



UNITED STATES EMBASSY
BANGKOK, THAILAND

“When Thailand extended its hand to us in 1833 as a partner in the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, America was still a young nation, just emerging on the world stage. We were grateful for Thailand’s gesture of friendship at that moment and have been Great and Good Friends ever since, recently celebrating 200 years since our first official letters proposing trade and cooperation were exchanged. We have accomplished much in those two hundred years, establishing respect and understanding through education and cultural exchange, investing in each other’s prosperity, and, through World War II and the Cold War, defending the cause of freedom and the rights of sovereign nations. For the last 75 years, we have welcomed generations of our Thai friends in meetings and celebrations at our Embassy on Witthayu Road. Today, we stand proudly together as treaty allies and trade partners as Thailand exercises a leadership role in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with Bangkok as a key regional hub. This state-of-the-art annex to our Embassy will house the many U.S. Government agencies that partner with Thailand and ASEAN to advance regional priorities, including improving public health, addressing environmental challenges, and combatting transnational crime. Designed to reflect traditional Thai architectural motifs, I hope the new building will become a landmark and a center of Thai-American friendship for many years to come.”

Chargé d’Affaires Michael Heath
U.S. Embassy Bangkok
March 2021

The New Office Annex in Bangkok.
View of the site looking east.



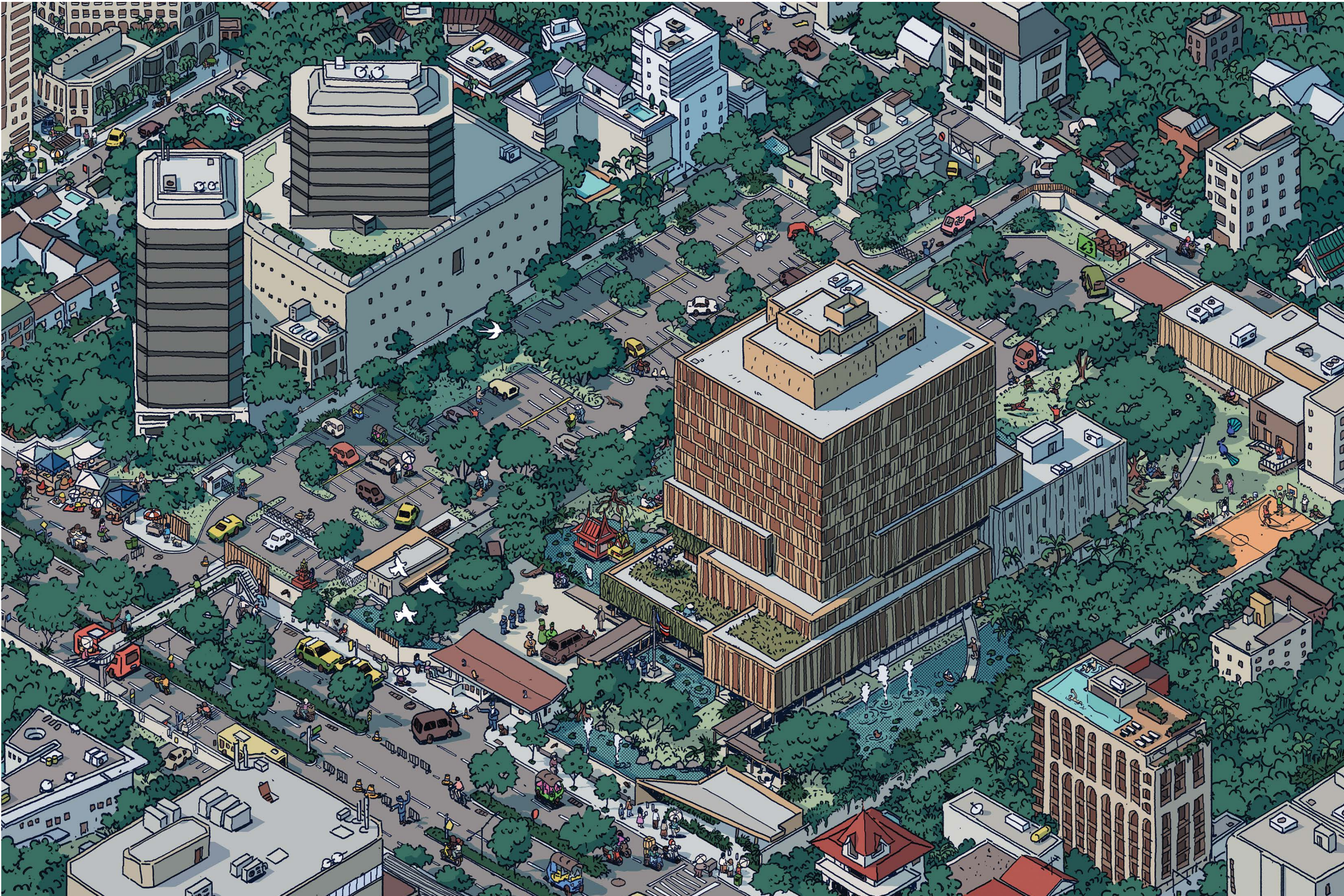


More than 200 years after initial trade in teak and sugar, America and Thailand have built a relationship that touches on almost all aspects of daily life for citizens of both nations. Interactions between the nations have been steady, with correspondence between kings and presidents—in response to an offer of elephants, President Lincoln addressed King Mongkut as “Great and Good Friend”—Thai exhibitions at America’s world fairs, and visits from the royal family. As great allies and good friends, America’s presence in Thailand is one of pride, having grown into one of the largest diplomatic missions in the world and serving as a headquarters for dozens of American agencies, offices, and training programs spread over three nearby campuses. A crucial hub for American diplomatic activity and for commerce in the region, the Bangkok Mission is an affirmation of the importance and warmth of the relationship between Thailand and the United States, and the New Office Annex will provide a modern and public symbol of the continued friendship.

At night, subtle lighting casts a soft glow on the façades of the New Office Annex with reflections shimmering on the warm bronze screens. Cascading light down the exterior, the building nods to Thailand’s historic temples and landmarks that light up the night sky.

Connecting Values and Context

Aerial view of the new design from Witthayu Road, looking to the northeast.



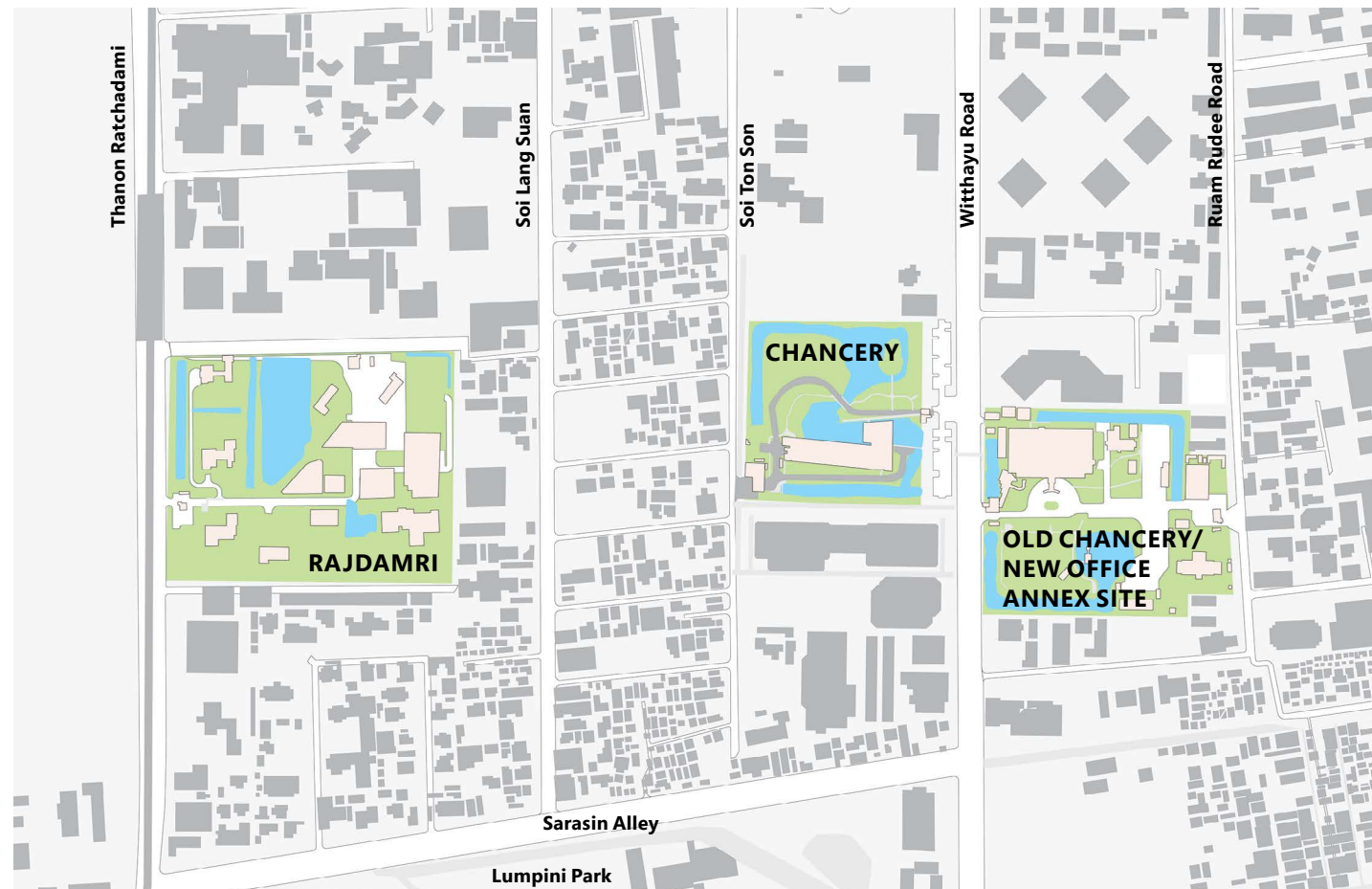


Informally, the New Office Annex site is recognized by locals as the location of the U.S. Embassy, which was built here in the 1960s. The new chancery, designed by Kallman McKinnell & Woodbuilt, replaced that building in the 1990s. The Chancery cleared the way for reuse of the original site to provide more functional space, all while keeping the Mission's locations within a 15-minute walk of each other.

