

Sean Griffiths

Output 2:
Dara Building (Grote Koppel),
Amersfoort, Netherlands, 2009

Abstract

The Dara Building in Amersfoort, Netherlands, makes a significant contribution to Sean Griffiths of FAT Architecture's on-going research into the creative potential of historical reference and repetition, in combination with digital and prefabricated construction techniques to generate new meanings in architecture. The design responded to a number of questions: how can a modern building integrate with and extend the meanings of an historic context? How can differentiation and variety be achieved using repetition? How can precast concrete construction be used to create expressive popular iconography and communicate cultural values about architecture? Can an art-based architectural practice be successful in a market driven environment? Its methodologies included numerous site visits to understand the site's complexity and latent potential, discussions with local planning authorities to get a sense of the Dutch legislation and regulations for historic contexts, and typological research, drawing on the traditions of baroque influenced, gable fronted Dutch architecture. A variety of programmatic solutions, spatial permutations, and the three-dimensional complexity of the building and its surroundings were tested through extensive physical model making and other forms of digital visualisation. The innovative external wall and window panels of the building were generated by drawing and re-drawing, then interpreting these design motifs in digital format, which were then

transferred directly to Dutch prefabricated concrete manufacturer, Hibex. Griffiths then collaborated closely with the manufacturer to produce the building's signature prefabricated façade panels. The building has been favourably reviewed in the architectural media, including in *Building Design*, *Blue Print* and *Domus*. It is regularly featured in lectures and exhibitions about the work of FAT delivered nationally and internationally including at London Metropolitan University in 2009, the Walker Art Centre in Minneapolis in 2009 and the Strelka Institute in Moscow in 2010. Griffiths was the lead architect from conception to execution on the project.

Key Words

Historical reference, digital prefabrication, repetition, differentiation

Context

The Dara Building is a commercial building, commissioned to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the founding of the city of Amersfoort. It was commissioned by Schipperbosch, a Dutch developer who has also worked with MVRVD, UN Studio, Foreign Office Architects and NLarchitects. In it, Sean Griffiths extends themes his research-based practice has pursued for a number of years into the creative potential of historical reference and repetition in combination with digital and prefabricated construction techniques, to generate new meaning in architecture. This continues in a deliberate fashion the work of American post-modernists Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Robert Stern, and brings postmodernist preoccupations forward into the digital fabrication age.

General Description

The Dara Building is located on an important site on the river Eem, next to the Mediaeval Koppelpoort, a water gate that forms part of the old city walls (fig.04). It is a modern interpretation of the palazzo, a typical building type in old European cities. It houses a restaurant on the ground and first floors and provides flexible office space on a second floor. Its external envelope is made up entirely of precast concrete sandwich panels that provide structure, insulation, enclosure and façade articulation. These were the result of an innovative collaboration with the Dutch concrete company, Hibex with whom Griffiths developed an approach to prefabrication that, whilst making use of its repetitive advantages, incorporated differentiation and allowed for a variety of profiles.

Research Questions

The project addressed the following research questions:

- 1) How might a modern building interpret its historic context and add to its cultural meanings?
- 2) How might the advantages of repetition offered by precast construction be used to produce variety and differentiation?
- 3) How might precast concrete construction be used to create expressive popular iconography and communicate cultural values about architecture?
- 4) How might an art based architectural practice work successfully in a market driven environment?

Aims and Objectives

1) To integrate a modern building into a complex historic context and add to its cultural meanings.

As has already been stated, the Dara Building was commissioned by a private developer to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the founding of the city of Amersfoort. It is sited at the eastern end of a row of nineteenth century riverside warehouses and modern office buildings (fig.01). It fronts the River Eem and is abutted by a mainline railway bridging over the river (fig.04). This forms the boundary between the historic town centre with its medieval street pattern and city walls and the nineteenth and twentieth century commercial city. Adjacent to the site is a national monument, a mediaeval water gate called the Koppelpoort. The site thus mediates complex and potentially contradictory influences - the river, the fortified mediaeval city, and modern nineteenth and twentieth century infrastructure, all of which needed to be absorbed into the building (fig.08).

Based on research into and knowledge of historical architecture and the development of cities over time, Griffiths opted for a palazzo typology for the building. This urban type typically comprised a principle facade fronting a street or streets, a piano nobile and an interior courtyard. In the Dara Building, this has been translated into a three storied building (fig.05) organised around a central atrium (fig.06), overlooked by balconies and traversed by a theatrically designed staircase that gives it a grand ceremonial quality (fig.03).

Externally, the building acknowledges the equivalence of river and railway with public facades fronting both (fig.02). Drawing on the traditions of baroque influenced, gable fronted Dutch buildings, these facades consist of rows of repetitive windows at each floor level (fig. 15). These partially return onto the rear façade, creating a corner element that provides a gateway moment for those arriving by train into the city (fig. 14a,b,c). The rear elevation, relating to the service areas of the building is made of simple black brickwork, contrasting with the two public facades of the building. The baroque influenced window surrounds protrude so that their depth forms the walls of the building (fig. 11). At the top and bottom of each window panel decorative elements are distorted and twisted to create the impression of their reflection in water or that they are melting away (fig. 17, fig. 12). This is heightened by black concrete of the top story, suggestive of a building destroyed by fire. Non- structural, diagonal strut-like elements combine with this to suggest a building either under construction or falling down (fig. 15). The building becomes a narrative for the city, constantly being ruined and rebuilt, and is suggestive of the events that form part of its history.

“The façade, seemingly plastic, is cast in modular concrete panels. Each of these panels, whether dripping in ornamental tendrils or topped with miniature roof gables emerge from a desire to graphically manifest the history of Grote Koppel” (Beatrice Galilee, 2010).

2) To take advantage of the repetitive advantages of precast construction to produce variety and differentiation.

The building exhibits innovative research into the potentialities of precast concrete technology. Its facades are made up of a series of precast concrete panels, each containing a window. These panels are loadbearing and incorporate all insulation, structure and finishes (fig.12). These responded to the design question posed by the architects as to whether a construction technique that usually demands repetition in both manufacture and expression could produce its antithesis – variety, difference and detailed articulation (fig.15, fig.16). This was achieved by placing decorative insets into precast concrete moulds to create different tops and bottoms to the different panels, while using the same basic template (fig.09). This technique gave the building a complex form of visual expression, vertically panelised, yet free flowing in the horizontal direction, repetitive but varied, solidly constructed and yet vulnerable in appearance.

3) To use precast concrete construction to create expressive popular iconography and communicate cultural values about architecture.

The expressive content of the building is embedded in the precast concrete panels, which make up its façade. Seemingly plastic, this façade communicates cultural values about architecture and the city that the building commemorates. Each of the panels, whether dripping in ornamental tendrils or topped with miniature roof gables emerge from a desire to graphically manifest the history of the site. The language, according to Griffiths is a kind of “mannerist futurism” (personal communication) (fig.19).

4) To translate an art based architectural practice into a market driven environment

The challenge for Griffiths in the Dara Building was how to translate aesthetic intentions and historic sensibilities into the language of a modern commercial development. He did this by focusing his design energies on the detailing of the façade panels, combining structure, insulation and aesthetic intent into a single precast element (fig.19). This meant that the cost-efficiency of repetition and prefabrication was made compatible with the aesthetic intent of the visual expression and communicative value. The result was a striking building whose external wall was made entirely in a factory, transported to site and erected in six weeks.

Research Methods

In the course of the design of this building, several visits were made to Amersfoort in the Netherlands to understand the site's complexity and latent potential (fig.08) . Extensive discussions were held with the local planning officers to get a sense of the local Dutch legislation and regulations for historic contexts. Research undertaken over many years was drawn upon to develop the typology for the building and a palazzo type adopted, drawing on the traditions of baroque influenced, gable fronted Dutch architecture. A variety of programmatic solutions and spatial permutations, as well as the three-dimensional complexity of the building and its surroundings was tested through extensive physical model making and other forms of visualisation. These analyses in turn allowed the refinement of the overall configuration of the building in terms of accessibility, circulation, lighting conditions, external finish, historical references and general functional viability. As well as more traditional forms of model making, or the drawing of plans and sections, the design process relied heavily on programmes like Photoshop and Vectorworks. The project capitalised on the abstraction made possible by contemporary representational techniques; for instance, the innovative external wall and window panels of the building were generated by drawing and re-drawing in Vectorworks, then interpreting these design motifs in digital format so they could be transferred directly to the Dutch prefabricated concrete manufacturer, Hibex (fig. 15-18). Through close collaboration with the company, the system of repetitive prefabrication incorporating differentiation described above was devised (fig. 13). This continued Griffith's continued experimentation

with prefabrication through close collaboration with manufacturers.

Dissemination / Impact

The building has been favourably reviewed in the architectural media, including in Building Design Blue Print and Domus. It was listed as one of the Daily Telegraph's Top 10 Buildings of 2010. It is regularly featured in lectures and exhibitions about the work of FAT delivered nationally and internationally including at London Metropolitan University in 2009, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 2009 and the Strelka Institute in Moscow in 2010.

Reviews of the Dara Building in the architectural media include:

Galilee, Beatrice. "Grote Koppel, Amersfoort, The Netherlands." *Domus*, 17 December 2010

<<http://www.domusweb.it/en/architecture/grote-koppel-amersfoort-the-netherlands/>>

Woodman, Ellis. "Top 10 Buildings of 2010." *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 December 2010, R16, R17 (fig.P02).

Woodman, Ellis. "Sweet Tooth." *Building Design*, 10 December 2010, 10-11 (fig.P01).

Woodman, Ellis. "Grote Koppel, Amersfoort, by Fat." *Building Design*, 9 December 2010. <www.bdonline.co.uk>

Evidence

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P.01 Woodman, Ellis. "Sweet Tooth." *Building Design*, 10 December 2010, 10-11.

P.02 Woodman, Ellis. "Top 10 Buildings of 2010." *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 December 2010, R16-R17.

