Redemption of a Ruin

Creating Space for a Museum in the Ruins of Wargöns AB

Johanna Bjurek & Wilma Hultgren
Chalmers School of Architecture
Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering
2026

Examiner: Björn Gross
Supervisor: Johan Ranch

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Figure 1 (cover). Exterior perspective.

Abstract

When large industrial sites shut down, they leave behind more than empty buildings. They also erode the local identity that once formed around them.This impact can be observed in Vargön, a small town on the outskirts of Vänersborg, where the last remains of the former paper mill known as Wargöns AB can be found. Once the heart of a thriving industry, the site now stands abandoned. The former main office, and only remaining building, has been left to its own devices since the closure of the mill in 2008. The office was further damaged by a fire in 2020, and this year the municipality of Vänersborg revised the detailed development plan and removed its previously protected status. This thesis positions itself as an intervention in this destructive trajectory and instead proposes a transformation of the office and its surroundings.

The thesis explores how the remains of the old main office could be reimagined into an art museum, in a pursuit to reactivate the old mill site and strengthen the local identity of Vargön. Through a *research by design* methodology, the thesis develops strategies for integrating new programs and spatial experiences within the existing fabric. The design proposal focuses not only on the transformation of the old office but also includes the addition of a new structure, exploring how these elements together can create a dialogue between what is and what once was. Combined with a redesigned landscape and a repositioning of the historic gate as the primary entrance, the project seeks to reconnect the site with the town of Vargön. Through mediating between the past and the present, the proposal demonstrates how architectural transformation can revive neglected industrial heritage and rediscover qualities in abandoned spaces.

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been a rewarding experience, made even more enjoyable by the support of the people around us. We would especially like to thank our supervisor, Johan Ranch, for engaging discussions and valuable guidance throughout the process, our examiner, Björn Gross, for insightful comments and feedback, and our deskmates for all the support, encouragement and distractions along the way.

Contents

Figure 2 (opposite). Workers leaving Wargöns AB, 1949.

PART I

Introduction

Introduction

Barasch, co-founder of the Lowline project in New York, discusses the concepts of ruins and redemptions in his book *Redemption and Ruin in Architecture* (2019). He explains that spaces are constantly abandoned, for many reasons, and no physical structure can remain useful for eternity. Structures of war fall silent in times of peace, businesses go out of business, entertainment venues lose their crowds. These structures are on occasion left as they are, for future generations to either preserve or demolish. Despite this familiar occurrence, the discovery of an abandoned structure often evokes strong feelings of loss and nostalgia. Time and neglect allow the place to crumble around the edges, letting nature reclaim it and become a blank canvas for marks of informal use (Barasch, 2019). So too is the case for the ruins of Wargöns AB, a once thriving paper mill outside of Vänersborg. The crumbling walls and scarred terrain tell the story of an industry that not only shaped the site, but also gave birth to the town of Vargön itself.

Purpose and Aim

The old main office of Wargöns AB has been abandoned since the closure of the mill in 2008. Recently, the municipality of Vänersborg has approved a change in the detailed development plan to allow for demolition of the previously listed building (Vänersborgs kommun, 2026). Thereby, threatening to erase the last remains of what made Vargön Vargön. This thesis aims to challenge the current trajectory by proposing a transformation of the old office into an art museum, along with the addition of a new building at site. Through these interventions, the project seeks both to rediscover existing values and to create space for new experiences and memories. In doing so, it aims to strengthen the sense of local identity, at present lost following the closure of the mill.

Research Questions

(01) **How could the industrial ruins of Wargöns AB be transformed into an art museum in order to reclaim local identity?**

(02) **How could a new building be introduced at the site in conversation with the existing building?**

Methodology

This thesis spans across four main phases, driven primarily through a *research by design* methodology. However, the initial phase (1), comprising the theoretical framework, is *research for design*. This theoretical part encompasses literature reviews as well as analysis of built references. The following phase (2) establishes the context of the thesis through an analysis of the site and its surroundings. Drawing from these two phases and further developed through an iterative process of sketching, modelmaking, drawing and digital modelling, the third phase (3) comprises the design proposal. The final phase (4) encompasses discussion in which the research questions are revisited to evaluate the outcome and provide concluding remarks.

