

From Humus to Human: A Repository of Remembrance

"From Humus to Human: A Repository of Remembrance" explores the profound and intricate connection between humans and soil, delving into the fundamental aspects of human identity, belonging, and the cycle of life. It highlights the natural process through which we emerge from the earth, only to ultimately return to it, symbolizing the unity, continuity of life.

The project is situated in "La Friche Josphat," a former marshalling yard in Brussels that, over time, has been gradually reclaimed by nature. Inspired by this unique and evolving setting, the design proposal emphasizes the preservation of a patch of tall spruce trees, which stand as a powerful symbol of growth, resilience, and the enduring flow of life. These trees are surrounded by the 'repository,' a gallery of niches where visitors can retreat in solitude, reflect, and engage in personal acts of remembrance. These niches offer a view leading toward a memorial garden, creating a tranquil and serene atmosphere for honoring memories, fostering reflection, and experiencing quiet contemplation.

The 'Repository of Remembrance' is embraced and protected by a ring of dwellings. These clusters of housing units serve as both a physical and symbolic mediator, between the rhythms of everyday urban life and the sacred, reflective realm of remembrance.

The very origin of the term "human" in Latin is similar to the root of the word "humus," both symbolizing the concept of earth. Soil and people share a profound connection. Therefore, in this sense, there is no difference between soil and humans, because our bodies are formed from the same components as soil, and one day will return to the soil. The influence of soil on human lives is multifaceted, extending to its role as the primary source of food, sustenance, and fibers for clothing, as well as its vital ecological functions like purifying drinking water. Human civilizations have recognized the important role of soil since ancient times. Soil has found its way into many cultural references and religious beliefs.



In Islamic culture, soil has a strong religious meaning. 'Turbah' has a primary meaning of 'dirt', 'earth' or 'soil', identified as the material God used to create the earth and humankind. Turbah also denotes any ground on which one prostrates oneself for prayer.

Humus [ˈhjuːməs]
The Latin word for earth (a rich and nutrient-filled soil).

Humilis [ˈhjuːmɪləs]
Humble, low, lowly, small, slight, shallow

Humilitas [ˈhjuːmɪlɪtəs]
Humility ("humble") + (in C-197), one who is grounded or near to the earth

Humō [ˈhjuːmɔː]
to bury (figuratively) to perform funeral rites

Humanus [ˈhjuːmənəs]
Derivative of homo ("man, human, person")

Human [ˈhjuːmən]
Of or belonging to a man, human, humane, adjective

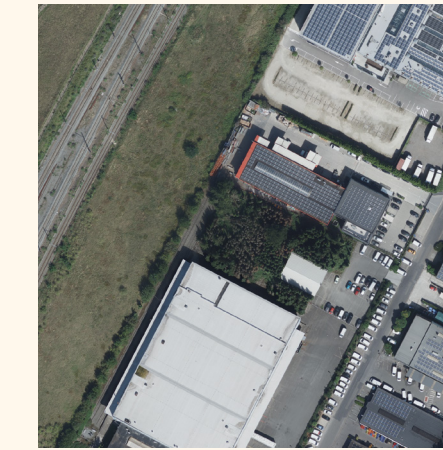
the second creation story tells us that humans were created from the earth, soil, humus and given God's breath of life.

Turbah leads to its connection with death, the moment when people return back to the earth. Turba (or turbe in Turkish) is an Islamic funerary building in a variety of contexts. Deceased Muslims are naturally buried. This means that the body of the deceased is washed and only buried in a wrapping of white cloth. In Islam the dead are associated with dust: a dead body is given an eternal grave, so the body eventually turns to earth after death (Fg 3, 4). Deceased Muslims are often repatriated to cemeteries in their countries of origin. But in the last couple of years, Muslims are rethinking to be buried in the country where they live now.

