



# PALACE THEATRE HOTEL

SWANSEA

ANNA GRESLE FARTHING

The Palace Theatre Hotel is located in an abandoned Grade II listed theatre in the centre of Swansea, Wales built in 1888. Abandoned in 2007, and surviving an arson attack in 2019, without this development, one of the most prominent and iconic buildings in the city would be lost forever. The theatre has a rich history, with a range of famous performers and many original architectural features. The design includes a guest lounge with private café, a bar (pictured above) and restaurant open to the public, as well as a range of suites.

This is an example for a hotel chain which turns buildings in areas in need of development into places at the heart of the community. Inspiring people to come and visit as well as engaging with the local residents. The design is heavily rooted in the area, working collaboratively with local artisans to create an authentic celebration of the buildings location, as well as drawing inspiration from the building's unique history to create a completely sympathetic design which doesn't shy away from the building's original purpose.



# THE ISSUES

## TOURISM POST-COVID

In a post-COVID world, people's outlook on holidays in the UK have changed. Through the limitation of a holiday within the UK being the only option to get away, many have begun to see the appeal of holidaying within the country. There are numerous environmental and socioeconomic benefits of this tourism trend, most significantly the reduction of CO2 emissions, as well as the development it will bring to these areas of the UK.

Swansea is already aiming to start this development with the Swansea Central Plan. A £135m redevelopment project set up by the council to help Swansea reinvent itself. The plan includes a 3500-seat area built above a multi-story car park alongside a hotel, shops, new bridge and housing. The project aims to create a 'hub' of 11,000 people working in the area and to encourage more people back to city centre living in Swansea. There are also plans to double the city's green space including creating a new inner-city park on top of the site. Phase one of the project is set to be completed by 2021. This is a prime example of how once popular tourist destinations are developing themselves to appeal to a modern-day target audience.

This project aims to encourage such trips with a chain of hotel developments across the UK which breathe new life into buildings of local historical and cultural significance, starting with The Palace Theatre in Swansea, Wales. This example will convey how a developer would take one of these buildings and translate the design approach to other buildings rather than just creating a carbon copy which is replicated across the country. The design will be inspired by the building's history and location, and therefore, will be unique for each location. This may also encourage guests to go and visit the other locations where more of these hotels are developed, as each experience will bring something new, while ensuring that they will receive the same quality of stay.



**SWANSEA CENTRAL PLAN VISUAL**  
(Swansea Council, 2019)



**SWANSEA CENTRAL PLAN - ROOFTOP GARDEN**  
(Swansea Council, 2019)

## SAVING THE PALACE THEATRE

The Palace Theatre has been facing the threat of being demolished since 1961 after it stopped being used as a theatre, however after a few incarnations including a bingo hall and nightclub, it was left abandoned in 2007. The building has been subjected to vast amounts of weather and water damage, as well as being overrun with vegetation. In 2019, the theatre narrowly survived an arson attack and it was then that Swansea Council started to seek developers in order to save this iconic building.

There are a multitude of original details remaining in the building, such as the plaster proscenium and decorative iron railings which can be restored. There is also a rich history linked to the building as its life as a theatre, including notable performances from Lillie Langtry, a young Charlie Chaplin and was where Sir Anthony Hopkins' had his first professional debut.

Not only is this building significant in the theatre community but is also a big part of the local community in Swansea. Everyone is aware of the building and agrees that it needs to be saved rather than torn down, with many members having memories of when it was open.

Because of this, it is integral to not only just 'save' the building, but to create something which embraces all of the history that comes with it. The development must completely embody all of the cultural, historical and artistic references that can be made, as well as working with, rather than around the existing architecture. The end product may not be the most conventional of designs, but it will be the kind of design which the building and local area deserves.



