



Kensington Palace

Bulgarian Embassy

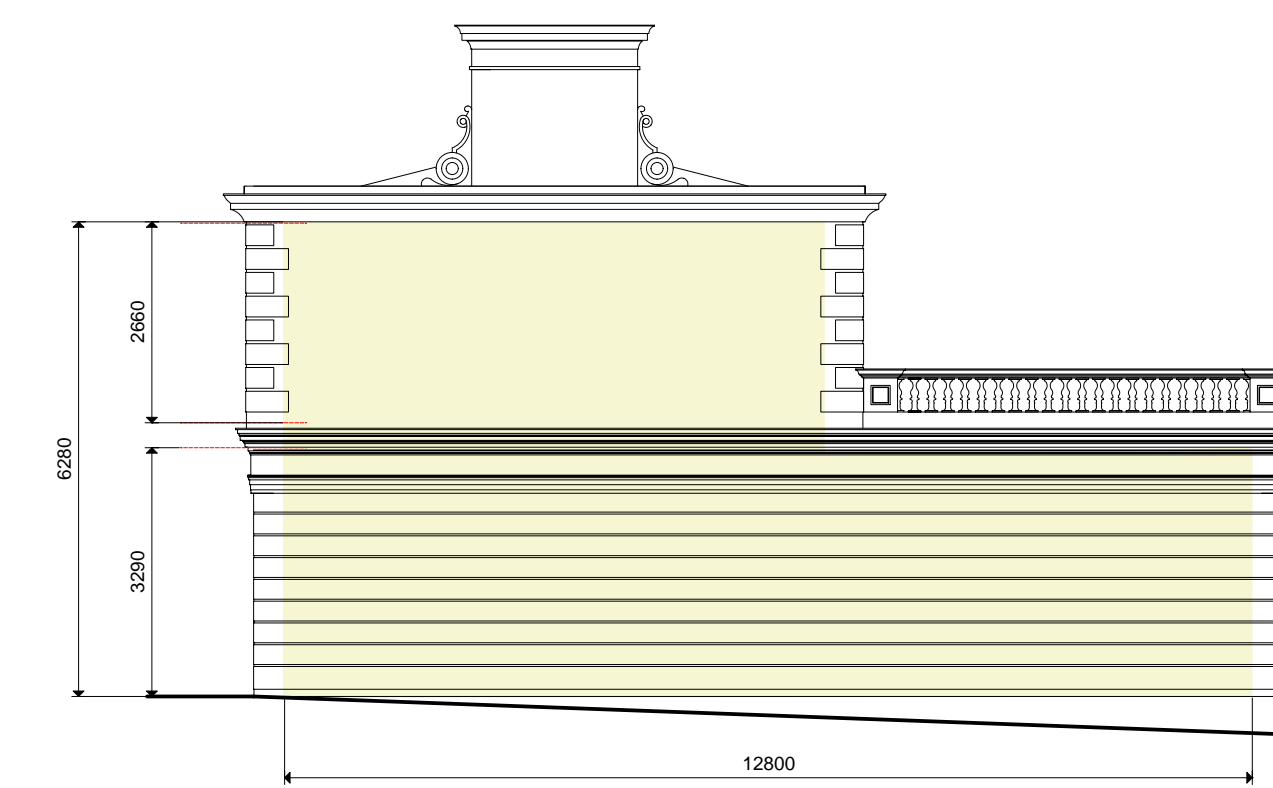
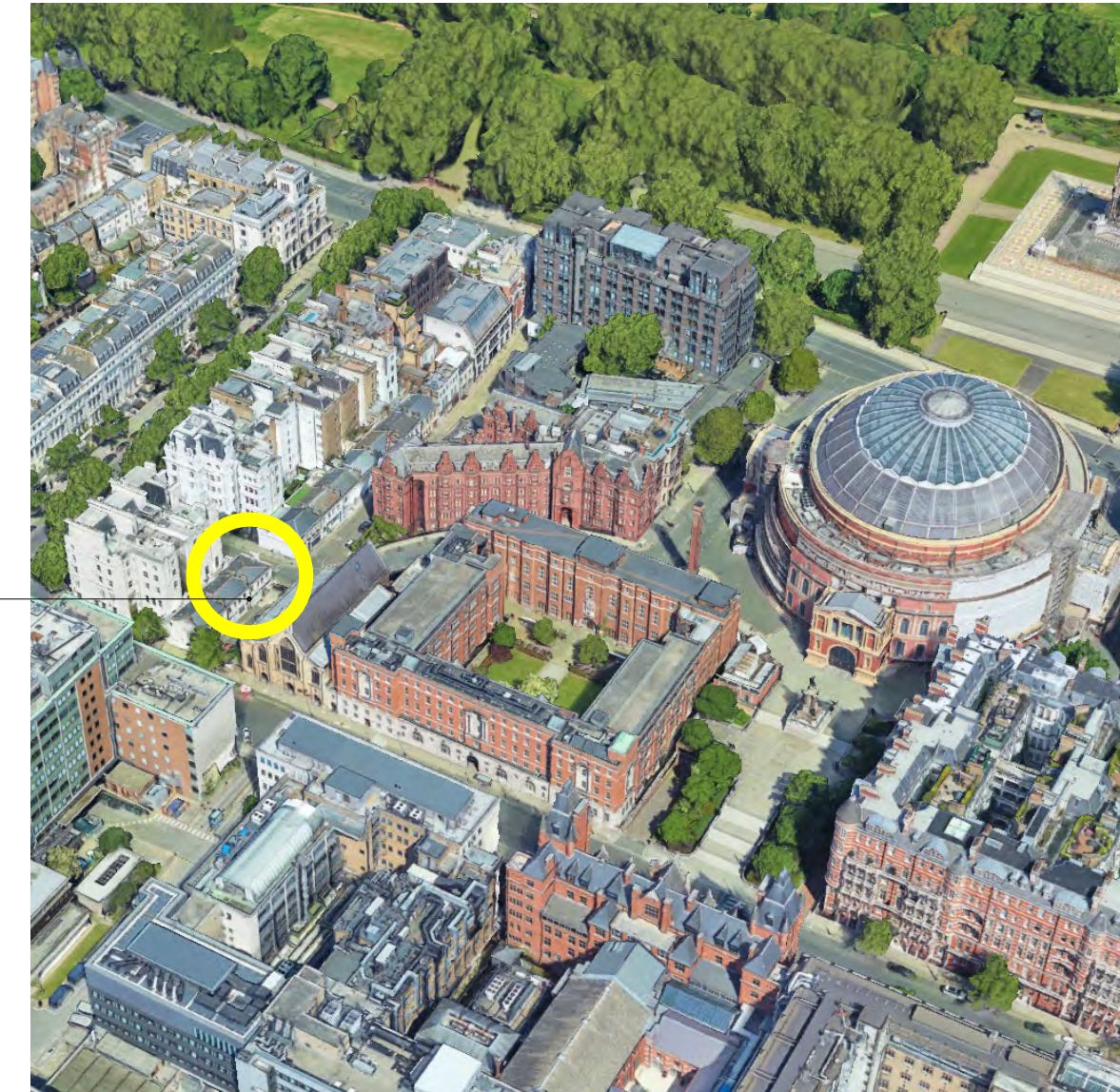
Royal Albert Hall