A cosmopolitan and dynamic city, Bangkok is defined by glassy skyscrapers, a rich architectural heritage, a vibrant culture, and street life that draws visitors from around the world. The city is suffused as well with a lush, often intense tropical environment. The team—consisting of SHoP Architects, a score of expert consultants and client-side leadership and staff—endeavored to incorporate that dual nature into the Department of State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations' (OBO) mission: to create secure, resilient, and sustainable projects that reflect American values and the best in American architecture, design, engineering, technology, sustainability, art, culture, and construction execution.

Located in Pathum Wan, a commercial district outside of the old city, the New Office Annex's large site features mature rain trees with impressive canopies that stretch almost 65 feet across, adding to the very green Lumpini Park area.

In reviewing the Embassy's needs, the team established goals to ensure the project would be a vital part of the U.S. Mission for



The 13-acre site (left) is located between the busy Witthayu Road to the west and Ruam Rudee to the east. The lush landscape (right) is an asset the design team wants to maintain as much as possible.





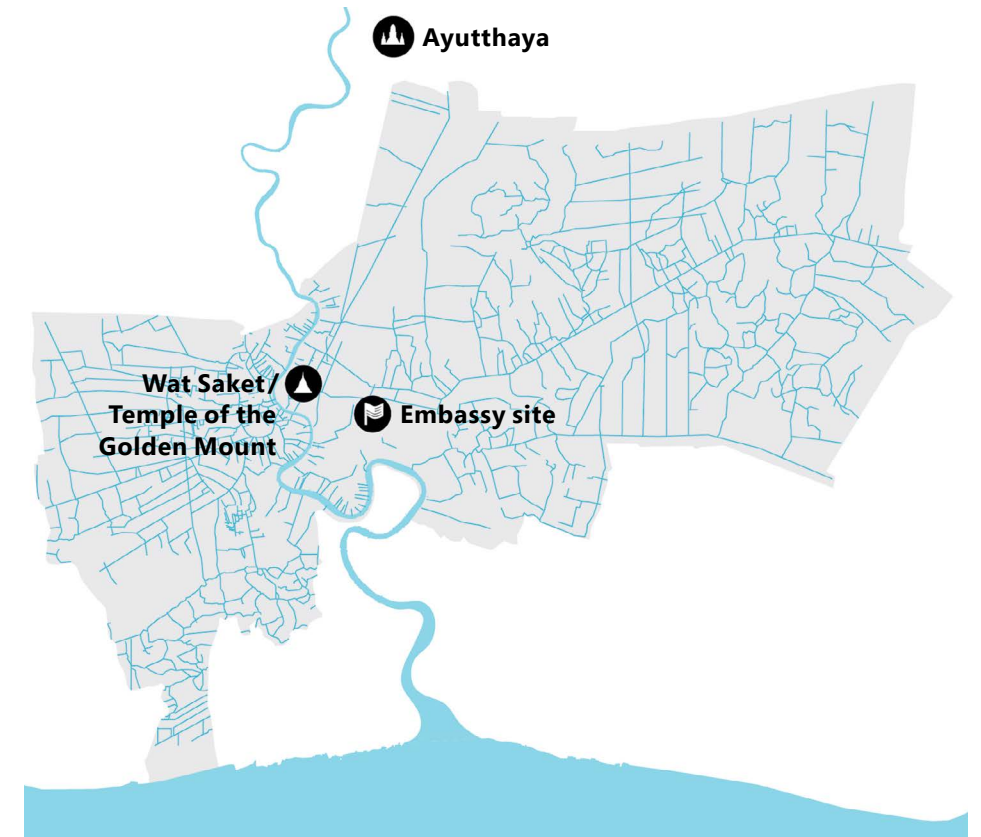
“We drew inspiration from the lush greenery enveloping the site and the surrounding streets, the crafted intricacies and rich colors of the historic buildings, and the dramatic contrast of light and shadow to create an architecture that would be both welcoming and respectful of the local community.”

Chris Sharples, Principal, SHoP

at least fifty years: build safe and functional spaces for America’s diplomatic work; create sustainable and resilient solutions specific to the site; allow for future adaptability and growth; and develop a design that reflects America’s culture and values while being sensitive to local culture, climate, and traditions.

With over 1,000 staff members to accommodate, the team balanced a large space need, the preservation of landscape and outdoor space, and challenging climactic conditions of heat, rain, and humidity. Looking to Bangkok and its architectural traditions, the designers found a layered quality made up of a series of spaces to address shading, air circulation, and cover in a way that softens the transition between indoors and outdoors. Thai architecture creates this layering with elevated living quarters that provide shaded gathering spaces below.

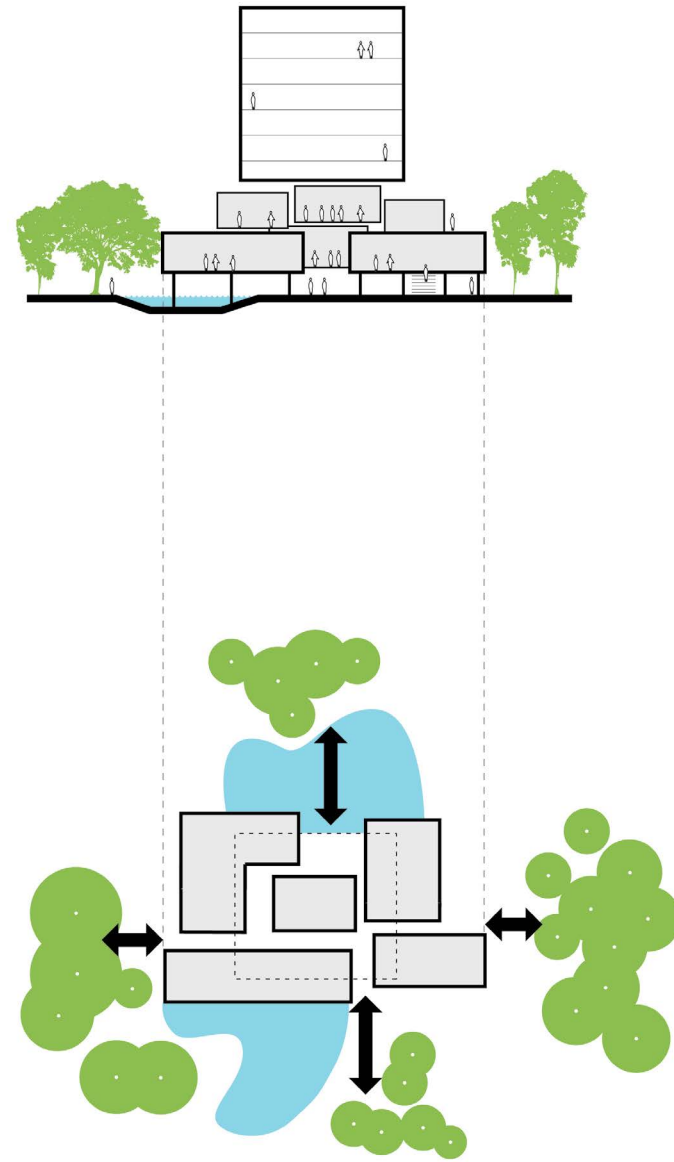
The team’s review of Bangkok’s existing environment included the shaded spaces that blend indoors and outdoors (facing, top row left), the Sala Thai and Royal Sala (facing, top row right), and the ruins of the ancient capital city Ayutthaya (facing, lower left). The rich palettes of golds, textiles, and other ornament provided many opportunities to reflect local customs and culture through a contemporary project.



The team turned to examples of traditionally maintained Thai homes from the early and mid-19th century, such as Nai Lert Park, the Jim Thompson House Museum, and the U.S. Chief of Mission Residence. These homes use Bangkok's vernacular architecture with shaded outdoor and indoor spaces that layer upon each other, often connected with a series of verandas, screens, and elevated porches. Other points of reference for the new design are the campus's existing Sala Thai and Royal Sala pavilions, historic structures currently on the site, and their ornamental details; the sacred Spirit Trees, decorated with colored ribbons; the ruins of the ancient capital city Ayutthaya, which has received preservation funding from the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation; and the use of gold and ornament on Bangkok *wats* (temples).

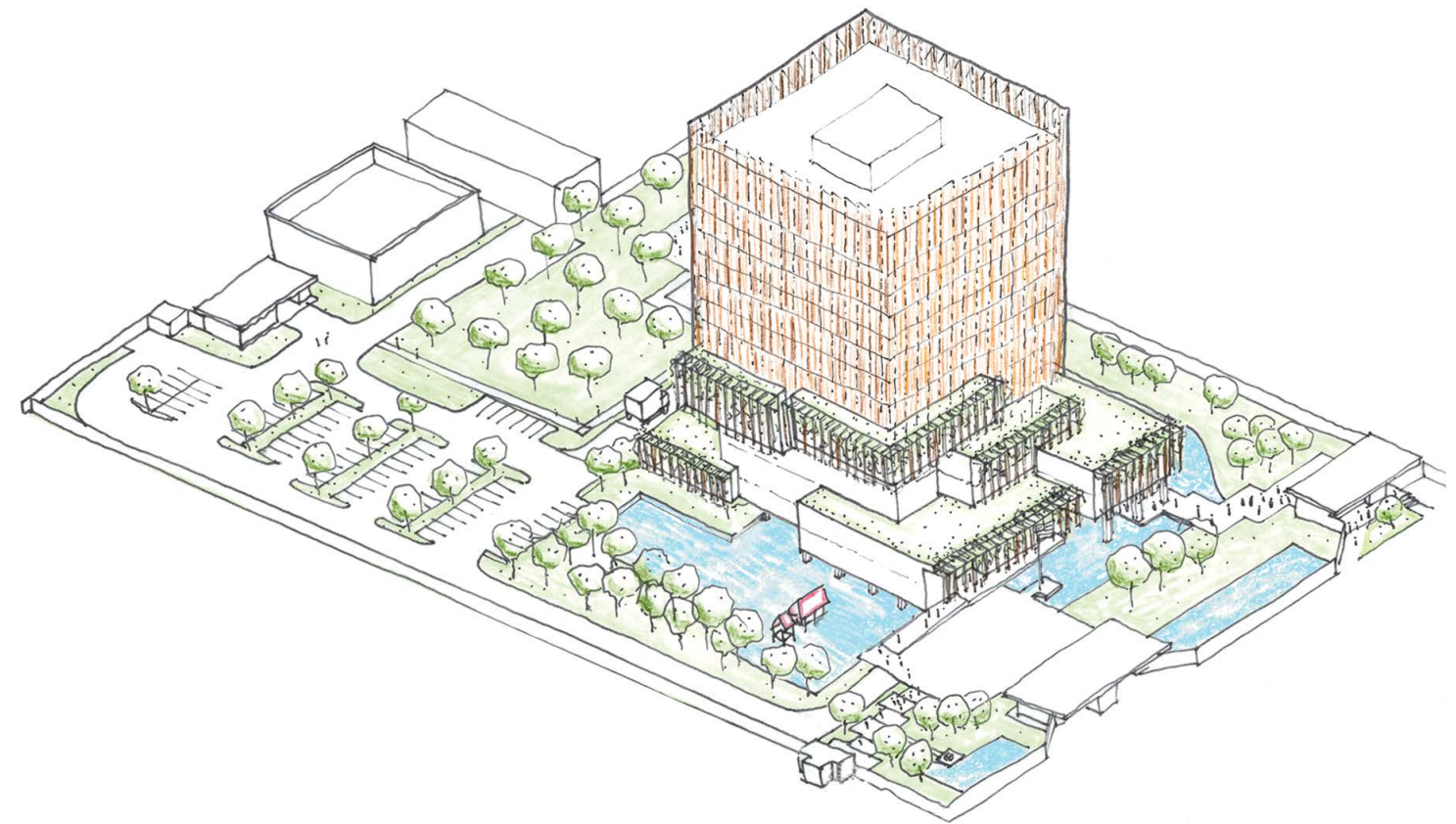
The program calls for two types of space: community-minded spaces that are shared across the Mission and with the public, and private spaces that are shared by agencies. The massing developed into a "Village" of shared collaborative spaces on the lower floors beneath a hyperefficient "Tower" of stacked floor plates.

