

A MATERIAL IMPRINT

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Heyvaert
1070 Anderlecht Brussels

1070 Anderlecht Rue du Compas 44

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Brick City

Brick as Urban Narrator

Belgium, like the Netherlands, has long been recognised as a country of brick and stone. More than a construction material, brick carries within its fabric traces of craftsmanship, construction, and transformation. A single brick already tells a story, but through its accumulation in walls, streets, and buildings it becomes part of a larger urban narrative. Brickwork records occupation, repair, adaptation, and growth over time. In this sense, brick is not merely a building material, but one of the protagonists of the city itself.

Brick creates the background fabric that allows other things to change. It acts as a vessel for urban memory, an archive of living history, it can weather, age, and carry traces of successive occupations while maintaining continuity between generations. To allow brick to tell this story, however, it must recover its tectonic authenticity. The solidity and permanence inherent to the material should not be concealed, but expressed.

Brick Dress

This raises the paradox identified by Jan Peter Wingender in *Brick: An Exacting Material*: the ambiguous role of the contemporary cavity-wall façade, suspended between load-bearing structure and cladding. Wingender describes this condition as the “brick dress”, a façade that can conceal the anatomy of the building behind it. Drawing on Semper’s notion of dressing, the brick façade becomes an image detached from construction, representing the ideal rather than the necessity of building.

This ambiguous role of brick is explored in the work of BLAF Architects, who sees the brick dress as the future ruin. In projects such as the JTB House, a self-supporting brick shell becomes the permanent outer layer, while a timber-framed interior is inserted within it. The result is a box-in-box construction that rethinks the relationship between permanence and change, structure and enclosure.

Permanence and Temporality

This approach gains additional significance when viewed against the history of construction in Belgium. Before the seventeenth century, timber was the predominant building material, and wooden structures were often treated almost as furniture: dismantled, moved, and reconstructed when necessary. The simplified association of brick with permanence and timber with temporality continues to shape architectural thinking today.

The dialogue between these two materials forms an important point of departure for the project. A permanent, solid brick façade contains lighter timber-framed interior volumes. The robust outer shell provides continuity and longevity, while the interior remains capable of adaptation and change. The project tries to embrace the coexistence of permanence and temporality.

Through this approach, structural brickwork becomes more than a construction technique. Like the city itself, it is an incremental material capable of recording time, occupation, and urban memory. Each brick carries its own history, but together they construct a larger narrative that continues to evolve through generations of use, repair, and transformation.

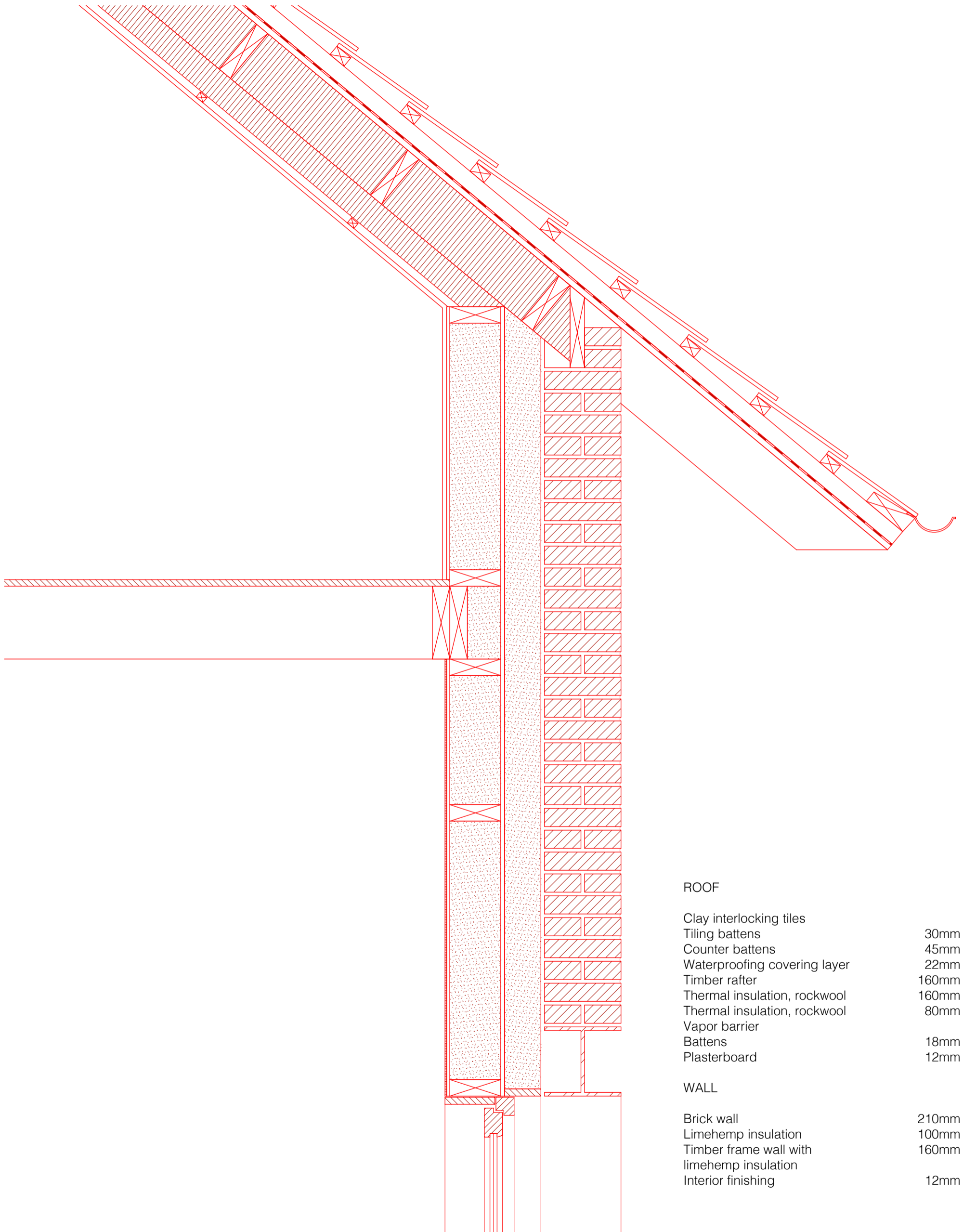
*Façade ruin. St-Elizabeth's Hospital renovation,
Washington DC*







