

The Reference Room

Hybrid of Theory and Practice through Material Reference

The Reference Room is a hybrid interior that merges public engagement with professional interior design practice, creating a space where theory and making coexist. Accessible to both members and non-members, the ground floor combines a sustainable home goods retail space with café and exhibition areas, encouraging visitors to experience design as both a process and product. The upper levels provide interior designers with a reference library, materials library, communal workspaces, and a private studio for a designer-in-residence, supporting research, collaboration, and material exploration.

Central to the project is the architectural insertion of two closely positioned volumes, separated by a deliberate gap that symbolizes the relationship between conceptual thinking and fabrication. Layered spatial elements and blurred boundaries allow movement, display, and workspaces to overlap, fostering openness and collective exchange.

The project follows a sustainable, circular design approach, using only reclaimed and natural materials. Material selection is based on performance, durability, longevity, and the extent to which materials create a rich, immersive experience. Reversible assembly methods enable adaptability and continued use of materials. Materiality serves as both a sustainable strategy and sensory expression, revealing histories of making, repair, and reuse. Together, the reclaimed elements form a layered tapestry, a patchwork transformed into something unique, beautiful, and experiential, showing how reuse generates new value, character, and meaning.

Design becomes magical when materials carry history, texture, and purpose.



Environmental Impact of Waste In Interior Design

Waste in interior design is produced through construction, renovation, and furniture disposal, with around 32% of landfill waste coming from construction and demolition and 42% of UK textile waste from household materials. If not reduced, this contributes to overflowing landfills, increased pollution, resource depletion, and higher costs for clients. Designers also face challenges such as tight deadlines and limited knowledge of recyclable or reusable materials, making waste reduction difficult. A circular approach using reclaimed materials can help reduce environmental impact and create more sustainable spaces. The Reference Room supports this by helping designers make more informed, environmentally responsible choices and design with adaptable reuse and waste reduction in mind.

42%

of waste in landfills comes from interior textiles



Keeping surplus materials from being wasted



Making good use of reclaimed materials



A materials library helps designers and clients explore textures, colors, and materials in one place while reducing waste and avoiding duplicate samples.



Design Creation



Material Experimentation



Reference Library



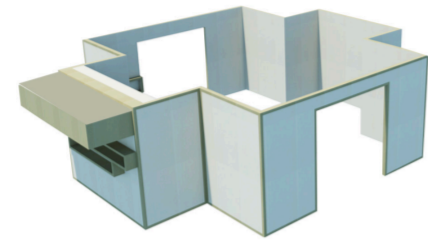
Collaboration



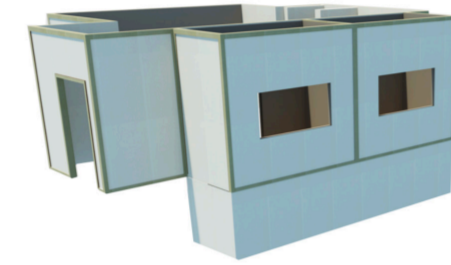
Cafe



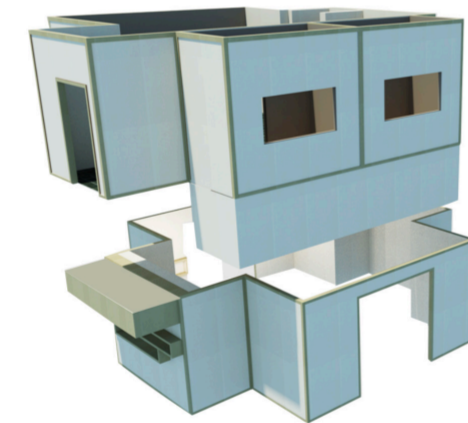
Retail and Exhibition



Volume A: the base of the insertion, located on the ground floor carefully framing circulation paths



Volume B: the top volume of the insertion, located on the first floor is cantilevered, slightly floating above volume A



Volumes A & B create a layered, suspended composition that introduces rhythm and hierarchy to the overall form.



Volumetric insertion: easily assembled and disassembled, filled with and surrounded by a patchwork of reclaimed and sustainable materials. The conceptual framework of the design is focused on layering, blending, and coexistence through materiality, form, and functions within the space.



