

Designing efficiencies

A quiet office building on an arterial highway stands as an example of the layered efficiencies inherent to a pragmatic approach, modest materials and respectful client-contractor-consultant relationships



Design

Nitin Killawala

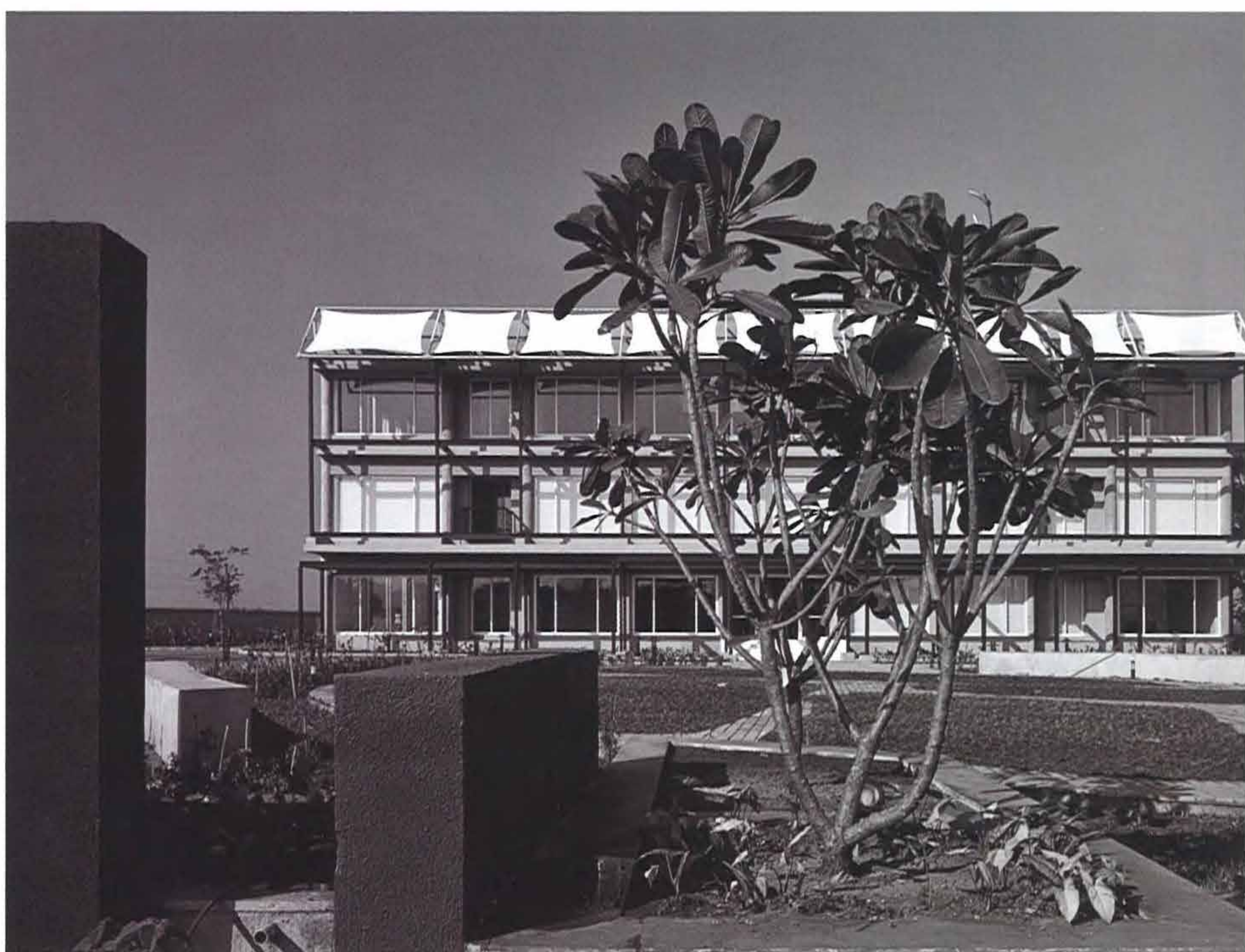
Text

Kanu Kartik Agrawal

Photos

Dinesh Mehta

Valsad



Speed is the defining feature of the new urbanisation. According to the cultural theorist Paul Virilio, cultural and technological change is propelled by the pursuit of speed. This results in 'dromocracy' a word coined from the Greek word *dromos*, both a verb and noun which means to race as well as a roadway. Dromocracy which gives primacy to speed in society is manifested in the proliferation of offices and industries along national road networks, giving rise to a corridor urbanism that is fast defining the edge and beyond-edge conditions that link cities to villages to towns. The DCPL building designed by the Mumbai-based architect Nitin Killawala is located on a busy highway in Valsad, along the so-called Golden Corridor that connects Ahmedabad to Mumbai. The site abuts farmland and public property introducing a relatively new strand of urbanity within an older infrastructural-agricultural fabric.

The building avoids the fugitive shapes of typical suburban office buildings. Instead, it invokes the *Urform* of the box-with-atrium, an office archetype lost in the mire of much contemporary construction. This typology is resurrected with a passing nod to Venturi and Scott Brown's decorated shed in its separation of function and symbolism. The two-meter deep exterior metal frame is designed to be covered by plants to buffer the building from sound and dust. But for now it is a spectral billboard, an empty signifier, where notions of climate and shade, growth and commerce, can be projected. It brings back into discussion a modernist trope devised in the tropics, the pergola cum brise soleil, which has slowly returned to India in a glamorized form via the 'Beyond-Bawa' school of design.

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Internal corridors, main staircase and liftwell are all illuminated in even natural light; climate control is achieved with partial and total enclosure of zones within the office building.

Above: The facade is designed to carry planting which will protect the building from highway pollution, dust and noise