Roof



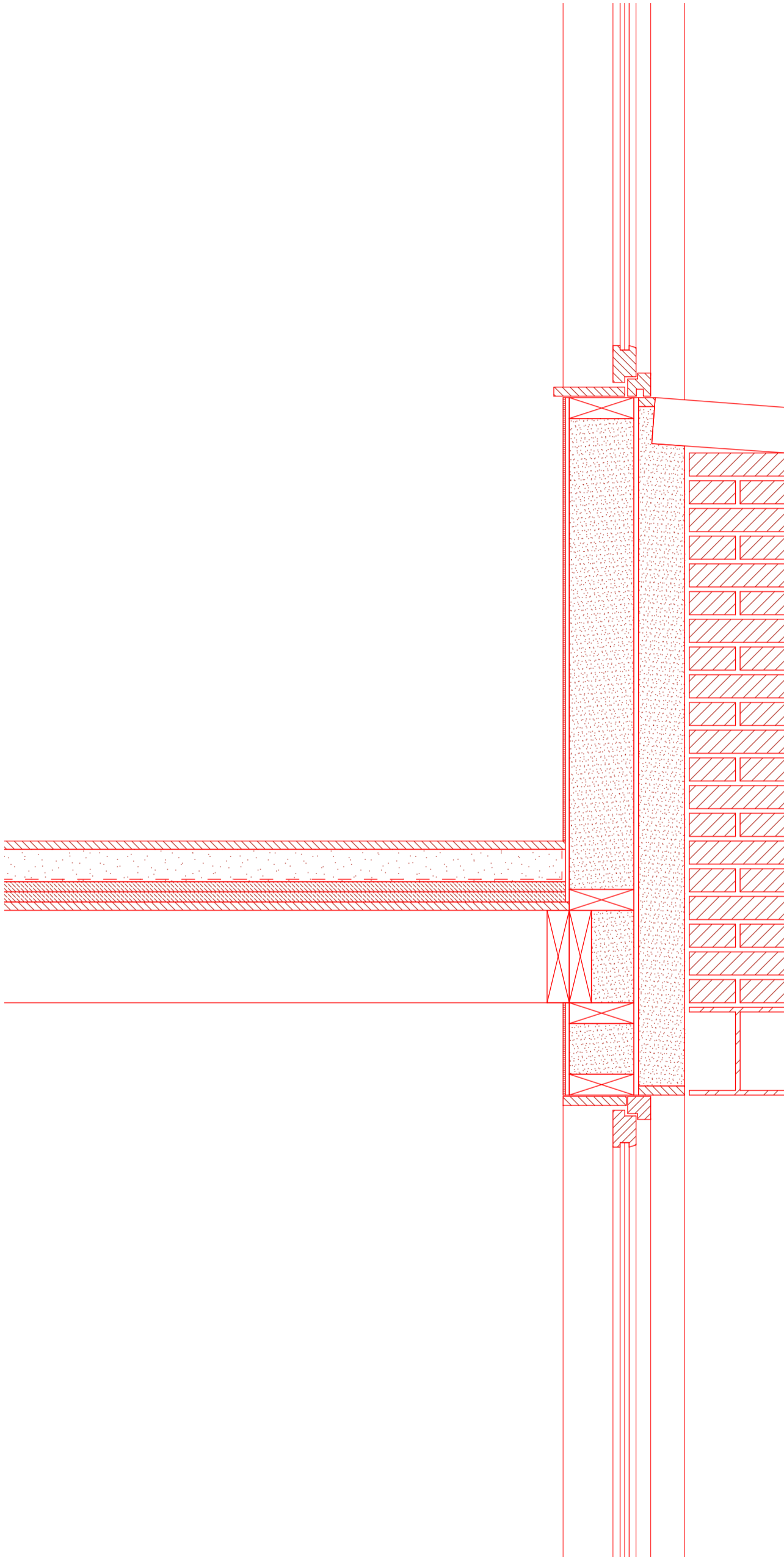
ROOF

Clay interlocking tiles	
Tiling battens	30mm
Counter battens	45mm
Waterproofing covering layer	22mm
Timber rafter	160mm
Thermal insulation, rockwool	160mm
Thermal insulation, rockwool	80mm
Vapor barrier	
Battens	18mm
Plasterboard	12mm

WALL

Brick wall	210mm
Limehemp insulation	100mm
Timber frame wall with limehemp insulation	160mm
Interior finishing	12mm

