

Reflection

My graduation project investigates the adaptive reuse of smaller maritime heritage sites, focusing on the Delta Shipyard and Water Tower in Sliedrecht. This work aligns with the Architecture track (A) within the MSc AUBS programme, which emphasizes integrated approaches to design, heritage, and sustainability. The project responds to a gap in both literature and practice, where attention is often given to large-scale port areas while smaller industrial sites remain underrepresented. While this provided an opportunity to contribute new insights, it also exposed a limitation in my own approach: I underestimated how challenging it would be to work with such a sparsely documented site and should have anticipated the lack of archival and technical material earlier in the process.

My research initially aimed to define clear, transferable strategies for reuse. However, I discovered that such clarity is difficult to maintain when working with a real site whose complexity resists categorization. I began with three distinct design strategies, but in practice, these often overlapped or conflicted. In retrospect, I should have embraced this ambiguity earlier, and framed my strategies as adaptable frameworks rather than fixed categories. My iterative process eventually led me to a more fluid approach, but earlier openness to complexity could have streamlined both the research and the design development.

The relationship between design and research was, at its best, productive and reciprocal. For instance, historical research highlighted the slipway's value, which directly informed my decision to preserve and emphasize it in the design. However, my attachment to certain early design moves, particularly the bridge connecting both sides of the shipyard, hindered the evolution of the project. I held onto this idea for too long and it was only after P3 that I removed it because I felt that it hindered my project more than it helped the accessibility. Replacing it with a ground-floor passage that preserved view across the river to the Biesbosch immediately resolved several spatial conflicts. This also freed up the front area, allowing me to introduce a semi-outdoor garden that strengthened the public character of the project. While these changes improved the design, I recognize that they came late in the process, limiting the time I had to refine the new configuration and its spatial qualities.

The decision to move the café to the back, add an elevator, an emergency escape, and a balcony on the bar improved the programmatic logic and accessibility of the project. However, these were reactive decisions rather than proactive ones. I see now that a more thorough analysis of circulation and accessibility could have guided these choices earlier and allowed for a more cohesive spatial experience across the site. Additionally, while I aimed to integrate material reuse into the project, I could have developed a clearer strategy for which elements would be reused, how they would be adapted, and

