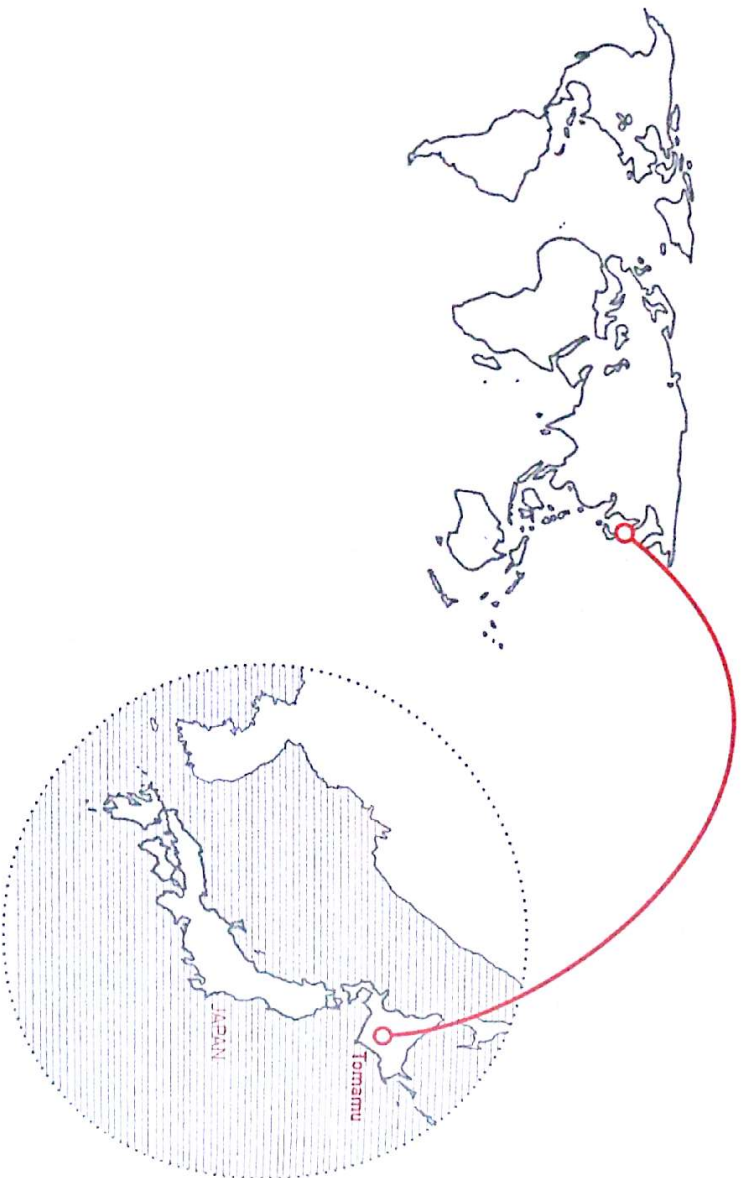


18

Church on the Water | 1985-88

Tadao Ando Architect & Associates
Tomamu, Hokkaido, Japan



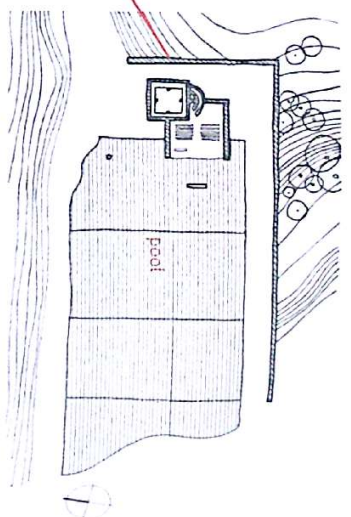
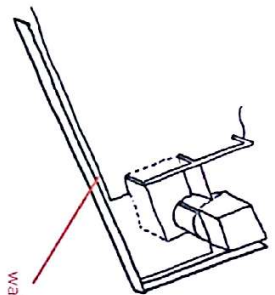
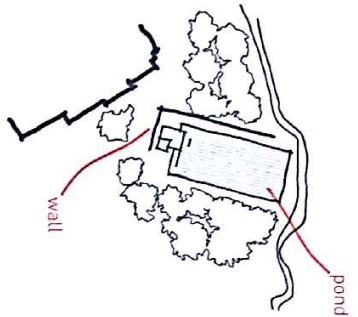
The Church on the Water was built to accommodate wedding ceremonies as part of the Alpha Resort Hotel in Tomamu, Japan. Its location and design are physically and visually distinct from the surrounding resort, reinforcing the difference between the sacred and the mundane.

