Star Observatory

National Star Observatory of Cyprus

In the village of Agridia in the Troodos Mountain Range

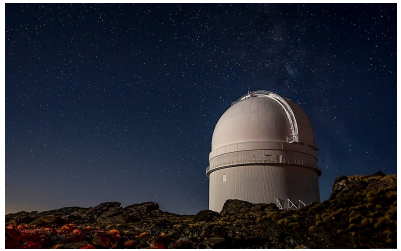
It is a forgotten village. Like many rural villages.
50 years ago it was a thriving community.
The last cafe closed in 2015.

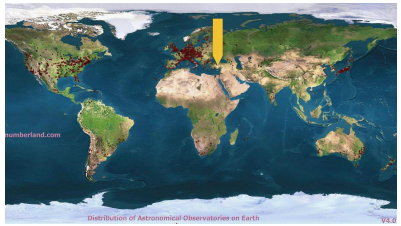
The village mayor

Silhouette of the Mayor of Agridia at the project site when the observatory was just an idea, photo taken by the architects

But there was a mayor who wanted to make a difference

But there was was a mayor who wanted to make a difference. He and the people of the village wanted to find a way to save the place they grew up in. Whilst searching for options, he took advice from a non for profit organisation who specialise in local regeneration projects.





DEMAND FOR A STAR OBSERVATORY

THE PROJECT

VILLAGE SURVIVAL

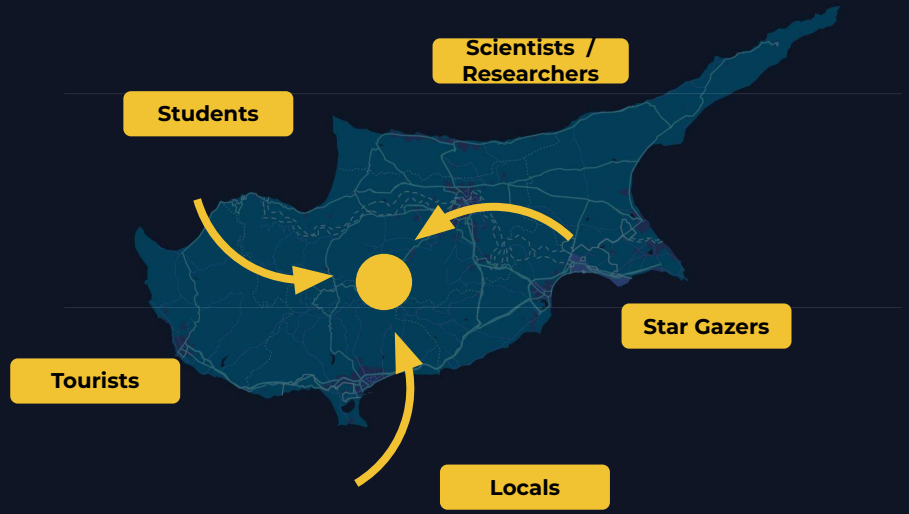
They said there was a need for a star observatory in cyprus for decades.
Cyprus is located in a region of the world with few star observatories, this would help cover the ‘gaps’ and provide more data to scientists.

Out of these needs, the demand for an observatory and the need of the village to prosper, this project emerged

He was advised to present a mature project in order to get funding for this and so he invited a team of various specialities to meet and assess the feasibility of this project. This is when we were brought in. At this point they were only talking about a simple building with two telescopes.

But we knew a simple building wouldn't actually solve their problem. This was a real opportunity of the village to change direction. If it didn't, in 20 years it would literally die out.

