Tony Fretton Architects

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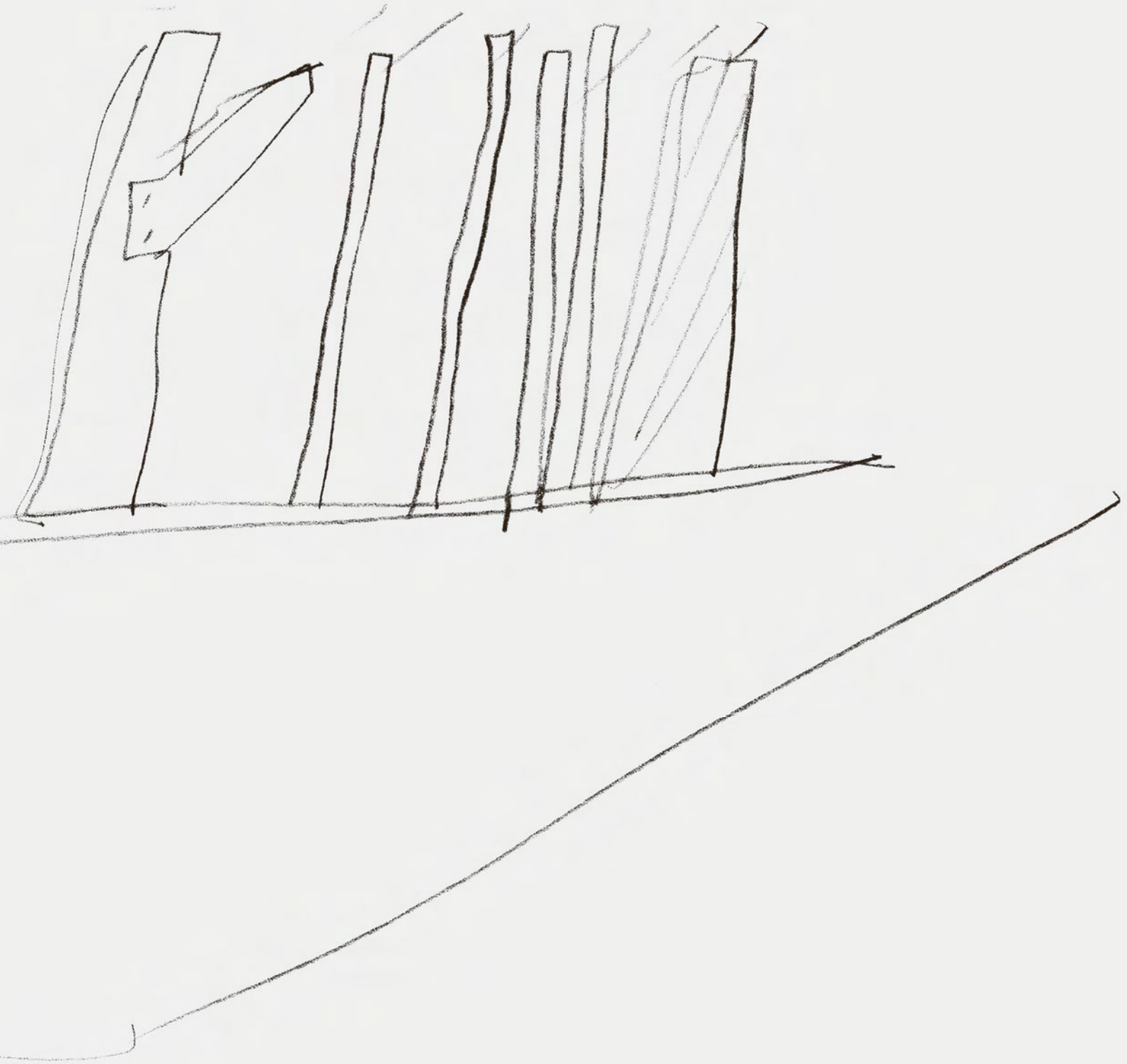
Buildings and their Territories

Birkhäuser Basel



House for Two Artists – HB
Previous page: Nyetimber Winery – TF

Introduction, Buildings and their Territories and project texts are by Tony Fretton

Introduction
Tony Fretton

Designing, constructing and establishing meaning in buildings are collective activities. The skills of my colleagues are intrinsic to the work that we make in the practice: the strategic vision and resilient thoughtfulness of Jim McKinney, the polymathic knowledge, synthesising skills and endurance of David Owen and the commitment and sheer hard work of those who have chosen to work with us.

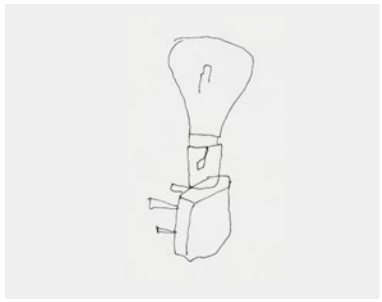
Words, the most collective form of communication, thread their way through the projects, in explanations to clients and constructors, and as the means, along with drawings, of explaining the projects to my collaborators, to myself and to the wider world. A large part of the text in this monograph, including two of the essays, consists of what I have written over the life of the practice about its overall ideas and the thinking behind individual projects. More trenchant commentaries are provided by other architects and writers whose intellectual and creative interests coincided with those of our practice. The interview by David Turnbull and essays by Mark Cousins and William Mann illuminate significant stages in our work. William Mann's essay The Architecture of the Unconscious Collective identifies a particular desire in our practice to make communicative architecture.

My experience in the Netherlands, both in realising buildings and as a Professor in the Architecture Faculty of TU Delft, indicates that this is possible. Here planning, architecture, teaching, and writing intersect and people are active in choosing where and how they live. At TU Delft I have found myself in the company of exceptional colleagues, in particular my associate professor Christoph Grafe and friend, fellow academic and sometime collaborator Mark Pimlott. Both, in their different ways, have helped me to understand what I have been doing and shown me the value of writing. Writing and publication are among the ways that a building acquires meaning. More stringent is the way that people, unaware of the architects' intentions, fit buildings into their practical and imaginative lives in even more personal and instinctive ways than designers. The restless search for ways that buildings might succeed in their world of use and misuse while also making a contribution to cultural knowledge is the underlying subject of this monograph.

Buildings and their Territories
Tony Fretton

Buildings and their territories is a phrase that compresses a large number of ideas and techniques in our work. Buildings hold a wealth of social and constructional knowledge for us, while territory is both the physical area in which our buildings have a positive effect, and the field of ideas with which they engage.

Designing buildings does not equip me to discuss the relationships between their ideas and material in the same way as an architectural historian or theoretician. Design is a form of knowledge and state of being for dealing with the material world, and a technique for producing things that other people can use and enjoy.



Mute Records – TF

The material world is my natural habitat. I find configurations of buildings and spaces there that, often unintentionally, are surprising, appealing in the basic ranges of pleasure and with political dimensions that can be experienced bodily. I can use these to make new buildings and initiate creative explorations. Encompassing the material world is the natural world, always surprising and with forces that are immeasurably larger and less knowable than a designer can deploy.

Drawing can seem like a natural process with a sketch accessing an architectural form in its most natural state. In a similar way I find that I can write about projects with particular immediacy near the end of a design. These pieces of writing accompany the projects in this monograph and give them their individual voices. The early ones are lean and propositional and talk intensely about ideas; their near cousins are romantic and populist; the later ones feel that they have understood architecture and what it can do in the world; and finally the more recent make large inclusive gestures and do not have to explain themselves too much. Bringing them together in the monograph has let me recognise another range of ideas, which arose in one project, developed in another and then became integral to the practice as whole.

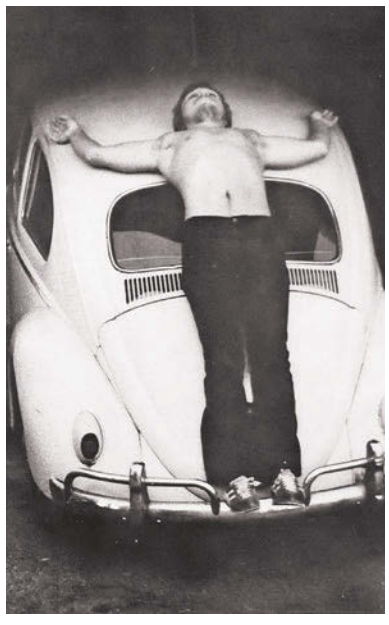
The human-made world

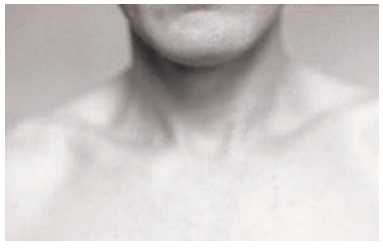
Throughout the 1980s I looked for an approach to make architecture that was socially and experientially engaging while speaking as freely about ideas as the visual arts. Robert Morris's sculptures and installations suggested that facts could be a source of compelling form, while Chris Burden's performance works let me understand the power of direct physical engagement with location. Dan Graham's writing, performance and installations showed very lucidly how popular culture could be interrogated to produce things of formal, experiential and intellectual beauty.

By chance I briefly became involved in performance art. I found that performance was working with existing physical things and patterns of behaviour – the same things as in architecture – but engaging with their underlying ideas in ways that I wanted to make happen in architecture.

In the projects that I designed immediately afterwards for Mute Records (1986) and the first Lisson Gallery (1986), I was intoxicated by unplanned events and material found in the surrounding district, and propelled by a strong sense of the possibilities of the moment. The fecundity with which form occurred in the world gave me the freedom to make form myself. I found that I could work with objects and events that had come into the world by processes other than architecture, and had acquired meaning by being common property. At that point, I experienced something similar to what the artist Robert Rauschenberg described as "working in the space between art and life". My responsiveness to the material I have described and the circumstances and desires of my clients seemed naturally to produce the rules and methods for making form that had the qualities I wanted.

By the time of the second Lisson Gallery (1992), the facts and events of London that would later be framed in the windows of the galleries, presented themselves to me with political, social and existential force, and the building seemed able to construct itself from meaningful fragments of other buildings to say something of its times.





Trans-fixed, Chris Burden, 1974
Right top: *747*, Chris Burden, 1973; Right bottom: *Chest*, Tony Fretton, 1985

The natural world

In 1993, the Samye Ling Tibetan Buddhist community launched a competition for a visitors centre and two buildings for retreat in Holy Island off the west coast of Scotland. The extreme austerity of the programme, the remoteness of the location with sea on all sides, and the absence of any significant context of building were conditions unlike any I had previously encountered in a building project. Nature's presence was everywhere – in the sea, the landforms, and the retreatants' deep enquiry into existence. As places of retreat the buildings had to be free from worldly associations. In designing the buildings I first let their primitive forms be shaped by the land itself, and then gave them the minimum configurations and imagery necessary for collective spiritual activity.

The clarity of circumstances of this project let me establish a different relationship in my work between building and nature. Nature is recognised as a parallel existence to our own that is legitimate and unknowable, while building resists a deep inclination to instrumentalise nature and makes itself open to life.

Imagery

Holy Island was designed as abstract architecture derived from the terrain while the Lisson Gallery was an assembly of parts and meanings of other buildings. In both, the intention was to bypass established architectural imagery and let the buildings seem like natural or social products. The meaning of the building was to be provided by the patterns of life of the occupants, facilitated by the internal configurations of the buildings. In the Lisson Gallery the occupants were the different but coexistent communities of art visitors and local people. In Holy Island, they were the members of a quietist community in contact during momentary breaks from practice.

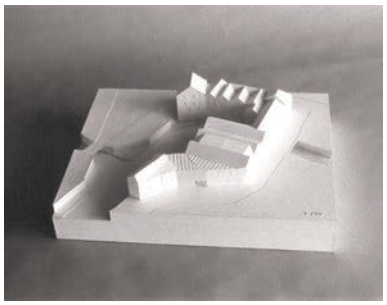
At a larger scale the two buildings made propositions about their position in the wider world. The Lisson Gallery points out that the city seen from the gallery is a cultural artefact as much as the art pieces within. Holy Island speaks of the relationship between human beings and the natural world.


ArtSway – RB; Faith House – HB

These projects depended on very focused clients with a similar sensibility to ours, which was the case with the Lisson Gallery. Subsequent projects have had to address broader audiences, which has led us to look for far more explicit and communicative imagery that was still able to be the vehicle for ideas. How this development was worked out in the projects up to the present time is described in the texts that follow, but its beginning lies in two small projects. The ArtSway Centre for Visual Arts (1996) in Sway, Hampshire, used a familiar but invented vocabulary in a locale where familiar imagery was in abundance, to show that familiar imagery can be grounded in communitarian rather than conservative ideas. In Faith House (1999–2002) at Holton Lee in Dorset the building was required to provide symbols to people of many different faiths of the relationship of humankind to nature. For this all aspects of the building were brought into play as symbols: the way that the building is approached; its position and outlook; the appearance; construction and detail.

Place

Intuitive approaches in earlier projects crystallised into clear and operable techniques in the Quay Arts Centre (1998) on the Isle of Wight. Social, cultural, and economic benefits were created by the optimistic exploitation of the building's relations to its location. The building placed people in communicative relations to each other and their surroundings. Parts of the building were designed to relate to surrounding buildings and natural forms, to make large-scale public gestures.




Quay Arts Centre – TF; Quay Arts Centre – MvS

Architecture

To this point we had sought the material and motivations for our buildings from outside architecture. In the Red House (2001) the material was architecture itself. The design freely uses architectural motifs from the past and present in combination with the ideas and possibilities of the present to create a modern outcome. This was a method used by Igor Stravinsky, James Joyce, Pablo Picasso, Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and, more recently, Álvaro Siza. Chance and contingency – recognised as creative forces by Marcel Duchamp and John Cage – also play a part in the Red House as it engages with aspects of the surroundings that are aleatory and pragmatic.

But unlike the Modern movement, where sources from earlier architecture are highly absorbed, sources in the Red House are allowed to be visible. However, these are not brought to the conclusions that their originating styles suggest so that there is both familiarity, and a productive ambiguity, that opens the scheme to the personal interpretation of others.


Red House – PC

The state

State culture is a quiet but extravagant user of objects and events for symbolic purposes. Our first scheme for the British Embassy in Warsaw in 2003–04 wove together many aspects of the project's location and made them available as symbols of diplomatic activity. In the scheme that was realised in 2007–09, the new location was much simpler leading us to design a calm, centralised building with double glass façade in which reflections of the surrounding trees and sky overlay a highly secure and robust interior façade. Both schemes project the intensity of national prestige and power. The new town hall in the small Flemish city of Deinze (2009–14) is part of the redevelopment of the area near the river and church. The issues and sensibility of the building are entirely municipal. It is presented as a visibly low-energy building, dignified but not extravagant, with stone facades that relate it to the church opposite. It is arranged as an office building with a prominent council chamber at the front, both with ample areas of glazing to give good day lighting but also so that the activity of council officials and politicians will be on view to the populace.

Warsaw Embassy I – DG; Warsaw Embassy II – CR

The public

The energy that characterises the earlier projects was a response to clients who were individuals with highly detailed requirements and an informed sense of use. As projects increased in scale, clients became client groups, formal briefs replaced verbal ones and different ways had to be found to conceptualise users and public. The forms of our buildings have become calm and substantial, their scope concerned with the value of human association within the building and the world around it.

In our competition scheme for Erste Bank headquarters in Vienna (2008) the extensive building is divided into three linked parts, each containing a planted atrium crossed by bridges, which bring it into scale with its surroundings and provide a romantic and intelligible geography to the interiors. At a civic level, the atria seen through the fabric of the building at night introduce a large scaled and permanent piece of nature into the fabric of the city.

Solid 11 in Amsterdam (2004–10) was required to be a building of great physical permanence and adaptability. Consequently the layout and style of the building had also to be durable. We appealed to very basic and persistent human pleasures by configuring the entrance to the building as a courtyard that is an extension of the street, and making the access walkways above it wide enough for social activity.

On the outside, the building was designed to be sober and stylistically ambiguous, neither old nor new. It also has strong figural elements such as the star-shaped forms in mirror glass, the suggestions of nature in the metal trees supporting a glass acoustic screen to the street, and at a smaller scale, building details that were resolved in individualistic but rational ways. All are designed to be gradually noticed and please the eye over a long period of time.

Solid 11 – PC; Fuglsang Kunstmuseum – PC

Cities need rooms where people can socialise without having to perform or consume. To create such a place, our competition design for the Munch Museum in Oslo (2009) collected all of the public areas of the programme into a large single room facing the water. To combat winter cold and control heat in summer, the building was wrapped in a deep, double façade filled with plants and trees. The imagery was intended to be spectacularly sociable, and it was reinforced by the populist gesture of an open air space on the roof, which gave a condensed picture of Munch's attitudes to art, Norway and personal freedom.

Through its unique location, the Fuglsang Kunstmuseum (2008), on the island of Lolland in Denmark, is able to attract visitors from far outside the region, and give a sense of pride to local people. The landscape in which the museum lies has been shaped by centuries of land management and cultivation. At certain points in the gallery sequence, views are framed that reconnect visitors to the wider location and show another form of creativity to art, that of the anonymous collective activity that made the landscape.

Fuglsang Kunstmuseum – PC

Works

Mute Records

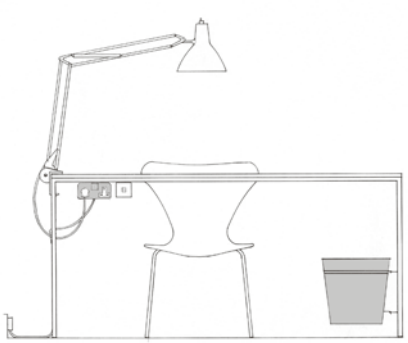
1986 Location: Horrow Road, London, UK
Tony Fretton, John Green, Ruth Aureole Stuart

Mute called us in after taking a lease on a 1970s speculative office building on a narrow site between Harrow Road and the Regent's Canal in west London.

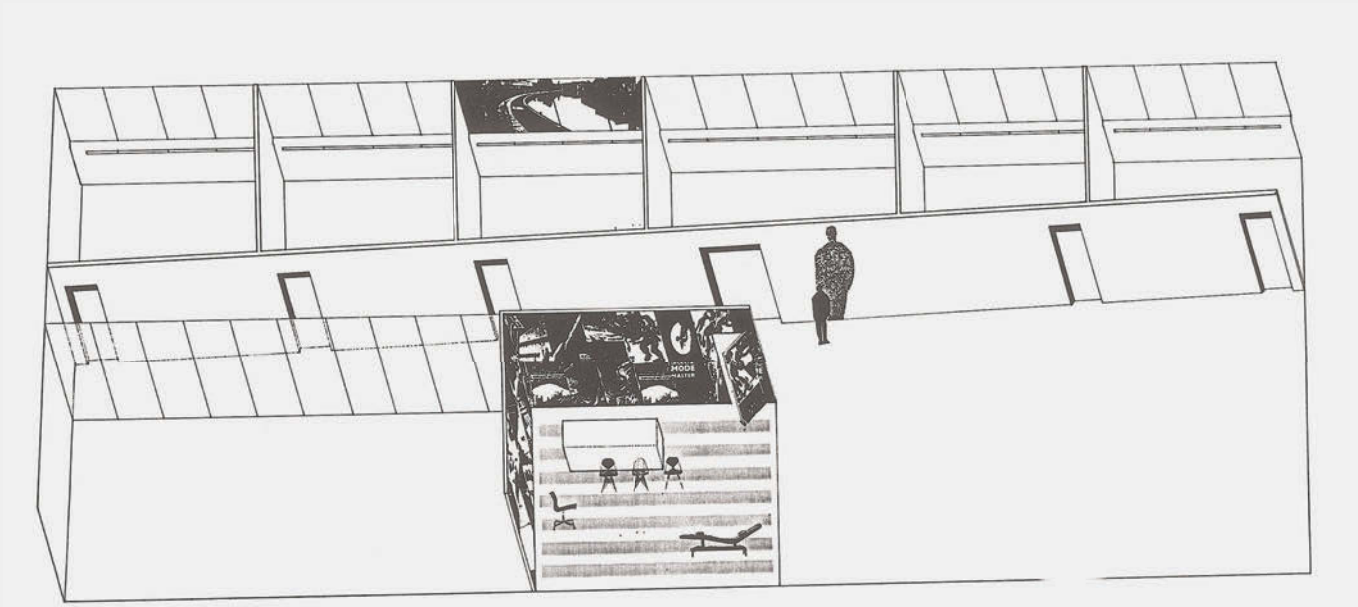
The modernist style that produced rational layouts and generous light was still at play in this building, but it had been freely compromised into vernacular. These observations, and Mute's working life, were the material with which we worked. We divided the interior with a long, angled, sound-resisting wall. On the one side were rooms for A&R people, who listened to very loud music. On the other were quiet rooms for the accounts department. The rest was an open-plan office for tour arrangers, sales people and others who needed to communicate with each other and would mark out their territories with furniture, possessions and personal sound systems.

Separated from this was the reception area, where couriers, people leaving demos, and others were kept at bay. Entertainment industry reception areas and theatre bars and have a special interest for me. Authentic, enjoyable places are created with wallpaper, photographs and vinyl tiles, which have atmosphere without needing architecture. In Mute's reception area, the vinyl tiles would be straightened out to look like modern art, and the walls and ceilings would be flyposted with bills for the latest acts so that it would gradually and continually change. On the other hand, the big angled wall was romantically intended to be a surface for shadows and reflections, with the light fittings, desks and doors playing against it in a kind of tension between doing and saying.

The building is set back from the street and, for reasons that can only be experienced, is unnoticeable. To compensate, the street number was placed in three-dimensional human sized letters in the lobby and along the parapet against the sky. Somehow this seemed consistent with the way that fans construct an image for Mute just from its name and address.



Left: Desk and Light – TF
Right: Interior and exterior – TF



Lisson Gallery I

1986 Location: Bell Street, NW1 London, UK
Tony Fretton, Michael Fieldman,
Ruth Aureole Stuart

We were invited to the Lisson Gallery's premises, near London's Edgware Road to discuss a new building. Meetings took place with the director and staff in the single room they shared below the gallery not far from the location of the new building. To reach it, you walked directly from the street into unguarded exhibition rooms and through a storage area into the basement. Some of the most interesting works, by artists such as Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Anish Kapoor, Dan Graham and many others, lay within reach awaiting shipping, or were casually displayed on the walls of the office. The gallery felt at ease in its peripheral location, a proletarian district away from the London art quarter, and the site they had purchased for the new building lay nearby in a terrace of partially occupied and wrecked buildings.

Our first schemes were intoxicated by the tactility of the site, and the possibility of art being shown in settings that had been made by the quiet action of disorder. But in order for the gallery to establish an international position, these visions had to be sublimated into the detail-less language of contemporary art buildings, and resurfaced in the final scheme as romantic spaces made from the bare facts of location and use.

The site is narrow at the front, widening into an area at the back that was added after construction had started. The extent of the space is not apparent from the entrance, and is only discovered by walking into the depths of the building. The natural shape is strange and sometimes contradicts perspective.

Daylight is brought into the front gallery through the translucent glass of the entrance screen, and through the skylight at the back of the gallery where it illuminates the floor for sculpture.

Electric lighting provides more controlled illumination of the walls to suit paintings. The entrance screen and skylight are visible to the viewer from most points so that the galleries appear naturally lit throughout.

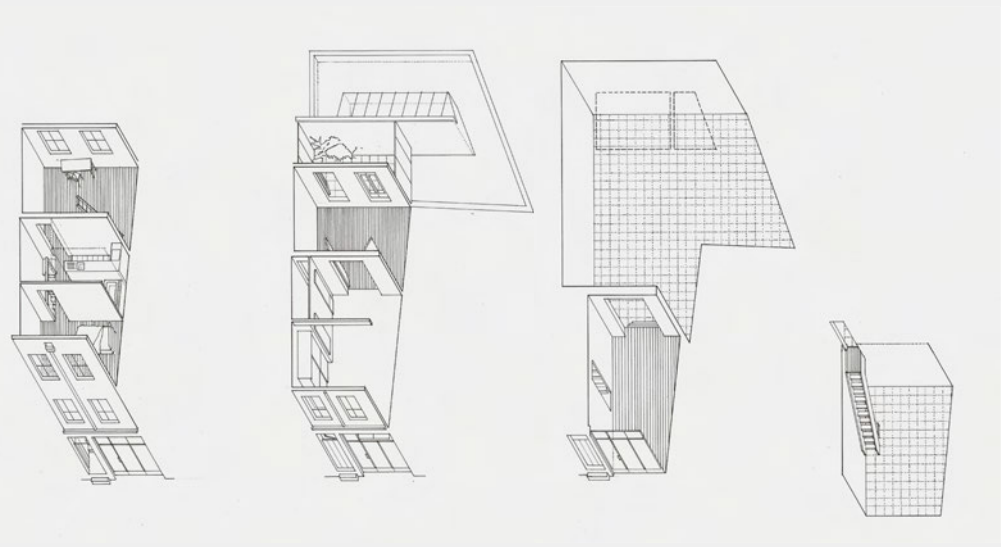
The front gallery is narrow with a wooden boarded floor. It steps down to the back gallery where the acoustic is different due to the room's larger size and paved floor. The basement gallery has a single view through the door to the back gallery, which conveys the presence of daylight at a distance.

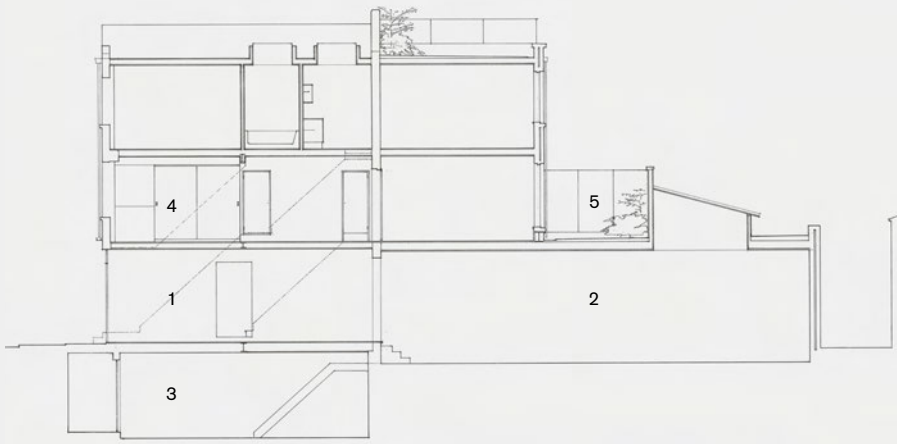
The facades and the entrance screen are treated as known types from the language of building so that, as far as possible, their formalisms will be distinct from those of the artworks on display. Their resemblance to similar things in other countries is intended to create a sense of placelessness and to underline the gallery's internationality.

The character of the spaces is established in ways that are experienced rather than seen, so that it is the art on display that predominates.

To reach the district in which the building is located requires a special effort. The forms of the streets and buildings encountered along the way persist within the building, but become quieter and more reserved. The rooms are still unguarded and the offices difficult to find, and in the depth of the space there is nothing between you and the art.

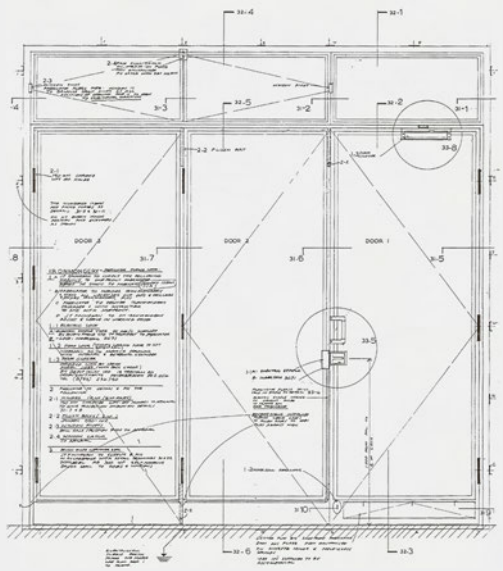
Site before construction – TF





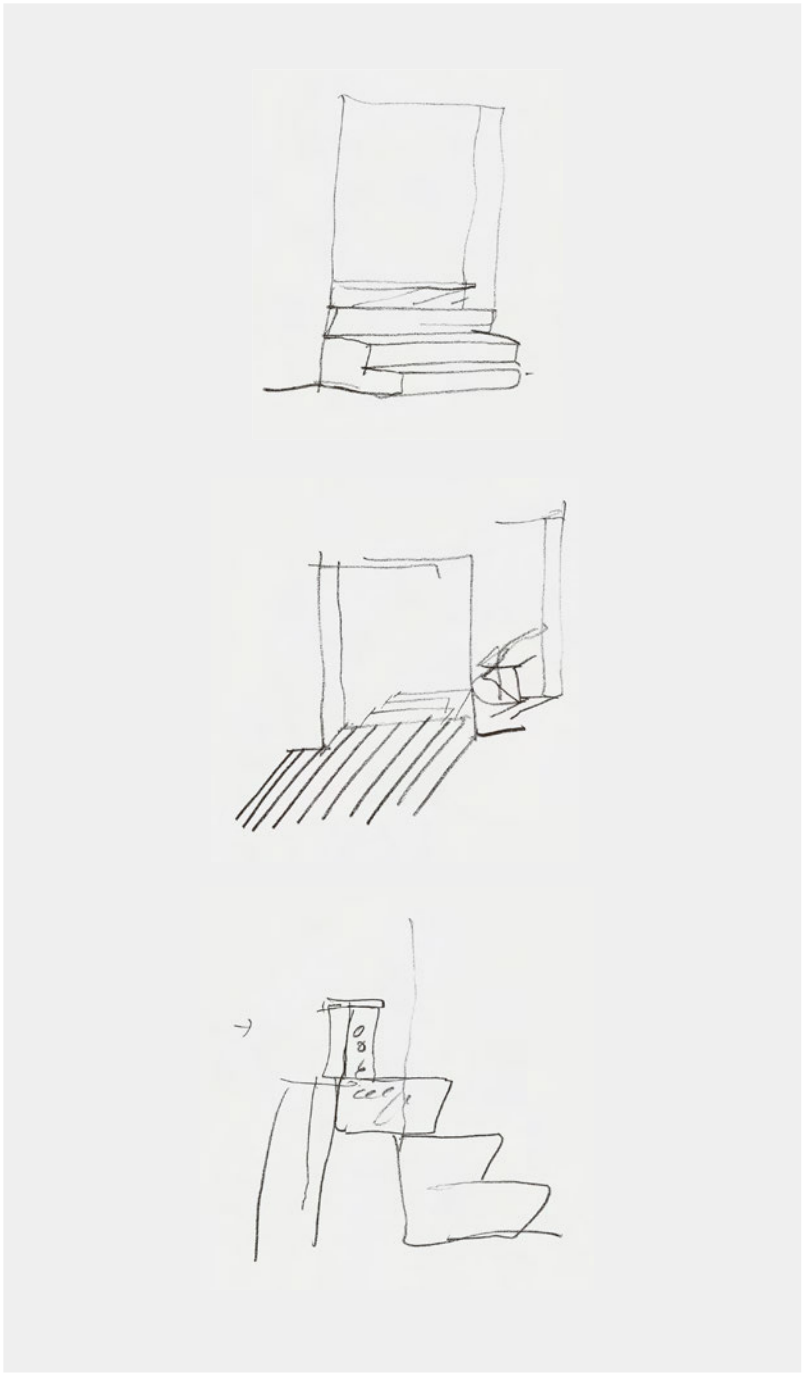
1 Front gallery
2 Rear gallery
3 Basement gallery
4 Apartment
5 Patio

Screen to patio – TF




LISSON GALLERY LONDON
ART & LANGUAGE
SOL LEWITT
CHARRINGTON
BRAZEN HEAD
SALOON BAR

Rear gallery – LE
Basement gallery – GW



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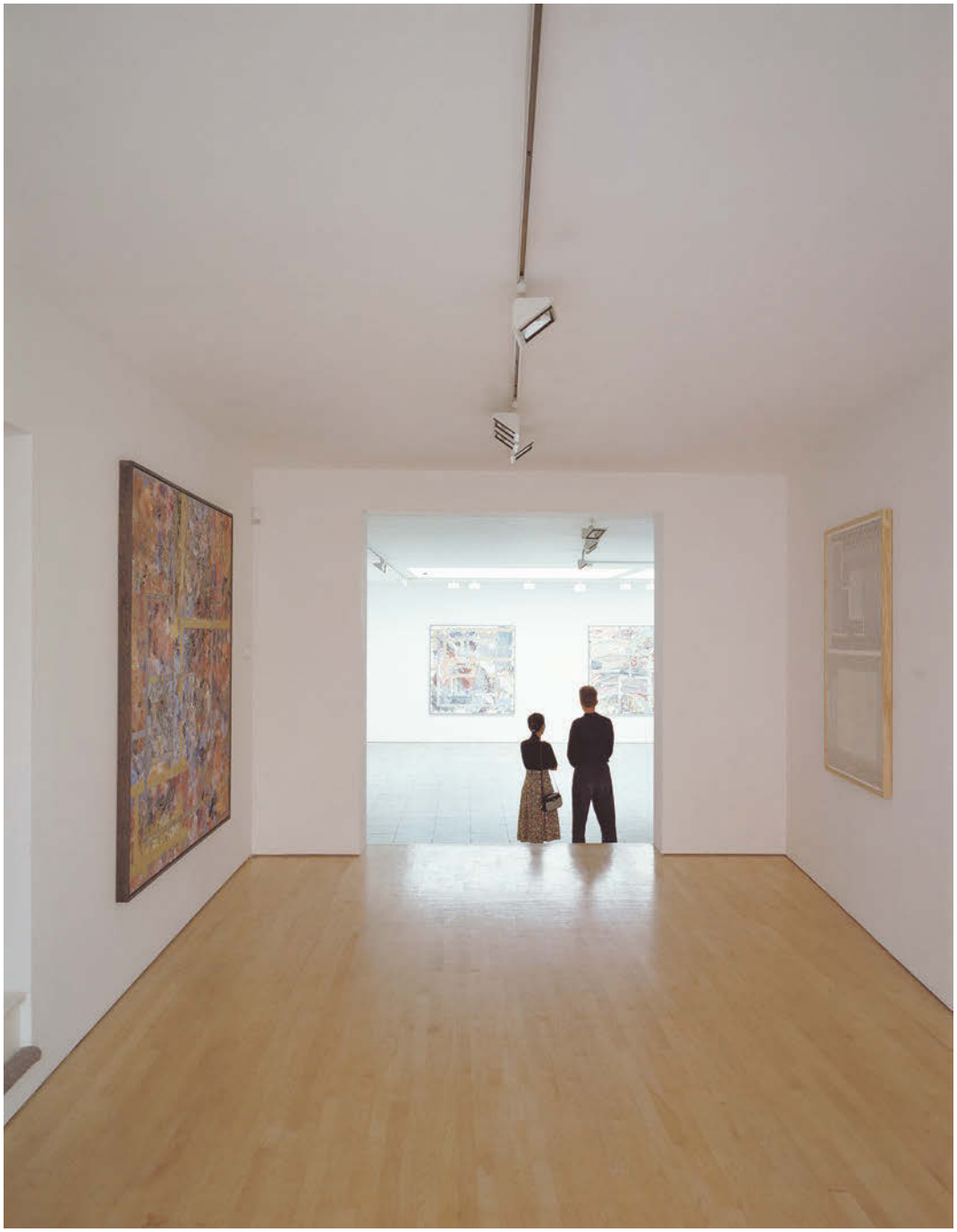


Front gallery – LE

Lisson Gallery II

1992 Location: Bell Street, NW1 London, UK
Tony Fretton
Project Architect: Michael Casey
Pia Petterson, Karen Teideman

By 1990, the gallery had acquired a site that adjoined our 1986 building and faced onto a nearby street. The pattern of small shops and houses in the district did not easily allow for larger buildings to be inserted and so the nearby school, office tower and elevated highway had broken the original fabric of the area into fragments. In the process they had become fragments themselves, surrounded by space where social engagement was more difficult, although a local community continues to exist and people choose to come and live here. In the street outside the gallery there is a market on Saturdays and the school playground fills with children at break time. Otherwise it is quiet.

Almost unobstructed north light comes across the open playground into the gallery windows, giving composure to the exhibition spaces despite their exposed positions.

The galleries are medium sized spaces about 6.5m in width and length. These are arranged as single rooms on the basement, ground and first floor. They can be understood either separately or as part of an ensemble with the others plus the differently scaled and configured rooms of the earlier building that we made for the gallery, to which this building is attached.

The ground floor has a high ceiling and the light enters steeply and in a great quantity. It has a large presence, and medium to large pieces can be displayed well, especially single wall mounted works or sculptures and installations that nearly fill the room.

The first floor is 2.7m high and suits small and medium sized works, although its horizontality can be used dynamically for larger pieces, such as Dan Graham maquettes. The daylight on each wall is slightly different due to the varying distribution of buildings outside.

The basement is taller than the first floor, and longer because it extends forward of the building beneath the street. Daylight enters through lenses in the pavement providing variable illumination on one wall while the rest are artificially lit.

Dimensions vary on every floor, and are unequal in each room. They have no proportional relationships and were all decided by eye. In this way the rooms are analogous to spaces in the surrounding area that occur incidentally, and share their unforced character. Windows on the ground and first floors frame views of the surrounding city. Exhibitions can work interactively with the views or treat them as an ambient background. A wall can be built to make a windowless room, or a translucent fabric screen installed to provide a quietly illuminated space.

In a similar vein, the front facade of the building is composed of the room interiors and reflections of surrounding buildings, trees and sky.

The floor lines of the gallery are the same as those of the 19th century building next to it, and the ground storey repeats its arrangement of a shop front and entrance door that have no relationship to the composition of the facade above.

The first floor window, the solid hatch above, and the panel in the roof storey establish a different axis that reduces the apparent width of the gallery's facade to make it seem similar to the building next to it. The elements of the facade are designed so that their appearance and function are very close, as in the work of the Swiss architect Hannes Meyer or in authorless objects such as a boomerang.

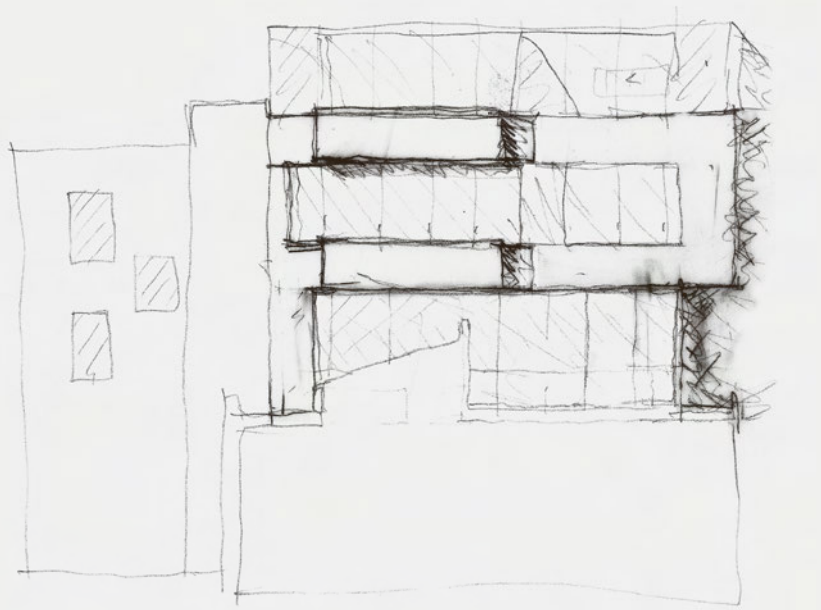
The transparency of the ground floor room gives equality between people in the street and those in the gallery. The difference in level makes the ground floor gallery feel enclosed and reduces direct eye contact by letting people in the street look into the gallery above the heads of those inside. The reflections in the glass give people outside a way of choosing to see or ignore the interior.

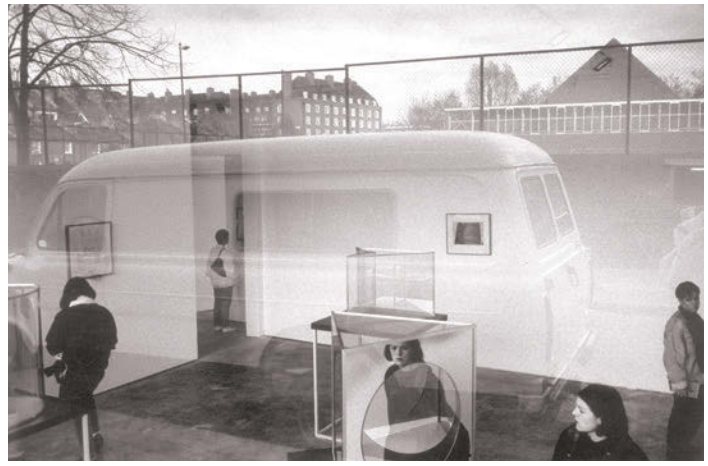
In the second and third storeys, the building looks in the opposite direction over a wide and very absorbing view of London. The size and form of the window and balcony give a sense of being in a personal space unobserved within the city. The buildings seen from this window show that, while some of the city changes considerably, much of it remains in a state of gentle modification. The generality of the plan in these two floors allows them to be rearranged from an apartment to a workplace, from a workplace to an office, and from an office to an apartment.

The spaces and fabric of the building are completed by what is outside them, and in turn they make public and personal spaces from the rudiments of human behaviour.

Since completion the buildings has become the principal showing space for the Lisson Gallery. The rear gallery of the earlier building has been absorbed into it, and the remainder, along with the basement of this building, has been turned into storage space.

— MC





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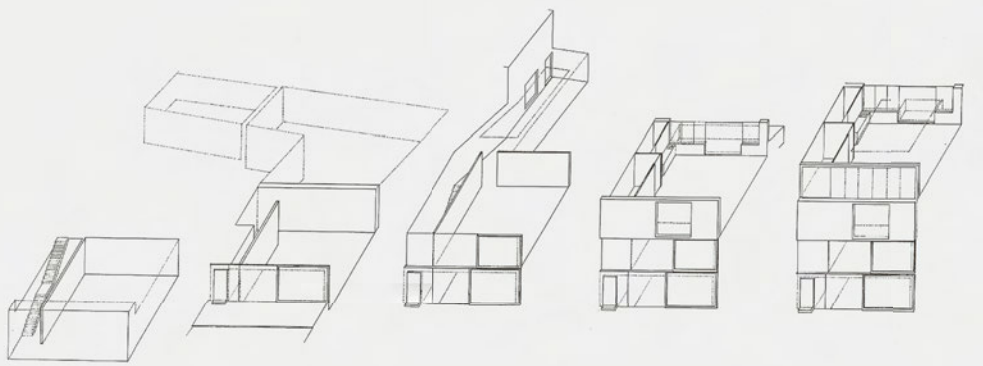

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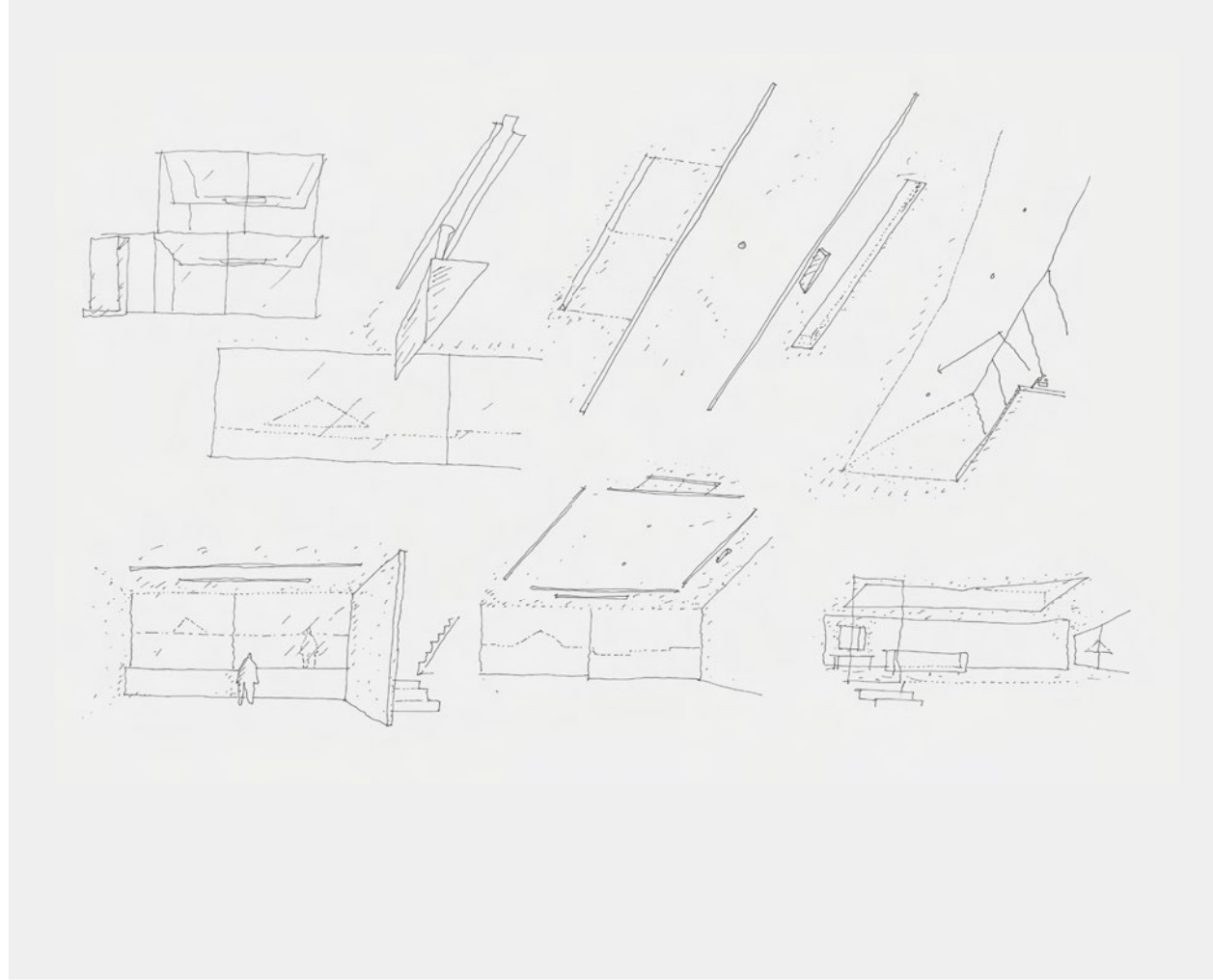
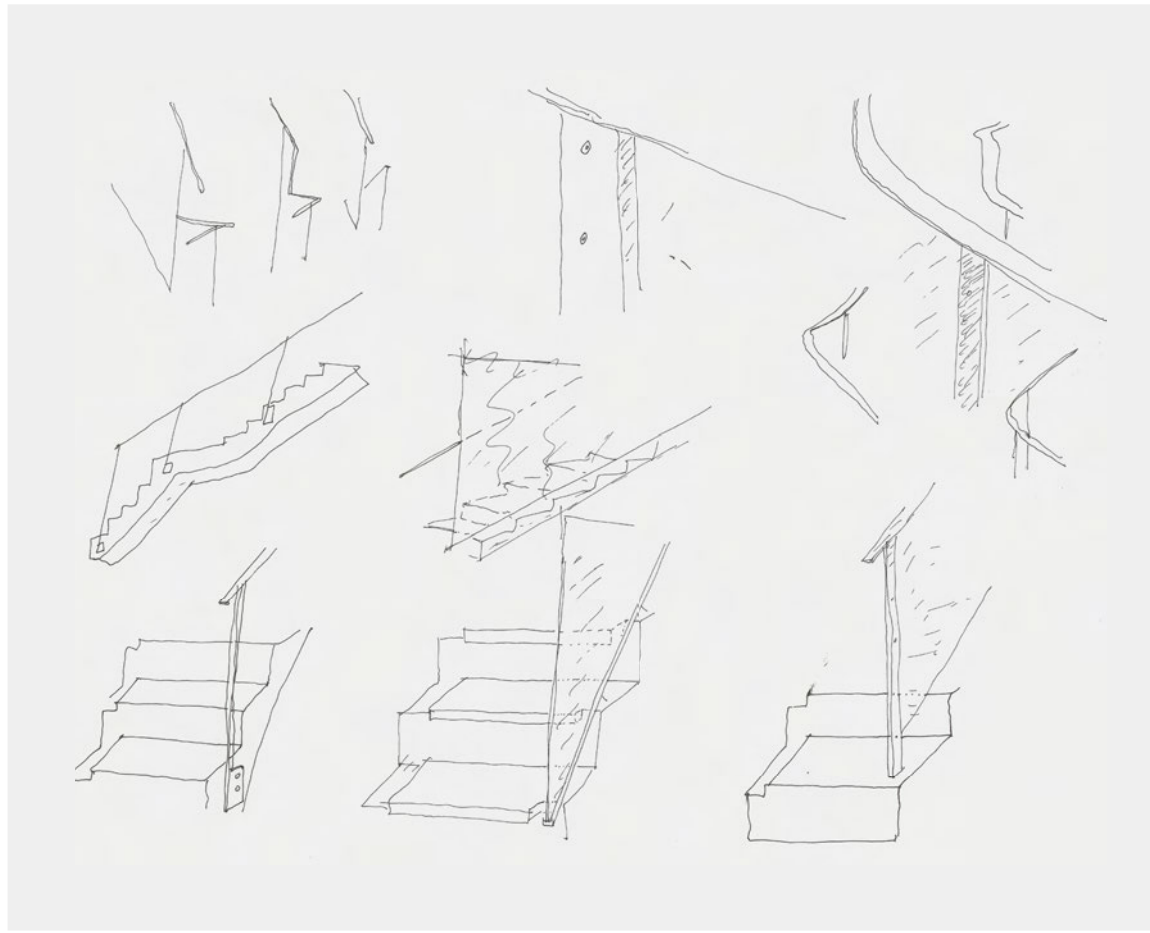


Left: Third floor gallery – LE

Ground floor gallery – LE
First floor gallery – LE

– LE



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R.J. SUTTON

Holy Island

1993 Competition
Location: Holy Island
Tony Fretton, Juan Salgado

To reach Holy Island, you leave Glasgow on the local railway, take a ferry and then walk to a small jetty on the Isle of Arran where, if the weather and tide permit, a small boat will take you across. Each stage of the journey is harder and more rudimentary than the last.

There is nothing on this island except small buildings, the faint remains of Celtic civilisation, and a rocky terrain that is sometimes very steep. There are no roads on which to transport building materials.

Two buildings were to be located at the furthest end of the island – one for women, the other for men – where members of the community would spend many hours in solitary meditation.

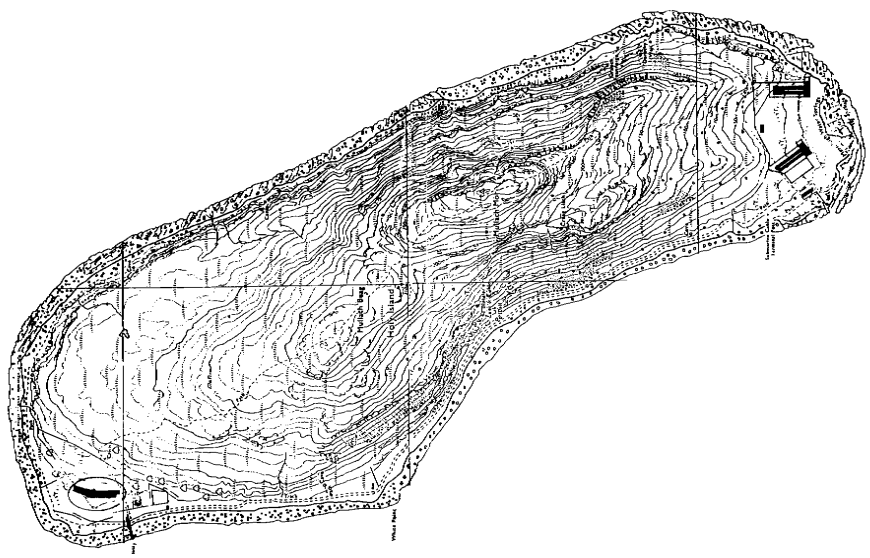
In each building, the communal refectory, shrine room and yoga studio with its outside court were situated on a level platform facing the sea. Ranged up the slope behind them were the cells where people on retreat would live and meditate. A walled garden was laid out around the cells and a courtyard and ambulatory in the interior to provide outdoor spaces where retreatants could walk and sit in sunlight, sheltered from the wind.

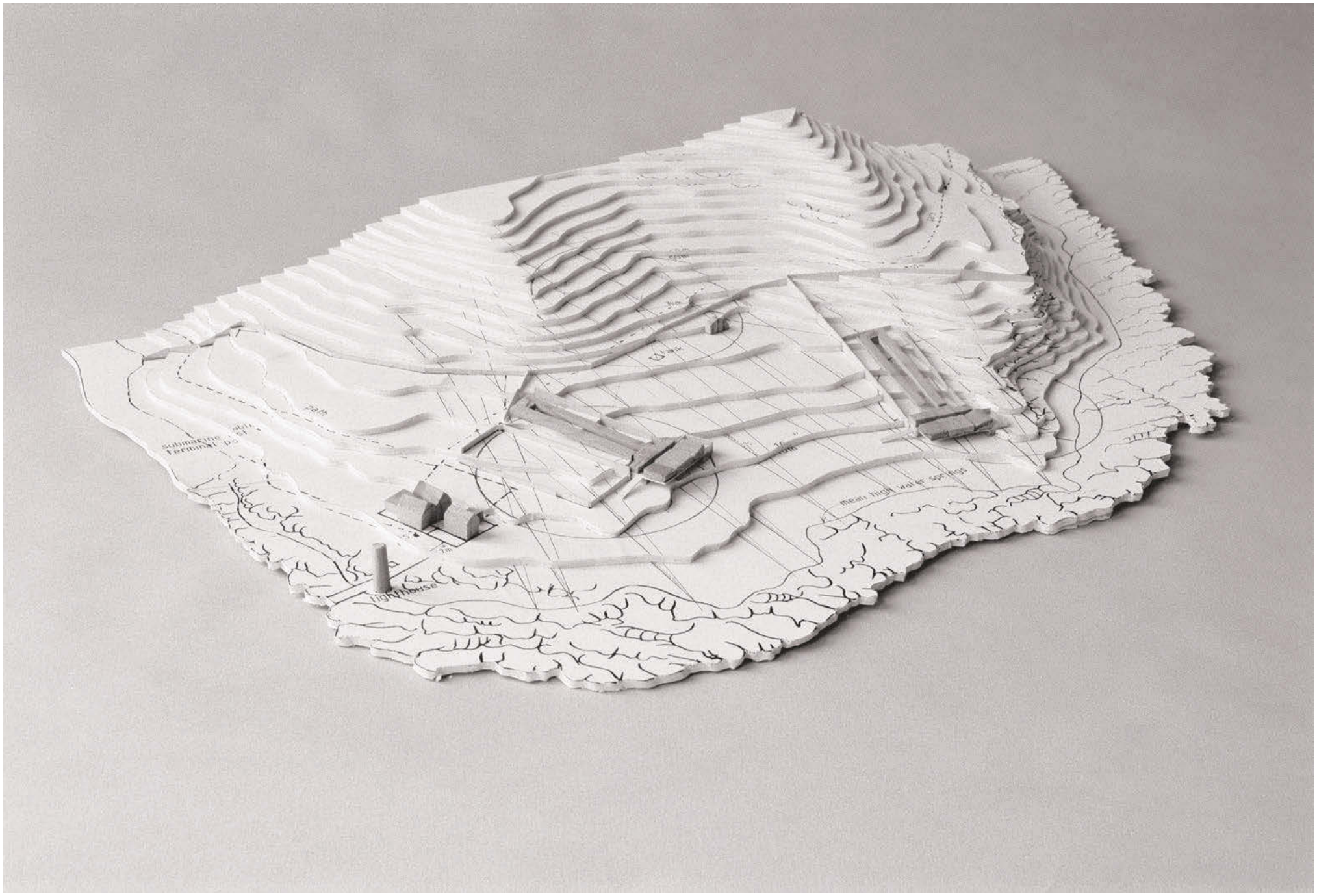
The new buildings would be far larger and different from any other on the island. Materials were chosen that would have the natural colours and textures of the island. Unpainted timber boarding would cover the exterior and would go grey and inconspicuous in time.

Stone would be collected from the island for garden walls and to cover the insulation on the roof, which would be very visible from the sea.

Timber, brought by boat and carried by hand, would give a well insulated frame structure resting directly on the rock and following the contours of the land.

Each building would develop a different form from the same plan, according to the shape of the ground on which it stood, a gesture that makes an analogy between the building and natural species that share a common structure but are given individual shape by circumstance.

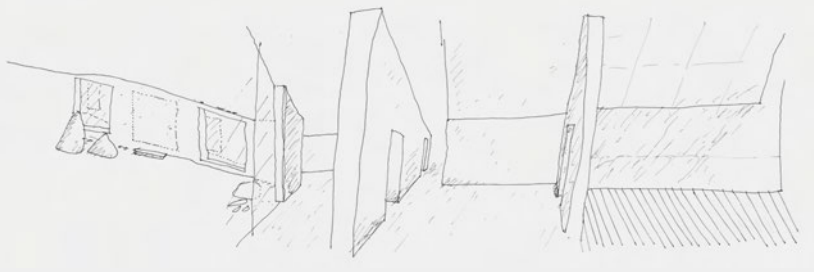




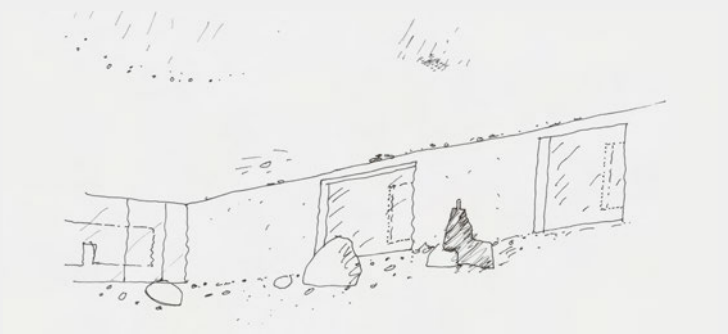
— TF

Meditation cell – TF

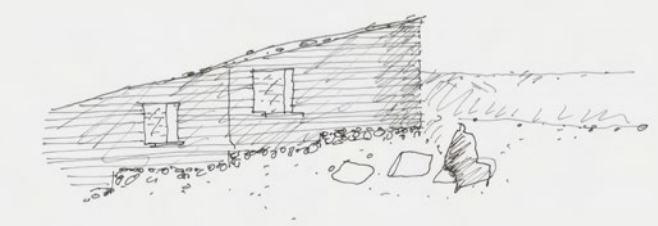
Landscape shapes the building – TF



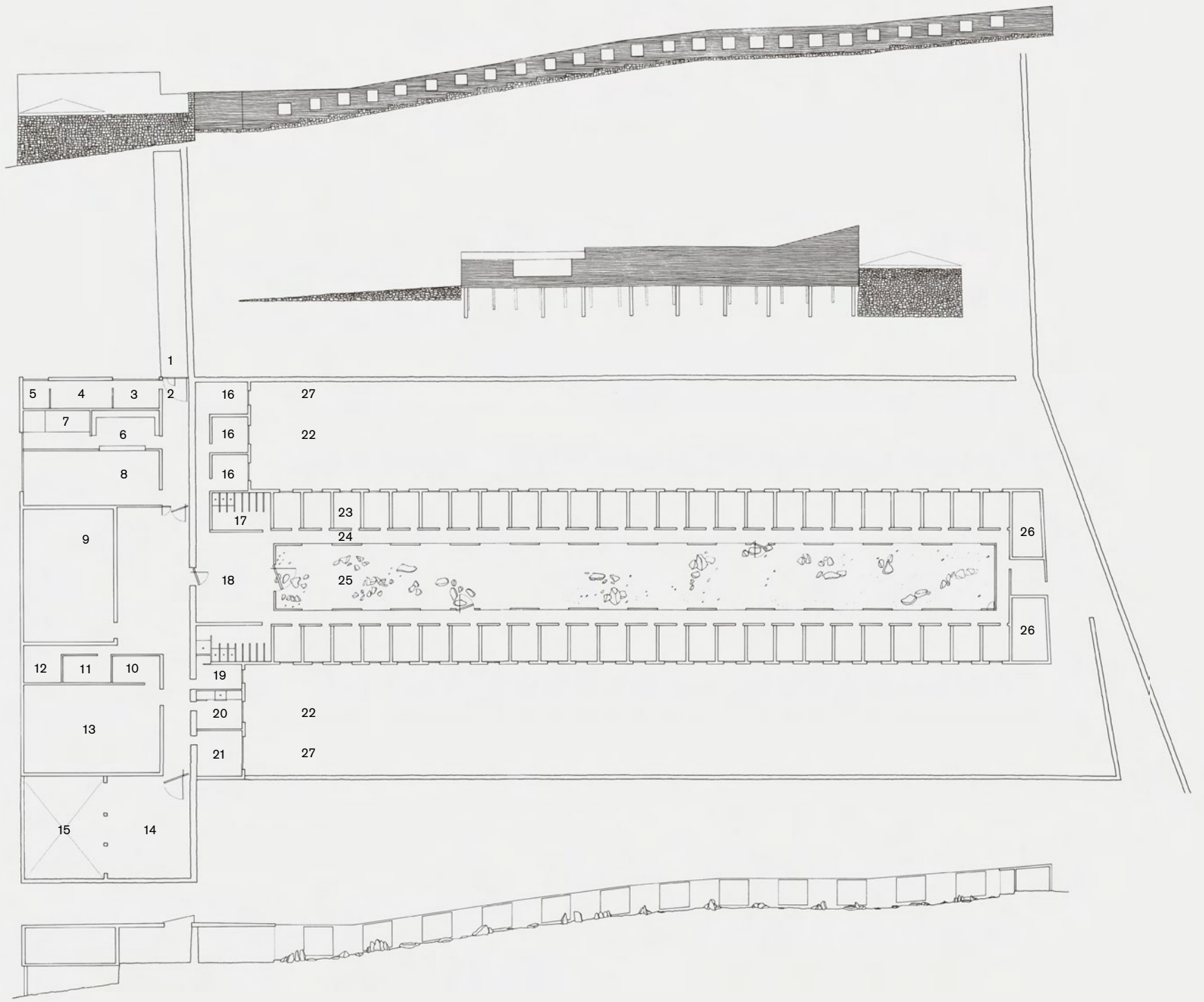
Threshold from inner court to prayer room – TF



Sitting in sunlight sheltered from the wind – TF



Outer court – TF



1 Ramp
2 Entrance
3 Laundry
4 Drying
5 Tailoring
6 Kitchen
7 Store
8 Dining
9 Prayer room
10 Yoga store
11 Torma
12 Sacristy
13 Yoga room
14 Cham court
15 Offertory
16 Disabled retreatant
17 Lavatory
18 Foyer
19 Interview
20 Medical
21 Library
22 Outer court
23 Retreatants room
24 Glazed corridor
25 Inner court
26 Store
27 High wall 2m

ArtSway

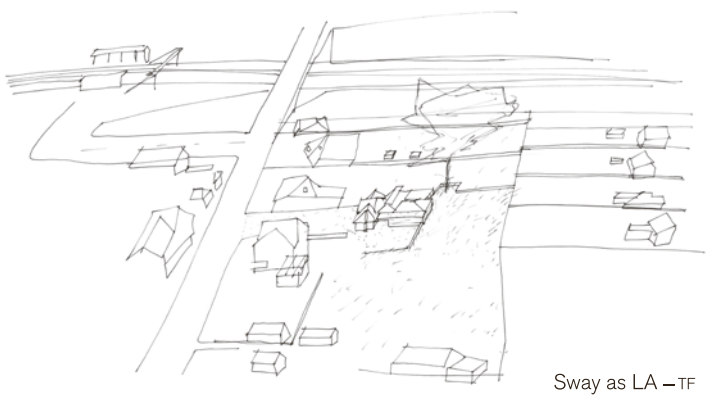
1993 — 1996

Location: Sway, Hampshire, UK
Tony Fretton
Project Architects: Tom Russell and Deborah Saunt
Jonathan Sergison, Jim McKinney, Steinthór Kári Kárason

Sway is a village 7 km from the south coast of England near Southampton. It developed into a commuter district in the late 19th century following the construction of the railway. The neo-vernacular style of its principal buildings was put together from a wide range of styles from across Britain, yet it is now taken to be authentic. In one of these buildings, a small former stable, a group of local people led by artist Linda Fredericks decided to make a small arts centre.

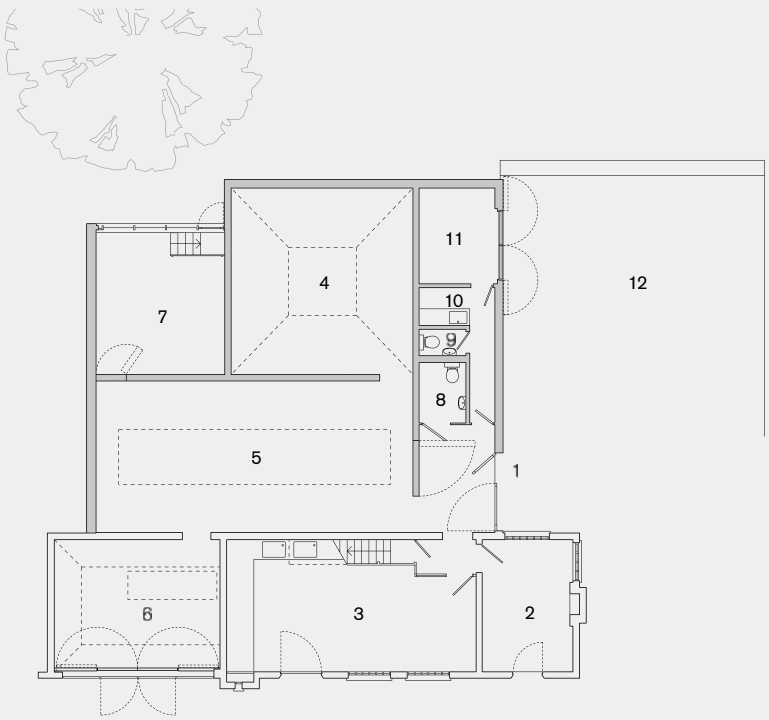
To extend the building to the right size, we attached a wood-framed building to the back of the stable. At the junction of the two buildings is the entrance that leads directly into the principal room, an exhibition gallery with a low, angled roof and a roof light running along its length. To the side there is another gallery with a pyramidal roof that is cut off at an angle to form a roof light. The third gallery was formed in a room of the original building, where the ceiling and roof have been opened up and the inclined roof lined with cedar. In each gallery, the configuration of the roof light provides light of a different character. From the galleries there are glimpses into the main studio where local people, especially children, can experiment with established art media, computer and video art, and to a smaller studio for visiting artists. Making and viewing art are threaded together and placed within sight of the village and field.

Familiarity, a strong component of neo-vernacular architecture, was a central issue in the project. Like the 19th century surroundings, the new building was an invention that looks as though it should exist in this location, and which sought to show that familiar forms do not have to lead to conservative ends. In doing so, it evokes a community spirit that underlies the inclusive values of ArtSway's programme.