The Village draws from Thailand's *Chaan* arrangement of volumes to create self-shaded outdoor gathering spaces that offer relief from the sun. Above the six floors of the Village, the Tower provides rhythm and consistency for the organizations working there. The entire building is elevated on a plinth, much like the *Lanna* style seen in traditional Thai architecture, to keep it safe from the regular flooding during the rainy season. Floating the building above the landscape provides opportunities for outdoor spaces that offer refuge from the heat and rain. A series of sheltered outdoor rooms, galleries, mezzanines, and informal workspaces accommodate the range of activity that happens at this large and busy diplomatic mission.



The building's massing (left) developed from a desire to combine two concepts in one building while organizing a large amount of program: a community-oriented "Village" with shared and collaborative spaces, and the hyper-efficiency of stacked floor plates in a "Tower." The Village draws from traditional Thai architecture in which volumes are clustered to create self-shaded outdoor gathering spaces that offer relief from the sun. Above the Village, the Tower provides rhythm and consistency for individualized working environments. The entire building is elevated on a plinth to keep it safe from the regular flooding that happens during Bangkok's rainy season and seems to float above the landscape.

Aerial view of the of the building and campus design from an earlier design stage.





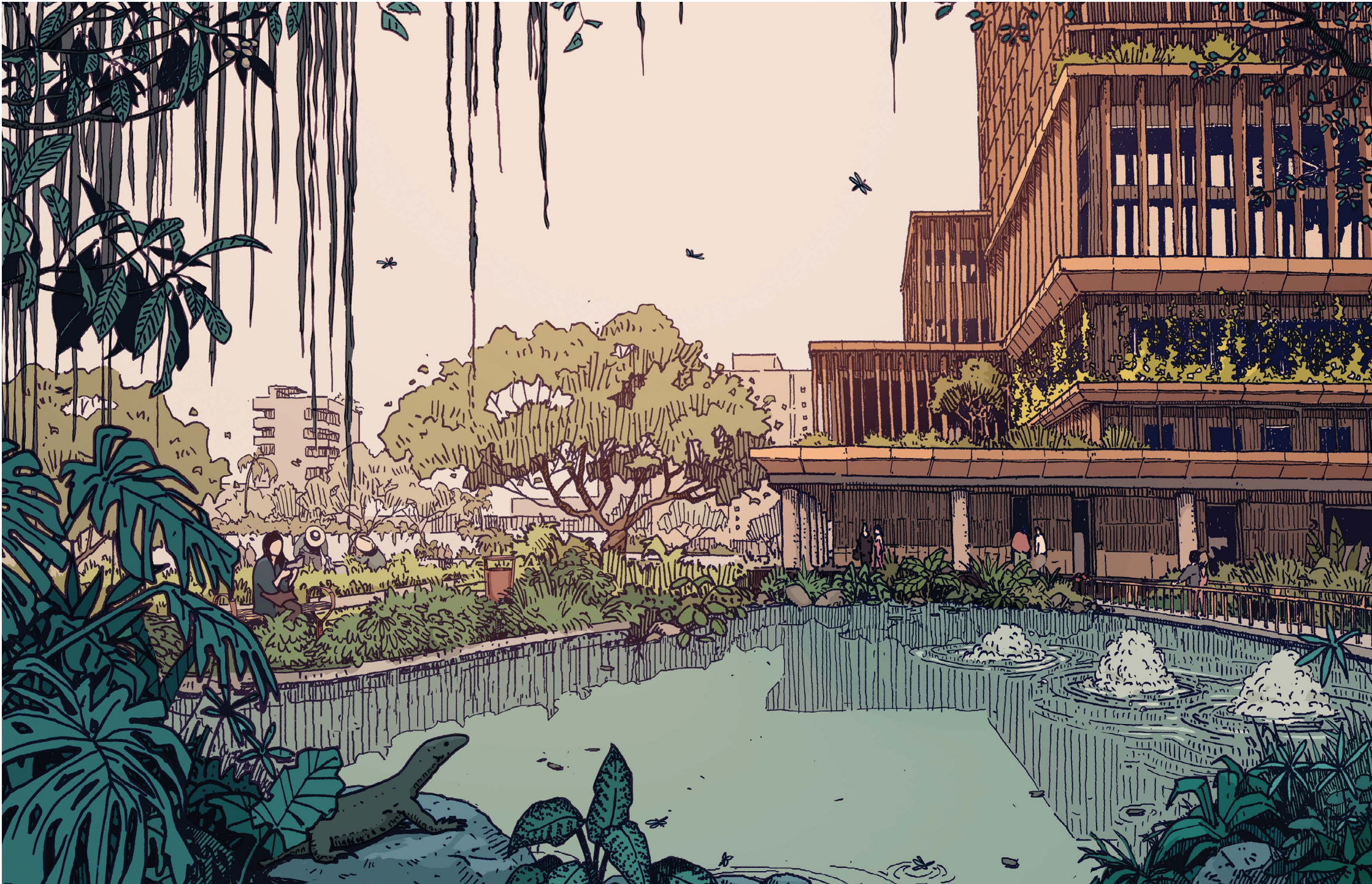
In addressing the consular program, the team looked to historic Thai buildings that connect a series of enclosed spaces with porches and outdoor rooms. By pulling apart the series of public, representational, and social spaces on the ground level, a series of in-between spaces become sheltered verandas or more enclosed “rooms.” As one travels higher up into the 14-story building, the workspaces become more and more private and distinct to support the varied needs of the agencies inside.

Upon entering the site (left), the view opens up to the 14-story building and its protruding smaller volumes cascading down to meet the visitor. A walkway canopy greets them after they have passed the entry building at Witthayu Road (below).



Working within the Landscape

View looking south across the northern *klong* featuring a pedestrian bridge accessing the New Office Building. Many mature rain trees were preserved in the adjacent open space.