Hyde Park

Buckingham Palace

London Eye

St. Ivan Rilski church



North elevation (Bremner Road)



West elevation (Jay Mews)

BULGARIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH ST. JOHN OF RILA

Context and constraints

The church of St. Ivan Rilski is located at the back of the Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria in London, which is at 186-188, Queen's Gate SW7 5HL. The church, accessible from Jay Mews through Bremner Road.

Currently the church is located at the ground floor of the building at the southern corner between Bremner Road and Jay Mews. The footprint is L shaped measuring 12.8 x 8.8 meters and 3.29 m high. The project aims at maximising the space of the church, adding a garage aside the entrance (measuring around 4.5 x 7.2 m) and exploiting the footprint of the flat upstairs (8.8 x 7.2 m).

The building itself is not listed. However, it is within the Knightsbridge Conservation Area and it is surrounded by Listed buildings such as the Embassy's Building (Listed Grade II), the Holy Trinity Church (Listed Grade I) and the Queen Alexandra's House (Listed Grade II), without mentioning the Royal Albert Hall (Listed Grade I).

For that reason, any proposal will be subject to a great scrutiny from the Council and Conservation Officers. Since the building is not listed, it is likely that a transformation of its internal space will be permitted. However, the greatest attention must be given to the external appearance which should be maintained as much as possible as the existing.

All the above suggests that the approach of demolishing all internal walls and slabs to exploit the existing volume is a valuable option as long as the external fabric of the building (walls and roof) is preserved.

The proposal has been developed considering all the above constraints as a feasible proposal that, in any case, is subject to the Council's approval. The proposal should be submitted to the Council to seek Pre-Application advice and to discuss with the Council the best course of action to develop the project further to be successfully approved.



The Royal Albert Hall



The Holy Trinity Church



The Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria

CONCEPT | Magnified perception

The big challenge of the project was exploiting as much as possible the available space, creating a church with all the traditional characteristics (the dome, the nave, etc) with specific requests about the location of the altar and the access.