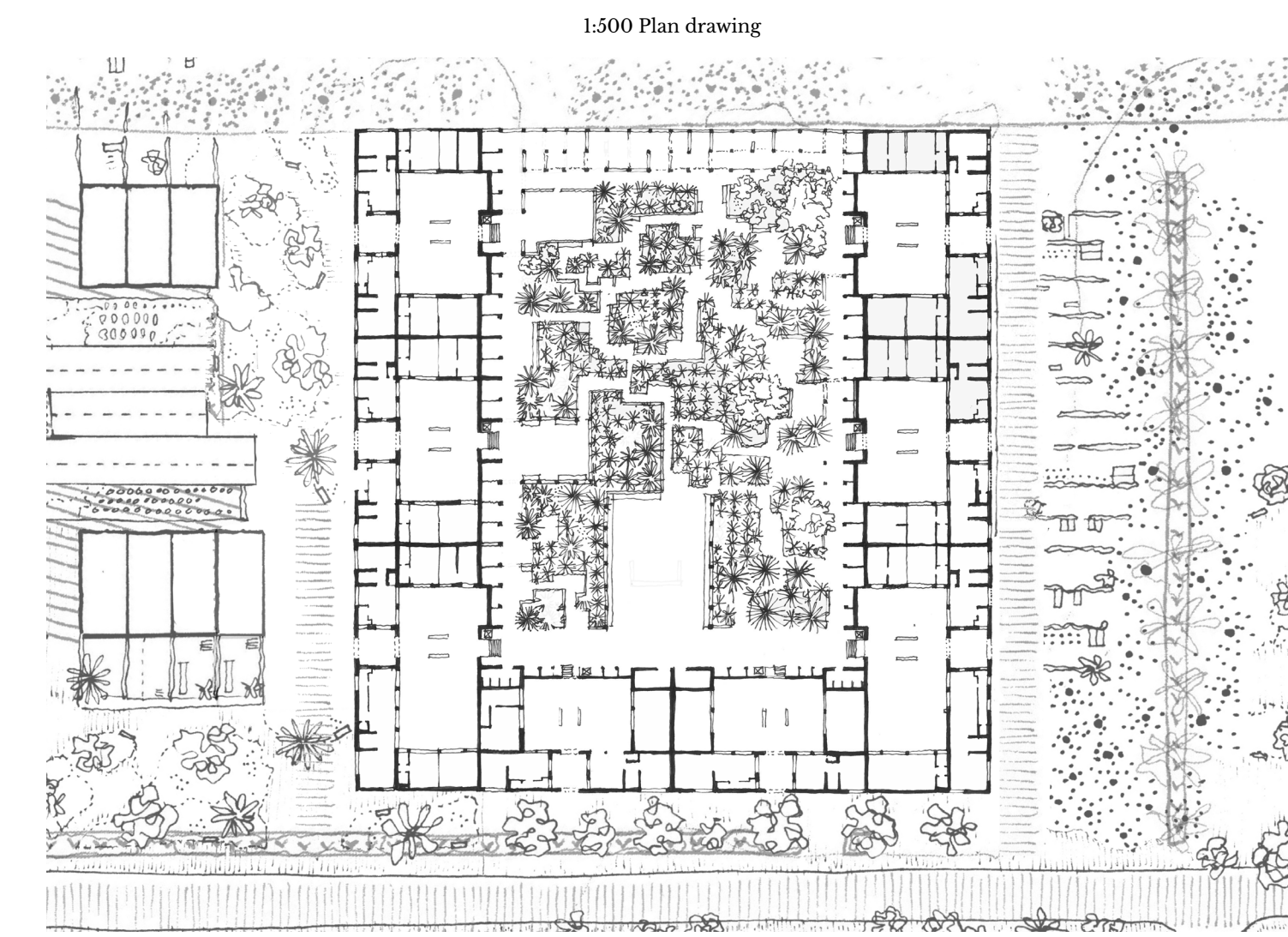
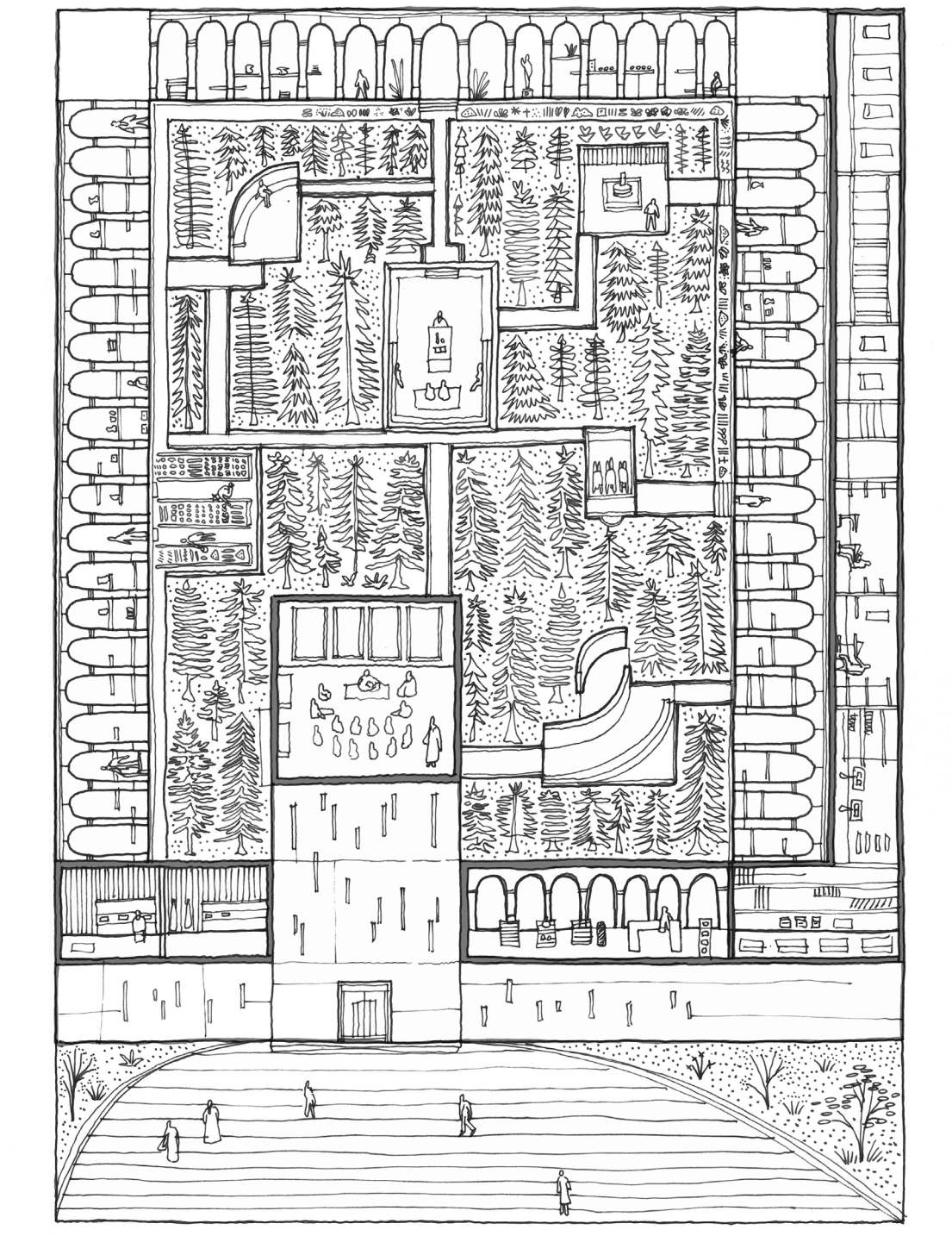
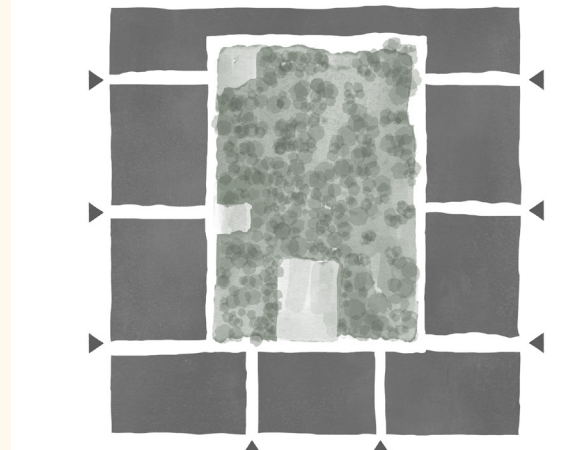


