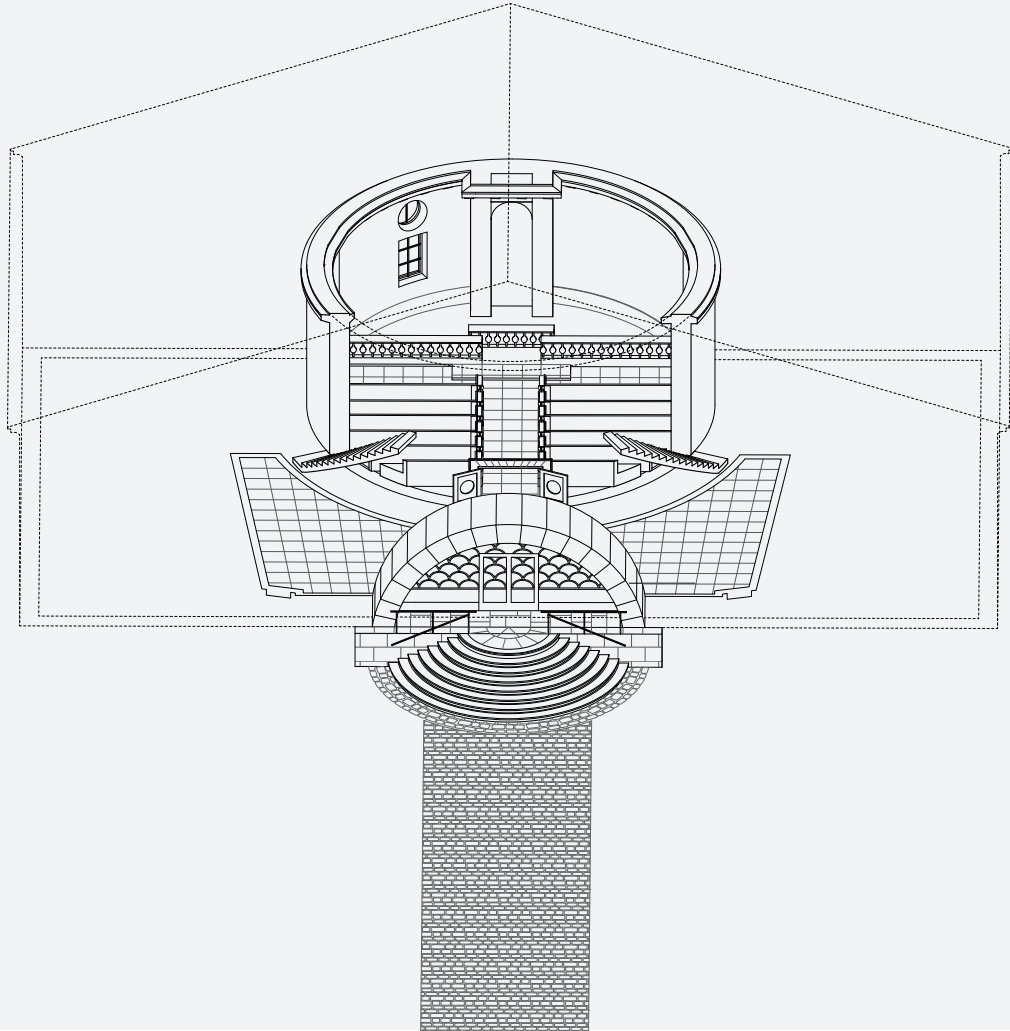


Research Plan



Lister County Courthouse (1917-21)

Erik Gunnar Asplund

La Salle Labrouste, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (1854-1875)

Henri Labrouste

Lister County Courthouse

Introduction	4
Reflection	4
A courthouse in context	8
Dialectical pair	9
In axial congruence	10
Foreshadowing	12
Poché	14
Lighting Hierarchy	15
Material Palette	16
Mannerist Humour	17
Volumes of Judicial Authority	18
Societal Context and Ornamentation	20
<i>Parti</i>	22

La Salle Labrouste, Bibliothèque Nationale de France Richelieu

Introduction	24
Reflection	24
Societal and Situational Context	25
Composition of Space and Light	26
Ornamentation	27
Library Now	27
Image Citation	42
Endnotes	44

Lister County Courthouse

Erik Gunnar Asplund

Introduction

The Lister County Courthouse (1917-21) at Sölvesborg, Sweden mediates complex conflicting programmes and juxtaposes monumentality with the prosaic nature of a district courthouse. The elevations of the courthouse are expressive of both the narrative and operations of the courthouse. The principal façade (East) is symmetrical in composition and incorporates motifs derived from Nordic Classicism; namely plaster swags, monumental arches, and broken-bed pediment. The striking 'fish scale' motif used as the screen and entrance door construction is not particular to the courthouse in any meaningful way but was a recurring motif within Asplund's oeuvre; the same motif is found at the Woodland Cemetery (1919- 40). The ornamentation and composition of the East façade speak to the authority of the judicial systems and convey said authority to the public as they ascend a processional axis from the railway station to the courthouse.

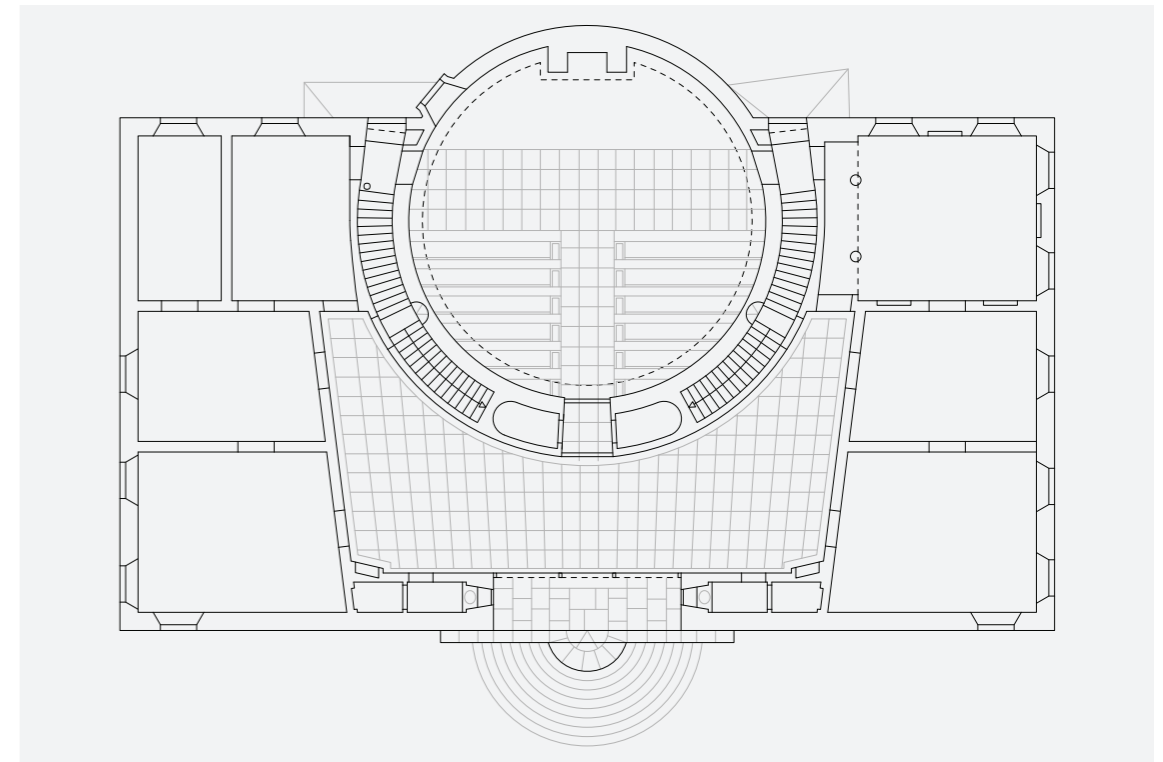
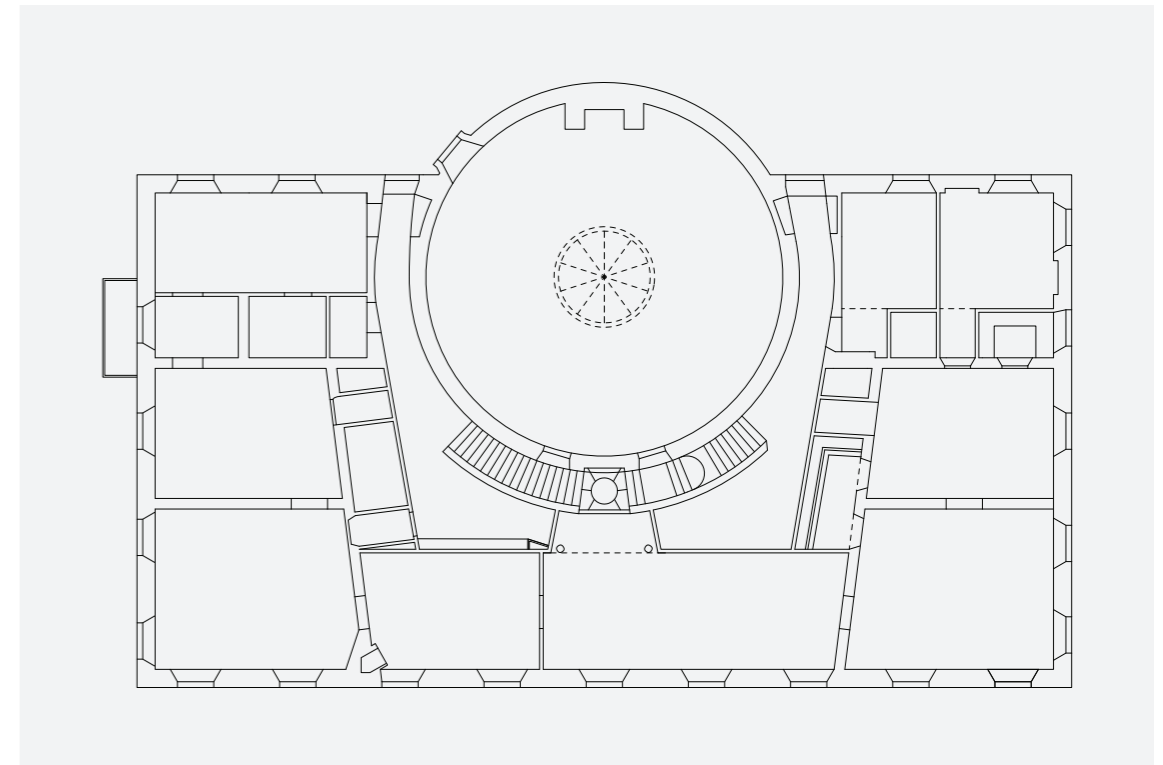
The back façade (West) carefully reveals the program of the courthouse by the protruding cylindrical courtroom. The apse of the courtroom is centred, crowned by provincial timber framing, and flanked by an alternative entrance to the courthouse at the basement level through which the accused enter. The façade communicates Asplund's direct answer to the adverse demands of the interior program. The public-private dichotomy of the courthouse is mediated by the vertical circulation in the poché that envelops the doubleheight courtroom and separates public functions from private living space.

