

THE STORY OF ROOMS

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Heyvaert
1070 Anderlecht Brussels

1070 Anderlecht Rue du Compas 54

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Editor's Note

*Citing from John Chase in the book **Everyday Urbanism: A Curmudgeon's Guide to the Wide World of Trash** - "Where there is trash, there is life."*

What brings façade alive?



During my visits to the site, I was drawn to the mess and the disorder. Yet I also began to understand that this chaos is precisely what produces the liveliness of Heyvaert. Part of my sensitivity to this "dirt" comes from earlier research with my group, where we traced the paths of waste as we moved through the streets. Following the trash, we gradually uncovered the identity of the neighbourhood, the discarded materials becoming evidence of everyday life. As John Chase suggests, "where there is trash there is life."

These domestic wastes made me imagine the people living behind the façades. Household objects are placed outside, waiting to be discarded or claimed again by someone else. These traces suggest an ongoing cycle of use, abandonment, and potential reuse. Trash became not just a waste, but a domestic and social residue, raw, messy, and deeply revealing.

I believe that every object and every display carries a story, and therefore needs a space in which to tell it, whether on the street, in a shop, at a market stall, or in a kiosk. These arrangements are not fully controlled but formed organically, constantly negotiating with the available space. The question here is not only about objects, but about how the space is structured to allow these objects, and the stories they carry to appear.

In Heyvaert, the boundary between private and public space is especially fragile. As John Chase describes it using the example of Venice neighbourhood in Los Angeles, the alleyways between houses and yards are typically understood as private domains, yet the simple act of placing unwanted items outside immediately transforms their status. What was once private becomes accessible, turning private thresholds into public space. A trash can, a box, or a discarded object can shift the entire spatial logic of a place.

What is left outside becomes part

of a shared terrain, where ownership is switched and exchange begins. In this way, the alley becomes public in its most direct form.

Within this framework, the “disorder” of Heyvaert is not simply visual noise but a spatial condition where domestic life leaks into public space. It marks the thresholds between private and public, order and overflow, ownership and abandonment. In Heyvaert, space is never neutral, it is constantly activated by objects that carry traces of human presence, forming an urban landscape where structure and chaos coexist.

Storage and Living

Several shop owners allowed me to photograph the interiors of their stores. Most shops followed a similar spatial arrangement: shelves densely packed with dried foods, large sacks of rice, canned goods, and refrigerators storing frozen products.

What intrigued me most were the spaces hidden behind the sales area. Sometimes the transition to the back room was concealed behind a refrigerator door, sometimes behind a simple interior door, and occasionally through a narrow corridor leading deeper into the building. I never ventured into these spaces, as I felt I would be intruding.

Object and Display

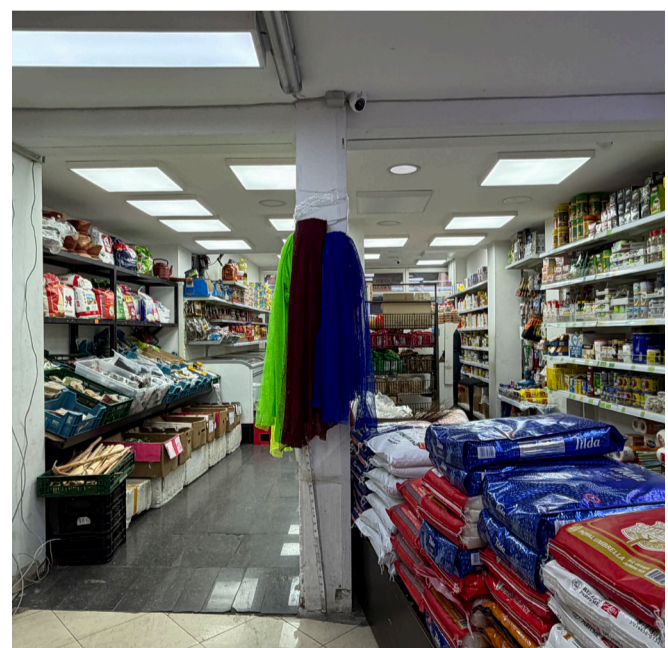
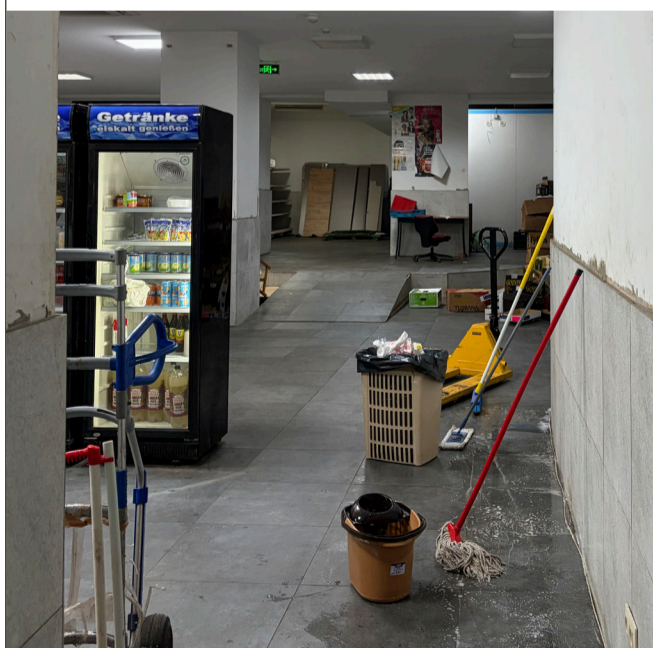
The colorful storefronts, with bright canopies and large poster signs featuring playful and memorable names, immediately catch the attention of passersby. As you walk along, you are greeted by fresh produce displayed at the entrance, carefully elevated to eye level for maximum visibility.