Window



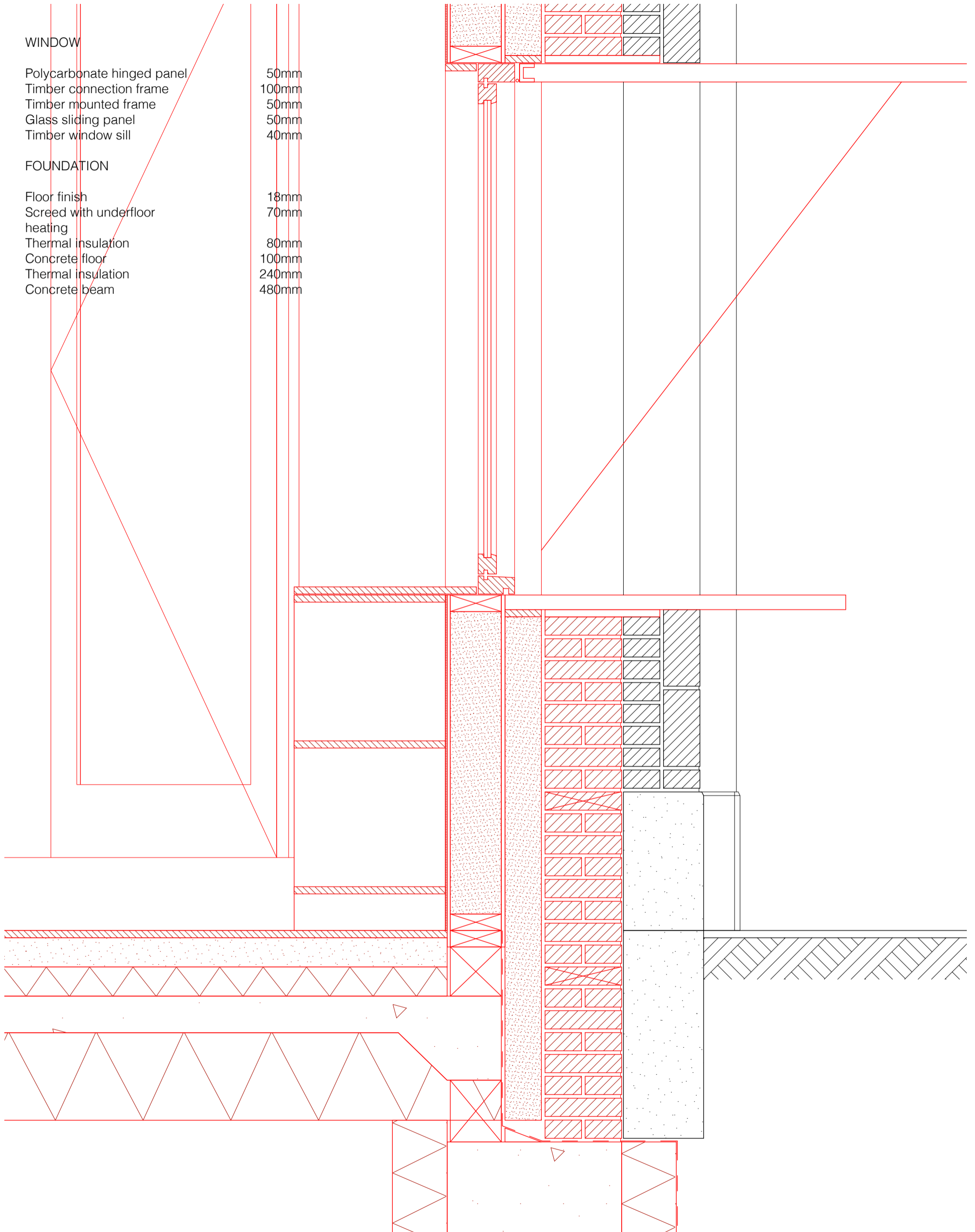
WINDOW

Steel lintel	190mm
Timber connection frame	50mm
Timber mounted frame	55mm
Glass window panel	50mm
Stone window sill	100mm

