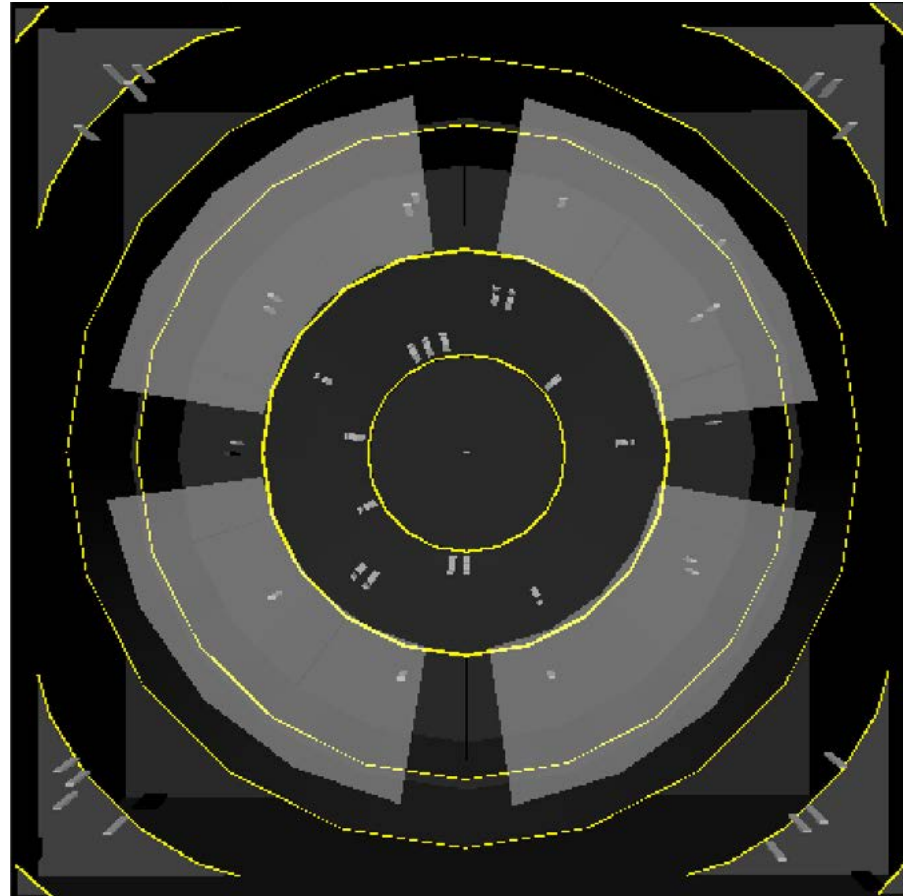


# BLACKSHIP

initial thoughts and notes  
18 July 2016



DAFFY

This document represents a flow of ideas that have been resonating since the brief yet compelling meeting with Alex Handy at Soho House.

It should be clear that although I go into distinct detail about a potential direction of how BLACKSHIP might look and feel, my practice is to work in a very modular and mould-able fashion.

Therefore nothing is precious, and like a shopping list, you might like 30% of the ideas and can cherry pick. Knowing what you guys like is great, but knowing what you don't is just as important.

Therefore, I find the best foot forward is to see a 'vision' through as far as I can safely take it, to see whether my ideas are compatible with your own. And it allows for an eventual design to develop that works both in terms of function and aesthetic.

What I've imagined is next level, wacky, unique, fun, elegant, reshapable and feels like a place that fully celebrates the spirit of VR and AR.

## ASSUMPTIONS

My pitch is based on the information given to date. That you're building a type of VR arcade. A way for people to thoroughly and properly experience this new phenomenon. They visit your premises and use the most state of the art kit to see the most next level content.

They'll see everything from the best Cardboard and Daydream can offer, via Samsung Gear through to Oculus and Vive and then ultimately to the 'main event' showcase, which would be an all bells and whistles installation in which the user gets strapped into and their whole body gets to enjoy.

You've given me the approximate size of 20,000 sq ft. You know it'll be housed in LA. You're pitching this as accessible, affordable, but cool, modern with an impeccable level of customer service. It will be called BLACKSHIP. (which I love)

Social, but not intrusive. I realise that my designs are based in a relative fantasy as I've made your 20k sq ft space into a perfect square, with the walls high enough to inhabit my vision. There will be many and various restrictions of which I'd have no control.

But I think it's always best to liberate oneself of potential pitfalls and restrictions, and focus on the realities once the seeds have been sown.

## MY CRITERIA

I've added some criteria of my own.

I think the design should be timeless, not futuristic. I think that the staff need to adhere to wearing a core selection of designs, which echo the root corporate identity. Given that most VR tradeshow, and demonstrations look generic, I want BLACKSHIP to be far more editorial.

I want to design a series of rooms with such a unique take, that no matter the angle, press photographers are guaranteed a fantastic shot of the entire space, where all of the activities are on display.

Thusly, I want peoples first impression to finding the space to be as impactful and important at the experiences themselves. How do we accomplish all of this? Well I've started like a recipe, with some key flavours.

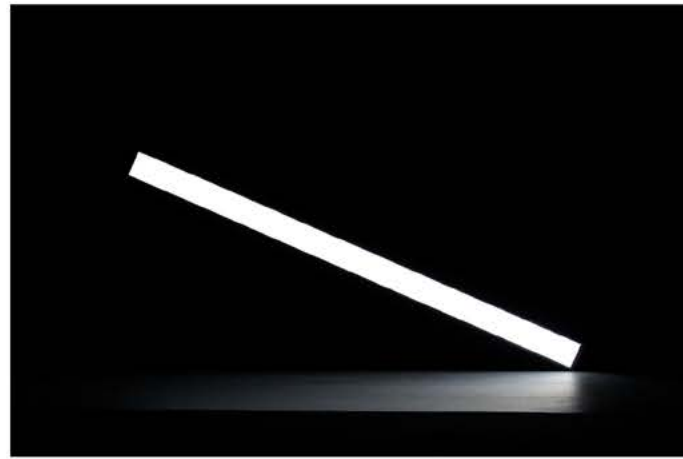
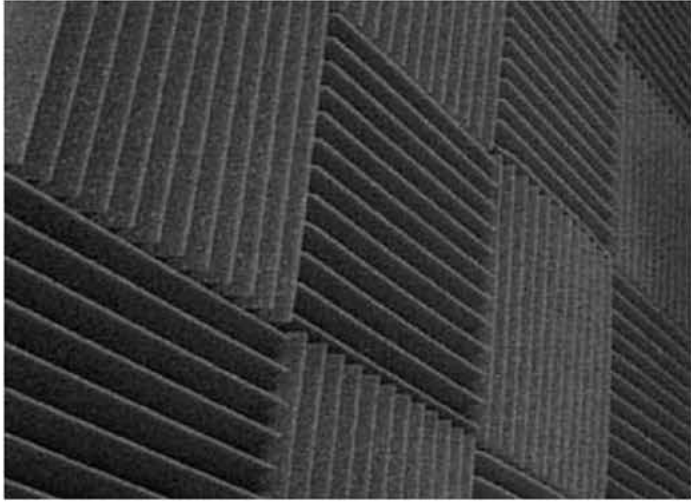
I also want to respond to that set of flavours, by figuring out what the key ingredients might be, in this case, what kinds of surfaces would make for an amazing interior.

## FLAVOURS ( key concepts )

- Social - VR is isolating, we should make this a little less 'sad'
- Scalable - Rooms shouldn't be fixed. The space should be convertible
- Impressive - Using the space to the fullest, to create a spectacular vista
- Editorial - The space should create photographs unique to BLACKSHIP
- Safe - Nausea free, and soft surfaces
- Soft - People should bounce into things like padded cells
- Dark - VR is better in darker environments
- Modern - Dark shouldn't mean 'lasertag' style blacklight
- Cool - In temperature (not in trend, cool is already assumed)
- Fashionable - Staff are in conceptual but practical clothing

## INGREDIENTS ( key surfaces )

- Grey foam - like sound insulation found in recording studios
- Black drapes - like those found in film studios
- Yellow EL wire - EL wire are thin strips of bendable lit cord
- Film lights - Suspended lights to honour the sense of a Hollywood sound stage
- Mution fabric - An invisible fabric which is designed for holographic projection
- Projectors - Pointing at the mution to give a moving element to the space
- Hazers - giving a sense of atmosphere and dreamspace