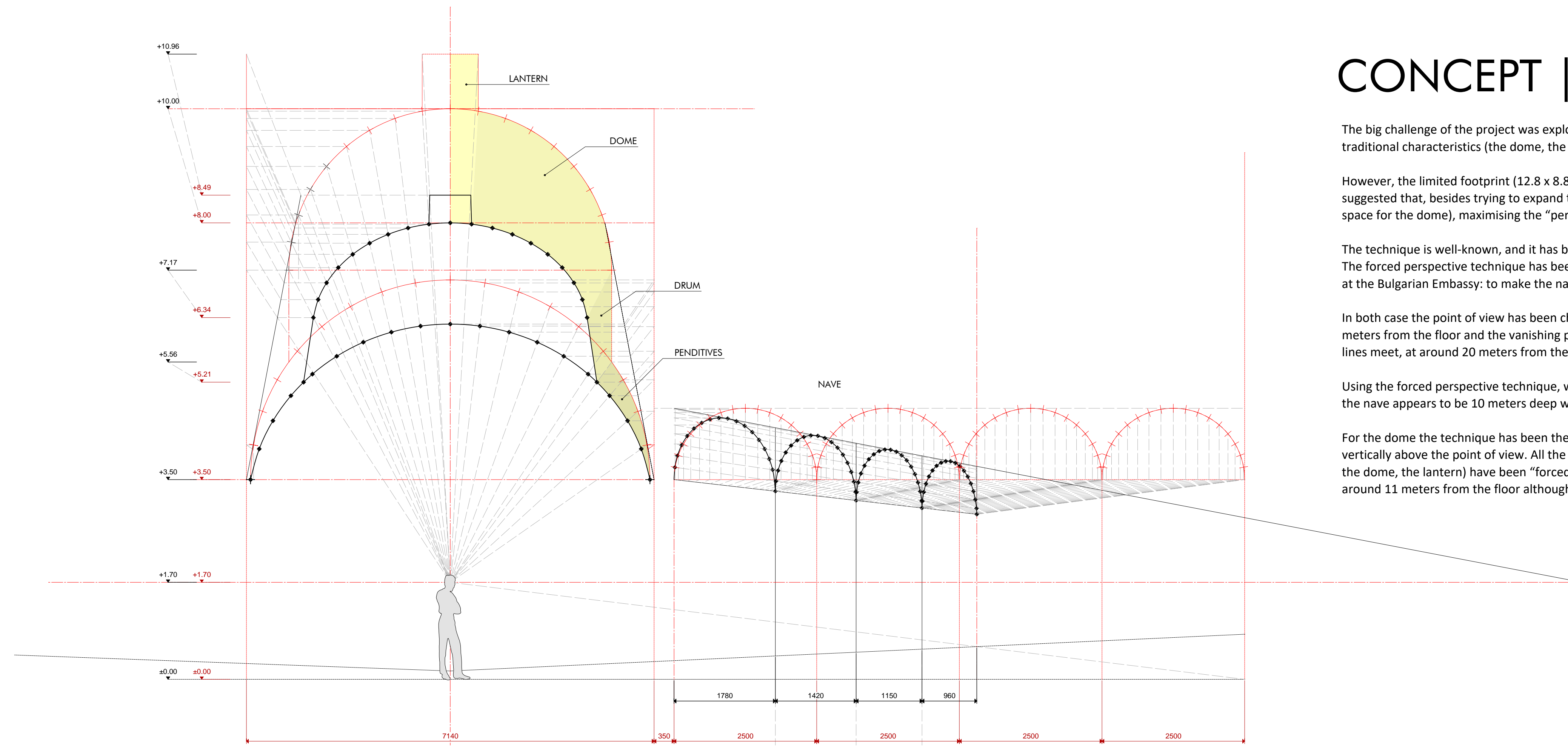
However, the limited footprint (12.8 x 8.8 m at ground floor and 7.14 x 8.89 m at first floor) with a façade less than 6.5 meters, suggested that, besides trying to expand the available space (for instance, lowering the ground level to gain a bit of ceiling space for the dome), maximising the “perception” of the space was an option worth to be explored.

The technique is well-known, and it has been use in architecture for centuries: it is the so called “forced perspective”. The forced perspective technique has been used in two ways in the project for the new St. Ivan Rilski church at the Bulgarian Embassy: to make the nave appear longer and to make the dome appear taller.

In both case the point of view has been chosen at the very centre of the dome in plan, conventionally at 1.70 meters from the floor and the vanishing point, that is the point in the position at which all receding parallel lines meet, at around 20 meters from the point of view.

Using the forced perspective technique, with the spans decreasing as much as the eight of the arches, the nave appears to be 10 meters deep while it is just 5.31 meters deep. The effect is helped by the rising floor.

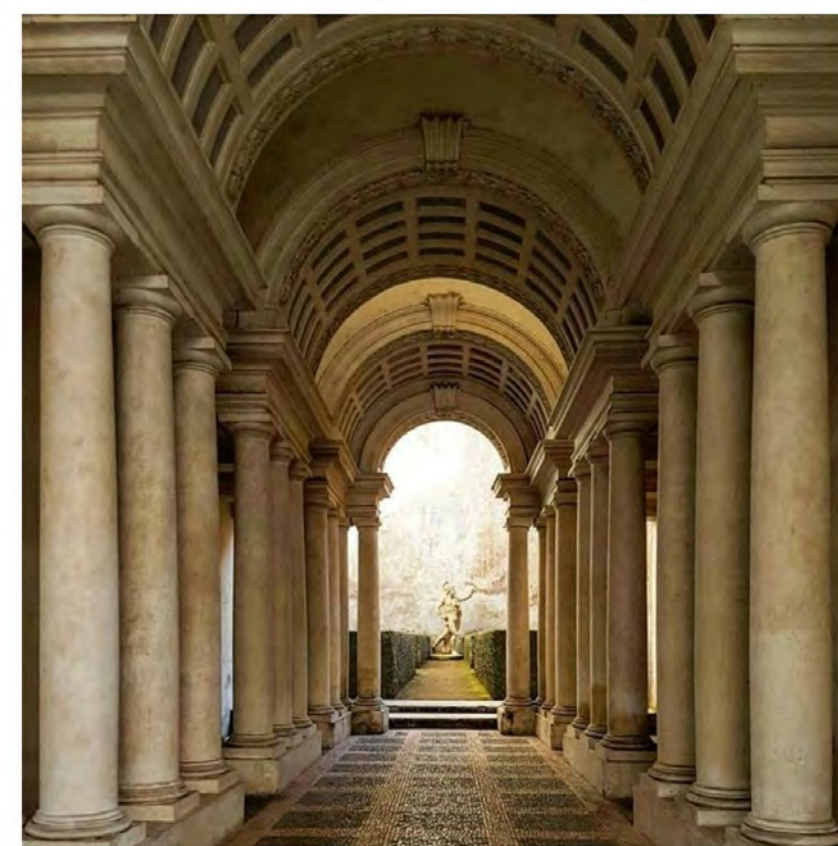
For the dome the technique has been the same but with a vanishing point situated at around 20 meters vertically above the point of view. All the elements forming the dome (the four pendentives, the drum, the dome, the lantern) have been “forced” in the perspective so the top of the lantern appears to be at around 11 meters from the floor although it is just at 8 meters.



