

# SKILLS WITHOUT BORDERS



Skills Without Borders responds to the challenges faced by migrants and refugees whose skills, qualifications and experience often remain unseen and underutilised. Through research into barriers to employment, accreditation and social integration, I developed an inclusive learning and enterprise hub within Birmingham's historic Exchange building. The project reimagines the building as a place of opportunity, cultural exchange and community support, where users can learn, connect and build confidence. By bringing together education, mentorship, enterprise support and shared social spaces, the design aims to create a greater sense of belonging and visibility. Through this project, I wanted to explore how interior design can help address social inequalities and support meaningful integration within local communities.

Asrar Amadi

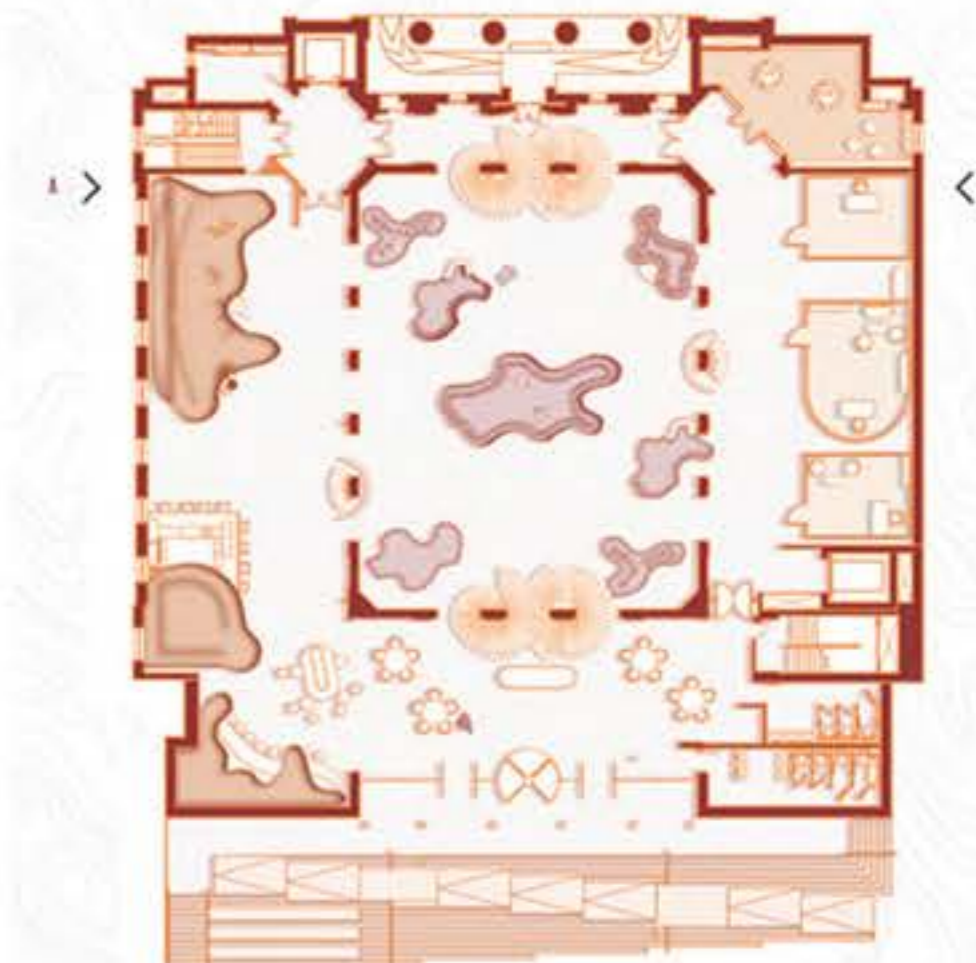
FLOOR PLANS



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

# "THEY'RE TAKING OUR JOBS"

## PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Negative media framing fuels division and creates 'us vs them' mentalities

## FEAR OVER FACTS

Public discourse often blames migrants for economic and social challenges without evidence

## POLICY & BARRIERS

Complex visa systems, lengthy recognition processes and legal barriers keep skilled people out

## INVISIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS

Migrants fill out essential roles in healthcare, transport, construction, care and hospitality and education

## THE HUMAN COST

Behind the headlines are real people, families torn apart, dreams delayed and potential wasted

## THE RESULT

Talent is wasted. Communities are divided. The economy loses out.

