

# Research Plan

## Kabinett

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# Introduction

## Context and Urban Setting

Centrally located, at the Helsinki Strasse in the upcoming Dreispitz neighbourhood in Basel, the Dreispitz tower - project 312 by Herzog & de Meuron - features an architecture archive with 40 apartments on top. This combination creates a rather unusual, possibly unique building type.

The Dreispitz neighbourhood used to be a fifty-hectare industrial area connecting the city of Basel with Munchenstein. The masterplan represented a warehouse and custom depot being transformed into an archive and residential complex. As a result of this plan, in 2001 there has been a substantial increase in density. (Fernández-Galiano, 2017)

Besides being housed in this unique typology, the archive itself can be seen as a rather unusual collection as well. Unlike the some more classical institutions, like the CCA for example, this is a private collection. Yet, its no personal collection, like the Soane Museum for example, either. The archive, as a collection also known as Kabinett, features the documentation of 600+ projects designed by Herzog & de Meuron since the foundation of their office in 1978. In relation to collecting and curating, no objective consideration concerning value is mandatory or necessary by external influence or pressure. The private collection serves another meaning than preserving and understanding history

and its objects, it becomes a tool of publicity. It can be seen as a reflection of privilege and a means of image building for the firm.

The archive, as a building, offers space for 'part-archive, part-laboratory, part-studio, part-display'. It is accessible by appointment and strives to be a repository of creativity and inspiration. The building is closely located to the Academy of Art and Design, so that it can contribute to student collaborations as well as potential workshops.





Fig. 1. Dreispitz neighbourhood, Basel. Dreispitz tower in the bottom right. Photographer Iwan Baan





