

SHARE ARCHITECTURE AWARDS 2026

Birgu's Living Piazza

Piazza tal-Belt Vittoriosa



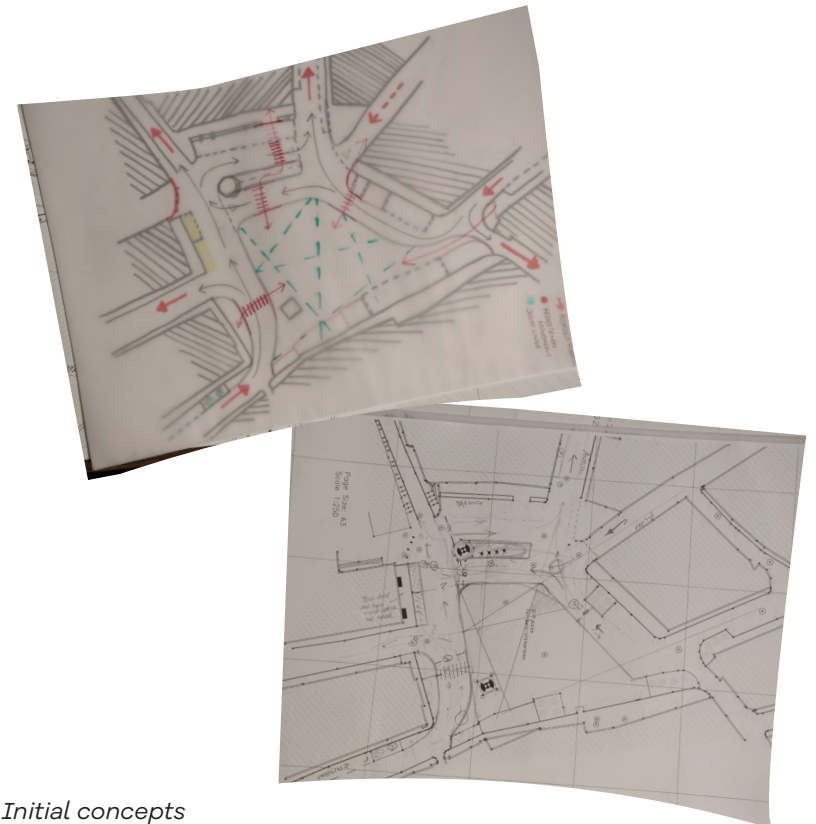
CONTEXT

The redesign of Birgu's Main Square, Pjazza tal-Belt Vittoriosa, presents a compelling example of urban design that thoughtfully reconciles contemporary spatial needs with the layered heritage of the place.

This project transformed the historic piazza, which for years had been used **as a vehicular transition and parking space**, into a pedestrian-oriented social space that prioritises human scale, accessibility, and memory.



Before picture of Pjazza tal-Belt Vittoriosa.



Initial concepts

HISTORY

The regeneration project faced challenges due to the piazza's archaeological significance. Piazza tal-Belt Vittoriosa, once the Knights of St. John's military parade ground known as Piazza d' Armi, remains central to Birgu's identity.

The Clocktower, which once stood in the centre of the piazza, was destroyed in WWII and never rebuilt, yet still remembered.

The design concept of the piazza is rooted in a sensitive integration of historic memory and contemporary urban life.

The design fosters an active dialogue between the contemporary public realm and the historical narrative of Birgu.



