

East Branch Library

Exterior Public Art

Proposal



Background

As adults, we have trained ourselves to filter-out our surroundings. We go about our daily lives, following patterns and paths with minimal thought or engagement with the landscape. Children don't have this problem. They *actively participate* with their environment – instinctively inventing new ways of improving the function of even the most mundane elements of our built world. A street curb becomes a balance beam. A handrail becomes a slide. A bike rack becomes a monkey bar. Children are constantly discovering new ways of interacting with the world around them. Another word we could use for this special form of creativity is *play*.

This proposal aims to facilitate a return to this youthful sense of wonder and discovery.

Concept

My approach to this idea of heightened awareness is akin to the literary genre known as Magic Realism. In these stories, people, places and things are described in a documentary style, where even the most mundane details are noted for accuracy and realism. We as readers are lulled into a sense of comfort and familiarity. And despite knowing the work to be fiction, we trust it to be reality. This is where the magic happens. Slowly and unexpectedly, unusual things begin to reveal themselves, magical things, things we know to be impossible. Yet we allow ourselves to *believe*.

With this public art proposal, I aim to channel this sense of the unexpected and magical by exposing the 'dreams' of overlooked and under-loved elements of the urban landscape: the bike rack, the strip of grass by the street curb, the concrete beneath our feet. The designs highlight the humble beginnings of these materials, but allow them to evolve to their full, heightened potential.

Interventions

The proposal consists of THREE distinct human-scale interventions, or 'characters', situated around the Library on North Avenue and Cramer Street. Each character exhibits a unique formal, material and textural quality – its own personality. As a group, they work together on the site to create a kind of sculptural procession, visually guiding people from North Avenue to the Library entrance on Cramer Street. Despite their individual natures, the three sculptures share the common quality of appropriating elements from the existing urban landscape. In this way they are extremely site-specific, literally emerging from the immediate material conditions of the site. They are at once camouflaged and obvious, real and surreal.

Character 1 - Rack

The city bike rack has become a ubiquitous fixture in the city, and thus, invisible to us. This intervention begins as a typical row of city bike racks, which successively transform into a perfect circle, like frames of an animation. The Rack gently points the way around the corner of North Ave. and Cramer, leading visitors to the next intervention and eventually, the Library entrance. In addition to presenting itself as sculpture, the piece is completely functional as a bicycle rack (or play structure).

Appropriated material: Upside-down 'U' bike rack
Location: North Avenue sidewalk, at Cramer Street intersection
Approximate Scale: 3' tall x 45' long
Materials: 3 city bike racks, 8 custom fabricated racks - powder-coated steel, anchored to concrete sidewalk.

Character 2 - Serpent

The strip of grass between street and sidewalk is generally unloved. Not so here. Amidst a typical patch of city grass, a magical ribbon of sod emerges from the ground, undulating up, down, and through the ground like a green sea-serpent. A series of stepping stones invite the young (and young at heart) to explore and relax on it's ribbon surface. At it's 'head', the grass gives way to a true living wall – a green vertical surface infused with living material (local sedums and ferns).

Appropriated material: City grass, between sidewalk and street
Location: Southern end of grass strip on Cramer St.
Approximate Scale: 4' wide x 50' long (in two sections). Ribbon height varies from 0 - 4 ft.
Materials: Structure: powder-coated steel with poured concrete footings and integrated drip irrigation hose.
Organics: Soil, grass, perennial sedums and ferns (living wall)

Character 3 - Boulder

The concrete ground plane is perhaps the most overlooked surface in the urban landscape. Here, the stamped rectangular pattern of the covered entry area comes alive. The rectangular pavers emerge from the ground plane, forming an extruded rocky formation that wraps itself around the existing exterior concrete column. The Boulder can be climbed, played on, and doubles as seating for impromptu conversations.

Appropriated material: Stamped concrete entry area (1' x 2' rectangular pattern)
Location: Covered library entry area
Approximate Scale: 10' wide x 5' long. Extruded height varies from 0 - 5 ft.
Materials: Internal structural frame, pre-cast concrete cap, stucco/concrete skin

Process

My role in this project would be that of designer/coordinator. Collaboration and communication with the public, library staff, architects, and contractors is key. My background in architecture, design, and education has taught me to be fluent in the many 'languages' involved in a project of this scale.

