

projeto

Liepāja Thermal Bath

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Architecture

Liepāja Thermal Bath is a proposal for a hotel and bathing complex on the coast of the Baltic Sea in western Latvia. Envisioned as a solid rectangular prism punctured by a series of spherical voids of various sizes, the project evolved from an interest in classical precedent and the prevalence of domes within the public bath typology. While inspired by history, the project attempts to avoid postmodern citation of classical form through processes of multiplication and intersection, deliberately undermining the singularity of the dome in favor of a non-hierarchical, unfamiliar, and labyrinthine spatial atmosphere. Though based upon precedent, the outcome is deliberately playful; within the confines of our office this project has always been referred to as "bubble bath". The project seeks to produce spatial qualities that can simultaneously conjure memories of something so enduring and monumental as a classical dome and so transitory and delicate as a soap bubble.

KEYWORDS: thermal bath; signification; atmosphere.

BANHO TERMAL DE LIEPĀJA

O Banho Termal de Liepāja é a proposta de um complexo hoteleiro e balneário na costa do mar Báltico, no oeste da Letônia. Concebido como um prisma retangular sólido perfurado por uma série de vazios esféricos de diferentes tamanhos, o projeto evoluiu de um interesse em precedentes clássicos e da prevalência de cúpulas dentro da tipologia de banhos termais públicos. Embora inspirado pela história, o projeto tenta evitar a citação pós-moderna da forma clássica por meio de processos de multiplicação e interseção, minando deliberadamente a singularidade da cúpula em favor de uma atmosfera espacial não hierárquica, desconhecida e labiríntica. Embora baseado em precedentes, o resultado é deliberadamente divertido; dentro dos limites do nosso escritório, este projeto sempre foi referido como "banho de espuma". O projeto busca produzir qualidades espaciais que possam simultaneamente evocar memórias de algo tão duradouro e monumental como uma cúpula clássica e tão transitório e delicado como uma bolha de sabão.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: banho termal; significado; atmosfera.

BAÑO TERMAL DE LIEPĀJA

El Baño Termal de Liepāja es una propuesta para un hotel y un balneario en la costa del Mar Báltico en el oeste de Letonia. Concebido como un prisma rectangular sólido perforado por una serie de huecos esféricos de diferentes tamaños, el proyecto ha evolucionado a partir de un interés en precedentes clásicos y de la prevalencia de cúpulas dentro de la tipología de baños termales públicos. Aunque está inspirado en la historia, el proyecto intenta evitar la citación posmoderna de la forma clásica a través de procesos de multiplicación e intersección, arruinando deliberadamente la singularidad de la cúpula en favor de una atmósfera espacial no jerárquica, desconocida y laberíntica. Aunque se basa en un precedente, el resultado es deliberadamente divertido; dentro de los límites de nuestra oficina, este proyecto siempre se ha denominado "baño de burbujas". El proyecto busca producir cualidades espaciales que puedan evocar simultáneamente recuerdos de algo tan transitorio y monumental como una cúpula clásica y tan transitorio y delicado como una pompa de jabón.

PALABRAS CLAVE: baño termal; significado; atmósfera.



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PREVIOUS PAGE
Relationship with
the landscape.

Aerial view of the
project implantation.

1. A New Thermal Bath in Liepāja, Latvia

Our design for the Liepāja Thermal Bath was in response to an open ideas competition intended to seek opportunities to stimulate the tourism economy of this coastal resort city. The project site lies on the border of the city of Liepāja and a lower density urban fringe, and it sits prominently adjacent to Liepāja Seaside Park and near a wide public beach. The sponsor of the competition sought design ideas that would attract people throughout the year, from Latvia and abroad, to a city whose tourist revenues are otherwise seasonally dependent. Organizers sought design proposals that could act as a catalyst for more widespread regional development and help strengthen Liepāja's reputation as a tourist destination. Although this was an ideas competition, the organizers planned to work with the city of Liepāja to gather resources for the potential realization of the winning proposal, so designs were expected to have a foundation in reality and have the capacity to be executed in built form.