VITTORIOSA

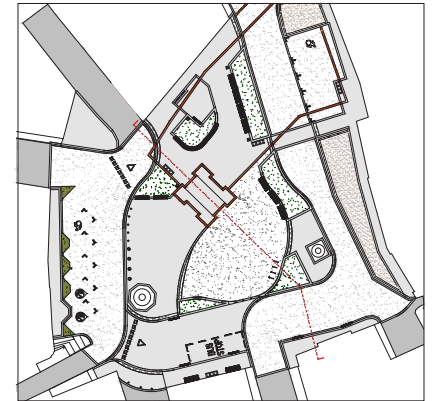
1968



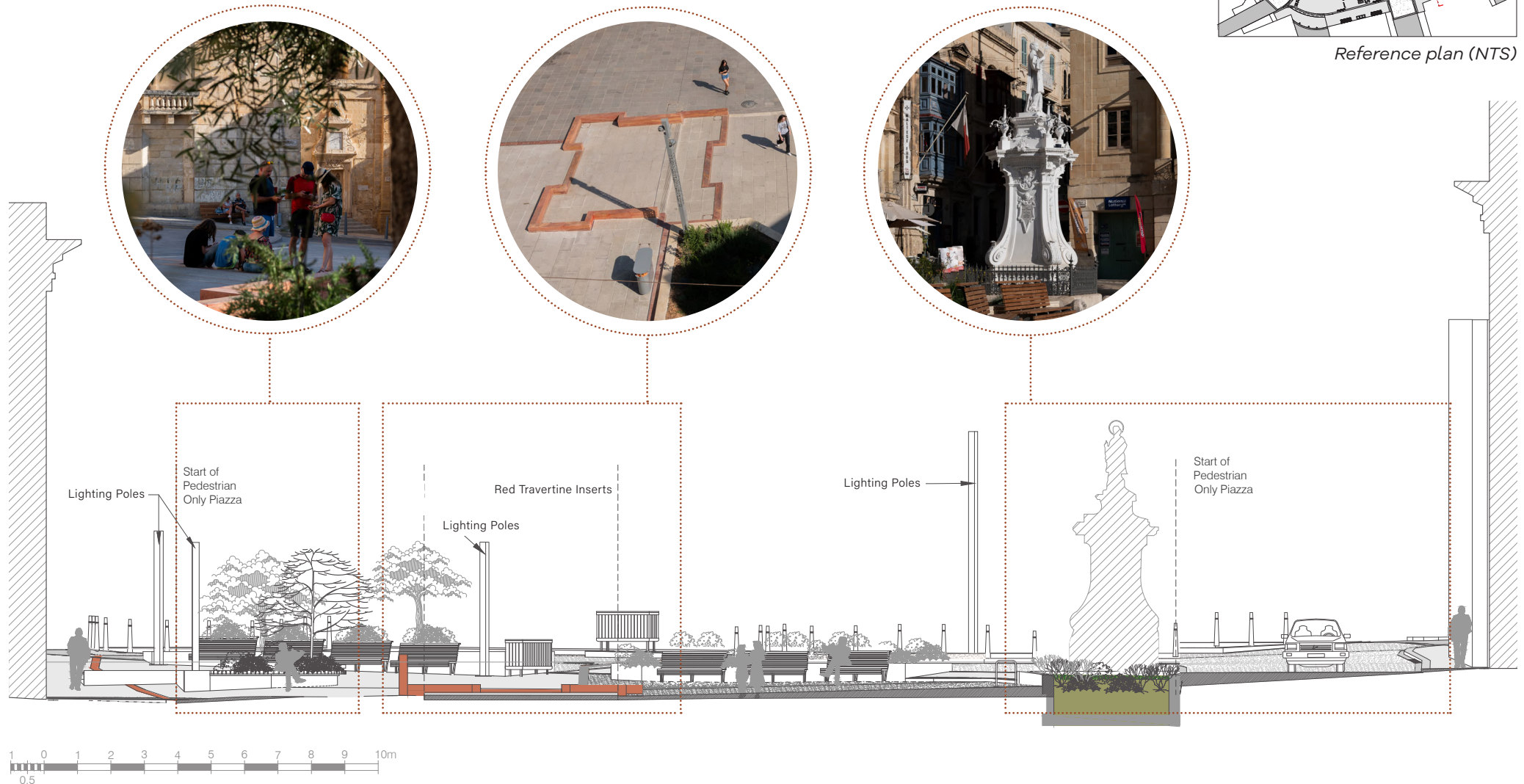
The design concept seeks to give birth to a space which fosters a vibrant public realm, **where heritage and modern urban life can coexist**, supporting social cohesion, civic participation, and a higher quality of urban life.

SECTION THROUGH PIAZZA

The different design elements across the piazza allow for **different uses by a variety of people**. From transitional spaces to seating and gathering zones, to spaces that recall historical layers, as well as space for commercial activities.



Reference plan (NTS)



ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS

One of the most challenging aspects was to carefully **uncover the underlying historical layers** while minimising disruption to daily life. This process ultimately led to a series of significant archaeological discoveries within the piazza, where some key elements were uncovered:

A

REMAINS OF A RESIDENCE

The discovery of the original tiling of a residence together with remains of a water system, made up of channels and small reservoirs.

B

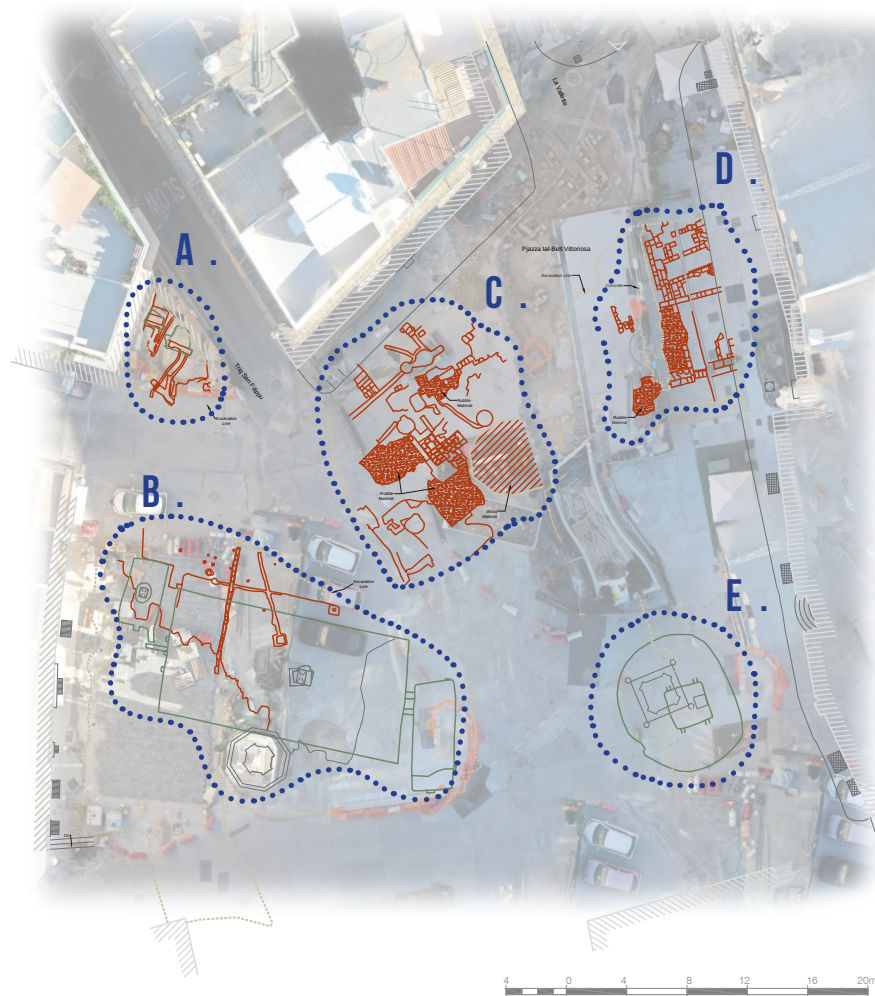
WATER CISTERN

A large public cistern located beneath the Victory Monument, measuring approximately 17m in length, 11m in width, and 7m in height, including adjoining side chambers. The reservoir has been reinstated for use.

