

*Fool's Land**



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A Matter of Scale

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*Lollidema (transl. Fool's Land) - a cluster of kitschy, oversized houses constructed in 1980's & 1990's Estonia

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I. Introduction

Problem statement

Houses are erections of their environment, representative of surrounding, as well as personal values and constraints. Most archetypical examples often emerge from private residential architecture, where the plot of land becomes a canvas for tenant's self-expression.

Architecture has always been a carrier of local identity, yet this relationship has weakened over the years. As current digitalization in construction and planning is undermined by efficiency, designs often become detached from their culture, tradition or someone's self-expression. Moreover, industrial building methods and housing systems promote simple, repetitive forms, which have consequently led to the standardization of residential architecture.¹

¹Frampton, Kenneth. 1983. "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance." In *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster, 16–30. Seattle: Bay Press.

The case of standardization is especially true in post-Soviet countries, where during the regime, new development consisted almost exclusively of low-cost mass-produced housing blocks. Private residential development was heavily regulated, while the desire for self-expression was simultaneously growing.² Consequently, overly eclectic architectural examples that emerged in 1990's were heavily criticized for their poor taste and kitschy appearance.³

The stigma of architectural ugliness has largely carried over into the 21st century, with many new residential developments retaining highly anonymous designs. Another issue arises as real estate developers continue prioritizing cost efficiency and financial gain over local identity, producing disengagement between the residents and their environment, as well as narrowing down the demographic.⁴

²French, Richard Antony. 1995. *Plans, Pragmatism and People: The Legacy of Soviet Planning for Today's Cities*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

³Ruudi, Ingrid. 2020. *Spaces of the Interregnum: Transformations in Estonian Architecture and Art, 1986–1994*. Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Arts.

⁴Martinez, Francisco. 2017. "'This Place Has Potential': Trash, Culture, and Urban Regeneration in Tallinn, Estonia." *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 42 (3): 4–22.

Relevance

Following the declaration of independence in 1991, Tallinn experienced rapid urban development shaped by its economic growth and gradual integration into Europe's real estate markets. However, newly developed residential neighborhoods have been catering to an increasingly narrower socioeconomic group, a large portion of which prioritizes investment value over long-term habitation, as is the case of the Kalaranna neighborhood.⁵ Apartments in districts as such are acquired as financial assets rather than homes,⁶ resulting in significant social inertia. Similar developments often promote social cohesion as a selling point, while in reality, their planning processes are characterized by private interests and restricted public access.⁷

⁵Tallinna Linnaplaneerimise Amet. n.d. "DP002040 – Kalaranna kvartali detailplaneering." Accessed June 3, 2026.

⁶"Finnish Investors Want to Buy Thousands of Apartments in Tallinn." 2013. ERR News.

⁷Prilenska, Viktorija, Katrin Paadam, and Roode Liias. 2020. "Challenges of Civic Engagement in the (Post-Socialist) Transitional Society: Experiences from Waterfront Urban Areas Mezapark in Riga and Kalaranna in Tallinn." *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* 44 (3):

A neighborhood that is next up for re-development in Tallinn is Paljassaare, an industrial area with a lot of heritage in port and cargo-handling industry accommodating very few residential needs, as currently less than 800 inhabitants call the district their home.⁸ Despite that, there have been many initiatives on behalf of local communities. Some of the carried-out interventions include play areas, communal gardens and art exhibitions.⁹ There has been a lot of interest shown in forming a unique local identity for the upcoming residential neighborhood, yet the current architectural proposals consist of structures with very anonymous design cues, potentially allowing for a similar socioeconomic scenario as in Kalaranna.

Development of a residential or a mixed-use structure with a focus on self-expression and individuality could be crucial to Paljassaare's mission of becoming a social neighborhood, preventing financial motives and facilitating residents' connection to their property, as well as their surroundings.

⁸OÜ Hendrikson & Ko, Paljassaare tee 18, 20, 24, 24a, 26a, 28, 28c, 28e, 30, 30a, 30b, 30c, 32, 32b, 32c, 32d kruntide ja lähiala detailplaneeringu keskkonnamõju strateegilise hindamise aruanne (Tartu–Tallinn: OÜ Hendrikson & Ko, 2011), 7.

⁹Prilenska, Paadam, and Liias. "Challenges of Civic Engagement," 221.

Introduction

Objective and motivation

To understand the current perspective, as well as the local history of individuality in residential design, one must turn to the architectural development of early post-independence, a particularly unique and ambitious period in Estonian history.

While in public projects this period manifested itself in established architectural styles, private residential developments emerged as eclectic, greatly oversized, and often self-designed mansions. Despite being monumental to the re-independence of Estonia, these structures to this day carry loads of architectural stigma surrounding their overly expressive design, antagonizing self-expression.¹¹

Seeking to destigmatize individuality in architecture, highlight the importance of said structures and interpret their design cues to facilitate communities, the aim of this project is providing a framework for a large-scale residential development which supports the ambition of self-expression.

¹¹Triin Reidla, Nii kole maja! Postmodernistlikud elamud ja nende väärtustamisproblemaatika (master's thesis, Estonian Academy of Arts, 2019), 3

Moreover, with the intention of preserving the industrial background of Paljassaare and bridging its heritage with the current needs of the neighborhood, the architectural intervention is to be carried out via adaptive re-use of an existing warehouse structure. Using various dismantlement and re-enforcement techniques, the structural elements are to be repurposed in a residential setting.

Research & design questions

The extent of this research comprises numerous discussions regarding individuality and self-expression in architecture, leading to the main question: how can large-scale residential developments facilitate tenant's connection to their property and surroundings via individuality-centered design?

Consequently, to make educated decisions and come to a conclusion, research needs to be carried out regarding questions supporting and explaining the main research topic. What architectural stigma is carried in local examples of expressive residential design? In what cases does individuality become synonymous with ugliness? Moreover, what structural and design interventions can help facilitate one's self-expression? How can a connection to your property become a shared interest and promote community building? What historical site aspects should be preserved when shaping local identity? How can they be related to the current and future needs of the location?

Introduction

Scope

As mentioned previously, the site being targeted is located in Paljassaare, an industrial neighborhood in the north of Tallinn undergoing a planning phase for a full mixed-use redevelopment. Currently, it accommodates numerous warehouses which are still actively operating under various companies. Within the whole area there is a significant lack of domestic facilities, such as shops, educational institutions and recreational areas. The detailed plan for Paljassaare's coastal area, currently available on Tallinn's environmental website (tallinn.ee), shows a full redevelopment plan for the area consisting of over 41 hectares of land. The proposal was prepared by numerous architecture and urbanism studios and consists of multi-functional developments - structures integrating residential, recreational, educational and other facilities.¹²

¹²K-Projekt Aktiaselts, Paljassaare sadama-ala detailplaneering. Seletuskiri, Töö nr 07142 (Tallinn: K-Projekt Aktiaselts, 2025).



Fig. 1. Paljassaare redevelopment visualisation. Source: *Citify*

With taking the local communal initiative as a basis for forming a neighborhood identity, this project counter-proposes a design for a residential multi-use structure within the area. Including the structures up for adaptive reuse and their surrounding plots, the area for consideration consists of roughly 2.4 acres of land. Assuming this project will be developed along with a few other plots in the area, it will not integrate every function necessary for a functional neighborhood and focus on facilities aiming to strengthen the identity of the neighborhood and self-expression within the residential part. 'Fool's land' serves as a first phase of the Paljassaare redevelopment plan, with an intention of influencing the further phases.

II. Approach

Approach

Methods

The analysis part of this project is to be carried out via various research strategies, starting with a two-week-long exchange in Tallinn and several analytical exercises to get familiar with the city and its environment. During the visit various relevant sites were visited and documented, with an image-series presented at the A0 review.

Moreover, specific buildings and historic happenings are analyzed through early post-independence Estonian literature and confronting it with the current issues and the discourse happening on social media or online in general.

The design itself is shaped via studying additional world literature, sketching, writing and modeling, while the final findings are presented via architectural drawings, diagrams and other art mediums.

Planning

Week 2.1 - 2.2

Excursion to Tallinn, formulating the design assignment, research assignment, conducting the research.

Week 2.2 - 2.4

Making research conclusions, finishing formulating the design assignment, first ideas on form and shape.

Week 2.5

A0 review

Week 2.6 - 2.9

Concluding the design brief, detailing the function, setting the layout and principle of construction.

Week 2.10

A1 review

Week 3.1 - 3.9

Detailing the project, navigating through scales. Communicating via diagrams, architectural drawings and models.

Week 3.10

A2 review

Week 4.1 - 4.6

Finalizing the project, focusing on detail and visual communication via perspectives and renders. Clarifying the narrative.

Week 4.7

A3 review

Week 4.8 - 4.9

Detailing the project based on A3 remarks.

Week 4.10

A4 review

Kalamaja & the issue of social cohesion

2.1 - 2.5

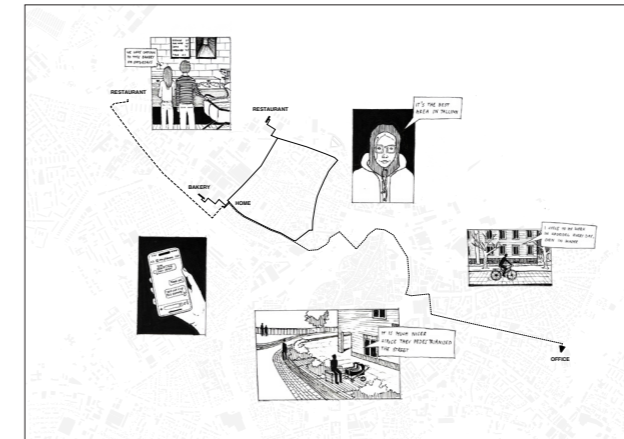
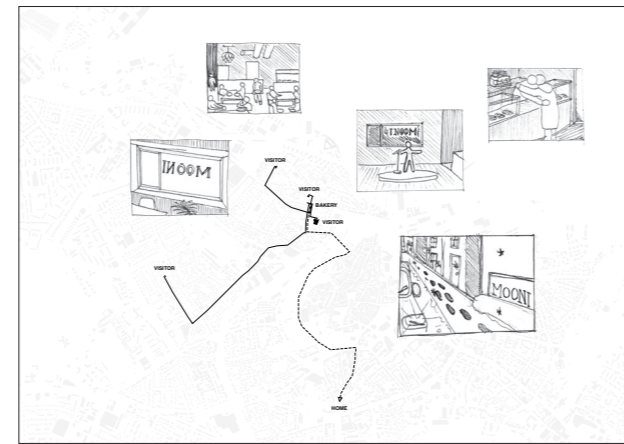
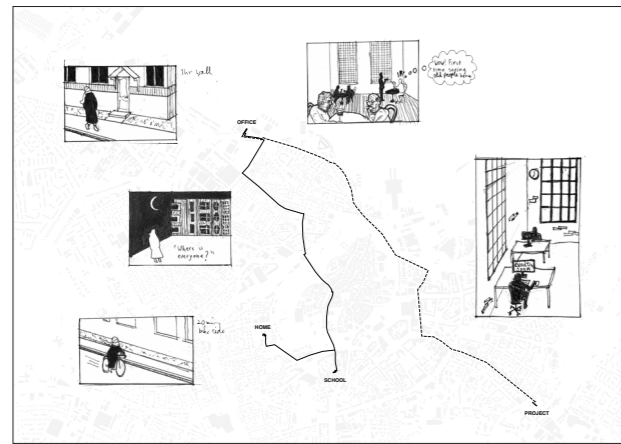
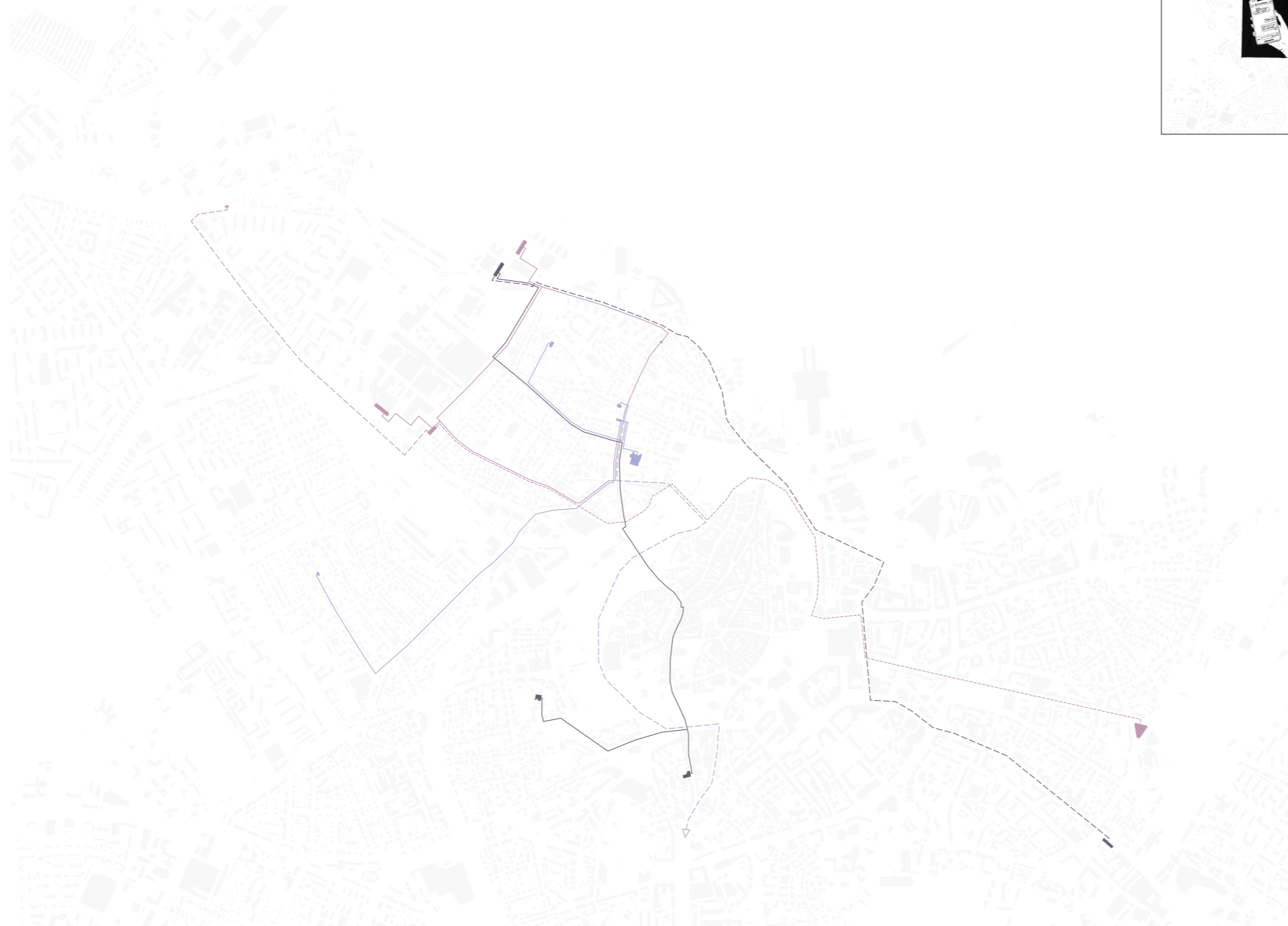


Fig. 2. Illustrative triptych and a combined map, 1:200, scaled to fit.



Kalamaja, located in central Tallinn, is a neighborhood that has undergone a drastic transformation in the past decade. Its roots go back to the 14th century when it was a fisherman's village, leading to an industrial expansion in the 20th century and a gentrification-driven redevelopment in recent years.¹³ Consequently, the area is particularly diverse in its architecture and residents, as locals occupying the older homes for most of their lives are now co-existing hand in hand with the younger demographic moving into the new developments.¹⁴ Under these circumstances Kalamaja was chosen for an analytical review on points of social cohesion and integration.

Three interviews with similar questions were conducted anonymously on three different interviewee scales: a resident, being a young mother working in tech and living in one of the new developments, a cafe owner, living outside of Tallinn and driving to work every day, and an architect at a local design firm, which has worked on multiple projects in the area.

The answers remained similar in all three cases - the sense of community is relatively weak, which seems so be common for Tallinn in general, however it is strengthened by the architectural diversity in several areas, which is apparent when comparing them to the newly developed Noblessner and Kalaranna districts. Architectural diversity forms a plethora of different styles, housing types and target audiences, resulting in cultural vibrancy.

The interview results were reproduced into an illustrative triptych and combined into a map.

¹³Ingmar Pastak, "Commercial Gentrification in Post-Industrial Neighbourhoods: A Tallinner Case Study," *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 111, no. 5 (2020): 847-863.

¹⁴Ingmar Pastak and Anneli Kährlik, "Symbolic Displacement Revisited: Place-Making Narratives in Gentrifying Neighbourhoods of Tallinn," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 45, no. 5 (2021): 814-834.

Galeriikohvik Viru & the public realm

2.1 - 2.5

Estonia's architectural heritage is remarkably diverse and reflective of different eras, the most transformative of which was arguably the 1980's and 1990's. The restoration of independence brought about a fundamental transformation of the economy - a shift in ownership structuring, which affected all areas of day-to-day life, including architectural practice. A transition into private architectural trade meant that public architecture could become a self-definition of the local culture and no longer a representation of the regime.¹⁵

Although the economic reality of the 1990's had significant constraints, the public architecture realm was still able to manifest itself in projects resembling niche architectural styles, notably futurism and deconstructivism, as well as experiment with previously scarce materials, such as glass and metal.¹⁶ However, many projects remain examples of paper architecture, as they did not have the means of realisation.

Galeriikohvik Viru is a perfect embodiment of this cultural era, as it is especially symbolic of the excitement and celebration at the time, as well as huge and sometimes rushed ambitions of early independence.

¹⁵Reidla, Nii kole majal
¹⁶Ado Eigi, Enn Rajasaar, and Kalle Vellevoog, comps., Vaba Eesti ehitab: 10 aastat ehitamist Eestis 1991-2001 (Tallinn: Solnessi Arhitektuurikirjastus, 2001).

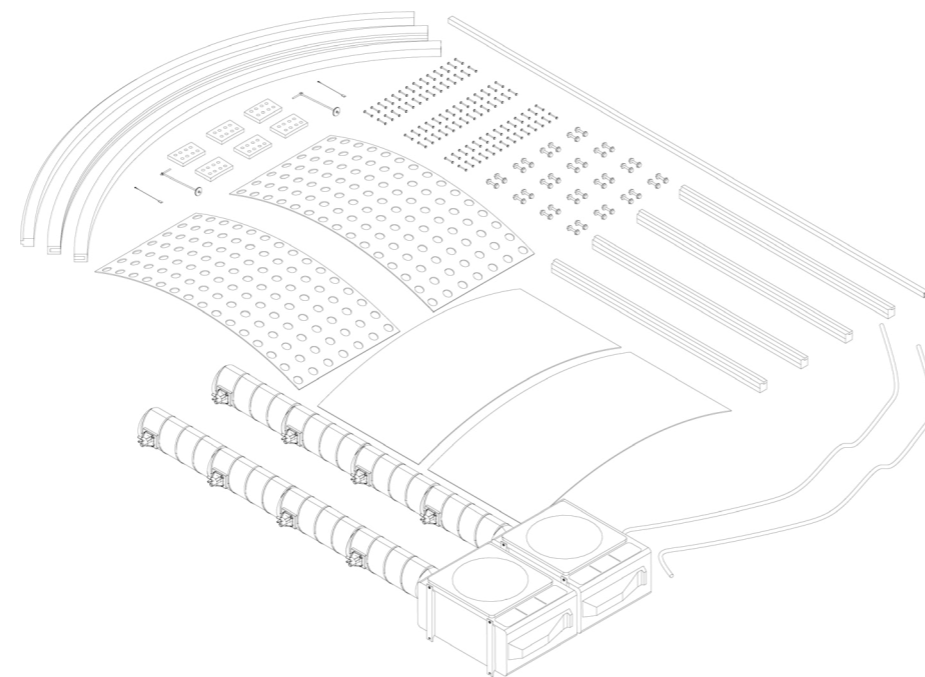
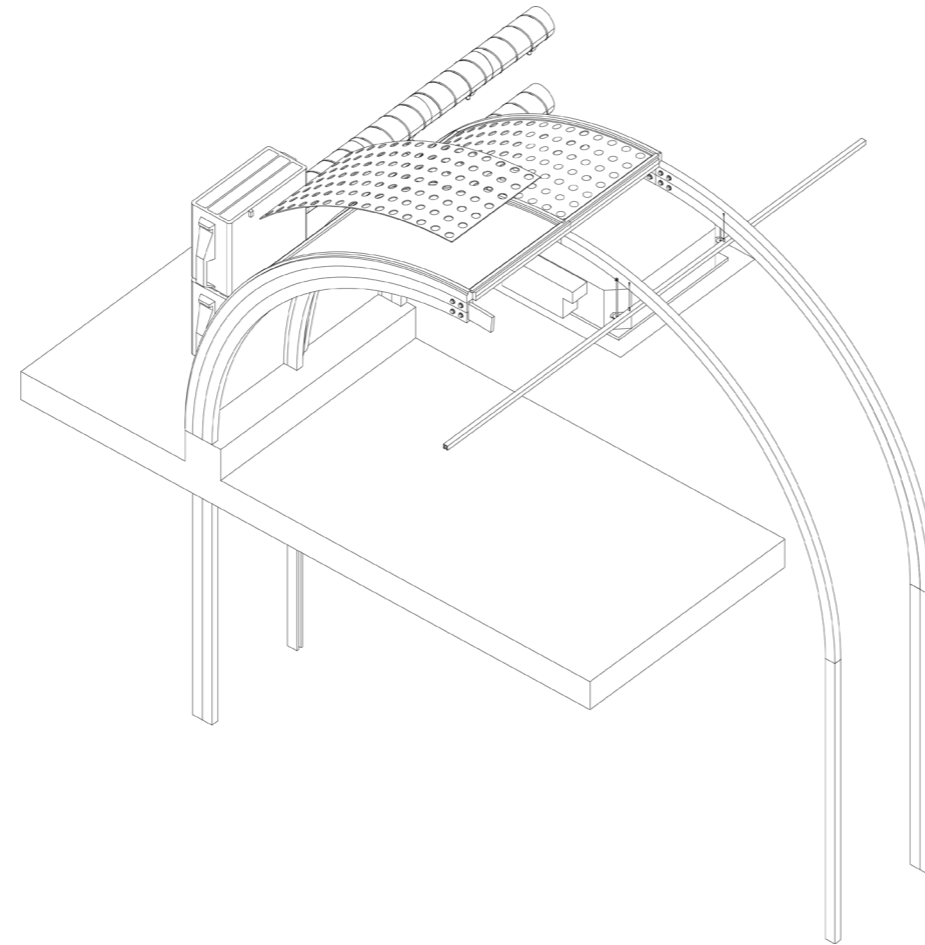


Fig. 3. Structure assembly



Fig. 4. Galerikohvik Viru. Source: Estonian Museum of Architecture, 1995.

