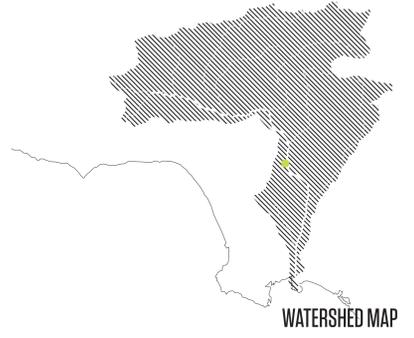


# [Re]generative design for THE LOS ANGELES RIVER

AMBER SWANSON  
HAJO NEIS  
THESIS STUDIO 2013



## REIMAGINING AN URBAN RIVERSCAPE IN LOS ANGELES

My proposal for this thesis studio will focus on a section of the Los Angeles River in the heart of downtown Los Angeles. The architectural intervention will be sited on a vacant parcel of land near Union Station, on the west side of the river channel. Here I am proposing an urban river interpretive center, a community gathering space with the focus of river habitat and flood education, and an urban playscape for the city. Its location, near the cultural neighborhoods of Chinatown, El Pueblo, and Little Tokyo allows it to access and celebrate the diverse history and culture of the area. This proposal will also take into account the larger urban context and could potentially become a key link in a network of parks and green-space and an important demonstration site for sustainable water management and multipurpose flood mitigation.

### THE RIVER PAST

Long before the Los Angeles River became what it is today, it was the life-source for early native American people, who lived on the banks of the river. Spanish settlers established a pueblo from which the young city was born. Ditches called zanja were constructed to carry fresh water into the city.



The unconstrained river supported a variety of fish and wildlife, and allowed water to absorb into the ground slowly.

### FLOODING



As the city developed close to the rivers edge, it was often devastated by unpredictable flooding. Eventually, the public demanded that something be done to prevent flooding, and Army Corps of Engineers set about channelization.

### CHANNELIZATION

The effort took 3,000,000 barrels of concrete, 147 million pounds of reinforced steel, and 10,000 workers. Two hundred and twenty six miles of rivers and tributaries, in addition to the river's fifty-two mile length were retrofitted to avoid further devastation.