C

CLOCK TOWER AND ADJOINING RESIDENCES

Remains of the foundations of the former clock tower and adjoining residences, which were destroyed during the Second World War.



D

ARCHES

A series of archaeological remains identified as arches that belonged to basement levels of pre-existing dwellings.

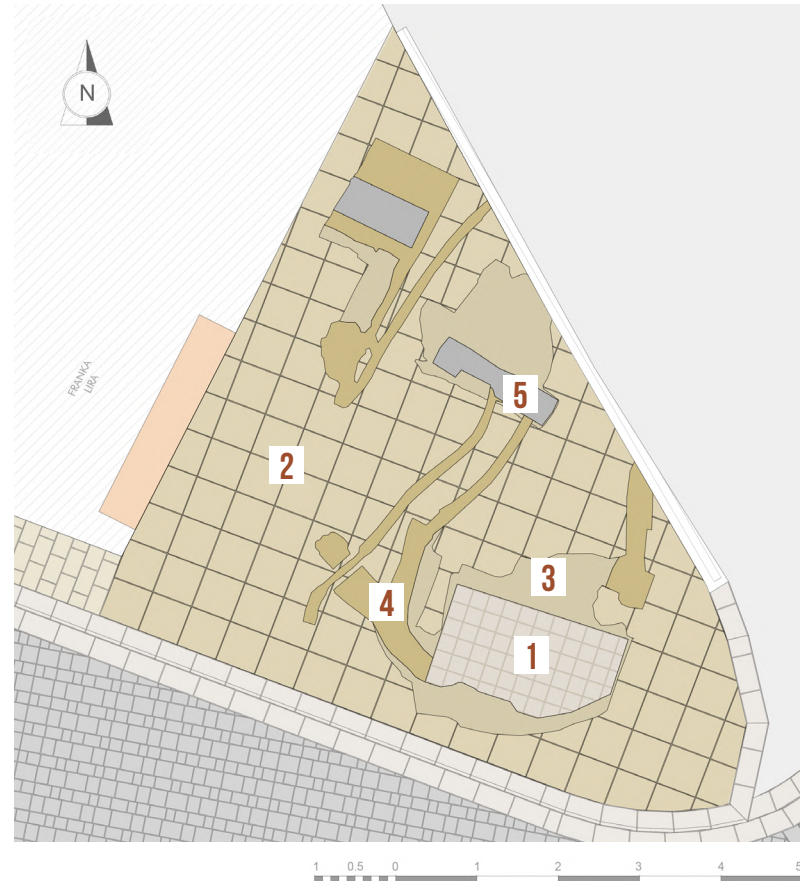
E

WATER RESERVOIR

The discovery of a bell-shaped reservoir directly underlying the statue, which was also linked with an adjoining residence.

4 0 4 8 12 16 20m

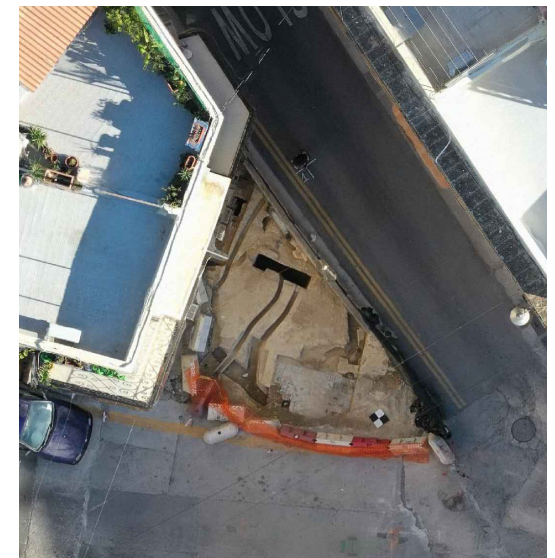
ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS



- 1. White Terrazzo tiles
(Representing unearthed tiles)
- 2. Granite Bush-Hammered Finish
- 3. Hardstone
- 4. Granite Brushed Finish
(Representing water channels)
- 5. Grey Terrazzo Finish
(Representing well openings)

Interior remains of a residence were uncovered. This archaeological find included the original tiling as well as water systems.

