

# 4

This study of relevant precedents is divided into 3 categories: typological; theoretical and structural. The aim was to get a better understanding of these projects, and to learn from them.

## PRECEDENTS

# 1 TYPOLOGICAL PRECEDENTS

## THE ORIGIN OF WELLNESS CENTRES - ANCIENT ROMAN PUBLIC BATHS

The public baths of the ancient Romans (*thermae*) may be viewed as the original wellness centres. These promoted overall health in two components – mind and body. Spiritual health was provided in temples, which were usually situated close to the baths, but did not form part of the bath precincts. Going to the *thermae* was a daily routine for both men and women in ancient Rome ([www.vroma.org](http://www.vroma.org)).

Visiting the baths was a daily ritual and followed a specific pattern. Patrons entered the baths and then changed from their street clothes into suitable clothes for exercising and bathing. Next, they took a dip in a cool pool, before proceeding to the central courtyard (*palaestra*) for exercise. This was surrounded by a shaded *portico*, which led to the baths. After exercising, dirt would be scrubbed off their bodies, and then they would proceed through the various rooms. These rooms ranged from warm dry rooms to hot wet rooms and cold wet rooms. After this leisurely bathing ritual, bathers would proceed to the gardens, library or lecture halls to listen to, and take part in debates, literary readings or to buy a snack from food vendors.

These baths thus had three parts – exercising, bathing and learning. They catered to the body and mind. The baths played an important part in daily life as social and cultural centres (Gardner. 1975: 225). This grouping of these uses together, and the procession through them, emphasised the interconnection between the mind and body, and epitomised the ideal Roman way of a healthy life (Yegül, 1992, cited in [www.vroma.org](http://www.vroma.org)).

## CONTEMPORARY WELLNESS CENTRES

The term ‘wellness centre’ may refer to more than one type of function. It is used to describe cosmetic salons; gymnasiums; and spas. This thesis supports the alternative, holistic view of wellness, and views ‘wellness centres’ as places where holistic wellness is promoted; that is, the health of mind, body and spirit.

Typically, wellness centres manifest in one of two types: in natural settings, with mainly spa and cosmetic functions, which are visited once a month; or in existing buildings in urban settings, which usually only cater to the body; with gyms or sports facilities. Many of these centres follow specific aesthetic approaches. The former is generally characterised by the excessive use of stone cladding and other ‘natural’ materials. In the South African context, these wellness centres are usually spas. They also tend to be overly symbolic, and to make excessive use of African traditional architectural styles or materials. These spas are visited at random intervals and do not form part of daily life.

The latter is mostly present abroad, and generally has a very clean and almost clinical character. Gleaming white tiles, bright colours and fluorescent lighting are employed to aid this clinical character, while the interior is no different to a typical gym. Although these wellness centres are visited routinely, they only cater to the needs of the body, and not the mind or spirit.

Neither of these typologies or aesthetics is relevant to holistic wellness. The architecture employed in most of these centres does not relate to healthy environments. Holistic wellness reaches beyond the human realm into the environmental realm, and this should be apparent in these buildings.

## THE ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION

This thesis proposes that holistic wellness practices should form part of people’s daily rituals. At the moment, visiting a gymnasium is a daily activity for the user. This activity can be expanded to not only include health of the body, but also of the mind and spirit.

The author proposes a return to the original concept of wellness as an all-encompassing state of being.

## TYOLOGICAL PRECEDENT: PROGRAMME

### **WELLNESS WAREHOUSE KLOOF STREET, CAPE TOWN**

**CRAIG MUNNIK (STORE DEVELOPMENT DESIGNER)  
2008**

The Wellness Warehouse was conceptualised by Sean and Carlos Gomes. It aims to promote a balanced lifestyle, combining aspects of mind, body and spirit in the programme. The Gomes brothers saw a gap in the market, and researched the concept extensively in South Africa and abroad ([www.sacs.co.za](http://www.sacs.co.za)).

The Kloof Street store is a 2000m<sup>2</sup> shop, which hosts six different departments - EatWell, a foodmarket and appliance store; BeWell, the health department, which hosts a pharmacy, NaturalMed dispensary and WellClinic; LiveWell, which supplies environmentally-friendly household products ; LoveWell, which supplies environmentally-friendly baby merchandise; LookWell which sells environmentally-friendly beauty products and houses the WellSpa; and MoveWell, which sells fitness equipment and beds and offers massages. All of these departments also house educational books and DVDs which relate to the topic of the department. This is the first project in the world to combine these different aspects in one shop ([www.sacs.co.za](http://www.sacs.co.za)). Homeopaths, nurses, dieticians and chiropractors are available at these departments to assist clients. The Warehouse promotes the use of natural medicine as a supplement or alternative to conventional medicine.

