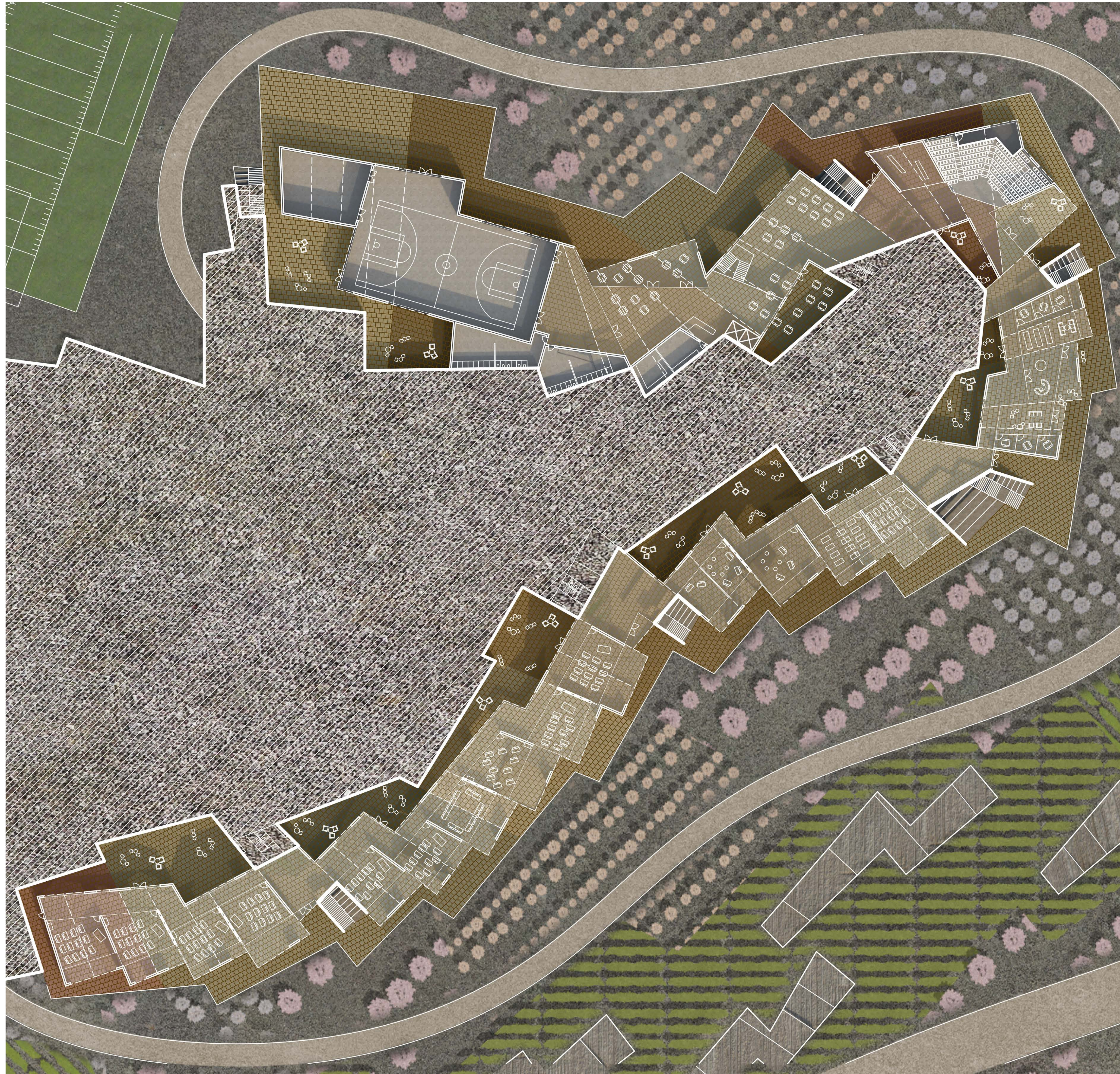


Re-Framing a Cultural Gaze | We and Our Mountains



Main Floor Plan of COAF SMART Learning Facilities, accessed by descending from arrival/entry level above

Our proposal for the COAF SMART Armavir Campus seeks to expand the thriving legacy of the COAF non-formal educational model, taking into consideration the unique site conditions, microclimatic demands and expanded ambition of the Armavir site and campus. We do so in the aim of cultivating an identity uniquely its own but one that dialogues with the sister campus in Dilijan and threads through a rich cultural and architectural heritage, to continue its institutional legacy.

