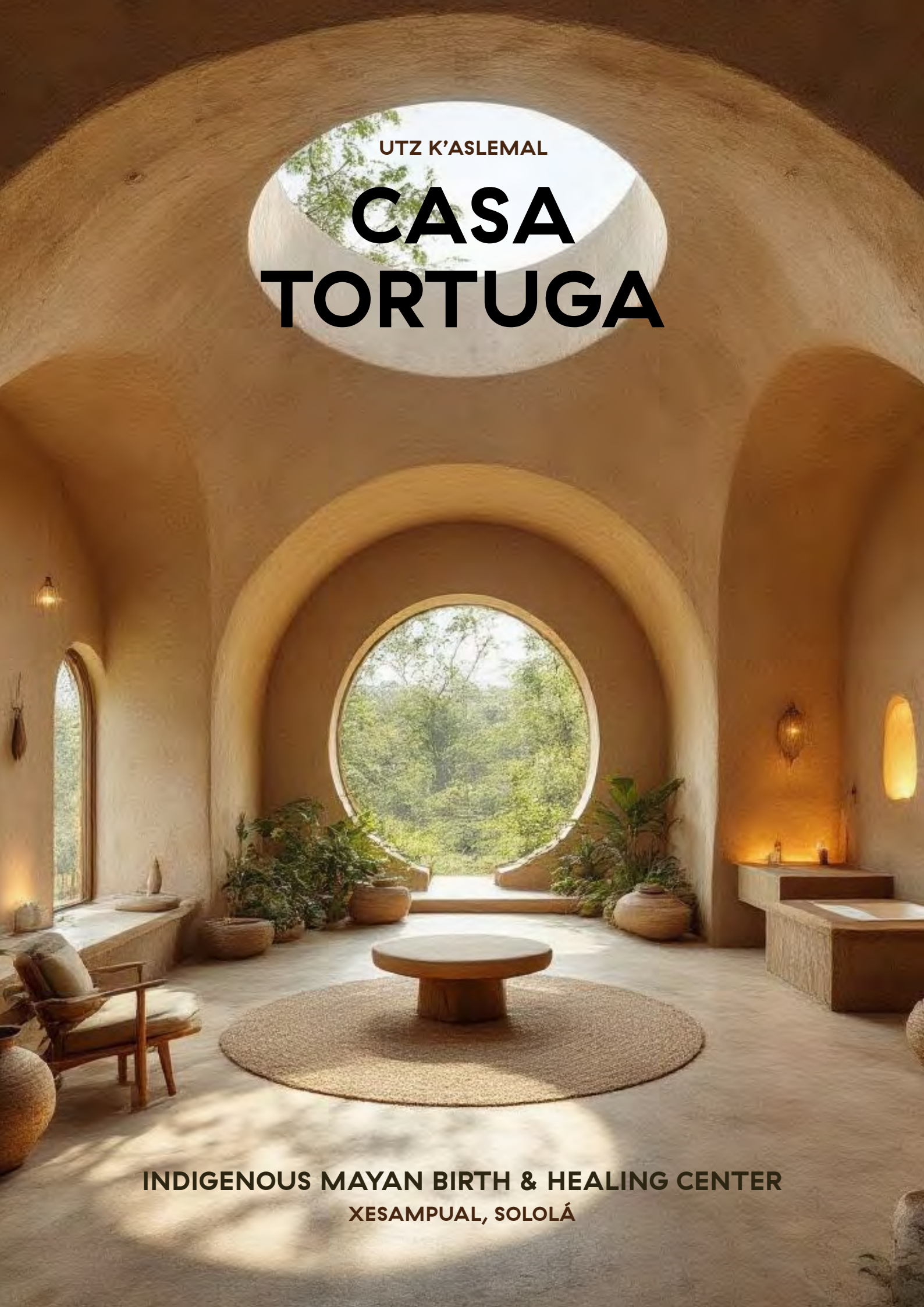


UTZ K'ASLEMAL

CASA TORTUGA

INDIGENOUS MAYAN BIRTH & HEALING CENTER

XESAMPUAL, SOLOLÁ

ROOTS &

PURPOSE

We are the Zavala family — daughters, sons, and relatives of Maya midwife and healer Nana Rosalía, guardians of ancestral wisdom passed down through generations. Our mission is to share this knowledge through respectful, holistic care for mothers, babies, and families in our community.

In rural Guatemala, we live guided by the Maya worldview, deeply connected to nature, life's cycles, and the sacred fire that directs our healing. This connection shapes every act of care, blending tradition with attentive, culturally grounded support.

