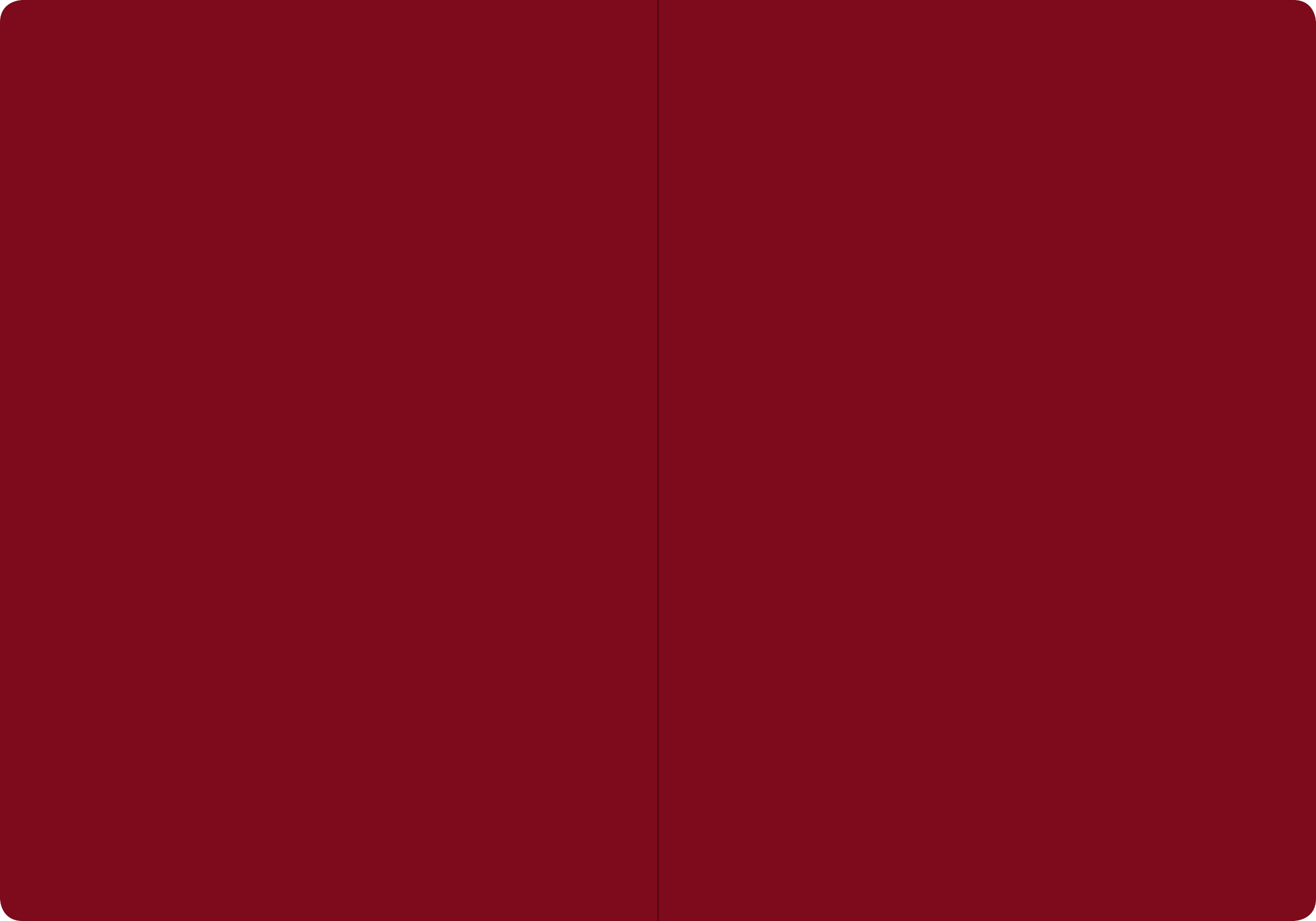


# REASONS FOR WALLING A HOUSE

51N4E

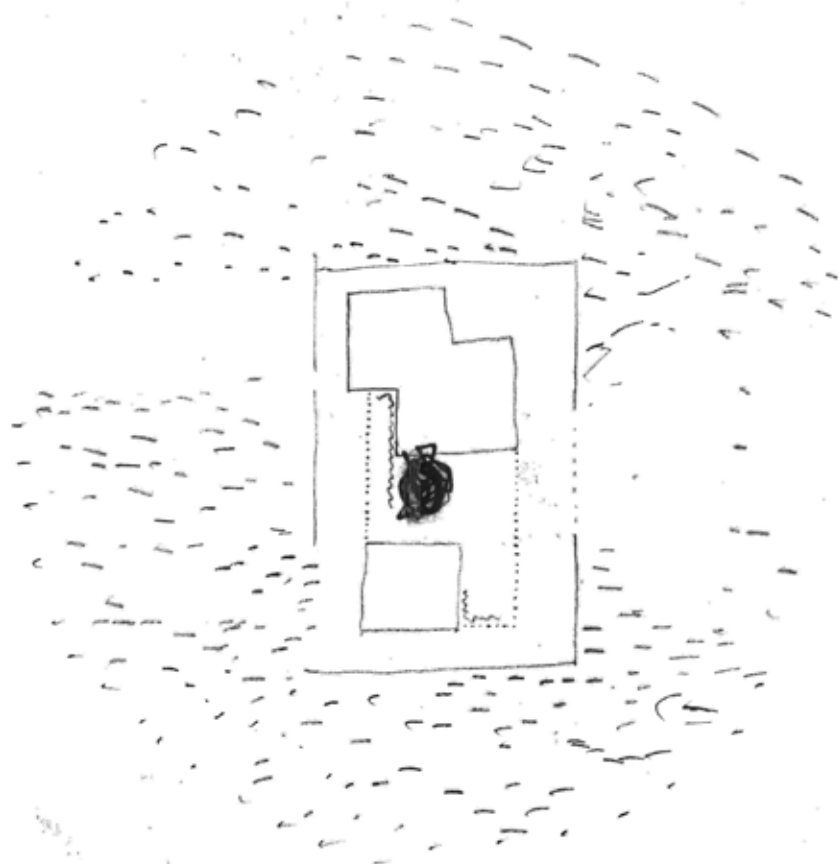
Enrique Marty  
51N4E  
Andrea Branzi  
Josse De Pauw  
Something Fantastic  
BeL  
Dirk Braeckman

RUBY PRESS



REASONS FOR WALLING A HOUSE



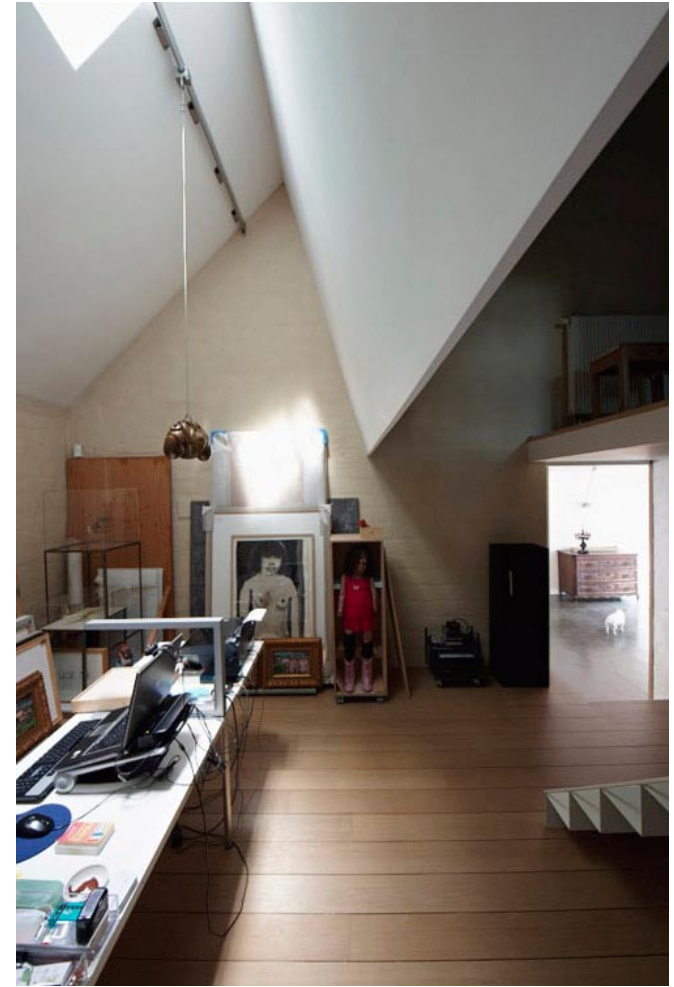










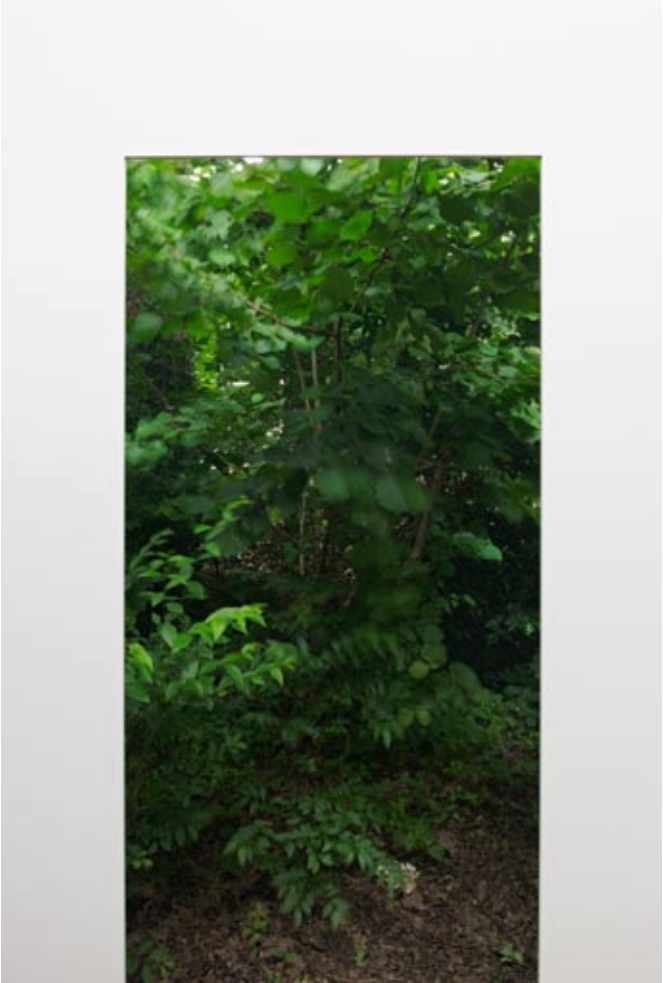














# THE ARTECONOMY HOUSE



- |                    |                      |              |
|--------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| 1 Doorbell         | 5 Study & collection | 9 Kitchen    |
| 2 Entrance         | 6 Terrace            | 10 Cloakroom |
| 3 Outside lobby    | 7 Outside bathroom   | 11 Garage    |
| 4 Serpentine space | 8 Inside bathroom    |              |

REASONS FOR WALLING A HOUSE  
(THE GUEST FILES 2003—2011)

51N4E

Enrique Marty  
51N4E  
Andrea Branzi  
Josse De Pauw  
Something Fantastic  
BeL  
Dirk Braeckman

RUBY PRESS

# THE HOUSE THAT ISN'T ONE

Ilka & Andreas Ruby

This book is about a house that isn't one. But it is also not two houses. Rather, it's one house with multiple identities that are all inextricably intertwined. It is the result of 51N4E's radical and generous transformation of a conventional single-family house built almost twenty years ago in Sint-Eloois-Winkel, Belgium. Their project is radical because it achieves a maximum transformation with a minimum of means: the gutting of the interior and the walling of the exterior. And it is generous because it doesn't replace the old house with a new one, but instead gives it a second chance to become a new house. The intervention liberates the house from its rigid domestic program and rhetoric in favor of a productive ambiguity that allows for multiple readings and uses. While the house continues to serve as a home for its two owners, it is no longer singularly devoted to this function. The spaces it offers overwrite the typological canon of the residential house. Some spaces layer atmospheres by combining different functions, like the bathroom-cum-closet or the office-cum-workshop on the second floor. Other spaces are programmed in ways unorthodox for a house. Tucked discretely under the attic, the living room has no direct access to the garden, which is a must-have for the detached single-family house. The shower provides another example; theatrically staged outdoors, it circumvents all routine ways of using a normal shower. Yet other spaces challenge preconceived notions of living by their openness of meaning. The large space on the ground floor, for instance, is not exactly a living room. In fact, it's not even a room to begin with; it's just a void that connects the

front and back of the house and invites the outdoor space inside. The newly created exterior spaces around the house—no doubt its most astonishing aspect—represent a kind of space largely unexplored within the context of European residential housing. This inhabitable threshold between the interior and exterior of the house is reminiscent of the Engawa, the “in-between space” of traditional Japanese houses. Neither a terrace nor a courtyard nor a pathway, the space is enclosed by white walls that block the view to the surrounding landscape, provoking one's imagination to conjure up images of that which is there but cannot be seen.

All these deviations from the conventional spatial routines of a single-family residence make it impossible for both the owners and their visitors to feel indifferent about the house. To use it means to re-invent it and to appropriate it daily with different wants and wishes.

This open-ended character of the house is a clear inspiration for this book. Rather than describing the house, this book continues the project of the house by emulating its driving logic: to open up solid configurations, destabilize fixed meanings, and avoid routine by giving choices and taking chances. The book is therefore about the transformation of the house: the architectural transformation by 51N4E that enabled it to become what it is now, as well as, and perhaps more importantly, the future transformation(s) that it will inspire. To this end, a number of people from the disciplines of art, architecture, photography, theater, and graphic design were invited to spend time in the house. First, they

were invited to visit the house with the owners, and later, they stayed there all by themselves to engage with it in their own idiosyncratic ways. Each contribution in this book is the result of an individual stay in the house. The time that all the authors spent at the house ties this book together; what makes it unique is that each contribution reflects its author's individual reading of the residence. Together, they present an eclectic cross section of the house, a reading that oscillates between references that are concrete and those that are more abstract and obscure. In that sense the book doesn't tell you what the house really is. Instead, it confronts you with possible perceptions of the house, so that you can discover your own take on it. Imagine you've been invited to the house of a friend who is not there.

Just make yourself a home.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

People who matter to this (book)project:

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Bertrand Lafontaine, Mostafa Einuan,  
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## CONTRIBUTERS

### 51N4E

51N4E is a Brussels-based international practice that concerns itself with matters of space production—architecture, urbanism, design, and spatial analysis. Founded in 1998 by Johan Anrys, Freek Persyn, and Peter Swinnen, 51N4E gained recognition through key projects such as Lamot (2005), TID Tower Tirana (2004-10), C-Mine (2006-10), Skanderbeg Square (2008-present) and, most recently, large-scale urban studies of Bordeaux (50.000 logements; 2010-present), Istanbul (2011-present), and Brussels (2011-present). Since 2011, the exhibition *51N4E: Double or Nothing* has traveled to BOZAR in Brussels, the AA in London, MAO in Ljubijana, and the Graham Foundation in Chicago.

### ENRIQUE MARTY

Enrique Marty is an artist living and working in Salamanca, Spain. His oeuvre is driven by a maniacal fantasy and obsession to depict everything in his environment, using a variety of media such as painting, video, and sculpture. Enrique Marty exhibits worldwide and his works are included in major public collections: the Museo Marugame Hirai in Japan, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, M.U.S.A.C in León, and the Ozil Collection in Istanbul. The images and scenes that he depicts invite the viewer to enter into a state of extreme awareness of a fascination for life.

### ANDREA BRANZI

Andrea Branzi is an architect and designer based in Milan. From 1964 to 1974, Branzi was a member of the group Archizoom Associati, the first vanguard of Radical Architecture and Design. In 1987, Branzi received the Compasso d'Oro award for his career. Andrea Branzi works in the fields of industrial and experimental

design, architecture, urban planning, education, and cultural promotion. Branzi is the Director of the Graduate Program in Interior Design at Facoltà di Interni e Design of Politecnico di Milano, where he also teaches as a professor.

### JOSSE DE PAUW

Josse De Pauw is an actor, author, and theater director, living and working in Brussels and Antwerp. He writes, creates, and performs, both individually and in collaboration with other directors, actors, visual artists, composers, and musicians. In 1986, De Pauw played his first leading role in a film and since then, he has starred in over sixty films and directed two of his own, *Vinaya* and *Übung*. De Pauw also writes fiction, short observations, and travel stories. His texts have appeared in two books, *Nog* (2004) and *Werk* (2006). De Pauw is the creator of many acclaimed theater plays, which he also acted in, such as *Weg, Larf, Übung, die Siel van die Mier, Ruhe, Strange News, De Versie Claus, over de bergen, and De Gehangenen*. De Pauw is the recipient of several awards for his work as a writer, actor, and director.

### SOMETHING FANTASTIC

Something Fantastic is a young architecture practice committed to smart, touching and simple architecture. The practice authors and develops books, teaches at the ETH Zurich, and designs for private and institutional clients. Recent titles include *Something Fantastic* (2010), *Re-Inventing Construction* (2010) and *Building Brazil* (2011). Next to Something Fantastic, the partners—Julian Schubert, Elena Schütz, and Leonard Streich—operate a creative agency, Belgrad, to work within the broader field and context of creative production.

### BEL

BeL Associates is a Cologne-based architecture practice founded in 2000 by Anne-Julchen Bernhardt and Jörg Leeser. Their speculative and research driven architectural work is closely intertwined with their teachings on building typologies, urban environments, and contextual architecture. Bernhardt and Leeser currently teach at the RWTH Aachen, the Bergische Universität Wuppertal, and the PBSA Düsseldorf.

### DIRK BRAECKMAN

Dirk Braeckman is a photographer living and working in Ghent, Belgium. His work has been recently exhibited in several solo shows at the Museum M in Leuven, Robert Mille Gallery in New York, Zeno X in Antwerp, Bernier/Eliades Gallery in Athens, S.M.A.K. in Ghent, De Pont in Tilburg, and the Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens in Deurle. Braeckman's work is included in many important public collections, such as the Sammlung Goetz in Munich, De Pont in Tilburg, MAC's in Hornu, and the Royal Palace in Brussels.

### ILKA & ANDREAS RUBY

Ilka Ruby and Andreas Ruby are the founding partners of textbild, an office for architectural communication. Through textbild, Ilka Ruby and Andreas Ruby author and edit books, magazines, and essays; curate exhibitions and conferences; and consult architects and institutions ([www.textbild.com](http://www.textbild.com)). In 2008, they founded their own publishing house, Ruby Press ([www.ruby-press.com](http://www.ruby-press.com)), with the publication of *Urban Transformation*. As editors and publishers, Ilka Ruby and Andreas Ruby champion smart, sustainable, and innovative approaches to architecture and urban development.

## IMAGE CREDITS

House introduction:  
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N°4 (51N4E)  
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Guest:

**Enrique Marty**

**UNTITLED**

Date of arrival:

16.12. 2008 and 4.12.2009

Date of departure:

16.12. 2008 and 4.12.2009

Postscript title:

**THE COUPLE**

Postscript comment:

On the very day that we finished the house, we started fantasizing about the project's afterlife. There would be guests, generously invading the house. We imagined a bacchanalia. The feast would start with the slaughtering of an animal, hanging by its feet from the thin steel wall. The blood would cover the perfectly white tiles of the outdoor bathroom. It would be the perfect inauguration ritual. Although the clients completely rejected the idea, our suggestion triggered their freely associative minds. Later, they proposed Enrique Marty as the first name for the guest file.



Presence and Change:  
A Conversation with Enrique Marty

Christophe Van Gerrewey

*Let's start with a basic question: What do you do as an artist?*

I consider every project on an individual basis. It all depends on the space, the questions, and the circumstances. I therefore make very different kinds of art works: installations, oil paintings, watercolors, sculptures, movies, or architectural adjustments to exhibition spaces.

*You have no general approach; as you say, it all depends on the situation and the exhibition. However, a recurring element in your practice is the fabrication of small creatures, small sculptures, that resemble existing people.*

Yes, but I don't "make" these sculptures; I usually take molds directly from the body. It's a different process that's closer to that of taxidermy than that of sculpting. The statues of Julie and Michel are not sculptures but puppets. Their body parts can move. I cast only their heads and their hands, and they gave me their real hair and clothes. I then made the two sculptures out of polyurethane foam and covered them with layers of latex. Afterwards, I painted the skin, eyes, wrinkles, and so forth. But the hair and the clothes are real, although the clothes have been made smaller and the hair was mixed with artificial hair.

*Seeing as your models are actually alive, how do you define the term 'taxidermy', the process of stuffing dead bodies and animal corpses?*

Our idea of taxidermy is somewhat mistaken. It's not simply a process of taking out the intestines, bones, muscles, organs, and replacing them with a more durable material inside the skin. I learned this from a taxidermist. After he receives the skin from an animal—let's say from a dead tiger—he makes a real-size sculpture of the animal. He then takes a cast of this sculpture and reproduces it in polyurethane foam, just like I do. He glues the skin to the reproduction, and adds a pair of crystal eyes. That's different from what I do. I don't use crystals—instead, I paint everything on the latex, even the eyes. But aside from that, the process of taxidermy is quite similar.

*Another analogy to your work can be found in voodoo. Voodoo priests make small clay puppets of existing people. Like you, they also use real elements from their subjects: nails, hair, sometimes even a tooth. And then they pierce the sculpture with needles in order to punish and torture the real model.*

A lot of people find the use of real hair the most striking aspect of my work. And, indeed, taxidermy also has a somewhat magical aspect. Think about it: Why is real hair and skin so important? It dates back to ancient traditions that tried to preserve the reality of someone by reproducing and simulating their presence even though they were absent, or even dead. Personally, I don't understand why people keep reproductions of dead animals in their homes, be it an animal they themselves hunted or a pet they loved for years. It's a phenomenon that keeps intriguing me. I once knew a hunter who, like a caveman, kept a room full of horns from the animals that he had killed. Why? I can't explain it, and the same applies to my work. I don't want to give answers; I want to raise good questions.

