

# UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE “BREAK-UP BENCH”

MITHŪN

The first year at college and away from home is full of growth, transformation, immense joy and potential heartbreak. During this period of transition and emotional upheaval, how can we as designers support students' mental health and wellbeing through intentional design?



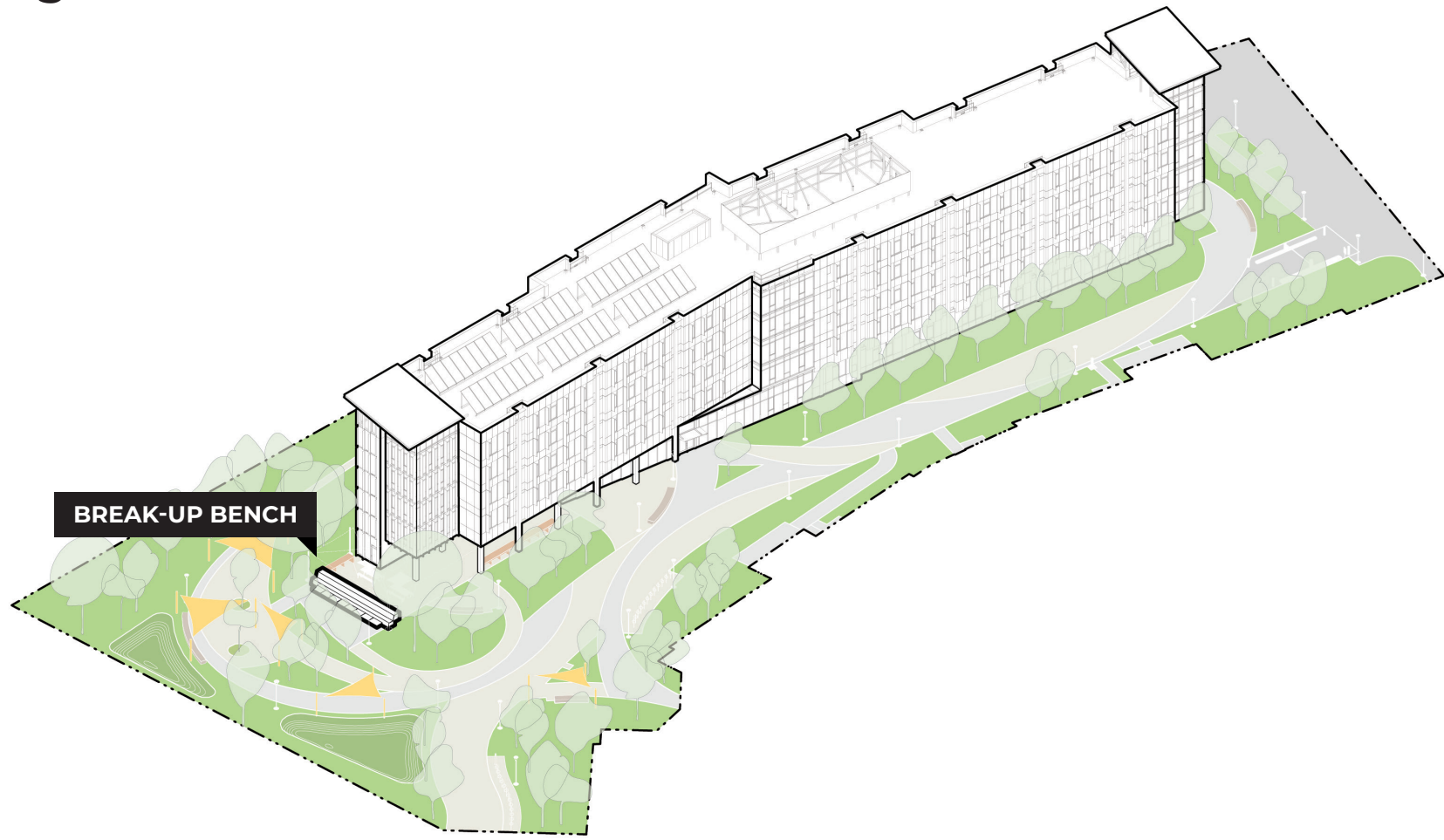
**LOCATION:**  
University of California Irvine Mesa Court Housing, Irvine, CA, Opening Fall 2025