1. Empty Site: 233 Shoreditch High St, London E1 6PJ



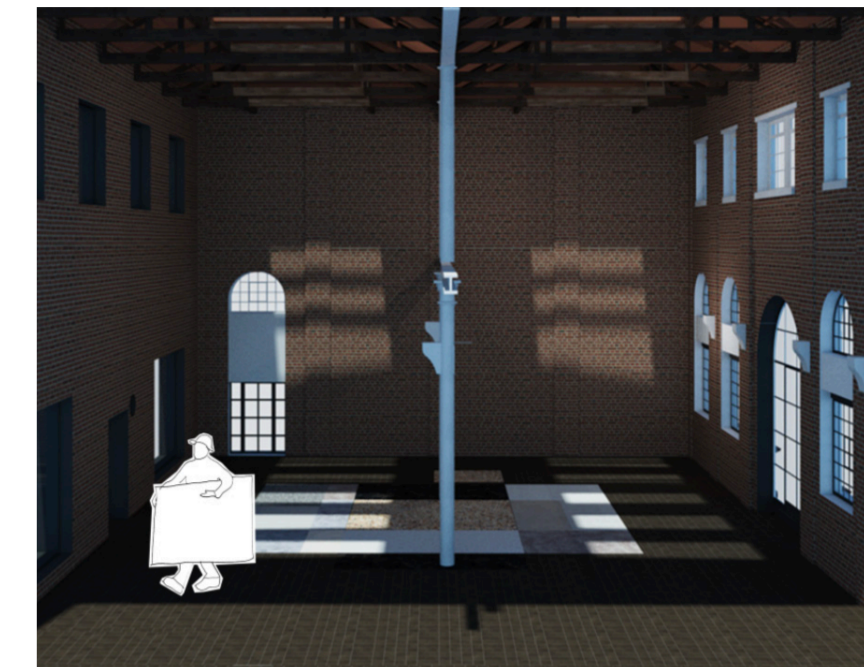
2. Easy assembly and installation of Volume A



