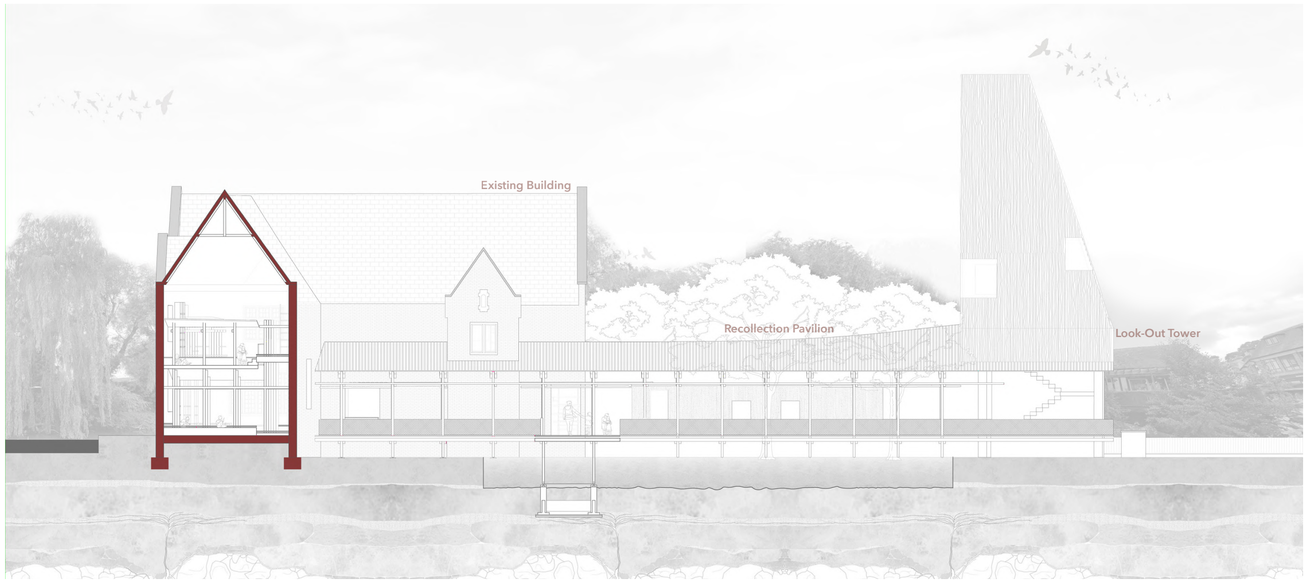
Alexandrina Andrievschi

The Looking Library

A Children's Library for Observation and Memory

Observation through Material, Light and Landscape



Project Summary

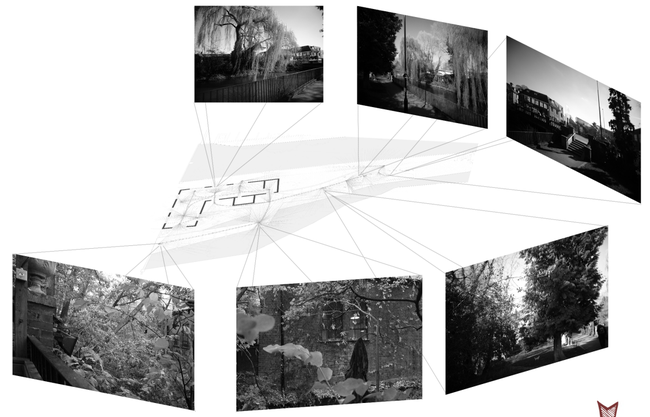
The Looking Library is a children's library that uses materiality, light, and observation to address the growing impact of screen-based environments on attention and memory formation. Through timber furnitecture, pavilion, framed views, natural light, and an observatory tower, the project creates a sequence of spatial experiences that encourage children to slow down, engage with their surroundings, and learn through observation.

Through timber construction, daylight, landscape integration, and child-scale furnitecture, the project transforms architecture into a tool for learning, reflection, and engagement with the physical world.

Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford

Surrounded by Water

The presence of two streams shapes the project's environmental strategy, allowing the pavilion to extend into the landscape and create direct encounters with water, vegetation, and seasonal change, fostering children's awareness of the natural environment.



