

A confluence of university and community

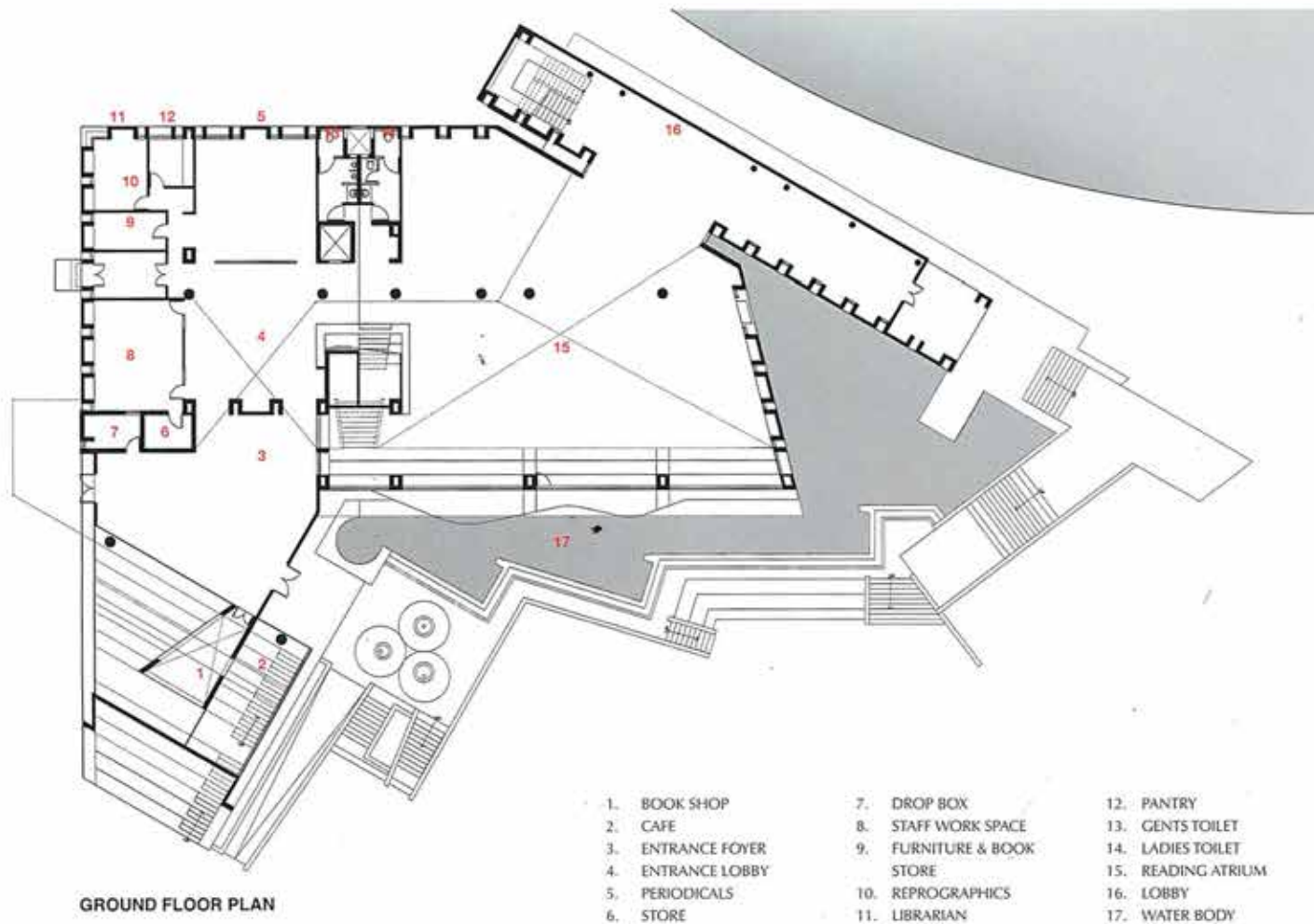


Rajeev Kathpalia

Project: Flame Library, Pune
Architects: Vastu Shilpa Consultants, Ahmedabad
Text: Sayantan Chakraborty

Demonstrating that the process of learning extends far beyond the classroom, the library of FLAME University has been built closest to nature, on the slopes of the Western Ghats in the outskirts of Pune. The design of the institutional campus can be called a 'bazaar of education' of sorts, which is a rather unusual approach to a campus design. The library thrives on

casual encounters with known and unknown faces, and with students from different disciplines mingling and sharing knowledge. The classrooms, laboratories, faculty rooms, and performing arts, visual arts and recording studios play a major role in these friendly encounters. They all merge at the university plaza, which is the core space of the institution holding activities for the residents of the