*Your sculptures seem quite difficult to produce. What strikes me in particular is their close resemblance to their models. Sure, they have the same hair and clothes, but they are nevertheless remarkably similar. Do you think you have a talent for producing likeness? And in this sense, would you consider your art old-fashioned because you continue to realistically reproduce subjects from the real world? Personally, I know that I couldn't do it.*

For me, the technique is only important because it allows me to develop my ideas. But this doesn't change the fact that everything you see in my work is made entirely by me. I do not have a team of assistants at my disposal because I'm the only one who can understand what I want to do and what I want the objects to look like. Others might have the same skills as I—after all, technique is only technique, it's based on practice—but the concepts behind the work might suffer.

*The close resemblance of these sculptures is, on the one hand, very important; but, on the other hand,*

*the sculptures are not photorealistic. You present a version of a real person: smaller, certainly not heroic, versions that are in a way unhappy, damaged, even pathetic.*

There are several reasons for this. I'm not interested in making copies. I'm interested in the human mind and the human body. When you create art, you create a language—a dramaturgical language. The viewer stands in front of a stage, and on this stage, something extraordinary happens. I don't want to bore the viewer. I want to show him or her something interesting.

Also, most of the sculptures do not wear shoes; they only wear socks, even when they are naked. There is a specific and personal reason for that. When I wear socks, with no shoes, I feel very uncomfortable and vulnerable. I would even prefer to stand barefooted than just in socks. It's the same for the sculptures, I think. They might look angry, but in reality, they're very scared.

*With your sculptures, you reveal a dark and bleak view on mankind and the human condition.*

Yes. Some people tell me that I make freaks and that I only concentrate on the freaky parts of life. But that isn't true. This is not just a part of life—this is life. Everything is freaky. I see this everywhere. Everything is very strange; life is strange. Normality doesn't exist.

*This depiction of suffering bears religious connotations—the most obvious and pure example being the passion of Christ.*

Yes, it's perfect. I hate the word freak. In museums of ancient art, we only see monsters, blood, torture, decapitations; people are shouting, crying, suffering. Let's not forget that I am Spanish. I have been to the Prado many times, and I am very familiar with the tradition of Spanish Baroque painting. And think of the Flemish Baroque tradition—Rubens is one of my most important references. I feel connected to our recent history of art—installations, sculptures, performances—but I think it's necessary to consider ancient history as well.

*You are from Salamanca—a dark, medieval town in Spain.*

I still live in Salamanca. The city is full of strong ancient symbols. It has been very important to me. As a child, I walked around in its cathedrals and churches—it was a very mysterious city. I was amazed by the figures carved in wood: they were so gothic. But as I said, the Spanish Baroque tradition has been very important to me in general.

*There is a tradition in art and life that certainly underscores the tragic and dark sides of life, but that—because of this—also pays attention to its healthy, good, and beautiful aspects. You, however, want to show the terrible sides of human life. Is this out of compassion? Or do you want to encourage a form of mutual understanding?*

It might seem pretentious, but I want to make the viewer conscious. When Michelangelo painted the *Last Judgement*, he not only wanted to depict something beautiful, he also wanted to terrify people. Be careful, he wanted to say, be conscious. This is what I give to you: compassionate advice, a warning.

*You gave two small sculptures to Julie and Michel, the inhabitants of the house near Kortrijk. What did they ask for in return?*

It was a general question. They showed me their house and the intervention by 51N4E. It's a remarkable design—very extreme, even though it actually amounts to almost nothing. They asked for a work of art, but I was free to produce whatever I wanted.

I talked to them about how it felt to live in that kind of house. I saw how, during the long construction process and in the presence of the building team, they constantly moved from one place to the other. It was as if they were enacting a little performance in their own house. They lived in the kitchen for a few weeks while the living room was furnished. Then they moved somewhere else while the kitchen was painted, and so on. This is how the initial idea to make puppets that can be moved from one room to the other developed.



Another important event from my childhood has been influential to my work in general and this project in particular. Three of my mother's brothers decided to buy a plot of land in Spain and to build three houses on it. I was still a little child the first time I visited these houses. Because of some strange mistakes made during construction—the plan was misread—one of the houses was extremely small. I remember seeing the front door and thinking that it must be the entrance for the cat. But it was the actual front door, and inside, the ceiling was very low as well. However, nobody seemed to mind. This scalar difference was also present in the other two houses. It was completely surreal, but I learned the difference that size makes, the “re-scaling” of only one small part of the world. This was the starting point for this work, together with the “displacement” of the puppets, the movements of Julie and Michel.

*Did you ask for their permission to make these sculptures?*

I proposed it, and they agreed.

*It seems like a strange situation, although a rather ancient one as well. You do not make autonomous art works for a museum or gallery, but you are commissioned a piece by a specific customer or the Maecenas.*

It's true. But the real difference doesn't lie in the way the work is made or commissioned. The real difference is that the work has a second life once I have finished it. Since the puppets moved in, Julie and Michel have constantly been taking pictures of the four of them living together. In this sense, they are enacting a performance with the puppets as physical attributes, but this performance is actually part of their daily life.

*And the sculptures live in their house. It's impossible not to refer to Sigmund Freud's 'das Unheimliche', 'the uncanny'—that which is simultaneously known and foreign, familiar and strange. In this sense, the sculptures are truly uncanny. When Julie and Michel look at these creatures, they know and recognize them. But they are smaller and different*

*to the touch: their skin is made of polyurethane, their natural hair combined with artificial hair, their eyes are painted, and so on. In the context of a home, this sensation is even more felt because it is a familiar place, a safe haven. Since the puppets moved in, Julie and Michel's home has become 'unheimlich'. To put it bluntly: Do you think you have made their lives more difficult?*

That's what I want to figure out. I told them that they have to live together, the four of them, and later tell me what had happened, and not the other way around. But it is indeed a realisation of the uncanny, the unexpected and unknown that manifests itself in your own daily life—even in your own house, the place where you think everything's under control. It is very important and frightening, and it might make life more difficult. But at the same time, as Freud said, it's cathartic. An improvement takes place when you go through with it. Your life is better after the experience.

*The presence of art in the house is always somewhat bourgeois. That is, I sit in my house and I look at my paintings; I feel comfortable, rich, and succesful. It reminds me of the opening phrase of Manfredo Tafuri's 'Architecture and Utopia', in which he says that "to ward off anguish by understanding and absorbing its causes seems to be one of the principal ethical exigencies of bourgeois art."'<sup>1</sup> But in your case, the opposite happens. The inhabitants of the house ask for art, but you give them a version of themselves. And because this version is so similar, it will never entirely ease their fear. The inhabitants will always recognize themselves in these sculptures, but they will never feel comfortable with their presence. Change will always be necessary.*

You should talk with Julie and Michel about this. Julie, for instance, is a person that is constantly evolving, thinking of new questions, traveling, and changing. I don't know whether my art works are responsible for these qualities, but I certainly hope to confront and question. The making of these puppets should have consequences, as in the case of voodoo, but with different means and ends.

*In that aspect, there are a lot of similarities between what you have created, and what the architects of 51N4E have. Geert Bekaert writes that "they're not afraid of the ordinary, but they make it extraordinary by reimagining it, giving it a new look and a new use."<sup>2</sup> The existing house of Julie and Michel is enlarged. It looks the same as before, but it certainly isn't the same. In your work, you present the owners with a scaled-down version of reality.*

The new house altered by 51N4E is the same as the old one, but in a simple and extreme way. It took me a while to define this house as open or closed, but it's actually both. It has views to the surroundings from inside and outside and it provides shelter, but the wall offers neither security nor real safety.

*The architects were prepared to work within the existing situation. For them, the original, 'fermette'—a "classical" Belgian villa—was not taboo. They almost left it like it was and tried to reinforce what was already there. This is not as common as it might seem. Today, many architects still consider "modern" architecture as totalitarian: it cannot hybridize architectural styles and it also has to create its own site. This is not the case for 51N4E, for whom the site is a mixture of presence and change. This also bears a resemblance to your own artistic strategy. You don't make autonomous installations; instead, your practice is defined by a very literal acceptance and manipulation of what is already there.*

Yes, that's true. I totally agree.

*In this regard, it strikes me that your work is untitled, or does it have a title?*

No, it doesn't. You could call that a problem, but it isn't. It's obvious that it does not have a title.

*This might have to do with the fact that it's actually an ongoing performance. Maybe the puppets can only be named once the performance is over.*

The way that Julie and Michel live with the sculptures is a performance. It's a performance in the

way that marriage is a performance: laden with symbols, contractual agreements, rules, problems, and happiness.

*"Till death do them part..."*

I was recently told that the sculpture of Michel has a broken leg. Julie broke it when she tried to place it on a chair. I'm thinking of making a plaster for the leg. It was an accident, but accidents can happen. They are part of the process, of both life and work. This only proves that the puppets, just like architecture and the idea of home in general, are a mental situation. It's about thinking, posing questions, and feeling.

*There is a famous advertisement for a brand of Belgian beer: "My home is where my Stella is." In other words, I feel at home wherever I have a glass of beer in front me. Could you say the same for Julie and Michel and their puppets, their alter egos? Modern people need a home, but not a perfect home. We need elements of strangeness to feel at home; a perfect home, where everything is always in the right place, quickly becomes both scary and unlivable. Both architecture and art can mirror the difficulties of life.*

I have to admit that when I first saw Julie and Michel's house and the intervention by 51N4E, I thought of a bunker. But once you enter, everything changes. A menacing wall opens up the house. Once inside there's a lot of light and warmth. There's no closure or isolation whatsoever. Maybe it's the same for the situation with the puppets. At first, you might think that this must be hell, too frightening, too weird. But that's actually what engenders new questions and starts to open up new possibilities.

1. Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976), 1.

2. Geert Bekaert, "51N4E Space Producers," in *Rooted in the Real: Writings on Architecture* by Geert Bekaert edited by Christophe Van Gerrewey (Ghent: WZW Editions & Productions, 2011), 216.



Guests:

**51N4E**

## THE CLIENT REFUSING ALL LIMITS

Date of arrival:  
30.11.2003

Date of departure:  
...

Postscript title:  
**THE MAKING OF**

Postscript comment:  
The work we conceive and build as architects often engages with the theme of public intimate spaces. It's almost an involuntary method; rendering the intimacy of this house and these clients entirely public felt natural from the very start. More than just a built project, this process is about the freedom of living and about being as conscious and precise in regards to this freedom as possible, even when faced with powerful and seemingly unbreakable taboos.



House 1, plan and elevation, 1988

## HOUSE 1

We thought it was going to be a polite and rather brief visit. On the afternoon of December 8th, 2003, we found ourselves ringing the bell of a house that we actually didn't want to enter. It was a telephone call a couple of days earlier that brought us here. A woman on the phone had anxiously inquired if we'd be interested in a project that would change her and her husband's (domestic) life for good. Intrigued by her mildly confusing innuendo, we accepted the invitation without any further expectations. It would only take us a good hour to drive there from Brussels, she had explained.

We drove through vast empty landscapes, basked in the ever-changing hues of the beautiful winter sun, surrounded by derelict farms, scattered industrial boxes, and an impossible silence. She had selected a jewel-like water tower—the last sign of civilization—as our landmark. From there we entered a small forest; at its edge sat the house. We pulled over. The shock couldn't have been greater. This was not a house, this was a mimicry of a house, an image of feigned domesticity. As the front door swung open, we delved even further into our state of disbelief. The anxious voice on the phone belonged to a woman with almost fluorescent red hair, who now spoke in a voice without comparison and radiated an impatient presence. Her overgenerous welcome couldn't have clashed more with the house that she inhabited. Stepping over the threshold felt like Alice disappearing into the rabbit hole; we fell into a bottomless pit from which we would resurface from only seven or so years later.

Once inside, we met her husband, who was kind, wise, and silent. He welcomed us with slightly wondering eyes. We were invited to have a look around. It was the first



Honoré d'O, glass marble landscape reflection, 1999

house they ever built, some twenty years ago, a ready-made romantic image of a home offering ready-made possibilities for life. They had gradually grown aware of the shortcomings of the house. By now there were two things of which they were certain, explained the couple. Firstly, the house could never be torn down for the simplest of all reasons: it was a part, albeit a confronting one, of their life so far. Secondly, they wanted to stay in the house during its reconstruction, to witness everything as intimately as possible. "Everything else is negotiable," whispered the husband. We walked around in silence. The light began to fade. This was House 1. It stopped existing that day.

## HOUSE 2

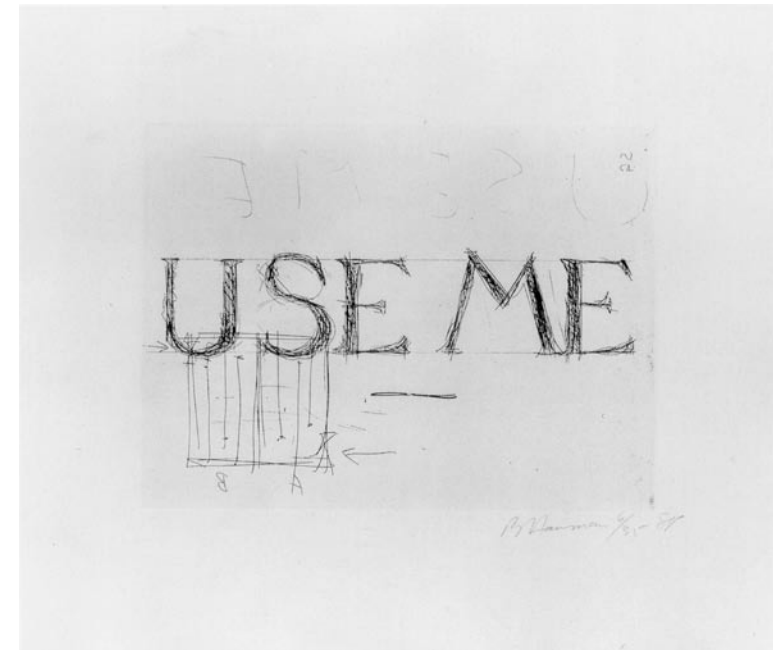
Driving back, and baffled by what we had just witnessed, we tried piecing together the hints that the couple had laid out for us. Gradually, we realized that we were not expected to build a house, but a life. Seeing as their first house—a total compromise—had kept them from questioning their desires, ambitions, and ways of life, this new house would have to do the exact opposite. It would have to become a space of doubt. And we would have to become partners in conceiving this doubt, this afterlife of the house and the couple. As the landscape flashed by us in reverse order, the light grew ugly again. We entered Brussels with uneasy smiles on our faces.

A week later we received a letter from the couple. It was an attempt to list their undecipherable desire for change. Reading the clumsy, yet charming, words and phrases, it became clear that there were no words to capture their



longing. Reading between the lines, we understood that they were secretly dreaming of a rather straightforward addition to their first house, keeping its young history intact, tacking on a new, disparate world onto it. A grafted house, a new compromise? However strange the whole operation seemed, it presented an opportunity to designate doubt and the suspension of disbelief as the project's motor. A true testing ground. We wrote them back, explaining that we were in, but that we weren't going to fulfill their silent wish for a typical contemporary addition, probing whether they were open to this attitude. They said yes. Yes! YES!

So by now their problem had become ours. The visit had fueled us with incoherent images and thoughts. Nothing seemed to match. One of our most vivid recollections was of an engraving by Bruce Nauman. Hopelessly challenging the house's interior, it spelled out "USE ME" in Roman script. Formally, it felt extremely out of place, yet in terms of its content, it couldn't have been more poignant. In a strange way, it captured the essence of their unspoken question. They needed to be used, they needed to become the medium for their own process of change. Though this insight didn't help clarify the situation, it at least opened it up. Three weeks after our first visit, we returned to the house with a seemingly improbable proposal on offer. Our uneasy smiles returned as we began to explain to the couple their potential future. The atmosphere shifted from ominous to promising, and back to ominous again. They could have silenced us after two sentences, but they didn't. They listened, trying to understand the tension that they themselves had created. As we turned the last page of the presentation, we all looked at each other in total silence. They were speechless. Though they didn't move, their eyes turned in all directions. It was



Bruce Nauman, Use Me, 1988

clear that they felt used. Even slightly abused. It was an uncomfortable moment of invention.

## RITUAL

The proposal for the second house opened up the first house by both walling and gutting it. A twelve-millimeter thick steel wall, three meters high with a three meter offset from the original house, offered a new set of spatial and social relationships yet to be deciphered. It was as if we placed a sheet of paper around the house: the wall was too thin to protect, too unstable to divide, eclipsing the surroundings and the old house, yet capturing views and patterns of light that were always there but never framed. The gutting of the interior cleansed the house and opened up a serpentine space that was foreign to both domestic dimensions and expectations. By the same logic the front door was abolished and replaced with a fifty-centimeter slit to lure people in. Once you stepped “inside” through the opening in the untreated blue steel, you entered a walled space partially covered by tree crowns. Painted off-white on the interior, the steel caught the filtered forest light and projected it deep into the serpentine space. The forest, garden, interior, and exterior all belonged to the same spatial sequence: an open, continuous, and tactile space where, day and night, the light felt endless and almost ritual.

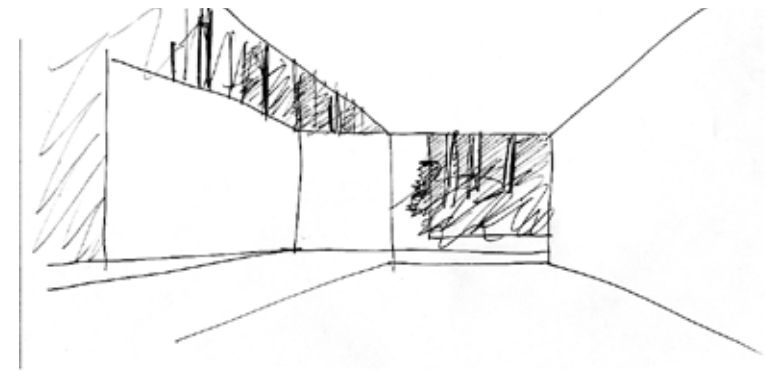


12 mm steel wall

## THE BUILDING

All these extremely specific sensibilities and ambitions had to be translated into an official document for approval by the authorities. Unsurprisingly, the project was rejected by lack of categorical information. Was it an addition to a house? We thought of it more as a subtraction, an abstraction, but there were no classifications for these kinds of nuances. In the end, after a couple more rejections, we decided to hand in the project as an art piece, fully aware that it was everything except that. And as no real constraints exist for art works, neither in size nor time, the project was approved within two weeks and given maximum leeway. The gutting and walling could begin. It promised to be a precision bombardment: a continuous evaluation of what to keep, reject, shift, make invisible, transform into an interior, an exterior—and everything in-between.

With the couple still inhabiting the house like squatters refusing to leave the premises, we had to reinvent the social codes of a construction site. It became a ceremonial enterprise, whereby week after week, the specific location of the couple's hideout had to be renegotiated. It felt as if they were indefinitely trying to postpone the end of the first house and the beginning of the second one. There were two types of construction site meetings: the ones with him, quick, precise, and economical, and the ones with her, endlessly questioning everything in every possible way. One late afternoon, at the end of yet another endless and exciting discussion about the project's many details, the atmosphere suddenly changed. She asked us whether we had an hour or so to spare; she had a question to ask. It felt like the initial phone call. And before we knew it we found ourselves sitting



Space subtraction

at a table too small, in the middle of a half gutted house, being served champagne.

Hesitantly, she began to tell us about a recurring daydream of hers in which she approached an austere house with upright, stately windows and a beautiful garden. She entered the first room. It was a large and imposing space with a square table at its center. This was, in her words, the room of the men. But the men were not there. She crossed the room, towards the back corner, where a door opened up to a second space. The room had a low ceiling and one wall entirely of glass, overlooking the lush gardens of the house. The floor was soft, made of pillows or blankets—or rugs? Women were reclining on the floor. Each time the dream stopped there. Just as we entered into her daydream, she slammed a heavy book on the small table. It read: *The Collected Works of Louise Bourgeois*. In between one of the pages, an A4 print, crumpled at the edges, stuck out. The page in the book depicted *The Destruction of the Father*, an intriguing but horribly organic space that sucks one's gaze inwards. The loose A4 page was a photo of the client sprawling on a bulky bed in front of a curtain covered in scribbles. Because of its overall pink hue, the image felt like a total environment—the result of a bad print, she explained. But by now everything extraordinary seemed intentional, normal, and vague.

Was this seemingly haphazard collection of ephemera—the print, the Bourgeois book, and the daydream—a new commission? Once again, we had to try to decipher her intentions, starting with the pink picture. It turned out to be a picture of her twenty-five square meter studio in Paris, which was filled to the brink with a king size bed. During the years, she realized that this strange setting provoked



picking 2006-09-28.jpg



model 2004-01-30.jpg



forest test 2004-07-07.jpg



window sliding system.jpg



IMG\_4182 2007-02-21.jpg



model serpentine 2004-01-30.jpg



squat 2006-10-08 .jpg



P1080203\_2008-06-09.jpg



IMG\_6450 2007-10-27.jpg



wall space 2007-12-20.jpg



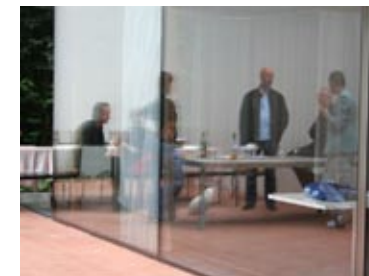
P100\_327\_2010-03-18.jpg



party\_177 2008-06-21.jpg



lamp post.jpg



party\_75 2008-06-21.jpg



after meeting 2009-10-11.jpg

people to behave out of the ordinary. The proportion of the bed to the room, together with her determination to use it as a table, couch, and bed, provoked friends, family, and the occasional stranger to expose themselves, sometimes with friction and sometimes without. By abstracting social and even sexual codes, she had discovered a machine to erase and trigger new meaning. And it was exactly this that she wanted for the house. Stripping and rewriting the space wouldn't do the job. She needed intimacy. She called her desire the "LichtBed." We never questioned the name.