Framed Views

The library is orientated around a series of framed views that highlight the site's landscape and waterways. These moments encourage children to pause, observe, and develop a greater awareness of their surroundings through direct engagement with the environment.

Architecture As a Tool for Observation Film

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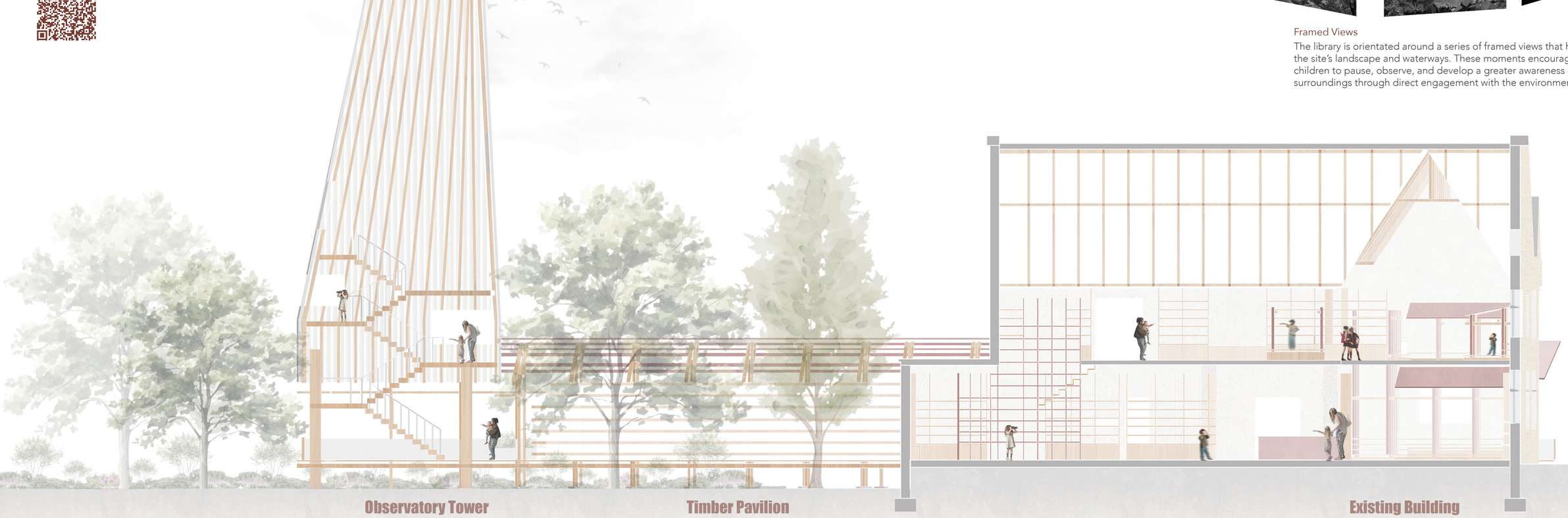
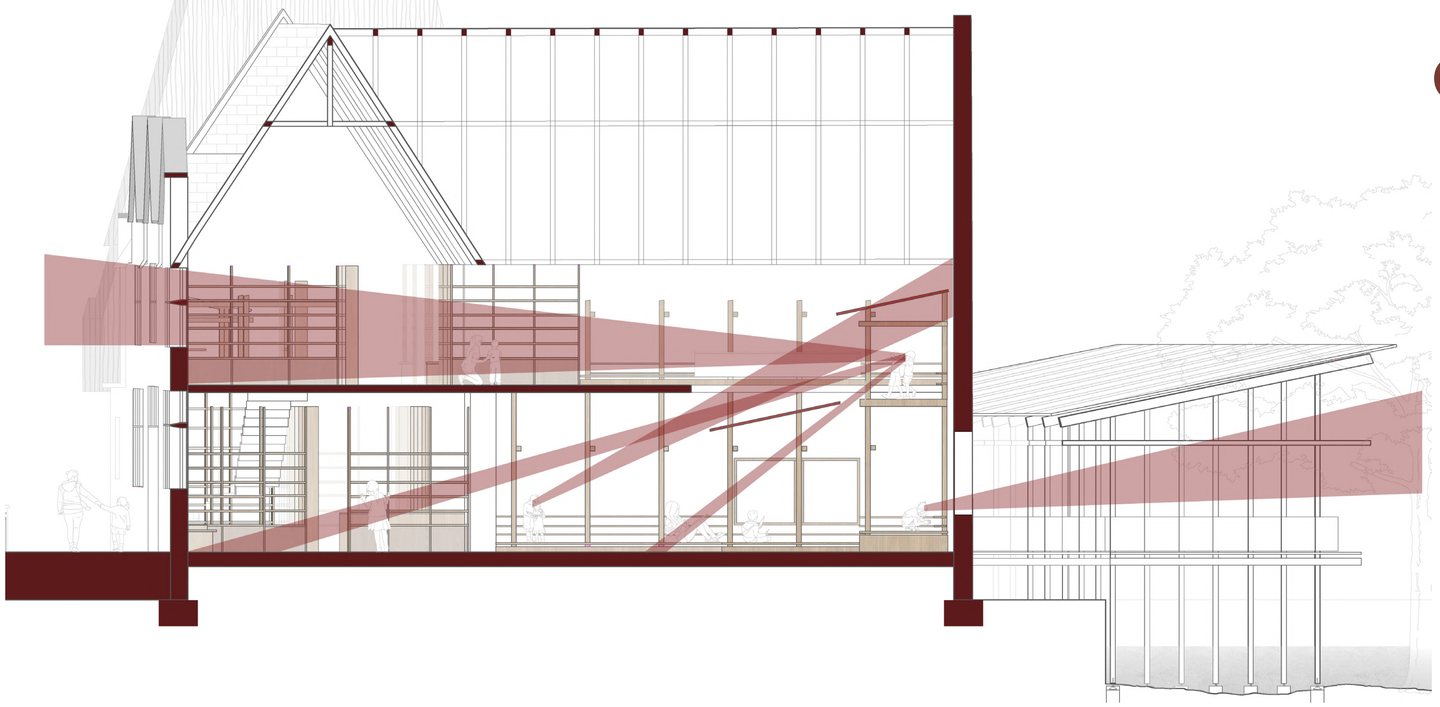




