

A report focusing on:

Advanced Construction Technology

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Table of Contents

<u>Study</u>	<u>Page Number</u>
1.0 Introduction.....	3
2.0 Research.....	4
2.1 What is Off-site Construction?	4
2.2 Recommended Off-site Construction Method.....	5
2.3 Foundations and Superstructure Recommendations.....	6
2.4 Distinctive Architectural Designs and Building Envelope Types.....	7
2.5 Recommend Envelope for Distinctive Buildings.....	8
2.6 Case Studies of Parametric Architecture in Sustainable Projects.....	9
2.7 Passive and Active Systems for Efficient Heating and Cooling.....	10
2.8 Fire Safety Measures	11
2.9 Innovative Construction Materials and Methods.....	12
3.0 Recommendations and Conclusion.....	13
4.0 Reference List.....	14
5.0 Appendices...../.....	18
5.1 Appendix 1.....	18
5.2 Appendix 2.....	19
5.3 Appendix 3.....	20
5.4 Appendix 4.....	20
5.5 Appendix 5.....	20
5.6 Appendix 6.....	21
5.7 Appendix 7.....	22

5.8 Appendix 8.....	23
5.9 Appendix 9.....	24
5.10 Appendix 10.....	25
6.0 Bibliography.....	26

1.0 Introduction

This report has been prepared in response to the client's request in developing a distinct, high-end residential building, located in Swansea's SA1 Maritime Quarter. The client is interested in designing a property that stands out for its opulent architectural style, while also remaining committed to maximizing sustainable construction. This report aims to explore the feasibility of this project by analyzing key factors that will impact the effective delivery of this development.

Swansea's Maritime Quarter is renowned for its dynamic environment and is particularly celebrated for its blend of modern and historical architectural prowess. Despite its beauty set against the waterfront, the densely developed layout gives rise to difficulties related to on-site construction. As a result, innovative approaches are necessary to address the spatial constraints and minimize disruption to the surrounding community. Moreover, the client has highlighted that sustainability and innovation are core principles of this project. To create a structure that not only upholds luxury standards but; also sets a benchmark for environmental responsibility and architectural excellence.

In this report, the client's requirements will be explicitly addressed by assessing the most suitable methods for off-site construction, distinctive architectural envelopes, advanced building services, fire safety measures, innovative materials and sustainable practices to be integrated into the project's development.

2.0 Research

2.1 What is Off-site Construction?



Source: (DesigningBuildings, 2022)

The phrase ‘off-site construction’ refers to completing project elements in factory-controlled environments before transporting and assembling them on-site. It’s particularly instrumental in areas like Swansea’s Maritime Quarter where traditional methods are constrained by limited space and restricted accessibility. Therefore, producing a significant portion of the work in a controlled, purpose-built environment can result in 70-80% greater efficiency, fewer delays, accelerated building processes and reduced on-site disruption compared to traditional methods. (DesigningBuildings, 2022) (IKO, 2022)

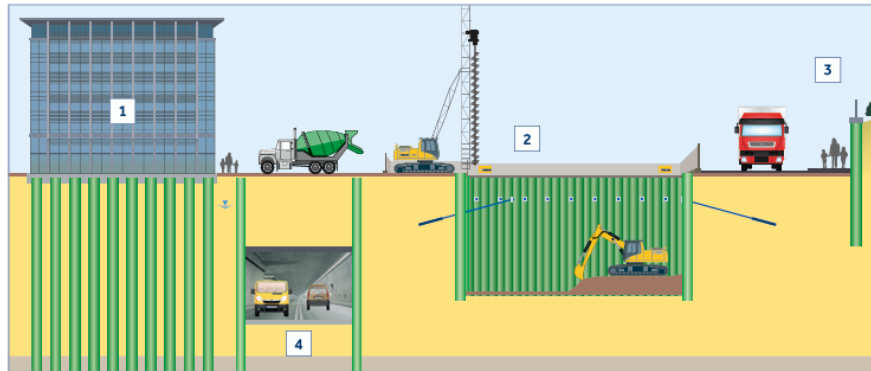
2.2 Recommended Off-site Construction Method

For this luxury apartment block, modular construction is the most suitable off-site construction method. Some of the countless advantages are as follows:

- ◆ **Reduced Construction Schedule:** Construction of modular buildings can co-occur with the site and foundation work. Projects can be completed 30% to 50% sooner than traditional construction.
- ◆ **No Weather Delays:** Fabricating modules in a controlled environment virtually eliminate weather-related delays. With 60% to 90% of construction completed off-site, projects can be accomplished faster, yielding quicker returns, higher quality and increased sustainability.
- ◆ **Streamlined Material Storage:** By constructing the modules in a factory and promptly transporting them to site upon completion, construction sites can remain cleaner, safer and optimize space in densely built-up areas.
- ◆ **Lower Waste Volume:** WARP anticipates that adopting modular construction could result in a 90% reduction in materials used by recycling materials, controlling inventory and protecting building materials. (Modular Building Institute, 2024) (NRB Modular, 2023)

When compared to other methods, modular construction is the most effective choice due to its capacity to balance speed, efficiency, sustainability and spatial constraints. While panelized systems and off-site component construction offer some flexibility, they require more on-site labor and can be less efficient in restricted urban settings like Swansea Maritime Quarter. These methods may result in a higher volume of waste, more on-site material storage and an increased susceptibility to weather-related delays compared to modular methods. On the other hand, while volumetric construction can be effective for larger, more uniform layouts, it's less suited to sites with restricted access and doesn't provide the comparable degree of design flexibility required for a luxury apartment block. (IKO, 2022)

2.3 Foundations and Superstructure Recommendations



1. Foundations
CFA piles are extremely effective at providing structural support for a range of structures such as buildings by transferring loads into the underlying soil.

2. Lateral support to excavations
CFA piled walls are an established method of providing earth retention on site boundaries or close to adjacent buildings. These are generally installed as CFA contiguous piles or secant piles.

3. Slope stabilisation
CFA piles are used to prevent landslides or protect existing buildings and are often combined with other techniques such as ground anchors or soil nails.

4. Infrastructure
CFA piles can be used in a variety of infrastructure projects such as tunnelling, road or bridge construction as well as flood protection.

Source: (Keller, 2023)

Foundations

For restricted urban sites with limited space, Continuous Flight Auger (CFA) mini piles are the most suitable foundation solution due to their efficiency, minimal disruption and adaptability (as shown in the image above). Fast, quiet and virtually vibration-free, CFA piling is ideal for environmentally sensitive areas and sites in close proximity to neighboring buildings. Unlike traditional piling methods that generate significant noise and require heavy machinery, mini piles offer a quieter, less invasive alternative that minimizes environmental impact, stabilizes foundations in unstable soil and reduces the need for extensive excavation. Therefore, the balance of performance, accessibility and sustainability renders mini piles as an appropriate foundation choice for this development. (Keller, 2023) (Van Elle, 2023)

Substructure

For this unique project, a steel-framed superstructure is undoubtedly the most suitable choice. Unlike the long curing times and extensive formwork required for concrete, steel can be prefabricated off-site and transported to site when required. This approach mirrors modular construction as it facilitates faster on-site assembly in restricted settings. In contrast to concrete, steel is lighter, more durable and highly sustainable due to its recyclability. These inherent properties allow steel to be repurposed at the end of its life cycle. Therefore, this eco-friendly option combines both efficiency and sustainability, supplying steel framing as a superior choice for Swansea's Maritime Quarter proposed development. (Van Elle, 2023) (Keller, 2023)

Additionally, Riley and Cotgrave (2013, pp. 45-47) state that the table below depicts the differences between ‘Steel Structures’ and ‘Concrete Structures.’ The table highlights how steel sets itself apart from more traditional materials like concrete:

<i>Steel Structures</i>	<i>Concrete Structures</i>
High compressive strength and tensile strength	High compressive strength but low tensile strength
Sustainable in small cross sections	Sustainable only in large cross sections
Prone to corrosion	Less prone to corrosion
Doesn't require a formwork	Requires a formwork
Can be prefabricated offsite in modular construction and transported to site	Can be prefabricated offsite and made on site
Higher strength to weight ratio	Lower strength to weight ratio
Not fire resistant, but can be fireproofed	Fire resistant

2.4 Distinctive Architectural Designs and Building Envelope Types

For a block of luxury flats to stand out and complement its surroundings, a variety of envelope types should be considered. Each envelope factoring the visual aesthetics, practicality, performance and sustainability.

