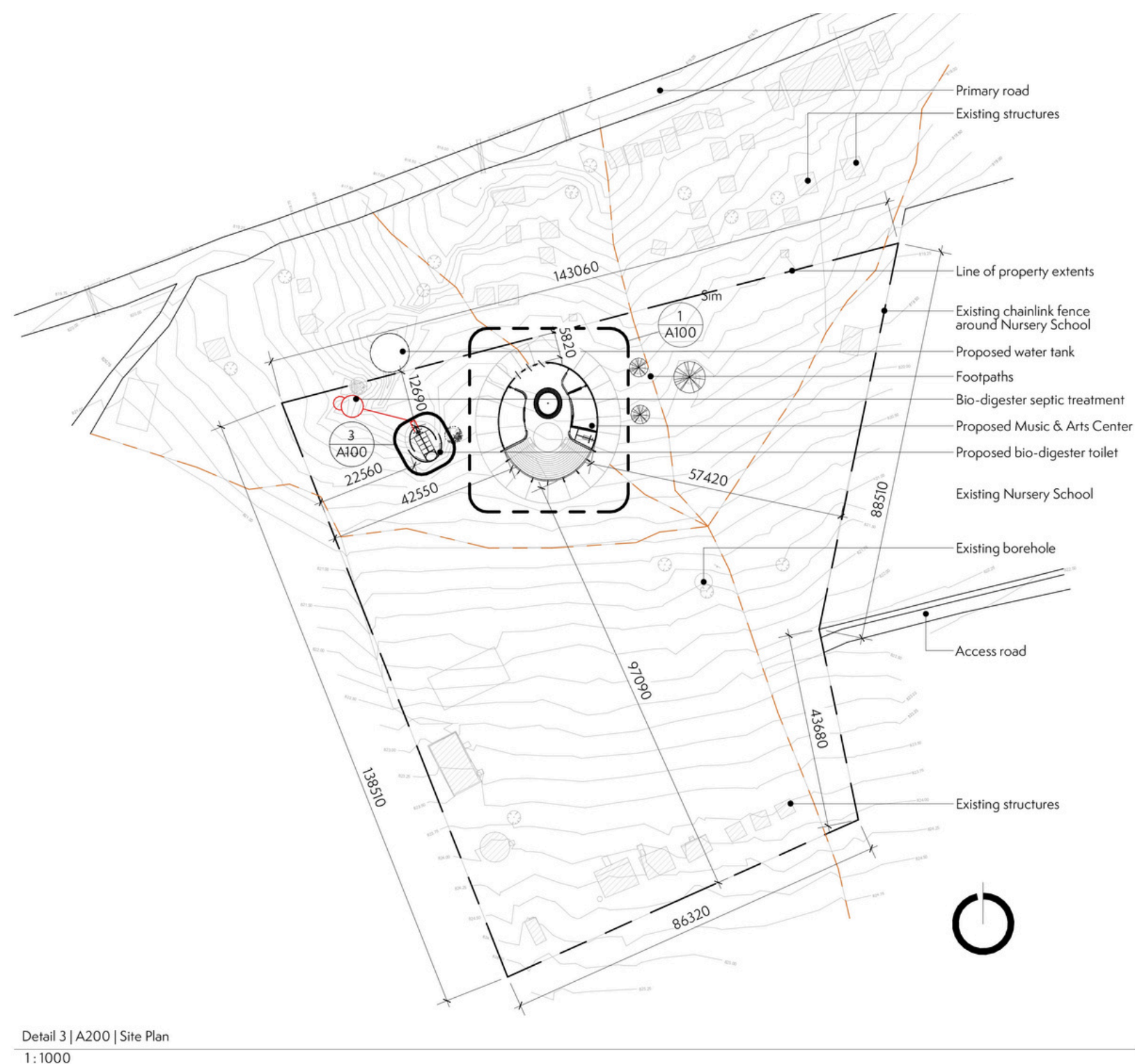


THE BIDI BIDI PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE

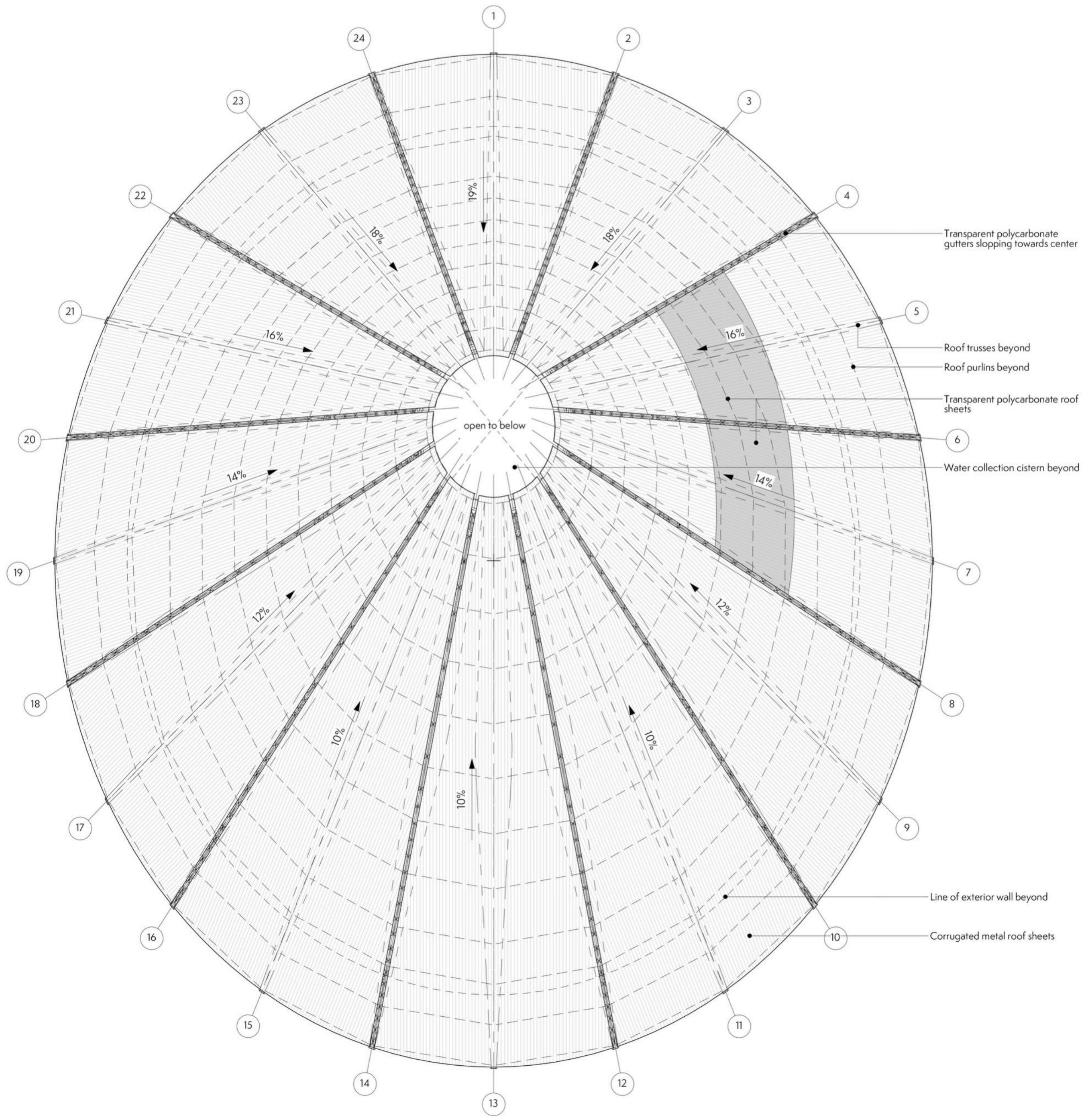


In the heart of the Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement, the largest of its kind in Africa, lies a beacon of hope and creativity—the Bidi Bidi Performing Arts Centre. For more than 270,000 South Sudanese refugees who call this place home, the Centre is more than just a building; it is a sanctuary where music, art, and performance bring the community together, allowing them to find solace, expression, and connection amid displacement.

