



SARAH AJRAM

PORTFOLIO

INTERIOR DESIGN

2024

Awarded Best Portfolio



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Blake Centre for Illustration

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Project: Quentin Blake
Centre for Illustration.

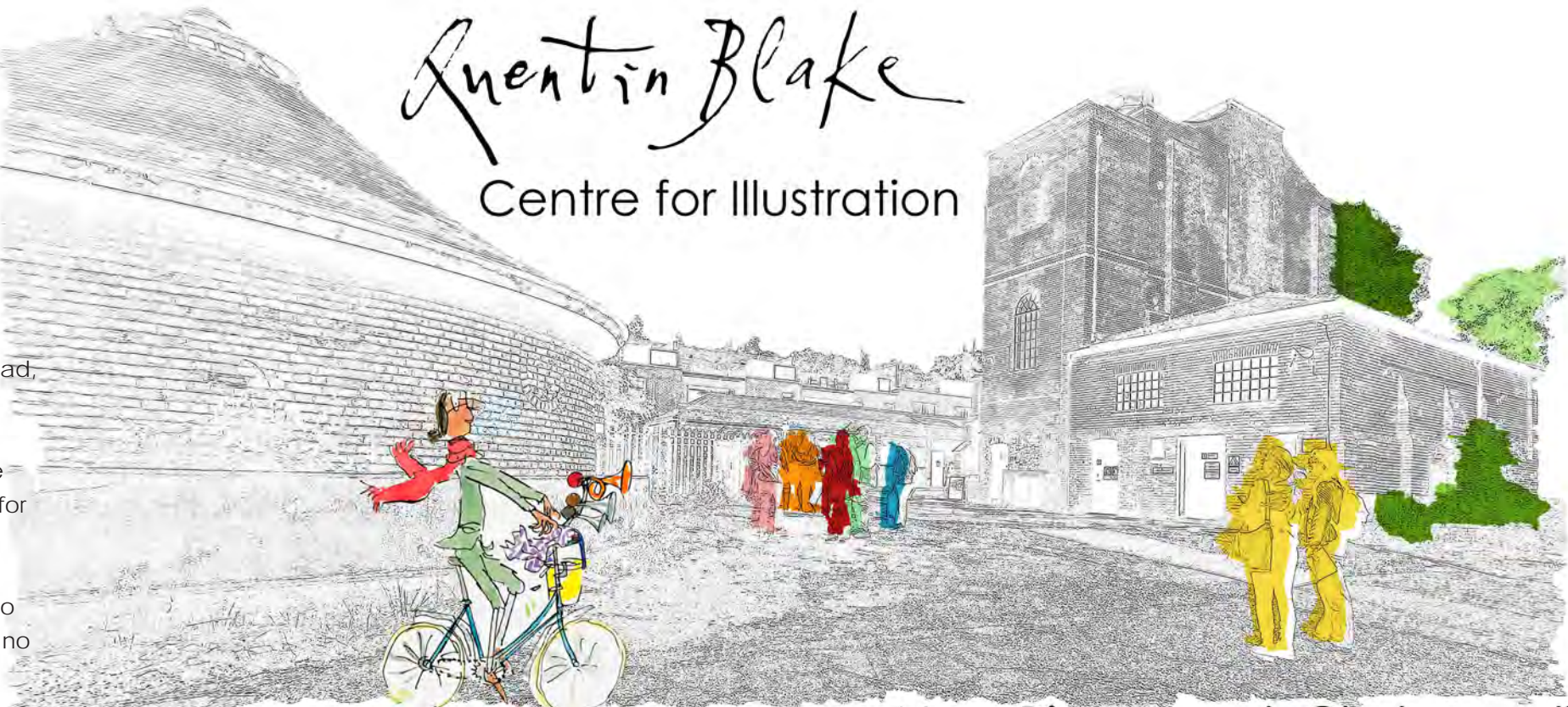
Type: Academic,
London Metropolitan
University.

Date: 2024-25

Location: New River Head,
Clerkenwell.

Objective: Choose one
of the buildings on site for
Adaptive Re-use.

Challenges: Grade II, no
natural light, small and no
ventilation.



Photography & Photoshop.

New River Head, Clerkenwell

The Quentin Blake Centre has recently relocated to a new home in Clerkenwell, situated on the historic site of New River Head, a location with a complex history. We have been invited to design a new space within the existing site that aligns with the ethos of the Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration. The proposed design should connect to the building, either to its palimpsest and/or contextually with the history of the surrounding area.