Drawn in by the vibrant display, you step inside the shop and are met with an overwhelming abundance of products lining every shelf. The space is densely stocked in an almost organized chaos, with brands and colors facing outward, creating a strong visual impact and a sense of abundance.

Aisles are narrow, as every available space is used for both display and storage. Floors are filled with boxes and wooden pallets, while large sacks of rice and baskets of fresh vegetables are stacked throughout the space.

Even at the cashier, no space is left empty. The counter is filled with small products, and the area behind it continues the dense display of goods, ensuring that the sense of abundance follows you all the way to the exit.

Interior shot of several produce shops around Rue Heyvaert and Rue Ropsy Chaudron. Photo by author.







Everydayness

Little spaces, Little places and Little sceneries

While photographing Heyvaert, I found myself less interested in buildings as architectural objects and more drawn to small scenes of everyday life. My camera often drifted towards spaces that might otherwise go unnoticed: a chair left outside a garage, objects carefully arranged in front of a shop, a bench temporarily occupied, a corner appropriated for selling goods, or traces of someone's daily routine. These moments felt less like designed spaces and more like evidence of people continuously shaping their environment.

What interested me were the traces people leave behind and the ways in which they use, make, and adapt space over time. Looking closely, it became clear that these places were never the result of a single decision. Instead, they were formed through many layers of actions, adjustments, and negotiations carried out by different people at different moments. Together, these layers created a sense of place.

Many of these spaces seemed to emerge almost accidentally. They were not designed to become meaningful places, yet through repeated use they acquired character and identity. A collection of objects, a habit of gathering, or a simple act of occupation could gradually transform an ordinary corner into a recognizable place. There is something paradoxical about this process. Architects often spend enormous effort trying to create places with atmosphere and identity, while some of the most memorable spaces arise effortlessly through everyday use. They feel logical, natural, and therefore beautiful.

In these situations, people are not simply users of a finished environment. They actively participate in shaping it. The relationship is no longer one of maker and user. Instead, inhabitants continuously modify, adapt, and reinterpret their surroundings, attaching their own meanings to them.

Most of the places are a result of a long accumulation of decisions made by many different agents. Some of these agents were people, but others were objects, materials, weather, light, vegetation, or time itself. A chair left outside, a faded sign, a plant growing through a crack, the movement of sunlight across a façade, each contributed something to the atmosphere of the place. They carried evidence of everyday life and revealed how people establish relationships with their surroundings over time.

The term "little spaces" used by Kumiko Inui in her research, *Learning from Little Spaces*, is useful here because it refers not only to physical size but also to the scale of human actions. Many of these places occupy only a few square meters, yet they reveal something larger about how people inhabit the world. They emerge through small gestures: moving a chair, placing objects outside, creating shade, gathering with others, displaying goods, or claiming a temporary territory. These actions may seem insignificant on their own, but together they shape the character of a place.

As Inui puts it, looking for these spaces felt similar to looking for landscapes. They exist almost everywhere people live, yet they often remain invisible because of their ordinariness. Once attention is directed towards them, they begin to reveal themselves as small but meaningful expressions of everyday life. Although many of them are highly personal and specific to a particular context, they often contain qualities that feel universally familiar.

What makes these places particularly interesting is that they

are largely products of chance. Their development cannot be fully planned or predicted. They emerge through use, repetition, and adaptation.

Inui also suggests that rather than designing every outcome, the role of architecture could be to create conditions that allow such places to develop. The challenge is not to control the entire process but to provide a framework that people can engage with, transform, and make their own.

This shifts the role of architecture. Instead of producing finished images or spectacular objects, architecture can act as a guide, helping reveal and support the richness that already exists within everyday life. The world is already full of diversity, improvisation, and small acts of creativity. Often these qualities are overlooked because they are ordinary. By paying attention to little spaces, it becomes possible to recognize the value of these everyday practices and the quiet ways in which people continuously produce meaningful places.

