

Digital Detox Retreat

Reclaiming Connection Through Historic Reuse

Context: Vallis Florida is a conceptual interior design proposal that transforms the historic Cleeve Abbey in Somerset into a digital detox retreat — a sanctuary for stillness, reflection, and meaningful reconnection. The design draws deeply from research into digital dependency, mental well-being, and emotional burnout in today's hyper-connected world. Rooted in both heritage and human need, this project re-imagines the abbey's original purpose — a place of monastic simplicity and quiet devotion — into an inclusive, multi-sensory experience for modern visitors. Through carefully curated programs such as yoga, communal dining, creative workshops, and mindful rest, the retreat offers an environment that speaks to both body and soul. This is a space where history isn't just preserved — it's lived in, felt, and reinterpreted as a tool for healing.

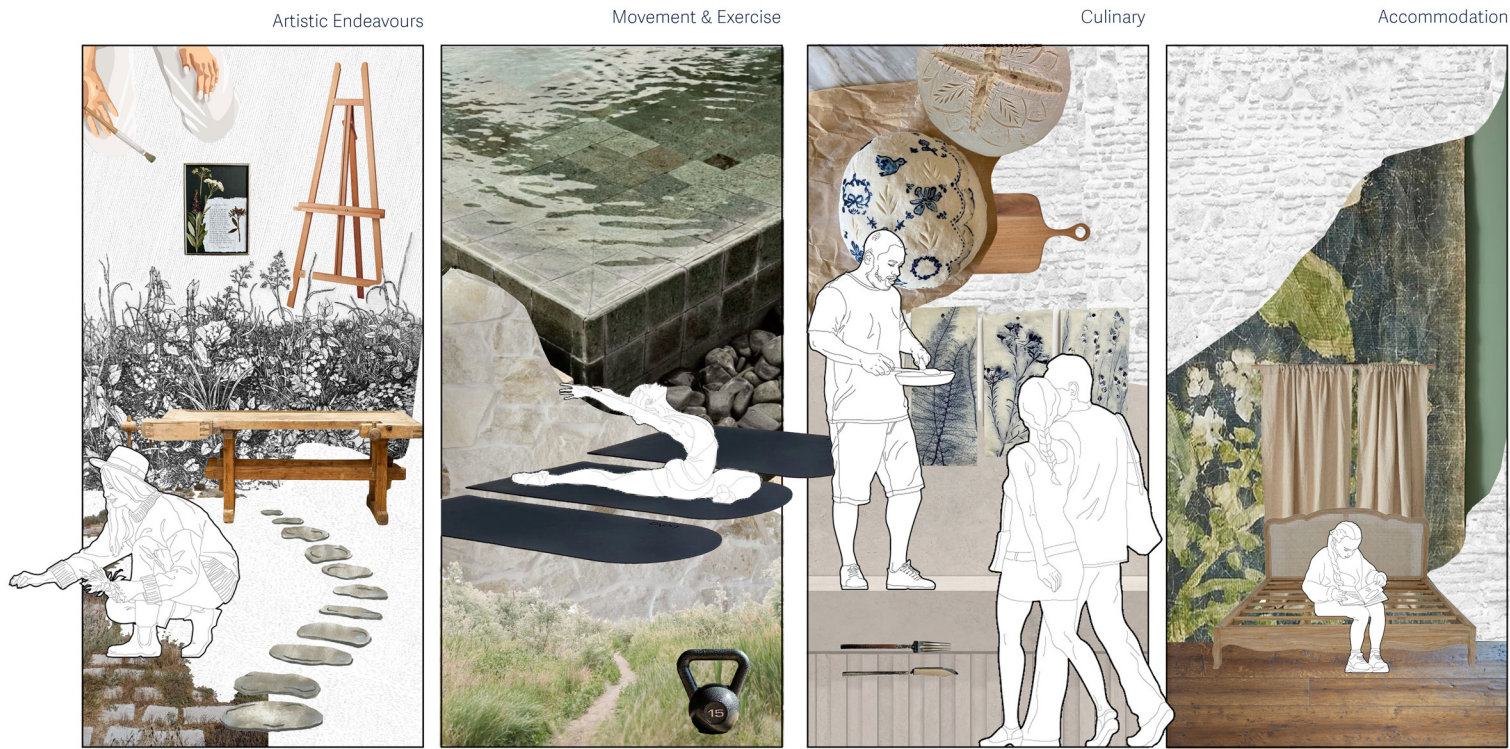
Significance of the project: The compulsive need to be online has accounted for at least 35% of the population and has created various mental and physical health issues as a consequence. Research indicates the sharp decline in in-personal social interaction from 2000-2017, which dropped to about 70% as screen time increased. As technology becomes ever more embedded in our daily lives, it quietly erodes the depth of our human relationships. The endless stream of notifications, the pressure to perform online, and the constant reach for our devices all create emotional distance — even in the closest of spaces. Val(l)is Florida offers an antidote: a space that gently encourages guests to set their phones aside and step into a slower, more intentional rhythm. It is a retreat not only from screens, but from the noise of modern life. Within the peaceful walls of Cleeve Abbey, visitors are invited to rediscover the lost art of presence — to engage face-to-face, to savour silence, to breathe without distraction. In doing so, the project becomes a timely and vital response to the loneliness and disconnection that so often define contemporary existence.

