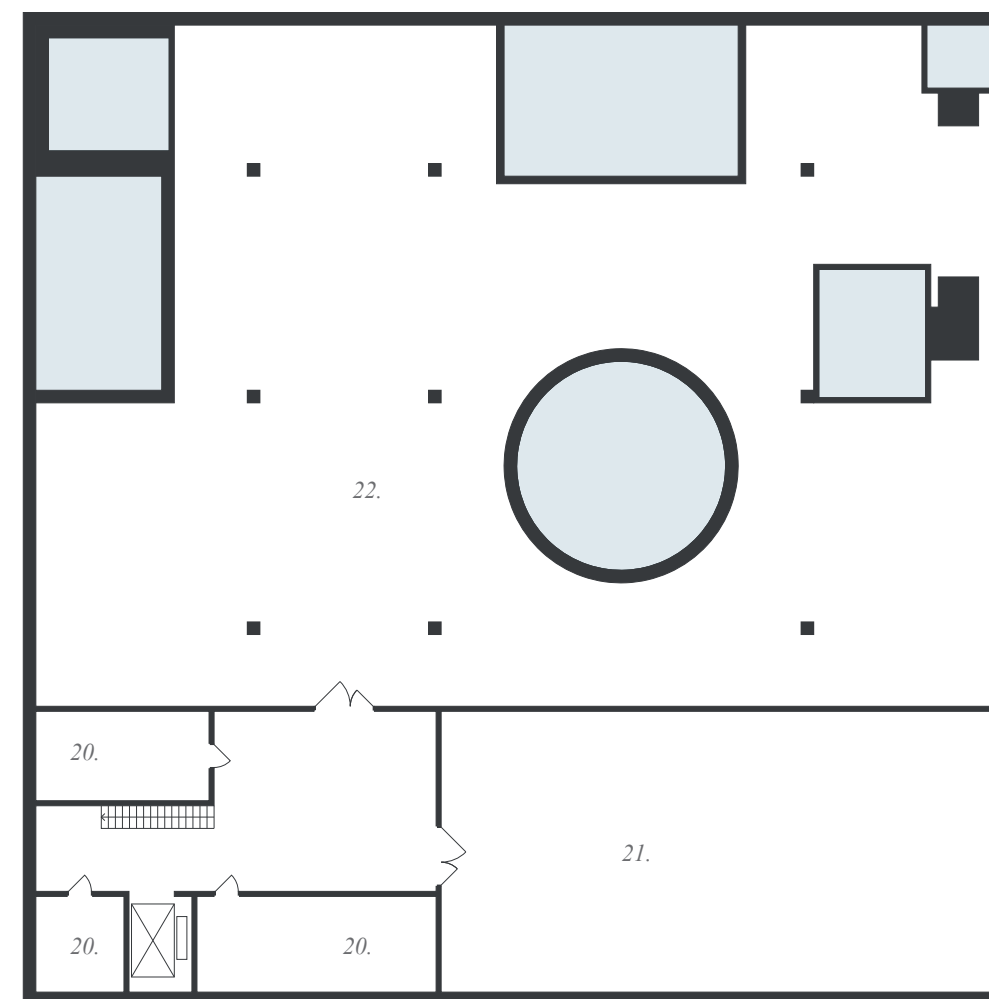


Figure 18. Basement 1:300.

- | |
|---|
| 20. Storage 13+24+36m ² |
| 21. HVAC 243m ² |
| 22. Pool plant space 1025m ² |

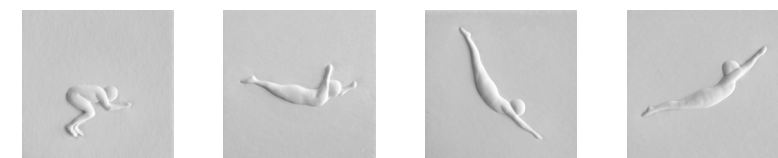
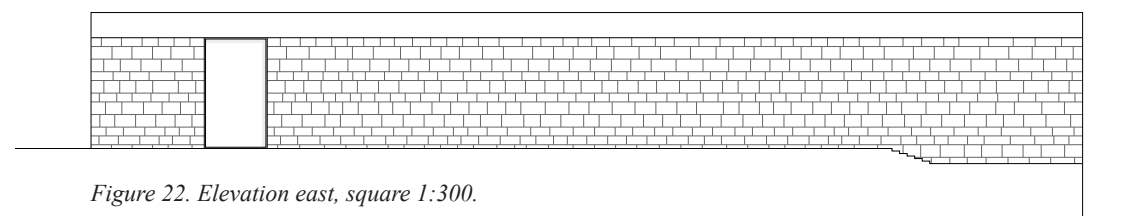
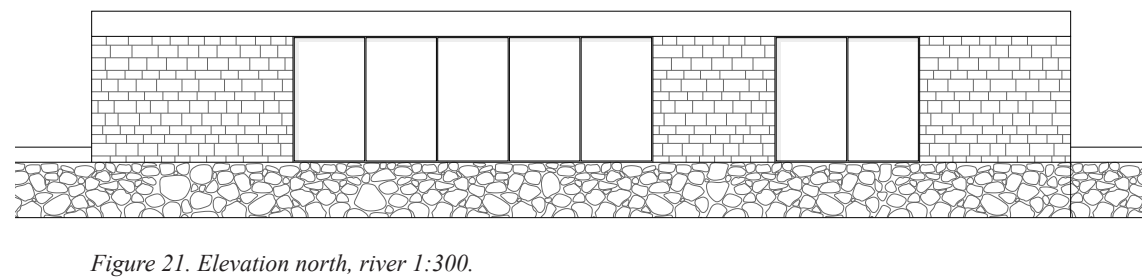
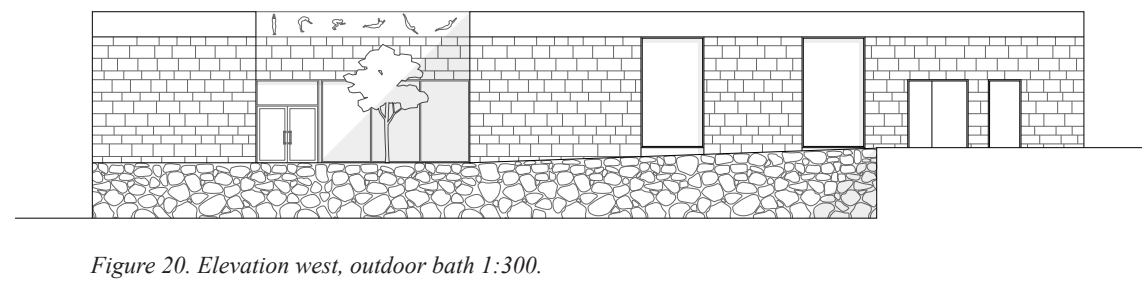
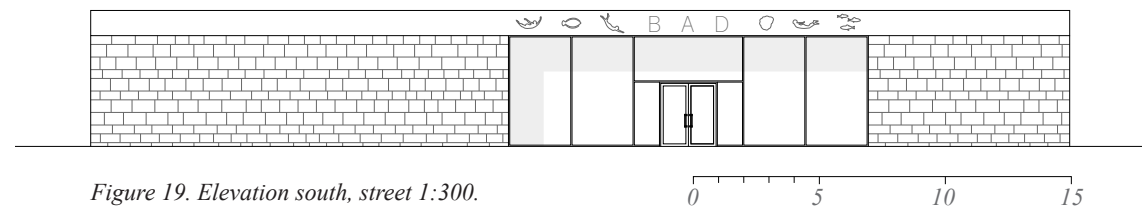


Figure 23. Divers 1:10 & 1:50. Plaster cast.

Entering the Spa

When approaching, the building appears as a group of slate blocks holding the concrete roof slab. In between the blocks, facing the street, the foyer appears. A generous opening glazed from floor to ceiling crowned by a sign and reliefs portraying life in water. A clear welcoming gesture to step inside.

When entering the foyer the guests are greeted by the reception in the center with places to sit and rest, have a snack or wait for company on both sides. In the foyer you are still connected to the world outside, a connection that will shift back and forth as you move through the spa. From the foyer the visitor reaches the changing rooms on either side of the reception.



Figure 24. Entering the spa.