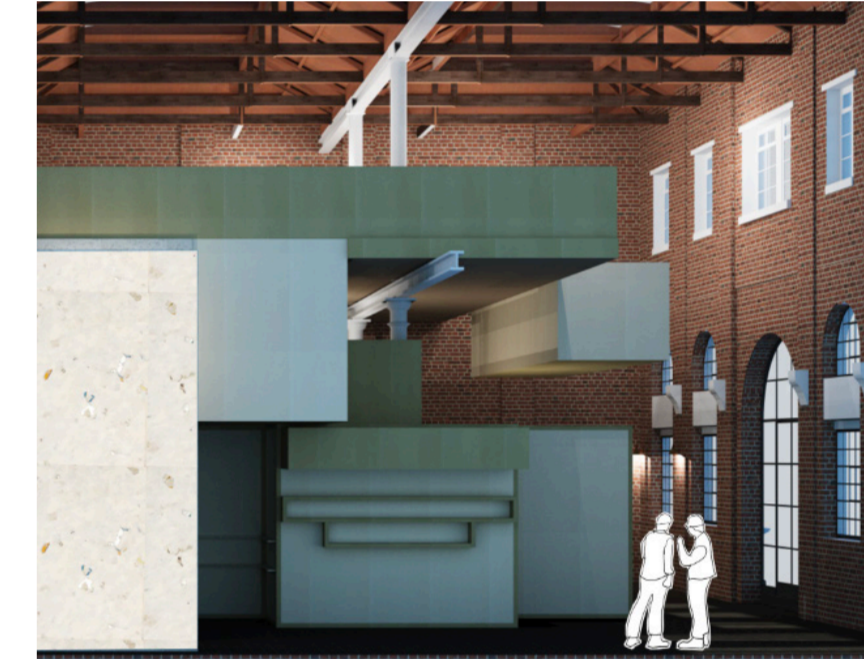
3. Installing Volume A and Mezzanine



4. Volumes A & B stack atop one another



7. Full disassembly of all components

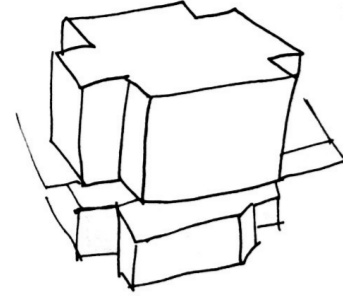


6. Easy disassembly



5. The design in its entirety

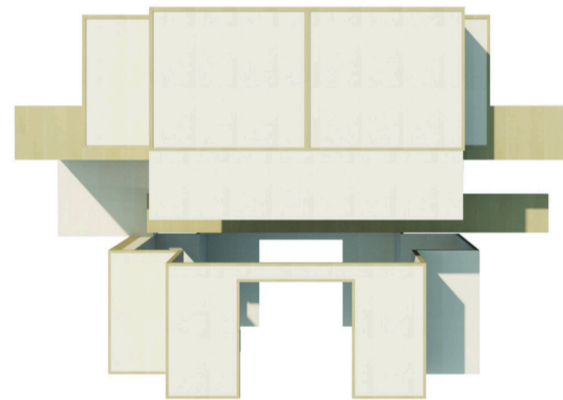
Design Process



The design centers on a compact volumetric insertion that preserves the historic shell by keeping the perimeter open and active. While the volume reads as a unified object, its interior reveals a layered system of reclaimed and sustainable materials, merging spatial clarity with environmental intent.



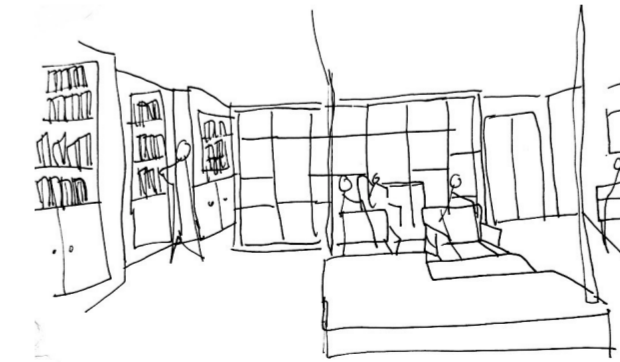
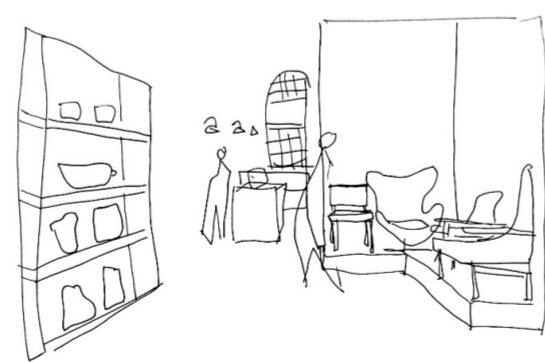
Using wooden boxes to represent the central volume, which serves as both a functional core and conceptual anchor, creating a dialogue between the historic Victorian context and resourceful design through a single unifying structure, helping to understand how the insertion would appear when formed from one durable composite material.



The Insertion explores the dialogue between thinking and making through closely positioned inserted volumes that nearly touch, capturing a moment of suspended connection. Designed for easy assembly and disassembly, it uses Viroc, a dry-mix material made from pine wood scraps and cement.

