architecture | ataraxi

Portfolio

mini | project



Agora Sophia

A classical sanctuary of wisdom, immersed in tranquility, blending the teachings of ancient and modern eras, thoughtfully redefining the library.

Dates
06/10/2024 to 11/11/2024

Project Type
Library Rooftop Intervention

Agora Sophia is a response to the modern struggles and turmoil amongst university students. The intervention functions as a catalyst for opting for the teachings of the greats who walked before us, enabling enlightenment of the minds of those in the present day.

Blending classical and contemporary architectural influences, Agora Sophia is a reimagined space where ancient wisdom meets modern understanding. The term "Agora" refers to a public gathering space, while "Sophia" signifies wisdom, deep knowledge, and insight.

Incorporating modern teachings on mental health, biophilia, and sensory environments, this sanctuary blends the past with the present for a better future.



Library Role

Contextual Theme



As you explore the progression of my project, you will notice I have embraced the respective theme to deepen my familiarity and immersion in the style. This journey has enhanced my understanding and appreciation of the practices and methodologies established by those who walked before me in the architectural and philosophical field.

Library

"Lai-bre-ree"
Noun

"A building or room containing collection of books, periodicals, and sometimes films and recorded music for use or borrowing by the public or members of an institution."

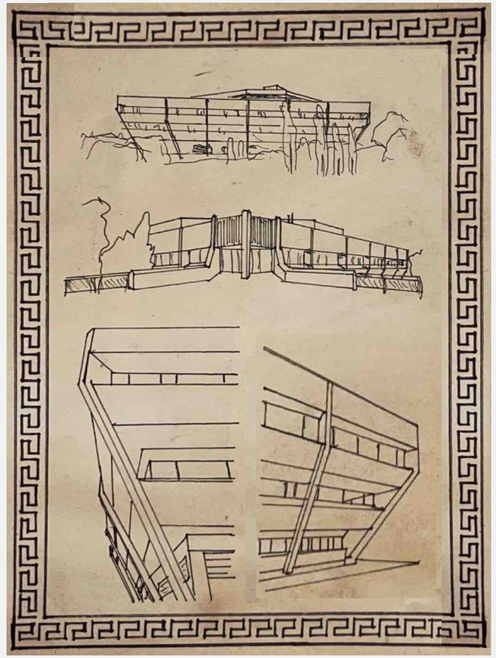
Oxford English Language Dictionary

This is far from how *I* would define a library - they are far more than a form of storage. My library consists of:

- House of bountiful knowledge
- Facility to expand one's academia, understanding and mental integrity
- Community enrichment
- Exploration of the mind
- Fellow academics - teachers and students
- Conditions for mental clarity

A successful library accommodates and nurtures the full academic journey for its users in an atmosphere of mental clarity.

My architectural intervention will be to **enrich** the experience for users of the Loughborough University Pilkington Library, as seen in the observational drawings.