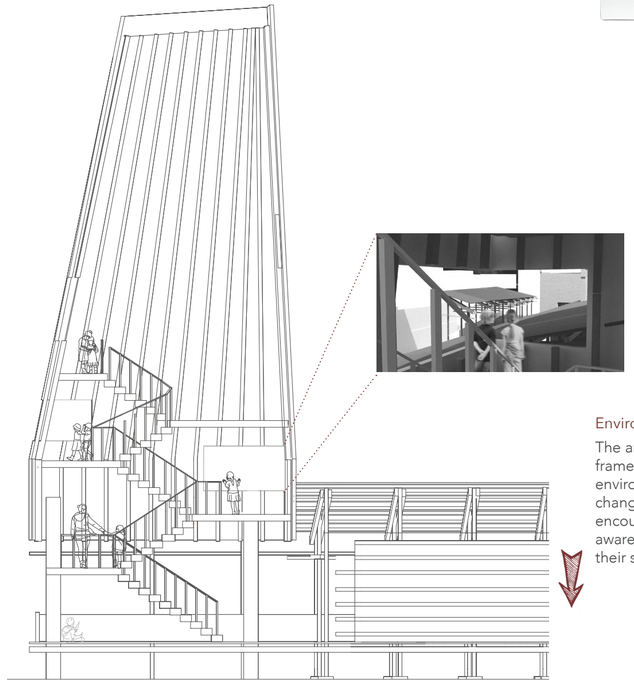
Observation Through Landscape

Framing Water, Light and Seasonal Change

The landscape becomes an active learning environment through framed views, movement, and environmental engagement.