Designed by Tadao Ando, the church brings drama to its response to the site and religious contexts. Boundaries such as inside/outside, sacred/mundane, darkness/light and traditional/modern are made apparent and then resolved in the design.

Selen Morkeç, Sze Nga Chan and Georgina Prenhall



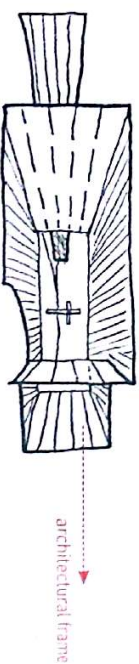
The context



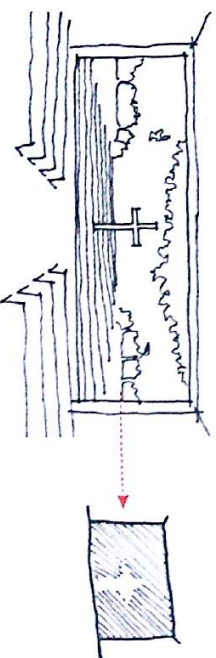
A 6.2-metre (20-foot) L-shaped concrete wall makes a boundary to separate the church from the nearby resort. The artificial pond created by a nearby stream, together with the Yubari Mountains north-west of the flat site, emphasize

the connection of the church with nature. The wall wraps around the rear and side of the chapel. The chapel itself sits on the bank of the pond, with a small encroachment into the water.

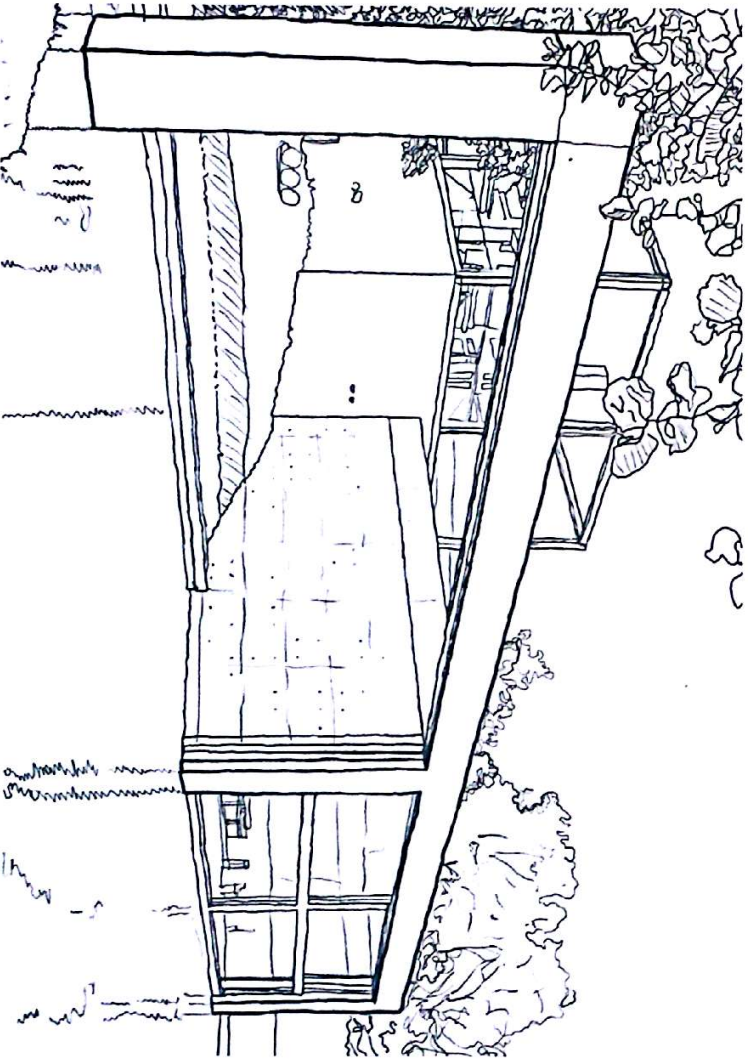
The L-shaped wall acts like a punctuation mark that distinguishes the sacred inner space from the mundane aspects of the exterior. It bounds the chapel and the artificial pond on two sides.