Delimitations

This thesis is an explorative work into *one* possible future for the ruins of Wargöns AB and will not explore other possible programs. Neither current political decisions nor ambitions will be considered. Profitability is not at the center of the work, and the thesis rather argues from the standpoint that built heritage carries implicit responsibilities.

Due to the risk of collapse, it was not possible to enter the building thus the work is based upon drawings and documents provided by the municipality of Vänersborg, as well as on site visits. The assessment of the structural integrity of the old office is based on a technical report carried out following the fire in 2020. It is likely that the condition of the building, due to the lack of weatherproofing, has deteriorated since then. However, this speculation will not be taken into consideration.

The total size of the plot where Wargöns AB once was located is roughly 20 000 m², however, the thesis will mainly focus on the old office and the area closest to it. The rest of the site will be seen as a delimitation for the span of this thesis, but could however be possible future work.

Background

The process of deindustrialization and changing global economic dynamics have led to the abandonment and demolition of many industrial sites (Nocca & Remroy, 2025). Once central both to economic growth and urban development as well as to local identity and ways of life, these industries have now become residual spaces (Urbact, 2025). While still physically present, they have become socially disconnected from their surroundings. The closure of industries results not only in vacant land and redundant buildings, but also in a rupture of the identities of places that once depended on them. This situation is described by American sociologist Bell in his 1973 book *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* as particularly evident in smaller towns shaped around one large employer. In those positions, the industry has played a bigger role than only the one of an employer. The corporation structures everyday life, shapes a shared sense of purpose and becomes a social support system (Bell, 1973). However, as opposed to institutions such as family or the church - traditional sources of social support - the employer always strives to remain profitable (Bell, 1973). As manufacturing has declined in importance in the global West, production has either been outsourced to countries with lower labour costs or replaced by automation (Ergen, 2022). Consequently, many employers have either relocated or closed, leaving these industrial towns with losses extending past purely an economical one. Any remaining buildings become ambiguous in their memory - both as reminders of a past that no longer exists but also as a unique testimony to the technological, economic and social evolution of our society (Nocca & Remroy, 2025).

The old office of Wargöns AB, the last remains of a once extensive industrial complex, illustrates this phenomena. It embodies both the material and symbolic traces of the town’s industrial past yet its many years of abandonment and recent changes in the detailed development plan suggest an uncertain future for the former mill.

Figure 3 (opposite). The old drawing office at Wargöns AB.

PART II

Theory

Theory

Value of Age

Whenever one proposes the transformation of an old structure, especially one in poor condition, the question inevitably arises - why should it be preserved? Why preserve buildings at all? It is difficult to argue this point purely from an objective perspective and impossible to argue from an economical one. Researchers Aigwi et al. (2023) argue that preserving and reusing existing buildings should be a key strategy in addressing the growing need for sustainable development. Every existing structure embodies significant amounts of energy and materials from its original construction. By prolonging a structure's lifespan rather than opting for demolition, these resources are conserved, construction waste is minimised, and the demand for new material production is avoided or reduced (Aigwi et al., 2023).

Beyond these environmental considerations, there exist equally significant yet less tangible reasons for preservation. In the foreword to Plevoets and Van Cleempoels 2019 book *Adaptive Reuse of the Built Environment* architecture professor Stone states that there is an increasing need to retain our current built environment. Existing buildings form part of our collective memory and are essential physical contributions to the built environment, whether they are structures of great historic significance or old buildings simply having outlived their intended function. Existing structures also embody authenticity - something that is becoming more and more important in today's digital age. She emphasizes that in an era dominated by mass production and digital perfection, there is a growing yearning for spaces that convey character, individuality, and a tangible connection to what once was. In this context, age within an object is therefore seen as a great value - and something that already resides within our existing building stock (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019, foreword by Stone).

