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Restraining Order: An Urban Monastery for Capuchin Friars

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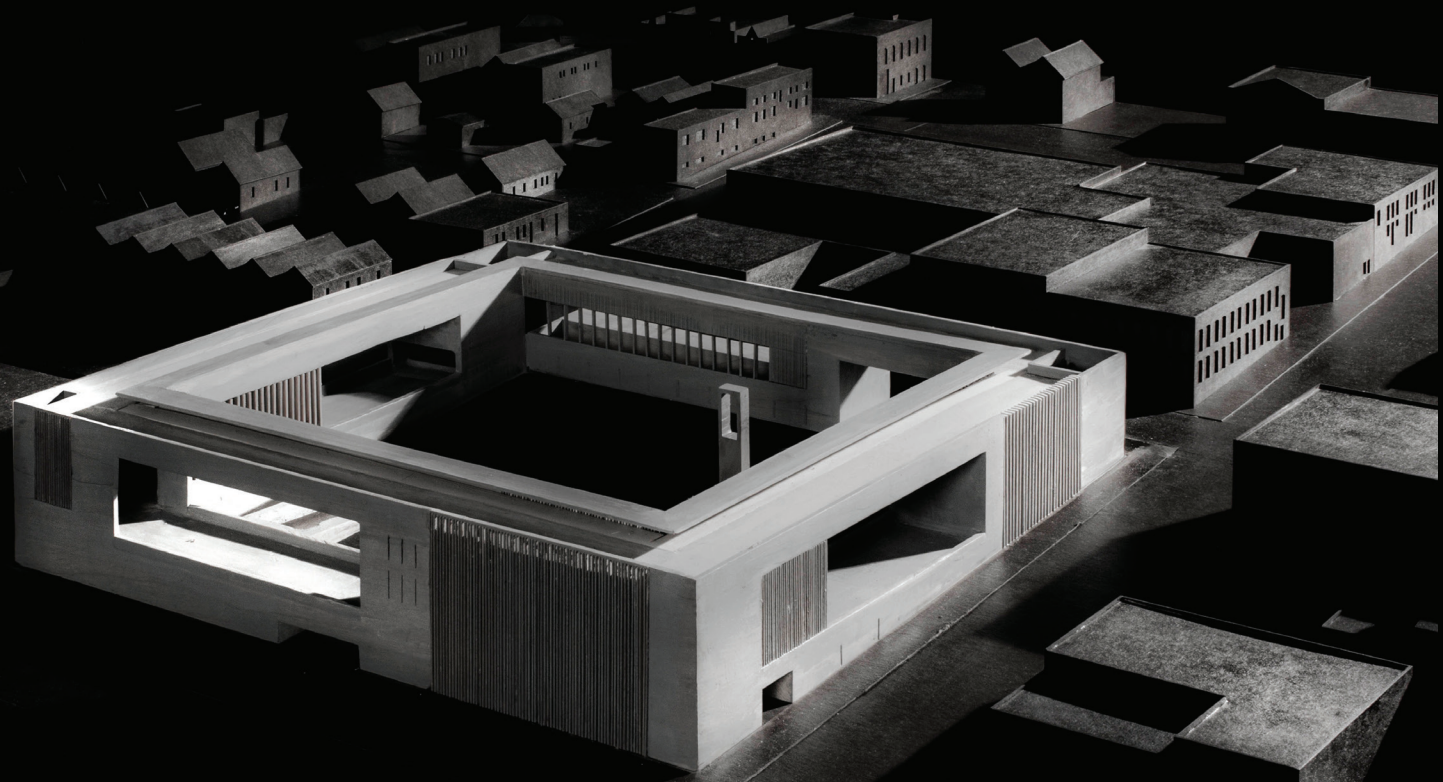
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restraining order

an urban monastery for capuchin friars



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an urban monastery for capuchin friars

02 fall 2014

a graduate design studio | johnsen & schmaling, visiting professors in practice
university of wisconsin-milwaukee | school of architecture and urban planning

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The work included in this book was produced in the fall of 2014 by graduate architecture students at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee enrolled in *ARCH 815 - Studies in Architectural Technology and Theory: "Restraining Order: An Urban Monastery for Capuchin Friars,"* a design studio organized and instructed by Sebastian Schmaling and Brian Johnsen, Visiting Professors in Practice.

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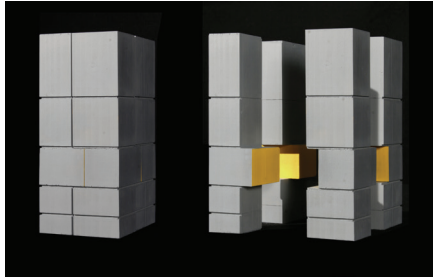


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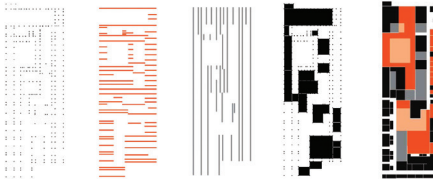


site urban context

Ben Penlesky,
study model
Abbey Sint-Benedictusberg
(Hans van der Laan)



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analytical diagrams
Tautra Mariakloster
(Jensen & Skodvin)



Dan Causier,
study models
Tautra Mariakloster
(Jensen & Skodvin)



“Again we decree that the monasteries which are to be built shall be built as humbly as possible, from mud and twigs, or from rock and clay where twigs cannot be had easily. . . We also decree (. . .) that absolutely all vanity, superfluity and precious things of gold, silver, silk or velvet shall be banished from our churches. . . ” Statutes of Albacina (1529)

Synopsis | This volume documents the work produced in the fall of 2014 by a group of 15 graduate students at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Architecture and Urban Planning. The studio, “Restraining Order,” focused on the design of a monastery complex for Capuchin Franciscan friars in Milwaukee’s central city. The title alludes to the radical simplicity, austerity, and restraint governing the life of a Capuchin friar — a life dedicated to serving those in need: the poor, the sick, and the socially marginalized. The 500-year-old Order of Capuchin Friars Minor arrived in the United States in 1857, when two Swiss friars established the first American Province of Capuchins in Milwaukee, starting a legacy of social engagement that continues to this day. Currently, Capuchins in Milwaukee are busy running one of the city’s largest soup kitchens, collaborating with UWM nursing students to provide basic healthcare for the poor, and offering emergency shelter for the homeless.

It is the Capuchin ethos of frugality and restraint that guided our semester-long design investigations, exploring the possibilities embedded in an architecture of profound and unapologetic simplicity. From the outset, the concept of frugality had a significant impact on the design of Capuchin buildings. At a time when churches were expected to be built from stone and feature elaborate décor, the Holy See made an exception and permitted the Capuchins to build simple buildings from wood, a material customarily deemed too mundane and too provisional to adequately represent the Divine.

Our conceptual explorations of architectural simplicity and restraint focused on the use of wood and concrete, arguably today’s equivalents to the “mud and twigs” that the Capuchin’s had formally declared the preferred material palette as early as 1529. We paid particular

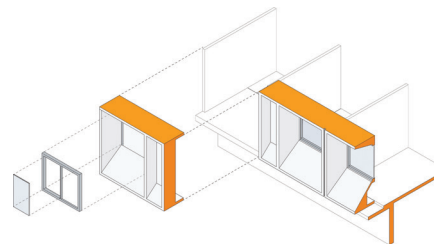
attention to the rapidly evolving field of contemporary wood construction, continuing a research agenda that we initiated in the fall of 2013. Students were challenged to develop meaningful architectural strategies at all scales that exploited the conceptual richness of seemingly archaic topics such as silence, solitude, humility, and spirituality, all fundamental humanistic concerns increasingly marginalized in a world hungry for perpetual entertainment and instant gratification.

Monastic Architecture | Monasteries tend to be more than single, monolithic buildings, instead combining different typologies and programmatic elements into complex ensembles that organize the daily lives of their inhabitants and offer them housing, work, food, education and, arguably, even entertainment. As quasi-urban microcosms, their architecture reconciles and transcends seemingly contradictory objectives and values, mediating between the individual and the collective, between the need for spatial separation and the desire to facilitate communal life, between self-sufficiency and inter-dependency.

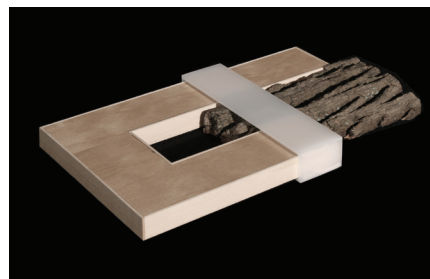
The proposed urban Capuchin monastery complex in Milwaukee may be unprecedented in terms of its urban setting, program and overall scope, but it inevitably becomes an extension of the rich trajectory of Christian monastic architecture that spans nearly two millennia, making the study of historic and contemporary precedents a prerequisite for any meaningful design explorations. Students were asked to study a number of architecturally significant monasteries, focusing on their roles as archetypes of “hybrid buildings” – structures that house diverse, sometimes even competing mixes of programs and uses. Precedents included paradigmatic historic projects such as Le Thoronet, a 12th century Cistercian monastery, and Elias Bombarone’s San Francesco in Assisi; 20th century examples by van der Laan, Breuer and Le Corbusier; and lesser known contemporary buildings such as Tautra Mariakloster in Norway by Jensen & Skodvin or the Knotpher Friary in Ireland by ODOS Architects.



Michael Duncan,
conceptual massing
San Lorenzo de El Escorial
(Juan Bautista de Toledo)



Justin Koepler,
facade studies
Kloster Baldegg
(Marcel Breuer)



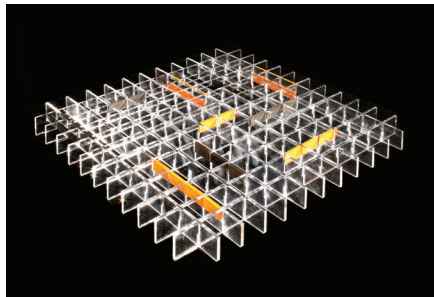
Christian Gluvna,
conceptual massing
Val Notre-Dame Abbey
(Pierre Thibault)



aerial view of site



view of site from
W. Pierce Street



Michael Duncan,
analytical site model

Our research of monastic architecture was intended to be an analytical and interpretative exercise rather than a comprehensive historic or anthropological survey; the objective was to identify and understand both formal and conceptual frameworks that have shaped the design of monasteries – unique and reoccurring ordering principles, both immaterial and concrete, that could inform our own design approaches. Students were asked to concisely decipher the main characteristics of each project, highlighting the general contextual, volumetric, infrastructural, circulatory, and spatial strategies that were employed in its design and translating the findings into a comprehensive narrative that conveys the precedent's essential architectural and theoretical frameworks.

Site and Context | The proposed Capuchin monastery occupies an entire city block on Milwaukee's South Side, a dense urban area with a sizable Hispanic and predominantly Catholic population. Mirroring the economic challenges facing many of Milwaukee's central city neighborhoods, the area suffers from disproportionately high rates of unemployment and poverty as well as from a lack of healthcare facilities and other social services. The site is located at the threshold between the Menomonee Valley and the Walker's Point neighborhood, bordered by S. 11th, S. 12th, W. Bruce and W. Pierce Streets, and sandwiched between National Avenue, an important east-west thoroughfare, and the Burnham Canal, which marks the southern border of the Menomonee Valley and is slated for a comprehensive environmental cleanup and wetland restoration project.

Our initial studies focused on the proper decoding and intimate understanding of the complex urban context of the site and its geographical, infrastructural, social, cultural and ecological landscape. Following decades of modernism's radical rejection of context as a legitimate architectural concern, the revisionists of postmodernism rehabilitated contextuality as a subject worthy of a designer's attention, but their ideological agenda was quickly hijacked and commodified by profit-seeking developers and their willing corporate design henchmen who turned the renewed interest in contextuality and

place-specificity into cheap, historicist, and easily digestible copy-cat architecture, highly marketable but void of any meaning. We set out to test how context may continue to serve as a valid source for architectural explorations, at a time when the concept of “contextual design” has effectively been reduced to an exercise in stylistic sugarcoating.

Students developed an extensive series of analytical site studies that transcended the simple mapping of the site’s immediately obvious physiognomy. In addition to the collection of geographical data and traditional mapping techniques (topographic surveys, figure-ground plans, circulation maps, solar studies, demographic charts, etc.), students used a variety of alternative media to offer an interpretative reading of the forces that have shaped and continue to shape the area over time, revealing those unique characteristics and idiosyncrasies – physical or immaterial; visible or invisible; obvious or elusive – that imbue a place with its genius loci, its distinctive atmosphere and particular flavor. Simultaneously considering the site’s extents and constraints and scrutinizing its existing and speculative properties, students deliberately selected specific thematic lenses for their investigations, allowing them to carefully analyze and thoroughly explore the site at all relevant scales – the scale of the region, the scale of the surrounding neighborhood, and the scale of the urban block itself –, with the goal to define a specific genetic pool for their own projects.

