

The Haven Club explores how interior design can support survivors of domestic abuse through a trauma-informed and research-led approach. Rather than focusing solely on physical safety, I investigated noise as a tool of control, intimidation and psychological harm, using this research to shape both the concept and spatial experience of the project. Through the study of acoustics, sound absorption, survivor stories and trauma-informed design principles, I developed a design process that translated an invisible experience into spatial form. By combining social research, technical investigation and conceptual exploration, the project challenges traditional approaches to refuge design and explores new ways interiors can support healing, comfort and recovery.

By Poppy Hooper

THE Haven CLUB



WHAT IS THE DESIGN CONCEPT ?

MAJOR PROJECT



In 2020, West Midlands saw

80,399

Reports of domestic abuse

These numbers are shocking but they are part of a national pattern affecting every region - with 1.8 million reports of domestic abuse across all of England and Wales.

That's over 8 million people harmed by those who they should have been able to trust most - partners, ex-partners or family members.



Only **1 in 4** survivors

report abuse to the police

The fact is, these reported cases are just the tip of the iceberg. This shows how vast the issue is due to only a few cases being reported and this number still being very high.



West Midlands

Has some of the **highest levels** of domestic abuse police reports in England and Wales.

I want to look more into this and create a space for these victims to go and feel safe due to the numbers going up at pace.



1 in 5 Children

Across the UK will experience domestic abuse.

Thousands of children are growing up in homes where safety is not guaranteed. This is not OK - Every child deserves to feel safe, every one of us can help make this happen.

WHAT IS THE HAVEN CLUB ?

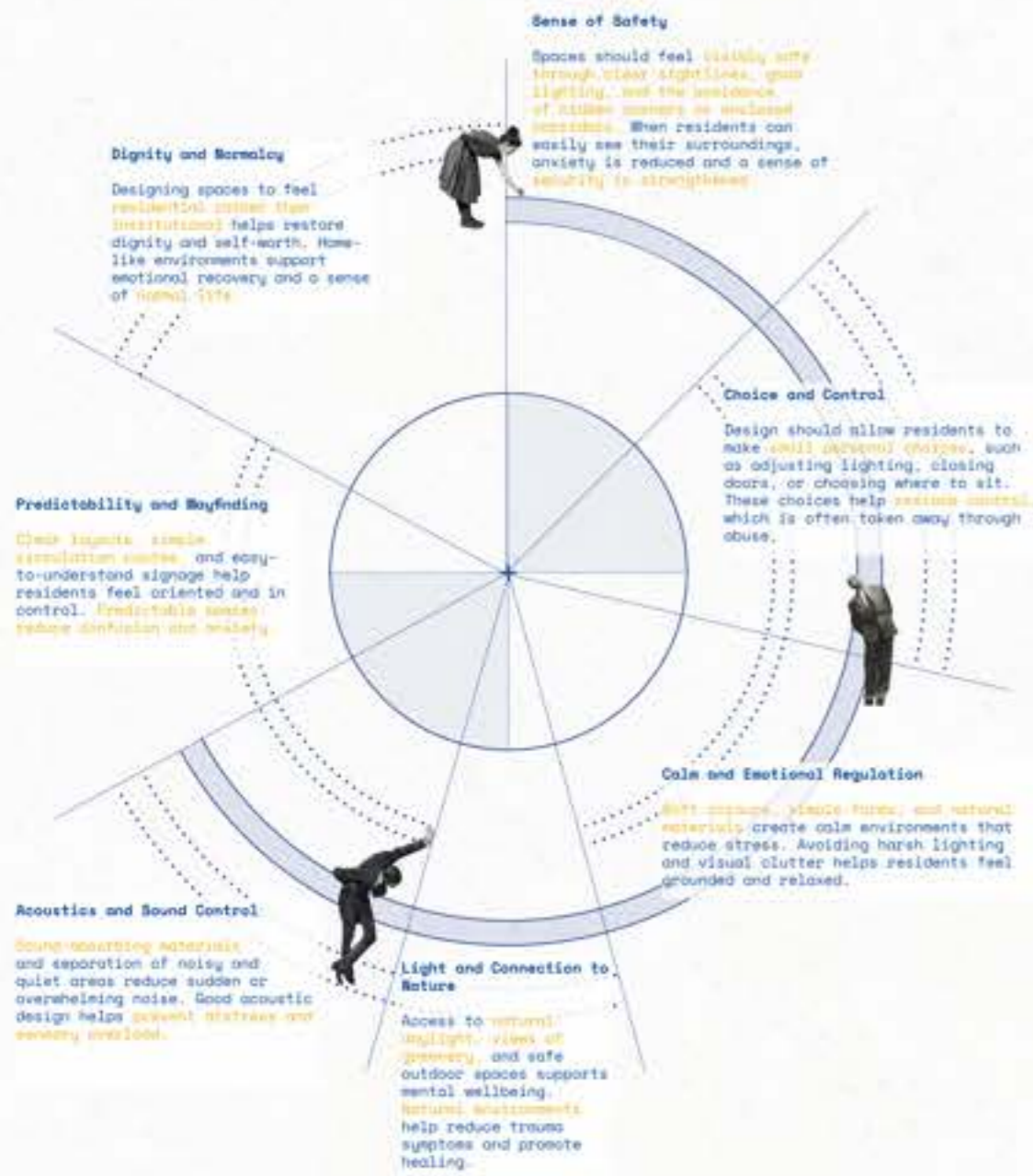
THIS PROJECT TRANSFORMED AN EXISTING BUILDING INTO A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPORT SPACE THAT COMBINES THE COMFORT OF HOSPITALITY WITH THE SAFETY AND SUPPORT OF A COMMUNITY SANCTUARY FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN ESCAPING ABUSE. DESIGNED AS A HYBRID BETWEEN A REFUGE AND A HOTEL,