**TEAM MEMBERS:**  
Webcor - Construction, Thornton Tomasetti - Structural Engineering, Langan - Civil Engineering  
Mithun - Architecture, Interiors and Landscape

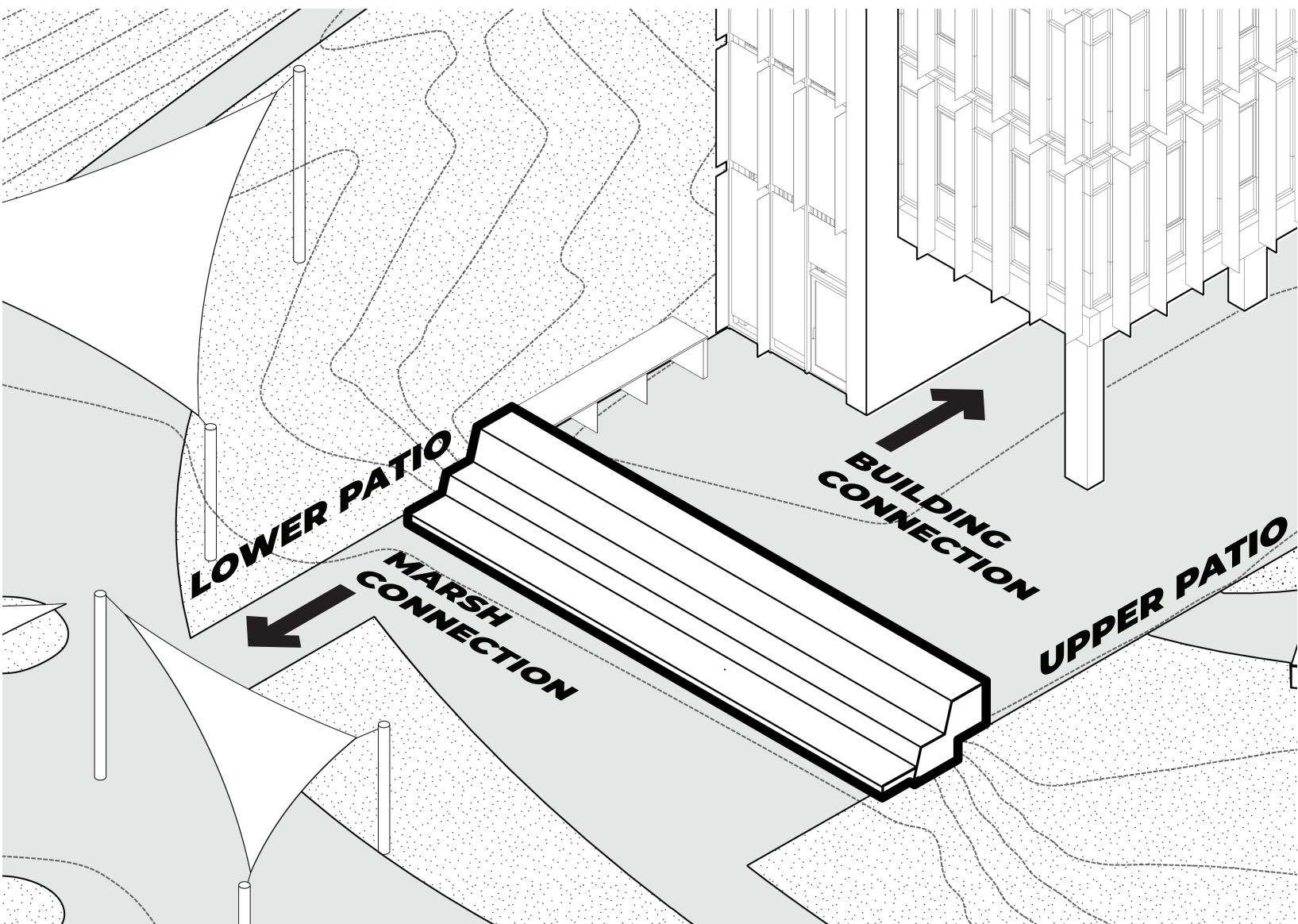
**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**  
The Mesa Court Residence Hall Expansion at University of California Irvine addresses a growing need for affordable inclusive student housing by offering 437 beds for incoming freshman. The project advances university goals of community by highlighting connections to nature, diverse connotations of 'home', and multi-scale spaces for socializing, study, and restorative/wellbeing practices for a post-pandemic generation of students.