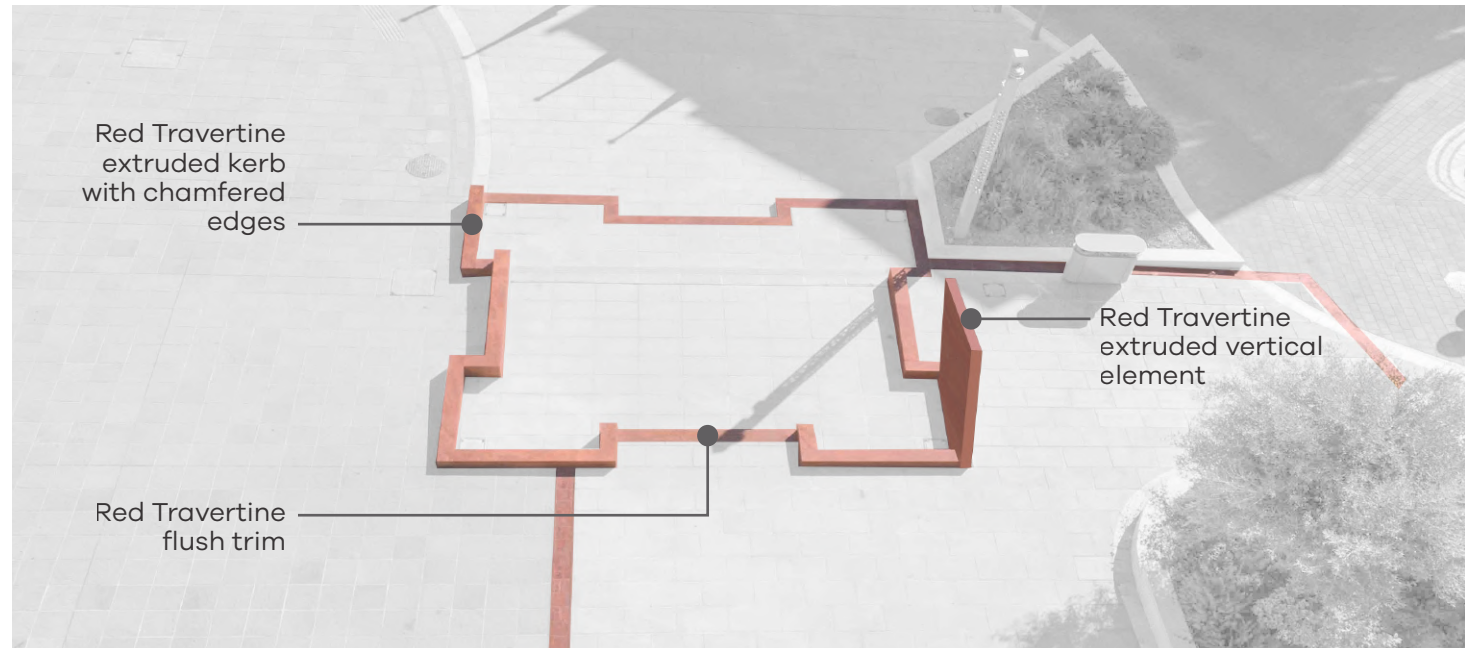
It became part of the project's intention and aim to translate this finding on the surface finish, giving the public a glimpse of what once stood, similar to the approach taken with the Clock Tower. The footprint is now sealed with materials chosen to reflect and recall the presence of what was once a residence in *Piazza tal-Belt Vittoriosa*.



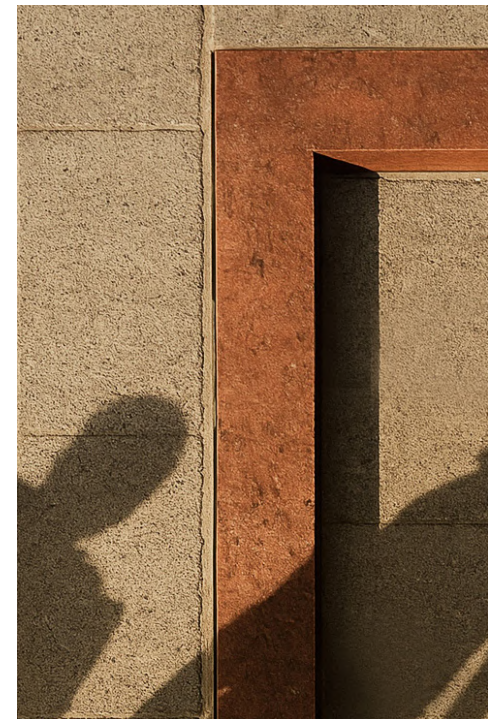
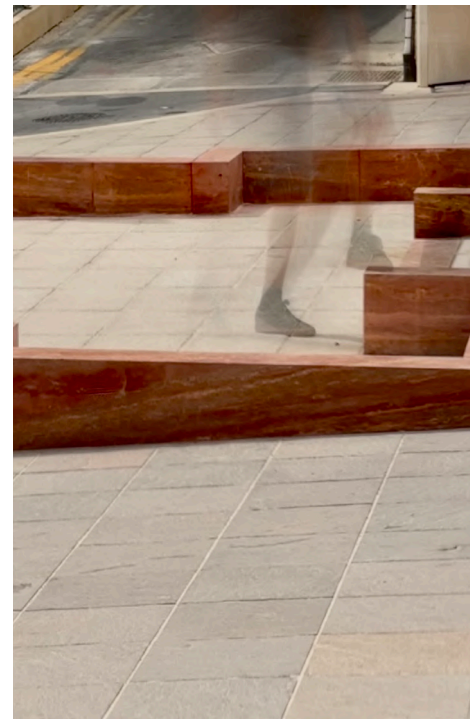
Aerial photo of exposed findings