Soil is a dynamic and constantly evolving entity, far from being a static substance. Its composition and characteristics undergo continuous changes influenced by various factors, with the introduction of new seeds being a key element. Seeds from different regions and parts of the world can be transported by wind, water, animals, or human activities to new locations, contributing to the biodiversity and altering the soil composition.

As part of the project, my colleagues and I developed an urban vision for La Friche Josphat. We conducted an "as found" study of its existing ground conditions, vegetation, and human traces, revealing a rich mix of soil and biodiversity from past interventions. This informed our masterplan, which explores extending rewilding across the site. The urban plan envisions a new environment where nature, industry, and housing coexist. By selectively removing concrete and retaining industrial boundaries, we connect the wild friche with the urban landscape. "Mediator" spaces allow for fluid interaction between nature and human activities, supporting both the Friche ecology and community needs.



The chosen location is an existing patch of Serbian spruce trees in La Friche Josphat. Originally planted as Christmas trees, they now symbolize the dynamic landscape and flow of life. These spruces hold cultural significance, often planted to commemorate important events or honor those who have passed, symbolizing growth and resilience. To protect and enhance the value of this last green in town, I propose a Repository of Remembrance. The trees are surrounded by a gallery of niches where visitors can retreat, reflect, and engage in personal acts of remembrance. These niches offer views leading to a memorial garden, creating a serene atmosphere for contemplation. The housing units function as a protective fort or kasbah, facilitating interaction between the city and a space dedicated to reflection and remembrance.