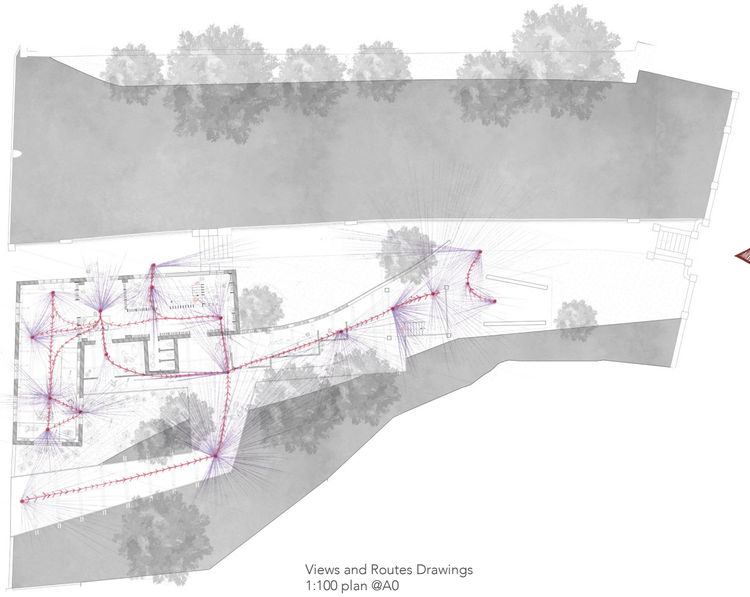
Observation Begins in the Landscape

The landscape is conceived as an extension of the learning environment. Positioned between two streams, the library uses framed views, elevated walkways, and observation points to encourage children to engage with water, vegetation, light, and seasonal change. Rather than separating learning from nature, the project transforms the surrounding environment into an active tool for observation, fostering awareness, curiosity, and a deeper connection to place.



Environmental Qualities

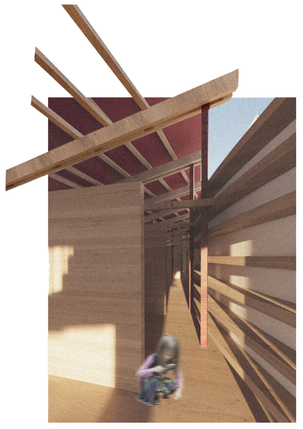
The architecture is orientated around a series of carefully framed views that draw attention to the site's most significant environmental qualities. Openings are positioned to capture changing conditions of light, water, vegetation, and weather, encouraging children to pause, observe, and develop an awareness of the landscape through direct engagement with their surroundings.



Views and Routes Drawings
1:100 plan @A0

Children Experience with Views

A network of platforms, walkways, and reading spaces creates multiple points of observation throughout the library. By experiencing the landscape from different heights and perspectives, children become more aware of their surroundings and develop a greater understanding of the environment through movement and exploration.