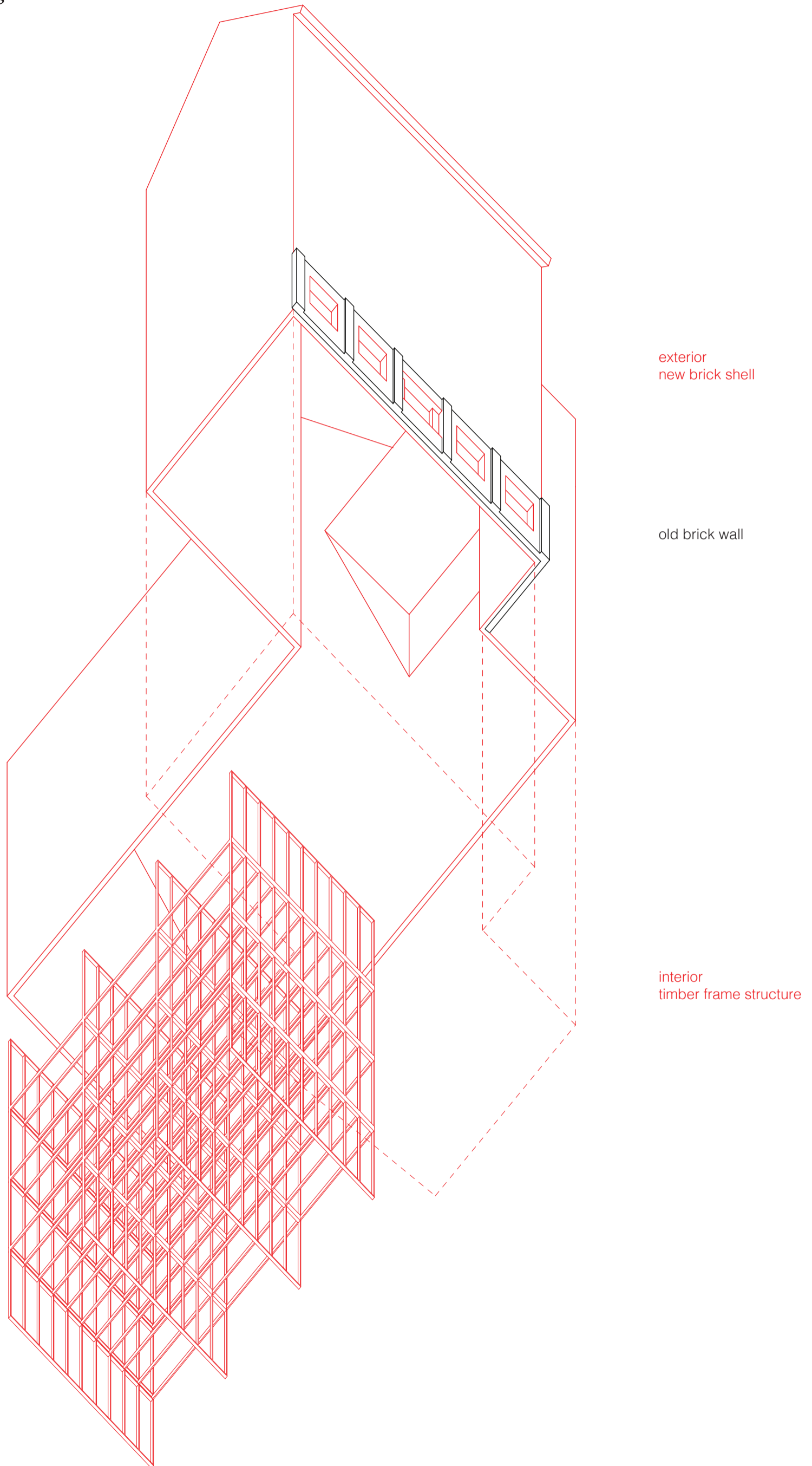
FLOOR

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

