



# THAI TOWN MARKETPLACE

Presented by: The Thai Community Development Center  
- a public market built and owned by the community -



CSC ARCHITECTURE

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*“An organization's works, not its words, are the telling assessment of its beliefs.”*

*– John Carver*

## THE THAI COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CENTER (THAI CDC)

Founded in April 1994 on the principle that all peoples have a basic right to a decent standard of living and quality of life.

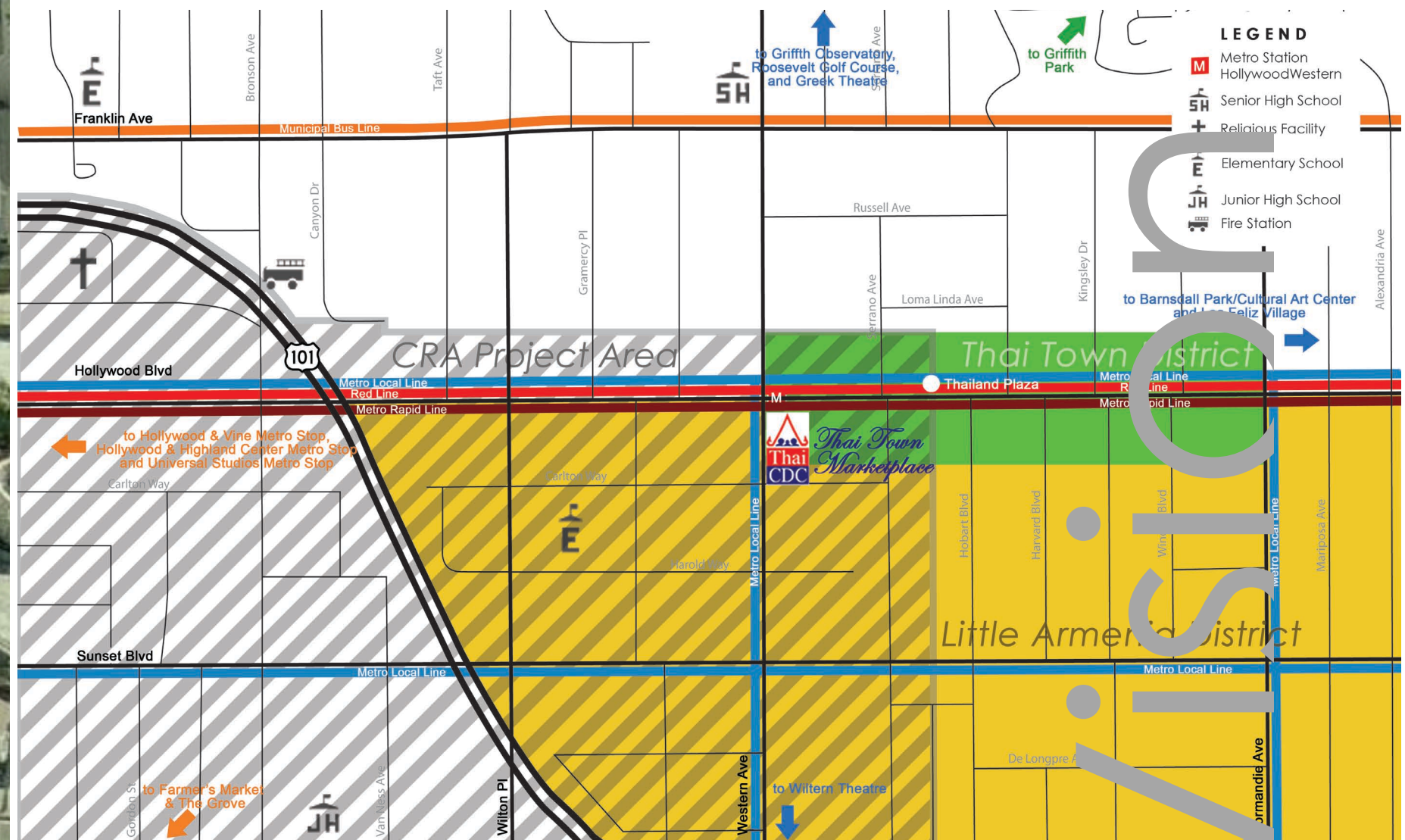


### OUR MISSION

*To advance the social and economic well-being of low and moderate income Thais and other ethnic communities in the greater Los Angeles area through a comprehensive community development strategy including human rights advocacy, affordable housing, access to healthcare, promotion of small businesses, neighborhood empowerment, and social enterprises.*







## THE CONCEPT

**Thai Town Marketplace** is an innovative approach to community revitalization facilitating economic empowerment and improvement of public spaces. A self-sustaining business incubator in a public market setting, Thai Town Marketplace provides local entrepreneurs with the opportunity to conceive a business, establish its viability, and ultimately, to mature to independent success in traditional commercial spaces.

Thai Town Marketplace provides an ideal low-cost entry point for start-up businesses, administrative services, group marketing, technical assistance, and small business and entrepreneurial training for low- to moderate-income individuals. By fostering innovation, the Market's individual businesses become engines of economic growth and opportunity. With facilities for nineteen start-up micro-enterprises, the Marketplace creates 40 permanent jobs for low-income individuals striving to become economically self-sufficient.

### Thai CDC: An Advocate for East Hollywood

East Hollywood is one of the more economically challenged sections of Los Angeles County. Adding to the community's vulnerability, gentrification and massive redevelopment projects along Sunset and Hollywood Boulevard threatens to displace many families and local businesses. Thai CDC understands that gentrification is a natural process of change and renewal in an urban setting. It is the manifestation of many factors in the life of the city including, socioeconomic, cultural, and political consideration. Creation of the Thai Town Marketplace as a meaningful urban artifact at this moment in time showcases East Hollywood's multiculturalism.

We envision a unique, thriving, public marketplace celebrating cultural diversity. Thai Town Marketplace is a means to promote immigrant entrepreneurship, generate business opportunities and employment, and revitalize the East Hollywood community. By empowering low-income individuals through micro-enterprise and employment opportunities, Thai Town Marketplace builds a community asset and provides a venue for stimulating cultural synergy. Drawing its vendors from the community, the Marketplace becomes a stage where individual voices speak a unique cross-cultural language, a language of flavors, fragrances, and spices, a place where community members have access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally representative foods.





# ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

**Strategically located above the Metro Station** at the intersection of two major transportation corridors, the Marketplace is situated at the base of an MTA mixed-use development. A nexus of multi-modal transportation, this location lends itself naturally to its consequential organization. Moreover, its adjacency to the monumental Apsonsi Gateway enriches the gateway's symbolism with physical space and form, specific to public gathering. Set back from the street, Thai Town Marketplace represents something of an "urban oasis" to commuters and visitors. A structured open canopy, the iconic exterior "Sala" court typology organizes pedestrian scale elements (landscaping, site graphics, signage, specialty lighting, etc.) into a carefully choreographed sequential experience.

**Augmenting the Apsonsi monument**, the Community Information Center provides historical, cultural, and current events information, preparing pedestrians embarking from this gateway on their journey into Thai Town. Conveniently located along the pedestrian sequence, retail kiosks help sequester the Sala's seating courts, flanking them and creating vistas that guide pedestrians into the Market's interior food venues.

**The Marketplace's interior typology** references a distinct structured bay system typical of traditional market court organization that creates functional order, maintains Marketplace Identity, and allows differentiation of the individual vendors in a clean and sanitary environment.

**The Thai CDC is aware of the significance of the Marketplace's cultural tourism synergy** with Thai Town, due in part to the growing Preserve America movement. Activating the streetscape with alfresco dining and space to host cultural events, Thai Town Marketplace creates a safe, enjoyable environment for families, and introduces Thai Town as a fun experience for tourists in Los Angeles.

**Importantly**, Thai Town Marketplace is developed to be a living, dynamic entity, evolving over time to achieve the Thai CDC's public objectives and to maintain economic viability.





