

baghdad design centre

a place to meet... a place to stop... a place to make... a place to study... a place to work

the concept...

The design of the Baghdad Design Centre, within the walls of the ruined Old Governorate Building, is intended to heighten atmosphere and appeal to the senses by creating spectacular internal spaces, and a new external image.

The ground floor is predominantly open, although covered under arches, to allow the space to continue acting as an important meeting and recreational area. The restriction of light entering the ground floor, and the introduction of water, enables the meeting spaces and cafe to act as places to shelter from the extreme summer temperatures, a requirement highlighted by the ad-hoc series of fabric shelters already created on the site. The ground floor also contains a series of workshop units where those working at the centre can display and sell their work. Orange trees are introduced into the open courtyard spaces to provide further shade and to help soften the concrete structure.

The building is organised into three predominant volumes which correspond to the different site axes. One volume each at the north and south of the site and one, which contains the double height exhibition space, that straddles across to connect the other two. The volumes and their scale are intended to fit in well with the existing context of mainly 1 to 4 storey buildings.

All of the existing walls of the building are retained although their nature is changed by interventions to the front facade and by lining the inside with a locally-made reflective cobalt-blue tile.

In urban terms the building is highly permeable with entrances on three sides to enable to the building to act as a route and therefore increasing footfall through the building. The building will become an icon of regeneration for the city.