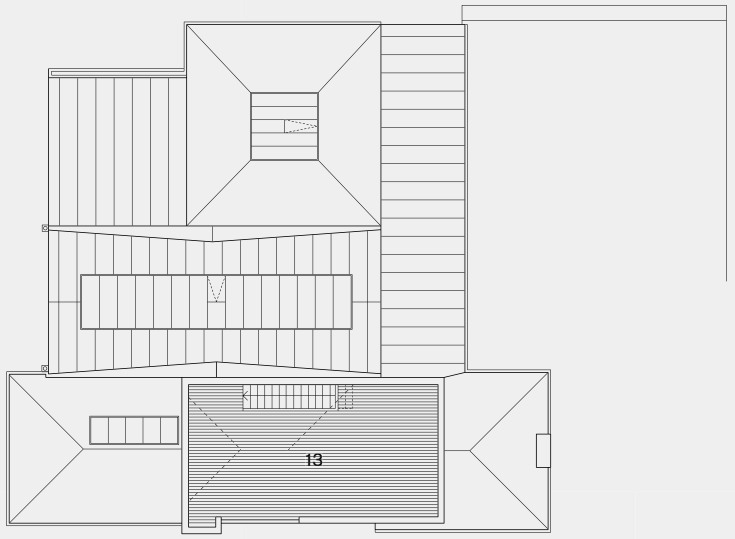


Sway as LA – TF

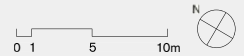
— LE



Ground floor



First floor/roof



Site plan

1 Gallery
2 Artists' studios

Ground floor

1 Entrance
2 Reception
3 Studio 2
4 Gallery 1
5 Gallery 2
6 Gallery 3
7 Studio 1
8 Disabled WC
9 Staff WC
10 Kitchenette
11 Store
12 External court

First floor

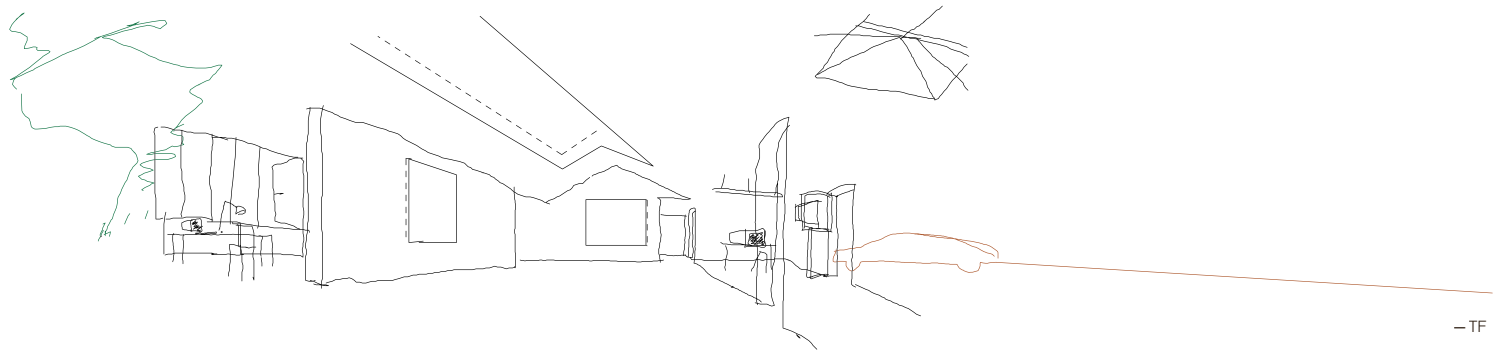
13 Offices

— LE

— RB

Gallery 3 – LE

Studio 1 – LE



– TF

Gallery 3 – LE

Artists' studios – RB

Quay Arts Centre

1994
—
1998

Location: Newport, Isle of Wight, UK
Tony Fretton
Project Architects: Tom Russell
and Deborah Saunt
Jim McKinney
Furniture: Mark Pimlott
Bridge: Jim Partridge

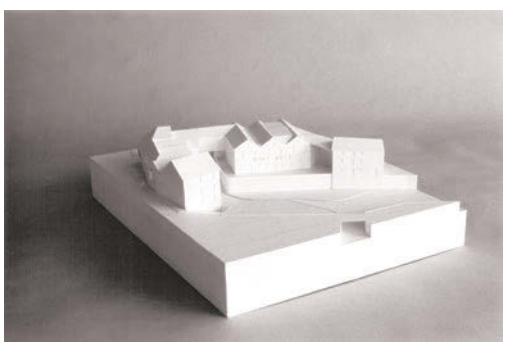
The Quay Arts Centre occupies three industrial buildings ranged along the River Medina. Two of the buildings had already been connected in the past. We connected the third, a former rope store for boats on the river, with a new building. Towards the river, the new building has the form of a covered sun terrace and is as sparsely constructed as the boat sheds further up river. Towards the rear street, its timber-boarded facade continues the sinuous line of the existing buildings and has a loading door that opens to the backstage of the theatre.

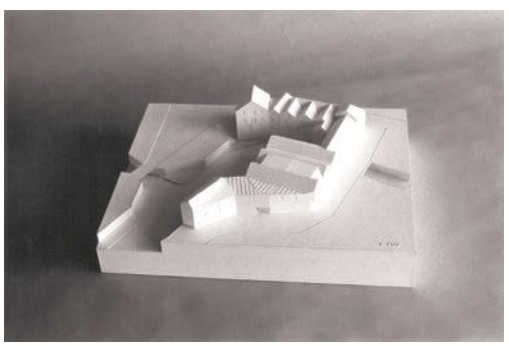
The ground floor of the buildings starts as a shop and box office in Sea Street, passes under cover across a bridge where the river flows under the building, becomes a cafe facing a terrace on the river with glass-sided studios at its side, and finally passes across the sun terrace to end in a small gallery in the furthest of the three buildings. In the midpoint of the sequence is a stairway and glass-sided lift that lead to the theatre and exhibition spaces in the first floor. Ranged to one side, the exhibition area consists of two spaces, joined at right angles to each other, which can be configured in a number of ways.

The 130-seater theatre space can also be arranged in various ways – either for music, film, dance and small-scale theatre, or as a flat-floored space for rehearsals and dance and exercise classes. A green room and theatre dressing rooms are located in the rope store building overlooking the river. Children attending ballet classes will change clothes in real theatre dressing rooms and enter the theatre space by the backstage.

Every space in the arts centre works hard to maximise income, interaction between the different users, and pure enjoyment. Creative activity in the studios is on view from the terrace and cafe, which has become a food venue in itself. Businesses hire the studios for out-of-office events catered for by the cafe.

In this project, the form of the building is both the art form and the social form. The ground floor is a place of public engagement made visible to the town across the river and the gallery and theatre above are shared imaginary worlds.





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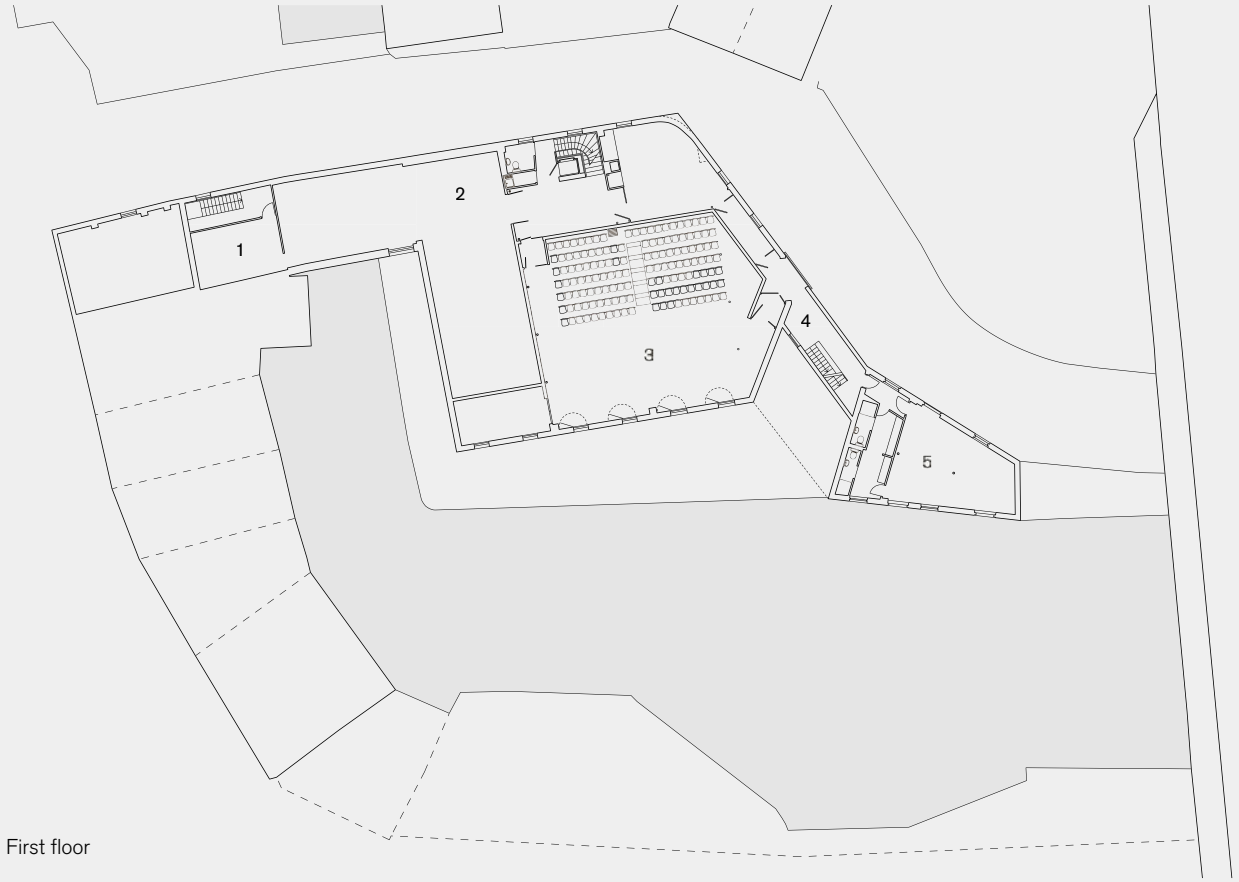
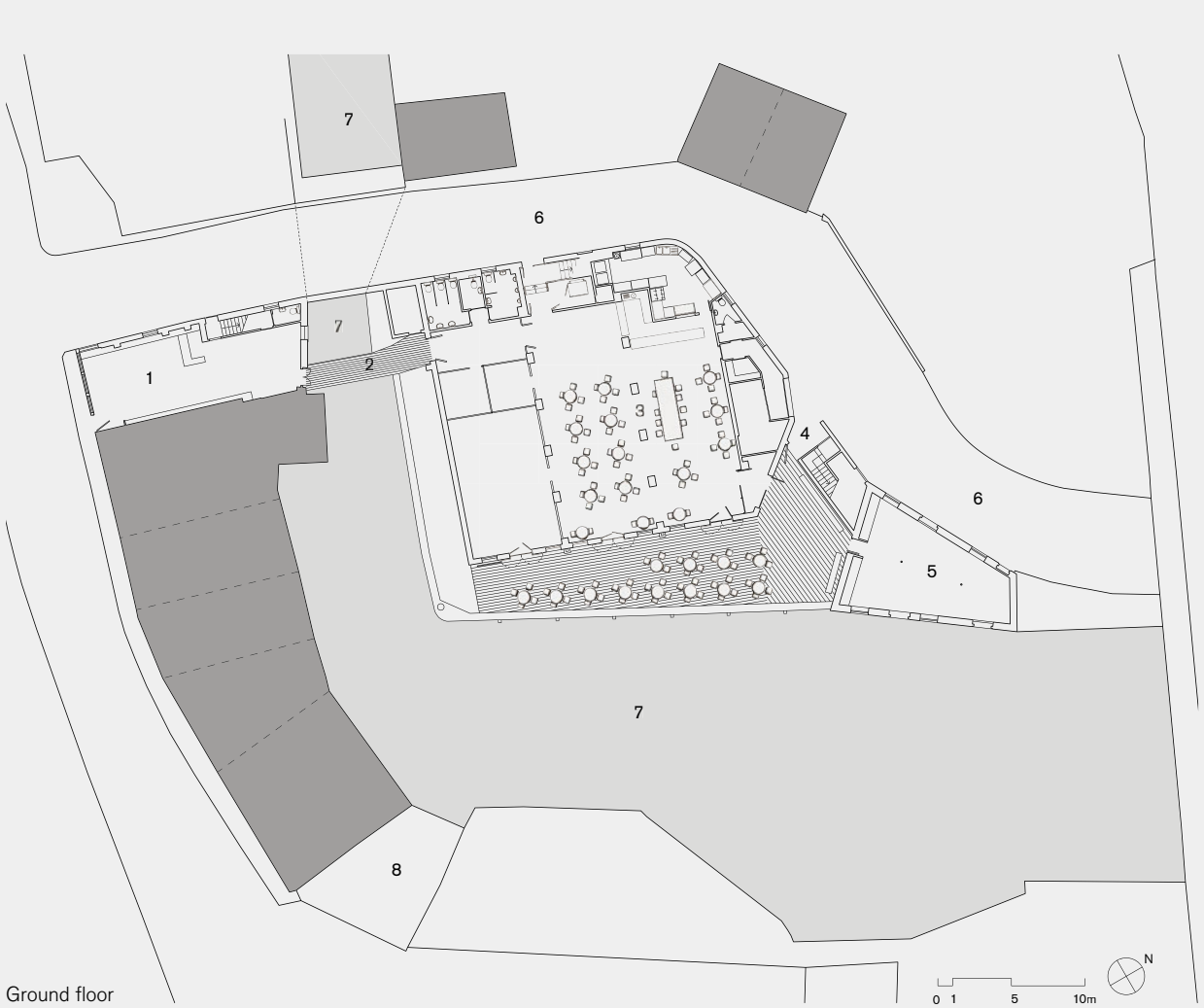


First floor

1 Video room
2 Art gallery
3 Theatre/cinema
4 Link
5 Changing and green room

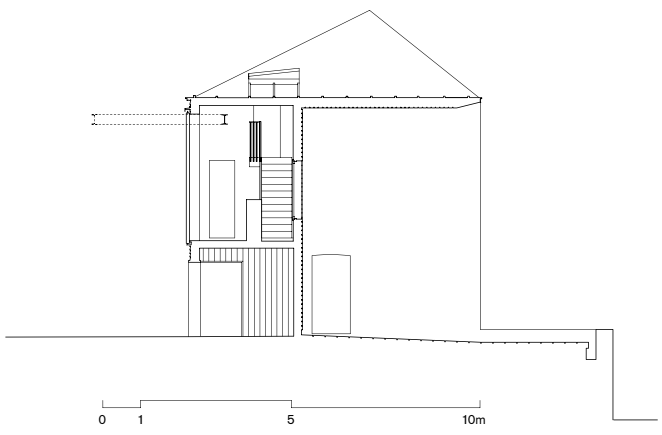


Ground floor

1 Shop
2 Bridge
3 Cafe and seminar rooms
4 Link
5 Rope store gallery
6 Street
7 River
8 Boat slipway

Link entrance – HB

Bridge – HB

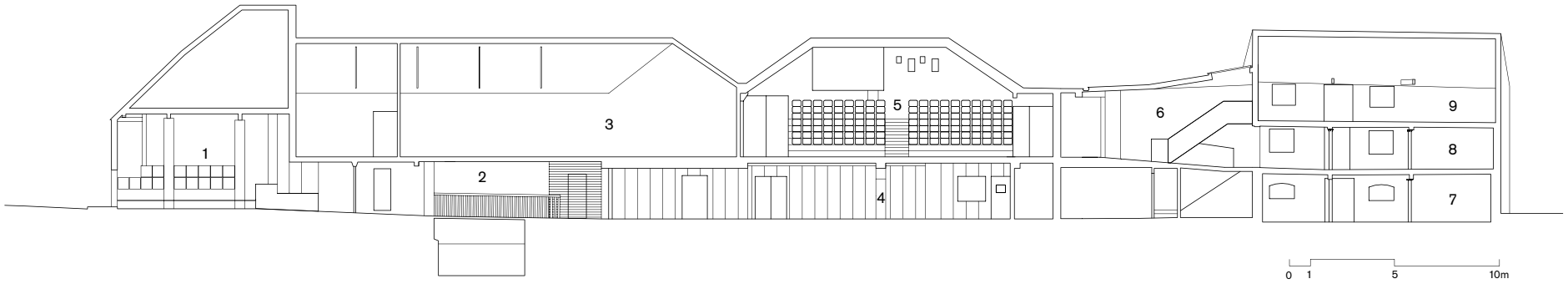


Art gallery – MvS

Theatre and cinema – HB

Cafe – HB

1 Main entrance and shop
2 River passing under building with bridge across
3 Art gallery
4 Cafe and seminar rooms
5 Theatre/cinema
6 Link
7 Rope store gallery
8 Changing and green room
9 Administration offices



— MvS

Red House

1996
—
2001

Modified in 2010
Location: Chelsea, London, UK
Tony Fretton
Project Architects: Tom Russell and Jim McKinney
Judith Brown, Emma Huckett, Matthew White, Matthew Barton, Hendrine den Hengst, Glen Lowcock, Myrka Wisniewski, Klas Ruin

Mark Pimlott designed elements of the interiors in the original building and extensively in the later modifications.

Chelsea was a retreat for statesmen from medieval times, and consists of houses interspersed with greater works. In the vicinity of Tite Street is Christopher Wren's Royal Hospital with grounds that extend up to the back garden of the Red House. At the end of Dilke Street, which joins Tite Street opposite the Red House, is the walled Chelsea Physic Garden. The River Thames, originally the route by which statesmen came from the city to Chelsea, can be seen obliquely from the bay window of the Red House.

In 1874 the river was embanked to control flooding and a road built along it to the centre of the city. Tite Street and the surrounding district were laid out on the land that these works created. Tite Street follows no considered urban design, consisting of freestanding studio buildings and houses designed by architects for artists interspersed with lesser quality buildings by developers. By the late 19th century, Tite Street had become a fashionable address for artists and writers, in particular the writer Oscar Wilde and painter James McNeill Whistler. Whistler's studio, commissioned in 1877 from the progressive architect E.W. Godwin, originally stood to the left of the site of the Red House. In 1968 it was replaced with a far less interesting house in an ill-designed neo-classical style. In the 1990s, a developer re-clad that house with facades of neo Georgian pastiche. In this state, with its uncanny similarities to her political attitudes, former Conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher briefly considered it for her London residence.

Buildings and places are shaped by events such as these. Architects respond by mitigating their effects and building according to ideals. The Red House is designed according to the ideals of style, habitability and relations to society and nature that recur in great houses from the Renaissance to modernity. At the same time, it makes positive use of aleatory and the pragmatic aspects of the location. By aligning with the different planes of the houses on either side, the Red House is given a facade with depth and modelling. A bay window and screen wall aligning with one plane stands in front of a flat elevation aligning with the other. The axis of the bay window is almost on the centre line of Dilke Street, giving greater significance to this part of Tite Street. A garden on the roof looks along Dilke Street and has an implicit relation with the Physic Garden.

The proportions of the main facade were allowed to come from the width of the site and the heights chosen for the rooms, aided by a casual misalignment of the parapet with those on either side that is typical of London. The windows and the bay have exact proportions, the small windows and bay being square and the taller windows a square and a half, while the openings in the screen wall are proportioned by eye. The bay window and the garage door below it provide a compositional centre, around which the different windows and openings are composed.

As in a Dutch canal house or a small Venetian palazzo, the fenestrated facades of the Red House give measured contact between the private interior and the public spaces of the city around it.

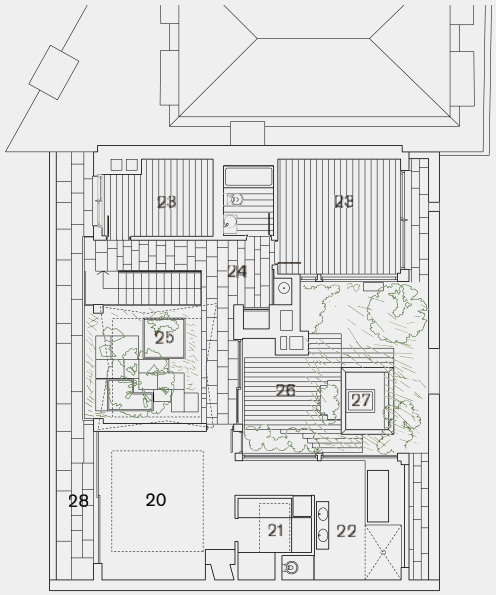
The house is entered discretely via a planted courtyard behind the ground floor screen. In a brief moment the city gives way to a view to the entrance hall and the walled garden behind the house. Facing the walled garden are the family room, kitchen, and a projecting dining room surrounded by silver birch trees.

From the entrance hall, a formal staircase leads up to the first floor to the principal room in the house, a two-storey-high space that extends from the street to the garden behind.

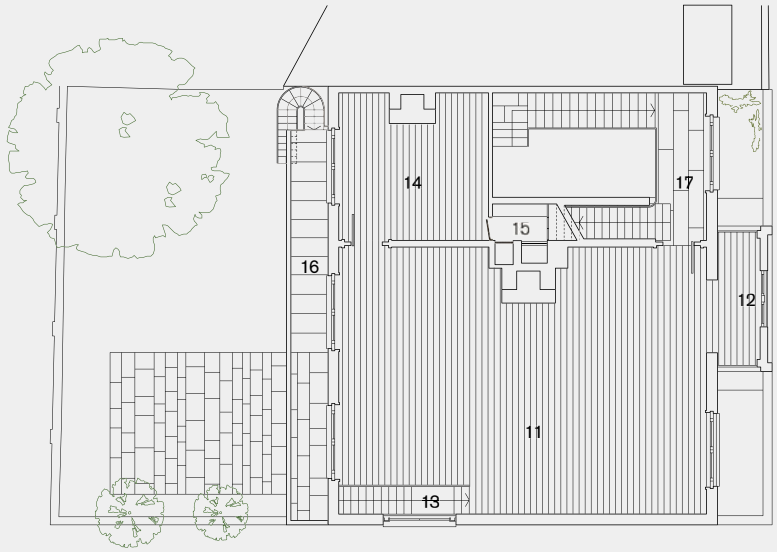
With the scale of the bel-étage of a Dutch canal house, the room is large enough for the display of art works, and intimate enough for a small gathering of people. Tall windows frame views of the Royal Hospital grounds across a balcony which runs along the back of the house, while the projecting bay window provides a smaller space looking out to the street. A stair that is casually cut into the corner of the room, almost like a conversion, leads down to the dining room so that guests can be entertained in the large room before dinner, or can assemble informally in the garden or dining room and go up later. Next to the large room is a smaller sitting room, looking out to the balcony at the rear from which a small stone stair leads down to the walled garden.

A study, concealed in the second floor above the entrance hall and small sitting room, extends across the whole depth of the house and looks out into trees on either side. On the third floor are the bedrooms, configured as pavilions surrounding a tropical hot house (changed in the later modifications to a dressing room) and a densely planted garden court.

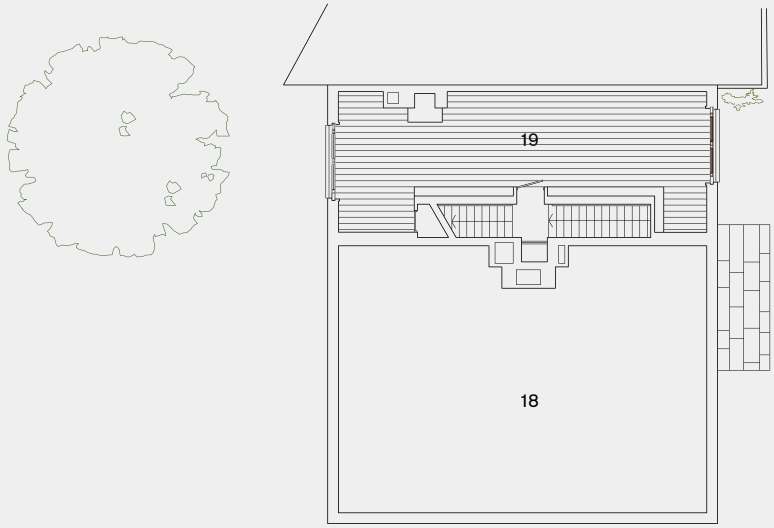
Throughout the Red House, rooms were designed in response to their location and outlook, and invite use without fixing their purpose. Formal themes were established and then adjusted to capture the unexpected beauty of chance relationships. Recognisable architectural motifs are present in the design but are purposely left inconclusive so that the house is at the same time familiar and ambiguous, and open to interpretation by those living there now and in the future.



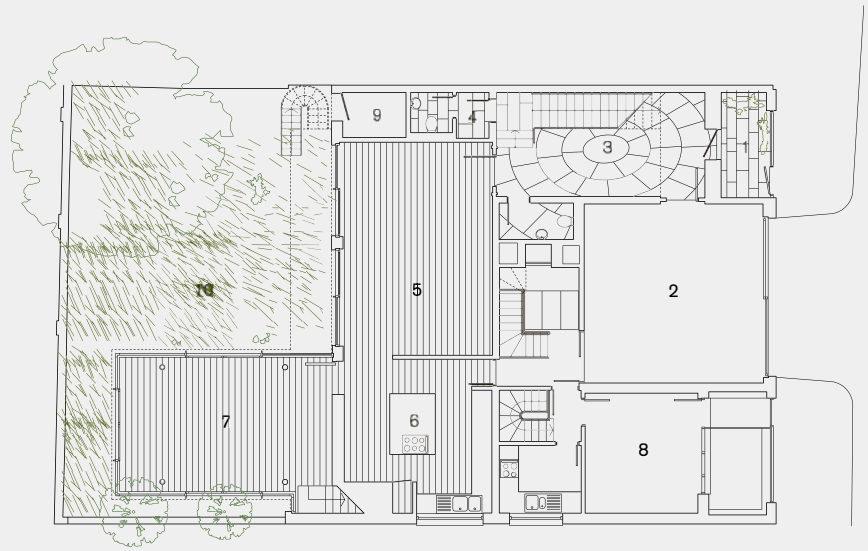
Third floor



First floor



Second floor



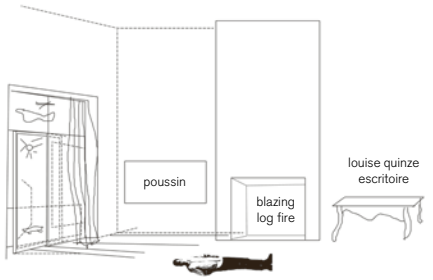
Ground floor

Ground floor
1 Entrance court
2 Garage
3 Entrance hall
4 Coats
5 Living room
6 Kitchen
7 Dining room
8 Staff apartment
9 Garden store
10 Garden

First floor
11 Lounge
12 Bay window
13 Stair from dining room
14 Small sitting room
15 Bar
16 Balcony
17 Landing

Second floor
18 Douple height lounge
19 Study

Third floor
20 Main bedroom
21 Wardrobe
22 Bathroom
23 Bedroom
24 Servery
25 Hot house
26 Roof court
27 Hot tub
28 Terrace

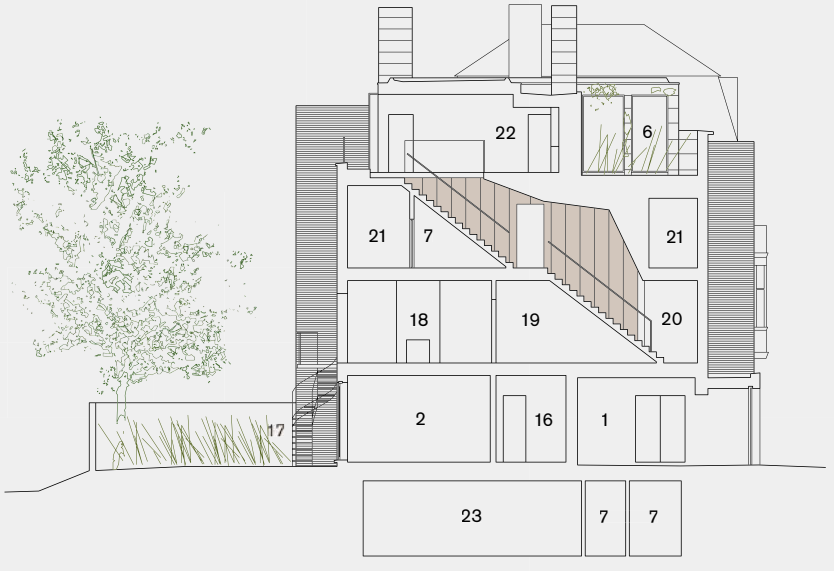


– TF

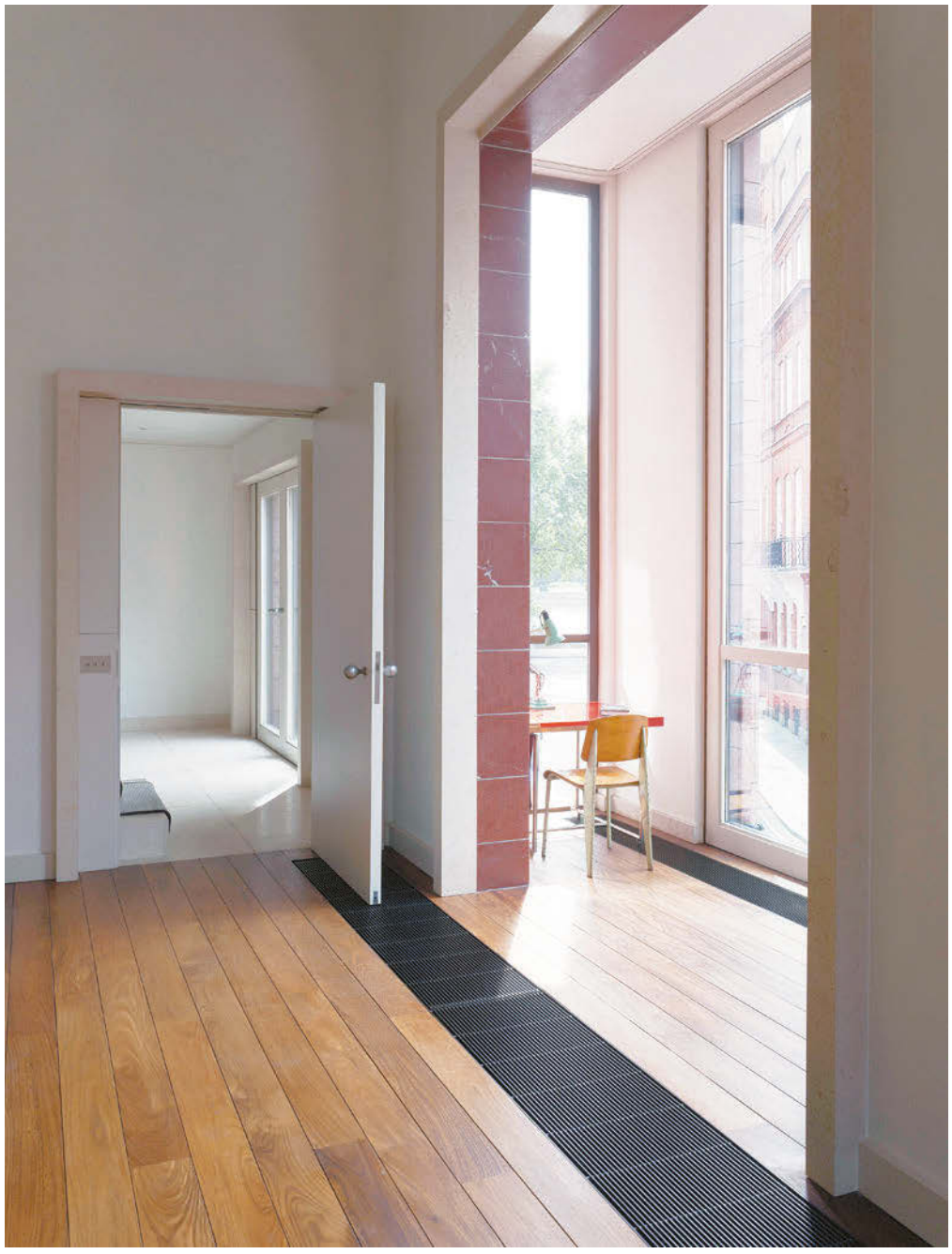
Lounge – PC

Garden – PC

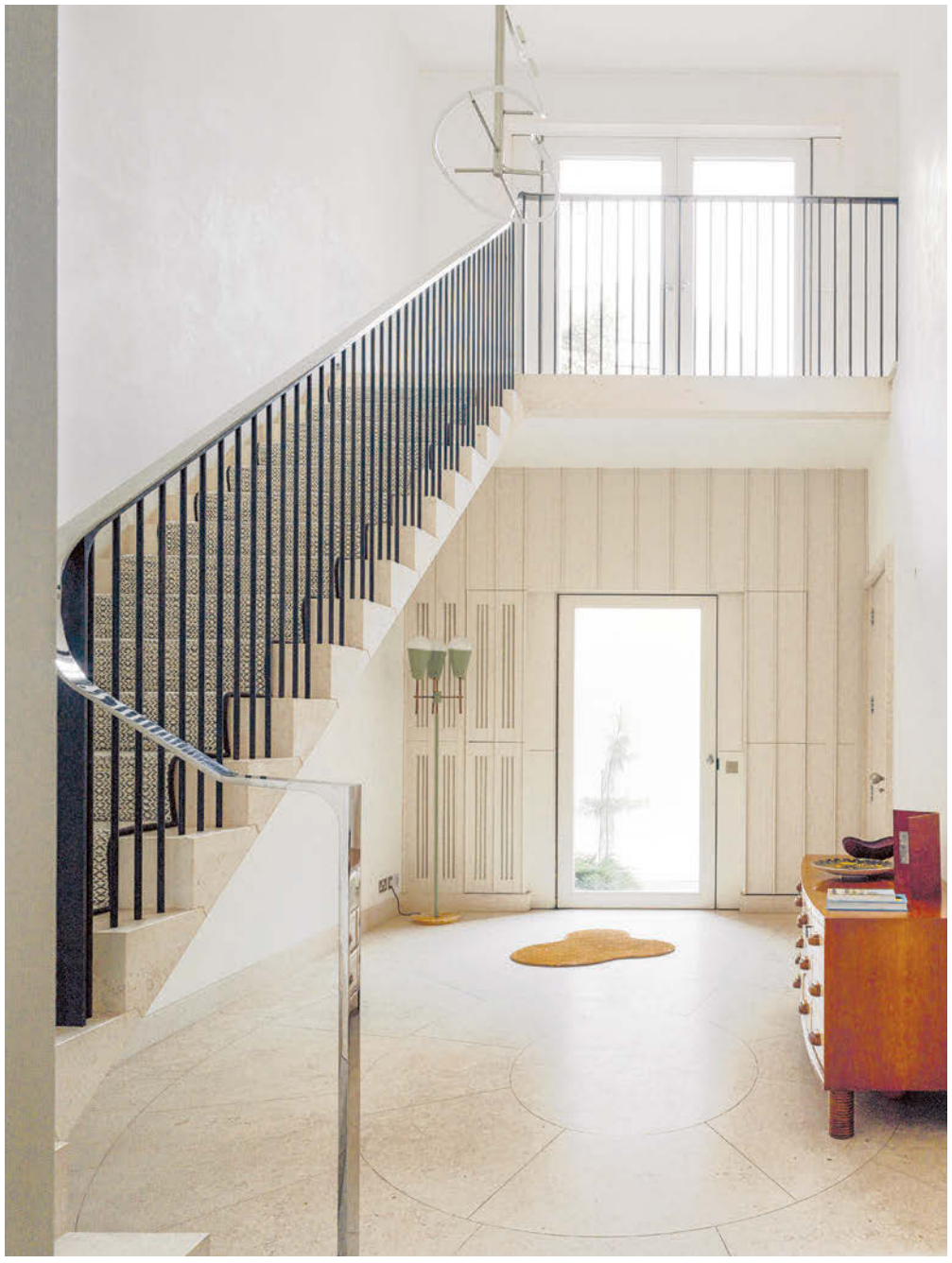
Dining room – PC



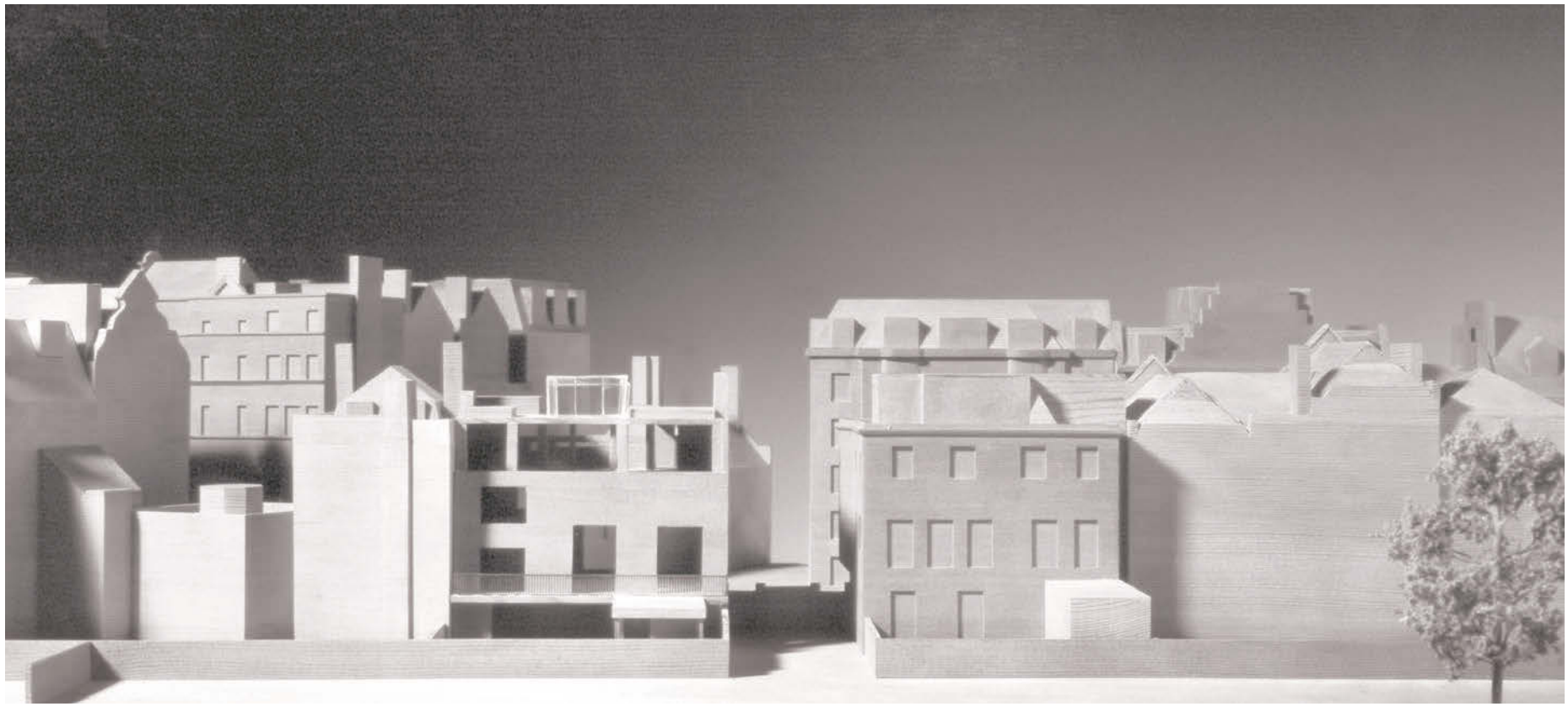
1 Garage
2 Living room
3 Lounge
4 Bay window
5 Hot house
6 Roof court
7 Storage
8 Loundry
9 Kitchen
10 Dining room
11 Staff apartment
12 Lightwell
13 Bathroom
14 Dressing room
15 Main bedroom
16 WC
17 Garden
18 Small sitting room
19 Bar
20 Landing
21 Study
22 Servery
23 Plant room
24 Bedroom



Bay window – PC

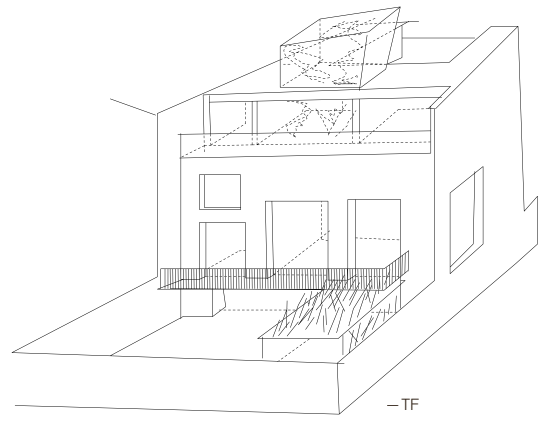


Entrance hall – PC



Rear elevation in context

—HB



—TF

Balcony – HB

Roof court – PC

Laban Centre

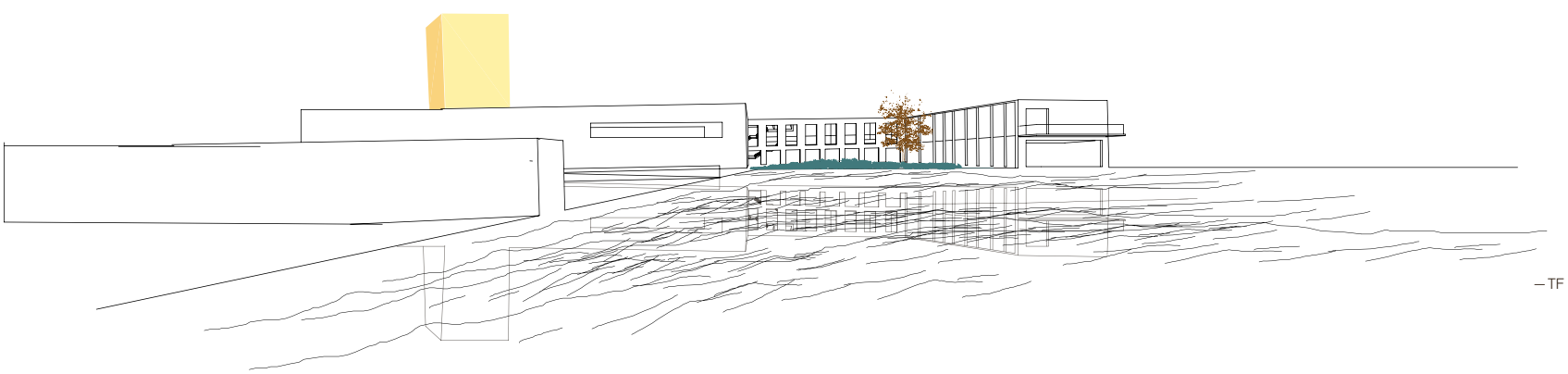
1997 Location: Deptford Creek, London, UK
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, Judith Brown, Sophie Laenen

Through its activity as a port and a centre of shipbuilding, Deptford was culturally and economically rich from the 16th century before sliding into economic decline in the late 19th century. Buildings from the golden period remain, including a fine Baroque church by Thomas Archer that is within view from the location of the Laban, while much of the neighbourhood has become banal and incoherent through later building. The Laban had chosen to relocate to a site next to Deptford Creek, a tidal tributary of the River Thames outside the historic centre. Its surroundings are characterised by low, scattered buildings of unexceptional design under a large sky with distant office towers on the horizon.

We aimed to create a believable place in this quite remote area by forming visual and experiential relationships between the new Laban building and its locale, and by placing different aspects of its inner life in productive contact with each other.

A tall, gold fly tower identifies the Laban in the wider neighbourhood to guide theatre audiences and visiting dance companies to the building. The entrance is configured as an inviting courtyard placed axially on the Baroque church and visible along a wide local street. As visitors enter the courtyard, they see the activity in the costume department, administration offices, theatre foyer and cafe.

Visitors, students and theatre audiences all arrive in the cafe, a place for informal sociability that looks out to the neighbourhood on one side and on the other to a garden in the heart of the building bordering the creek. From the cafe, a wide, glazed corridor leads along two edges of the garden to the dance studios and teaching rooms, and provides informal places where students can stretch, relax or read. This too is a place for meeting and sociability, but just for the Laban community, while being discretely visible from the café and garden. The garden is a place to enjoy the sky, ground and the changing aspects of the creek. Planting in the garden is chosen to attract butterflies and insects to sustain fish in the creek and give other life forms a presence in the project. Groundwater provides heating and cooling to the studios and theatre, which are naturally ventilated. Facades have a balanced array of windows in solid walls, giving well-distributed natural light and good thermal performance, but also allowing the interplay of views within the building and to the outside world. From the corridor outside the library, a window frames a view of the Baroque church. Within the first-floor studios, windows look into the sky and out to the horizon, giving moments when dancers can locate themselves in the world outside.



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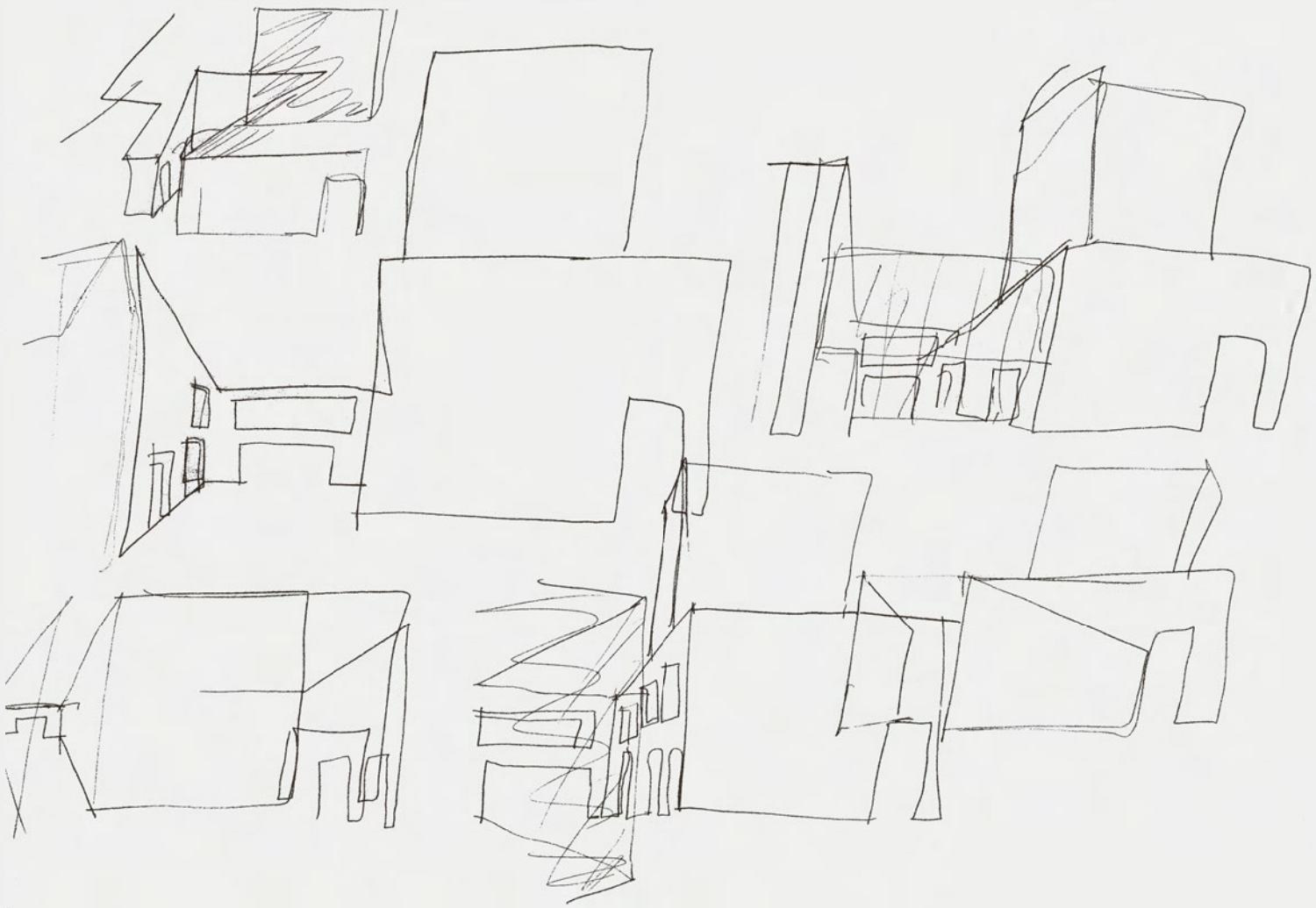
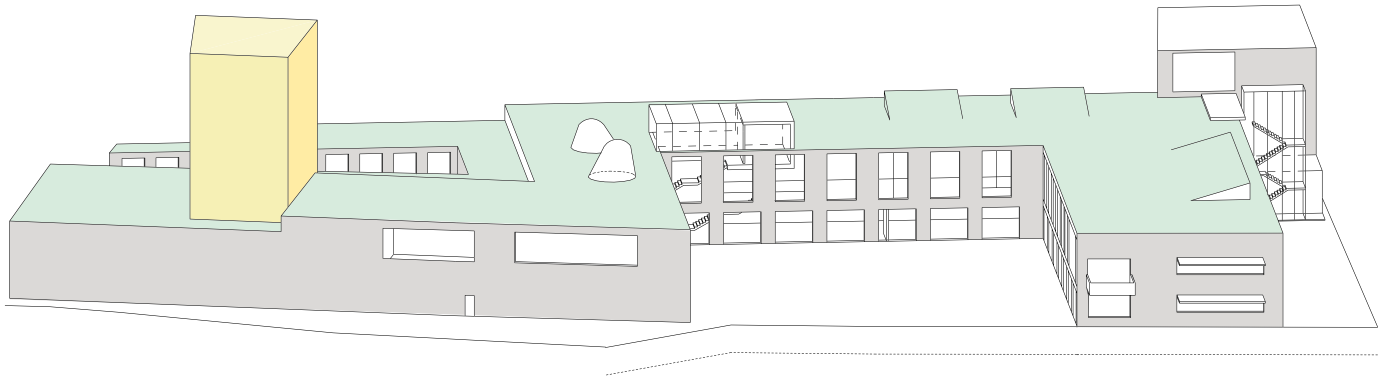
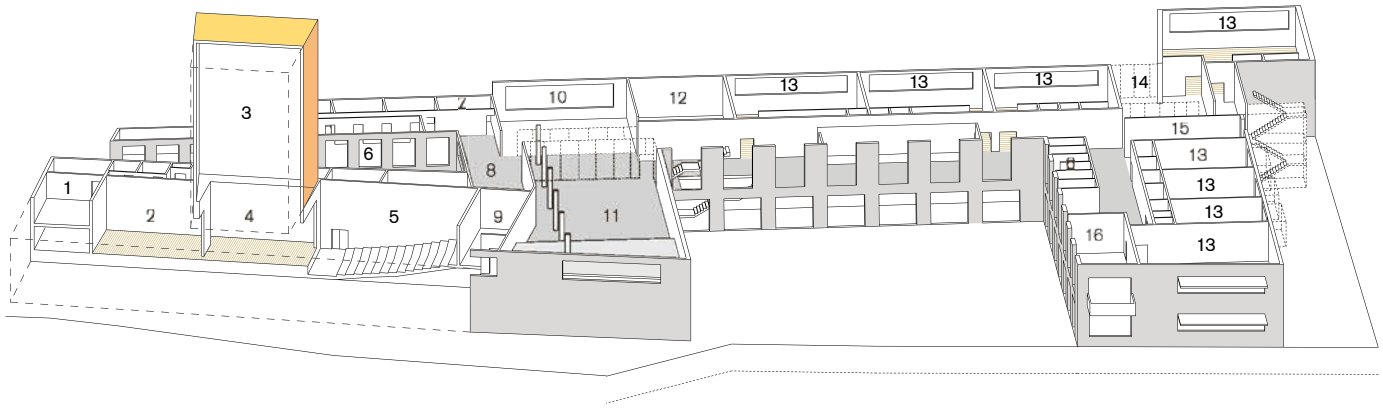




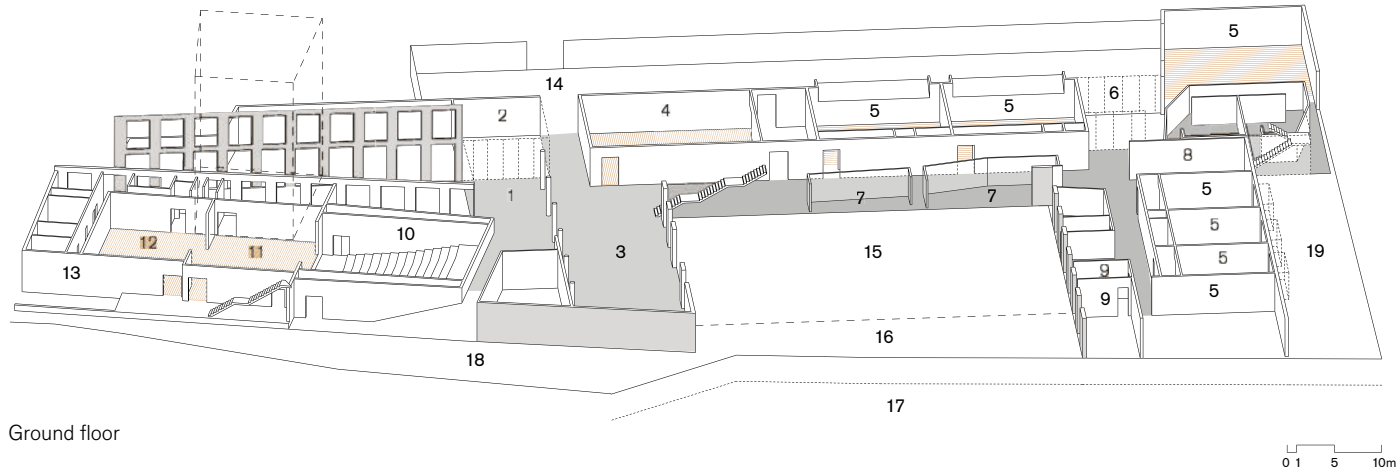
Roof

1 Wardrobe
2 Scenery store
3 Fly tower
4 Stage
5 Theatre/auditorium
6 Tutor rooms
7 Conference rooms and administration
8 Communal space
9 Control rooms
10 Visual arts studio
11 Library
12 Lecture hall
13 Dance studio
14 Seminar room
15 Visiting artist studio
16 Staff common room



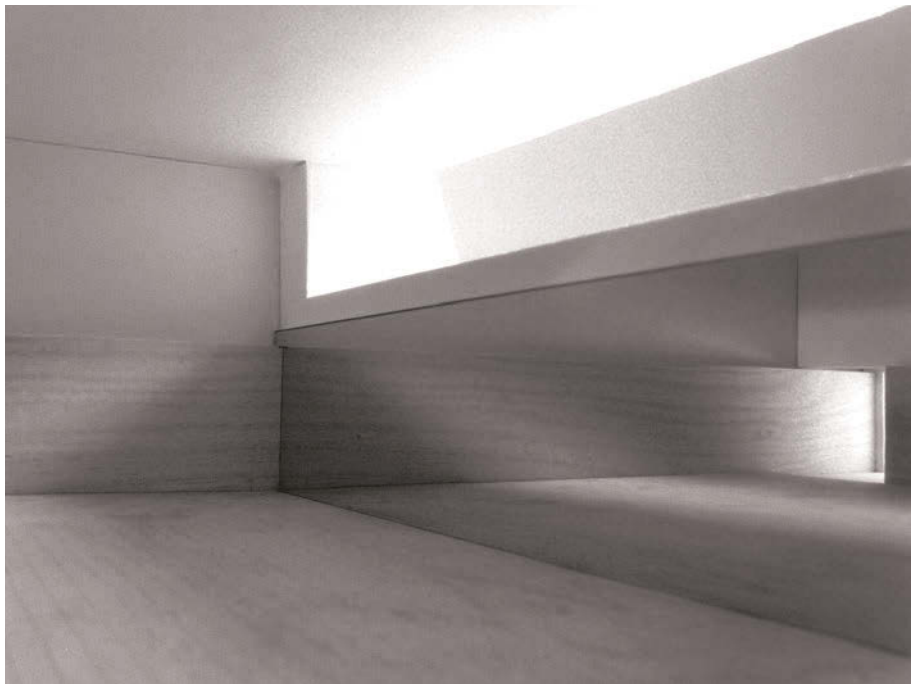
First floor

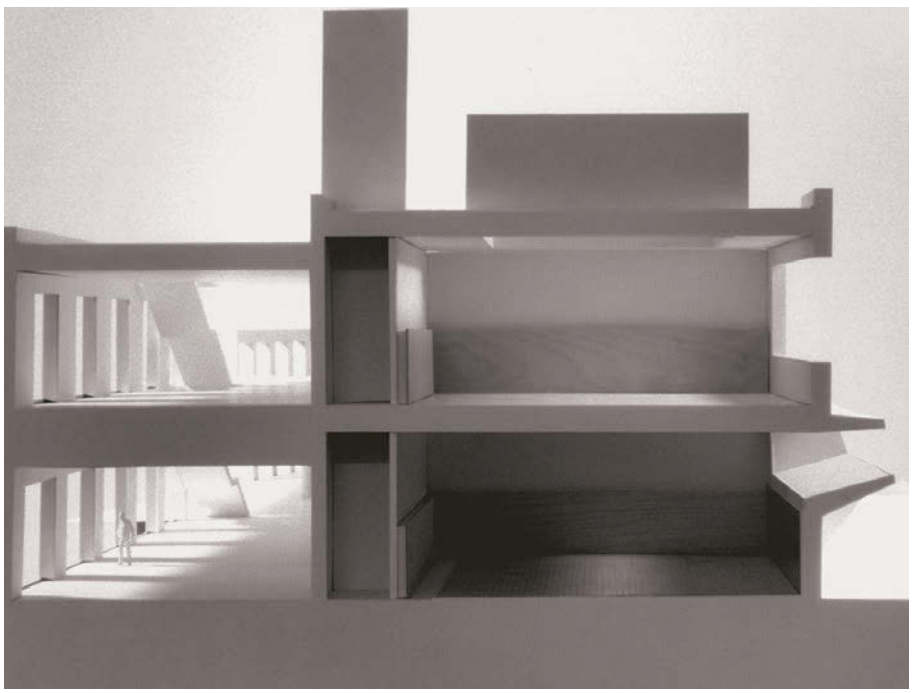
1 Entrance
2 Front office
3 Cafe
4 Studio theatre
5 Dance studio
6 Seminar room
7 Changing rooms
8 Artist studio
9 Postgraduate and student common room
10 Theatre/auditorium
11 Stage
12 Scenery store
13 Loading bay
14 Copperas Street entrance and car park
15 Garden court
16 Terrace
17 Deptford Creek
18 Public park
19 East court



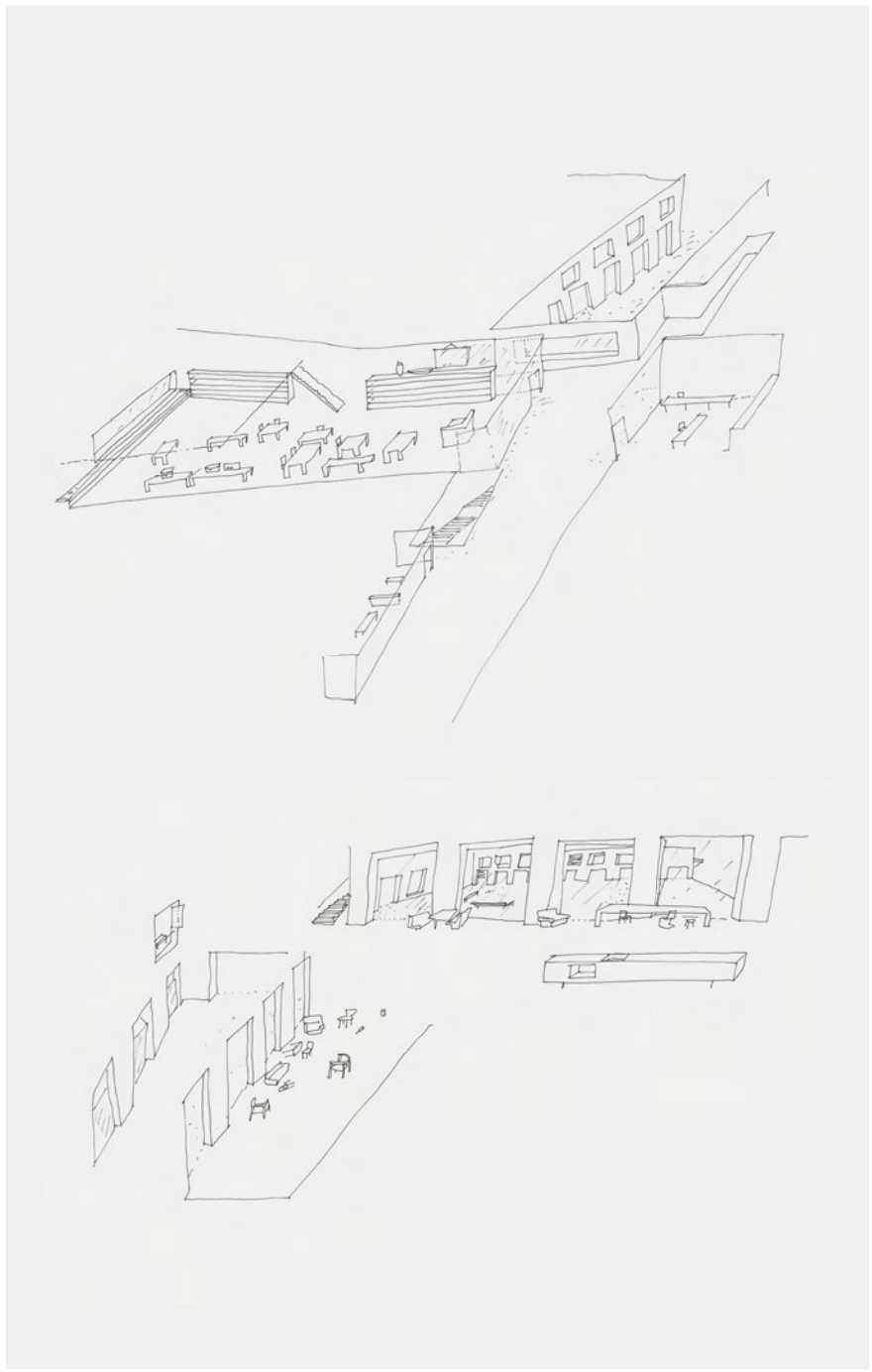
Ground floor

DG –





Dance studio – TF
– DG



Library – TF
Entrance – TF

Holton Lee

1999
—
2005

Location: Poole, Dorset, UK
Holton Lee
Tony Fretton

Administration, archive and
performing arts centre buildings
1999 (unbuilt)
Tony Fretton, Karin Hepp (Admin & Archive)

Artists' studios
2002–2005
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney
Project Architect: Simon Jones
Matthew Barton

Faith House
1999–2002
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney
Project Architect during construction:
Matthew White
Judith Brown, Klas Ruin,
Emma Huckett, Matthew Barton

Holton Lee Trust is a charitable foundation that empowers disabled people through personal counselling, spirituality, art therapy and contact with nature. It carries out these activities in the grounds and buildings of the extensive Holton Lee estate near Poole on the south coast of England. As its programme increased in scope, the trust recognised that it would need to reorganise how it used its buildings and also commission a number of new ones. The new buildings were to be Faith House, containing rooms for meetings, art exhibitions and individual quiet contemplation; a group of artists' studios; a small performing arts centre; and a central administration building with an archive attached for the storage and study of works and publications by disabled artists.

Our master plan proposed a series of simple, low-maintenance buildings that would improve functionality and give meaning to the original ad-hoc arrangements, while representing the trust's ethos through relationships to the immediate location and the wider landscape. Faith House and the artists' studios were designed and realised by our practice in 2002 and 2005, while the performing arts centre, administration and archive buildings remain unrealised.

Administration, archive and performing arts centre buildings

The administration building was designed with a formal fenestrated facade like the brick façade of the farmhouse to which it was to be attached, but made of wood. Behind the facade, the building became fragmented and the interior merged into the immediate wild landscape. The archive building was positioned in the garden of the farmhouse, passively cooled by solid brick walls and a heavy roof, and with a conical form that would make it visible above the entrance building.

A simple building was proposed for the performing arts centre with wooden facades and a green, pitched roof. A deep entrance lobby would look out over a large field that is used variously for car parking, camping and fetes. Behind was a flat-floored theatre space with a glazed side wall that looked into a thicket of trees and undergrowth, and beyond to the sky and agricultural fields of the estate.

Artists' studios

The studios were formed in a farm building located opposite an open-sided barn used for farm storage and occasionally for exhibitions. The building's exterior brickwork was thinly over-painted to retain its original qualities while making it distinct from the buildings around it. The roof windows provide north light to the studios, and their forms play against the extreme openness and utility of the open barn.

Four studios were laid out in the existing brick building, connected by an external covered path. A new timber room was attached to provide a common room for the artists. The roof windows provide as much wall space as possible in the studios, while a long horizontal window in the common room provides views over the fields.

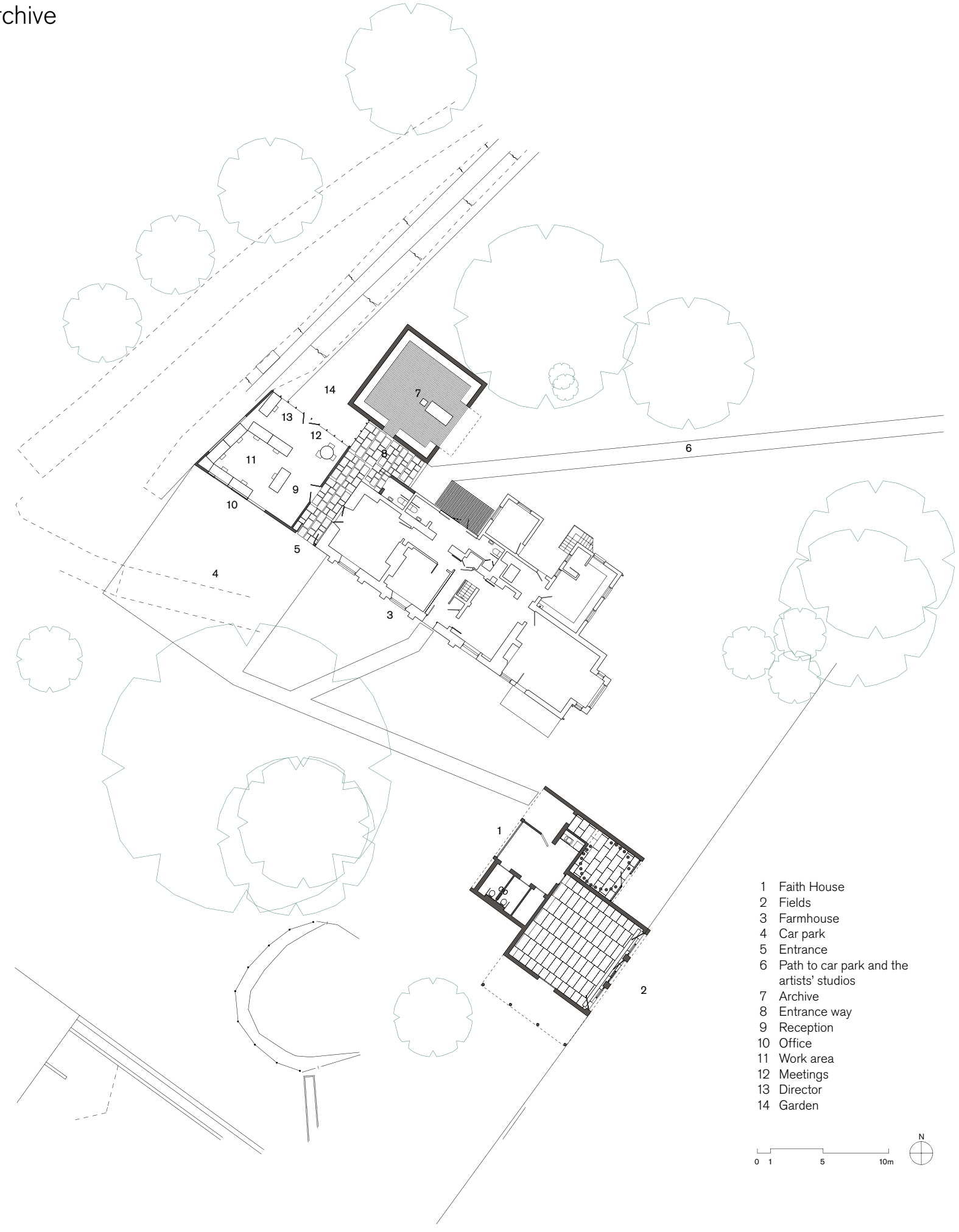
Faith House

Faith House has a specific role as the focal point for the new and existing buildings, providing a room for meetings, discussions and exhibitions, and another smaller room for quiet individual contemplation. Through its location and form, it symbolises the relationship of humans to nature that is central to the work of the Holton Lee Trust.

The building is situated in the front garden of the farmhouse, the most central and serene part of the estate, and placed on a slight rise where it can be seen against the sky and fields as visitors approach. Its three-part facade, consisting of an open porch, central window and blank panel, could suggest several things at the same time: a rural temple, an agricultural building, or an abstract artwork. A circle of silver birch trees in the room for quiet contemplation has proved to be a symbol that people find supportive of their own beliefs. In the larger room, the windows open directly onto the fields and in doing so place humans in contact with other life forms, the weather, and the seasons.