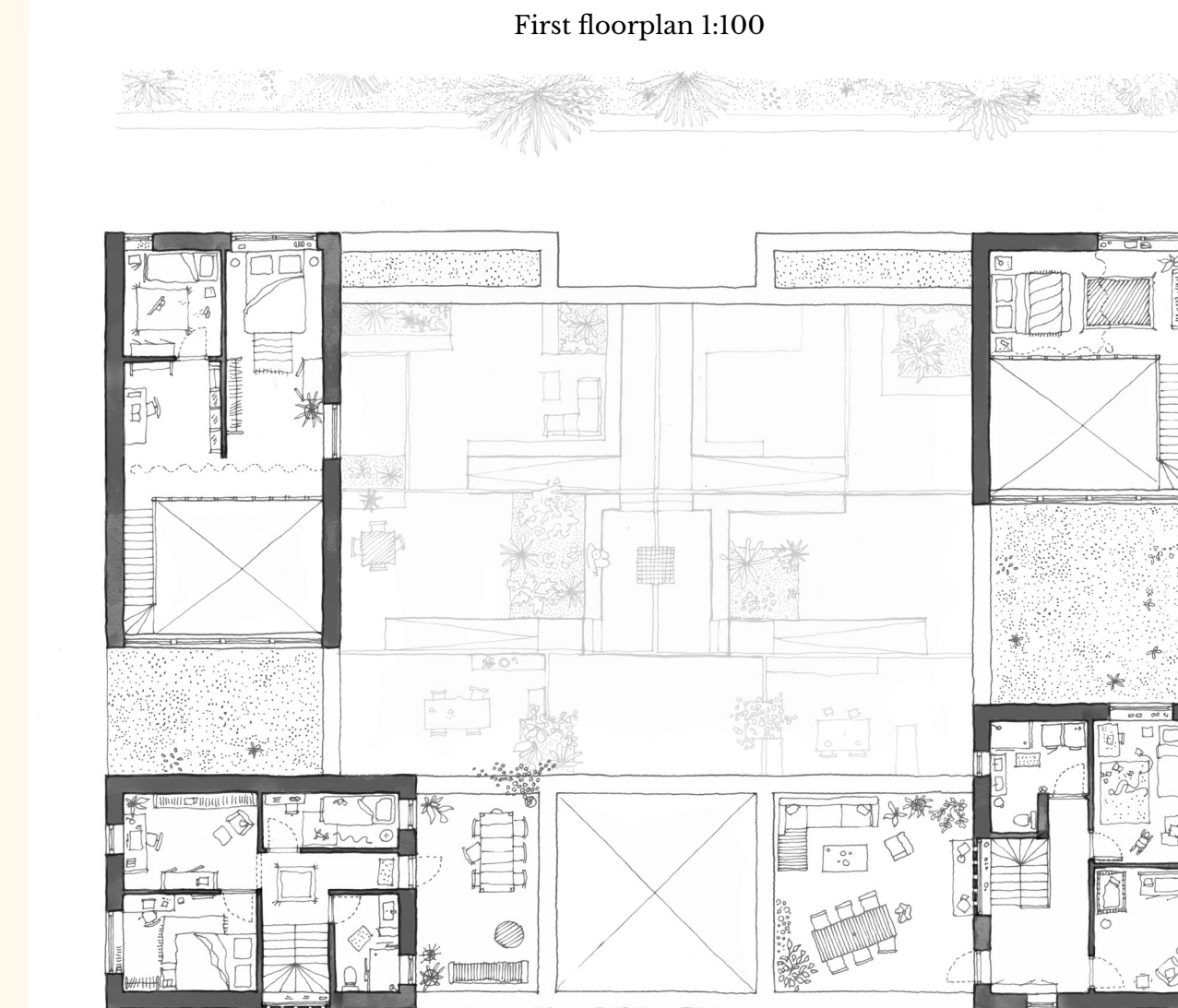
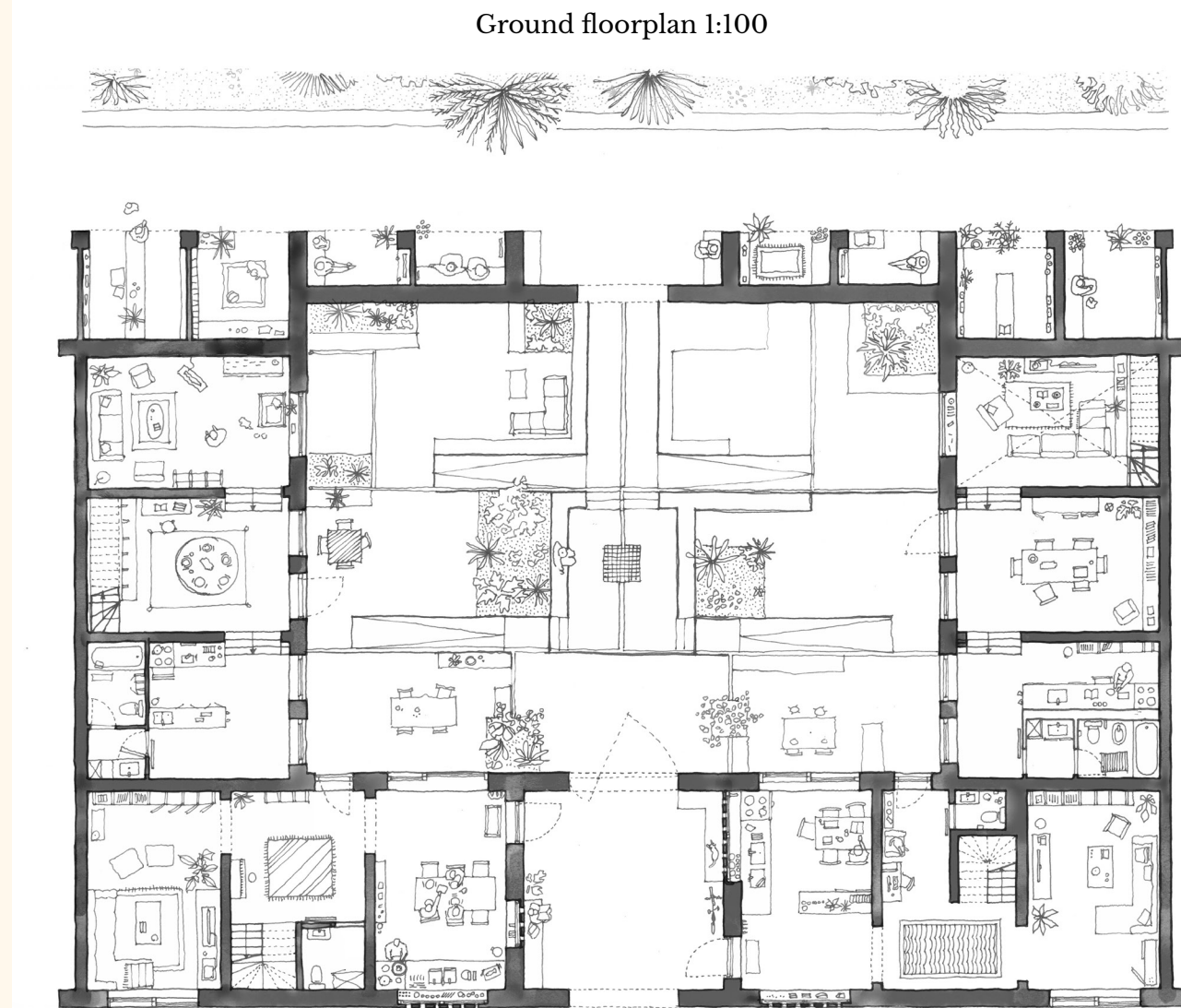