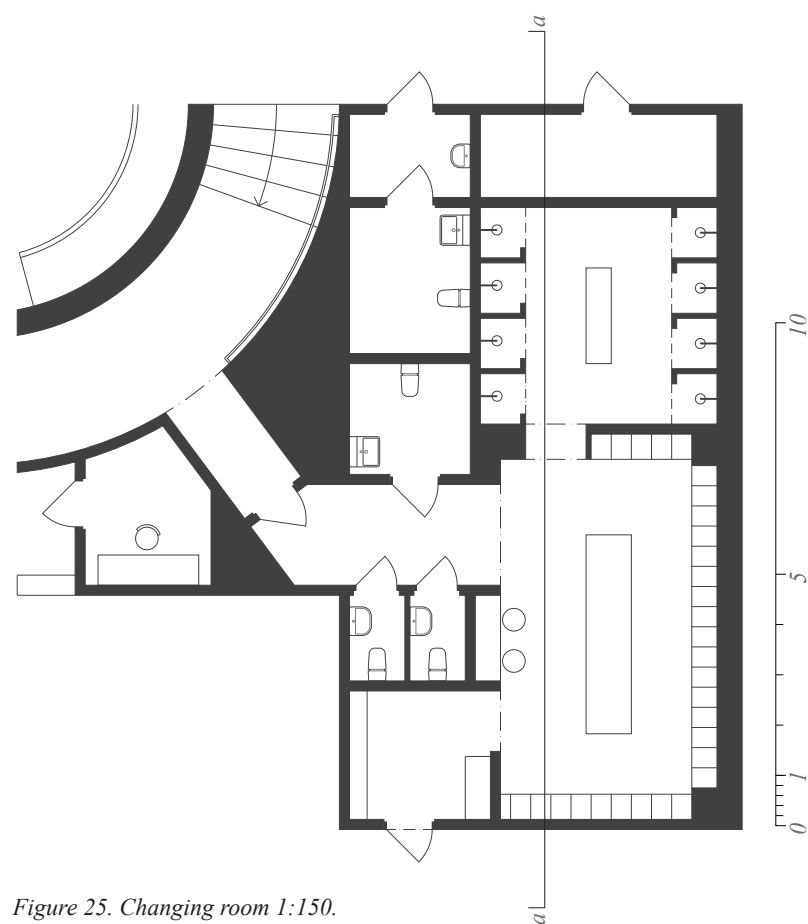


Figure 25. Changing room 1:150.



Figure 26. Section a-a 1:150. Changing room - Showers.

The Changing Rooms

One main room with lockers along the walls and a centrally placed bench to put bags and clothes on while changing into swimwear. A desk with mirrors placed along one of the walls reduces the need for lavatories in the changing room. The shower room has a similar layout but instead with a module that the visitor can hang their towels and robes on.

The interior of the changing rooms is softer than in the rest of the spa with wooden lockers and lower ceiling height. The tactile expression of warm wood creates an atmosphere that embraces the bather in the vulnerable act of undressing. The visitor accesses the spa-area through narrow corridors to then arrive in the wide, curved corridor. The scale and generosity of the spa-area is amplified by the visitor coming from a smaller space with different character.

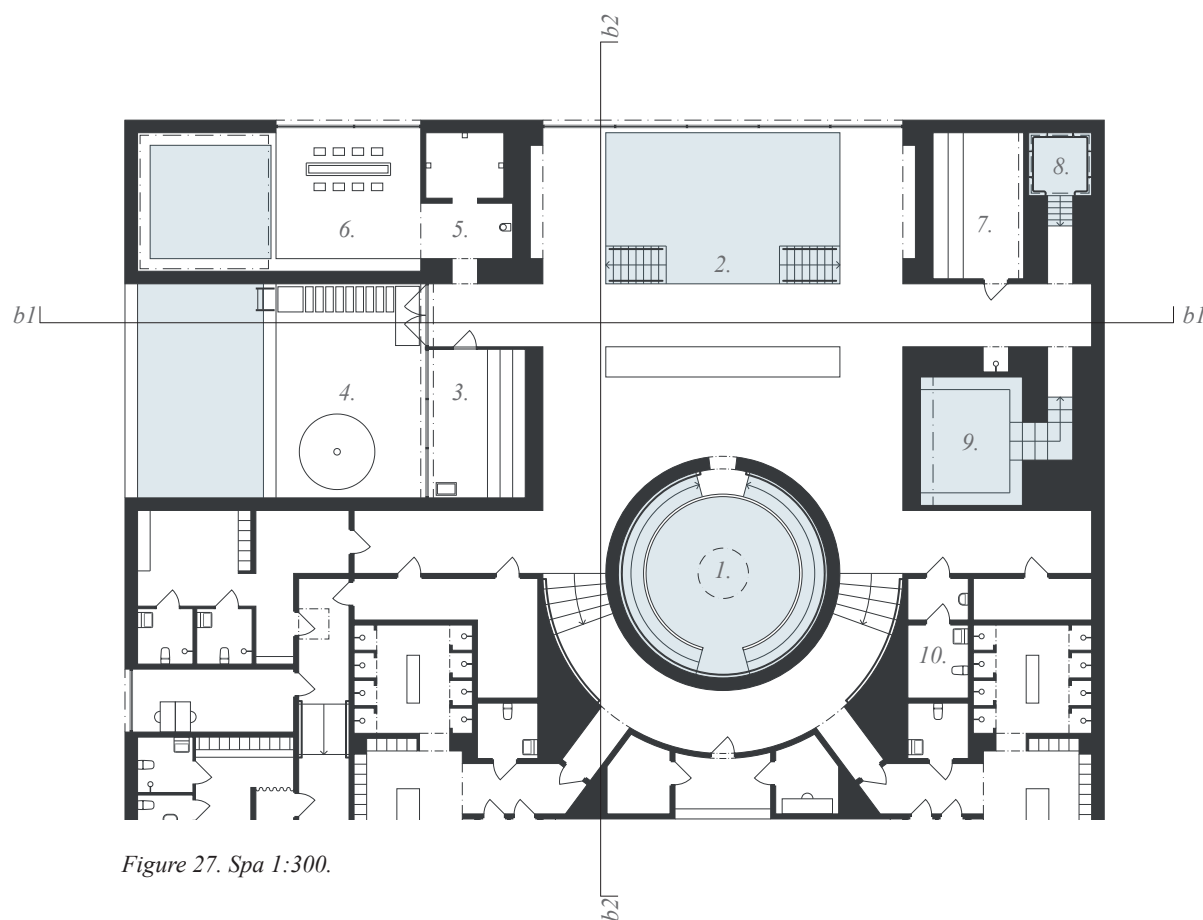


Figure 27. Spa 1:300.

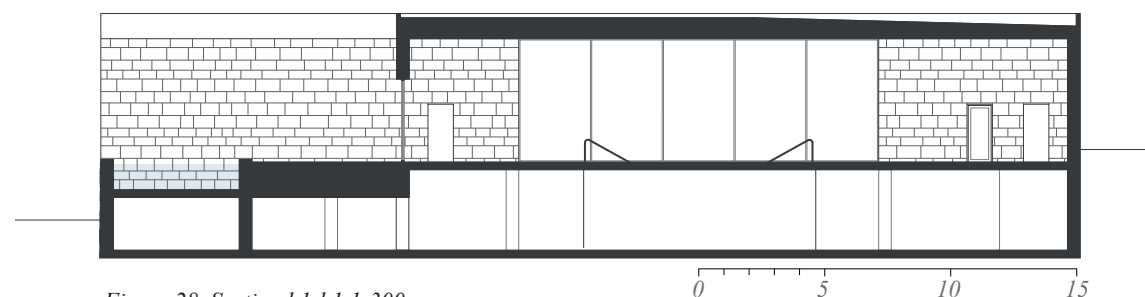


Figure 28. Section b1-b1 1:300.
West side - Main bath - East side.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1. Round bath 54m ² | 7. Steam sauna 21m ² |
| 2. Main bath 124m ² | 8. Cold plunge 10m ² |
| 3. Dry sauna 23m ² | 9. Hot bath 27m ² |
| 4. Outdoor bath & garden 96m ² | 10. WC |
| 5. Drinking fountain & showers 17m ² | |
| 6. Scrub room 62m ² | |

The Spa

From the changing room the guest enters the main pool room by following the light in the curved corridor created by the round bath in the middle. When stepping into the spa the guest is greeted with a wide view over the river. From this point, the organization of the spa is clear with the axis running from the east to the west side of the spa. This provides comfort for the guest, especially for the ones arriving alone.

