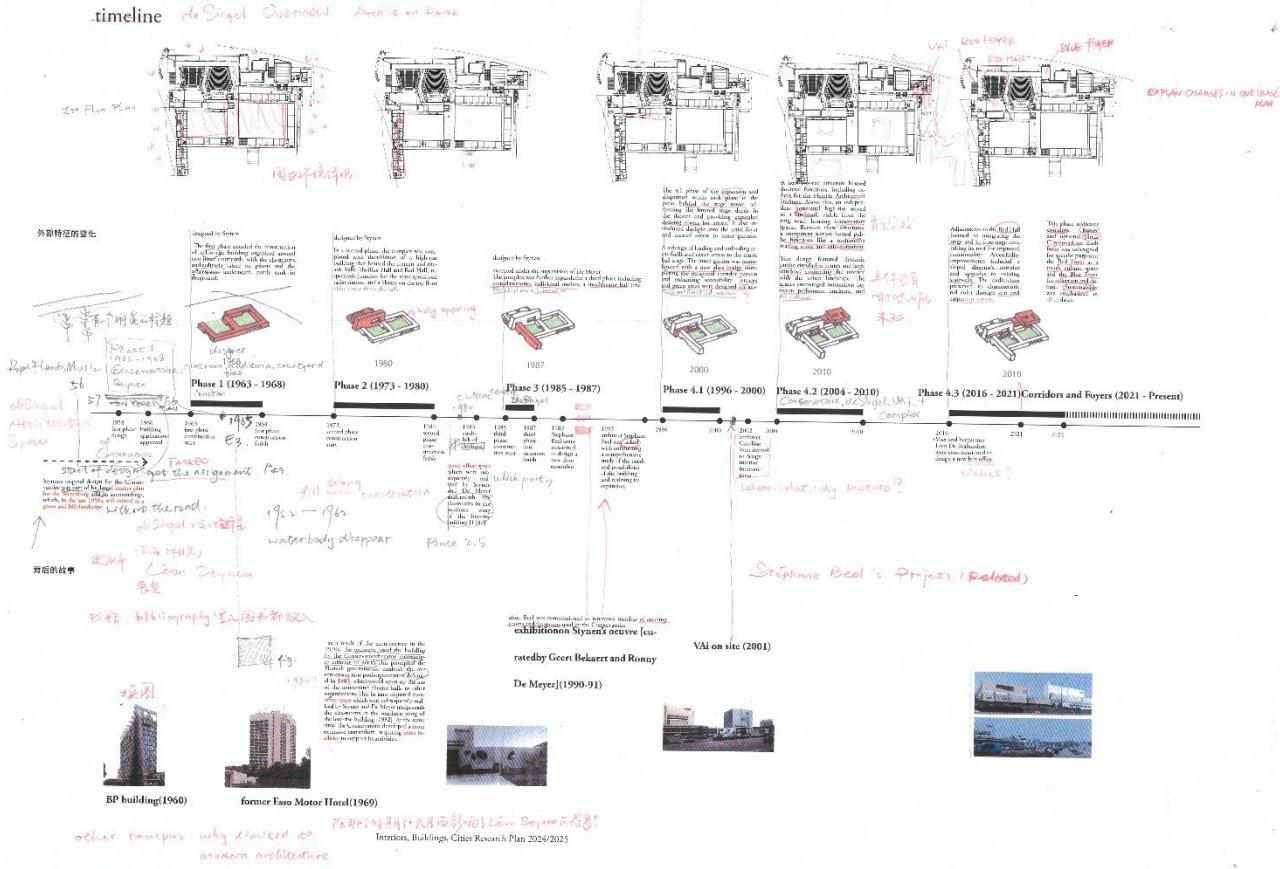


# **Graduation Project**

## **Reflection**

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Interiors Buildings Cities  
May 2025

