How to draw a plant in a pot: form and light

Choose a simple outline, a thick-lip and folded-leaf construction, or a finished tonal drawing. All routes begin with supports; the two detailed routes show each new decision in a separate pair.



Simplest



A little more detail



Best version

The first route finishes earlier; later stages show checks of its completed form. The second retains a line drawing; tonal stages belong to the third. These pencil-style illustrations are AI-generated, not child drawings.

Your goal

Show lip thickness, construct a turning leaf and erase a hidden support. In the third route distribute light, halftone, self-shadow and cast shadow. Use pencil, paper and a soft eraser; starting skills are a light oval, curve and taper. Allow roughly 25–60 minutes and stop at a line route if preferred. Age is a recommendation rather than an ability rating. Your own sizes and uneven lines are welcome.

Construct a surface: Begin with masses and direction. Align the lip ellipses, connect a fold to the leaf edge and erase only hidden or used supports. Thickness and turns are form decisions rather than decoration.

Practice: Draw two nested ovals independently and add the lower band arc. In a second trial turn a broad ribbon and show its underside.

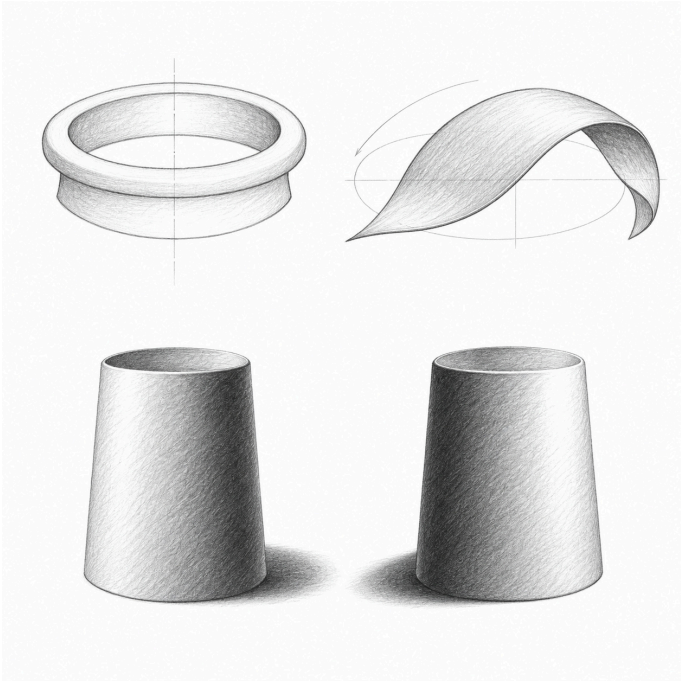
Check: Ovals do not cross, the band joins at its sides and the turned flap belongs to the same ribbon.

Light and three values: Choose one light source. Retain a light surface, connect it with gray halftone to the dark turned-away side; a cast shadow starts at contact and extends away from the light. Routes 1 and 2 need no tone.

Practice: Choose upper-left light for a simple cylinder, reserve a white patch, add medium and dark tones and a shadow from the base. Repeat on a new cylinder with light from the right.

Check: Three values are visible; the dark side and cast shadow agree with the selected light.

Warm-up



Upper-left example: independently construct outer and inner ovals and the lower lip arc. Upper-right: place a broad ribbon, connect a turned flap and erase its hidden edge. For route 3 practise the lower pair: one cylinder lit from the left, another from the right; begin your trial with a white form rather than copying finished hatching.

Why: These same decisions will appear on the pot and leaves.

Check: The lip has thickness and the flap joins the ribbon; changing the light switches the white area and cast-shadow sides.

Repair: Fix one arc or fold join; in a tonal trial lift gray from the light side and close a contact-shadow gap.

Step 1. Place the opening and pot mass

Trial



Trial



Trial



After checking



Simplest

After checking



A little more detail

After checking



Best version

Simplest: Place one light oval and tapered sides. This route uses a plain edge without a thick lip.

A little more detail: Lightly place the opening oval in the lower half of the page. From its side points draw two lines tapering slightly toward a rounded base; leave space above for two leaves.

Why: Large supports let you check width and tilt before details.

Check: Is the base under the oval centre, with enough room for the plant above?

Repair: Soften one trial side and move it rather than redrawing the whole pot.

