



DESIGN OPERA
ARCHITECTS

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1.0

INTRODUCTION



1.1 DESIGN OPERA ARCHITECTS

At Design Opera, we recognize that a home is much more than a structure—it's a place of memory, comfort, and identity. In the face of devastating loss with the recent fires, our team extends heartfelt sympathy and unwavering support. We are here to help not only rebuild, but reimagine a new space that reflects personal lifestyle and provides the grounding and beauty needed to move forward.

Founded in 2008, Design Opera is a collaborative architecture and design firm based in Los Angeles, California. Our work focuses on the integration of progressive and traditional elements, blending timeless design with contemporary needs. Through a thoughtful and iterative process of research, development, and storytelling, we craft environments that are not only aesthetically compelling, but emotionally resonant.

Our portfolio spans residential, hospitality, and commercial projects across California and beyond, each rooted in sensitivity to site, culture, and climate. We approach every project as an “opera” of coordination—where the best outcomes emerge from collaboration, artistry, and precision.

Among its many national recognitions, Design Opera was most recently honored with:

- Honor Award, AIA|LA Residential Architecture Awards (2022)
- Honorable Mention, FRAME Magazine Awards (2022)
- Honor & Merit Awards, AIA|LA Restaurant Design Awards (2021)

Our work has been featured in national publications such as O (The Oprah Magazine), LUXE Magazine, Design Bureau, ARCHITECT Magazine, and Dream Homes San Diego.

Led by Gregory De Peña, AIA, Design Opera is supported by a dedicated Los Angeles based team, Ema Bakalova, Bende Ducsay, and Stephanie Tilley; alongside project collaborators, Architect Demetri Darnos and Interior Designer Diana Jaqueline. With more than twenty five years of experience, Greg's work is defined by a thoughtful, research-informed process and a deep commitment to environmental responsibility. His work reflects a deep interest in vernacular architecture, sustainability, and innovation—often blending advanced analysis with a sensitivity to time and place. His philosophy is rooted in creating architecture that not only responds to environmental and cultural challenges, but also enriches everyday life through clarity, connection, and enduring beauty.

We believe great architecture is a dialogue between people and place. At Design Opera, we design spaces that are timeless, personal, and alive with your story crafted with meaning, shaped by collaboration, and inspired by the lives they serve.

1.2 PROJECT NARRATIVE



The Garden House Pacific Palisades, California

Set within the Alphabet Streets in the Pacific Palisades after the devastating fires, The Garden House captures memories of community and nature. The home is divided into three volumes, each reminiscent of the architectural character of the Palisades and each connected by a garden that creates a balance of openness and privacy.

On approach, by forgoing the traditional garage, a carport helps to extend the landscape into the site—enhancing the home’s connection to the community and nature. The kitchen is positioned at the heart of the home, with a private, open garden mediating between it and the living room. The separation of these main spaces creates a mixture of traditional and contemporary values, making The Garden House the next generation of the Californian home. The kitchen offers a sense of intimacy by avoiding a large, undivided floor plan, while the living room, set apart from the rest of the house, becomes a dedicated space for gathering and entertainment.

On the lower levels, both the kitchen and living room have an indoor and outdoor feel through the use of sliding glass doors that pocket into the walls. Above, with the use of a modern-style Juliette balconies, the private areas of the home continue this dialogue. Bedrooms and intimate spaces open directly onto quiet, protected outdoor zones, ensuring that all spaces engage with nature. These connections support a lifestyle where privacy and openness coexist harmoniously and where waking up to a garden or stepping into dappled afternoon light is part of daily life.

Throughout, the home embraces a sense of visual continuity and layered experience. The architecture and landscape are deeply intertwined, offering ample opportunities for customization and personalization. Whether expressed through varied planting schemes, subtle material shifts in the rammed earth, or flexible outdoor programming, the home is designed to accommodate evolving needs and preferences. It is not prescriptive, but suggestive, allowing the residents to shape their environment over time.

Ultimately, The Garden House is a home of light, air, and strength. It offers shelter while gently unfolding into the surrounding landscape. Privacy and openness live side by side, creating a space that feels both grounded and free. It’s the kind of place where families can begin again—where new memories can be made, routines can settle in, and life can slowly take root after loss. More than a structure, it is a foundation for something lasting.



