

# Retreat

Supporting Yoga Through  
Architectural Expression

RAIC 690 Syllabus Diploma Project

by

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# Retreat - Supporting Yoga Through Architectural Expression

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Heartfelt gratitude to you all.

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this thesis project is to observe the relationship between yoga and architecture in order to study two key questions. First, how do the guiding principles of yoga inform architectural design? Second, how do the architectural qualities of form, materiality and physical-spatial synergy support a space of retreat for yoga practice?



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## INTRODUCTION

*“The lesson of all sacred architecture, all sacred space: that we need only look about us, and feel with a new intensity the space and light and solid and void, and the sound and the quiet, and listen to the presence of the past, and from there look into ourselves. And then we will find the transcendent.”*

*- Paul Goldberger (2010)*

### Why Yoga?

I believe yoga is an important practice - one capable of bringing moments of stillness and peace to its followers. I have practiced yoga for longer than I have practiced architecture and, in my experience, the one has increasingly informed the other. Although I initially came to yoga primarily as a physical practice and means of stress relief, it has had a larger impact than I could have imagined, on all aspects of my life. I think there are many connections between architecture and yoga; many sparks of inspiration and joy that relate yoga to architecture and vice versa. This paper aims to further explore these connections and sparks.

The practice of yoga can be a crucial element of personal wellbeing and connection to the wider community, and further universal connection. I believe it is important to have a place of retreat in order to nourish our souls and rest our minds. Being able to disconnect and recharge outside of one's normal daily routine brings a different focus to individual practice. Personally, I have

found an increased need for, and benefit from, longer moments of stillness and reflection; an essential break from the constant noise and movement of my life. I carry a sense of peace with me into my daily routine long after I leave a retreat.

Yoga has existed for centuries, or more, as an established element of daily life in many parts of the world. The Sanskrit word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, meaning “to yoke” or “to unite” (Dass & Thomas, 1981). In the practice of yoga, this union is the connection of body, mind and spirit. The underlying significance speaks to our need for connection - with ourselves, with each other in community, and with nature.

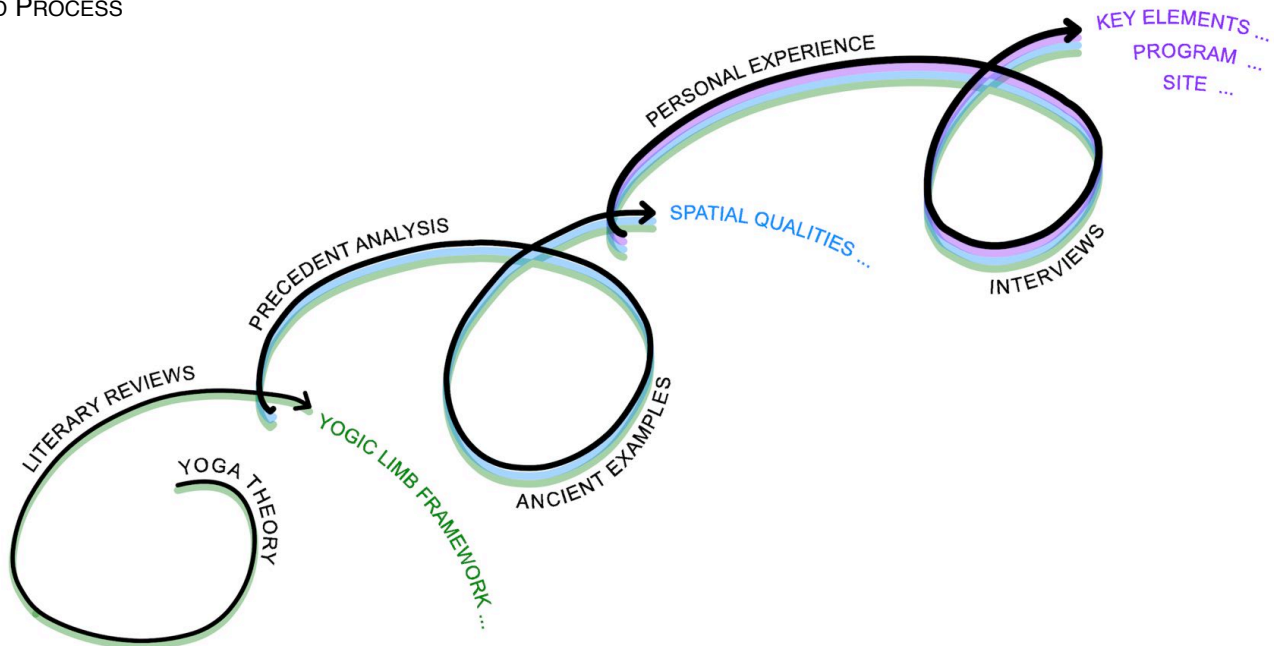
In terms of religious roots, yoga comes from Vedic and Hindu traditions, with elements that pre-date Hindu religion (Iyengar, 2012). This ancient practice dates back thousands of years and has seen a resurgence of interest in the last century or so. Modern yoga, particularly as practiced and understood in the Western world, often has a different meaning, shifting away from the spiritual and religious connotations. A person from any religion, or no religion at all, can come to yoga without having to give up, or change, a personal belief. Essentially, yoga is not associated with any one belief system, although the practice of yoga can have spiritual elements for many people. The opportunity to rest in

stillness and reflection can bring the sacred to the forefront of many people's experience of their personal yoga practice.

## Methodology

Thorough exploration of two main areas of research have been undertaken during this journey: the investigation of sacred architecture, through a review of modern retreat centres; alongside a comprehensive inquiry of the foundations of yoga theory to ground the intention of this project and establish a framework.

FIG. 1 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS



Literary reviews, precedent studies, qualitative and quantitative analysis and personal interviews have been the main focus of the research methodologies. The iterative nature of this research will



extend into the next phase of the diploma project and will continue to inform overall process.

## **Paper Structure**

This paper, following this introduction, is divided into three sections. The first section, *Yoga and Architecture*, provides an introduction to yoga theory and considers how yoga has been incorporated into the western world. The key tenets of yoga philosophy are outlined and connections are made to architectural theory. The integration of yoga and architecture is explored in the establishment of a guiding framework.

The second section, *Analytical*, views architecturally relevant case studies through the lens of the yogic limb framework to establish some interpretations about how architecture supports the practice of yoga in a retreat setting.

The third section, *Experiential*, will explore both my personal experiences while attending various retreats, as well as those of interviewees. These interviews add additional layers to test against my own experience. Investigation continues to follow the lens of the yogic limb framework, but will focus on the experiential elements, rather than the analytical.

The culmination of the first three sections will result in the exploration of design strategies that can be used in the

development of a new typology of architectural expression. The possibilities for integration of sustainable solutions are also explored here.

The remaining sections will be developed in terms two and three of the Diploma Project (RAIC 690b) and will form the foundation for the design project (annotated visual argument). Section Four, *Site*, will explore site selection and describe the site chosen to investigate the concepts introduced in the research term. Section Five, *Program*, will introduce a functional program for the site that serves to illustrate the issues discussed.

The final section, *Project Description*, will present descriptive text of design process and concepts, with integration of reproduced drawings of the final design project: the architectural expression of spiritual space in the form of a yoga and meditation retreat centre.

## **Project Aims**

This project endeavours to create a retreat centre where urban dwellers can extract themselves from their busy daily lives and discover moments of stillness and quiet. The intent is a holistic, experiential retreat for the union of the mind, body and spirit, allowing for solitude and self reflection, as well as a re-connection to nature and the larger community. Although people from further afar may visit the retreat centre, the project is primarily targeted for

people living in the urban centres of Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia.

It is important to locate the retreat centre away from urban centres for several reasons. First, the congestion of the city does not contribute to a sense of calm or a connection to nature. Spending time in nature has been shown to contribute to a healthy body and mind (Psychology Today [PT], 2003), while city living tends to be distanced from nature. The connection to the natural rhythms of our larger natural environment are more clearly evident, and therefore more easily accessed, outside an urban setting.

The vision can be expressed in the following mission statement:

TO CREATE A RETREAT CENTRE THAT PROVIDES A SUPPORTIVE  
ENVIRONMENT FOR CONTEMPLATION AND SOLITUDE IN NATURE;  
GENERATING A RICH SPIRIT OF PLACE, LAYERED WITH THE  
INTEGRATION OF SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECTURAL PRINCIPLES AND  
YOGA PHILOSOPHY.

Taking time out for a retreat can help people find inner peace and invigorate the mind, body and spirit while re-connecting with the authentic self and with nature. Architectural design can support this practice by using a holistic approach, where numerous elements (including siting, orientation, adjacencies, circulation, approach, building materials, and the built form) are all considered to inform the ‘enlightenment’ of a project.

## YOGA AND ARCHITECTURE

*“It is essential sometimes to go into retreat, to stop everything that you have been doing, to stop your experiences completely and look at them anew, not keep on repeating them like machines. You would then let fresh air into your mind. Wouldn't you? This place must be of great beauty, with trees, birds, and quietness ... For beauty is truth and truth is goodness and love.”*

*- J. Krishnamurti (1999)*

### Evolution of Yoga and Yoga Retreats

The concept of retreat is an ancient one. In its function as a verb, the word retreat means to withdraw, and is often used in description of military tactics. The phrase to “beat a hasty retreat” brings to mind a visual of quickly getting out of danger. In its function as a noun, retreat has roots in spiritual seclusion practiced by various religions, including Buddhist, Catholic, Hindu, Christian and Islamic communities (Cooper, 1999).

Ancient retreats were not practiced to escape the daily stressors of life, but to quiet the mind in order to get closer to god. These retreats were seen as an essential element, simply one part of the whole of a follower’s spiritual or religious practice (Mann, 2002).

The architecture of the retreat is historically simple, even simplistic, and in many ways still is. The ‘retreatant’ does not need opulence, luxury or even *things* in order to withdraw and sit



FIG. 2 - TIBETAN MONK IN NATURE.  
IMAGE CREDIT - PUBLIC DOMAIN FROM:  
[HTTPS://UPLOAD.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/  
WIKIPEDIA/COMMONS/5/51/  
ПРАКТИКА\\_ТУММО.JPG](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/51/ПРАКТИКА_ТУММО.JPG)

quietly. In very early days, a typical retreat setting was simply nature. Sitting atop a mountain or in the woods, with no shelter or ‘architecture’ per se, a monk would meditate or pray, often for long stretches of time. The ideal retreat setting eventually progressed to the more formal container of a monastery or a temple location, which can be extremely simple architecturally; or in temple architecture, can tend towards opulence.

Towards the 1950s, organized group retreats gained in popularity in North America, requiring the introduction of a space large enough to host more than one individual (Goldberg, 2010). These group retreats ranged from religious to secular and often fit themselves into existing spaces or buildings. Due to lack of funds, these spaces were often used temporarily by the group and repurposed the remainder of the time in order to earn supplementary income.

Supporting this challenge, even today it is difficult to find retreats that have been designed and purpose built, rather than a renovated building such as a farm house, barn or decommissioned church.

Yoga and meditation retreats have significantly risen in popularity along with the increase in mainstream yoga classes in the western world (Syman, 2010). The intent has not changed however - the function of a group retreat is still to withdraw and focus inwards,

now just surrounded by the energy of like-minded people. Retreat gives the opportunity to physically, mentally and emotionally draw back to oneself and allow time and space for reflection and stillness. Practicing yoga and meditation while on retreat adds to the connection with oneself and with nature.

### **Yoga Theory - 8 Limbs of Patanjali**

There are a multitude of branches of yogic teachings, including Jnana, Karma, Bhakti, Raja and Hatha (McCrary, 2014). In the west, outside India, the term yoga is typically associated with Hatha yoga and its asanas (physical postures), or as a form of exercise. All types of yoga fall under the umbrella of Classical or Ashtanga yoga. Ashtanga is a Sanskrit term that comes from ancient yoga Sutras (books) of Patanjali and refers to an eight-fold path to enlightenment (Stiles, 2001; Iyengar, 2012). Ashtanga literally translates to ‘Eight Limbs’, with *Ashta* translating to eight and *Anga* translating to limb (Dass & Thomas, 1981). Patanjali’s sequence consists of five “outer” limbs and three “inner” limbs. These limbs, or aspects of practice, progress from concrete, external ideas to subtle, internal concepts (Sarbacker & Kimple, 2015). Enlightenment, or peace, is the ultimate goal of Ashtanga yoga practice and is the eighth and final limb.

Enlightenment, according to ancient yoga texts, is the freedom of the mind from worldly attachment, where one comes to terms with their true nature (Hanh, 2011; Iyengar, 2012). It is the ultimate union of body, mind, and spirit. According to Sarbacker and Kimple (2015), another way to articulate this eight-limbed path is “outer, inner, and then everything” (p. 13).

The eight limbs are laid out as follows:

1. Yama (restraints or disciplines towards the outside world)
2. Niyama (observances or rules of conduct personal to oneself)
3. Asana (posture)
4. Pranayama (breath control)
5. Pratyahara (detachment / withdrawal of senses)
6. Dharana (concentration)
7. Dhyana (meditation)
8. Samadhi (Enlightenment)

It is interesting to note that asana and pranayama, the most popularized forms of yoga practice, especially in the west, are third and fourth on the list, building upon personal, or internal, restraints and observances, and ethics towards the greater community. Physical postures and breath work on their own are not yoga, but simply two components of the whole of yoga. The physical body is viewed as a means to unite the breath body in order to reach

enlightenment. Each of the eight limbs builds upon the previous, but the process is not necessarily linear; much like architecture, the yogi's journey will likely take a circuitous route, and begin again and again, over the course of a practitioner's life.

Both the limbs of Yama and Niyama contain five further sub-limbs. The five yamas are restraints that relate to how we function in the world, how we treat ourselves and others, and how we choose to live on the earth. The five yamas below can be viewed as similar to several of the ten commandments and are a version of "thou shalt not" (Adele, 2009).

1. *ahimsa*, or non-violence; this can extend to compassion for all living beings, including ourselves and the planet we inhabit. Ahimsa also refers to internal thoughts, not just gross actions.
2. *satya*, or truthfulness; this extends to living truthfully among our fellow humans and being honest with ourselves.
3. *asteya*, or non-stealing; refers to both physical, material stealing and abstract, internal theft.
4. *brahmacharya*; refers to moderation or control over the impulse to live in excess.
5. *aparigraha*; refers to non-hoarding or contentment with what you have.



The five niyamas below can be seen as rules of conduct that mandate self discipline and internal observances (Adele, 2009).

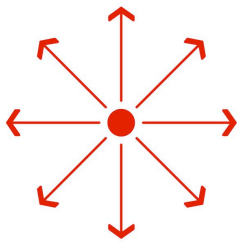
1. *saucha*, or purity; references physical and mental cleanliness.
2. *santosa*, or contentment; related to *aparigraha*, refers to being satisfied with what we have and where we are, in practice and in life.
3. *tapas* or austerity and discipline; can relate to burning off what no longer serves us and also to challenging yourself with staying in a moment of discomfort.
4. *svadhyaya*, or self study; relates to becoming self aware and going deeper with self observation, especially of habits.
5. *isvarapranidhana*, celebration of the spiritual and surrender to the unknown.

### **Yogic Limbs + Architecture = Limb Framework**

These limbs are integral to the foundation of yoga practice, where if one limb is missing, an unbalance occurs. A comprehensive, integrated approach to yoga, and subsequently to architecture, requires a balance in all elements. Successful architectural design also speaks to a holistic approach, with the union of body, mind and spirit.

*It is only with the heart that one  
can see rightly; what is  
essential is invisible to the eye.  
The Fox to the Little Prince  
- Antoine de Saint-Exupery*

The following framework, based on Patanjali's yoga limbs, has been established, during this research process, as a means to evaluate both precedent projects and my own retreat experiences. This framework has also informed interview questions. Each limb corresponds to an architectural concept or experience of space. The last two limbs, meditation and enlightenment, are so tied to each other, in an intangible sense, that they are combined to correlate to one framework concept - Spirit of Place.

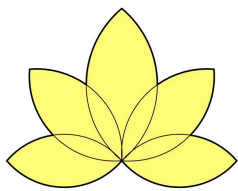


The first limb, Yama, corresponds to the architectural concept of ethics; particularly site, materiality and sustainability. The sublimbs of the yamas pertain to truthfulness, moderation, non-stealing, and non-harming, and these have a direct link to architecture and sustainability. Being true to the site with selection of local materials that honour the climate and setting, as well as minimizing, or even eliminating, harmful impacts on the earth, are important elements to architecture (Feuerstein, 2007; Álvarez, 2014). The equivalent retreat analysis is similar; exploring the experiences of location and setting, as well as materiality and sustainability endeavours, of a particular retreat.

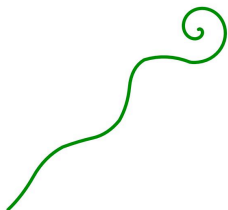


The second limb, Niyama, the internal rules of conduct, corresponds to the architectural concept of program and the guiding rules that influence the program and adjacencies of a

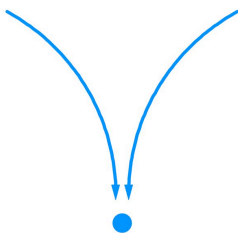
precedent project and also of a retreat experience. Whether the program is clustered together in one building, or is sprinkled around the site in separate buildings, relates to internal rules. As this limb relates to cleanliness and austerity of the body, it directly connects to the experience of spaces where retreat participants eat, sleep, bathe and practice.



The third limb, Asana, the physical postures of yoga practice, corresponds to the architectural concepts of form, geometry and structure. As in a physical yoga pose, the structure of the body supports the pose; similarly, the structure of a building supports its architectural expression. In an experiential retreat analysis, this limb corresponds to the variety of classes or sessions offered as well as the interactions of participants between sessions.



The fourth limb, Pranayama, breath work, corresponds to the architectural concept of circulation. Much like exploring how the breath circulates within the body, we can study how participants circulate within a building, site, or a retreat centre. Additionally, as the practice of pranayama sometimes means constraint or restriction of the breath from certain parts of the body, this corresponds to an investigation of public versus private spaces.



The fifth limb, Pratyahara, can be viewed as a bridge between the external limbs and the internal limbs (Sarbacker, 2015). Pratyahara

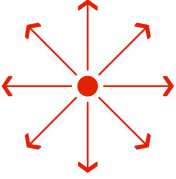

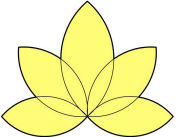

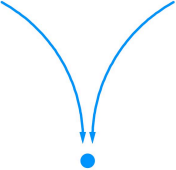

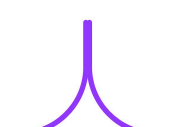
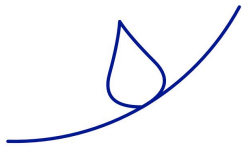
	Yogic Limb	Architectural Concept/ Precedent Analysis	Retreat Experience
	Yama (restraints or disciplines towards the outside world)  - non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, moderation, non-hoarding	Ethics - Site / materiality / sustainability	Site / materiality / sustainability
	Niyama (observances or rules of conduct personal to oneself)  - purity/cleanliness, contentment, heat/rigour, self study, surrender to unknown	Rules - Program / adjacencies	Amenities - food, accommodation, washrooms, spa, gardens.
	Asana (posture)	Form / geometry / structure	Variety of classes offered & interactions between sessions
	Pranayama (breath control)	Circulation (public/private)	Circulation (public/private)
	Pratyahara (detachment / withdrawal of senses)	Journey / Approach	Journey / Approach
	Dharana (concentration)	Scale - Length of retreat / size of group	Length of retreat / size of group
	Dhyana (meditation) & Samadhi ('Enlightenment') - combined	Spirit of Place:  sacred / magic / special	Spirit of Place:  sacred / magic / special  Long term / short term effects

TABLE 1 - YOGIC LIMB FRAMEWORK

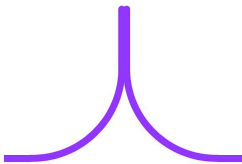
Things you do  
(ACTIVE • EFFORTS)

Things that happen TO you  
(PASSIVE • RESULTS)

is the idea of withdrawing or detaching one's external senses and journeying inside, in preparation for meditation. The corresponding architectural concept is journey and approach, applying to both architectural analysis, as well as the experience of journeying to a retreat, no matter if it is near or far. Formal or informal procession, a fundamental architectural concept, is also related to Pratyahara.



The sixth limb, Dharana, is intentional concentration, or “paying attention on purpose” (Dass & Thomas, 1981, p. 9). Like Pratyahara, Dharana is also internal preparation for meditation, with concentration on the rhythm of the breath, or a repeated mantra, such as OM. The corresponding architectural concept looks at concentration from the perspective of scale, relating specifically to the intended use of the space, in conjunction with the length of retreat and size of group. A retreat space will likely have significant differences if it is intended to support a group of fifty staying for three months, versus a group of twelve participants visiting for a weekend.



The seventh and eighth limbs go beyond physical concepts to ephemeral concepts. They no longer are within the control of what a person can do; rather, these limbs, and the concepts behind them, are a result of the six limbs that have come before. Dhyana, the

seventh limb, is classified as meditation, and is different to what most of us think of as meditation, which in actuality is simply Dharana, or focused concentration. Actual Dhyana meditation is the lack of striving to meditate. The natural culmination of the previous limbs results (in rare occasions) in Samadhi or enlightenment, something that is impossible to do by trying and difficult to express in words. The architectural concept that corresponds to these two limbs is Spirit of Place, the intangible feeling of the sacred, special and magic. In architecture, this feeling is not something tangible, the outcome of which can actively be controlled, but rather it occurs as a result of successes in the previous elements. The hope, and intention, is always the culmination of an architecturally and spiritually rich spirit of place.

*“I see the task of architecture as the defence of the authenticity of human experience.”*

*Juhani Pallasmaa (2005)*

The table on the following page synthesizes the information above and outlines the framework which has been used as a lens to view each part of this research process. It also highlights the similarities between precedent analysis points and retreat evaluation points, as the analytical and the experiential are several times linked.

## **ANALYTICAL**

### **Case Study Selection**

While there are many properties around the world that host retreats, I chose to look at retreat centres that were designed and built with the specific purpose to hold space for yoga and meditation retreats. Out of several retreats that were reviewed, three retreat centres were selected to be explored in depth. Each was selected for a different reason and is unique from the rest. Two are located in the United States, in California and Massachusetts, and the third is situated in Suffolk, England. All three projects are ground breaking in that they were designed specifically around the practice they support, rather than reusing and renovating existing buildings, with the challenge of fitting the retreat's needs within existing walls.

Joshua Tree's desert setting is home to North America's oldest retreat centre designed and built for the sole purpose of creating a spiritual oasis. Also known as the Institute of Mentalphysics, the Joshua Tree Retreat Centre now hosts several thousand visitors every year and has fulfilled the vision of a place of spiritual connection that inspired its founder, Edwin Dingle, more than seventy years ago (Institute of Mentalphysics [IM], 2018).

The Kripalu Centre, located on the opposite coast from the Joshua Tree Retreat Centre, has similarly deep roots. It was founded by Amrit Desai in 1970 and functioned for its first several years as a residential ashram, with few visitors. The property itself was established in 1983, after moving from Pennsylvania to Massachusetts. After undergoing significant organizational changes in the mid-nineties, the burgeoning centre hired an architectural team to design and construct a new residence hall in 2009 (Kripalu Centre for Yoga and Health [KCYH], 2018). For the purposes of this research, the focus is on the new Annex building, with a cursory overview of the older, existing building on the site.

The third retreat is the Vajrasana Buddhist Retreat in England. This particular project differs in its purpose, namely being designed for meditation and following Buddhist teachings, rather than the practice of yoga. Physical asana practice does occur on some retreats, so the principles of sacred space at this retreat centre can still inform this research. The retreat was built in 2016 as an extension of the organization's Central London home base, in order to have the ability to welcome larger groups for longer periods of time. The London Buddhist Centre was established in 1978 under the larger worldwide order of Triratna Buddhist Community (London Buddhist Centre [LBC], 2019).



Additionally, I have reviewed a few small retreat centres in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, brought into being by a handful of individuals with a desire to share their passion for yoga and wellness with the larger community. Each purpose built precedent will also serve to inform this endeavour in some way.

These three main case studies are explored in depth below using the Yogic Limb framework as a lens through which to analyze the architectural concepts found in each project. With exception of the Joshua Tree Retreat Centre, I have not personally visited these sites, so any reference to experiential opinions has been inferred from others' experiences in combination with thorough analysis of images, videos and articles available.

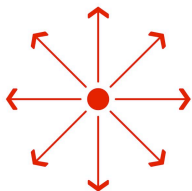
## Joshua Tree Retreat Centre

- Joshua Tree, California. (1945-1955) Frank Lloyd Wright Sr. & Frank Lloyd Wright Jr.

The Joshua Tree Retreat Centre (JTRC) was designed over the course of a decade by Frank Lloyd Wright, with his son, Frank Lloyd Wright Jr. Due to conflicting design ideals between client and architect, ultimately the design and completion of this massive project landed in the hands of the junior Wright architect (IM, 2018).

Located on 400 acres of sprawling desert outside Palm Springs, the project was designed around ancient existing energy lines. Several intersections of these energy lines culminate at a vortex, which, according to the centre's founder, is a place of amplified energy (IM, 2018).

I have personally visited JTRC, although I have not participated in a retreat here.



## Yamas - Ethics: Site / Materiality / Sustainability

Due to the harsh desert climate, each building was designed to minimize solar gain and maximize air flow, utilizing large overhangs on low buildings. Locally sourced material, such as natural stone from the Yucca Valley, forms a solid base which supports lighter steel elements. All materials, including stone,

concrete and steel, are intended to stand for decades in the unforgiving desert valley.

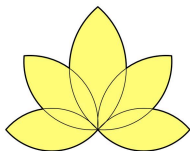
In the words of the architect himself, “...each dwelling place [is] rooted deep in the soil of the Desert, tied to it with quartz-jewelled native stone quarried from the site” (Wright, 1947, p. 8).



### **Niyamas - Rules: Program / Adjacencies**

The program for the site separates functions into different buildings. Accommodation spaces are located in separate buildings than the large dining hall. Practice spaces are contained within three unique buildings, scattered around the site. There are separate men and women quarters in dormitory style, along with smaller cabins for four to six people.

Each zone of dwelling is clustered along linear paths, with accommodation mainly to the west of the large site and program spaces kept mainly to the south of the site, closest to the road and main entrance. Nearest to the site entrance is the main temple and a simple building that houses both the office and bookstore.



### **Asana - Form / Geometry / Structure**

The architecture of the retreat centre reflects the desert that surrounds it - spacious and sweeping (Wright, 1947). The low desert architecture has a sense of restraint. The buildings are



FIG. 3 - SACRED GEOMETRY  
IMAGE CREDIT - JOSHUA TREE RETREAT  
CENTRE

relatively small for such a large site and at times are clustered to form intimate moments.

The geometry and structure are explicitly shown through the use of external stone-clad concrete columns and external metal frames. Frank Lloyd Wright's style of triangle geometry is enhanced by the client's wish to include 'sacred' geometry. These sacred angles are present within many of the practice spaces as well, expressed in the shape of a roof or the pattern of window mullions.

### Pranayama - Circulation

Due to the large size of the site, there is some distance between the various buildings and functions. This distance is covered on foot, giving time for contemplation between the moments of a retreat. Processing an earlier yoga practice while journeying to the dining hall for a shared meal can impart a mindfulness and importance to each experience, such as eating, sleeping and practicing.

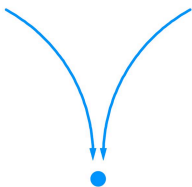
Private administration functions are housed in separate buildings and located on the outskirts of the centre.

### Pratyahara - Journey / Approach

Journeying to Joshua Tree requires an approximate one hour drive from the nearest large centre, so one progresses from the lushness of palm trees to the arid openness of the desert. Regardless of which direction travelled, visitors enter directly off main highway



FIG. 4 - CIRCULATION PATHS  
IMAGE CREDIT - AUTHOR'S IMAGE



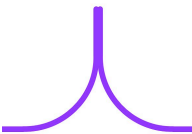
with access via a slightly intimidating security booth. Directed to the large parking lot, a retreat participant then travels further on foot towards program and accommodation spaces.

Once off the main road, there is no paving on the site, it is simply dirt or gravel paths. Given the nature of the desert floor, there is often no delineation between the path except for a row of small stones; both humble and practical.



### **Dharana - Scale: Length of retreat / Size of group**

The immense site offers accommodation for up to 300 people, with practice spaces for 1200 people (15,000 sq.ft./1400 sq.m.) (Goolsby, 2015). Multiple retreats are often held simultaneously, with up to fifty people participating in each retreat. The length of most retreats held at JTRC are three to seven days long, but some retreats stretch to several weeks long (IM, 2018).



### **Dhyana & Samadhi - Spirit of Place**

The vortices mentioned earlier, and the energy lines on which they are oriented, are integrated heavily into the design of site plan resulting in special places on site. Several of the eighteen vortices culminate in water features, which feels unexpected and significant in the dry desert setting. The labyrinth and medicine wheel are examples of other sacred places within the site that offer quiet moments for personal reflection.



FIG. 5 - SPIRIT OF PLACE  
IMAGE CREDIT - AUTHOR'S IMAGE

There is a conflict here when I reflect on the spirit of place at JTRC, as the first impression is that it feels simply like a business, with the security booth and the office and reception area. There is a lack of personal connection, and I believe this is due to the size of the centre. However, since I have visited this retreat centre in person, I feel that the site navigation and practice spaces feel authentic overall and the project sits in the desert landscape with purpose.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

Referring back to the yogic limb framework introduced earlier, we can interpret the analysis above. The strengths and successes of this retreat centre are found within the limbs of the Yamas, Niyamas, Asana and Pranayama. Respect for the site is evident in every element of the centre, echoing a respect for oneself. Physically separating the spaces, and introducing an internal journey within the site, is suggestive of the self reflection that can occur on a personal retreat. Truth in materiality, geometry and structure help to anchor the JTRC as a place for exploring personal truths.

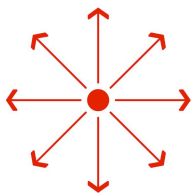
The challenges of the JTRC ultimately stem from the scale of the site, and the impersonal aspect of hosting multiple retreats simultaneously. Although there is an element of journey to arriving

at the centre, the absence of a formal approach lacks separation between highway speed and contemplative pace. Therefore, the subtle, internal limbs of Pratyahara, Dharana and Dhyana & Samadhi are left unfulfilled.

## Kripalu Centre Annex

- Stockbridge, Massachusetts. (2009) Peter Rose + Partners.

Located on a large wooded site in Massachusetts, this retreat centre experiences all four seasons. Journeying to this East Coast climate at various times of the year, a visitor might experience cold winters, warm summers or fall foliage. The most recent addition to the centre, the Annex, contains supplemental accommodation and practice space.



## Yamas - Ethics: Site / Materiality / Sustainability

The existing brick building was constructed in 1957, and further renovated in 1983, with no special sustainability efforts. The focus of this analysis, however, the Annex building, was newly constructed to high eco-efficient standards for the time (Cilento, 2010).

Sustainability efforts employed in the most recent building include the use of a structural concrete mass to act as a thermal sink, absorbing sun and heat during the day to release it in the cooler evening hours (United, n.d.). Additional heat, as well as cooling, is provided via geothermal radiant ceiling panels to the dwelling spaces and practice room. The simple wood cladding, sourced from salvaged reclaimed wood, functions as a movable screen, allowing visitors to adjust how much sun and therefore, heat,



enters each individual room. According to the architect, the combined effect of the above significantly minimizes the energy consumption of the building (United, n.d.).

FIG. 6 - SUSTAINABLE STRATEGY  
IMAGE CREDIT - PETER ROSE + PARTNERS



The layout of the building funnels fresh air through the corridor and indirectly into each room, as well as bringing daylight from each glazed end of the building deeper, into what could have been a dark corridor with no natural light.



### Niyamas - Rules: Program / Adjacencies

The general rule for organization of program within the Kripalu retreat centre has the original, larger building housing the largest program and common spaces, as well as the majority of the accommodation rooms. The main building also contains secondary amenities such as spa, sauna and bookstore. The newer Annex houses a smaller program space and additional accommodation rooms.

Most of the housing in the older building is dormitory style, while double rooms with private bathrooms make up the majority of the accommodation in the newer annex building. Accommodation is located on the more private upper floors, while activated, public spaces are located on the lower floors.

A large, double height dining room in the main building holds 300 people for main meals; however, there is also a smaller cafe on the ground floor of the Annex, adjacent to the practice room. Both of these common spaces overlook the extensive grounds.

### **Asana - Form / Geometry / Structure**

The design concept of the Annex resulted in an angled, split rectangle floor plan, in order to take advantage of views and increase ventilation circulation. The form is much like an open book; a poetic reminder that Kripalu is a place of learning and self study.

The exposed concrete structure is visible throughout the building, expressed in the floors, ceilings and walls. While this is a benefit from a sustainability aspect, the proliferation of bare concrete results in sparse, almost institutional, spaces within the new building. Tindale, who visited Kripalu for a five-day retreat, opines, “It had a deliberately minimalist design - no extra stimulation to cloud our minds...When you strip away the modern

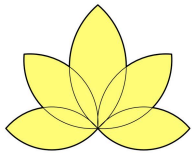


FIG. 7 - POETIC FORM  
IMAGE CREDIT - PETER ROSE +  
PARTNERS

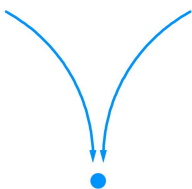
light fixtures and bedding, we essentially stayed in a concrete bomb shelter” (2017). The practice room and lobby, especially, could easily be mistaken for spaces within a modern office building, due in part to the exposed round concrete columns.



### **Pranayama - Circulation**

Each building contains all program spaces, common rooms and accommodation under one roof, with travel between the two buildings via a glass enclosed breezeway. This means a participant may never need to venture outside during their stay at Kripalu. Functionally, this makes sense for the cold winter months, but acts to compress the experiences during warmer seasons.

Both buildings, several storeys tall, utilize stairs as purely functional exit stairs, resulting in most people traveling via elevator to their rooms. Given the size of the centre however, a visitor may still travel on foot for a significant distance, just inside rather than outside.



### **Pratyahara - Journey / Approach**

The centre is situated two and a half hours from Boston, and visitors travel from the main highway into the historic, small town of Lenox, MA. From there, the journey progresses through a winding tree lined road, ten minutes from the nearest small town.

The retreat centre sits in an isolated rural setting that requires effort to reach.

FIG. 8 - ENTRANCE TO KRIPALU SITE  
IMAGE CREDIT - KRIPALU CENTRE



In this remote location, an arriving visitor parks and walks a short distance to the main building. Unfortunately, there is an abundance of vehicles and paving at this retreat centre, with the expected congestion and destruction of views from the new Annex building (United, n.d.).