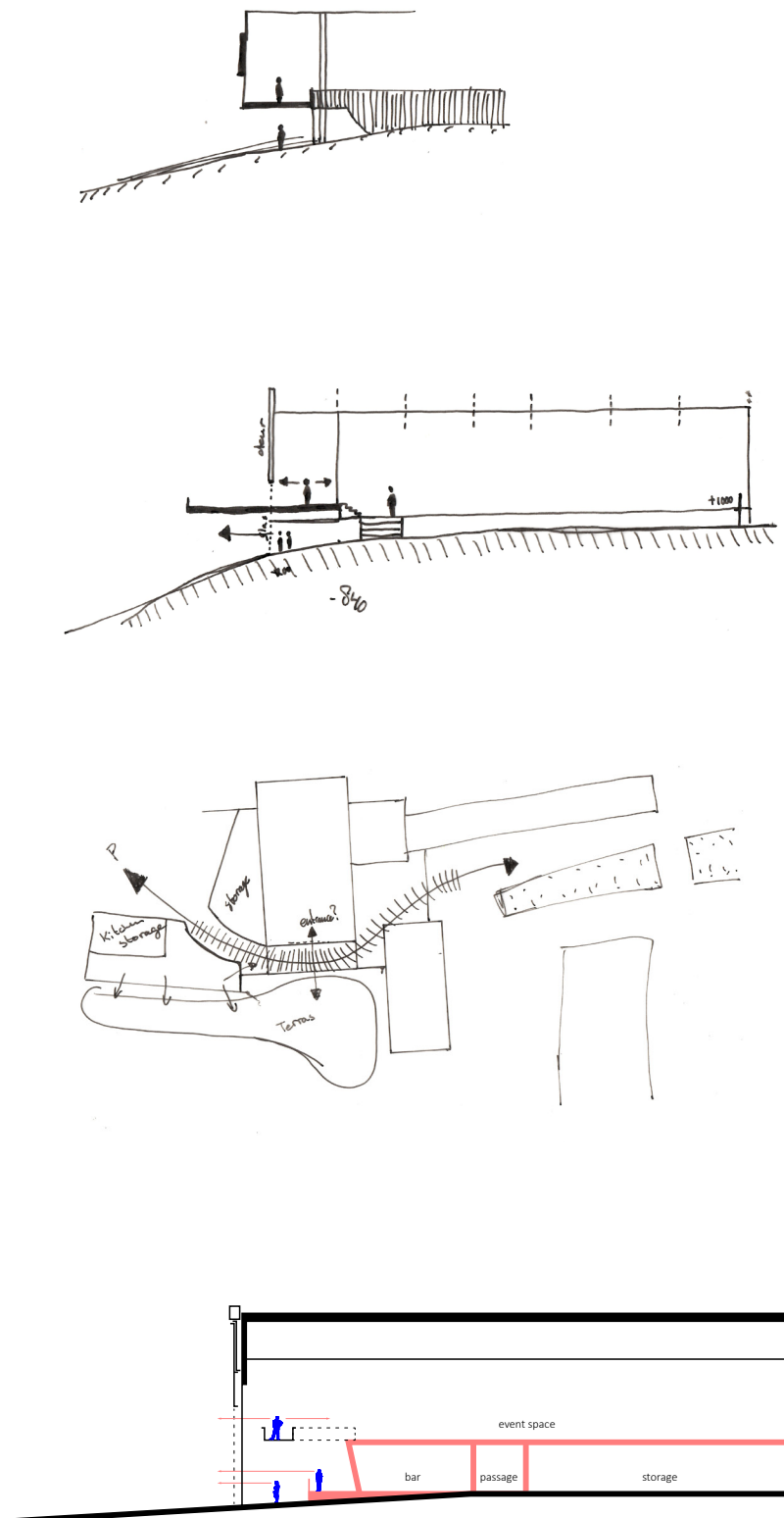


Image 1
Early sketch concepts for incorporating the slipway and waterfront as a central feature in the design, using a bridge as a key element.

how their historic materiality would be made visible in the new interventions. My approach to sustainability, while present, could have been more rigorously developed with specific performance goals or construction strategies.

I set out to balance historical preservation with new public uses. In retrospect, I now see that responsible reuse goes beyond respecting material heritage. It demands asking who the intervention serves, who it invites in, and who might be excluded. While the project promotes access and remembrance, these goals were more conceptual than embedded in participatory processes. A stronger stance would have required earlier and more sustained community engagement, particularly to ensure inclusivity and long-term relevance.

While the principles I developed, such as preservation through visibility, material reuse, and narrative layering, do hold potential for other sites, they remain too abstract to apply without significant adaptation. Future work should aim to develop more flexible tools or design frameworks that others can critically interpret and apply in diverse contexts, rather than presenting strategies as universally applicable solutions.

What challenges have arise in repurposing smaller shipyards?

Throughout my research, I encountered several challenges in repurposing smaller shipyards. One of the biggest difficulties was the lack of documentation, which made it challenging to develop informed preservation strategies. Additionally, their locations often pose constraints—some are isolated or prone to flooding, limiting redevelopment potential. I also realized that their size can be problematic, as they are often too large for small-scale uses yet too small for industrial purposes. Moreover, many structures are deteriorated, requiring careful decisions about preservation. These challenges reinforced the importance of site-specific solutions and a flexible approach to balancing historical authenticity with modern functionality.

What transferable lessons from the Delta Shipyard project can inform future heritage redevelopment?

The most valuable lesson has been the importance of adaptability in both design and mindset. Letting go of a developed design ideas, such as the bridge across the shipyard which I had until the P3 presentation, opened up a more coherent and site-sensitive solution. This process reaffirmed the value of letting research and design continuously inform one another. It also emphasized the importance of identifying and working with the existing strengths of a site to guide transformation rather than imposition.