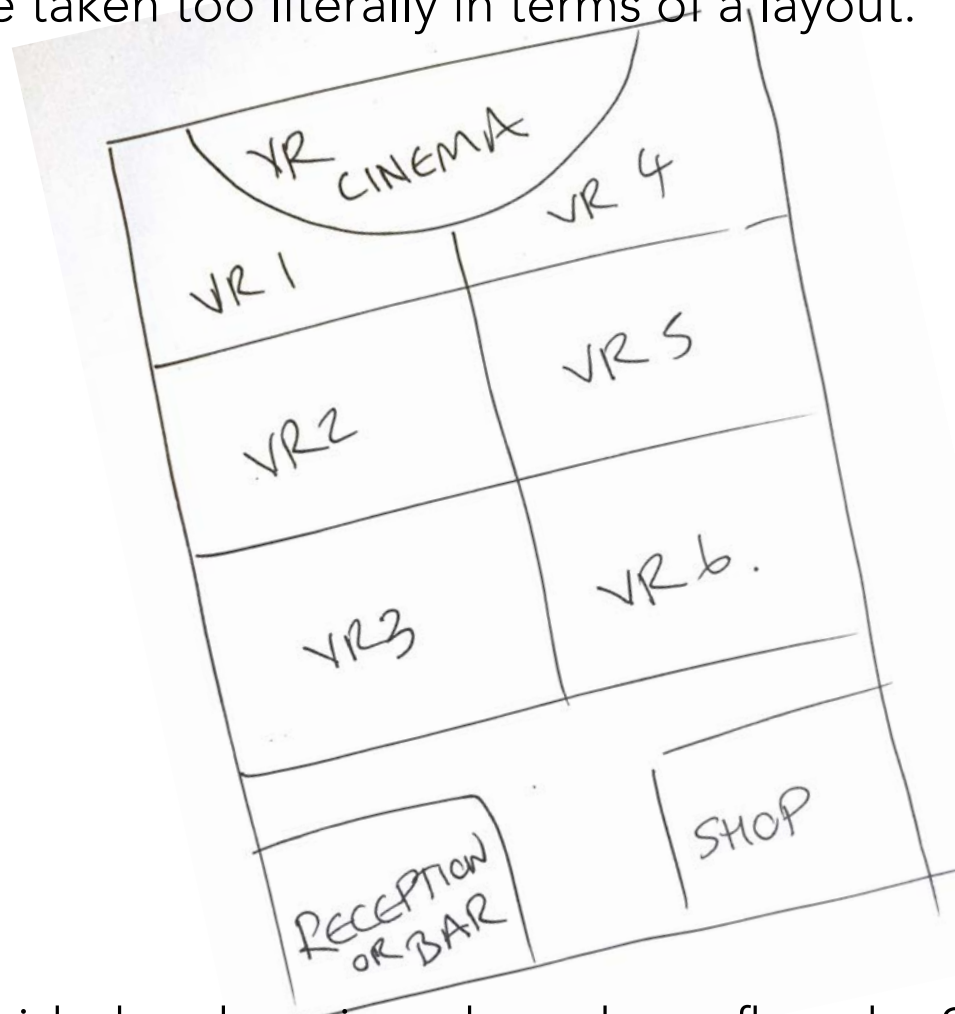
## Core concept

The loose plan Alex sketched out, to highlight what was needed in the space was useful, but I know it was not to be taken too literally in terms of a layout.

It contained...

- reception / bar
- shop
- 6-8 rooms
- VR cinema

It was something like this...



I feel that the way the space is divided and sectioned need to reflect the SPIRIT of virtual reality, needs to push the SOCIAL aspect, beyond 'futuristic' it needs to feel TIMELESS, the space should suggest a recognisable IDENTITY, and within it's tech modernity, it needs to feel SAFE, and COSY. Floors soft, walls nice to touch.

So with this in mind, I wondered if the space needs designing with a core concept at its heart. I wondered if the screening room should have a 360 feel. And whether your customers could have a place to reflect and discuss what they'd seen, in the round, and within an amphitheatre like situation. Much like philosophers might have had their discussions on the steps of the theatre at Epidaurus.





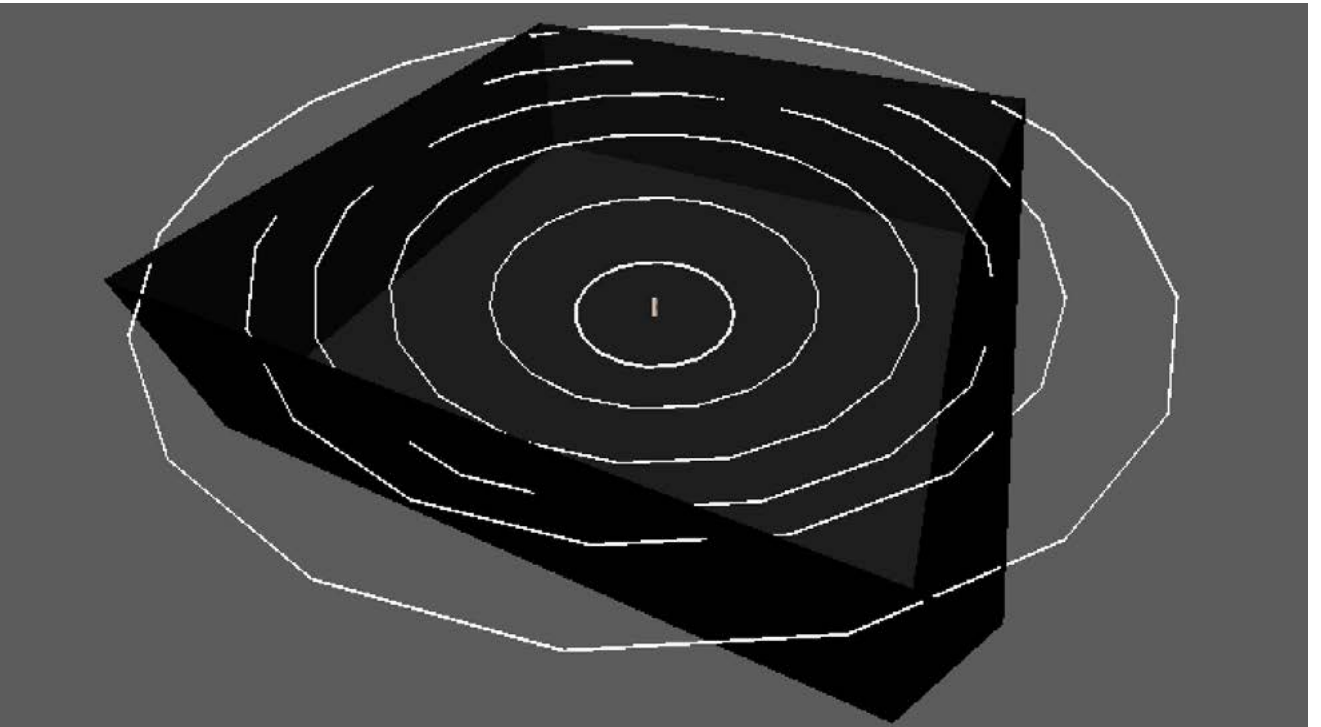
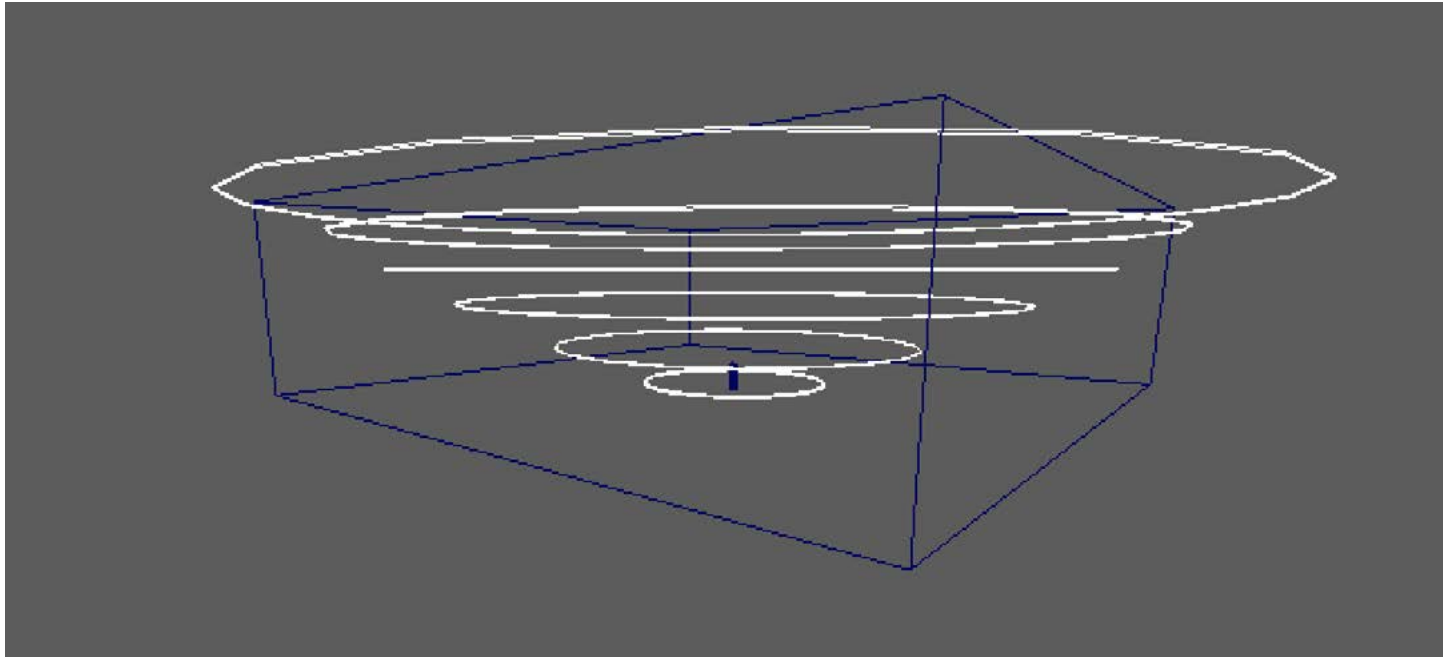
My sketches from this point all lead to a similar feeling. That the core of this space needs give the impression of focussing on one person.