Site and Siting

The proposed campus is conceived of as a complex of structures that positions itself at the northern tip of the site atop one of the higher elevation moments. The master plan organization of the campus follows key topographic features and wraps the educational programs around a ridge line loosely constituting a kind of U figure in plan. Strategic sectional positioning along the ridge allows the emergence of two varied fronts throughout the project: a more introverted piazza or commons condition framed by the U figure looking inward with access to main arrival and departure points, as well as gathering opportunities around sunken gardens and fire pits. The outer perimeter of the U figure orients itself towards the sprawling site and landscape beyond, capturing 270 degree views from Mount Aragats to Mount Ararat. As such the involuted plan figure provides a pragmatic solution for programming specific spatial adjacencies as well as promotes more serendipitous opportunities and moments for reflection, private introspection and small scale engagement, connecting one another to the landscape beyond.

A cross section cut through the U figure shows the dynamic nature of spatial sequences, access to views and outdoor spaces as one follows the planted terrace of agriculture overlooking Mount Ararat into classrooms and labs, out to sunken courtyards, up to and cross the main commons, into the gymnasium and out again to the terraced landscape overlooking Mount Aragats.

On Organization and Form

The project draws inspiration from Armenian culture and every day rural life alike. In particular, we're interested in exploring affinities towards place and space, as it's played out through landscape, territory and terror. As a part of this legacy, one iconic image emerges as the quintessential picture of longing for and belonging to the homeland: Mount Ararat. Depicted in art, photography, film and now through the ubiquity of social media this cultural symbol still holds a significant place in the hearts and psyche of the Armenian people. To further dwell on this phenomenon, we can expand the affinity to include other notable symbols such as Mount Aragats. As the seminal 1965 film 'We and Our Mountains' attests, this landscape is deeply engrained in its people and vis versa.

So, mountains of the Armenian highlands have always been imposing figures, both physically and phenomenologically. Armenian architecture also draws inspiration from this phenomenon. Often composed strategically against breathtaking natural backdrops, the 'high' architecture of monastic complexes arrays and deploys the gmbets as if to recall a mountainous ridge line appearing in focus from strategic perspectives. Upon closer inspection, the pleats of these gmbets literally deploy peaks and valleys to gain their tectonic strength.

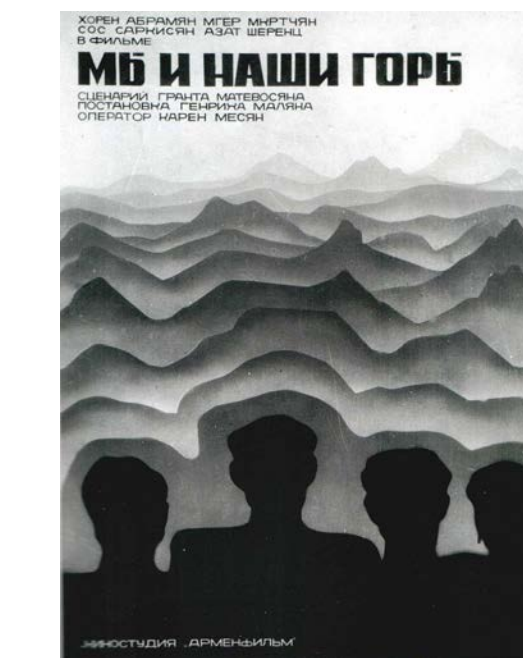
From the timeless to the everyday, you can see a plethora of informal stone sheds dot rural hillsides across the country, nimbly folding and burming themselves within the local landscape. This vernacular architecture serves to house people, animals, food and much more.

