

# SHIFTING NARRATIVES

STRIPPING LAYERS OF TIME TO REVEAL HIDDEN MARITIME HERITAGE



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This thesis is dedicated to my father, who showed me what it means to be curious.  
Thank you for all the summers spent on the boat, and for all the rides on the bicycle.

I would also like to give special thanks to

Jonas - For keeping me grounded. I couldn't have done this without you.  
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## ABSTRACT

Transformation is inevitable. It happens spontaneously, as well as intentionally. This thesis deals with architectural and social values associated with the many renovations and alterations of Amerikaskjulet, an industrial building of Gothenburg. In its glory days the area was bustling with activity, as Amerikaskjulet not only was a warehouse of incoming goods but also a terminal for thousands of people travelling with, or just witnessing the greatness of, the America ships. Eventually, however, the departures ceased and in the 1980's the building was transformed into an office building.

This transformation, and renovations of Amerikaskjulet prior to that, have been brutal. The building is now altered into anonymity. The building has lost its prominent features and thereby its beauty. It is a collection of layers presenting an awkward pile of materials. On the facade, some details are still resembled but from the inside it looks like any other office building from the 1980's.

For this thesis, I am imagining Amerikaskjulet as layers of time, seeing the many interventions the building has had. This thesis is an investigation and application of a method. Through the method of stripping and slow dismantling of materials, the layers and what's beneath them is uncovered. I am illustrating Amerikaskjulet in the stripping phase

with collage techniques.

During the stripping, waste material from the dismantled objects has occurred, which is then integrated in the project. Thus, this thesis also suggests concepts of adaptive reuse of materials in Amerikaskjulet.

Although the adaptive reuse is the final act of the thesis, it doesn't stand alone as the thesis' result. The process of uncovering and stripping is the project's core and should also be read as the thesis' result.

By transforming old buildings in a slow way and at the same time retrospectively to find other values that are not evident at first glance, heritage can be maintained and revived.

*Keywords: transformation, heritage, narrative, collage, stripping*



*F1: Amerikaskjulet in the 1950's and M/S Kungsholm.*



*Amerikaskjulet in 2025.*



When I was a child I liked to ride my bicycle. My father and I took a route from the picturesque dwelling area down the slope in Krokängsparken and ended up in Eriksberg. In my memory, Eriksberg was always dusty and sunny. The space was all empty and I didn't understand why the big orange crane was there.

We rode our bikes down to the riverside. Down by the river, just by the old rail tracks, there was an opening in the ground. Climbing down, I found myself in a tunnel stretching into the bay. While running it, I felt like I was part of something big and important, like the ***world outside*** opened up and ***reached into me.***

## 01. INTRODUCTION



F2-3: Eriksberg in the 1990's.

Transformation is an honest and spontaneous effect of being part of this world. It inevitably just happens as an effect of natural decay and neglect. Transformation is also forced in different scales, such as in terms of usage adaptation or simply moving furniture around.

When we speak of transformation within the architecture field, this transformation is often an act of care. Meanwhile, transformation may also be careless and result in irreversible interventions.

## EXPLORATION

This fragment of my childhood took place in Eriksberg just before the riverside redevelopment in the late 1990's. I kept coming back every few weeks to see the transformation but eventually fences were put up and at times I wasn't able to reach the quay. A few years later, the area was unrecognized.

Eriksberg is an example of a part of Gothenburg that has previously been a harbour of an industrial area, and that is now transformed to fit a new normal in the city. The harbour of Gothenburg has developed from numerous small scale harbours in the city centre in the 1800's, with a shift in the 1970's to large scale container complexes in the periphery of the city, leaving waterfront areas of the inner city subjects of renovation into modern public areas and costly housing units since the 1980's.

Amerikaskjulet is this thesis' prospect and focal point. It is a building situated by Stigbergskajen, a quay by the river just behind Stigbergstorget and Sjöfartsmuseet. Built in 1910-1912 as a warehouse, it

has a strong core structure of reinforced concrete. In its glory days the area was bustling with activity, as Amerikaskjulet not only was a warehouse of incoming goods but also a terminal for thousands of people travelling with or just witnessing the greatness of the America ships. The building has undergone a few radical renovations and renewals. The first major transformation happened in 1959 with a complete conversion into a modernist building. The second renovation of importance took place in 1987 when the building was turned into an office building. This was due to decreased ship departures as an outcome of the economic recession in the 1970's.

Nowadays, it still houses only offices, but the harbour is still in use occasionally for cruise ships.

An old withered building holds much beauty. It's simple to envision a caring transformation to save it from any eventual traumatic experience of a final collapse.

Although in the case of Amerikaskjulet, the context has changed drastically over time, and the building body with it. While the intended use has changed, the transformation of Amerikaskjulet has been brutal. The building's strong characteristics such as towers and roll up doors, are demolished and replaced. Both the interior and exterior are layered with plaster, its strong core is somewhat hidden in between walls and the wooden window bars are replaced with thin plastic. Not unlike the Eriksberg area, the building is altered into anonymity. The building has lost its features and thereby its

beauty. It is not an old withered building but rather a collection of layers presenting an embarrassing pile of materials. On the facade, some details are still resembled but from the inside it looks like any other office building from the 1980's.

What happens when buildings are transformed into something we don't recognise, and they only live on in our collective consciousness? What happens when the maritime heritage ceases to be visible in our built heritage?

Is there a way to transform industrial buildings without the maritime heritage being lost, but rather, for it to be enhanced and preserved?

These issues are what this thesis deals with. It is an exploration in maritime traces in built heritage, as well as methods for building transformation.

## THESIS QUESTIONS

How can a severely modified historical building be transformed to better highlight its maritime heritage?

How can transformation of a building be performed as an act of care?



F4: Detail of goods nearby Amerikaskjulet, ca 1950.

## DELIMITATIONS

This master's thesis is about bringing light on and reviving architectural qualities and details in Amerikaskjulet which are connected to maritime industry in Gothenburg, but not limited to any specific period of time.

This thesis suggests concepts of adaptive reuse of material in Amerikaskjulet.

This master's thesis is not about transforming Amerikaskjulet in terms of program or usage, nor is it about building restoration or how to reuse material in the most energy- and cost effective way.



## 02. MARITIME INDUSTRY IN GOTHENBURG

Since its establishment in the 17th century, Gothenburg peaked as a trade city as early as in the 18th century, owing to its close relationship to the water and the seas.

The city of Gothenburg and specifically for this thesis, the site of Stigbergskajen, has a long history of shipbuilding and docking. Formerly called Gamla Varvet, the waterfront area just below Stigberget in Majorna has played a vital part in the maritime industry of Gothenburg since its cradle. After serving as a shipbuilding yard, Stigbergskajen was built to enable bigger ships to anchor right by the quayside (Hilmeresson, 2015). Along Stigbergskajen Amerikaskjulet was built in 1910-1912, originally designed as a warehouse for goods arriving with the ships.

Shortly thereafter, Amerikaskjulet also housed a terminal for travellers going with the new direct link between Sweden and North America which emerged in 1915. Although the majority of the now known America emigration had already happened at this time, the ships increasingly came to host an exclusive cruise experience for Swedes visiting their relatives now settled in the USA. The building came to symbolise America in Gothenburg and Sweden, and it was always a festive atmosphere when the ships arrived from the land “over there”.

It is the backdrop of memories for thousands of people and for many it was possibly the last Swedish ground they set foot on before leaving for America. A lot of people also used the building and quay as their workplace.

The Gothenburg harbour owes the stevedores their success. Loading and unloading ships was heavy work and before cranes were a fully integrated part of the harbour, the labour was done manually. At its peak, the Gothenburg Harbour had 15 000 employed stevedores by the shipyards in the 1960's (Sjöfartsmuseet, 2025).

The dock workers' international working environment facilitated the spreading of unionisation and workers' rights leading to the dock workers of Gothenburg being union pioneers.

The stevedores often put their lives at risk since fatalities at work were not unusual. It was always due to serious accidents or strikes that more safety accessories were integrated in the day to day work (von Platen & Stenberg, 1990). The work was also unreliable. The stevedores gathered early in the morning for the first calling. The need for workers varied day by day, and it was common for workers to wait for a full day without being called (von Platen & Stenberg, 1990).



F5: The bustling harbour of Stigbergskajen and Masthuggskajen, ca 1930.





*F6-9: Workers by Amerikaskjulet in the 1920's, 30's, 50's and 60's. Amerikaskjulet is depicted as a body, the goods being its air and the roll up doors its lungs.*





## POST INDUSTRIALISM AND MARITIME ANCHORS

The work in the harbour of Gothenburg remained the same for decades. It wasn't until the 1960's that new inventions started to provoke transformation in the maritime industry (Hilmersson, 2015). Post industrial winds of change blew from the USA, and there was now a way to handle goods in the harbours more effectively and with less workers.

The introduction of roro-ships and containers drove the construction of the massive Skandiahamnen in the periphery of Gothenburg which eventually outplayed all inner harbours. One by one they were forced to close down, resulting in 90% of the dock workers losing their jobs.

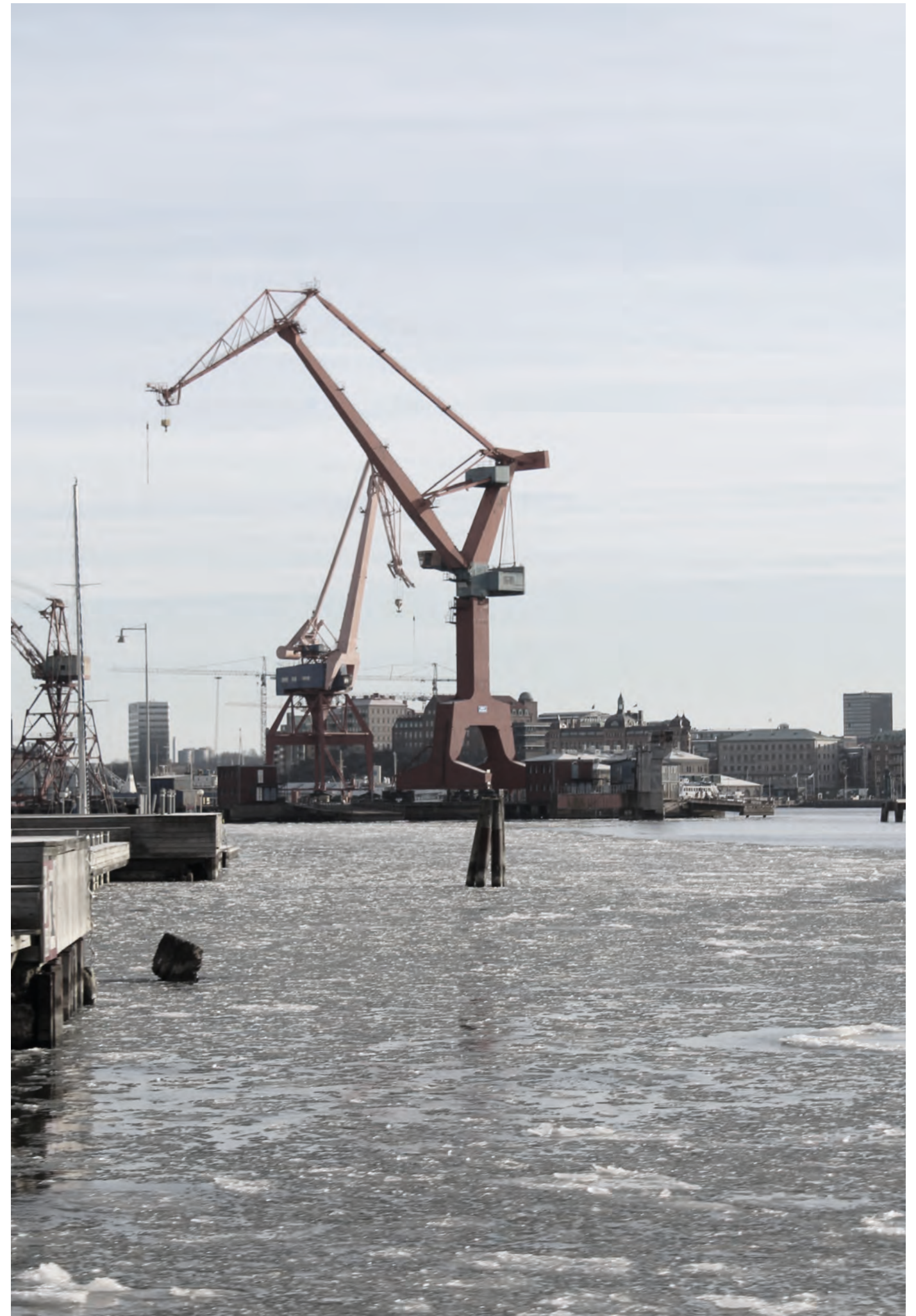
The inner harbours, like the one in Eriksberg, remained vast lands and ruins of the once vibrant industry. Gothenburg was in search of a new identity.

