

THE SAPIENS LAB

Craft and Cultural Laboratory in London
Concept & Operating Framework

Short Overview

THE SAPIENS LAB is a living craft and cultural environment in London, bringing together woodwork, art, music, floristry, education, a café, and small public events. The Laboratory is conceived as the first public working platform for THE SAPIENS GARDEN and as a place where people can learn, create, participate, and return to action through real practice.

In simple terms, THE SAPIENS LAB is a space where people encounter culture through working with their hands.

General Concept

THE SAPIENS LAB is the first public working platform for THE SAPIENS GARDEN — a future cultural and landscape environment on the coast of the United Kingdom.

Context

THE SAPIENS GARDEN is a long-horizon cultural initiative that brings together architecture, nature, landscape, craft, engineering, sound, and literature into a single ecosystem:

- a 42-metre timber lighthouse constructed using traditional timber-frame techniques and clad in larch;
- a garden in which each tree is associated with a figure who has shaped the course of human history — Plato, Bach, Morris, Newton, Shakespeare, Turing, Attenborough, Rumi;
- a space of memory, learning, and intergenerational cultural transmission.

THE SAPIENS LAB serves as the point of entry into the project and the first opportunity for direct engagement with its core idea. It is an interdisciplinary environment in which craft, sound, text, and embodied practices coexist within a unified space, allowing participants to move freely between material, artistic, and intellectual modes of thinking.

An artist or designer may work with wood and music; a carpenter may study calligraphy and painting; a musician may immerse themselves in joinery; a poet or philosopher may explore sketching or public speaking.

In this way, each participant may, within a single day, move between the roles of student and someone who shares knowledge, expanding both personal experience and capability. This interdisciplinary approach supports the search for new forms of expression and helps form a more integrated view of one's own creative practice.

Sensory Concept of the Space

THE SAPIENS LAB is conceived as an environment in which work unfolds through sensory experience and action. The space is structured around the primary channels of perception: touch, sight, hearing, smell, and taste. Each area of activity corresponds to a specific mode of interaction with material and environment:

- **Craft Workshop** — working with wood by hand; tactility; the scent of pine shavings; physical effort;
- **Artistic Practice** — work with image, form, and colour; the scent of oil paint and paper;
- **Musical Environment** — sound, rhythm, listening;
- **Living Workshop** — working with plants and natural materials; the fragrance of flowers and nature;
- **Café** — taste, warmth, and the aroma of freshly baked cinnamon pastries.

Smell acts as a unifying element throughout the space: pine shavings, turpentine, oil paint, handmade paper, flowers, coffee, and baked goods. These aromas connect different parts of the Laboratory, create a cohesive atmosphere, and remain in memory as part of the experience.

Spatial Structure

The Laboratory is organised as a unified spatial system of approximately 270 m², comprising three levels of interaction:

- separate working rooms and studios;
- a central adaptable hall with a small stage;
- an integrated space with a café and seating.

The rooms are acoustically separated, ensuring silence and concentration, yet all open into the central hall. The café adds a layer of everyday life — observation, conversation, and informal meetings. This structure allows work, learning, and participation in the educational process to take place simultaneously.

Studios and Areas

The Laboratory includes four main working rooms and a central public area.

1. Hands & Wood — Craft Workshop

The foundational space of the Laboratory, dedicated to working with wood.

- carpentry and joinery practice: carving, joints, theory;
- making wooden objects and structures: boxes, chairs, tables;
- furniture restoration;
- traditional techniques: log construction / laft and timber frame;
- ceramics and clay work;
- workshops on tool sharpening and care for wooden objects.

2. Eyes & Colour — Art Studio

A space for form, image, and visual thinking.

- drawing and architectural sketching;
- colour studies and work with colour and form;
- graphics and calligraphy;
- textile practices / needlework;
- small-scale objects: handmade jewellery, glass, and ceramics.

3. Ears & Sound — Music Studio

A space for sound, voice, and performance.

- piano and string instruction;
- basic improvisation for beginners;
- chamber rehearsals and recording;
- public speaking, vocal work, and stage practice.

4. Breath & Flower — Living Workshop

A space for plants, flowers, seasonal materials, and supported participation through practical work.

- floristry, bouquet-making, and bouquet delivery across London;
- working with seasonal plants.

Central Hall — The Stage

A place where the Laboratory becomes visible and audible.

- concerts and exhibitions of participants' work;
- lectures and presentations;
- readings and literary evenings;
- chamber performances and spoken word events;
- meetings with partners and cultural figures.

The hall is transformable and equipped with basic lighting, sound, and a Cavendish grand piano. It is the space where internal work takes on a tangible public form.

Operating Principles

The Laboratory functions through practice:

- small-group learning: 1–4 participants;
- individual sessions available, both with and without a tutor;
- no prior experience required;
- sessions led by practising masters and members of the community;
- adherence to safety and safeguarding principles.

Formats

- short two-hour intensives;
- two-day weekend masterclasses;
- lectures and seminars;
- open days introducing different areas of practice;
- programmes supporting selected social groups, including young people, disabled participants, neurodivergent participants, and those seeking a supported route into practice;
- groups for school pupils;
- groups for university students;
- groups for different age groups.

Living Workshop & Social Engagement Programme

The Living Workshop, Breath & Flower, is both a social and working environment in which people receive support in returning to action, responsibility, and participation in community life.

Participants aged 18+ may join, including those requiring additional support: disabled people, neurodivergent participants, and those experiencing social uncertainty or lacking a stable direction. Work is structured as a regular practice in small groups under the guidance of a master. Participants carry out concrete tasks: assembling bouquets, preparing orders, packaging, and delivering them across the city.

Each action is brought to completion. Each participant is responsible for their part of the process and sees the result of their work realised in a real-world context. In this way, the process forms a complete cycle:

material → composition → handover → city-wide delivery

Bouquets are delivered across London, while some of the bouquets are sold in micro-format through the café. This creates a direct connection between the individual, the surrounding environment, and urban life — an experience of purpose, completion, and belonging.

This direction is one of the key components of the project. It connects cultural practice with a real social function and forms a sustainable model in which participation, labour, and human dignity are inseparable.

Modes of the Space

During the day, the rooms operate: learning, making, and skill development. In the evening, the central hall comes to life through performances, meetings, and cultural events. Thus, the space exists in two modes — internal and public.

Function of the Laboratory

THE SAPIENS LAB serves a practical role within the structure of THE SAPIENS GARDEN:

- education in craft and art;
- creation of real objects and prototypes;
- testing of engineering and artistic solutions;
- community formation;
- job creation;
- providing a gradual and supportive path into social participation.

Timeline

- **2026** — preparatory phase;
- **2027** — testing and development, followed by scaling.

Audience

The Laboratory is open to:

- teenagers and young people;
- people seeking practical skills and hands-on experience;
- local residents and visitors to the city;
- participants seeking a practical entry into culture, creativity, or art.

Outcomes

For participants

- a real created object;
- a safe learning environment;
- practical experience;
- support from a community.

At the Laboratory level

- a series of educational programmes;
- regular cultural events;
- a sustainable community;
- employment opportunities;
- a unique environment for social integration, particularly for young people and adults who lack access to conventional pathways of development.