Our campus proposal, draws on these cultural, architectural, geological and every day references choosing to position itself as both informal and at once, giving form to.

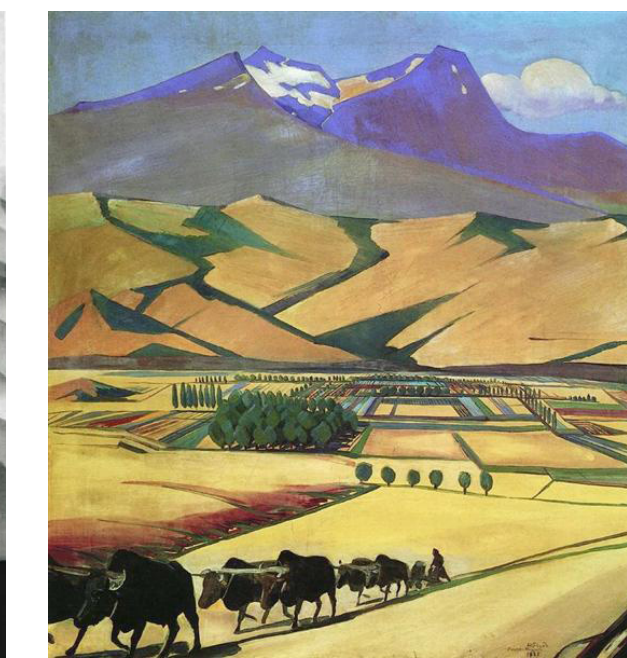
At the scale of the site and more pragmatically, the involuted plan profile allows for a nuanced organizational strategy where programs can be visually autonomous from one another but still be quite close in proximity. The terraces abutting the outer edge provide moments of outdoor convergence between programs and with landscape, while the interior sunken courts foster more private and localized outdoor conditions. The outdoor commons framed by the involuted plan on either side, brings multiple wings of the campus together and allows a quick connection to and from.

The profile at the building scale allows for a bent enfilade of spaces that at times connect and disconnect to facilitate program adjacencies. At the smallest increment, the stepped plan allows for a staccato of smaller classrooms, labs and meeting spaces. At the larger scale the stepped profile aggregates to produce a gymnasium or the cafeteria.

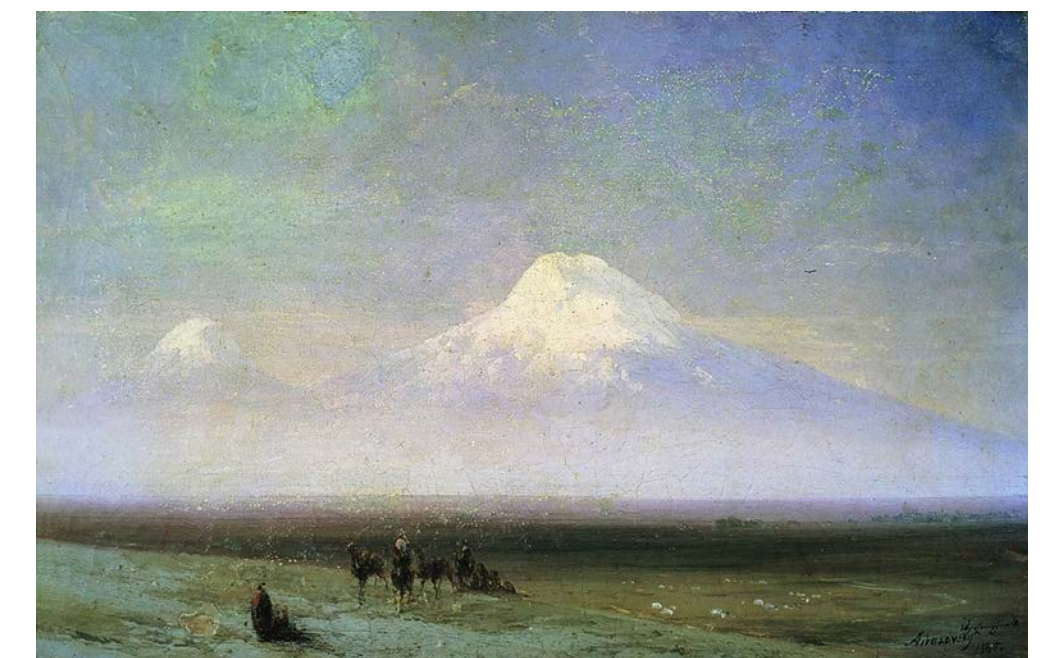
At the scale of the building and more formally, a stepped, lenticular profile calibrates the landscape topography. The lenticular edge deployed in plan allows for strategically choreographed, serial views from each program, towards notable landmarks. The resultant lenticular elevations behave as a formal device from which to look out of, expanding the surface area of views towards the exterior. The lenticular form, also gives the campus massing its characteristic pleating and folding when seen from the exterior, a language while unapologetically contemporary and specific to this site characteristics, also relates back to massing strategies of formal and informal indigenous architectural examples noted earlier.