**SIR ANTHONY HOPKINS**



**LILLIE LANGTRY**



**CHARLIE CHAPLIN**

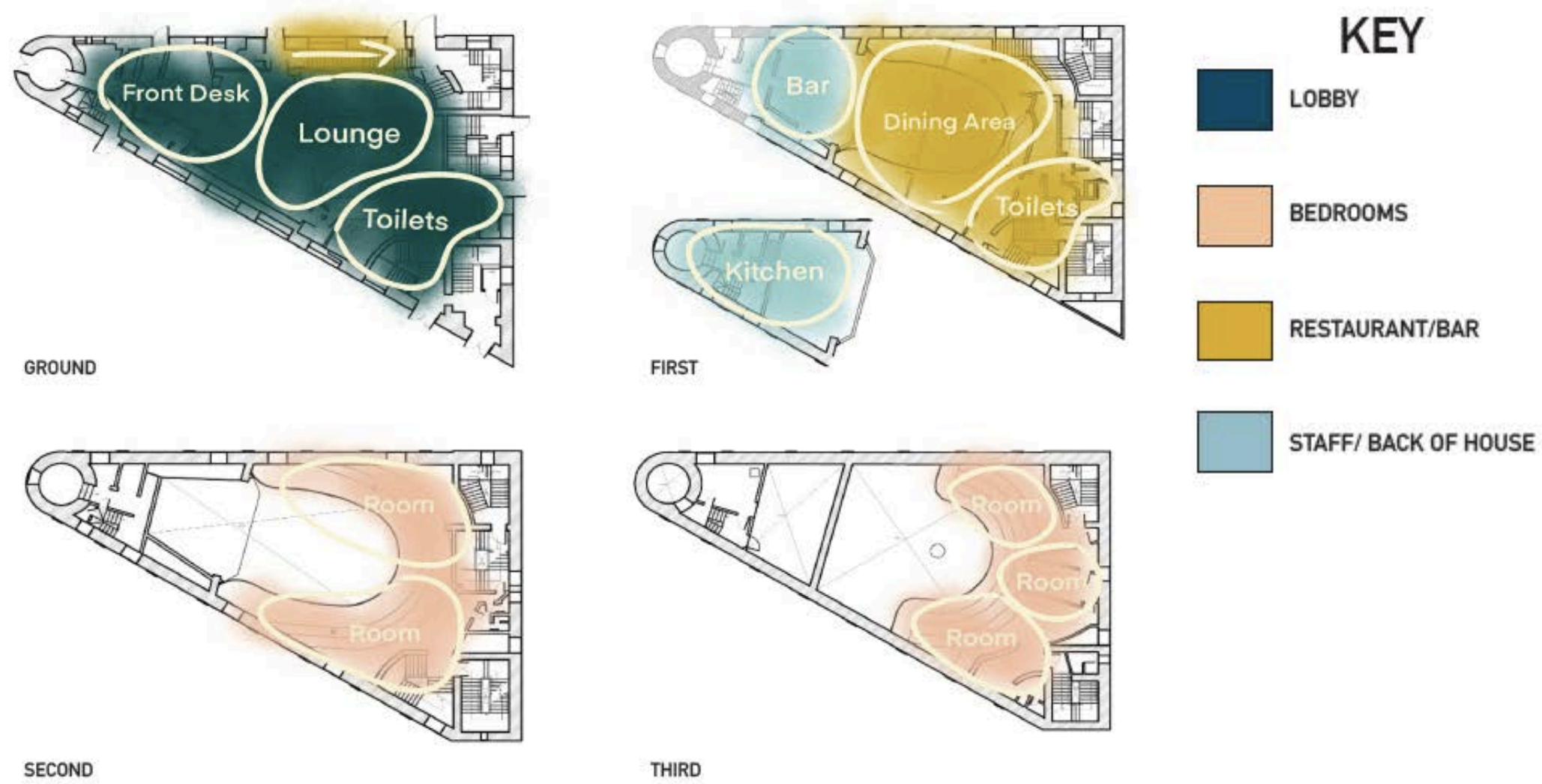


**EXISTING INTERIOR PHOTOS** (GWP Architects, 2020)

**ANNA GRESLE FARTHING**

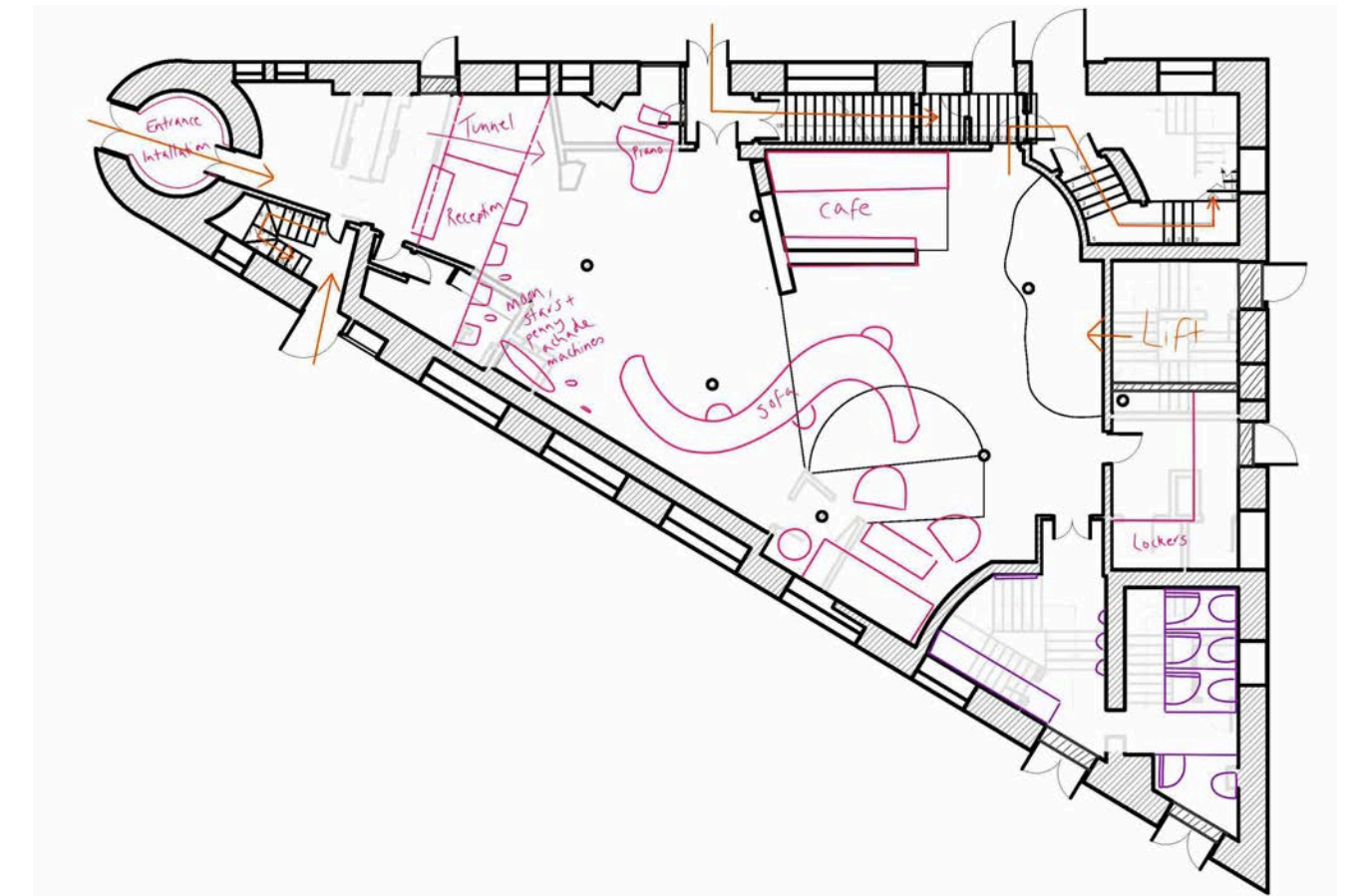


# ZONAL & SPACIAL PLANNING



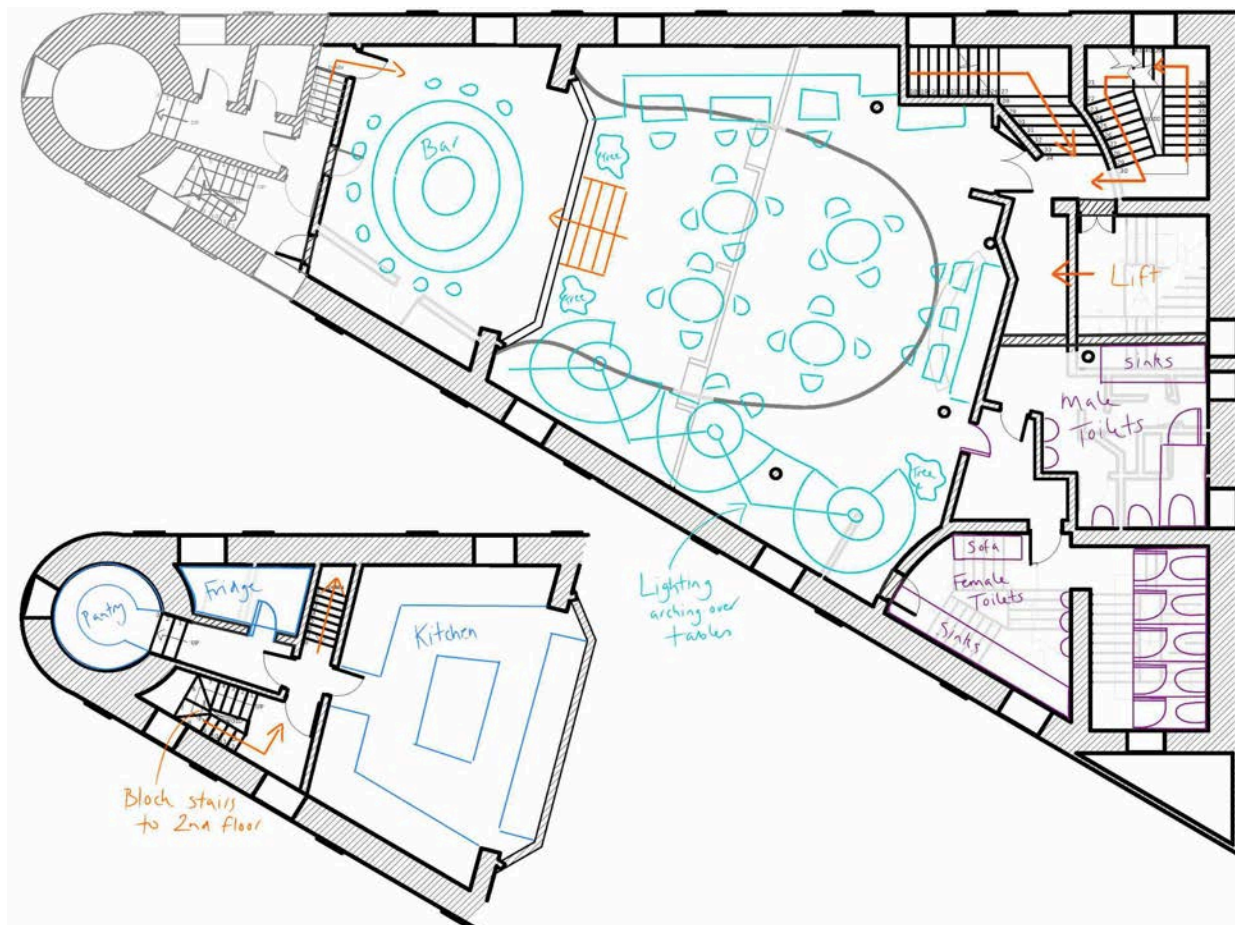
## ZONAL PLANNING

Zonal planning played such a big part in ensuring that the layout of the hotel worked with the building. Not only is the purpose of a building changing, but the original architecture and layout is extremely site specific - for example, the wedge shape and curved balconies. Having the main entrance on the ground floor, bar and restaurant on the first floor, allows for a separate public entrance, as well as making a feature of the stage and auditorium. The guest suites have been assigned to the balconies, as even though they created unusual room shapes, it ended up working on the designs favour, as it helped create really unique and different feeling rooms, which is then reflected in the design styles.