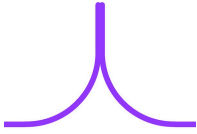


### **Dharana - Scale: Length of retreat / Size of group**

The 120 acre site offers accommodation for up to 400 people (with 150 in the annex), and practice space for 700 people (10,000 sq.ft./ 930 sq.m. with 3000 sq.ft./275 sq.m. in annex). The 34,000 sq.ft./ 3150 sq.m. annex contains eighty rooms over six storeys (KCYH, 2018).

Similar to JRTC, multiple retreats are often held simultaneously, with up to one hundred people participating in each retreat. The length of most retreats held at Kripalu are three to seven days long,

but some programs stretch to several weeks, such as the yoga teacher training courses.



### **Dhyana & Samadhi - Spirit of Place**

The site's history has both a positive and negative impact on the spirit of place at Kripalu. The fact that a previous spiritual retreat once occupied the site gives a sense of a rich past (KCYH, 2018).

The property itself features a distinct connection to nature, with the grounds extending out to include a labyrinth, meditation garden and hiking trails.

However, the fact that at the turn of twentieth century the property was considered the “largest private dwelling in the United States” as a summer vacation home, still imparts an energy of superiority and grandeur (KCYH, 2015). According to a student who has visited several times in various capacities, Kripalu is “run much like a hotel. And they offer a lot of services. People come in from New York and all over the world...complaining about their rooms” (T. Boyd, personal communication, May 20 2019). This is not the entire experience at Kripalu of course, but ultimately, it lacks a feeling of authenticity and spirit, important elements to enhance the practice of yoga.

## **Strengths and Weaknesses**

Referring to the yogic limb framework, we can further explore the analysis above for successes or failures. The strengths and successes of this retreat centre are found within the limbs of the Yamas, Pratyahara and, to a lesser degree, Asana. While more can always be done to make a building or site more sustainable, the efforts put into designing the Annex building as a low energy project are commendable. Aside from the sheer number of vehicles, the journey itself is successful, gradually bringing participants into a slower pace as they travel from city to town to the retreat centre.

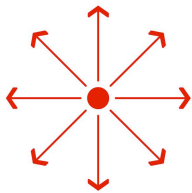
The challenges of Kripalu Centre also seem to be a result of the scale of the site and the buildings on it. According to architecture critic, Robert Campbell, the project is “daring and serious” (2010); and I would suggest these are not qualities a building intended to house the mindful practice of yoga should aim to achieve. The overbearing structures in the landscape and the hundreds of people sharing a meal together lends an impersonal aspect in a different way, but with a similar result, to JTRC. Circulation being entirely contained to the interior, when there is nature, and lots of it, right outside, seems to counteract the principles of yoga. Therefore, several limbs, such as the Niyamas, Pranayama, Dharana and Dhyana & Samadhi are left unfulfilled.



## Vajrasana Buddhist Retreat Centre

- Bury Saint Edmunds, England. (2016) Walters & Cohen Architects.

The Vajrasana Centre has a different feel to it than the other case studies, in both its compact scale and inwardly focused nature. Buddhist principles inform the centre's focus and circulation, bringing a participant to an almost monastic frame of mind. The architects spent a great deal of time with the client group, learning how they practice and the fundamental reasons 'why' behind those principles, in order to incorporate them respectfully into the architecture of the centre (LBC, 2016).



## Yamas - Ethics: Site / Materiality / Sustainability

The Vajrasana Buddhist Retreat Centre (VBRC) features locally sourced materials, such as wood and stone, and as a result feels at home in the natural surroundings. Cross ventilation and natural light are featured throughout wherever possible, through use of skylights, clerestory glazing, and operable windows. The layout of the buildings themselves also aids in maneuvering fresh air throughout the site.

All new construction was constrained within the foundations of existing outbuildings in order to minimize impact to the site (Walters & Cohen Architects [WCA], n.d.). An existing Tudor style



FIG. 9 - RURAL SETTING  
IMAGE CREDIT - GOOGLE EARTH

home in workable condition was also retained and repurposed (WCA, n.d.).



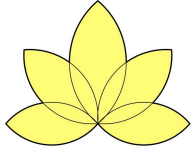
### **Niyamas - Rules: Program / Adjacencies**

In a similar manner, but on a much smaller scale than Joshua Tree Retreat Centre, each function is contained within its own building. Because the retreat centre is smaller than JTRC, each purpose can be housed within a single building, rather than several buildings. One building bounding the main courtyard contains only accommodation, with approximately sixteen rooms and forty-five beds (WCA, n.d.). Another building forming the elbow of the courtyard can house an additional fifteen people and contains all common spaces. Communal dining and socializing occurs in this space and the lounge features a large fireplace for chilly English evenings.

Space for worship, contained within the main shrine building, forms the fourth wall of the courtyard. The shrine room is scaled as the largest volume in comparison to the other structures, to indicate its importance in the hierarchy of the retreat centre.

The existing Tudor building mentioned earlier, renovated during the construction of the new buildings, was repurposed to provide private staff quarters and administrative spaces in a separate building, held away slightly from the new buildings (WCA, n.d.).





### **Asana - Form / Geometry / Structure**

The rectangular shape of the retreat centre, focused around a central courtyard, alludes to monasterial cloister layout. Surrounding this is a vernacular language of simple peaked roofs for secular spaces, bounded by the regular rhythm of a sheltering colonnade. The sacred precinct is marked by a different form, material, and scale for worship and practice space.

The main structure of the buildings is simple concrete block, painted crisp white on the interior and faced with local timber on the exterior. Regular structural timber frames express the roof structure and provide scale and rhythm within the dining and lounge spaces.



### **Pranayama - Circulation**

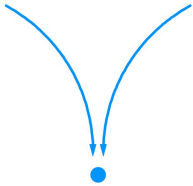
The overarching circulation of the project is based on three main Buddhist concepts, informing a processional route (Harper, 2016). This route, ambulatory in nature, leads through two courtyards and terminates in the shrine room. Within the circulation of the space, Harper observes "Transitions and thresholds have clearly received a great deal of attention" (2016, para. 5).

Although the range between buildings is not nearly as far as at JRTC, the distance, nonetheless, is similarly covered on foot. This once again provides time for contemplation between activities.



FIG. 10 - CIRCULATION  
IMAGE CREDIT - WALTERS + COHEN

Due to the rainy and cold climate common to England, these outdoor paths are covered to provide shelter. This provides further reference to monastery architecture, with colonnades surrounding the courtyard.



### **Pratyahara - Journey / Approach**

Journeying to the retreat centre from London, as many visitors do, means an increasing separation from the bustle of urban life as a visitor winds their way through rural English countryside roads.

The last step of the journey occurs when visitors turn off the small farm road onto the property. Vehicles are left in a small parking lot very close to the entrance and the remainder of the journey into the site is traveled on foot.

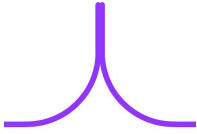


### **Dharana - Scale: Length of retreat / Size of group**

The 5 acre site offers accommodation for up to 60 people and practice space for the same. The retreat centre is approximately 13,000 sq.ft./1200 sq.m. and contains twenty sleeping rooms. Most retreats held at VBRC accommodate forty participants (LBC, 2019).

Because of the relatively small size, only one retreat occurs at a time, so all participants attend the same retreat. The length of most retreats held at VBRC are three to seven days long, but some

retreats extend to one or two weeks long. Generally, the centre is intended to accommodate short stays, rather than extended sojourn.



### **Dhyana & Samadhi - Spirit of Place**

The minimalist, sparse and almost monasterial feel, serves to direct focus inward and towards the retreat's monuments and worship. According to Wainwright (2016), "It is minimal but not oppressively so, and has a slightly spartan atmosphere without being overly utilitarian...It is architecture that fades into the background, allowing your mind to concentrate on higher things".



FIG. 11 - SPIRIT OF PLACE  
IMAGE CREDIT - WALTERS + COHEN

The spirit of this retreat centre comes as a result of the element of worship and the presence of monuments to Buddha. The stupa, shrines, and the procession to the main shrine room differs from the other precedents, but seems to heighten the sense of spirit of place. There is a feeling of being "a small part of something much larger" (Mark, 2016, para. 14) at this retreat, that helps achieve an anchored spirit of place within a larger community.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

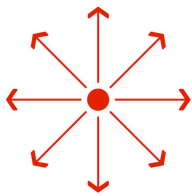
Applying the yogic limb framework introduced earlier, we can decipher the above analysis. The strengths and successes of this retreat centre are found within the majority of the framework limbs, including the Niyamas, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana and Dhyana & Samadhi. Physically separating the spaces and

introducing an internal journey within the site is an important element of a personal retreat. Truth in materiality, geometry and structure help to anchor the VBRC as a place for exploring personal truths.

The challenges of the Vajrasana Centre result from the difference in purpose of this retreat centre compared to the others explored. The acutely introverted quality of the site, in addition to its small scale, seems too inwardly focused, lacking an opportunity for distance and reflection. This comes as a result of the practice of worship. Additionally, there seems to have been unexplored opportunities for sustainable design, given that this is a current new build project. Therefore, the limbs of the Yamas and Asana are not entirely successful, especially if applied to the function of a secular retreat centre.

## Case Study Conclusions

The case study analyses undertaken have resulted in several conclusions about how architecture supports the practice of yoga in a retreat setting. These interpretations are outlined below and were revisited, after further testing against my personal experiences attending yoga retreats, as well as the experiences of several interviewees.



### **Yamas - Ethics: Site / Materiality / Sustainability**

Honouring the site with local building materials that are of that site is an important part of achieving this yogic limb. Natural, sustainable materials, such as wood and stone, can have a less harmful impact on the environment as well as a beneficial impact on the inhabitants of the space.

Locating the centre within nature, outside of the air and light pollution of a large city, gives the body, mind and spirit fresh air, with the time and space to fully appreciate it. Being able to see the stars and, conversely, not being able to easily run home or to the office, offers a chance for deeper integration of the practices of yoga and meditation.

Pushing sustainable efforts as far as possible can connect the architecture of a retreat centre to nature in a similar way that yoga is connected to nature. Natural ventilation and daylighting via solar

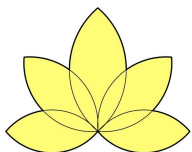
orientation are beneficial, but the design can do more to support the project in a self-sustainable manner that reflects the principles of yoga. Carbon neutral, net positive, Living Building or Cradle to Cradle design principles can be explored in support of yoga philosophy.



### **Niyamas - Rules: Program / Adjacencies**

Housing each functional space in a separate building is a means to achieve a sense of separation while on retreat. Allowing the hierarchy of spaces to be expressed externally can also have a significant impact on grounding the main yoga practice space, while giving it further importance.

Common spaces, such as dining halls and large lounge areas, being purposely held away from the quiet spaces of a retreat centre, such as sleeping rooms, smaller lounges and practice rooms offers a distinct separation between public and private, sacred and temporal. Direct access to the outdoors from each space is important, whether that be a visual connection or a physical ability to venture outside.



### **Asana - Form / Geometry / Structure**

Intentional design ideas informed by a deeper meaning, such as JTRC's sacred geometry, Kripalu's open book or VBRC's cloister concept, help to impart a feeling of purpose and significance.

Architectural form influenced by local vernacular can also be meaningful, to further anchor a project within its site.

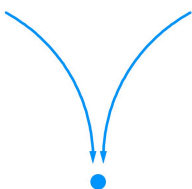
Honesty in structure, and expressing how a building supports itself, can also reflect a body's structural support and the link to the physical asana postures of yogic practice.



### **Pranayama - Circulation**

If the program of a retreat centre is organized per the Niyama limb above, with exterior space between each activity, this allows a participant contemplative time to process, reflecting on each experience throughout their retreat before beginning the next. Allowing this time for self reflection to occur outside rather than within a building furthers a connection to nature and all its seasons.

Offering the option of protected shelter to the wanderer means this sort of exterior circulation can be comfortable year round. A formal procession, with thoughtful use of thresholds between spaces, adds to the significance of practice.



### **Pratyahara - Journey / Approach**

A layered journey enhances the sense of withdrawing or retreating. Simply turning off the main road into a parking lot is not sufficient to prepare a retreat participant for the coming personal journey. Journeying for at least some distance from one's home, with a further journey from the main road to the final destination,

provides an expansion of one's experiences. An additional layer of journeying can take place on foot, further into the site, once the visitor has left their vehicle. This also helps establish a mental distance from the busy world, inhabited by the car, and the calmer realm of walking in nature while on retreat.

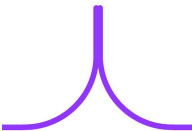
A change in surface material, such as from asphalt to gravel or dirt, can act as a tactile or auditory cue. The approach and arrival experience should signal a change of pace and focus.



### **Dharana - Scale: Length of retreat / Size of group**

The scale of a retreat centre impacts almost every other aspect of it, so finding the right balance here is important. Too large and it can feel impersonal and institutional. Too small and it can feel constrained and stifling.

Allowing for a single retreat group at any given time can help to focus the program, and also the scale, of a retreat centre.



### **Dhyana & Samadhi - Spirit of Place**

The culmination of design successes in the previous six limbs will theoretically, and perhaps automatically, result in an authentic spirit of place, with intangible sacred and special moments, both architectural and spiritual, within the retreat.



## **EXPERIENTIAL**

### **Personal Retreat Experience**

While the previous section discussed architecturally significant retreat centres, through the lens of architectural analysis, this section will examine my own personal experiences and opinions of retreat centres. The yogic limb framework, introduced earlier, establishes a corresponding experiential element to each limb (Table 1, p. 23). Instead of being based on architectural concepts, however, these investigations are based on individual insight. We explore these retreats from an experiential stance rather than an analytical one.

In addition to weekend retreats I have visited over the past several years, I recently attended a variety of retreat centres to explore a diversity of settings and experiences; three were visited alone, while one was attended with a friend.

The retreats vary in location and length, as well as in purpose. All retreats took place in the province of British Columbia; either in Victoria, where I reside, or on a nearby Gulf Island. Some were set in rural locations, while others occurred in urban, city centres. The shortest retreat was one day, with no overnight stay, while the longest retreat was three nights, four days. The focus of each retreat varied from a silent day of seated meditation, to a yoga and

meditation weekend, to a conference event with a diverse selection of workshops, lectures and physical asana classes.

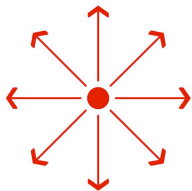
This section will also explore the personal experiences of several retreat participants, whom I interviewed with the intention of interweaving my personal opinions with those of others. The yogic limb framework was used as a foundation to create the set of interview questions, tying each element back to the principles of yoga.

## **Salt Spring Centre of Yoga (SSCY)**

- Salt Spring Island, BC; two night weekend retreat.

The Salt Spring Centre of Yoga is located on a 60 acre property with a long, rich history. The site was purchased in 1970 by a non-profit organization, with the purpose of establishing a community to spread the message of peace of the yoga teacher Baba Hari Dass (Salt Spring Centre of Yoga [SSCY], n.d.). With its founder, the community renovated the existing farmhouse to function as accommodation, practice space and dining room.

While not purpose built for the function of retreat, the centre functions solely in the capacity of holding retreats, yoga teacher training and community yoga events. The SSCY hosts many retreats each year, ranging from two nights to a week long deep dive. There is a community of long term residents who live on the property, as well as karma-yoga residents who volunteer one or two months of their time to be of service to the centre.



## **Yamas - Location & Setting / Materiality / Sustainability**

Salt Spring Island is located within easy traveling distance of both Victoria, Vancouver and the rest of Vancouver Island. The property itself celebrates, and is immersed in, nature with ponds, trails, and a garden producing food for the residents and guests. The farmhouse, renovated with reuse of simple materials to repair and



FIG. 12 - SSCY RURAL SETTING  
IMAGE CREDIT - AUTHOR'S IMAGE



make improvements over time, is rustic and charming. Additional small outbuildings have been added over the years; most are very rustic, constructed of wood framing and wood cladding.

The site is on grid, with no solar collection or wastewater reuse. Rainwater collection is used for the organic farm and gardens. The centre, and most of Salt Spring Island, sustains itself on well water; which results in signage placed in the washrooms and dining area, advising the reduction of water use.

### **Niyamas - Amenities**

The accommodation features clean, simple, minimal rooms, with shared washrooms down the hall. Most rooms are upstairs in the main house, but there are also two rooms in a separate building sharing one washroom, called the garden house.

There is a cozy library and sitting room, with books to borrow during your visit, which looks out to the grounds. Located on the ground floor of the main house, away from the dining area and entrance, it is typically a quiet space. Aside from this simple room, there is no other sitting area for guests, besides the option to go outside into nature.

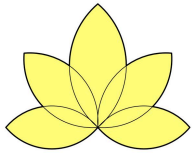
There are several practice rooms scattered around the property. The largest, and most used, practice room is in the main house, immediately off the entry and adjacent to the dining and kitchen

areas. It contains some shrines and sacred elements, but is otherwise very simple, with wood floors and a more intimate carpeted area. A traditional wood stove is welcome during winter months, and for chilly, morning meditation sessions. Because the space was repurposed from a hundred year old structure, from the interior there is only a moderate amount of glazing from the sleeping spaces and the practice space connecting a participant to the exterior. A smaller practice room in the separate garden house, and an even smaller yoga space in the pond-side yurt, are also simple and rustic.

There is a small common dining area, which spills outdoors in summer. In rainy or cold months, this space is cramped and can be uncomfortable. The small kitchen tucked in the back is located very close to the practice space, which can interrupt silent moments with the bustle of mealtime preparation. All meals are cooked by volunteer residents in the Vedic tradition, with produce from the property's own organic garden.

The other unique amenities of the centre are the sauna and spa; also very rustic and charming, a small walk away from the main space, in the quiet garden house. Gardens to wander through, with temples, shrines, ponds and trails to discover, are the other intrinsic amenities of the centre. There are many hidden moments to explore

on the property, which deepened my quietude and connection to nature.



### **Asana - Variety of Classes / Interactions**

Multiple instructors teach a variety of classes, such as meditation, breathwork, yoga postures, and an evening workshop. The workshop is typically about mindfulness or yoga philosophy, brought into everyday life, and offers an opportunity for discussion with the group. Most sessions are held with the entire group in the main yoga hall, in the main house. Some yoga posture classes are split into two groups and use multiple practice spaces.

Meals, including morning tea, lunch and dinner are shared together in the small dining space. Interactions are usually quite lively, as six people to each round table discuss the previous session or simply, daily life. At times there is a lack of quiet and calm, so being able to eat outside when the weather is amenable is important to me. Meal time conversations are varied and interesting, as there is opportunity to speak with fellow participants, yoga teachers and the resident staff.

Opening and Closing circles at the start and finish of the weekend give time to go deeper and synthesize the experience, as well as connect on a deeper level with fellow participants and the centre community.



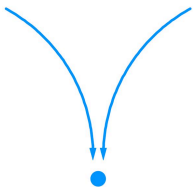
### Pranayama - Circulation

I have stayed in both the main house and the separate garden house over the years. Staying in the smaller garden house means walking a short distance between each class or meal. I enjoy this time to process and the few moments of alone time in what can be an intense group setting. Staying in the main house means simply going downstairs for class or mealtime, with less space or distance for reflection. This is beneficial on rainy visits, though, to avoid getting soaked several times a day.



FIG. 13 - CIRCULATION  
IMAGE CREDIT - AUTHOR'S IMAGE

Public space is the upper two floors of main house, with the lower floor for administration space and resident staff. Private dwellings also exist on the property for long term staff and teachers who live on site.



### Pratyahara - Journey

My journey to the centre has each time been by car, from downtown Victoria. A short, scenic ferry ride then transported me to this popular and picturesque Gulf Island. This act of leaving the shore of one island and landing on the shore of another, further solidifies the act of 'retreat', both in a physical and mental way.



FIG. 14 - JOURNEY ACROSS THE WATER  
IMAGE CREDIT - AUTHOR'S IMAGE

A further twenty minute drive via the main road and then a secondary rural road brings visitors to the centre property. Located approximately in the middle of the island, the centre's location

means a similar journey for all visitors, regardless of where they land on the island. The final journey is a turn from the road onto a long gravel driveway. This change in materiality signals a shift in mindset and is a reminder to slow down, literally and metaphorically.

Ascending the front steps of the farmhouse leads arriving guests through double doors into a quiet entrance space. Welcome tea is served in the dining room during check in process. From the first moments there is a sense of calm and peace.



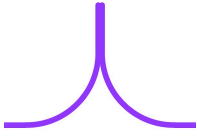
### **Dharana - Length of retreat / Size of group**

Approximately thirty people attend each retreat, although this does vary with the seasons, as more people may camp on site in summer. Only one retreat occurs on site at one time. Sometimes the group is composed of several groups of friends; sometimes more mother daughter duos attend. The number of couples and individuals fluctuates. Visitors travel from nearby Vancouver or Victoria and also from across Canada.

The stay at the retreat is two nights, three days, with only one full day to enjoy the centre. The size of property felt manageable but unnecessarily large, as not all of the 60 acres are being utilized. A participant can explore most of the property via the creek trail and through the gardens and farm. I felt that there was definitely



enough space outside to support the size of group, but not enough space inside to give supportive options.



### **Dhyana & Samadhi - Spirit of Place**

The property and the centre have an intense sense of community; both with other guests, staff and volunteers; as well as a connection the larger community on the island, and even reaching around the world to sister properties. A visitor feels the energy of living in harmony with the land and the resultant connection to nature.

The retreat's authenticity comes from the rich history of the centre, the rustic nature of the property, the shrines and an overall feeling of warmth. I bring home with me a feeling of connection and calm that weaves into my daily life and lasts throughout the next week.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The intangible spirit of place is powerful at SSCY and is the centre's greatest strength. The journey here always takes me out of my busy mindset, almost immediately after getting on the ferry. There is a release; of tension and of control. The tactile change in material from the paved road to the gravel driveway on arrival, further signals a shift in mindset, reminding me to slow down even more.

The challenges about retreating to this property are due to lack of space, lack of options to support various levels of solitude, lack of



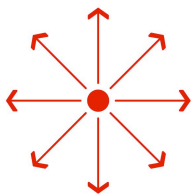
FIG. 15 - SPIRIT OF PLACE  
IMAGE CREDIT - AUTHOR'S IMAGE

purpose built spaces designed to work specifically for this community and the general disrepair of the buildings. Each space does have a beautiful view, through small windows, but this could be enhanced. While the centre may not wholly celebrate nature from inside, the overall property definitely does.

## Santosha Retreat at Stowell Lake Farm

- Salt Spring Island, BC; three night long weekend retreat.

The Stowell Lake Farm retreat centre is located on an established farm, focused on ethical sustainable food production. The long history of key founding individuals living and farming on the property is evident in the care and love taken with every aspect of the retreat. The introduction of retreats came many years after the farm was well established, in order to offer visitors an opportunity to stay on the land for longer visits.



### Yamas - Location / Site / Materiality / Sustainability

While the centre is rural, it is also located close to a moderately busy secondary road, resulting in road noise and noise from neighbouring properties during practice sessions.

Although there is no visible use of solar panels, rainwater collection barrels are attached to the roof of each building. Geothermal energy provides power to the renovated barn and recently built gatehouse, which houses the practice space.

Natural wood is featured both interior and exterior; with all cladding locally sourced and locally milled wood. Most of the buildings on the property are built with standing seam metal roofs and an abundance of windows, giving a visual as well as auditory connection to outside and nature. The metal roofs reflect the



FIG. 16 - SET IN NATURE  
IMAGE CREDIT - AUTHOR'S IMAGE

change of temperature throughout the day with the sound of pops and creaks, as well as the soothing sound of rainfall during a storm.



### **Niyamas - Amenities**

A separate building, purpose designed for retreat participants, houses the majority of the accommodation. Beautiful new rooms and thoughtful design touches are present in the newly built accommodation space, while large amounts of wood, and natural light, on the interior keep the space feeling warm and special. There is a small common sitting space and deck for guests to share. Other accommodation options on site are small two-person yurts and a few cabins, all sharing outdoor washrooms.

The larger common lounge and main dining room are found in a nearby separate building. This is a renovated old barn with a new farm house kitchen, located in a visible position; further connecting a participant to the centre's harvest and food production. These shared common spaces are quite large, almost overwhelming, and not very cozy or intimate.

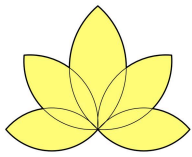
A third building houses dedicated practice space. Recently built, designed specifically for a retreat centre, this space features the graceful curves of an exposed timber roof and plastered walls. While there are good acoustics and lots of natural light, it is also an irregular shape and layout, meaning some of the group is around a



FIG. 17 - INTENTIONAL DESIGN  
IMAGE CREDIT - AUTHOR'S IMAGE

corner and can't easily see the instructor. At times, the amount of direct sunlight was overbearing, and became a distraction from going inwards.

There were no sauna or spa facilities on this property, but the grounds are idyllic, with ponds, gardens and stone walls to explore.



### **Asana - Variety of Classes / Interactions**

A generous variety of classes, such as meditation, breathwork, yoga postures, yoga nidra, and restorative yoga, was taught by one instructor. All sessions were taught in the same space, with all participants.

Meals, including breakfast, lunch and dinner are shared together in the large dining space upstairs in the converted barn or outside around picnic tables. Interactions are usually quite lively. As at the SSCY, at times there was too much animation, and I was especially grateful to be able to bring my tea back to the small sitting area in the accommodation building, for some time alone.

Opening and Closing circles at the start and finish of the weekend give time to go deeper and synthesize the experience, as well as connect on a deeper level with fellow participants and yourself.



### **Pranayama - Circulation**

As each function is separated into distinct buildings, participants must walk or go outside between sleeping, eating and practice

spaces. It was a short walk, but provided enough time for contemplation and quiet. Regardless of which accommodation option a visitor chooses, they would travel between the clustered buildings in a similar way.

There was a small office near the farm house kitchen, providing private administration spaces.

### **Pratyahara - Journey**

As with visits to SSCY, I journeyed by car, continuing on the short ferry ride to Salt Spring Island. The retreat property is a 10 minute drive from the ferry terminal, and arriving visitors turn directly onto the property from a secondary road. There is a short gravel drive, but it is not far to the retreat buildings, with no formal procession or approach. From the main parking lot, there was no official check in process and participants travel further on foot to the sleeping spaces.

### **Dharana - Length of retreat / Size of group**

Twenty-four people attended this retreat, although property can sleep up to thirty. There were several individuals and a number of couples. Visitors had traveled mainly from nearby Vancouver or Victoria.

The stay at the retreat was three nights, four days, with two full days to enjoy the experience. The 100 acre property felt

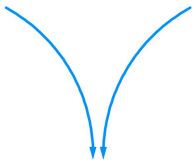


FIG. 18 - JOURNEY ACROSS THE WATER  
IMAGE CREDIT - AUTHOR'S IMAGE



manageable, because only a portion of it was used for retreat centre purposes and the remainder used for farm functions, production fields, and houses for the owners, staff and workers that live on site.

There was ample space inside and out to support the size of group, although the dining room and main common lounge felt slightly cavernous, while the practice room felt slightly constricting.

### **Dhyana & Samadhi - Spirit of Place**

The retreat centre and property provided me with a strong sense of community; directly from connecting with other guests and also indirectly from the sense of visiting a working farm. A definite connection to nature exists on the farm, with the permanent residents living in harmony with their land in a remarkable way.

This retreat's authenticity is due to location and the warmth of the interiors. The extra day spent on retreat added to my internal connection, and I was easily able to maintain a calm and stillness as I returned home.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The barn building felt like a social hub, located close to the main accommodation building and acting as a point of connection for visitors. The practice building set further away provided more seclusion and a separation from the bustle of mealtime while

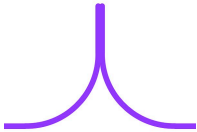


FIG. 19 - SPIRIT OF PLACE  
IMAGE CREDIT - AUTHOR'S IMAGE

meditating or practicing. In this way, a sense of importance is imparted to the practice space, introducing a minor processional route to reach it several times each day.

I had some challenges with the common spaces; even though the physical space for dining and socializing was larger than at SSCY, there was still a lack of options to honour people's preferences.

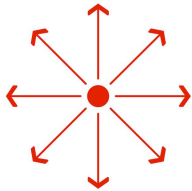
The layered journey, a minor pilgrimage, to reach the retreat centre, in a similar way to SSCY, enhanced the experience of withdrawing from my daily routines and surroundings.



## Shambhala Meditation Retreat

- Victoria, BC; one day (daytime only).

I attended a daylong meditation retreat at the Shambhala Buddhist Centre. This space is also where my weekly yoga practice is held and it was interesting for me to experience the space in two different contexts.



### Yamas - Location / Site / Materiality / Sustainability

The Shambhala Centre is located in the eclectic community of Fernwood, close to downtown Victoria. The building is a reuse of existing space, adapted to suit Shambhala requirements. The centre also shares the building with a dance studio across the corridor, which sometimes means the chatter of boisterous young dancers filters into the meditation hall during practice.

The neighbourhood itself is quiet and filled with mature trees; birds often chirp excitedly outside the windows. Aside from a few small windows, there is little connection to outside from within practice spaces or the library. The interior is very simple, neither rustic, nor new, with aging gypsum walls and ceilings and a simple wood floor.

There are no sustainable features to this centre, likely because of lack of funds, not lack of a desire to live lightly in the city. Members of the Shambhala community, by the very nature of

practicing Buddhism, are constantly attempting to reduce their footprint in daily lives as well as doing whatever they can at the Centre.

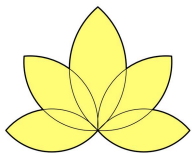


### **Niyamas - Amenities**

There are few amenities at the Shambhala centre; it feels very basic, almost similar to a recreation centre. Partly this is because of the washrooms, shared with the dance studio users. There is no accommodation as this is a non-residential retreat centre, where people do not come to stay long term, but return home at the end of practice.

The special spaces are the main shrine room and the smaller upper shrine room. Each includes sacred buddhist elements, such as wall hangings, prayer bowls, and statues. The entrance to the main shrine room is adorned with beautiful Ikebana floral arrangements that change weekly with the season.

Off the main entrance space, there is a library with many books for loan, as well as a small kitchenette to make tea. Lunch was served in this small space around makeshift tables.



### **Asana - Variety of Classes / Interactions**

Given that this retreat was only eight hours long, there was a surprising amount of variety. Several instructors throughout the day led the group through both seated and walking meditation

sessions, along with some short interludes of stretching, chanting and Buddhist teachings to offer a break from the intensity of meditation. The space this was held in functioned well for all of these experiences.

Breaks for lunch and tea were observed in silence, though there was a short discussion about personal observations at the end of day.

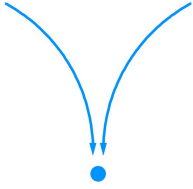
### **Pranayama - Circulation**

Entering into the meditation space, there is an informal experience of procession; first passing into the shared entrance, then through a door to the cloakroom, where a visitor respectfully removes shoes. The space, and the visitor, becomes gradually more quiet as the journey continues through a sliding door. This door leads down a walled in ramp, heading only towards a blank wall straight ahead. Finally reaching the bottom of the ramp, the only choice is to turn the corner into the space. The compressed journey culminates in a large open room with minimal Buddhist adornment.

During the lunch break, I took the opportunity to give my body some movement and walked around the neighbourhood. Because the day was so still and intense, the time to leave the centre momentarily was welcome. It would have been nice however, to



stay in solitude and not need to encounter cars, bikes and the ‘outside world’



### **Pratyahara - Journey**

Although the centre is located close to home, I travelled by car due to an early morning start time. I felt intrigued leading up to the day of the retreat, but no large sense of anticipation or adventure because the space is familiar to me. I wonder if my expectation might have been different, had the retreat been held in an unfamiliar, but still urban, setting.

The journey back home was a short commute; too short, in fact, and would have been better suited to a thirty minute walk in order to synthesize the experiences of the day.



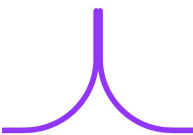
### **Dharana - Length of retreat / Size of group**

A relatively small group of people participated in this day-long experience. Ten to twelve people shared the space with me from 8am to 6pm.

Going home at night was challenging after the intensity of the day and I missed the overnight factor of other retreats I have attended.

### **Dhyana & Samadhi - Spirit of Place**

This spiritual oasis in the city gave me a sense of connection to other Shambhala communities within this Buddhist organization; more so than when I practice yoga in the same space. Sharing



energy and focus with the participants, also layered authenticity to the retreat space.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

It was an entirely withdrawn, internal day. Due to the intensity of the experience, there were real challenges and opportunities. I found it quite difficult to return home that evening to “real life”, with the expectation of my family to chat, watch TV and use technology, that same evening. I ended up hiding out in my bathroom, soaking in the tub, trying to drown out the household din. Because of this, I found the benefits of going inward on a daylong retreat were very short lived.

## **Victoria Yoga Conference**

- Victoria, BC; three day conference (daytime only).

While not following the typical idea of a yoga retreat, the Victoria Yoga Conference was still an intensive period of time, away from my daily life, focused on the journey of quieting the mind and calming the body. Rather than investigate each limb in depth, I have summarized the overall experience, while still following the basic yogic limb framework.

The conference was located in the Student Union Building at the University of Victoria, in a natural suburban setting surrounded by trees. I appreciated the nearby gardens, ponds, and fountains on campus to explore between sessions. I also thought it appropriate that the conference was situated in a place of higher learning, which grounded the overall intention of the conference.

The makeshift practice spaces were classrooms, multipurpose rooms and meeting rooms and were mostly large, bright spaces, although there was not a lot of warmth to them.

Due to the conference nature of this ‘retreat’, there was a lot of buzz between sessions; vendor booths and tea bars held many lively conversations.

The first day, all my sessions were held in one building, so did not have time to journey outside. On the second day, I had sessions in

both buildings, and had to travel between buildings, resulting in welcomed fresh air, and time for digesting the day's events.

The twenty minute journey by public transit to UVIC did not offer me sufficient time to disconnect from the urban bustle of downtown or regular life.

I shared this experience with approximately 200 people, and the energy of such a large group of like-minded people sharing breath and experiences was uplifting. I left at the end of each day feeling extremely grounded and connected to something larger.

There was a lack of warmth and spirit of place due to the overall institutional feel, but people made it authentic.

## Interviews

In order to anchor my personal experiences in the diversity of others, a series of interviews were conducted with six individuals who have recently participated in a yoga retreat. A variety of interviewees was selected, ranging in age from 30 to 60, both male and female, with differing levels of yoga practice. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured qualitative research method. The interview questions were also grounded in the yogic limb framework established and presented earlier. They were recorded, transcribed and summarized as follows. Refer to Appendix A for the interview questions and Appendix B for the transcriptions.

Each person attended a retreat at a different retreat centre from the others. The experiences and locations varied from a weekend at a nearby local retreat centre, to a 10 day silent retreat in Alberta, to a week long retreat in Oregon. All retreats were residential, meaning there was an overnight stay component to all of them.