The concept behind the design for this store was 'shops within shops', which breaks up the monotony of the big space, and creates visual interest ([www.sacs.co.za](http://www.sacs.co.za)). Wellness Warehouse won the Retail Design and Development Award for the store design category in 2008, which is awarded by the South African Council of Shopping Centres (SACSC).

Wellness Warehouse specialises in organic produce and environmentally-friendly products and packaging. Here, wellness is not only promoted as a human requirement, but also stretches to include the natural environment, and its health. According to Gomes ([www.thepropertymag.co.za](http://www.thepropertymag.co.za)), "Our aim for clients is to promote balance in work and play, balance in relationships with themselves, others and the environment." This balance epitomises the concept of holistic wellness.



Fig 4.1 INTERIOR OF WELLNESS WAREHOUSE



Fig 4.2 UMKHUMBANE COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE - CHARACTER (top), COURTYARDS (bottom) + CIRCULATION (right)

## TYPOLOGICAL PRECEDENT: HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

### UMKHUMBANE COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE CATO MANOR, KWAZULU-NATAL

#### ROBERT JOHNSON ARCHITECT AND ASSOCIATION IN ASSOCIATION WITH ZAI CONSULTANTS

1993

The Umkhumbane Community Health Centre is a public health facility with an alternative view on health. The centre was conceptualised around the idea of a 'place of wellness', and focuses on health instead of illness. This centre combines multi-faceted aspects of health, and offers counselling on such elements as nutrition, diet and exercise, and also offers urban agriculture. It aims to be a place of "learning, teaching and intellectual exchange" (Anon, 2005: 38).

Different functions are accommodated, such as a maternity unit; eye clinic; pharmacy; physiotherapy and dentistry departments; and occupational therapy workspace. It also offers traditionally 'non-medical' functions, such as an exercise lawn, a community vegetable garden; seminar rooms, research facilities and community rooms (Anon, 2005: 1).

The architects conceived a new health centre typology, which relates to the human condition, and feels healthy instead of sterile. The organisation is also much more straightforward than that of typical health centres.



Fig 4.3 LAYOUT - PLAN 1:1000

The building is organised along a central spine, from which the central functions branch off. Alternating with the health facilities are pockets of open space, which allow sunlight and fresh air into the building, and allows for a connection with nature. The architecture engages the users, instead of alienating them. This results in “places so celebratory that church assemblies gather there on Sundays” (Saunders, 2006:17).

The Umkhumbane Health Centre exhibits health as an everyday activity. Its multi-functional programme encompasses wellness as a holistic concept: the focus is on health instead of illness (Saunders, 2006:17). This building invites the elements of nature into it, and utilizes them as healing elements. This association with nature does away with the clinical sterility which is usually associated with health centres, and creates a humane, healthy environment.