4
1
7
3
2
7
6
5
8
1 Administration
2 Farmhouse
3 Archive
4 Performing arts centre
5 Artists' studios
6 Faith House
7 Car park
8 Poole Harbour

Administration & Archive

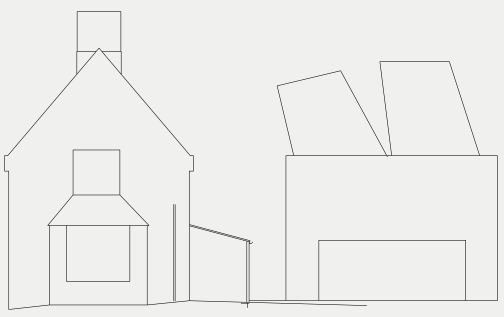


1 Faith House
2 Fields
3 Farmhouse
4 Car park
5 Entrance
6 Path to car park and the artists' studios
7 Archive
8 Entrance way
9 Reception
10 Office
11 Work area
12 Meetings
13 Director
14 Garden

TFA/DO —

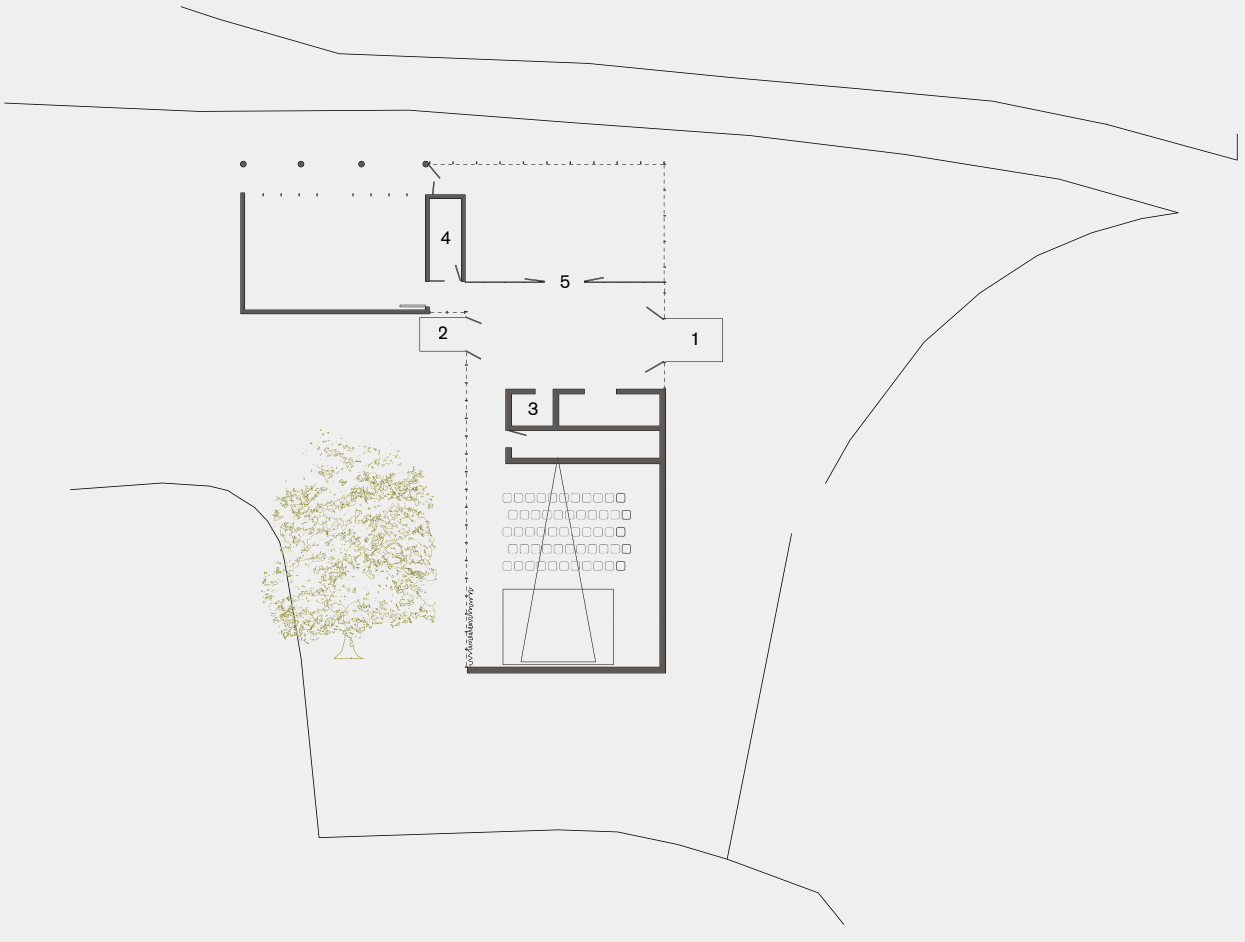
North elevation

South elevation



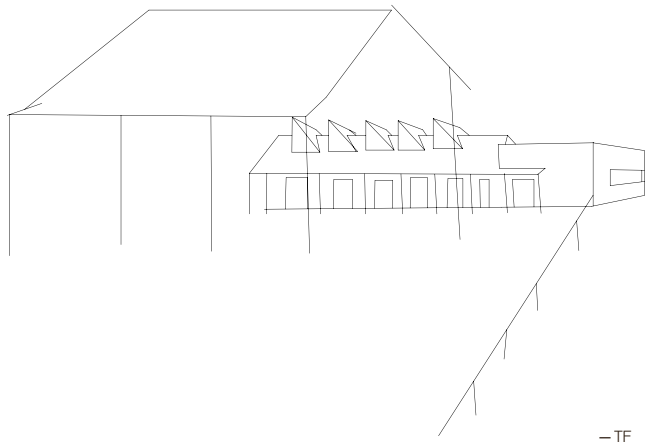
East elevation

Performing Arts Centre



1 Entrance ramp
2 Ramp to court
3 Kitchenette
4 Art store
5 Retractable partition

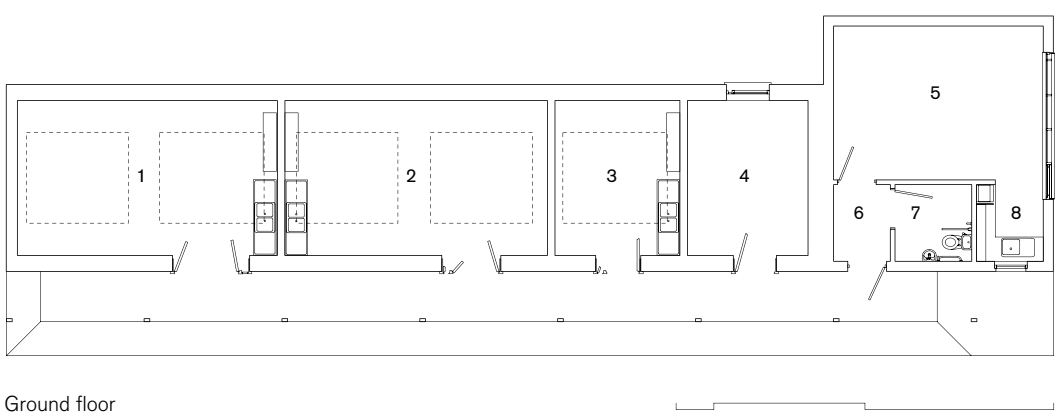
Artists' studios



– TF

HB –

Roof



Ground floor

1 Studio 1
2 Studio 2
3 Studio 3
4 Office or studio 4
5 Common room and exhibition space
6 Lobby
7 WC
8 Kitchen


2

Faith House

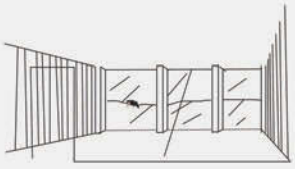
— HB

1 Farmhouse
2 Farmhouse garden
3 Porch
4 Entrance hall
5 Quiet room
6 Quiet garden
7 Assembly room
8 Sun porch
9 Paved garden
10 Existing boardwalk across pond
11 Existing pond
12 Fence
13 Field

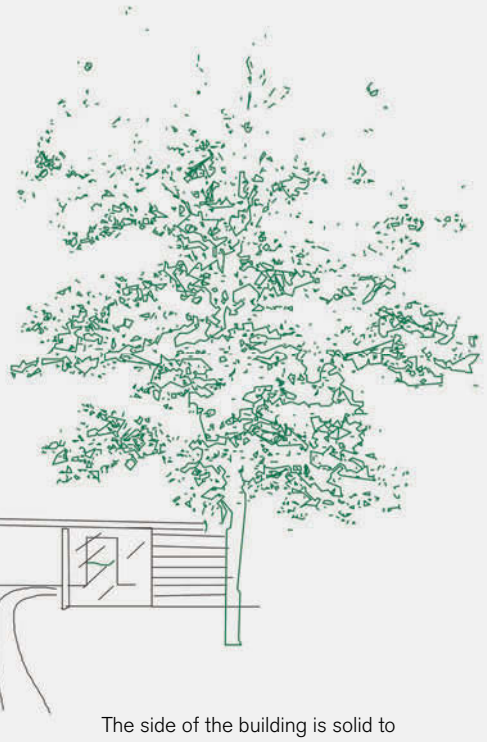
Entrance hall – HB

Assembly room – HB

The fields and sea are visible around and through the building from the entrance to the garden.



The main room faces the landscape through large opening windows.



The side of the building is solid to maintain the privacy of the existing farmhouse.

The building is set back on the south side to make a sun porch in the garden on that side.

Quiet room – HB

Groningen

2001 Location: Groningen, the Netherlands
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, Matthew Barton
Executive Architects: Van Helden & Partners
Lex Van Helden, Rodolp Boonstra,
Werner Snippe

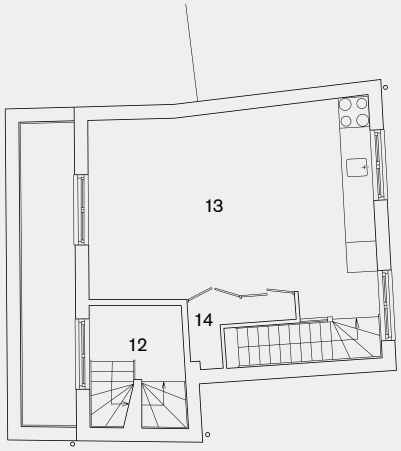
In the Blue Moon festival of 2001, architects from outside the Netherlands were invited to design a permanent building on a small, complex site within Groningen and a temporary installation in the open land outside the city. Our installation was a children's theatre made by growing a field of maize to a child's height, and then cutting a long entrance pathway to a circular space for performances in the heart.

In the city, we designed a building with two apartments that would be an inconspicuous and useful part of Groningen for a long time to come. The building made a series of gestures that connects its occupants with the larger community of the city: an entrance hall where the occupants meet in passing and which plays a part in the activity of the street outside; balconies that project domestic life into the life of the city; and a top storey with a crown of gold-framed windows that rhymes with the church spire behind it.

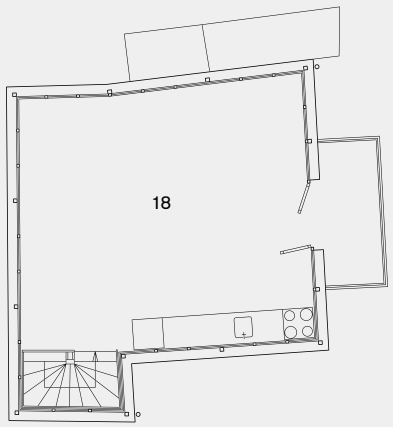
—CR

– HB

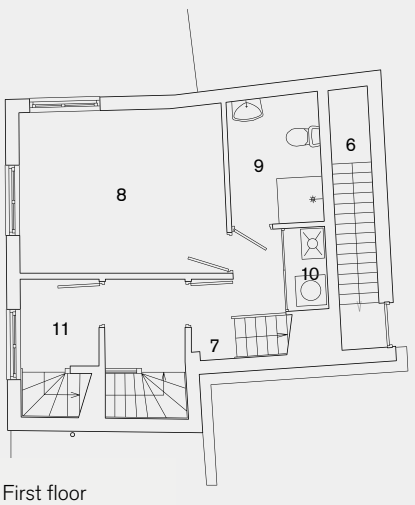
– CR



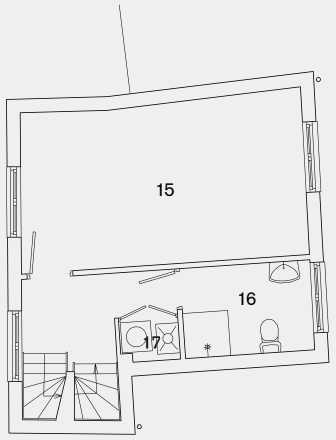
Second floor



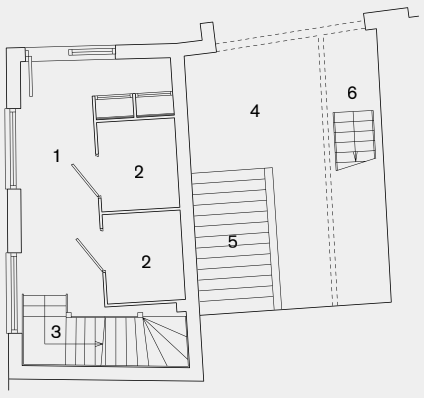
Fourth floor



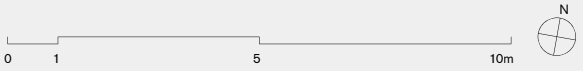
First floor



Third floor



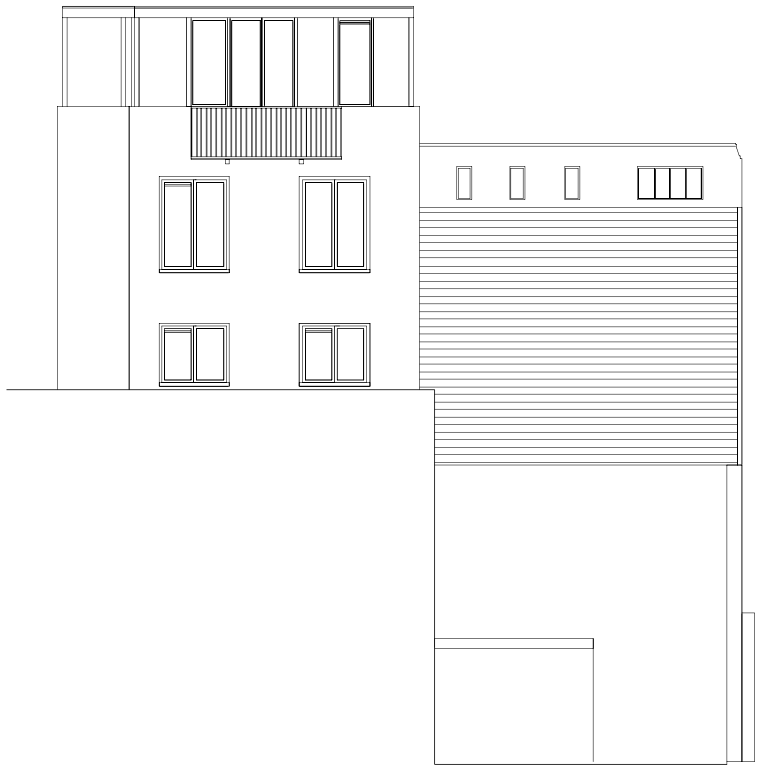
Ground floor

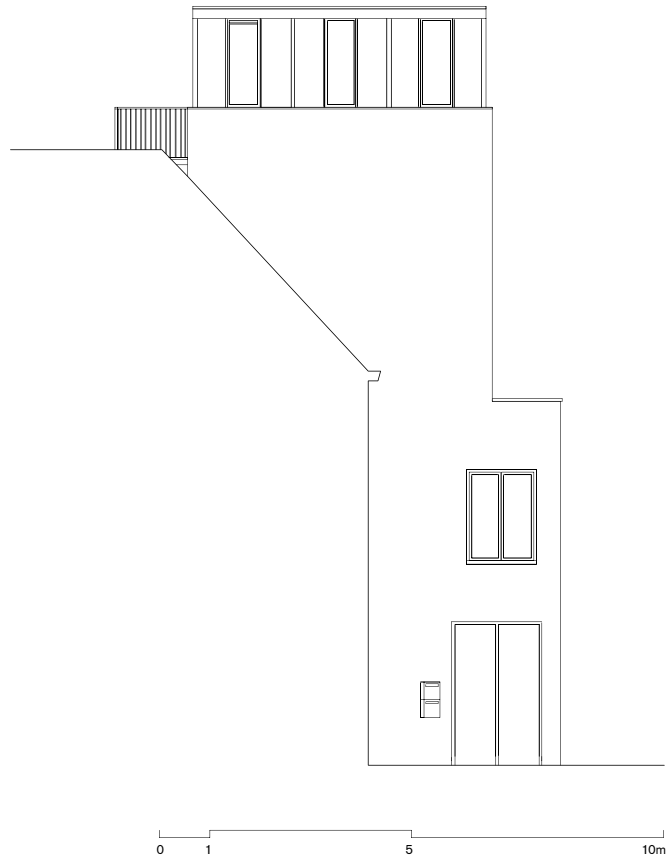


1 Entrance hall to apartments
2 Bicycle store
3 Communal stair to apartments 1 and 2
4 Service yard of shop
5 Stair to shop basement
6 Escape stair from shop
7 Entrance to apartment 1
8 Bedroom
9 Bathroom
10 Heating and washing machine
11 Entrance to apartment 2
12 Stair to apartment 2
13 Living and dining room
14 Storage
15 Bedroom
16 Bathroom
17 Heating and washing machine
18 Living and dining room

Entrance hall – CR

– HB





0 1 5 10m

— CR

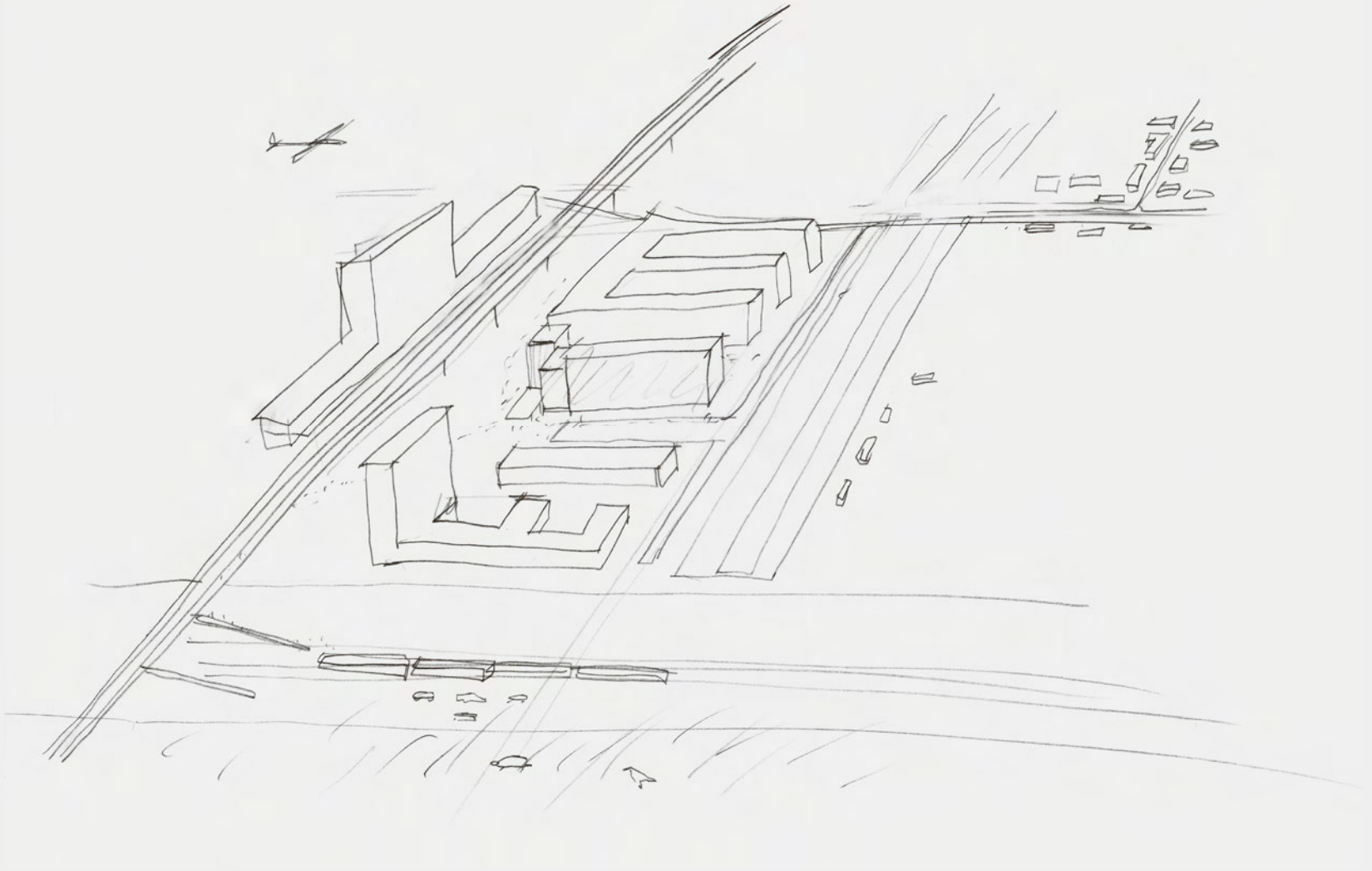
Hotel Pro Forma

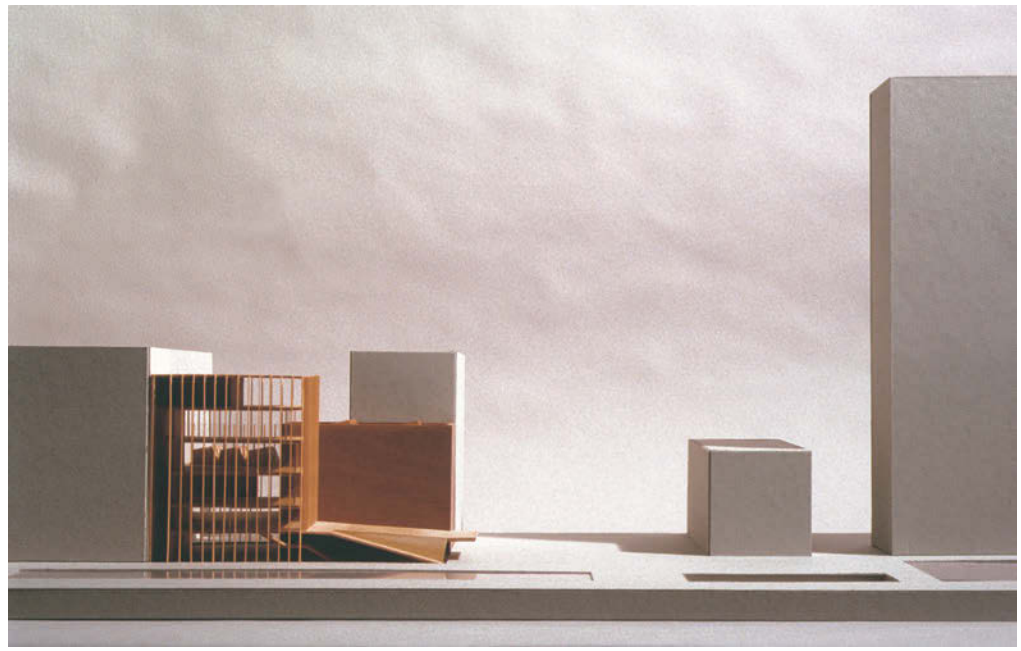
2000 Competition
Location: Copenhagen, Denmark
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, Matthew White
With thanks to John Glew for his advice

Hotel Pro Forma is an experimental Danish performance art group based in Copenhagen, with a creative practice that extends across theatre, opera and visual arts. The project was located at Armager, a peninsular that has been master planned as four districts for the expansion of Copenhagen. At the time of the project, a driverless, elevated metro had already been built, running from central Copenhagen across the unfilled landscape to a new station for the rapid rail link for southern Sweden, and then beyond. Close to the metro, a dense fabric had been planned (now under construction) to create an inner-city quality for the development. Ørestadt City, the district next to the railway station, was planned around a central square as a focus for the development as a whole. Hotel Pro Forma had secured a site with a significant position in the square, and was proposing an ambitious programme that would situate culture and creative business within Ørestadt from the outset. This programme required art spaces capable of housing both performance and visual arts, low-cost studios for small innovative media companies who would inform the digital art work of Hotel Pro Forma, a simple guesthouse for visiting artists, and a trattoria-style restaurant at street level where all the constituent groups and the public meet.

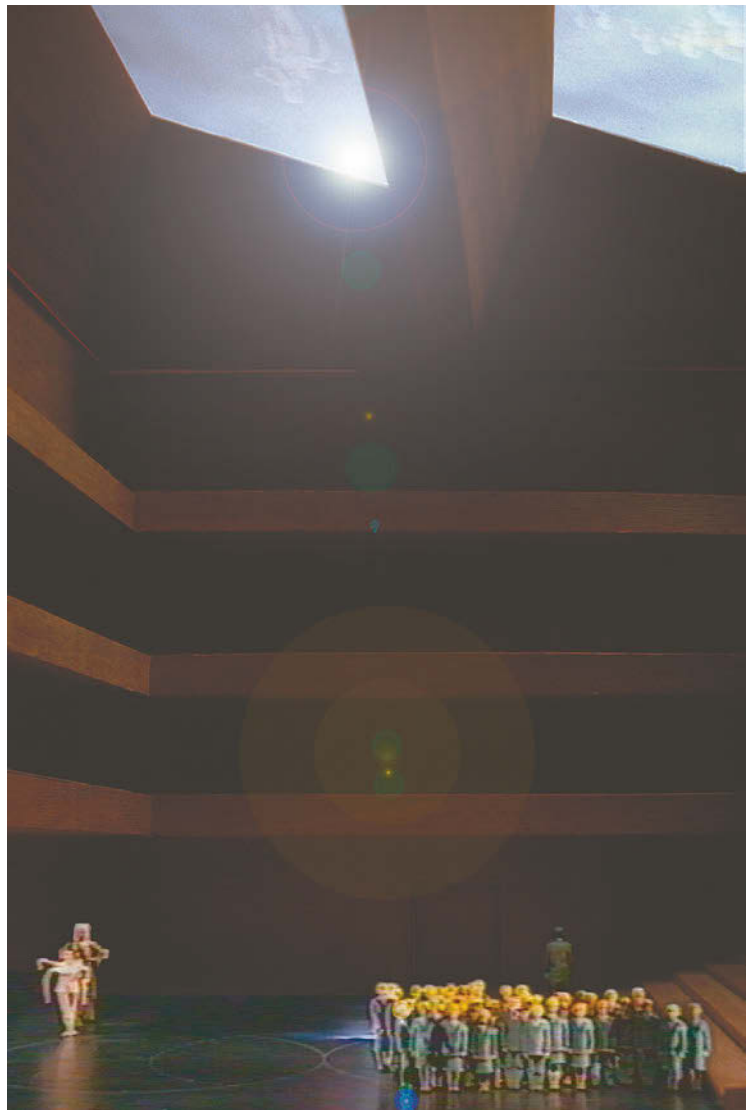
Although extensive, the programme proposed a building that was much smaller than the buildings of the master plan. Like Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum in New York, our design was for a building that was smaller and stranger than the buildings around it. The design consisted of two striking forms: a closed performance space, and an open loft tower for studios and guest house. Gold and bronze anodised curtain walling was proposed for the exterior to give a refined, but strange, monumentality while the interior would be raw concrete.

The ground floor of the building was transparent to the surroundings and provided a visually continuous space containing the trattoria, theatre box office, guest house reception and media studio along with places for people simply to sit and relax. A projecting canopy over the space provided a roof garden, close to the metro and connected to the square by a public stair. Guest house rooms and studios were located at the top of the building, with views to Armager and the city. Performance areas were inward looking and their interior configuration possessed a high level of ambiguity and openness to interpretation. Continuous balconies on several levels let the audience and cast be deployed in many different ways, and their imagery could be construed as an industrial space, for example, or a historic playhouse. Similarly, the rooflights that were necessary to provide daylight for exhibitions of painting or sculpture would also allow performances by daylight or moonlight.



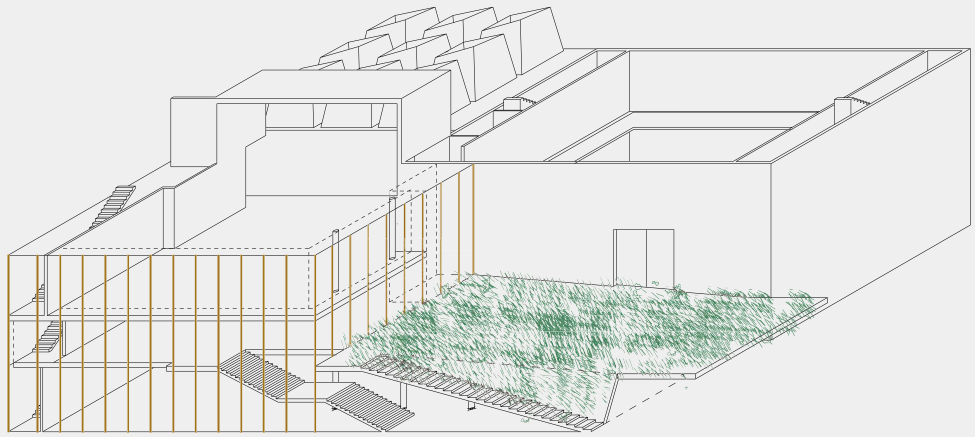


— DG

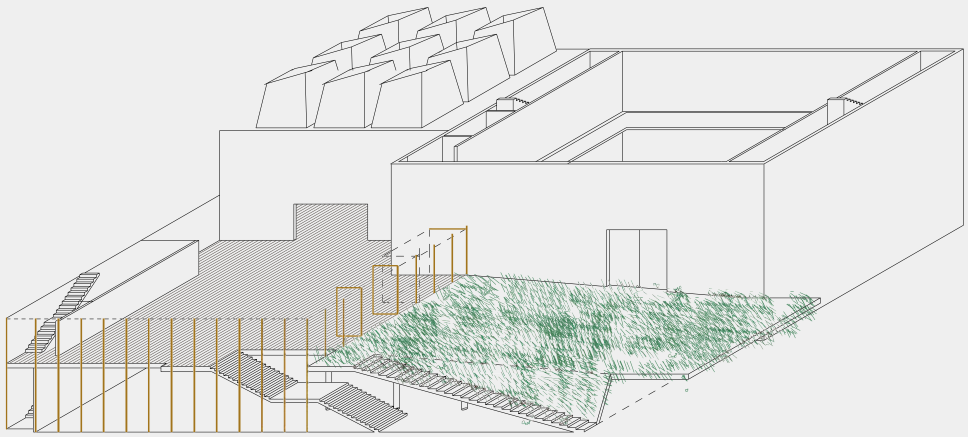


Performance space as theatre — DG

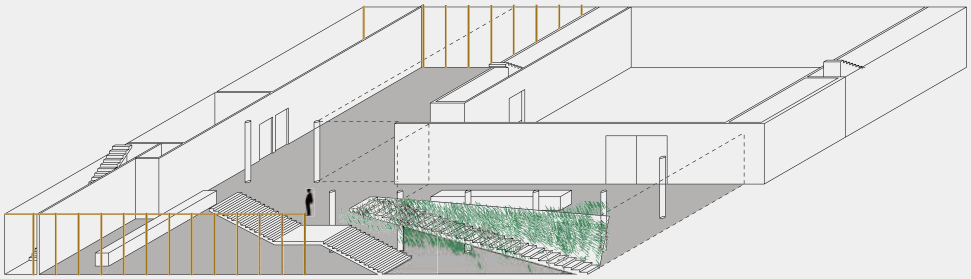
Performance space as gallery — DG



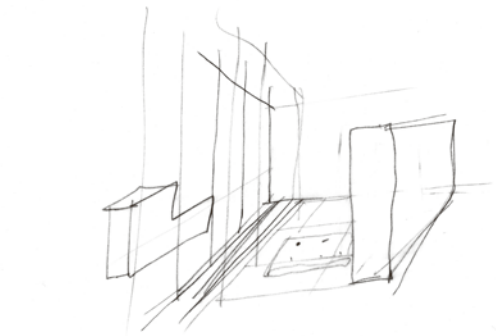
Second floor



First floor

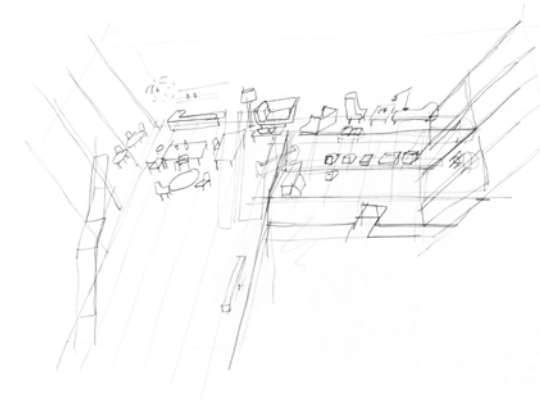


Ground floor

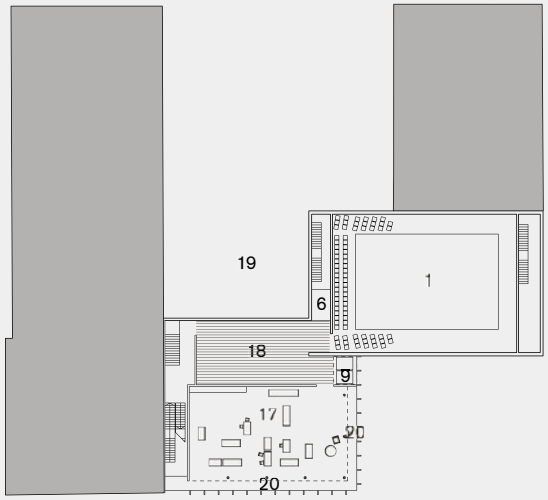


Fourth floor – TF

First floor – TF



Ground floor – TF



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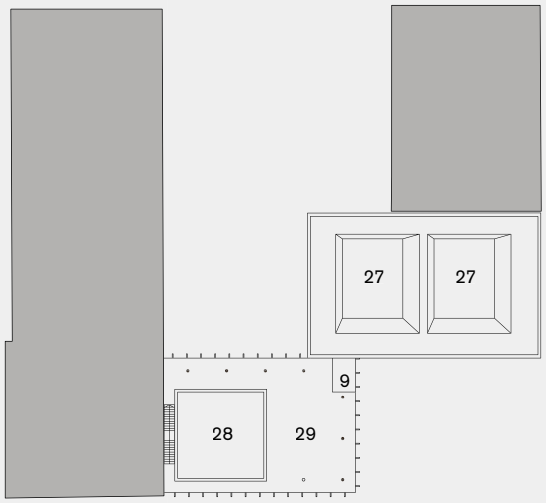
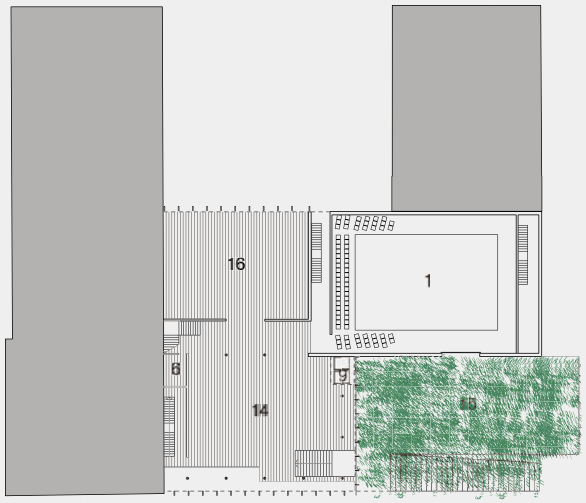


Fifth floor



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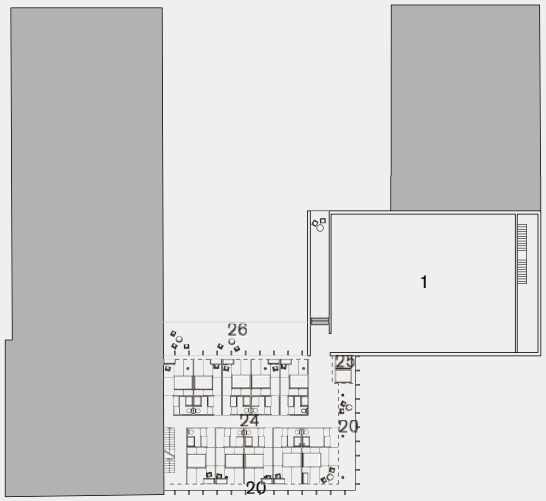
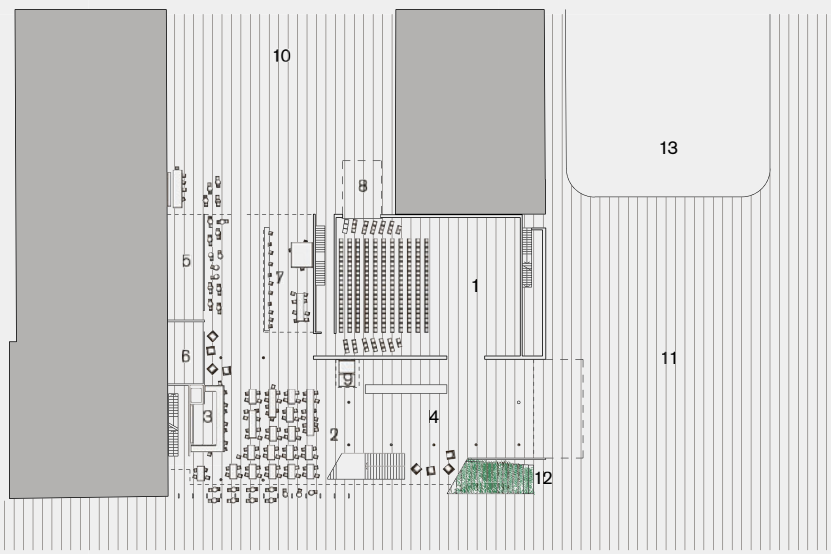
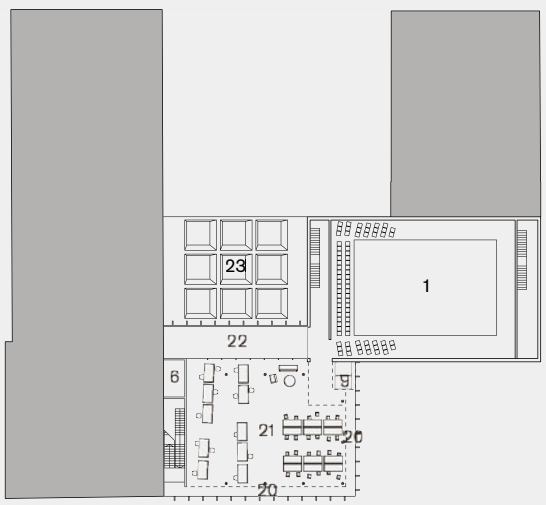


Fourth floor



Ground floor



Third floor

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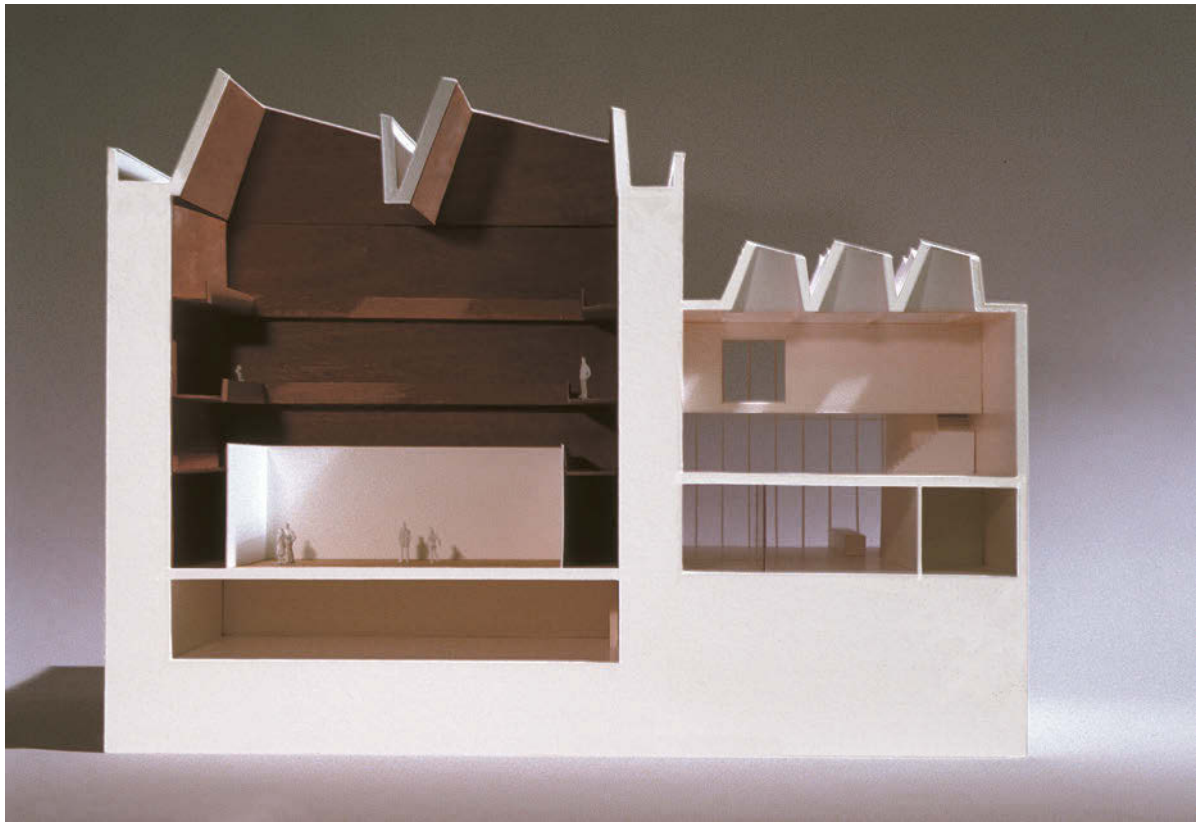
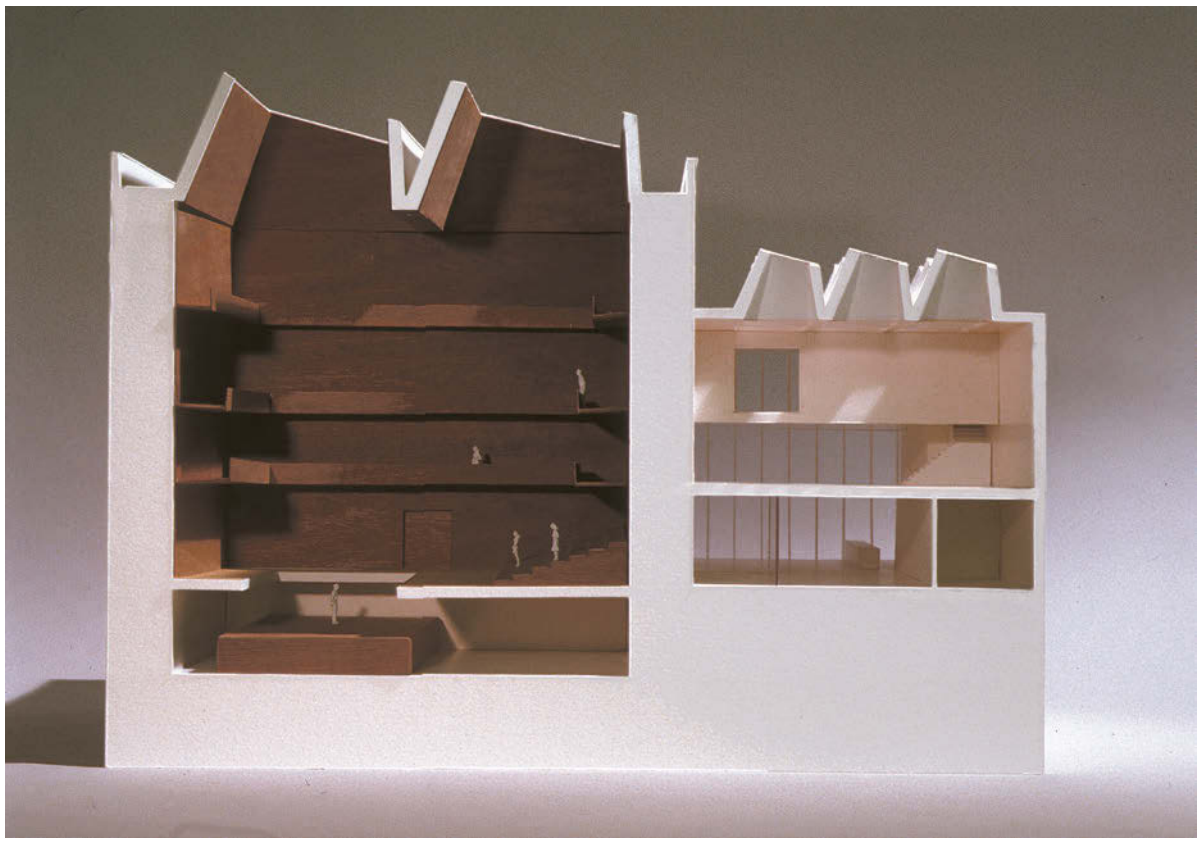




1 Performance space
2 Cafe
3 Bar
4 Crush/tickets
5 Research/media
6 WC
7 Cyber cafe
8 Loading bay
9 Glass lifts
10 Courtyard
11 City plaza
12 Grass steps to garden on canopy
13 Bus station
14 Lobby/lounge/theatre interval bar
15 Roof garden on canopy
16 Art gallery
17 Arts centre administration offices
18 Exhibition space in office entrance lobby
19 Void above gallery
20 Balcony
21 Office to let to creative businesses
22 Void and rooflight above lobby/ art space below
23 Gallery roof lights
24 Artists' hotel
25 Lift technical room
26 Hotel and theatre terrace
27 Rooflights over performance space
28 Technical room
29 Roof terrace/performance and exhibition space

— DG

Camden Arts Centre

2000 — 2004

Location: London, UK
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney,
Project Architect during construction:
Robert Romanis
Simon Jones, Nina Lundvall, Mel Hosp,
Matthew White

Camden Arts Centre is a publicly funded visual arts venue in north London. Despite its peripheral location, the quality of its programme of exhibitions and public education has made it an international destination. It occupies a former public library, standing on high land at the junction of two steeply inclined roads. One of these, Finchley Road, has changed from an originally quiet suburban boulevard to an urban highway. The non-stop traffic has destroyed small-scale business in the neighbourhood, and had rendered unusable the wild and beautiful open land that lay behind the building. Although designed in the 1890s, the library was constructed in phases up to the 1920s. Each phase has slight differences of detailing and style. Floors range from terrazzo to parquet and lino, every roof structure is unique, and every door and its handles are slightly different in detail. In the 1950s, an extension was added on the garden side in an entirely utilitarian style. When it became an arts centre in the 1960s, the building was used with only minor alterations. The first floor library rooms became galleries and drawing studios and the book storage rooms in the ground floor plinth became ceramic studios and offices. This ad-hoc quality, and the way that public art classes took place next to contemporary art exhibitions, had made the building significant and memorable for a large number of people. We had a strong sense of Camden Arts Centre as a collective artefact in which intelligent policy had made sense of contingency. We sought to continue that process in the modifications and additions that we made.

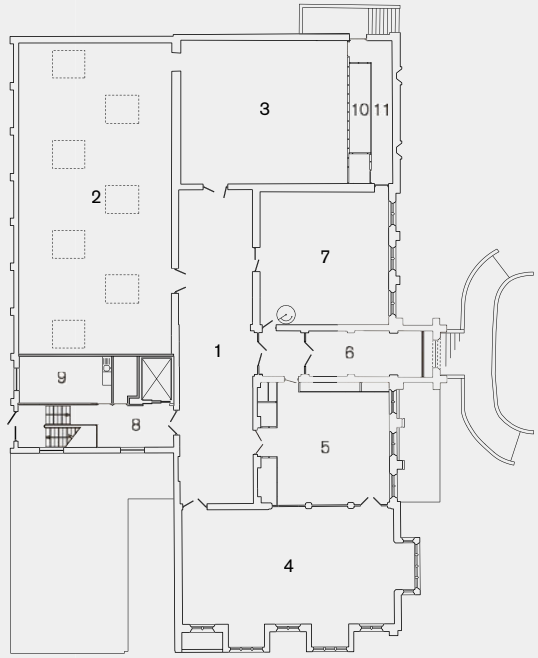
In the galleries, which were well known and liked by public and artists. we provided climate control, better daylight and display lighting, and more discreet escape routes without significantly altering the character of the spaces. In the ground floor, which was less coherent and known, we were more invasive. A public concourse, cut through the building, connects the street to the land behind. A new glazed portico identifies the accessible entrance in the street, and places the contents of the concourse – a window showing the activities in the ceramics studio, the bookshop, and reception desk – squarely in the public eye. At the end of the concourse, a new cafe building faces the open land behind the building. Here, design team artists MUF in collaboration with Camden Arts Centre gardener Julie Bixley, made an intriguing garden, with surfaces that replicate the floors of the former houses that occupied this part of the site. Between the garden and the highway we placed a glass screen that reduces traffic noise to tolerable levels and frames views of the garden and cafe for passing vehicles.

In style, the additions and alterations to the building are from the present time, relating to the existing architecture just by scale and alignment. Their additive nature shows that Camden Arts Centre remains open to change. The new spaces were designed primarily for public experience, and the bookshop, cafe and garden have become places of cultured sociability for the neighbourhood and the city as a whole.

– HB

Entrance lobby – HB

– DG



First floor

First floor

1 Central gallery
2 Gallery 1
3 Gallery 2
4 Gallery 3
5 Studio 1
6 Research library
7 Studio 2
8 Main stair
9 Staffroom
10 AV and chair store
11 Fire escape

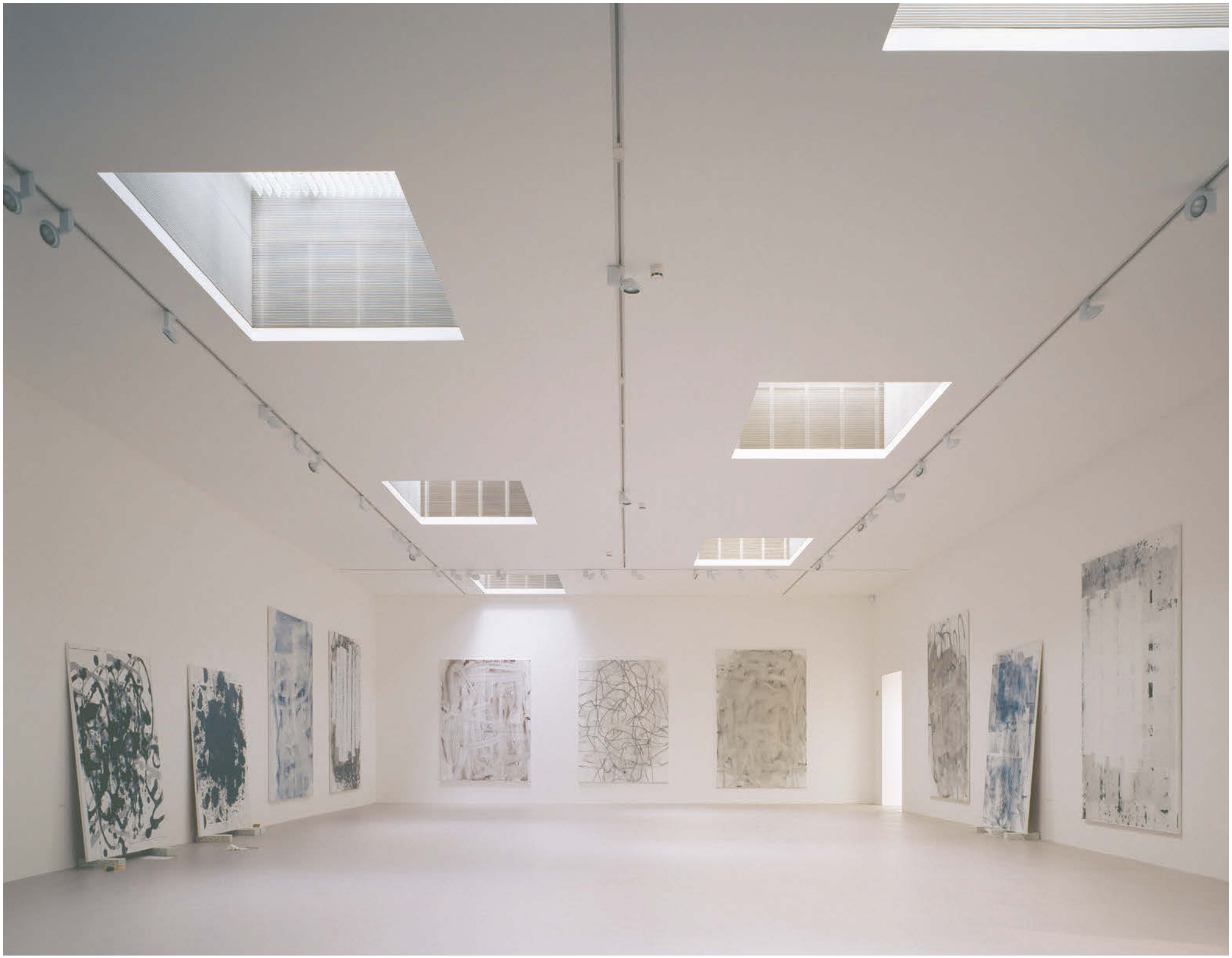
Ground floor

1 Entrance lobby
2 Bookshop and reception
3 Cafe
4 Garden terrace
5 Courtyard
6 Meeting room
7 Offices
8 Photocopying
9 Director's office
10 WC lobby and lockers
11 Book store
12 Cleaner's store
13 Ceramic studio
14 Glaze room
15 Kiln room
16 Workshop and store
17 Plant
18 Crypt space
19 Original stair used as part of the garden landscaping
20 Glass screen

Ground floor

Glass screen – DG

Cafe – HB



Gallery 1 – HB

1 Cafe
2 Offices
3 Gallery 3
4 Entrance
5 Central gallery
6 Studio 1
7 Reception/bookshop
8 Bookstore
9 Ceramics studio
10 Workshop
11 Gallery 2
12 Studio 2
13 Studio 1
14 Gallery 3

Gallery 1 – HB
Gallery 3 in its original form

Gallery 2 – HB

Gallery 1 with *that open space within*, Anya Gallaccio, 2008 – Camden Arts Centre

House for Two Artists

2002 — 2005

Location: London, UK
Tony Fretton, Jim Mckinney
Project Architects: David Owen and Matthew Barton
Karin Hepp, Simon Jones, Matthew White

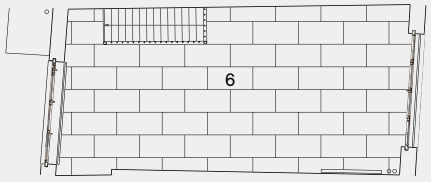
Our two clients are artists with a young family and are long-standing friends of our practice. Clerkenwell was developed in the 18th century as terraces of houses and workshops for small-scale, precision manufacturers. Our clients' building had been reconstructed in the early 20th century in a very utilitarian way. To manage the limited budget, as much of the existing fabric as possible was reused, and the design was orientated to strategic changes in plan, section and facade that would provide long term value. A series of possibilities was presented in model form to our clients, and they made extensive practical and conceptual contributions to the scheme. Everything in the scheme was very simply detailed and our clients constructed some parts themselves.

The existing basement that extends the length of the site was replanned as a workshop and a day lit painting studio for one of the artists. The top floor, with windows on both sides looking out over the city, is a studio for the other artist, who makes smaller photographic-based work. Between the two studios are the floors where they live and share the upbringing of their children. The focus of this part of the house is the ground floor living room, which opens to a small terrace behind the building for outside eating. This in turn leads to a more secluded upper terrace on the roof of the basement studio.

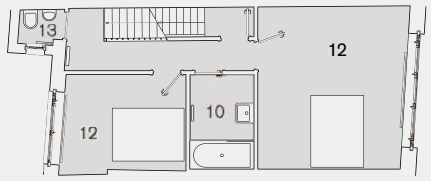
A series of modifications was made to the street facade to improve its performance and relationship to the terrace of houses in which it stands. Red, self-coloured render was applied to the facade, which our clients thinly overpainted in black to match the colour of the brickwork on the houses on either side. Composite aluminium and timber windows were installed with frame dimensions similar to the traditional windows of the houses on either side. Tall French windows in the top floor make it seem like an attic above the parapet line of the adjoining houses. The whole facade requires little or no maintenance, and although clearly of its time in aesthetics and purpose, has deep connections with its locale.


RALPH DAVIS Solicitors
unit

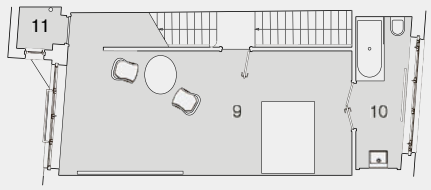
1 Entrance from street
2 Living room/kitchen
3 Lower terrace
4 Upper terrace
5 Rooflight
6 Studio
7 Studio and storage
8 Access to park
9 Bedroom/sitting room
10 Bathroom
11 Boiler room
12 Bedroom
13 WC



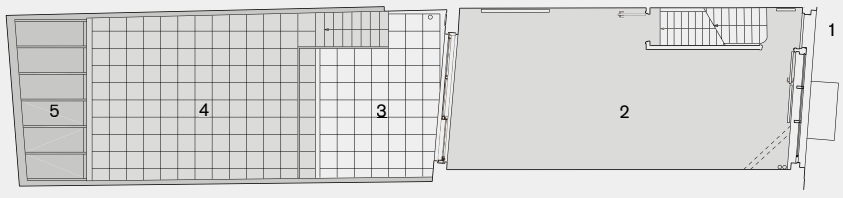
Third floor



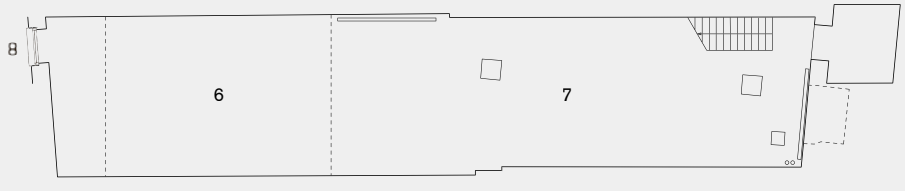
Second floor



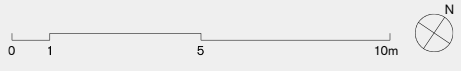
First floor



Ground floor

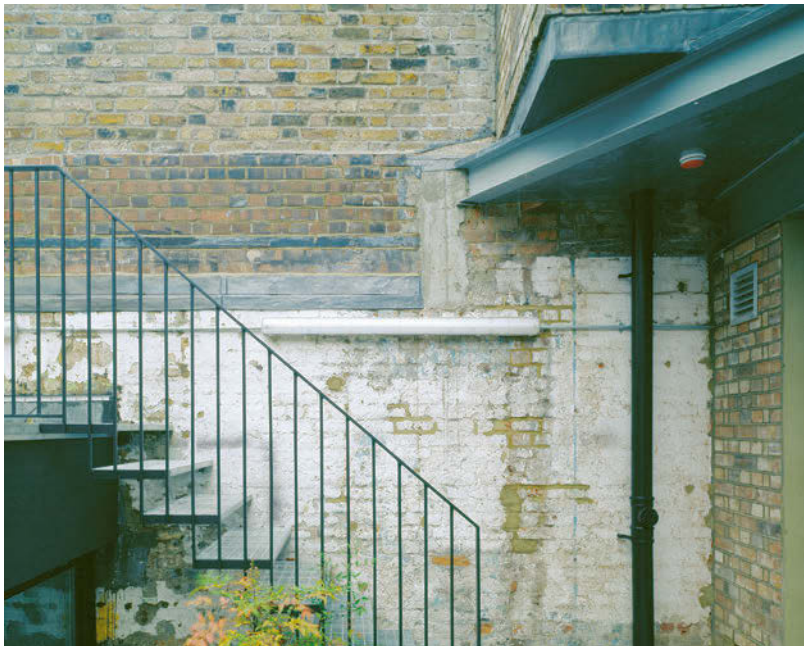


Basement



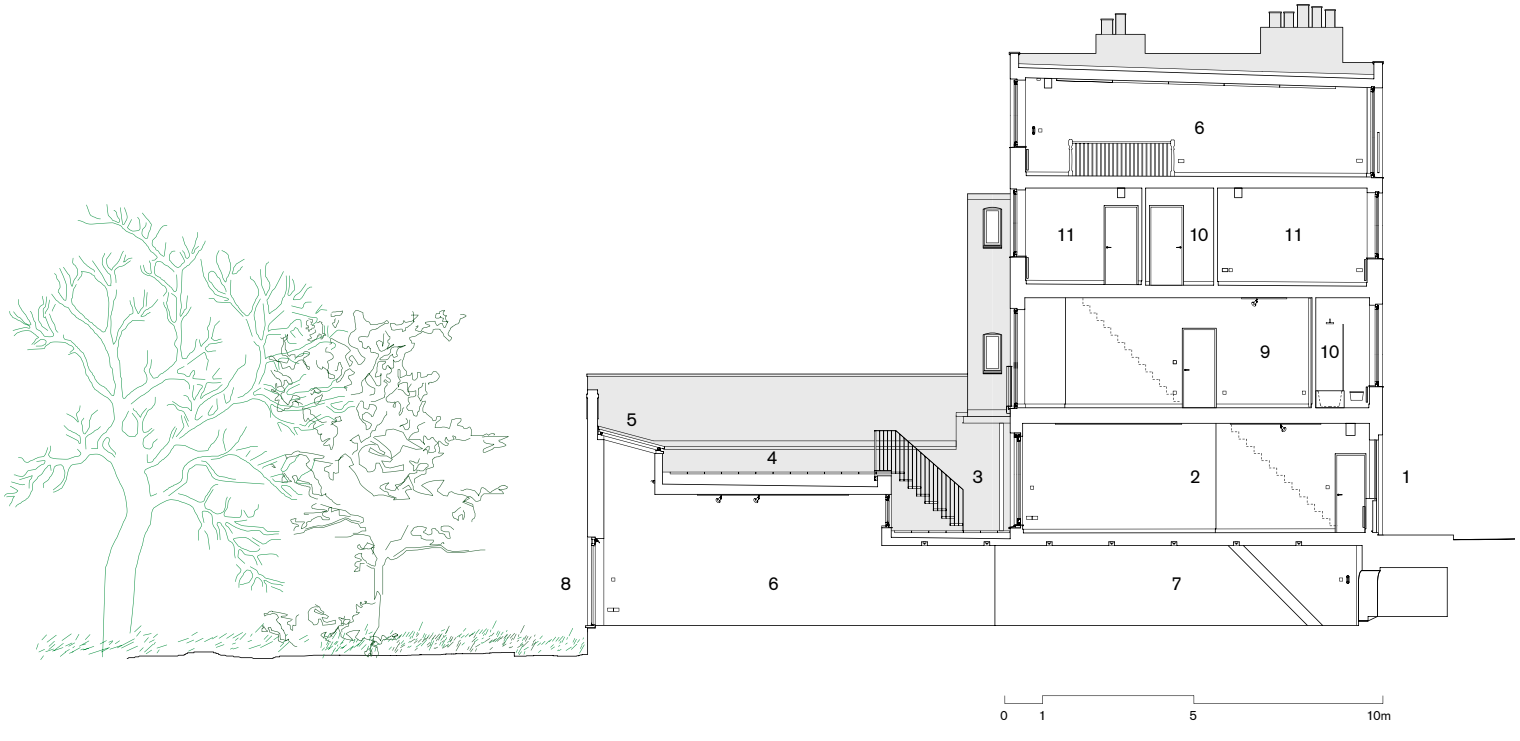
First floor bedroom – HB
Living room and kitchen – HB

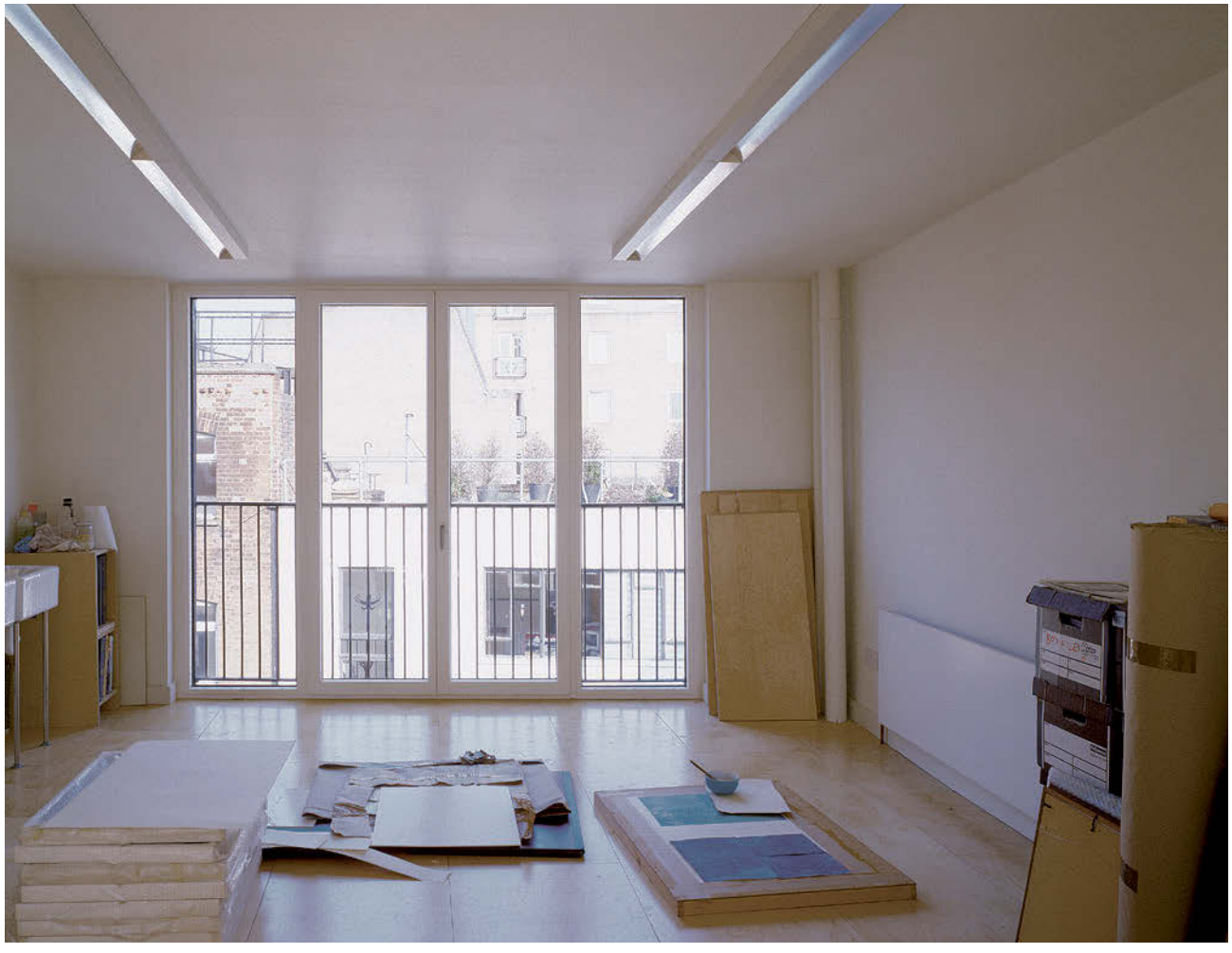
Kitchen – HB



—HB

1 Entrance from street
2 Living room/kitchen
3 Lower terrace
4 Upper terrace
5 Rooflight
6 Studio
7 Studio and storage
8 Access to park
9 Bedroom/sitting room
10 Bathroom
11 Bedroom





Third floor studio – HB
Basement studio – HB

Warsaw Embassy I

2003
—
2004

Competition
Location: Warsaw, Poland
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, Sandy Rendel, David Owen, Nina Lundvall, Simon Jones, Karin Hepp, Robert Romanis, Valerie Tse, Aureliusz Kowalczyk
Detailed Scheme: Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, David Owen, Steinthór Kári Kárason, Donald Matheson, Nina Lundvall, Aureliusz Kowalczyk, Matthew Barton, Marina Mitchell-Heggs

We won the project for a new ambassador's residence and chancellery in Warsaw in competition in 2003. In changing security conditions, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office halted the project and commissioned a new building from us in 2007 in a more secure location within the city.

The first project was located near Lazienkowski Park in a district of villas set in walled gardens. Across the street was a classical palace in extensive grounds. Adjacent was the Swedish embassy in a 19th century villa, with one facade facing the street and the other forming the east boundary of the embassy site. Each of the two new buildings of the embassy was based on a model with appropriate plans and high levels of conventional meaning. The residence was an abstract, neo-classical house combining elegance and domesticity, where formal events could co-exist with the daily life of the ambassador and family. The chancellery, as the workplace and public face of the embassy, was a refined office building in the tradition of the Uffizi in Florence and the Seagram Building in New York, faced in extensive high security glazing.

With the Swedish embassy, the buildings formed three sides of the entrance courtyard from the street. Simply paved and containing a few mature trees, the courtyard's character would be defined by activity. Cars arriving and setting down passengers disappeared through the facade of the chancellery down a ramp under a grass bank, an arrangement that was intentionally masked and theatrical. Vertical windows discreetly showed the life in the residence, while a long single window framed public events in the chancellery. Looking on from the sideline were the windows of the Swedish embassy.

Juxtaposition of different architectural styles and activities makes cities exciting, along with the tension between what can be seen of the interiors from the outside and what remains private. From the courtyard, the entrance foyer of the residence appeared simple and symmetrical. In the foyer, where guests gathered, a view opened up to the garden on one side and on the other to a wide stone stair leading them to the salon on the first floor.

Embassy salons must have a scale and configuration that suits their particular mixture of business and formal entertaining. Here it was a double height space that occupied almost the whole of the first floor of the residence. An ambassador's study at the head of the stair provided a place for private conversations, just before guests entered the salon itself. Couches and chairs around a fireplace and windows facing the courtyard gave a focal point to one part of the salon, and another was given by a furniture group that looked out across a balcony to the garden. At the southern end, 30 people could be seated in different configurations for dinner. Private living rooms and a garden were provided for the ambassador and family in the ground floor and bedrooms on the third floor, with guest rooms alongside for visitors and their retinues, and a more private suite on the floor below.