The Project Aims: This project embraces the principle of re-use not just as a method of preservation, but as an act of transformation — giving new life and relevance to an existing space. Val(l)is Florida re-imagines the atmospheric remains of Cleeve Abbey as a sanctuary for digital detox and reconnection, honouring its spiritual and architectural legacy while embedding it with renewed social purpose. The design aims to sensitively reflect the emotional and mental challenges of contemporary society — particularly our increasing reliance on technology — through a space that is tactile, human-centred and deeply contextual. By weaving modern wellness needs into the abbey's original fabric, the project demonstrates how historic buildings can be thoughtfully adapted to support the well-being of today's communities. This is re-use not just of structure, but of meaning — creating spaces that speak to both past and present.



“Unplugged”

This case study shows time and again about the benefits of digital detoxing and how taking a step back can truly make positive effects in our life. As mentioned before, inspiring from the profound effects of how technology effects children to reflecting on the issues it can cause parents, couples and friends, widening the demographic. This case study benefits me due to the ever growing evidence on how couple feel the effect of technology being a third wheel in their relationships. It reinforces the importance of designing a space that not only encourages disconnection from devices but actively nurtures real, meaningful human connection.



70%

“Do you feel like social Media impacts your Mental Health?”

41 people Said Yes with 18 saying No

65%

“Would you ever have a break from Technology?”

40 people Said Yes with 20 saying No

60%

“Do you feel emotionally attached or uneasy when your device isn't within reach?”

36 people Said Yes with 25 saying No

57%

“As a result from technology, have you ever experienced tech related stress or anxiety?”

34 people Said Yes with 26 saying No

Primary Research:

This primary research highlights a growing emotional dependency on technology, with the majority of participants reporting negative effects on their mental health. High percentages expressed stress, anxiety, and difficulty separating from their devices, while many showed a willingness to take a break from technology. These findings underline the urgent need for spaces that promote digital disconnection and emotional reconnection — reinforcing the relevance and purpose of this project.

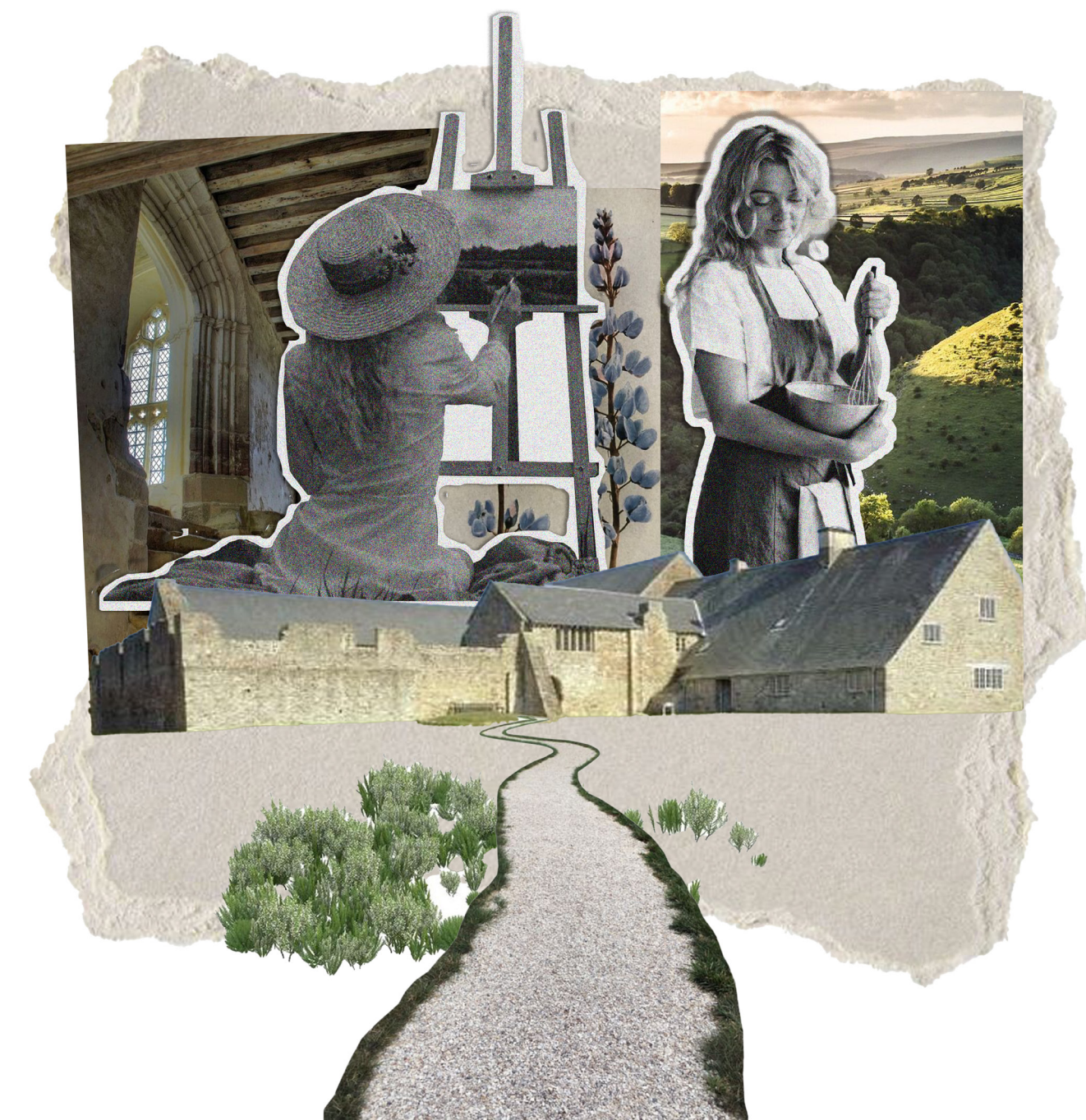
The average person touches their phone 2,617 times a day.