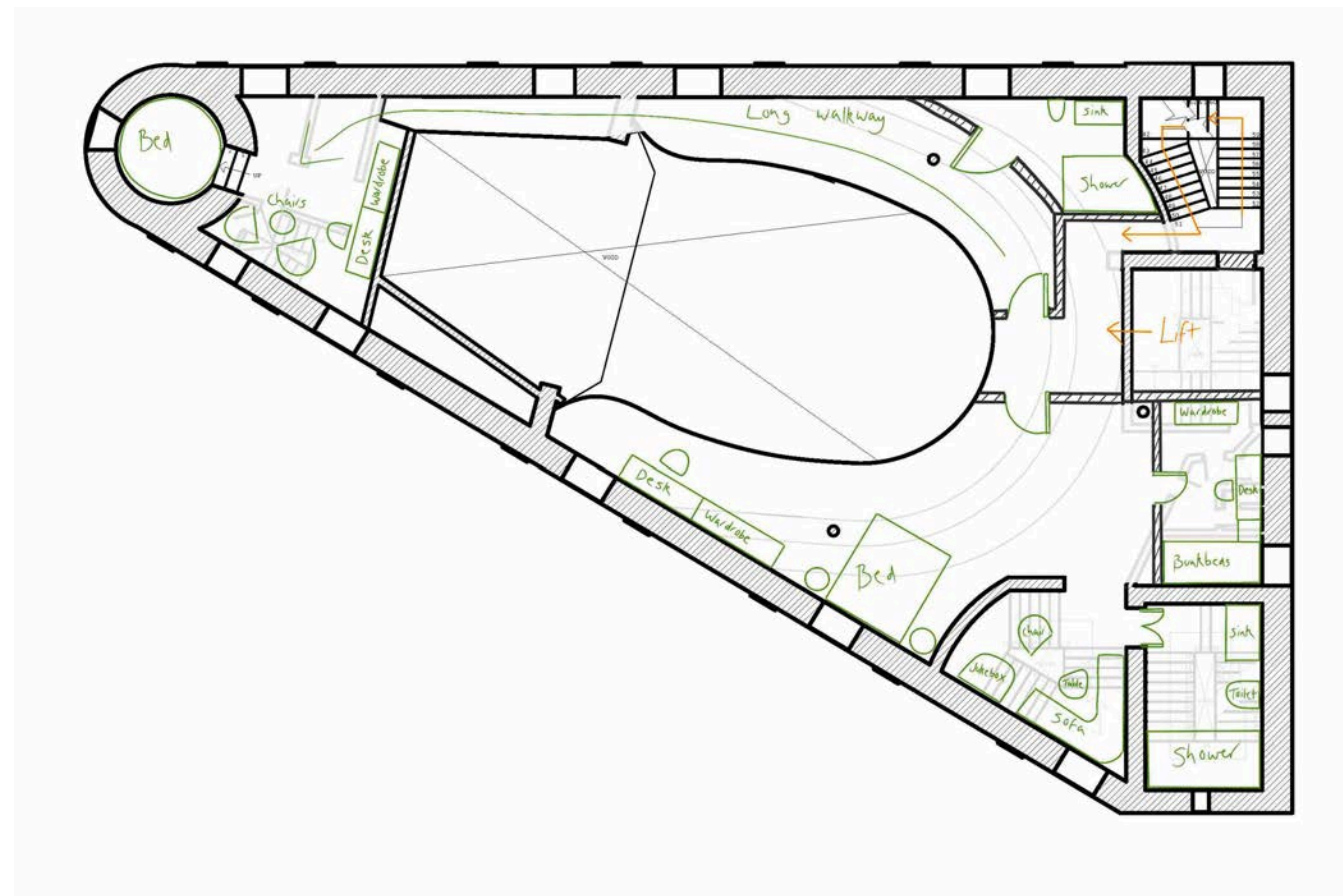


## SPACIAL PLANNING- GROUND FLOOR

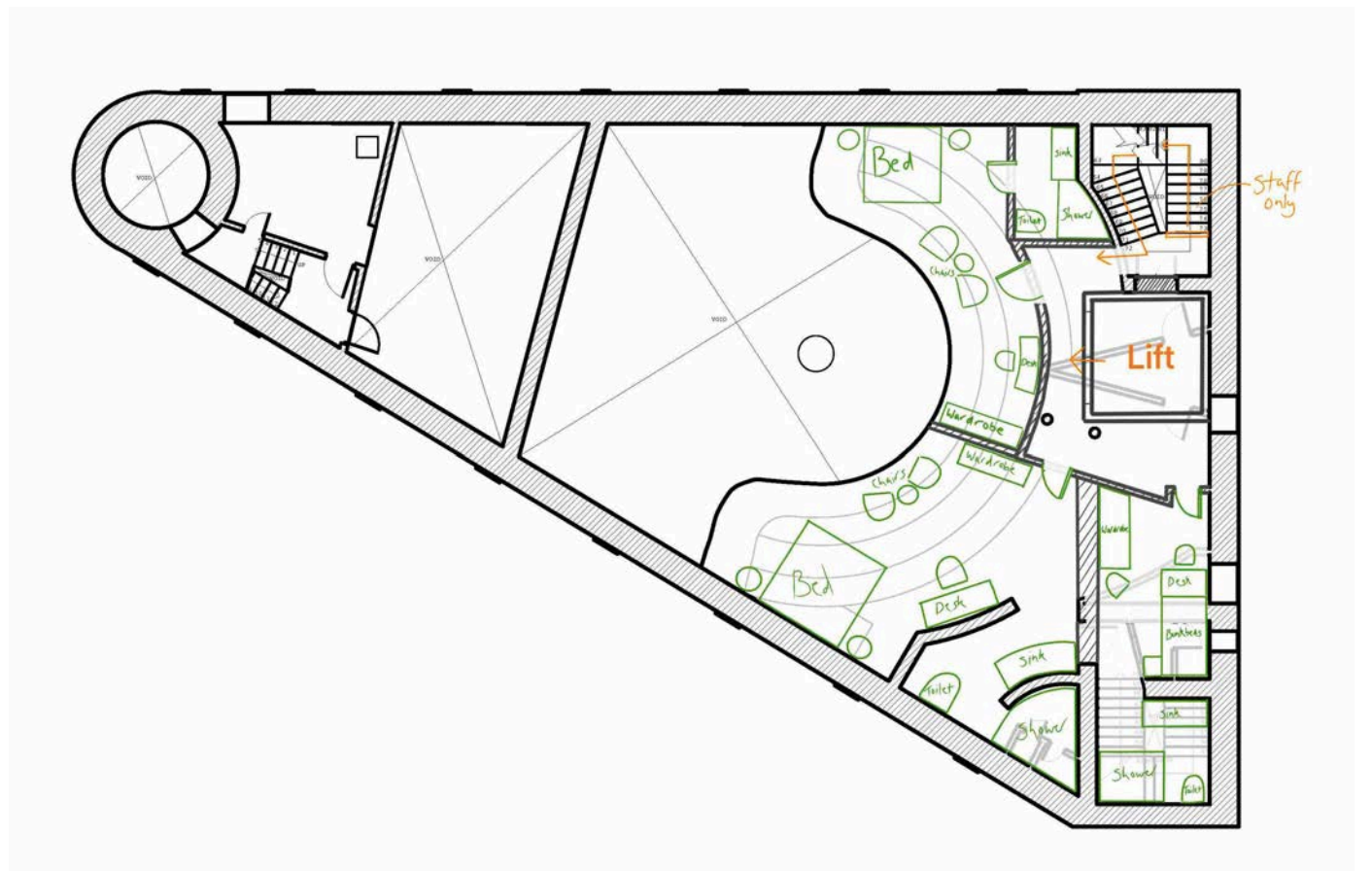
Many iterations of the spatial planning were created, and these continued to evolve further still as the process went on. The main challenge in creating a successful layout for a building which was heavily purpose built is to try to consider the customer journey through the space, and how this can be manipulated to create a layout which isn't fighting against the architecture, but instead uses it to its advantage. For example, with this project, there were a lot of irregular shaped walls and rooms which didn't lend themselves to conventional purposes, such as bedrooms and bathrooms. However, by embracing what was already there, there ended up being a much more unique and functional design.