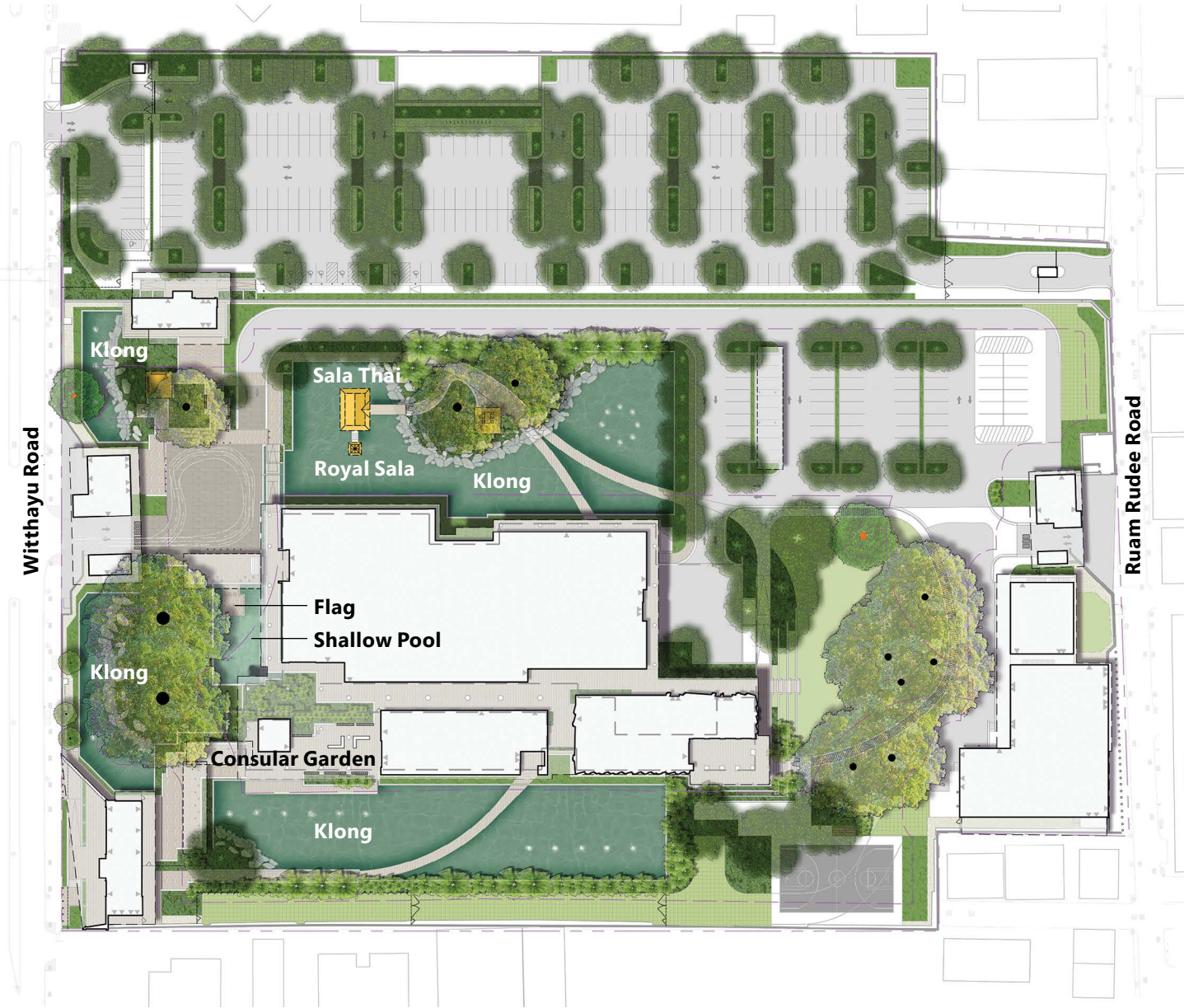


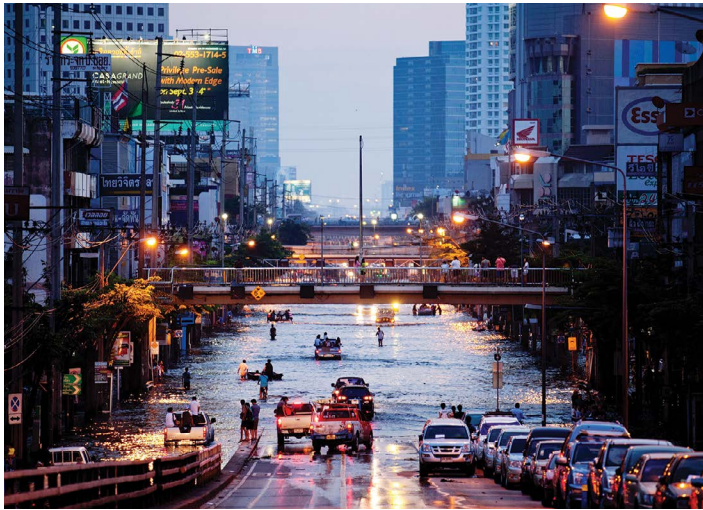
Bangkok's lush vegetation and landscape inspired the Annex's design inside and out, including the rope-like trunks and roots of the ficus trees, the *klong* system, and an elevated walkway in a nearby park.



In a city with so much opportunity for vegetation, the team wanted to preserve as much of the site's open space as possible to create a strong sense of connection to nature across the project.

The site's landscape also supports the Embassy's vital role as a wildlife sanctuary.





During Bangkok’s rainy season, which typically lasts from May until November, drenching downpours are often a daily occurrence. Combined with the city’s high groundwater level, periodic flooding is a part of life in Bangkok. Equally representative of the city is the network of canals that help carry away excess water during the rainy season. Across the campus, a number of existing *klongs* define the space and assist in storm water management. Due to their connection to the municipal water system, the *klong* water table can be artificially lowered and then released into the city’s system as they fill up with rain water. An integral part of designing beyond the 100-year floodplain requirements, the *klongs* display a beautiful aspect of campus resiliency.

Seemingly floating above the water, the Annex sits on a plinth that visitors reach via elevated paths over the *klongs*. The site’s dozens of mature trees and open, green spaces can be a rarity in Bangkok. The rain trees’ canopy provides a dappled light and much-needed shade, while spirit trees perform a more cultural role—they are adorned with strips of colored fabric as offerings to the spirits within. Many of the mature trees and as much of the open space as possible were preserved with careful siting of the building and *klongs*, providing opportunity for future expansion and community spaces.

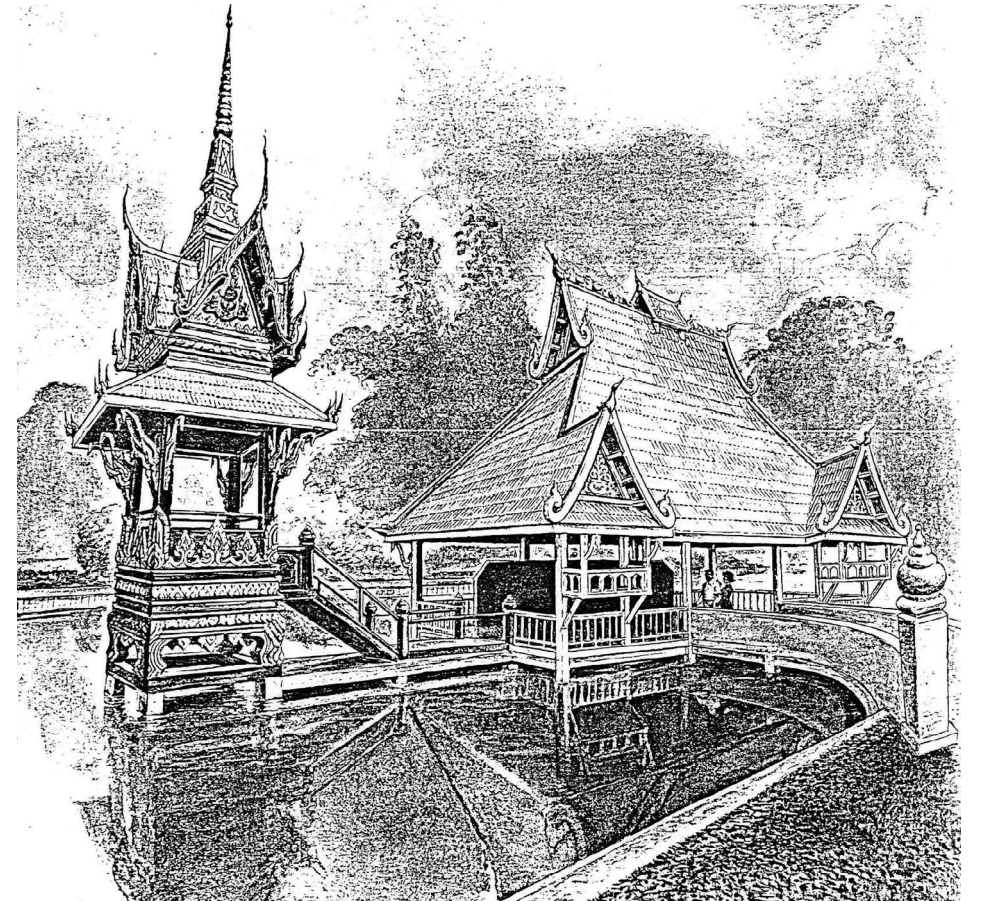


A severe flood that occurred during the monsoon season of 2011 (above, left) spread across vast areas of Thailand and inundated parts of Bangkok as flood waters coming from the northern provinces reached the mouth of the Chao Phraya. Originally built as moats, to protect the palace from intruders, the canals—known as *klongs*—have also been adaptively reused (above, right) as a system of transportation.

“I was immediately struck by the opportunity to develop a system of walkways through the site. Somewhat above that wet surface, it would be a very gratifying way of organizing circulation and a beautiful experience as well.”

Faye Harwell, FASLA, Director, RHI

The site is home to two *salas*—covered pavilions common in Thai architecture. The Sala Thai and the Royal Sala (named after a visit by Princess Sirindhorn) are used for ceremonial purposes throughout the year by members of the local community. The Royal Sala was built and dedicated to the King and members of the Royal family on the occasion of the 60th birthday of the late King Rama IX, serving as an enduring symbol of respect and appreciation of the monarchy. The *salas* will be removed for restoration during construction and then be given pride of place on the new campus. Both will be reinstalled on a platform in the center of the *klong* on the northern, more private edge of the site, a small footbridge connecting back to the balance of the landscaped grounds.



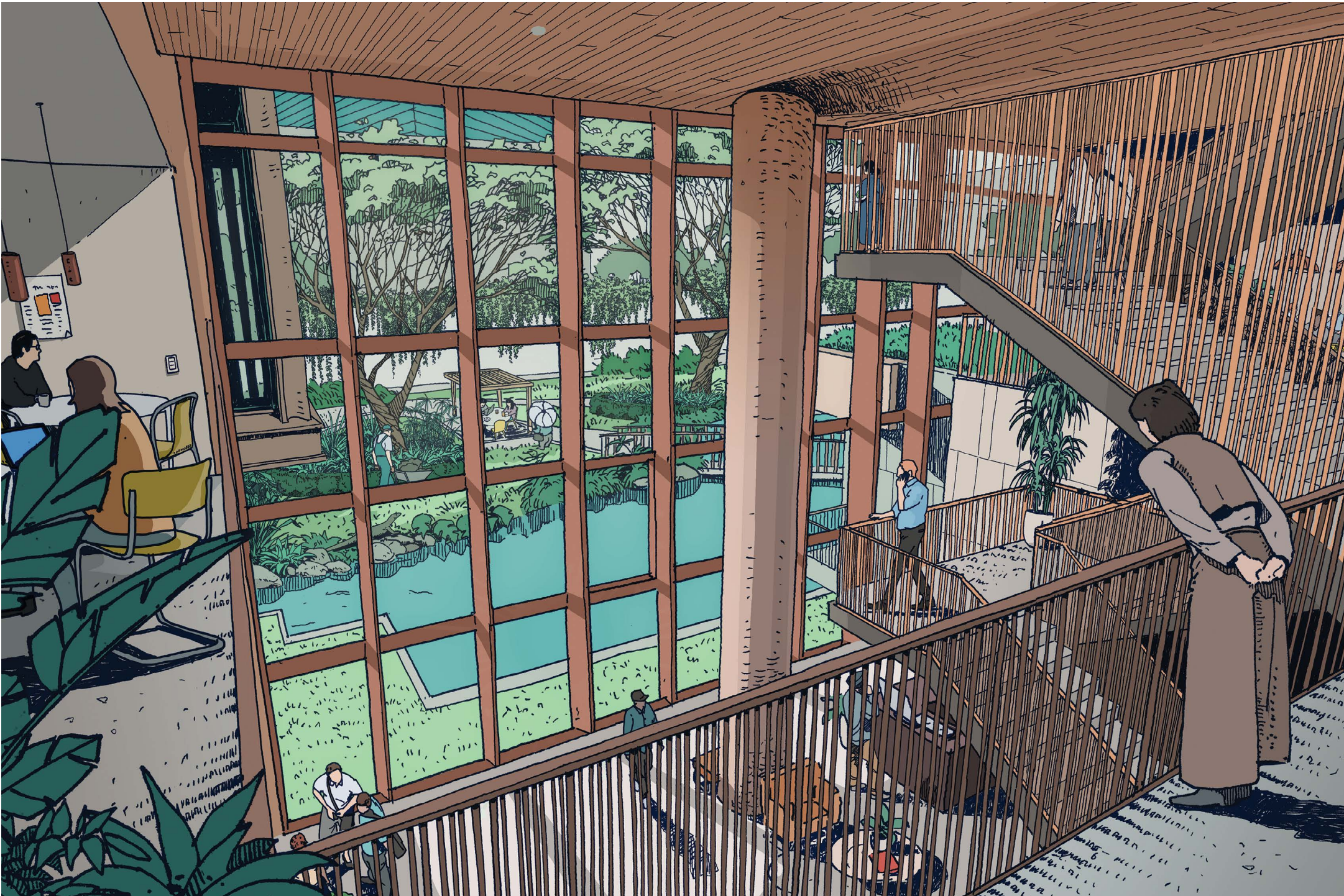
The original Sala Thai (right) was built in 1987. It was conserved and modified in 2010 to its current design.