## REALITY

Migrants are more likely to be entrepreneurs, innovators and job creators than job takers.

**BRITISH JOBS FOR BRITISH WORKERS**

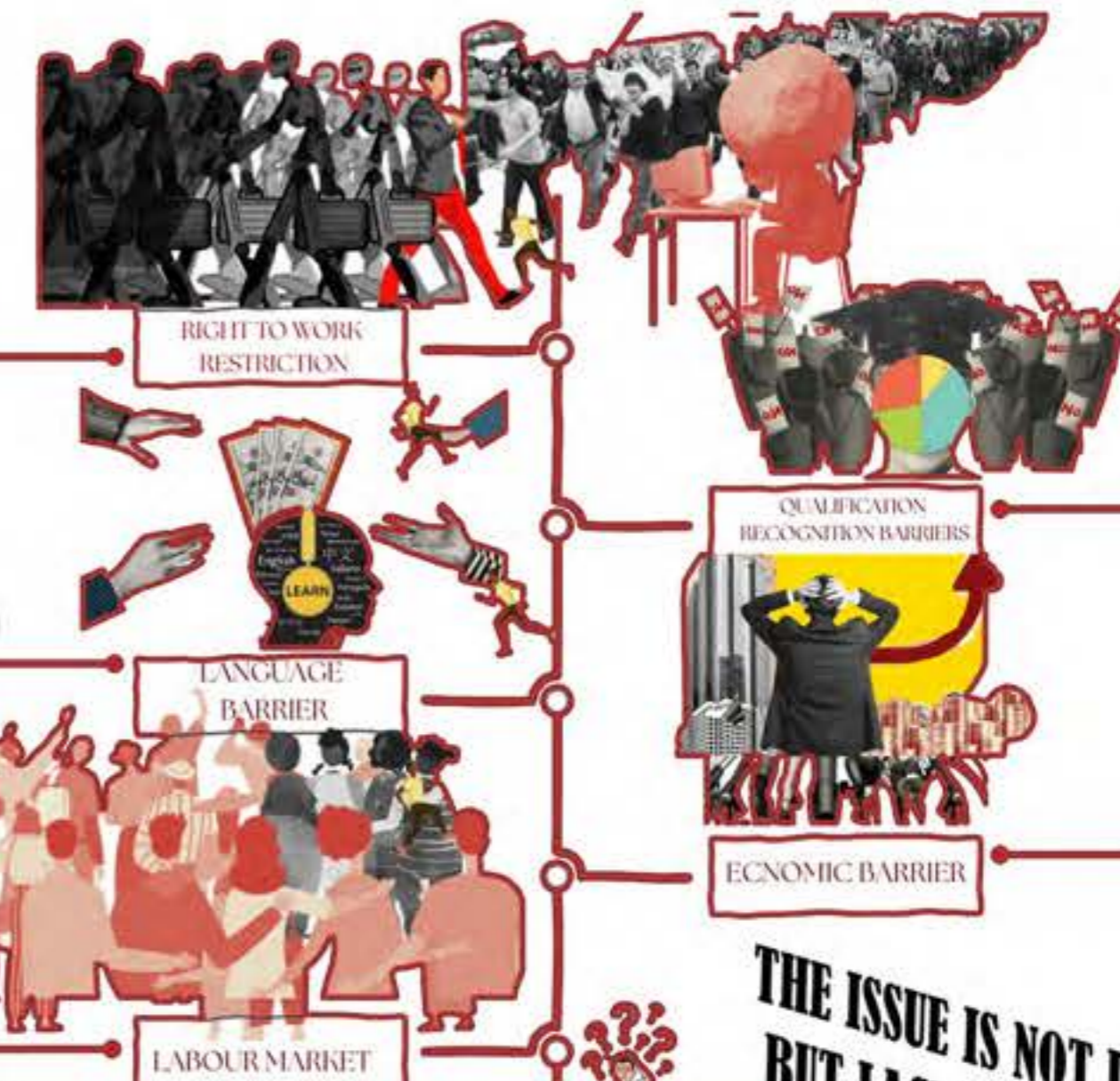
## RESEARCH

### THE BARRIERS

- Asylum seekers **CANNOT** work while waiting
- Waiting times can exceed **12+ MONTHS**
- This freezes professional progression