For Wargöns AB, these perspectives highlight the need for transformation beyond only environmental concerns. The structure carries not only material values but also intangible qualities not replicable in new construction. While a transformation may be more complex, and more expensive, the demolition of the old office would result in irreversible loss of value. The value of age embedded in the old office, together with its connection to the history of Vargön, are qualities that this thesis aims to retain and expand upon.

Adaptive Reuse

Before World War II, the majority of buildings considered cultural heritage were ancient or medieval. However, after the extensive bombing in Europe during World War II, the value of buildings from other historical periods and other typologies were being acknowledged. This large building stock that potentially could fall within the need of conserving brought architects and conservationists closer, and thus became a starting point for the practice of *adaptive reuse* (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019). The 1964 *Venice Charter* states that 'the conservation of monuments is always facilitated by making use of them for some socially useful purpose' (ICOMOS, 1964, article 5). In the 1970s, *adaptive reuse* was properly established as a discipline (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019).

Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2019) introduces the concepts of *adaptive reuse* as the process of restoring and repairing buildings for new and continued use. It is not to be stuck in time, but to allow the building fabric to change and to host new functions. They consider the existing building stock to be rich and emphasize how it contains several layers of histories, narratives and materials. Through approaching the host space as a *palimpsest*, made of several layers over time, meaningful additions can create a strong relationship between old and new. *Adaptive reuse* should not only aim at respecting what is left from the past to the present, but rather to look for values and memories

of the host space to strengthen said relationship through sequences of tangible and intangible associations (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019).

Plevoets and Van Cleempoel highlight that *adaptive reuse* has become a key incentive for urban regeneration, with the functional use and reuse of historical buildings at the center of it. Beyond successfully repurposing the existing building stock, it also creates and strengthens the sense of local identity. Regeneration happens not only through said reuse of existing buildings, but also through the reactivation of local traditions, narratives and craftsmanship, creating continuity and a strong identity (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019).

Within the concept of *adaptive reuse*, the remains of Wargöns AB can be understood as a *palimpsest*, carrying layers of industrial history, connecting it to the town of Vargön. The building, and site, will be considered as resources where existing qualities will form the basis for new spatial experiences. By introducing a museum program, the proposal seeks to reactivate the site and reconnect it with the town. The proposal will build on the premise that through *adaptive reuse* the life of the structure can be extended and new elements and functions can be introduced. Through these interventions, the goal is to strengthen the relationship between old and new and rediscover the site's layered history.

Local Identity

Professor and landscape architect Shao et al. (2017) attempts to define the concept of local identity, describing it as a vital component in urban development. Following increased globalization, it has become increasingly important to focus on a smaller scale identity that is beneficial to local communities. A strong local identity can serve as a major attraction both for people and businesses. It has also been recognised as an important factor in shaping the relationship between a city and its inhabitants. Identity, however, remains a dynamic concept that is difficult to define precisely. It depends on multiple surroundings factors, such as environment, time, historical heritage and traditions. However, Shao et al. (2017) conclude that a strong local identity should provide continuity for development, preserve traditions of local communities and most importantly, provide a sense of belonging. Strong local identity spans across diverse dimensions, including physical, social, sensory, and memory-related aspects, all of which shape how people experience and relate to a location (Shao et al., 2017).

The concept of local identity acts as a useful framework for integrating various elements that contribute to the uniqueness of a place. It thereby strengthens the relationship between people and their surroundings, aiming at creating environments that people feel connected to and invested in (Shao et al., 2017).

If the transformation of Wargöns AB intends to strengthen the local identity of Vargön, considerations should move beyond purely aesthetic aspects. While architecture alone cannot address all challenges, it can be a meaningful tool to reconnect the site to the town and to the historical heritage of the former mill. At the same time, it can provide opportunities for new experiences, making space for both continuity and change.