ADDRESS: 1037 N ILLIFF STREET

1.3 PARCEL INFO & DIAGRAMS

Project Name: The Garden House

Reference Site Address:
1037 N Illiff Street

Lot Area:
6,500 SF

Zoned:
R1 - V1

Building Height:
27'-0" < 33'-0" Max Height

Stories:
2

Parking:
2 covered spaces provided

Lot Coverage:
2416.5 SF < 2,600 SF Max

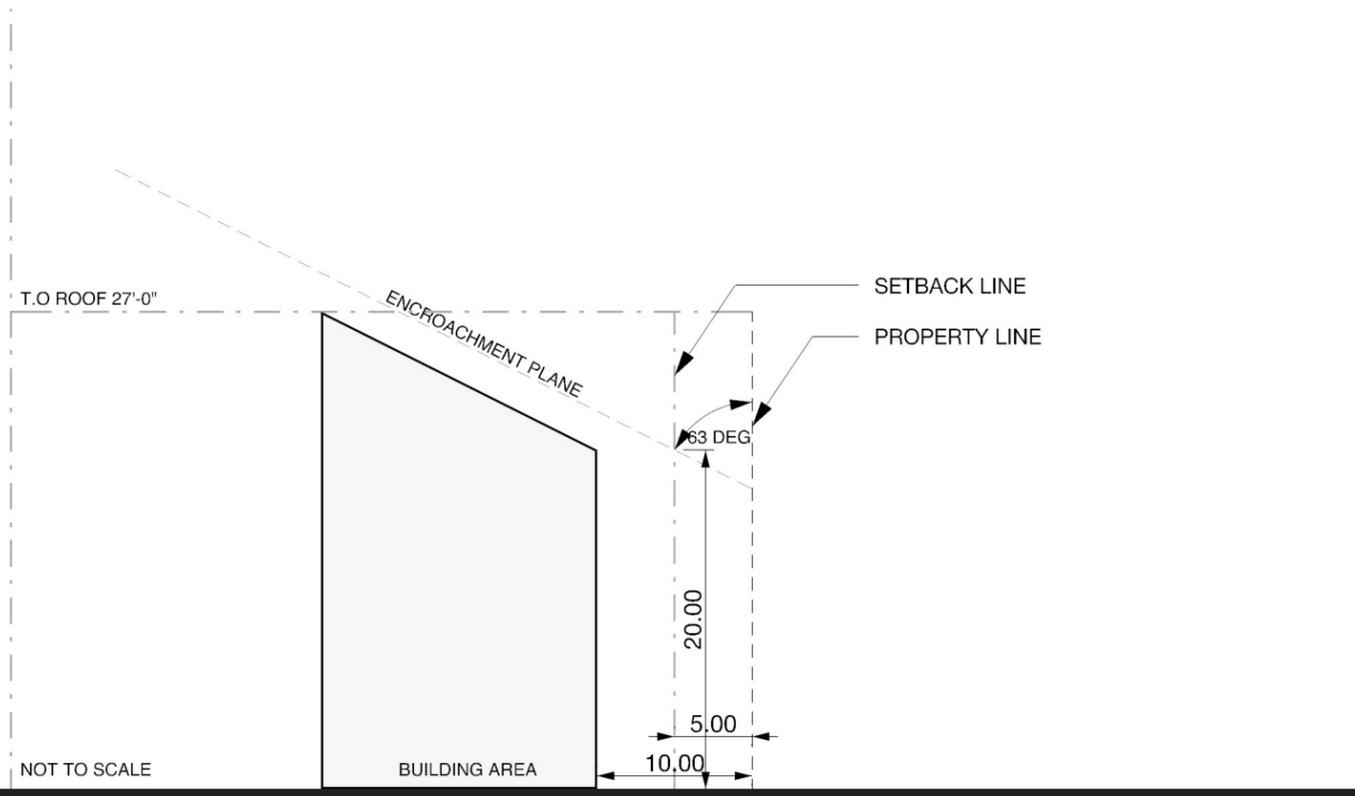
Maximum RFA:
3,250 SF = 50% of lot
650 SF = 20% bonus
3,900 SF Max FAR with bonus

Setback Requirements:
Front Yard: 25' - 0"
Side Yard: 5' - 0"
Rear Yard: 15' - 0"

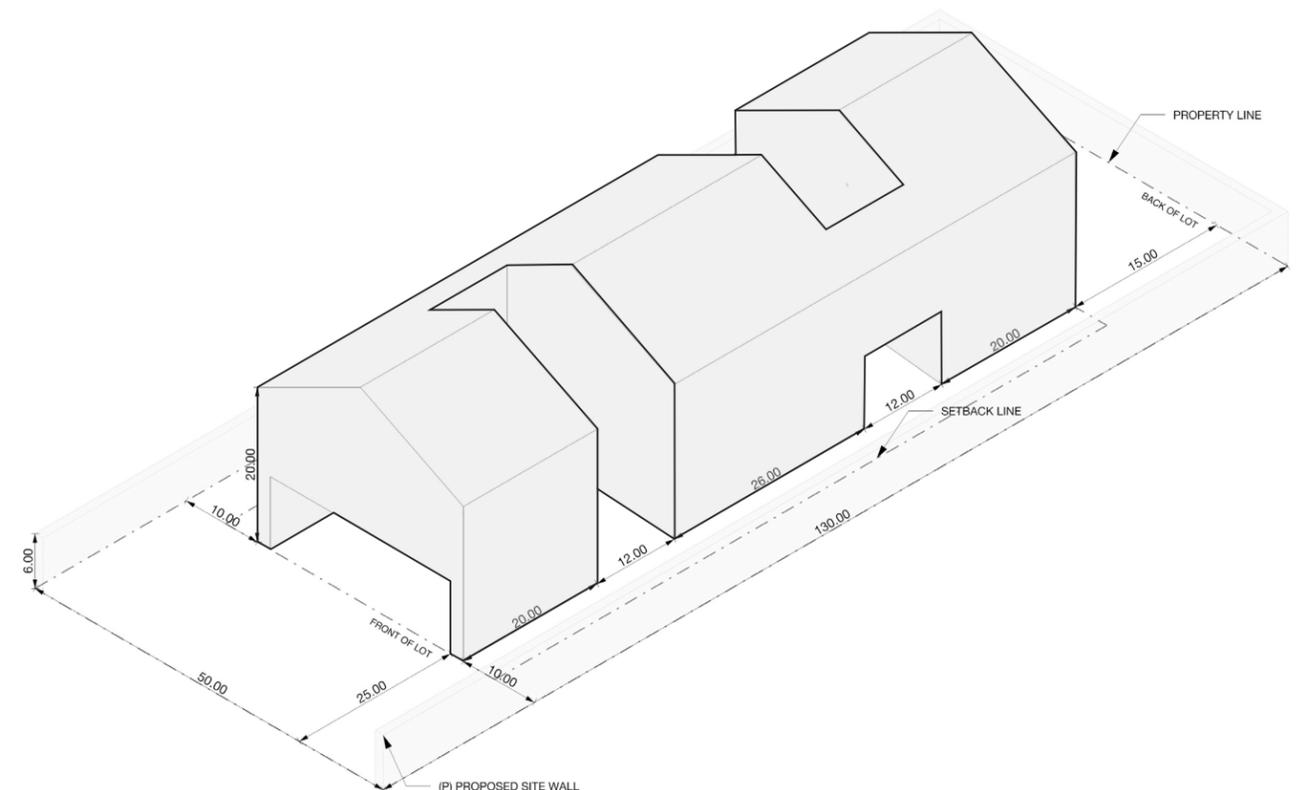
Floor Area:
Level 1: 2,236 SF (including covered entry, covered garage and covered walkways)
Covered Entry + Walkways: 307 SF
Garage Area: 436 SF
Level 2: 1,664 SF (excluding stairs)
Basement: 1,808 SF
Total: 5,451 SF