THE SPACE PRIORITISES PRIVACY, SECURITY, AND DIGNITY WHILE PROVIDING ACCESS TO SPECIALIST SUPPORT SERVICES. RESPONDING TO THE SHORTAGE OF SAFE SPACES FOR SURVIVORS, THE PROJECT USES A THEORY-LED, TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN APPROACH, INCORPORATING ACOUSTIC AND SPATIAL STRATEGIES TO CREATE A CALM AND NURTURING ENVIRONMENT.

THE COMPLETED SPACE SERVES AS BOTH A PHYSICAL REFUGE AND AN EMOTIONAL HAVEN, SUPPORTING HEALING, STABILITY, AND RECOVERY THROUGH A RESTORATIVE AND SUPPORTIVE SETTING.

Trauma informed Design

"How do we avoid re-traumatizing people—and instead support safety, dignity, and agency?"



- What does this diagram show?
- Sense of Safety
 - Calm and Emotional Regulation
 - Choice and Control
 - Dignity and Normalcy
 - Predictability and Wayfinding
 - Acoustics and Sound Control
 - Light and Connection to Nature

Why does trauma led design matter?

Designing in a trauma-informed way matters because the environments people move through every day can either increase stress and harm or actively support safety, dignity, and wellbeing. Research shows that when buildings are designed with clear layouts, calming sensory conditions, and respect for user choice, people feel safer, more hopeful, and more in control. Studies of trauma-informed shelters and supportive housing have found improvements in residents' sense of security, comfort, and belonging after redesign, while healthcare and wellbeing buildings report better engagement and reduced anxiety. These outcomes show that trauma-informed design doesn't just help 'vulnerable' groups - it creates spaces that reduce harm and work better for everyone.

Survivor Stories

Anonymous Female
Housing for Women refuge and advice services

A woman living in London fled a violent partner and sought safety at a refuge supported by Housing for Women. When she arrived she felt alone and frightened - especially because English wasn't her first language. Support workers at the refuge helped her rebuild confidence and gave practical help. Since leaving the refuge she now has her own home and is working again, something she once thought was impossible.

Melanie's Story
Refuge support groups and outreach workers

Melanie reached out to Refuge after leaving her abusive partner. Initially, she struggled with guilt and feelings of isolation. Through weekly support groups, she connected with other women who had been through similar experiences - listening and then sharing her own story. Over time she regained self-confidence, rediscovered interests she'd lost, and eventually started helping others in group activities.

Sue and her daughter
Stroud Women's Refuge

Sue had lived for years in a controlling and abusive relationship that severely affected both her and her young daughter's well-being. She came to Stroud Women's Refuge only after recognising how much the abuse was damaging her child. Living in the refuge gave her safety, time to recover, and support to focus on her daughter's needs and her own healing.



NOISE

Investigating Noise

Information and Impacts

Throughout all the different aspects of abuse I want to look into noise as something to resolve and take back as a victim.

Noise is a common and powerful feature of domestic abuse, but it's rarely talked about. Abuse isn't only physical, control, and psychological harm. Intimidation, control, and psychological harm.

There are many different features of noise in domestic violence and it can have engaging effects, such as noise as intimidation, constant verbal abuse - Sleep Deprivation Through Noise, Noise as a Public Tool of Control, The Psychological Impact of Noise and also focusing on Children and Noise in Abusive Homes.

Noise is not just background in situations of domestic abuse; it is often a warning signal, a control tactic, a weapon, and a trauma trigger. The soundscape of abuse - shouting, slamming doors, breaking objects, and issuing threats - plays a central role in creating and maintaining fear. Sudden or aggressive noises can signal impending violence, keeping victims in a constant state of alertness. Over time, these sounds become associated with danger, conditioning the body to respond with anxiety and hypervigilance even before any physical harm occurs. Although domestic abuse is frequently described in terms of physical violence, the auditory environment within an abusive home is a powerful mechanism through which control and intimidation are enforced.

I want to look into and investigate this more and see how I can help through trauma led design and also focusing on how to use it in design and create a conceptual design.