The program included in the competition brief consists of four different programmatic zones which total 5,500 m². The outdoor pool zone (620 m²) consists of a large thermal water pool as well as a pool bar with underwater seating. The interior pool zone (650 m²) has various small indoor pools as well as showers and locker rooms. A spa and wellness zone (600 m²) includes a reception area, massage rooms, a gym, juice bar, and beauty salon. A hotel (3,600 m²) completes the program, and consists of deluxe, standard, and family rooms. A restaurant and bar are also included within the hotel component of the program.

2. The Culture of Bathing

The practice of cleansing the body has transformed substantially throughout the last two millennia within Western culture. While the technologies required to transport and heat large quantities of water made the communal nature of the public bath a pragmatic necessity in ancient times, the public bath offered social opportunities as well. Bathing was a form of civic performance, its architecture a stage for business negotiations and political debate.

While bathing began to recede as a social practice in the Middle Ages, the typology of the public bath was most severely threatened in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as the flush toilet and personal shower fully ushered the act of cleansing into the domestic realm. To-

day, the notion of bathing in the presence of others can be either repugnant or so erotically suggestive as to be prohibitively uncomfortable. In an age when the collective body image is so carefully constructed by advertisers selling lingerie and workout videos, the public bath is now a typology caught between pleasure and anxiety.

This project, through its abstractly historical formal references, immersive atmosphere, and approach to its site and program, seeks to elevate the experience of communal engagement with water and establish itself as a key amenity in this region of Latvia. While the project brief clearly envisions the bath and hotel complex as a means to attract tourism, our proposal seeks to engage with the history of the public bath typology in order to explore topics of monumentality and affect.

3. Revisiting Signification

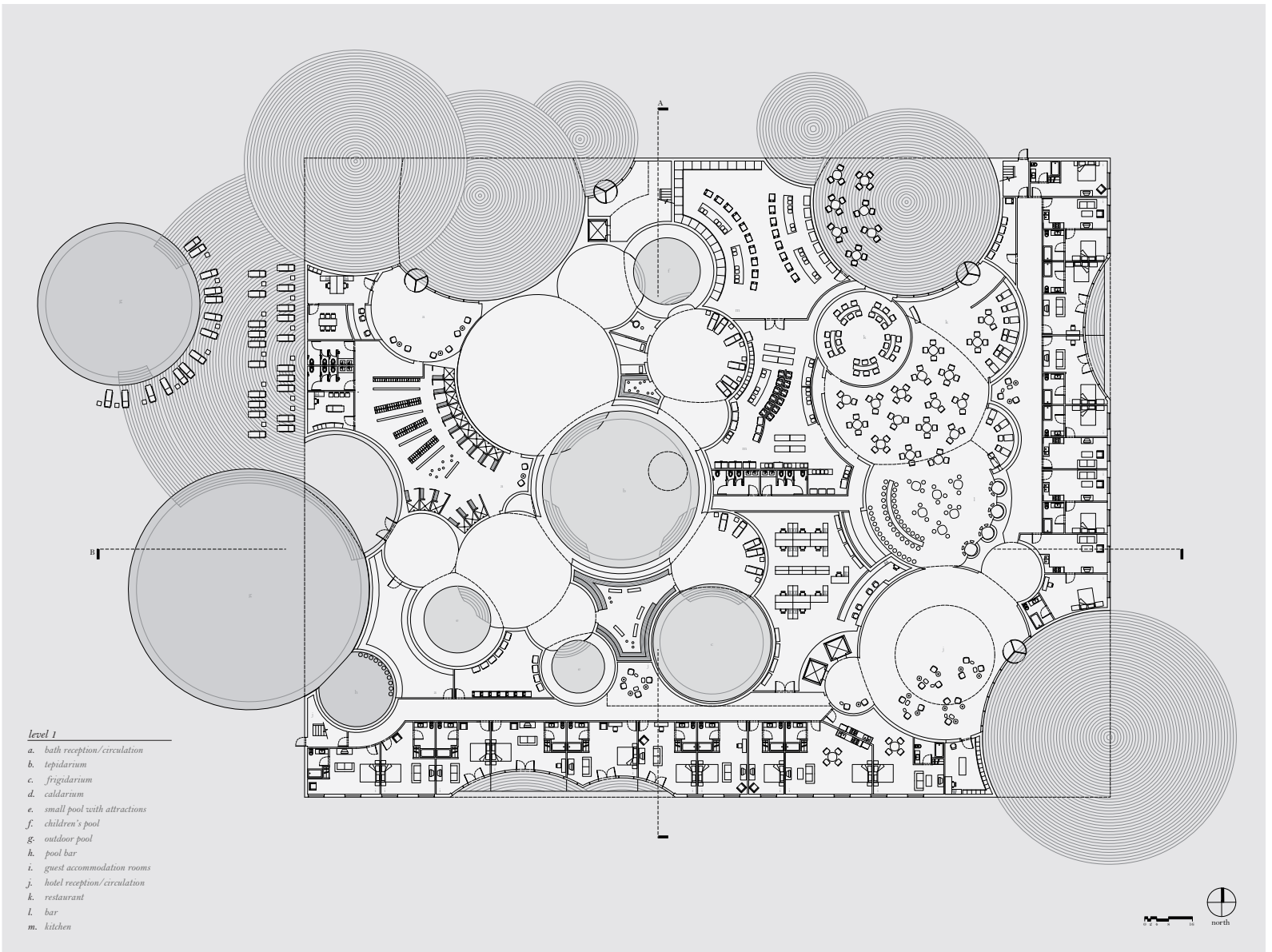
Our design for Liepāja Thermal Bath originates from a keen interest in the formal associations of the dome throughout architectural history, and more precisely, its role within the typology of the public bath.