CLOCKTOWER FOOTPRINT



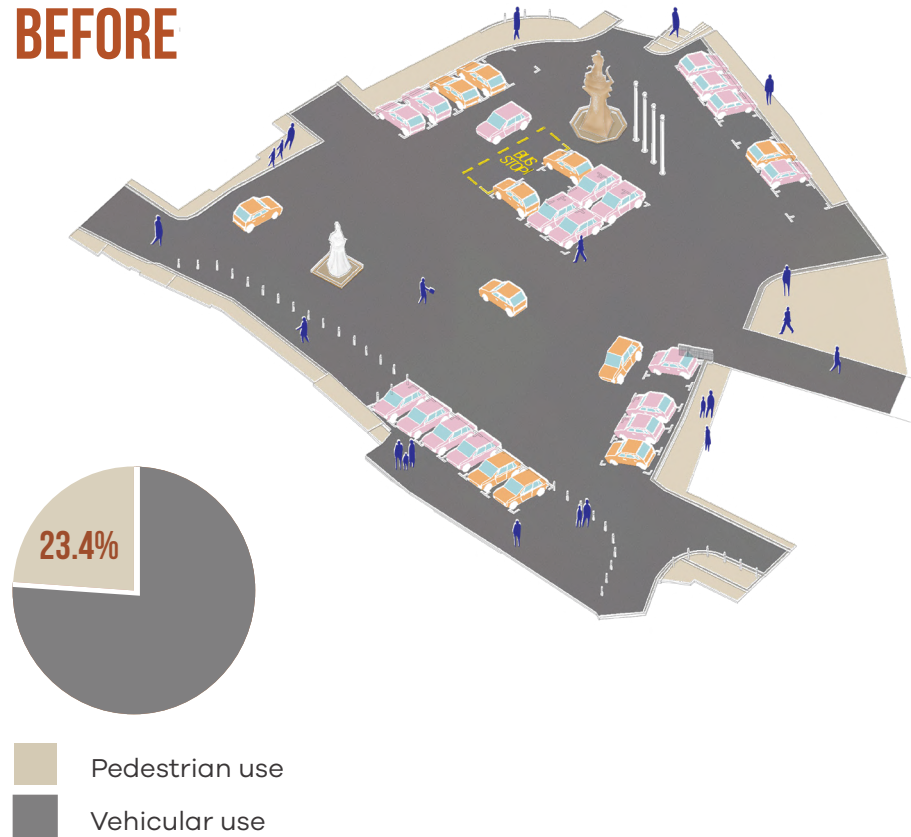
A key feature of the design is the subtle tracing of the original footprint of the former clocktower and the building adjoining it, which dominated the square for centuries. This is done through the use of a red travertine composition of trims, kerbs, and extrusions, introducing a powerful spatial and symbolic layer within this space. **This grounds the new piazza in its historical narrative, offering a quiet yet meaningful reminder of the site's past** without resorting to reconstruction. The detailing encloses a stepped gathering area, enhancing both the functional and symbolic roles of the site as a place of social engagement.



PEDESTRIANISATION

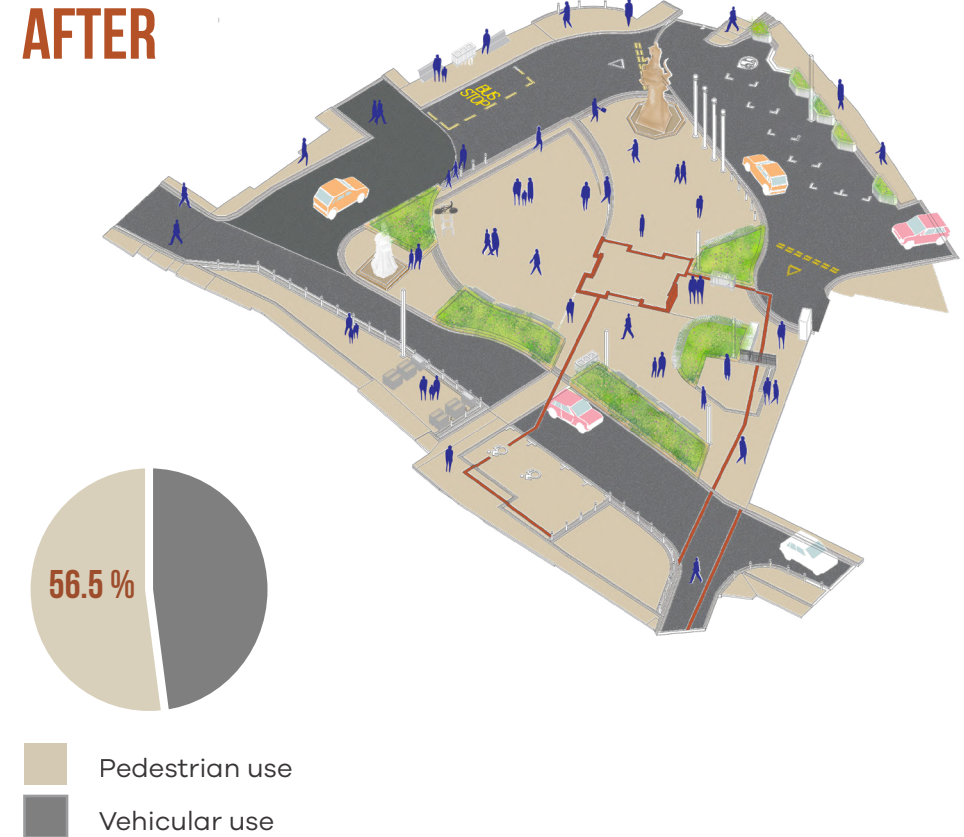
The space is **conceived as a flexible platform that can accommodate a variety of uses over time**, from everyday social interaction to traditional feasts, processions and public gatherings.

BEFORE



The square was previously dominated by vehicular traffic, with little consideration for pedestrians. Crossing was unsafe and uncomfortable due to the constant flow of vehicles and no designated areas to cross from. The absence of seating and shading made **the space uninviting, reducing its role to little more than a glorified surface parking area and a passageway** lined with shops and bars.

