

THE DESIGN HANDBOOK
T H O L

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Proem

We were asked in 2018 to create a retreat on a 21 acre piece of land that sat next to a habitat that has deer and was very close to one of the larger wetlands around Ahmedabad; Thol , which in winter attracts a rich variety of migratory birds.

The client and his family are extremely organised people, and very conscious about quality and maintainability of developed work. One of them is a great tree lover and also an amateur bird watcher. The planned development itself is for a large joint family, with many brothers and uncles of varying age groups hence with varying interests. The client cognizant of this diverse requirement ensured a single point of conversation for us, to make our work process cohesive .

They were clear about their requirements but as is natural for a development of this scale, the requirements were suitably modified from time to time.

The development started with wanting to build four small cottages with two or three sleeping places each; and finally has rested with two cottages with four sleeping places each. A common gathering space for the family and friends has over time been carefully re- programmed to allow for what seems a logical usage , with all earlier expectations considerably curtailed.

This document culls selected images from design documents ,to allow some understanding of the process. While it limits itself to showing that part of the process that allowed decisions of space and sitting, and to some extent materiality, it chooses not to include many other studies that were done simultaneously.

More technical in nature, these consisted of detailed regional hydrological mapping to assess and mitigate flooding potential, to many studies of balancing the cut and fill of soil at site, or a rather exhaustive one of flora that maps every thing from local trees, shrubs, grasses, creepers, but also fruit bearing trees, nitrogen fixing crops and grasses, and seasonal vegetables and herbs. There were also studies of nutrient values of soil at site and at locations from where soil would be borrowed.

For the relatively small built programme there were regular structural reviews of the buildings being designed, and some checking about materiality. This document focuses only on space making, and the thinking that went into determining the skeleton of the project; the way the land would be modulated, or drained, the way planting would be imagined, the way the built would be thought of with ideas of movement, enclosure, volume , light and texture.

We are acutely aware that even this process has really not stopped, where this document chooses to, and as the work gets built, many things will get further refined or changed; and perhaps a few years from now when the project is occupied it may be educative to revisit this compilation and extract new lessons from it.

Why Process

All designs have processes.

What differs is in their aspiration.

At a very minimum , a process takes on as its parameters the task of responding to simple ideas of usable spaces, or cost, or constructability or addressing local laws. Or it can add to it, layers of the user's literal and then perhaps spiritual aspirations.

But the processes that matter and are engaging, take all this as a bare minimum. They then add and hence examine ideas of life and culture. They strive to find ways of developing conversations that engage the individual , but at the same time hope to engage with history and our changing notions of life.

Good processes work with many notions of time, the immediate and the archaeological; the past, the present and the future.

While a great deal of the human endeavour works to bring succour and safety to mankind, its higher pursuit is to search for and communicate meanings that allow our minds to think better of our place in the world, but also the nature of our relationship with it.

Constructed spatiality is a timeless device which while enabling and celebrating many ideas of occupation, if embedded with silent conversations of many diverse ideas of life and culture, become potent devices of soliloquy and calibration.

Any process of design that tries to grapple with these ideas without becoming axiomatic is of value and should be ,we believe at all times, attempted.