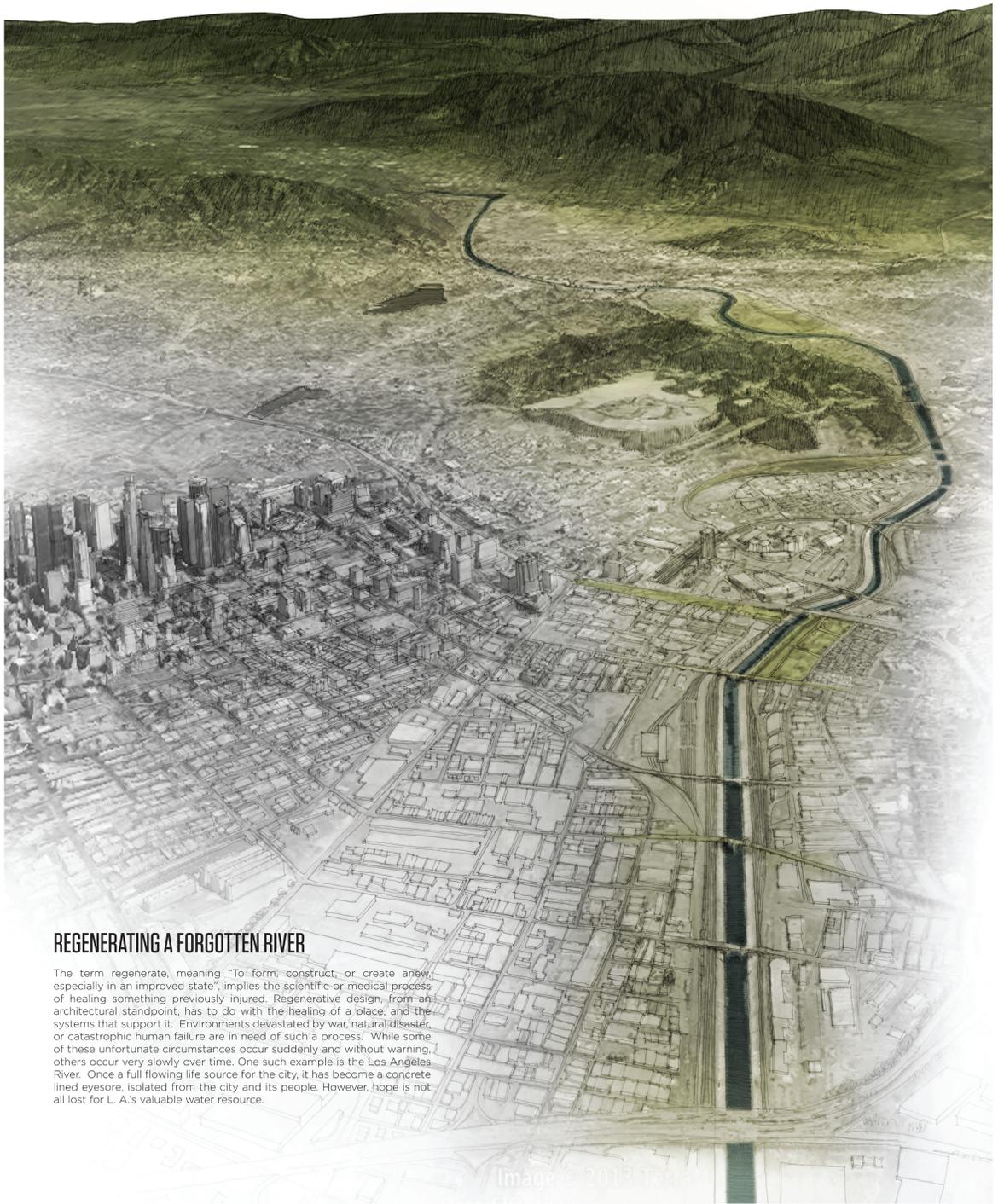
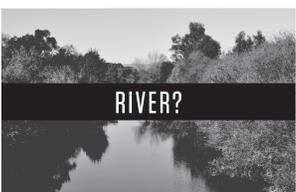


## RIVER STRATEGY

### A NETWORK OF WATER TREATMENT AND RECREATIONAL SPACE

Addressing the entire length of the Los Angeles River is challenging, as it covers a wide area and is managed by many different authorities. However, taking a regional approach to the river takes into account the entire watershed function and allows for a network of river related projects. Goals to improve the entire river include flood control improvements, which better address social and environmental needs; habitat improvements, such as removing concrete in some areas and native planting; recreational improvements such as parkspace and bike infrastructure.

## WHAT IS THE L.A. RIVER?



### REGENERATING A FORGOTTEN RIVER

The term regenerate, meaning "to form, construct, or create anew, especially in an improved state", implies the scientific or medical process of healing something previously injured. Regenerative design, from an architectural standpoint, has to do with the healing of a place, and the systems that support it. Environments devastated by war, natural disaster, or catastrophic human failure are in need of such a process. While some of these unfortunate circumstances occur suddenly and without warning, others occur very slowly over time. One such example is the Los Angeles River. Once a full flowing life source for the city, it has become a concrete lined eyesore, isolated from the city and its people. However, hope is not all lost for L. A.'s valuable water resource.