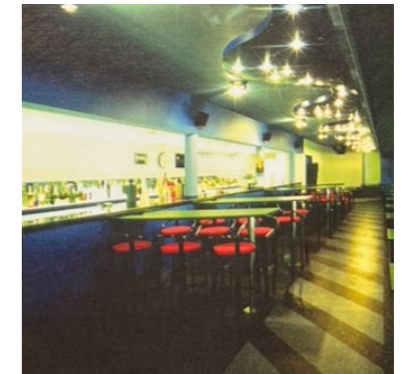


Fig. 5. Galerikohvik Viru. Source: Arhitekt Peep Janes, 2012.

In 1992 the project for a grand cafe was prepared by Peep Janes, the construction was finished 3 years later. A lot of pressure was being put on the design, since it was framed as the pinnacle of that days architecture, as well as representative of future Estonia. The design is described as combining technology and art via imitating the principle of a theater - as the guests are dining they monitor the people passing by and vice versa.¹⁷

Galerikohvik Viru has spent the past three decades without major structural changes. However, as conceptually the cafe failed, various mechanical alterations were made to the interior to accommodate its changed function as a fast food restaurant. These changes were documented in axonometric diagrams.

¹⁷Karin Hallas-Murula, ed., Arhitekt Peep Jänes (Tallinn: Museum of Estonian Architecture, 2011).

Ilmandu & the private realm

2.1 - 2.5



Fig. 6. Kadaka tee 36.



Fig. 7. Kadaka tee 36.

Whereas public post-independence architecture was expressive of national cultural identity, individual self-expression was exhibited in private residential development. The shift from state-controlled design to private practice for many meant that for the first time in their lives their home could be reflective of their identity.¹⁸

¹⁸Mari Laanemets, "Kodud Eestile," in *In Vicinity*, ed. Paul Kuimet (Tallinn: Lugemik, 2011).

As in all Baltic countries, prior to independence private home building was heavily controlled, since land ownership as it is understood today did not exist. For residential construction a right to use a plot could be granted, often via personal connections or bribery, however, whatever is constructed on that plot was nevertheless heavily regulated. Circumstantially, individuality in private architecture was not being considered.¹⁹

Ultimately, Declaration of Independence was followed by the Land Reform Act, which was a turning point in liberated architecture. The return of land to its former owners, coupled with the low cost of construction materials, signaled the beginning of a new stylistic era, where trends of previous decades started intertwining with new phenomena. Creative expression was left restricted by owner's ambitions and their financial means.

Architects and designers were beginning to engage with international examples, as during occupation times the material they were able to study was exceptionally limited. Moreover, society was getting introduced to Western media – local networks started broadcasting TV shows such as 'Santa Barbara' and 'Dallas', which helped shape the local perception of the ideal life and gave stylistic references which soon found their way into newly constructed homes.²⁰

¹⁹Mari Laanemets, "Kodud Eestile," in *In Vicinity*, ed. Paul Kuimet (Tallinn: Lugemik, 2011).

²⁰Reidla, Nii kole maja!

²¹Eigi, Rajasaar, and Vellevoog, *Vaba Eesti ehitab*, 10.



Fig. 8. Kadaka tee 25.

Historically volatile circumstances have resulted in people often losing their material possessions, which prompted the concept of a home being symbolic of permanency and inseparability. It became a status symbol, inducing a show-off competition of who had more.²¹

Stylistic expression of the post-Soviet era came to be defined by unregulated private residences ranging from 500 to 700 square meter in size – unique symbols of liberated architecture and creative confusion. Individuals who quickly acquired money, yet had limited exposure to international architectural precedents, often aspired to own houses reminiscent of castles, churches, and other monumental buildings familiar from their local surroundings. The products defining this era were oversized houses, combining many different architectural styles and forming a kitschy post-modernistic expression.²²

²¹Anu Kannike, "Domesticating Social Change: Estonian Home in Transition," *Ethnologia Fennica* 39 (2012): 62–80.

²²Matas Sukys, *Architecture of Independence: The Conversation Around Ugliness in Early 90's Lithuanian Home Design* (master's thesis, Delft University of Technology, 2025).



Fig. 9. Kadaka tee 25.

Clusters of such houses started forming villages alongside major cities, as is the case of Ilmandu. Soon after the first few mansions appeared, the area infamously started to become a laughingstock amongst locals, eventually picking up the ironic term 'Lollidemma', direct translation of which is 'Fool's land'. Over the years, as the village was forming, Ilmandu has locally become the face of self-expression and simultaneously, stupidity in architecture.²³

²³Ellen Jõgi, "Eksklusivsed fotod. Soomlasest äärmees näitab oma 'Lollidemma' lossi," *Äripäev*, July 27, 2025.



Fig. 10. Kadaka tee 37.

Ilmandu & the online realm

2.1 - 2.5



Fig. 11. Facebook post of an article about a villa for sale (translated). Source: Facebook

Consequently, over the last decade the discourse regarding Ilmandu and early post-independence private architecture moved to social media platforms, where the majority of users refer to it in a degrading manner. Despite being symbolic of an era, its monuments are widely perceived as trashy and low-class.²⁴

On the other hand, some users express fascination and a sense of curiosity, ironically comparing the structures to grand public buildings, as well as debating whether they could be worth paying a small fee to visit as a museum. Discourse as such raises a question, can the architectural stigma regarding expressive residential design be reversed? Moreover, can individuality in design be used as an advantage in new developments?

²⁴Jõgi, "Soomlasest ärimees näitab oma 'Lõlidemaa' lossi."



Fig. 12. Discussion under the article about a villa for sale (translated). Source: Facebook

Paljassaare & identity at risk

2.1 - 2.5



Fig. 13. Paagi tn. 10, social welfare center.



Fig. 14. Laevastiku tn. 1, house of prayer



Fig. 15. Paljassaare tee 18, cargo warehouse

Paljassaare is a neighborhood located on a peninsula in Pohja-Tallinn shaped by its post-industrial legacy. As the resident population is very low, the area remained marginal within the metropolitan structure, characterized less by its residential demographics and more by infrastructural uses. However, as community initiatives begin to reframe its identity, Paljassaare is getting integrated within the framework of Tallinn.

Community-informed development has been the driving force behind the recent changes in the area via initiating various collaborations between residents, artists and local institutions.²⁵ Nevertheless, despite the efforts for the neighborhood to form its unique character via promoting creativity, published future plans consist of very anonymous, non-location specific designs.

²⁵Christian Pagh and Mattias Malk, eds., *Hundiiepa Neighbourhood Playbook* (Tallinn: The Hundiiepa Team,

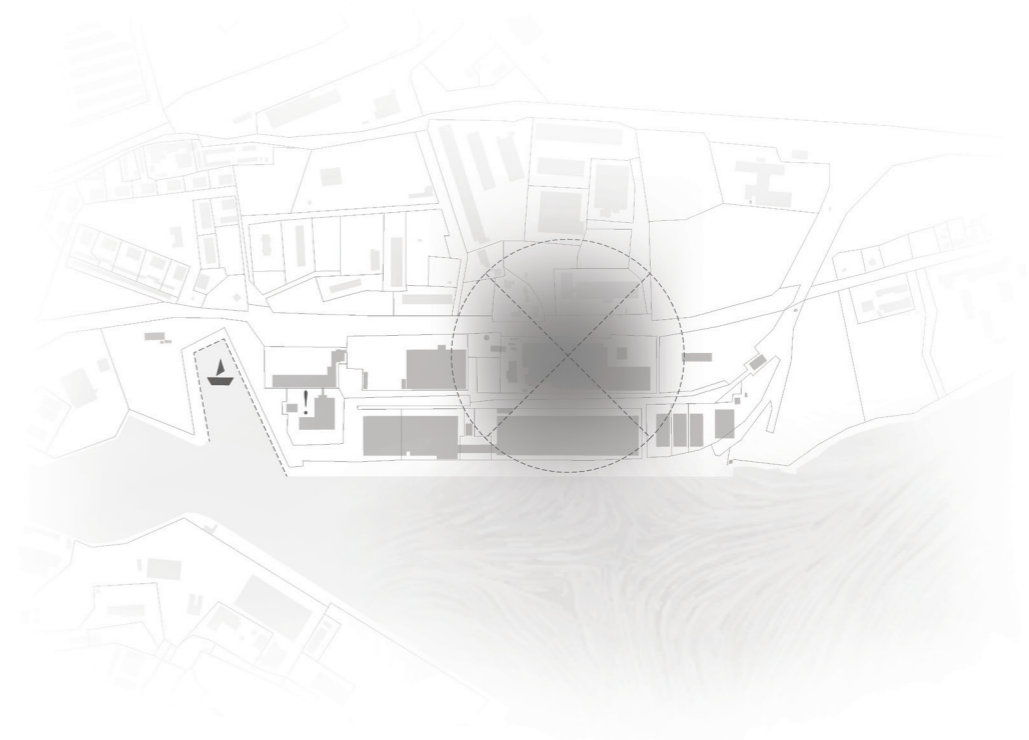


Fig. 16. Site analysis



Fig. 17. Playground next to Paljassaare tee 18



Fig. 18. Urban farming next to Paljassaare tee 18

Pin-up (A0 review)

2.1 - 2.5



III.

Results

Strategy & inspiration

2.5 - 2.10

Locally, in Estonia, individuality in residential architecture has peaked in the early 1990's, as discussed in previous chapters. Neighborhoods structured in a similar manner to Ilmandu were able to facilitate self-expression via providing a medium for construction that was a completely blank slate.²⁸ Materialized structures were sincere and personal representations of their owners' personalities – expressive, yet isolating, as outside the plots there was no infrastructure facilitating interaction. What could have been a shared interest among the neighbors circumstantially became a parallel of expressions where individuality thrived within given boundaries but did not translate outside.

A different outcome of a similar scenario can be seen in Nomme, another neighborhood in Tallinn. Although it is not perfect, as the infrastructure is also lacking, the eclecticism of architecture seems to bring the neighbors together as they exchange interactions while working on their properties. This setting is allowed by a different approach of privacy in urban planning – houses are closer together and the streets are narrower, overall a much denser pattern.

²⁸Reidla, Nii kole maja!

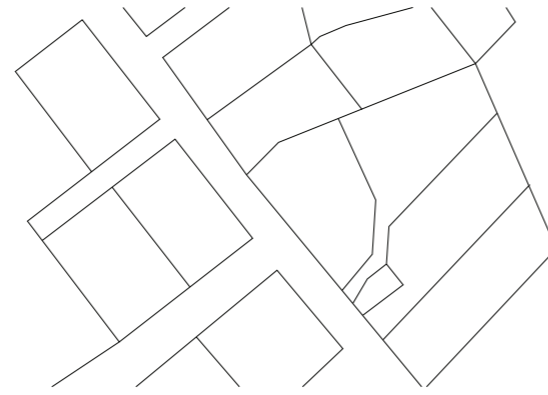


Fig. 19. Urban pattern / plot sizes in Ilmandu, 1:500

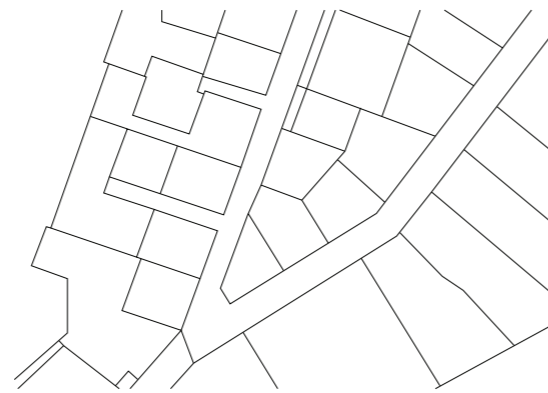


Fig. 20. Urban pattern / plot sizes in Nomme, 1:500

Consequently, the role of privacy is vital to individuality and needs careful consideration. As in early post-independence residential design, privacy can be a medium encouraging self-expression and a safety measure, providing a feeling of total freedom within a property. In practice this translated via three-meter-tall concrete fences (see fig. 21) and fortress-like facades (see fig. 22), giving a building the appearance of a protective structure rather than a house. Nevertheless, it can be a tool in community building, when combined with a supporting infrastructure.

Consequently, Fool's Land aims to integrate parts of various mentioned frameworks within the apartments, allowing for privacy inside and out while encouraging interaction among the residents and framing individuality as a shared interest.



Fig. 21. Kadaka tee 31



Fig. 22. Kadaka tee 23

To make sense of the stylistic clashes in 90's residential architecture this project aims to reframe it through elements of a hauntological lens. Hauntology is a term first introduced by the philosopher Jacques Derrida in 1993, describing the persistence of past elements being present today, particularly the traces of unrealized futures that continue to 'haunt' the contemporary culture.²⁹ Instead of seeing time as linear and progressive, hauntology suggests that the present is occupied with remnants of what was once imagined or could have been, while buildings can be interpreted as physical repositories of memory and ideology. Beyond being physical objects, they carry residues of political systems and social aspirations.³⁰ Through such framework, stylistic clashes become evident of temporal layering, a visual manifestation of unresolved transitions, interrupted futures and contextual clashes within the built environment.

²⁹Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), xviii-xix

³⁰Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014), 16-30.

Emerging directly after decades of standardization, the designs reveal a sudden exposure to capitalist imagery, personal freedom and Western fantasies, a mixture reflecting the dialogue between stunted past and the alternate realities revealed by the independence and celebrating a milestone in Estonian history.

Understanding and destigmatizing eclectic residential design can solve a previously discussed issue: community disengagement and investment-driven housing development, where homes are designed for maximum market neutrality rather than long-term inhabitation. Contemporary housing frequently prioritizes resale value and efficiency, whereas developments based on non-conformity often foster stronger personal attachment. An example of that could be the Barbican Estate in London, which despite being controversial became valued for its strong communal identity.³¹ Therefore, individuality in residential architecture can also encourage permanence.

³¹Harriet Atkinson, *The Barbican Estate* (London: Historic England, 2016), 6-12.

Site & structural changes

2.5 - 2.10

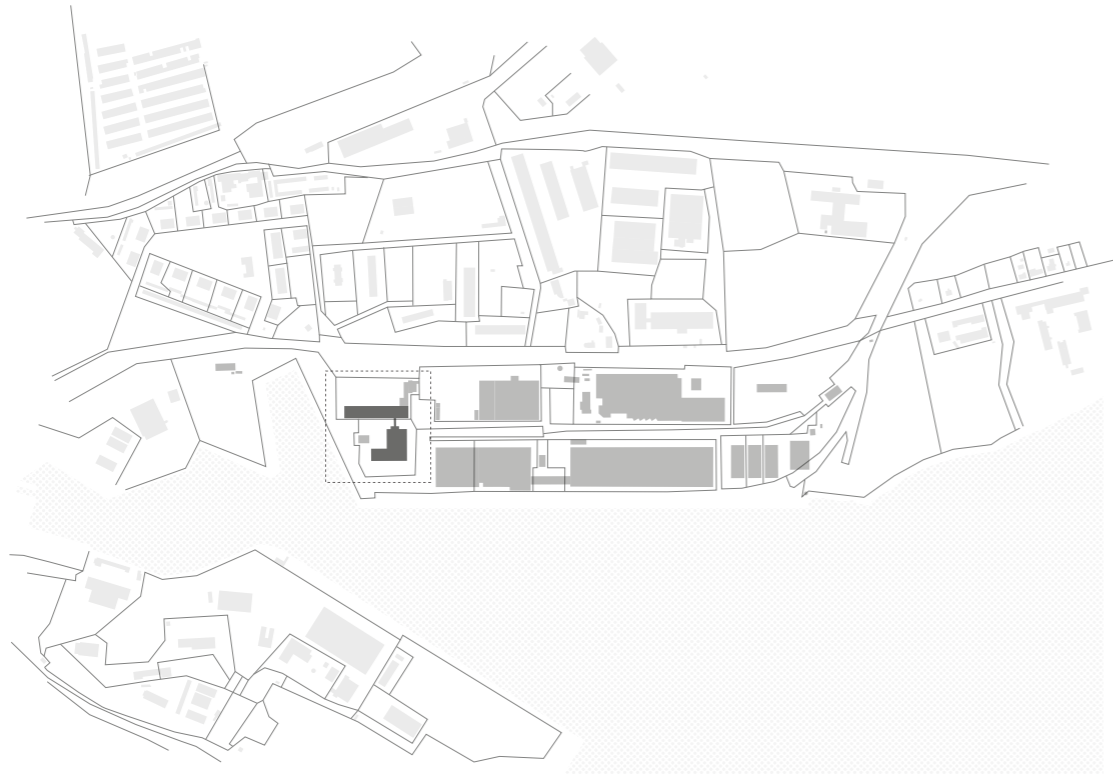


Fig. 23. Project location



Fig. 24. Paljassaare tee 20 and 26a



Fig. 25. Paljassaare tee 20 and 26a

Despite being a very low-density residential area, the Paljassaare coastline is filled with various industrial structures and warehouses, some of which stand empty, while others remain partially in use. The plots located south of the neighborhood (see fig. 23) are arguably the most representative for the area, as they give the first impression when entering Paljassaare through its only leading road.²⁶

²⁶Pagh and Malk, eds., *Hundipea Neighbourhood Playbook*.

In the past structures under addresses Paljassaare Tee 20 & 26a used to be part of a harbor production complex involved in various port logistics. A similar function is still partly present, while another part is now repurposed as a cultural venue.²⁷ Nevertheless, the buildings are standing in poor shape, with the facades being damaged and intensely worn down. On the other hand, their structural underpinnings consist of reinforced concrete portal frames connected with concrete floor slabs, forming a very open structure independent to the façade, suitable for adaptive reuse.

As the façade is removed, the buildings are stripped of their historical context and negative post-Soviet connotations. The underlying structure is to be reinforced and occupied with residential & mixed-use facilities.

²⁷Pagh and Malk, eds., *Hundipea Neighbourhood Playbook*.

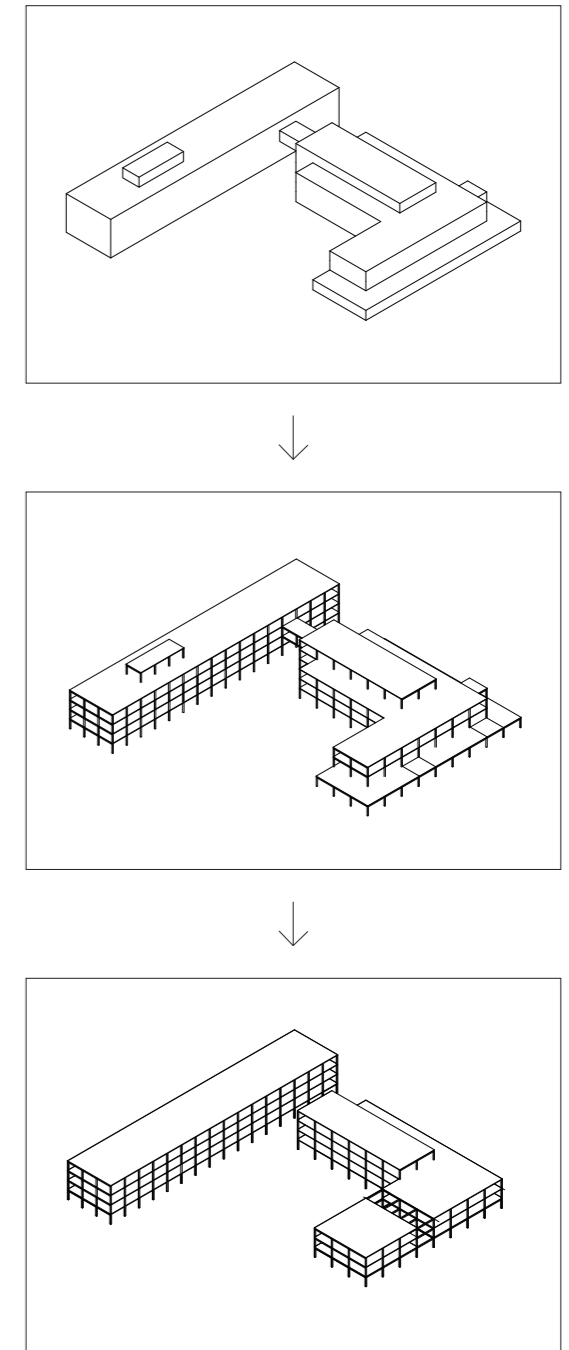


Fig. 26. Structural adjustments

Conceptual framework

4.1 - 4.7

To apply the notion of individuality to a large-scale residential project, Fool's land reinterprets it through a lens of privacy, a quintessential design element of early post-independence Estonian residential architecture. Small openings, high fences and monumental facades masked homes as protective structures, creating a feeling of total freedom within their boundaries and further encouraging personalization.