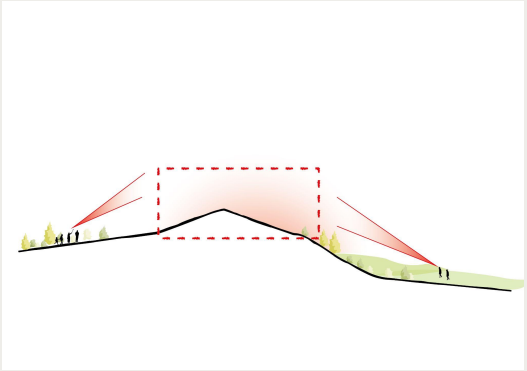
This building needed to attract people

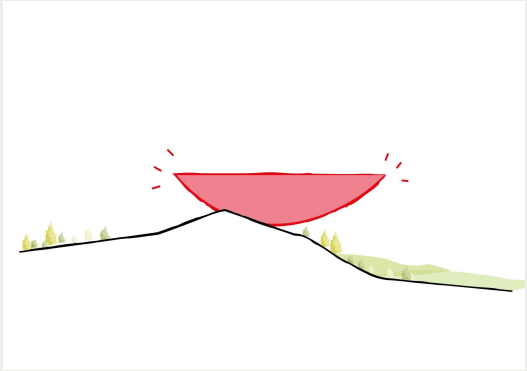


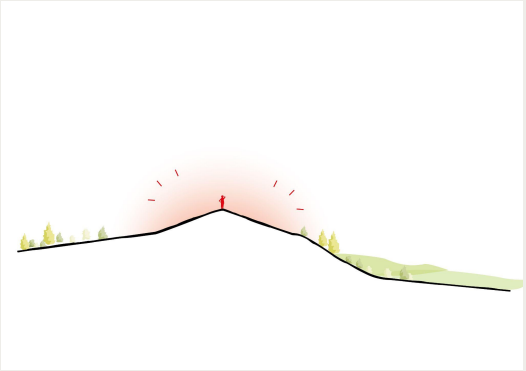
This would create demand for other services that the village would need to accommodate for. In time this would create a microeconomy, the catalyst being the star observatory.

How do you create a destination?

But as architects, how do we create a destination? We found at the time that it required three things.







1. It needed to be visible

It needs to be visible. The main road doesn't pass through the village. But our site is visible from the road. It could stir people’s curiosity when they see it from afar.

2. Distinct

It needs to be distinct.
It needed a strong identity if it is to be memorable. But sit in harmony with nature.

3. An incredible human experience

And 3, at the heart of it the human experience needs to be incredible if this is to be a destination.

The Site

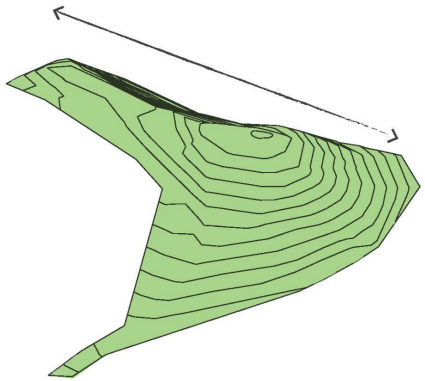
The site sits a couple hundred m away from the village.

So the site was our starting point.

Remarkable patch of land overlooking a vast valley.

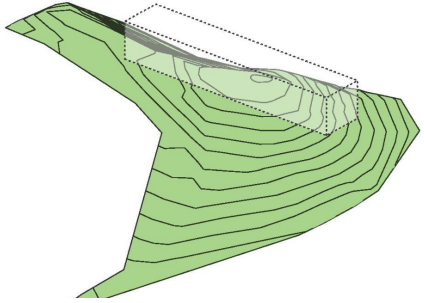
But it was long and quite awkward.
We explored different ways of dealing with it.

Design Approach

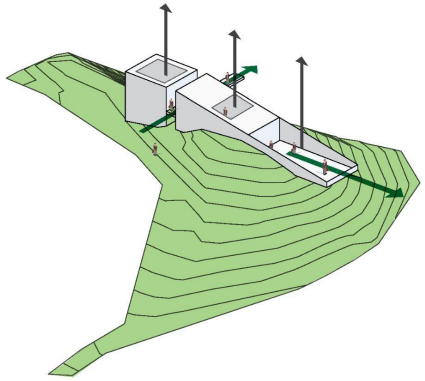


Long awkward site

Didn't want to ruin the natural forms of the mountain.
Didn't want huge excavations.

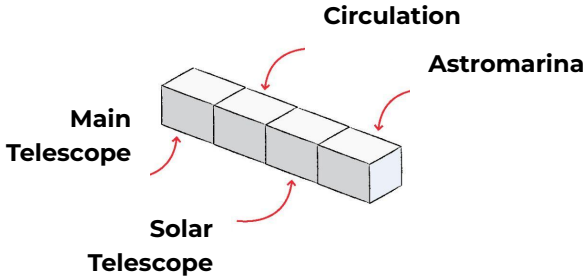


We landed upon a long linear volume.

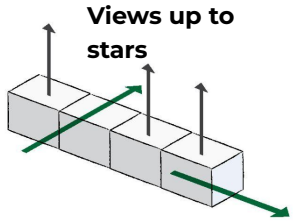


Mass sunken into soil

Finally we sunk the mass a little into the soil.