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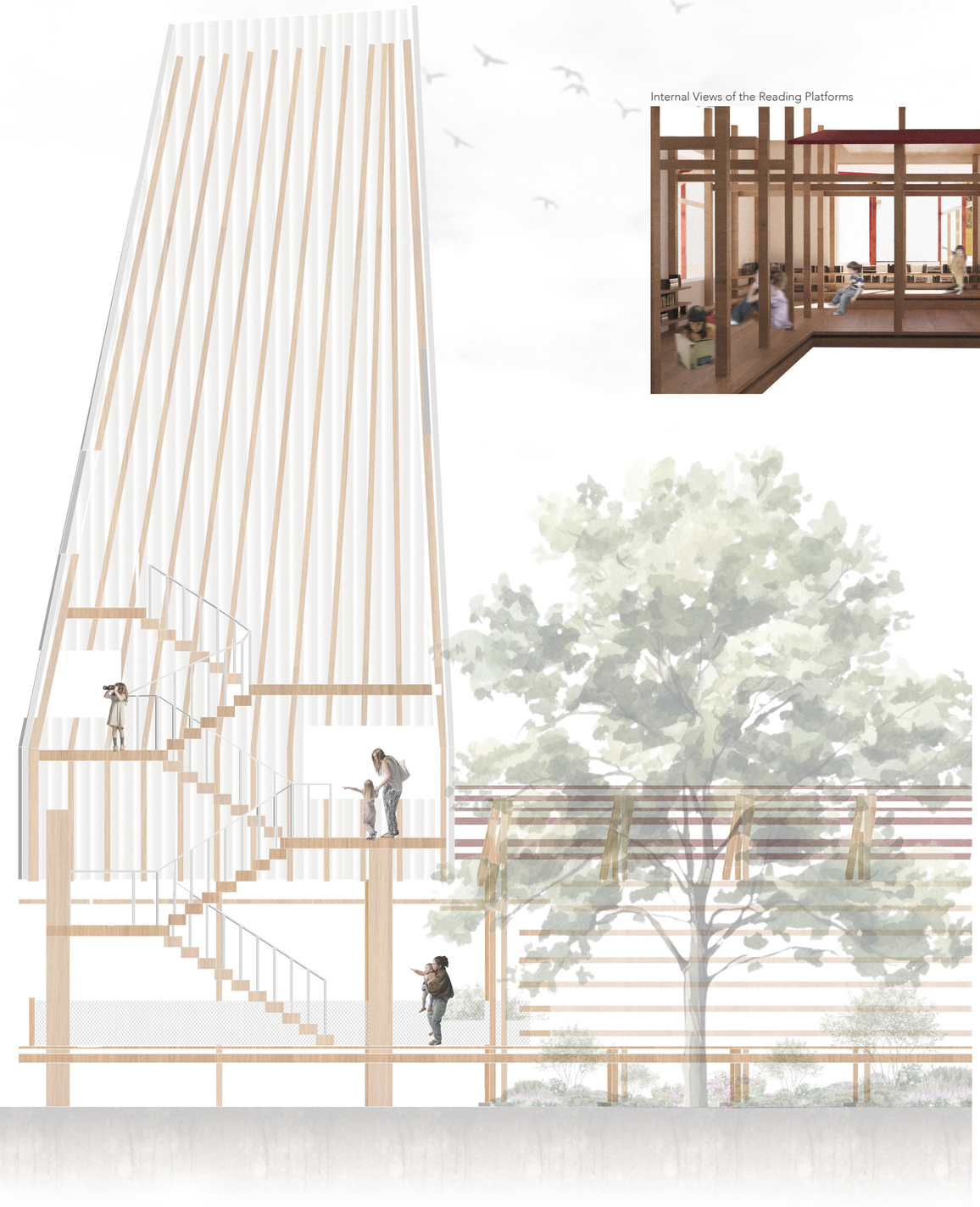
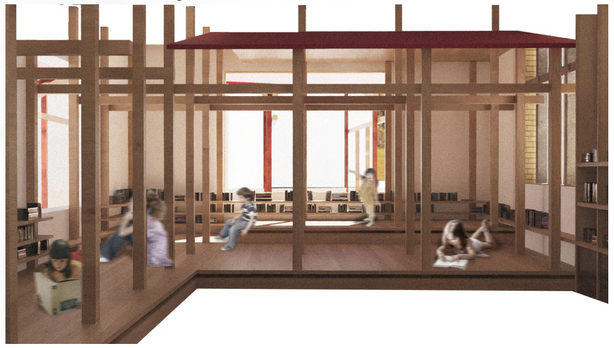
Material as a Method of Observation

How materiality shapes attention, movement and occupation



The project employs a restrained palette of timber, corrugated steel, and polycarbonate to create a material language that supports observation, orientation, and environmental awareness. Each material is selected not only for its constructional performance, but for its contribution to atmosphere, light, and user experience. Together, they establish a sequence of spaces that encourage children to engage with their surroundings through touch, movement, and changing perceptions of the landscape.

Internal Views of the Reading Platforms



Material As an Active Tool For Learning

Timber

Timber is used throughout the project as both a structural and educational material. Through integrated furnitecture, platforms, and framed openings, the material encourages children to slow down, occupy space, and engage with their surroundings. The repetition of the timber framework creates moments for reading, journalling, gathering, and observation, transforming materiality into an active tool for learning and memory formation.

Red as a Landmark

The red material palette is used to establish moments of recognition and orientation throughout the project. Contrasting with the natural tones of the timber structure and surrounding landscape, the red roof and structural elements create a memorable visual identity that allows children to easily recognise and navigate the library. As a colour associated with attention and recollection, it reinforces the project's ambition to create lasting memories through place and experience.

Polycarbonate

The observatory tower is wrapped in polycarbonate to transform natural light into an architectural experience. The translucent skin diffuses daylight throughout the interior, creating changing atmospheres that respond to weather, season, and time of day. This environmental responsiveness reinforces the tower's role as a place of observation, reflection, and awareness of the surrounding landscape.