**PROJECT HIGHLIGHT:**  
Support and belonging are fundamental to the growth and well-being of students as they enter a new phase of life. Additionally, UCI's student body is comprised of diverse cultures, identities, and abilities, many of whom are first-generation college students. To address the multitude of needs of the student population, the project's multidisciplinary design is rooted in data driven research to cultivate inclusivity through color theory and spatial organization and scale. The site design creates a hierarchy of landscape spaces that offer unique opportunities for gathering, studying, or quiet respite. Our approach recognizes that students will be coming to this new community with unique backgrounds and a varied sense of what makes them feel comfortable and safe.

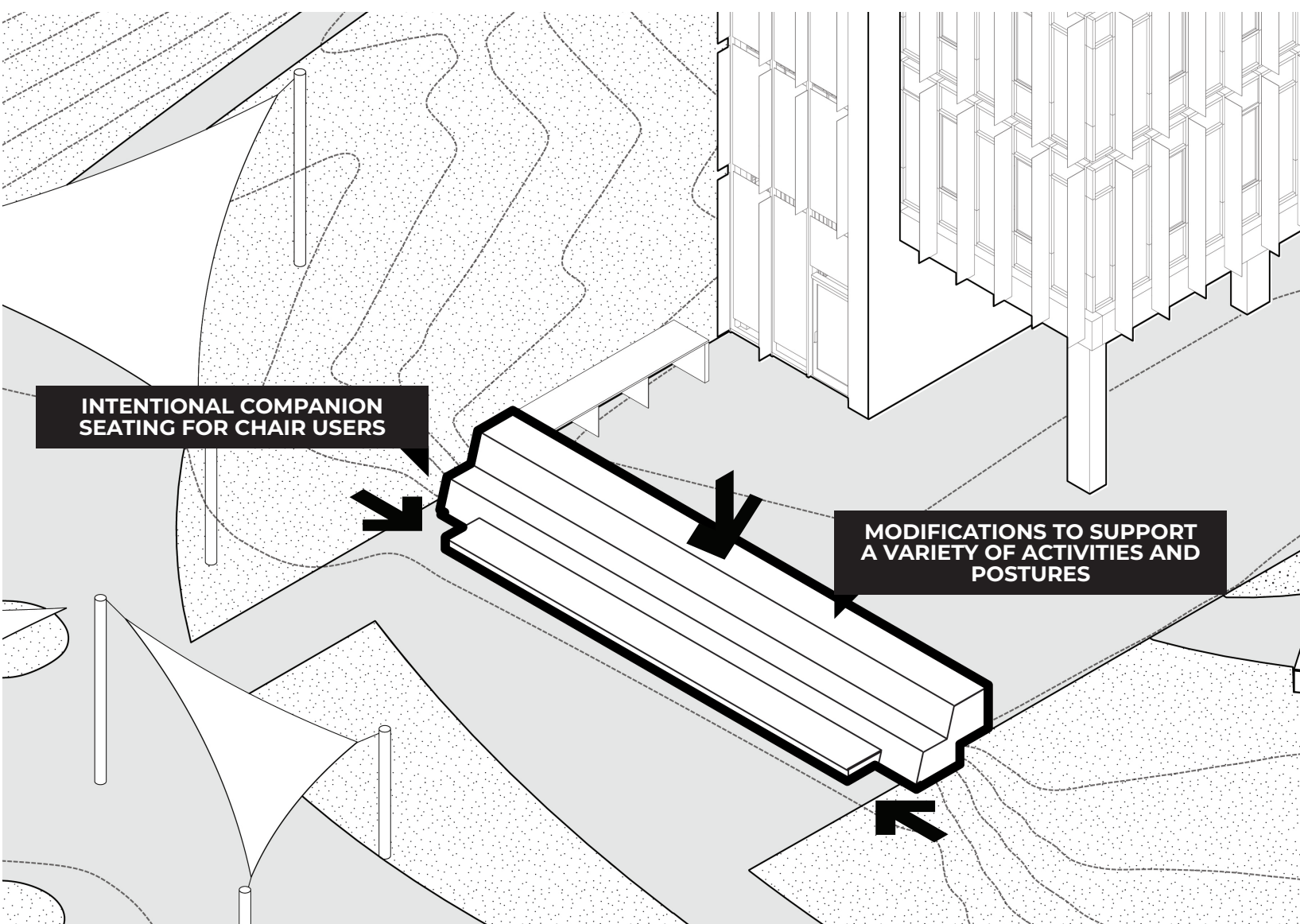
Diversity of spaces can encourage belonging by supporting different perspectives on what may feel immersive, what is calming when you need focus, vibrant when you crave social interaction, protected when you need to feel safe. A range of seating and usable surfaces inhabit the various outdoor spaces, allowing users of different needs to find comfort. Sensitive to the challenges of student depression and isolation, circulation spaces have been designed to encourage casual encounters and foster interaction through adjacent seating opportunities. One of these moments of choice is a custom gathering feature connecting two levels of the site. The Break Up Bench is a multi-use gathering space nestled between the building, an expansive exterior porch and the site's largest plaza. Both a tiered bench at the lower level and a community desk at the upper level, it is intended to be a landing spot for people to relax, study or potentially have an intense conversation.