### Business Incubation and Job Creation

- Improves economic mobility by providing a low cost entry point for local small businesses to start-up and succeed
- Creates at least 40 permanent jobs

### Healthy Diet Promotion

- Promotes healthy diet habits among low-income families through access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods

### Social Integration

- Creates a dynamic sense of public life through public space enhancements and hosting cultural events

**The Thai Town Community is part of the collective living dynamic of Los Angeles** whose physical manifestation evolves over time. This physicality is “the architecture of the city.” The evolution of the built form and the spaces we live in are a biography of our aspirations. Collectively, these spaces are like the influences and events in one’s own lifetime that make us who we are. Thai Town Marketplace is a meaningful event in this life. Occurring at a particular place and moment, Thai Town Marketplace celebrates and transforms the Thai Town gateway into a locus of human interaction for the local, and greater, Los Angeles communities.





CulturalRoots



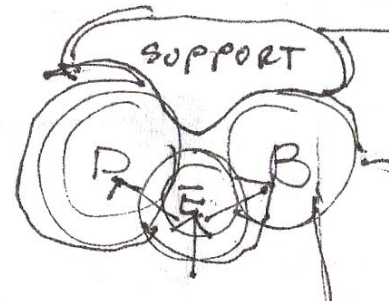
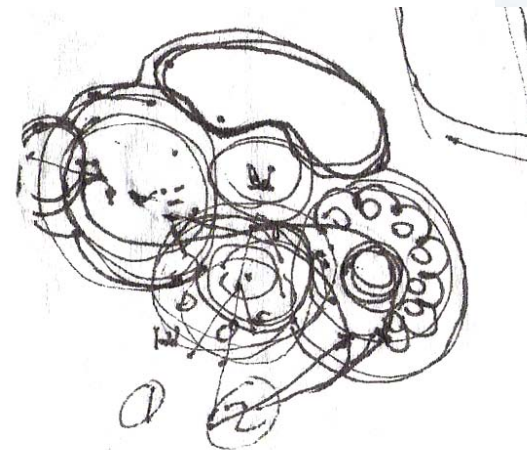
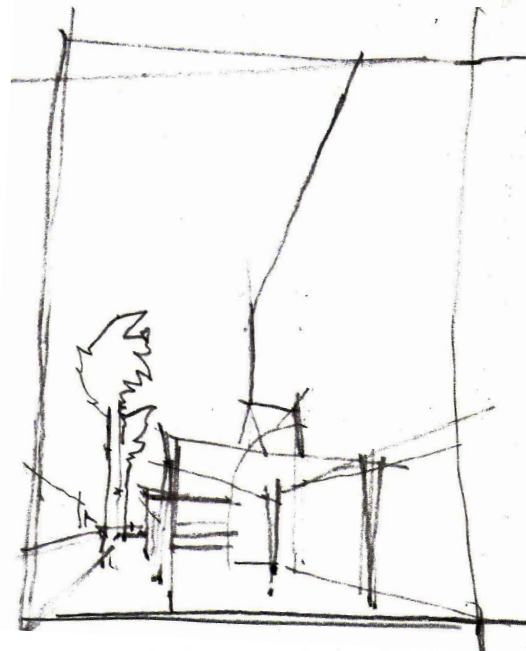
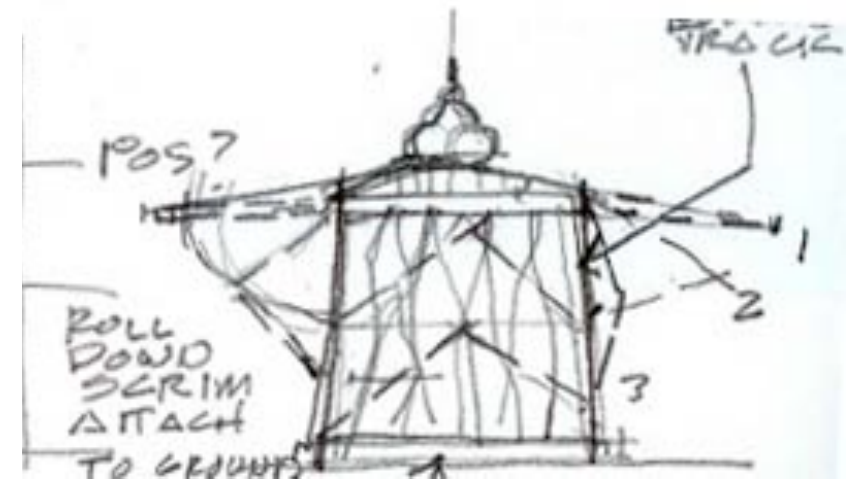
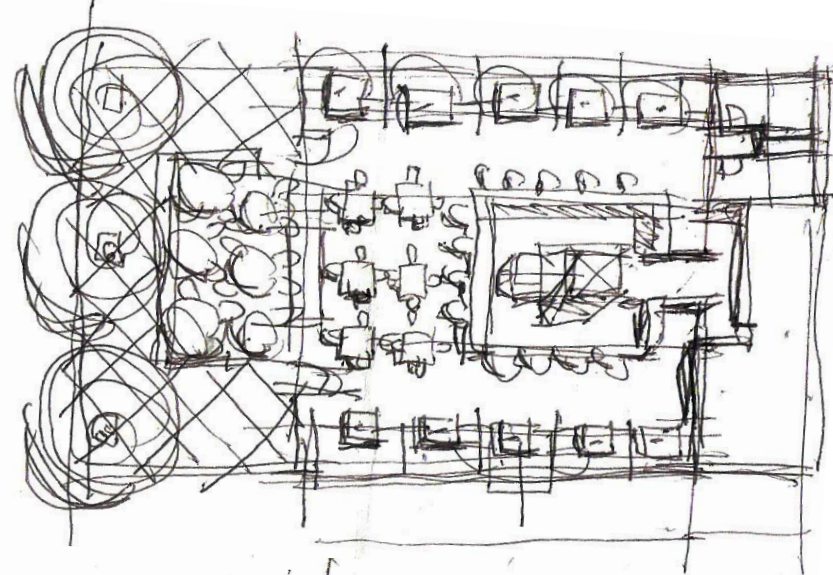
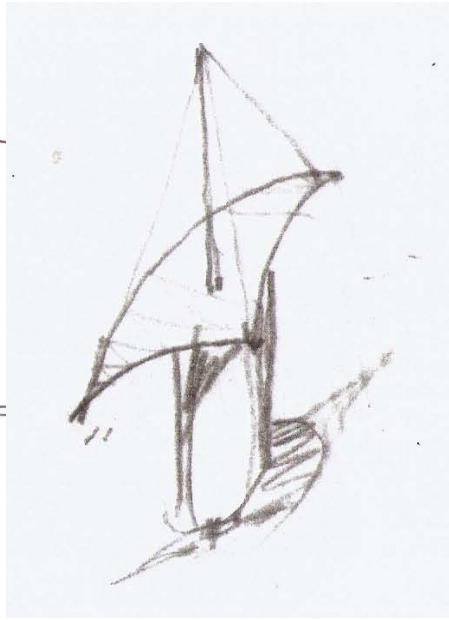
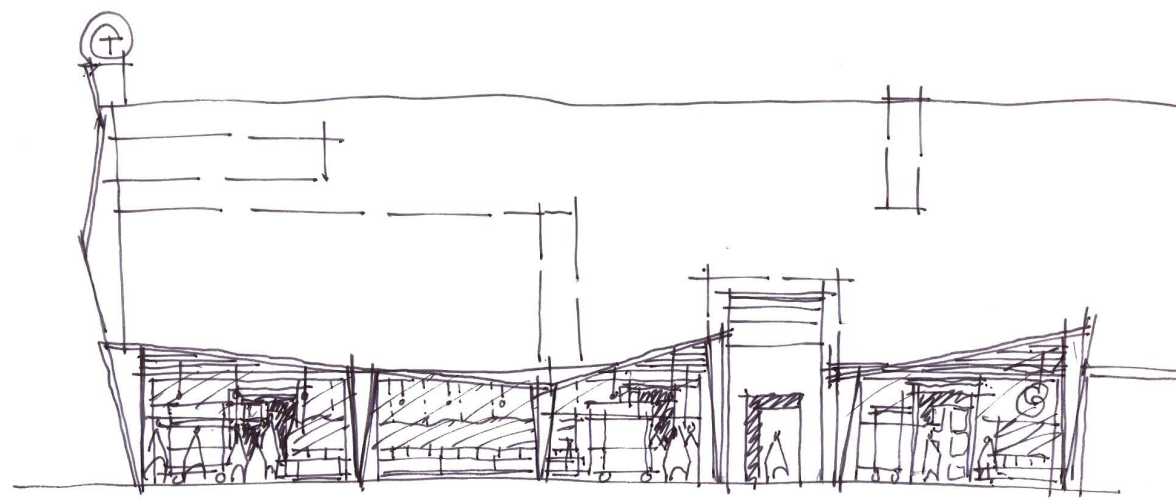
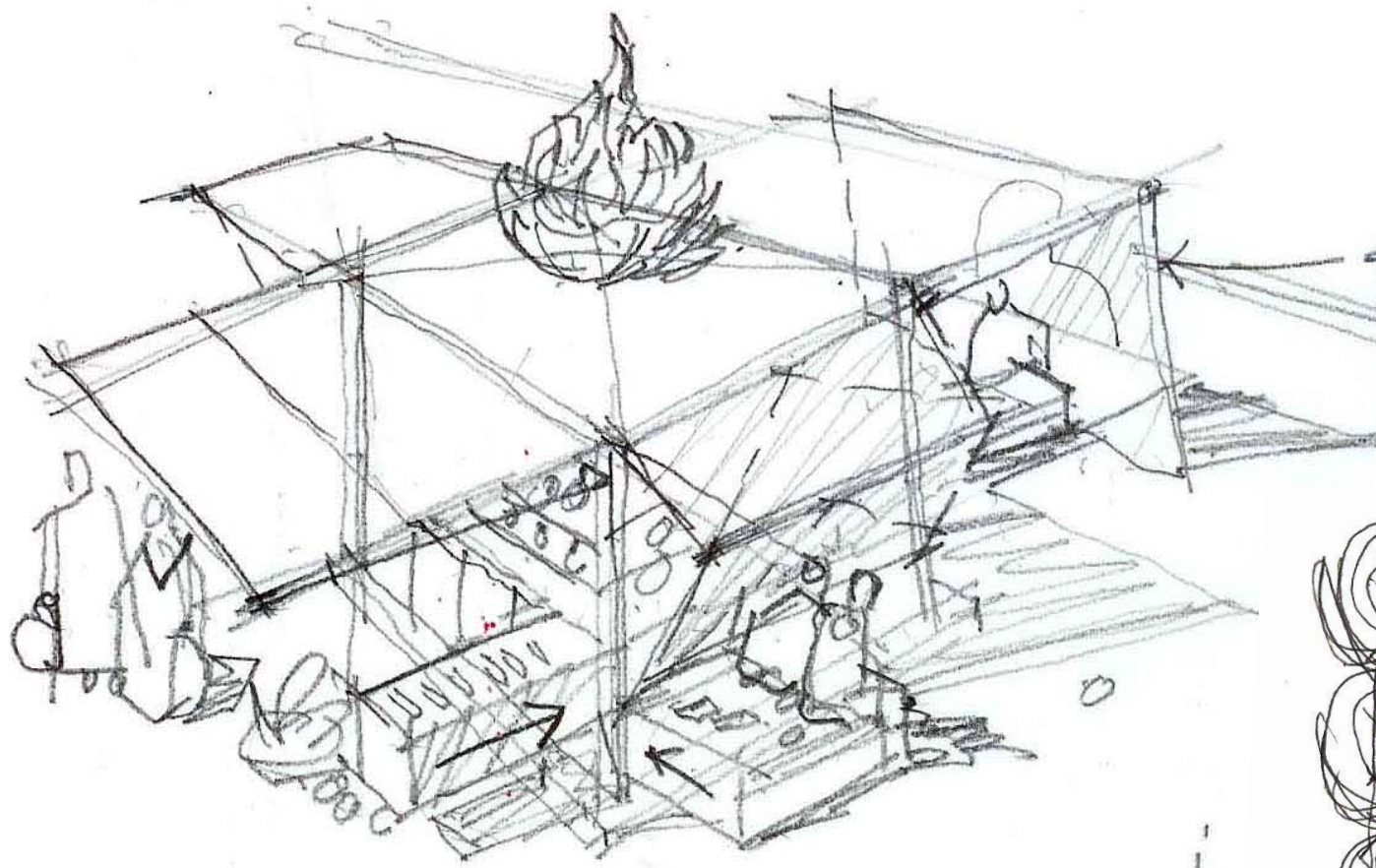