From this vision, a dream has grown: Casa Tortuga — the House of Birth and Life. A holistic space supporting women and families from conception through birth and postpartum, it empowers women, nurtures families, promotes sustainability, and preserves the cultural heritage of Maya midwifery for future generations.

We are grateful to all who walk this path with us. Casa Tortuga is more than a building — it is a living testament to ancestral wisdom, community strength, and the enduring power of care, knowledge, and connection.

Rooted in wisdom, present in life, guided by purpose.



STEP BY STEP

OUR JOURNEY

01. DREAMING TOGETHER

2020

We begin to develop the idea of a birth house — a space that unites traditional knowledge, sustainability, and community well-being.

02. WEAVING THE NETWORK

The ideas take shape. We bring in professional expertise from architecture and build a collaborative network to make the vision of the birth house a reality.

03. DESIGN

2025

We start designing and planning the building, while exploring funding options and navigating the challenges that come with a project of this scale.

04. BUILDING WITH OUR HANDS

26/27

Construction begins — digging, raising walls, largely without machinery, and with many helping hands. Our vision takes form consciously and collaboratively.

05. BREATHING LIFE IN

2028

Casa Tortuga opens its doors. The birth and healing center is established, and quality, impact, and acceptance within the community are continuously evaluated and strengthened.

NURTURING THE

SACRED

Casa Tortuga has several key goals: providing safe births in rural regions of Guatemala, promoting health and education for women, babies, and families, training new midwives and healthcare professionals, and preserving the cultural heritage of Maya midwifery — always with a focus on empowering women and strengthening the community.

The midwives provide culturally respectful and personalized care, working closely with nearby medical facilities to ensure professional support is available when needed.

Sustainability is central to Casa Tortuga. Through training programs, workshops, postpartum retreats, and the sale of herbal medicine and handicrafts, the tradition remains alive, the community is strengthened, and the Maya worldview of care, knowledge, and respect continues to be passed on to future generations.

Safe births. Skilled hands. Living heritage.