THE LOS ANGELES RIVER THROUGH DOWNTOWN

[Re]think  
FLOOD CONTROL



[Re]store  
NATURAL SYSTEMS

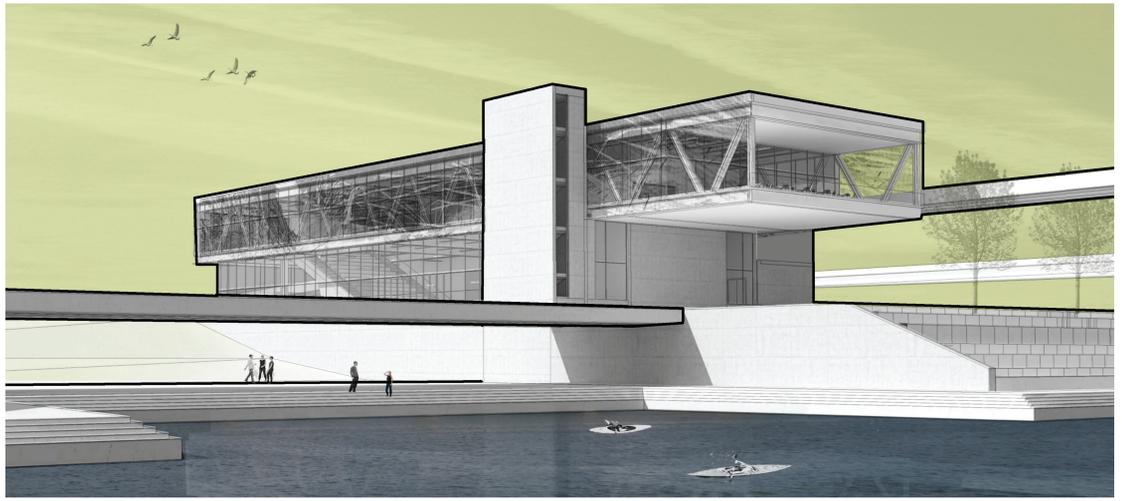
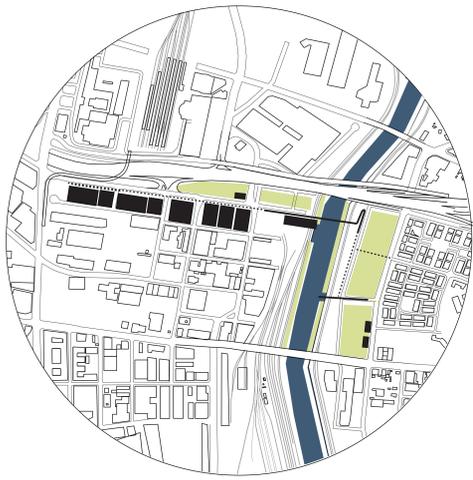


[Re]claim  
PUBLIC SPACE



[Re]imagine  
AN URBAN RIVERSCAPE



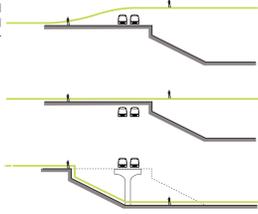
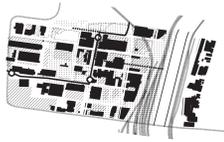


### THE SITE NOW

My proposal for this thesis studio focuses on a section of the Los Angeles River in the heart of downtown Los Angeles, sited on a vacant parcel of land near Union Station, on the west side of the river channel. Here I am proposing a river access point, pedestrian bridge and river interpretive center with the focus of river habitat and flood education, and an urban playscape for the city. Its location, near the cultural neighborhoods of Chinatown, El Pueblo, and Little Tokyo allows it to access and celebrate the diverse history and culture of the area.