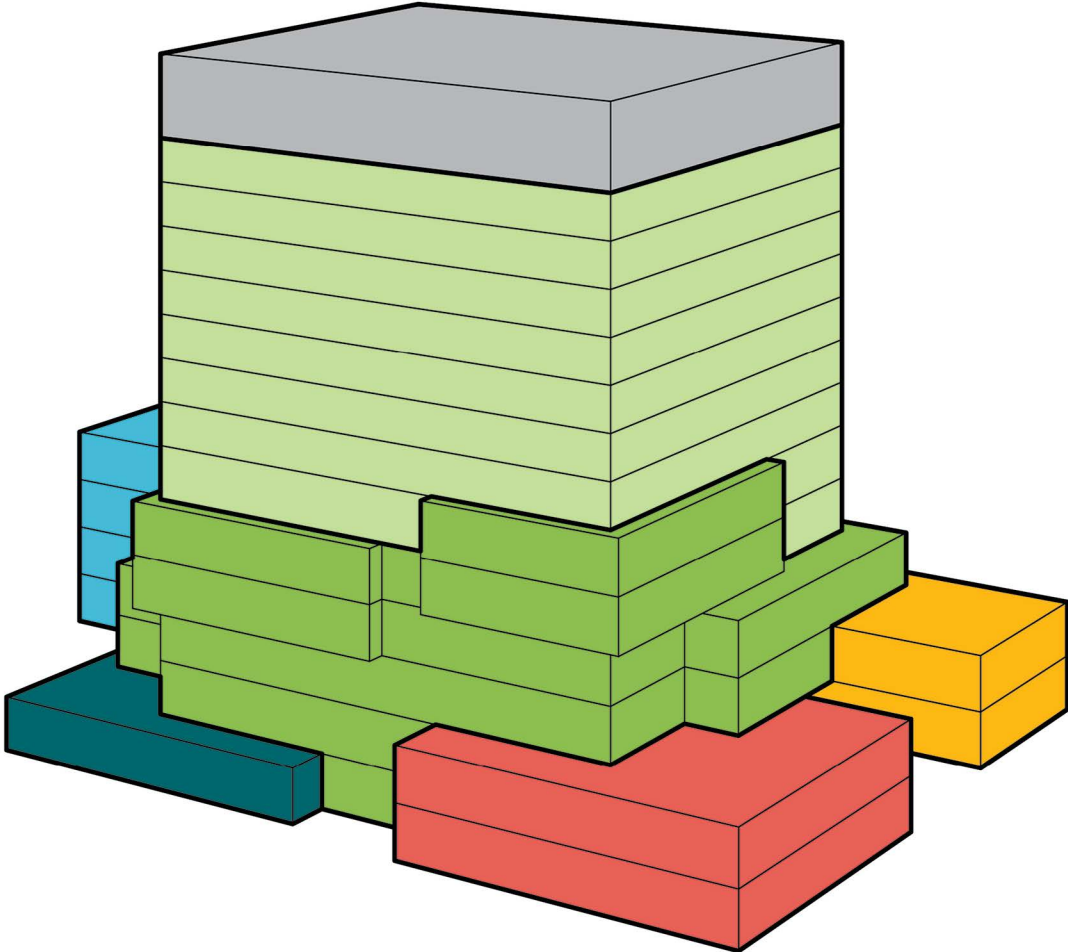
Accompanied by the sound of water, visitors travel to their designated building entry along shaded elevated paths that overlook the carefully planned, lush vegetation.

Creating a Diplomatic Commons

The double-height veranda space with views out to the northern *klong* and staff garden.



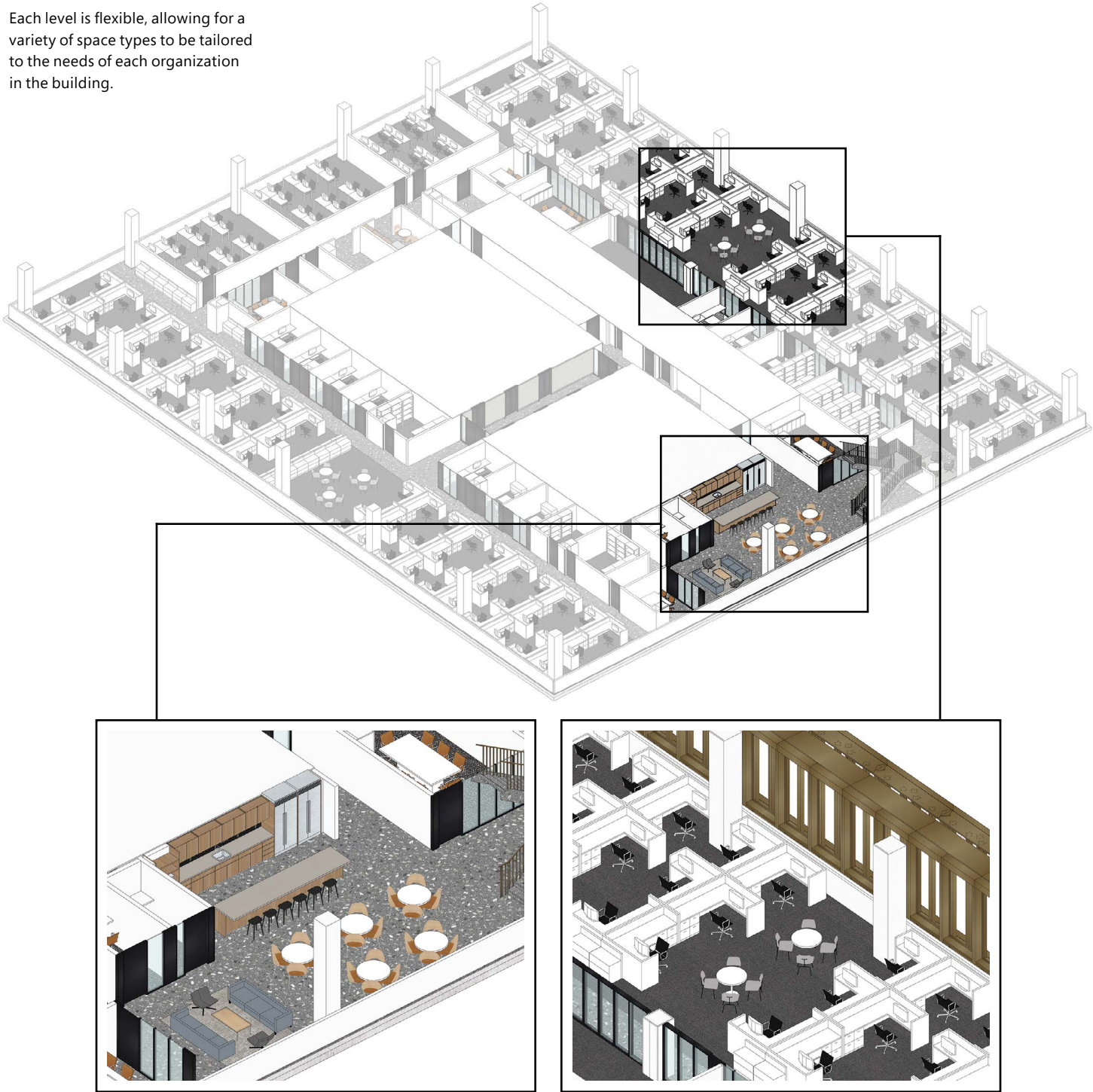
Shared spaces grow smaller and more defined as staff moves up into the Tower, serving the needs of the specific offices and various agencies. This flexible working environment is needed to accommodate different types of teams, as well as to allow for growth and change in the years ahead. As needed by each group, these levels feature shared workspaces, conference rooms, informal hubs, and private offices.



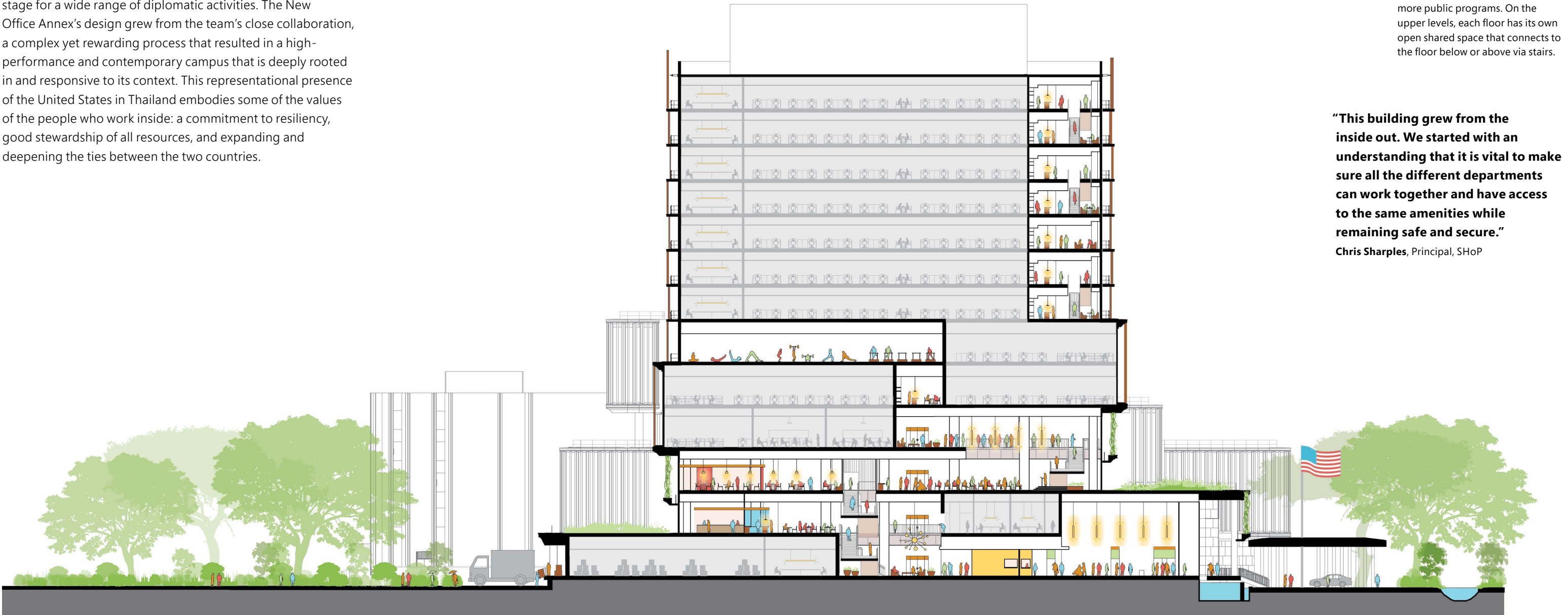
Different programmatic areas are stacked in a way that allows more public functions—the Consular and Main entries—to lead directly to the common and shared spaces, which form the heart of the building on the lower six floors.

