GENIUS LOCO

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ABSTRACT

While there is much to see and do, the experience of Los Angeles as a city is very much fragmented. Rather than providing an easy transition from neighborhood to neighborhood, transportation serves as a barrier making it difficult to move within the city. Some neighborhoods are more walk able than others, however, anyone who wishes to move throughout the entire city would be wise to own an automobile. Public transportation does exist, but it is largely inadequate given the population and area of Los Angeles. Limited access to the subway connects a select few destinations near downtown Los Angeles with busses reaching further into the suburbs. Unlike denser cities, such as New York, the population of L.A. is spread over a larger area of urban and suburban neighborhoods. Freeways creep almost continuously as the automobile proves to be the most popular mode of transportation. The 405, like many other freeways in L.A., runs five lanes wide in each direction. Freeways have begun to offer benefits to those traveling in larger groups, providing a carpool lane for automobiles carrying two or more people, but this hardly solves problems of congestion. The potential for a continuous experience of L.A. comes to a halt as most of the population is tied up in a city wide traffic jam.

As a remedy to the congestion currently plaguing the city, plans to further develop public transportation are being devised. Expanding the current system of buses and subway lines will surely help to alleviate some of the traffic jams and allow the city to operate much more efficiently. However, should efficiency be the only goal for a city of such a caliber? Perhaps expanding the subway offers another opportunity, a chance to refine and explain the character of Los Angeles.

THESIS PAPER

"Are we there yet?" These four simple words summarize the child's perspective of a family road trip. These same words might also be used to describe freeway travel in Los Angeles. A trip that seems never-ending and a destination you might not even recognize when you are there. Traffic and parking structures make up the experience of moving throughout Los Angeles. The second largest city in America should be famous for its grand civic experience, not its congested freeways. As it stands right now, freeways ruin the experience of moving throughout the City of Angeles. This thesis will explore opportunities to add a sense of grandeur to the movement of Los Angeles.

It must be noted that this thesis is not in favor of removing the automobile from Los Angeles altogether. One trip down scenic Mulholland Drive is an experience so distinctly Angelino that it can almost defends itself. There is an appropriate role for the freeway, but this is not a strong enough means of transportation to anchor a city of this caliber. Architectural historian, Reyner Banham, would disagree. He has gone so far as to suggest that the, "freeways seem to have fixed Los Angeles in canonical and monumental form, much as the great streets of Sixtus V fixed Baroque Rome, or the Grands Travaux of Baron Haussmann fixed the Paris of la belle époque."[1]

Monumental in scale? Definitely. By this standard, Los Angeles might even be considered more monumental than both Rome and Paris. However, given the elegance of these two cities one might find the association a bit twisted. Moving throughout these two cities is an event that people travel great distances to experience, the same cannot be said for the congested freeways of L. A. If nothing else, this raises an interesting question, is Los Angeles capable of providing movement with the same sense of grandeur as Rome or Paris?

In response to problems of congestion, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority of Los Angeles has raised the question of adding to the existing subway system. Certainly expanding the reach of the subway would help to fight congestion and allow the city to move faster and more efficiently. However, it seems that


mojave desert
san bernardino mountains
santa monica mountains
los angeles basin
santa monica bay
pacific ocean
santa catalina island

los angeles: aerial map

los angeles: subway map

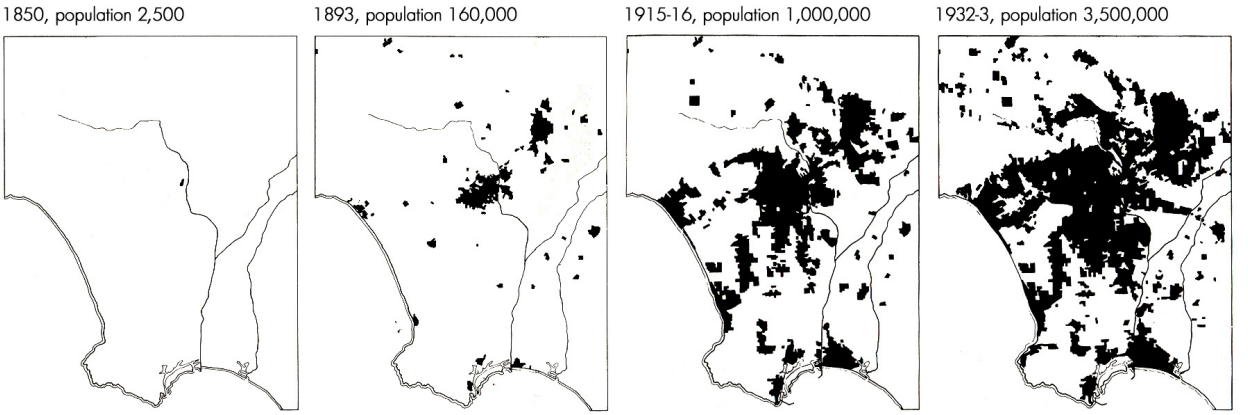

la cienega blvd.
la brea ave.
exposition blvd.
crenshaw blvd.
western ave.
normandie ave.
vermont ave.

mass transportation has more to offer than simply an increase in efficiency. Purposeful future planning of subway stations in Los Angeles will add grandeur to the way we move about the city.

In order to properly discuss the unique condition of moving throughout Los Angeles it is important to begin with a deeper understanding of the area and its development. In terms of its geography alone, Los Angeles County contains a wide range of natural landscapes including mountains, canyons, deserts, basins, valleys and beaches. Most familiar of all is a coastline shared with the Pacific Ocean and the Santa Monica Bay. Roughly seventy miles of shoreline makes for an impressive collection of beaches interrupted only briefly by the jagged cliffs of the Palos Verdes Peninsula. A natural skyline is created by the Santa Monica and San Gabriel mountain ranges to the north. In addition to its urbanized areas, Los Angeles County encompasses the western portion of the Mojave Desert and two islands, Santa Catalina and San Clemente. Ultimately, it is not the individual parts alone but their interaction as a whole that makes the natural landscape so rich. Southern California is known for having a mild climate that consistently produces pleasant weather. However, it is entirely possible to encounter snow in the peaks of the San Gabriel Mountains or extreme desert heat in the Mojave all in the same day as a trip to the beach. This natural sense of variety makes Los Angeles a very unique place to live. 'L.A.' can be used to describe either the entire county or just the city. This project is concerned with the later, the population of the Los Angeles Basin.

Natural beauty aside, Los Angeles is an odd location for the second largest city in America. The city barely receives one third the annual rainfall of New York City and has a natural water supply that would be lucky to support a population of 500,000 people.[2] Its location on top of the San Andreas Fault means that the area is prone to earthquakes and summer long droughts mean that each fall the region is susceptible to fires. Finally, with no natural deep water harbor to speak of, the fact that ten million people now live in Los Angeles County is a remarkable feat. Perhaps the only natural advantage is the mild climate, something the population takes full advantage of.

California joined the United States in 1850; prior to this the region underwent periods of Spanish and Mexican rule both of which shaped its future. Spanish Catholics established a string of religious outposts along the California Coast during the late 1700's. Missions lined the coast with a spacing of roughly 30 miles, equivalent to one day of travel on horseback.[3] To offer protection to the missions, a series of presidios were located in natural harbors such as San Francisco and San Diego. Finally, a series of small pueblos was assembled in order to supply the presidios with food and various other necessities. The area we now refer to as Los Angeles was founded in 1781 by Filipe de Neve (Spanish Governor of Las Californias) as *el pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles* (the village of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels).[4] Arid soils and proximity to the Pornicula River made the area perfect for



Maps of the Los Angeles Basin illustrate the rapid dispersal of development.

a small agricultural settlement.

In order to populate the pueblos in California, the Spanish government offered land to Mexican citizens. Land was divided into *solares* (building lots) and *suertes* (sowing fields) and distributed through a lottery. Residents were expected to farm the land and sell their goods to the presidios at a reasonable price. Farming was so successful that by 1830 Los Angeles was the largest of the Spanish settlements in California with a population of roughly 1000 people.[5] This practice marks the beginning of a land ownership trend that appears again and again throughout the history of Los Angeles.

In 1821 Mexico gained independence from Spain. Expanding upon the land ownership opportunities created by the Spanish, the Mexican government made it easier to obtain land. By 1846 almost all of the farmable land in southern California was being cultivated by rancheros.[6] The practice of profitably subdividing land had become commonplace in Los Angeles long before the arrival of Americans.

Even after joining the Union in 1850, growth was relatively

slow until Los Angeles became the terminus of the second transcontinental railroad. During the civil war, Congress had helped to subsidize a railroad connecting San Francisco to the east coast. The western portion of this railroad was operated by the Union Pacific, the same company that owned and operated many of the shipping docks in San Francisco.

After the civil war ended, word began circulating that congress was considering subsidizing another transcontinental railroad. A terminus was not immediately determined, however, it had long been expected that San Diego would become a prime shipping location along the California coast. Just like San Francisco, San Diego has a maritime history dating back to its origins as one of the Spanish presidios, an advantage that the city owes to its natural landscape. A narrow strip of land, now referred to as 'The Silver Strand,' creates a natural harbor perfect for docking large ships. When combined with the mild climate of Southern California, San Diego appeared to have the ingredients to become a world class shipping city.

Downtown Los Angeles, on the other hand, is located nearly twenty miles from the ocean. At the time, the only physical

connection was a train that linked downtown to the shallow water port of San Pedro. Because the port was unfriendly to large ships and open to most winds, it was considered to be a very poor location for shipping and thus a great disadvantage. However, realizing the importance of connections to the north and to the east, citizens of Los Angeles lobbied hard for their city, and not San Diego, to become the terminus of the Southern Pacific railroad.[7]

Owners of the Union Pacific saw the natural advantages of San Diego as a great threat to their own shipping port in San Francisco. One stockholder exclaimed, "we would blot San Diego out of existence if we could, but as we can't do that we shall keep it back as long as we can."[8] What was once considered San Diego's greatest asset had momentarily become the city's greatest roadblock.

As evidenced by its current prosperity, Los Angeles did indeed become the terminus of the Southern Pacific railroad. The shallow water port in San Pedro (now the Port of Los Angeles) was eventually dredged and has become America's premier west coast shipping port. This may very well be the single most important event in the history of Los Angeles. Had this connection taken place in San Diego, it is no stretch to say that Los Angeles would not have evolved into the enormous city it is today.

People living in Los Angeles knew that immigration was important for growth and with the new transcontinental railroad in place the city was ready to take off. Originally, promoters targeted farmers from the Mid-West and pitched Los Angeles as a heavenly place for farming.[9] In reality, Mid-Western farmers were unfamiliar with the techniques and crops necessary to farm successfully in Southern California. Simply due to familiarity, farmers looking for a change of pace generally opted to relocate to Oregon or Northern California instead. Realizing this, Los Angeles changed their pitch. Still focused on the farmer, L.A. claimed to be a place to retire from the rural life yet maintain your spacious living.[10] People migrating to Los Angeles were different from people moving to other locations. Unlike cities such as Chicago or San Francisco that offered the potential for material gains, people began migrating to Southern California for completely non-economic reasons. People moved here to own a small plot of land and live on the fringe of a city. The effects of this lifestyle can be seen in the low density, single family housing that generates much of the fabric of the city. Los Angeles existed almost exclusively on agriculture and land development until roughly 1915 when the Chamber of Commerce decided to begin promoting the city as a land of opportunity for manufacturing.[11] Manufacturing

Pacific Electric Railway

Existing Freeways

did indeed find a home in Los Angeles, but not until after petroleum and the film industry had already arrived. With its new economy people finally began moving to Los Angeles in pursuit of a career, but at this point industry was scattered throughout the region rather than focused in a single downtown area.

Today Los Angeles is so frequently associated with freeways and automobile traffic that many people do not realize the area was once home to the nation's largest inter-urban railroad, the Pacific Electric. Henry Huntington purchased small local railways and formed the Pacific Electric in 1911.[12] His railway operated as a means to bring people to his new property developments. Once again, the profitable subdivision and development of land played a key role in the formation of Los Angeles. The Pacific Electric helped to shape the urban form, or lack thereof. At first, having a railroad radiating from downtown made it easy to commute into and out of the city. People began moving to the suburbs before the business district had a chance to fully develop. Despite the fact that it was never dense with housing, railways allowed downtown Los Angeles to function as a cultural and commercial center. Because most of the land in Los Angeles was still owned by rancheros it could only be urbanized as it became available, meaning that development occurred sporadically throughout the region, resulting in a city with no true center. While the railway moved development in large leaps, the automobile allowed settlement to take place in between the railway stops. More and more people found the automobile to be the most convenient means of transportation and rail service became unprofitable with services decreasing significantly in the 1930's.[13] The sprawling urban form created by the railways was eventually responsible for its demise.

Due to the overwhelming demand for better roads and parkways, the Automobile Club of Southern California generated a comprehensive plan for additional freeways. In 1941 the City Planning Department approved plans to begin construction on the freeways that are still in use today.[14] Acknowledging that the low density of Los Angeles created a unique situation, the planning department issued a statement that, "no mass rail rapid transit system could be financially successful in Los Angeles without a substantial subsidy or increase in fares charged."[15] Rather than fixing problems with the railways and encouraging density near train stations the decision to build freeways enabled people to live wherever they wanted to, fixing Los Angeles in a state of sprawl.

Currently, the city of Los Angeles is home to more than 3,800,000 people[16] and 500 miles of freeway.[17] Arriving to your destination and parking in a parking structure is not the most glamorous way to move throughout the city. These structures are burdened with providing the maximum number of parking spaces for the lowest construction cost. Very seldom, if ever, does a parking structure evoke an emotional response from its inhabitants. Aside from an entry ramp or two, the typical parking structure makes no

attempt to connect to a larger context such as the street, the block or the city. Several schemes seem to appear over and over so frequently it might be said that, 'once you have seen one parking structure you have seen them all.' It has become commonplace to see parking garages covered in architectural camouflage but at heart a new parking structure is no different than the last. In reality, this method of movement seems to encourage the fragmentation of Los Angeles.

Parking structures are a universal solution. The same design that works in Tokyo will also work in Berlin, Sao Palo or Los Angeles. In certain cases, universal solutions are a good thing. For instance, when researchers find the cure for cancer it would be a shame if this discovery was not implemented universally in order to help as many people as possible. Universal solutions in architecture have a time and place as well. However, they are not appropriate when it comes to establishing the identity of an area. A world in which there are no unique cities or buildings is monotonous.

Adding to the subway system offers Los Angeles a unique opportunity. One way to approach the task of adding subways to Los Angeles might be to simply punch holes in the sidewalk and insert cookie cutter stations. Add the same station at each location with occasional adjustments to accommodate different volumes of passengers and voila! Instant transportation! Functionally speaking, this strategy would meet the needs of Los Angeles in terms of alleviating congestion, but the city needs more from a new mode of transportation than simply a way to move more people. Another way to approach the problem is to think of the subway as a building that mediates between the highly modernized mode of transportation and a city with many unique qualities. Subway stations can be placed at key locations throughout the city, creating important nodes.

In his essay, *Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance*, Kenneth Frampton offers a suggestion for dealing with the effects of universal culture. Frampton does not suggest eliminating modern technology entirely; rather, "the fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism is to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place."[18] To cite one of his examples, he argues against the exclusive use of artificial lighting in art museums. It is well known that oil paintings suffer from direct contact with sunlight. For this reason, art museums are commonly lit using only artificial lighting. Through this process, art becomes a commodity because it is rendered as placeless, in other words, "the local light spectrum is never permitted to play across its surface."[19] Another way to approach the task of lighting an art museum is to include top-lit gallery spaces that make use of a carefully contrived system of louvers and monitors, allowing natural light to trickle through. While the means of permitting sunlight to enter the space are almost entirely of modern invention, the inclusion of natural light generates a space that reflects the surrounding climate. Unlike utilitarian parking structures, mass transit stations

have the opportunity to react with this type of sensitivity.

The notion that subway stations might become important nodes surfacing throughout the city is reminiscent of the changes Pope Sixtus V made to medieval Rome. After becoming elected Pope in 1585, Sixtus V set out on a mission to transform medieval Rome into a city fit for the capital of Christendom.[20] Much like modern day Los Angeles, Medieval Rome was an unorganized mess. FIGURE 1, a painting by Roman artist Bartolo, illustrates the scattered monumentality of medieval Rome. When Sixtus V became Pope, the city was already home to an impressive collection of cathedrals and relics from the city's eventful history. As the image suggests, various important buildings and monuments were scattered haphazardly throughout the city without any grand scheme to unite them. Sixtus V's vision (see FIGURE2) was to identify important nodes and connect them through a network of extraordinary streets. Each of the nodes contained three things; an important church, an Egyptian obelisk and un-programmed urban public space. Individually, each of these piazzas is an archetypal example of urban public space. Together, the interaction of these spaces successfully creates a grand civic out of movement within Rome.

Thinking of subway stations as isolated buildings leaves modern day Los Angeles in the same predicament as medieval Rome. However, this is not the case, subway stations are inherently connected to one another and to conceive of them as a collective unit puts the designer in a position to begin uniting the city. While subway trains themselves do not travel elaborate streets in the same fashion as a pedestrian moving throughout Rome, they still function as a cohesive network.

After reviewing the development of urban form in Los Angeles it is clear to see why the city is plagued with urban sprawl and congestion. The city has already grown to epic proportions in terms of its size and population. With the right planning, Los Angeles has an opportunity to mature into a world class city known for its grand civic experience rather than its traffic. It is the goal of this thesis is to explore the possibilities for creating a grand sense of movement through the implementation of locally sensitive transportation nodes.

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1 Banham, 17.