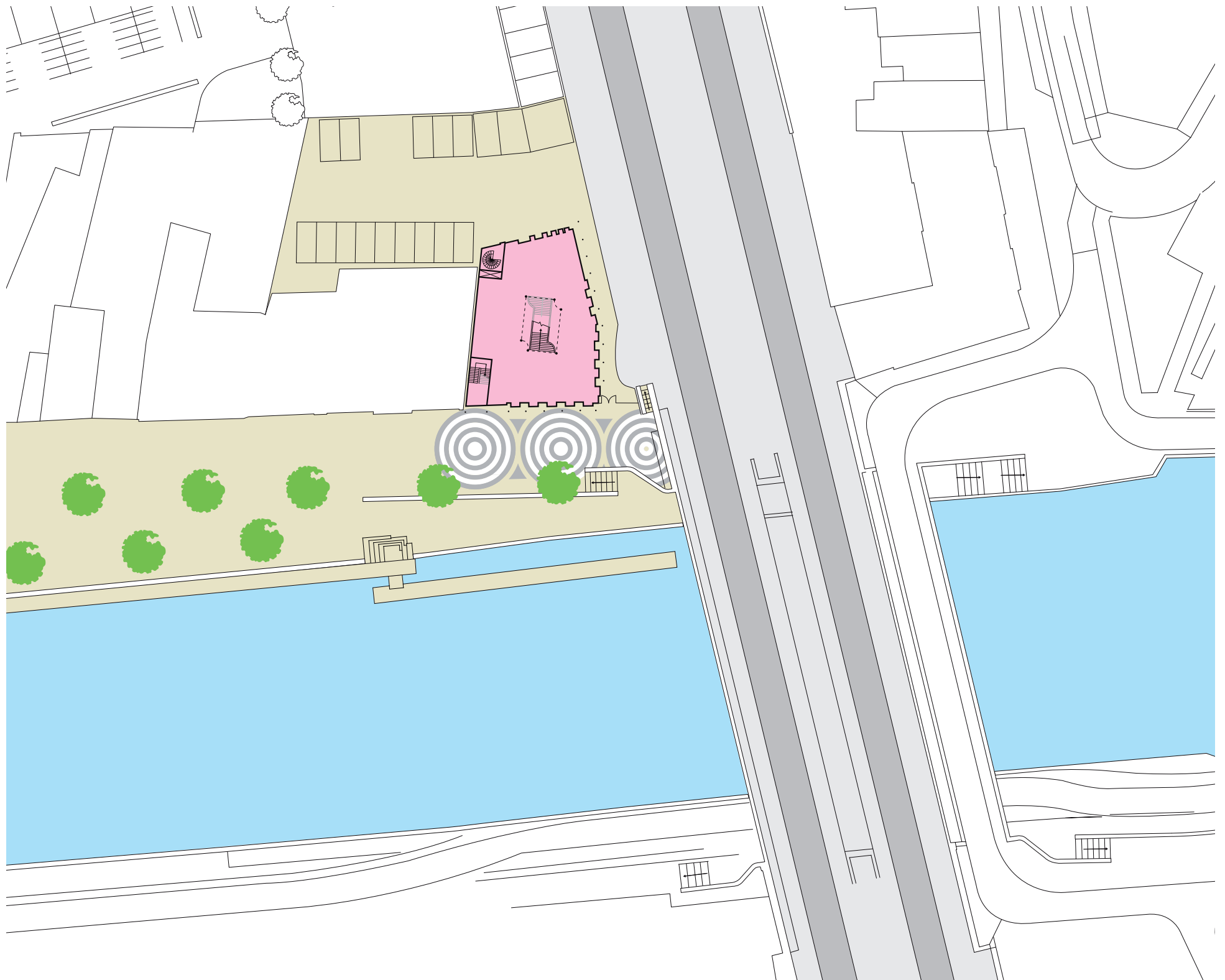
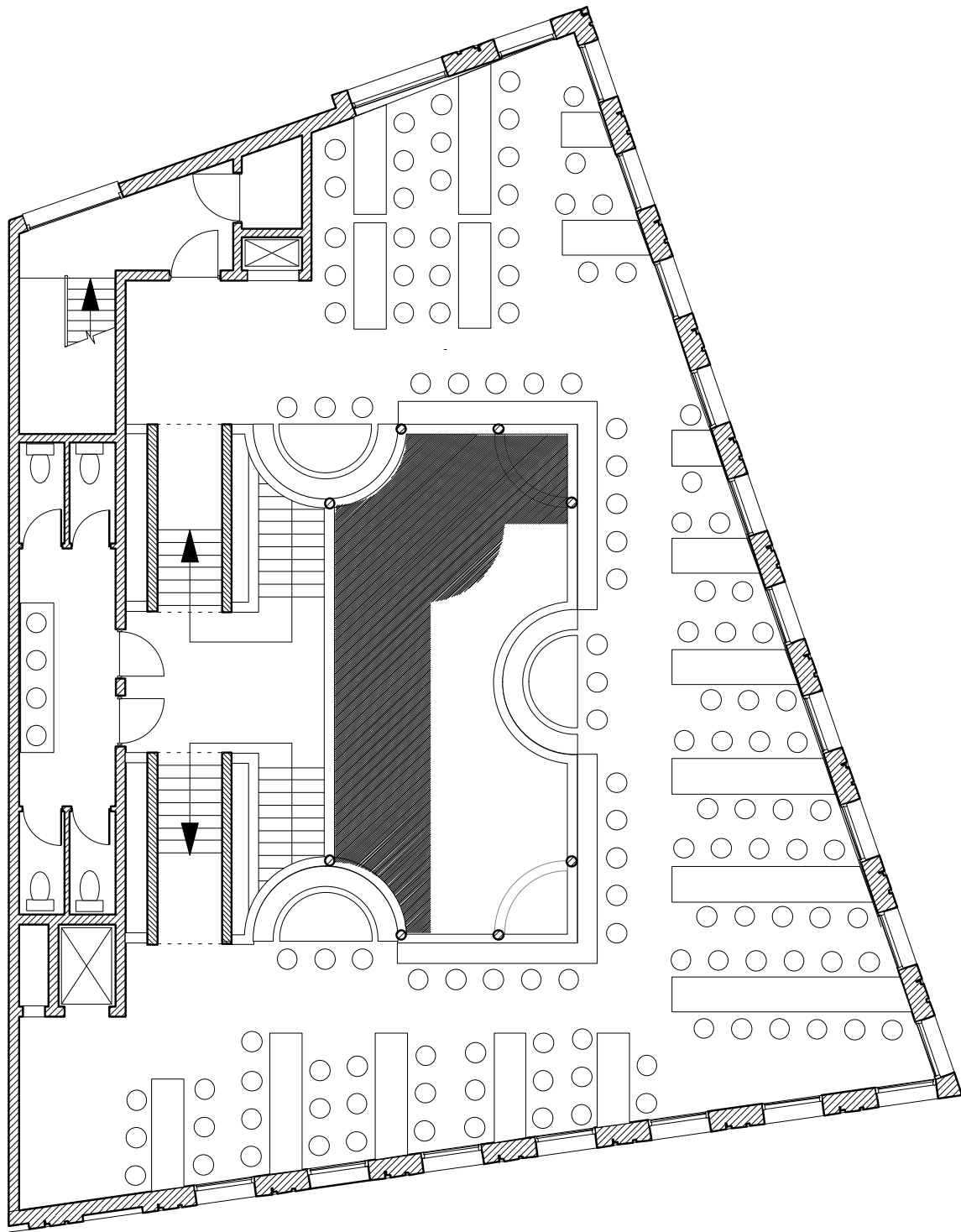
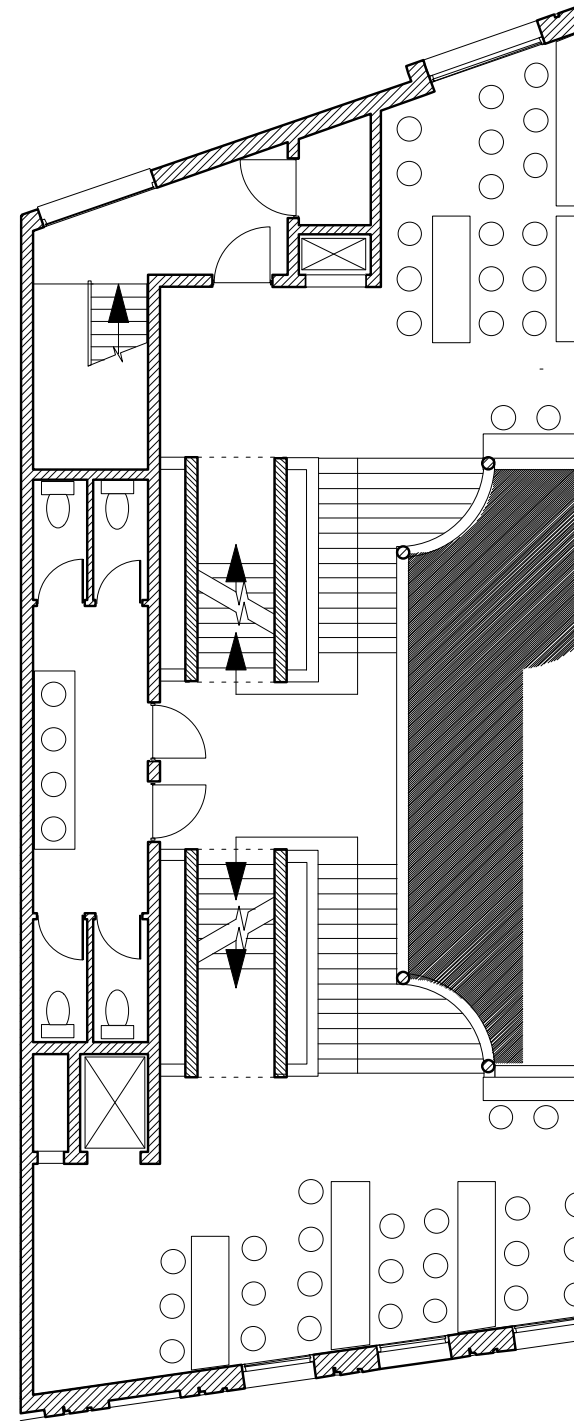


Fig.01 Site Plan

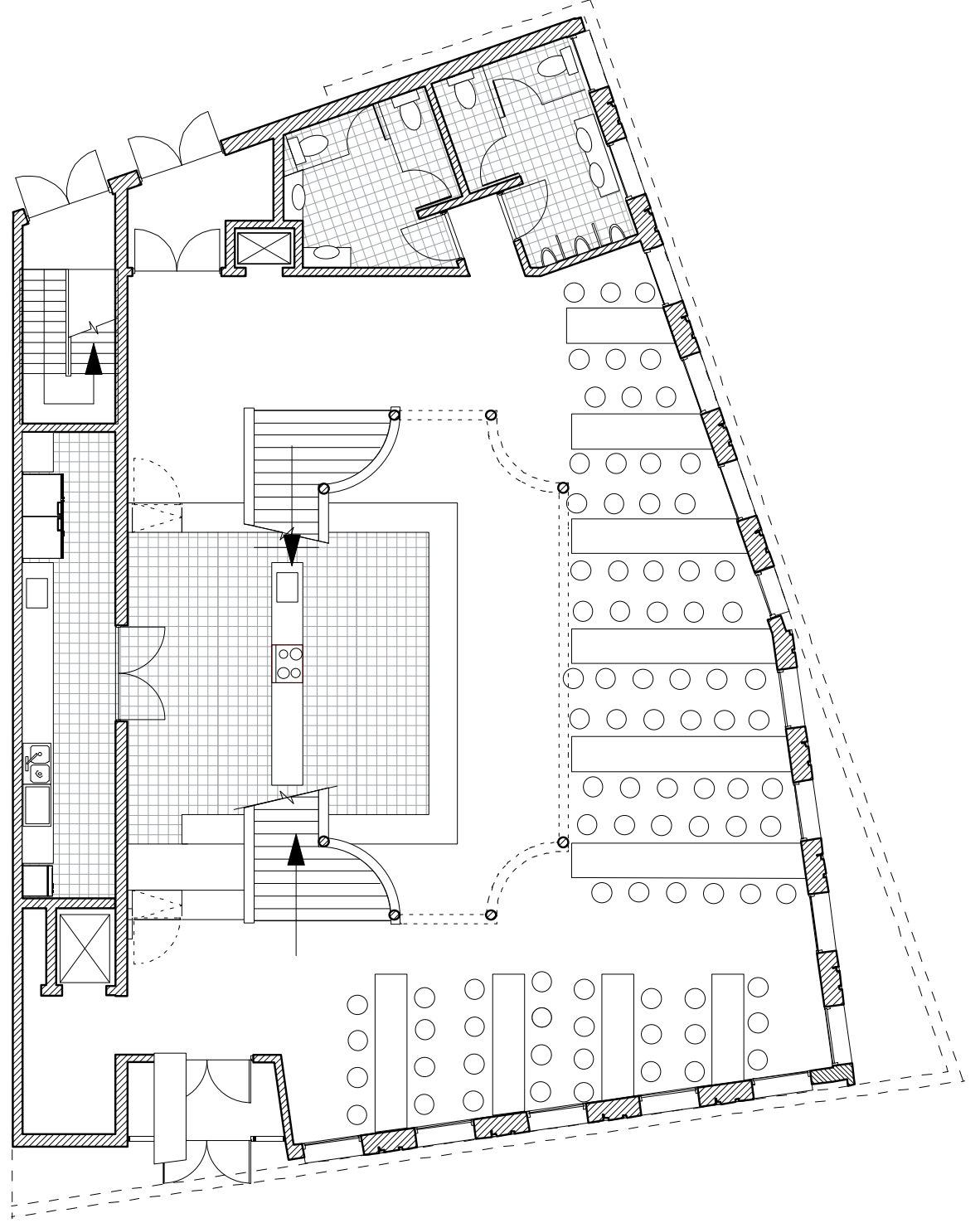
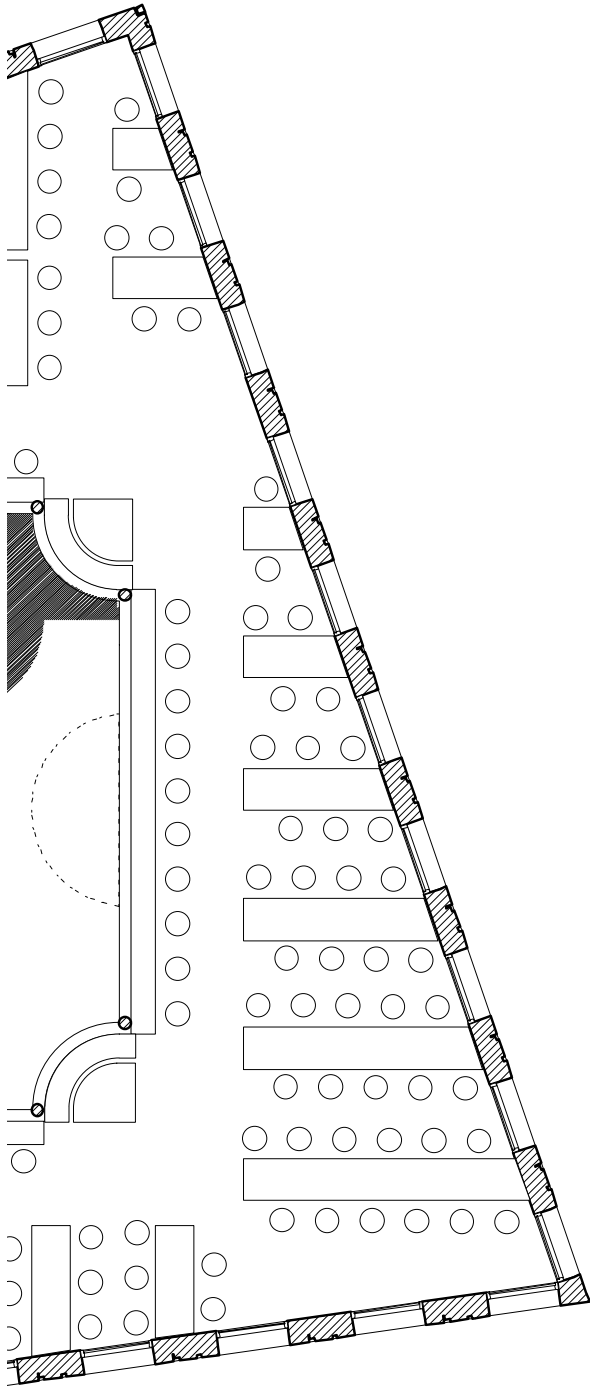