Material Exploration in 3D Form

Turning Sketches into material lead 3D vignettes



Cafe: mycelium, coconut fibre and bamboo



Exhibition: cork, viroc, mycelium and bam-



Retail: cork, mycelium, and coconut fibers



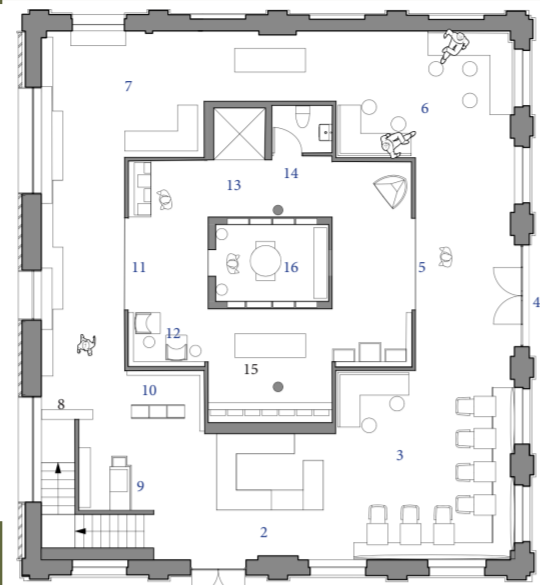
Reference Library: cork, dried moss and



Materials Library: plant fibres, mycelium and

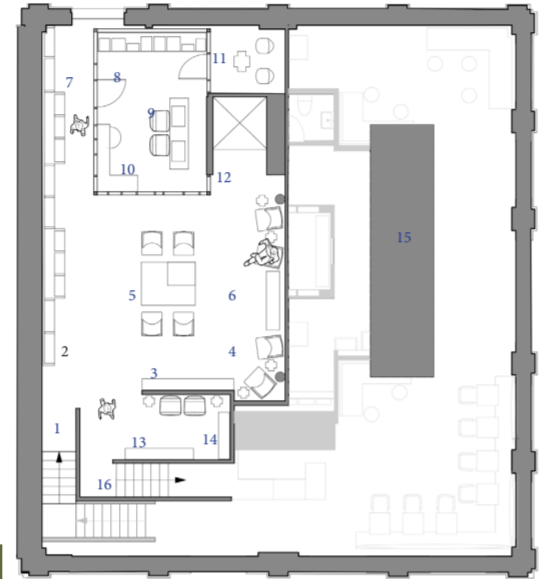
The Plans

1. Piazza Entrance
 2. Cafe Counter
 3. Cafe Seating
 4. Secondary entrance on Shoreditch High Street
 5. Entrance/Exit into the Retail Space
 6. Additional Cafe Seating
 7. Exhibition Space
 8. Exhibition Introductory Panel and Labeling
 9. Reception Desk and Materials Drop off
 10. Book Display and Seating
 11. Entrance/Exit into the Retail Space
 12. Seating that is used for retail and functions as overflow cafe seating
 13. Lift to Mezzanine and First Floors
 14. WC
 15. Retail space of home ware goods.
 16. Central home volume continuation of retail space
- Ground Floor: Open to Members & Non-Members
Features: Reception, Cafe, Exhibition and Retail Spaces



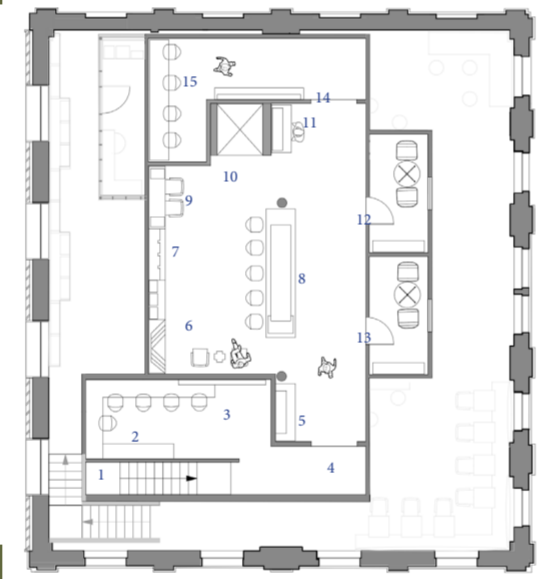
Ground Floor

1. Steps from the ground floor
 2. Bookshelves
 3. Book Storage
 4. Seating
 5. Table and Seating
 6. Bookshelf
 7. Entrance into the Designer in Residence's Office
 8. Shelving and Storage Unit
 9. Table used for meeting and displaying materials
 10. Designer's desk
 11. Private area for the Designer in Residence
 12. Lift to Ground and Top floors
 13. Book display
 14. Storage Unit
 15. Extended Geometric Volume from First Floor
 16. Stairs to the First Floor
- Mezzanine: Member Access Only, with the exception of their design clients
Features: Resident Designer's Private Office, Reference Library and Reading Nook



Mezzanine

1. Steps from the Mezzanine floor
 2. Material Storage
 3. Communal Workspace
 4. Entrance to Materials Library
 5. Material Display and Storage
 6. Seating
 7. Material Storage and Display
 8. Shelving and Storage Unit with seating
 9. Table used for meeting and displaying materials
 10. Lift to Mezzanine and Ground floors
 11. Material Display and Storage
 12. Member's Only office space
 13. Member's Only office space
 14. Materials Storage Unit
 15. Communal Workspace
- First Floor: Member Access Only, with the exception of their design clients
Features: Materials Library, Communal Work Areas and Offices for Hire



First Floor

Isometric View reveals the geometric volume on the top floor. This perspective provides a clear view of the first-floor office spaces and highlights the architectural overhang. On the ground floor, communal seating, the exhibition area, the retail space entrance, the covered side of the resident designer's office, and a private nook are visible. Prominent green library bookcases offer a glimpse into the reference library on the mezzanine. The isometric view highlights the composition and collective value of the selected materials. These materials create a cohesive, distinctive interior, each chosen for its contribution to the overall design. The insertion is a singular material, while the surrounding materials were selected to enhance both aesthetics and function.