Program | Capuchin friars maintain a robust presence in Milwaukee to this day, but their current facilities are geographically limited to the north-east corner of downtown. The proposed monastery on Milwaukee’s South Side will allow the Order to reach out to the area’s largely underserved minority and immigrant populations, providing critical social services and filling the current void of appropriate facilities or a functioning public welfare system.

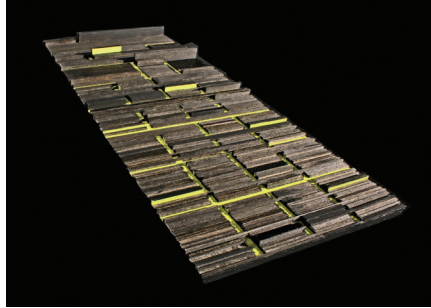
The new monastery complex will include a friary for 32 brothers and their guests; a church; a soup kitchen and food pantry; a small health clinic staffed by volunteer doctors;



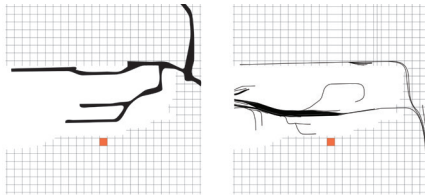
Justin Koeppler,
site diagram



David Raschka,
analytical site model



Amber Piacentine,
analytical site model



Dan Causier,
site diagrams



studio desk,
December 2014

a small homeless shelter; and structured parking for 15 cars. Buildings will occupy only 50 percent of the site; the remaining open space will be used as a vegetable garden and orchard as well as a cemetery for deceased brothers. Four distinctive but interrelated design paradigms guided the design investigations:

holism: site design, building design, and landscape design must be developed in tandem, following a comprehensive design strategy to create a monastery complex that becomes an integral part of the surrounding area and neighborhood fabric.

functionality: the monastery and its different parts shall be organized in a manner that takes advantage of the existing typological and topographic context. All program components of the monastery shall be organized on the site in a way that allows them to function both individually and as a whole.

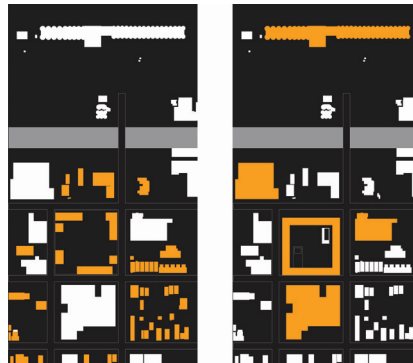
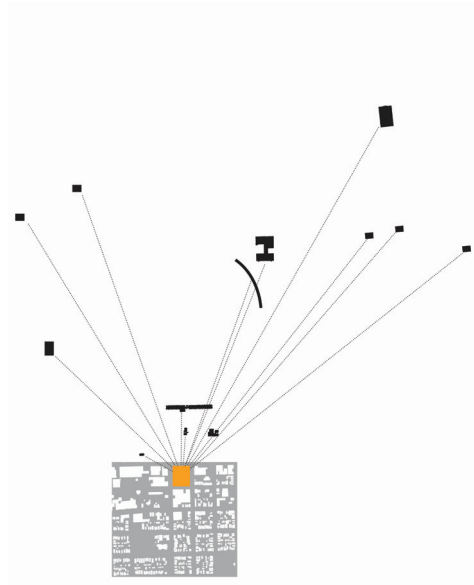
public presence and visibility: the monastery shall have a robust visual presence in the neighborhood, a beacon of hope in both physical and spiritual terms.

materiality: wood and wood-based hybrid products must be the primary construction materials for both structure and building envelope, complemented only by cast-in-place concrete. The building is expected to serve as a case study in the innovative use of wood in contemporary architecture, highlighting recent advancements in timber technology.

Process | Students were encouraged to employ a non-linear design approach, with the focus of attention constantly oscillating between overall concept, program, structure, envelope, and detail, to facilitate the congruous development and refinement of all aspects of the project. Particular emphasis was put on the design of convincing tectonic concepts, the material integrity of each project, and the care with which its components were assembled and joined. The iterative design process required students to continuously and critically re-examine their architectural strategies and steadily shift between scales, all in an effort to avoid design decisions made in a vacuum without understanding the ramifications for the building complex as a whole.

MONOLITH | Dan Causier, Matt Moulis

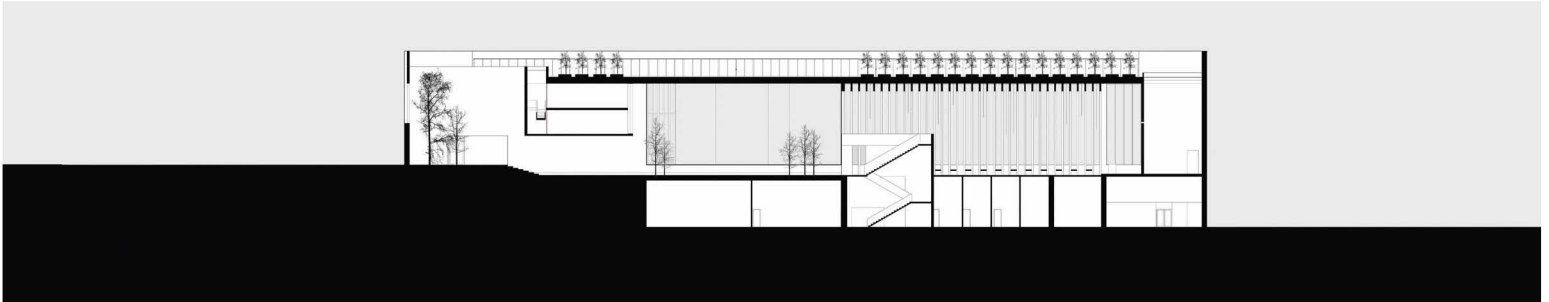
Inspired by the power and simplicity of the industrial silos that form a visual and spatial backdrop to the site, the project draws from the atmospheric implications of the program within its urban context and from the Capuchin Order's open-arms social outreach mission. As an urban microcosm in which differentiated elements are linked by a common infrastructure, the building attempts to meld the two overlapping neighborhood scales; it is organized as a series of programmatically distinct spaces within a thickened wall, separated by large-scale voids that frame vistas beyond. These spatial voids, including the rooftop garden that serves as the cloister, are in turn either naturally abundant (prairie grass), populated sparsely by slender birch trees, or organized as orchards and gardens. With an ambitiously restrained scheme for wall apertures and a deliberately simple material palette applied in precise tectonic assemblies, we sought a visually quiet aesthetic reduced to its essential components, consciously articulated with minimal detail. Interior spaces provide continuity with outdoor spaces and moments of communal interaction. The design of the friary complex underscores our thematic embrace of the program's inherent contradictions of grandiosity and restraint, shelter and openness, and, perhaps most importantly, the extremes of spiritual purity and earthly humility.

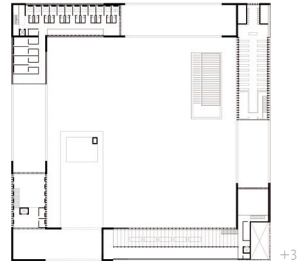


from top:
distant views
urban response

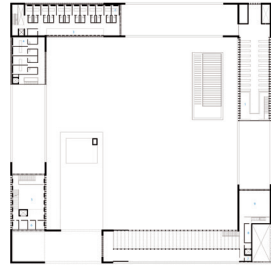
opposite:
church entrance



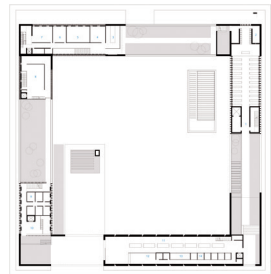




+3



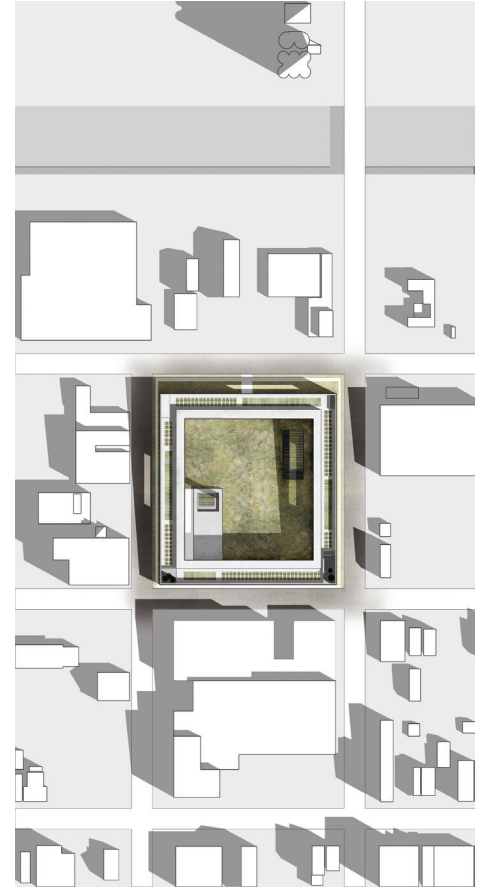
+2

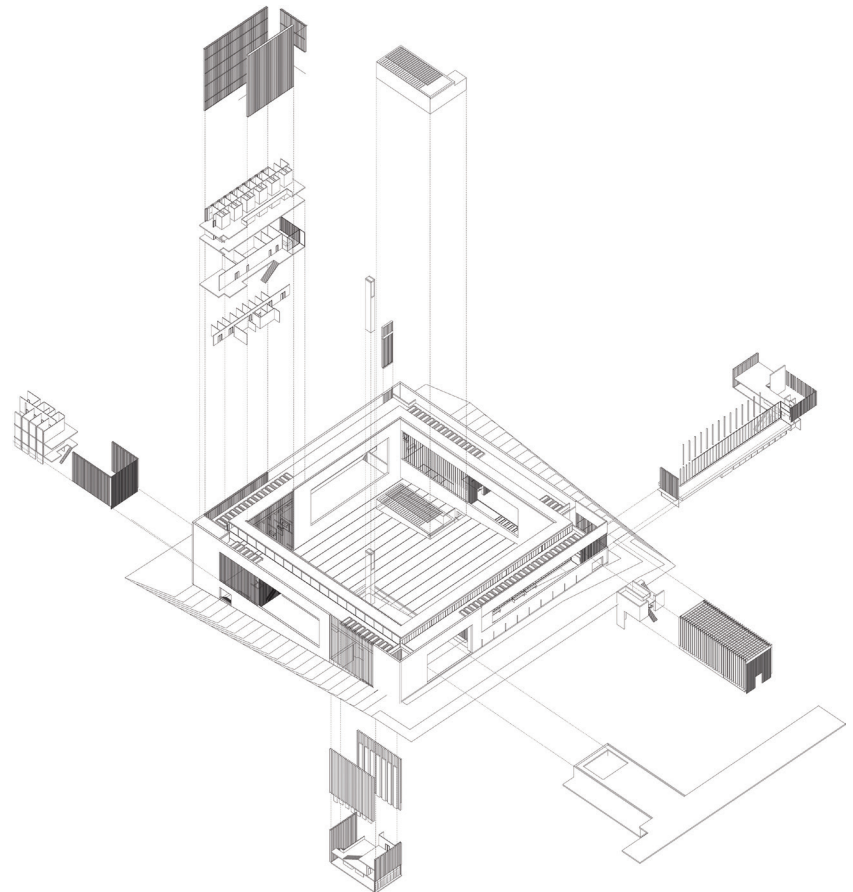
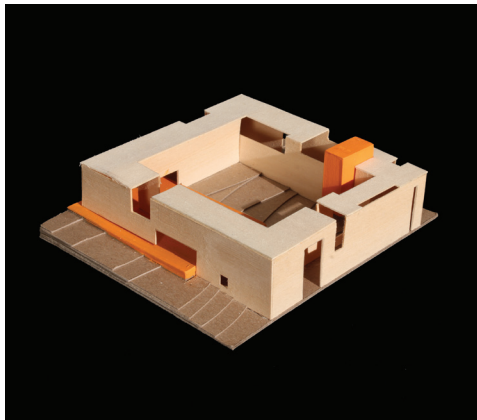