SECOND FLOOR PLAN

Fig.02 Ground, First and Second Floor Plans



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

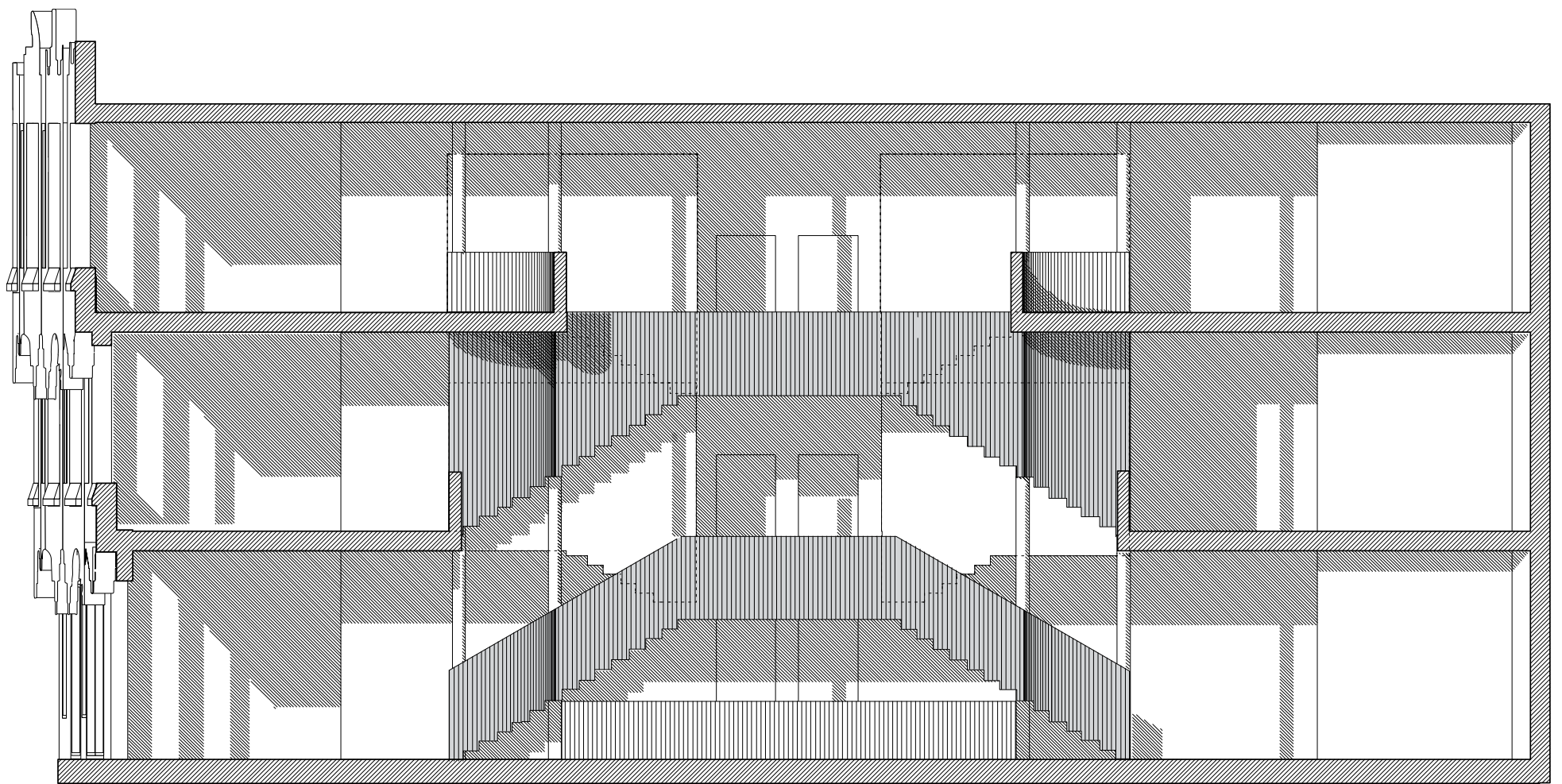


Fig.03 Long Section



Fig.04 Short Section



Fig.05 Model held up to site



Fig.06 Façade panel in factory



Fig.0 7 Façade panels being erected

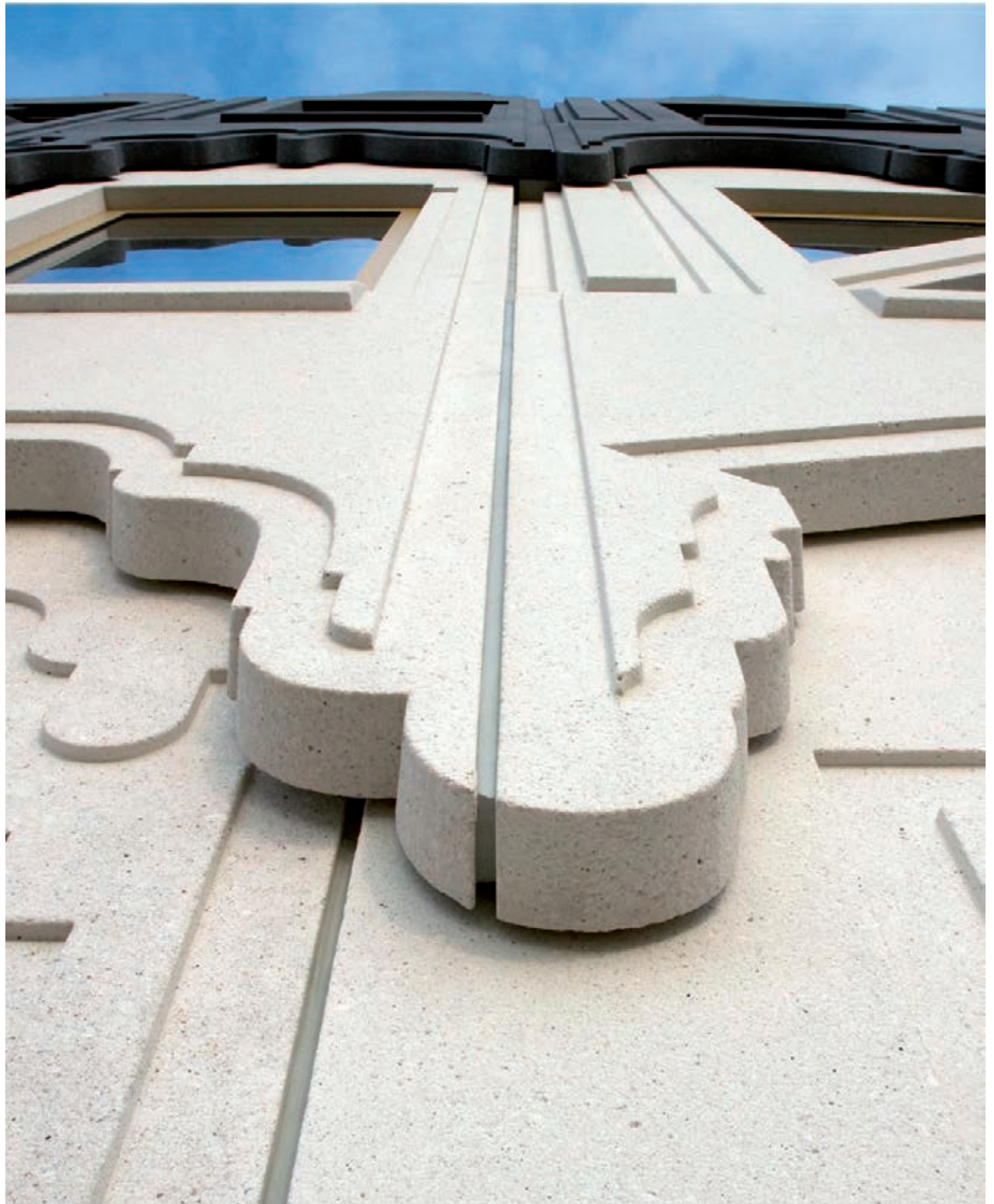


Fig.08 Façade panel detail.



Fig.09 Canal Elevation

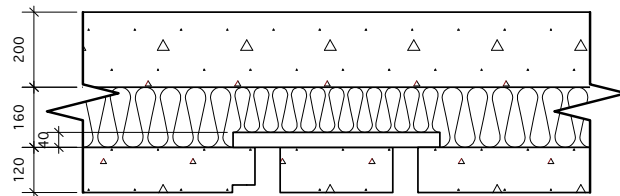


Fig. 10 Corner of building at night



Fig.11 Internal Staircase

Technical Development



facade panel build up
 preferred option 1 - can this be achieved?

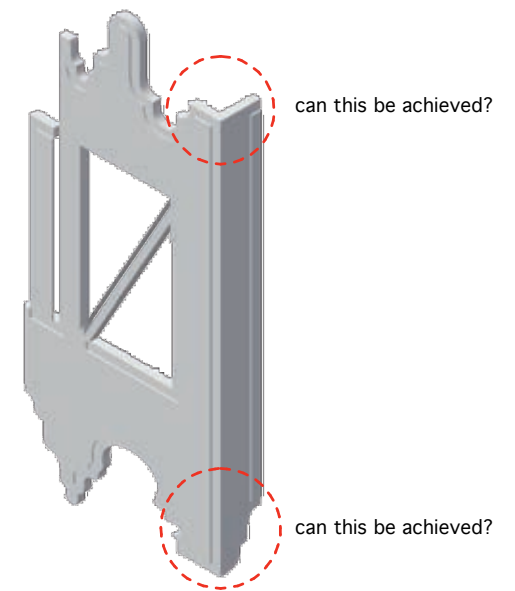
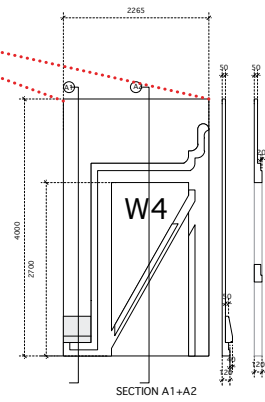


Fig. 12 Wall build-up sketch, Façade corner detail

Ground floor panel
 This needs to be set back to the specified depth, 50mm



First floor panel
 This needs to be set back to the specified depth, 50mm

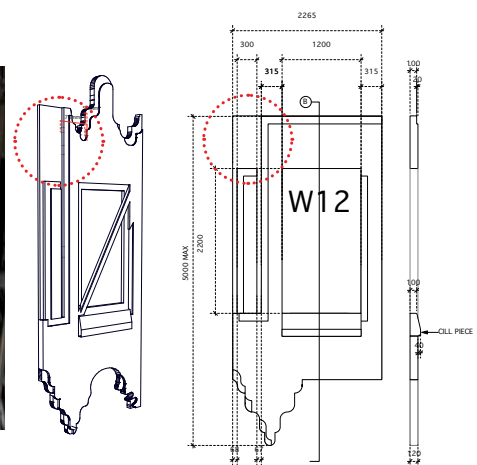
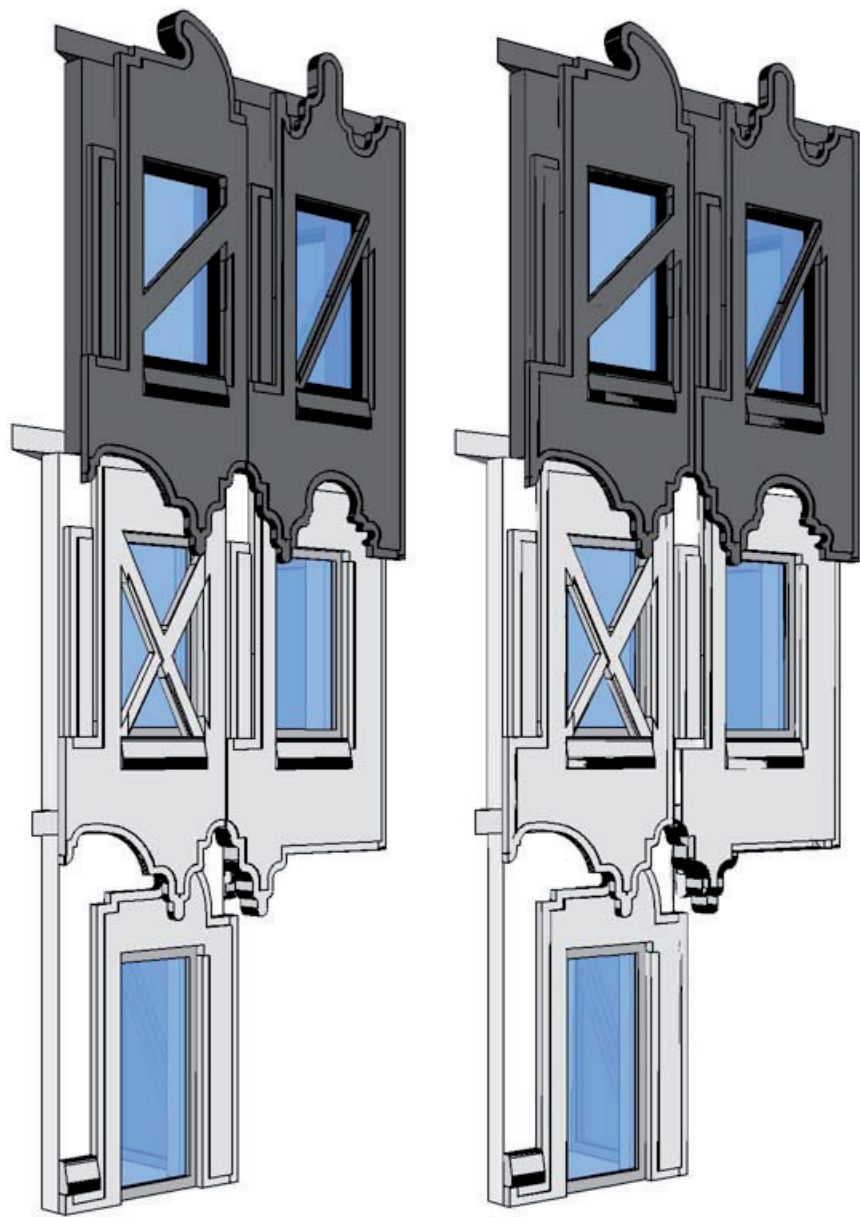