Investigating Noise

Studying The impacts of noise



- Noise as Intimidation**
Abusers often use loud, sudden noises such as shouting, slamming doors, or throwing objects to intimidate and create fear, even without physical violence. These sounds trigger the body's fight-or-flight response, leaving victims constantly on edge. Over time, survivors may become highly sensitive to noise because they have learned to associate it with danger.
- Constant Verbal Noise**
Noise in domestic abuse frequently takes the form of relentless verbal aggression. Yelling insults, making threats, issuing repeated accusations, and conducting loud interrogations - sometimes late at night - are tactics used to dominate and control. The raised volume itself becomes part of the abuse, overpowering the victim's voice and undermining their confidence, making it difficult to think clearly or respond safely.
- Sleep Deprivation Through Noise**
Many survivors experience deliberate sleep disruption as a method of control. Being kept awake by shouting, woken in the middle of the night, forced into arguments while exhausted, or subjected to loud music or television can severely impact wellbeing. Sleep deprivation increases confusion, anxiety, and emotional vulnerability, weakening a person's resilience and making them more susceptible to manipulation.
- The Sound of "Waking up Separately"**
Even in moments of quiet, sound shapes the emotional climate of an abusive home. Survivors often describe listening carefully to footsteps, keys in the door, or subtle tone changes to predict an abuser's mood. This constant monitoring becomes a survival strategy, but it can later manifest as anxiety and hypervigilance, even in safe environments.
- Noise as a Public Tool of Control**
Abusers may also use noise publicly to humiliate or isolate their partner. Creating loud scenes, yelling in front of children, or making threats within earshot of neighbours can intensify fear and shame. Public outbursts reinforce control by undermining the victim's sense of dignity and increasing social isolation.
- The Psychological Impact of Noise**
Long-term exposure to aggressive and unpredictable noise can have lasting psychological effects. Survivors may develop hypervigilance, heightened startle responses, anxiety, panic attacks, or symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Even after reaching safety, including in refuge settings, everyday household sounds can trigger distress because the nervous system has been conditioned to anticipate harm.
- Impact on children**
Children living in abusive homes are often deeply affected by the noise of conflict. They may cover their ears during arguments, hide when voices rise, and later become distressed by shouting or loud confrontation. Research from organisations such as Refuge shows that exposure to domestic abuse - including repeated exposure to aggressive noise - can have lasting effects on a child's emotional wellbeing and development.



Investigating Acoustics

Acoustic Use in interiors

Importance in Design

Acoustics should be integrated early, not treated as an afterthought. Poor acoustics negatively impact stress levels and productivity, while proper design boosts user well-being, especially as modern designs favor hard surfaces.

Key Strategies for Acoustic Design

- Absorptive Materials:** Upholstered furniture, thick curtains, carpets, and acoustic wall panels absorb sound, reducing echoes and ambient noise.
- Surface Treatment:** Hard surfaces (concrete, glass) reflect sound, while textured, porous surfaces scatter it. A balance is necessary to prevent over-dampening while reducing unwanted echo.
- Ceiling and Wall Solutions:** Ceiling clouds/baffles are highly effective in open-plan spaces. Decorative acoustic panels can be integrated as art, combining aesthetics with function.
- Layout and Zoning:** Placing bookshelves, plants, or room dividers helps break up sound paths.
- Ceiling baffles and treatments**
These are good for acoustic integration and also decorative design that creates an interesting look - you can also add lighting within.
- Furniture**
The choice of furniture is important, certain materials and sizes absorb sound.
- Wall Paneling**
This can be a fun and interesting acoustic method as you can incorporate it into the design concept.
- Sliders**
These can be any materials and join together spaces of all.



218 West/Subcat Studios
By Jally acoustical consulting, Syracuse, New York



The design addressed major acoustic challenges, such as blocking outside noise and separating sound between rooms. Each studio was carefully designed to suit its specific acoustic needs, resulting in a range of spaces that each have their own distinct sound quality.



Conceptual Video

Creating a concept idea

Trigger Warning
This video contains distressing audio (noise in domestic violence, including shouting and screams of abuse, some violence) and this triggering visual description is advised.

What am I creating?

Through my research, I became fascinated by how sound plays such a powerful role in the trauma and horrific experiences of domestic violence. I wanted to take that noise and treat it as its own concept, using sound waves to represent it visually and physically. Rather than only focusing on sound waves alone, I decided to create a conceptual video that follows the journey of a survivor of domestic violence. It represents the hardship, fear, and painful realities of abuse, but also the possibility of healing and rebuilding life afterwards. I am using the sound waves within the video as a way to transition into a conceptual model, allowing the idea of noise and trauma to physically move and evolve into something that reflects both survival and strength.



Part one: The Height of Storm

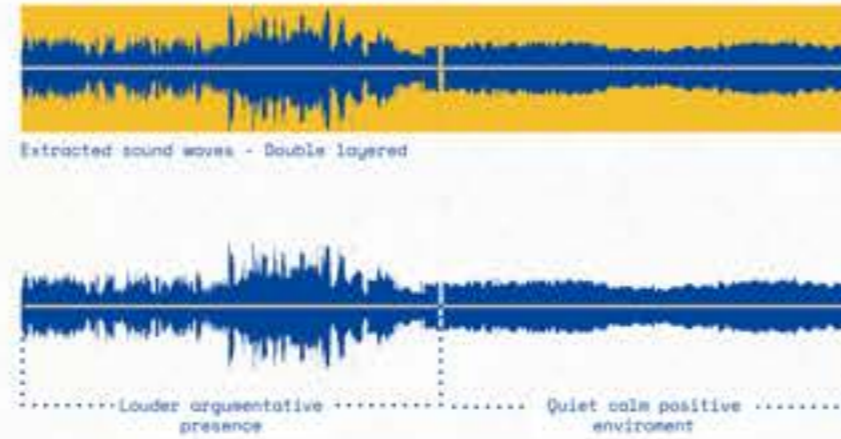
The first part of the video represents the hardship and violence that many women are forced to endure. I draw from news reports and film clips that focus on domestic abuse and violent situations to help shape this section. These sources allowed me to build an authentic soundscape, a sound bar that captures what a violent and horrific environment can actually feel like. Although the clips are disturbing, they provide a raw insight into the reality of abuse. They push me to go beyond the surface and truly delve into the emotional intensity and seriousness of the situation, rather than presenting a simplified or softened version of it.