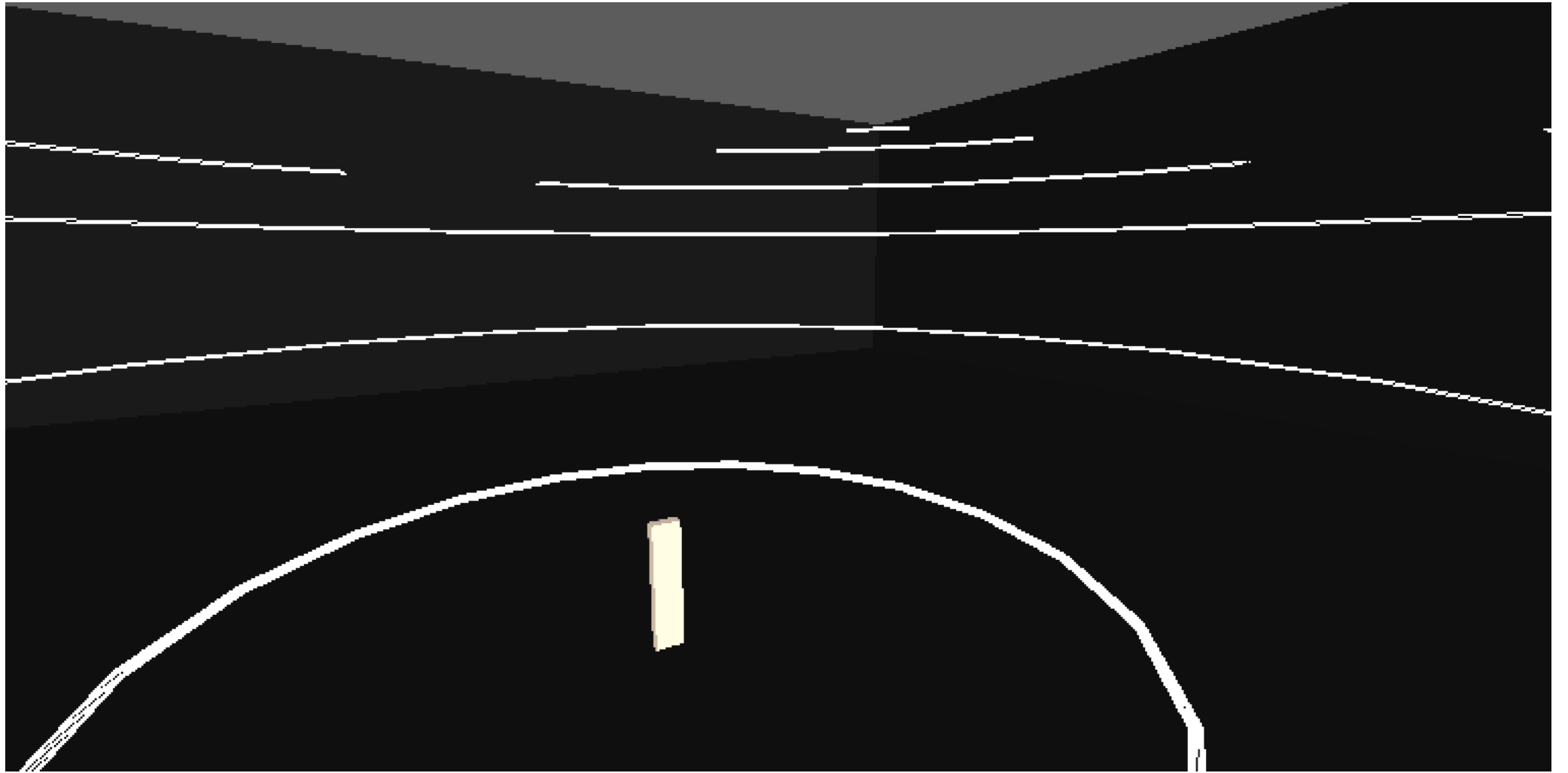
You.

SLAP BANG in the middle of this magic place.

The purpose of this notion is to represent the importance in VR of establishing the SELF. Also to build a sense of drama from the minute one enters the space. The inherent knowing that the experience will ultimately lead you up to being 'that' guy in the middle of everything.

I started building ideas in the computer, creating a single VR user in the middle of an expansive hall, then from this position - like a wifi signal - I took a cone shape, and intersected it with the 20,000 sq foot floor space.

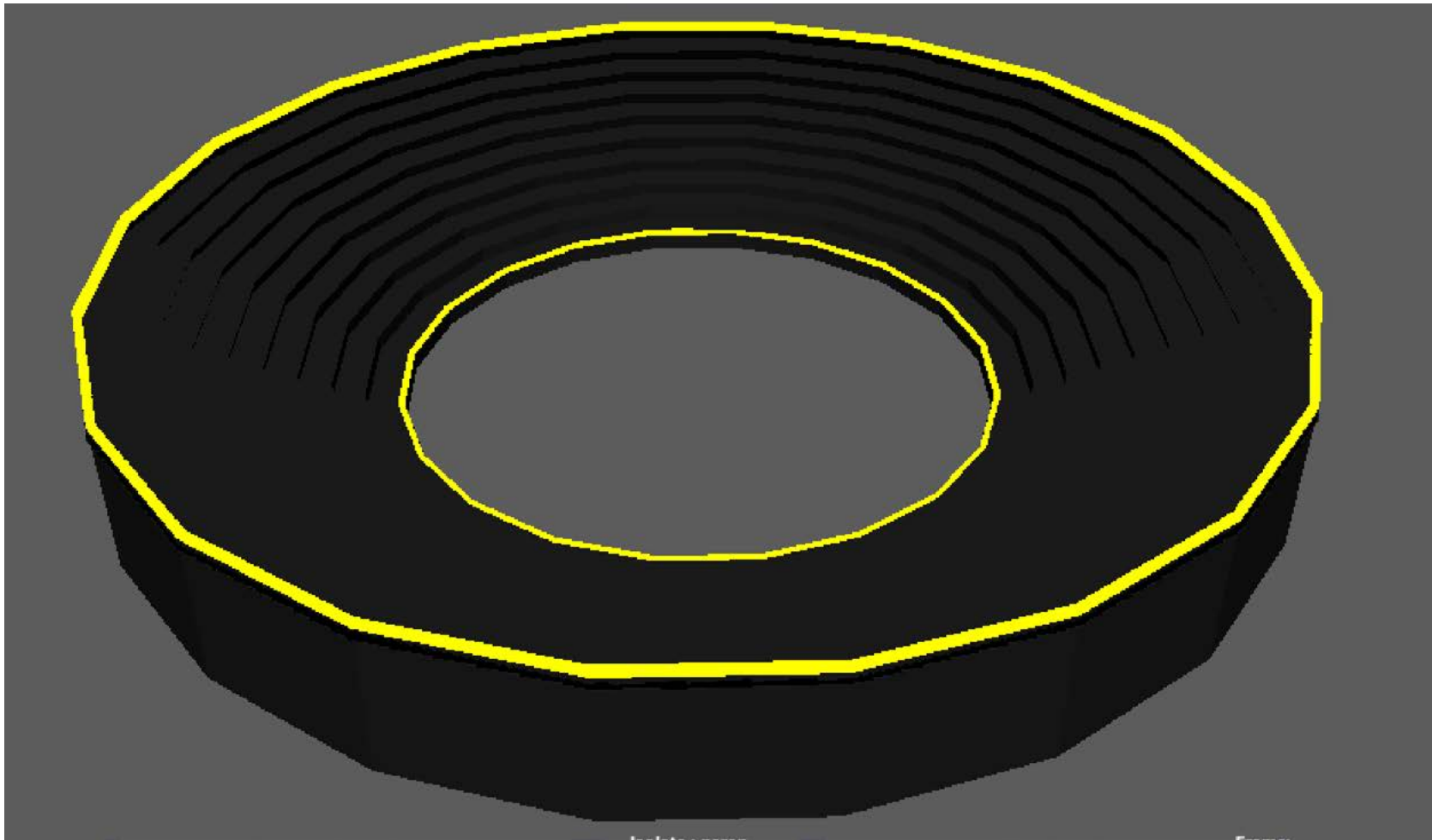




I took to heart the reference I adored from the play *Contractions* by Mike Bartlett - in which the stage was lined by a single thin line of light - and the rest of the design shaped itself.



The central SELF position represents the most prominent experience. You might be hoisted, winched or in a gyro wheel. It might also at times represent a virtual AR space, an ARena, in which people can play virtual games, such as chess. But it's the one experience and location that takes a little longer to prep people to see. It would be set on a circular stage, on the ground. Surrounded by an array of monitor speakers allowing for beautiful spacial sound fidelity.