ARCHITECTURE

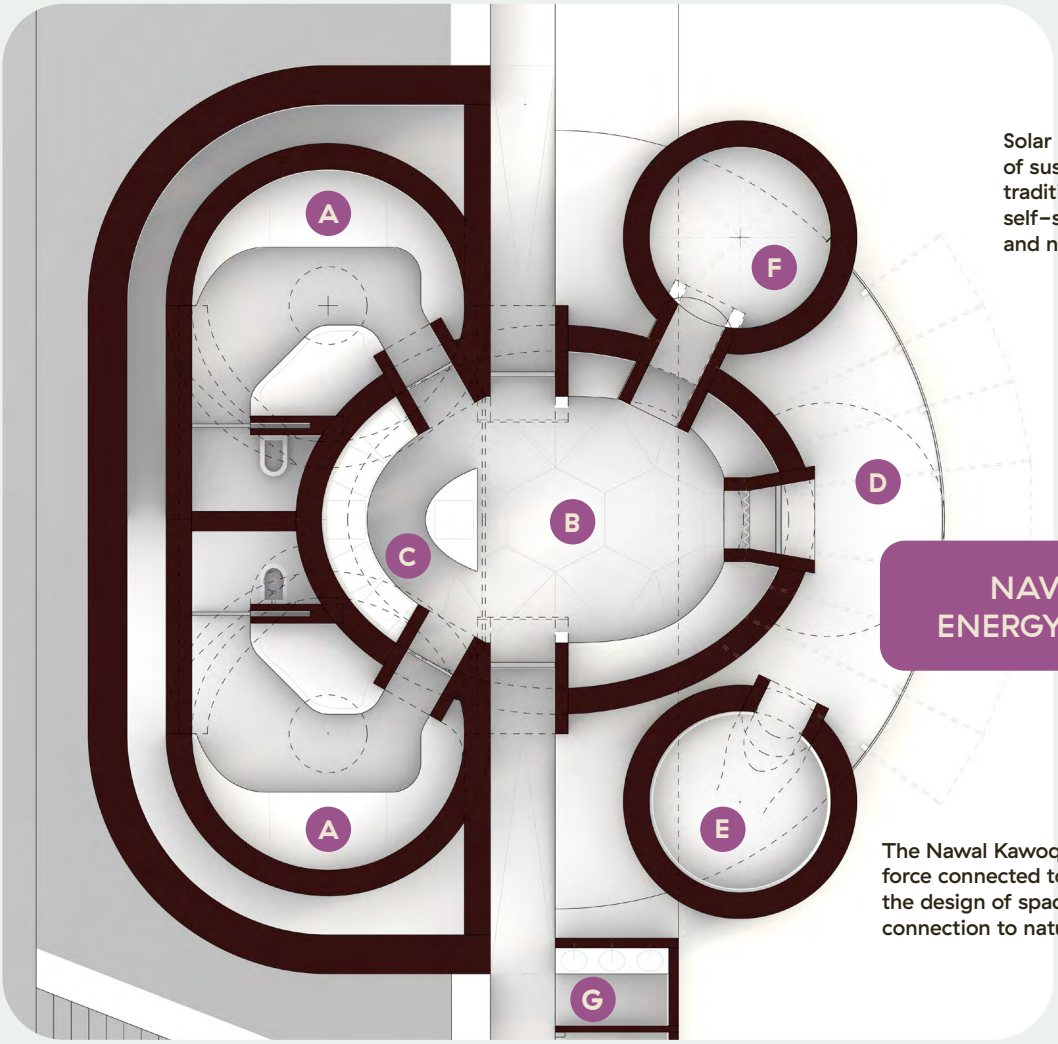
PROGRAM

A sanctuary for growth, learning, and life.

A	Two Birth Rooms — built into the hillside, partially underground
B	Multipurpose Room for education, gatherings, and community activities
C	Infrastructure Zone — kitchen, washing facilities, and waste management
D	Altar / Terrace for ceremonies and reflection
E	Temazcal — traditional steam bath for cleansing rituals
F	Herbarium & Healing Garden — preserving plant knowledge, hosting workshops, and producing ointments and teas
G	Sanitary Facilities

Total Area: approx. 140 m²

Construction Process: Casa Tortuga is realized through hands-on, sustainable, and community-based construction. Following traditional *Bajareque* techniques and using local materials such as bamboo, sugarcane, stone, and wood, foundations and structural elements are built collaboratively. This approach not only respects traditional methods but also strengthens the connection with nature and community throughout the building process.



Solar panels are integrated into the cycle of sustainability — in harmony with traditional worldviews and to enhance self-sufficient energy through sunlight and natural light.

NAWAL KAWOQ: ENERGY OF LIFE & BIRTH

The Nawal Kawoq (the Turtle) — in Maya tradition, the force connected to life, storms, and midwives — inspires the design of spaces that protect, heal, and strengthen our connection to nature.