With the aim of designing a distinctive block of luxury flats, the various building envelope types are as follows:

1. **Curtain Wall Systems-** Curtain wall systems offer a sleek, modern look that's typically constructed from glass or aluminum. This non-structural facade amplifies thermal performance through embedding advanced glazing technologies. As such, it often integrates daylighting for improved energy efficiency by reducing the need for artificial lighting.
2. **Sustainable Cladding Systems-** Sustainable cladding materials are durable and recyclable exterior panels made from materials like thermally modified timber and recycled metals. This configurable system can provide an added layer of insulation and protects the building from inclement coastal weather in the SA1 region.
3. **Parametric facade-** Parametric facades use a computational design method to create complex and creative exterior geometries. This eye-catching facade often integrates sustainable solutions and futuristic visual styles for a standout high-end landmark in its surroundings.
4. **Green facades-** This verdant facade provides a serene and harmonious balance between nature and the built environment. These living walls offer various benefits, including natural cooling, air purification, promote sustainability and exemplify pioneering biophilic design principles.

(Huxley & Co., 2020) (Tesla CAD, 2024) (Urban Green Blue Grids, 2024)

2.5 Recommended Envelope for Distinctive Buildings



Source: (Arpitha, 2024) (Sen, 2024)

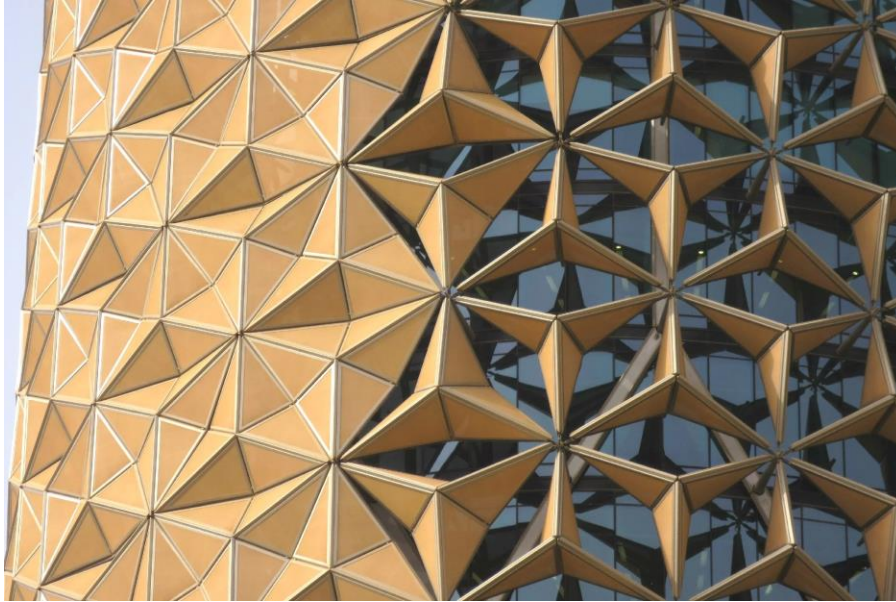
Among the options, combining a curtain wall facade with a green face can indeed create a distinctive luxury development in Swansea's Maritime Quarter. The dual aesthetic of glass and greenery is rare; and undoubtedly an optimal solution for performance, sustainability, eco-friendly and organic appeal for an iconic building.

Despite this, the parametric facade remains unmatched with its unique and standout appearance, as illustrated in the two images above. Here's why:

1. **Unparallel Creativity:** Parametric designs can produce innovative patterns that defy conventional aesthetics. Positioning the luxury block of apartments as an instant landmark.
2. **Adaptability:** These facades can be tailored to specific environmental and cultural landscapes. Therefore, the building envelope can remain relevant in the Maritime Quarter while also maintaining its individuality as a distinctive block of luxury apartments.
3. **Material Flexibility:** The design accommodates advanced building materials like Ethylene Tetrafluoroethylene (ETFE), lightweight composites and solar integrated panels for cutting-edge innovation.
4. **Sustainable Potential:** Parametric designs often incorporate passive solar strategies, daylighting and natural ventilation for sustainable building practices. Additionally,

replacing glass with ETFE offers a lightweight, durable and energy-efficient solution. Its durability, resistance to corrosion and long-lasting sustainability helps overcome the site's environmental challenges. All while promoting sustainable development. (WFM, 2022) (Paulus, 2024)