Housing typology

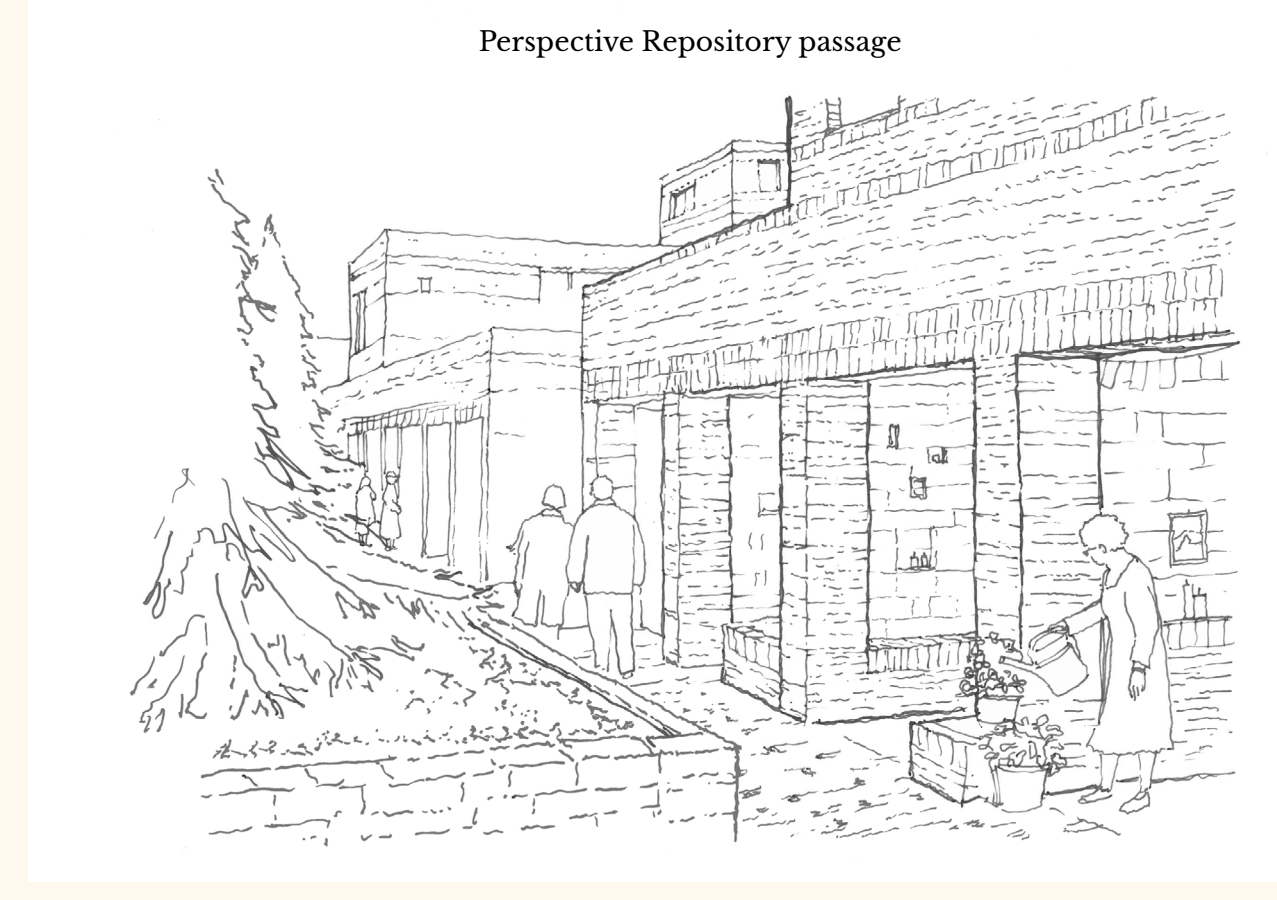
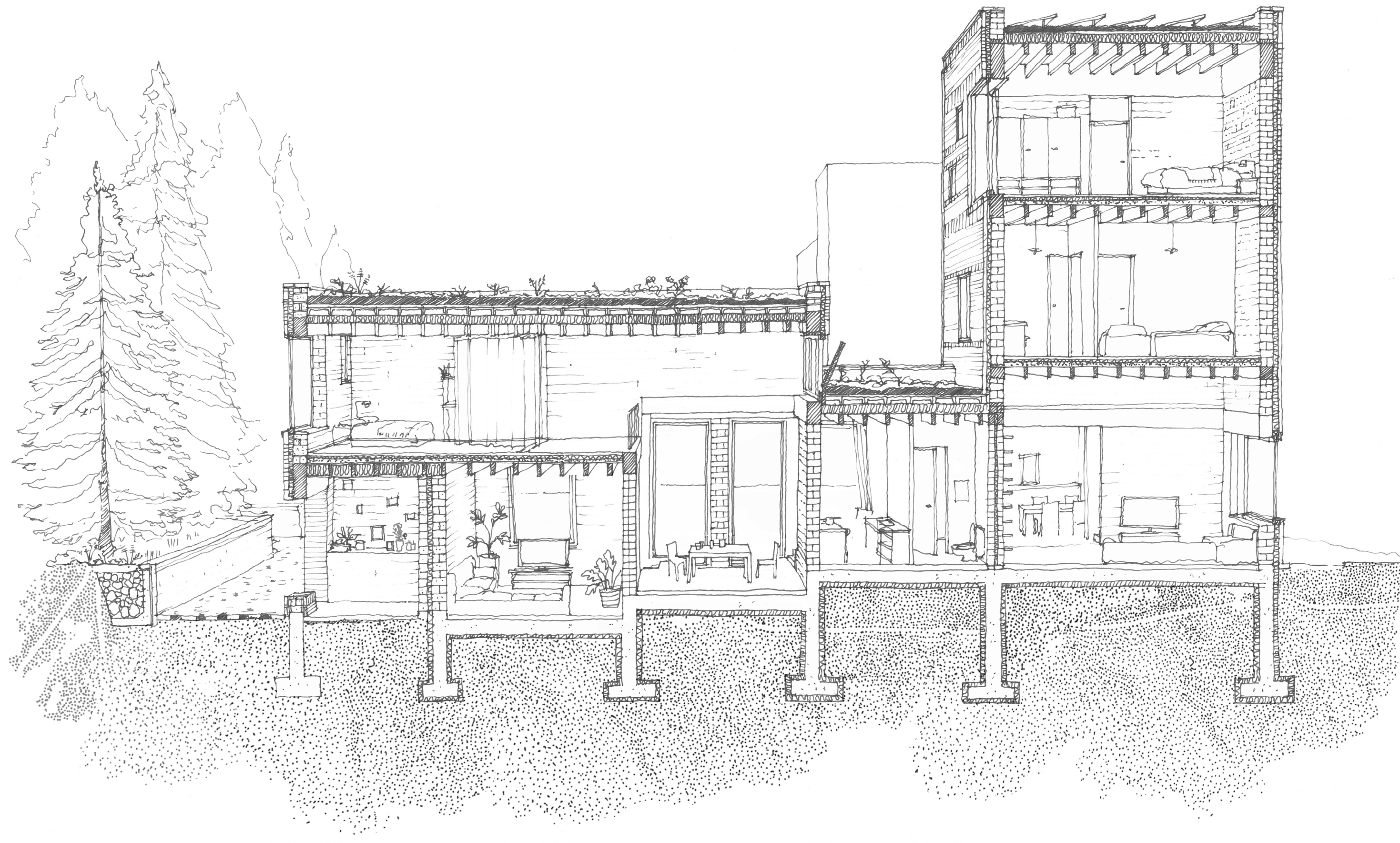
The housing design is inspired by the patio house typology found in North African and Arab countries, where a communal courtyard serves as a transitional space between the public and private domain. In this design, each cluster of homes features four residences arranged around the entire garden. This configuration creates a series of outdoor spaces that provide a gradual transition from the city to a space of remembrance. Each cluster includes four different "multigenerational homes," reflecting the dynamic change of life and renewal symbolized by nature.