The main bath is the biggest pool in the spa. On each side of the pool there are concrete reliefs, flowing motifs that soften the raw expression of the slate. A festive element balancing the strict forms.

Thick interior walls on either side of the main pool room hold ventilation shafts, and outlets are placed hidden in the pattern of the stone walls. The slate on the walls is smooth, and the floor has a more textured finish to prevent slipping.

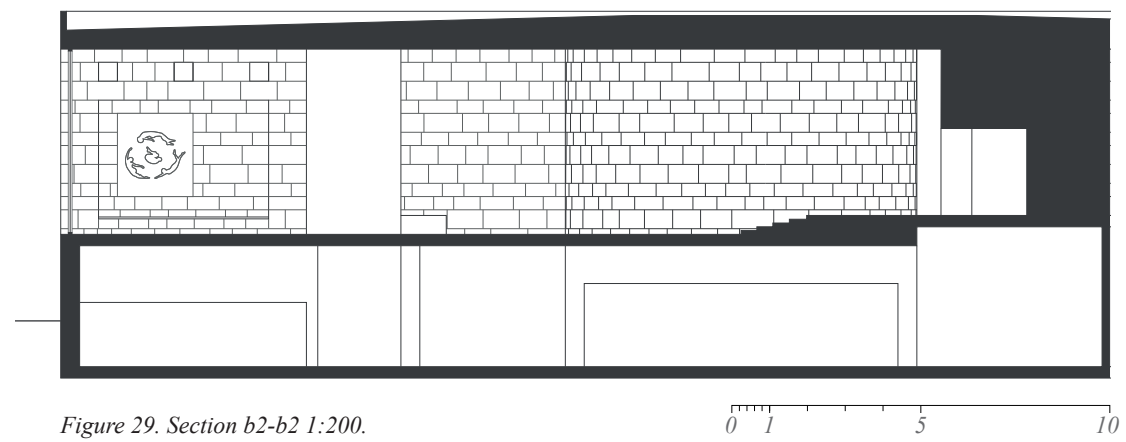


Figure 30. Entering the main bath.

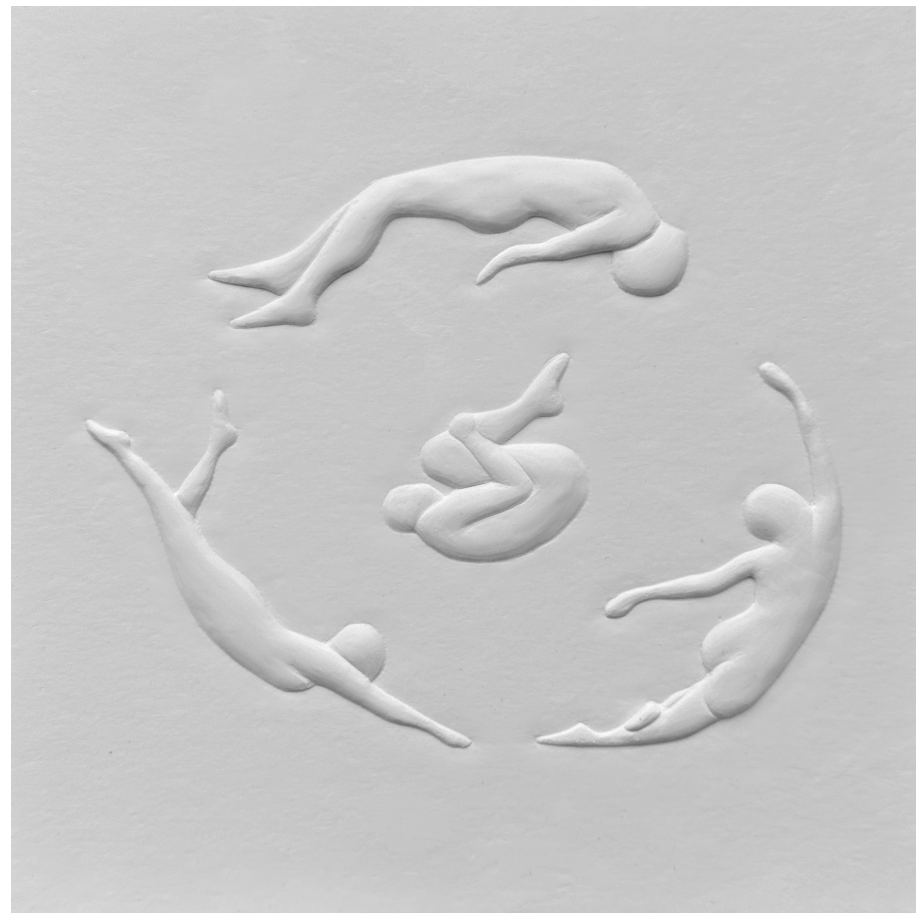


Figure 31. Swimmers. Plaster cast.



Figure 32. View of main bath.

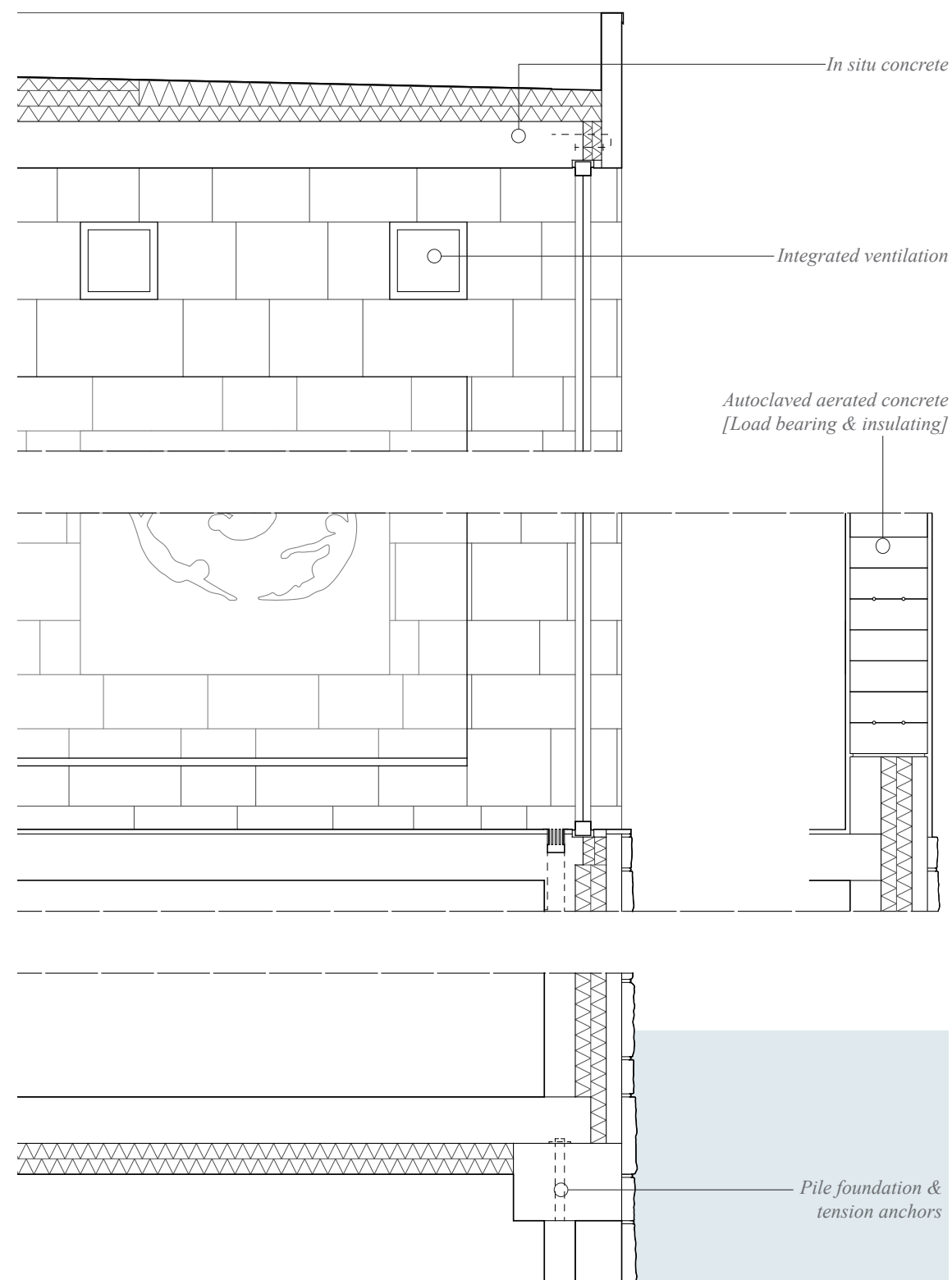


Figure33. Section 1:40.