Corrugated Steel

Polycarbonate

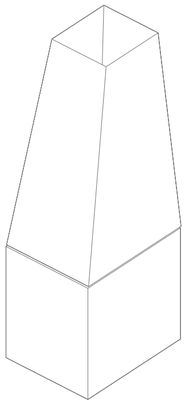
Oak coated in red

Oak

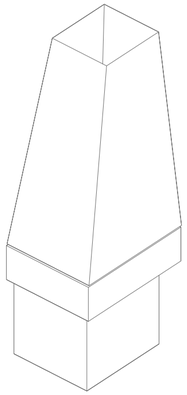
Observatory Tower

A Landmark for Reflection and Observation

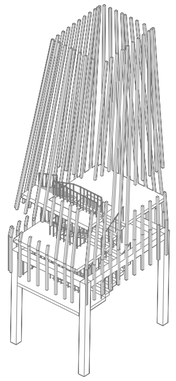
The observatory tower acts as the culmination of the library's journey of observation. Rising above the surrounding landscape, it provides children with new perspectives of the site, encouraging them to pause, look, and engage with their environment. Through a sequence of ascending platforms and framed openings, the tower transforms observation into an active learning experience, reinforcing the project's ambition to foster awareness, curiosity, and memory through direct engagement with place.



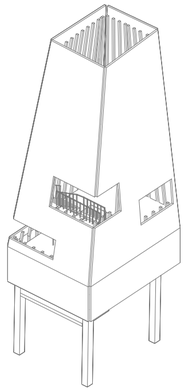
Basic Form



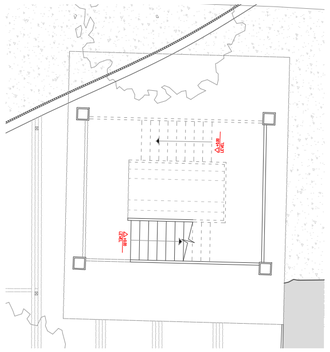
Functional Form

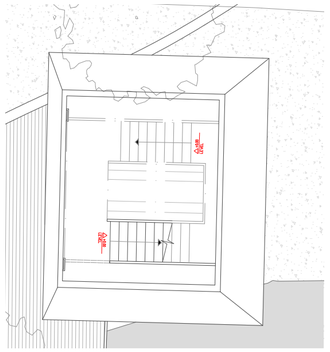


Framework



Usage Scenario





From Structure To Observation

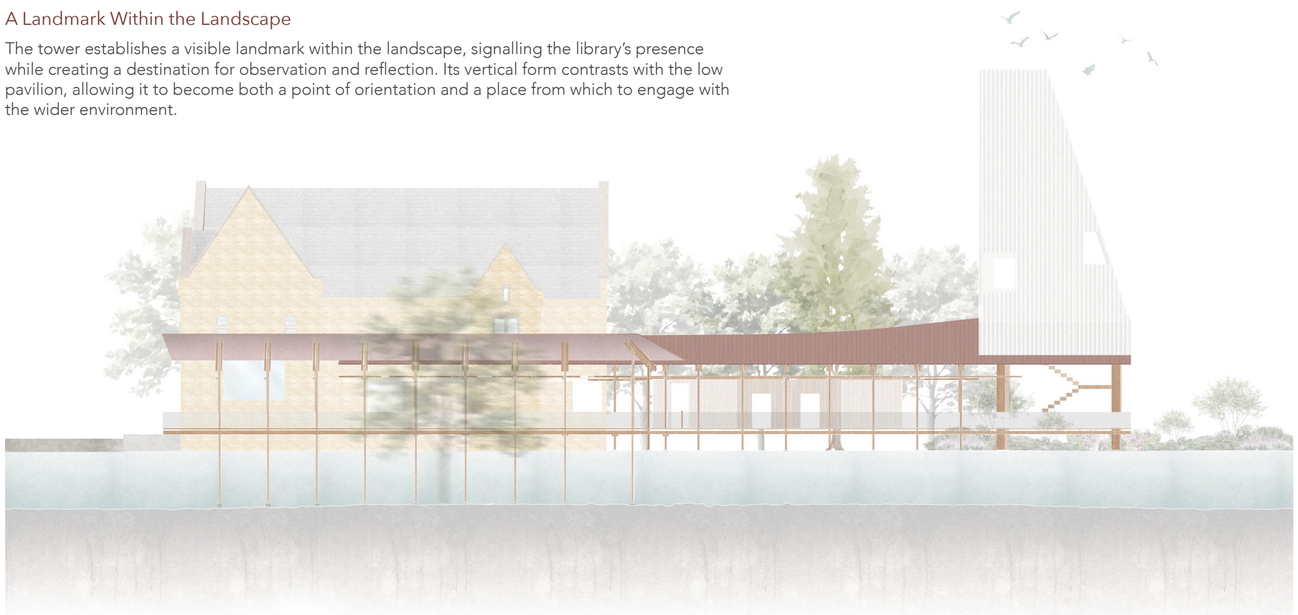
The tower is developed through a series of simple structural modules that evolve into spaces for occupation and observation. Openings are positioned at different levels, creating varied viewpoints that encourage children to experience the landscape from multiple perspectives while moving through the structure.