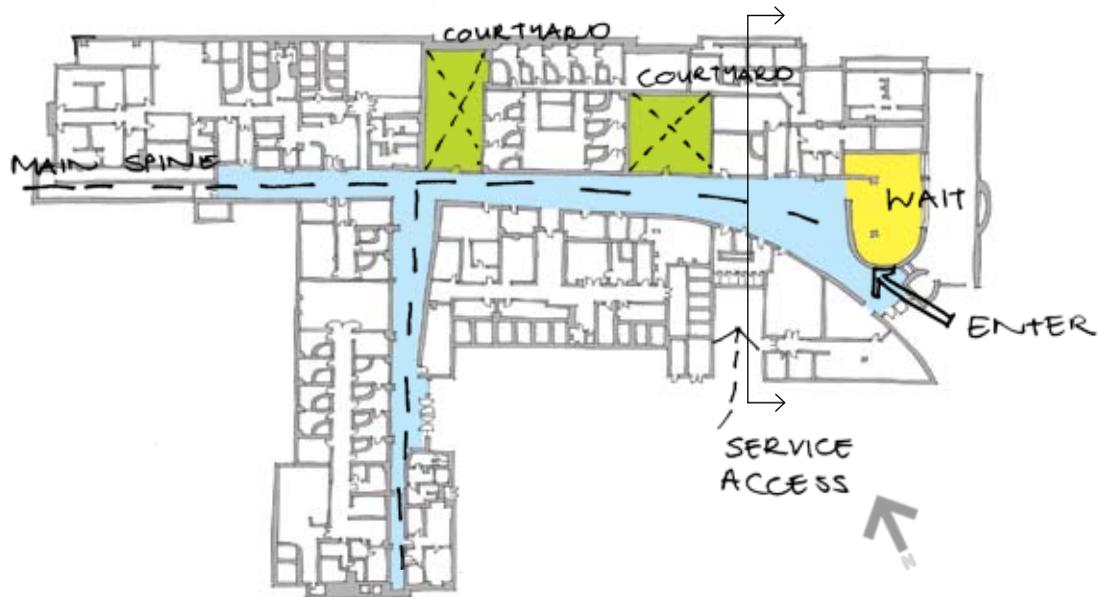


Fig 4.4 CIRCULATION - PLAN 1:1000

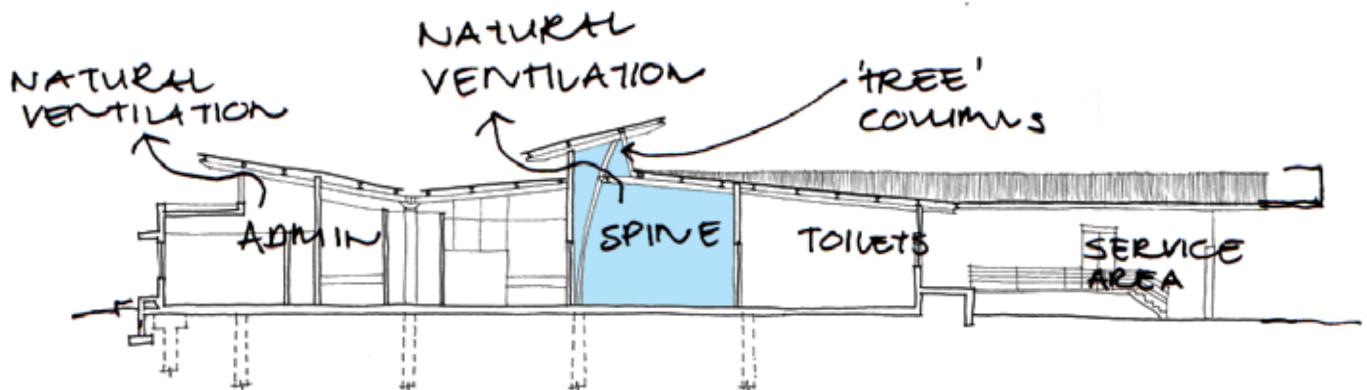


Fig 4.5 LAYOUT - SECTION (n.t.s)