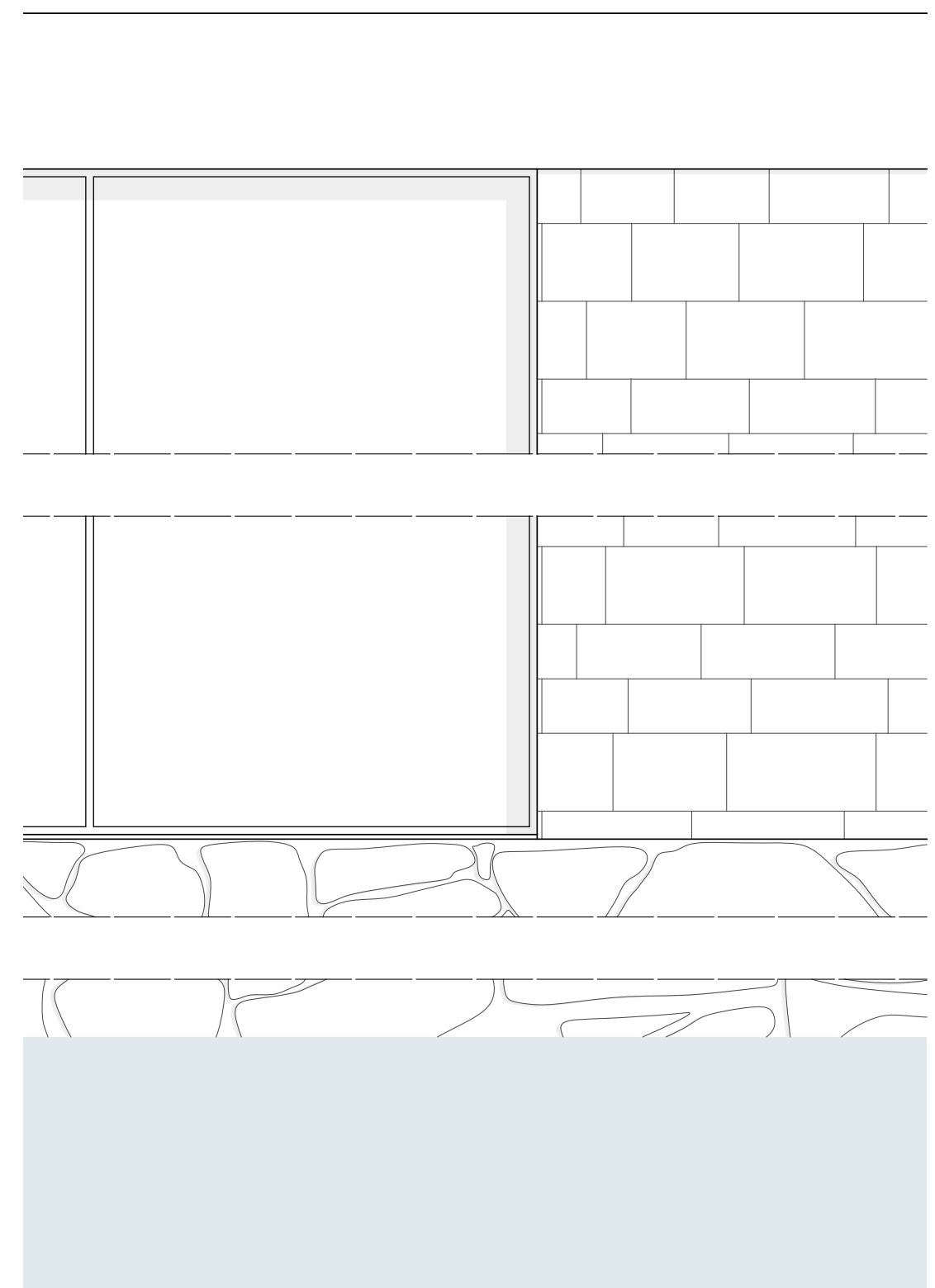


Figure 34. Facade 1:40.

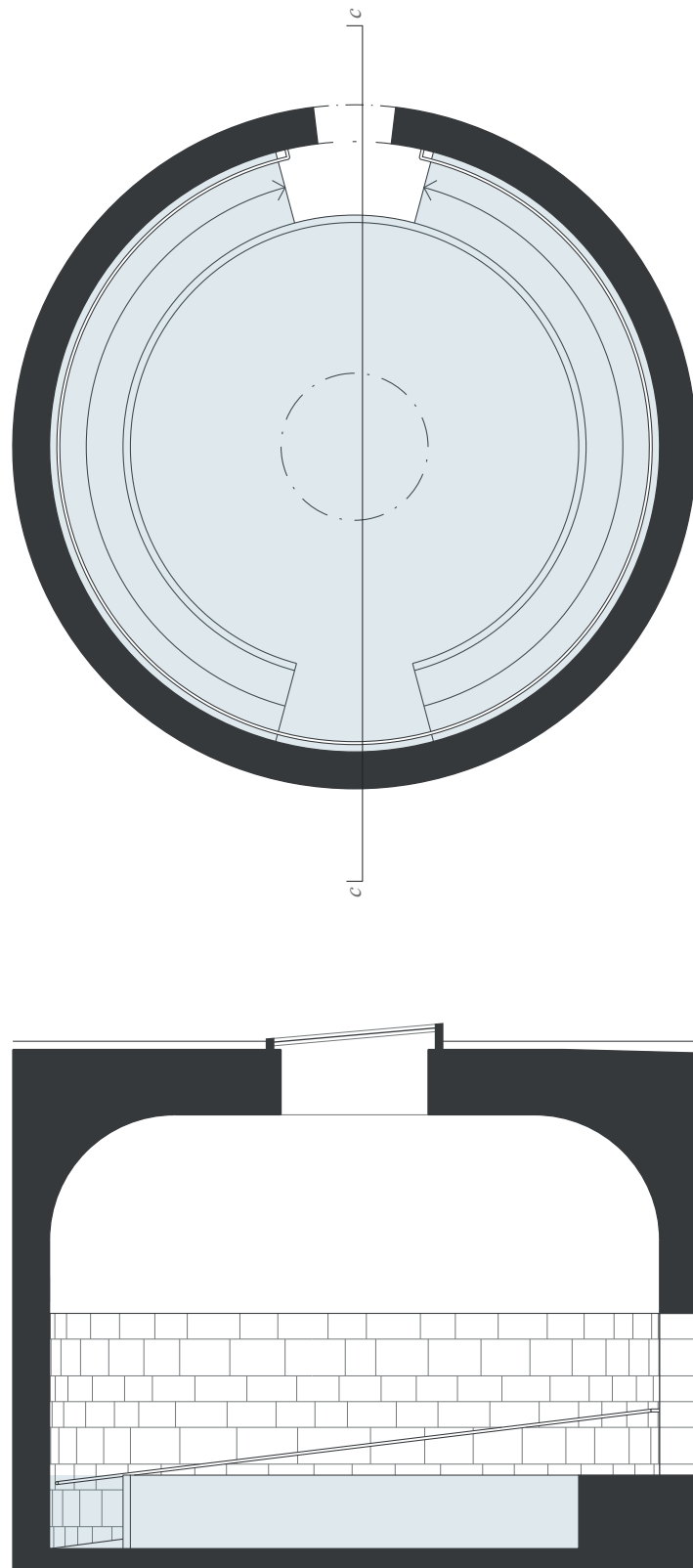


Figure 35. Round bath, plan & section c-c 1:100.

The round bath

Upon entering the round bath, the visitor steps onto a small plateau with two symmetrical ramps leading down into the water. A protective edge runs along the sides of the ramp to guide the visitor to follow the path along the wall.