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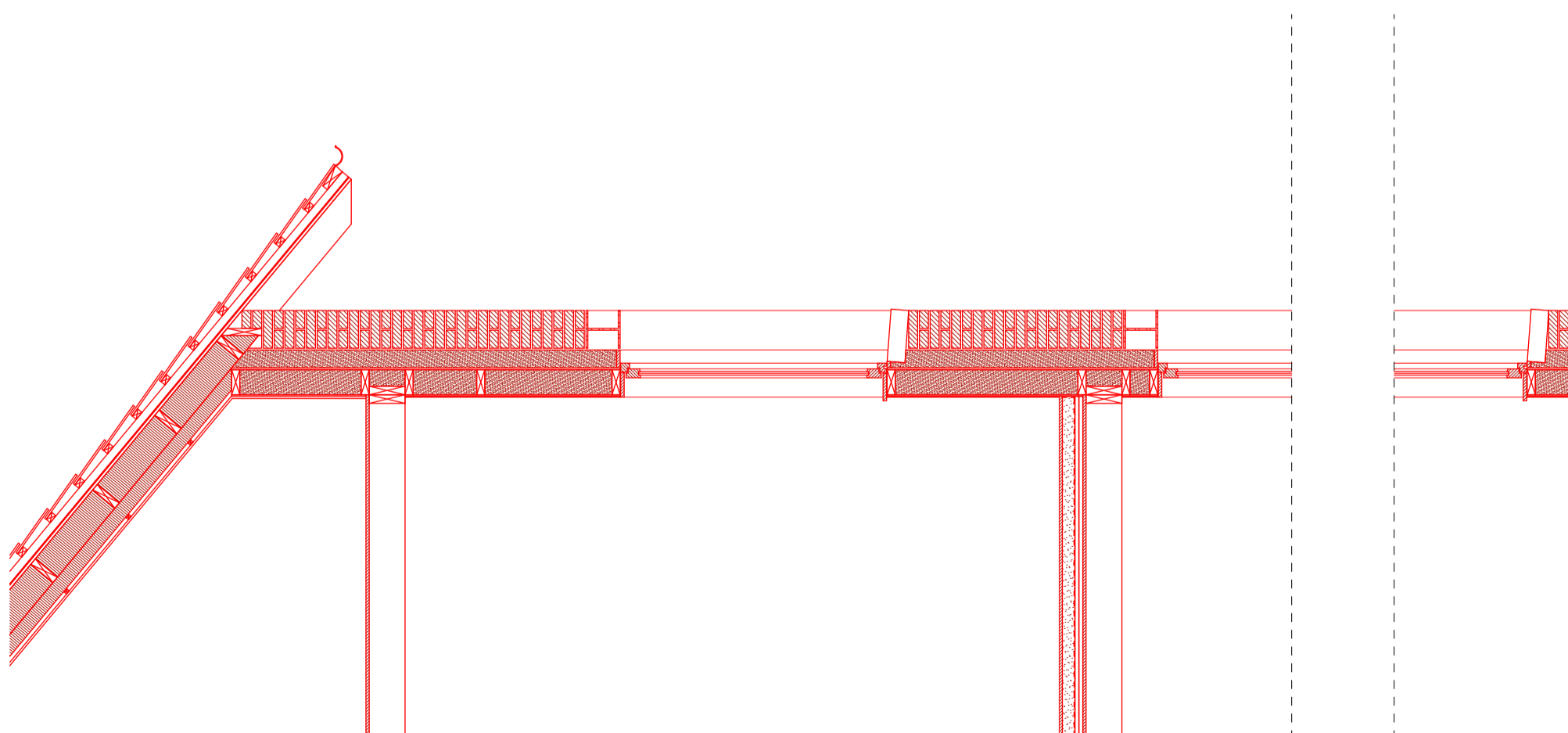
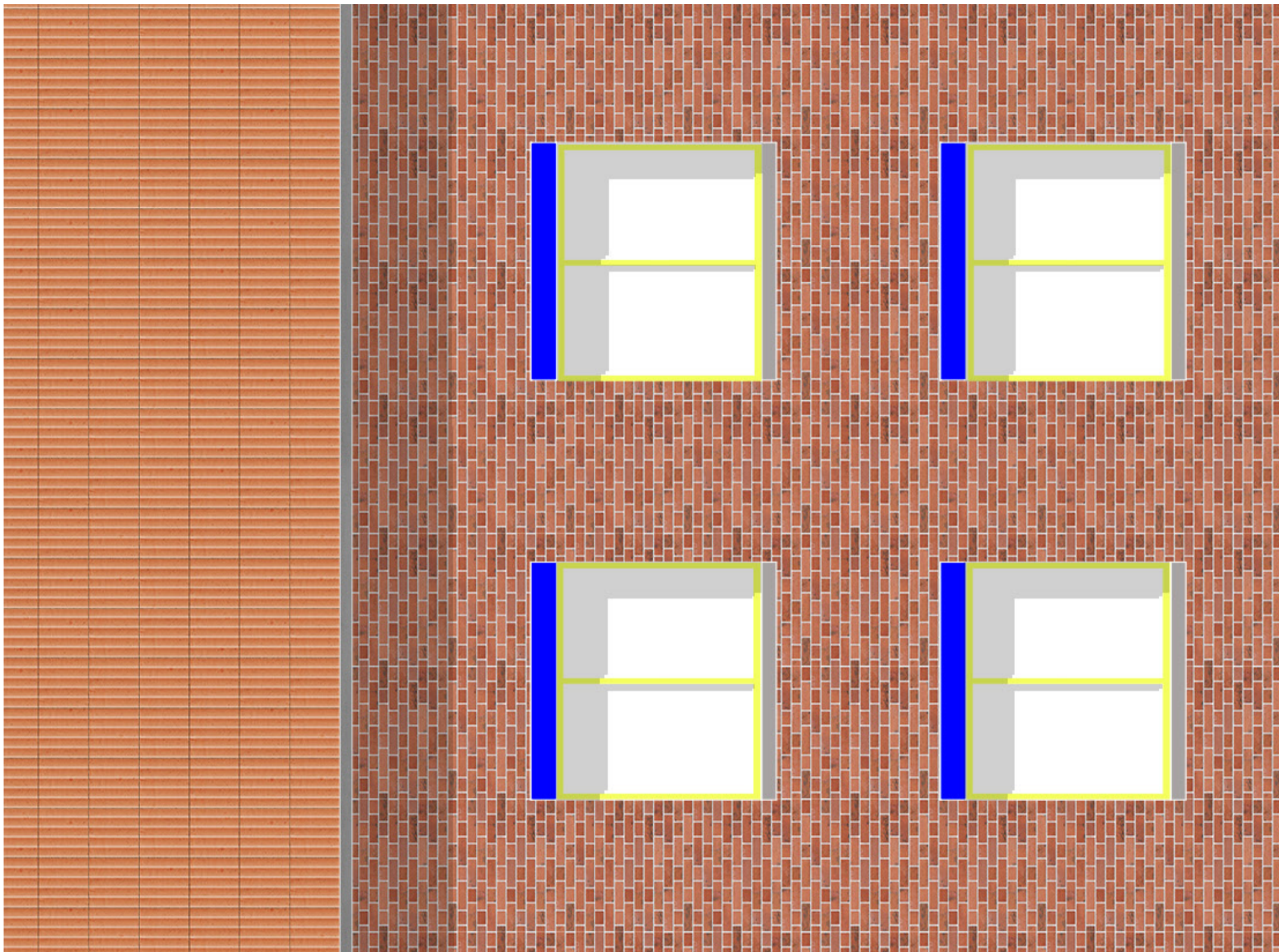
Little space at Circularium. a small kitchen corner in the shared workspace, objects display the care and character. photographed and collaged by author.