NEW RIVER HEAD

The Quentin Blake Centre of Illustration occupies a 0.17-hectare site in Clerkenwell's **New River Head** Conservation Area, comprising four Grade II listed buildings: the Engine House, Boiler House, Coal Store, and Windmill Base. Located between Amwell Street and Myddelton Passage, the site has **contrasting** qualities. Some areas feel **stark** and **utilitarian**, while others hold more character and potential. The Myddelton Passage entrance offers a far more **engaging** arrival, with pathways, closely set buildings, and mature trees creating a natural sense of sequence, enhanced by the sounds of birdsong. By contrast, the Amwell Street entrance feels **bare** and uninviting, its openness and lack of features amplified by traffic noise from the main road. These observations suggest that approaching the site from Myddelton Passage would create a more appealing and memorable first impression.



Aerial view

KEY

Unwelcoming	Noise: Hum	Illustrious
Prison-like	Windy	Warm
Cold	Noise: Roar (Flightpath)	Neglected
Industrial	Enclosed	Dark/ Stale
Bare	Peaceful	Sloped/Uneven
Car Noise	Chirping Birds	Isolated
Aged	Breezy/ Happy Place	Leafy
Barren	Whimsical	Welcoming



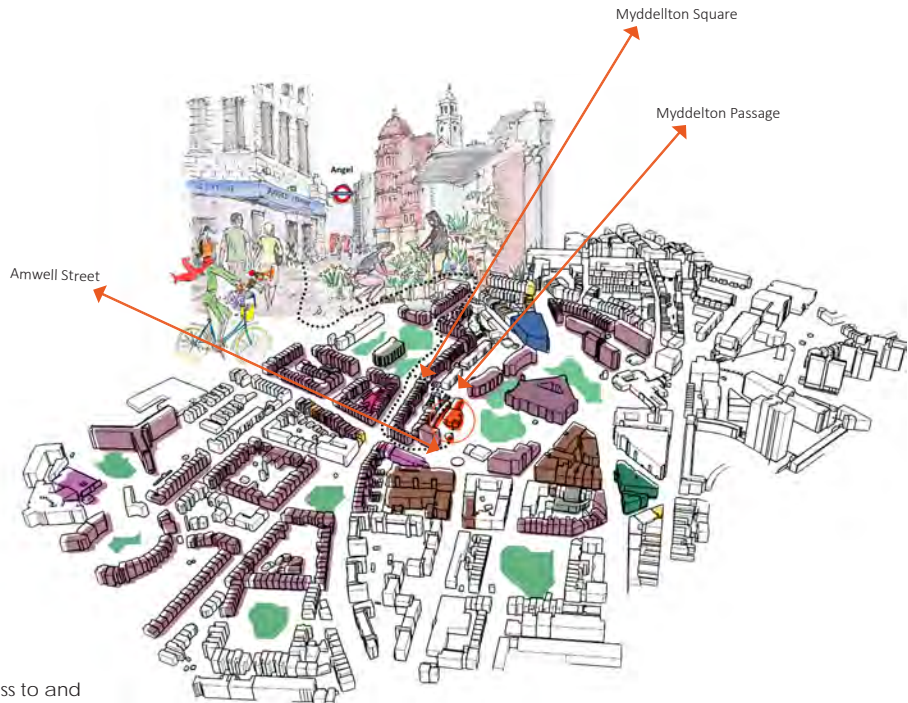
SENSORY

LIGHT BEHAVIOUR



CLERKENWELL CHARM

Clerkenwell is a lively district known for its mix of creative studios, design showrooms, and historic institutions, alongside residential squares and schools such as Hugh Myddelton Primary. The area draws a wide community of students, office workers, families, and visitors to landmarks like Exmouth Market, Sadler's Wells Theatre, and St John's Gate. With its blend of heritage, education, and a strong design and cultural scene, Clerkenwell provides a ready audience for Quentin Blake's Centre for Illustration's new location.



	The Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration (New River Head)
	Residential
	Cafe
	Schools and Nurseries
	Urdang City University of London
	Sadler's Wells Theatre
	Businesses: Design
	Furniture Shops
	Green Spaces
	Churches