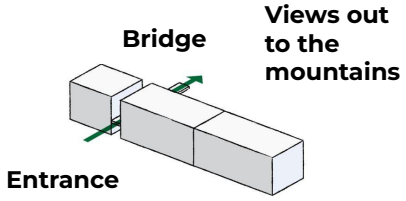


Star Gazing Functions
We dissected the main floor into 4 volumes for the key functions.

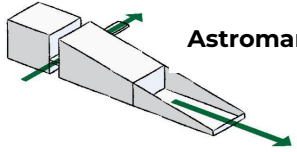


Important Views

A star observatory is a building all about looking out, so the direction of views from each function was important to determine.

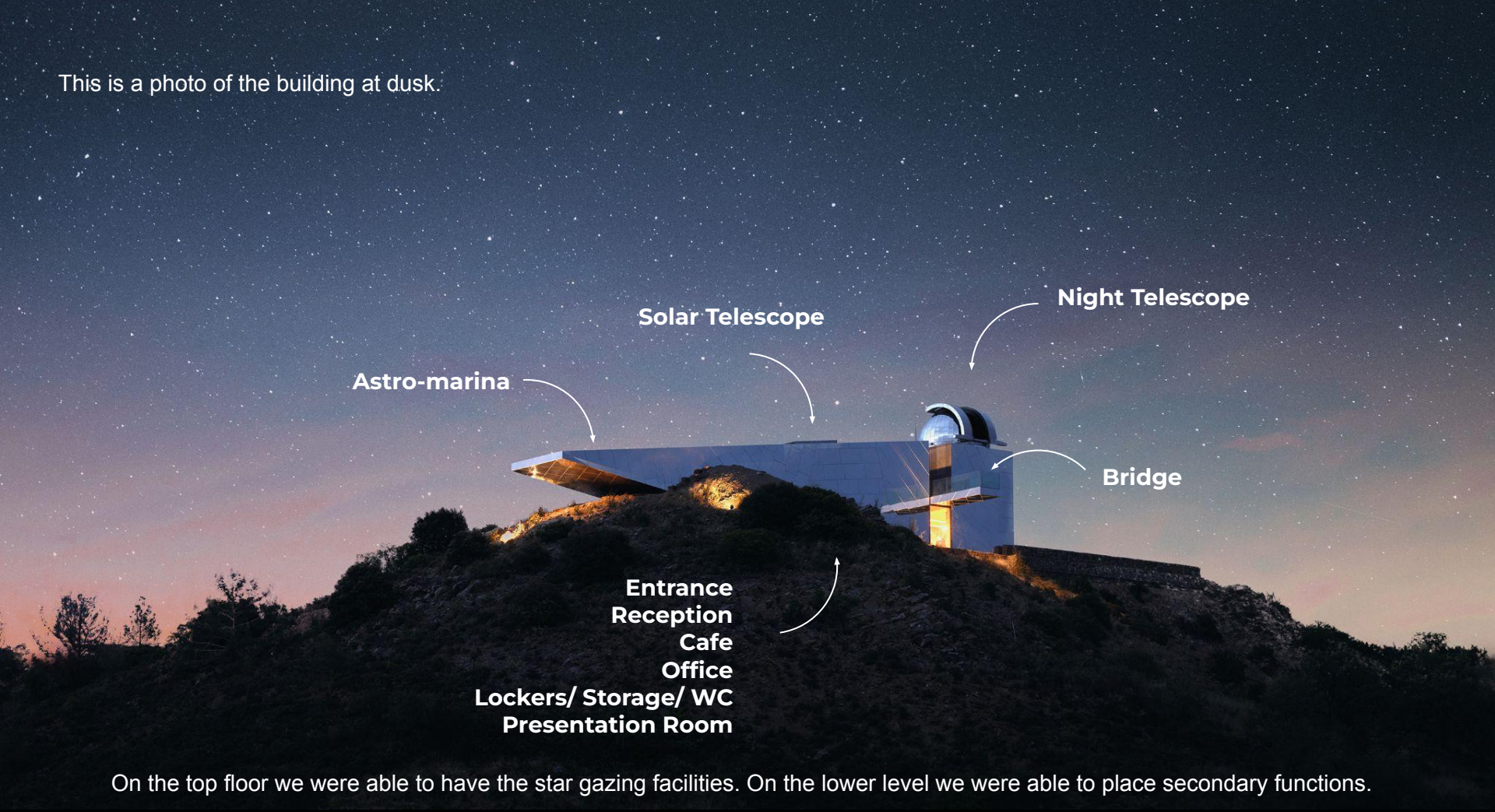


Splitting the volume
We proceeded to separate the two main telescope rooms with the opening. This marked the entrance but also created a bridge.