The design emerged as a dialogue between pragmatism and poetry, between earthen masonry and parametric design, and between Hassell and Localworks. Compressed earth blocks, molded from soil excavated on-site, formed walls that seemed to rise organically from the terracotta landscape. “The earth here holds stories,” a local craftsman remarked as he pressed clay into wooden frames, his hands etching texture into each block. Above, a roof of lightweight steel arches like a skeletal canopy – a deliberate counterpoint to the grounded masonry.



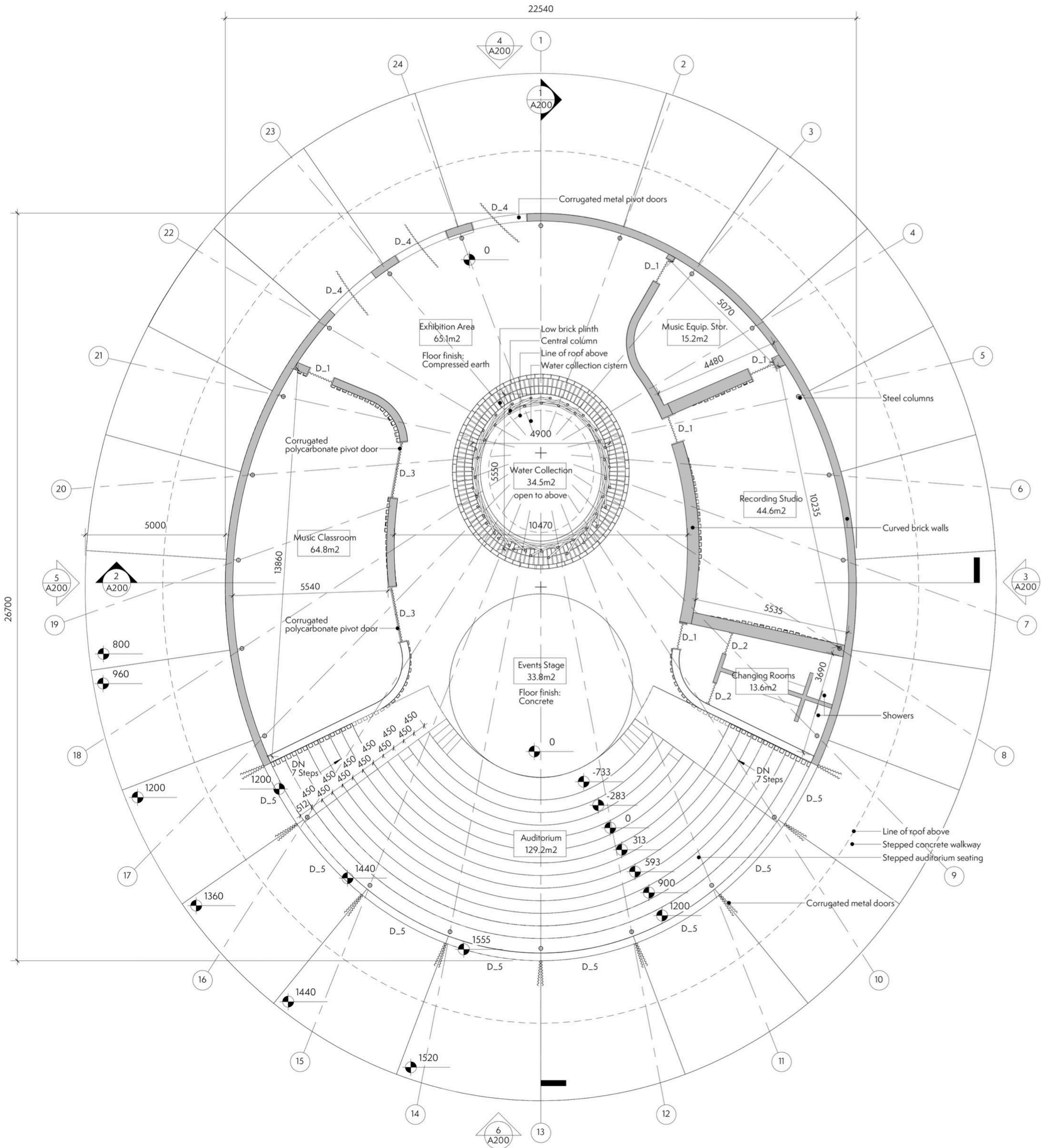
ROOF PLAN 1:100



Roof Plan | Scale 1:100

Critically, the architecture refuses to impose. Prefabricated in Kampala, the roof was delivered to site as a kit of parts, assembled by refugees and Ugandan laborers working side by side. "This isn't charity; it's collaboration," says Xavier De Kestelier of Hassell who we worked with closely throughout the design and construction process.