- IELTS / professional English tests required
- Cost + retesting
- Accent **discrimination**

Migrants overrepresented in hospitality, logistics cleaning and **UNDERREPRESENTED** in other fields  
Lower employment rates for refugees in first years after status



- Overseas degrees not automatically **recognised**
- UK ENIC equivalency costs money
- Missing documentation common for refugees
- Regulated professions require UK exams

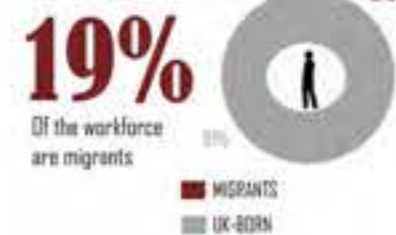
- High cost of requalification.
- **NO INCOME** during retraining
- Equipment cost for starting business

**THE ISSUE IS NOT LACK OF SKILL, BUT LACK OF ACCESS**

## RESEARCH

### STATISTICS

MIGRANTS ARE A VITAL PART OF THE UK WORKFORCE



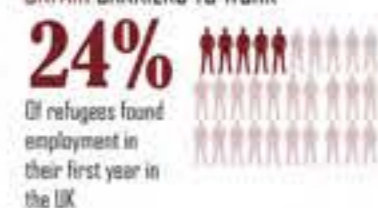
MIGRANTS CONTRIBUTE SIGNIFICANTLY TO THE ECONOMY



HIGHLY EDUCATED MIGRANT WORKERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO OVERQUALIFY



REFUGEES FACE LONG AND UNFAIR BARRIERS TO WORK



**12 MONTHS**

Asylum seekers are restricted from working for 12 months.

SKILLED AND EXPERIENCED BUT UNDERUTILISED



ASYLUM MIGRANTS EARN SIGNIFICANTLY LESS



INVESTING IN REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS EVERYONE



### SOURCES

- OFFICE OF NATIONAL STATISTICS
- UK GOVERNMENT IMMIGRATION SYSTEM STATISTICS
- UK GOVERNMENT, REFUGEE INTEGRATION OUTCOME

- BREAKING BARRIERS, REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT REPORT
- NUFFIELD FOUNDATION, THE REFUGEE LABOUR MARKET
- MIGRATION OBSERVATORY, LABOUR MARKET ANALYSIS

## RESEARCH

### BREAKING THE BARRIER



#### 01 SKILL RETENTION + PREPARATION

- Skill **documentation** lab (portfolio rebuilding space)
- **Language** for profession classroom
- **Peer networking** commons
- Volunteer **demonstration** kitchen/workshop



#### 02 ACCREDITATION & ENTERPRISE SUPPORT ZONE

- Business **mentoring** rooms
- **Legal** advice pods
- Health & safety **certification** classroom
- Shared **admin** office

Skills without borders tackles the barriers at multiple levels: **skills recognition, validation, infrastructure and integration** creating a supportive ecosystem for migrants and refugees to rebuild their professional futures



#### 03 SKILL VALIDATION STUDIO

- **Demonstration** bays
- **Portfolio** review room
- Recorded **assessment** studio
- **UK compliance** workshops



#### 04 SHARED INFRASTRUCTURE

- Shared **commercial** kitchen
- **retail** pods
- Rotating **leases**
- **pop-ups**
- **network**/event