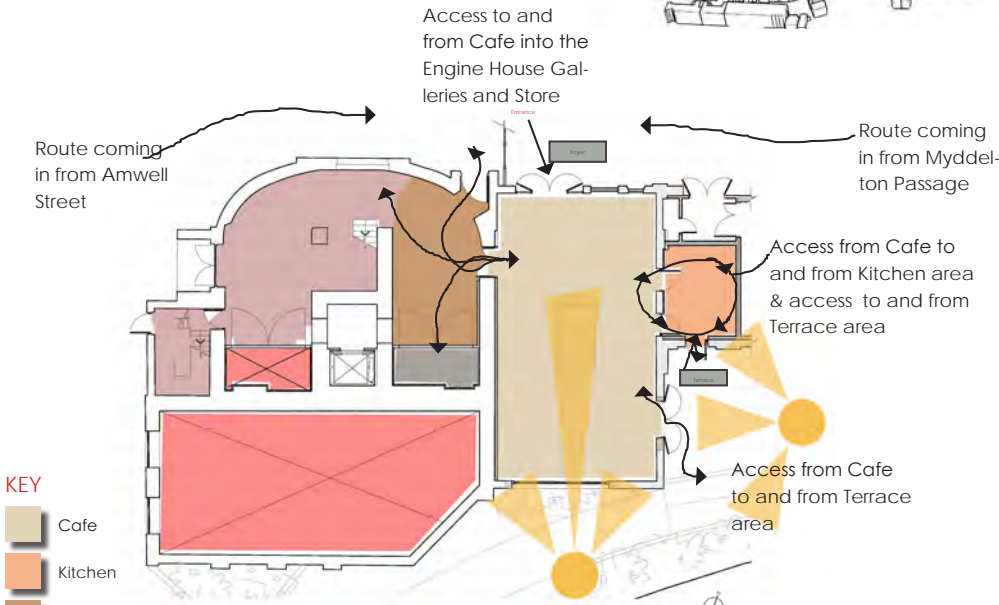
DETAILS



KEY

	Cafe
	Kitchen
	Access area from Engine House Galleries
	Engine House Galleries
	Store
	Plant and Pump House: Unusable Space

LAYOUT





My trace and sketch of the rust surface.

My exploration began with site photography, focusing on textures and overlooked details. One image in particular stood out, the **rusted** surface of a manhole cover, marked with scratches and irregular traces. These impressions resembled **ink** on a plate, a surface carrying **memory** through its marks. This observation led me back to the brief and the Heritage Interpretation Statement V1, where I uncovered Clerkenwell's strong links to the **printing industry**. The connection between this industrial fragment and the area's cultural heritage became a catalyst for my design exploration, resonating with my own personal ties to printmaking and forming the foundation for the initial concept.

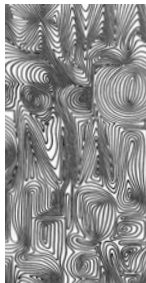
TYPOGRAPHY



Experimenting with Type (font drawn is the one used by QBC, Antique No 6) and mark-making collected from site



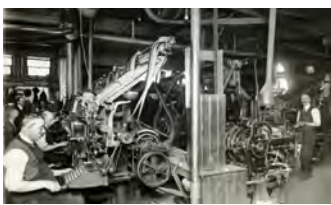
Examining ink and paper at a microscopic scale to uncover patterns and visual cues for inspiration.



Looking at patterns from typography.



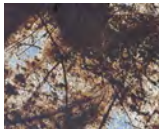
The first magazine to be published in 1731 and printed in Clerkenwell.



Looking at machinery and also the lever printing presses structure.



Kodak British head office, Clerkenwell Road, 1902.



Rusted surface close up.



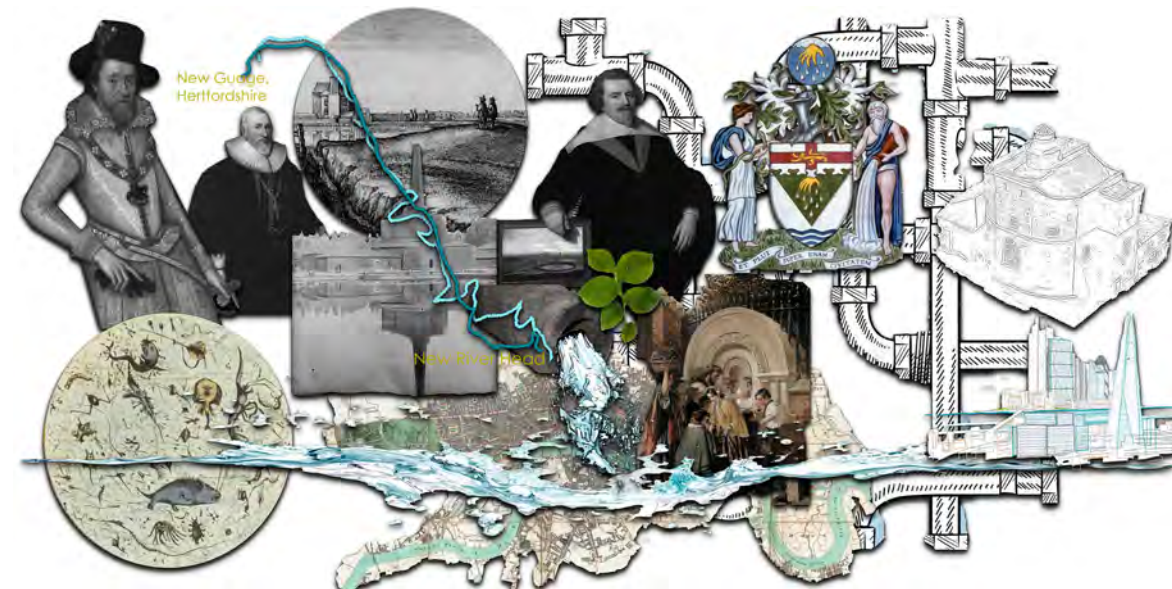
Saatchi Art, 2019 by Anne Borchardt

PRINT



Handmade collage combining print techniques with foliage imagery collected from the site.