While adapting the portal frame & floor structure, this project aims to fill it with detached modular units. Visually the modules oppose the existing framework, but logistically they create a shared residential infrastructure facilitating communal bonding.

All in all, in principle the project consists of three structural entities: the old re-purposed concrete framework, futuristic modular insertions and a mediating steel structure, resting in-between the two and extending onto the façade. In a hauntological manner, the design combines traces of the past and the notions of unrealized futures, suspending it in-between. Visually it is defined by stylistic ambiguity and eclectic coordination.

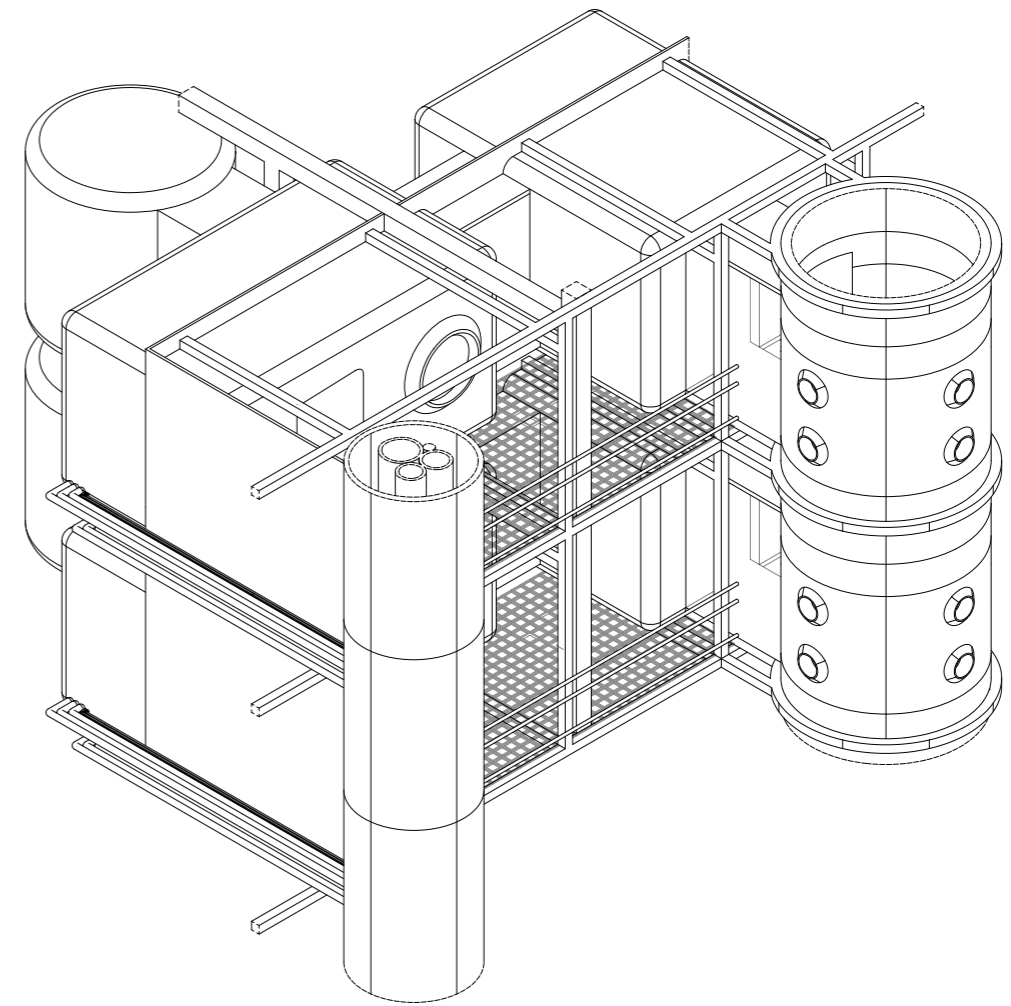


Fig. 27. Isometric section, 1:50

Module design

4.1 - 4.7

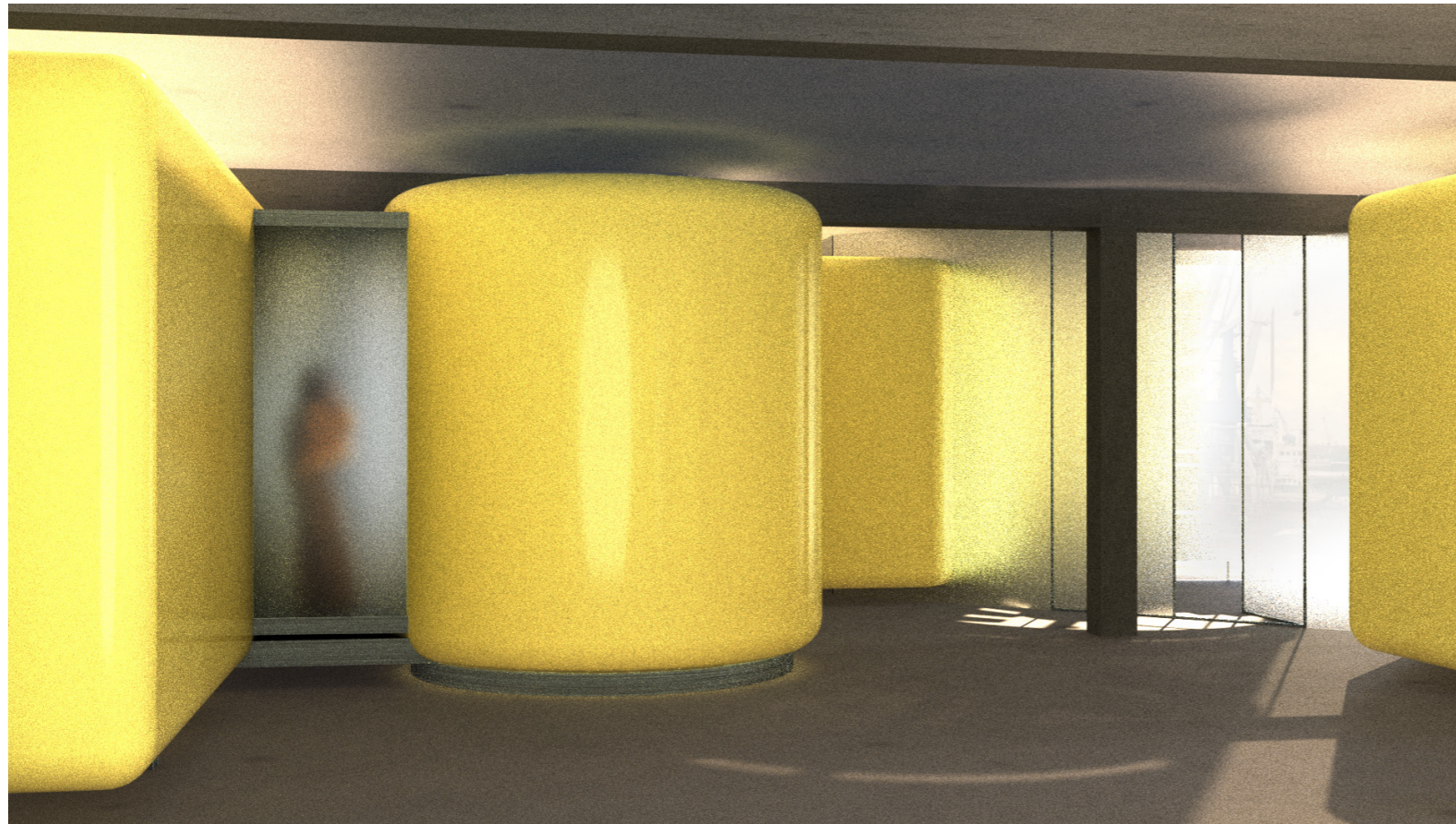


Fig. 28. Perspective from the circulation space

The module design aims to physically and visually remove the user away from the context and surround them in a remote, capsule-like environment, supporting freedom in customization and behavior. It is further encouraged by forming two types of spaces within the unit: private and transitional. All living functions are separated into individual modules: private spaces, being isolating environments with minimal openings. The modules are connected with translucent corridors: transitional spaces, entities allowing to claim space via movement.

The corridors stand out within the façade, as well as internal circulation by forming personalized fragments and highlighting the living functions that are used the most. Domestic scenography is strengthened by lighting systems accentuating every transitional space.

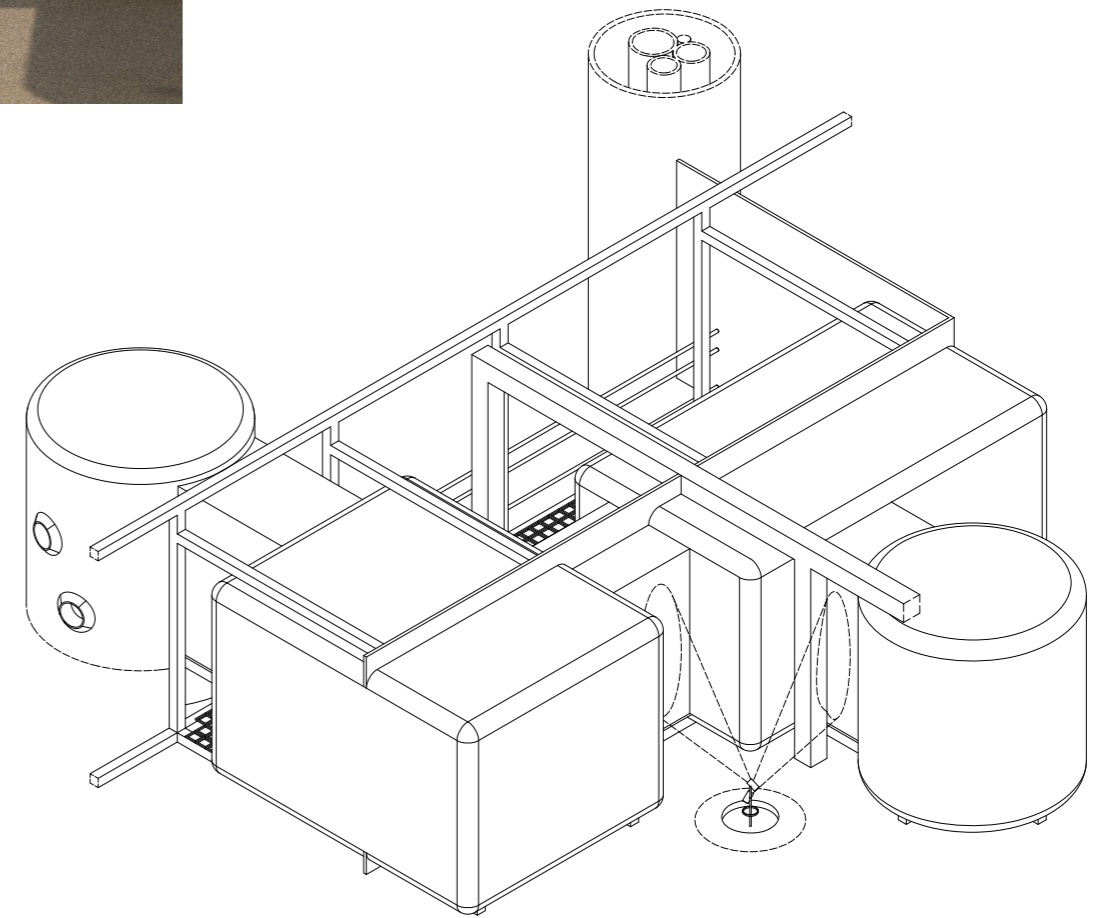


Fig. 29. Fragment + corridor lighting

Module design

4.1 - 4.7

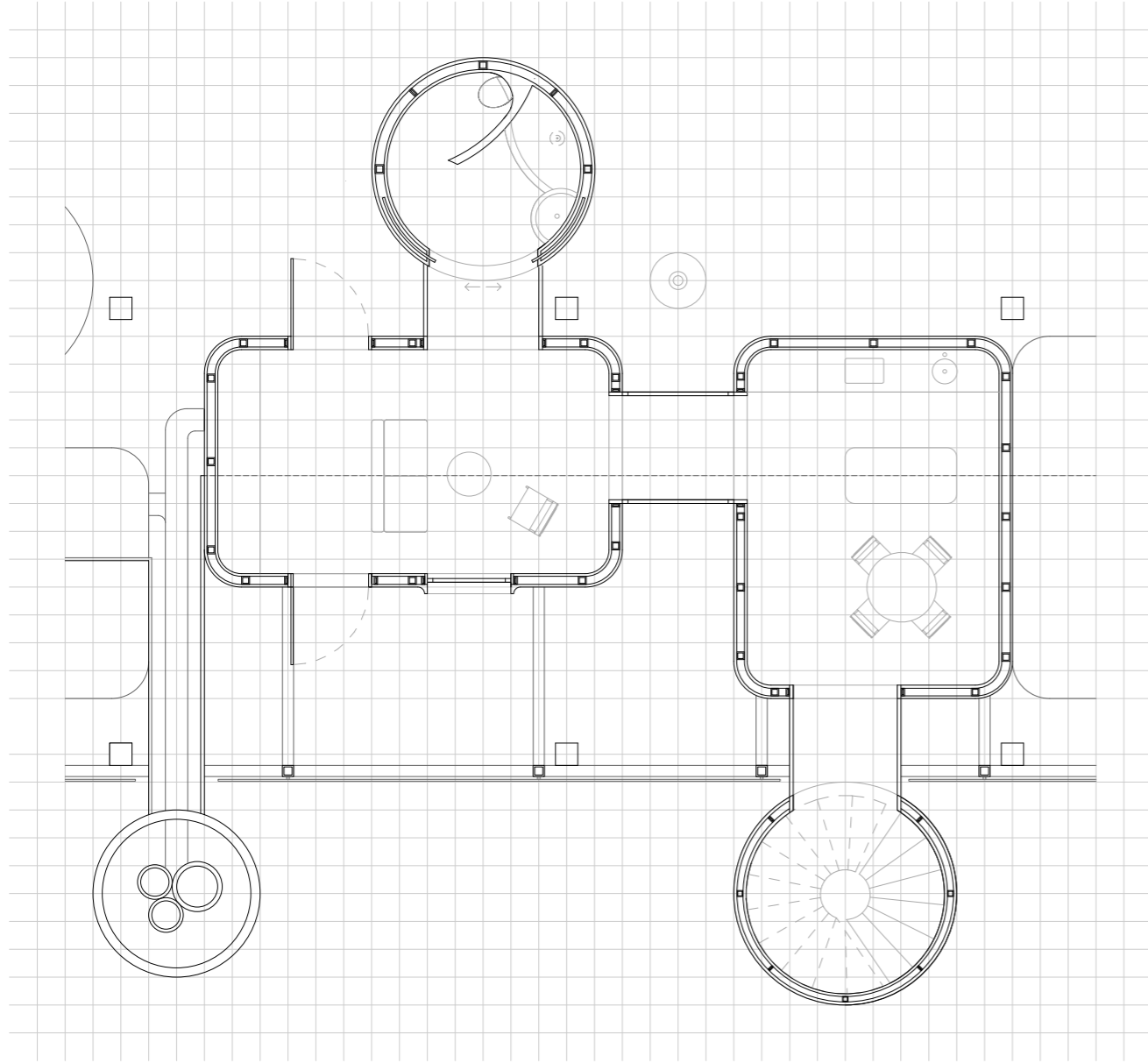


Fig. 30. Apartment floor plan, floor 1/2, 1:50

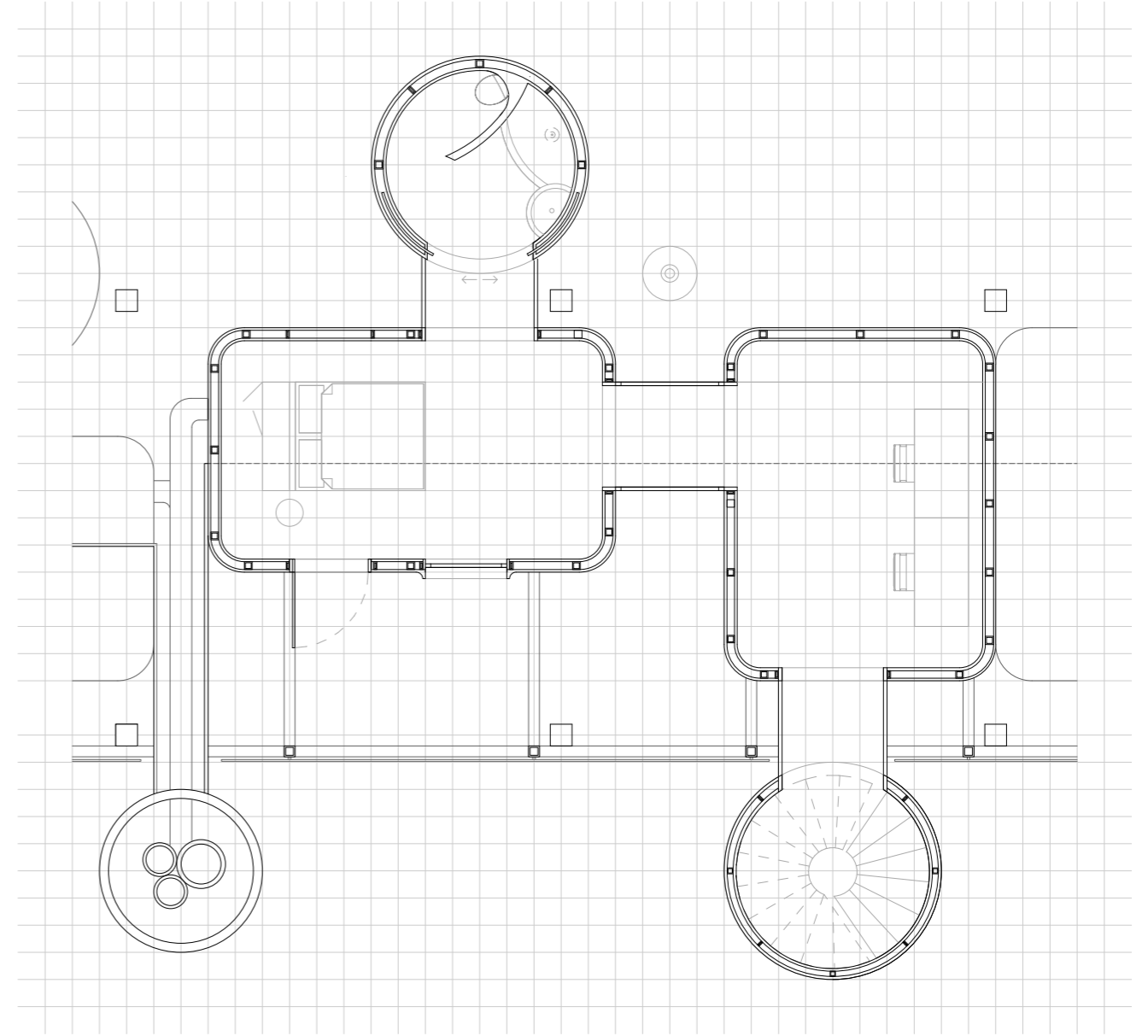
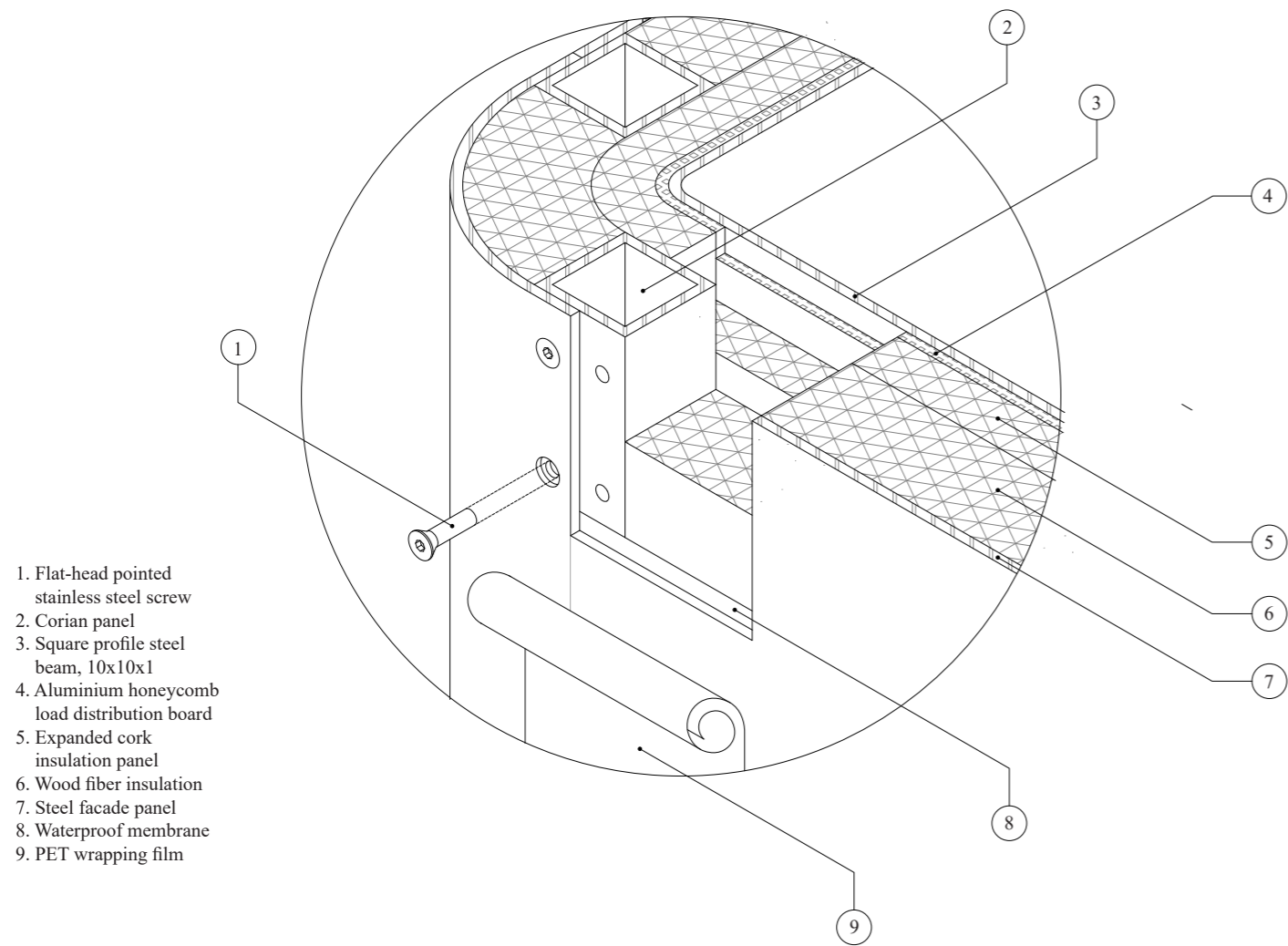


Fig. 31. Apartment floor plan, floor 2/2, 1:50

Material composition

4.1 - 4.7

Fig. 32. Wall composition, 1:5



Visually contrasting the aged concrete structure, the living module is clad in thin steel sheets wrapped in PET film. All screws and seams end up covered, resulting in a glossy, unified appearance.