+1

opposite:
exterior corner
section through church

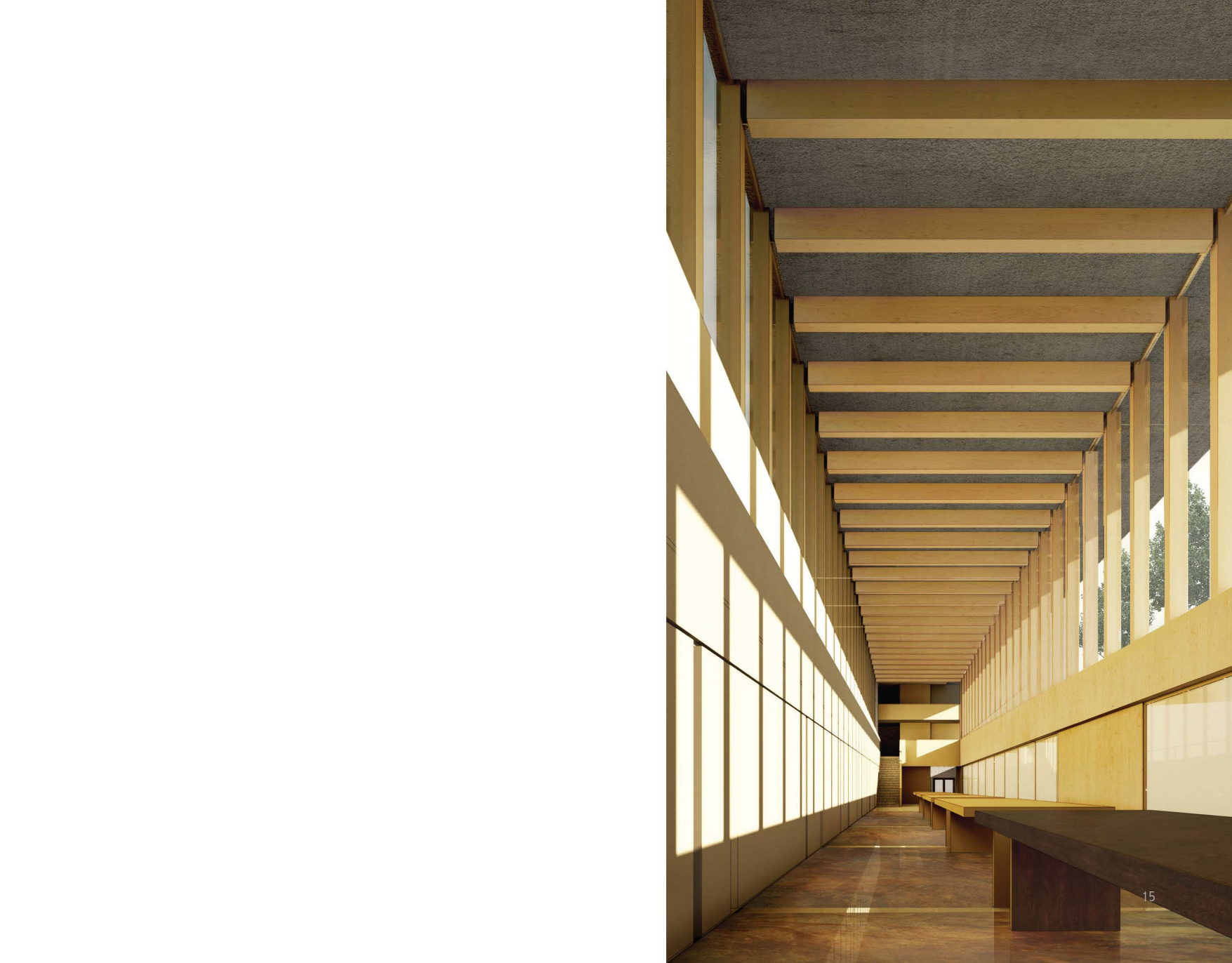
right:
floor plans
site plan

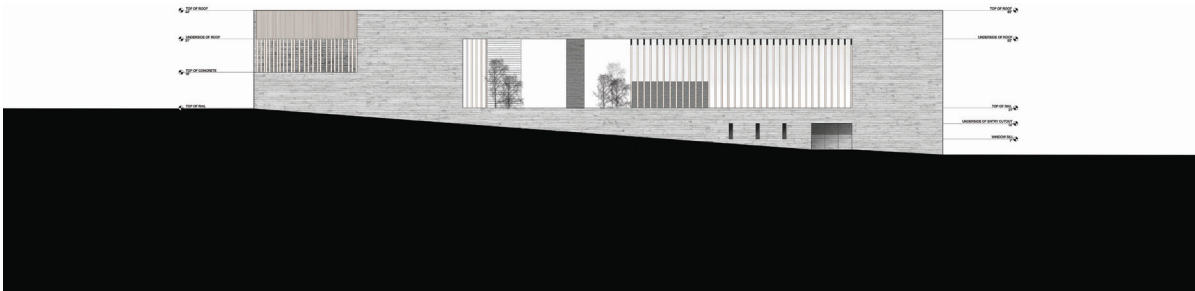




from left:
massing studies
exploded axon

opposite:
soup kitchen

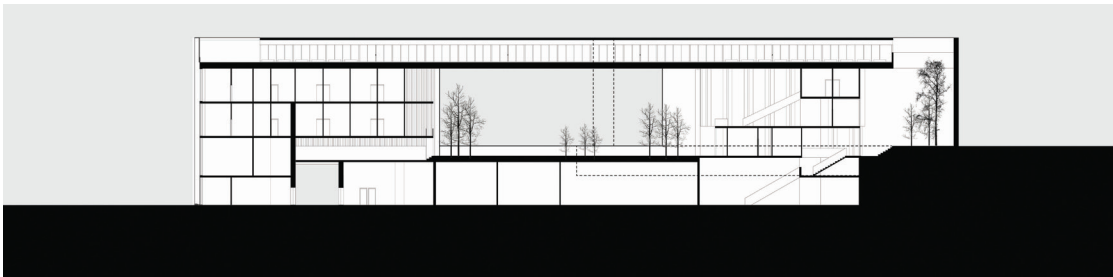




from top:
entry plaza
east elevation

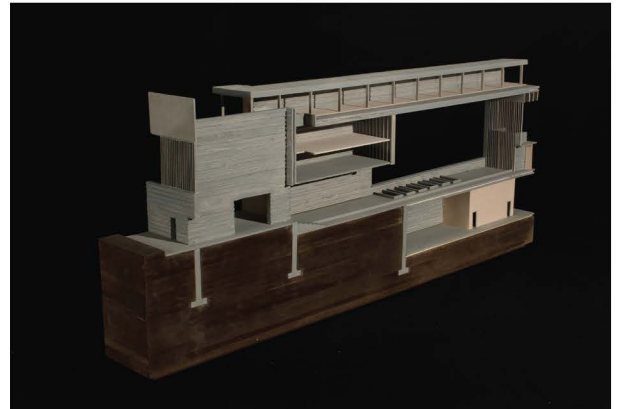
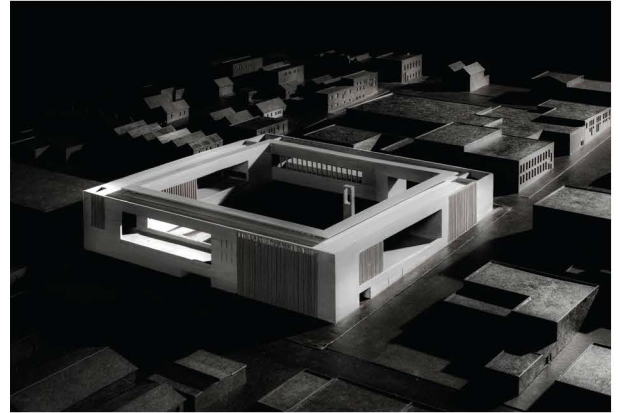
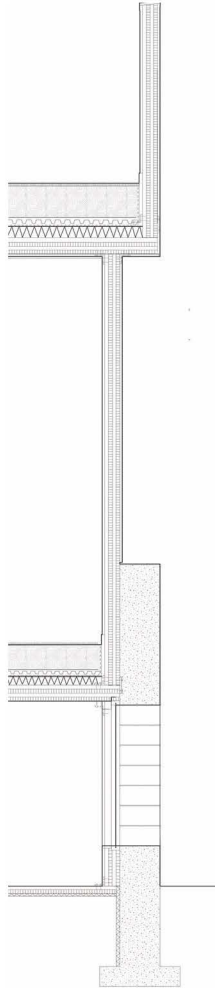
opposite:
refectory

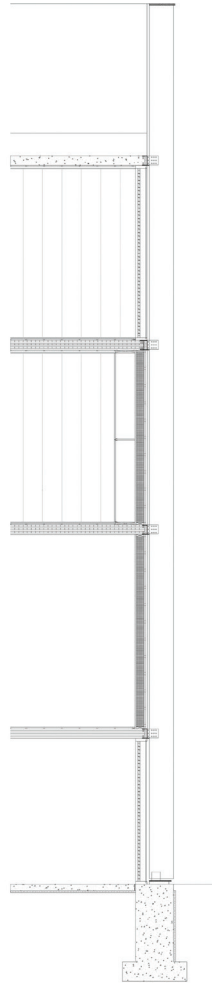
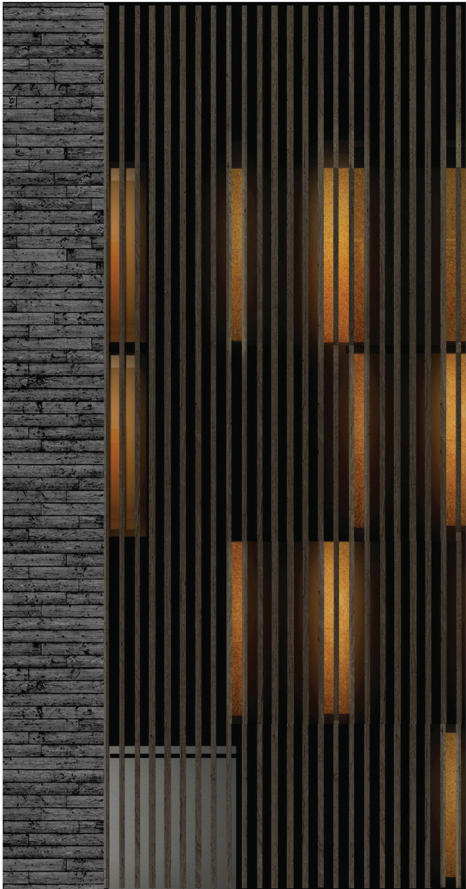