Exploded Isometric



Ground Floor -- Member and Non-Members

1. Cafe Counter
2. Cafe Seating
3. Central Volume -- Home ware retail area
4. Exhibition Display

Mezzanine -- Members Only Access

5. Skeletal Office Space for Resident Designer
6. Suspended Reading Table
7. Suspended Book Shelves

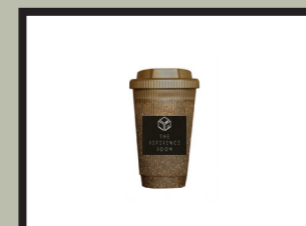
First Floor -- Members Only Access

8. Small Bookable Offices for Member Designer
9. Suspended Materials Display and Viewing Table



Logo and Merchandise

The Reference Room will offer merchandise for purchase as keepsakes. Both members and non-members may choose from the available products, which are essential tools for interior designers. Members receive these goods as a token of appreciation, while non-members can purchase them at the retail shop. All merchandise is eco-friendly, reflecting the brand's ethos.



The Reference Room logo uses a minimal cubic form with a hand-drawn quality to reflect the assembly of reclaimed materials into a unified whole. Fragmented letterforms reference material offcuts, echoing the space's focus on reuse, study, and reinvention.



Visitors entering from the piazza and are first welcomed by the café and seating area. Inside, large sculptural forms define the building's center. The perimeter is clearly visible, encouraging exploration of both the outer edges and the central volume.



This view explores the inner layers and marks the entry into the retail space from the interior, adjacent to the exhibition area. Visitors can access the large geometric insertion from two points.



On the perimeter of the retail space is the exhibition area. The current exhibition is of mid-century modern design. Visitors are encouraged to explore all of the zones.



The passages between the exhibition space into the retail area, entering layers



A peak inside the sustain goods retail space. All of the items are friendly home ware items.



The central focal retail display sits within a dining room-like installation



Section AA



Section BB

The Plans Showing Reclaimed Flooring



A view of the nearly touching volumes; ground floor meets first floor



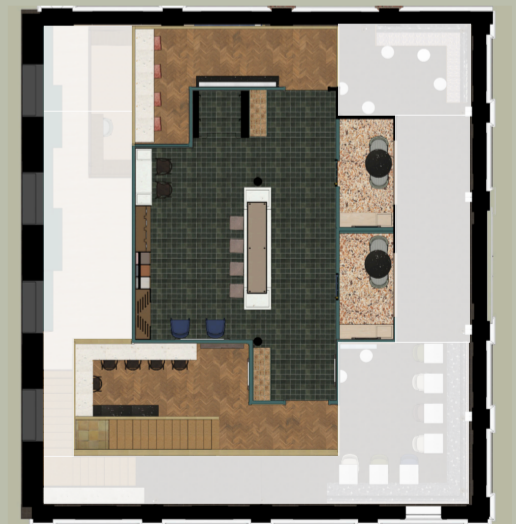
Ground Floor -- Open to All

The flooring is a patchwork of different tiles and stone offcuts sourced from around the UK. No stone goes to waste and the flooring shows that even the most mismatched of materials can make something interesting and pleasing.



Mezzanine -- Members Space

The flooring is a mixture of reclaimed tiles and wood floor planks. The Resident Designer's office flooring is cork planks. Cork is a sustainable, renewable, and biodegradable material. Cork's insulating and lightweight properties help reduce energy use and make it a great flooring material.



First Floor -- Members Space

The flooring is a combination of reclaimed tiles and wood floor planks and Terrazzo wood chip board from offcuts and wood dust -- a highly sustainable material because of its design around waste reduction.