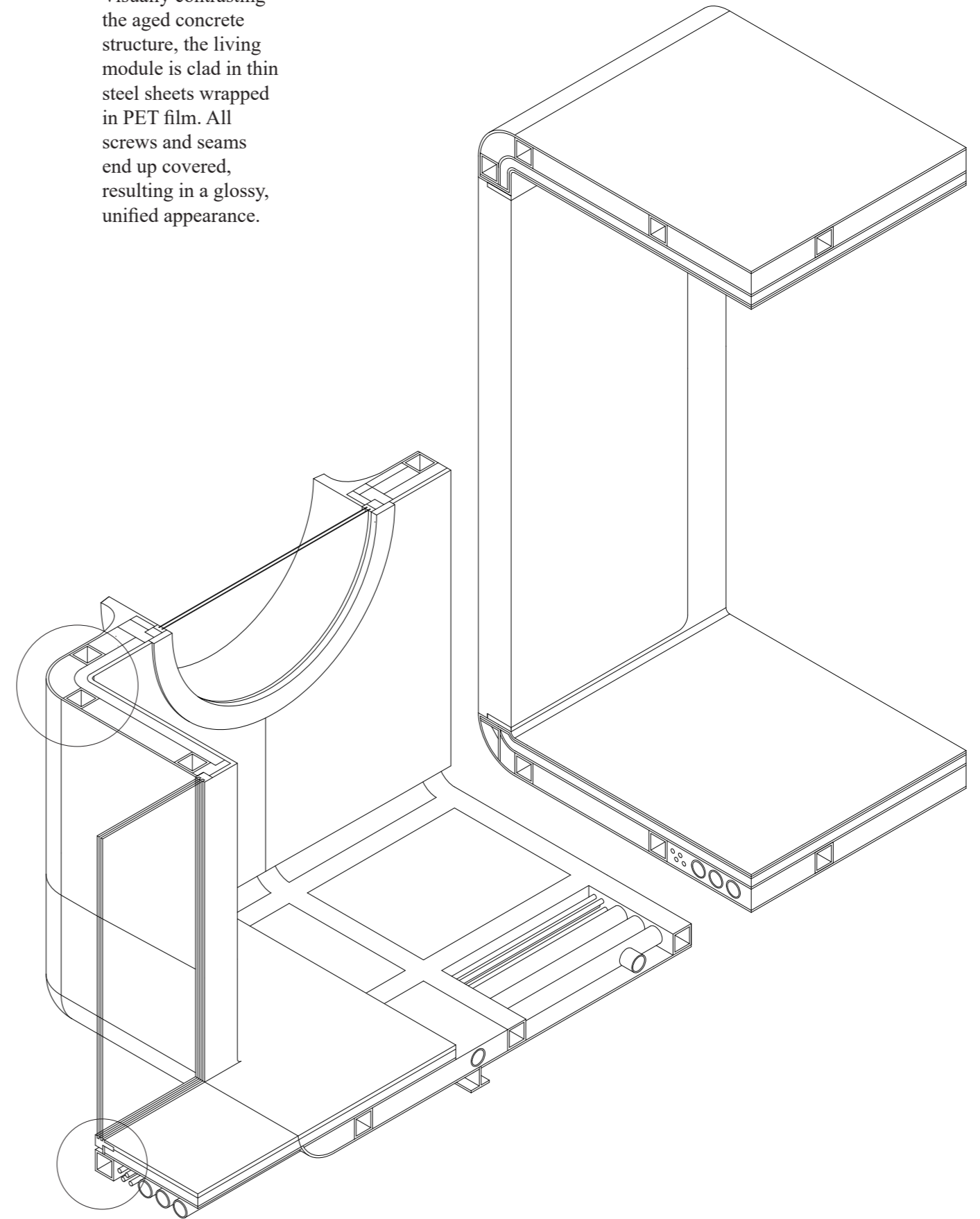


Fig. 34. Module fragment, 1:20

Fig. 33. Corridor floor composition, 1:5

Module assembly

4.1 - 4.7

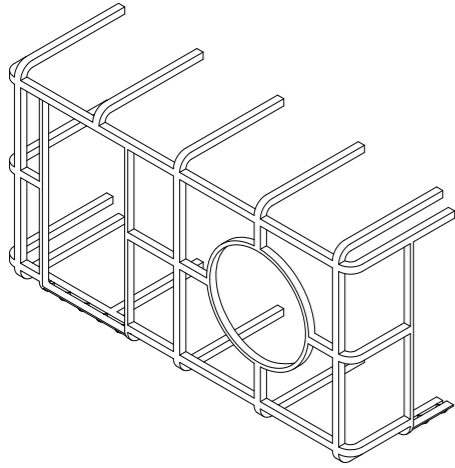


Fig. 35. Step 1. Steel frame assembly

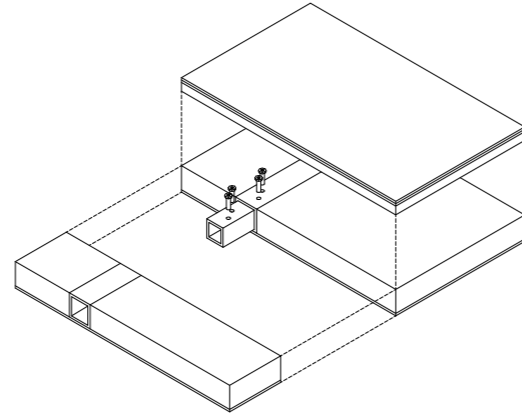


Fig. 38. Step 4. Connecting the two module halves

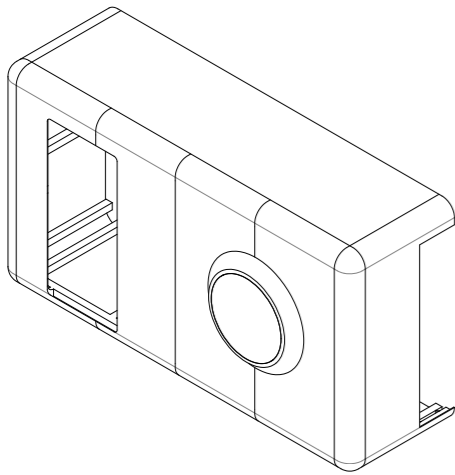


Fig. 36. Step 2. External cladding

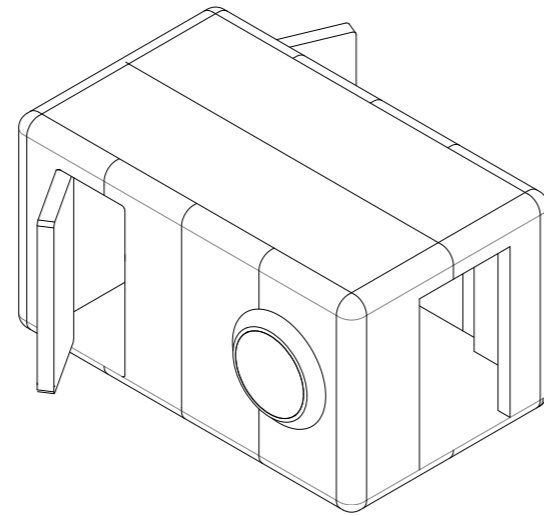


Fig. 39. Step 5. Mounting the floor

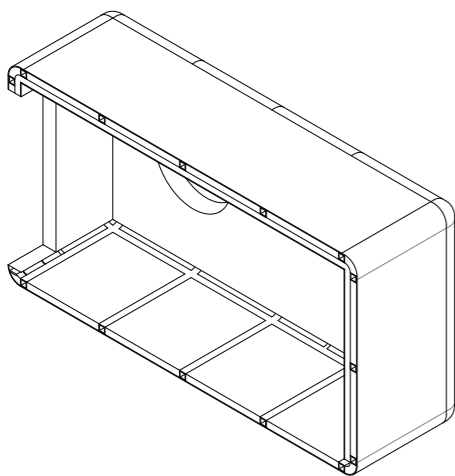


Fig. 37. Step 3. Internal cladding (the floor is left open)

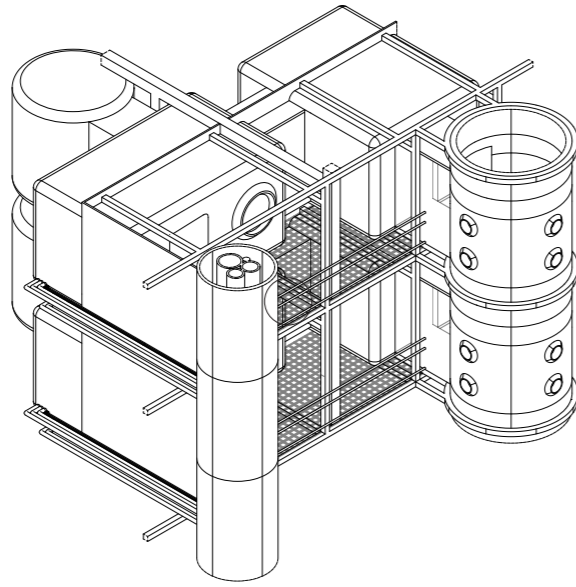
The modules are designed to be factory-assembled in two halves and transported on site. The assembly is done only via mechanical connections, and one module half is sized to fit in a standard dimension moving vehicle.



Fig. 40. Interior view

Structural composition

4.1 - 4.7



Floating appearance of the modules is allowed by the mediating steel structure, which consists of standard sized steel profiles in combination with custom plus-shaped connections.

The module installment procedure is assisted by a rail system integrated within the steel profiles, allowing to slide them in and out the structure.

On each floor of the building a gutter is integrated into the edge of the concrete floor, which directs the water into an underground water storage and filtering facility.

The system is topped off with a steel mesh floor, which levels out the surface while allowing rain water to pass through.

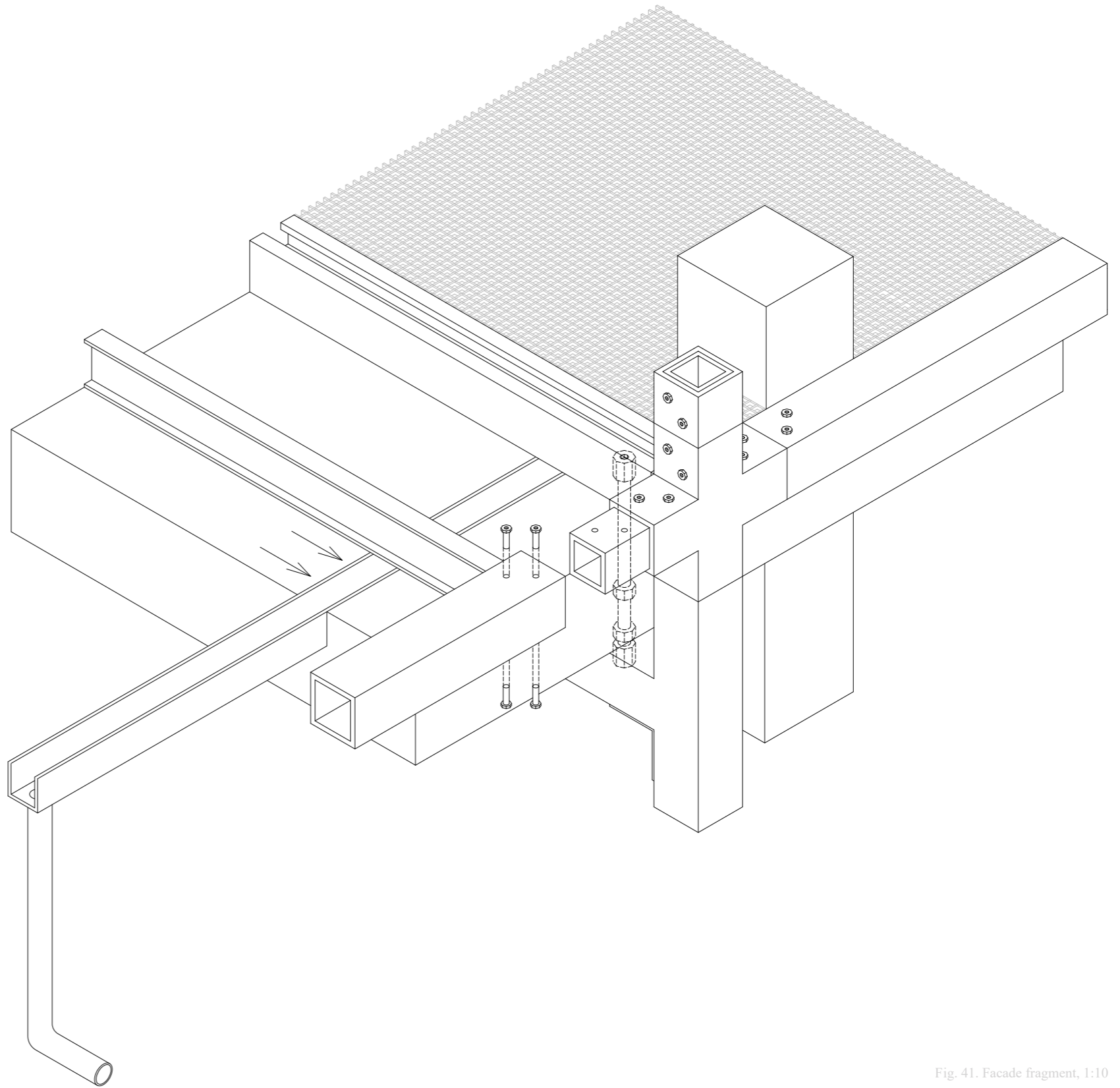


Fig. 41. Facade fragment, 1:10

Master plan

4.1 - 4.7

Moving onto a larger scale, the master plan is designed to accentuate the undefined, open nature of the site, where broad and large surfaces are continuously used for various temporary events, proving their necessity for the community life. Added landscaping aims to provide visual privacy to the residents living on the ground floor without any strict physical barriers.

To give purpose to the ground floor throughout all times of the day, it combines several functions - residential, retail, corporate and leisure. Volumes are divided into sides A (upper) & B (lower).

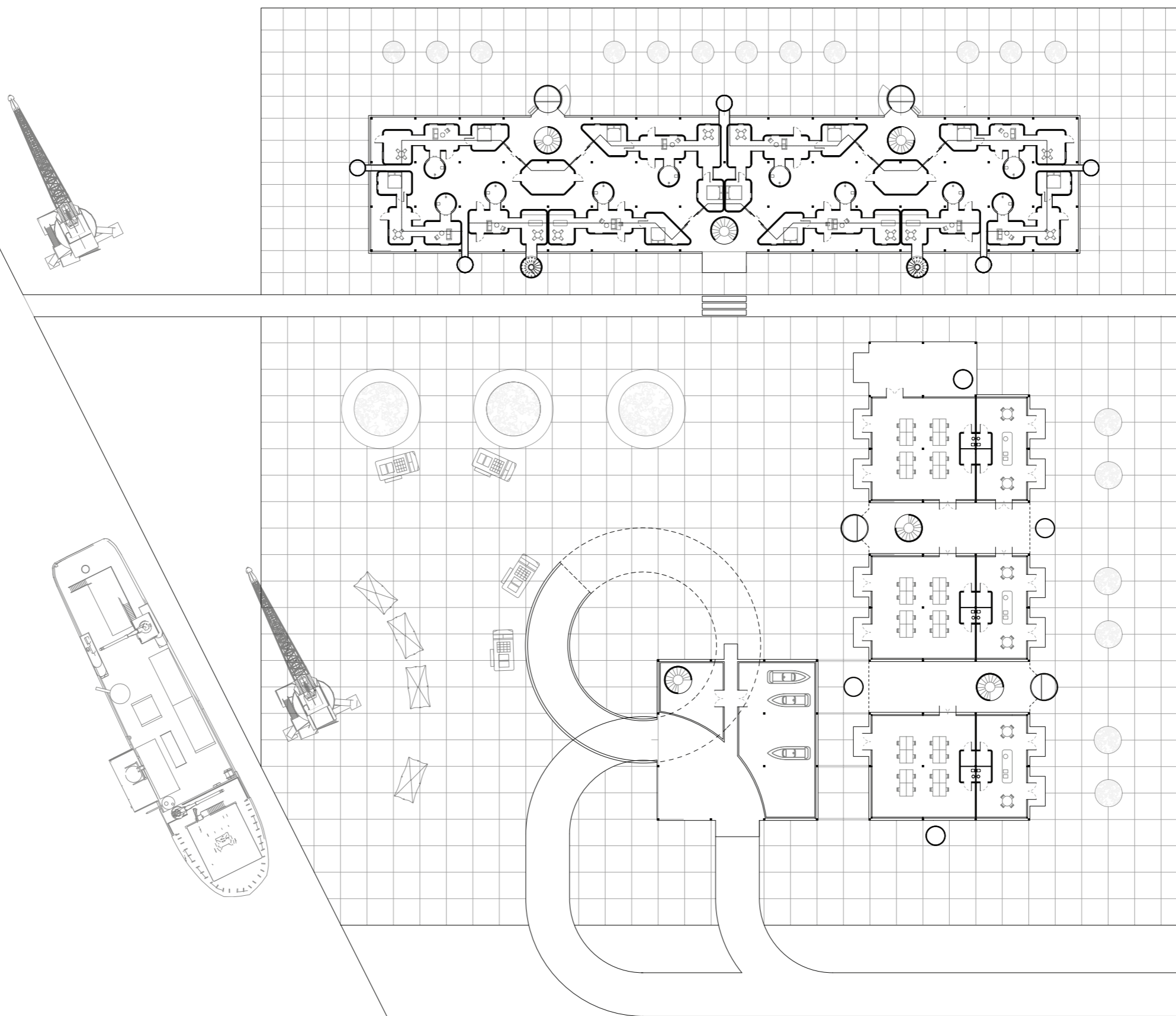


Fig. 42. Master plan, 1:1000

Layout

4.1 - 4.7

Within each residential floor the circulation is rotated to 45 degrees, shortening the sightlines in exchange for an intimate atmosphere. Each floor of side A includes a shared utility room and a climate-controlled circulation area, which is allowed by a thin divider running along the modules (see fig. 27).