'We Are Our Mountains' Film Poster, 1969



'Mount Aragats' by Martiros Saryan, 1925



'Mount Ararat' by Ivan Aivazovsky, 1885



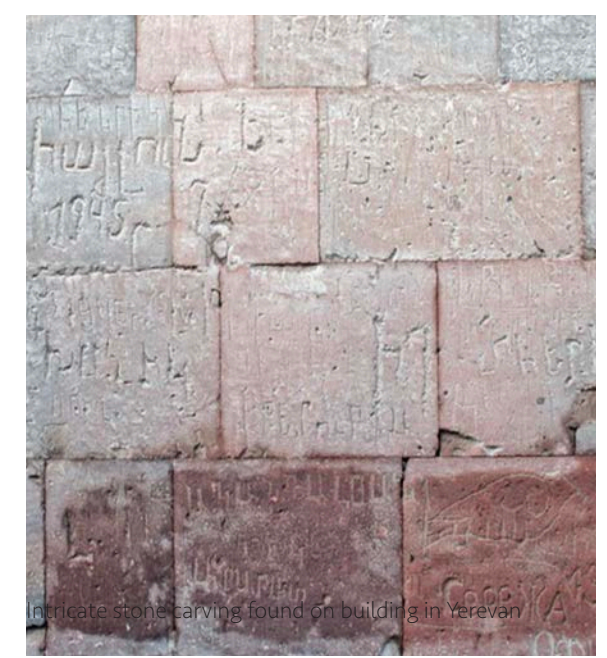
Hovanesavank, photographed in the winter



Vernacular stone village structure, photographed in Ararat region



Intricate stone carving found on building in Yerevan



COAF SMART Campus against the backdrop of the Dilijan forest



Exterior Perspective, looking towards campus from the main road South of the site. It sits perched atop a high point on site, roof silhouettes layering against the backdrop of the sky.



Arrival and Entry Level Plan of COAF SMART Learning Facilities

Ultimately, to bring the conceptual conversation back to the phenomena of a gaze towards these iconic landmarks and their significance as geological markers within the Armenia culture, we are interested in a formal language that operates as both viewing device facilitating the cultural gaze as well as an architectural artifact that when looked upon from the outside, folds itself into the legacy of these silhouetted layers. If this phenomena of the cultural gaze thus far looks towards the past, then the hope and ambition of the proposal is one that the architecture of this institution becomes a vehicle to frame a gaze towards the future.

Natural Forces

The proposal leverages a number of low tech but tried and tested architectural responses in engaging and harnessing natural forces. As a starting point, it is conceived of as a bermed condition, sectionally embedding itself within the geological condition of the site in order to harness the properties of its thermal mass to help regulate internal temperatures throughout the year through solar heat gain and loss. The openings that line the outer frontage are all conceived of with substantial overhangs above for sun mitigation.