Overall Project Goals

- To act as a memorable visual cue to guide visitors to the Library's Cramer Street Entrance.
- To engage the curiosity of the public.
- To transition visitors between city and library, with designs presented at a human-scale.
- To serve as functional, interactive, and safe platforms for contemplation, conversation, and play.
- To open our eyes and minds a bit wider – allowing poetic and sublime moments to reveal themselves to us, wherever we may be.

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Image List



Note: all pages include the following information in the vertical column on the right:
(top to bottom)

- Simplified site plan with intervention placement (orange)
- Character icons (Rack, Serpent, Boulder)
- Project title and credits

Page 1 - Overview

- Isolated views of 3 interventions - Rack, Serpent, and Boulder

Page 2 - Rack

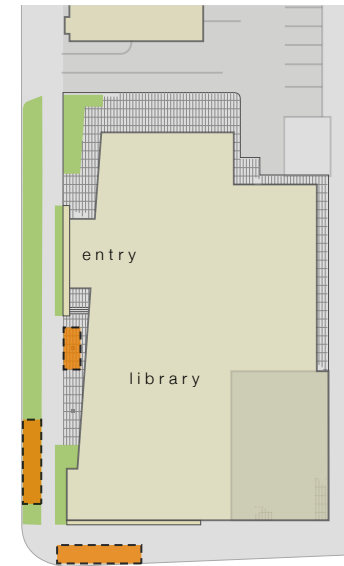
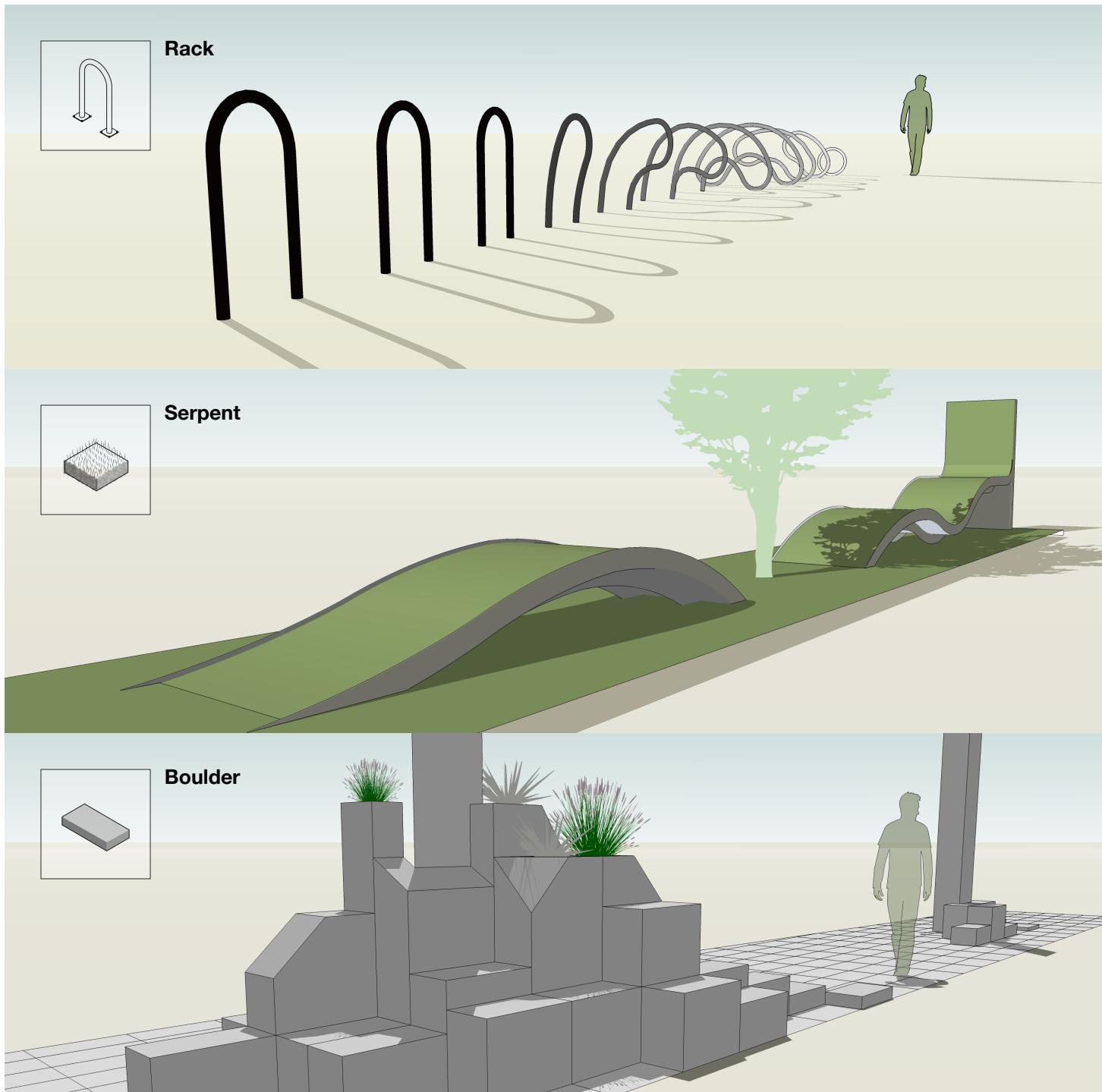
- Appropriated material drawing: Inverted 'U' bike rack
- Overhead site view of rack placement and rotation
- Elevation of bike rack form distortion
- Perspective view of intervention on site, from the North Avenue sidewalk