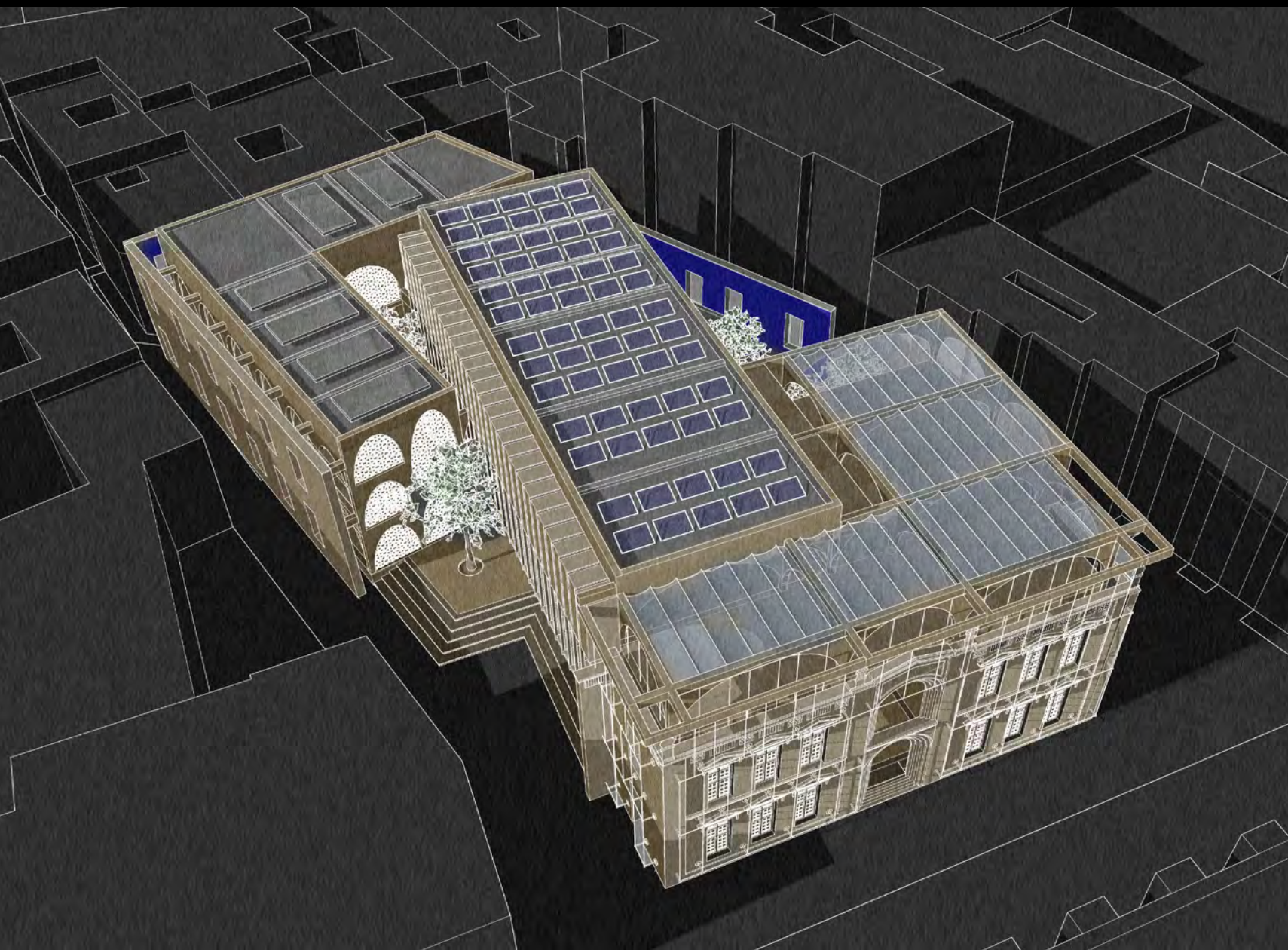


islamic eclecticism...



The concept of 'Islamic Eclecticism' developed from the desire to create a single piece of architecture which incorporates a mixture of elements from local and regional styles to create something that is new and original. The nature of the sources used are wide and varied from the timber cladding on houses in Bagra, the traditional Islamic typology of the covered souk to the luxurious Moorish palaces of southern Spain. The