**ACCESS RECOGNITION INFRASTRUCTURE**



**70%+ IMPROVEMENT** IN EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES through skills recognition and support

**50% FASTER ACCESS TO QUALIFICATION** through validation and compliance support

### ANTICIPATED IMPACT

**2X STRONGER COMMUNITY INTERGRATION** through shared spaces and networking

**SUSTAINABLE LOCAL ECONOMY** through enterprise support and pop-up opportunities

"SKILLED INDIVIDUALS ARE SYSTEMATICALLY PUSHED INTO INVISIBLE LABOUR, DESPITE THEIR CONTRIBUTION, EXPERIENCE AND POTENTIAL"

# DIGITAL EXPLORATION DEVELOPING THE BORDER

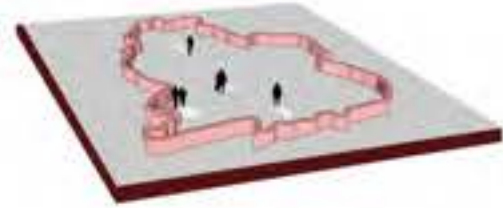
After 3D printing the outline, I modelled the Birmingham border in SketchUp to explore its potential as an architectural form. This allowed me to test scale, thickness, elevation and how the border could be used to shape spaces and experiences.

- EXPLORATION INTENT**
- Test the outline as a spatial structure
  - Explore elevation, voids and enclosure
  - Understand how people can move under, through and around the form
  - Discover opportunities for gathering, learning and interaction

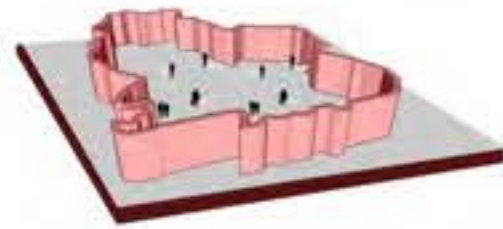


**PHYSICAL TO DIGITAL**  
The 3D printed model informed the digital model. Extruding the border allowed me to explore different heights and thicknesses, revealing the potential for sheltered spaces below and elevated landmarks above.

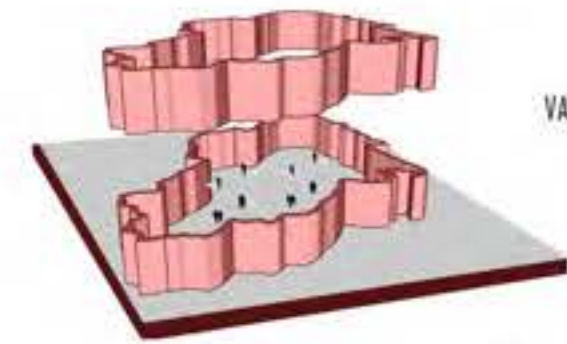
**KEY INSIGHT**  
Extruding the border transforms a line on a map into an architectural framework. The voids created beneath become spaces for people, movement and interaction, turning the edge of the city into an opportunity rather than a boundary.



LOW EXTRUSION / subtle edge + seating



HIGH EXTRUSION / overhead shelter + void



VARIABLE HEIGHT / dynamic experience

CONCEPT STATEMENT

## BREAK. REPURPOSE. RECONNECT.

Instead of working within the border, the idea is to break it. By fragmenting the boundary, new spaces are created within the broken pieces. These spaces become opportunities for movement, interaction, gathering and community.

The border is no longer a dividing line, but a framework for connection.