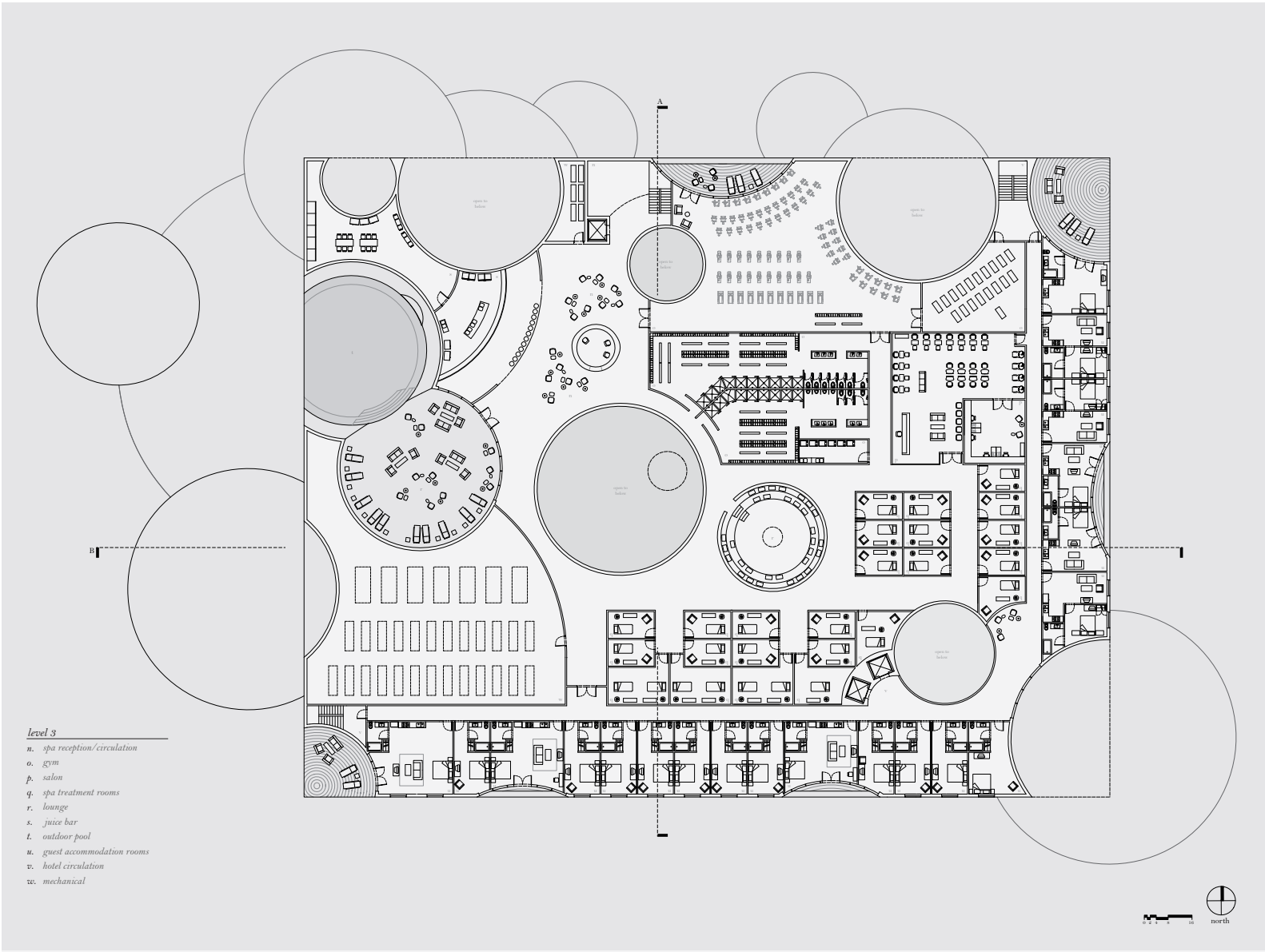
The dome has been an important organizational and representational device throughout the history of the public bath, playing a central role in the most technologically innovative Roman bathing structures, through myriad dim and atmospheric Ottoman examples, and continuing on into countless Renaissance and Baroque precedents. The dome's semiological and organizational roles in these structures are closely aligned: by reinforcing centrality and singularity, the form renders unmistakably explicit the primacy of the circle of space below.