2 Fulton, 6.

3 Fogelson, 7.

4 Fogelson, 7.

5 Fogelson, 7.

6 Fogelson, 8.

7 Fogelson, 45.

8 Fogelson, 46.

9 Fogelson, 66.

10 Fogelson, 67.

11 Fogelson, 125.

12 Fogelson, 164.

13 Fogelson, 184.

14 Bottles, 224.

15 Bottles, 224.

16 U.S. Census Bureau

17 Reinhold.

18 Frampton, 82.

19 Frampton, 87.

20 Bacon, 139.

PRECEDENT STUDIES

ROME, ITALY
URBAN DESIGN PRECEDENT

FORT-PITT TUNNEL
EXPERIENTIAL PRECEDENT

PIONEER COURTHOUSE SQUARE
PROGRAM PRECEDENT

AMTRAK STATION
ANTI-PRECEDENT

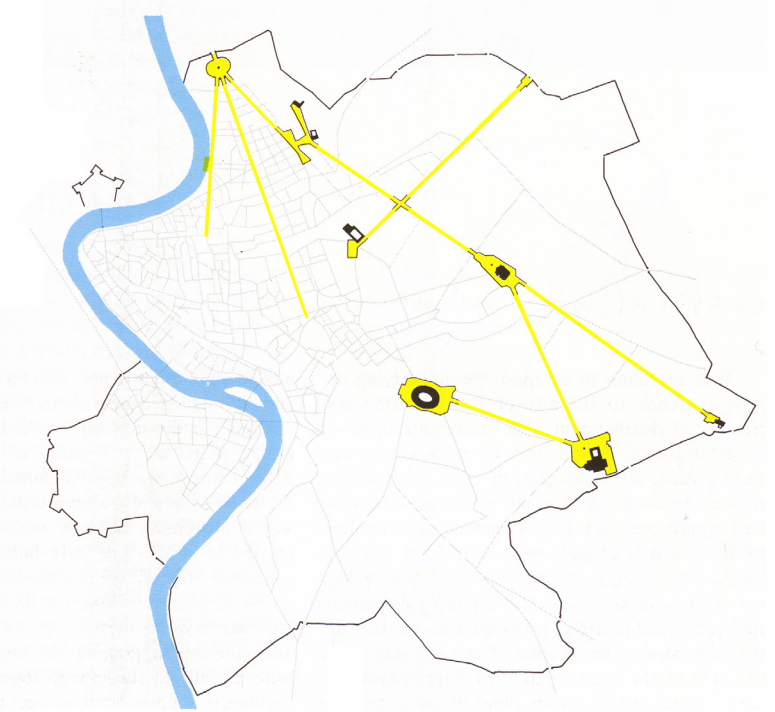
PARKING STRUCTURES
ANTI-PRECEDENT

ROME, ITALY
(urban design precedent)

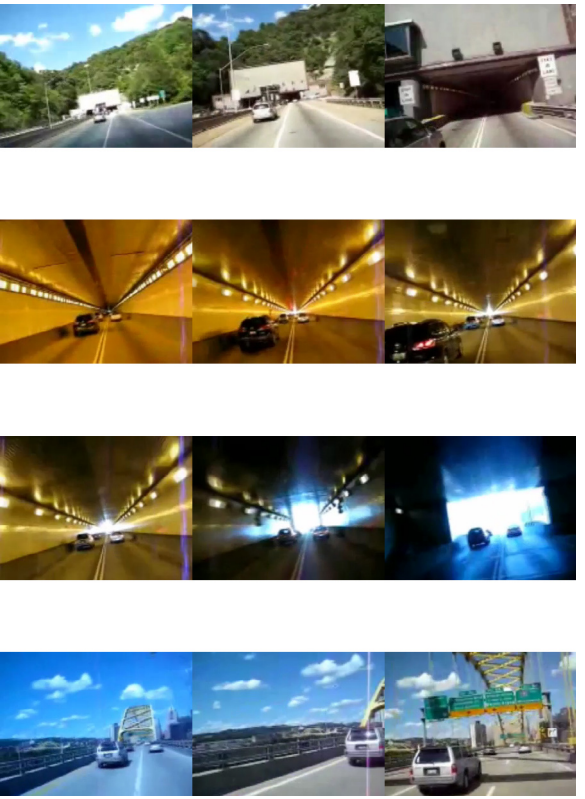
To appreciate the full affect of Pope Sixtus V's plan for Baroque Rome it is important to first understand the organizational structure of Classical Rome. Monumental buildings such as baths, stadiums and amphitheaters are the essential building types of third century Rome. Edmund Bacon identifies the organizational strategy of classical Rome as 'compression.' Forms are jumbled together tightly and chaotically but manage to work in harmony because of their classical order. The organizational structure of Baroque Rome is the total opposite; Bacon recognizes the new strategy as 'tension.' Rome was a sprawling medieval city when Sixtus V became Pope; his goal was to transform the city into a place fit for the capital of Christendom. In reality, only a small amount of progress was made during Sixtus' lifetime, but the city continued to develop according to his vision long after his death. Part of the process was the identification of key landmarks such as churches or city gates. Each of the landmarks generally contained a piazza which Sixtus identified using an Egyptian obelisk. Initially the piazza's surrounding key landmarks stood on their own. Overtime, changes were made to better integrate the piazzas with a system of movement that unites the city. Key lines of movement are formed through the connection of important buildings and landmarks which create the 'tension' that Bacon defines as the structure of movement in Baroque Rome.

Los Angeles would benefit from a similar form of articulation. During the reign of Pope Sixtus V, the city was traveled almost exclusively by foot. The movement structure of a modern city is much more varied, forcing the designer to reconcile a number of different elements including the automobile and the subway as well as pedestrian traffic.

classical rome



baroque rome



FORT-PITT TUNNEL

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
(experiential precedent)

Imagine traveling North on I-279 towards downtown Pittsburgh. Overpasses and exit signs line the freeway as it rides the gently rolling Allegheny foothills, a concrete tunnel appears in the distance. As you enter, your eyes slowly adjust to the artificial lighting. Marking the end of the tunnel is a bright light expanding slowly as you advance. You exit the tunnel. Blinded for a moment, everything is bright as your eyes adjust for the second time. Suspended directly over the Monongahela River you are finally presented with the skyline of downtown. Mentally, this experience signifies your arrival to Pittsburgh. In this case, freeway travel, an experience that is normally considered very banal becomes an important part of the landscape. Driving 1-279 is an experience that works with the natural landscape to introduce and explain the character of Pittsburgh.

This sense of arrival all works hand in hand with the efficiency one expects as a result of freeway travel. I-279 still functions as a gateway to the city, facilitating the movement of a large number of automobiles. It is precisely this connection to the landscape that this project hopes to achieve. In addition to alleviating congestion, the subway should serve the purpose of adding to and explaining the character of Los Angeles. A goal that can only be achieved through a careful understanding of the landscape and how it currently behaves.

PIONEER SQUARE

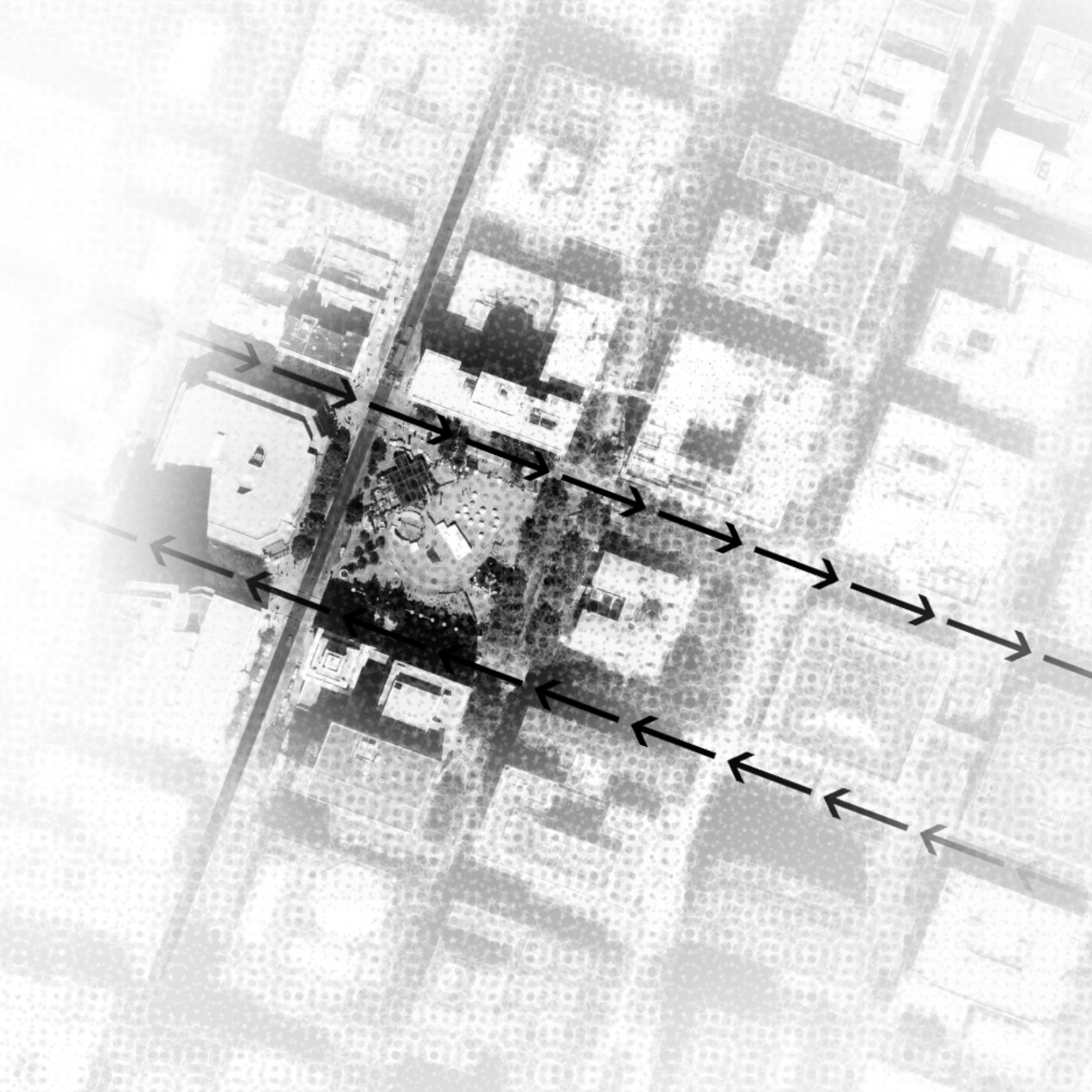
Portland, Oregon
(program precedent)

Portland held a national competition before selecting local architect Willard K. Martin of Martin/Soderstrom/Matteson as the project designer for Pioneer Courthouse Square. Prior to becoming a public square the site was home to a variety of different functions. Initially it was a public school that later become a Stanford White hotel and finally a parking structure. Martin's final design certainly offers more to the community than a parking structure and it has been nationally recognized for its successes.

One particularly interesting design challenge was coping with the site's topography. Public squares function best when they are flat but the site drops approximately 19 feet over a width of only 200 feet. Designers overcame this by creating two levels separated by a curving staircase with extra wide steps that give people a place to sit as well as turning the lower level into an amphitheater. Separating the space into two levels also allowed the architects to bury a space for ticket sales and souvenirs beneath the first level and include a water fall that takes advantage of the change in topography. Aside from dealing with a significant amount of topography, the design team decided to take on Portland's infamous rainy weather. An intense red-orange brick was selected for the surface of the square meaning that the design still looks inviting even when the weather is not. In addition to providing a brilliant backdrop for public life, designers found a way to add a personal touch by inscribing the bricks with the names of local citizens who made a donation of $30.

On its own, the design stands out as an exceptional example of urban public space. However, in combination with Portland's MAX Train, Pioneer Courthouse Square becomes significant on a much larger scale than the single block that it occupies. The MAX Train connects Portland's suburbs with downtown and Pioneer Square becomes an important point of entry into the central business district. This space provides a break from the repetition of high-rise buildings and gridded streets that form the rest of downtown Portland.

Directly related to the goals of this thesis, Pioneer Courthouse Square is a project that realizes the importance of designing in a manner that enhances and explains the surrounding context.



AMTRAK STATION

Royal Oak, Michigan
(anti-precedent)

In some ways, comparing the Amtrak Station in Royal Oak, Michigan to Portland's Pioneer Courthouse Square is an 'apples to oranges' comparison. Pioneer Courthouse Square functions primarily as urban public space that also accommodates mass transportation. Royal Oak's Amtrak Station is a train station with no additional functions. In fact, the entire design bears a no frills attitude. While they may differ greatly in terms of their setting, it must be noted that both buildings share the opportunity to create a portal of entry for their surroundings. While Pioneer Square makes every attempt to relate to its surroundings, the train Royal Oak station could achieve the same affect in any surrounding. The whole station is really nothing more than a metered parking lot and a glass shed offering protection from inclement weather. To avoid intersecting with eleven mile road, both the train tracks and the station are elevated. While this change in elevation certainly prevents unwanted congestion it also removes the station from its surroundings. In addition to being located slightly higher than its surroundings, the train station is located just west of Main Street meaning that it faces the backs of any surrounding buildings. It is conceivable that the designers of this station intentionally removed it from Main Street to avoid creating a nuisance. However, as Willard K. Martin proved in Portland, it is possible to effectively integrate mass transportation into a congested setting. Perhaps selecting a different location would have allowed this station to better integrate itself with Main Street while at the same time avoiding any unwanted interference. Understanding the missed opportunities of this particular project helps to define precisely what this thesis would like to avoid.


2

PARKING STRUCTURE
(anti-precedent)

In a city dominated by automobile traffic, the parking structure plays an important role. It becomes the transition space between a means of transportation and a final destination. For example, consider someone living in an apartment and working in a high rise. On either end of this persons commute is a parking structure that serves as the portal between a point of departure and a final destination.

As a building type, parking structures are very repetitive. Typically built to efficiently store the maximum number of cars in the minimum amount of space, very few changes are made from one to the next. Stacked parking and careful space planning allows the designer to achieve great efficiency, and in this respect the parking structure is generally very successful. However, given the prominent role that parking structures play in the day to day life of many Angelenos, it can be said that a very great opportunity has been missed in creating a place-less environment that exists independent of its surroundings.

The architectural interventions this project seeks to explore are not directly related to parking structures in any way. However, it is intended that the final design for each subway station will capitalize on an opportunity that is missed by placing such heavy emphasis on the use of parking structures. Where the primary goal of the parking structure is to achieve efficiency, the final design for this thesis seeks to add to the environment in a way that helps to clarify and accentuate the character of Los Angeles.

PROGRAM STATEMENT

Each subway stations is intended to become an important 'node' of transportation considered in respect to both its local surroundings and its connections to the rest of the city.

To revisit the example of roman piazzas, not all of the piazzas in Rome were the product of pope Sixtus V's grand vision. Some of the roman piazza's are of secondary importance. Not only is this acceptable, it is desirable. Certain points in the city serve as focal points while other piazzas are used almost exclusively by locals. It is necessary to create a hierarchy of importance within the city. Subway stations in Los Angeles will work much in the same way; it is impractical to assume that each and every station should become an event to behold. This project will encompass a variety of stations ranging from large, significant public locations to smaller less prominent residential areas.

Rather than generating a complex program, the subway stations will each remain relatively simple. Below ground each of the stations will perform as a subway station is expected to perform, offering a space for the loading and unloading of trains. Above ground the stations will generate architectural interest through the use of public space.

A primary function of subway stations is to orient passengers with their surroundings. While this thesis is interested in the effect that more thoughtful planning might have on the urban experience of Los Angeles, the primary focus is in discovering a process for interpreting and designing a piece of architecture that expands upon and explains its surroundings.

Rather than developing intricately detailed subway stations, each design will focus on the threshold between the subway and the immediate context. This threshold is an opportunity to orient passengers with their surroundings, and in turn, provides a framework for demonstrating a process of interpreting the character of a site. Orientation can only be achieved through a careful understanding of character; therefore, the subway stations will only be as successful as the design process. The following program describes a general set of guidelines that each of the stations will follow.

STATION ENTRANCE

Purpose/Functions:
Provide Orientation
Easily detectable within urban context
With respect to each traveler, the entryway serves one of two purposes. Each station is either the beginning or the end of any given journey.

Activities:
Entering and exiting the station.
A designated meet and greet space should be accounted for.

Spatial Relationships:
Connection between surface circulation and the subway trains
Protection from inclement weather

Equipment:
Hand rails and appropriate signage.
Any seating that is provided should be clear of all circulation

Purpose/Functions:
Fare Control and Collection Areas

Activities:
Map reading
Counting change
Way finding

Spatial Relationships:
Connection between surface circulation and the subway trains
Protection from inclement weather

Equipment:
Hand rails and appropriate signage.
System Maps
Any seating that is provided should be clear of all circulation

MEZZANINE

	Purpose/Functions: Loading and Unloading of trains Spatial Relationships: Typical platform width: 32' Platform Edge to Side Wall or VCE: 8'8" Tactile Edge: 2' Equipment: Hand rails and appropriate signage. System Maps Turnstiles
PLATFORM	Any seating that is provided should be clear of all circulation

Actual vertical circulation requirements are based on externally conducted level of service studies. Because such studies have either not been conducted or are not made publicly available, minimum requirements will be established based on the vertical circulation provided by existing stations within Los Angeles.

One 48" wide staircase and one 40" escalator will be provided for each direction of travel.

