

MANCHESTER SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE



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MANCHESTER
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IN TAMESIDE

**MSA
LIVE 25**

Team

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Partners

Portland Basin Museum is housed within the restored nineteenth century Ashton Canal Warehouse in Ashton-under-Lyne.

The museum combines a modern interior with a peaceful canal side setting. It allows visitors to step back in time on Tameside 1920s street, as the sights and sounds of bygone Tameside are brought to life. Visitors can also explore the area's industrial heritage and discover what life was like down the mines, or on the farm. Local crafts and industries and marvel at historic machines can be found. It is more than a museum but also a welcoming, family friendly and free place for the local community. There are regular activities for people of all ages, such as temporary exhibition and art workshop. Rachel Cornes from Cultural and Customer Services of Tameside Council is also the museum manager. She represents the museum as our client in this project.



Introduction

PORTLAND THINKSPACE

The Portland Thinkspace MSA-Live project involves redesigning and re-imagining the “Learning Space” at the Portland Basin Museum in Ashford. Working with our collaborator Rachel, as well as our team of Masters students and Undergraduate students, we developed two design options to re-think the existing space.

The site is a local museum situated alongside an intersection of three canals, and features exhibits on the local history of the area. Our particular area of focus was on their existing “Learning Space”. While the surrounding exhibit areas feature delightful brick and stone features, as well as large windows overlooking the canals, our particular room is located in the corner, lacking any of the direct sunlight, and feeling quite dim and outdated compared to the rest of the museum.

Combining photographs provided by our collaborator, Rachel, as well as our experiences from the first site visit we did, we realised that the lighting and furniture were key areas to focus on improving. Nearly every member of our team who visited the “Learning Space” commented on how bad the lighting was, and how distracting it was, in addition the furniture felt childish and too small to be used for meetings and knitting sessions held there. It became clear therefore, that our two main focusses would be on the furniture/storage, as well as the lighting.

The Masters team prepared mood-board presentations to help gauge Rachel's preferences toward design, and following this we began to produce the materials necessary to guide the undergraduates through the speedy design process. Included in this were mood-boards, existing site models, as well as various presentations on visualisation, interior design, and overall architectural representation skills.

During the two weeks we worked as a wider team, with Masters students holding workshops and engaging the undergraduates in the design process – this ultimately led to us producing a series of visuals and diagrams of two proposed options. Within each option were various takes on modular and adaptable furniture designs, as well as lighting solutions to re-invigorate the space.

In the following pages we've laid out all the work and processes from this project, and we hope you enjoy reading and looking at the images as much as we did producing them!



MEET THE COLLABORATOR

On 29/01/2025 we visited the site for the first time, not only to experience the site but to interact with and meet in person with our collaborator, Rachel Cornes.

We had a quick tour of the museum and its current exhibits and displays, before being shown the project space, and having an initial discussion about its current issues and the potential for its future. We had also prepared an initial presentation, with our first ideas and images, to help push forward the discussion and start to develop ideas with Rachel.

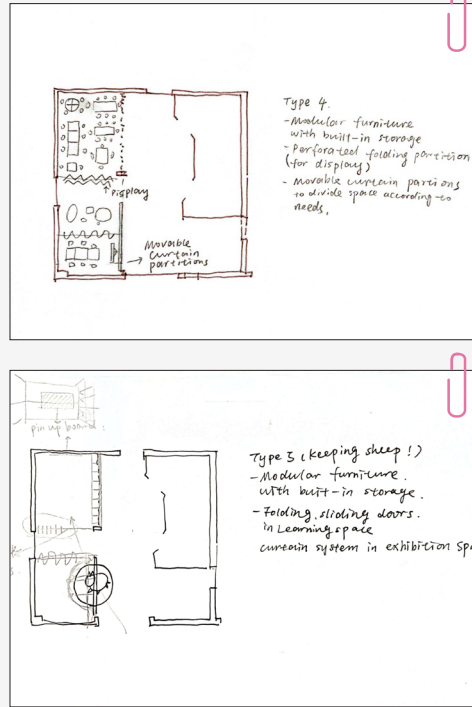
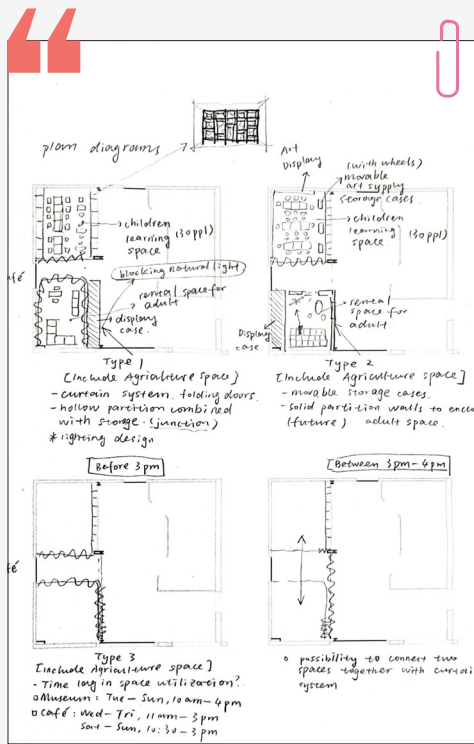
After this we were free to look around and take photos and inspect the space, to fully understand the potential and the limitations.



Our group was photographed for the first time at the entrance of the PORTLAND BASIN MUSEUM. It's also a new and wonderful start for the project~

This is a design for a learning space and we need to consider how to get the most out of this space.



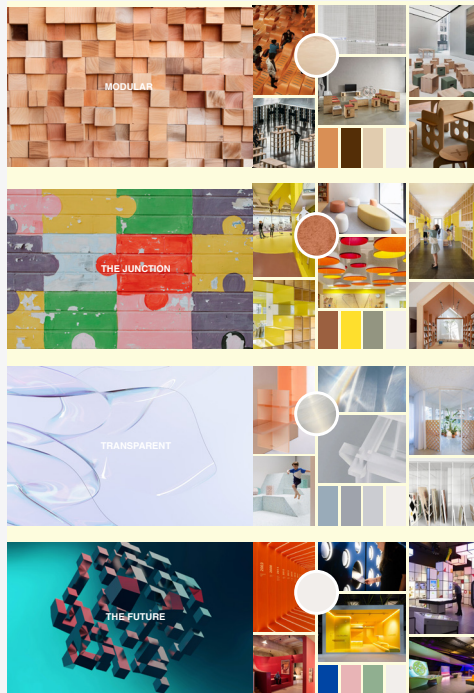


DIGITAL MODELLING

Based on site visits, we conducted measurements and drawings of the project, ultimately creating a modeled reconstruction. These models are specifically designed for BA students to enable them to render realistic effects.

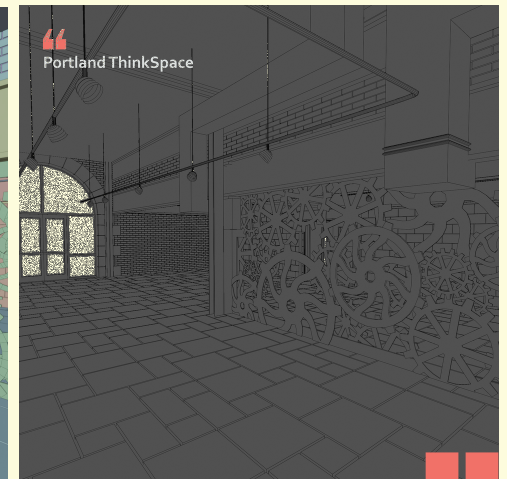


Thanks to Patrick for restoring the perfect model-



INITIAL CONCEPTS

We proposed four conceptual reference precedents, which are modular, the junction, transparent and the future. We brainstormed and came up with five different floor plan sketches based on the four concepts above, in accordance with the client's complementary needs. The first two scenarios discussed the flexible spatial arrangement of the space with the sheep pen partially removed. The third one discussed the possibility of integrating the museum and the café by taking advantage of the difference in opening hours between the two spaces. The fourth option discusses the possibility of dividing the exhibition space and adjusting the size of the space through a curtain system to suit the needs of different groups of people. The fifth is discussing the retention of the floor plan of the sheep exhibition.





ACTION PLAN

1 Introductions and Kick-off
Begin the first week with introductions to each other, the project, and the collaborator to establish a solid foundation.



2

Skill Development Workshops
Conduct workshops and tutorials focused on modeling, visualization, and presentation skills.

3 Group Design and Individual Guidance
BA students work in groups on specific design sections, followed by individual guided design based on their interests.



4

Refinement and Output
In the second week, refine students' models and support them in rendering and finalizing their drawings.

5 Final Presentation and Celebration
Present the final work to the collaborator, then celebrate with a Pizza Presentation to share and enjoy the outcomes together.

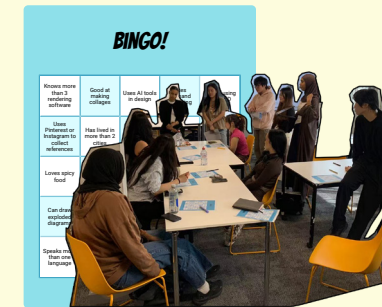


PROJECT INTRODUCTION

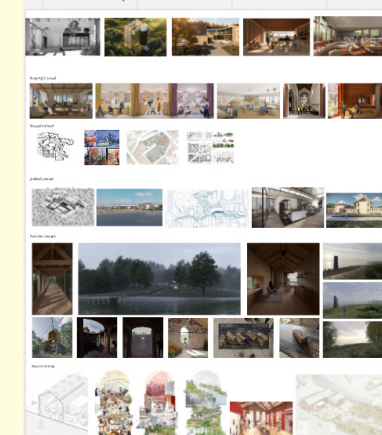
We started off the day with some icebreaker activities to get to know each other better, following this we had some quick presentations from the M.Arch/MA.AR team to familiarise the BA's with our experience.

We also presented our practice/university experience to help them to familiarise the BA's with the skills we can help them develop.

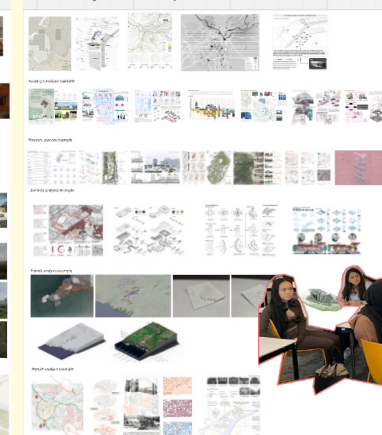
After lunch we broke off to research some precedents and sketch some initial ideas in-line with our collaborator's aspiration.



Visual examples



Site analysis examples



March and MA.AR students are sharing their project experiences on Miro!

Xueying is sharing her experience with us~



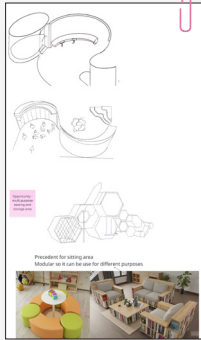


SITE VISIT

We visited the Portland Basin Museum. We examined the workshop space while discussing our design ideas. Later, we explored the museum to understand its context. Before moving on to further brainstorming, everyone shared their initial concepts with our client, Rachel. To encourage collaboration, B.A. students were asked to team up with others who had similar design ideas. M.Arch and MA.AR students listened to the presentations and offered helpful feedback. The day ended with a group discussion. B.A. students were given the task of developing their design proposals further.



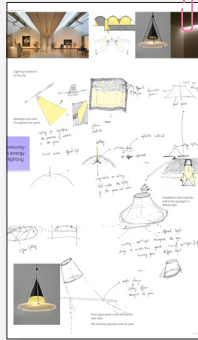
Monika's idea



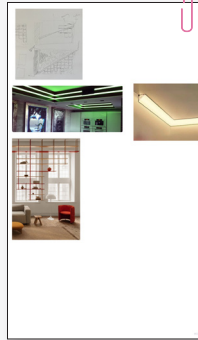
Nehir's idea



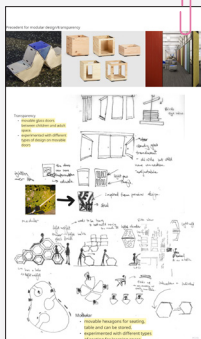
Chi Son (Jason)'s idea



Samira's idea



Sara's idea



Pal's idea



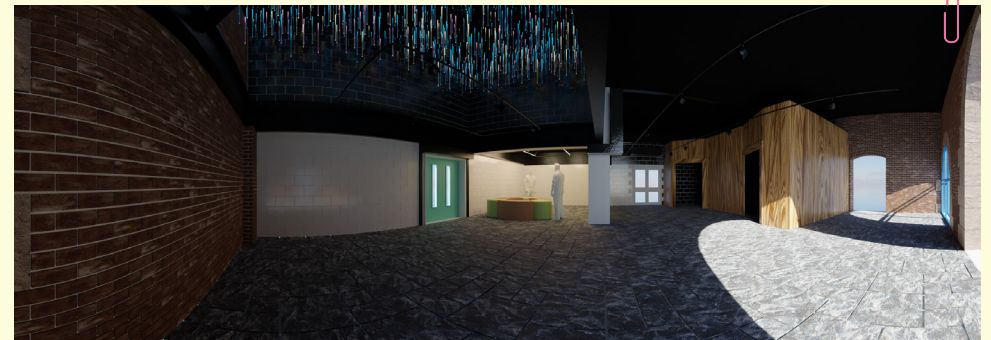
INITIAL IDEAS

After a tour of the site, everyone started drawing their initial ideas based on the four thematic concepts. Ayaa also led us through the process of analysing some of the images in terms of SWOT in order to for a better final output.



PRECEDENT VISIT

We visited to the Manchester Museum. We mainly visited the lighting in the museum as well as learning about the design of the study space. After finishing the visit, the focus shifted to a modelling workshop on human scales, where we officially began translating our design ideas into digital models within the existing site model.

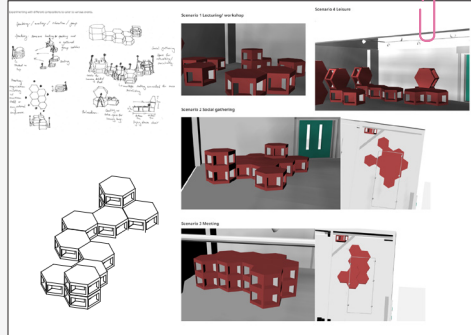




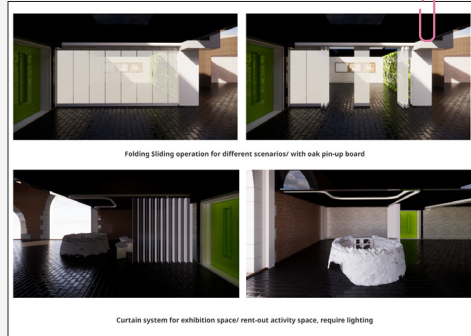
DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

The focus of our design is modular furniture, which can be flexibly combined to suit different needs, making it both practical and convenient. One of the main issues we addressed was the dim lighting. We redesigned the lighting layout to make the interior brighter and more comfortable. We also designed the furniture and interior layout based on the client's requirements.

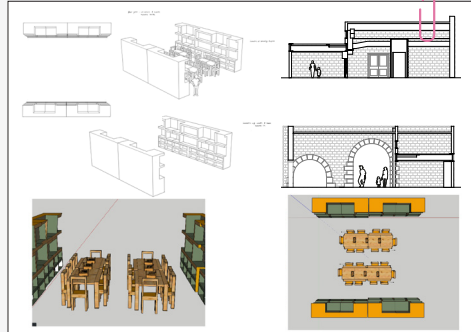
Sara



Xueying



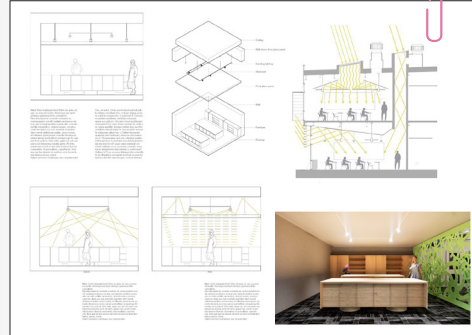
Nehir, Paris, Monika



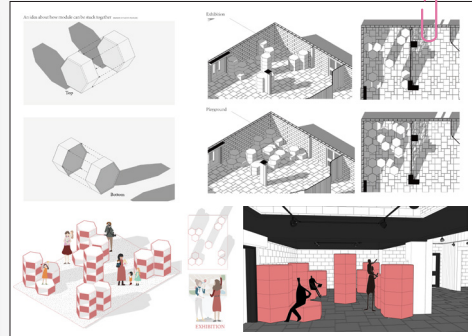
Patrick



Jason



Junfan



Daisy



REFLECTION

Organising activities - We planned a clear sequence of activities to support visual and design development. While effective for those with full attendance, absences did affect consistency. To improve this, we could have used printouts or activity sheets to track progress more clearly.

Tools used - We used varied presentation styles—PowerPoint, Miro, and interactive sessions—to keep undergraduates engaged. Communication was maintained through WhatsApp, email, and collaborative platforms, alongside design and modelling software.

Engagement - Some sessions were too talk-heavy, with less time for hands-on work. In future, we should prioritise more active participation—shorter introductions and longer working sessions—to boost engagement. This balance comes with teaching experience.

Communication - Although we had a strong internal plan, it wasn't always clear to undergraduates. Daily printed task sheets or clearer morning briefings could improve this. Overall, communication was still strong across various channels.

Collaborative and teamwork/Skills - The team worked well together, sharing tasks based on strengths. We encouraged undergraduates to explore new tools and techniques, resulting in strong final outputs that met the collaborator's expectations. The environment was inclusive and supportive.

Sharing roles - Workload was well distributed within the Master's team. Everyone contributed meaningfully and felt involved throughout both the preparatory phase and the two-week project.

Support and problem solving - While we did have the action plan to guide our progress across the two weeks, we weren't afraid to adapt and deviate from it where necessary, in order to facilitate a more fulfilling experience for the team. We also had frequent meetings (between the masters students) to adapt and develop new activities as needed, and this was echoed through the whole team (with undergraduates), where we had frequent meetings to explain what was going on and figure out issues in the process.

Strengths:

Everyone was enthusiastic and fun to work with.

We produced a lot of clear presentations and activities.

We worked well with each other, and with the undergraduates.

We had a great action plan for the two weeks, that proved effective to produce designs for the collaborator.

Areas for improvement:

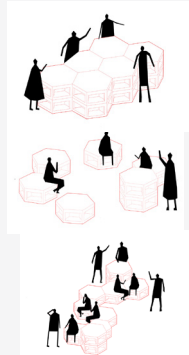
Communicating our action plan in a more concrete and clear way to the undergraduates.





OPTION 1 - Exhibition Space

Visuals + Diagrams



Scenario 1: Meeting

Events can be hosted with seating and table space for drinks and food to be placed.

Scenario 2: Learning

This space allows meeting to be taken place where the hexagons are stacked on top of each other to form tables.

Scenario 3: Socializing

Presentations or public speaking in smaller groups can be hosted as an example of an event used for this space.



Sara + Daisy: The concept behind the design on the wallpaper was to make the canal an active agent of the space. The wallpaper follows a minimalist depiction of the River Tame, with local landmarks along the way.

My vision for this space was to provide a way for visitors to feel more immersed in their community, taking them on a journey of the town.

OPTION 2 - Outputs

Visuals and Concepts



Ayaa + Team: The concept behind the design on the wallpaper was to make the canal an active agent of the space. The wallpaper follows a minimalist depiction of the River Tame, with local landmarks along the way.

My vision for this space was to provide a way for visitors to feel more immersed in their community, taking them on a journey of the town.

FINAL OUTPUTS

Portland ThinkSpace



ABOUT

Each year the MSA LIVE programme unites Masters Architecture year 1 and Masters of Architecture & Adaptive Resuse students with those in BA year 1 and year 2 and Masters Landscape Architecture 1 in mixed-year teams to undertake live projects with external partners to create social impact.

LIVE PROJECTS

All MSA LIVE projects are live. A live project is where an educational organisation and an external partner develop a brief, timescale, and outcome for their mutual benefit.

SOCIAL IMPACT

All MSA LIVE projects are for community benefit or have social impact. Social impact is the effect an organization's actions have on the well-being of a community. Our agendas are set by our external collaborators.

EXTERNAL PARTNERS

MSA LIVE projects work with many organisations: charities, community groups, social enterprises, community interest companies, researchers, practitioners and educators.

STUDENT-LED

Our MSA masters students take the lead in the project conception, brief development, delivery and co-ordination of a small project. Other cohorts joined for an eventful 2 weeks of activities at the end of the academic year.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Working in teams within and across year groups and courses; MSA students participate in peer to peer learning. In addition, collaborators, participants and students engage in the transfer of tangible and intellectual property, expertise, learning and skills.

LARGE SCALE

This year approximately 650 students from 5 cohorts in MSA have worked on 40 projects with partners.

QUESTIONS

For questions about MSA LIVE please contact the MSA LIVE team:

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BLOG

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