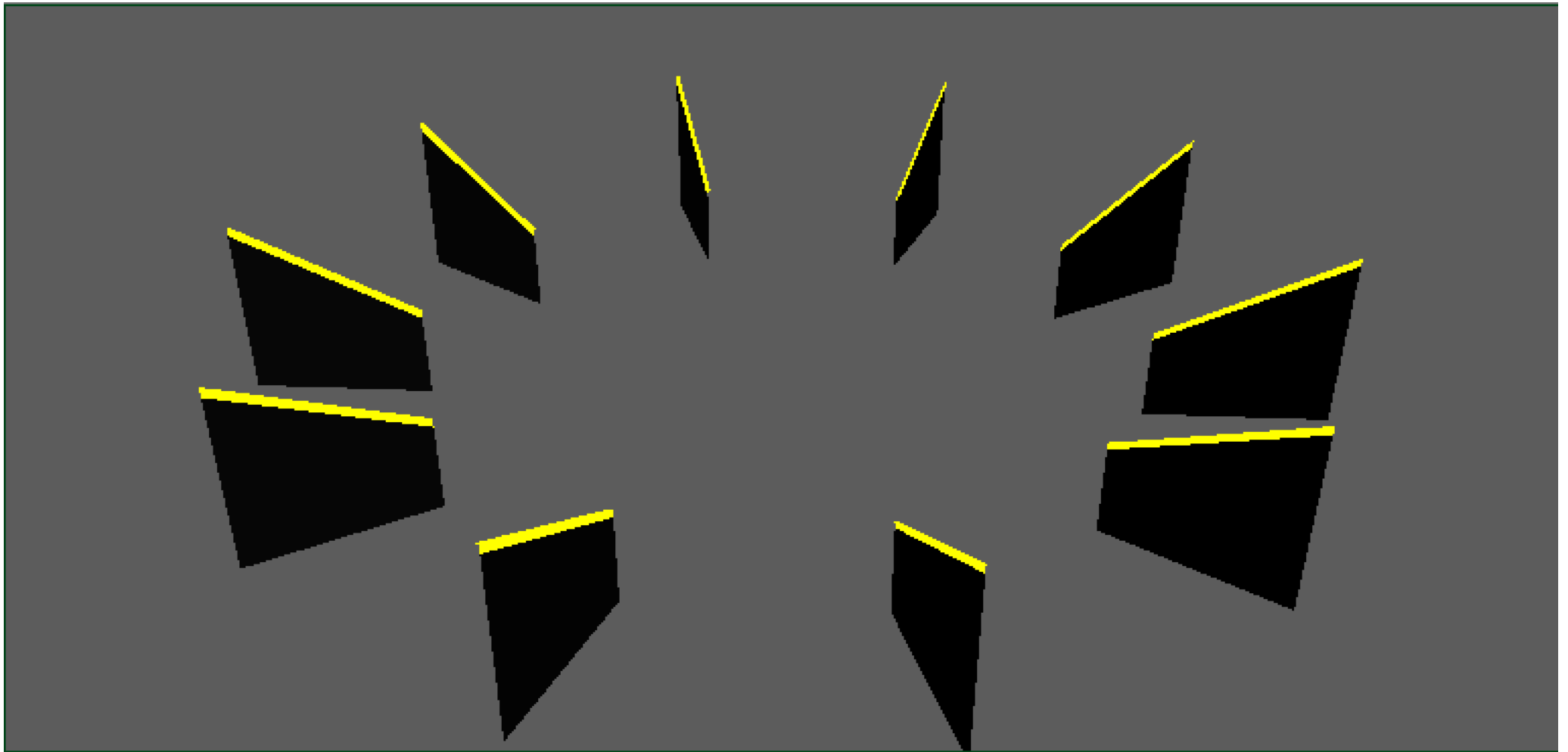


I hope that BLACKSHIP adopts a raw space so that we can retain the original features to give the overall package a feeling of a super modernity set in an open warehouse. Looking and feeling opulent, like a fashion show or an artistic pop-up. For my directing gig at Louis Vuitton they set up the show in a large dusty warehouse, Halles Freyssinet, Paris. They sectioned off the required space with black fabric. The light absorbent quality meant that you couldn't see ambient light bouncing off it, so once inside it made the place feel infinite.



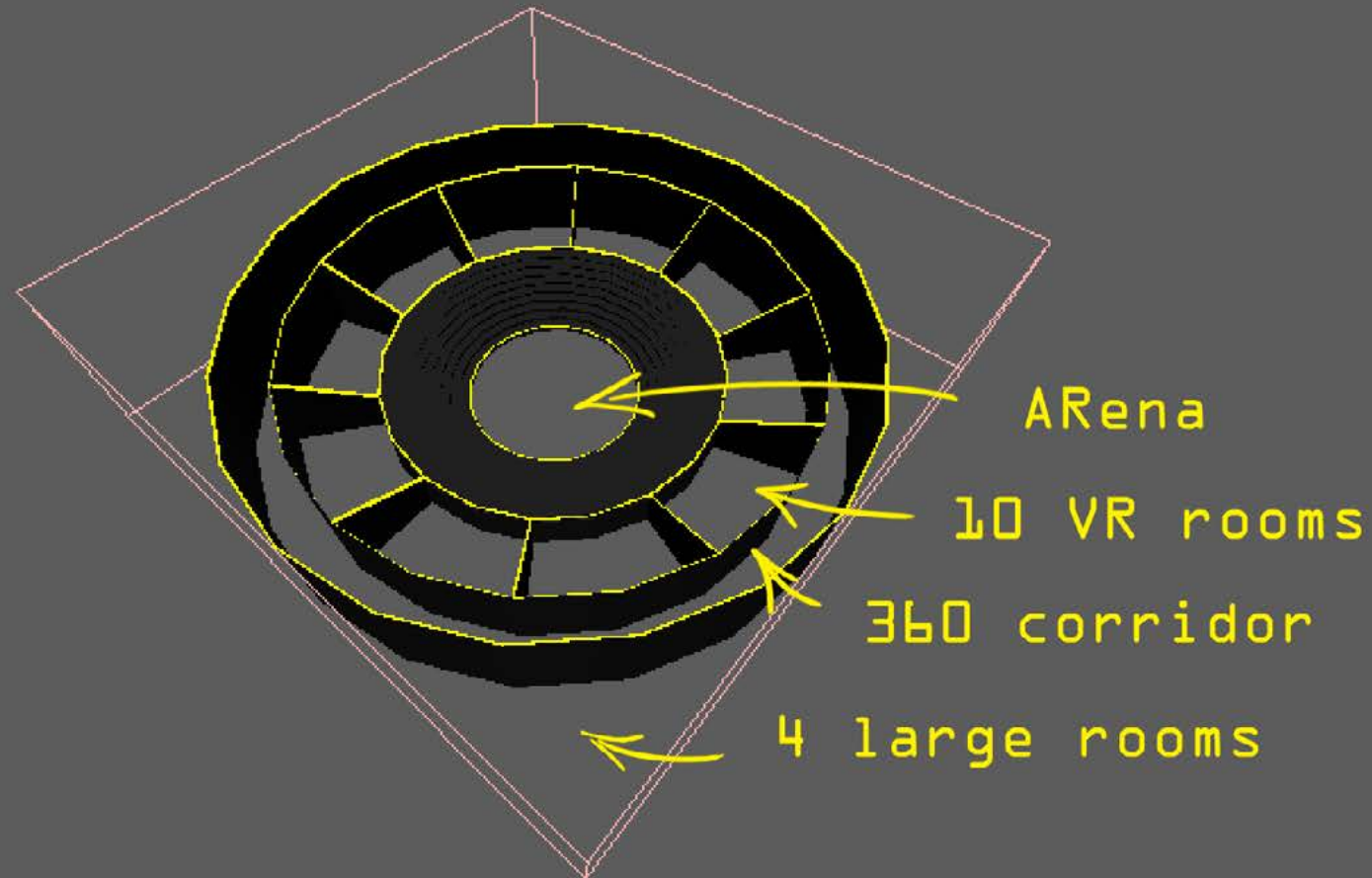


So instead of solid walls dividing the space, I wondered about separating the rooms using thick black velvet drapes. These pieces of fabric would jut out like dividers from the back circular wall created by the amphitheatre. This decision also allows for further division or expansion of rooms. As well as feeling luxurious, the touch of the fabric is a beautiful way for a VR user to be stopped by an obstruction. No-one wants to walk into a wall.