Best version: Place a light opening oval, axis and tapered pot mass. Leave the leaves for later and reserve space to the right of the base for the eventual shadow.

Why: The later shadow must begin at the base of an already placed object.

Check: Does the axis pass through the opening and base centres?

Repair: Move only the base under the oval; keep the outline light.

Step 2. Construct the inner opening

Trial



Trial



Trial



After checking



After checking



After checking



Simplest

A little more detail

Best version

Simplest: Check the two arcs of one oval: they meet at the same side points. Do not add a second oval.

A little more detail: Draw a smaller oval inside the chosen outer one. Keep their tilt and centre aligned, leaving a visible strip between the two contours.

Why: Two aligned ellipses establish the top surface of a thick lip.

Check: Is the inner oval fully inside the outer one, with its arcs meeting at shared side points?

Repair: Soften an escaping inner endpoint and bring it inside without changing the outer oval.

Best version: Place the inner oval in the same view as the outer one. Check both side endpoints before strengthening the opening edge.

Why: Tone cannot repair inconsistent geometry; first establish one coherent lip surface.

Check: Does a continuous upper surface remain between the ovals without crossing lines?

Repair: Move only one inner arc endpoint, then check the other arc.

Step 3. Give the lip thickness

Trial



After checking



Simplest

Trial



After checking



A little more detail

Trial



After checking



Best version

Simplest: Keep one plain edge. Check that the sides taper toward the base; this route has no broad collar.

A little more detail: Below the front outer edge add a lower arc, joining it to the upper oval with short sides. This makes a broad collar; refine the taper and rounded base below it.

Why: The lower arc shows vertical thickness rather than another opening.

Check: Can you see the upper surface and front band connected at the sides?

Repair: Shorten a band side that detached from the upper edge; avoid adding another closed oval.

Best version: Build the lower lip arc and short side connections. From the lower band bring the chosen body sides down to the rounded base.

Why: This same lip will later have a lit upper surface and a darker underside.

Check: Does the body begin below the band rather than across its front surface?

Repair: Erase only a short trial body line inside the lip and restore it below.

Step 4. Place the stem and leaf masses

Trial

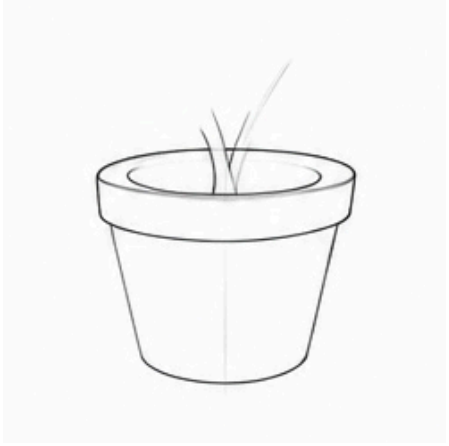


After checking

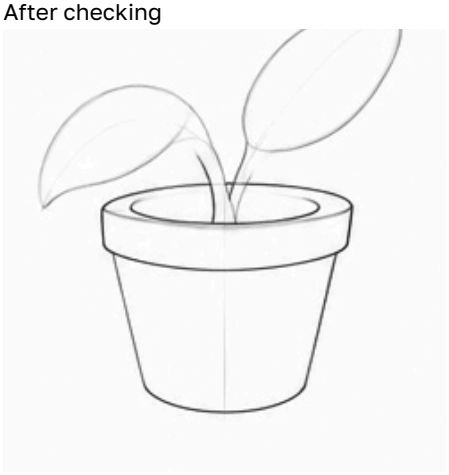


Simplest

Trial



After checking



A little more detail

Trial



After checking



Best version

Simplest: Add a short stem and two plain leaves. The left leaf hangs across the rim and the right points up-right.

A little more detail: Raise a short curved double-edged stem from inside the opening. From its fork place two light masses: leftward and down on the left, upward and right on the right.

Why: Mass size and direction help you find an organic silhouette before folds or midribs.

Check: Do both leaves have a shared growth point, with the stem inside the opening?

Repair: Move one light mass closer to the fork; do not add a third leaf.

Best version: Place the curved stem and two light oval leaf supports. Keep the future pot highlight area clear; do not add tone yet.

Why: Light and shade will belong to these chosen masses, so place them first.

Check: Is the right leaf higher than the left, with sizes suited to the pot?