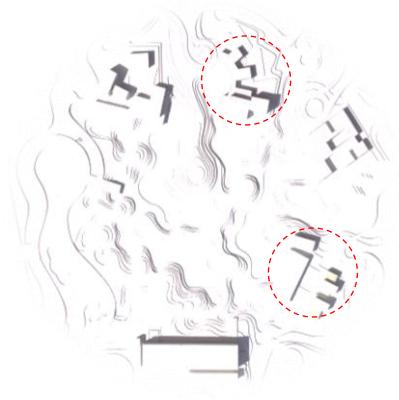


Site

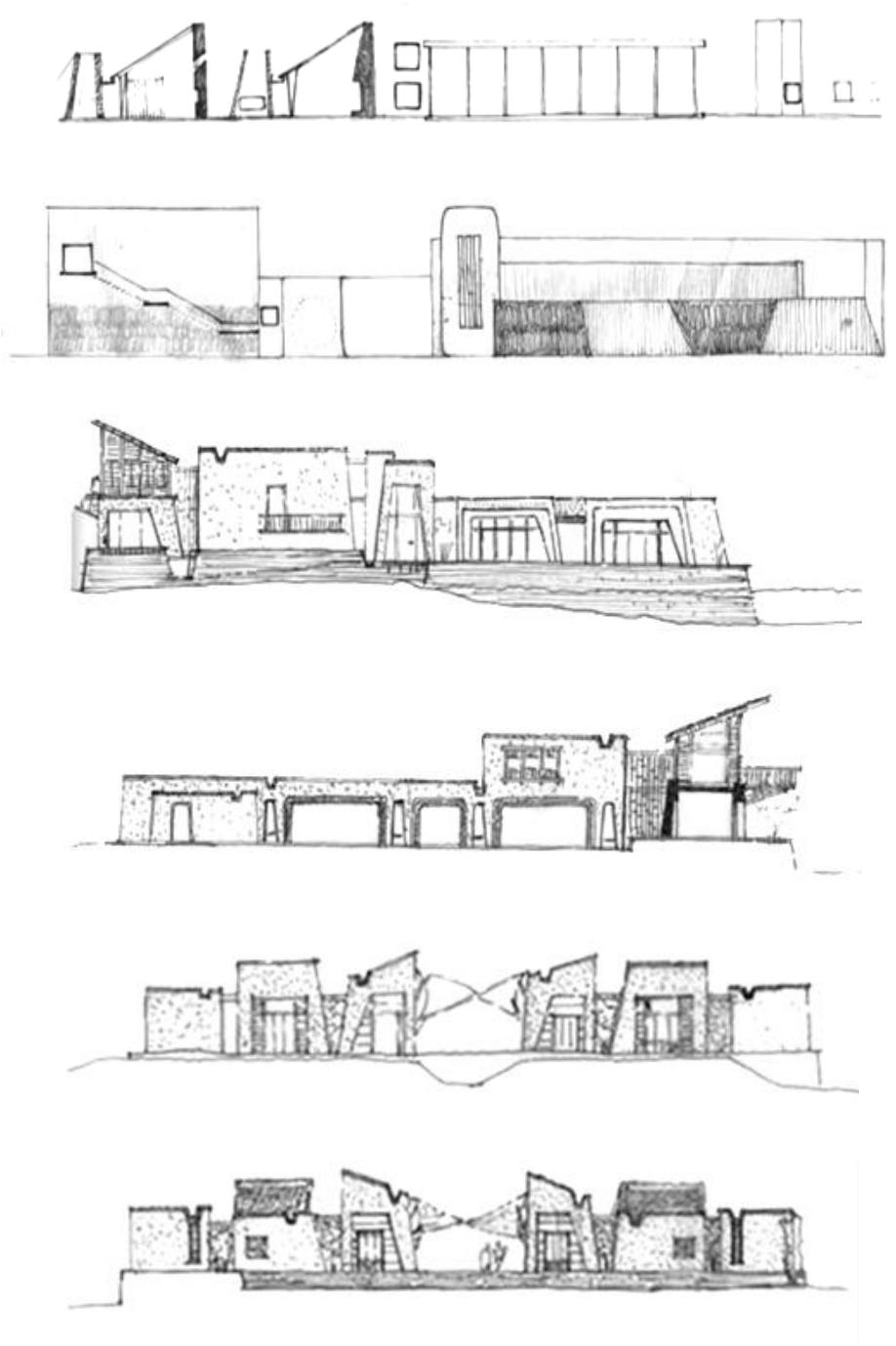
In the initial heady rush of meeting someone, many things get noticed. In time a comfortable relationship evolves and many things that were noticed at the outset seem less pertinent- but never unimportant. The ability to form a quick impression about someone is critical, the fallibility of not allowing that impression to be challenged over time can be an undoing.