arch, which is used extensively within this design, is also a typical of architecture in Iraq and the region for over two millennia whilst also a prominent feature of the front facade of the existing building. By bringing these elements together to create something modern, but not alien to the intended users and visitors, the proposal acts as an antidote to the hysteria of 'look-at-me' buildings and shape-making.

massing study...



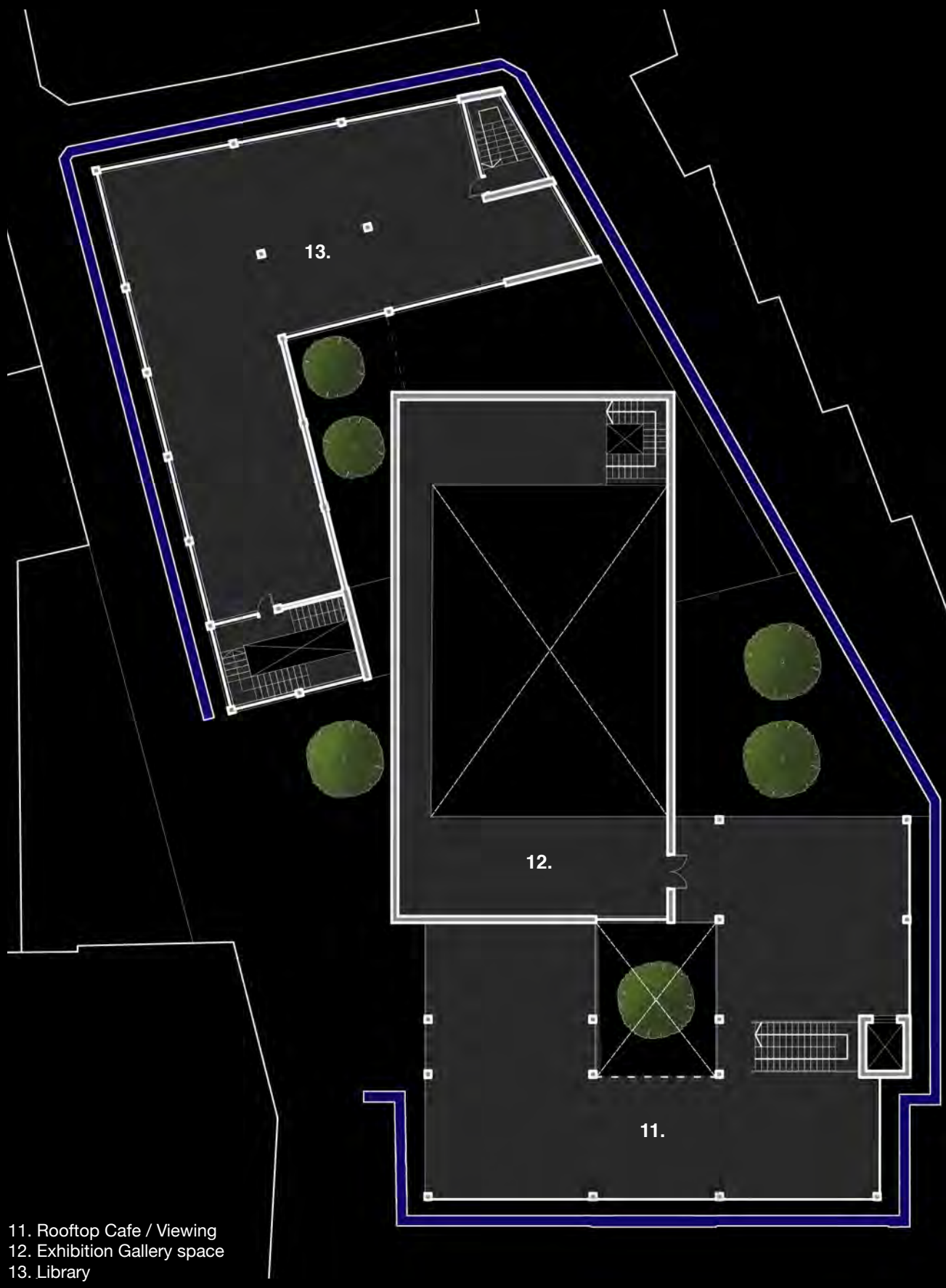
the entrance space...