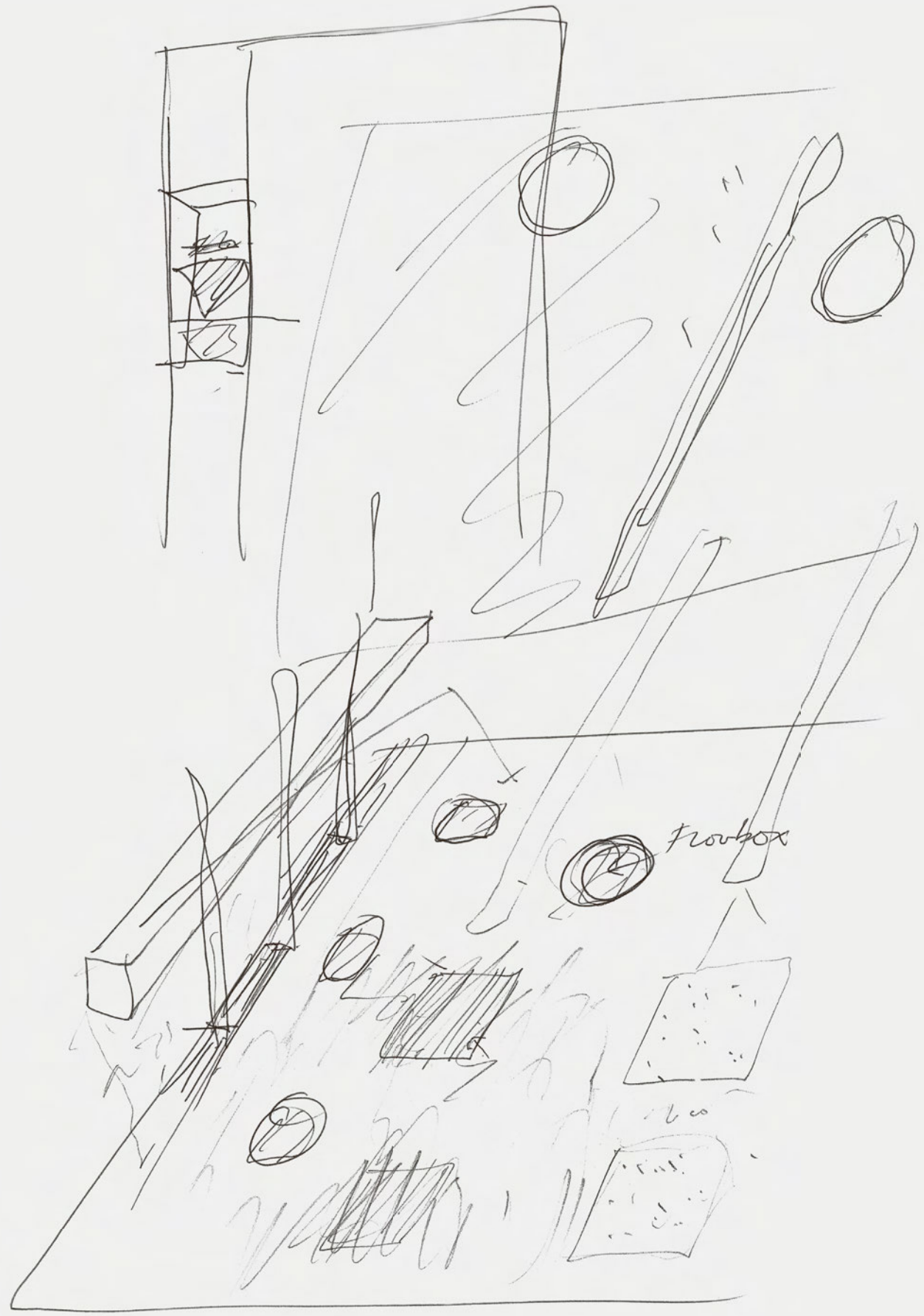
Privacy and publicness in embassy life are themes that carried through the design of both the residence and chancellery. Like the residence, the chancellery was entered through a stone-covered entrance hall where a cafe for chancellery staff and visitors was located on one side, while the other housed a stone staircase and glass lift that rose inside the glazed facade to a wide landing on the first floor. Here, looking out to the court and surrounding area, guests could assemble outside the room for public events. Like the salon in the residence, this room was two storeys in height and occupied the full width of the plan.

Office floors in the chancellery were designed as single, finely detailed rooms with different outlooks to the street or garden. Areas such as the medical suite that looked to the garden and had a reception area with children's playthings would provide a more human geography within the workspaces. The third floor where diplomatic business took place was set back as an attic and surrounded by a rock landscape seen through glass.

The chancellery was intended to be enigmatic, strange in scale by being the same height as the residence while having a facade usually seen on larger buildings. Its repeating elements were more robust to counter bomb blast, making it powerfully miniature. For the residence, we proposed a calm symmetry within which there were incidents and adjustments associated with domestic comfort. A visual and experiential scheme connected the material elements of the scheme from the scale of the facades to the small domestic details. Thick mullions in the facade and railings of the entrance gates were composed in relation to the scale of the trees in the courtyard and door frames that visitors would touch as they passed through the gatehouse and into the buildings. Outside the entrance of the residence was a grille to stamp snow off shoes. Inside was an absorbent mat, a seat to take off outdoor shoes and a rail for coats – all essential in the Warsaw winter. Visitors, free of their winter clothes, would see the garden covered in snow before ascending to the warmth and comfort of the first floor salon.

There, artworks from the government collection were displayed alongside furniture accumulated by successive ambassadors over 200 years. Mid-20th century silverware and Chinese lacquer cabinets stood beside chairs that were originally a gift in the mid 18th century and were replicated one by one as they wore out.

These objects, which came into being through the creative conviction of the artists who designed them, had acquired wider meanings over time and were open to further interpretation in the future. Our expectation was for the scheme we had designed to exist in a similar way. It is this ability of objects made by creative practice to be a vehicle for the imagination of others that is their distinguishing and most heartening characteristic.



A visual and experiential scheme connected the material elements of the scheme from the scale of the facades to the small domestic details – TF

Ground floor

Gatehouse

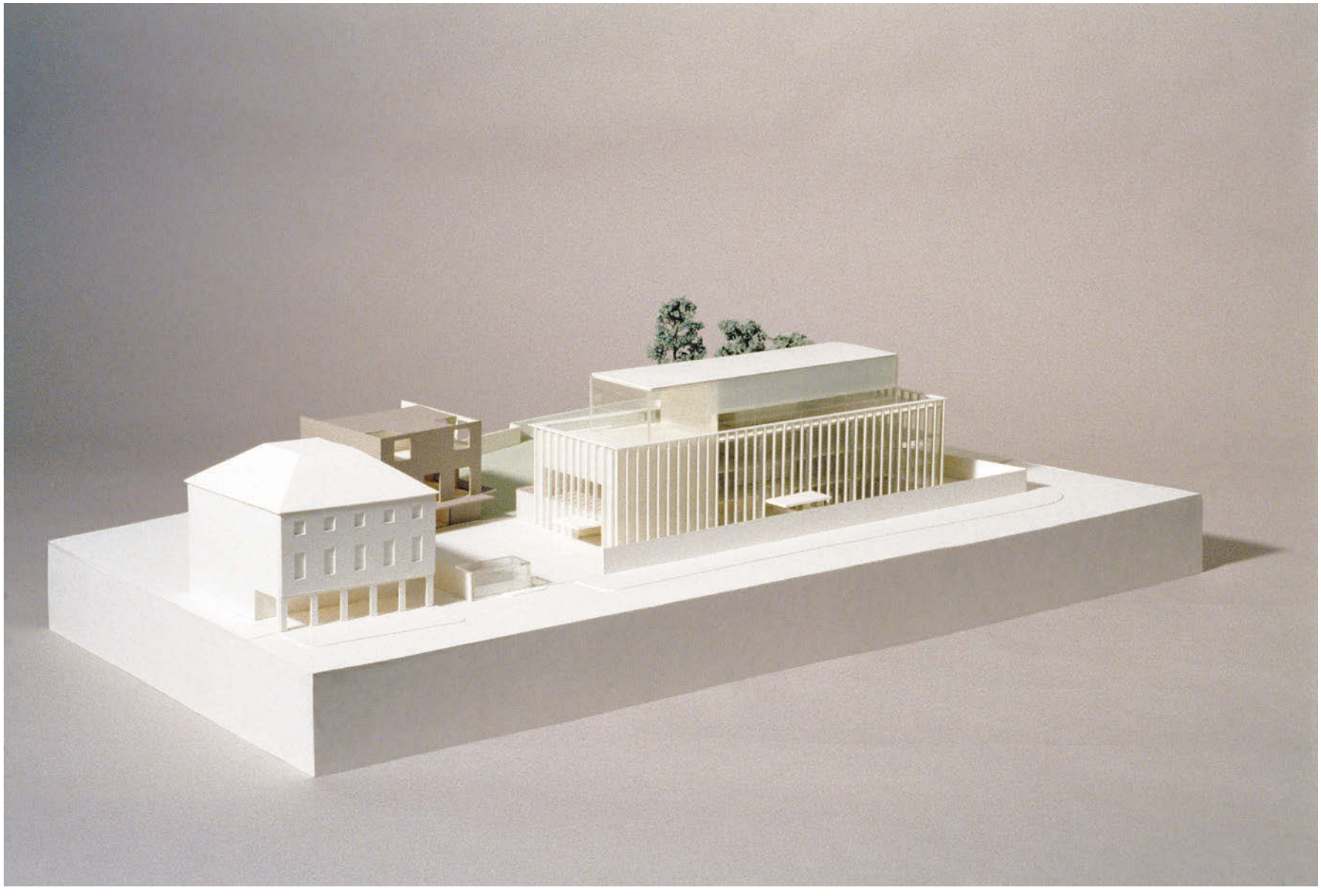
1 Site entrance

Embassy

2 Forecourt
3 Main entrance
4 Public reception
5 Meet & greet room
6 Restaurant
7 Kitchen
8 Court
9 Consular & visa entrance
10 Reception
11 Offices
12 Carpark entrance

Residence

13 Entrance lobby
14 Entrance hall
15 Private sitting room
16 Private dining room
17 Private kitchen
18 Private garden
19 Staff entrance court
20 Main garden



—DG

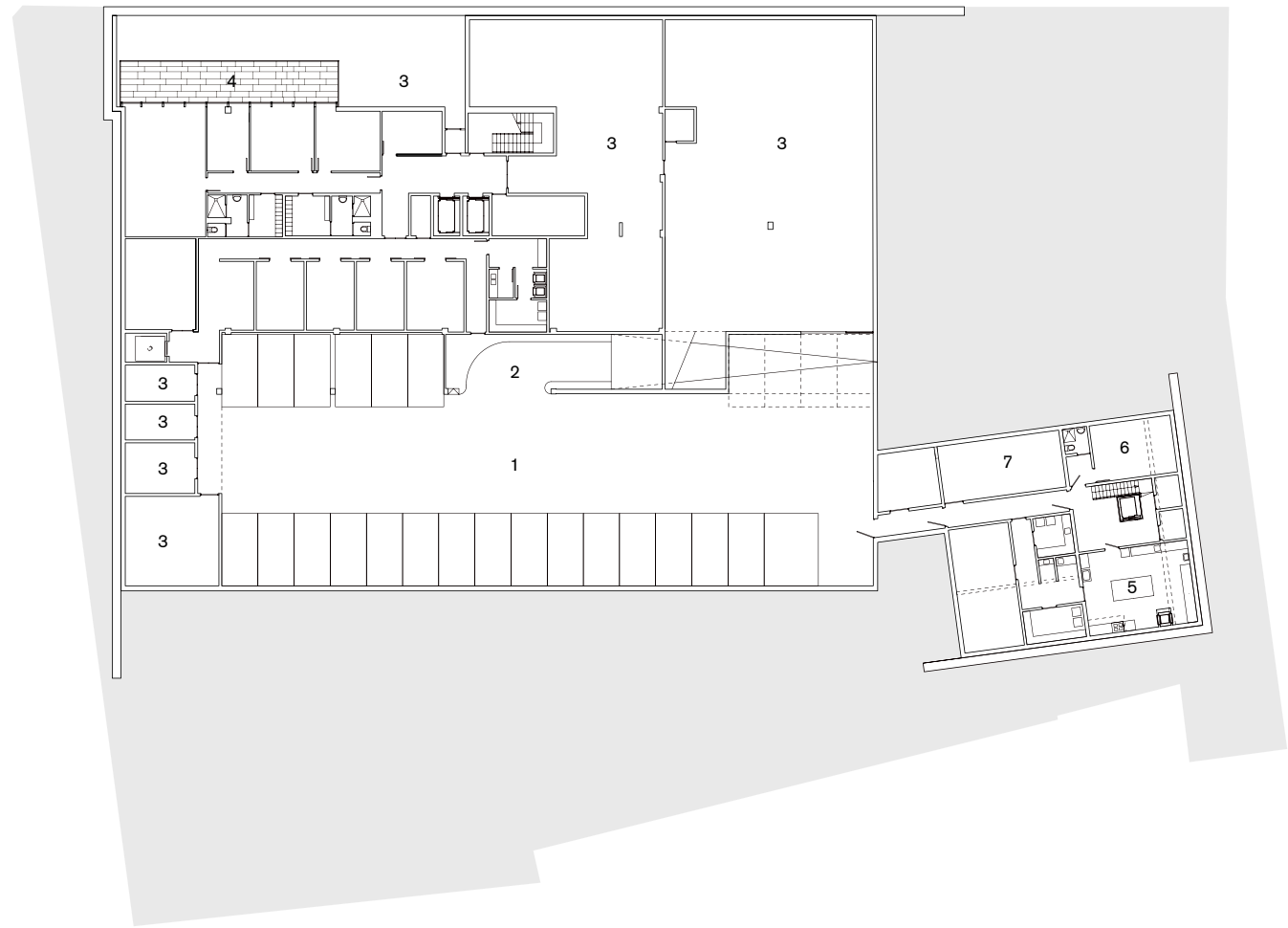
First floor

Embassy

1 Ante room
2 Public function room
3 Public library
4 Public meeting rooms
5 Servery
6 Offices

Residence

7 Drawing room
8 Dining room
9 Balcony
10 Study
11 Servery



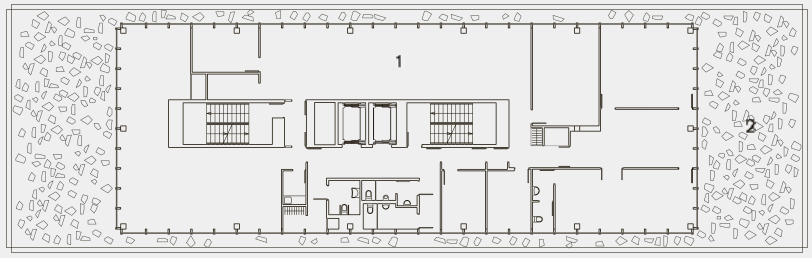
Basement

Embassy

1 Carpark
2 Ramp
3 Plant
4 Court

Residence

5 Kitchen
6 Staff room
7 Plant



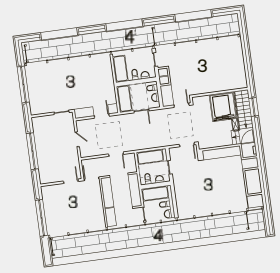
Third floor

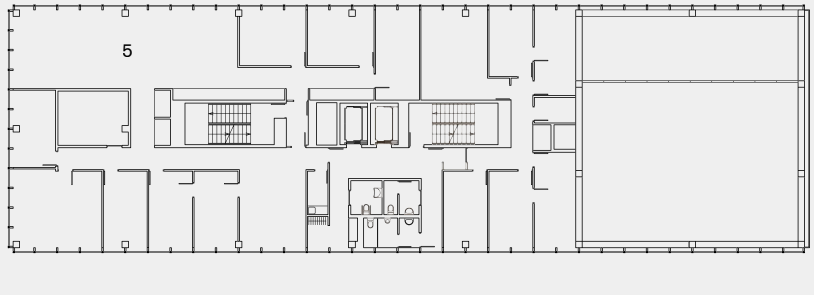
Embassy

1 Offices
2 Stone garden

Residence

3 Bedroom
4 Terrace





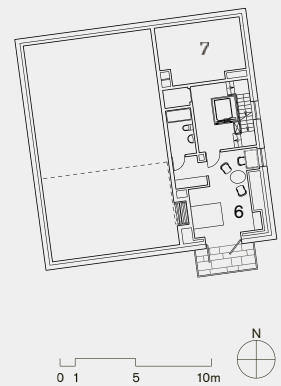
Second floor

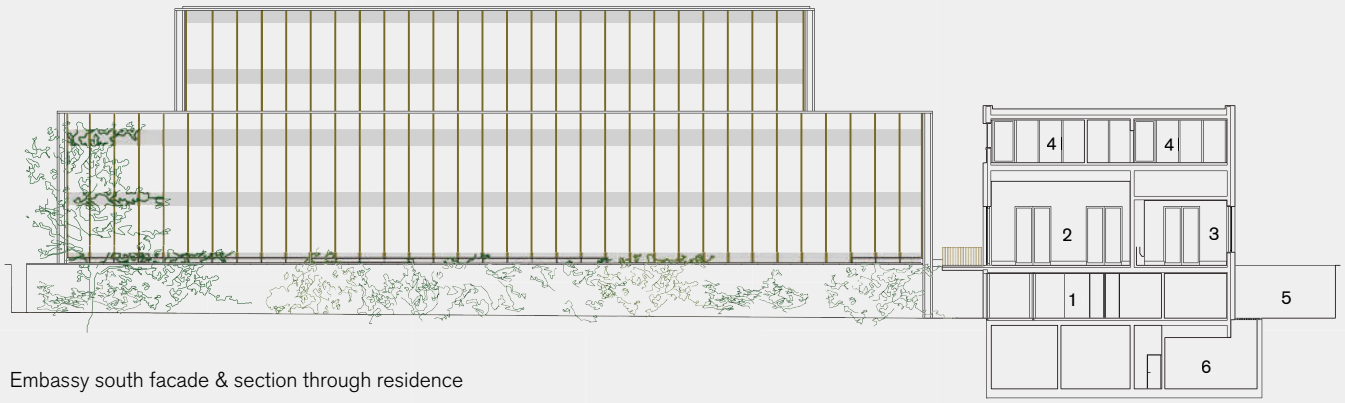
Residence

5 Offices

Embassy

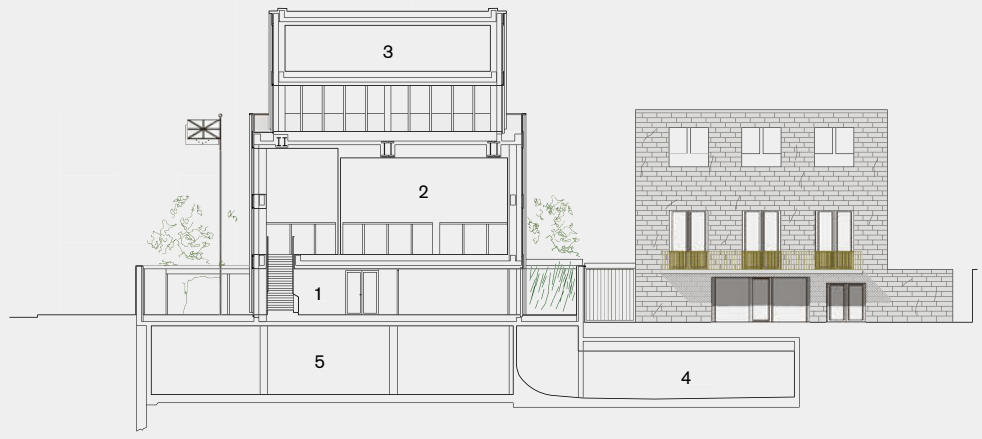
6 Bedroom
7 Plant





Embassy south facade & section through residence

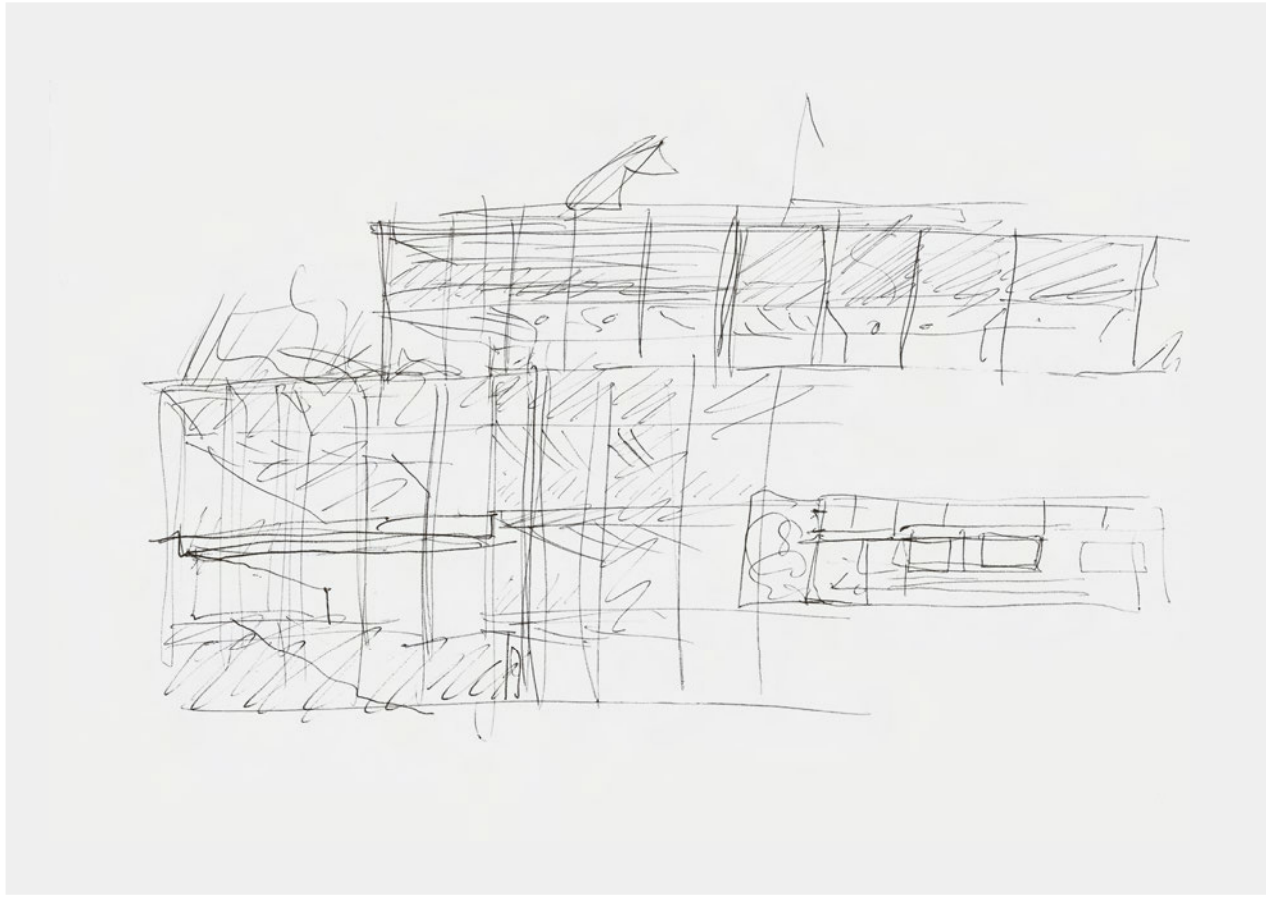
1 Entrance hall
2 Drawing room
3 Main study
4 Bedrooms
5 Staff entrance court
6 Kitchen

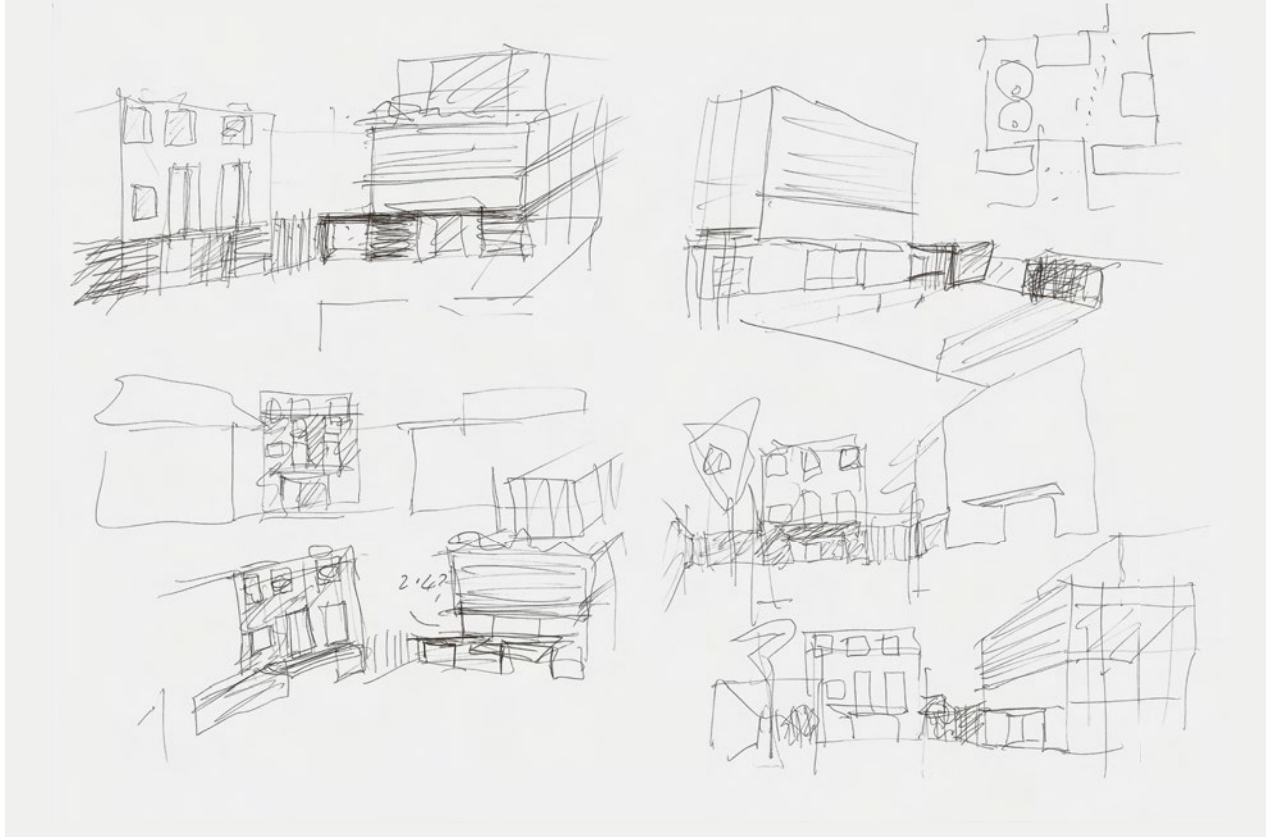


Residence west facade & section through embassy

1 Main entrance hall
2 Exhibition space
3 Plant
4 Parking
5 Stores

— TF





Kapoor House

2004 — 2008

Location: London, UK
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney
Project Architect: Sandy Rendel
Nina Lundvall, Don Matheson, Guy Derwent, Michael Lee, Simon Jones, Max Lacey, Martin Nässén, Piram Banpabutr

The house occupies an intriguingly long and narrow site in Chelsea, beginning at the main street as the ground floor of an apartment building, continuing between tall windowless walls, and ending in a paved court of houses. For our clients, the attraction of the site was its capacity to provide a long, flowing space on the ground floor that could combine family living, entertaining and the display of art. In our design this space is articulated into places with different characters connected by shifting lines of sight and continuities of detail. Throughout the house, daylight is introduced from different directions and sustained by surfaces with different degrees of reflection: lightly polished stone, lacquer, glass and polished stainless steel.

The entrances to the house and the garage are placed on either side of the existing entrance to the apartment building. Diffused daylight comes into the entrance hall through etched glass windows. As the hall leads to the living room there is a large cupboard for coats and shoes, space for a couch and artworks and a stair down to guest and play rooms in the basement. The floor of the entrance is of Hopton Wood, a honey-coloured stone that is the stuff of classic modern sculpture, and which continues throughout the ground floor of the house. In the entrance hall, two discontinuous lines of Mandale stone run longwise in the floor, grey in colour and containing fossils. A long, illuminated recess in the ceiling continues the composition, and both ceiling and floor slope gently downwards through a glass door leading to the rest of the house.

Beyond the door, the space opens to the full width of the site, shaped by a glass-enclosed courtyard into a discreetly visible kitchen and a dining area that is also day lit from above. At that point, a few steps lead down to a tall and extensive living room and a stair of solid Hopton Wood stone extends up to the first floor. At the end of the living room, sliding windows open to the garden, and a glazed corridor filled with bookcases runs along the side of the garden to the parental bedroom. Stairs in the corridor take the level of the bedroom up above the garden, to which it opens as a pavilion. Below the bedroom are the bathroom and dressing room, lit by clerestory windows and lined with reflective surfaces.

At the top of the stairs to the first floor is a courtyard with a glass floor that provides daylight to the dining room below. To one side of the court a library opens up, and on the other are children's rooms that look away from the courtyard to the garden and the neighbourhood at the back of the site.

The house is a magical interior, a contemporary invented space in which images from today are mixed with fleeting images of classical China and 18th century England. It is a place with only a discreet presence in the surrounding streets, and is part of the city only through the experience of those invited to enter.

—HB

Rear entrance – HB
Garden from rear first floor bedroom – HB

Front elevation

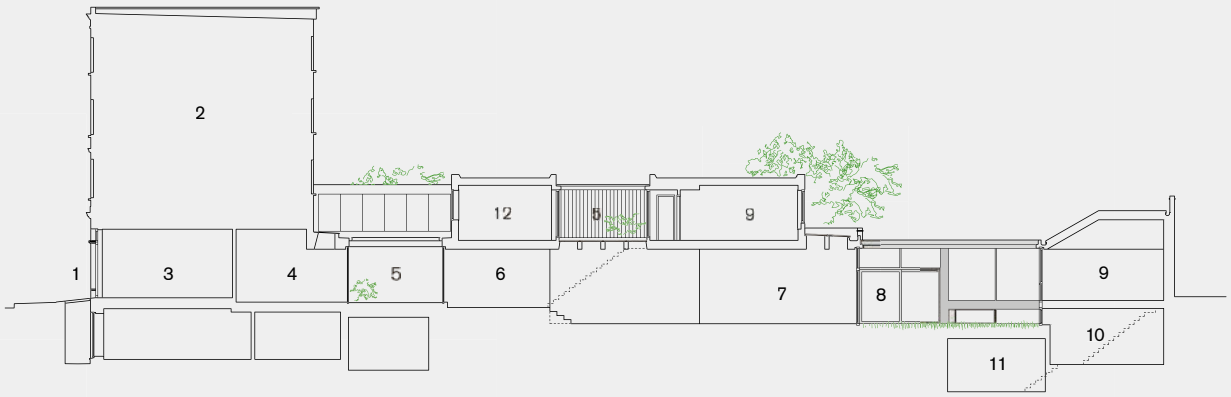
1 Garage
2 Entrance to apartments above
3 Entrance from street

Short section

0 1 5 10m

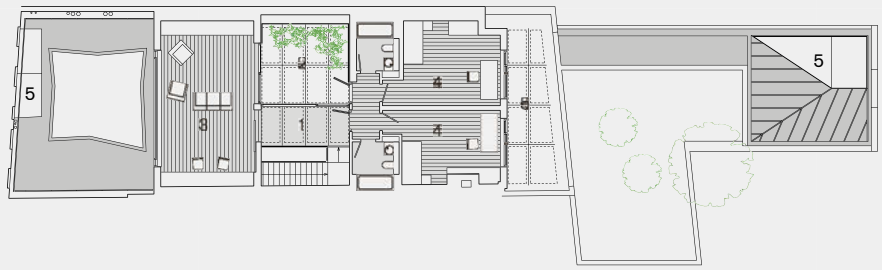
1 Courtyard
2 Spa
3 Storage

– HB



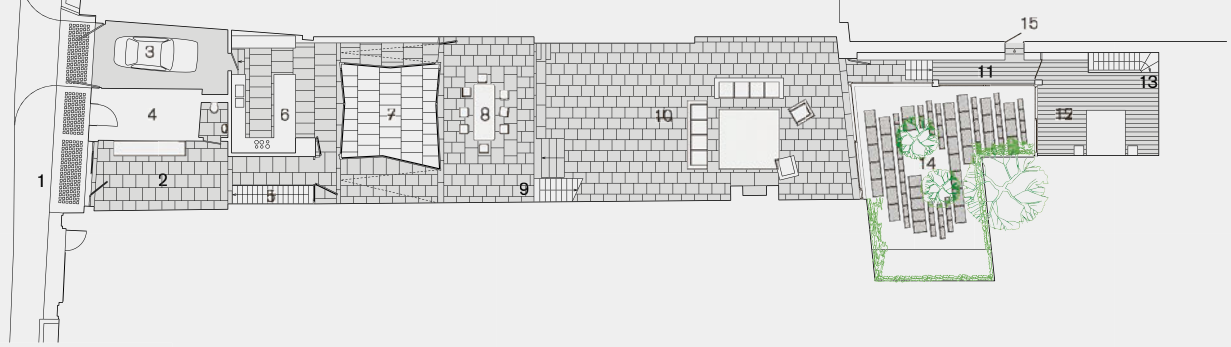
Long section

1 Main entrance from street
2 Apartment building above
3 Garage
4 Kitchen
5 Courtyard
6 Dining room
7 Living room
8 Garden
9 Bedroom
10 Dressing room
11 Bathroom
12 Sitting room/study



First floor

1 Glass landing
2 Glass floor to courtyard
3 Sitting room/study
4 Bedroom
5 Rooflight



Ground floor

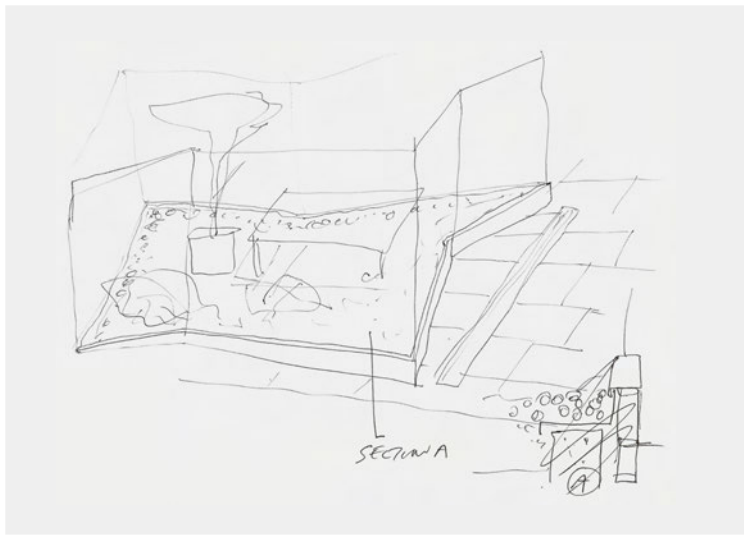
1 Main entrance from street
2 Entrance hall
3 Garage
4 Entrance from street to apartments above
5 Stair to front basement
6 Kitchen
7 Courtyard
8 Dining room
9 Stair to first floor
10 Living room
11 Library link
12 Master bedroom
13 Stair to rear basement
14 Garden
15 Rear entrance

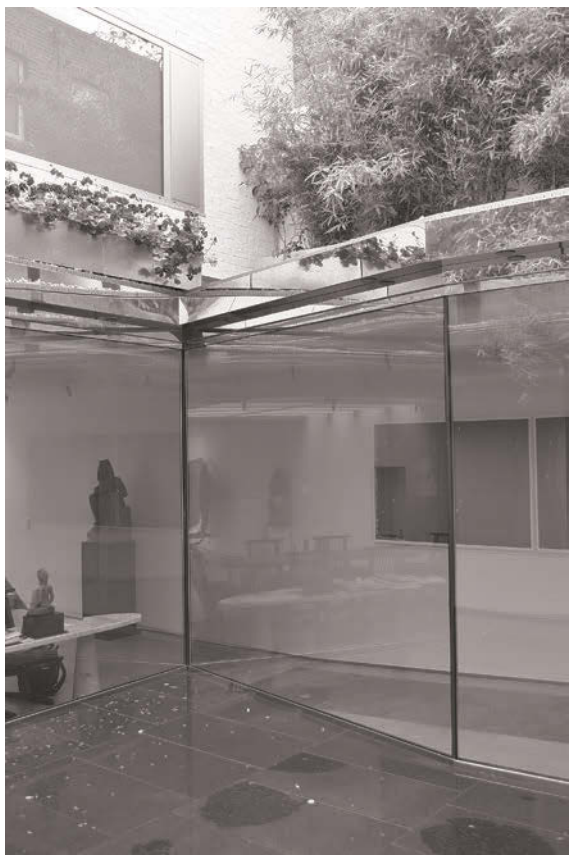
Front basement

Rear basement

1 Bedroom
2 Bathroom
3 Lightwell
4 Utility room
5 Plant room
6 Storage
7 Spa
8 Master dressing room
9 Master bathroom

Entrance hall – HB



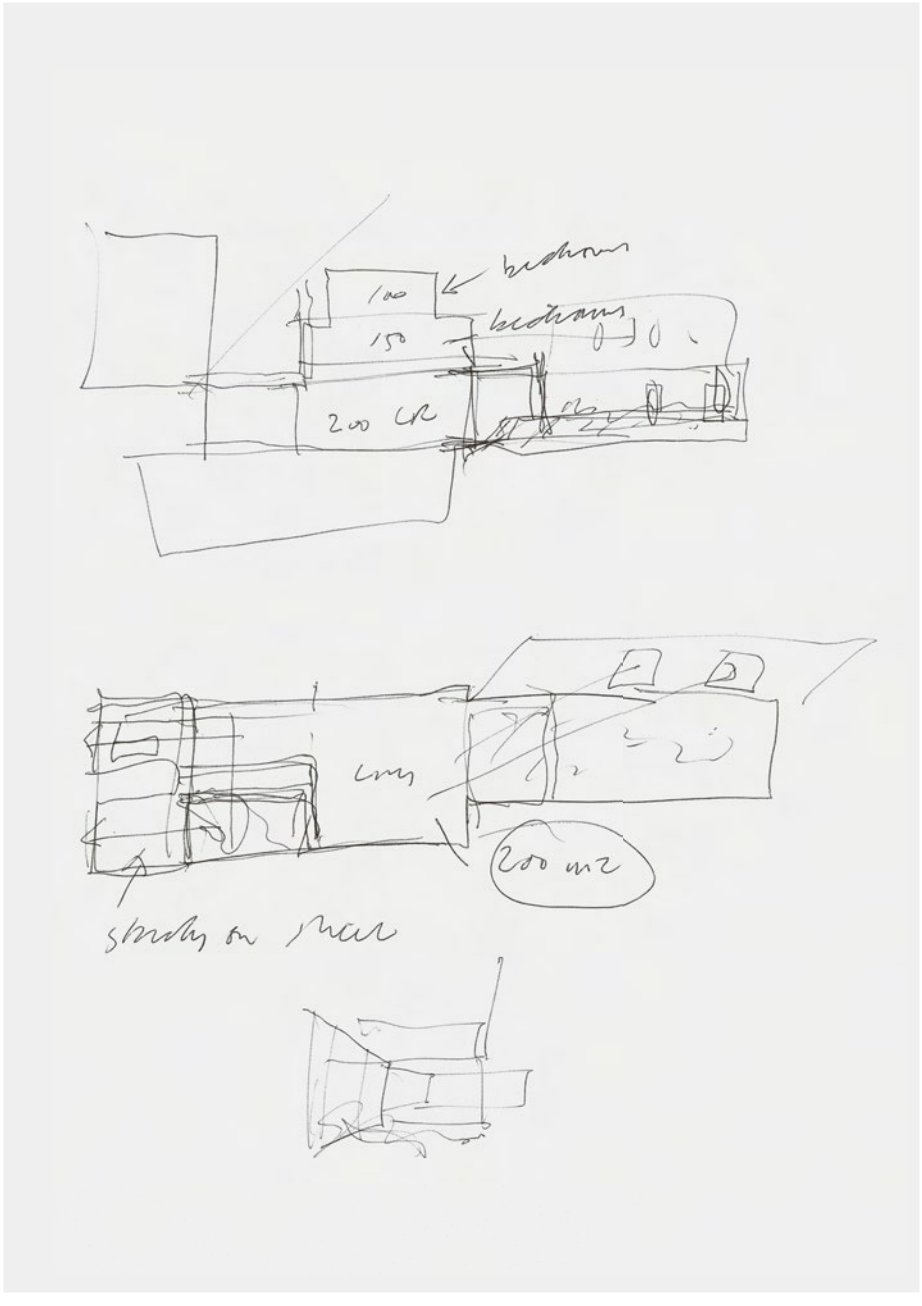


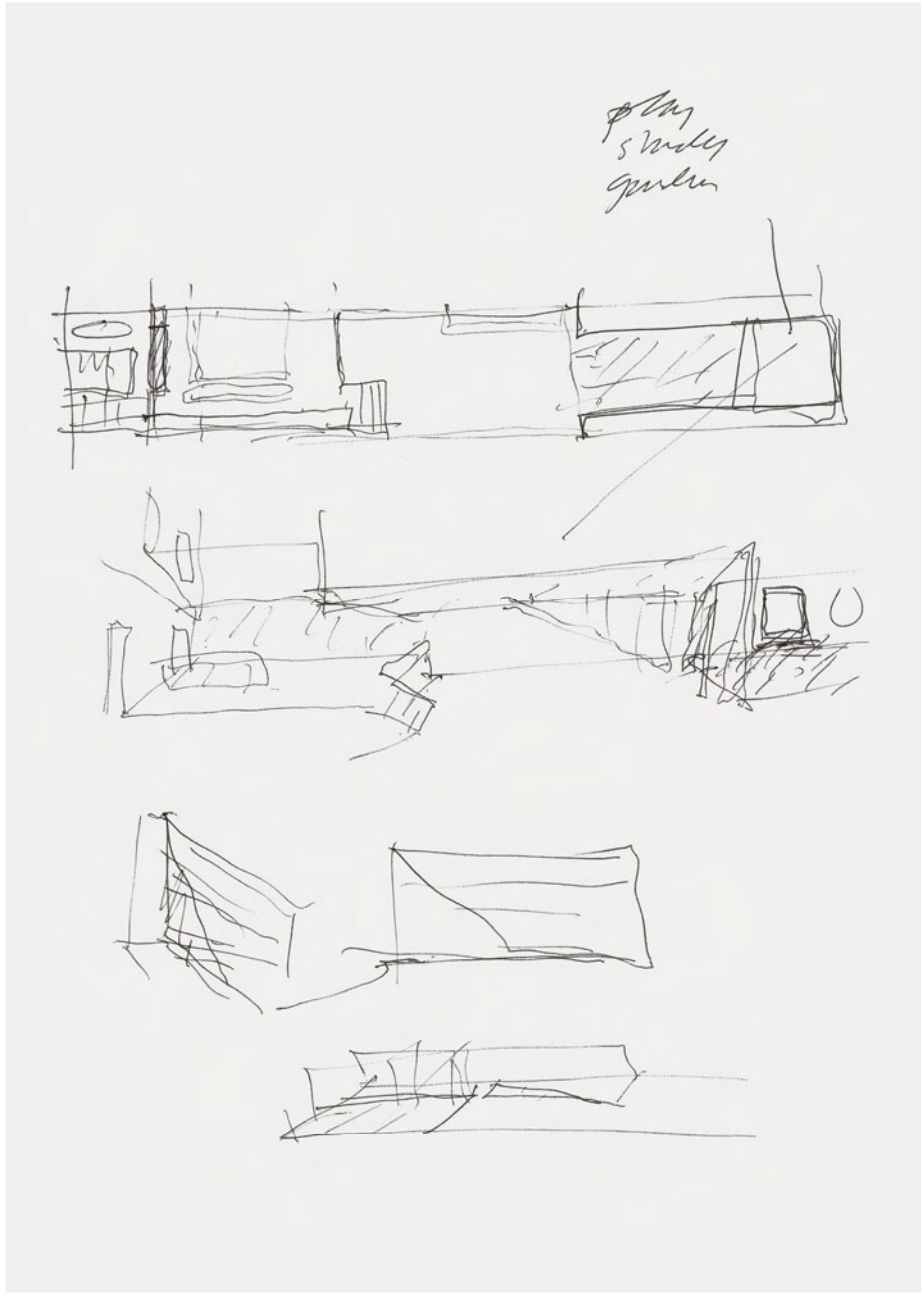
Courtyard – TFA/SR

– TF

Master bedroom – TFA/SR

View to first floor sitting room/study and courtyard – HB





— TF

— TFA/SR

— TFA/SR

Tietgens Ærgrelse

2004
—
2010

Location: Frederiksgade Square, Copenhagen, Denmark
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, Sandy Rendel
Project Architects: Chris Snow and Donald Matheson
David Owen, Clemens Nuyken, Annika Rabi, Guy Derwent, Michael Lee, Martin Nässén, Nina Lundvall, Gàbor Zomdor

In 1894, the industrialist, financier and developer C. F. Tietgen contracted businessman and architect Ferdinand Meldahl to complete the Frederiks Kirke, or the Marble Church as it has become known, which had been abandoned since 1770, and to realise a square of apartments, Frederiksgade, around it. Meldahl carried out no design himself. Albert Jensen, an architect in his office, completed the Marble Church according to designs previously made by Johan Zwingmanns, while Meldahl gave the apartments to architects Johan Schroder, Henrik Hagemann, Frederik Blichfeldt, Caspar Leuning Borch and Valdemar Ingemann.

These works were intended to complete Copenhagen's Frederiksstaden district, which had been initiated in 1749 by King Frederick V with four palaces, designed by court architect Niels Eigtved in the Rococo style, forming an octagonal plaza. Tietgen, however, was not able to acquire all the land for Frederiksgade, and the north-east corner of the development remained incomplete, with its existing buildings and open land unaltered. This state of affairs acquired its own legitimacy in Copenhagen popular culture and became known as Tietgens Ærgrelse, or Tietgen's agony. It was reactivated by the Danish architectural foundation Realia that purchased part of Tietgens Ærgrelse. Realia commissioned us to design a building in the style of the present time that would complete the square and resolve the difference between Meldahl's apartments and the buildings on Tietgens Ærgrelse.

Our design was based on stylistic, social and material facts that we observed in the location. In the original part of Frederiksstaden, Eigtved's four palaces are the architectural statement. In Frederiksgade, however, it is the church that is the statement and the apartments are just its setting. Although by no means of the same quality as the original Rococo architecture of Frederiksstaden, the apartments possess the underlying strength of 19th century domestic classicism, a style that gave many European cities formal coherence and habitability while being able to handle contingencies in the location and programme.

In Frederiksgade, the classical apparatus of a plinth, middle and cornice, pavilions at the centre and ends, plus surface modulation by pilasters, changes of plane, balconies and ornamentation, gives a robustness that has easily dealt with alteration to detail over time and in use. In our view, this style still had utility and the capacity to be rigorously modified to address the issues of the project and the present time.

In the building we realised on Tietgens Ærgrelse, the facade facing the church is the same width and height as the pavilion at the end of the range of apartments opposite it. Like the pavilion, it is divided into three bays by pilasters. But as a building of the modern era, its parts are functional as well as decorative, so that the pilasters are the structure holding up the building, while the spaces between them are filled windows or loggias. Together, the new building and the pavilion form a symmetrical pair, and their longer side facades frame the view of the church from Store Kongensgade, as surely was envisaged in original layout.

On its long facade, the new building engages in a simple, direct comparison with the other. Ornament is omitted, and projections are increased in depth to compensate. Horizontal emphasis is allowed to develop in the windows bringing them closer to the architecture of the modern movement. Windows are larger in size, revealing interior life to the district and the district to the interior. In its plainness, the new building acts as a setting for the church, quietly emphasising the flatness of the church's lower storey and the plasticity of the columns supporting the dome.

Where the new building faces Store Kongensgade, the street outside the square, its facade again forms a pair with the pavilion opposite but its design is developed as an enlargement of the flat-fronted stucco buildings that lie on its other side. To draw the two different buildings into a composition, the new building is given three lines of windows, a cornice and an attic that match that of the pavilion.

Like the apartments, the facades of the new building in Tietgens Ærgrelse are of unpainted stucco, a traditional material in Copenhagen. In classical buildings in other parts of the city, this is sometimes used in combination with stone of the same colour, stucco painted to look like stone, and wood painted to look like stone or stucco. This suggested a materials regime for the project that was both technically proven and with familiar and useful associations. In Tietgens Ærgrelse, natural stucco is placed over a layer of high-performing thermal insulation. The cornice is of a mixture of Obernkirchen stone – also used in the restoration of the Frederiksstaden palaces – and Glass Reinforced Concrete (GRC) that looks like stone. Balconies, when installed, will be of GRC that looks like stucco. Penthouses are clad in Belgian Blue Stone that looks like the slate on the roofs of the apartments.

The existing apartments in Frederiksgade have come to be occupied in a very informal way, some as residences and others as workplaces. Their forecourts have become entrances, gardens and bicycle parks. On the roof of the small house in Tietgens Ærgrelse, an ad-hoc garden has been built. Through the way in which it is configured, the new building will play a similar role in the square. Its loggias have the same spirit as the informal garden on the roof of the small house. A café is planned on the ground floor that will be entered from Store Kongensgade and look out onto the Marble Church. A discreet professional office is planned for the first floor. Above this are dwellings, two per floor, one an apartment facing the Marble Church, the other a loft space looking out to Store Kongensgade. A penthouse occupies the whole of the attic and has extensive views over Copenhagen with the cupola and statues of the church startlingly evident.

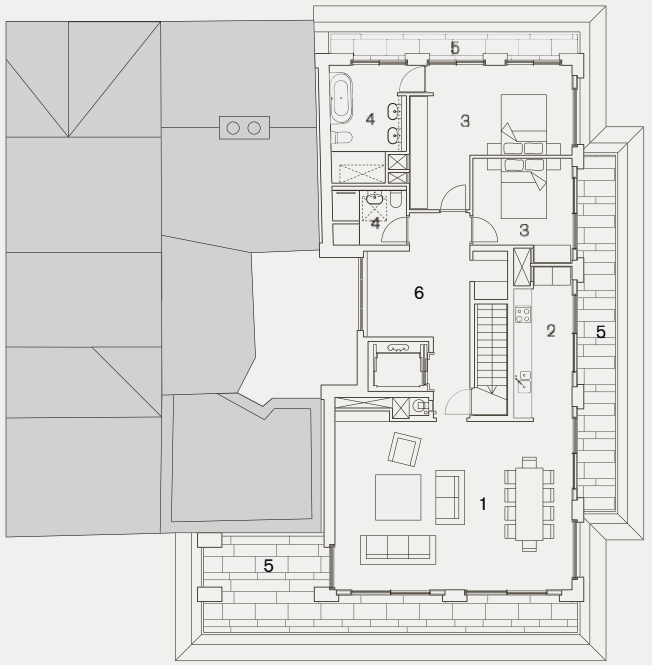
By their outlook, the interiors of the building have social and physical continuity with the neighbourhood. Not only is the geometric Marble Church part of their view, but also other older buildings, whose organic qualities come from successive modification. While cities can be given beauty and order by architecture, their character is given by the impact of events and the effect of people living their daily lives. From this perspective, the delay to the completion of the building caused by the construction of the Metro is part of that process. In order that the final appearance of the building can be understood, the balconies and cornice have been superimposed on the photos shown here. When the building is finished and its entrance opened into Frederiksgade, the unfinished corner of the square will be resolved, finally bringing Frederiksstaden to completion, not in terms of its original intentions but through what is has become.

— CR/TYS

Fourth floor living room – CR

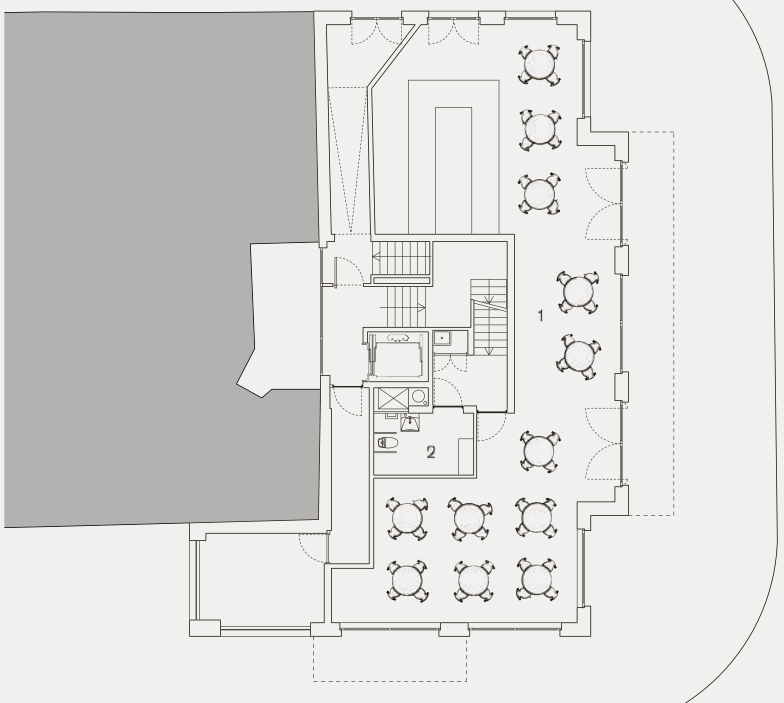
First floor

1 Office
2 Kitchen
3 WC
4 Terrace



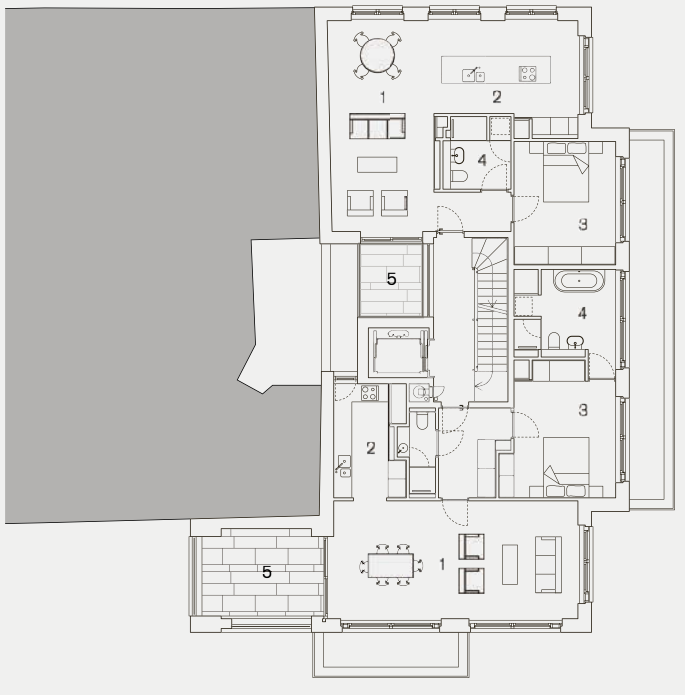
Fifth floor

1 Living/dining
2 Kitchen
3 Bedroom
4 Bathroom
5 Terrace
6 Study



Ground floor

1 Cafe
2 WC

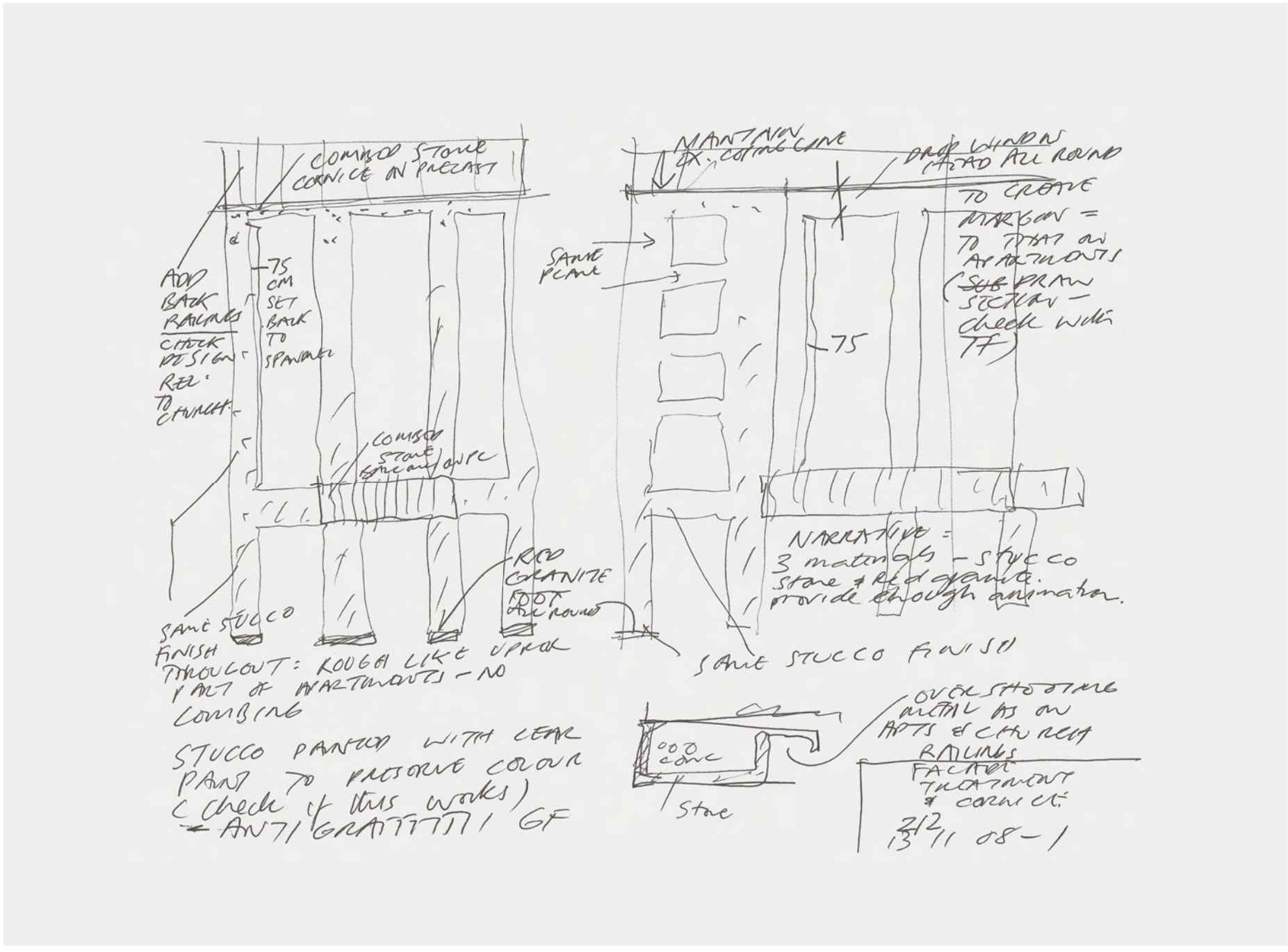


Second to fourth floors

1 Living/dining
2 Kitchen
3 Bedroom
4 Bathroom
5 Terrace

0 1 5 10m N

Before construction



– TF

— CR/TYS

Elevation facing church – CR/TYS

Together, the new building and the pavilion form a symmetrical pair – CR

– CR

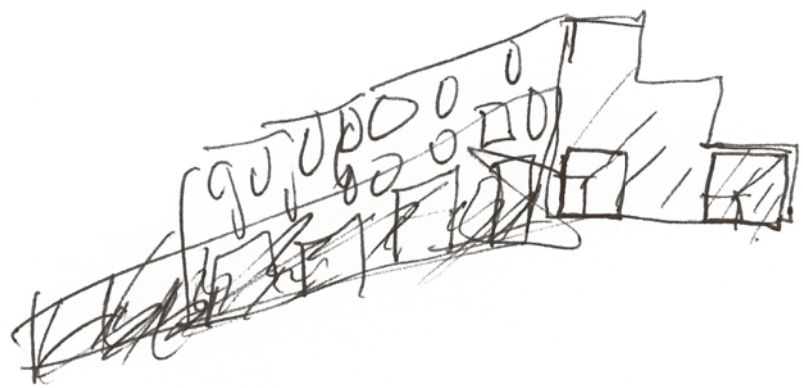
Vassall Road

2004
—
2008

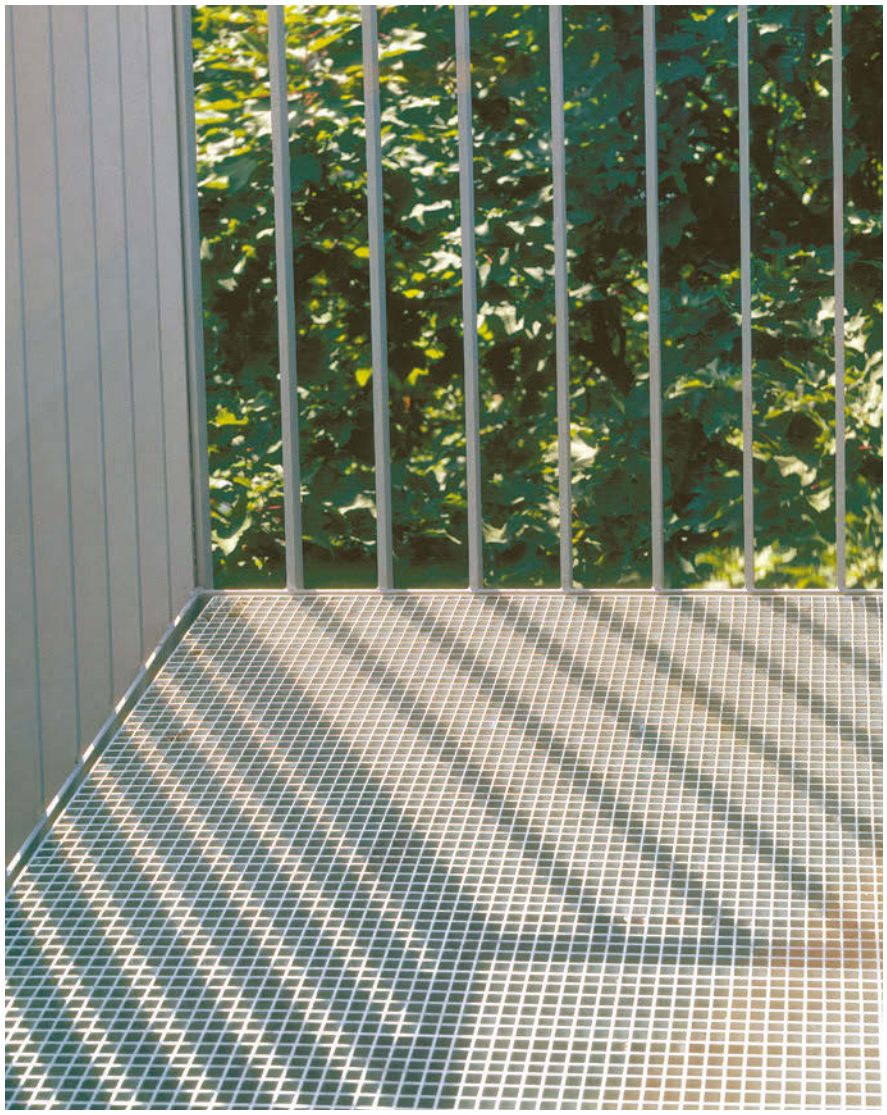
Location: Brixton, London, UK
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, David Owen, Sandy Rendel
Project Architect: Michael Lee
Guy Derwent, Simon Jones, Annika Rabi, Nina Lundvall, Matthew Barton, Max Lacey, Martin Nässén

This building is situated in a district that developed in the 19th century as a suburb with dignified and well-proportioned houses. Opposite the site is a terrace of elegant villas with large windows and brick facades. Further down the street is an array of cottages and small houses facing a wide stone pavement. In the 1960s, the side of the street where the building stands was rebuilt as social housing. Originally a well-composed, brick modernist terrace, it was subsequently ruined by over-cladding and the destruction of the public house that occupied the end of the terrace.

We designed a group of apartments and duplexes for sale on the end of terrace site with a doctors' clinic in the ground floor. The project was the result of a deal between our developer client, the social housing company and the doctors' clinic. Market-led solutions had become an established means in the UK and one of the aims of our design was to provide collective symbolism and a sense of community for them. Apartments and duplexes in our scheme are scaled to appeal equally to small families, retired couples or single people working from home. An entrance lobby in the street leads up to an open air walkway along the back of the building. The duplexes are entered from the walkway through patios that offer a place outside the kitchen in which to eat, or for children to play in safety. Together, the patios and communal walkway create the grounds for sociability among the building's residents, while balconies in each duplex facing south over the street provide contact with the wider neighbourhood. Brick is used for the facades and is lightly over-painted with black mineral paint to simulate the aged quality of the brickwork in the locale.



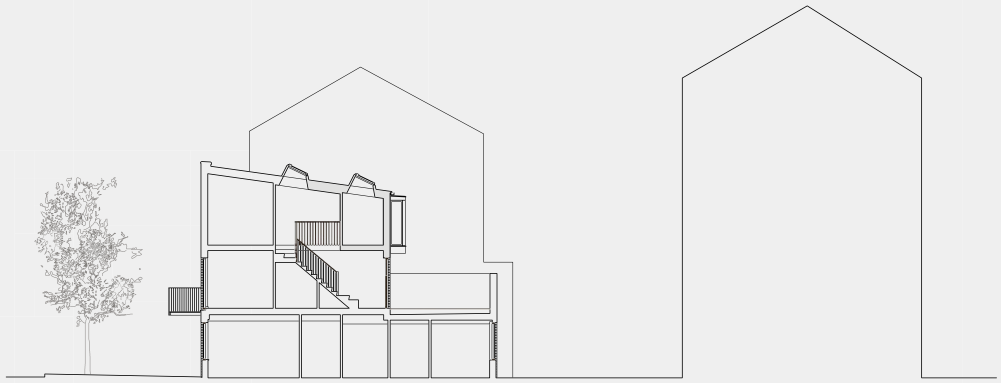
— PC



— PC

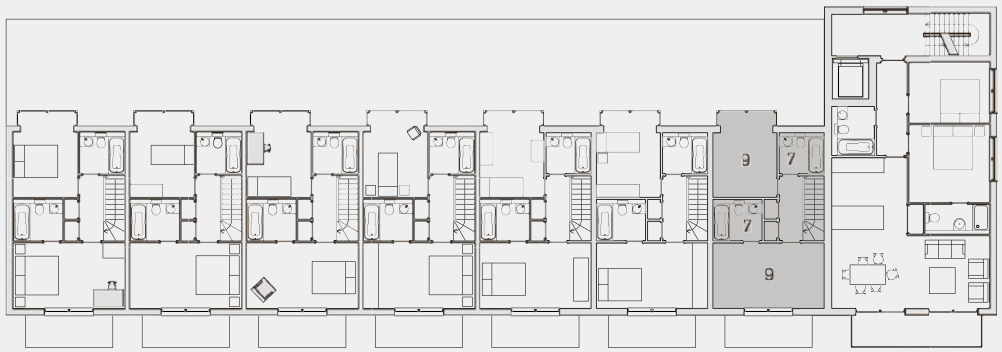
— PC

Rear elevaton – PC

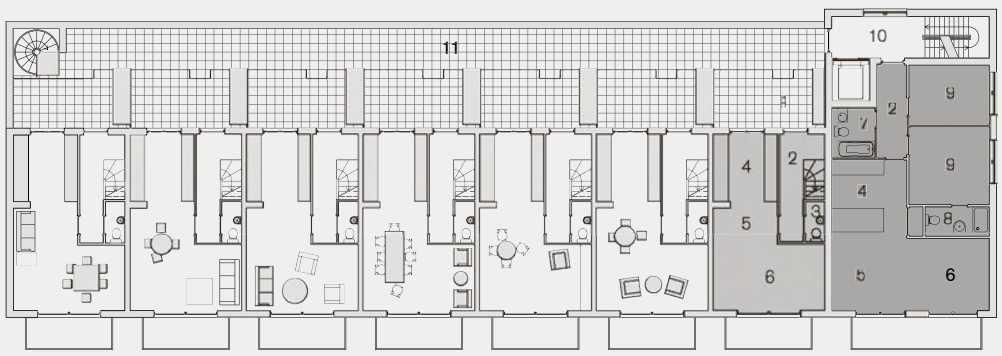


Section

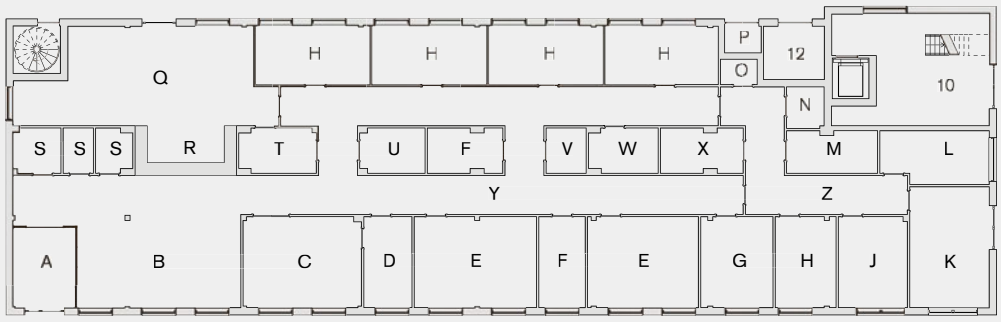
Roof



Second floor



First floor



Ground floor

Residential

1 Patio
2 Hall
3 WC
4 Kitchen
5 Dining area
6 Living room
7 Bathroom
8 Ensuite
9 Bedroom
10 Residential circulation
11 Walkway
12 Residential refuse

Doctor's surgery

A Draught lobby
B Waiting area
C Multipurpose room
D Breakout room
E Nurse treatment room
F Utility room
G Consulting room
H Practice manager
J Meeting room
K Staff room
L Record storage
M Plant room
N Staff WC
O Cleaners' store
P Refuse
Q Administration
R Reception desk
S Patient WC
T Interview room
U Storage room
V Clinical waste
W Plant
X Staff shower and WC
Y Patient circulation
Z Staff circulation

Third floor apartment – PC

Walkway – PC

Solid 11

2004
—
2010

Location: Eerste Constantijn Huygensstraat, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, Sandy Rendel
Project Architects: Clemens Nuyken and Laszlo Csutoras
Chris Neve, Donald Matheson, Guy Derwent, Michael Lee, Martin Nässén

A Solid is a concept developed by the social developers Stadgenoot for buildings with long term durability and flexibility of use.

