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# URBAN OASIS

THE CENTRAL MARKET REDEVELOPMENT OF HONG KONG

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE  
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# ABSTRACT

# URBAN OASIS : THE CENTRAL MARKET REDEVELOPMENT OF HONG KONG

BY **SEAN ZEE KWOK**  
SUBMITTED TO THE **DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE**  
ON **JANUARY 15, 2001**  
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**“To find the nature from within, we must recover the nature from without...”**

In the ultra-urban centers of today, "nature" has become a precious resource that often gets sacrificed in the name of progress and development. The presence of nature has become increasingly elusive in the concrete jungle of present-day metropolises. And in the contemporary urban center of Hong Kong, where development is extensive and population is saturated, this displacement of nature cannot be spared. Looking high above, the Victoria Peak reveals itself in a distance between the crowded towers hugging the hillside; patches of sky are held up by the pinnacles of the numerous skyscrapers; intermittent rays of sunlight penetrates the close-knitted cracks between buildings. Under the pressure of development, the nature of Hong Kong struggles to manifest itself in increasingly fleeting glimpses.

As the engine of progress churns on, the repression of nature intensifies in the urban center of Hong Kong. Humanity within its inhabitants is suppressed under more and more layers of desensitizing urban artificiality. Tsting my belief that urbanity does not necessarily precludes nature, my thesis proposes to recover the balance in the contemporary urban life. My thesis investigates the collection, distillation and intensification of the elusive natural forces in today's Hong Kong and using architecture phenomena to raise the awareness of these forces in the minds of its occupants. In my project, I attempt to reveal the "urban nature" of Hong Kong, proposing a humanistic urbanism for the city as an alternative vision to present condition- creating an oasis of life, out of the urban artificiality.

Thesis Supervisor : Fernando Domeyko  
Title :Senior Lecturer of Architecture





# INDEX

- **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**
- **BACKGROUND**
- **HUMANIST URBANISM**
  - **Awareness : Intimacy : Harmony**
- **SITE**
  - **Urban Matrix of Central**
  - **Functional Clusters in Central**
  - **The Central Market**
- **STUDIES & ANALYSIS**
  - **Urban Nature**
  - **City of Light : Shadows and Reflections**
  - **Precedence**
- **PROGRAM**
- **CONCEPT & DEVELOPMENT**
  - **Sectional Evolution**
  - **Spaces of Light**
  - **Garden of Reflections**
  - **Developmental Sketches and Models**
- **PROPOSAL**
  - **Drawings**
  - **Models**
- **CONCLUSIONS**
- **BIBLIOGRAPHY**



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Thank you for all your constructive criticism and valuable advice during the semester. Your unique perspective has helped me reach the depth and richness that I have hoped to achieve in my project. Your keen sense has been crucial in guiding the development of my thesis where on many occasions clarify in my mind my own unconscious intentions. It has been a great experience working with you and I appreciate all your help.

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### **To my peers:**

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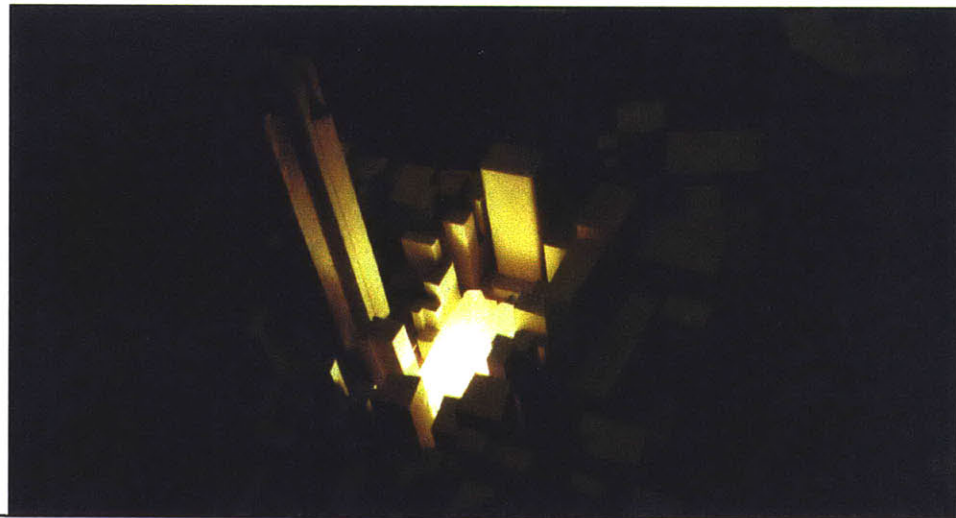


## BACKGROUND

### **“A human sanctuary surrounded by the chaos of urban artificiality - an urban oasis”**

Having lived most of my life in one of the densest and most developed cities in the world, Hong Kong, I grow weary of the present direction of urban development where natural and humanistic concerns have given way to progress. As nature is progressively repressed in our cities, more and more artificiality is introduced to take its place. We fill the void of the dislocated nature, by numbing ourselves with countless variety of entertainment, isolating ourselves with walkman, cell-phones and Palm Pilots and losing ourselves in the endless toils of our daily chores. And as more and more of our nature is displaced from our cities, more and more artificiality is introduced to take its place, as a result, less and less of humanism remains in modern urban life. Like a vicious cycle, this present condition will spiral out of control, if unchecked.

The balance in urban life must be recovered. Science may try to amend the developmental side effects like pollution and devastation of our environment, but like taking pain-killers, science may subdue the symptoms, it never provides the cure. In my mind, the only way to really deal with our urban developmental disease is by fighting it at the source on a humanistic level- a change in our urban life.



Acknowledging this need for change, I search for an alternative way to think about our cities, and the possible role of urban architecture to promote a more balanced way to live. My thesis examines the use of architecture to collect, filter and intensify the elusive natural forces buried deep in our modern urban centers, as the means to promote an awareness of their presence in its occupants and recover the humanism in modern urban living. The site chosen for my thesis is located in Central, Hong Kong, China- one of the most intense urban settlements in the world, where development is saturated, density is overwhelming and manifestations of nature suppressed.

Located deep in the heart of Central, on the northern shore of the Hong Kong Island, the Central Market is chosen as the ideal platform for the investigation of an urban oasis. Amongst the artificiality of modern urban life, one of the most direct links to nature is the food that we eat. In Hong Kong, with the traditional Chinese passion for cuisine, food remains an essential part of daily life and an integral part of its culture. And the Central Market lies at the intersection of Hong Kong's food culture and many of the urban natural forces.

The present-day Central Market is founded on the same site where the first market of Hong Kong has once stood as the social center of the early inhabitants of the island city since 1848. I hope that I would find a way to redevelop the site as a renewed locus for its urban neighborhood and ultimately creating an urban oasis for the Central District. The focus of my thesis research is the revelation of nature through architecture phenomena to recover the balance of urban life in this dynamic site, embedded in the ultra-urban setting of Hong Kong.

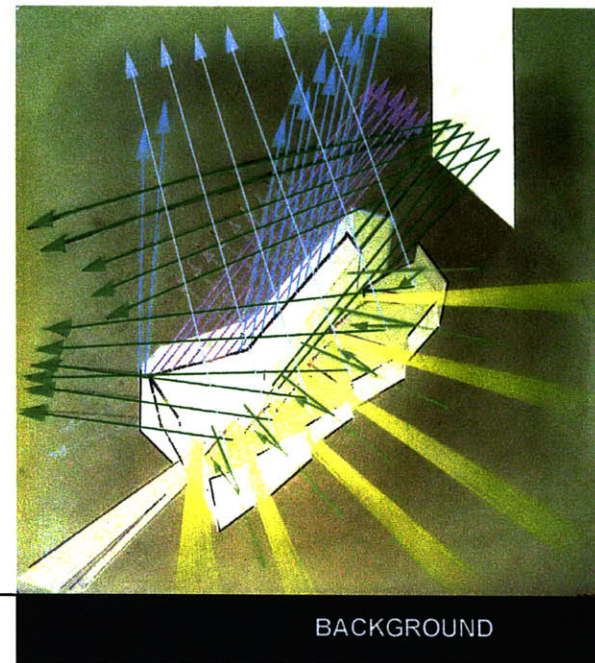
To grasp the nature of what I search, a few parallel investigations take place to inform the design of the urban oasis at the Central Market site:

The definition of "Humanist Urbanism" in Hong Kong

The study of the site and the analysis of its surrounding urban matrix of Central

The search for the subdued manifestations of nature in the ultra urban city

The consultation of precedence with similar humanist and architectural concerns





**HUMANIST  
URBANISM**

- **AWARENESS : INTIMACY : HARMONY**

### **Awareness : Intimacy : Harmony**

What could a Humanist Urbanism be in Hong Kong? The answer may be found by understanding its current urban conditions. Cities are stressful environment to live in, especially in the ultra-urban metropolis of Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, people live day by day in a fast pace lifestyle with long working hours and little time to stop and relax. To add to the already high-stressed conditions, the physical setting of the city is chaotic, congestive, oppressive and even dangerous. Hong Kong's urban lifestyle and setting reflective and codependent to one another, are the primary causes of stress in the lives of her inhabitants.

The stressful urban living keeps city-dwellers psychologically on constant alert, triggering anxiety and distress on a daily basis. As instinctive mechanism of self-preservation, the over-stressed urbanites desensitize themselves with endless entertainment, (alcohol and drugs), isolate themselves from social contacts with cell-phones, MP3-players and palm-pilots or chose to lose themselves by immersing into the daily toils of work and more work. Until finally, they manage to completely disconnect themselves from their own humanities. A Humanist Urbanism for Hong Kong would be the creation of an urban environment where people can recover their own humanity by being at peace with their surroundings and themselves.

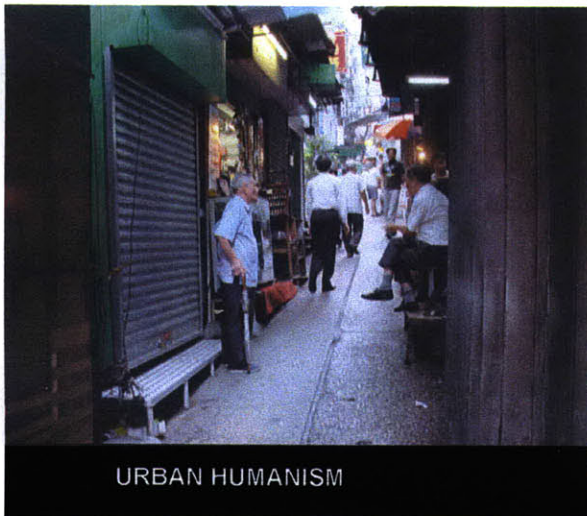
To find a humanist urbanity for Hong Kong, it seems necessary to take away the intrinsic stresses embedded in her lifestyle as well as her environment. This require a rethinking in her current urban lifestyle and reconsideration of its physical setting so as to recover a balance in the lives of her inhabitants. In my mind, an architecture that promotes such changes can only be attained if it brings about in its occupants, an awareness of themselves in relationship to the larger natural environment, provide the potential for intimacy where people can relate and communicate with one another and achieve a harmony in the environment that one may find solace and peace from the daily toils of life.





#### **Awareness : Connection between the World and the Mind**

The logic of the city can be difficult to read from its environment and sometimes it may not even exist. The lack of order and disorienting nature of the urban environment causes anxiety in the inhabitants of Hong Kong. Occasionally, a few observant people may be able to read the cryptic signs divulged by the repressed nature- the larger movement of the landscape, the intermittent ray of sunlight, or the subtle bends in the roads, as ways to orient themselves in the city. But this can only be done with great concentration and difficulties. The role of a humanist city is to make known to her urban inhabitants, the nature which is repressed and reveal the structure of that is hidden, providing its occupants the possibility to form a profound connection to their environment. By understanding their place in the world, it would be possible for these urbanites to regain the much needed security in their lives.



URBAN HUMANISM

#### **Intimacy : Relationship between One and Another**

The overwhelming density of Hong Kong may put her inhabitants physically close together, but in an environment of extreme proximity, people actually instinctively withdraw into their own mental spaces as a way to escape, completely alienating themselves from the others. Hiding behind cellular phones, CD-players and Palm-pilots, people become apathetic to their environment, their fellow men and women, and even to themselves. To fully explore the potential of humanist urbanism, my investigation will leave, for the moment, developmental as well as economic pressure but just take into the consideration of the human needs. A need for properly proportioned spaces where people may have the room to relax their self-defense and comfortably interact with one another. Using shared intellectual and physical experiences like food, sports and art, as a common bond and medium, urban dwellers may be able to intimately relate to one another recovering the humanity in our urban lives.

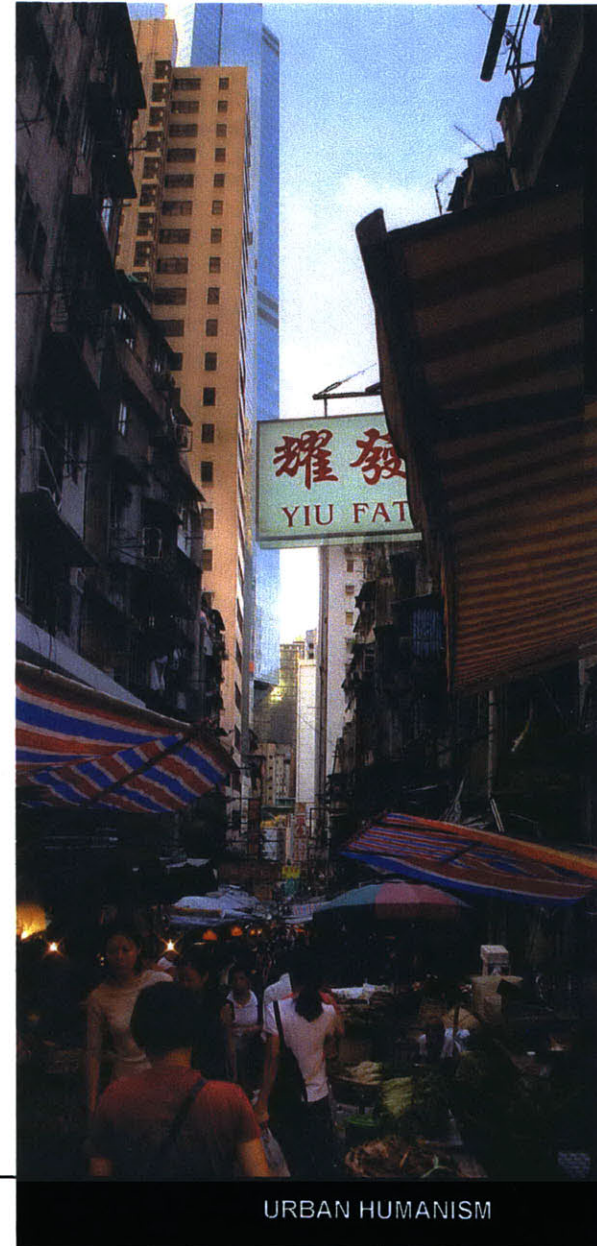
### Harmony : Balance between the Material and the Void

In the study of Feng Shui, practitioners believe in the presence of "chi" or energy embedded in our environment. This "chi" flows through all things in the physical world, including people. What people do to their physical world alter the embedded "chi" in the world and ultimately influence the "chi" within themselves. What people do also affect balance of chi in themselves, a related philosophy professed by Yoga or Tai-Chi. In the modern cities, the balance of "chi" is lost due to the imbalance found in the urban lifestyle and environment. This imbalance is caused by the concentration of too much of some elements and not enough of others, e.g. too much artificiality and not enough nature or too much work and not enough rest. By controlling and maintaining the proper balance between:

material and space	work and play
artificiality and nature	movement and rest
light and shadow	sports and culture
reality and reflection	yin and yang

in its environment, a humanist urban environment can help promote the mental as well as physical balance-"chi" in her inhabitants. Finally, in finding the harmony of "chi" in their surroundings, they may recover the proper balance of energy in their own lives, giving them the emotional and mental clarity to feel, to think and to be human again.

To found an urban oasis in the heart of Central, Hong Kong, my thesis must embody the qualities of awareness, intimacy and harmony that I described, proposing a microcosm of humanist urbanity for the city of Hong Kong.





**SITE**

- **URBAN MATRIX OF CENTRAL**
  - **Introductions**
  - **Urban Image of Central**
  - **Urban Logic**
  - **Design Implications**
- **FUNCTIONAL CLUSTERS IN CENTRAL**
- **THE CENTRAL MARKET**



## URBAN MATRIX OF CENTRAL

### • Introductions

To ground my project in its surrounding urban matrix, I made an intensive analysis of the urban fabric of Central, Hong Kong, where the Central Market site is located. Trying to identify the "genius loci", I looked for the hidden urban structure and its underlying logic to inform my design. In my research, I attempt to decipher the language of the city, learn its vocabulary, and finally use it to construct the urban oasis, out of and belonging to the city of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong, one of the densest cities in the world, grew from its humble beginning from a fishing village to today's metropolis, in a relatively short period of 160 years under the British Colonial rule. Hong Kong is a product of an intricate layering of different opposite but formative forces: British Colonial power and Chinese involuntary subjugation; the British desire for organization and order and the Chinese preference for practicality and organic growth; obsession with connections and preoccupation with spatial occupation; the shortage of land and the developmental pressure from the large and growing population; the rigid orthogonal urban grid and the topological landscape. In the constant tug of war between these opposing forces, Hong Kong acquired one of the richest urban landscapes among today's global metropolises.

Using its most intense as well as the oldest urban settlement, the Central District as the focus, this paper tries to investigate the direct impact of these different opposing factors in the shaping of Hong Kong. Theories of the correlation between the layering of these formative forces and the physical as well as interpretive layering of the urban fabric will be formulated.

### • Urban Network of Hong Kong

Although the city of Hong Kong was founded on a single island, it had never developed in isolation. Since its beginning, its existence depended on its function as an integral juncture in many layers of larger global networks. Hong Kong was acquired from China by the British to become its naval base and yet another entrepot

along the British Imperial trade route and destined to be its gateway into China, sealing its fate as the permanent crossroad between the East and the West.

In 1841, China ceded the 72 sq.km Hong Kong Island to the British Empire under the "Nanjing Treaty", as the penalty of the Opium war, thus beginning the short but incredible urban history of Hong Kong. In 1860, after another military conflict with China, in the "the Convention of Beijing", Kowloon Peninsula and Stone Cutter Island were signed over to the British as well. The Colonial British government was finally able to secure its control over the Victoria Harbor for trade, and acquired an addition of 7.4 sq.km to the administrative boundary of Hong Kong, temporarily relieving the developmental pressure of the city. And finally, in 1898, China agreed to lease to the British, for 99 years, the land north of Boundary Street extending all the way to today's border and all the outlying islands, together called the New Territories, further adding an area of 933 sq.km to Hong Kong, and completing its boundary as we would know today. The territory of Hong Kong came to a combined area of 1012 sq.km.

In the following 100 years, Hong Kong experienced the most incredible economic development and unparalleled urban growth. In the beginning, with only a small portion of the northern shore of Hong Kong Island - today's Central, Sheung Wan, and Admiralty inhabited, Hong Kong, then called the City of Victoria, gradually expanded. By the early 1850's, land in this Central District was already running out, and the first of many years of land reclamation projects began. The city also expanded laterally from Central, towards the east and the west, creating a linear and continuous urban settlement along the northern coast of Hong Kong Island. In 1916, with the Kowloon-Canton Railway completed, a fast and efficient connection between Hong Kong and China was created and the Kowloon Peninsula began its urban development as well. Soon after, the northern urban strip of Hong Kong Island and the southern tip of Kowloon Peninsula together formed the urban center of Hong Kong, connected across the Victoria Harbor by a myriad of ferries and later on vehicular and MTR tunnels. With the population growing at an alarming rate from the influx of Chinese immigrant escaping from the Mainland, and the developmental pressure from the booming economy, urban development soon migrated outward from Kowloon Peninsula into the New Territories. There, "New Towns",





Painting of Hong Kong in 1840

as they were called, sprouted up in pockets all over the countryside, providing the much-needed housing to the growing population and relieving some of the population congestion in the urban areas. Over the years, more of these New Towns developed in Hong Kong and the central urban areas continued to spread outward, and the major civic task of Hong Kong became the construction of infrastructure that would support and connect all its urban areas. Multiple networks of transportation - the MTR (Mass Transit Railway), trains, ferries, vehicular arteries and other public transportation were constructed to connect, quickly and efficiently, all these major urban nodes. The local transportation networks also link the city to its ports - both airplanes and ships, connecting Hong Kong to the larger global transportation networks and establishing Hong Kong a major node in the network of global metropolises.

Today, Hong Kong's role as an entrepot between China and the West remains but it has also emerged as a crucial node in the global financial network. The view of Hong Kong as a node in multiple systems of larger global networks is reflected in its own urban development. At the core of the urban network of Hong Kong lies its origin, Central. Central remains Hong Kong's most intense urban settlement after 160 years of urban growth and development. By understanding its urban fabric and the logic behind its development and seeing it as the intersection of multiple urban networks, one can begin to understand the rest of Hong Kong.

#### Language of Analysis - Layers and Connections

In Central, the conventional tools of urban analysis, such as figure-ground drawings, or the identification of the edges, paths, landmarks, districts and nodes proposed by Kevin Lynch, though may provide a good starting point of analysis, are inadequate to fully account for the multi-layering, connectivity and three-dimensionality of its urban fabric.