When asked to place the experiential elements that corresponded to each 'limb' of the framework in order of its importance to their experience, the results were interesting. I first noticed that every one of them found it difficult to rank these elements. There were multiple comments noting that all the elements were equally



*The beauty of it is being in nature.*

- T

*Quiet, peaceful and isolated. So no neighbours, no cell service. I love the total disconnect.*

- J

*...people have meditated for thousands of years in rustic conditions. So are we making it overly comfortable because of all of us city folk that are driving out to the country for ten days and having all these expectations?*

- S

*It's too easy to get caught in the trappings of beauty, rather than focus on the practice.*

- T

*... more opportunity for solitude when eating.*

- D

*... needed more space for myself in quiet.*

- J

*I loved that [the spaces] were separate because I got to go for this little walk.*

- D

important and that it was impossible to separate them from each other. Unequivocally, the elements that were placed highest in importance were location and setting (Yamas) and spirit of place (Dhyana & Samadhi). In most respondent's opinion, these two elements are closely tied, linked together in a manner that was difficult to verbalize. The energy of a property, as I experienced, is a massive part of a rich spirit of place.

The aspect of being in nature was ever present in the comments regarding the Yamas. Partly due to the level of isolation and solitude, and partly due to the energy of natural elements, such as hot springs, rivers, or lakes.

Generally, people enjoyed staying in accommodation that was comfortable, over extremely rustic. However, there were a few intriguing comments about being too comfortable, and whether that conflicted with a yogic principle about getting to the place of being comfortable in discomfort. Does the beauty of a too perfect space actually serve to distract from the practice of yoga? Tanizaki has written about this in a similar way, stating "As a general matter we find it hard to be really at home with things that shine and glitter" (1999, p. 18).

Amenities, types of classes, interactions with others and the scale of the property and the group were indicated as equally important

*... walk through a beautiful setting, which is lovely because then you get that time between.*

- W

*The act of getting there, that journey, separates you from day to day life and puts you into a different mindset.*

- S

*...crossing that water was even more symbolic to me of leaving behind my normal life, my normal concerns.*

- D

*The very definition of retreat is leaving!*

- R

*There were issues with the really big windows during certain times of meditation. The sun would be a distraction from a meditation practice.*

- D

*The property is infused with the energy of the teacher.*

- T

*... the whole energy supports transformation.*

- W

to interviewees ranking the experiential elements. When speaking about interactions and scale a comment that came up several times was the need for a retreat centre to support solitude, especially at meal times, in larger groups.

Although circulation and journey were placed lower on most of the rankings, the consensus amongst all respondents was that separation and distance, both from moments and experiences while on retreat, and from daily life, was essential to their ability to experience depth of practice. Being 'away' was an integral part of their enjoyment of a retreat. A prolonged, layered journey that gradually transported the visitor from civilization to seclusion, was preferred to a short journey that only offered an abrupt transition into the mindset required for periods of retreat.

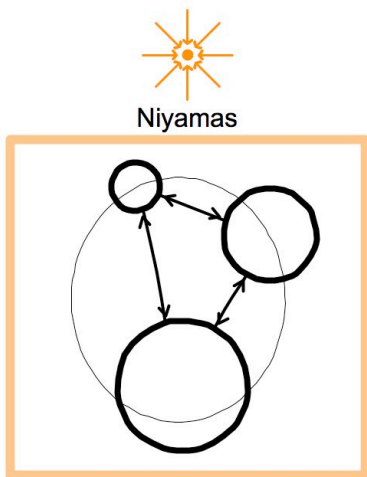
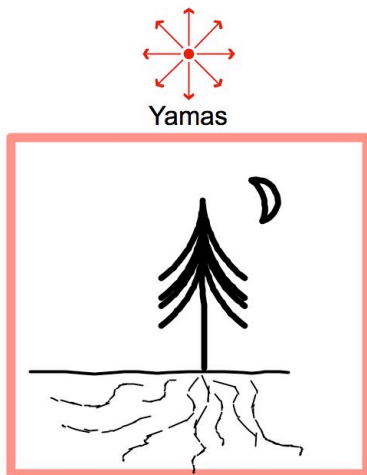
The architecture of a retreat centre, in most cases, was viewed as a backdrop to the experiences, with the richness of the spirit of place, and a feeling of connection to something greater, being quintessential to the experience.

Overall, the opinions of those whom I spoke with echoed those of my own, with a few minor differences as outlined above. The differing experiences are the ones that have caused me to pause longer and contemplate deeper, and will perhaps enrich the design phase of this project the most.

## RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

Layering the personal experiences of myself and others onto conclusions formed earlier as a result of case study analysis lead to the following ‘key tenets’ of architectural expression that can support and enhance the practice of yoga.

In order to be as accessible as possible, the retreat centre will be embedded within nature while being not too isolated from the city. A retreat may be away from the city but still an active participant in urban culture. Visitors need not rely solely on vehicles, but will also be able to reach the retreat centre with public transit or by bicycle.



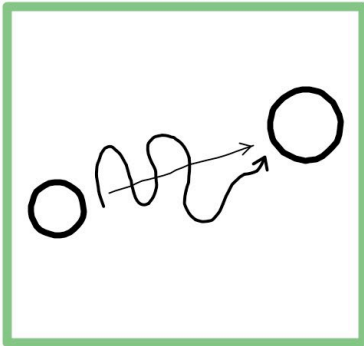
The retreat centre will be ‘of its place’, with locally sourced, natural materials anchoring it to the site. Sustainability, an intrinsic element of yoga practice, will be explored to the fullest degree; this will require further research to determine whether the design principles of off-grid, carbon neutral, or net positive design are appropriate. As mentioned earlier, one of the tenets of yoga theory is ahimsa, roughly translated to mean ‘do no harm.’ This applies both to our thoughts and actions towards fellow living creatures, both human and animal, but also to our environment. Being conscious of our impact is not only crucial as individuals, but is also an important element of any retreat centre.



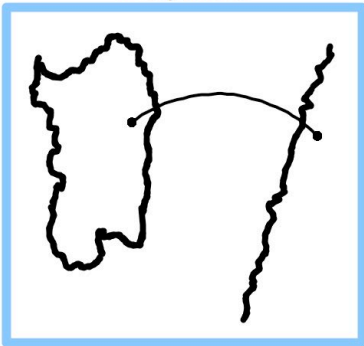
Asana



Pranayama



Pratyahara

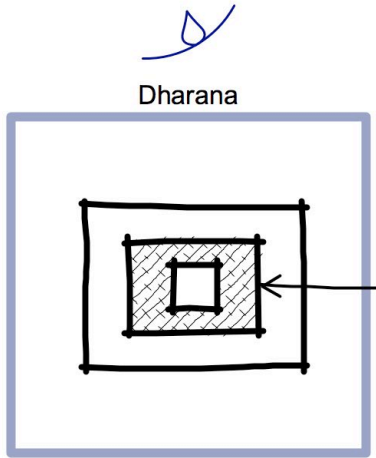


Separation of functions into different buildings recognizes the collective experience, while still honouring the individual experience. Architectural hierarchy can be expressed to distinguish private sleeping spaces, from public common zones, from sacred practice spaces. The site, and its grounds, becomes the overall vessel to contain the collection of spaces and experiences.

Poetic, meaningful, but still simple, form and structure can honour the building materials and express honesty in structural elements. A deeper architectural concept can add larger significance to the overall design of a retreat centre.

Space between buildings and experiences, outside in nature, offers time to contemplate and process. Weiss asks, “what threshold do we step across that elevates a location and makes a place feel sacred?” (2008, p.19). This signal to mark the transformation from everyday to sacred comes from each threshold and transition encountered along the journey from one’s home, the procession onto, and within, the property, and the internal circulation within a retreat centre grounds.

Additionally, with the presumption that most visitors to the retreat centre will arrive from the city, the separation of time and space from city to retreat becomes a transportation from one realm to another. Leaving the familiarity of one’s city for the unknown



natural surroundings of a retreat, further distances the mind from habitual routines and daily stressors.

A balanced scale, pertaining to the entirety of the retreat experience, from the size of the property to the types of amenities; from the length of the retreat and the size of group to share the experience with.

The above limbs, through thoughtful, engaged, architectural design, can synthesize as a sacred space to unite with one's inner self and with nature; to experience both solitude and connection.

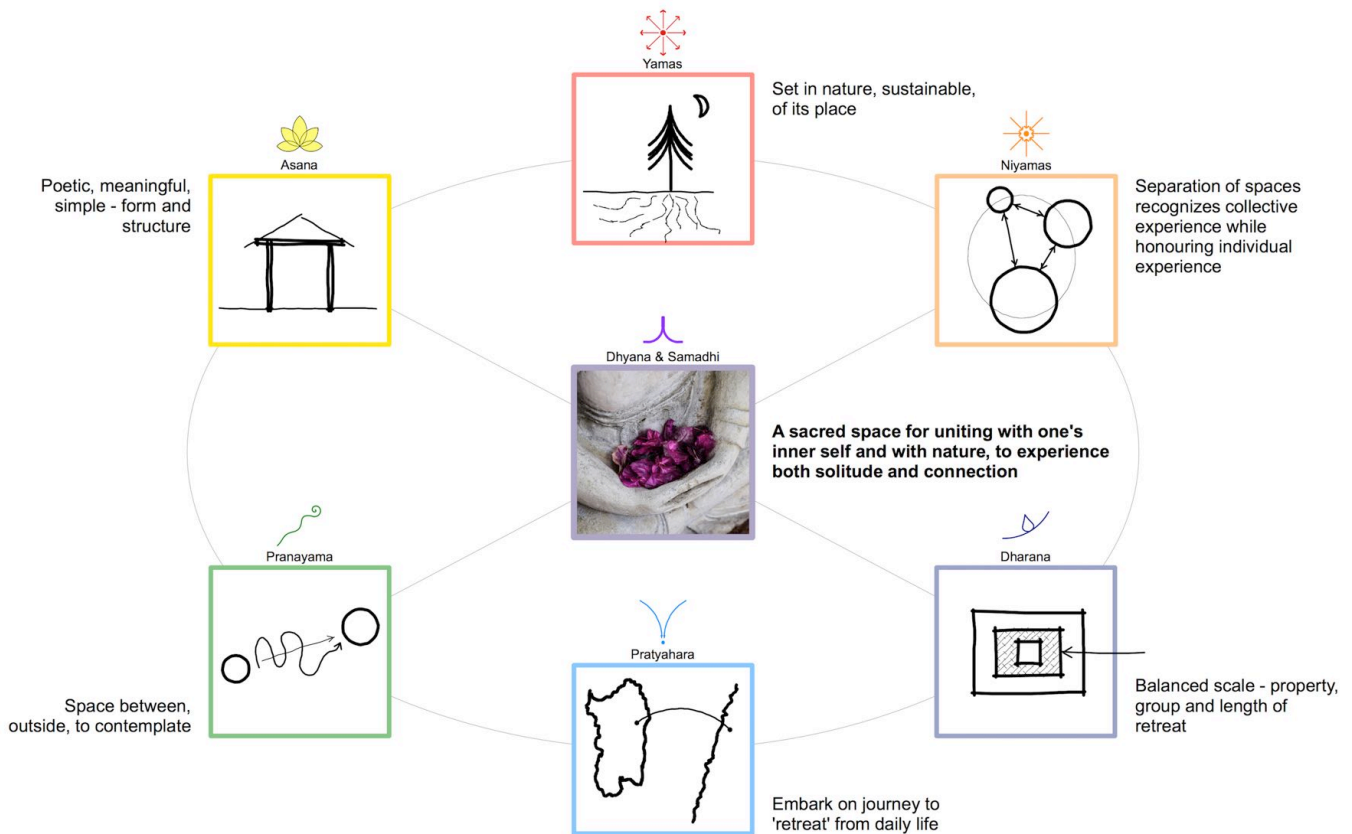


FIG. 20 - YOGIC LIMB ELEMENTS OF ARCHITECTURAL RETREAT

Yoga is not just about the physicality of the practice, but about finding balance and contentment in the present moment. By providing meaningful experiences like a sense of journey and procession, with a balance of direct and obstructed views and a variety of textured light and shade, architecture can enhance the practice of yoga by celebrating the present.

Yoga instructor Lara Rubin Alexiou expresses the connection between our body's physicality and that of architecture: "Your body is a living breathing piece of architecture, designed specifically for you" (TED, 2014). The retreat centre can engage with natural rhythms like the movement of light and the changing temperatures through the days and the seasons, connecting participants to nature in a tangible way.

The research findings discussed above will be applied to the design of a yoga retreat centre in an annotated visual argument in fulfilment of the requirements of RAIC 690b.

## SITE

### Selection and History

Site selection was informed by the following parameters based on precedent studies and experiential interviews. These elements were further refined to tie back into the yogic limb framework.

Exploration of potential sites through the lens of the yogic limb framework led to the selection of an interesting and varied site on Galiano Island. Galiano is one of several Gulf Islands, and is centrally located in the Salish Sea between British Columbia's mainland coast and the province's largest island, Vancouver Island.



YOGIC LIMB	ARCHITECTURAL CONCEPT	SITE SELECTION
Yama (restraints or disciplines towards the outside world) - non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, moderation, non-hoarding	Ethics - site / materiality / sustainability	- Ethical site - Solar exposure conducive to sustainable design
Niyama (observances or rules of conduct personal to oneself) - purity/cleanliness, contentment, heat/rigour, self study, surrender to unknown	Rules - program / adjacencies	- How close or how far from ferry, access, civilization? - Nearby to natural amenities
Asana (posture)	Form / geometry / structure	- Natural beauty of site - 1 or 2 major natural features (lake, waterfall, river, forest, meadow, ocean)
Pranayama (breath control)	Circulation (public / private)	- Accessible site (no treacherous terrain) - Bikeable?
Pratyahara (detachment / withdrawal of senses)	Journey / Approach	- Journey tells a story, prepares for personal inner journey - Approach into site is gradual, layered
Dharana (concentration)	Scale - length of retreat / size of group	- Economy of scale (balanced site size)
Dhyana (meditation) & Samadhi (Enlightenment) - combined	Spirit of Place - sacred / magic / special	- Land with history - Powerful energy on site (just feels good)

TABLE 2 - SITE SELECTION -  
YOGIC LIMB FRAMEWORK

FIG. 21 - GALIANO ISLAND CONTEXT  
IMAGE CREDIT - GOOGLE MAPS



### GALIANO ISLAND

*Area • 60.15 km<sup>2</sup> (23.22 sq.miles)*

*Population • 1,044*

*Density • 17.4/km<sup>2</sup> (45/sq.mile)*

*Accessible via direct ferry from  
both Victoria and Vancouver*

*Past industries - logging and  
fishing*

*Current industry - tourism and the  
arts*

*(Galiano Island, 2020).*

Formed of ancient sandstone, Galiano Island was home to the Hul'qumi'num people, part of the Coast Salish Nation (Steury, 2012). The modern Penelakut nation are their presumed descendants and still retain rights to procure food from the island. Shell midden beaches exist as a reminder of their presence, dating back 3000 years (Steury, 2012). The island's history supports the Samadhi limb with a rich history and spirit of place.

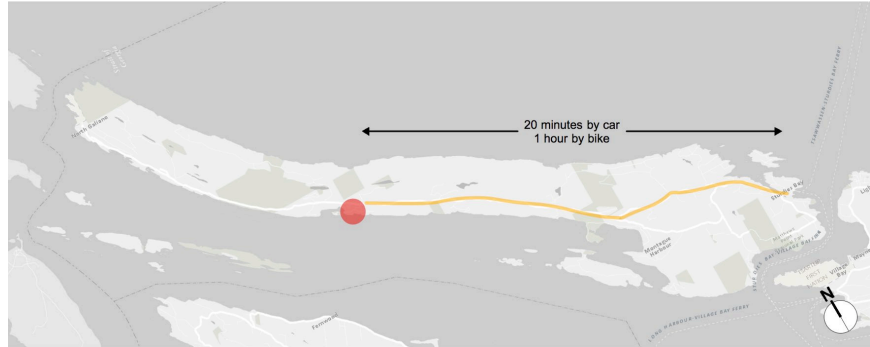
With an area of sixty square kilometers and a population of just over one thousand full time residents, Galiano Island is less dense and less touristy than its popular neighbour Salt Spring Island.

A layered journey to reach the island supports the limb of Pratyahara by allowing time to shed the outside world and prepare for retreat. The physical act of crossing water signals the start of a withdrawal and a journey inwards. Further journey to a site located



in the middle of the island, and at the end of a no through road, serves to enhance this experience.

FIG. 22 - SITE LOCATION  
IMAGE CREDIT - GOOGLE MAPS



During the twentieth century, approximately half of Galiano Island was owned by the MacMillan Bloedel logging company (Griffiths, 2005). The site chosen for this project likely played a role in the logging transport process, as evidenced by a large clearing that spans multiple properties and terminates at the nearby cove at the end of the road (H. Kottner, personal communication, September 6, 2019).

FIG. 23 - SITE CONTEXT  
IMAGE CREDIT - GOOGLE MAPS



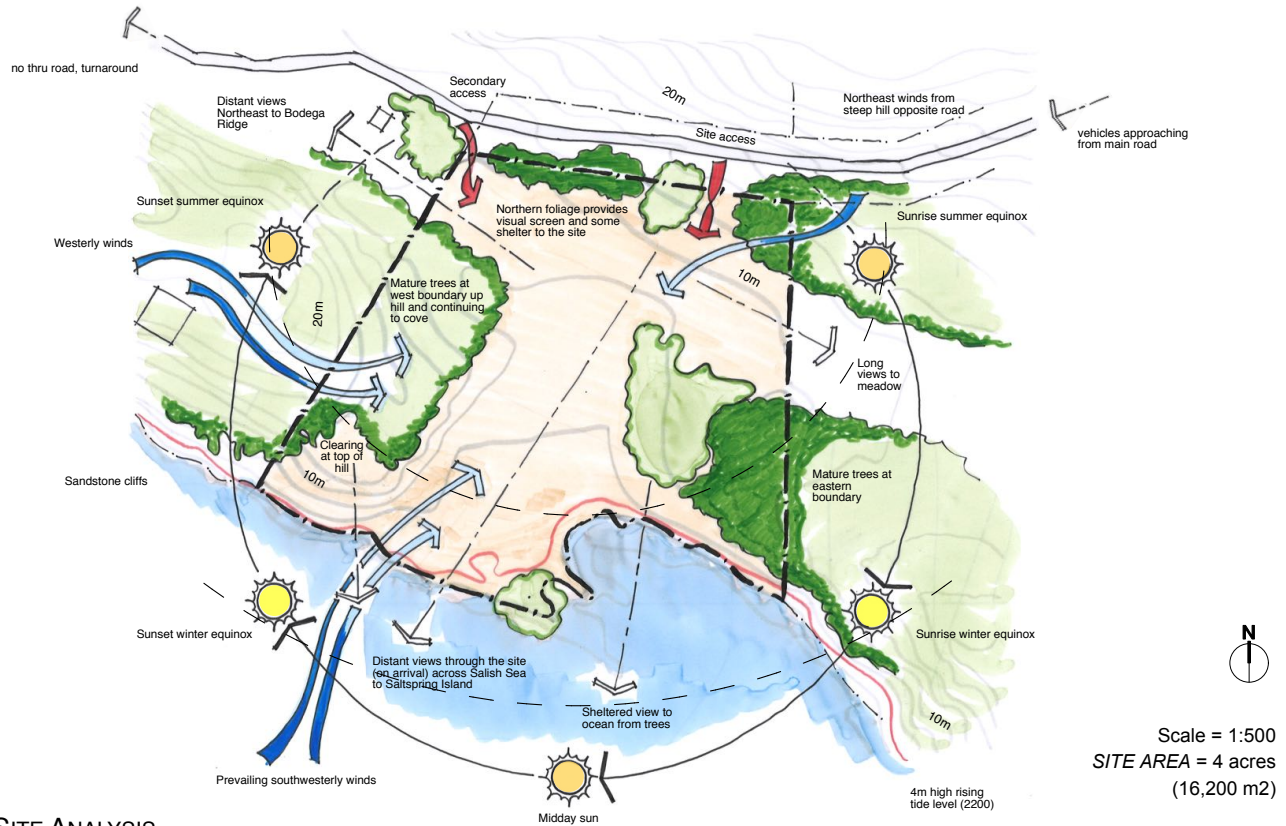


FIG. 24 - SITE ANALYSIS



## Climate

Like much of the southwest coast of BC, the climate of Galiano Island is characterized by year-round mild weather, with rainy fall and winter months and relatively dry summers. The absence of severe temperatures in either the winter or summer makes this a location conducive to building ecologically and living off the land.

The selected site sits on the west coast of the island, oriented due south. Prevailing southwesterly winds occur from the water for the majority of the year, with occasional winds travelling down the hill to the north and the hill to the west (Weibe, 2018). Average annual rainfall is approximately 1,100 millimetres (Env Canada, 2019).





One of the most compelling qualities of the idyllic four acre site is its sense of containment. This is experienced from the gradual descent into the clearing and the wooded hills that bracket the site. A progressive unfolding of the terrain supports the Pranayama limb with a sense of procession.



Mature Fir, Cedar, Maple and Arbutus trees densely fill in the hills behind and to either side of the gentle meadow, while Alder, Birch and Oak trees pepper the remainder of the site. The soil makeup here is a combination of shallow sandstone bedrock, topped with sandy loam, on the hill conditions, and gravelly, loamy sand, over silty clay, at the meadow conditions (Agriculture Canada, 1989).



The site encompasses a variety of conditions — ranging from open meadow to forested areas, to rocky cliffs, to flat shale beach, giving opportunity for a variety of experiences.



FIGS. 25-30 ABOVE - SITE CONTEXT  
IMAGE CREDIT - AUTHOR'S IMAGES

FIG. 31 RIGHT - SITE AERIAL  
IMAGE CREDIT - PETER NASH REALTY  
(USED WITH PERMISSION)



## PROGRAM

The site conditions naturally informed the program of the project, with the three main programmatic elements being communal space, sleeping space and practice space. The relatively modest scale of the site called for a modest group size, accommodating up to twenty guests. This also supported research conclusions from personal experience, interviews and precedent case studies.

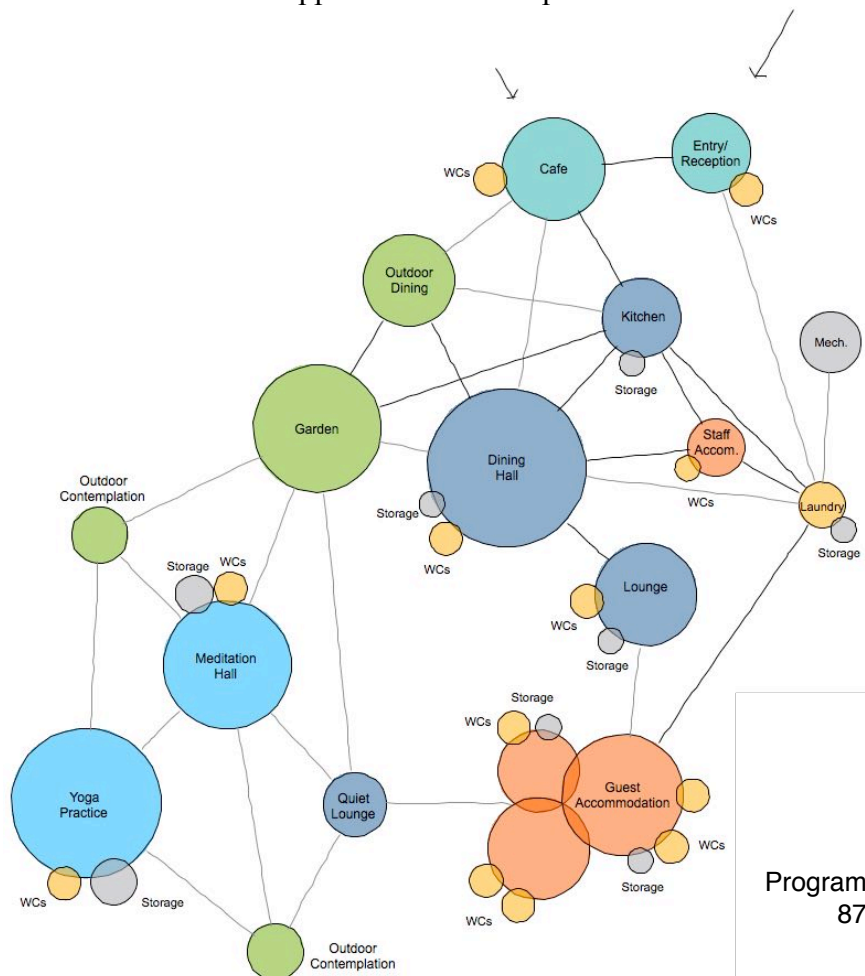
Each of these zones are celebrated with separation, allowing room for pause and reflection between experiences in a way that supports the Niyama limb. There is natural overlap and connection, even with purposeful separation, as none of these elements function without the support of the other spaces.

### PROGRAM

- Entrance / Reception - 30 sq.m.
- Community Cafe - 60 sq.m.
- Mechanical Learning Hub - 50 sq.m.
- Office - 40 sq.m.
- Living Room - 150 sq.m.
- Dining Room - 70 sq.m.
- Kitchen - 45 sq.m.
- Pantry - 25 sq.m.
- Quiet Lounges - 15 sq.m.
- Accommodation - 370 sq.m.
- Laundry - 25 sq.m.
- Yoga Practice Space - 160 sq.m.
- Meditation Space - 160 sq.m.

Total Area = 1200 sq.m.

FIG. 32 - PROGRAM  
SIZE + ADJACENCY





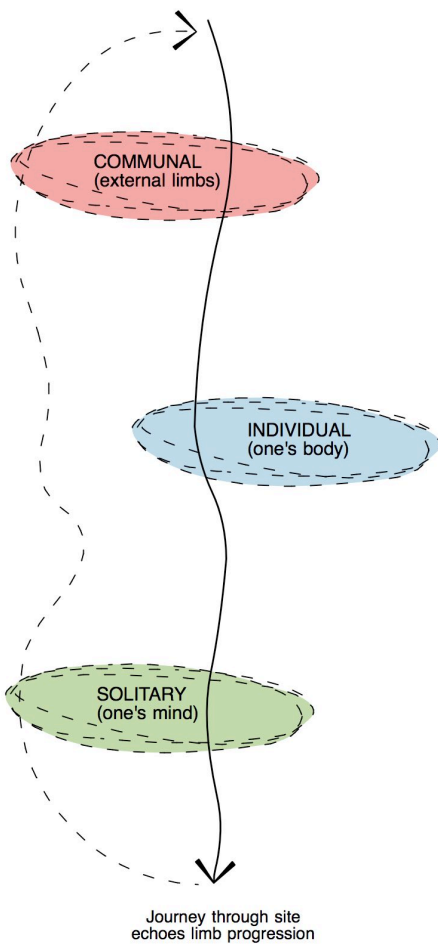


FIG. 33 - PROGRAM DISTRIBUTION  
CONCEPT

The site was also instrumental to the distribution of program, progressing from public to private. The transition from collective, to individual, to solitary, echoes the progression of yogic limbs.

Communal space is found at the north of the site, closest to the access road, while individual sleeping space is centrally located in the middle of the site, tucked into the treeline. A small clearing at the top of the hill, to the southwest edge of the site, provides a secluded location for the quiet solitude and reflection of meditation and physical practice.

The contrasting form and scale of each of these volumes, reinforces their significance within the experience of the site. In a similar way to the Vajrasana Buddhist Centre, the sacred precinct is marked by a different form, material, and scale to indicate the importance of the meditation space in the hierarchy of the project.



FIG. 34 - PROGRAM DISTRIBUTION  
ON SITE

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A feeling of mindfulness and connection while still allowing space for a completely personal experience is the intention of the design concept of this retreat.

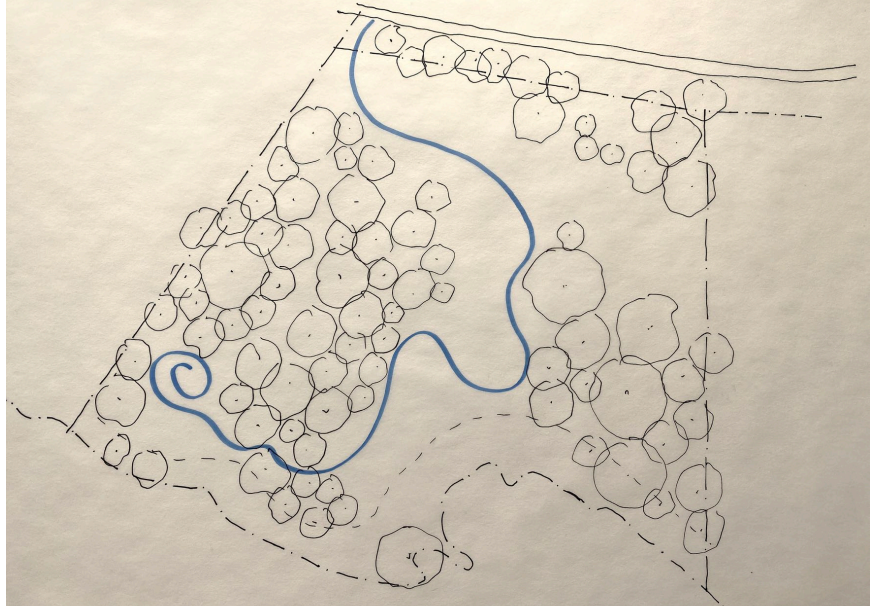


FIG. 35 - CONCEPT SKETCH  
• PATH / WALL •

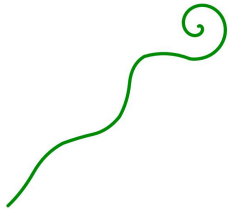
The introduction of path as a guiding element, serves to ground the experience of the site in a unified, continuous cycle of movement. This path then becomes wall and acts as a processional route, merging in and out of built form. As one moves beside and through the wall, this tactile interaction gives a grounding aspect to the circulation.

The concept of the Dharana limb, as scale and focus, evolved into the intent of compression and expansion. The wall is used as an instrument to create moments of contraction and relief, both within and outside the buildings.



FIG. 36 - CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT  
• WALL TO BUILT FORM •





## Circulation - site as connective tissue

The concept of prana can be described as energy that rides on the breath. In a similar way, the meandering paths found throughout the property support energy that rides on the circulation of the site.

Water symbolizes the cyclical nature of yoga, time and nature. This is represented by the continuous movement of rain and water throughout the site, in gravel channels and retention ponds.

Internal circulation within the retreat site continues the idea of journey; spiralling in and around the buildings to act as connective tissue, following existing patterns of site topography. In time, additional pathways and spontaneous moments will develop through daily use of the meadow, forest and garden.

FIG. 37 - SITE CIRCULATION

-  PRIMARY PATH
-  SECONDARY PATH



## Floor Plans

### Communal Building

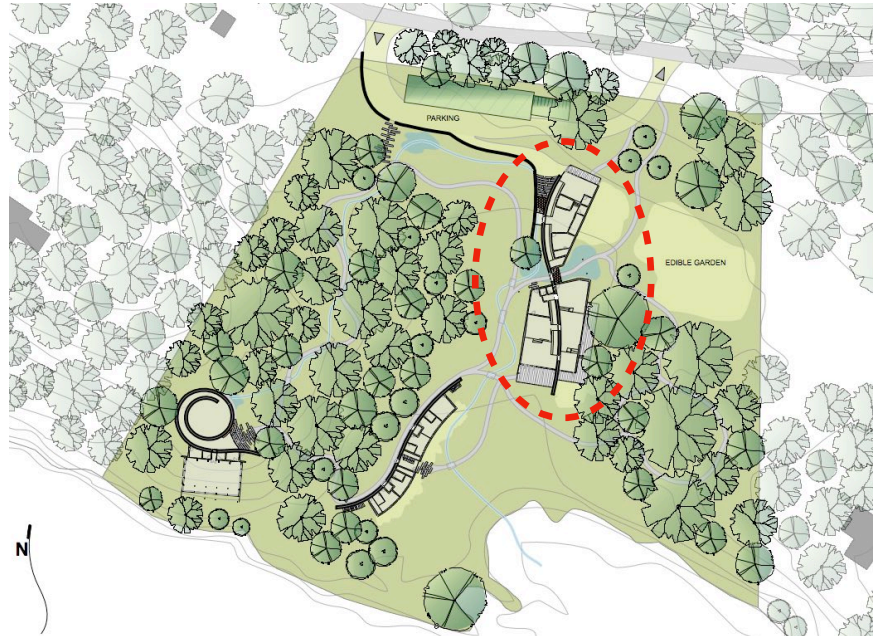


FIG. 38 - KEY PLAN

The communal building is located near the road, for ease of public access. To the north of the building, vehicle and bicycle access are located off of the rural no-through road. A curved parking structure, concealed with a green roof, hints at the architectural form of the practice space to come. This first, more public side of the building contains the community cafe, mechanical learning hub, and offices. The living room, dining room and kitchen occupy the second, more private part of the building. The rammed earth wall guides the entire entry sequence from the the road, through and into the communal buildings, and onwards deeper into the site. See detailed floor plan (Fig. 39) on following page.