2.6 Case Studies of Parametric Architecture in Sustainable Projects



Source: (Palana, 2017)

Real-world cases such as the Metropol Parasol and the Al Bahar Towers, exemplify how parametric architecture impacts material efficiency and energy consumption. These case studies have demonstrated the practical application and measurable benefits of introducing parametric designs into architectural projects. For example, the Al Bahar Towers feature a dynamic facade that responds to sunlight, reducing solar gain by up to 50%. The shading system's honeycomb (as seen in the image above) dynamic facade expands, contracts or shifts to optimize insulation, lighting and shading based on factors such as the sun's position, temperature, weather and solar exposure. Such adaptability not only delivers striking high-end allure but also enhances the building's sustainable energy use by minimizing the need for artificial heating and cooling. (Paulus, 2024)

2.7 Passive and Active Systems for Efficient Heating and Cooling

As mentioned in the Al Bahar Towers, active and passive systems can be integrated within a buildings design to create a highly efficient and sustainable environment. This approach is commonly found in mixed-mode buildings where both systems can work together to maximize energy efficiency and occupant comfort.

How These Systems Work Together:

1. Passive Systems

- **Collector (Aperture and Trombe wall):** For passive solar design, *appendix 7* shows how south-facing windows, positioned within 30 degrees of true south, capture sunlight in winter to optimize natural heating and reduce the need for artificial warmth.
- **Thermal Mass:** *Appendix 8* demonstrates thermal mass cooling with pre-cooled concrete slabs and natural ventilation as an energy-efficient alternative to traditional systems.
- **Distribution:** Heat is transferred through the building via conduction, convection and radiation to evenly warm different areas.
- **Control:** Overhangs and shading devices limit heat gain in summer by naturally maintaining a balanced temperature inside.
- **Natural Ventilation:** Strategically placed windows allow outdoor air to cool and ventilate spaces efficiently without the need of active systems. (U.S Department of Energy, 2023) (NREL, 2023)

2. Active Systems

- **Electric Heat Pumps:** Visualized in *appendix 9*, electric heat pumps are highly efficient devices used for both heating and cooling. By transferring heat rather than generating it, they can be up to three times more energy-efficient than conventional electric heating methods.
- **Radiant Systems:** This system uniformly disrupts heat across an entire floor space, providing consistent warmth. This method reduces energy consumption and doesn't rely on fans to heat or cool spaces.
- **Variable Air Volume:** This system adjusts airflow to match the building's needs by ensuring energy isn't wasted on any unnecessary heating or cooling. (Trane, 2023) (McKinlay and Lyzun, 2024) (U.S Department of Energy, 2024)

Integration of Systems:

Synergy: Passive systems like thermal mass and natural ventilation can be combined with active solutions such as heat pumps and radiant systems. By integrating passive and active systems, buildings can reduce excessive energy consumption by relying on active systems only when necessary. This approach helps create a net-zero energy building, where the building's energy needs are met through renewable sources and highly efficient systems.

Intelligent Control: A Building Automation System (BAS) optimizes building performance by dynamically controlling Heating, Ventilating and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems based on real-time data. For instance, BAS can use occupancy sensors to detect vacant areas and adjust heating or cooling to reduce energy waste. BAS can also adjust active systems based on factors like occupancy and external weather conditions. This intelligent system optimizes energy use by complementing passive systems for a more efficient and sustainable environment. (Integri Controls, 2024)

In summary, combining active systems like electric heat pumps and radiant systems with passive strategies like thermal mass and natural ventilation creates a sustainable, energy-efficient building that adapts to varying conditions and reduces reliance on active systems.