left:
cloister
section through clinic and friary

opposite:
partial wall elevation
partial wall section
site model
section model





left:
partial wall elevation
partial wall section

opposite:
sanctuary



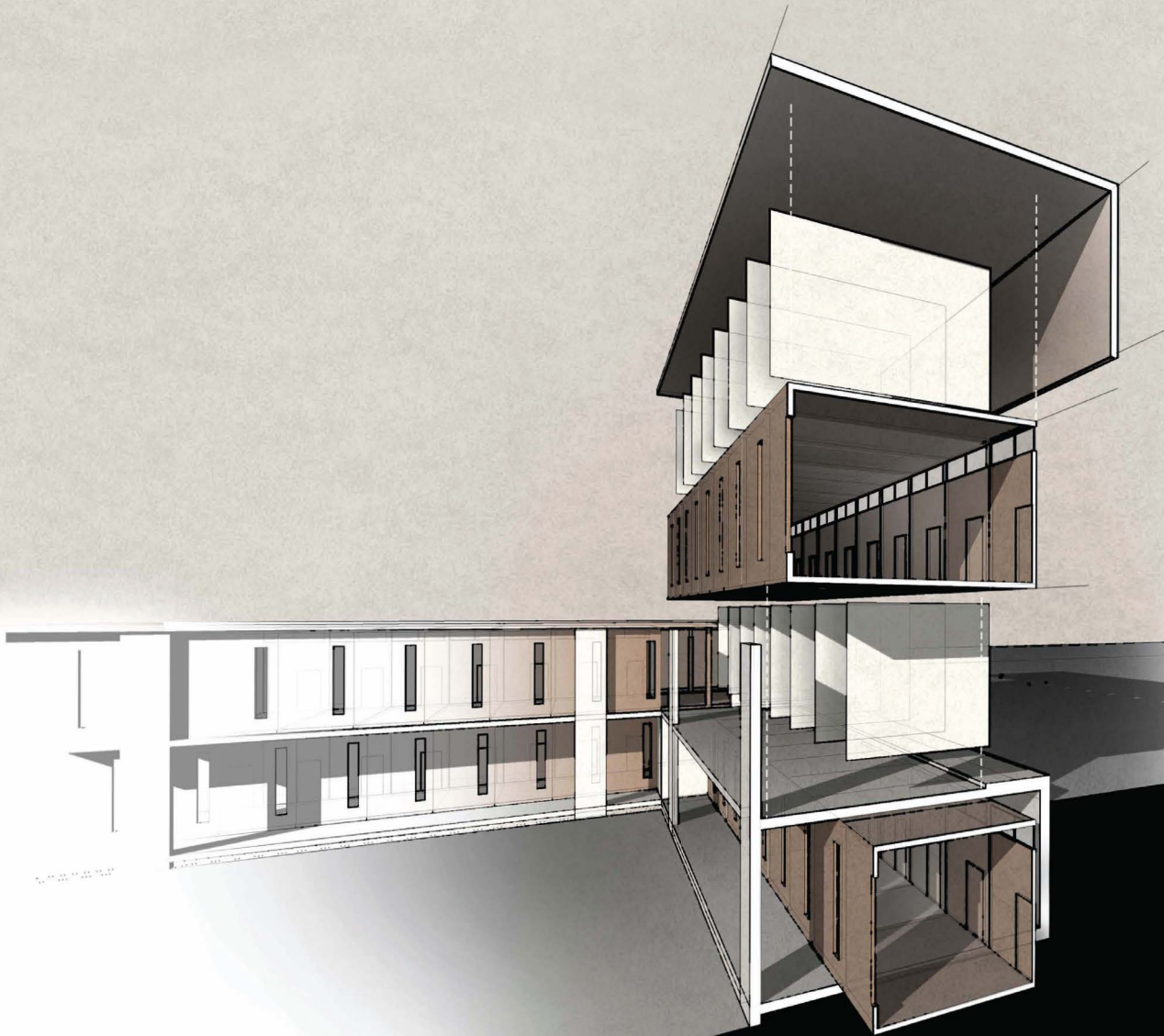
MODULE | Chris Knitt, Cameron Kollath

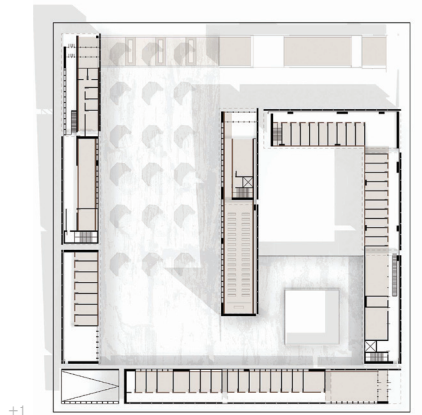
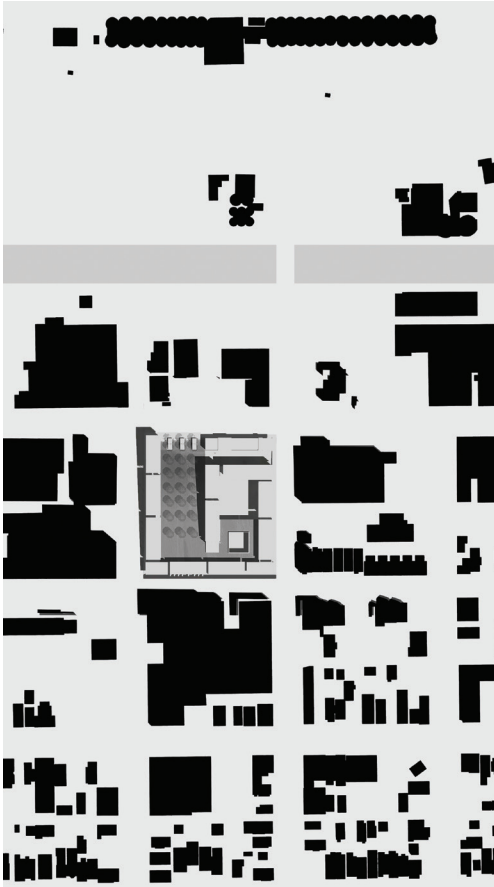
The dialectic between the individual and the collective – arguably one of the central philosophical tensions embedded in the Capuchin Order's DNA – forms the conceptual framework for the design of a monastery complex on Milwaukee's South Side. In an attempt to eliminate any perceived hierarchical differences between the various functions of the monastery, the program is organized in a series of dimensionally standardized building modules made from three interlocking components: a concrete base, a wood shell, and a wood wrapper. The concrete base establishes a datum that normalizes the site's slope, its walls reaching up at key structural points to support the wood shells and establish an organizational skeleton in which the program can unfold. The modular wood shells are directional in nature and remain static in size, but they are oriented to either the interior or exterior, depending on the particular needs and appropriate responses for the different program components. Finally, the wood wrapper is inserted between the base and the shells, an interior liner that defines spatial boundaries and at times transforms into the building skin. The aggregate modules create a serpentine building form that wraps around the urban block and intertwines with a necklace of exterior spaces – a series of landscaped zones, some exposed, others carved deep into the site, offering various degrees of protection and separation from the outside world. The most private space, the cemetery, is only accessible through an underground passage from the cloister, an empty, cradled outdoor room marking the project's spiritual center.



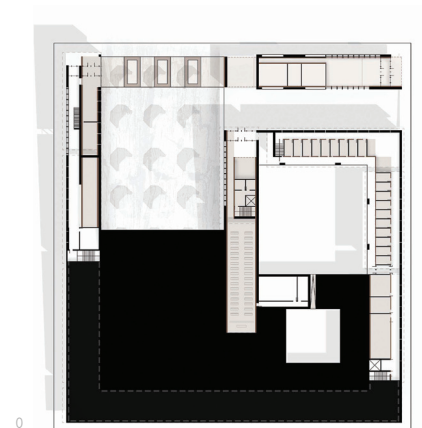
section model

opposite:
friary axonometric





+1

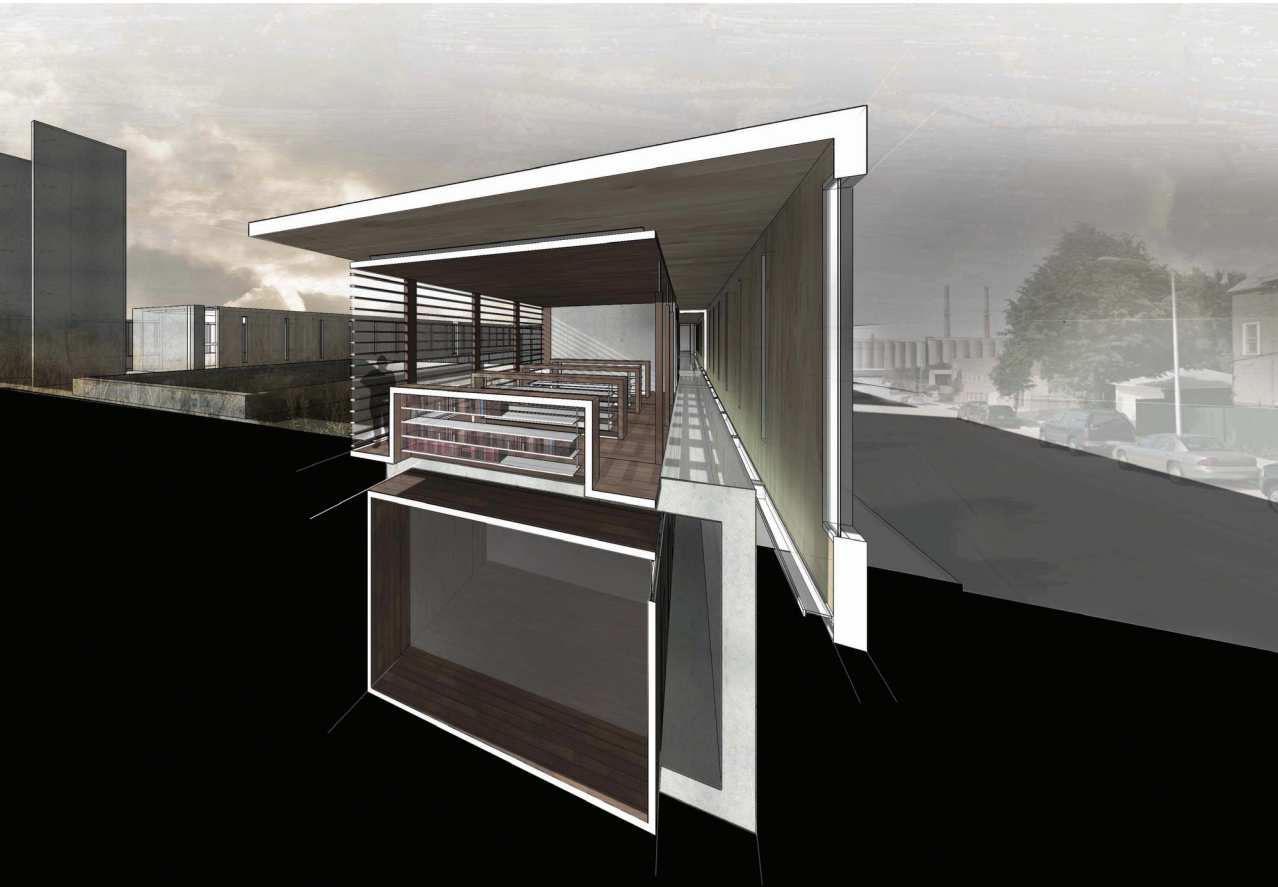


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left:
site plan
floor plans

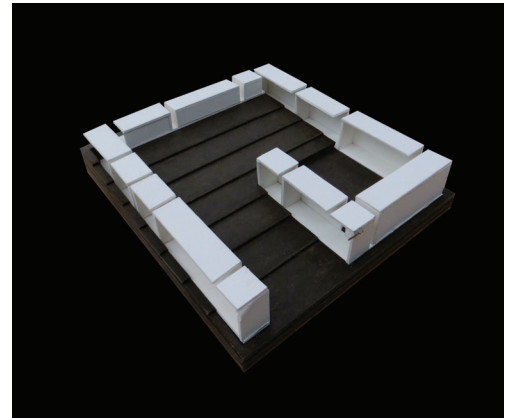
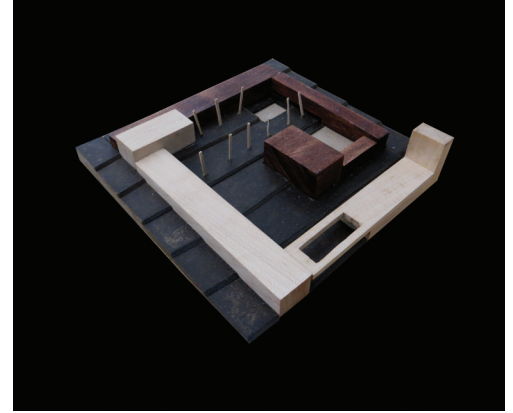
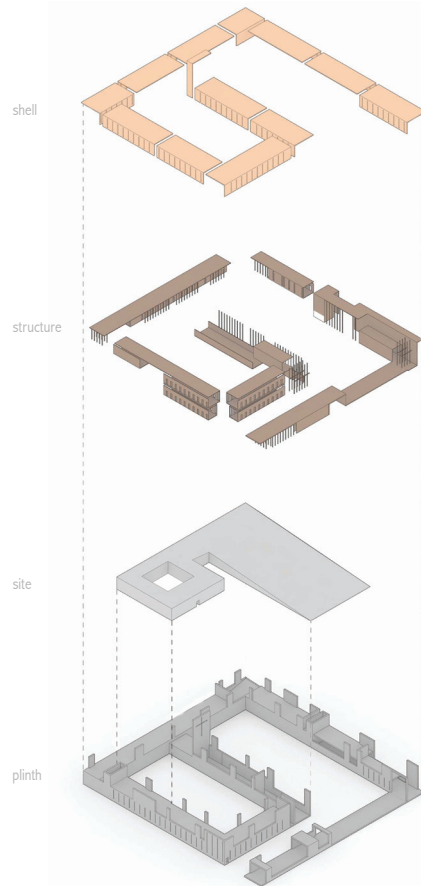
opposite:
site model