Fig. 13 Response to panel prototype photographs

OPTION 1-TOP/BOTTOM OFFSET

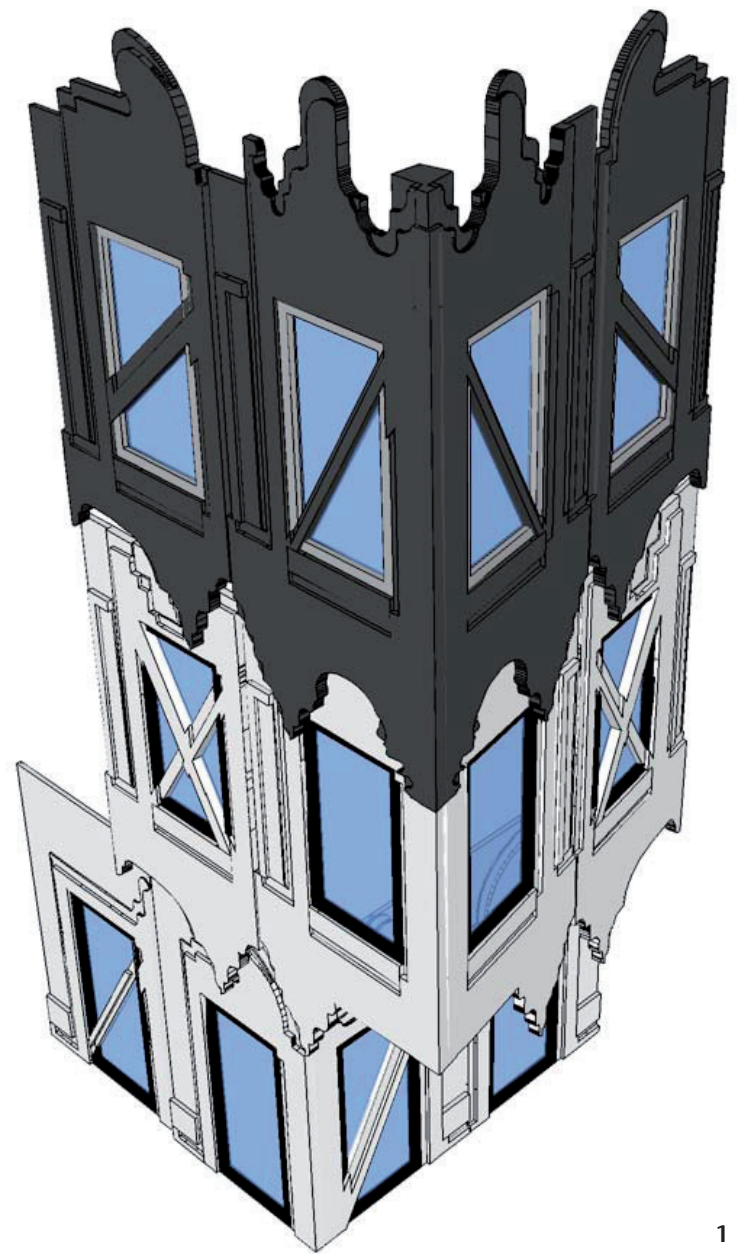
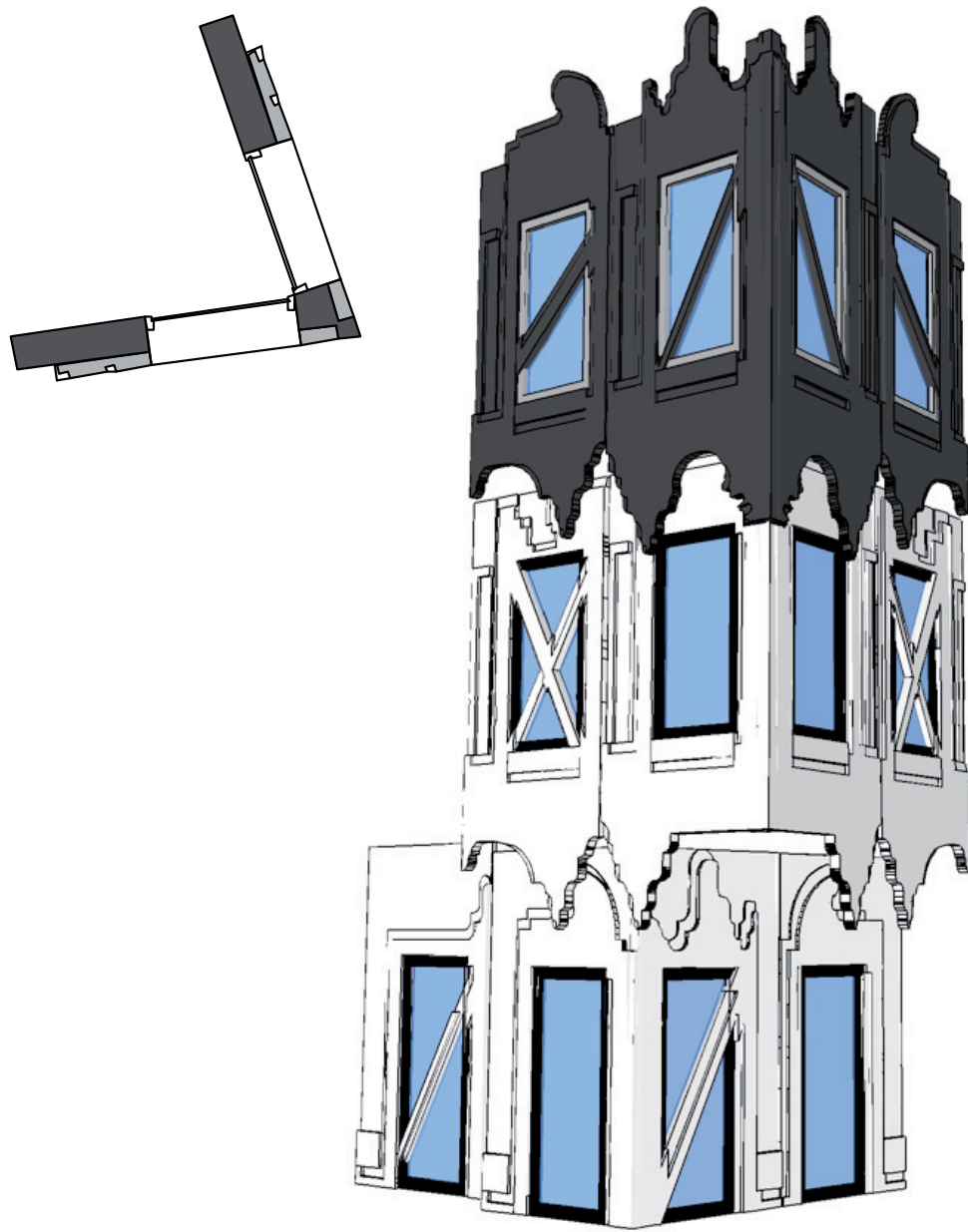


OPTION 2-ALL EDGES OFFSET



Fig.14a, 14b Corner offset studies

ORIGINAL- CORNER PIECE



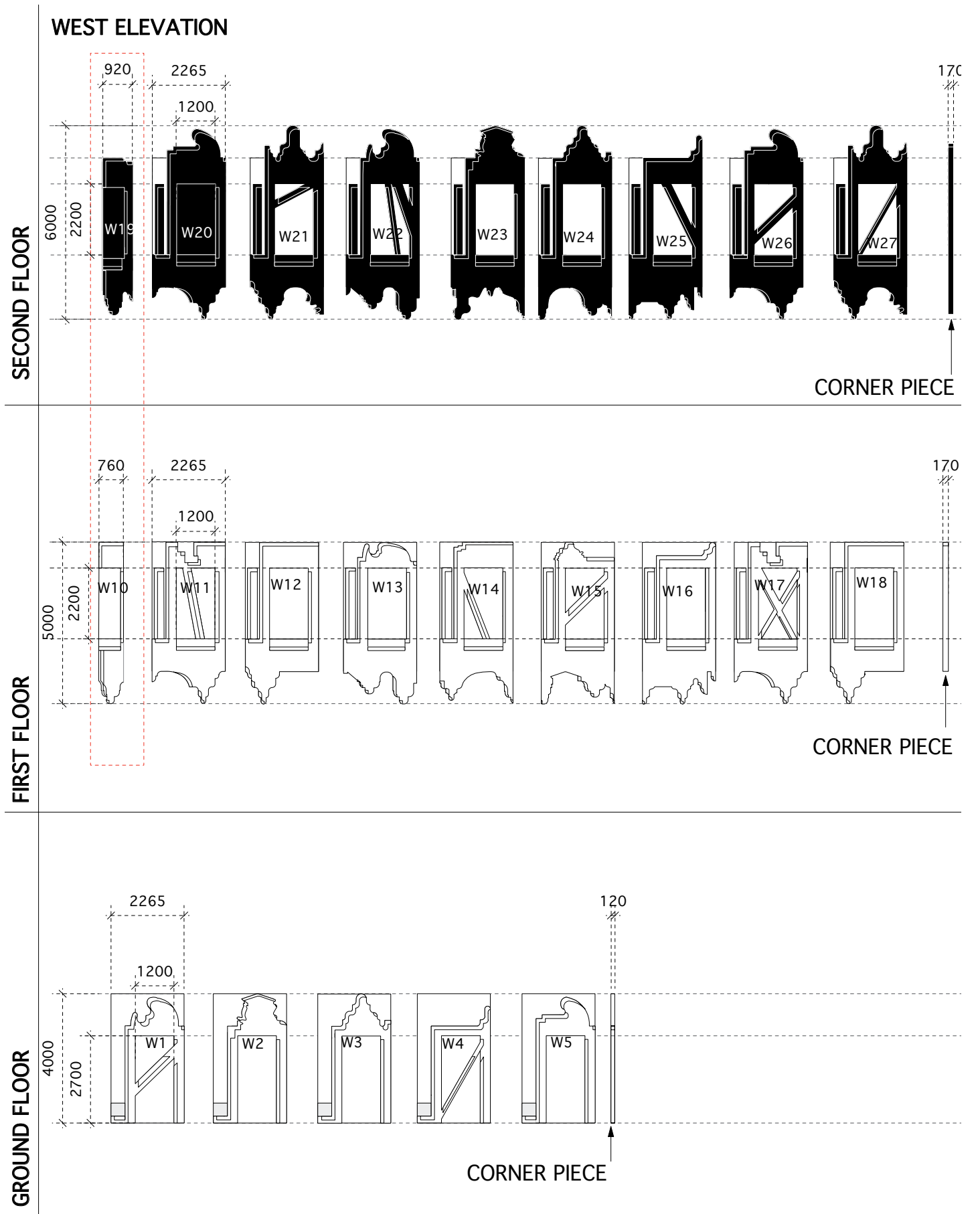
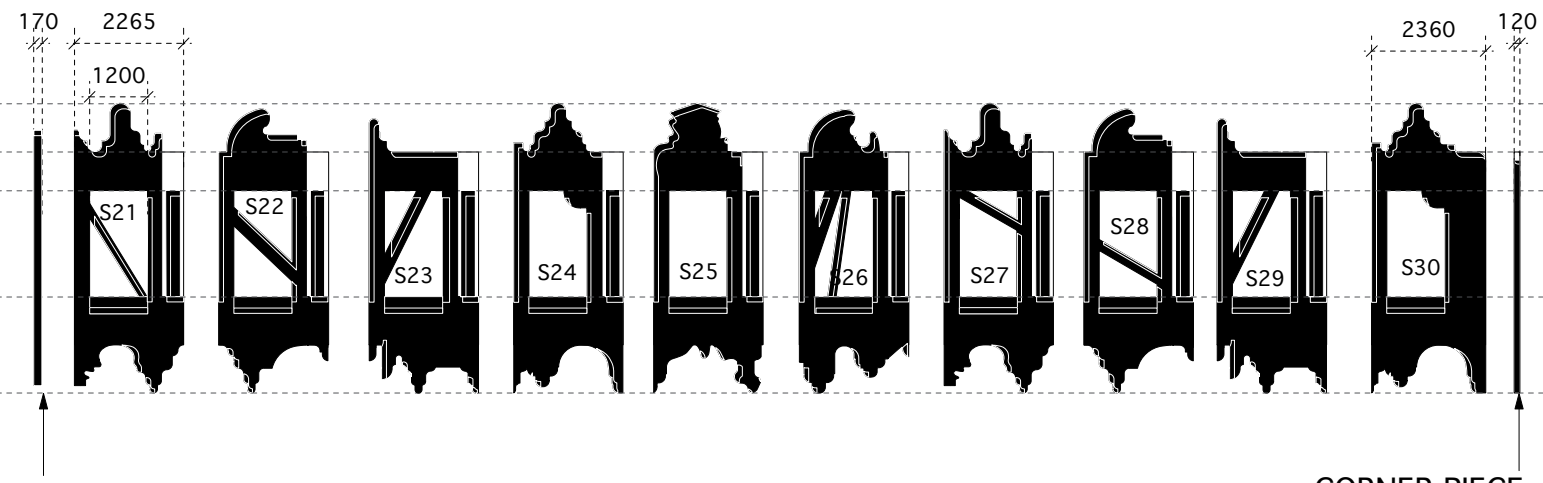
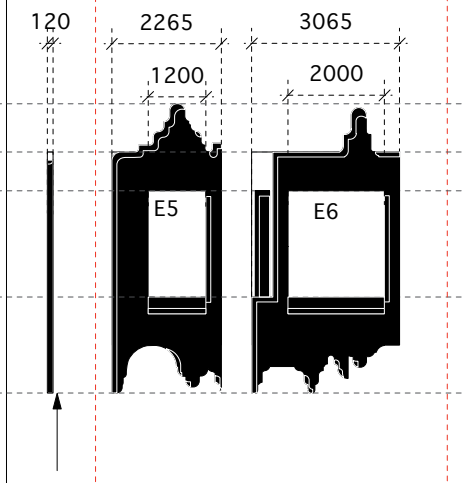