CurrentEvents



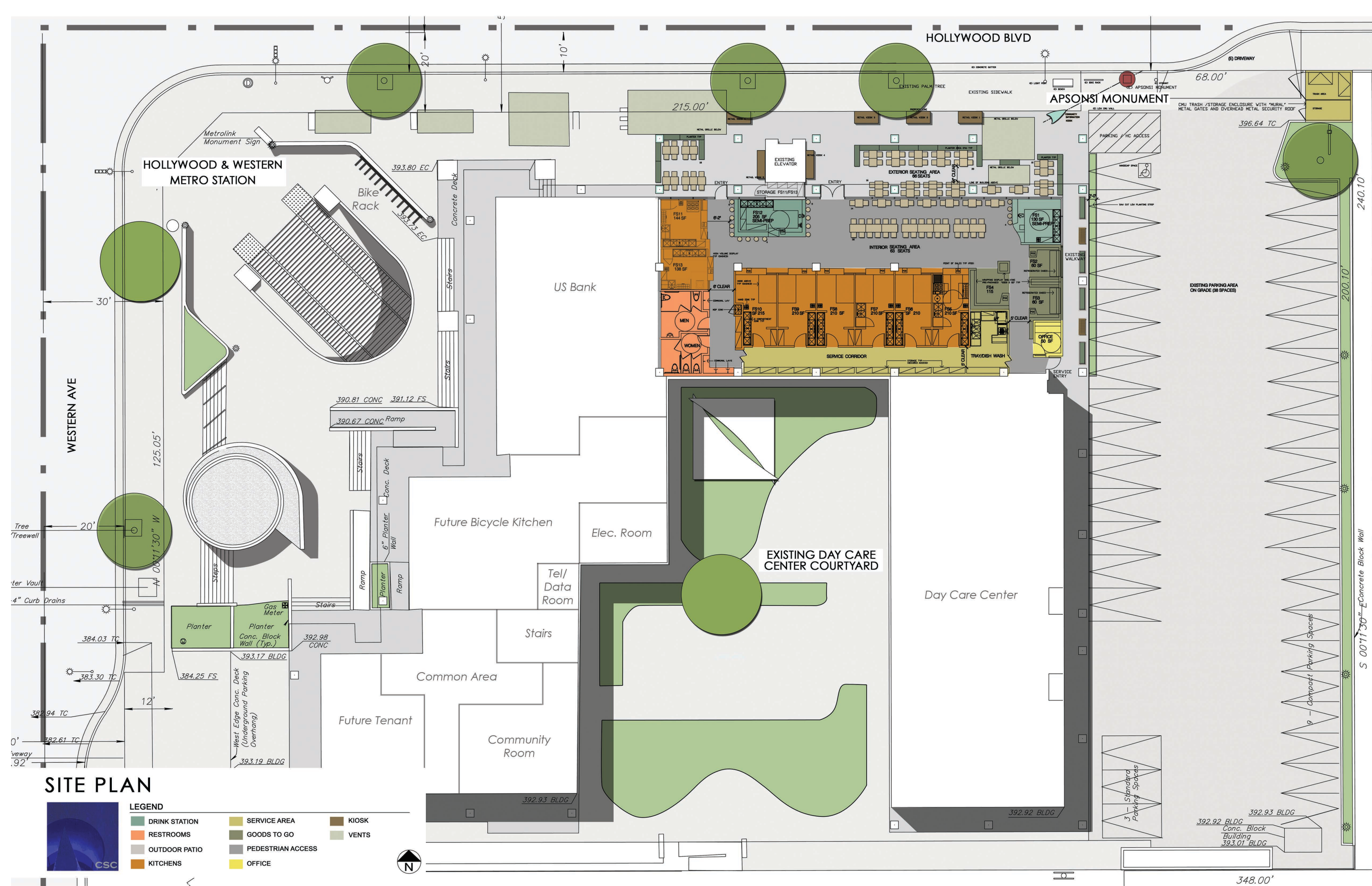






RoughSketches

















# Exterior Elevation





## THE SALA

From the corner of Hollywood and Western, visitors are greeted by the “Sala” pavilion the signature visual icon of Thai Town Marketplace. Paying homage to the open-air meeting places found throughout Thailand, the Sala is Thai Town Marketplace’s symbolic “wai” gesture welcoming visitors into the Marketplace. Whether you’re just having a cup of coffee, on a lunch break with friends, or an intimate dinner, the Sala is the perfect place to enjoy good conversation and fine food alfresco. Outdoor table service provides a complete dining experience for up to sixty-three Marketplace patrons under the East-Sala, while the West-Sala provides sit-down table service for up to twenty-two patrons.