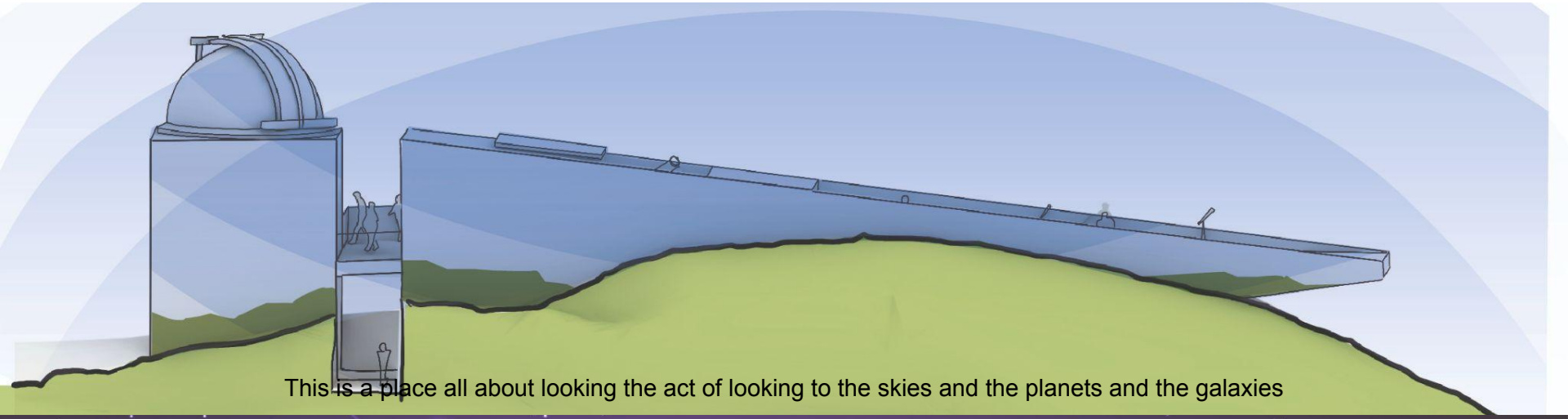


Reducing the volume
We then chamfered the second volume directionally towards the mountain range with the highest peaks. Here we placed the astromarina, a viewing platform for moveable telescopes.

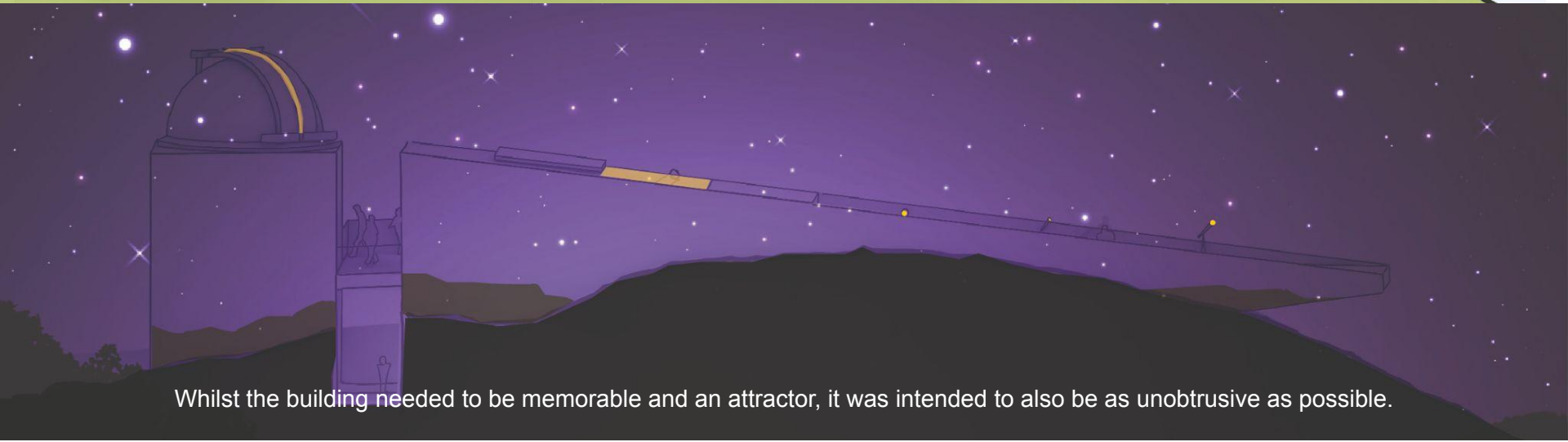
This is a photo of the building at dusk.