### TRAINS AND ACCESS

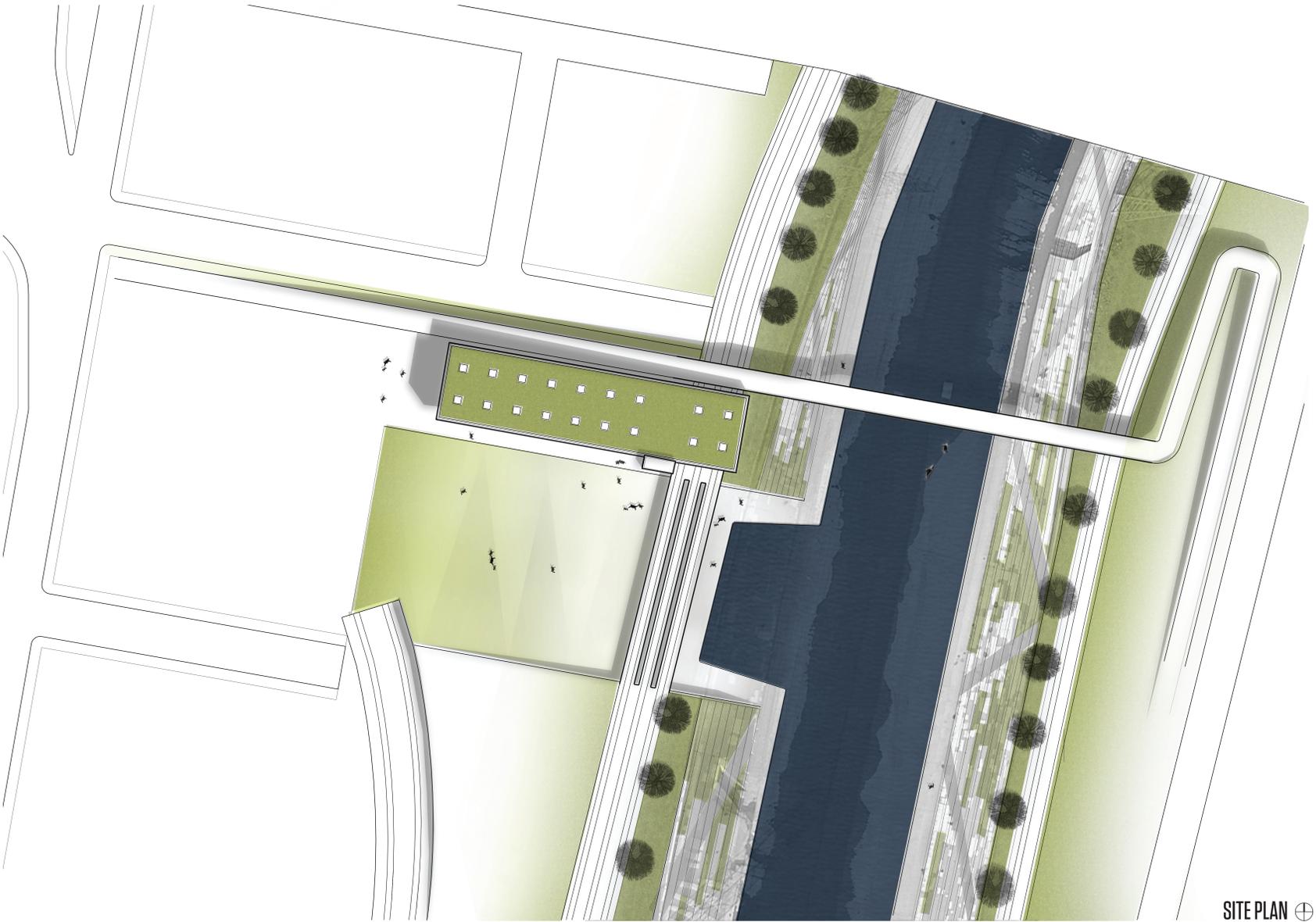
A major challenge to the access and revitalization of the river are the railroad lines which follow both banks of the river for a substantial portion of its length