Reflection

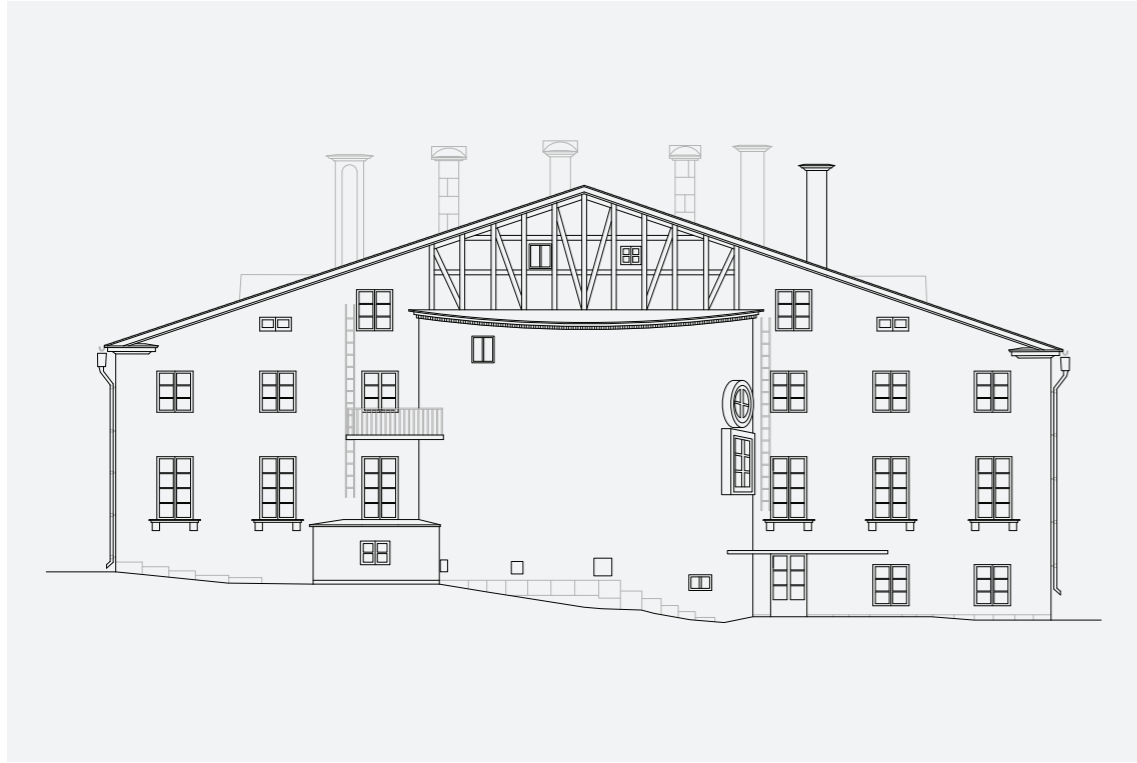
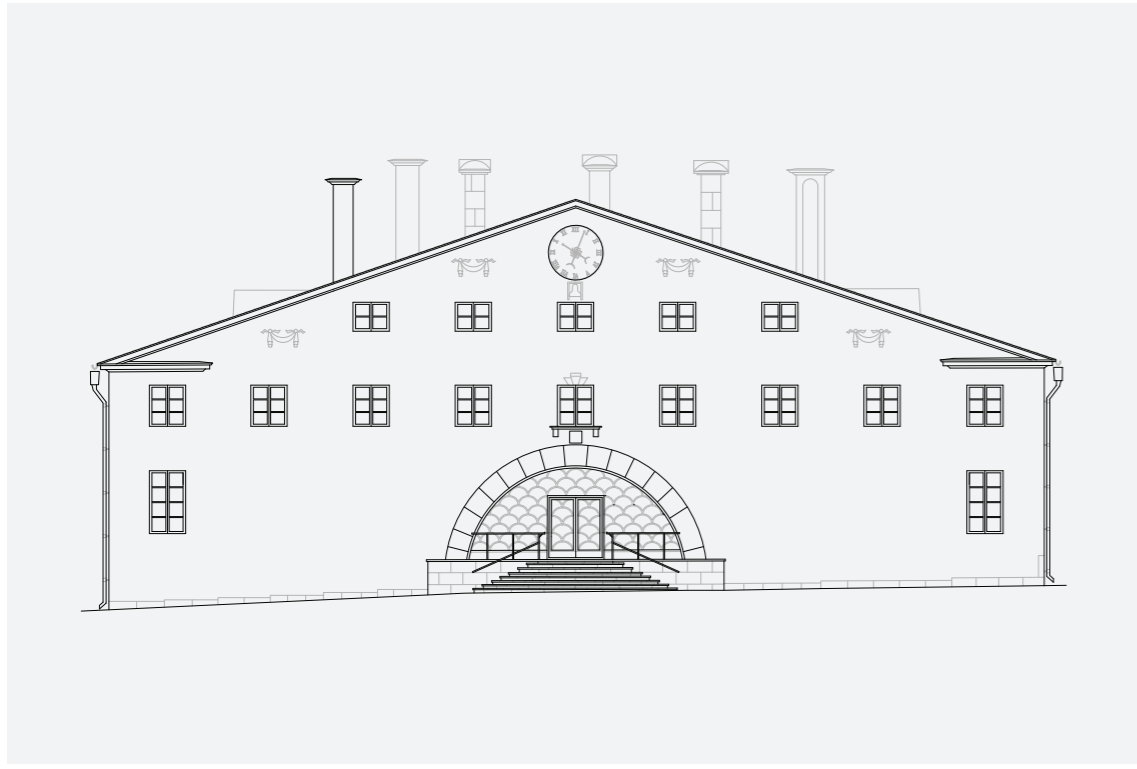
The design of the Lister County Court House anticipates that of the Stockholm City Library (1924-1928). The concepts that Asplund implemented at Stockholm were first developed in the courthouse design; namely the principal cylindrical space at the centre of the plan, vertical circulation as an extension of that cylinder geometry, and a processional sequence articulated by monumental portals. Asplund's use of a cylindrical volume to denote importance is directly comparable between both designs. The Stockholm City Library reverses the direction of the enveloping vertical circulation to allow access to upper levels rather than discourage it. Both designs centre a monumental portal on the principal facades preceded by a processional ramp or tree-lined axial road.



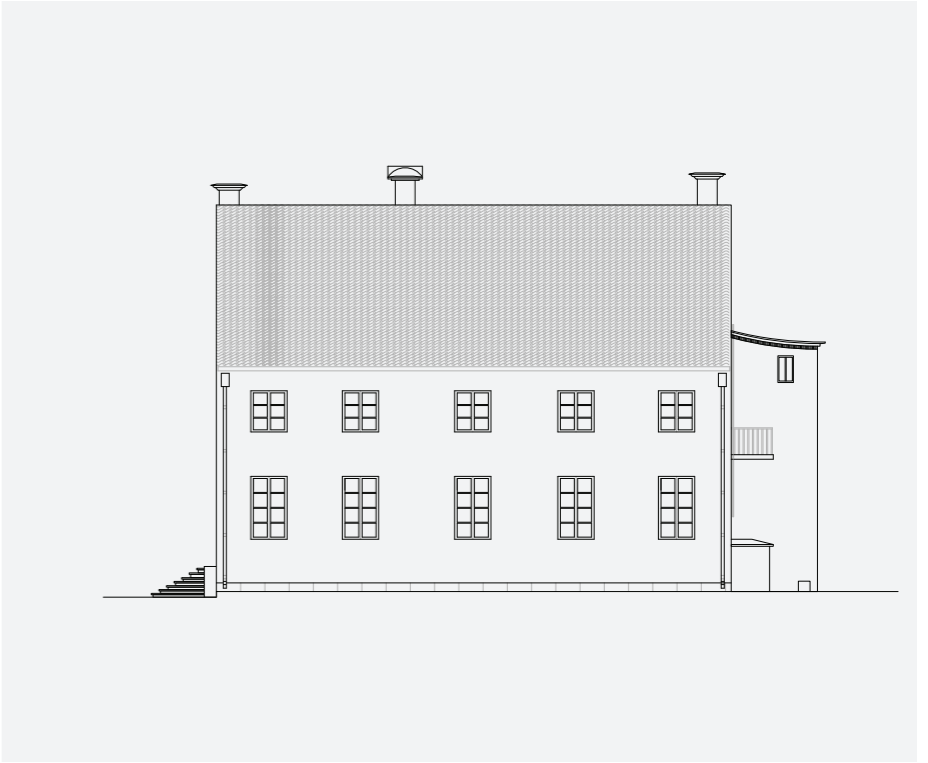
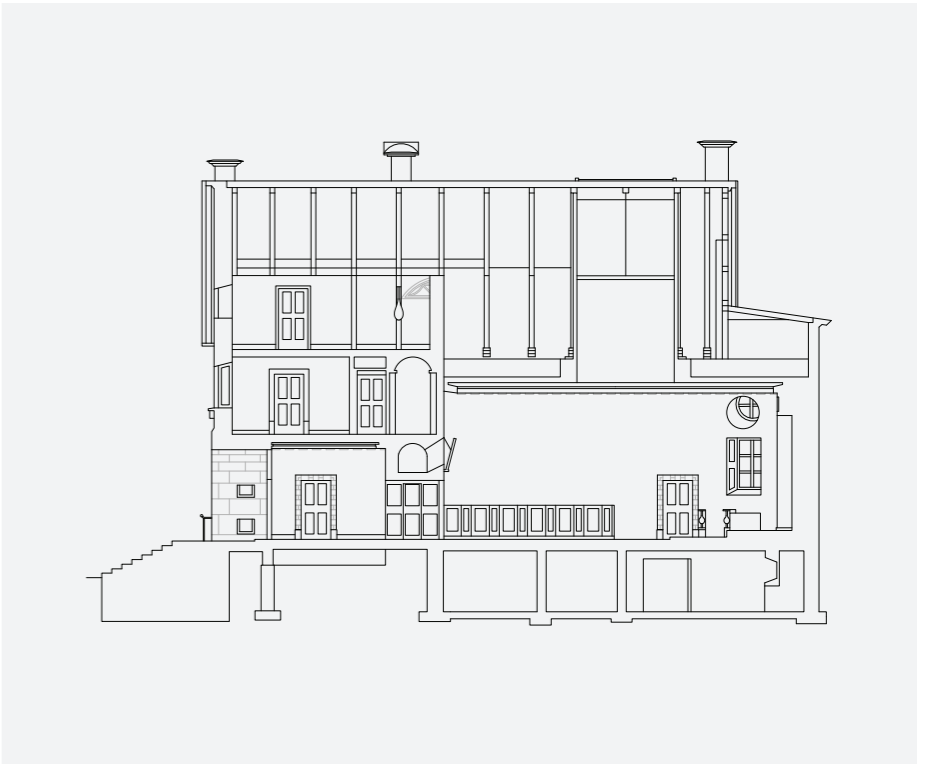
(Right, clockwise): Fig. 1. Lister County Courthouse window detail, photograph, Lasse Olsson; Fig. 2. West (back) elevation, photograph, Lasse Olsson.



(Above, descending): Fig. 3. First floor plan, 1:250; Fig. 4. Ground floor plan, 1:250.



(Above, descending): Fig. 5. Front (East) elevation, 1:250;
Fig. 6. Back (West) elevation, 1:250.



(Above, descending): Fig 7. Section, 1:250; Fig 8. Side (North) elevation, 1:250.

A courthouse in context

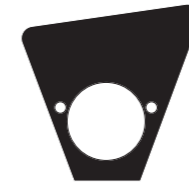
According to Hakon Ahlberg (1943), the mayor of Grönköping is a strict man.¹ For a smaller community, the governing body has to be more strict in order to be respected. Therefore the facade of the courthouse in Sölvesborg expresses authority. The monumental facade faces towards the community and suggests something very important business is going on behind the vast entrance and the windowless space on the ground floor. Monumental courthouses are reoccurring in several other small Swedish towns.



(Descending, left to right): Fig. 9. Karlskrona Rådhus (1912); Fig. 10. Borås Rådhus (1910); Fig. 11. Ystad Tingshus (1903); Fig. 12. Lister County Courthouse (1917-21).

Dialectical pair

In 1915 the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin wrote *The Principles of Art History*. Wölfflin categorised the experience of art into dialectical pairings whose measure is the experience of the individual who moves through them.² The sequence or composition of the square and the circle is a clear example of this principle. This pattern reoccurred in several designs of Nordic architects around that period of time.