Page 3 - Serpent

- Appropriated material drawing: Grass strip between street and sidewalk
- Image of a planted 'green wall'
- Overhead site view of serpent
- Elevation (facing East)
- Perspective view of intervention on site, from Cramer Street

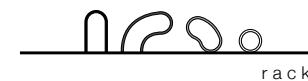
Page 4 - Boulder

- Appropriated material drawing: Stamped concrete floor (1' x 2' pattern)
- Image of naturally occurring columnar basalt formation
- Overhead site view of covered entry area
- Elevation (facing East)
- Perspective view of intervention, from sidewalk



sites

north ave.



rack



serpent

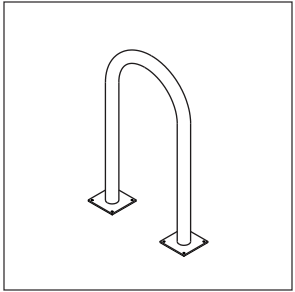


boulder

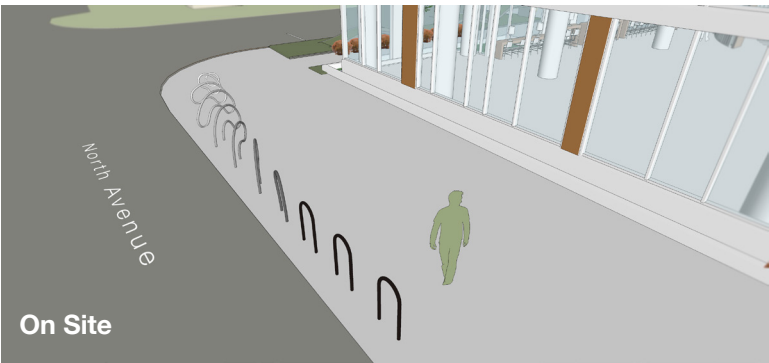
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MILWAUKEE
PUBLIC LIBRARY
East Branch
Public Art Proposal