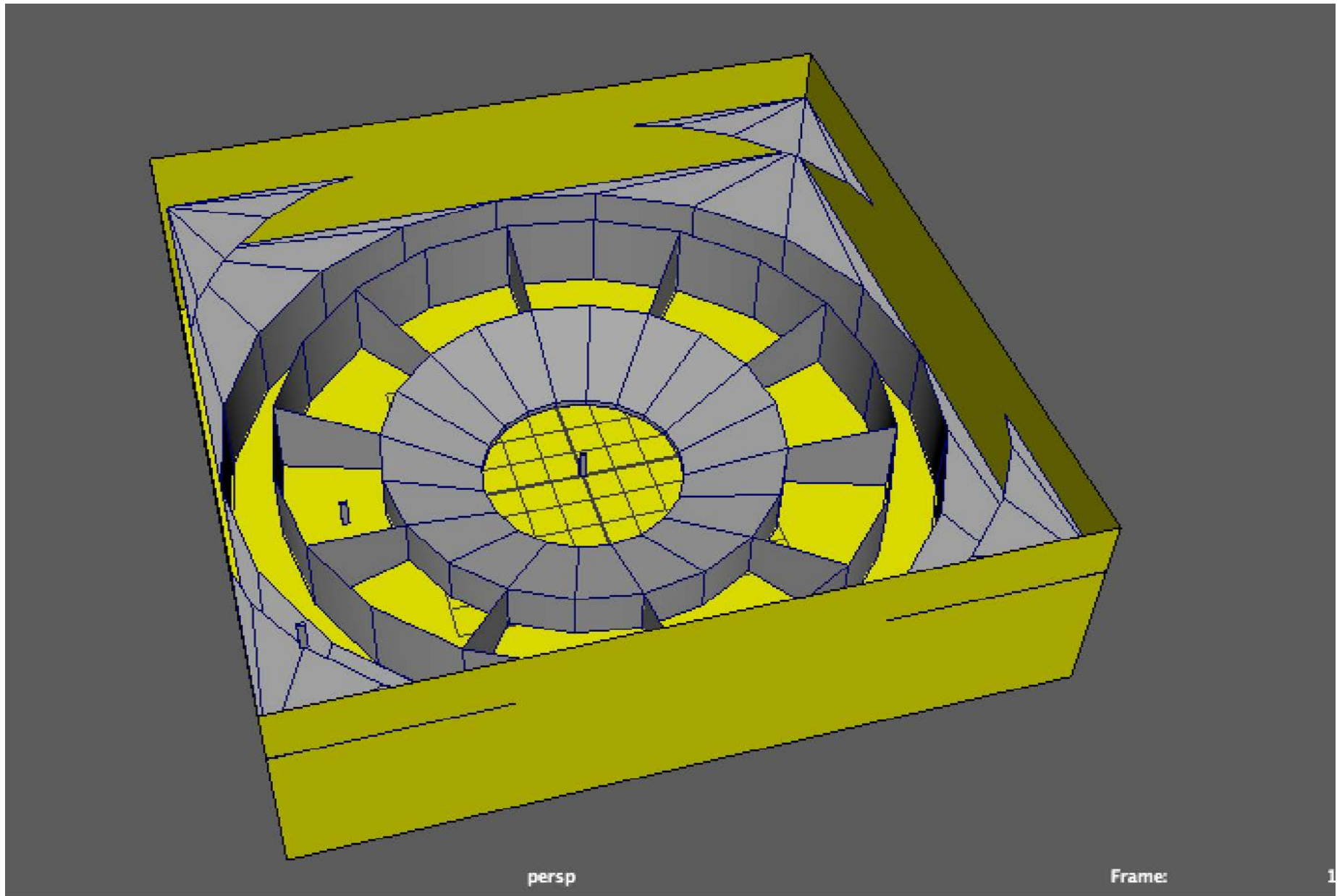




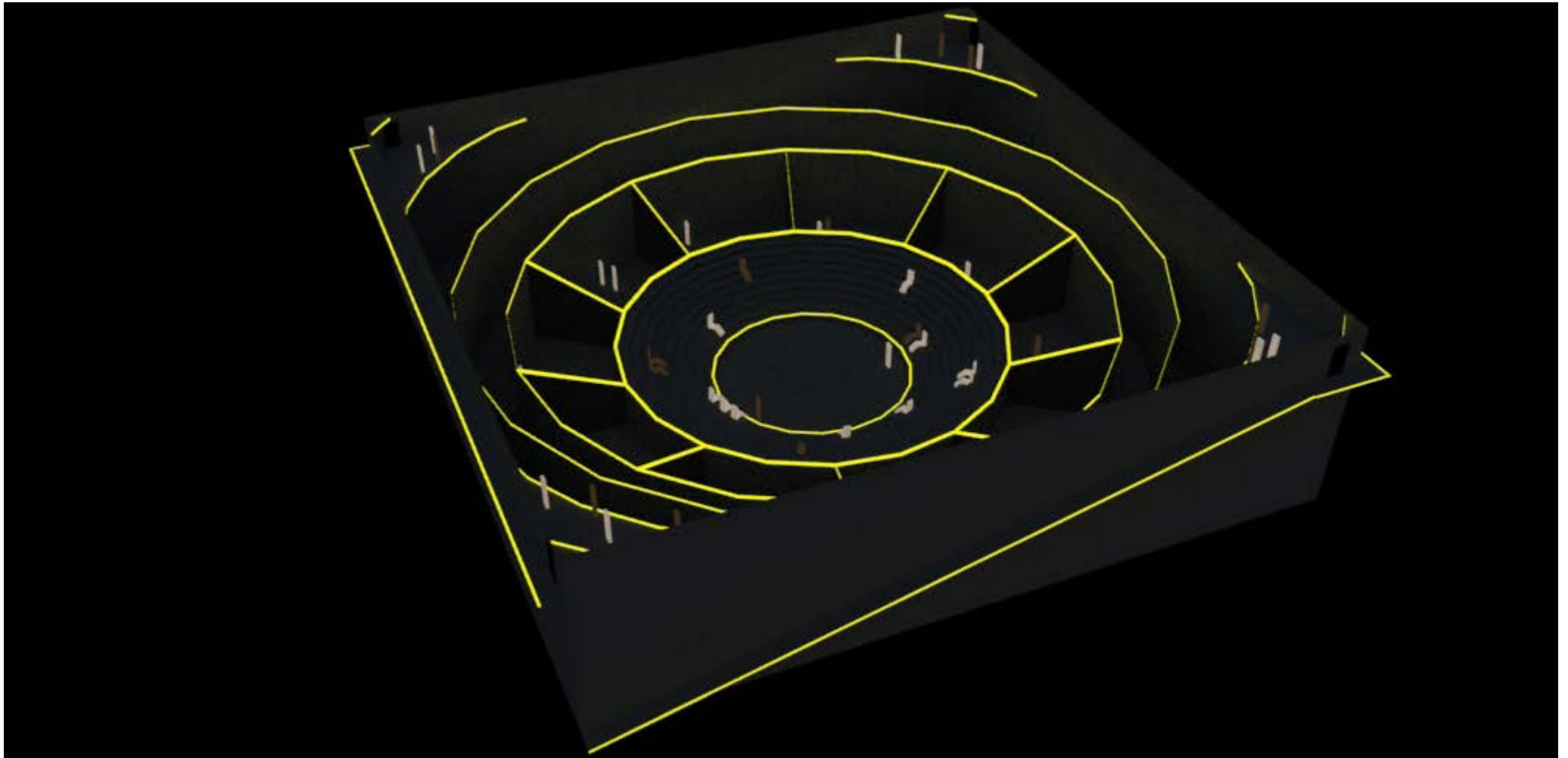
At this point of construction, emanating out, we've now got a kind of black cylinder, almost as wide as the overall space. At this juncture we add another circular - and taller still - wall of fabric. Its diameter exactly that of the width/depth of the space. In doing this, a large corridor has been formed, acting as a perfect access way. As well as making a useful infinite path for experiences which require long walking distances.



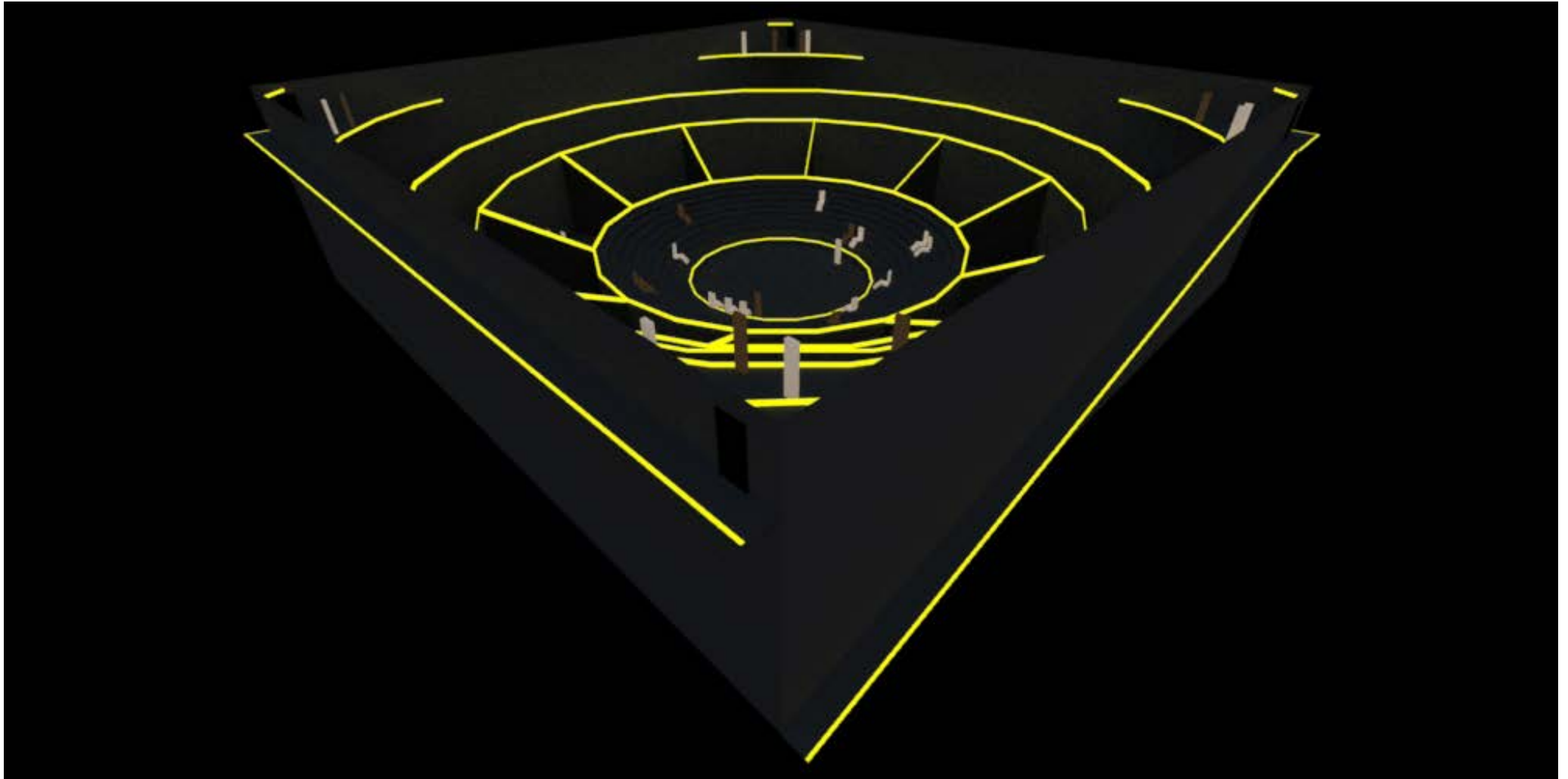
Because this outer edge of fabric touches the wall in four locations, it naturally creates 4 large corner chambers, useful for reception, bar, cloakroom, shop etc.