In axial congruence

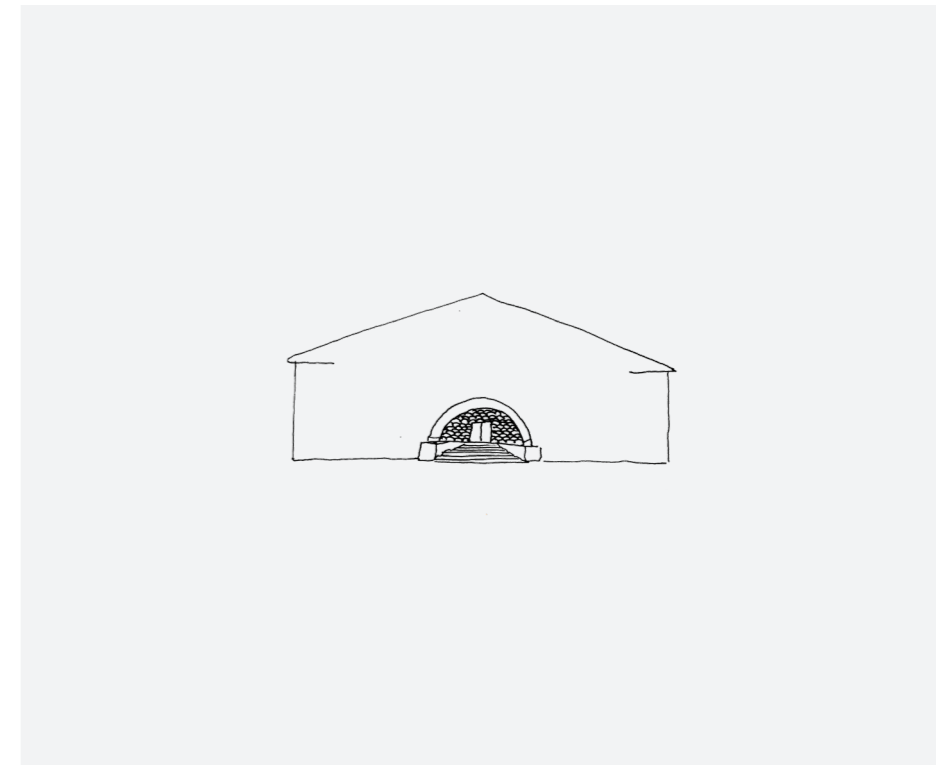
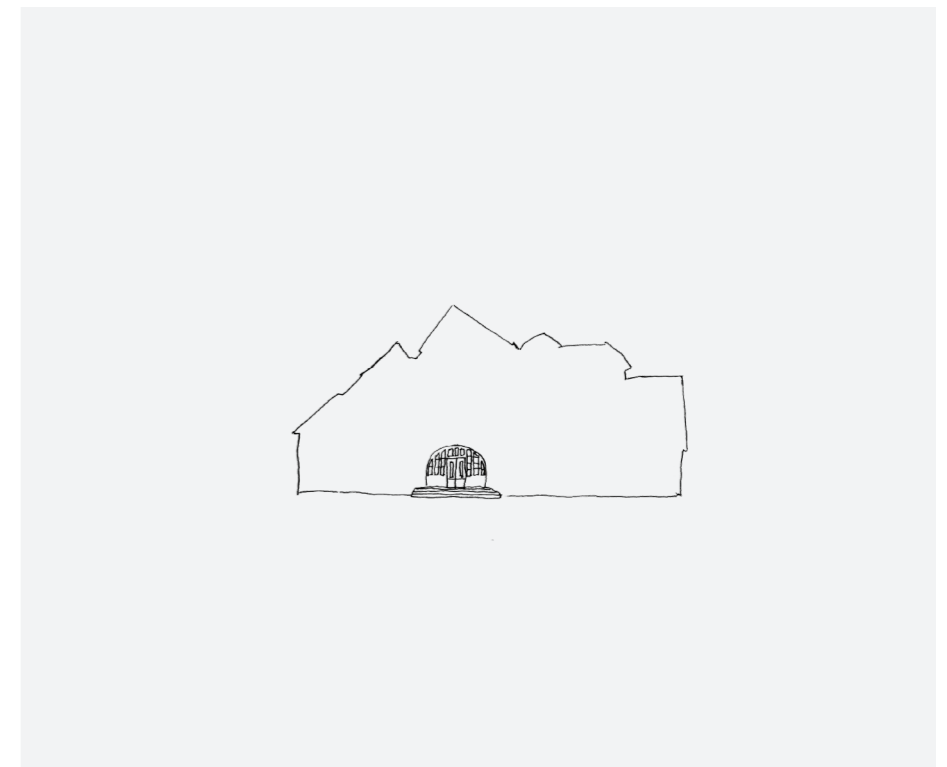
Asplund connects the Lister county courthouse with the local train station of Sölvesborg, by placing the building on the opposite side of a tree lined lane. This strong axis line also results in the very symmetrical facade design and suggests pushing the cylindrical courtroom to burst out at the back facade.



(Right) Fig. 17. Site location plan in relation to Sölvesborg Train Station with original tree lined axial road, 1:5000.



Furthermore Asplund refers to the train station on the other end of the lane by mirroring the vaulted entrance. A method to unify the landscape (Figs. 18-19).



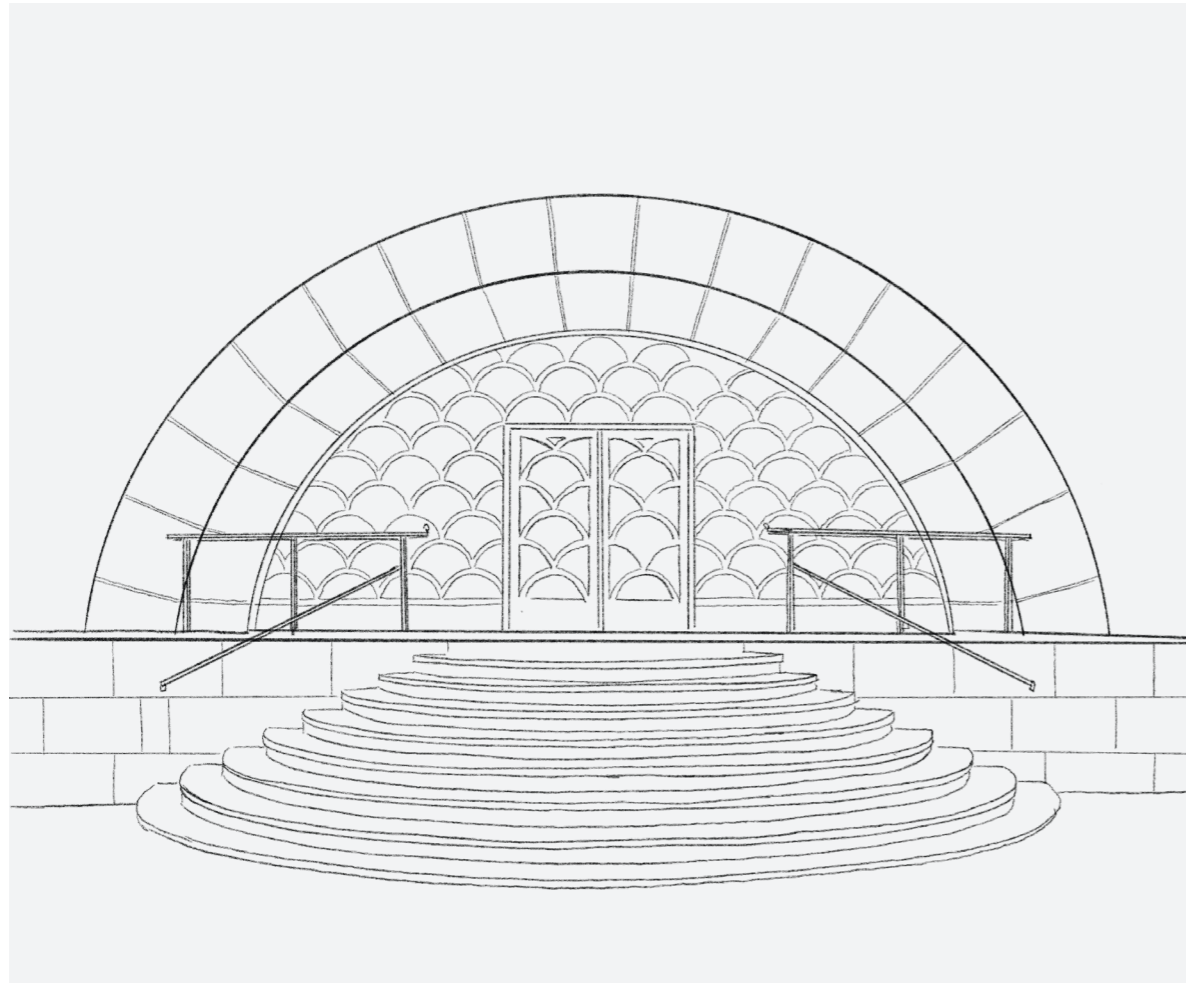
(Above, clockwise): Fig. 18. Sölvesborg Train Station facade analysis, Sketch, NTS; Fig. 19. Lister County Courthouse facade analysis, Sketch, NTS; Fig. 20. Axial road, photograph, Lasse Olsson; Fig. 21. Axial road with view of Sölvesborg Train Station, photograph, Anna Ingesdotter.

Foreshadowing

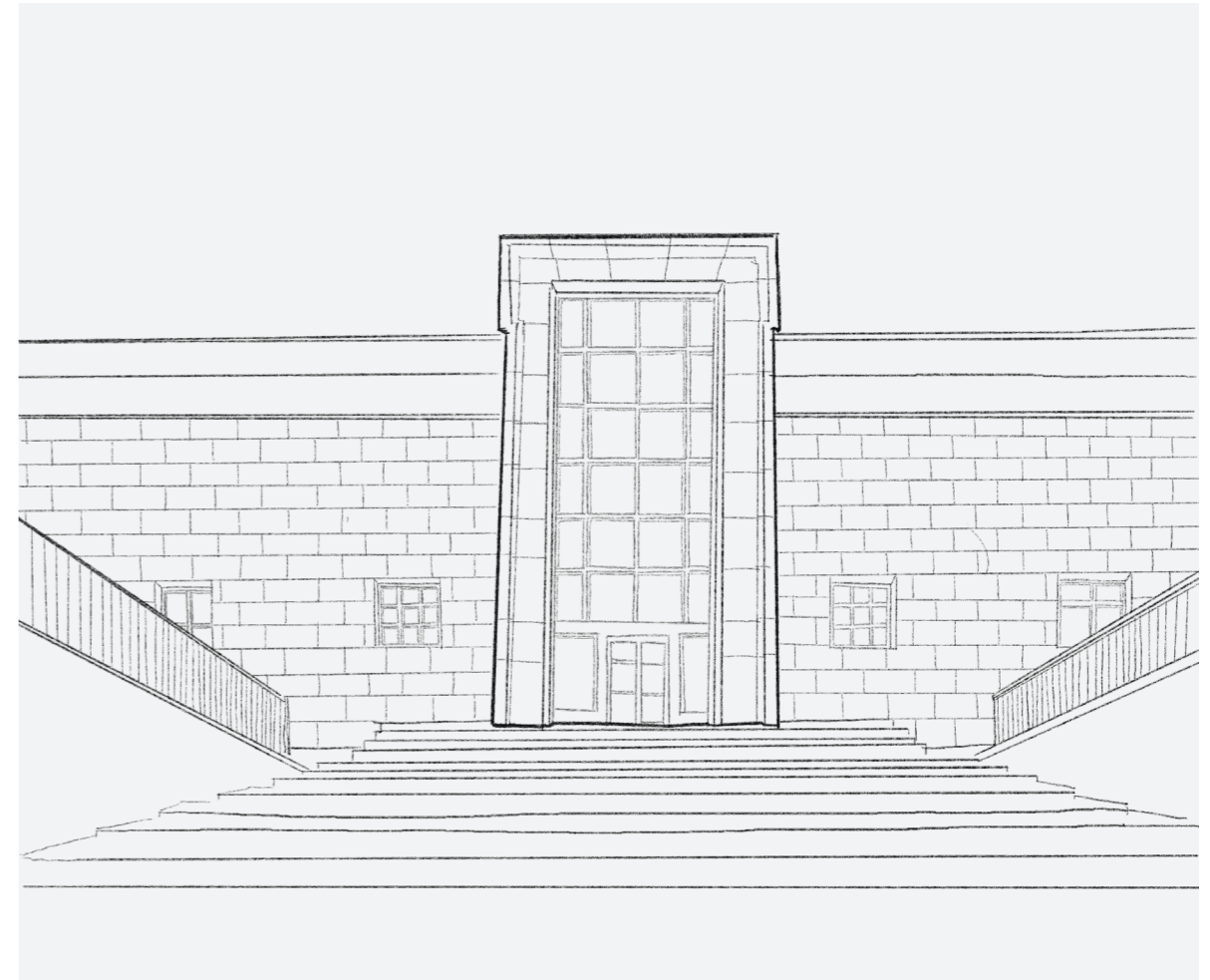
Many solutions used by Asplund in the Country Courthouse were then developed and applied in the building of the Public Library of Stockholm.