Forced perspective

In architecture, a structure can be made to seem larger, taller, farther away or otherwise by adjusting the scale of objects in relation to the spectator, increasing or decreasing perceived depth.

When forced perspective is supposed to make an object appear farther away, the following method can be used: by constantly decreasing the scale of objects from expectancy and convention toward the farthest point from the spectator, an illusion is created that the scale of said objects is decreasing due to their distant location.

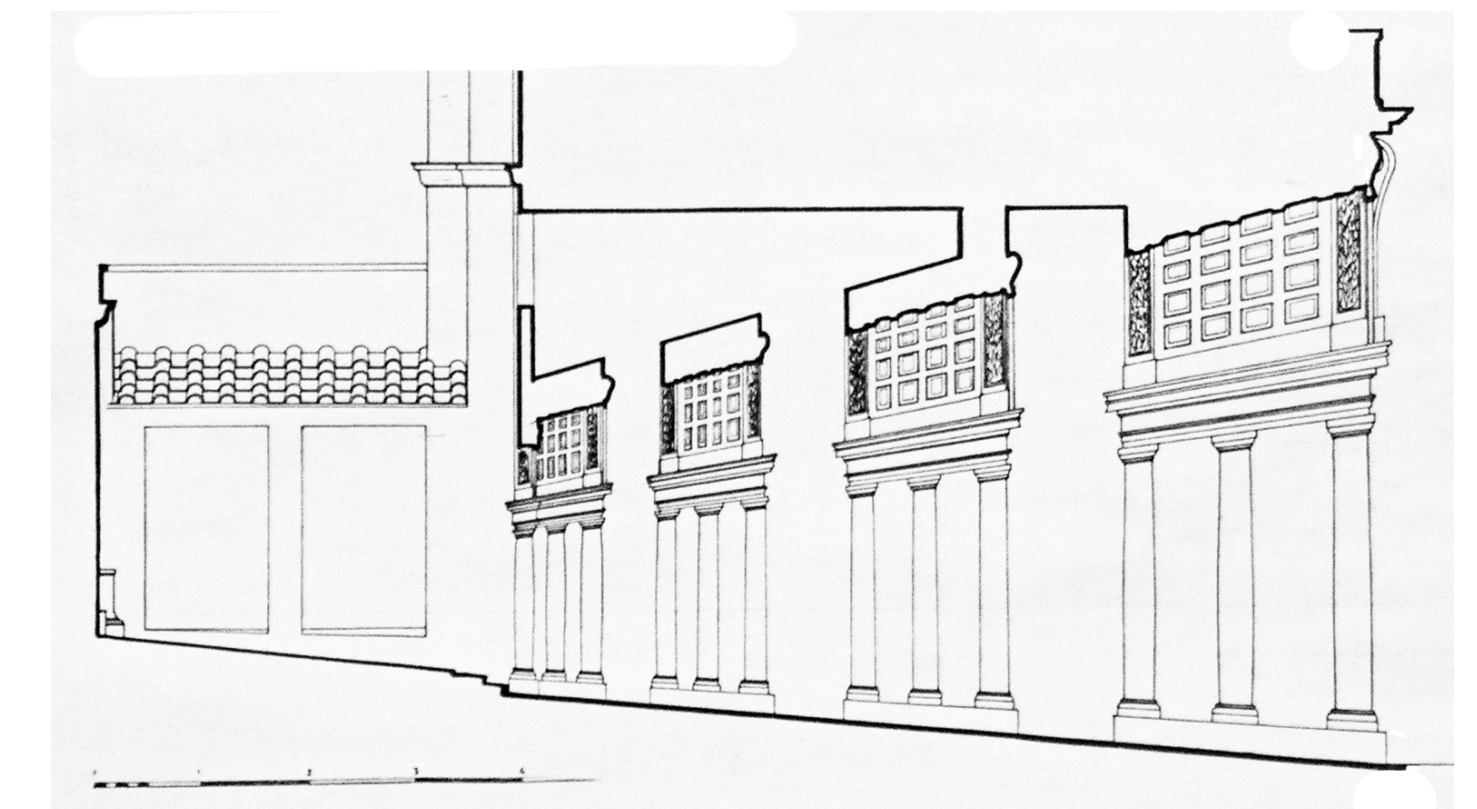


The 16th century Palazzo Spada in Rome is home to a spectacular example of forced perspective, the creation of that genius of Baroque architecture, Francesco Borromini (1599-1667).

The false perspective is created on the illusion that the tunnel is at least 35 meters long, while in reality it is only 8.82 meters long.

The illusion is due to the fact that the floors converge in a single vanishing point; thus, as the ceiling descends from top to bottom, the floor rises, the intervals between the pillars decrease, the forty-two squares of the ground shrink in perspective, the walls tend to converge and the Doric columns gradually decrease in height as they move away (the first is 5.68 meters while the last is just 2.47 meters).

As a result, the tunnel entrance measures 5.8 meters high by 3.5 meters wide, while the exit is 2.45 meters high and one meter wide.



ARCHITECTURE | Access and layout

The plan follows the traditional footprint with the Sanctuary to the East and the entrance to the West.