2.8 Fire Safety Measures

Fire safety in modern developments is paramount and can be addressed through a variety of safety measures including fire detection systems, smoke ventilation systems and active fire suppression systems. (Midsummer Fire Protection, 2023)

Passive fire safety includes the use of fire-resistant materials, compartmentalization and strategic building design as seen in *appendix 10* to limit fire spread. On the other hand, active systems like sprinklers, alarms, smoke control systems and automated systems like HVES and Siemens Cerberus Pro detect, suppress and assist occupants in the event of a fire. (Firetrace International, 2021) (Versus Group, 2023) (Siemens, 2024) (The Constructor, 2023)

Fire Safety Case Studies

In 2017, the Grenfell Tower fire ignited underlying flaws in the building's design. This exposed flaws in fire safety design as the combustible cladding allowed flames to engulf the structure within minutes. (Gardiner, 2017)

In response to this, building regulations have undergone major reforms with stricter guidelines on material safety. A relevant example of this is the Meridian Tower, a luxury apartment block in Swansea's Maritime Quarter. Following the Grenfell tragedy, the Swansea City Council issued a £5m improvement notice requiring internal compartmentation improvements and external firebreak upgrades which included replacing the brickwork to prevent fire propagation between flats. (BBC, 2020)

These changes now reflect the mandate use of non-combustible cladding, fire-resistant materials and improved evacuation procedures to address fire safety in similar developments. As a result, fire safety has become a central component of modern building design. Therefore, the lessons learned from the Grenfell tragedy have led to stricter compliance with UK Building Regulations (Approved Document B) and local fire authority requirements to ensure such a tragedy is never repeated. (Gardiner, 2017) (HM Government, 2024)

2.9 Innovative Construction Materials and Methods

When building luxury flats in Swansea's Maritime Quarter, embracing global innovations in construction materials and methods can truly transform a project.

For example, transparent wood is being tested in Sweden as an eco-friendly alternative to windows and plastic. Meanwhile, countries like China and India are using modular bamboo as a lightweight, abundant material stronger than steel. However, both materials require further research and development before widespread adoption due to potential risks, high costs and disruptions to traditional construction methods. Sometimes, relying on tried-and-tested materials is a safer option. (Rethinking The Future, 2023)

Although innovative materials like self-healing concrete, 3D-printed materials, aerogel (the hardest and the lightest material in the world is made of 99.8% air!) and transparent aluminum are emerging as promising materials of the future for sustainability, innovation and efficiency. Tried-and-tested methods like modular construction and recycled steel are more widely used than emerging innovative materials that are still in development and require further testing. For instance, steel-framed modules are precision-engineered to tolerances of less than 1/32" by using systems like Z Modular for unmatched accuracy and strength compared to traditional methods. These relatively innovative materials are proven for their durability and efficiency while emerging technologies such as self-healing concrete and 3D printed materials are still undergoing research before they can be widely adopted.

Therefore, depending on the client's risk tolerance, combining these innovative materials with the reliability of established materials and the ingenuity of off-site assembly can prove to be faster, more sustainable and practical for restricted sites like the Maritime Quarter. (Z Modular, 2021) (PlanRadar, 2023)

3.0 Recommendations and Conclusions

In conclusion, developing a luxury apartment block in Swansea's SA1 Maritime Quarter requires a strategic approach to overcome the site's spatial constraints in delivering a high-end, sustainable construction that meets exceptional quality standards. Given the project's requirements, modular construction is a great fit for this project because it's fast, efficient and eco-friendly compared to traditional construction methods. It solves logical constraints and aligns perfectly with the client's sustainability goals. Additionally, using mini piles for the foundations and a steel-framed superstructure can help minimize on-site disruption and environmental impact in the restricted area.

For the building envelope, combining a parametric facade with green elements will create a distinctive, eco-friendly design through passive solar strategies and innovative materials like ETFE. Additionally, integrating passive and active heating/cooling systems with intelligent building controls can enhance energy efficiency and occupant comfort by complementing the building envelope's solar strategies. Furthermore, fire safety measures should follow current regulations by using non-combustible materials and advanced detection systems.

Lastly, combining proven materials with emerging innovations like 3D printing will result in a sustainable, cutting-edge development that meets both luxury and environmental standards.