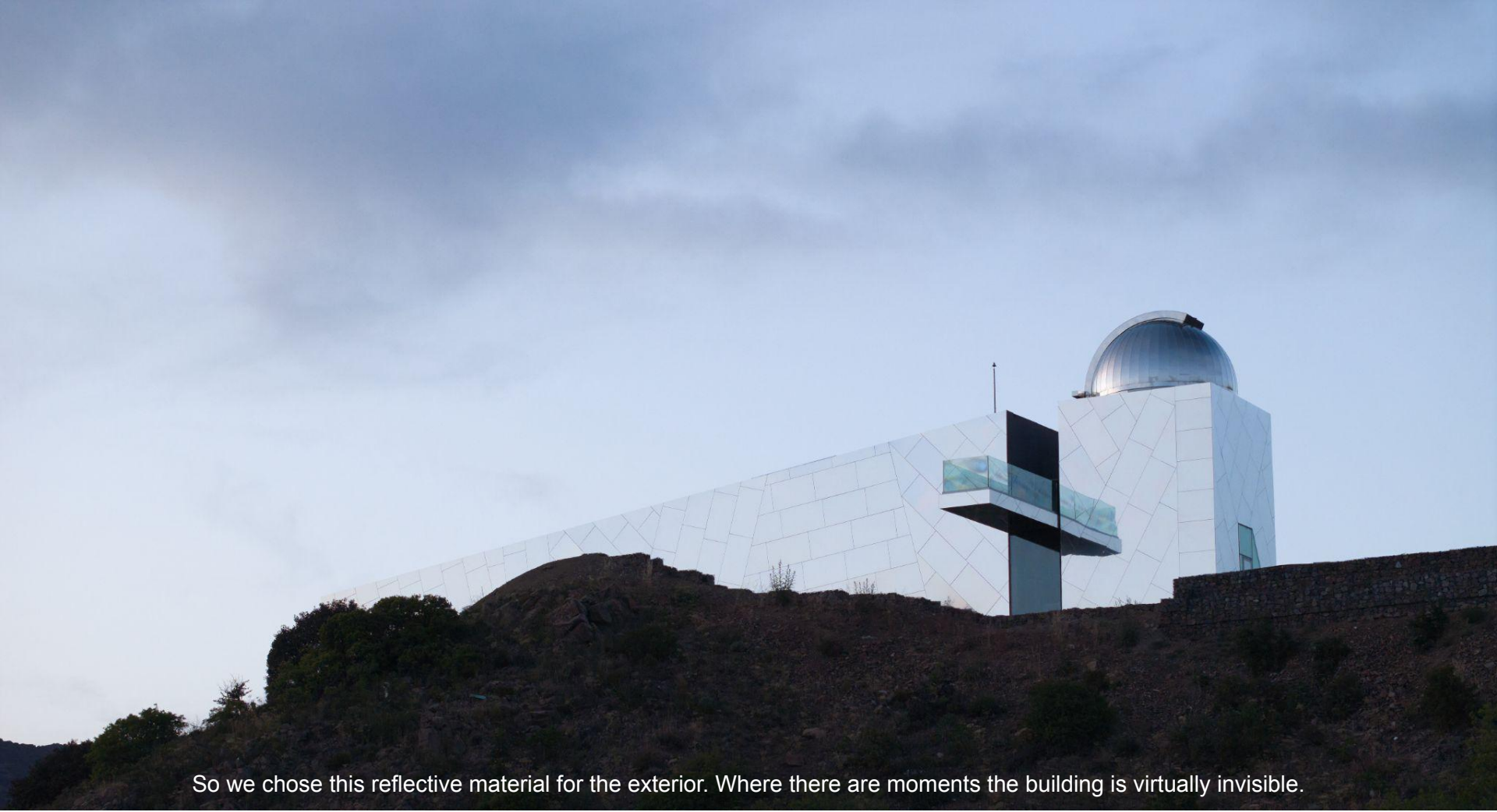
On the top floor we were able to have the star gazing facilities. On the lower level we were able to place secondary functions.