Foundation

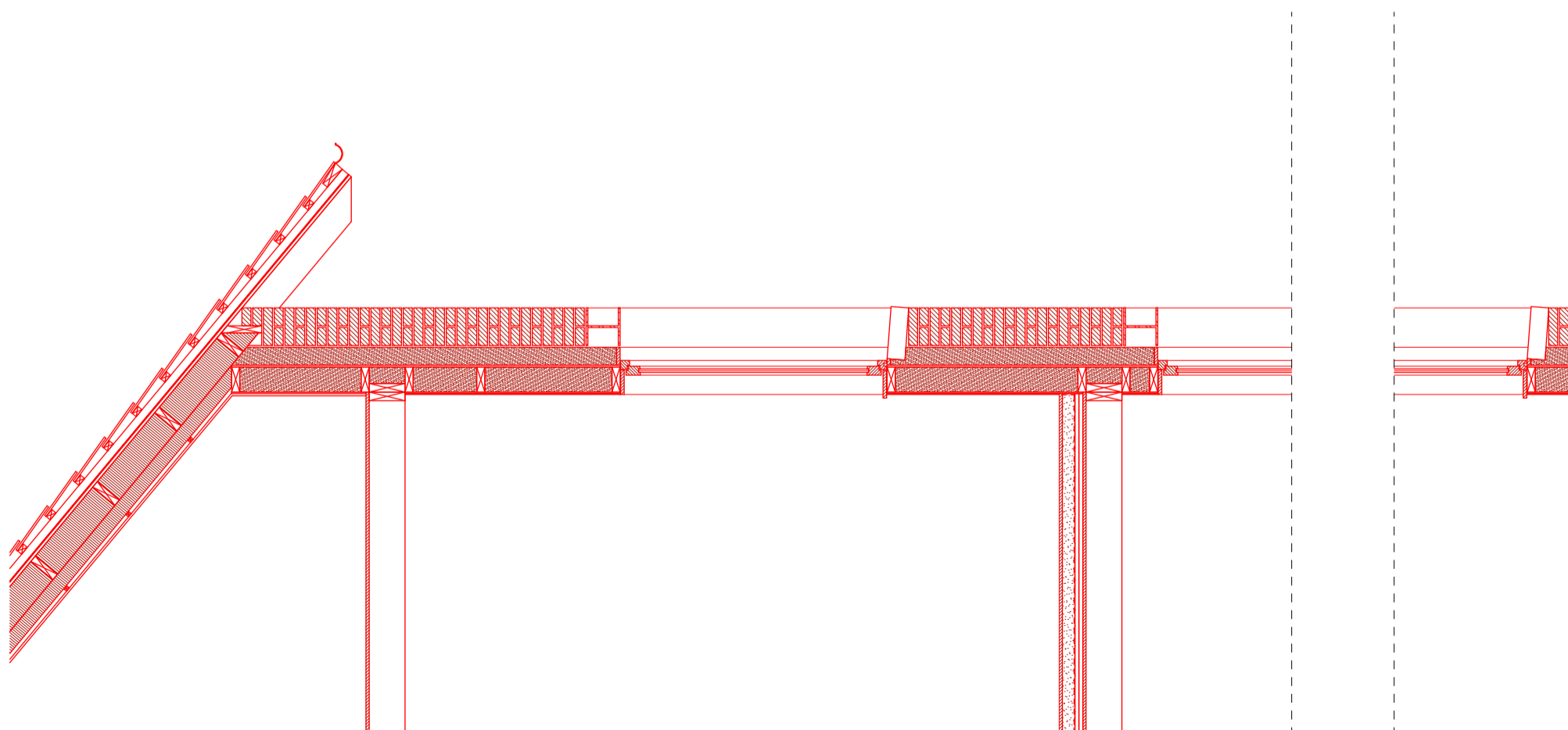
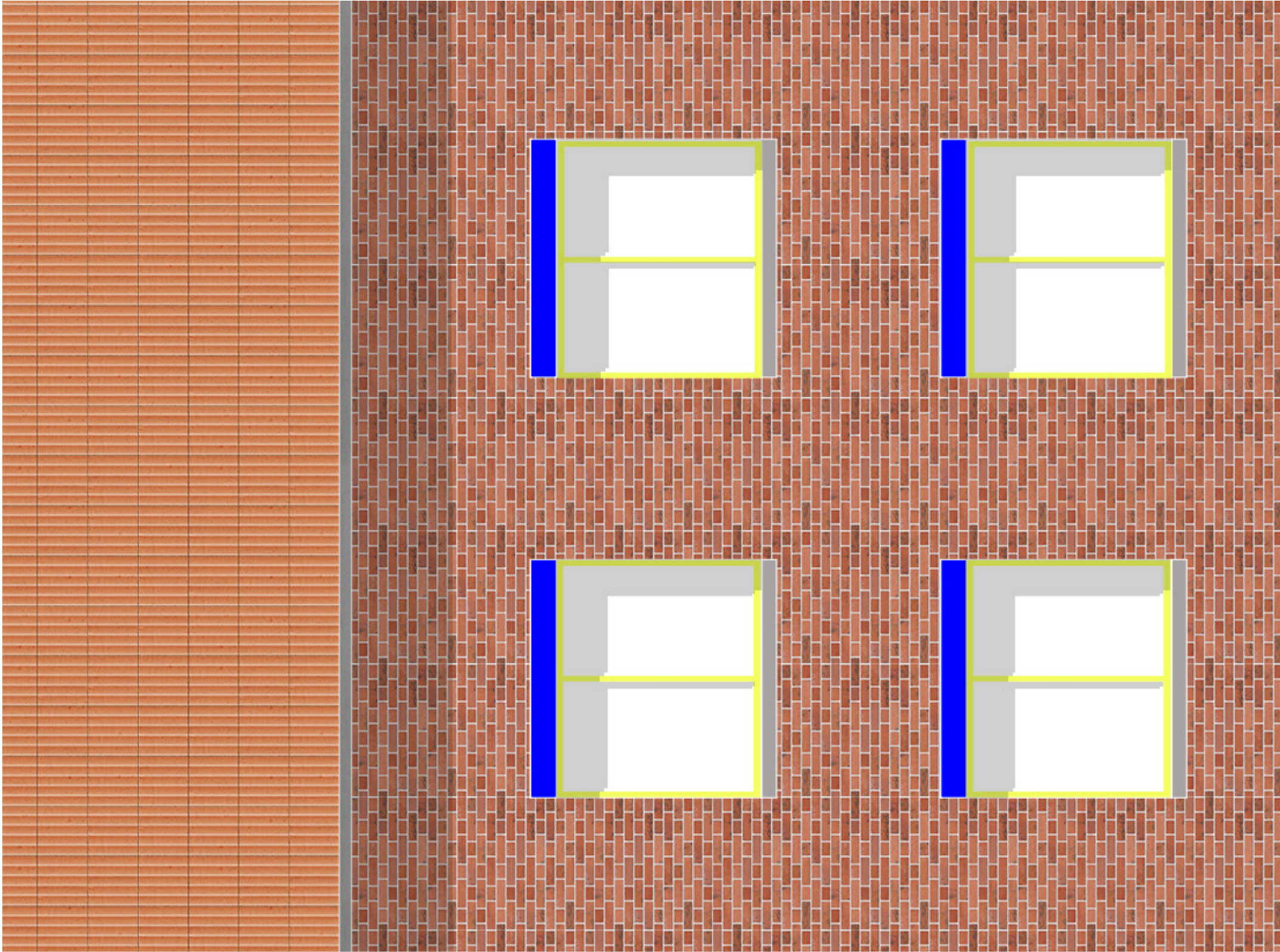