Architect/Interior Designers
**NITIN KILLAWALA & ASSOCIATES,
MUMBAI**

Design Principal
NITIN KILLAWALA

Design Team
KETAN MISTRY

General Contractor
DESAI CONSTRUCTION

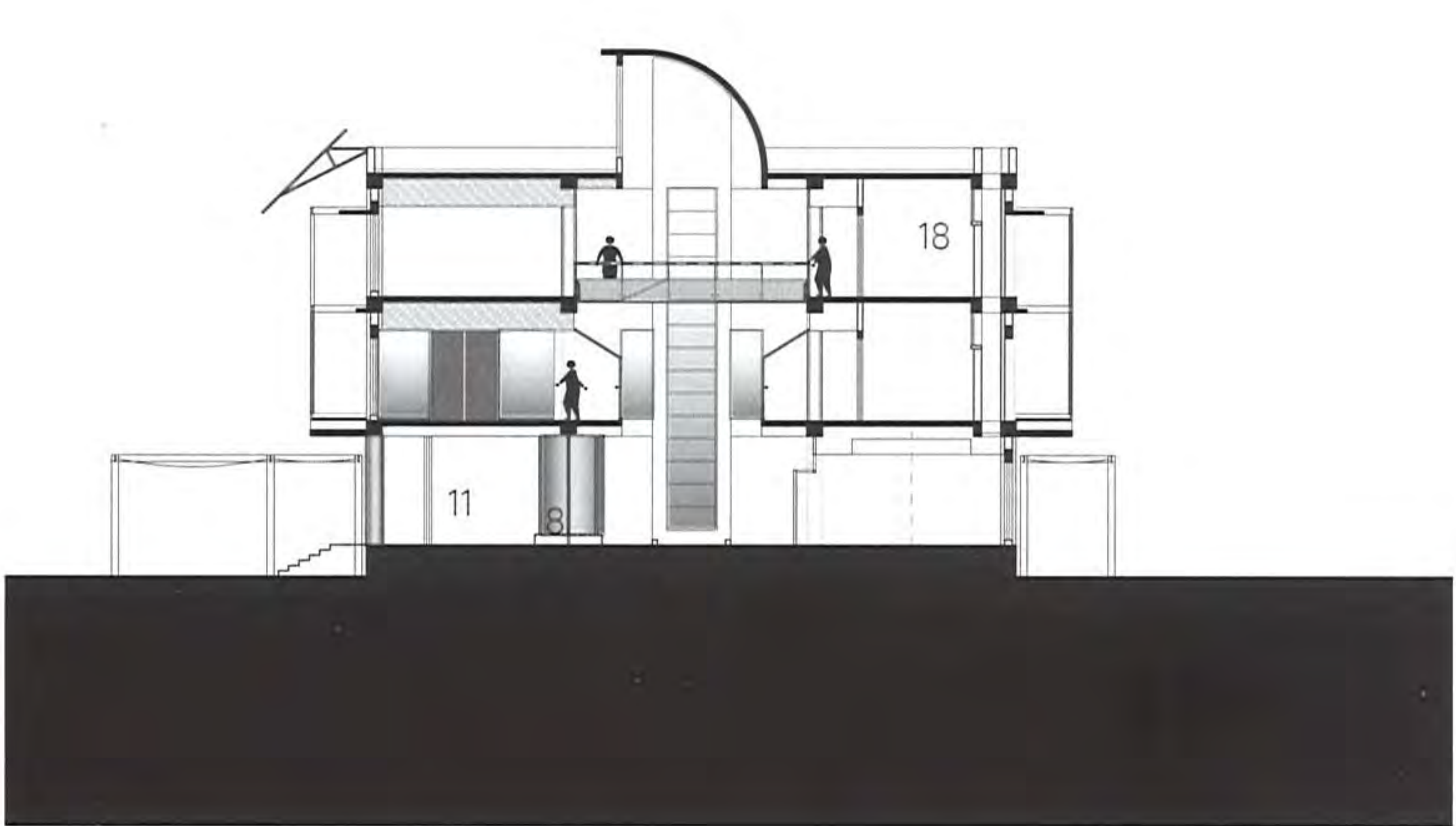