The representational efficiency of the dome has made it a favorite among patrons with an interest in reinforcing the notion of a centralized and singular power system, whether that system is absolute monarchy, monotheism, hegemonic dictatorship, etc. Not surprisingly, the form acquired more than a few problematic political associations during the first part of the 20th century, and despite postmodernism's light hand with classical form, the dome has never been fully rubbed clean of its authoritarian tarnish.

Our design seeks to undermine the conventional symbolic performance of the dome by challenging its centripetal tendencies as well as its hierarchical bias. Working with its generative primitive, the sphere, we propose a multiplicity of domes, both upright and inverted, as a rhizomatic formal and organizational embodiment of

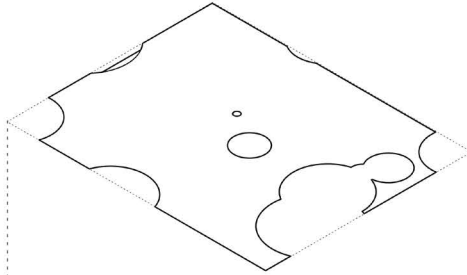
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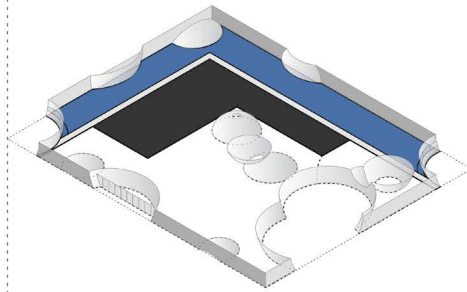
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roof



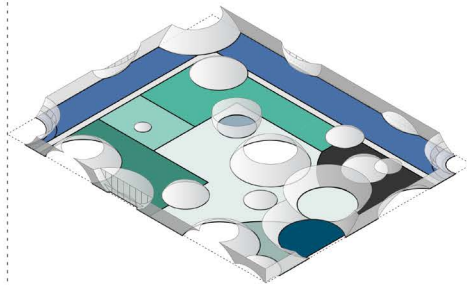
level 4

- guest accommodation rooms
- hotel circulation
- mechanical



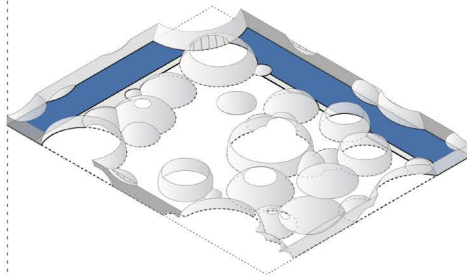
level 3

- spa reception/circulation
- gym
- salon
- spa treatment rooms
- lounge
- juice bar
- outdoor pool
- guest accommodation rooms
- hotel circulation
- mechanical