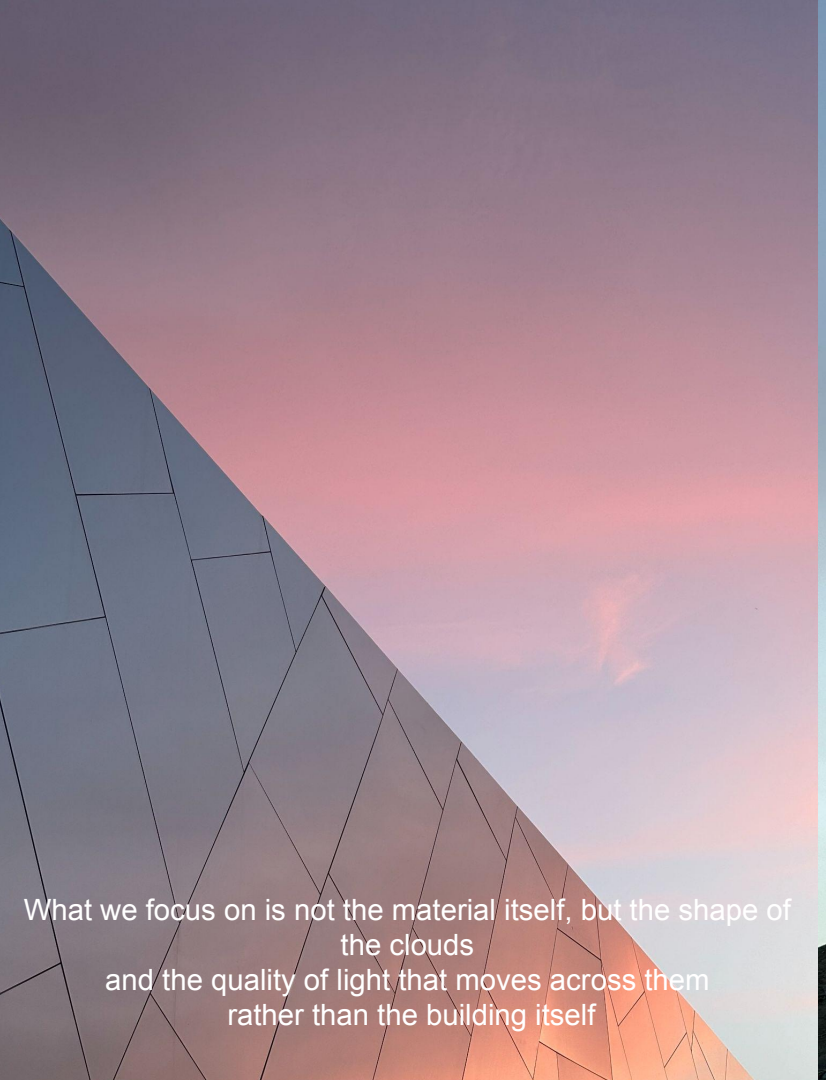
This is a place all about looking the act of looking to the skies and the planets and the galaxies