Part Two: The Sound of Survival

The second part focuses on life beginning to feel hopeful again. The video transitions into scenes of children playing, where laughter and joy introduce a softer, more positive atmosphere. This marks the turning point in the survivor's journey. The clips, taken from films as well as real-life footage of women enjoying their lives again, show moments of freedom, happiness, and rebuilding after abuse. There is a clear contrast in the sound bar here; it becomes less harsh and far calmer, reflecting a safer and more peaceful environment. This shift highlights the possibility of healing and shows that life, after trauma, can still hold joy and light.



Conceptual video with sound waves



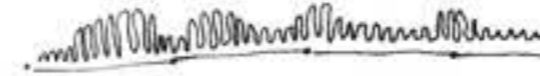
Conceptual Model

Creating a concept idea



Calm Voice - Sound wave

I extracted a calmer voice from video, this shows calmer waves although they fluctuate they do this in a steady flow that moves smoothly. I wanted to focus on a calmer voice as it represents what is better and how people should be spoken too.



Calm Voice - Sound wave

I extracted and divides the top half of the sound wave and created a sketch. This then informed me to create a model from this design.

The model

This shows the sound waves and how they move gracefully.



Shouting voice - Sound wave

I extracted a shouting sound from video and this sound wave, this shows that the waves can fluctuate alot and shows the aggressiveness and how they can move harshly. I wanted to look into this due to loud shouting voices being such a part of domestic violence.



Shouting voice - Sound wave

I extracted and divides the top half of the sound wave and created a sketch. This then informed me to create a model from this design.

The model

The model shows the drastic way in which the sound waves move etc and how they can see harsh and frantic just like the voice behind them.

Why am I using this?

I am turning sound waves into a structure, I didn't want to just show an abstract wave but the possibility of different sounds and how they can change the space. From this I built from this into a model and more with experimenting this into the design of some way.



Screaming Child - Sound wave

I extracted a Screaming child voice this is high pitched and moves the sound bar alot due to the fluctuation of tone and screaming. This is important to look into an children are such a big part of the domestic violence journey.



Screaming Child - Sound wave

I extracted and divides the top half of the sound wave and created a sketch. This then informed me to create a model from this design.