We were back at square one. During construction, we had to rethink what the house would or could do. Was her vague wish an implicit revolt against our intervention? A house encircled with almost nothing. A space too tough to appropriate? Did we need to make a dreamlike soft floor? A patch to lie on? The one issue we deliberately postponed during the whole operation—imagining the house inhabited—had to be addressed. There was no escape anymore.

### HOUSE (3)

We started with two tables. They were narrow and long, measuring seventy by three-hundred centimeters, and strangely fitting to the space. They could be used separately or together, provoking situations ranging from intimate to stately. They were generic in their appearance, but highly specific in their fabrication. The tabletop was extremely thin, exposing the honeycomb structure of the horizontal surface, as if it were cut out of a big surface. The tables challenged the space, but were unable to fulfill her need for intimacy. More than a final product, they were a means to



understand the clients' limits. But the heart of the house was still empty.

We found ourselves confronted with our "own" empty serpentine space, and the sheer impossibility of inhabiting it. Seeing as the space was without a clear orientation—a front or back, a good or bad side—everything remained possible at all times, as if there was no context. But then came that first model, a mound of softness in one of the serpentine's alcoves. The shapeless mass suggested a permissive use, as well as positions and distances yet to be discovered. No standard ergonomics! The undefined scale of the object, measuring some three by three meters, proved to be the missing link. Placed by the entrance window, this was an object in front of which you had to decide whether you were in or out, whether you were willing to engage with it or not. After some thirty small-scale models, we constructed an extremely clumsy full size cardboard version in the atelier. The volume was not beautiful, it was even a bit hopeless in its expression, and with its razor-sharp edges, the cardboard nulled all intended softness. And yet, it was full of potential. Not knowing how it would evolve, we invited the client to the atelier, where the cardboard heap was waiting for her. As she entered, dressed in luscious pink silk, she kicked off her shoes, climbed onto the piece, and sat there glowing. When we saw her reclining, we knew that the piece was right for her, and that she was right for the piece. We all climbed in, looking for a position, demarcating our own personal space, and celebrating this undefined and intimate moment made out of cardboard.

A search for real softness followed. First, we thought of stacking mattresses—latex foam sheets of different thicknesses—and using a bondage technique to sculpt the heap



Table (70 x 300cm, 2006/08)

into an appropriable surface. The stacking, however, proved problematic for several reasons: the piece became extremely heavy, the final surface was nearly impossible to control, and the gradient of softness was more uncomfortable than it was accommodating. The clients nevertheless kept the built model, which was placed in the serpentine space for several months and used it as a real-life testing ground. The latex dummy did a lot, except that which it had to—namely, be a “LichtBed.” Everybody agreed that the latex stacking was intriguing but inappropriate and rather ugly. It was too much of an obstacle in the space and it lacked subtlety in huge proportions.

Our luxurious stint of endless experimentation was rapidly coming to an end, with the clients feeling that their needs had been fundamentally overlooked. With a finished house, but no defined heart, time was ticking and patience evaporating. We knew that we wanted the underside of the bed to be completely transparent so that light could beam through. We also knew that, like the original cardboard surface, we wanted the piece to accommodate as many positions and relations as possible. In our search for the right material translation, we encountered Chevalier Masson, an artisan duo specializing in fabric. In order to make the piece lighter, we imagined a roughly woven surface, soft and hard at the same time, a thick weave intertwining with a very light triangular steel supporting structure. Chevalier Masson’s made-to-measure wool fabric allowed us to realize the ambiguous scale that we had been aiming for all along. Restructuring the latex foam sheets into foam tubes dressed in wool finally abolished the opposition between heavy and light, present and absent, soft and hard. The result was alien, yet self-evident. Together with the tables, and some



LB\_model1 2006.jpg



strümpfewolfgangtiillmans.jpg



harem1.jpg



LB\_2.17 2006-06-19.jpg



DSCN0941\_silk bags 2006.jpg



DCS03828\_May 2006.jpg



DSC03863 51N4E\_2006-06-20.jpg



CardBoard LichtBed 51N4E\_july 2006.jpg



House fit 2006-09-28.jpg



LichtBed 2 foam\_2006.jpg



DSC08072\_LichtBed2 upscale 2007-02-12.jpg



stacking09 2007-03-14.jpg



stacking24 2007-05-30.jpg



P1080471.jpg



bondage test4.jpg

collected chairs of varying nature, the heart of the serpentine space finally came into being.

## AFTER-LIFE

With the house finished and inaugurated, and with the first positive, yet puzzled echoes collected, we felt it was time to part, to climb back out of the rabbit hole. Unsurprisingly, just as we were exiting, we were pulled back in for one last time.

It was a hot summer day. We were sitting outside, in between the house and the wall. Looking at the couple and their friends, we saw how they moved about on their new-found territory. We observed the way they used the house as if they were guests in their own world, behaving as if everything was possible, as if they were attached to nothing. It was both beautiful and somewhat eerie. We mumbled something like: "What if there were other people in your house, other visitors?" After all, in varying degrees, we had been their guests for nearly seven years. Now that the house was finished and we were leaving, the time seemed right for new guests.

Together with the clients we started dreaming of the perfect guest list, people who would be able to confront this construct, challenge it, read or even misread it, and render it richer. Enrique Marty was the first name on the table. The clients had some of his drawings and a very discomfoting sculpture in their collection. And he had visited the house during construction, unsure of what to make of it. We all agreed that he would be the perfect initiator. We devised some rules. The guests would receive a carte blanche invita-



party 2008-06-25.jpg



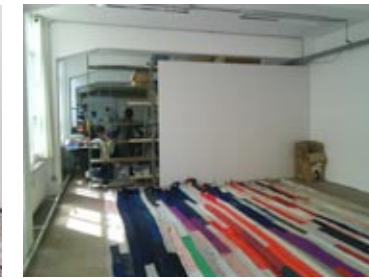
P1010548\_2006-05-08.jpg



doubt\_2009-01-01.jpg



LB knitwork2\_2009-09-25.jpg



flat LB#2 exhibition model\_2011-05-05.jpg



P1030682 2009-05-28.jpg



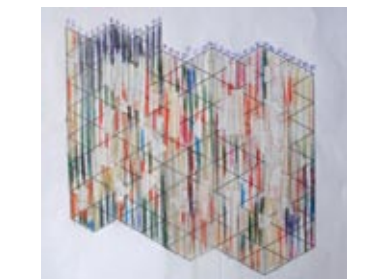
LB colors\_2009-10-26.jpg



fial structure 2010-01-22.jpg



LB 1st Loop 2010-01-25.jpg



LichtBed Coloration3\_2009-12-07.jpg



27\_IMG\_1171\_2010-01-28.jpg



009 expo51N4E-AA London 2011-11-13.jpg



P220332\_2010-08-17.jpg



025 expo51N4E BOZAR bxl 2010-06-29.jpg



Caption Pending

tion, a fridge full of food, and unlimited access to the house for as long as they wished, without the presence of the clients. These rules would apply to all guests without exception. In addition, there would be no preconceptions about the guests' contribution. It could be anything, even nothing. When Enrique Marty entered the house with his carte blanche contribution, carrying two scaled dolls of the owners—their alter egos—we knew the afterlife of the house was both secured and challenged. The rest is history.

Their history.

51N4E, December 2011



The serpentine's heart



The alter-ego, Enrique Marty, 2009

Guest:

**Andrea Branzi**

**TOKONOMA**

Date of arrival:

29.04.2011

Date of departure:

30.04.2011

Postscript title:

**THE SHRINE**

Postscript comment:

Sipping on a cup of coffee at the long table in the serpentine space, Andrea Branzi suddenly recalled the concentric plans of the Café Alzheimer, one of his earlier works. It was as if the house gradually made you slip into a state of oblivion, a process that could only be counterbalanced by recognizable objects. Hence the TOKONOMA proposal, in which Branzi proposed to introduce a new recognizable object in the heart of the house. It would perform as a shrine for voluntary recollection, clearly referencing Japanese built-in alcoves in which precious items are displayed. The TOKONOMA shrine would protect memories while at the same time making them public. The shrine is currently being produced.



shifted facade

Dear Julie & Michel, dear 51N4E,

One of the problems of architecture in the age of globalization is that of being suitable to a "borderless world". A world where everything blends, melts and expands itself. A flat world, where the places have lost their specific function, and are available to acceptor and change their function in real time.

Within this crossable and faded territory, architecture still preserves its structural stiffness, and its irreversible foundations, creating closed rings and enclosures, that don't correspond any more to the fluidity of our society, or to our individual identity, always growing.

Thus it's a philosophic problem, more than one of design.

We must actually create rings where the "interior" expands itself towards the exterior side, and it's able to receive the "exterior" world inside itself.

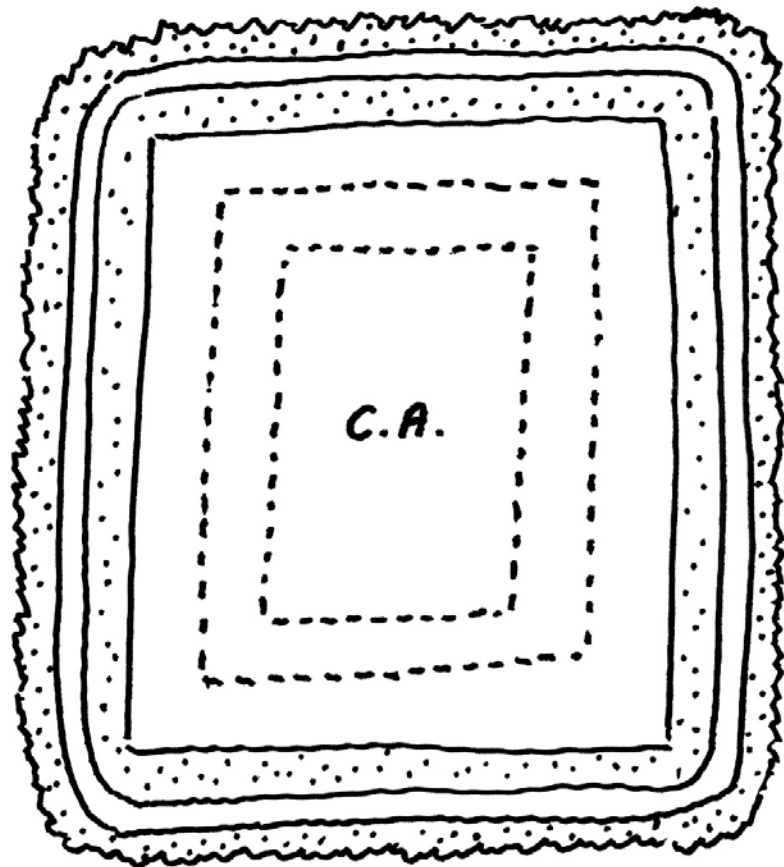
In the ancient Japanese architecture the house didn't have an exterior image, all made of woven bamboo; only the interior surface was in plaster, as if the main façade was the private and not the public one.

I have found many of these considerations in your project, and in the decision to realize an architecture "without an exterior image", but only a real theatre backstage, all inside, made by the persons who live in it, by the objects placed there.

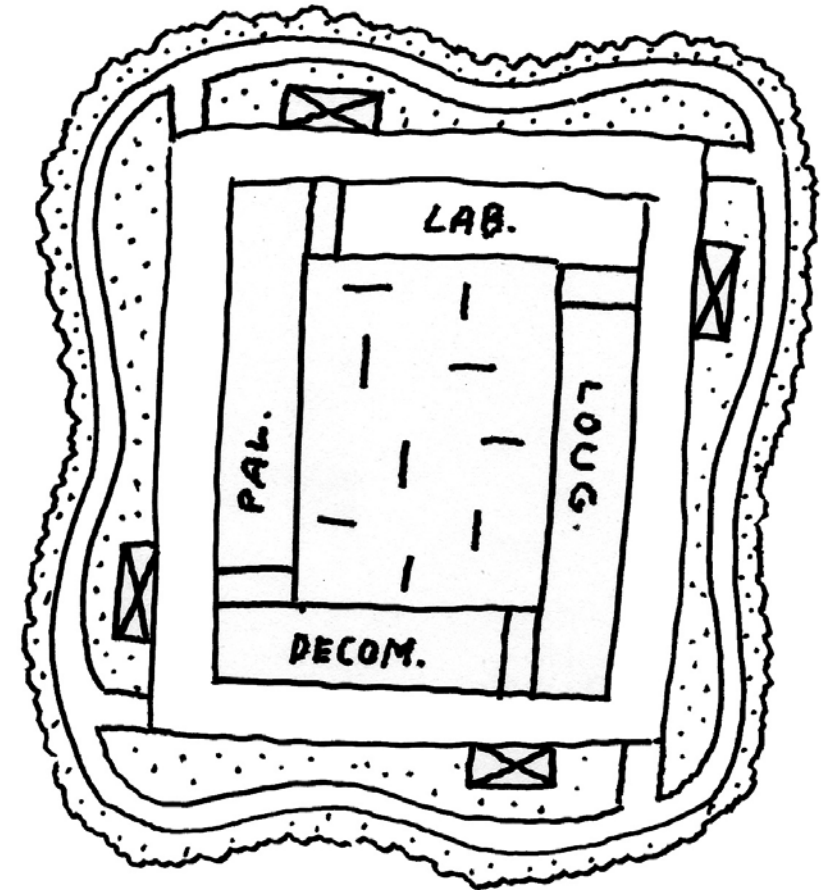
An architecture where the quality of the space is in the quality of the human relations, by hospitality, by culture, and not only by the stiff forms that contain them.

Andrea Branzi,  
Aprile 2011

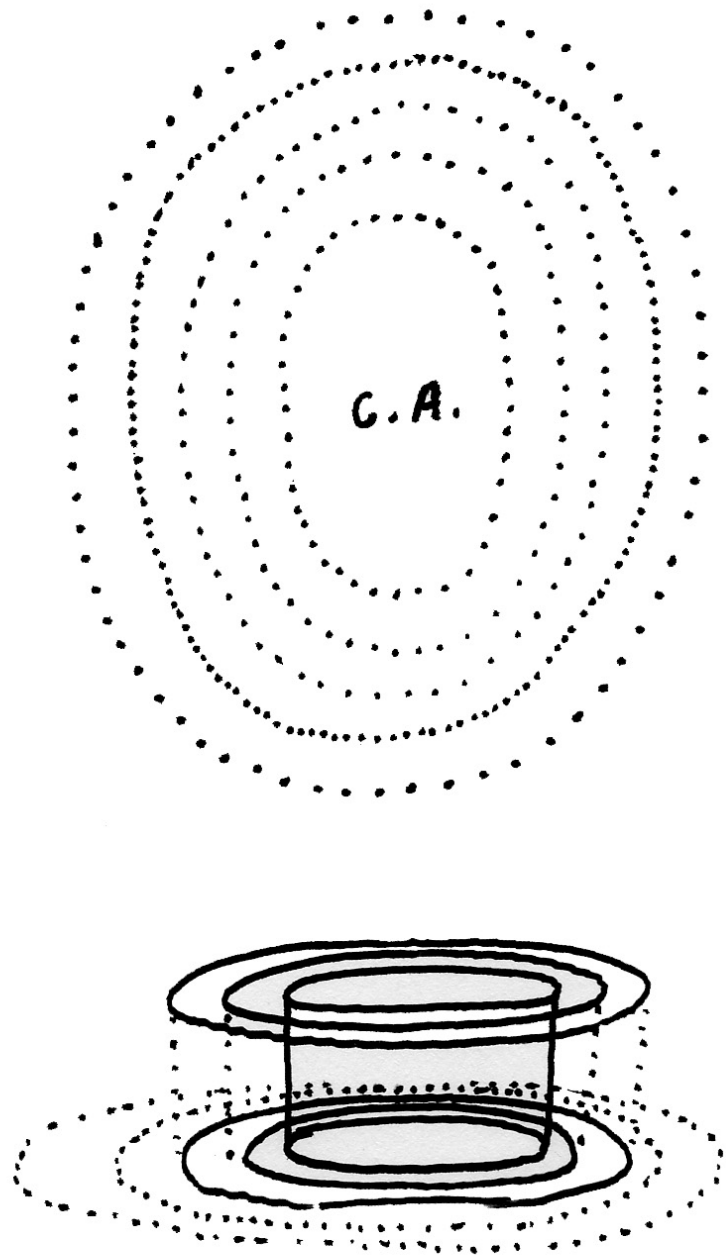
a letter from Branzi



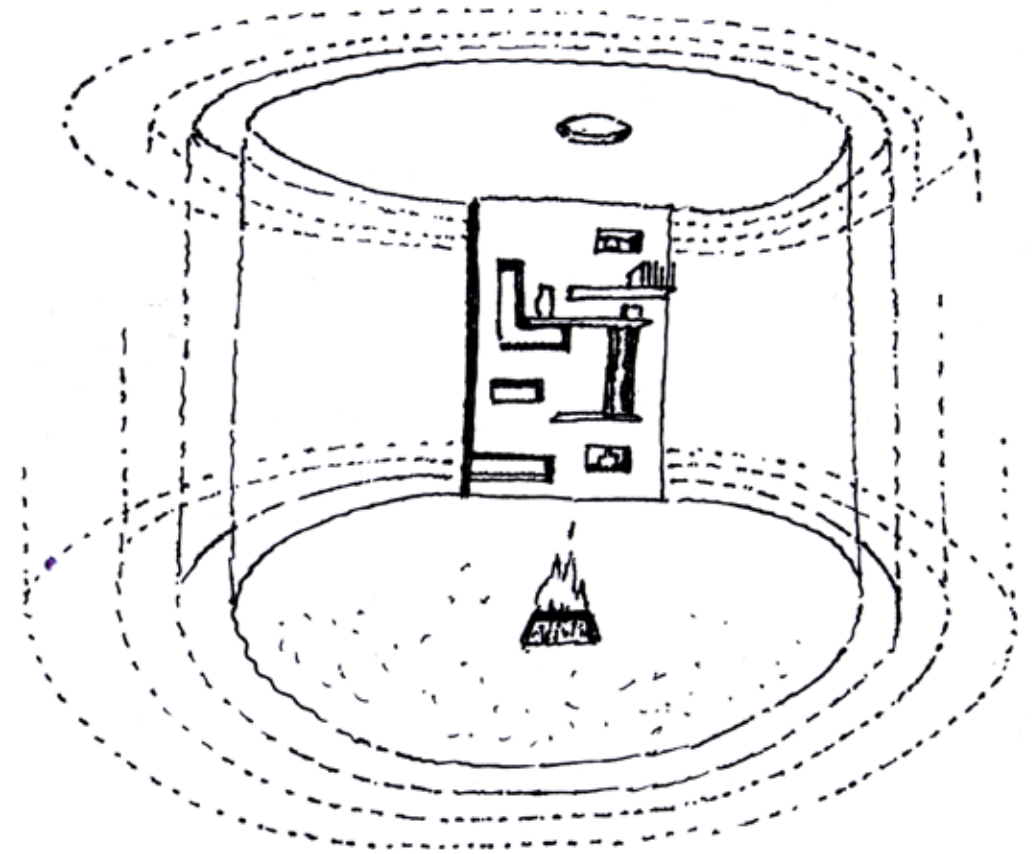
CA Alzheimer 2 (Andrea Branzi, 1968?)



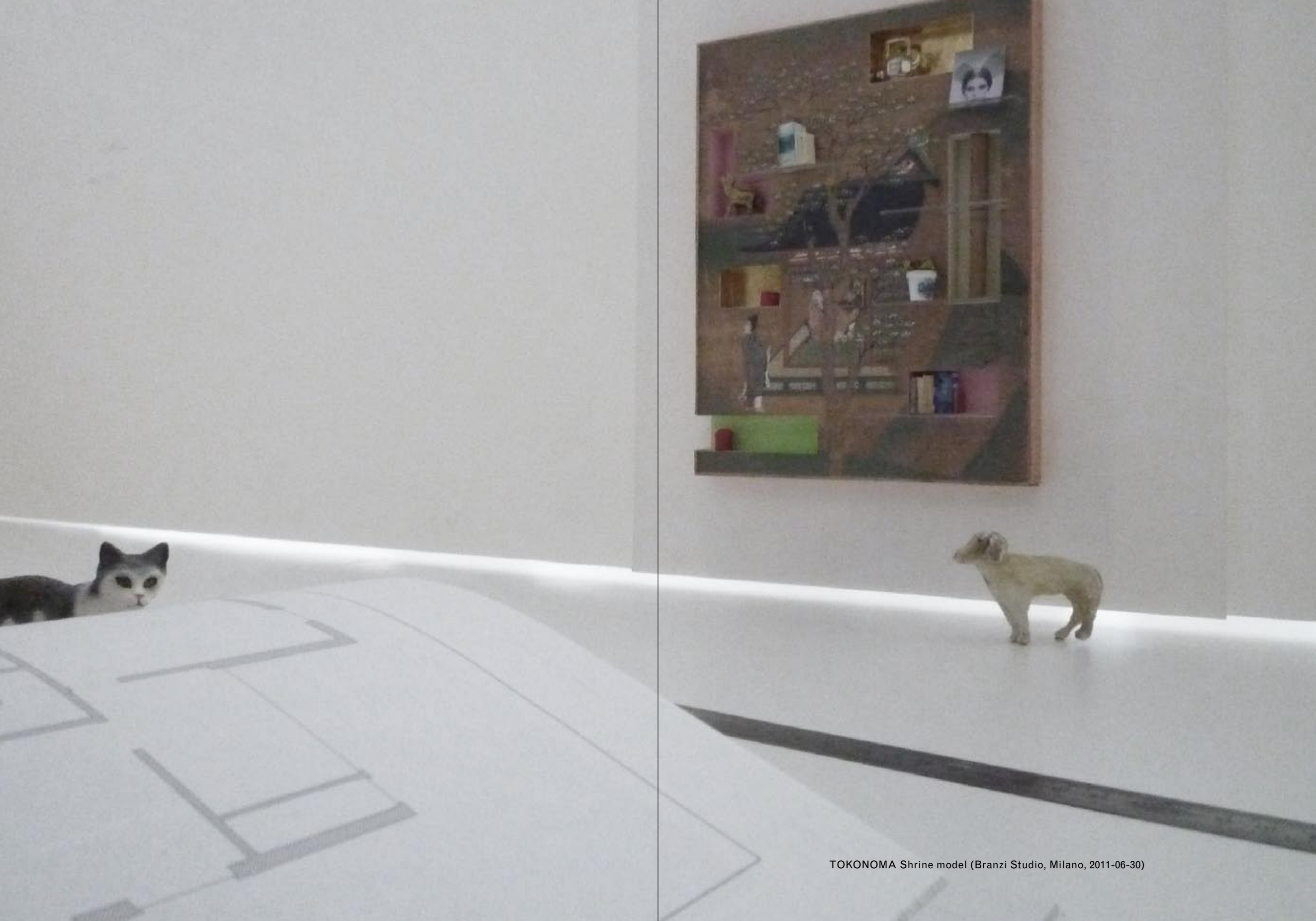
CA Alzheimer 3 (Andrea Branzi, 1968?)