The grammar of maritime history, as manifested by Ida Dicksson (Pålsson, 2024), is the preserved details in the public city, that speak of the no longer existing maritime industry. Traces of Gothenburg harbours such as Färjenäs, Masthugget, Rosenlund and Röda Sten are still visible in objects such as chains and piers. In Eriksberg the big orange crane symbolises the shipyard history of Gothenburg and the previous industrial port is now being used as a harbour for smaller boats, although any traces of the past are gone.

It's fascinating how the maritime industry has influenced the area of Amerikaskjulet and Stigbergskajen. Cranes and rail tracks contributed to a distinct skyline and evident elements in public space. Although Stigbergskajen is still occasionally in use as a harbour for international cruise ships, there is no visual evidence that this was a site where thousands of people gathered for the main event of the ships' arrival.

Although keeping and preserving all of the harbour traces would be obstructable - maintaining old cranes is a costly and never ending process - there ought to be more methods to keep maritime history in the city.

*Maritime bodies and cranes of Lundby harbour as seen from Lindholmen in present day.*



### 03. TRANSFORMATION AS AN ACT OF CARE

The act of transformation within the field of architecture has varied over time, originating mainly for practical reasons in the past.

Kenneth Powell (2005) reckons one movement of building transformation emerged in the aftermath of the 1970's oil crisis. The movement, inspired by historical buildings, asserted demolition was not only unnecessary but merely waste.

At the time of the oil crisis in the 1970's that sparked this movement, Amerikaskjulet had already been refurbished in 1959 in a modernist style. The architect's aspiration for purity and clean lines led to the towers being taken away and the facade was simplified in terms of plastered walls. This transformation was not an act of care for Amerikaskjulet as a structure, but rather the celebration of change in itself was an act of care for society.

As communicated by Bie Plevoets and Koenraad van Cleempoel (2019), two opposites of building transformation theory are found in Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879) and Ruskin (1819-1900). Viollet-le-Duc reckoned the best way to reuse a historic building was to find the best possible program for it so that it wouldn't need any more alterations in the future (Plevoets & van Cleempoel, 2019). In order to do so, one must position oneself in the original architect's intention and imagine what they would do, being given this assignment and opportunity (Plevoets & van Cleempoel, 2019). Ruskin, on the

other hand, believed protection should be prioritised - if a building was being well cared for it would age beautifully and restoration will not be necessary (Plevoets & van Cleempoel, 2019). Ruskin was also firm on the note that a building's program should not be changed (Plevoets & van Cleempoel, 2019).

Positioning Amerikaskjulet and its renovations in between these two opposite points of view, it becomes palpable that the renovations don't seem to go in any of these two directions. Following Viollet-le-Duc's example would mean to ask: What would Hans & Björner Hedlund do? It is apparent that Hedlund and Hedlund would not take down the towers, the building's perhaps most characteristic feature.

Waterfront areas of industrial cities were prone to demolition until the direction of the cities was changed resulting in docklands no longer in use facing major transformations as developers envisioned the potential in the waterfront properties (Powell, 2005).

Economic gain aside, what else can be achieved through building transformation? By changing the outlook and seeing the building in its historical context, we might find ways to maintain and highlight cultural values.

By handling the building with more care and respect, specific methods and results evolve.

Building transformation is necessary to adapt buildings or public spaces to their ongoing contextual transformation. Building transformation is necessary to avoid demolishing and to fit a new program into suitable spaces.

The discourse is often about what the building can do for us. But what can we do for the building?





Amerikaskjulet 2025 as seen from the river.



F10: Stigbergskajen as seen from Hisingen ca 1970, Amerikaskjulet to the right in the back.

## LISTENING TO BUILDINGS

Buildings, however well or poor designed, tend to live their own lives in our mind. They seem to be more than a mere assembly of construction material. They are, in a way, psychological entities or even projections (Littlefield, 2007). We may develop senses of happiness, euphoria, boredom or shame attached to the building in our mind, determined by our memories bridging the building. While we apply adjectives and character, a building in a sense evolves a voice, their own agency. This agency is more than just symbolism, it is rather a matter of asking what the building would say if we would listen to it (Littlefield, 2007).

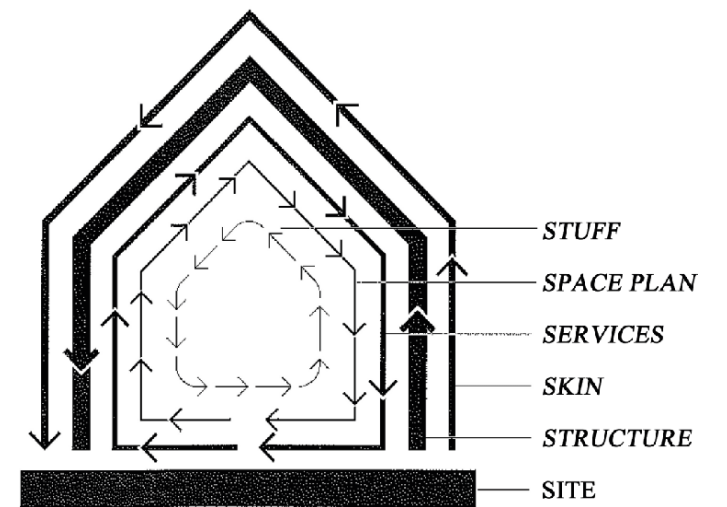
In building transformation, the act of listening to buildings puts architects in a new role reading the building from another perspective. As Paul Davis puts it: "It's about letting a building talk to you and not walking inside with a lot of preconceptions." (Littlefield & Lewis, 2007, p. 10)

A building's voice and story is not always clear, as is the case with Amerikaskjulet, which over the years, has lost its voice and whose stories seem to fade. Some buildings cannot be fully understood in itself but rather need personal validification to reveal themselves. To uncover a building's stories and to find their voice, is difficult. Architects must leave room for listening to buildings, in order to allow the building their identity.

## LAYERS AND UNBUILDING

Frank Duffy argues there are no buildings, but what we really perceive is a set of layers (Brand, 1994). Duffy perceives four layers: Shell, Services, Scenery and Set, whereas Stewart Brand developed them into six layers following the now-known 6S sequence: Site, Structure, Skin, Services, Space Plan and Stuff (Brand, 1994).

While site is eternal, stuff gets replaced or moved around every few weeks, depicting the 6S sequence to consist of different paced systems. While structure persists and dominates, interiors rarely stay the same due to building users' growing frustration, boredom and shame. Although, a rigid structure might keep back any desired changes, as well as an often alternated interior puts stress on the structure. Thus, we need to be able to design buildings in a way that makes adaptation natural without putting too much pressure on the building.

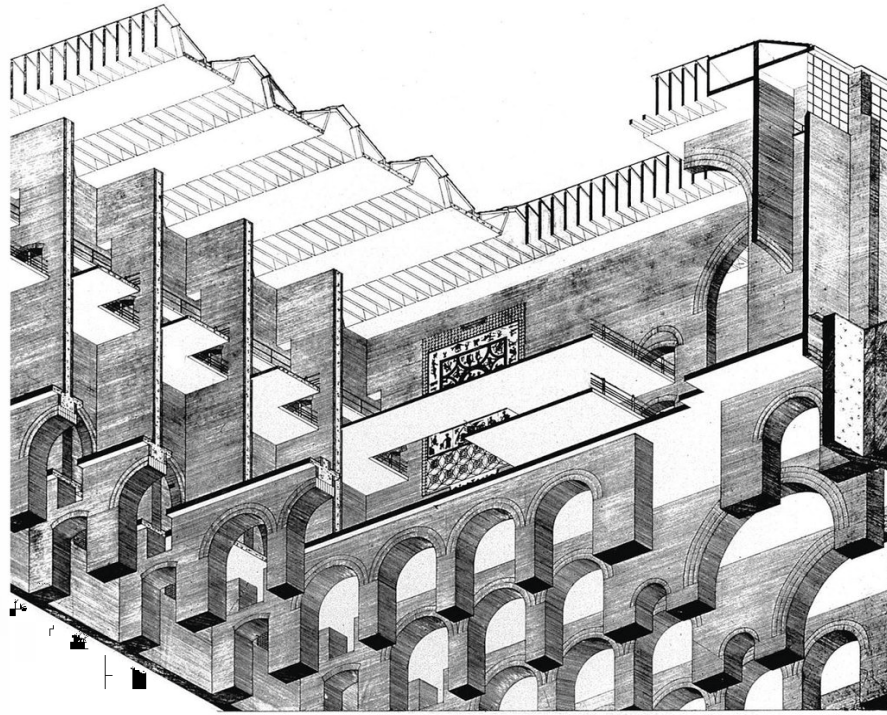


F11: The 6S theory as explained by Brand.

The old view on demolition as the inevitable stage for allowing new creation is increasingly rejected. On the contrary, one can argue that the architect's role is fundamentally changing. Starchitecture is dead and demolition design sees new light (Kozminska & Plevoets, 2024).

Demolition design is here understood as a transformation strategy and might be embodied as an attentive selection of what to keep and what to remove in a transformation, which calls for an agency that subtly navigates through the aesthetic, functional and ecological needs. The act of removal in itself can be applied to Brand's theory on layers, creating new meaning to a building. By removing layers, the building's aesthetics and atmosphere can be drastically changed.





F12: Worm's eye axonometric by Stan Allen (1984) of Merida Museum. Allen's drawing is an inspiration for this thesis. To communicate the time layers effectively and beautifully, the old is depicted as a hatch while the add-on is a clear line drawing.

11

While the discipline of architecture may not consider it to be an artful technique or tool, **subtraction** is a primary activity in the ecology of building and making space - a capacity that all buildings possess."

(Easterling, 2014, p. 8)

## STRIPPING: THE SELECTIVE REMOVAL OF LAYERS

The creation of the Moor Street Hotel in London by Earle Architects (2007) as explained by Saskia Lewis (2007) was a transformation and an application of stripping layers. The block consisting of fifteen buildings housed all sorts of more or less illegal activities, before the municipality regained control by buying all properties.

Moor Street Hotel would be a boutique hotel spanning over several of the properties, meaning the cleanout had to be thorough and across the adjacent properties. The deconstruction was done slowly and by hand. By opening walls to the adjacent buildings new routes were created.

I find the transformation of Moor Street Hotel inspirational for this thesis. Although the Moor Street Hotel prior to transformation was in a different condition than Amerikaskjulet is in present day, both projects have gone through odd alterations resulting in nooks and peculiar spaces that were not intended from the beginning. An example of this in Amerikaskjulet is an opening in the staircase that is now covered.

Keller Easterling emphasises the importance of demolition in the architecture field. She acknowledges it to be an essential component of being an architect. Demolition, or subtraction, is what happens prior to any construction, and is

not simply absence but rather a space-making endeavor (Easterling, 2014). Subtraction is in some cases an aggressive act, but there is also a more artistic mindset that "takes subtraction in hand and shapes it as a construction rather than a negation" (Easterling, 2014, p. 34). In the case of Amerikaskjulet, subtraction can be a care of act and essentially a necessity to be able to revive values.

By slowly stripping the layers of material and time, new old views and values become visible. What happens when layers are stripped one by one? What views will be apparent in Amerikaskjulet when walls are being torn down?

## LAYERING TIME

Seeing the structural components and added materials as layers is a matter-of-factly perspective on a building. It's easy to comprehend and imagine adding a layer of plaster to a wall of concrete.

Imagining time as a transformation driving factor is more difficult to do. Time doesn't have sharp edges or something we can see or touch, and yet we see its effect on everything in this world.

For this thesis, I am imagining Amerikaskjulet as layers of time, seeing the many interventions the building has had.



## REFERENCES: APPROACH

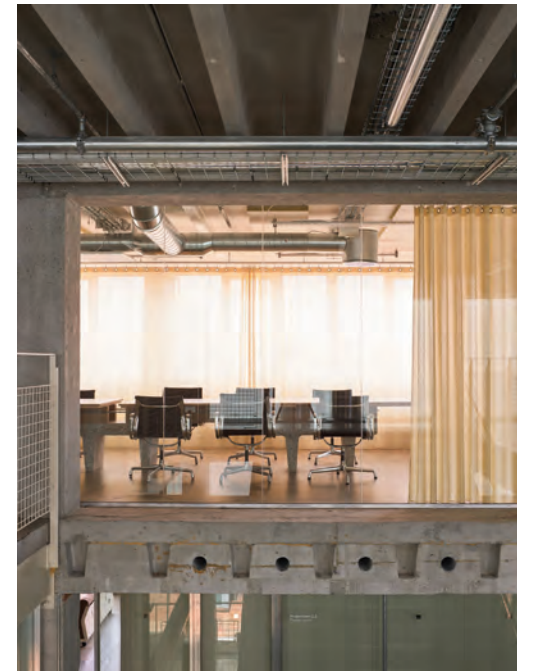


*F13-15: The photographs taken from the same angle before, during and after interventions show what impact a building transformation truly has. While the “during” part (above) is evidently not the aim, this picture stands as a design piece in itself. It is the art of listening to the building to let the mixed bare materials advocate for themselves and show the possibilities.*



*F16: Slightly above the working desks, large ventilation pipes are placed which are also a reminder that no technical detail is too embarrassing or ugly to be exposed.*

*F17: By incorporating glass, steel mesh detailing and pale coloured curtains the ambience is kept light despite the heavy materials..*



## Thoravej 29 (Pihlmann Architects, 2025)

This is a building transformation turning a 1960's factory into a social hub. While leaving the concrete structure intact, new views and patterns for movement are discovered when slabs are tilted down forming new stairways connecting the floors.

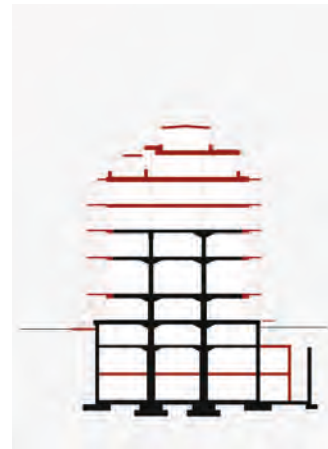
With a holistic approach, the architects aimed for adaptive reuse for a lot of the material, finding a new purpose for it fitting to the new program.

The architects describe the reuse process on their project webpage with didactic photos which brings the reader even closer to the project and shares a greater understanding and knowledge on adaptive reuse. A piece of the slab stands as a substantial table leg while wood panels are processed into new fiber boards which then are used as a tabletop. This type of process shows that adaptive reuse is site specific - each site and building has its unique conditions.

*F18-21: Describing photographs of the recycling process turning wood panels into fiber boards for a table top.*







F22-24:  
 Left: Concrete mushroom pillars highlighted in the middle of the room.  
 Above: The stripping phase reveals the stacking of the mushroom pillars evidently in different heights.  
 Above: The cross section is showing the original structure in black and additions in red.

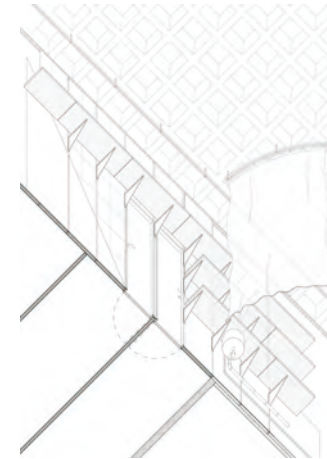
## Conversion of a wine storage (Esch Sintzel, 2023)

This conversion of a previous wine storage into housing units demonstrates an embracing of its load bearing structure: the concrete mushroom pillars. The building is stripped into its core which is then centered in the new housing plans. The concrete columns are the centerpiece of the building and are not to be concealed. The columns are instead like arrows on a map, constituting the direction of movement. Even its original grey surface

is left unpainted, adding to a contrast to the soft white walls, which are set in between the columns as opposed to integrated with them.

Differentiating both the old structure and additions represented in the drawings is a powerful yet delicate way to clarify the building's timeline.

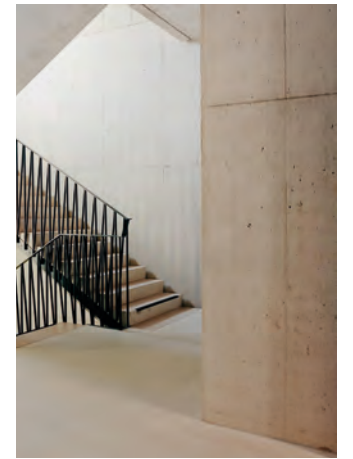
## REFERENCES: DESIGN AND REPRESENTATION



F25:  
 Axonometric drawing of project Woof, a conversion of a post office into a veterinary clinic (MacIver-Ek Chevroulet, 2024). The drawing combines technical details with spatial organisation understanding.



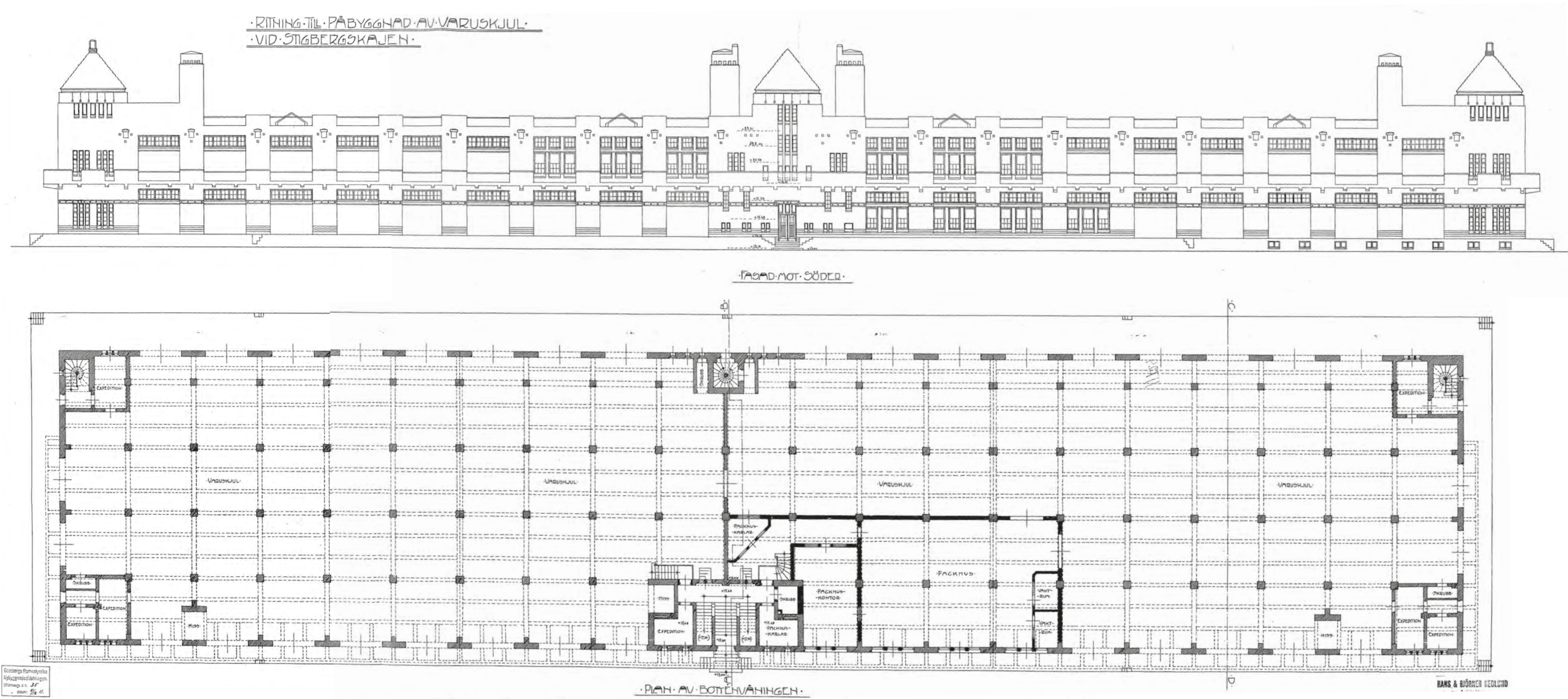
F26:  
 Stripping phase photograph of conversion of the Felix Platter Hospital in Basel (ARGE Müller Sigrist Architekten, 2022). This photo distinctly demonstrates the raw concrete beneath the dismantled surfaces.



F27:  
 This photograph taken after completion of Kunsthaus Göttingen (St Atelier, 2021) tactfully describes the fine handling of concrete surfaces.



04. INTRODUCING AMERIKASKJULET



F28: Original drawings of Amerikaskjulet's entrance level plan and southern facade, ca 1910.



Amerikaskjulet (Björner Hedlund & Hans Hedlund, 1910) was originally constructed as a warehouse in a massive structure of pillars and beams. It was designed to carry enormous loads from the goods unloaded on the quay. The concrete was reinforced and this had not been used in any other building in Gothenburg yet.

The pictures depict Amerikaskjulet under construction and as completed. The photographer seems to have been mainly interested in the concrete structure and captured its rigid pattern, not unlike a planted forest. In the pictures, the building's strength and power is honored.



F29-32: Amerikaskjulet during and post construction.







*F33: Construction of Amerikaskjulet, using timber to cast the concrete. In the background, smoke can be seen from the industries of the harbour in Sannegården. It is evident that the maritime industry contributed to a completely different skyline than today.*

In its original state, the building consisted mainly of open spaces spanning between the pillars. The roll up doors on both sides facilitated handling goods conveniently from the quayside, going through the building to the other side. The side towards Oscarsleden, now known as the heavily trafficked Oscarsleden, was equipped with rail tracks enabling goods to be transported on wagons.

The roof was equipped with openable windows allowing for goods to be transferred through the ceiling, contributing to the building's machinery.

Although known as "the shed", the construction is everything but that. Its somewhat hostile shape due to the heavy towers with different widths and heights, and with the accompanying windows getting narrower, only acknowledge the architects for their desire to make a complex but very functional structure out of a simple program.

A third storey was added when Amerikaskjulet was renovated in 1959 by architect Nernst Hansen, resulting in a completely changed building with plastered facades.

Changes were also made by the Swedish architectural firm Liljewall in the 1980s, when the harbour of Gothenburg decided to use the building for offices. Drawings from 1987 demonstrate that glassed ceilings brought in lots of light, and the sketch perspective drawing shows mezzanine floors bringing light to the lower floors.

*F35: Workers loading goods into Amerikaskjulet using the roll up doors. Note the altitude that the workers are on, and the absence of security railing.*



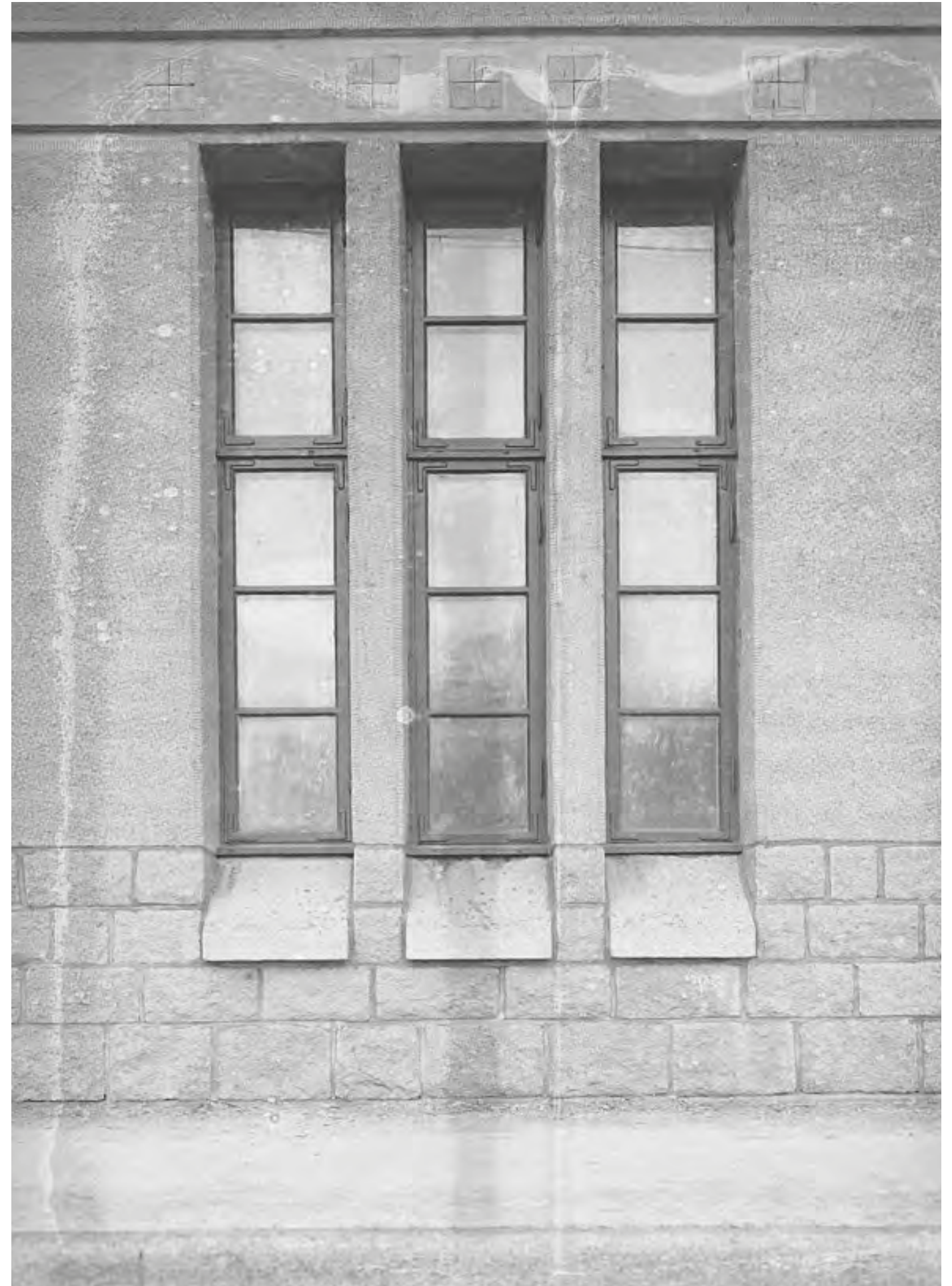
*F34: Newly constructed Amerikaskjulet. In front of the building, railtracks are seen connecting to the newly built fishing harbour to the left of Amerikaskjulet.*







*F36: Amerikaskjulet in its prime days in the 1940's, as both a warehouse and a terminal. Here illustrated as a landmark clearly in its context of Gothenburg with its closeness to the river and the shipyard of Sannegården.*



*F37: Amerikaskjulet's characteristic triple windows set in the concrete and granite facade. The picture also depicts the glazed tiles above the windows, a detail that is still preserved.*





F38-39: Facade drawings from 1911 and 1959 respectively, showing the facade depicted in the photos to the left.

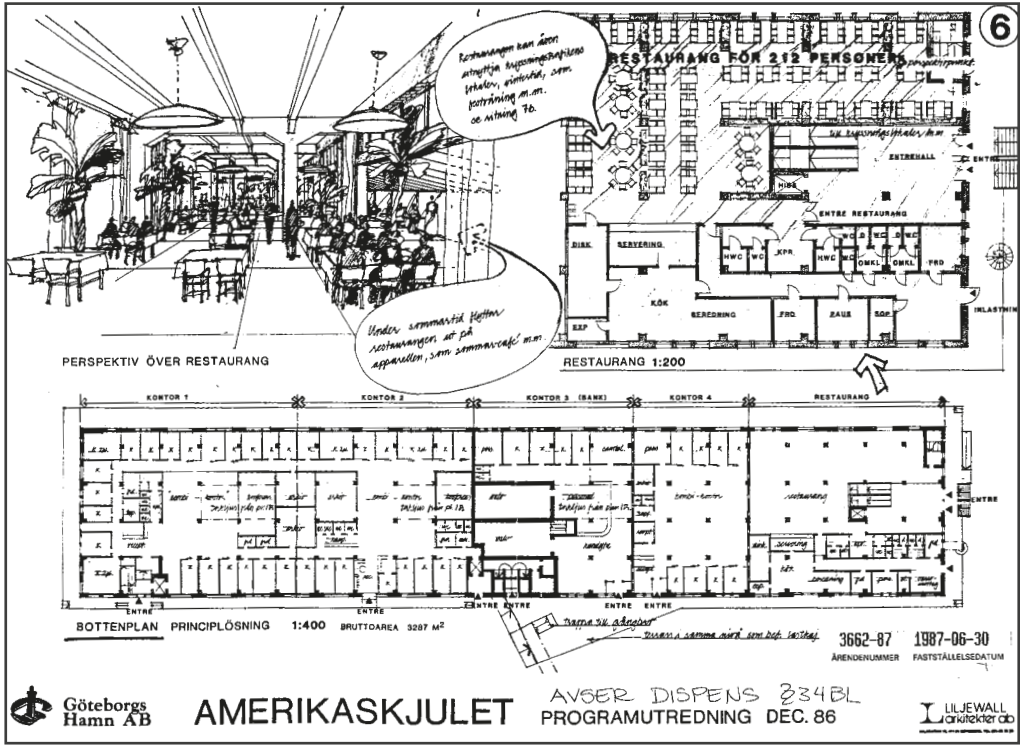
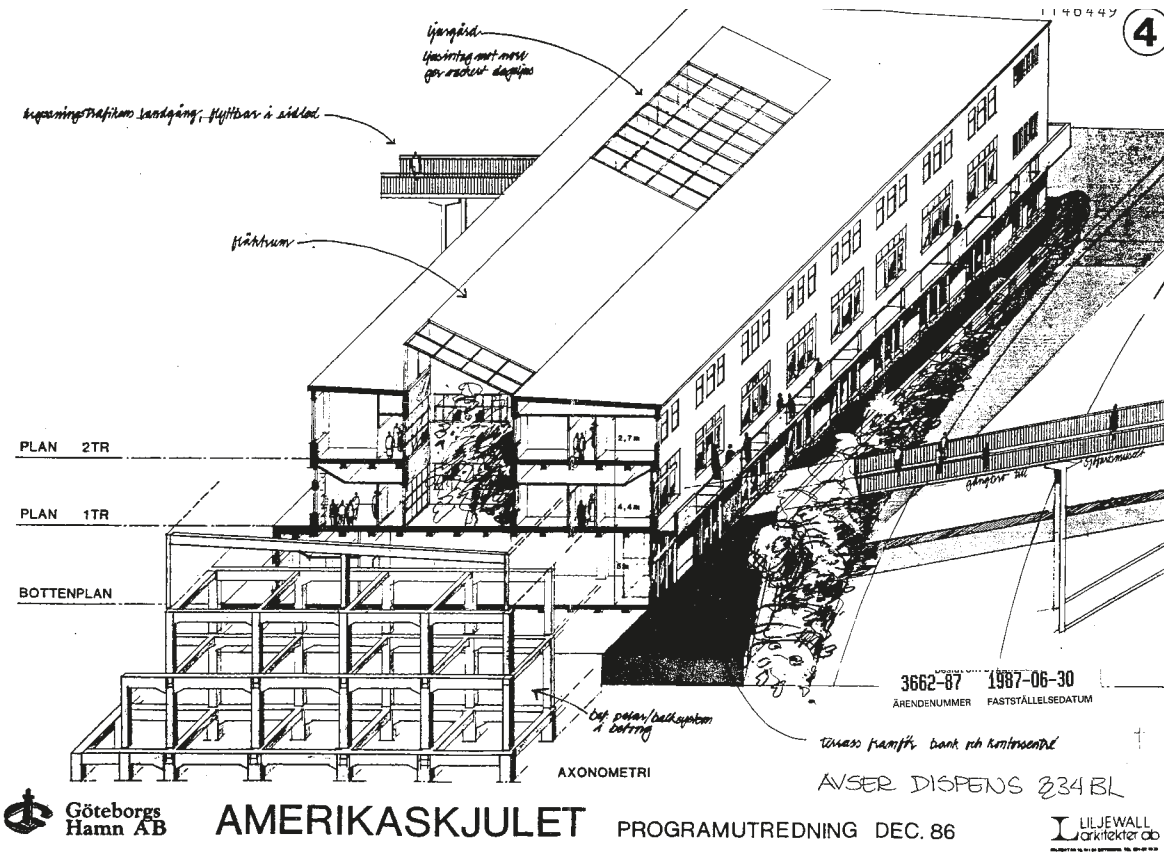


F40-41: Amerikaskjulet from the same angle at different times, before the harsch renovation and after.





Photo of atrium and skylight



F42-43: Drawings of Amerikaskjulet's alteration in 1987.

Since the 1980's transformation into an office building, the building's function remains. The offices have since been transformed in additional alterations. The closed rooms and corridors have been exchanged into the more modern open-plan office. Because of the big air volumes being too costly to heat up, the atrium at the far west has been closed and the ceiling height in some places has been lowered so much that the top windows are covered with plywood boards.

lacking personality and character. While there is evidence that old parts of the building indeed remain, like the original limestone staircase and the blue wooden doors on the eastern wing, these fragments are rather relics on a plain backdrop, than enhanced and added to the maritime experience.

one with numerous added layers.



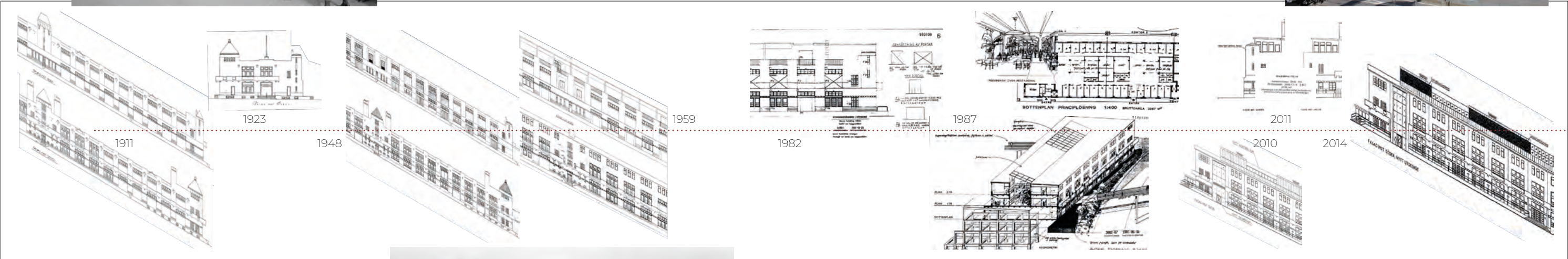


TIMELINE

F46: Photo of eastern wing, 1924.



F47: Photo of Amerikaskjulet, 1961.



F48: Photo of southern facade, 1912.



F49: Photo of Amerikaskjulet from the river, ca 1970.

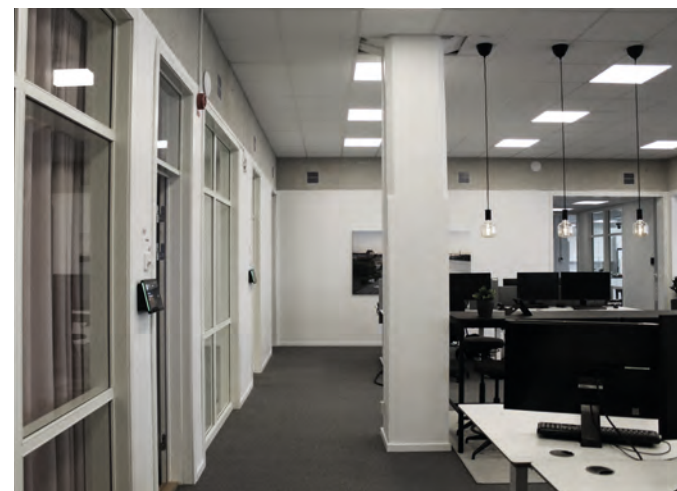
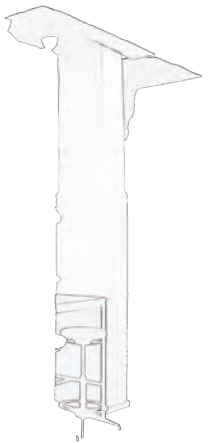
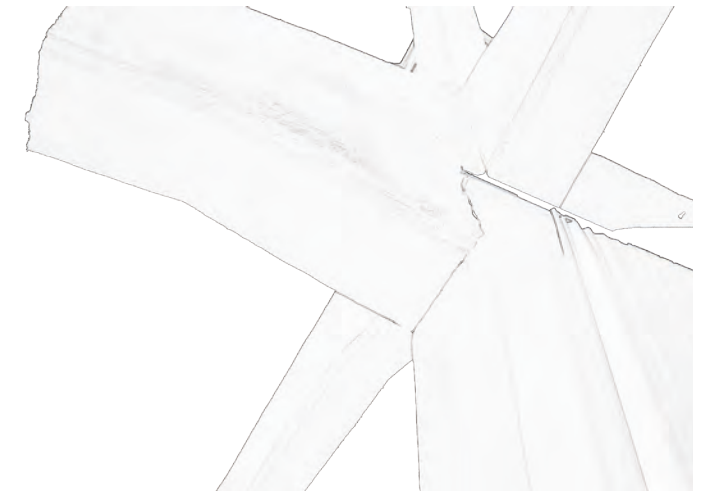




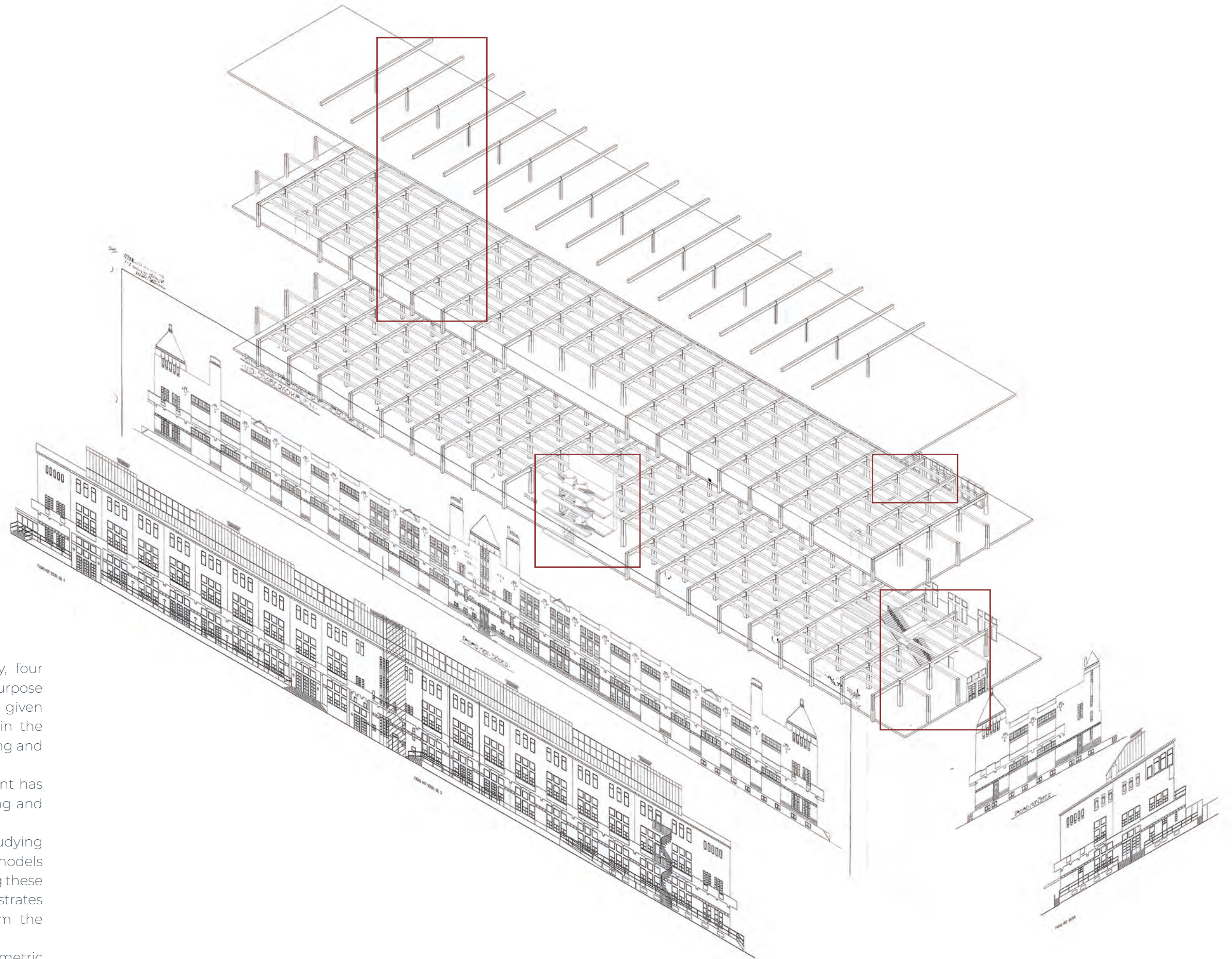




The pillars, although clearly visible in many situations, are most often not fully perceived but often integrated with a wall or hidden behind decorations. Ongoing renovations during a site visit enabled me to see parts of the structure that are normally hidden. Owing to the suspended ceiling temporarily being taken away, new dynamic views are created. The boundaries between the raw and covered, the fresh painted and the neglected, are visible. The hidden part of the pillar has paint patches coming off and this is also where the technical wires and pipes are hidden.







# FOUR SITUATIONS

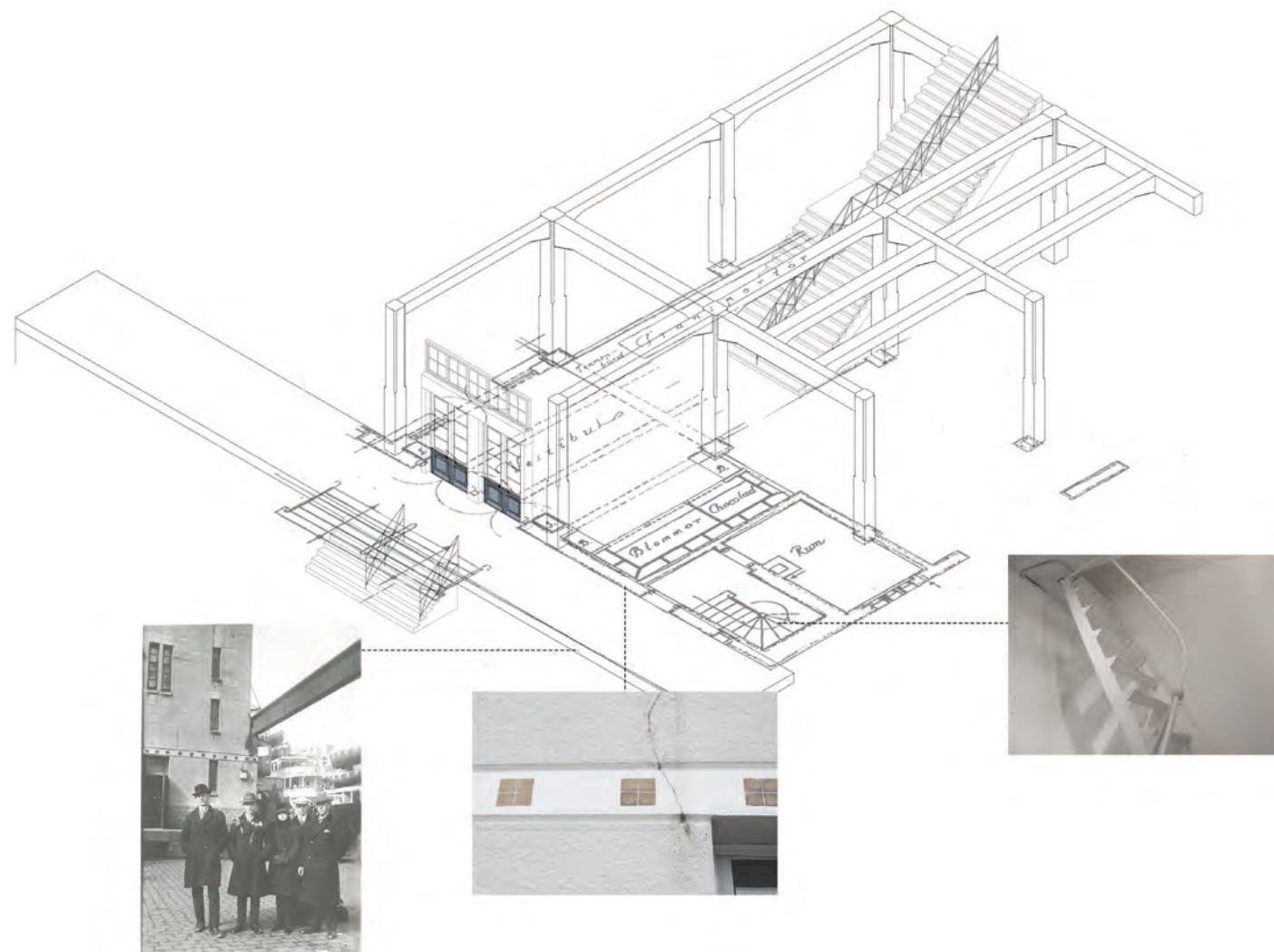
In the continuation of the inventory, four situations in the building are analysed. The purpose of choosing four situations is for me to be given deeper understanding and more freedom in the following design phase as opposed to analysing and re-designing the whole building.

The spatial values as well as movement has changed gravely in some areas in the building and these areas constitute the four situations.

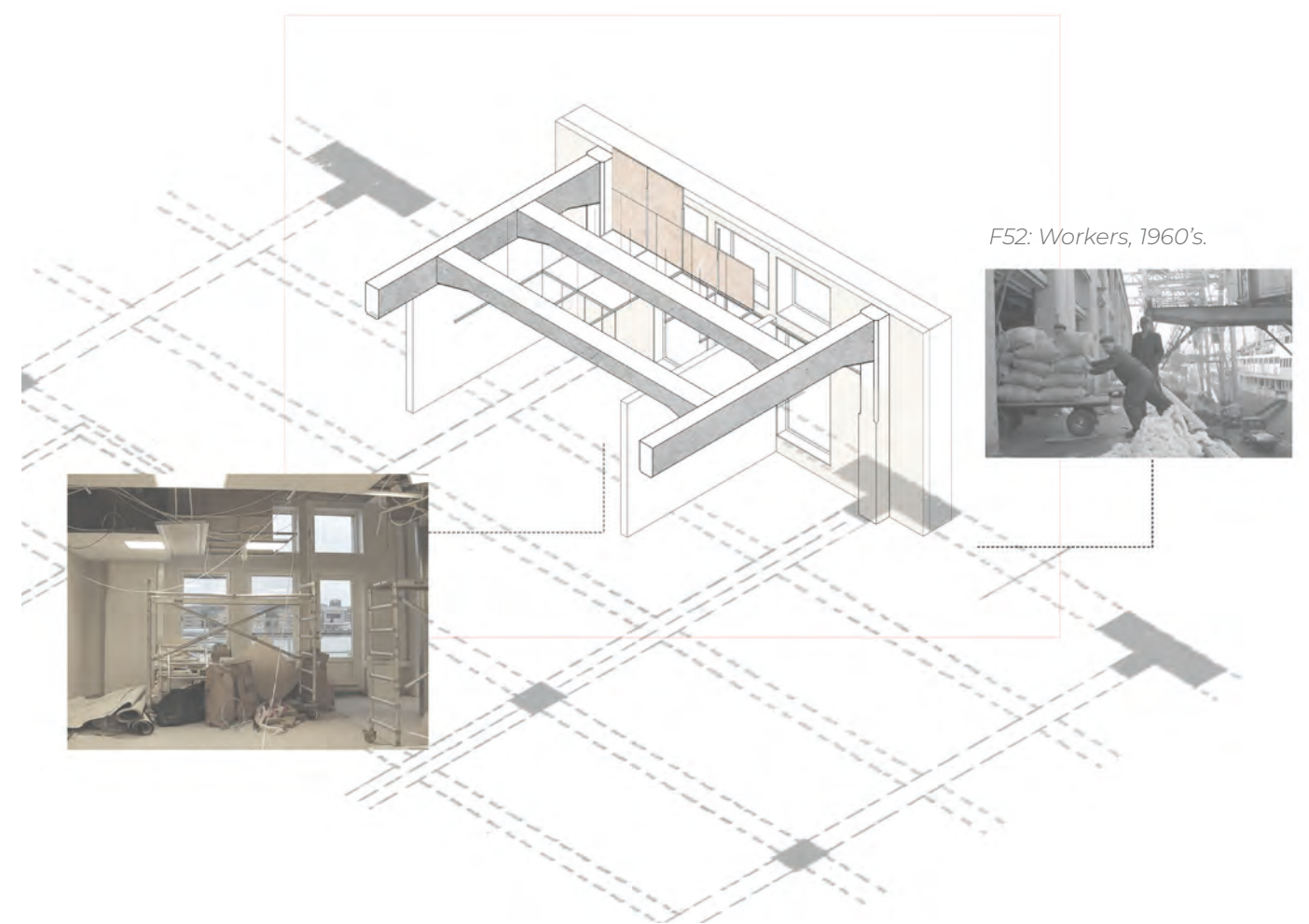
The analysis is carried out by studying drawings and photographs and making 3D models of how it looks in the present day. By overlaying these layers of time, a collage is created that illustrates change over time and the divergence from the past.

The drawing to the right is an axonometric overview showing the basic structure of the building and the oldest facade drawing (1910) within the newest facade drawing (2010). The four situations are marked in red.





F50: Travellers, 1928.



F52: Workers, 1960's.

## THE 1923 STAIRS

The eastern wing of the building has been subject to multiple alterations throughout the years and perhaps one of the most influential is the transformation in 1923 - a new entrance with the characteristic double doors.

Old photographs portray the eastern entrance with hundreds of people waiting in line to enter Amerikaskjulet before embarking on their journey. The kiosk in the vestibule provided flowers and chocolate as gifts for arriving friends and family members. The limestone stairs led to the waiting hall on the second floor.

In the corner tower, a more neat steel staircase leading directly to the balcony on the second floor was likely used by employees. The name "Greta Garbo staircase" affirms that this was the staircase that Greta Garbo, Swedish movie star, used when she arrived with the ship from America to visit.



F51: Travellers by the eastern wing, 1930's.

## THE WINDOW MODULE

This situation is not specific in terms of location since the triple window is a recurring event along the walls. The window module demonstrates the changes that have been done to the windows and the multiple ways they have been used.

The primary design included wide roll up doors to facilitate easy access into the warehouse while handling goods.

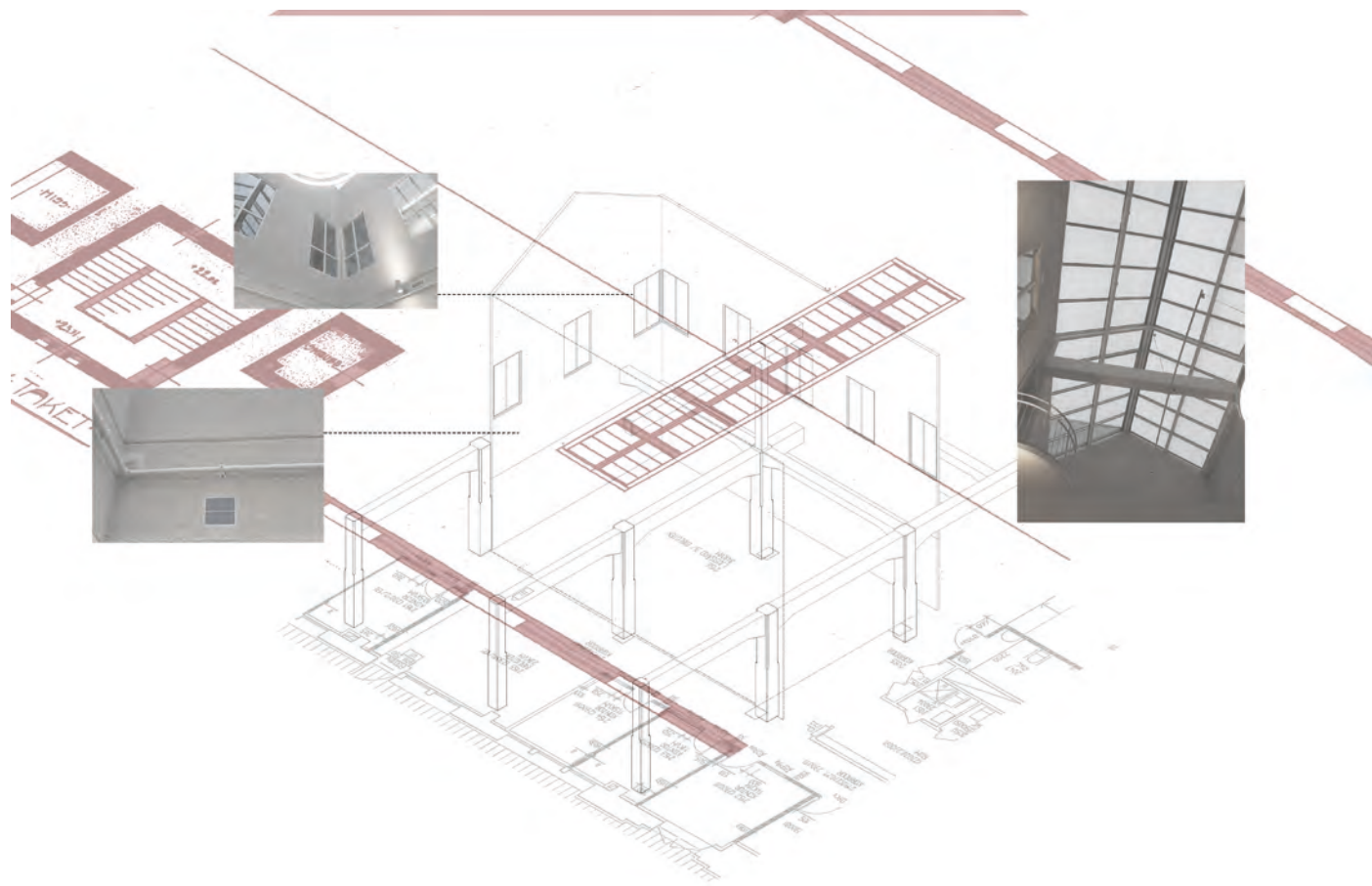
In the present day, the roll up doors have been replaced with regular windows and a suspended ceiling is set up due to high heating costs.

The different materials blocking the windows and the space are shown in the collage, as well as photographs in the window situation at different times.



F53: Passengers in Amerikaskjulet terminal (n.d).





## THE ATRIUM



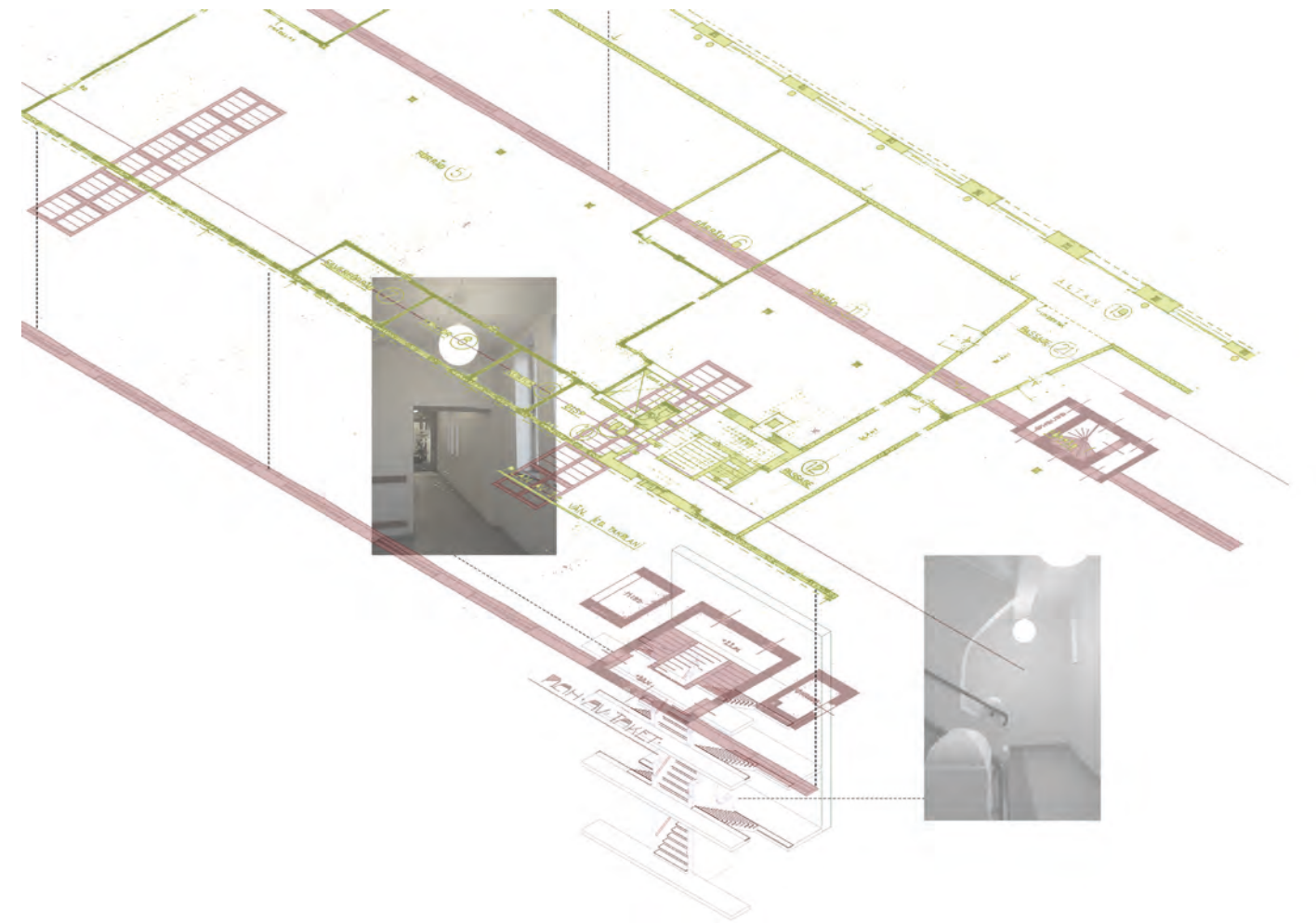
Interior photo of atrium, 2025.

Although not an original design, the group of four atriums created in the office transformation in 1987 is an enhancement and gain in the elseways brutal alteration. By opening up the slab on the third floor as well as the roof, light is being brought down to the second floor with a large skylight.

The shape of the skylight resembles the original skylights on the second floor that were taken away in the refurbishment in 1959, although the newer one is angled differently and differs in size.

The atrium tactfully exposes the inherent strength in the load bearing structure which is standing bare in the middle of the room.

The collage depicts the original skylight in red and is the same scale as the axonometric and present day plan in black.

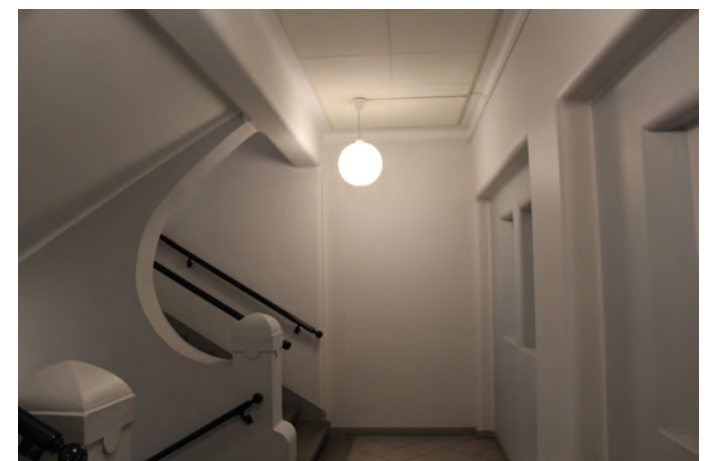


## THE MAIN STAIRS

This ornamental centerpiece of the building has remained the same since its construction in 1910. With the central staircase the visitor accessed the roof directly.

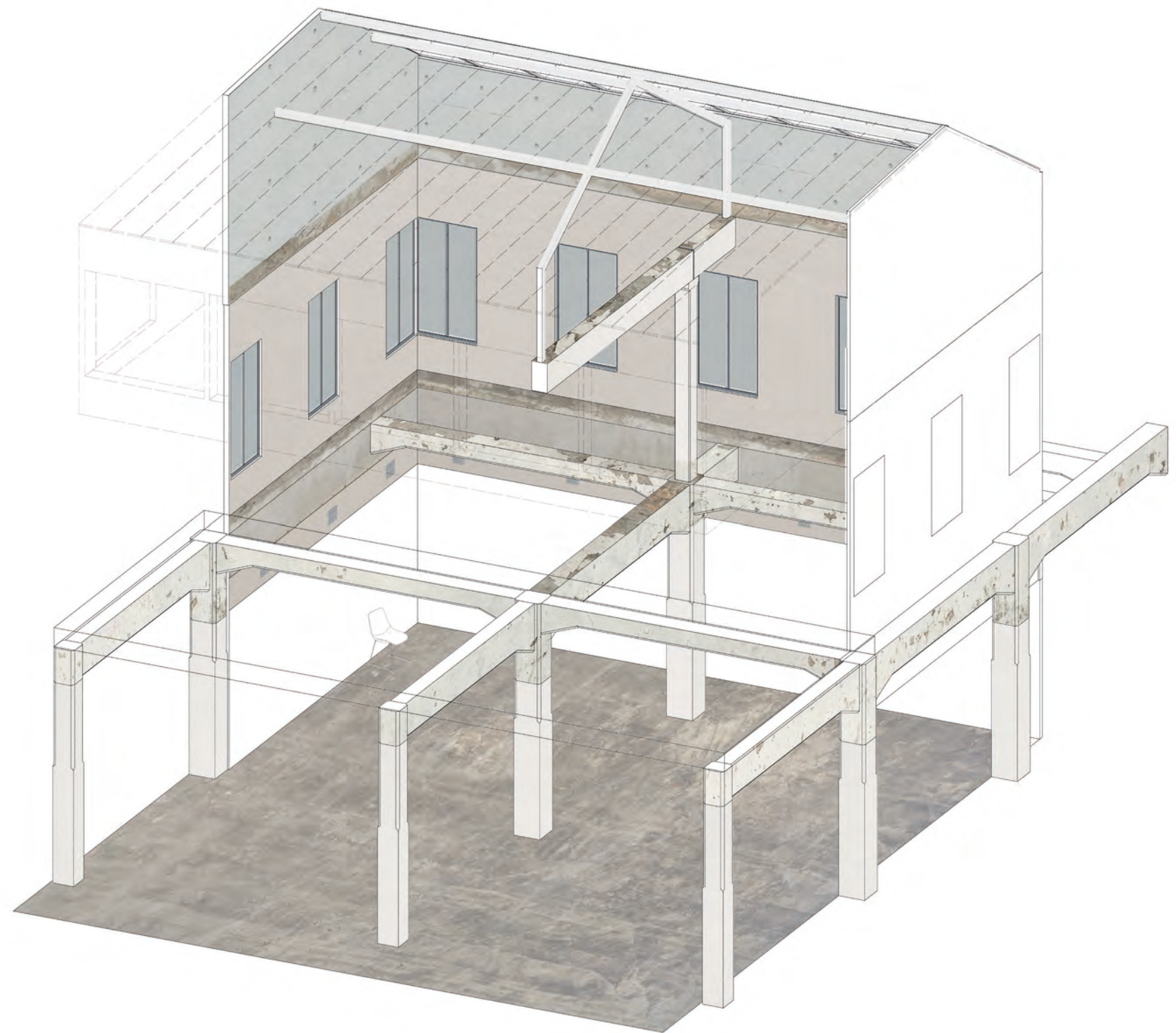
In the modernist refurbishment in 1959 the main stairs were therefore kept but from that time on only leading up to the added third floor and no longer the roof. Back in the days, the roof was partly used as extra storage space for goods, as well as spectator area when the big ships arrived and departed.

The openings that used to bring the visitor outside to the roof are still observed as shown in the collage. The plan drawing from 1959 in yellow is laid over the original drawing from 1910.



Interior photo of original staircase, 2025.





## STRIPPING OF LAYERS

One of the atriums from 1987 is closed off in 2010 when a control room is built on the roof and a slab is put on the third floor. The photo from the present day is showing an open office with working desks. Instead of the natural skylight that was before, artificial light is integrated with the suspended ceiling that has been put up.

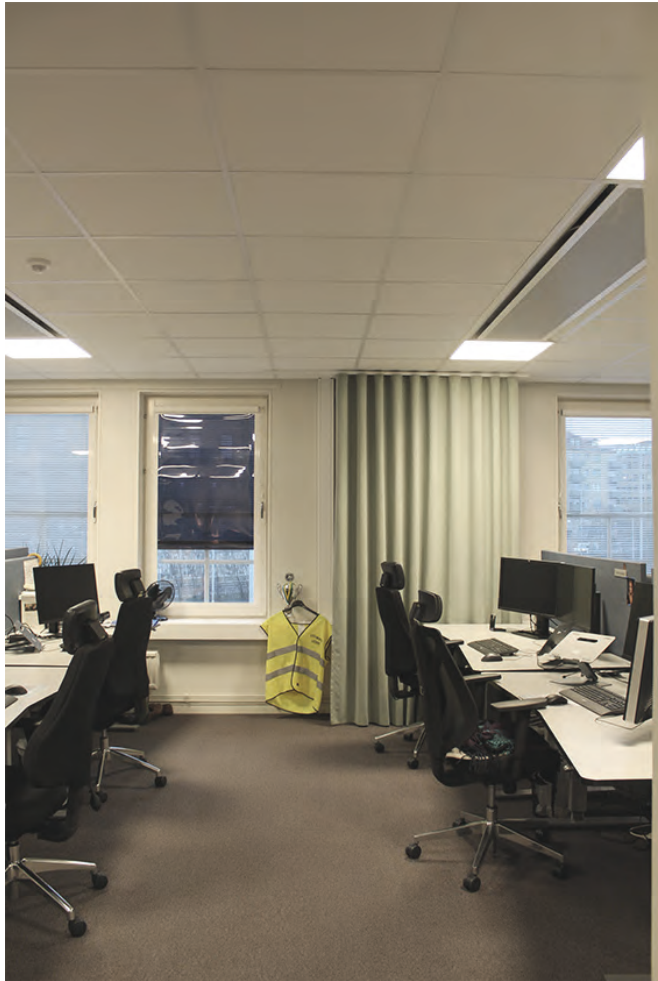
In the stripping of the atrium, the control room is being taken down, as well as the slab. The collage depicts markings on the wall and the concrete pillars and beams, from the slabs that are now taken down. Where the control room has been, there are concrete walls with holes from gypsum

boards. There are also holes where the suspended ceiling's installation rails have been put up. There is a difference in the finish of the pillars and beams that have been or haven't been visible. The visible parts have been cared for and maintained, and the unshown parts are neglected with old paint coming off from the time when it was the atrium's focal point.

## DISMANTLED MATERIAL

- Floor carpet
- Suspended ceiling sheets and lighting
- Installation rails and wires
- Concrete slab on third floor
- The control room: concrete slab, windows, roof metal sheets, concrete walls





# DISMANTLED MATERIAL

- Floor carpet
- Suspended ceiling sheets and lighting
- Installation rails and wires
- OSB boards
- Wooden stud walls

The working desks are spread out all over the building and a lot of them are located by the big windows overlooking the river. The ceiling height and the light coming from the windows is nothing compared to what it has been. To reduce heating costs, a suspended ceiling was put up which blocks the upper windows. Drawings prior to the renovation in 1987 are the first ones to show Amerikaskjulet in section with lowered ceiling.

In the picture to the right, the building is depicted with the original ceiling height and the load bearing structure showing. The suspended ceiling is dismantled and traces of this are seen, such

as holes in the walls and neglected surfaces above the ceiling line.

It's fascinating just how much character is brought back by just taking down the ceiling boards. The voluminous space gives a hint on how it might have looked and been experienced in previous years.







## DISMANTLED MATERIAL

- Aerated concrete blocks
- Concrete walls

The staircase was probably originally used to get to the few offices that belonged to the supervisors at the working site. In the original drawings there are small window openings by the staircase on the ground floor. There were also doors onto a small mezzanine floor and a stair leading down to the warehouse. It remains unclear the function of these small window openings since they were too small to bring any goods through. Since the mezzanine floor was half a storey up, it's presumed that the warehouse and the outer wall behind it was seen through the openings from the stairs.

At different times, the windows have been

closed for unclear reasons, though markings in the wall from the openings are still seen.

The view from the staircase is recreated in the drawing below, when the blocked openings are reopened. The white plaster is being stripped away as well as other surfaces on the floor and the load bearing structure in the warehouse. The connection between the warehouse and the staircase is here revived.







## DISMANTLED MATERIAL

- Floor carpet
- Concrete walls

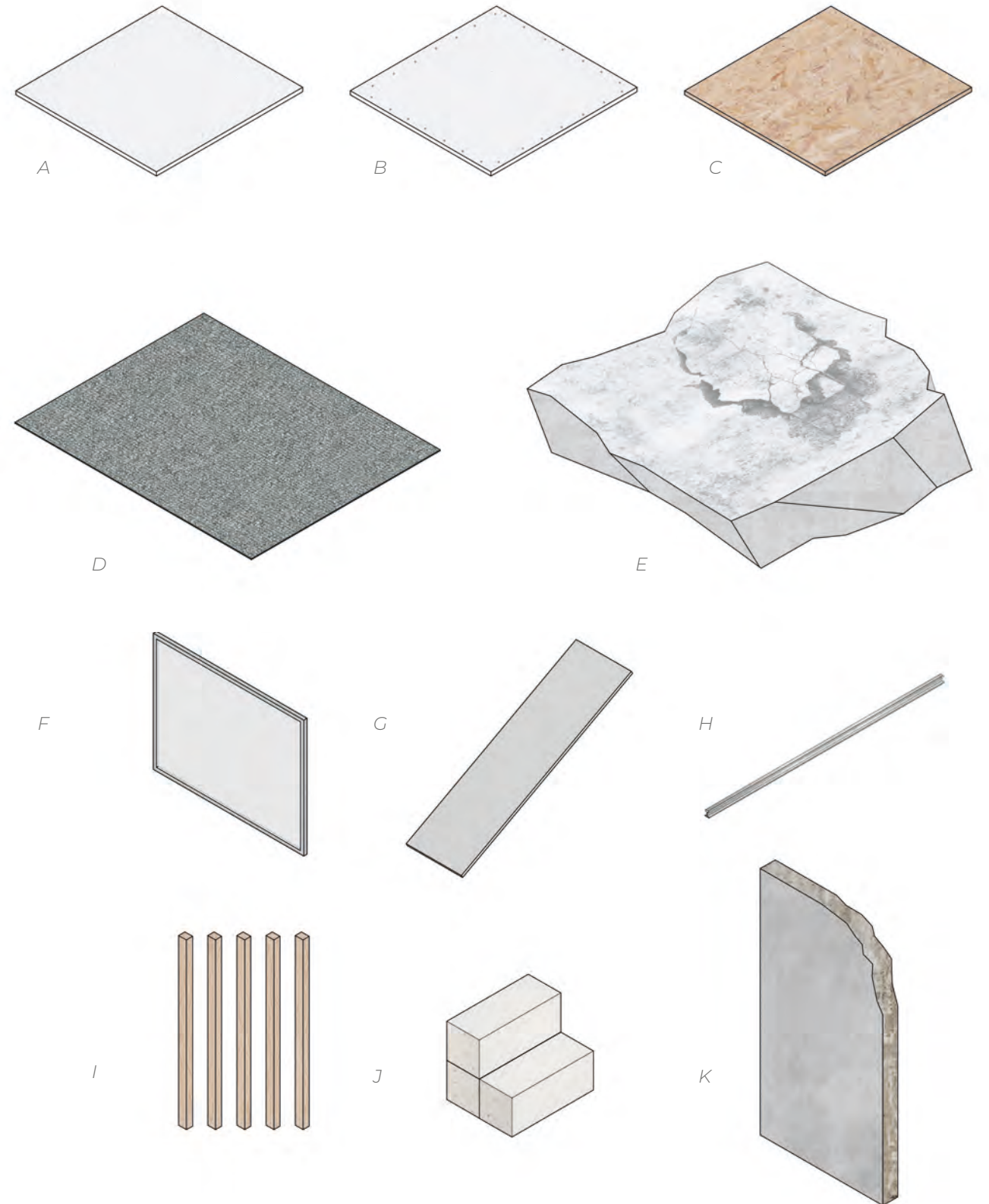
This was where the visitor first came in contact with the building's interior since the construction of the entrance in 1923. A vestibule with a small waiting room, as well as the kiosk, welcomed the visitor. The grand waiting hall was upstairs.

Today the entrance is hardly a grand one, despite its generous ceiling height. Walls enveloping the staircase does indeed make the stair the main character but the connection between the stairs and the rest of the building is unclear. When the walls are being taken down the visitor is in contact with the inner rooms directly. The collage is showing a close-up on the materials around the stairs during stripping.



## LIBRARY OF COLLECTED MATERIAL

- A Suspended ceiling boards of rock wool
- B Integrated lighting modules
- C OSB boards
- D Floor carpet
- E Pieces of concrete from slabs
- F Windows from control room
- G Exterior roof sheets of metal
- H Various metal components from installation rails
- I Various wood components from inner walls
- J Aerated concrete from inner walls
- K Concrete from inner walls





## REVIVING SPACE AND VIEWS

In this thesis' final stage the shop is brought back as a way of reusing and reviving old views and usage. Entresol levels are created by opening up the slab. Henceforth, there is a connection between the entrance and the rest of the building. The visitor is also able to see the river from here now that the walls are taken down. The metal is conceptually reused as a railing and some of the concrete and wood can be used as benches in the foyer.







## REVIVING MATERIAL AND USAGE

This is a representation of how the building can be used. Amerikaskjulet was once a public building, and it should be accessible for all, also in the present day. Since the building holds offices today, the image suggests future coworking spaces, as one part of its program.

The characteristic interior of Amerikaskjulet is once again clearly visible and stated, as opposed to present day's interior which resembles any 1980's office building.

The preserving of the atrium from the 80's renovation is a demonstration that this renovation added something in particular to the building. In the refurbishment in 1959 the original skylights were demolished, and to bring them in again was one of the ideas with the 1987 renovation. It is in this case not necessary to rewind all additions and alterations.

The shelf, furniture and the curtain are conceptual ideas of reusing the wood, steel and fabric.



## 07. DISCUSSION

### IDENTITY AND HERITAGE

A city's identity and heritage partly consists of its layers of buildings and infrastructure, and partly of its inhabitants and their culture. In a city as old as Gothenburg, traces from the past can be seen in many places in terms of buildings, ditches and barriers.

As a result of the small inner city harbours having been replaced with container complexes in the city outskirts, traces of Gothenburg's maritime history are being concealed and forgotten. It is the responsibility of people working with building design to care for this heritage as well as for future needs. However, at present time, development of a city is often manifested as forced change driven by economic profit and effectiveness. This desired newness runs the risk of stripping the city of its heritage and identity. This thesis on gentle transformation is relevant for the profession of architecture and for society as a whole, for the purpose of promoting other interests than economic gain. In a time where the effects of global warming are approaching, relying on and making use of existing building stock is essential.

### LISTENING TO AMERIKASKJULET

In this thesis I have, inspired by Littlefield and Lewis' (2007) essays on transformation of old buildings, viewed Amerikaskjulet as a psychological as well as a physical entity placed in its maritime heritage context. Amerikaskjulet is not merely an assembly of materials and should not be treated as such. It carries a unique history, being the only remaining building from that time with this purpose and it holds architectural values. Although it has some protection from the municipality and is not at risk for being demolished, Amerikaskjulet should be treated differently than it is today, and be highlighted as the valuable heritage building that it is in a way that

the public can access it. This could be performed as a transformative design by paying attention to its historical layers and honoring the origin while still adapting the building for future needs.

In this thesis, I have attempted to find the voice of Amerikaskjulet in order to transform it while highlighting its maritime traces and heritage. Through the method of stripping I have revealed its layers and uncovered what's beneath them. I have done so as an act of care. People should know of and be able to access the historical layers of Amerikaskjulet, what the building was and what it came to symbolise. Comparing old photos with present day drawings of the building, the most evident difference is the way the building is being used and who it is for.

There is also a big difference in the handling and management of the load bearing structure - the reinforced concrete pillars and beams. The construction is a self explanatory layer of time, outlining the architects' intention to begin with. In old photographs, they are the focal point. A building carrying that load simply must feature a strong and powerful core. The load bearing structure was then, and ought to be in present day, the main event of the building.

Accordingly, the transformation design in this thesis brings the pillars to the center of attention. By stripping away walls and even parts of the slabs, inspired by built projects of architects such as Pihlmann and Esch Sintzel, the spatial qualities are enhanced as opposed to the current office layout where the columns and beams are hidden.

### ADAPTIVE REUSE

In this project, there was an occurring dilemma with the emerging waste material as a result of the stripping. For instance, taking off the suspended ceiling would mean having a variety of compartments such as rock wool sheets and installation bars. Rather than ignoring the growing pile of leftovers, I integrated them in the thesis. Essentially inspired by Pihlmann Architects' project Thoravej 29 and its holistic approach, I have applied adaptive reuse as an act in this thesis. Although it's not the main part or ambition in this project, I intend the reuse of waste material to be an eye-opening inspiration for further discussion and research. Amerikaskjulet, a composition of layers and times, can be seen as its own system where materials can be extracted and live different lives.

Apart from contributing to less waste material, the reused pieces also demonstrate that adaptive reuse can be performed at different scales and to varying extents at the same time. Although the building still contains the same material, they are showcased in a different way that revives old views and highlights its core - the ceiling height and concrete structure.

### FURTHER RESEARCH

The values of Amerikaskjulet analysed in this thesis have evidently not been limited to the time when it was constructed, but rather each layer of time and its belonging alterations are valued and respected. This led to the facade being separated from this thesis. The justification behind this decision lies mainly in how the building is perceived from the inside, which is completely opposite of what it has been. The exterior has much resemblance with the modernist refurbishment that was done in 1959 and to undo this refurbishment in an effort to revert to its original design would not be a gentle or slow act of transformation. Although with further research, the facade would perhaps have its own voice in order for Amerikaskjulet to be fully transformed.

### CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

Transformation is often carried out as a hastily and violent procedure. The method of slow stripping in this project has been a valuable tool to interpret the boundaries between layers and to reflect on how a building is a composite of its materials. By transforming old buildings in a slow way and at the same time retrospecting to find other values that are not evident at first glance, heritage can be maintained and revived.

This thesis is an investigation and application of a method. The process is the project's core and can be read as a result. As opposed to a fierce quick demolition where everything ends up in a pile of rubble, by dismantling slowly and by hand new layers become visible. The process of subtraction and stripping can be important tools of the design process. Since all layers are not visible in the initial phases, it's beneficial to not have a decided arrangement for the outcome or the found materials, since what will be uncovered might alter the conditions.

The reference projects of Pihlmann Architects and Esch Sintzel inspired this thesis mainly with its concrete core and holistic approach, demonstrating views before and during reconstruction. These building transformations are, as opposed to Moor Street Hotel's gentle and slow dismantling, rather forceful and harsh. The difference between before construction and the result is striking. Although the transformations were a way of listening to the building and its highlighted core, there is not quite anything gentle about them. In this thesis, some situations allowed slow transformation whereas the subtraction of the slabs in the creation of the entresol levels is in a way a brutal handling of the core of Amerikaskjulet. This process and investigation of the method of stripping, is the focal point of the project.

This thesis' result demonstrating a suggestive future scenario where a lot of material is stripped, and old



views are revived, could be interpreted as different outcomes. On the one hand, the result is read as such: the finished room prepared to being used. On the other hand, the result could be a part of the process of building transformation. The continuation could be performed in a similar way by stripping layers or this could be read as a future-proof design protected from any potential alterations. Any future program of the building has purposely been excluded from this thesis. Henceforth, it is challenging to state that the result of this thesis is how Amerikaskjulet should end up. Even the program is represented conceptually in this thesis' result. Also, a building transformation is never fully finished and is an ongoing process. It is learned by Brand's 6S theory that even the small scale changes put stress on the structure and space plan meaning transformation is constant.

When I played by the remnants of the Eriksberg industrial area as a child, I felt like I was part of something big and important. Becoming an adult and seeing the world shrinking certainly takes away some of the magic that being a child in a big world has. I believe in the significance of preserving and reviving our cultural heritage, to enable and promote this feeling of belonging in the world, even for us who are no longer children in a big world.

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F47. No title. (1961) [photo] © Göran Duvander Retrieved 2025-03-26 from [https://live.staticflickr.com/2262/2390114440\\_e07bca920b\\_o\\_d.jpg](https://live.staticflickr.com/2262/2390114440_e07bca920b_o_d.jpg)

F48. Göteborgs stads varuskjul vid Stigbergskajen (1912) [photo] Retrieved 2025-04-18 from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TEKA0018388.jpg>

F49. Vy över hamnen 1970-talet. (1970's) [photo] Photo © Hamnarbetarförbundet Retrieved 2025-05-13 from <https://arvet.hamn.nu/media/2305>

F50. No title. (1928) [photo] Unknown Retrieved 2025-05-15 from <https://www.hembygd.se/bjorketorp/plats/291973/picture/2381425>

F51. No title. (1930's) [photo] Unknown Retrieved 2025-03-26 from <https://www.facebook.com/sjofartsmuseetakvarietgoteborg/posts/amerikakajen-med-amerikaskjulet-har-varit-ett-avg%C3%B6teborgs-f%C3%B6nster-mot-v%C3%A4rlden-h/945222304271667/>

F52. Lyft till 2:a vån 32:an inget skyddsräcke (1959) [photo] Photo © Hamnarbetarförbundet Retrieved 2025-03-08 from <https://arvet.hamn.nu/media/10337>

F53. Passagerare Amerikaskjulet, Göteborg (n.d) [photo] Retrieved 2025-04-18 from <https://www.mynewsdesk.com/se/sjofartsmuseet-akvariet/images/passagerare-amerikaskjulet-goeteborg-437797>