In contrast to the other areas of the spa, there is a material shift on the wall between slate in the lower half and a smooth concrete finish that continues on to the ceiling. The walls slightly curve towards a circular skylight, casting directed rays of light into the room. The light combined with the shape and smooth surface creates an abstract space.

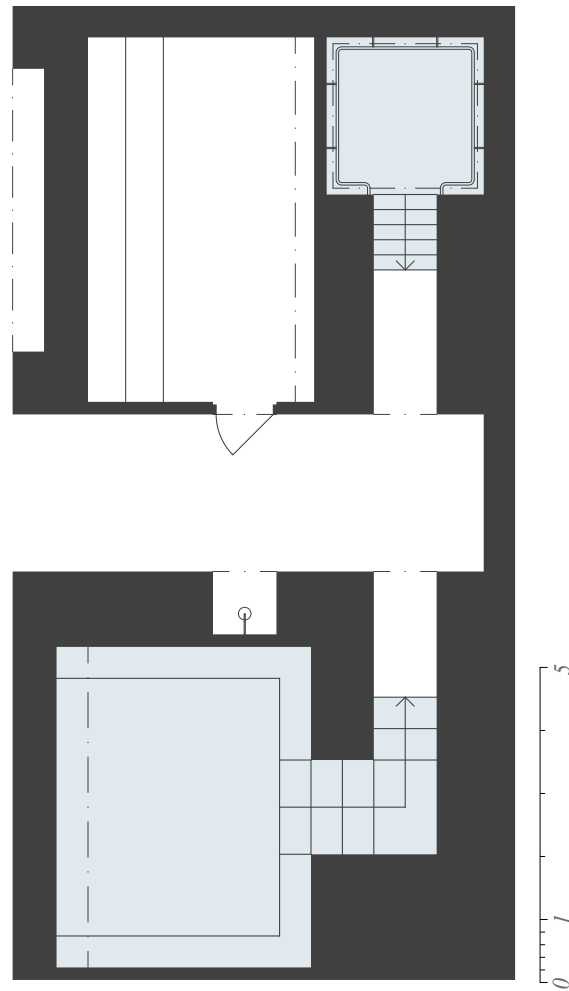


Figure 36. East side 1:120.

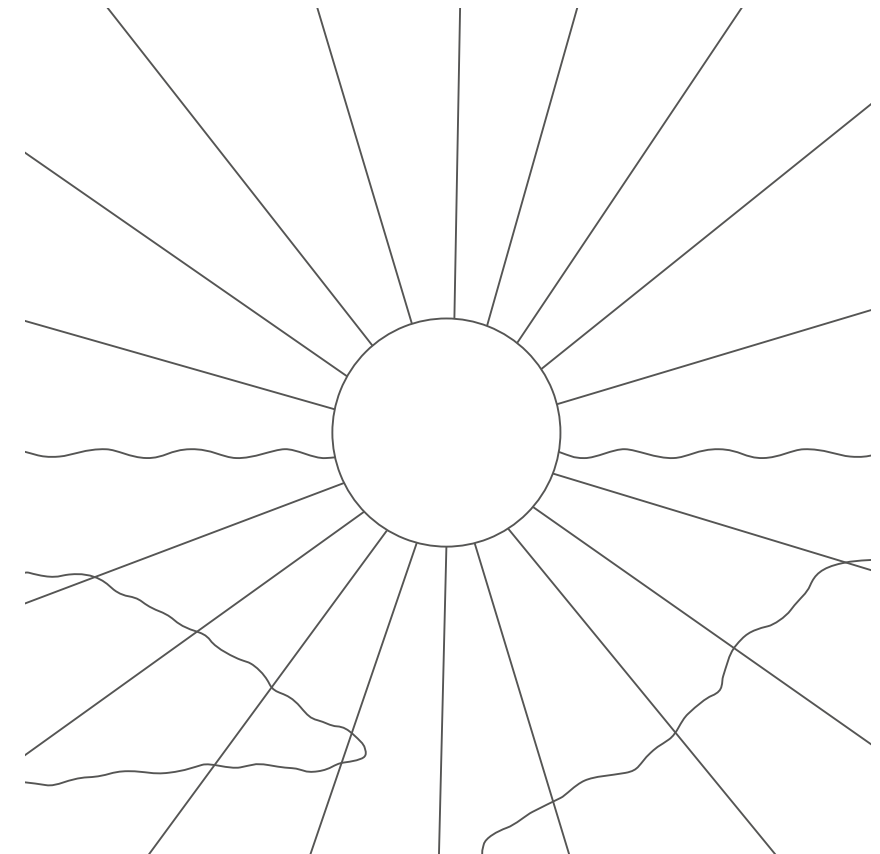


Figure 37. The sun and sea, motif in hot bath.

The East Side // The Introspective

At the east side of the spa the ritual of the hot and the cold takes place. This section of the bath is more intimate in scale and darker than the rest of the bath. The atmosphere encourages introspection and enables a calm bathing experience.

When entering the steam sauna, the atmosphere makes bather wind down. The room is filled with a warm mist and the light is dimmed. Light from the ceiling slit falls on the wall opposite the bench. Water is trickling down the wall creating a slowly changing motif and a calming sound effect when the drops hit the water surface of the gutter.

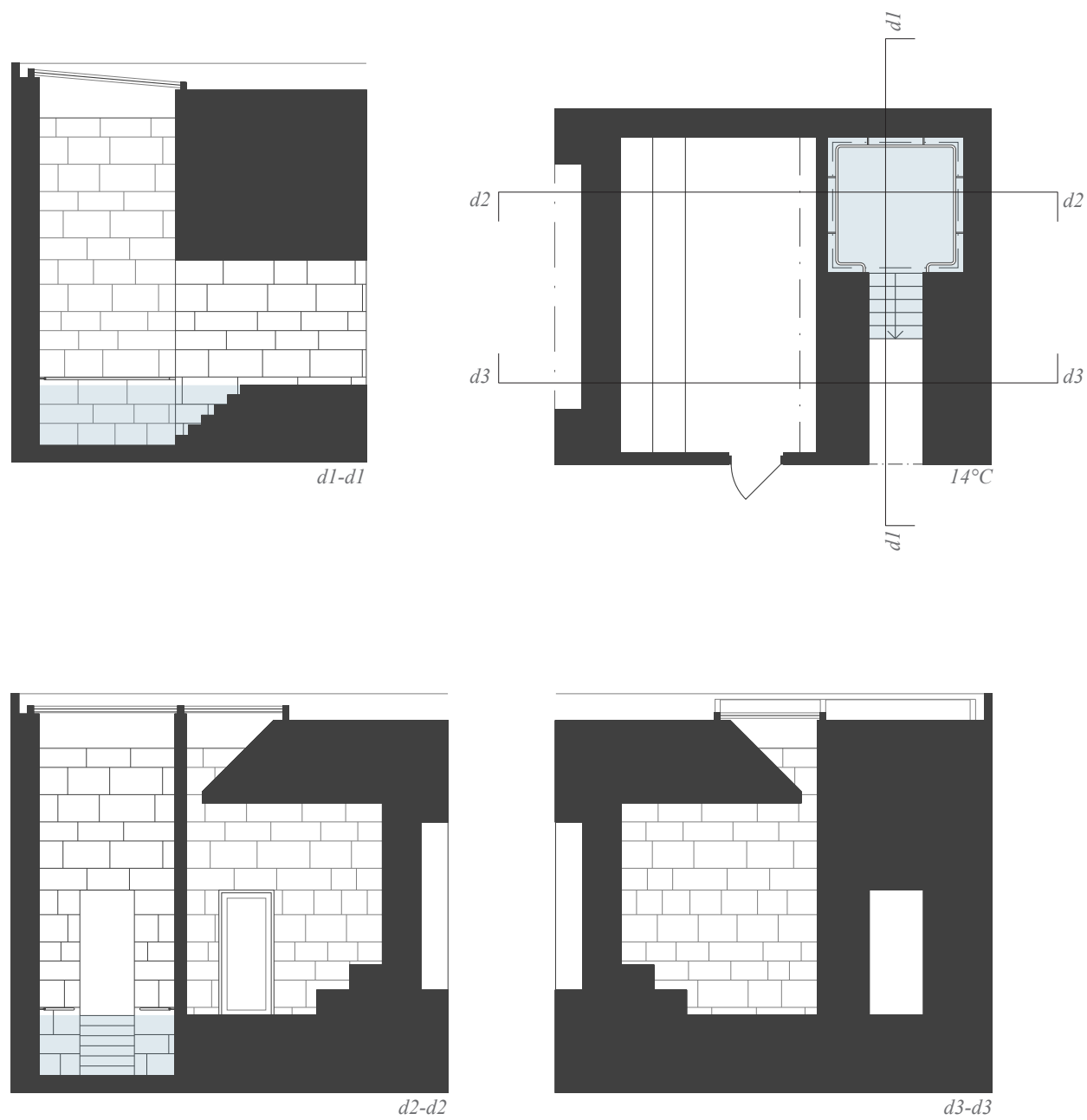
In the end of the east corridor, opposite of each other, is the cold plunge and the hot bath. The baths are smaller and more intimate, with the water surface covering the entire room, reaching out into the corridors.