Client Profiles



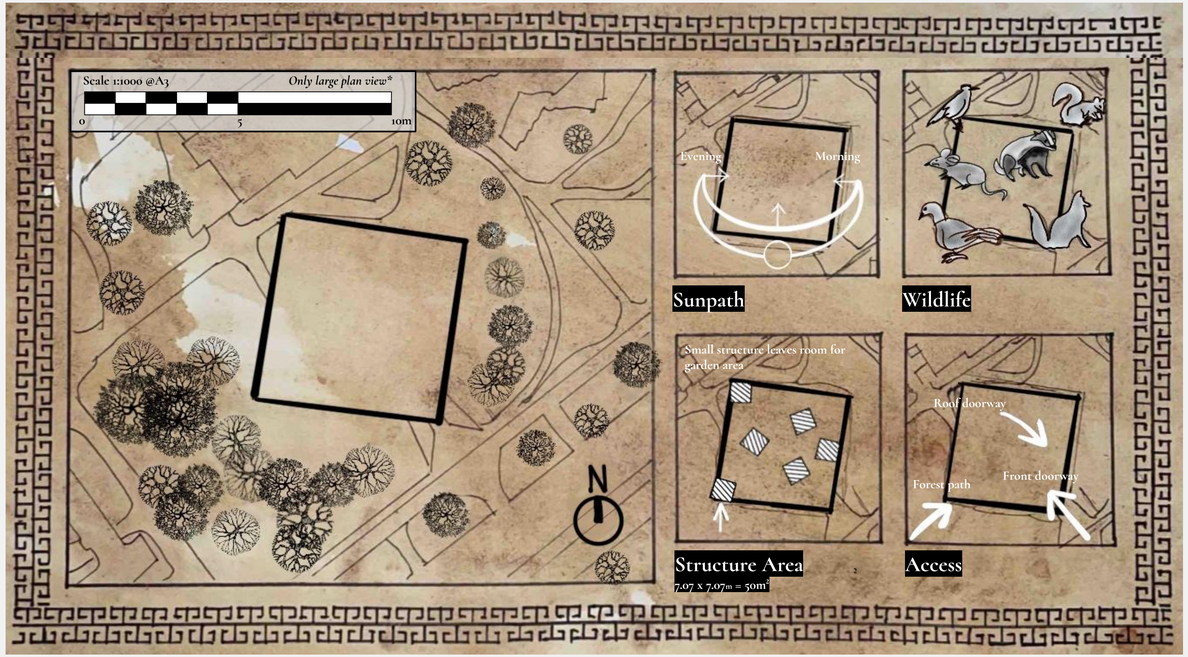
Name - *Craig*
Age - *20*
Course - *Undergraduate in BioChemistry*
Library visit frequency - *Rarely, mostly for using printers.*
Library positives - *I like being in an environment where other students are working as this incentivises me to do the same.*
Library negatives - *Study spaces are uninspiring and almost demotivating. Additionally the resources are outdated, we should implement texts that are timelessly helpful.*
Library sufficient? - *No, I use more course-specific facilities.*

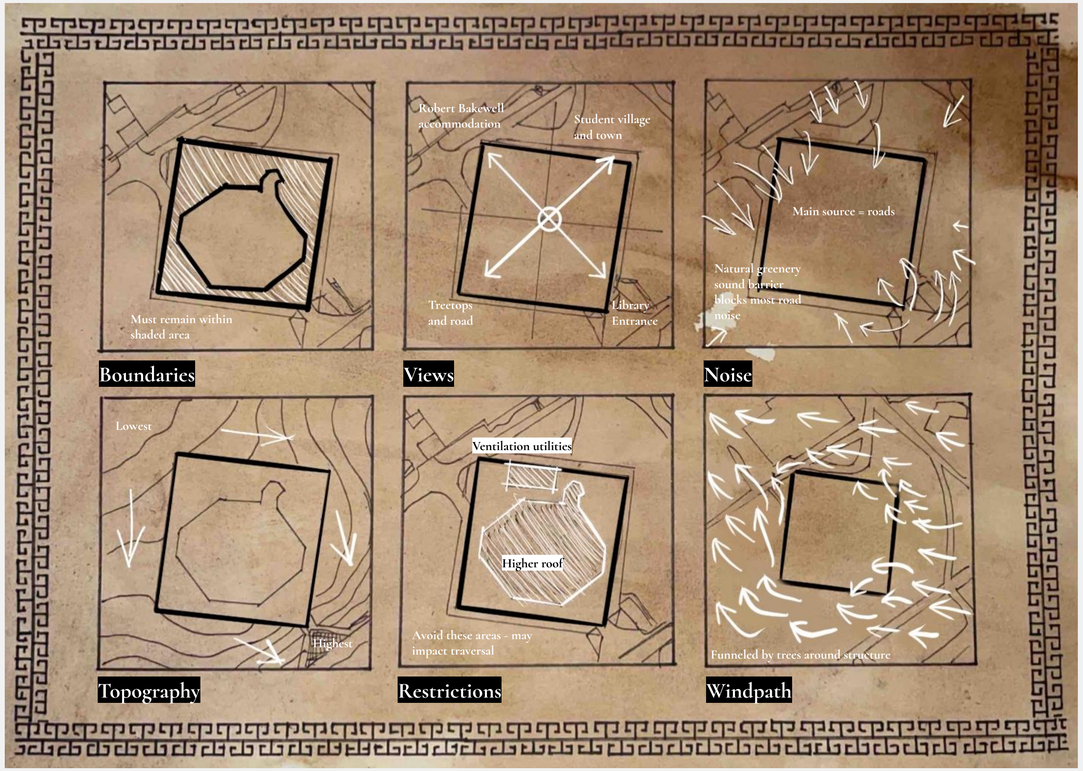
Name - *Sarah*
Age - *19*
Course - *Undergraduate in Accounting and Finance*
Library visit frequency - *Once and never again.*
Library positives - *I like that the library is a location dedicated to academics that is separate from my personal life.*
Library negatives - *The workspaces feel soulless and built for robots instead of humans. I cannot simply sit in a plain, dark box and be creative. Additionally, the layout is difficult to navigate and is entirely indoors.*
Library sufficient? - *No, instead been using cafes due to more natural atmosphere.*