## SITE STRATEGY

### ACHIEVING RIVER ACCESS DOWNTOWN

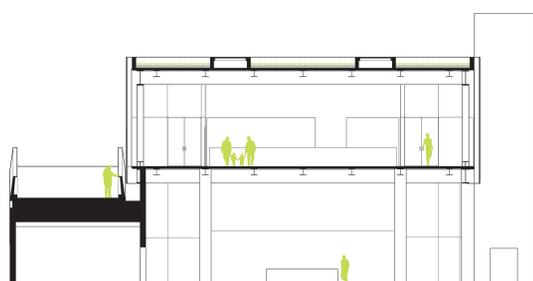
As is, site is polluted and vacant and the river is constrained by railroad tracks. However, the urban scale of the site can address several cultural neighborhoods and a network of public spaces and museums near downtown. Goals to improve this urban river edge include: river channel upgrades, which improve access, safety, and connectivity; building upgrades including converting parking space and developing appropriate buildings on public sites; recreational improvements, to support existing and future networks within a more urban context; transportation improvements, including connections to Union Station, bridges across the river and bike and pedestrian infrastructure.



SITE PLAN  
1/32"=10'



SITE SCHEME



TRANSVERSE SECTION  
1/8"=10'



### FUTURE PROJECT ROLE

As the river changes, so does the role of the river - interpretive center. Now instead of raising awareness of the river's potential, it celebrates its transformation and tells the story of its regeneration. In addition, it acts as a way finding device, directing people to the water's edge.



### CONCLUSION

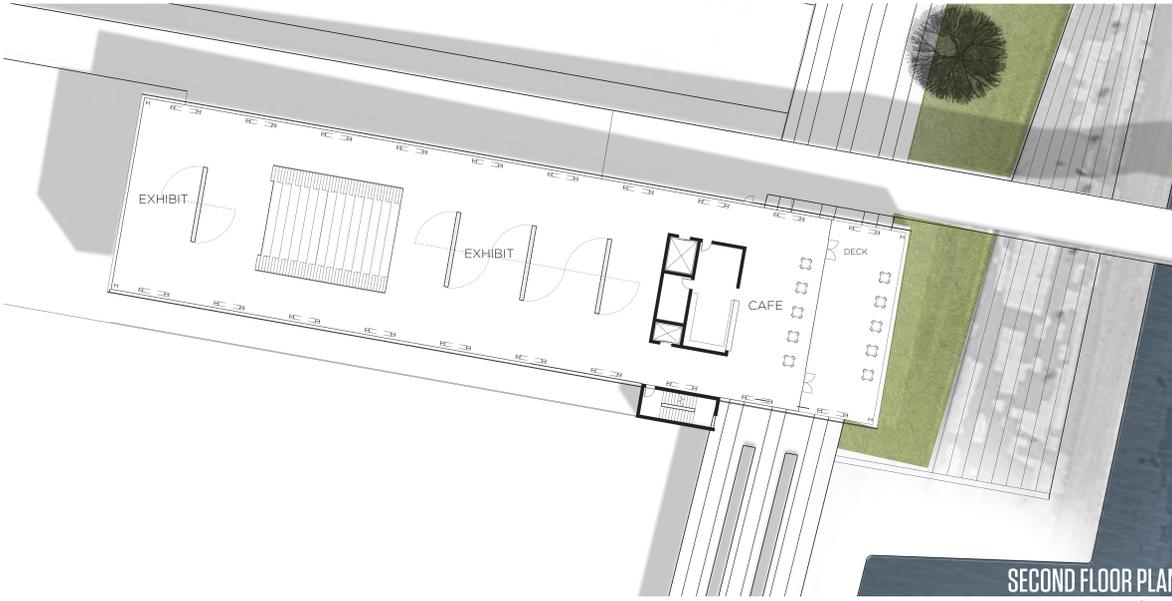
While a single urban design or architectural intervention may not be enough to save the entire LA River, providing examples of successful improvement is an integral step to its revitalization. If successful, the revitalization efforts of the L.A. River have the potential to increase economic development, improve the condition of surrounding neighborhoods, and give the city and the region a landmark to be proud of.