To understand Central, it is necessary for one to look at its fabric on all its different layers. Below ground, there are the system of tunnels of the MTR (Mass Transit Railway) and the new Airport Express, and vehicular tunnels. One ground level, there is the network of streets and roads and footpaths. A level above that, there is the network of elevated pedestrian walkways that connects buildings to buildings. And at the highest layer, the office towers, although not physically connected, defines a zone of inhabitation that links them together visually as a connected field of occupation. Each of these layers deserves their own analysis that defines their respective edges, paths, landmarks, districts and nodes. However, it is more crucial to understand the cross-layer connections between the different components of each layer.

Because of this three-dimensionality of Central's urban fabric, much of the analysis of its city form will be accompanied by sectional drawings, series of figure-ground plans, axonometric sketches, diagrams and photographs. These graphical tools will help show the urban fabric of each layer, as well as the interrelationships and the connectivity between the different nodal points in the spatial urban matrix that together the different layers create.



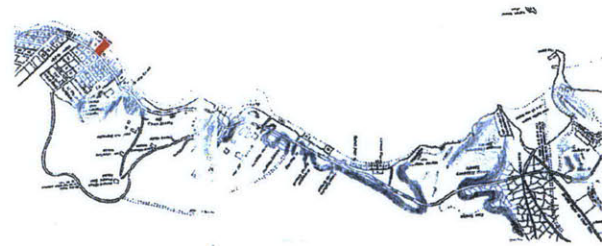
Map of Hong Kong Island, Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories in 1998



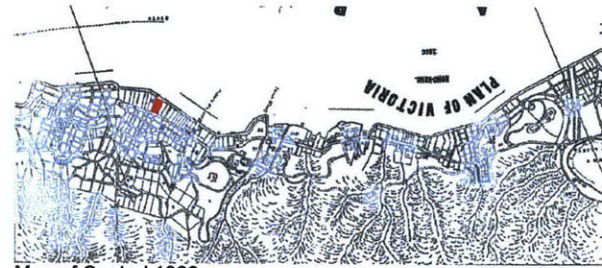
- **Urban Image of Central**

Central is the origin of Hong Kong's urban history. Located at the elbow of the Victoria Harbor, at the center of the urban spine along the northern coast of Hong Kong, it is the nucleus of Hong Kong's urban network.

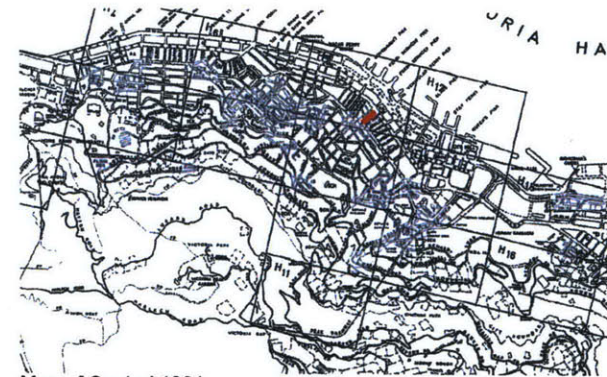
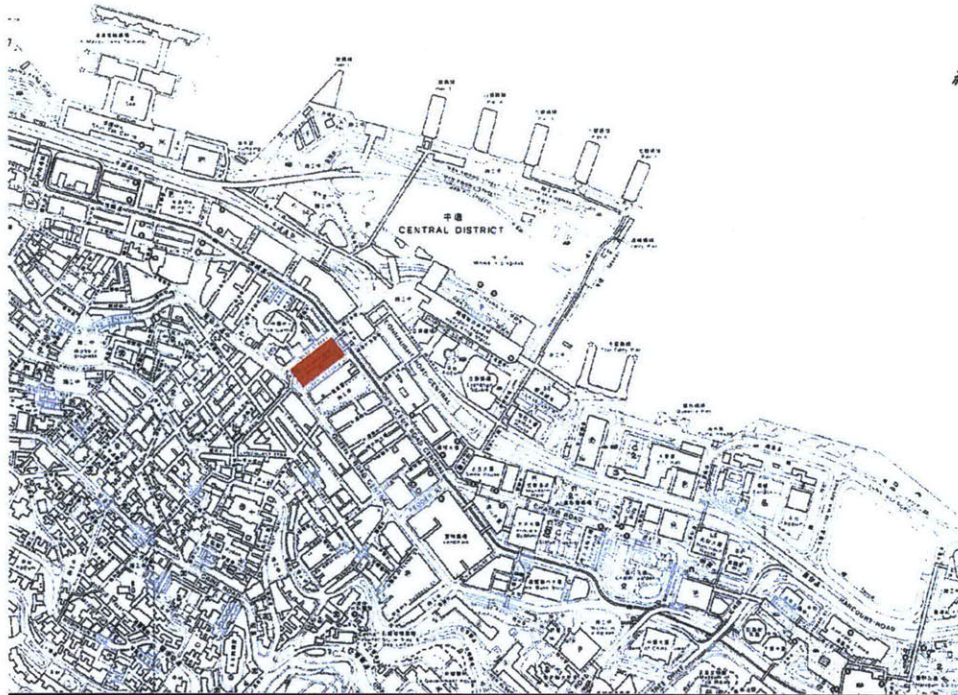
Then known as the City of Victoria, Central was the first location of Hong Kong to be settled by the Colonial British, chosen for its proximity to the Kowloon Peninsula- then still part of the Mainland China, and its easy access to the deep Victoria Harbor. In 1841, the first streets were laid down, and the 160 years of urban development under the British Colonial rule that followed was nothing short of incredible. From its humble beginning as a fishing village to today's international port and global financial center, these first few streets constructed on the northern shore of Hong Kong Island, resisted the test of time and defined the logic based on which the rest of the city grew. In this section, each component of the urban fabric of Central will be dissected and analyzed as to their origins, developmental processes and internal logic.



Map of Central 1842



Map of Central 1866



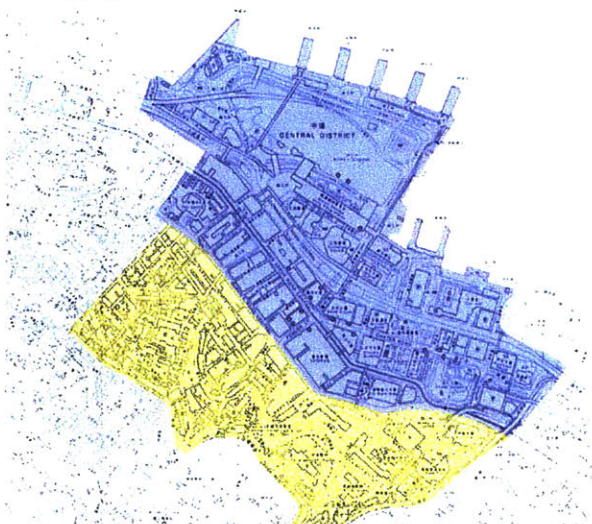
Map of Central 1901

Map of Central 1998





Map of Central 1998 Denoting its boundary



Map of Central with Highlights of the Coastal Grid in Purple and the Hillside Grid in Yellow

### The Colonial Grid

As a physical manifestation of their Imperial power and a tool of colonization, the British laid down their urban grid on the northern coast of the small Island of Hong Kong. However, when the rigid grid was adapted to the Chinese culture of Hong Kong and inserted into the topological landscape of the Island, it resulted in an unexpectedly rich urban landscape. The urban grid of Central, created under the tensions between the British Colonial power and Chinese adaptive sensibility; rigid orthogonality and geographical constraints; the desire for order and organization and the culture of practicality and need for organic growth, is a product of the layering of all these formative forces.

The District of Central is defined by Jubilee Street on the East; Cotton Tree Drive on the West; Caine Road on the South; and the Victoria Harbor on the North. The urban grid under investigation lies within these boundaries. With the connective edge defined by Queen's Road Central, the urban fabric of Central can be seen as the collision of two different grid systems - the Coastal Grid and the Hillside Grid, each with their distinctive characters.

In the Coastal Grid, to the north of Queen's Road Central, the urban grid is relatively large and orthogonal, characteristic to the urban settlement found along the northern shore of Hong Kong Island. Built on relatively flat land, the grid pattern is regular and blocks are rectangular, only bending occasionally to conform to the gentle coastline. Blocks are large and building plots can fill up the entire block. All the major roads are created from successive land reclamation projects and lie parallel to each other and to the original coast of the Victoria Harbor. The smaller cross streets, intersecting these Coastal Roads, provide the necessary connections between them. All roads in this coastal zone of Central are major pedestrian pathways and vehicular thoroughfares that connect the district to all the other nodes along urban spine on the northern coast of Hong Kong Island.

In striking contrast, the Hillside Grid, to the south of Queen's Road Central, is much smaller and more organic, due to the constraints of the mountainous topology of Hong Kong Island. Conforming to the movement of the landscape, the grid pattern becomes irregular and blocks often become oddly-shaped. The blocks vary largely in their sizes, while the plots are comparatively smaller to those in the Coastal Grid, ranges from. As the slope becomes too steep, most of the cross streets that extend from the Coastal Grid transform into smaller footpaths. The wider Hillside Roads wind up the foothill of the Victoria Peak, hugging the contours of the mountain, to provide access to the residential neighborhoods on the Mid-Level and the Peak.

For a closer inspection and a deeper understanding, the urban grid of Central can be further broken down and analyzed by the following components: the Coastal Roads, the Hillside Roads, The Cross Streets and the Vertical Strata:

### The Coastal Roads

Lying within the Coastal Grid, beginning with Queen's Road Central, all the major roads that was constructed to its north, bore a direct relationship to the harbor. These Coastal Roads include Queen's Road Central, Des Voeux Road Central, Connaught Road Central and the newest addition, Man Cheung Street. Together, they define the commercial and financial district of Central. All these roads lie parallel to each other and bear an organic relationship to the original coastline for they are created from a series of successive land reclamation projects that started in the early 1850's as an answer to Hong Kong's growing developmental pressure. Beginning with Queen's Road Central, these Coastal Roads became the major traffic arteries that link Central with all the other urban nodes along the northern spine on Hong Kong Island.

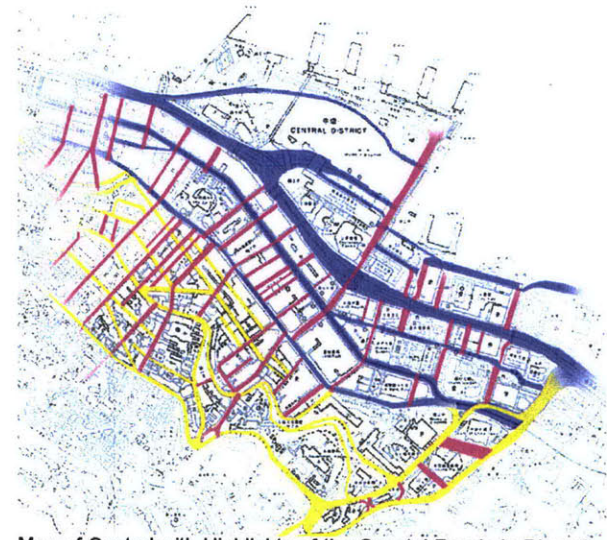
### The Hillside Roads

South of Queen's Road Central, on the foothill of the Victoria Peak, the roads take on a topological character, very different from that of the Coastal Roads. These Hillside Roads are carved into the slope and hug the changing terrain as they wind up the mountain. Because they conform to the movement of the landscape, the urban grid that they create, as compared to that of the Coastal Streets, are more organic and less regular.

### The Cross Streets

The Cross Streets in Central, like Pedder Street, Pottinger Street, Queen Victoria Street and Jubilee Street, plays a critical role in stitching together the two urban grids- the more rigid Coastal Grid and the more organic Hillside Grid. The Cross Streets intersect the major roads in the two grid systems, providing the necessary connections among them.

Also these cross streets used to provide the direct access to the waterfront of the Victoria Harbor from the city, and had maintained these crucial links through the many land-reclamation efforts until recently. After the Construction of Exchange Square Complex and the latest land reclamation effort for the International Finance Center Complex, these cross-streets to the harbor are physically cut off at Connaught Road Central.



Map of Central with Highlights of the Coastal Roads in Blue; the Hillside Roads in Yellow; and the Cross Streets in Purple





Map of Central with Highlight of the MTR &Tunnels



Map of Central with Highlight of the Streets

### The Vertical Strata

In Central, the intensity of urban life and the concentration of inhabitation have forced the urban fabric to stratify into multiple layers. The segregation of the vertical layers allow different functions to occur simultaneously over the same footprint, increasing the efficiency of the land, the most precious resource in Hong Kong.

Underground, the MTR, provides the lifeline for Hong Kong, linking all the urban nodes together. The paths of the MTR mirror the movements of the surface vehicular thoroughfares, establishing stops at each major urban settlement in Hong Kong. It stitches together the fabric of Hong Kong by compressing the time of travel between the nodes, and uniting the entire city into a coherent whole. And with the construction of the new Airport Express Terminal next to the International Finance Center Complex, Central became the interchange between the highly efficient local MTR network and the Airport Express which connects to the new Foster-designed International Airport where the global transportation network can be accessed.

On the surface, the streets and roads in Central take on the intensity of the urban life. To allow faster and more efficient connections between thoroughfares, the streets and roads weave over and under one another in a network of overpasses and underpasses creating a network of seamless transitions. Connaught Road Central embodies this dynamism.

A level above, the Elevated Pedestrian Walkway network was first created as a privately-funded project by one of Hong Kong's most powerful development companies, Hong Kong Land Development Company, to connect all their commercial developments in Central. The Elevated Pedestrian Walkway extends beyond the collection of their private commercial building, and connects to other civic buildings and public amenities such as the Central Post Office and the Star Ferry Pier with the intention to divert the maximum pedestrian traffic into the shops, boutiques, cafes and restaurants along the route, inside their buildings. Protected from the elements and free from street traffic, these semi-indoor or indoor walkways, provide a comfortable and convenient alternative to the pedestrians sidewalk of the pollution-ridden streets. Although originated as a completely profit-oriented scheme, the Elevated Pedestrian Walkway network unexpectedly became one of the most successful urban interventions in Central and created a signature character for Hong Kong's cityscape.

High above, the building towers occupy the highest layer of the urban fabric. Together, these pencil-like towers of steel and reinforced concrete define a common zone of occupation. Insulated from all the movement and retail activities below, these skyscraping towers provide the precious space for the inhabitants of Hong Kong as their residents as well as places of commerce.





Map of Central with Overlays of the Four Vertical Strata



Map of Central with Highlight of the Elevated Pedestrian Walkway System



Map of Central with Highlight of the Towers





Photo of the Governor's Mansion Overseeing the Central District 1957



Photo of Store Signs and Street Vendors along Wellington Street 1925



Photo of Illegal Balcony Constructions 1980's

### Urban Logic

In the constant tug of war between the many opposing but formative forces, Hong Kong acquired a very rich urban landscape. In this section, I will try to identify a few of these forces and postulate their roles in the shaping of the urban fabric of Central. Theories of the correlation between the layering of these formative forces and the physical as well as interpretive layering of the urban fabric will be formulated.

### British and Chinese Cultural Tension

The cross-cultural tension between the West and East manifests in the urban fabric of Hong Kong on many layers and scales. During the colonial years, the Queen-appointed Hong Kong Governor headed a core administrative body consisted of British officials, ruled over Hong Kong and its ethnic Chinese subjects. During these 160 years, the relationship between the small British ruling body and the Chinese majority population was defined by desire to control on one side, and reluctant acceptance on the other. The Colonial government established the rule and their Chinese subjects would follow them, but only to satisfy the minimum requirements, and often tried to bend or exceed these rules whenever possible. The urban fabric of Central reflects this repressed confrontation.

In the larger urban context, the British first laid down an urban grid in today's Central, as a physical manifestation of their colonial power and a sign of control. The Colonial government provided a logical grid work of roads and streets and constructed their basic collection of Colonial style buildings in strategic locations, for civic uses, their clubhouses, their banks as well as the headquarters for their trading companies. And the rest of the urban space was left to their Chinese subjects, with their own residents, offices and amenities. Examples of the two different styles of buildings and the sense of their uneasy coexistence can still be recognized today in Central.

On the streets, the facades of buildings together with the ground plane of the streets form a network of continuous channels of space in the city, establishing the rigid framework where the cacophony of store signs juts off the facades of buildings fighting for attention from the pedestrians. Pedestrian sidewalks are invaded by hawkers and vendors who choose to ignore the indoor facilities provided by the government, and illegally set up their own street markets. The most celebrated as well as hated characteristics of Hong Kong's cityscape are its collage of illegal balcony constructions covering many building facades. As soon as the government takes them down, new ones spring up somewhere else because the desire for space within this congested city is stronger than any building regulations.

The British arrive at Hong Kong to colonize the humble fishing village into its own image. Despite their best effort, the deep-rooted Chinese culture resisted, and between the tension of the two cultures, an urban fabric that is uniquely Hong Kong emerged.

### The Residential and Commercial Boundary

Queen's Road Central was not only one of the first major roads built in Hong Kong, it also defined a boundary between the residential and commercial districts that still exists today. Queen's Road Central was the datum between the Victoria Peak and the narrow strip of reclaimed land along the northern coast of Hong Kong. It was determined at the very beginning that the precious land on the northern coast of Hong Kong be reserved for commercial activities, because it was the only place where it was flat enough to construct large buildings and easily access the deep Victoria Harbor. Thus, the area between Queen's Road Central and Des Voeux Road on the waterfront defined the extent of the commercial district of Central. Des Voeux Road allowed access to all the shipping docks and piers on the Victoria Harbor at that time. As the pressure of economic development and population growth built, the waterfront of Central migrated further into the Victoria Harbor with each successive land reclamation project to allow the commercial district to expand to the limit of the new shoreline.

From Queen's Road Central southward, along the hillside, spawn the residential developments. Limited by the steep slopes, the vernacular construction material of wood and brick and the unsophisticated building technology at that time, only 3-story narrow tenement houses could be built on these sights. These tightly packed, inadequately lit and poorly ventilated tenement houses became the homes of the Chinese inhabitants of Hong Kong. As the slope tapered and flattened at Mid-Level, after Caine Road, the British Colonials and wealthy Chinese tycoons built their large luxurious mansions, commanding a panorama of the Victoria Harbor and a dominating view of the city (Central) below.

The simultaneous proximity and segregation of the two districts - residential and commercial, allow Central to experience the full cycle of daily life. Every morning, people would take the elevated escalator to go from their homes on the foothill of the Victoria Peak to their workplaces in the commercial district. And every evening, these workers will leave their offices and return to their homes in the residential district, completing the cycle of the day. This intimate relationship between the residential area to the south of Queens Road Central and the commercial zone to the north of Queen's Road Central has largely maintained today. However, as land become even less available and more expensive in Central, the pressure of redevelopment of these residential neighborhoods on the foothill of the Victoria Peak is increasing.

Hong Kong has a large and ever increasing population of 6.8 million people packed into a small area of 1000 sq.km. Because of Hong Kong's mountainous terrain, only 20% is suitable for practical urban settlement. And about one-third of Hong Kong's total population, 2.3 million people concentrate in these dense settlements, establishing density as high as 10,000 people per sq.km in some areas. The oldest of the urban settlements in Hong Kong, Central, respond to developmental pressure and land shortage with a combination of continuous land reclamation efforts, construction of denser development and ever taller skyscrapers.

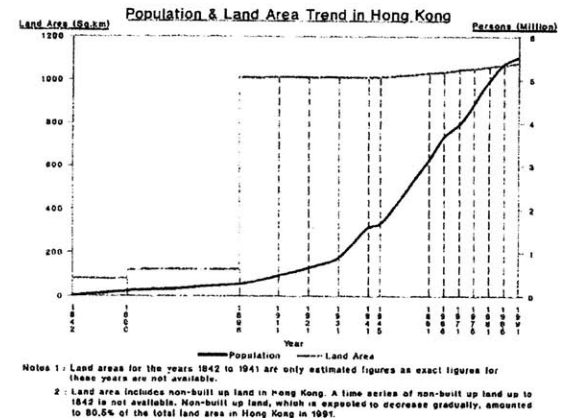


Chart Showing Hong Kong's Land Area and Population Growth through Time



### Connections and Nodes

“Living in Hong Kong is like playing a permanent game of musical chair, there are more people than chairs, and that’s why everyone is always moving around. And if the music ever stops, there won’t be enough room for everyone and we’ll start overflowing into the Harbor...” my friend once said. Even though this statement was a gross exaggeration that was meant as a joke, there is still a grain of truth in it. In Hong Kong, a place with such shortage of space, everyone needs to be in permanent motion, both physically and mentally, to cope with its claustrophobic density.

The inhabitants of Hong Kong stay in a constant state of flux as a method of mental escape from its ultra dense environment. By staying in motion, their minds are not given time to notice the smallness of the city but persuaded to register its size according to the distance they travel. The more often they travel, the greater the mental distance they create, and the larger the city seems. A second need of movement arises from the distributed nature of Hong Kong’s urban settlements. To make the city feel larger and more coherent, the movement between the urban nodes are made quick and seamless, compressing the in-between space and stitching together all of different urban nodes. Until finally, the city is no longer viewed as a collection of small, distributed urban settlements but as a larger homogenous unity. Thirdly, by extending its connections to the regional, continental and global network of cities, Hong Kong is able to expand its symbolic boundary. Providing its inhabitants with the physical and symbolic possibility of escape which gives the much needed psychological comfort in such cramped living condition.