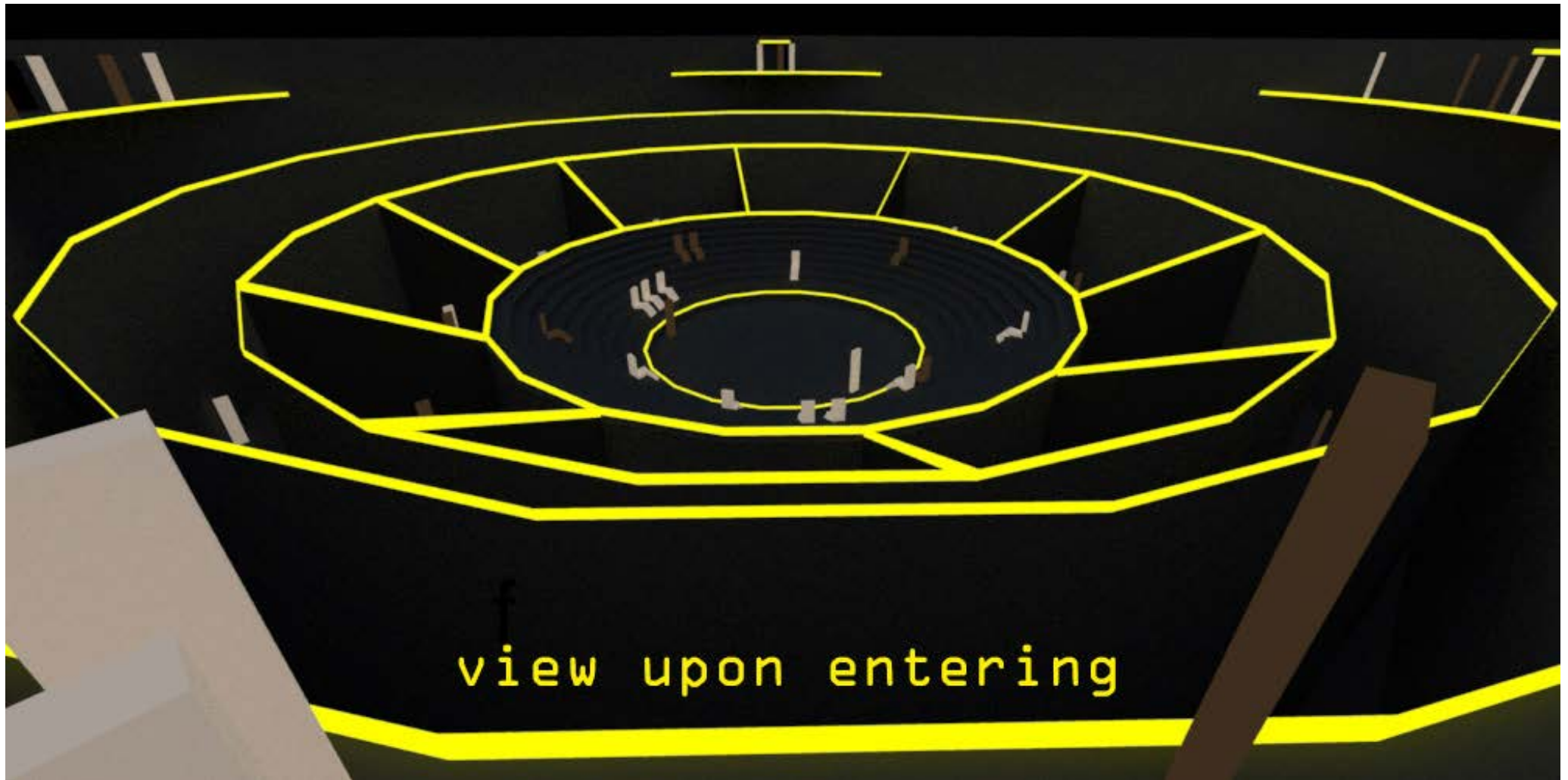
Finally, corner balconies way up high will be placed. They are once again trimmed to match the flow of circles formed from the central VR user spot. This concludes the concept of ever increasing circles propagating through the space. Here, people can watch, eat dinner, drink and socialise allowing for an amazing vista. Up high in the four corners of the building, people can look down and see the beauty and movement of various people all exploring the VR within a great network of rooms.



These balconies should be accessed via an external ledge, running around the outside of the building, once again playing with the overall topic of various realities.  
( External / Internal / Augmented / Virtual )



The balcony view would be everyone's introduction to BLACKSHIP. Editorially, a magazine covering the space can fully expose in ONE photograph, the entirety of what happens at BLACKSHIP. The space sells itself.



There is new VR establishment in Lincoln, UK called TENSION VR offering a journey through VR experiences. Looking at the images in the press I feel it should be our ANTI-REFERENCE. Take a look at the buildings in the pages ahead. These are what I think of when I consider exciting LA architectural moments. Then you'll see TENSION VR's base. I follow this immediately with my rough of what the BLACKSHIP building could look like. I think the comparison draws a useful distinction.





TASCHEN

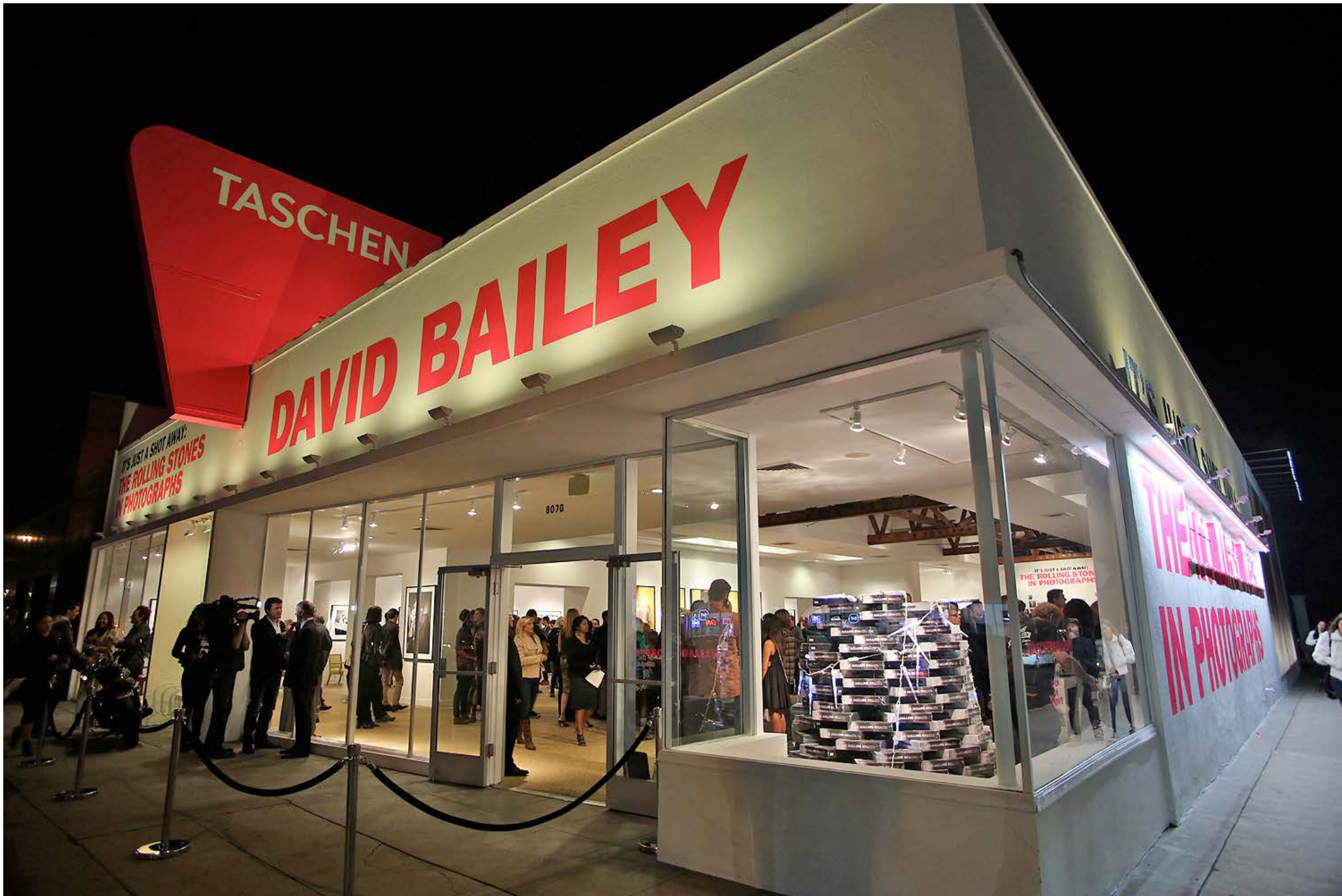
DAVID BAILEY

IT'S JUST A SHOT AWAY:  
THE ROLLING STONES  
IN PHOTOGRAPHS

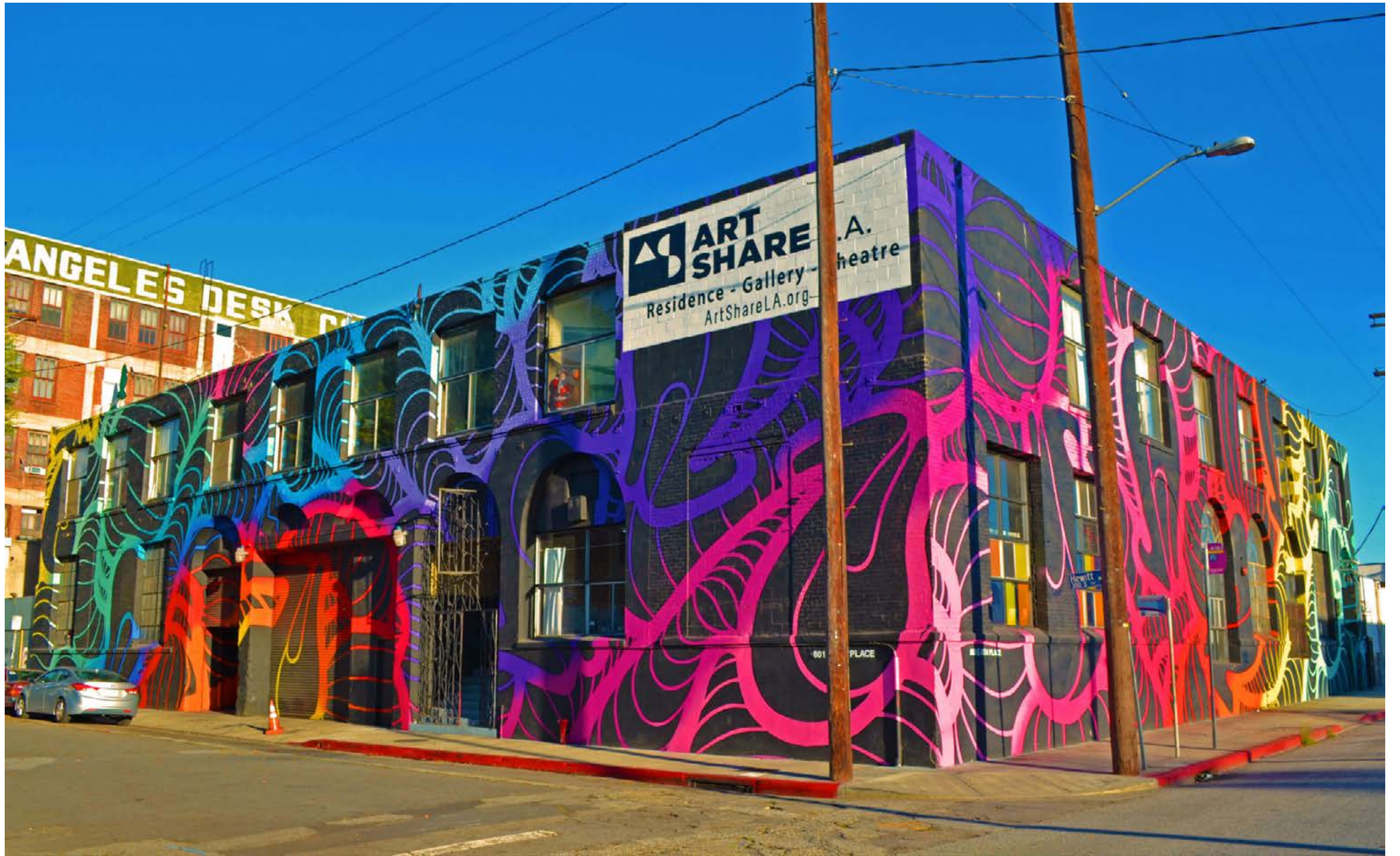
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IT'S JUST A SHOT AWAY:  
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THE ROLLING STONES  
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ANGELES DESK