Name - Oliver
Age - *23*
Course - *Masters in Aerospace Engineering*
Library visit frequency - *Once a week.*
Library positives - *I like the respect for the library rules to create a peaceful and calming work environment.*
Library negatives - *Not worth its journey. I have to complete a lengthy commute just to experience the same resources and atmosphere as any other university facility. There is nothing unique or worthwhile on offer.*
Library sufficient? - *No, instead opt for more local university facilities which offer similar experience.*

An assessment of the client feedback regarding the library indicates some key themes. It is evident that many find the study spaces uninspiring, with plain, enclosed designs that lack room for creativity and comfort. Navigation can be confusing, and resources are often outdated or too generalised, failing to meet specific student needs. Additionally, the library's environment and facilities don't offer anything unique, leading students to seek more convenient or appealing alternatives like cafes or other university spaces. A new library intervention could improve this situation by offering a more inviting atmosphere with natural light, inspiring study areas, timeless resources, and facilities that enable students to cater to different academic disciplines. There appears to be a desire for a relaxed, yet relatively formal study environment. Perhaps exploring a culmination of these points could offer a more unique and fruitful user experience.

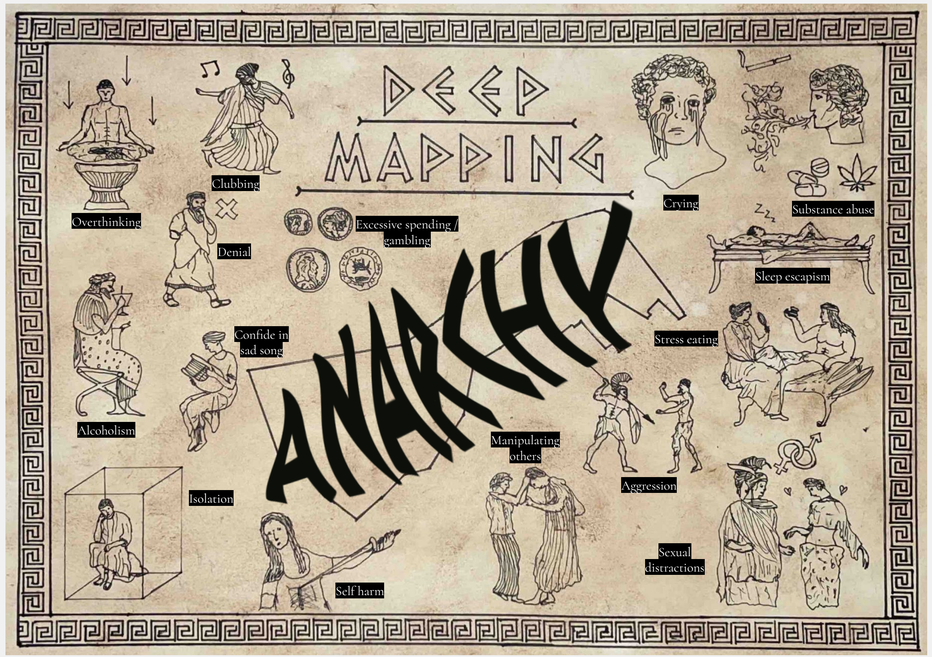
Site Analysis





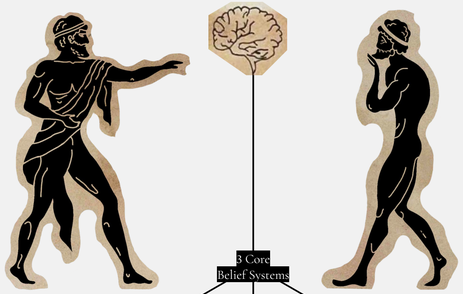
Deep Mapping

A thorough understanding of the clientele is a key factor in successful architectural interventions. I collated deep map research focused on the coping mechanisms of university students facing academic pressures, revealing a diverse but predominantly negative range of responses. Many students turn to damaging behaviours as a means of distraction, reflecting a deeper sense