

The Quiet House

A Neuroinclusive Tea Sanctuary for Sensory Restoration and Regulation.



I need to be somewhere with enough space and quiet.

I am soothed by quiet and warm, soft colours and materials.

Project Statement:

The Quiet House reimagines a Georgian church at Chatham Historic Dockyard as a neuroinclusive tea sanctuary designed for sensory restoration. Developed through lived neurodivergent experience and informed by survey results from 125 participants, the project responds to the lack of sensory retreat spaces within overstimulating public environments. Drawing on tea philosophy, biophilic design and adaptable sensory strategies, it enables users to regulate light, sound, privacy and social interaction according to their individual needs. By promoting choice, autonomy and sensory wellbeing, the project advocates for a broader understanding of accessibility that extends beyond physical access, while reinterpreting spaces of ritual and reflection as inclusive environments for diverse communities.

Neurodivergent Voices:

Throughout the project, a series of speech bubbles show direct quotes from neurodiverse survey participants. Ensuring their voices are heard.

Bright lighting makes me feel uncomfortable

The seating arrangement often feels awkward and like I'm in the centre of everything

I hate being seen and feeling visible



Designed with neurodivergent people, not simply for them.

User Research:

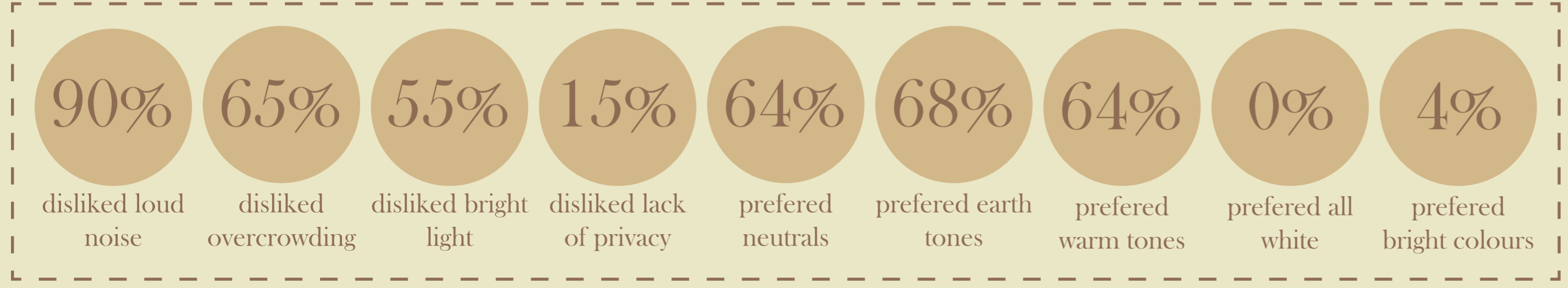
According to my research into neurodiverse preferences, colour can have a huge effect on these users. Neurodiverse individuals often experience colour perception uniquely or intensely, and some neurodiverse individuals may find certain colours exceptionally bright and overwhelming. For this reason combined with my survey results on colour, I decided to design this project around a series of subtle neutrals and warm earth tones.



The Need For Sensory Refuge

My own neurodiverse experience navigating overwhelming public environments revealed a lack of spaces designed for sensory regulation and retreat. This project began as a personal observation and evolved through research with neurodivergent participants to explore how hospitality environments can better support sensory wellbeing, choice and accessibility.

To begin research, I conducted a survey of 25 neurodivergent participants to gain an understanding of their needs, preferences and experiences in public spaces:



Tea Ritual: Pause, Reflection, Mindfulness

Drawing from the rituals of Japanese tea culture, the project reinterprets tea as a framework for slowness, mindfulness and sensory restoration.

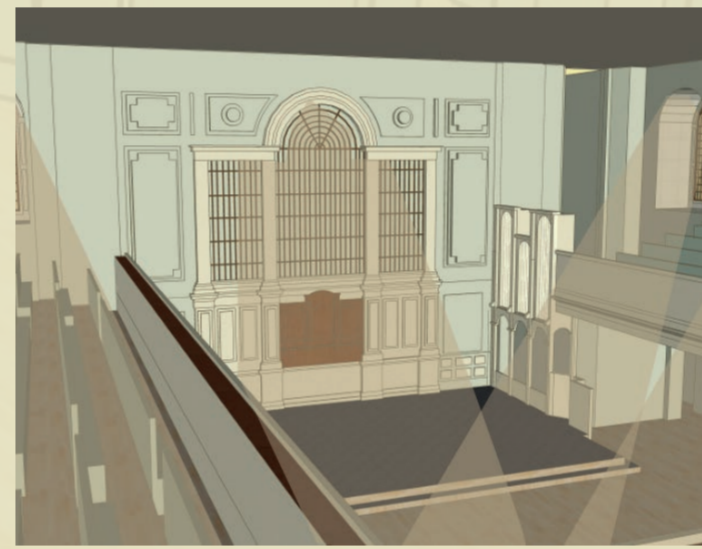
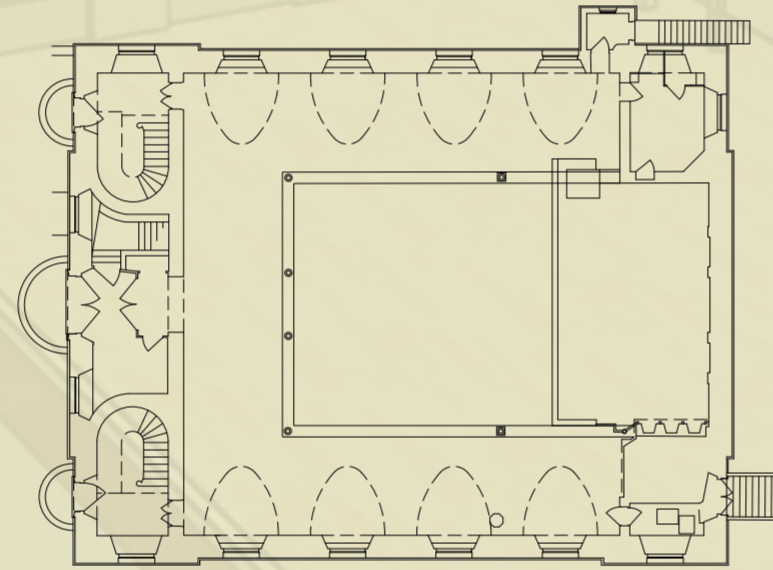
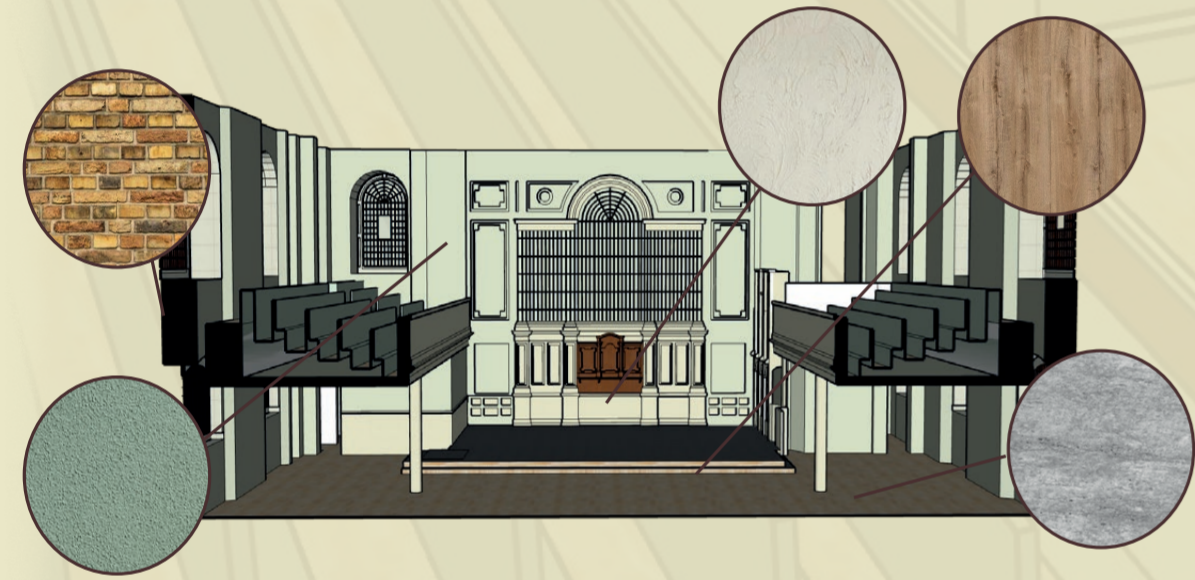
Place, Culture and Context

Why Chatham Dockyard?