BACK TO BASICS

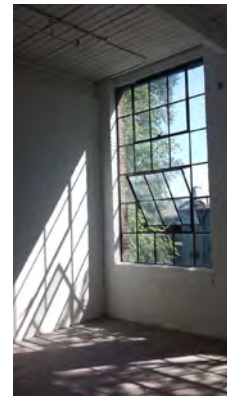


Time line Collage: Photoshop

My initial exploration into Clerkenwell's printing heritage offered interesting directions, but it soon felt misaligned with the brief. Refocusing, I grounded my concept around three **anchors: Architecture, Context, and Juxtaposition.**

Architecturally, I drew from **industrial** structures and the idea of adaptive reuse. Contextually, I connected to New River Head's **history** as a **freshwater** supplier, exploring iron as both material and motif, from engineered pipes to natural **ore formations**. To counterbalance this, I introduced elements from the freshwater **ecosystem**, inspired by **plants** gathered on site.

This process crystallised into **Iron Rivers**, a concept for a **café** space within the New River Head site, where industrial heritage and natural systems flow together in dialogue.



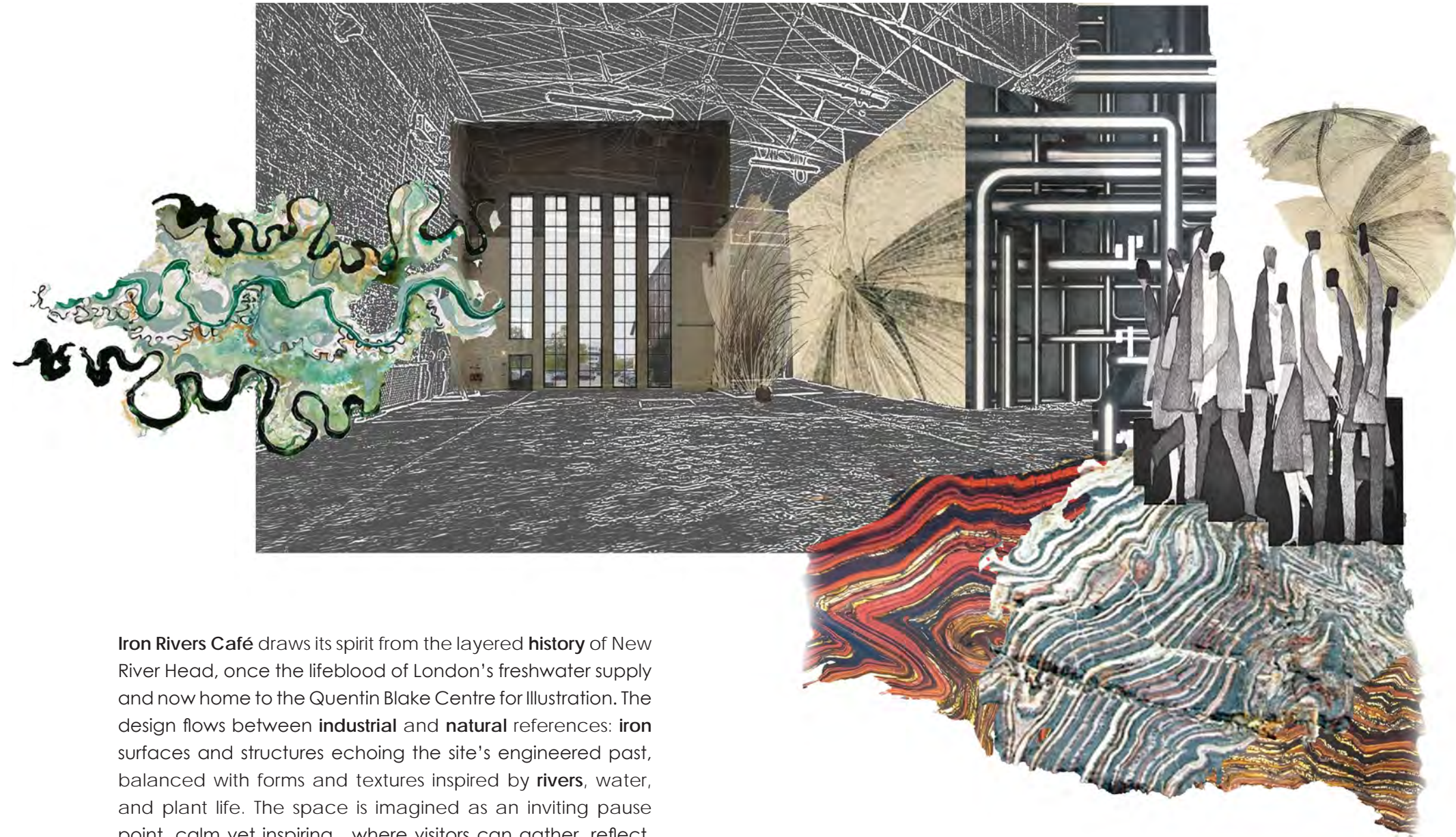
Architectural: Industrial.