### *Sala -*

An easily recognizable symbol of Thai architecture, the Sala is an open pavilion found throughout Thailand used as a meeting place and protection from the sun and rain. Through Sala Thai, everyone can enjoy a little “Thai-ness.”

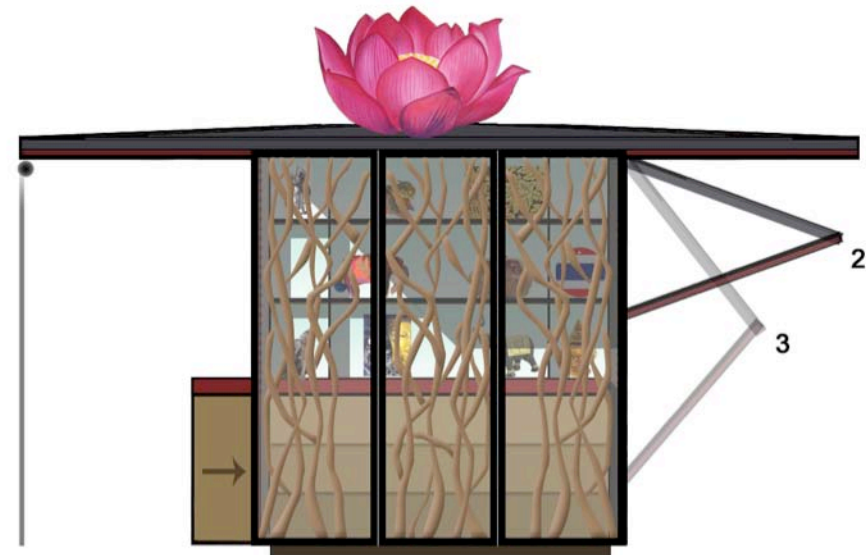




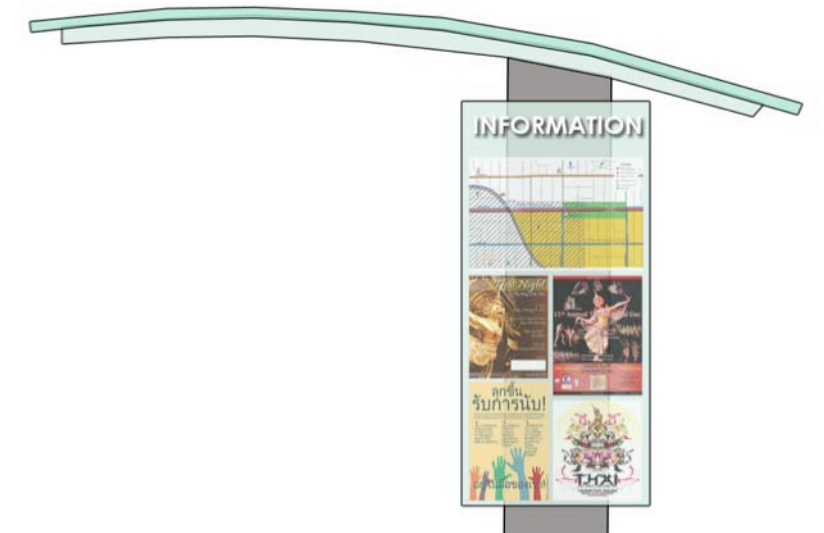
Closed Kiosk  
w/ artwork



Kiosk Option 1



Kiosk Option 2



Information Kiosk

## INFORMATION CENTER

**The Sala is also, where visitors encounter the Thai Town Information Center.** Sharing the community's history and offering suggestions on where to go and what to see in Thai Town, the Information Center is also a Community Board for announcements of upcoming events and community communication.

**During the height of tourist season,** the Information Center also accommodates facilities for concierge services. The concierge provides visitors with information about cultural events, recommends popular neighborhood venues, spas, where to eat or shop, assists with tours of local attractions, and helps visitors with directions on how to travel by Metro.

## RETAIL KIOSKS

Giving visitors a taste of famous markets in Thailand, such as the Chatuchak weekend market in Bangkok, artisan/retail vendor kiosks on the Metro Plaza display merchandise and arts & crafts, reflecting the Thai Town community's traditions and cultural mix.





# MARKETCOURT

**From the plaza,** Specific View-Corridors draw visitors into the Market. Once inside, visitors are immersed in the heart of the Marketplace. Comprised of eight full-kitchen incubators, the Marketplace's exhibition-style kitchens draw customers in and communicate freshness and quality.