Considerations:
Minimum Headroom: 10'
Minimum Queuing Clearance: 30'

SITE SELECTION

Four sites have been selected to offer a variety of different responses and interpretations of the city. Two sites, Santa Monica and Griffith Park, examine unique natural conditions that define Los Angeles. Echo Park has been selected to examine a unique social condition within the city. Finally, the entire Wilshire Corridor has been selected as an urban condition that is unique to L.A.

1 SANTA MONICA
SANTA MONICA BLVD. + OCEAN BLVD.

2 GRIFFITH PARK
OBSERVATORY AVENUE

3 ECHO PARK
ECHO PARK BLVD. + SUNSET BLVD.

4 WILSHIRE CORRIDOR
WILSHIRE BLVD. + LA BREA (example site)

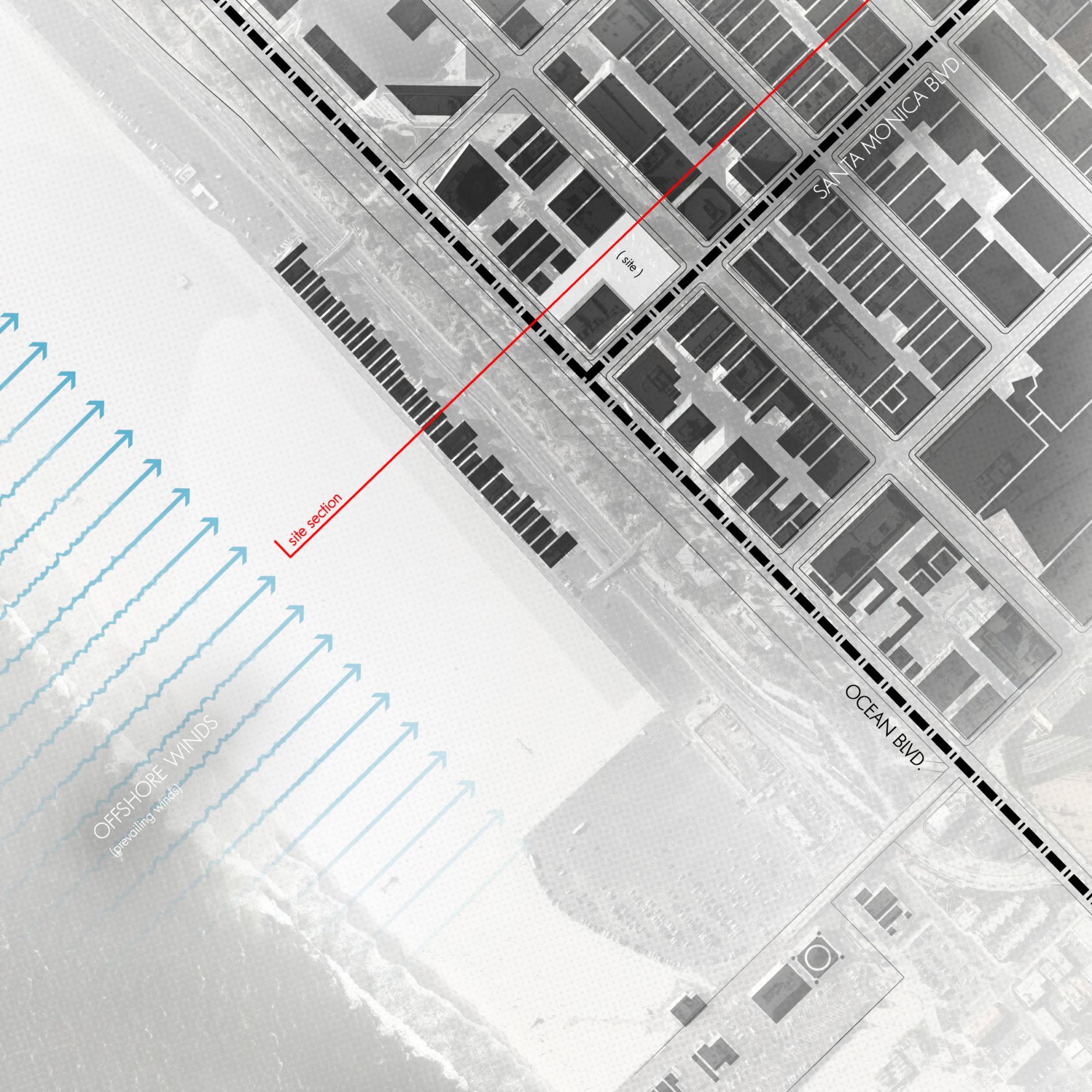

1 santa monica
2 griffith park
3 echo park
4 wilshire corridor
project site
1 mile
1


2
3
4
example

SANTA MONICA

Santa Monica Blvd. + Ocean Blvd.

Santa Monica Boulevard connects Hollywood to the Pacific Ocean and along the way it behaves as one of two major thoroughfares in Los Angeles, the other being Wilshire Boulevard. Together, these two boulevards set the tone for east-west movement in Los Angeles and act as one of the most important transportation corridors in the city. While the character of these two roads changes intermittently, it is somewhat fitting to describe them as a linear city. If one were to unravel a portion of a gridded city and form a single element it might look the way these boulevards do. Buildings range in scale from ten and fifteen story high rises to single story buildings. In some cases, such as Century City or Westwood, a small gridded network of streets originates from the major boulevards and extends for several blocks north or south. Both Wilshire Boulevard and Santa Monica Boulevard terminate in Santa Monica as they intersect Ocean Boulevard. Unlike the linear city that defining the majority of Los Angeles, Downtown Santa Monica behaves as a very walkable gridded city that aligns itself with the Pacific Ocean. Ocean Boulevard is lined on the west side by Pacific Palisades Park, a bluff with views of the famous beaches and Santa Monica Pier as well as Malibu and the Santa Monica Mountains. East of Ocean Boulevard and north of the 405 is the gridded downtown area. Streets are lined with ficus trees and two to three story buildings. Tourists and locals both make good use of the many sidewalk cafés, independent movie theaters and other shops.

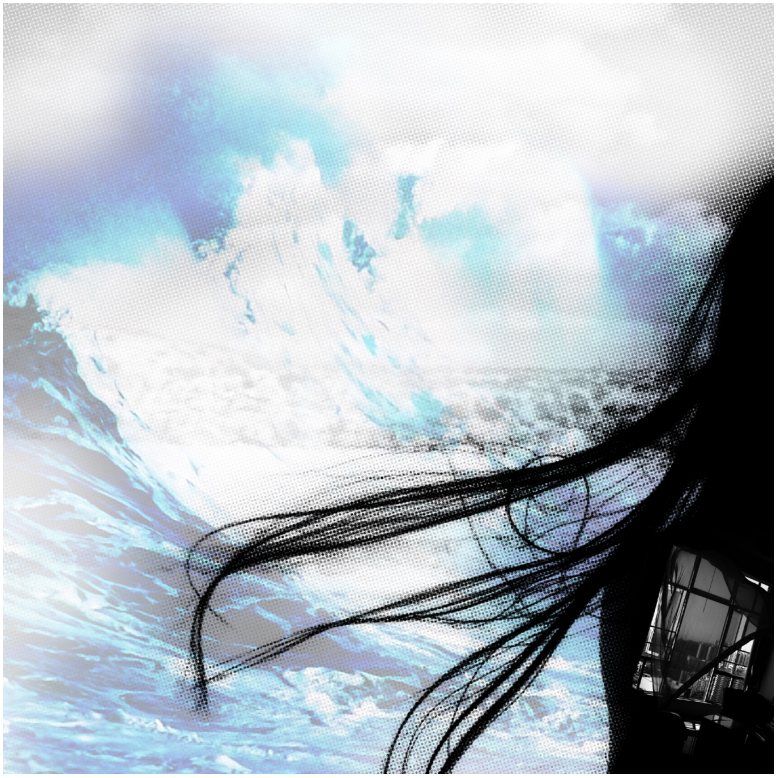

SANTA MONICA BLVD
(site)
site section
OCEAN BLVD.
OFFSHORE WINDS
(prevailing winds)


PAY
FRINGE
BELLE VUE PLAZA


ONE WAY
ONE WAY

COLLAGE STUDIES

Rather than identifying important aspects of the site and simply taking them at face value, a series of collage studies is an attempt at thinking of these elements in a different light. The goal here is not to design the final building from the outset, but to begin seeing the defining character of the site as having a physical impact on the design of space. For instance, the collage pictured to the right is meant to build upon the sites proximity to the ocean. Typical site analysis would find it sufficient to simply state that the ocean is nearby. Perhaps this fact would influence the final design, but it is not a necessary starting point. This collage is an attempt to make a spatial connection between the ocean and a potential design. In this case, the ocean is seen as a plane with boundaries and edges, a physical entity that the final design must anticipate and interact with.



On the previous page, a collage is used to hypothesize what a space defined by sunsets might feel like. The image is meant to have a surreal quality to it, but the simple use of materials and color are based firmly in reality.

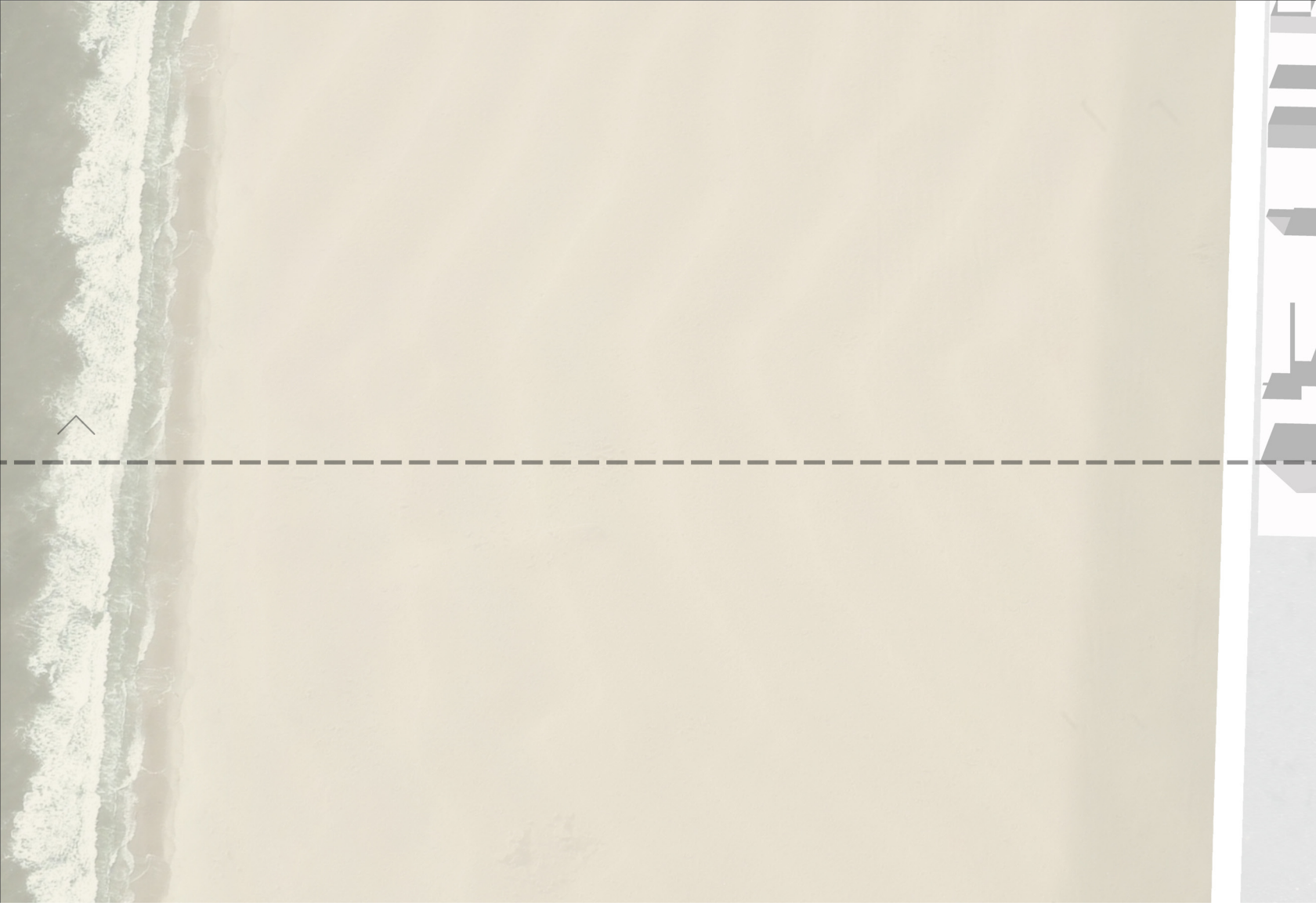
Featured above, a quick collage highlights the affect of the ocean breeze on the human body.

FINAL PROPOSAL

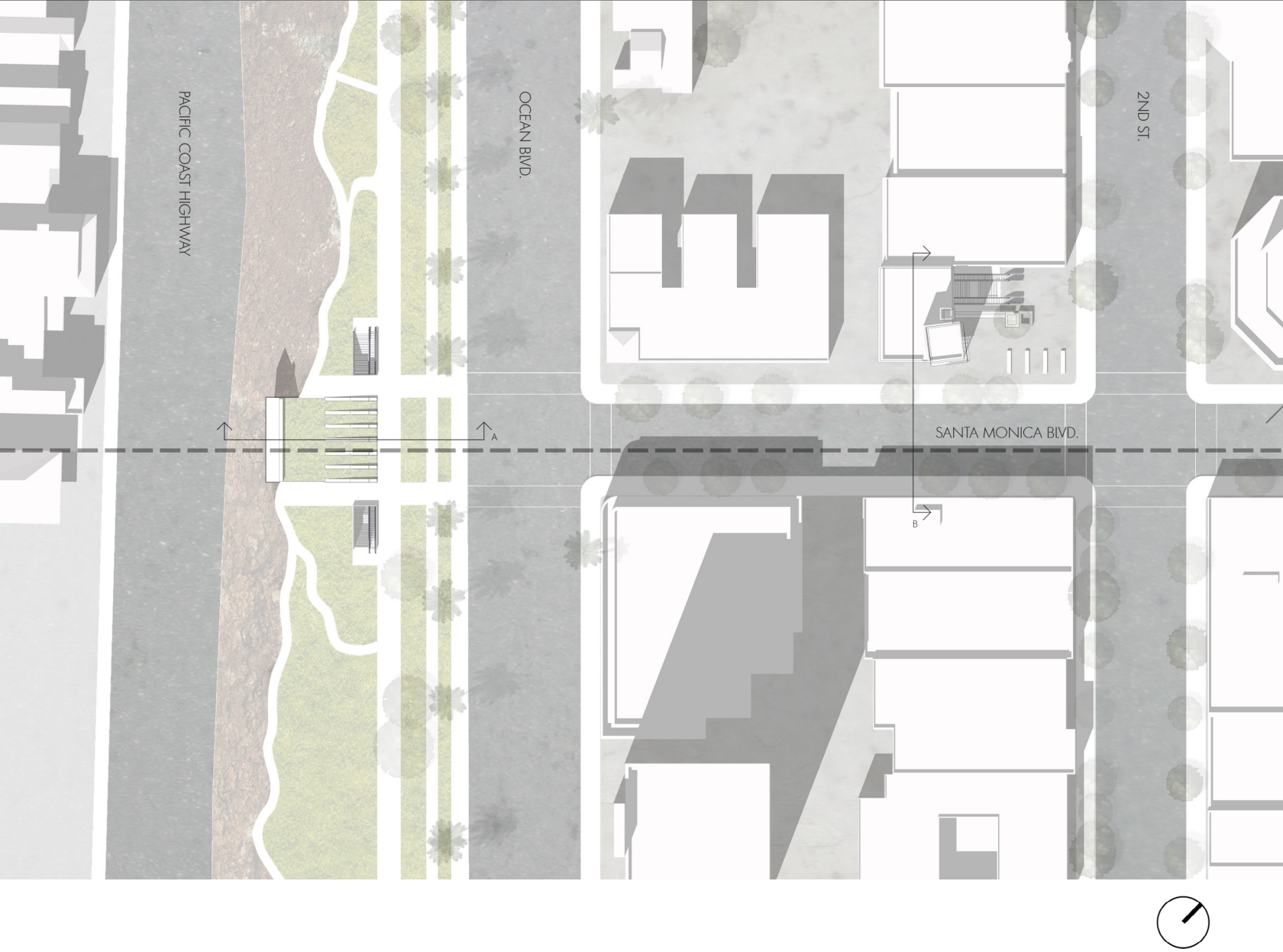
Inspired by the initial collage studies, the final proposal for Santa Monica is seen as accentuating an exciting naturally occurring condition, the end of Los Angeles. More specifically, the ending of the urban condition of Los Angeles and the beginning of the Pacific Ocean. The design is sited in two key locations. Within the gridded portion of the city, the station links itself with a cafe while a small staircase carries passengers to the platform below. This entrance to the station is important because it sets up a dichotomy between the very urban condition and a unique natural setting.

The second location is buried within the sandy bluff that separates ocean from city. As travelers ascend from the platform below they enter a large white volume, their eyes fixed on the opening at the end of an elongated tunnel. With a slight bend, the ceiling rises before it meets the end of the tunnel, hiding the connection between the two surfaces. A soft glow blurs the edge of the ceiling. Pure white surfaces and a highly reflective concrete floor collect light, allowing the atmosphere inside of the station to reflect the actual conditions of the world beyond. Rather than capping the space with glazing, the tunnel is left open, allowing ocean breezes to permeate. Although the tunnel faces the ocean, it is not meant to create a space for viewing. Directly above the tunnel is a world famous park space, due in part to the incredible views of the Santa Monica Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. It would be foolish to assume that a subway station located directly below the park would offer better views of the oceans or the mountains. Instead, the opening at the end of the tunnel is used as a means of creating an ambiance consistent with the rest of the surroundings.