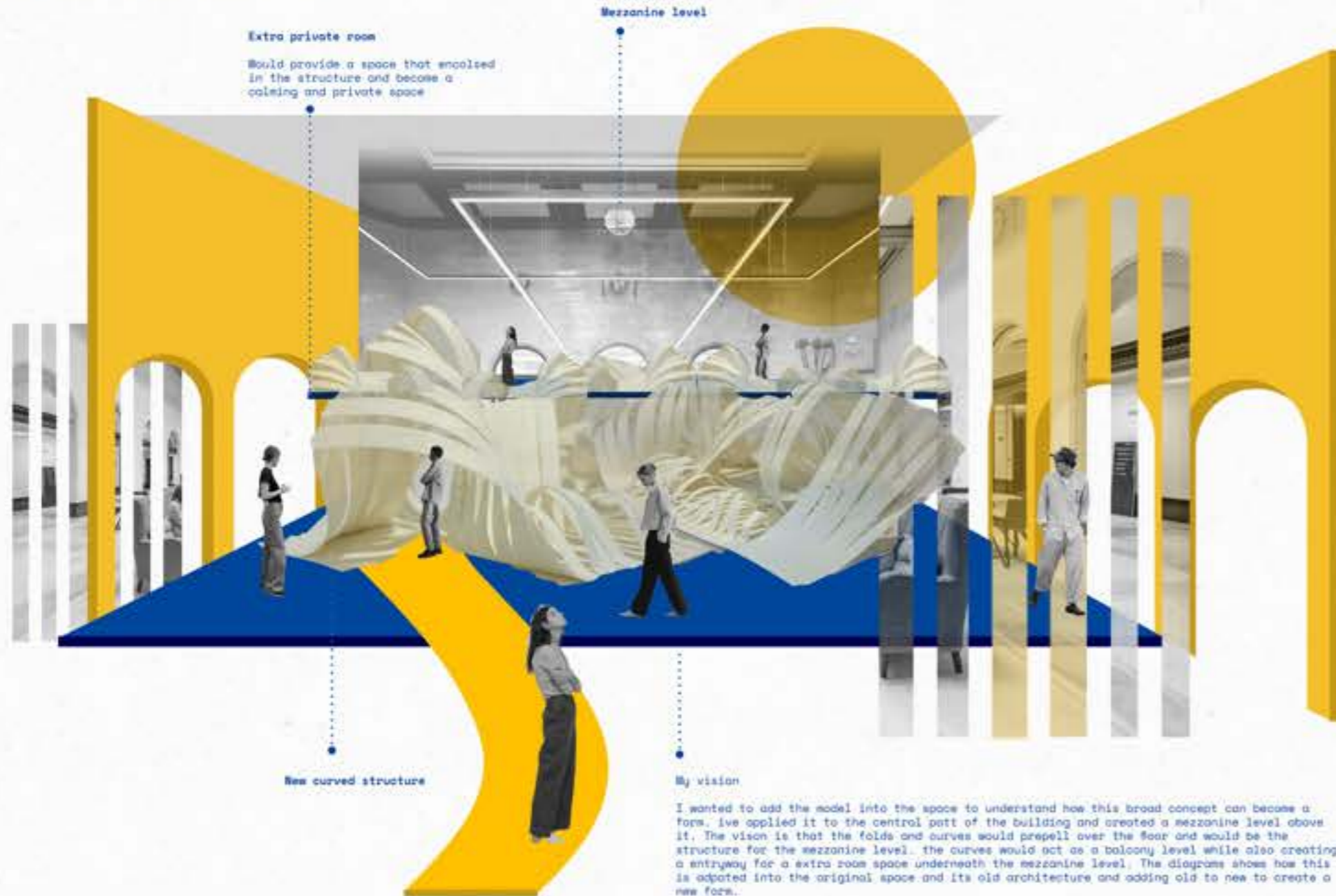
The model

The model shows the way in which the voice fluctuates and represents it through random changes in the voice tone.



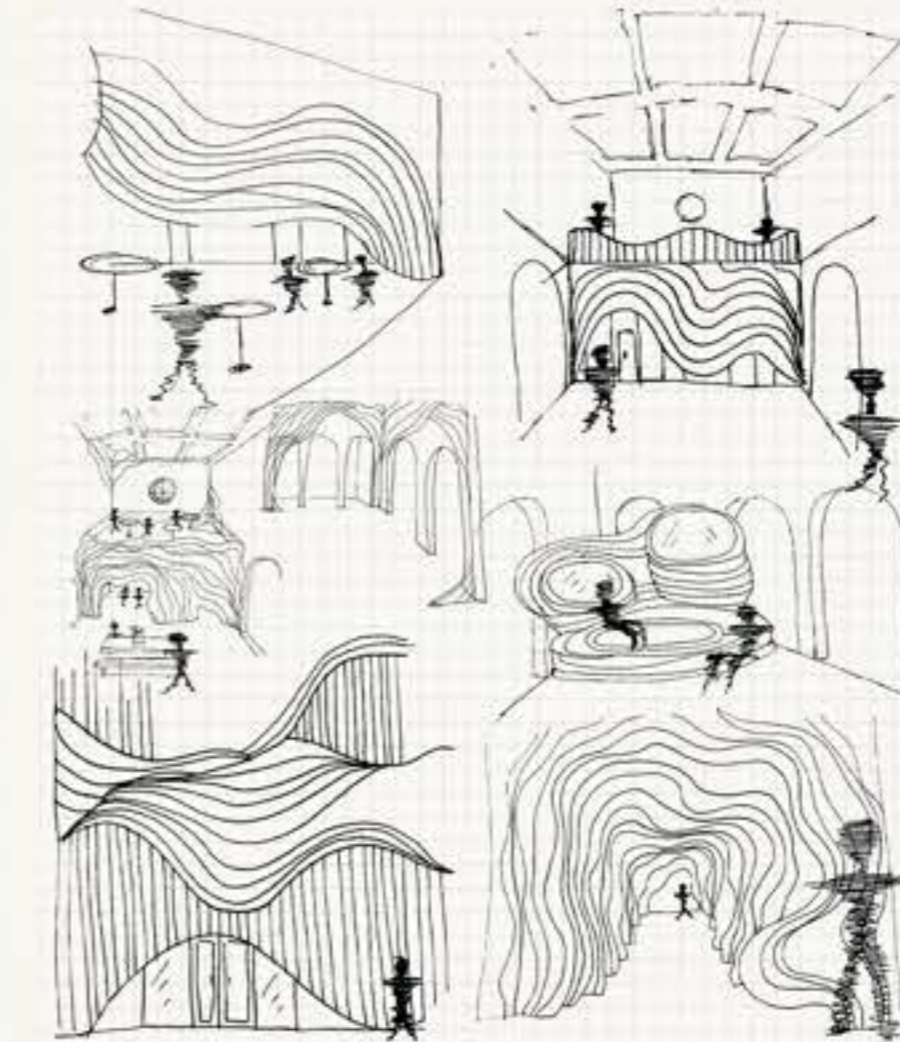
Conceptual Collage

Adding concept model into space



Conceptual sketch ideas

Visualising the model in the space
I have applied the model and its twists and turns and sketches it into different parts of the space.



Conceptual Sketch - Models - Mixed collage

Throughout my sketching and sketch up Model, I used to understand how the curves and overall design of the model could fit into the space. I needed to focus on creating calming environments and comfortable spaces, as the area must be suitable for women who have experienced domestic violence. I was able to develop several different ideas, with my favourite being the addition of a mezzanine level in the main area. This creates a calming space underneath, while also providing a separate area above where people can relax and unwind. I also incorporated these ideas into seating options and curved walkways throughout the space, helping the environment feel more natural and welcoming. Additionally, I implemented these design elements into wall coverings and acoustic features to further enhance the sense of calm within the space.