Total Residential Floor Area (RFA):
3,250 SF
(excluding 400 sf of garage, 250 sf of covered porches, and excluding basement)

PROJECT DATA



ENCROACHMENT PLANE DIAGRAM



BUILDING ENVELOPE DIAGRAM

1.4 DESIGN FEATURES

FIRE RESISTANCE

The Garden House is constructed using rammed earth walls, an excellent material for fire resistance due to its high thermal mass and non-combustible composition. This allows it to withstand extreme heat without degrading or emitting toxic fumes. It is a dense, compacted structure providing natural insulation and durability, making it a sustainable and resilient choice for homes in fire-prone areas. Additionally, its earthy aesthetic and low environmental impact make it both a practical and beautiful solution for contemporary design.

ROOFING

The home uses a Corten corrugated metal roofing for its durability, cost-effectiveness, and ability to shed water efficiently—making it ideal for a range of climates. Its lightweight nature reduces structural load, while the rhythmic texture adds a subtle architectural character to the building’s profile. A low-slope metal roof with concealed gutters and limited overhangs reduces ember catchment zones and enhances durability under extreme heat conditions.

EXTERIOR FINISH

The rammed earth structure used on the first floor of the home serves as the finished facade. The walls are compacted using locally sourced aggregates and stabilized with minimal cementitious binder, yielding a monolithic, low-maintenance exterior that is non-combustible, vapor permeable, and resistant to UV degradation. On the second floor, a metal framed wall is finished with stucco to create a balanced and cost effective material palette that provides a lighter, airy contrast that feels open and family-friendly. Together, they reflect a modern take on California living—natural, durable, and well-suited to a climate where indoor-outdoor connection and fire resilience are equally important.

WINDOWS & DOORS

The windows and doors in the design were carefully selected for both their fire-resistant properties and their role in enhancing the connection to nature. We chose non-combustible, high-performance frames and glazing systems suitable for fire-prone areas, ensuring safety without compromising on aesthetics. Sliding doors and fully openable windows with Juliette balconies are integrated throughout the home to create a seamless transition between indoors and outdoors, immersing residents in the surrounding landscape.

DEFENSIBLE SPACE INTEGRATION

The site strategy incorporates a tiered defensible space system, using hardscape elements like decomposed granite, concrete terraces, and metal-edged planting beds to create protective buffer zones. Vegetation is selected from drought-tolerant species that are strategically placed to disrupt lateral flame movement while supporting erosion control and biodiversity. Near the home, rammed earth facades and non-combustible materials provide added fire resilience, while flammable elements such as wood mulch and dense shrubs are intentionally avoided near windows and vents. Fire-resistant plantings—such as lavender, manzanita, succulents, and California lilac—further enhance safety while maintaining a strong connection to the landscape.

VENTS

The proposed project minimizes the venting requirements by exposing the underside of the roof creating dramatic high ceiling spaces on the upper level. Where required, we’re approaching the project’s venting with a focus on safety and resilience. To minimize the risk of ember intrusion, we plan to use ember-resistant vents with fine mesh screens that meet wildland-urban interface (WUI) standards. These vents are strategically placed to maintain proper airflow while preventing wind-driven embers from entering the building envelope. This approach allows us to balance fire safety with healthy ventilation and energy efficiency.

EMBER-RESISTANT FEATURES

Smooth, joint-free facades and non-combustible materials like rammed earth and metal framed stucco walls help resist heat and prevent ember intrusion. Windows are deeply set into thick walls for added protection, and ember-resistant vents, gravel buffers, and fire-safe plantings contribute to a layered, resilient design. The building envelope minimizes vulnerabilities with continuous insulation, sealed eaves, and non-combustible details, including metal-clad fascia, soffits, and parapets designed to deflect embers and reduce debris buildup.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is an important consideration in our design, reflected in both material choices and building strategies. We’ve chosen rammed earth made from local soils to reduce embodied energy and transportation impact, while ensuring durability, low maintenance, and natural insulation. In addition the corrugated metal roof works to collect rain water which is used for irrigation. With is large southern exposure, solar panels help to lessen the electrical loads. All materials are non-toxic and recyclable, supporting a healthy, low-impact home. Operable windows and sliding doors are integrated throughout to promote natural ventilation, reduce reliance on mechanical cooling, and enhance daylighting—creating a more energy-efficient, comfortable, and environmentally responsive living space.