- TOWER
- VILLAGE

Each level is flexible, allowing for a variety of space types to be tailored to the needs of each organization in the building.



Nature and the verdant garden spaces outside connect back throughout the building, whether with framed views from an individual workspace or the Gallery's wall of windows that almost disappear. These green spaces become the connective tissue of the campus—a biodiverse landscape that embraces the rich local culture and the site's ecology—and provide a stage for a wide range of diplomatic activities. The New Office Annex's design grew from the team's close collaboration, a complex yet rewarding process that resulted in a high-performance and contemporary campus that is deeply rooted in and responsive to its context. This representational presence of the United States in Thailand embodies some of the values of the people who work inside: a commitment to resiliency, good stewardship of all resources, and expanding and deepening the ties between the two countries.

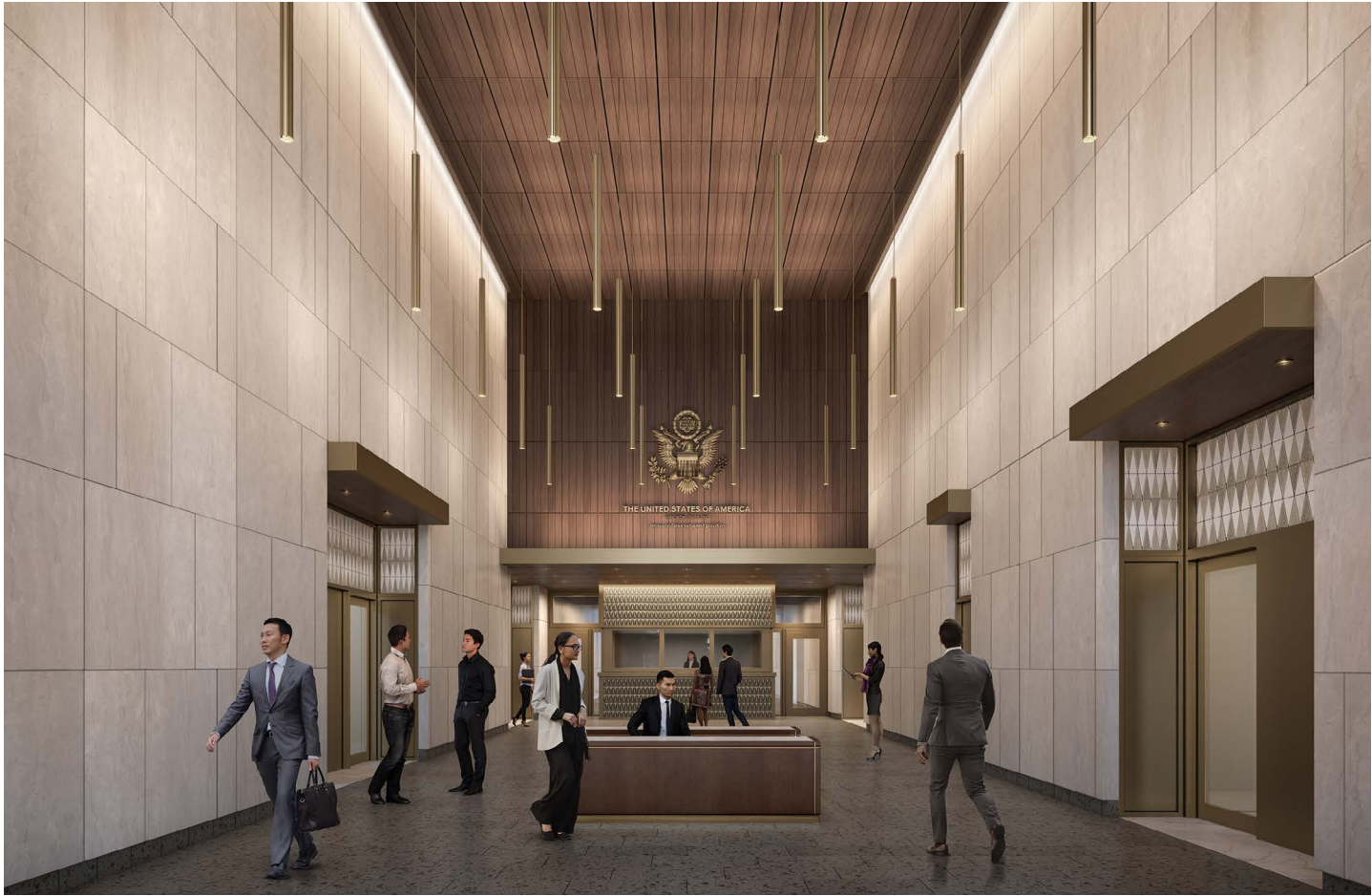


The idea of the diplomatic community as a village inspired the various connected shared spaces in the building, which begin at the Main Entry, at right in the sectional drawing below, and move up through the building. The lower six floors, the Commons, connect more public programs. On the upper levels, each floor has its own open shared space that connects to the floor below or above via stairs.

“This building grew from the inside out. We started with an understanding that it is vital to make sure all the different departments can work together and have access to the same amenities while remaining safe and secure.”
Chris Sharples, Principal, SHoP

The Lobby, directly accessed from the Main Entry, is used by staff and diplomatic visitors. Warm limestone, dark wood ceilings, bronze-colored lighting and fixtures, and terrazzo floors create a palette that continues throughout the public-facing and representational spaces. A ground-level veranda connects to the landscape and *klongs* outside, while the monumental stair connects the public spaces and culminates in the Gallery.

Accessible from the lobby (below), the double-height veranda (facing) overlooks the northern *klong* and provides access to the monumental stair.





The Gallery's flexible layout can be transformed from a series of smaller, informal gathering spaces to the primary ceremonial space in the building. The west-facing windows establish an important visual connection to the American flag and the Chancery across Witthayu Road. Vines trail from planters, built into the screens outside, providing dappled light and softening the view outside.

The ground-level Multi-Purpose Room, designed to hold a variety of events and trainings, looks over a covered outdoor space and into the Consular Garden.

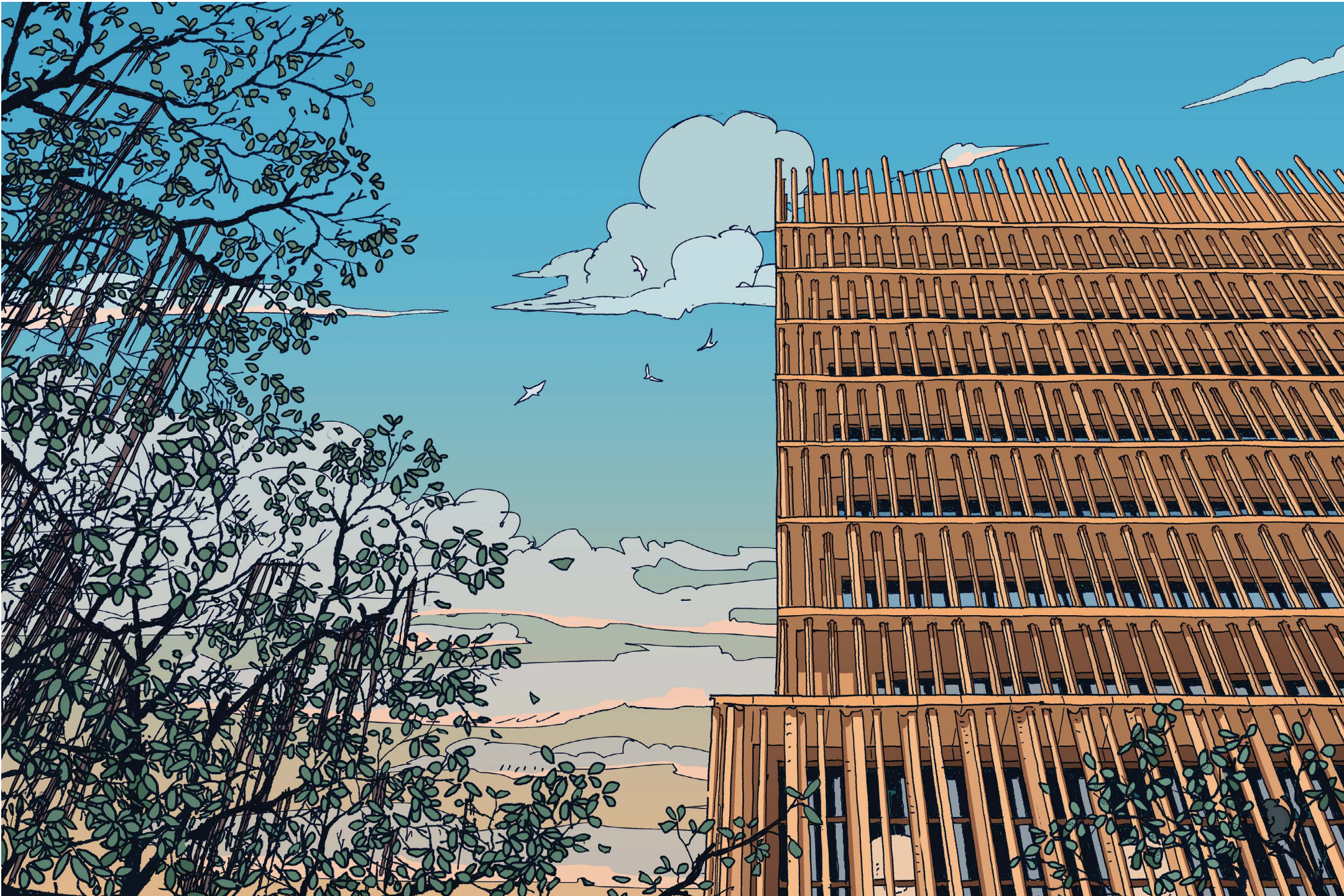


A first stop in preparing for a journey to the United States, the Consular Waiting area is an important representational space. The ceiling system design drew inspiration from patterns in Bangkok's traditional architecture.