Fig 4.6 LIGHT-FILLED SPACES; THRESHOLDS



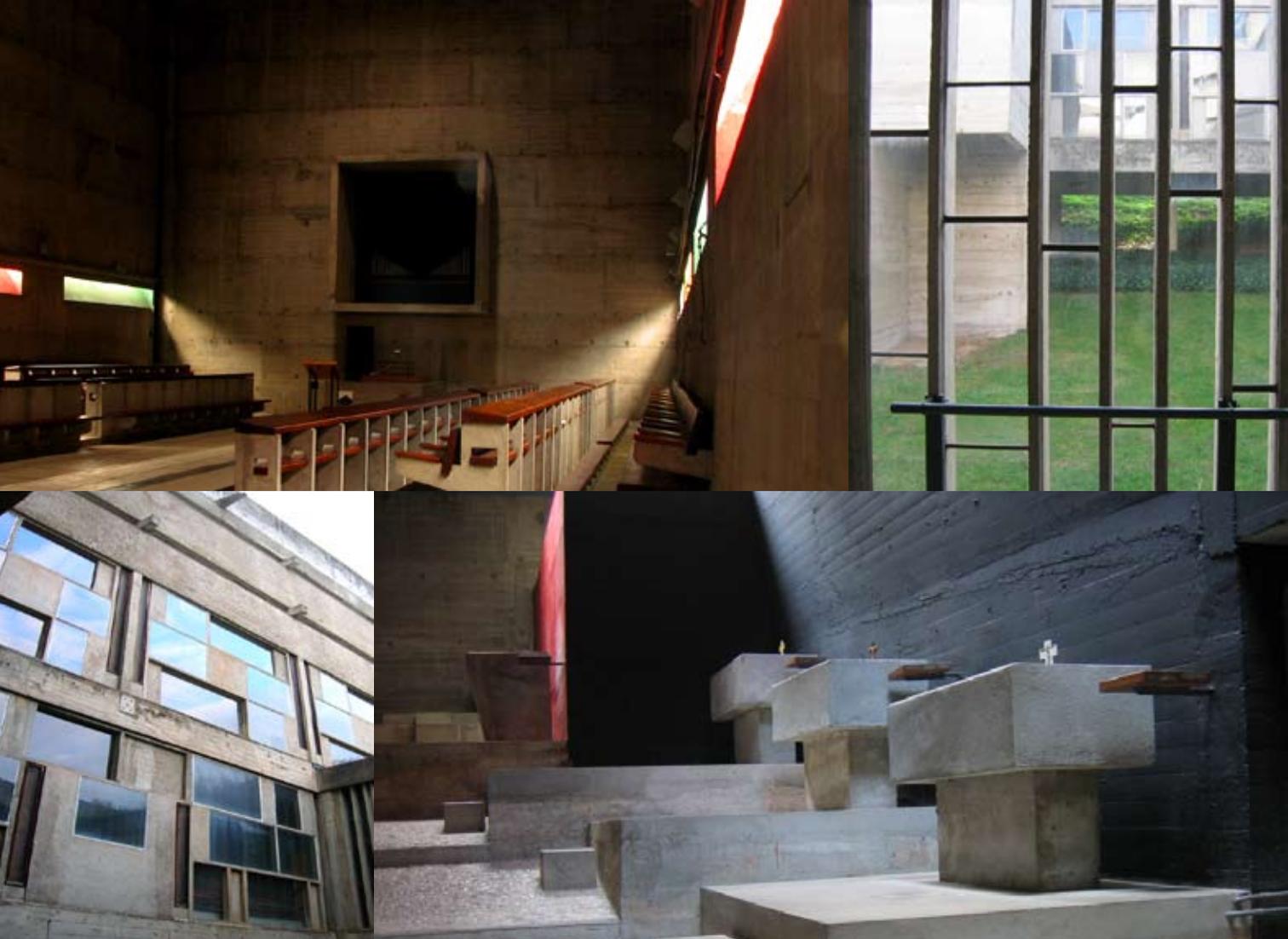


Fig 4.7 LA TOURETTE -DIFFERENT QUALITIES OF LIGHT (top + middle); VIEW FROM THE SOUTH (bottom)

## 2 THEORETICAL PRECEDENT

### MONASTERY OF SAINTE MARIE DE LA TOURETTE EVEUX-SUR-L'ARBRESLE, NEAR LYON, FRANCE

ATELIER LE CORBUSIER  
1952-59

The Dominican Order of the Catholic Church commissioned Le Corbusier in 1952 to design a monastery near Lyon; a place of retreat, prayer and study (Copans, 2001). The site is situated outside the town on a hill, which is surrounded by open fields on the south and west side, and by trees on the north and east. The site has a view over the valley towards the town. It houses a training school for monks; living quarters (cells); contemplation spaces; a library and a refectory. In addition to these private functions, more public functions are provided, including a church and town hall. Dominican monks live a life of isolation and contemplation, but also serve the community in which they live. Le Corbusier emphasises this duality as juxtaposition in the design of the monastery.