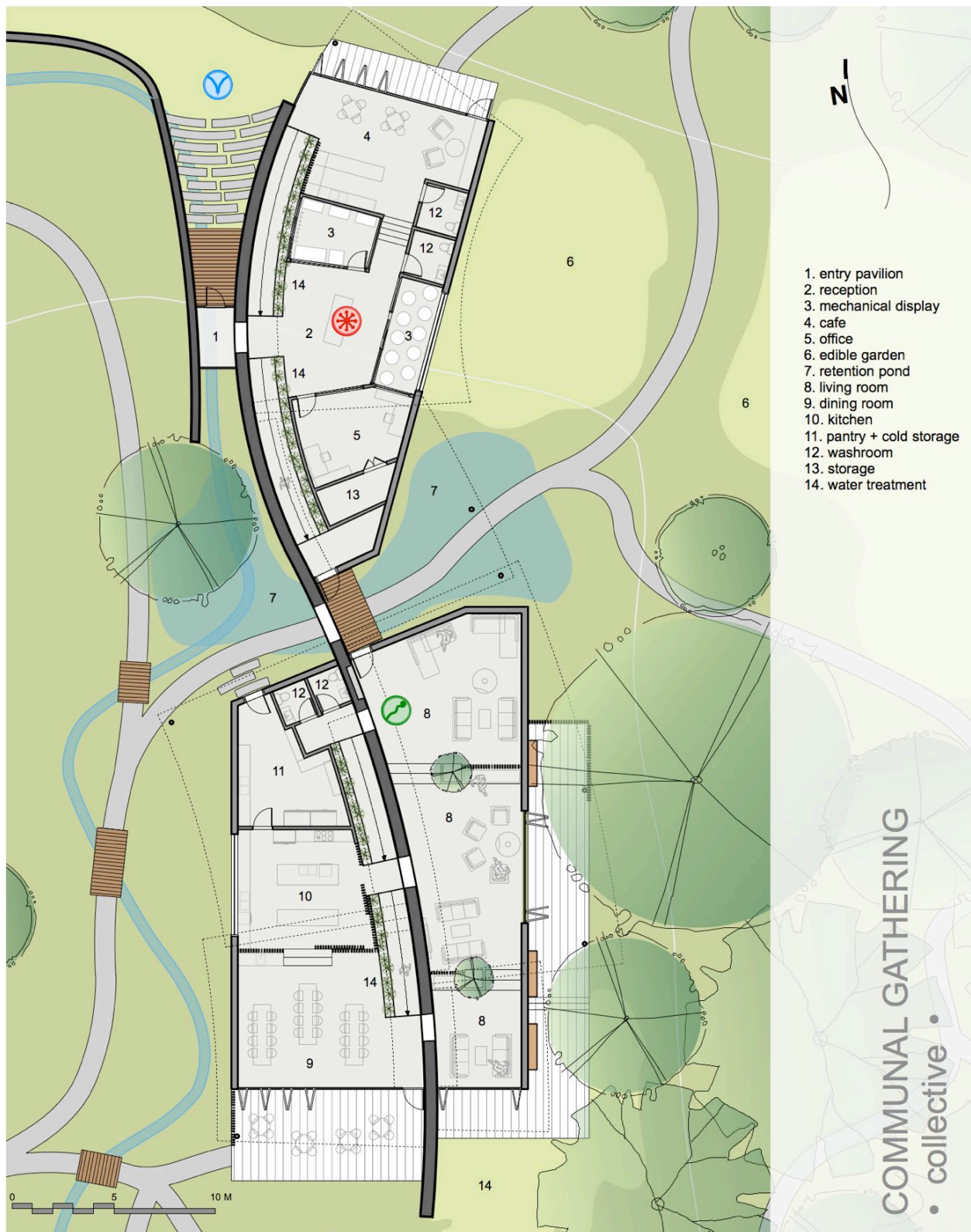


FIG. 39 - COMMUNAL FLOOR PLAN

## Accommodation Building



FIG. 40 - KEY PLAN

The accommodation building is located centrally in the middle of the site. The sinuous building contains twelve sleeping rooms for guests and one for staff, in a combination of minimal single and double rooms. Lower, more accessible rooms are entered from the back of the building, tucked below the cantilever and through the rammed earth wall. Upper rooms are accessed from a corridor edged by the rammed earth wall, which runs the length of the building. Additional spaces found here are two small quiet lounges, shared washrooms, and staff laundry room. See detailed floor plan (Fig. 41) on following page.



FIG. 41 - ACCOMMODATION FLOOR PLANS



## Practice and Meditation Building

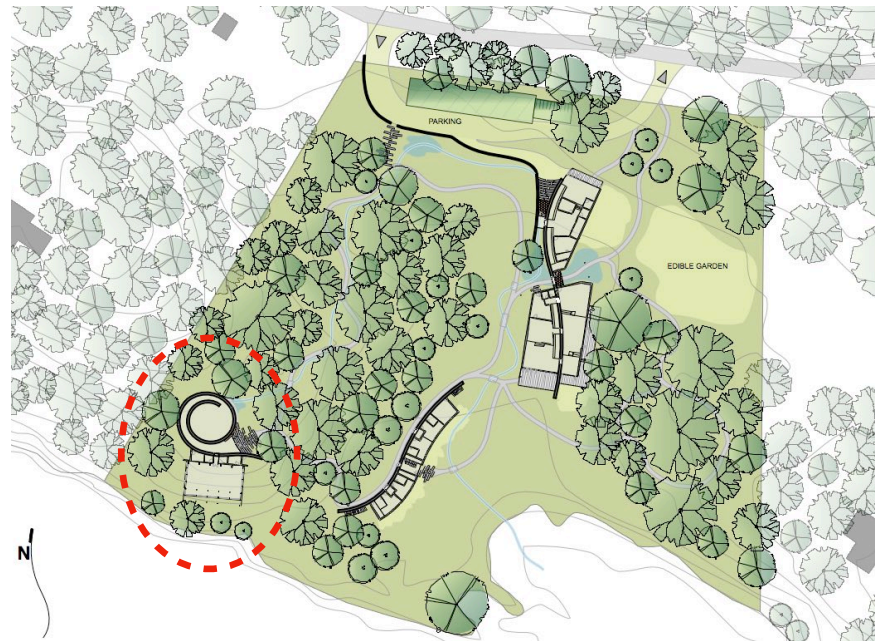


FIG. 42 - KEY PLAN

The practice and meditation building is located at the furthest removed portion of the site. The practice space occupies the ocean side of the building, animated in its purpose. The introverted spiral form contains the meditation space on the forest side. The nature of the hillside topography here means the practice space hovers over the ocean, while the meditation space burrows into the earth. See detailed floor plan (Fig. 43) on following page.

All buildings are further explored in the following section, *The Journey - a narrative....*

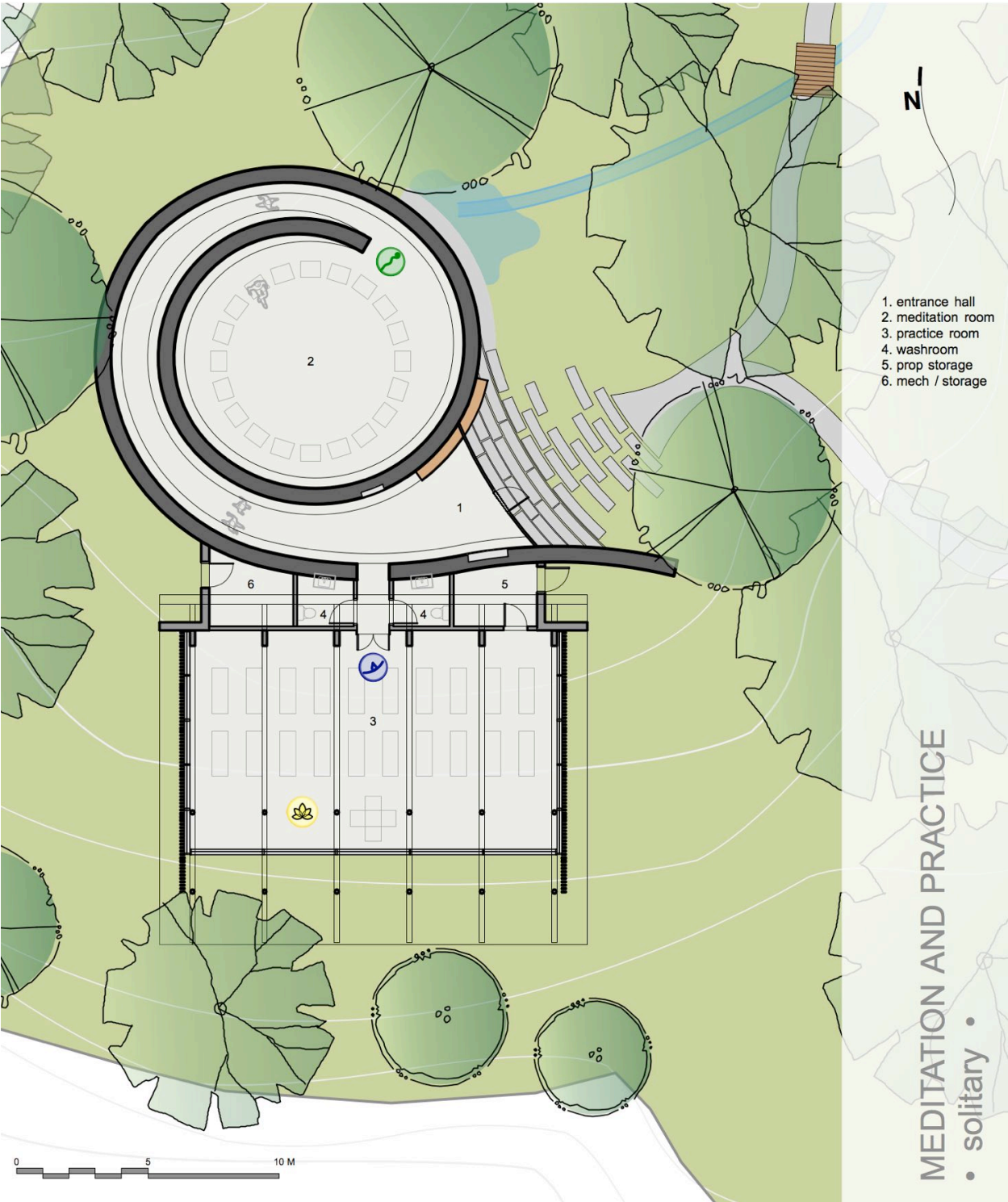
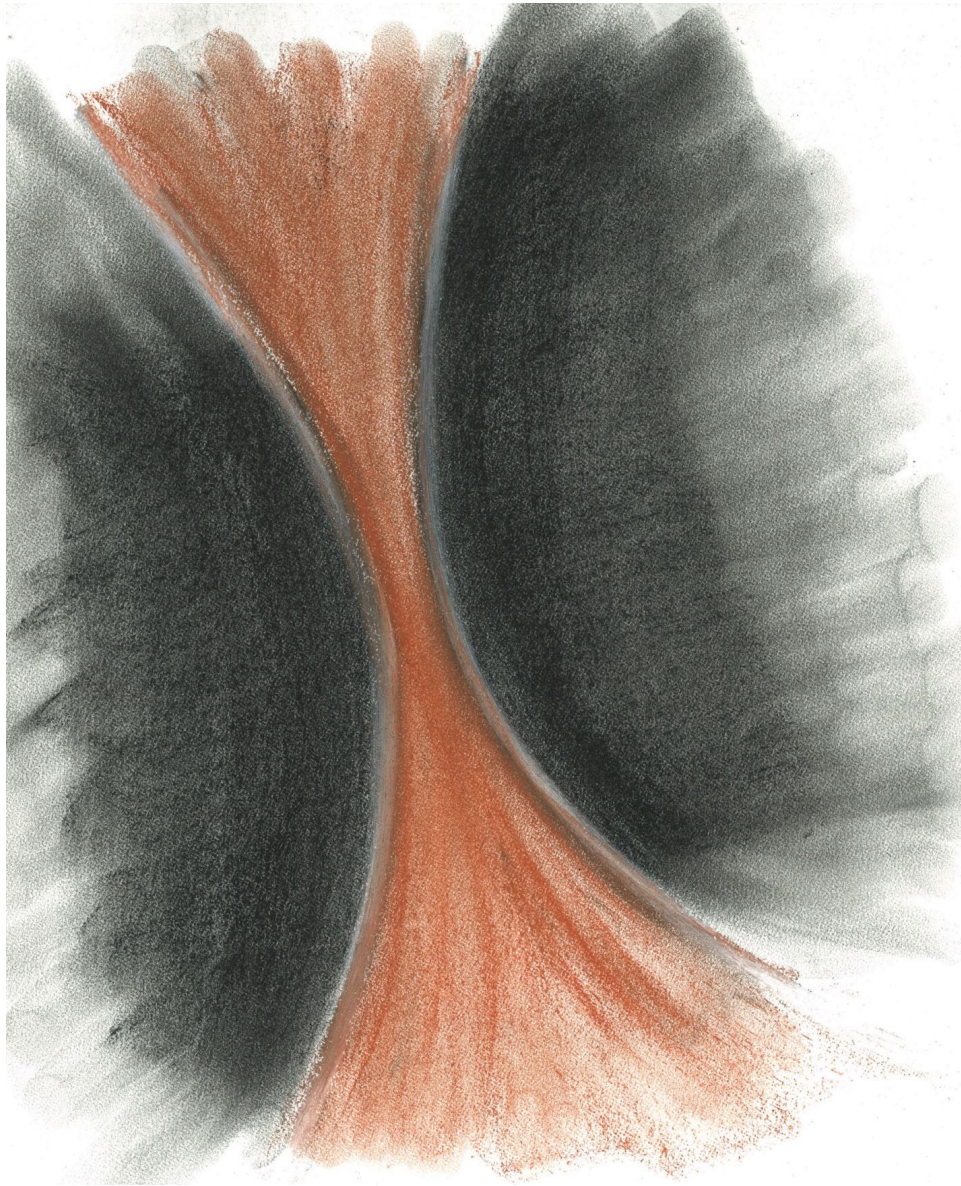


FIG. 43 - MEDITATION FLOOR PLAN



## The Journey - a narrative ...

FIG. 44 - CONCEPT SKETCH



From a place of stillness and movement, we'll follow alongside a meandering path of water that makes its way from the high point of the site, through mature trees, down into the open meadow, and continues on, guiding us through the experience of arriving.

A rammed earth wall emanates from the entrance to the site, where it pushes through the earth, awakening the land that it's formed from. The gesture of the curve responds to the topography and becomes a grounding element for the retreat.

Gravel crunching underfoot, we make our way along the length of the low wall as it gradually becomes a tall enclosure. Compressing the entry experience, it guides towards a lantern-like entrance, hovering over a reflection pond. The extended procession allows us to shake off another layer of the outside world before fully arriving.

The physicality of pulling on a door handle, carved from local wood, curving in your hand, serves as a cue that this gesture is integral to the entirety of the project.



FIG. 45 - PRATYAHARA LIMB • JOURNEY •



A threshold is expressed, as wall becomes floor for a brief moment, allowing the first opportunity to pass through and under the rammed earth wall, as we turn and step inside.

A view through 'showcase' mechanical equipment towards the meadow and edible garden, immediately anchors the connection to sustainability and place. Learning opportunities abound for visitors to both the community cafe and to the centre, as the highly visible nature of rainwater treatment heightens curiosity about where our water comes from.

Beckoned by curving ramps, we travel up to the cafe or descend towards the private communal spaces. Lush planting edges each ramp, a reminder of the water treatment strategy found throughout the site. Ribbon skylights also follow the gentle curve, allowing sunlight to bathe the wall and illuminate the path of the ramp.

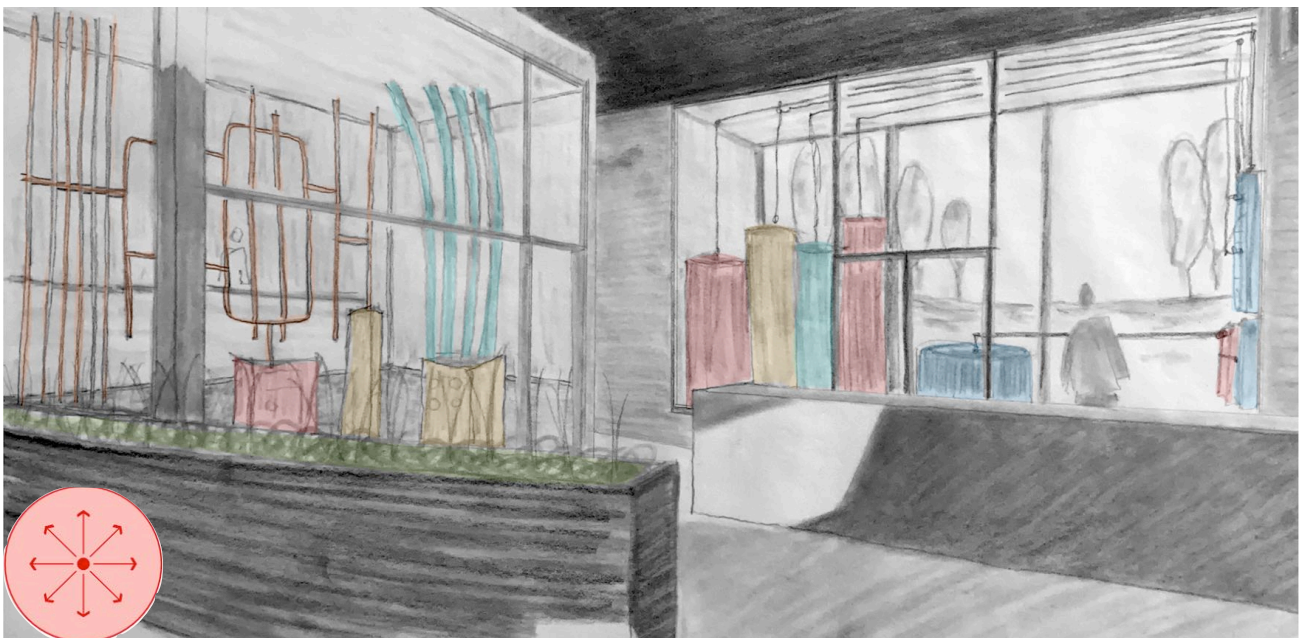


FIG. 46 - YAMAS LIMB • ETHICS •



Following the pull of light, a moment is offered to pause as we pass between buildings and experiences. Finding ourselves outside for a few breaths, the smell of ocean and fir trees anchors us back to the present moment.

Travelling over a retention pond, sparkling with light, the journey brings us over a bridge, into a space filled with warmth and energy. Seemingly growing out of the landscape and reflecting the natural flow of topography, the living room and the roof above it gently spill down the site. Charred wood cladding is expressed on the interior, bringing warmth, and contrasting the brightness outside.

Clerestory windows direct periphery views up toward trees, while large southern windows support shifting moments of shared experience or of quiet study.



FIG. 47 - PRANAYAMA LIMB • CIRCULATION •

Circulation weaves through, and around, the wall; with stairs and ramps sliding down the building, connecting services with social space. Passing through the rammed earth wall to where meals are shared, a higher ceiling reflects the dynamic, energetic nature of the dining space, contrasting the lower ceiling of the more intimate living room. Laughter and conversation animate the live edge communal tables, while a view to nature, and the kitchen, keeps us rooted in place.

Covered outdoor areas allow opportunity to enjoy the smell and sound of rain on a metal roof, and observe the passing of seasons, while still being protected from the elements.

Leaving the protection of the collective space, a path guides through the clearing, towards individual space. A choice is offered — to travel towards the glowing entry volume or slip behind and



FIG. 48 - NIYAMAS LIMB • SEPARATION OF SPACES •

under the building, walking the length of the rammed earth wall, toward the meditation building.

The short distance traveled outside supports the transition from one moment to another, giving each experience its own importance.

Nestled into the tree line, we find small quiet lounges and screened front porches. This retreat within a retreat offsets the sometimes boisterous energy of the larger communal hub.

The curvature of the accommodation building is interrupted by a glass element that serves to reorient and connect to the site by offering glimpses of views and establishing an entry point.

Climbing the stairs that slice through the wall, an obscured view is offered up the hill, while a glance over the shoulder, provides outlook to the water's edge and horizon.



FIG. 49 - PRANAYAMA LIMB • CIRCULATION •

Ducking under the wall once more, to where sleeping spaces are located on the water side of the rammed earth wall, while cleansing, and common spaces, occupy the forest side.

The vaulted ceiling of the bright corridor alternates between solid and transparent solar panels, giving a dappled effect as light spills down the wall. Glazing wraps up and over the interior space, so that the act of sleeping under the stars underpins notions of rest and universal connection.

Continual interaction with this spine of wall, reinforces a connection to place, and gestures towards the next moment. The wall serves to both separate, and unify, our experience. Stairs hug the rammed earth wall as they terrace down, and the exterior wall becomes path as our journey continues.



FIG. 50 - PRATYAHARA LIMB • JOURNEY •



To reach the meditation building, we embark on an uphill climb; rewarded by solitary space, where movement is balanced by stillness.

On approach, the practice volume shields most of the ocean view, while a glass plane slices between two walls and a warm glow of light filters from the interior.

Inside, the contrast created by the thick rammed earth walls and dark wood ceiling serves to underline the brightness of the exterior left behind. Compressed between two walls and a low ceiling, the curve gradually narrows as it spills into the round softness of the meditation space.

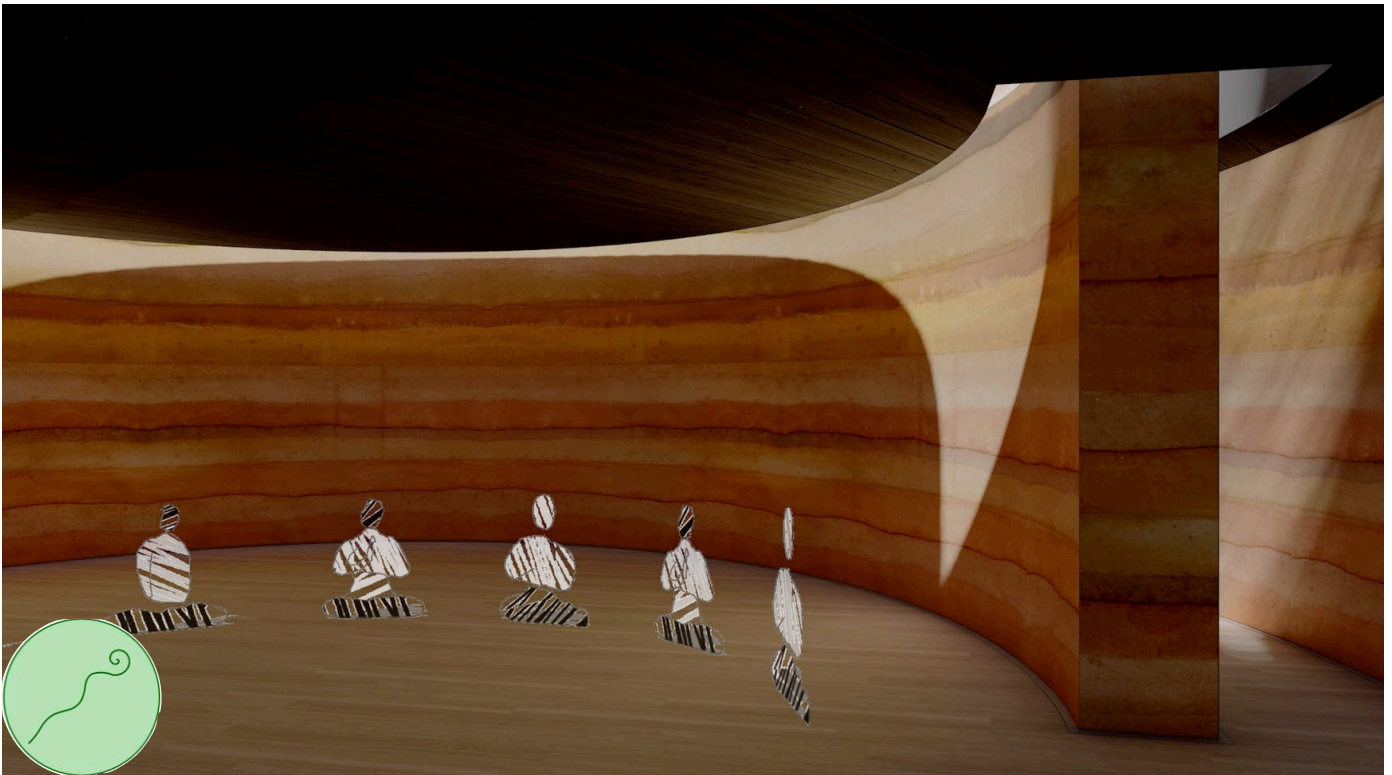


FIG. 51 - PRANAYAMA LIMB • CIRCULATION •

Winding into this room for contemplation, a tactile transition to cork floor underfoot, helps to soften acoustics and offset the solidity of the walls. Slivers of sky allow for awareness, of the passing of time, and elements.

Emerging out from this sense of burying in and cocooning, the pull of more and more light guides us back to the surface. A portal to one side serves as a transition between the experiences of meditation and physical practice.

The practice space soars, echoing the animated nature of the activities it supports. Heavy structure is expressed and celebrated, suggesting the act of holding up the body during a yoga pose.



FIG. 52 - ASANA LIMB • FORM + STRUCTURE •

The louvered side walls serve to restrict harsh afternoon light, while still letting in glimpses of the surrounding trees.

A framed view to the ocean, reveals the suspended cliff condition of the space; as the glazing appears to slide past the boundary of the floor.

This perceived risk factor gives new meaning to warrior pose as you face out from the edge of a cliff. My teacher often says that this is warrior's work — this journey and this practice.

Compressed once more from all sides, we pass through an extended threshold, focusing the attention on a subtle reminder of the ultimate limb of the yoga journey.



FIG. 53 - DHARANA LIMB • SCALE + FOCUS = COMPRESSION •



From this place of stillness and movement, we'll follow alongside a meandering path of water that makes its way from the high point of the site, through mature trees, down into the open meadow and continues on...

FIG. 54 - CONCEPT SKETCH





## Structure

Representing natural strength, wood makes up the ‘bones’ of each building, while the spine is further articulated as rammed earth. Simple roof structure honours this, highlighting the connection to nature and the surroundings.

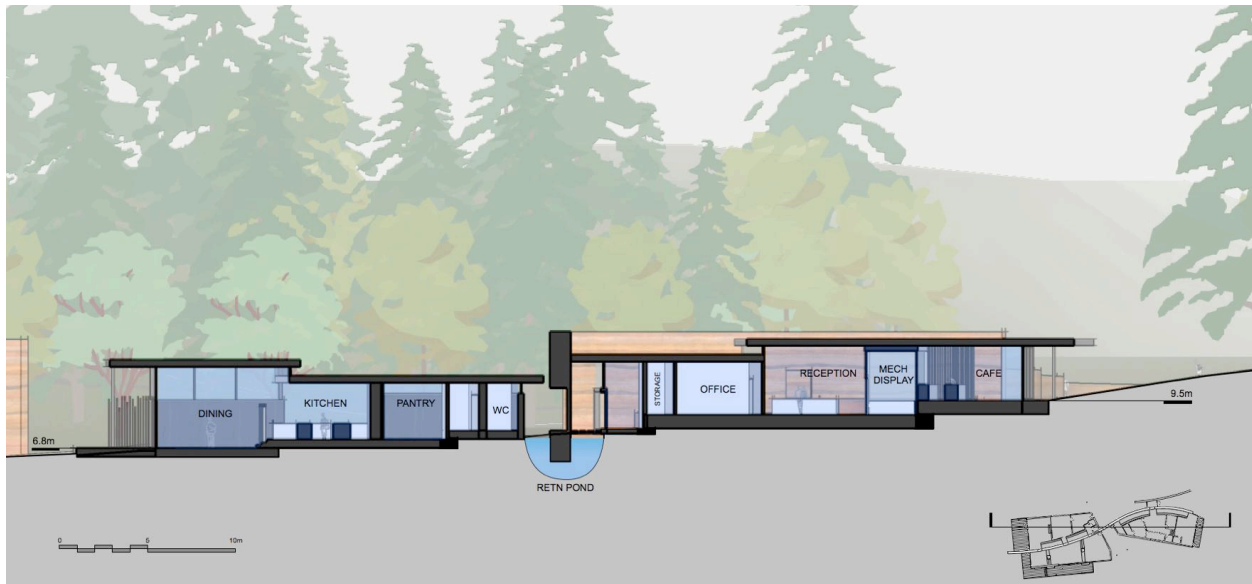
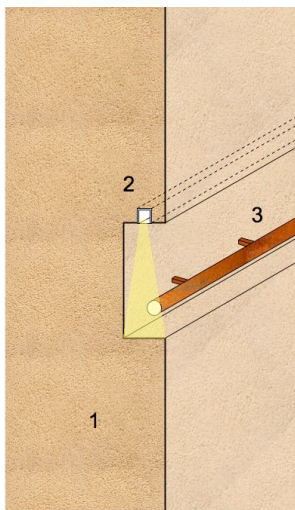


FIG. 55 - COMMUNAL BUILDING SECTION

Informed by the Joshua Tree Retreat Centre, respect for the site echoes a respect for oneself, and allowing the roof to follow the sloping topography of the site is one way this is achieved.

Further interaction with the guiding spine is encouraged by physically reaching into the rammed earth wall in order to grasp the ramp’s handrail.



1. RAMMED EARTH WALL
2. INSET LED LIGHTING
3. CORTEN HANDRAIL

FIG. 56 - HANDRAIL DETAIL



FIG. 57 - ACCOMMODATION  
BUILDING SECTION 1

The form of the accommodation building is reminiscent of residential architecture, to support a feeling of familiarity and comfort. This was influenced, in part, by the Vajrasana Buddhist Centre's vernacular design language.

The structure clings to the wall and contains minimal rooms, while a cantilever supports both common space above, and shelters a person passing below.

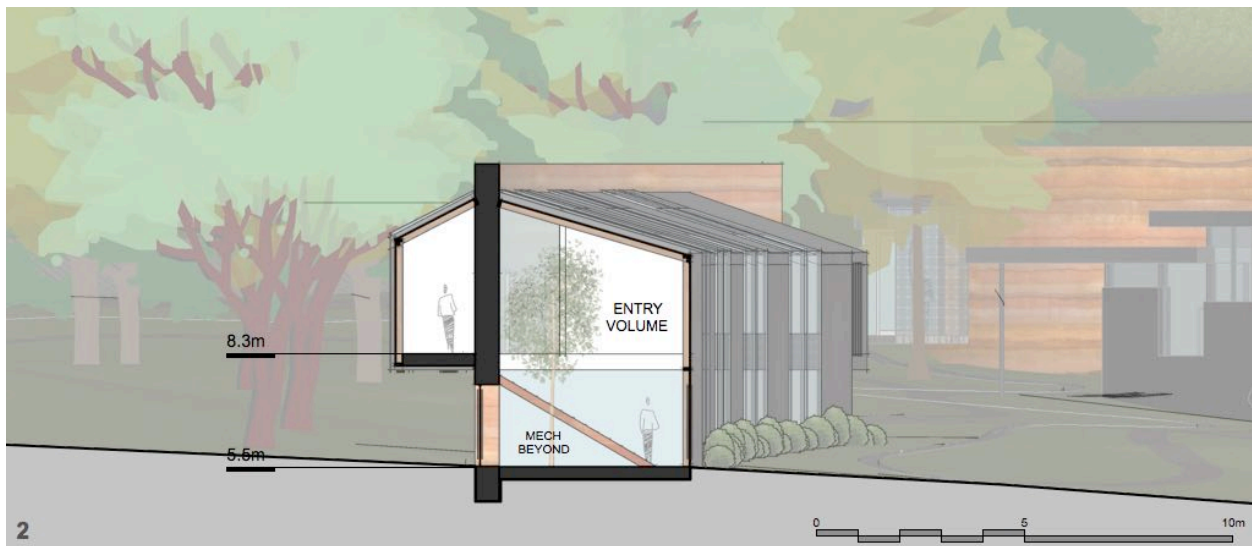


FIG. 58 - ACCOMMODATION  
BUILDING SECTION 2

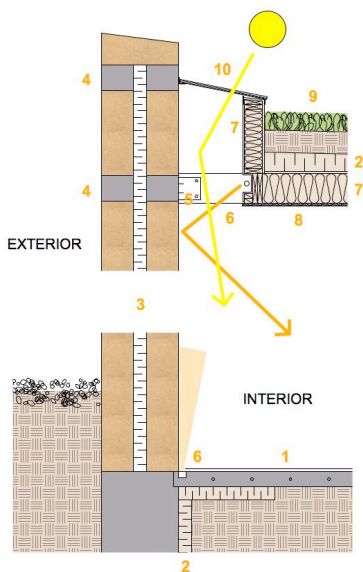


FIG. 59 - MEDITATION BUILDING SECTION

The tectonic nature of heavy timber in the practice space, expresses solidity and grounding, in a space of movement. The generous overhang is supported by angled columns, reaching also into the interior space.

By allowing the structure to ‘speak’, structural tensions are more clearly understood and related to yoga.

The main structural element of the mediation space is emphasized by indirect light washing continuously over the surface of the wall. When natural daylight isn’t present, recessed lighting provides a similar emphasis.



1. STRUCTURAL SLAB w RADIANT HEATING & CORK FLOORING FINISH
2. RIGID INSULATION
3. STABILIZED INSULATED RAMMED EARTH (SIRE)
4. PUDDLED EARTH BOND BEAM
5. STEEL KNIFE-EDGE CONNECTOR ATTACHED TO WOOD BEAM
6. INSET LED WALL WASH LIGHTING
7. CELLULOSE BLOWN IN INSULATION
8. SHOU SUGI BAN WOOD CEILING
9. EXTENSIVE GREEN ROOF
10. SKYLIGHT

FIG. 60 - WALL SECTION



## Sustainability

The materials selected are of this particular place, including wood, from the old schoolhouse located on the site, and from nearby reclaimed sources; as well as rammed earth made from soil and sand excavated during construction. In a similar way to the Joshua Tree Retreat Centre, truth in materiality, geometry and structure helps anchor this project as a place to explore personal truths, as well as supporting the Yama limb.

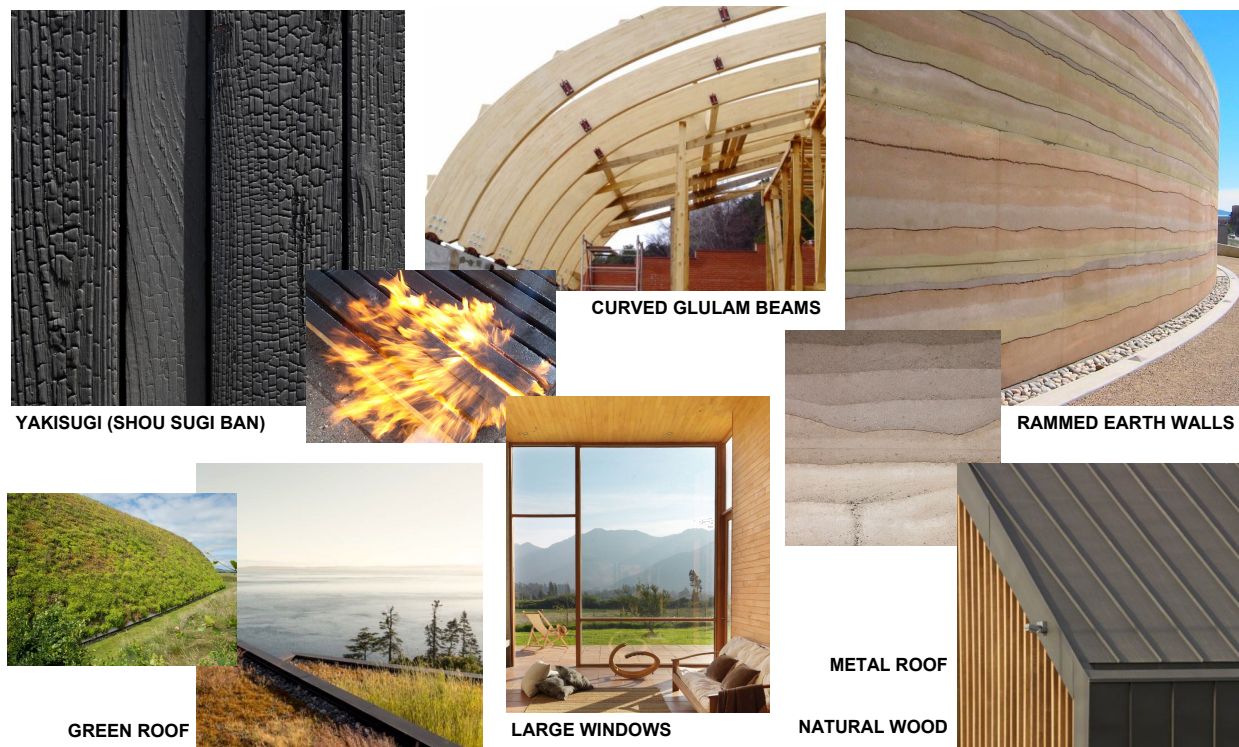


FIG. 61 - MATERIALITY

Shou sugi ban offers a natural method of finishing, pest and fire control, and adds an element of tactility that ties the separate buildings together. Metal roofs offer an auditory connection to the seasons, as they crackle with the transition from night to day.