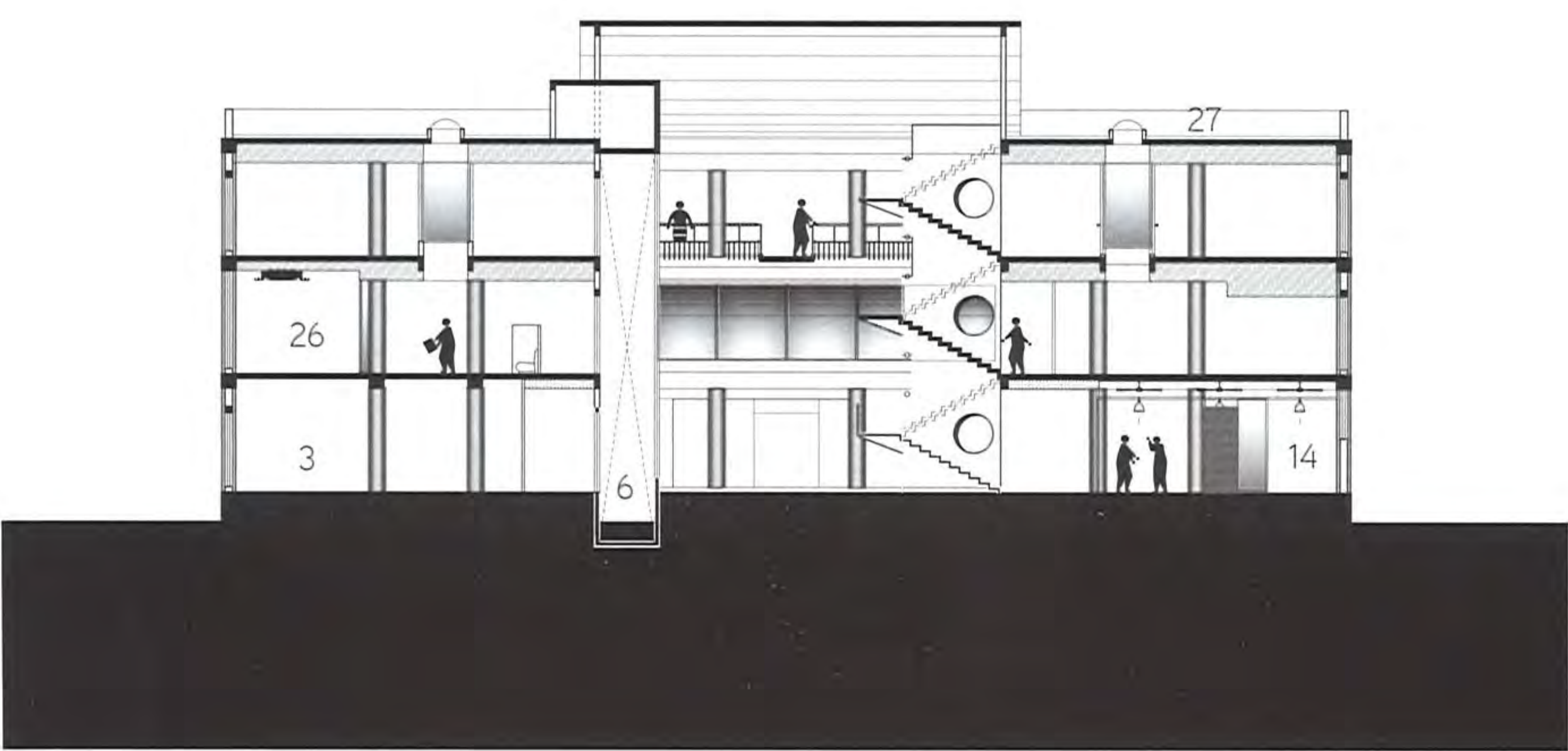
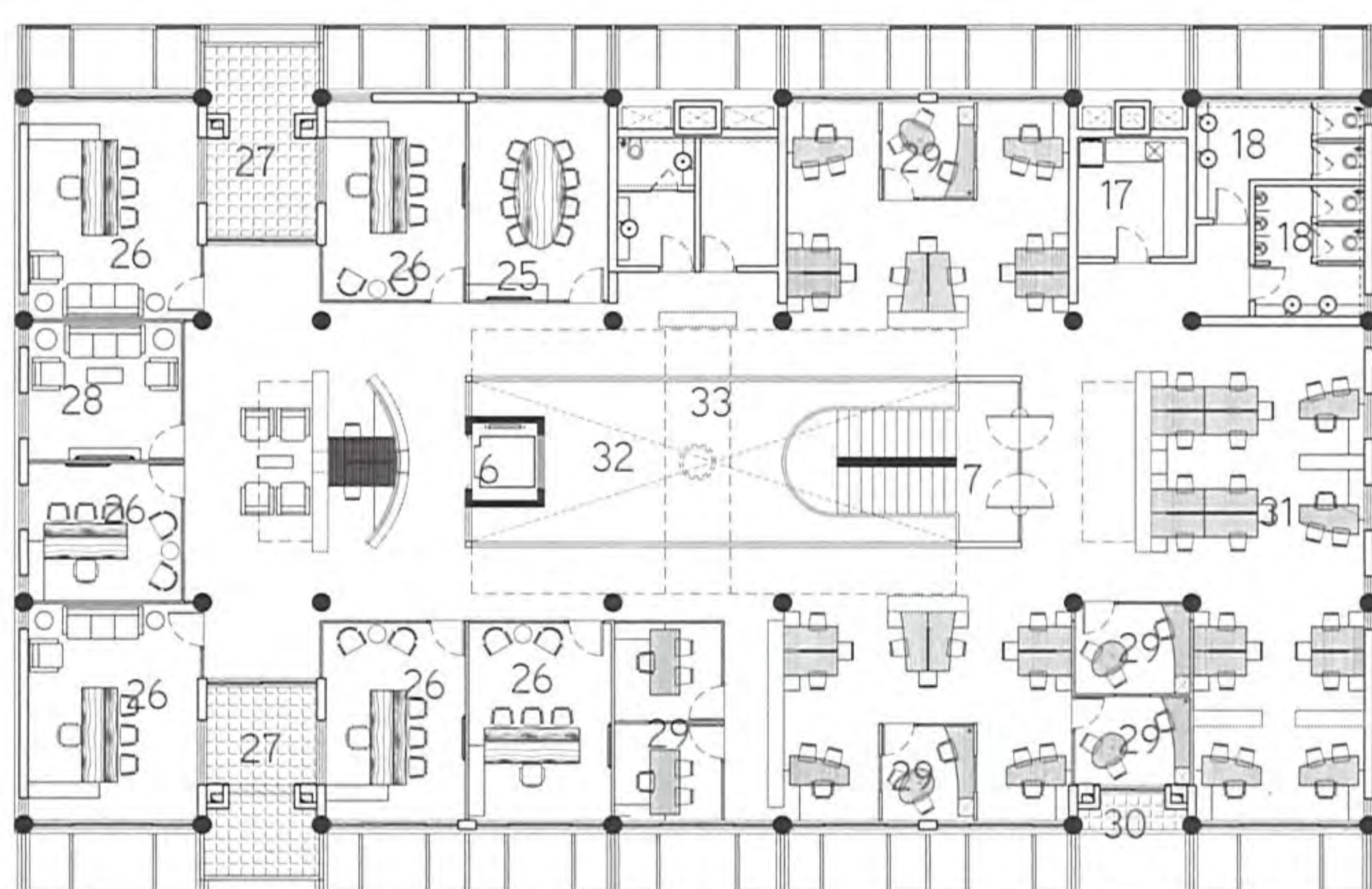