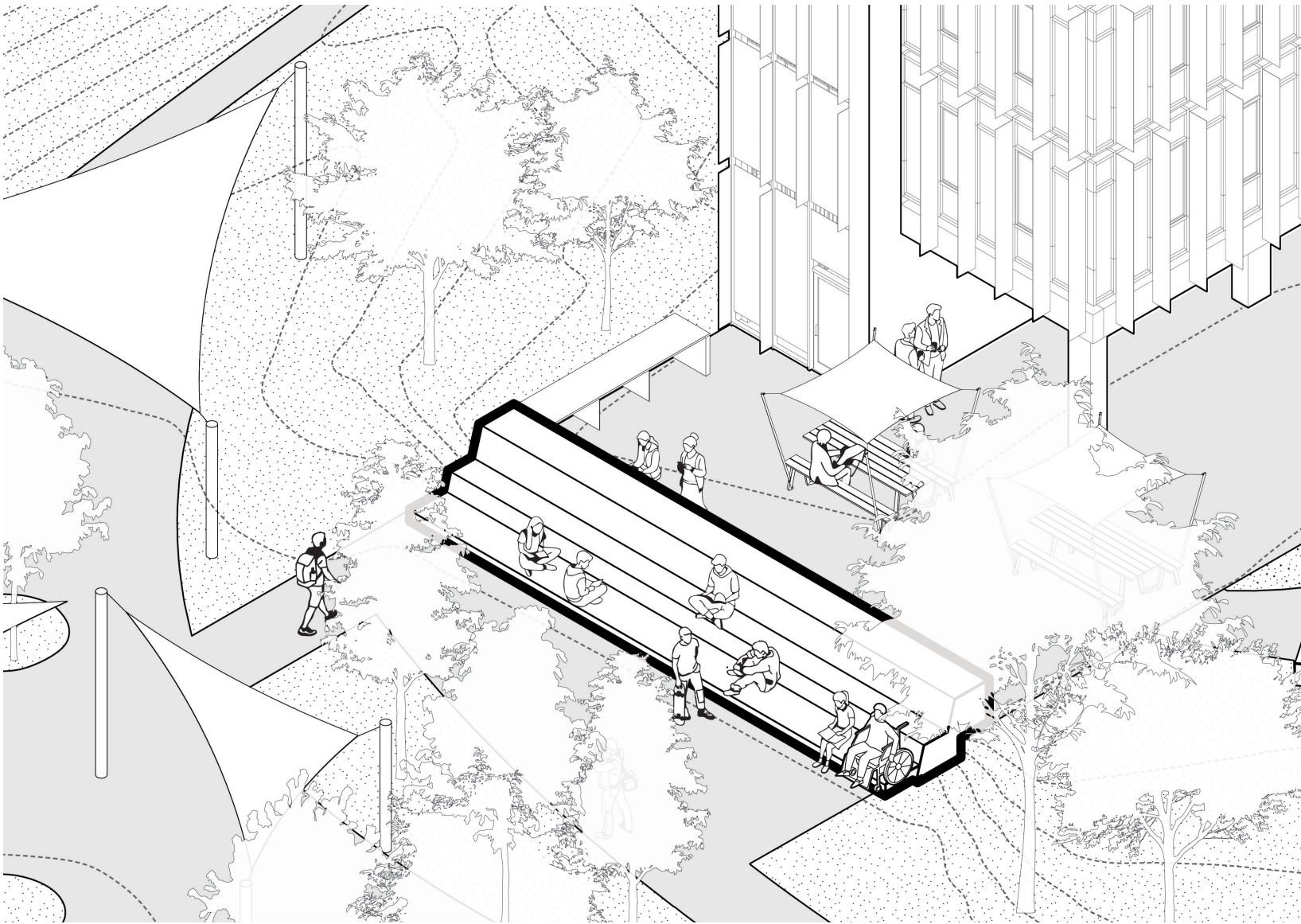
The Break Up Bench is a multi-use gathering space nestled between the building and a larger active plaza beyond.