For these reasons, the city of Hong Kong is obsessed with its transportation. For such a small city, it has one of the most efficient and extensive public transportation networks in the world. Among the MTR, trains, light-rails, the Airport Express, trams, buses, mini-buses, taxis, water shuttles, ferries, escalators and elevated walkways and airplanes, the inhabitants of Hong Kong have all the different choices to travel seamlessly from one place to another within the city and for that matter, anywhere in the world. Within all these overlapping transportation networks, Central functions as their nerve center. And to physically accommodate all these different networks on its already limited space, the urban fabric of Central has to grow horizontally and multiply into many vertical strata.

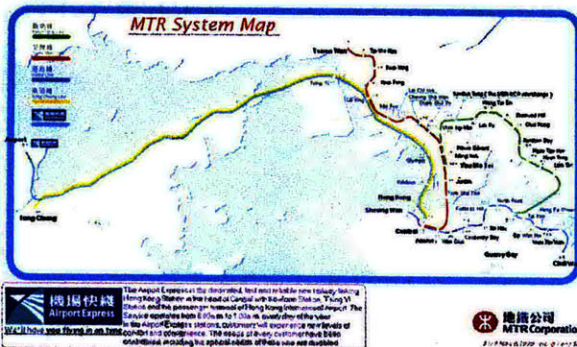


Diagram of Hong Kong's Mass Transit Railway (MTR)

### The Horizontal Layering

The physical form of Hong Kong has changed drastically over its 160 years of development. At the beginning, the British laid down their grid over the fishing settlement on the northern shore of Hong Kong Island. After many years of land reclamation efforts, the northern shore of Hong Kong had gradually invaded into the Victoria Harbor and had become unrecognizable to its original form.

Land reclamation is a way of life in Hong Kong. Central, being the origin of Hong Kong's urban history, experienced the first of these efforts. In 1841, after creating the first of the Coastal Roads, Queen's Road Central, it became evident that the narrow strip of flatland on the northern coast of Hong Kong Island would soon be insufficient to support the urban development of this booming British Colony.

And in the early 1850's, the first of many land reclamations was already underway. New land is added to the previous shoreline creating today's Des Voeux Road Central and Chater Road. In the 1890's, more land is added, Connaught Road Central, then known as Praya Central was created. In the 1950's, the land where today's Exchange Square Development was located was added to the coastline of Central. And finally, In the late 1990's, in the most recent land reclamation projects, a trapezoidal shaped land mass was formed in the Victoria Harbor to provide the site for the new Cesar Pelli-designed International Finance Center Complex, the new Central Station for the Airport Express, and the new ferry piers.



View of Central 1840's



View of Central 1868



View of Central 1890's



View of Central 1997



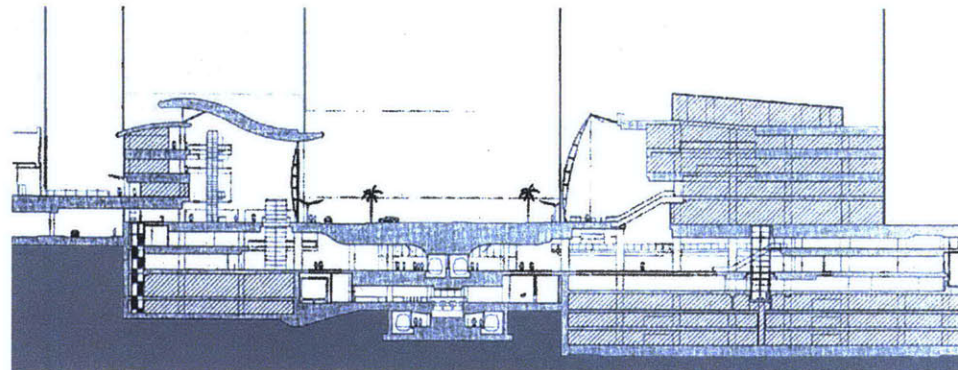


Photo of the Exchange Square Complex taken from a Section of the Elevated Pedestrian Walkway, Showing the Office Towers at the Highest Layer; Below, the Elevated Pedestrian Walkway; Then, the Roads- Connaught Road Central; and Finally, Below Ground, Hidden from View are the MTR and Vehicular Tunnels

### The Vertical Stratification

As part of the solution for urban growth and land shortage, older neighborhoods are redeveloped, and larger and taller buildings are built in place of lower and smaller low-rise blocks. The newer and larger towers often occupy a few of the previous plots and sometimes, as large as the entire block. The contemporary skyscrapers wipe out the fine grain of urban occupation that existed before horizontally. In the old urban fabric, a typical block may contain twenty 7-story buildings with stores or restaurants on the ground floor, offices on the second and third floors and the rest of them dedicated to residential use, the same block after redevelopment may end up with four to five 30-story towers where two of these towers may be residential apartments, and the rest are office towers with their first five stories dedicated to stores, boutiques, restaurants and cafes. The connectivity changes from a horizontal model to a vertical one.

The buildings in this new urban model though may have a much larger footprint than before, they maintain the fine grains of functions in a vertical layering. The connectivity previously provided by the main roads and intersecting streets are replaced by a three-dimensional system of MTR (subways), streets and sidewalks, elevated pedestrian walkways, escalators and elevators. Today's figure-ground plan of Central may show the grain of the district growing, but upon close examination, in a three-dimensional study will show that the diversity of previous functions still remain and they are only reorganized and intensified vertically. The vertical stratification of the urban fabric and the continuous strife for building height are analogous to the on-going land reclamation efforts, both stemming from the pursuit for more occupational area within the confined boundary of the small Hong Kong Island.



Section Showing the new Hong Kong Station with the International Finance Centre in Gray



- **Design Implications**

- **Central as a Urban Planning and Design Laboratory**

During Hong Kong's urban history, there has never been a coherent plan for its development. Representative of the whole of Hong Kong, Central is a product of many layers of formative but also accidental forces. Like a natural landscape, the urban fabric of Central evolved through time, not on the design of a few individuals but under the spontaneous influence of the collective needs and developmental pressure of the society.

Without a preconceived master plan for its development, Central acquired to its present dynamic richness from many years of trial and error. The model for its growth is continuously fine-tuned, updated with every success as well as revised with each failure. The following section lists a few highlights of the present model of development in Hong Kong as well as their influences on my own proposals.

- **Present Models of Development**

- **Continual Land Reclamation**

Today, Central is almost fully developed. The only way for the District to grow, is by land reclamation. The newest land addition to the area sits in front of the Exchange Square Development. The new reclaimed land provide the site for the Hong Kong Station of the Airport Express, the International Finance Center, and the new ferry piers. Limited by the view corridor of the Foster-designed Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank on one side and shaped by the desire to showcase the new Pelli-designed International Finance Center Complex as the new landmark for Hong Kong, this new trapezoidal landmass bears neither relationship nor respect to the previous coastline. This latest land reclamation effort, driven only by the private will of a few powerful corporations and developers, set a poor precedence for future development of Central.

- **Urban Redevelopment**

Because land reclamation is so costly and only reserved for large developments, the second method of urban growth in Central comes from the redevelopment of existing urban fabric. The older and smaller buildings are torn down, their plots are then combined to provide the site for a bigger and taller skyscraper in their place. This type of redevelopment increases the total floor area from the same footprint, and augments the efficiency for the same piece of land. However, in this model, many older buildings that may have historical values would be sacrificed in the name of progress and growth. And the fine grain of urban activities that the district once enjoyed would eventually disappear.



Aerial Photo of Central Showing the Reclaimed Land along the Coast Providing the Site for the new International Finance Center

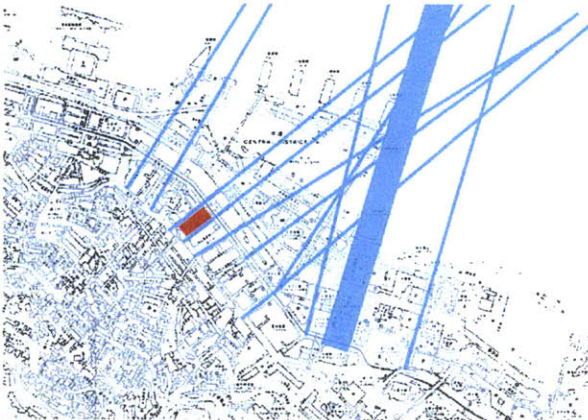


Photo of New Developments inserted into the Old Urban Fabric





Photo of New Office Buildings for Lease or Under Construction in the Older Residential Neighborhood



Proposal for Visual or Physical Connection to the Harbor

### Residential Neighborhood Gentrification

A growing trend of the urban redevelopment in Central is the gentrification of its residential neighborhood. In the urban history of Central, the residential district and commercial district had always been defined by Queen's Road Central as their connective edge. Before the advancement of building technology, the commercial establishments used to occupy the larger buildings constructed on the flatland along the coast of Central, while the shorter and smaller buildings built on the foothill of the Victoria Peak were reserved for housing, creating a distinct relationship between the two. However, today, the steep slopes at the bottom of the Victoria Peak no longer pose any technical difficulties on construction or limitation on the building height, the invasion of the more lucrative commercial buildings into the residential districts is becoming increasingly evident. The gentle balance between inhabitation and commerce that has been established since Central's conception is now being threatened.

### Preliminary Proposal

Base on the present developmental direction of Central's urban fabric here is a few of my initial thoughts on the design proposal:

### Recovery of the Connection to the Harbor

As the Victoria Harbor recedes further and further away from its original shoreline, the roles that the cross streets plays in Central, like Pedder Street, Pottinger Street, Queen Victoria Street and Jubilee Street becomes critical. These cross streets used to provide the direct access to the waterfront of the Victoria Harbor from the city, and had maintained these crucial links through the many land-reclamation efforts over the years, that is until recently. These cross-streets to the harbor had been cut off after Connaught Road Central. The Exchange Square Development formed the first layer of barrier and now the International Financial Center formed the second, completely disconnecting the rest of the Central District from the Victoria Harbor. These two developments, by privatizing the waterfront of the Victoria Harbor, reduce the clarity of the urban image for the rest of Central. Hopefully, with some planning and effort, the intimate topological connections between the Victoria Peak and the Victoria Harbor that the cross streets use to provide may be recovered, either physically or visually. And finally allowing the District of Central to reconnect to its geographical root, an re-emerge as the city that was founded between the mountain and the harbor. Queen Victoria Street and Jubilee Street, the 2 cross streets that flank the Central Market site still offer a visual connection to the harbour. My design proposal will take advantage of this connection.



#### Maintaining the Boundary between Inhabitation and Commerce

The dynamic tension created by the simultaneous proximity and segregation of the residential and commercial district in Central gives the district its intense and rich urban life. Established at the beginning of Central's developmental history, this physical separation of the two activities at Queen's Road Central - inhabitation and commerce, allowed Central to experience the full cycle of daily life and gave its urban fabric a deeper cultural meaning.

The interplay between the residential and commercial district enriches the urban life of Central. While the commercial district provides the residential neighborhood with unparalleled conveniences and a wide selection of support services, the residential neighborhood supply the necessary life force that sustains the commercial district throughout the day. Their existence depends on the presence of the other where together they create a mode of inhabitation that neither can sustain alone in Central.

In order to maintain the quality and richness of urban life in Central in the future, the gentrification of the residential neighborhood for short-term profit should be avoided. To ensure that the District of Central will continue to thrive as the urban center of Hong Kong, this symbiotic relationship between the residential district to the south of Queen's Road Central and the commercial district to the north must be maintained.

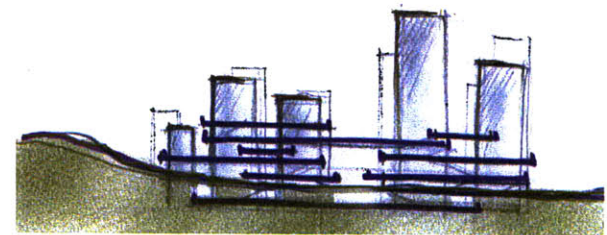
The program of my proposal will acknowledge its location at the juncture between the residential and commercial district of Central. The programmatic functions that I introduce to my project will try to enhance the richness created by the symbiotic relationship of inhabitation and commerce.

#### Intensification of Vertical Stratification

As land becomes increasingly scarce in Hong Kong, the vertical stratification of Central's urban fabric not only creates an attractive urban spatial layering, but also becomes a necessity. Today, there are four layers of urban fabric coexisting in Central - the MTR, the streets, the elevated pedestrian walkways and the office towers. However, it is not hard to imagine, in time, additional vertical layers being introduced. Similar functions located in different buildings can be linked together - transportation, recreation, retails, commerce and civic, and eventually create many specialized districts sectionally. For my project, instead of today's model of a network of paths connecting different nodes, some of these paths may be expanded to become plazas, catering to the different specialized functions of the different sectional districts. The sectional connections between the functional layers will improve with the introduction of more escalators and elevators until eventually the flow between these different layers become seamless. The new model of development can help multiply the possibility of as well as intensify the life of Central.



Proposal for the Maintenance of Residential and Commercial Boundary in Central

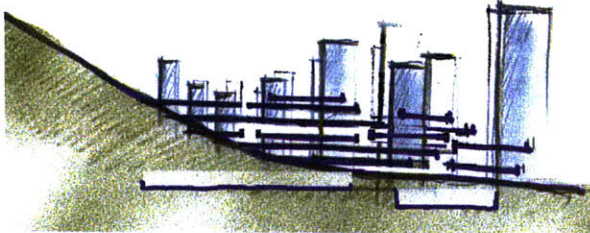


Sketch of Future Intensification of Vertical Stratification of the Urban Fabric

#### Extension of the Topology

The Mid-Level Escalator Project provides an excellent model for the marriage between Hong Kong's mountainous topology and the vertical stratification of its urban fabric. Horizontal extensions at different topological levels from the Victoria Peak can be linked with the layered urban fabric of Central at different sectional districts. This model can help anchor the different functional layers of urban space into the topology of Hong Kong Island.

The Mid-Level Escalator, the lifeblood to the Central Market site will play an integral role in ordering the topology of the project. The topography of the Victoria Peak will be revealed in the topological layering of the final design.



Sketch of the Proposal for Topological Extensions of the Urban Fabric



Photo of the Elevated Pedestrian Walkway Reaching its Terminus at the Central Market



## FUNCTIONAL CLUSTERS IN CENTRAL



Plan of Central with Highlights Showing Its Boundary and the Location of the Central Market  
A Circle with a 400m Radius is Used as Scale and a  Reference of Distance

The effort to identify the different functional clusters embedded in the urban matrix of Central is a way to further ground the project in its surrounding urban fabric and also help me define a program that is tailored for the lifestyle and culture of the Central District. I seek to identify the patterns and relationships among the different functions and that of the site. I also searched for the changes in occupation of the different functional clusters at different times to try to understand the cycle of daily life in the district. Establishing a deeper understanding in the nuances of life in the urban matrix of Central and guided by my desire to recover the balance of urban life, the program of the urban oasis can take shape and be given sense.

The use of the 400m-radius circle in the following analysis is based on my observation of patterns found within Central. Half the distance between two MTR stations, the length of the Mid-Level Escalator, twice the distance between two plazas, the 400m seems to represent the maximum distance between two points in the city that people are willing to cover on foot without the use of mechanized transportation. The 400m-radius circle are placed in the maps for scale and reference.



## THE SOHO DISTRICT

The Soho District an emerging district that resulted from the recent completion of the Mid-Level Escalator in Central. Lined with trendy restaurants and bars, this young district attracts many 20-30 something working in Central. This hip district is a nightly hang-out for these young professionals. The Central Market site located at the terminal of the Mid-Level Escalator can tap into the restaurant culture of the Soho District and incorporate similar functions into its program.



Photo of Restaurants on Elgin Street in the Soho District

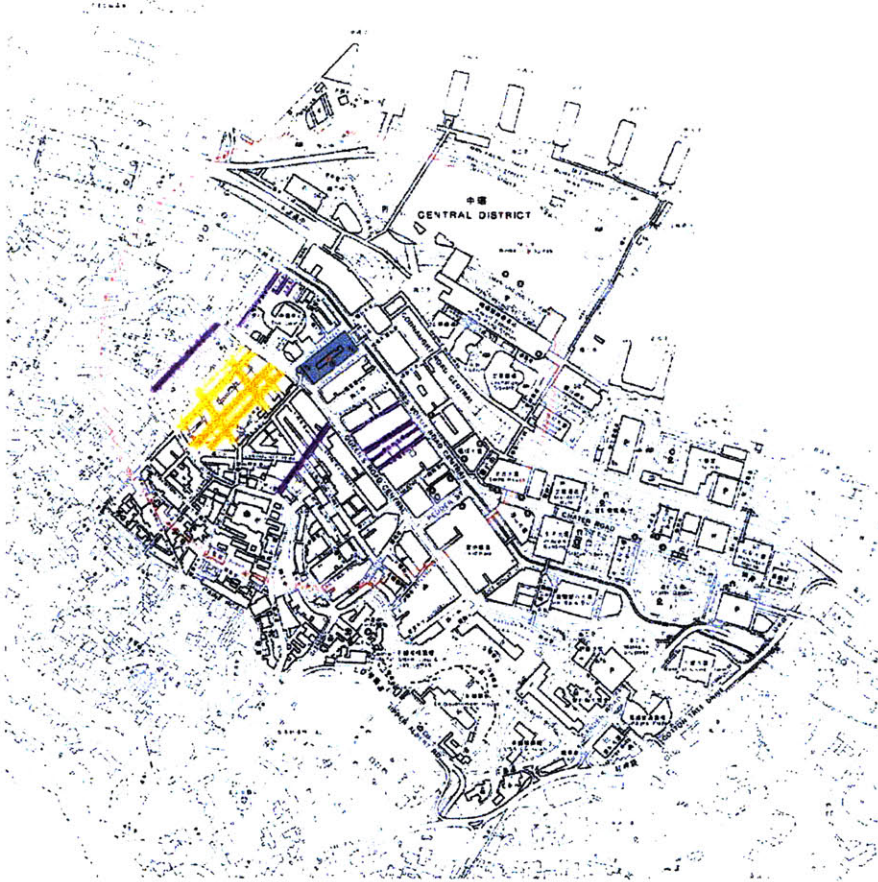


Photo of a Typical Scene in One of the Cross Streets

### STREET MARKETS

Found in many cross streets in Central, these local street markets have occupied these topological streets since the founding of the city. However, as the city develops and her culture becomes more westernized, the new boutiques and indoor shopping arcades are more popular among the people today. Once populating every road and street in Central, as their popularity wanes, these traditional street markets recede to the smaller cross streets. In the design of my own project, I would like to adopt the topology, intimacy and tactility found in these cultural and historical markets.



## SHOPPING DISTRICT

Retail stores cover the entire Central District being most concentrated along Queen's Road Central and Des Voeux Road Central. Trendy shops and boutiques occupy the storefronts along all the streets and roads, while more shops are located inside multi-level shopping arcades in the podiums of buildings connected through the network of semi-interior Elevate Pedestrian Walkways. My design would provide appropriate amount of retail space in recognition of the commercial context of Central.