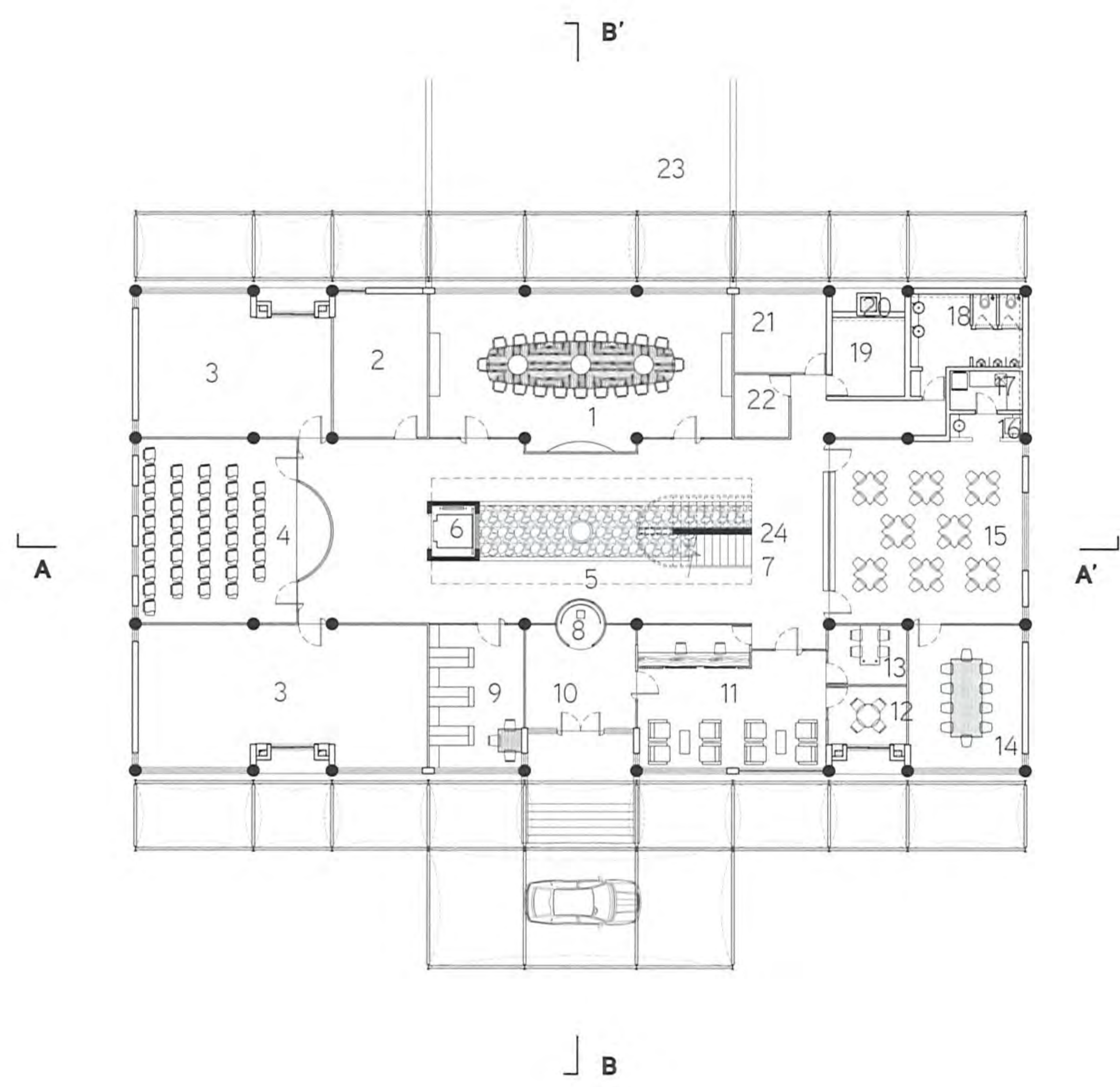
Structural Consultant
**CONCEPT DESIGNERS &
ENGINEERING
CONSULTANTS, VAPI**