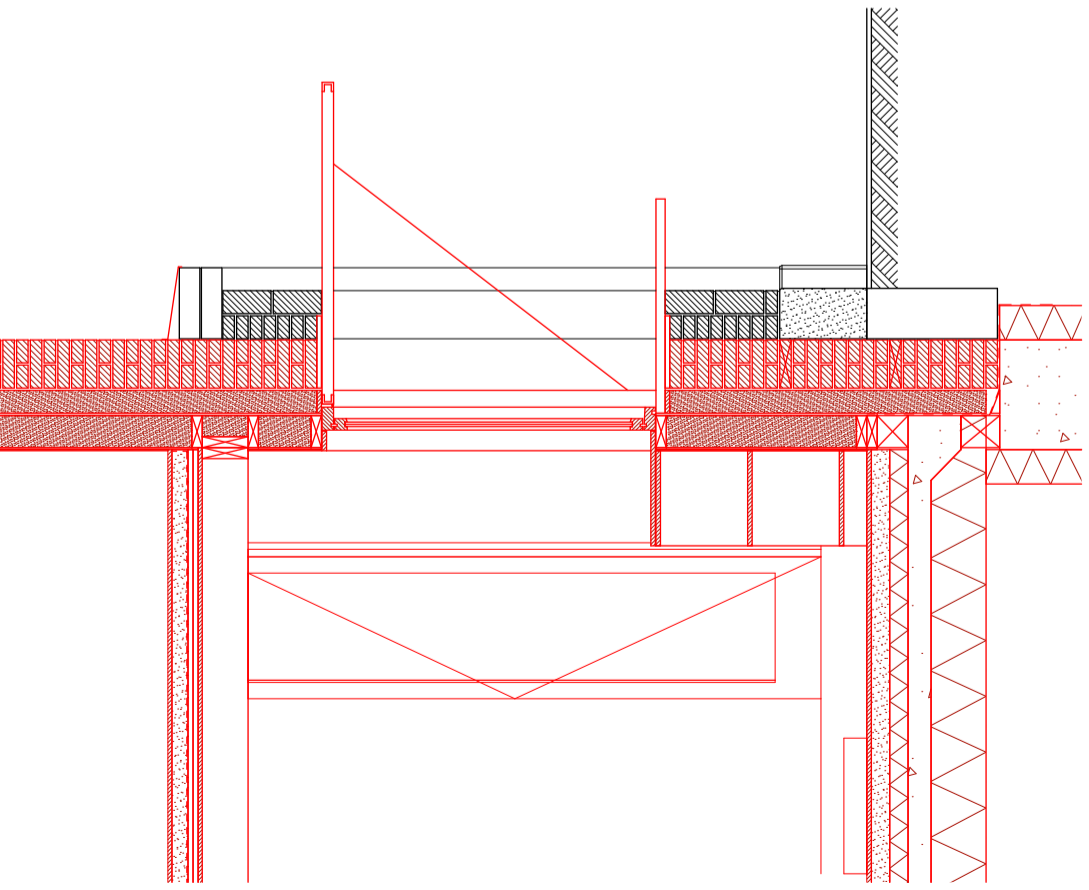
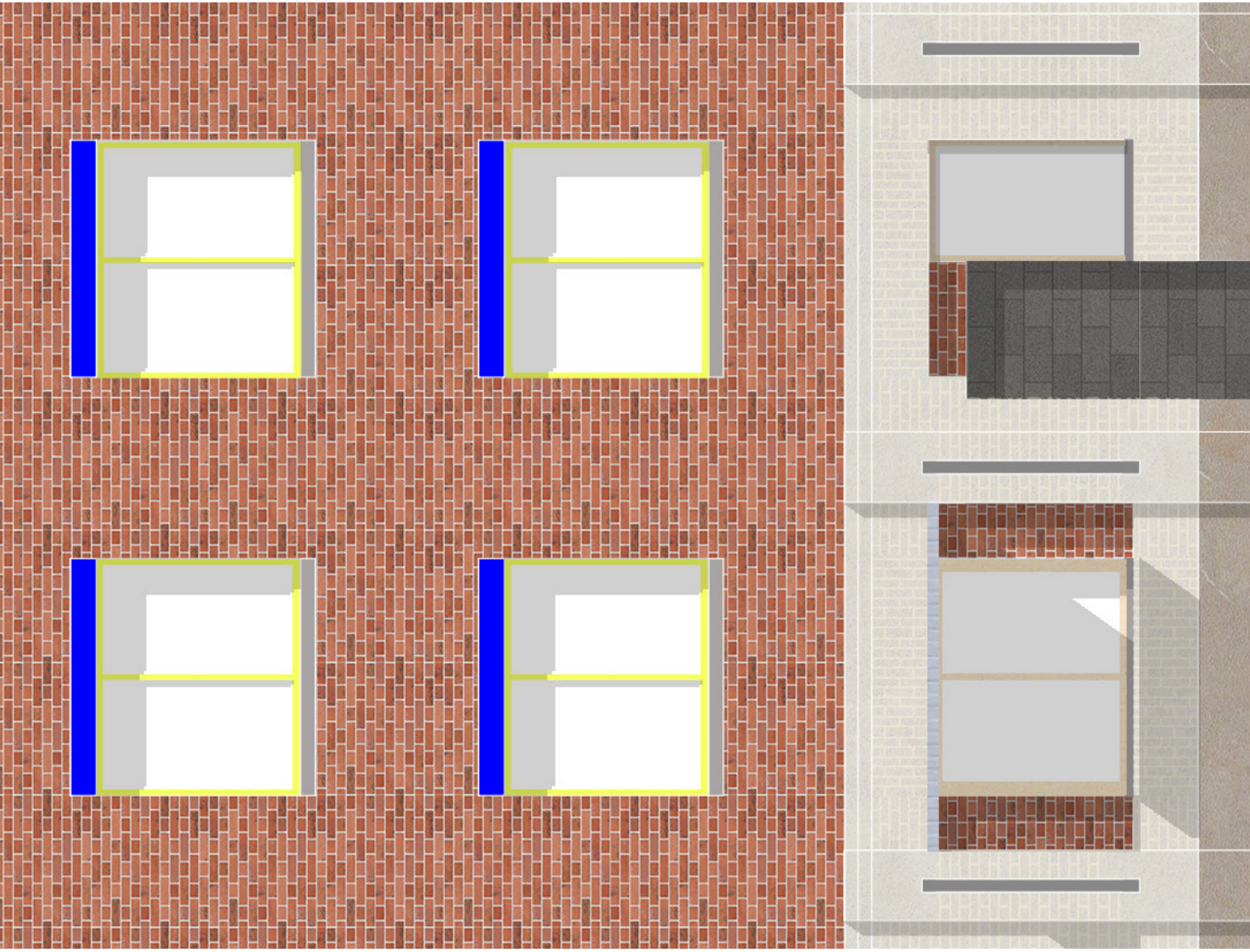
structural diagram