High screen-time has become a barrier to connection in relationships

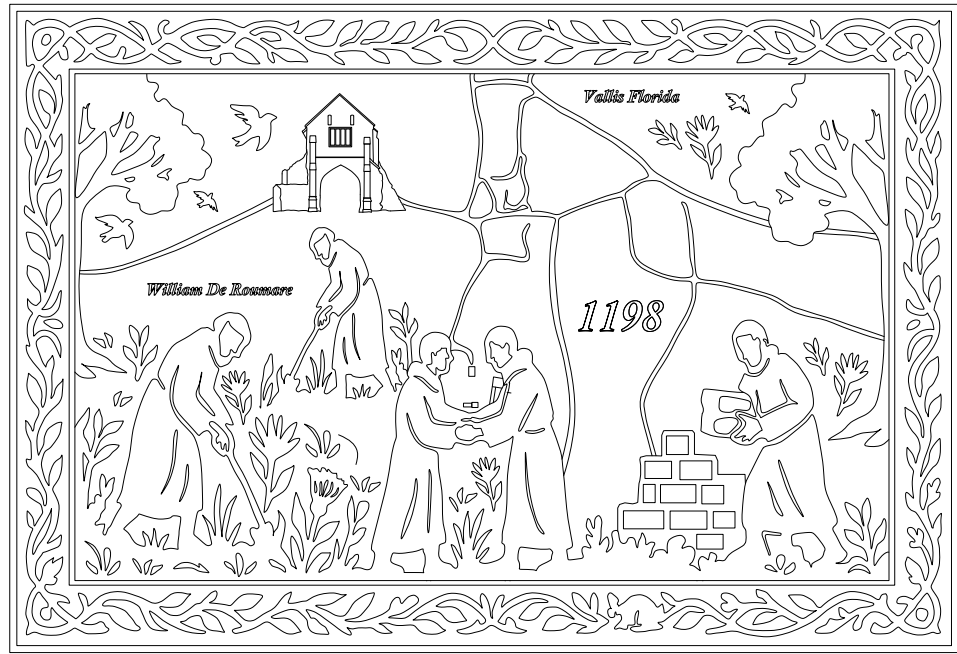
44% of couples admit to ‘phunning’ their partner.

Phone-subbing is linked to relationship dissatisfaction such as feelings of isolation and insecurity