of internal conflict. This insight points to an urgent need for architectural designs that better cater to the mental well-being of university pupils. Loughborough faces a growing atmosphere of psychological unrest, and my work aims to address this by creating spaces that promote balance and clarity, drawing from principles that foster mindfulness and resilience.



Research

At our core, humans and their natural sources for happiness remain unchanged. It is for this reason that we can look back upon the timeless teachings of ancient Greek philosophers and apply them to our everyday lives today. The Greeks are renowned for their mental fortitude and foundation of philosophy, making them a suitable source of guidance for those who find themselves lost in the 21st century.



HEDONISM
Pursuit of a good life through the pursuit of pleasure. The highest aim in human life is to live a life of absolute pleasure.

EPICUREANISM
Good life is achieved through the absence of pain. Ataraxia is the word defining living in a state of serenity, calmness and tranquility. A life of peace.

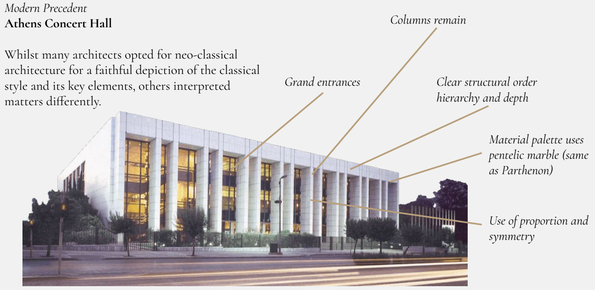
STOICISM
The governance of emotions enables us to use our knowledge and logic to achieve happiness. Do not worry about what you cannot control and combat your issues rationally.

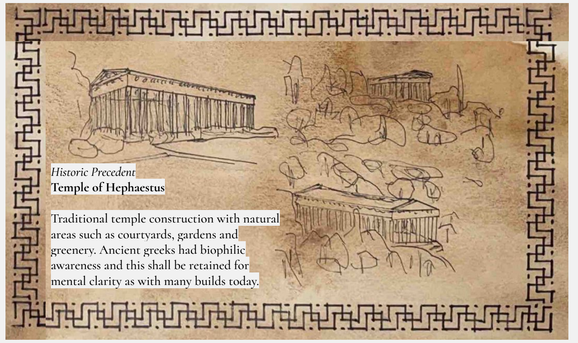
Whilst much of our current understanding was yet to be uncovered by the ancient Greek philosophers, their values can serve as a solid foundation when combined with our own to pave a new route for the future. Modern research highlights the importance of mental health and employs a variety of different methodologies to be considered in conjunction with respect for Greek heritage. Henceforth, the project is aptly titled 'Agora Sofia,' translating to 'gathering space for wisdom,' for both new and old practices. Investigation of precedents will enable me to explore how others have architecturally implemented this concept across the ages.