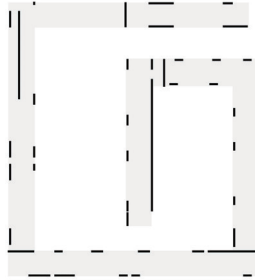
library axonometric

opposite:
exploded axonometric
concept models





privacy gradient



principal structure



internal shells



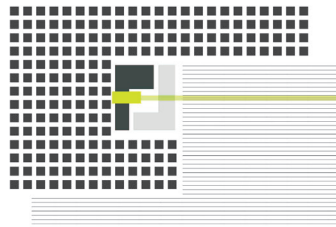
left:
site diagrams
main entrance

opposite:
library axonometric



RIBBON | Amber Piacentine, David Raschka

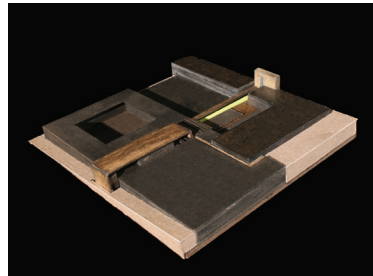
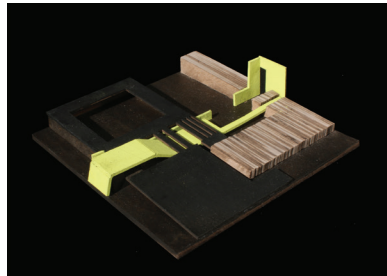
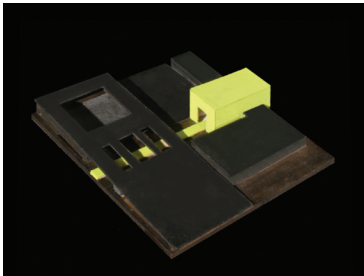
Milwaukee is geographically and culturally divided by its bridges, waterways, and freeway connections, creating an intricate and sometimes surprisingly complex patchwork of urban conditions and diverse neighborhoods. Located immediately south of the Menomonee River Valley, at a point of tension between a dense, fine-grained residential neighborhood and its coarse-grain industrial counterpart across the Burnham Canal, our project seeks to mediate between the area's contrasting urban textures, celebrating the surrounding typological richness while simultaneously stitching together pieces that currently lack connection. Our initial design investigations revolved around the existing alleyway dividing the property in half, part of a long view corridor of alleys interconnecting the adjacent city blocks. Rejecting the program brief's suggestion to abandon the alleyway, we instead reinforced its axis with an expressive, folding ribbon that marks the main entrance into the complex and functions as the monastery's organizational and circulatory spine. The ribbon creates spatial boundaries, provides shelter from the elements, leads into and through the church, and ties together the two distinct, intertwined building volumes accommodating the program. One of those volumes houses the friary itself, occupying a monolithic concrete block with narrow apertures - a simple, repetitive structure facilitating an introspective life of solitude and meditation. The other is a lighter, wood clad form with abundant glazing, an inviting building that provides space for those functions that directly serve the community.



from top:
divided connections
site textures

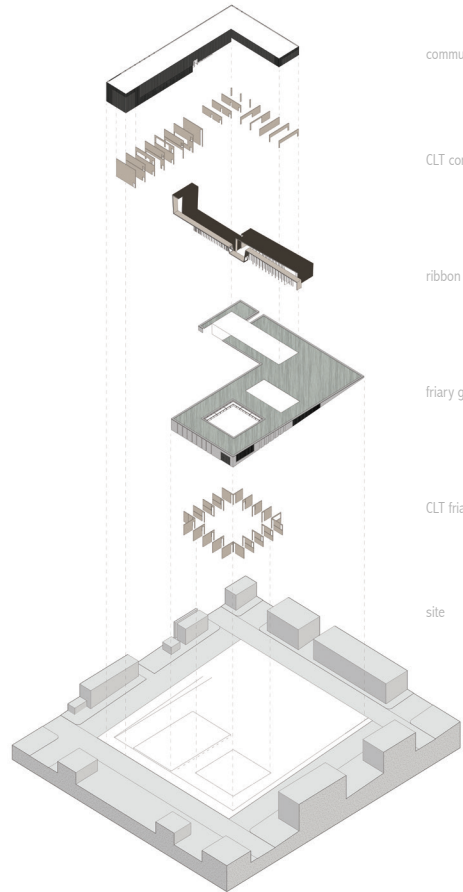
opposite:
friary





left:
cemetery
massing studies

opposite:
exploded axonometric
floor plans



community program

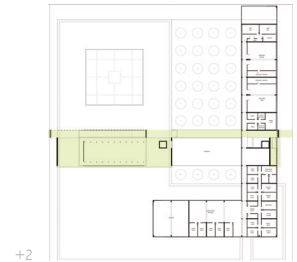
CLT community walls

ribbon

friary green roof

CLT friary walls

site



+2



+1

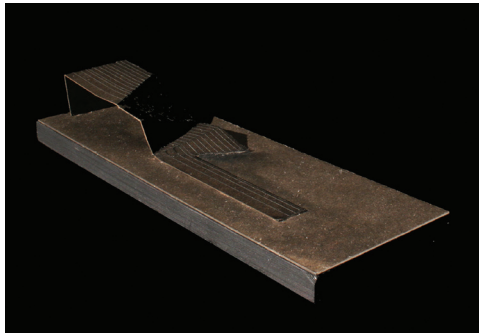


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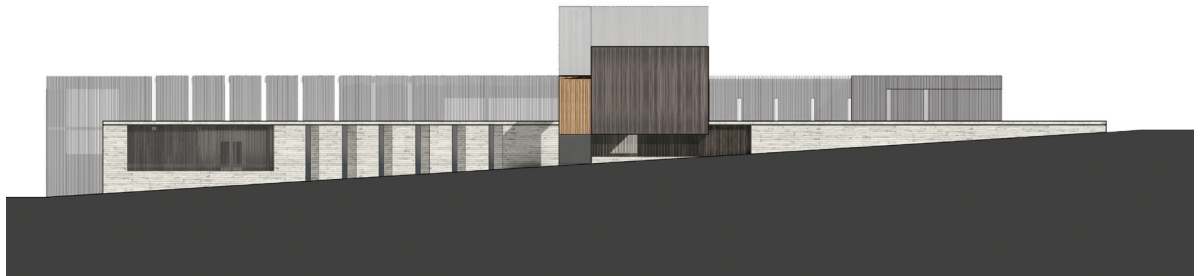
opposite:
site model
east elevation



right:
exterior from alley
ribbon studies





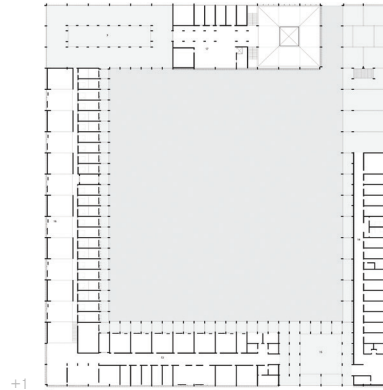


opposite:
church

right:
section models
west elevation

VEIL | Justin Koeppler, Jordan Nelson

Our design for an urban monastery focuses on two elemental architectural conditions, path and shelter, both fitting physical expressions of the Capuchin Order's spiritual essence and its friars' contemplative journeys and communal lives. The different program elements are consolidated in one large, continuous building form that traces the site's boundaries, forming a protective perimeter around the open center of the block, where orchard and cemetery are located. The building follows a strict structural grid, its rigor establishing a carefully proportioned geometric order that facilitates a variety of sectional qualities and spatial experiences. A series of pathways – internalized, covered, or entirely open – connect the different functions of the monastery, setting up a precisely choreographed journey that leads through the entire complex and culminates in the tall, light-filled sanctuary of the church. The idea of shelter is expressed in a highly animated, protective veil of wood slats, a filigree of vertical boards forming the outermost skin of a multi-layered enclosure system that changes its appearance depending on the time of the day and the preferences of the users inside. The spacing and modulation of the wood slats respond directly to internal or external forces, functioning as privacy screen, shading device, and light filter.



+1



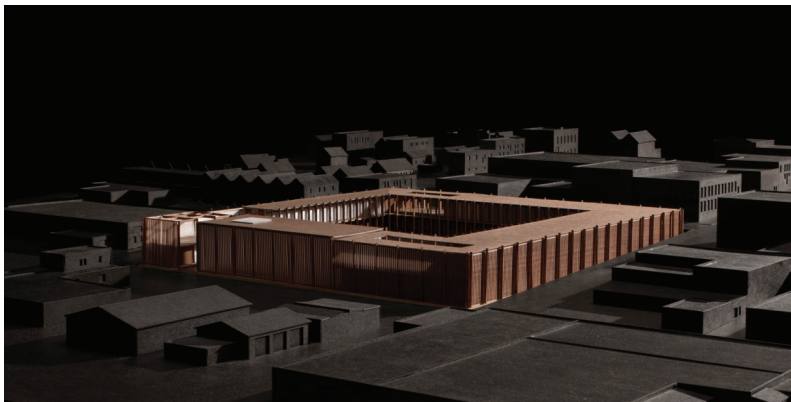
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left:
floor plans

opposite:
courtyard and cemetery

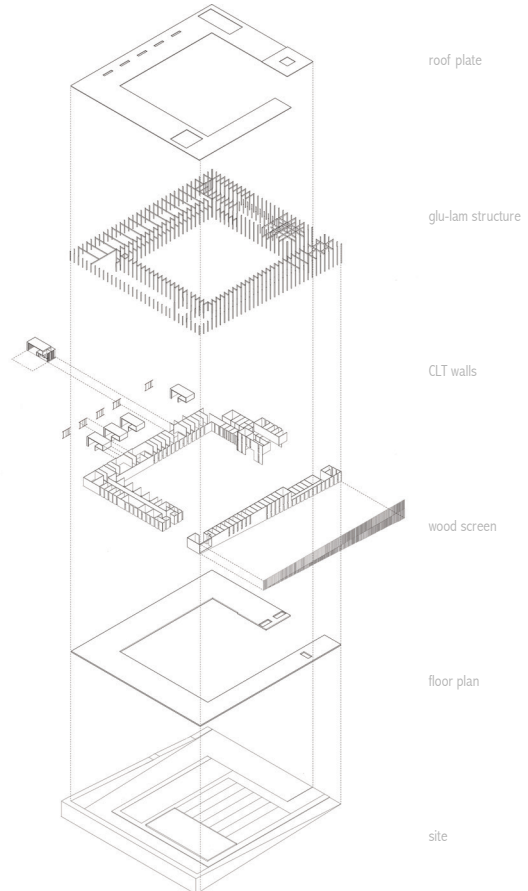




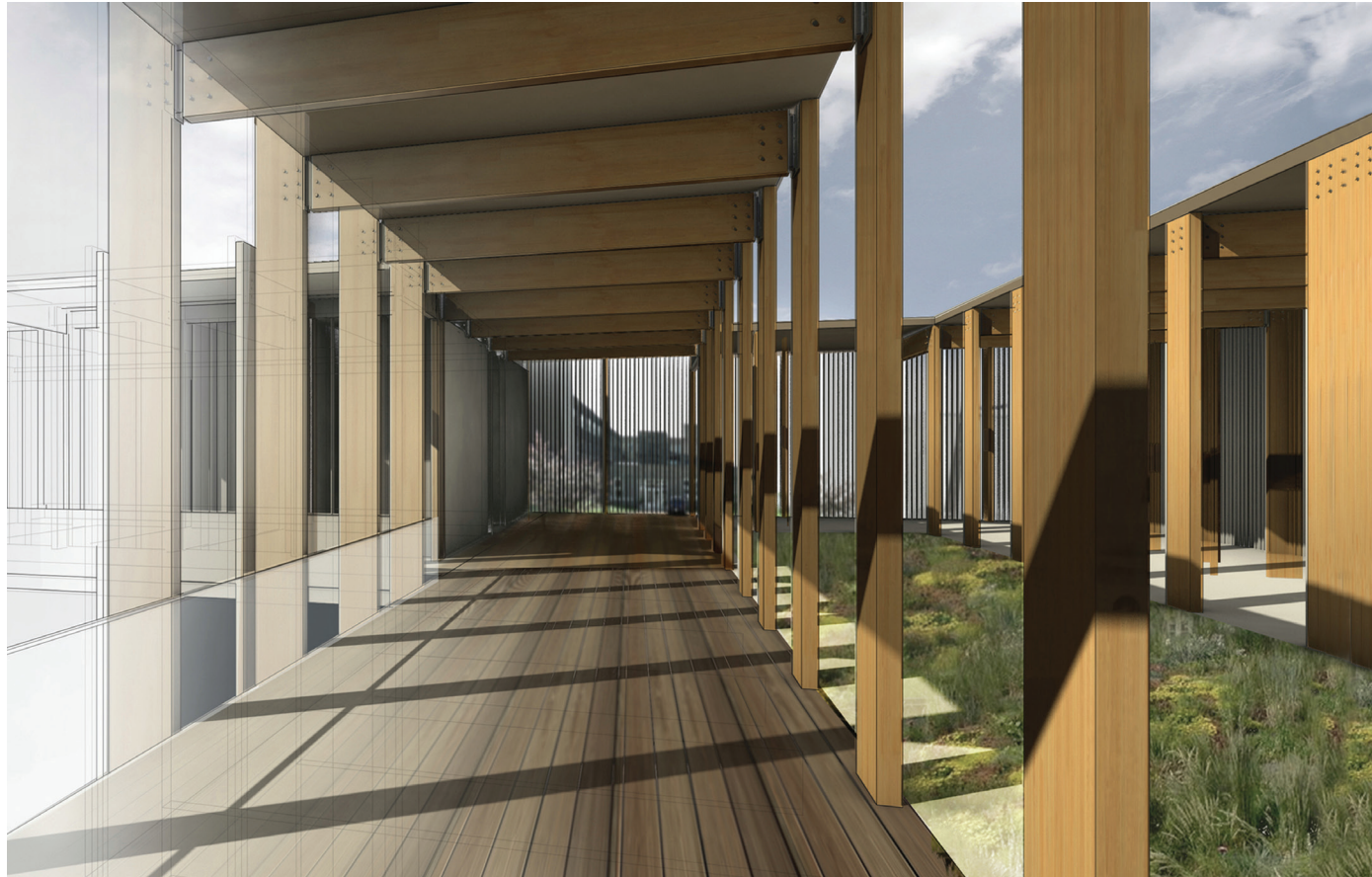


opposite
entry courtyard

right:
site model



opposite:
library
exploded axonometric
cloister







opposite:
church

right:
section models of sanctuary
exterior east facade

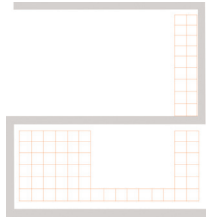
PATH | Amanda Marcott, Patrick Wesley, Sky Yin

The project is anchored by a colonnade meandering through the site and a covered path that organizes the site, unifies the various programmatic features of the monastery complex, and offers a choreographed procession from the church at one corner of the property to the sculptural, freestanding bell tower at the other. The building program engages the path in multiple areas. Echoing the Capuchin Order's strong sense of community and its efforts to reach out and connect to the people they serve, the individual friary cells are two-sided rooms that open up to both the colonnade along the friary's outside perimeter and the cloister on the other side, offering friars the opportunity to use the path as a terrace that engages with the public realm or, alternatively, find privacy and silence in the building's internalized courtyard. The sanctuary and community spaces of the church visually connect to the path and spatially spill onto it, allowing the public to interact and participate, actively or passively, in church events and activities. The rest of the site is occupied by a landscaped orchard, its natural topography and lack of order reading against the geometric discipline and structural consistency of the meandering colonnade and the buildings it anchors.