DESIGN QUALITIES

The architecture embodies a sense of tectonic clarity, revealing mass, shadow, and texture through its primary material. A central design idea was the balance between privacy and openness. While the exterior maintains a quiet, private presence, the interior opens up at the heart of the home—featuring generous, light-filled spaces that connect directly to nature. This creates a feeling of living within the landscape while preserving a sense of safety and seclusion. The design thoughtfully balances shelter and openness, using precise openings and restrained volumes to create a home that engages with the climate, the natural surroundings, and creates a sense of connection to place.

CONSTRUCTION METHODOLOGY

The construction methodology is grounded in resilience, sustainability, and craftsmanship. The ground floor is built using rammed earth, a site-poured technique that compacts local soils in layers to create thick, high-performance walls with excellent thermal mass and inherent fire resistance. This process minimizes transportation impacts and reduces embodied carbon, while offering a timeless, textural quality. The upper floor utilizes lightweight framing and stucco cladding, providing structural efficiency and visual contrast. Openings are carefully integrated during construction to ensure airtightness, durability, and precise fire-rated detailing.

EFFICENCY

Efficiency has been carefully considered in both energy use and spatial planning. Passive design strategies, such as natural ventilation and the thermal mass provided by rammed earth walls minimize reliance on mechanical systems. The layout is designed to maximize functional space with minimal waste, incorporating multifunctional rooms and adaptable zones for long-term flexibility. Durable, low-maintenance materials further enhance the home’s overall performance and longevity.

STYLE FEATURES

The home’s style is defined by a sense of tectonic clarity, with clean lines and expressive materials that highlight mass, shadow, and texture. A grounded rammed earth base is paired with a lighter stucco-clad upper floor, creating a balanced and modern composition. Large operable windows, sliding doors, and Juliette balconies foster a strong indoor-outdoor connection, while courtyard-centered spaces provide openness and privacy. The natural palette, soft textures, and fire-resilient detailing reflect a calm, contemporary California aesthetic, with opportunities for custom expression through pigment variation and compositional layering in the rammed earth.

CUSTOMIZATION POTENTIAL

The design offers strong customization potential through the expressive use of materials and form. Rammed earth allows for infinite variation in pigments and textures, giving each wall a unique character tied to the site. The system also supports compositional layering, with opportunities to integrate exposed stone, adobe-like reveals, or pigment shifts for added depth and richness. The layout of the home is designed to be adaptable, with flexible interior spaces that can be reconfigured over time to suit evolving family needs or lifestyle changes. Open floor plans and sliding partitions allow rooms to expand, contract, or shift in use, supporting both privacy and communal living. The strong connection to the outdoors—through generous openings, strategically placed courtyards, and covered walkways—allows exterior spaces to function as true extensions of the home. These outdoor areas can be customized as gardens, dining spaces, play areas, or quiet retreats, creating an indoor-outdoor living experience tailored to the needs of each household.