Repair: Reduce only one overly wide mass by softening its trial edge.

Step 5. Choose connected leaf contours

Trial rim: full view



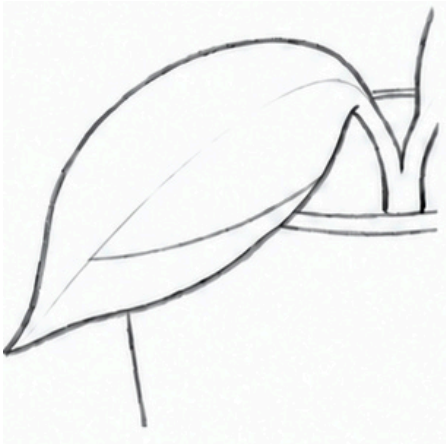
Trial



Trial



Covered section: close-up



Simplest

After checking



A little more detail

After checking



Best version

Simplest: Check the two plain shapes without folds. Find the trial pot arc continuing inside the left leaf: it is a covered rim, not a vein.

A little more detail: Choose broad leaf contours over the light masses, from stem to tip and back. Depart from the trial oval where the leaf narrows; do not trace the whole oval automatically.

Why: The mass was a support; the actual leaf surface has its own edge.

Check: Is each leaf continuously joined to the stem rather than an oval pasted onto it?

Repair: Soften only an unwanted trial-oval segment and choose a smooth join to the stem.

Best version: Refine the broad organic edge of both leaves over the scaffolding. Keep supports pale and leave the surfaces unshaded.

Why: Choose where the form is before tone can obscure an incorrect contour.

Check: Do the right and left leaves each have a chosen tip and connected base?

Repair: Erase a small kink at one leaf base and reconnect only that local section.

Step 6. Construct the leaf turn

Trial rim: full view



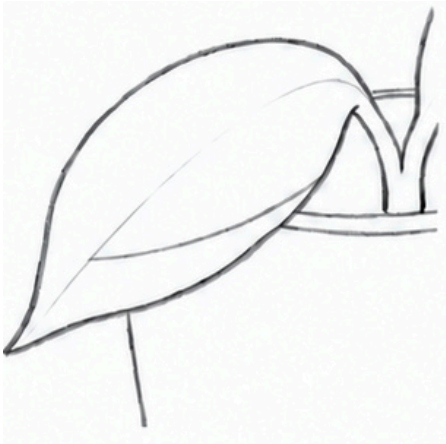
Trial



Trial



Covered section: close-up



After checking



After checking



Simplest

A little more detail

Best version

Simplest: Do not add folds. In the trial find both places where the rim arc enters the foreground leaf: that short section needs to be hidden.

A little more detail: Separate a narrow underside on the left leaf with a curved fold edge. Turn the right tip back: connect its upper surface to a small flap with one fold arc rather than adding a separate leaf.

Why: A turn reveals two sides of one surface and adds a real construction decision.

Check: Does the turned flap start on the same leaf, with its underside connected to the edge?

Repair: Remove only an extra seam that makes the flap look pasted on; retain the fold edge.

Best version: Build the turned right tip and left underside with connected curves. Keep them white for now; their tones come in a separate stage.

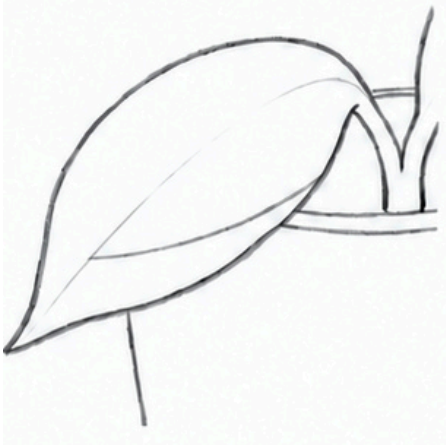
Why: Construct distinct surfaces before deciding which receive light.

Check: Can you point to the upper and lower sides of each turned section?

Repair: Repair the fold-to-edge join first; do not hide a gap with dark hatching.