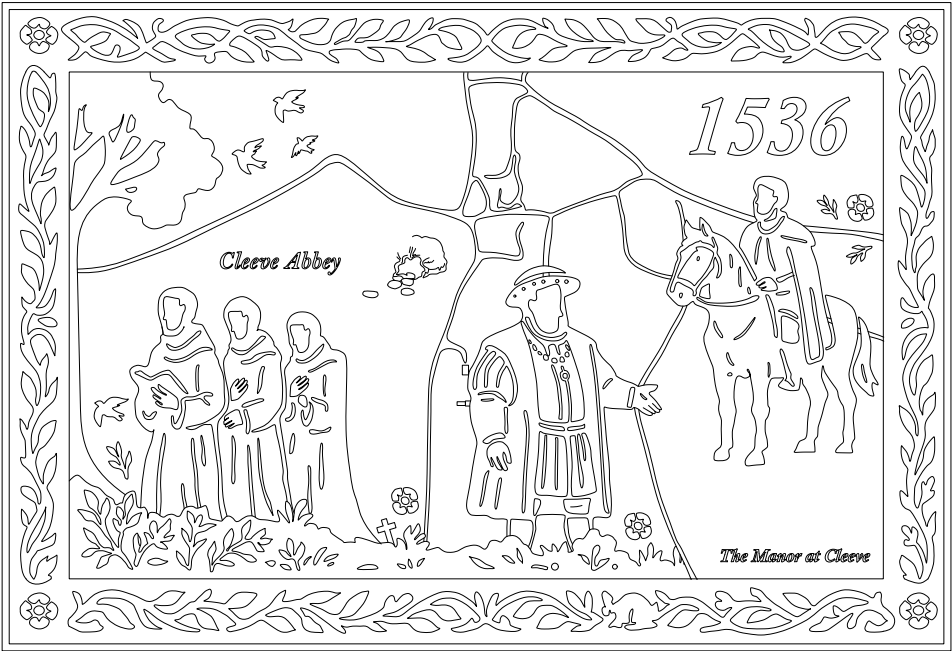
Concept Collage



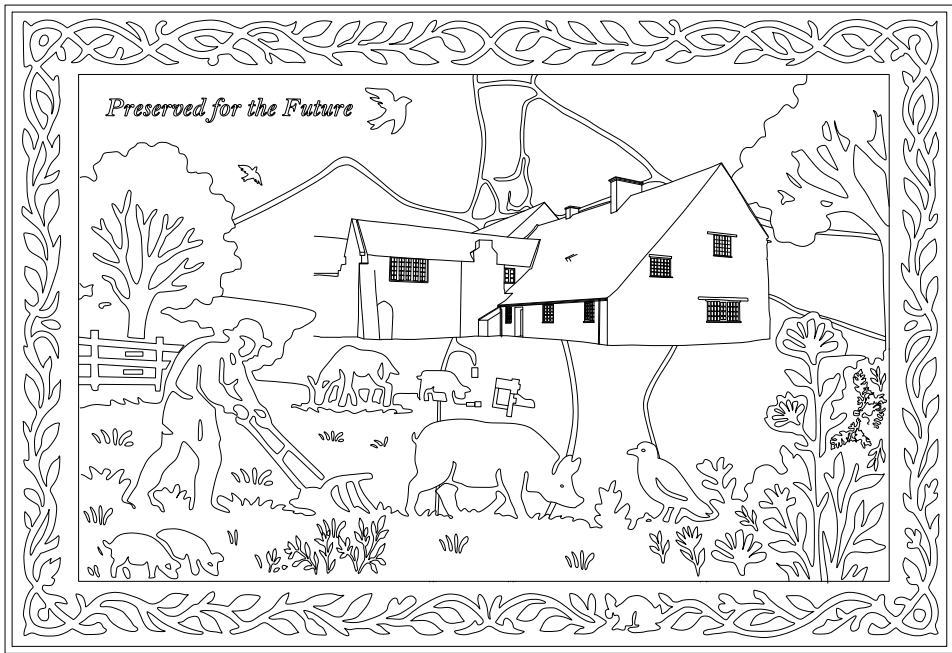
Cleeve Abbey's History: Panel Concept



Panel 1: 'The Flowering Valley'
Life and Devotion at Cleeve Abbey, 13th Century



Panel 2: 'The Crown's Command'
The Dissolution of the Abbey, 1536–1537



Panel 3: 'Fields and Echoes'
From Farmland to Ruins, and Back to Nature



Cleeve Abbey Gate House

Founded in 1198 by Cistercian monks, Cleeve Abbey was established as a place of spiritual discipline, agricultural labour, and communal life. Its austere beauty and functional layout reflected the Cistercian ethos of simplicity and devotion. Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII in the 16th century, the abbey was stripped of its religious function and re-purposed for secular use—eventually becoming part of a working farm. Though much of its fabric was altered, key elements of the monastic architecture survived, preserving a quiet continuity between sacred and domestic pasts.