Artist - **Ray Chi**
Assisted by Tim Stoelting

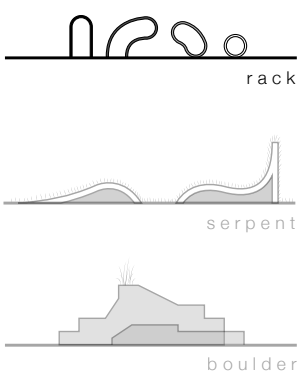
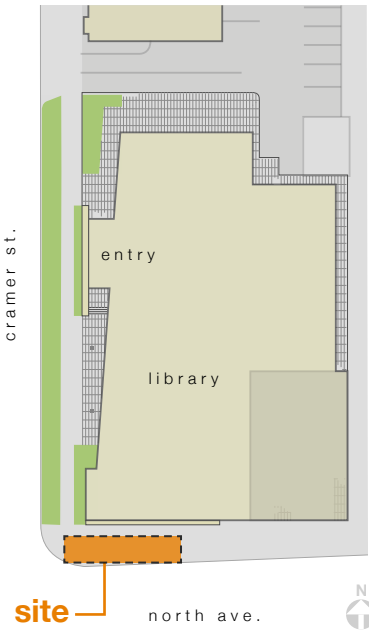
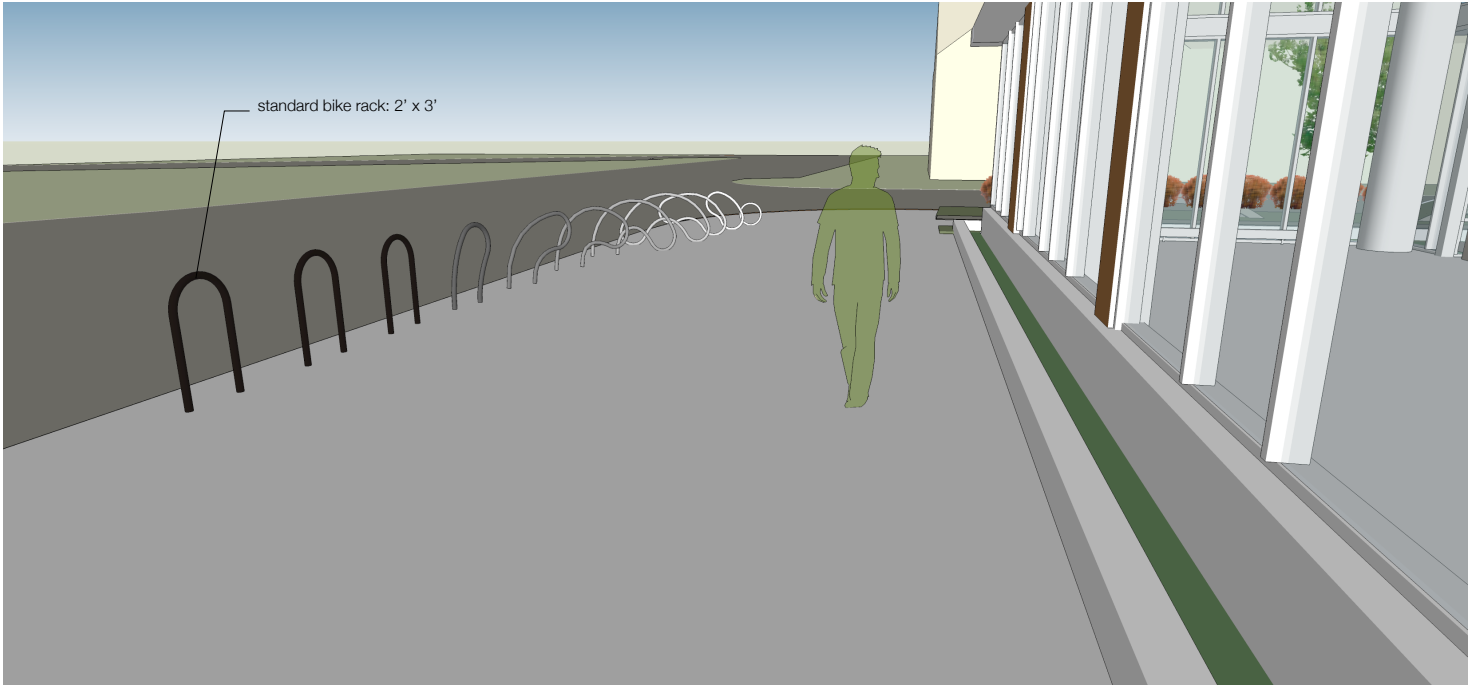