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5.0 Appendices

5.1 Appendix 1

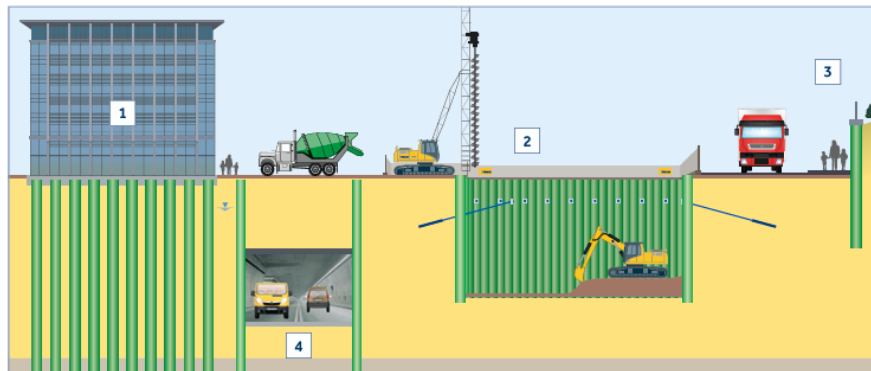
Appendix 1 presents the concept of off-site construction:



Source: (DesigningBuildings Wiki, 2022)

5.2 Appendix 2

Appendix 2 illustrates CFA piles impact on foundations, lateral support for excavations, slope stabilisation and infrastructure:

**1. Foundations**

CFA piles are extremely effective at providing structural support for a range of structures such as buildings by transferring loads into the underlying soil.

2. Lateral support to excavations

CFA piled walls are an established method of providing earth retention on site boundaries or close to adjacent buildings. These are generally installed as CFA contiguous piles or secant piles.

3. Slope stabilisation

CFA piles are used to prevent landslides or protect existing buildings and are often combined with other techniques such as ground anchors or soil nails.

4. Infrastructure

CFA piles can be used in a variety of infrastructure projects such as tunnelling, road or bridge construction as well as flood protection.

Source: (Keller, 2023)

5.3 Appendix 3

Appendix 3: Riley and Cotgrave (2013, pp. 45–47) state that the table below illustrates the differences between ‘Steel Structures’ and ‘Concrete Structures.’

<i>Steel Structures</i>	<i>Concrete Structures</i>
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Higher strength to weight ratio	Lower strength to weight ratio
Not fire resistant, but can be fireproofed	Fire resistant

5.4 and 5.5 Appendix 4 and 5

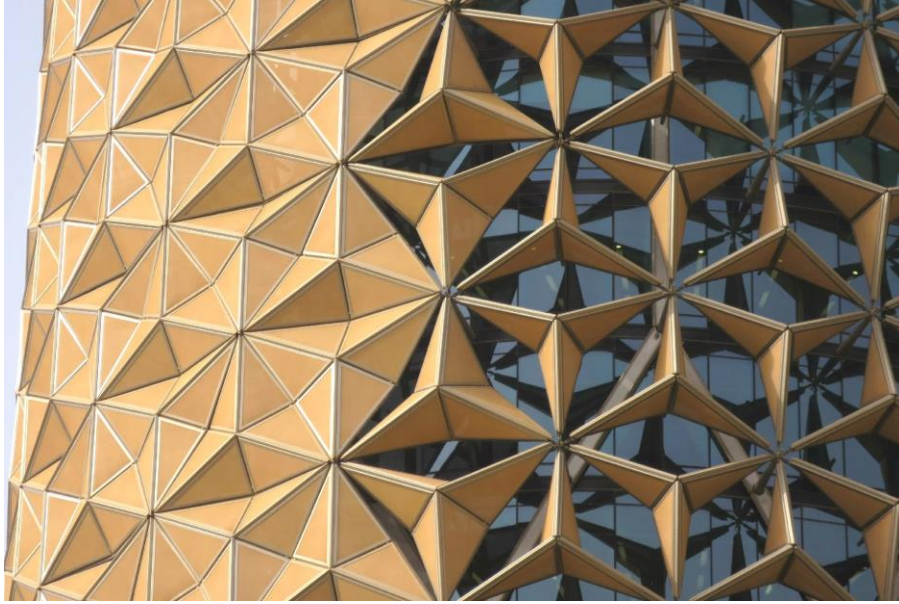
Appendix 4 and Appendix 5 showcases the beauty of a parametric building envelope:



Source: (Arpitha, 2024) (Sen, 2024)