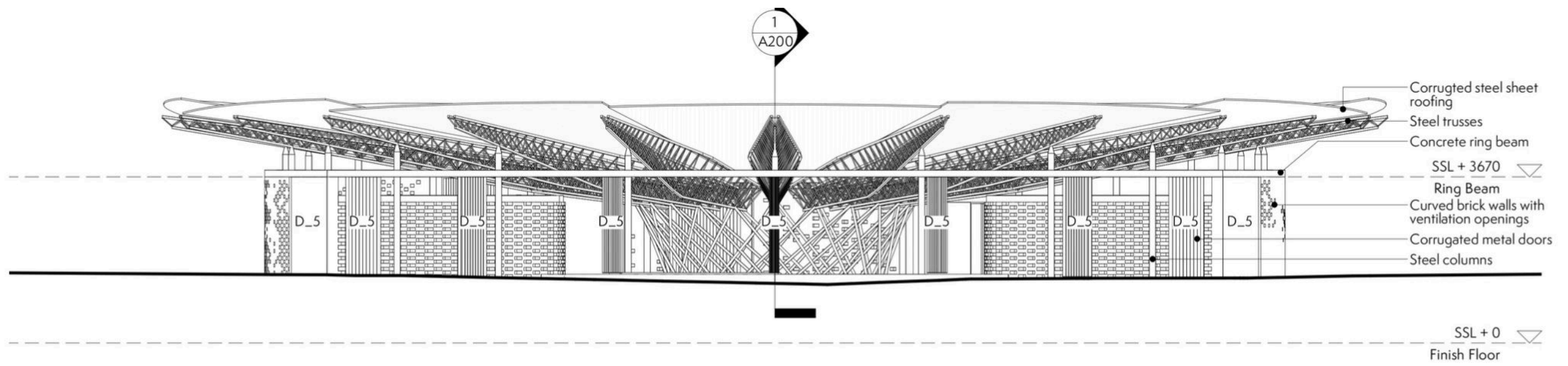
FLOOR PLAN 1:100



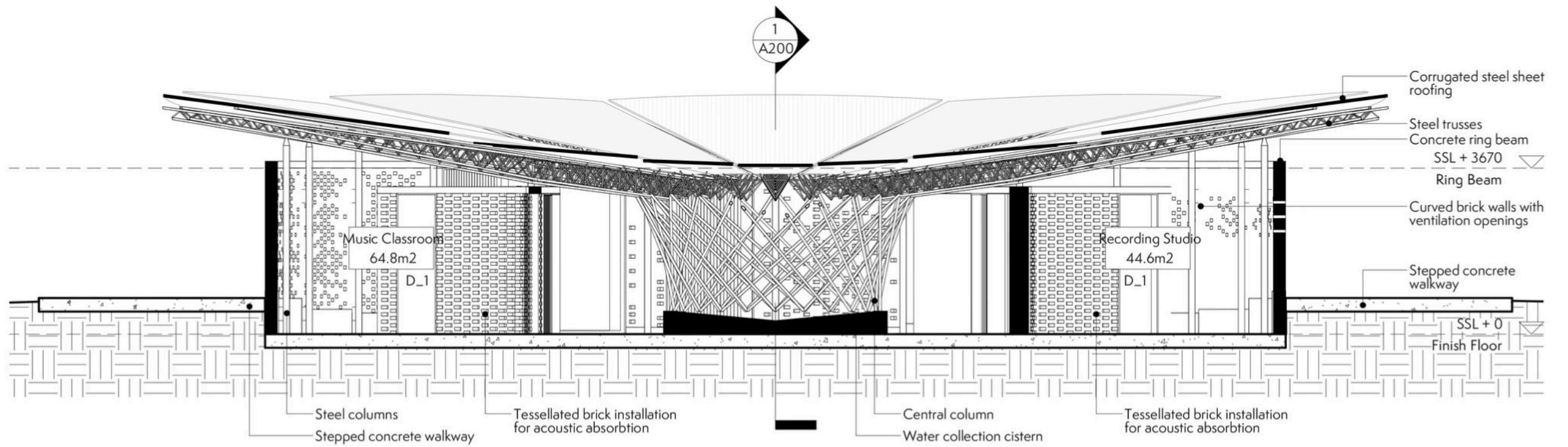
Floor Plan | Scale 1:100

The Centre's elliptical form embraces the landscape like cupped hands, its asymmetric oculus opening skyward to frame the endless African sky while drawing natural light deep into the heart of the structure. At its core lies a semi-open amphitheatre, a democratic space where earthen walls curve to create natural acoustics for performance and gathering. The amphitheatre's semi-open form, flanked by floor-to-ceiling doors, could hold both the intimacy of a poetry circle and the exuberance of a full-community dance performance. Radiating outward from this central space, a classroom and workshop area provide a flexible learning environment, while a state-of-the-art recording studio offers residents the tools to capture and share their stories with the world beyond the settlement's boundaries.