CA Alzheimer 1 (Andrea Branzi, 1968?)



TOKONOMA Shrine (Andrea Branzi, 2011)



TOKONOMA Shrine model (Branzi Studio, Milano, 2011-06-30)

Guest:

**Josse De Pauw**

With Kristien De Proost, Herman Sorgeloos, Diederik De Cock

## **B-CHATS**

Date of arrival:

2.5.2011

Date of departure:

6.5.2011

Postscript title:

**THE PLAY**

Postscript comment:

'in retrospect, it feels extremely natural that this collection of scenes would be reenacted in the house—almost as if each space and each room possessed its own dialogue and was waiting for it to be spoken. Josse De Pauw did just that: using every space available, from the bathroom to the wine cellar,\* De Pauw introduced playing as a natural condition of the house. Each scene was documented photographically. The dialogues were also recorded to captivate the difference in acoustics between the inside, outside, and in-between spaces. The B-Chats were left behind in the house as sound bites on a DVD.

\* The story goes that after De Pauw's visit, the clients started labeling their wines for future guests, having found some precious bottles completely empty.

AT THE GATE

She:  
"Let's not talk much."

He:  
"Just as you like."

She:  
"You understand, don't you?"

He:  
"No, not really."



IN THE CELLAR

He:  
"Don't you believe I love you?"

She:  
"Yes. I believe it."

He:  
"Isn't it enough?"

She:  
"Oh yes. It's enough."



NIGHT ON THE BENCH

He:  
"It's you I love."

She:  
"Of course. But ... even so."

He:  
"I don't want anyone else."

She:  
"..."



ALONG THE WALL

She:  
"What?"

He:  
"Your feet."

She:  
"What?"

He:  
"They're walking."





## EATING ICE-CREAM

She:  
"You start."

He:  
"I have nothing to say."

She:  
"Ten minutes ago, you had quite a lot to say."

He:  
"I can repeat what I said."

She:  
"But in a more friendly tone."

He:  
"In a more friendly tone."

She:  
"I'm listening."





IN THE GARDEN

She:  
“Aren’t you playing tennis?”

He:  
“Harry has a stiff arm.”

She:  
“He smokes too much.”

He:  
“Smoking doesn’t ...”

She:  
“... If you smoke two packages a day your circulation ...”

He:  
“... of course it affects the circulation ...”

She:  
“It goes without saying.”







NIGHT ON THE TERRACE

He:  
"I'm tired."

She:  
"Do you think you can sleep now?"

He:  
"I took another Nembutal."

She:  
"Let's go to bed."

He:  
"What's the time?"

She:  
"Nearly four."

He:  
"You can hear the trucks on the motorway now."



AT THE FENCE

He:  
"Look at me."

She:  
"..."

He:  
"Please take my hand."

She:  
"..."

He:  
"Put it against your cheek."

She:  
"..."

He:  
"Can you feel my hand?"

She:  
"Yes."

He:  
"But can you feel that it's my hand? That it's me."

She:  
"No."

He:  
"Now you know what I mean."



AFTER DINNER

He:  
"But the truth?"

She:  
"The truth is different."

He:  
"We'll be truthful."

She:  
"We'll try to be truthful."

He:  
"We'll have to practice."

She:  
"What do you think of my meatballs?"

He:  
"Disgusting!"

She:  
"You see! And so on."







AT THE STAIRCASE

She:  
"It's a funny thing, you know."

He:  
"What 's funny?"

She:  
"Do you like coming home?"

He:  
"Is everything complicated today?"

She:  
"I'd like us to hide in bed and just hold each other tight  
and not get up for a whole week. And we'd both have a good cry."

He:  
"We haven't chosen that sort of life."





AT HER DESK

He:  
"Do you think life is dull?"

She:  
"No. What a question! Do you?"

He:  
"I don't know."

She:  
"I still think life's exciting."

He:  
"You are pretty, you know."

She:  
"Is there something you want to tell me?"

He:  
"Can life suddenly go wrong?"

She:  
"Do you mean us?"

He:  
"Is it a matter of choosing, and making the wrong choice?"

She:  
"Has something happened, darling?"

He:  
"Nothing. Absolutely nothing."





IN THE BEDROOM

She:  
"So you think we'll live together all our lives?"

He:  
"What a funny question."

She:  
"Aren't you ever sorry that you won't sleep with anyone else but me?"

He:  
"Are you?"

She:  
"Sometimes."

He:  
"I wonder if there's something wrong with me. I'm content."

She:  
"So am I."



AT THE TERRACE

She:  
"Tea is still hot."

He:  
"Shall I make you some toast?"

She:  
"No thanks."

He:  
"A piece of cake then?"

She:  
"No thanks. I'm dieting."

He:  
"How ridiculous."



## BATHING OUTSIDE

She:  
"Darling."

He:  
"Yes, my dear?"

She:  
"Do you think we're living in utter confusion?"

He:  
"You and I?"

She:  
"No, the whole lot of us."

He:  
"What do you mean by confusion?"

She:  
"Fear, uncertainty, folly. I mean confusion.  
That we realize secretly that we're slipping downhill.  
And that we don't know what to do."

He:  
"..."

She:  
"Perhaps it's like a poison."

He:  
"Inside us, you mean?"

She:  
"Darling."

He:  
"Yes?"

She:  
"Have we missed something important?"









Guest:

## Something Fantastic

### MAYBE, MAYBE NOT

Architecture Around Sint Eloois Winkel  
in 18 Photographs, 8 Stories and 12 Drawings

Date of arrival:  
12.11.2010

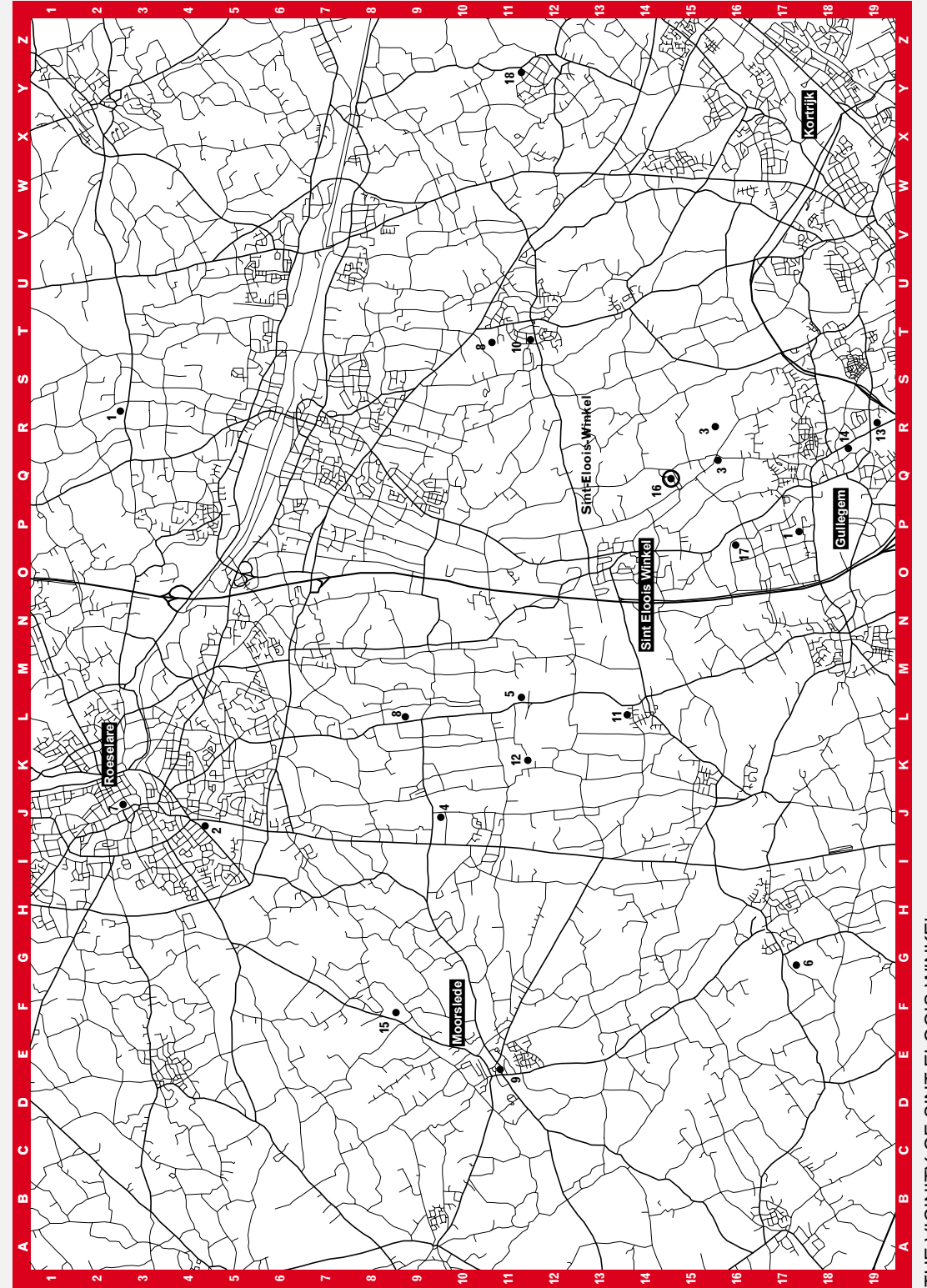
Date of departure:  
14.11.2010

Postscript title:  
THE CONTEXT

Postscript comment:  
Having read and examined Something Fantastic's stories, pictures, and drawings, we no longer know what is real, speculated, or even completely fantasized. Mixing non-fiction with fiction—or is it the other way round?—they managed to make the unbearable lightness of everyday life acceptable.

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THE VICINITY OF SINT ELOOIS WINKEL

Map

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### Item 1



Brasserie Trobiere

### Item 2



House Cascade

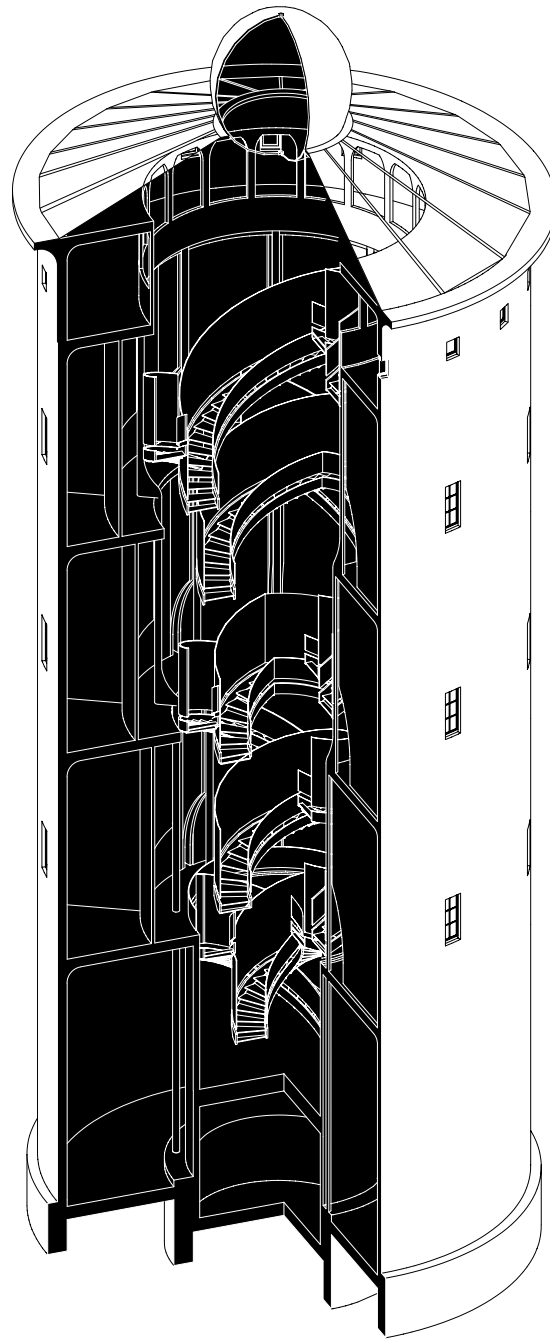


Tower of Hermits

“Situated on a hilltop between Kortrijk and Sint-Eloois Winkel, the Tower of Hermits was built in 1909 for a fraternity of Trappists. Twenty-seven monastic cells are distributed on three floors connected by two spiral staircases. Built by blacksmiths from Brussels, the spiral staircases are still considered as extraordinary examples of Beaux-Arts steel structures in the region. The innermost staircase leads downward, and the outer one upward. It was the duty of each monk to walk this vertical cloister a dozen times a day. After the law of Vandervelde was passed in 1919—prohibiting the sale of hard spirits in bars, which, in turn, boosted the demand for strong beer—the monks of the Tower unanimously voted to join the Cloister of Orval in 1932. Since then, the tower has been vacant—only the top floor has been refurbished to accommodate the succeeding owner.”

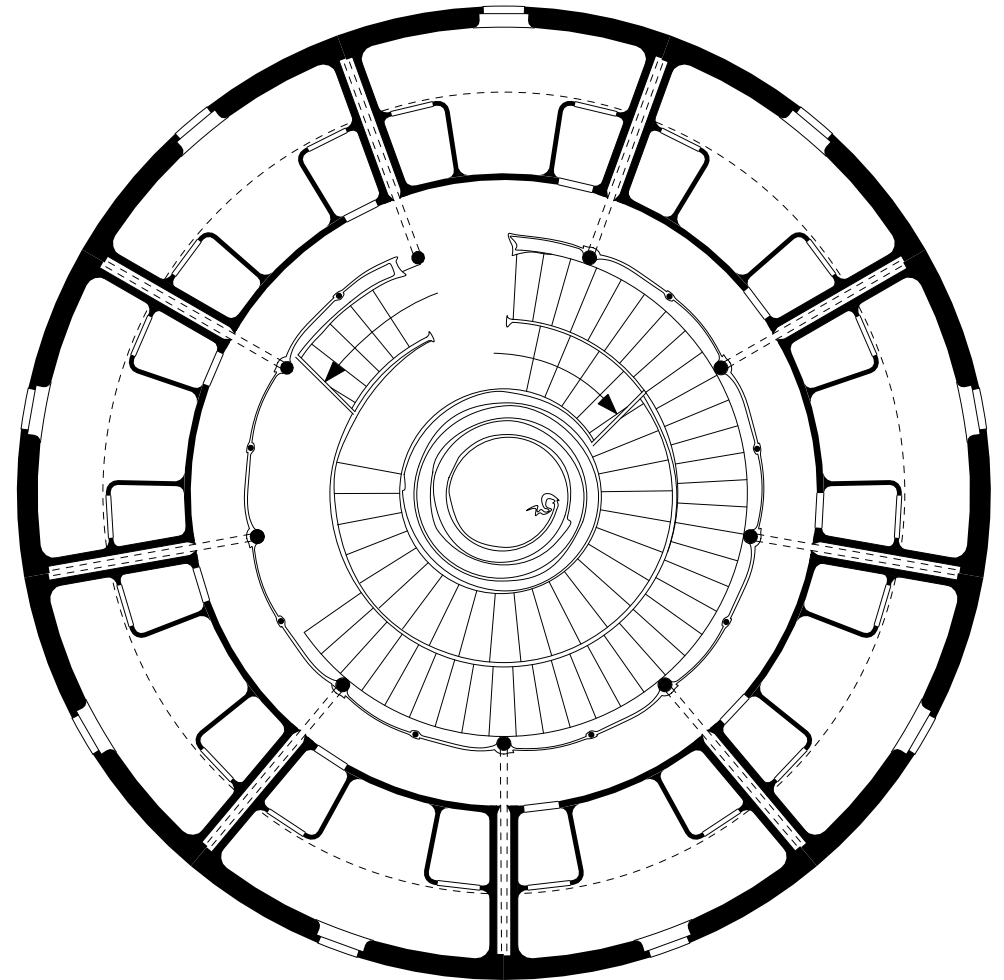
Tower of Hermits

Item 3C



Tower of Hermits

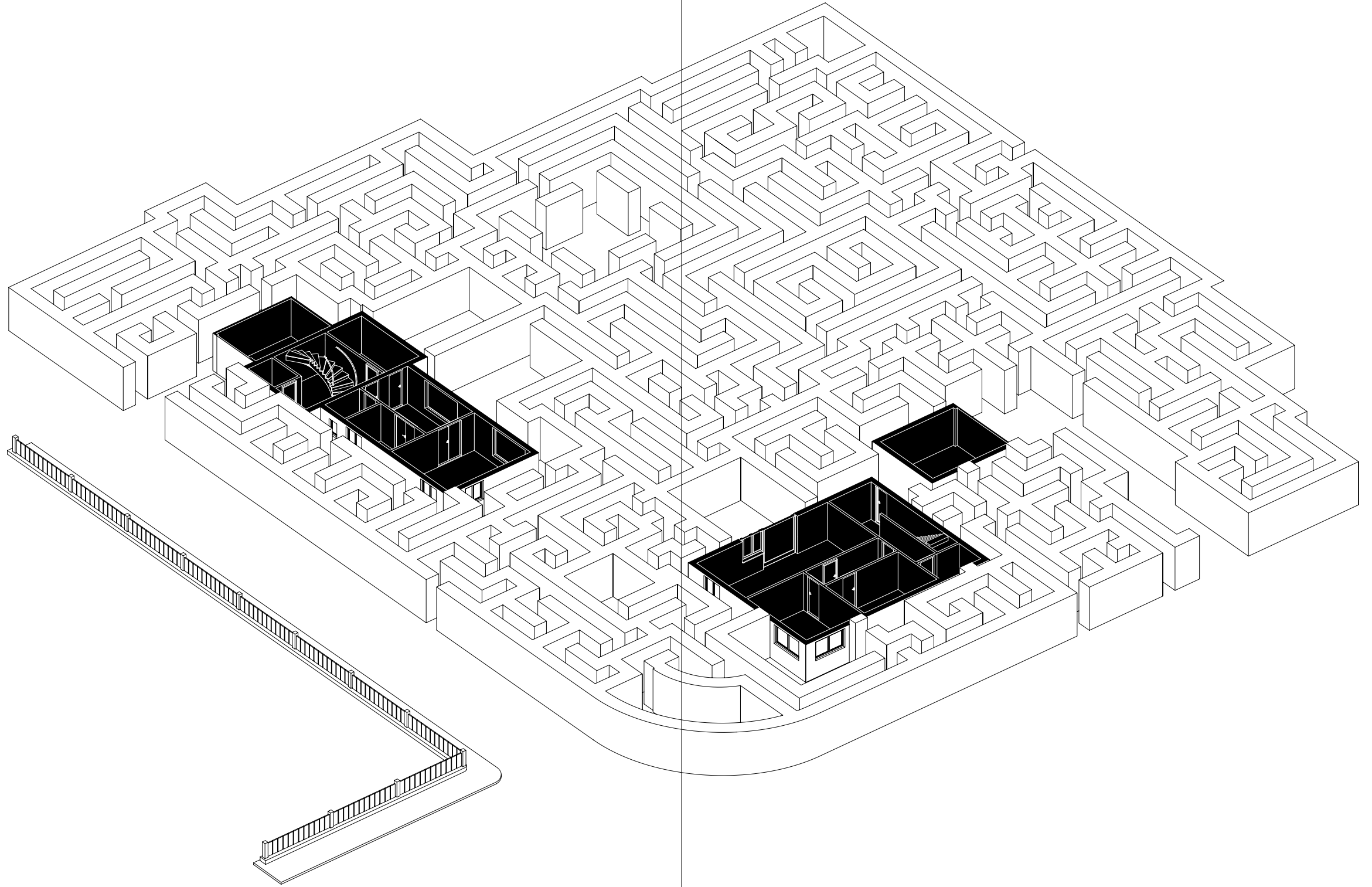
Item 3D



Tower of Hermits



Hedge Labyrinth



Hedge Labyrinth

“The gardens on the corner of Kortewagenstraat and Meerlaanstraat in Beitem are completely covered by a hedge labyrinth. Back in 1993, one of the residents of the two plots, Yves van den Brande, befriended Roy Walker, the set designer for Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining*. After realizing that *The Shining*’s infamous labyrinth didn’t actually exist in the real Timberline Lodge in Oregon—the inspiration for the movie’s Overlook Hotel—van den Brande convinced his neighbor to build a replica of the maze. After several alleged instances of voyeurism last year, the two owners closed the labyrinth to the public.”