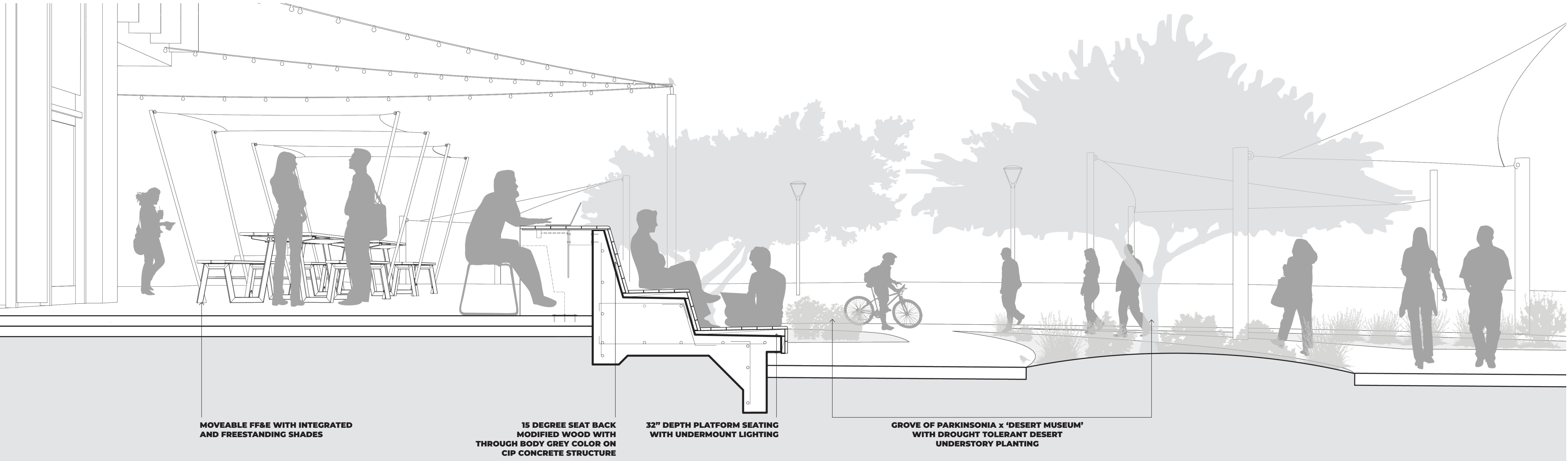
Both a tiered bench at the lower level and a community desk at the upper level, it is intended to be a landing spot for people to relax, study or have an intense conversation.



Design refinements ensure comfort for bodies of varying sizes and abilities.



The tiered bench spans two gathering plazas, breaking up the elevation change and creating a flexible use feature designed to encourage social connection and strong community.



OUT IN FRONT

SMALL-SCALE INTERVENTIONS