Contextual: Exploring the site's historical function, with a focus on iron as a material, iron piping systems, and the industrial details and relics embedded in the site.

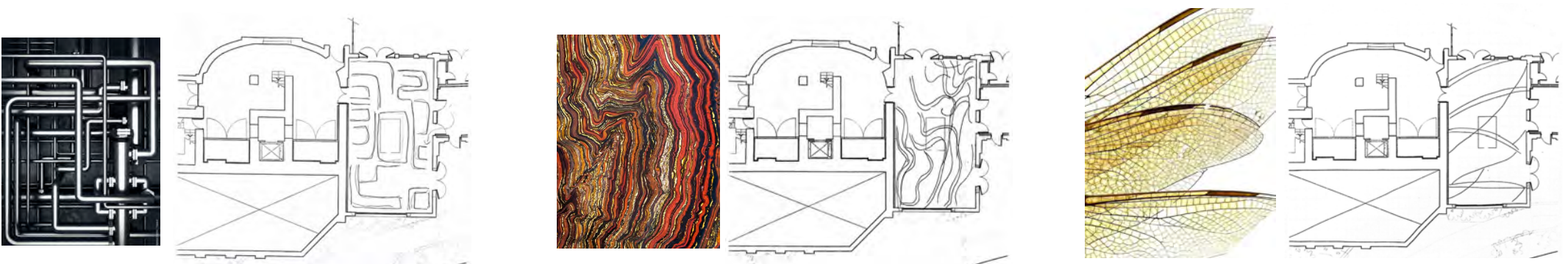


Muse: Freshwater Ecosystems



Iron Rivers Café draws its spirit from the layered **history** of New River Head, once the lifeblood of London's freshwater supply and now home to the Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration. The design flows between **industrial** and **natural** references: **iron** surfaces and structures echoing the site's engineered past, balanced with forms and textures inspired by **rivers**, water, and plant life. The space is imagined as an inviting pause point, calm yet inspiring , where visitors can gather, reflect, and connect, immersed in a dialogue between heritage and creativity.