An additional entrance has been added to the North side, along Bremner Road giving direct access to the centre of the church and its dome.

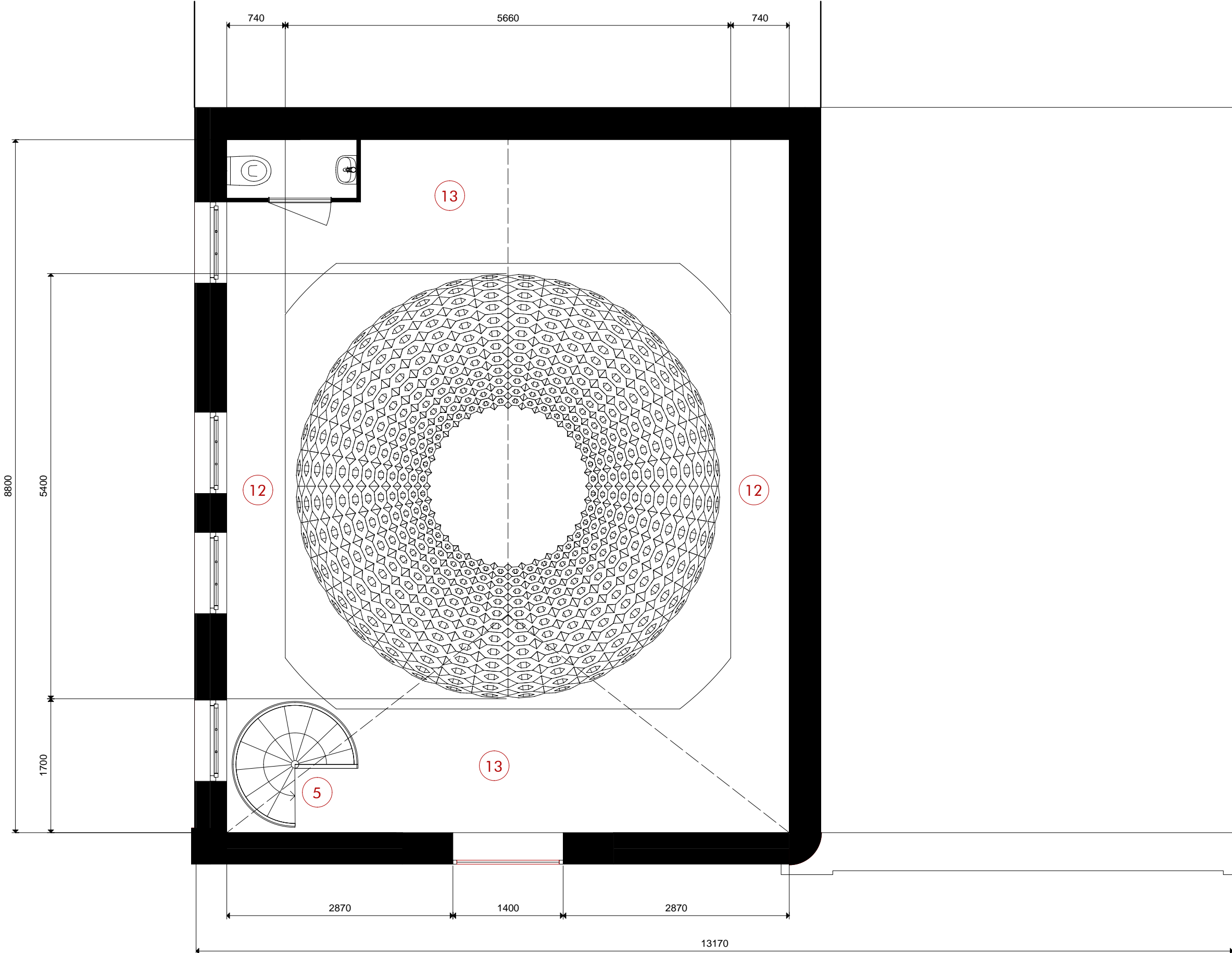
A secondary access connects the church with the parking area in Jay Mews.

Bremner road is slightly sloping so there is around half a meter between the entrance in Jay Mews and the western entrance. The aisle on the northern side of the nave is a ramp connecting the northern entrance with the western one.

