

Archiving Architecture

A new Home for the VAI
An archive “under the sky”

REFLECTION

Graduation Studio
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Research question phases
addressed in my proposal

- What is the identity of the VAI in relation to past, future and context?
- How do you prioritise users and functions?
- What is the meaning of an archive you want to achieve?



This year, the graduation studio Interiors Buildings Cities focuses on developing a new home for the VAI (Flemish architecture institute). The brief introduces the Art campus of DeSingel which resembles a crucial connection to the VAI, and its current depot located in the city centre of Antwerp, Belgium. The scope deviates in three different directions – working within the existing body of DeSingel, working in proximity or completely developing a self-standing building.

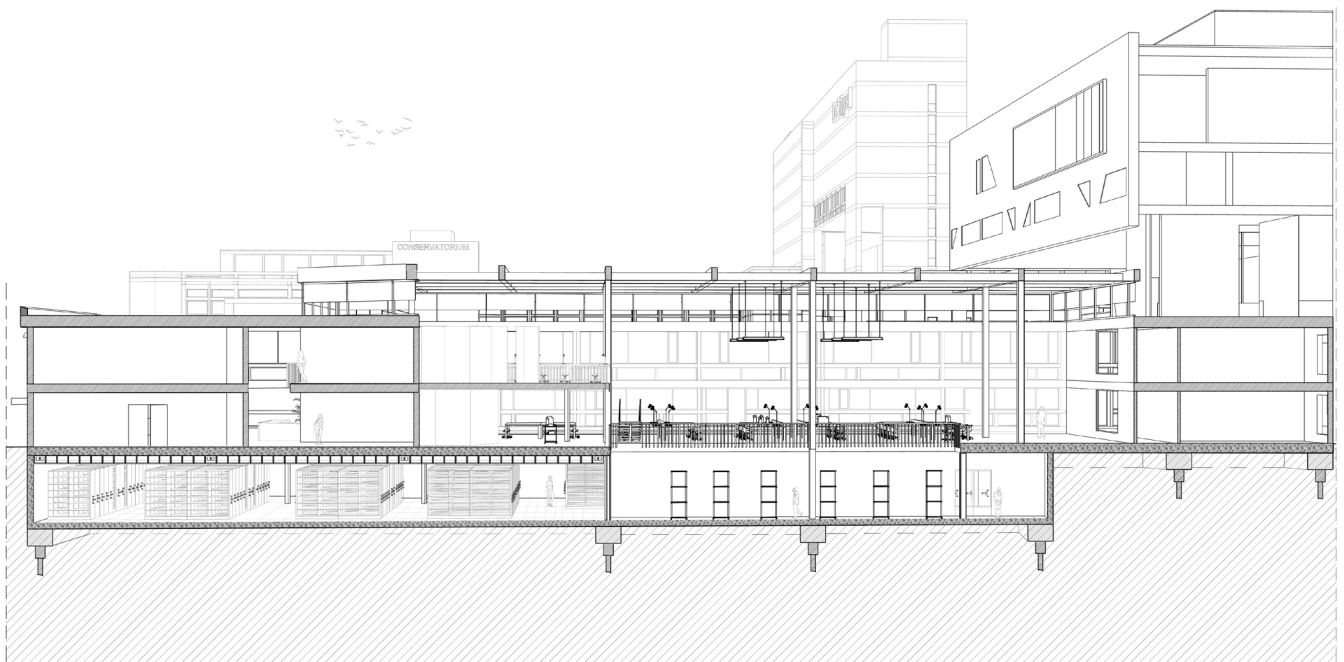
The academic research begins with gathering information about archives focusing on multiple case studies ranging from sterile types such as the CCA in Canada to display archives of Herzog & de Meuron in Switzerland. The initial brief “Looking carefully” organizes a collective work of assigned archive institutes to be developed into a physical model of a key space. Being part of the group working on the “Kabinett” I had the opportunity to analyse a

careful distinction between archive typologies which led to the next stage of my design approach. As a result, by replicating a picture of our physical model of an existing photograph, I was strongly fascinated by how quickly the human perception changes when it comes to imagining an archive process to physically experimenting it.



Moving forward, the following chapter develops an understanding of archive prototypes enhancing human interaction within public, collective and private realms. The brief results in a physical model as a product of the information gathered during a site visit at the VAI where archive materials are collected. Moreover, a visit to DeSingel takes place to introduce initial thoughts and experiences of the following stages throughout the academic year.

As a result, my P1 proposal represented a street corner where furniture pieces from Claire Bataille & Paul ibens are displayed. The vitrine sets the boundaries between the publicness and privacy within a potential archive working space. That was the moment when my initial research question thought developed whether to identify what is on display, how can one display the VAI to the public or how to show the embedded archive to the city?



Towards my P2 Presentation, decision making is one of the crucial parts of my design development. By prioritising spatial elements in my design and integrating building technology, the design proposal shifts in several aspects.