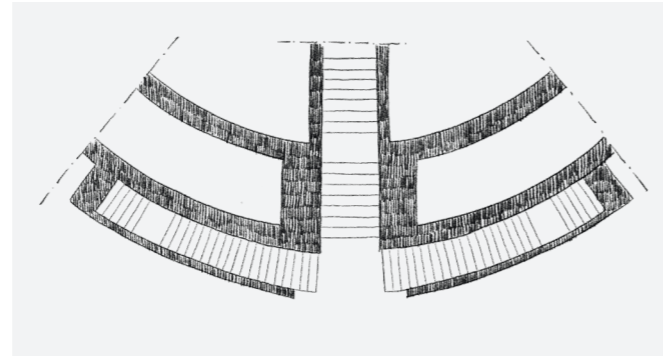
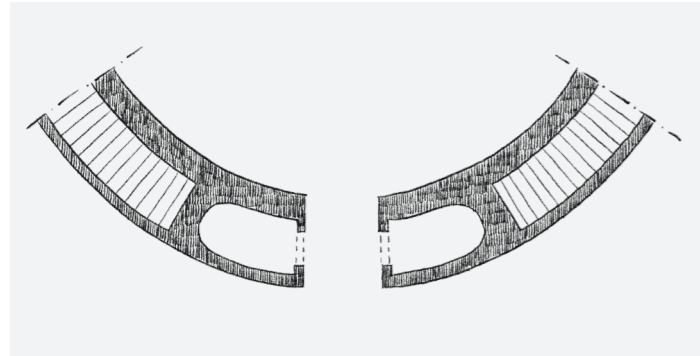
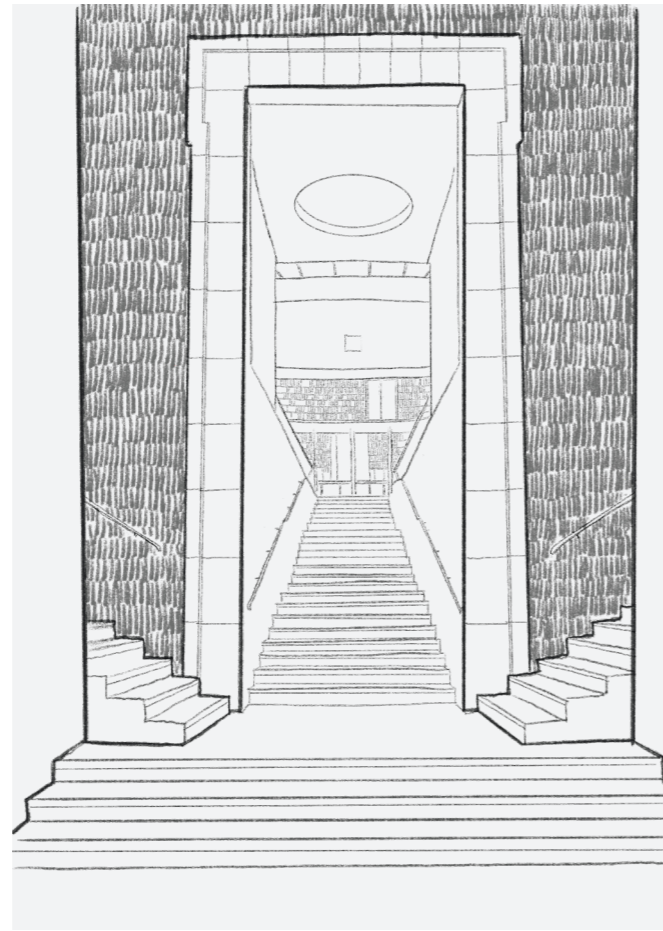
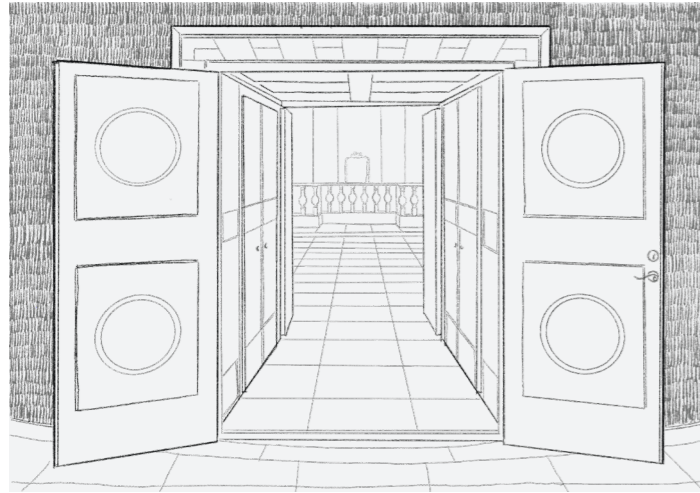
One of them is the entrance to the building placed on the pedestal and emphasised by the stone frame around the doors. The same solution can be noticed in the building in Stockholm. It's another reference to the classical architecture used by Asplund in his building. However, the monumentality of this gesture is consciously broken by the detailing inside the frame.

(Descending): Fig. 22. Lister County Courthouse entrance portal, Archival Photograph; Fig. 23. Lister County Courthouse entrance portal analysis, Sketch, NTS.



(Descending): Fig. 24. Stockholm City Library entrance portal, RIBA archival photograph (1987), Chris Martin; Fig. 25. Stockholm City Library entrance portal analysis, Sketch, NTS.





Poché

In the Lister County Courthouse, Asplund uses the space between the walls of rotunda to fit staircases and other facility rooms. The same idea was then developed and used in the Public Library of Stockholm where between layers of walls of rotunda architect placed vertical circulation and storages.

The entrance to the central spaces in both buildings is placed on the axis directly from the main entrance. This also can be considered as a reference to Palladian floor plans.

(Left, descending) Fig. 26. Lister County Courthouse portal analysis, Sketch; Fig. 27. Lister County Courthouse poché and circulation analysis, Sketch, NTS.

(Right, descending) Fig. 28. Stockholm City Library portal analysis, Sketch; Fig. 29. Stockholm City Library poché and circulation analysis, Sketch, NTS.

Lighting Hierarchy

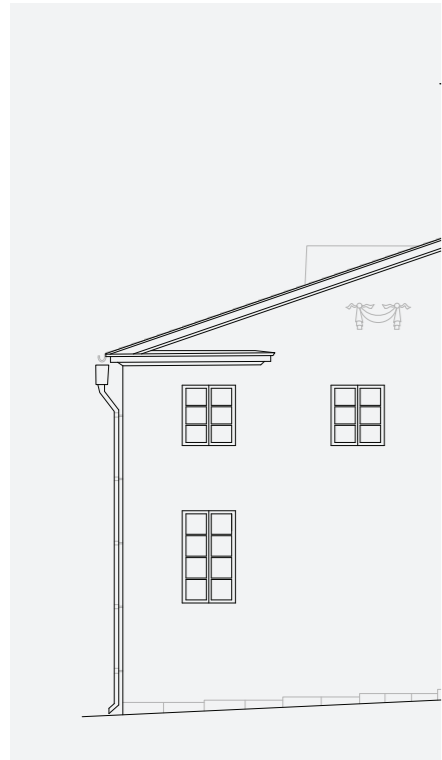
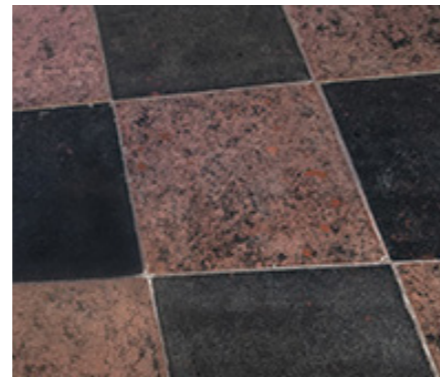
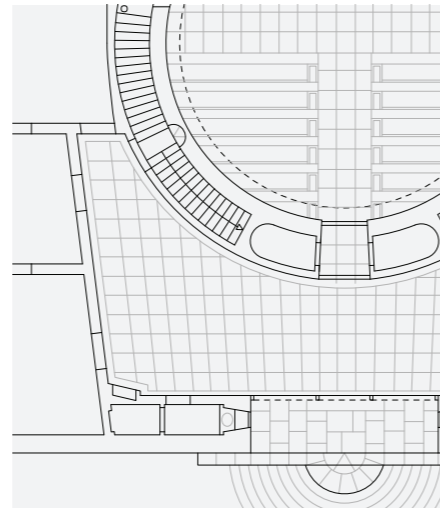
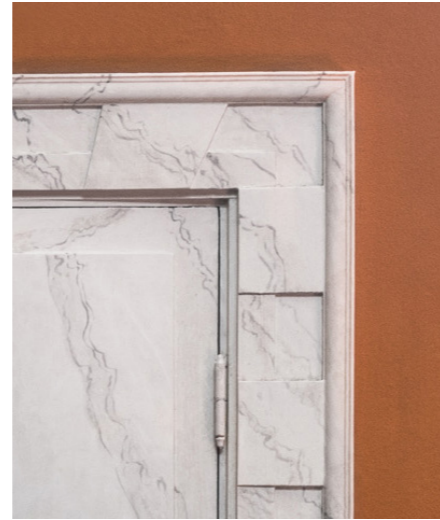
Asplund tailored various types of lighting to suit the specific level and function of each space. Overall, the formal language of his lighting designs is centered around the circle. In transitional spaces like corridors, he opts for a more modern style of ceiling lighting, exemplified by his iconic Asplund pendel (image 2), which boasts a simpler form. In interior spaces such as courtrooms and meeting rooms, he employs a more classical and ornate design for the primary fixture, complemented by a more minimalist approach to wall lamps.

(Left, descending) Fig. 30. Lister County Courthouse portal analysis, Sketch; Fig. 31. Lister County Courthouse poché and circulation analysis, Sketch, NTS.

(Right, descending) Fig. 32. Stockholm City Library portal analysis, Sketch; Fig. 33. Stockholm City Library poché and circulation analysis, Sketch, NTS.

Material Palette

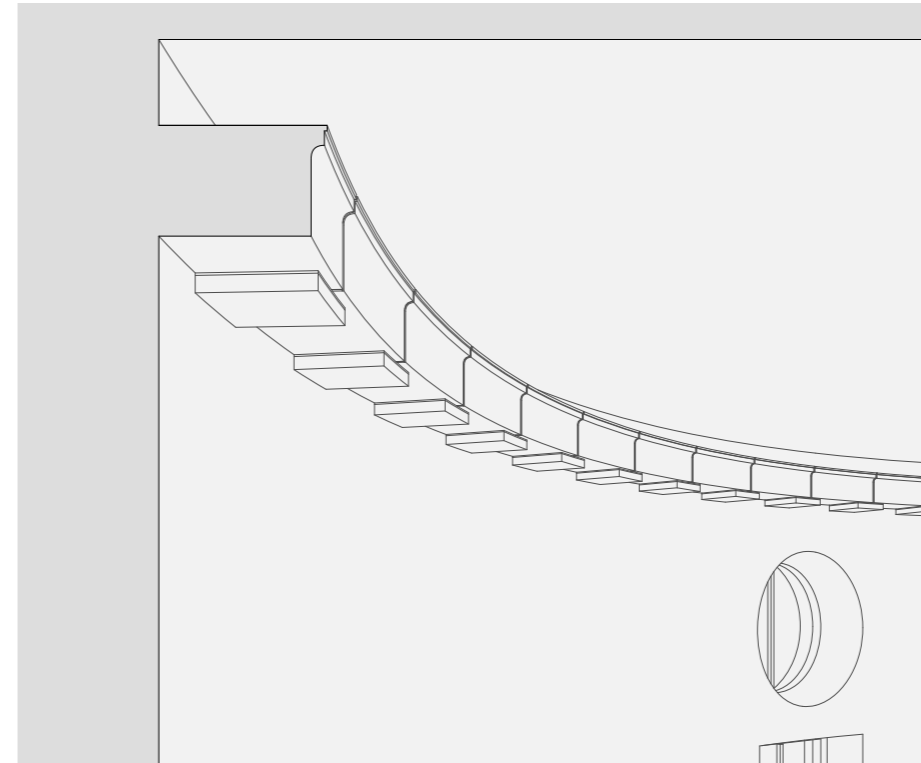
The materiality of the Lister County Courthouse partakes in both authenticity and imitation.



(Clockwise): Fig. 34. Dropped cornice, photograph, Lasse Olsson; Fig. 35. Imitation marble door surround, photograph, Lasse Olsson; Fig. 36. Ground floor plan, NTS; Fig. 37. Flagstone floor detail, photograph, Lasse Olsson; Fig. 38. Back (West) elevation, photograph, Lasse Olsson; Fig. 39. Front (East) elevation, hard line drawing, NTS; Fig. 40. Entrance portal plaster detail, photograph, Lasse Olsson.

Mannerist Humour

Asplund's sense of humour is evident throughout the detailing and ornamentation of the Lister Courthouse. From comedic plaster reliefs to bloated balustrades, Asplund evokes the same playful articulation of elements as can be found in Mannerist architecture. Just as Giulio Romano drops the triglyphs at the Palazzo del Te (below), Asplund suspends the dentil cornice in the courtroom and vestibule spaces.