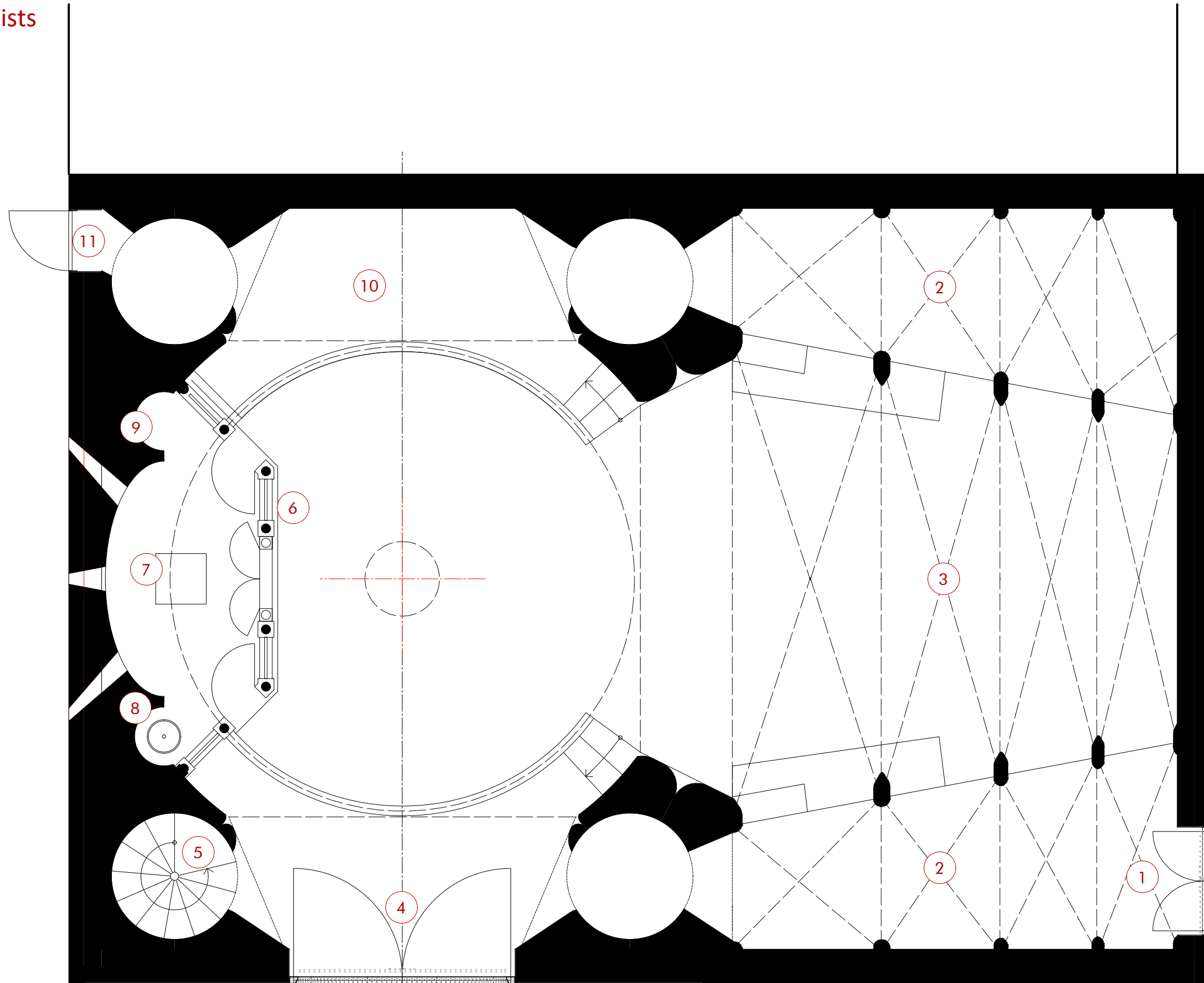
Since the floor of the nave is also sloping down (because of the forced perspective), the church is perfectly accessible to wheelchair users.

The spiral staircase leads to the gallery level where an office space can be located as long as with a tea point.

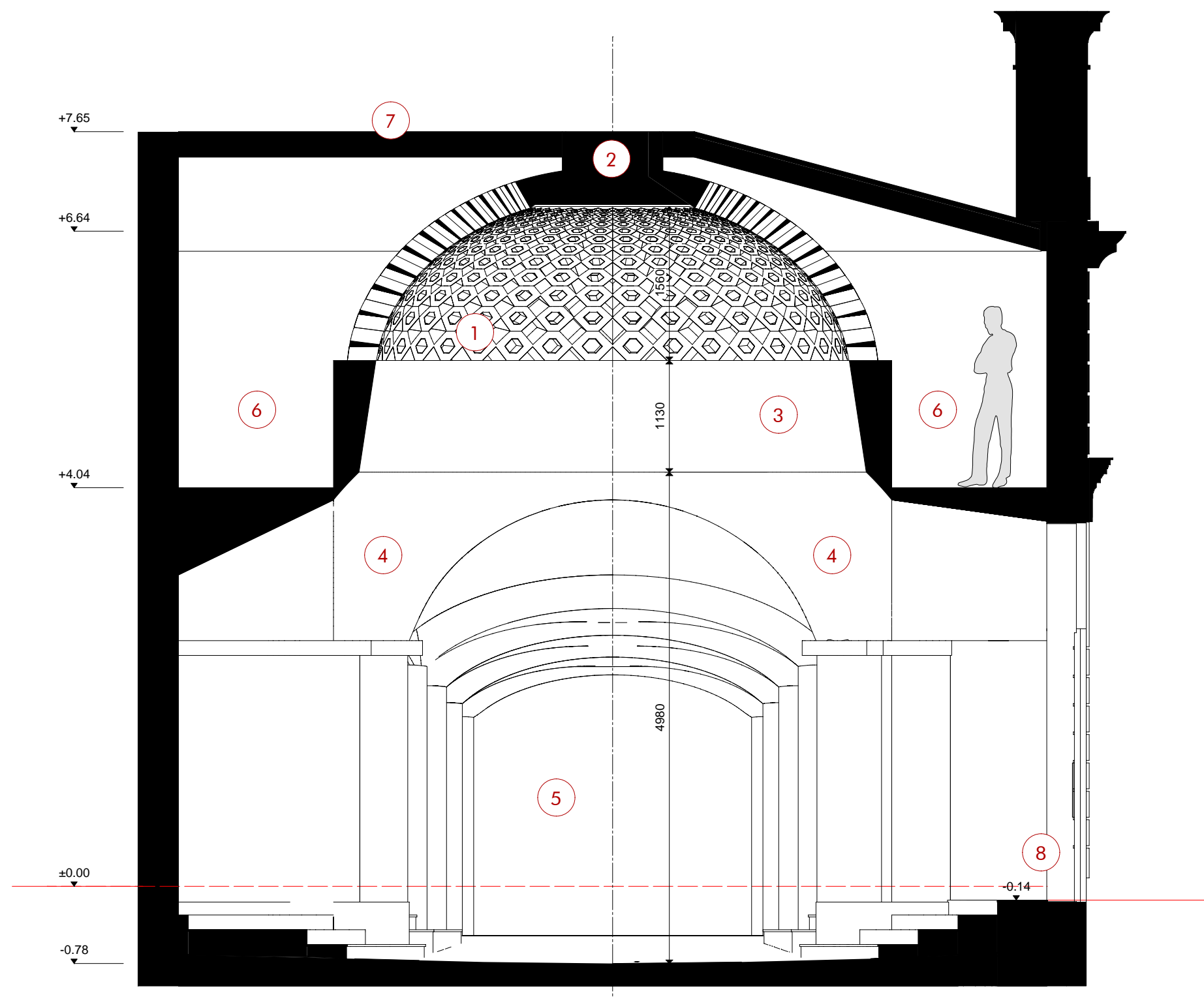
- ① West entrance
- ② Aisle
- ③ Nave
- ④ North entrance
- ⑤ Stair
- ⑥ Iconostas
- ⑦ Altar
- ⑧ Prep area
- ⑨ Vestment
- ⑩ Choir
- ⑪ Secondary entrance
- ⑫ Gallery
- ⑬ Office
- ⑭ Tea point
- ⑮ Christ Pantocrator (stain glass) and Oculus
- ⑯ Pendentives decorated with four evangelists
- ⑰ Apse
- ⑱ Rooflight
- ⑲ Toilette