first floor plan... 1:250@A0



first floor plan... 1:250@A0



second floor plan... 1:250@A0



looking into the building from the west...



a view from the north entrance...

an approach to the existing...



The proposal intends to keep all of the existing façades found on the site; any further destruction would be unwarranted and undesirable. They act as an important memory.

There is a clear difference in architectural quality between the front facade and the others and the proposal intends to treat these two conditions differently. The concrete frame of the building extends up and over the front facade to create a sheltered cafe terrace at the top of the building but also to allow the existing masonry to be anchored to a series of cables and rods which keep the facade in place; a new solution developed specifically for this building. These cables and rods create the effect of a fine filigree screen from which banners can be hung to advertise the centre and its latest exhibitors and events. The facade itself would be conserved and rehabilitated to bring back its former glory. The screening, which does not detract from the beauty of the facade, creates a visual indicator of the regenerated building whilst not over-powering it. The other façades would be anchored to the concrete frame in a more conventional buttressing solution.

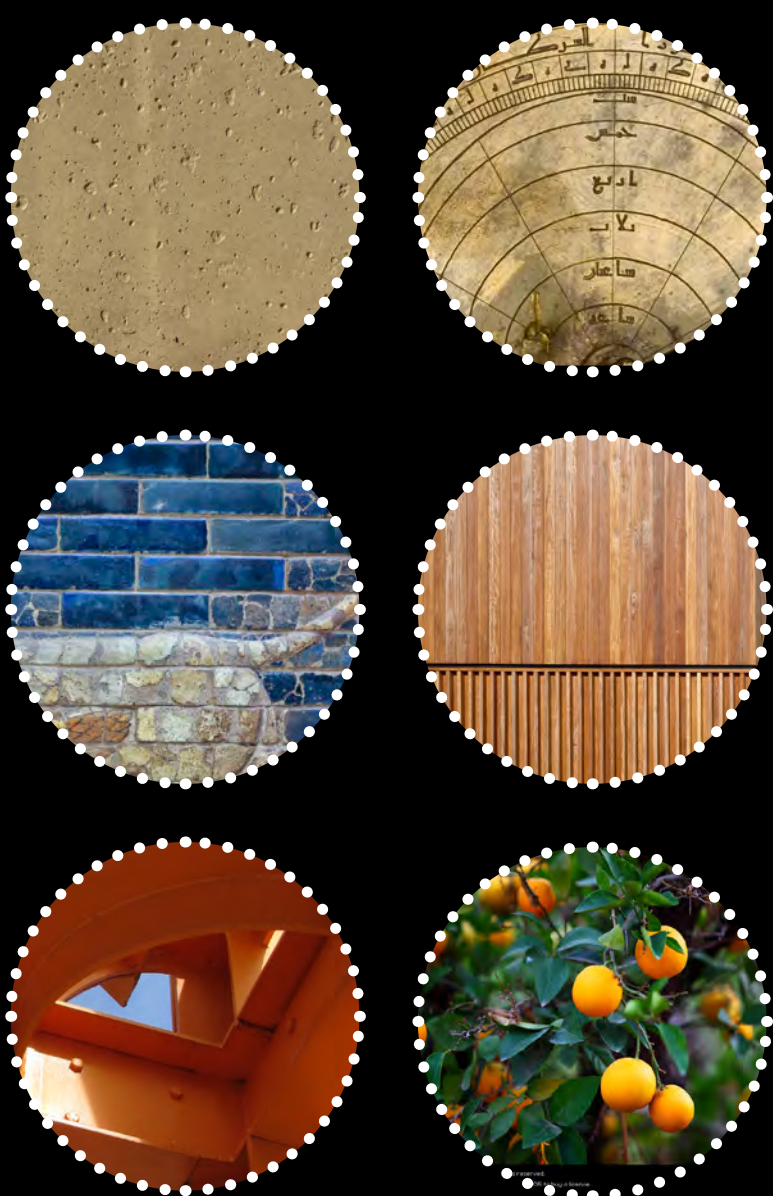
The inside of the existing façades, which are in very poor condition, would be lined with the locally-made reflective cobalt-blue tile, similar to those found on the Ishtar Gate, to cover up the degradation and help stabilise the masonry. The blue tiles would help to highlight the importance of the existing façades by giving them a prominence and status. The new concrete structure is set back by 900mm from the existing to allow light to down the façades and ensure maintenance is possible. The glazed tile would bounce light around the scheme helping to create the colourful and vibrant place which this should be.

It may be possible to instigate a fund-raising scheme by which the tiles are signed or decorated by locals, dignitaries or school children before they are fired, glazed and hung. This would create an interesting collage effect, would be an art-work in itself and also help to create a sense of public ownership towards the centre.

The proposal is intended to strike the right balance between conservation and retention whilst also using the façades to create a striking contemporary feature.



a material palette...



The materials are chosen to compliment each other and be sourced, and manufactured, locally where possible.

The structure of the building will be created from a pigmented concrete made using local aggregate and sand to give it a distinct colour which fits in with the local context. The form of the frame will ensure that the work can be carried out by local contractors using already developed expertise. The concrete frame is intended to be flexible for future change to building usage. The flat roofs are ideal for solar panels.

Special fixtures, such as the mashrabiya screens, lighting and handrails, will be made from brass, ideally working with local crafts-people and designers to ensure bespoke and meaningful solutions. There is a significant history of brass making in Iraq that this proposal intends to build on. The timber elements of the facade will utilise, if possible, a locally grown timber, which will go silver over time.

The locally-made reflective cobalt-blue tile, similar to those found at the Ishtar Gate will help to bounce light around the lower sections of the building whilst adding a rich colour to the interiors.

The steel cables, which help to stabilise the front facade, will be painted in a bright orange, a complementary colour to the cobalt blue.

Orange trees placed in openings and courtyards throughout the scheme add a softening aspect but also a sweet scent that will infuse the centre and further add to the atmosphere.