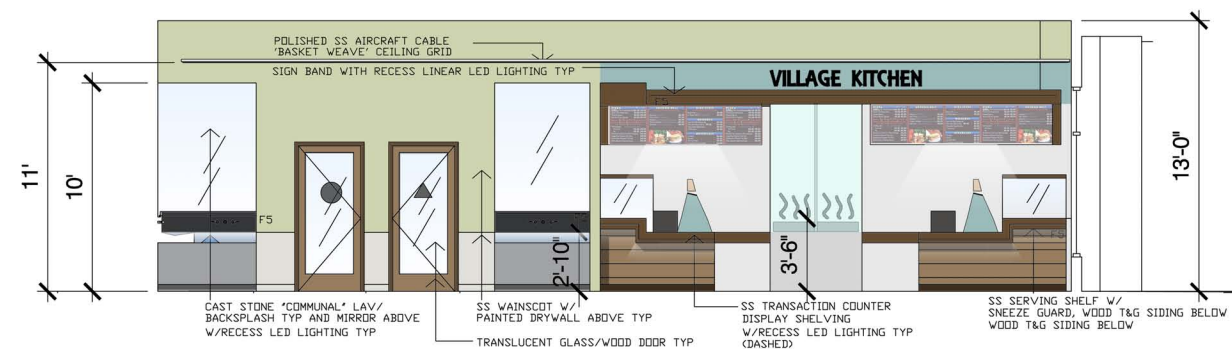
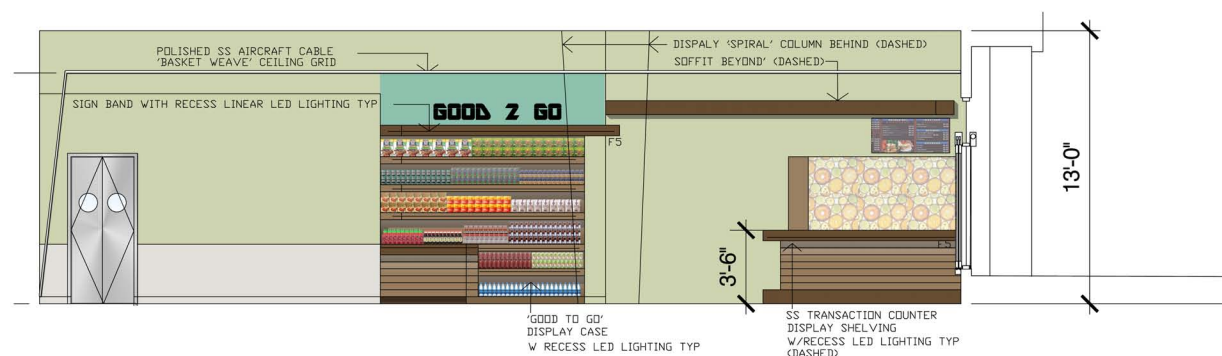
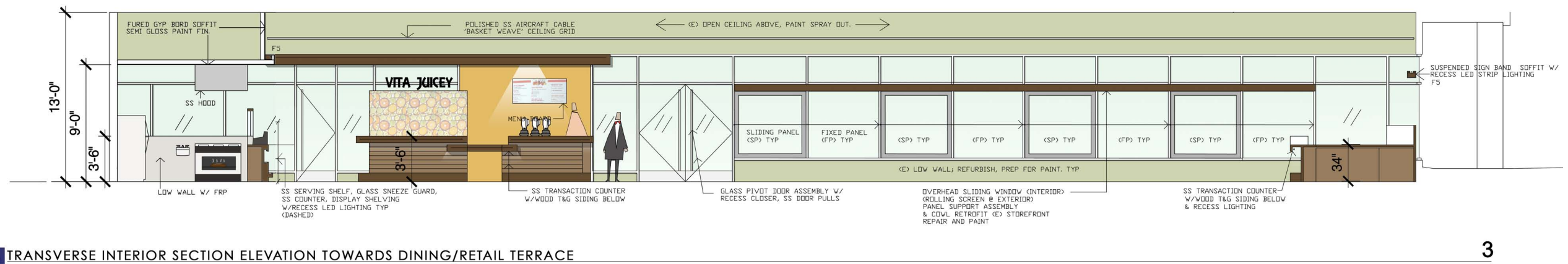
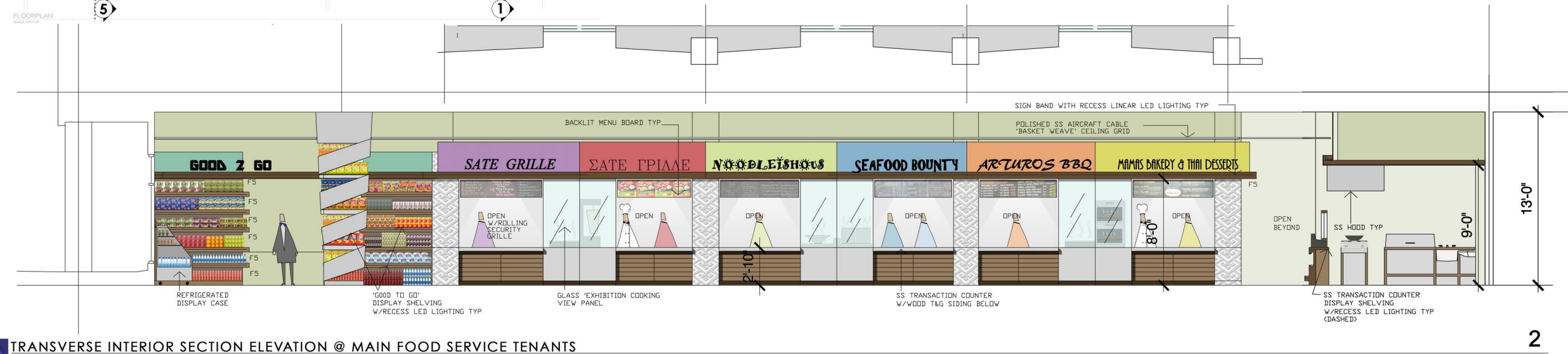
**Approximately 4,500 square feet,** the Market Court is fully handicapped-accessible and provides two semi-prep food service counters, three “Famima-style” Goods 2 Go vendors, restrooms, a common office, and indoor seating for up to fifty-seven

**While Metro passengers & Goods 2 Go shoppers** may prefer eating at the counter, there's also table service indoors and out. Enjoy a leisurely meal in comfort. Just take a table number, place your order with one or more of the counters, make sure they see your table number, then take a eat at a table and relax with your friends. When your order is ready, Marketplace expeditors will bring it to your table.

**INCUBATOR KITCHENS** – A new approach to urban revitalization, full-kitchen spaces provide eight promising start-up food-service concepts the help they need to progress to bigger spaces and ultimately open a full retail business outside of the public market. Through their small business program and entrepreneurial training, the Thai CDC provides business incubation opportunities for low to moderate-income individuals who are interested in starting their first business.

**GOODS 2 GO** – Three spaces in the Marketplace provide for convenience-store-style vendors, as well as, community Day-Stalls showcasing individual concept incubators. Day-stalls provide a flexible community amenity enhancing Thai Town Marketplace's authenticity.



[illegible]



# FOUR EXPERIENCES FOUR STORIES

Thai Town Marketplace is more than a destination – it’s an experience. Celebrating the community’s cultural diversity and authentic cuisine, the Thai Town Marketplace clientele is a mixture as varied as the residents of East Hollywood. Thai Town Marketplace draws tourists, lunchtime visitors, residents from Hollywood, North Hollywood, and Los Feliz, as well as, from neighborhoods along the Metro Red and Gold Lines, and the affluent communities adjacent to Thai Town in the Hollywood Hills.

## The Heart of Thai Town – The Soul of Our Community

We want to know this spectrum of Market visitors more vividly. We foresee a visit to Thai Town Marketplace’s future when we interview the people we meet there...

## METRO HOLLYWOOD APARTMENTS RESIDENT



Yes, I have an apartment upstairs. My son made it so I came to California’s City of Angels. Here I am blessed because I have my grandchildren near me.

Yes, always ... Elderly Thai women gather here every morning to chat under the pavilion. We are a group from the neighborhood, all knowing one another. Thai people truly have a beautiful community here, because she is bringing good fortune to us (motioning towards the gateway Apsonsi). We are helping her too. We know that by gathering friends to our community with kindness and hospitality of Thai Town, our lives are better.

think it is a good choice for me ... Living here makes everything convenient. I can know the news of Thai Town from the Community Board on the Information Center, the Thai CDC makes a clinic in the Community Room where I received influenza vaccine from doctor Panosian ... and when we celebrate the Songkran Festival – it gives memories of my life in Thailand.

Oh, many kind of vegetable ... Have you been? Weekends they have a Farmer’s Market here. I can find good prices for the vegetables I need ... some I can only find here from the Farmer’s Market – elsewhere they are too expensive. I cook for myself most of the time, but sometimes I will come downstairs to the kitchens. I may take my mealtime here, or I like to have a ready-made snack from the Goods 2 Go. It’s easy for me to afford, and I would like to see the showmanship of the chefs. Perhaps, more beautiful than I do in the kitchen, but they will not cook with the secrets I know (laughs)...

Yes, there are many items from the vendors ... Thai language newspapers – children are always here for Manga ... I keep a shrine in my apartment, so I get incense from Mr. Supasawat – from his kiosk, over there. Sometimes, I will use the flowers from these Dok Khun for my shrine because they bring memories of home.



## SILVERLAKE RESIDENT

There's a group of us that get together outside of work sometimes. We tend to start out at a place for something to eat – hit a club or whatever from there... I live in Silverlake, but some of the guys live downtown, so Los Feliz Village sort of became our default meeting place. Since they opened the Marketplace though, I always suggest we powwow in Thai Town. It's an easy jaunt on the Red Line for them, and I'll usually ride my bike down, and lock it up here. That's just under five miles, so, I get here, and I'm ready for an ice-cold Roselle Tea. And, they've got the Bike Doctor here, so I've used that a few times.

Weekends are “primetime” here. I'm serious! There's always something you won't find on the menu at any other place – ‘cause they have the East Hollywood Farmer's Market, and there's always something from the market that shows up in one or two of the chef's specials. After a bite, we might head into the “Cahuenga Corridor” or better, just let the Metro do the driving, and hit some place downtown – bam! You're there.

... Yeah, I mean, you can feel the energy – see – look over here ... they have it all set up to try-out new ideas. Each one of these kitchens is its own business. Whoever figured all this out really knew what they were doing, ‘cause what's happening here is culinary innovation that's uniquely L.A. There's the most authentic Thai cuisine you'll find anywhere, across from Salvadoran, next to Armenian, and the fusion of everything in-between.

Um, it's been a while ... I started coming here around the time they first opened – when the Bike Doctor opened. I remember Mrs. Songprawati had her kitchen right over there, on the end. Selling finger-foods and sweets, she carved-out a real niche for herself. Almost single-handedly introducing L.A. to Thai sweets, or at least the L.A. who normally wouldn't come east of Laurel Canyon. Dara and her partners did some little events and small-scale weddings – they had the place here – all recipes from her grandmother's grandmother, and some they came up with themselves. They really started to hit though when wedding planners from the Westside started using their confections. That was the tipping point. Suddenly, a tradition with hundreds of years of history became the “new thing” you were reading about in Bon Appétit magazine. I still follow them on Twitter so I'll know when they bring out something new. Their retail shop is over on Normandie, Siam Palace Sweets. If you fly out of LAX on Thai Airways, all the dessert sweets are made by Dara and her partners.