Electrical and PHE Consultant
IN HOUSE

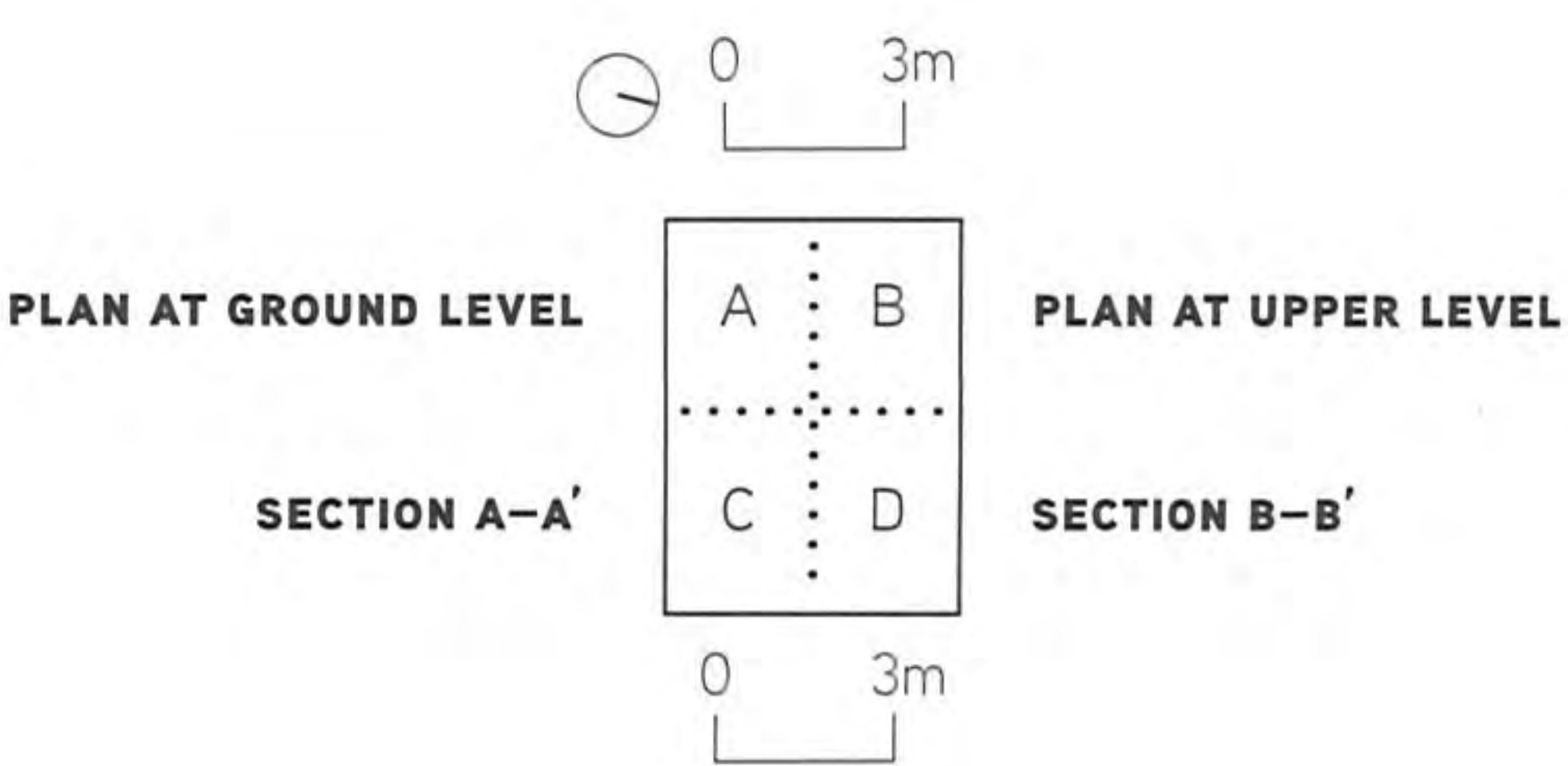
Client
DESAI CONSTRUCTION

Total built area **2800 m²**
Total site area **4200 m²**

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Natural light defines the
quality of the interior, in the
panoptical atrium as well as
in the offices arranged at the
perimeter



- | | | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Board room | 8 Temple | 15 Dining area 2 | 22 UPS | 29 Cabin |
| 2 Records | 9 Library | 16 Water cooler | 23 Courtyard | 30 Balcony |
| 3 Future expansion | 10 Entrance lobby | 17 Pantry | 24 9inch thick RCC wall | 31 Accounts |
| 4 Training centre | 11 Reception | 18 Restroom | 25 Conference room | 32 Void above |
| 5 Pebble court | 12 Meeting area 1 | 19 Panel Room | 26 Director's room | 33 Bridge above |
| 6 Lift | 13 Meeting area 2 | 20 Shaft | 27 Terrace | |
| 7 Staircase | 14 Dining area 1 | 21 Server | 28 VIP lounge | |