Traditional Tools,
Innovative Construction:
A High-Performance
Façade Screen

The north façades as seen from
the ground.



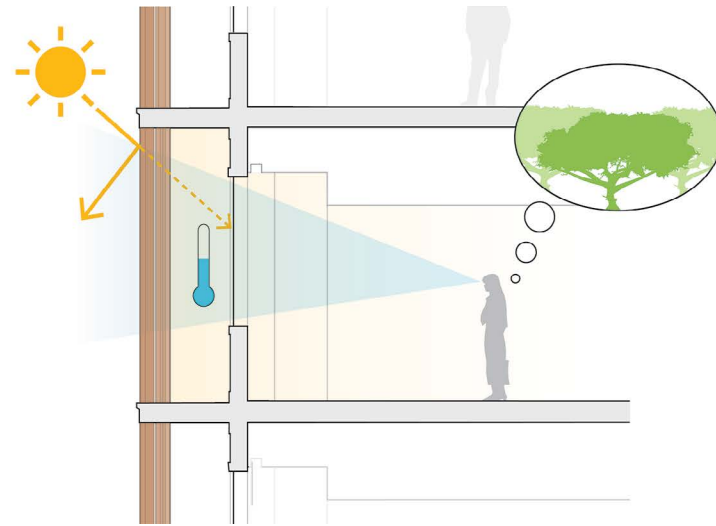
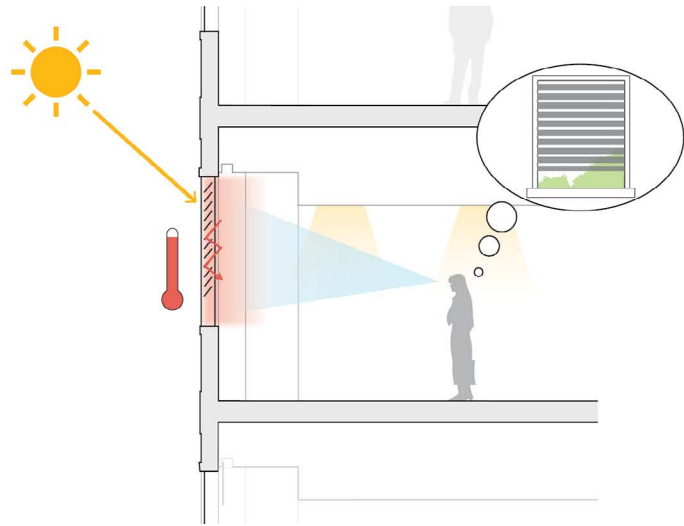


Pedestrians in Bangkok (below) often use umbrellas to guard against the sun's intense heat. Bangkok's climatic challenges (facing) require a design and materials that address glare, daylight, heat gains, and user comfort.



While many of Bangkok's new glass towers rely heavily on air conditioning and interior shades to provide respite from the city's extreme heat, humidity, and glare, the Annex uses passive design strategies found in historic Thai architecture. Covered porches and layered screens have created comfortable spaces in Thailand for centuries, essentially merging the indoors with the rich landscape surrounding it.

The tower of the New Office Annex revisits these traditions with an innovative high-performance façade that maximizes views and daylighting while controlling heat gain and glare. An iterative design process assessed many options and identified extruded aluminum profiles as the most effective balance between performance and comfort. Sun exposure and spatial functions define the levels of opacity, which varies on each of the four sides of the façade.

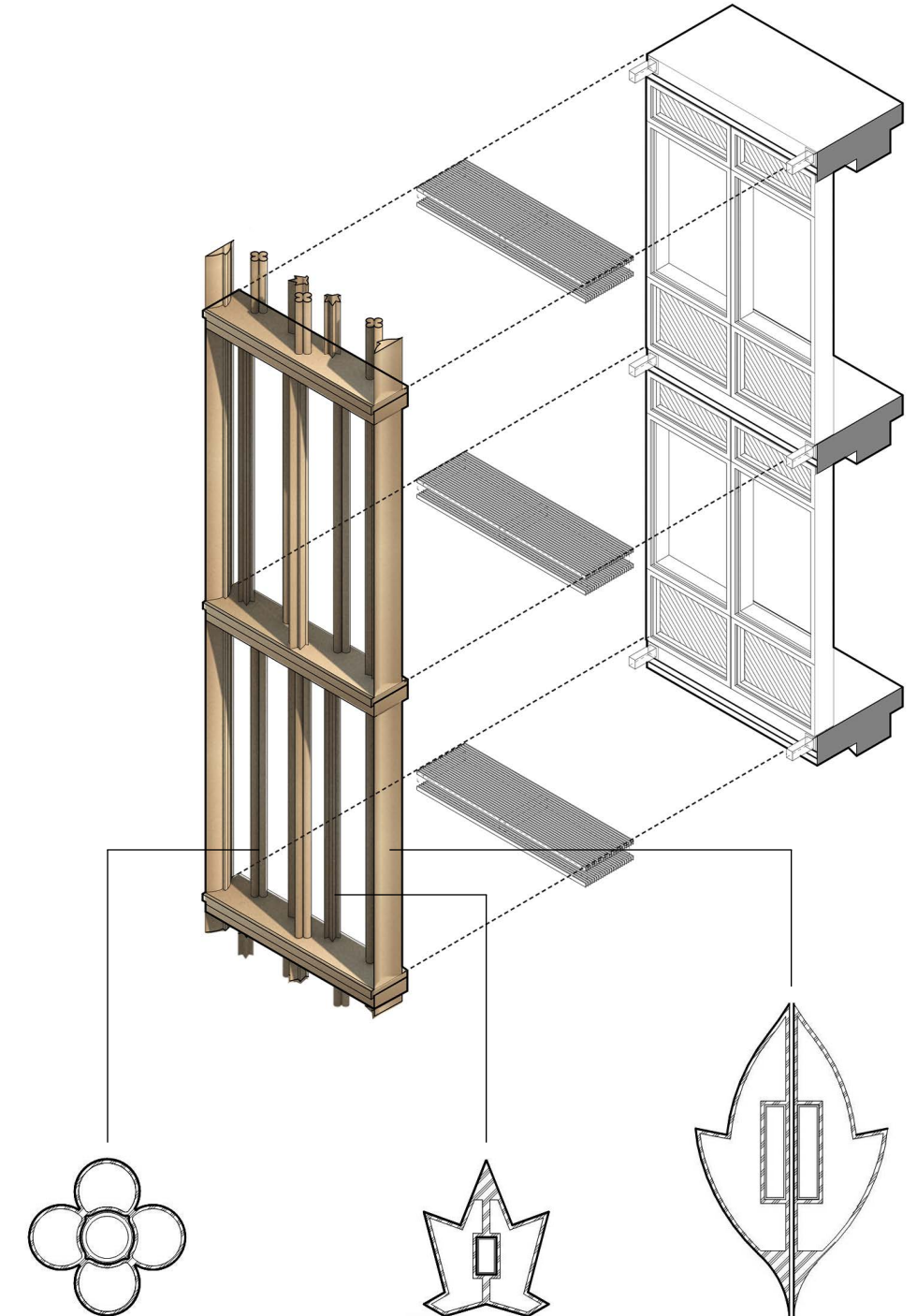


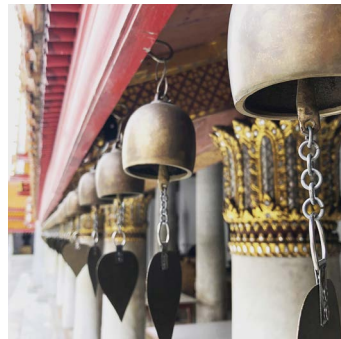
Sun exposure is most pronounced on the eastern and western façades, where the screens are denser to reduce glare and heat gains within. By deploying a system of external shades, the use of interior shades is minimized, allowing staff to work comfortably while maintaining views out to the city and a connection to the landscape. The aluminum profiles are extruded in different shapes based on forms commonly found in Bangkok: bells, leaves, and even the vines that hang from the rain trees. Although the façade screen's primary purpose is to improve building performance and create a comfortable and healthy working environment for the staff, its warm bronze color and varied patterns give the tower a more intimate scale while relating it to screening elements found on other buildings throughout the compound—a shared language, both symbolic and functional, that serves to give an identity to the whole.

“We started to ask which geometries could help us articulate the sense of visual richness and biophilia we saw in the city. We borrowed shapes from patterns we saw in the rich fabrics and in flora and fauna and drew them into our architectural language.”