IRON RIVERS



SPATIAL PLANNING



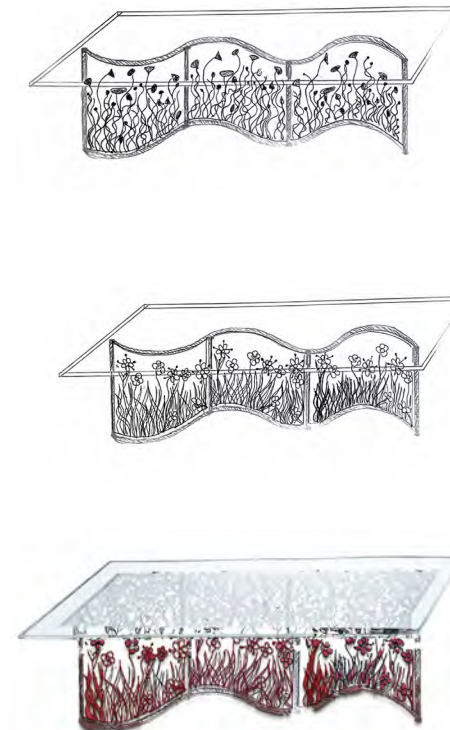
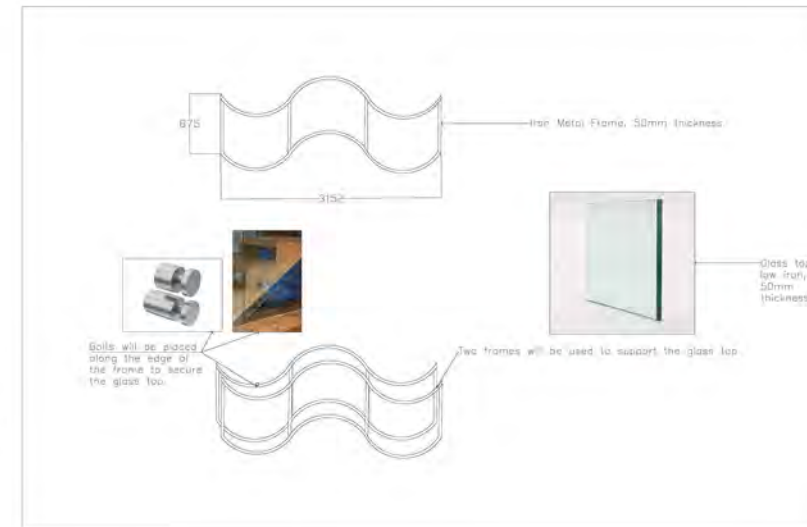
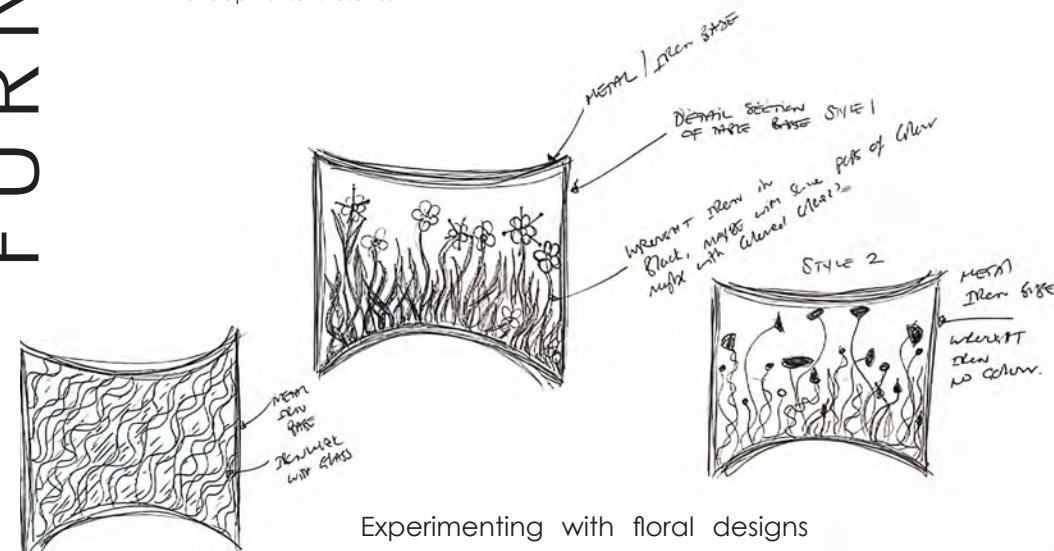
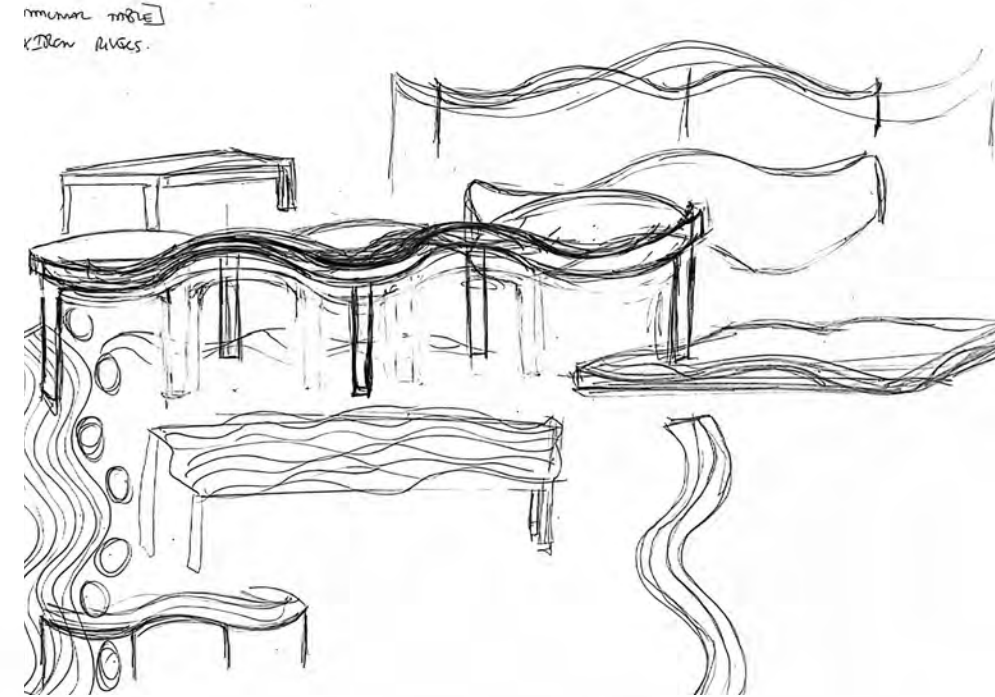
Exploring different layouts and my first one is where I am trying out the service area/counter in the centre of the room. This would take up a lot of space and may not be practical when it comes to flow from counter to kitchen and back.

Experimenting with various seating styles such as round tables and chairs, long tables, bar seating and lounge seating.

The final layout incorporates a mezzanine level, adding 376.21 sq ft of usable space and enhancing the overall spatial experience.

Exploring meandering lines and ripples to mimic the flow of rivers.