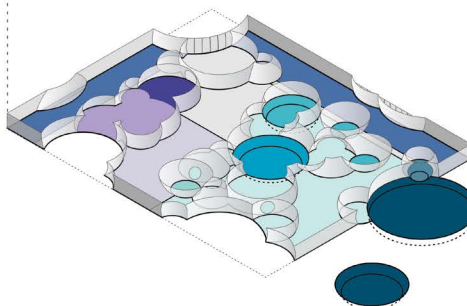
level 2

- guest accommodation rooms
- hotel circulation



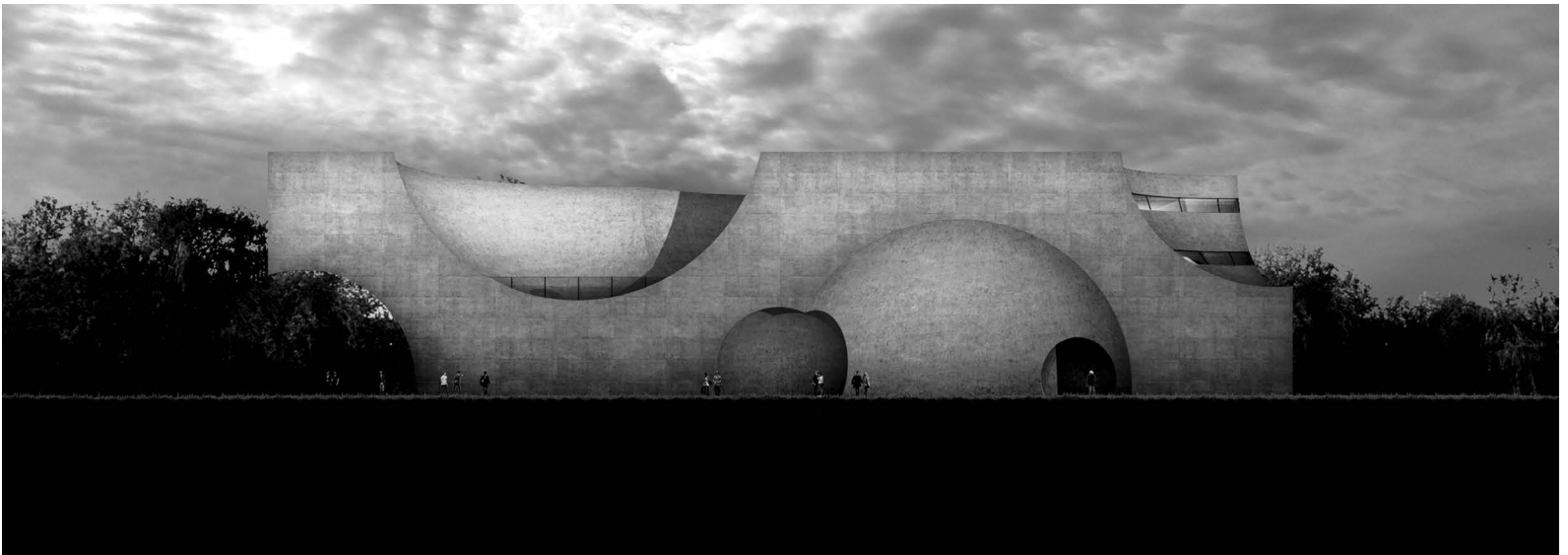
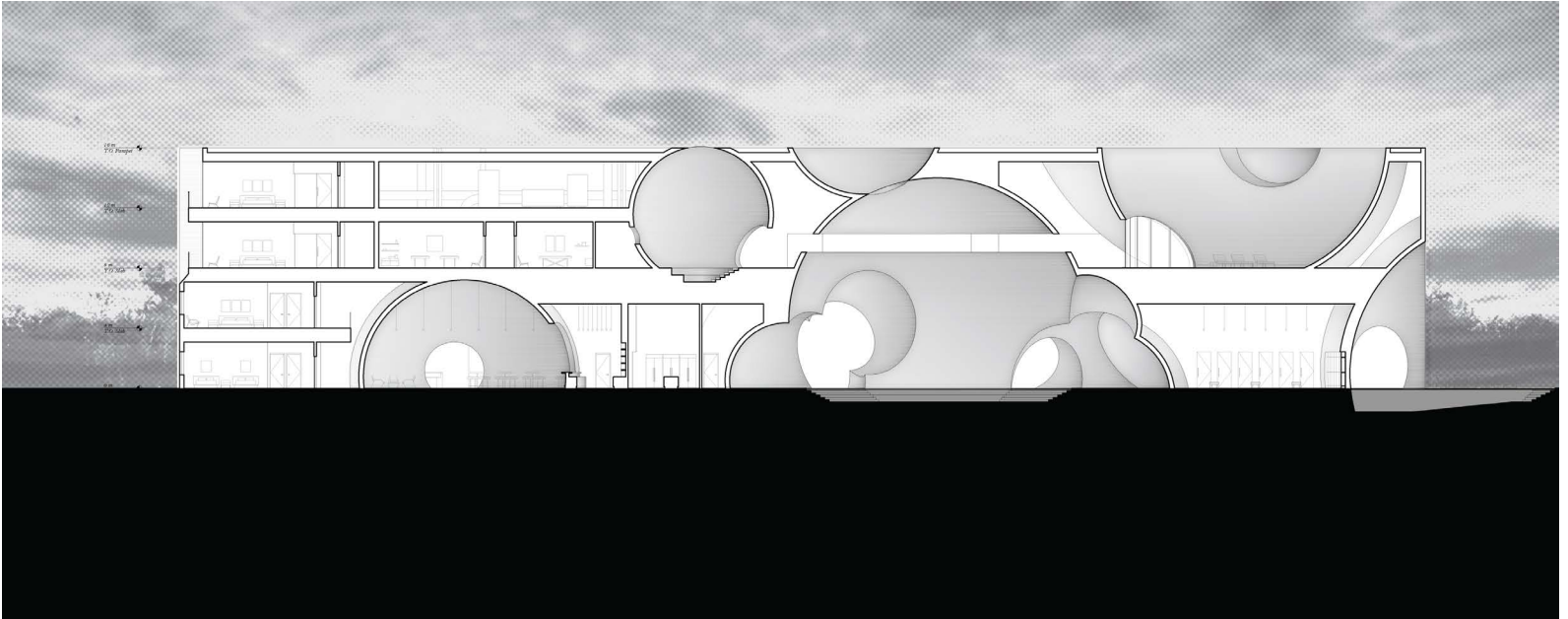
level 1