Fig.15 Panel Schedule 01

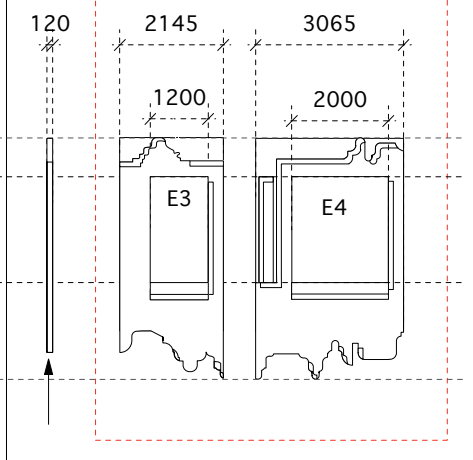
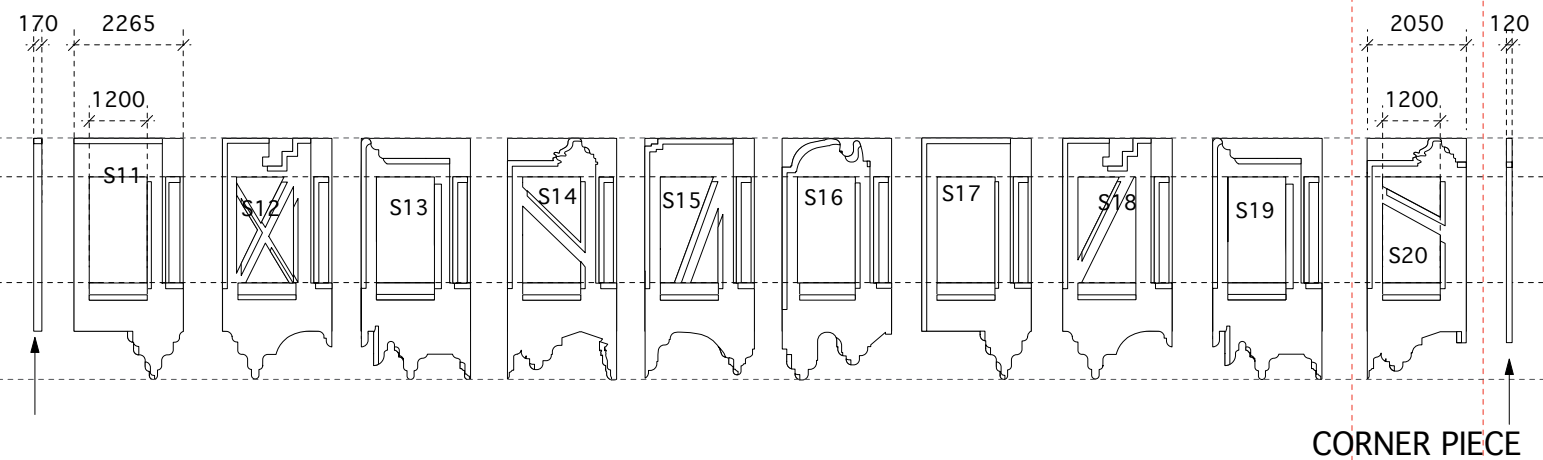
SOUTH ELEVATION



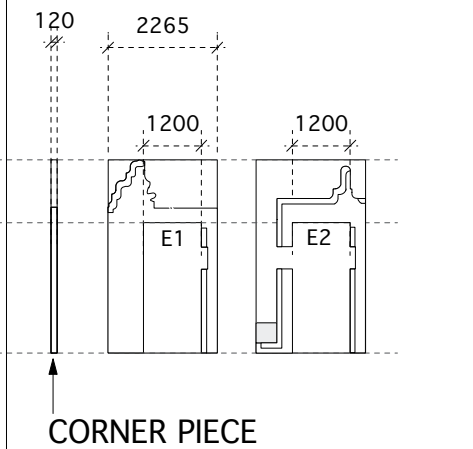
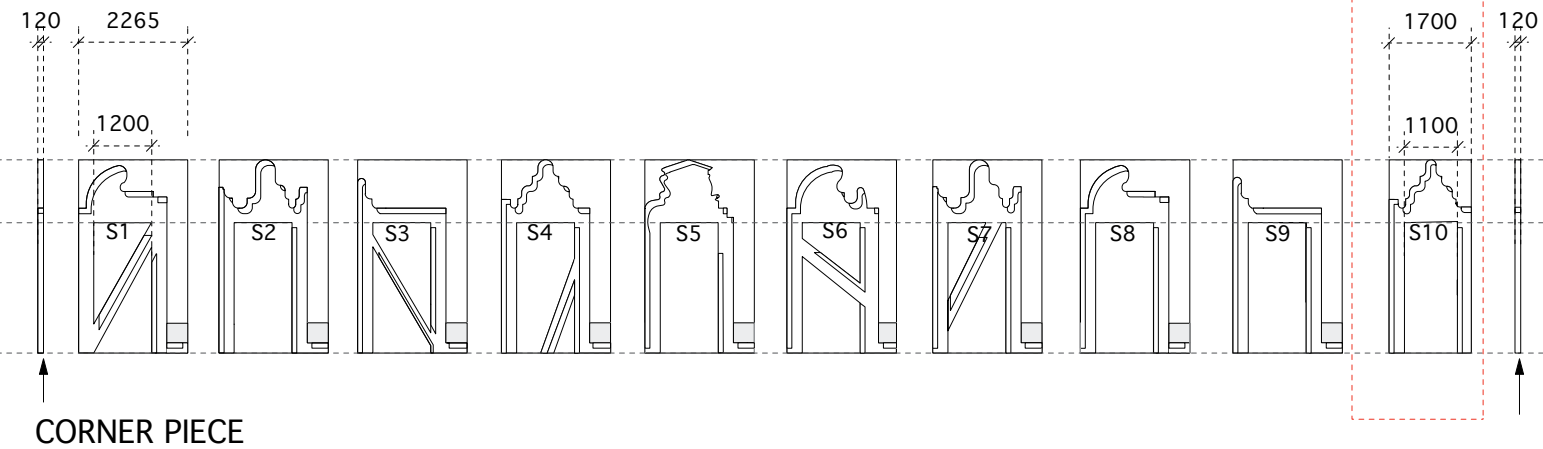
EAST ELEVATION



CORNER PIECE



CORNER PIECE



CORNER PIECE

CORNER PIECE

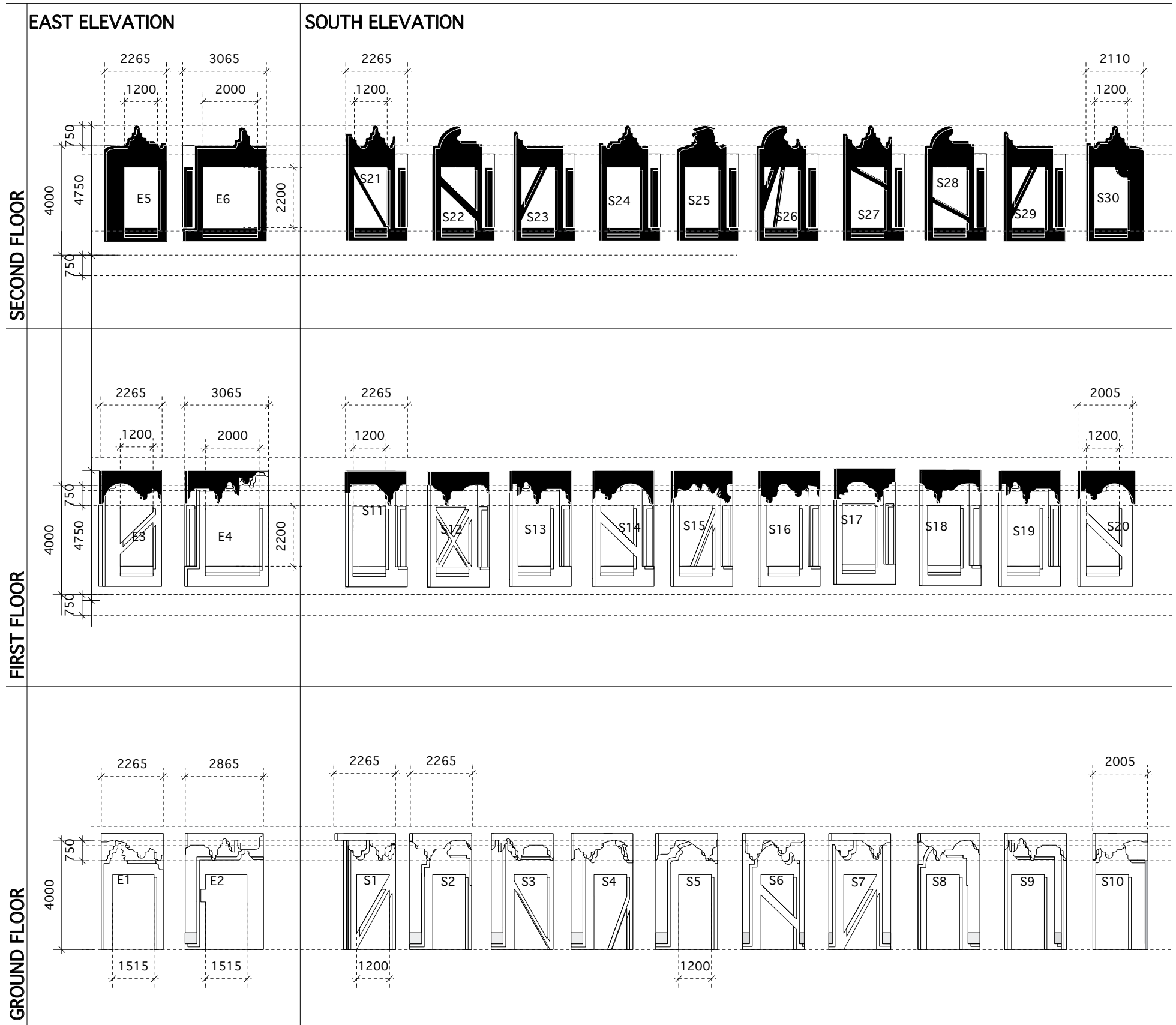
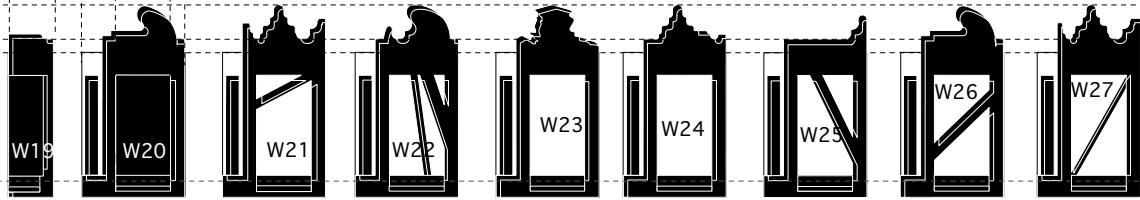


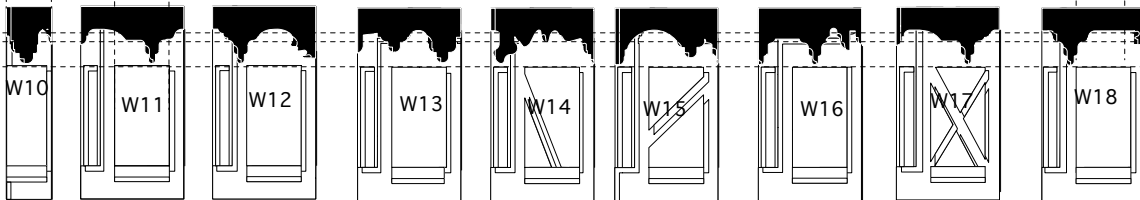
Fig.16 Panel Schedule 01, Option 2

WEST ELEVATION

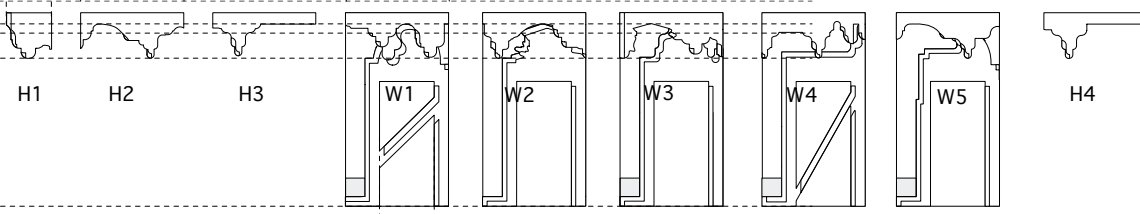
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990
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1065