Framed Views and Vertical Movement

Each level of the tower is organised around moments of pause and viewing. As children ascend through the structure, changing heights and framed openings reveal new relationships between the streams, vegetation, sky, and surrounding city, turning movement through the tower into a process of discovery.

A Landmark Within the Landscape

The tower establishes a visible landmark within the landscape, signalling the library's presence while creating a destination for observation and reflection. Its vertical form contrasts with the low pavilion, allowing it to become both a point of orientation and a place from which to engage with the wider environment.

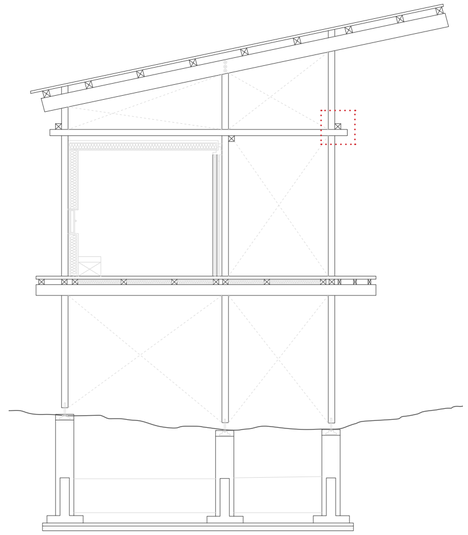


Material & Construction Strategy

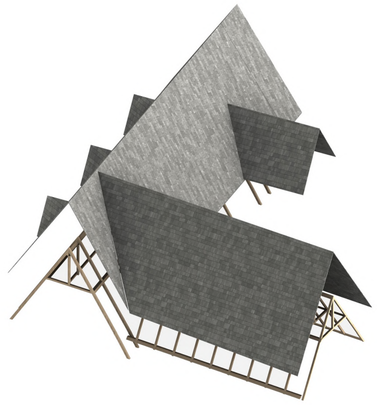
Lightweight Construction and Environmental Integration

Material & Construction Strategy

The project employs a lightweight timber construction system that minimises intervention within the existing landscape while extending the life of the retained building. New structures are elevated above the site's waterways, reducing ground disturbance and allowing water, vegetation, and ecological processes to continue beneath the pavilion. Through a combination of timber framing, polycarbonate cladding, and lightweight steel roofing, the project balances environmental responsiveness with child-centred spatial experience.



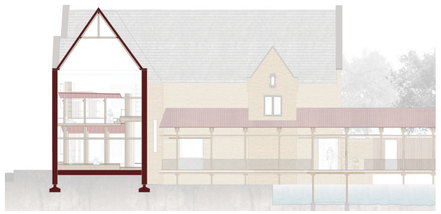
1:20 @A2 Pavilion construction detail



Existing Building Retained

Minimal Ground Disturbance

Lightweight Timber Construction



Lightweight Timber Framework

The pavilion is constructed from a repetitive timber frame that allows for efficient assembly and adaptation. Elevated above the landscape, the structure minimises its footprint while creating continuous connections between the existing building, the observation tower, and the surrounding environment.