Fig. 2. Dreispitz neighbourhood, Basel. Dreispitz tower. Photographer Iwan Baan



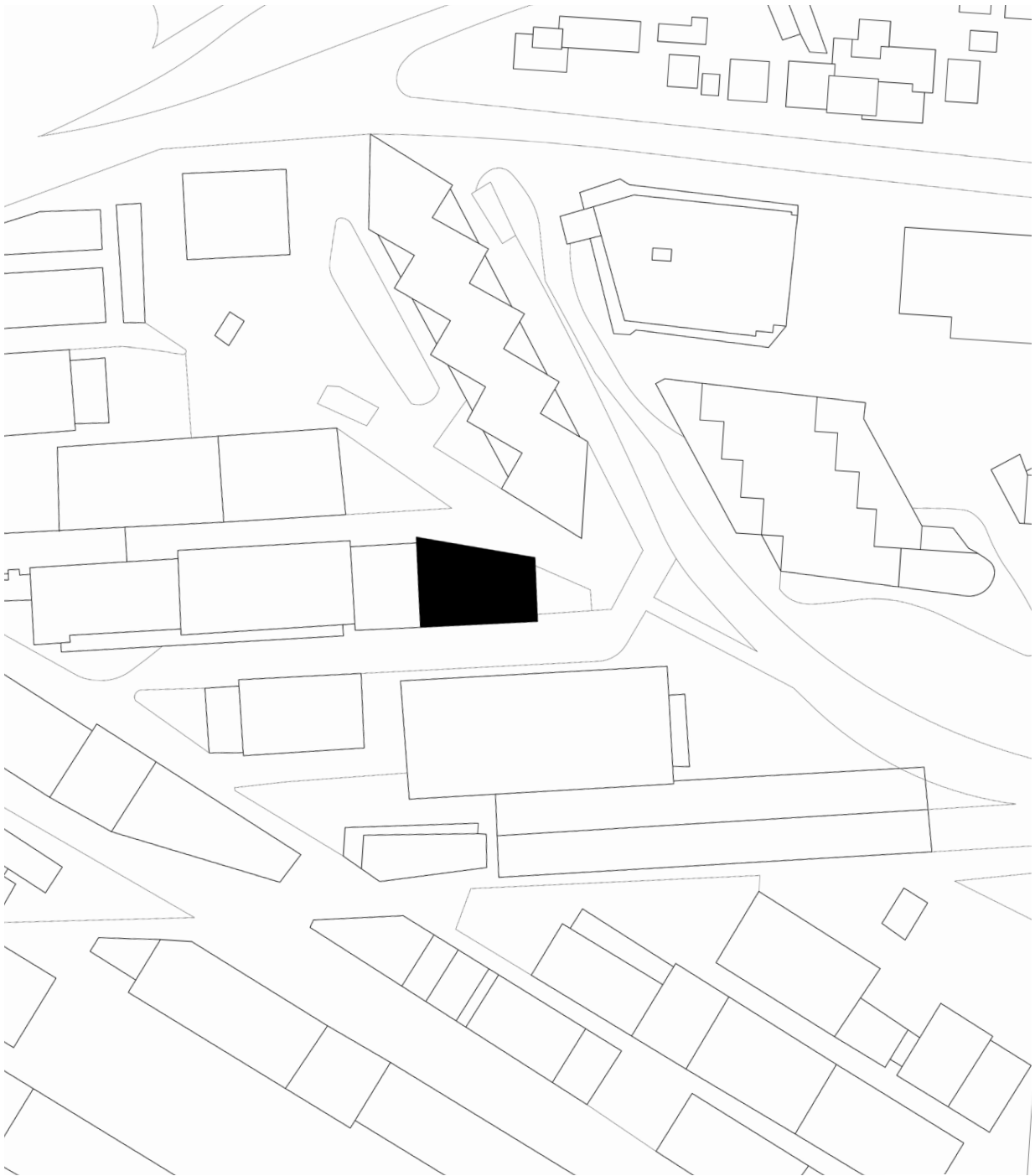


Fig. 3. Dreispitz tower and surroundings

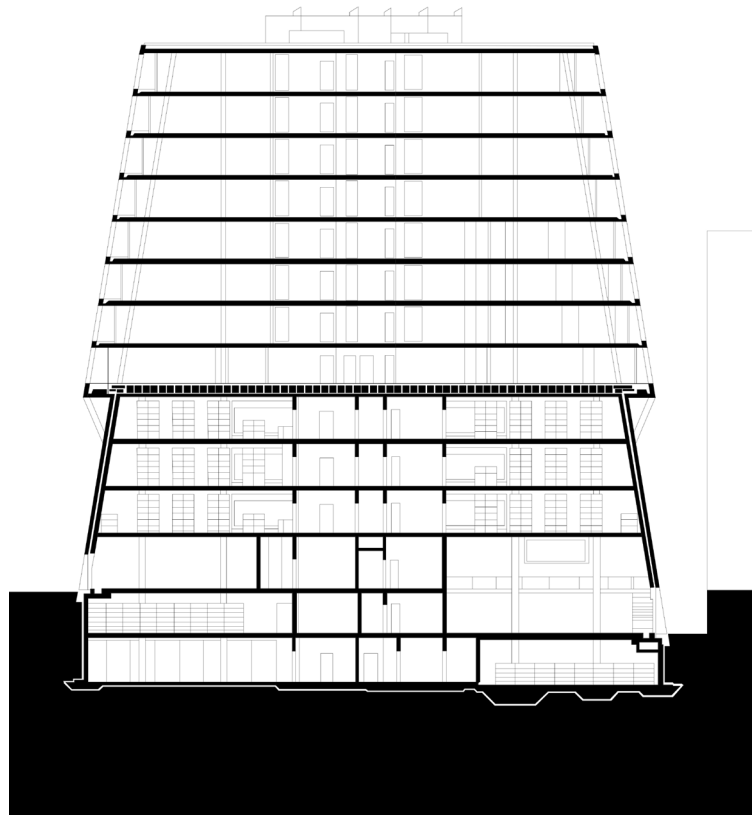


Fig. 4. Section drawing representing the layout of the archive and the residential floors