Figure 38. Cold plunge. Plaster cast.



Figure 39. Cold plunge, stair. Plaster cast.



The cold plunge

The corridor leading down into the cold plunge is straight and narrow, one meter wide, with steep steps. From outside the entire room is visible and the bather can see if there is someone inside or on their way up. A gesture supposed to counteract the feeling of discomfort when walking through a narrow passage. The character of the corridor urges the bather to move forward, not to hesitate when quickly stepping down into the cold water. The room is narrow but filled with light. The walls rise up and end in a skylight. The bright room, cool temperature and sense of movement creates a light, uplifting yet focused atmosphere.

Figure 40. Cold plunge, plan & sections d 1:120.



Figure 41. Hot bath, relief. Plaster cast.

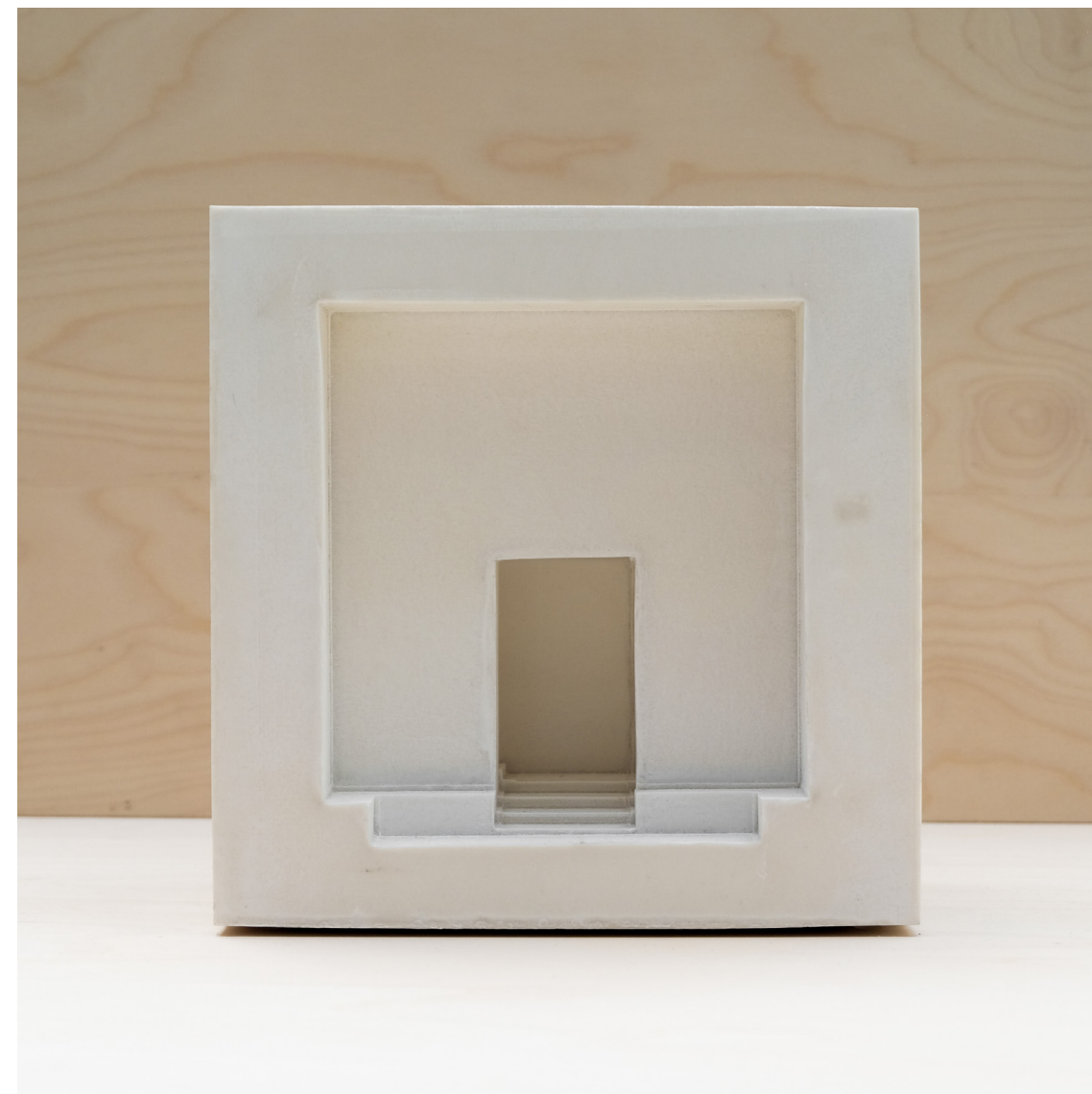
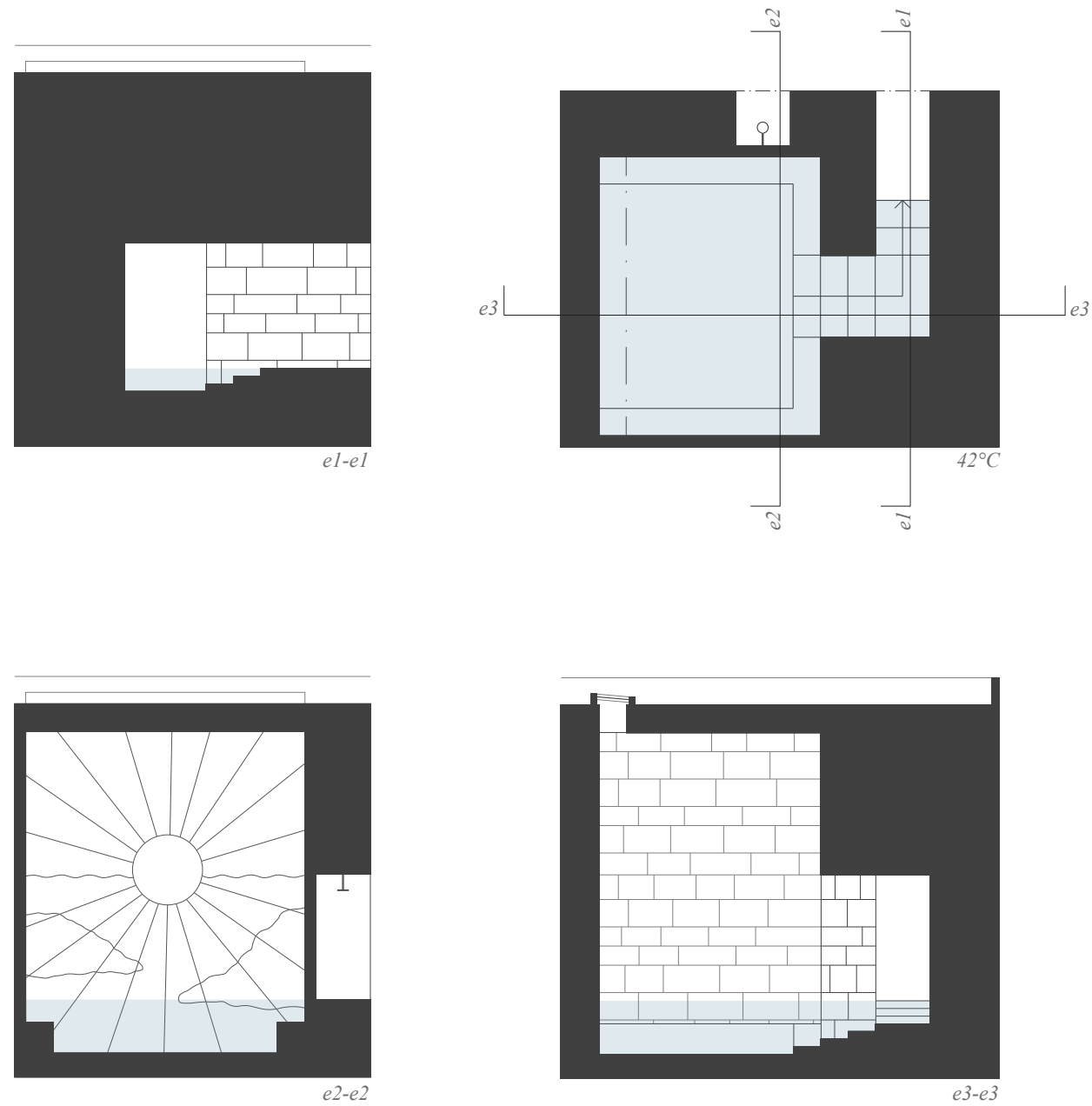