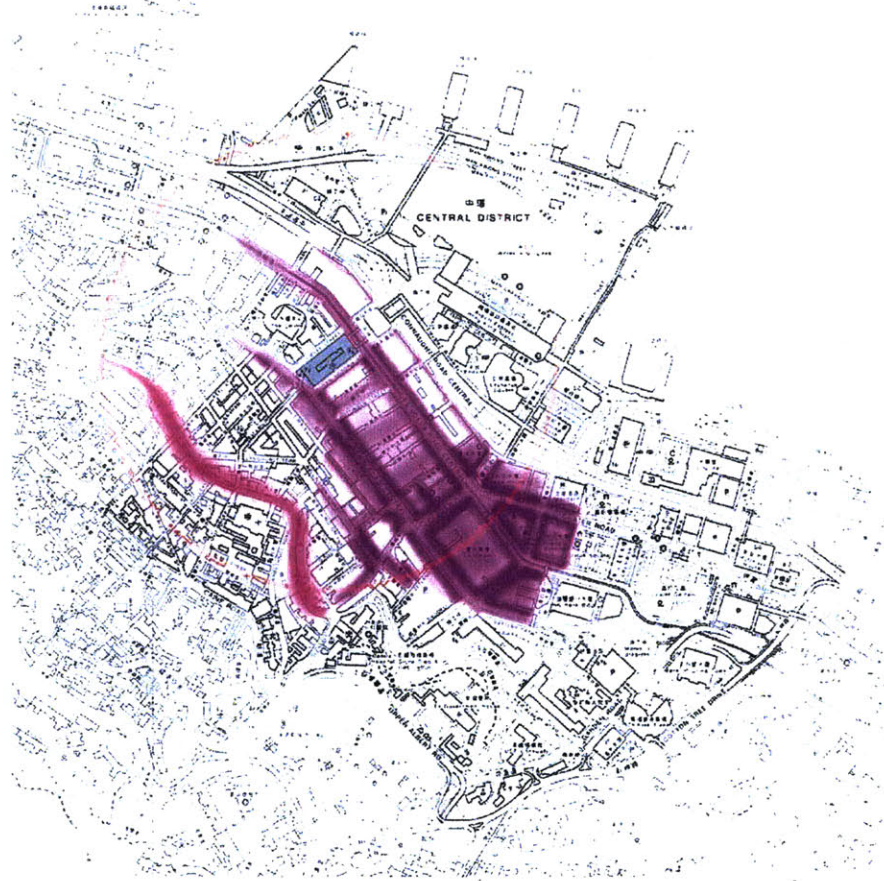


Photo of Designer Boutiques lining Ice House Street



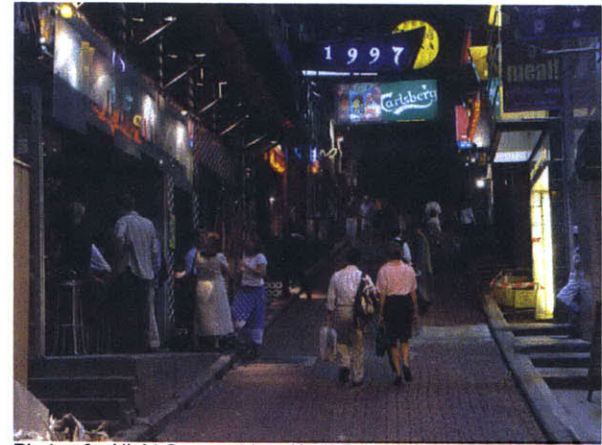
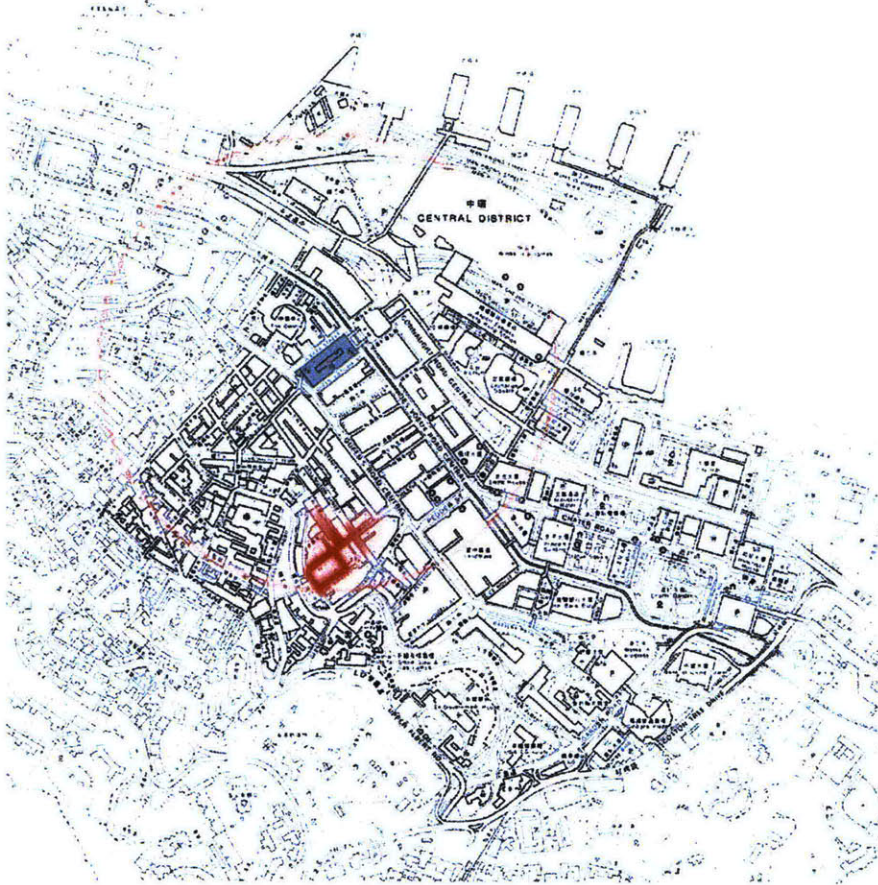


Photo of a Night Scene at Lan Kwai Fong Where Bars are Beginning to Get Crowded

### LAN KWAI FONG

Lan Kwai Fong is the local club district in Central. There are many bars, clubs, restaurants and discos located in the small district. During the day, many businessmen and women go there for power lunches or an afternoon cappuccino. At night, the area transforms into a lively club scene where the same businessmen and women go to let loose and have a good time. The daily transformation of Lan Kwai Fong reminds me the importance of considering the daily cycle of the city for my own project.



## FINANCIAL DISTRICT

The Exchange Square Development and the new Cesar Pelli-designed International Finance Center house many of the major global corporations and is the home of the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. Besides having unobstructed view of the harbor, this waterfront mega development contains an assortment of restaurants, cafe, shops, gym and a plaza for the enjoyment of its affluent occupants. Feeling disgusted by this display of the power and money, I realize that a humanist urban oasis must be conceived as an amenity to the city where resources should be freely accessible to the public.



Photo of the Exchange Square Development

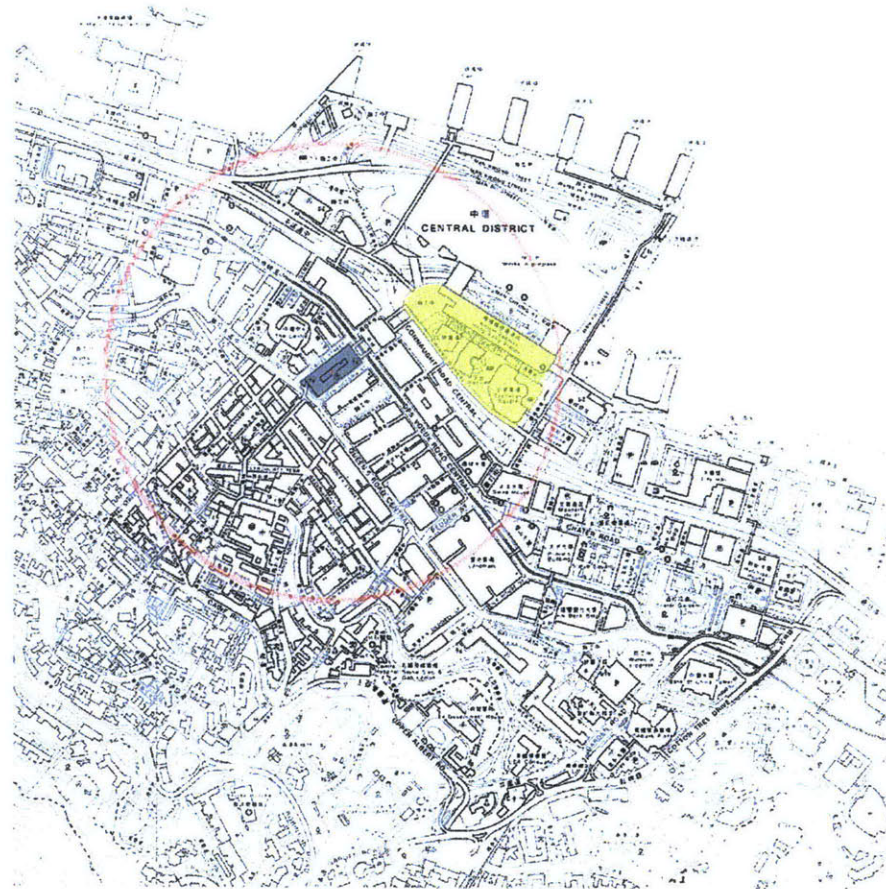






Photo of the Exchange Square Plaza

## PLAZAS

Most of the plazas in Central are either civic or built by developers for zoning incentives. By accident or by design, these plazas are all located within 200-250m from the next closest one- half the 400m walking distance. These plazas in their proximity to one another, provide the pedestrians with a moment of relief from the endless movement in the city. Currently, the Central Market site lies in between two plazas that are located more than 400m apart. The introduction of a plaza on the site can potentially fill the gap and reinforce the hidden logic of the city.



## PARKS AND GARDENS

Other than a few scattered planters, all the sizable parks and gardens are located outside the heart of the Central District. They are all located around the fringes of the district and can only be reached by transportation. In the most developed area of Central, where the Central Market site is located, 30plus-story skyscrapers sprout claustrophobically close together without the relief of any green spaces. To recover the balance to the urban artificiality and to introduce a little humanity into the urban center, my project would be conscious about its openness in relationship to the rest of the city and I would consider the use of green spaces as an integral part of the program.

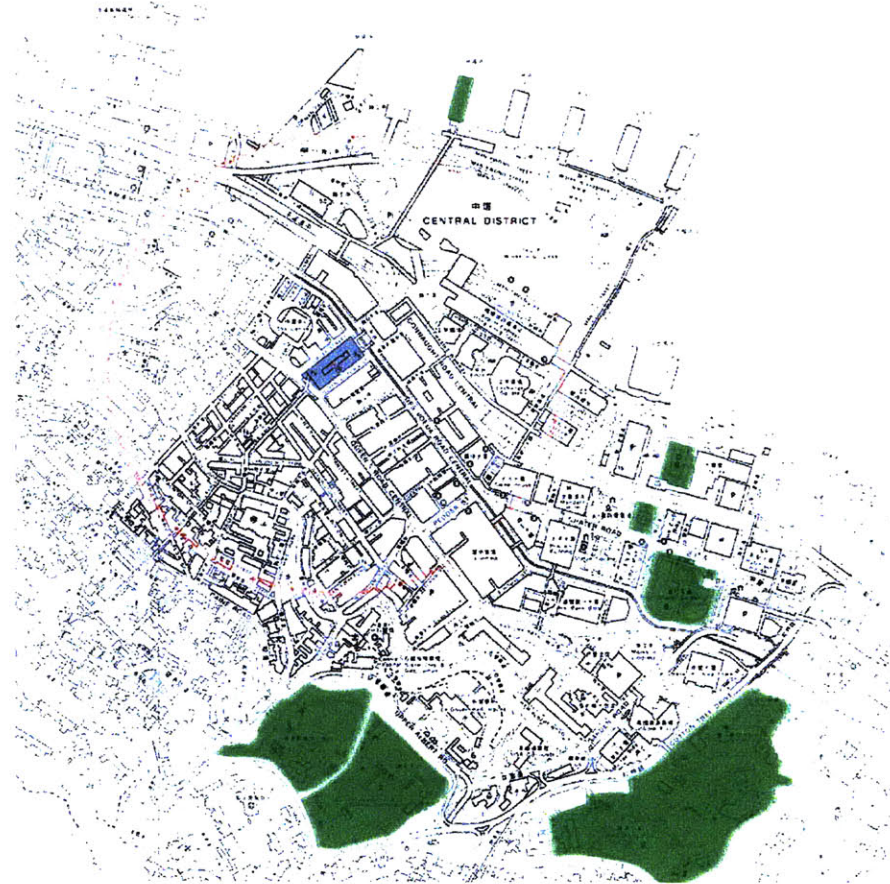


Photo of a Roof-Top Garden on One of the Ferry Piers

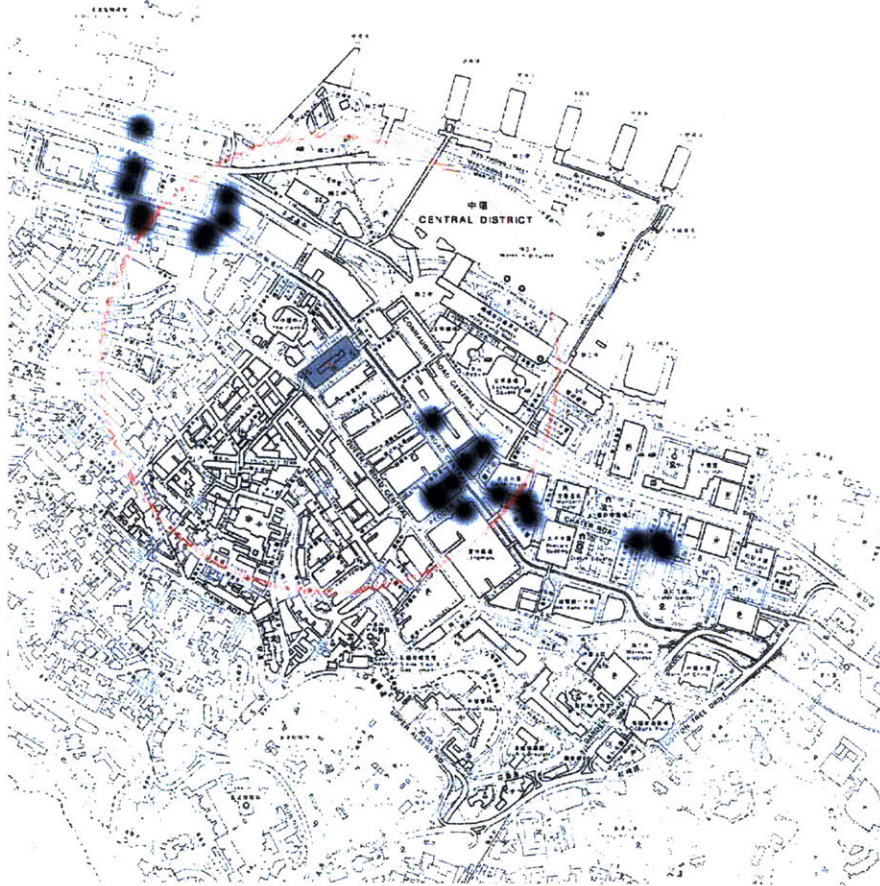


Photo of the New Hong Kong Station Still Under Construction Awaiting the Completion of its Hotel Wing.

#### MTR- MASS TRANSIT RAILWAY

The Lifeline of Hong Kong, the MTR transports her 6,8 million residents, seamlessly and efficiently to all the major urban nodes, airport, train station and seaport distributed over the 1000 sq.km. territory. With Sheung Wan Station on the west, Central Station to the east and the new Hong Kong Station to its north, the Central Market site is within the 400m-walking distance from any one of the multiple access to the MTR network, connecting the project to the larger urban fabric of Hong Kong.



## ELEVATED PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

The Elevated Pedestrian Walkway network connects to all the major transportational nodes- MTR, bus station and ferry terminals as well as through many buildings in Central. The Semi-enclosed walkway system protects the pedestrians of Central from weather and traffic, allowing them quick and safe passage to their destinations. The Central Market site, located at the junction between the Mid-Level Escalator and the Elevated Pedestrian Walkway, experiences foot traffic from people going to work in the morning from the Victoria Peak residential area and going back home at night from the commercial area of Central. The design of the project should acknowledge, take advantage of and reflect the diurnal flux of people.

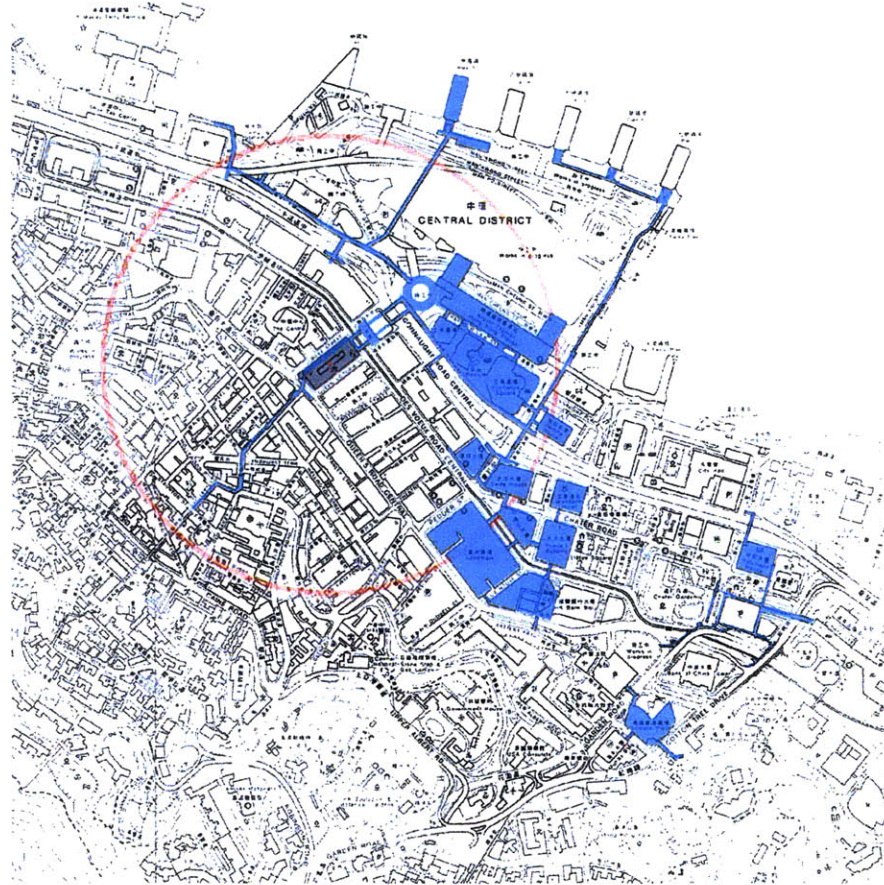
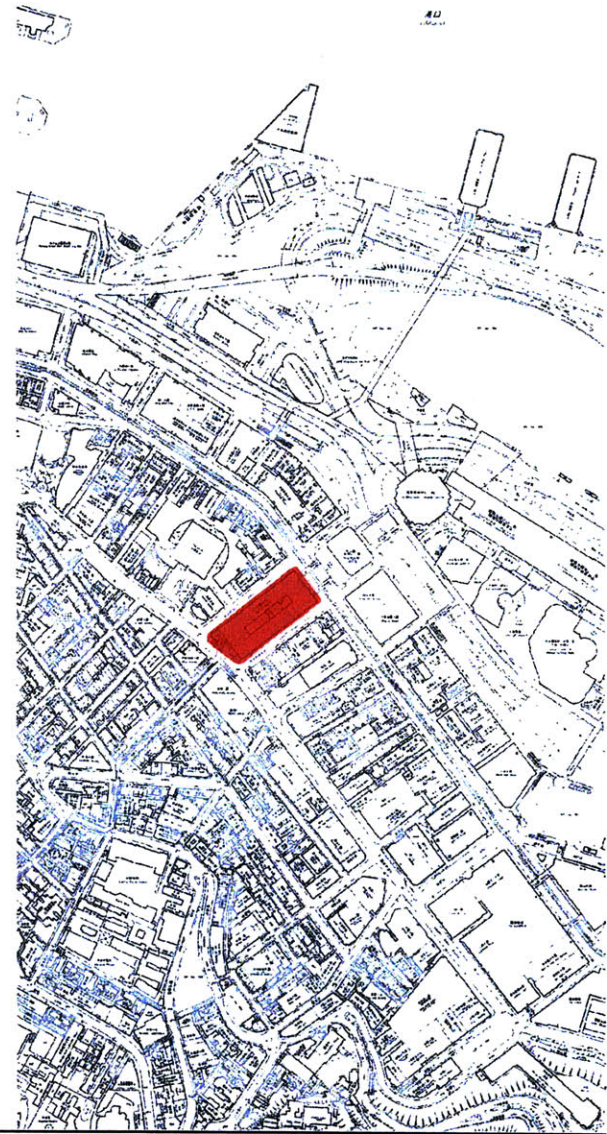


Photo of the Elevated Pedestrian Walkway Crossing Des Voeux Road Central



## THE CENTRAL MARKET

The Central Market site is chosen for its historical connection to Hong Kong's food culture, its embodied heterogeneous relationship of urban artificiality and subdued nature, its location at the juncture between the residential district and the commercial district of Central and its connectivity to Hong Kong's multi-layered urban fabric. Curbed by two of the main vehicle arteries - Queen's Road Central and Des Voeux Road Central on the southern and northern edges and flanked by Queen Victoria Street and Jubilee Street on the two sides, the gently sloping site occupies a 4000sq.m block in the heart of the Central District. It lies at the boundary between the primary residential neighborhood -the Mid-Level, and the main financial district in the Central District on northern shore of Hong Kong Island. Scattered around the vicinity of the site, within the residential and financial districts, are many smaller functional clusters described in the previous section, like the Lan Kwai Fong nightclub districts, the Soho restaurant district, the antique shops along Hollywood Road, the retail district near the Landmark Building, the Banking district, and the global corporation office areas near the newly reclaimed waterfront. The Central Market site is situated at the intersections of main transportation lines- the Mid-Level Escalator, the MTR, bus-lines and the elevated pedestrian walkways, and in close proximity to others- the Airport Express, the cross-harbor ferries and water-shuttles to surrounding islands and neighboring Chinese cities.