- bath reception/circulation
- tepidarium
- frigidarium
- caldarium
- small pool with attractions
- children's pool
- outdoor pool
- pool bar
- guest accommodation rooms
- hotel reception/circulation
- restaurant
- bar
- kitchen



Axonomic scheme of the distribution of the program on the floors.

Longitudinal section and elevations of the project.



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Interior-exterior
relationship
perspective.

Inner perspective.

a contemporary public that is democratic, horizontally empowered, and increasingly networked. Capitalizing on the seemingly serendipitous intersection of these friendly spherical forms, as well as the unique spaces between them within the poché, the project uses its sociopolitical conceptual foundation in service of an unorthodox spatial experience that is both spirited and atmospheric.

AUTHOR

Steven Christensen is a registered architect, and he received his Master in Architecture from the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University in 2008. He has led courses in design, construction, and representation at the University of Michigan and UCLA, and he has been an invited critic at several institutions including Harvard, sci-Arc, USC, Woodbury, Michigan, Utah, and Cambridge. Prior to establishing his independent practice, Christensen contributed to widely published and exhibited projects for firms including Preston Scott Cohen, Gensler, and CORE. His office has received several local and international awards and honors, and it was the 2016 recipient of the Architect's Newspaper's Young Architects Award.

TEAM

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Citation Award, AIA NextLA Design Awards, 2014.

Liepāja, Latvia, 2014.