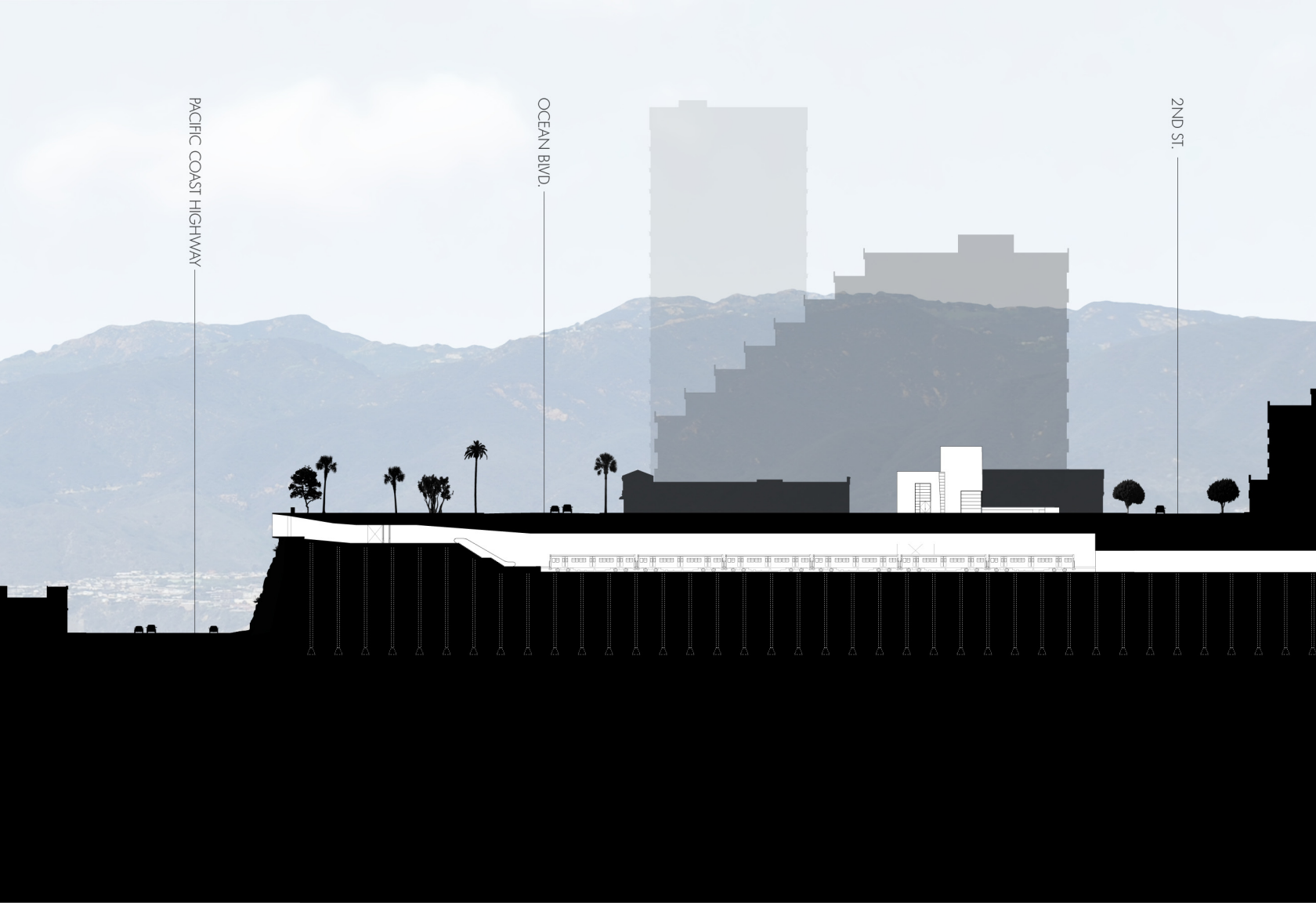
Every attempt has been made to understand what it is that makes the site unique. In this case, understanding that sunsets and oceans are desirable characteristics is not a difficult task. In fact, it may seem obvious to cite these elements as defining the character of Santa Monica. Having said this, it would be a mistake to ignore these aspects and it would be detrimental to compete with them. The challenge with this site is not in identifying the defining elements but in designing a building that accentuates an environment that these elements are already creating.



The final design emerges from the ground in two locations. On one end, the sandy bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean and defining the edge between city and beach is penetrated by a white box that protrudes from the side of the bluff. When travelers finally surface they are within the park that lines the edge of the bluff. The other point of entry intersects with a cafe that is located on the corner of Santa Monica Blvd. and 2nd Street. A small plaza just outside the cafe provides a place for waiting for trains and other passengers.

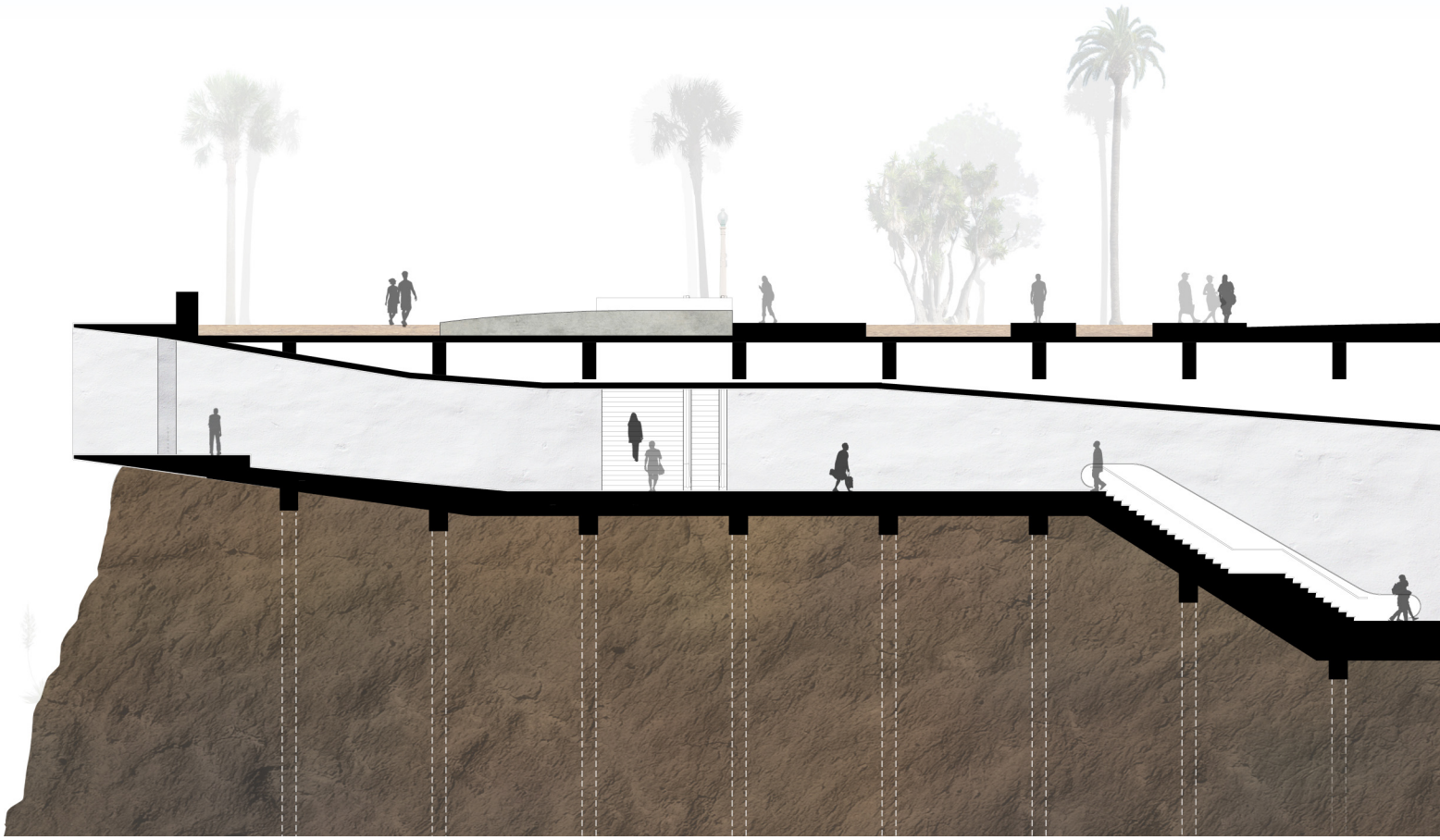

2ND ST.
SANTA MONICA BLVD.
B
OCEAN BLVD.
A
PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY

Concrete caissons positioned along the length of the station add extra support in the relatively unstable sandy soil conditions.


PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY
OCEAN BLVD.
2ND ST.

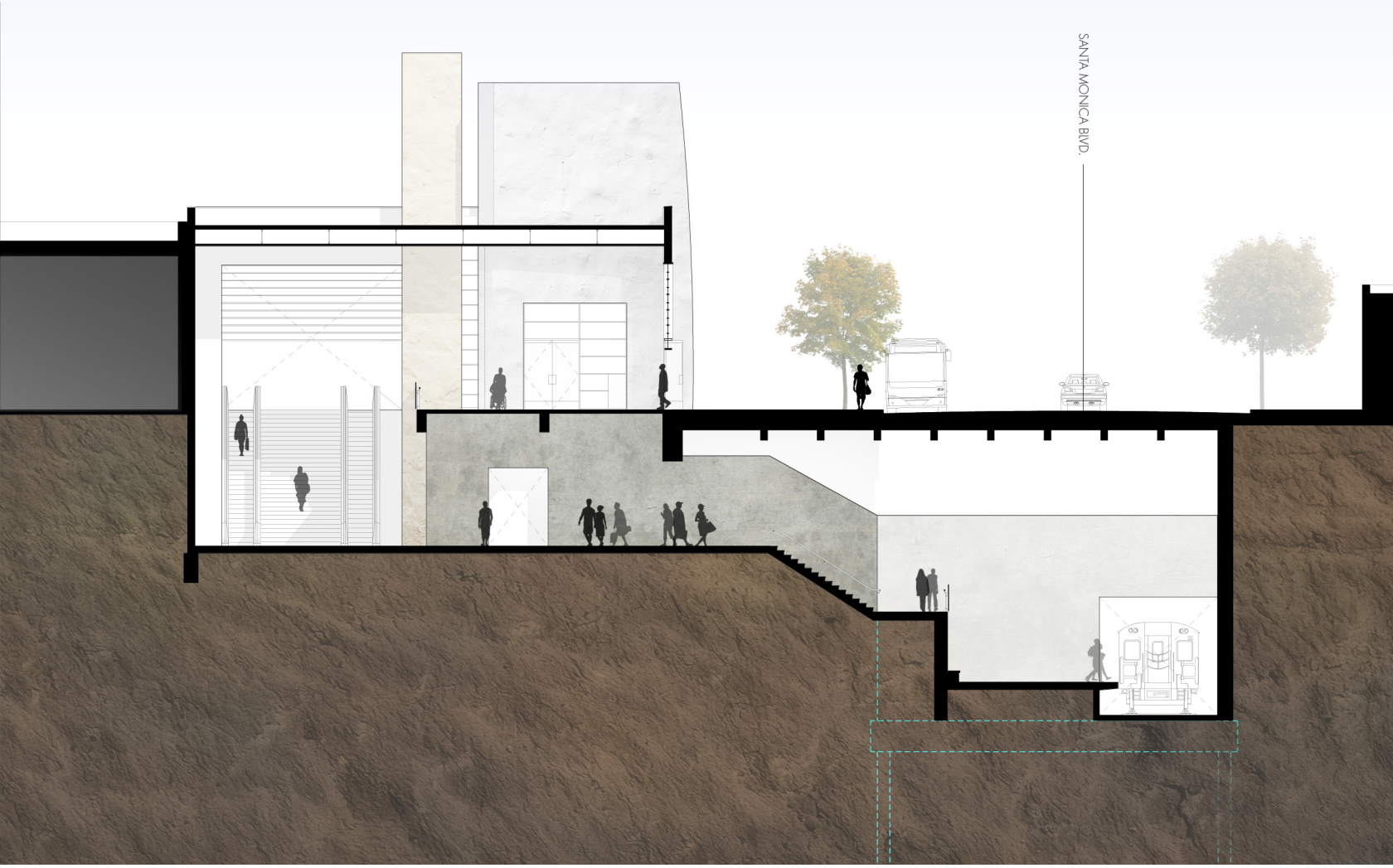
SECTION A

Slightly tilting the ceiling upwards allows the surface to slowly disappear into the backdrop of the sky.



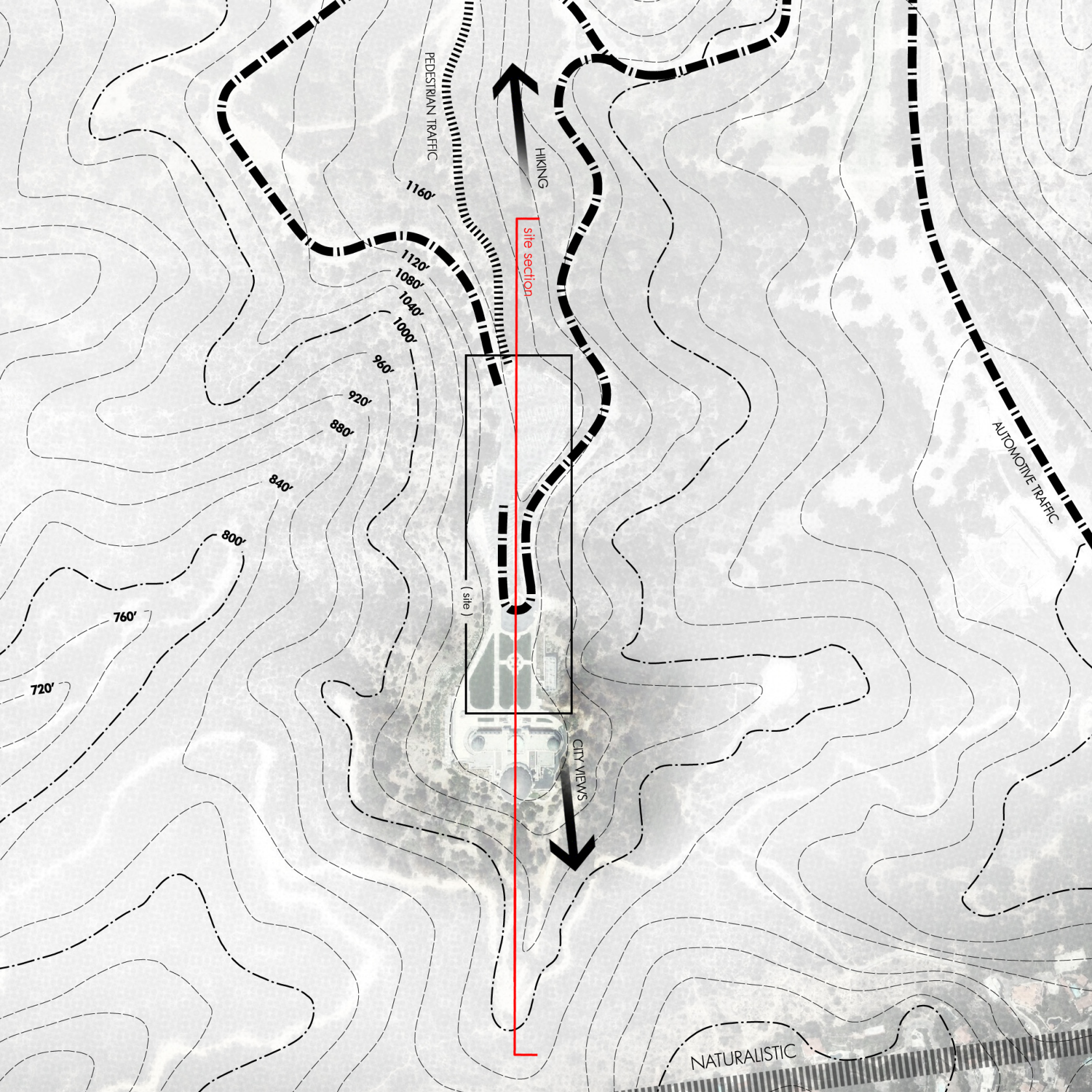
SECTION B

Taken through the portion of station located inside the city, this section suggests the manner in which the subway station wraps beneath a proposed cafe. A gesture that ties the subway station to the walkable urban context.