SECTION AND ELEVATION 1:100



Detail 6 | A100 | Building Elevation - South
1:100



Detail 2 | A100 | Building Section - North/South
1:100

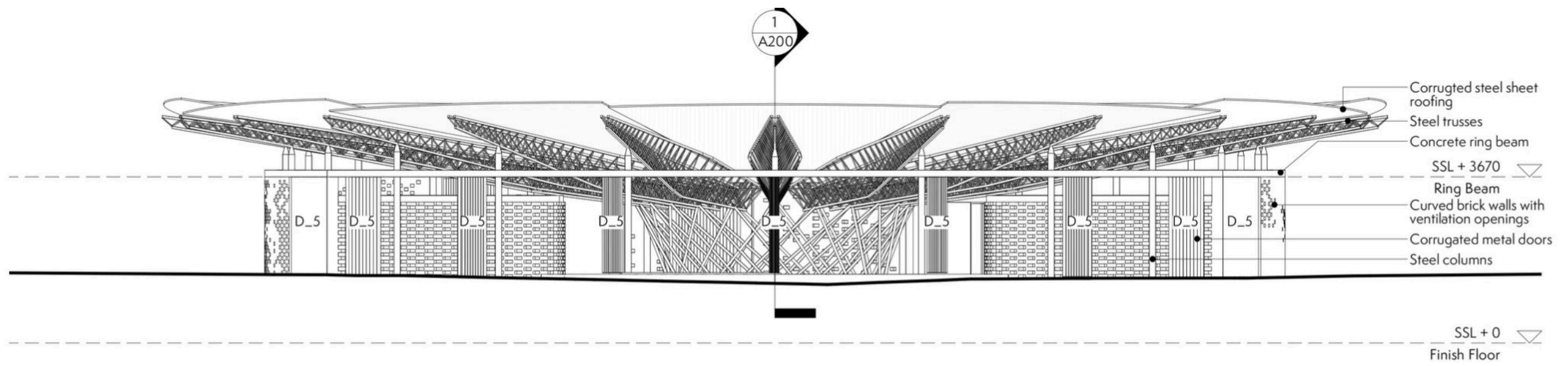
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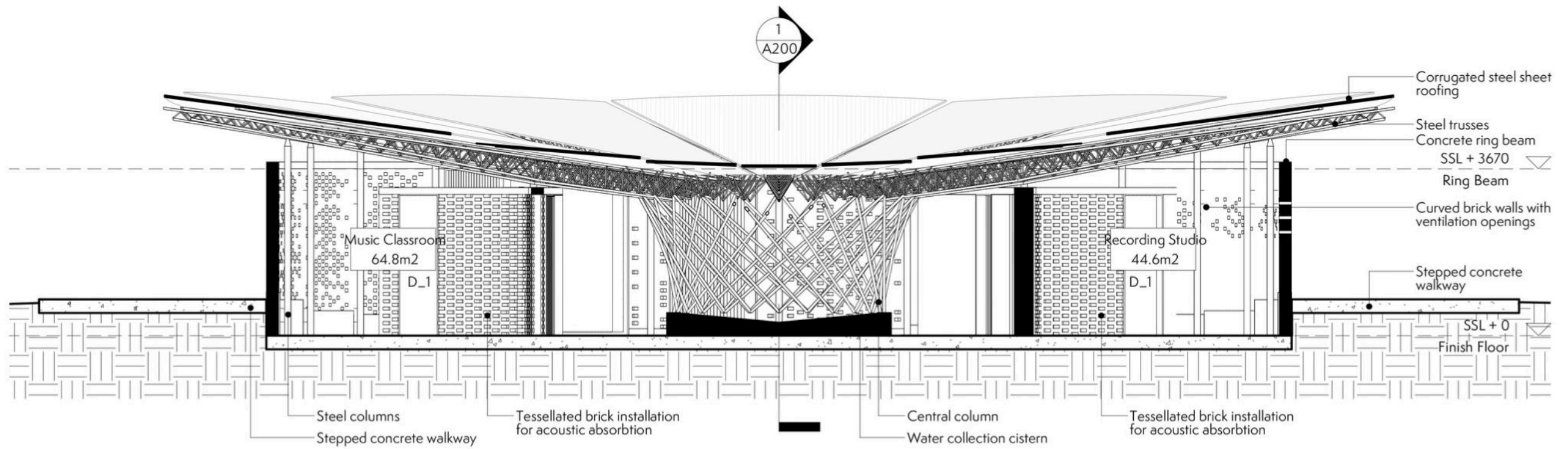
Acoustics became an unexpected protagonist. For the recording studio, with the help of Arup, the principle of a Helmholtz Resonator was applied to earth construction: Gaps in the earthen walls, arranged in rhythmic patterns, and the void of the cavity wall filled with vermiculite, to create a dynamic texture that successfully diffuses sound without relying on imported sound absorbing materials. Daylight is provided through bottles cast into the concrete slab above.