SHIFT IN APPROACH

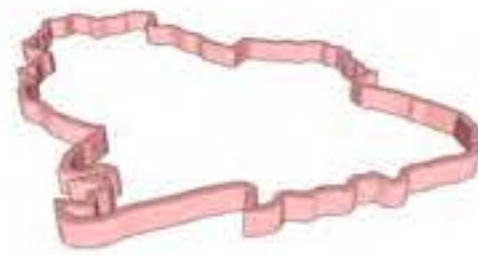


WORK WITHIN the border

BREAK + REPURPOSE the border

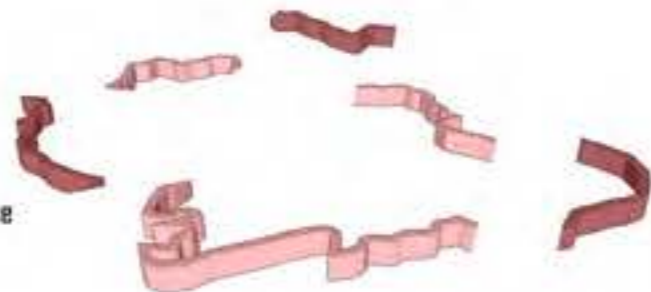
01

**THE BORDER**  
A closed boundary that divides.



02

**BREAK**  
Fragment the border to release its potential



03

**REPURPOSE**  
Create spaces within the fragments for movement, interaction and gathering

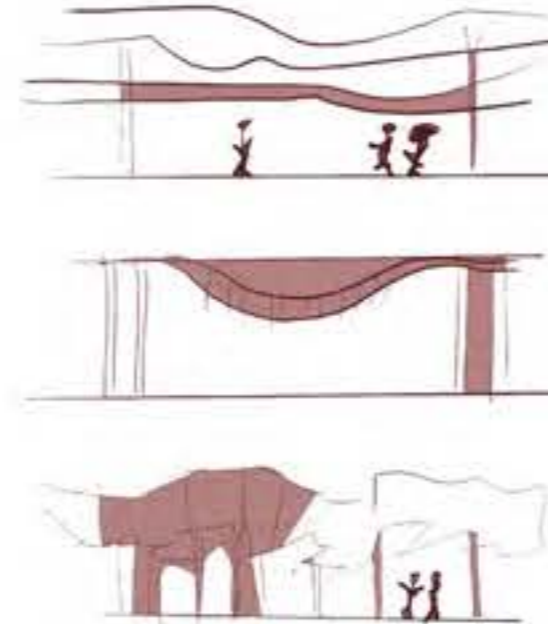


SKETCH EXPLORATION

# SKETCHES DEVELOPING THE BORDER

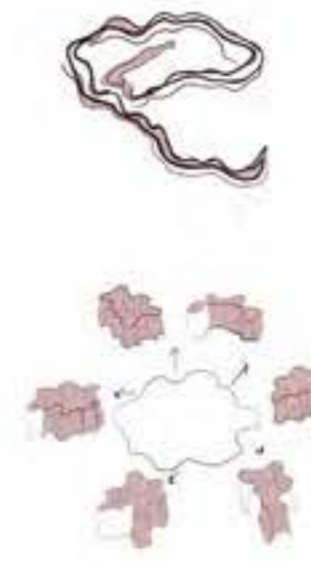
A series of sketches exploring how the Birmingham border can be transformed from a flat outline into a three dimensional architectural framework. The studies investigate elevation, voids, movement, shelter and interaction.

SECTION SKETCHES EXPLORATION



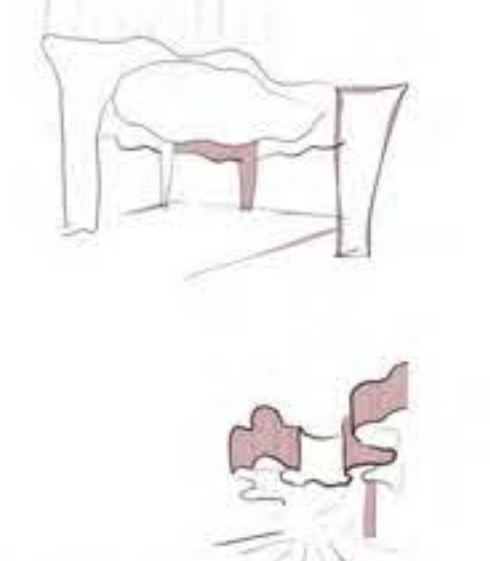
These sketches explore how the Birmingham border can be transformed from a flat outline into an architectural form through extrusion, elevation and sectional manipulation. By lifting and carving the boundary, the studies investigate shelter, enclosure, openness and the relationship between people and space beneath the form.

PLAN + ORGANISATION



The border was broken apart, shifted and reconfigured to test how the form could organise movement, gathering and circulation. These plan studies explore how fragmented edges can create multiple entry points, central voids and flexible zones for interaction and community use.