Additionally, vertical light wells that act as cooling chimneys dot the volumetric mass regularly, allowing each sub-zone in plan to regulate its microclimate through controlling operability. The overall bermed and stepped building strategy also promotes a terracing quality that allows for unobstructed access to views, air and light from each space within the campus. In most cases, it also allows for direct access to a generous outdoor terrace and/or courtyard. The terracing continues the strategic planting pattern of various architectural surfaces drawing garden and agriculture right up to and at times into the campus itself. Finally, in an effort to reduce waste and energy consumption as well as harness the thermal mass properties, the proposal leverages local tufa stone materials and construction techniques.

The site strategy makes room for agricultural and strategically zoned use of the majority area. It also preliminarily considers drip irrigation by positioning campus buildings at higher points on site and allowing for more free and natural movement of water throughout. Lastly, we propose a small solar farm onsite to generate energy needs for the campus and it's growing ambitions, moving forward.



Exterior Perspective, showing vehicular approach to the campus from the West



Exterior Perspective of the arrival and entry courtyard, with commons and outdoor garden beyond

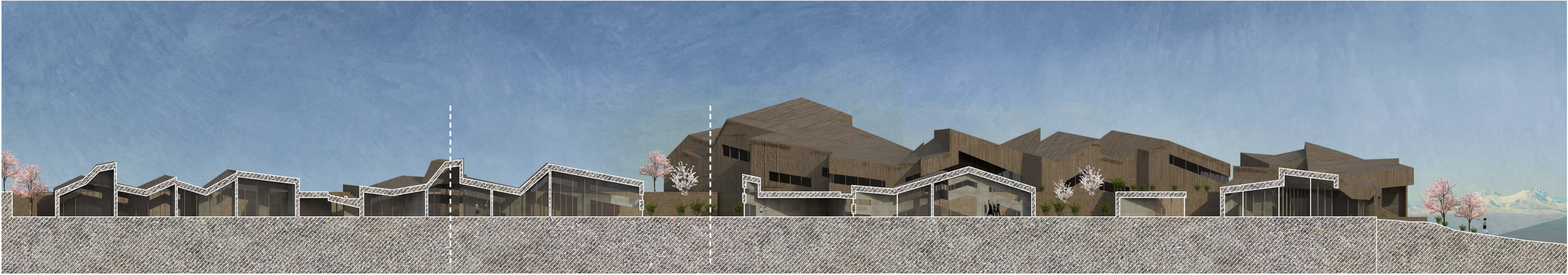


Interior Perspective Views of the Cafeteria Looking Towards the Sports Halls and Reception