Chatham Historic Dockyard attracts over 140,000 visitors annually yet offers few opportunities for sensory retreat. The site is characterised by large crowds, noise, exposed outdoor conditions and a busy central cafeteria. For neurodivergent visitors and others experiencing sensory overwhelm, these conditions can create barriers to comfort and participation. The Quiet House introduces a dedicated space for restoration, providing a calm alternative within an otherwise stimulating environment. Considering that roughly 15% of the UK population are neurodivergent, these statistics suggest 21,474 of these guests could likely be neurodivergent. Therefore it is essential to cater for their needs.

Why The Church?

Historically, churches have served as places of pause, reflection and community, making them an appropriate setting for a space centred on sensory restoration. The existing architecture already embodies qualities of ritual, repetition and contemplation, encouraging slowness, presence and respite from everyday activity. Rather than preserving the building solely as a religious space, this project reinterprets the church as an inclusive sanctuary for reflection and wellbeing. By transforming it into a non-religious tea house, the design retains the building's cultural significance while making its restorative qualities accessible to a wider and more diverse community of dockyard visitors.



Primary Case Study: Tiny Tims Tea Rooms

As part of the research process, I visited Tiny Tim's Tea Room and evaluated the experience through a neurodivergent lens. While the space offered a unique atmosphere, observations highlighted challenges relating to crowding, noise, visibility and limited opportunities for sensory control. This exercise reinforced the importance of providing user choice and quieter environments within hospitality settings.



strong food smells



tables very close together



very loud talking



loud BOH dish noises



can't choose your own table



not enough table space



expected to eat with hands



staff hitting into chairs



very exposed, visible seating

Design Implications

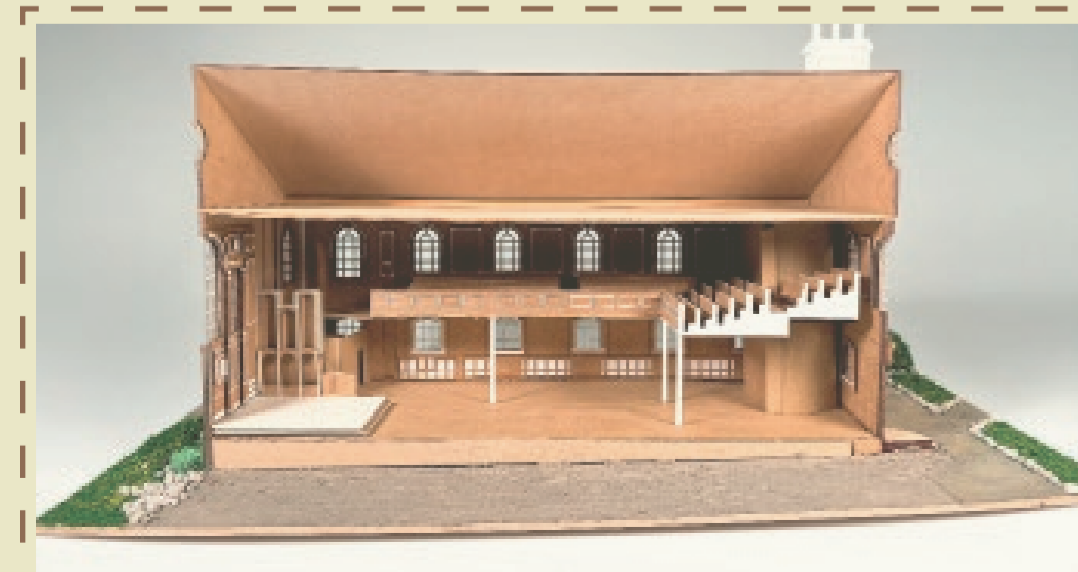
From this study, I knew my design had to account for sensory choice, privacy, reduced crowd density, greater user control and alternative seating options.