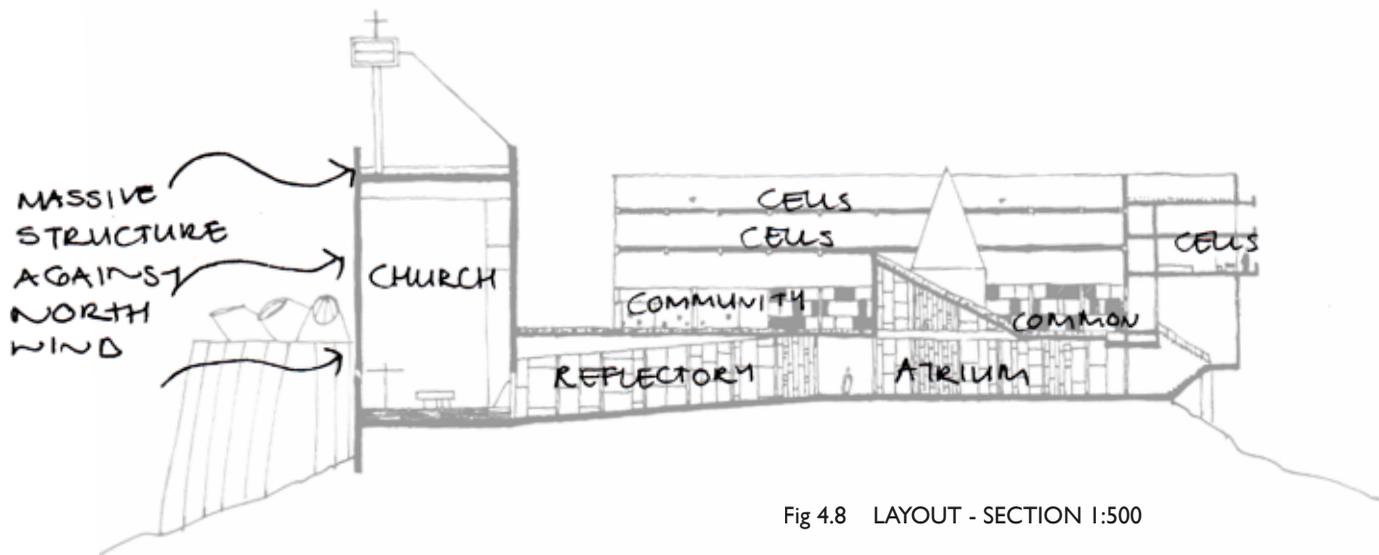


Fig 4.8 LAYOUT - SECTION 1:500

### LEVELS OF PRIVACY

The plan of the monastery is a simple form - a courtyard building, with its northern wing (the church) slightly disconnected from the rest of the building. The church, a public building, is physically and psychologically separated from the monastery. Its expression is different from that of the monastery – it is a concrete box with no apparent openings. The façades of the monastery are mostly glazed. This disconnection emphasises the contrast between the public church and the private monastery.

Another layer of privacy is between the individual and the collective. Collective spaces which host interaction, such as the refectory, have unrestricted views towards the landscape. The monks' private cells are long, narrow spaces which are orientated directly towards the landscape, and offer framed views. This treatment of varying levels of privacy and interaction is visible on the north elevation.

Traditionally in monasteries, the courtyard is an open space surrounded by a colonnade which leads to the surrounding wings. This courtyard, however, deviates from the tradition in that it is not open, but houses bridges connecting the different wings. Varying conical shapes form part of this walkway. This creates visual tension, and is in stark contrast with the quiet landscape which surrounds the building. This juxtaposition signifies the contrast between man (courtyard) and nature (outside). Man is chaotic, while nature is calm (Copans, 2001).

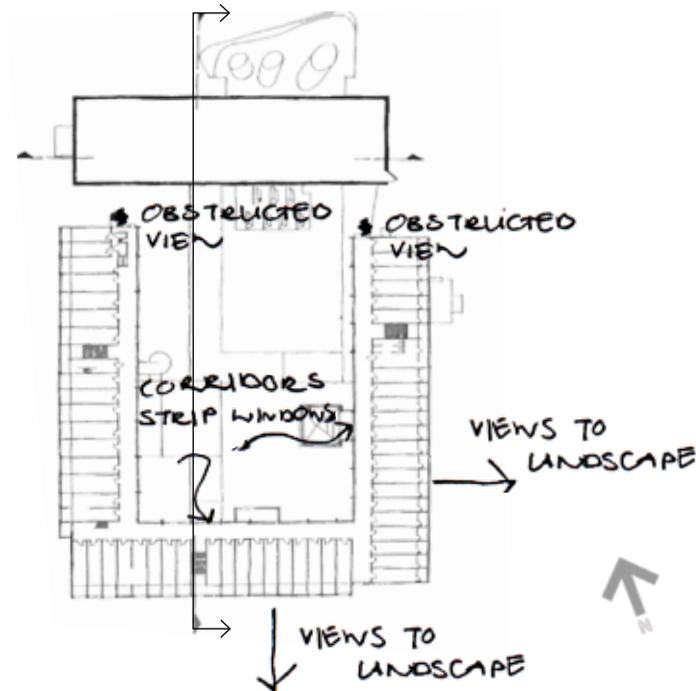


Fig 4.9 VIEWS - OBSTRUCTED, FRAMED + UNLIMITED - PLAN 1:1000

## LIGHT + NATURE

Light and nature are interwoven in the monastery at La Tourette. Each part of the building is articulated according to the time of day that it receives light. Le Corbusier refers to this as the “orchestration of light”, which expresses progressive degrees of intimacy (Millet, 1996: 76). Le Corbusier used daylight to emphasize the connection between the monks and nature, and to facilitate their contemplative lifestyle.

At the entrance bridge to the monastery, the flood of daylight and the view towards the landscape create a symbolic break from the secular world. The church also highlights this disconnection. The monks access the church via the walkway, while the public access it on the north eastern corner through a small entrance. The interior of the church is dark, with light in specific locations. Upon entering the church, visitors have to wait a moment to adjust their eyes to the contrast with the bright outside light. This serves as a psychologically separation between the church and the monastery (Millet, 1996:79).