Plan of Central with the Central Market Site Highlighted in Red



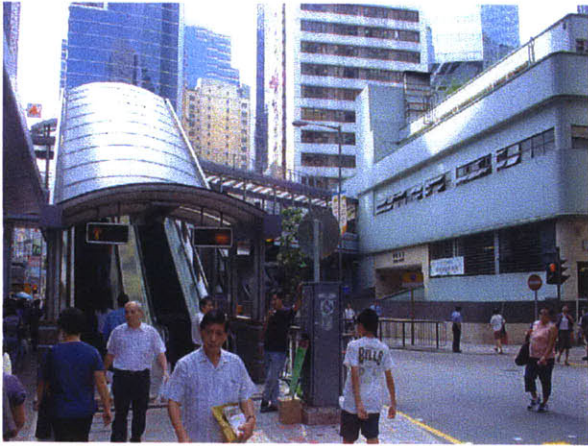


Photo of the Mid-Level Escalator Terminating at the South Entrance of the Central Market



Photo of Jubilee Street to the West



Photo of the Northern Entrance with the Elevated Pedestrian Walkway Bridging the Market with the Hang Seng Bank Building



Photo of Queen Victoria Street to the East



Photo of the Interior of the Deserted Central Market

The current market occupies the entire site with a 3-story building (3 x 4000sq.m = 12000sq.m). Originally, the 3-story market was occupied by food vendors, but with the recent completion of the Mid-Level Escalator, the third floor had been converted into a makeshift retail-shopping arcade. With the continuous renovation of the city and new buildings emerging around it constantly, today's Central Market stands isolated and out of character. The Central Market, which was once a waterfront residential neighborhood market, is now displaced from the harbor by the surrounding office towers built on newly reclaimed land. Today the Market, at 30% occupancy rate and barely serving the residential population of the Mid-level at the foothill of the Victoria Peak, seems out of place and without purpose. The site awaits transformation that would allow its new manifestation to bring nature back into the ultra-urban development of Central, help it reintegrate into the urban fabric and today's culture of Hong Kong. The dynamic urban forces embedded in the site help inform the essence of this "urban oasis" and provide the clues for the form of the final design.





## STUDIES & ANALYSIS

- URBAN NATURE
- CITY OF LIGHT : SHADOWS AND REFLECTIONS
- PRECEDENCE



## URBAN NATURE

Nature exists everywhere, even in a highly developed urban center like Hong Kong. The difficulty is to be able to filter out all the artificiality that exists in this urban environment and find the purity of the subdued nature within. If we look carefully, we can still find the natural elements in the urban centers of today that remain relatively unadulterated and connected to the larger natural environment- the sun, the sky, the landscape, the topology, the food that we eat and most importantly, ourselves - the people. In my thesis, I would like to use the existing vocabulary of the city, to create, in contrast with the current artificial urban existence of Hong Kong, a hyper awareness of these natural elements. To create a sanctuary where we can be in touch with these different manifestations of the "urban nature" through architecture phenomena, reinforcing the holistic relationships between:

People and Natural Elements- the Sky, the Sun, Wind and Rain (Feng-Shui)

People and Topology

People and Landscape

People and Food - Fresh Produce and Cuisine

People and People - Culture, History and Social Interaction

People with Themselves - Physical Experience and Contemplation

The kaleidoscopic reflections of the mutable sky on the glass skyscrapers revealing the change of weather and the seasons





The mirror image of the Victoria Peak on the reflective glass facades of buildings showing the landscape in the distance



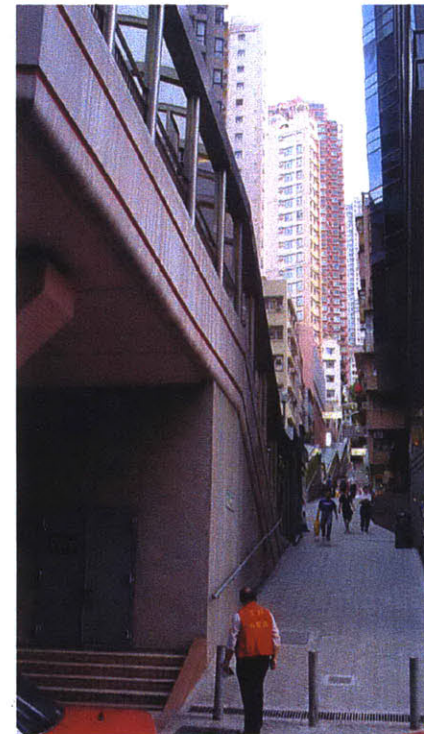
The alignments of parallel cross streets pointing directly towards the Victoria Harbor



The moving shadows of the sun travelling deep into the canyons of narrow streets and roads registering the passage of time



The rolling Mid-Level Escalator following the contour of the Victoria Peak foothill marking the topology of the land



## CITY OF LIGHT : SHADOWS AND REFLECTIONS



Looking Down at the Victoria Harbor from the Peak, the City of Hong Kong Shimmers in the Night

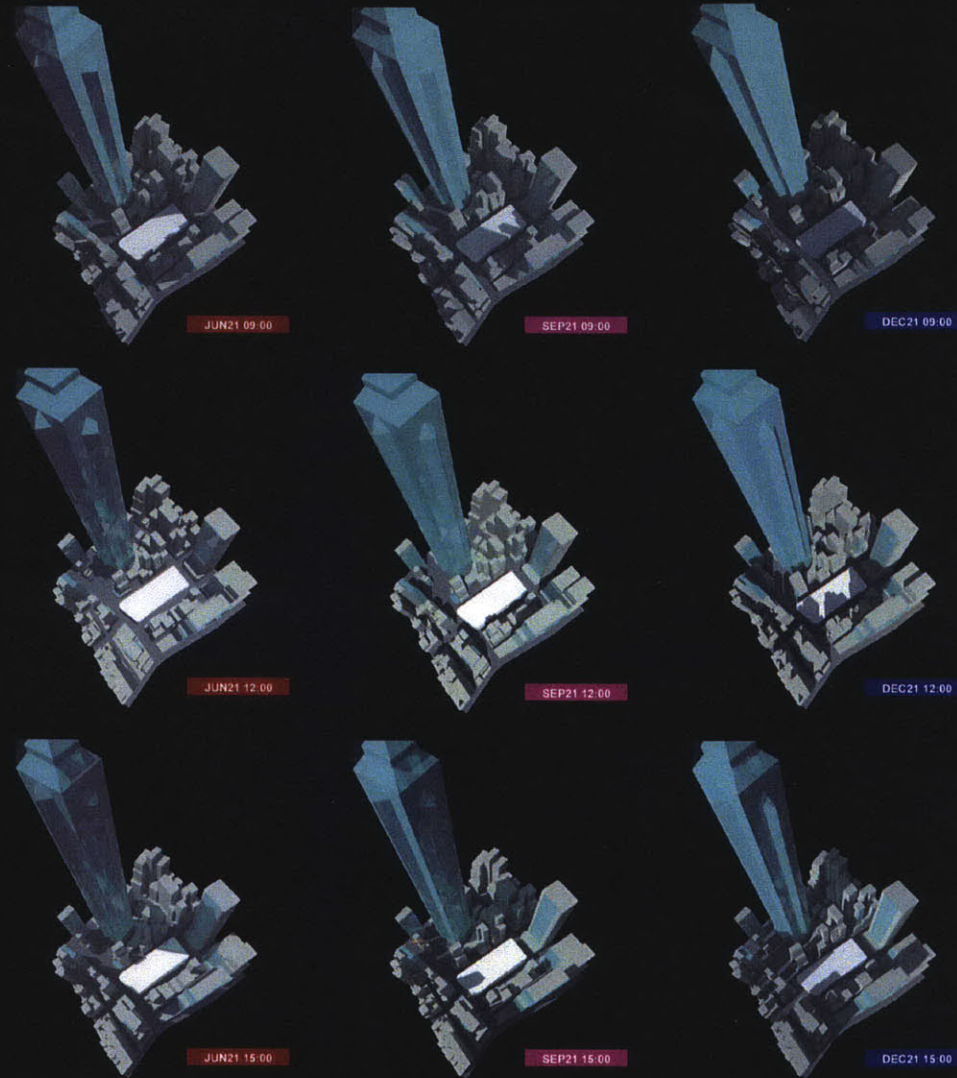
After observing the city, I came to recognize the power of light and reflection as an architectural language and not just the by-product of the city but as barrier, filter and intensifier. During the day, cladded by the reflection of the sun and the sky, even a 70-story building disappears into the urban sky. Shrouded by light and reflections, buildings lose their individual identities, forms and details until one sees nothing but the moving clouds. At night, in the flood of color and shimmering lights, all that is ugly is washed away.

Light is the purifier of all things...



“In the light, one recover his human-  
ity and in his own reflections, one  
will find sanctuary.”

I did this series of lightscape studies in order to get a better understanding of the phenomena of light, shadows and reflections at the Central Market site. I generated lightscape solutions for different seasons- summer, spring/fall and winter and for different times of the day - 9am, 12pm and 3pm. In the computer model, I accounted for the effects of shadows as well as reflections on the site. Using reflections to reveal the urban nature in is the primary idea for my project, so with the information that I get from this study, I hope to have better control over the phenomenon in my design.



## PRECEDENCE



Central Park, New York

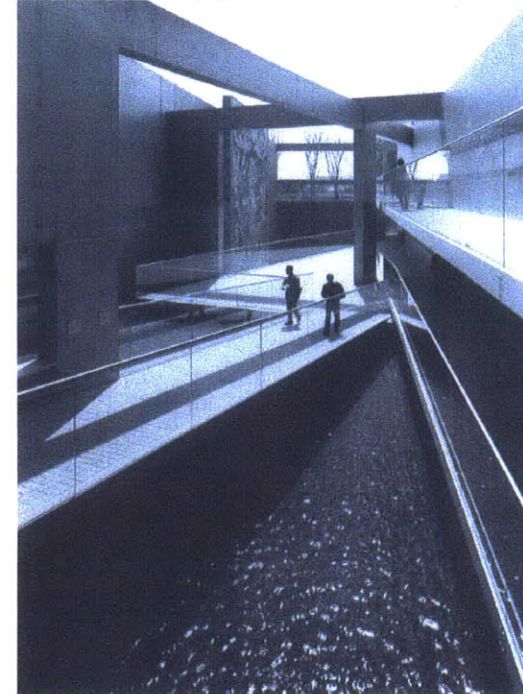
Searching for a way to enter into my thesis of proposing an urban oasis in the city of Hong Kong, I looked at a variety of urban interventions which I consider to share my natural and humanist concerns. Starting with one of the more obvious precedences, Central park, New York, embodies ultimately the vision of an urban oasis, providing all the New Yorkers a humanist escape right in the middle of the metropolis. However, as I looked deeper, I came to realize that even though the idea of a lush "Garden of Eden" in the middle of the city is attractive, the literalism of creating a mock natural landscape is not what I am looking for in my project. It is becoming clear to me, the urban oasis that I seek in Hong Kong, is more abstract, where "nature" is manifested architecturally and urbanistically and not nostalgically nor romantically. I seek to create an urban oasis where urbanity is embraced.



With this realization, I consulted a few other projects with visions and ideas that lied closer to my own. Located directly on 5th Avenue of New York, is the Rockefeller Center complex where towering skyscrapers provide the backdrop for the sunken plaza creating a place for New Yorkers and tourist alike to enjoy a cup of coffee in the summer or go skating with friends in the winter under the Christmas tree. In Hong Kong, close to the Central Market site, many local street markets occupy the cross streets in Central. One can spend a whole afternoon meandering up and down these topological streets under a crack of light beneath the layers of make shift canopies, embraced by a cacophony of color, texture, smell and chattering between the narrow stalls of food and produce. In Japan, in a Zen Rock Garden in Kyoto, one sits for hours watching the shadow of the sun creeps slowly over the ripples of the sand, observing the passage of time and season, contemplating the harmony of the universe- Zen. In Ando's Garden of Fine Art in Kyoto, the soothing sound of falling water lures you as you circulate deeper and deeper into the earth, further and further away from the chaotic world, leaving behind all your worries in the city above, until finally all that is left is the earth, the sky and nothing by your humanity in between. The four projects that I have just described embody the humanistic vision of the urban oasis that I seek in my thesis. In their perfect balance between urbanity and nature, their architecture helps people get in touch with their world, themselves and their humanities, effects which I hope to achieve with my own design.



Zen Rock Garden, Kyoto



Garden of Fine Art, Kyoto



Rockefeller Center, New York



Local Street Market, Hong Kong





## PROGRAM

### “I know not what I seek, until what I search for is finally found”

The Central Market, today, stands out of place with its urban neighbors. Its function as an enclosed residential neighborhood market is a product of early Colonial British values, and has been built in a Hong Kong physically unrecognizable to the present one. It awaits transformation to become once again, the urban focus that it is intended to be. The program that I define must give the Central Market site a renewed focus as an urban oasis in its current context.

The desire to reveal the urban nature through architecture phenomena as a way to recover the humanity in the Hong Kong's urbanism gives focus to my search for the right program. The focus helps me read deeply into the dynamic site, finding the relevant forces- urban, natural and social. Exploration into the continuity of the urban matrix, investigation into existing urban activities and cultural history, together with studies of local and international precedences of similar humanist urban interventions, help me define the appropriate program for the site. I attempt to define a program that would make new sense of the existing Central Market site, laying a foundation of change and provide a new model for humanistic urban development. I try to find a program that has physical, social and natural connection to the context of Hong Kong in the present and providing a vision of a humanist urbanism for the future.

Continuously adapting to my maturing notion of a new “humanist urbanism”, my deepening understanding of the “urban nature” in Hong Kong, my growing knowledge of the urban matrix of Central and the evolving form of the project itself, the program refines through the semester. The final program draws from existing functions found within the city but concentrates only on activities that are meditative, sensual and tactile:

Tucked away in the subterranean levels are located the sports facilities:

Basketball court, volleyball courts, squash courts, swimming pool, dance studios, gym, therapy rooms, changing rooms and reception areas.

In the northern bar:

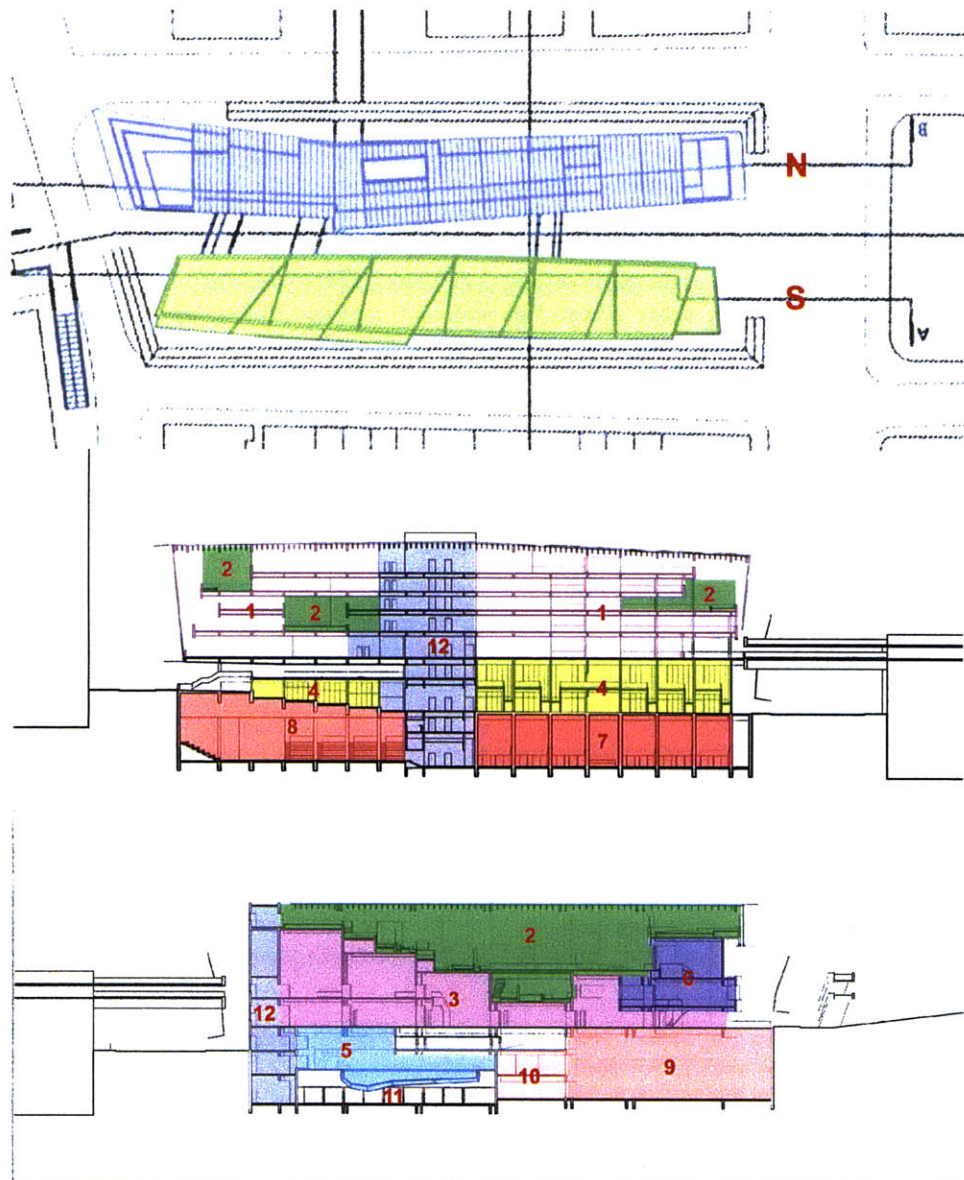
On the ground level are the retail storefronts- grocery store, wine shops, tobacco and cigar stores and cafes

On the second, third, fourth and fifth floor are the restaurants and bars

In the southern bar:

On the ground floor and the first floor is the gallery of light where traditional and contemporary art is displayed for public viewing

On the roof terrace is located the garden of reflection



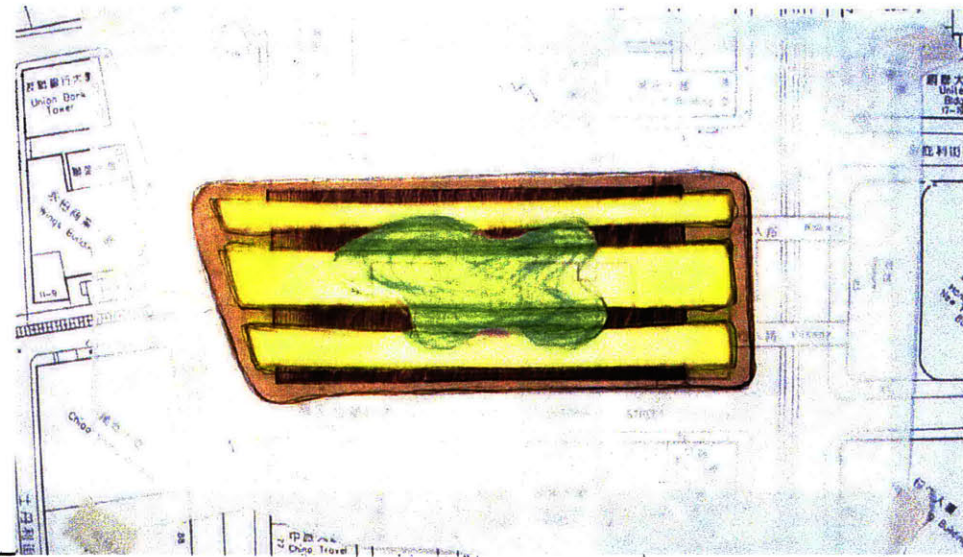
While the program defines the activities in the project, the architecture defines their relationships. I sift through the existing functions of the city to formulate the program and distill the language of the urban fabric to construct the architecture for an urban oasis grounded in Central, Hong Kong. Together the two components form a symbiotic relationship that create this urban oasis in the heart of Central, promoting a humanist urbanism that recovers the balance between nature and artificiality in the city.