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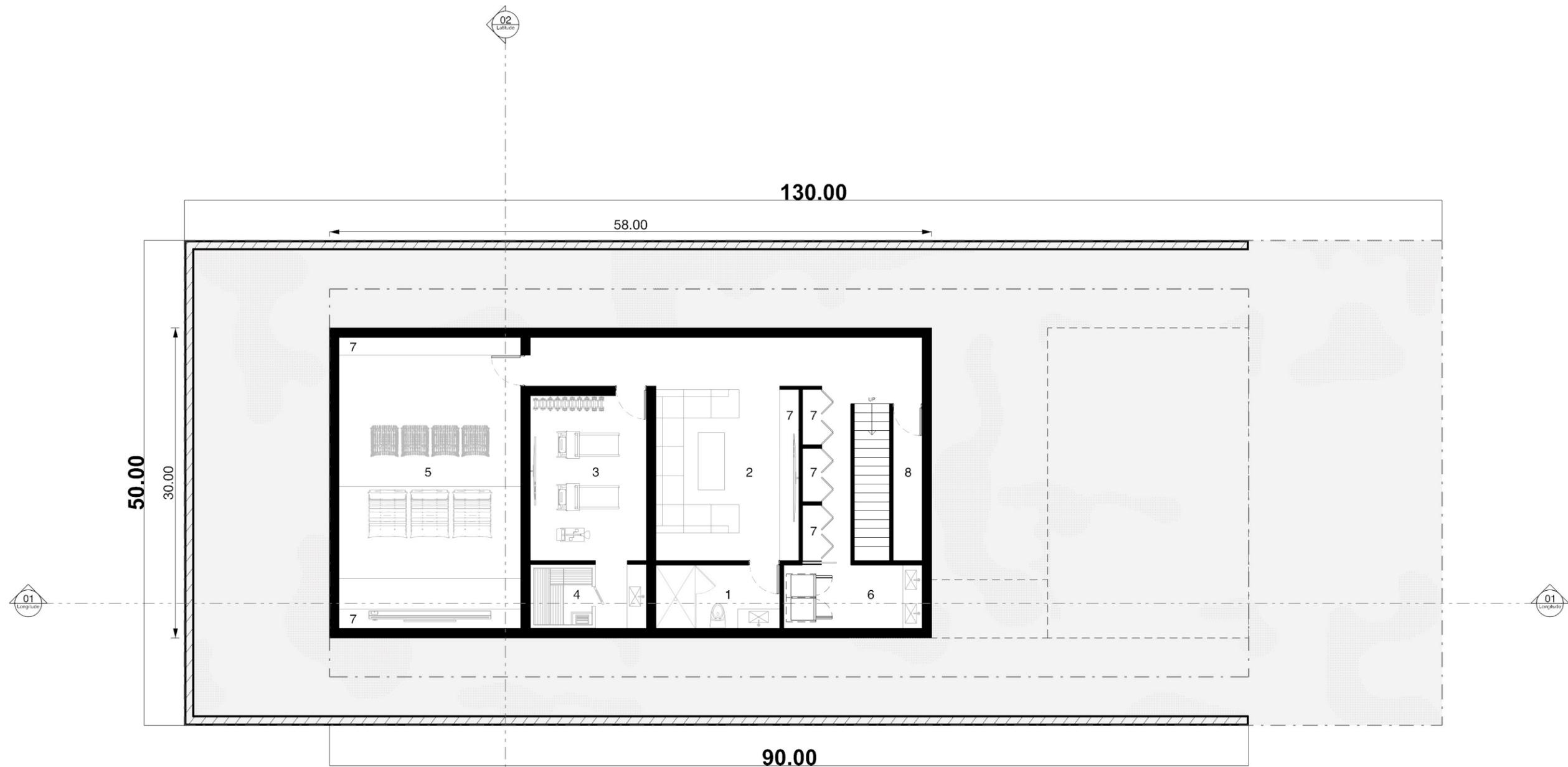
PLANS