Programs of Use from the Past



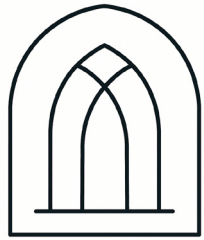
Floral Art
Workshops



Yoga &
Stillness



Cooking
Workshops



Immersive
Dining



Banquet
Hall

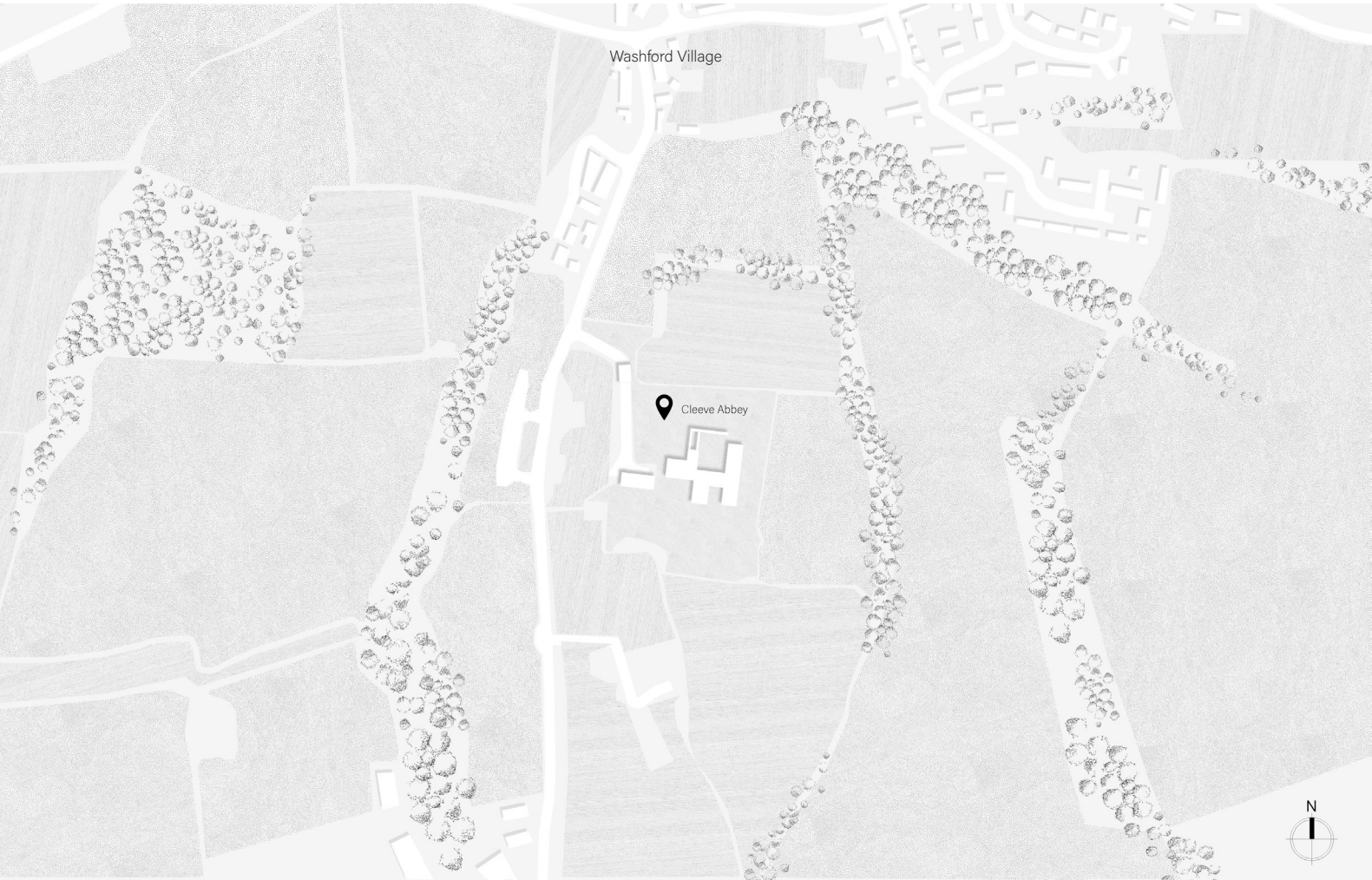


Monastic
Accommodation

Primary Imagery



Site Plan



Adaptive Reuse at Cleeve Abbey: Cleeve Abbey offers a powerful and authentic setting for exploring adaptive reuse, particularly within the context of interior design education. As one of the most complete and evocative monastic sites in England, the abbey provides not only a rich architectural fabric but also a deep narrative of communal living, craft, and contemplation. By choosing this site, the project demonstrates how a historically significant structure can be re-imagined for contemporary use while honouring its original spirit.

Target Market



Couples

From research, couples are one of the key user groups that suffer from our advancements in the technology world. Couple who are seeking quality time together, free from digital distractions. They value connection, intimacy, and shared experiences in a tech free environment. Partners feeling emotionally or relationally distant, resulting in seeking reconnection or healing.



Historic
Enthusiast

Seeing as Cleeve is a historic site many users, from local, families and tourist would have visited Cleeve Abbey in its empty shell. These Individuals interested in heritage, traditional craftsmanship, or historical settings. They value spaces that tell a story, evoke the past, and disconnect them from modern over stimulation.



Nature
Enthusiast

People who feel rejuvenated in natural surroundings and often seek simplicity, sustainability, and mindfulness. They are drawn to organic environments that foster a deep connection to the outdoors.



Friendships

Friends looking to reconnect, deepen their bonds, or simply enjoy each other's company without the noise of digital life. They value shared activities, meaningful conversations, and laughter in an environment that promotes presence and togetherness.