Mezzanine Ideas - Iterative

Calming down the concept

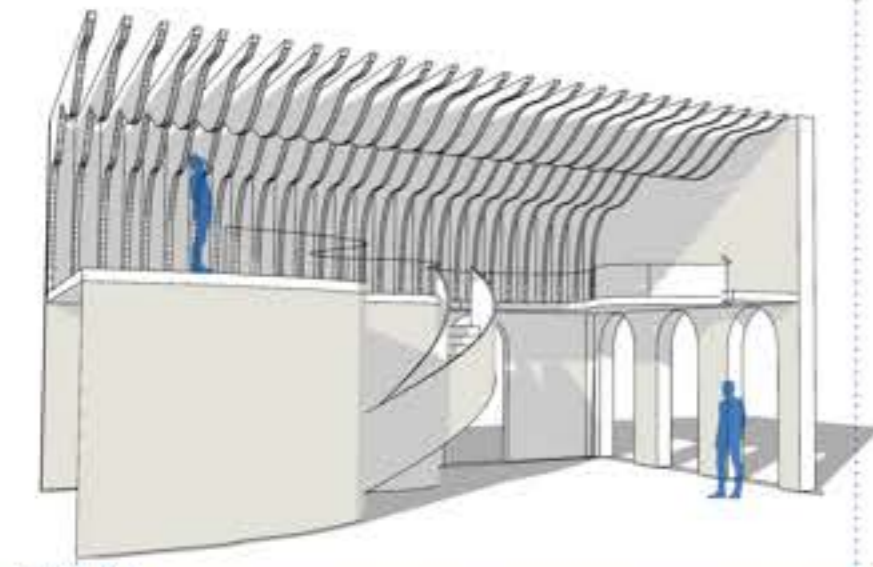


Diagram No.1

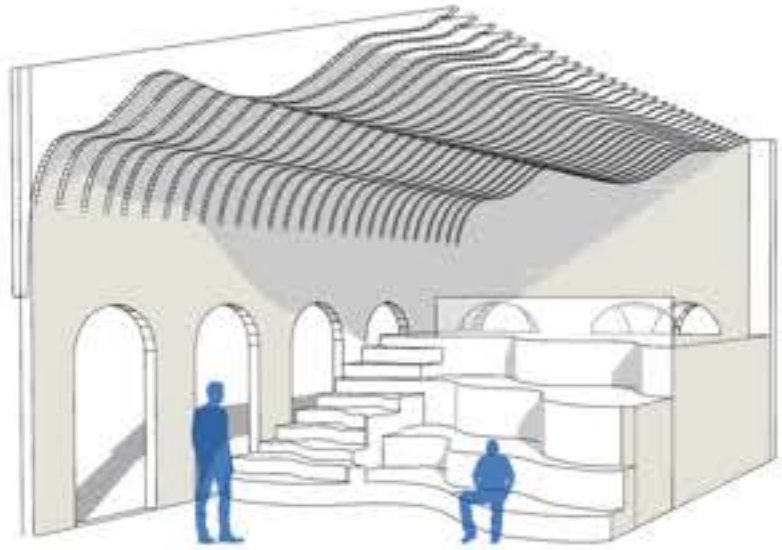


Diagram No.3

Why am i calming down the concept ?

When creating the mezzanine level that links to the concept i wanted to focus on calming down the design, all of the previous conceptual models have focuses on the sound waves but are seen as quite busy and chaotic , i wanted to hone this in and focus on my earlier works and focusing with the calmer sound wave models and creating openings and structures that resemble my original models and sound waves and creating a space that works well with the user and how they would feel comfortable within the space.

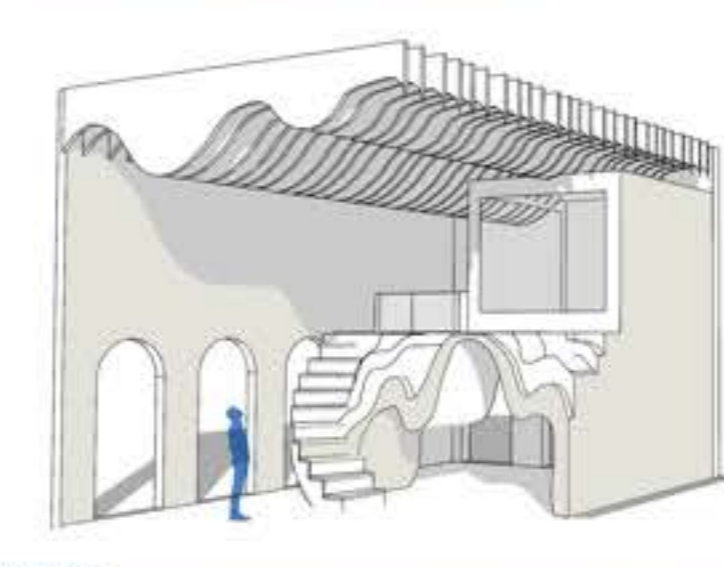


Diagram No.2

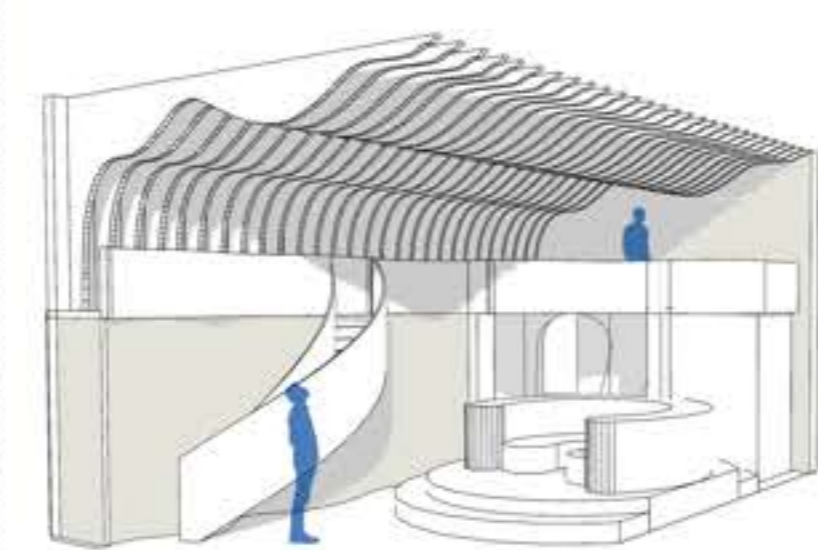


Diagram No.4

What am i designing ...