Built References

In addition to the literature review, built references are within transformation projects important as guidelines and inspiration. By analysing methods and features in built references, the knowledge and former experiences in similar projects can strengthen one's own.

Valencia

The original building dates from 1861 and was designed by H.C. Stilling as a dance pavilion in Vesterbro. Eventually the building lost visibility in the urban context in between built structures around it (Dorte Mandrup, 2014).

The renovation aimed to bring back its spatial qualities and give it a new function while respecting heritage. The former dance pavilion is made into a triple-height hall with a skylight running the length of the room. Internally, existing walls of the hall are maintained and gently renovated to preserve character (Dorte Mandrup).

Authors' Reflections

Through the layering of old and new, the building retains its identity but is adapted for modern use and preserves authenticity. Original spatial qualities are exposed and new interventions are inserted with clarity but restraint to draw attention to the new structure within the new shell. New materials and load bearing elements are introduced in conversation with the brick shell, still with respect to the history of the building.

Copenhagen, Denmark.
Built in 1861.
Transformation completed in 2014 by Dorte Mandrup.
Dance pavilion transformed into offices.

Figure 4. Valencia.

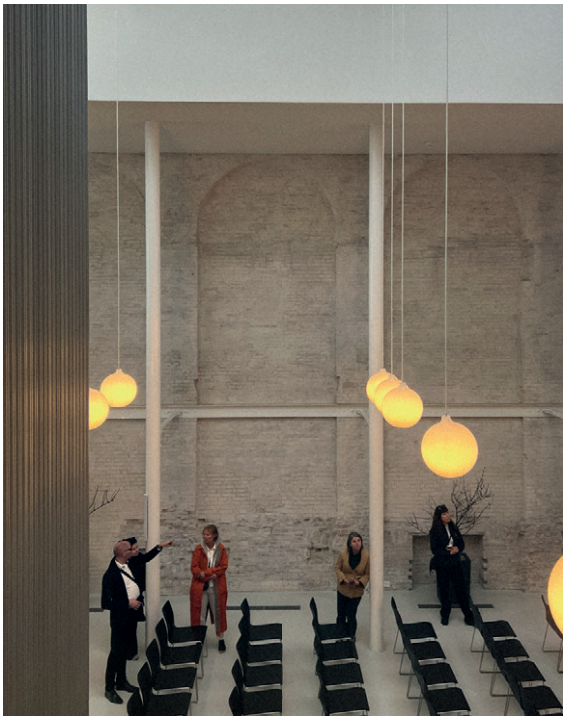


Figure 5. Valencia.

Neues Museum

The Neues Museum in Berlin was designed by Friedrich August Stüler and originally completed in 1859. Extensive bombing during World War II left the building in ruins. In the context of reuniting a divided city, the restoration of the museum later became a matter of national significance (David Chipperfield Architects, 2009).

The restoration by David Chipperfield Architects began in 1997 and was completed in 2009 and has since gained much recognition for its innovative approach to restoration. For the practice, it was important to respect all phases of the building's history, including the many years it spent as a ruin. The transformation is neither an exact reconstruction nor a contrasting contemporary addition. New materials are carefully inserted in the existing fabric and the result is a convincing, modern interpretation of the 19th century building (David Chipperfield Architects, 2009).

Authors' Reflections

Beautifully translated old facades creating a continuity, but without mimicking. The large stone staircase marks a new intervention through its simple, more modern shapes, but has a heaviness that gives a permanent expression.

Berlin, Germany.
Built in 1859.
Transformation completed in 2009 by David Chipperfield Architects.

Figure 6. Staircase in Neues Museum.

Figure 7. Facade of Neues Museum.

Figure 8 (opposite). Found at site.

PART III

Context

Figure 9. Map of Sweden.

The Site

Vargön is a small town of approximately 5000 inhabitants (Statistiska centralbyrån, 2024). Situated 5 km southeast of Vänersborg, the seat of the regional council for Region Västra Götaland. The site of Wargöns AB is located a 5 minute walk from the center of Vargön.

Figure 10. Map of Region Västra Götaland.