Identifying the Need

Site Challenges

Noise	Crowding	Environmental Exposure	Lack of Retreat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Machinery - Visitor Activity - School Trips - Families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Popular Tourist Destination - Busy Central Routes - Existing Cafe Often Full 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wind From Waterfront - Cold Temperatures - Limited Sheltered Outdoor Spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No Dedicated Quiet Space - Few Opportunities For Sensory Recovery

These conditions informed the decision to create a dedicated sensory refuge within the dockyard, providing an alternative environment for visitors seeking rest, regulation and respite.



1:50 site model

Why Tea?

Tea was selected not simply as a beverage, but as a framework for slowing down. Across many cultures, tea rituals encourage presence, reflection and intentional pauses from daily life. These qualities align closely with the project's aim of providing relief from sensory overload, transforming a routine act into an opportunity for restoration and regulation.

A place once dedicated to spiritual restoration is reimagined as a place of sensory restoration.

Architecture of Choice

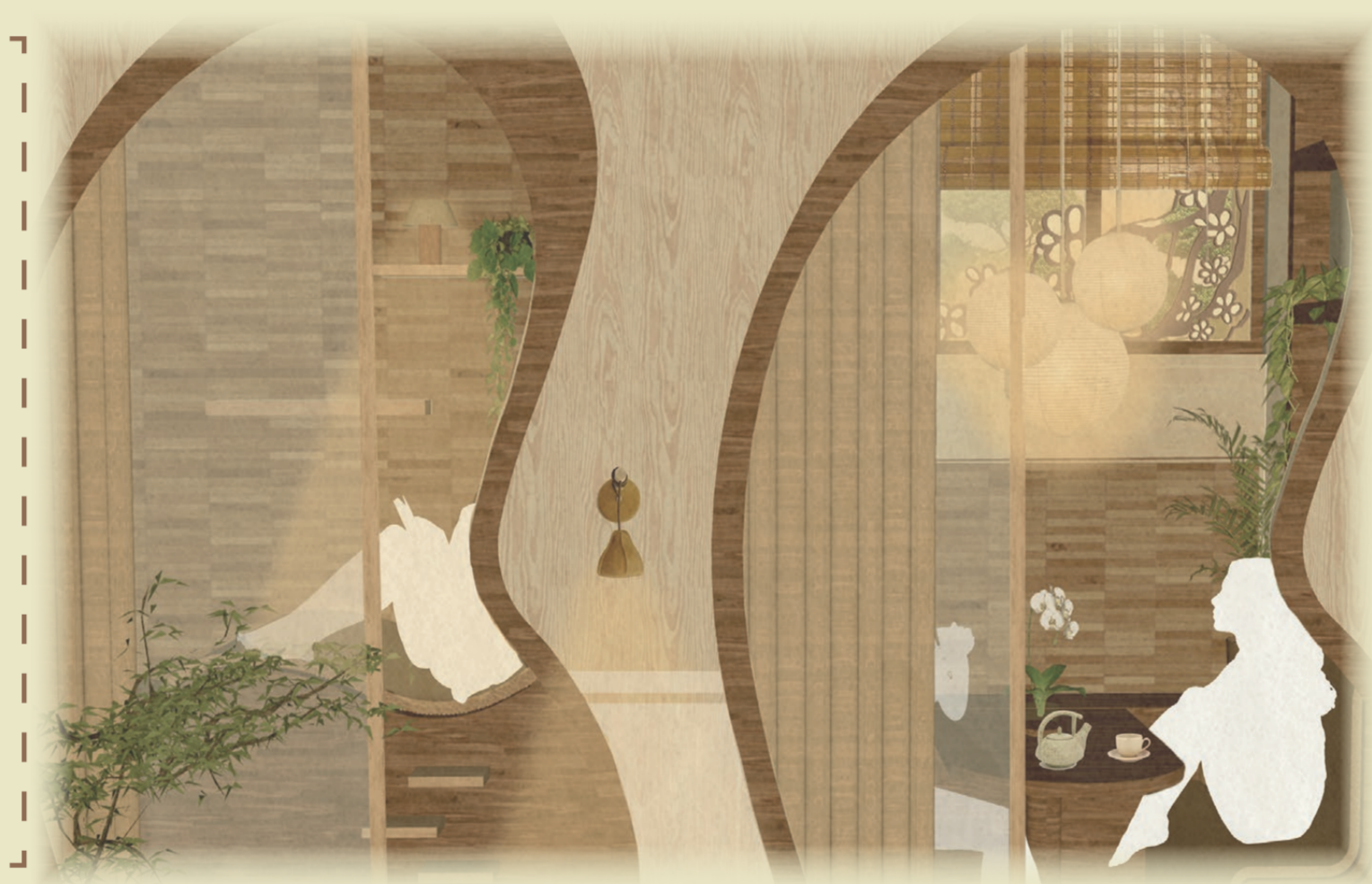
Participant Voices:

Accessibility is achieved through choice, not standardisation.



Adaptable Booth Seating

Survey findings highlighted the need for greater sensory choice within public hospitality environments, with 90% of participants identifying loud noise as a source of discomfort and over half reporting sensitivity to bright light and overcrowding. In response, the adaptable booth system enables users to regulate privacy, sound and lighting according to their individual needs. Offering both seated and reclined settings, the booths challenge the 'one-size-fits-all' approach to accessibility, recognising that there is no single neurodivergent experience. Instead, users are empowered to shape their own sensory environment through choice and control.

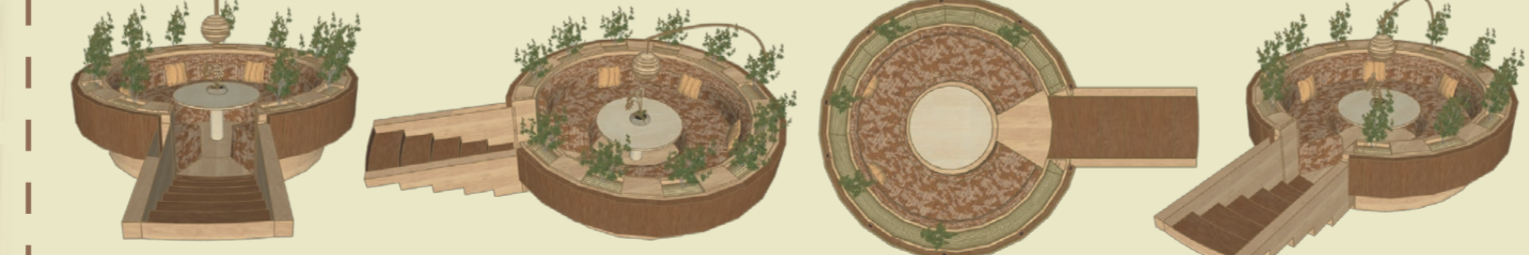


There is no single neurodivergent experience.

User Need	Design Response	Outcome
Need for Privacy	Curtains	Reduced Anxiety
Sound Sensitivity	Acoustic Screen	Reduced Stimulation
Light Sensitivity	Adjustable Blind and Lights	Reduced Stimulation
Different Comfort Needs	Choice of Reclined or Seated	Greater Comfort
Need for Autonomy	User-Controlled Environment	Increased Agency
Need for stimulation	Central Pond Pods	Fulfills Social Desire