Hedge Labyrinth



De Guyter's Organ



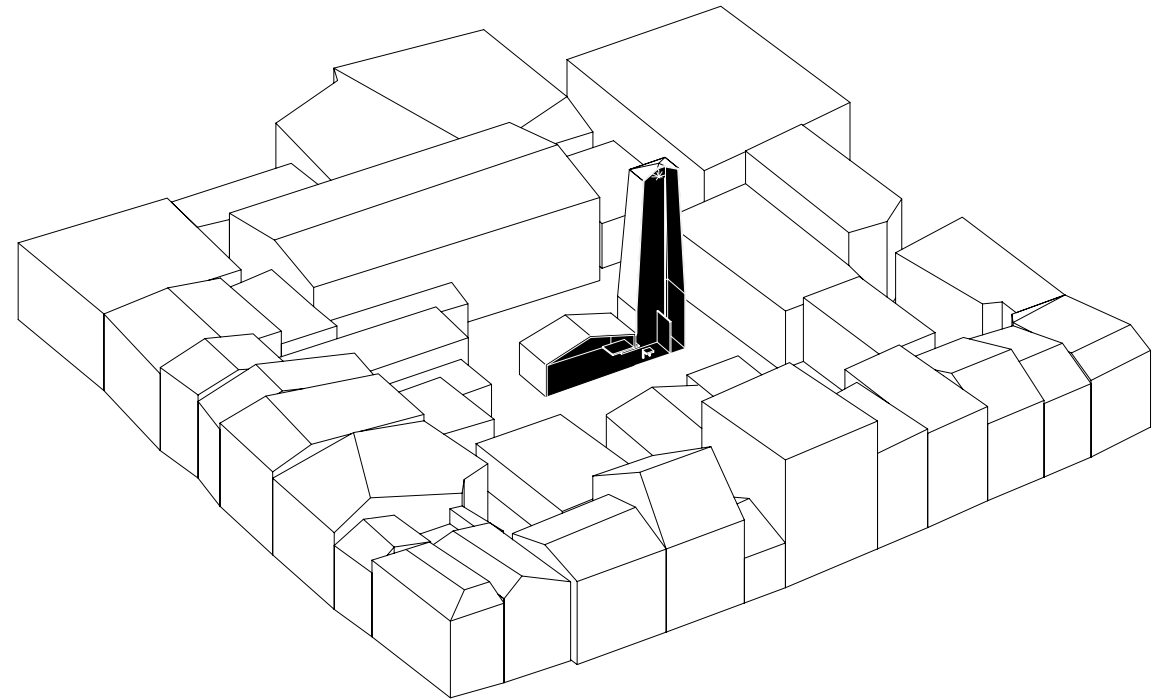
Wall of Hope

Item 7A



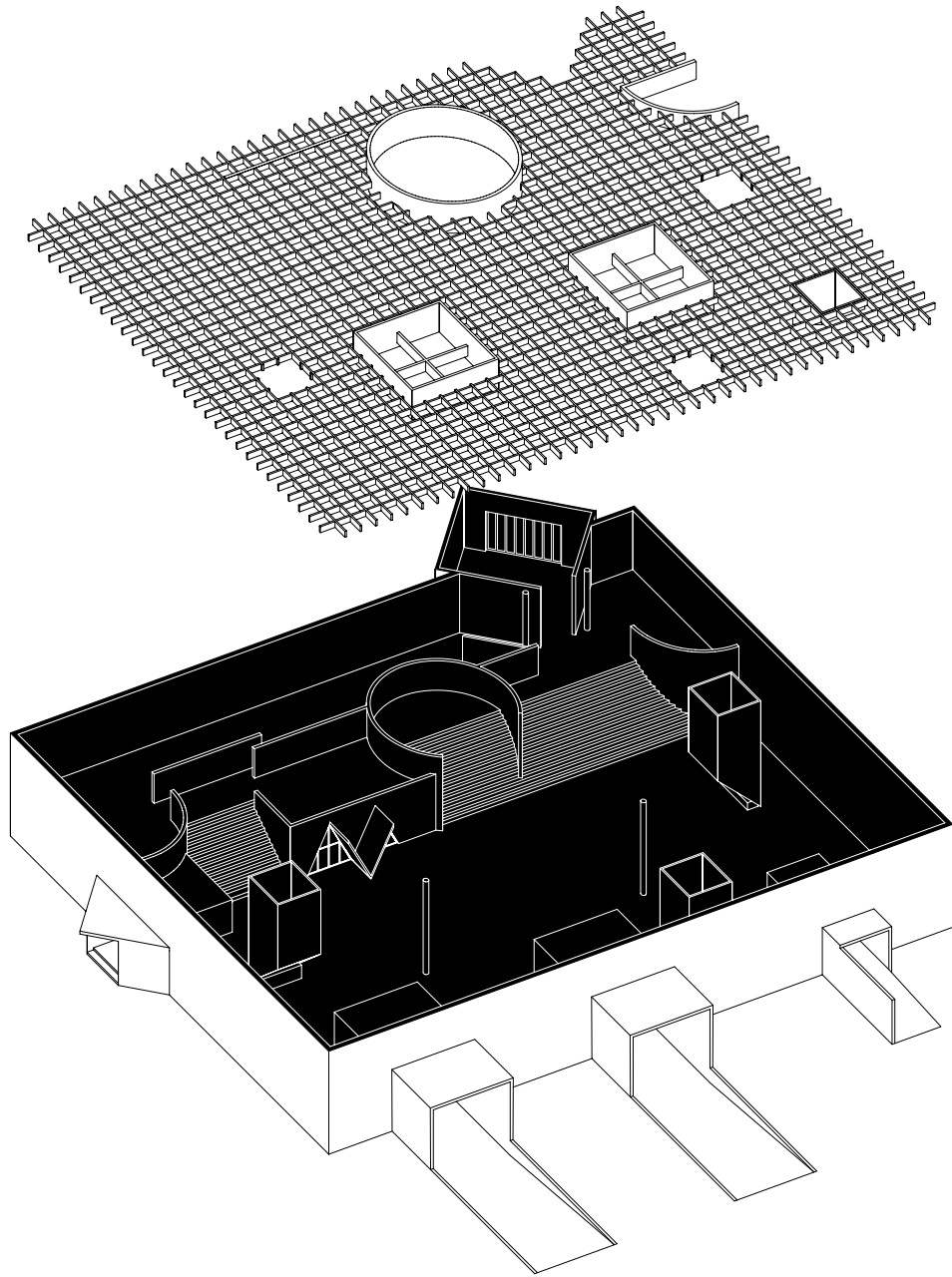
Shooting Tower Roeselare

Item 7B



Shooting Tower Roeselare





Vanders Briquetiers

“What is now the truck wash in Vossemolen was first developed to house the administrative offices and exhibition rooms of the Vanders Briqueteries. In 1967, Michel Vanders, the founder of the Briqueteries, commissioned the architect Juliaan Lampens to design the building, inspired by a house that he’d built in Kortrijk for his neighbor Delbeke. However, the brick workers’ guild strongly opposed Lampens’ commission because of his modern style, which he had recently demonstrated with his design for a sculptural concrete chapel in Kerlare. With both Vanders and the brick workers’ guild refusing to compromise, the guild eventually harassed Lampens into resigning from the project, even though construction had already begun. A landscape of idiosyncratic forms, the interior layout was built according to Lampens’ design—but because some parts were covered in brick at a later date, Lampens never refers to this project. In 1999, Vanders Briqueteries went bankrupt. A new entrance facade was added to the front elevation in 2002 when the building became a truck wash.”

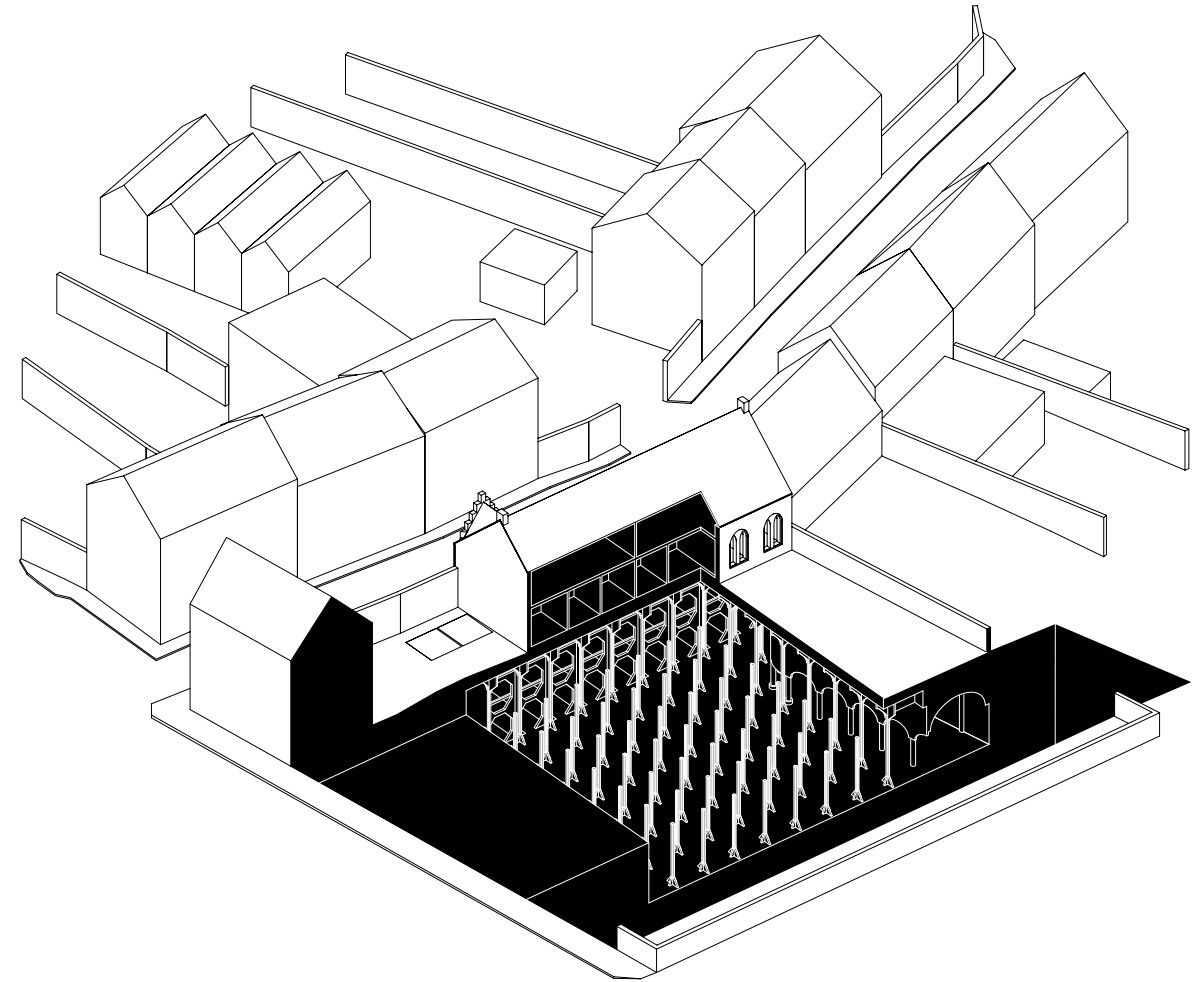
Vanders Briquetiers



Old Ammunition Depot

“The battlefields of Flanders were bitterly contested during the First World War. At several times during the war, a number of towns fell into German hands only to be liberated by the Belgians and their allies shortly thereafter. Moorslede was one of these towns. In 1917, one of the bloodiest years for the Allies, Australian troops stationed in Moorslede built an underground ammunition depot in the garden of the Church of Saint Martin. In order to hide the structure—the first concrete structure ever built in the area—from German air surveillance, a fake old-looking church was built on top of the depot. The German troops never discovered it, even though it took almost a year to finish and the highest part of the underground depot was visible on the facade facing the street.”

Old Ammunition Depot

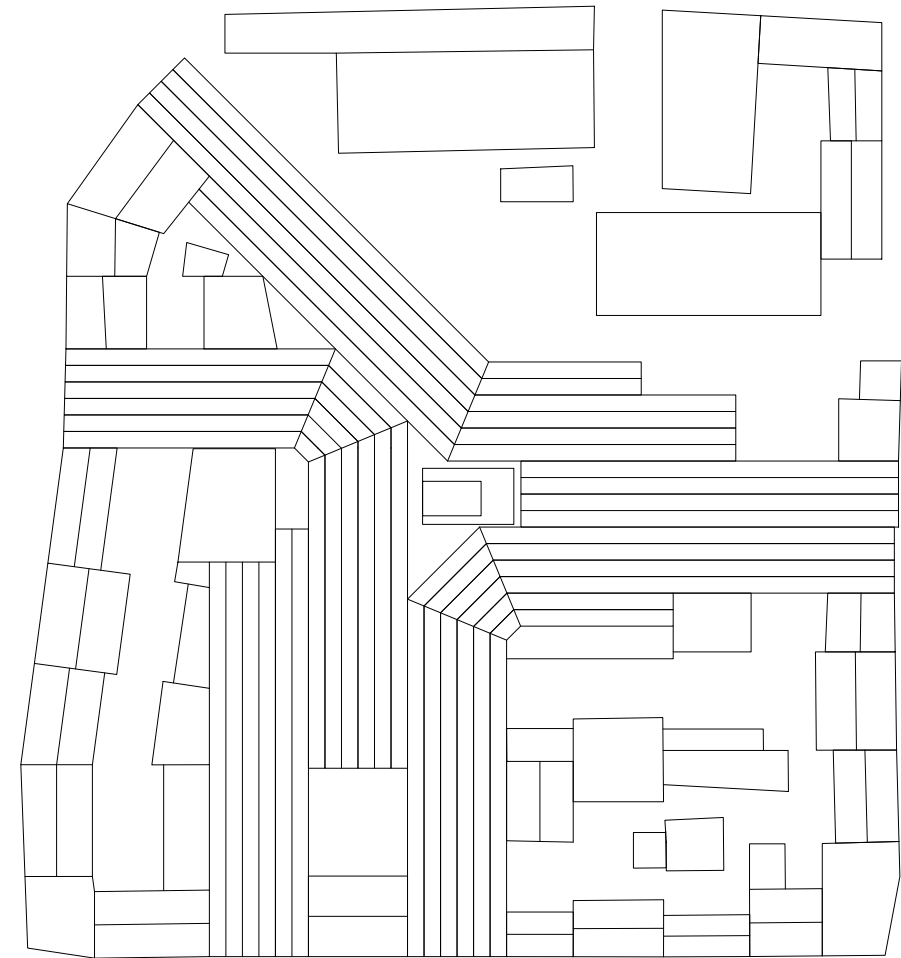


Old Ammunition Depot



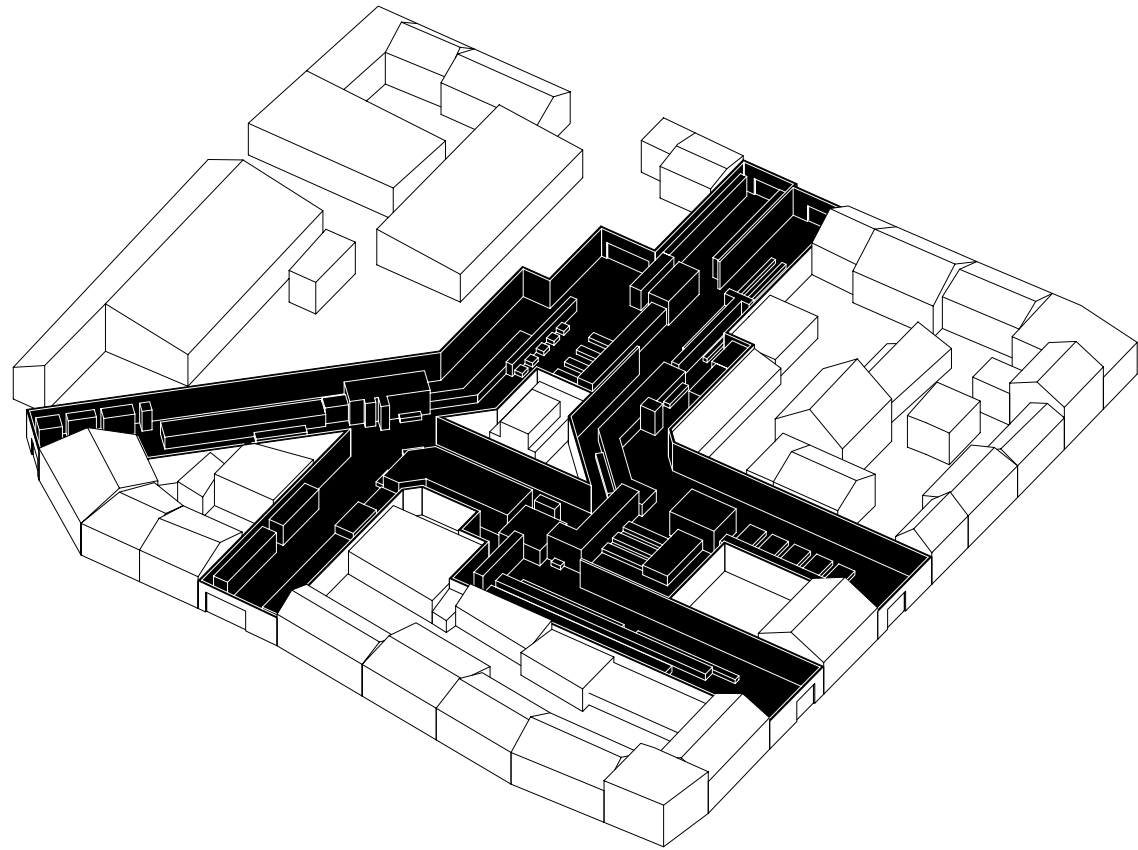
“The FG Frosting Cooperative is a small freezing plant in Ledegem. When Dubois Frosta had to auction off the plant and its machinery in 1988, because it couldn’t compete anymore with larger and more modern freezing plants located in the countryside, the plant was taken over by a cooperative. Today, the members of the cooperative, as well as hobby farmers from Ledegem’s neighboring villages, have their small quantities of produce professionally frozen at FG Frosting. To process a high variety of produce, the cooperative’s assembly lines split at various stages according to each vegetable’s unique properties and process. The plant has access to four refrigerating and freezing machines in total: three linear machines and one spiral cryogenic freezer. As a whole, the complex occupies a whole block in central Ledegem, and has three entrances and two gates where frozen goods can be picked up.”

FG Frosting Cooperative



FG Frosting Cooperative

Item 10D



FG Frosting Cooperative

Item 11



House De Crem

Item 12



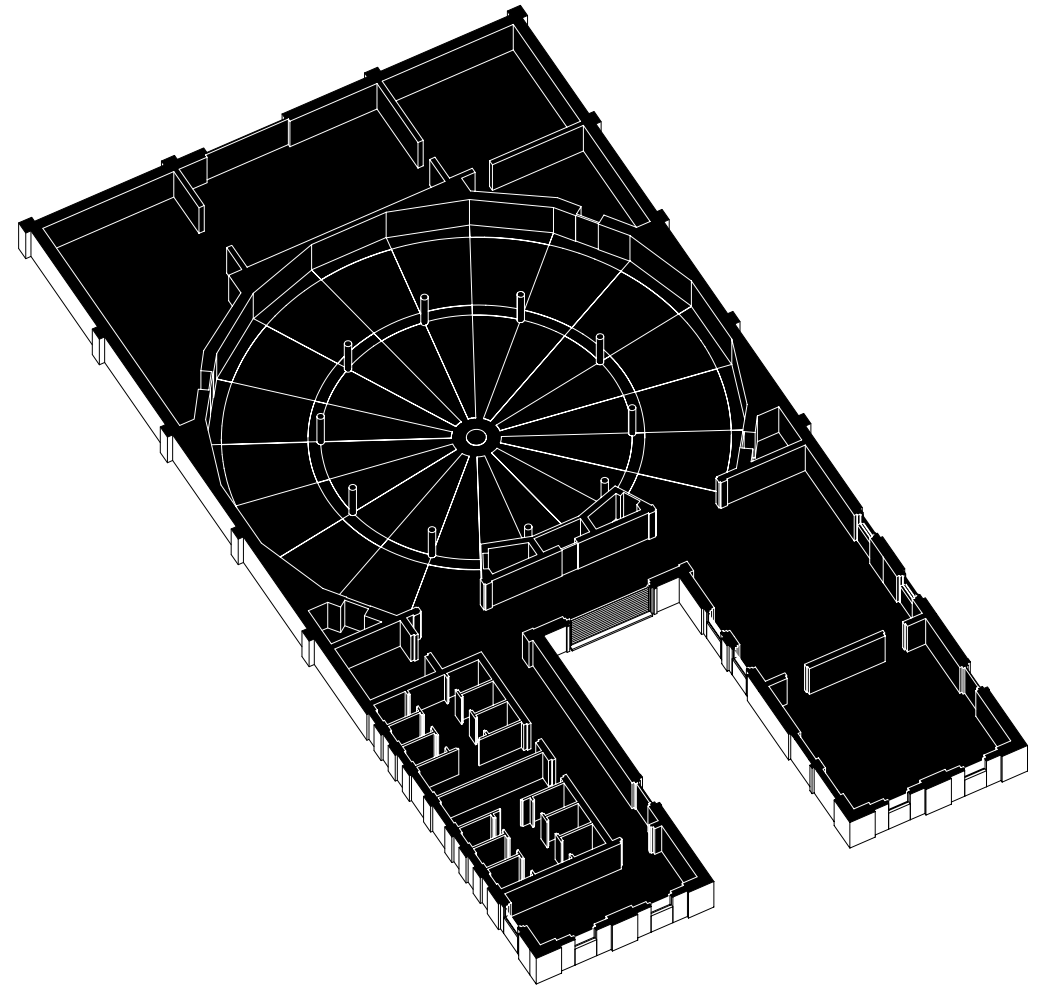
Hog Farm Gondry



Darts Palace Gullegem

“The Darts Palace of Gullegem is located on the southern end of Bissegemstraat. Built in 1934, this building was converted into a darts hall in 1979, giving it its present-day characteristic features: its circular hall, which can accommodate up to fourteen players in a circle, facing away from the center and towards a circular dartboard wall; and the dartboard-like pattern of the floor tiling. The Darts Palace was most popular in the 1980s, when Luc Marreel, a native Gullegem dart athlete, brought home a number of national and international championships, including the Belgian National Championships, the Dutch Open and the Winmau World Masters. The Darts Palace never hosted an official competition, because it didn’t comply with the regulations stipulated by the British Darts Organisation; nevertheless, the Darts Palace was a very popular venue in the region up until its closure in 2003.”