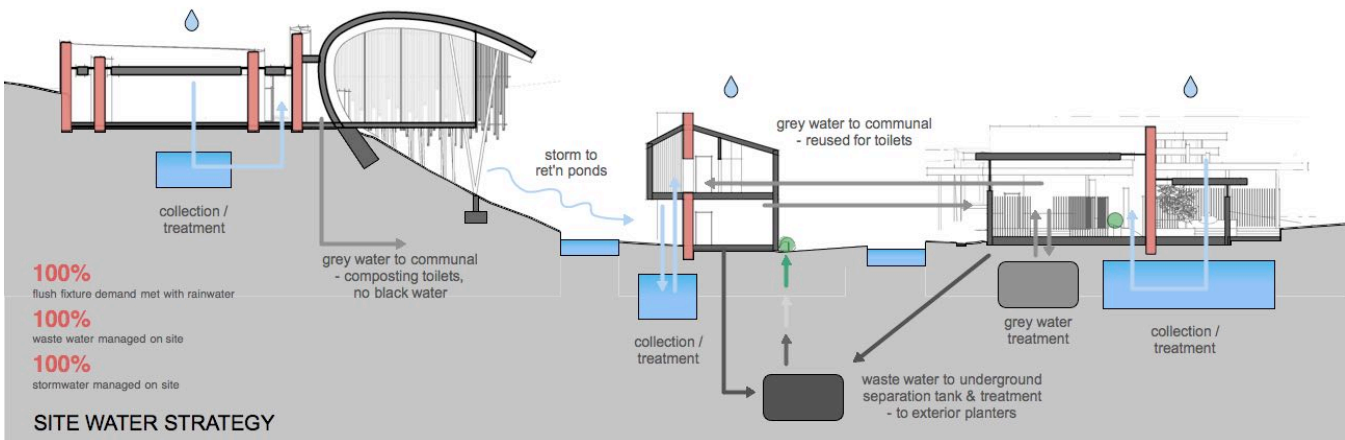
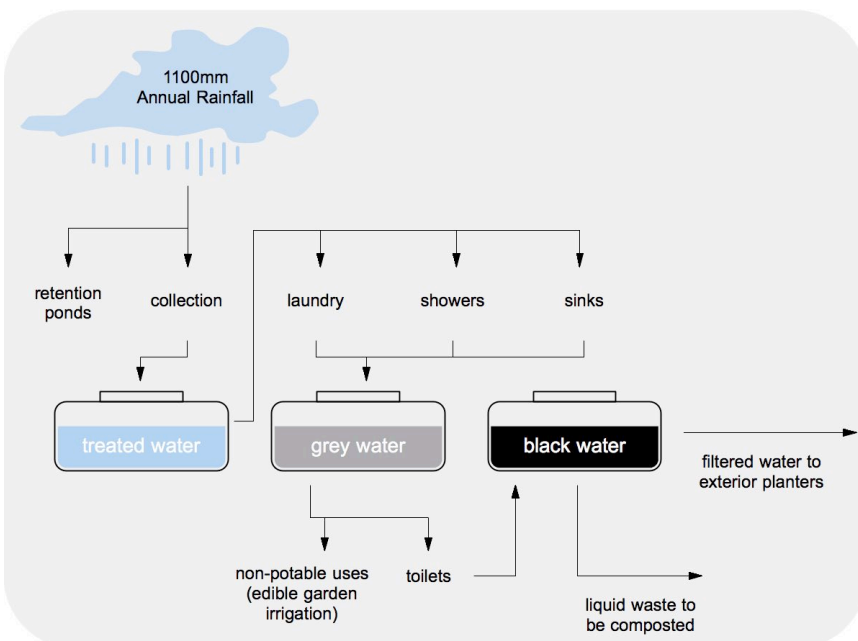


FIG. 62 - SITE WATER STRATEGY

Water reuse is celebrated in the mechanical hub of the communal building, where colourful pumps and dials, labelled for clarity of information, showcase the zero runoff nature of the project.

Rain water is collected, treated and used for sinks and showers. The grey water produced by those functions, is then treated and used to flush toilets and irrigate the edible garden. This waste water is separated, treated and utilized for landscape irrigation; meaning that the same water is recycled a total of four times. Refer to Appendix C for further data.

FIG. 63 - SITE WATER SCHEMATIC



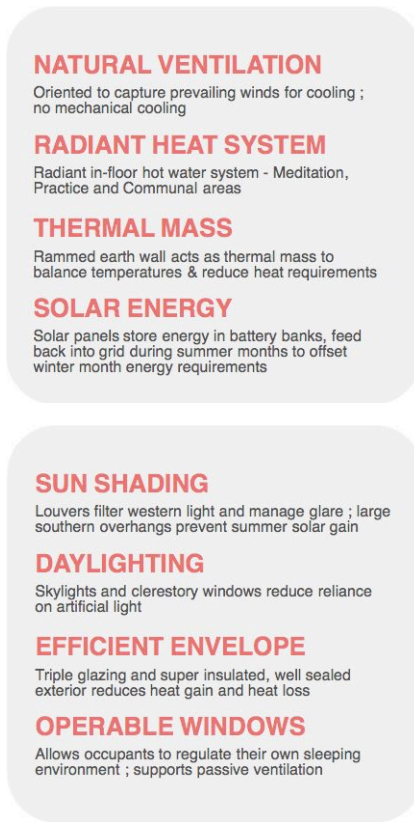


FIG. 64 - ENERGY STRATEGY



FIG. 65 - LIVING BUILDING PETALS. IMAGE CREDIT - PALMER.OLIVIA DISTRIBUTED UNDER A CC BY-SA 4.0 LICENSE. RETRIEVED FROM: [HTTPS://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/LIVING\\_BUILDING\\_CHALLENGE](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living_Building_Challenge)

Retention ponds throughout the site offer both peace of mind for fire protection, and a place of still water, to pause and rest.

Mechanical systems are reduced by use of natural ventilation, and thermal mass, offset by radiant in-floor heat. Whatever power is needed for this is supplied by solar collection. Virtually all spaces relate to the outdoors and receive natural daylighting. Minimal use of artificial light, strategically located, serves to elevate the experience and reduce reliance on the power grid. Refer to Appendix C for further data.

Using the Living Building Challenge as a guide, several ‘petals’ are achieved through design, including Net Positive Water and Net Positive Energy (International Living Future Institute [ILFI], 2019). There is an interesting correlation between several of the petals and the yogic limbs. Several sub-petals relate to the Yamas limbs of ethics, including Responsible Materials, Responsible Sourcing, Healthy Interior En, and Access to Nature (ILFI, 2019).

Sub-petals of the *Place* petal (Ecology of Place and Human Scaled Living) connect back to the Dharana limb, with a sense of balanced scale. Additional petals such as *Equity* (Universal Access and Inclusion) and *Beauty* (Beauty + Biophilia and Education + Inspiration) are met simply by approaching this project holistically and relate to the Samadhi limb, or spirit of place (ILFI, 2019).



## CONCLUSION

We come back to the definition of yoga — as union. Union of all limbs, union of all elements. And union of architecture that brings it all together into one holistic experience.

The wall itself symbolizes each yogic limb on the path towards enlightenment; while each building embodies the limbs in its own way. This path to internal clarity involves a sense of journey and a transformation of body and mind. Architecture can become a container through which the ideas of compression and release, movement and stillness, and collective and solitary experience, are free to be explored.

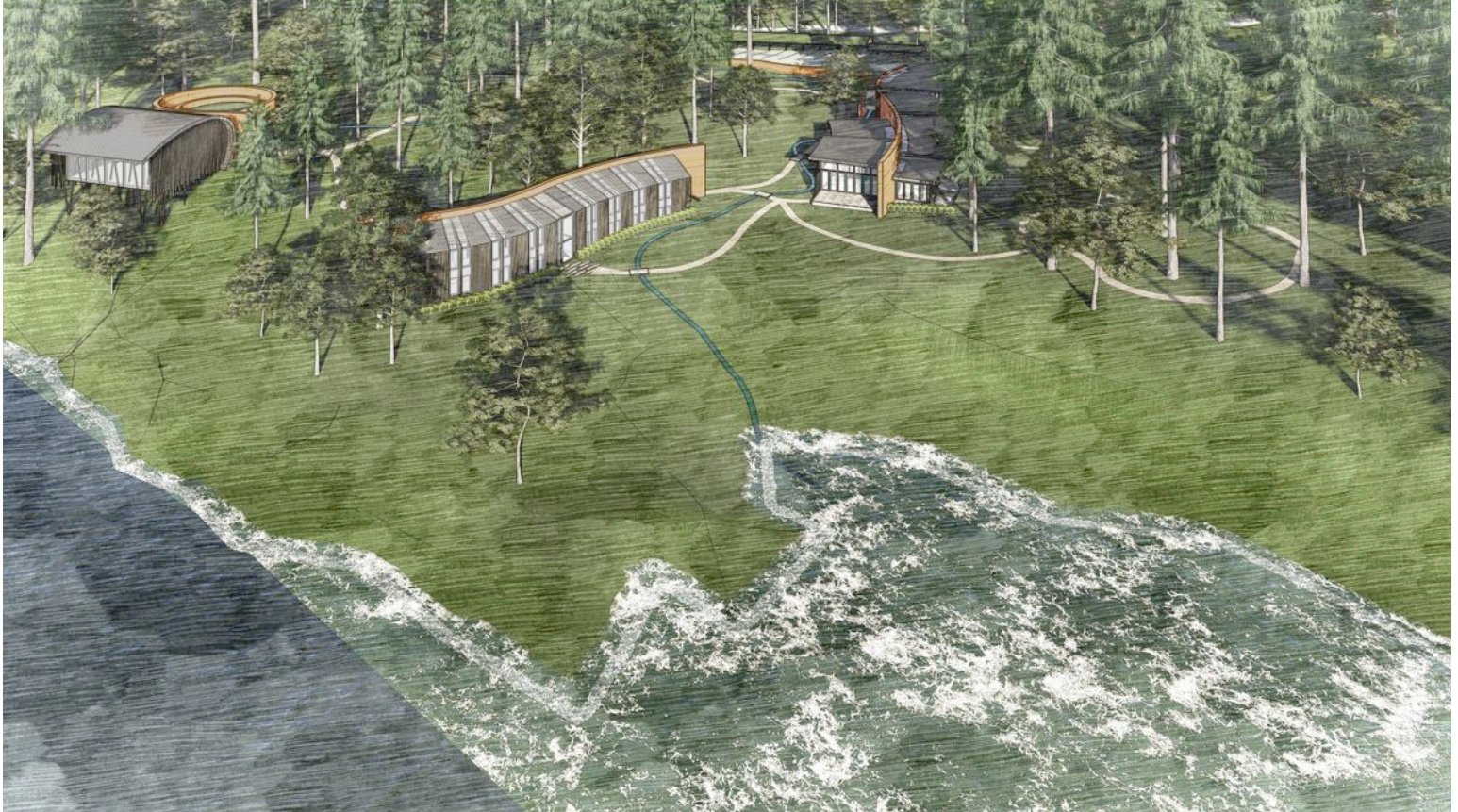
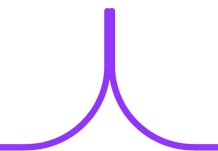
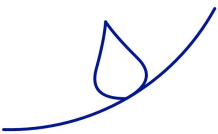
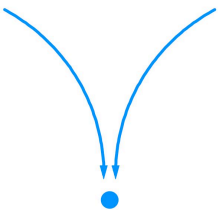
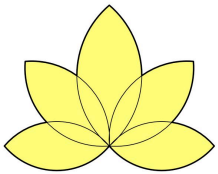
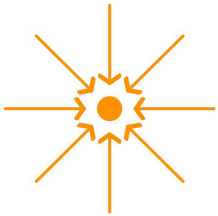
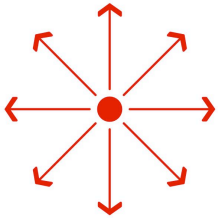


FIG. 66 - RENDERING • SITE OVERVIEW



The architectural design of this project supports the practice of yoga with a holistic approach, where all limbs are supported, by utilizing elements such as siting, orientation, adjacencies, circulation, approach, building materials, and built form. The whole of the project all come together to inform the ‘enlightenment’ of a retreat centre and the people who visit it.

The hope is that this research has the potential for a wider reach than simply a framework to design a retreat centre. I believe the elements here can be applied to the thoughtful design of any building typology, but especially healthcare (including hospitals and seniors homes), education, and inclusive housing, where the union of body, mind and spirit would be particularly beneficial.

This project is rooted in the present, and has hopefully served as a reminder that you are the stars that you sleep beneath, you are the tree that you lean against for support, you are the earth that comprises the wall you run your fingers along, and you are the water that supports life in all of it.

We are all one, in our need to discover a place of retreat to nourish our souls and rest our minds.



FIG. 67 - RENDERING • VIEW FROM WATER



*"Be not daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly now. Love mercy now. Walk humbly now. You're not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it."*

*- translation from The Talmud*

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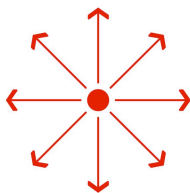
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## APPENDIX A - Interview Questions

How long have you practiced yoga? What made you first consider a yoga or meditation retreat? Where have you attended a yoga or meditation retreat?

*I have created a framework for evaluation based on Patanjali's 8 limbs of yoga. We will review each element of the retreat through this framework lens. If you've been on more than one retreat, let's discuss the most and least successful. If possible, try to focus on retreats closest to Victoria.*



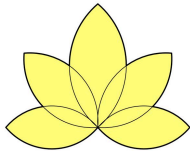
Yamas = ethics / materiality / sustainability

What was the location and setting and how did that impact your experience? Was it rural or urban? Was the materiality of the building rustic or new? Were there any apparent efforts at sustainability (such as solar, rainwater harvesting or low energy consumption)?



Niyamas = amenities

What was successful or not about the accommodations, practice spaces, common spaces? Were there any unique amenities and how did that affect your experience?



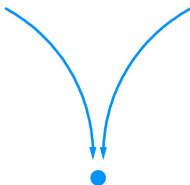
Asana = type of classes and interactions between practice

What sort of sessions and classes? Was there one instructor or multiple instructors? Were the connections you experienced between practice sessions lively or subdued and how did that affect your experience?



Pranayama = circulation

What was successful or not about navigating around the retreat? Was there far to walk or travel outdoors between sleeping / practice / dining? Or was everything in one building?



Pratyahara = journey

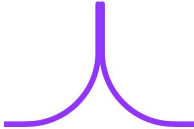
Can you describe your journey to the retreat and how it affected your first impression upon arrival? How far did you travel? Did you travel alone or with someone else? Once you arrived at the retreat, was there anything special about your journey further into the property (i.e. to the accommodation or check in)?

Dharana = scale



Can you describe the length of retreat and size of the group? Did the size of the group work for you? Did the size of the retreat (including the property and buildings) seem manageable, overwhelming or not enough space?

Dhyana & Samadhi = Spirit of Place



What were the sacred, magic or special elements to the retreat property? How did you feel a part of a larger community or something greater than yourself? Did the space feel authentic? If yes or no, how did the space feel authentic?

Please place the previously discussed elements in order of importance to your experience:

- i. Location and Setting
- ii. Amenities
- iii. Types of classes
- iv. Circulation around the spaces
- v. Journey (ie nearby or far away)
- vi. Size of group / length of retreat
- vii. Spirit of Place

What worked for you about this retreat?

What challenged you about this retreat or could have been better?

Thinking about the design of the retreat setting, was the building repurposed or built specifically to function as a retreat centre? Does it always function as a retreat centre or are other types of events hosted there?

Is there anything you would like to add about your experiences while on retreat?

## APPENDIX B - Interview Transcripts

### Interview 'D'

- M: I am gathering information about yoga retreats as you know, and my topic is kind of how architecture can support the practice of yoga and vice versa, how yoga can support architecture. So I just have questions about retreats that you have attended. If as this item says, if you've been to more than one retreat, if we could discuss the most and the least successful, but if you've only been to one, that's all good too. And if you've been to more than one, we'll focus on the ones that are closest to Victoria.
- D: when you say retreat, do you just mean yoga retreats? These are only retreats, not have you been on more than one retreat?
- M: Generally a yoga retreat, yoga or meditation.
- D: Okay. This is my only one.
- M: How long have you practiced yoga?
- D: Uh, I don't practice yoga. Before the retreat I wasn't practicing yoga at all. Uh, I had done it. Geez. I don't know. I think when I was pregnant with my kids. Anyway, it had been a long time before I went on the retreat. So, and then since the retreat I've been to one yoga class.
- M: What made you consider a first yoga retreat?
- D: I wanted some time that was away from my normal life. I just wanted to get away. I wanted something structured where I had something to do during the day like, I didn't want to have just a bunch of free time. I wanted something that was health focused, focused on healthiness and self focused, focused on self care and you know, the self. And also I thought it was kind of weird to do a Yoga retreat, being that I didn't do yoga and I wanted the challenge. I wanted to see if I could do it. And push myself a little and I didn't want to have to cook my own food.
- M: A little bit of pampering at the same time as putting yourself out there. That's great.
- D: I think just getting to sleep in that was nice. It's a different kind of waking up, that's for sure.
- M: Where have you attended a yoga or meditation retreat?
- D: Uh, what's the name of that farm on salt spring island, Stowell Lake farm. That's it. I don't know if I said that right.
- M: So that's our just kind of background questions so that I know a little more about you. For my research, I created a framework for evaluating, existing retreat centres that are elsewhere in the world and also evaluating my own retreat experiences. And it will be used to kind of as a lens to evaluate your retreat experiences based on the eight limbs of yoga. And so we will review each element of the retreat through this framework Lens and I'll guide that. So the first one is the yamas first limb, which talks about kind of ethics. The correlating kind of element for my framework is kind of sustainability materiality and site selection. So we'll kind of talk about those elements. So thinking about the location and setting of the retreat and how that impacted your experience. Is it rural, urban?
- D: It was a very rural setting. Are there is a lot of open spaces and was I would say a little, I think the word's bucolic, it's kind of pastoral. It felt like I was on a farm. I think I was on a farm too. I think it was technically a farm, the buildings, they seem to, you know, fit in with the, the environment.
- M: Was the materiality of the building kind of rustic or was it new?

- D: Well, where the yoga itself was, where the yoga classes were taking place. It seems more modern, there really big tall open windows. With that kind of fresh looking, I think it was lighter coloured wood. And then where we ate though, it looked like an old, like a big old barn, you know, those big old farm barn houses where you might back in the day have had horses or something.
- M: Oh, so kind of both. Did one of those feel better to you when you were there?
- D: Oh Geez. That's hard. Cause they were both good for their purpose. I guess I prefer the openness with all the windows. I like that. Like where I was when we were in the building where we did the yoga, I was at the corner and so I was really close to some sliding doors and also to windows. But there is a bit of a wall, non see through wall, which was nice because I didn't have direct sunlight so I could hide there. But also I felt like I really liked that there was a door in case I wanted to leave, especially cause I didn't do a lot of yoga. It's like what if I can handle it? I mean that's easy exit going to hang out by the exit.
- M: Were there any apparent efforts at sustainability that you saw on the property? Like solar, rainwater harvesting, low energy consumption, if you noticed Anything like that?
- D: Yeah, it was, I think there was a fair amount of it, although I don't think I can put my finger on too many of them, but I know that there was rain harvesting. I think I remember seeing a green roof somewhere, but I don't know if that was, just that lean to where there was the little farm stand. You know what I mean? I can't really remember. But it did feel, yeah, it did feel like there is an effort to make, for example, the building that we were sleeping in, it seemed like there was an effort to make it part of the natural environment instead of making it just in it because there was all these wood accents inside seemed to match what was going on outside. So bringing kind of outside in, I guess.
- M: Okay, nice.
- D: I'm not an architect so I don't really pay attention to this kind of stuff to that degree. Oh, and then the building that we did, the yoga in there was, like, I don't know what it's stickers on the windows. A bird. And so I thought that was cool because there was an awareness that, you know, birds might try to fly into the windows. So just being careful about the natural environment or habitat, and the animals that are there.
- M: The next limb is the Niyamas limb, which talks about, specifically with the Yoga Sutras. It talks about purity, cleanliness, kind of honouring your temple, your body. So my correlated element is the amenities that you have there, where you, where you slept, where you ate, where you washed, how you took care of yourself while you were there. So I guess the question is, it's a broad one, but what was successful or not about the accommodations, practice spaces, common spaces. And we can go through those one at a time.
- D: It's difficult for me to say anything negative about it. I felt like the food, if it's part of the body and taking care of the body, I would say that the food was, it felt very clean and very pure. So I really enjoyed that. I really enjoyed the food. I guess one of the things that I didn't like was how kind of the only option for eating inside was to eat in a big mess hall with everyone, I guess it would've been nice to have more options for instead of it being kind of a forced socializing when you're eating or you Eat outside, maybe the weather wouldn't allow that to have more opportunity for solitude when eating.
- D: Where my accommodations were, uh, was I think they were really new, like built in the last year or something. And I just love the setup along one of the walls, the wall that my room was on was facing, a house that a family lived on and it was a really farm like setting. So when I would look out my window, I would see their house and they would see those two sheep and their kids would play there, you know, that was their yard.
- D: And then so it went in my room and then beside my room there was a bathroom and then two individual rooms each with a shower and then another room with a bathroom, just had the toilet and the sink. And I really liked that. I really like that the showers were separate from where the toilets and sinks were. Because it just seemed like it would be a waste of space to have them integrated because



sometimes people need to shower but they don't need to go to the bathroom or vice versa. So I thought that it made it really good for people sharing common amenities to have it separated that way.

D: There were just generally a lot of bathrooms, which I would say was nice, like where the yoga practice space was. There is a bathroom, a toilet on the actual floor of the yoga. Then you could go down the stairs and then there was another bathroom and I thought that was really nice that there was a bathroom available. You had to go down two flights of stairs, maybe eight stairs, but it was made it more private because the bathroom that was on the same floor as the yoga space, everyone might be able to hear you. And so there it wasn't a very private bathroom, which some people might not like. So I really liked that the one downstairs was quite private.

M: That perfectly covers off all of those three things. Thank you. Were there any other unique amenities on site? How did that affect your experience at the retreat?

D: I'm trying to remember. Unique Amenities, you know, I can't really think of anything. The building that the yoga itself was in. I just really liked the design of that building. Like how you go in the two glass doors and then it seemed kind of very earthy colours and then that huge wooden staircase that was so wide, yeah, I just love that staircase so much wood. I really liked the building, but I can't really think of any amenities that just jumped out. And other than those bathrooms. The window is opened in my room. I like that. To be able to get fresh air.

M: So our next limb is the asana limb, which is practicing yoga postures, and the correlating element is the types of classes, the variety of classes, as well as the interactions that you had between practice. What kind of sessions in classes were there, was there only one instructor or multiple instructors?

D: There was one instructor, Dorothy, and she was amazing. She was just perfect for someone who doesn't do yoga because she would, you know, I feel like there was two or three levels to pretty much every pose and she would start with level one and then say those of you who want more of a challenge can do this. If you want even more of a challenge, you can do that. And I felt like it was okay to just stay on level one or even just try to take a nap on the mat.

M: Yeah, that's always okay. I'm just going to hang out on the mat for a while.

D: Felt okay to do that. Which was nice. So the different classes there was the hatha flow classes, I think they're called. I'm not sure cause I'm not, I don't normally do yoga and I really liked those. But there was a point I think in day to where I thought if I have to do any more fucking yoga, I'm going to scream, you know. Like the day before it was over, it just felt I hit some kind of yoga wall. It was really weird. I think what's going on, you know, but it was, I've just not used to doing that much yoga and I was doing five hours a day. And then there is meditation and then there was Yoga Nidra class, which was yoga, meditation class. And that one was probably my favourite. I really liked that.

M: And you did all of these variety of classes in the same practice space?

D: That's right in the same space. Yeah.

M: And it all worked?

D: There is issues where the really big windows, during certain times of meditation the sun would shine. It would be a distraction, you know, it would sort of be a little, yeah, it would distract from a meditation practice. Cause I would be having some kind of concentration or mindfulness and then the sun would, you know, start really, if my eyes were closed, I could really feel the sun, you know. Like it was a little intense at times. I was really happy that I picked up that spot in the corner where there were solid walls as options because at least I could move kind of over to get out of the direct sun. It's a problem with really tall windows. Right. Having good blinds.

M: So kind of connections that you experienced between the practice sessions, were they lively or subdued connections with people, with your fellow participants? I guess how was that experience?

- D: They were cautious because I wasn't sure why other people were there and there was, I got the sense, I was not even the sense, I was mindful of the fact that other people might be there for solitude and so I didn't want to invade someone's, you know, solitary time. Like if they felt, like I myself did want some solitude and just because I was having a moment where I wanted to socialize, it doesn't mean that the other person was feeling the same. Right. So there was a mindfulness about that and I felt like giving other people space. And at the same time there were some opportunities around, I would say specifically around eating, to socialize. That was perhaps a bit more lively.
- D: Yeah. I wanted to spend time alone and I did. I felt like I did spend time alone. So that was nice.
- M: So it kind of, sounds like there was opportunity and support for however much alone or together time...
- D: That's right. And I feel like eating could have been where we eat, could have been more supportive of alone, you know? But I don't know how they would make that possible. Like, I don't know, you know, maybe they could have a no talking in this room or something.
- D: But that seems weird, right? Because everything was, nothing was forced like that. I don't know. So I don't know. Interesting. Silent. I loved the kitchen. I love that we could see where they were cooking and we could go into the kitchen and it felt like, it felt like in that sense I was welcomed into the community of the people that actually live there. Yeah. Even though it was temporary, it wasn't like, you know, a permanent part of that family. But it did feel like I was integrated into it because I had access to the kitchen, which was a beautiful kitchen.
- M: the next limb is Pranayama, which is breathwork. So I liken this much as breath moving through a body. It's how you move through how you circulate through a site or through a building. Um, so moving around and navigating around the retreat is what we'll talk about next. Was there far to walk or travel outdoors or was everything in one building? How much kind of space and movement
- D: There was a lot of opportunity to walk outside, except, and there was a beautiful little pond that was quite tranquil, walk around and we could leave the retreat grounds and go walk down the road, which I also did, but one of the, I was a little concerned about walking around too far on the farm because I wasn't sure where people's houses were and I didn't want to go on people's private space, the people that live there. So, I wanted to be respectful of the people that live there all the time. So there was a little hesitation also, I wasn't sure, there was quite a bit of forest space around it and I didn't want to get lost or something or eaten by a bear.
- M: So to get between kind of your sleeping, dining practice space, how was that?
- D: Perfect. I loved it. I love that they were separate because I got to go for this little walk and the walk from the sleeping space to the yoga practice space was along a little path and it was a very beautiful little walk. It was short but beautiful. And I liked that it wasn't too far because some of the classes ended at night and so it was dark and I didn't have a flashlight so there was minimal lighting along that path. But it wasn't so far that I felt uncomfortable walking alone at night. Quite close. And there was this big wall, some kind of stonewall and got to pass that. Anyway, that was beautiful. That was a really nice, yeah, it was a nice path.
- M: So, separate buildings for each function. And that was good. That was positive for you?
- D: That was positive to me. Yeah. And also I wouldn't want the cooking to be in the same building necessarily where I'm sleeping because then people might be coming and going a lot more if they're hungry or thirsty or they need something. Also it could be like, it could smell, you know, there's certain kinds of foods that it has a really strong smell and my nose can be like, my sense of smell can be kind of sensitive to different kinds of smells. So I liked that it was separate. I liked that the food was really close to where we were sleeping because if I got thirsty, I didn't have to go that far at all.
- M: Dining was close and practice space a little further.

- D: Yeah. That was Kinda Nice.
- M: So this next limb talks about the journey. Pratyahara is the limb and it's about kind of withdrawing your senses in preparation for meditation. So stopping, you know, closing your eyes. And so as we withdraw our senses, we can also kind of withdraw our selves towards the retreat. That's the correlation. Can you describe your journey to the retreat and how it affected your first impression upon arrival?
- D: My journey to the retreat was freaking awesome. It was part of the adventure. So I drank a little bit too much alcohol the night before. So I woke up with a slight hangover, which my friend who's a yoga instructor said was a shitty idea. And then I thought, because my kids aren't there, that I had so much time. And then I realized suddenly I had 10 minutes to make it to the bus stop. So then I had to bee line it to the bus stop. And this is my life is just a big rush all the time. So this is just part of my normal life. And then I got on the bus and then it was an hour bus ride and it stopped in so many places. It was so annoying. I don't normally take bosses, it didn't go in the most efficient route at all. But that was good because that was like the whole weekend, you know, it wasn't about efficiency and that sort of happening the minute I got on the bus. The journey kind of prepared me for sure. It was giving me patience, you know, and then got to the ferry and I love taking ferries. I love the boat. I find it very relaxing to be on water. And so just that crossing of the water was just a further reminder, like taking the buses, letting go of control because you don't, it's not efficient, you don't control it. Being on the boat, crossing that water, it was even more symbolic to me of leaving behind my normal life, my normal concerns. And then when we got there I was nervous about, you know, who's going to pick me up? What if they forgot me and someone was right there. So you know, it just all came together. It was awesome. The journey back was even better, it was amazing.
- M: How far would you say you traveled in kilometers wise or distance wise?
- D: On the way there, I would say it was about two and a half hours, maybe two, two and a half hours.
- M: Did you travel alone or with someone else?
- D: Alone. Which was awesome. Solo travel's great.
- M: Once you arrived at the retreat, was there anything special about your journey further into the property? Like at the, uh, either at check in or at accommodation?
- D: Uh, so the man that picked us up, oh, I remember now, we took us up to where the rooms were, he's like, oh, I guess it doesn't matter which is which because they're all the same, but you're technically here and I want it to be where I technically was. So I did go into that room and then I was really happy because I think it was probably the best room. But other than that, I can't really think of anything. You know, he gave us a little talk about where things were, which was good. Um, I was really pleasantly surprised at how nice the room was. It was really nice.
- M: The next limb is the Dharana limb a which talks about concentration. So I kind of relate that to the scale. Like how concentrated are we? It's kind of a different way, to think about concentration. So if you could describe the length of the retreat and the size of the group and whether that worked for you.
- D: So the retreat was three sleeps. The size of the group. I would say it was about 20. And those both worked for me. Yeah, I really liked, I think two sleeps wouldn't have been enough because I quite enjoyed having two full days of retreat. I've done other things where I just go away, not retreats, but other things where I go away for two sleeps and when you only get one full day, not as nice. You don't feel, for me, I don't feel that I'm really immersed in the experience unless I have more than one full day. It's too rushed. My whole life is rushed. That's why I went to begin with. So, and then the size of the group was good. I felt like if it was any bigger, it might've been too big. You know? It was big enough where it wasn't too intimate. I didn't feel like I had to get to know just a really tiny group of people that we were going through something together. But it was, it was small enough still where I felt like I can make connections and after three sleeps really kind of like, I feel like I know everyone's face from it. And be and still feel like you're part of the community. So I thought it was nice.

- M: Did the size of the retreat, including the property and the buildings seem manageable, overwhelming or not enough space?
- D: It was perfect. The size and I really liked the size of the yoga building itself. Actually where we did the yoga practice of felt like people were maybe a little bit squished in at sometimes, yeah. Cause there were times where people had to move to share a wall and the mats were a little bit close. But the farm itself was really big and Nice. Not overwhelmingly large, not to me. No.
- M: So the last limb is about enlightenment, which is really hard to define and kind of as a result, my correlating idea for that is the spirit of place, authenticity, sense of community's, sense of connection and how you can't really plan for that. We can't really design for that. But if maybe if all the other elements are done well, then you'll reach enlightenment, in that sense. So it's hard to put some this into words, so whatever you feel like saying. But what were the sacred magic or special elements to the retreat property? We can start with that.
- D: One of them go to like, I would say in the space of the yoga practice on the building itself was just so beautiful and it just seemed to be a part of the natural environment as opposed to just being something on it. Uh, when I opened those doors and not just that I really liked that staircase and I liked the, I can't remember what the building material was, but it felt like, I don't know, Tuscan or something.
- D: I don't know. I've seen that in like magazines or something. Wasn't it stone or something? It would, do you know what I mean? On both sides of the, almost like rock could be plastered. I don't exactly know what it was, but in some kind of plaster thing or cob, I saw cob building there. Oh, it might've been a cob building. I wonder. So that, I don't know, it just seemed, it made it seem like the building materials were really natural. So that space I thought was pretty sacred to the yoga space. And then also I thought it was really cool that there was a porch off the yoga room and that to me made it seem like it was more flexible. Maybe it could have other uses. I could picture it serving other purposes. I could picture people having a social event there. But I could hear animals from that building. And so when we were doing meditation and I heard the farm animal that just seemed kind of sacred because it felt like, okay, you know, like I was, I don't know, part of the farm or something. I don't know. I don't know how to describe that.
- D: And then the room where I slept, there was just a lot of wood. It was just, I just slept very well there. So even though we had to wake up early, I didn't, I woke up and I didn't feel tired. I felt more rested sleeping there, even though I knew there might be spiders.
- M: this assumes that you did feel this way, but how did you feel if you felt that you were a part of a larger community or something greater than yourself?
- D: I did feel like I was part of a larger community. I feel like there were other people that were there for the same reason that I was, which was to do self care and take time out of normal life. And to remember for me it was remembering that many different ways to live. Like there's people that live on that farm and do that all the time. And that, yeah, that was beautiful. And the other thing I liked about it, it was, and I'm not surprised that this happened, before. I was a little worried about maybe not fitting in or feeling uncomfortable because I don't do yoga and I kind of thought, man, Yoga people aren't, they don't really seem like the types that are too judge-y or you know, exclusive snobs. So I was right. They were very kind, very welcoming and accepting of me into their community.
- M: So the kinds of the people that made it feel like a community experience.
- M: Did the space feel authentic to you?
- D: Definitely. It definitely did.
- M: And how?