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1200

TOP TYPE:

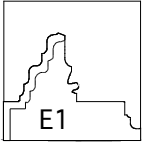
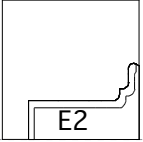
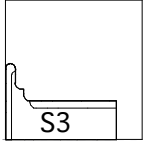
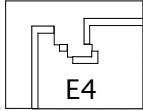
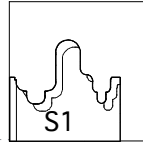
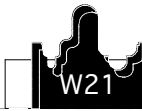

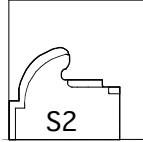
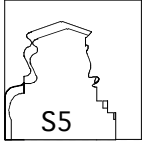

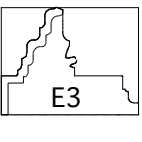

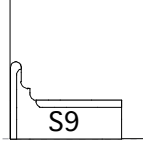
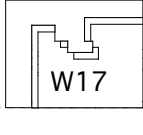
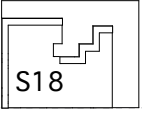
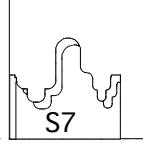
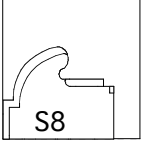
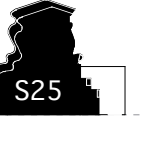
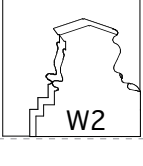

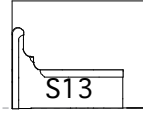

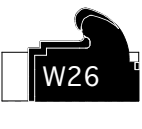
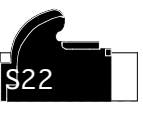
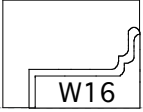
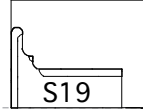


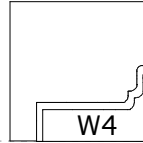


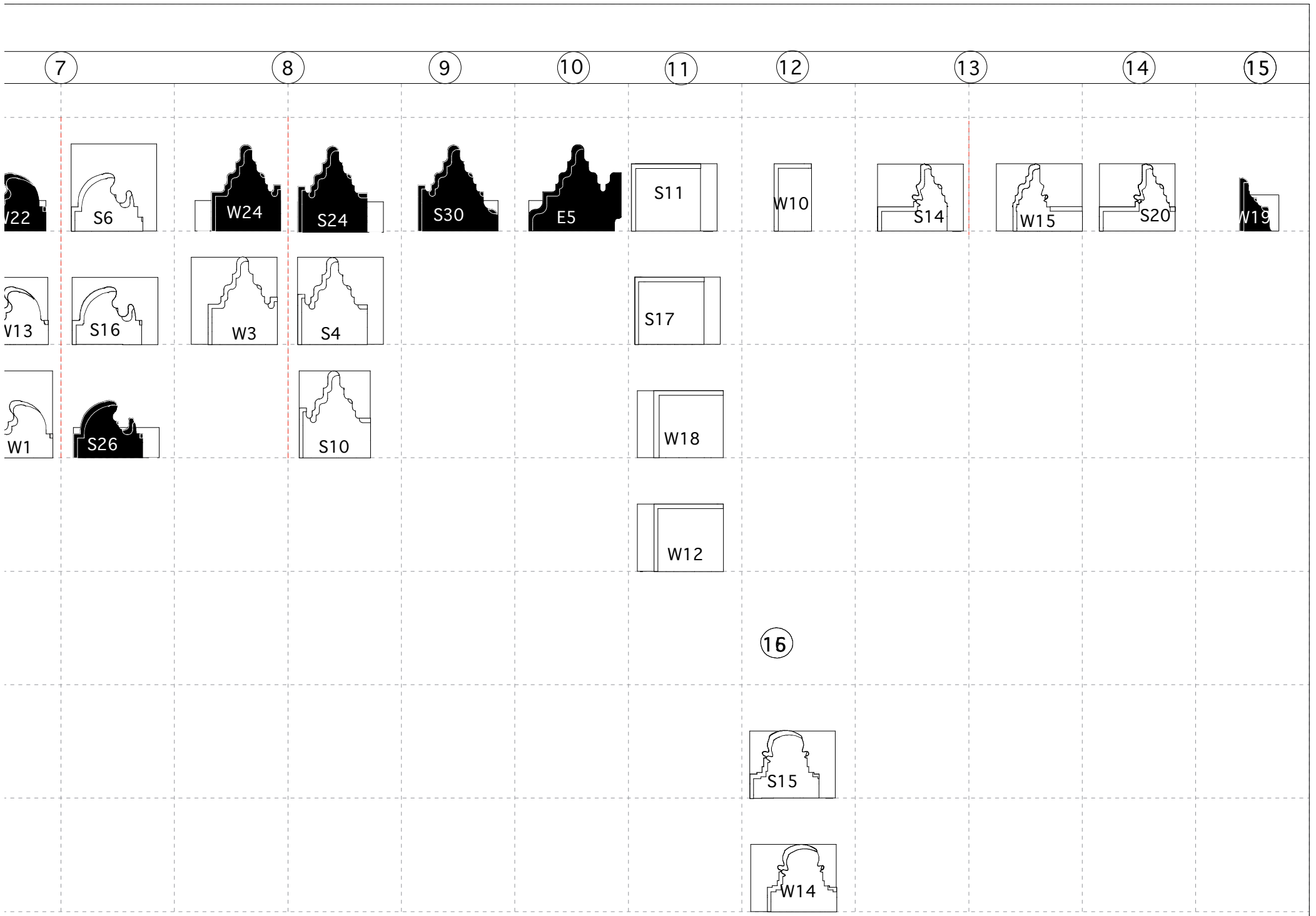
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	 W25	 S13	 W11		 S21		 W26	 S22			 W
	 W16	 S19			 S27			 S28			
	 W4	 S23									
		 S29									

Fig. 17a Panel Schedule Detail



BOTTOM TYPE:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Fig. 17b Panel Schedule Detail

TOP TYPE:

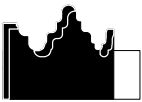
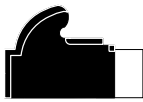




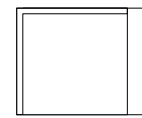
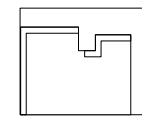
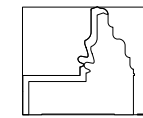
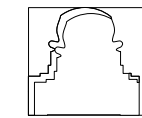
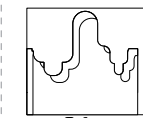
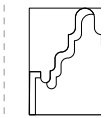

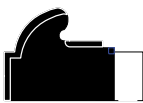




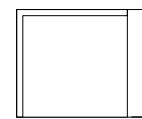
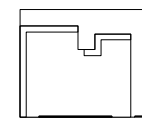
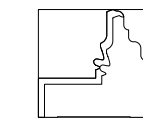
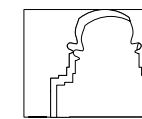
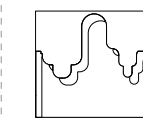
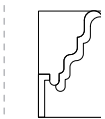



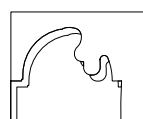
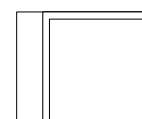
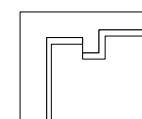
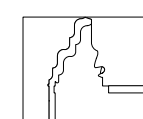
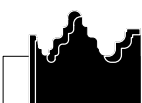

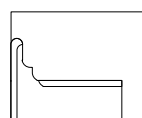
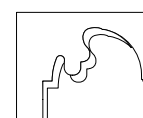
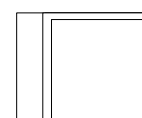
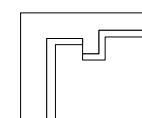

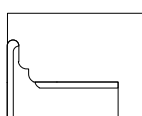
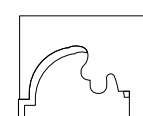
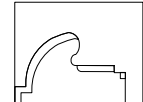
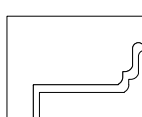

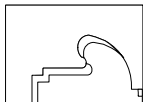
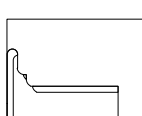
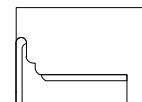
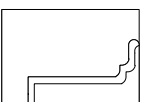
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Fig.18a Panel Schedule O2 Option 1

2

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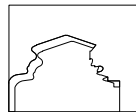
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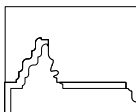
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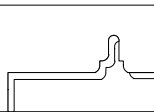
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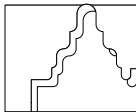
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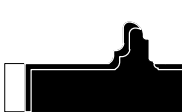
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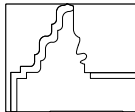
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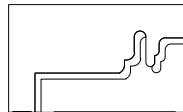
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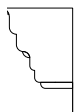
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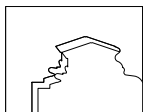
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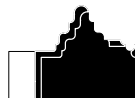
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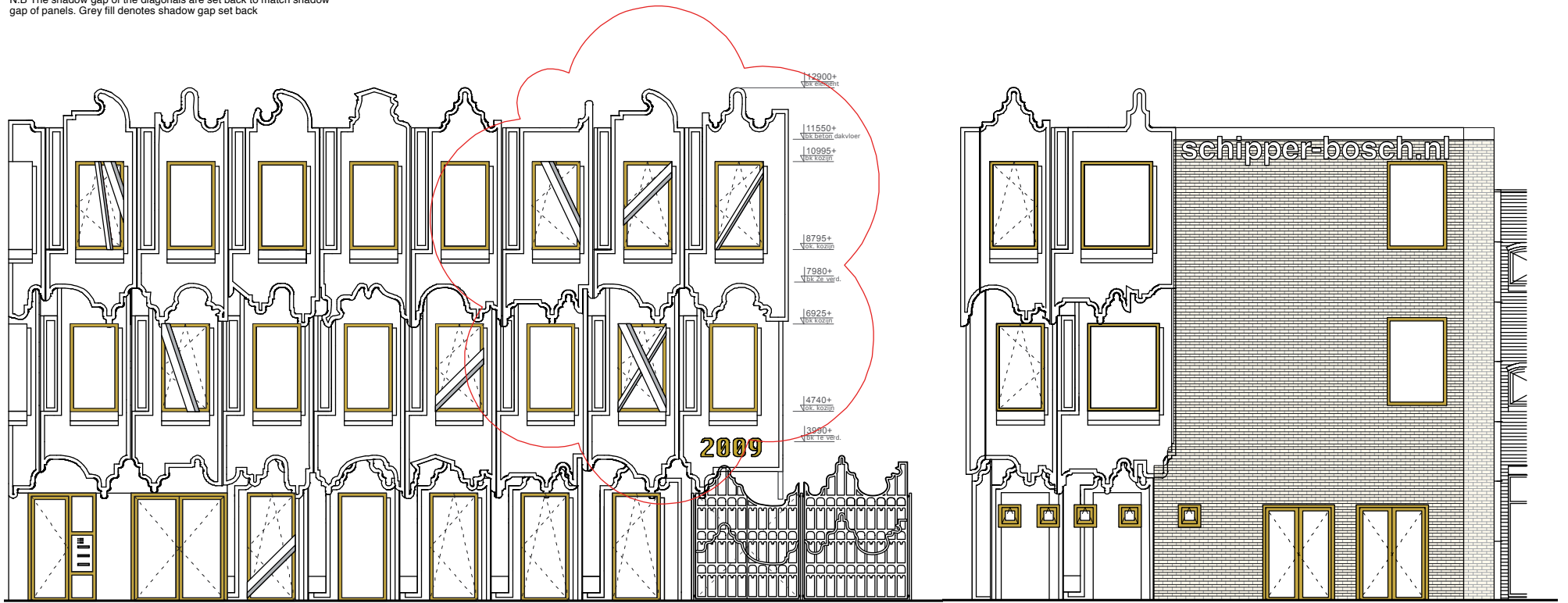
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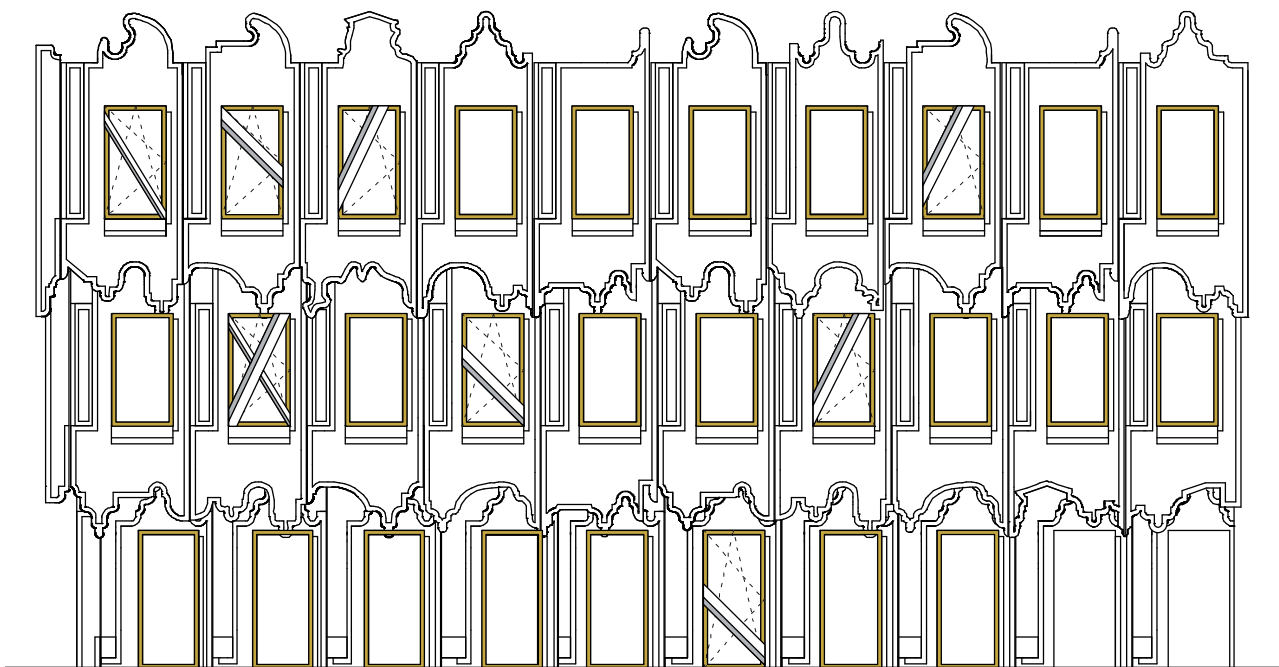
Note:
Window positions have been revised to allow for more windows on the ground floor of the restaurant to be openable. Window positions have been revised to allow for the repositioning of diagonals.

