

sketches, going through the possibilities of the next step in painstaking detail. Often we sent faxed pictures and photos of our next step — samples of how the brick would look if it were two and a half inches high, or two inches high; what the corner would look like if the brick arrangement went three then one then three then one, and all the other possible combinations. There was not one piece of stonework on the

building we did not discuss like this as the project evolved, and where we did not use the fundamental process to choose the thing which made the greatest — and best — impact on the whole.

To give the reader some idea how extreme this plastic treatment of the building was, this nearly sculptor's attitude towards every bit of brick, I will describe the emergence of the arches in the interior.

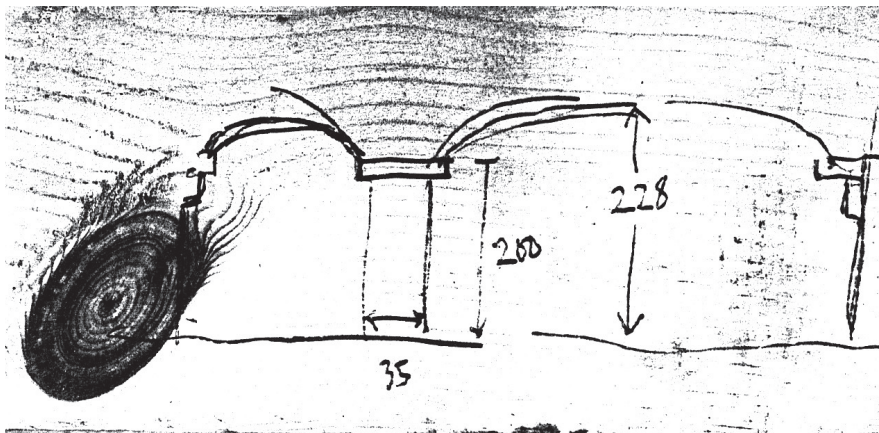


5 / EMERGENCE OF THE ARCHES

When we made the initial drawings of the building for a building permit, I found myself unable to visualize just how the cross-structure of the building worked. I could visualize the space rather clearly, and the structure, I knew, was a big thick wall, with a ring beam, surmounted by a wooden truss and rafter roof.

But I also knew that there was some missing thing, something I had not visualized. I found out what it was only at a relatively late stage, when the walls were already going up, after we had the exterior walls up to about three meters and could experience the rooms, interior space, windows, gallery, and the smaller

rooms. Walking about inside, I saw a tremendous lack of coherence in the cross-walls. They did not make sense. Structurally they were OK, but as space, the rooms did not end properly. In fact, all the cross-walls of the main building, four of them, were missing something. I had sensed that this problem might be coming. During the design phase I had wondered how the cross-walls were going to work, but at that early stage there wasn't enough information to make a realistic judgment about what to do. Intentionally, I left it as an open question to be solved when we could experience enough to make a realistic judgment.



Early sketch of a cross-wall, made on a piece of scrap wood, after it first became possible to judge the presence, scale, and effect of the arches in these walls.

I began to see that what was needed in the cross-walls was an arched structure.

So far, we had beautiful openings in the long walls — doors and windows, these beautifully, gently, arched openings. But there was nothing yet of a similar character in the cross-walls. To make the space feel three-dimensional, whole, solid, and at one, a similar series of arched openings was needed — I felt — in all the cross-walls, something that would tie the walls together structurally, that would make openings in the cross-walls correctly.

It was only a small step from that thought to the thought that the very same arches, if introduced into a system of four walls, would provide a kind of cross-structural stability which would reinforce the action of the massive walls and ring beam.

We then began to examine each of these cross-walls, one by one. They told us rather simply what to do. All we needed was a kind of language which would allow any combination of arched openings to be created, and we could lay out all four cross-walls without difficulty.



These sketches of the arch curves, made on the wall of our construction shack and very exactly drawn, gave us the ability to see the difference in being-character between curves of only slightly different radius and span. From them, we finally got the templates of the curve we used to build the forms. The top sketch gave us the best line for the bigger arches; the central, inner sketch gave us the line for the smaller openings.

This final touch (at a fairly massive scale), not foreseen or contemplated at the time of the initial drawings or even construction, is what now holds the building together most firmly, gives it a solid and definite unity as a thing.

As this unity came into being, so did the being nature of the centers themselves, individually, together, all at once. The thickness of the members feels profound. Windows are the right size, in the right positions. Alcoves are the right size. Ceilings are the right height. The coherence of the whole has no need to be wrong on these points. It is careful consideration of the feeling of these kinds of things which informs the whole and makes it sensible.



Something approaching true living structure: a sequence of arches in the building.



One of the openings, as it developed in rough block and concrete