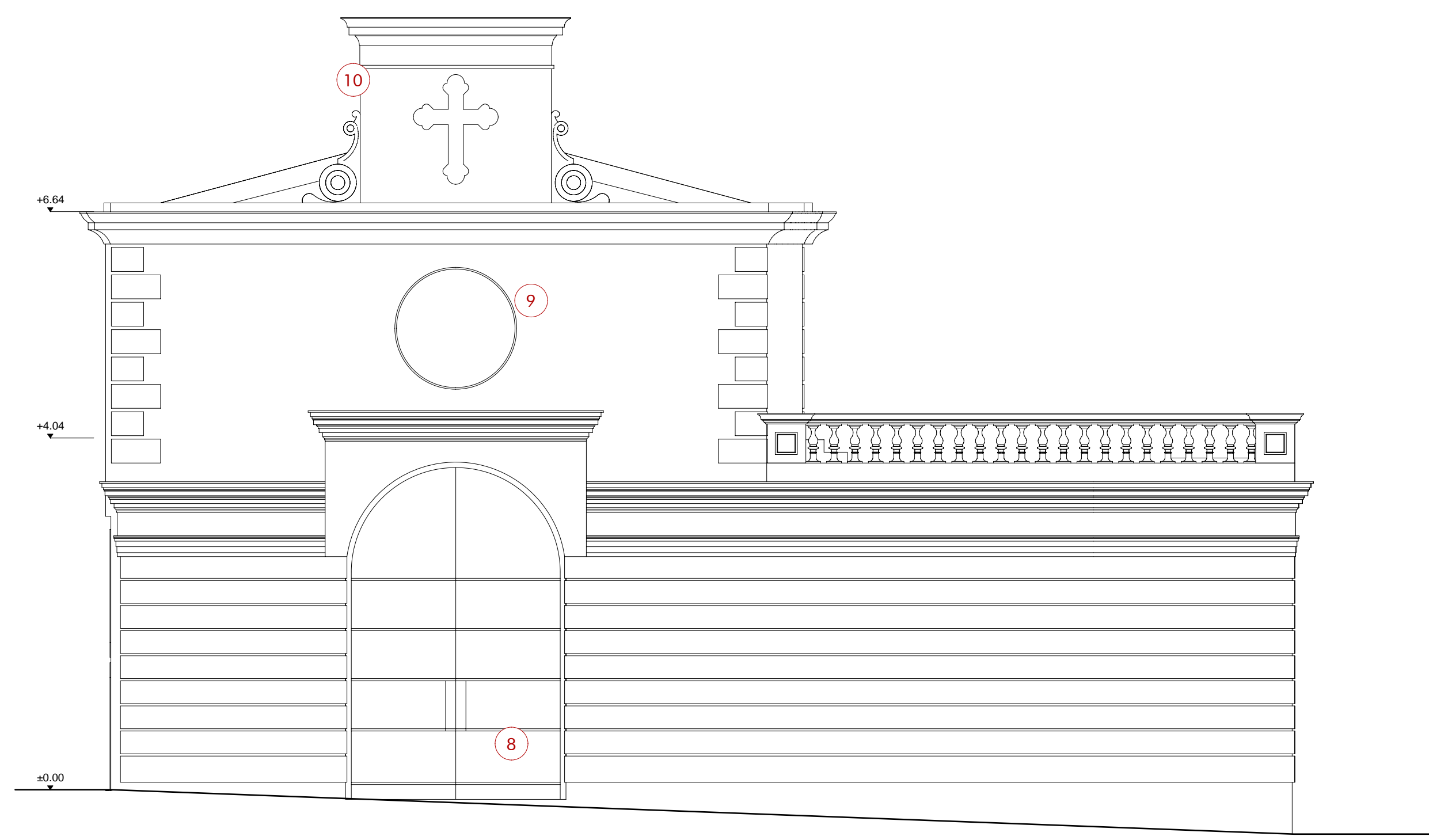
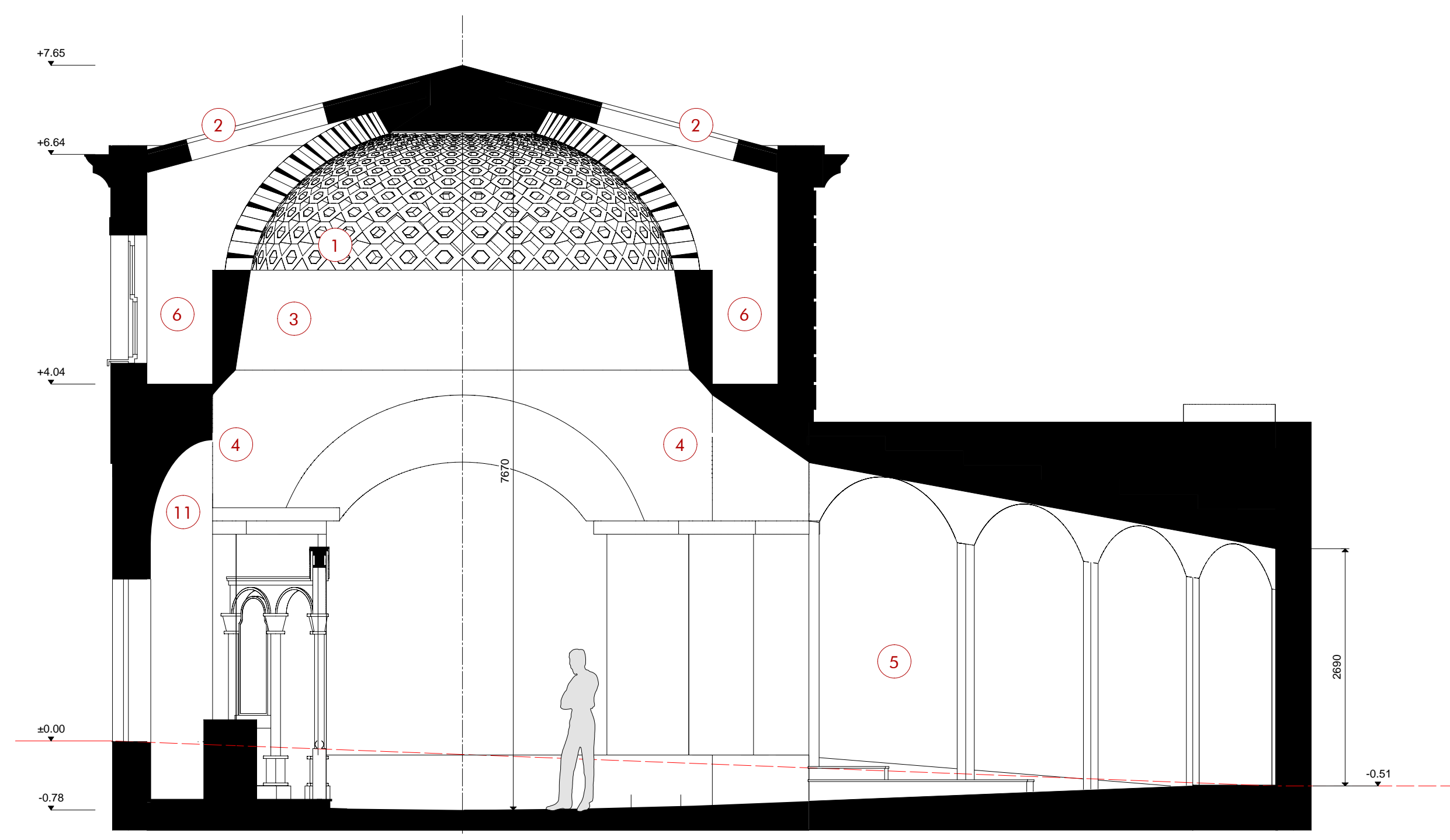
Level 1



Level 0



- ① Dome
- ② Rooflight
- ③ Drum
- ④ Pendentives
- ⑤ Nave
- ⑥ Gallery/Office
- ⑦ Existing roof
- ⑧ North entrance
- ⑨ Rose window
- ⑩ Chimney
- ⑪ Apse



ARCHITECTURE | Volume and facade

Exploiting the difference of level of Bremner Road from East to West (half a meter), and the sloping floor required by the forced perspective, the lowest point of the church is around 80 centimetres lower than the current entrance from Jay Mews.

The dome is contained within the existing roof (ridge at around + 7.65) which covers the space between the dome and the existing external walls (the gallery) that is wider enough to accommodate an office space.

The peculiar shape of the existing chimney on the top of the northern façade along Bremner Road, suggested the opportunity of creating a more church-like façade on this side: by adding a cross on the top, a rose window just below, and a large entrance at street level, the façade is completed with all its traditional main elements.

On Jay Mews, at the upper floor all the windows should be retained (just transforming the odd door into a window like the others), and at the ground floor the wall should be solid with niche aligned with the window above.



FINISHES & MATERIAL | Stone and plaster