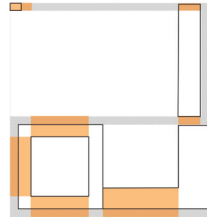


left:
site model
section model

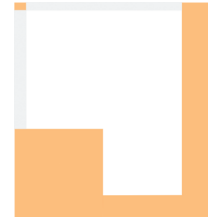
opposite:
concept diagrams
exterior NE corner



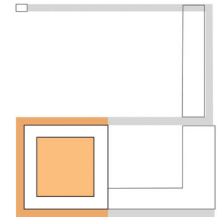
site organization



path activation

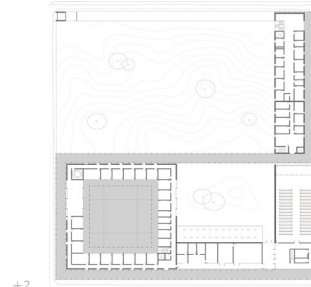


site permeability

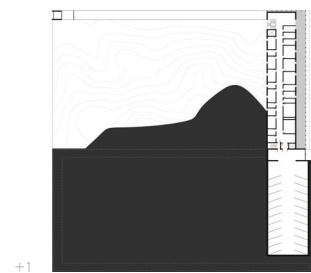


friar cell space extension

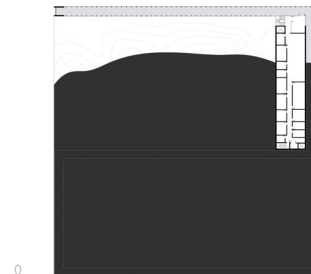




+2



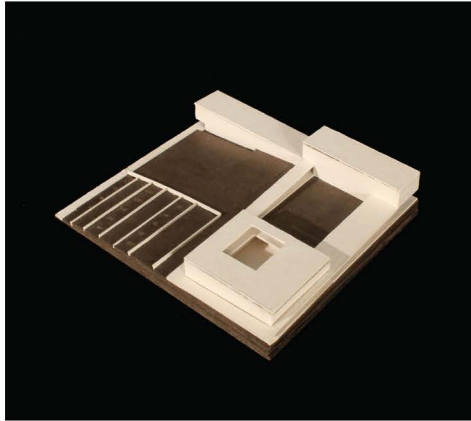
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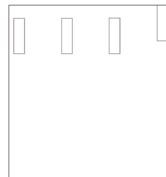
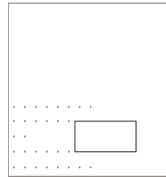
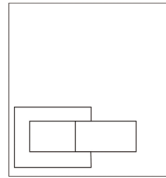
left:
church and path perspectives
floor plans

opposite:
concept studies
friary



PODIUM | Michael Duncan, Lindsay Gregory

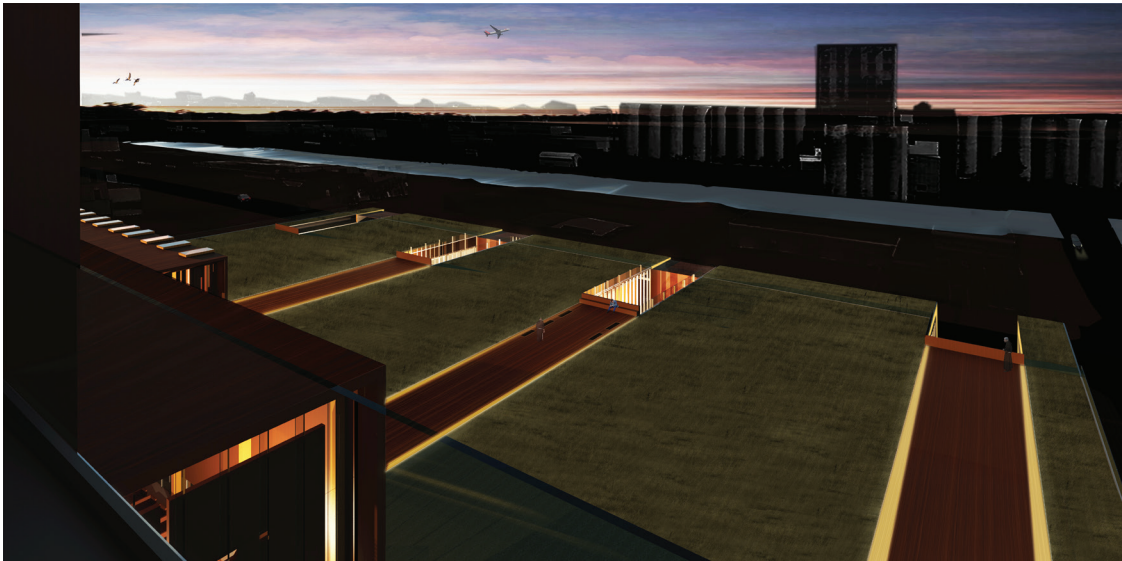
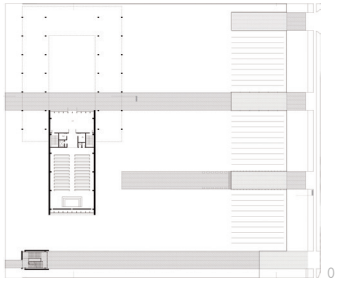
Located at the threshold between a dense residential neighborhood and large industrial buildings, our design explores the possibilities of sharing space with the surrounding community, offering a radical alternative to the conception of a monastery as an introvert, fortress-like structure and appropriately expressing the Capuchins' non-cloistered life focused on social engagement. A concrete plinth occupies the entire property and negotiates the steep slope of the existing topography, creating a publicly accessible podium with a vegetated roof plane that covers the plinth and folds down to transform into a green façade system along Bruce Street. Four courtyards cut into the plinth provide natural light and private outdoor access to the soup kitchen, health clinic, and homeless shelter housed within the plinth. The friary is a courtyard building lifted off the ground plane, allowing people to pass beneath it and enjoy the ample green space and views of the Menomonee Valley and the monumental grain silos just north of the site. The church is the only object that rests directly on the plinth, its volume seemingly slipping past the friary to form a cloister, one that is open to the public and provides the main access to the sanctuary.



concept diagrams

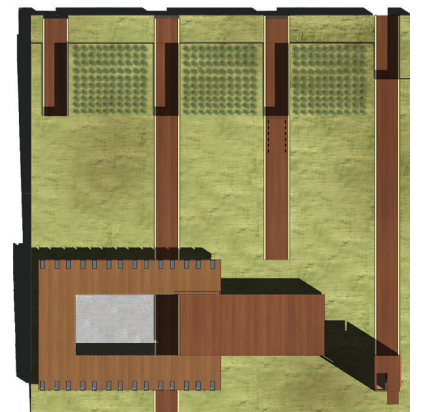
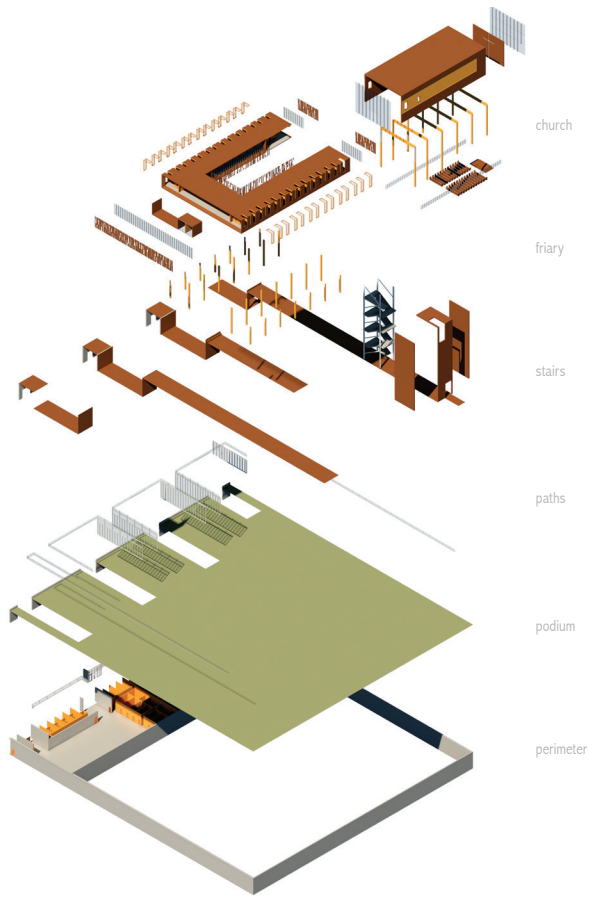
opposite:
view from Bruce Street





left:
floor plans
vegetated podium

opposite:
exploded axonometric
site plans

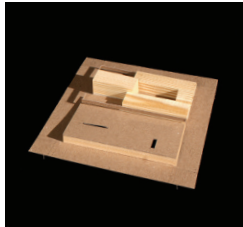
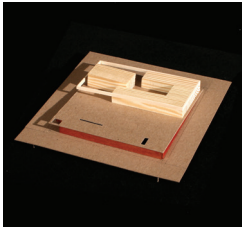
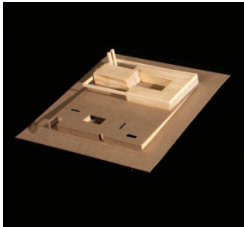




left:
cloister
east elevation

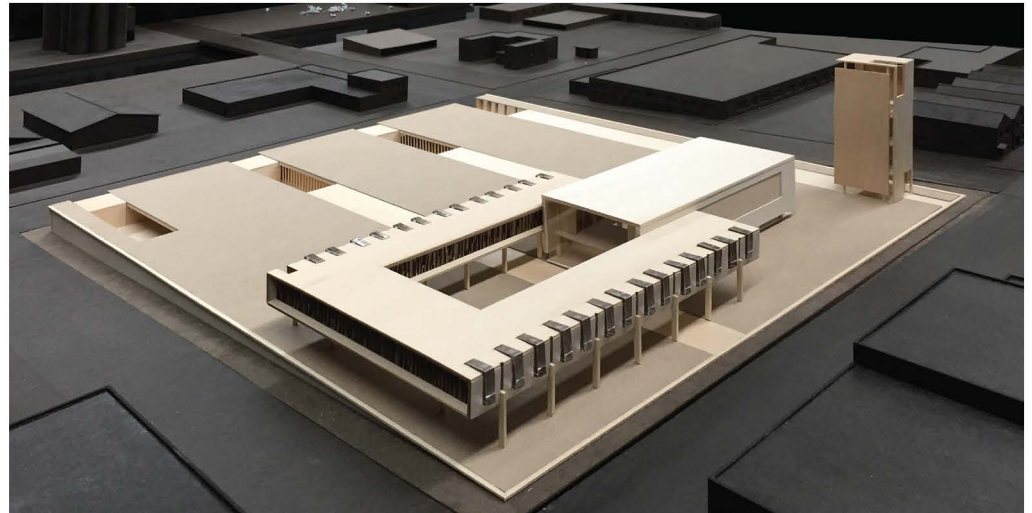
opposite:
site model





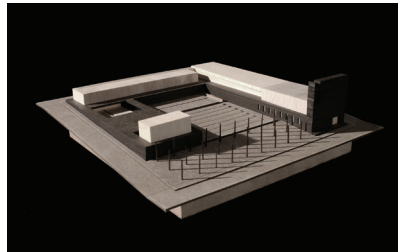
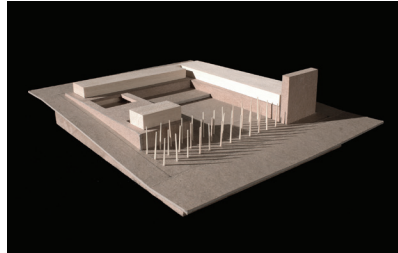
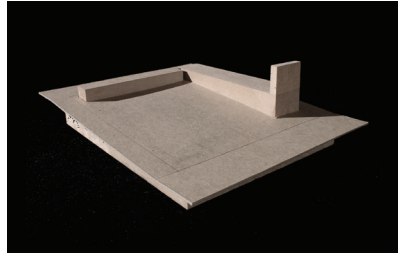
left:
section model
massing studies