## Layout of the archive

The design by Herzog & de Meuron represents a distinctive approach towards the architecture archive, not only by building mass, but also through various programs offered in the building. The archive includes a multi-functional space offering an exhibition area, a workshop, archival floors and an office space. The plinth level entirely represents the archive. The two basement levels feature a double height workshop which can be accessed through the mezzanine on the ground floor. Yet, the floor seems to be used as a depot and temporary storage mainly. The workshop also includes a courtyard that could be accessed on the -1 floor. Besides the aforementioned mezzanine, the exhibition space is also situated on the ground floor overlooking the patio. This room features a typical layout of empty space with some freestanding pieces of furniture,

allowing for the display of a variety of art, booklets, photography and physical models. Archival material rotates through internal and external exhibitions, often curated by external artists. The archival floors, located on the first, second and third floor, are more densely filled as storage. The typical storage unit is essentially a wooden cabinet and is modular and demountable. The cabinets have large glass panels and allow for all the stored material to be visible and easily accessible. This way the archival floors are permanently in a state between storage and exhibition. This state of visibility allows external curators access and insight in the material and helps the collection to stay 'fruitfully workable' as aimed by Herzog & de Meuron. (Kabinett – Herzog & de Meuron, z.d)



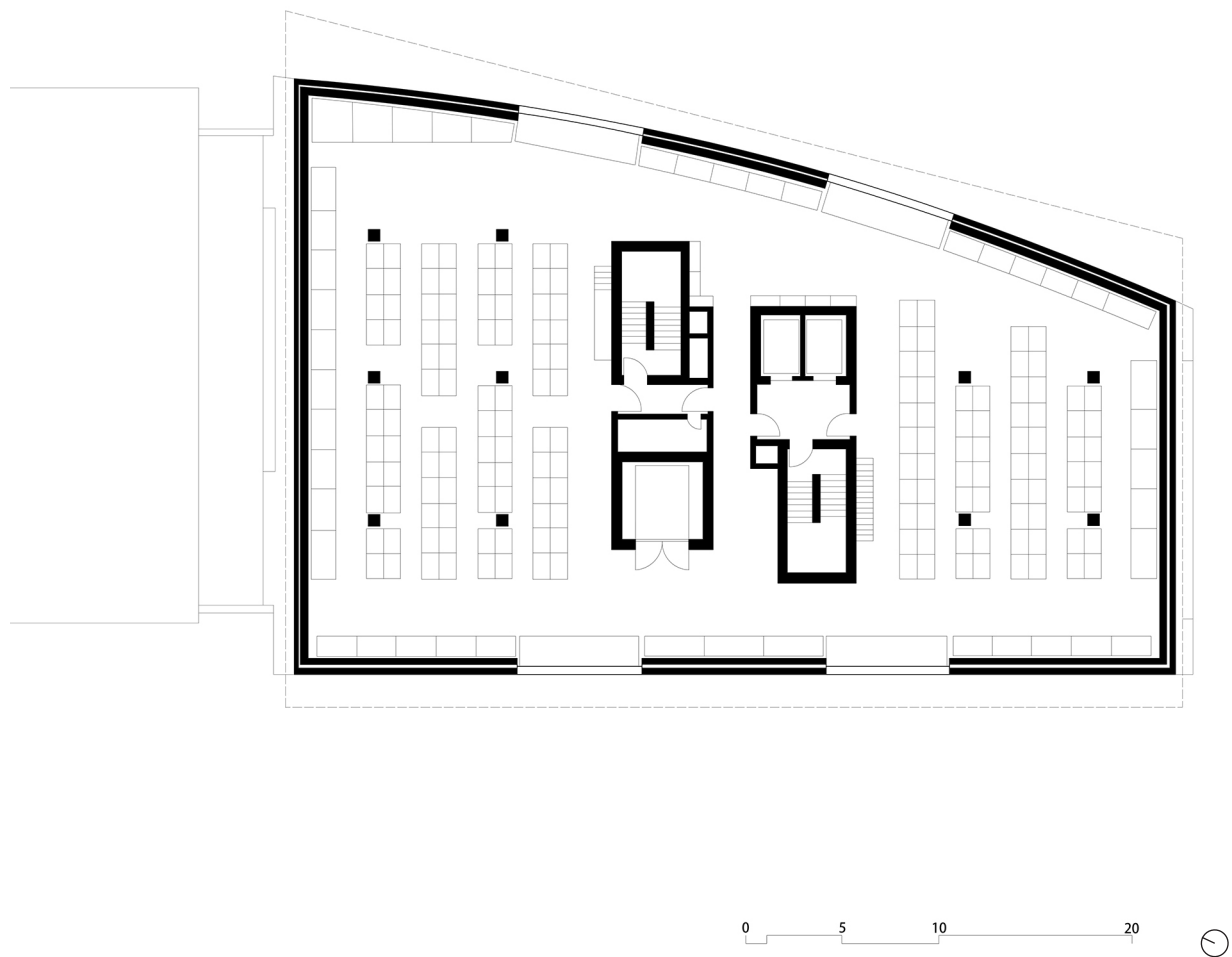


Fig. 5. Archive storage layout on the first, second and third floor

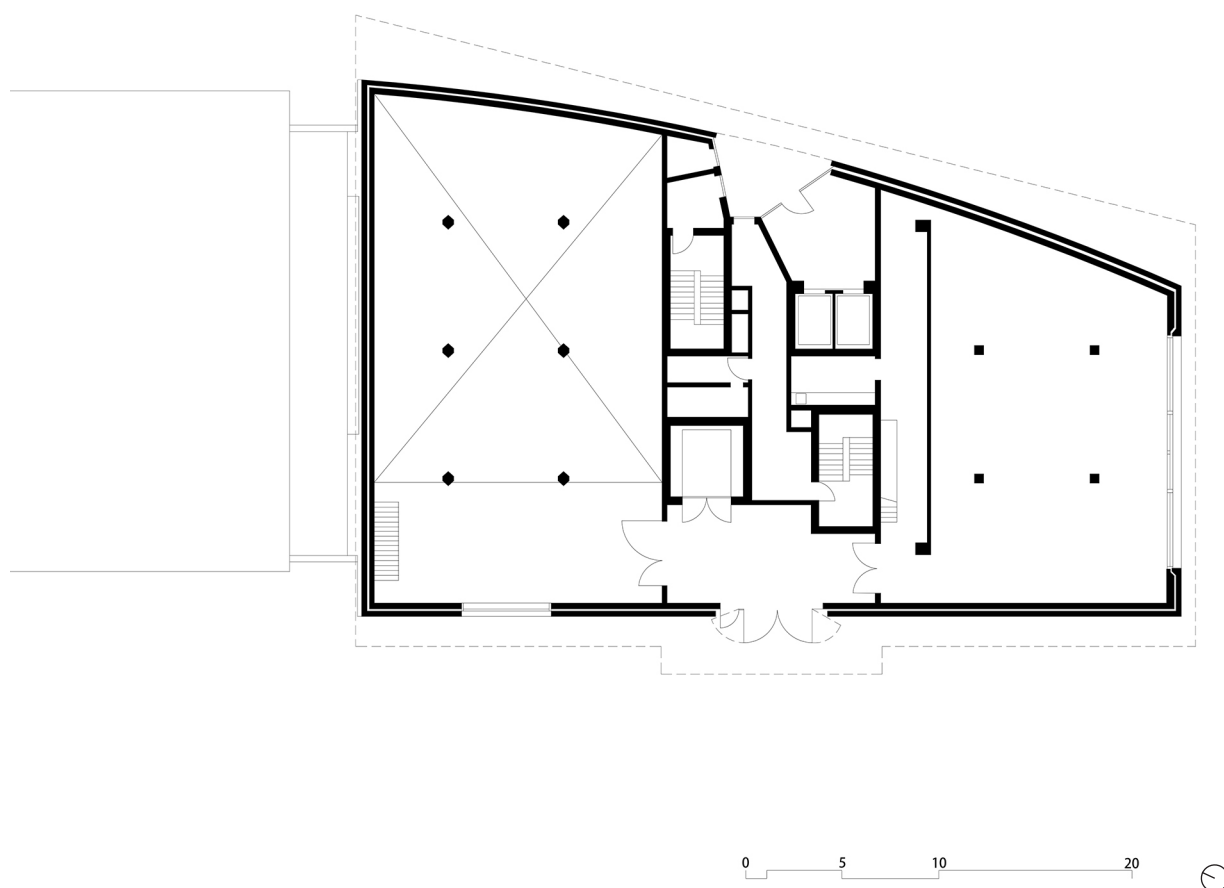


Fig. 6. A depot and an exhibition on the ground floor

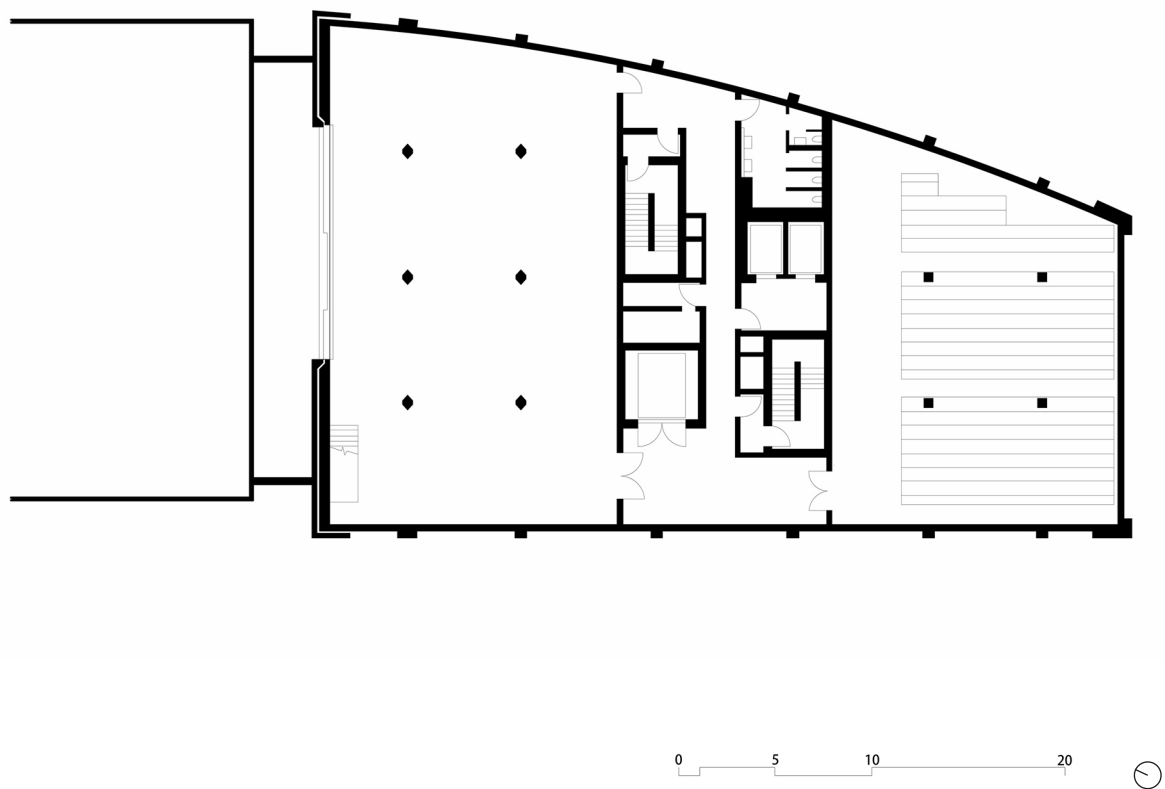


Fig. 7. Depot storage in the basement



# Kabinett

## A collection or a building

The inaugural exhibition, to celebrate the opening of the archive in 2015, is one of many examples of Herzog & de Meuron's very specific way of thinking about architecture and how an archive can inform practice. (Kabinett – Herzog & de Meuron, z.d.) This is - a part of - a collection exhibited, but it is also a place of work, to contemplate and explore. Between the vast amount of objects from over 600+ projects, the exhibition space allows for representation or to highlight a narrative or specific thought. The exhibitions are often curated by external artists and can be seen as an example of Herzog & de Meuron's desire for the collection to be something. If the purpose of the objects is not to spark new thought or to inspire and stay fruitfully workable, the collection is nothing but mere waste products, or as Jaques Herzog himself states 'just waste.' (Herzog, 2002)

While the collection itself is called Kabinett, the archive is both collection and building. Over the years of accumulation the Kabinett has been housed in multiple places. Yet, as the collection grew, in order to keep everything together, and to make sure the collection could be used and repurposed effectively - in order to not become just waste - the need for a specific building arose. This is where the current Dreispitz tower comes in. In housing the archive, the building itself becomes the archive. The

collection takes form in its display, and the role of the building is key.