SECTION AND ELEVATION 1:100



Detail 6 | A100 | Building Elevation - South
1:100



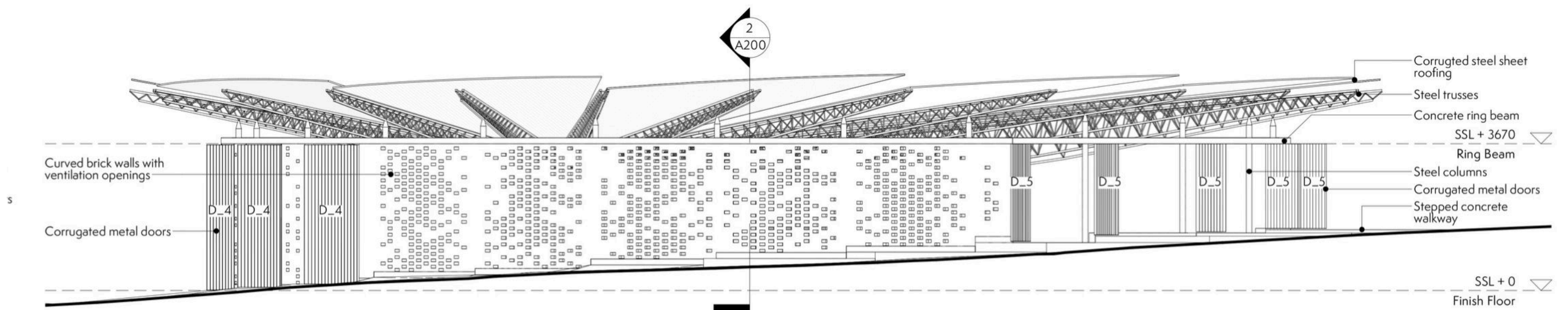
Detail 2 | A100 | Building Section - North/South
1:100

“We wanted a structure that speaks to resilience without romanticising hardship,” explained Mawa Zacharia, a South Sudanese refugee and co-founder of Sina Loketa.

His words echoed through the early design development, grounding the project in a truth far removed from abstraction: this would not merely be a building, but a vessel for healing, identity, and collective memory.”

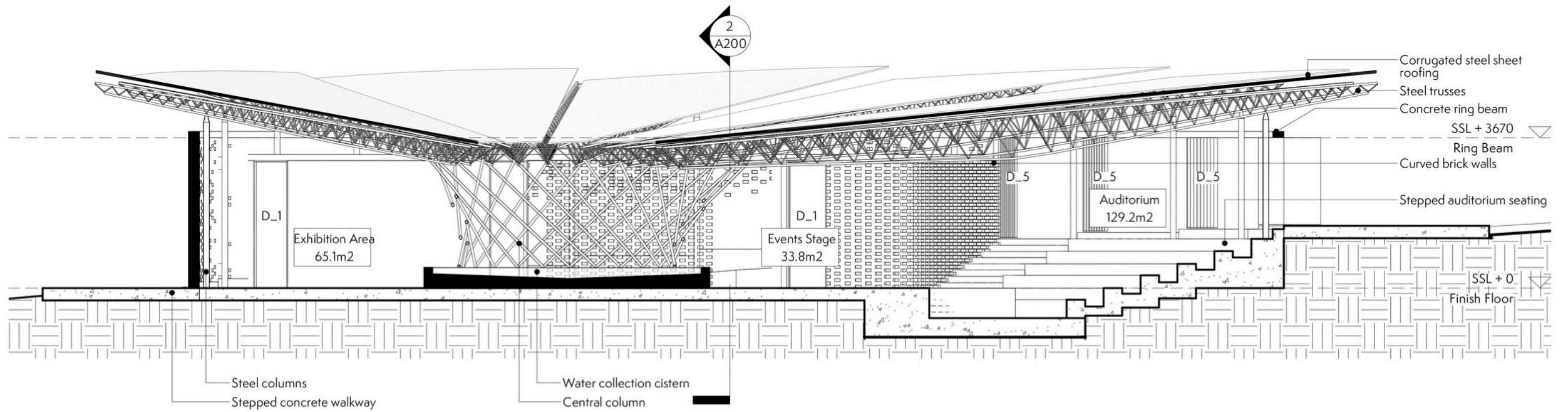


SECTION AND ELEVATION 2 1:100



Detail 5 | A100 | Building Elevation - West
1:100

Detail 3 | A100 | Building Elevation - East
1:100



Detail 1 | A100 | Building Section - East/West
1:100

The performing space is anchored by an oculus lighting feature that not only brightens the performance area but also creates a mesmerizing play of light and shadow, linking the Foyer to the Performance Space. The interplay of textures—metal, earth bricks, and down-standing structural elements—adds to the richness of the experience, both visually and acoustically, while the open sides of the building allow for natural cross-ventilation, keeping the space cool and comfortable.