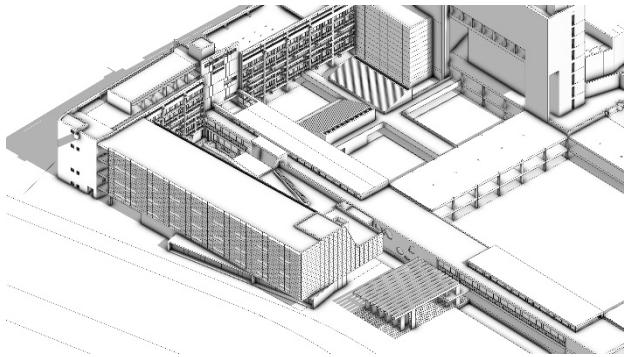


## Introduction

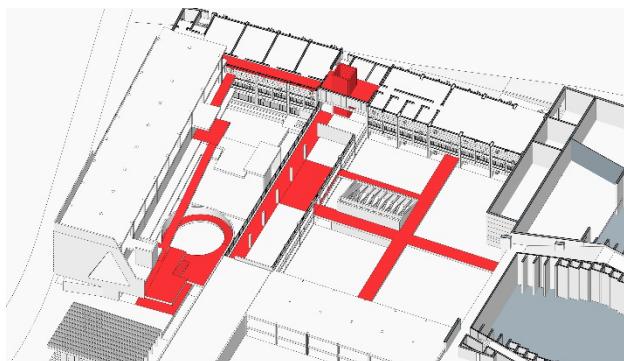
The main focus of the Interiors Buildings Cities (IBC) Graduation Project is to design a new home for the Vlaams Architectuurinstituut (VAi) at De Singel. This new home is centered around an architectural archive, and also integrating existing spaces such as the library, offices, exhibition areas, and lecture halls. While the project's renovation and expansion site, De Singel, is a very complex "public cultural palace" that combines theaters, art schools, radio stations, offices, restaurants and other functions.

The Graduation Project also involves several academic subjects: a deep understanding of the origins of the archive building type; the history of prominent Belgian modernist architects; the development of De Singel and its relationship with the city; and the key challenges in renovation design projects. These are the four Graduation Project goals that I have summarized based on my graduation studies.

## Current progress



My proposal consists of two parts. A new four-story "North Wing" is built on the open space on the north side of the site along the street to accommodate the main storage space of the new archive. At the same time, a courtyard system consisting of corridors, exhibition halls and outdoor spaces is placed in the existing east courtyard of De Singel.



On the one hand, the new "North Wing" is connected to the east wing of De Singel, which was expanded in 1987, and an entrance space is reshaped on the other side. In order to deal with the different floor heights of the archive in the north wing and the old building in the east wing, I tried to design a ramp system that can connect the ground to the third floor. As a unique visitor flow line, it connects, expands

and continues the public space near the building entrance while balancing the height difference.

On the other hand, a series of courtyards also strengthen the connection between the various spaces of De Singel and improve the quality of the outdoor space. The purpose of the courtyard exhibition hall is to use the directionality of the sloping roof to echo the old building, while allowing the relatively low courtyard shape to form a unique and beautiful fifth façade of the building.

## Methodology and workflow of IBC

IBC has a unique and excellent methodology, especially the use of large-scaled physical models for research, learning, design, presentation, and display - these were things I had never encountered before. Combining this with my previous courses, such as MSc1's House and MSc2's Salon, I have learned an architectural approach from IBC that observes, researches, and designs from different scales and perspectives. I believe integrating this method into my personal workflow will greatly benefit my future architectural career.

During the IBC Graduation Project, my classmates and I actively participated in teamwork. Everyone contributed to model making, drawing, literature research, and many other complex tasks. The work efficiency and the final presentation outcomes during this period led me to reflect on the dichotomy between democracy and autocracy in group work. Some tasks require brainstorming to gain breadth, while others require the efficiency that autocracy brings. These project management experiences and reflections may influence my future studies and work.

As an architecture student from China, experiencing European architecture, particularly in the Netherlands and Belgium, up close for the first time was incredibly impactful. Through the House, Salon, and Palace projects, I observed the respect that developed countries have for their urban ethics and heritage preservation, as well as a form of minimalistic aesthetic that bridges classicism and restraint. These reflections on architectural context and aesthetics could serve as a reference for the challenges faced by urban architecture in China after its rapid development.

## Reflection on the feedback

In general, I received relatively positive feedback in P2 and P3. While my instructors recognized my design direction, and also gave me new challenges.