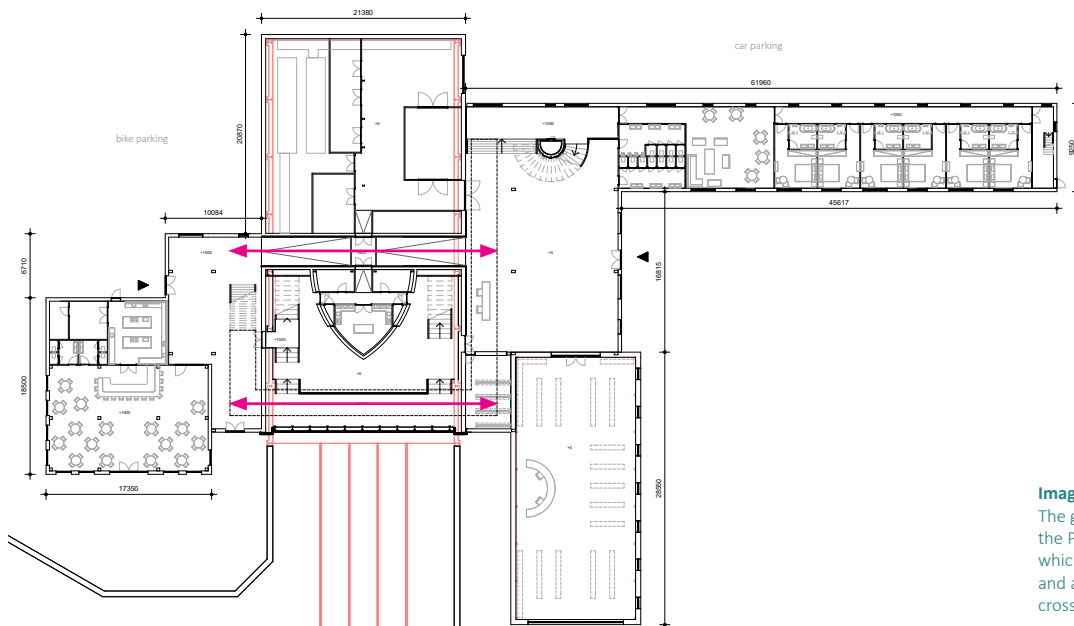


Image 2
The ground floor for the P3 presentation which had the bridge and a passage that crossed the main hall.

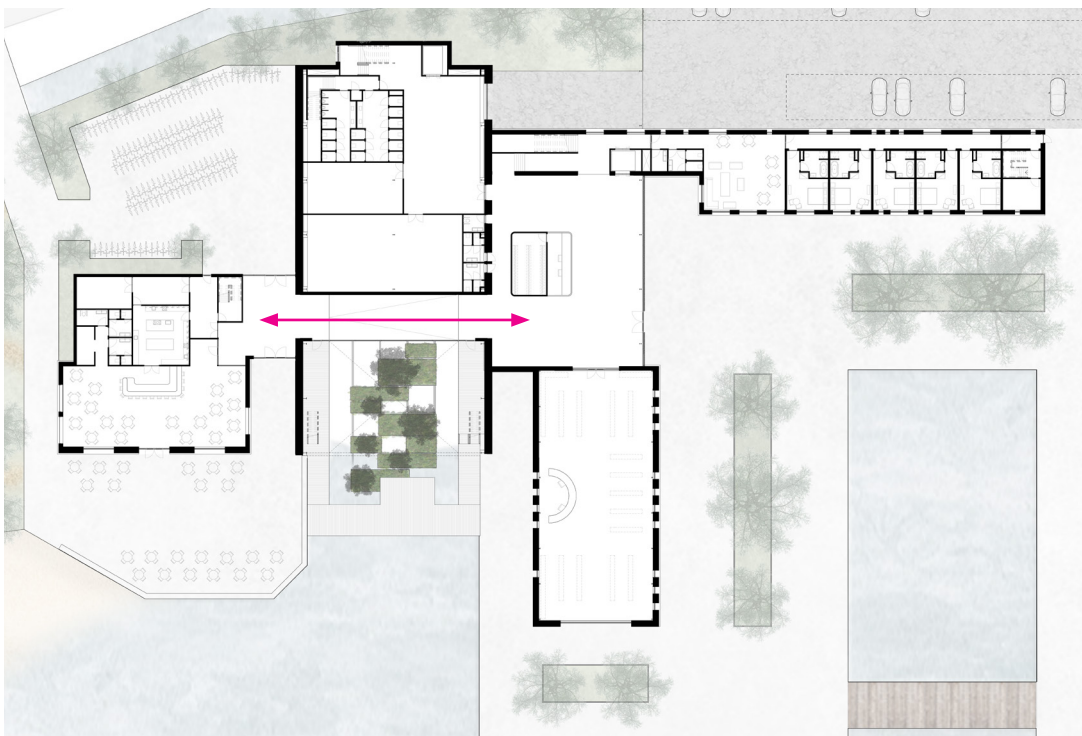


Image 3
Ground plan after the P3 presentation in which the bridge has been removed and the passage has been moved to the front of the shipyard for the view across the river. Both of these changes also have had their effects on the foyer.