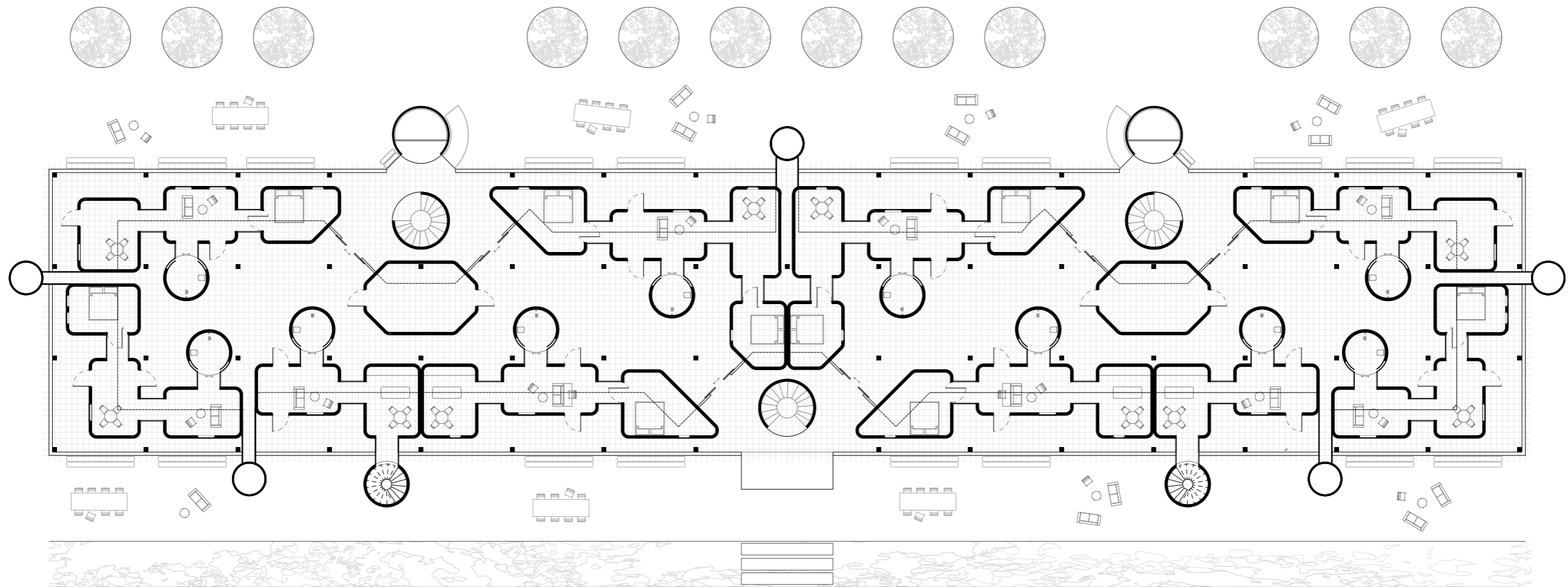


Fig. 43. Building A, ground floor plan, 1:200

Layout

4.1 - 4.7

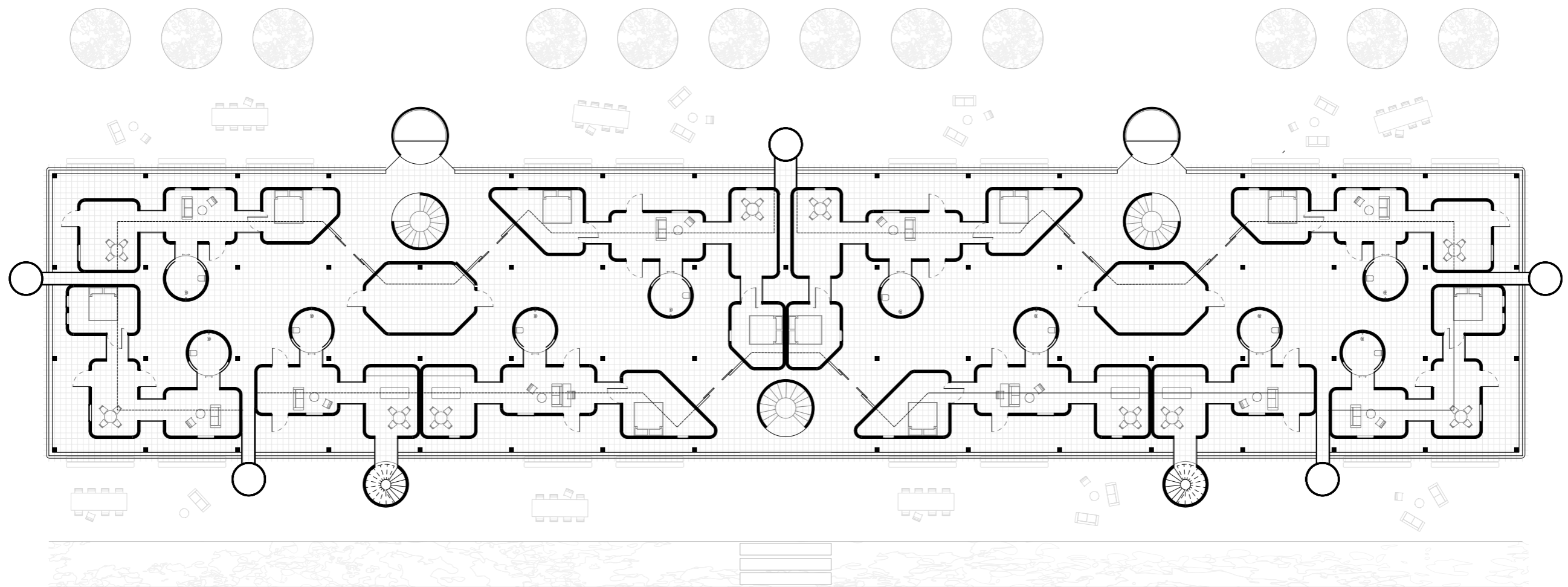


Fig. 44. Building A, first, second and third floor plan, 1:200

Layout

4.1 - 4.7

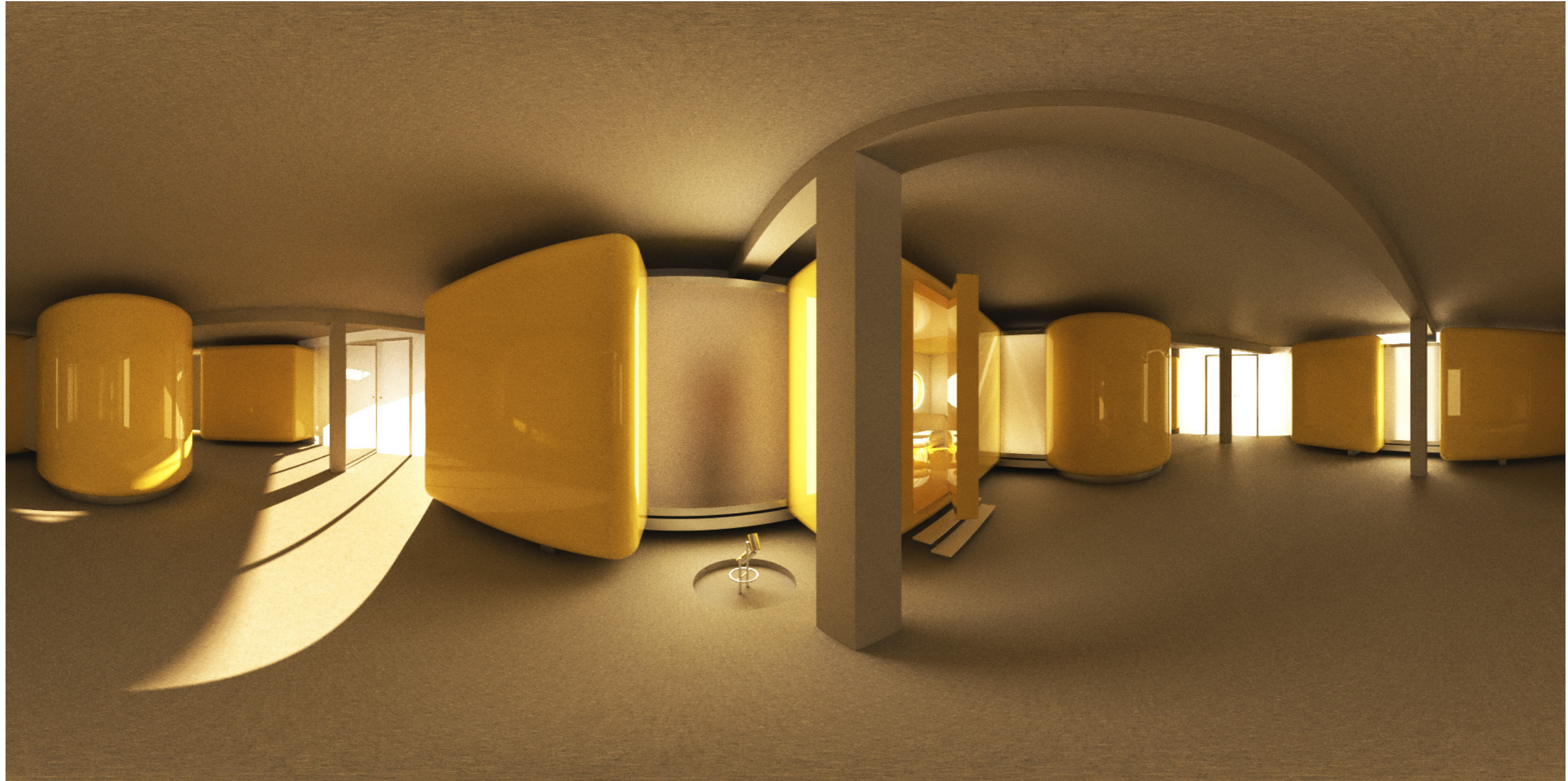


Fig. 45. External circulation, 360 degree view.

Layout

4.1 - 4.7

The ground floor of side B is aimed at public and semi-public use. Spaces facing the street (right) facilitate cafe and retail function, while the ones facing the courtyard (left) are reserved for offices.

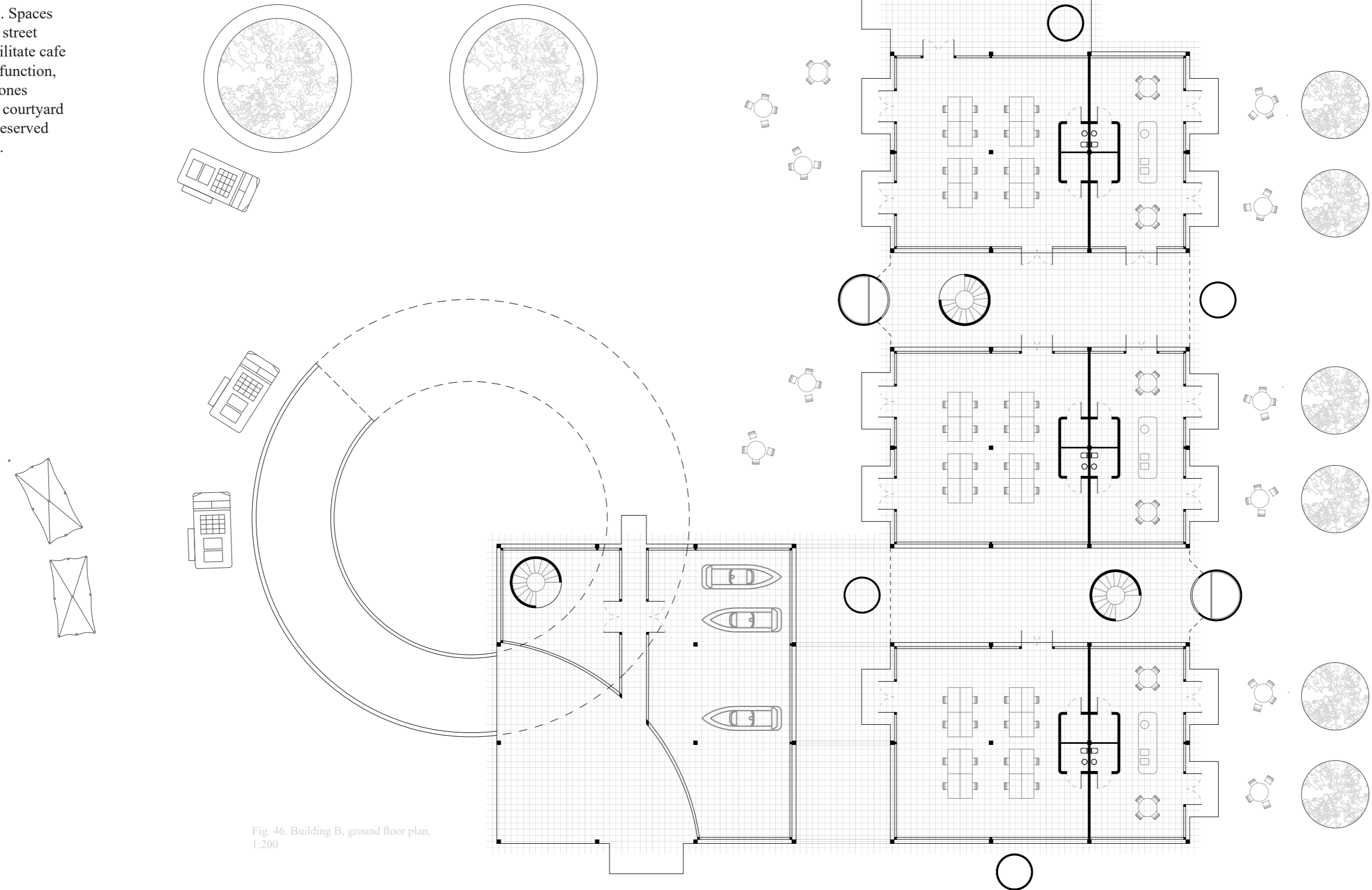


Fig. 46. Building B, ground floor plan, 1:200

Layout

4.1 - 4.7

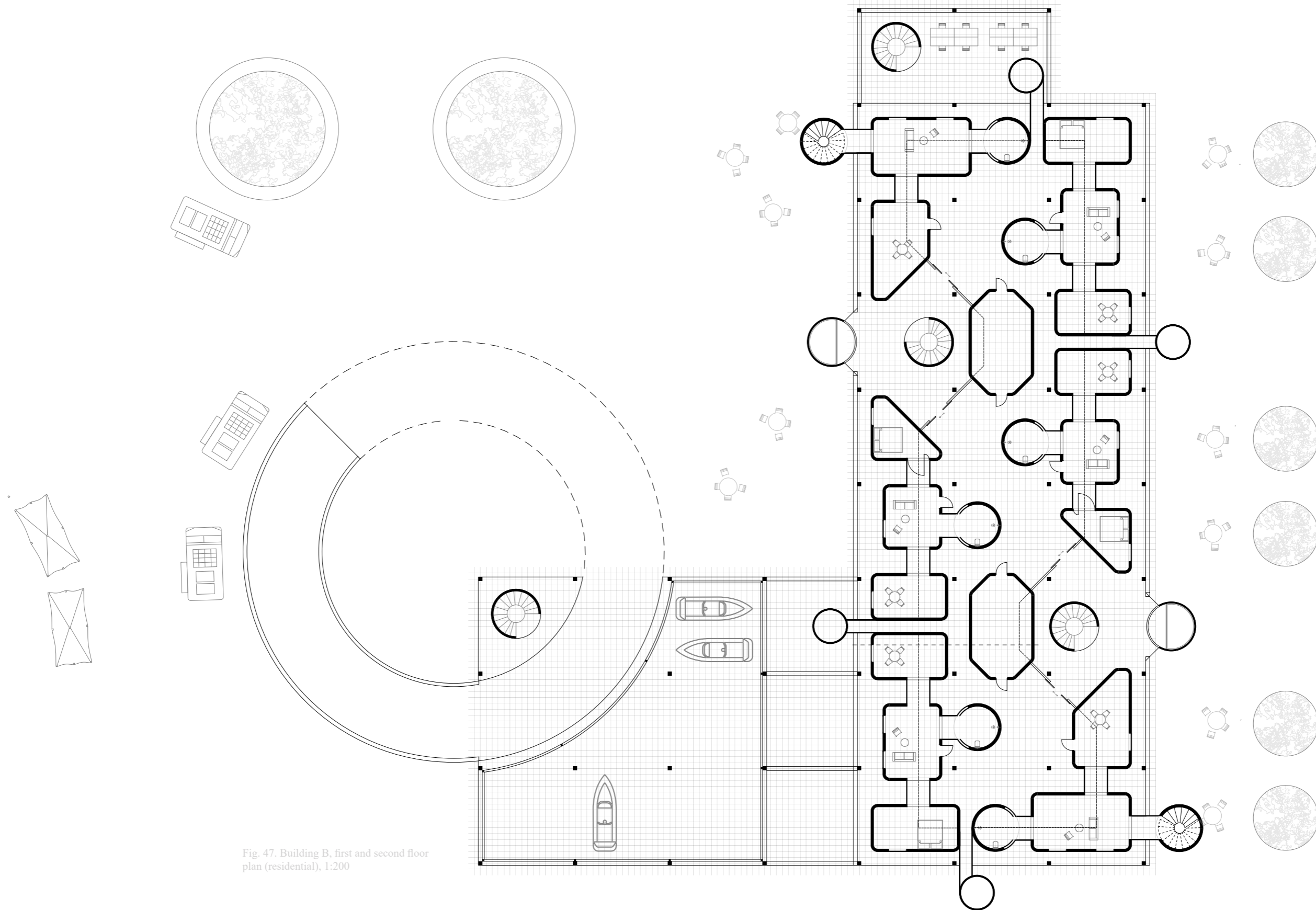


Fig. 47. Building B, first and second floor plan (residential), 1:200

Layout

4.1 - 4.7

The roof of side B is designed to provide outside spaces to both the residents and visitors of Paljassaare, with urban farming facilities and lookout points. Moreover, it provides an entry point to the shared co-working space aimed at the tenants who work from home.

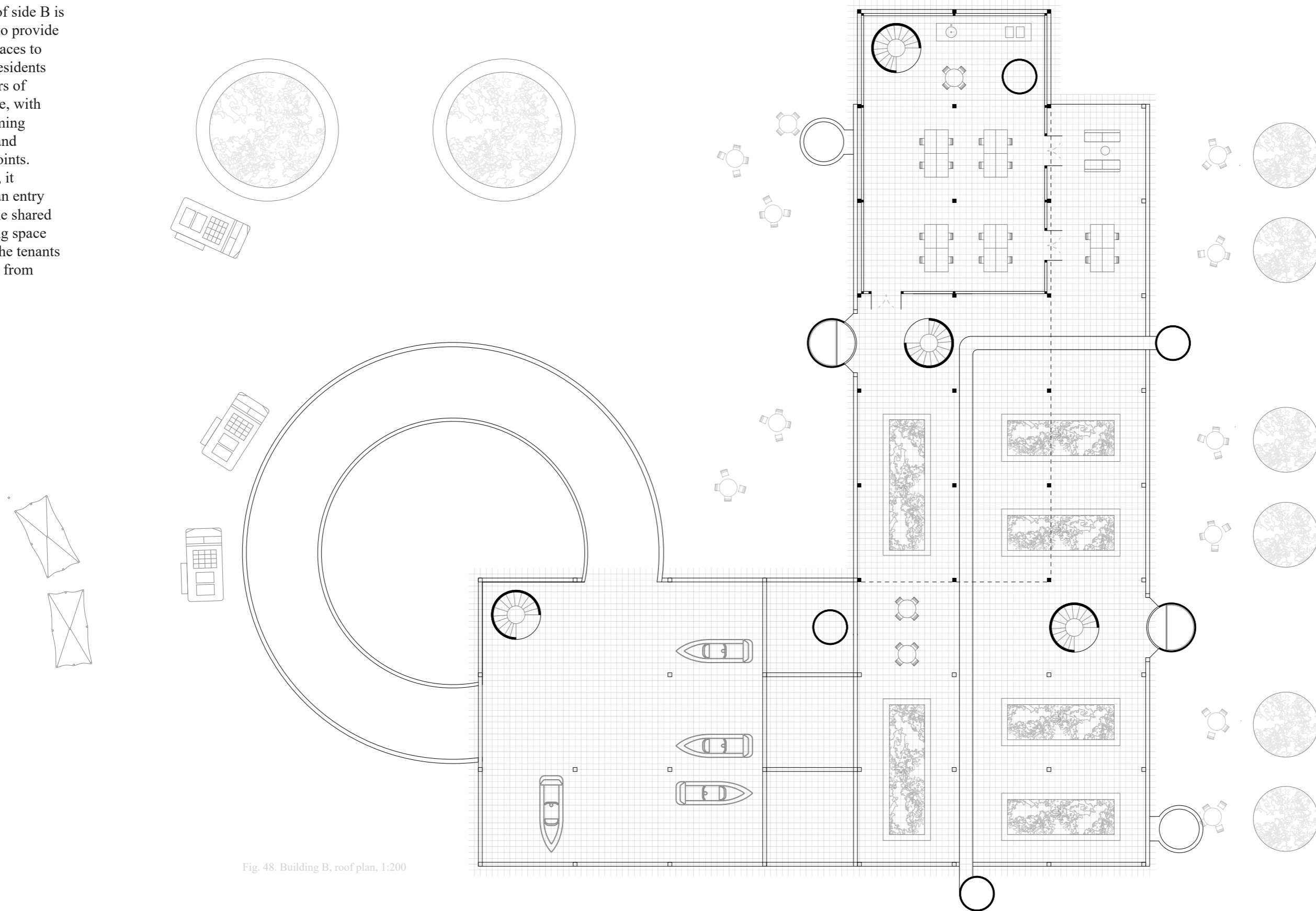


Fig. 48. Building B, roof plan, 1:200

Layout

4.1 - 4.7

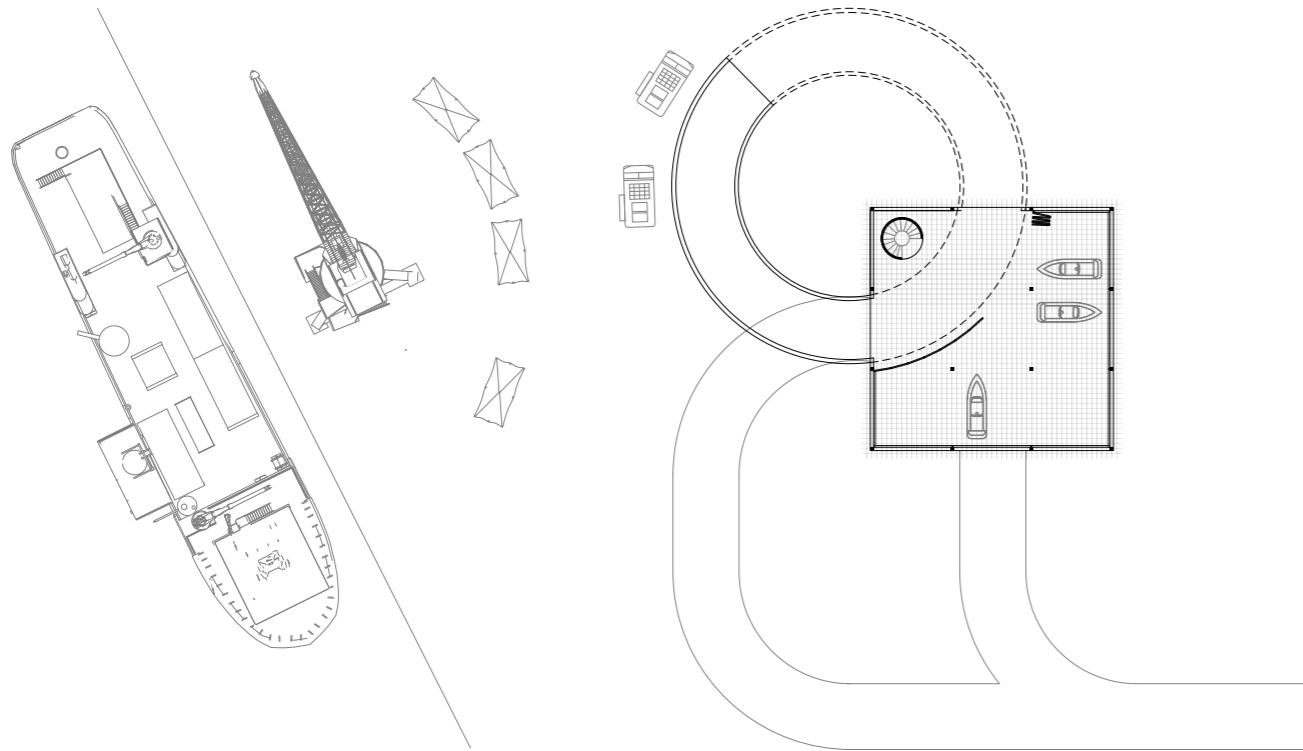


Fig. 49. Boat storage facility, upper floor plan + context

A structure partially connected to side B functions as a public boat storage facility along with a public rooftop.