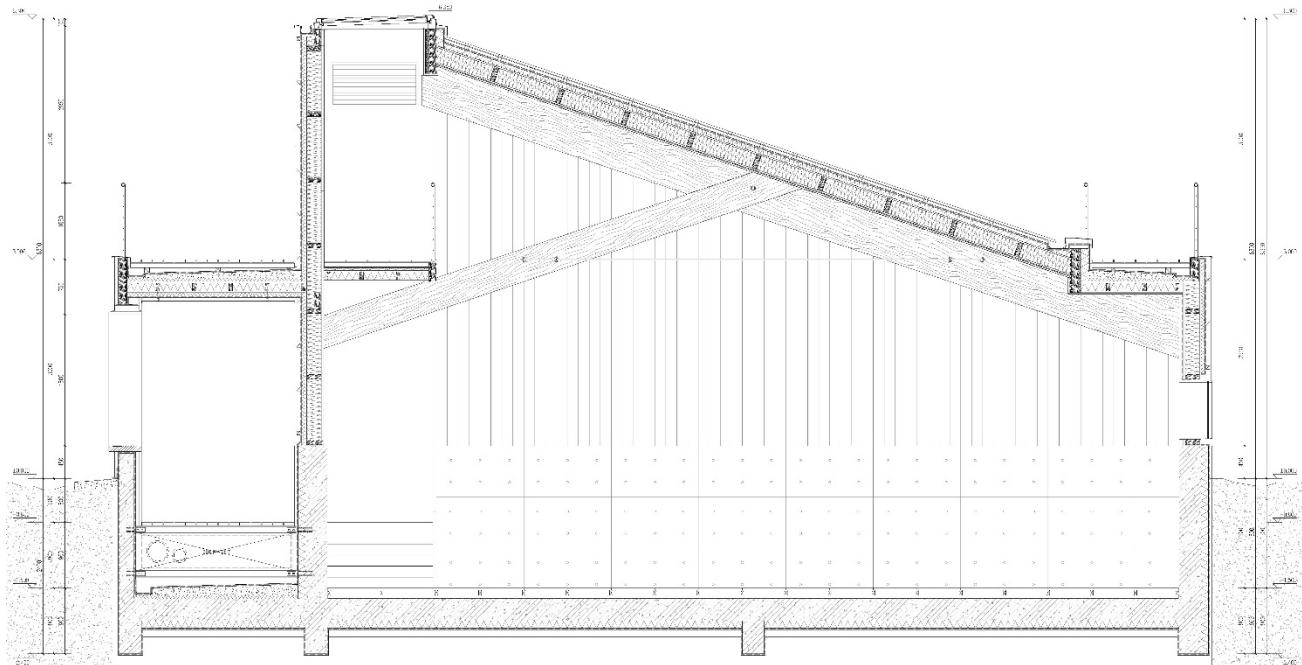
In the feedback from P2, balancing the relationship between the new and the old became an important goal. The current De Singel has not been created overnight, but has undergone several development phases from 1960 to 2020. From Modernism to Super-Dutch, each phase has faced the challenge of balancing the new and the old. These challenges include issues related to form, function, materials, architectural ideas, urban development, and the opposition and unity of new and old building technologies.

In the process of designing the new archive, the connection between the new north wing and the old east wing should be a question that needs to be considered from all aspects. In terms of physical space, my proposal uses ramps to deal

with the complex height difference, while forming new streamlines and unique public spaces; in terms of architectural structure, the new and old structures are independent of each other, and the space is connected by structural seams; in terms of architectural shape, the north wing continues the volume of the east wing, and forms a C-shaped volume with the theater in the east of De Singel, creating an introverted outdoor space.

Meanwhile, finding a sustainable direction for both De Singel and VAI in architecture should be a forward-looking goal of the design. Given the historical context of the site, it is easy to predict that both De Singel and VAI will face more challenging developments, possibly stemming from urban, technological, or environmental factors. At the same time, the newly designed archive will face the possibility of expansion. In my proposal, the north wing adopts the CLT structural system, which adopts standardized floor height and column span as much as possible while meeting the carbon balance, so that the space has a certain flexibility to face future transformation, expansion and development. The courtyard exhibition hall adopts a wooden frame structural system and uses an independent air conditioning and heating system to meet the needs of time-sharing use.

In the feedback from P3, the instructor hoped that I would not get lost in too many complex form elements while paying attention to accessible design. Therefore, I reorganized the elevations of various parts of the building interior, optimized and simplified the proposed ramp system and public space to make them clearer and more efficient.



## Working plan between P4 and P5

1. Make a large-scale model of 1:33 or 1:50 to verify and present the public interior space of the foyer. This process is used to test the feasibility of the building structure and verify the proposal's idea of how the material is presented.
2. Make a complete and refined model based on the existing 1:200 block model to present the complete proposal. Placing the new part in the site model will be a process to verify the public nature of the building in the city.
3. Make high-quality renderings of the main public spaces. In this process, the material presentation of the building facade and interior space will be clearly expressed, which is crucial

to showing the atmosphere and usage scenarios of the indoor and outdoor spaces.

## Questions relate to my work

1. If the proposal is actually implemented, what challenges will be encountered in the process from drawing to construction? How will professionals, archive staff and the public evaluate the actual completed building?
2. What positive impact will the renovation of De Singel complex have on my future career as an architect in China? Is there a methodology for large-scale integrated cultural building renovation projects?