

P4 Reflection
Towers in the Garden

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MSc4: City Room (2018-2019)

Interiors Buildings Cities

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The year theme of the Interior chair is “Intimate City” and our task was to create a so-called “City Room” for a certain area of Antwerp. It was a relatively open assignment without specific site location or function type, so the method for developing the notion for the city room served as a common ground for the whole graduation studio. The project started with research session, “Precedents, Context, People”, where we looked into four European cities to both discover the city rooms in the city and define intimacy in the corresponding urban conditions. After that, we moved on to Antwerp, where each of us chose one specific site to insert our idea of an urban constitution.

Through the whole process, the research methods were weaving with each other. The main approach of the studio was to study the precedents, context and people. While there were others like typology studies and urban morphology in later period of design. Thus, this reflection consists of four parts according to the period of time we were: *From Research to Design* describes how I finished the research and integrated the results to the design process. The *Encountering Situations* reveals the difficulties when I first started urban ideas. *Detours and feedbacks* discussed the thinking through making aspects of design. *Graduation under Interior* talks about what I learnt from the whole year in the chair and what I can take further in professional fields.

From Research to Design: typology studies

The research series began with the study of Paris, Vienna, Naples and Milan. In the group of Paris, we decided to make seven short films and present them together after editing in the same manner. They



Figure 1. Sequence of rooms in Gare de l'Est (from P1)

were named *One day in the life of Paris*. Each of us chose a distinguishing building to observe and record in the whole day, so that we could have a comparison of city rooms and intimacy moments. It was an appliance of precedents studying. In my opinion, it is also a typological method since each of us chose a type of public building in the city. For me, I looked into Gare de l'Est, or East Station, for its sequences of rooms that were not very common in regular organization of stations because most stations have only a major hall. By observing the people in the station, I found how the connecting rooms affect people in terms of their route and relaxation. Other group members present also different city rooms such as Palais Royale, the Passages, the cafés, etc. By the end of Assembly, we got a grasp on various of urban spaces that forms the complex Paris.

The second phase was the *Coupe Anatomique*, or detailed section. After discovering the city rooms in the city of Antwerp, it is a good way to visualizing and presenting it in detailed lines, as Heinrich Tessenow did in his drawings. This gave us a sense of spatial qualities, and moreover, how material and detail play an essential role in creating a room.