opposite:
exterior northeast corner
site model



INTERLOCK | Christian Gluvna, Ben Penlesky

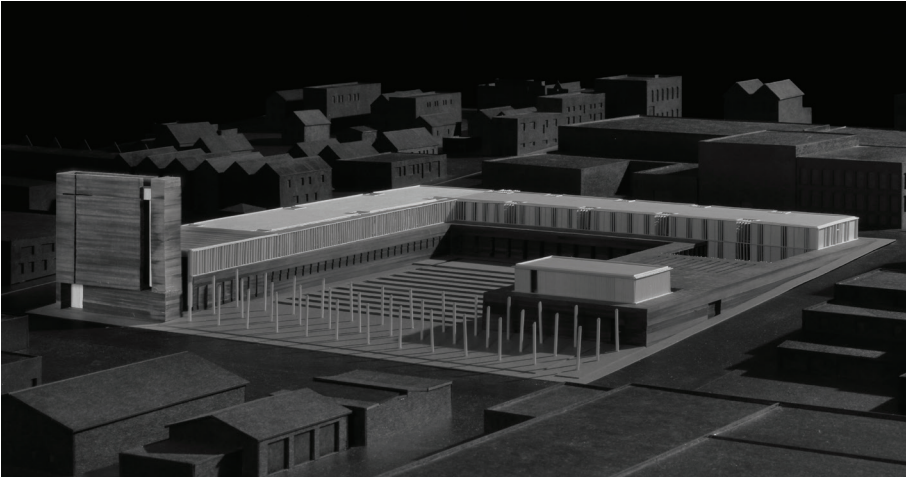
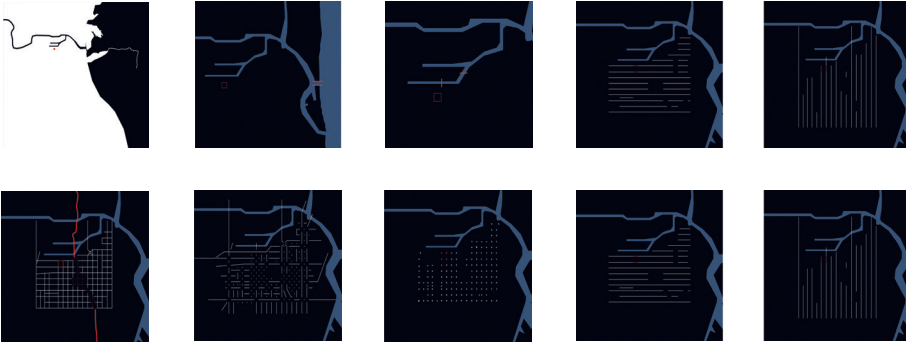
The urban friary bordering Milwaukee's Walker's Point and Menomonee Valley neighborhoods is conceived as intertwining wood and concrete forms wrapping three sides of the site to enclose a centralized garden. The site remains open at the northern end, with rows of low fruit trees forming a thick border between interior and exterior worlds. The orchard space also serves as a link in a conceptual chain of vegetated zones, connecting the highly cultivated garden of the friary with the native wetlands of the Menomonee Valley, whose restoration is currently underway. The striated concrete plinth establishes the boundaries of the built form, mediates the sloping ground condition, and references the unapologetic pragmatism of the industrial buildings dotting the valley to the north. The concrete plinth folds up at the northeast corner to form the bell tower and church frontispiece. The wood volume sits atop the plinth, loosely mirroring its path while at times digging into and carving away at the concrete base to create spaces of spiritual significance—the church, the cloister, the crypt. This wood form is clad in vertical boards and fins that create a rhythm of shadows and openings across the façade, adding material warmth and an architectonic scale that befits the residential neighborhood to the south.



left:
massing studies

opposite:
right perspective



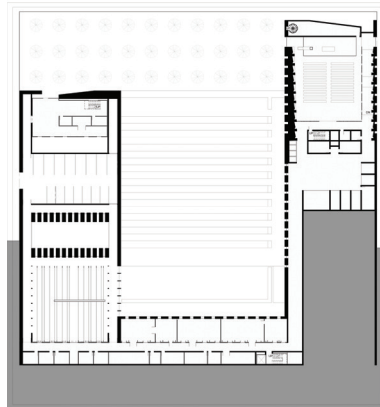
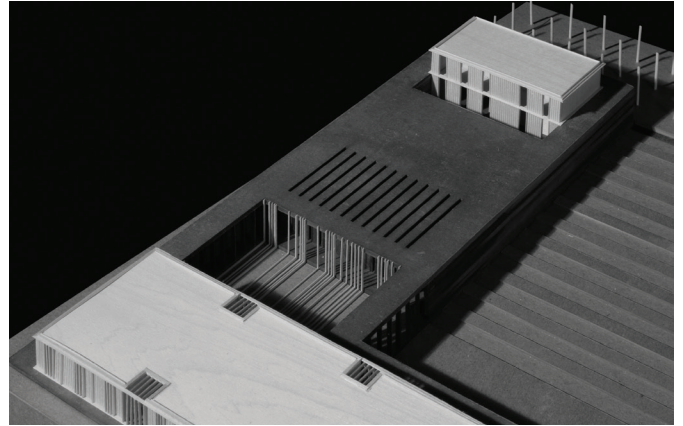
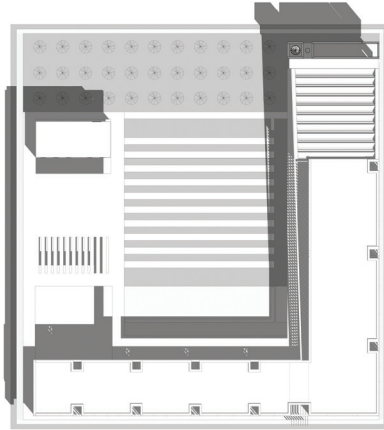