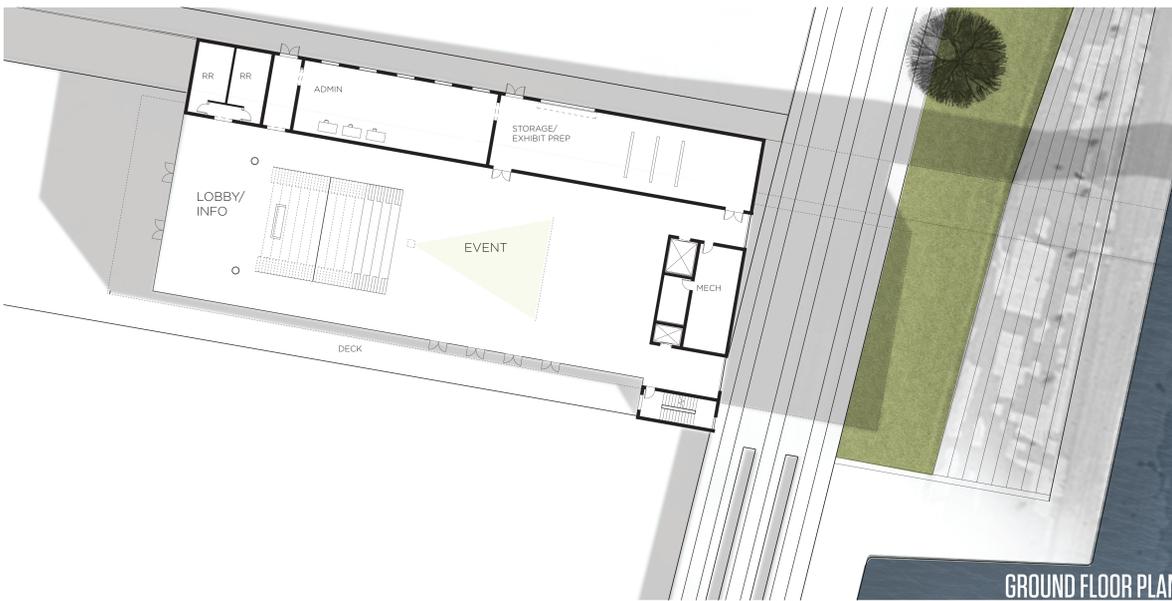
## BUILDING STRATEGY

### INTERPRETING THE LOS ANGELES RIVER

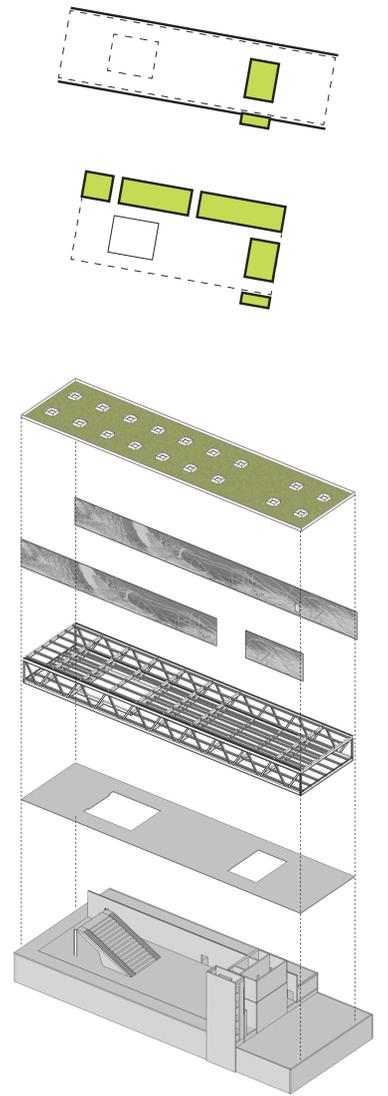
Unfortunately there are few positive or beautiful structures immediately adjacent to the building site, and access to the river is blocked by railroad tracks. However, this site is in a location that could become a key link in river and transportation networks. It can be seen from multiple approaches as one enters the city center. The program goals for the Los Angeles River Interpretive Center include the design of: exhibition space, flexible spaces with displays that tell the story of the Los Angeles River and educate about flood control; gallery space, for displaying art related to the river and culture of Los Angeles; an auditorium, for large gatherings, conferences, and events, and a river cafe that offers extensive views of the river.