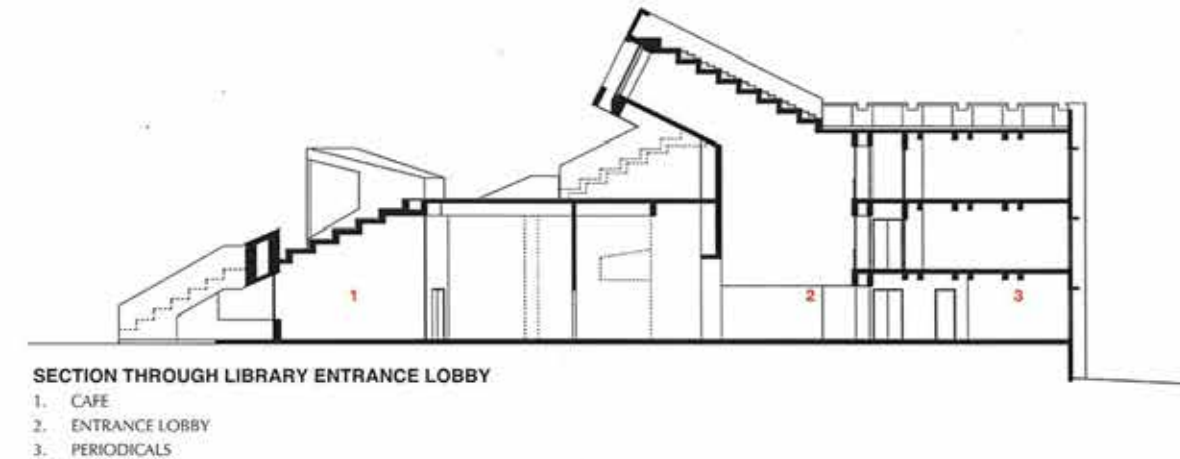
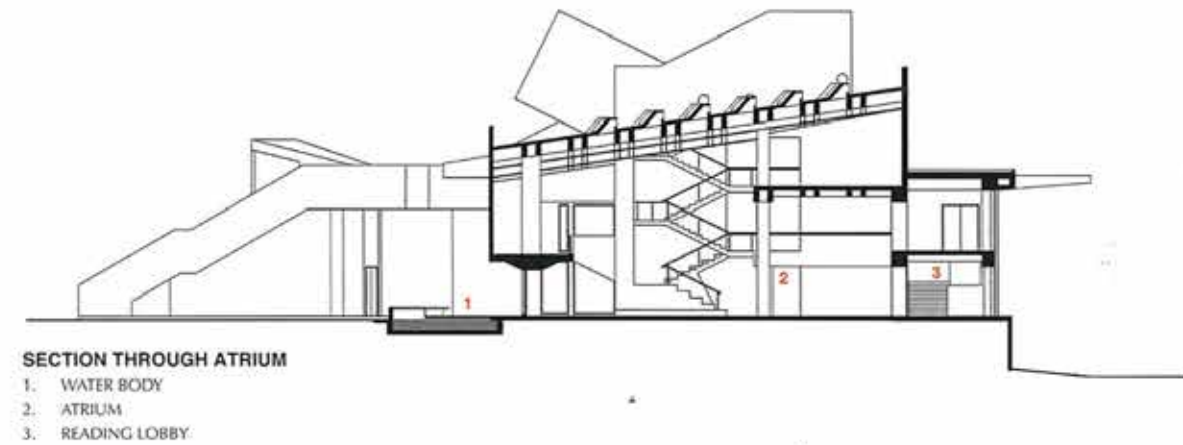
town and the academicians – a confluence of the university and the town. The plaza spreads out to the rooftops of the library, dining hall, reception and administration, through grand stairs and a bridge.