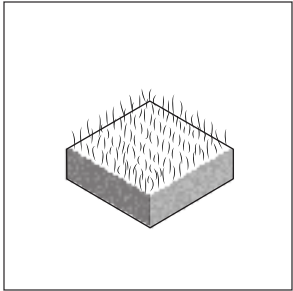
Appropriated
Upside-Down 'U' Bike Rack



Form Distortion

Perspective View





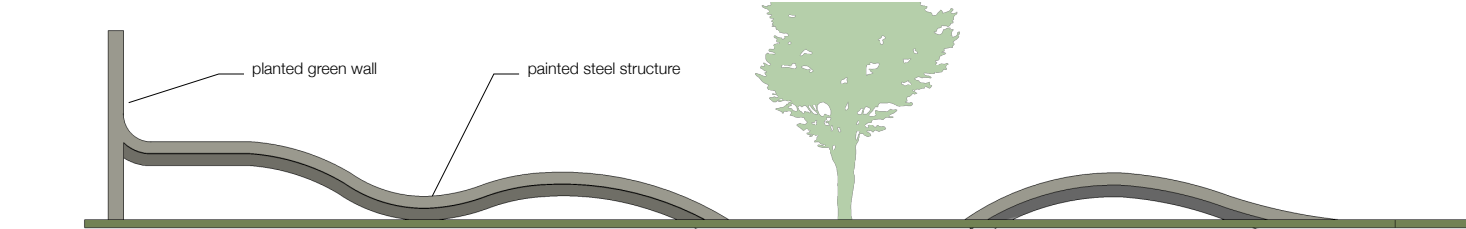
Appropriated
Grass strip between street and sidewalk



Example of 'green wall'

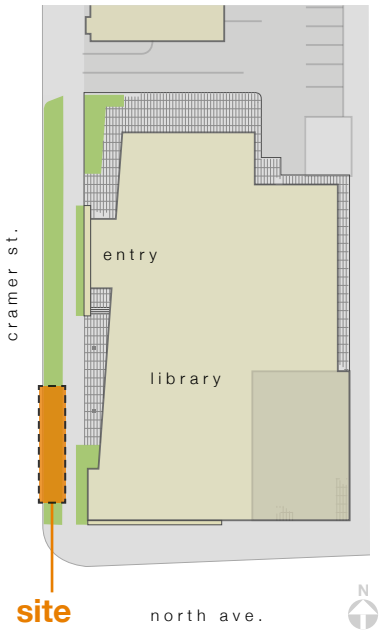
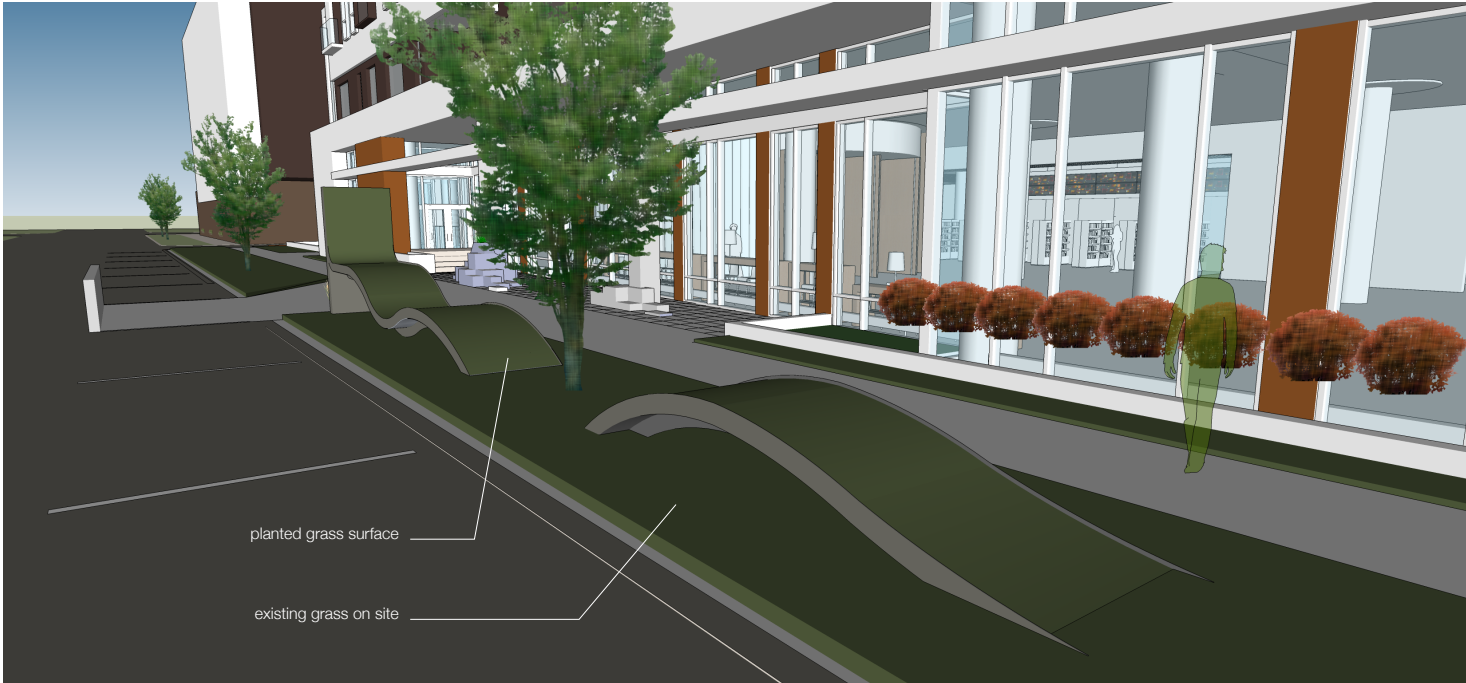