Function-wise the storage facility incorporates the residential complex within Paljassaare's industrial framework by providing an extension of the boat marina, which the structure is directly facing.

Additionally the storage facility functions as an underground vehicle parking garage and a crisis shelter.

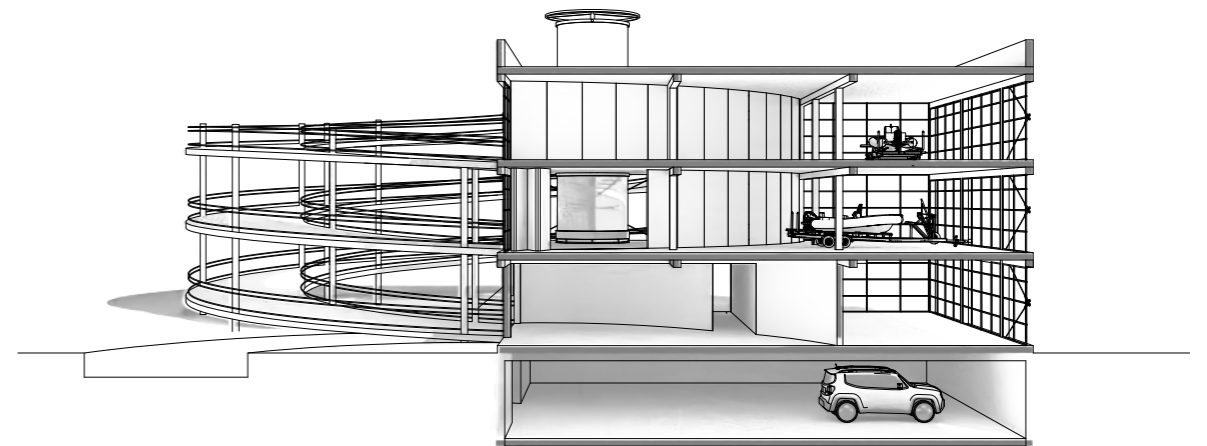


Fig. 50. Section, 1:500

Circulation & structural reinforcement

4.1 - 4.7

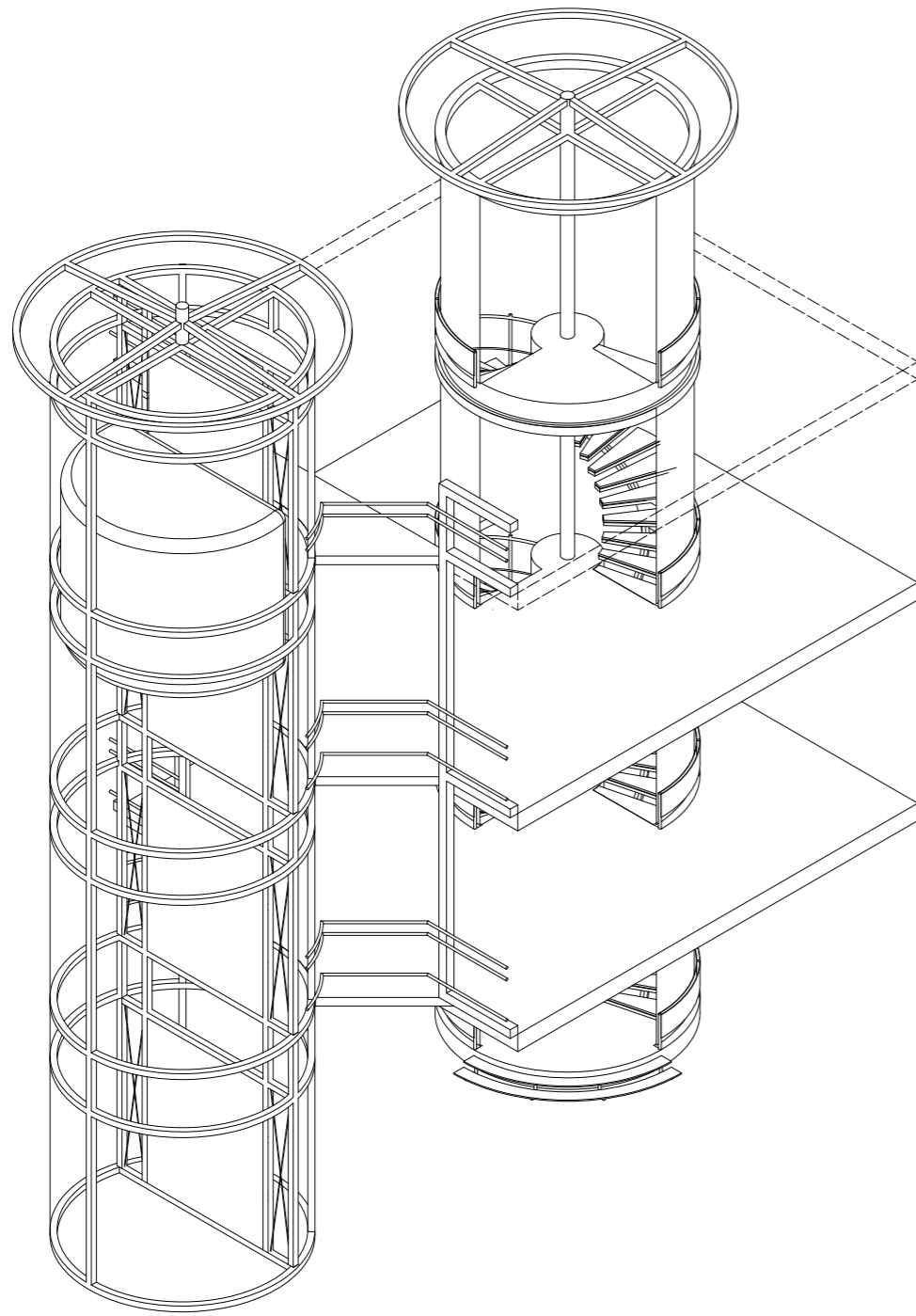


Fig. 51. Circulation towers

Vertical circulation within the structure happens via external tower structures, each consisting out of an elevator together with a staircase.

In some cases a portal frame row needs to be shortened in order to not obstruct movement, thus a column is replaced with a triangular steel structure transferring the forces to surrounding columns.

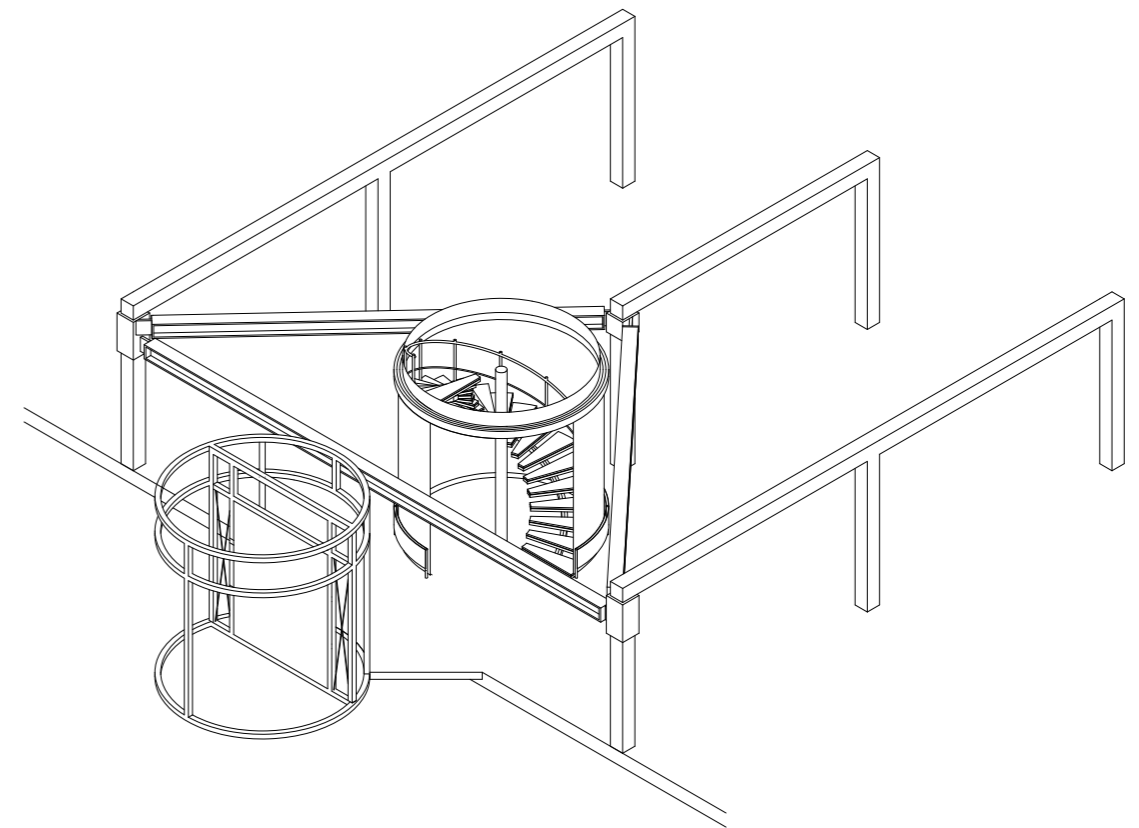


Fig. 52. Triangular steel support system

Exterior

4.1 - 4.7

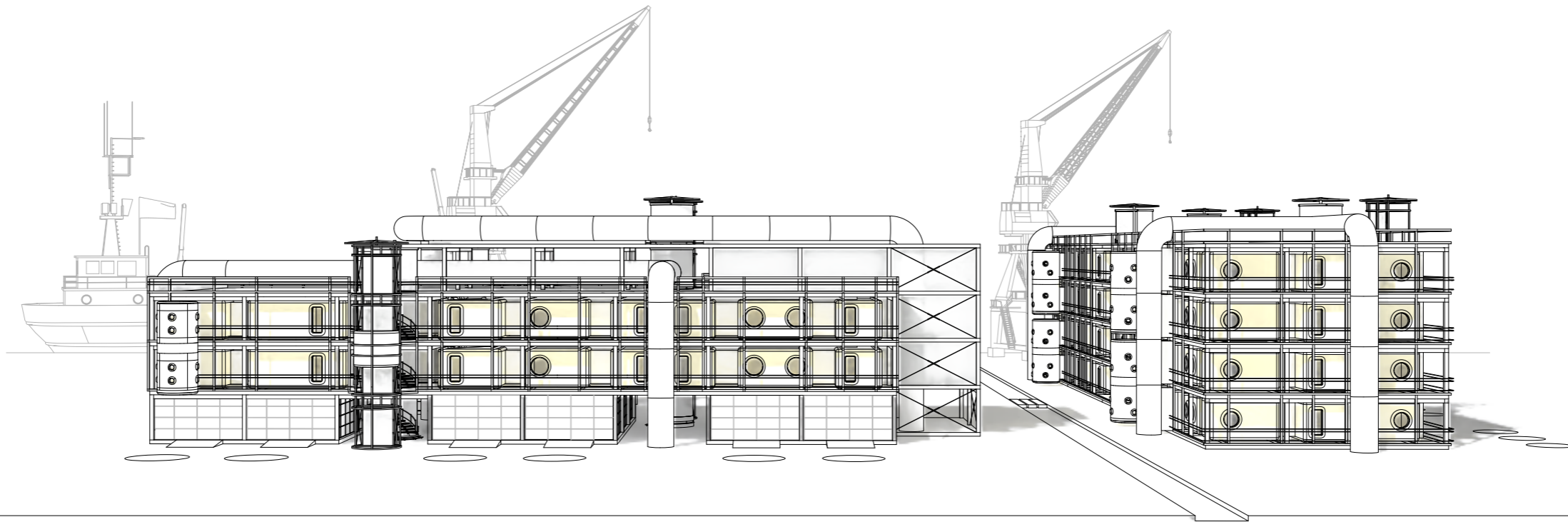
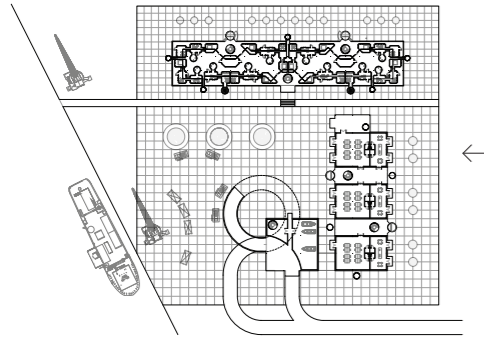


Fig. 53. Elevation A, 1:500

Exterior

4.1 - 4.7

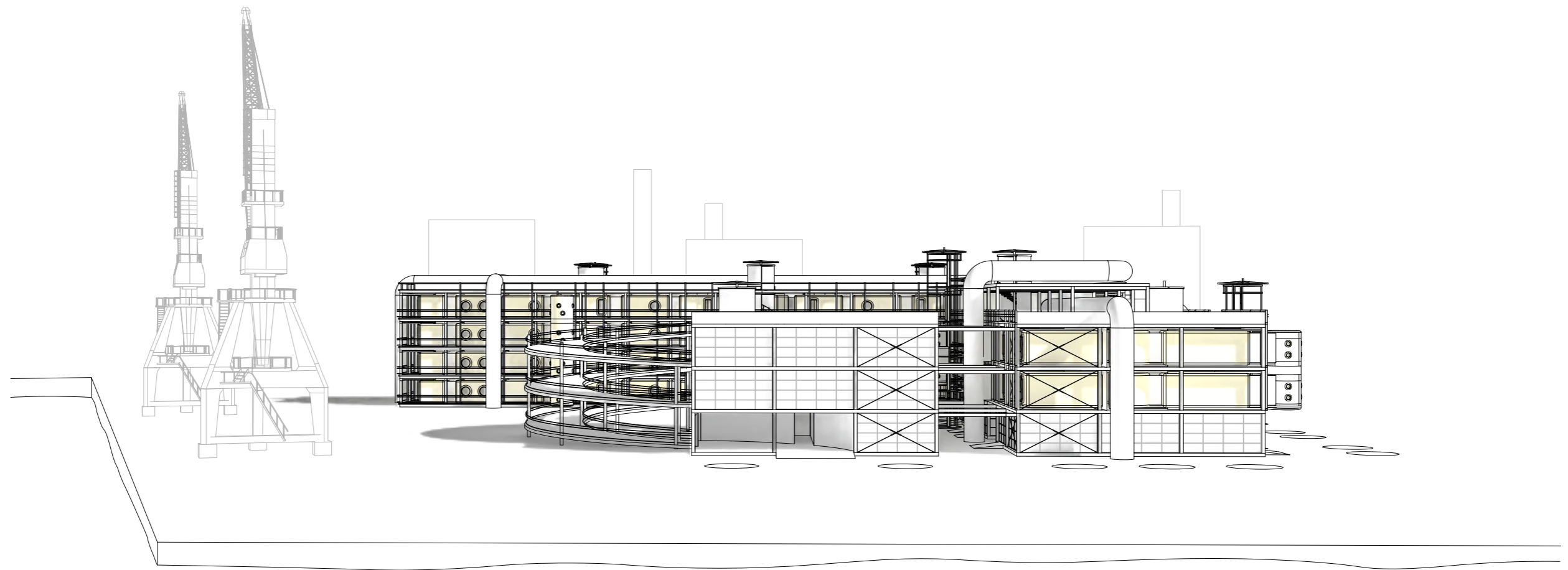
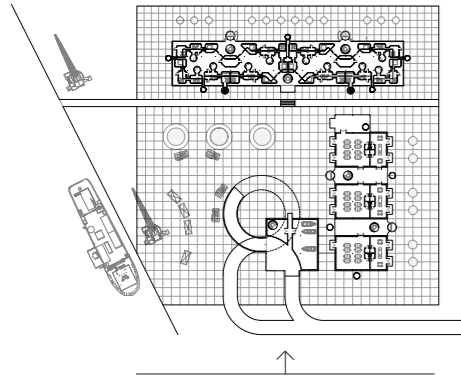


Fig. 54. Elevation B, 1:500

Exterior

4.1 - 4.7

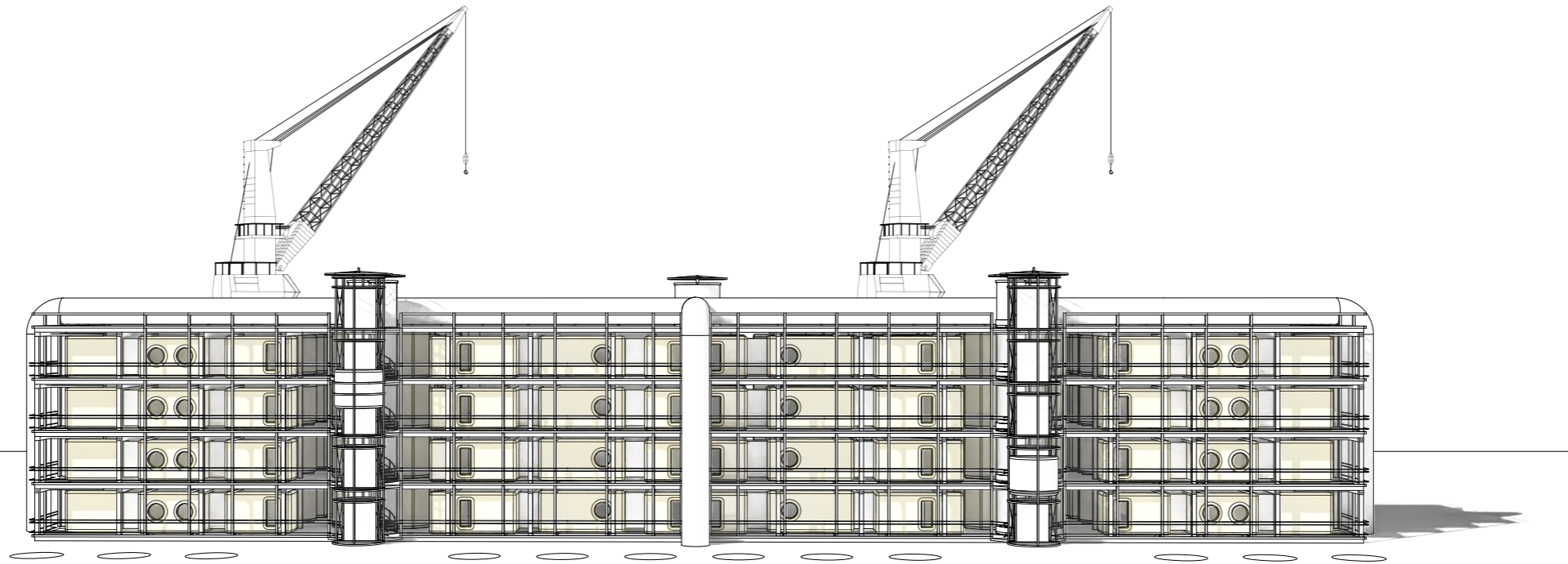
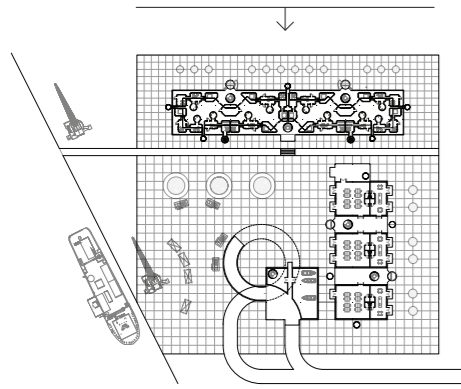


Fig. 55. Elevation C, 1:500

Exterior

4.1 - 4.7



Fig. 56. Exterior night-time visual

Climate & utilities

4.1 - 4.7

The climate concept aims for the structure to be self-sufficient in supplying water and electricity to the communal spaces. Electricity is generated by small residential-grade wind turbines on top of the circulation towers, later stored in utility boxes for future use. Rain water is collected in the gutters on each floor and directed into an underground storage and filtering facility, from which it comes back into the main pipe system.