SPATIAL + ATMOSPHERIC



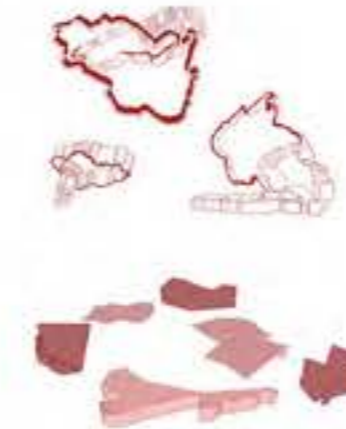
These sketches investigate the experiential qualities created by the form, including light, shadow, compression, openness and visibility. The studies explore how varying heights and suspended elements can shape atmosphere, movement and social interaction within the space.

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

## FROM BORDER TO EXPERIENCE

REDEFINING SPACES THROUGH FRAGMENTS

All furniture and spatial elements are formed using fragmented pieces of the Birmingham border, symbolising the breaking of physical, social and cultural boundaries. The design repurposes these fragments into spaces of connection, opportunity and community



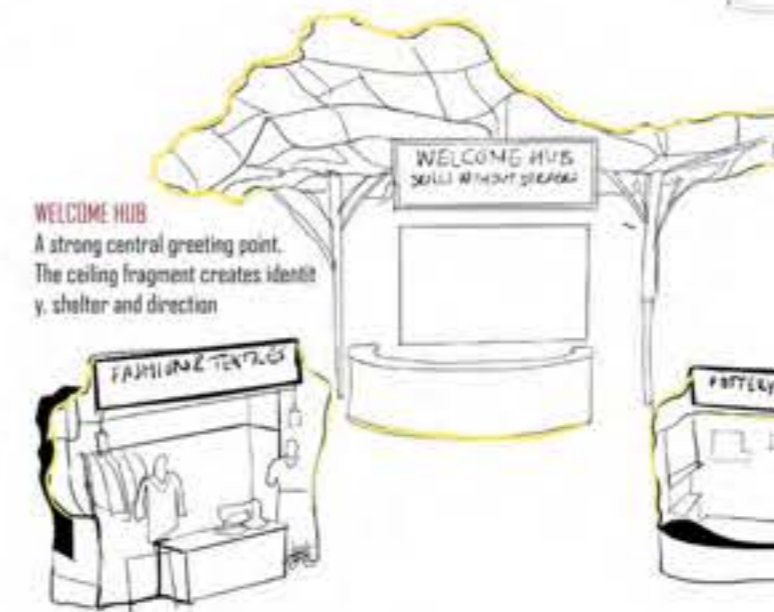
KEY INSIGHT

By breaking the border into fragments, the design transforms a dividing line into a unifying system. Each fragment becomes a purposeful element that shapes space, defines function and creates a cohesive experience for people.

**LOUNGE SEATING**  
Fragments form organic seating that creates intimate and welcoming space



**WELCOME HUB**  
A strong central greeting point. The ceiling fragment creates identity, shelter and direction

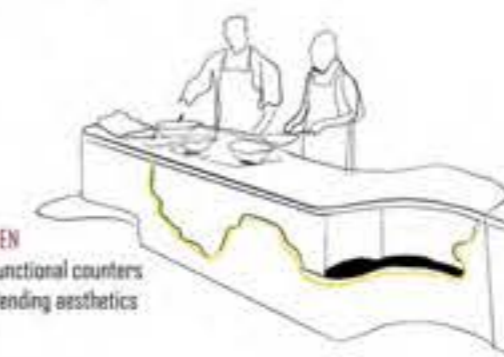


**CAFE AREA**  
The border becomes the ceiling feature, defining the space and adding character.



**MARKET POP-UPS**  
Fragmented forms create flexible market and workshop spaces that support small businesses, showcase handmade products and encourage creativity, learning and community interaction.

**COMMERCIAL KITCHEN**  
Fragments shape functional counters and workspaces, blending aesthetics with practicality



**ADVICE ROOMS**  
Illuminated border fragments guide users into private rooms for support and guidance.



# AXONOMETRIC

Exploded axonometric exploring the spatial arrangement and relationship between the public, collaborative and private zones within the design, highlighting the functions and atmosphere of each space across all three floors.