ARCHITECTURE

DESIGN BUILD

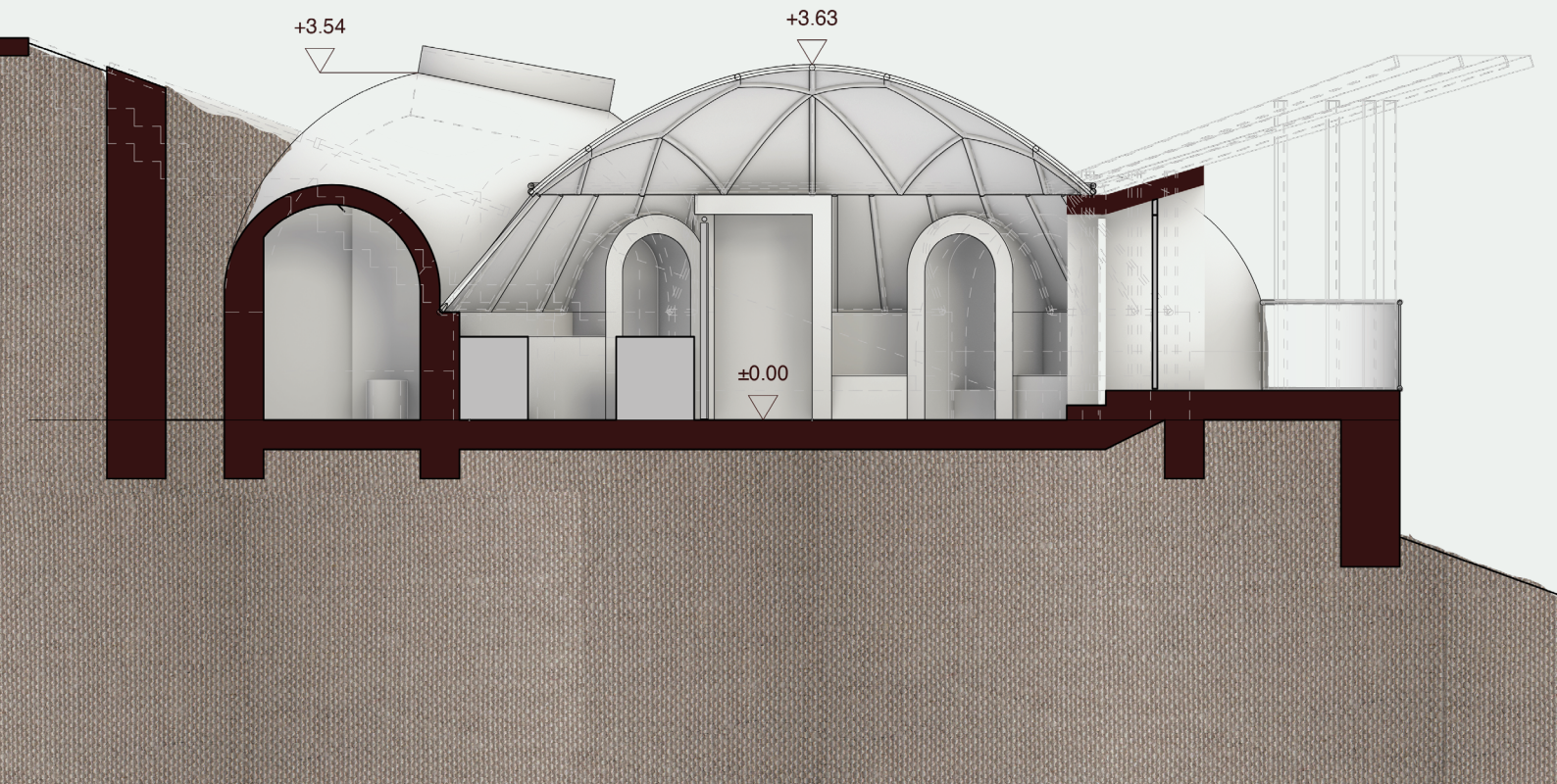
Casa Tortuga is far more than a building — it embodies respect for nature, the ancestral wisdom of the Maya K'iche' people, and sustainable construction practices.

Rooted in Maya culture and local building traditions, it emerged from an intensive dialogue with the community and the Maya worldview, in which earth, body, and spirit are inseparable.

Inspired by the turtle — the Nawal Kawoq, symbol of thunder, storms, and the protective midwife of life — the building's form evolved from sketches and models into an organic whole. Partially embedded into the hillside, it is constructed in traditional *Bajareque* style using local materials such as earth, stone, sugarcane, bamboo, and wood. Like a seed in the soil, the building creates a protective space where new life can grow and flourish.