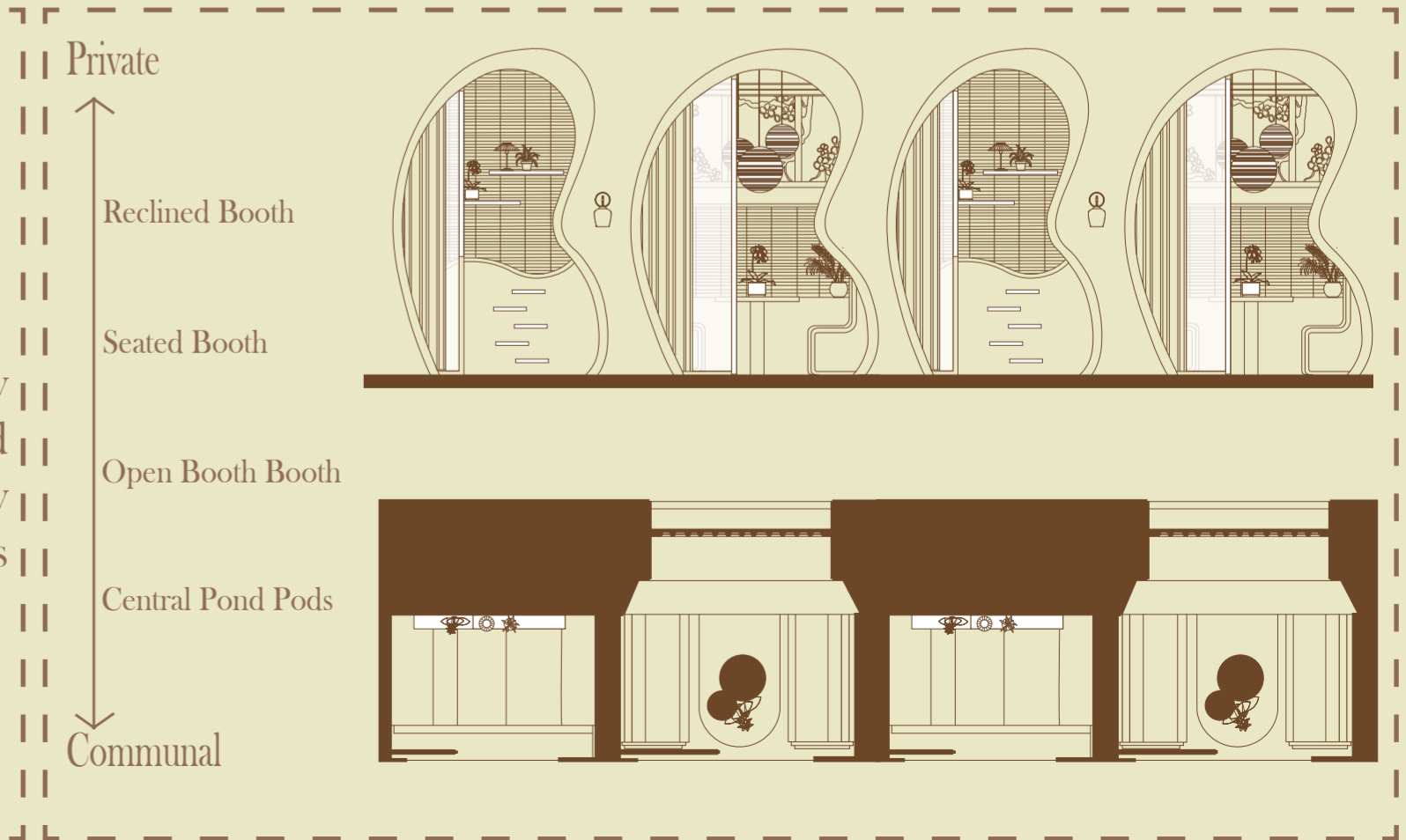


The Central Pond Pods



While the adaptable booths support users seeking privacy and sensory control, the central communal seating encourages social connection and shared experience. Together, these spaces provide a range of sensory and social environments, acknowledging that users have different needs at different times.

The Quiet House offers a spectrum of sensory and social environments, allowing visitors to choose the level of stimulation, privacy and interaction that best supports them.



Nature as Regulation

Recreating the restorative qualities of nature within a controlled environment.

In another survey, I asked 100 participants to describe what a soothing space looked like to them. Nature appeared in 14% of answers, revealing a strong preference for nature, quiet outdoor environments and natural materials. These preferences informed a biophilic interior space designed to support sensory restoration.



Describe A Calming Space to You

Lying on the mossy ground floor of a forest with trees all around

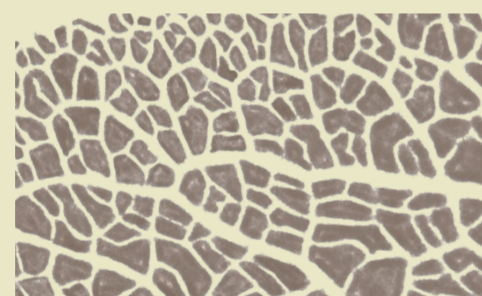
A quiet, open space close to nature

lots of plants and big windows for lots of natural light

A space that has plants, earth tones, natural materials

Canopy Roof Design

Natural systems informed architectural form.