The multigenerational homes vary in size but are designed with a rigid envelope structure, allowing each residence to be customized according to the needs and preferences of its residents.

- 1. Housing block of 20m x 20m**
Creating an entry point at the city to the garden.
- 2. Passage**
Making the first connection from the city to the garden.
- 3. Patio**
Carving out the air-between spaces, enhancing the connection from the city to the garden.
- 4. Corridor on the housing**
Doubling entrances from the adjacent spaces.
- 5. Kasbah**
The homes feature a tall outer envelope system defining the dwelling in three spaces.
- 6. Repository**
Carving out the niches of the repository at the back of the dwelling cluster.



Perspective section
1:50 perspective section of two dwellings covering the repository. These are constructed from rammed earth bricks, with a concrete structure on floors and walls. The earth material is supported by a concrete slab that not only supports the load but also embodies the symbolic value of building with earth on the very site.



Perspective impression of the repository; a gallery of niches designed for visitors to personalize and take care of their personal acts of remembrance.



Facade 1:20

Section 1:20

Fragment 1:20

This 1:20 detail showcases the symbolic and technical integration of the building with the earth. Constructed using rammed earth bricks, the structure embodies sustainability by utilizing locally sourced soil, emphasizing its connection to the site.

The rammed earth provides excellent thermal mass, promoting natural temperature regulation, while the design includes a natural ventilation system. Wooden beams are used for the floors and lintels, complementing the other local materials. The brown roof enhances biodiversity by supporting local wildlife, creating a space for nesting. The use of these materials ensures minimal environmental impact and a strong link to the natural surroundings.

Additionally, the garden design features retaining walls that enable visitors to walk through the spruce tree garden. These walls are engineered to support the earth while allowing the trees to continue growing and thriving, preserving the ecological balance and enriching the visitor experience.