At that moment, the research question touches onto programme distribution and creating a hierarchy between primary and secondary functions whilst keeping the boundaries introduced earlier. Thus, by allowing more focus into the courtyard feature, the secondary functions are adapted into an outer layer of the courtyard. But then how does one carefully establish a connection between

the current depot in the city centre and the new depot as an extension of DeSingel? The answer is set to unfold multiple design elements which develop the potential seen in during the first site visit in the existing depot. How can one introduce a beneficial relationship with the existing depot and the new one in relation to re-establish the dialogues between Leon Stynen and Stephane Beel?



One of the design attempts represent a continuation of the existing west wing of Leon Stynen and it allows Stephane Beel to “float on it”. As a result, the archive in the courtyard enhances the relationship between the existing west wing of Léon Stynen where the exterior façade becomes an interior archive piece. By doing so, the new extension features a unity element accommodating a home for the VAI along with additional supportive functions.

Another design attempt came when the new courtyard was to communicate to the existing two courtyards. The process, however directed into introducing a roof element where the structure does not just provide structural support rather embrace the architectural significance in the archive working spaces where one could work, perceive and connect to archive materials. Then is the archive a space? A community? An element? A figure? And maybe a notion?

Those questions lead to analytical studies as part of the process after introducing personal fascinations whilst keeping the respect, the boundaries and the brief requirements.

Bringing elements to a display is not only a beginning to establish a “a new home for the VAI” but also being able to show self-integrity. Bringing back the street corner develops into a potential urban corner which invites the city in, fosters new connections whilst repairing previous ones and ideally activates the art campus of DeSingel. Looking into interior qualities is another phase of the design process where a void in the ground floor extends by allowing the grand opening to overlook the physical models collection in the lower floor. The mezzanine then offers a lightweight system with additional shelving and seating and desk space by optimising the use of the railing which creates an illusion of a continuous façade of Stynen. By



doing so, the archive does not just fulfil the mission of the VAI which is to be seen by the public, rather than being situated in an enclosed box, but also activates the use of DeSingel by implementing additional programme connecting the existing body of Léon Stynen and providing a new entrance to Stéphane Beel's part. As a result, publicness is introduced in the VAI whilst Stynen and Beel form a dialog showing integrity, respect and values. That moment then frames an incredibly critical phase where a sense of respect is brought, the more you look, the more you perceive, the more respect and the more responsibility you have to set yourself such challenge which could not work but also could embrace the unique meaning of the VAI.

Further design develops into a building technology section which sets another crucial step in my design decisions when expressing interior and exterior. By testing various

methods I conclude that due to the existing ground floor of Stynen's wing being only 2.3m and the upper floor 3.3 I am then challenged to propose a feasible analysis to provide connection between my extension and Stynen's wing. The result lays in providing a new topographical study resulting in a developed landscape sloping down to the new entrance and potentially excavating an entrance bit to Stynen's wing where I can build a ramp to bring my floor to the same level (my floor 2.8m and Stynen's 2.3).

A 1:20 drawing represents crucial details when connecting the new extension to the existing façade of Stynen and the roof cantilevering on the existing roof. Another challenge to develop the design is found when establishing a roof structure based on grid sizes as its distinctive geometry reflects the street edge. As a result, to keep the design feature the grid is then not based on sizes rather



on its geometry leading to a bespoke roof piece supported by exposed columns in the courtyard working spaces.

Axonometric drawings are then used to represent the structure of the roof allowing it to cantilever on top of the existing roof rather than transferring load on it. The roof then results into a lightweight structure "lifted" with a filtered glass to prevent the courtyard from overheating. In addition, the raised roof features wooden window frames on the edge of the roof frame. A critical detail is then set to cantilever the roof only on Styne's roof and the other three sections to be flush simply because Styne's façade is the cultural heritage element adapted to the new integrity. Moreover details 1:5 contribute to certain design decision explanations showing main elements in my architectural approach. A roof detail, showing the raised window frame with the slanted roof, a mezzanine railing with a desk top, a foundation where the new extension touches Styne, a raised access floor to respect simplicity by not interfering ventilation ducts on the roof structure and an integrated electricity on the edge of the beam for lighting fixtures.

To conclude with, the design attempts result in multiple options which either fulfil the mission of the VAI but lack integrity, unity or publicness. Whether to compromise, to challenge or to keep testing, my graduation project represents process phases where I set myself to find my personal fascinations which could help me to develop this project into the final stage where I am able to present the final product called "Archiving Architecture" by the academic brief or my understanding of public transparency,

repairing dialogues between architectural developments and mostly deliver the wishes I had observed during all site visits whether within the current VAI depot, DeSingel or the community of the city of Antwerp, Belgium.

Finally, towards the P5 presentation, all design choices are merged into a coherent phase where the project unfolds my personal preferences and observations when it comes to developing myself as an architect. As a result, developing an archive during my graduation project did not just unfold challenges, but also contributed to my architectural approach, helped me identify problematic phases I could improve which reflected in my final project "The archive under the sky".