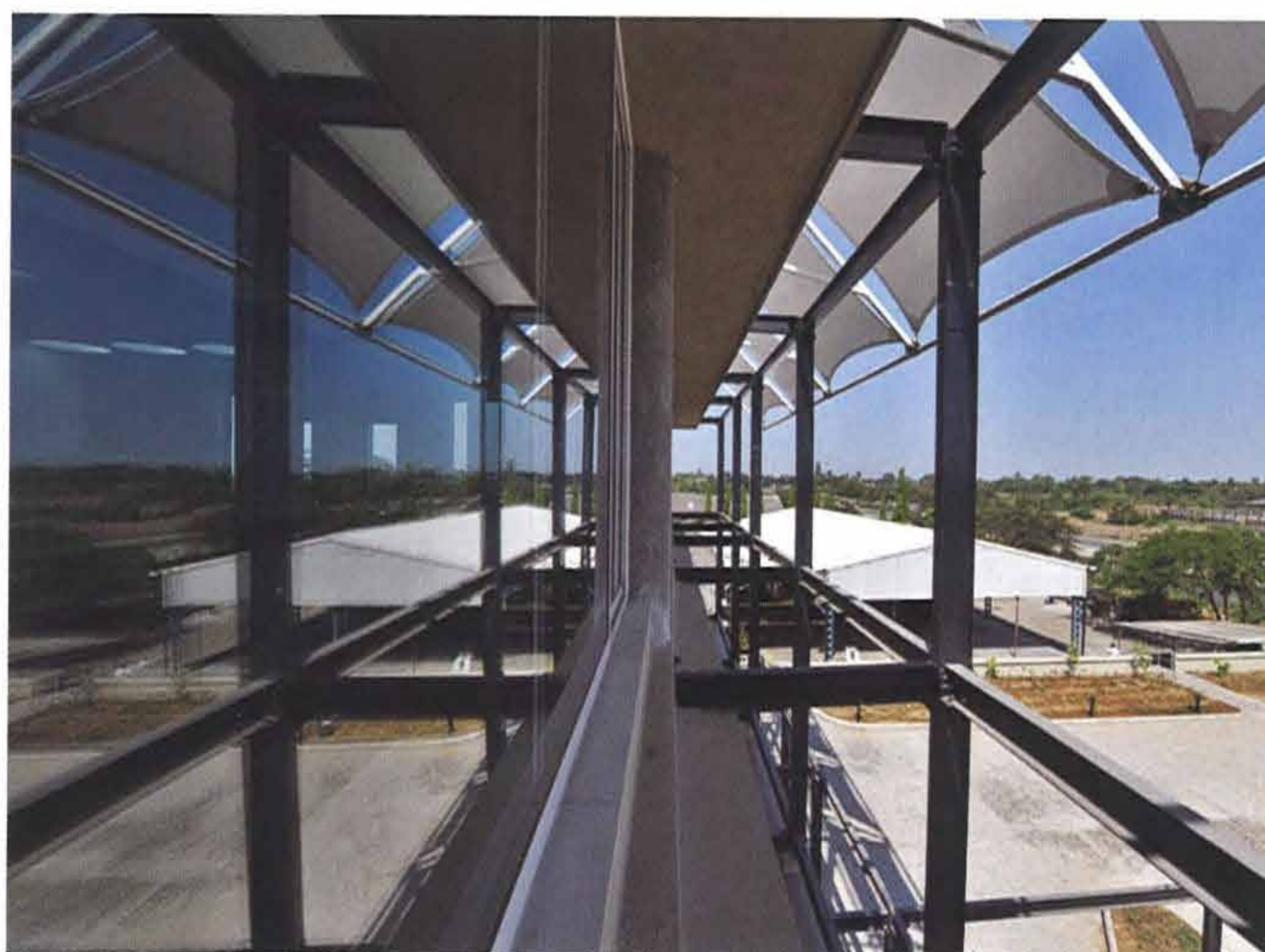




Here it is painted black and roughly bolted with rivets, modestly low-tech. The central atrium functions more like a panoptical device than a social one. At the entrance level, a linear gravel bed between the staircase and the lift encourages contemplation instead of schmoozing and the glass-encased offices on the floor above curb noise penetration. A varying grid marked by exposed concrete columns demarcates spatial allocations in the form of cabins and open office layouts. The offices are partitioned with transparent glass or fire-resistant boards, a few in colour that animate the mostly white palette. A projecting *jharokha*-balcony in painted red metal huddles between the frame and captures views of the fields. This move, subtle and diminutive in proportion to the expanse of the building, adds that extra moment of individual repose and delight in an otherwise no-fuss design.

While one has to squint when looking outside to the blinding

chrome of the asphalt highway the interiors seem in contrast evenly bathed in a soft light. The sun penetrates the center of the atrium in the morning from a large east-facing skylight. However, light remains diffused for the rest of the day, a constant reminder of how much energy is saved by natural light. Killawala believes in efficiency instead of gratuitous green labels for his buildings. "I do not believe in the popular notion of sustainability which has become all about branding new products and catering to the market," he says, "I prefer to create efficiencies of space, movement, and material usage. I have minimized circulation, separated air-conditioned and naturally ventilated areas, provided natural light, and used cheap limestone for the flooring." Sometimes architects forge relationships with clients to become partners in efficient project delivery. The added advantages of a contractor-as-client include construction



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Planting will eventually thicken the MS façade element, creating an eventual green face for the building.

Left: A private perch within this grid inserts an unexpected visual and spatial feature

expertise and an in-house project management team. “Due to a confluence of skills between the clients and us, the DCPL office building was completed in seven months which would otherwise have taken at least fourteen months for a building of this size,” says Killawala, who was able to achieve this deadline due to his background in working on large-scale institutional buildings and partly due to the clients who are one of the largest infrastructural contractors in the Gujarat region.

Nitin Killawala likes to collect timepieces. One large clock is prominently displayed on an archway in his studio. It is not surprising that measuring time should be such a passion for Killawala, for his work celebrates both slowness and speed. Slowness allows him to calibrate his design process while speed comes from knowledge and experience. Spare and rational, well-proportioned and direct, the DCPL building is

the work of an architectural practitioner who has built his portfolio incrementally, working out the kinks of design and construction over time to achieve clarity of expression.

— KANU KARTIK AGRAWAL

Architect and critic