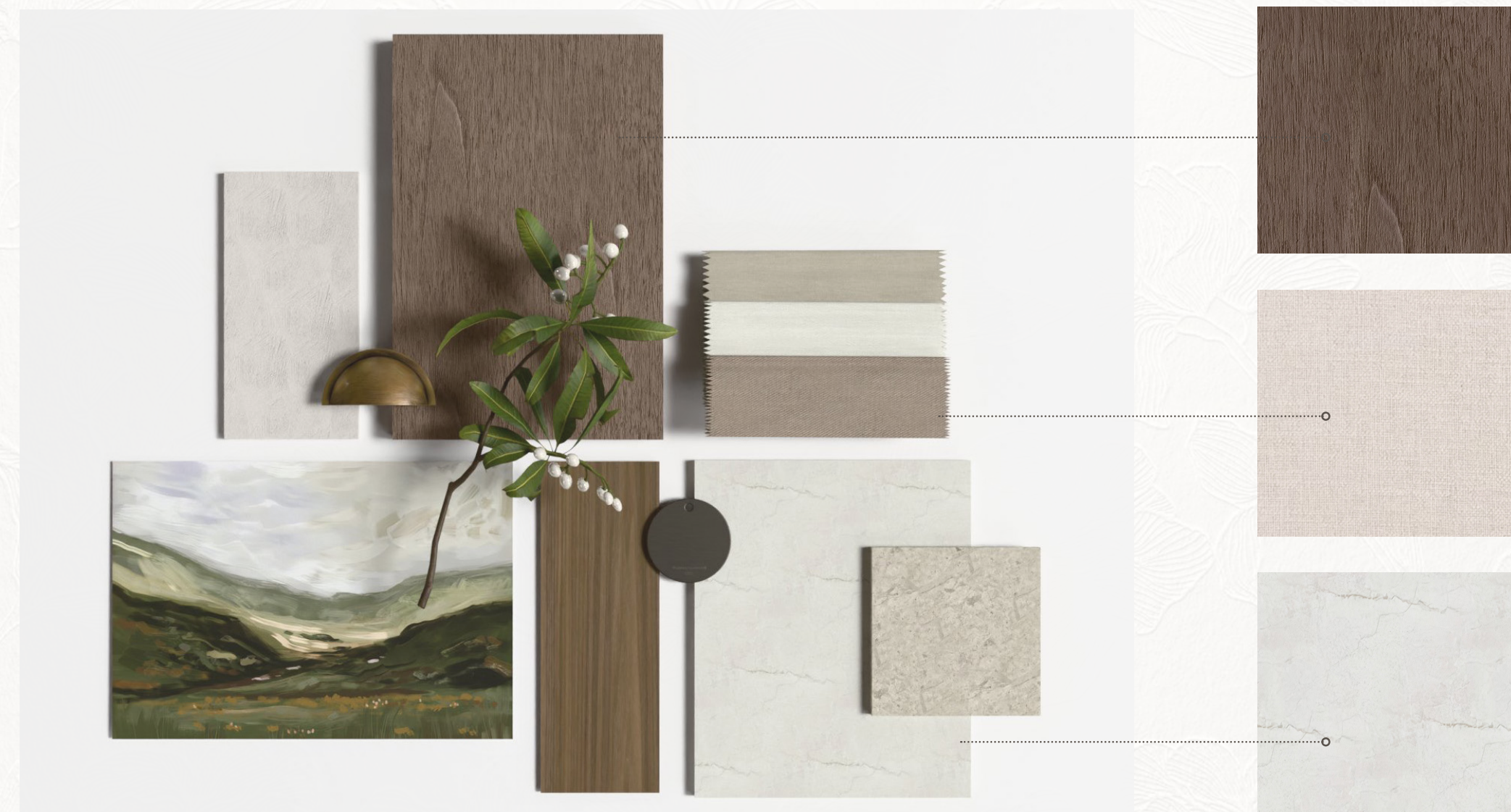
The Community

Local residents or groups who use the space for gathering, wellness, or social connection. They value inclusive, shared experiences, and spaces that foster human connection beyond the digital realm. Given the nearby village, locals can benefit from the site's amenities and use the space as an additional area for work or community activities.

Concept Collage



Material Selection



Solid Oak

Oak reflects enduring craftsmanship, with its strength, grain, and timeless appeal. Used in historical buildings for centuries, it connects the past and the present. Whether in flooring or joinery, oak honours traditional methods while bringing warmth and authenticity to the space - echoing the quiet integrity of monastic life.

Sustainable Fabrics

Natural, ethically sourced fabrics - such as linen, wool, and organic cotton, can bring softness and breathable while supporting ecological responsibility. Their tactile simplicity aligns with the pared-back purity of the monastic aesthetic, reinforcing a mindful, hand-crafted ethos. Sustainability here is not a trend but a return to enduring values.

Marble

Marble brings a sense of permanence and quiet luxury, echoing sacred architecture through the ages. Its natural veining speaks to geological time and tradition. Used thoughtfully, it balances elegance with restraints, suiting the reverence of Grade 1 setting while elevating the daily rituals of retreat life.