AFTER

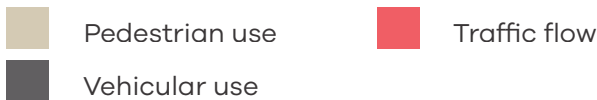
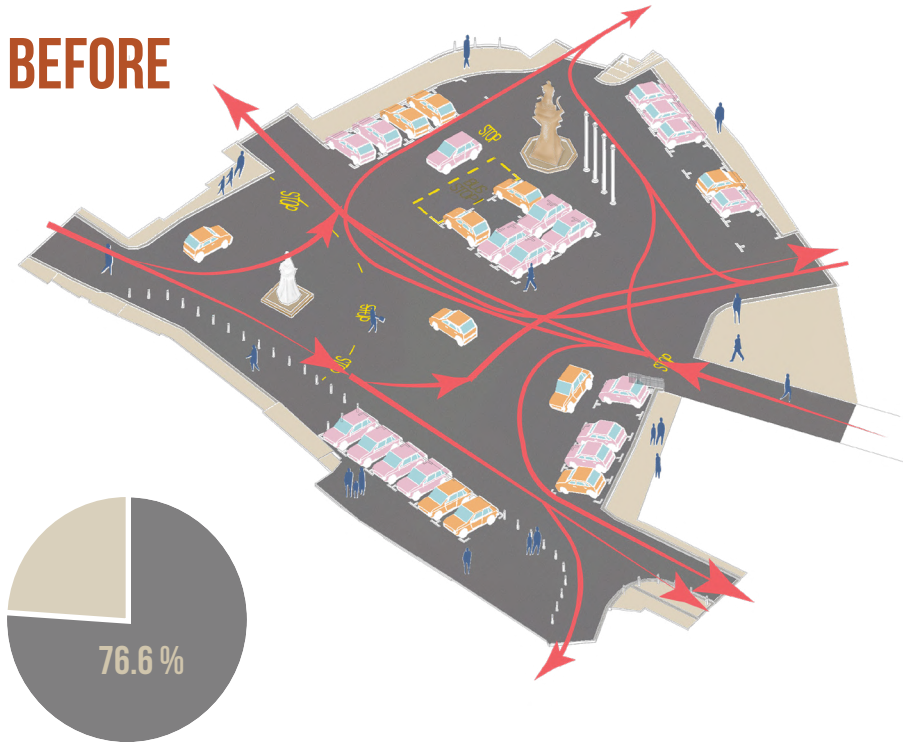


The new design transforms the square into a welcoming and primarily pedestrian-only nucleus. Shaded areas, seating and greenery provide comfort and encourage people to linger. It has become a safe, accessible and inclusive environment where **residents and visitors can meet, rest and enjoy the square as a social and cultural hub.**

URBAN TRAFFIC

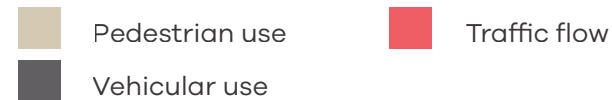
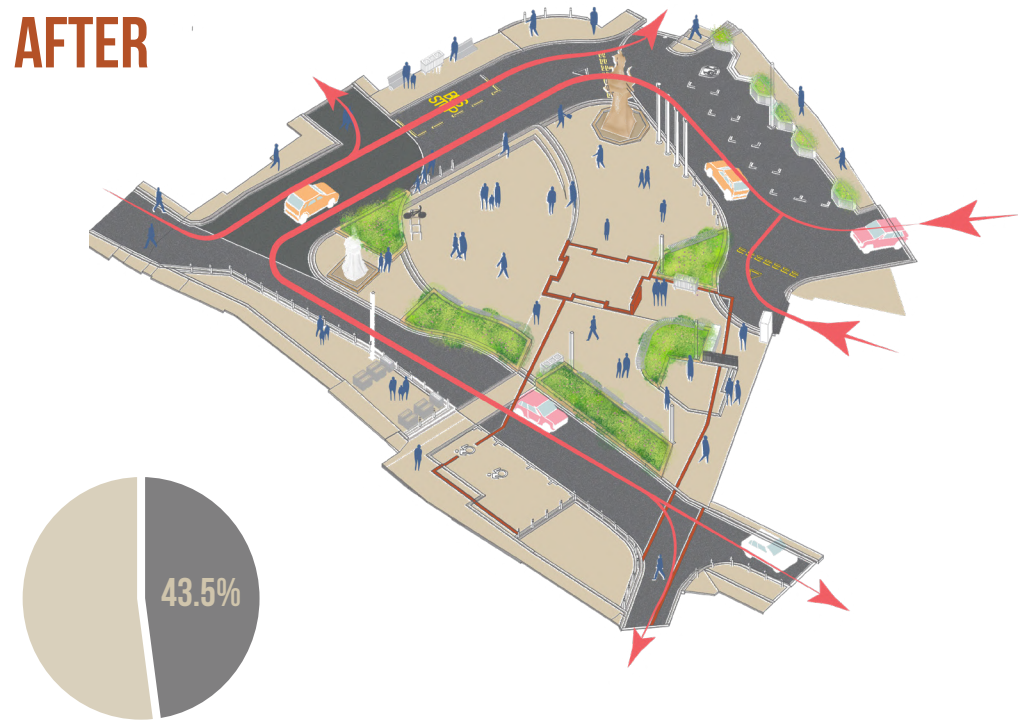
The **primary idea in this project is to reduce car dominance and to create a dedicated pedestrian-only zone** – a spatial void repurposed as a fully accessible place of congregation, rest, and interaction.

