

the 'central idea'. The architect Ian Ritchie explains the importance of this to the whole process:

Unless there is enough power and energy in this generative concept, you will actually not produce a very good result, because there is this three years or so of hard work to go through and the only sustenance, apart from the bonhomie of the people involved, is the quality of this idea, that is the food. It's the thing that nourishes, that keeps you, you know every time you get bored or fed up or whatever, you can go back and get an injection from it, and the strength of that idea is fundamental. It has to carry an enormous amount of energy.

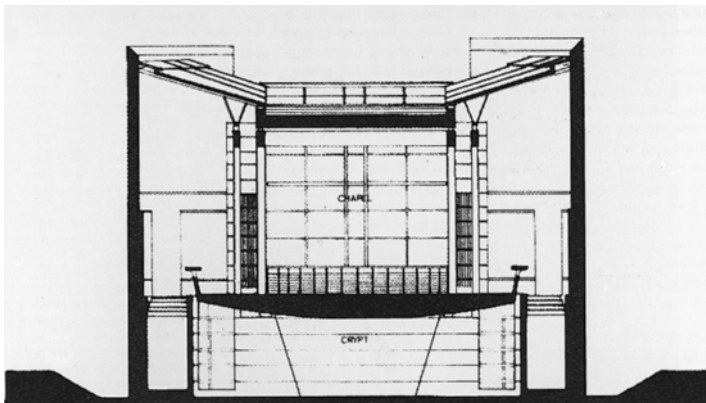
(Lawson 1994b)

Just as a commitment to the idea can be seen to 'nourish' the designer, as Ritchie puts it, so can the search for it in the first place. The central idea does not always appear easily and the search for it may be quite extensive. The architect Richard MacCormac describes this search:

This is not a sensible way of earning a living, it's completely insane, there has to be this big thing that you're confident you're going to find, you don't know what it is you're looking for and you hang on.

(Lawson 1994b)

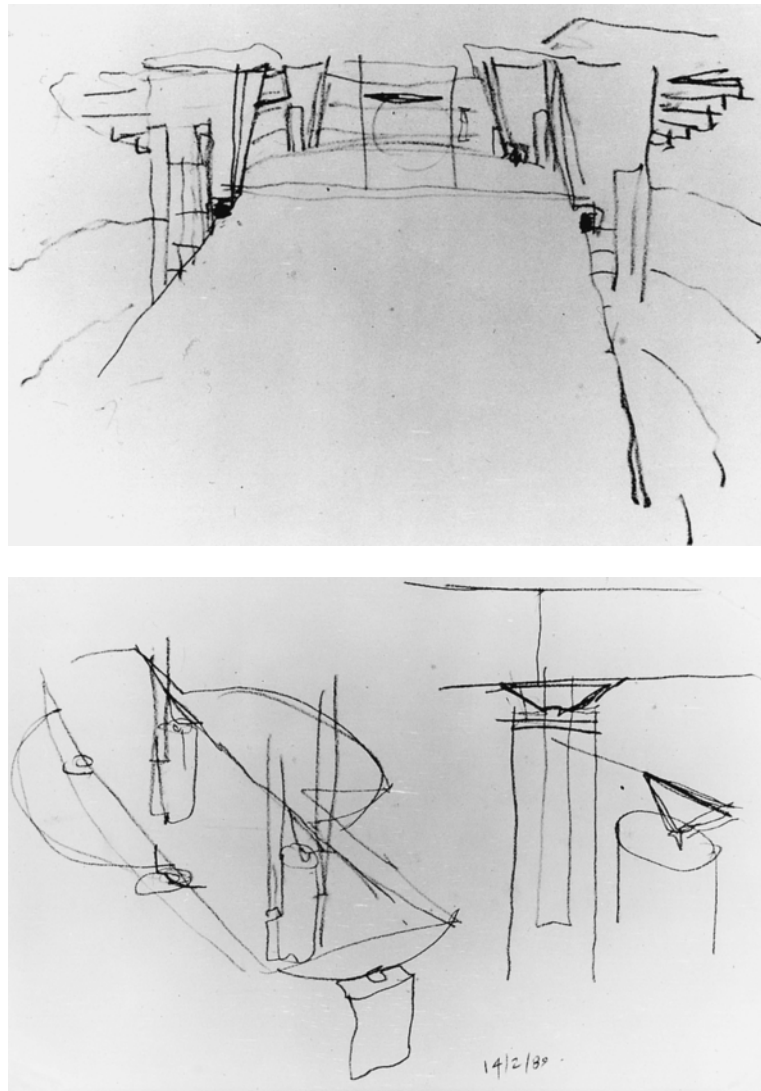
The central idea may not always be understood immediately it begins to appear. Richard MacCormac has described this in the development of the design for his acclaimed chapel at Fitzwilliam College in Cambridge. (Fig. 11.5) Very early in the design process the idea was established of the worship space being a round object at the first floor in a square enclosure: 'At some stage the thing became round, I can't quite remember how.' Eventually the upper floor began to float free of the structure supporting it. However, it was not until the design team were considering such detailed problems as the resolution of balcony and staircase handrails that



**Figure 11.5**

Richard MacCormac's chapel at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, shown in section with the worship space at the first floor

the team finally understood the idea and made explicit the notion of the congregational space being a 'vessel' (Fig. 11.6). This was then to work its way right through to inform the detailing of the constructional junctions which articulate the upper floor as if it were a boat floating (Fig. 11.7). Richard MacCormac has convincingly argued that this quality of design would have been extremely unlikely to emerge if the designers had changed between the outline and detailed design stages as is now common in some methods of building procurement.



**Figure 11.6**

Two of Richard MacCormac's sketches as he explored the idea of the worship space as a 'vessel'