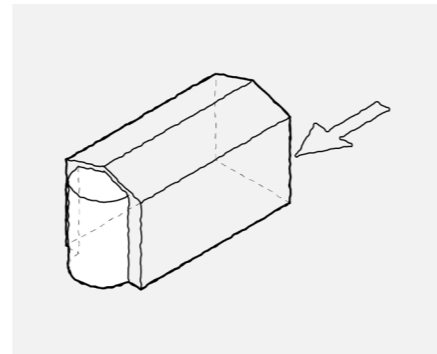
(Above, left to right): Fig. 41. Dropped cornice detail, hard line drawing, NTS; Fig. 42. Dropped triglyphs, photograph of Palazzo del Te (1524-34) courtyard, Mantua, Giulio Romano.

Volumes of Judicial Authority

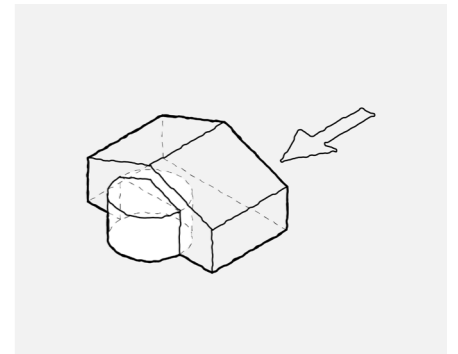
The court room cylinder is not fully expressed on the exterior. As such it resembles the apse of a church or basilica. Given the secular nature of the Lister Courthouse its volumetric composition employs the same judicial authority as the Roman basilica.



(Descending): Fig. 43. View of apse, photograph, Aula Palatina (Basilica of Constantine) (c.300-10), Trier; Fig. 44. View of interior facing apse, photograph, Aula Palatina, Trier; Fig. 45. Judicial apse concept diagram Aula Palatina (Basilica of Constantine), sketch.



(Descending): Fig. 46. Exterior view of apse, Lister County Courthouse, photograph, Lasse Olsson; Fig. 47. View of interior facing apse, Lister County Courthouse, photograph, Lasse Olsson; Fig. 48. Judicial apse concept diagram Lister County Courthouse, sketch.



Societal Context and Ornamentation

During the 19th century, Sweden was on a mission to improve building in the countryside, as Sweden was predominantly a rural society.

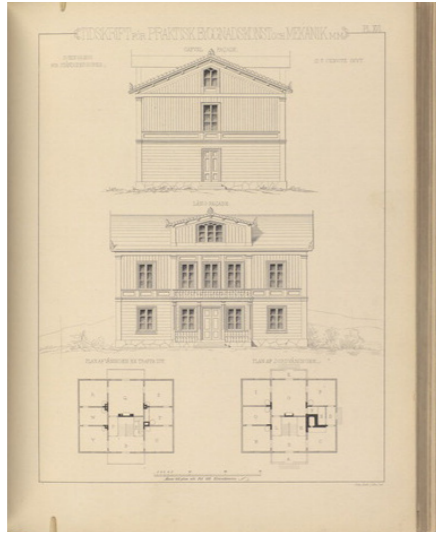
In line with this, Charles Emil Löfvenskiöld published the book *Landtmanna-byggnader*, this was an elaboration on plans for a new series of farm buildings.³

Asplund referenced this rural building style in multiple ways. We can only assume this is his method of juxtaposing this grand gesture of a monumental courthouse with the small town nature of Sölvesborg.

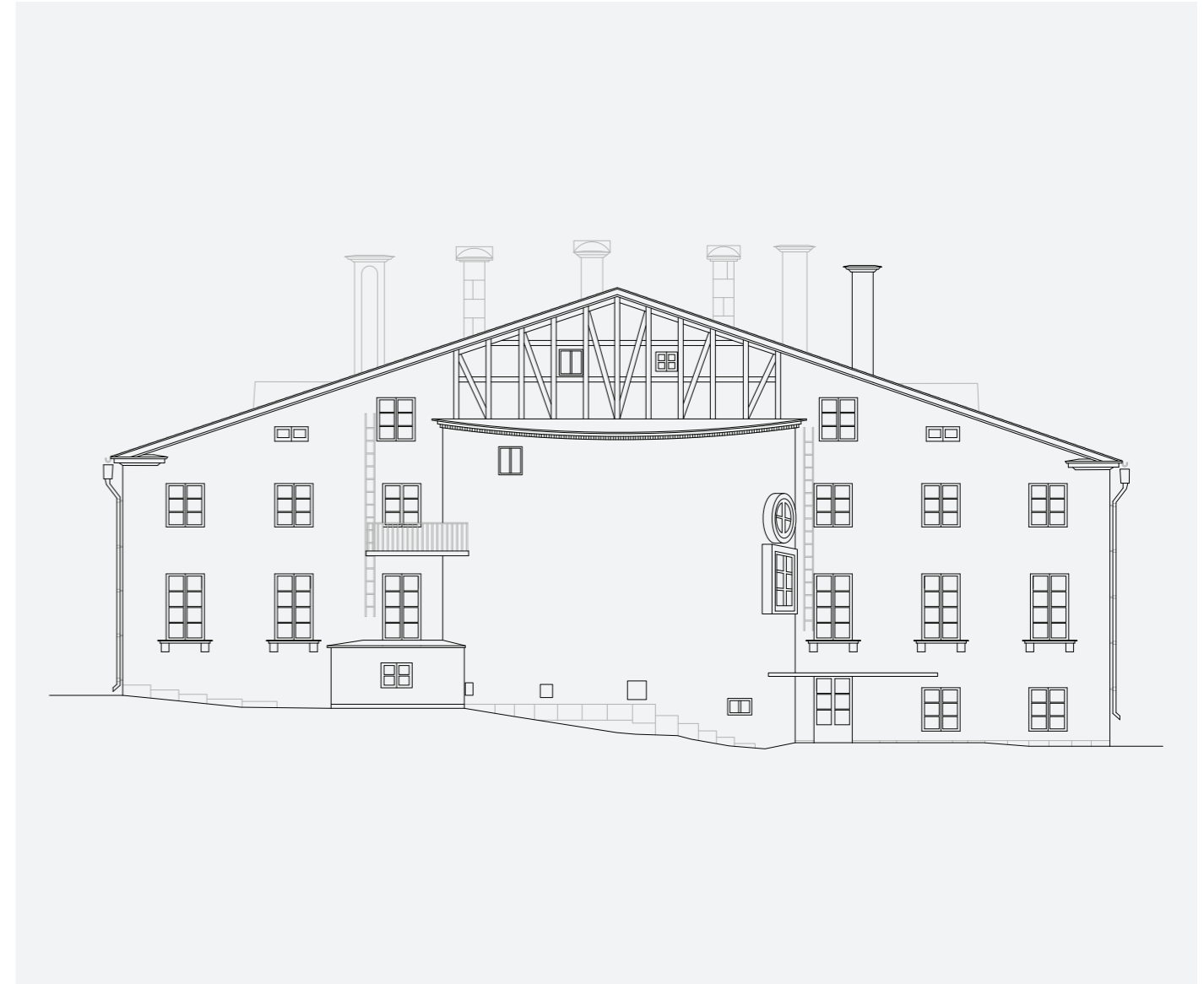
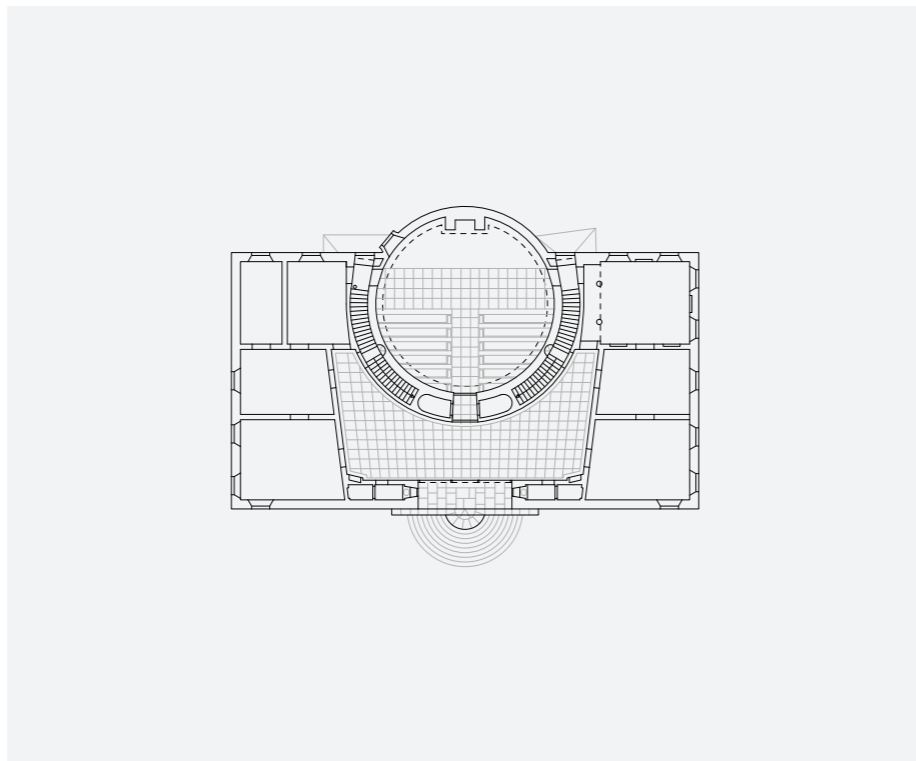
When looking at the facade we also see this commonality in the long stretched facade. Where you enter the building in the middle stairs leading to the door.

Dentils are used as ornamentation in farmers houses. For the farmers houses they are mainly used in the exteriors, while Asplund applies it in the interior detailing. This is another example of Asplund's sense of playfulness within a relatively serious building.

Regarding the floor plans (Figs. 3-4), one can see some resemblance with the plan of a farm house. A central entrance, with the main room behind this and some secondary rooms embracing the main room.



(Descending, left to right): Fig. 49. Theodor Chiewitz, G. (1850) House for a gentry or clergy family; Fig. 50. Löfvenskiöld, C.E. (1868) Landtmanna-byggnader. P.A. Norstedt & Söner. Stockholm, Frontispiece; Fig. 51. Lister County Courthouse ground floor plan, 1:500.