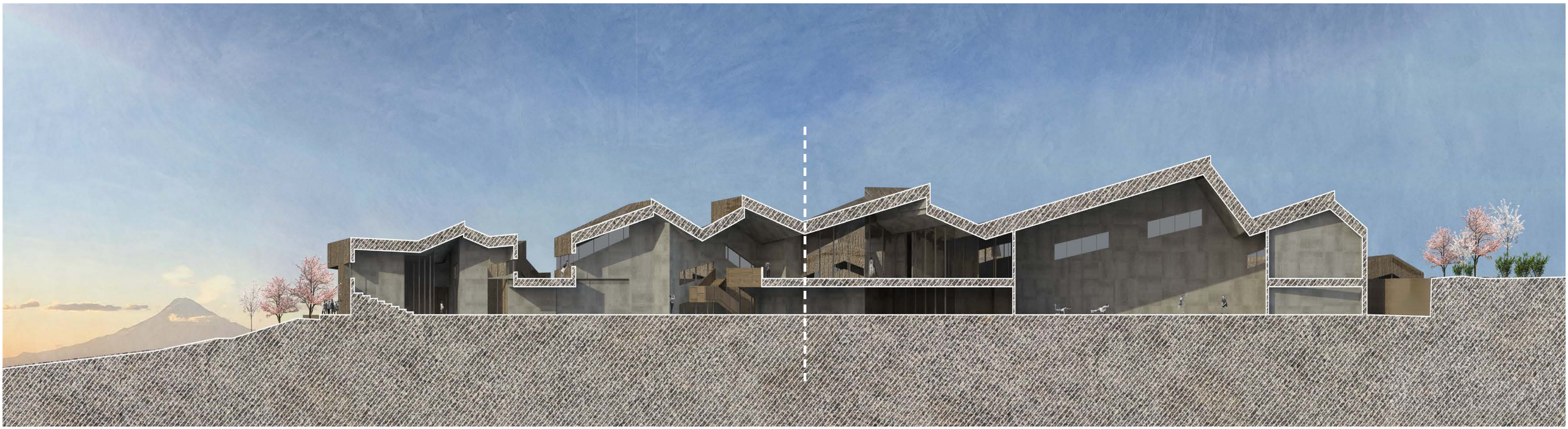


Interior Perspective Views to the South, looking from the lenticular openings of classrooms and labs to Mount Ararat





Section A, cutting through classrooms and labs



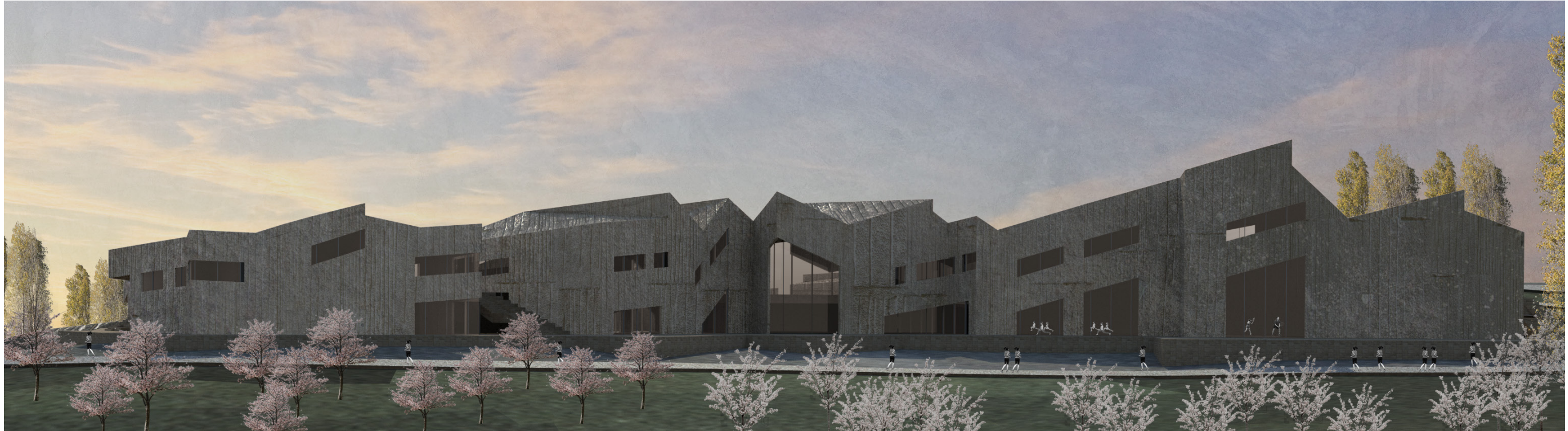
Section B, cutting through cafeteria and indoor sports facilities



Section C, cutting through both sides of the plan figure and through the courtyard commons



Site Plan



South Elevation, looking to communal school facilities such as cafeteria and gymnasium



Zoomed in diagram of site layout and organization

- A. CAMPUS ENTRANCE
- 1. Guard House
- 2. Reception Point
- 3. Parking Area
- B. EDUCATIONAL
- 4. Reception
- 5. Staff Office & Health Post
- 6. Sports Hall, Field+ Running Track
- 7. Cafeteria
- 8. Culture Corner
- 9. Auditorium
- 10. Library
- 11. Programmatic Rooms
- 12. STEAM Wing
- C. EVENT CENTER
- 13. Restaurant
- 14. Meditation Forests
- 15. Conferencing & Performance
- D. AGROLANDS
- 16. Green House
- E. INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITIES