

# REFLECTION.

JACK OLIVER PETCH  
interiors buildings cities

The project - 'Het Water Ensemble', situated in Zurenborg, Antwerp - addresses a set of specific issues in the context of the chair, the context of the city and the context of the interior.

As there was no given design brief, a significant part of the year was dedicated to formulating the design narrative, the built expression and the urban intervention in tandem with explorations of both the assignment - the public room - and year's theme - the intimate city. In this project, I was researching not only the context of the area of Zurenborg, a region built in the 19th century for the nobility to live, but also how to develop an intimate room for the city. Questions such as 'What is a public room?' developed over the course of the year into 'How can this calm typology manifest in the context of a bombastic surrounding?'

These research aspects should, ideally, be completed before the start of the architectural design stage in a linear manner that fits into the graduation timeline of the university. In reality, the process of the studio is much different. The narrative continues to develop throughout the semesters, with frequent re-evaluation of the research, the methods used and the answers developed to become more fine-tuned. The specificity of the project brief requires specific narratives to be developed in-tandem with outcomes of the design.

In addition, the typology of the programme, known as either 'the alchemical rehabilitation centre' or a 'water palace of perfect rooms' (depending what side of the record is on the turntable), has brought on a third research question onto the project. At every stage of the design I have been questioning how I can implement theory of alchemical transformation through elements - this manifesting as specific rooms, each with physical and tactile qualities. This specific insight was derived after looking into the local area, a corner of three elements with one missing revealed itself to be a microcosm of information - a secondary perfect corner of Zurenborg that was planned but never manifested.

At the urban scale, the project is a brick tower, shed, glasshouse and garden wall, with each element dealing with either the different conditions of the corner or the courtyard.



*Above: roof plan with surrounding context.*

## RESEARCH AND DESIGN:

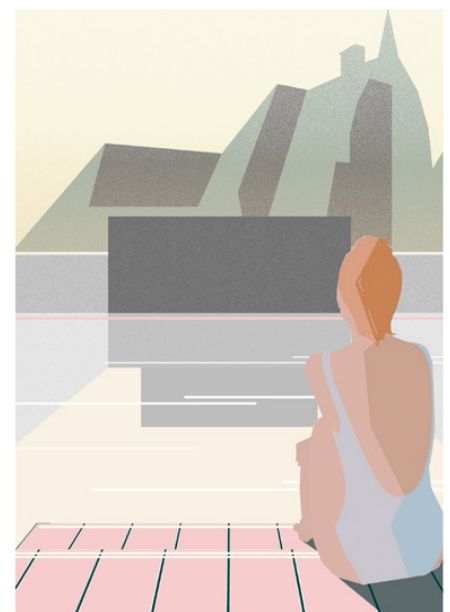
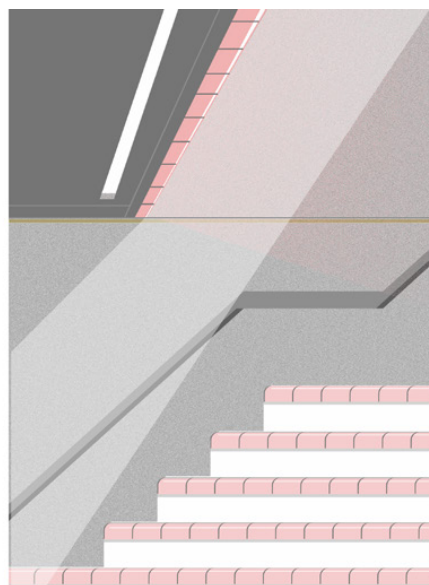
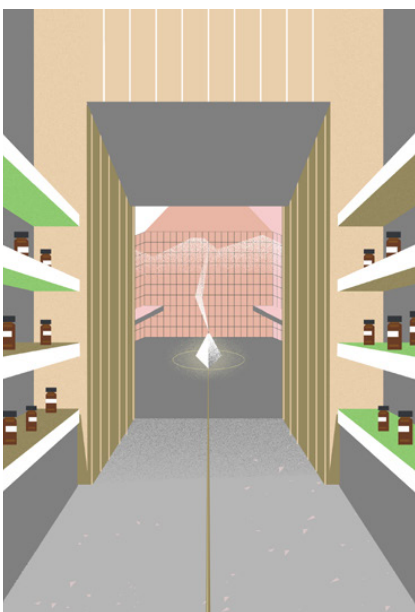
The research phase of the studio began with explorations of four European cities: Paris, Vienna, Milan and Naples. The goal, as explained to us, was that through the excursions, teamwork and products made there would be an understanding of the specificity of intimacy in these cities (Paris, Vienna) and then we would use these methods to a new context (Antwerp). Unfortunately, the handover moment between the research and design stages was not as smooth as intended, with ambitions of the tutors of both stages having a disconnect of the overall goals; assignments left in limbo, outcomes unclear and conclusions unresolved. Moving forward from this stage, the tasks shifted towards finding sites (again, this was left unclear if the goal was to find sites for the whole group to research further or to instead find potential sites for ourselves based on random selection.)