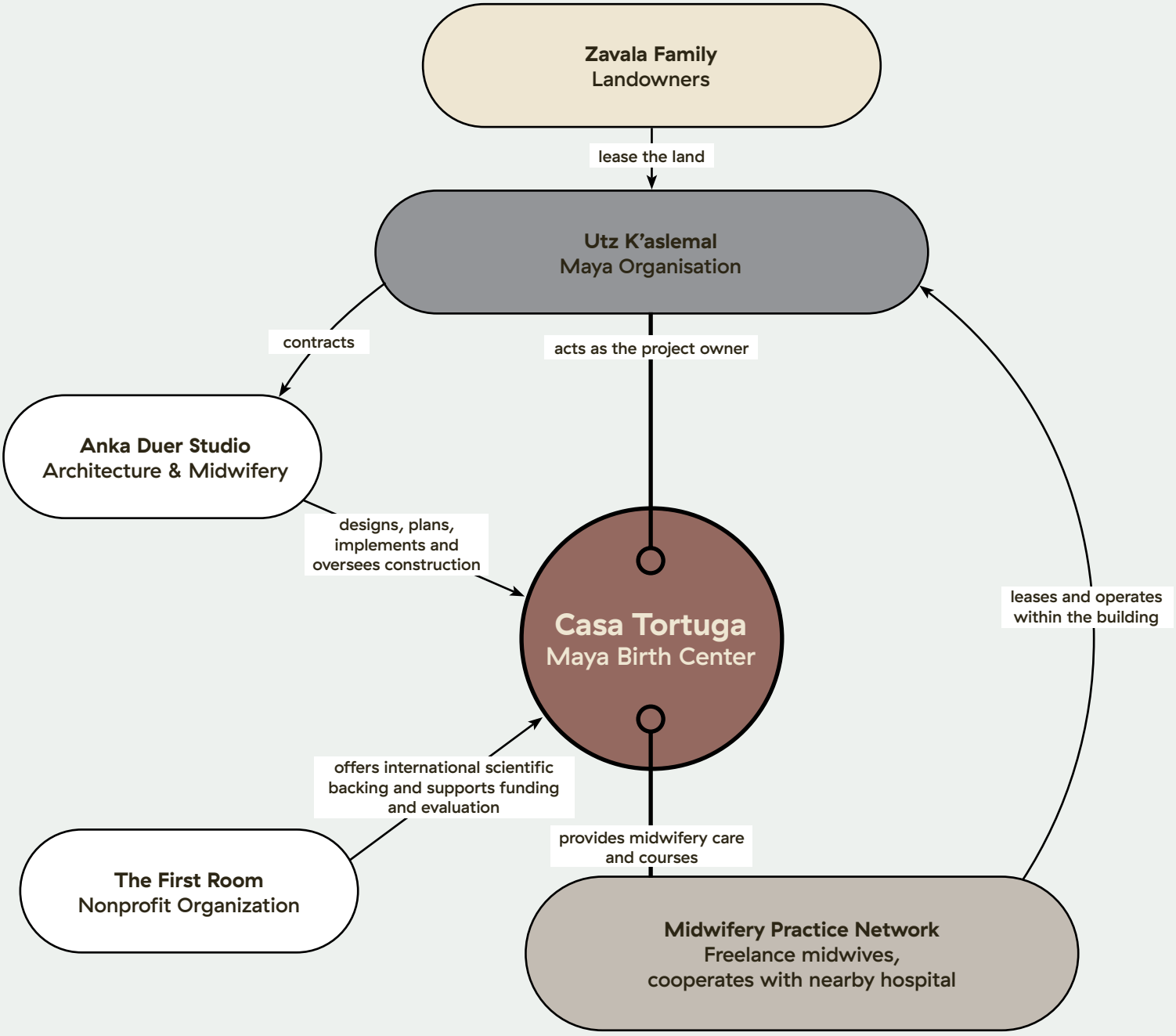
Its proportions follow the sacred numbers of the Maya, creating a healthy, sustainable, and nurturing environment where life unfolds — intimately connected to nature, birth, and continuity.

Sheltered in the earth like a seed from which new life grows.



STRUCTURE & OPERATIONS

OVERVIEW



- **Zavala Family:** Maya midwives, Ajq'ijs (spiritual guides), and activists
- **Utz K'aslemal:** Local Maya organization
- **Comunidad Profesional de Comadronas:** Midwifery practice collective in the founding process
- **Anka Duer Studio:** Symbiosis of architecture and midwifery, specialized in the design of birth spaces, www.ankaduer.com
- **Jerico Honatan Gutierrez Sosa:** Construction manager and expert in traditional building techniques
- **The First Room:** International nonprofit organisation for salutogenic birth spaces, www.thefirstroom.org
- **Extended Network:** The Midwife Project, Indigenous Council, Ruk'u'x Kawoq, GuateMaya Retreats & more

HOW YOU CAN GET

INVOLVED

We are deeply grateful and happy that you would like to be part of this dream.

You can support us in many ways:
— Individual, institutional, or corporate donations
— Contributions of materials or services
— Active participation and professional support
— Sharing the project and spreading the word on social media

Donations can be made via www.gofundme.com/f/casa-tortuga or directly to:
Name: Ixquik López Zavala
Bank: Banco Industrial (BI), Santa Lucía Utatlán, Sololá, Guatemala
Account: 7845266112
IBAN: GT68-INDL-0000-0000-0526-6112
SWIFT/BIC: INDLGTC

If you would like to contribute or learn more, you can contact **Anka** (for English, German and Spanish) or **Ixquik** (for Maya K'iche' and Spanish) — their contact details can be found at the end of the document.

PHASE 1 — CONSTRUCTION OF THE MAYA BIRTH HOUSE

Building materials and equipment	$ 75,000
Construction team	$ 55,000
Installations, heat pump	$ 50,000
Solar panels (including storage)	$ 40,000

PHASE 2 — BRINGING THE SPACE TO LIFE

Furniture	$ 5,000
Basic medical equipment and administrative supplies	$ 10,000

PHASE 3 — EXPANSION FOR POSTPARTUM CARE

Postpartum tiny-houses	later
Infrastructure module (kitchen and sanitary facilities)	later

UTZ K'ASLEMAL

!GRACIAS MALTYOX!

Contact:
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