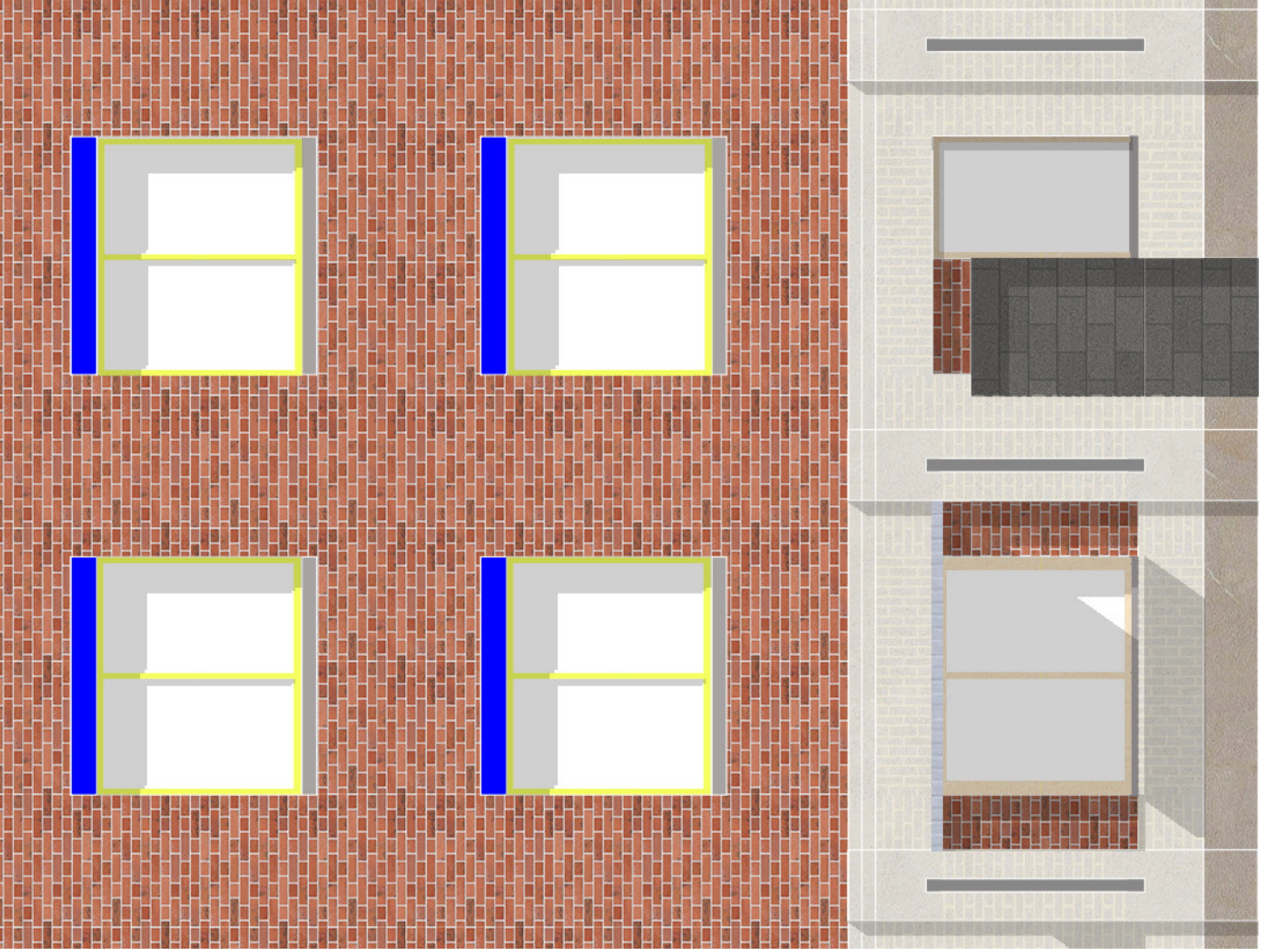


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ROOF

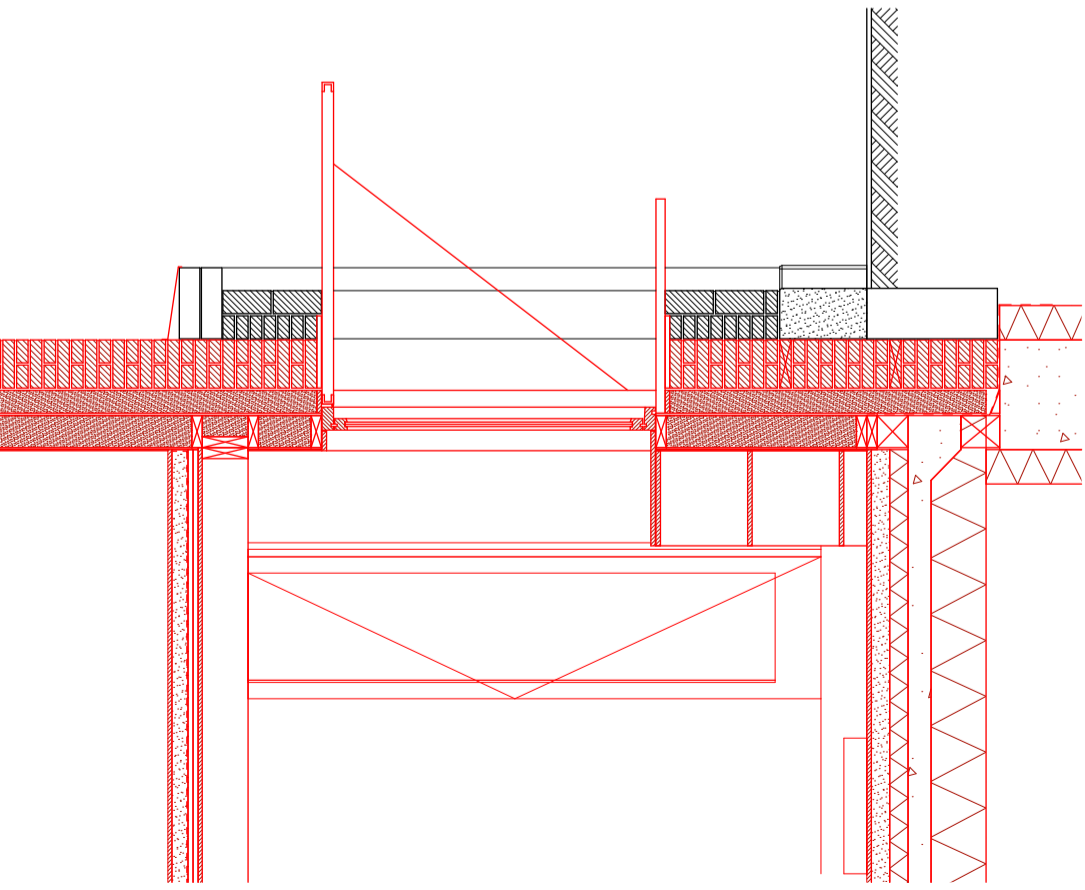
- Clay interlocking tiles 30mm
- Tiling battens 45mm
- Counter battens 22mm
- Timber rafter 160mm
- Thermal insulation, rockwool 160mm
- Thermal insulation, rockwool 80mm
- Battens 18mm
- Plasterboard 12mm