## SPACIAL PLANNING- FIRST FLOOR



## SPACIAL PLANNING- SECOND FLOOR



## SPACIAL PLANNING- THIRD FLOOR

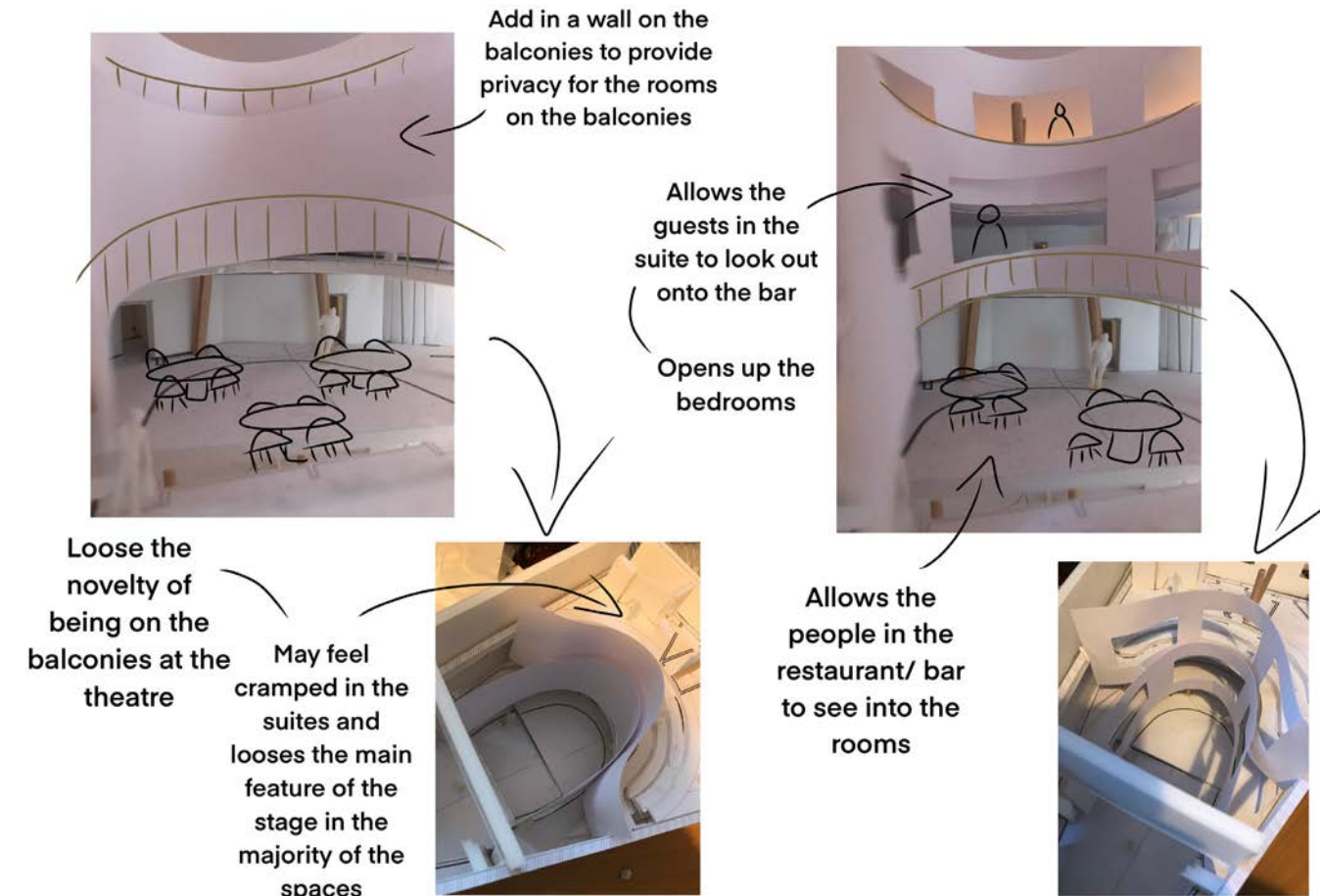
**ANNA GRESLE FARTHING**



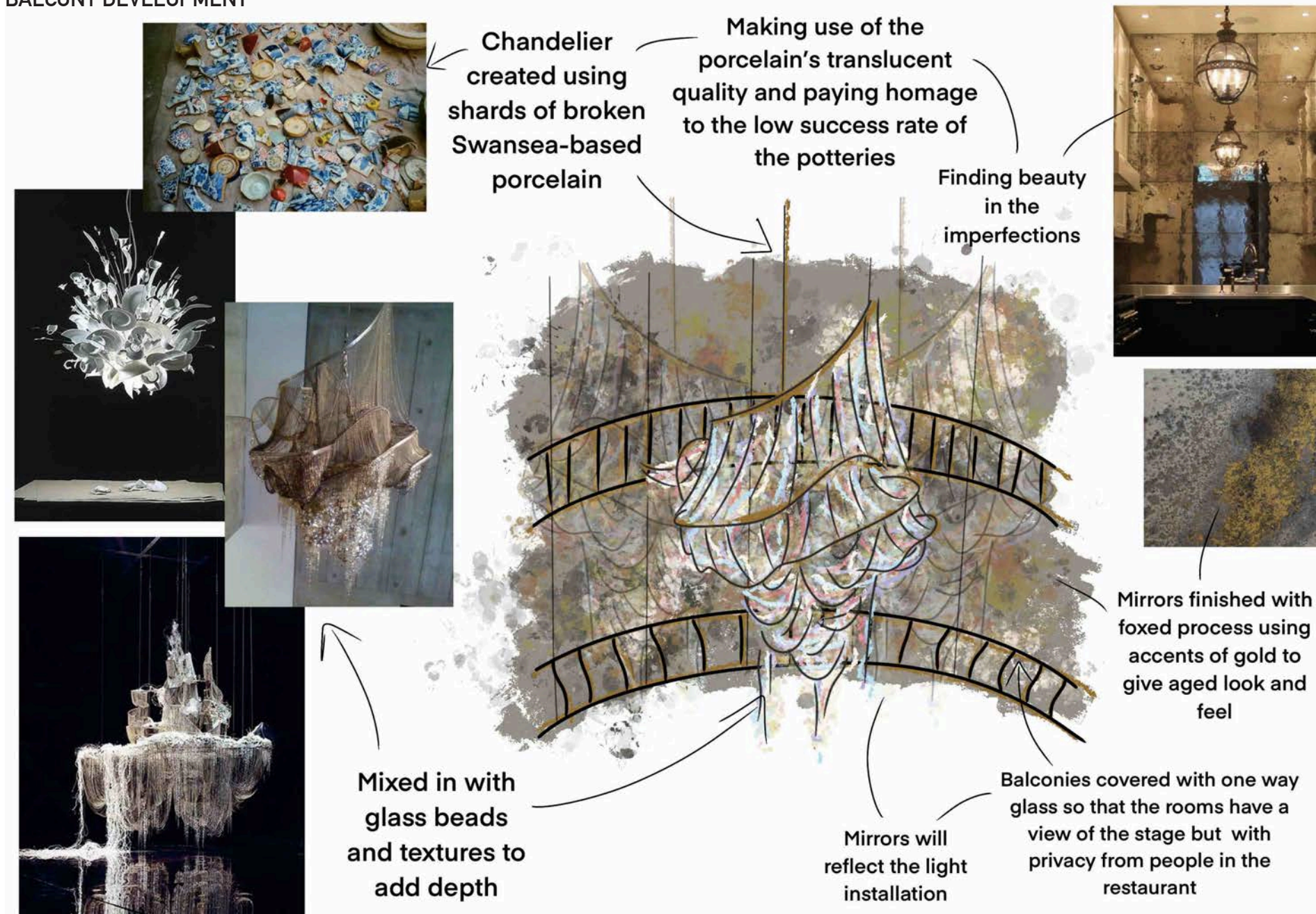
# ADAPTING THE EXISTING SPACE

Due to the original purpose of the building, there is a large, very open auditorium with two curved balconies looking down onto the stage on the first floor. The most logical formulation was to locate the guest suites of these balconies, however making these private was a must. Instead of seeing this as an obstacle and simply putting up walls or trying to formulate the rooms away from the balconies, this was instead viewed as a design opportunity. The use of one-way glass finished with an antique looking foxed effect means that the rooms have an amazing view of the people below (a nod to the original purpose of watching performances), but the people in the restaurant are completely oblivious. Instead it creates a really dramatic setting, with the light from the massive broken porcelain chandelier installation being reflected back into the space. This was also a practical decision as due to the previously decorative fake windows, there is little natural light in the building. By leaning into this lack of natural light and paying close attention to creating ambient yet functional lighting creates a usable and intimate feeling space.

## BALCONY PRIVACY DEVELOPMENT



## BALCONY DEVELOPMENT



RESTAURANT (FIRST FLOOR)



HOPKINS SUITE (SECOND FLOOR)