The cross in the water outside the building extends the symbolism beyond the architectural frame. A four-part glass wall slides away to leave no barrier between the interior and the water.

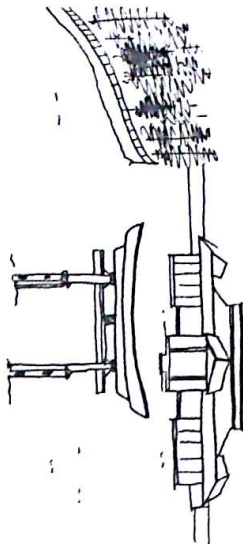


Seen from inside the chapel, the cross is framed within nature by walls. The changing seasons create different scenes.



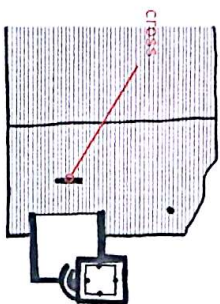
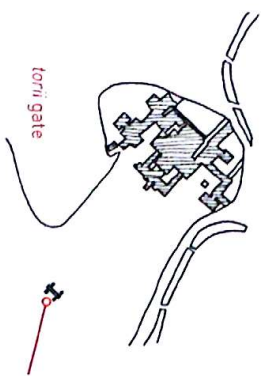
The precedent

The Church on the Water is an engagement of modern architecture with traditional Japanese aesthetics.



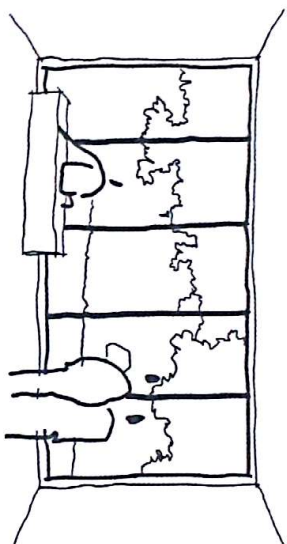
Torii gate, Itsukushima Shrine, Hiroshima, Japan

At the Itsukushima Shrine the torii gate is positioned in water far from the shore. Although distanced, it is situated on the central line of symmetry of the shrine as the central element in religious reflection.



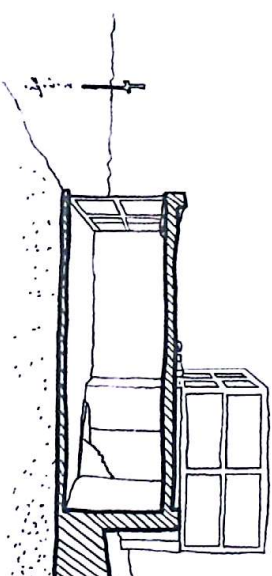
The relationship with water is an interpretation of traditional Japanese Zen Buddhist architecture, in which there is a dialogue between a building and surrounding nature through response and integration.

Similar to the layout of the torii gate, the main element of religious reflection (the cross) is positioned at a distance from the main chapel, on the water, along the central line of symmetry of the main structure.

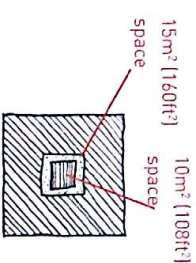


Yoshikien Garden, Nara, Japan

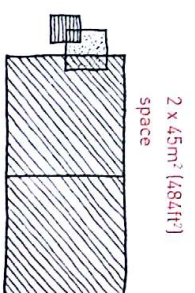
Framing nature is another gesture Ando quotes from traditional Japanese architecture.



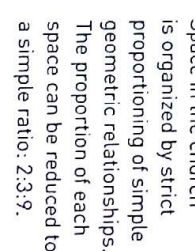
The main chapel 'frames' the landscape, prompting a relationship between the visitor and nature.