- N Northern Bar
- S Southern Bar
- 1 Restaurants and Bars
- 2 Garden
- 3 Art Gallery
- 4 Retail Shops
- 5 Swimming Pool
- 6 Offices
- 7 Squash Courts
- 8 Basketball Court
- 9 Volleyball/Badminton Courts
- 10 Dance Studios
- 11 Therapy Rooms
- 12 Elevator Lobbies



# CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

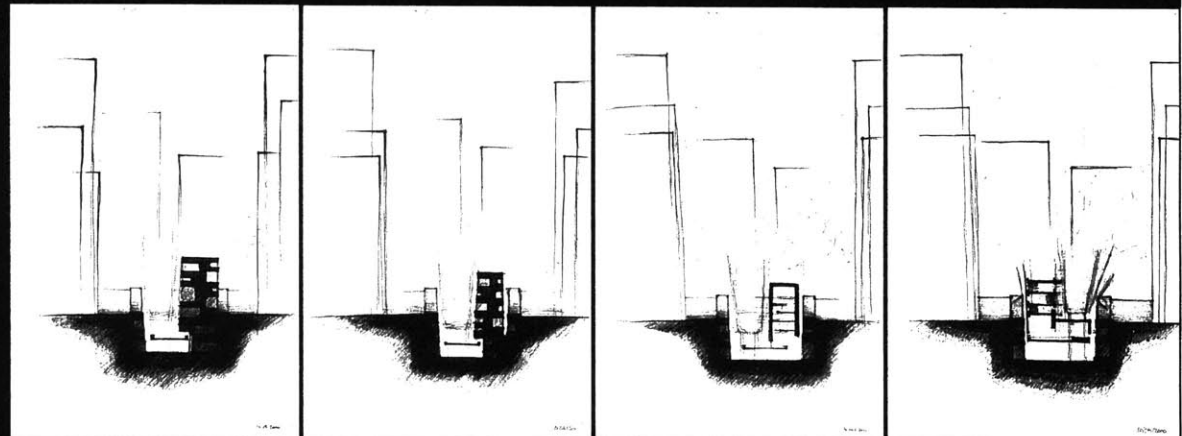
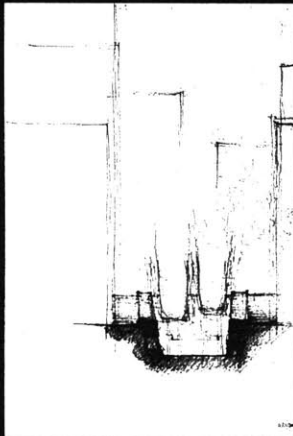
- SECTIONAL EVOLUTION
- SPACES OF LIGHT
- GARDEN OF REFLECTIONS
- DEVELOPMENTAL SKETCHES AND MODELS



## SECTIONAL EVOLUTION

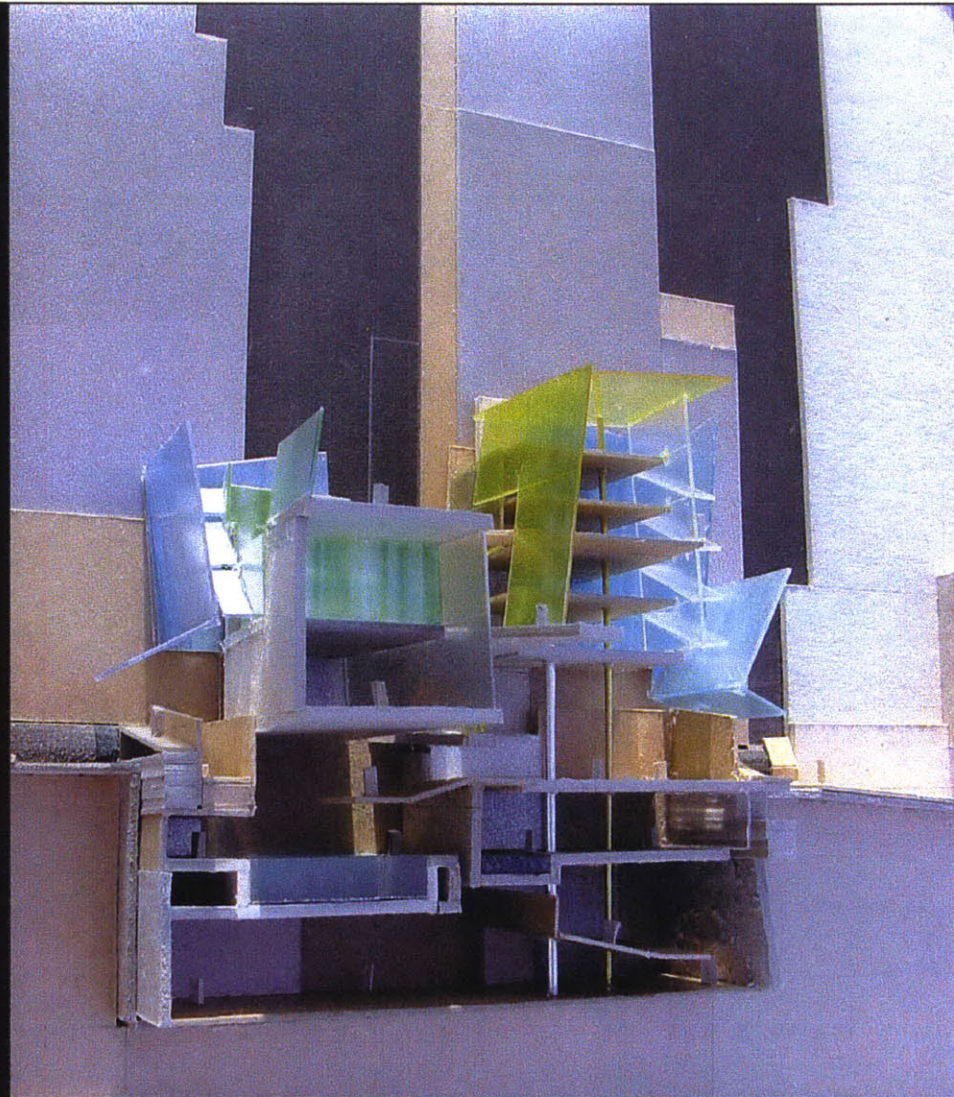
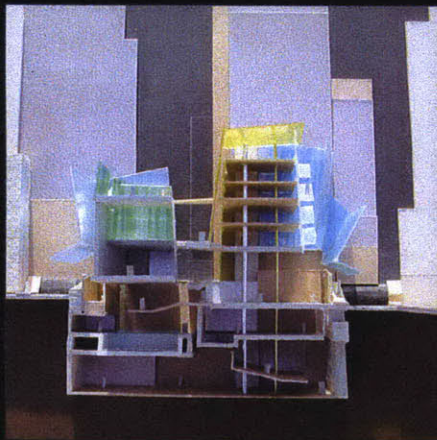
### “Between the heaven and the earth, the mind”

Letting my hand guide my mind, I develop and refine the project. In the series of sectional sketches, I explore different aspects of the design. Out of the series, I consider the first sketch to be the most potent, to which I always refer, during the development of my design. In the other sketches, I begin to differentiate the different parts of the project, the northern bar from the southern bar; the aboveground from the subterranean, the solid from the void, the light from the dark. The exercise of doing these sketches frees my imagination and shows me the first glimpse of what I seek- the true origin of the project.



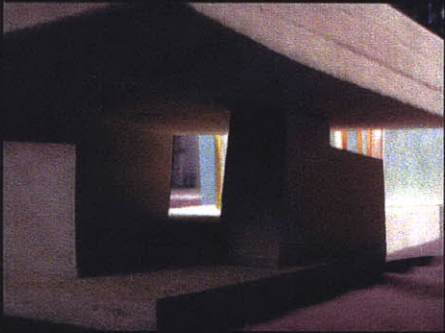


The culmination of these exercises resulted in a sectional collage model that marked my first attempt to enter into the interior of building, defining the beginning of the architecture within the form. Using what I have learnt from making the 3 conceptual models of light spaces and my studies of light and reflections in the city, I am able to construct this sectional model, incorporating the notion of reflections as collectors, filters and intensifiers of urban nature.



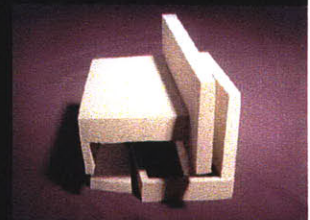
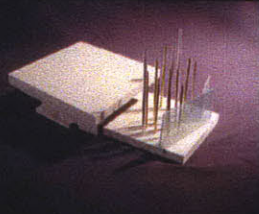


## SPACES OF LIGHT

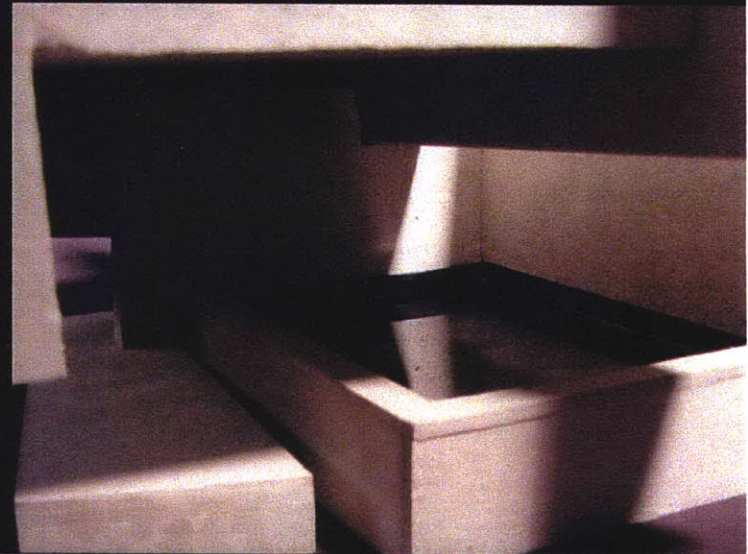


In the model above, I explored the garden space and its relationship with the overlooking restaurants. Here, the exterior urban chaos is filtered out by the mirage of the garden on the green reflective glass. The glass is used to reflect the vertical elements that bring the light from the sky, doubling the perceived area of garden with its own reflections. The expansiveness of the garden space is further exaggerated by the horizontal compression of the observation space.

In the model below, I explored the narrow space between the building skin and the restaurant space. Like a periscope, the sheet of blue glass reflects the changing sky and project it deep into the interior of the observing space, filtering out the urban discord with a plane of light.



In this model, I explored how sunlight may reach deep into the subterranean spaces. Through incisions in the ground, light penetrates through the earth and from the reflections of the water combined with the humid vapor in the air, the entire space is bathed in atmospheric light. Despite its isolation, the subterranean space is connected to the surface world through light.

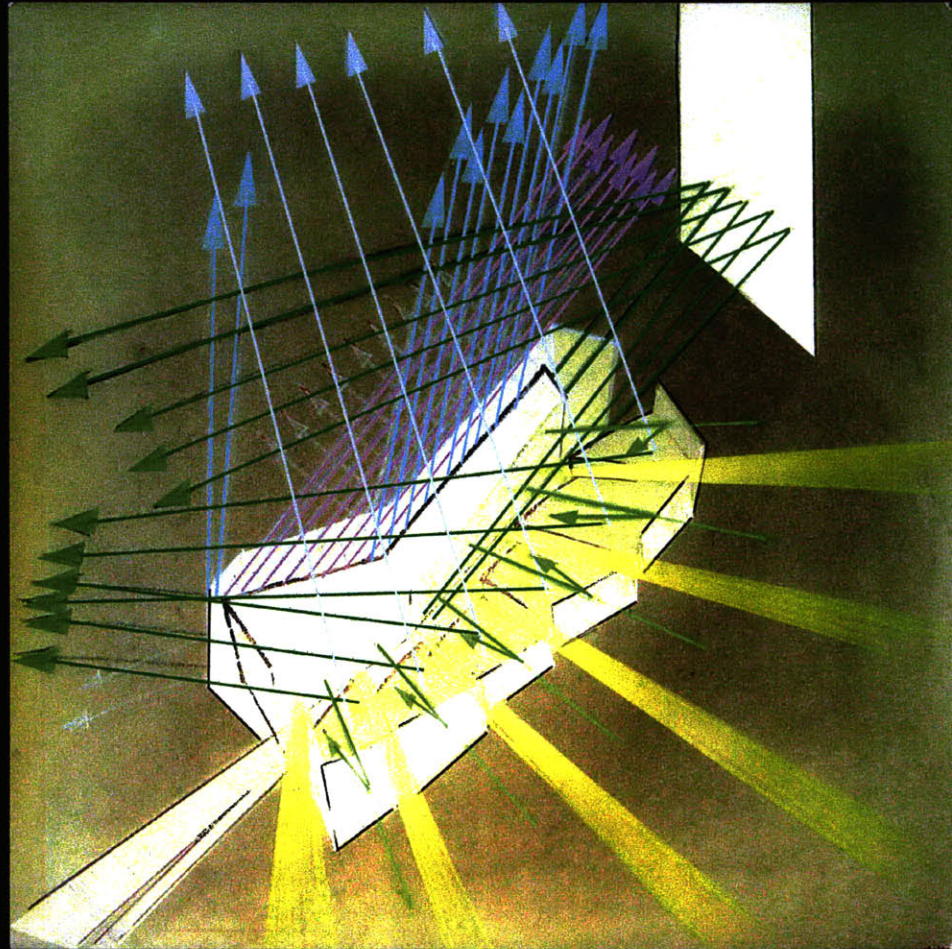




“In the labyrinth of possibilities, I followed the path of light”

Parallel to my sectional investigations and inspired by the kaleidoscopic reflections in the city, I developed the three concept model to find the architecture phenomena that best reveal the different aspects of the urban light in Hong Kong. In the two models where I investigate the light of the city above ground, reflective glass is used as filters, barriers and reflectors to differentiate the humanist harmony inside from the artificial chaos outside. And in the model where I explore the subterranean condition, water is used as reflector of the light, that penetrates deep through narrow incisions, bathing the space in atmospheric light. These models are crucial in defining the spatial strategies for the entire project. They help develop the diagrammatic drawing that depicts the combination of all these spaces into a building on the site, guiding the programmatic development and establish clear relationships between the different programmatic elements.

This diagrammatic drawing, generated from the conceptual models, documents the strategies in collection, filtration and intensification of the urban and natural forces in the project using the play of light and reflection. The process of this drawing also helped me organize the different programmatic elements on the site and clarify their relationships to one another.



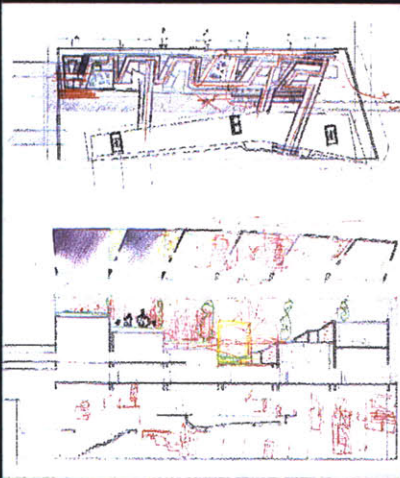


## GARDEN OF REFLECTIONS

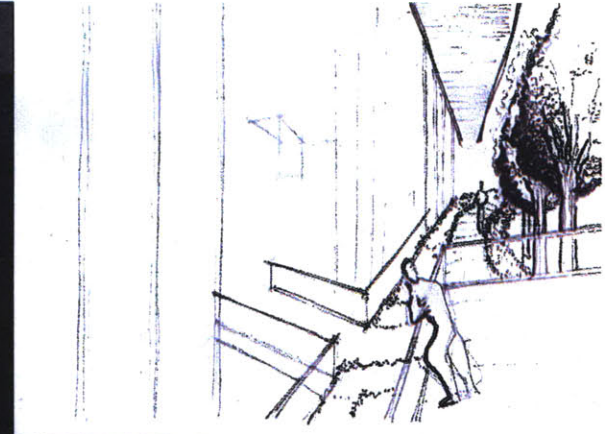
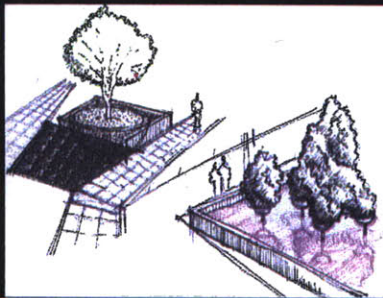
“Through the mirage of shadows and reflections, the nature of the true and real is revealed”

Building on the investigation of the spaces of light, I concentrated on the phenomenon of reflection as the language of revelation to develop the roof-terrace garden, above the art gallery space. The following series of sketches documents the evolution of my notion of this garden, which I consider the project's nucleus. In these sketches, I explore its topology, clarify its architecture and more importantly define its relationship to the other parts of the project- the art gallery, the restaurants and the elevated walkway passage. The design evolves from a more literal model of “Garden of Eden”, where trees are planted on a suedo-natural landscape, to a more architectural manifestation that plays with reflections and light and other physical phenomena to reveal the “nature of nature” while acknowledging its artificiality.

Sketch of the Meandering Topology of the Garden

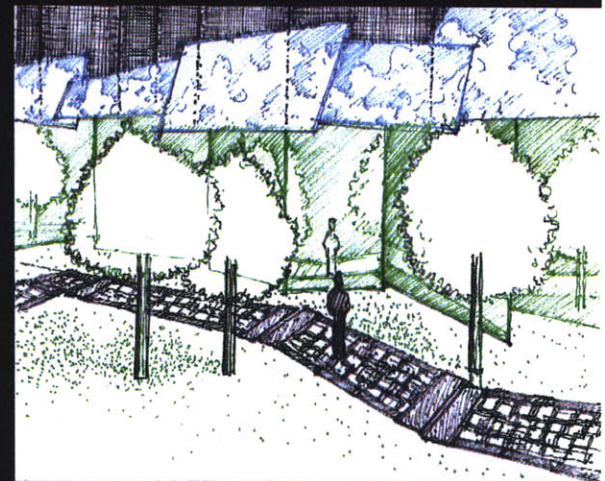


The sketch below explores the idea of using planters instead of a mock natural landscape and glass blocks instead of stone as my attempt to free myself from the romanticism of nature and embrace the abstraction of the urban nature. The sketch also includes suspended grotesque rocks on a pool, using their reflections as a way to reveal the force of gravity and their weight.

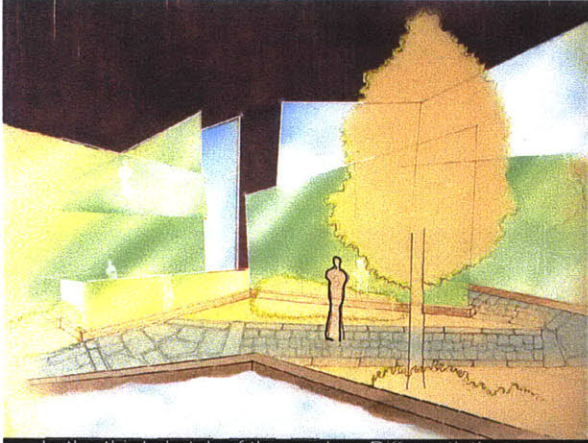


In the first sketch of the garden- Searching. I searched for something- something to reveal the nature of the city, the nature of the nature in the city

In the second sketch of the garden- Reflections.

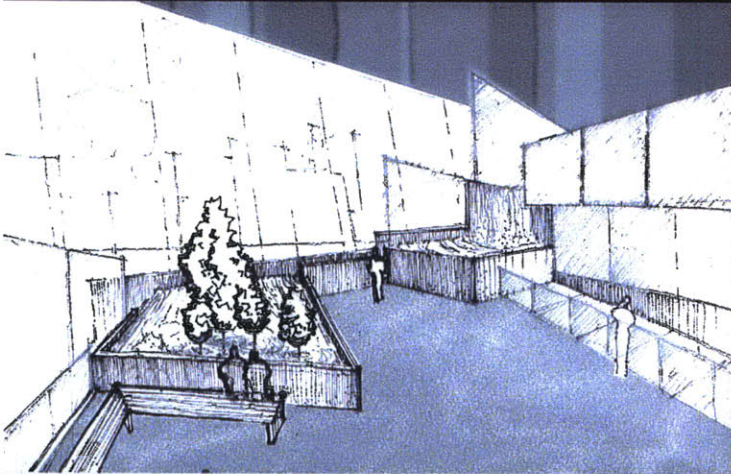




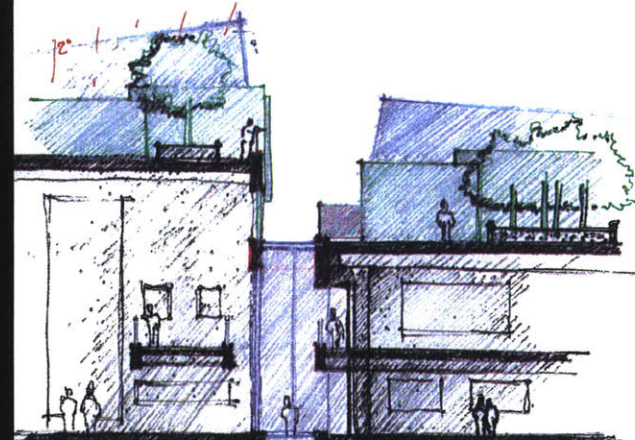


In the third sketch of the garden- Differentiations

In the third sketch of the garden- Abstraction

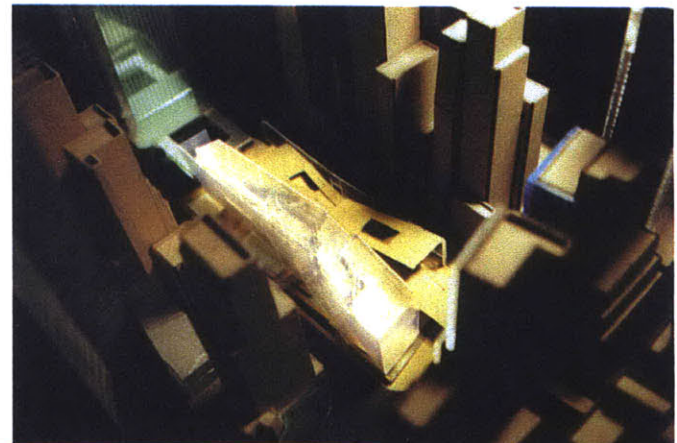
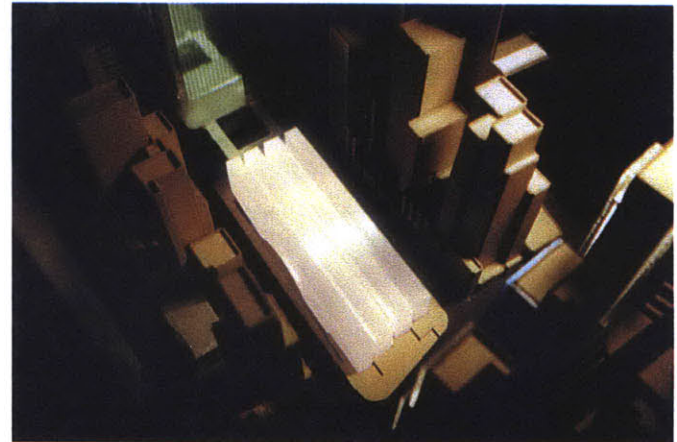
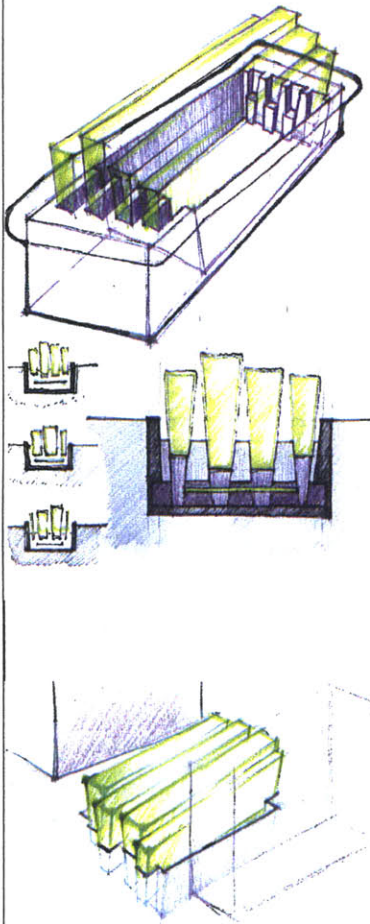