Step 7. Erase hidden edges and mass supports

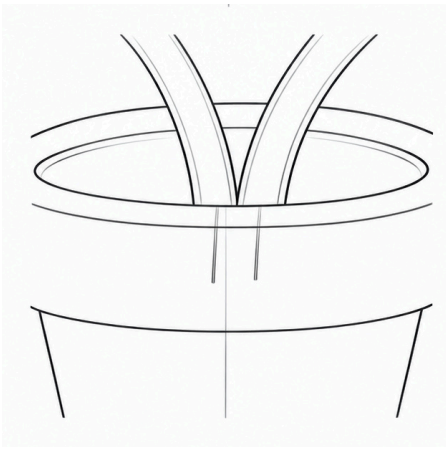
Covered edge: close-up



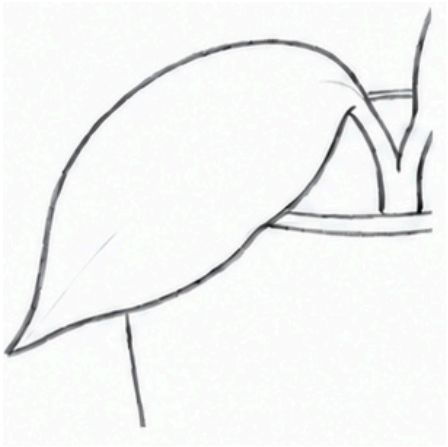
Trial



Hidden stem: close-up



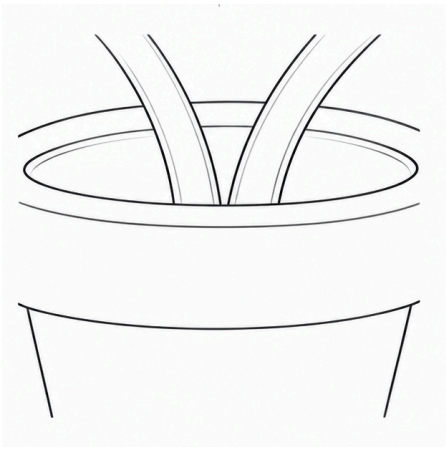
After erasing: close-up



After checking



After erasing: close-up



Simplest

A little more detail

Best version

Simplest: Erase only the rim arc inside the foreground left leaf. The close-up pair shows that same area before and after; preserve the leaf outline.

A little more detail: Erase trial ovals inside the chosen leaves. At the stem base remove the short extension crossing the front lip; its visible edge should end at the near opening arc.

Why: The lip is in front of the stem base, and trial ovals are not leaf boundaries.

Check: Are there fewer supports, with the stem emerging from the opening rather than crossing the front band?

Repair: Restore only an accidentally erased visible stem end up to the arc; keep the hidden segment erased.

Best version: Remove unused leaf-mass supports. The close-up pair shows the stem base: erase only its two short extensions inside the front lip. Visible stem edges end at the near opening arc; preserve that arc.

Why: Tone must belong to chosen surfaces rather than leftover scaffolding or hidden edges.

Check: Is the hidden stem absent inside the front band while the leaf folds remain connected?

Repair: If the eraser touched a fold, restore its short endpoint without returning the trial oval.

Step 8. Choose the fold line or light area

Trial



After checking



Simplest

Trial



After checking



A little more detail

Trial



After checking



Best version

Simplest: Keep the leaves plain without veins or tone. Check their directions and the repaired overlap.

A little more detail: Choose one central line on each leaf, following its established bend. It runs from base toward tip and must not jump straight across the turned flap.

Why: The central line describes the surface rather than merely decorating an outline.

Check: Does it bend with the leaf and stay on its surface?

Repair: Soften only a straight or escaping endpoint and return it to the bend.

Best version: Choose light from the upper left. Very lightly mark a broad lit area on the left/front body and the future halftone boundary farther right; find leaf faces turned toward the light.

Why: Without reserving a light area it is easy to make the whole pot evenly gray.

Check: Can you point to the area you will leave white and the side that will be darker?

Repair: Widen the light area before hatching begins; keep its boundary a pale support rather than a dark seam.

Step 9. Remove guides or build halftone

Trial



Trial



Trial



After checking



Simplest

After checking



A little more detail

After checking



Best version

Simplest: Erase the remaining axis and pale directions. Keep only the visible edges of the pot, stem and two leaves.

A little more detail: Remove the pot axis, side ticks and unused light leaf directions. Preserve the chosen lip, folds and central lines.

Why: Used supports should no longer read as the object surface.

Check: Is there a clean connected drawing rather than a set of overlaid ovals?