5.6 Appendix 6

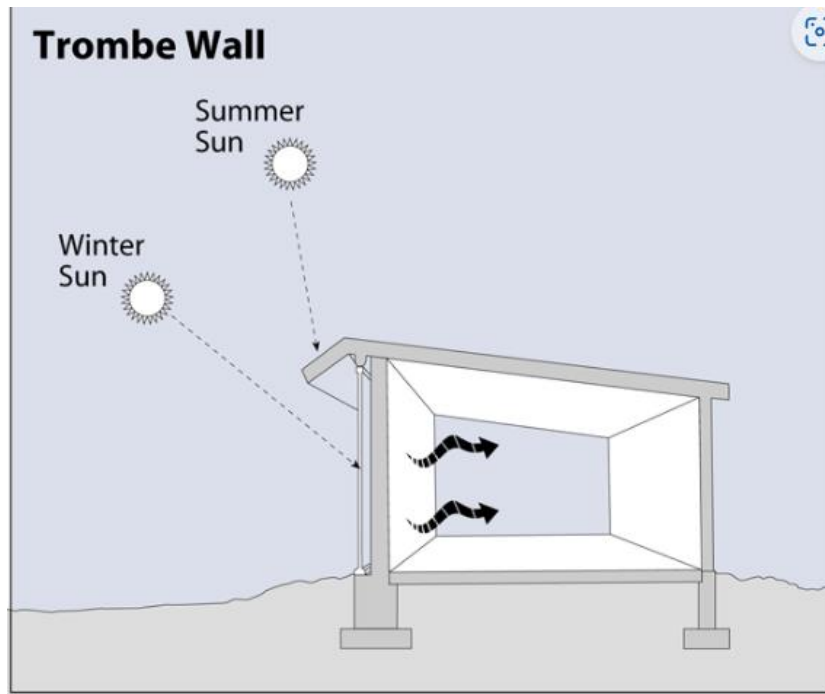
Appendix 6 presents real-world examples of parametric design in the Al Bahar Towers:



Source: (Palana, 2017)

5.7 Appendix 7

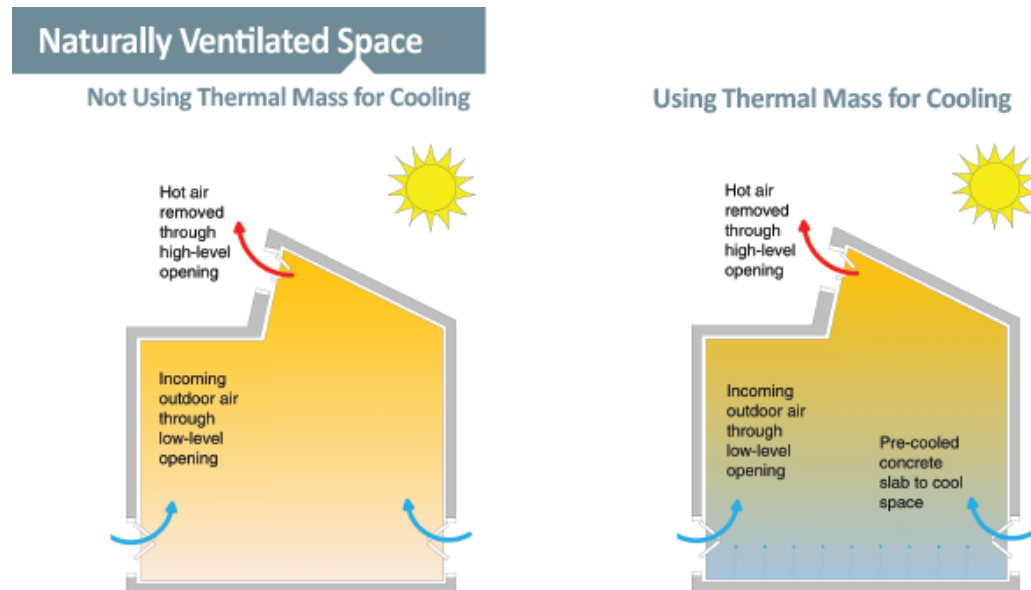
For passive solar design, appendix 7 shows how south-facing windows, positioned within 30 degrees of true south, capture sunlight in winter to optimize natural heating for reduced reliance on artificial warmth.