ANNA GRESLE FARTHING



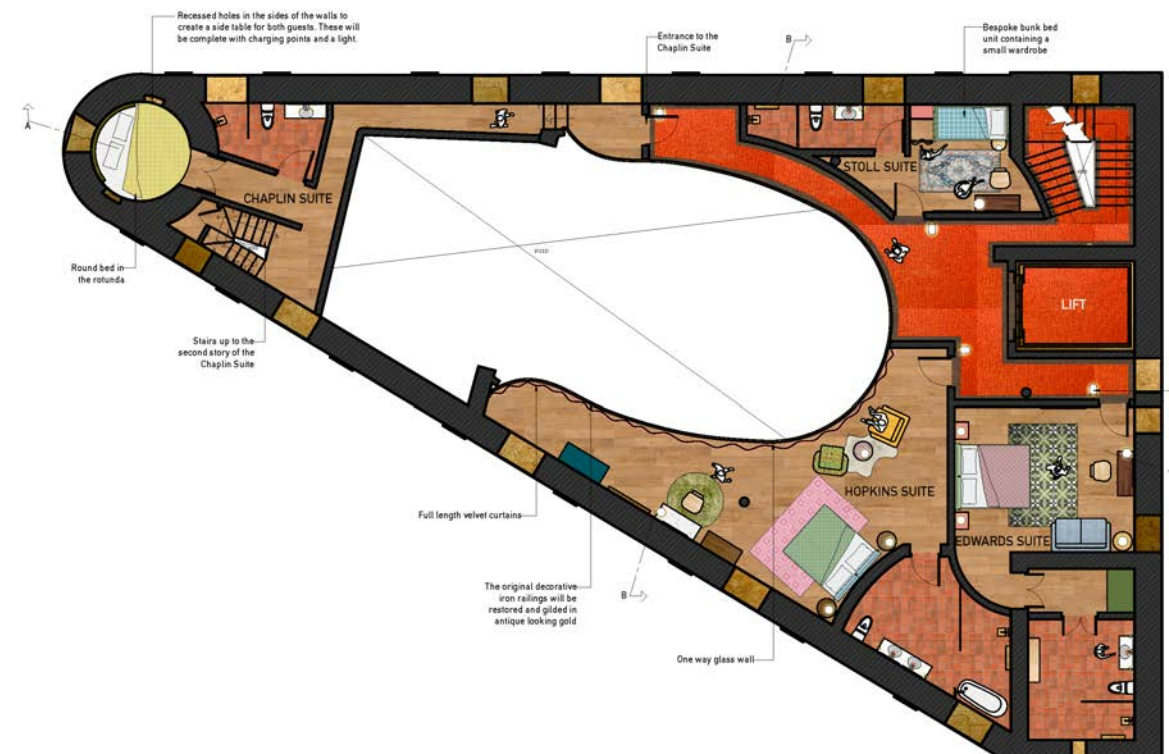
# THE FINAL DESIGN

The success of this project is down to the fact that it completely embraces the building, not just in terms of its architecture, but also in its history and location. The scheme feels at home with the building, and despite the danger of having awkward or dysfunctional spaces, these have instead been used as design features, and add to the customer experience. For example, the Stoll suite, which has been utilised as a bunkbed room to make the most of the small space. Original features such as the railings, pros-arch and pillars have not only been kept in the new design but are instead highlighted by finishing them with an antique gold gild.

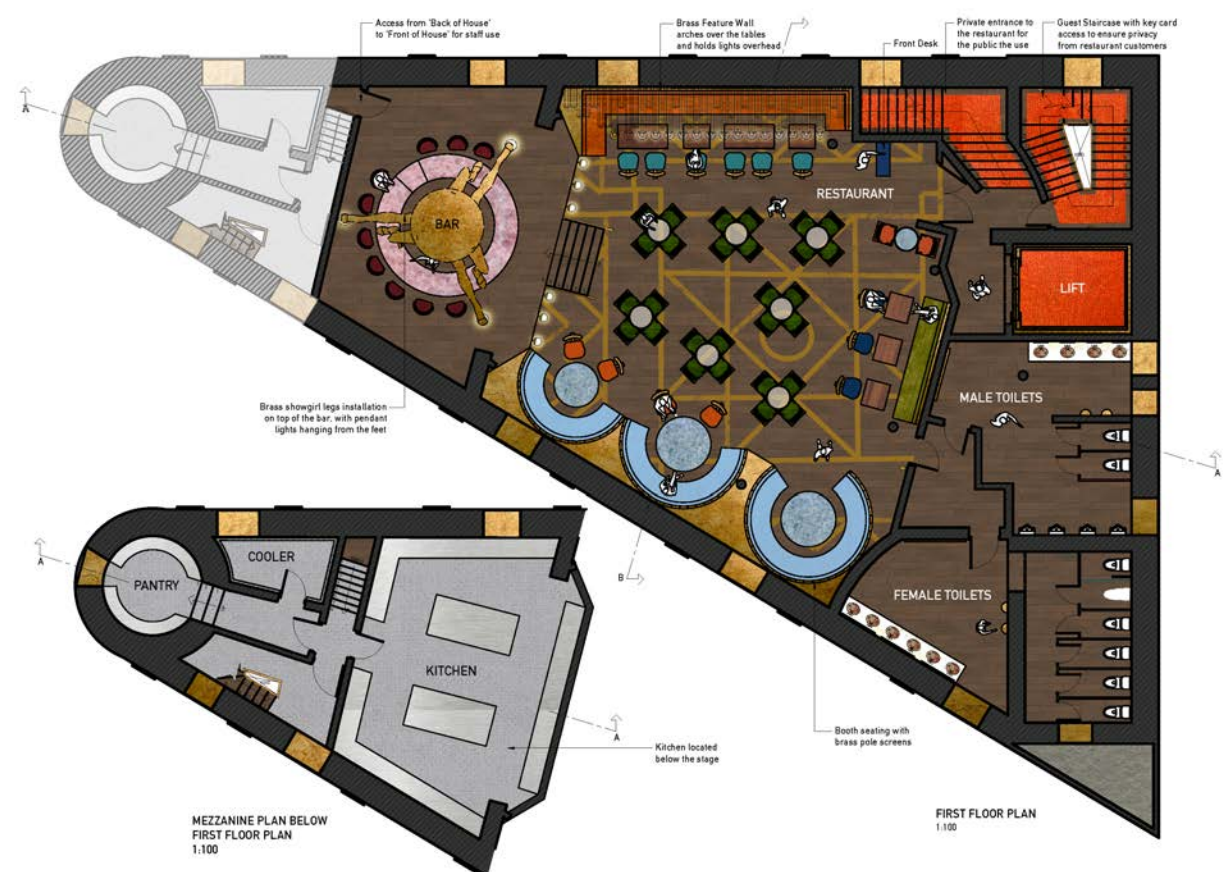
The end result is a really quirky hotel experience which would be a huge benefit to the UK tourism industry in Swansea as it is truly unique and cannot be found anywhere else.