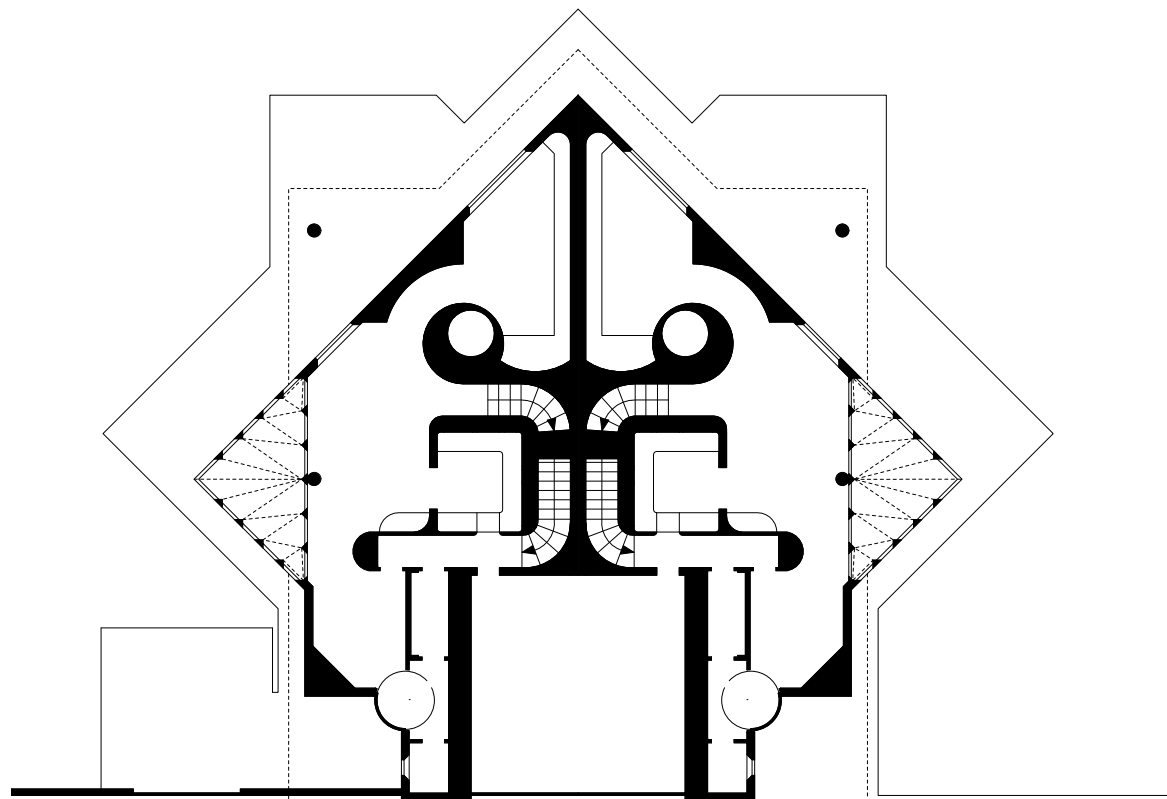
Darts Palace Gullegem



Darts Palace Gullegem



House Eochroa



House Eochroa

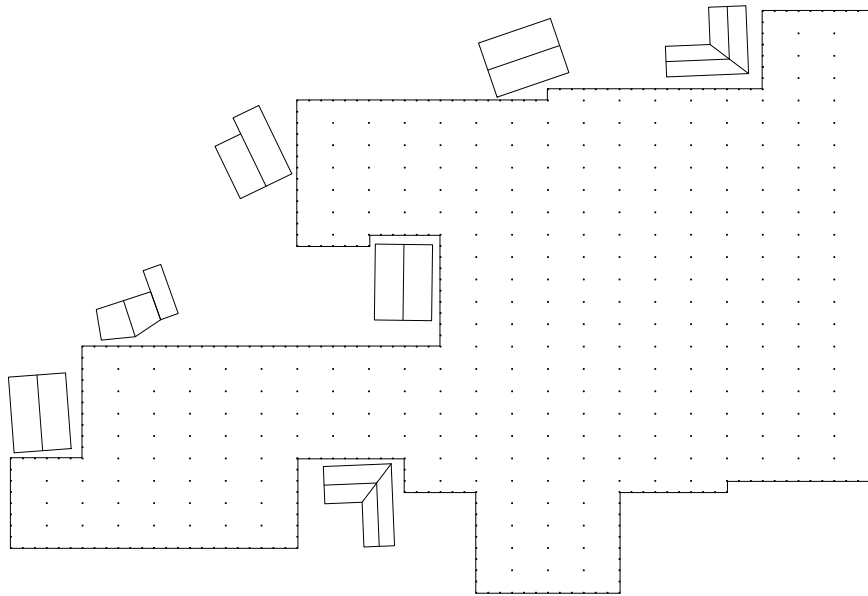
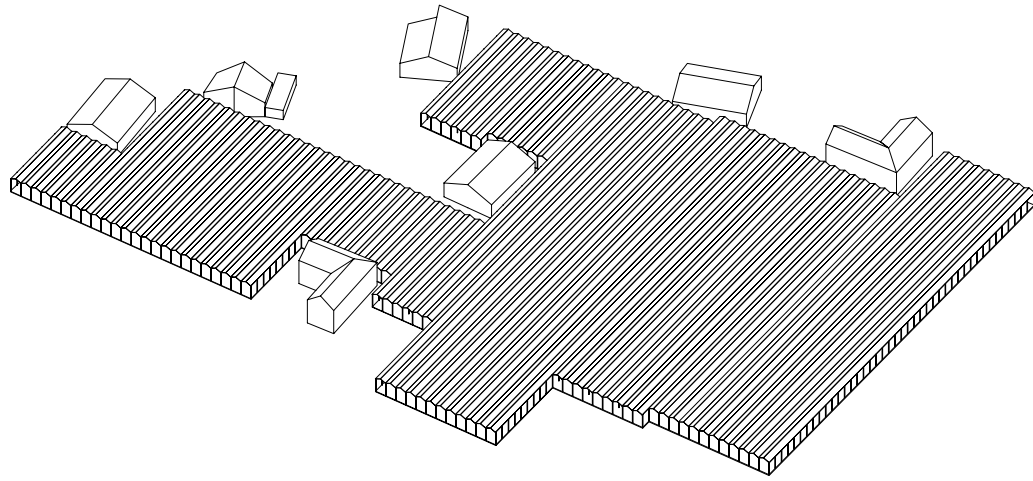
“Michel Cauvin built the House Eochroa, Gullegem, in 1984 as a home for his two daughters, Lanelle and Amoke. From 1953 to 1959, Mr Cauvin was the commander of the Force Publique in the Belgian Congo. After his service, Mr. Cauvin stayed in Africa where he opened up a lodge in the Parc National de la Salonga and adopted two twin girls from Elomi, a village in the northern part of the parc. He returned to Belgium in 1971 only when Mobutu’s Zairisation made business too difficult for the Belgians. Lanelle and Amoke, who are now both married with two children each, still live in the house today. Eochroa is Mr. Cauvin’s favorite kind of African butterfly.”

House Eochroa



Floating Venlo

Item 15 B



Floating Venlo

Item 16



House Arteconomy

Item 17



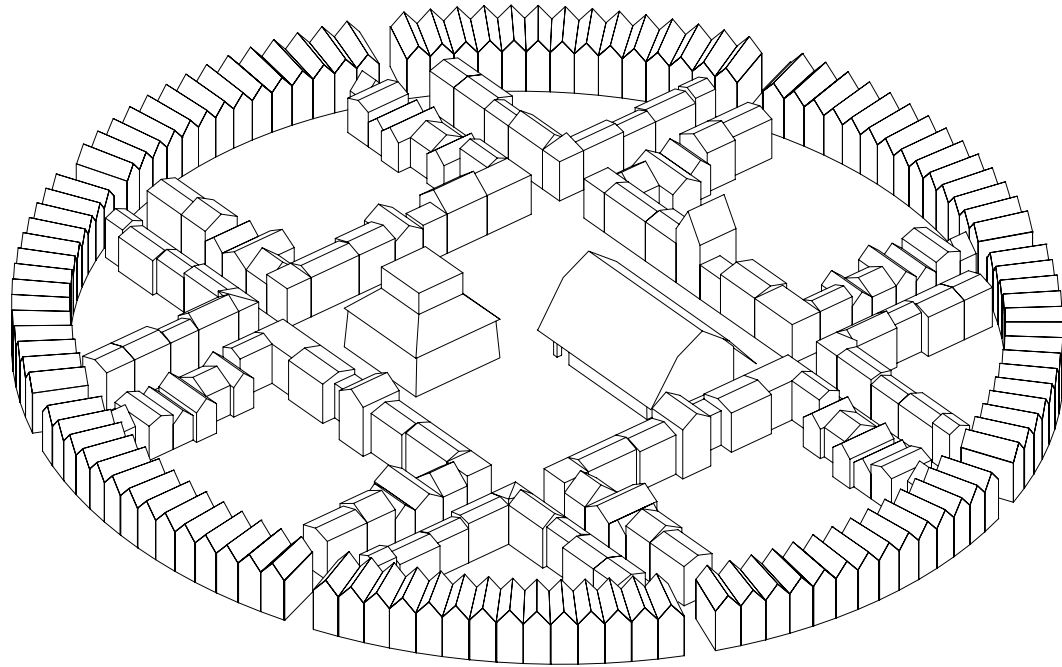
Zonestad



Laager Village

“The village of Laager was founded in 1675 by a dozen farmers who emigrated from America to Flanders. The sons and daughters of America’s first generation of Dutch immigrants, they left the “land of opportunity,” citing religious fundamentalism and a general lack of culture as some of their reasons. While many of the barns that once formed the village’s circular boundary continue to store chicory, as they were originally intended to, most of the settlement’s historic wood frame buildings—the parish hall and cultural center, to name a few—do not exist anymore.”

Laager Village

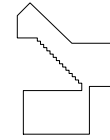


Laager Village

Guest:

**BeL**

## A GUEST HOUSE



Date of arrival:

2.7. 2010

Date of departure:

4.7.2010

Postscript title:

**THE NEXT ARCHITECT?**

Postscript comment:

As an exception, BeL Architects received a precisely formulated challenge alongside their invitation. They were asked if it was possible to design one more intervention for the house. Their answer was the Guest House, a miniature house hidden within the existing building envelope, a parallel realm of contemplative space waiting to be occupied by either guest or host.

## The Guest House

The Guest House is based on BeL's personal experience as both guests and temporary inhabitants of the Vandenbroucke residence.

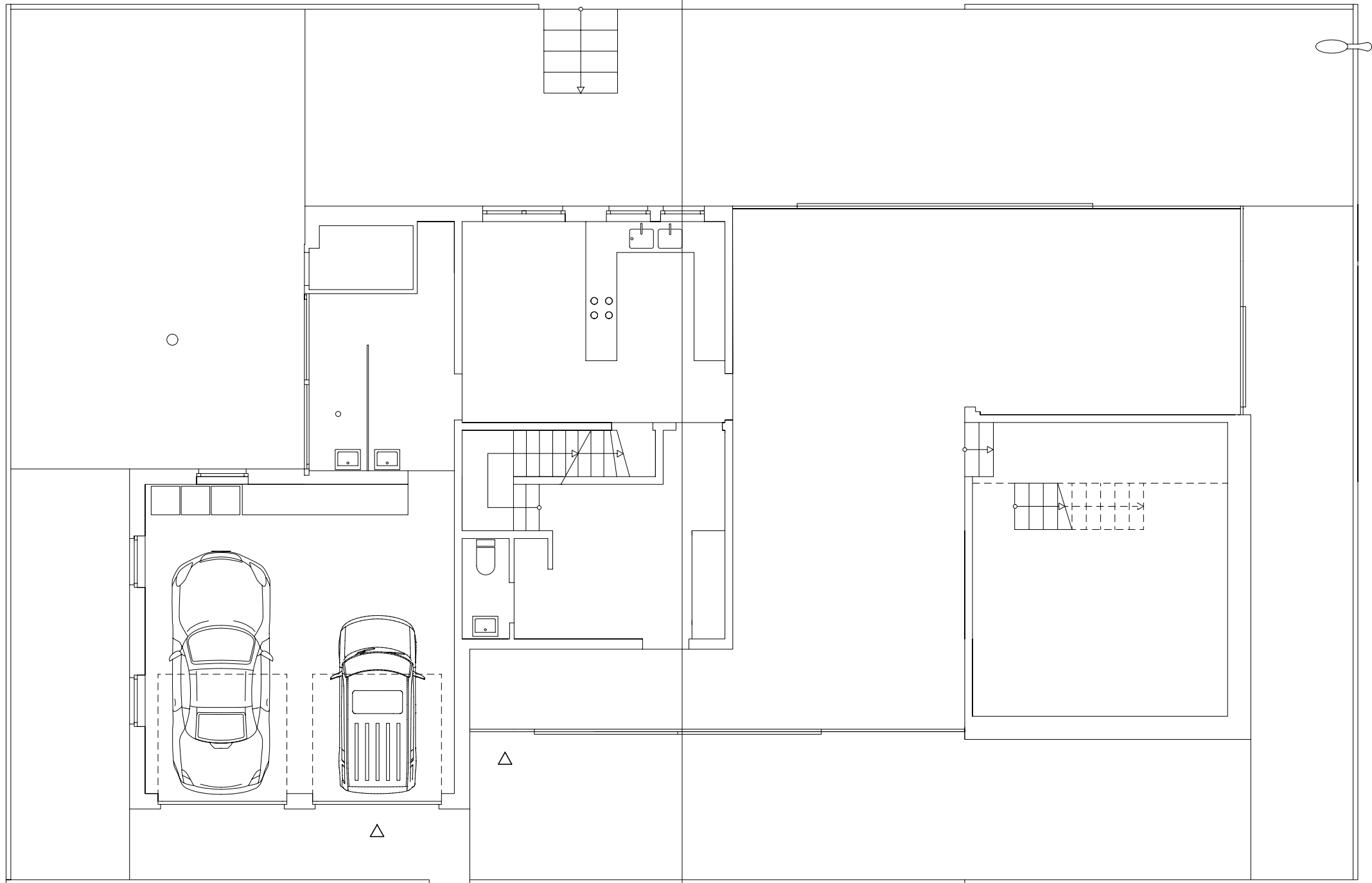
Built fifteen years ago in the style of a *fermette*, the residence was recently extensively renovated by 51N4E. By gutting the existing house and adding an exterior space enclosed by a steel wall, 51N4E completely blurred the boundaries between the exterior and interior. This radical transformation opened the existing conventional plan to new functional programs. Domesticity takes on a new significance and the fluid spaces offer a multitude of interpretations. In its ambiguity, the house exists as both an architectural manifesto and a home. Even more, it is a spatial portrait of the residents: an open house, eagerly awaiting guests.

However, the guest program brings to the fore a main functional limitation of the house: as a guest, it is almost impossible not to intrude on the privacy of the hosts, and vice versa.

This programmatic friction, in turn, highlights two essential architectural shortcomings. First of all, the existing guest room is situated right next to the master bedroom; guests and hosts therefore share an intimate spatial condition that is not always to their liking. Secondly, when guests become hosts and inhabit the house on their own—sleeping in the master bedroom—the sophisticated alarm system exerts enormous pressure on the temporary resident. It demands very specific operational skills and its misuse sets off a chain reaction that only the owners can stop.

The Guest House allows the house to meet the extra demands of a guest program. It enables each individual user to become independent by providing alternative spaces that can be appropriated by guests and hosts alike. These additional spaces expand the building volume neither horizontally nor vertically, but inward and within the existing volume of the building. The Guest House is the hidden space waiting to be discovered inside the building.

Existing Ground Floor M 1:100

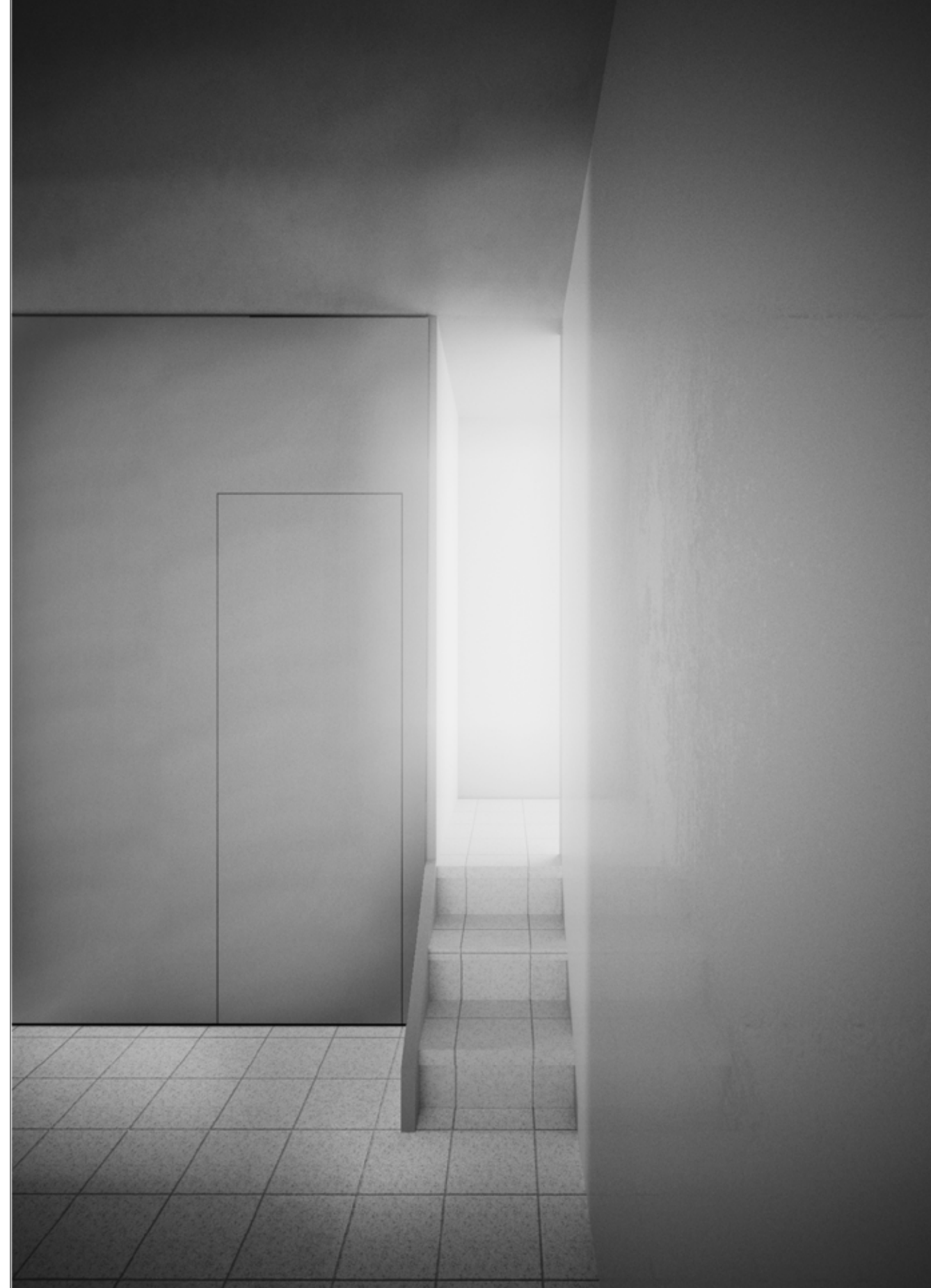


## The Hall

The new joint entrance-lavatory hall in the garage is crucial for improving the house and recognizing its drive-in nature. The garage is not covered by the alarm system and therefore accessible to both the hosts and their guests. By placing the entrance-lavatory hall in the garage, the Guest House is entirely excluded from the alarm system, permitting its independent occupancy.

Both parties enter and exit the house through the new entrance-lavatory hall, where the alarm control panel is located. Four doors give access from the entrance-lavatory hall to the rest building; from here one can enter the garage, the ground floor bathroom, the central staircase hall, and the upper floors of the Guest House.

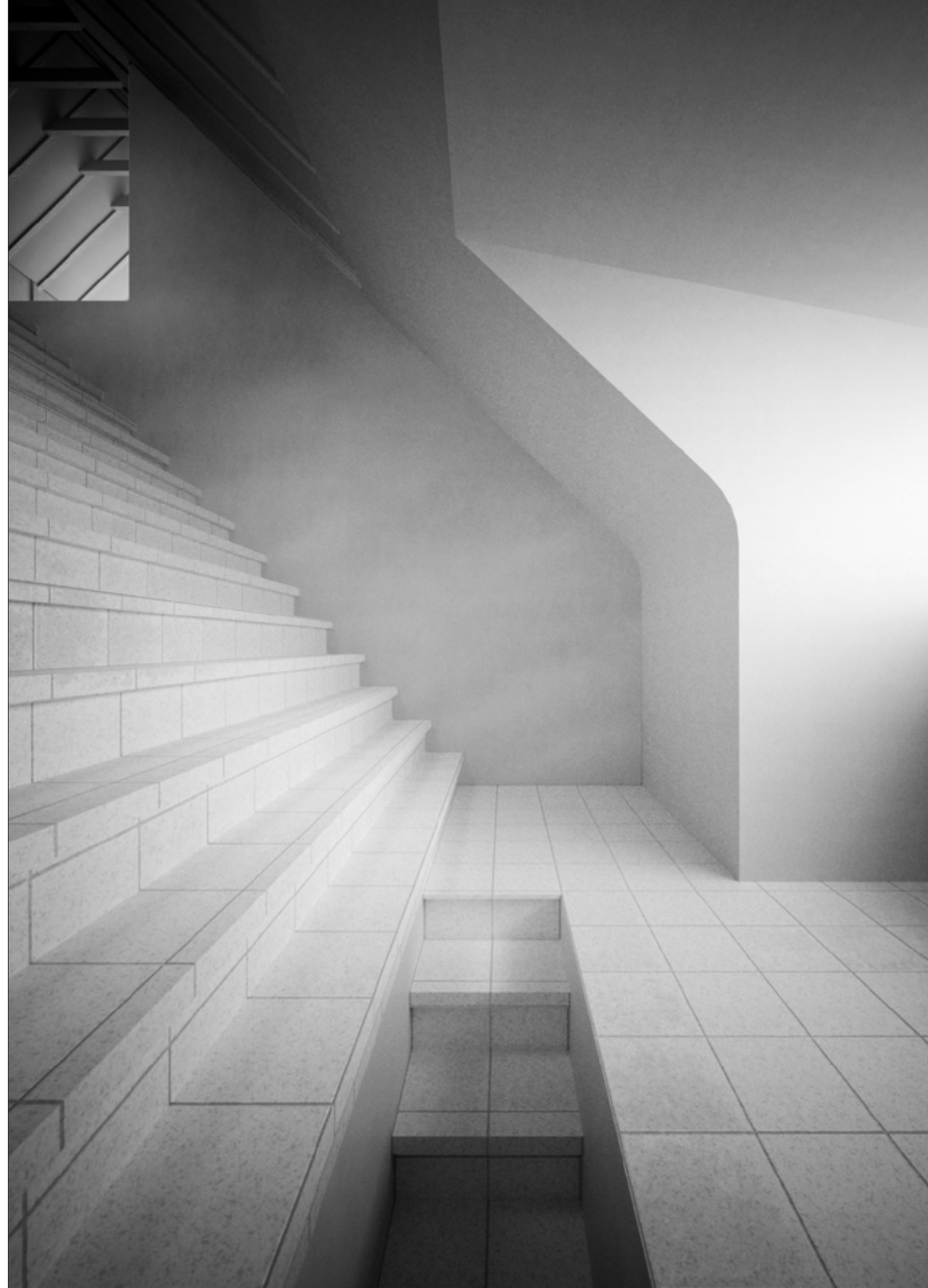
The entrance-lavatory hall replaces the former lavatory in the central staircase hall. In case the entrance-lavatory hall is occupied, there is an additional door that provides access to a new staircase that leads up to the Guest House from the garage. This staircase is a mirrored and scaled copy of the existing staircase. Fifty centimeters wide, it reflects the spatial constraints placed on inward expansion and introduces a new scale to the building. The central staircase hall remains nearly untouched. Its mirrored space, the Guest House, is compressed and hidden behind its black walls.