“The details are not the details. They make the design.” — Charles Eames



Bespoke Furniture
Made from Upcycled and Recycled Materials



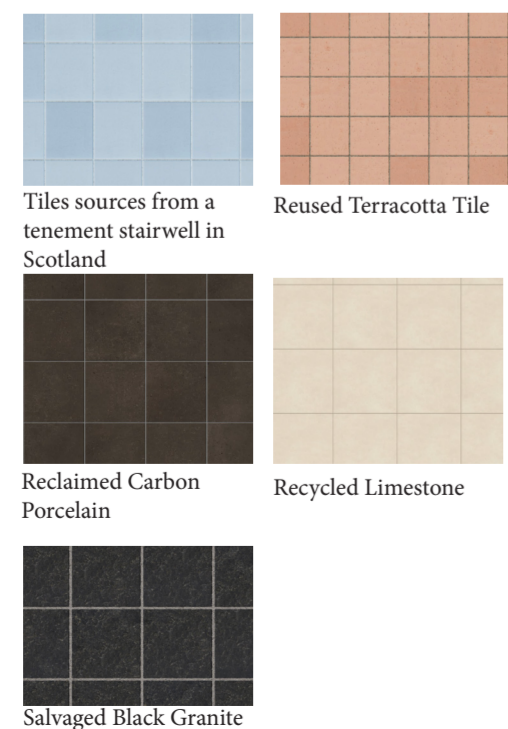
The Designer-in-Residence plays a key role in the Reference Room, requiring studio space and resources to develop projects and experiment. A rotating Designer-in-Residence program, supported by a grant, enables the in-house designer to focus on self-initiated projects dedicated to sustainable design. The resident designer curates regular exhibitions, organizes lectures by leading international interior designers, and positions the library as a hub for contemporary design discourse.

The resident designer's office is intentionally visible, offering others a glimpse into their daily work. The space is designed for transparency, with a structural framework that exposes the creative process while maintaining some privacy. Semi-transparent elements allow passersby to observe the designer at work, balancing openness with discretion.



Salvaged Tiles

The tiles in this project have all been salvaged from previous installations. Be it from residential or commercial interiors all of the tiles had a previous life and have been reused in the Reference Room adding historical layers to the design that would not be otherwise accomplished with new materials.