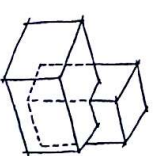
15m² (160ft²) space



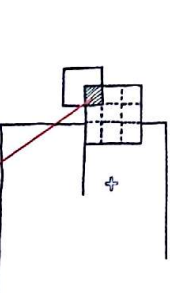
10m² (108ft²) space



2 x 45m² (484ft²) space

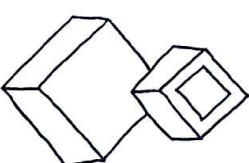
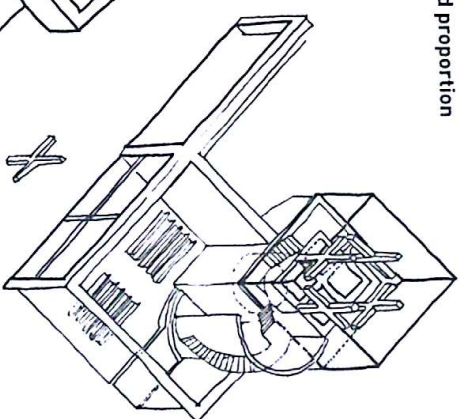


interlocking cubes

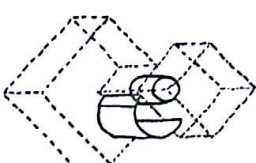


overlay: 5m x 5m (16ft x 16ft) area

Building form and proportion



Two separate cubes compose the main volume of the church. On one corner the larger cube is overlaid by a smaller cube.



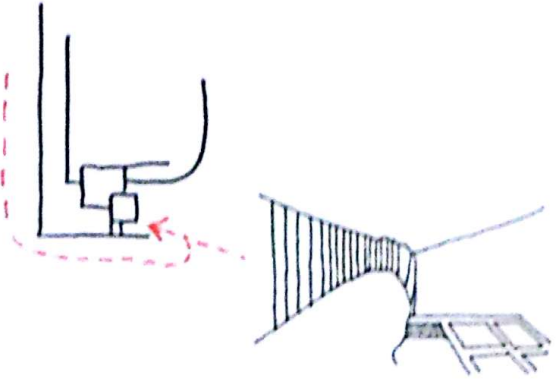
Spiral staircases fit between a cylindrical void and a curving wall to connect the spaces formed by the two cubes.

Space in the church is organized by strict proportioning of simple geometric relationships. The proportion of each space can be reduced to a simple ratio: 2:3:9.

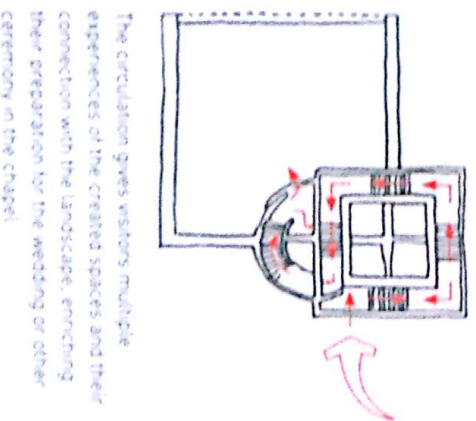
Two interlocking cubic volumes share a corner area of 25m² (270ft²). The larger cube is aligned along the central line of the pond. The cross on the pond sits along the centre line of the cube.

Space and levels

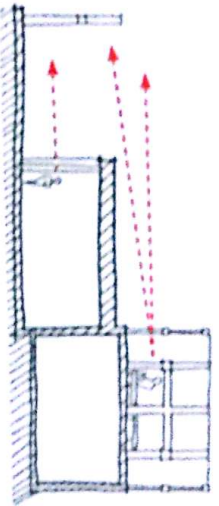
A path from the resort leads to an entrance flush with the wall so the continuity of the surface is maintained.