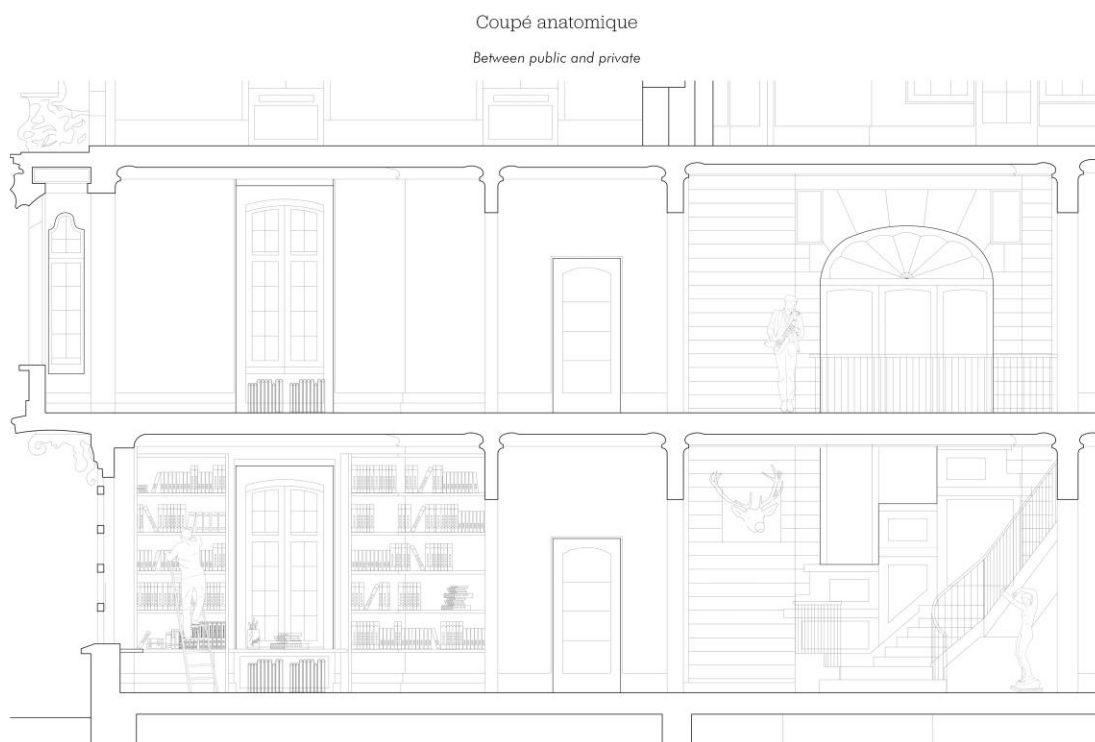


Figure 2. Coupe Anatomique of the villa in Sint-Hubertusstraat 16

Encountering Situations

The idea of site choosing procedure did not work well, I think, for one could only see the full potential of the site after he/she did thorough studies on it. Many of us actually swapped the site before finally decided. And the requirement that each one should have its own unique site did restrict a lot. For me, my final decision is a private garden located on the corner of Sint-Hubertusstraat 16 in the Oud Berchem district. It is a back yard of an abandoned villa located in a southern rural area in Antwerp. The program was mainly an elderly social house with community center on the ground floor. After analyzing, it is gradually clear that the site consist of three key elements: the old villa, the back garden, a residential building at the end of the site.

The “Precedents, Context and People” method was naturally integrated here. Firstly the context: the old villa is an art-deco styled mansion built by natural stone. It was the starting point and essence of the project. The residential building, on the other hand, is in poor condition and its façade was distracting and improper compared to the surrounding buildings. The center of the site and the project, however, was the garden in a triangle shape. For the people: it is basically a rural district with elderly people as the main age group. It was the main urgent need to build a meeting place for senior people. For the precedents: I was looking into the Villa Garbald, a project that aimed to renovate the old villa as well as to build an extension as a reception center. The analytical method is quite efficient while facing a new problem, for it is reasonable and systematic. It is also very beneficial to building a foundation for further design.



Figure 3. Images for primary idea for the garden

Detours and Feedbacks

Tryouts are necessary for testing the volumes. It is not merely listing all possible skins as we could, it is rather done under a certain idea of or attitude towards the design strategy. Through this process was where I found most excited because it is a combination of improvisation and inference. In the process, we had automatic visual feedback while making the choices. I have to admit that I wasted lots of time because of some detours. When I choose one of them, I would also be distracted by the promising qualities other volumes had. Later on, I became less confident and more aware of the disadvantage of the chosen one.

The choice between two specific skins was the major struggle I have been through. I have developed to 1:200 plan under both skins. At last, I decided that the existing maples were the major elements to respect. I chose the one with less destruction to the trees. In another perspective, going deep on an idea helps we more aware of the side effects it could have.



Figure 4. Tryouts of volumes

Graduating under Interior

It is actually my first time to finish designing a building under the philosophy or principles of the Interior studio. Some of them I was not very familiar with before, for instance, the urban morphology.

It was used as a common judgement of the urban gesture a volume provided. The consistency of the city is what European cities kept well in the past centuries and was really impressive. Therefore, cities have personalities, which requires buildings with their own contexts.

For drawings and modeling, the Interior studio is always encouraging the “thinking through making” process. It seems producing without planning. However, I can understand that it is crucial to have a grasp on the structure at the beginning of a primary idea instead of developing a skin before inserting structure and material. Besides, it is beneficial for creating the interior compared to the digital modeling where the elements are not physical.



Figure 5. Masterplan