Cafe Perspective Visual



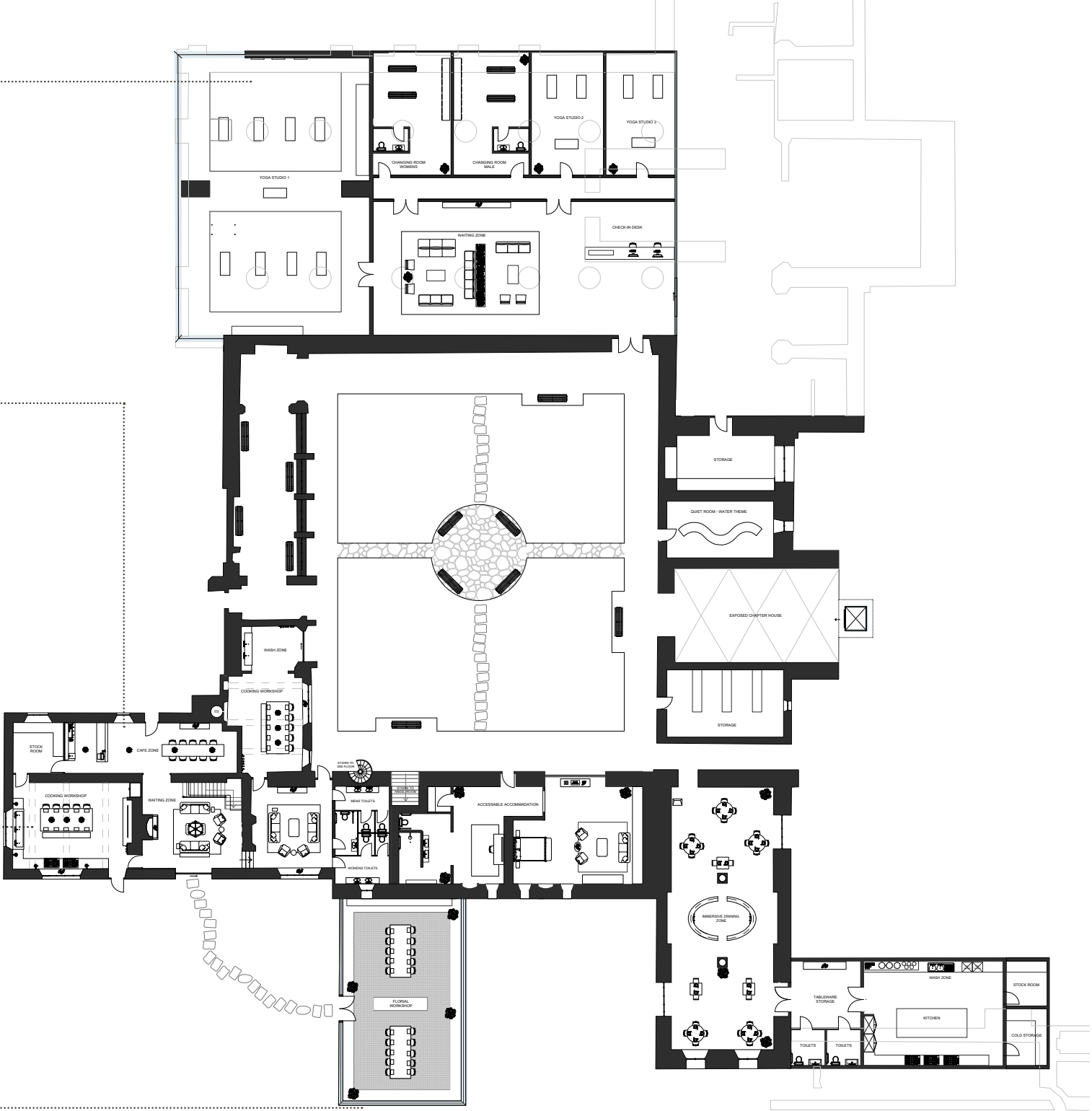


Yoga Studio

A calm and contemplative space designed to promote inner stillness and physical wellbeing, the yoga studio invites guests to reconnect with their bodies and breath within the tranquil, historic setting of the Abbey.



Ground Floor Plan



Cafe/Entrance

Serving as the first point of arrival, the café welcomes visitors with warmth and simplicity. It offers light refreshments and a place to pause, setting the tone for the retreat experience through natural materials and a serene atmosphere.



Cooking Workshop

Inspired by the monks' tradition of self-sufficiency, the cooking workshop reflects historic practices of preparing simple, seasonal meals with care and intention. Through hands-on sessions, this space carries forward the abbey's ethos of rhythm, labour, and quiet reflection—offering guests an opportunity to reconnect with the mindful process of making food in a communal and grounded way.