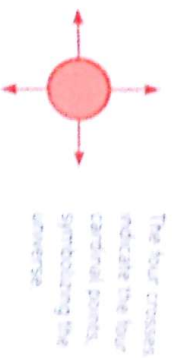
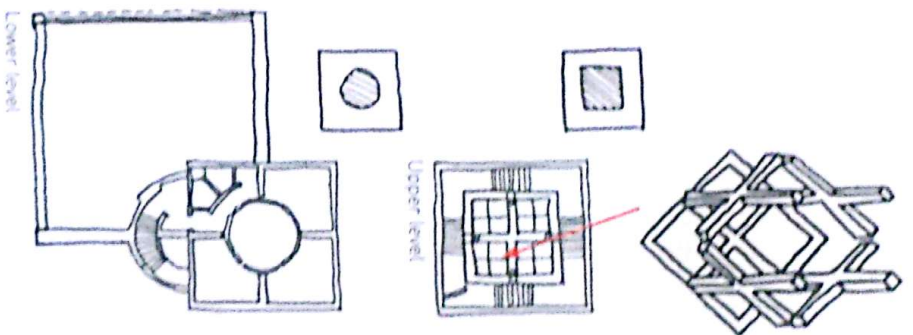
Inside, a corridor leads up steps to the top level, where four crosses are arranged in a square inside steel-framed glass walls. The route passes around the outside of these crosses. Steps then descend back to the level of the entrance but a wall prevents visitors returning to the outside. Instead, they turn right and descend a semicircular staircase to a lower level where there is a waiting room under the four crosses. They enter the back of the chapel faced with a view of the water and the solitary cross.



The circulation gives visitors multiple experiences of the created spaces and their connection with the landscape, enriching their preparation for the wedding or other ceremony in the chapel.



The cross in the water and its landscape setting is seen first as part of a wide vista from inside the glass box on the upper level. It is seen again as the focus of a carefully controlled view from inside the U-shaped enclosure of the chapel.

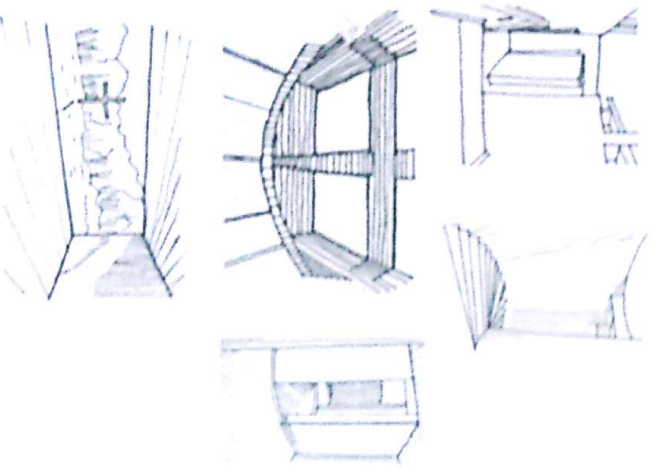


Space within a space

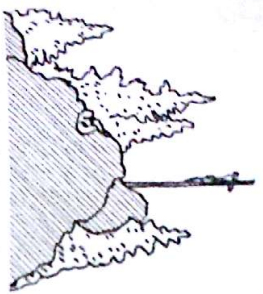
The space contains a smaller space within. The contained space slightly differs in form from the enclosing one. The formal contrast indicates a functional difference. The contained space reiterates the form of the enclosing space. Then, the contained space becomes a focus of attention.

Light

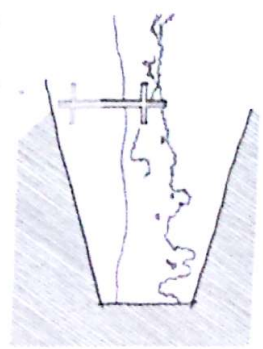
The contrast between light and darkness defines many zones of interest in the building. Daylight comes from the glass box on the top level and from the open wall of the chapel. The cylindrical void acts like a light tube from the glass box to the waiting room. Reflected light brightens the semicircular stairway. The water surface bounces light into the chapel.