FLOOR

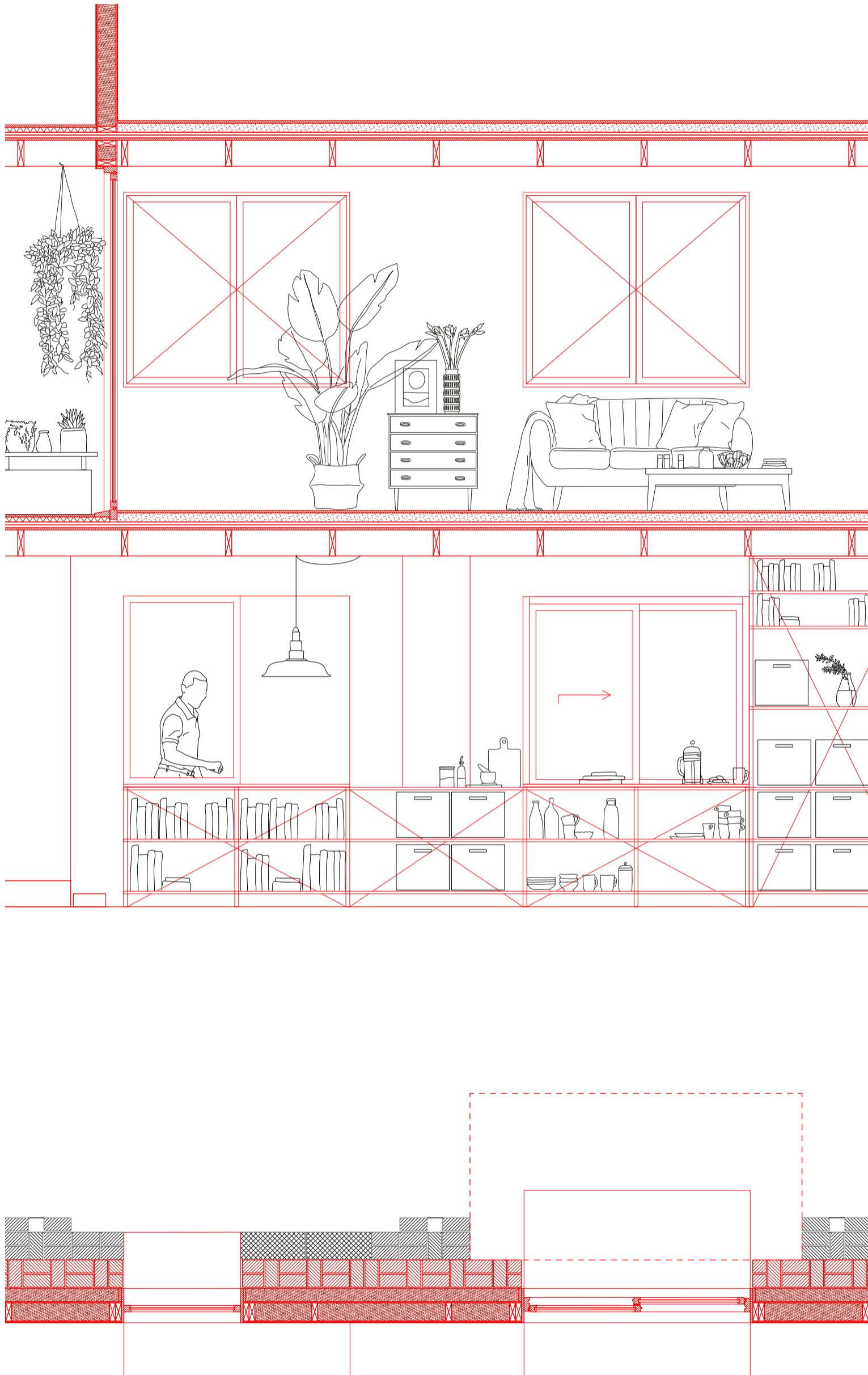
- Floor finish 18mm
- Screed with underfloor heating 70mm
- 2x Acoustic decoupling mat in fibreboard 44mm
- Plywood 18mm
- Wooden Beam 200mm