The pipe framework is condensed into one large unit (of which there are several in both buildings), which runs externally along the facade to keep the internal circulation spaces visual clutter-free. Piping units are insulated so the utilities can function in all climate conditions.

Apartment units are ventilated by a mechanical system manually providing air in and out the apartment. Additionally, natural ventilation is possible through window openings.

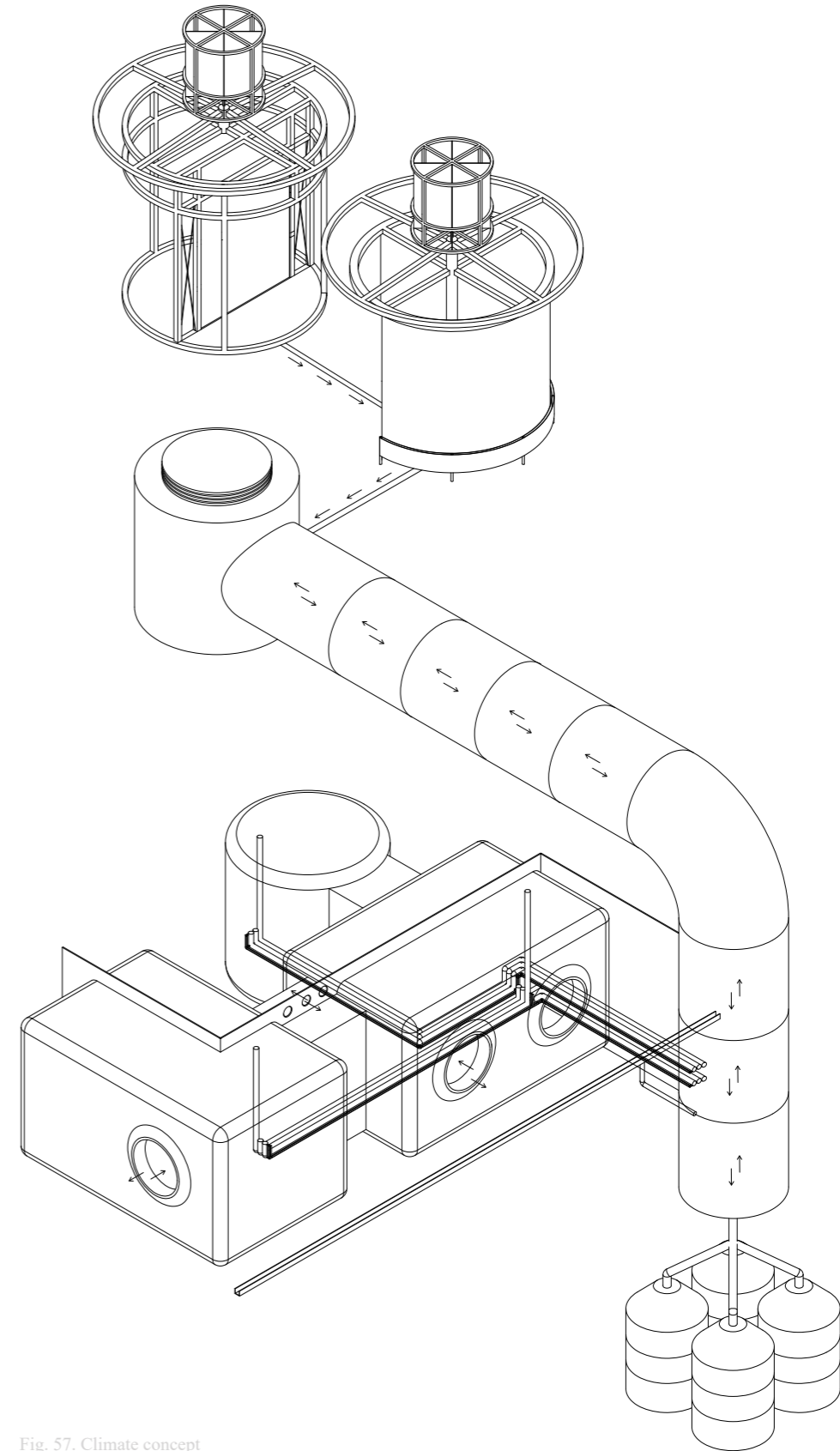


Fig. 57. Climate concept

IV.

Conclusion and discussion

‘Fool’s land’ is an investigation on a large-scale residential development ability to facilitate tenants’ connection to their property and surroundings through individuality centered design. In response to the planned development ongoing in Paljassaare, the design proposal questions the contemporary trend of anonymous design and investment-driven architecture, as well as explores individuality as a catalyst for prolonged inhabitation and community building. Through historical analysis, theoretical framework building and design experimentation, the project presents a solution strengthening both personal attachment and collective belonging by treating individuality as a shared spatial condition and a mutual point of interest rather than an isolated act.

As research shows, the stigma surrounding expressive residential architecture in Estonia largely originates from the private developments of the early post-independence era. While societally, structures such as those in Ilmandu became symbolic of excess and stupidity, they simultaneously celebrate a significant

cultural and political shift, the liberation of domestic identity after decades of state-controlled standardization. ‘Fool’s land’ argues that these environments should be interpreted beyond subjective appeal, but also through their social and historical significance. Through a hauntological lens the visual contradictions of post-independence residential architecture become representative of aspirations and inheritance within the built environment.

The architectural proposal translates those findings into a contemporary residential framework through adaptive reuse of an industrial warehouse structure in Paljassaare, while balancing isolation and involvement. Detached apartment units encourage freedom of personalization and behavioral individuality, self-expression beyond the physical realm. Simultaneously, shared circulation and communal spaces establish a collective residential infrastructure intended to facilitate social interaction and shared identity.

In answering the design question, Fool’s land’ demonstrates that

connection to property and surroundings can be strengthened by allowing design to accommodate visual ambiguity. Rather than producing housing optimized for market value and efficiency, the proposal prioritizes emotional investment and therefore, positions expression as an integral architectural and social mechanism.

Technical aspects within the project are considered to support the architectural intentions. While reusing the existing portal frame structure the design aims to preserve site’s industrial heritage, as well as avoid total demolition and waste of resources. The modular units are assembled off-site without using any chemical connections, simplifying logistics and making future maintenance easily accessible. Moreover, the structure incorporates wind energy and water collection systems, aiming to make communal spaces self-sufficient regarding energy and water.

Ultimately, ‘Fool’s land’ is an alternative proposition to a contemporary housing development in Tallinn. It is a project embracing the power of contradiction and

stylistic ambiguity, framing it as a tool of connection. By reinterpreting the legacy of early post-independence residential architecture on a larger scale, the project suggests that housing is able to progress beyond anonymity and act as a framework for collective memory and participation.

Implications

4.6

The design assignment condensed the scope of the project to a singular intervention in Paljassaare, however, its implications extend beyond that and question the future direction of contemporary residential architecture overall, especially in the Baltic context. As housing development industry continuously favors market neutrality and financial optimization, residential architecture risks becoming detached from its local identity and the experiences of its residents. The proposition states that individuality and ambiguity should not be treated as architectural shortcomings, but qualities capable of enhancing social engagement.

In the context of architecture as a profession, 'Fool's land' highlights the importance of reconsidering how housing is evaluated and designed. Contemporary residential developments can often be judged through coherence, thus isolating personalization. Therefore, the project proposes a theoretical framework embracing controlled stylistic inconsistency and user involvement as design strategies.

Furthermore, 'Fool's land' vouches for adaptive reuse within post-industrial contexts, allowing for culturally layered environments, which are hard to capture in new construction. The proposal stands as 'Phase 1' for the redevelopment plan of Paljassaare, suggesting that the following phases could benefit from integrating similar approaches and spatial practices rather than relying on standardized urban models.

Ultimately, the project recommends a shift away from anonymous design towards the acknowledgment of collective memory and self-expression as valuable components of contemporary urban life.

Reflection

4.6

The process of developing 'Fool's land' was highly iterative and research-driven, starting with a site visit, continuing with historical analysis and theoretical explorations, ending with experimental design methods. The project relied on interviews, literature studies, sketching, model making and digital visualization to build the narrative and design proposals. Particularly important was the exchange in Tallinn, where various neighborhoods, buildings and social conditions were documented and analyzed through photography, mapping and observation. Those experiences were essential in understanding the spatial atmosphere and societal perception of particular environments.

An unconventional tool essential to the project was social media discourse analysis. Platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have become valuable mediums for understanding public discourse surrounding expressive post-independence architecture. Contemporary social media functions as an immediate and unfiltered representation of a collective opinion, which allowed the project to examine how environments such

as Ilmandu are discussed, criticized and remembered today. Conducted anonymously, the research on ironic and contradictory narratives found online became highly relevant to the architectural argument of the project.

The research phase was eased by previous knowledge from writing a third quarter thesis on a similar subject in Lithuania, another Baltic country with a similar post-independence architectural legacy. An overlapping part of that research was reassessed, adapted and can be found in the 'Ilmandu & the private realm' chapter.

Simultaneously, the project involved several struggles. The primary difficulty re-appearing throughout the project was maintaining control over the narrative, as with ever-expanding research it became more and more layered and complex. The themes of individuality, negative perception, nostalgia, privacy and liberated identity often overlapped and expanded in multiple directions.

Reflection

4.6

Introducing hauntology as a theoretical framework for the analysis became particularly useful in structuring these contradictions, allowing the project to interpret design as a layered condition shaped by its histories and unrealized futures rather than a purely formal format.

Another challenge, which occurred at the beginning stages of the project, was narrowing down the assignment. Initially the project aimed to explore broader urban interventions, particularly in the public realm. However, focusing specifically on residential architecture ultimately turned out to be the most coherent approach, having the most relation to the goal of destigmatizing expressive design. Housing turned out to be the clearest medium through which individuality, self-expression and attachment could be explored spatially and technically, while bringing something new to the table. Reducing the scope strengthened both the narrative and architectural resolution of the project.

Ultimately, the process demonstrated that architectural research could benefit from embracing ambiguity and unconventional sources of information alongside traditional design methods. The final outcome is representative of the speculative architectural proposal, but also a broader reflection on identity, memory and contemporary residential design culture. 'Fool's land' engages with contradictions and everlasting unresolved issues, while suggesting possibilities for future proposals.

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List of figures

Unless stated otherwise, all figures are courtesy of the author.

Cover image: Kadaka tee 36 / Enn Rohula's house in Ilmandu. Author: Ingmaar Muusikus, 1940-1998.

Figure 1. Paljassaare redevelopment visualisation. Source: *Citify.eu*

Figure 4. Galeriikohvik Viru, Tallinn, 1995. Source: Estonian Museum of Architecture.

Figure 5. Galeriikohvik Viru. Source: *Arhitekt Peep Janes, 2012.*

Figure 11. Facebook post of an article about a villa for sale. Source: Screenshot by author from the Life24 *Facebook* page, accessed on December 7th, 2025.

Figure 12. Discussion under the article about a villa for sale. Source: Screenshot by author from *Facebook* discussion, accessed on December 7th, 2025.

V.

Appendix

Quick design assignment

2.1 - 2.5

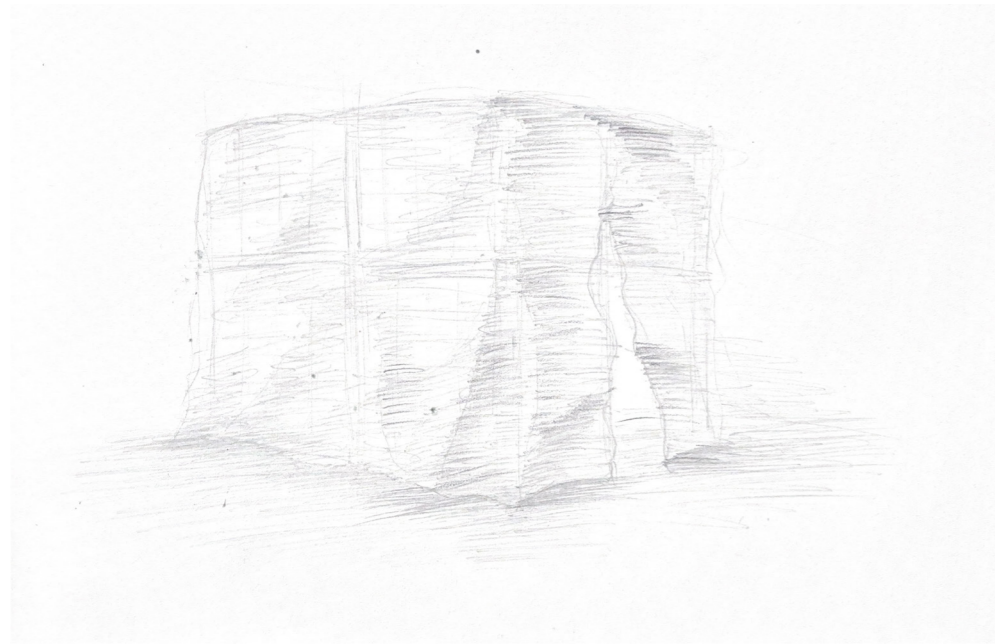


Fig. 1. Covered structure

The main aim for this short assignment was to design a dwelling space for a monk to spend time during his artist residency in EKA. Space requirements - areas designated to **sleep, brew tea and boil rice**. After the residency is finished, the dwelling will be displayed as part of the exhibition of the monk's work. When designing I first perceived the dwelling as part of the upcoming exhibition, thus it had to become a sculpture depicting the time that the monk spent within. This act can be imparted via chosen materials, such that degrade very fast and are affected by the human body - warmth, sweat, etc.

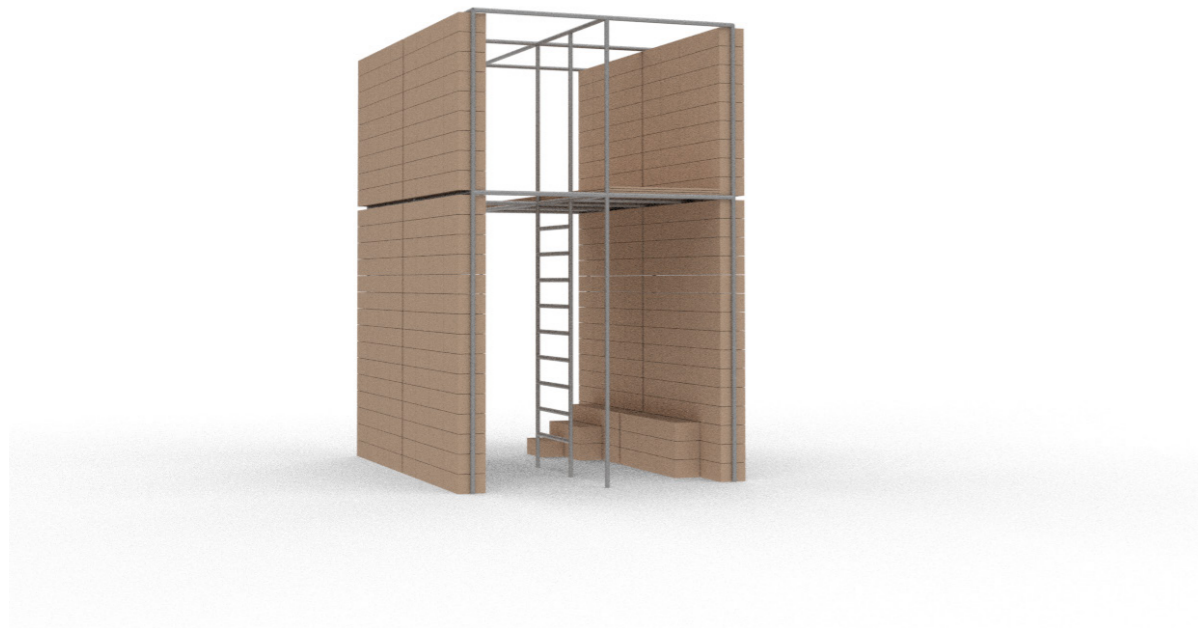


Fig. 2. Open structure

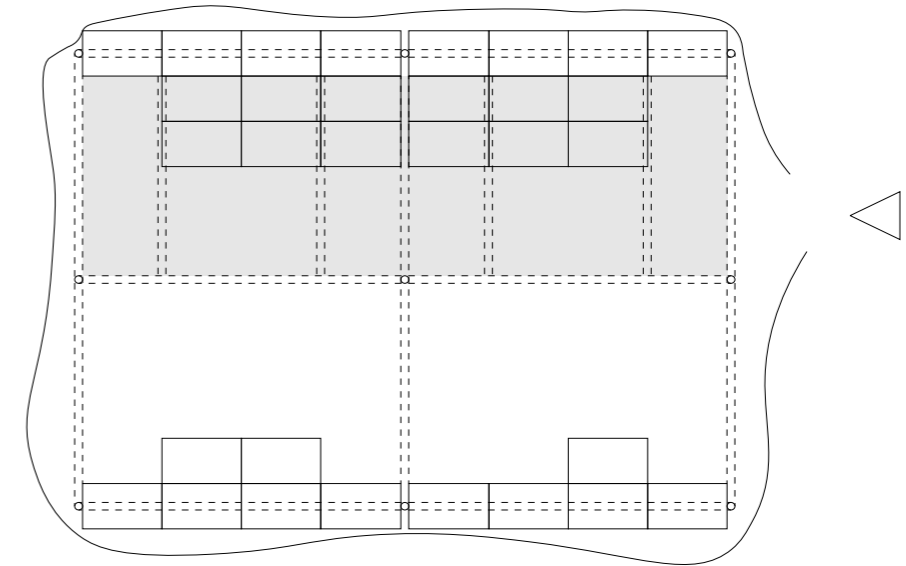


Fig. 3. Floor plan, 1:20

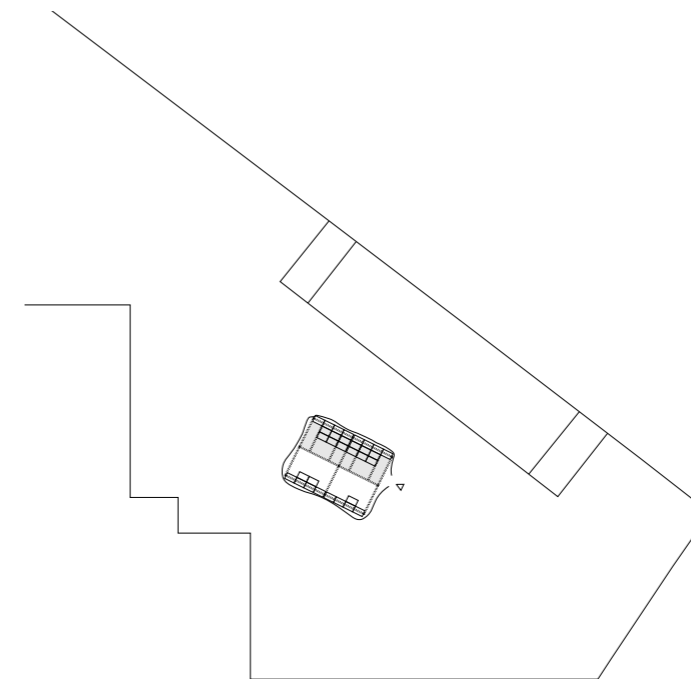


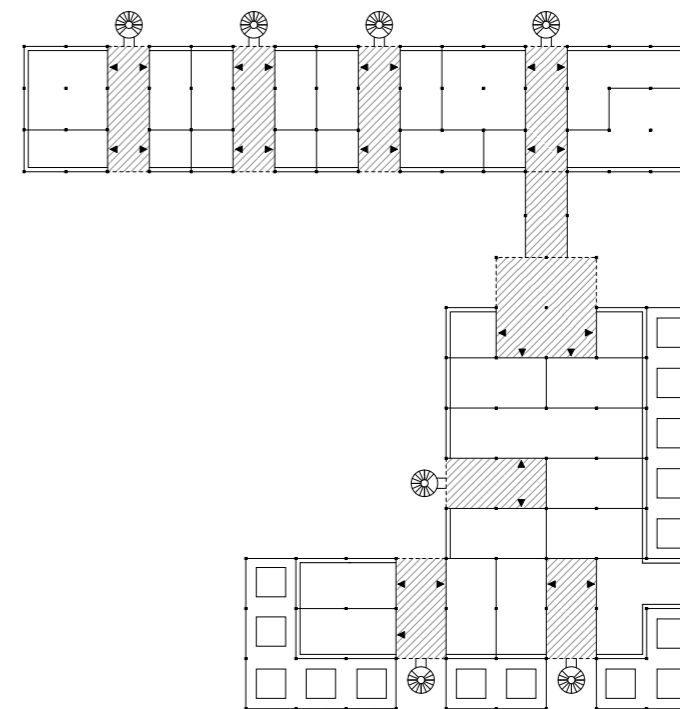
Fig. 4. Floor plan, 1:200

The body of the structure consists of two elements, steel scaffolding and cardboard panels, as well as boxes. The scaffolding provides a shell to mount the cardboard panels, as well as structural integrity from external forces such as rain, wind, etc. The cardboard forms walls and base surfaces, all of which are unassigned in terms of purpose. This allows the monk to choose how to use the space, while the outcome will be apparent in the wear and tear of the cardboard. As during the residency EKA is closed, the structure is located in the middle of the courtyard as a symbol of centralization.