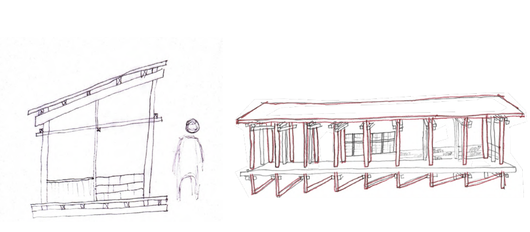
Extending The Existing

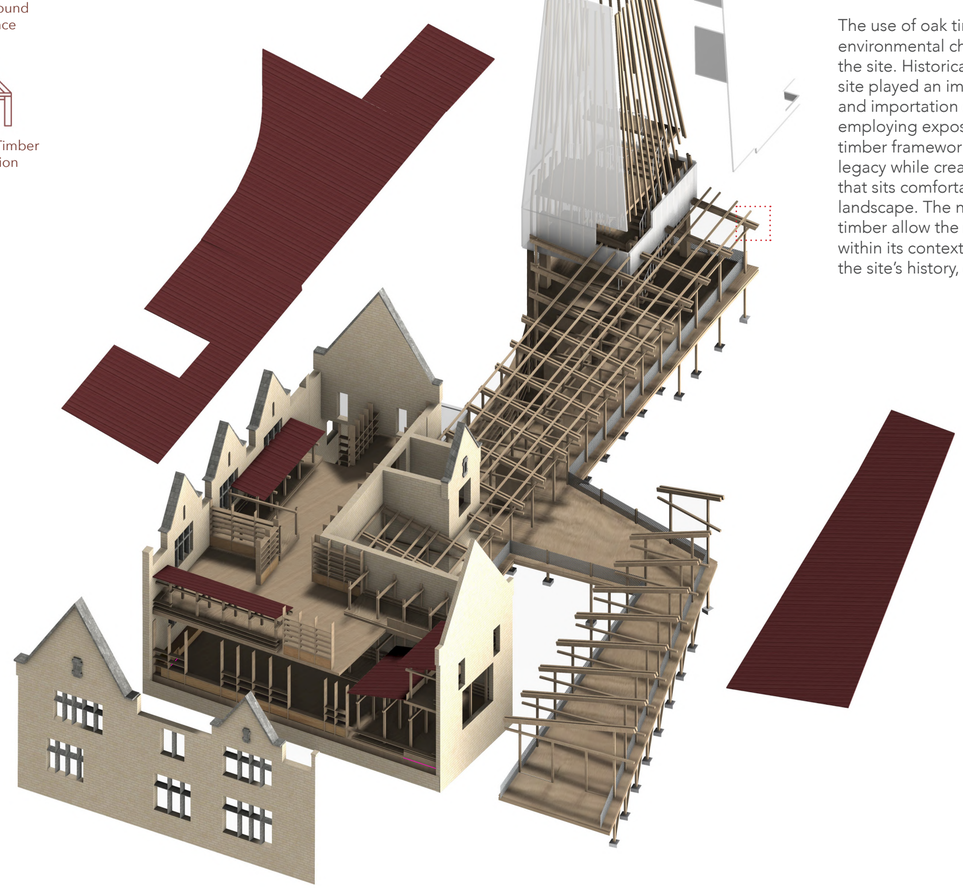
Inspired by the spatial approach of BC Architects Woodstock project, the pavilion is positioned to surround and extend the existing structure rather than compete with it. This strategy preserves the presence and memory of the original building, allowing the new intervention to establish a respectful dialogue between old and new while reducing material waste and preserving the site's architectural memory. By wrapping around the existing, the pavilion creates a sense of continuity and protection, reinforcing the idea of architecture as an addition that acknowledges what is already there.

Understanding Structural Logic

Physical study models were used to explore structural rhythm, modular construction, and lightweight timber assembly. These investigations informed the pavilion's repetitive framework and elevated construction strategy.

Precedent study model of the structure, 1:100





Timber as a Material of Memory

The use of oak timber responds to both the environmental character and historical identity of the site. Historically, the waterways surrounding the site played an important role in the transportation and importation of timber throughout Oxford. By employing exposed oak beams and a lightweight timber framework, the project acknowledges this legacy while creating a familiar material language that sits comfortably within the surrounding landscape. The natural texture and warmth of timber allow the new intervention to feel rooted within its context, establishing a dialogue between the site's history, environment, and future use.