Source: (U.S Department of Energy, 2023)

5.8 Appendix 8

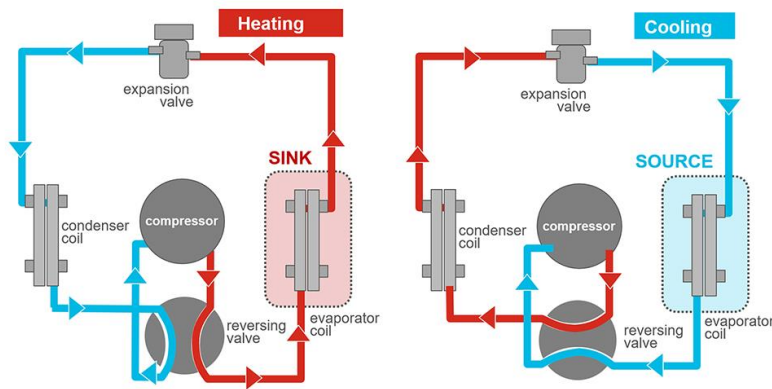
Appendix 8: demonstrates thermal mass cooling with pre-cooled concrete slabs and natural ventilation as an energy-efficient alternative to traditional systems.



Source: (McKinlay and Lyzun, 2024)

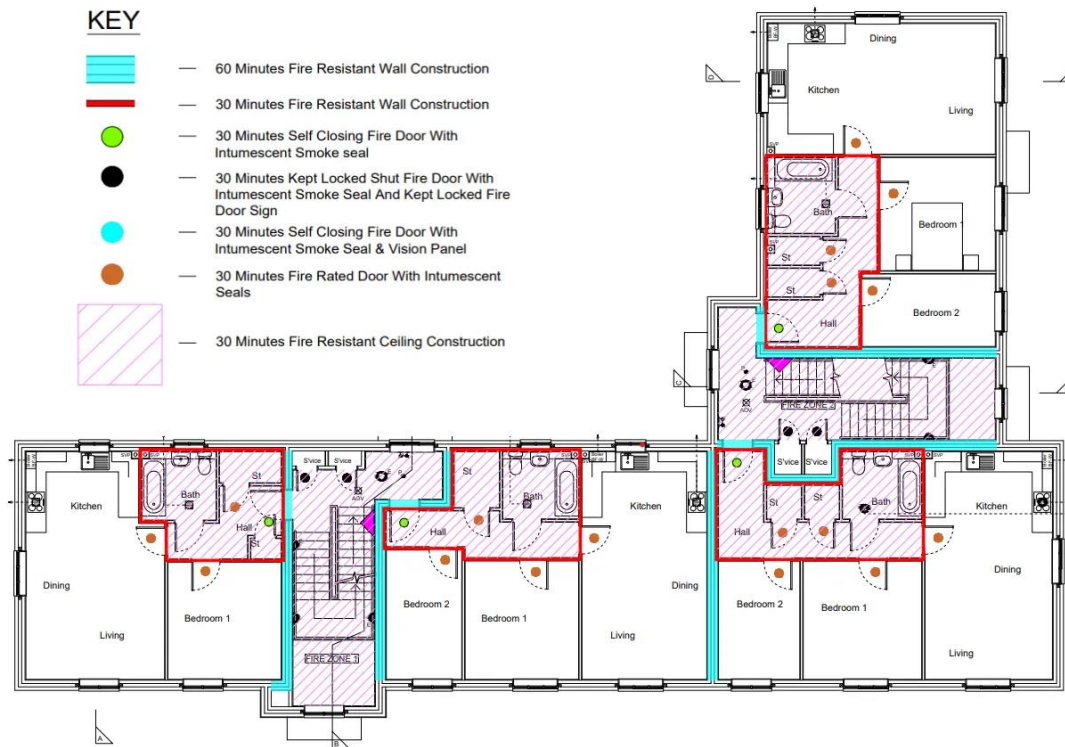
5.9 Appendix 9

Appendix 9: shows how electric heat pumps are highly efficient devices for both heating and cooling by transferring heat between the source and sink.



5.10 Appendix 10

Appendix 10: shows how fire compartmentation is designed and integrated into buildings of a similar nature:



Source: (Verus Group, 2023)

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