Chris Sharples, Principal, SHoP

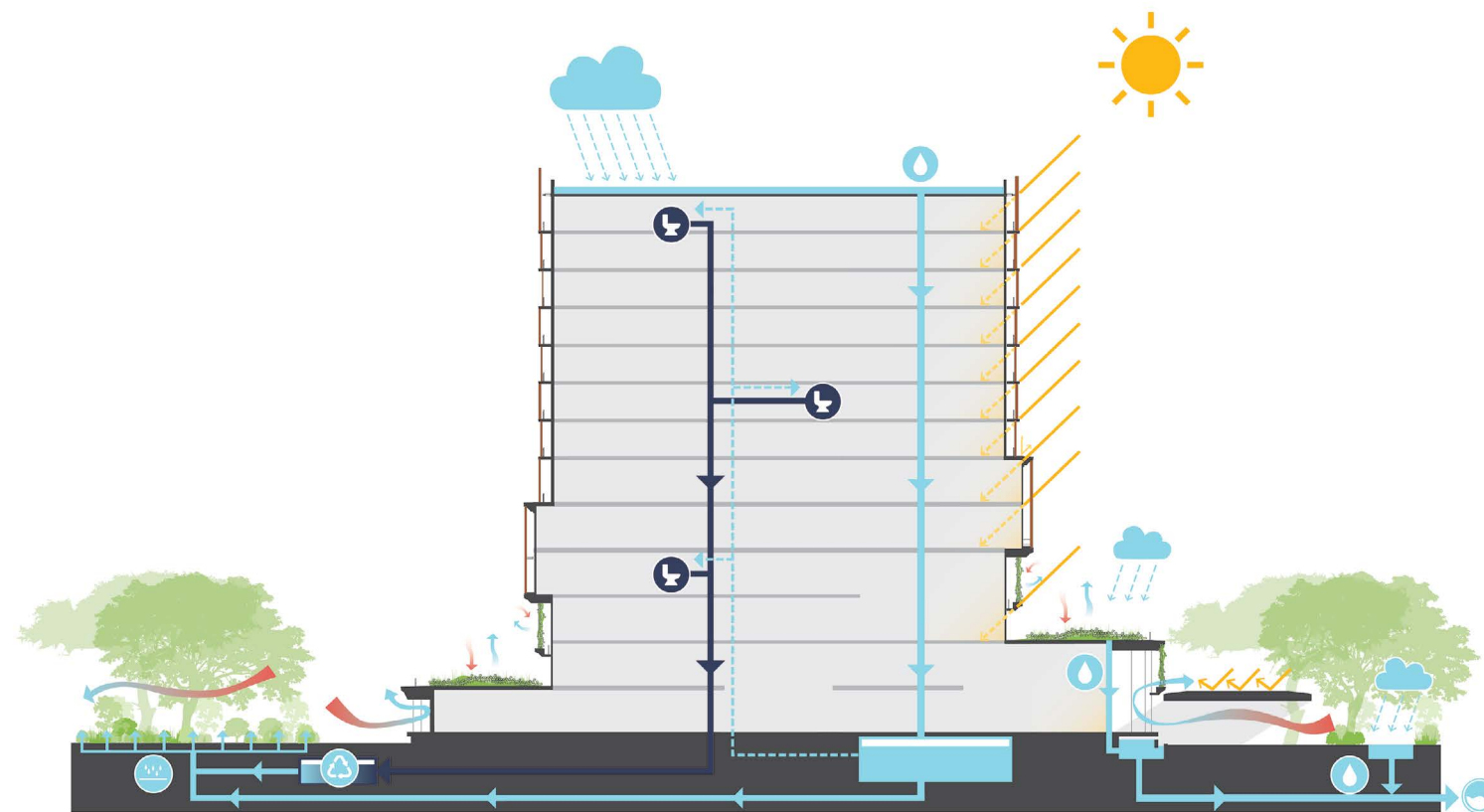
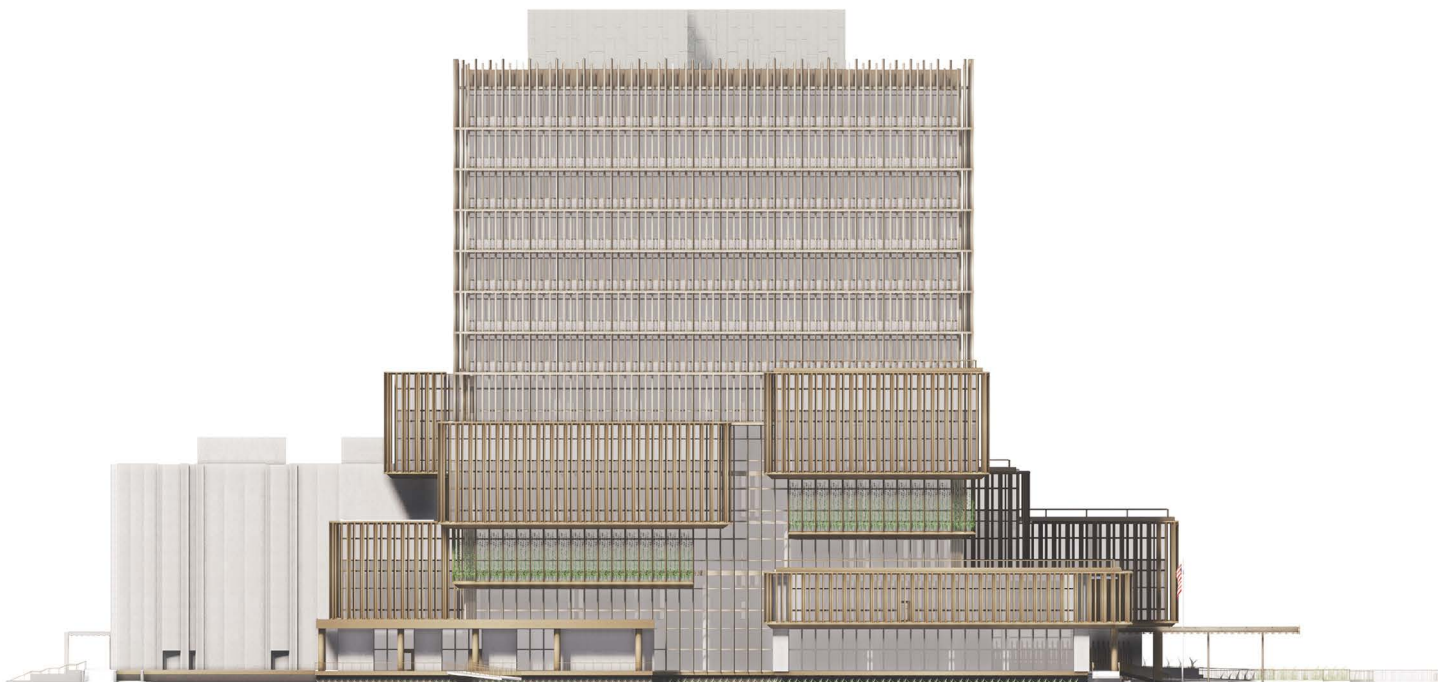
The façade screens (facing) mitigate solar heat gain and glare and greatly reduce energy consumption, while sheltered porches and verandas are left open to create comfortable outdoor spaces that passively cool adjacent indoor spaces. The extruded, vertical elements (below) are three distinct shapes derived from Bangkok's natural forms and rich culture of ornament (following page, top row).





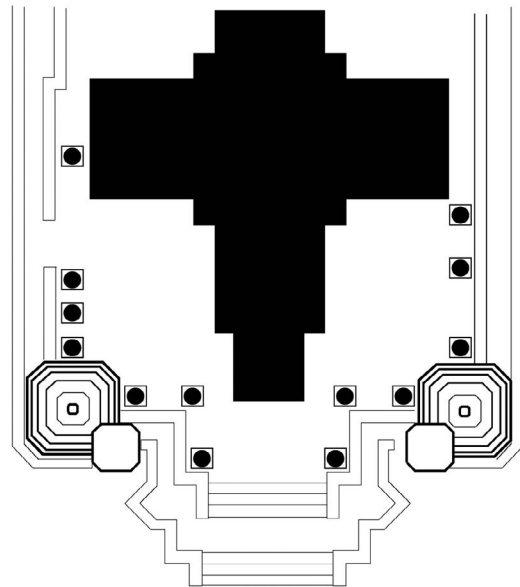
From afar, the screen's warm color shimmers like a translucent veil in a dramatic play of light and shadow. Up close, the screen reveals openings that subtly connect the building to its site.

The New Office Annex's active and passive building systems are integrated and finely tuned to Bangkok's climate. Rainfall and runoff are channeled towards the *klongs*, while graywater is cleaned and used for drip irrigation in dry seasons.

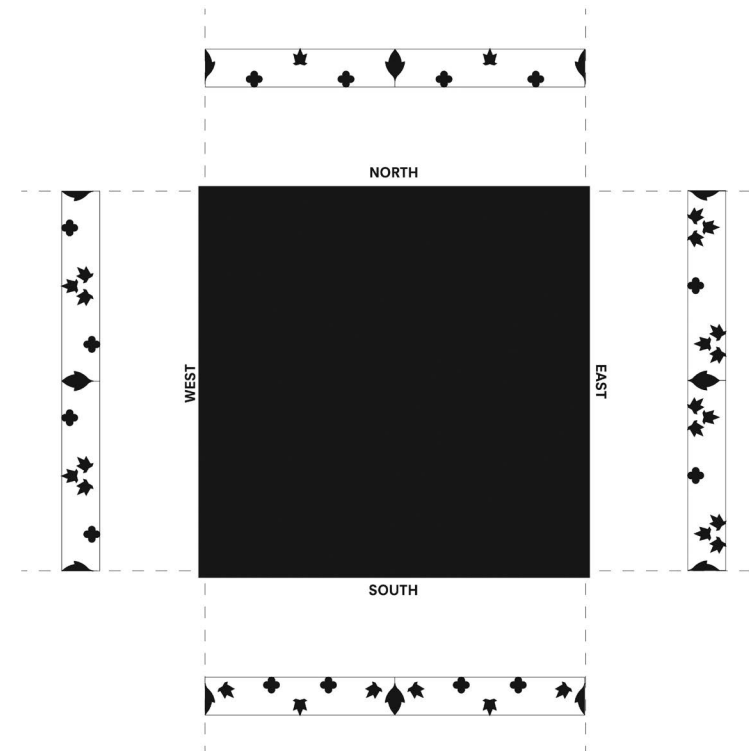




Wat Suthat (top) is one of the many temples in Bangkok with a layered façade and a column-supported arcade (below) that maximizes shade and minimizes radiant heat and glare inside the temple. The traditional arcade is translated and modernized in the exterior screen for the New Office Annex.



Vertical bronze-colored anodized aluminum elements at variable density comprise the façade screen. The pattern is optimized based on the solar exposure, with alternating patterns over two floors.





While physically connected to the main building, the Marine Security Guard Quarters has a distinct identity of its own. The faceted stone façade is inspired by the ancient ruins of Ayutthaya, where the Embassy is helping to preserve Wat Chaiwatthanaram through a grant from the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation. The windows are angled slightly away from the exterior garden spaces to provide a greater sense of privacy. The stone is used to contrast the glass and metal screen of the main façade. A yard connects to a sheltered porch (below) that is reserved for the Marines and serves as the main entrance to the residence.





“The very long name for Bangkok refers to it as “the Great City of Angels.” The design for the new U.S. Embassy office building truly captures that sense of grace and presence, and it clearly reflects the importance that the United States places on its relationship with Thailand and the region.”

Acting Director Henry Jardine
Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations
March 2021

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Landscape Architect

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