2.1 SITE PLAN



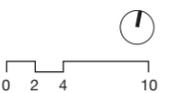
2.2 BASEMENT PLAN

*OPTIONAL

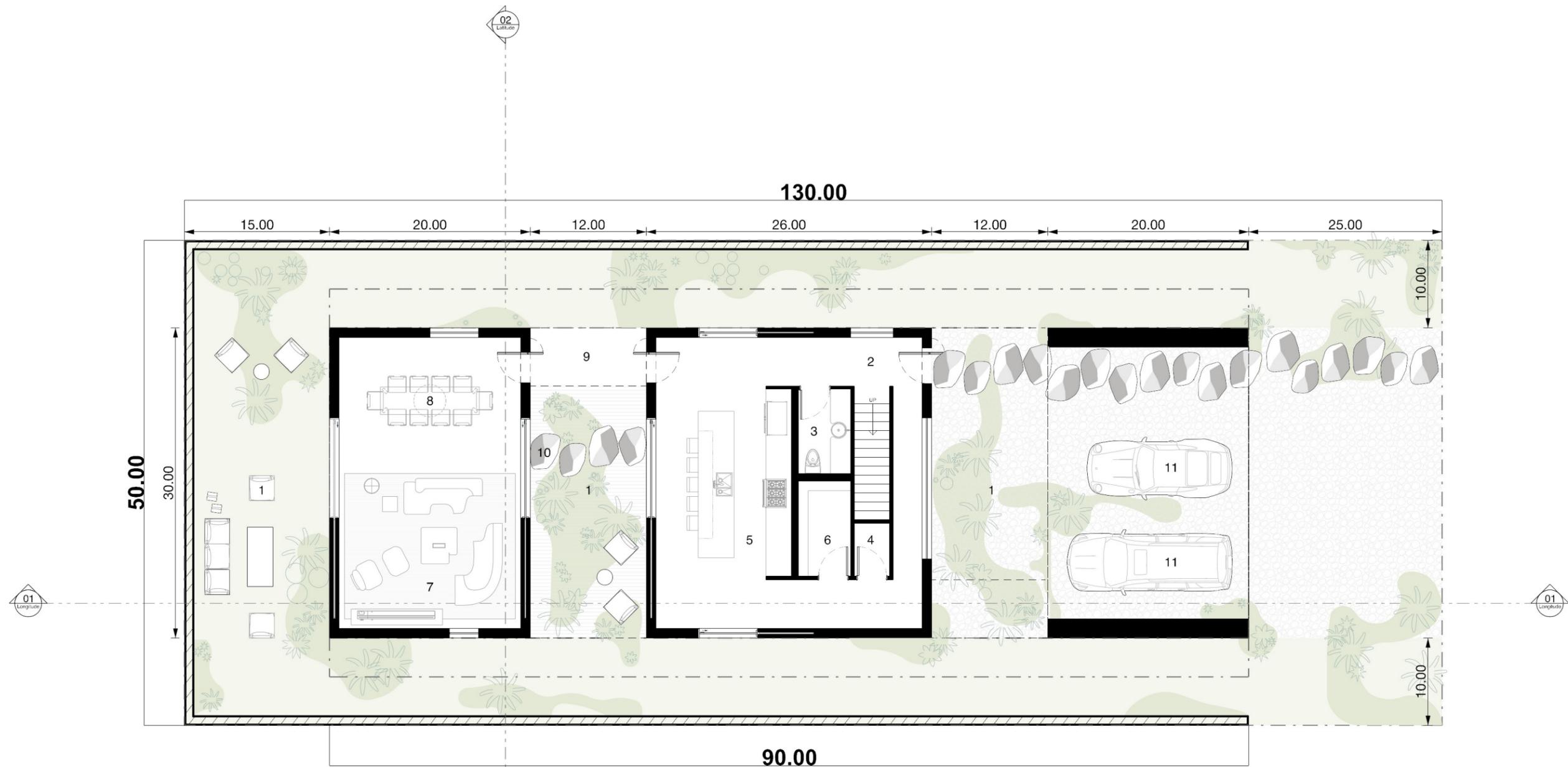


KEY

- 1. BATHROOM
- 2. FAMILY ROOM
- 3. FITNESS
- 4. SAUNA
- 5. THEATRE / ENTERTAINMENT
- 6. LAUNDRY
- 7. STORAGE
- 8. MECHANICAL ROOM

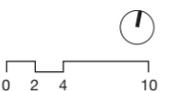


2.3 GROUND LEVEL

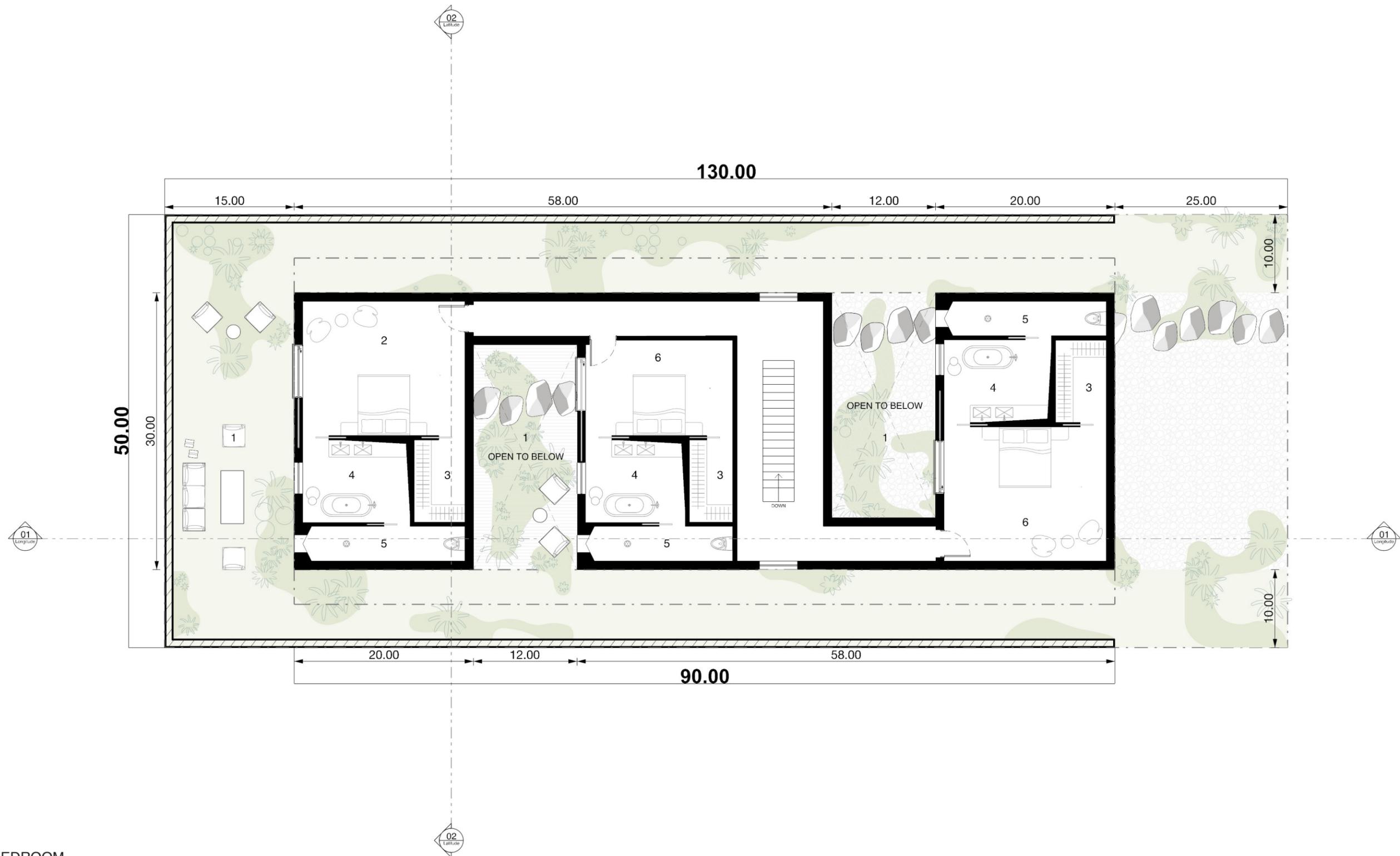


KEY

- 1. GARDEN
- 2. ENTRY
- 3. POWDER ROOM
- 4. ENTRY CLOSET
- 5. KITCHEN
- 6. PANTRY
- 7. LIVING ROOM
- 8. DINING ROOM
- 9. COVERED OUTDOOR CORRIDOR
- 10. STAGGERED STONE WALKWAY
- 11. PARKING