Repair: Restore only a short visible edge accidentally touched by the eraser; do not retrace the entire picture.

Best version: Use repeated light strokes to build a broad medium gray across the centre and right body. Let strokes follow the rounded form and leave the left light area white. Begin light halftone on leaf planes turned away.

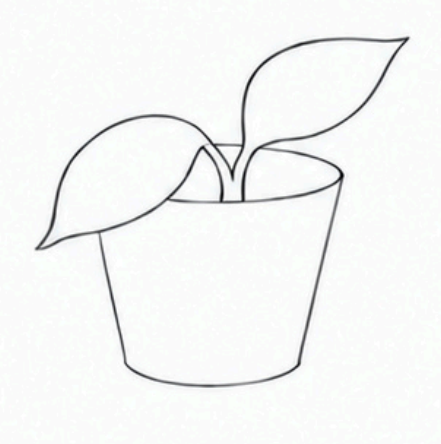
Why: Halftone connects the light area to the coming dark side, showing roundness without a flat fill.

Check: Can you see a white area on the left and a broad, clearly readable gray area farther right?

Repair: Lift tone softly from the light area; do not darken everything to hide uneven strokes.

Step 10. Refine an edge or self-shadow

Finished drawing



Trial



Trial



Form check



After checking



After checking



Simplest

A little more detail

Best version

Simplest: Your drawing is already finished. Check that the repaired rim stops at the leaf; add no veins or shadows.

A little more detail: Check the turned right tip. If a second trial line remains beside the chosen edge, erase only that line and retain one connected fold surface.

Why: Two accidental contours can make one tip look like two separate parts.

Check: Does the repaired tip remain connected to its leaf without a doubled edge?

Repair: If a needed edge disappeared, restore only its short endpoint up to the fold line.

Best version: Layer strokes to make the pot right side darker than the halftone. Darken the opening interior and lip underside, then the constructed leaf undersides. Preserve the white area on the left.

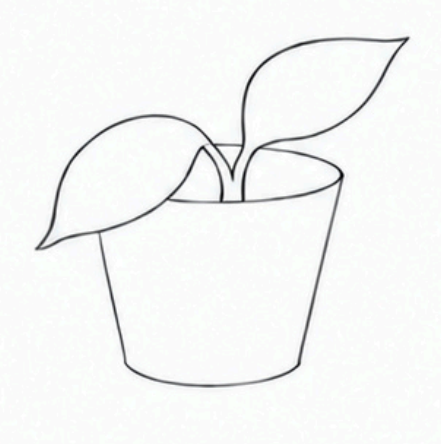
Why: Self-shadow belongs to surfaces turned away from the chosen light rather than an equally dark border around everything.

Check: Can you distinguish light on the left, medium tone along the form and dark on the right/under folds?

Repair: If the dark band swallowed the light, lift only its left edge and leave halftone between them.

Step 11. Check the base or cast shadow

Finished drawing



Trial



Trial



Form check



Simplest

After checking



A little more detail

After checking



Best version

Simplest: Check that the base joins the sides. This is a check of your finished simple drawing; it needs no shadow.

A little more detail: Check the rounded base. If an extra trial edge remains beside it, soften and erase only that second line; this route does not add a cast shadow.

Why: One chosen lower boundary makes the base clear without adding a tonal task.

Check: Does the base continuously join both sides without an accidental second stripe?

Repair: Restore a short join at one side if the eraser broke it.

Best version: Begin the cast shadow directly at the base and direct it down-right, away from the upper-left light. Make the contact dark and the far end softer; leave the surrounding background white.

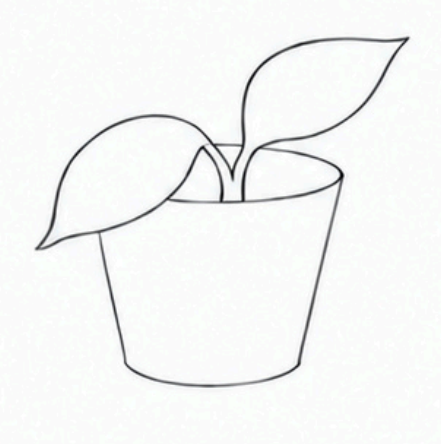
Why: The cast shadow joins the pot to its support and shares the light direction of its self-shadow.