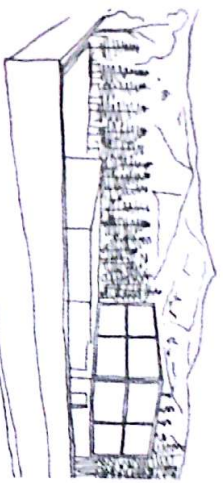
Experiential cohesion



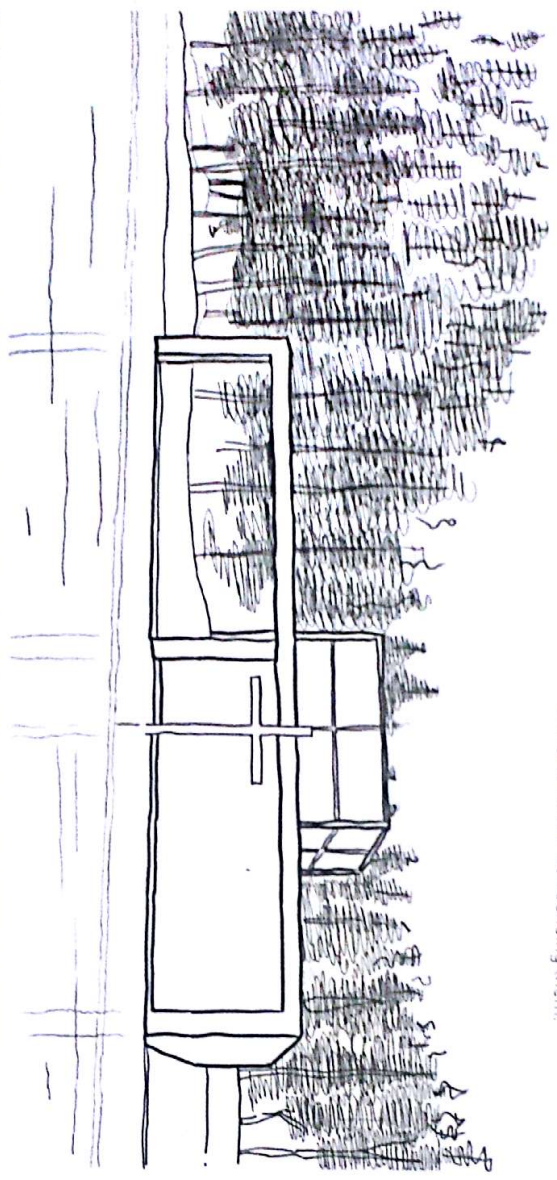
The cross in the landscape is an anonymous yet strong pastoral symbol of spirituality.



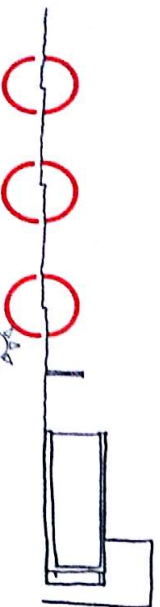
At the Church on the Water, the cross in water is framed within the landscape.



The strong geometrical form of the buildings stands in striking contrast with the amorphous forms of nature surrounding them.



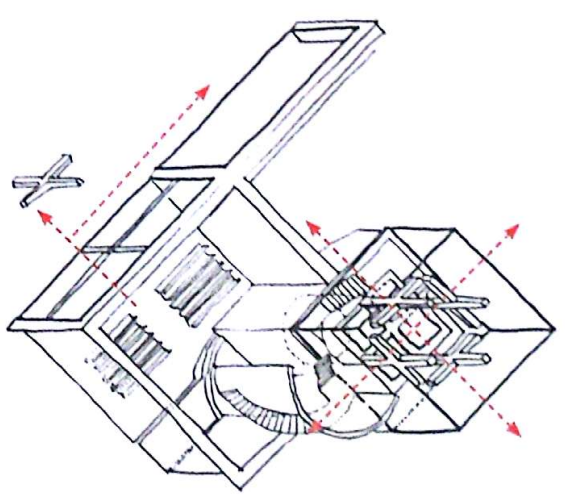
The depth of visual engagement with the surroundings stretches to a distant view of the mountains and beech trees.



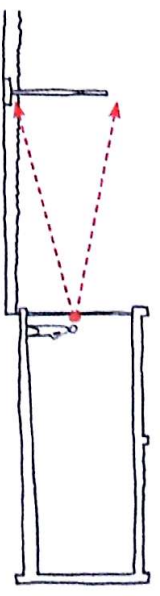
The pond has a tiered surface that creates soothing sounds as well as visual reflection and serves to enrich religious experience in both ways.



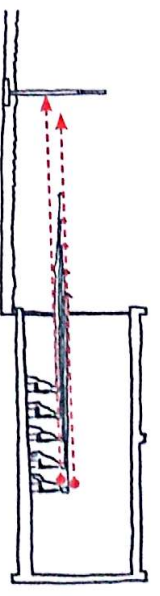
Natural light in the chapel is controlled, with the only glazed facade facing the pond. Reflected light from the water surface eliminates the need for additional lighting in the chapel space.



With the glass wall slid to one side, the chapel opens up to the cross and the landscape framing it. Inside/outside divisions are defied.