901 PLACE

901 PLACE







The very uninspiring TENSION VR, Lincoln, UK



BLACKSHIP L.A.

4 x corner rooms

360 access corridor

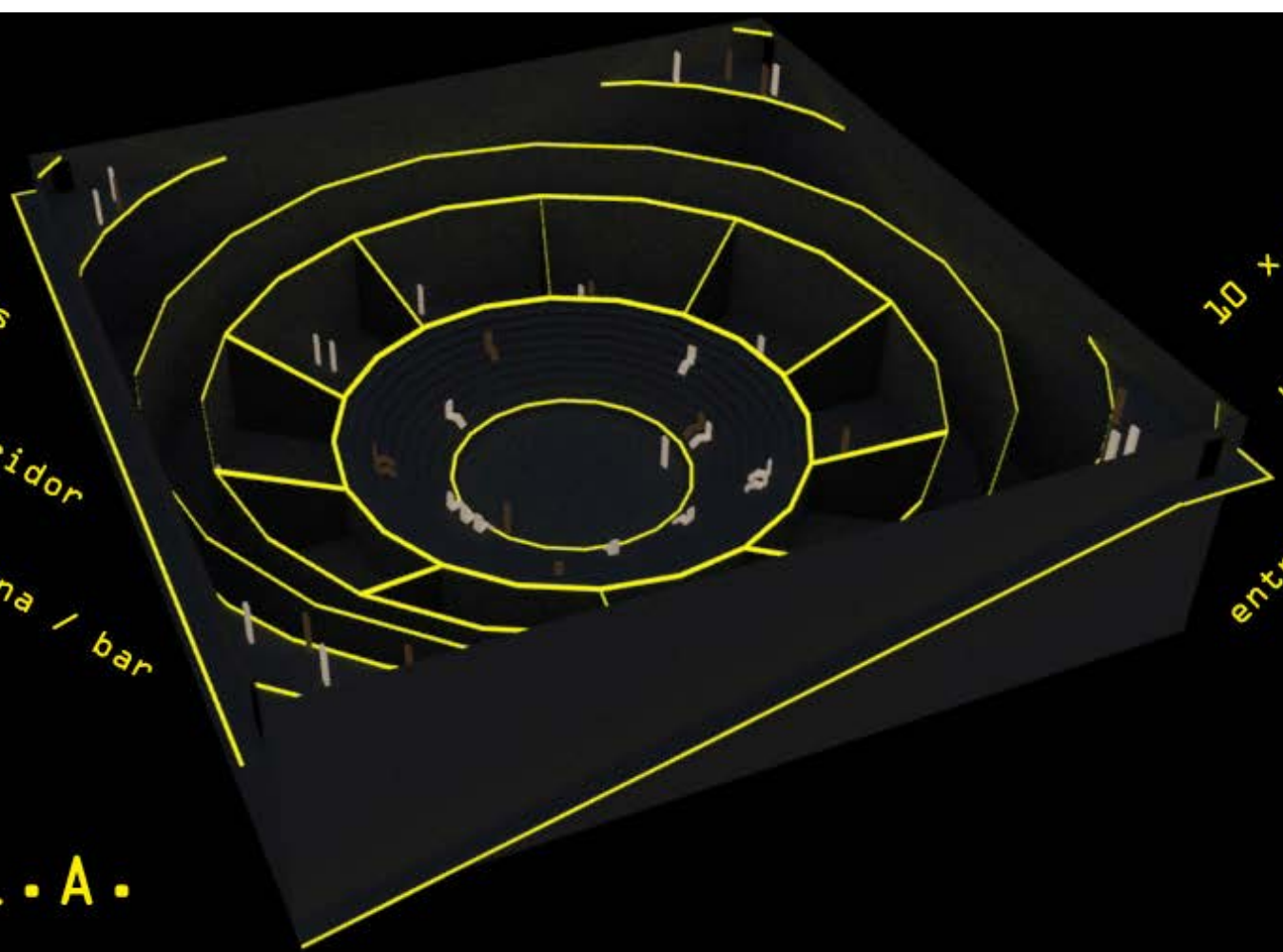
ARena / bar

10 x vr spaces

4 x balconies

entrance

BLACKSHIP L.A.



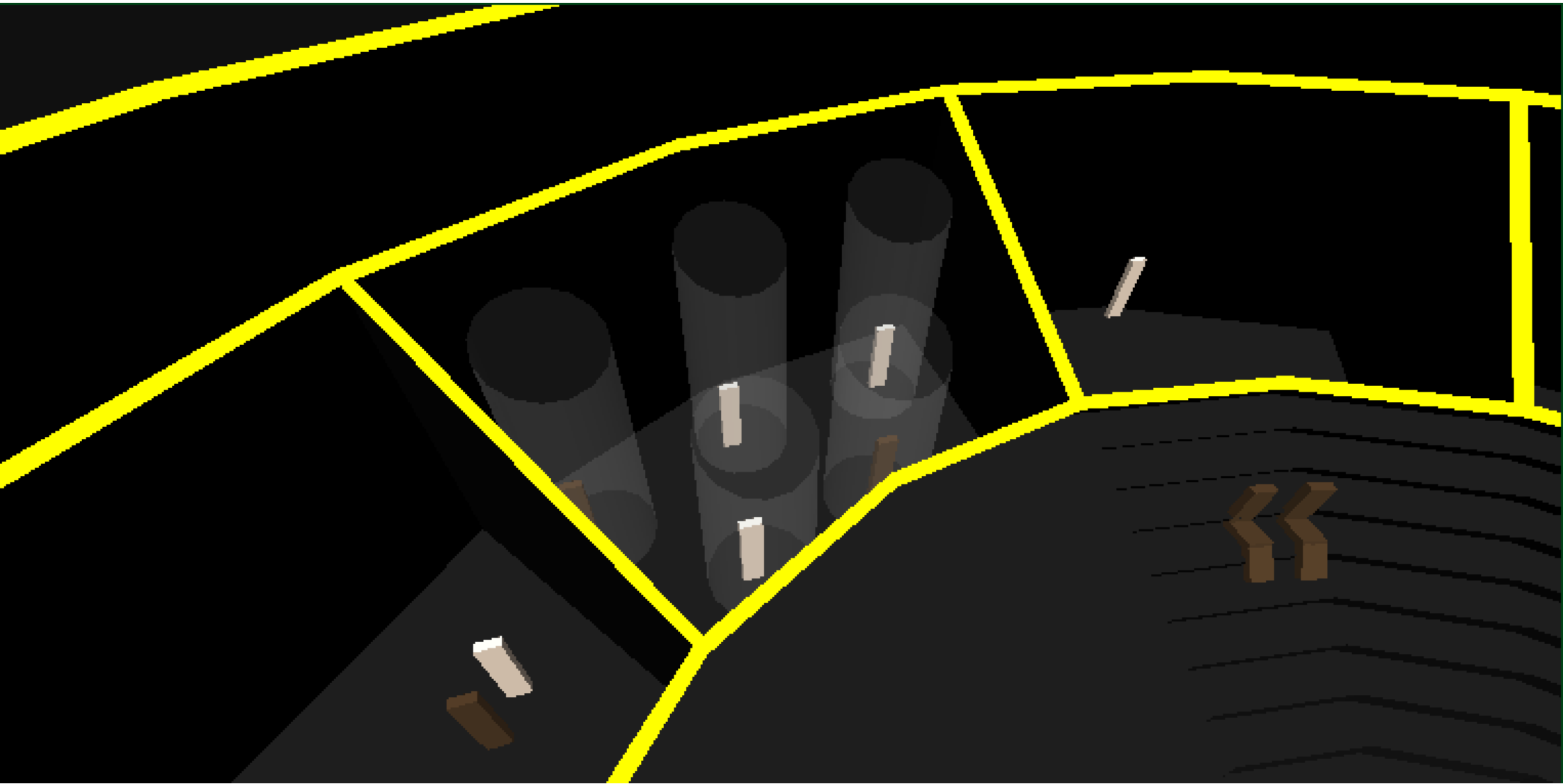
## EXPERIENCES

Part of the larger discussions would be about the experiences themselves, and I won't go into too much detail about my own personal thoughts. However, I can touch on some points related to how they occupy the space.