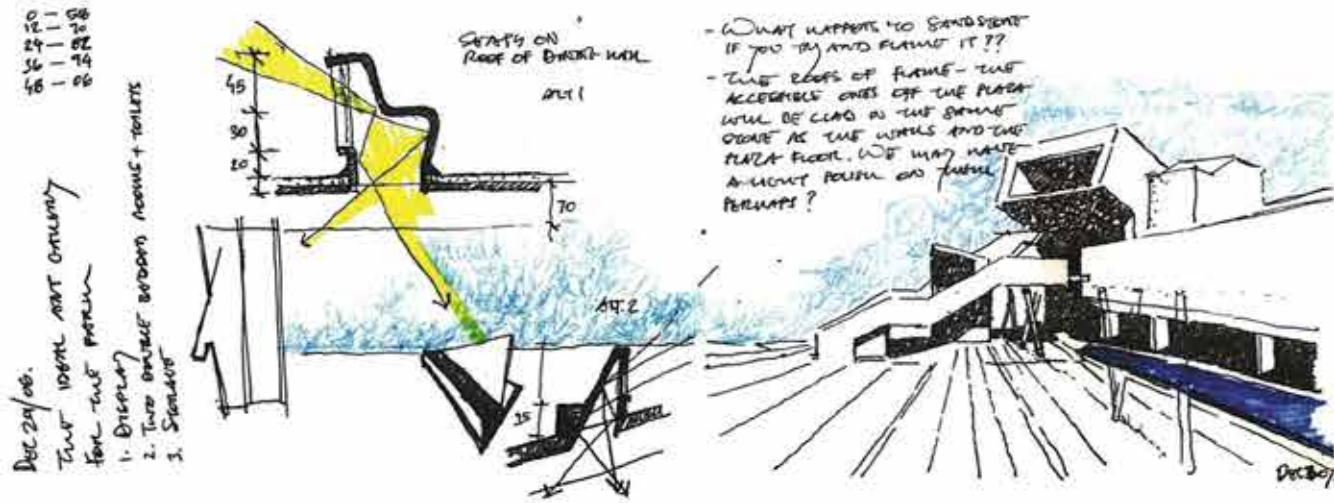
The library overlooks the university plaza, with a cricket field to the south and the Western Ghats to the north. A center for the exchange of learning and information, the library is accessible to both students as well as academicians.

The library has a wedge-like profile, with a sloping ramp that connects the plaza to the cafe and the bookstore on one side, and a shaded area and water body on the other. Once inside, one enters a lobby that is illuminated by the skylight. The spacious reading atrium is illuminated by an

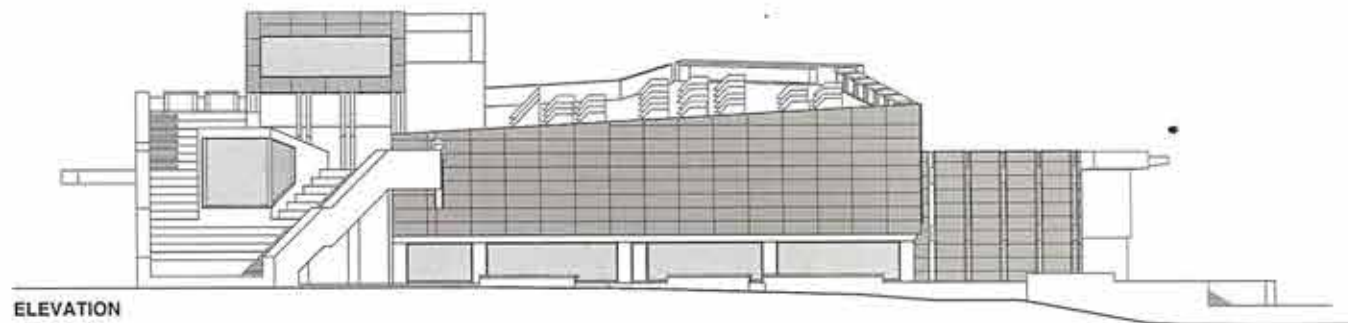
array of skylights. It can accommodate around 150 people and is naturally ventilated. The profile of the building is built in such a way as to create a stack effect, which allows the breeze from the south to get cooled by the water body, circulate through the entire space and eventually rise and exhaust through force ventilation fans installed on the roof. The atrium opens onto a reading lobby that overlooks a panoramic view of the cricket field and the Sahayadri range beyond it. The lobby steps down into an open amphitheater that connects to the greens.

During working hours, the primary access to all the facilities within the building is by means of a central staircase that is located adjacent to the reception area. The





CONCEPT PLANNING



ELEVATION



staircase is also a space for informal activity. The landing and steps are surrounded by reading areas, benches and seats and create spaces that can be used for personal as well as group studies. Users can access the internet center and discussion rooms after hours, through the plaza stairs that naturally seem elevate the university plaza and create a new environment of social interaction and access to different facilities at flexible times. The reading lobby on the northern side can also be accessed from the amphitheater after opening hours. Hence, the entire building can be thought of as three different buildings: the central main library, the internet centre and the reading lobby. The building transforms from one complex and intricate machine during the day to three simplified units during the evening.

It is this flexible and multi-faceted character in the interior of the building which also reflects on the exterior. The basic aspects of climatic and contextual sensitivity as well as a clarity of spatial organisation have been kept in

mind while designing it, giving it a flexible identity that is integral to a campus which is a perfect blend between a university and a community.

Photo credit: Rajeev Kathpalia, FLAME Foundation

Factfile

- Client:** FLAME Foundation
- Design team:** Rajeev Kathpalia (Principal Architect), Jose Benoy, B N Panchal, Suketu Shah, Sagar Shah, Shailesh
- Consultants:** N K Shah (Structural Engineer), Sheth Techno Consultants Pvt. Ltd. (MEP Services)
- Built-up area:** 2,100sq m
- Year of completion:** 2013