In these diagrams i am working with the void area and the main socialspace and kitchen and restaurant, i am creating a mezzanine to have the kitchen underneath and restaurant on top.

Diagram No.1

This represents a mezzanine level with a kitchen underneath it focuses on a curved design and curved staircase, it also incorporates a sound wave looking structure that resembles the sound wave structure . i will look into the materiality of this and the lighting of how it reflects on the actual building and its beautiful light structure.

Diagram No.2

On this drawing it shows the curved design that wraps around the stair case and focuses on creating a mezzanine level that will hold the restaurant it uses sound waves as its main driver.

Diagram No.3

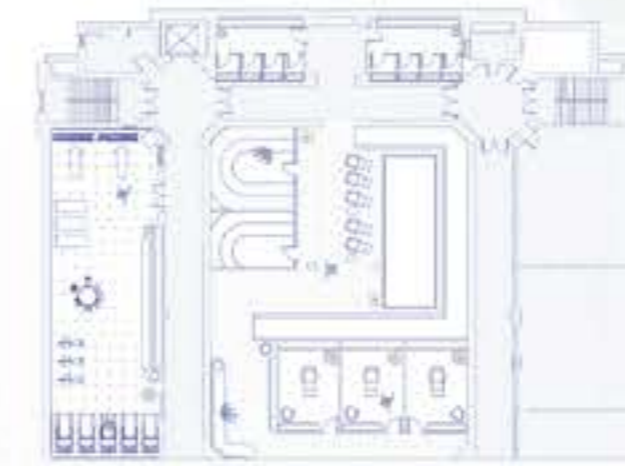
This shows the levels of the staircase that winds up and uses the communal social space as a seating area . it becomes one with the building and turns the level into a restaurant level.

Diagram No.4

I now work with all my other diagrams to create a curved design mezzanine, it also is informed as u can see into a kitchen space and see the staff working, it also incorporates the curves and levels and has them on the floor through seating etc and sticking to the curved themes.

Takeaways

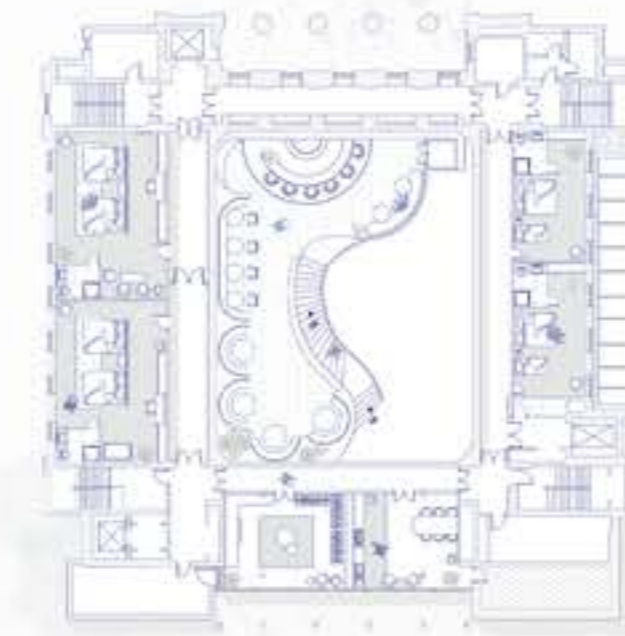
From this i want to create my final mezzanine level and also work with lighting and materials to understand how much light gets through the building.



Vault Level



Ground Floor



First Floor + Mezzanine



Second Floor

The Plans

The plans allow you to see the overall scale of the site and how all of the spaces are placed and designed. It allows clear direction of how people are moving around the space shows parts of the design that might not necessarily been seen in the visuals such as rooms like storage or staff spaces.



KEY NOTES

THE HAVEN CLUB

SECTION BB

DATE: 1.2024
SCALE: 1:100
DRAWN BY: [Name]
CHECKED BY: [Name]

Core Spaces

Explaining the functions

01 Bedrooms



There are three different types of bedrooms that are located on the top floors that allow different amounts of people and various situations to adapt to our facilities.

02 Social Space



The social space is a space for the women and children to come relax its in the central part of the building in the hub of it all.

03 Restaurant



The restaurant is a nice comfortable space for people to come and eat at any time. Will be open 24/hrs for anyone that needs.

04 Gym Facilities



The gym is a luxury space that has basic equipment to allow the women and children to have a fun activity while also being good for the mental health, there are child pens where children can be kept.

05 Spa Facilities



The spa has a pool and relaxation zones such as spa therapy rooms where the women can receive treatment. It also contains a sauna and steam room.

06 Self Use Kitchen



The self use kitchen is a space for the women to cook there own food on the bedrooms floors to give them a sense of independence and privacy.

07 Therapy



The therapy rooms are where trained therapists can speak to the women and children and help them through there hard times.

08 Free Shop



The free shop is a space where the women can grab anything they like from shoes to clothes to kids toys this is all free and donated and gives the women a sense of freedom.