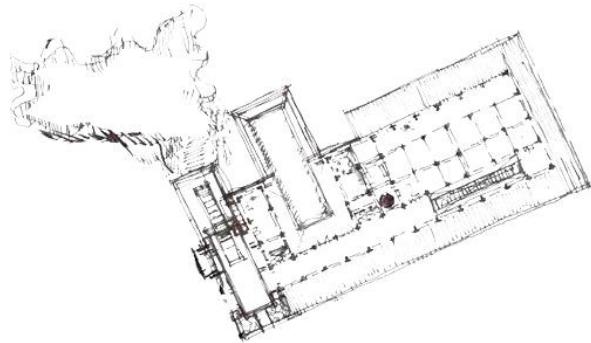
The center of the site consists of hard even land surface which continues to be even towards the west but converts into lumpy soil. Towards its south eastern side exists ploughed agricultural fields which were used by farmers. Along the periphery from the south corner to the north corner through the east exists lumpy uneven soil hence forming the water catchment territory.



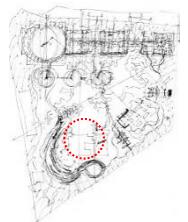
At this stage the work was presented and a change in the programme was suggested. The four villas were reduced to two but with increased number of bedroom spaces in each . Preference towards the design of villa 1 and 3 out of the 4 was indicated and the design further developed in this direction.

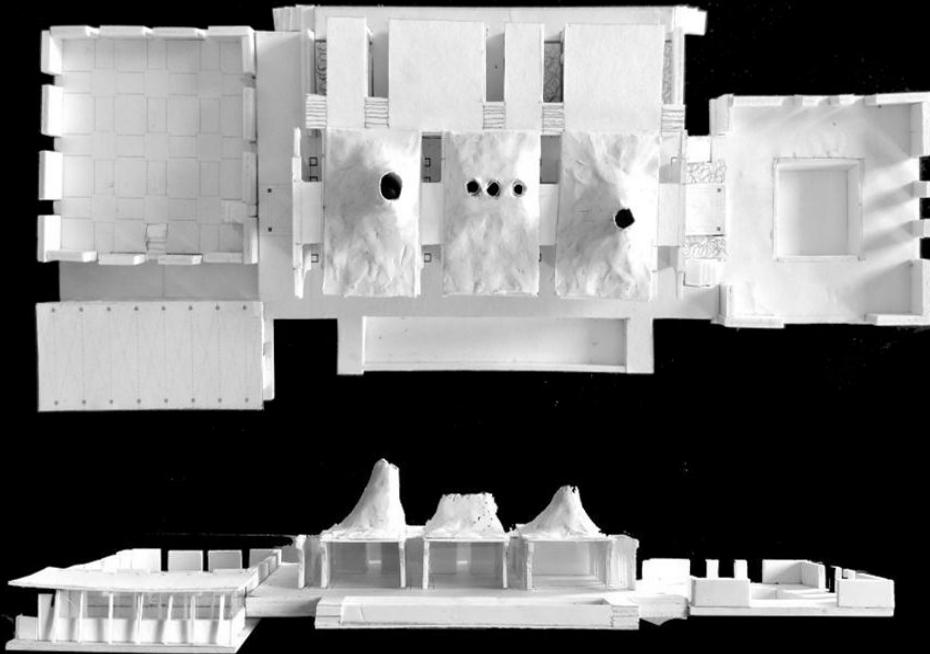


Various manners of engaging with the sky were tested while imagining the built

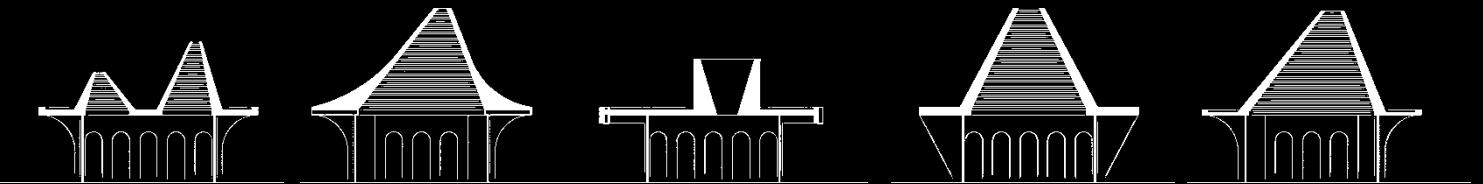


Reimagining the public pavilion





Study models to visualise the roof structures.



Exploration of roof forms.



Realizations





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