Figure 11. Vargön 1:10 000.

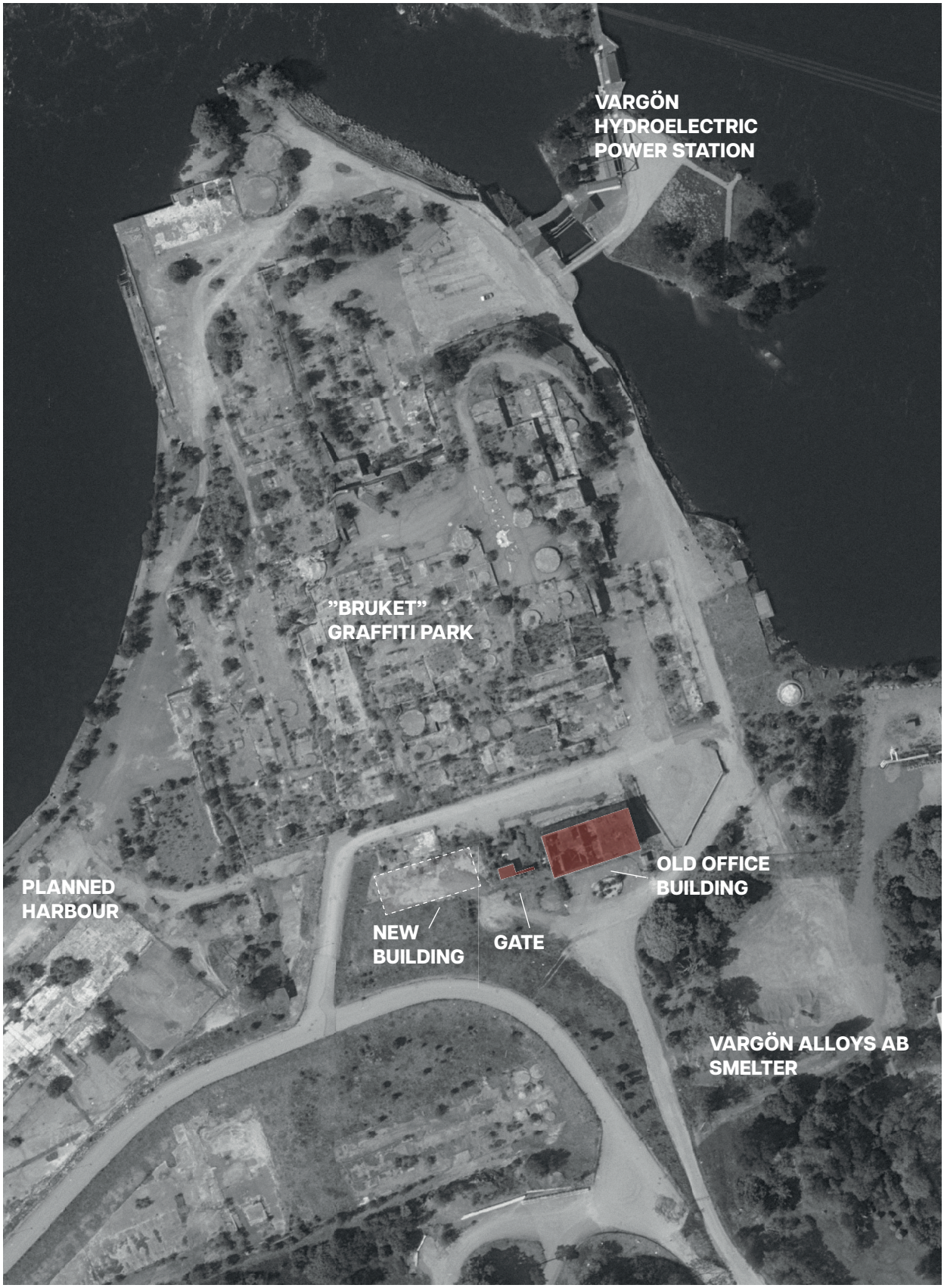


Figure 12. Aerial view of site.