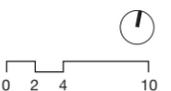


2.4 SECOND LEVEL

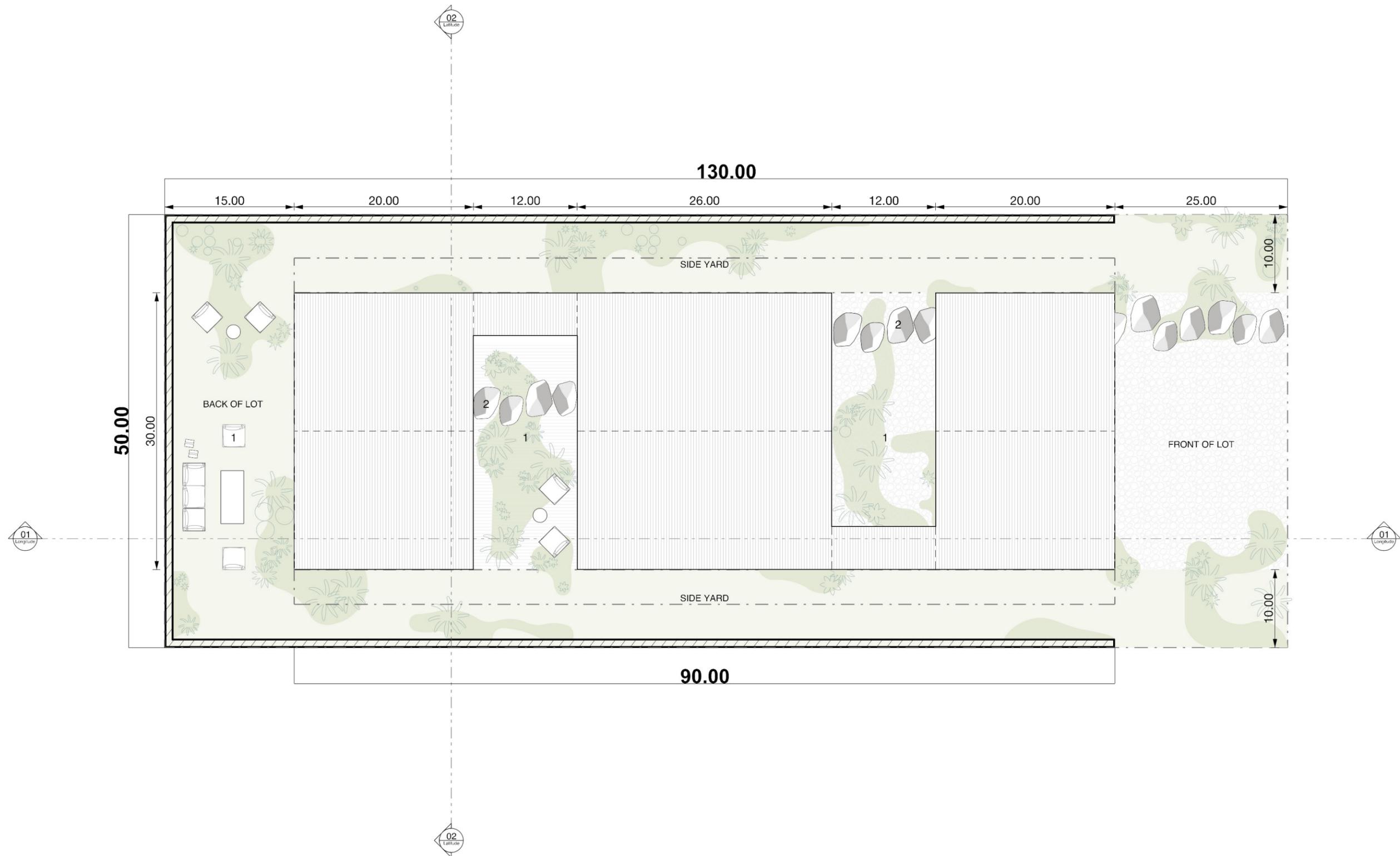


KEY

- 1. GARDEN
- 2. MASTER BEDROOM
- 3. CLOSET
- 4. VANITY & BATHING ROOM
- 5. SHOWER & WC AREA
- 6. BEDROOM

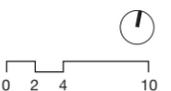


2.5 ROOF



KEY

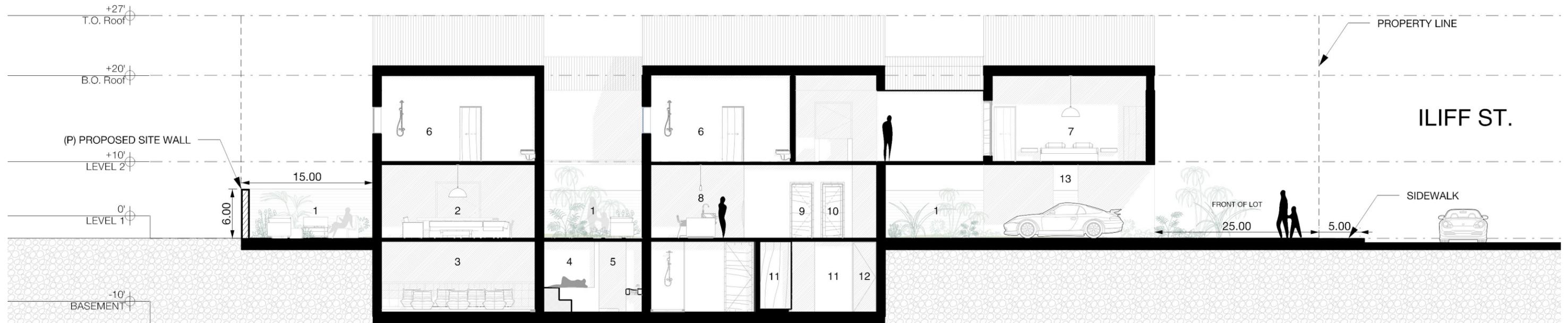
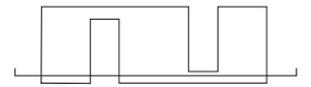
- 1. GARDEN
- 2. STAGGERED STONE WALKWAY