- D: Well I guess, I don't know, it was just more like, I don't know, it was weird because I wasn't sure what came first. Like I wasn't sure if they offer retreats to keep their lifestyle going or if it was the opposite. Right. But it didn't feel forced. It didn't feel like we're just having you here because we need money. You know, the hippies on the communes used to sell hammocks. I doubt that they enjoyed making that many hammocks. Probably not. But it seemed like they enjoyed their work. Like I saw the cook cooking and she appeared happy and I saw other people working there and they appeared happy. So it didn't feel like we were putting them out by being there and you know, it felt like maybe they enjoyed providing what they were providing. That part of it felt quite authentic.
- M: The previously discussed elements, the seven of those, if we could put those in order of importance to your experience. So location and setting amenities, types of classes, circulation, journey, size of group and then spirit of place and I can let you do that.
- M: It's all just opinion. So I feel like we've kind of covered a lot of this already, but what's the main thing that worked for you about this retreat?
- D: Yeah, the setting, I would say where it was, yeah, I would say the setting. The farm was so relaxing and peaceful. And the food really worked for me too. I really like not coming to cook, not having to care for others so that I could care for myself. That was what I wanted and that's what I got.
- M: And what challenged you about the retreat or could have been better?
- D: So much yoga. It was good though. I'm so glad I did it, but you know, I hit some kind of weird yoga wall that I didn't know. I cannot do another down dog. You have to do with other aligned and then I just refuse to do any.
- M: thinking about the design of the retreat setting, was the building repurposed or built specifically to function as a retreat center? Does it always function as a retreat center?
- D: So the three separate buildings, the accommodation building was purpose built for people I think who have accommodations, right. I think it was built after they started offering retreats successfully and they realized they needed to expand, but it was definitely built. You could tell it was built with people going to nice retreats in mind. Where the eating took place, building number two that was repurposed. It used to be some kind of barn, I could picture cows being there or horses having lived in there or something. It was repurposed. The third building where the yoga practice was, that was built, I'm not sure if it was built specifically with yoga in mind, but I would say it was built some kind of like Community Events Center, multipurpose space where people could maybe have a wedding there or you know, have a yoga class or have a drumming class or whatever. You could tell it was built as a common communal space.
- M: And the last question, is there anything that you would like to add about your experiences that we didn't cover?
- D: No, no, no. It was great. It was great retreat. I'm so glad I did it because people thought it was crazy that I was doing it cause I don't do yoga. And I'm so glad they did it. So yeah, that was very successful. It's good to do something that you don't normally do to try new things is very good for the You know, the spirit.

## Interview 'S'

- M: So a couple of background questions about how long have you practiced yoga?
- S: How long have I practiced yoga? That's a good question. A number of years now. I first in Calgary and then when I was doing my thesis I tried to do it. Then my work term, well actually before that, because my work term here, I tried to do it a little bit here and there. It's actually been maybe five years. Then the past couple of years have been a lot more consistent.
- M: What made you first consider going on a retreat? Like aside from just going to classes but deciding to go somewhere for a longer period?
- S: So first I'll separate two things. So the retreat that I went on was not a yoga retreat it was a Vipassana retreat and it came through ... so 50% of me is architecture, 50% of me is psychology. And so I know there's a couple I've known for a long time that do group work and body work and energy work and things like that. So years ago they had recommended to me as a way of getting into the body basically. And so that's when I found out about it and that's why I went sort of as you know, motivation of personal growth, you know, as a larger catch phrase. But then more specifically, just that process of trying to locate your body and getting into it.
- M: So Vipassana was actually your first retreat?
- S: That was my first retreat. And then, yeah, that was the first, I guess more formal, publicly accessible retreat. And then I've done retreats too with Doug and Naomi, which anyone can do that. Like you go there, you could call them up and say, I want to sign up for a retreat. But they just do their own work for themselves with their own clients, where for Vipassana and I was a larger organization. Right. They have meditation centres all over the world. I did a 10 day silent.
- M: Is that what you did?
- S: Yeah. If it's your first time, there are certain parameters and things like that that they set that's just different than if you've done one before.
- M: Anywhere else that you've attended a retreat?
- S: I don't think so. Like I said, I've been to Esalen but not for a retreat. That was just to see it.
- M: So the base of my research, to give you a little bit of background on how I'm getting into this is that I've created a framework based on Patanjali's eight limbs of yoga. I don't know if you're familiar with the eight limbs, but the eight limbs that lead you towards enlightenment. And I mapped each one to an architectural element and also to an experiential element.
- M: So when you're analyzing architecture, that's, that's one kind of column. And then you're actually just attending a retreat as looking at it through a non-architectural point of view.
- S: But what's funny with that is Doug and Naomi kind of have seven principles that they have. So one of them is self care. One of them is harvesting, meaning you work with your parents and you harvest that material. Yeah, there's meditation and there's creativity.
- M: Awesome. It might be connected.
- S: I think so. My quick summary without sort of fully understand what the eight limbs are is I think the body is designed in a particular way based on evolution. And so there's different methodologies and strategies that different groups and different people have developed for working with the body, right? And so the eight limbs is one sort of methodology for working with the body, so to speak. And then they their own methodology. But because it's all grounded in how the body's designed, it ultimately always comes back to the boundaries that the body represents or how the body's built, you know. So for example, if you, if we're talking about strength training, the body has the capacity to develop

strength and build muscle, right? So, but you might have one methodology and I might have a different methodology, but we're still governed by how the body's designed and its potential for building strength. So my interpretation is the fingers you're talking about is grounded in how the body's designed and their methodology is grounded in how the body's designed. So maybe different terminologies or interpretations.

M: This is just, this is one that I happened to as I started to do my preliminary research. It just kept coming up again and again and again and it really resonated with me. So I just decided to utilize it.

M: Let's start with the first limb, is the Yamas, and it's the, I liken it to the ethics of, it's kind of, do no harm, truthfulness, so similar to some of the commandments, how you treat the world around you. So I correlated that to sustainability efforts and materiality and the site. So the questions follow what was the location setting and, as in was it rural or urban, and how did that impact your experience?

S: So am I speaking to both retreat experiences or do you want me to just talk about Vipassana?

M: Let's focus on Vipassana and that was whereabouts in Alberta?

S: It was rural. And it was close to Red Deer. I can probably find it, but it was definitely rural. So they've got five centres in Canada. One in Alberta is Youngstown, which is new. Actually. That's not where I went. I'm just looking at the picture and that's definitely not where I went. They can't be correct. So the center is located at 8.5 acres on the outskirts of Youngstown, Alberta. A small farming village in the Canadian badlands. So this sounds to me as though it's a new location from the place that I went, but I think they did that in BC at one point too. They built a new center. And it was still rural for sure.

M: The materiality of the building. Was it rustic? Was it new, bright?

S: Oh, rustic. It was, it was kind of an old, uh, I don't know the age of it, but, and I don't know when it would have been built, but it was basically, you want me to just fully describe, just so you know, everything. So there was basically, I would say two common houses. So one was the common kitchen, fairly large. And then there was the meditation hall itself. And then there were the individual huts, I guess, and they slept at least four people in bunk beds. And you'd get up at five in the morning and then you'd go to the Meditation Hall and then you would meditate and then you would go for breakfast and there'd be the senior people who had signed up to cooking and, you know, everyone was quiet even while you ate and then go back and meditate and that kind of thing. But it was all rustic in the sense that it had been there for a number of years and it was wood frame and, you know, I can imagine when it was first built, they didn't probably have a huge budget and, you know, they just built kind of what they could.

S: Oh, definitely. Secluded. Definitely quiet.

M: And the rustic and isolated aspect of it... did that affect your practice?

S: Well, looking at, I mean, I don't know where this retreat is, where that picture is from, but I, there's no way. I think doing it in a city would be much, much more difficult, because I think part of when you're going on a retreat, so similar to Doug and Naomi, their retreats were in Taos, New Mexico. And so part of getting there sort of puts you in a certain frame of mind, right? So if you're living in Calgary and you're going to drive out to, you know, Kananaskas or the foothills or wherever it was, you know, just even that transformation or that or that, that journey sort of sort of puts you in the right frame of mind. Or if you're going all the way down to Taos, New Mexico, which is not easy to get to. It kind of separates you from your very busy active day to day life and it puts you into a more isolated, separate mindset. So, you can focus on what you're there to do.

S: So there's a, there's a meditation center in Calgary, a Buddhist Meditation Center, off the Bow River. It's kind of downtown and it's big. They built a brand new, there was an old one and then they rebuilt and whatnot. So I'm sure it has value within a certain context because, or I guess is how I would define it. If it's a meditation center within a city, it can facilitate daily practice because you have a place that's accessible. You can go on a daily basis. Like there's a shambhala centre over Fernwood



and sometimes I go there Wednesday evenings. But a retreat, that's not a retreat though. Right. So it's separating out what helps you in your daily practice and what's accessible versus a dedicated retreat where you can move and go much deeper and much farther, much quicker.

M: Did you notice any sustainability like solar?

S: No. And I would say that was just partly because, I mean, it was literally, I don't remember what year it was, but early 2000s, before, culturally, we were really understanding the consequences. But it wasn't awful. No. Well, I guess what I would say is if there was, it would be a natural part of what it would be to have a facility like that in a rural setting. Like there wasn't sort of additional steps being taken. I would say, if you were living on a farm in 1980 there would have been things you were doing that were sustainable that were just by virtue of just living on a farm in the 80s. Like composting. I'm sure everyone on a farm composted, you know, just because it's like you just take your kitchen scraps, you feed them to the pigs.

M: Yeah. That's fair. It's kind of an innate part of rural life.

S: So I'm sure there was innate things. But nothing additional.

M: So the next limb is the Niyamas, which is about kind of how you treat yourself, treat your body. So I likened that to, as you purify and nourish yourself, the actual amenities and the accommodations and the dining spaces. So you mentioned what was there, but maybe we can talk about how it felt inside, the space inside. Accommodations, we can start there.

S: It's harder to talk about because it's hard to separate out, I think, experience and the expectations from the environment. So for example, as part of the retreat, yeah, I think, I think we, did we get up at five or maybe four in the morning and it was something ridiculous like that. And so that almost undercuts, if you're not used to, that sort of almost undercuts everything else in a way. But I would say that the old rustic cabins didn't really facilitate getting up at four in the morning. Right. Everyone's expected to be quiet. But you know, it would have been better in hindsight if you had, if you would've had your own space, cause inevitably somebody is going to snore or somebody's going to get up at, you know, two in the morning because they're sneaking out to have a cigarette when they're not supposed to be, you know, or somebody goes for a pee break or something like that.

M: And the meditation hall itself?

S: I don't know. I just keep thinking of how intimidated I was during the first time. So I don't know. It's interesting. No, it's not because of the space, but just because it's your first time and you're having this meditative experience and you don't know what to expect and what the rules are and you don't want break a rule and get in trouble.

M: Was it kind of focusing towards the outside or lack of windows to outside?

S: Definitely lack of windows. So yes, to that sense it was, there were no windows. And it did facilitate, cause it's all about getting into your body. So it's trying to minimize the distraction, so you're not allowed to talk during the retreat. I would say it facilitated the sense that it was a very sparse space. There was the cushions, no windows, the walls, you know, it was minimalist as much as those things typically are. I mean there was adornment to things like that, but yeah.

M: In the cabins, just going back to the accommodation, there was four sharing and then each cabin had it's own washroom or are you outside to washrooms?

S: So, so there was another common building, which was the bathrooms. Kind of like you would see at a park, a national park or something like that. And so yeah, you had to go outside and use the facilities.

M: Did you like that or hate that, or were in indifferent?

- S: I don't know. I feel it's almost a bit of a philosophical question, how comfortable do you want to make the experience, you know, are you trying to make it super easy. So your focus is only on the meditation or are you strategically making decisions or design decisions to sort of push people in certain ways to maybe make things tougher or easier? You know, I don't know.
- M: That's an interesting thought.
- S: Maybe having separate washrooms. Like what's the cause and effect of that? You know, I don't know. I think I, you know, again, in the context of it being my first time, I, I kind of just accepted it for what it was and was also equally intimidated by it. But I don't think I have an opinion one way or another about whether, I mean, it's always nicer to have a washroom in the same cabin you're in ... always. Of course you get up and you're just, you have a washroom in your room. That's better.
- M: The common spaces. So you mentioned there was a common house or two common houses and then the kitchen, I guess a dining hall.
- S: Yeah.
- M: And any kind of lounge, common space?
- S: No, no, no. It was pretty much you eat and then you go back to meditating.
- M: Dining hall?
- S: It was large, meals were provided, but there were people who were, well I guess I guess in terms of how it was structured, the students just meditated, period. But then there were people who volunteered to cook in the kitchen who had experience who, I guess you could say they had enough experience that they could be meditating while they were working. I guess. So in theory, if I had to kept doing it, I might have signed up to do a retreat. And then to be somebody who was participating in the cooking as part of your way of giving back to, you know, the, the program or you know, the culture of it. But it was definitely a separate, as a student, there was no expectation that I was going to be in the kitchen cooking and cleaning, you know.
- M: Were there any other kind of unique amenities that we haven't touched on?
- S: No. The only other side of it was that that's probably important actually is so part of the meditation would be in the hall, for certain periods of time you would be meditating in the hall and then sometimes you could, I don't remember if it was a choice or whether it was an expectation, but they had a courtyard. But basically, you know, there was the kitchen and then the meditation hall and then the washrooms and then the cabins. And so there was a central area where you could meditate while walking. So you're outside, meditating and walking. Almost an active meditation in the sense, again, you're still not talking, you can't leave that confined space. You could walk outside and it's similar to the Shambhala Meditation Center. You'd be 20 minutes sitting, 20 minutes walking, 20 minutes sitting.
- M: So the courtyard kind of becomes another space.
- S: A hundred percent. And I think part of it is like, I think philosophically when you're meditating, you want to have boundaries around you, right? Cause part of it, I mean this is my interpretation is your body's like a boundary that contains you and it holds you. Right? And so you're having that similar relationship reflected in the physical environment. So the meditation hall was a boundary that holds you while you're meditating. And then the courtyard space is a boundary that holds you while you're meditating. So, even if you were taking that and then turning it into a path, there's still boundaries on that path and you're still sort of holding you and containing you. Cause if you don't have those edges then you're in chaos. You're out of control, so if your body doesn't have edges and boundaries, then your energy is just spilling out of you out of control. So I'm pretty sure, I don't know this for sure. But I'm pretty sure that the courtyard also represents boundaries that's holding you or helping to continue while you're trying to have this inner experience.

- M: Asana is the next limb, which will be a little bit different for a meditative practice, that's what variety of sessions or classes did you have and whether you had one instructor or multiple instructors.
- S: I guess in a way there was multiple although not really. So there were two people who were sort of facilitating it. That were seniors, but they were quiet and they were there at the same time. So it wasn't like you were having two different instructors coming in and give you different instructions. It was two people who just kind of, you know, were holding the space so to speak. But then there was also the video screen of the head guy, I can't remember what his name is and they would play those in the evenings. So you were kind of getting two instructions, but the people who were physically there were just kind of holding the space.
- S: And the practice was essentially the same. At least within the context of Vipassana. And from what I remember, it was essentially the same practice. It just depended upon how far along you are in your practice. So within the context of that, it was at that time as a first timer, it was all about physical sensation and becoming a quantum is with physical sensation. So, you know, you'd start by feeling the physical sensations around your, around your nostrils, and as you're breathing in and out, right. As a way of tuning you into sensations you aren't normally attuned to. And then you just follow that sensation and then if you feel that somewhere else in your body, you sit with it for a minute and then you move on because if you avoid it, then you're developing avoidance stuff and if you sit with it for too long, then you're developing attachment stuff so to speak.
- S: Right? You want to become a quantum, this where the sensation is not driving you, but you're just sort of feeling it and just scanning your body. And so depending upon how experienced you are, it just, it just determined how deep you go inside your body, how subtle the physical sensations were, how good you were at, not reacting to sensations, but just being aware of them, but still holding your presence and your attention I guess. But the practice itself, the overall was one, it's not like, it's like if you go to the yoga place, a different instructor will have a different whatever, right? But within that, within the Vipassana specifically, it was one practice. With Doug and Naomi as a different example, it was the same two teachers, but they would be different exercises they would have you go through So I think it just depends on the methodology. Right.
- M: Were the connections that you experienced between practice sessions, with your fellow participants. Was that lively or subdued?
- S: It was very subdued. Number one, cause you weren't supposed to talk period. Uh, and if anything, there was this tension around it because you get in trouble or not just get in trouble, but you could literally be kicked out. You'd be asked to leave if you were to disruptive. So within that context, it was a very inner process and the rules and the space and the structure was all about trying to facilitate that. So the rules were about, don't talk to people and the space was about, you know, you could walk and meditate, but only within these boundaries.
- S: Right. And then there was like, you get up at four and then you go meditate until this time. And then it was all structured around isolation in a sense. Right. Whereas, you know, by comparison with Doug and Naomi, you know, there would be group work where there'd be a circle of people and you'd be participating in what their experience was because there'd be a couple in the middle of the circle and you would be sort of on the outside participating by relating it back to yourself. And then you'd break for lunch or dinner or breakfast and everyone would be participating in the meals and you'd be sitting around a big table and you'd be talking and conversing and you know, so, it's two totally different approaches
- M: Would you say one worked better for you?
- S: I think it just depends on, I think you have to have, uh, I dunno, that's a tough one because I think it depends on what your goals are. Not to be overly philosophical, but you know, a lot of sort of Buddhist, not the Vipassana per se, but a lot of Buddhist work is sort of about almost in a way, leaving your body because it's transcendence. Whereas Doug, Naomi's work is all about getting into your body, right? It's about being grounded in this life, right? Like you're here on this earth to experience this earth. Like Naomi will always say like, why would you want to leave it? She almost kind of

represents the body in a sense and speaks from the body, which is might sound weird, but, so their practice is ultimately about being in your body and being grounded in your body , whereas a lot of Buddhist stuff is about actually exiting.

- S: So it's two totally different philosophical points. And Naomi would argue within this life, you should be grounded in your body, later on when you're older, then yeah. Then maybe you start to experiment with, you know, spirituality and all that other stuff, but you know, while you're on this earth, you should be connected to the body. So it's two totally different philosophical approaches and I would say the Vipassana space was appropriate to that approach. And the facilities were appropriate to that approach.
- S: Although the Vipassana was also, at least, at least initially was also getting into your body, but it was a different, that was a physical sensation whereas Doug and Naomi, it's about, you know, the emotional body and energy through the body and that kind of stuff. I guess ultimately what I would say is that the different approaches of ultimately, you know, built up a structure, whether it's in the scheduling for example, and the programming as well as the physical environment to facilitate whatever their philosophical goal is. It aligns with their purpose.
- M: So the next limb, is pranayama which is about moving breath. Okay. So I liken that to as breath moves through your body, how do you move through space or property? So what was successful or not and about how you navigated the spaces?
- S: Brilliant. Well, I guess I would say that the vipassana one was successful in the sense that, you know, like I was saying earlier, your movement was restricted based on their goals. Right. And sort of having that container. So I would say it was successful even though it was difficult because if it's your first time, it's very hard to sit still. It's very hard to be contained. It's very hard to just be in your body. It's very hard to just sit there and do that. So you want to run around, you want to walk wherever you want to walk, you want to break those, you want to break that container. So it was successful in the sense that it was facilitating the goals that they were trying to achieve, even though it's difficult and tense while you're in that space. Because it's not, you know, conceptually you kind of understand what's happening and you're there because you want to get what you can out of it. But it doesn't mean that it's easy to do or that your body wants to sit still.
- M: We kind of covered this already, but maybe not. Was there far to walk or travel outdoors between the sleeping, dining practice spaces?
- S: It was fairly contained. You were just walking across the courtyard.
- M: The next limb is pratyahara, which is about withdrawing your senses. So starting to close your eyes go inwards. So I liken that to the journey, how you got to the retreat and how that effected your first impression.
- S: How did I get to do retreats? So it was by car on the highway. It was from Calgary to the retreat center. And so I got picked up, I can't even remember how I found out about the vipassana retreat initially, but somebody, I got a ride up there with somebody who had experience. So it was basically carpooling, which I think in hindsight probably helped because then it sort of immediately put you into a different mindset is, and you're talking about it and somebody senior is there to talk about it. And then as I said earlier, the process of physically getting there just helps to sort of create space, I guess between the retreat and what you're going to get out of it and your past busy life basically. So it's almost, maybe it's a little too pretentious, but it's like you're being transformed because you're going from Calgary and you're on the highway and then you go to a secondary road and then you go to a rural road and that, you know, each transition just helps to like, you know, help transition.
- M: And you traveled with someone else like an hour?
- S: Yes, I would say, it was at least an hour, maybe an hour and a half.

- M: So when you arrived at the retreat, any processional further journey into the site or were you just kind of, there?
- S: There was the parking lot and then there was the courtyard and whatnot. There was no, yeah. I guess the only thing I would maybe kind of related to a co-housing project where cars park on the outside. Uh, but there was no, I know in architecture that, you know, you might sort of design an approach and that approach helps facilitate or transform. That wasn't there at this site. It was just a parking lot, grounds and so I don't know the history of that specific site enough to know whether it was purpose built or whether they just sort of took over an existing campground and bought that. And then, you know what I mean? They would have obviously built the meditation center, but I don't know if they sort of took over an existing campsite is like, oh great, it's good. You know, we'll build the facilities we need. We already have the cabins. All we need to do is build a meditation hall. I don't know that. The newer ones obviously would be purpose built. So maybe they would have something that's more approach driven, but based on that picture doesn't look like it.
- M: The next limb then talks about scale, which is about how big was the group? How long was the retreat? How big was the property?
- S: So the length of the retreat in terms of time? Oh yeah, 10 days.
- M: And how many people?
- S: I would say like 40 or 50.
- M: Okay. So scale in both of its sense, of the length and amount of people, did that work for you?
- S: Time again is one of those things that, the length of time is just driven by them sort of determining what's a good amount of time, right, yes. If I had to determine the time, I might've chosen something that was less, but then, but who am I, you know, I'm not the person who should be deciding that. So the time worked in the sense that it was set up by them and you know, challenges you and that was okay. I think they have 7 day ones as well. It's hard to know whether, did they go with seven days because people were having difficulty and complaining and so then they sort of softened it, but then the people aren't getting as much out of it as they could have had they just stuck it out.
- S: It's almost like if you're on the exercise bike is that 20 minute mark. That's the magic mark when your body turns over, so to speak to the next gear, you know, so if you're just like, oh, I don't want to be 20 minutes if you're not getting out of it, but if you're a personal trainer that's like, know what you're going for 40 minutes, then you get more out of it. As far as the number of people, because it's driven by the finances of what they're trying to do and accomplish. I think that many people in some ways actually helps the anonymity, meaning that it actually facilitates you being more internal. Whereas if it was four people, I think will almost become harder not to socialize in a way.
- S: With Doug and Naomi's work for example, smaller groups just work better because then you get more time with them. They do pods now just four people and so Naomi can work quicker and faster and go deeper with people. So again, I think it depends on kind of the structure and the goals, right? Like for the Vipassana you could probably do 50 and go bigger because it's just people giving you a class instruction and that you're taking that in. There isn't a one on one interaction that's happening.
- M: The size of the property and the buildings we kind of did talk about this, but did the size of the property and the building seem, manageable, overwhelming or not quite enough? I know I'm asking for you to repeat yourself a little bit.
- S: Yeah, it was fine. It was sort of the Vipassana. I would say it was appropriate. I think if it had it been bigger than you wouldn't have been as contained, you would have had to walk farther between the buildings, and then therefore people would have lolly gag, so to speak, and dinner would have started later and it would have ended later and people would have been striding into the meditation center, all those kinds of things. Yeah, I would say the size of it was appropriate.

- M: The last limb, and then we do have a couple of short follow up questions afterwards, but the last limb is really the enlightenment limb and it's the hardest to define. So I've likened it to the spirit of place. Which is something you can't really design for, but if everything else falls into place, hopefully achieve a rich spirit of place. So the questions that pertain to this topic or what were the sacred and special elements of the retreat center?
- S: I think just the meditation hall, if you removed the meditation hall, then it's just a camp ground, right? With a big kitchen. So within that context of the meditation hall that was the, because yes, you could meditate in the courtyard, but that was just, that was just an alternate sort of supplementary sort of experience. It was really about the meditation hall, which contains the Meditation and it held the instructional practice, right? So without that, nothing existed.
- S: So anyways, what does it, kind of an interesting experience. But the point of that being is that the energy was, that's what defined that place. That's what makes that place famous and why people come to that site specifically because of the energy of that space on that site. And I asked Naomi, I said, so, cause when she goes to space, she can feel that, right. And so in certain places they feel flat, right. So Victoria, to her feels flat. Christchurch Cathedral feels flat, you know? Whereas when she goes to Sedona or even Vancouver, she could feel the energy of those places. Right. So it's a much, much harder thing to define and the only way you're going to define it is if you know somebody who's really sensitive to that or you yourself are sensitive to it. But that would be something that would define a space more than anything. The feel of it for sure.
- S: But yeah, history of a place that's that intangible thing, you can't define it, you can't design for it. And the thing about the work that we're talking about, body work, Yoga work, meditation. I was like, if we were talking, welding, it's not going to matter. You can set up a welding shop or anywhere and it's, it's still going to be defined by building. It's a purpose built building for welding. But you can do that anywhere. But if we're talking about this work and ultimately body work and energy, but that's a whole other layer that, how do you, how do you account for that? Because it's just, it's either there or it's not there, you know, as opposed to just like, I'm going to build a church here. Okay, great. But is there, is there something else that facilitates that and how do you find out if you're not.
- M: I skipped ahead to this one earlier, but the space felt authentic, you mentioned; what about it made it authentic?
- S: I think part of it was the journey, right? Cause you're on this journey and that's transforming you. And I think part of it is, I think almost in a more intangible way. It was the choice to go there. It was the process of getting there. And I'm like, if that same building had of been in Calgary, it wouldn't have been as impactful. But then also obviously the meditation hall itself, Right? Because it has its own presence. I mean it didn't look like anything special, but it just by virtue of it being called a medication center and the acting as a meditation center. That kind of defined that space. Not just that space of that building, but the entire site.
- M: So the elements that we've just discussed, the limbs, if you could place those in order of how important it was to your overall experience in terms of what mattered to you most or had the most impact?
- M: In general, what worked best for you about the retreat?
- S: I almost want to say the overall site and its location. It's the separation. Especially for something like the Vipassana, which is supposed to be kind of isolating. It can transport you to a place which facilitates you being able to then be more successful in the program.
- M: And what challenged you or could have been better?
- S: I think what challenged me was me. Because it was just not an easy experience. So it's just, you and yourself just trying to maintain the discipline to do it and continue. And in theory, I mean, I'm not the kind of person that would've done this, but in theory had it not been outside of Calgary, you know, in theory I could have left the retreat halfway through, got on a bus and been back home in half an hour,

you know, bailed on it. Right. But if you're out there in the middle of nowhere, you can't really do that. Right. Even if you have your own vehicle is so becomes, then you've got to drive all the way from an hour and a half, and then you're thinking about how you just let yourself down right. In terms of what could have been better, I don't know. I think the sleeping accommodations, I would say the shared nature of the sleeping accommodations because on one hand that was, yes. Okay. So I would say that was the one contradictory side of it because you're supposed to, it's supposed to be inner journey. You're supposed to not have any distractions. And here you are trying to get up at four in the morning and just getting a decent sleep. And then there's other people who are going to be coming in later or if somebody snores, I'm not going to sleep. Then if I can't sleep, then it's completely undermine the entire experience. So, so I would say that would be the one thing that I would've changed.

S: The only counter point to all of that is at the Shambhala center you're supposed to meditate with your eyes open because it's supposed to sort of symbolize that when you are like, if you learn to meditate with your eyes closed and in isolation, when you go out into the real world, you can't meditate. It's sort of broken for you in a way. But if you learn to meditate with your eyes open, then that means you can be sort of grounded and present even as you're walking around the city of Victoria. So that's the only, I guess counter argument to what I would say. But at the same time, what I would also then argue back on the other way is that if it's a retreat, it's not really about, the retreat is about being separate from other people while you're meditating because you're going farther and deeper and you're doing it with a span of 10 days. Right. In other words, the Shambhala center is where I can go to practice meditating amongst other people with my eyes open, et Cetera, et cetera. But if I'm going away to a retreat for 10 days, and that's an opportunity for me to be isolated and try to go in as deep, as quick as possible.

M: You mentioned this before, but the design of the retreat was repurposed or built specifically to function as a retreat?

S: I think the meditation hall was built by them to be a meditation hall. And the rest of it, I just don't know, I could see it being both, because I don't know if the meditation was new. It was old. It was like, I just don't remember how old it was in relation to the other buildings, whether it was newer or the same, same age. And how many places have a large communal kitchen like that. So it could have been built specifically for that. But at the same time, assuming it was built back then that's kind of what they were building, right? Like they were just kind of building local materials. They were just building a little shacks for people to sleep in. Like, you know, whereas design nowadays would probably be more thoughtful. It would have more, it would probably have more. Uh, I dunno, but it's Kinda hard to say whether that's better or worse in the sense of people have meditated for thousands of years in rustic conditions. So are we making it overly comfortable because of, you know, all of us city folk that are driving out to the country for 10 days and having all these expectations.

M: Do they host any other types of events here or just meditation retreats?

S: I'm pretty sure it was solely for the purpose of retreats, but I think they had different types of retreats. Like some of them are 21 days.

M: There's only one happening at the same time?

S: Oh yeah, for sure. Yeah, that would have been way too disruptive. Had there been multiple.

M: Is there anything that you would like to add that we didn't cover already?

S: I don't think so. No, I don't think so. Thank you.



## Interview 'W'

- W: I've been to retreats on salt spring, several in Mexico. And then I went to Tulum with Dorothy a couple of times. I went to Italy with Dorothy once. I'm thinking of abroad and went to Bali with Dorothy.
- M: Closer to home... Other than stowell lake?
- W: Anywhere closer to home? Well, I did a one day out of what is now the roundhouse.
- W: I'm thinking of all the countries I've been in, which ones? I've done yoga retreats and, let me see. Mexico. There was, two inside Kalita, that Hara Mara, but that was before.
- M: Okay. My intent is to find ones that aren't super tropical, more with a climate like our own.
- W: I, back in the day I went to Kripalu, you know, in yogi Desai was still there. And that was in the old shadow brook monastery that turned a yoga retreat
- M: yeah. So I know a fair bit about that one. So I think we'll, not do that one.
- W: I've been to Breitenbush hot springs for yoga retreats.
- W: It's in an old growth forest an hour and a half east of Salem. Near Mount Jefferson. Mount Adams. It's a natural hot springs intentional community on a dirt road. One of my favourite, favourite places on earth. I love that place.
- M: Oh yeah. Maybe we can talk about that one cause I don't know anything about it.
- W: Right. Breitenbush is awesome. I haven't done a yoga retreat there for while. I've done a bunch of other retreats more recently, but I can certainly talk about the space.
- M: Yeah, let's do that. That sounds good.
- W: Do you have sort of a thesis or is it just sort of you, what's your kind of like, bent?
- M: yeah, my thesis is, really how the eight limbs of yoga are expressed in architecture and how can a retreat center support that. If you have any questions throughout the process, feel free to ask. If you need something clarified, feel free.
- M: How long have you practiced yoga?
- W: Sort of funny. I mean, I first went to yoga classes back early seventies. And I would go to retreats here and there. But in terms of actual formal practice, you know, not sort of here there, you know, I think I started in 1990 when I was in Berkeley. So, however many years that is. How many is that? I'm not good at math.
- M: A fair bit. Yeah. 20 or 20 plus years at least.
- M: So what made you first consider a retreat or going deeper in your practice?
- W: Well, I don't really remember where my first retreat was, but just thinking about the concept, I think I find it exponential. Like you can maintain a practice by going to class or having your home practice, but you break down, in my opinion, a lot of barriers, both spiritual, well spiritual, emotional and physical, I should say. All three when you go to a retreat because it's, yeah, it's exponential. And also when you've had a highly stressful life like I have, they're like little islands, you know, of ways of reminding yourself that there are more important things. I mean, I do meditation, so I've been, I've done a bunch of meditation retreats, but sometimes just sitting, it's, it doesn't serve me as well. It depends on where I am in my life. But the Yoga I love because it's like moving meditation. So I get the

meditation, kind of get the movement, I get the mindfulness. And it's nice for somebody else to make the food.

M: That is awesome.

W: Yoga retreats. I would say almost always have fantastic food and they're in a lovely place. And the other thing is that they sort of support your practice in a lot of ways. Oh, and I also think the people, I think out of any groups that I've traveled with and I traveled with a lot, cyclists, hikers, paddlers, cross country skiers. I mean I've been on group trips with all kinds of different people, rock climbers, and I would just say Yogis, you could almost be guaranteed with a few exceptions that there aren't going to be any jerks in the group. And when I say jerks, I don't, you know what I mean? Like people was such huge issues that they kind of colour your experience.

M: We've already been over this question. Where have you attended? So many, many places. That's amazing. And when was the Breitenbush retreat?

W: The last time I was at Breitenbush was, uh, a year ago, but it wasn't for a yoga retreat. I'm trying to think. When I went to a yoga retreat, it was a teacher from Portland. I can't remember names. So I'm not exactly sure the place hasn't changed, so, okay. Whatever I would say about the physical space and everything and it hasn't changed. Yeah.

M: So I kind of gave you a heads up that I'm basing all of this on Patanjali's eight limbs of Yoga, but I've created a framework for evaluation. So we'll look at each element, each limb, and I have questions that are kind of focused for that. And answers are both what was successful and what was not successful. So either way, I'm not only looking for critical, I'm not only looking for positive, so everything. So the first limb being the Yamas, I liken that to the ethics of a site and have a place, also how sustainable a project is and what kind of materials they use. So along with that comes location and setting. Was the hot spring, rural or urban, secluded or?

W: It was quite, secluded. They're off the grid and they run everything geo thermally. Yeah. And they, well, not in winter, but the rest of the year, they grow a lot of their own food and they have very sustainable practices and uh, yeah, I mean they've been that way for a very long time. I'm trying to think the first time I went there, I want to say it was yikes. Maybe early, mid nineties. Yeah. So I mean if anything, they've, you know, improve their routine, but they were way ahead of the curve. They're an intentional community. So they kind of been getting it right for a long time. Yeah. And they have a, they built, some years in a salmon ladder type contraption for the river because they have a wild river, the Breitenbush river that runs through there. So they built this whole thing and got funding for that. And then they're forest is old growth forest and on, so that more super active in the whole spotted owl thing in Oregon. And you know, they're, they're just, yeah, it's a multigenerational. But the people who started at were my age or older even, you know, so it was originally just a hot springs resort and then this community came in and bought it. And yeah. So it's pretty neat.

M: Would you say that the materiality of the building is fairly rustic or was it new and bright?

W: Rustic, rustic, rustic. Charmingly rustic. Like elves in the woods rustic, like a real hobbit should come out of it. They have a variety of accommodation. Did you want me to speak to that?

M: We will get to that moment.

W: Yeah. Rustic for sure. Yeah.