## The Stairs

On the second floor, the narrow stairs from the garage opens up to a grand staircase. Leading towards a small opening in the ceiling, this second staircase provides access to the attic on the third floor. The steps physically separate the owners' private rooms from the Guest House. The width of each step is determined by the minimum head clearance necessary to enter the lavatory on the second floor.

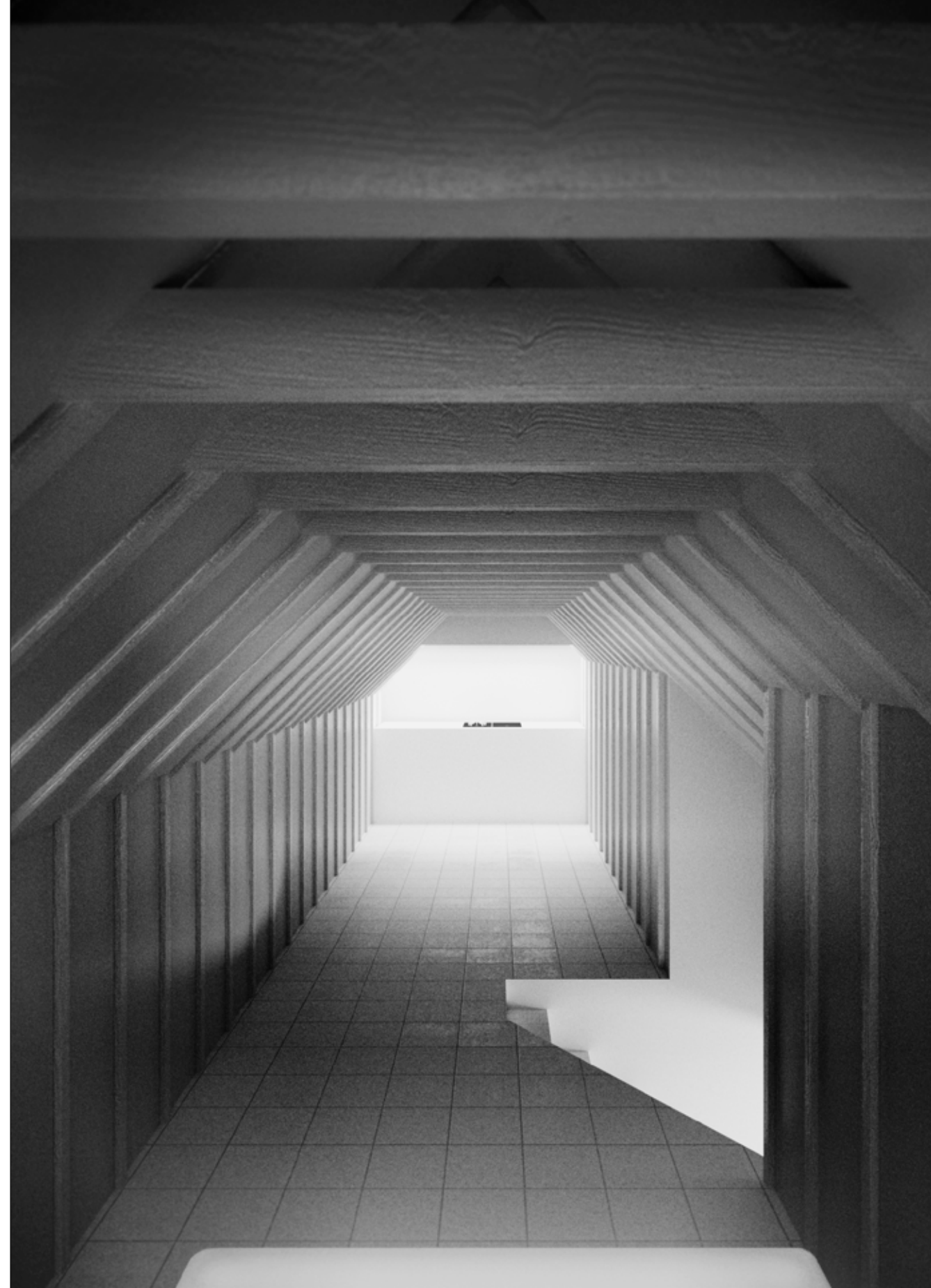
The spaces below and above the grand staircase remain open for use and taper with its incline. In the Guest House, the staircase is both a living and a dining room. One can sit here on the steps and drink coffee, for example, with a direct view of the forest. Below the inclined surface of the staircase, and next to the owners' private rooms, the hallway provides a dramatic space to place art objects.



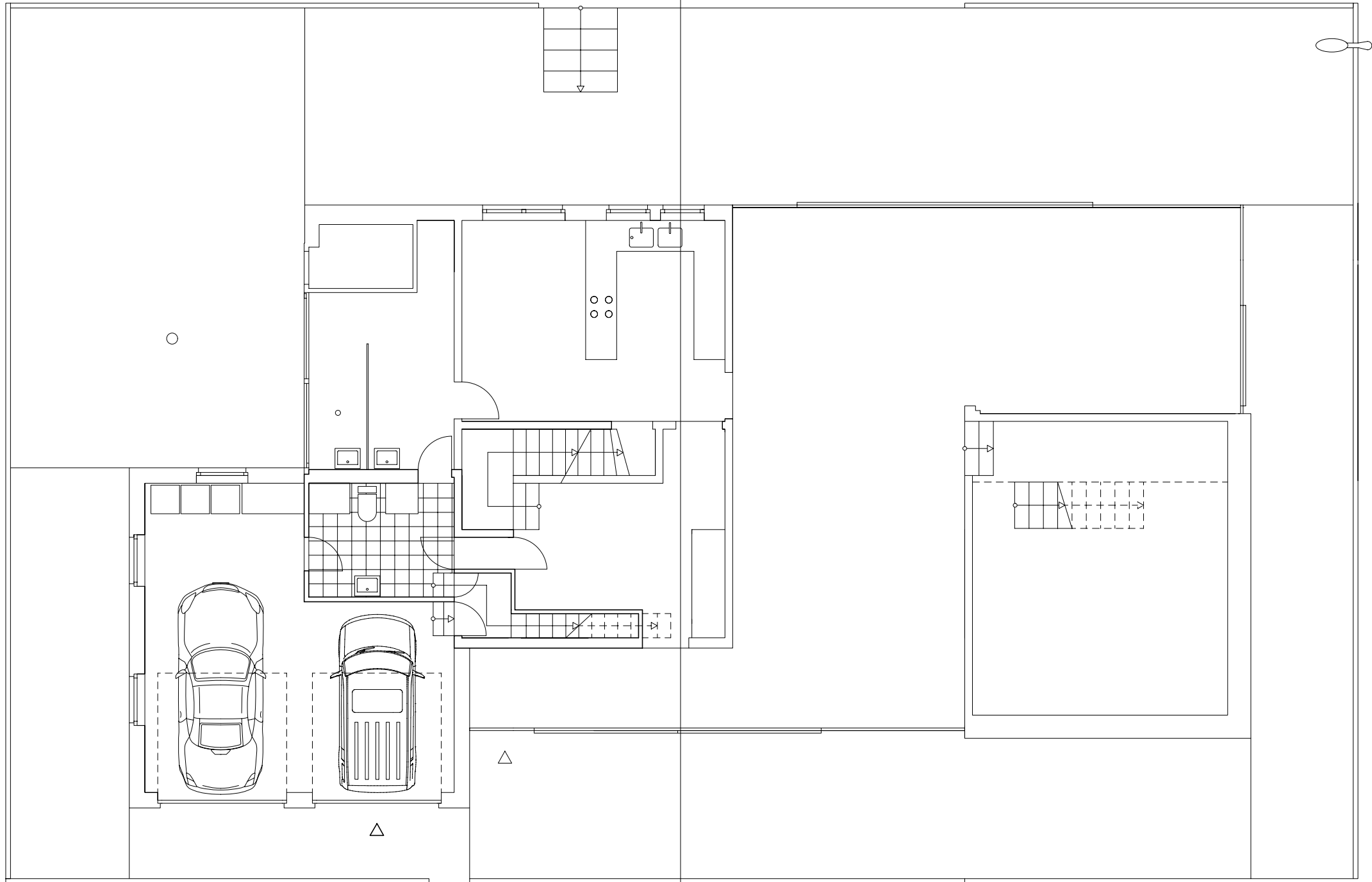
## The Attic

The attic is a thermally insulated space located right underneath the roof and measuring two by ten meters. In both corners, skylights bring natural light into the room. One corner is equipped with a kitchenette and the other features a king-size bed. The height of the space is just enough to stand upright.

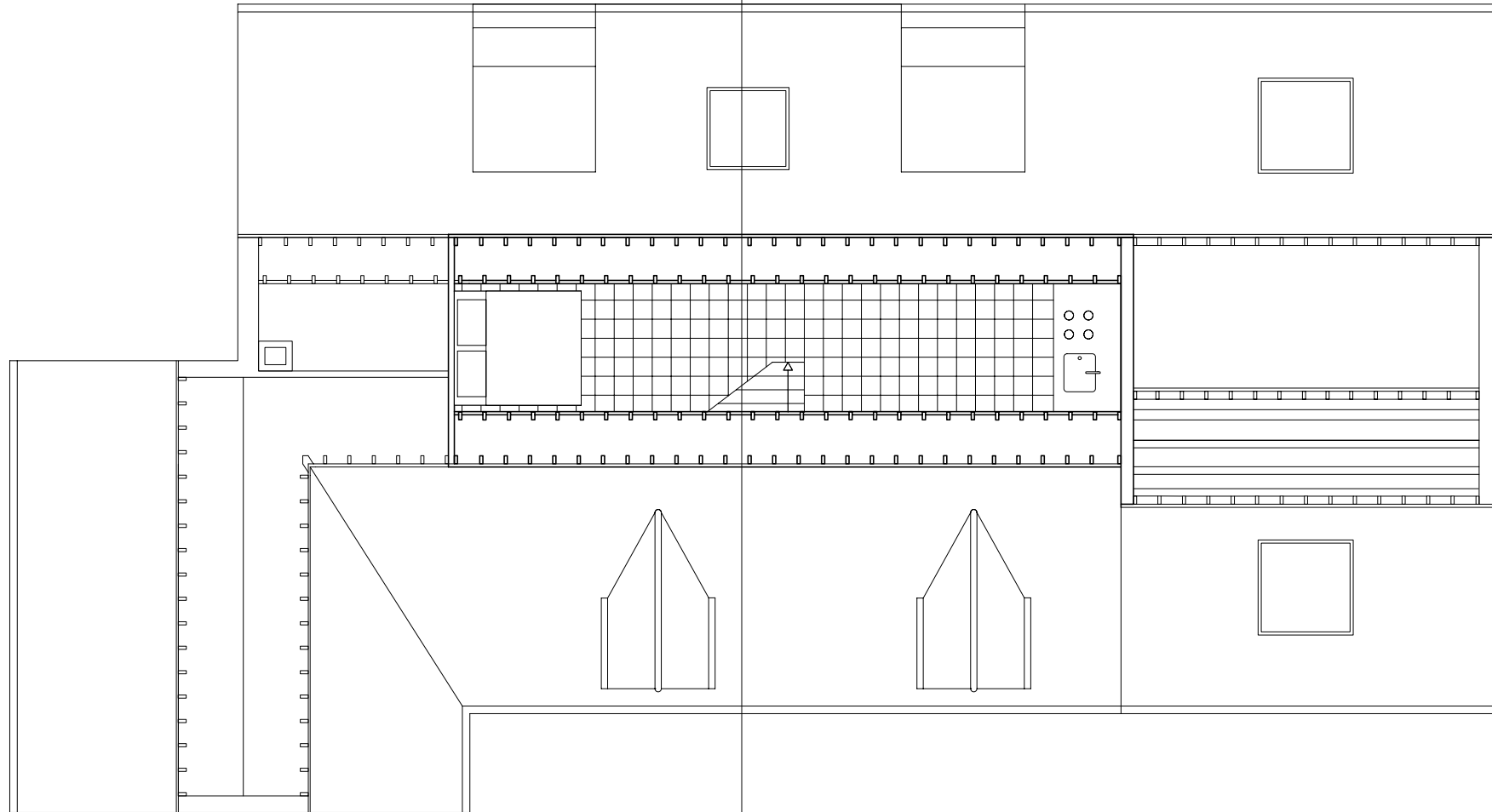
The space spanning between the bed and the kitchenette is open to all kinds of uses. Depending on the type of furniture, the space can be reconfigured to meet specific demands. A dining table creates a dining room; a desk, a study; a sofa, a lounge; and so on.



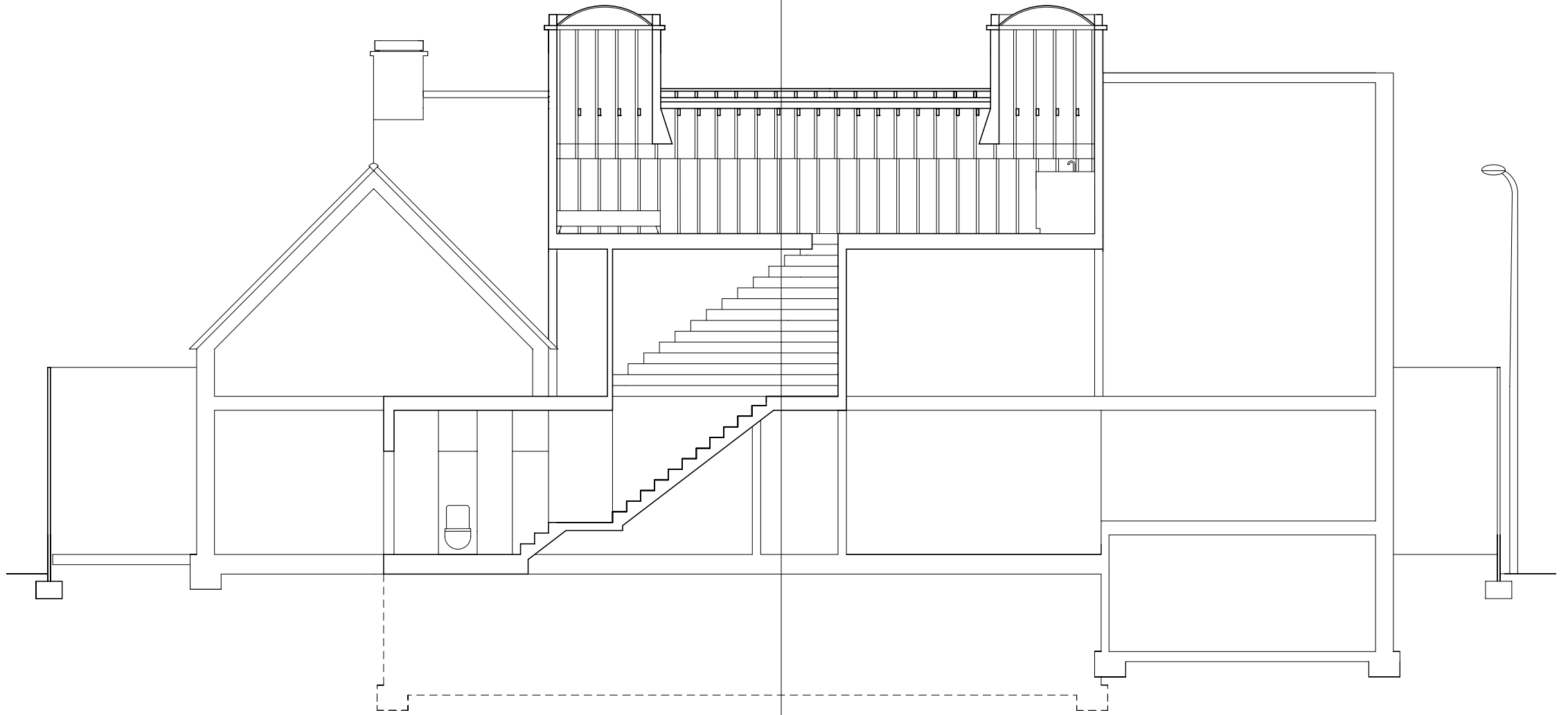
Ground Floor 1:100



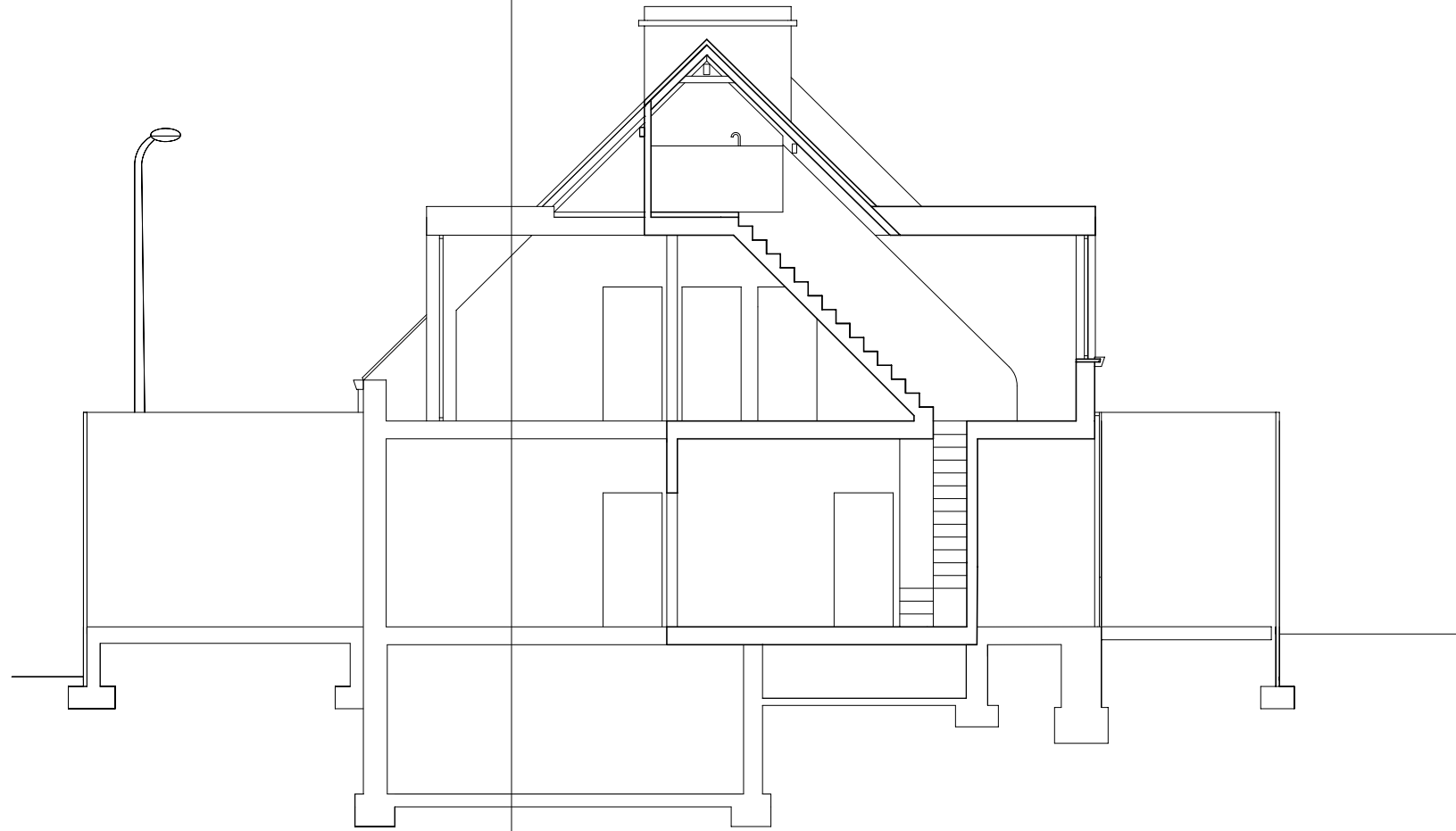
Second Floor 1:100



Longitudinal Section 1:100



Cross Section 1:100



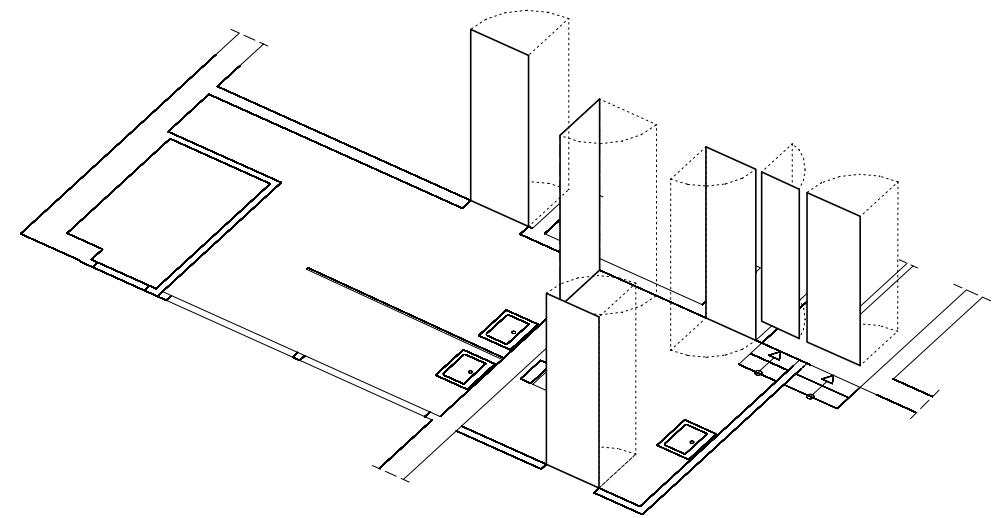
## The Doors

The alarm system and the six doors of the entrance-lavatory hall control the use and accessibility of the entire building. Electronically, the alarm system activates the surveillance of different zones in the house, whereas the doors physically determine the privacy of a space.