Ah, well, yes ... You've found me out. I've got the Marketplace Card, the whole nine yards, but I'll only admit to eating here maybe twice a week. The food's always top-flight – better than some chichi place and without the high tab – the vibe is way cooler ... It's the best of both worlds, really. They run a tight ship, an “A” at every counter – very professional – and they've got street-cred.



## EAST HOLLYWOOD RESIDENT

Sure ... I have some time right now, but when I have another patient, they'll have to come first...

I'm an RN, and I'm in the Nurse Practitioner program at UCLA ... I was born in Armenia, but my parents moved here when I was only two – we still live in the neighborhood.

Originally, we had screenings and counseling only a couple times a year ... It started out as the Thai CDC's health fair, “Live, Work & Play in East Hollywood,” and there's a booth during the Songkran Festival. We'd screen for Hepatitis B... A group of us at UCLA realized our community needed more services than we could provide in only one or two days a year. So, we began developing the Thai Health Network [THN], a network of Thai and Asian American health workers who collaborate to improve access to healthcare for Thais everywhere in the United States. So, now we have health screenings and counseling throughout the year at various locations. You'll see our announcement if you look on the Community Board on the plaza...

Yes, it's a little more today than usual ... We're providing flu vaccine to anyone who is “high risk.” So, if you're over 50, or pregnant – also children 6 months to 19 – you can come in and get the vaccine ... Adults usually ask, ‘do I need to get the flu shot?’ ‘When should I get it?’ Children ask, ‘is it going to hurt?’ So, we'll give them a tamarind candy for letting us give them the shot ... One of the other nurses got them from Goods 2 Go, the a section in the Market with pre-made foods and stuff...

Fringe benefits? Oh, I'd have to say that would be lunchtime (laughing). Don't get me wrong, I love my mother, and to me, she is the best cook in the whole world, but there's nothing like a healthy dose of Tom Yum Gung to help boost the immune system. I'll take some home for my mother. She needs more authentic Thai cuisine in her diet (laughs)...

Also, I'd have to say the real fringe benefit is getting to know my neighbors.





CULTURAL TOURISM  
GERHARD & ILSA



Thai Town Marketplace leverages the cultural resources and diversity found in Thai Town to promote cultural tourism, ethnic cuisine, artisans, and cross-cultural understanding. The Marketplace’s authenticity attracts both visitors and residents alike.

**GERHARD:**

I have been to Los Angeles a dozen times for the company, usually at least once a year. But, I have no real experience of the life of the city. And so, this year we decide to come for our holiday. Today we visit Universal Studios. When we get on the subway returning to the Hotel Biltmore, we notice on the map, “Thai Town.” We must discover what this is...

**ILSA:**

Coming up from the subway, we can see the colorful silk scarves in the kiosk. In another is a master sculptor in teakwood...

**GERHARD:**

We have discovered Thai Town Marketplace! I can see inside the chefs making with the wok. There is this colorful digital media display and a half dozen other kitchens each of a different kind, from soups to entrée, and a bakery too. The children see this excitement and then are already inside.

**ILSA:**

We walk in, and immediately – the hustle and bustle of every kitchen is fantastic. The fragrance of the curries and peppers – all fresh – everything alive! The chefs make their cooking into a wonderful performance – how you call this – “flair?” They have the wok sizzling and making everything right in front of you – this says quality, and it’s exciting to watch...

**GERHARD:**

The children see all this, and want now one of everything from the menu just to see the chef making it for them. And so much variety – authentic Thai cuisine, an Armenian bakery...

**ILSA:**

I had no idea Thai Town had so many different cultures. They combine flavors from Latin American and Thai cuisine to create a Thai menu, which I’ve seen nowhere else before – this is amazing! We have truly experienced L.A.

**GERHARD:**

With the children, there are four of us. We had a beautiful lunch, and including the children’s Thai Iced Tea, and the Kadaif for dessert, it is still very affordable compared to last night in Santa Monica. Plus, we can enjoy a little serenade from the stage here. This trio, performing on traditional Thai instruments...

**ILSA:**

And here already for a shopping spree ... I think I must have this silk scarf from the kiosk. The shop owner shows me swatches – I never knew there were all these types of silk ... She walks me to the concierge at the Information Center and gets for me a Thai Town map/brochure showing where, just down the street, I can create tailor-made with her silk. By tomorrow night, I will sleep in silk pajamas!



# THREE VENDORS THREE JOURNEYS

A Public Market is not simply a collection of vendor stalls. It's a persistent memory, an emotional association, a childhood playground; it is a world unto itself. Marketplace Vendors come from the community, each is on a journey. In some cases, that journey has brought them to East Hollywood from the tambons of Thailand, or the municipios of Central America. In others, they may have lived here all their lives. Yet, all of them have chosen the path of enterprise. Their footsteps take them in the direction of opportunities that life in the United States has represented to the world for over two hundred years.

## A Public Market Built and Owned by the Community

Our Vendors know their customers as friends, and together they build a vibrant and diverse meeting and eating place where everyone feels at home. Our visit to Thai Town Marketplace's future acquaints us with the aspirations of the parent organization, the Thai CDC, as well as the businesses it nurtures in its incubator. We hear the stories of graduate and nascent alike...

## SIAM PALACE SWEETS & SIAM PALACE CATERING

Daraneer (Dara) Songprawati

It's a big event. ... You'll have to talk to me while I'm working – very busy... Thai Airways is an important client. We want everything should be perfect.... Everyone asks me that question – everyone with a sweet tooth. Don't worry; we're keeping our retail shop on Normandie. From now on, we'll only be making confections there. When we first moved in, I thought, 'this is so much bigger than our space in Thai Town Marketplace, we will have no problem servicing our catering clients... Then, we did only for small parties, one hundred people at the most. Then, Thai sweets really caught on with wedding planners, especially from the Westside. To them, Thai sweets are an exotic new treat they never knew before. Before too long, I'm thinking, 'how can we accommodate our clients in so small a space?' Now, we have a new catering kitchen in North Hollywood. Without it, we could never do an event like this one....

That's the second question everyone asks – all my life. Ever since I was a little girl in Singburi province, my mother and I would make Thai sweets and snacks to sell at the temple market. When I came to the United States, I made them for weddings – all my friends tell me, 'you should sell these to restaurants.' I tried that, but restaurants wanted to know my work history, see my ServSafe certificate and proof I was cooking in a health department licensed commercial kitchen. I had no idea about all these things. All I had was enthusiasm, and I believed in what my mother taught me from her mother, and her mother's mother....

I was making just at home, selling at Wat Thai weekend market here in North Hollywood. I couldn't afford to rent a commercial kitchen. Then, the weekend market was shut down, and so were my earnings. I was thinking, 'I could never make a business out of my family recipes,' until my friends Dee and Wan suggested we start a business at Thai Town Marketplace – I'd made the wedding sweets for all their daughters. I didn't know what the Small Business Program has taught me. Back then, I can only think, 'this is beyond my reach, and too risky,' but my friends won't let me say no (laughs). Together, we worked with the Asian Pacific Islander Small Business Program's Women's Business Center. We wrote a business plan, applied for an SBA loan – working with Cooke Sunoo; we were able to get assistance from CAMEO [California Association for Micro Enterprise Opportunities]. It all seems like ages ago. Now, we have three more women joining us to open this location....

Yes, we were among the first to graduate from the incubator.... It was easier for us, I think, because our business always relied more heavily on our relationships with event planners than, say, Metro passengers. That's why support from Thai Town Marketplace's loyalty program is so important. When a business graduates from the incubator, they need their customers to follow them to their new location. The loyalty program's social media lets customers know about your move, and that they can still pay with their Marketplace Card. That way, Thai Town Marketplace is always expanding outward from Thai Town gateway – the Apsonsi are watching over our celebration today.