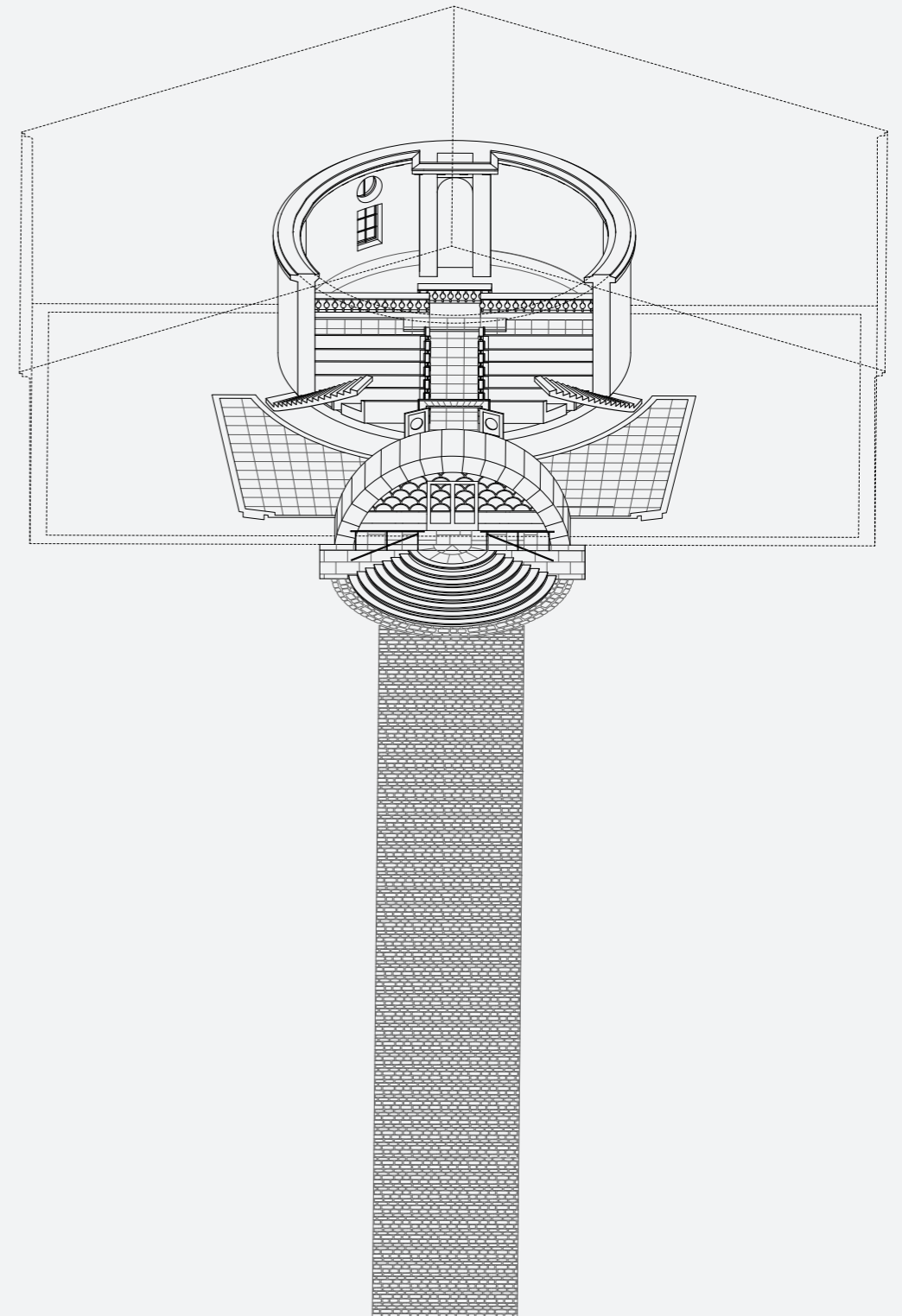


(Above): Fig. 52. Back (West) elevation, 1:200

The way Asplund decides to end the building is quite particular. At the back facade at the top floor, he suddenly introduces this half-timbered structure, which is not used in any other part of the building. It is an attempt to show some vernacular flavour as there were a lot of half-timbered houses in this neighbourhood, which were influenced by the proximity of Danish culture.

Parti

The final illustration of the Lister County Courthouse highlights the intriguing contrast of a monumental structure in a small, rural town. The courthouse rises prominently on its central axis, as if placed on a pedestal, and features a grand entrance that underscores this striking dichotomy. However, this effect is somewhat mitigated by including the half-timbered structure at the rear facade. Moreover, the drawing also reflects Asplund's playful design sensibilities. While much of the building adheres to symmetry, the squared and rounded windows on the left side of the courtroom playfully disrupt the overall harmony.



(Facing Page): Fig. 53. Lister County Courthouse parti diagram.

La Salle Labrouste, Bibliothèque Nationale de France Richelieu

Henri Labrouste

Introduction

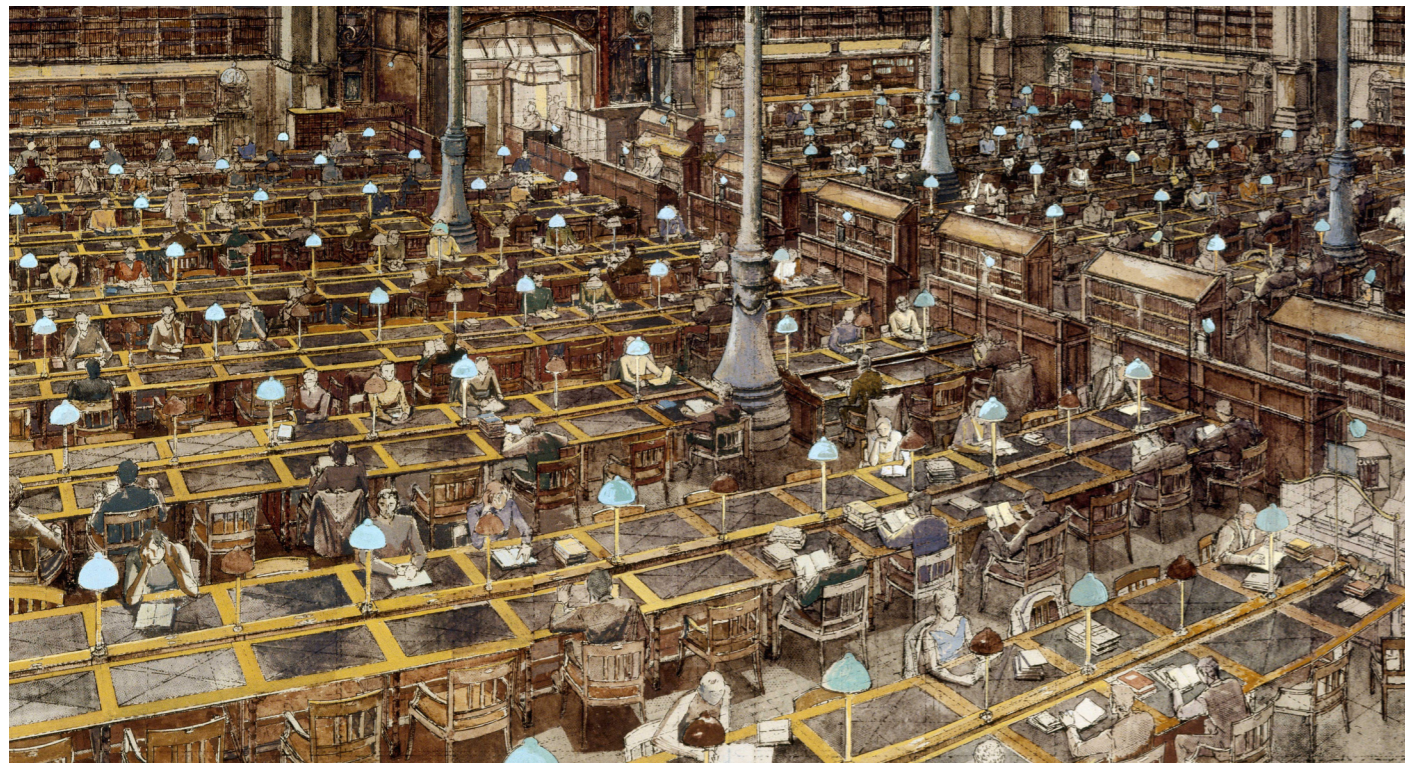
The Labrouste Reading Room at the National Library of France Richelieu (La Salle Labrouste, Bibliothèque Nationale de France) (1854-75) is a landmark in architectural technology and library design. The innovative use of iron as a structural and ornamental material within the Labrouste Reading Room is best expressed simultaneously in plan and section. The Labrouste Room utilises an array of sixteen cast-iron columns to span a width and breadth of thirty-four metres. The cast-iron columns support nine domes with oculi that allows for the nearly uninterrupted flooding of natural light into the reading room. Despite the liberating nature of the structural system, Labrouste orientates the room to complete a sequencing of spaces that runs north to south; courtyard to Labrouste Reading Room and reading room to book storage. This procession of spaces is reminiscent of temple architecture; pronaos to cella and cella to adyton.⁴ With such a comparison we might deduce the significance of the book as cult object in an increasingly secular French Republic.

Reflection

The idea of the book as a revered object, was already initiated in the brief that Labrouste received from the committee. He was asked to build a 'house for the books'.⁵ This concept emphasizes the central role of books and the primary purpose of reading for gaining knowledge. In the design, Labrouste separated the book storage from the reading room, giving librarians the task of retrieving requested books. The significance of 'reading a book' is underscored in the furnishing of the reading room. The reading room is stocked with uniform tables and identical lamps, creating individual reading spaces. This setting is not inviting any discussions or collaborations of any other sort (Fig. 55.) Asplund's original design for the Stockholm Public Library shared a similar distance between the visitors and the books. The stories housing the books in the rotunda were initially only accessible for the librarian. Later, additional stairs were added so that the individual could find a book for themselves. This is more conforming to the contemporary character of libraries, where everyone is free to explore their preferences.



(Descending): Fig. 54. Inaugural engraving (1869), Collection BnF, département Estampes et Photographie. VA-237 (4)-FOL; Fig. 55. La salle Labrouste de la Bibliothèque nationale, 1860-1866 (2002), Érik Desmazières, Watercolour on paper.



Societal and Situational Context

The programme of Labrouste's library reflected the changing society at that time. After the French Revolution cultural institutions started opening to the public. That influenced also the institution of Public Libraries which could not be any more just a sacred space for privileged people but should be open and accessible to the public. As a consequence of that, we can consider the presence and importance of a great main reading room which can fit hundreds of people. Nevertheless, books were still separated from the visitors and kept in another storage space which can be entered only by qualified workers of a library.

Labrouste's library is located in the centre of Paris 900m to the north of the Louvre Museum in the place of a former Imperial Library. Restoration took place between 1854 and 1875 and started from the south. He didn't simply restore or redesign an old building but sometimes he also revealed some façades of the courtyards of the palace to the public which were not visible before.

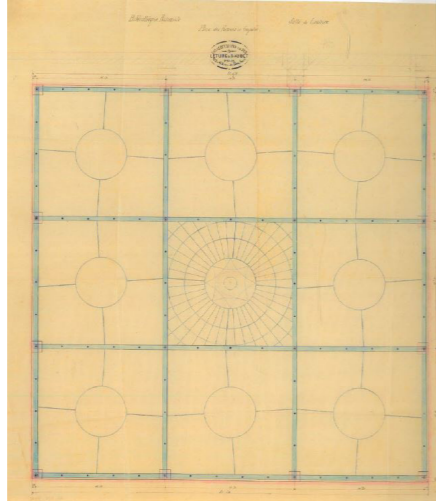


Fig. 56. Site location plan, 1:5000.

Composition of Space and Light

The spatial qualities of the library are dictated by the two structural independent systems. The first one is a solid build-up of the walls of the building creating a solid contrasting frame for the second one entirely autonomous light iron structure of the domes of the main reading room. Specific light conditions in Labrouste's library were possible to achieve thanks to the unique solution of locating nine oculi in each dome. That makes circles of light overlap and produce diffusive even lighting. Moreover, domes are finished with bright ceramic tiles which reflectively dissolve the source of light. That solution creates a unique ideal for reading shadowless light.

Specific light conditions in Labrouste's library were possible to achieve thanks to the unique solution of locating nine oculi in each dome. That makes circles of light overlap and produce diffusive even lighting. Moreover, domes are finished with bright ceramic tiles which reflectively dissolve the source of light. That creates an ideal for reading shadowless light.



(Descending) Fig. 57. Plans of La Salle Labrouste domes (undated), Leturc and Baudet (contractors), 85.5 x 74.8 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Fig. 58. La Salle Labrouste (2002), Bogdan Konopka (1953-2019), photograph.



Ornamentation

Fascination with new technology and materials available after the Industrial Revolution is visible in a desire to highlight structural elements and use them as ornamentation for the interior. The entire composition is supplemented with paintings of natural landscapes like trees, bushes or birds. That together with a very thin and light structure and defused light from above creates an atmosphere of being in the garden which breaks the rigid and official imagination of a library like it used to be before.



Library Now

Bibliothèque Nationale de France would be refurbished every 30-50 years. Through the comparison of the photos spanning more than a century, most of the existence was very well preserved in Labrouste's room, which implies the original design's long life. Jean François Lagneau is the architect in charge of the latest renovation of Labrouste's room. "We have managed to achieve this goal and the very slight visible transformations in the reading room made it possible to restore the colours to the original vibrancy Labrouste intended, while enabling this room to continue to play, under the conditions of our times, the role for which it was designed" he stated like this.



(Descending): Fig. 59. Salle de lecture de la Bibliothèque impériale, Paris II^e (1870), Louis-Émile Durandelle (1839-1917), albumen print, 42.9 x 34.5 cm; Fig. 60. La Salle Labrouste interior, Yohan Zerdoun, photograph.

Fig. 61. Bibliothèque Nationale de France Richelieu ground floor plan, 1:500.