On Site

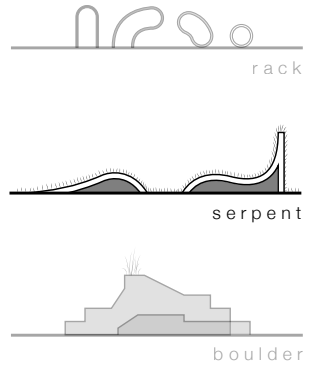


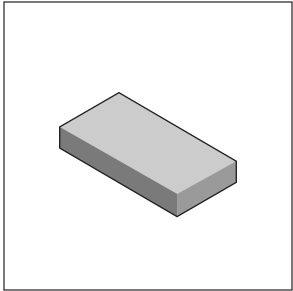
Elevation

Perspective View



site

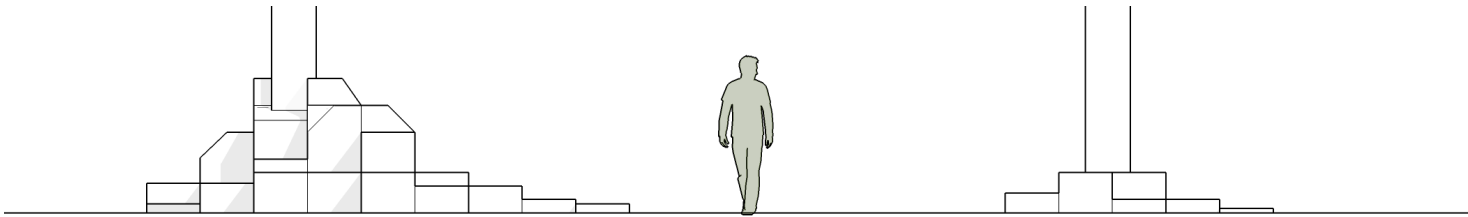




Appropriated
Stamped concrete floor

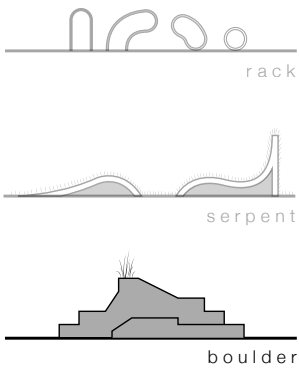
