The dialectic between the individual and the collective – arguably one of the central philosophical tensions embedded in the Capuchin Order’s DNA – forms the conceptual framework for the design of a monastery complex on Milwaukee’s South Side. In an attempt to eliminate any perceived hierarchical differences between the various functions of the monastery, the program is organized in a series of dimensionally standardized building modules made from three interlocking components: a concrete base, a wood shell, and a wood wrapper. The concrete base establishes a datum that normalizes the site’s slope, its walls reaching up at key structural points to support the wood shells and establish an organizational skeleton in which the program can unfold. The modular wood shells are directional in nature and remain static in size, but they are oriented to either the interior or exterior, depending on the particular needs and appropriate responses for the different program components. Finally, the wood wrapper is inserted between the base and the shells, an interior liner that defines spatial boundaries and at times transforms into the building skin. The aggregate modules create a serpentine building form that wraps around the urban block and intertwines with a necklace of exterior spaces – a series of landscaped zones, some exposed, others carved deep into the site, offering various degrees of protection and separation from the outside world. The most private space, the cemetery, is only accessible through an underground passage from the cloister, an empty, cradled outdoor room marking the project’s spiritual center.
Library axonometric

opposite: exploded axonometric concept models
privacy gradient

principal structure

internal shells

left:
  site diagrams
  main entrance

opposite:
  library axonometric