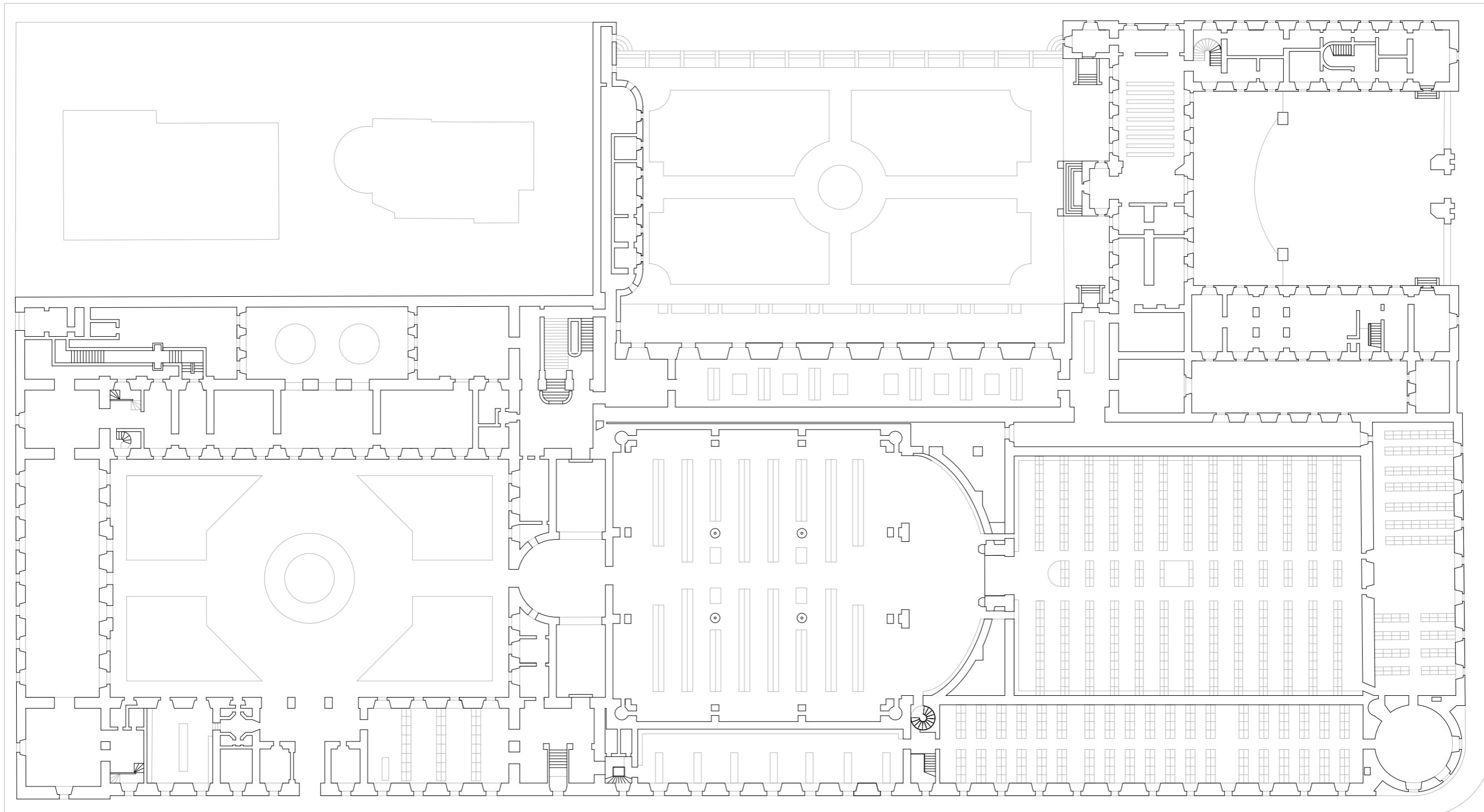


Fig. 62. Bibliothèque Nationale de France Richelieu first floor plan, 1:500.

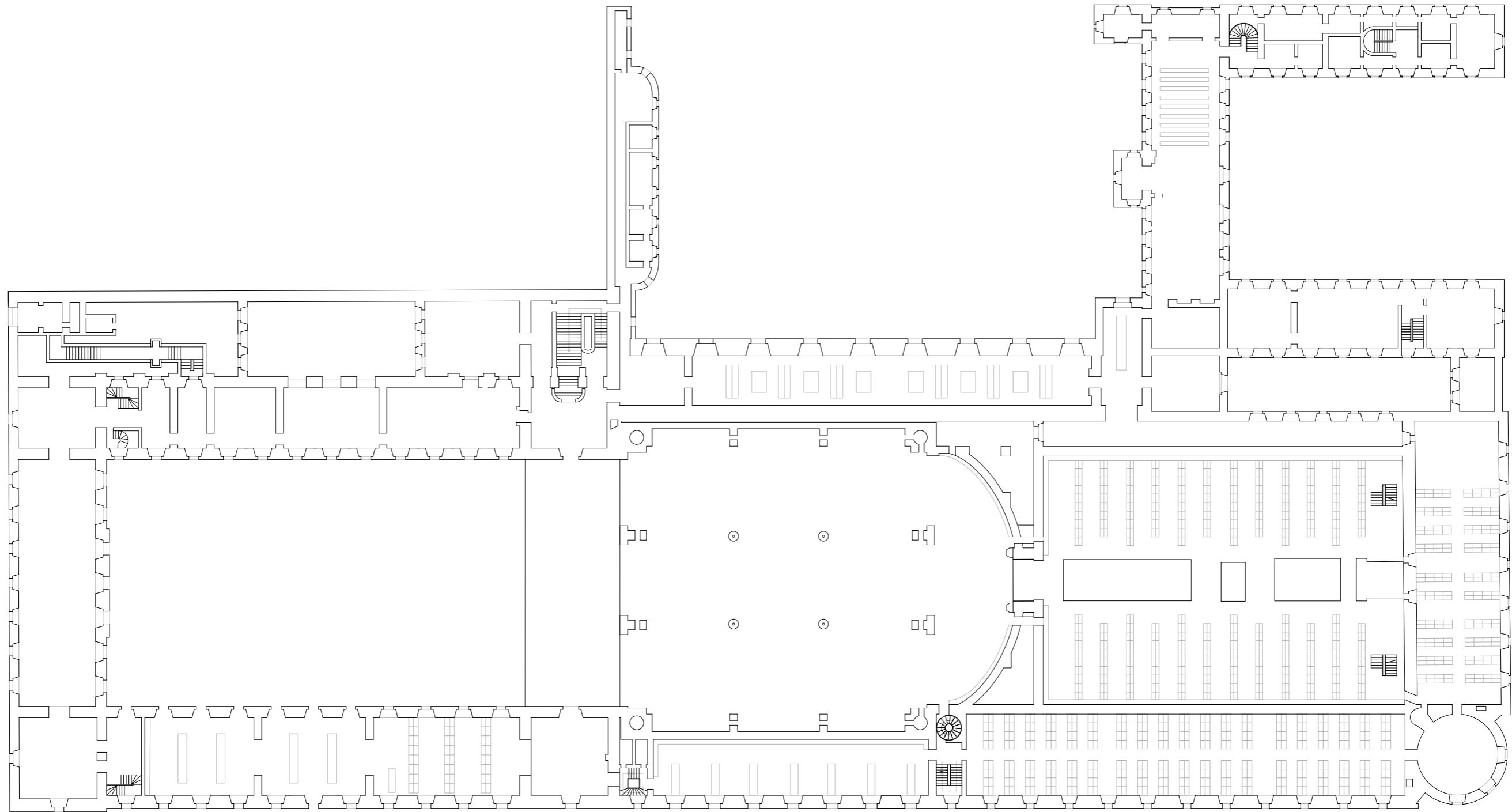


Fig. 63. La Salle Labrouste, Bibliothèque Nationale de France
Richelieu ground floor plan, 1:250.

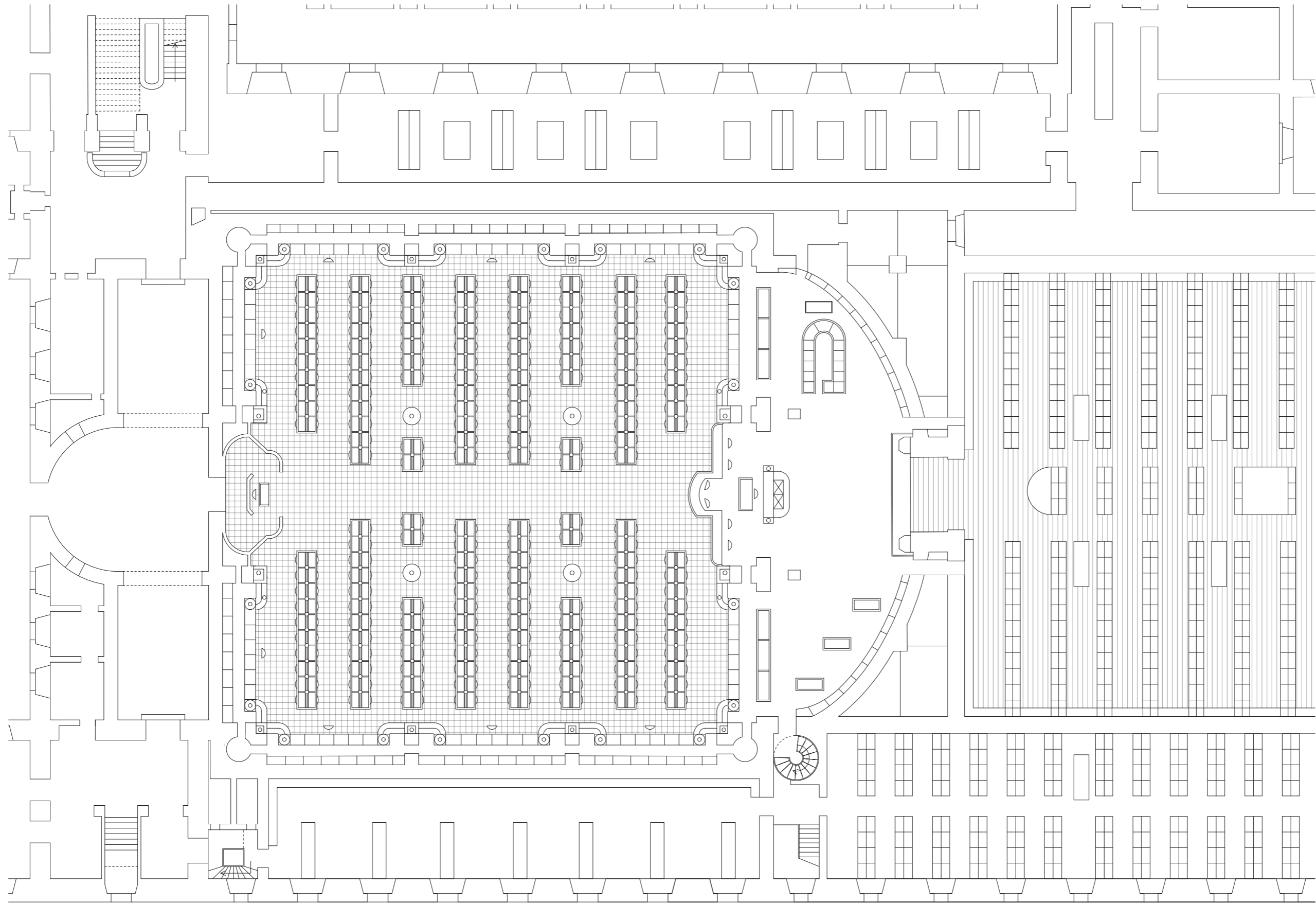


Fig. 64. Bibliothèque Nationale de France Richelieu North-west facade, 1:500.

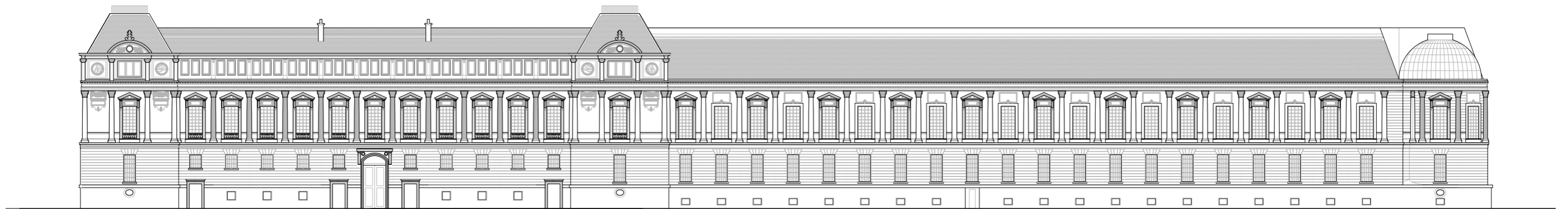


Fig. 65. Bibliothèque Nationale de France Richelieu courtyard facade, 1:200.