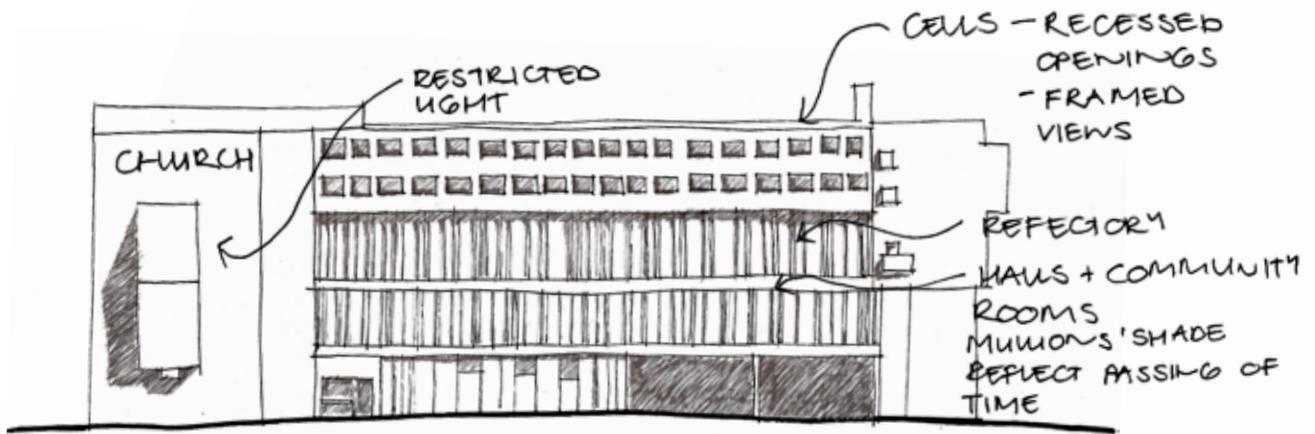


Fig 4.10 QUALITY OF LIGHT - WEST ELEVATION 1:500

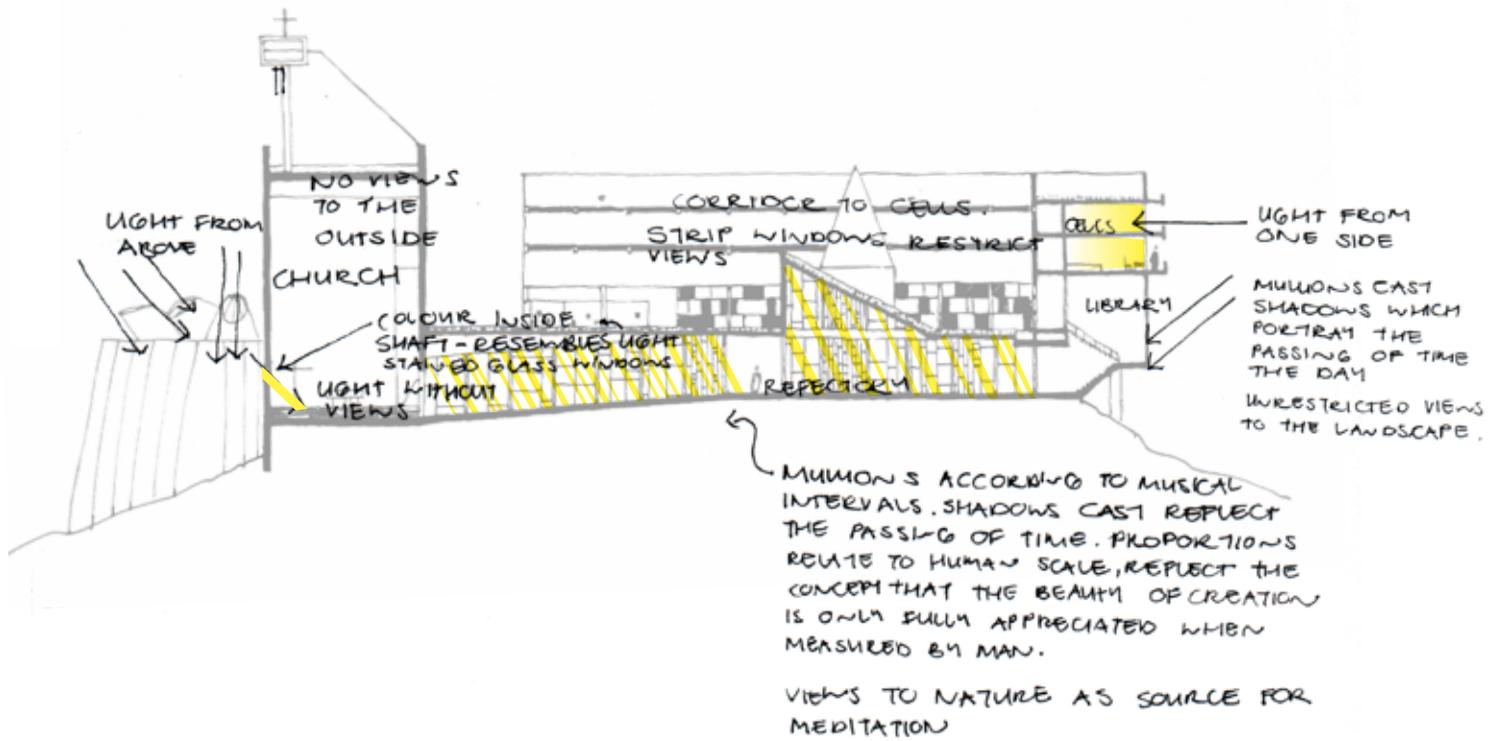


Fig 4.11 QUALITY OF LIGHT - SECTION 1:500

In the church, light is mostly from above (skylights) and from horizontal and vertical slits in the walls. Vertical slits show the rising of the sun, while horizontal slits catch the light of the setting sun (Millet, 1996: 77). The interior surfaces of the horizontal slits are painted in bright colours and the light they shed resembles the light cast by stained glass windows in traditional churches. The canonical hours which are strictly adhered to in the Catholic Church are made more profound by the awareness of the time that the light of the rising sun sheds on prime (the first service of the day; held at sunrise) and the setting sun on the final service, the vespers.

Light creates hierarchy in this austere space. The Chapel of the Holy Sacrament is perceptually the brightest part of the church, due to three light-cannons above it (Millet, 1996: 78). This also serves as a division between the congregation and the monks. These light cannons are directed to shed direct sunlight on the Holy Sacrament at noon and at equinoxes – another way in which light exhibits the patterns of nature and highlights the significance of the occasion.

Many different methods of allowing light into a building are present in the church. At the public entrance, a vertical slit shows the rising sun; two slots separate the northern part of the church from the main body; and three punctures surround the confessional (Millet, 1996: 78). Behind the monks' pews, horizontal slits let in light. Above the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament at the centre of the church, three light-cannons allow diffuse light in. The nave is defined by light from light-cannons above the sacristies on both sides. Conical skylights are present above the private altars. All of these allow different qualities of light to enter the church.