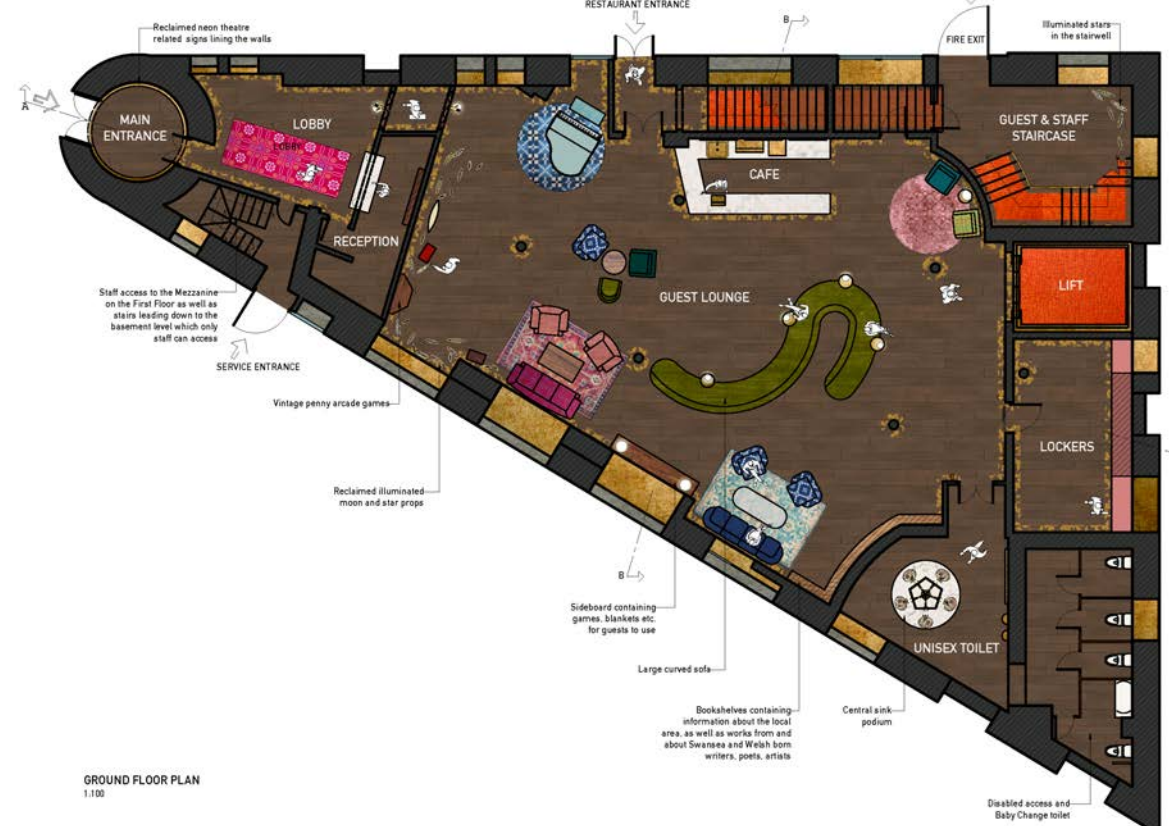
THIRD FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



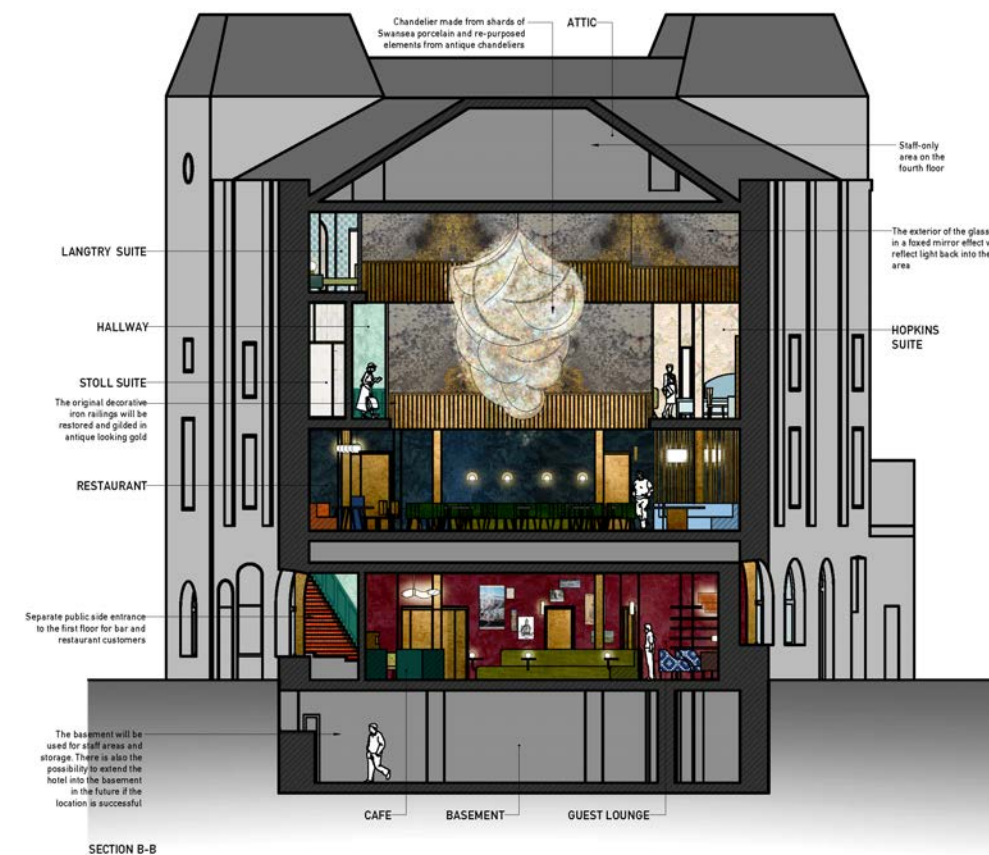
FIRST FLOOR & MEZZANINE PLANS



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



SECTION A-A



SECTION B-B



STOLL SUITE (SECOND FLOOR)



GUEST LOUNGE (GROUND FLOOR)

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