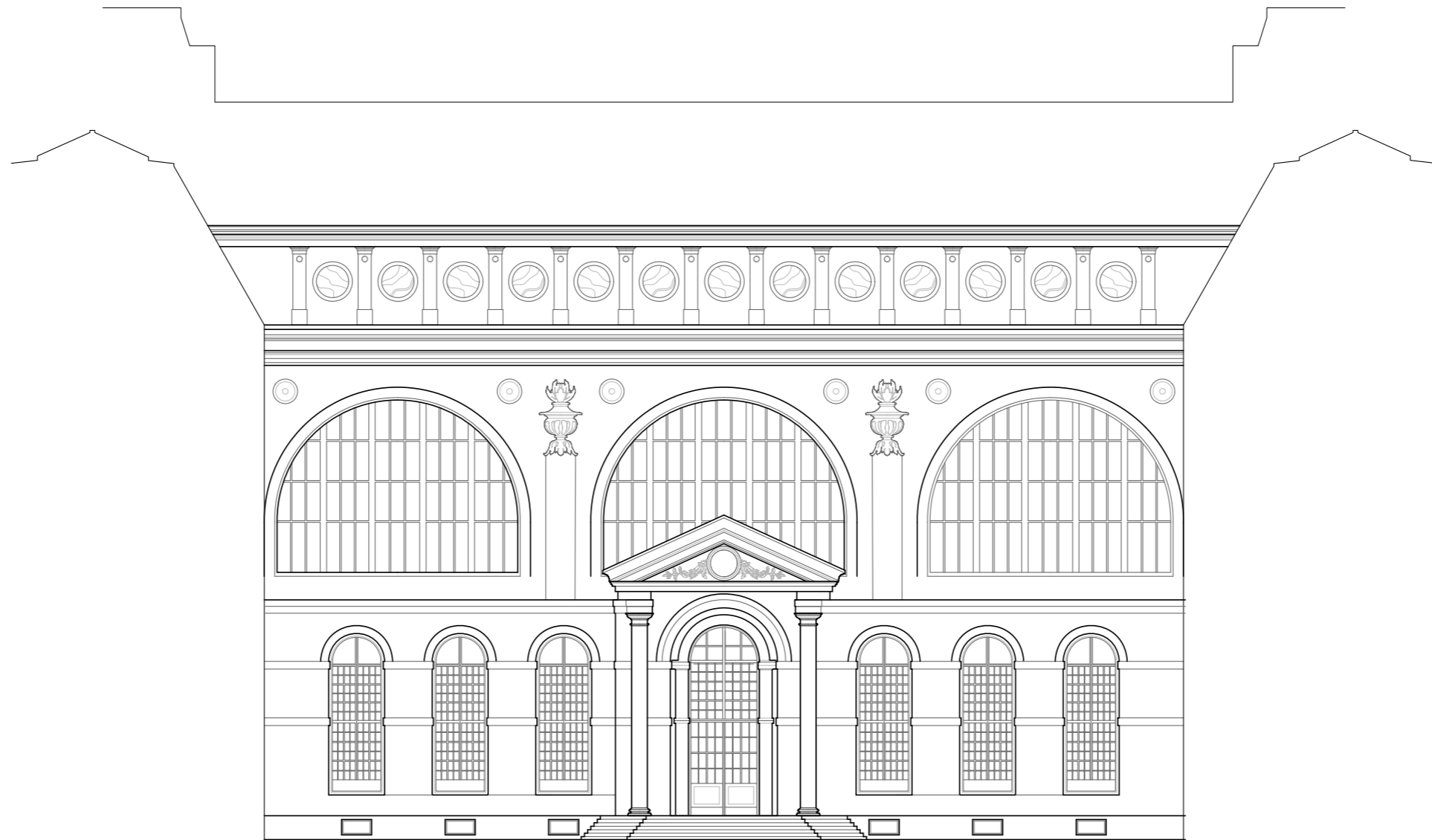


Fig. 66. La Salle Labrouste Bibliothèque Nationale de France
Richelieu section, 1:200.

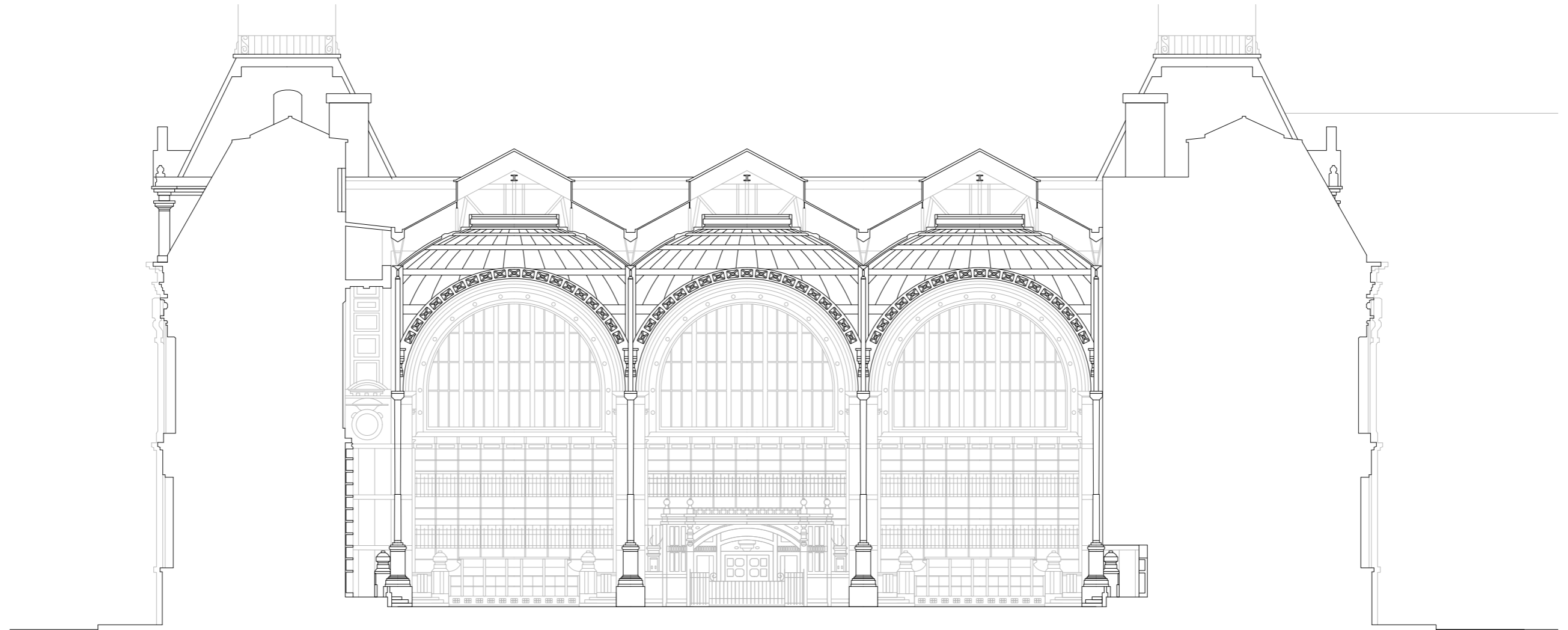


Fig. 67. La Salle Labrouste Bibliothèque Nationale de France
Richelieu section, 1:500.

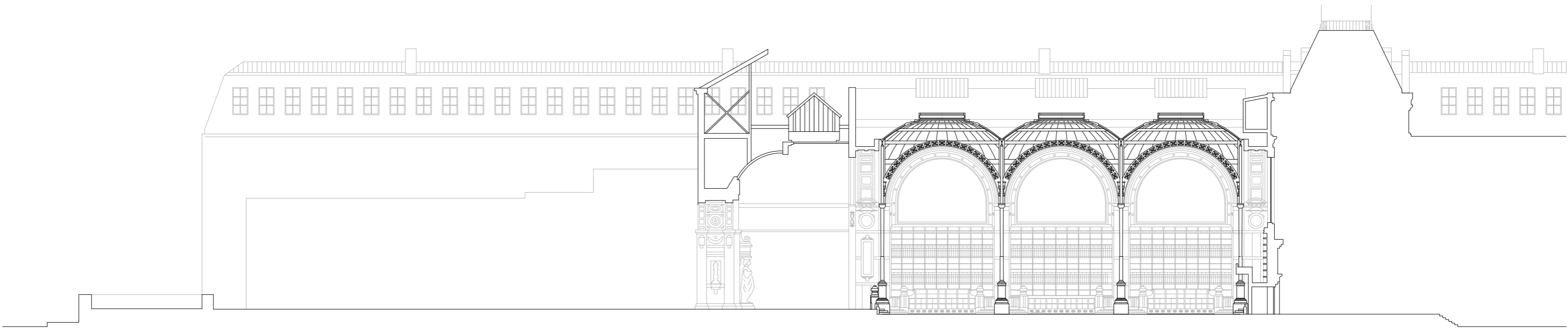


Image Citation

Fig. 1. Olsson, L. (n.d.). Lister County Courthouse window detail. [Photograph]. Lasse Olsson Photo. <https://app2.editnews.com/page/read.ashx?issueid=428720>

Fig. 2. Olsson, L. (n.d.). West (back) elevation. [Photograph]. Lasse Olsson Photo. <https://app2.editnews.com/page/read.ashx?issueid=428720>

Fig. 3. Made by authors. (2023). First floor plan, 1:250. [Digital drawing].

Fig. 4. Made by authors. (2023). Ground floor plan, 1:250. [Digital drawing].

Fig. 5. Made by authors. (2023). Front (East) elevation, 1:250. [Digital drawing].

Fig. 6. Made by authors. (2023). Back (West) elevation, 1:250. [Digital drawing].

Fig. 7. Made by authors. (2023). Section, 1:250. [Digital drawing].

Fig. 8. Made by authors. (2023). Side (North) elevation, 1:250. [Digital drawing].

Fig. 9. Karlskrona Rådhus. [Photograph]. (1912). Digitalt Museum. <https://digitaltmuseum.se/021015562625/karlskrona-radhuset-1912>

Fig. 10. Boras Rådhus. [Photograph]. (1910) Blogg Gamla Boras. <https://gamlaboras.blogg.bt.se/blogg/radhuset/>

Fig. 11. Carlborn, A. (n.d.). Tingshuset på hörnet Tingsgatan-Österleden. [Photograph]. Ystads Kommun. <https://yb.kulturhotell.se/items/show/17601>

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Fig. 18. Made by authors. (2023). Sölvesborg Train Station façade analysis. [Sketch].

Fig. 19. Made by authors. (2023). Lister County Courthouse façade analysis. [Sketch].

Fig. 20. Olsson, L. (n.d.). Axial road. [Photograph]. Lasse Olsson Photo. <https://app2.editnews.com/page/read.ashx?issueid=428720>

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(Descending left to right) Fig. 30. Ornament lighting vestibule, Sketch, NTS; Fig. 31. Ornament lighting gallery, Sketch, NTS; Fig. 32. Ornament lighting Court room, Sketch, NTS; Fig. 33. Ornament lighting Meeting room, Sketch, NTS.

Fig. 30. Made by authors. (2023). Ornament lighting vestibule. [Sketch].

Fig. 31. Made by authors. (2023). Ornament lighting gallery. [Sketch].

Fig. 32. Made by authors. (2023). Ornament lighting court room. [Sketch].

Fig. 33. Made by authors. (2023). Ornament lighting meeting room. [Sketch].

Fig. 34. Olsson, L. (n.d.). Dropped cornice. [Photograph]. Lasse Olsson Photo. <https://app2.editnews.com/page/read.ashx?issueid=428720>

Fig. 35. Olsson, L. (n.d.). Imitation marble door surround. [Photograph]. Lasse Olsson Photo. <https://app2.editnews.com/page/read.ashx?issueid=428720>

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Fig. 37. Olsson, L. (n.d.). Flagstone floor detail. [Photograph]. Lasse Olsson Photo. <https://app2.editnews.com/page/read.ashx?issueid=428720>

Fig. 38. Olsson, L. (n.d.). Back (West) elevation. [Photograph]. Lasse Olsson Photo. <https://app2.editnews.com/page/read.ashx?issueid=428720>

Fig. 39. Made by authors. (2023). Front (East) elevation. [Digital drawing].

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Fig. 47. Olsson, L. (n.d.). View of interior facing apse, Lister County Courthouse. [Photograph]. Lasse Olsson Photo. <https://app2.editnews.com/page/read.ashx?issueid=428720>

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Fig. 64. Made by authors. (2023). Bibliothèque Nationale de France Richelieu North-west façade, 1:500. [Digital drawing].

Fig. 65. Made by authors. (2023). Bibliothèque Nationale de France Richelieu courtyard facade, 1:200. [Digital drawing].

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