Le Corbusier used views of nature to emphasize man's connection to nature. This is based upon the idea that nature can only be appreciated when viewed in relation to man (Millet, 1996:77). Various parts of the monastery react differently towards nature. The monks' cells have balconies which focus on and reach out to nature. The refectory and chapter have glass walls, of which the mullions reflect musical intervals. Movement of the shadows cast by these mullions make the users aware of the passing of the day. This allows for the study of nature as a source of contemplation.

Light in the student brothers' and common rooms is more subdued. Only the interior wall facing the courtyard is glazed, and is shaped by a checkerboard configuration of glazed and opaque panels, which diffuse light entering the room (Millet, 1996: 78).

Light quality and views change as the user moves through the monastery. These elements reflect the use of the spaces they occupy, and add to the experience of those spaces.

## **CONCLUSION**

Monks living in the monastery are disconnected from the contemporary world and its inhabitants, yet are connected to the environment. Le Corbusier utilized light to emphasise this connection of man to nature.

La Tourette illustrates how subtle changes of light or views can give meaning to a space, and can support the function of that space. It illustrates how light possesses metaphysical qualities – it may be used to create hierarchy; to lend an air of mystery, as in the church; to connect the user to the patterns of nature, as in the refectory; or to emphasize levels of privacy, as in the entrance to the monastery.

This central concept of light and nature is visible in the plan, section and elevation of La Tourette, and exhibits the potential that lies in these subtle elements.