1. cheaper devices (located on the steps and in the first VR ROOM)

I feel that no-one should ever feel like they can't jump into an experience. So I'd be wanting to consider offering Samsung Gear VR Headsets to people waiting on bigger 'rides'.

These would be customised to only display a selection of BLACKSHIP curated experiences, such as LANDS END (or Avengers!!!) We'd design this BLACKSHIP app using my suggested talent Mikko Martikainen of Miculeney. These would be available on the ARena steps for seated experiences. And in VR room 1, in which 5 people can be experiencing at once. They don't need to move and therefore might be surrounded by a soft sheer fabric to limit their movement.





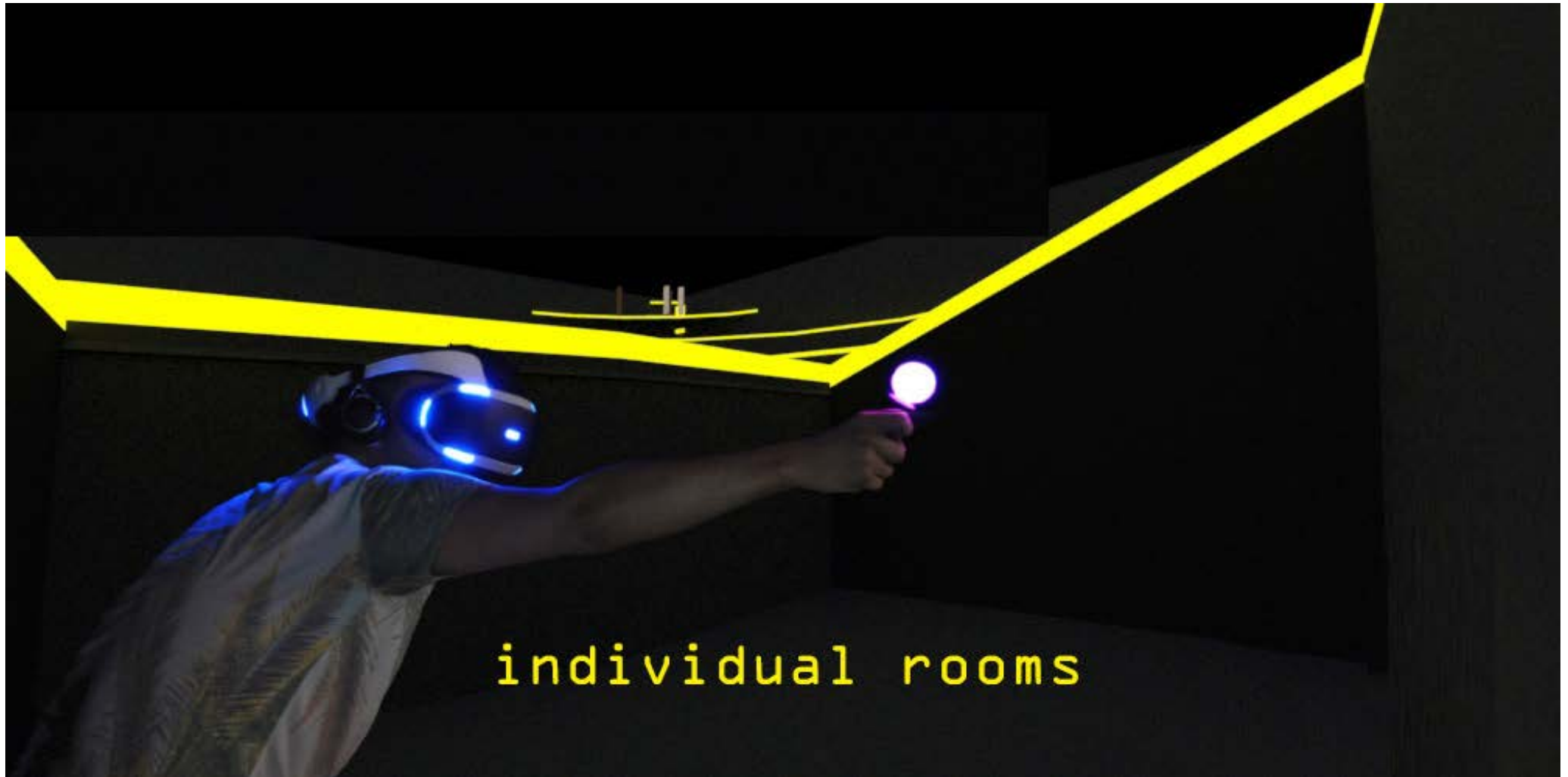
## 2. Permanent setups (2 VR rooms)

Next would be to offer bigger experiences, people can stay in this for longer than the 5 or so minutes offered in other rooms. On my first go, I wanted to stay in the 'Tilt Brush' universe for a good 20 minutes. The picture below is fabricated, but a really nice example of how Augmented Reality could be realised. We'd have people stood on an LED panel which is coloured based on the top view of the drawing they are making. From the right angle, and live AR compositing the TV monitor would present the artist AND the art in one space. A first. (Also check Paintlab VR on Facebook)



### 3. VR rooms (7 remaining VR rooms)

Then stepping up the level of experience again, these rooms are designed to show off specific experiences, involving some aspects of 4D, including wind, interaction etc. These would most certainly be VIVE or RIFT based.



#### 4. 360 corridor

My friends at CREW Belgium, make experiences involving human contact. A company like this could make use of this space very easily by leading people wearing the headsets around this maze of rooms, holding their hands all the way through.



## 5. ARena

The ARena space should be reserved for the more installation type experiences. Things that are good to watch as a spectator on the steps, and something to look forward to strapping yourself into.

People sat on the steps listen to the 360 based audio, they can watch the screens mounted up high on mution fabric to see the experience themselves. Or the screens can be playing beautiful inspiring visuals.

This circular space could also be used for AR experiences such as multiple people playing multiple chess games by walking around the edge of the circle holding Google TANGO AR devices. The chess would augmentationally be superimposed over the main event happening in the same 3D space.

Google my friend YEHUDA DUENYAS of MINDRIDE for transpiration. The image overleaf shows a MINDRIDE experience setup at VRLA.

Then check out MARC ZIMMERMAN'S FILM 'LONGING FOR WILDERNESS'. An amazingly beautiful, and FAST journey from an urban street, to utter tranquility.

Bridge these artists and set it as the centre pieces within the proposed ARena at BLACKSHIP. I think it would be a game changer.







## SOUND

One of the biggest lost opportunities in VR is sound production. I feel that whether people are doing a Samsung Gear experience, or in the main event, the headphones they use must be of the best quality. The emotive response from sound is profoundly more important than the fidelity of an image. So within the VR experiences I would recommend BOWER & WILKINS P7's (maybe the new wireless variety) or the new OSSIC's (which I've not tested yet <https://www.ossic.com>) And maybe for the ARena, an array of suspended KRK - ROKKIT monitor speakers.







## FASHION

To compliment the graphic lines within the space, the outfits that the staff wear should be recognisable, cutting edge, hint at 'sporty', and stand out against a dark environment.

Sporty is very trendy in LA, more now than ever. Susan Sarandon's SPIN, a multi-venued PING PONG comeback franchise is paving the way for combining fashion with staff uniforms. She looked to TV's 'Project Runway' to get her designs right for the event.



As well as selling VR systems, and instead of selling just logo'd t-shirts, I think selective pieces from sports fashion lines could be offered, as well as having the staff happily wearing the pieces.

As an example, I found this new designer duo called ANOUKXVERA. Their clothing takes its source from body parts. This in a dark environment with headsets and EL Wire lined rooms, should give enough nods to the likes of Tron, without being too retro or dated.

Again, here we see a 'before and after' using the TENSION VR showroom in the UK as a counter argument, in which the t-shirts they wear look like they are from a computer games tradeshow and the people wearing them look like they work at a Student Union bar.

Follow this visual, with a sophisticated solution I think would work for BLACKSHIP.







## SHOP

So I think the shop could be aspirational AND affordable. Gifts at all price points.

VR - As well as selling the Oculus Rift/Vive along with the recommended computer, I think you could also stock the Samsung Gear VR headset, The Carl Zeiss ONE device for general headsets, and then various sized BLACKSHIP branded 'cardboard' packs.

SOUND - If you follow my audio recommendation, and supply the best headphones for the experiences, I would assume they would also sell very well. If you also like my concept of using an official speaker system in the space too. ie KRK ROKKIT, these might also be something that could be sold. Headphone wise, you might want to offer three headphone systems at three price points. The Bower and Wilkins as a top end, Beats in the middle, and a final cheaper option.

CLOTHING - Given the fever of healthy, trendy (and wealthy) people in LA I think fitness based VR gear would fly off the rack. Especially when they look good on the models, and people are pumped after a VR day and want to take the whole concept home with them to remember the day.

GIFTS - On top of all this, I feel that there are some really smart and fun toys that could be stocked related to VR and the lighting style established in the venue.

## SUMMARY

So that's what I'd do with complete creative freedom. Without naming names and with trusted partners, I've asked around and people concur that a space like this is more than appropriate for a modern experience showing off the best in VR experience.

I hope that there are some concepts here that pique your interest, because I very much want to make this fun house an actual reality.



[www.daffylondon.com](http://www.daffylondon.com)





A dark grey, three-dimensional rectangular sign is centered against a black background. The sign has a slight perspective, showing its top and side surfaces. Two thin, bright yellow lines run diagonally across the front face of the sign, one from the top-left corner to the middle-right edge, and another from the middle-left edge to the bottom-right corner. The text "BLACKSHIP L.A." is displayed in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font across the center of the sign's front face. The letters are evenly spaced and have a slight glow, consistent with the neon-style lines.

BLACKSHIP L.A.