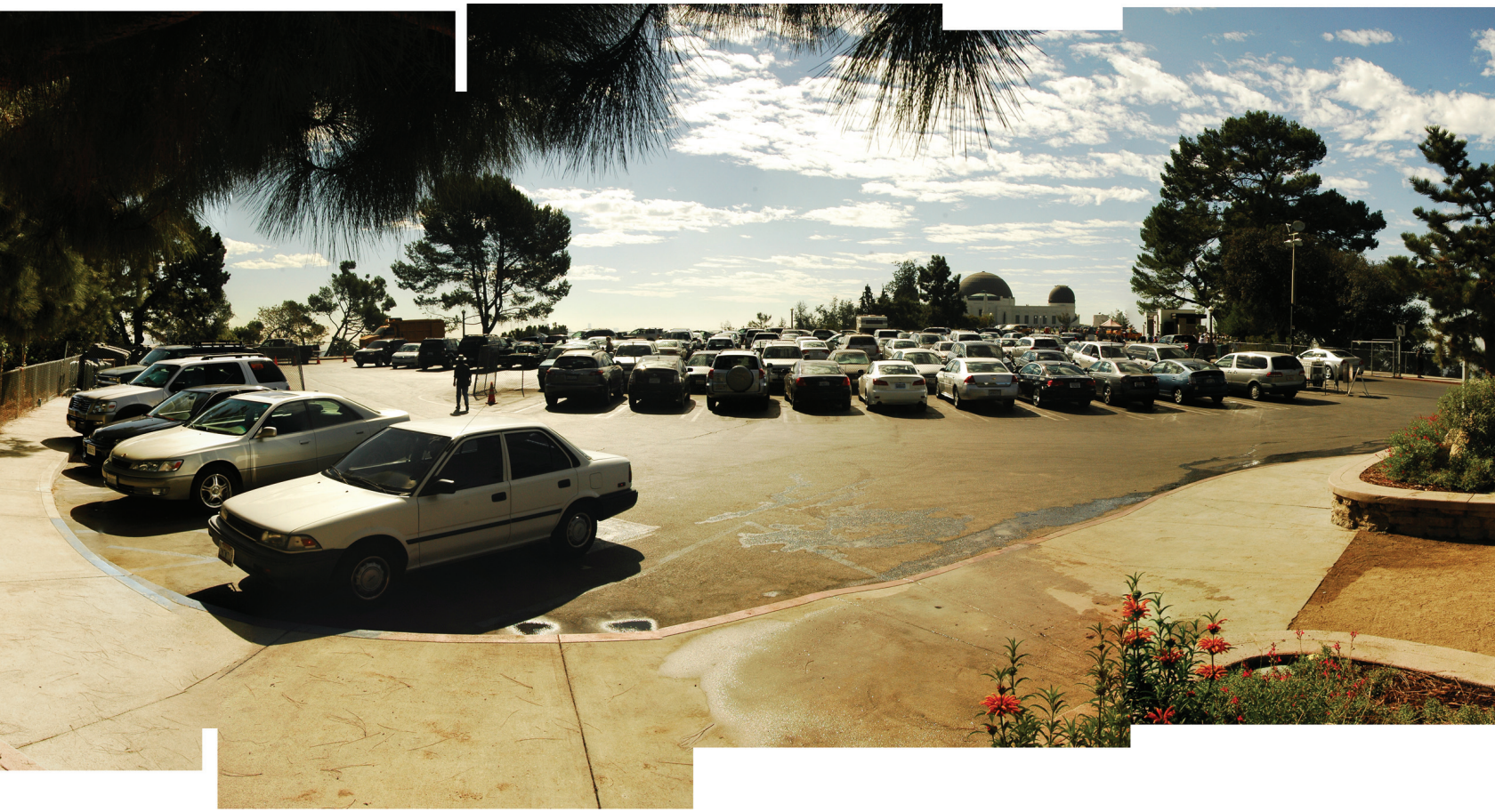

SANTA MONICA BLVD.

GRIFFITH PARK
Observatory Ave.

In a city that is filled with parking lots, freeways and medium density building as far as the eye can see, Griffith Park is a welcome break. In fact, if Los Angeles were to have a 'Central Park,' this would be it. Even though the park is not located anywhere near the central business district and is within walking distance for only a handful of people, the park is always busy. Locals make use of the Griffith Observatory parking lot as a starting point for hikes up and down the mountain. Tourists come to Griffith Observatory for the best view of the Los Angeles Basin. On a clear day it is possible to see the Pacific Ocean, Downtown Los Angeles, the San Bernardino Mountains, Catalina Island and a long list of other landmarks. Even though Griffith Park follows none of the repeating patterns that occur throughout the city, it plays an important role in forming the public perception of Los Angeles.


PEDESTRIAN TRAFFIC
HIKING
site section
1160'
1120'
1080'
1040'
1000'
960'
920'
880'
840'
800'
760'
720'
(site)
CITY VIEWS
AUTOMOTIVE TRAFFIC
NATURALISTIC

Formal geometry establishes an axis running North-South through the observatory.



A parking lot sits between Griffith Observatory and a nearby hiking trail.

COLLAGE STUDIES

Once again, collage was used as the process for not only identifying important aspects of the site, but attempting to understand the spatial implications of these characteristics. The most notable feature of the site is quite obvious. Located atop the Santa Monica Mountains, the site has a tremendous amount of topography. Pictured to the right is a collage that looks at the effect of placing a building in such a prominent position above the city. Dramatic views are created and one has the feeling that they are separated from the city below.

New Balance

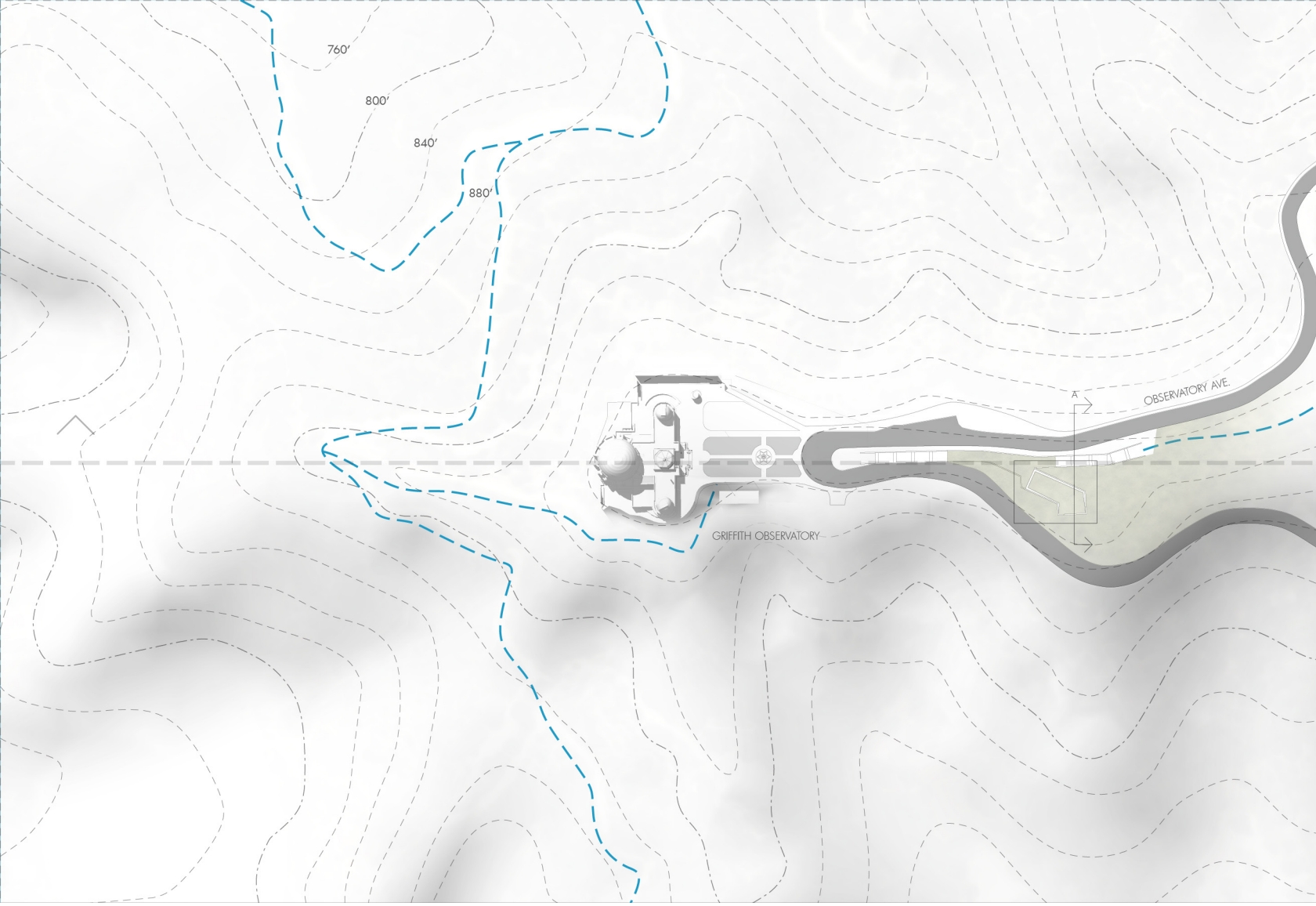
To the left is a collage that hypothesizes what it might be like to inhabit the center of a mountain. Notable is the diminished sense of scale one might experience as well as the overall quality of a space where the primary building material is sedimentary rock.

Above is a collage depicting the noticeable affect that such an overwhelming amount of topography has on the human body. Suggested here is the notion that the final design should somehow make the topography of the site physically apparent to the building's inhabitants.

FINAL PROPOSAL

Similar to the final proposal for Santa Monica, the design for Griffith Park is meant to accentuate an already compelling naturally occurring space. Passengers arriving to the station are carried from the platform to the mezzanine via a 240' elevator ride. Generous in terms of its scale, the mezzanine space is essentially a cavity that has been excavated from the sedimentary rock that forms most of the Santa Monica Mountains. Layers of compressed earth formed slowly over millions of years wrap the walls of the space, a detail that no designer can replicate. A simple floor and ceiling are suspended to create enclosure, but neither extends far enough to meet the edges of the cavity. After ascending a small staircase, inhabitants must choose one of two destinations, the Griffith Observatory or the trail head of a hike that leads up the mountain. In both cases, a gentle ramp points travelers in the right direction as they slowly make their way to the surface. The decision to use a gentle ramp is a reaction to the tremendous amount of topography on the site. Gently ascending towards the hiking trail, the ramp is a gesture meant to suggest that the hiking trail actually begins inside the station itself. In a similar fashion, the ramp extending towards the Observatory is seen as becoming the first part of a procession that leads visitors to what is perhaps the most spectacular view of the entire city. From the balconies of Griffith Observatory, one can see the entire Los Angeles basin including the Santa Monica Mountains, downtown L.A., the Pacific Ocean and a long list of other landmarks. Through the use of a formal lawn, it is suggested that an axis runs north-south through the building. In its approach, the ramp slowly extends this axis into the station itself.

Unlike the rest of the stops along the subway, it is not necessary to brand Griffith Park with a white obelisk because the building itself already serves this function. Rather than competing for attention, the building will function as the subtle hint that the observatory is indeed connected to the rest of the subway system.



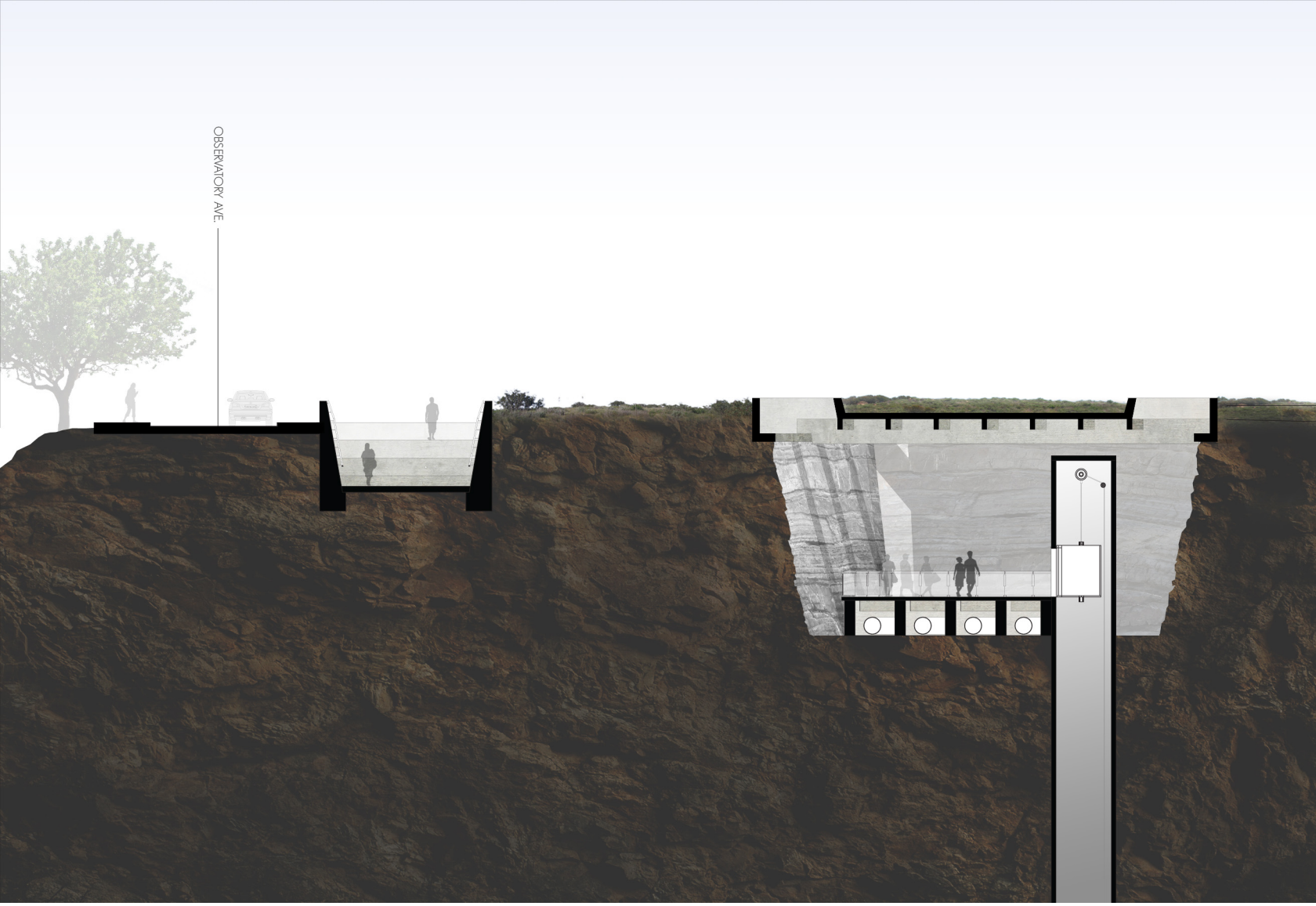
Now occupied by a series of ramps creating subtle openings in the earth, the site was once used as a parking lot. Part of the proposal is the notion that unused space should be allowed to return to its natural state, covered with small coastal sage scrubs and local grasses.


HIKING TRAILS
920′
960′
1000′
1040′
1080′
1120′
1160′
1200′
1240′
1280′
1320′
1360′
1400′
1440′
1480′
1520′
1560′
1600′

Cut through the ramps that carry inhabitants to the surface, this section demonstrates the notion that the station is a starting point for the events occurring on either side of it.

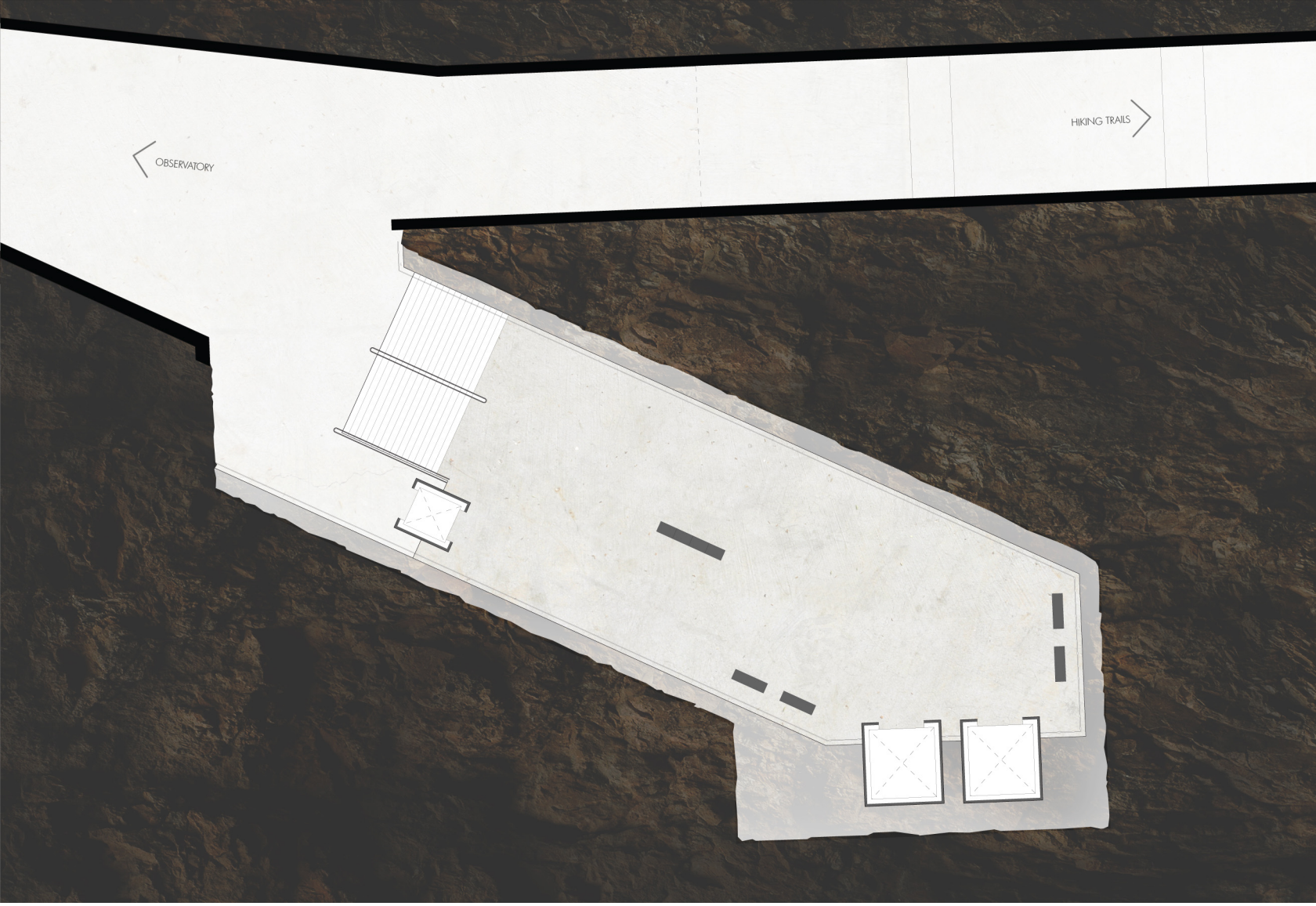
SECTION A

Section A is cut through both the ramp and the mezzanine. The excavated walls of the mezzanine tilt slightly, allowing light to sneak in through a gap between the suspended ceiling and the existing rock walls. This section is also significant because it includes some of the natural vegetation that will be allowed to repopulate the site.