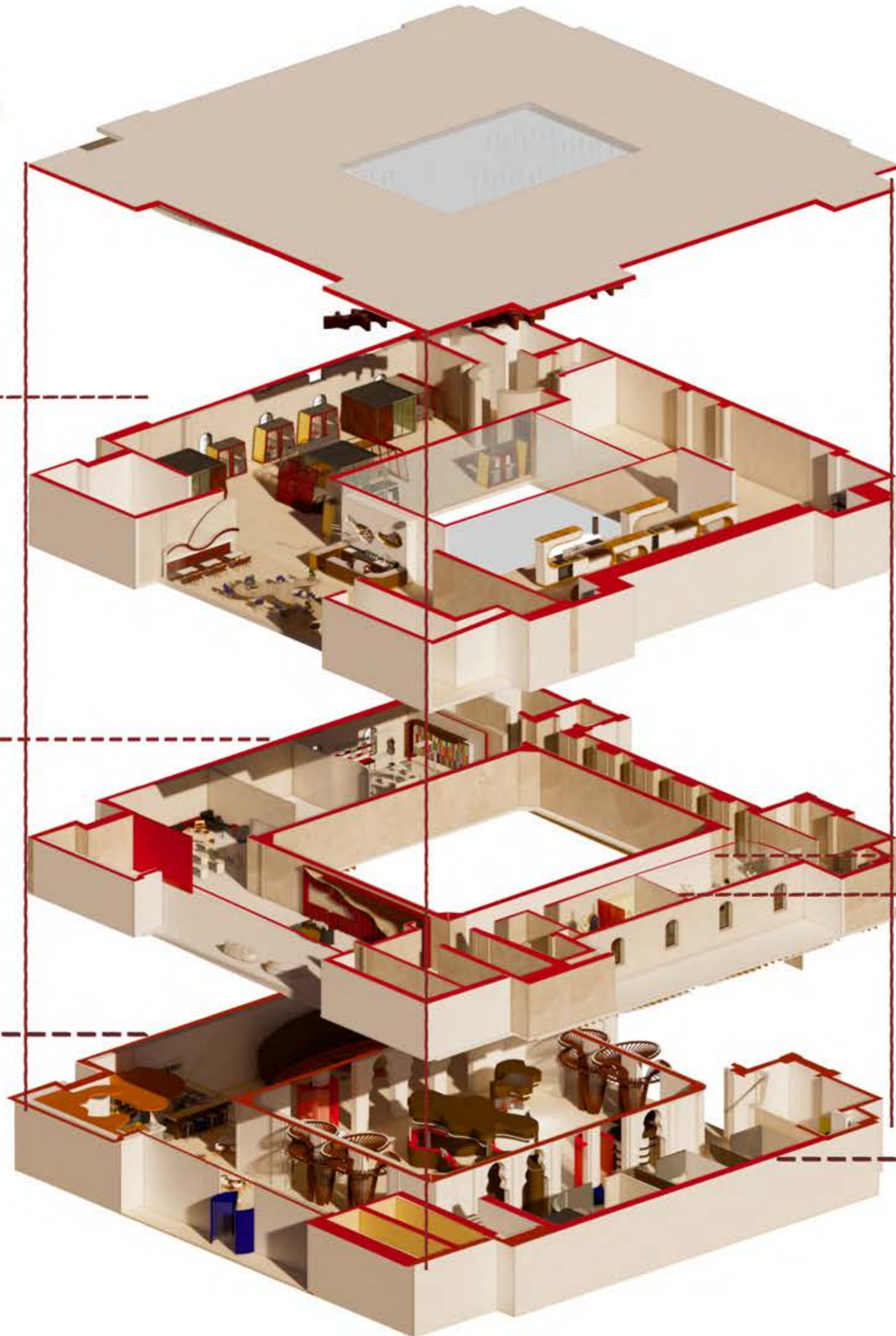
STUDY PODS



SEWING ROOM



LOUNGE AREA



CLASSROOM



SALON ROOM



ADVICE HUBS