N.B The shadow gap of the diagonals are set back to match shadow gap of panels. Grey fill denotes shadow gap set back



ELEVATION 1

ELEVATION 3



ELEVATION 2

Fig.19 a Elevations

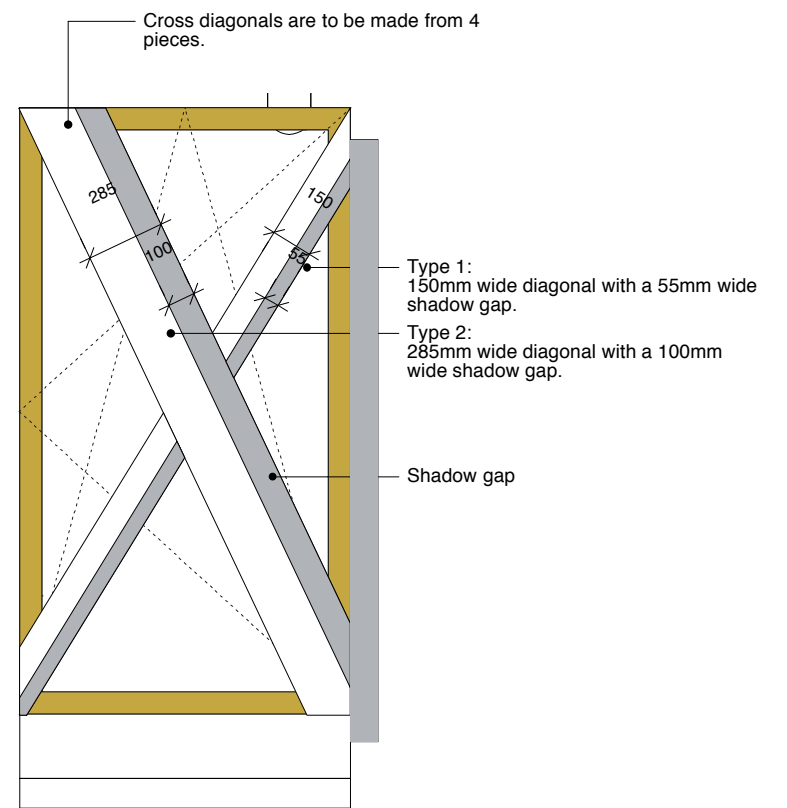
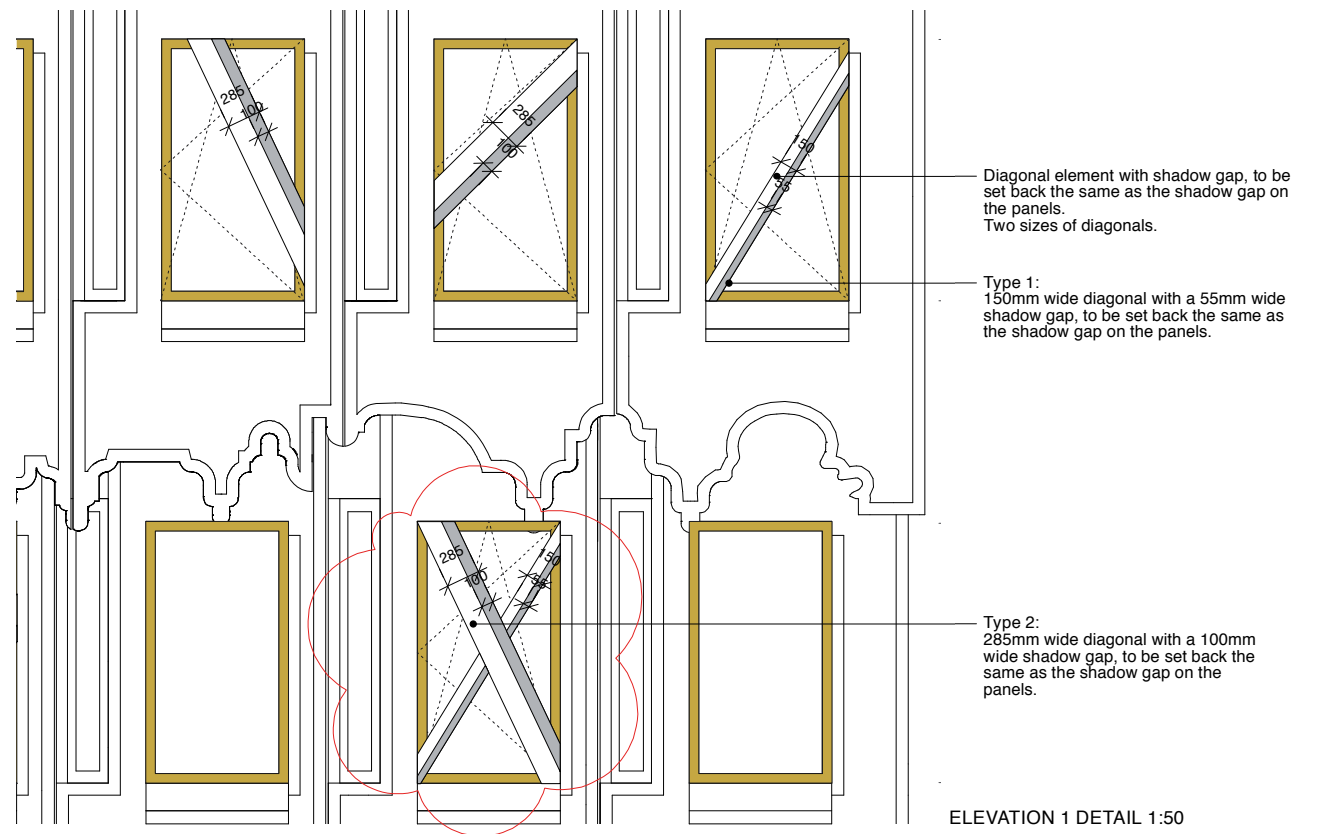


Fig. 19b Elevation Detail



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"A boundless depth opens up, effaces walls, drives away contingent presences and accomplishes the miracle of inexpressible space"





Iced gem
Fat's new Amersfoort office and restaurant is a wedding cake with extra bite **P.10**

Hawkins Brown brings film drama to Kent
See BD Reviews

BUILDING DESIGN ARCHITECTS' FAVOURITE WEEKLY

£60m housing scheme puts DSDHA in big league

BD's Architect of the Year to design luxury scheme on site of former government buildings

David Rogers

Architect of the year DSDHA has been catapulted into the big league after landing its largest ever job – a £60 million luxury residential scheme in Westminster.

The firm, which picked up the prize at last month's BD-organised awards, is drawing up plans for hundreds of apartments for Berkeley Homes on the site of two former government buildings.

Twelve-year-old DSDHA's previous biggest contracts, a housing scheme at the 2012 athletes' village

and its Stirling-nominated Guildford Education Campus in Surrey, have both been around the £25 million mark.

Berkeley recently paid £65 million for the Ministry of Justice buildings, known as Abell & Cleland House, on the corner of John Islip Street and Page Street. The buildings' neighbours include the Barbary building, refurbished for the fashion company by AHMM, as well as MI5's HQ and the Tate Britain art gallery.

Berkeley has already begun stripping out the 1930s buildings



"We're working on the design now to submit it to Westminster Council next spring"
Deborah Saunt

ahead of demolition with construction due to start in 2012.

DSDHA partner Deborah Saunt said: "We're working on the design now in order to submit it to Westminster Council next spring." The council has drawn up strict

guidelines on what it considers good design under its Design Excellence Initiative, which was introduced back in 2008 to raise standards in the borough. Council deputy leader Robert Davis, who spearheaded the move and is in charge of planning at the authority, said: "I've been quite impressed by the designs we've seen since we started this."

"I got fed up of planning officers telling me 'well, it's not bad'. That's not good enough. I want Westminster to look superb and use the best architects. Clients have to

bear in mind we won't be satisfied with second-rate and mediocre."

Berkeley's land buyer Conor McGahon confirmed the scheme would be high-end residential and this week the firm held its first public consultation on the plans with local residents with a second due in February.

DSDHA is carrying out work on another scheme in Westminster on the corner of South Molton Street and Oxford Street. The six-storey mixed-use development has been likened to New York's Flatiron Building.

INSIDE

NEWS
Lloyd's Building set to be listed

English Heritage ready to submit Richard Rogers' London Building the day it turns 50. **P.3**

LETTERS
Birmingham brouhaha

The fee row is misleading, say the city's BSF architects. **P.8**

OPINION
'A dab of Debord and a swig of the spirit of '68 will not do. There are really pressing issues out there'

Student action could have a real impact, says Robert Mull. **P.9**

BUILDING
Community recharge

Adams & Sutherland's Newham community centre has emerged from the displacement of the Olympic construction work. **P.12**

TECHNICAL
Unexpected overheads

John McAslan's King's Cross concourse and Nicholas Hare's Royal Opera House workshop in our roofing special. **P.16**

CULTURE
Sections and dissections

The Slice, the Architectural Association's latest exhibition, deals with the act of cutting open and uncovering. **P.20**

MJP focuses on beech life at St John's

MJP Architects has completed the four-storey Kendrew Quadrangle for St John's College, Oxford.

It is the third building MJP has designed for the college. Its Garden Quadrangle and Senior Common Room both won several prizes.

Kendrew Quadrangle's design was informed by its surroundings, which include several listed buildings and walls and an ancient beech tree in the centre of the quad.

The 6,000sq m horseshoe building contains 80 en-suite student rooms, six small flats for college fellows, a law library, archive and a number of teaching rooms. At the heart of the scheme is a café in a double-height glass box.



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Working Smarter 

BUILDINGS: FAT

Sweet tooth

Fat's new building in the Dutch town of Amersfoort is good enough to eat, writes **Ellis Woodman**

Pictures by Jeroen Musch



The building accommodates two floors of restaurant space with an office above.

like Fat's buildings but nervously so. They present themselves as a joke at the expense of someone who sounds worryingly like me – the declension sap clinging to the idea that the architecture of the 21st century might still be capable of embodying values of cultural continuity, urban propriety and tectonic expression. Of course, the vast swathe of current building really does treat such concerns with complete disregard. What gives Fat's work its sting is that it not only acknowledges those bien-pensant expectations, but – in its own twisted way – sets about answering them.

The approach of the artist Jeff Koons is perhaps analogous. Take a work like his famous 1988 ceramic sculpture Michael Jackson and Bubbles. Its imagery is found and abjectly kitsch, and yet the craftsmanship of the hired artisans that Koons employed to realise it immediately invests it with value. Further authority is bestowed by the centuries-old sculptural tradition to which the composition adheres. The roles of Madonna and Child have here been taken by a surgically altered pop star and his pet ape but this remains a kind of Pietà.

And so in Fat's work one finds an unimpeachably architectural imagination at play. The practice describes its latest project, Grote Koppel, a mixed-use building in the Dutch town of Amersfoort, in terms of a palazzo. Sure enough, it offers a classically tripartite expression: three storeys united in a common rhythm of solid and void but distinguished by the level of refinement that each presents. It is an image on which numerous banks, embassies and gentlemen's clubs have been modelled but is here applied to a structure that accommodates a two-storey restaurant and a third floor of office space.