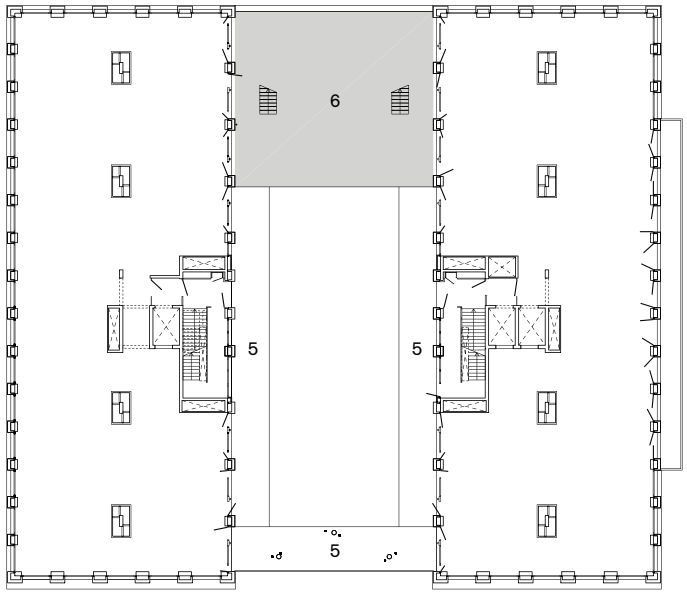
Solid 11 faces the Jacob van Lennep canal in west central Amsterdam and is part of small master plan by Belgian architect Jo Crepain for a site created by the relocation of a large hospital. Three buildings are ranged along the street and separated by public spaces. Each building is configured as a pair of parallel blocks with a private open space between them. Together the public and private spaces reinstate the pattern of the streets and bring south-west sun to Constantijn Huygenstraat and views of the buildings and public spaces behind. The architect for each of the three buildings is different, as are their programs: social housing, a psychiatric hospital, and in our case flexible space intended for range of activities including apartments, workspaces, a hotel, shops, cafes and restaurants and public facilities such as a kindergarten. A specific aspect of our design is the internal courtyard that extends from Constantijn Huygensstraat and is overlooked by walkways along the upper floors, which will make all of those changing activities visible to each other and the world at large.

I had thought for a long time about the way that the American artist Sol LeWitt initiated his series of wall drawings with simple instructions to others that lead to realized works with powerful artistic and experiential qualities.

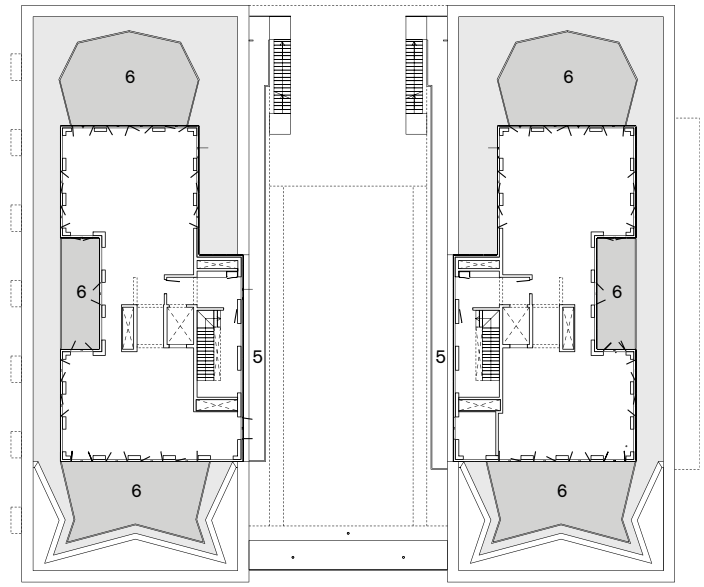
In Solids 11 the defining proposition was a building at the scale of the city made with repetitive columns of brick, a repetitive material, giving a format where different scales, detail and incidents could develop during design and use. As the brief developed a number of overt incidents were added on the facades – two large shapely forms in reflective glass set back within the columns of the facade; two mirror glass penthouses; metal tree-forms holding up the glass acoustic screen facing the street; a busy array of south facing balconies and a large first floor balcony overlooking the canal. In these and smaller scale elements the building was designed to make constructional issues intrigue the eye. In simple terms the building is proposed as a sober and calm part of the city within which a wealth of detail and incident lies to be discovered by those who encounter or occupy it.

Courtyard elevation

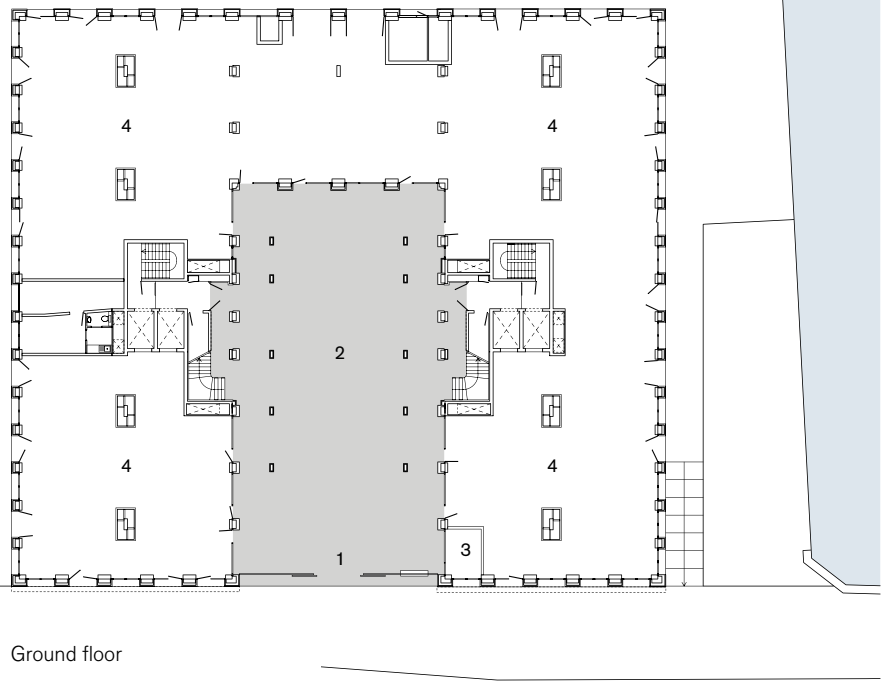
— PC



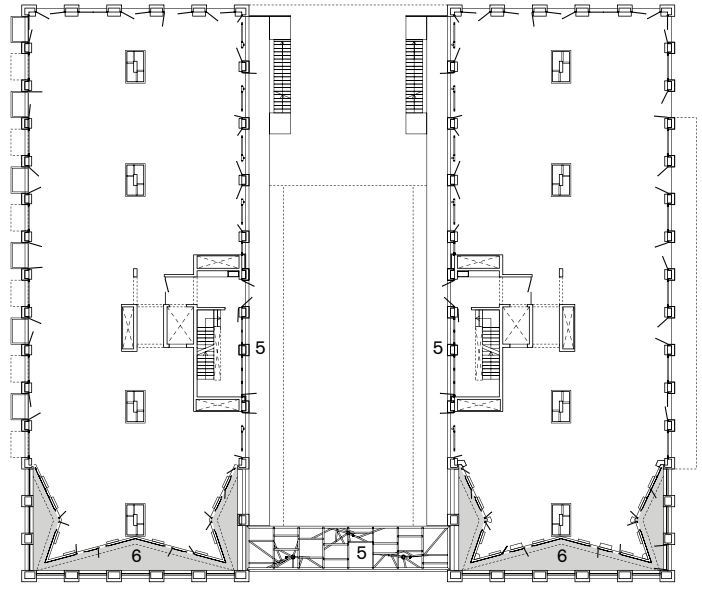
First floor



Sixth floor



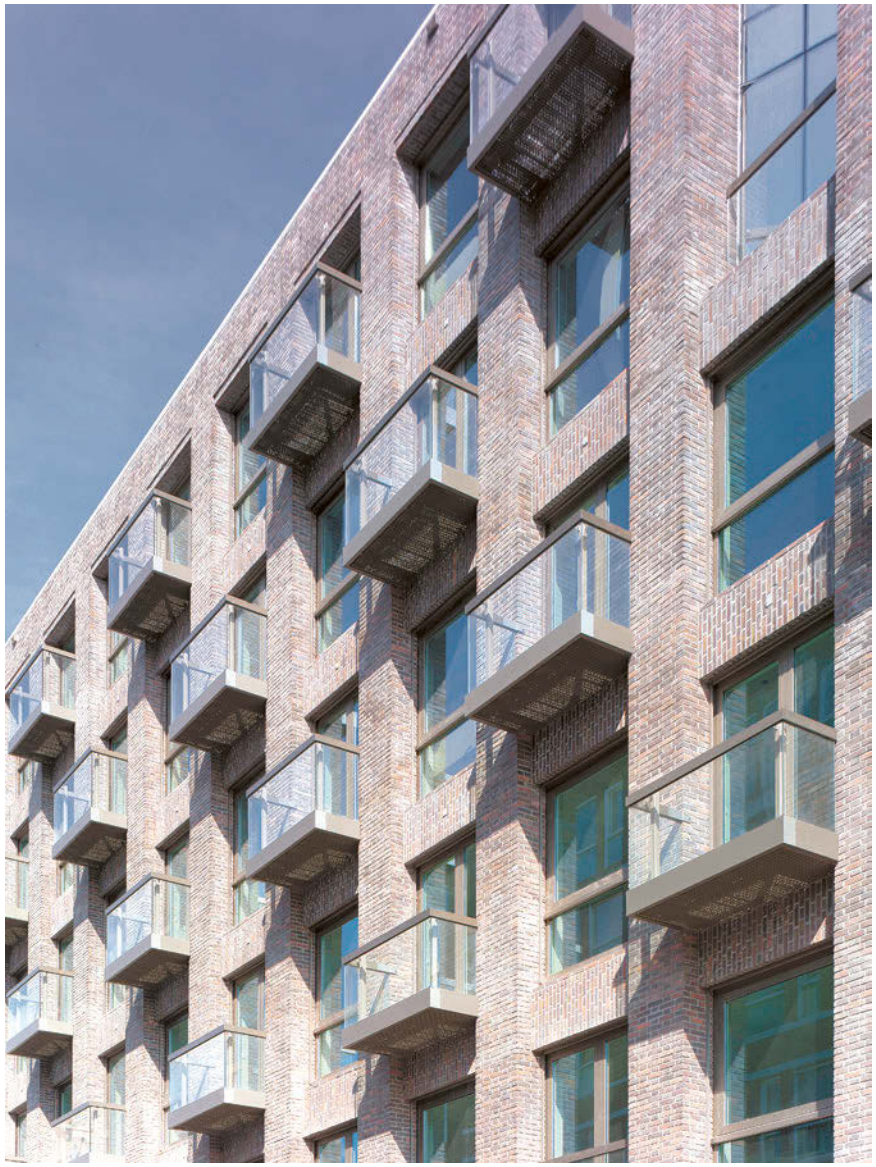
Ground floor



Fourth floor

0 1 5 10m N

1 Entrance
2 Courtyard
3 Entrance kiosk
4 Commercial use
5 Walkway
6 Terrace



— PC

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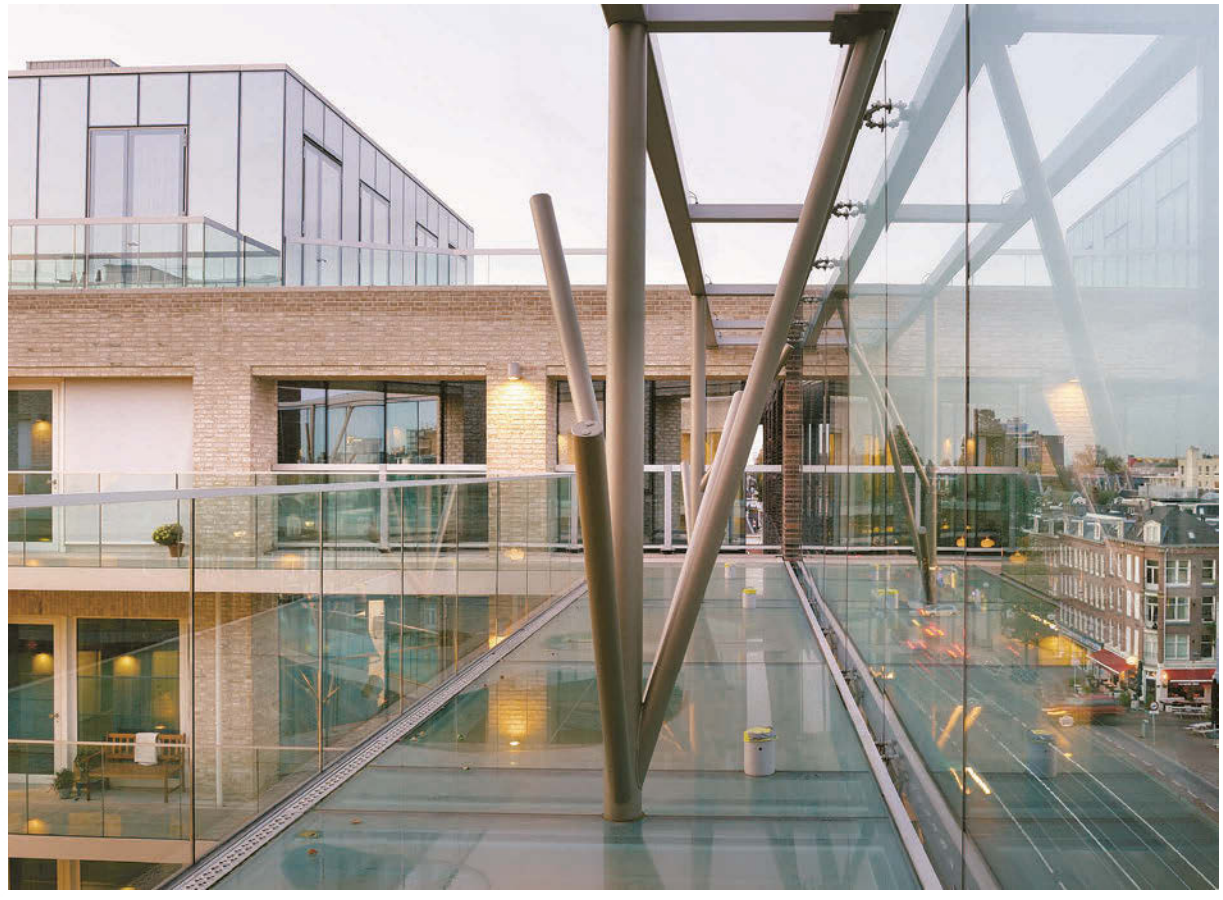
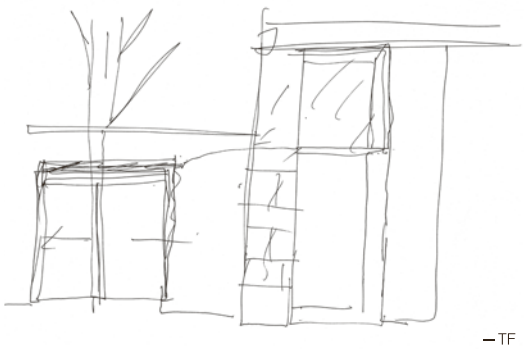




– TF

– PC

Andreas Ensemble

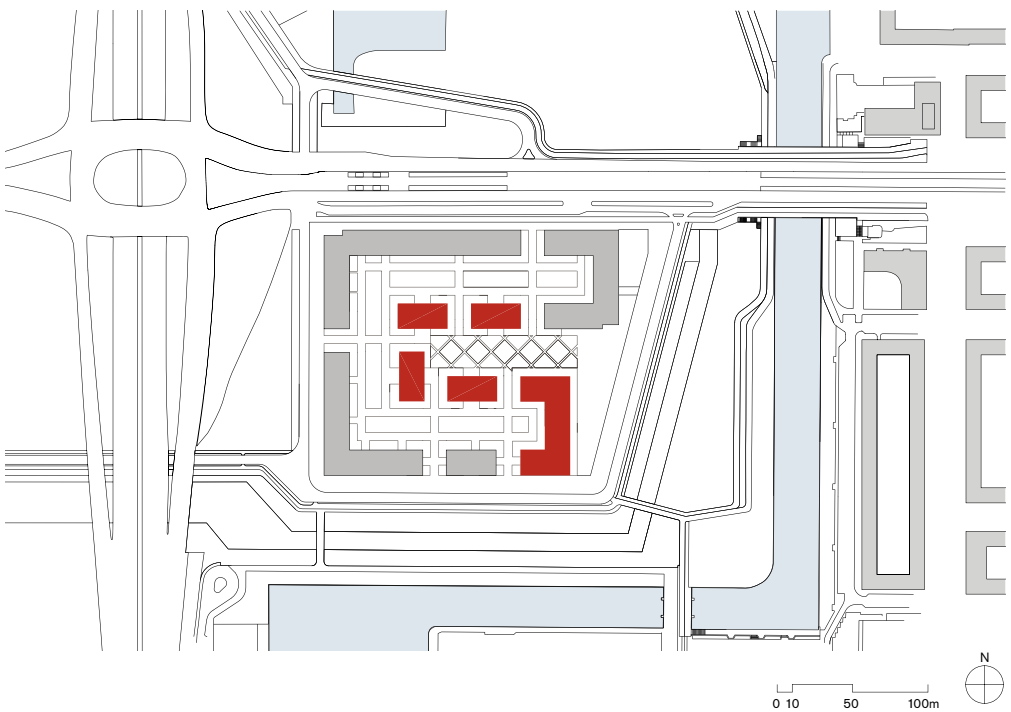
2005
—
2010

Location: Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney
Project Architect: David Owen
Annika Rabi, Guy Derwent, Nina Lundvall, Martin Nässén, Matthew Barton, Max Lacey, Frank Furrer, Michael Lee

Andreas Ensemble is bordered by a pleasant, tree-lined canal on the east and a fine stretch of water to the south. Busy highways run along the other two boundaries, separating it from the extensive Rembrandtpark to the north. Amsterdam City Council's master plan for the site followed Hendrik Berlage's layout of nearby Amsterdam South rather than the looser planning of Cor van Eesteren to the West. Long buildings enclose the whole of the perimeter of the site together with groups of smaller buildings in the landscaped interior. Hague architects Geurst & Schulze designed the majority of the buildings along the perimeter, which provide social housing and a hotel among their other uses. We designed apartments for sale in a long building on the south perimeter and in four blocks in the interior. The long building enjoys a very good outlook over the water to the south. Those in the interior of the scheme have much more limited views and exposure to the sun. By planning them with a perimeter of reconfigurable space around a service core in the centre, we were able to place living rooms and balconies wherever they would receive sunlight and views of the canal and water.

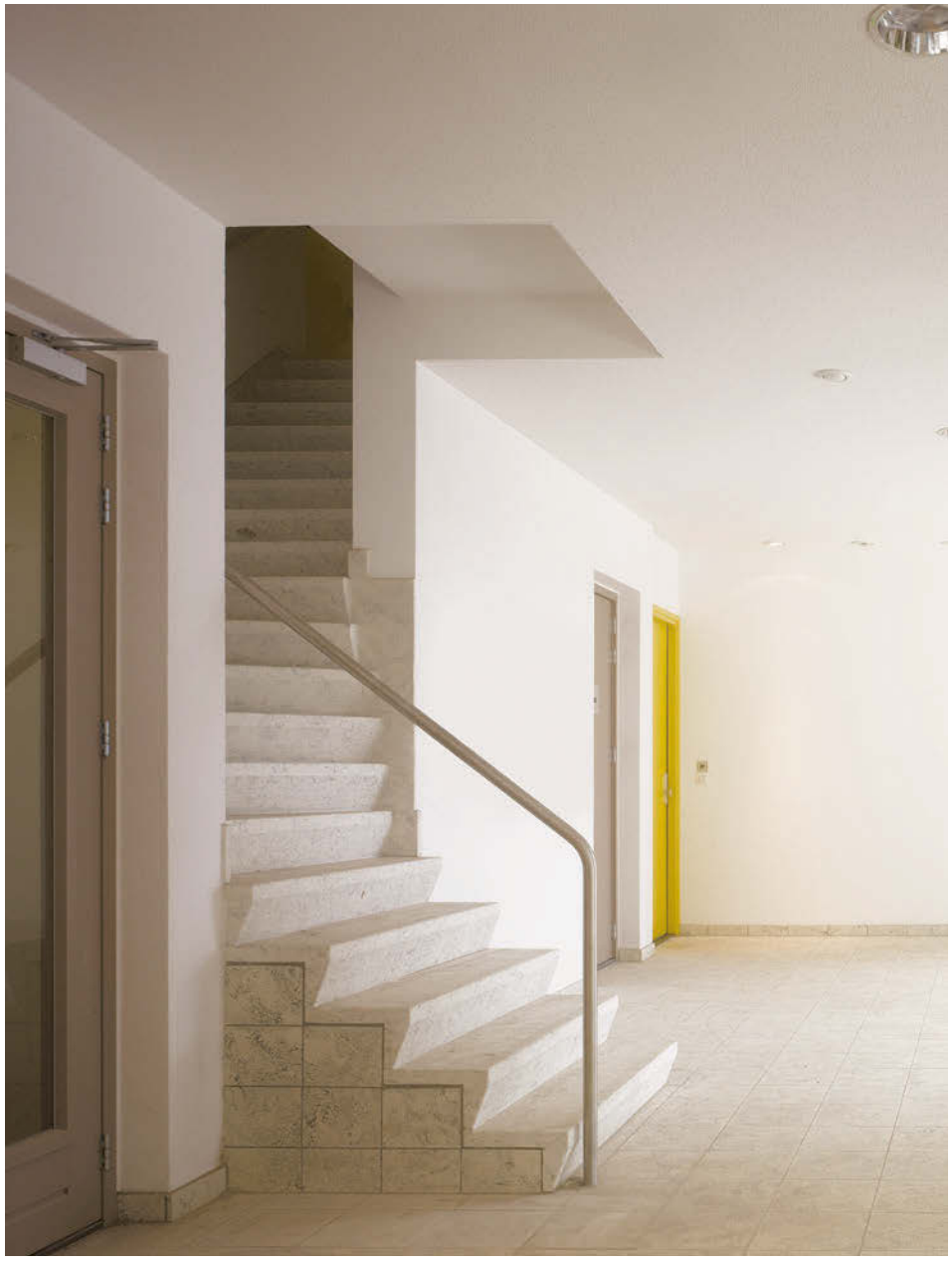
External materials were selected to give a permanent, subtle polychromy to the buildings. Facades are of refined, grey Danish brickwork. Windows are of anodised aluminium that is light bronze in colour on some facades and blue-grey on others. Balconies are powder coated in pale metallic colours, and penthouses have a pale green, pre-cast concrete cladding.

The buildings are designed as a series of dignified repeating forms to give repose to the whole estate. Within their symmetry, subtle differences are given by changes in the colour and format of windows and the different and sometimes unexpected position of balconies.

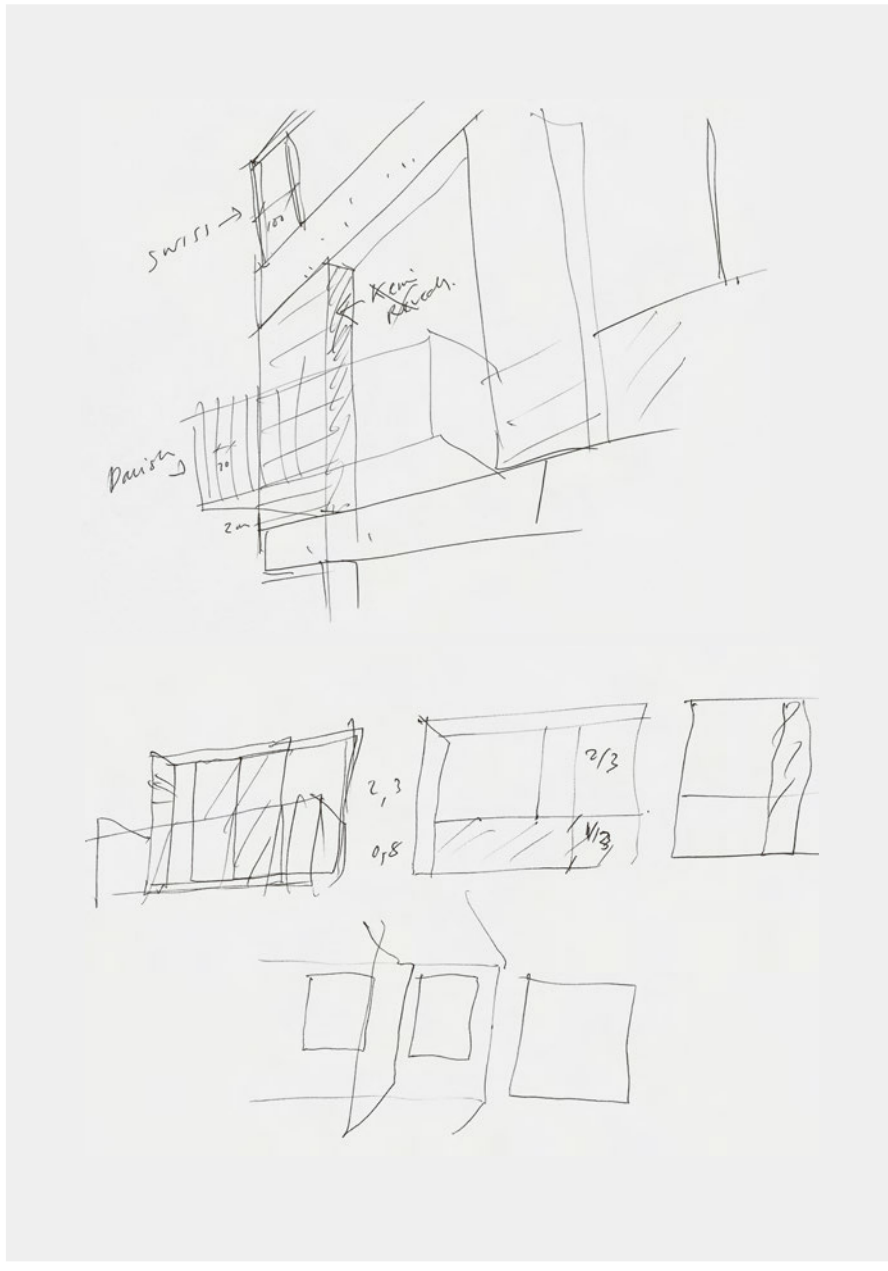


— CR

– CR



Entrance hall – CR



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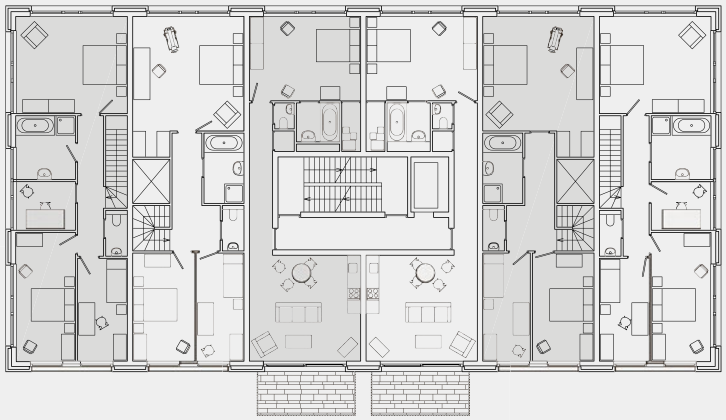
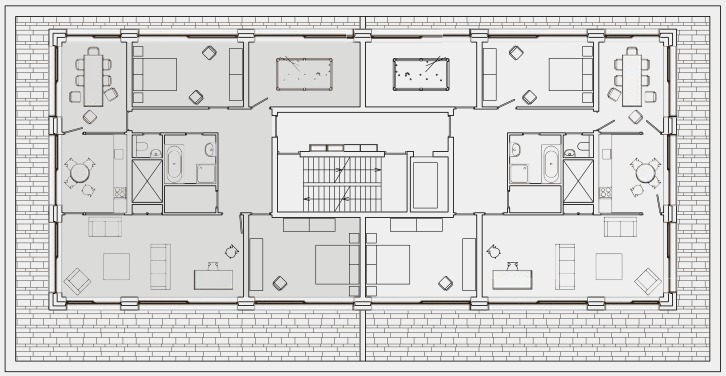
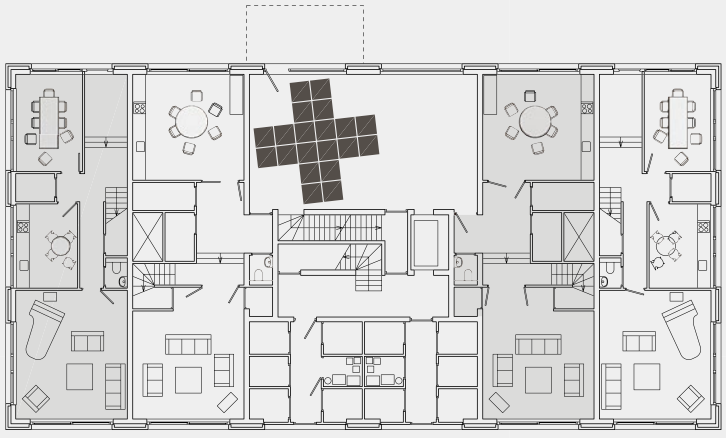


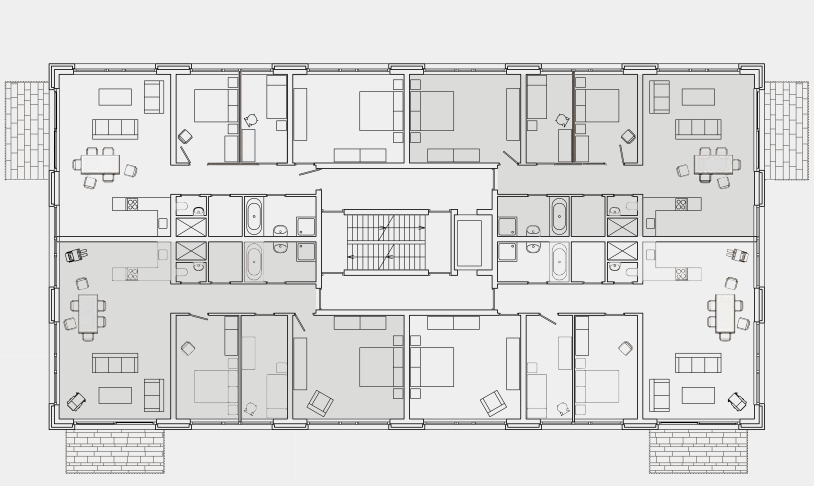
First floor
Duplexes with ground floor



Fifth floor
Penthouses



Ground floor
Duplexes with first floor



Second-fourth floors
Apartments

— CR

FugIsang Kunstmuseum

2005
—
2008

Location: Lolland, Denmark
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, David Owen, Sandy Rendel
Project Architect: Donald Matheson
Matthew Barton, Michael Lee, Nina Lundvall, Simon Jones, Martin Nässén, Guy Derwent, Annika Rabi, Gus Brown

Unlike the location of an urban museum that is reached through the room-like spaces of a city, visiting FugIsang entails a long journey through open countryside to a country estate set in a broad agricultural landscape. At the heart of the estate is a farmyard with a long barn on the west side, painted white with a tall roof. On the north side is the land steward's house, long again, simply ornamented and made of pale brick. To the south is the manor house, set back by an appropriate distance and separated by a moat. Country classical in style, the red brick facade is arranged in three tall gables, and the interior has decorated ceilings and parquet floors that change in pattern from room to room. The best of its rooms look out to a refined, landscaped garden behind, and have long been places for the performance of music. In the attic are plain bedrooms for visitors who come to stay and walk in the wonderful countryside around the estate, which extends, absolutely flat, to a bird sanctuary at the edge of the sea in Guldborgsund to the east of the estate.

Out in the fields on this side of the farmyard stands another barn, this one painted red, and a path leading to Guldborgsund.

What would it mean to place a museum here, a significant building of a different kind to the buildings around the yard that would bring in visitors and alter the land around it? These were questions that landscape designer Torben Schønherr, my colleague Ebbe Wæhrens from executive architects BBP and I asked ourselves when we first stood looking at FugIsang. The countryside and sea to the east had such significance for us that I felt that they should be the first things that visitors saw as they came to the museum,

To make this happen, the new building was placed to one side of the view in line with the land steward's house, not axial on the manor house as might be expected, but lying out in the fields. This intuitive decision gave one of the organising principles of the building in which the view of the land appears and disappears as visitors progress through the museum. A second principle was for the building to be as abstract as possible while maintaining connections with the earlier buildings around it. The museum's facade is the same length as the manor house and the three diagonal roof lights above it recall the division of the manor house facade by three gables. Like the buildings around the courtyard – and many classic works of Danish modernism – the museum's facades are constructed from brick. As in the barn on the west side of the court, they are painted white and the roof lights are in a grey brick the colour of the roofs of the buildings around it.

Visitors walk from the car park into the farmyard, and see a view of the land and sea to the east framed between the white barn and the museum. At the entrance to the museum, the facade steps forward, and the view of land and sea is temporarily taken away. Here, a canopy of painted metal in the form of an open-sided cube, low and wide, provides shelter from the rain, and is matched by a glass wind lobby of equal scale and transparency in the entrance foyer within the building. One end of the foyer is arranged as a cafe, the other as a bookshop and reception area. Both look out through extensive windows on one side to the courtyard and on the other, through a public art studio to an existing orchard. A glass door in the reception area shows the way to the library and offices on the first floor, while other doors indicate the lecture hall, toilets and cloakroom. The foyer is a public place in which everything is where it can be found and enjoyed in the company of friends and strangers within the landscape and spaces of FugIsang.

From the foyer there is a line of sight into the museum's long central gallery and, at its end, a view of the landscape and sea that resembles the first narrow view seen when entering the estate. The exhibition spaces, which are arranged as three suites around the central gallery, are places where groups of visitors can spread out and immerse themselves in the collection. The first of these suites consists of medium-scale rooms arranged in enfilade. Paintings from 1800 – 1900 are displayed in the first three rooms, which have ornamented ceilings and are day lit by the diagonal roof lights that were seen above the facade. Further along is a room for works on paper, which for reasons of conservation is artificially lit. At the end, a gallery for plaster casts is lit by a window looking out towards the land to the east. Between the galleries are very small rooms, called pockets, where a few people at a time can view a single work of art.

On the opposite side of the corridor is a single, large, minimally detailed gallery for temporary exhibitions. Abstract and reconfigurable, this tall space is naturally lit through a ceiling of open metal grids, above which there is space to support suspended artworks and projectors. Further along on this side is the third suite, consisting of a plainly detailed, top-lit space configured with screens into four rooms. Here modernist works from the early to mid 20th century are displayed, ranging from medium-scale figurative works to large abstract canvases.

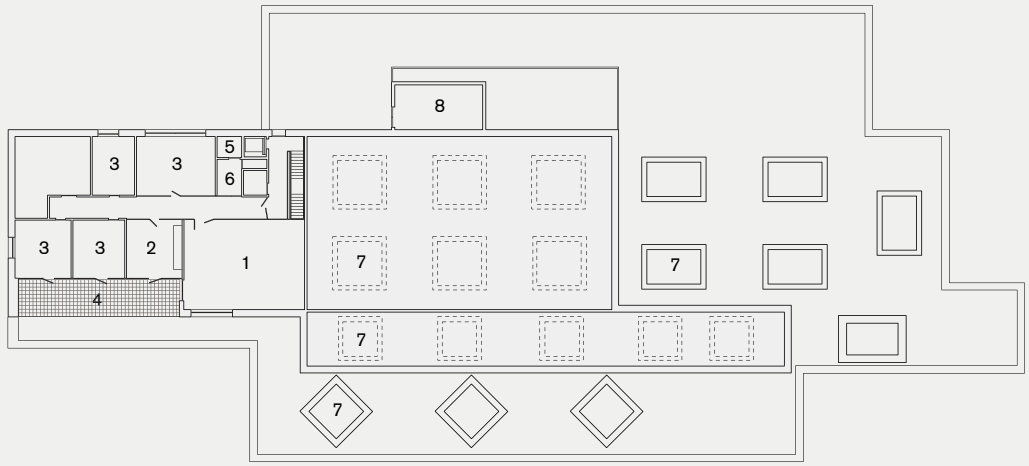
These spaces are connected by the central gallery, which is neither simply an exhibition space nor a place of circulation. Couches could be interspersed with artworks in the classical manner, or the whole space given over to an exhibition or an event. At the end is a room where visitors can rest and reflect. Initially it seems like a gallery but consists only of windows giving views of the sea and landscape.

The different characters of the galleries and public spaces were developed empirically and are bound together like the buildings of FugIsang itself, through simple similarities. In this way, and through the loss and recovery of the view of landscape and sea that occurs within the museum, some underlying qualities of the locale are introduced to the quiet, top-lit interior. Our intention is for the museum to be filled with slight differences that are stimulating but unobtrusive, so that the art not the building predominates, and for there to be a combination of familiarity and emptiness that allows the building to become the imaginative property of those who encounter it.

— PC

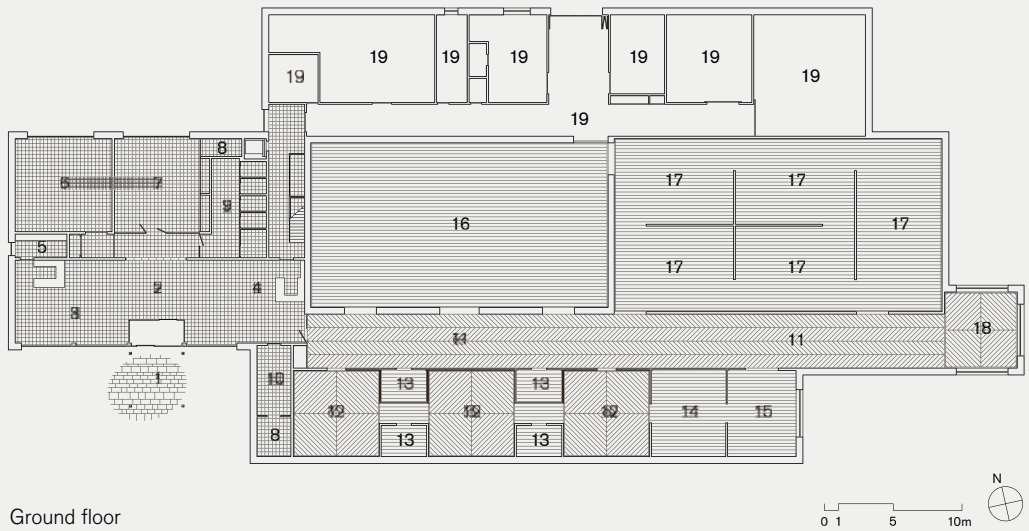
— PC

– PC



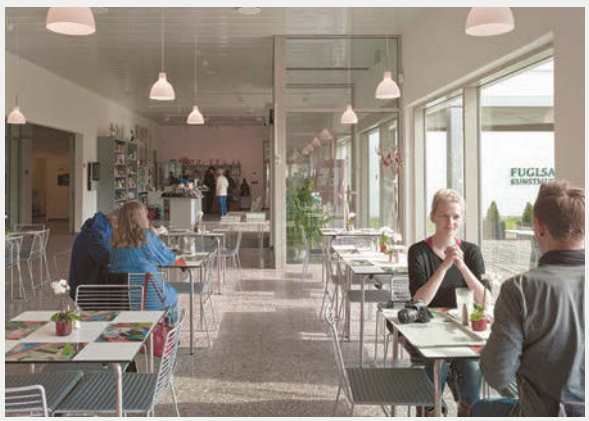
First floor

1 Library
2 Staff room
3 Office
4 Terrace
5 WC
6 Cloakroom
7 Rooflight
8 Plant



Ground floor

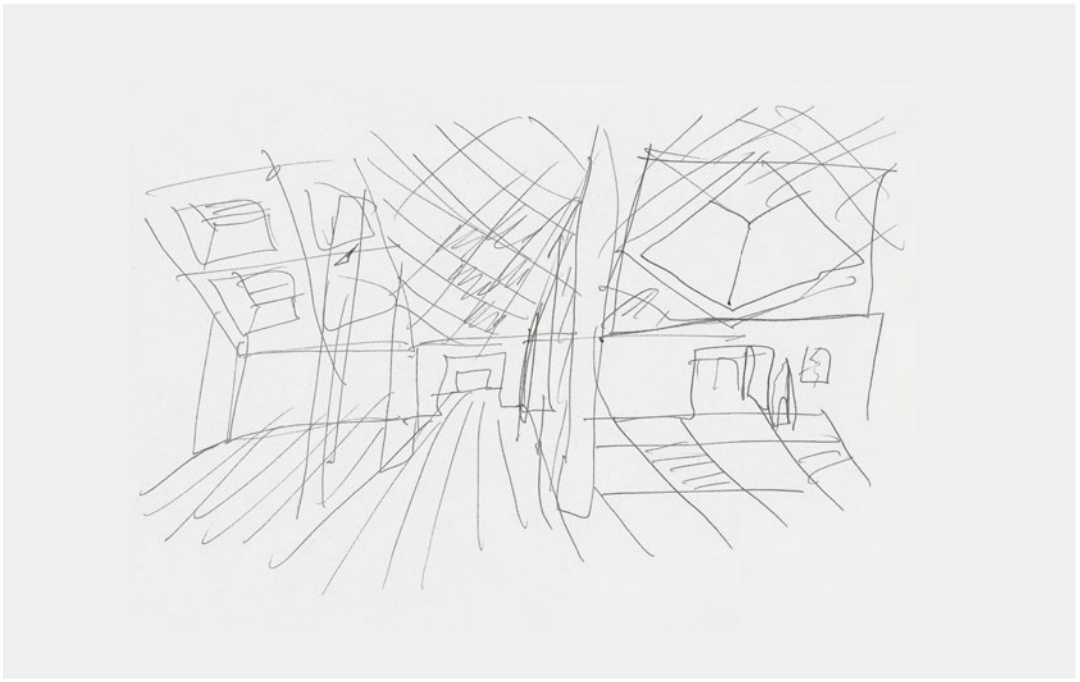
1 Entrance canopy
2 Foyer
3 Cafe
4 Ticket desk/bookshop
5 Kitchen
6 Lecture room
7 Art classroom
8 Store
9 WCs
10 Cloakroom
11 Central gallery
12 Paintings 1800–1900
13 Pocket gallery
14 Works on paper
15 Plaster casts
16 Temporary exhibitions
17 Modern art
18 Rest area
19 Back of house



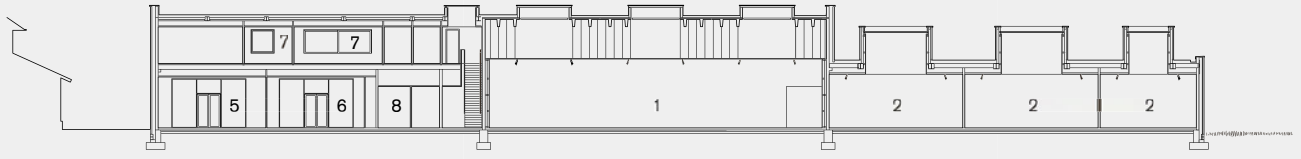
Art classroom – PC
Cafe – PC

– PC

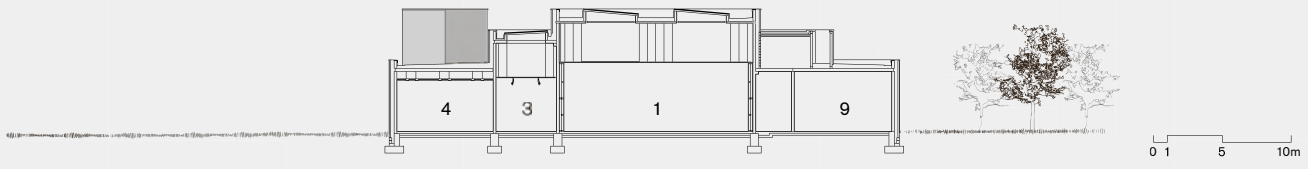
Temporary exhibition gallery viewed from central gallery – PC



Left: Paintings 1800 – 1900 – PC – TF

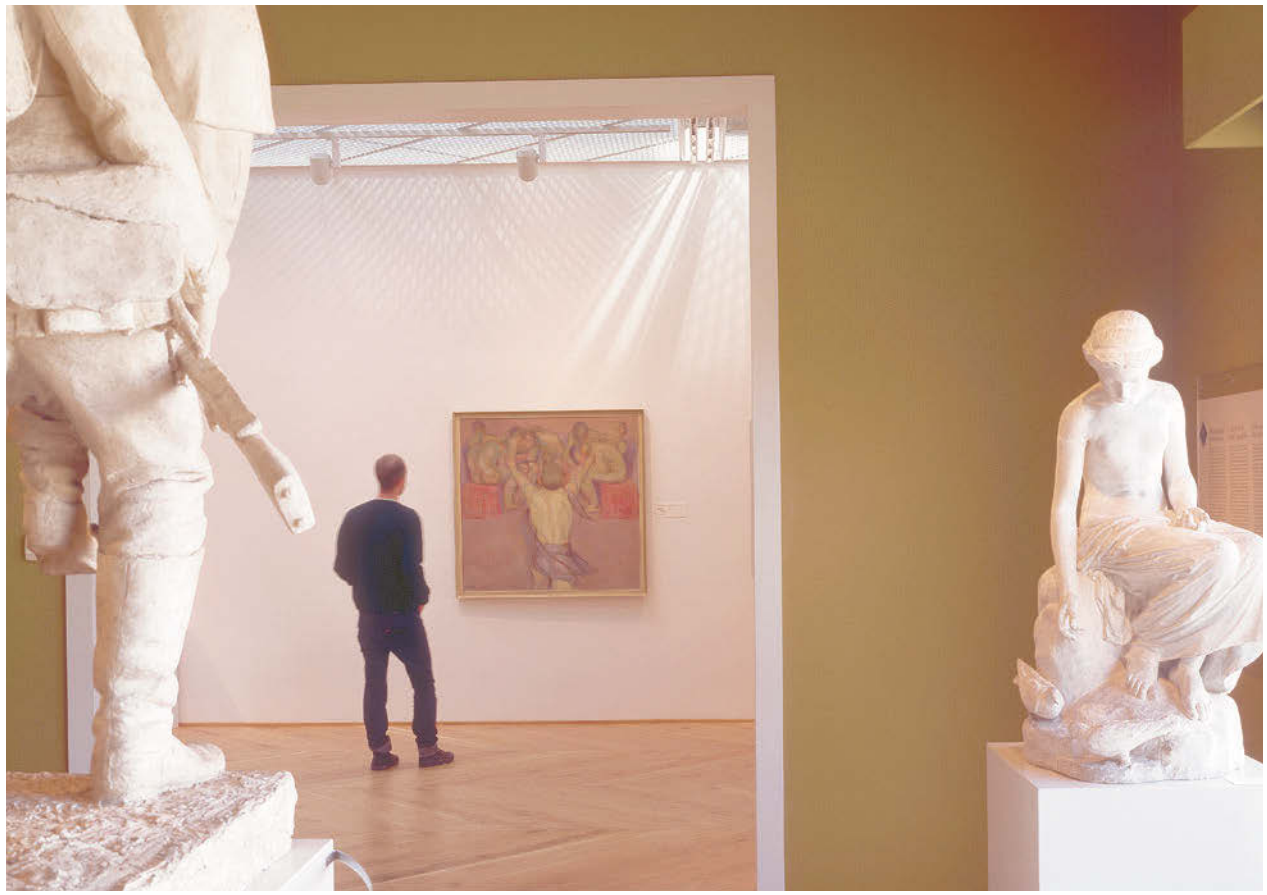


Long section



Short section

1 Temporary exhibitions
2 Modern art
3 Central gallery
4 Paintings 1800 – 1900
5 Lecture room
6 Art classroom
7 Office
8 WCs
9 Back of house



Plaster cast gallery – HB
– PC

– HB

Warsaw Embassy II

2006
—
2009

Location: Warsaw, Poland
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, David Owen
Project Architect: Donald Matheson
Frank Furrer, Tom Grieve, Laszlo Csutoras, Chris Neve, Chris Snow, Guy Derwent, Nina Lundvall, Martin Nässén, Matthew Barton, Max Lacey, Piram Banpabutr, Gus Brown

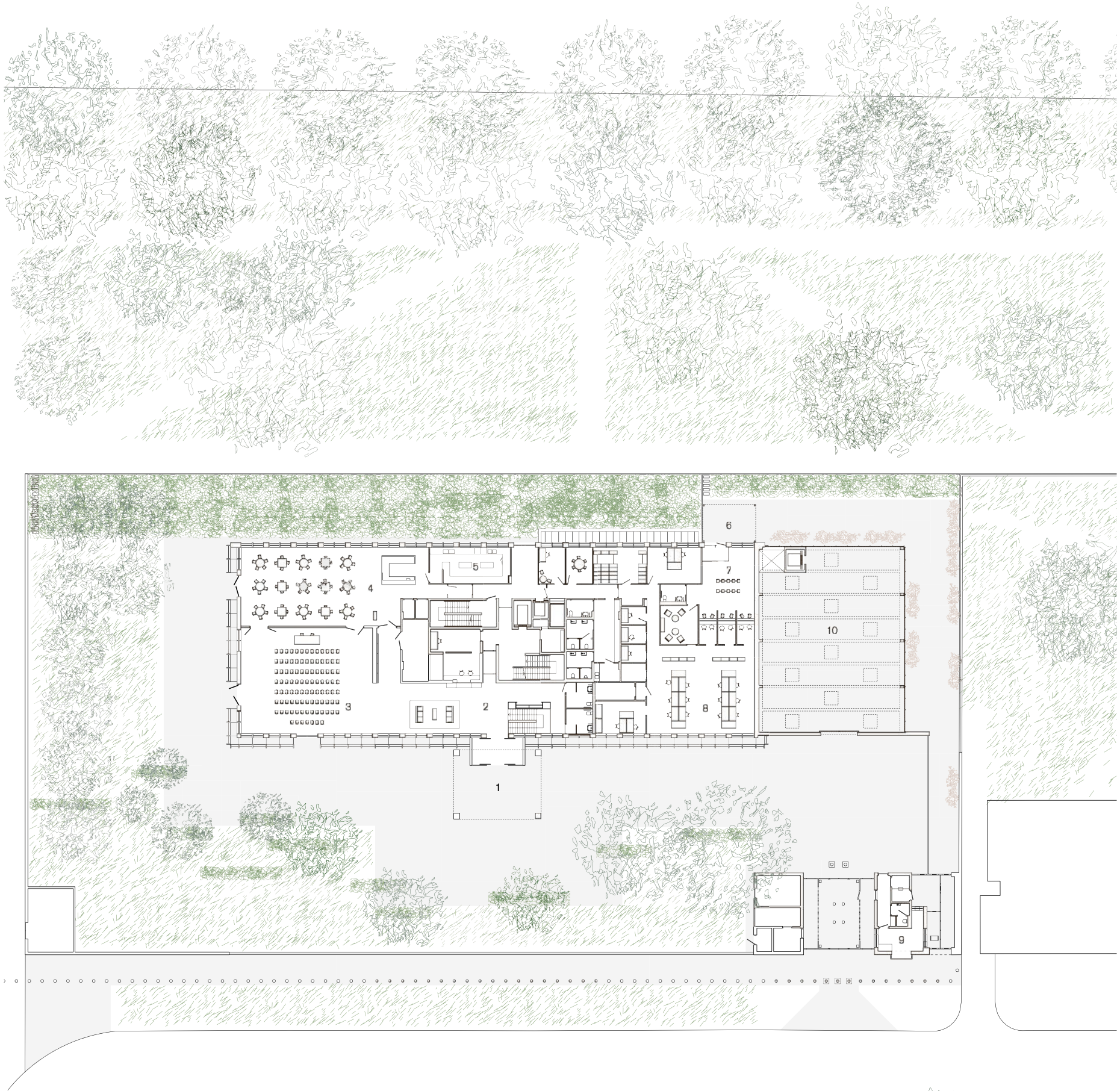
Set in its own grounds in a district of other embassies, the new building presents a calm and formal exterior to the outside world. On one side it faces a road, on the other, a mature park laid out with canals and allees of trees. Its long form is centralised by an attic in a neo-classical way, and underlined by the longer figures of the walls and railings enclosing the site. With the exception of the north face, it is enclosed with double facades that regulate the extreme heat and cold of the Warsaw climate. The outer facade is very plain and reflects the sky and trees around it, while the inner facade is more substantial, with blast-resisting windows set between piers and spandrels in a modulated composition. The material of both facades is a pale bronze-coloured aluminium, the outer being slightly darker than the inner. This pale polychromy is a distant relative of the painted stucco buildings of the school of Karl Friedrich Schinkel that can be seen in Warsaw.

The embassy is arranged over three floors. The ground floor provides a space for public exhibitions and events, a restaurant and bar. Around these interior spaces, the grounds are laid out with lawns and paving for large public events, and smaller areas for informal gatherings. Existing trees were supplemented with new trees set out in relation to the form of the park, lawn and areas of tall grasses. The consular and visa section occupies the remainder of the ground floor and is entered through the rear of the building by a separate route through the grounds. On the first floor are the embassy's administrative offices. The workspace here is day lit through the facades and by two courtyards in the centre of the plan. In the attic on the second floor are the ambassador's suite and a conference area, both with extensive roof terraces.

A range of material finishes extends through the interior. Lifts and service cores are in marble. In the office, columns are covered in white plaster, and the windows set between them have mullions and spandrels in light-bronze anodised aluminium. With an acoustically absorbent ceiling, carpeted floor and double facade, the offices are places of calm and dignity.

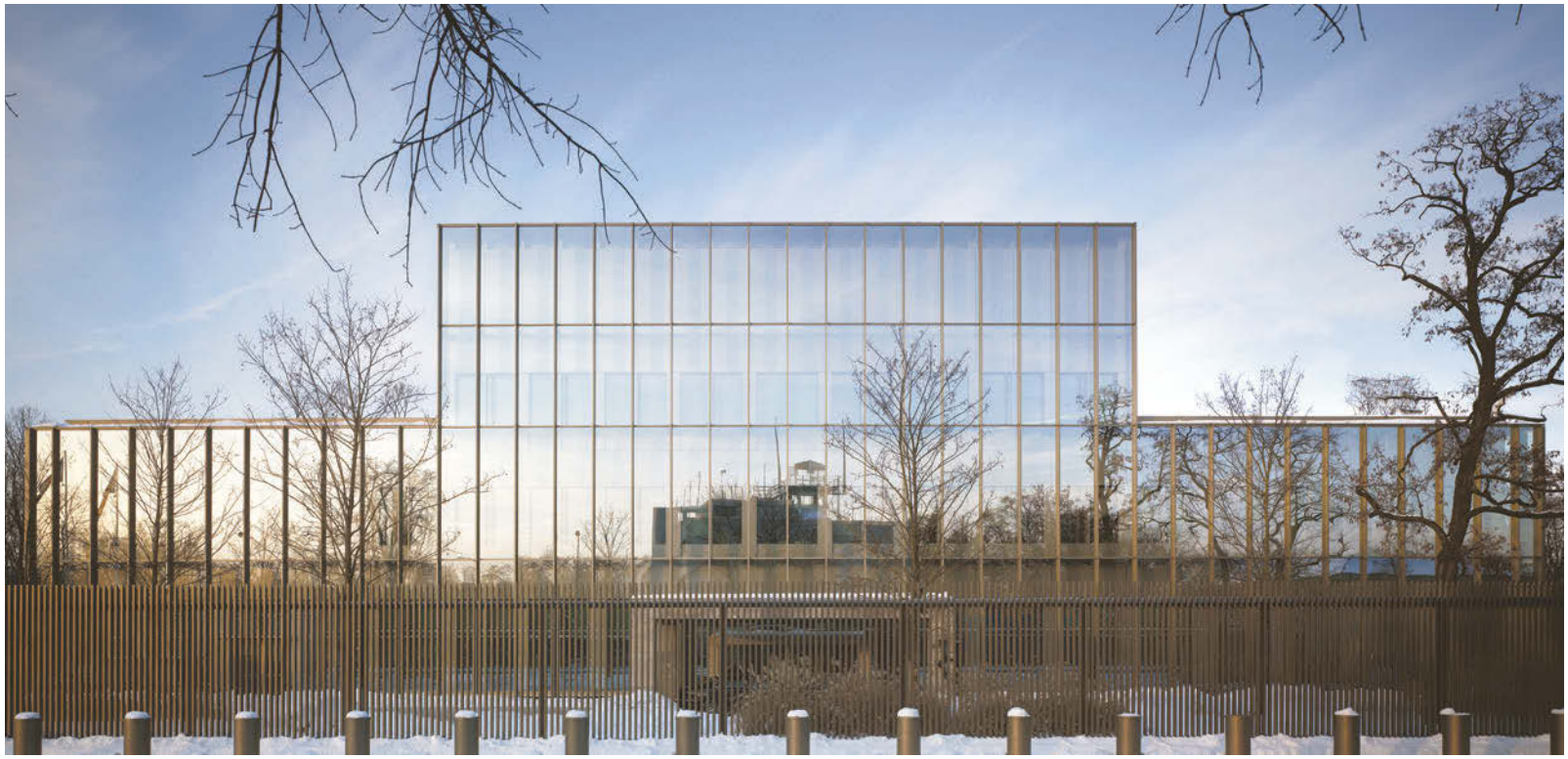
Each floor has its own identity through its relations to the outside world. Public spaces in the ground floor flow from one to the other and into the grounds. Open office space in the first floor is given a degree of separation by the interior courts. In the ambassador's suite, the offices have the small scale and fine quality of cabinets, a theme that continues in the small spaces for sitting that are defined by lines of thick hedge and planting related to the grounds around the embassy and the park beyond.

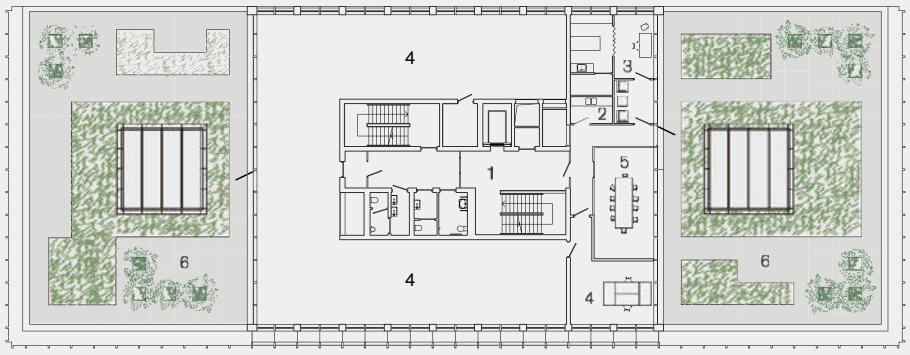
— PC



Ground floor

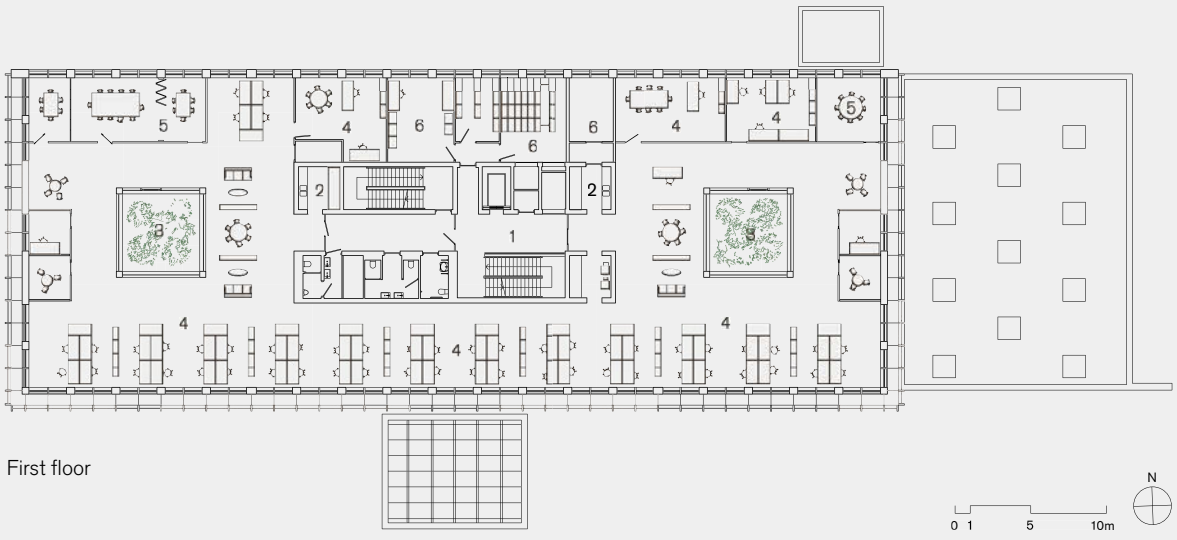
1 Main entrance portico
2 Foyer
3 Exhibition/conference
4 Cafe
5 Kitchen
6 Consular entrance portico
7 Consular and UK Border Agency
8 Office
9 Gatehouse
10 Carpark