left:
analytical site diagrams
site model

opposite:
church



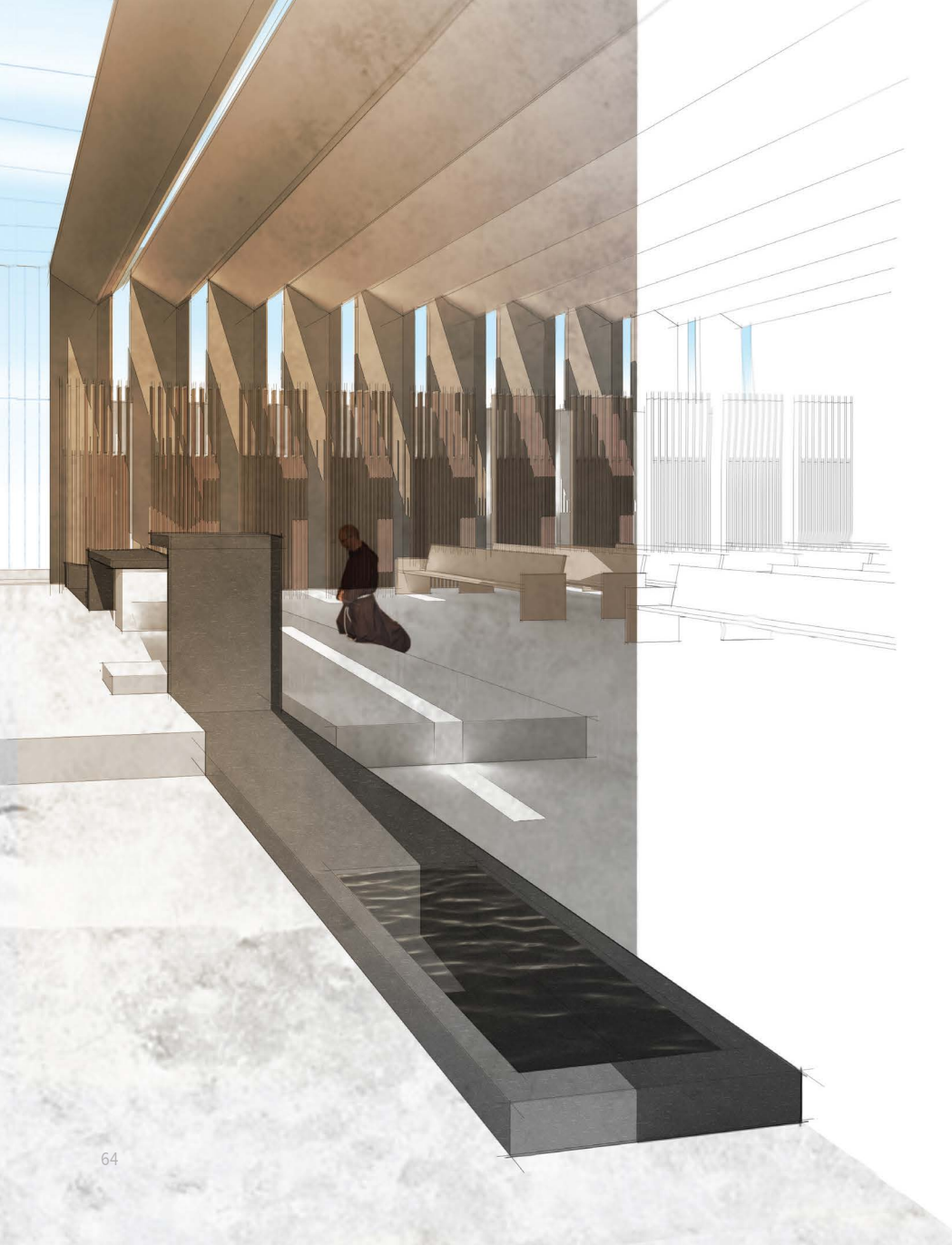


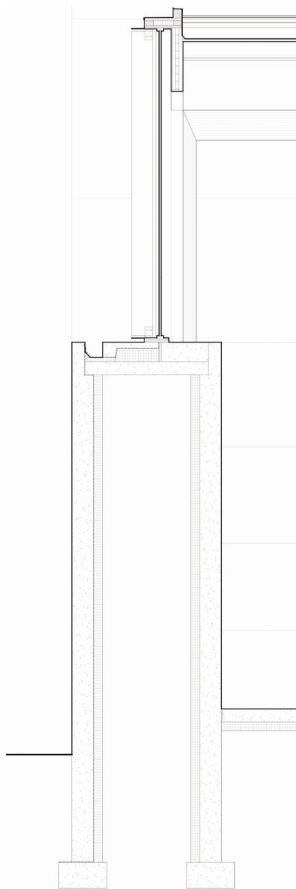


opposite:
baptismal font and altar

from left:
roof plan
floor plan
cloister model
crypt

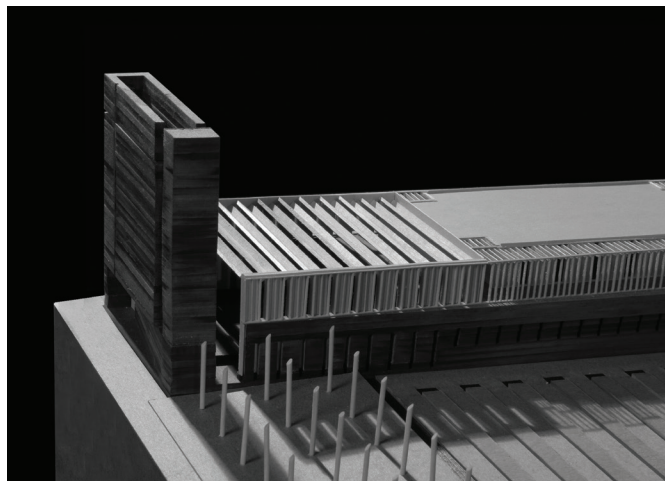
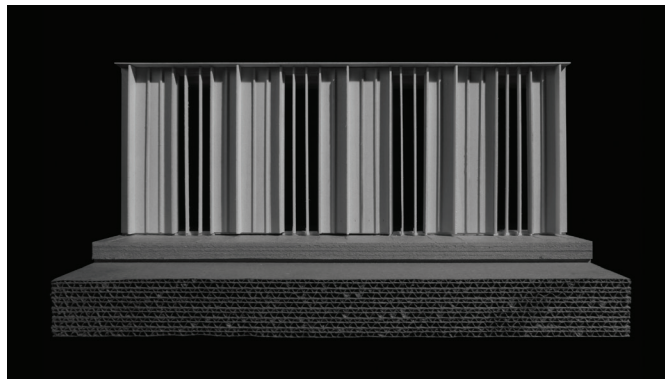
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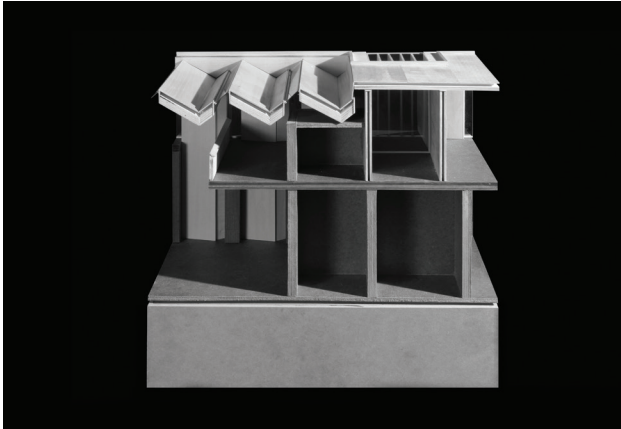
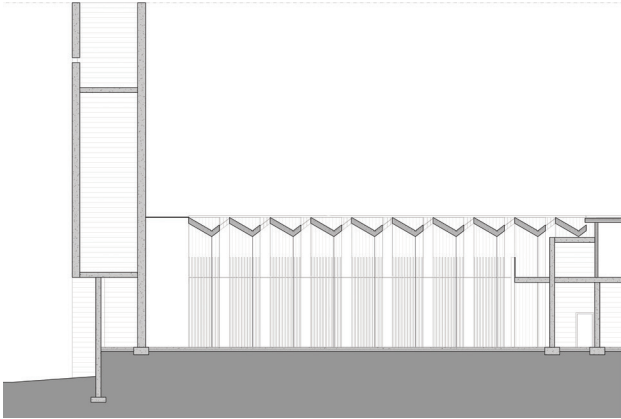




opposite:
church

from left:
wall section
facade study
bell tower model

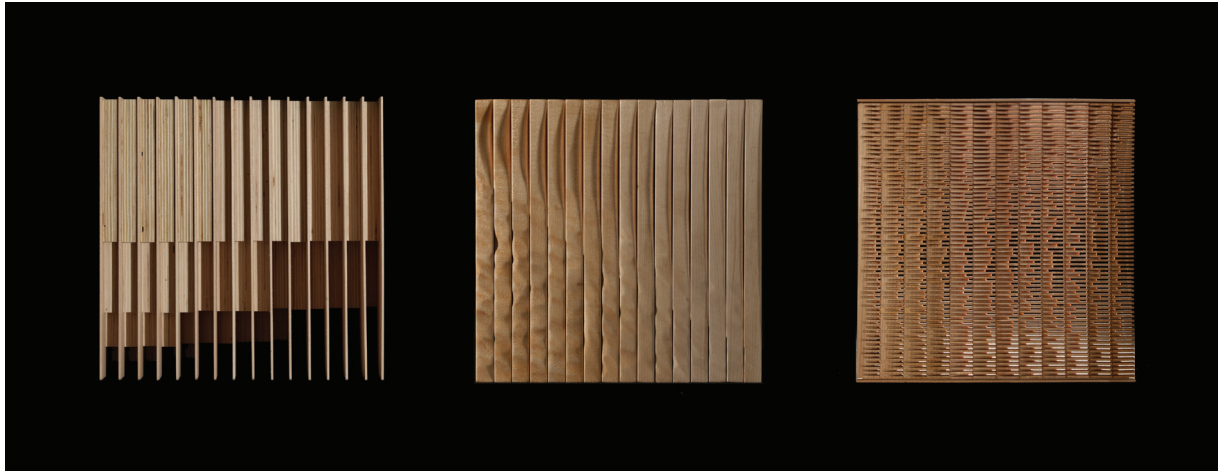
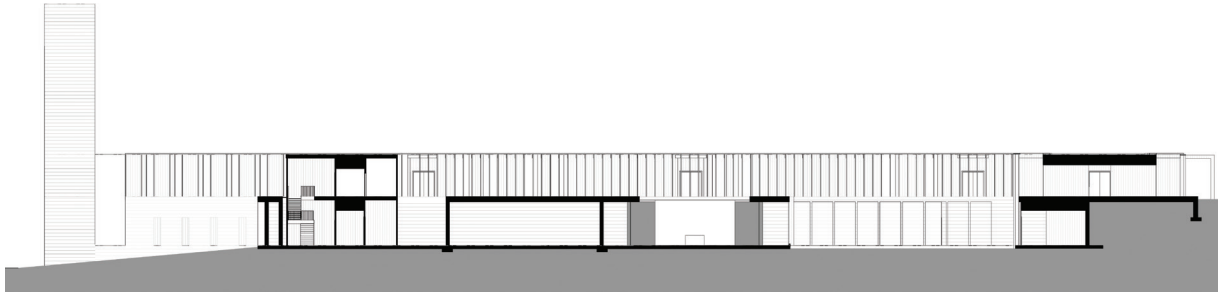




left:
section through church
section model

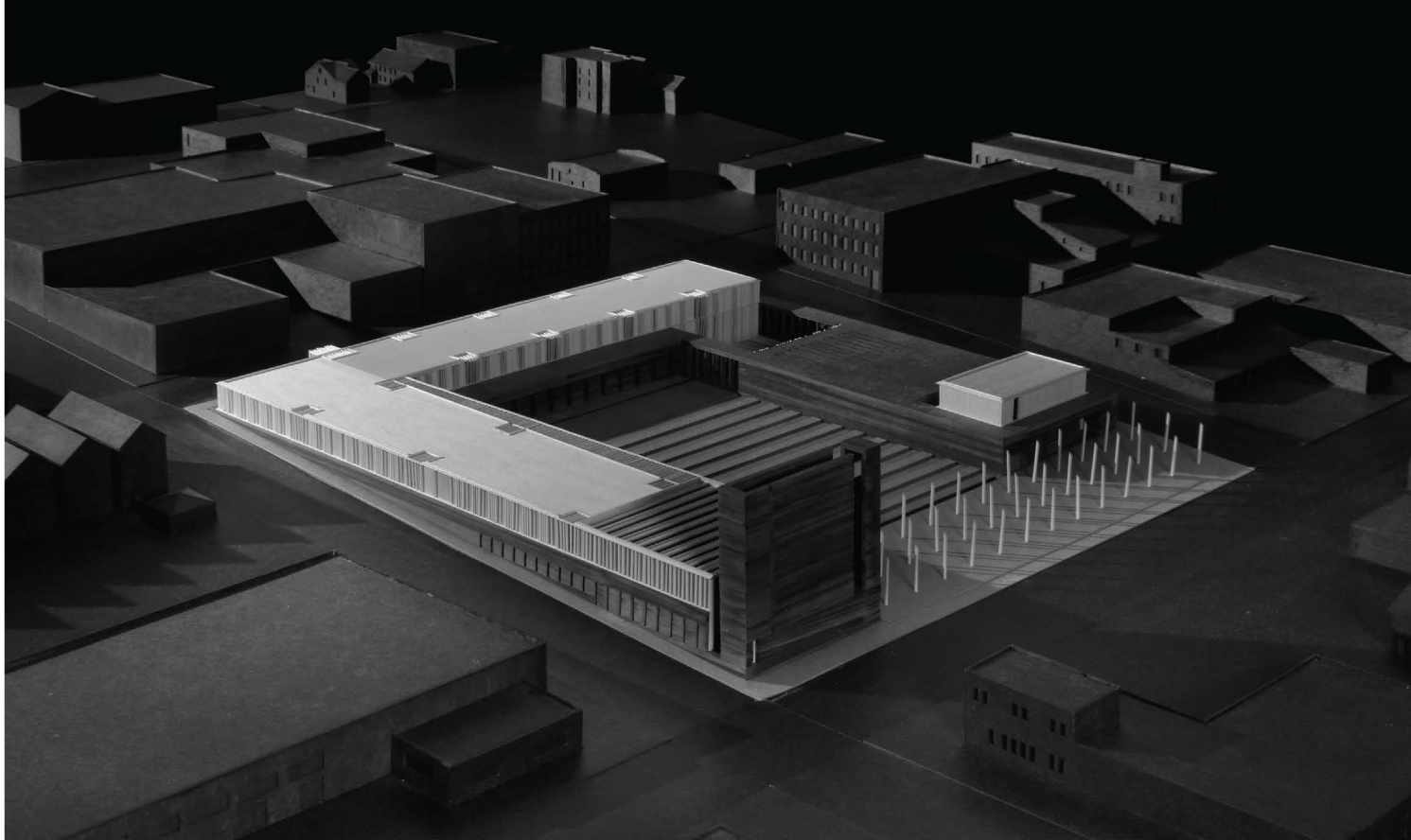
opposite:
church

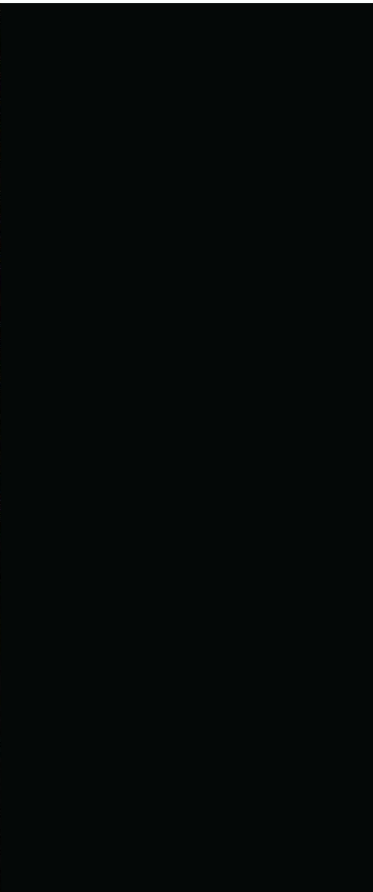




left:
building section
facade studies

opposite:
site model





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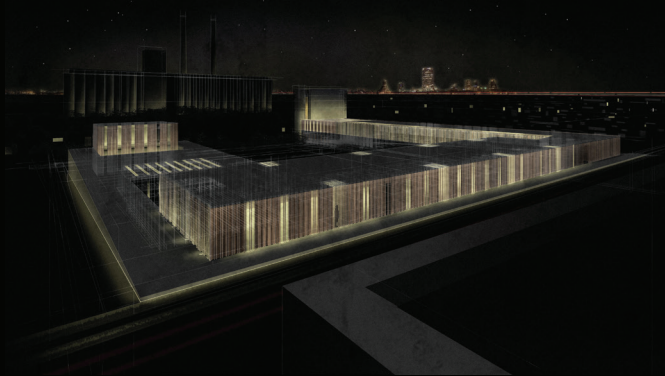
This studio would have been impossible to organize without the generous help from the Capuchin Province of St. Joseph and from Colleen Crane at the Provincial Public Relations Office. We are indebted to Capuchin Friar Mark Joseph Costello, a trained interior designer and liturgical consultant from Chicago, who generously donated his precious time to visit the studio several times throughout the semester, patiently sharing his knowledge and wisdom with the students.

The students greatly benefited from the sharp eyes of our invited critics, a group of distinguished practitioners and academics from here and abroad whose constructive input at critical junctures of our semester-long design investigations was invaluable: Brian Phillips, Principal at Interface Studio Architects in Philadelphia, PA; Kay Hartmann, Design Director at KLH in London, UK; Scott Pollock, Department of Architecture at Jade University of Applied Sciences in Oldenburg, Germany; Matt Christianson, P.E., Principal at Core4 Engineering; and local practitioners Chris Ludwig, AIA, Tom Joy, Eric Ponto and Marc Roehrl; and from the Department of Architecture, Associate Professor and Chair Karl Wallick, Assistant Professor Kyle Reynolds, and Associate Professor Gil Snyder, whom we thank for sharing our enthusiasm about the emerging field of mass timber technologies and its ramifications for contemporary architecture.



"Again we decree that the monasteries which are to be built shall be built as humbly as possible, from mud and twigs, or from rock and clay where twigs cannot be had easily. We also decree (...) that absolutely all vanity, superfluity and precious things of gold, silver, silk or velvet shall be banished from our churches..."

from the Capuchin Statutes of Albacina (1529)



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