BEFORE



In the past, the piazza functioned as a busy car intersection. Vehicles crossed the space to and from several directions, and parking spaces added to the congestion. At a certain point in time, the bus stop was also inconveniently in front of the statue, exposing passengers to hazardous traffic conditions. The space was **entirely defined by vehicles, with little regard for people.**

AFTER



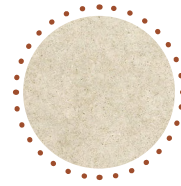
Although a limited number of car spaces have been retained, traffic routes have been redefined into clear, legible paths that prioritise safety. **Risk zones have been significantly reduced, giving children safe areas to play and residents and visitors more space to gather.** Local businesses also benefit from increased footfall, as visitors now feel more welcome to stay and enjoy the piazza.

MATERIAL PALETTE

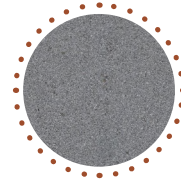
The use of natural paving materials across the piazza contributes to a harmonious environment which blends with the historic character of the site. Different materials, elements and textures are used to define different zones such as vehicular paths, different pedestrianised zones, the outdoor catering areas and soft landscaped areas.

This approach ensures continuity with the surrounding architectural context, while enhancing the tactile and aesthetic quality of the space in a way that feels both authentic and enduring.

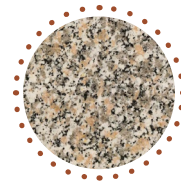
HARDSTONE



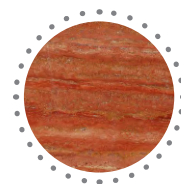
BASALT



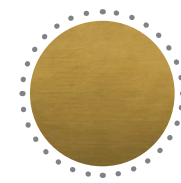
GRANITE



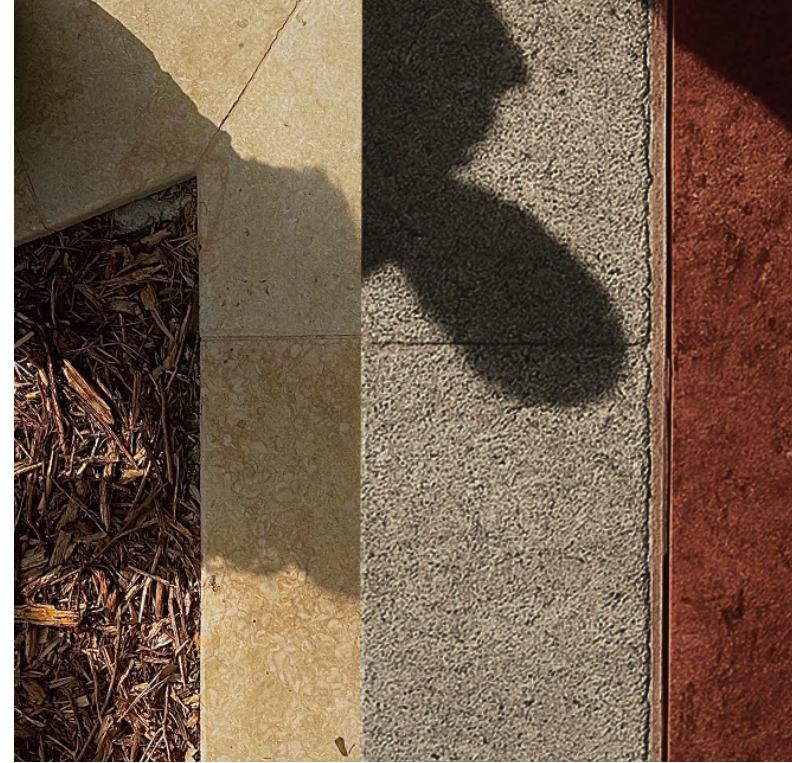
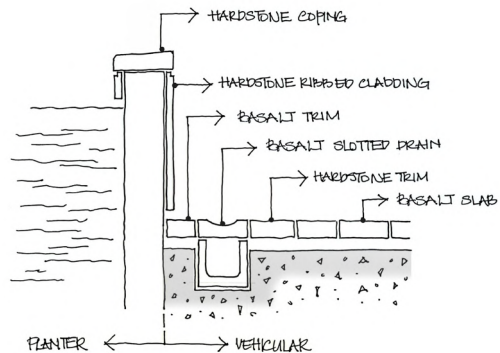
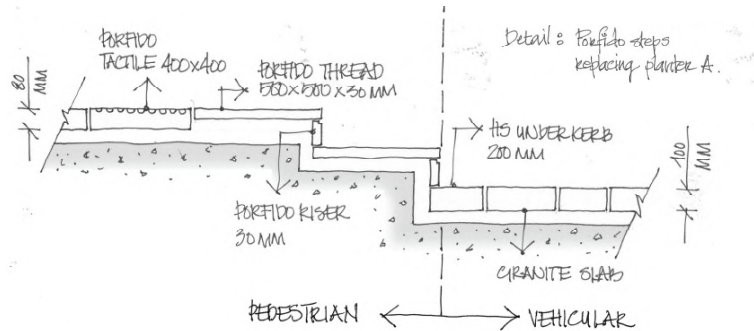
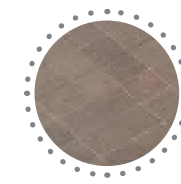
RED TRAVERTINE