M: And aside from the geothermal, was there any solar or rainwater collection or they're off grid, so probably,

W: Yeah, I'm sure they have it all. I know for sure they have some solar, I don't know about rain water collection. I'm sure they must, I don't have a visual memory of rain barrels and stuff, but they must.

M: And material was kind of wood cladding or stone or how was it built?

- W: Yeah, it's all the old wood, the cabins, everything. And uh, I think there's some rock foundation. If my memory serves me, I'm sort of visualizing some rocks on some of them.
- W: yeah, they're definitely rocks. And then they built a new little cob building for a meditation hut. And that was really, that was a new addition. It was very sweet.
- W: And they have their own little fire departments there, which is on site, yeah, they're own the little fire truck. And so cause being that secluded and you know, things can get a little scary and a dry summer.
- M: So thinking then next about the Niyamas limb, which in the limbs of yoga is about kind of purity and cleanliness, how you take care of yourself, how you're rigorous with yourself. So I liken that kind of to the amenities. How do you purify your body while you're staying there? How do you rest? Where do you eat? So we can talk about the accommodations and then the practice spaces and also the common spaces and kind of what was successful or not about those.
- W: Well, the accommodations are a myriad. There is a little campground that you can camp in during certain months and also during certain months they have, uh, this is a different price ranges, right? They have platform tents with beds in side two single beds. They also have cabins, some with a shared bath, some with their own bath, and they're just sort of lined up in little rows. They look very cute, like little monopoly houses, you know, all made out of wood, you know, and they're very rustic. Again, geothermally heated. And then there's two rooms in the lodge. They usually try to reserve those for people who are handicapped, because you know, the food and some of the programs are in the big building in the lodge. However, I've been able to stay there, uh, on several occasions. It's really nice when you go when the weather's Yucky, so you don't have to go outside.
- W: You can just be tucked in. And there's a really comfy library, which is, you know, quiet room, quiet space. They have a massage building, they have a kitchen, they have a big dining room and, and they have a big, you know, deck outside and in the back. So when the weather's lovely, people just eat outside. And the hot springs are amazing because they're all wild and they have cold showers by the hot springs. And there, uh, there's one that's silent pool that's way out at the edge of the meadow. And then a few others that sit in the upper and then down below is more the social pools where they have four pools that represent the four directions and they're of different temperatures. So the silent pool is go there, but no talking. Yeah. And the other two pools before the silent pool are quite nice.
- W: I mean, people can talk there, but they're not sort of the chatty pools. Where as the ones, the four that are, you know, that's sort of where people go and chat, you know, and they're quite nice and you know, when the weather's decent, like when we were there and there was a particularly warm day and people were dipping in the river, which is, there's a bridge that goes from the facility by the salmon thing across to where the community lives on the other side of the river. They have their own hot pool over there. So the bridge is really nice and there's a little thing, it's almost like doing a puja where you, you know, throw your troubles downstream and gather in. There's a little plaque of what to do as you cross the bridge. Yeah. There's something about, I don't know how to describe it.
- W: And then there's all these hikes in the old growth forest. And they have a hiking map. There's something about that place, that I think Tassajara and Esalen and those are on hot springs too. Even for a weekend where I did not experience a energy shift of some description, something shifts. Sometimes I've had major shifts and that's usually for a five day retreat or a week long retreat. But even on the weekend retreat, it's a combination of the trees and the community and the silence and the hot springs and whatever workshop you're involved with. Plus the people there. I mean most of the people there are from Oregon or the Pacific northwest, so they have this kind of mellow vibe, you know, they're not strident aggressive type of people. Yeah, they're just mellow.
- M: Yeah, it sounds, pretty amazing. Yeah. I'm actually really excited that we're talking about a place I know nothing about. I don't know to, to connect it, so I'm just, I'm just getting your, I like that. Thank you.
- W: Two years ago I went to, they have an annual service weekend. I went to that where everybody, you don't have to, but people offer things that people take things and then you do sign up for service and

then a couple of years in a row in the fall I went to their annual mushroom thing or my colleges come in and we'd go out on four raise and they hire chefs and cooks up much rooms. You know, they still all bunch of different

M: So the accommodations, like the cabins, as you say, they're rustic, but they have indoor washrooms?

W: Some of them do and some shared washroom apart or Greek bath house situation. I've stayed in every possible option there is.

M: Is it one room per cabin or are there multiple rooms per cabin ?

W: Well some, there's a front room and a backroom. Some I think even have bunk beds. I've never been in one of those. So they have a variety of ways in which you can sleep there. I don't know if there's a, strictly a dormitory cabin. I've never seen one that large, you know, like a hostel. So I think probably the largest would be three people in a room or something. That's my guess.

M: So the practice space, how would you, how would you describe that and how did it work for you?

W: Well, generally we're in the big room. If it's yoga, in the big room it has a fireplace and has a carpet that they roll the cart it up, you know, kind of like salt spring center. And just a lovely old log room, you know, with windows on all sides. And yeah, it's, it's very cozy. Just a very sweet space. They have a little sort of hut thing with a carpet that they do yoga classes, you can just go to yoga classes and it's a very small space and that's really nice. It's very kind of Woodsy, cozy. I think those are the only two spaces I've been to for an actual yoga retreat. All the other places were various small buildings for things like writing, but I don't think any of them accommodated yoga. So I think it's pretty much always in the big room.

M: And so there was a connection to nature with the windows and the logs and the materials.

W: yeah. And, and it's really nice cause you know, on warm days, all the windows are open. You can hear the river down below. And it was just really nice. Yeah. Oh and I forgot to mention they have the most amazing geothermal heated sauna. It's like you're in the sauna and then you go outside and there's a bathtub or you can fill up with cold water. Almost nobody wears bathing suits. We don't, you don't walk around naked. I bet if you did people wouldn't freak. But it's just considered bad form. But at the tubs, everybody's naked and in the sauna you're naked. And the sauna, it sounds like a dragon, you know, that you, if they're more growers this roar, you know when you're in there low rumble, there's also ice cold showers outside. So the sauna is just the best sauna ever.

M: So the quiet library that you mentioned, that's a shared space and it's small or big?

W: Well, there's two rooms. There's one room, that has some children's toys in it and you can shut the door if you're in there with your kids. So they have a little toys they can play with and things like that where people can just lounge in there and talk quietly. And then the other libraries just sort of silence, please take off your shoes. That kind of thing.

M: How about the dining room is that kind of big and long tables or smaller and more intimate.

W: Most of the tables or four tops. There are some two tops, uh, the four tops are generally round. There are some two tops. And then trying to think if there's any, there might be one long table, something like that. Oh. And then they did put up a sort of a canopy outside so people could eat outside if they wanted, if it were raining and cold. Yeah. There's some people like to do that as well. Yeah. So theirs, but on a nice day everybody sitting outside eating, you know, even if it's sitting on the grass, you know, with your food.

M: Yeah. For sure. Yeah.

W: And it's buffet style, you just, there's a time that you go in and eat and eat and the food is vegetarian and you can request, they have gluten free and all that, all the options. And it's basic delicious food.

- M: And a lot of it, you said it was grown on the land?
- W: During the summer. Yeah. Or as close by, they try to do really good job.
- M: So we're going to move on to the Asana limb. Which I liken to the variety of classes and what kind of sessions were you doing there and did you have one instructor for the whole time or multiple?
- W: just one this particular one I'm thinking of because it was a large group, she had an assistant with her, so there was actually two of them. So I'm not actually sure if she were an assistant, but she led different, she had sort of a bit of different focus. I can't describe it, but I can't remember exactly. But one of them did a certain thing and the other one did a certain thing.
- W: They had their own roles. Yeah. They just, they just had a different practice. I knew it was all Hatha, but I just remembered, so-and-so's going to do this part and I'm going to do this part. And they complemented each other very nicely.
- M: Huh. Did they split the group in two or did they just kind of do it at the same time?
- W: Yep. Same time.
- M: and so, and then you said it was all kind of a Hatha postures.
- W: Yeah. I don't remember it being like, you know, it wasn't, yin, it wasn't anyasara and it wasn't hot. I don't do hot. I mean it wasn't any of that. It was just sort of nice practice.
- M: Yeah. Okay.
- M: In between your practice sessions, the connections that you had with people, there are other participants. Was it lively or was it subdued? And how did that work for you?
- W: You can do either there. You know, there's people there who even have little things on staying in silence, you know, that you can put a little thing on just like, I'm not ignoring you. I'm just in silence all the way to people who are just really connecting, you know, I just want to connect, connect, connect. So there's some livelier conversations going and you know, I wouldn't say raucous, but very enthusiastic, to people who are clearly just wanting to be on their own. So it accommodates I think all of that. Yeah. Cause I could, I did both those people. I've never been the in silence one, but I've been the person who just, I just really need chill time and my purpose here is not to connect with others and not being on friendly, but I really need my energy to go to me. Whereas other times it was much more of a connective kind of thing.
- M: And there was space to do that.
- W: Yes. Mostly I remembered Jai Utah had a, had a workshop in kirtan. Man. We were like, we were so elevated. It's really funny. Yeah, that was awesome. That was one of the best ever. Yeah.
- M: So we'll talk next about Pranayama and uh, for me the connection there is however the breath may move through the body. How does a person move through the building or the space or the property of the retreat? Were you kind of in separate buildings and moving between them? Are you all in one building?
- W: Yeah. As far as accommodation, we were all scattered around the property and then the hot springs where different places, you know, but where we ate and where we practice was in the same place. Yeah. And, but sometimes I've been to workshops there that weren't in the main building, so they were smaller cohorts and so they would be in an outbuilding. But yeah, for Yoga we were all in the same place.
- M: Okay. And did that, did that work for you having dining and practicing the same building?

- W: Yeah, no, it's fine. It's nice, although, you know, it's fine the other way too, because then you know, you're forced to walk through a beautiful setting, which is lovely because then you get that time in between, you know, your accommodation and where you're eating and where you're practicing. So yeah, I wouldn't, ideally, I wouldn't want to stay unless the weather's just horrendous. Like there's a snow storm going on. I was there one time for that. I would not want to stay all three things in the same building unless the weather is really crappy, then I just feel like it's too much closeness. Right.
- M: The distance between the accommodation of the practice space, was it far, close, how long of a walk?
- W: Depends, if you're in the camp ground it's about, maybe 10 minutes. If you walk briskly. They also have this thing called the inner path. It's this sort of path through the woods that you can take like a little contemplative path. And the others are fire roads, they can run their own vehicles on them, but cars don't go down there, you know, just their own vehicles. I think probably a little over 10 minutes would be the longest between one to the other.
- M: And where you stayed was how far?
- W: Well, again, I stayed in various cabins, you know, different times. So, between five and 10 minutes walk.
- M: What was your favourite distance, I guess?
- W: It depends on the weather, you know, cause if it's crappy weather that 10 to 15 minute walk is in the rain is not so great, you know. But it depends on the weather. If the weather's nice, I was fine with.
- W: Walking through the forest, it was great.
- M: We will go on now to Pratyahara, which in the eight limbs of yoga is about withdrawing your senses and starting to, you know, not listen and really focus inward. So I kind of correlate that to the journey to the retreat and kind of preparing yourself for, for what's to come. So because you are in a completely different state, how did you get there? How was this, what was that like?
- W: I think only one time did I share a ride with somebody because I think I've been biking and I got a ride with somebody from Portland. They do a ride sharing thing, you know, lots of people from Portland, but I was always in my own vehicle. So for this purposes I was in my own vehicle. I always bring my bike, my bike because I like to bike around there. There's a great cycling just off the property. Uh, and I always hike. I mean as you're getting there, you know, you're driving through Portland, it's very busy. Then you go, there's a back road from Portland, which is open in the summer or not, not open in the winter, I should say. It's open spring, summer, fall because it's quite high and it gets a lot of snow. And as you go along that road, it just gets more and more beautiful and more and more rural.
- W: There's a beautiful, one of the Oregon scenic byways, or you can just go down the I five and come in from Salem. But regardless, the closer you get to the property, the more and more isolated it is. So you're, I just always remember when I drive off property after a workshop, uh, I just feel like I'm in no hurry at all. Like I don't just don't even want to drive more than 20 clicks and hour, you know, I'm just Kinda like, I'm in Zombie land, you know, cause I've slowed down so much. Yeah.
- M: Yeah. Getting back on the i5 would be interesting.
- W: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I take it slowly.
- M: Hmm. And so how far of a drive from Portland?
- W: It's not that far? I think maybe an hour and a half. I, I want to say cause I've never, yeah, I, yeah, I want to say an hour and a half.
- M: Yeah. Time to transition. And were you, are you usually alone or with a friend or somebody else that you're traveling with or?

- W: I once went with girlfriend, years ago we had a blast. I was there with my boyfriend and our little trailer last fall. I went there with an ex boyfriend and 2012, that was not for a retreat specific retreat. The one I went to last fall was a yoga retreat. I, there was one, uh, years ago by myself, but we went for a weekend cause I wanted him to experience Breitenbush . So yeah. That was that. The ladies from Portland and that was, that would've been last fall. Late September that I did that retreat. It was a weekend retreat with him and we were in the trailer. A little campground.
- M: Mm. And then as you arrived at the retreat, was there anything special to greet you upon arrival and then further journey into the site? Anything special about that?
- W: Yeah, they have a really neat checkin at the gate cause they don't want people just coming on property so they have this nice little check in, cheerful people giving you maps, telling you where to park, your cabin, whatever it might be. So yeah, they're very, very good about helping you when you first get there.
- M: And then you park and walk further in?
- W: yeah, there's a parking lot where everybody parks and then they have these sort of little, well unless you're in the campground and then you just go right down this little road and camp your vehicle. But they have these little pull carts, like garden carts and you load all your luggage in that role. It, you roll into your cabin. down this little road. It's really nice. The hard part is rolling it up the hill afterwards. getting down the hill is no problem. There's just a slight incline as you go back.
- M: When you're all relaxed. Yeah, Dharana, the next limb talks about scale, and concentration. So thinking about kind of how long were you there and what size of group, were you there with on most occasions?
- W: Oh, it's so varied. Like sometimes, I mean for Yoga, you know, it's, there was always the full room, you know, so I don't know, 20 some odd people for the yoga. I've been to writing retreats where there were 10 people in a small space. So yeah, different sizes depending. And then I just been out on personal retreats where I just went and that was kind of the, you know, after nine 11. And I think I've been there one or two times more where I just was there cause I was passing through and I just wanted to be there.
- M: Do you have a preference on a small group or medium group?
- W: No. No. I think it just depends on what you're doing. I mean, you know, I wouldn't want a huge group for a writing retreat. I would be kind of awkward. But yeah, I think it just depends in that, you know, then they limit the size of the group because of the facilities that they have there. So they kind of know that yoga is going to be the big room and you know, the Kirtan was the big room.
- M: Would they have multiple retreats happening at the same time or is it usually, just one?
- W: yeah. Yeah. And they're only, they're very good about it because they're only limited by the size of accommodations. Right. So, so they know that they allot a certain number of spaces.
- W: And then they kind of juggle it is, I guess the workshops fill up and then the spaces themselves can only fit a certain number too. So somebody is doing a lot of logistics on that one.
- M: How is it to be there with other people who aren't in your program?
- W: Well, it's really fun. There was on that, there was only one workshop. It was, I hate to make fun of it, but it was kind of funny because I can't remember what I was in, but there was a workshop there for people with depression and anxiety. And I hadn't really clued in at that time too, who were my fellow... at Cortez, you know, I think there are always be running at hollyhock one or two, maybe three at the same time. So it's always kind of fun. They give presentations about what's going on. So you kind of know and you can attend evening talks if you're signed up for one, you can go to a talk if somebody's doing something right. So, so at Breitenbush , it's just, it was kind of funny because there were a lot



of, and I hate to, I hate to say this was true, there were a lot of very unhappy sort of overweight people, right? And I would just say anything like, I wonder what's going on with some of these people. They look really unhappy. And then, I thought I'd look at the schedule to see who else was there with me. And I thought, oh, these people are here for depression and anxiety. No wonder.

M: Yeah. Interesting.

W: Yeah. So I, I, you know, then it was like, oh, okay, I get it. So then sometimes I would sit with some of the unhappy looking people and just kind of chat with them and you know, everybody's been there, right? So it's kind of Nice to connect and unless they want to be by themselves, but usually when you're depressed, the worst thing is to be by yourself, you know, just sort of wallow in it. Anyway.

M: So the last element that I talk about is the spirit of place, which is really hard to define. I know that, but it's kind of a culmination of the elements that came before really. And if those are all successful than hopefully we have a rich character and the spirit of place. So thinking about the buildings or the property really, were there any kind of secret, magical elements that were there?

W: Well, the whole place is magical. I mean, I, I love that. I love the space. I just, the energy, you know, the, the movement of the river, the movement of the hot springs, you know, there's just so much energy. And one time I went there when I was there with my ex boyfriend in 2012 I hadn't taken mushrooms for a really long, is there any place I would take mushrooms? It was there and we took questions and went out in the old growth forest and then we sat in the hot springs and this is really weird. We heard the earth rumble and it, you know, there weren't any jets flying overhead and we both looked at each other and I said, did you hear that? And he goes, I was just going to ask you the same thing. So we talked to some people on site and they call it the Breitenbush rumble and they said certain people here at certain times and they feel like it's just something geothermal, that it kind of reverberates throughout the property. It's a very rare thing and we thought we were losing our minds, but we both heard it right in. Of course we're on mushrooms, so we're hyper tuned in.

M: Oh, okay. So there's some energy to that place.

W: Oh, it definitely has energy. Yeah. So the whole, the whole energy supports transformation. I mean, I, it's like I said, it's one of my favourite places on the planet. I love Breitenbush.

W: Yeah. I've done some pretty heavy work there. I have to say

W: You know, I went back to Esalen just to contrast, uh, in 2012 and it just felt I would go there in a heartbeat again, but it just felt like, uh, I dunno. Just too glitzy California for me. You know, I was there in the 90s and it was amazing and it's still a beautiful site, but it just felt a little kind of LA glitzy, you know?

M: Oh, interesting. Yeah.

W: And I don't think Tassajara Zen Center, will ever change. I mean, that place is extraordinary. There's something about hot springs that I think really facilitate a deep practice. Something it's sort of in Yucatan, you know, they have those, underground rivers and cenotes and there's something about the energy there that really supports transformation. I dunno. So that's my theory on Breitenbush anyway. Plus the old growth trees are extraordinary.

M: So thinking about the place as a whole, the buildings, the property, what specifically worked for you about, about the buildings and, and the practice spaces or really anything?

W: They're clean, but cozy, you know, I mean, the people in the community, there are the ones that maintain it. Like it's, it's Karma Yoga. So it's like salt spring centre, right. So, you know, they take pride in their place. It's not like employees, not that they would do a bad job, but I think it's special when it's the people who are part of the community. So they maintain it and they're cheerful little employees who are always coming through. I think that makes a difference. And, and just, there's, there's just a

lot of history in those rooms of people who've been coming for years and years and transforming themselves. Right. So there's, there's a legacy, I guess I'd say it's been around for a very long time.

W: Maybe there's a collective vibe of souls who have transformed. So I liked that about the place, the history.

M: Hmm. So the flip side of that question is what, challenged you about being in this space on retreat or what could have been better?

W: Well, I would say the only thing that is hard because you're, you're at some sort of elevation. One year I went seriously, they had to have a guy picks up at the end of the road, out by the highway. Not I five but the highway cause you know, that goes through there because there was so much snow. They had gotten record snow and it was wild because there were tunnels. They had to dig tunnels between the cabins. And it was like, it was very strange because you were walking through this tunnel and literally, I mean I'm not that tall, but all I could see with somebody else's head and the top of their shoulders was disembodied, you know, you've ducks in a shooting gallery. It was so strange and I brought my snow shoes and to get up to the level where I could even snowshoe was absurd.

W: I mean they had dug pathways, you know, to the pools. But it was extraordinary and it apparently right before I got there, the first time in history, their whole, uh, whatever by tower or something got snowed out and had to do, be repaired and we knew it was losing stream. Yeah. It was really, really extreme. And I happened to arrive right in the middle of it. It was in March and it was a, uh, a huge snow storm and it was unexpected. I was on my way north back to BC. Yeah, it was intense. I would say the only challenge is when I arrived there and the weather's crappy and you've got to transport your stuff in the rain and was just a, uh, you know, a momentary or, and then you've got a walk in the rain, you know, and it's cold and clammy and you know, around, you know, and go down to the lodge. But then everything's fine. You get in the hot springs, everything's good, but you know, when it's pouring rain, like it is out today, you know, and you arrive and you've been driving for a while, but that's just road crankiness, you know? And that is, that just melts away very quickly.

M: Weather, it does affect us for sure. Yeah.

W: Yeah. But it's part of the beauty there. You know, it's green and lush and reforest is beautiful. So.

M: So thinking about the design of the retreat, was the building repurposed from some other function or was it built specifically to be a retreat center?

W: Well no, it originally was it an old fashioned, but no it was originally some sort of hot springs resort. They have pictures of people back in the day and old timey clothes, you know. And I think in the 70s is when this community bought this place, started an intentional community. That's what I think anyway.

M: Does it always function as a retreat center or other types of events hosted there? Like conferences or weddings?

W: I don't know about weddings. They do have, they shut it down I think for one period of time to have stuff for their own people there. And then there's the annual service thing, right. Where there's just that one thing going on. Kind of like salt spring centre when they just have their one thing going on. But people from outside come to that. Not that I'm aware of. You can look at their website, but I think it's pretty much... Yeah, they're just running retreats pretty much all the time.

W: Yeah. I mean, as I said, you can go there as a private retreat, but people sign up for a retreat get priority. And there are times in where I think they don't have retreats, so then you can just do a personal retreat and you don't have to worry about priority.

M: All right, our last question then I'll let you go. Is there anything that you would like to add about the buildings, the spaces that we didn't cover already that you think was important?

- W: Well, you know, I think that given, the things, I think that, I mean ideally the place, the food, the nature. Well, like you say, they should all support the eight limbs and, and I think that it doesn't really matter to me how luxurious places, although I've been to some, you know, more fancy places, but there's also always some sort of natural element and really good nourishing food.
- W: To the ones that are in my mind, the best, you know, I mean, even Dorothy's retreats in Italy, we were out in the countryside, you know, and I can go for a run in the countryside and I, you know, I, I'm trying to think if I've actually ever been to an urban yoga retreat and I'm racking my mind to think if I have been, because to me retreating entails not urban. I've been to urban yoga classes for sure, but, oh, I remember I went, oh yeah, I went with some people from, was that studio? It's done in Granville island. They got a bunch of them, a semperviva. I went to a Galliano with those guys. And that was neat cause that was hiking and yoga. Okay. Yeah, that was a lovely retreat. I just think that how the facility connects to yoga and nature, all you want all the inputs to be transformative. That's my ideal. And the people that you go with are important for sure.
- W: But I don't think, to me it's as critical and element because I find that the people you go with are almost a given.
- W: I just assume when I go to a yoga retreat that the people are going to be mellow and just kind of good people. Right. I suppose if I went to some really power yoga, you know, calisthenic kind of thing. There might be some people that were a bit different than the way I approach my practice. I don't know if I dislike them. I just think it would be a different approach.
- W: And I was much older but more advanced in my practice and they were all in their attire. You know, I don't really dress in attire. I have some, but I'm not an attire person, you know, it's just amusing to me that sort of perfect look. And I just thought, oh, okay, that's interesting. This is where yoga has gone. But that was, that was about, I don't know, 10, 15 years ago when they were the perfect bodies in yoga journal and everybody was getting outs, you know, look and fancy, you know,
- M: Well, there you go. That's all that matters. Well thank you so much Whitney. You're welcome.
- W: and as you go along, I know how this works with embedded research and stuff and as you go along if there's things you need to circle back on as if some themes emerge, you know, please feel free to, to, you know, look, look back. And I'm like that. I think I've been to more yoga retreats in anybody. I know. I'm a junkie and I've been to more of Dorothy's than anybody that's for sure.
- M: No, I'd definitely more than anyone I've talked to. So I think you would be a wealth of knowledge for sure.
- W: All right. Thank you so much. Thank you. I appreciate it. Thanks. Take care.

## Interview 'T'

- M: How long have you practiced yoga?
- T: Since the mid nineties. Yeah, 20 plus years.
- M: And thinking about your very first retreat, either yoga or meditation, what made you first think like, I want to do this for a longer stretch of time?
- T: That one's interesting cause I never parse out yoga and meditation. For me it's all one thing. So it's difficult. But I guess back in the earliest days I probably, I probably did have that idea. Like Yoga, I would consider yoga, just physical practice and meditation, something else. And my first, I guess real retreat was on salt spring island. I mean I had been doing classes here. You know, here and there. but my first retreat where I actually pulled up stakes and went somewhere, was on salt spring at the center.
- M: And so what made you think, okay, I want to go for ....
- T: Well it was a gift. So it was just a random thing, but in fact I had been looking at this place for a long, long time online for literally years. And then for my 40th birthday I was gifted a retreat. It was kind of all very weird and serendipitous. I think I was always too afraid to go on retreat because I just thought I wasn't good enough. They're not for me, I'm not going to know enough. Those kinds of things. So I'm kind of the type of person that needed to be pushed in the direction.
- M: So nudged you towards something you were already thinking about?
- T: I was already curious about, which is interesting when you start to think about in the bigger context of the mind not being here and ideas floating around out there and then just like, you know, kind of grabbing onto them. That's kind of what it felt like. It felt like it had been floating around out there for a long time, and then suddenly it was like, okay, it's your time.
- M: So other than salt spring center, where else have you attended retreats?
- T: Oh Gosh. Okay. So, Kripalu in Massachusetts, Sivananda Ashram in The Bahamas. I've taken some city retreats here in Victoria, say at Moksana or Hemma. And I would call, when a teacher comes to offer something for periods of time, days or even a day, I would call that a retreat. Gosh, where else? Vancouver at this studio. For a weekend. Mary Winspear, with Angela Farmer and, and her husband Victor. So they offered something at Mary Winspear and it was a city retreat. So go home every night and go back every day. Tall Tree in Cordova Bay. Shambhala Meditation Center.
- M: So I've created a framework for evaluation based on Patanjali's eight limbs of yoga and we will review each element of the retreat through this framework lens.
- T: Well, Kripalu and Sivananda, which are very near and dear to my heart. There are some things that I love about them and some things that I don't love about them, but as, I mean, they're not close.
- M: For some reason, the Bahamas one, just because I feel like you can do different things with space in a tropical climate than what you could do here in terms of ...
- T: Well, it's very interesting because it's very modest. Like that's the other thing. The thing that's really appealing about it is that it's on the beach and little cabins and then outside meditation and practice spaces, platforms that just look out to the water. So there's nothing special, but they're very special. I mean, other than that, the food is very modest. You know, that it's a very simple diet, very, very classical teachings.
- T: oh, Mt Madonna. Also, in California.
- M: Okay, let's talk about that. I mean is that okay?

- T: Yes. See it feels like a home to me. Mt Madonna feels like a second home because it's a sister center to salt spring. Because it's so connected and so, yeah. I'm not sure if you'll get the most out of that from me, but let just ask me the questions. I'm just not sure if I can be that objective because it really does feel like going to my grandma's house or something.
- M: So thinking about the yamas and ethics and materiality and sustainability, we'll just kind of go through these questions one by one. What was the location and the setting and how did that impact your experience?
- T: Okay, so it is on a mountain, with a redwood forest attached to it. I'm not entirely sure of the number of acres. I want to say 70 acres of redwood forest. It's pretty, pretty significant and it overlooks Monterey Bay. So, it's not, you know, coming from Canada it's not super easy to get there. You can, you can't fly into it, so you have to fly into San Francisco and then drive an hour to get there, so it's pretty rural. It's relatively secluded, although it's a big retreat center. I would say it's an ashram more so than a retreat center. Although they do have a conference building and they have a community building and they have a lot of accommodations for visitors.
- T: They have temples there. A beautiful hanuman temple that has grown in leaps and bounds, that they, you know, brought the hanuman murti from India. And so it's a pretty big deal. And then of course, Babaji, lived there and, well he didn't live there, but he taught there. He lived in a place nearby in a house with one of his students named Ma Renu. And so she allowed him to live in part of the house. And she lived in the other part. So they would come up and go back and come up and go back. She sponsored him to come to California.
- M: I've just answered the next question for you, my apologies. Was it rural or urban?
- T: Yeah, it was really secluded.
- M: Because it's so large, this may be kind of tricky to answer, but was the materiality of the building of rustic or new and if there's multiple buildings what was the overall feel?
- T: So they've been there for 40 years. So I would say that the conference building is relatively new. It had newer architecture, but the community building and some of the other buildings I would say are a little more, I wouldn't say rustic, but not modern. So as an example, one of the cabins would have one room and then one room and then they would have a jack and jill bathroom. So you'd be able to share the bathroom from two different rooms, but very modest rooms, like a bed, maybe a mirror, maybe not, you know, a chair and maybe a desk. And then looking out onto, not all of them, but looking out onto looking out onto the land. So because, you know, that was a real place of coming to go inward, there wouldn't be a lot of bells and whistles.
- M: Was it mostly wood construction, wood cladding, or?
- T: I would say wood construction and wood and cement in the newer building. Yeah.
- M: Um, were there any apparent efforts at sustainability that you saw, like solar, rainwater harvesting or low energy consumption?
- T: I would say they're probably looking at that now, but I don't think that when they built the building it was a thing. There maybe solar panels there now, but I'm just, not that I can remember. I'm trying to think of the heat, I think it's electric heat. Pretty basic.
- M: So we'll move on to the Niyamas. Thinking about amenities, we'll go through kind of each zone, but what was successful or not about the accommodations, the practice spaces and the common spaces?
- T: So the accommodations are very modest. They don't have a lot of amenities besides a bathroom and a shower and a sink. Yeah, just really the basics. I mean, I think that's and actually, you know, if I could just kind of back up, all of the places that I've gone to are all like that. They're very basic

because the main underpinnings are going there to do a practice. So I tend to stick to places that are very kind of classical in nature where it is about going inward with the teachings and also with the space so that you don't get caught up in the trappings of beauty. Like the beauty of it is being in nature. So the accommodations are basic. Yeah. The beds aren't even that comfortable, honestly. You know, like salt spring beds aren't super comfortable. No, they're not.

M: So functional washrooms so you're sharing?

T: Yeah, usually in between two rooms and you can get a private room if you like, usually not with a bathroom. So you can get a private room with no bathroom. Shared bathroom. You have to walk down the hall and then if you want to pay more, of course there are a couple of rooms that have a private washroom. So you might have a shared room, private bathroom; single room, private bathroom, but that increases the cost.

M: So thinking about the practice spaces, are there many or is there one main space?

T: There are probably about three different spaces, three or four different spaces. So the common room can be used as a practice space, which is a really large, large room. This is the room that we practiced in, as a group when Babaji left his body, we would all have a group practice in that room. Very powerful. And then there's a redwood room, which is more, it's beautiful. Like it's all wood. So hardwood floors, kind of cabin-ish. Pretty large room, but no toilet. So you have to leave the room to go to an outhouse. And then there's another couple of spaces. So, in the conference space, there's a very large room where they hold YTT and then there's another smaller space. But they're not anything special to be really honest with you. I mean the redwood room is probably the most beautiful. Yeah. Like aesthetically pleasing just because of the wood floors.

T: So now Kripalu is a different story. Their practice spaces are, you know, they have a lot of money. They used to be nonprofit, but I think they're private now. Anyways, they are bigger and they have beautiful spaces. So I think part of it is first of all the money that comes in, you know, and where they choose to, how many programs they offer.

M: Does the grandness of the place work better for you or worse for you when you're at Kripalu practicing?

T: Well interesting. So I did my yoga therapy training at Mount Madonna and I was there for two weeks. It was very beautiful, very quiet. They have, because they also have a community of people who live there, right? So it's their home and so it's treated like home and it was very quiet, very rural. And then I went from there to Kripalu, the second half of my training and it was like a hotel. People come in from New York and all over the world and very loud and people complaining about their rooms and people with money. And it was just, I was shocked because it was so, the contrast was so different. Now I love Kripalu, but in that moment I could really see the difference between these two places. You know where this is just a little bit more folksy. Mount Madonna is a little more down to earth and Kripalu was just a little bit more shi-shi. A little bit more modern.

M: Because people's expectations going in are higher?

T: I think so. And I think that people, when people are spending more money to go there and when they spend more money, they also want different amenities. You know, they want to get a bang for their buck. So they run it like a hotel. They have two rows of people helping you, like receptionists. So four on this side and four on that side. And they offer a lot of services. You know, they have tons of classes going on, workshops going on all the time. So people can come up for a couple of days for a retreat and then go back to Boston or whatever. So it's just a little bit different in that regard.

T: I think the one thing I'll add though for Mount Madonna and salt spring is that they've both been, because the teacher has been really, his whole MO was just about bringing people into sadhana, passing teachings along to people that I think the intent was a little different. You know, the underpinnings of the organization was different.

- M: I have found that when I'm looking at a place that kind of started because of the founder it usually results in a very different feel than something that doesn't have a foundation of teachings.
- M: So common spaces at Mount Madonna, what are those like?
- T: The common spaces are used for, all the food is served in the common spaces and the food is all usually buffet style. So there's a tea bar and then very similar to salt spring. And then everybody eats in the common room. So some people eat on tables and some people go into the larger common room and sit on the floor. And so it's a nice opportunity for people to connect. And just basically connect to eat a meal together. So all meals are like that. And the common rooms are used for that.
- T: You know, they're used for meetings. Usually if people are there doing Karma Yoga, we'll all get around in a circle and talk about what needs to be done for the day and who's doing what, especially on big retreats and that kind of thing.
- M: So staying as a guest, what kind of common spaces would you have access to other than your room and the dining area?
- T: Probably not. No, no. I mean outside, outside, yeah, there wouldn't be any need for it unless of course, you know, so as an example, if I was staying in the conference center, I would have access to my room, access to the teaching room, access to the common room for meals. And then I would also might have access to, if I was going to get a body treatment, I'd have access to that space. But there just wouldn't be a need to go into any of the other spaces unless you had a reason to.
- M: So that leads to something else... you can stay at the conference center? But then there's also separate accommodation buildings?
- T: The conference center has rooms, has accommodation.
- M: So how many buildings with accommodation are there?
- T: The conference center, the main house or the main community center, has rooms downstairs. Usually for Karma yogis or for more kind of longterm residential kind of program people. And then they also have, I think they call it the RAM buildings are, they're little cabins.
- M: Have you ever stayed in one of the little cabins?
- T: I have.
- M: What are those like?
- T: They're very rustic.
- M: And is that the two rooms that are shared with a bathroom?
- T: Yeah. They're very neat.
- T: And then I also stayed in one where we had, it was a bigger building and so two of us stayed in one room, two people stayed in another room and then we all had, and there was a little kitchen. This was a long time ago. So I'm just trying to recall. There was a small kitchen where you could make tea and stuff like that. And then shower. Like in a bathroom. And then there's camping spaces too.
- M: Were there any unique amenities and how did that affect your experience?
- T: Well, the uniqueness of course is the teachings and I don't know if that's an amenity, but it's certainly for me it's a pull. I'm less concerned about the amenities than I am about the teachings. So, they have Ayurveda body treatments for amenities that happens in Ayurveda Centre. Cause they're also a college, right? So that would be some amenity. Hundreds of trails for hiking. Their amenities in terms of food is pretty moderate but also good.