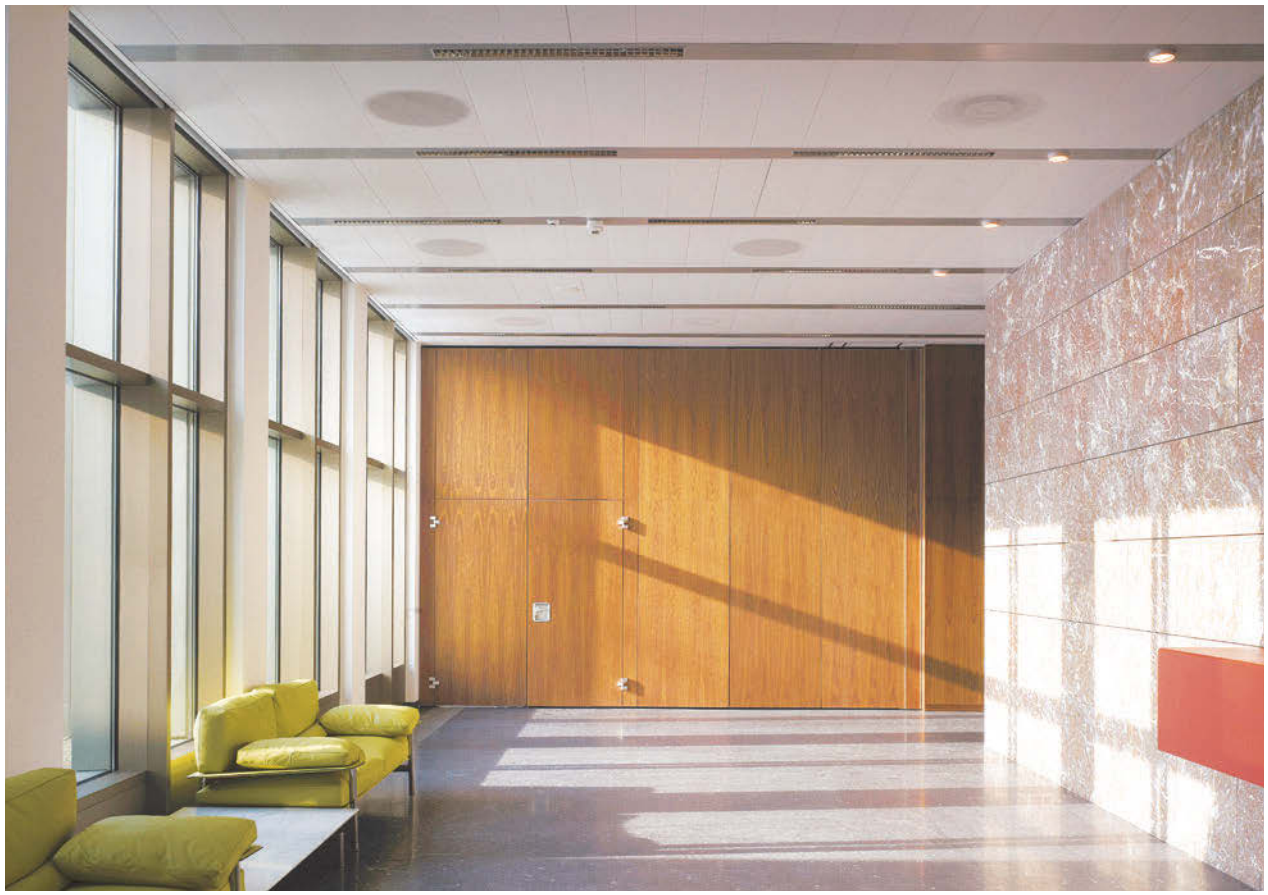
Second floor

1 Stair and lift lobby
2 Tea point
3 First aid room
4 Office
5 Meeting room
6 Roof terrace

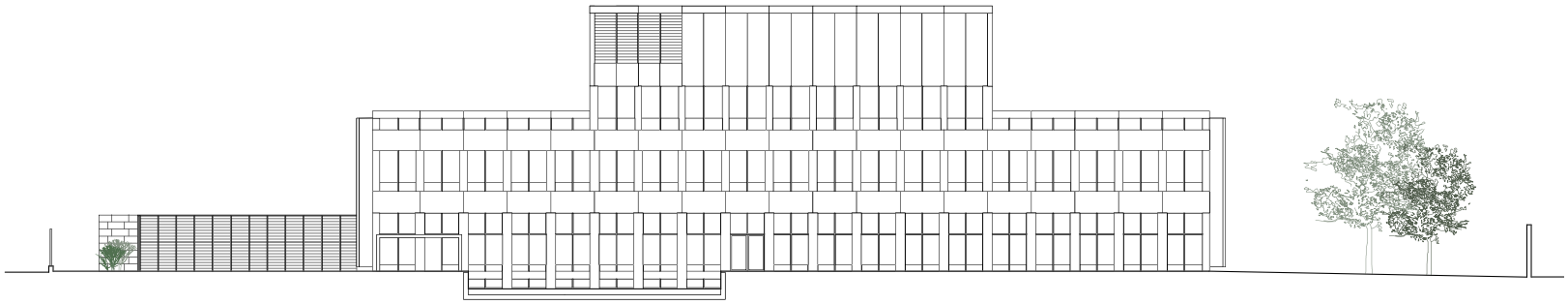


First floor

1 Stair and lift lobby
2 Tea point
3 Planted courtyard
4 Office
5 Meeting room
6 Technical areas

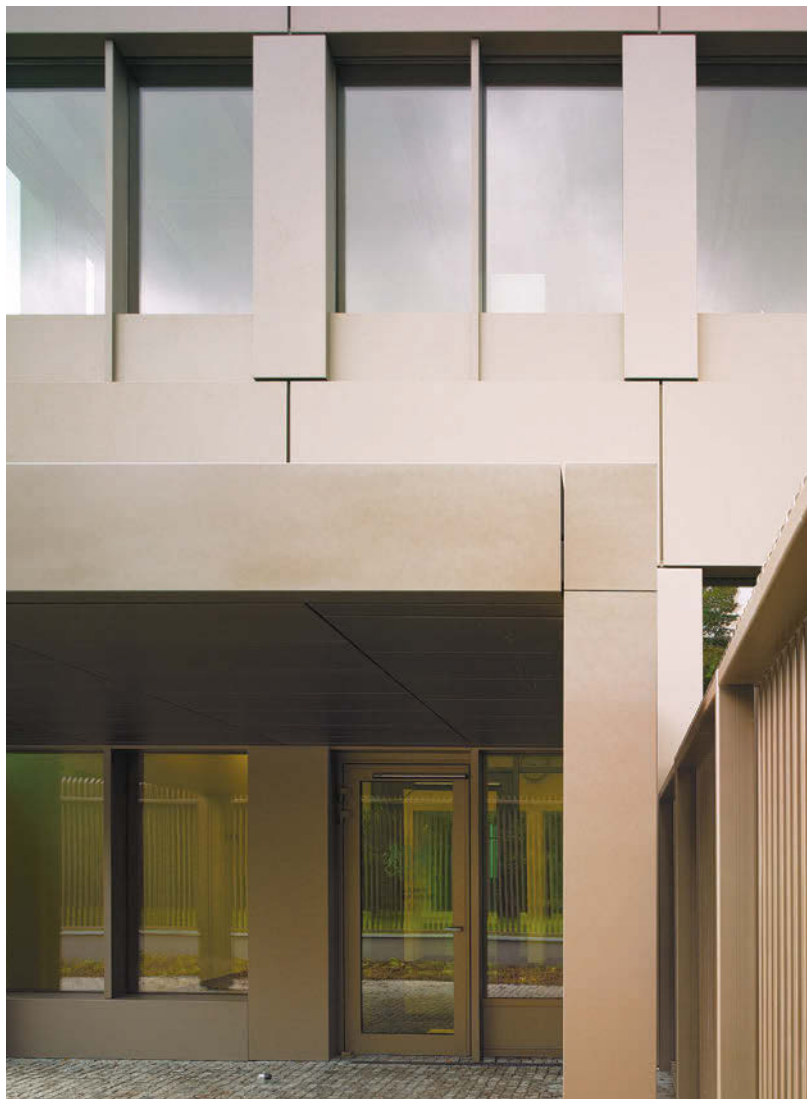


First floor office – PC
Ground floor foyer – CR

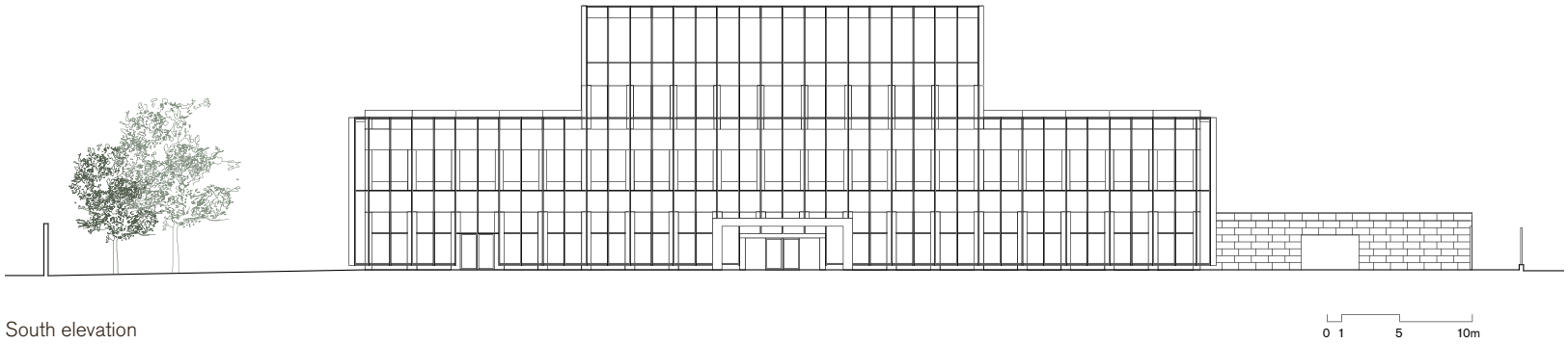


North elevation

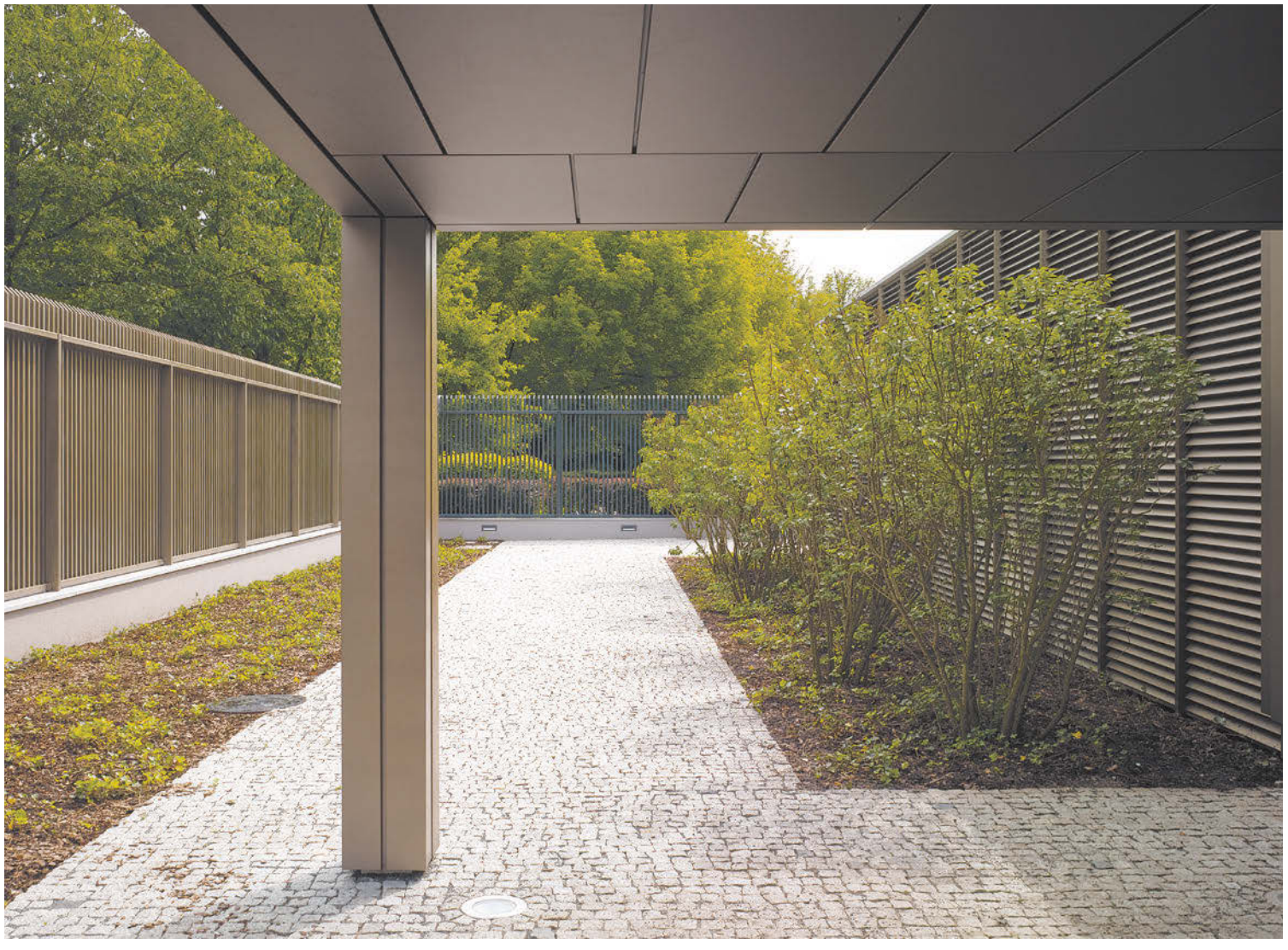
Door from cafe to garden – PC



Consular entrance portico – PC



South elevation



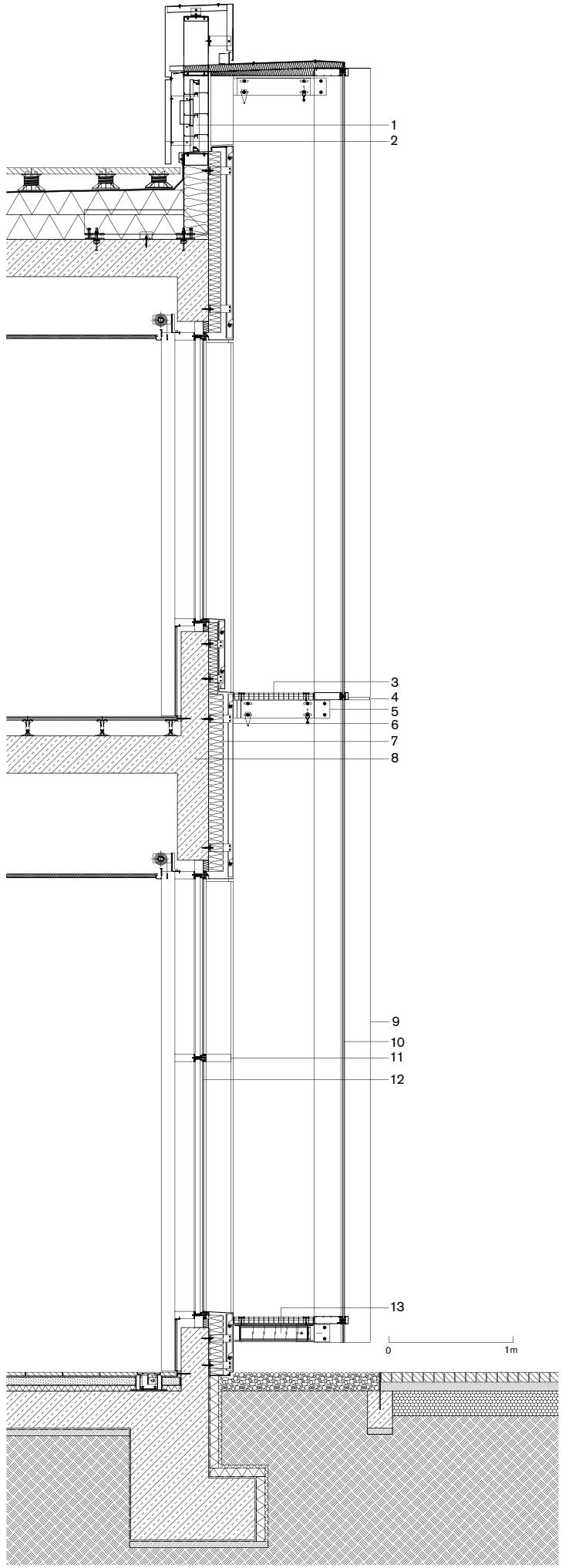
— PC

— PC

Section through double facade

1 Anodised aluminium automatic ventilation louvre – heated air out
2 Perforated anodised aluminium cladding
3 Anodised aluminium grillage – walkway for maintenance access
4 Expansion joint to anodised aluminium glazing mullion
5 Stainless steel bracket to support outer glazing
6 Anodised aluminium sheet cladding
7 Semi-rigid insulation
8 Reinforced in situ cast concrete
9 Anodised aluminium glazing mullion
10 Toughened glass with *Supersilver* coating
11 Anodised aluminium glazing transom
12 Laminated blast resistant glass with argon filled cavity
13 Anodised aluminium automatic ventilation louvre – cooler air in

– PC



— CR

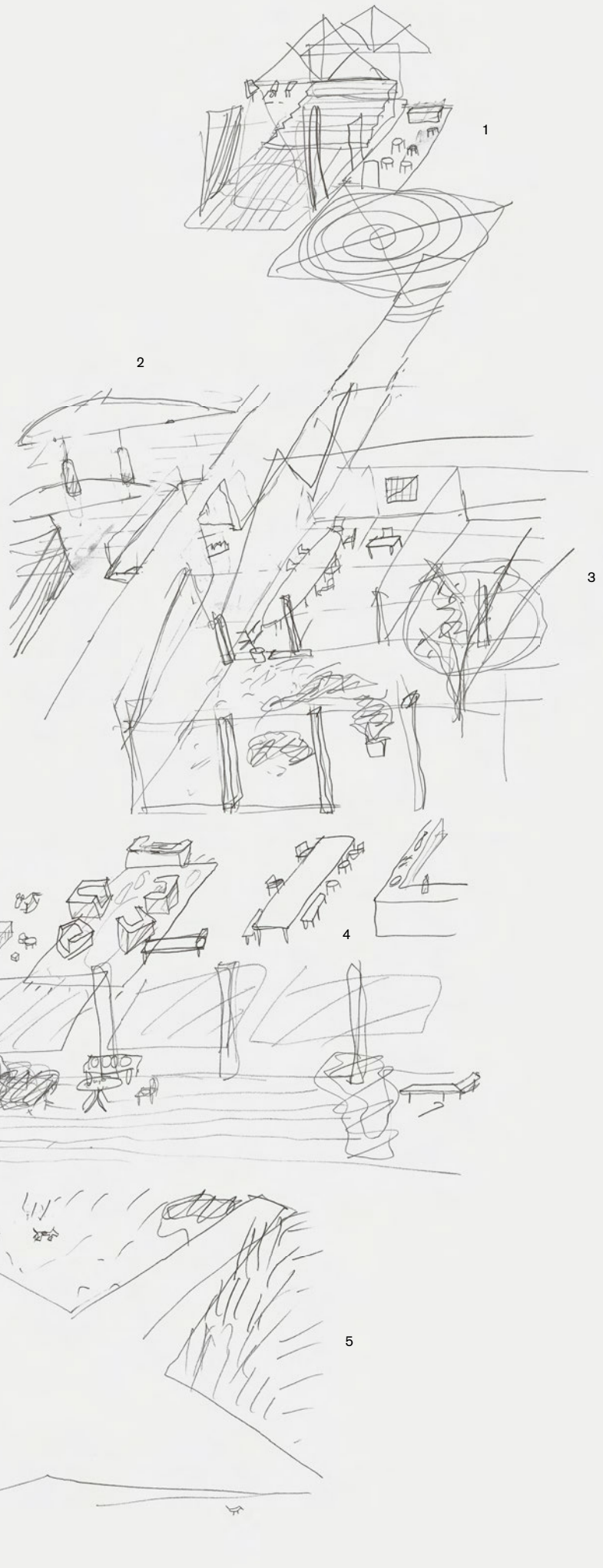
Spinderihallerne

2006 Invited competition
Location: Vejle, Denmark
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney David Owen, Sandy Rendel
Project Architects: Simon Jones and Donald Matheson
Michael Lee, Matthew Barton, Guy Derwent, Max Lacey, Annika Rabi, Gus Brown

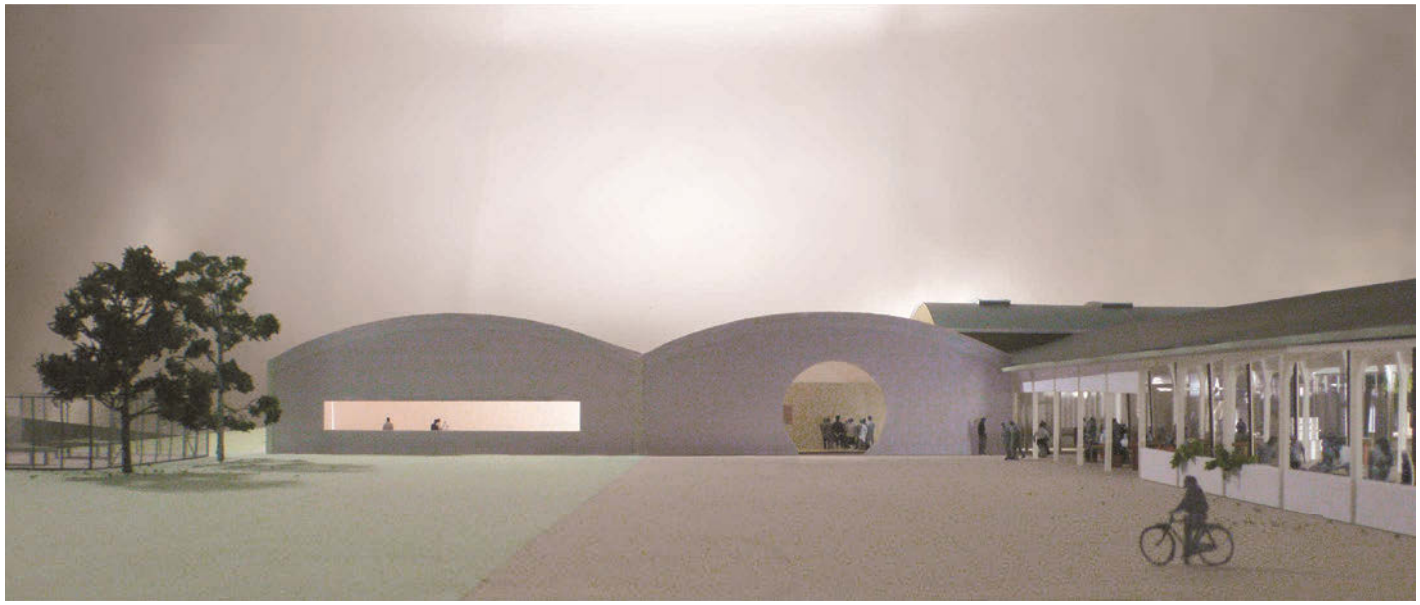
For more than one hundred years, Vejle Spinning Mill was a major employer in the city's industrial district. Since closing, it has been informally occupied by artists and craft workers, community groups and small businesses. Vejle municipality, supported by the Realdania Foundation, sought to expand those existing activities and bring a public dimension to them. To do this they launched a limited architectural competition to alter the building so that art, business and the community would co-exist in greater synergy.

Having developed additively over a long period, Vejle Spinning Mill consisted of a range of different types and scales of building. The largest of these were an extensive north-lit, concrete-framed factory and a series of halls with concrete vaulted roofs. Around and adjacent to them were smaller buildings, less striking in structure but with individual characters.

The scheme had to provide a large number of offices, studios and shared workshops that could be reconfigured for changing patterns of use, together with supporting facilities and meeting rooms. Alongside were to be new premises for the Vejle Amateur Theatre and Wedala Boxing Club, which already occupied parts of the building, and the Vejle Museum and Trekanten Children's Theatre, which were already established elsewhere in the community. Most significantly, there was to be a large and very public cafe-restaurant, which would stay open in the evening. In our view, the investment of the working lives of the people of Vejle into the Spinning Mill had made it a collective entity. Our primary architectural statement was to open the building to the city for renewed creative work and public enjoyment. To bring this into effect with the limited budget, we proposed two strategies: the selective cutting open of the building fabric to give functionality, meaning and public access; and the placing of significant parts of the programme in the most distinctive parts of the buildings. The Vejle Museum was placed in the vaulted halls looking out to the main approach from the city through large glazed openings in the facade. On the adjacent side, the facade was removed to reveal the cafe-restaurant and the studios located in the north-lit factory behind it. As in Lina Bo Bardi's SESC Pompéia in Sao Paulo, the cafe-restaurant was intended as a public living room and place of creative interaction for those working here, visitors to the museum, children waiting for the theatre to begin, members of the seniors' club, and people spending time reading or talking to each other over a cup of tea. In fine weather, those activities could spill into the garden outside the museum and cafe, while further out there were enclosed sports courts in which people could flee communality and play individualistic competitive sports. Studios and work spaces extended from the cafe-restaurant into the building, arranged around two long courts cut into the structure. A long public corridor ran at right angles to them through the building, offering views into the courts and studios on one side, and on the other, to the foyers of the boxing club and amateur theatre, with their displays of memorabilia. The floor of the corridor becomes patterned and magical before leading out beneath a glass roof under the stars to the children's theatre.



1 Children's theatre
2 Boxing club
3 Workshops
4 Cafe
5 Garden



Section through BIZ-ArT, courtyards and cafe – DG
East main entrance – DG

Ground floor

1 Vejle Museum
- a Museum entrance
- b Exhibition spaces
- c History laboratory reception area

2 BIZ-ArT
- a Administration area
- b Studios and office space
- c Workshop space

3 The Trekanten Theatre
- a Main theatre entrance
- b Foyer
- c Tickets
- d Coats
- e Public toilets
- f Cleaners' store
- g Store
- h Auditorium
- i Stage
- j Back stage
- k Workshop
- l Delivery and goods access
- m Stage door and staff entry
- n Dressing rooms

4 Vejle Amateur Theatre
- a Access stair

5 The Veterans Senior Club
- a Main entrance
- b Cloaks and WCs
- c Quiet room
- d Sitting rooms
- e Kitchen

6 The Wedala Boxing Club
- a Access stair

7 Shared meeting facilities

8 Cafe/kitchen
- a Public entrance
- b Dining area
- c Lounge area
- d Public WCs
- e Kitchen
- f Servery

9 Multi-purpose hall

10 Civic living room

11 General Spinning Mill Facilities
- a Main entrance
- b Spinning Mill main reception
- c Museum library display case
- d Public WCs
- e Biz-ArT display case
- f Boxing club display case
- g East main entrance

12 Courtyard

Our Lady of Lourdes

2006 Invited competition
Location: Hungerford, UK
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, David Owen
Michael Lee, Gus Brown, Max Lacey

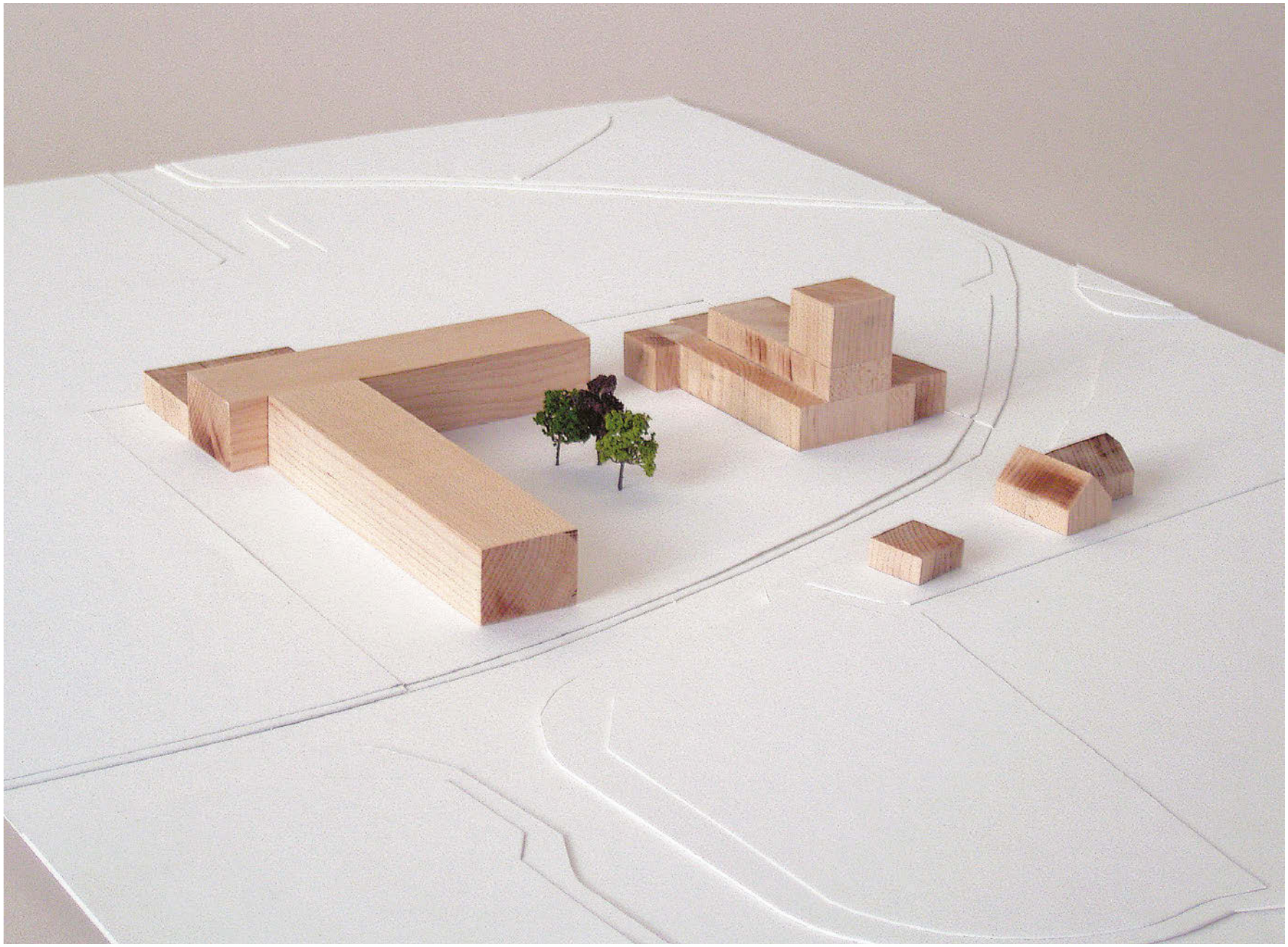
The trustees of Our Lady of Lourdes wanted to construct a new church on the land they owned by developing part of the site with houses for sale. In our design, the project would provide a significant incident in the fabric of the neighbourhood, drawing the buildings on the other side of the street into a relationship with it.

The new houses were set back from the road in a railed and gated courtyard that provided for parking and children's play. Next to the houses and also set in a garden, the new church would be a gentle public building with simple forms and materials, animated inside by light. Facing east, it presents its bell tower and sanctuary to the street. Wedding and funeral cars would drive up to the church through the garden, while people would leave their cars in the housing courtyard and approach the church through the garden on foot. A narthex, the entrance to the church, takes the form of a glazed porch where churchgoers can congregate and speak to the priest on departure.

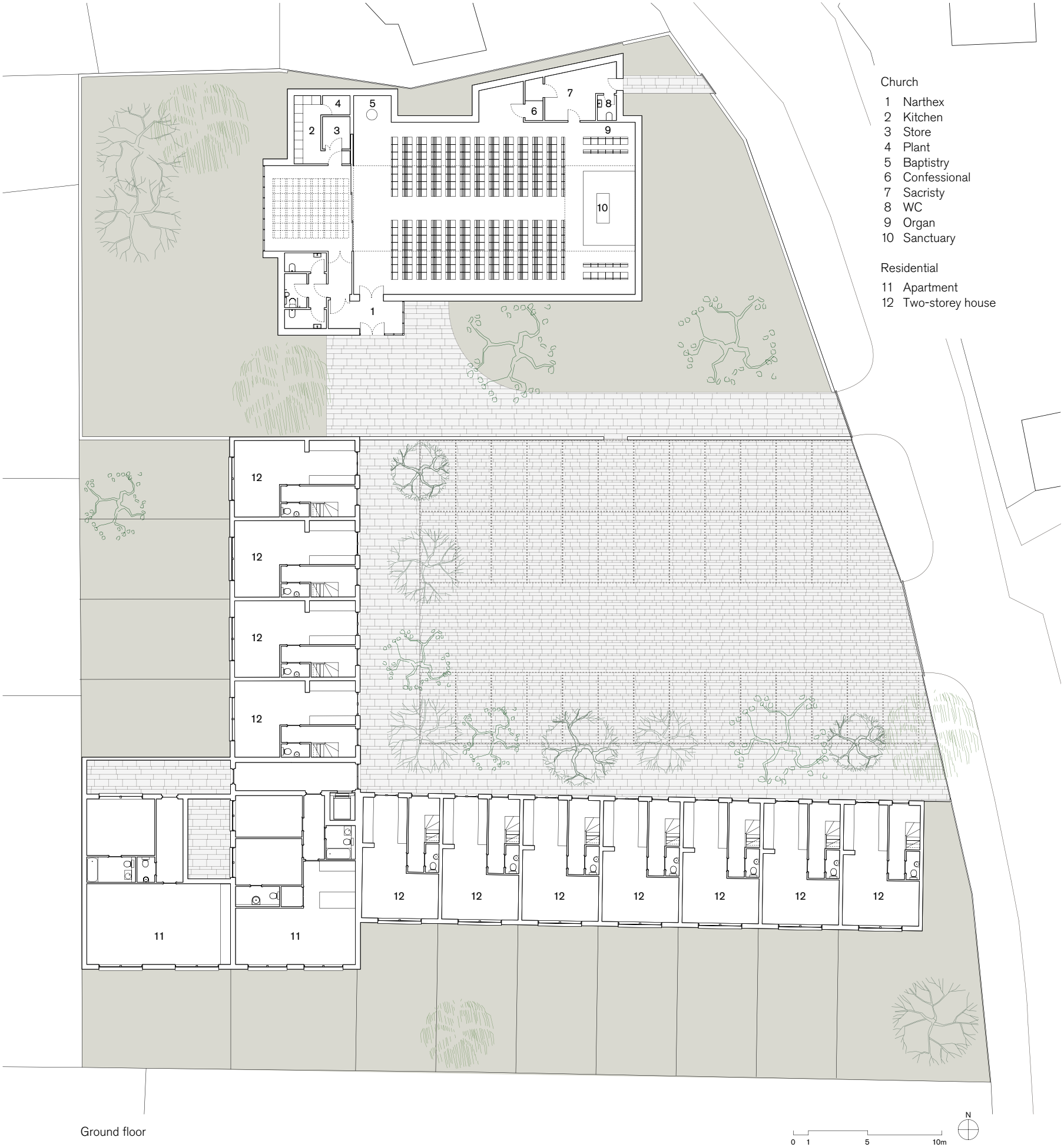
On entering the church, there would be a direct view of the baptistry, located in a recess in the north wall. Further along, the confessional was set back from the main body of the church for discretion and quietness. At the eastern end of the church was the sacristy with a high space above. To these three elements, light comes from above through stained glass of different colours.

On the west side, the church hall could open to the rear garden for social activities. Simple, monumental construction was proposed using insulated brick walls, a lead roof, and aluminium window frames and rainwater pipes that provide long-term durability and low maintenance.

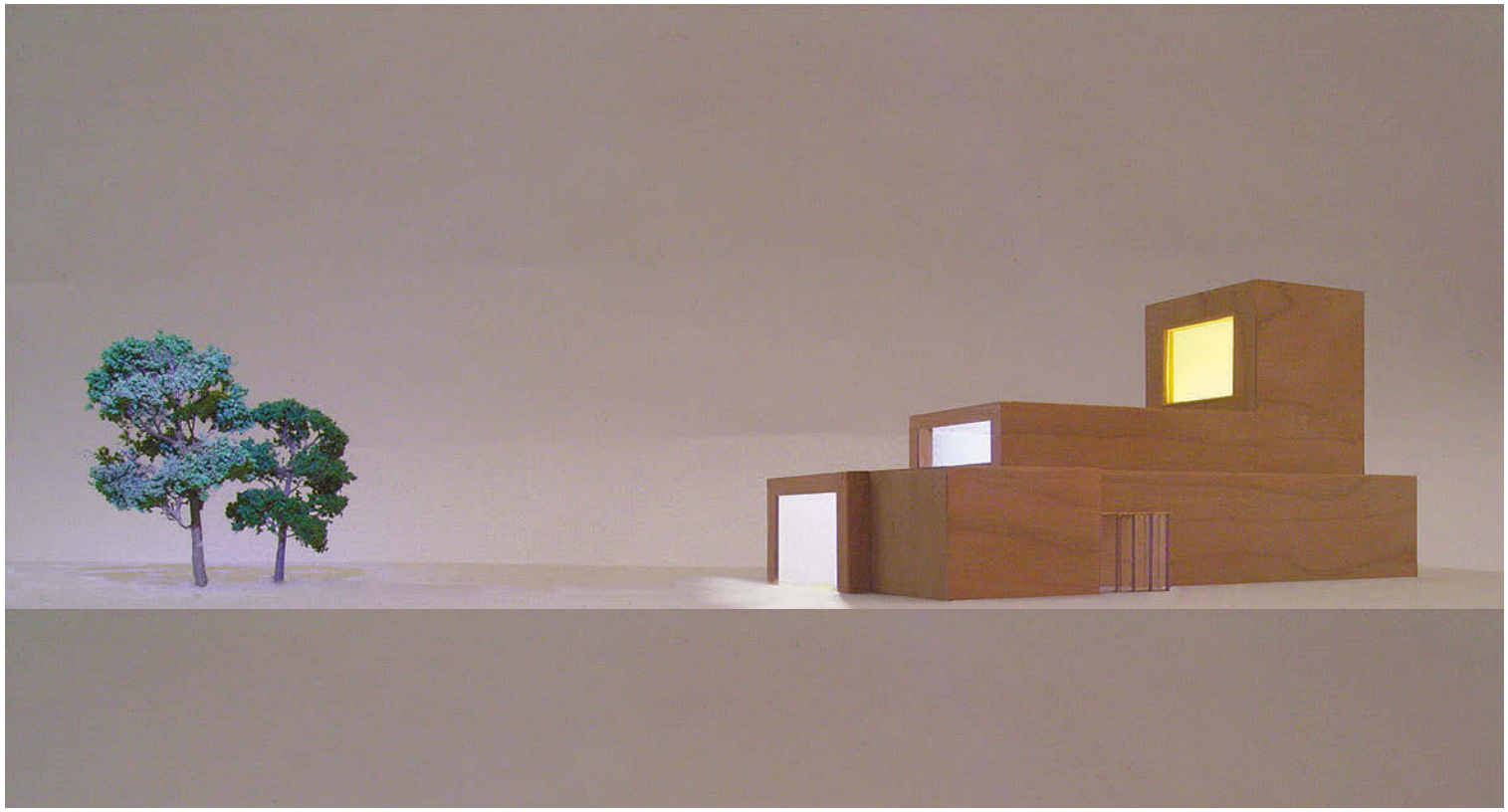
– TF

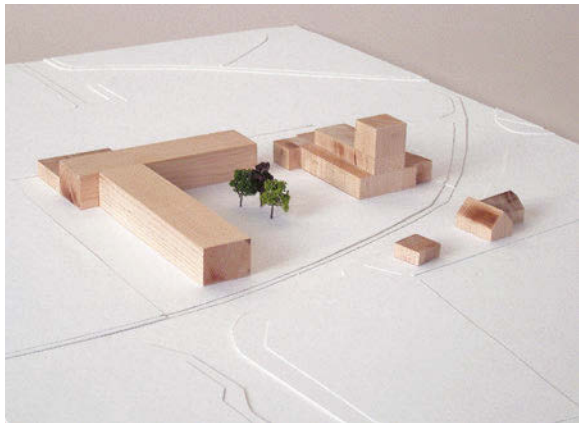


— TFA/ML



Ground floor





Model photos – TFA/ML

Erste Bank

2008 Invited competition
Location: Vienna, Austria
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, Sandy Rendel, David Owen
Project Architect: Laszlo Csutoras
Martin Nässén, Piram Banpabutr, Chris Neve, Guy Derwent, Chris Snow, Richard Prest

Large areas of land will be released by the proposed reconstruction of Vienna South railway station. Its development has been the subject of several design competitions, including the headquarters for Erste Bank. The bank was to be located in a significant position on the corner of two major roads, with long views over the Schweizer Garten opposite, and downwards to the Belvedere Palace and centre of the city.

Erste Bank's extensive programme included flexible office space for 4'000 employees, naturally ventilated and with close proximity to daylight and views. It also required a conference centre, trading suite and other similar items along with a range of facilities at street level for bank employees and the neighbourhood.

We proposed a building with three connected parts with a scale that related to the buildings in the immediate neighbourhood, and which provided an intelligible scale to the spaces of the interior. In each of the three parts, offices are arranged around a covered atrium, each with a different shape and containing different types of trees and planting. These would be several degrees cooler than the interior so that opening the office windows offers a sense of exteriority. Bridges suspended across the atria and passing through the trees connected the offices to the lifts and the communal facilities of the meeting rooms and cafes.

The building shaped three external spaces around it: to the west, a plaza containing shops, cafes and facilities for employees identified the building from the direction of the new station; to the north, a smaller entrance plaza faces the city centre and Schweizer Garten. Both plazas lead to the atrium of the central building that provides a richly planted entrance at ground level. To the south-east was a garden exclusively for the Erste bank restaurant, with tall glass screens towards the street that reduced traffic noise and gave views over the Schweizer Garten.

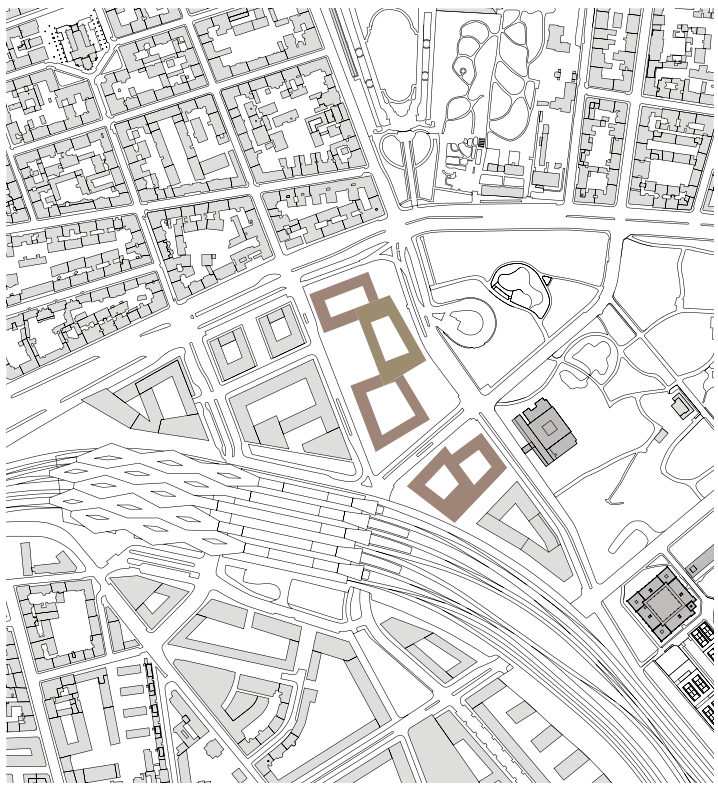
A grid of pilasters in the facade gave a restrained abstract quality to the building, while occasional pragmatic variations and exceptions provide animation. The north and south facades were clad in red Belgian marble, while the centre part, which has the greatest presence towards the station and Schweizer Garten, was one floor higher and had a facade clad entirely in bronze.

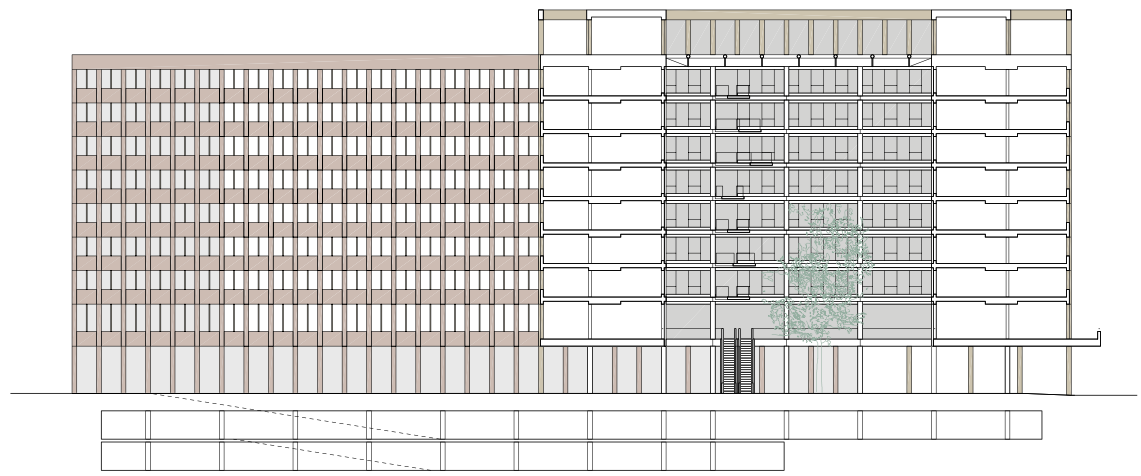
Inside, structural columns were covered with white marble and the internal faces of window mullions were covered with bronze to provide a modulated enclosure to the offices. With exposed concrete ceilings, these elements provided massive surfaces for night-time cooling as part of a regime of low-tech energy management. External sun shading was effected by projecting the pilasters and mullions of the facade in places where the building was not shaded by other buildings around it. This would make the orientation and change of seasons evident to occupants and act as another element in the formation of the character of the interior.

At night the atria and their planting, illuminated by small amounts of lighting, would be visible through the facade, adding a large-scale element of nature to the city.

– HD

Bank from Schweizer Garten

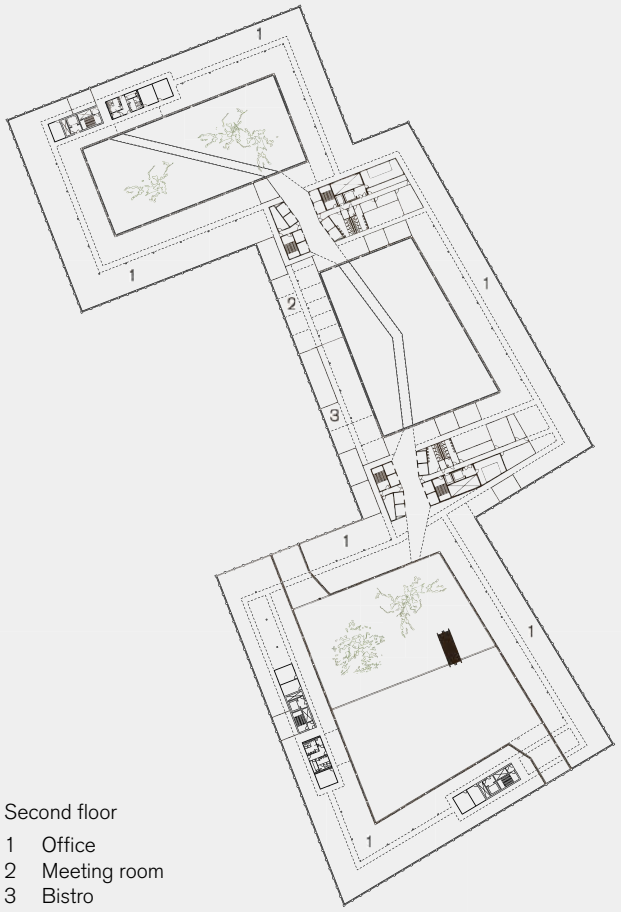




Section through main entrance area

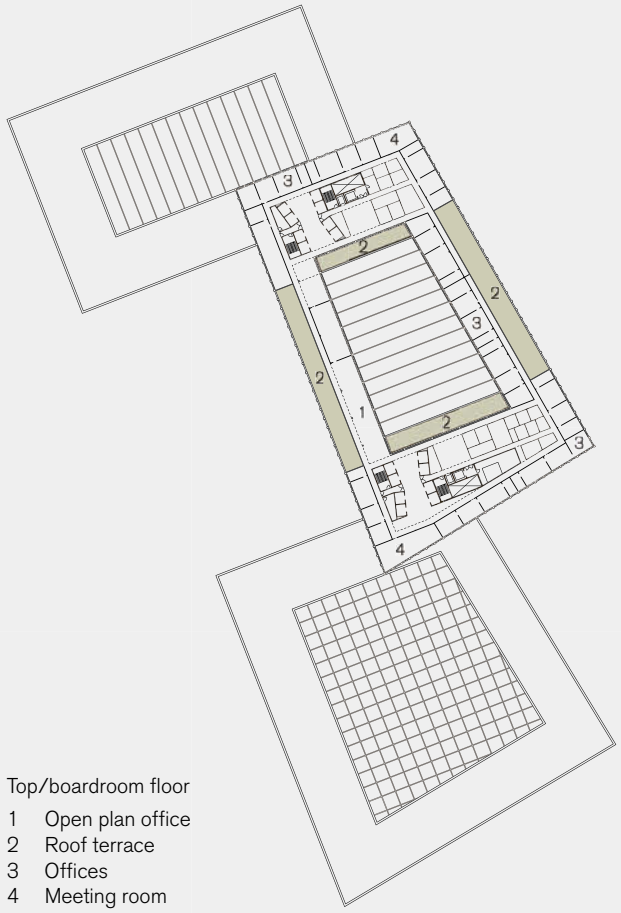
0 1 5 10m

Ground floor



Second floor

1 Office
2 Meeting room
3 Bistro

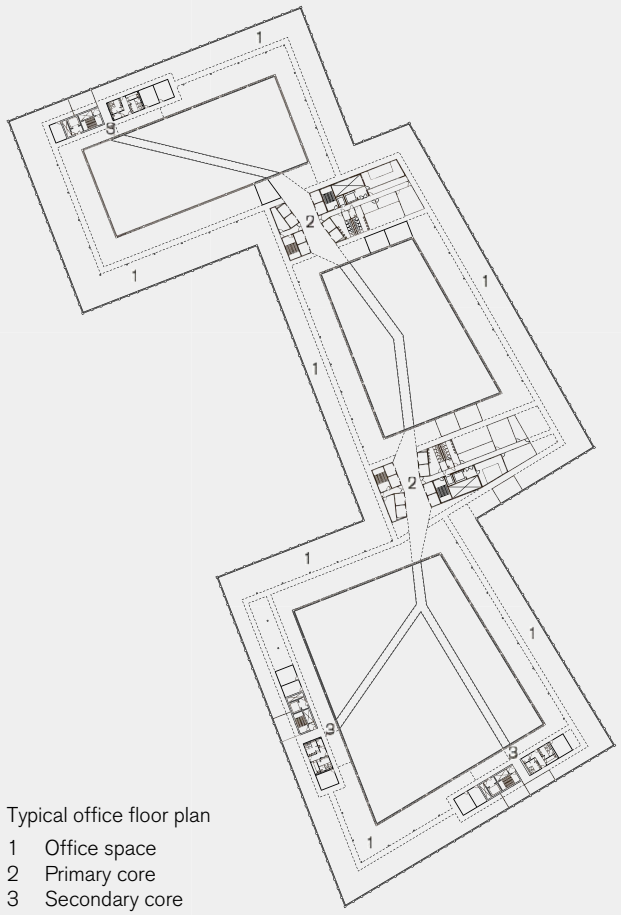


Top/boardroom floor

1 Open plan office
2 Roof terrace
3 Offices
4 Meeting room

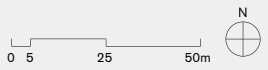
First floor

1 Office
2 Conference room
3 Training area
4 Facility management/ security centre
5 Dealer area

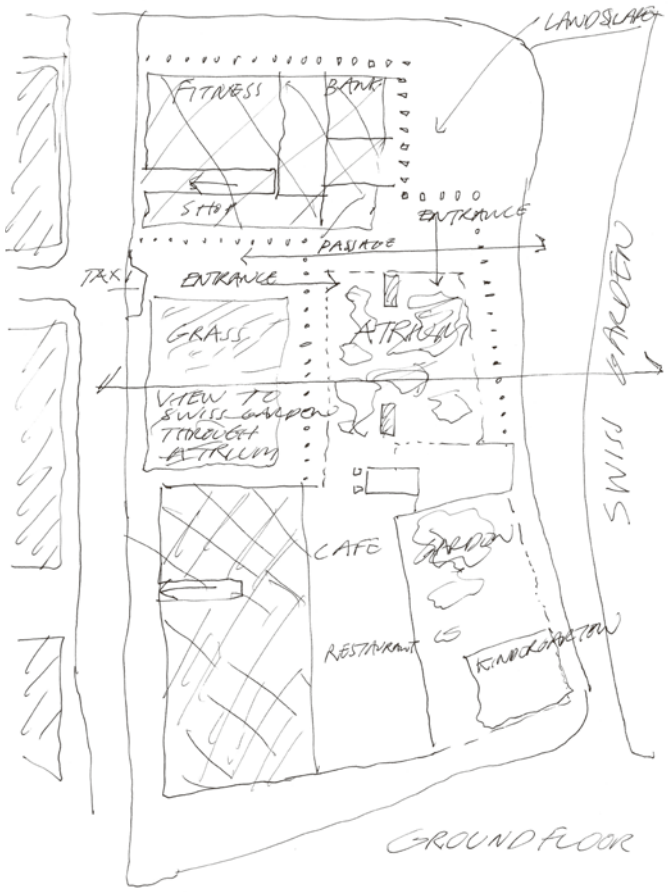


Typical office floor plan

1 Office space
2 Primary core
3 Secondary core



Main entrance atrium – HD



– TF

Molenplein

2010 Location: Den Helder, the Netherlands
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, David Owen
Project Architect: Chris Snow
Chris Neve. With the kind help of
Geurst & Schulze Architecten

Molenplein is part of a planned response by the municipality to the relocation of a Dutch navy base and the subsequent loss of population that is affecting its economy. New housing was to be provided that addressed the aspirations of middle-income people, who were fundamental to the city's continued prosperity but were among those leaving. In addition, the Napoleonic dockyard opposite the project has been restored to provide places for new business and culture.

The project occupies a strip of land facing the dockyard across the Werfkanaal on one side and the smaller Helderskanaal on the other. In their master plan, urban designers West 8 proposed large, three-storey houses towards the dockyard and compact, two-storey houses to the rear, with private gardens in between. West 8's plan also sought to mirror the diversity of existing houses further along the canal by mixing different houses designed by two participating architects, Geurst & Schulze and ourselves.

Our approach to the project was stimulated by the openness and energy that we saw in de Prinsendam in Amsterdam, where owners radically personalised their interiors. We also wanted to achieve the generosity of scale and abstraction that we saw in Dutch architecture from the golden age, early Dutch modernism and contemporary work such as that of Frits van Dongen. Geurst & Schulze filled in the spaces of this historical perspective with more elaborate designs that recognised the combination of richness and simplicity of the Amsterdam school.

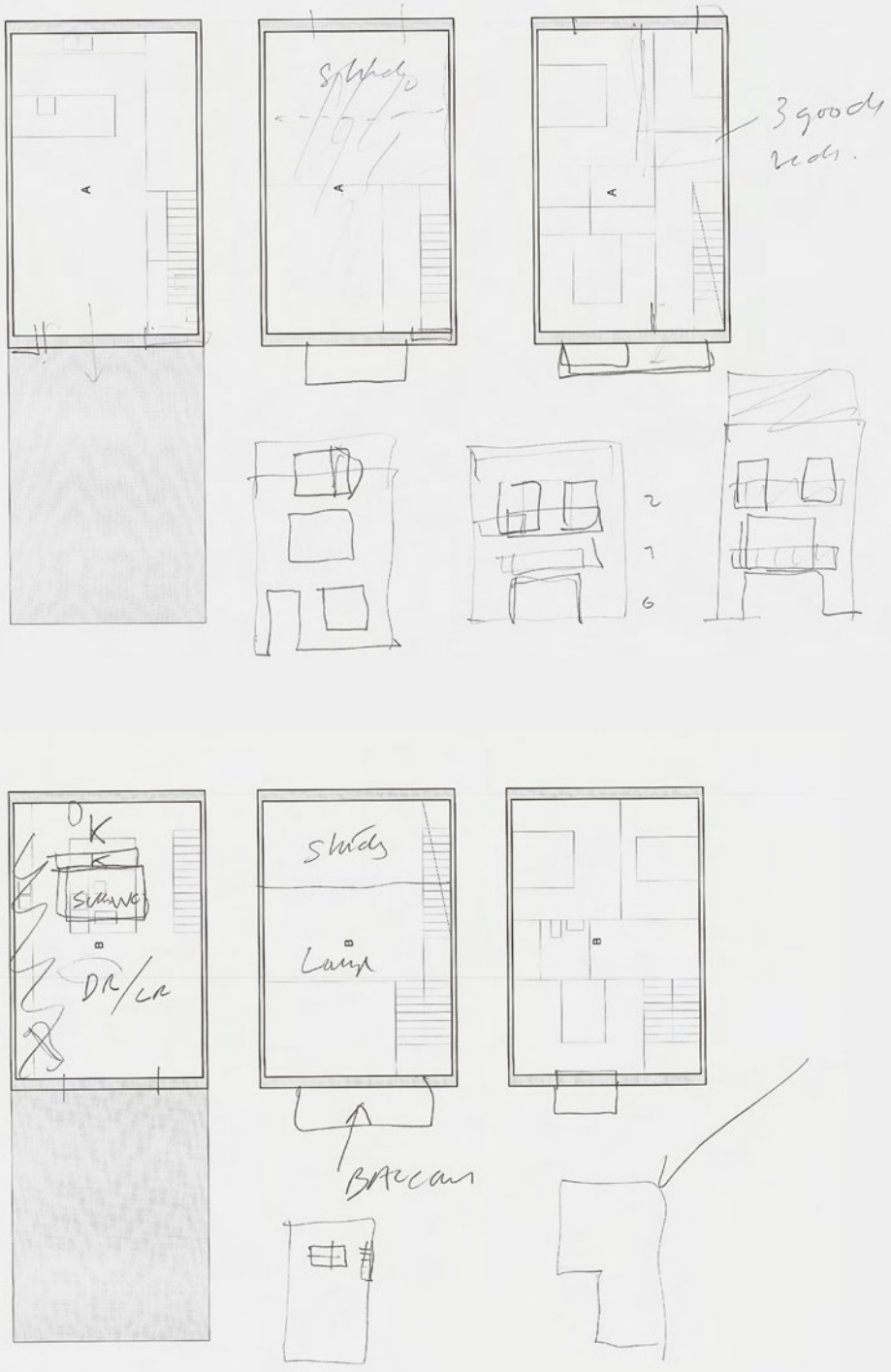
For our part, we made abstract versions of Dutch canal front and back houses containing interior spaces that invite reconfiguration. An elemental quality was given by using standard Dutch wooden window frames and rose-coloured brick with thick white pointing, which recognises the spruce air of the brickwork in the naval yard opposite. Added to the repertoire was a measure of ornament given by discreet panels of Belgian marble.

Pictorial moments were encouraged such as the view across the back gardens to the church. Here, the forms of the houses become both abstract and familiar, something that can be experienced in the gardens of Amsterdam canal housing and at J.J.P. Oud's modernist housing at Kiefhoek.

–TF

Elevation to Molenplein – CR

Geurst & Schulze Architecten on the left and Tony Fretton Architects on the right – CR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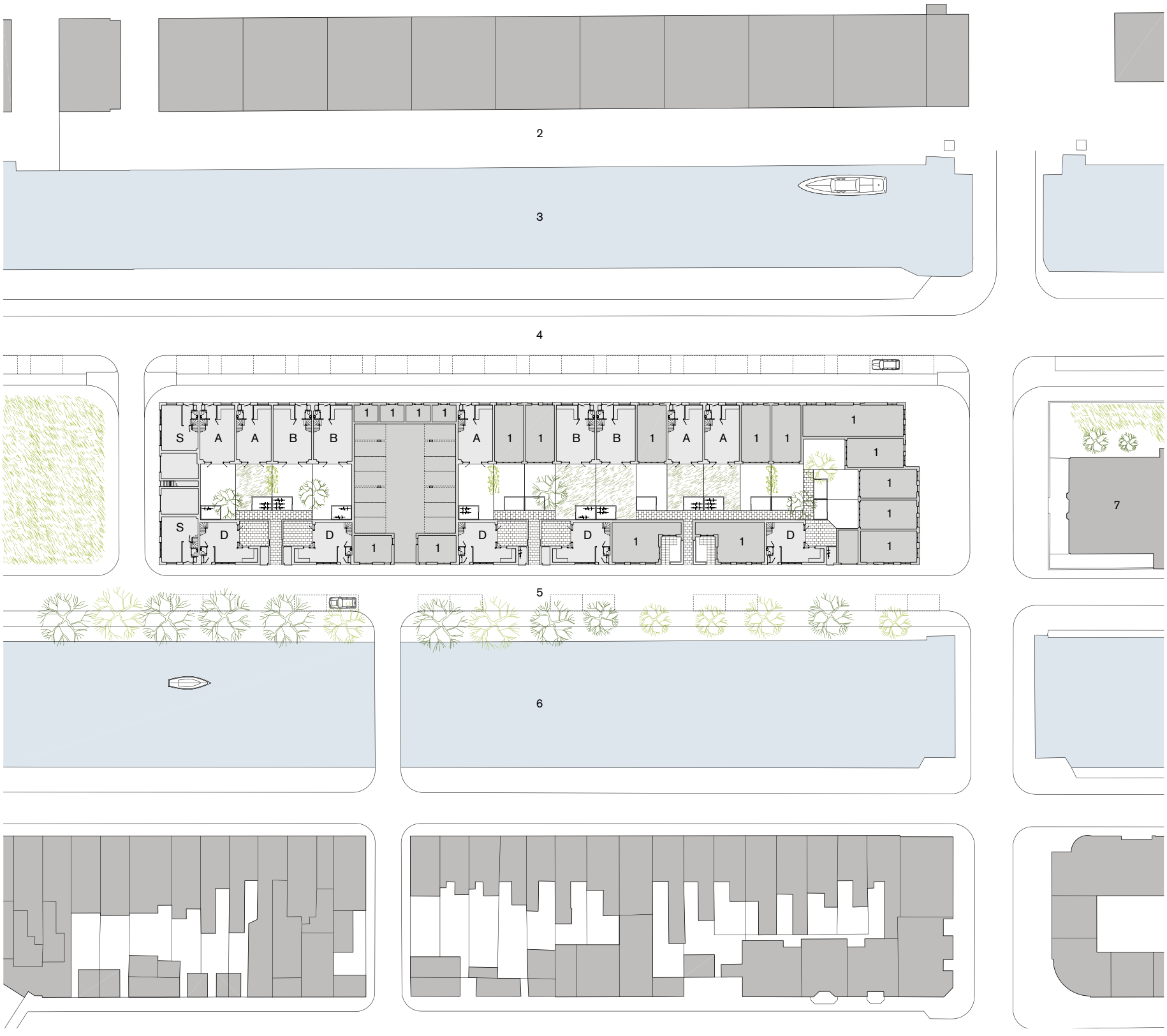
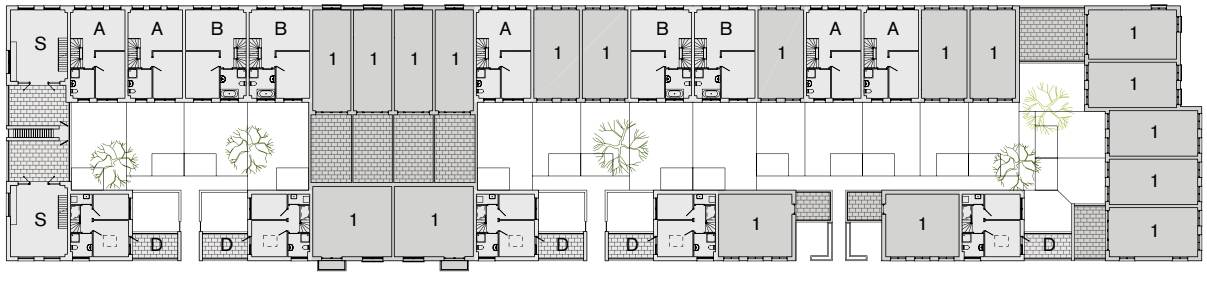


Ground floor

Second floor

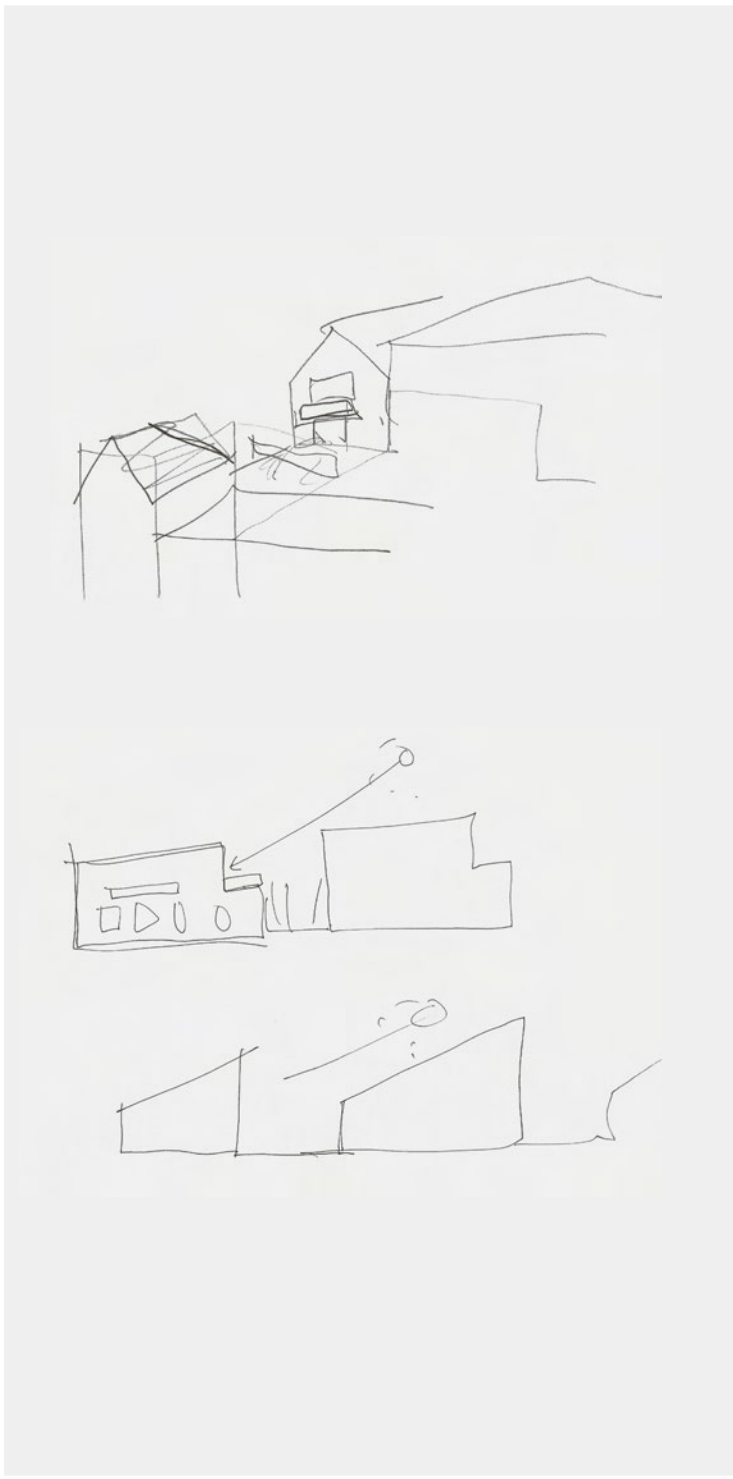


First floor

S, A, B and D housing types by Tony Fretton Architects

1 Housing by Geurst & Schulze Architecten
2 Dockyard
3 Werfkanaal
4 Molenplein
5 Molengracht
6 Helderskanaal
7 Church

Elevation to Molengracht – CR



– TF

Side street elevation – CR

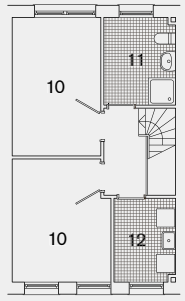
Type D
Street elevation

Type A

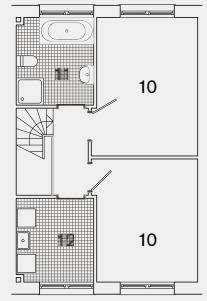
Type B

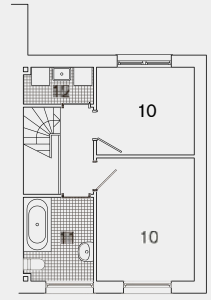
Type S

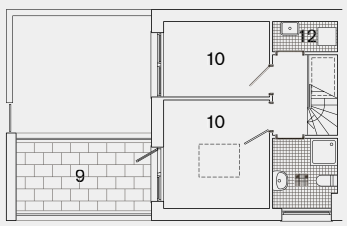
Type S
Side street elevation



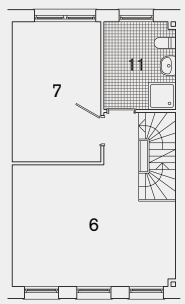
Second floor

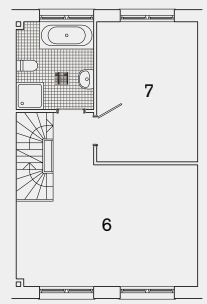


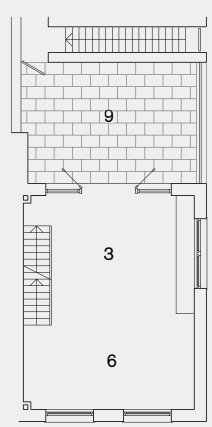


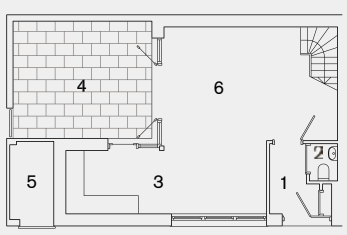


First floor

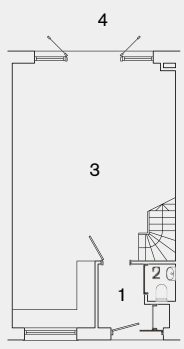


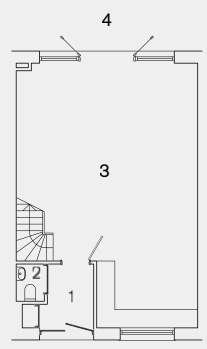


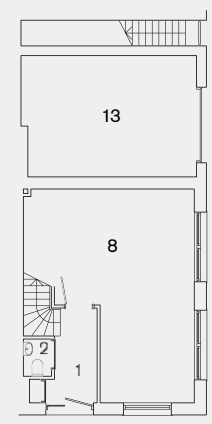




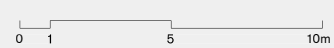
Ground floor







1 Entrance
2 WC
3 Kitchen/dining room
4 Garden
5 Bike store
6 Living room
7 Study
8 Workplace
9 Roof terrace
10 Bedroom
11 Bathroom
12 Laundry room
13 Garage



— CR

Edvard Munch Museum

2009 Invited competition
Location: Oslo, Norway
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, Sandy Rendel, David Owen
Laszlo Csutoras, Martin Nässén, Nina Lundvall, Piram Banpabutr, Chris Neve, Guy Derwent, Chris Snow, Richard Prest

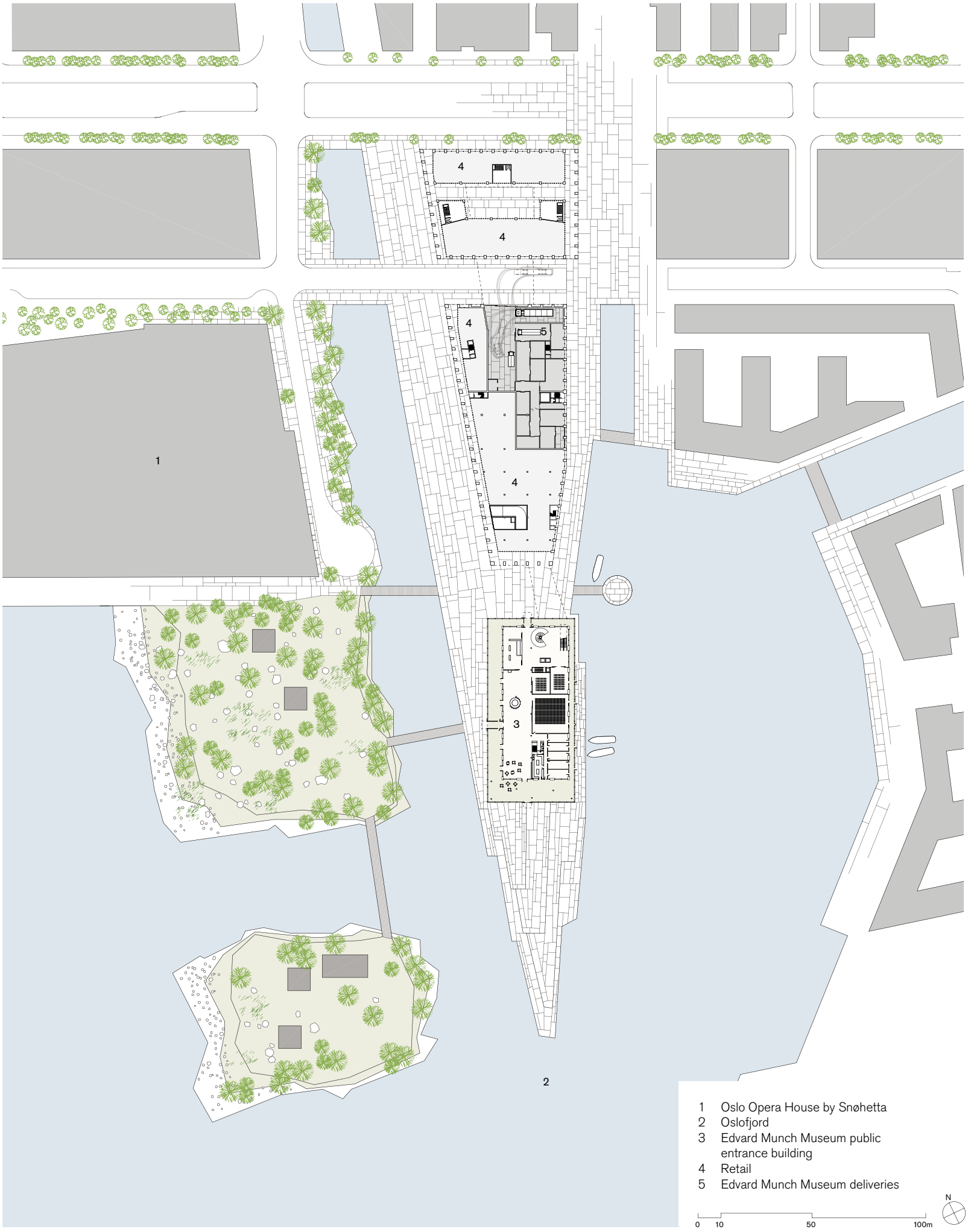
The museum was to be relocated from a building in the city of Oslo to a spit of land projecting into a fjord, as part of the waterfront development that had begun with Snøhetta's opera building. Since the completion of the opera house, the development plans of the waterfront had become municipalised and populist and the Munch project was required to contain elements of shopping and residential. Museum security and the form and disposition of the building were subject to intricate local rules. In direct contrast, Munch himself was internationalist and extremely free in working outside rules and conventions. We chose to foreground those qualities of Munch for pure public enjoyment while making the constraints completely invisible. Our design consisted of two main parts: a gallery building for the artworks, and a large salon-like room on the fjord. The gallery building, was a fenestrated building clad in Norwegian marble. Conservation and enjoyment of external views were balanced by placing the exhibition spaces in the interior, and providing facades of deep, insulating windows with adjustable sun and light control. Along the facades, introductory galleries were located, together with places for the public to sit and relax looking out to the city and fjord.