Figure 42. Hot bath, entrance. Plaster cast.



The hot bath

The hot bath is entered through an angled corridor. Unlike the cold plunge the bather has to wait for the room to appear. A sequence supposed to trigger curiosity to explore. The corridor gets wider after the turn to allow two persons to meet in the corner. The steps down to the hot bath are slower, to give the body time to adjust to the warm water. On the wall opposite the entry there is a motif draped in light from the ceiling slit. A concrete relief portraying the sun sinking down in the sea at the west coast. The direction and focal point gives the bathers something to rest their eyes on, a comfort for strangers in an intimate space.

Figure 43. Hot bath, plan & sections *e* 1:120.

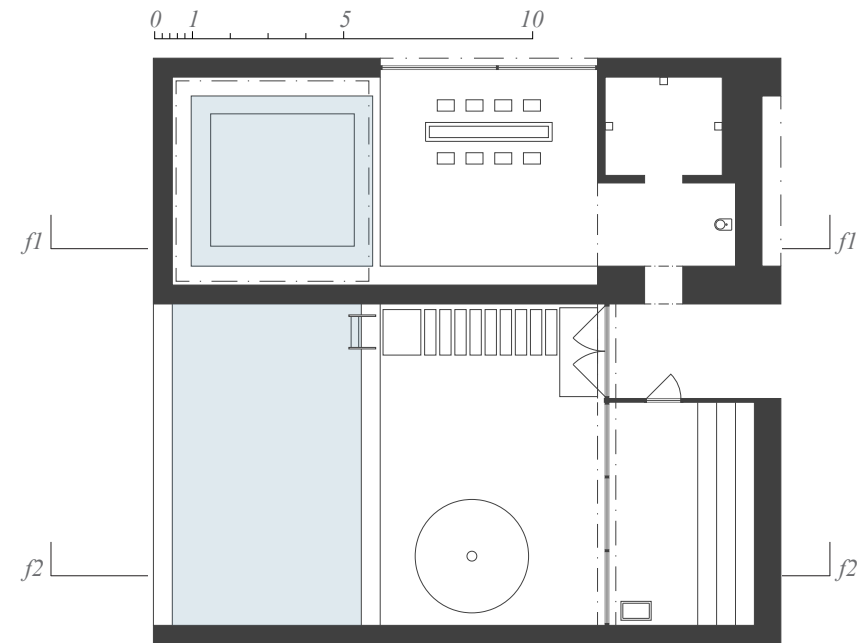


Figure 44. West side 1:200.

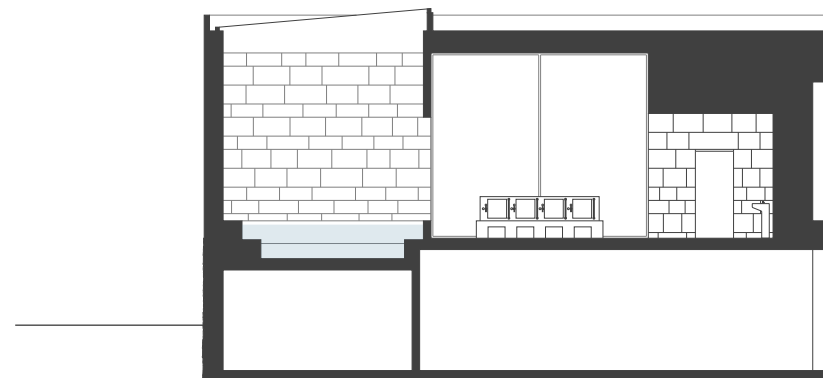


Figure 45. Section f1-f1 1:200.
Bath - Scrub station - Drinking fountain.



Figure 46. The scrub room.

The West Side // The Social

The west side of the spa has a more cheerful attitude with generosity in size as well as daylight and views. Approaching from the main pool room, the window and glazed double door at the end of the corridor already signal this to the visitor before seeing the rooms and functions.

The scrub room

On the right hand side are the showers and the scrub room. The visitor first enters a zone lower in ceiling height and with a drinking fountain to the right, and from there continues straight ahead to the showers or to the left into the bath. The idea of the scrub room is to create an open, light space in which a multitude of activities can take place simultaneously. The layout is inspired by the Japanese 'Sentō' (communal bathhouses) with a scrubbing station and a shallow pool in the corner of the room. Every scrubbing station has a mirror, a shower head and a handle aiding in getting up from the low stool.

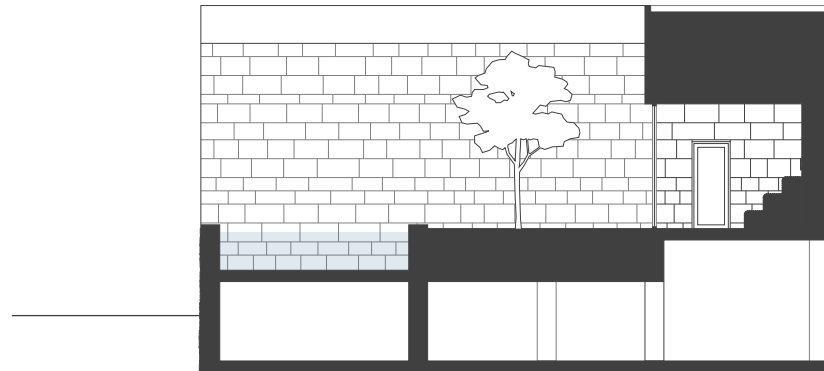


Figure 47. Section f2-f2 1:200.
Outdoor bath - Garden - Dry sauna.



Figure 48. The outdoor bath.

The outdoor bath

The dry sauna and outdoor bath are facing west with a view of Sjömagasinet and a small marina, though with some distance created by the small bay. From the sauna the bathers see the view, with the garden and bath in the foreground. The room is bright and open and in combination with the view the atmosphere allows small talk between guests to occur.

The bather reaches the outdoor bath via stepping stones in a bed of gravel; an act that calls for attention. Outside the bather is exposed to the weather but still sheltered by the slate blocks. When visiting the spa in the evening, the sun sets over Älvsborgsbron which can be enjoyed from the sauna and outdoor bath.



Figure 49. View from dry sauna.

Discussion

The main thesis question “How can the spa typology be reimagined as a public bathing facility that supports everyday well-being?” can be interpreted in many ways. A simple answer could be that it is about economics, like it is in many cases. If visiting a spa was cheaper, then maybe more people would be inclined to do so. It is a fair point, though it must contain something more than that and this thesis has therefore sought to understand the issue through the architectural lens.

One important aspect of making this spa public is the location of the facility, locally as well as in the city. As previously stated, the city of Gothenburg has ambitions to expand the city around the river and for that reason placing a public building along the water front seemed like a suitable choice. Today it is not recommended to bathe in the river. But by placing a public spa at this location, the people of Gothenburg can enjoy being by the river while taking a bath. Therefore the hope is to strengthen the identity of Gothenburg as a city of water. Another aspect of this site is its proximity to residential buildings and public transport. Bathing here can be an activity you do after work and as a daytrip on weekends. The public spa should not feel like a destination but rather a stop along the way, and its position in the city can therefore strengthen that.