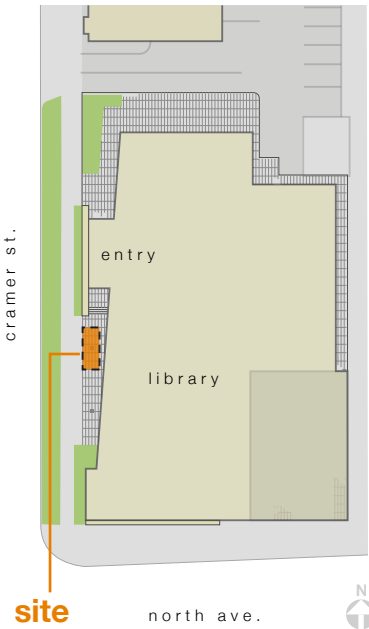
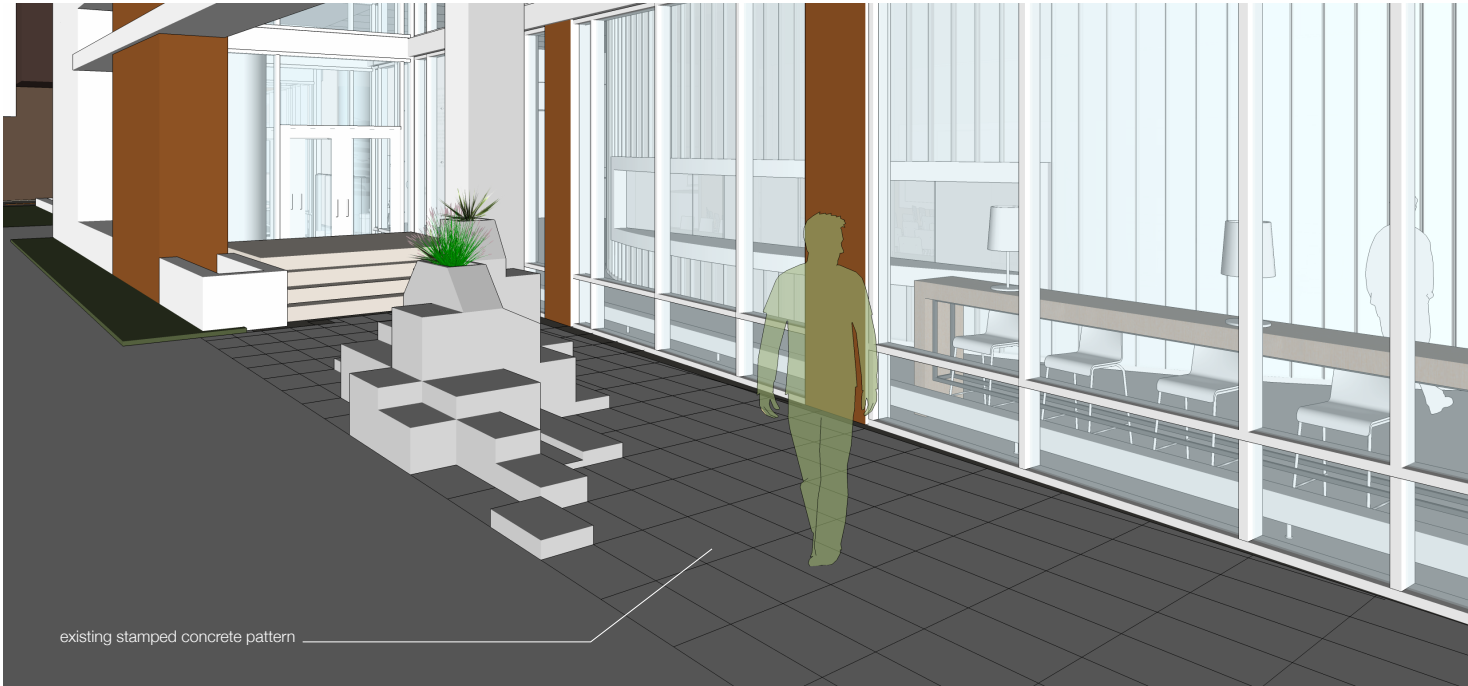


Naturally occurring columnar
basalt formation



Elevation

Perspective View



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