All of the public areas of the brief were collected to form the public room, a separate building that looked out to the fjord and faced the gallery building across a new public square. Deep, double facades filled with plants would keep the room warm in winter and cool in summer. Like the Glyptotek museum in Copenhagen or the cafes in Berlin frequented by Munch, it was to be a place for people to spend time together in all seasons, but uniquely in the natural setting of the fjord. The public room had a generous entrance from a new square, with a bookshop and ticket desk, a place to hang winter coats, a cinema and rooms for lectures and meetings. These opened on one side to places to eat and drink or to sit by a fire and read, and on the other side to the water. Next to the entrance, escalators and lifts led up to a glass bridge across the square to the museum.

On the turf-covered roof of the public room were wooden huts that would resemble Munch's studios, and an open-air gallery. This recognises Norway's particular contribution, begun by Munch, to making and displaying art in the open air.

Like the roof in the opera house, where people are encouraged to walk, the public room and landscape on the roof were highly visible, popular gestures. In our scheme, the tendency of cultural buildings to become popular destinations was developed into a means of effective social and cultural interaction.

Model photos – TFA/DO



1 Oslo Opera House by Snøhetta
2 Oslofjord
3 Edvard Munch Museum public entrance building
4 Retail
5 Edvard Munch Museum deliveries

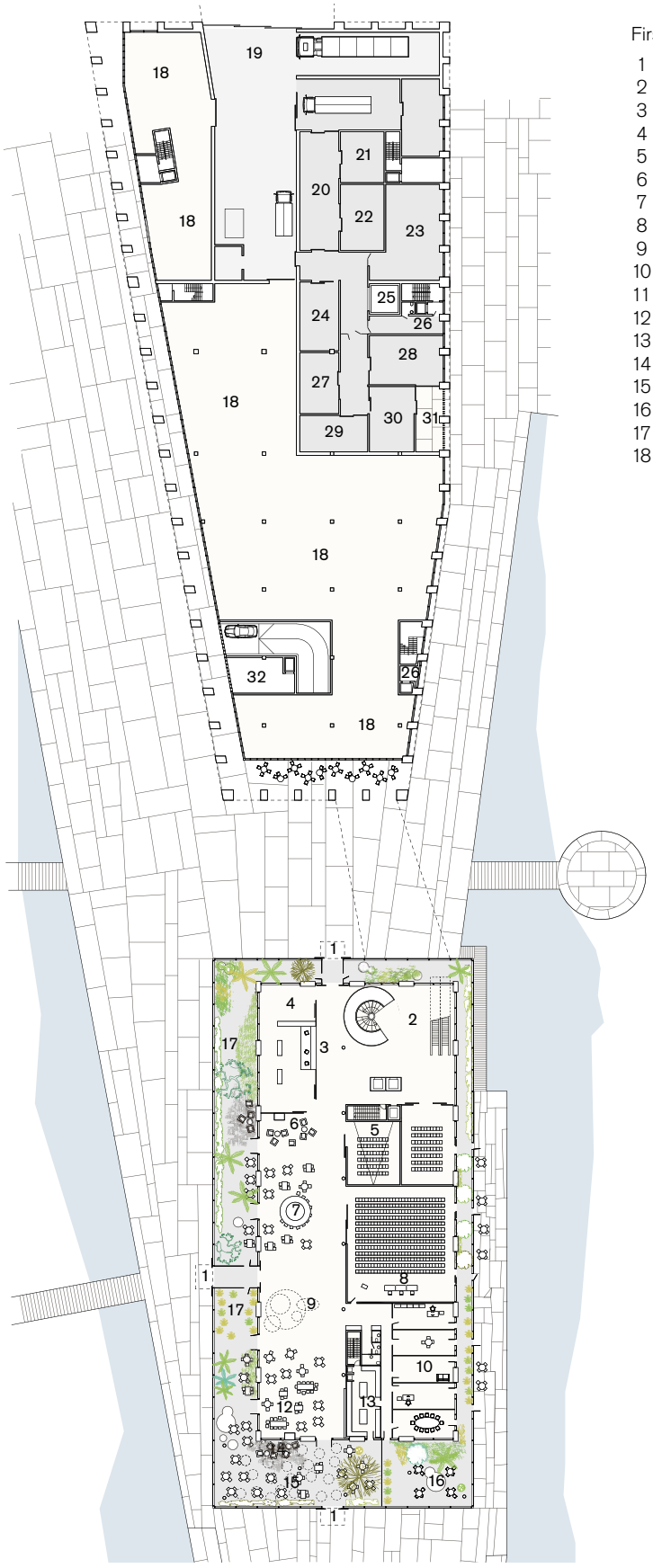
N

0 10 50 100m

— TFA/LC/HL

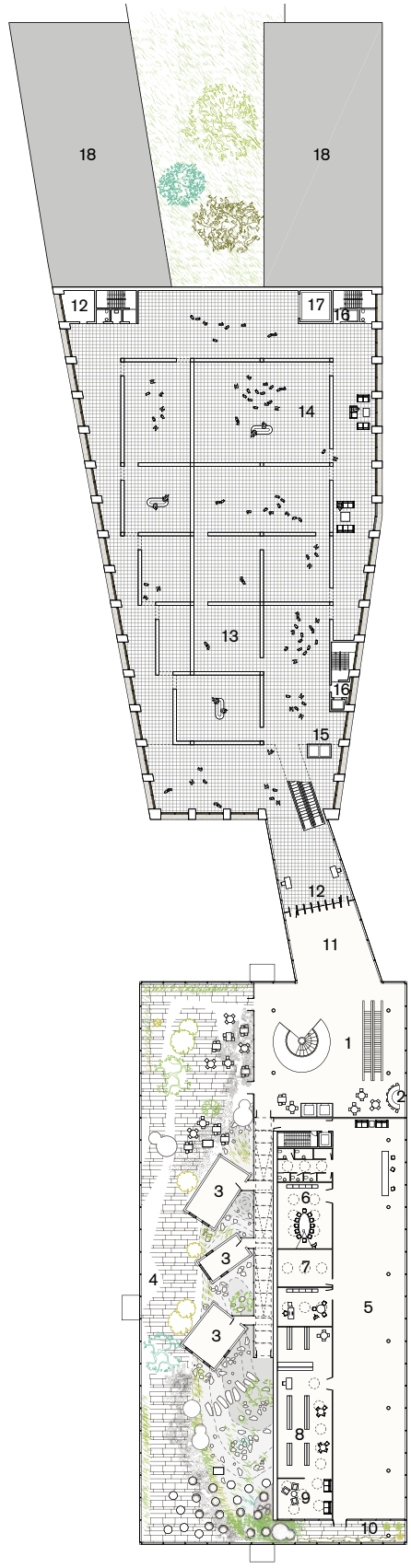
Ground floor

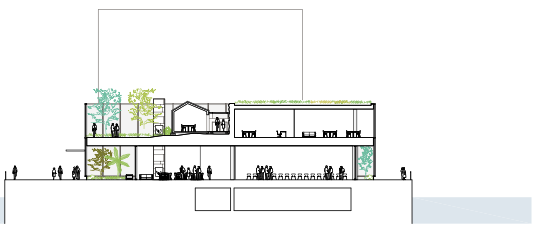
1 Entrances
2 Foyer
3 Box office/reception
4 Shop
5 Cinema
6 Reading corner
7 Bar
8 Auditorium
9 Play area
10 Sponsor's room
11 Terrace
12 Cafe
13 Servery
14 Outdoor reading corner
15 Covered outdoor seating
16 Sponsor's garden
17 Winter garden
18 Retail space
19 Gallery deliveries
20 Unpacking room
21 Box room
22 Quarantine room
23 Office
24 Installation room
25 Art lift
26 Staff lift
27 Operations workshop
28 Exhibition production workshop
29 Metal workshop
30 Joinery workshop
31 Yard
32 Goods deliveries



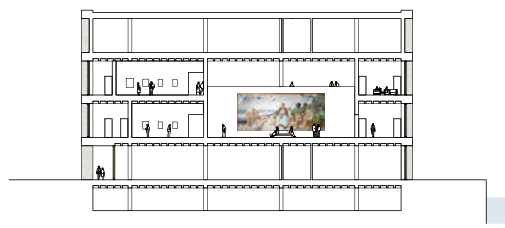
First floor

1 Foyer
2 Bar
3 Teaching
4 Outdoor gallery
5 Office
6 Meeting room
7 Archive
8 Research library
9 Reading room
10 Staff terrace
11 Bridge
12 Security
13 Reconfigurable gallery
14 Monumental works
15 Visitor lift
16 Staff lift
17 Art lift
18 Residential apartments

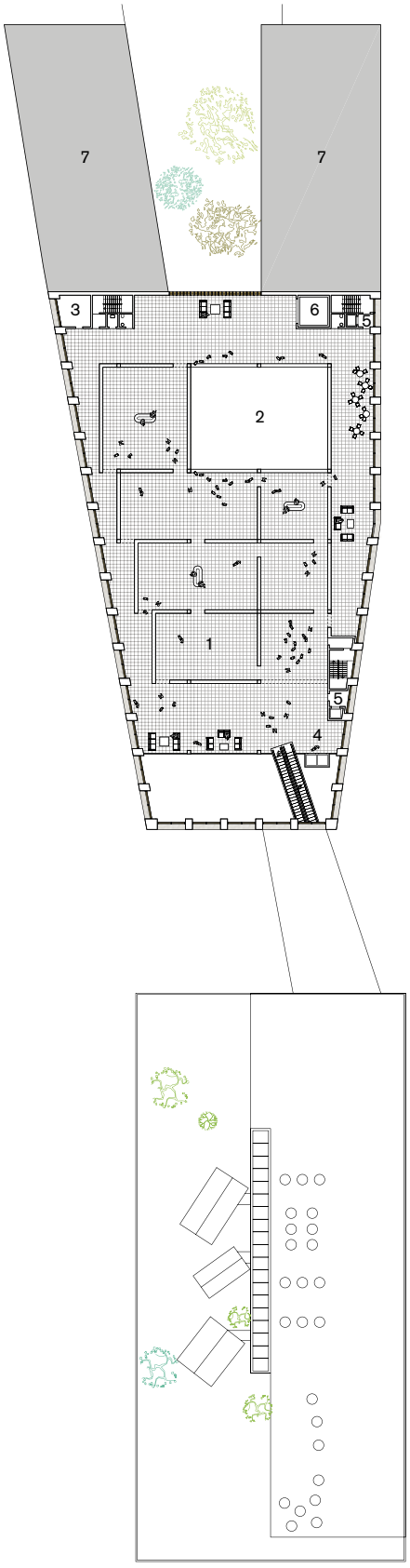




Short section through public room

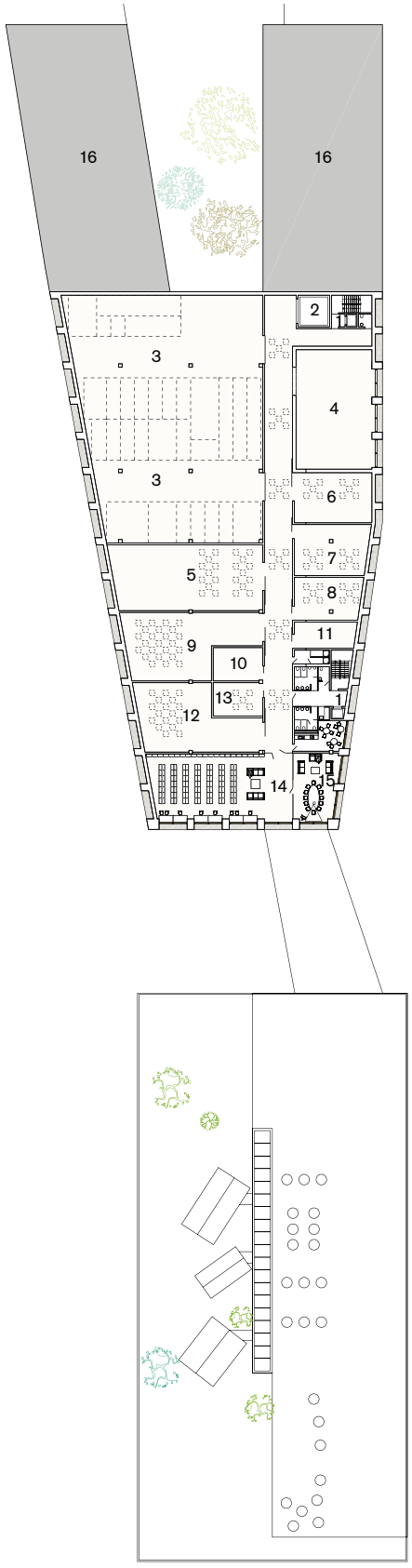


Short section through gallery



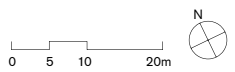
Second floor

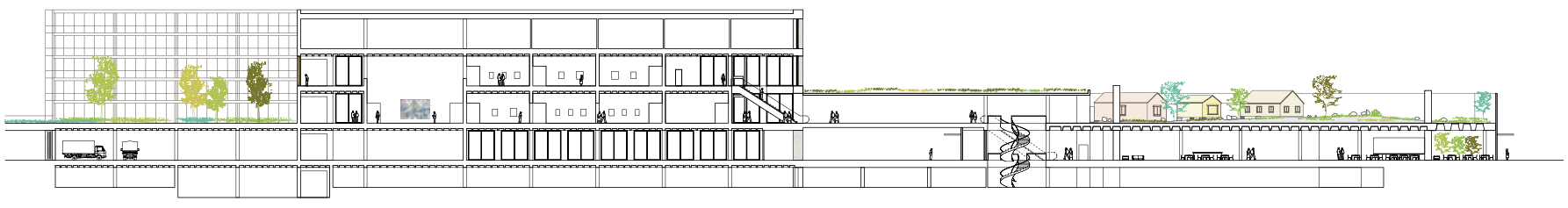
1 Reconfigurable gallery
2 View over monumental works
3 Security
4 Visitor lift
5 Staff lift
6 Art lift
7 Residential apartments



Third floor

1 Staff lift
2 Art lift
3 Secure art store
4 Plant
5 Photo studio
6 Painting studio
7 Paper studio
8 Varnishing room and chemicals store
9 Mounting room and materials store
10 Microscopy room
11 Conservation store
12 Sculpture studio
13 Dust-free rooms
14 Library
15 Meeting room
16 Residential apartments





Long section through gallery and public room

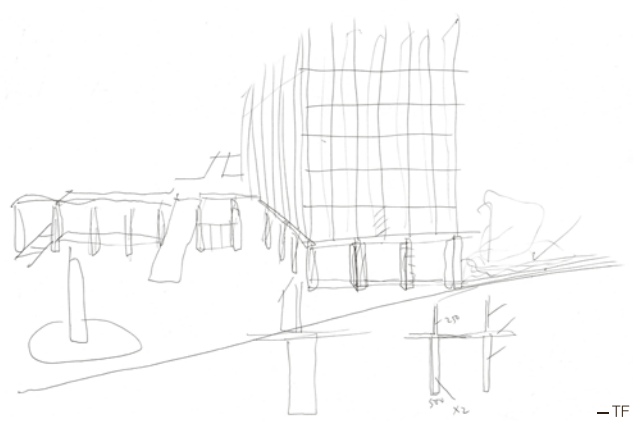
Lund City Hall

2010 Invited competition
Location: Lund, Sweden
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, Sandy Rendel,
David Owen
Laszlo Csutoras, Martin Nässén, Nina Lundvall,
Piram Banpabutr, Guy Derwent, Chris Snow

Lund consists of east Lund, the historic centre and west Lund, which is newer and a few minutes away across the railway line. The historic centre is rich, diverse and filled with buildings from different periods. West Lund is uniform and spacious, with brick apartment buildings set in well-designed landscape. As part of an ongoing development plan, Lund City Hall will be relocated to west Lund and a new bridge for pedestrians and cycles built across the railway to the historic centre.

Landscape is the defining aspect of west Lund, and in our scheme it was extended across the new bridge, making it into a park in which to walk, ride or sit. The new landscaped bridge lands on the roof of the entrance building of the city hall. From there a wide, formal stair descends into the space of the plaza while glass lifts provide an alternative weatherproof route. A heated spiral ramp for cyclists passes through a landscaped court inside the entrance building separated only by a glass screen from its cafe. All means of descent from the bridge are concentrated around the entrance building and mixed with its other functions, so that there would be constant activity at the edge of the plaza.

Lund City Hall is a day lit and naturally ventilated building, arranged around courtyards with views to the country and city. Towards the railway, it is ventilated through a winter garden. Its facades consist of windows between columns of light-coloured regional brick and precast concrete horizontals of the same colour. The city hall can be extended in the future, using bricks of different colours and in a slightly different format so as to create a dialogue with the buildings opposite in historic Lund. The top floor is modulated by changes in the spacing of the verticals while the corner is emphasised by a gold clock that would be visible in the railway station and historic Lund.



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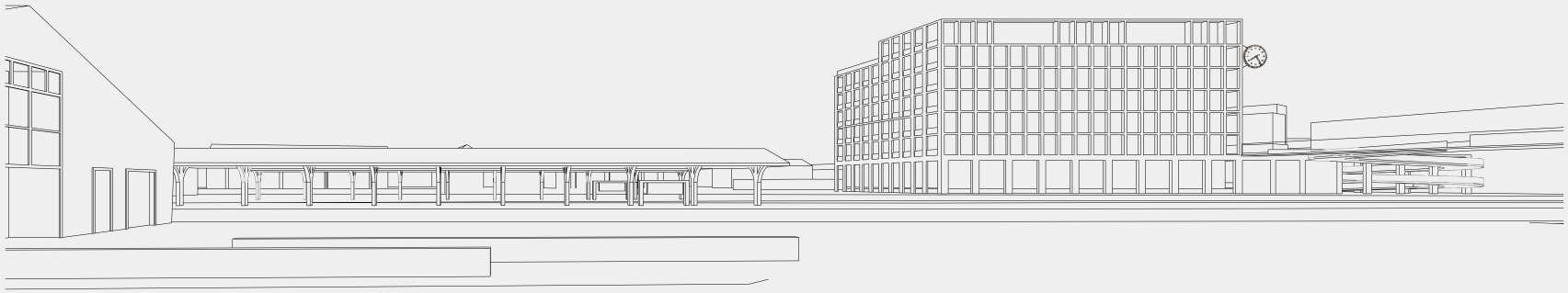
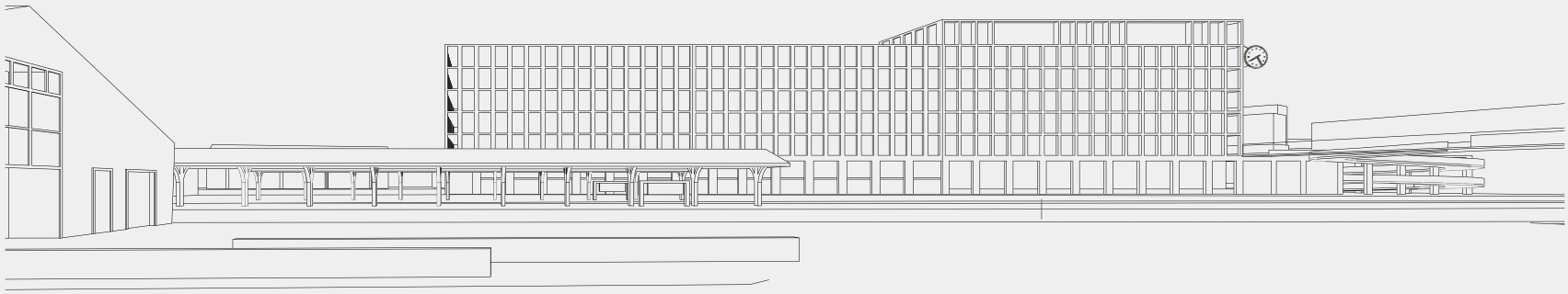
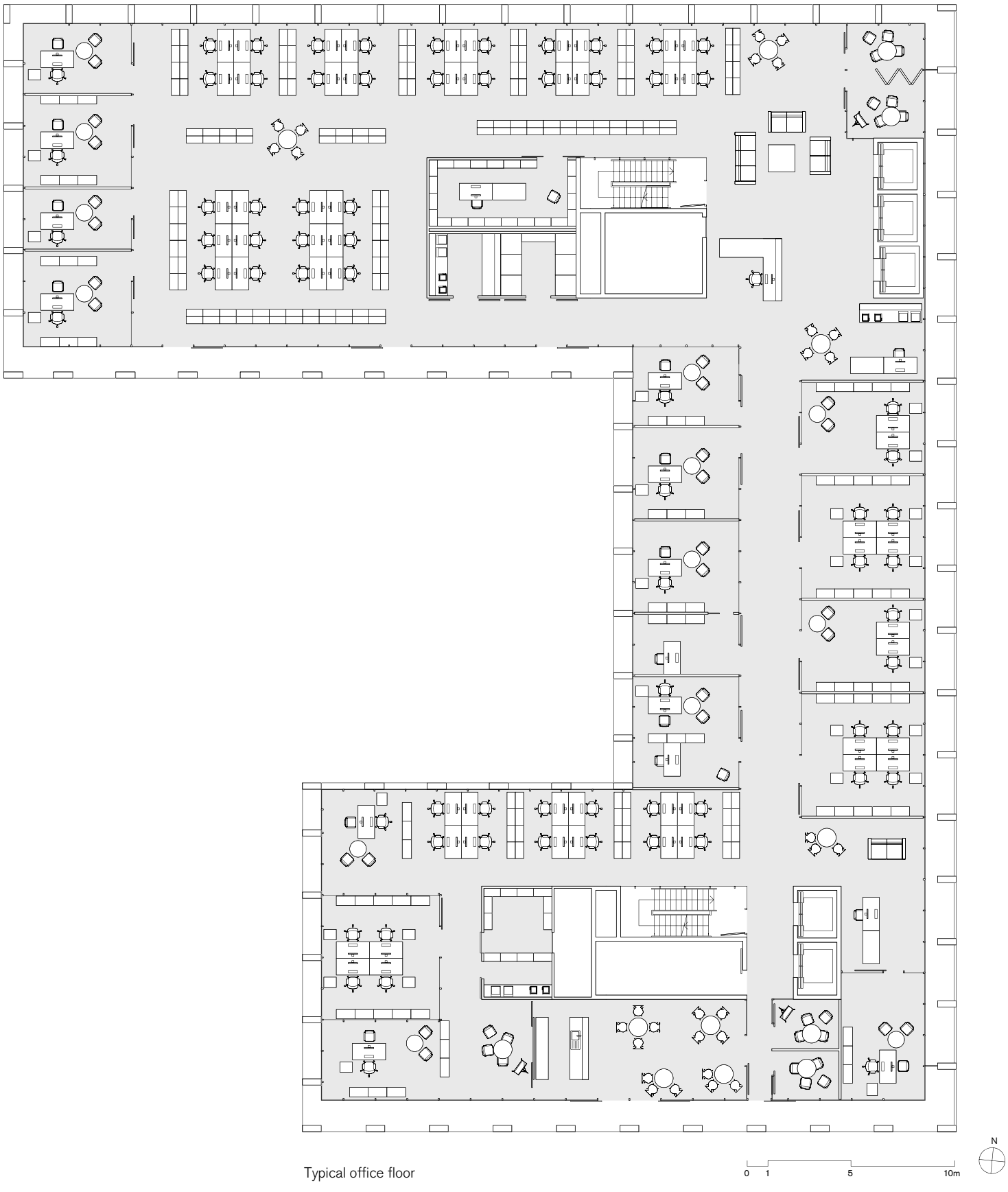


Phase 1



Future phases

Courtyard section



Typical office floor

Deinze Town Hall

2009
–
2014

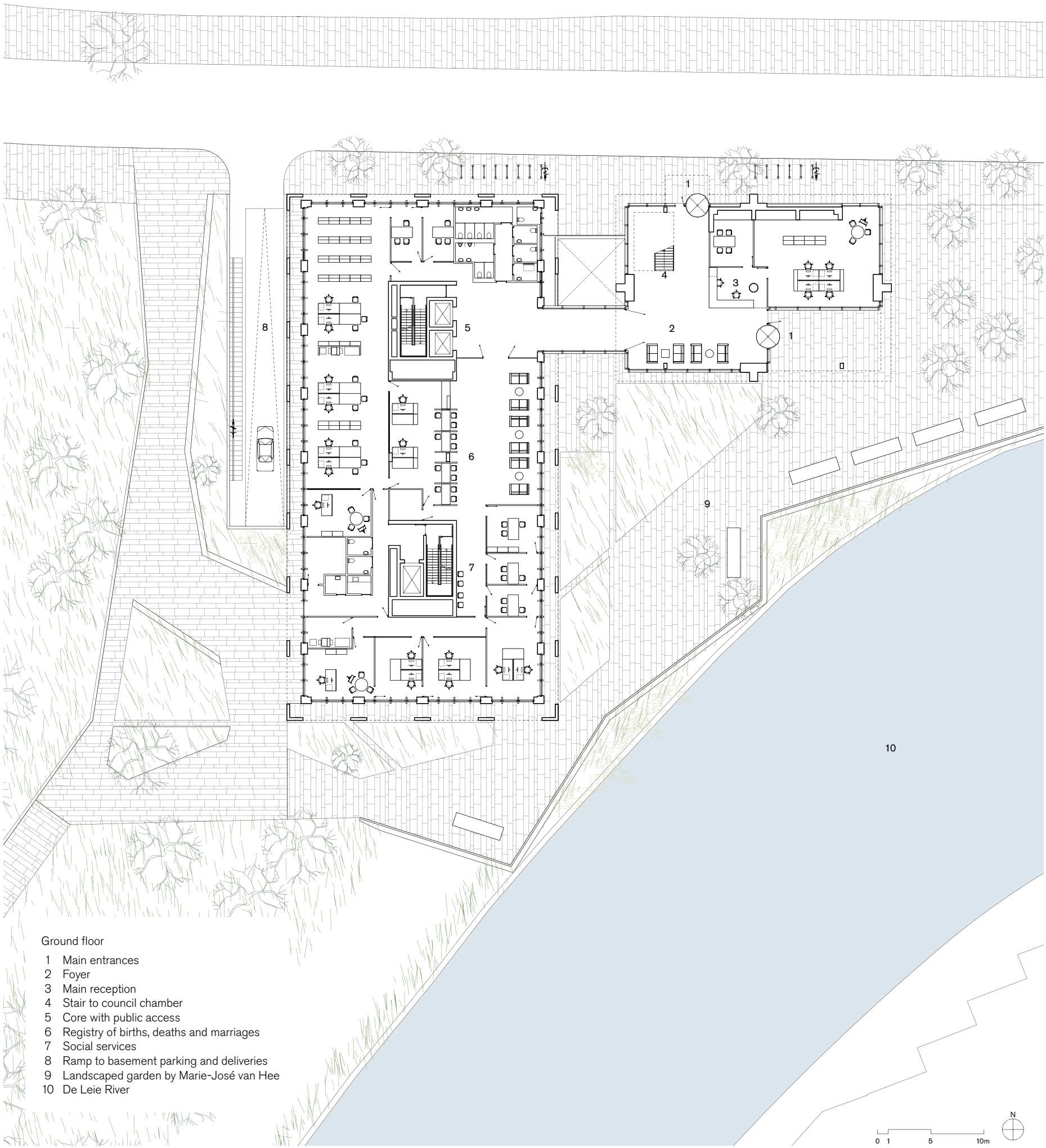
Location: Deinze, Belgium
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, David Owen
Project Architects: Chris Snow and Tom Appels
Io Schønherr, Piram Banpabutr, Martin Nässén, Nina Lundvall, Guy Derwent, Chris Neve, Matt Atkins, Paul Little, Henry Lau

The town hall is straightforwardly legible to citizens, politicians and functionaries and able to maintain its architecture while absorbing changes to the programme. A simple, reconfigurable loft building contains tall, day lit and naturally heated and ventilated spaces. A lower building attached to the front identifies the entrances and lets the political processes taking place in the council chamber be visible to the city.

In both parts, the cladding is set back behind a columnar facade to provide a loggia to shade the building from summer sun, and provide informal spaces outside the workspaces and council chamber. The loggias are pure facade, abstract and pictorial, able to present the building as something significant by reversing the solidity of the 14th century church opposite it. In plan, the building forms a public space at the edge of the river, which will be incorporated into Marie-Jose van Hee's landscape plan for the whole area.

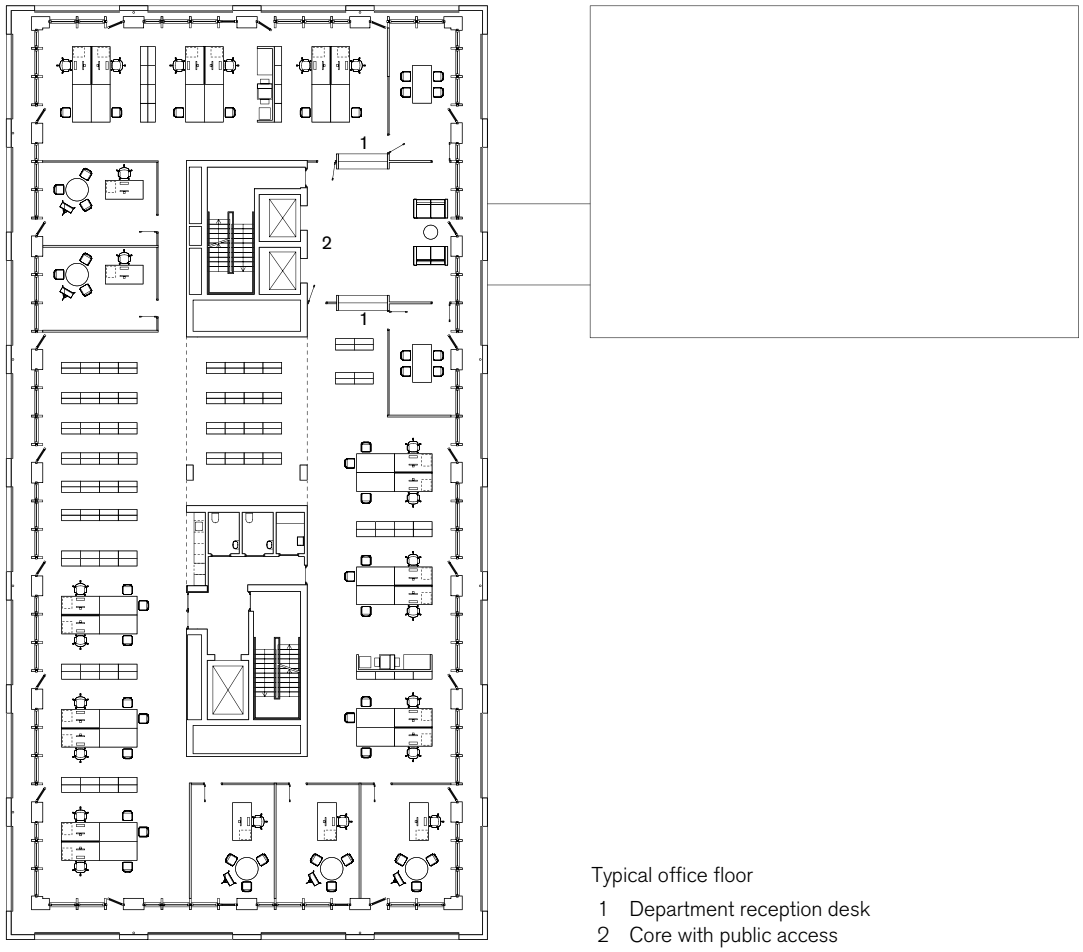
Landscape scheme – Marie-José van Hee

— TYS



Ground floor

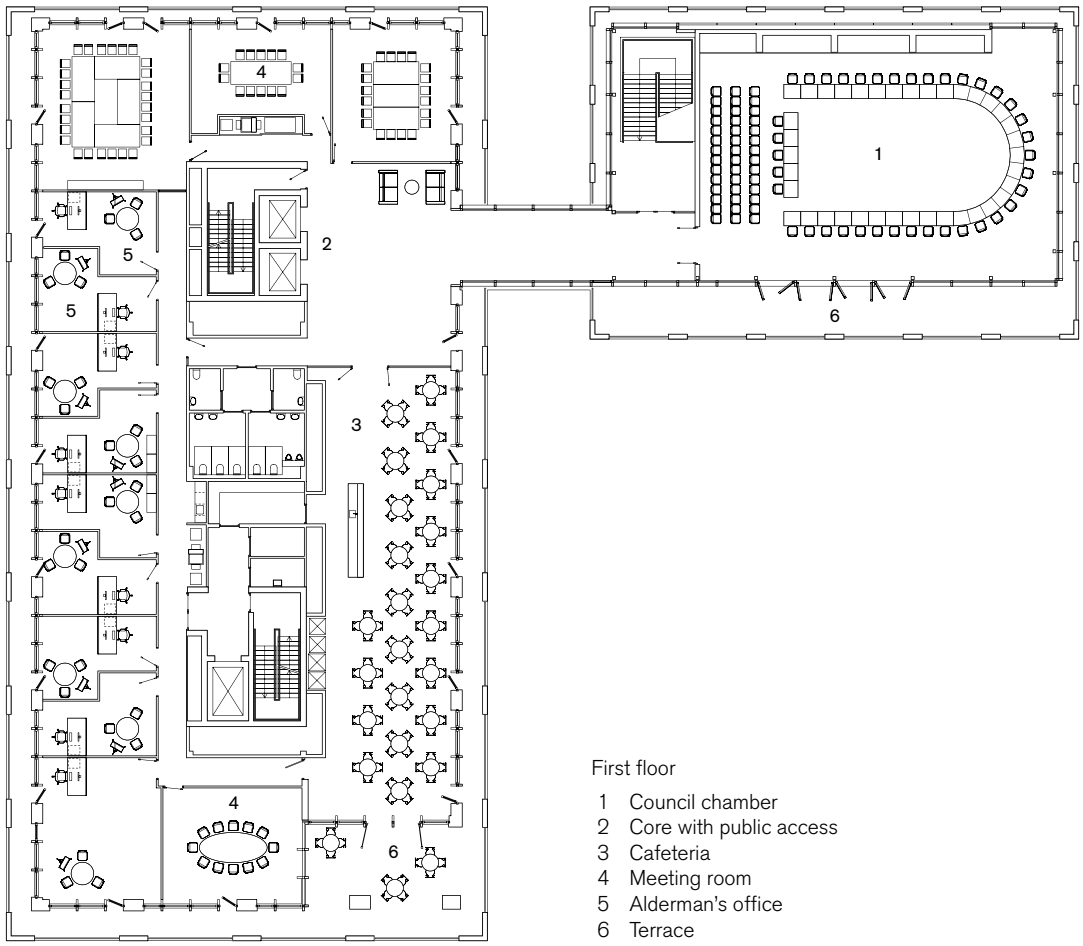
1 Main entrances
2 Foyer
3 Main reception
4 Stair to council chamber
5 Core with public access
6 Registry of births, deaths and marriages
7 Social services
8 Ramp to basement parking and deliveries
9 Landscaped garden by Marie-José van Hee
10 De Leie River



Typical office floor

1 Department reception desk
2 Core with public access

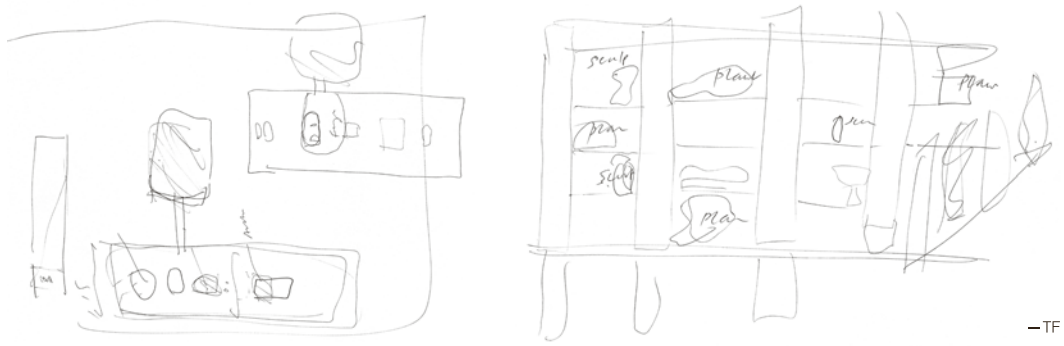
—TFA/MA



First floor

1 Council chamber
2 Core with public access
3 Cafeteria
4 Meeting room
5 Alderman's office
6 Terrace

Study for office – TFA/NL/IS



– TF

Study for council chamber – TFA/NL/IS

Tower Wharf Restaurant

2010
—
2012

Location: London, UK
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, David Owen
Project Architects: Chris Snow and Daniel Buckley
Guy Derwent, Yuichi Hashimura

As a world heritage site, the Tower of London and Tower Bridge attract very large numbers of tourists throughout the year. Providing them with tickets, information, and refreshments are small buildings ranged outside the walls of the Tower and along the river. Among them now is the Tower Wharf Restaurant that we have designed.

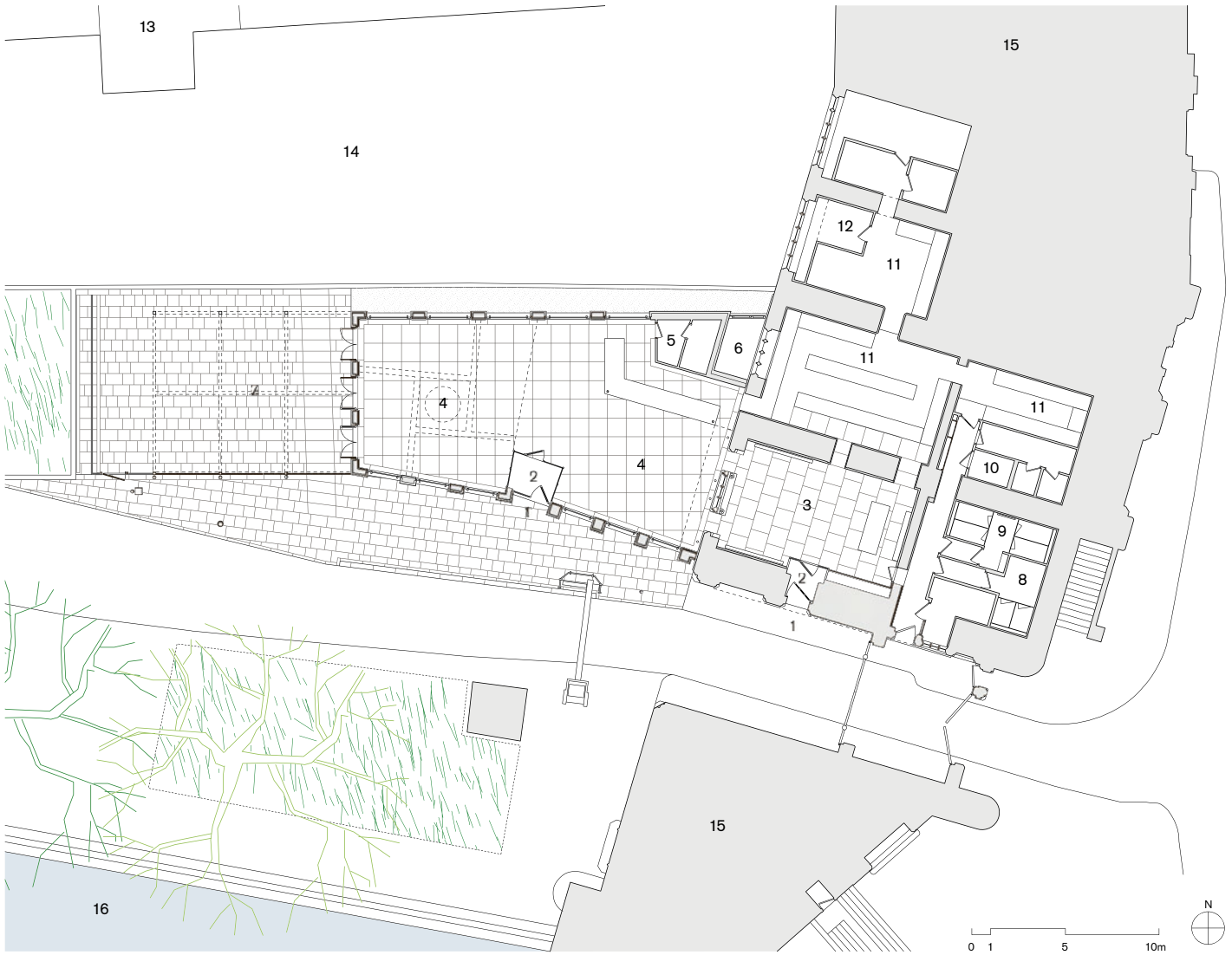
The question for all these small, temporary buildings is how they relate to the Tower of London, a building of great permanence. The ticket office avoids the issue by being in a hi-tech style that makes it a part of the surrounding city of new office buildings rather than the tower. Kiosks along the riverside have adopted a generalised garden architecture of brown-painted timber that thinks it is inconspicuous. Neither of these strategies would have worked for the Tower Wharf Restaurant. Because of its proximity, it had to engage with the architecture of the Tower. Because of its distance from the tower's main tourist entrance, it had to be far more visibly striking and more fanciful than the kiosks.

The body of the restaurant is in two parts, both covered with sawn timber painted to match the colour of the tower. One looks like the Tower of London turned upside down, with the space between the battlements becoming the windows. The other is a long low piece that links to the arch under Tower Bridge and, like the kiosks, thinks it is inconspicuous. At one end, the arch is a dark cavernous bar. At the other end, there is a terrace for dining against the backdrop of the tower far into the evening. Here, sun blinds roll out of a structure that has the skeletal form of the row of workshops that once might have occupied the same location.

— PC

1 Entrance
2 Draught lobby
3 Bar area
4 Dining area
5 Store
6 Plant
7 Terrace with awning
8 Male WCs
9 Female WCs
10 Accessible WCs
11 Kitchens
12 Office
13 Tower of London
14 Moat
15 Tower Bridge
16 River Thames

Restaurant – PC



Terrace – PC
Bar – PC

— PC

— PC

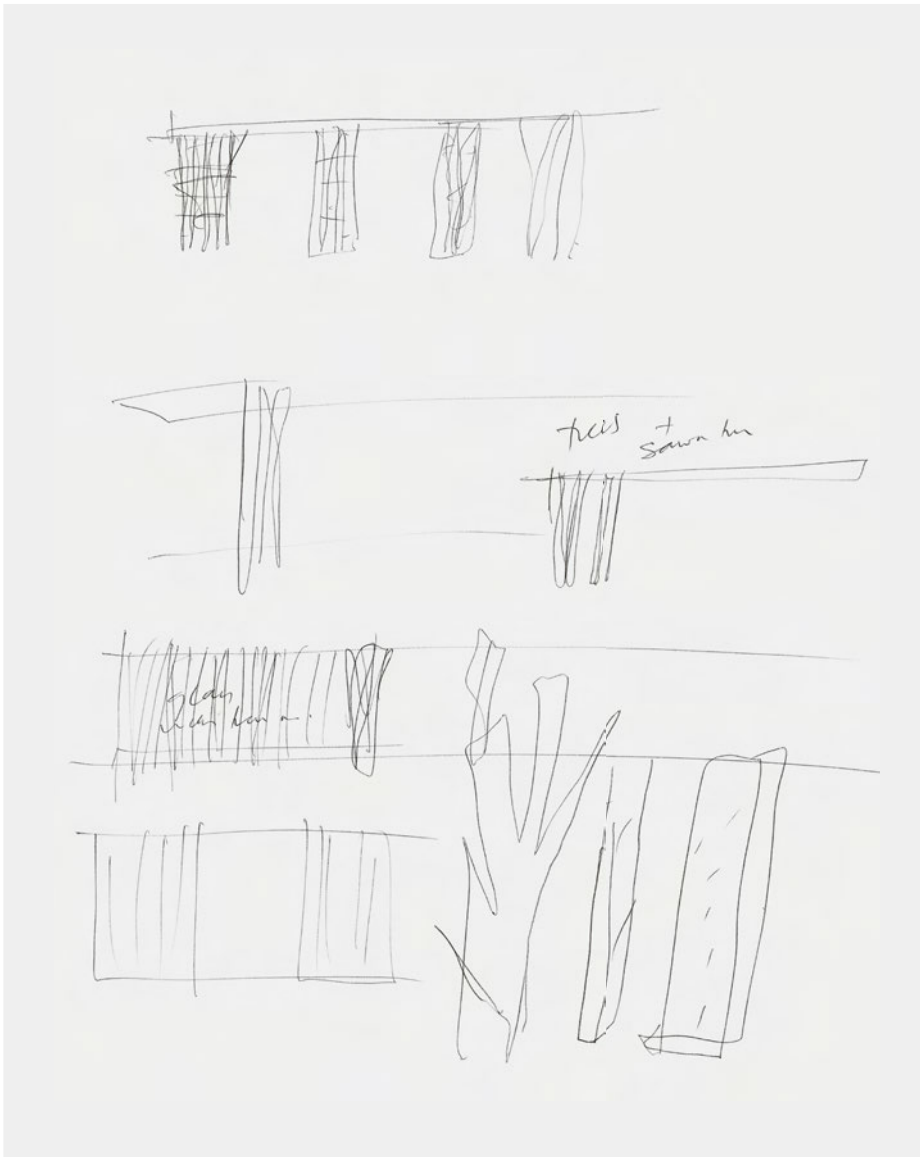
Nyetimber Winery

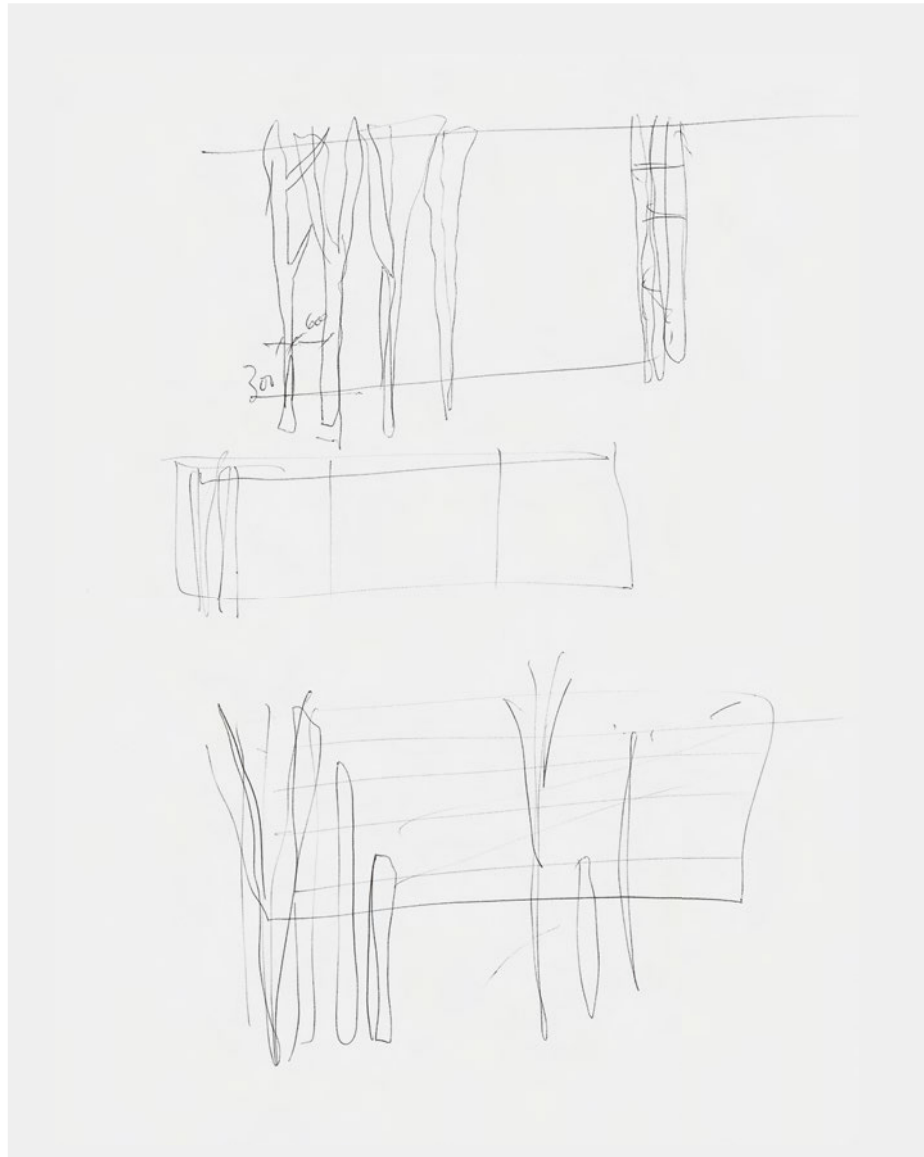
2010 Invited competition
Location: West Sussex, UK
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, David Owen,
Chris Snow

Nyetimber has been producing sparkling wine since 1988 in this location, which has similar soil conditions to the Champagne region of France. In 2010, the owner launched a limited competition for a visitor centre and a new production hall, where the wine is bottled and matured. Our scheme proposed a massive, vaulted building that provided passive cooling for the production hall, constructed in several shades of local brick, a material that is both archaic and modern. A sun-shading facade was to be made for the visitor centre from a combination of reclaimed timbers, old enough to show the very different world view of the carpenters who made them, regularised timbers that show how we think today and in the future will also look historical, green wood taken from the forest, and living plants.

Elevation to the rear – TFA/CS/DO
Left: Elevation to the road – TFA/CS/DO

Sun-shading facade to the visitors centre – TFA/CS





— TF

Victoria & Albert Museum

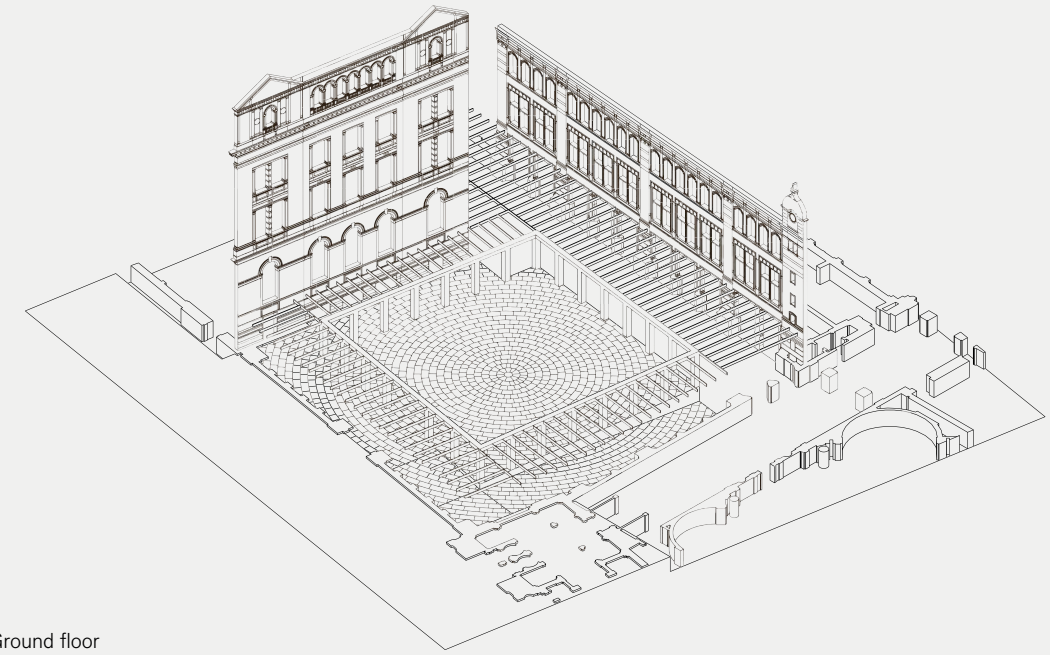
2011 Invited competition
Location: London, UK
Tony Fretton, Jim McKinney, David Owen,
Nina Lundvall, Yuichi Hashimura

The Victoria and Albert Museum is a wonderful collection of rooms and buildings, developed over time by different designers. Though stylistically diverse, they provide the constant light and space in which to see beautiful objects. Their combination of formal clarity and idiosyncratic layout gives a feeling of certainty combined with the possibility of becoming agreeably diverted to things never previously seen.

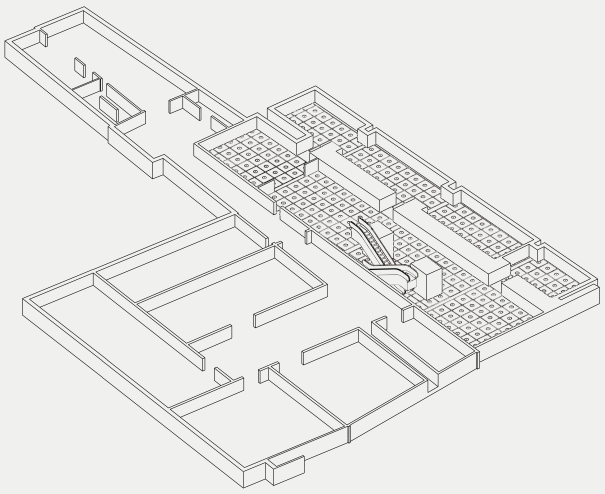
Our scheme for the new public entrance courtyard and the temporary exhibition gallery located below it arose from these understandings. The public courtyard is an elegant, open-air space at the level of Exhibition Road, which has been recently pedestrianised to connect all of the South Kensington museums. A classic level plane that is immediately comprehensible and accessible, the courtyard provides for sociability and relaxation, events, performances, open-air exhibitions and many other future uses. Its line and level gives views into the surrounding galleries so that the courtyard would be part of the museum from the moment it is entered.

Along each edge of the courtyard, a new colonnade extends from the classical stone screen by architect Aston Webb. On the south facing side the colonnade houses a sunlit open-air cafe. On the north facing side, it encloses an easy ramp for people of all abilities to descend and enter the museum in front of the Western Range galleries. Along the Western Range, the colonnade becomes a glazed concourse that connects with the route to the main entrance in Cromwell Road at one end, and to the Sackler Education Centre and museum cafe at the other. Centred in the concourse are escalators and lifts that descend to the entrance area of the new temporary exhibition gallery below the court. Columns are gathered around this area, giving it a special quality and keeping the exhibition space completely uninterrupted. Daylight from above, and a mosaic floor like those found throughout the museum, orientate the visitors before they enter the black box of the temporary exhibition space. Here, exhibits can be displayed at a far larger scale than in any other space in the museum. The variety of configurations that the gallery offers, and the opportunity for it to be entered and left from different positions, would stimulate curators and exhibition designers, so that for visitors, each exhibition would be different.

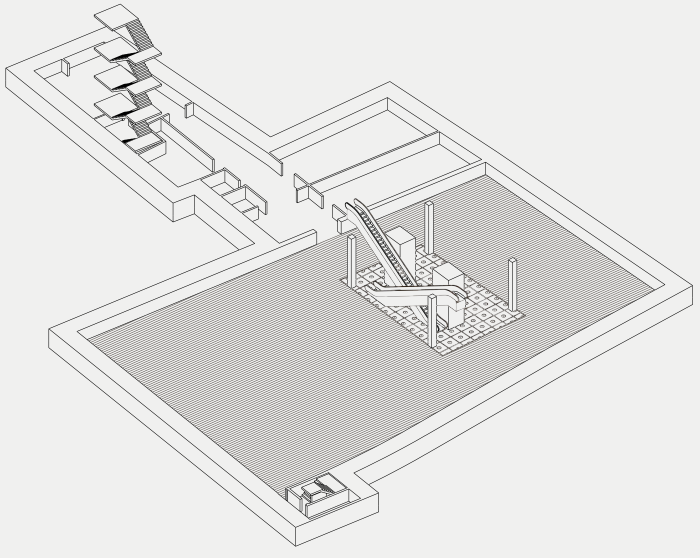
Courtyard seen from the Western Range – TYS



Ground floor



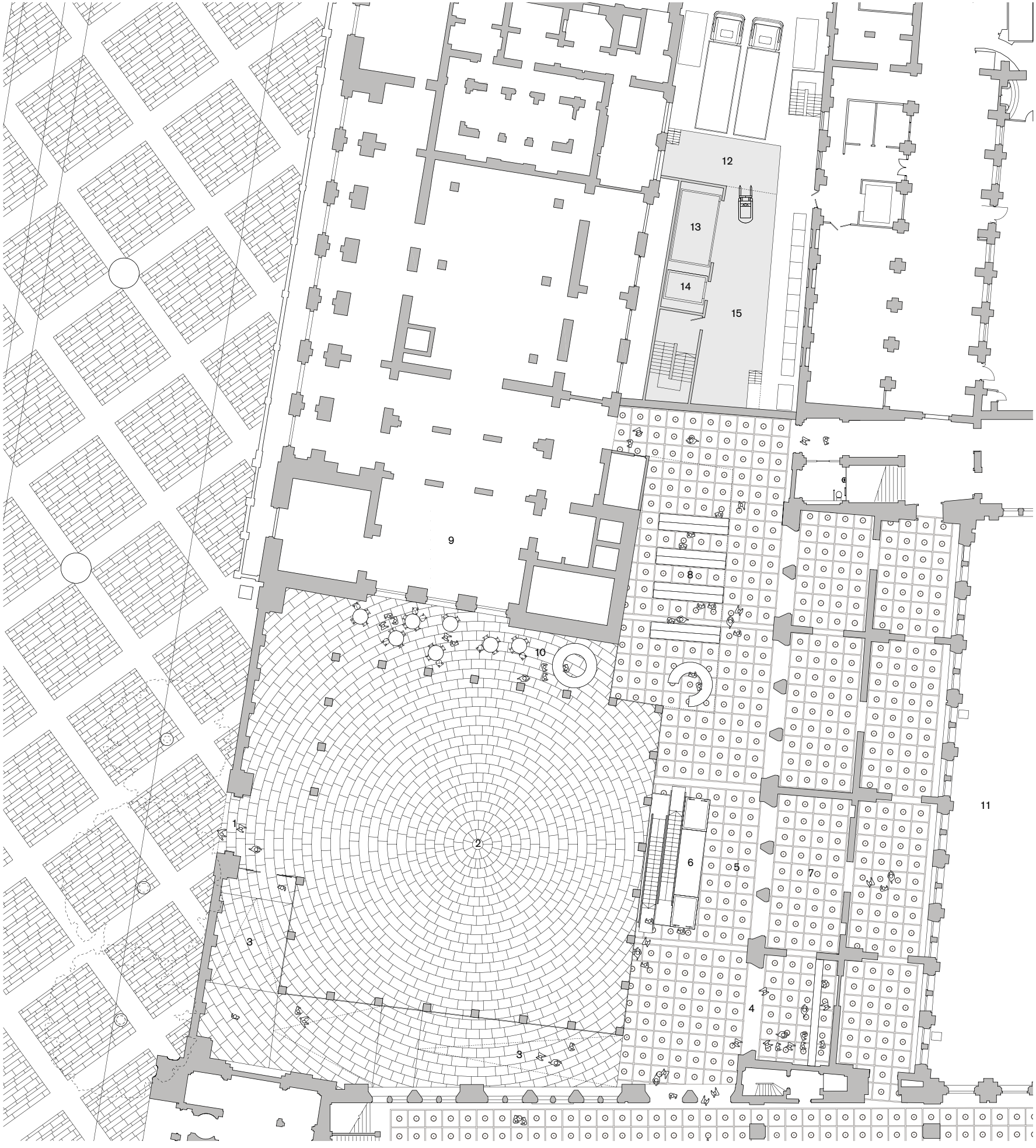
Intermediate basement



Basement

Gently sloping entrance ramp – TYS

Daylight from above, and a mosaic floor like those found throughout the museum, orientate the visitors before they enter the black box of the temporary exhibition space – TFA/YH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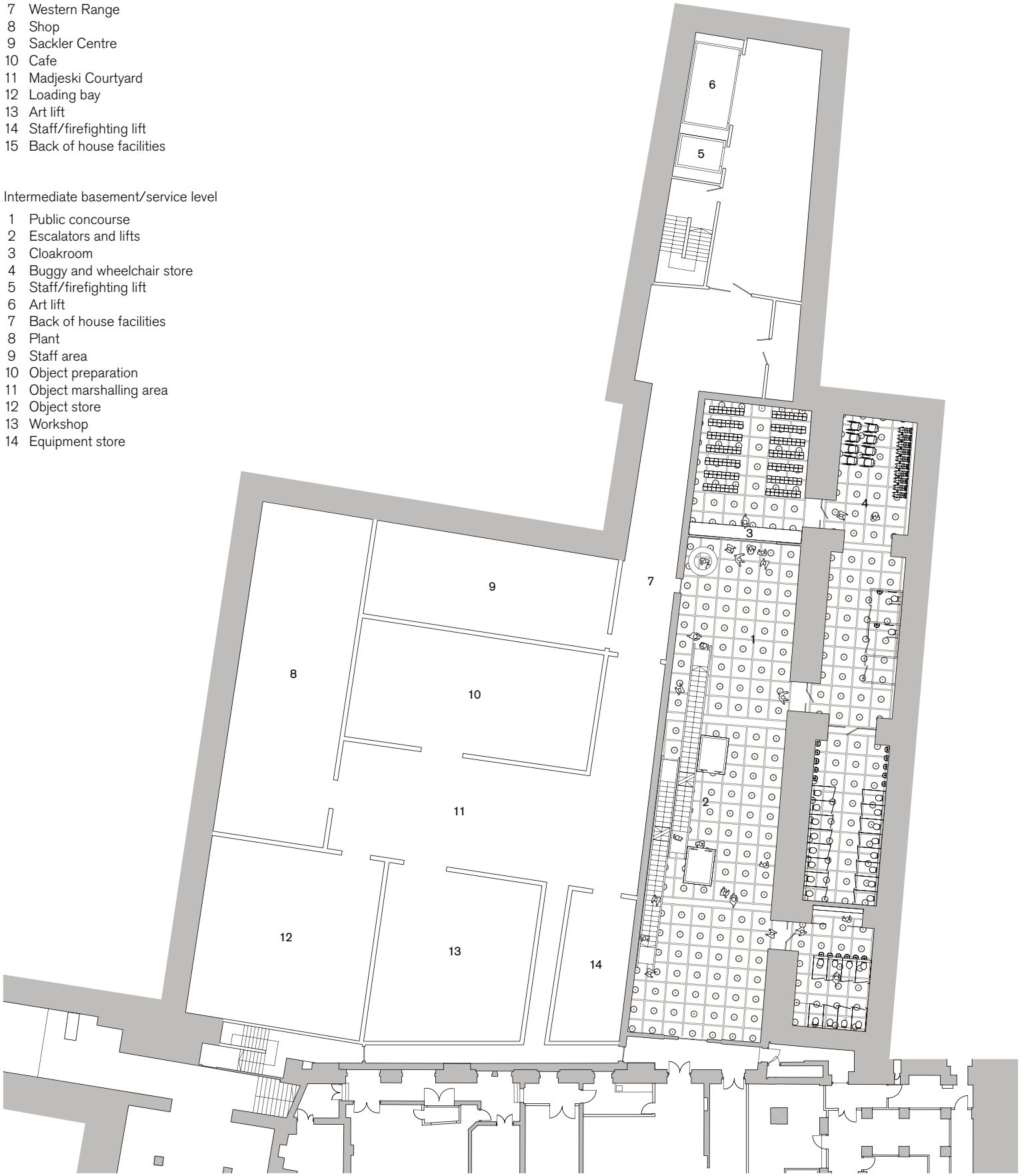
Ground floor

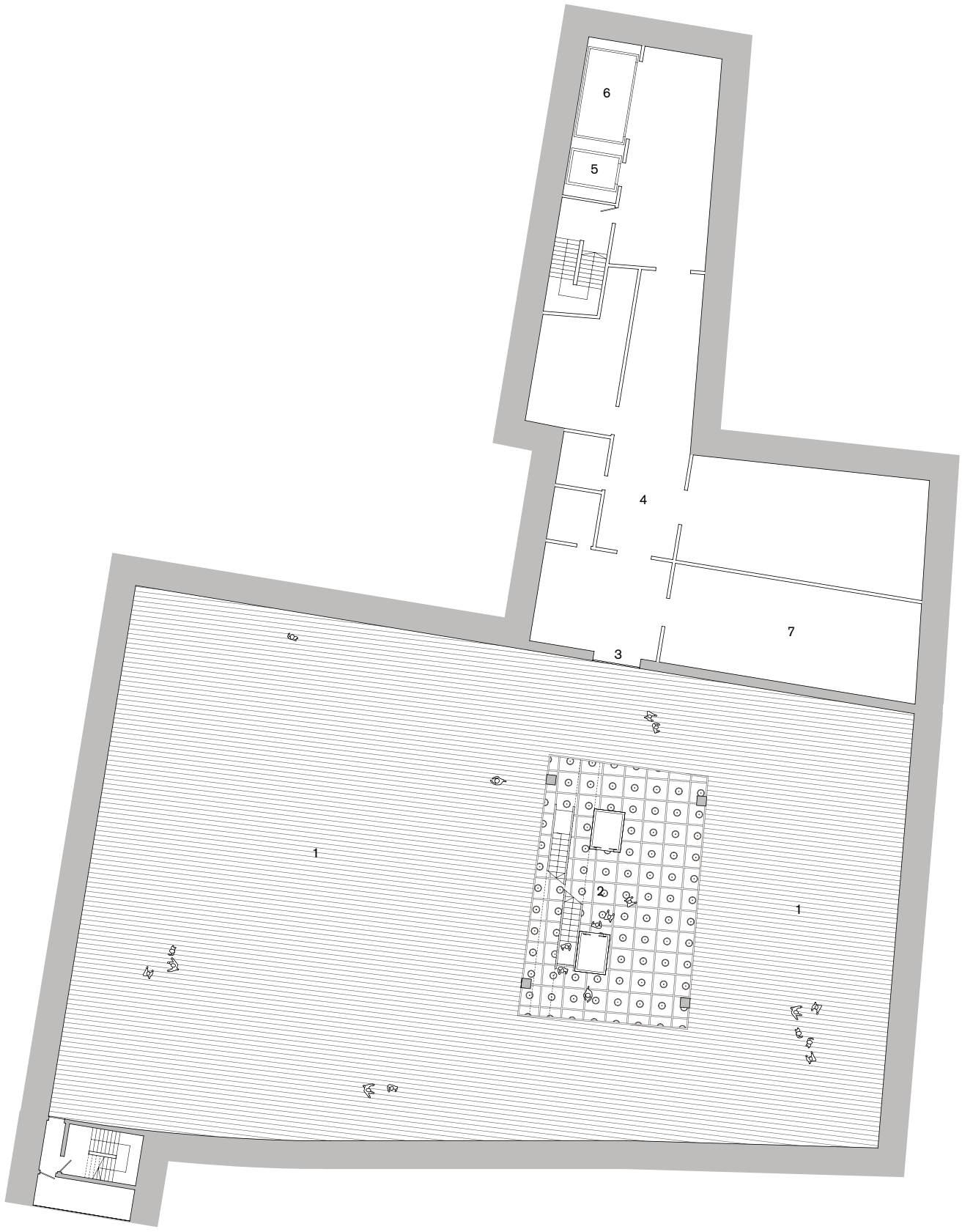
1 Entrance from Exhibition Road
2 Courtyard
3 Ramped access
4 Reception
5 Public concourse
6 Escalators and lifts
7 Western Range
8 Shop
9 Sackler Centre
10 Cafe
11 Madjeski Courtyard
12 Loading bay
13 Art lift
14 Staff/firefighting lift
15 Back of house facilities

Intermediate basement/service level

1 Public concourse
2 Escalators and lifts
3 Cloakroom
4 Buggy and wheelchair store
5 Staff/firefighting lift
6 Art lift
7 Back of house facilities
8 Plant
9 Staff area
10 Object preparation
11 Object marshalling area
12 Object store
13 Workshop
14 Equipment store



Intermediate basement/service level

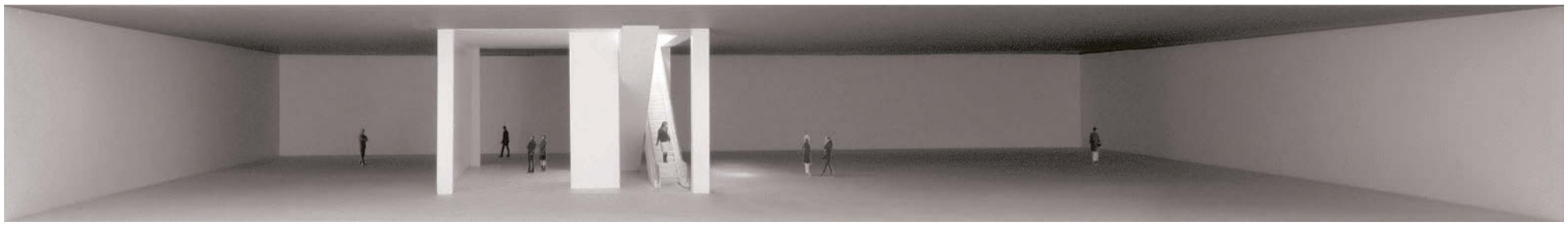


1 Gallery
2 Escalators and lifts
3 Back of house gallery access and emergency escape
4 Back of house facilities
5 Staff/firefighting lift
6 Art lift
7 Plant

0 1 5 10m

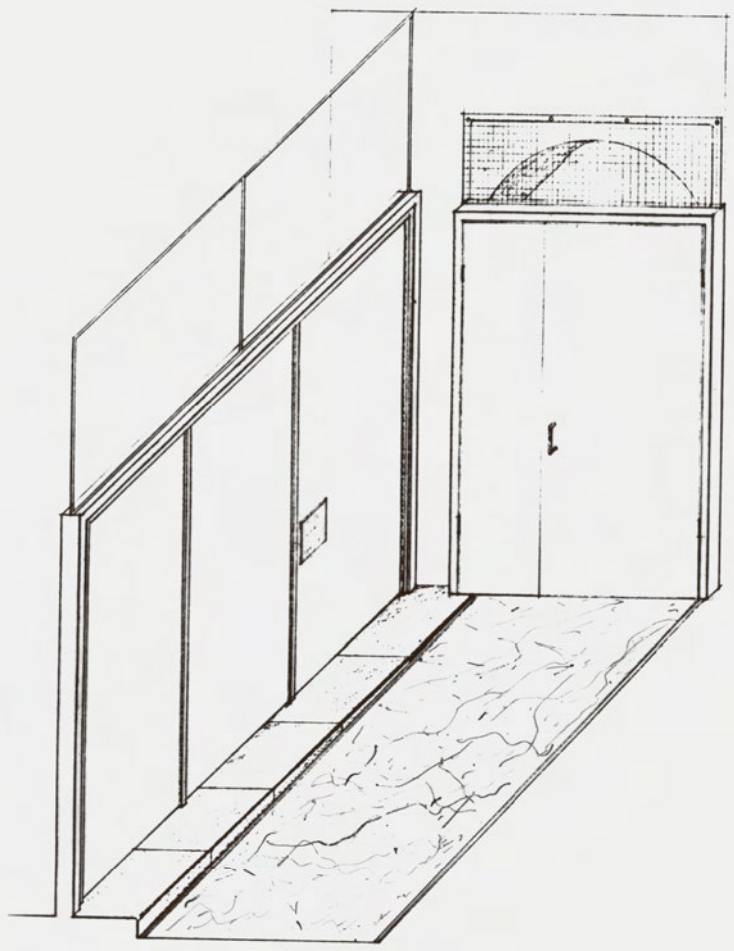
N

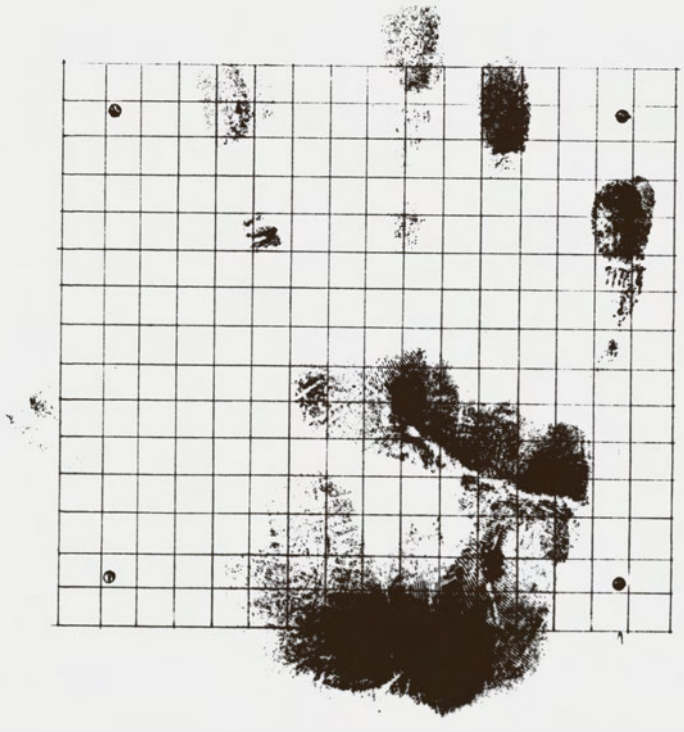
Basement



—TFA/YH

Essays & Conversations





Unbuilt office, 1980 – TF
Door push plate – TF

Conversation
David Turnbull and Tony Fretton 1994

David Turnbull

Your early independent work seemed to be based on all abdication from architecture as a discipline and a decision to investigate the work of conceptual artists who were involved with performance, like Chris Burden and Robert Morris. In more recent work, and I am thinking here particularly of the Lisson Gallery, there is a very strong sense of a relation between your imagined performative, physical engagement with the space of the building as it is being thought out and your hope for the performance of the building as it is experienced by its users once it is complete. In that sense it seem quite reasonable to think of your architecture in terms that are explicitly concerned with both the act of showing and a demonstrative physicality.