A sectional sketch showing the relationships between the terrace garden, the art gallery and the subterranean spaces

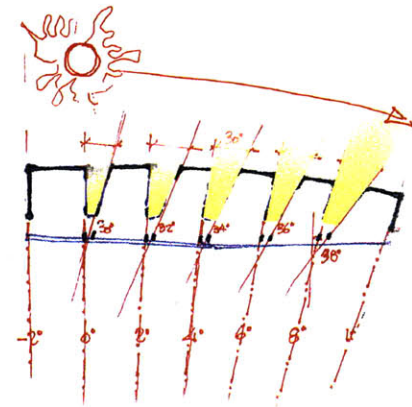
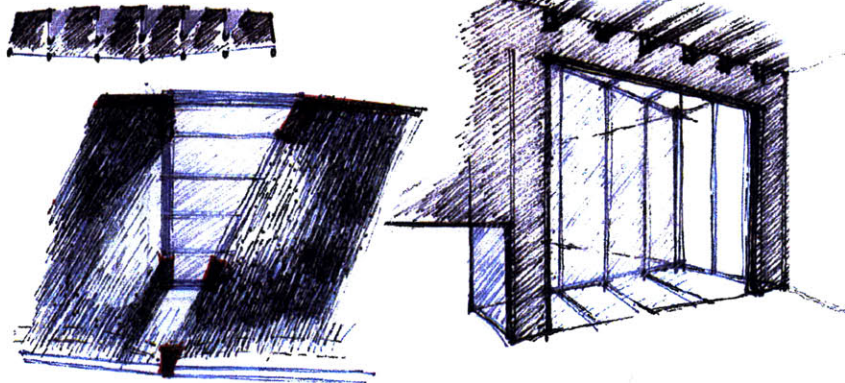
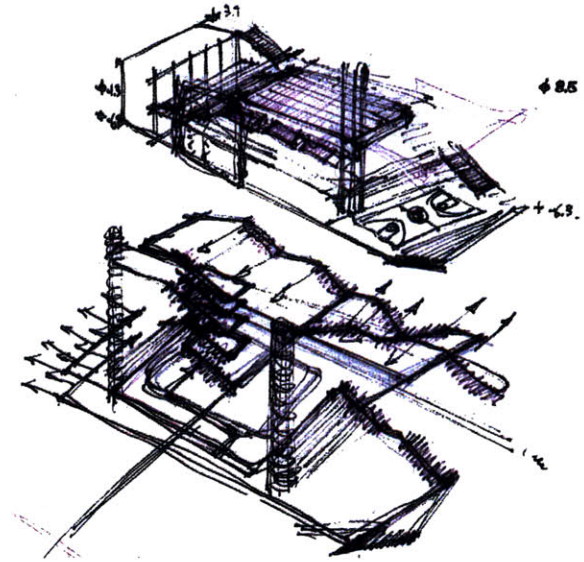
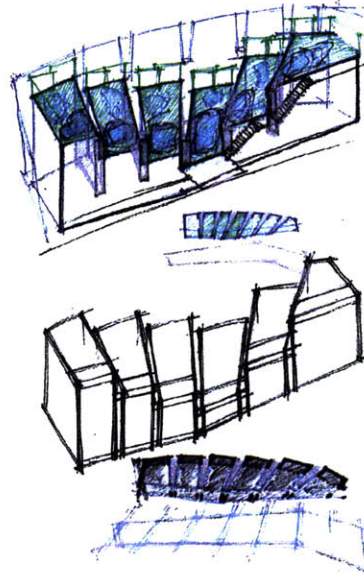
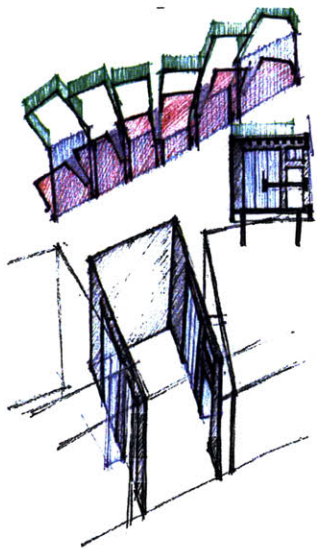


## DEVELOPMENTAL MODELS AND SKETCHES

**“Like a ball of sculpting clay, my notions are kneaded and formed by the forces of the city.”**



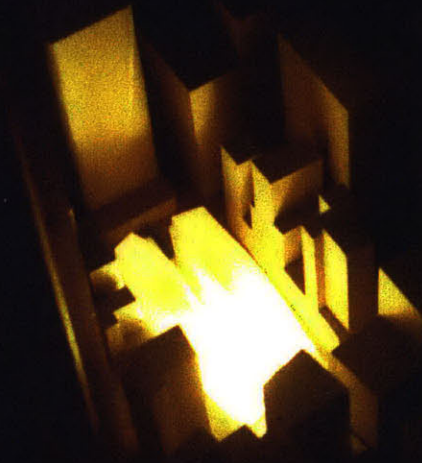








- DRAWINGS
- MODEL



PROPOSAL

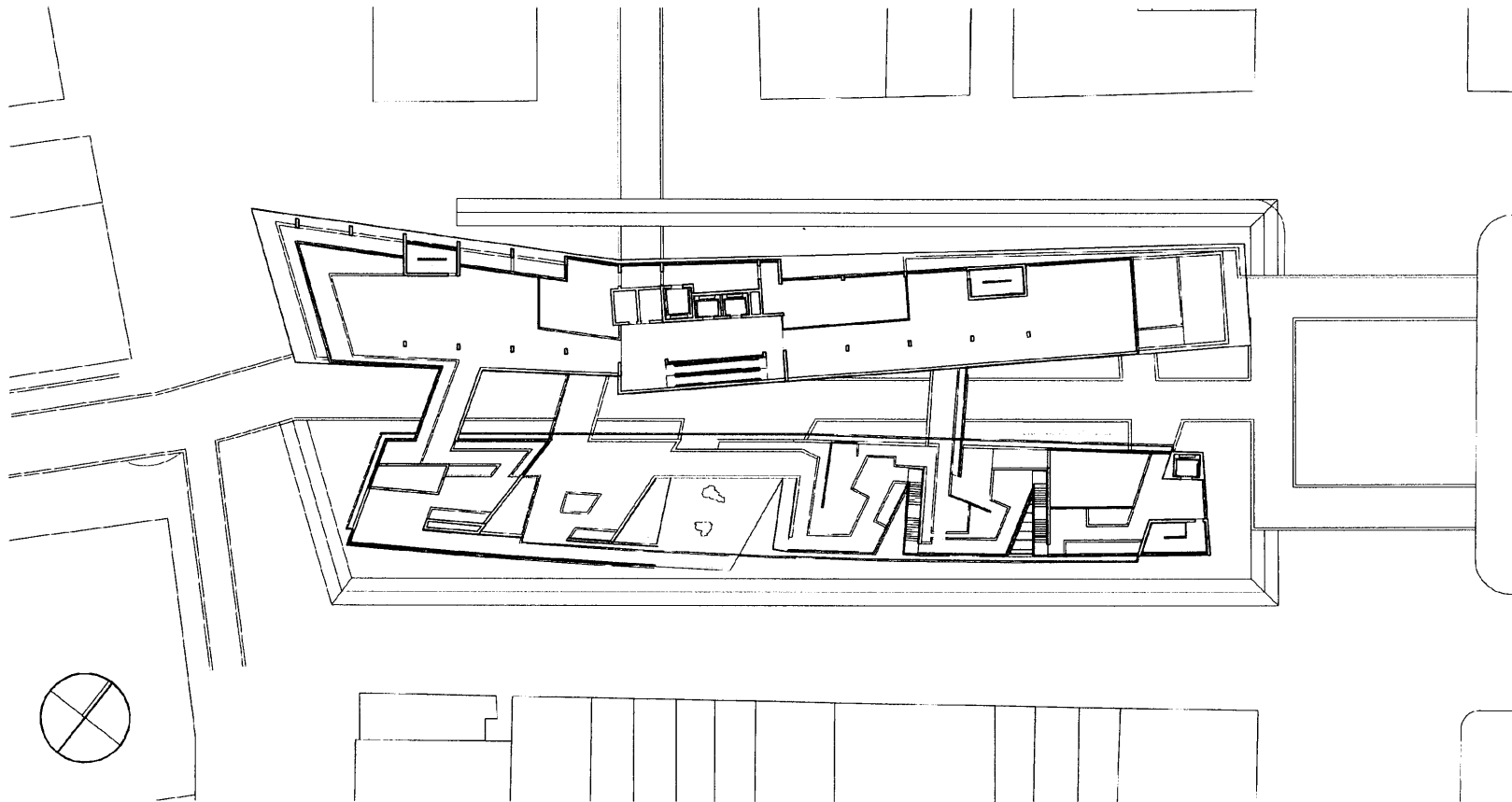
**FINAL DRAWINGS**



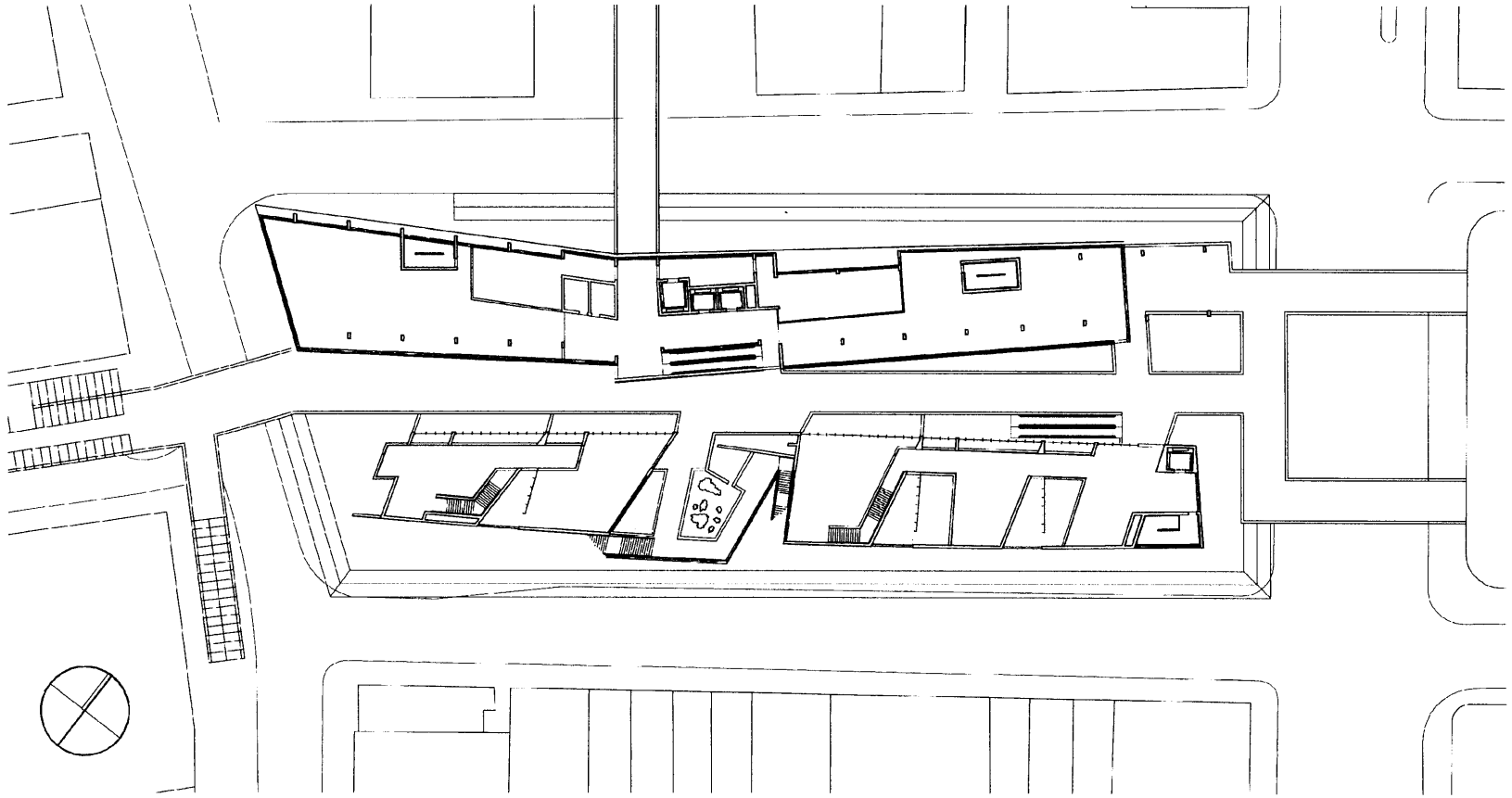
**“Out of the muck of the  
earth, unadulterated.  
The Lotus Flower”**

**SCALE 1:1000 SITE PLAN**



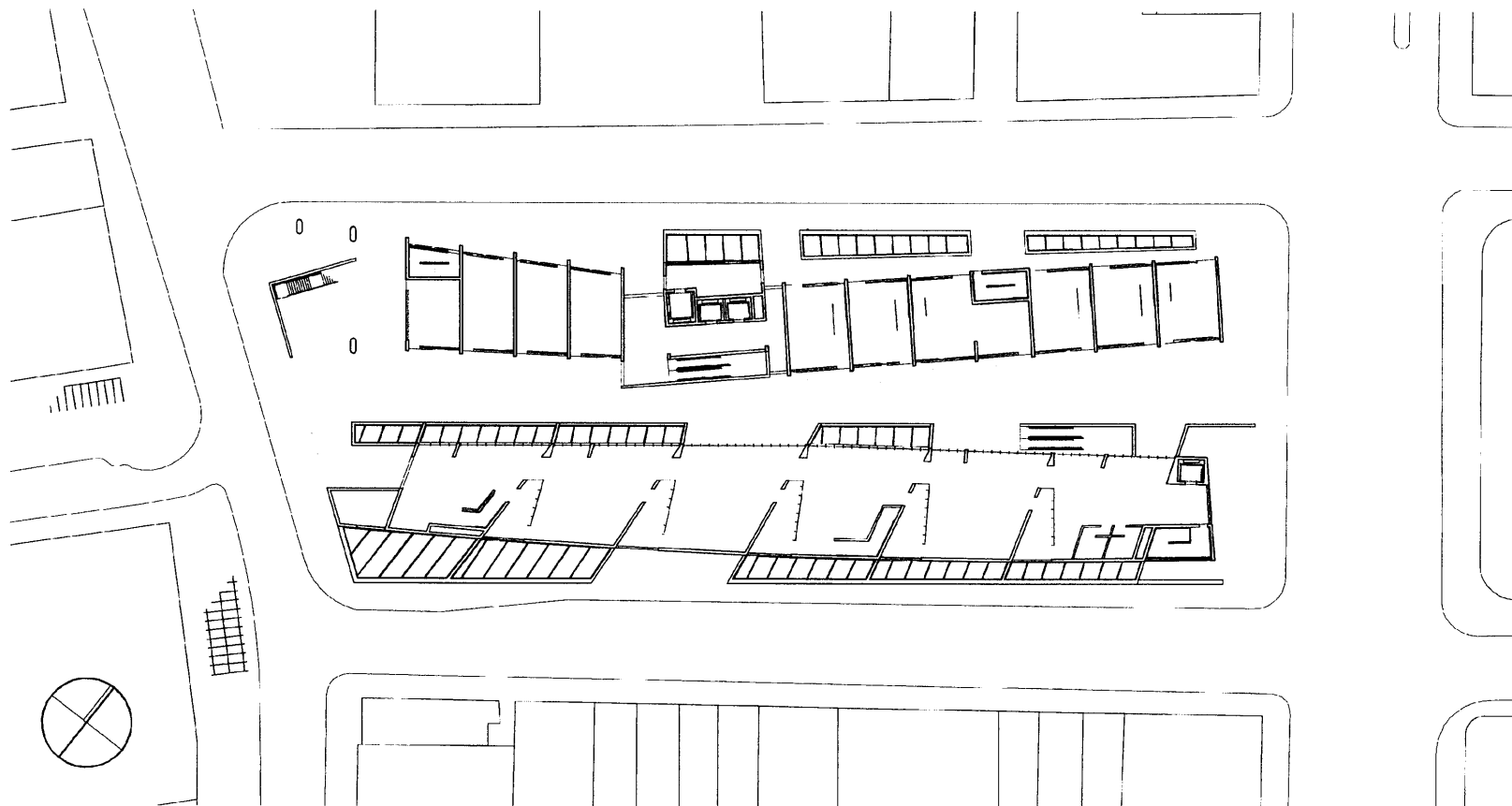


SCALE 1:600 4/F PLAN

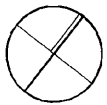
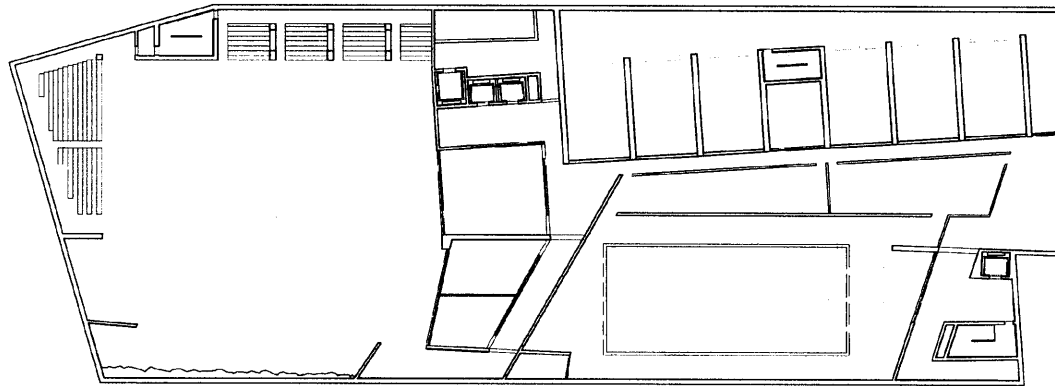


SCALE 1:600 2/F PLAN



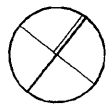
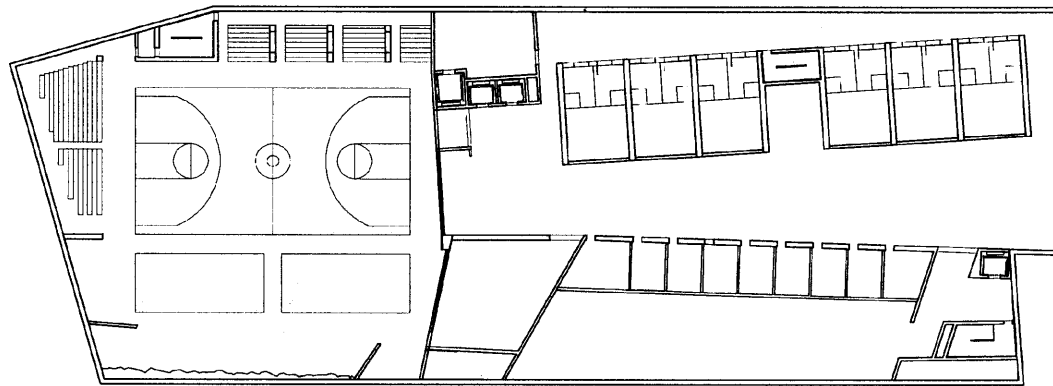