This design started from a collection of leaves which were then transformed through a series of collagraph prints to reveal their skeletons. This leaf pattern was then inserted into the new curved roof design. Testing of the physical roof model revealed dappled light patterns similar to sunlight filtering through a tree canopy. The roof intervention was designed not only to increase daylight and strengthen connections to nature, but also to soften direct sunlight through dappled shadow patterns, reducing visual overstimulation.



Physical Model 1:50



Survey results show users preference for nature. However, outdoor environments can also be overstimulating due to cold, wind and unpredictability. A solution for this is to recreate the restorative qualities of nature while maintaining the environmental control of an indoor space.

User Research Findings:

- preference for nature
- preference for quiet outdoors
- preference for earth tones
- preference for natural materials

Design Response:

- internal planting
- koi pond
- timber finishes
- earth tone palette
- leaf inspired roof
- bird attracting landscape

Benefits of Outdoors:

- nature
- birdsong
- greenery
- fresh air
- water
- sunlight

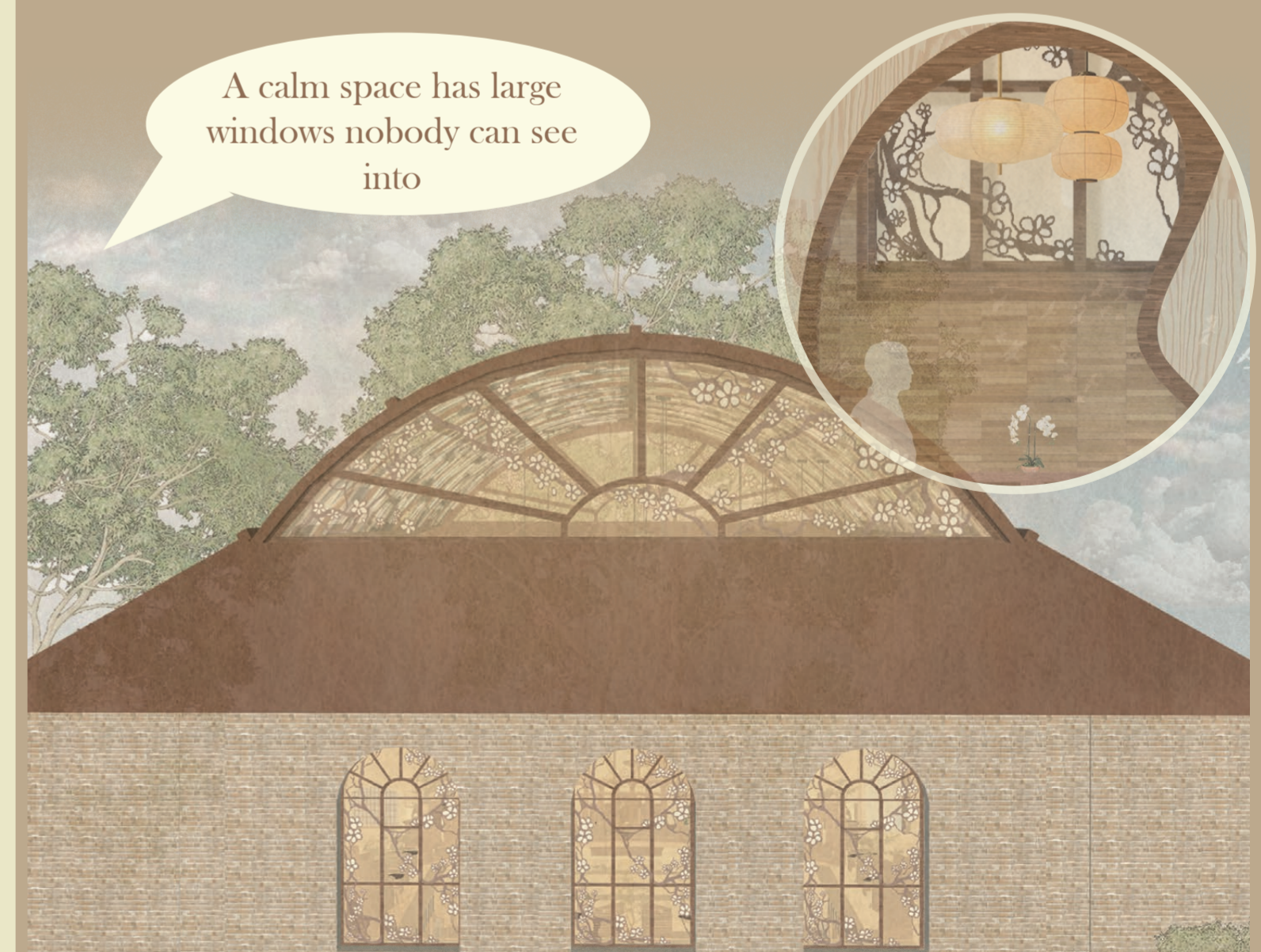
Challenges of Outdoors:

- wind
- rain
- crowds
- temperature
- unpredictability
- brightness

Softening Sunlight

Something that is widely known as a natural wellness benefit is sunlight. However, many responses reported sensitivities to light, making it harder for neurodivergent people to enjoy. To counteract this I have designed tinted windows that soften, diffuse and warm the natural light while also providing added privacy. This design choice reflects the 25% of survey respondents that mentioned 'warm lighting' when describing a calming space.

A calm space has large windows nobody can see into



The Sensory Sanctuary: Design Outcome



A sanctuary for sensory restoration.

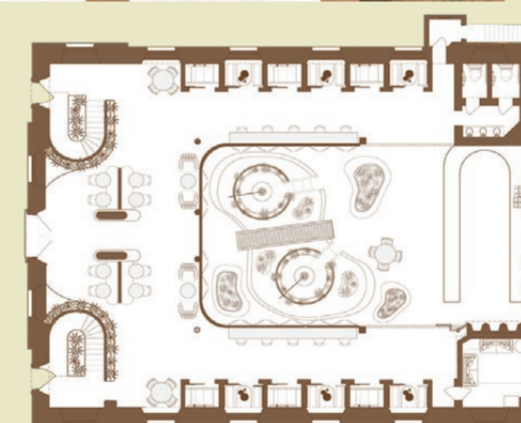
Beyond Physical Accessibility

The Quiet House challenges conventional approaches to accessibility by recognising sensory wellbeing as an equally important aspect of inclusion. Rather than prescribing a single environment, the project offers a spectrum of experiences, empowering users to choose the level of privacy, stimulation and social interaction that best supports them.

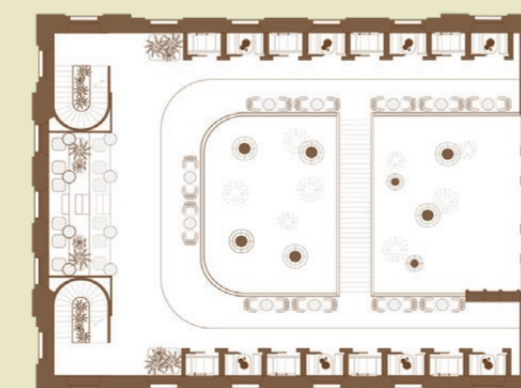


Key Outcomes

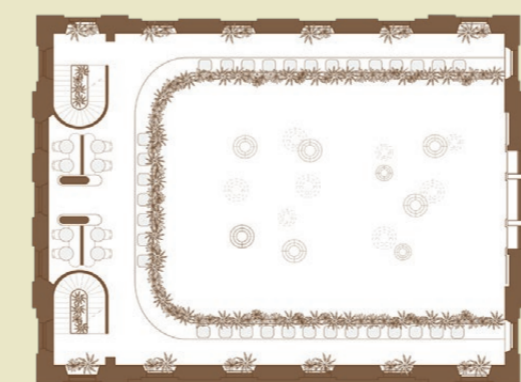
- Choice over standardisation
- Sensory restoration
- Neuroinclusive hospitality
- Choice over standardisation
- Sensory restoration



ground floor



first mezzanine



second mezzanine

Social and Cultural Impact

The Quiet House expands accessibility beyond physical access by recognising sensory wellbeing as an essential aspect of inclusion. Through adaptable environments, users can choose the level of privacy, stimulation and social interaction that best supports them. The project demonstrates how hospitality spaces can welcome both neurodivergent and neurotypical visitors through choice, autonomy and care.