BRASS TRIM

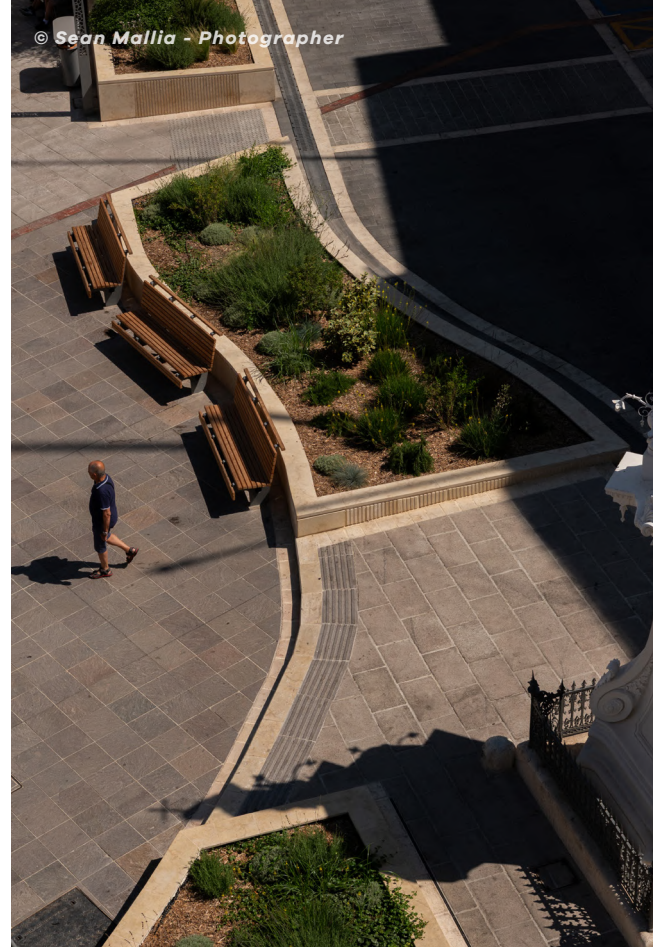


PORFIDO





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DETAILS

As part of the regeneration, **urban furniture and architectural lighting** were carefully designed to enhance both **functionality and atmosphere** while **respecting the historic context of the piazza.**

The seating, bollards, bins, and other street elements were selected for their simple, timeless design and durability in terms of their materials. Benches have been placed to encourage rest, social interaction, and views of key landmarks, while removable or low-impact elements ensure flexibility during events and traditional gatherings.

Lighting was strategically integrated to highlight architectural features, such as the historic façades and monuments, the clocktower footprint, and the edges of the piazza, while also ensuring safe and comfortable night-time use.



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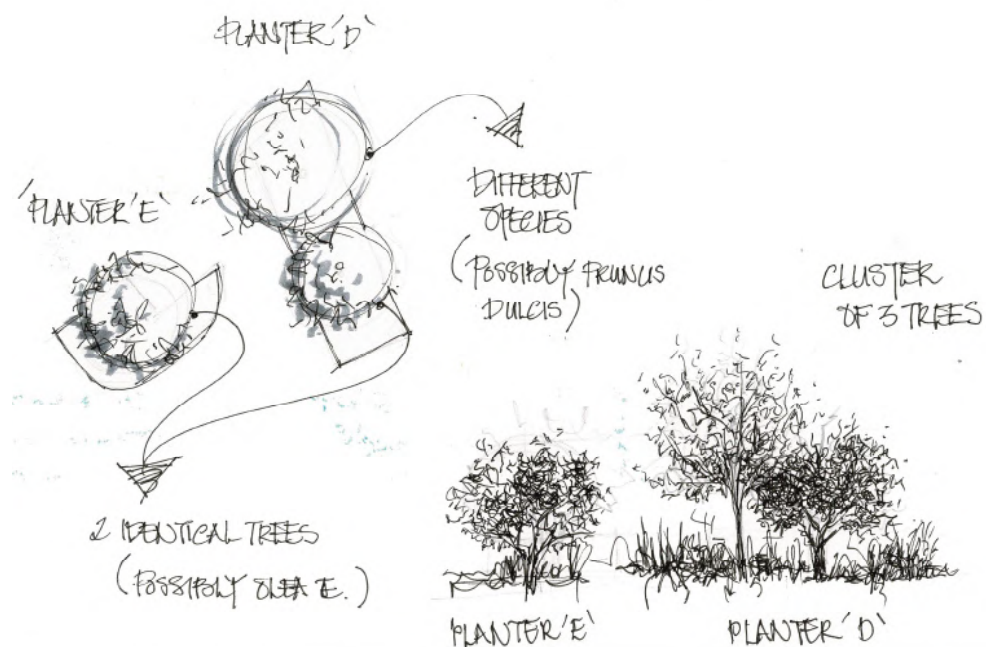
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GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The design concept includes the introduction of green infrastructure to enhance the piazza's visual appeal and provide shade, comfort, and psychological well-being. These elements soften the urban setting, contribute to microclimate regulation, and create a more inviting, liveable public space while remaining respectful to the piazza's historic character.

The shaded areas become hubs of social gatherings and activity during the day and provide the opportunity to be lit up at night.



BACK TO THE PEOPLE

The regeneration of the historic piazza has brought significant social benefits by transforming the space into a pedestrian-friendly, green, and culturally respectful environment.

The creation of a safe pedestrianised space has allowed for better enjoyment of the piazza and its surrounding heritage buildings and monuments.

As a result, the regenerated piazza now functions as a vibrant, inclusive, and socially active public space, where **heritage and contemporary urban living come together strengthening local identity, civic pride, and social cohesion.**





before



after



before



after



before



after



before



after



before



after

MASTER PLAN