09 Medical Rooms



The medical rooms are a space for the women to be checked out by professionals and see if they need to be moved to a hospital later on.

10 Staff Room



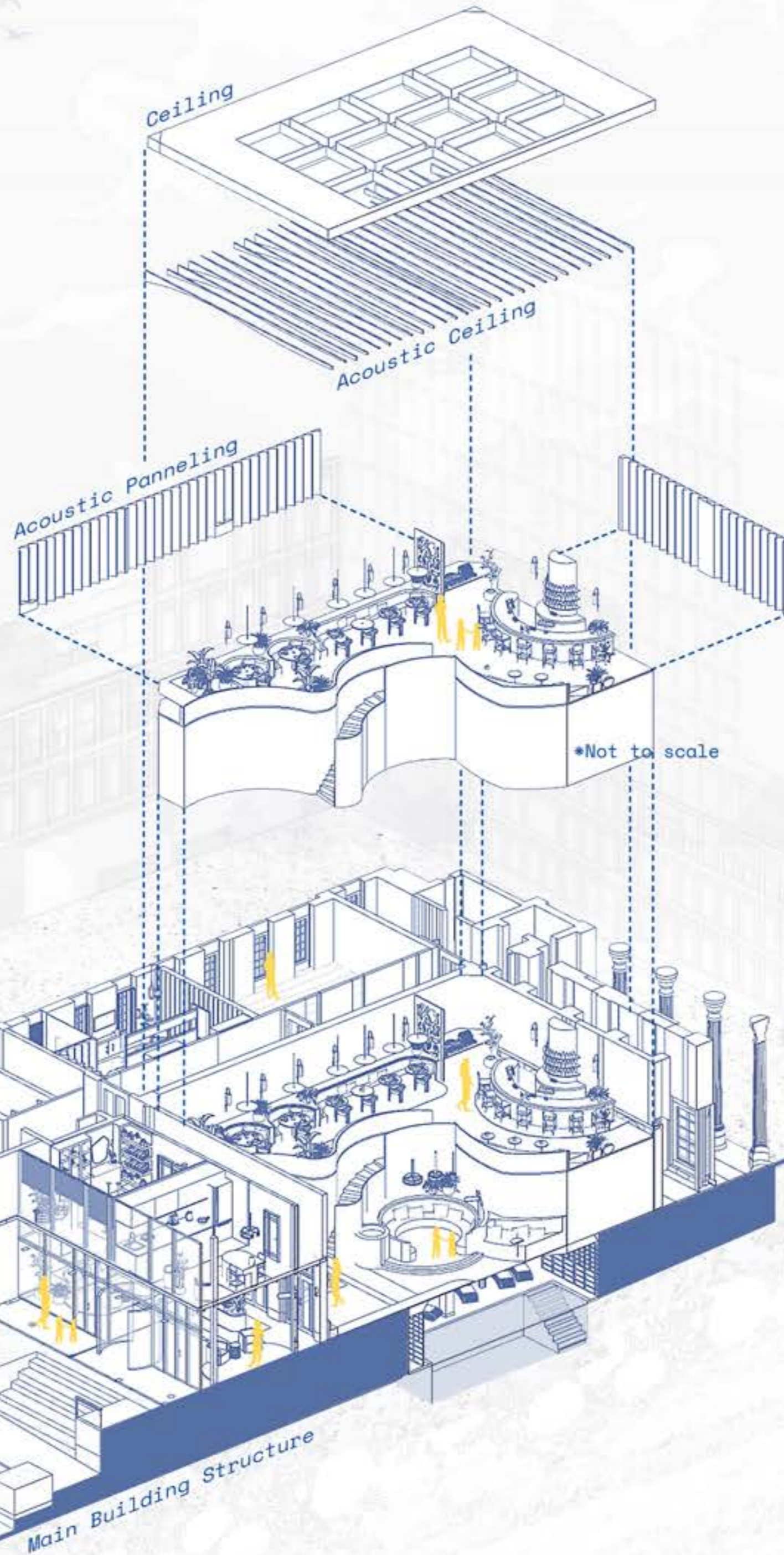
The staff room is a space for all the staff to cook or gather for meeting and relaxation etc.

Axonometrics

Understanding Levels

The axonometric drawing helps to visualise the overall layout of the space and how the different levels connect, as well as highlighting the new ceiling structure. It shows the vault level below ground, including the addition of the pool and how this integrates within the space.

The drawing also illustrates the new ceiling feature within the void, demonstrating how it is attached to the existing structure. This design allows natural light to filter through softly while also maintaining a sense of privacy.



•Not to scale



Signage

Signage

The signage allows for the users to have a clear sense of direction in tough times and be able to see things quickly - these signs are placed around the entire building.



Acoustic Features

Around the entire building there are acoustic finishes and structures. All of the bedrooms are lined with acoustic panneling in different materials and designs and in the main spaces the acoustic ceiling structure is present allowing sound to not echo but allow the user to feel safe.



Key Card Access

To be able to get into the building you will need key card access that will be given to you by reception. You will need key card access plus a bedroom key to get into the bedrooms. Throughout the buildings most of the areas will be key card access and this allows users to feel safe - security is top priority.



Privacy Glass + Doors

All of the glass in the building has a film on it allowing people to see out but not in making the user feel safe. The amount of doors you need to go through with key card access is two allowing the women to feel like security is top