FOUNDATION

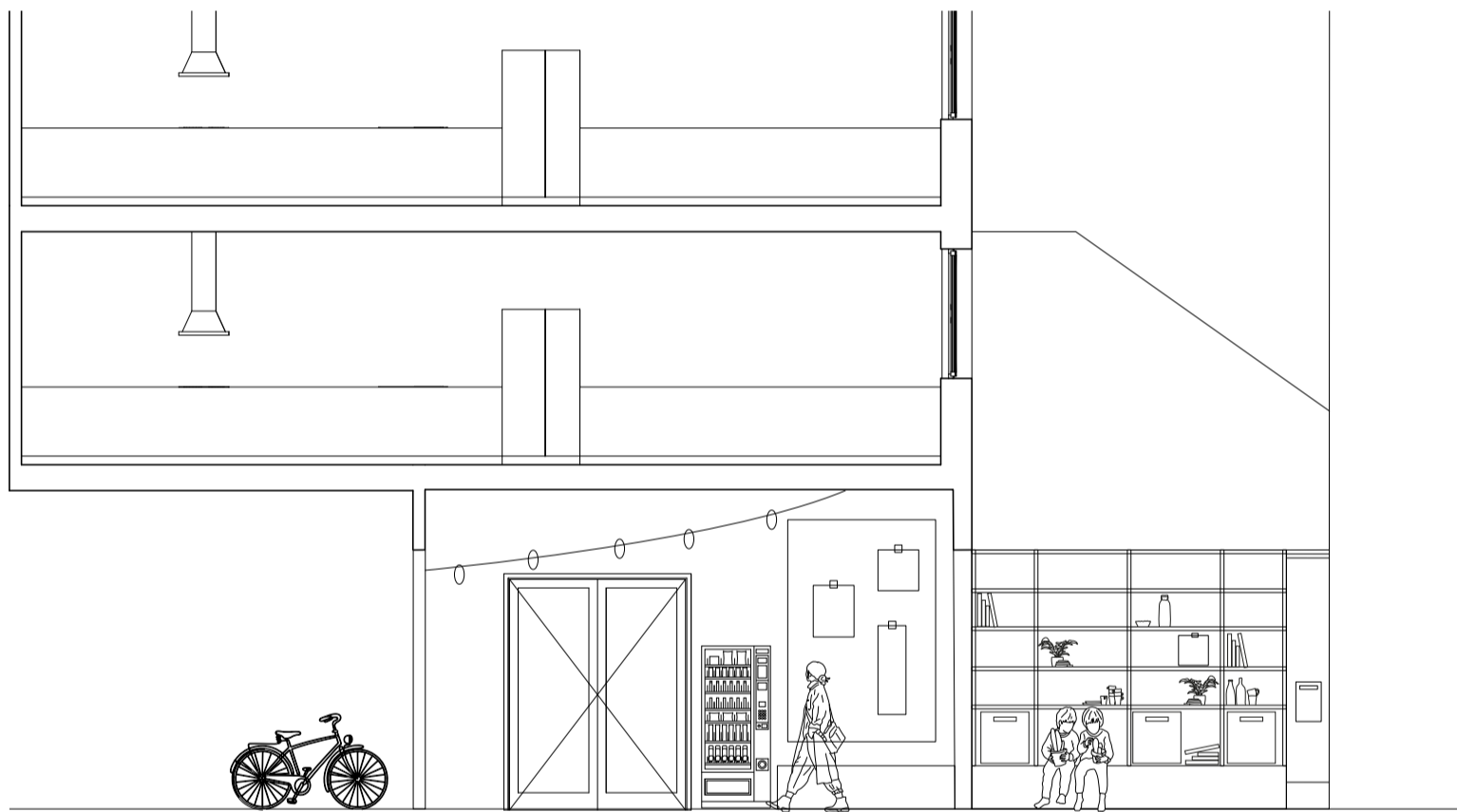
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- Screed with underfloor heating 70mm
- Thermal insulation 80mm
- Concrete floor 100mm
- Thermal insulation 240mm
- Concrete beam 480mm