OBSERVATORY AVE.

ENLARGED PLAN

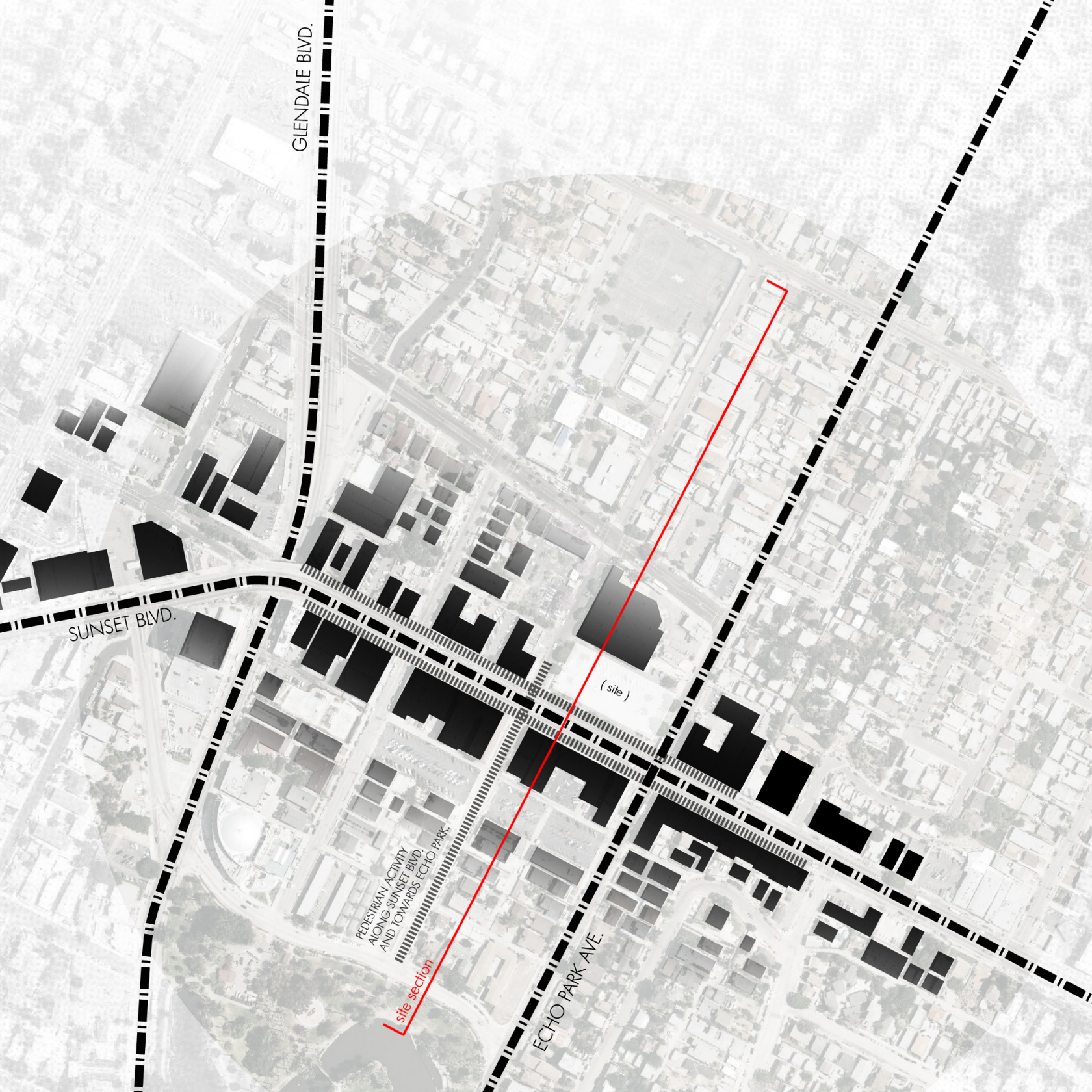
This plan clearly illustrates a shift in materials as the concrete walls of the ramps terminate and become the excavated surface of the mezzanine cavity. Also important to notice is the spacing between the concrete floor and sedimentary rock walls, a condition which suggests that the chamber extends well beyond the inhabitable space of the station.


OBSERVATORY
HIKING TRAILS

ECHO PARK

Sunset Blvd. + Echo Park Ave.

Sunset Boulevard changes its character as it moves from downtown to the ocean, sometimes behaving as a major thoroughfare (from West Hollywood to Downtown). At other times the road functions like a scenic drive, winding in and out of canyons. In this case, Sunset Boulevard behaves similarly to Wilshire Boulevard while Echo Park Avenue operates on a smaller scale similar to La Brea. What distinguishes this intersection from those along the two major thoroughfares is the addition of a strong sense of local character. Sidewalks lining Sunset Boulevard are always full of people (usually locals) who are making good use of the sidewalk shops and cafes. Unlike Santa Monica, where shops are a combination of national chains and one-of-a-kind locations, shops in Echo Park are almost always independently owned. One exception is the Walgreens located on the northwestern corner of the intersection of Echo Park Avenue and Sunset Boulevard. A large parking lot located in front of Walgreens breaks the pattern of small independent stores lining the sidewalk. The Echo Park site is representative of a situation one might find in other distinguished neighborhoods such as Silverlake or Los Feliz.


GLENDALE BLVD.
SUNSET BLVD.
(site)
PEDESTRIAN ACTIVITY
ALONG SUNSET BLVD.
AND TOWARDS ECHO PARK.
site section
ECHO PARK AVE.

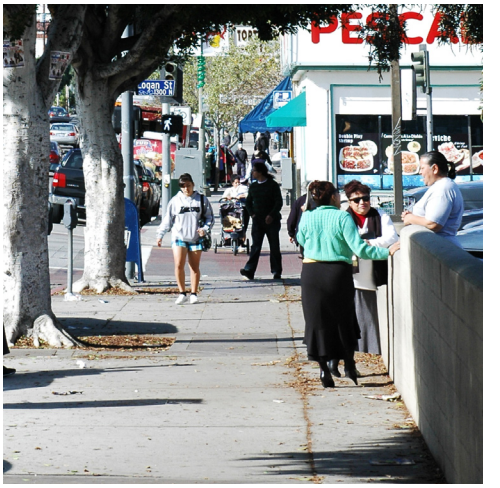
Echo Park Avenue runs from left to right across the image while Sunset Boulevard recedes. To the far left, tight urban development typical of Sunset Boulevard. Residential development appears along Echo Park Avenue in both directions.


CLIN


TATTOO
EXPO
SEPT. 26-28
LA Conv. Ctr.

Understanding the character of Echo Park was much more difficult than the first two sites which were full of natural phenomena to react to. There is a very pronounced atmosphere, it just took a more careful analysis to uncover precisely what the cause is. The site is located in a Walgreens parking lot that lines Sunset Boulevard. Not a typical place to find people interacting, but Echo Park is not a typical neighborhood. A 4' high wall separates the parking lot from the sidewalk and inadvertently becomes host to a wide array of activities. A photo essay documenting people's interactions with the wall was compiled over the course of numerous trips to the site. At any given time it is likely that people will be using the wall to wait for a bus, sell fruit, or simply enjoy the day. One thing is clear from the photo essay. Echo Park is a vibrant neighborhood full of human interaction. As a conclusion from this exercise, it is clear that whatever architecture is inserted in echo park should be secondary to the social interactions that already take place. In fact, the social interactions that take place should have an influence on the final design in terms of providing an adequate space for day-to-day life to take place.

PHOTO ESSAY


Logan St

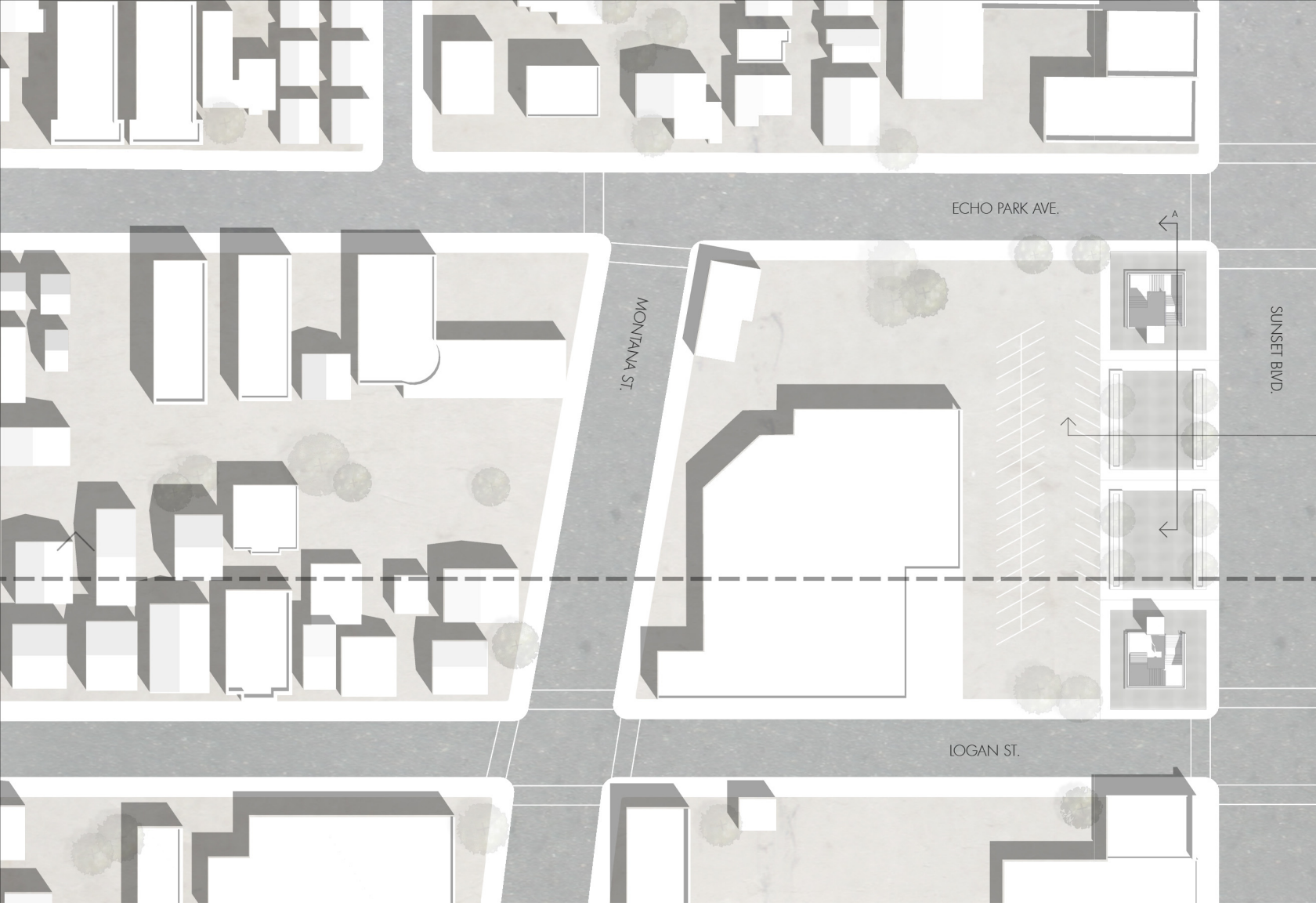
FINAL PROPOSAL

Rather than burdening the site with more architecture than is necessary, the final proposal for Echo Park seeks mostly to get out of the way. Unlike Santa Monica or Griffith Park, Echo Park is not a showcase for the city. This is not to say that the site is unimportant. In fact, it is just as important for the city to have strong neighborhoods as it is to have world famous landmarks. It would be disrespectful to the residents of Echo Park to treat the final design as though the neighborhood were something it is not. The most thoughtful response to such a strong sense of community is to allow the community to drive the design, which is precisely what this proposal seeks to do.

One half of the existing parking lot has been reclaimed as part of what can be seen as extending the sidewalk. Because there was already a great deal of activity occurring on the site, there is no need to add additional program. Sufficient open space has been provided for meeting other travelers and residents. Along the edges of the space are planters suitable for waiting for a bus or simply enjoying a piece of fresh fruit. The only major architectural interventions are a pair of white towers that give a sense of enclosure to the interior public space. In addition, the twin towers serve as vertical circulation elements, housing an elevator that travels to the mezzanine level. A staircase wraps around each of the towers.

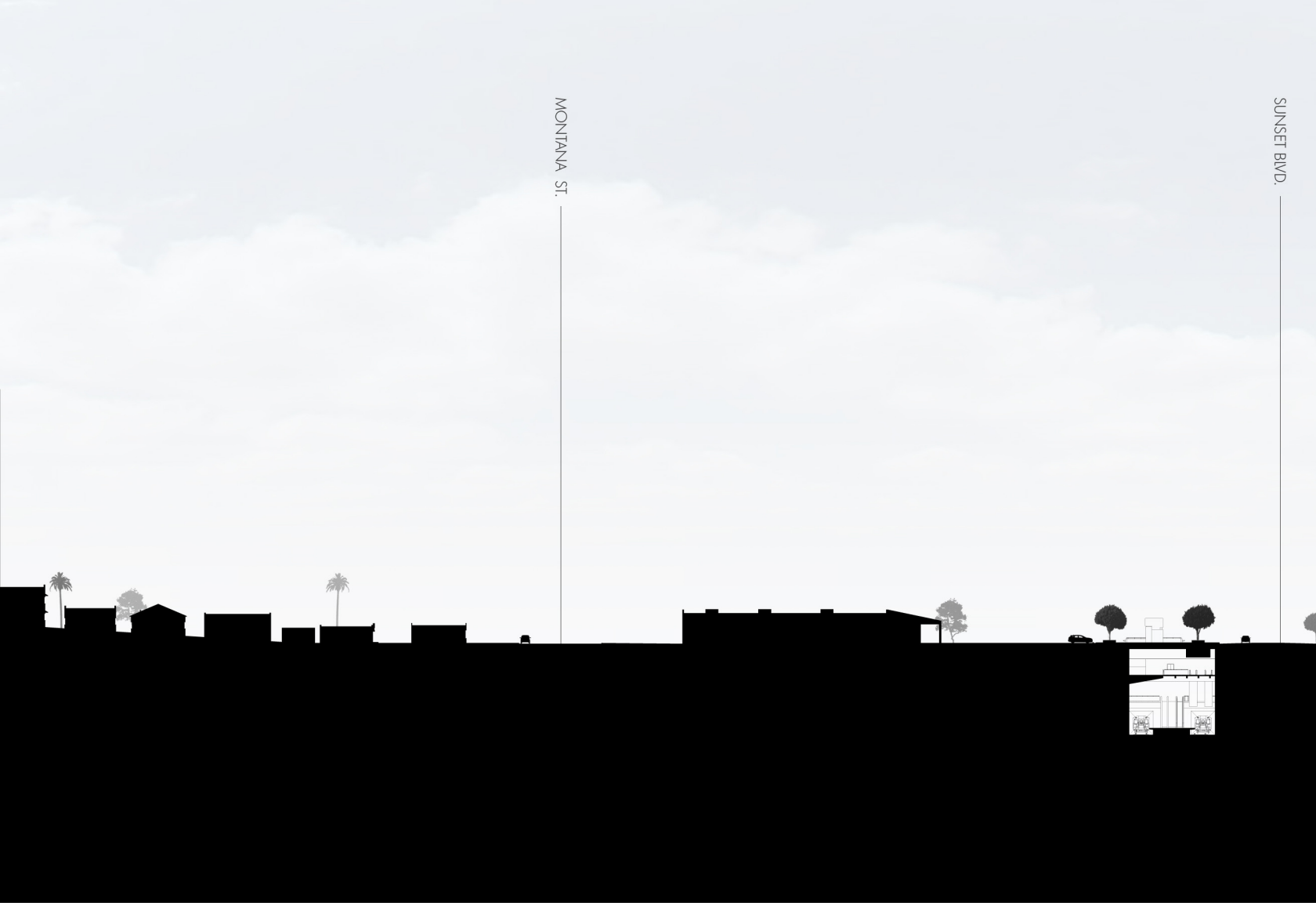
The towers also serve as branding elements, part of the overall gesture that attempts to unite the stations with white obelisks, Reveals in the surface of the towers allow lights to flash, indicating that a train is arriving and permitting the subway passenger to remain a part of the other activities that are happening on the site.


CENTER
PESCADO
MOJADO



Allowing the parking lot to become a prominent public space strengthens the already strong sense of community gathering that occurs along Sunset Boulevard.