The Kabinett relates to the idea of the 'cabinet of curiosities', or Wunderammer, where a cabinet or sometimes even a room displays someones private collection. The atmosphere of the exhibition space allows for the display and experience of the accumulated material as if it has a deep and intrinsic value. Historically the purpose of such a Wunderkammer is to display power and wealth. Herzog and de Meuron seem to make use of the Kabinett in a similar way. Both collection and building can be argued to be more of an image building tool than archive for all intents and purposes. An accumulation of objects, preserved and laid out as an act of privilege and show of accomplishment.

The collection contains both objects of Herzog & de Meuron's own creation as well as external art pieces. Esther Zumsteg, the Herzog & de Meuron partner overseeing communications and exhibitions, played a big role in the organisation of the archive. (Sudjic, 2015) When walking through the building, with the material carefully laid out in the cabinets, it is evident Esther and her team spent months on the rows and rows of three dimensional contents of the archive.



Fig. 8. Inaugural exhibition 2015, in the exhibition space. An empty room with a large cabinet and table, both filled with a carefull curated horizontally laid out pile of objects from a multitude of Herzog en de Meuron's projects. Photo by Iwan Baan



Fig. 9. Cabinets on storage floor. The cabinets are closer together than seen in the exhibition space, and the cabinets themselves are filled more compactly. Yet, the material seems to be clearly visible and carefully curated. Photo by Iwan Baan

## The Kabinett filled with cabinets

The Dreispitz tower - as an archive - is by nature more of a showroom than a warehouse. While the Kabinett today seems to be in a permanent state between storage and display, this hybrid originated from decades of exhibitions and its lessons the practice learned from doing so. As Sudjic (2015) states, few architects have thought more about the meaning of displaying architecture. Together with Remy Zaugg, Herzog & de Meuron have extensively considered and criticised many forms of architectural display. With the development of the current hybrid and layout pattern of their exhibitions stemming from their work together for the exhibition in the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1995. (Herzog et de Meuron, z.d.) Zaugg mocks many forms of display and criticises the 'naive' use of chronology, big pictures and perfect final models. (Zaugg & Herzog & de Meuron, 1995) Their method as seen in the Paris exhibition - with only horizontal surfaces and purposeful neutrality in the laid out material - became a formulaic approach, as seen in their exhibition 'Waste and sweet dreams' as well. (Herzog & de Meuron : No. 250: An Exhibition, 2004)

Although obviously not everything is preserved from all their projects through the years, the amount that is, still is truly dazzling. Throughout the process choices are made about what to keep and what to discard. This selection process is a careful curation and goes hand in hand with the purpose of display, for the preserved object should be able to serve as a tool for the practice, external researchers and future exhibitions. To be able to see and experience the objects, the archive is built and organised from a multitude of wooden cabinets. Everything is carefully curated and laid out behind glass panels.

Sudjic beautifully draws an impression explaining how walking through these rows of shelves the vast amount of material 'seems to blur into a single object, as if you are negotiating the inside of some massive, mainframe computer.' (Sudjic, 2015) It is an experience similar to that in natural history museums, walking through the cabinets. As Philip Ursprung explains, the laid out material could be compared with the exhibiting of archaeological findings, of the curation of dinosaur bones. (Ursprung, 2002) The layers in the cabinet allow for a somewhat effective storage system, but simultaneously make use of the horizontal laid-out display method of Zaugg, and create the atmosphere of the Wunderkammer.

The cabinets are therefore not only seen in the storage/warehouse section of the archive, but also used for exhibitions. An example of this is the exhibition at the Gabrielle Jungels-Winkler Galleries. (Royal Academy of Art & Herzog & De Meuron, 2023) Yet, surprisingly the only in-house event the cabinet is seen is the inaugural exhibition of 2015. (Inaugural Display, 2015) Noteworthy might be that the cabinet used in this exhibition is the only one made from solid pine while the other cabinets are all built from some laminated wood with demountable connections. Therefore one could assume the solid wood one might have been a prototype.