# GABRIELLA'S

Francisco & Gabriella Barahona

**FRANKIE:**

It feels longer, but it's only been fifteen years. ... At first, I didn't speak any English, but a friend got me a job at a club on Sunset, washing dishes. I remember there was this fancy party. The chefs dressed in these crisp white jackets, and wore a toque – you know, the “chef's hat.” The food was like a beautiful design on the plate. And, all the guests are saying what amazing work the chefs do. I say to myself, ‘that's who I want to be.’ So, when I'm in the kitchen, I ask, ‘how I can become a chef?’ And, they begin to teach me. I worked hard. My first promotion, I became a prep cook. Since then, I've worked everywhere from Fast Food places, on up to Station Chef at a restaurant in Silver Lake. That's where I met Gabriella.... Gabi had experience working in commercial kitchens in East L.A. ... We began dreaming about our new life together, about owning our own restaurant.



**GABI:**

We think, ‘what is separating us from our dream of being our own boss, of opening a restaurant of our own?’ So, Frankie and me set up along with the other street vendors on Breed Street in East Los Angeles – we make authentic Salvadoran food there...

**FRANKIE:**

But, health inspectors drove us all out of there.

**GABI:**

So, we began looking into what it would take to open in a food-court, in a mall or something...

**FRANKIE:**

Rent was just too expensive. It was only for big corporations...

**GABI:**

I'd heard about Thai Town Marketplace in my women's group at Immaculate Heart. I knew there was going to be openings for new businesses...

**FRANKIE:**

That's if you're Thai, I thought, but we're Salvadoran...

**GABI:**

I asked Reverend Ochoa, he said, ‘the United States has laws to guarantee equality.’ So, I called, and found out – Thai Town Marketplace is for everyone! That same day, I wrote down a menu of my Grandmother's recipes. We keep it in this frame, here. ... Both of us remembered what we endured just to come to this country. If we made it through that, we told each other, making our own restaurant will be easy...

**FRANKIE:**

But, neither of us had experience in the front of the house.

**GABI:**

The burden of leasing a space, and all the things about managing a restaurant were just too much. We wanted to start out by building on what we know best, giving everything a Salvadoran flavor – Pupisio in the morning... And, maybe some Tortas at lunchtime (laughing)...

**FRANKIE:**

That's why we thought about a food-court, so that much of the front of the house was already taken care of. I knew that in the kitchen, I am the boss, but I had no knowledge of business. I could not break through and become my own boss...

**GABI:**

So, we learn more about Thai Town Marketplace. We find out its mission is to help people like, Frankie and me become successful business people. The Thai CDC gave us business counseling, and we have a mentor. We take inspiration from these (pointing to the framed menu), but our mentor works with us to design our menu so it works better in the Marketplace. ... We're working hard to make our dream come to life here.

**FRANKIE:**

Less than six months. ... Oh, yes, many Tortas... I buy my bread from the Baker here in the market, Mr. Boyajian. Lunchtime rush is huge. The location is great! Right above the Red Line station, easy to see from the street – there's always plenty of foot traffic. We have customers we see every day, and weekend regulars too.

**GABI:**

They come here from all over. One man I've gotten to know comes all the way from Yorba Linda.

**FRANKIE:**

Gabriella's personality brings them back. She makes everyone feel at home – that, they're a part of our family.

**GABI:**

(Laughs) I think it's because of my empanadas...



**ARAM:**

Yes, at USC. ... I'm still committed to earning my MBA. I tell my friends, 'I'm skipping all the theory in favor of direct application.' I'm not only a vendor, though; I also mentor other entrepreneurs here in the Marketplace through the Asian Pacific Islander Small Business Program.

**JAMES:**

What does one do with an economics degree? I graduated just in time for the collapse, when the price for economists was hovering at around a dime a dozen. So, I decided to pursue my other passion, and enrolled at Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts over on West Sunset.... We've known each other for a while. How long has it been?

**ARAM:**

Over five years now – we met when we were both at UCLA.

**JAMES:**

We were two of a kind, two foodies supporting our habit by earning a degree in something practical.

**ARAM:**

We'd make these incredible journeys all over L.A. on a quest for the best Squash Blossom Pizza, or whatever our craving du jour was.

**JAMES:**

I remember one time we started in San Diego, and made our way north to this little whole in the wall in Santa Barbara looking for the best Pulled Pork Nachos. We'd upload a picture of each order, scarf-down, then, back in the car 'til the next location – posting our own reviews on Chowhound as we went along....



**ARAM:**

Just about the time I'd all but forgotten what made me enthusiastic about getting a business degree, James came to me with his idea of fusing our twin passions of food and business. That spark ignited a fire.

**JAMES:**

We had all this knowledge, but in a down economy, there wasn't much chance either of us would land our dream job. So, we created our own dream jobs.

**ARAM:**

All of a sudden, I saw every food-quest we'd been on from a business perspective. We hadn't been slacking off; we were researching our marketing plan, investigating our flanking attack on the culinary marketplace.

**JAMES:**

It was a creative challenge. ... We had all these brainstorming sessions. At one point, we listed all the foods we remembered from when we were kids. The rule was; the food had to be fun.

**ARAM:**

Armenian pizza! My grandmother would cringe if she heard me say that, but that's what we used to call it.

**JAMES:**

Lahmajoun, literally, 'meat with dough.' It's a traditional Armenian recipe for minced beef or lamb on flatbread.

**ARAM:**

You'd try to describe it to other kids, but no matter what, you'd always end up just telling them, 'it's an Armenian pizza.'

**JAMES:**

We make traditional lahmajoun, from Aram's grandmother's recipe; but we also have our own modern interpretations. Some of my favorites are ground beef lahmajoun with garlic and holy basil, braised lamb vindaloo, a very simple but elegant tomato and garlic with Jamón serrano and mozzarella di bufala. ... In relation to, say, Wahoo's, El Pollo Loco, Yoshinoya, – California Pizza Kitchen – Joon is a completely new entrant. Ready to disrupt the fast food industry, and with, like, a blind side!

**ARAM:**

Porter's Five Forces never looked so appetizing. We must have written the business plan in less than a week. We thought we had a brilliant idea. At the end of the day though, we were just two guys with huge college loan debts – pounding the pavement looking for start-up capital. That was a reality-check.

**JAMES:**

That's when we found out about Thai Town Marketplace. I grew up in Arcadia, so, I'd always thought of Thai Town as a place to go for the restaurants – Aram, grew up in Little Armenia...

**ARAM:**

You honestly couldn't ask for a better location. East Hollywood is becoming something of a, "food destination," and the lowered barrier to entry was ideal for our situation.

**JAMES:**

We see the Marketplace Incubator as the perfect place for de-bugging our business plan, establishing relationships with suppliers, working out the workflow in the kitchen....