Fig 4.12 WESTERN FACADE; SOUTHERN FACADE; INTERNAL COURT YARD; INTERNAL VIEW OF CONNECTING BRIDGE (to bottom)

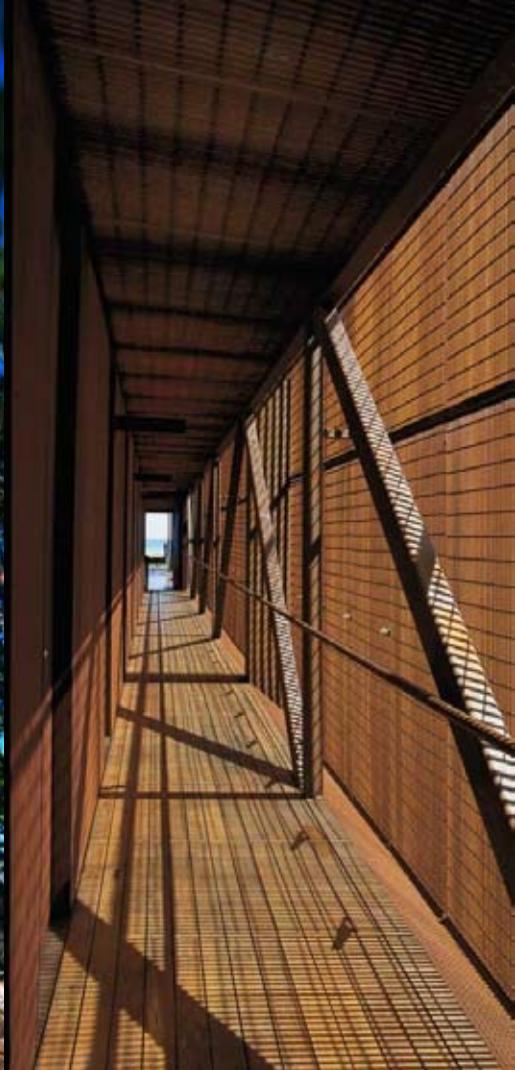


Fig 4.13 WEEKEND HOUSE - VIEW FROM THE EAST (top left); SKIN (right top + bottom); BRISE SOLEIL (bottom left)

### 3 STRUCTURAL PRECEDENT: SKIN

#### Weekend House at St Andrew's Beach Victoria, Australia

Sean Godsell Architects  
2006

The clients of this project requested a weekend retreat which would reconnect them to nature after they'd spent many hours in air conditioned, fluorescent-lighted office spaces during the week (Schittich, 2007: 502). The architect conceptualised a linear building, which reaches out to the views on both ends. The building is organised around a corridor on the northern edge, which also acts as a ventilated skin and offers solar protection to the western façade. The width of the building is wrapped in a weathered steel mentis grating skin.

The corridor is covered by the weathered steel grating skin, which exposes its users to the elements of nature as they pass between rooms.

#### STRUCTURE

The structure of the building is from pre-oxidised steel to accommodate the weathering process of the weathered steel. Welded connections are used throughout. A simple material palette of weathered steel, timber and glass is employed throughout the building.

The main structure consists of two open web trusses which support the floor and roof. This structure is supported by four square pre-oxidised steel columns which carry the load to the ground (see fig.4.14).

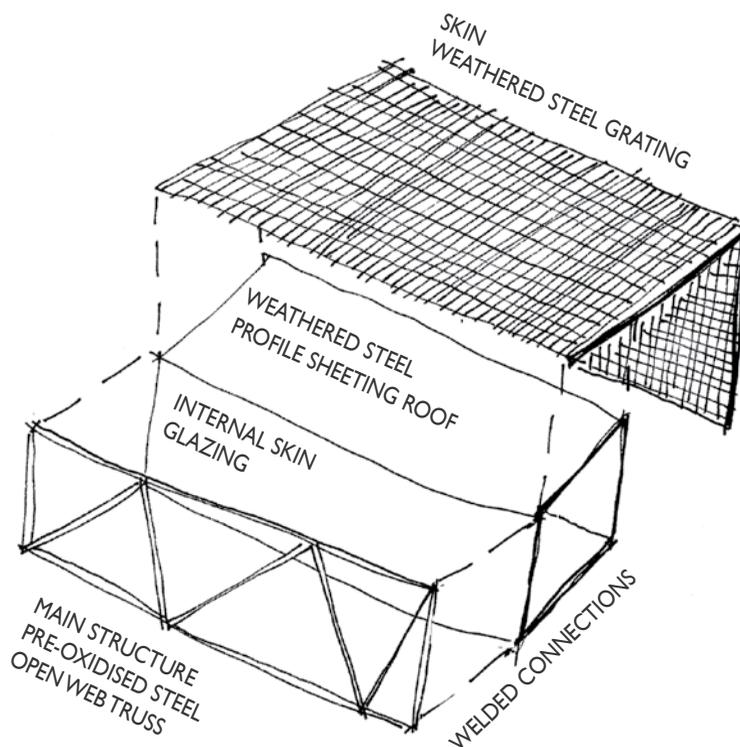


Fig 4.14 DIAGRAM OF STRUCTURE