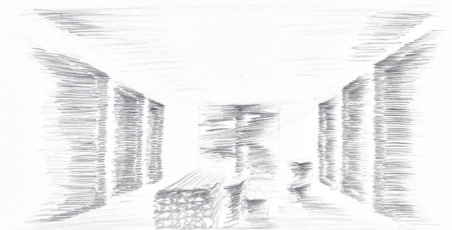
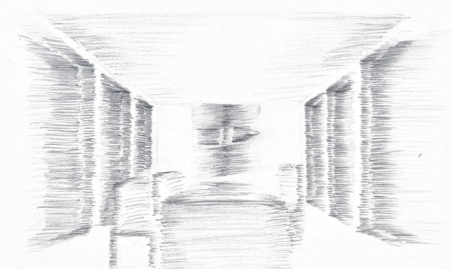
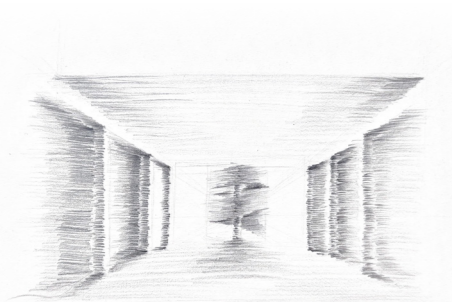
The first design iteration took upon the principles of individuality and self-expression by studying the private architecture of the 1990's and defining three key design concepts – spatial appropriation, life-long construction and selective privacy.

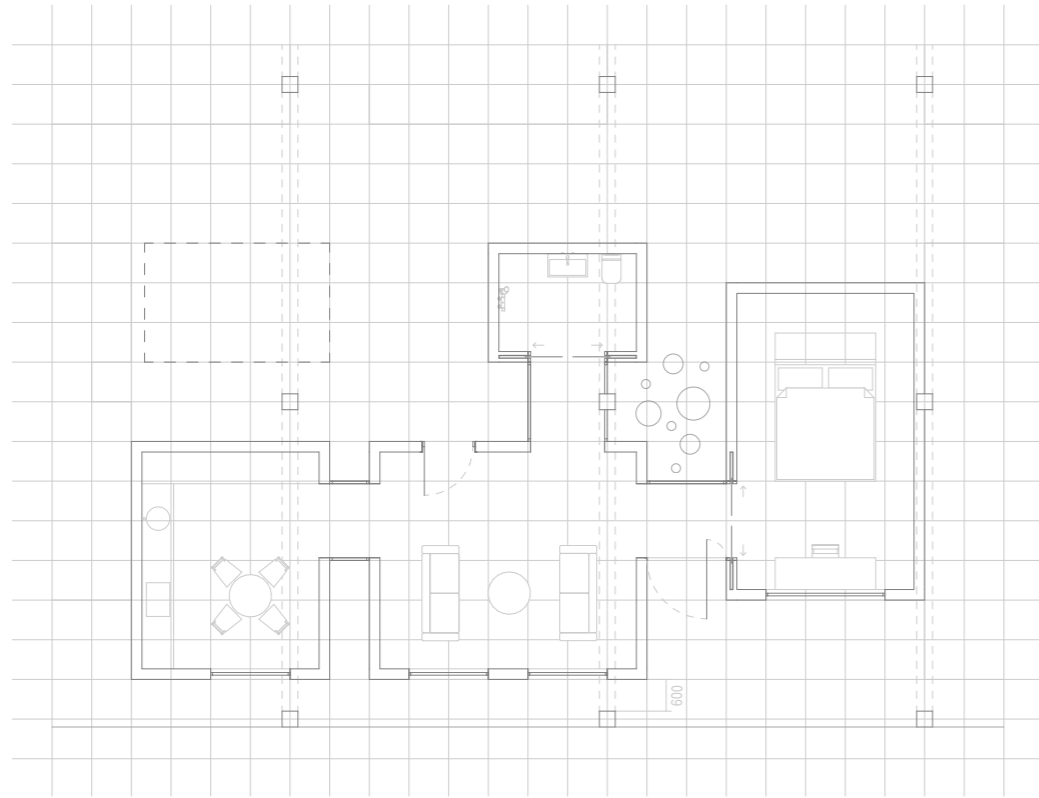
Spatial appropriation defines the urge to claim inside and outside space by occupying it with physical possessions. The design allows that by creating courtyards shared between multiple apartments, as well as narrow spaces behind the façade to display personal belongings. Life-long construction stems from customizing your property throughout the years of living there. The design incorporates various measures to encourage and ease maintenance and customization of the façade.

Selective privacy responds to the conversation regarding the relation between privacy and individuality. By fitting a double façade the residents can choose whether they want to keep it open or closed to the public. are taken to later design variants.

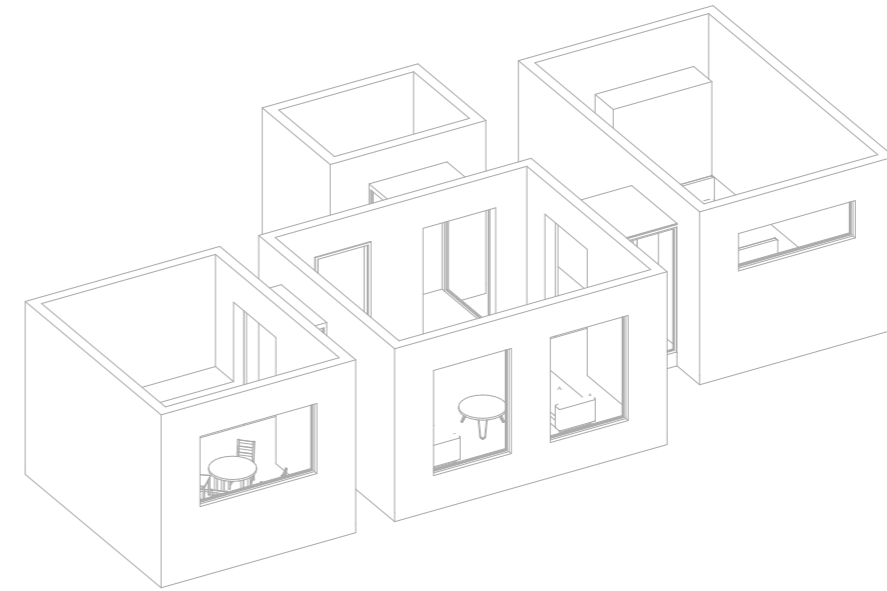


The overall design has several drawbacks, mainly being too ambiguous in its core. When this many decisions are left up to the residents there is too much space left for failure. Nevertheless, the positive outcomes of this design stage are taken to later design variants.



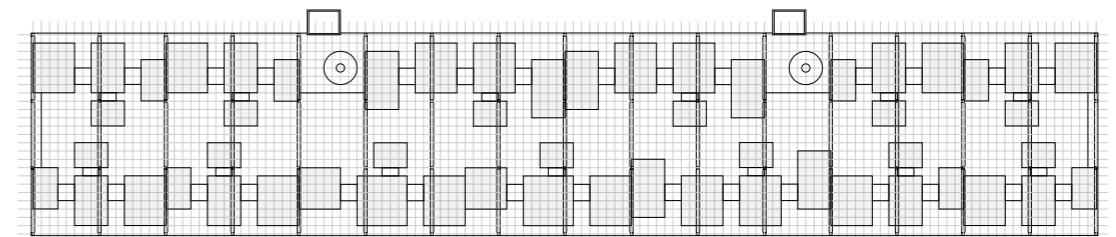


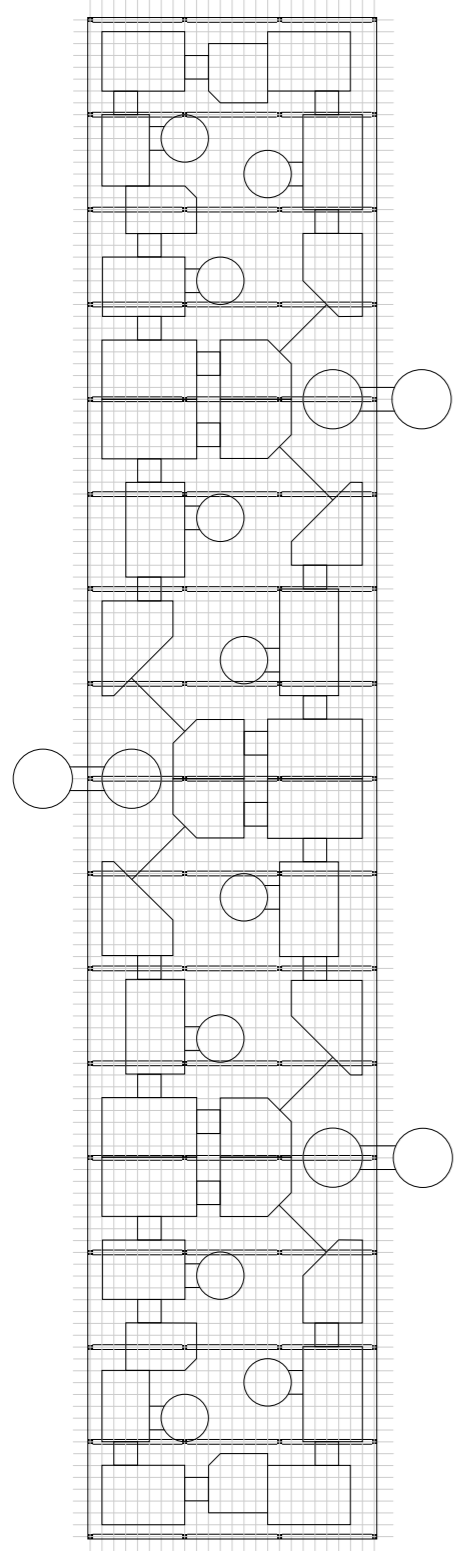
Second design iteration elaborated on the importance of privacy and appropriation beyond the physical level. The floor plans of individual units take shape as individual separated boxes connected with corridors. Each living function has its own volume that is closed off and visually isolating, therefore, it can be personalized to the fullest extent. The corridors connecting the volumes are transparent, contrasting from the volumes and claiming space through movement.



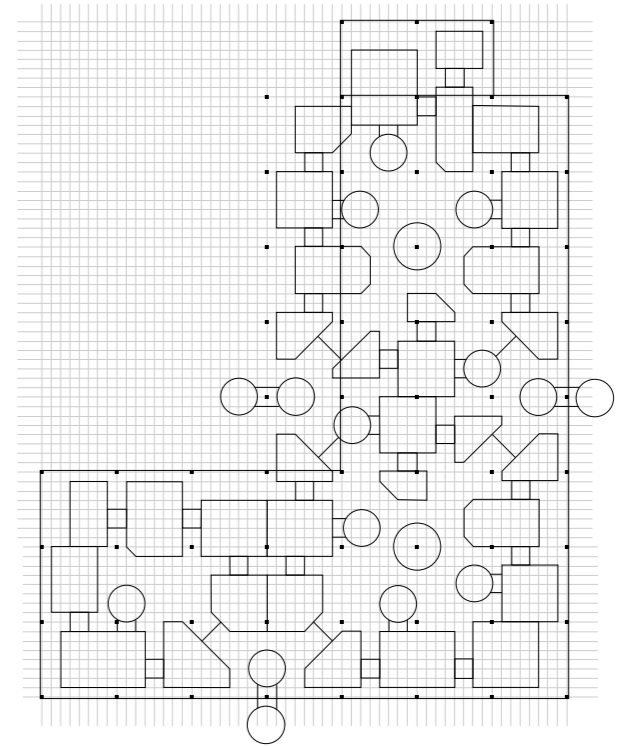
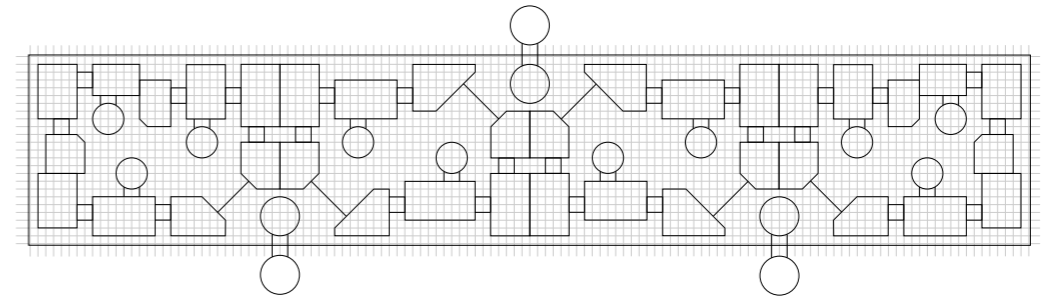
Personalization happens based on the user's habits, in which rooms is the most time spent, which ones the least, etc. The layout is treated as more of a domestic scenography rather than a traditional apartment floor plan.

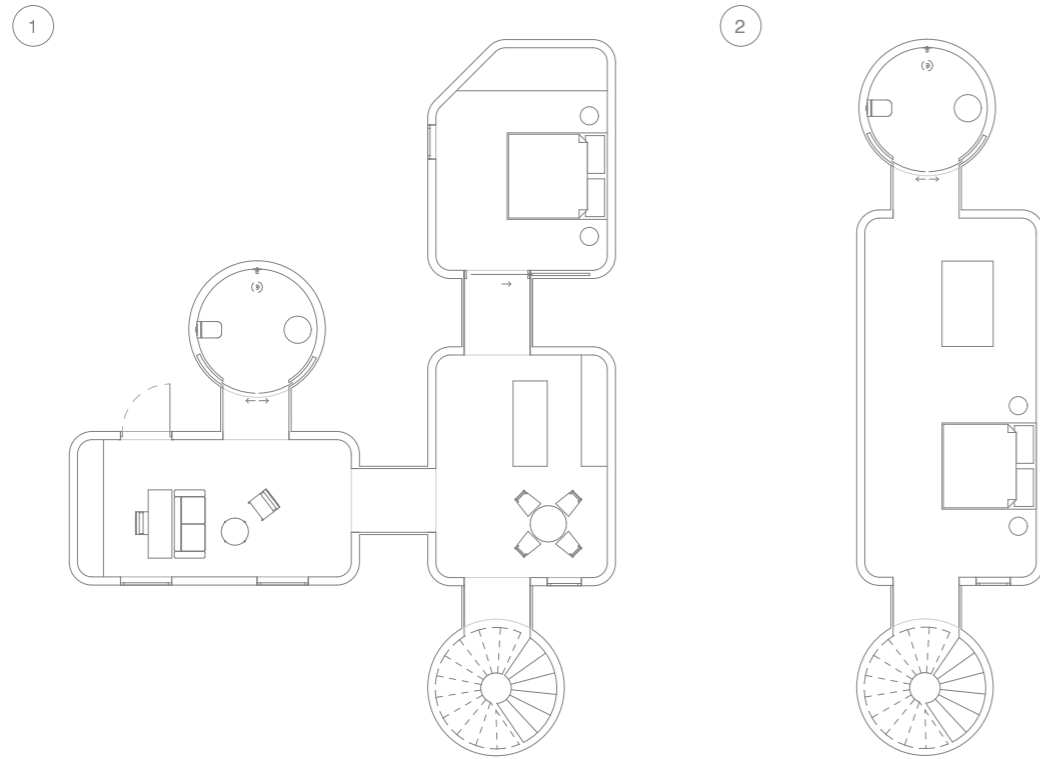
The design has circulation drawbacks due to sharp unit corners and long sightlines. However, the design is further advanced, and the issues are addressed in the later stage.



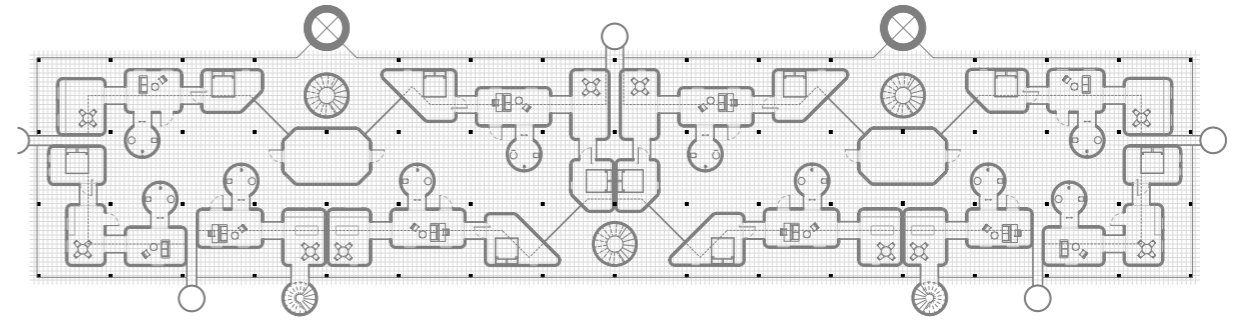


Continuing the design by shifting the corridors to a 45-degree angle, thus shortening the sightlines and creating a more intimate atmosphere. Moreover, allowing a circular volume shape in combination with the angle allows smoother circulation and diminishes narrow, hard to access spaces.

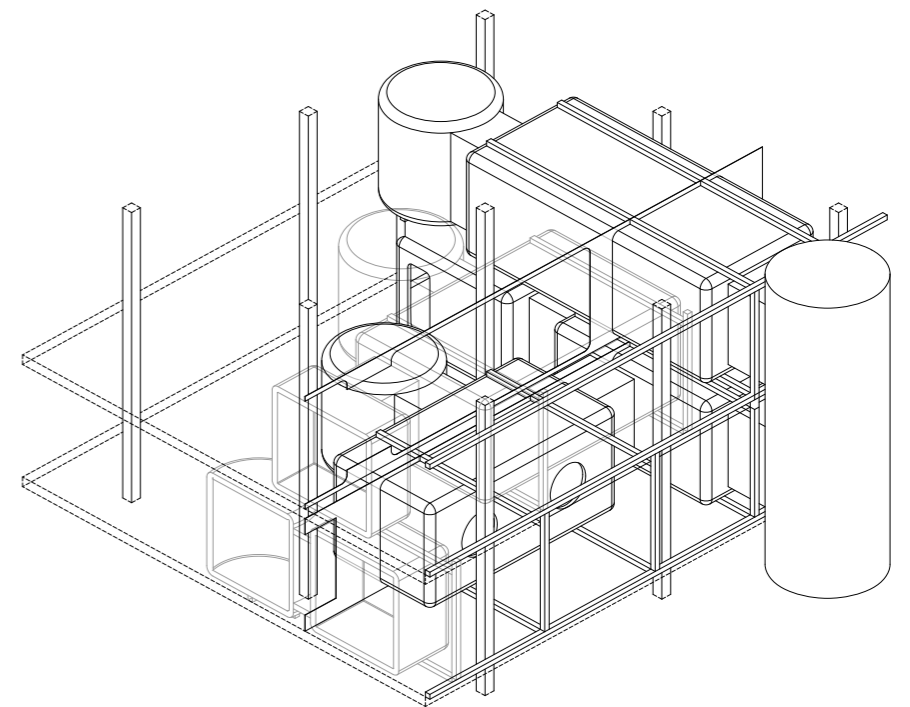


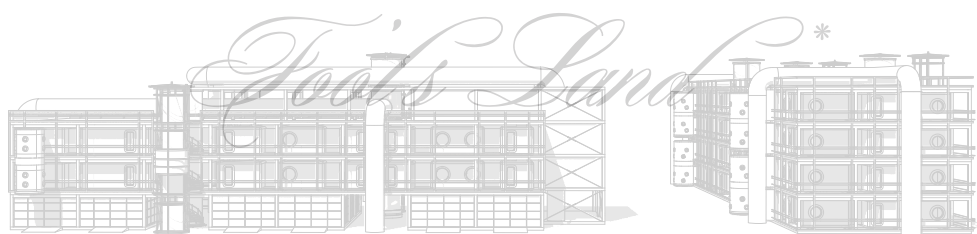


The third design iteration continues building on the same principles but further elaborates on the concepts of privacy and isolation. Each unit is detached from their neighbor and 'floats' in-between the concrete slabs, for accentuation all volume edges are rounded. Merging the two there is a thin mediating structure which extends onto the façade and forms the external shell of the building.



The circulation is located externally of the concrete structure. All units are placed at different distances to the façade in order to provide visual privacy without any physical barriers.





A tribute to individuality in home design

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