climate diagram







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

- Floor finish 18mm
- Screed with underfloor heating 70mm
- Thermal insulation 80mm
- Concrete floor 100mm
- Thermal insulation 240mm
- Concrete beam 480mm

Brussels's Material Bank



In Brussels

In the fieldtrip after the Midterm presentation, the idea of constant collecting, composing and reusing of the available resources was recurring in the projects we visited. Throughout the different buildings, there was an ongoing exchange between architecture and its surroundings, creating numerous “little spaces” and moments of interaction. The projects embodied patchworks of materials, layers of time, and traces of past and present uses. Even everyday activities and maintenance became visible within the architectural framework, becoming part of the life of the building itself.

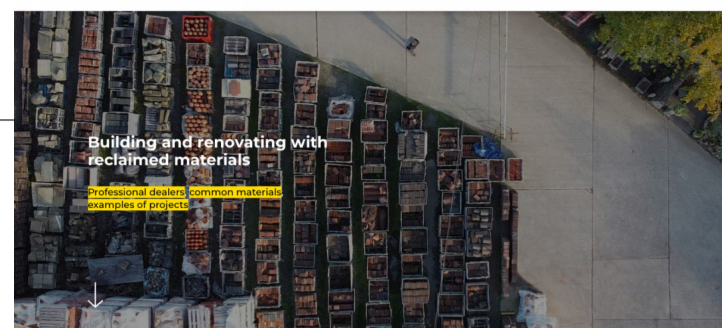
In the contemporary dance and music center by OUEST, existing elements were carefully preserved and incorporated into the new intervention. The communal kitchen walls displayed a patchwork of repairs and infills, revealing different layers of modifications made to the same structure over time. A tree was retained in the garden, and the building unfolded around it rather than replacing it. The project also established a strong relationship with the city through framed views towards the urban landscape and the train lines below.

In the renovation project of a local movie theatre, elements such as the old cashier window and former circulation routes were maintained. These fragments preserved the memory and nostalgia of the place for those who had known it in the past. At the same time, the restored cinema offered a completely new experience for future visitors. Rather than rewriting history, the new interventions overlapped with existing memories, allowing multiple narratives to coexist within the same space.

The final project from CENTRAL, Magasin 4 offered another perspective on this process. The architect explained that they had not returned to the building after its completion. They had won the competition, designed the project, constructed it, and delivered it to the community. From that moment onward, the community took ownership of the space. During the visit, the walls of the hemp-block construction were covered with layers of posters, and the main hall had been painted black, concealing the original material. The spaces had been continuously adapted to meet the changing needs of their users. The architecture had become a living framework rather than a finished object.

Across all of these projects, traces of the old and the new continuously overlap. They may appear to be covered, erased, or overwritten, yet they always remain present, whether physically embedded in the building or preserved in collective memory. Every repair, modification, and composition tells a story.

In this sense, materiality extends beyond physical matter. It is no longer only about brick, concrete, or timber. Material becomes social and collective. Its imprint forms a network of stories carried by the people who have visited, inhabited, transformed, or simply encountered a place. Through these accumulated traces, architecture becomes a vessel for memory, use, and ongoing life.



Editor's Note

Looking back at the project, I realize that it was primarily constructed through my own perspective. In many ways, I became the protagonist of the story I was trying to tell. The design emerged as my reaction to the diverse characters of Heyvaert and to the complexity of the city itself. While the project presents the voices of the tailor, the food trader, the resident, and the kiosk owner, the selection of these protagonists, the traces I followed, and the spaces I chose to present were all filtered through my own lens.

Throughout the project, I became increasingly aware that architecture cannot be the only story a city tells. Cities are not defined solely by their buildings but by the people who inhabit them and the everyday practices through which they continuously produce urban life. The proposal therefore should not be understood as a definitive vision for the site, but rather as one possible fictional narrative among many that could emerge from this urban fragment. If the project were viewed through someone else's eyes, a completely different story might unfold. This multiplicity of perspectives is precisely what makes the city rich, complex, and impossible to reduce to a singular identity.

My fascination with what is often considered "urban dirt", informal storage, discarded furniture, food waste, clutter, and messy appropriations of space, became a guiding theme throughout the design process. These elements are often overlooked or treated as signs of disorder, yet for me they reveal the everyday negotiations between people and their environment. They are traces of occupation, adaptation, and life. In this sense, they became the lenses through which I read Heyvaert and constructed my fictional story. The kiosk owner, the grocery store owners, the tailor, and the newly arrived families became the main characters inhabiting this narrative.