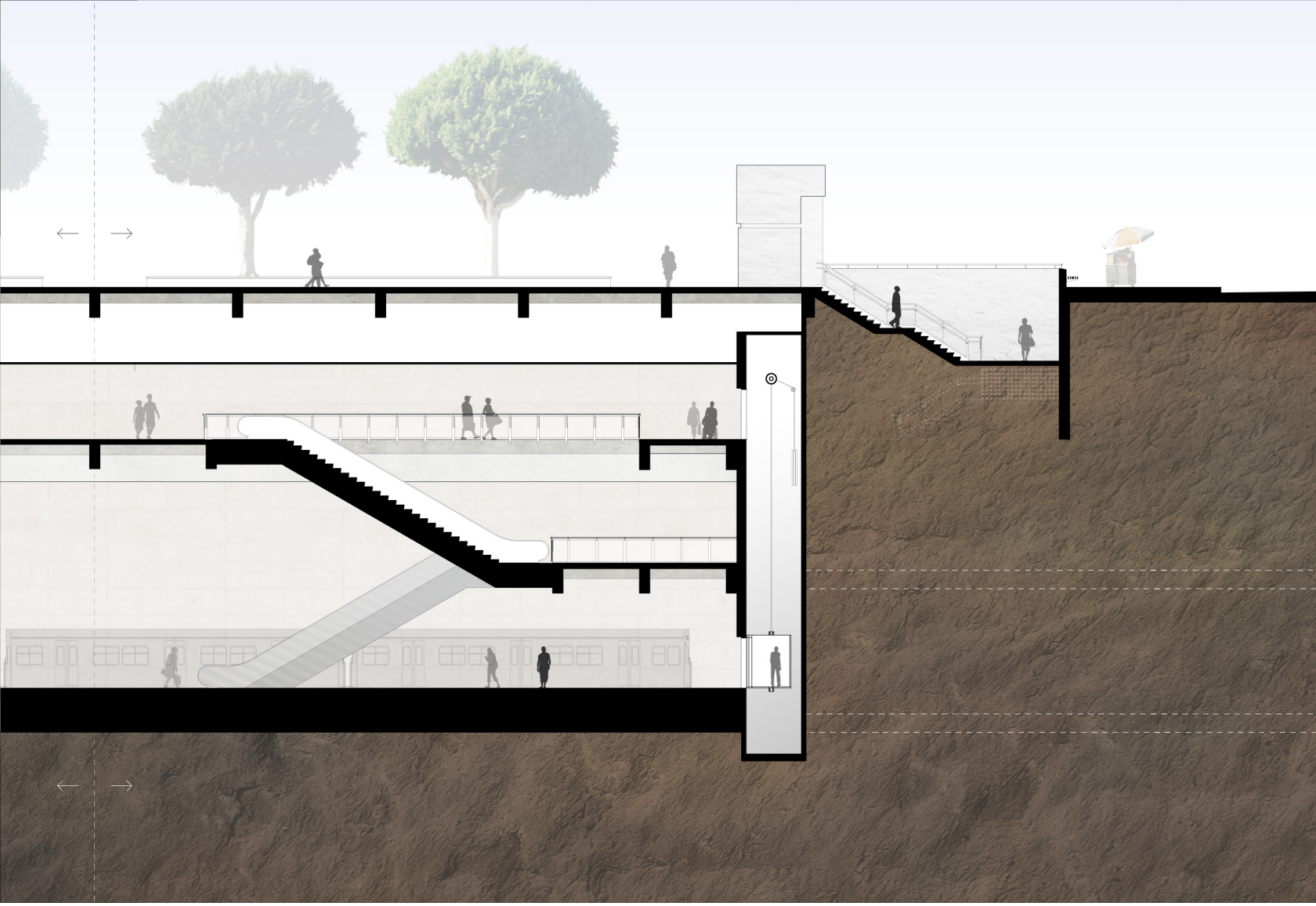

PARK AVE.
B


SUNSET BLVD.
MONTANA ST.


PARK AVE.

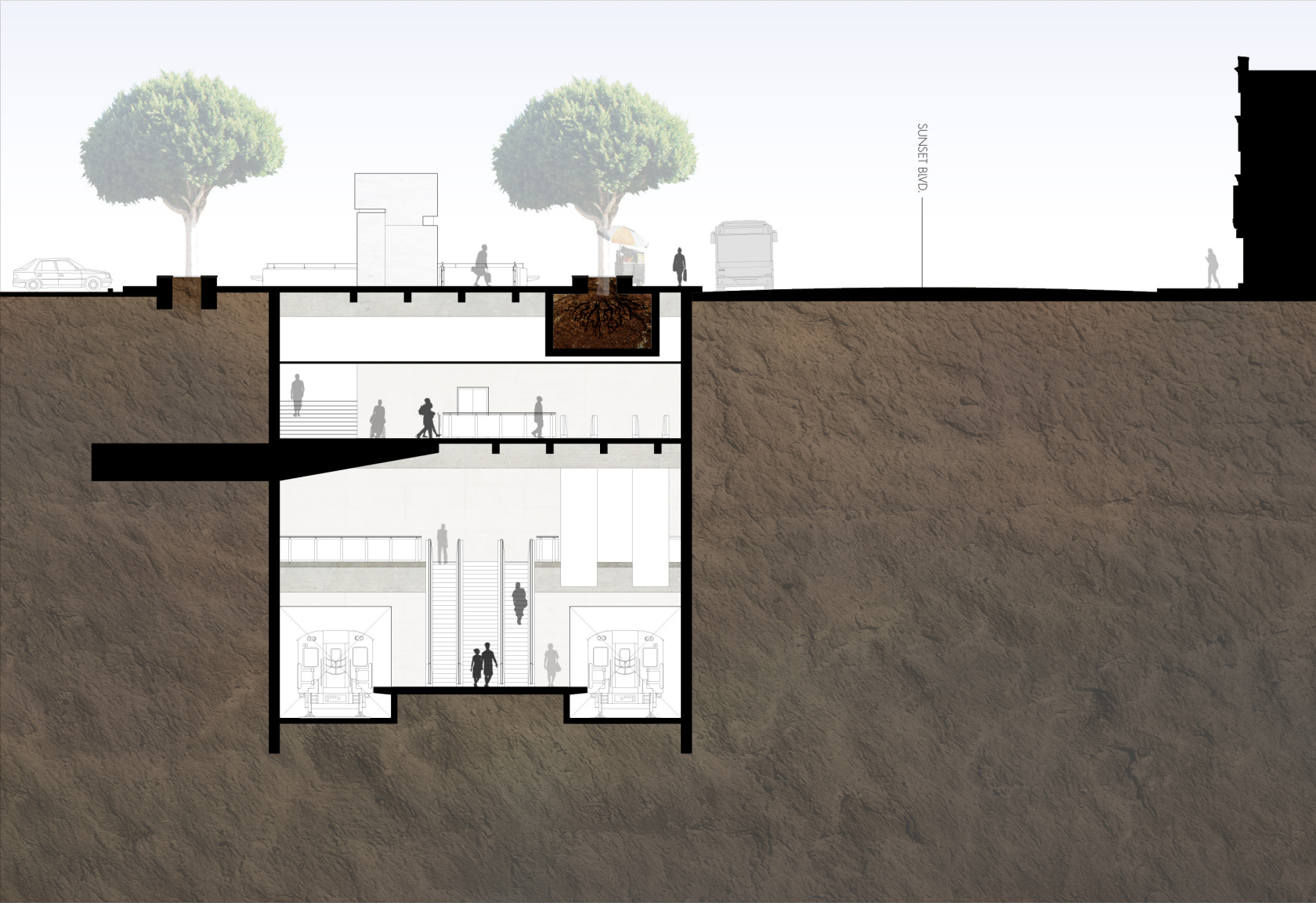
SECTION A

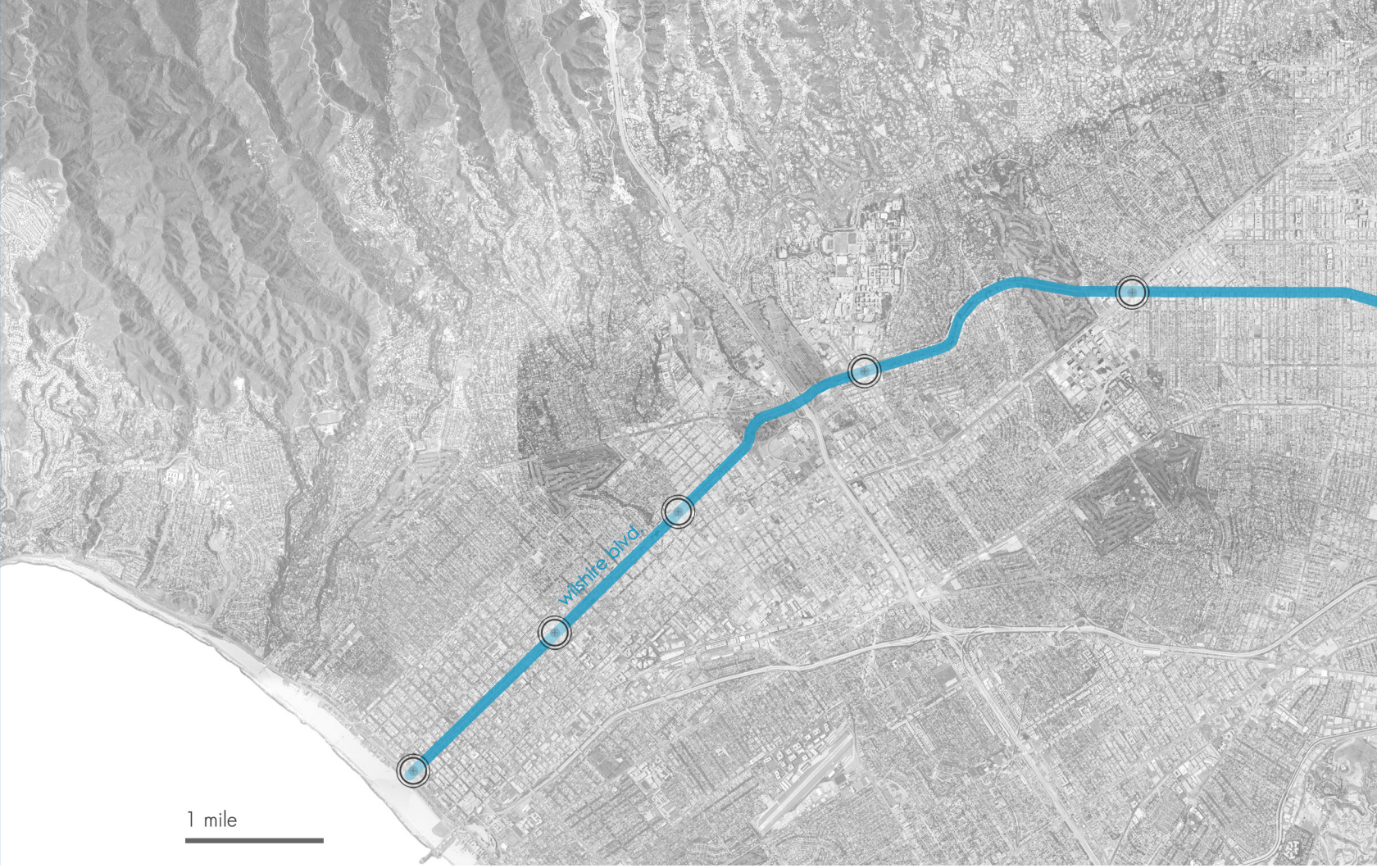
Cut parallel to Sunset Boulevard, section A shows how the towers work in conjunction with the stairwell to create a distinct interior and exterior to the public space. On the opposite side of the white tower shown here is an elevator that brings passengers down to the mezzanine level. From here a second elevator carries passengers all the way to the platform.



SECTION B

Taken perpendicular to Sunset Boulevard, section B shows how the sidewalk is connected yet separate from the interior public space. Ficus trees create a sense of enclosure within the piazza.


SUNSET BLVD.



WILSHIRE CORRIDOR

Wilshire Blvd. + La Brea Ave.
(example site)

World famous Wilshire Boulevard is perhaps the single most important element in defining the built landscape of Los Angeles. The city is known for its sprawling medium density development. Occasionally, this slightly repetitive nature is interrupted by one of the major thoroughfares that spans the city. Two of these thoroughfares have been already been examined by this thesis (Sunset Boulevard and Santa Monica Boulevard).

Shown above are 7 proposed subway stops along Wilshire Boulevard. Unlike the 3 previous sites, where the moves generated by the station are meant to describe one particular intersection or targeted area, the moves generated for this stop will apply to all of Wilshire Boulevard. This particular site is, in a way, a commentary on a prototypical urban form that exists in Los Angeles.


Busby's
5455
Buy stock in rubber.
LA
X...PRESS
SUBWAY
BOX BROTHERS
Robeks Juice


STARBUCKS COFFEE
Bowls.
Bad for haircuts.
Good for meals.
DAE SUNG
BROTHERS TAE KWON DO
City
Print


10528
BEL-AIR PATROL
480366
005401
1052

Photography was used as a means of uncovering the character of Wilshire Boulevard. What became apparent was a noticeable volume that one experiences when they are on the boulevard. There is an abrupt transition that occurs as one moves from outside of the boulevard (typically coming from a residential space) to the inside of the boulevard. From the right vantage point, the boulevard has an overwhelming presence when compared with the scale of the surrounding context.

This sequence of photographs illustrates the dramatic shift in environment one experiences when moving from Wilshire to the surrounding residential areas.

FINAL PROPOSAL

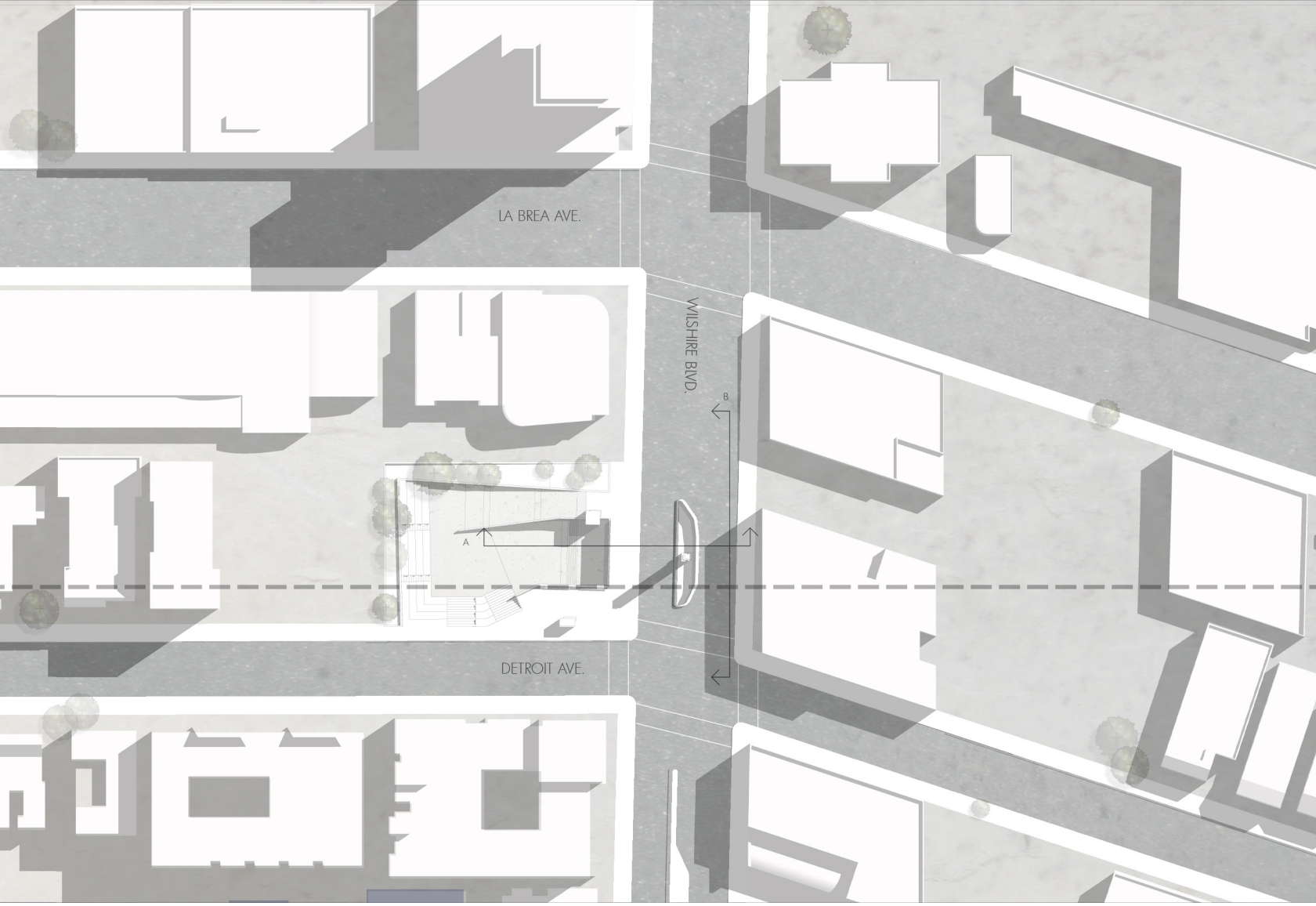
This proposal represents a set of ideas that can be applied to the entirety of Wilshire corridor. It is not intended that the design for this specific location become a unit that is simply dropped into place at a given interval. However, the underlying principals behind this design are meant to accentuate the character of the entire street. This proposal is a direct response to the notion that Wilshire corridor already behaves like a large cavity that cuts through the city.