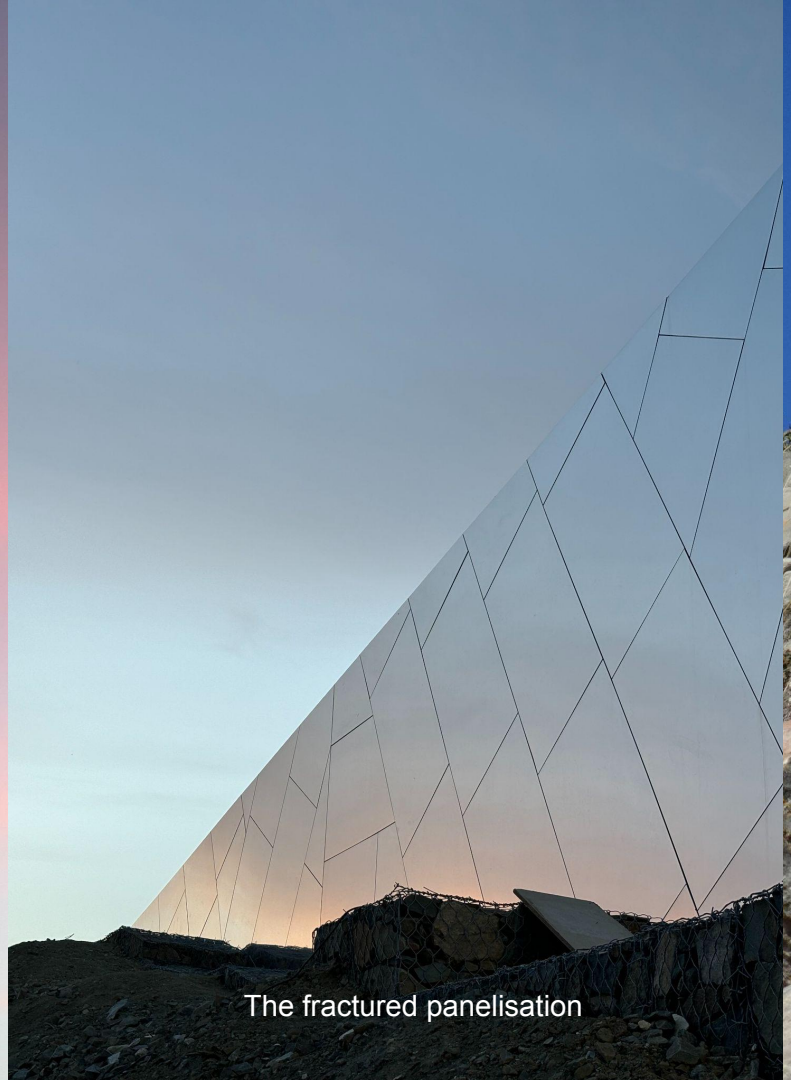


Whilst the building needed to be memorable and an attractor, it was intended to also be as unobtrusive as possible.



So we chose this reflective material for the exterior. Where there are moments the building is virtually invisible.