Different spaces are linked together depending on which doors are open or closed. Not covered by the alarm system, the garden, courtyard, and garage can be used without further opening the house. To occupy the entrance-lavatory hall without being disturbed, a minimum of four doors need to be locked. Leaving the door to the ground floor bathroom open, but locking the bathroom's door to the kitchen can expand the space of occupancy across the bathroom to the outdoor shower. For the guest in the Guest House, the bathroom is the only available space for showering. It is therefore indispensable to the Guest House, even though it is shared with the rest of the house.

The doors complicate the degree to which the spaces in the house are either private or public. This ambiguous situation can only be resolved by the sole occupation of the house, either by the guests or hosts, or, alternatively, the negotiation of this issue between the two parties.

## The Doors



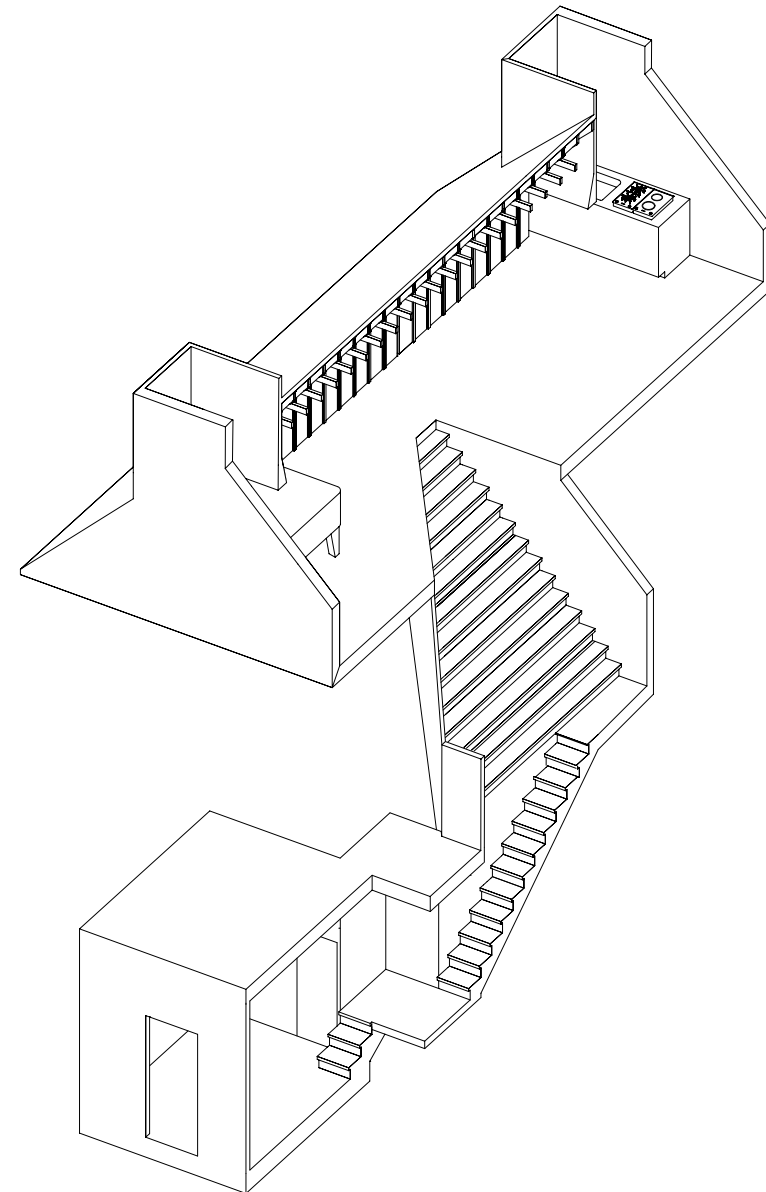
### The Axonometric View

The Guest House is a miniature house hidden within an existing building. It's a complementary space waiting to be occupied by either guest or host. It offers a diversity of spaces in a spatial continuum. It is small in scale; and, yet, a whole new universe.

Searching for the remaining voids within the building, the Guest House utilizes the building's maximum volumetric capacity. With a minimal intervention, the Guest House strives to make more room by converting surplus volume into residential space.

Challenging both the visible and invisible thresholds between the residents, the Guest House emphasizes alternative modes of dwelling and pushes the margins of cohabitation.

### Axonometric View



Guest:

**Dirk Braeckmann**

**UNTITLED**

Date of arrival:

1.11. 2009 and 4.4.2010

Date of departure:

2.11.2009 and 5.5.2010

Postscript title:

**THE DEEP**

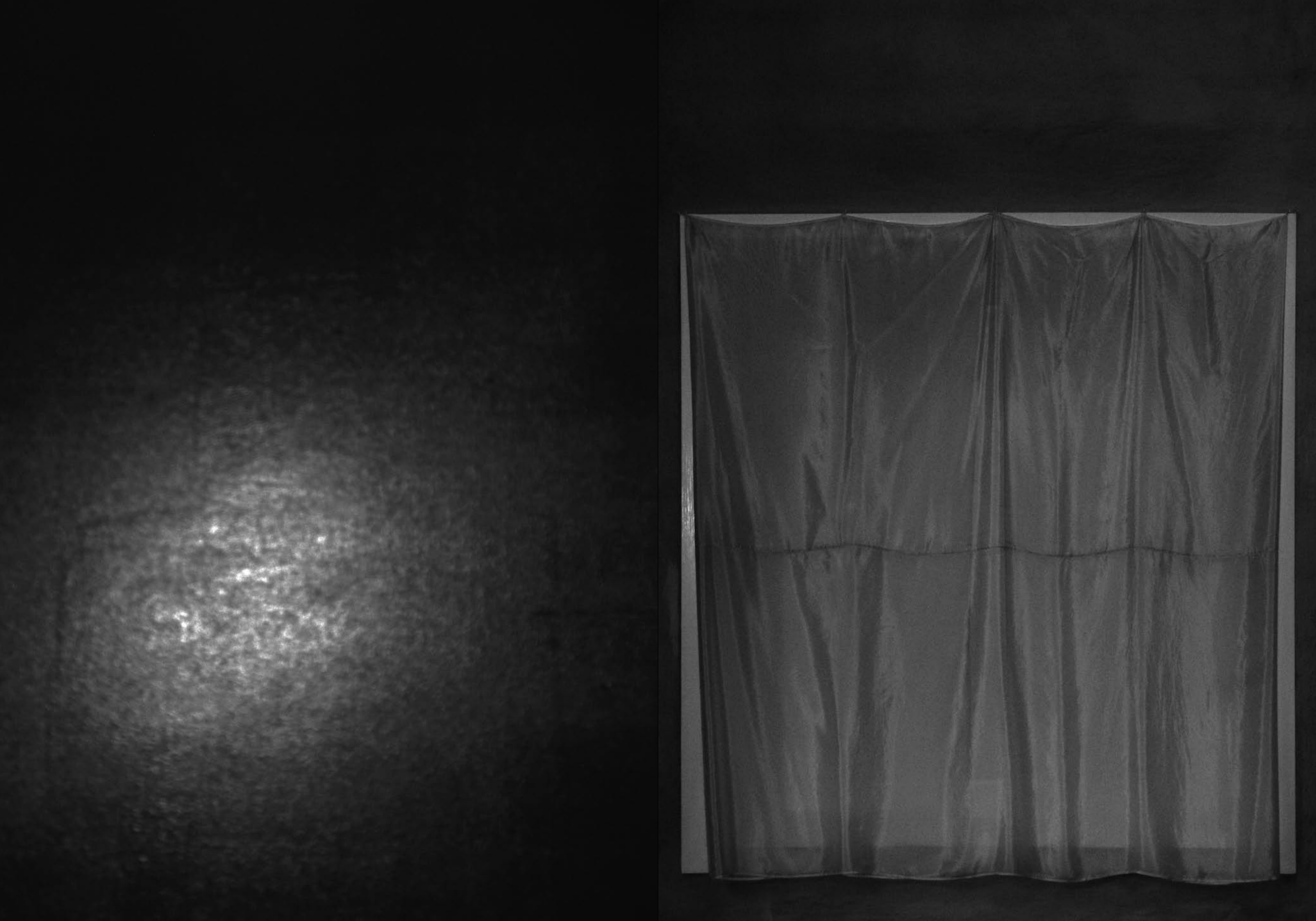
Postscript comment:

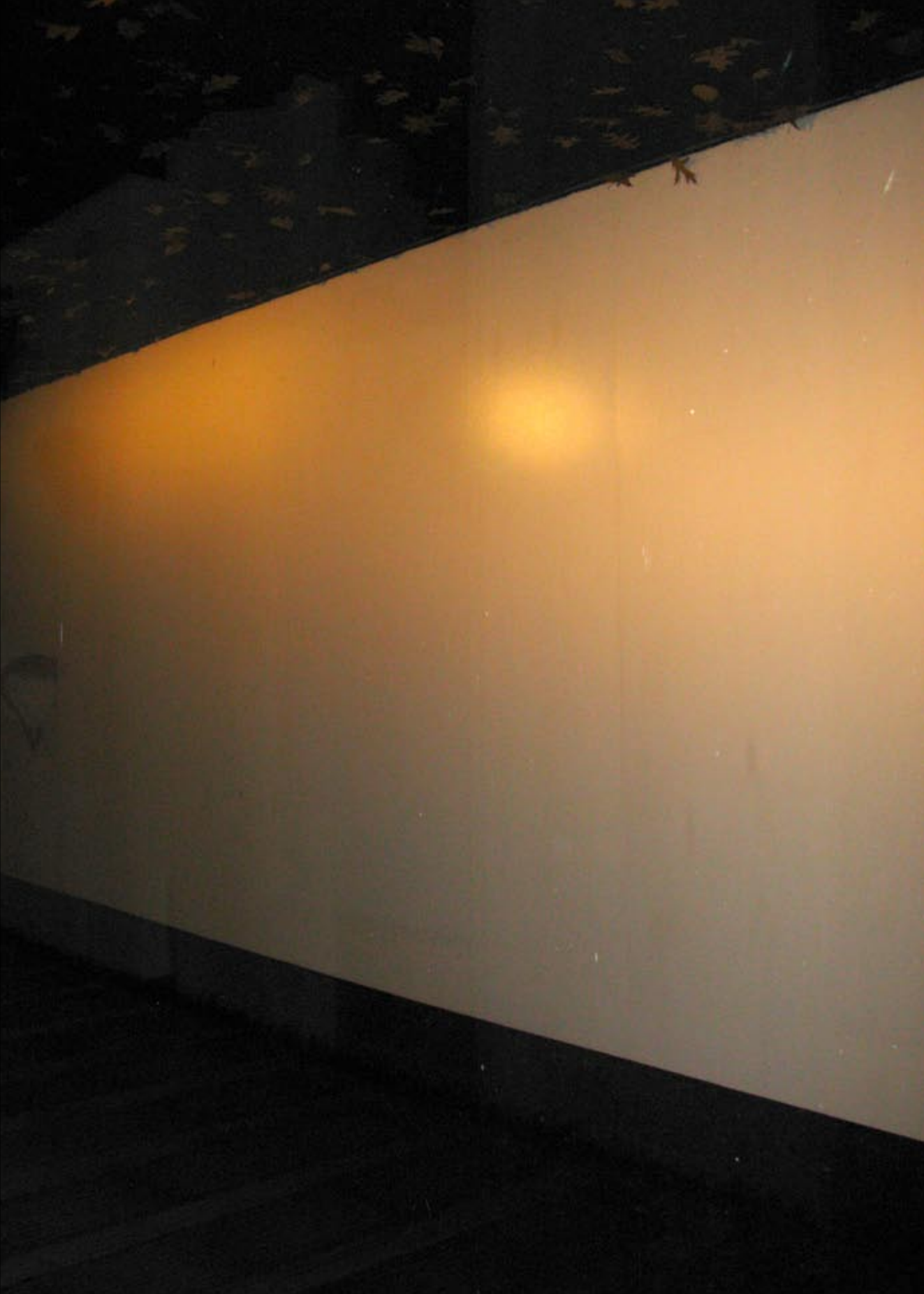
On two separate occasions, Dirk Braeckman wandered the house at night, from dusk till dawn. No further explanation needed.















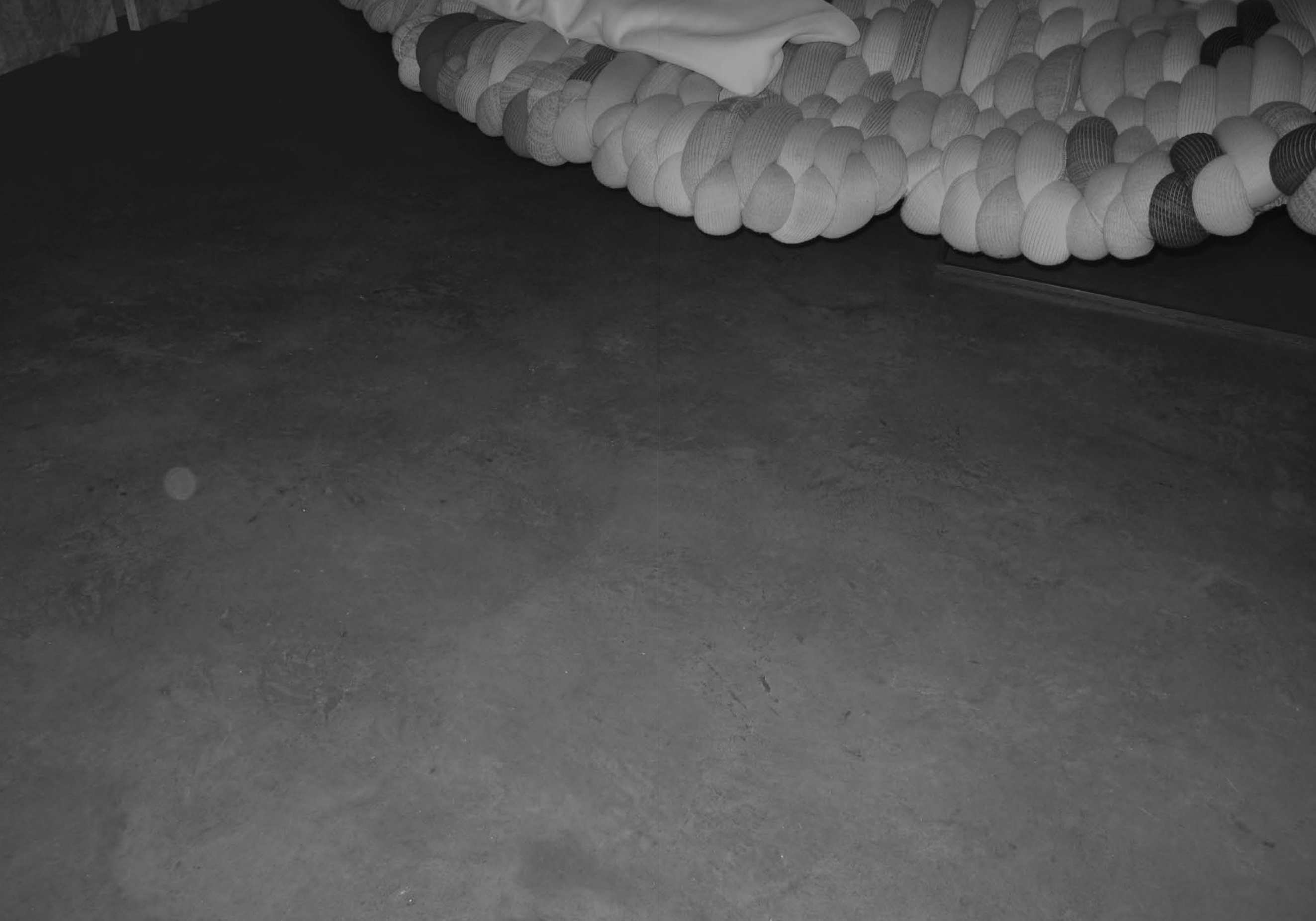










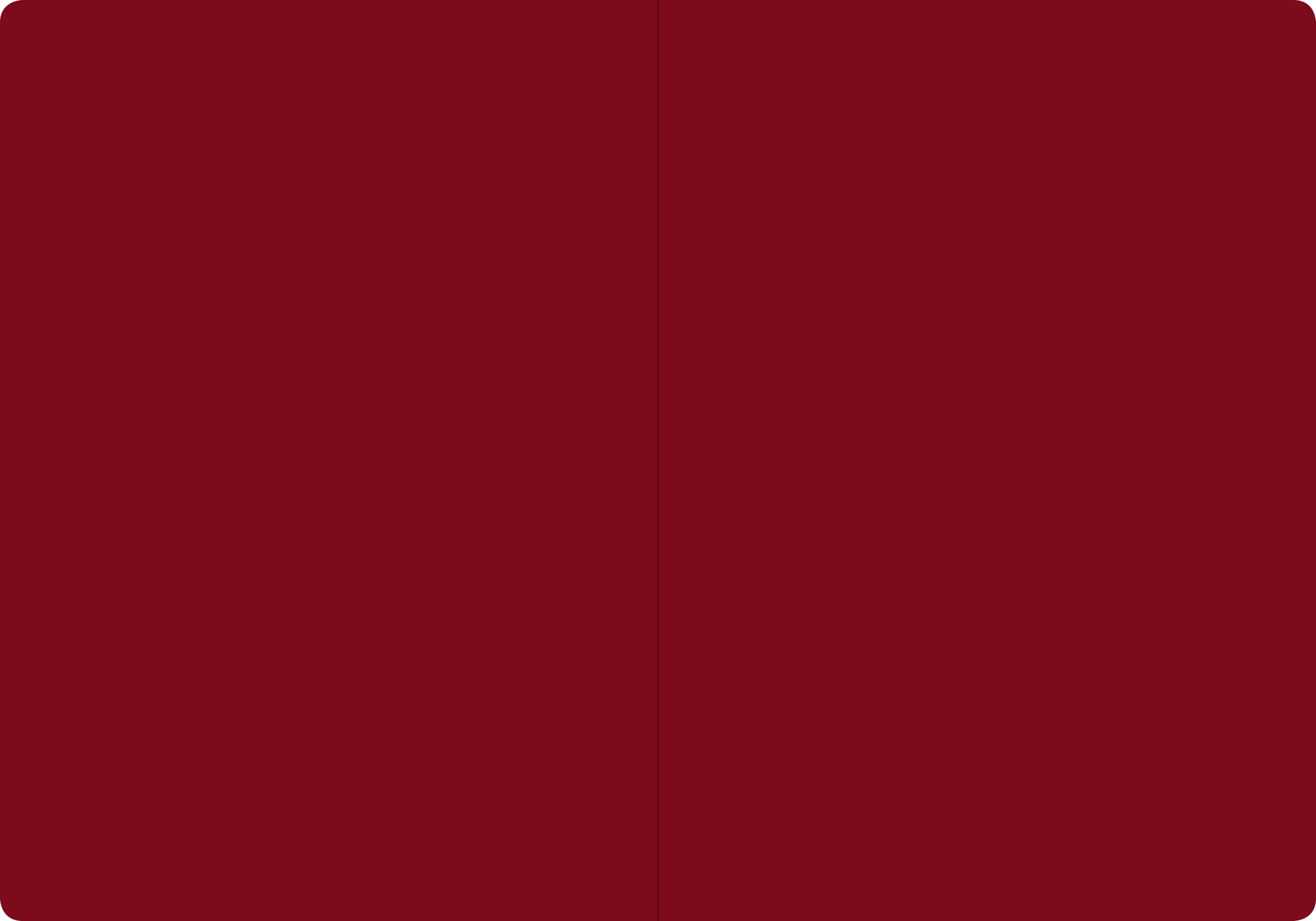




This book may be a first of a long series of Guest Files,  
since unexpected guests will continue to be invited at the house.  
And since Julie & Michel, the hosts, won't stop to be who they are:  
infinitely beautiful and unpredictably generous people.  
But it could also be the last.



The Next Expected Guest: Anri Sala  
Image: "Anri Sala, Airport, 2005; Edition for Parkett 73; C-print, 52 x 70 cm; Ed. 60/XX"



A couple lived in a small house on the edge of a forest. It was their first house. After two decades of homeliness they however had outgrown their home, mentally and physically. The commonplace dwelling was radically rebuilt by literally gutting the interior and walling the exterior with a steel wall three metres high—an intervention resulting in a complex layering of infinite reflections, filtered perspectives and spaces with no recognizable function. On completion, the architect announced that it was no longer a family residence but a “guest house”, even for the actual owners and occupants. The house no longer belonged to them, it had become public. It was at this juncture that the plan was conceived for the “Guest Files”, a series of invitations giving artists, designers, writers, thinkers, ... carte blanche to create work during their stay at the house. The guests were given the key for an unlimited period of time, having the run of the house without its inhabitants. Since the guest house’s inception, a disparate series of guests have left behind an ever growing collection of beautiful yet uneasily questioning “gifts”.  
Reasons for walling a house.