Precedents

Modern Precedent
Athens Concert Hall

Whilst many architects opted for neo-classical architecture for a faithful depiction of the classical style and its key elements, others interpreted matters differently.





Historic Precedent
Temple of Hephaestus

Traditional temple construction with natural areas such as courtyards, gardens and greenery. Ancient greeks had biophilic awareness and this shall be retained for mental clarity as with many builds today.

Key Principles

Maintain classical elements faithful to Greek heritage and design.

Offer a unique library experience with features not found elsewhere.

Include relevant elements of modern mental health teachings such as biophilia.

Rethink traditional study spaces - create not just a desk, but a 'temple' of learning.

Host a calming atmosphere with gentle sensory stimulation, avoiding silence.

Feature symbolic motifs and art prevalent in Greek culture such as statues and patterns.

Adaptable structure for year-round use by students and public in and out of term time.

Considered relationship with context such as view framing, privacy and sun exposure.

Create a separation between personal and academic spaces via crossing a boundary.

Provide timeless resources for academics such as Marcus Aurelius' 'Meditations.'

Concept

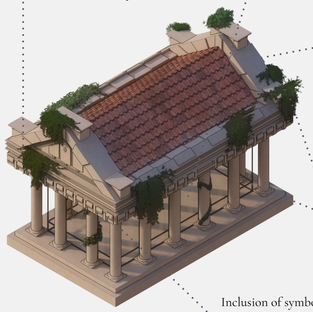


Key considerations from prior pages have been carried forwards into the key principles of the project. This process maintains project direction and is considered in conjunction with the appreciation for the rich contextual history.

Design Development

JOURNEY





Clear definition of structural hierarchy / order

Sufficient yet uninspiring blank canvas for resources and study spaces

Mix of interior and exterior spaces to accommodate year-round use

Relationship between design and context - restriction of light and view from library windows could be countered via a skylight

Streamlined approach to garden space is required to optimise available space

Integration of biophilic elements via greenery and removable window fixtures to enable openness of design

Inclusion of symbolic motifs that resonate with the project themes

Sensory features included in garden setting to harness deep focus and lack of abnormal silence



Opportunity to create a monumental crossable boundary at the site entrance via a bridge

Ultimately, this approach is unable to satisfy the requirements set out for the intervention in earlier pages. The structure has evolved extremely little since the days of Ancient Greece and deserves to be reconsidered.

I shall set out to create a new design via tearing apart the structural language from the era and construct a layout with an inventory of ancient building elements. This will provide me far more freedom for the design with the best interests of the user in focus in conjunction with respect for the heritage of the style.



Design Development

Building on the deconstruction of classical forms, the new intervention design integrates key elements aimed at enhancing mental and academic performance. The most impactful aspects have been highlighted here.

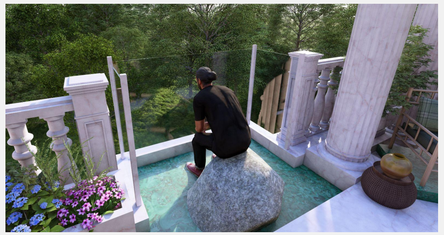


Sensory Environment

The rooftop walkway concludes at a boundary crossing point, marked by a bridge spanning a shallow pool. This design element causes a psychological transition of entering a space dedicated to deep focus and productivity. Water flows into the pool from a chiseled block across the site that functions as a water wall, integrating a combination of artistry and functionality. The water travels through the intervention space, moving from the sculpture pond to the pool via a short sheer descent. Together with strategically placed fountains, these elements cultivate a calming sensory environment, enhancing users' ability to achieve optimal focus.