Check: Does the shadow touch the base, extend away from the light and soften farther from contact?

Repair: Fill only a light gap at the contact or soften an overly hard distant edge.

Step 12. Remove supports and explain your choices

Finished drawing



Trial



Trial



Form check



After checking



After checking



Simplest

A little more detail

Best version

Simplest: Explain why the leaf hides the pot rim. If the forms read clearly, stop: a finished simple drawing needs no extra lines.

A little more detail: Remove any small leftover trial mark. Name the lip upper surface and leaf underside; keep the clean line result without new decoration.

Why: The final checks already constructed surfaces rather than introducing surprise details.

Check: Can you explain lip thickness and leaf turn even if your proportions differ from the example?

Repair: Repair only a particular gap or support remnant that obscures the surface.

Best version: Soften remaining axis and light-area guides, then gently unify the existing strokes. Preserve the white light, gray halftone, dark self-shadow and cast-shadow contact.

Why: All tonal decisions were built in earlier stages; a guide should not look like a seam on the surface.

Check: Does upper-left light explain every dark side and the cast-shadow direction?

Repair: Repair one area inconsistent with the light rather than darkening the entire drawing.

If the drawing is unclear

The lip looks like two separate openings. Cause: The inner ellipse crosses the outer one or the lower arc is not joined to the band. Repair: Repair one inner endpoint and join the lower arc with a short side without changing the whole body.

The turned tip looks pasted on. Cause: The fold edge does not connect the leaf upper and lower surfaces. Repair: Remove an extra seam and restore a short fold-to-edge join.

The stem is drawn over the front lip. Cause: A trial extension of its hidden base remains. Repair: Erase only the section on the front band; the visible stem ends at the near opening arc.

The pot is evenly gray. Cause: The light area was lost and halftone does not differ from the dark side. Repair: Lift tone on the left/front, darken only the right side and retain medium tone between them.

The pot seems to float above its shadow. Cause: A light gap separates the cast shadow from the base. Repair: Close only the contact gap and soften the distant shadow end.



Hidden stem and supports



After local erasing

Independent tasks

Choose one new condition. First place your own supports and name the changed decision, then compare with the example. Routes 1 and 2 may finish as clean line drawings; tonal examples show the additional route-3 application.

1. A more open top view



New construction supports



Example after removing supports

Increase opening-oval height at the same width and lift the leaves above the lip. First place your own outer and inner ovals, then find where the near arc hides the stem base. If choosing the tonal route, repeat the familiar light stages after construction.

Why: A higher viewpoint exposes more of the upper surface and changes the stem/rim intersection.

Check: Is the opening noticeably deeper vertically, with the stem base hidden by the near rim?

Repair: Soften one overly flat inner endpoint or erase only the stem base behind the near rim.

2. A leaf in front of the thick lip



New construction supports



Example after removing supports

Keep the opening shallow but lower the turned left leaf across the front band. First decide which two band arcs it covers, then preserve its connected fold and erase arcs only inside the leaf. Optional tone follows the already practised stages.

Why: The leaf covers a new part of the thick lip, so the earlier erasing location cannot simply be copied.

Check: Is the leaf outline continuous, with both upper and lower band edges stopping at it?

Repair: Restore one visible arc endpoint up to the leaf boundary while keeping its covered segment erased.

3. Light now comes from the upper right



New construction supports



Example after removing supports

Construct your own folded-leaf pot and choose upper-right light. Independently reserve light on the right, build halftone nearer the middle and the dark side on the left. Direct the cast shadow down-left from the base rather than copying the main example tone.

Why: Moving the light requires new value choices on familiar surfaces and a new shadow direction.

Check: Is the light side on the right, the dark side on the left and the cast shadow attached to the base down-left?

Repair: Lift unwanted right-side tone softly, darken only the turned-away left area and close a gap at base contact.

Self-check

Point to one connected lip surface, a leaf fold and a removed support. If choosing tone, name the light source and three values and show cast-shadow contact.

Question: If the light moves to the right, where does the cast shadow go and what stays light?

Answer: The light surface faces the source on the right and the dark side turns left. The cast shadow starts at the base and extends left, away from the light. Value decisions change rather than only colour or decoration. Uneven lines are welcome; explaining the chosen surface and light matters more. Structural and visual checks were performed; no classroom trial has been conducted.