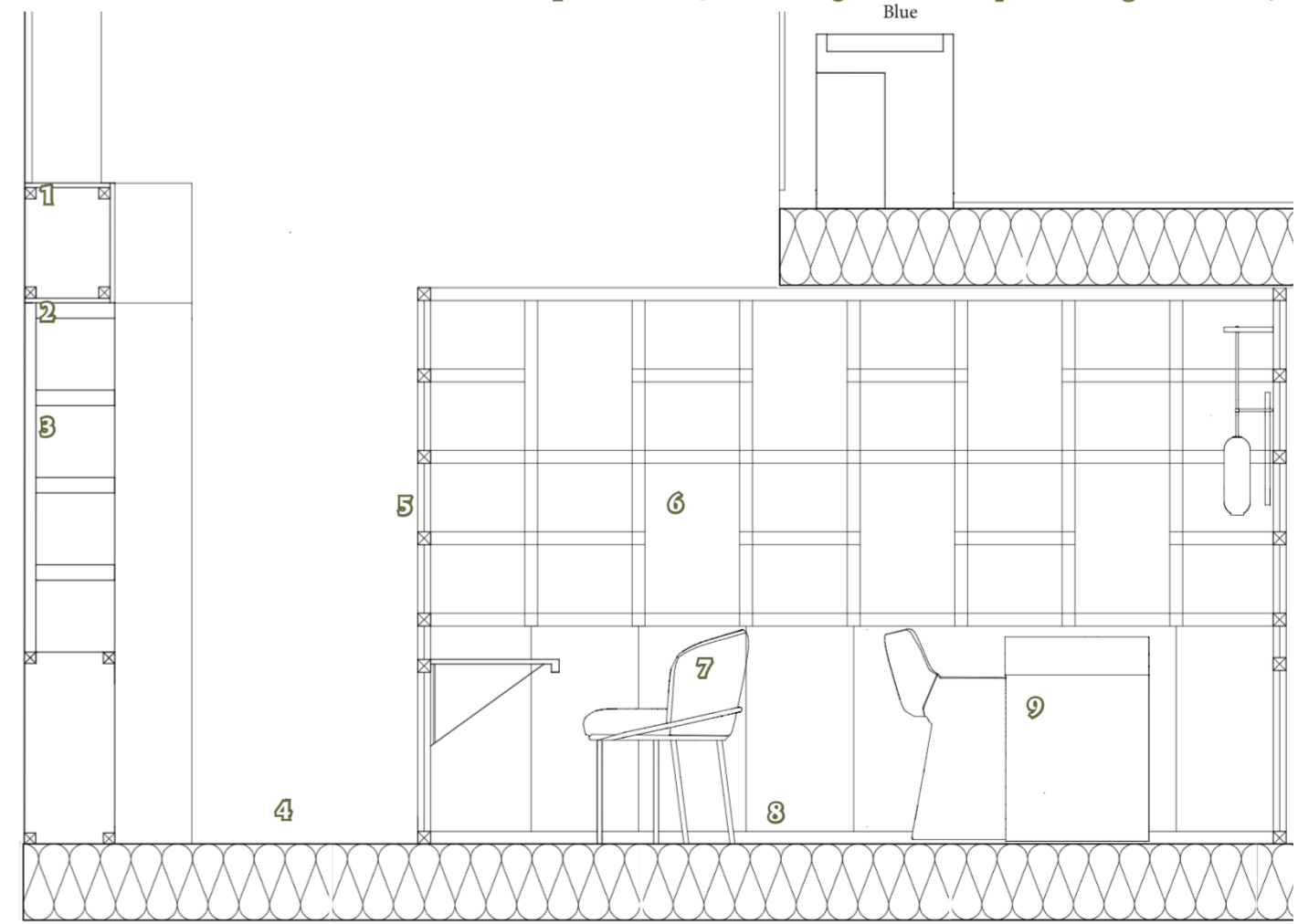
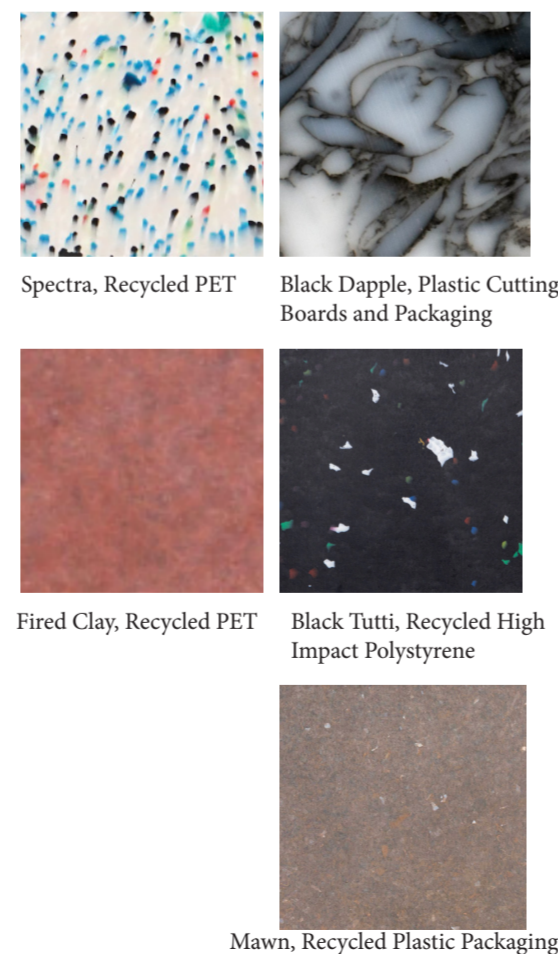


Saved Fabrics

The textiles in the design have all been reclaimed. Whether they were saved from landfill or repurposed from other uses that are all recycled, integrating circular design into the bespoke upholstered furniture throughout the design.



SMILE MATERIALS



1:20 Cross Section of the Designer in Residence's Office. The Resident Designer's office features a frame constructed entirely from reclaimed wood and toughened glass. The built-in desk uses reclaimed timber and a folded steel plate bracket, with the timber finished in a wood stain to enhance its grain. The office flooring consists of cork planks, while the external flooring is reclaimed white oak hardwood. The bespoke materials viewing table is made from Smile Materials plastics in a custom colour, produced entirely from recycled yogurt pots. The bespoke chairs have been upholstered in reclaimed fabrics.





Retail Space: Features limited-edition homeware and furniture made from recycled, repurposed, and sustainably sourced materials, sold exclusively in collaboration with the Reference Room. The interior of the central red volume mimics a residential dining room.



A View of Volumes: Designers looking down from the mezzanine reference library on to the activities happening on the ground floor.



Reference Library: The library features a curated collection of interior design books, journals, and magazines.



Reference Library: Reference materials are accessible through an annual membership for professionals and a discounted student fee for interiors students. It is a communal area to discuss interior trends and exemplary case studies.