At the same time, the project was shaped by a persistent struggle between architecture and lived experience. The moments and spaces that fascinated me most were not the result of a singular architectural gesture but rather the outcome of multiple actors, overlapping activities, and the gradual accumulation of time. The beauty of these small urban spaces often emerged accidentally rather than intentionally. Yet the architectural intervention I was proposing remained, at this moment, static and speculative.

This tension raised an important question: if the most meaningful spaces are produced through everyday life, what is the role of the architect? Throughout the project, I arrived at the understanding that architecture should not attempt to prescribe life but rather create the conditions in which life can unfold. While informal appropriations and encounters cannot be fully designed, they often depend on a spatial framework that enables them to happen. The architect's role, therefore, is not to design every moment but to provide a resilient background that supports change, adaptation, and occupation over time.

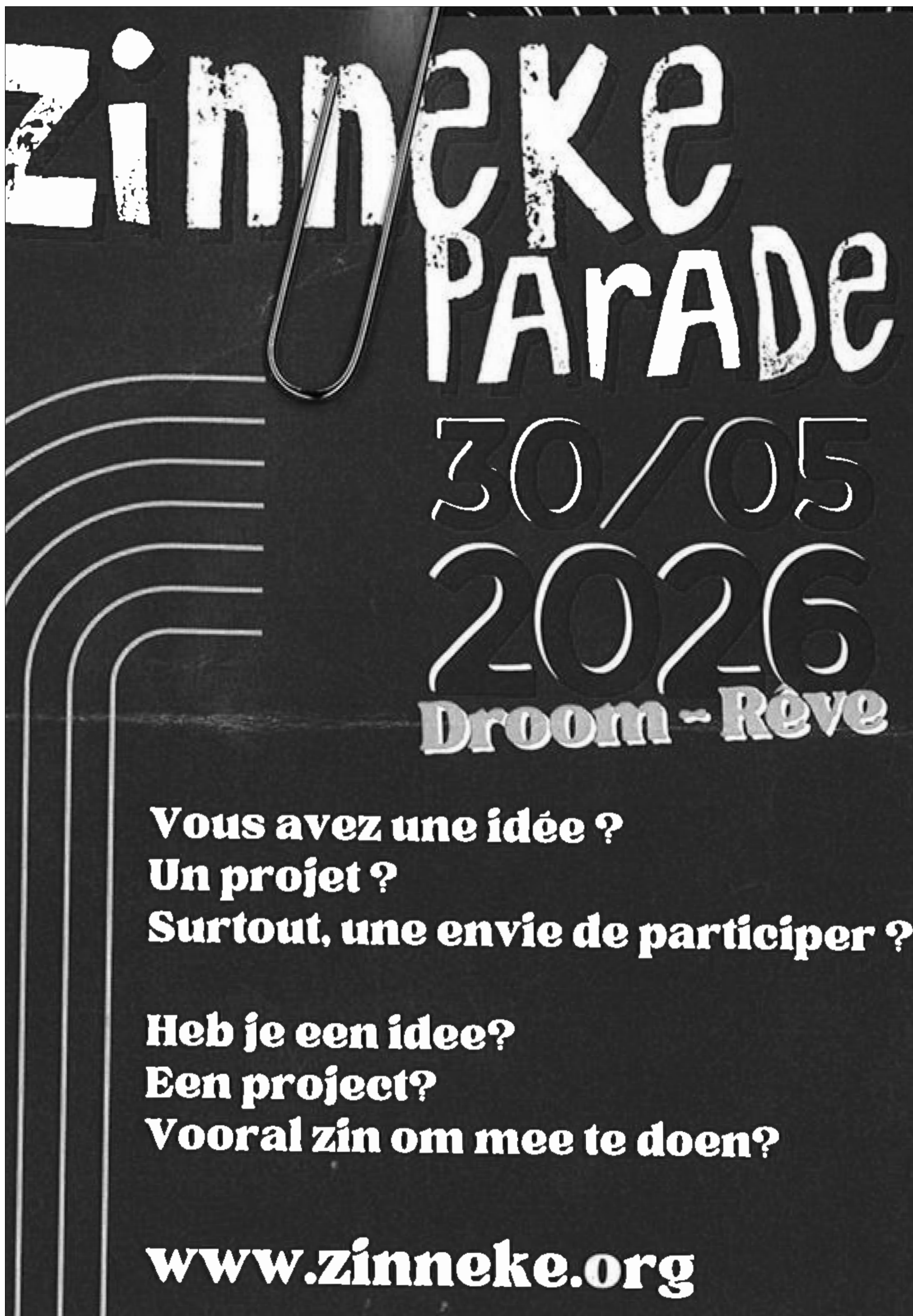
The proposal of the kiosk reflects this position. Rather than introducing a dominant object, it acts as a spatial binder and catalyst between existing activities. Likewise, the decision to preserve what already exists and to emphasize architectural layering acknowledges that the identity of Heyvaert is not created through a single intervention but through continuous processes of transformation and accumulation. The use of brick reinforces this idea, recording the intervention while remaining part of a larger story that will continue to evolve long after the project is completed.

In the end, this project has shifted my understanding of architecture. I no longer see architecture as a finished object, but as one participant within a broader network of people, materials, activities, and temporal processes. The city is continuously produced through everyday life, and architecture's role is to support that production rather than control it. The project therefore becomes less a final design proposal and more a reflection on how architecture can engage with the plurality, messiness, and incompleteness that define urban life.

Like a Tetris board that is never complete, Heyvaert remains open, unfinished, and alive.

Group picture in Brussels. Urban Architecture Graduation
Studio 25/26





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