3.0

SECTIONS

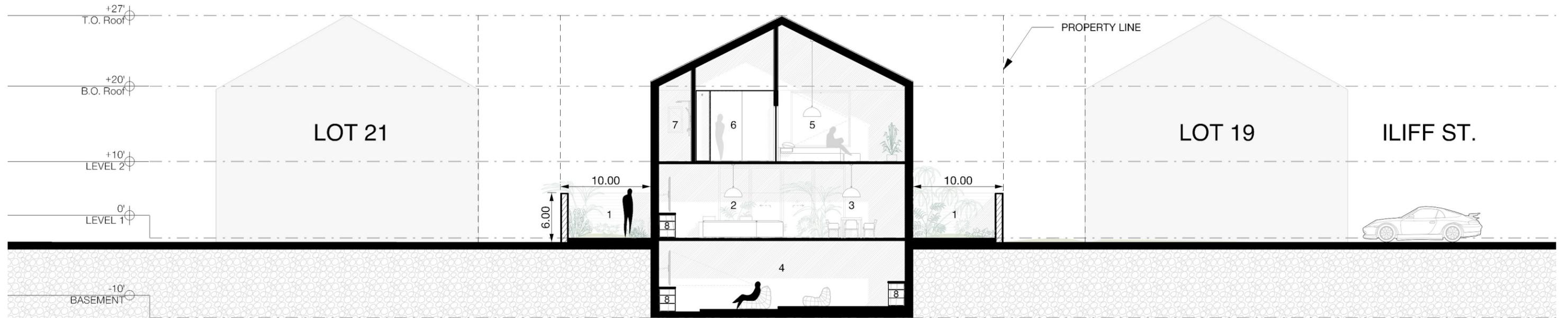
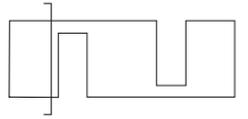
3.1 LONGITUDINAL SECTION



KEY

- 1. GARDEN
- 2. LIVING & DINING
- 3. THEATRE / ENTERTAINMENT
- 4. SAUNA
- 5. FITNESS
- 6. SHOWER & WC AREA
- 7. BEDROOM
- 8. KITCHEN
- 9. PANTRY
- 10. ENTRY CLOSET
- 11. STORAGE
- 12. MECHANICAL ROOM
- 13. COVERED PARKING

3.2 LATITUDINAL SECTION



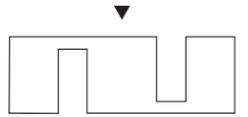
KEY

- 1. GARDEN
- 2. LIVING ROOM
- 3. DINING ROOM
- 4. THEATRE / ENTERTAINMENT
- 5. BEDROOM
- 6. CLOSET
- 7. SHOWER & WC AREA
- 8. STORAGE

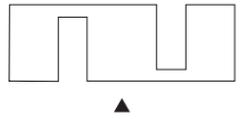
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ELEVATIONS

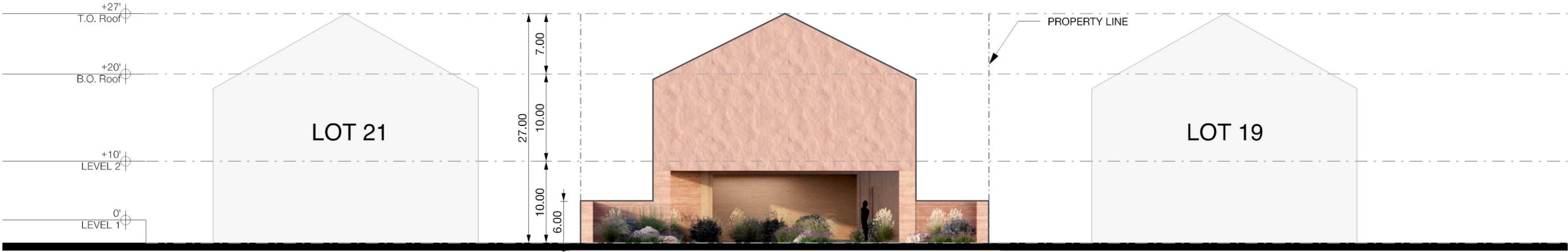
4.1 NORTH ELEVATION



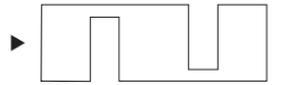
4.2 SOUTH ELEVATION



4.3 EAST ELEVATION



4.4 WEST ELEVATION



5.0

RENDERINGS