COMMUNAL TABLE



MATERIALITY

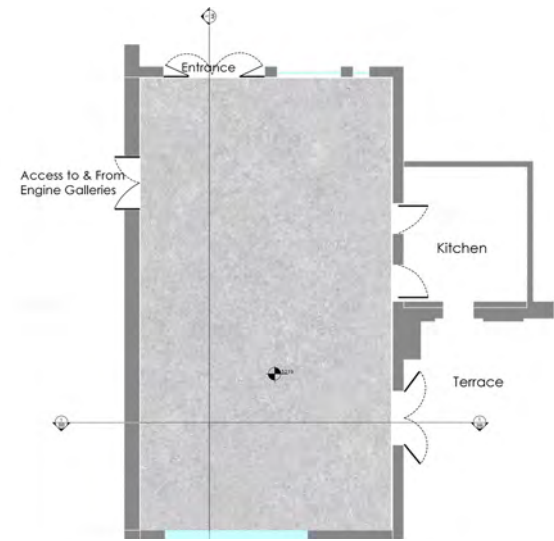
For my material palette, I have prioritised **durability**, **warmth**, and **practicality**. **Oak** is used in the reading nook (section 1 AA) and on the seat surfaces of the terrace banquettes, chosen for its density and natural resistance to insect and fungal damage. The floors and terrace banquettes (see rendered terrace section) are in **concrete**, with polished concrete specified for the flooring to create a reflective finish and allow for easy maintenance.

Tables, chairs, and stools are constructed in wrought **iron**, selected for its strength and longevity, with low-iron **glass** used for the table tops to achieve clarity and refinement. Fabrics are in heavy-duty, stain-resistant **velvet**, ensuring both durability and elegance. A **marbled velvet** pattern, inspired by natural iron formations, is introduced on the lounge seating, reading nook backboards, and bench beneath the stairs to add depth and texture.

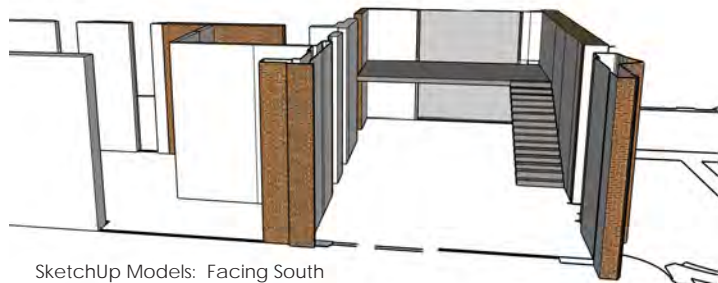
To enhance colour and character, I have specified Hammerite Ultima matt paints, **red** for the communal table and **navy** for the round café tables. This water-based finish is designed for metal and offers a lasting performance of up to twelve years.



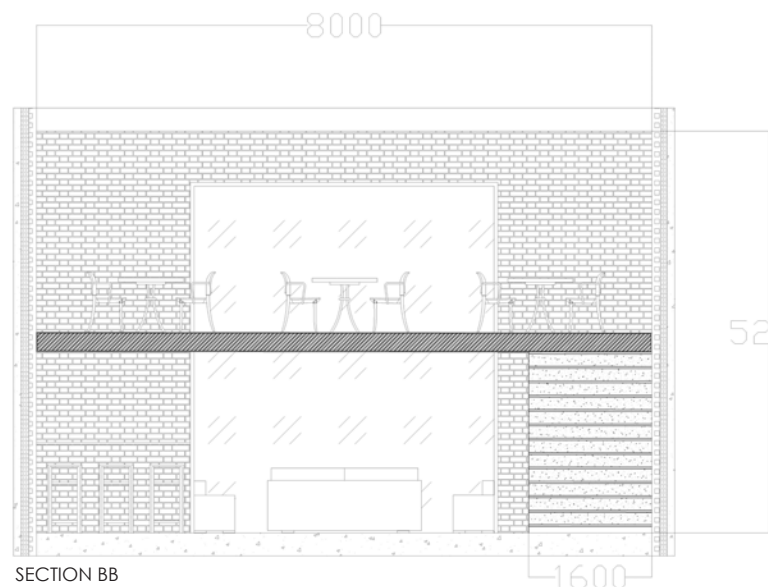
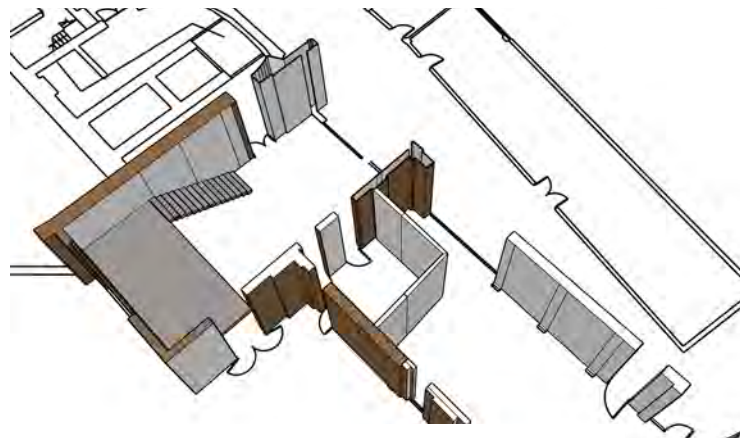
VISUALISATION