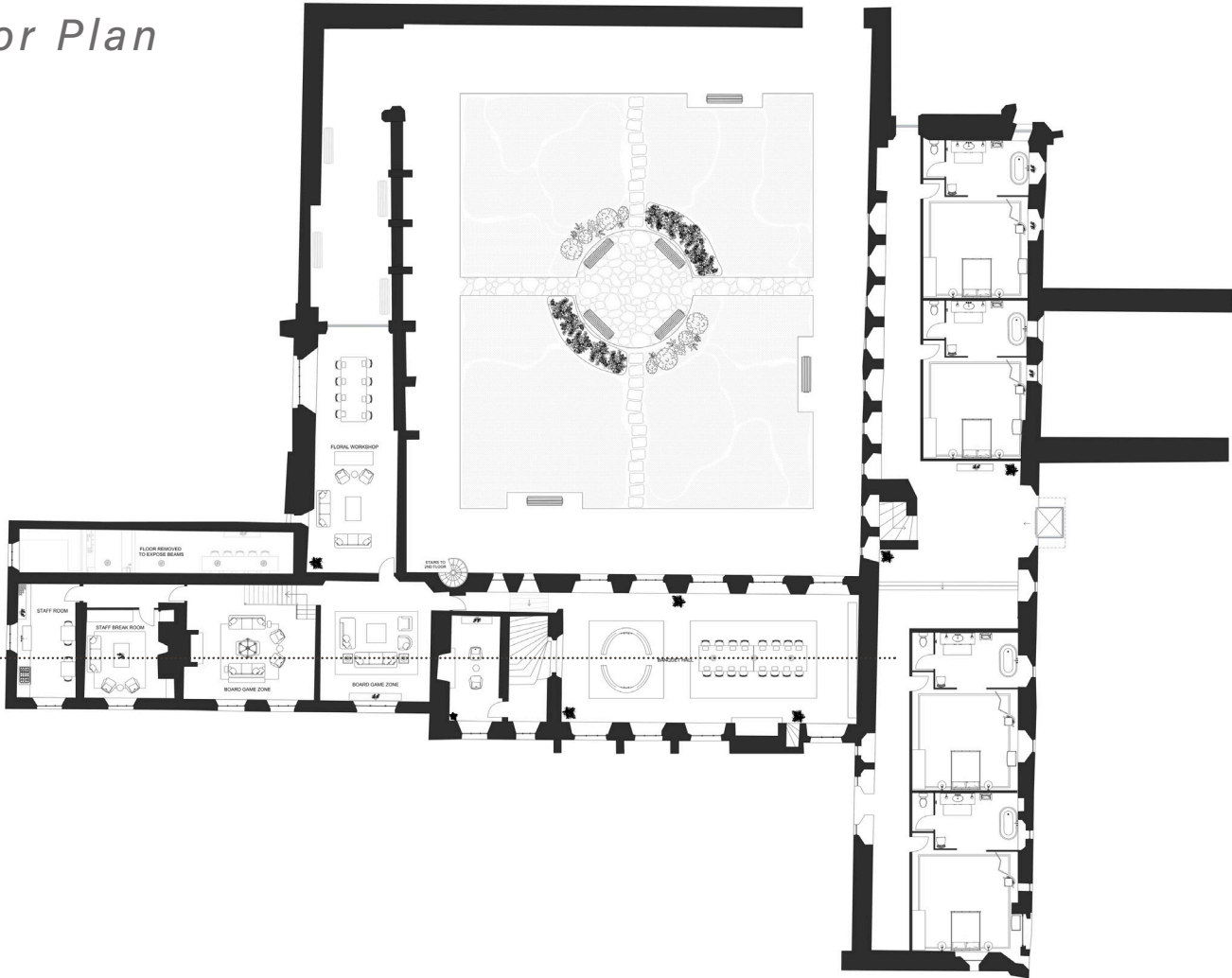


Drawing from the abbey's original name, Vallis Florida—meaning "flowering valley"—the floral workshop offers a sensory and meditative experience rooted in monastic horticultural traditions. Historically, monks cultivated flowers and herbs for ritual, medicine, and ornamentation. This workshop honours that legacy, inviting guests to engage with nature through botanical crafts and floral arrangements that foster creativity, presence, and a sense of place.

Floral Workshop

The Dormitory

The dormitory layout is directly inspired by the original monastic sleeping quarters, where monks slept side by side in silent unity. A narrow corridor now runs along the building, echoing the original arrangement, while individual rooms offer contemporary comfort. Each space features an exposed ceiling, preserving the architectural honesty of the abbey. As part of the digital detox experience, the dormitory becomes a place of solitude and restoration, continuing the abbey's historic role as a sanctuary for reflection and renewal.



The spatial interventions throughout the abbey are carefully attuned to its past. Rather than imposing a new identity, the design draws directly from the building's former monastic functions. The dormitory, for example, retains the layout and rhythm of the original sleeping quarters, reinterpreted to accommodate private yet humble rooms that echo the monks' shared life. The cooking workshop channels the abbey's legacy of self-sufficiency, transforming the act of preparing food into a meditative, communal practice. The floral workshop takes inspiration from the abbey's name—Vallis Florida—and from the monks' horticultural traditions, offering a direct connection to the site's sensory and symbolic past.

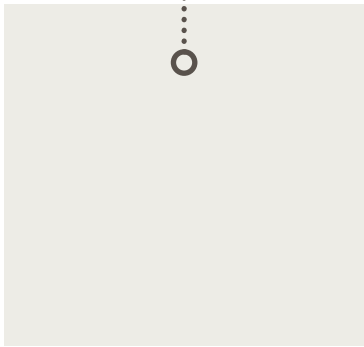
First Floor Plan



The Dormitory:

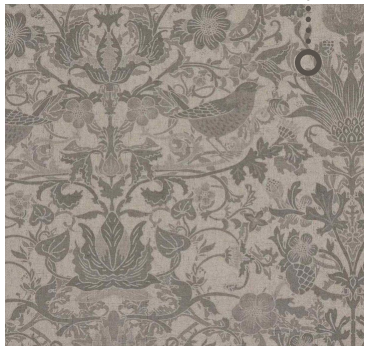
This design takes inspiration from the original monastic dormitory, where rows of monks once slept in quiet simplicity, their lives shaped by rhythm, ritual, and retreat. A newly introduced dividing wall now runs the length of the space, forming a slender, contemplative corridor along one side of the building. This gentle intervention honours the historic spatial arrangement—evoking the memory of communal sleep while responding to modern needs for privacy and stillness.

Each room has been carefully crafted to maintain a sense of openness and connection to the architectural spirit of the abbey. Vaulted ceilings remain exposed, allowing the weight and warmth of the timber beams to be felt fully, both visually and atmospherically. The layering of old and new creates a dialogue between past and present, preserving the austere beauty of monastic life while offering a restful retreat from the distractions of the digital age.



Carpet

Carpet plays a key role in transforming tall, industrial-style spaces with raw materials into warmer, more cohesive environments. Its soft texture contrasts beautifully with hard surfaces like exposed concrete, brick. Acoustically, it helps ground the space by absorbing sound and minimizing echo—a common issue in high-ceilinged rooms.



William Morris Wallpaper

This William Morris print reflects the essence of craftsmanship and simplicity central to the design concept. Known for his dedication to hand-crafted detail and nature-inspired motifs. Despite the complexity of the design, it maintains a sense of calm and balance—achieved through repetition, natural forms, and a limited, earthy color palette. The print embodies traditional craftsmanship, where each element is intentional, reflecting a deep respect for materials and making.



Original Stone Walls

Retaining the original stone walls at Cleeve Abbey preserves its historic character and showcases the craftsmanship of the building. The natural texture adds depth and beauty, while supporting a design rooted in simplicity and honesty. It also promotes sustainability by reusing existing materials and enhances the space's atmosphere through its thermal and acoustic properties, aligning with both conservation and thoughtful design principles.

Accommodation Section