- M: Does the food come from the land?
- T: Some of it does, so they have a farm there too. They have a bookstore. And they sell books, music, incense. They sell some clothing. They sell, you know, when you forget your toothbrush or toothpaste or deodorant, they have that kind of stuff there. And lots of pictures of Babaji. And they also have a cafe. It's relatively new, which is why I didn't twig to it. You can go get Chai and in addition to the tea bar, that's usually that's free.
- M: Are these all located in separate buildings?
- T: The bookstore and the cafe are kind of back to back. So the opening to the bookstore would be here and the opening to the cafe would be here. So it's kind of attached to the same building. What else? They have a temple there that hundreds of people come from Santa Cruz or San Francisco. Outdoor temple.
- M: So, asana, the variety of classes and types of classes, what sort of sessions and classes did you participate in?
- T: Well, it depends on why I'm going. So I've been there for yoga therapy training and that's a very structured training, with non- Mt Madonna teachers. And then the asana classes at Mt Madonna, are very classical, so very different than the classes that I teach, in that they really teach from that perspective of the primer. So very modest asana classes. Beautiful, but not a lot of bells and whistles.
- M: Any variety to that or is it repeated? Like if you're there for several days?
- T: I've taught there and so they get variety and a different kind of class when I teach is quite different, which they've told me, Oh, this is quite different than what we usually get here. So it might not be the same thing over and over and over again. But it also might not go in a very similar direction that I do. Like in terms of really, although I will say that they're still about trying to get their students to go inwards, which is very similar to what I do.
- M: And I think you just answered the next one too. Is there one instructor or multiple instructors?
- T: So there's multiple. Both. There's both sometimes. Sometimes they would break it up into a gentle class or intermediate class. Very similar to what we do at salt spring so that everybody can get their needs met.
- M: I'm assuming that it's similar to salt spring with some restorative classes and there's some just meditation pranayama classes?
- T: Yes.
- M: And does all of that usually happen in the same space?
- T: Different spaces. So sometimes they will offer a beginner meditation class and sometimes they offer an intermediate. So these are not the same, same. Often we're being split depending on where we are at in our sadhana. And of course that would mean that we would need to have a different teacher, someone who can teach intermediate practices compared to someone who is teaching beginning practices.
- T: Of course, you know, Babaji always said that, that we're really not meditating anyways. We're trying to really, what we're doing is concentrating. Until you get to that point, that place, that just happens, that place that you can't really talk about.
- M: So in between sessions and were the connections that you experienced in between your practice sessions lively or subdued, and how did that, as a participant, affect you?
- T: So this can be tricky because usually when you're going to retreat, there's often times where you're encouraged to practice silence. So I've been to silent retreats at Mount Madonna with different

teachers with Aryashanti as an example. And it was a five day silent retreat. And so you're encouraged not to talk, so you practice multiple times together. It's not asana. It's like a Buddhist meditation. And so there's a group of people in a large room, where we'd all practice meditation together and then that happens five times a day. So you're encouraged to come to all the five times a day. This is just one example. Everyone's encouraged to come to the five meditations a day. And then in between those meditations, you're encouraged to not fill your mind with a lot of stuff. So like, don't use your social media, don't use your computer. Even reading books, don't read books necessarily. Practice Yoga if you like, or Asana if you like, just to kind of move your body. Don't write notes to each other. So it's not just about not speaking. So there's a lot of space to be in your own business.

- M: So on a retreat like that does everyone come and go their separate ways and sit in a room and be silent together?
- T: Everyone goes their separate ways. So there's, and there's also no eye contact. Well, you're not purposefully looking to people to make eye contact. You know, to kind of get that validation that we're always seeking most of the time in our life, you know, hey, do you see me I'm here? And so we're encouraged not to do that. Just to kind of watch what happens when the normal social habits or social norms are set aside. Watch what your mind does, get to know yourself. So you know, initially your mind is just freaking out. You're just like, what did I do? Why did I come here? And then you get to a point where everything kind of subsides, the mind relaxes, knows you're not in danger. You start to look at your habitual ways of thinking and a retreat like that is set up so that there's not a lot of stimulation coming in.
- T: And so, and it's not for everyone. So no, we're not all sitting around. We'd go for a walk on our own or maybe someone comes with us, but we're not talking, we're just simply walking, but we're spending a lot of time alone. Because of course, at the end of the day, it's a path of aloneness, you know, it's not a road built for two.
- M: So very different kind of interactions depending?
- T: So very different kind of feel compared to going to a retreat when I've been there practicing Yoga Asana, where we're going in but there's a lot of interaction, a lot of question asking, well what about this? A lot of note taking, a lot of mind stuff, you know, where we're learning something in a different way. I'd say we're both, we're learning things both ways, but this way is more of an academic intellectual learning and the other one is a reduction of intellectual learning.
- T: Because that's our waking state, right. Is to get as much information as I can in order to know as much as possible so that ultimately I can be better than you. And so the practice, the whole practice itself would say that that's BS and stop it. And here's some ways that you can stop doing that so that we can really realize that we're same, same, and I'm going to do what I can to help you out because in that assistance of you being well and happy, I'm also well and happy.
- M: So thinking about Pranayama and circulating through a retreat, how do you navigate around it? There's a lot of separate buildings, so?
- T: Walk, walking outside.
- M: Was there anything that wasn't successful about journeying outside?
- T: Well, weather. So if it's raining, which doesn't usually happen, but you know, in a place like Kripalu, everything is indoors. So you'd never actually ever have to go outside, in someplace like The Bahamas, you'd always have to go outside because basically the retreat is outside and at Mt Madonna, you could be doing both, you know, so if you were in the conference centre, and they brought food into the conference room, you could essentially never have to go outside. You'd just be going from your room to the thing.
- T: But if that wasn't the case, you would have to walk to the common building and have dinner. So that's not really a problem. But that's how you would navigate it. And then if you're walking, going to different

yoga studios, you'd have to walk to the redwood room, up a path, you know, so they give you a map and they show you the lay of the land so that you know, where everything is.

M: Was there far to walk between them?

T: I mean sometimes yeah, some are further than, so if you were in the ram cabins as an example, there are quite a distance to both buildings. So you'd have to walk up, a 5, 10 minute walk depending on how fast or slow you walk.

M: And other buildings are quite close?

T: Yeah, relatively.

M: I guess the difference between Kripalu that you mentioned everything's inside and at Mount Madonna everything mostly is separate. Does one of those work better for you when you're at a retreat?

T: Not necessarily, I like them both. I mean the interesting thing about Kripalu is that the building is huge. And so, you know, depending on where your room is, you're walking in the building, but you're still walking distances on different floors, because it was an old Jesuit monastery at one point. So, I guess I like walking outside, you know, I like it. Being at Mount Madonna actually gives you an opportunity to get outside and walk from place to place so that you can get some fresh air. And, Kripalu, I mean you could literally stay indoors the whole time. You'd never have to leave.

M: The journey, pratyahara, going to retreat. Can you describe your journey there and how it affected your first impression?

T: I think the first time I went there, it's interesting because I've been there multiple times for different teachers and not necessarily my teacher. So every time I go there for something different, it's different. The very first time I went there I was very excited to go there because I was like, oh, I'm going to Mt Madonna. It's kind of like the mother ship that we all kind of want to get to, because of course Babaji was there and so we wanted to be there. And so I was excited to go there. You step on the land and the land is charged, you can feel the energy change, you can feel that there's a settling of your internal workings just because he's such a peaceful guy. And everything he stood for was about peace and so that translates to the land.

T: So intention is I think really important when it comes to that. So I think when I got there, I think that there was an instant settling because I was like, oh, here I am. And I could feel the shift here. Even with all the nervous butterflies. I mean I think that the nervous butterflies in the anticipation is more about the other people that are coming to the retreat and how am I going to interact with them rather than actually being in the place itself. You know, cause sort of that subtext of the land and then there's the more superficial stuff of the human condition stuff. And so I feel I could resonate with the peace of the land and certainly now, I don't know if I had this insight back then, but then having that translate into, I don't actually have to be anything special here.

M: Did you go alone or with somebody or ?

T: I can't even remember all the times, honestly. I've usually gone with someone. So I went with someone, I went by myself and met someone there for a silent retreat. I went with someone to my yoga therapy training. I've gone with someone for another retreat, to a Mt Madonna event. I've gone with my teachers to Mt Madonna too. I've gone to a new year's retreats with people and also by myself. So yeah. All kinds of different.

M: Did you journey by plane?

T: I take a plane and then I drive or get picked up.

M: How long is that journey from the airport?

- T: It's about an hour from the airport to gradually, if you arrive into a big city airport, you're kind of gradually getting more and more secluded as you go. You know, it's interesting, what you brought up earlier about when is it that you start to withdraw the senses, you know, of going and I think that I, and it's the same when we practice yoga. Like when is it that you start to practice, you know, is it all the time? So I'd say now for me, it's all the time. Back then it might be when I like, book, my ticket, I'm like, Oh, I'm going there and start preparing somehow mentally for the journey, you know? And so it means getting all your stuff in order, which is kind of a corralling of things that you need to take with you. So your mind is occupied with this journey, you know, at least for me.
- T: So all of the rest of the stuff of the day, it sort of falls away a little bit in preparation for this beautiful thing, you know? So I would say now for me it's just everything all the time and even gets a little bit deeper when I know I'm going to go up there and I'm so excited to go up there and see the place. And there's a constant current running through in relation to that. And then there's the physical, the formal practice of Pratyahara where you actually start to withdraw your senses, on purpose.
- M: So arriving to the property... you then journey to check in at your accommodation and then?
- T: So you step onto the land, you go register, you get your room number and you get set up and then you're given a schedule of events. And so, you make sure that, you know where all the places are that you, you know, there's events being held on different parts of the land, you know, where they're held, what time they're held. You got to give yourself enough time, then you get yourself set up and get comfortable in your room and then you begin.
- M: Very technical question... do you park, close to where you stay or do you park far away and?
- T: If I am being picked up then I don't have a car and a lot of people come without a vehicle. There has been times where I've driven up though. And so, they have some parking spaces. If a lot of people are coming up then they will tell you where you have to park or where you can't park or that you should be making arrangements to carpool just because parking's limited.
- M: So scale, length of retreat typically and size of group, which may be always different?
- T: Yeah, different, different, different, different, different. So, you know, I've been to five day retreats there. I've been to two weeks of training there for Yoga therapy. People come for Karma yoga up there, yoga service and study for three months. So it's not been my experience but, for me probably two weeks there and then another two weeks at Kripalu. So for me that was a month retreat.
- M: Was there a difference to how you felt like the property or the space worked for you for a short amount of time versus a long amount of time?
- T: Yeah, sure. Because when you're there for longer, you just feel more comfortable. You know, you just feel like you live there.
- M: So it still worked for you for longer? You didn't feel like, this is too long to stay somewhere?
- T: Well, here's the thing. So I didn't also put India there, right. Because I've also been on retreat in India at two different locations. And so depending on where I am, if it was really more rural, then two weeks can feel like a long time because it's just tiring after two weeks to have a bucket bath every day. You know, and it's tiring to not be able to use water to brush your teeth. But it's not the case with these places because there's no hardship.
- M: And the size of the groups normally?
- T: My yoga therapy training was 40 people and maybe even more than that, maybe even 50 people. And the five day of the retreat was maybe 300 people. So it depends on...
- M: How does that affect your experience?
- T: Well you're not talking to each other. So that's one good thing. The 300 was silent.

- M: So that definitely makes sense why you're splitting the groups. With the 40 people did they split it as much?
- T: No because it's just a YTT. So we're all in the same room. We're all practicing they don't split the groups up in terms of asana practice, everyone practices the same thing.
- M: Was there a size of group that you preferred?
- T: Well, I prefer smaller group. It's more personal. And certainly if you're on a teacher training you're really interacting a lot with people and you're sharing a lot. And there's a different kind of camaraderie that is created because we're really kind of going through a fire in that way. You know, we're also learning a lot about ourselves through this process of learning how to teach.
- M: Just skipping to Kripalu, what's the typical retreat, size of group there?
- T: They do multiple groups. So I've been to one with 30 people, I've been to one with 70 people. All over the place. I've been to one where there's in one room, asana room, where there's a hundred people. So yeah, there's something powerful about that too. But I also, I like a moderate size of people.
- M: So the 70 acres or whatever we're estimating at Mount Madonna, did that seem manageable or overwhelming?
- T: It's not overwhelming, it's quite beautiful because there's all different kinds of trails that you can take, different lengths of times.
- M: And you mentioned Kripalu was a huge building, did that seem manageable still or overwhelming?
- T: It's manageable once you get the lay of the land. Plus they have beautiful grounds also and they have trails and if you walk across the road you can get to a lake. So there's that too, it seems mostly manageable. I mean, when you're on a training and things happen pretty back to back. You know, you're moving, we're doing this theory class, now we're doing this, we're having this asana, now we're doing this. And then we have lunch and we have an hour for lunch. And so it's like, how do I get outside and eat my lunch and get outside and then back into class, right. It's a training, which isn't a retreat, but at the same time it is a retreat because you're not in your, you know, if you look at the word, you know really what the word retreating means, pulling yourself out of your regular routines. It's definitely doing that in all cases, but it's not necessarily a retreat where, you know, you're kicking back and stay in bed. No, you have to be there.
- M: So spirit of place. This might be hard to really pinpoint. What did you feel were the sacred magic or special elements of the retreat or the property?
- T: Well, Mount Madonna is just easy because the property is just infused with the energy of the teacher. So for me, that's the magic of that place. And I mean he's, you know, all his imprint is all over the land. You know, he'd build rock walls, the same rock walls you see at salt spring, very similar at Mount Madonna. And so he's all over the place there. And so the integrity of the teacher has a lot to do with how I feel the sacredness or the magic of the place. I don't feel the same way when I go to Kripalu, it's beautiful, but I don't feel the same connection, or the sacredness of the land itself that I do at salt spring or that I would at Mount Madonna.
- T: The Bahamas, you know, they're very classical and it's at the beach. And so, the magic of that place is just, you're in nature the whole time, you know, when you're practicing in the morning and you hear the morning doves, and so there's something, so beautiful about that.
- T: There's something different about Kripalu because they are also in the middle of nature, but because it's not as rich a history maybe. I mean Swami Kripalu was their teacher and he was there for a time and then when he left his body then Amrit Desai came in and then there was a whole scandal with Amrit Desai. And so, I think that shapes the land, you know, and now there's a bunch of his students who have got it up and running as a very viable retreat center. So, they're all practicing for sure. But

they're all western. And I think a large part of what they do is also to make money. And that creates a different energetic quality about it.

T: And I'm not saying that Mount Madonna or salt spring also isn't concerned with revenue because they are, because they have to be, that thing doesn't run by itself. But the quality of how it's done and the size of the centres don't allow for that. Plus they are community people who've been living together since the 70s, right. For 40 years. So I mean, it doesn't come without its problems.

M: Is Sivananda like that as well? There's a community there or ?

T: Yeah. They do have a community of people who live there and they're very serious. So, you know, when I go onto their land, it's beautiful because it's tropical and I feel, oh, Yay, I'm here again. But I don't feel warm and fuzzy when I go there from the people who live there and run the center. Some of them, you know, the young kids who are doing the reception, they're all very lovely, but some of the Brahmacharias, they're hard. They're there to practice and it's not warm and fuzzy.

T: So it's different than Mount Madonna. It's different than salt spring center. Sure. And even different than Kripalu, you know, to a large degree. So just in terms of when I think sacred or special elements, actually the elements are what make it special, the elements of nature, make it special, make it magical. And then the teachings make it, you know, make it rich and magical. I don't think that you can have one without the other.

M: I am almost going to skip this one. How did you feel a part of a larger community at mount madonna and yeah, we've already talked about that?

T: Well at Kripalu I didn't feel like a part of the community unless I was in the training. Then I feel a part of that training community, but I don't feel a part of Kripalu community because I'm not. And at Sivananda, I've been there five times, but I don't feel I've become part of their community, but I feel like I'm a part of the group that I'm with.

M: And do you get a sense of something greater at both of those? Do you feel connected to the bigger picture?

T: Yeah. In all cases I do. I mean, yes, I do. It's partly because of what I'm doing, partly because of the teachings, partly because of the grace of the teacher. And I seek that out. You know, I seek out connection. I want to know how we're connected. I hold a deep faith that somehow we're connected. Like, we're all connected in this room and, I seek that out.

M: So last one of the spirit of place, or authenticity. This is something I've given a lot of thought to as I go through this journey. I guess if we could think about each of the three main ones that we've talked about, did each of them feel authentic or did some feel less authentic?

T: They all felt... Mount Madonna for sure feels authentic because that community is about finding peace. That's it. So they are also regular people, you know, and so going through a regular human experience. So, Kripalu, I'm not sure that I can speak to it as a whole organization, but certainly the teachers that I've experienced there feels very authentic.

M: I'm more thinking about the space.

T: I would say. Yeah. They all authentic in what they were offering. I guess if, I'm just trying to understand your question. If I were in a place where the space was really beautiful and very yoga-like, looking very yoga-like, but they were actually drinking and having raves on the land that would feel inauthentic to me. And so all of the places that I've been to feel authentic in the sense you're not allowed to bring alcohol or drugs onto the property unless they're prescription. You get kicked off the land in The Bahamas if you bring alcohol onto the land. I know situations where there have been high teachers there who have been tripping and they kicked them off. Same thing I think with Kripalu.

- T: I think what makes it genuine is that the people who are going there are going there for something, you know? So short answer is yes.
- M: And that is exactly what I'm getting at. You can build a space, you know, token yoga stuff, shrines and make it look yoga-ey but does it feel authentic? Because sometimes, it doesn't, it feels tacked on. It feels trendy. So that is something that I have been thinking about.
- T: Well, I mean, I think that's really important for you to look at. You know, you can put a statue of the Buddha in, but it doesn't mean it's a spiritual place. So I'd say for sure Mount Madonna and that has a lot to do with the teacher, you know, and the students that have been following the teacher.
- T: Absolutely for The Bahamas because, you know, again, it's based on very classical teachings of Swami Sivananda and they don't mess around. It feels very authentic. Kripalu, same thing, even though they've had scandal. I think that Swami Kripalu himself was a very classical teacher in his offerings and had the fullness of the teachings behind him. And that's still there, although it's being offered more in a modern context. Like it's bigger and it's more like a retreat center, not like an ashram, you know. So there's a little bit of a difference. Like the Bahamas is an ashram, Mount Madonna I would say is pretty close to an ashram. And then I guess the other one that I went to in Vancouver, I would say that was authentic in her offering, but it also that's probably the place I felt the least connected. But again, some people felt very connected there. I just didn't.
- M: With the next question, what I'd like you to do is place the previously discussed elements, so location, setting, amenities, types of classes, in order of importance to your experience. So what impact they had on your experience.
- M: I'm thinking about something that you went to more as a student retreat, what worked for you about the retreat?
- T: Well the place worked definitely where it was located, I would probably, because it was at Mount Madonna. So the location was probably a big draw. I think the way that it was organized was a big draw so that it was very well organized just in terms of the scheduling, the accommodation, the expectations of students. So, you know, lots of preparation. In order to get us prepared for the retreat so that once we were there, then we had another kind of orientation about what the retreat would look like and what was expected of us, how much practice there was going to be, it was a silent retreat after this time... You know, what that silence meant. So organization I think was really valuable to the retreat. And the fact it was silent and the fact it was with a specific teacher. You know, a very respected, highly skilled zen Buddhist teacher or teacher on awakening. I mean, I think that's a lot - location organization, teacher.
- M: What challenged you about this retreat or could have been better?
- T: Could have been better? My attitude. I am a feisty one. It was challenging, it was silent. So, it brings up a lot of stuff. So I don't think anything could be better. I think my attitude could have been, you know, and of course as you go through the retreat, your attitude changes. It gets a little bit softer.
- M: Was there anything that challenged you about the retreat itself or the functionality of things?
- T: So nothing particular about the space, but you know what was challenging actually. So in the silent retreat, going into the common room and having a meal with a bunch of people who are talking. Because it was also the regular community there, plus our group. So that was a challenge actually. And I knew a lot of the people so hard not to interact with the people and how to have them respect that we were actually doing this other thing. So I guess integrating a silent retreat with the regular community at meals was challenged.
- M: I'm thinking about the design of the retreat setting. Was the building repurposed or was it built specifically to function as this place?



- T: We were in the conference center, which was purposely built for rentals. So basically, they have all of the rooms there, they have all the washroom facilities, they have a big space to teach in and then they have a tea bar. I mean you could essentially have everything in that so you wouldn't have to go into another room for food. You could essentially have food catered into that building.
- M: The community center that you mentioned, was that built purposefully?
- T: Yeah. Purpose built. The cabins obviously. And it was purpose built because they actually had a fire. So the original building was burnt down and so they had to rebuild. Might not have chosen to do that. They may not have.
- M: And does it always function as a retreat center or other types of events are hosted there?
- T: They have had weddings there, but they're more like weddings for the community, you know, Indian, sort of traditional Indian based weddings. So I think that they're rented out for all kinds of reasons, but any kind of spiritually sort of, I can't think of anything else that I know that they've been rented out for other than practice mindfulness. Honestly, I can't answer that question with a lot of knowledge. They may, I know it to be rented out though mostly for spiritually based trainings and retreats.
- M: Is there anything you would like to add about your experiences in terms of the spaces, the buildings, the functionality that we didn't cover already that you think is important.
- T: I don't think so. I love retreats and I think all of the places I have been, even if they haven't been designed for the purpose, I think they all fulfill the purpose really well. And creating a context where people can really start to observe themselves in a way that they're supported in doing that. They're not so uncomfortable that that can't happen. And when it is uncomfortable, it's usually just uncomfortable, not because of the space. Individual mental discomfort rather than space discomfort.

## APPENDIX C - Water & Solar Calculations

### Rainwater:

Requirements for rainwater collection and water usage are based on the following collected data and extrapolated for use at this retreat:

#### Average non rainwater collecting household:

- household water consumption (based on 2.4 people per household)
  - 840 litres / day
  - 350 litres / person / day (CMHC, 2014)

#### Average rainwater collecting household:

- household water consumption (based on 2.4 people per household)
  - 275 - 480 litres / day (depending on efficient appliances & conserving habits)
  - 115 - 200 litres / person / day (RDN, 2012)

*Note - households monitoring rainwater usage are typically more conscious of how much water they consume.*

#### Average Hotel - Standard:

- 375-750 litres per room / day
- x 10 rooms (20 guests) = 1.35 - 2.7 million L / year (at 100% occupancy)

#### Average Hotel - Eco (35% reduction):

- 250-500 litres per room / day (Ahn & Pearce, 2013)
- x 10 rooms (20 guests) = 0.9 - 1.8 million L / year (at 100% occupancy)

*Note - hotels using eco-friendly water reduction methods may only address the issue at fixture usage, not consumption awareness.*

### Occupancy Calculations:

- Mainly 4-day retreats (1 per week) and day use during non-retreats
  - 48 weeks x 4 days = 192 days
- 4 week-long retreats / year
  - 4 x 7 = 28 days
- 192 + 28 = 220 / 365 = 60% occupancy

**Water use - Galiano Island Retreat:**

Grey water is re-used for toilet flushing and irrigation, so harvested rain water is used only for:

- Showers
- Sinks
- Laundry
- Kitchen use (food prep and dishwasher)

**Water consumption - Galiano Island Retreat:**

Assume 200L / person / day x 20 ppl = 4000L / day

= 1,460,000L / year x 60% occupancy = **876,000 L / year**

*Note - 200 litres per day is a safe overestimate based on ultra low-flow fixtures and consumption awareness signage throughout property.*

**Water collection:**

1,000,000 litres = 1000 m<sup>3</sup> of water (RDN, 2012)

- Requires 1000m<sup>2</sup> roof catchment area

*1m<sup>2</sup> of catchment area x 1mm of rain will produce 1 litre of water  
therefore*

*Roof Catchment Area (in m<sup>2</sup>) multiplied by Annual Precipitation (in  
millimetres) equals potential water collection (in litres)*

**Roof Catchment Areas - Galiano Island Retreat:**

- Communal Roof = 745 m<sup>2</sup>
- Accommodation Roof = 285 m<sup>2</sup>
- Practice Roof = 200 m<sup>2</sup>
  - Total Roof Area = 1230 m<sup>2</sup>

**Water collection - Galiano Island Retreat:**

1230 (roof area in sq.m.) x 1100 (annual precipitation in mm)

= 1,353,000 litres potential water collection

x 77% efficiency based on site conditions

= **1,041,810 litres** actual rain water collection

*Note - actual number may vary due to monthly efficiency variability, see  
table below for forecasted rainfall collected.*

**Water storage - Galiano Island Retreat:**

Water is stored in below grade cisterns for use during dry months of April to September. More water can be collected than is needed during the wet months, so overflow rain water is redirected via a journey through the landscape and retention ponds, before gradually being absorbed into the ground.

*Note - wet months shown in italics below indicate a purposeful 75% retention of available rain water collection. The remaining 25% would be used as per above.*

Month	Indoor Usage (litre)	Precipitation (mm)	Assumed Collection Efficiency	Rainfall Collected (litre)	Month-End Storage Volume (litre)
<i>October</i>	64,000	118	80%	<i>87,084</i>	23,084
<i>November</i>	64,000	181	85%	<i>141,926</i>	101,010
<i>December</i>	64,000	165	85%	<i>129,380</i>	166,391
<i>January</i>	64,000	178	85%	<i>139,574</i>	241,965
<i>February</i>	64,000	112	85%	<i>87,822</i>	265,787
March	64,000	102	85%	106,641	308,428
April	64,000	62	65%	49,569	293,997
May	64,000	46	65%	36,777	266,774
June	91,000	44	75%	40,590	216,364
July	91,000	22	70%	18,942	144,306
August	91,000	36	70%	30,996	84,302
September	91,000	36	75%	33,210	26,512
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>876,000</b>	<b>1,100</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>902,512</b>	

## Solar:

Requirements for solar collection and energy usage are based on the following collected data and extrapolated for use at this retreat:

### Energy Use - Average BC household:

- household energy consumption (based on 2.4 people per household)
  - 900 kWh per month (BC Hydro, 2020)
  - 375 kWh / person / month OR 12.5 kWh / person / day

### Energy Use - Median Canada hotel:

- 1.37 GJ / m<sup>2</sup> / year (NRCAN, 2018)
- 380 kWh / m<sup>2</sup> / year

*Note: assuming a similar reduction in energy use to the eco-hotels referenced for water consumption, eco friendly hotel would use an average of 35% less energy, or approximately 250 kWh / m<sup>2</sup> / year.*

### Energy Use - Galiano Island Retreat:

- assuming similar energy usage to a large dwelling, rather than hotel operation (due to no commercial kitchen, swimming pool, elevator):
  - 12.5 kWh / person / day x 20 guests
  - x 365 days / year = 91,250 kWh / year
  - / 1200 sq.m = 76 kWh / m<sup>2</sup> / year

This is further refined in the energy use table below to provide a more accurate depiction (NRCAN 2018).

Appliance	Quantity	Watts	Hours per Day	Watts Hours per day
Fridge - 20cu.ft.	4	60	24	5,760
Freezer - upright	2	52	24	2,496
Oven / Stove - electric	1	1200	4	4,800
Dishwasher	2	1200	4	9,600
Coffee Machine	1	1000	8	8,000
Clothes washer	2	800	1	1,600

Clothes dryer	2	3000	1	6,000
Tankless water heater (hand sinks)	6	1500	3	27,000
Water Heater (showers/ laundry/kitchen)	10	4500	4	180,000
Desktop computer	2	200	8	3,200
LED bulb 75watt equivalent	300	15	6	27,000
<b>TOTAL watt hours / day</b>				<b>275,456</b>
<b>TOTAL kWh / year</b>				<b>100,541</b>
<b>TOTAL kWh / m2 / year</b>				<b>84</b>

*Note - the daily energy values listed here are for the most efficient units in their class and the information was obtained from the NRCAN website.*

#### **Solar panel requirements:**

- Galiano Island location - 1,050 kWh generated annually / 4 sun hours per day, annual average (source: <https://www.energyhub.org/solar-energy-maps-canada/>)
- 100,541 kWh annual use / 1,050 kWh generated annually
  - = 95.75 kW system
  - / .3 (300 watts per panel) = 320 panels

*Note - the above calculations are based on 100% occupancy, worst case scenario. Using the assumed 60% occupancy (see page 159), annual energy use would be approximately 60,000 kWh/year or 50 kWh/m2/year, significantly lower than traditional hotel use.*

#### **Solar panel sizing:**

- 300 watt panel is 1.95m x .99m or 1.93m2 (source: <https://www.energyhub.org>)
- Rounding to 2m2 for ease of calculations, 2 x 320 panels = 640m2
- Combined south oriented roof areas of communal and accommodation = 750m2

**Solar panel design:**

- Combination of transparent glazed panels for all skylight and clerestory locations
- Integrated flat panels on flat communal roofs
- Integrated sloped panels on sloped south facing accommodation roof

**Energy Reduction Measures:**

- Motion sensors in guest rooms, hallways and washrooms to turn lights off when no motion detected
- Air conditioning not required due to climate and passive ventilation strategies
- Solar hot water collectors supply in-floor radiant heating; no electric heat required

## **APPENDIX D - Final Evaluation Letters**



July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Final Evaluation: RAIC Syllabus Diploma Project

Student: Morgan Lesov

ID#: BC090023

Course: RAIC 690 A & B

Studio Location: Victoria BC

**Final Mark: Pass**

Thesis Mentors: Peter Johannknecht Architect AIBC, MRAIC & Rance Mok, Architect AIBC

Coordinator: Erica Sangster Architect AIBC, MRAIC

During the past 2 years in my role as thesis mentor for Morgan Lesov, I have observed that she has consistently demonstrated a high level of proficiency in her academic writing, including in-depth research, spelling, grammar, and correct referencing of sources.

Morgan utilized a wide range of media, incorporating charcoal or pencil sketches, clay models or 3D renderings to communicate complex design problems while exploring and developing appropriate architectural solutions.

During bi-weekly design review meetings, she skillfully expressed her various ideas and always engaged in discussions with an open mind. She remained passionate and focused both in her research and in her ideas while maintaining her positive attitude and work ethic. These qualities allowed her to successfully propel her work forward throughout the duration of the project.

For both her mid-term and final presentations, Morgan made appropriate use of her supporting material such as graphics and scripts. She fielded questions, responding truthfully and with confidence. Her arguments were concise and cohesive as well as comprehensive while remaining true to the original solution of her philosophical and artistic theme.

In her Thesis 'Retreat - Supporting Yoga through Architectural Expression', Morgan has, in my opinion, successfully synthesized foundational concepts and principles of the discipline



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A Corporate Partnership

Principals

**GREGORY DAMANT**  
Architect AIBC, LEED AP

**PETER JOHANNKNECHT**  
Architect AIBC, LEED AP  
Interior Architect AKNV Germany

of architectural design into complex problem solutions, such as stewardship of the natural environment and ethical responsibilities of the architect. I firmly believe she has gained the knowledge and skills over the past years to act as an architect, representing the best interests of the public by considering sustainability of the built environment and the application of professional judgment.

Sincerely,

CASCADIA ARCHITECTS INC.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'P. Johannknecht', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Peter Johannknecht, Architect AIBC, MRAIC  
LEED AP, certified Passive House Designer  
Architekt AKNW Germany  
Principal

July 24, 2020

Student: Morgan Lesov  
ID#: BC090023  
Course: RAIC 690 A & B  
Studio Location: Victoria BC  
Thesis Mentors: Peter Johannknecht & Rance Mok  
Coordinator: Erica Sangster

## RE: Final Evaluation – RAIC Syllabus Diploma Project

Final Mark: Pass

Having been part of Morgan's journey in her completion of the RAIC Syllabus Diploma Project, I am pleased to recommend a passing grade for her work in this course. In my assessment, she has met all the learning outcomes as outlined in the Course Guidelines. Her success was dependent upon high levels of proficiency in written, verbal, and graphic communication, and this was clearly demonstrated in the thoughtfulness of her research and writing, along with her use of different media, both digital and analog, to explore the various design questions that arose. Her presentations were always of high quality, well prepared, and professional, and she has demonstrated the ability to guide people along her lines of thinking in a comprehensive manner that allows for fruitful dialogue about her project.

Morgan tackled a thesis subject that allowed for a lot of complexity and avenues of exploration, and I believe that she has put in a lot of effort to leave no stone unturned in the exciting possibilities for linking yogic theory and practice with architectural expression. She was able to move seamlessly from theory to testing out her ideas on the design of an architectural project that fully explored the full range of aspects integral to architecture including appropriate relationships to context, sustainability, ethical practice, building technologies, materials, structure, and delight in spatial experiences. Overall, Morgan's passion and diligence in completing this course is reflected in the high quality of the finished outcome of the thesis project. Her thesis topic was also one that was personal to her, which made it a joy to witness her project development.

Sincerely,



**Rance Mok**  
ARCHITECT AIBC  
Associate, HCMA

Final Evaluation: RAIC Syllabus Diploma Project

16 July, 2020

Student: Morgan Lesov

ID#: BC090023

Course: RAIC 690 A & B

Studio Location: Victoria BC

Final Mark (recommended): Pass

Thesis Mentors: Peter Johannknecht & Rance Mok

Coordinator: Erica Sangster

In my role as coordinator, I've had the privilege of observing Morgan's development of her diploma project '*Retreat - Supporting Yoga through Architectural Expression*'. The subject of this project is deeply personal to Morgan; the work to develop her passion for yoga into a cogent architectural thesis showed maturity, discipline and integrity. The final product demonstrates Morgan's ability to infuse rigorous research and technical analysis with a holistic understanding of how we experience space. Grounding the entire process was the framework of yogic principles, the application of which to design is, in my opinion, an original contribution to architectural theory.

Morgan's disciplined research and thoughtful design exploration has demonstrated the full range of learning outcomes expected in a successful Annotated Visual Argument. She effectively self-managed a design process that was consistently based on her research findings and a thorough analysis of site, program and architectural expression. Morgan used a wide range of media to explore the design in depth and with consistent attention to the balance of technical resolution and spatial/sensory qualities. This balance was also achieved in her formal presentations, which drew upon these rich materials to effectively communicate the breadth and nuance of her design intent. The final design proposal is evidence of Morgan's maturity as a designer and contributes an original design approach that has broad relevance to architectural practice.

Sincerely,



Erica H. Sangster, Architect AIBC MRAIC  
Principal  
D'AMBROSIO architecture + urbanism