What makes a building public and how can architecture make people feel welcomed? These questions have been at the core of the discussions designing the building, and it is not straight forward. The first thing that came to mind was to create something informal and maybe use wood as the main building material. A place where people can somewhat relate the built work. Discussing it further and looking at other public buildings such as libraries, culture houses and churches, the informal bath was rejected. The reasoning was that if the idea is to embrace bathing as an important, and also serious, part of well-being then the building should signal the same. With this mindset, the result became a quite strict volume with grand rooms and materials. The attitude and gesture is similar to how cold bath houses were designed in the eighteen hundreds, but in a different materi-

al and expression. Throughout the building cast reliefs are placed as decoration. These kinds of ornaments communicate a sense of care. Care for the building and thereby for the ones using it. Similar to the ornamentation in many churches, we think these kinds of elements can bring comfort and ease the expression of a building with serious character.

Using natural stone, and in this case slate, as the cladding is an expensive choice and the decision was not taken lightly. One part of it is to strengthen the building’s formality and signal importance, which natural stone does effectively as it is recognized as an exclusive material. With that said, there is an abundance of natural stone types to choose from and they all differ in how people perceive them. The choice fell on a light slate both for its appearance and physical properties. Compared to other stones such as marble and even granite, slate has a somewhat more rough appearance though there is still a risk of the spa feeling too lavish and unapproachable. The idea was to create a balance between the luxurious and the casual; and slate seemed to perform well in that regard. One of the reasons is that the visitor does not need to be careful of the material since it is hard to permanently mark it. Therefore the visitor can feel relaxed yet being in a beautiful and dignified space. Another aspect of using slate throughout the project is the durability of the material. It will withstand both the outdoor climate at the rough site and the indoor climate in the bath.

Another aspect of how the design was affected by it being a public building was the organization of the functions. The public spa proposal is obviously inspired conceptually by Peter Zumthor’s Therme Vals, but one major difference is the spatial qualities. In Zumthor’s floor plan nothing is aligned, creating broken sight lines and unexpected experiences. The public spa proposal has, in one way, the opposite approach; seeking clear pathways and making sure the spa is easy to navigate. But once again, it is a matter of balancing the two. On one hand the spa should provide a sense of safety and mundanity, and on the other creating dynamic and exciting experiences for the visitor. In this case the result is clear communication and

overview of the space in the main room, and more dramatic and unexpected sequences in, especially, the east side of the spa.

Continuing with the second thesis question: How does space, light, and material affect the atmosphere in a public spa? This question is best answered through the examples in the two sides of the spa - The introspective and The social. They are an attempt to highlight how these attributes affect the atmosphere. The introspective side being darker, more intimate and features elements on which the visitor can rest their eyes on. On this side, the experience is more closely related to the one you get at Therme Vals, but still not quite as intense as there. One of the most discussed situations has been the flow between the cold plunge and hot bath. The cold plunge has a straight path from the corridor allowing the visitor to see the room without entering, while the hot bath has an angled path. The idea behind the angled corridor was to offer a different sequence, one that triggers curiosity. There is a concern regarding if the path to the hot pool could perhaps be too intense, or even scary. One way of counteracting this possibly negative effect was to widen the last part of the staircase, allowing two visitors to meet at this point as well as giving the bather more space in the fragile moment of stepping into a new room.

The other side of the spa - The social - has the opposite approach to spatiality and light. The rooms are more generous and feature multiple activities in the same space. The question that we are left with however is how much impact architecture has over these social interactions, and how much is in our culture. It is hard to draw any clear conclusions of how these types of spaces would function in reality. To get a deeper understanding of the subject more evidence based designs would need to be included in the study. Another way to the answer could be by investigating examples through study visits at different spaces.

To summarize: this thesis has been an attempt in showcasing how important the architecture is in the ritual of bathing. By really diving deep into the bathing experience one can imagine a magnitude of architectural possibilities of a public

spa. And this thesis is one example of how to approach the task. Ultimately, the prerequisites for a spa like this ever being built are weak. But that does not mean it would not work or benefit the city. Perhaps one day bathing for mental well-being will be recognized just as swimming once was for physical well-being.

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Figure 1. Authors own image. *Swimmers* [photography].

Figure 2. Kahlo, F. (1938) What the Water Gave Me [painting]. Wikiart. <https://www.wikiart.org/en/frida-kahlo/what-the-water-gave-me-1938>

Figure 3. Zorn, A. (1887). *Sommar* [painting]. Wikiart. <https://www.wikiart.org/en/anders-zorn/summer-1887>

Figure 4. Göteborgs-Tidningen (1935). *GSMHj:2300001* [photography]. Göteborgs stadsmuseum. <https://samlingar.goteborgsstadsmuseum.se/carlotta/web/object/2641520>

Figure 5. Jpmm (1999). *Therme Vals* [photography]. Flickr. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jpmm/>

Figure 6. Authors own image. *Floor plan & section, Therme Vals* [drawing].

Figure 7. Authors own image. *Light slit detail, Klockarebacken funeral chapel* [drawing].

Figure 8. Unknown (n.d.) *GhmPK:2151* [photography]. Göteborgs stadsmuseum. <https://samlingar.goteborgsstadsmuseum.se/carlotta/web/object/165311>

Figure 9. Atelier Sörberg. (1910-1919). Varbergs kallbadhus. [Photograph]. <https://digitaltmuseum.se/0210112511301/vykort-varbergs-kallbadhus-med-barnens-badstrand-i-forgrunden-detta-utseende>

Figure 10. Authors own image. *Sento, japanese communal bathing* [drawing].

Figure 11. Authors own image. *Oppdal slate* [photography].

Figure 12. Authors own image. *Offerdal slate* [photography].

Figure 13. Authors own image. *View from Sjömagasinet* [image].

Figure 14. Authors own image. *Space program* [diagram].

Figure 15. Authors own image. *Concept model* [photography].

Figure 16. Authors own image. *Site 1:1500* [drawing].

Figure 17. Authors own image. *Ground floor 1:300* [drawing].

Figure 18. Authors own image. *Basement 1:300* [drawing].

Figure 19. Authors own image. *Elevation south, street 1:300* [drawing].

Figure 20. Authors own image. *Elevation west, outdoor bath 1:300* [drawing].

Figure 21. Authors own image. *Elevation north, river 1:300* [drawing].

Figure 22. Authors own image. *Elevation east, square 1:300* [drawing].

Figure 23. Authors own image. *Divers* [photography].

Figure 24. Authors own image. *Enering the spa.* [image].

Figure 25. Authors own image. *Changing room 1:150* [drawing].

Figure 26. Authors own image. *Section a-a 1:150* [drawing].

Figure 27. Authors own image. *Spa 1:300* [drawing].

Figure 28. Authors own image. *Section b1-b1 1:300* [drawing].

Figure 29. Authors own image. *Section b2-b2 1:200* [drawing].

Figure 30. Authors own image. *Entering the main bath.* [image].

Figure 31. Authors own image. *Swimmers* [photography].

Figure 32. Authors own image. *View of main bath.* [image].

Figure 33. Authors own image. *Section 1:40* [drawing].

Figure 34. Authors own image. *Facade 1:40* [drawing].

Figure 35. Authors own image. *Round bath, plan & section c-c 1:100* [drawing].

Figure 36. Authors own image. *East side 1:120* [drawing].

Figure 37. Authors own image. *The sun and the sea* [illustration].

Figure 38. Authors own image. *Cold plunge* [photography].

Figure 39. Authors own image. *Cold plunge, stair* [photography].

Figure 40. Authors own image. *Cold plunge, plan & sections d 1:120* [drawing].

Figure 41. Authors own image. *Hot bath, relief* [photography].

Figure 42. Authors own image. *Hot bath, entrance* [photography].

Figure 43. Authors own image. *Hot bath, plan & sections e 1:120* [drawing].

Figure 44. Authors own image. *West side 1:200* [drawing].

Figure 45. Authors own image. *Section f1-f1 1:200* [drawing].

Figure 46. Authors own image. *The scrub room* [image].

Figure 47. Authors own image. *Section f2-f2 1:200* [drawing].

Figure 48. Authors own image. *The outdoor bath* [image].

Figure 49. Authors own image. *View from dry sauna* [image].

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