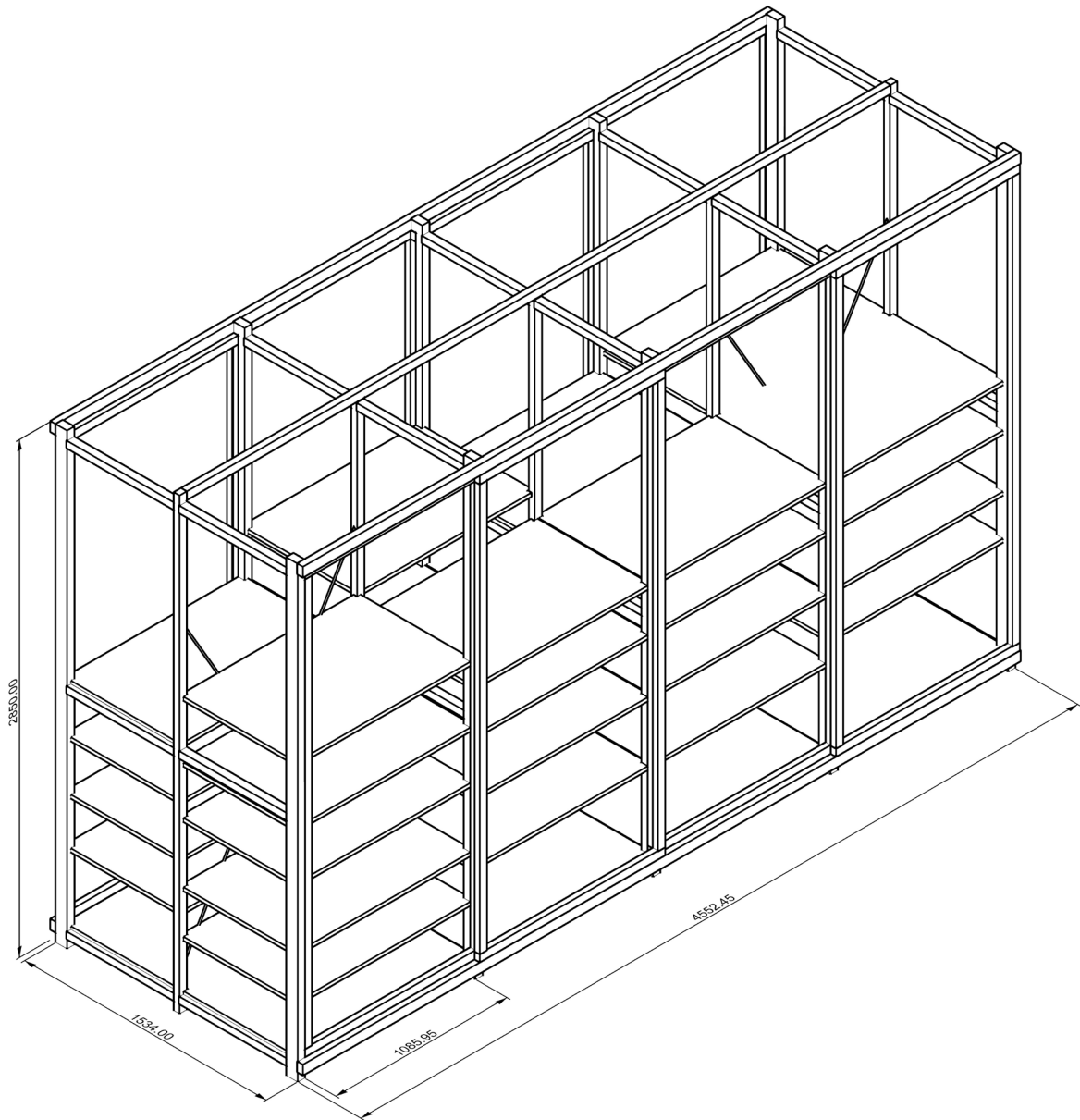


Fig. 10. Axonometric drawing of the cabinet, as used on the storage floors and in the inaugural exhibition. With flexible panels and a demountable skeleton, the cabinet can be brought down to transportable dimensions (Drawing made as re-construction for physical model building purposes.)