Tony Fretton

My way of working has always been physical and experiential first, with the meaning becoming clear later. I worked for ten years in architects' offices as a draughtsman, a project architect and site supervisor on big projects. Then, in 1980, it became clear that I could not carry on like that, and maybe would not even make architecture. The promise that architecture could engage with cultural and social ideas, which was evident, say in the early work of Robert Venturi, had given way to its being fixated with its own history and totally at the service of the status quo. At the same time, the powerful counter-culture of art and music in London, which had started in the mid 1970s, allowed many more things to be explored. It was this, in the form of performance, which led me back to making buildings, but at a smaller scale, and with different intentions. Performance was using the same materials as architecture but allowing them to be the carrier of ideas. So when I am designing, it is against that background.

DT

You clearly express a critical relation to the political, cultural and economic context of your buildings and projects.

TF

Yes, because it seems that although the object and events occurring in this society want to portray the world as factual and substantial, we find that we have to negotiate with them in a language-like way to establish personal meanings and forge large-scale agreements.

DT

Could you clarify how you think these agreements operate?

TF

Well, I think that we find that actuality, which is itself an attempt to establish aspects of reality with some precision, does not match the fluidity and inconsistency of events and has to be modified into cruder, more workable forms which are imprecise and open to interpretation.

DT

So you are consciously problematising the factuality that artists like Donald Judd and maybe Sol LeWitt were talking about, and searching for an extended definition of the term.

TF

My feeling is that the work of Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt, perhaps because of its concentration on factuality, is transcendental, and in this I see hope.

DT

The work of LeWitt and Judd has been referred to as if it emerged out of a kind of obsessional neurosis, certainly not in terms of transcendence. In your own work are you explicitly searching for the transcendental quality that you find here?

TF

I don't look for it, but it preoccupies me as I experience the physical world, and I suppose that I have wanted to show the deep commonness I find there to other people.

DT

For the house interior in St. John's Wood, London, you worked with common objects that were over-scaled such as balustrades, handrails and so on that were in a way almost uncomfortably large – one door was nearly twice as big as a normal domestic door.

TF

Because I knew my clients well and we trusted each other, it was possible to make these transformations, and other gentler ones, in a spirit of shared enjoyment and amazement. So instead of being critical, they were magical.

DT

I would like to stay with your assertion that your own experience of the work of Donald Judd supports the feeling that it has a transcendental quality, because it seems to me that there is a relationship between Judd's work and the work of Barnett Newman. I was struck by the relationship that Jean-François Lyotard makes between Newman's paintings and Renaissance and pre-Renaissance paintings of the Annunciation.

TF

These, and Louis Kahn, are artists whose work I have been looking at for some time. Barnett Newman wrote a lot about the religious basis for his work and supported his use of abstraction by referring to Native American art, which he said was always abstract when serving religious purposes. Kahn felt, I think, that his architecture had an affinity to the archaic forms that preceded classicism. But what interests me more is the power of their abstract figures to be affecting and communicative. I think that this comes from our awareness that the background to their work, although portrayed as archaic, is actually a deeply known Judeo-Christian one. In contrast, Judd's work seems to exist in the present, the realm we are best equipped to deal with, and its position is more like that of eastern thought where the nature of reality is apparent in all things here and now. This suits me better

because my experience is that pushing against reality is extraordinarily difficult and progress, if it comes, is marked by plainness and a sense of naturalness.

DT

One of the strategies that appears so persistently in your work is the deliberate framing of the physical context around the building as if it were a picture. I think there's a critical relation to photography here and notably to the photographic practice of Lee Friedlander, or more recently Thomas Struth. You appear to bring about an acute focus in a way that forces an incredible feeling of relationship between the occupier of your buildings and the locale in which they stand. Two of the most moving moments for me at the Lisson Gallery were Dan Graham's show where there was a deliberate and explicit rhyming relationship between Graham's work and the school by Leonard Manasseh that the building faces. The second occasion was in a piece by Christian Boltanski, when photographs of the children from the school were installed in the first floor gallery in such a way that there was an extremely powerful relationship established through the building. What is impressive is the way the building frames the context, but also allows other people to make profound relations of their own visible.

TF

The building frames views critically but openly. It also manages to be both real and an image of itself, which sits in the ordinariness of its surroundings without being absorbed. This heightens the excitement of being in and near it and allows the building to say something, to participate critically in the fiction of the city.

DT

What do you mean by the fiction of the city?

TF

I think it operates in many ways. The buildings in British cities have been made mainly not by designers but by builders and functionaries. Each time they build, they alter and slightly improve or disimprove and their work is authorless because unlike architects, they don't have a position. The dimension they add is populist and homogenising because they are building what people like and in this, they are masters of the art of communication. From time to time, developments in building technology become incorporated in their language, for example steel framing or curtain walling. Stylistic developments in architecture are also copied, and their ideas emptied out and forms used for other purposes.

Another factor in the way that we see cities is popular fiction, for example the novel, film, TV and advertising. Walter Benjamin, in his essay on the Russian writer Nikolai Leskov, discriminates between novelist and storyteller. The difference he said is that the storyteller has experienced the events he recounts or heard them from somebody who had experienced them. So the vernacularising of building can be seen to embody the experience of the builders, and to convey a fiction to which we all subscribe, a fiction that is the city.

DT

In your most recent work – I am thinking here particularly of the project for a Buddhist retreat on Holy Island and in a more minor way, the studio in Fulham for a product designer – it seems that a preoccupation with bodily relation and bodily metaphor has underscored the re-emergence in your work of an interest in surrealism. I think that there's a very interesting connection that could be made between this and an earlier part of our conversation about your sense of the transcendent qualities to be found in the objects by which we are surrounded.

TF

I think I am working with the doubt that occurs when you prod and probe the substantial world. Surrealism was a secularised, western attempt to get below the surface of things. It is a part of history with which I least connect and yet it recurs in my work. For instance in the London office for photographer Anton Corbijn (1993), tried and tested joinery techniques are used and these give it a quality of being deeply known. It was characteristic of surrealism to use deeply known, rather old-fashioned objects as a way into irrational experience. The work you mention is more preoccupied with the affecting power of forms. Sometimes, artists and architects, by distorting established languages, make forms that are peculiarly expressive and forward looking. The Florey building and other projects by James Stirling from the late 1960s are distorted to the point of being almost dysfunctional, and yet obstinately remain in the language of building. They seem to me to operate in a similar way to the paintings of Francis Bacon. To paraphrase Bacon's words, they seem to bypass rationality and to act directly on the senses. In the work you mention, there is a hope for something like this to happen.

DT

Earlier, I referred to the way in which the shapes in Dan Graham's work in the opening exhibition of the Lisson Gallery appeared to rhyme very explicitly with the forms of Manasseh's school. Rhyming in that sense is also something that seems to inform your work and I recall an essay you wrote recently about the Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza [1] in which you talk about relations which are established between the lines of his swimming pool at Leça de Palmeira and the coastline, the shape of the highway, the geometries played out in roadworks and kerb stones and the industrial buildings in the distance. In a way, the swimming pool brings into focus all of those marks made by mankind and their relationship to a larger nature. By writing about Siza in this way, it seems to me that you were also writing about your own, and I would like you to elaborate on the way that rhyming strategies of this sort have been used in your projects.

[1] Fretton. Tony Fretton: *Homage to Siza*, Building Design London (April 8. 1994).

TF

The response of people who use the Lisson shows me that it is possible to make a building that carries out the client's programme but also makes larger scale statements, and that this in no way detracts from the performance of the building, but actually makes it better. My two visits to Siza's pool at Leça de Palmeira, which I admire very much, have convinced me that these statements can be holistic and concerned with our place in creation, and that they can be expressed in ways that can be commonly understood. I am for architecture that is communicative and against architecture that feels it must be obscure, and I am more than ever convinced that this can be achieved. The prospect framed by the windows of the Lisson is of a city formed by mistakes and neglect, but also of a work in which we have all participated, where we might see our metaphysical position and our natural collective aims. The building is pointing out to the city and back to the viewer and telling a story, a story in rhyme so that we might receive it in that state between imagination and experience when we know the world deeply.

David Turnbull is Professor of Architecture at The Cooper Union

Swimming pool in Leça de Palmeira, Álvaro Siza – TF

The Architecture of Public Space
Katherine Clarke and Tony Fretton 1997

In a sequence of videos that Katherine Clarke and I made about public space, we pull into a motorway service station on the way to Heathrow Airport. At the back of the car park there is a motel. In its parking bays, the symbol for a disabled person has been obliterated and overlaid with one of a woman and child.

Next to the motel are a shop and two types of restaurant arranged in a mall. One restaurant is for hamburgers, the other for neo-health foods. The entrance to both leads back to the same place in which to eat. Outside the restaurant window, the ground is landscaped into a small mound where people are eating their food as if in the country.

The background music is a cable service to all stations in the chain. A young woman waiting for a hamburger dances discretely to it. The music is black American soul that has become in-car young family listening. Similar music is available on CDs in the shop, along with books, snacks and toys for the next part of the journey.

Everything is part of a reasonable, effective, contemporary, well-intended, confident, constructed environment.

We arrive at Heathrow. Terminal 3 is like a machine. The floor, walls, lights, ceilings, stairs, signs and airline desks are part of a unified style. There are no external views, and the spatial qualities are those associated with movement.

As a result, people are left with only their constructed personas to fall back on. A man and woman act as a couple, men embrace and cry as they do on American television, two Chinese ladies compose themselves against a column, a frequent flyer approaches the departure gate on the way to a brief stopover in duty free.

Losing people is surprisingly easy. The manipulation of conservative modernism to satisfy the client, brief and programme did not cover aspects like this. The only large, unpopulated areas are those to which access is restricted. The building does not differentiate them because the rule of modernism is that all space must be continuous, so access is controlled by a small number of policemen, a larger number of airline functionaries and the greater majority of people themselves.

—KC

Other areas deploy the symbols for a restaurant – blond veneer, a little upholstery and suburban colours, or dark wood and patterned carpets in a heritage theme reminiscent of the House of Lords, Buckingham Palace or a pub. The tables in the restaurant are round; the seats in the concourse are straight. The sudden austerity of the subway entrances shows that this is a fantasy world.

Video presents real time, space and behaviour more profligately than other media, showing these places to be full of undeniable facts and diversions. It reveals that there is not one single type of public space but many, constructed as much by events, forces, and ideas as by physical provisions.

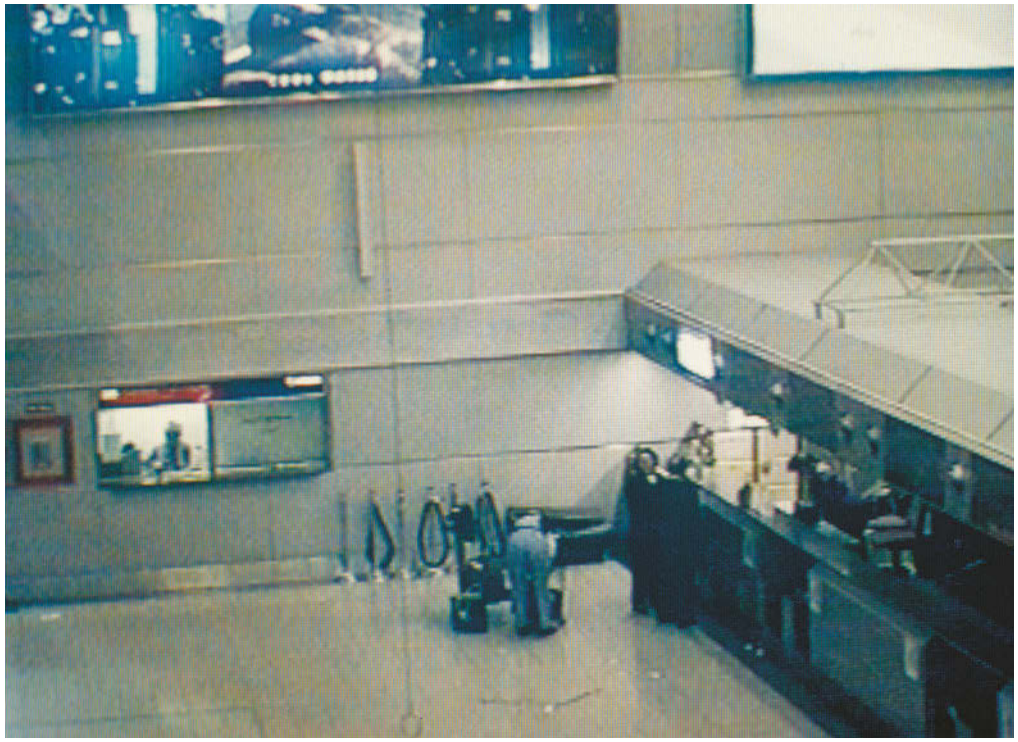
These spaces can be understood by everyday common sense, but they defy analysis. To appreciate and work with them requires other methods – ones that are analogous to the events themselves.

Characteristically, these are methods that come from the creative practices. The work of architects and artists such as Adolf Loos, and Marcel Duchamp, and of conceptual art, allows formative social ideas to be recognised in buildings and objects of use.

Conceptual art shows how to work with life events and objects, where they are located and how they form relationships with events outside themselves.

Pop art provides a view of how the symbols that arise in the meshing of society, politics and consumerism can be understood, and how the tension between society and artforms that want to be close to life can be handled.

The methods that I have described can articulate the ambiguity that exists below the surface of common experience. They can work with the actual, while recognising the actual's imaginary basis. When defining principal issues, they are able to keep intact more of the material and events in which those issues manifest themselves than can more single-minded practices, and retain a greater sense of their human, ecological and political consequences. In my experience they lead to buildings that are definite and open to interpretation at the same time, and perhaps most significantly are generative for other peoples experience.



— KC

Civil Architecture
Mark Cousins 1998

Tony Fretton's work has attracted strong support from architects, clients and critics. In particular, the Lisson Gallery is acknowledged as an exemplary space, both in its function as a gallery and in the complex relations it establishes with the site. Yet the published commentary on his work has a somewhat bemused character. The evident wish to praise seems to run into an invisible obstacle and is often diverted into an identification of virtues. The buildings are described as 'subtle', 'responsive', even 'modest' – terms whose architectural meaning seems obscure. At the same time, they are called 'disjunctive' and 'unsettling'. It is as if the critics are not sure what is being done, even if they are sure it is being done well. It feels as if the projects have missing pages. There is no evident stylistic or architectural signature to provide a critical point of reference.

But perhaps this is not the level at which to assess the coherence of the practice. This is not a practice that exists at the level of purely architectural dimensions. It is not one that fits into the current schools of architectural design – in a sense it could not for reasons I hope will become clear. But it is a practice that has a wealth to teach about how architecture can make a complex contribution to the city and its capacity to be an emotional object of thought. For the purposes of this argument, I will call this civil architecture.

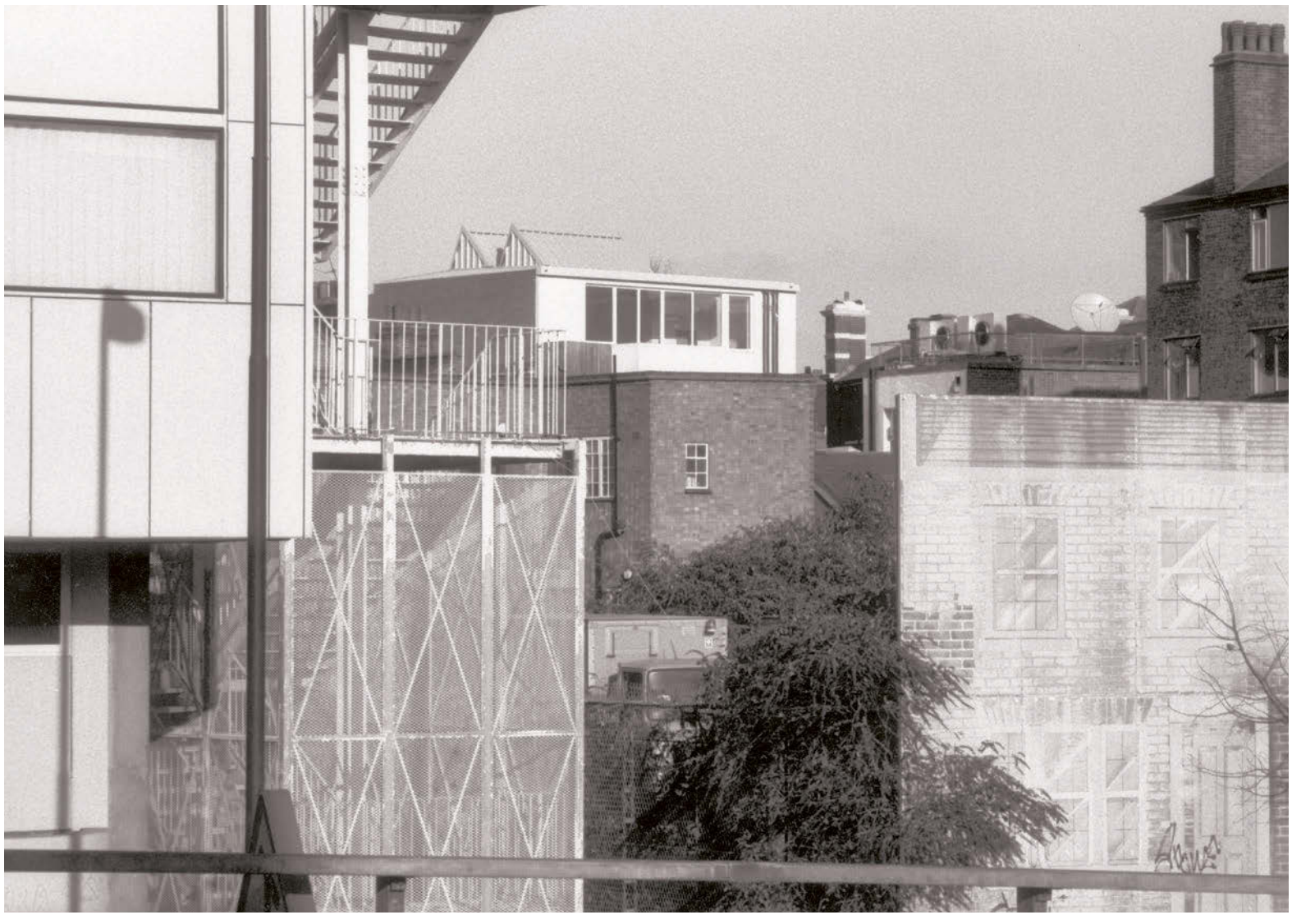
The term itself is dangerously misleading, too easily associated with civic architecture – its exact opposite. Civic architecture usually entails the imposition of a social ideology upon the urban fabric. What I am calling civil architecture, by contrast, is an architecture that bridges two worlds through a gesture of inclusion, confronting the subject with an element at the intersection of a culture and the subject's perception. In this sense, the very term 'civil' has a strangeness about it that needs to be rediscovered. It can refer to peaceful intent, recognition, the use of conventional artifice, the city outside the relation to the state, a certain reserve, communicating without necessarily meaning. This broad scope can seem bizarre. What is it that yokes such apparently disparate elements into a single term? This can only be addressed through an even odder term: happiness. Happiness is not a category with an elevated history within modernism, which would tend to dismiss it as a state at variance with seriousness. (Anguish has played a much more significant role in artistic and architectural thought.) Yet there is something about the relation between buildings and people that is precisely concerned with happiness, and indeed with a relation to the civil.

The civil is the moment when the construction of culture is revealed to the subject as an immediate sensation. The civil involves a dialectic concerning complexity and simplicity. The artefact is complex – it is the memory of other buildings, the knowledge of building, the fundamental reworking of something – but it is simple in its offices. The subject who accepts the gesture experiences a 'happiness'. He may even accept that the building has been pleased to see him. This happiness is not a vague thing. It is not euphoria. It is even prior to aesthetic pleasure. In this, it is like those dreams that, however implausible, leave us with an undeniable sense of reality when we wake. This question of 'happiness', then, is the moment when in the manifold of perception the subject apprehends that something is both made and real but is not harmful. In this, it touches the civil promise of architecture, a promise that is not frequently kept. Humans find themselves surrounded by objects that can seem both made and real but also harmful, or by made objects that lack reality. Tony Fretton acknowledges something of this: 'Solo performance made me hypersensitive to the relationships between humans and the material world. To explore this area, I frequently use ordinary everyday objects including established building types.'

This is not phenomenology, rather it is an experimental performance. This performative quality is not about what the building 'means' or 'says', but is an attempt to construct the civil gesture.

This happiness is not only happiness. It is also the condition for making a critique. Once accepted, the gesture can be employed by the subject in the service of criticism. Fretton wrote of the Lisson Gallery that the elevation 'rhymes with the surrounding high-rises,

– CSP



voids and objects, to point out that these are not mistakes or by-products, but part of an unconscious project that has to be acknowledged…they shine a light on a continual process which requires more than architecture to happen'. The architect and critic William Mann commented: 'It follows from this that the most effective strategy for the architect is to incorporate this process into their work, using established conventions in order to destabilise them, rather than attempting to change them wholesale.'

This civil gesture leads to an approach to architectural design that does not fit most critical categories. Of course, as with other practices of this size and independence, the series of projects reflects not so much the architect's choice but the history of commissions, and it would be absurd to define the practice in terms of the type of work undertaken. Yet there is a consistency that reflects the fundamental gesture and sets itself against a number of contemporary trends. Each new project derives from Fretton's elimination of its origin – wherever and however, he is always doing another building.

This sense of another goes in two directions. Firstly, it goes backwards to the memory of other buildings, although this is anything but the existence of historical examples and still less a practice of quotation. Rather, it bears on what has been said of Dan Graham: '[He] counters the historicist past with the conception of an actual though hidden past, mostly eradicated from consciousness but briefly available in moments not obscured by the dominant ideology of the new' [1]. This has an unusual consequence – to the memory, everything is vernacular by definition. William Mann described this as a recognition by Fretton 'that it is possible to reclaim for architecture the very large territory represented by the vernacular without the use of familiar proportions, motifs or tectonic language'. He believes that the various spatial and material innovations are now assimilated into the field of accepted meanings. Having lost their novelty, they can now serve as part of an expanded vernacular. This has nothing to do with quotation or eclecticism but is rather an exploration of the resonance that shared meanings confer on our material culture.

[1] Graham, Dan, and Wallis, Brian, *Rock my Religion: Writings and Projects 1965–1990:* MIT, 1993.

The other direction of another building is in terms of the city. Whether or not the site is clear, or involves the reworking of existing buildings, is not a fundamental question for the civil gesture since it is always as much a response as it is an intervention. Again, this is not, in current terms, a sensitivity to context or a modesty in respect to what is. Instead, it is a recognition that all building is rebuilding, that all gestures are constrained by being in a series. So-called originality can be the autism of architecture. An 'original' gesture could never be recognised; if it is recognised, it would have been awaited. It might be objected that the invocation of the city leaves out those projects that are, if not in the country, then outside the town. But the civil has priority here too. Nature itself, coded by memory, becomes itself the vernacular of the gesture. There is no attempt to represent nature, or to mimic the organic. Nature remembered is of the hands that have shaped it. There is no external 'other' in this architecture.

In this, it undercuts the pre-modernism that lurks in modernism. The myths of originality, of creating ex nihilo the concept of a site – all these drew modernism back into a heroism of the original. Tony Fretton's practice uses modernism yet it is one that is never pristine, but is disenchanted and can be freed for use. If this involves ambivalence about modernism, it places him firmly outside the nonsense about post-modernism. There are different ways of trying to put this issue. One way is to note that there is a profound difference between the narratives of modernist architecture and modern art, especially in the way they are represented historically. Many accounts of 20th century architecture are still under the impression that there was an end to modernism and that for better or for worse, something called post-modernism took its place or filled the vacuum. This story is told in terms of a reaction at the level of style. As a consequence, such histories regress the analysis of architecture into that of style and retreat in the same form of narratives that describe how the Renaissance became the Baroque.

Art history has damaged architectural analysis by privileging this link between period and style. Accounts of the fate of modernist art practice are more thoughtful and more related to the larger fate of modernism. They are concerned not with the trivial question of the post-modern, but with what we might call the afterlife of modernism, with the reworking of modernist art practice to fulfil other objectives as it is translated into other worlds. For it is a question of what happens when modernism is a given.

The historiography of modernist art is at its greatest difference from contemporary architectural practice in what has been called minimalism. It is this critical distance that produces some of the critical stumbling over the work of Tony Fretton. For on occasion, his work has been described as minimalist. Nothing could be further from it. Minimalism in architecture bears no evident relation to the work of Donald Judd, Carl Andre and Dan Flavin, and it is comic to see its proponents claim such an affinity. Most, so-called minimalism is precisely a style, a currently fluent and commercially desirable surface. Confident that less is more, its proponents cannot even value the less, unless it is the less that makes more. In effect, this minimalism is the designer feng shui of the commodification of the space of commodities. It reflects the scarcity of emptiness in a world where now it is the poor who are cluttered. This has little bearing on the concerns of artistic minimalism. Tony Fretton's work, which has no connection to current architectural minimalism, nonetheless does relate to the work of minimalist art. But it does so at the level of the object itself. The already-made elements of that art, such as the issue of seriality and the geometries of a kind of social ubiquity – are aspects that penetrate the work as a resource. It has nothing to do with surfaces but bears on the memory of modernity expressed in construction.

I have tried to argue that the strength and independence of Fretton's practice lie in a fundamental conformity to a civil gesture. Unfortunately, the terrain of this argument is obscured by many humanist panegyrics to this or that architect on the basis of their humaneness, their sensitivity to culture and location, their aspiration for a better life, etc. It would be better to imagine this civil gesture as being anti-humanist. It is founded not upon a utopianism, or a general doctrine of emancipation, but upon an analysis of contemporary culture. This requires an instinct for working at that exact and exacting intersection where the signifying elements of a culture touch the affective life of the subject. For it is that place where complexity and a momentary happiness meet, which constitutes, for better or for worse, the life of a culture. It was for this reason that Sigmund Freud made the fundamental link between Eros and the building of cities.

Mark Cousins is a cultural critic and architectural theorist

The Architecture of the Unconscious Collective
William Mann 2001

Tony Fretton's contribution to British and European architectural culture lies in his persistent exploration of the social possibilities of architecture in deeply unpromising circumstances. For in the Britain of the Conservative revolution of the 1980s and 90s, the general loss of confidence in the ability of modern architecture to represent the interests of a civilised society coincided with the political classes' loss of faith in the mechanisms, and even the motives, of the state.

Fretton quotes W.H.Auden's line that 'poetry makes nothing happen'[1], an admission of the limitations on architecture's direct social utility. Nonetheless, he shares the poet's belief in the public responsibilities of art. Since society, as much as architecture, is both a deep-rooted experience and a mental construct, Fretton explores the possibility that a worthwhile collective dimension can be found and expressed in the space of the city, in the institutions of civil society, and in the power of buildings to communicate an idea of community.

Modern public space

In the relation between exhibition space and street at the Lisson Gallery, Fretton explored for the first time ideas of the publicness of the interior. In the ground and first floor exhibition spaces, the worm's eye view of the street and its market – with the unconscious interaction of gaze and movement between gallery and pavement and the panoramic view over the schoolyard and social housing – present us with the phenomena of the city in all their confusion and clarity. With even the frames of the large sliding doors concealed, all props of mediation are stripped away, challenging the visitor to consider this strange jumble of experiences and contacts that we casually call 'society'. The imagined constructions of art and the living functioning of the city are confronted, sharing in each other's reality and fiction.

These street-rooms are an eloquent expression of modern public space. This was outside the articulated concerns of modernist architects, as set out in Le Corbusier's famous polemic on the street: 'Every aspect of human life pullulates throughout their length...It is better than the theatre, better than what we read in novels' yet 'the street wears us out. And when all is said and done, we have to admit it disgusts us.'[2]

But the experience of the individual in public was part of the mainstream of modern literature and film, succinctly expressed in Walter Benjamin's epigraph 'the street...the only valid field of experience'[3]. For all the extensive use of glass and picture windows in 20th century architecture, there are few examples besides the Lisson where the meeting between the reflective and the active life has been engineered with such immediacy.

In Fretton's competition entry for the Hotel Pro Forma, in Ørestadt, Denmark, the foyer is also treated as a public interior. Here, the tensions and openness of the city are internalised in the glazed ground and first floor foyers, forming a streetside promenade between the internalised gallery and performance spaces at the rear, and the metro viaduct at the front. The plan is simple and diagrammatic, with the fundamentals of the space's orientation inflected only by the fixed furniture of bars and desks, and the partial screen of the stairs set against the window. In a disposition of spaces without apparent hierarchy, the foyer is characterised by emptiness and clarity but surrounded by internal and external activity. It is a layered extension of the street, a place where you feel exposed, in public, aware of the multifarious life of the city, of which the hotel is a part.

With the superabundance of visual stimuli and the absence of architecture, the quiet disorientation of this sort of space is a more essential expression of metropolitan space than, say, the showy vertigo (and reverberating volume) of OMA's Euralille project. Our freedom to explore and appropriate this interior, and to express ourselves socially, is heightened by the reflective distance from the confusion of the city around us: the stillness of the architecture registers but does not simulate the vitality of the city. As Fretton writes in the project description for his Tokyo Forum competition entry: 'the emptiness which occurs in big cities is reached where space itself becomes vivid, buildings, vehicles and objects collide with enormous frankness and no detail, and the fiction of the city is revealed'[4].

Languid institutions

Besides this intense engagement with the street, Fretton has sketched out an intriguing and individual vision of urban institutions. As the space of civil society, these are as much places of our social freedoms as urban space. His 1995 entry for the Ballater Street social housing competition in Glasgow explored the possibilities of a single linear building, twisted and folded to form a diverse series of common spaces. Incorporated within the fabric of the block, at the head of the street that leads to the river, are studio spaces for the city's art school. Like the boa constrictor that has swallowed an elephant in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's The Little Prince, a single skin of inflected anonymity accommodates the diversity of urban life.

In many ways, this recalls the urban blocks of the pre-industrial or 19th century city, where churches or theatres would be buried in a mass of ordinary buildings. But the avoidance of emphasis on public functions gives the whole a sense of weighty balance, while the studied refusal to enclose the open spaces on all sides engages the surrounding urban landscape.

This strategy of the twisted, linear building was developed further in the competition project for the Laban Centre for Dance in Deptford, where the diversity of a single institution is strung together in a low, languid volume opening out through two courts to the fractured centre of the town and to the creek which runs out to the Thames. The dance theatre and studios are organised (with irreproachable logic) in order of size from the entrance. It is as if Saint-Exupéry's boa had swallowed an elephant[5], a monkey and a rat, lined up from head to tail, and then curled up in order to digest.

Although not differing radically in volume from a low-rise patio solution such as Herzog & de Meuron's winning scheme, where external spaces are extracted from the mass of building as if by

pastry-cutter, the differences in terms of internal organisation are fundamental. Instead of a 'field' of connecting spaces, a single promenade links the disparate elements. The generous gallery is bent around the courtyard, the width diminishing in relation to the distance from the entrance, while window spaces are appropriated for small offices and changing areas. Like typical medieval English towns where instead of a formal square the high street simply widens locally to accommodate the market and public assemblies, it is neither space nor route but a combination of the two.

At the Laban, the engagement of the internal circulation with the two external spaces makes the institution perceptible simultaneously as a living experience (an interior) and as a thing (an exterior). Meanwhile, the extension of the creek habitat and the street into the institution balances it between self-sufficiency and open-endedness. Avoiding the institutional commonplaces of the quasi-external 'street' or the introverted patio or cloister, the gallery appears a credible common space, focused but open, dignified but filled with life, a place marked by the changing light and rhythmic routines of the school and punctuated by the periodic influx of the public.

Seeming at first sight a modest conversion, the Quay Arts Centre in Newport is a continuation and vindication of this strategy of elongated institutions. Originally three separate buildings, Fretton linked them into a single entity by means of a bridge on one side and a narrow connecting block on the other. The interventions transform the jumble of buildings, previously cut-up by corridors, into a sprawling, generous creature, with the cafe and seminar rooms at the centre of a network of spaces, including exhibition galleries and a small theatre, strung around the quay-side terrace. Entrance is via the shop, and access to the exhibition spaces and theatre is through the cafe. Equally, the seminar rooms are beside the cafe, separated only by glazed screens. The interconnectedness of the diverse activities is emphasised and reinforced by these visual and physical links. It is particularly notable that, with the exception of the small lobby and passage to the rear of the theatre, there is no dedicated circulation space.

We should not allow the lack of spectacle or the apparently self-evident nature of the interventions to distract us from the sophistication of Fretton's thinking on people and their institutions. As Robin Evans explained in his suggestive article 'Figures, Doors and Passages', medieval and Renaissance houses had no circulation spaces, just rooms leading to other rooms, inflected by the mood of their décor and adapted for a particular use by furniture.[6] The Quay Arts Centre translates this idea of a matrix of connected rooms to a public building, mixing pre-modern spatial strategy with contemporary democratic sensibility to achieve equality of the parts and informality in the whole.

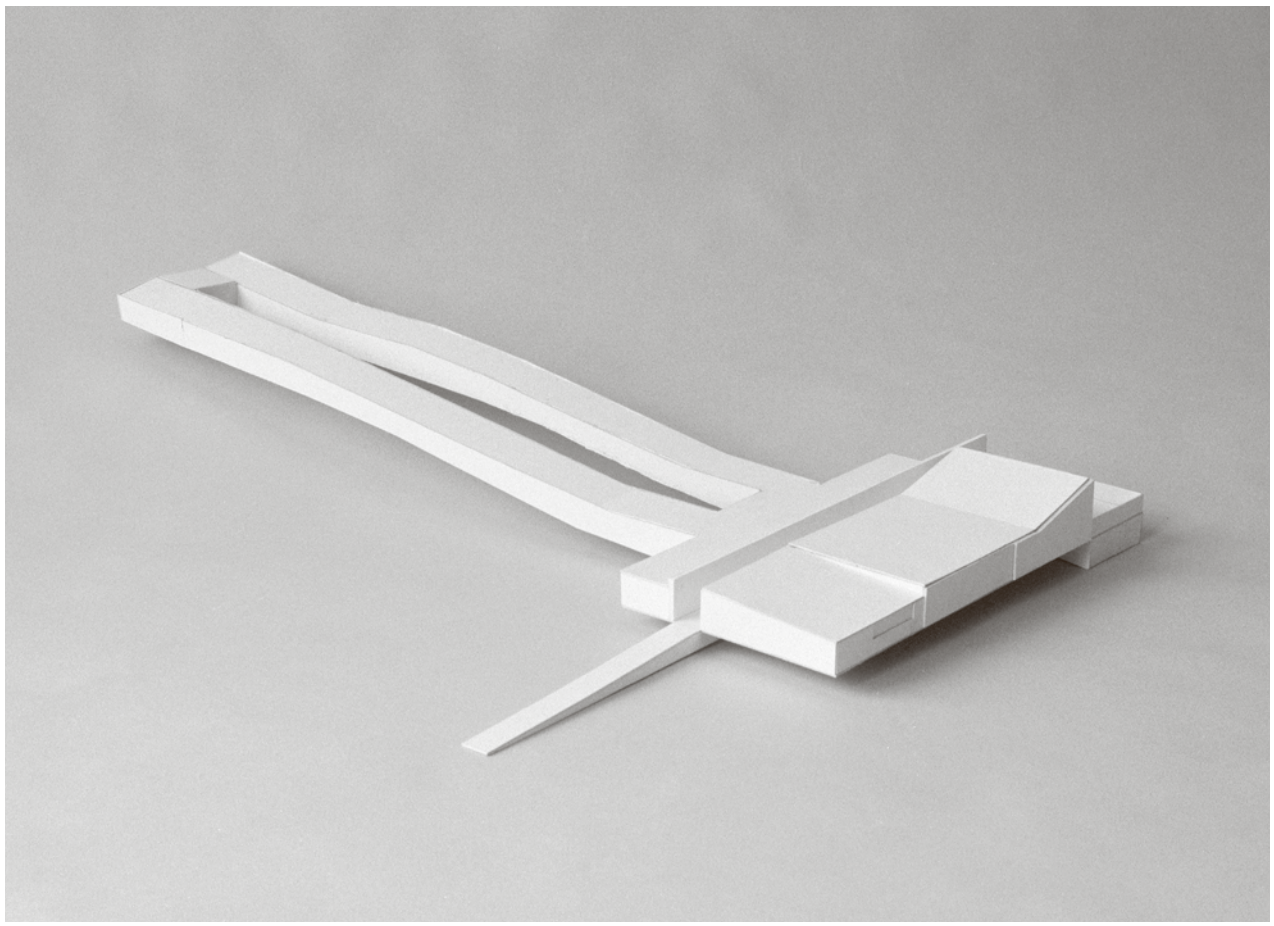
Landscape and language

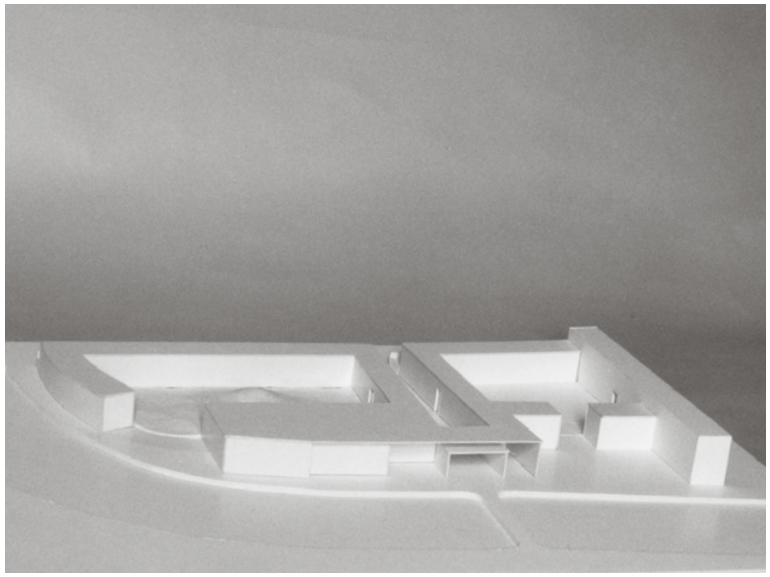
The public elements in Fretton's elongated institutions – the art studios in Glasgow scheme and the theatre at the Laban – are swallowed up in the mass of ordinary building with almost no articulation of their otherness. This is also the case with the communal spaces of the Holy Island monasteries. In each case, the public functions are located firmly at the head of the building, thereby maximising their accessibility, yet their presence is intimated only by oblique signs. At the Laban, this is the yellow-gold anodised aluminium volume of the fly tower rising out of the brick mass of the building. At Holy Island, the communal spaces detach themselves from the slope, sitting on a raised platform, and the refectory and shrine room are given a secondary accent by means of a monopitch and pyramidal roof.

In all these projects, the modernist syntax of sculpturally legible public elements and anonymous supporting functions (as exemplified by Le Corbusier and Jeanneret's Salvation Army building in Paris) and the pre-modern syntax of theatrical emphasis, are abandoned in favour of emphasising the organic unity of the institution. As such, they build on the treatment of the themes of anonymity and collectivity explored (and subsequently abandoned) by Hans Kolhoff in a number of projects in the late 1980s, and realised in the Piraeus apartment building in Amsterdam. They elaborate equally on the rhythmic abstraction and engagement with topography to be found in the urban architecture of 18th and 19th century England, most memorably and dominantly in the crescents of Bath, but more anonymous and subdued in numerous terraces of London. These projects represent the virtual suppression of architectural language and articulation (although these remain in the background, in the proportional relations of the repetitive windows) in favour of what Fretton calls a 'surrender' to the landscape. This is evident in the drunken embrace of the uneven topography in the Holy Island monasteries, poised between the suggestive abstraction of the Mobius strip and the humbled submission of an aircraft broken and scattered across a hill; or in the looping folds of the Laban or Glasgow studios opening and closing against the meanders of the rivers which border them and the objects and cavities of the urban field around them. They represent the collective as a fact of the land as much as a set of civil situations and boundaries that we learn, as an experience and an object of unconscious participation and reflective contemplation.

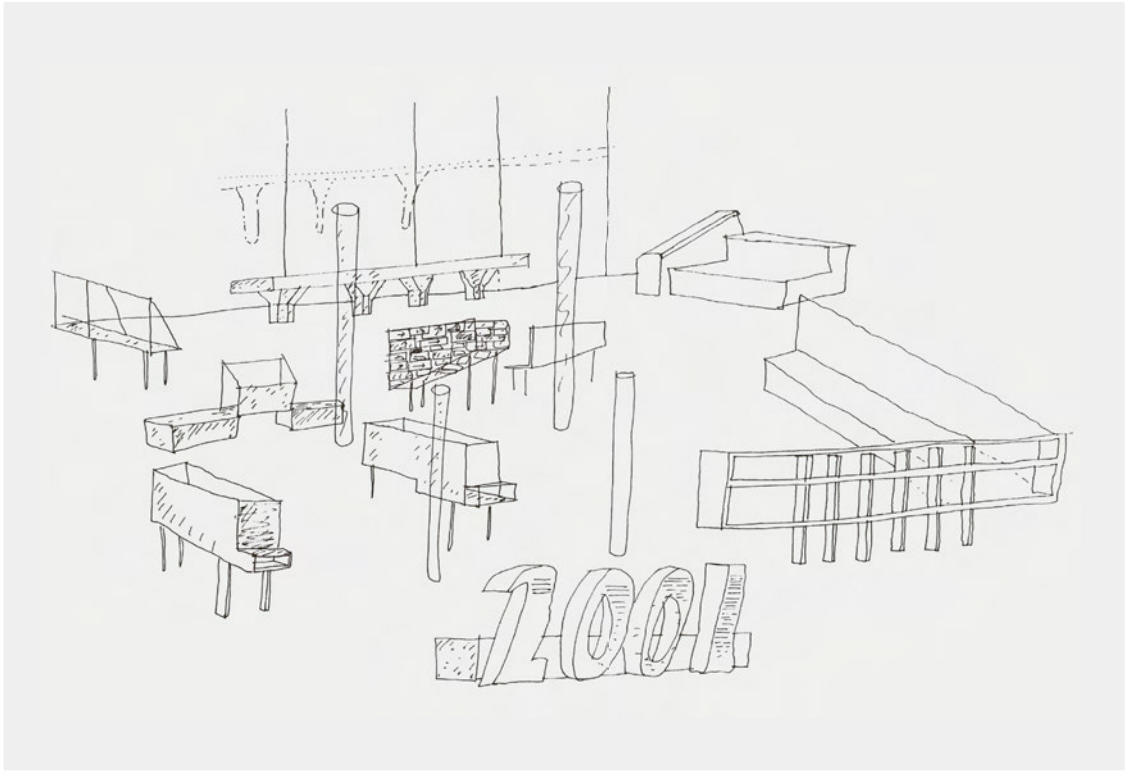
However, this abnegation of articulation represents one extreme of Fretton's work, which under other circumstances displays a precise ear and voice for the signs by which we allow architecture to communicate. His understanding of the way a building's appearance can communicate values is evident in his sensitive interpretation of other architects' work, as in his recent article on Peter Celsing's Stockholm Filmhouse[7], or in his exhibition design for the redesign of London's South Bank arts quarter. Here, the display cases were made as scale fragments of the buildings that form the complex, and amounted to an interpretation of the ideals which are legible in these buildings from the 1950s and 60s. Transparency and proportionality, the suspension of enclosed spaces, weapon-like roof lights and windows, the muscular mushroom-columned walkways, these are each extracted and assembled like the characters of an obscure language which talk of democratic openness, equality, focused enjoyment, dramatic surprise and the fairground variety which animated the 1951 Festival of Britain, which initiated construction of the complex.

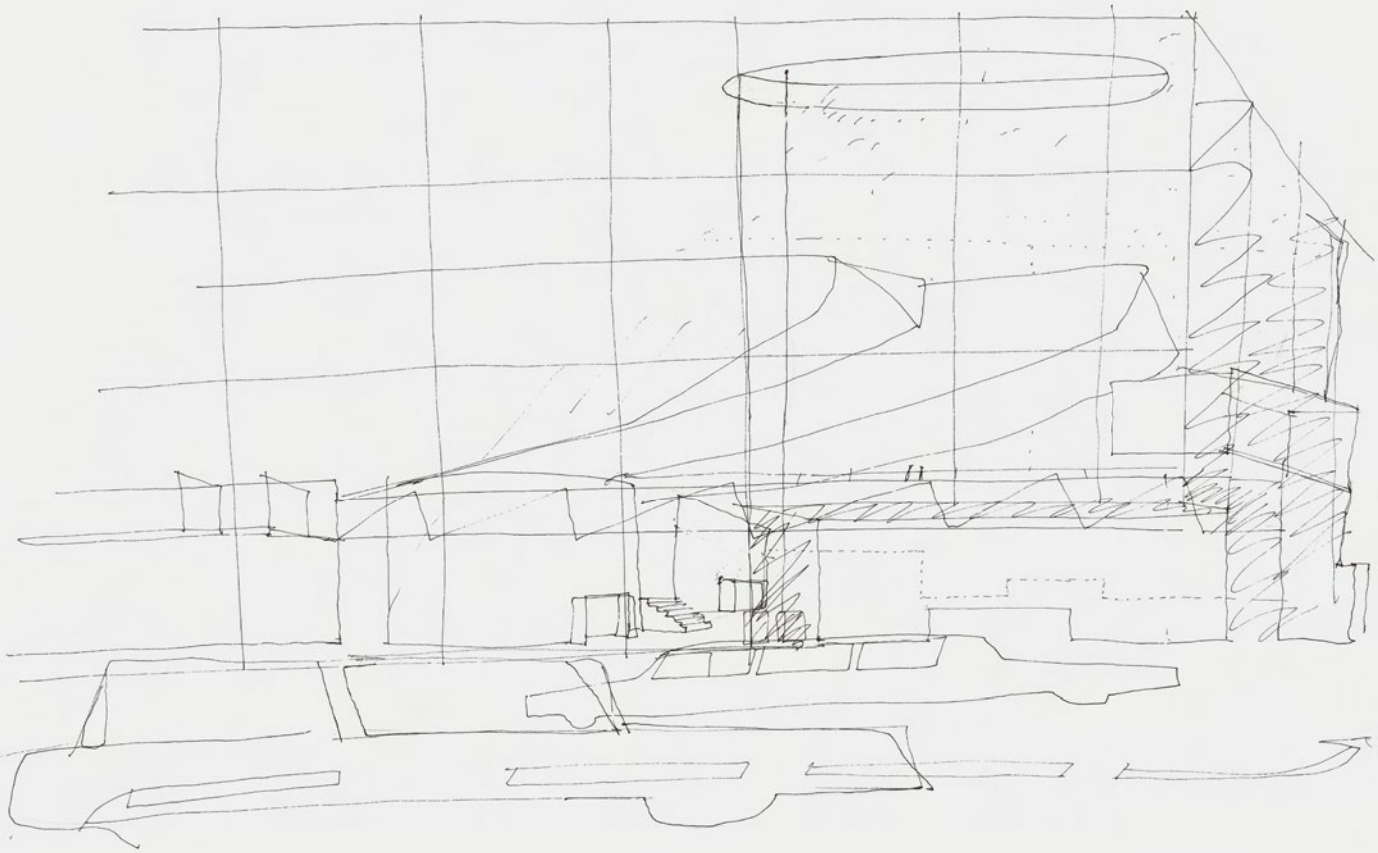
In his smaller scale work for urban and rural sites, Fretton explores the communicative possibilities of architecture through volume, proportion and familiar elements. Rejecting the seductions of 'lost' authenticity and expansive futures, he assembles characters from half-remembered languages into a pidgin language, a lingua franca[8] for the fractured realities of Britain's society. Fretton's architecture reprises a wide range of sources in

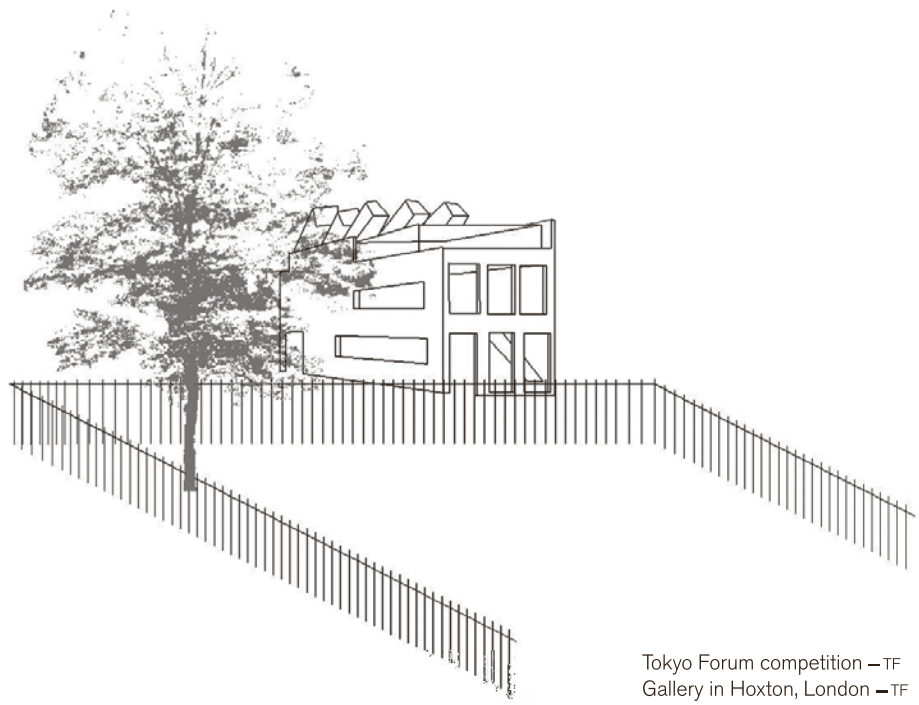




Holy Island competition – TF
Social housing competition, Glasgow – TF
Exhibition design South Bank, London – TF







Tokyo Forum competition – TF
Gallery in Hoxton, London – TF

which the primitive, the civil and the industrial all come together. As he states simply 'for me all the architecture of the past and present exists in the present, always revealing its radicalness and capacity to talk about the heart of human experience'[9]. But it is not eclectic breadth which distinguishes Fretton's work, rather the ability to bring ideas, strategies and elements together without either emphasising their fragmentary character or erasing their tensions. His buildings hover between the abstract and the figurative, always containing touches of common experience or familiar character, maintaining the schematic clarity of their strategic divisions – but never pretending to absolute legibility.

As at Sway and Ørestadt, the Holton Lee site is interpreted as a field of objects in which the new buildings participate. The setting is rural, and buildings are grouped with the mixture of autonomy and cohesion characteristic of a farm. While the volumes participate in this structured topography, they are stamped with signs of their intended purpose – the saw tooth roof lights of the artists' studios and the low portico-veranda of the Faith House. They are objects of mute specificity. Like the pyramidal volume of the gallery at Sway, their difference is forcefully expressed. However, by avoiding hierarchical relationships, they remain complementary characters of intense associative richness. For, as the analysts of language have explained, codified difference is as important to comprehension as any apparent representational root. As Richard Sennett has written of the 18th century city, convention is 'the single most expressive tool of public life' [10].

In the Ørestadt hotel, these linguistic differences are formed into a compact assemblage, with the measured frame of the tower in tension with the blank volume of the performance spaces, the sculptural roof lights and the grassed plinth, in a fragmentary parable on the evolution of the city.

In the projects for urban infill sites, the spatial and linguistic conventions of the surroundings are similarly engaged. These projects – the Lisson Gallery, the Gallery in Hoxton, the Red House in Chelsea and the apartments in Groningen – all accept the vestigial classicism which has informed the building of cities throughout Europe, at the same time capitalising on the contingencies of the site. The front of the Lisson Gallery has echoes of shopfronts, curtain walls and domestic spaces, all brought into a delicate harmonic balance. Equally, the proportional play of the front of the Gallery in Hoxton is unsettled by the horizontal cuts of the side wall and roof, and by the angular roof lights. The imbalances of their appearance seem to make some sense of the abrupt discontinuities of these genteel suburbs turned working-class pockets of central London. The Red House in Chelsea and the apartments in Groningen bring together the topographic variations of their surroundings (the twists in the streets and the variety of building heights) in the inflected order of their fronts, maintaining the civilised poise and contingency of the city in uneasy balance.

From the metropolitan to the urban, provincial or rural, and from the scattered to the focused spatial character, Fretton's buildings engage with the conventions of their settings like the characteristics of a genre, seeking out signs of commonality. They do this in order to bind the life and forms of all the buildings which define the collective spaces in an open-ended conversation, 'to point out that these are not mistakes or by-products, but part of an unconscious collective project which has to be acknowledged'. [11]

The subject of the discussion and assertions we can read in each of these places is the nature of our collectivity, how much this is buried in unconscious habits, and what are the background forces that keep our society in a fragile balance.

Of course, architecture is capable of much more as well as this. But at a time when the idea of collective action on everything from welfare provision to infrastructure is under challenge, this is the least that architecture can try to do. Fretton has had to reconsider architecture's possibilities under the retreat of public provision, as Auden revised his political ambitions for poetry in the darker political circumstances of the 1930s. Auden's puzzled affirmation of the public role of the poet remains valid:

> All I have is a voice
> To undo the folded lie,
> The romantic lie in the brain
> Of the sensual man-in-the-street
> And the lie of Authority
> Whose buildings grope the sky:
> There is no such thing as the State
> And no one exists alone [12]

Fretton's is a singular voice in both Britain and Europe that is hard to place. His work is a compelling mix of bravura and understatement, discipline and detachment, didacticism and empathy.

However, his command of what he calls 'the affecting power of forms' is powerful precisely because it is allied to his spatial understanding of the routines and habits that demarcate our individual and common lives, and of how these are embodied in places made specific by idiosyncrasies and histories. What I referred to earlier as his exploration of the social dimension of architecture is this: he accepts that social engineering and transparent language are beyond the scope of architecture. Instead, he seeks to prompt the sociable occupation of buildings and to express what, inverting Carl Jung's expression, we might call the 'unconscious collective' of our society, the hidden props of our co-existence.

William Mann is a writer and a partner in the London practice Witherford Watson Mann Architects

1 *Tony Fretton.* Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1995, 31.
2 Le Corbusier, 'La Rue', originally published in *L'Intransigeant,* May 1929, reprinted in Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre Complete* Vol. 1, Zurich: 1964, 118-119.
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9 Fretton,Tony, project description for the Red House in Chelsea, from the exhibition of his work at the RIBA, London, July-August 2001.
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12 September 1, 1939, from W.H. Auden, *Selected Poems,* London: 1979, 88.

Abstraction and Familiarity
Tony Fretton 2008

Designers have moments when certain aspects of a project become significant and can be imaginatively transformed and embodied in the fabric of the building. The appeal of designed objects is that they seem to make imaginative sense of facts and events, something that people strive do with the world around them. Historically, the creative arts have played a major part in making sense of the world, especially the modern world as was shaped over the last several hundred years by politics, science, industry and finance. Architecture in particular has had the responsibility of creating the physical places that both allowed new things to happen and gave them meaning.

Architecture in effect has always produced modern architecture. One approach has been to construct modern architecture from previous styles and vernaculars, as for example in classicism, neo-gothicism, national romanticism and to some extent art nouveau and 20th century post-modern. Although varying greatly in scope, each addressed significant architectural issues of the modern period and left traces that continue in the architecture of the present. For Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, gothic indicated the type of technical resourcefulness and representational capacity needed to make modern building structures. For Augustus Pugin, it suggested compositional techniques based on organic form that could be extended to the design of large modern institutions. Classicism, however gave the most systematic and extensive style, evolving a modern architecture from Greek and Roman precedents for the new humanist societies of the Renaissance, coalescing with vernacular building to give domestic classicism for the rising bourgeoisie in the Netherlands and Britain, and transforming into the neo and beaux-arts classicism of the 19th century city. Its long development gave general rules for the design of different types of buildings as ensembles that enclosed and shaped public spaces between them and embodied the mutual values of clients and designers. Even in its most residual form, it has proved capable of making habitable, adaptable and cultured cities.

Another approach to making modern architecture has been that of engineer-designers such as Joseph Paxton, Gustave Eiffel, Jean Prouvé, Buckminster Fuller and Norman Foster, who restricted themselves to applying the materials and techniques that have arisen since the industrial revolution to the social opportunities that were an outcome of the industrial revolution. In contrast, the architects of the early modern movement sought to translate new social patterns and innovative constructional engineering into form via the asymmetry and fragmentation of abstract art. Infrastructural preoccupation and the aesthetics of the modern movement have produced cities that are arrays of disconnected buildings surrounded by space emptied of conventional purpose and meaning. Although attitudes to such cities remain ambivalent, they are as real and complex as cities that were formed according to tradition, and are often positively embraced by their occupants. Crucially, their absence of custom can give the creative freedom to address the issues and possibilities of the modern world.

These two approaches, development of architecture from existing material that contains social, cultural and experiential knowledge; and newness and the unknown with the ability to stimulate human creativity, provide strategies for the work of my office in the present time.

While apparently in opposition, they are productively related. For example, the modern movement's tendency to turn city massing inside out, and reduce what was represented to function and technology, can be seen as reactions to and inversions of the beaux-arts classicism that preceded it. Le Corbusier's designs and writing reveal this in sophisticated detail, reformulating composition as 'traces regulateurs' and the modular. Precedent was diverted to the machine aesthetic and purist object. Columns were redeployed emblematically but with changed constructional and representational purposes. And the five points of modern architecture, as Alan Colquhoun has shown, were translations of standard motifs from beaux-arts classicism.

Le Corbusier then, can be placed alongside artists of the modern movement such as Igor Stravinsky, James Joyce and Pablo Picasso, who quite naturally reworked cultural formations from the past and incorporated them with striking new issues and possibilities of the present to make works of intense modernity.

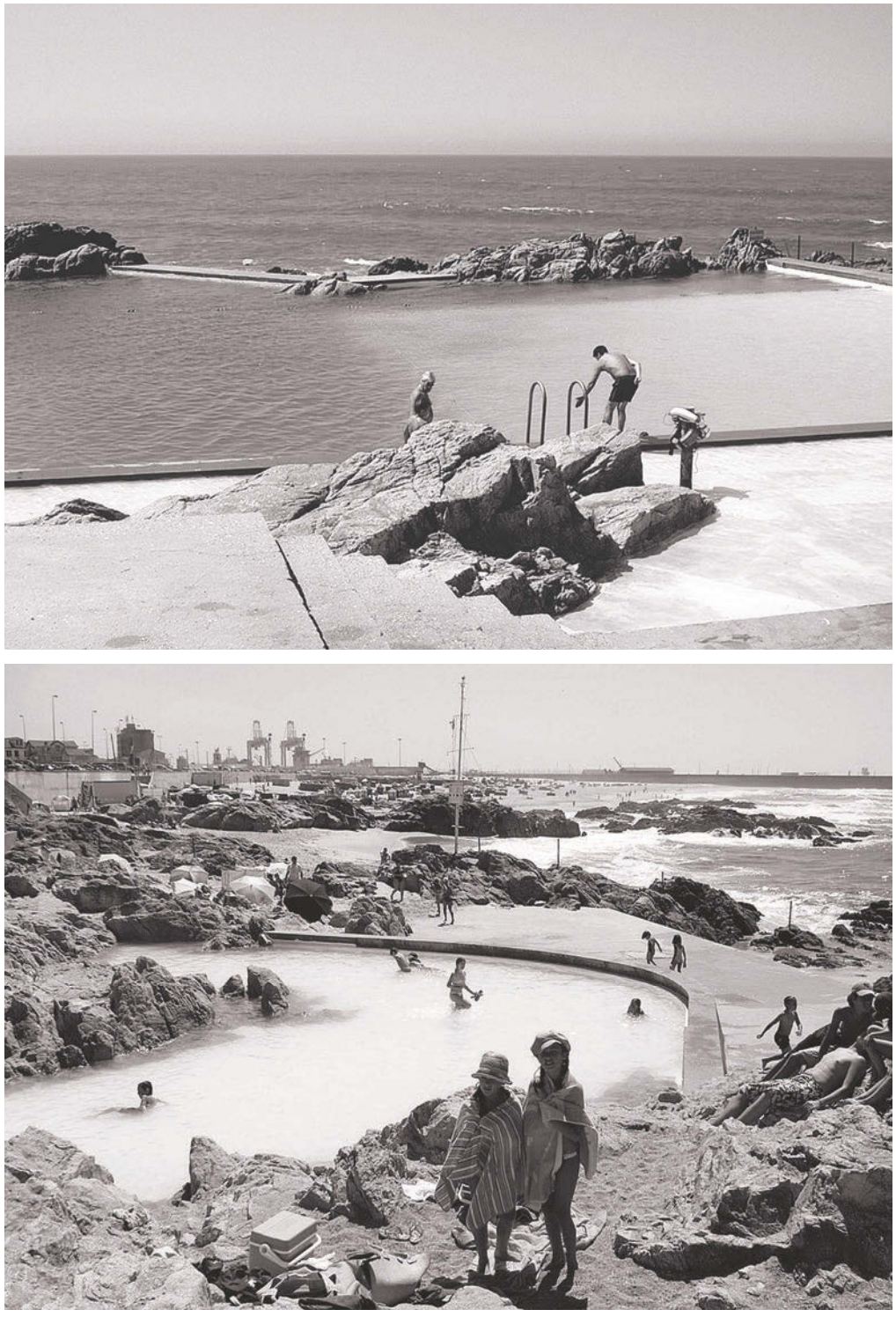
I think that the latter point remains true in the work of notable architects working today such as OMA, and Àlvaro Siza. In their submission for the extension of the Dutch parliament, OMA reworked selected motifs of the early European modern movement, particularly surrealism and Russian constructivism, with pragmatic modernism of the USA, placing them in dialogue with historical buildings in the location to make an architecture of contemporary expression.

Àlvaro Siza, in projects such as the housing at Èvora and bank at Vila do Conde, showed how highly abstract, contemporary architecture could be made that was socially intelligible and acutely sensitive to larger issues, by drawing deeply on the Portuguese vernacular. These factors are most poignantly evident in an earlier work, the swimming pool at the edge of the sea and its buildings in Leça da Palmeira. Siza's scheme establishes relations of material, scale and proportion with the industrial dock seen across the bay – a place of natural beauty that has been allowed to become a shipping lane – to draw human life in the pool into association with wild life in the sea in a context marred by industry.

OMA's insistence on a vernacularised and ironic modernism as a lens through which to view the present, although exceptionally brilliant, seems rhetorical in comparison with Siza's holistic and non-judgmental statement and its delivery through human experience.

And it is here that my interests lie – in making architecture that constructs a positive and operable realism from the circumstances of the project and conditions of the modern world, and offers it as transformative experience.

To do that requires measured amounts of known and new material, which is why I use and transform existing objects and buildings that have meaning, while applying high levels of abstraction to them. Retrospectively, I can see how this took shape in the design of the Lisson Gallery of 1992. The facts and events of London that would be framed in the windows of the galleries presented themselves to me with political, social and existential force, and the building seemed able to construct itself from meaningful fragments of other buildings to say something of its times. In this way, a natural relation with the past, and a high degree of freedom in defining the present, became possible.



Swimming pool in Leça de Palmeira, Álvaro Siza – TF

Biographies & Credits

Tony Fretton
born London 1945

Graduated Architectural Association School of Architecture 1972
Worked for Arup Associates, Neylan Ungless and others 1972–82
Tony Fretton Architects from 1982
Unit Master Architectural Association School of Architecture 1988–92
Guest professor EPFL Lausanne and Berlage Institute Amsterdam 1995–96
Professor Chair of Architectural Design and Interiors TU Delft from 1999
Semester studio GSD Harvard 2005–06
Guest professor ETH Zurich 2010–11

Jim McKinney
born Lichfield, Staffordshire 1969

Sheffield University BA (Hons) Architecture 1991
University of Cambridge Diploma in Architecture 1995
Tony Fretton Architects from 1996, principal from 2000
Taught at London Metropolitan University 1996–98, Architectural Association School of Architecture 1998-2004 and affiliated lecturer at University of Cambridge 2004–07

David Owen
born Blackburn, Lancashire 1965

Newcastle University, BA (Hons) Geography and Economics 1987
Manchester University BA (Hons) Architecture 1993
Bartlett School of Architecture London, Diploma in Architecture 1996
Harper Mackay Architects project director 1996–2002
Tony Fretton Architects from 2002, associate from 2007, principal from 2012
Has taught a final year degree studio at Kingston School of Architecture since 2011

Sandy Rendel
born London 1973

Graduated Cambridge University BA in Architecture 1995
Cambridge University Diploma in Architecture 1998
James Gorst Architects 1999–2004, associate from 2002
Tony Fretton Architects 2004–09, associate from 2007
Founded own practice in 2010

Colleagues in Tony Fretton Architects

Principals
- Tony Fretton
- Jim McKinney
- David Owen
- Sandy Rendel 2004–2009

Architects and assistants
- Tom Appels
- Matt Atkins
- Piram Banpabutr
- Matthew Barton
- Ralph Blaettler
- Gus Brown
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Toni Yli-Suvanto – TYS

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Yuichi Hashimura – YH
Henry Lau – HL
Michael Lee – ML
Nina Lundvall – NL
David Owen – DO
Sandy Rendel – SR
Io Schønherr – IS
Chris Snow – CS

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