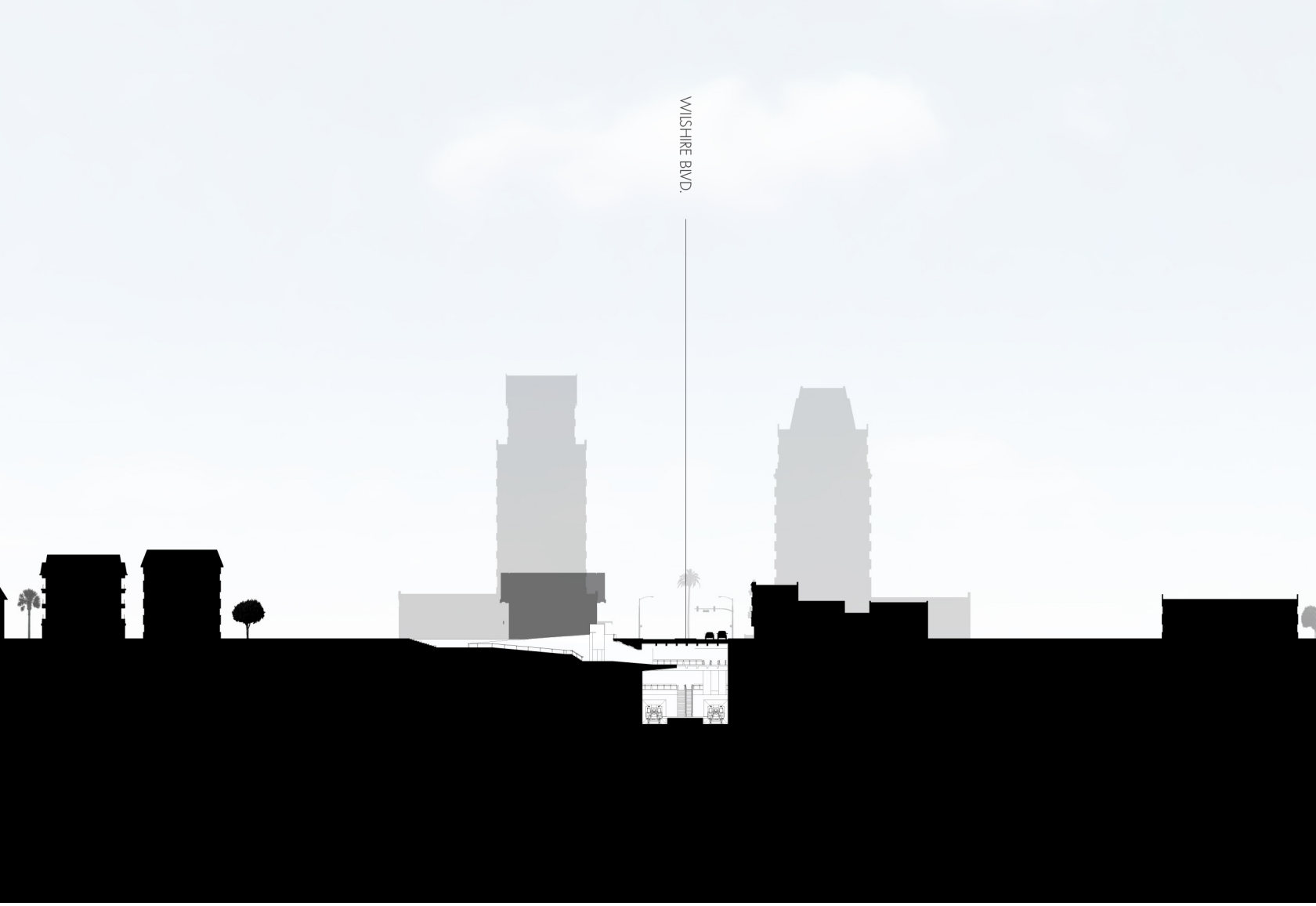
Wilshire Boulevard already has a distinct volume in terms of the width of the street and the height of the buildings. The overall gesture for this proposal is to allow the volume of Wilshire to extend below the surface. The subway entrance becomes part of the boulevard in the same way that the palm trees and high rise buildings already behave.

A ramp beginning on grade carries passengers below the surface of the street. Wilshire is literally given a thickness at the moment of entry, furthering the notion that the subway is in fact part of the overall sense of enclosure.

Once again, white towers help to identify the stations as part of a greater system throughout the city. This time, the white tower becomes an element that interacts with the street itself. A median that would normally be occupied by palm trees has been converted into a place for a light tower. An opening is cut in the surface of the street, allowing the obelisk to poke through and giving the subway a presence above the surface. Flashing lights signal the arrival of a train similar to the flashing lights in the proposal for Echo Park. From the right vantage point, it would be possible to monitor the progress of subway trains along Wilshire simply by watching the flashing lights move from station to station.

Wilshire Boulevard runs from East to West, cutting through the city. On either side of the boulevard is low density development that extends uninterrupted until it reaches the next major thoroughfare. The final proposal acts as a transition space between the two extremes.

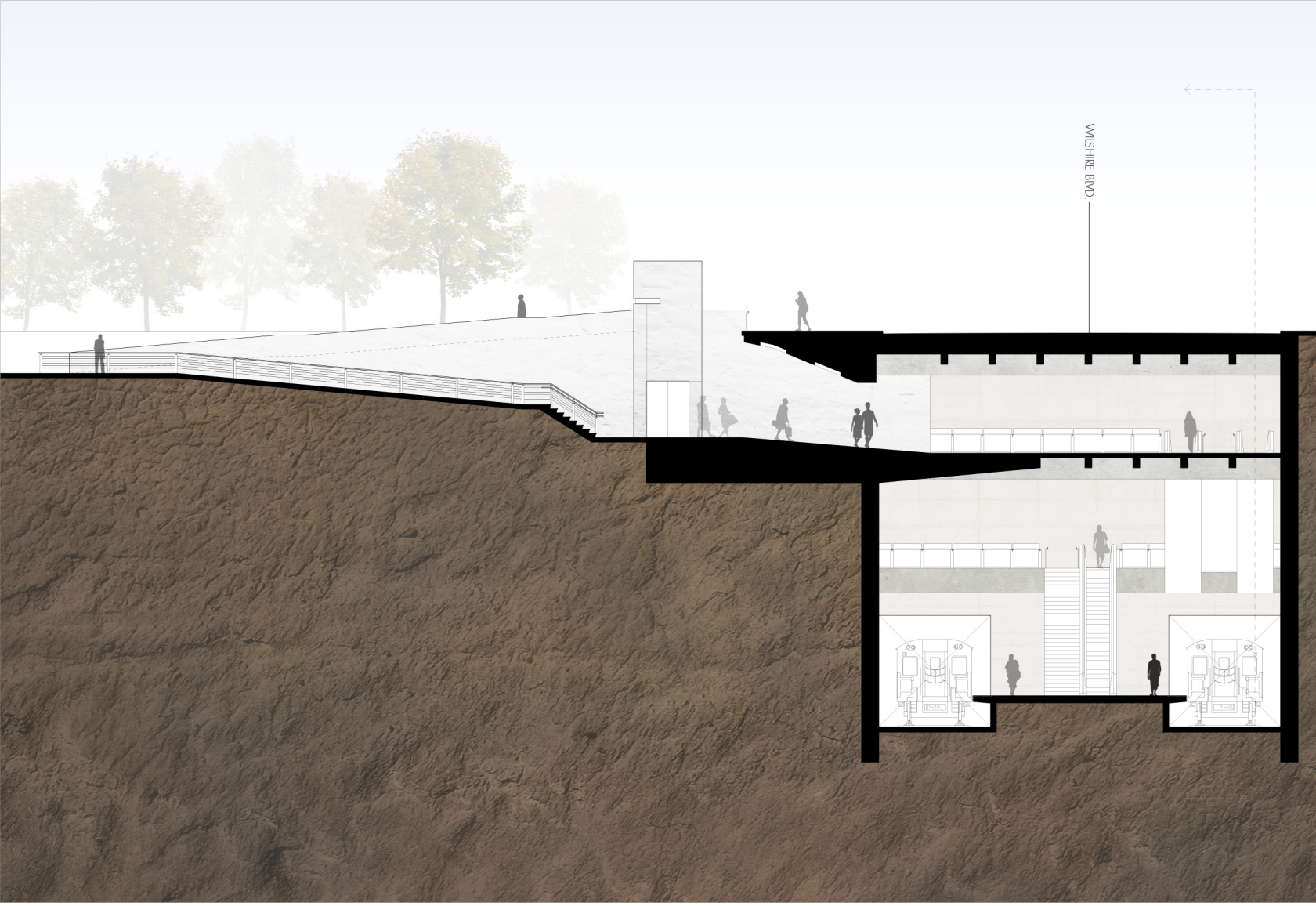

LA BREA AVE.
WILSHIRE BLVD.
B
A
DETROIT AVE.


WILSHIRE BLVD.

There is a noticeable difference between the height of buildings lining Wilshire and those that comprise the surrounding context. This juxtaposition gives Wilshire a unique character when compared with the rest of the city.

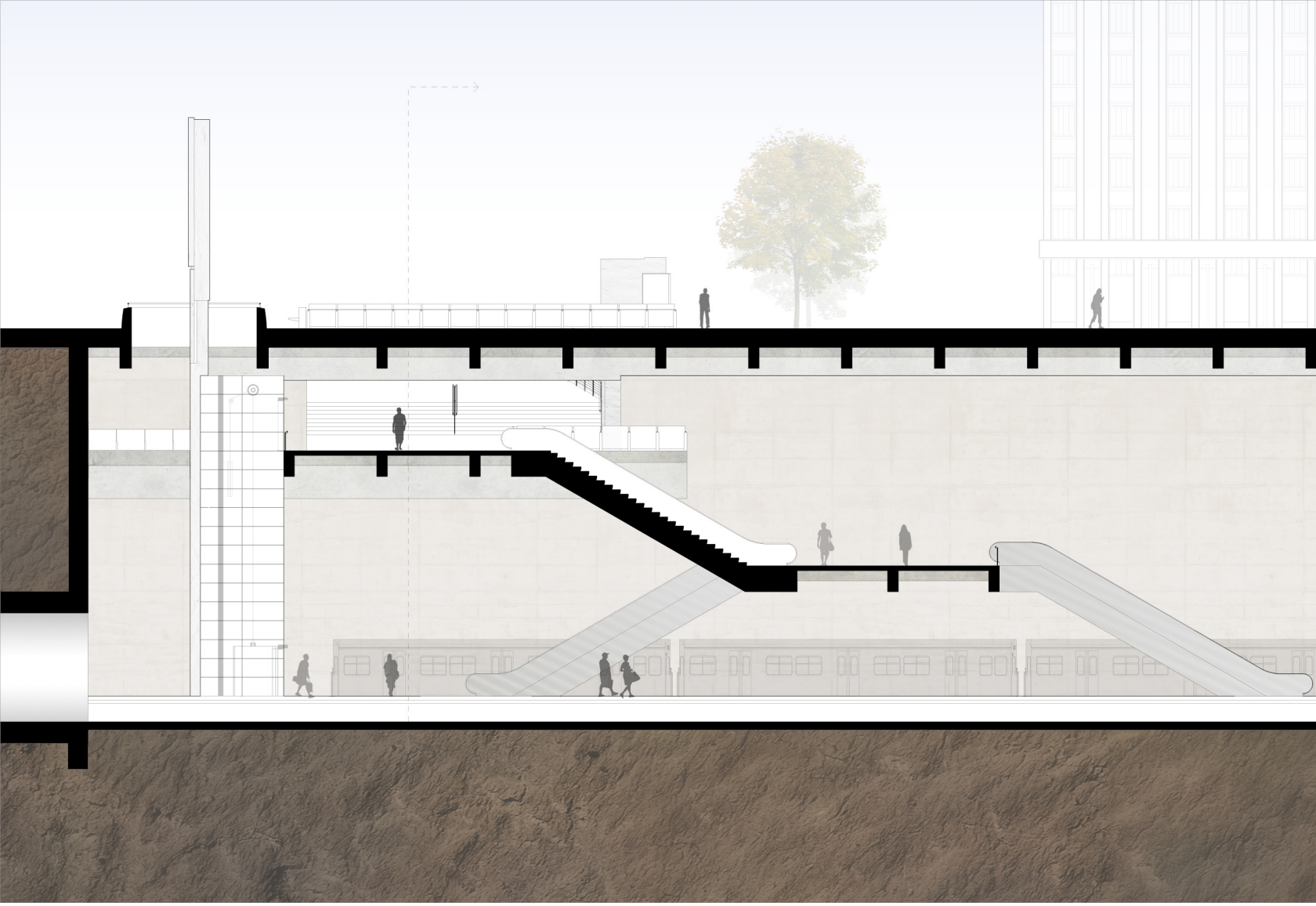
SECTION A

Section A is cut perpendicular to Wilshire Boulevard. Shown here is the manner in which the ramp carries travelers from street level into what can be seen as the thickness of the street.


WILSHIRE BLVD.

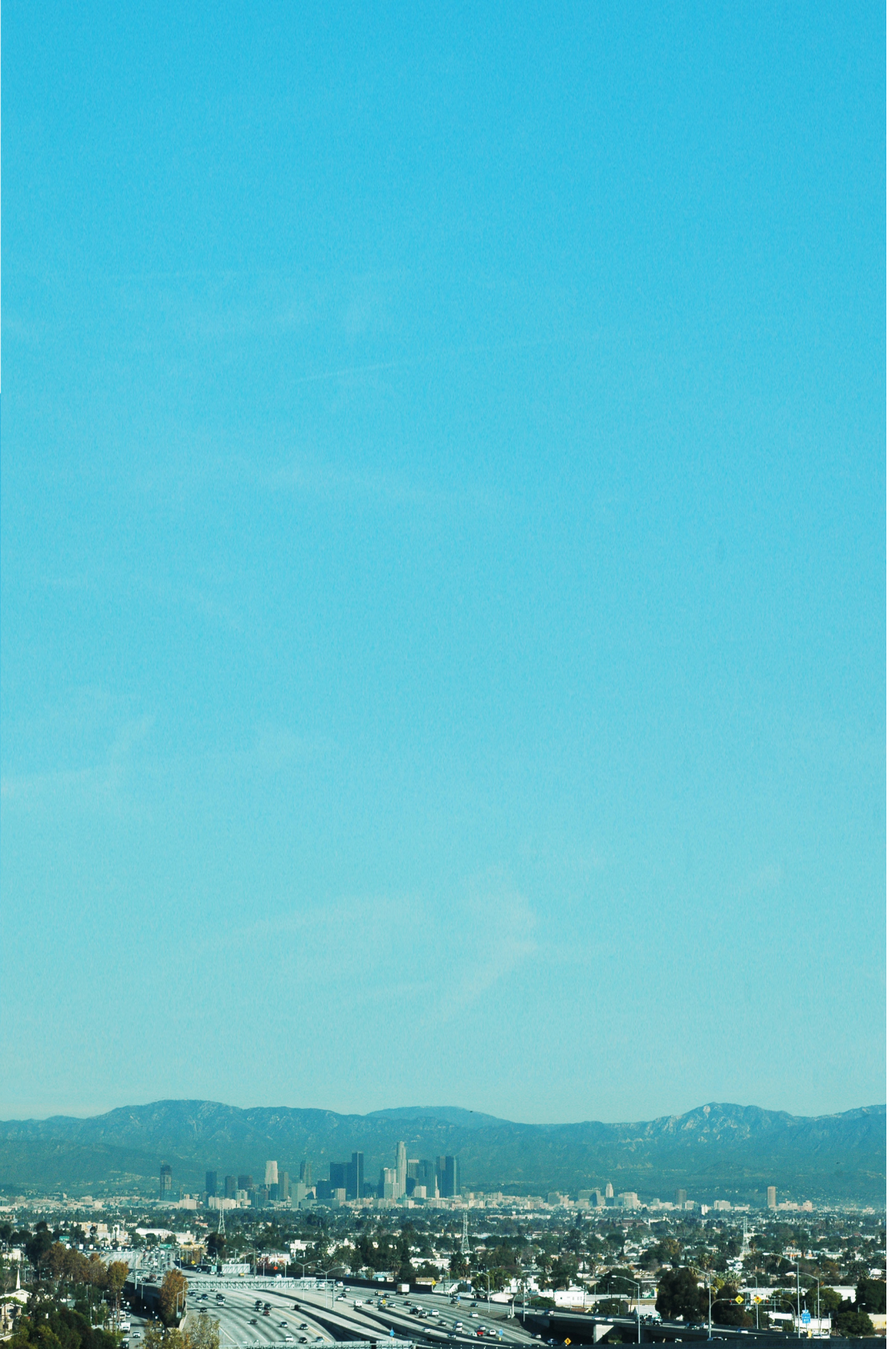
SECTION B

Cut directly through Wilshire, section B illustrates the manner in which the white tower pierces the street.



CONCLUSION

Certain buildings seem to spend more effort clamoring for attention than they do attempting to better their surroundings. This is especially true in Los Angeles where at times it appears as though the city plays host to a fashion show for buildings, a trait that makes designing 'contextually' in Los Angeles a difficult task. More than reacting to L.A., this thesis was about refining my own process as a designer. Working in collage and looking at the site through a more critical photographic lens offered me the opportunity to think deeper about site analysis than I would have otherwise. However, this process is far from complete. What I have learned as a result of this process is essentially a sense of restraint. My reaction to the site should come from a critical understanding of what is actually happening and a critical discussion about what is appropriate given the circumstances. The questions raised in this thesis are not easily answered nor can they be resolved with absolute certainty. As I mature I will continue to ask myself these same questions, slowly evolving my own process along the way.



GENIUS LOCO

SCOTT HAMPTON

Genius Loco is an intentional butchering of the latin phrase Genius Loci, or 'spirit of place'. The title is suggestive of the overall intentions of the project in terms of designing with the 'essence of place' in mind as well as a subtle pun mocking the chaotic nature of the urban landscape of Los Angeles. In no way is the title meant to read as fluent Latin, English or Spanish.