Fig. 11. Centre Pompidou, Paris exhibition. Zaugg & Herzog et de Meuron, 1995



Fig. 12. Schaulager exhibition. No. 250 an exhibition (2004)



Fig. 13. Royal Art Academy. Gabrielle jungels-winkler galleries exhibition (2023)





Fig. 14. Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron in the Kabinett

## Presence and future plans

Jacques Herzog writes about their position towards the use of accumulating and preserving the archive. About their search for new purposes, for without the immaterial, mental processes of understanding, learning, and developing the archived objects are nothing but waste products. (Herzog, 2002) They positioned themselves close to students and researchers and they organise exhibitions often curated by external artists. Yet, the archive is not open to the public. They state 'Visits are possible by appointment for specialists and for interdisciplinary research.' (Kabinett – Herzog & de Meuron, z.d.) Not quite inviting to common people. Also, the plinth is in strong contrast with the open facade at the housing floors on top. The archive is essentially a closed concrete block with blank walls on the ground floor.

At the same time, it is the residential accommodation that makes the archive space - which is not a museum, but a working space, possible (Sudjic, 2015) And as stated on the website as well; 'Making the Kabinett, or parts of it, accessible to the public is one of various future scenarios.' (Kabinett – Herzog & de Meuron, z.d.) Which all together insinuates an ambition to be more present in the future, they just might not yet know how.



## Creating a little more waste

Both the image and interior atmosphere of the Archive are strongly influenced by the cabinet. With the cabinet both storing and displaying most of the material, the collection truly becomes the Kabinett. It is this furniture piece that transforms the spaces from a concrete bunker to a showroom. The exhibition space is one of the most important parts of the archive. Because of its spatial flexibility and rotation of contents, the experience of the space changes often. At the same time, the atmosphere of the space seems to stay the same.

In an attempt to get as close to the interior atmosphere of the archive as possible, an in-depth analysis of the materiality is important. Through rebuilding a picture of the inaugural exhibition of 2015, an understanding of the exhibition space and its character are developed. This becomes particularly apparent during the construction of the model. By building the concrete walls and ceiling first, the space looked like a parking garage. The space maintained this character for quite a while due to the drab materiality of the concrete and the thickness of the walls and columns, even adding furniture pieces didn't change this. Yet, once the wooden floor is added, the space is radically transformed. The warmth and scale of the wood changes the space into an interior, maybe into a home even. Only now, the furniture starts to tell the story of the room. It is the cabinet that makes the space a showroom, an exhibition, and it is the

cabinet's materiality that tells us something about its contents. Instead of a pompous stainless steel, glossy object the cabinets' warm wooden frame and shelves allow for an inviting interaction with its contents. The displayed material does not seem to become overdramatically special or sacred, as to be put on a pedestal. It is simply curated and stored, easily visible and accessible. Exactly the way Herzog & de Meuron imagine their collection of waste products to be experienced.

As the character of the collection becomes apparent through the process of model building, irony arises. A comical example is the recreation of the displayed contents and models in the cabinet, simplified to little splinters and trinkets made by actual leftover foam and paper. Material described as a collection of waste products by Jacques Herzog, to be recreated with literal waste and trash in our model. One also might consider the model itself – as a finished object – suddenly useless, or a waste product. Aside from its immaterial value and the mental processes of understanding and learning, the model or model making techniques encapsulated, serve no further purpose. It becomes apparent the object was never relevant as an artwork and is merely a research tool, thus the same goes for the picture.



Fig. 15. Physical model. With the walls, columns and ceiling painted roughly as concrete, the space becomes a cold and almost parking garage like space. Even putting the cabinet in there does not solve this yet



Fig. 16. Physical model. With the floor added in, the space gets a sense of scale. There is a more balanced sense of materials and the warmth of the floor makes the space an actual interior space



Fig. 17. Inaugural Display (2015) in the exhibition space. Photographer unknown

## Conclusion

Herzog & de Meuron, tell a clear message through their archival activity. Their collection is worth nothing, yet it is kept in a concrete box with 700 mm thick walls, elaborately laid out and perfectly curated. Only when seen and interacted with, the Kabinett comes to life again, is worth something again. An archive as a showroom, with an exhibition space imagined as Wunderkammer and room for workshops and other forms of repurposing the content. The Kabinett is a strong tool for their image building, carried by the physical cabinet as a tool for storage and display at the same time.

As a private collection, only accessible by some through appointment, yet yearning to be seen, to be reinterpreted, to be learned from. With its contents rotating through internal and external exhibitions the Kabinett seems to want to be publicly accessible, and although for now unclear to what extent and form, perhaps one day will be.





Fig. 18. Recreation of Inaugural Display (2015) in the exhibition space

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