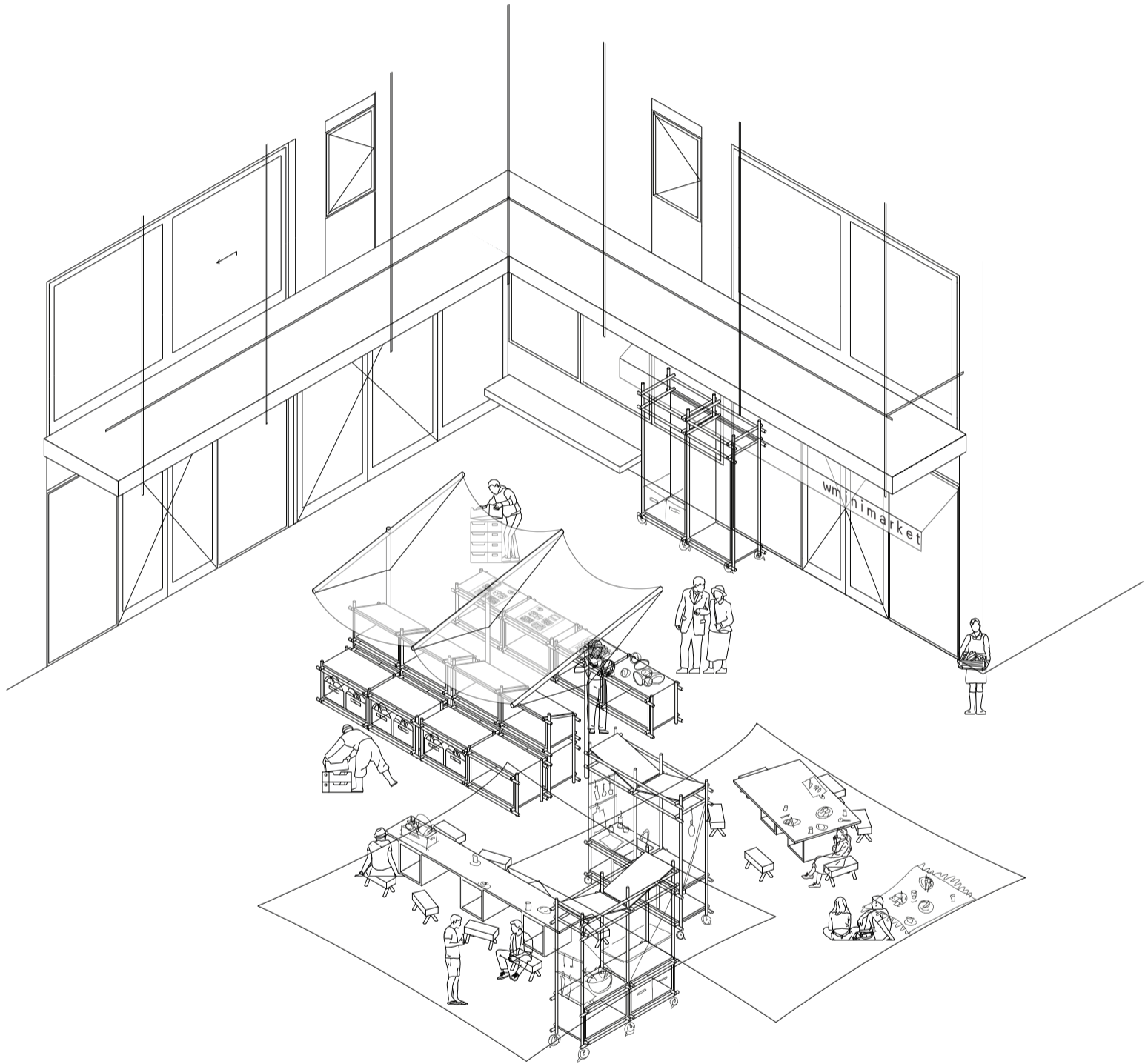
Kiosk



Entrance



Market square

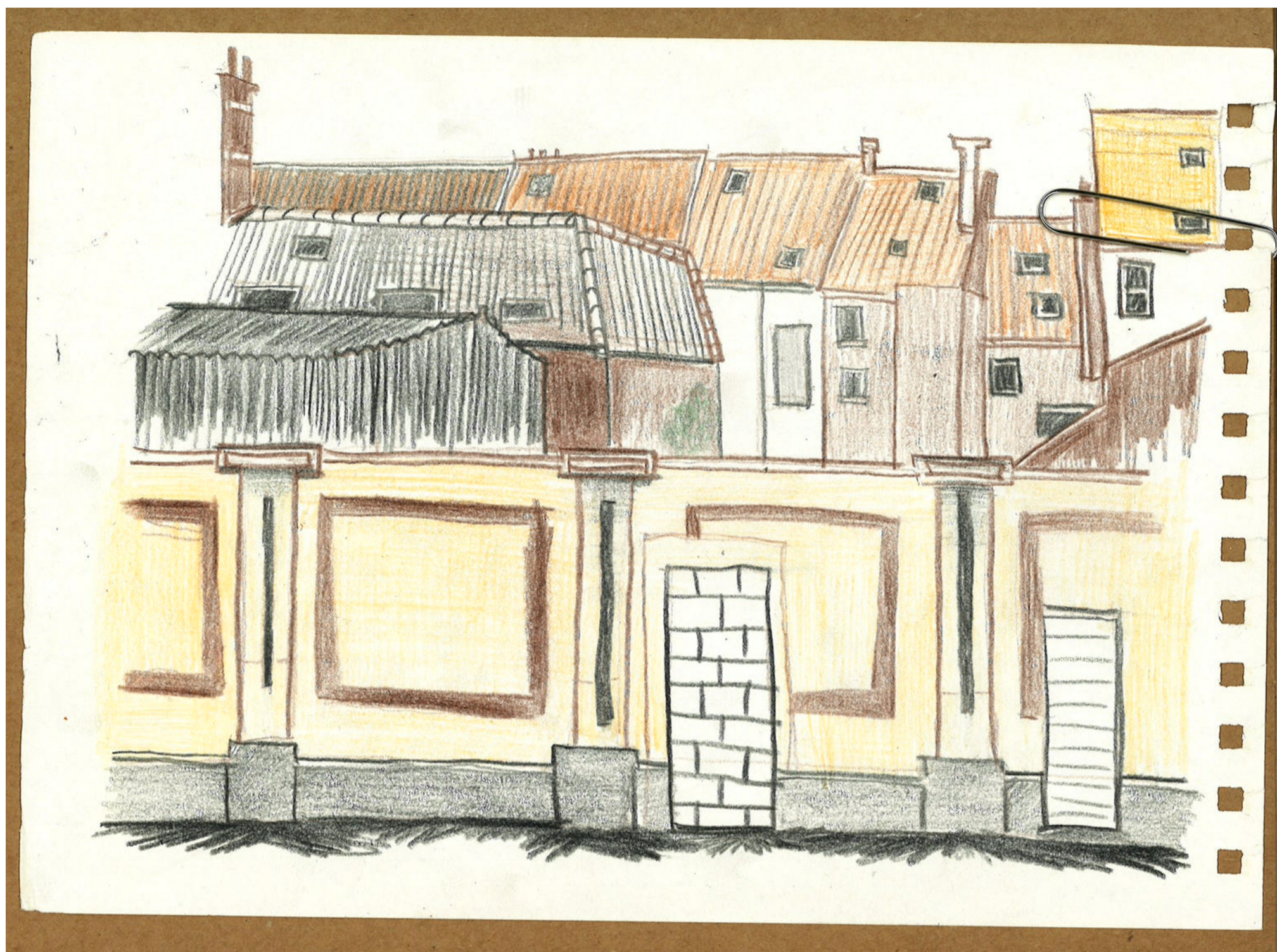




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Crayon drawing of the existing brick wall on the Rue du Compas. Drawing by author.



Over ons

Het Vlaams-Afrikaans huis Kuumba is de plek waar Afrikaanse en Vlaamse culturen samenkomen voor uitwisseling, dialoog en plezier. Onze werking wordt gesteund en geleid door onze vrijwilligers, die bijna allemaal van Afrikaanse origine zijn.

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