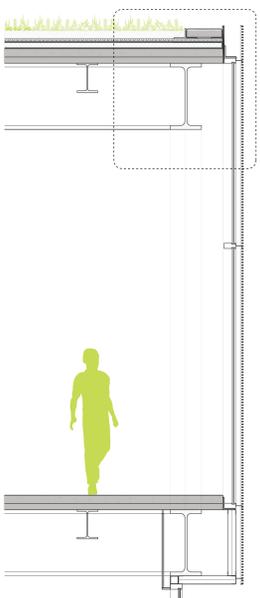
SECOND FLOOR PLAN  
1/8"=1'0"



GROUND FLOOR PLAN  
1/8"=1'0"



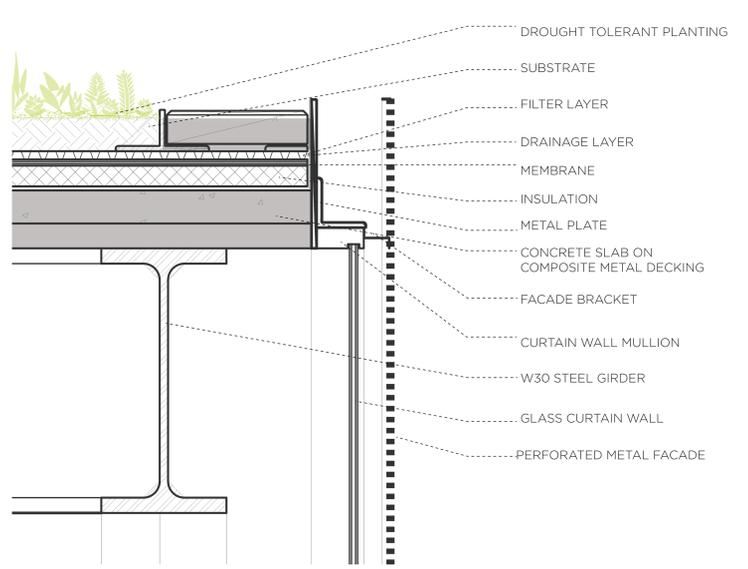
EXPLODED AXONOMETRIC



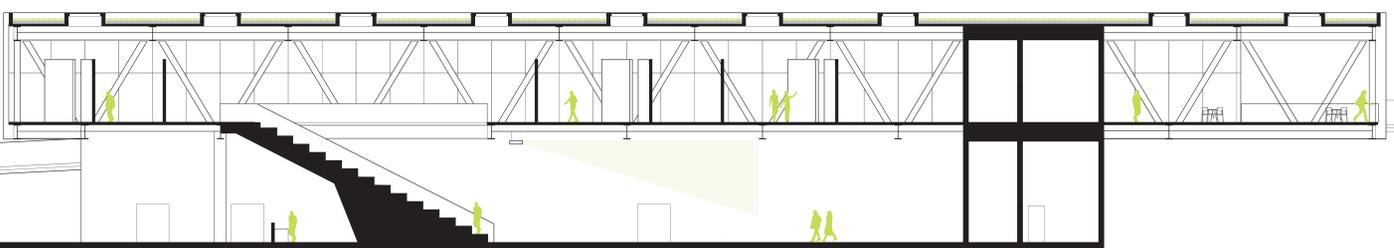
WALL SECTION  
1/4"=1'0"



FAÇADE DETAIL  
1/4"=1'0"



PARAPET DETAIL  
1"=1'0"



LONGITUDINAL SECTION  
1/8"=1'0"