Pondering Point

One of history's most iconic statues depicts the intervention's meaning to great accuracy, *The Thinker*. To honour the piece, I have included a dedicated introspection section atop a similar podium. Positioned to overlook lush foliage, this is optimal for deep pondering.







Providing Shelter

To ensure the intervention remains functional in less favorable weather, an integrated roof storage module is hidden behind the bookshelf. This module can deploy a retractable glass roof that extends to cover the entire intervention space, providing shelter during rain. For additional stability, the roof is aligned to rest on the indents of the entablature.



Symbolic Motifs

Drawing from classical architecture, I have simplified intricate symbolism to convey a clear message: "*Look back, yet keep moving forwards.*" This is expressed through protruding eye shapes looking across opposite directions, to represent the encouragement of historical awareness whilst embracing progress.

Furthermore, implementation of various classical statues in the centre of the design show a dedication to maintaining the beauty and teachings of the past, whilst other elements of the design resemble architecture of the present.

Final Design









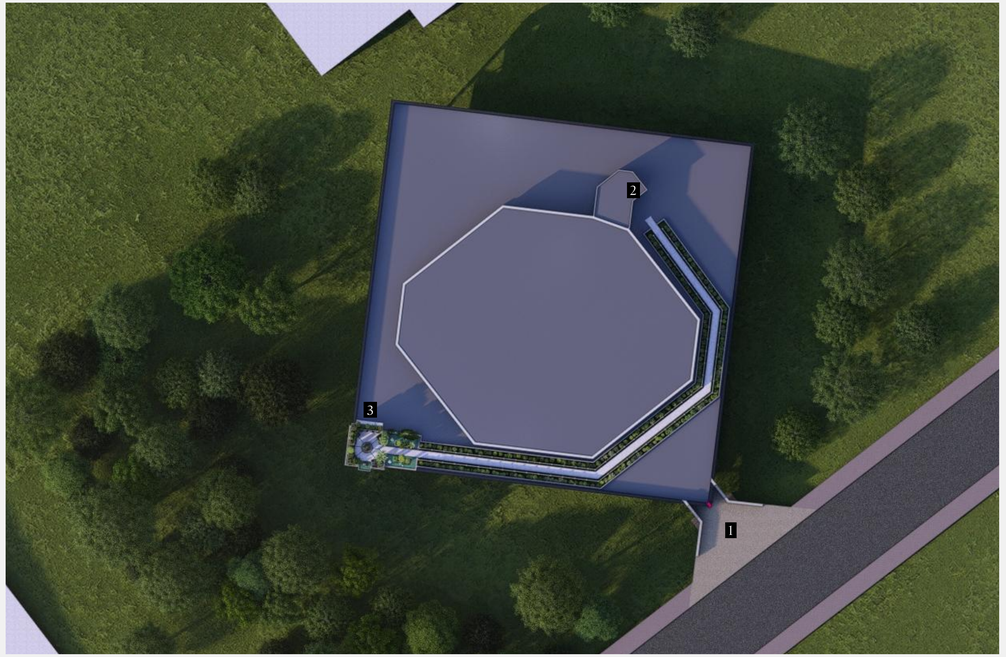


0 10 20 50m

Site Plan (1:500)

Legend

1 - Library Entrance
2 - Roof Entrance
3 - Intervention



N

0 1 5m

Plan View (1:50)

Legend

1 - Walkway
2 - Fountains
3 - Seating
4 - Statue Pond
5 - Water Feature
6 - Bookshelves
7 - Retractable Roof Storage
8 - Pondering Point
9 - Large Drop to Grass Below

E2
P16



N

Intervention Area
(50m²)

E1
P15

0 1 5m

Elevation 1 (1:50)



0 1 5m

Elevation 2 (1:50)



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