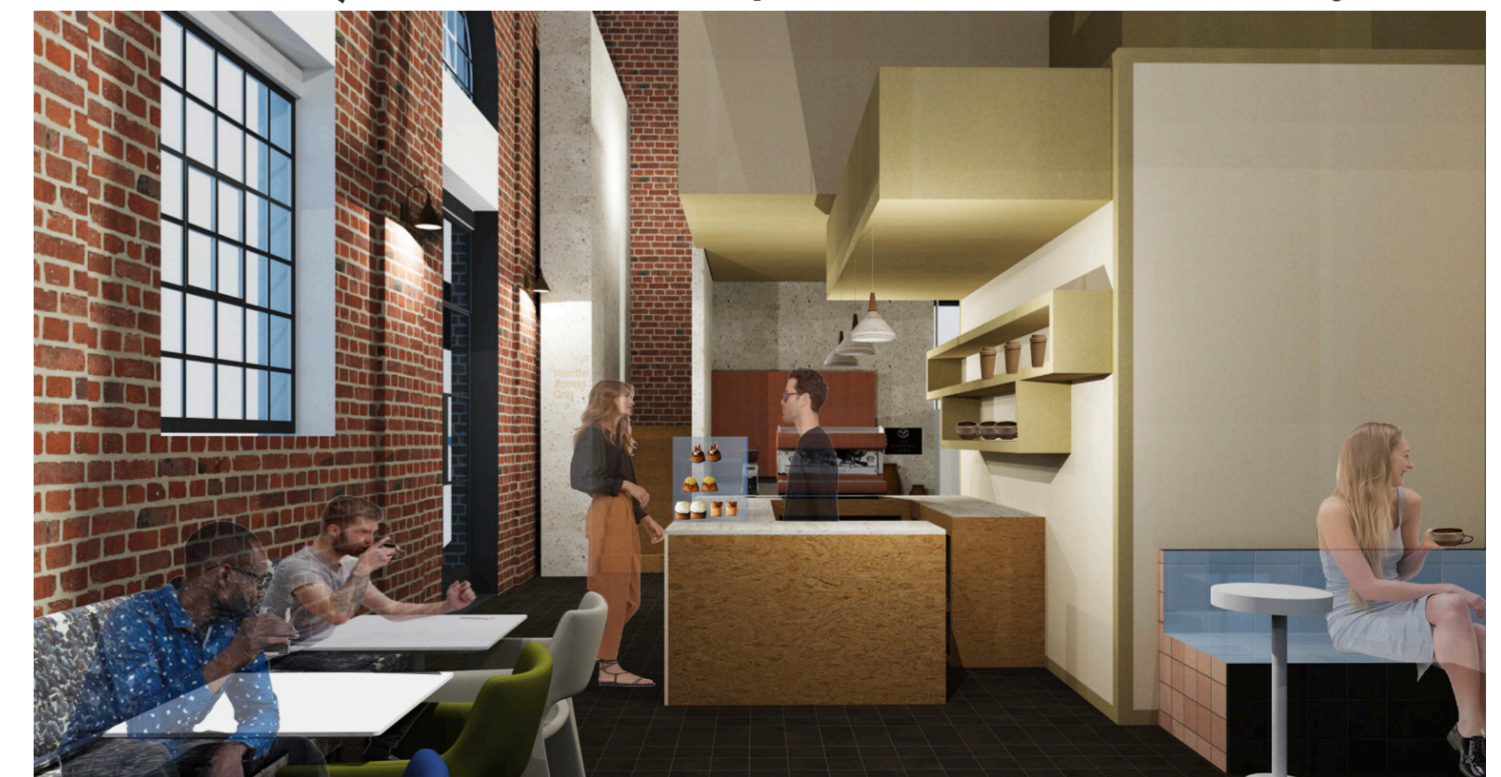
**Designed for adaptability,
the structure can be
reconfigured for new
settings, extending the
lifespan of its components.**



Materials Library: Designers can handle and borrow materials and use worktables to combine material varieties to create visual mood boards. The objective of the materials library is to raise awareness of new, innovative, and eco-friendly materials and present them to the library's professional users.



Materials Library: Communal work area for independent work, collaboration, and material viewing.



Cafe: the cafe is a place to gather, to enjoy conversations about design. Its proximity to the counter ensures convenience and encourages a casual atmosphere. The seating area serves as transition zone between the café and retail area.