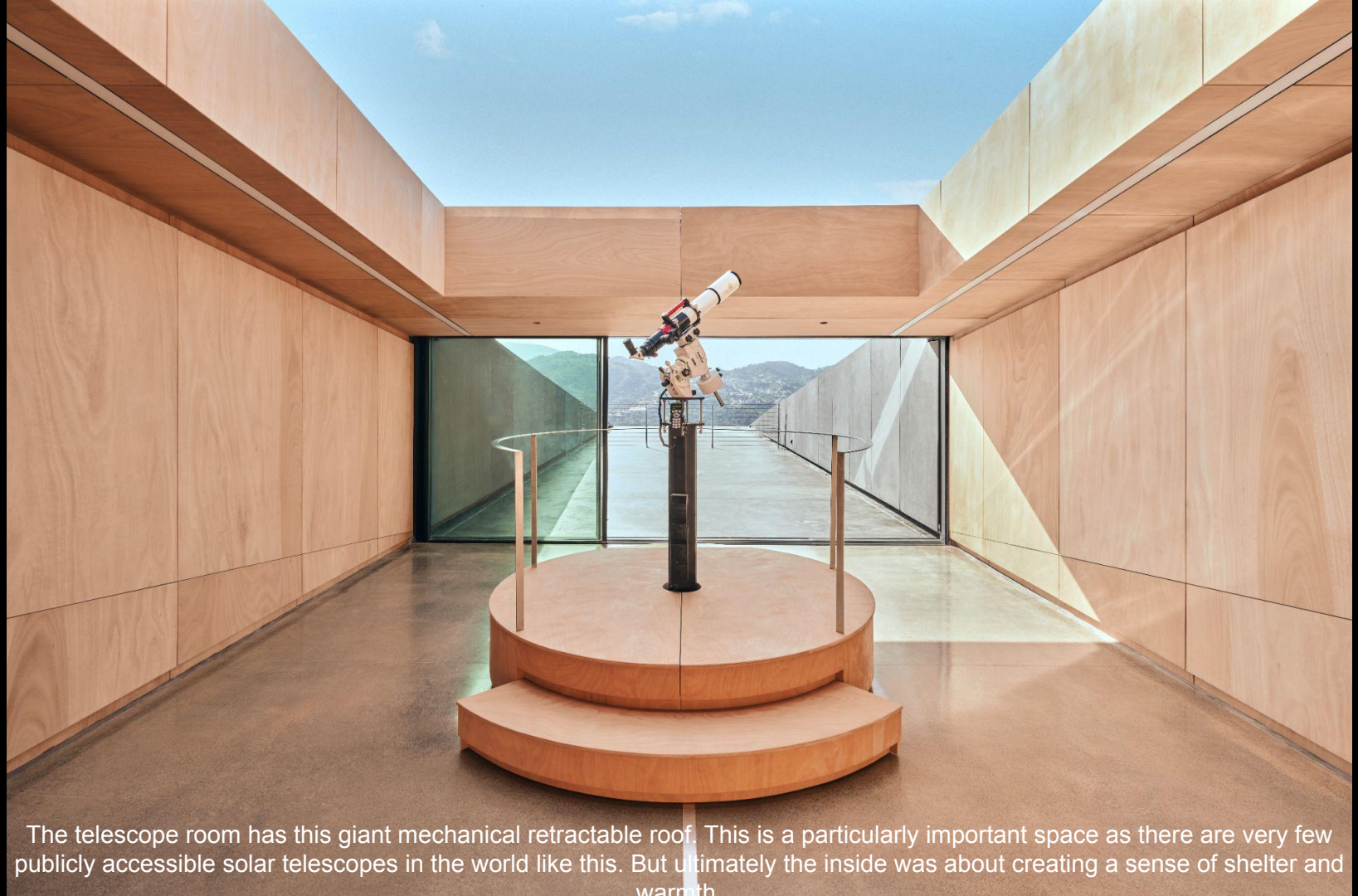

What we focus on is not the material itself, but the shape of the clouds
and the quality of light that moves across them
rather than the building itself


The fractured panelisation


Stems from the fragmented rocks of the site

On the inside the floors are these beautiful poured concrete. It offers this grounding feeling.
The walls are marine plywood, extremely durable, and warm.

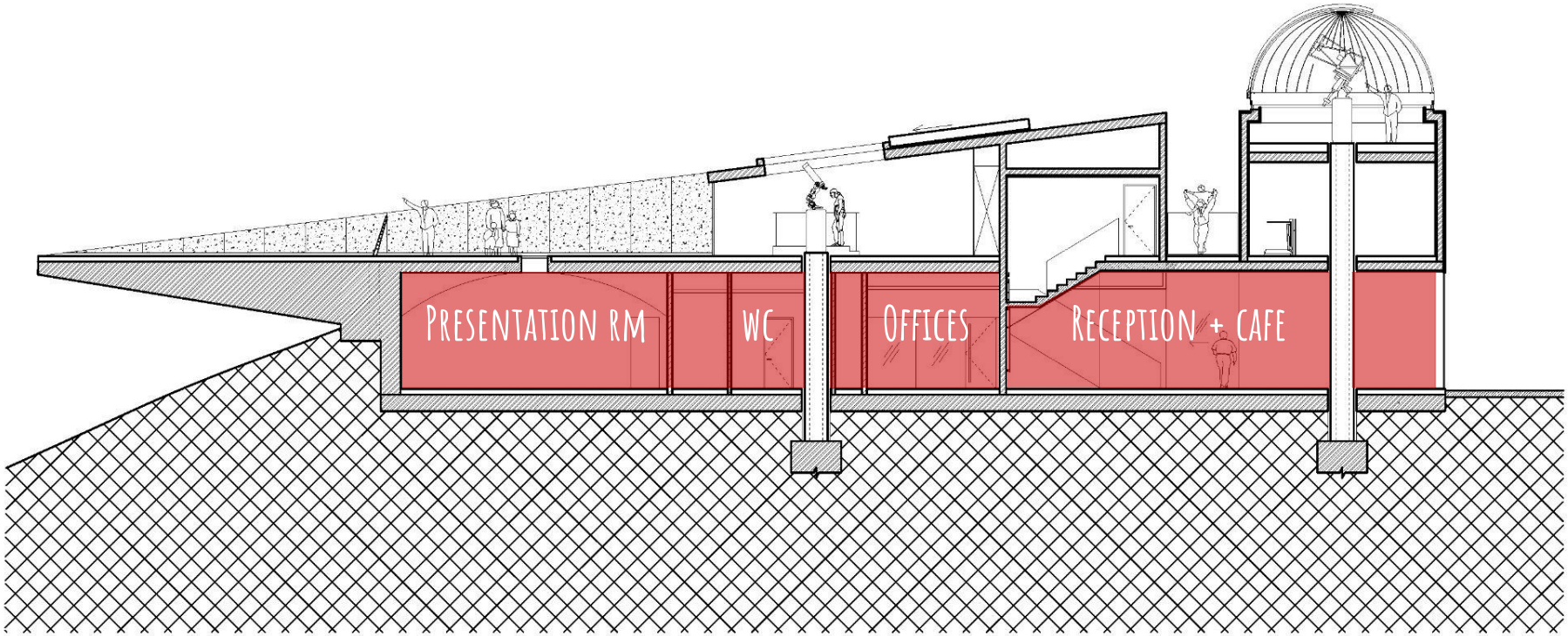
Up here is this super powerful telescope



The telescope room has this giant mechanical retractable roof. This is a particularly important space as there are very few publicly accessible solar telescopes in the world like this. But ultimately the inside was about creating a sense of shelter and warmth

The monochromatic palette internally and externally really gives you a real sense of the contrast between the two worlds.

Section



Section