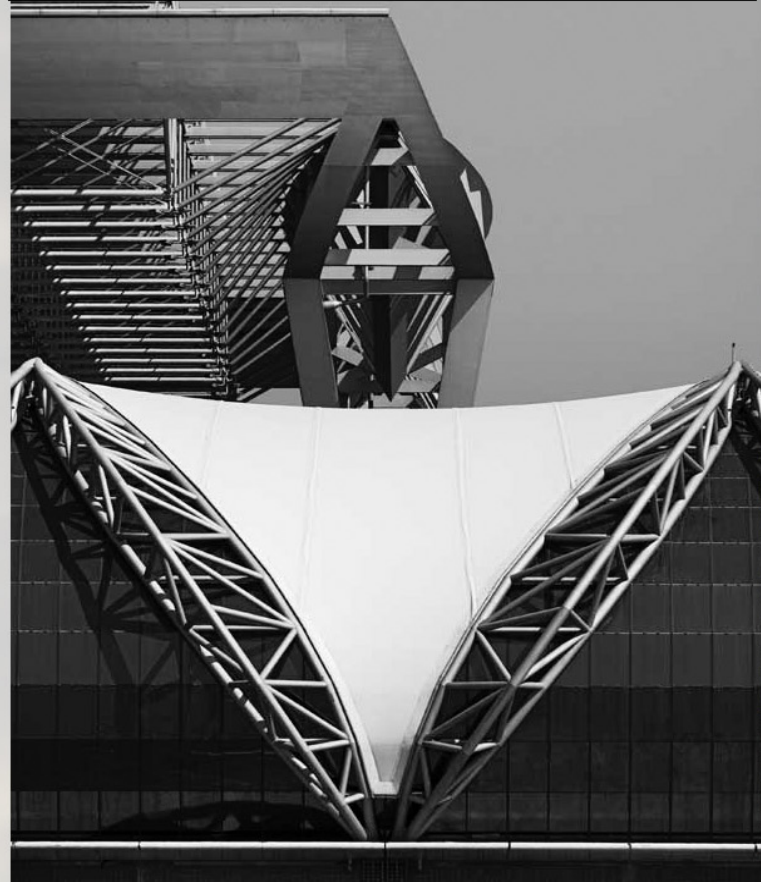
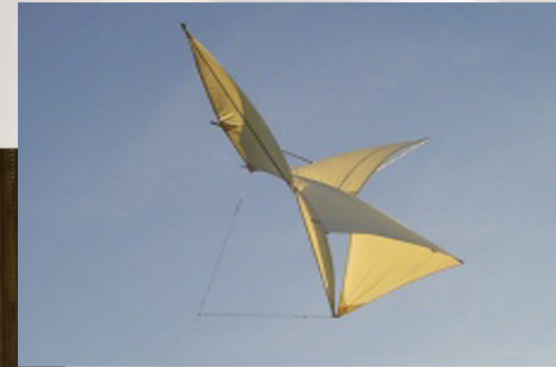
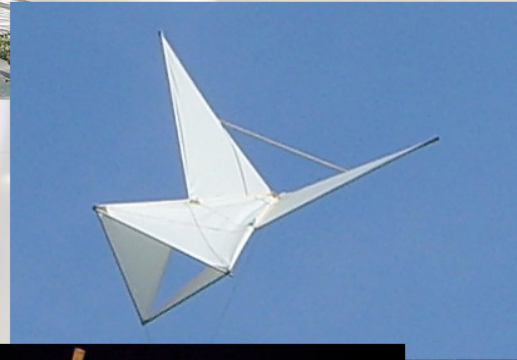
**ARAM:**

We're talking to investors, and we just started looking at commercial spaces. ... The incubator doesn't have a set time limit, but we're about half way along. We're using social media tools to get the word out about Joon – building our fiercely devoted fan-base (smiling).... We need to help each other succeed. ... I can honestly say that I feel more fulfilled counseling the other vendors than had I chosen a corporate career path.

**JAMES:**

There's no other place like this market. The food is truly exceptional – the atmosphere – when you're a customer, you get to know the owners. You know the person cooking your food, and if you're a regular, we know you too.





Associative Design Imagery:

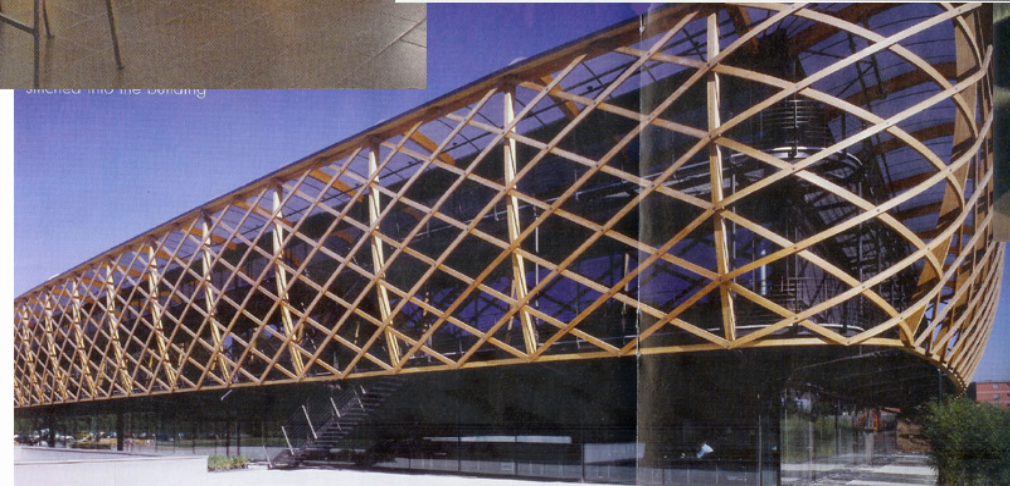
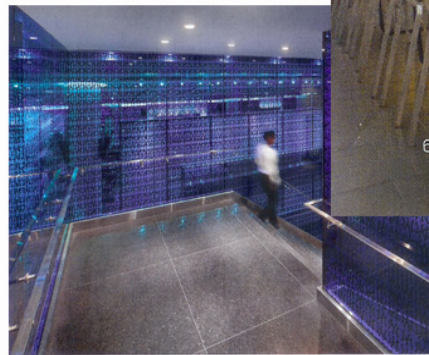
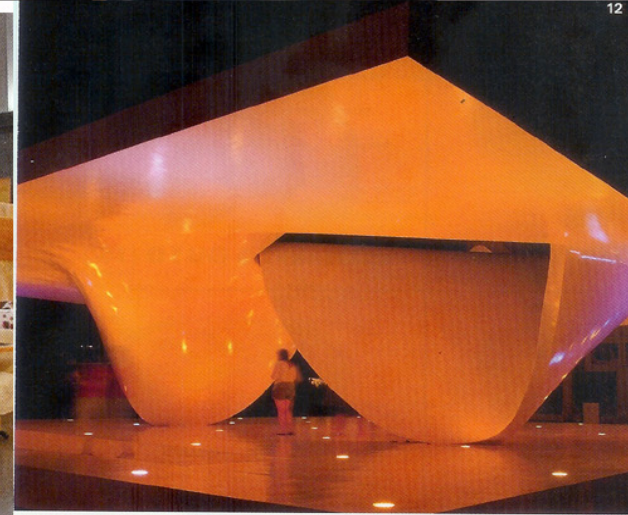
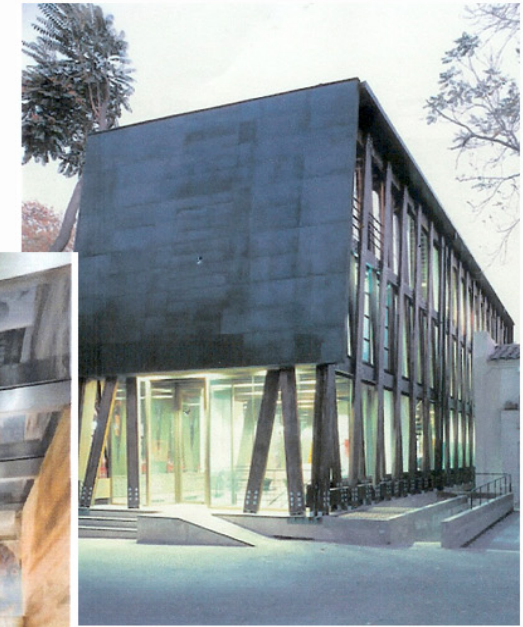
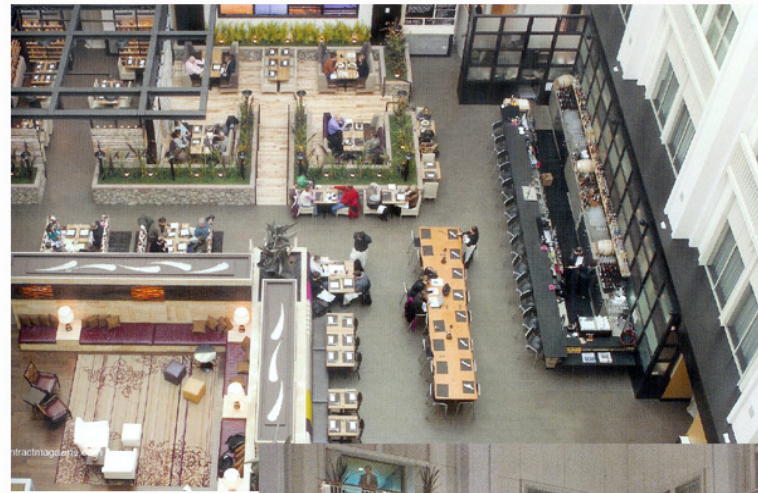
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SailShip





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