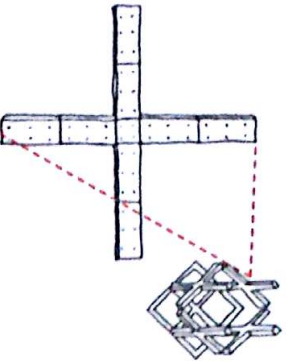


The contained space of the chapel extends into the landscape as the major object of the ritual (the cross) is embedded in the scene.

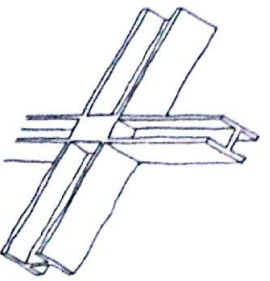


The slope of the chapel floor allows users to remain in direct visual contact with the cross and the landscape during religious rituals.

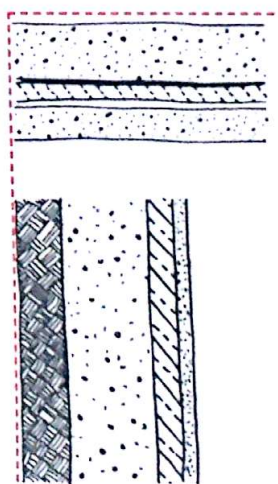
Response to the artificial



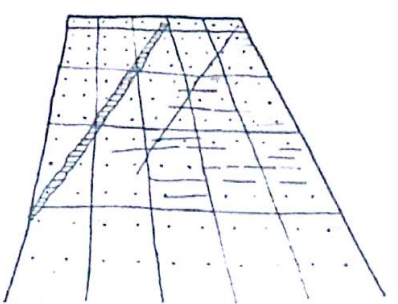
Concrete cross Located within the glass-walled box on the upper level of the chapel, its materiality and repetition in fourfold symmetry suggest community and strength.



H-section steel cross Located in the water away from the chapel, its materiality and isolation suggest difference and spirituality.

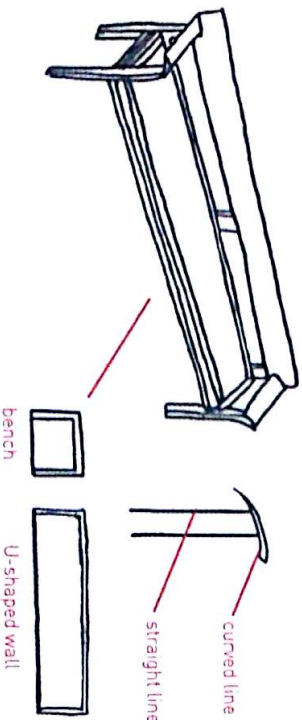


Walls and floors The granite floor seamlessly hides the underfloor heating. The thick double-layer concrete and granite insulated walls and floors ensure a comfortable internal temperature despite cold winters.

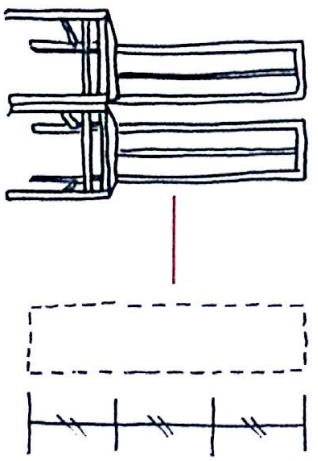


Concrete Concrete is the main material of the building. Its partly rough, partly reflective texture registers different qualities of light that enhance human experience.

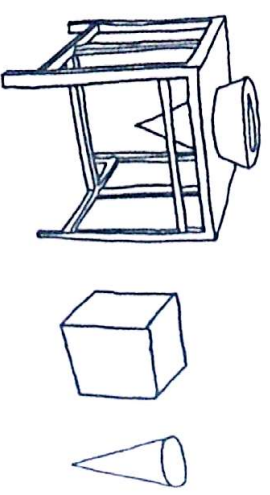
Furniture The overall integrity of form continues in the specifically designed furniture.



The benches, like the building elements, incorporate straight and curved lines. Their U-shaped form in plan repeats the form of the U-shaped wall of the chapel.



The height and width of the chairs are in 3:1 proportion.



The wooden stand for flowers in the chapel has two interlocking forms: a cube and a cone.