SCALE 1:600 LOWER G/F PLAN

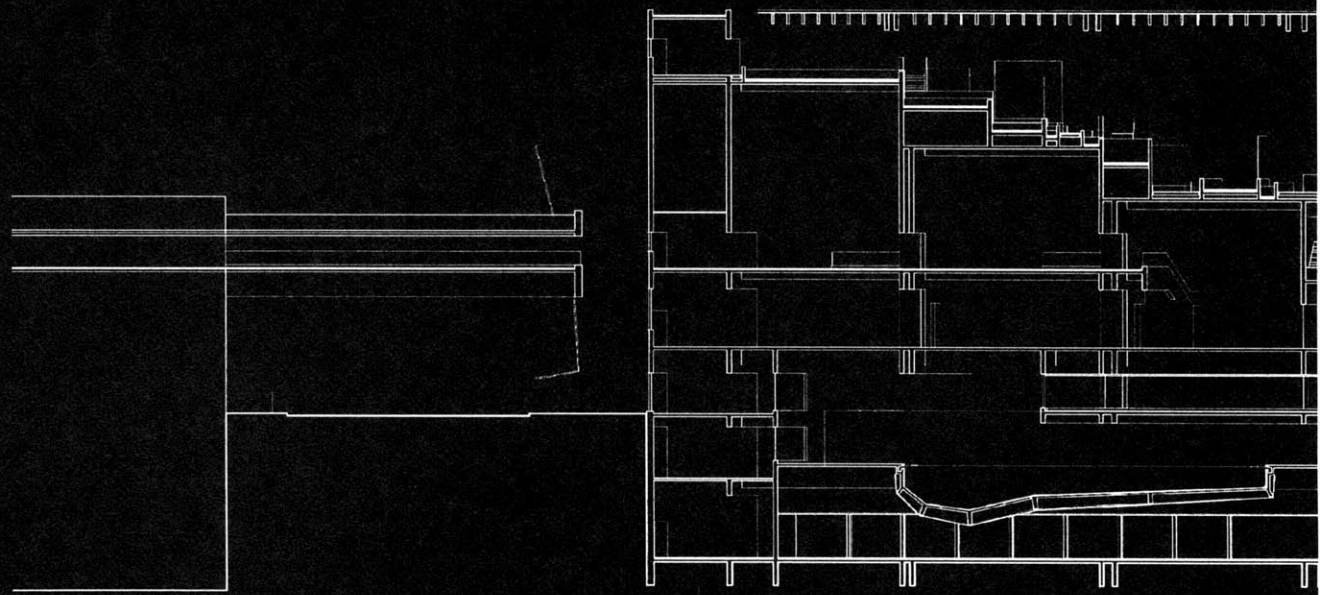


SCALE 1:600 B1/F PLAN



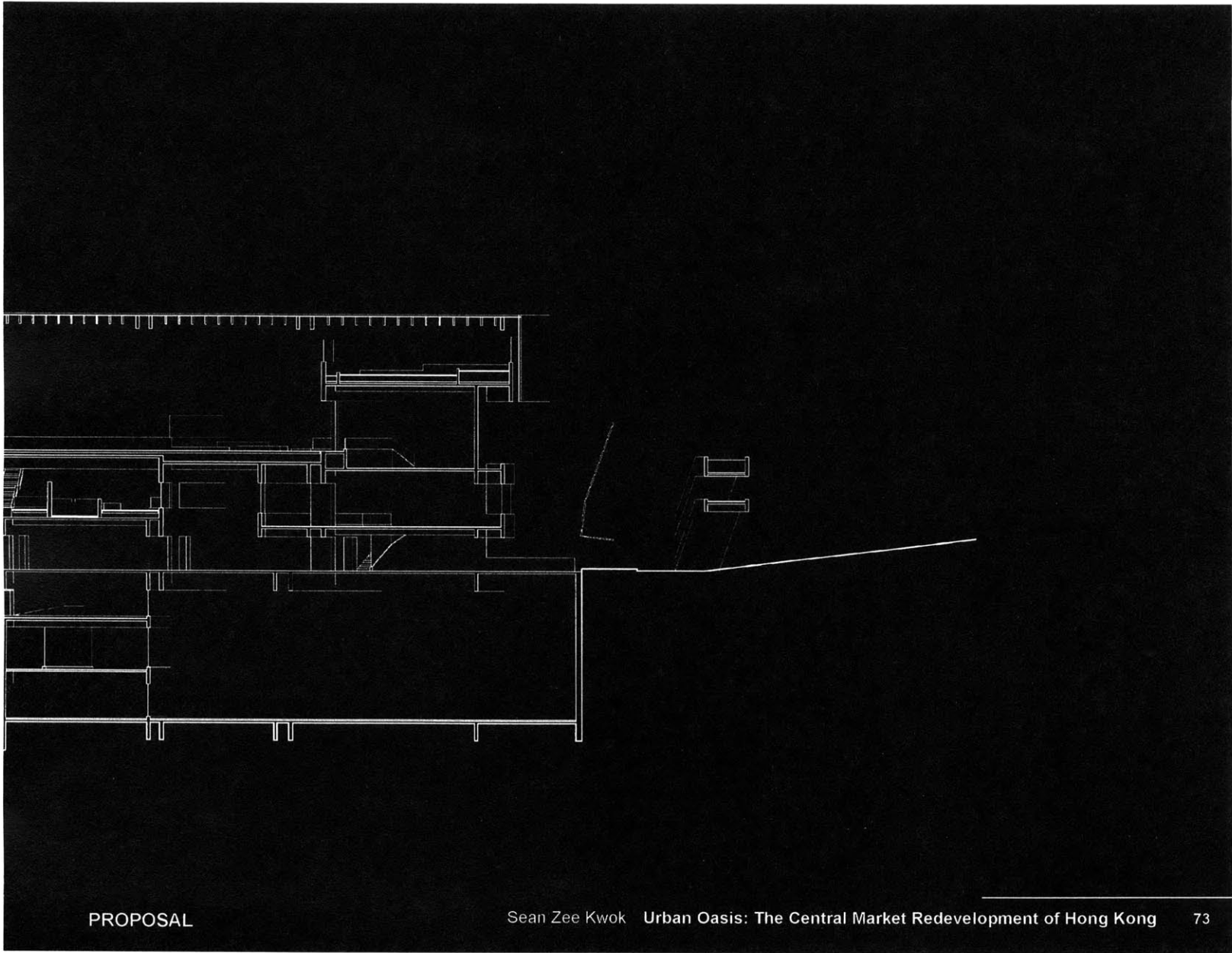


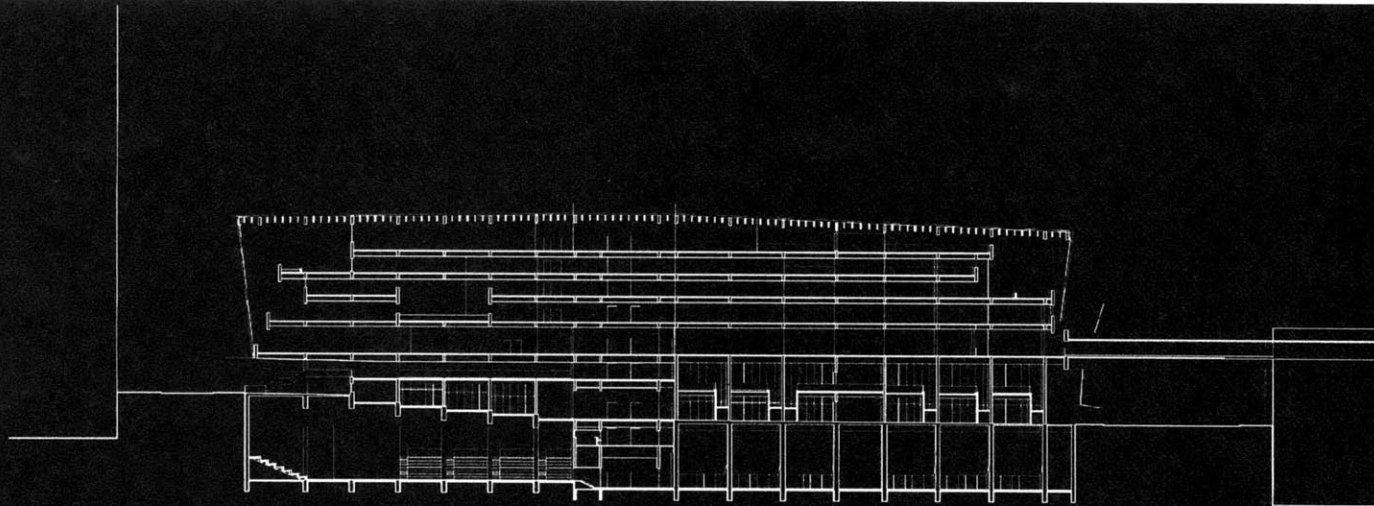
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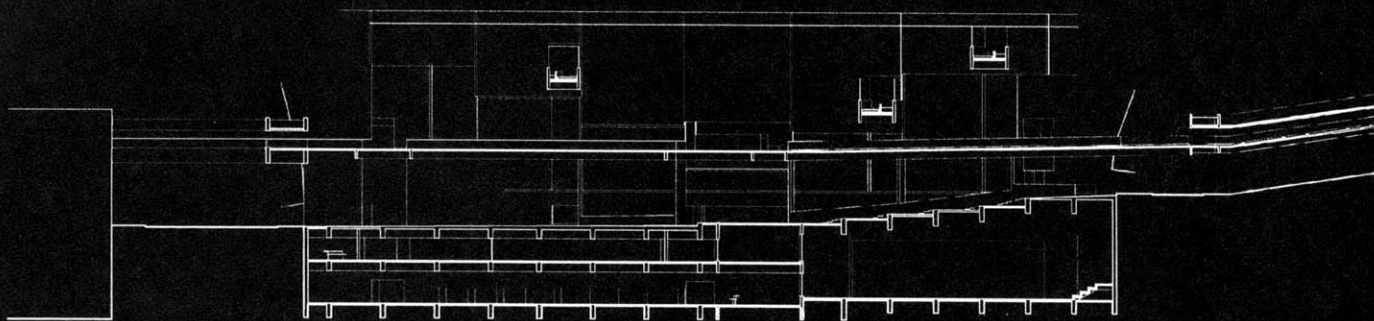
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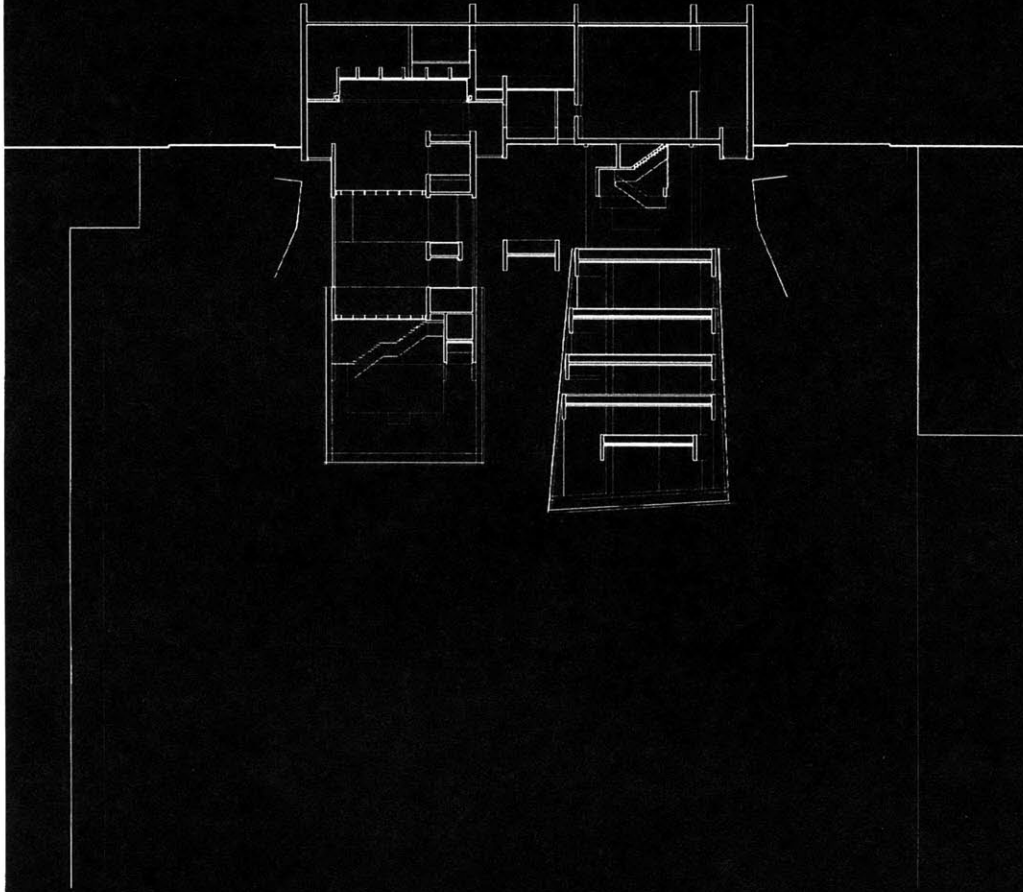


SCALE 1:750 LONGITUDINAL SECTION B-B



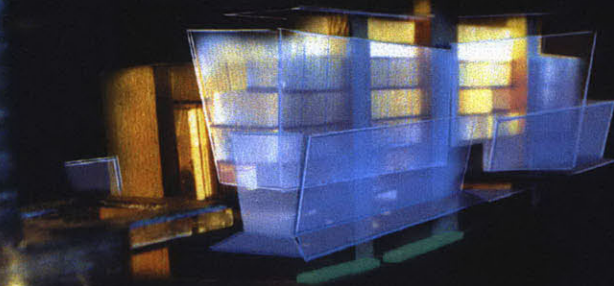
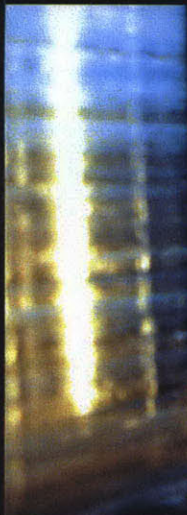
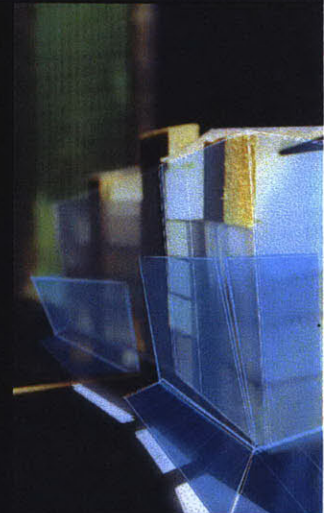
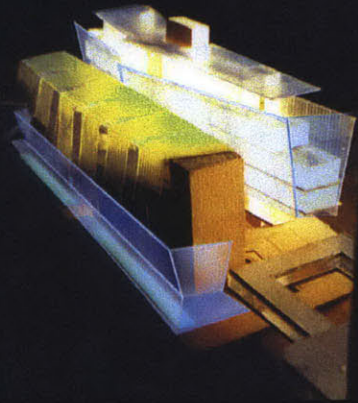
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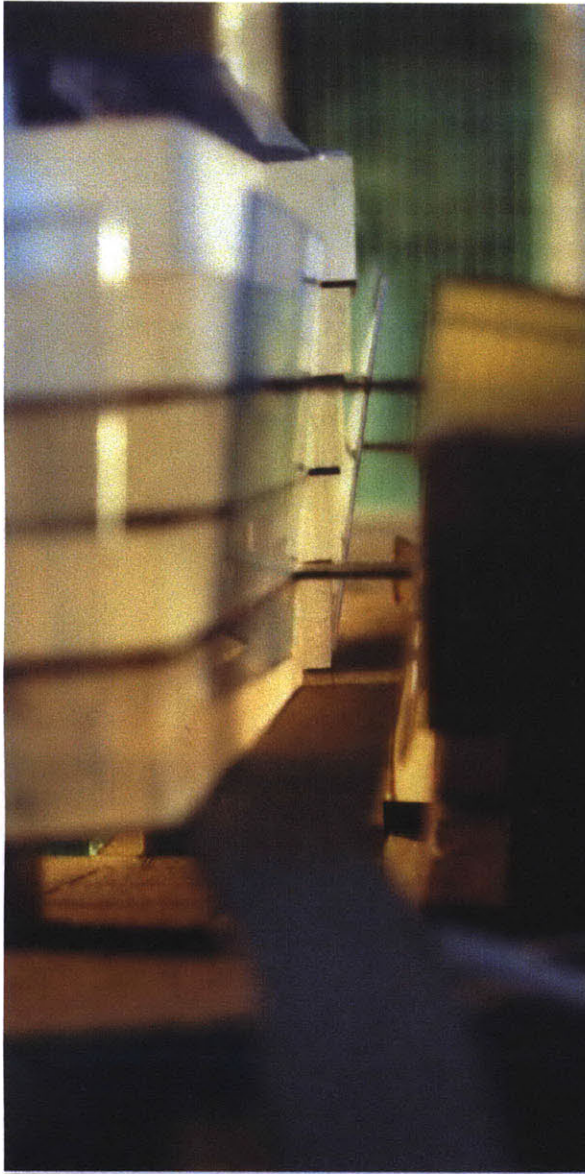
SCALE 1:500 TRANSVERSAL SECTION D-D

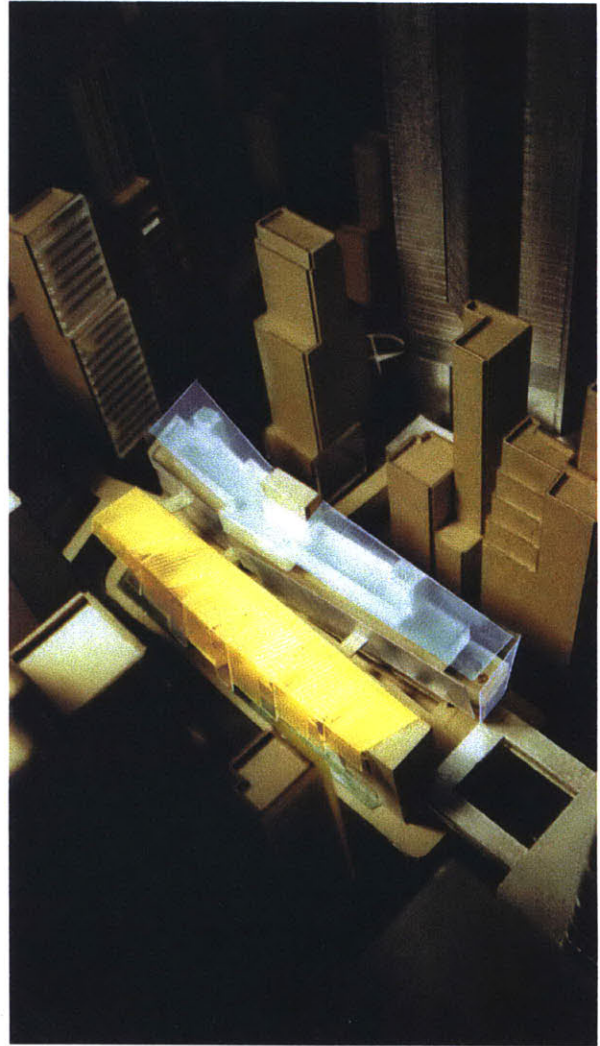




MODEL









## CONCLUSIONS

### **“In the investigation of the particular, the general is discovered”**

Development of urban centers is a growing reality in our modern world. Being born and raised in Hong Kong, for me, urban development is an everyday reality. Experiencing first-hand the gradual displacement of nature from the city to make room for progress, and seeing the result of the gradual deterioration of humanity in urban life, I have grown weary of the disturbing trend. Armed with only my dissatisfaction with the present inhumane urban conditions and its destructive development, I begin my thesis investigations- to create an urban oasis in the city of Hong Kong, my home.

To prevent becoming overwhelmed by the ambitious scope of the thesis complicated by my lack of a clear vision at the beginning, I have chosen a familiar site at the Central Market, Hong Kong, to explore my evolving notion of the urban oasis. The particularities of the forces found on the dynamic site- urban, natural and social, and my familiarity with these forces enable me to penetrate deeper into the project and eventually find the architecture that I seek. This experience has taught me the importance of grasping the particular in order to find the essence of the whole. As my thesis focuses in revealing the subdued urban nature, the developmental process of the thesis helps reveal my unformed desires and manifest my undefined architectural notions. To me, the value of my thesis lies not so much in the product of the proposal but more in the experience of devising the process.

As a result of my attempt to define an urban oasis in Hong Kong, I have become more acute to the existence of the many elusive elements of the urban nature in our modern cities. I have learnt that urbanity does not intrinsically preclude nature, and my investigations have convinced me that their successful coexistence depends only on our desire. In my thesis, I realize that in order to bring nature back into our cities, the process need not to be nostalgic nor romantic and urbanity can be actually be embraced. The only difficulty lies in the understanding of what is important is not “nature” as an untouched wilderness, but a deeper and more abstract manifestation- the “nature of nature”. I believe that with enough understanding, architecture and the language of the city itself can be manipulated to create a “natural city” - a Humanist Urbanism.

Within the short time of the semester, I have only been able to touch the surface of the complex problem of introducing into the city a humanist urbanism with a new model of urban architecture. However, I feel that what I have gained from the experience is enough to establish a solid beginning. What I learn in my thesis will help on my way to a lifelong quest to find this urban architecture which elevates the repressed urban nature into our awareness and hopefully recovering the balance and humanity in our urban lives.



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**Maps**

Sheet 11	1:20000	2000	HM20C
Sheet 11-SW-A	1:5000	Oct/1998	HP5C
Sheet 11-SW-B	1:5000	Oct/1998	HP5C
Sheet 11-SW-A	1:5000	1996	AHRP
Sheet 11-SW-B	1:5000	1996	AHRP
Sheet 11-SW-8A	1:1000	Dec/1999	HP1C
Sheet 11-SW-8B	1:1000	Dec/1999	HP1C
Sheet 11-SW-8C	1:1000	Dec/1999	HP1C
Sheet 11-SW-8D	1:1000	Dec/1999	HP1C