The site is an extraordinary one. The medieval town centre is of broadly circular plan – an arrangement enforced by multiple concentric canals. Fat's project stands immediately beyond the outer ring. It is the first building of an otherwise 19th century terrace that fronts onto the Kleine Koppel, the principal canal that feeds those of the town centre. The moment where the Kleine Koppel enters the old town is marked by a magnificent historic water gate, a structure to which Fat's scarcely less splendid building beckons energetically. And yet, sadly, this is an affair destined to go uncommemated – an elevated railway cuts across the canal forming an unpassable obstacle between Fat's building and the object of its affections.

Last year marked the 750th anniversary of Amersfoort's foundation, a milestone that the project's developer hoped the scheme might somehow celebrate. He

asked his architect for "a building like a wedding cake", an idea that Fat interpreted nothing if not literally. Each of its elevations' three storeys has been treated as a pronounced tier – although stepping successively outwards rather than in – while the precast concrete sandwich panels from which they are assembled have been modelled as if by a master pâtissier letting fly with the buttercream icing. Fat conceived these elements as akin to rococo window surrounds that had expanded to the point that they had literally become the wall. The surface is characterised by a busy graphic of grooves and profiles that distracts the eye from the actual construction joints but also emphasises the panels' impressively substantial nature. Here, ornament is presented not as an appliqué to structure but rather as one and the same thing. In keeping with the desired mood of celebration, the aluminium window frames have been polyester powder coated gold, while the year of completion – or at least of intended completion as the contract overran by a few months – has been emblazoned on the principal facade. So far, so festive.

And yet the image presented is not quite the wholesome one the developer must initially have had in mind. For one thing, the white

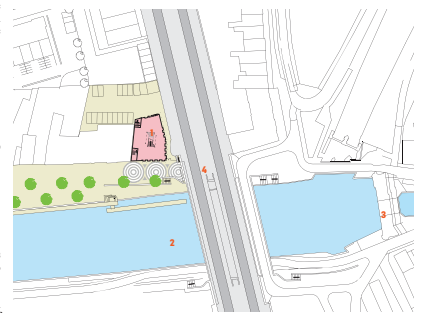
The precast concrete panels have been modelled as if by a master pâtissier letting fly with the buttercream icing

concrete of the lower two storeys is exchanged for black on the top – the sorry effect, one imagines, of a catastrophic fire. Meanwhile, sporadic windows are sliced across by concrete diagonals of mysterious purpose. Diagonal motifs often appear in the elevations of Fat's buildings, characteristically as a kind of graphic negation like the red line through a cigarette in a "no smoking" sign. The ones at Amersfoort certainly operate in that way but also suggest a more particular association, namely the timber struts installed in dangerous structures to save them from collapse.

The architect has piled on the paths through the use of a pseudo-digital font for the "2009" inscription, a choice that at once offers a calculatedly absurd counterpoint to the entropy evidenced elsewhere while providing the date's twined zeros with a formally redolent of the cancelled windows.



The building stands at the end of a 19th century terrace.



SITE PLAN
1 Grote Koppel
2 Kleine Koppel
3 Koppel poort (water gate)
4 Elevated railway

To top it all off, the dutch gable-like profiles from which the building's jaunty parapet is composed are deployed in inverted form at the first and second floor levels as if the whole thing were in the process of melting. Not since Richard Harris had his heart broken in MacArthur Park has a cake been so hilariously besmirched. "We like to think of it as a wedding cake for Darth Vader," Fat director Sean Griffiths explains helpfully.

There is an interior but annoyingly not the one the architect had hoped for. Originally, it was intended that the restaurant might occupy all three floors, distributed on galleries overlooking a central atrium. Fat concocted a madly

regimental arrangement of mirrored staircases that climbed up one of the atrium's sides – a configuration it likens to "a dystopian set for DW Griffith". However, when the developer realised that there was no market for so large a restaurant, the scheme was revised to the current arrangement. The restaurant interior has been based on a Fat design but only very schematically; rather than waiting for the architect to undertake detailed design, the proprietor simply issued his builders with print-outs of Fat's sketch-up model and told them to get on with it. The monumental in-situ concrete stair that occupies the centre of the plan is terrific but



The concrete stair at the heart of the restaurant.

little else bears much scrutiny. No, the achievement here all lies in the facade. In their heady combination of preposterously fertile decoration and rank decay they strike a note that an architect like Giulio Romano would surely recognise. For readers who remain unconvinced, it may be worth asking whether the elevations of the Palazzo del Te – with their clipped keystones, purposeful mis-scalings and rampant rustication – are any less wilfully grotesque than those at Amersfoort.

Nonetheless, I am sure there will be many who do feel they lack the sweet tooth required to stomach this particular padding. The reassuring tone of anguished

Calvinism that passes for proof of seriousness among many of Fat's contemporaries is certainly not on offer here. And yet behind the japes one does sense a seriousness, an ethical intent even. Jeff Koons has talked of his primary creative goal as "the lifting of cultural guilt and shame", and something of that mission surely guides Fat's practice too. The promise of succumbing to its buildings' strange pleasures is a liberation from the straitjacket of taste. Fat wants you to enjoy the world for what it is – comic and tragic, fantastic and pathetic – and its buildings are here to teach you how. There is medicine in this cake.

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of 2010

PLUS
Scary readers: the frankly terrifying winner of our ghost story competition

Seeing Vincent in a startling new light

2010's best shows changed the way we thought about art's most familiar figures



The Real Van Gogh: the Artist and his Letters Royal Academy of Arts

This groundbreaking show departed with the myth of the

madman tormented with genius to present instead the art of a meticulous professional. The artist whose voice we heard speaks not about suffering but about the practical business of how to draw and paint. We learn that even if it only took Vincent an hour or two to paint a picture, before his brush touched the canvas he had chosen and mixed his pigments, and knew precisely where he would place every touch of colour. The letters were exhibited next to the paintings that he refers to in them. When we turned from one to the other we saw the paintings through his eyes. It has always been easy to let what we know about Van Gogh's personal suffering colour the way we look at his art. The brilliance of this show was that it forced us to see what is really there and not what our imaginations add to it.



century Victorian view painters, he was far and away the most accomplished, knowing for his rivals such as Manet, Courbet and Bellini.

Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth 2010 Victoria and Albert Museum

Deserves its place as one of the best shows of the year not for the quality of individual works of art in it, but for the way the designers brilliantly brought together 500 disparate objects to evoke the decorative strangeness of a long dispersed collection.

Henry Moore 'The Britain' Tate Britain

This Britain took an artist whose reputation has, in recent years, been somewhat eclipsed by successors - from Corn to Kapoor - and restored him to his rightful place as the greatest British sculptor of the 20th century.

Michelangelo's Dream Courtauld Gallery

What an inspired idea in bringing together the artist's highly finished preparatory drawings to Titian's mar-

ble and together with the sublime example in his own medium, and then to explain the complex ideas expressed in them with the lightest of touches.

Kingdom of the Sculptors From the Royal Collection

The refinement and sophistication of these medieval, Migration, and post-Renaissance, ornate objects and masterfully executed three of us who never knew of their existence.

Victoria and Albert Art and Love Queen's Gallery

Superbly installed, this display of treasures from the Royal Collection revealed that for these glances so royal court in Europe could look that of the young Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

Francis Alys 'The Modern' Tate Modern

Even when looking at deconstructing ephemeral actions, the Belgian artist brings compositional rigour to

works that are by turns playful, intelligent and imbued with gravity. Impossibly nuanced, this show did full justice to one of the most important living artists.

Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballet Russes Victoria and Albert Museum

Appropriately over the top, extravaganzas punctuated with rare film footage of ballet as it was in pre-revolutionary Russia, Pevsner's show captures for Russia and the incredible costumes designed by Bakst, Proust and Matisse.

Fixed in pre-rotated steel shingles, its three-winged form has been conceived as a reflection of the processes that go on inside - fermentation in steel vats, aging in oak barrels and, finally, aging in bottles.

London Library Harold Tompkins

Harold Tompkins' work on the largest independent subscription library in the world is installed from the outside. But inside stairs have been re-worked, reading rooms established, the speed at which books can be accessed greatly enhanced. It's a dramatic transformation that retains the character of the institution.

Krishna-dossal School by Citrus & Vermorel

The first Hindu primary school in the UK, in north London, is housed in a traditional temple,

Recession, what recession?

Saleroom records tumbled as the art market bucked the downturn

auction highlights *By Colin Coates*

£66million Picasso, *Nude Green* Leiris and Dalí *On the Beach* *SOtheby's, NEW YORK, MAY 18*

One of a series of highly painted, intimate portraits Picasso painted in 1933 of his lover, Marie-Thérèse Walter. This painting was always going to fly. Four years ago, another example from the series, *Le Jeune*, was about to be sold for \$120m (£98m) when its owner, Steve Wynn, struck his elbow through it by mistake. With a recession steadily biting in 2008 (244,127m), estimates, this one sold to an anonymous buyer for \$106.6m (£86m) - a record for any work of art at auction, proving that, even in hard times, the very rich will put their money into great art.

£24million Gauguin, *Walking Past I* *SOtheby's, LONDON, MAY 17*

Estimated at £20m to £25m, this was the work that set the auction alight, sparking a lengthy bidding battle before falling to a telephone bidder, later identified as the Brazilian billionaire Lyda Safra, to whose Belgrade address it was reportedly delivered.

£22.6million Chinese vase *Sotheby's Auctions, HONG KONG, MAY 11*

Discovered in France, north-west London, this rare, finely decorated porcelain vase, probably made for a palace of the Emperor Qianlong in the 18th century, epitomised the taste of China's new rich and

attached Chinese dealers who drove the price to a record for any Chinese work of art.

£29million Andy Warhol, *Men in New York* *Phillips, NEW YORK, MAY 18*

Experts are puzzling how this painting, the most expensive in New York's recent contemporary art sale, made more than Warhol's trademark camp can paintings in the same week of sales.

£27.7million J.M.W. Turner, *Steam Train* *Christie's, LONDON, JULY 7*

The flow of treasures from Britain's stately homes continued unabated when this painting, from the collection of the Earl of Rosebery, sold for an artist's record to the J Paul Getty Museum.

£22million Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Finding of Moses* *Sotheby's, NEW YORK, MAY 18*

Highly prized when painted in 1904 but rejected when offered for nothing to British museums in the 1930s, this painting



£2.7million Frank Auerbach, *Autumn* *Sotheby's, LONDON, JULY 28*

Auerbach, who will be 80 next year, has been enjoying a recession-proof price boom and this was his highest price to date.

£892,000 Robert Rauschenberg, *Portrait of a Diver* *Sotheby's, LONDON, MAY 18*

Catalogued as a 19th-century painting in the 'Inventory of Rauschenberg' with a £150m estimate, this sold to dealer Philip Mendel, who believed it to be a genuine Rauschenberg but has yet to exhibit it as such.

£387,250 Get Quins, *Jonathan Rado* *Sotheby's, LONDON, OCT 15*

A good investment by White Cube gallery's Jay Sappington who bought it for about £20,000 in 2005, this was only the third painting by the 47-year-old Briton to appear at auction. It sold to an Asian buyer whom Sappington's said had never heard of Quins before this sale.

Advertisement feature



A coffee with Bouke de Vries

Artist Bouke de Vries is exhibiting at Pallant House Gallery in Chichester, Sussex. The gallery is supported by De Longhi, the leading Italian brand known for the coffee machines that turn coffee-making into an art form. Here, Bouke talks about his work.

several art fairs and group shows in London, Basel and New York, and some will art commissioned for the new Roland Mouret shop in London.

How would you describe your style? Deconstruction meets deconstruction.

Who has influenced you most? The wonderfully eclectic exhibitions put on by Axel Vervoort at the Palazzo Fortuny in Venice were inspiring.

Where do you think modern art is headed? I think art is starting to re-evaluate traditional skills, craftsmanship and beauty.

What are you working on at the moment? I'm working on pieces for

More than just a pretty facade

Spiritual architecture ruled the day, from a hippy hub to a Hindu school

Buildings *By Richard Dorment*

The Hill Building by David Cole and Pig Sorell *at the top of the page*

The Centre for Alternative Technology is an organisation with strong roots in the hippy movement that now focuses on best practice in sustainability. Its new building has been constructed from materials

that require minimum levels of energy to produce and transport of which, the most striking of which is the massive, earth-tamped brick walls of the cylindrical auditorium at the heart of the scheme. This is an extremely worthy building but a remarkably beautiful one too.

South London Gallery by GJ

A single room, tucked away from the street, the South London Gallery has always struggled with the constraints of its physical infrastructure. But the young practice has just that right with an inventive

adaptation of the neighbouring Victorian terraced house, with a tall, more gallery and a flat for artists in residence.

Swiss Church London by Chris & Gantenbein

17, High Street is the 153-year-old church of London's Swiss community. This year saw the completion of its dramatic renovation by the Basel-based architects, Christ & Gantenbein, introducing what is in effect a building within a building, the concrete walls of which are faced in concentric layers of mirror glass that reflect and fragment the surrounding architecture.



Finefare Henry, Spire by Peter and Partners

Easton and Partners' skills are never better demonstrated than when designing a shed, and the Finefare Winery is one of their most spectacular

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