The conclusions of the research phase was the following understanding of intimacy: If 'the festive' can be summarised as succinctly as the ability to see and to be seen, perhaps 'the intimate' can be the choice to see and to choose when to be seen. After the encyclopaedia of Intimate connections in Vienna was compiled I derived the working definition of intimacy as being the connection between people's ideologies or experiences, plus the methods used - or,

architectural expression used to show these ideologies of experiences - as well as how you, individually respond to the information presented.

The definition is admittedly broad but covers with the last point that someone's experience of intimacy can easily be the complete opposite of someone else's response to the same amount of information. What affects one person could barely scratch the surface of another person or persons, and vice-versa. It is in this understanding of intimacy that it is possible to pull in factors of the research methodology assignment where I looked into auto-ethnography and self reflection.

After the design stage truly started, the focus towards conditions of the surroundings began, this was accelerated by the stage of the P2 where massing, programme and typology were expected to be fixed. Progressing from this stage I personally found difficult, with many drastic changes of scale; typology (Cathedral; Villa; Garden; Shed; etc.) with some weeks I resorted to explore the maximum expression of a single idea to then pull back from design-wise. For example, designing the site as a 'temple to water', with a gigantic atrium, altar and spire. It was only when I began to split the task of designing the centre as an 'apocraphy cabinet' of elements that I began to make products that could be transferable across design changes.



*Above: internal views of planned spaces*

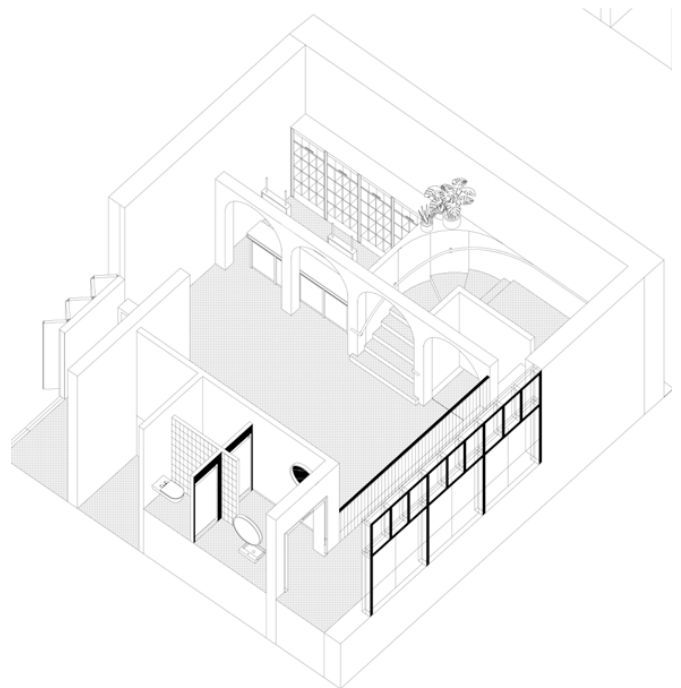
## ENGAGEMENT WITH THE YEAR THEME:

The project works closely with the year theme of the chair - the Intimate City. With the working definition derived from the P1 stage of intimacy, the project seeks to find a harmony between the ideology of the 19th century city planners (the elemental corner); use appropriate architecture expression to relate to the other three existing buildings and, lastly, manifest my own choices as a clear considered response. Questions such as 'how do people would use my building' and 'how do people feel in these spaces' were strongly debated. In addition, considerations were made in particular to motions of the privacy of guests, how much of the building in particular could be seen from the outside, where the users could mix and what should be kept separately.

## LOOKING AHEAD.

The final stage of the graduation process, after the no-go at the P4 stage will be to firmly integrate considerations of Building Technology into the design. Re-looking at how the project can work with sustainable and environmental considerations.

In regards to representation material, I would like to continue looking at the rooms in the spaces, with considerations being made to materiality and furnishings and how these can be fleshed out into liveable spaces that holistically benefit the users of the wellness centre.



*Above: preliminary design of welcome space.*