AutoCad & Photoshop



SketchUp Models: Facing South



SECTION BB



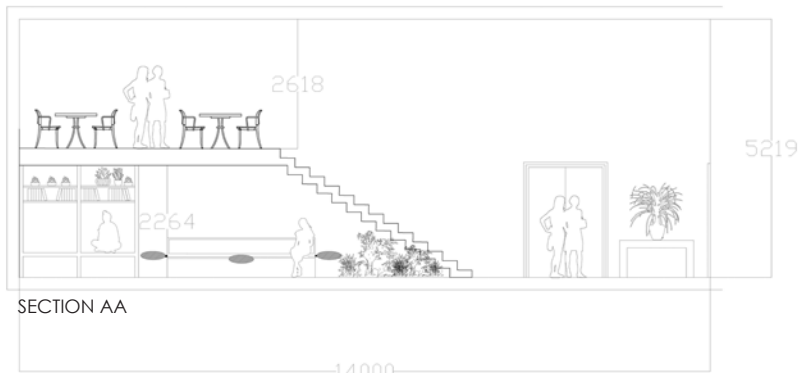
Existing interior, Boiler Room, facing South.



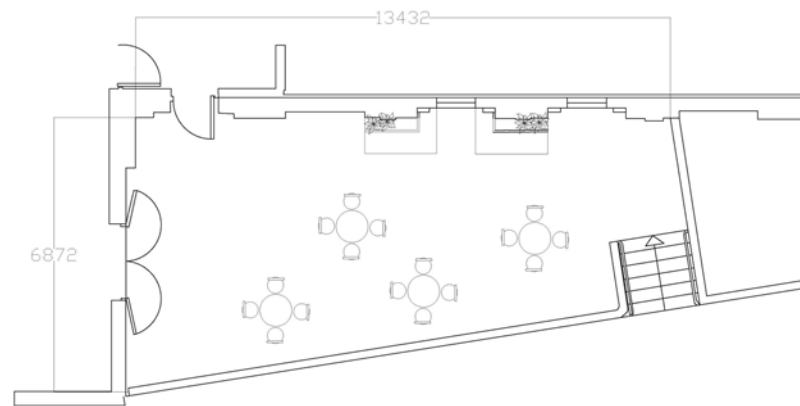
SECTION BB



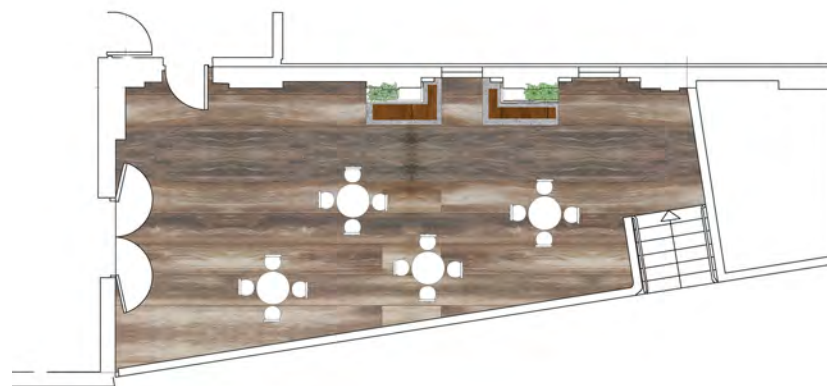
Section AA AutoCad & Photoshop



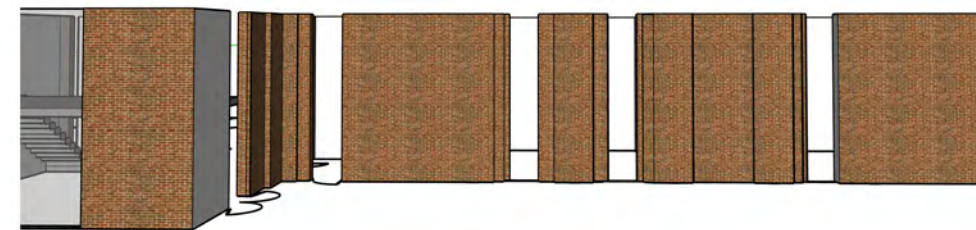
SECTION AA



Terrace Floor Plan.



PROPOSED



Existing Terrace Area, facing North.



AutoCad & Photoshop: Proposed Terrace Area, facing North.



Floral illustration adapted onto tableware and tote bags, extending the design identity across the café.

FINER DETAILS

Thank You