History

The history of Wargöns AB began in 1869, when canal and railway engineer Nils Ericsson founded a groundwood mill for the production of pulp outside of Vänersborg, by Göta Älv. Its location by the river was strategic, providing access to hydropower that could fuel the emerging industry. In 1873, paper production began, and the family business evolved into what became known as Wargöns AB. Originally, Vargön was merely the name of the island where the industry was established and the nearby village and its railway station were known as Rånnum. As the industry expanded, so did the surrounding settlement, and the name Vargön gradually came to refer to the entire area. During the 1940s, the canal separating the island from the mainland was filled in and the island of Vargön was no more, making the mill synonymous with the town (Bergström, 2009).

The paper production at Vargön continued for many years, until it was announced in August of 2008 that the paper mill was no longer profitable and would close (Holmen AB, 2008). At the time of the announcement, Wargöns AB was the municipality's largest single employer. The closure marked the end of 140 years of industrial history and left 340 people unemployed, a harsh blow to the small town of Vargön (Gustafsson, 2008).

The following year, the vast majority of the buildings at site were demolished, sparing only the old main office and the characteristic gate with its adjacent gatekeeper hut. In August of 2010, the municipality of Vänersborg purchased the plot with high hopes that it would soon be repurchased and redeveloped (Dahl, 2011). However, nothing happened and the old office was left to its own devices. In 2020, a fire severely damaged the building, leaving only a brick shell. The municipality now hopes that the change in the detailed development plan to lift the demolition ban will facilitate a sale of the plot (Sköld, 2024).

Figure 13. Old office, 1890s.

Figure 14. Old office, 1930s.

Figure 15. Old office (right), 1949.

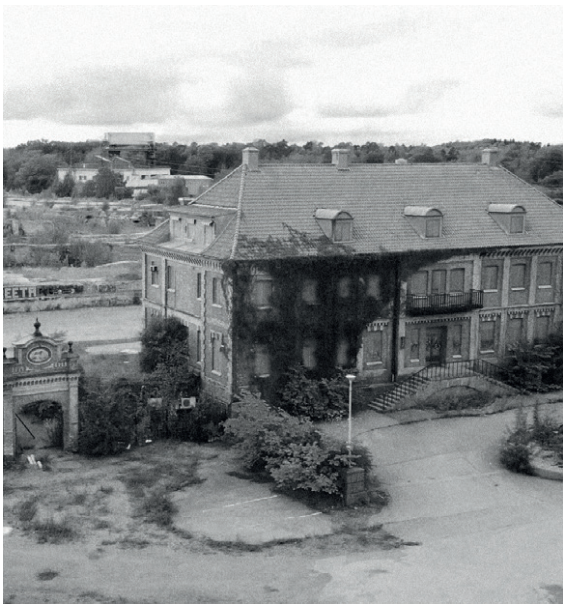


Figure 16. Old office, 2010s.

The Old Office

The old office of Wargöns AB is a two storey building with a basement, constructed in red and yellow brick. Since its original construction in the late 1800s, it has undergone several extensions and adaptations. The southern part, indicated in red in figure 18, is the original structure from 1888 and consists of load bearing, massive brick walls. The ground floor is constructed with two-stone thick walls. Steel beams have been utilised when needed to achieve larger spans. The foundation is in granite and the floor structure between basement and ground is presumably done in a combination of brick and steel with a possible concrete casting on top, a combination typical for its time. Both the roof structure and the floor structure between the ground floor and first floor were originally in timber (Wallin & Holm, 2020).

In the 1940s, the building was extended to the north. The inner walls and the floor structure were this time carried out in in-situ cast concrete, which explains the shift seen in wall thickness between the two parts. However, the exterior walls and basement were constructed in similar manner to the original construction, with a possible inner addition of concrete in the basement (Wallin & Holm, 2020).

Figure 17. Facades of the old office (right), the gate and additional office building (left).

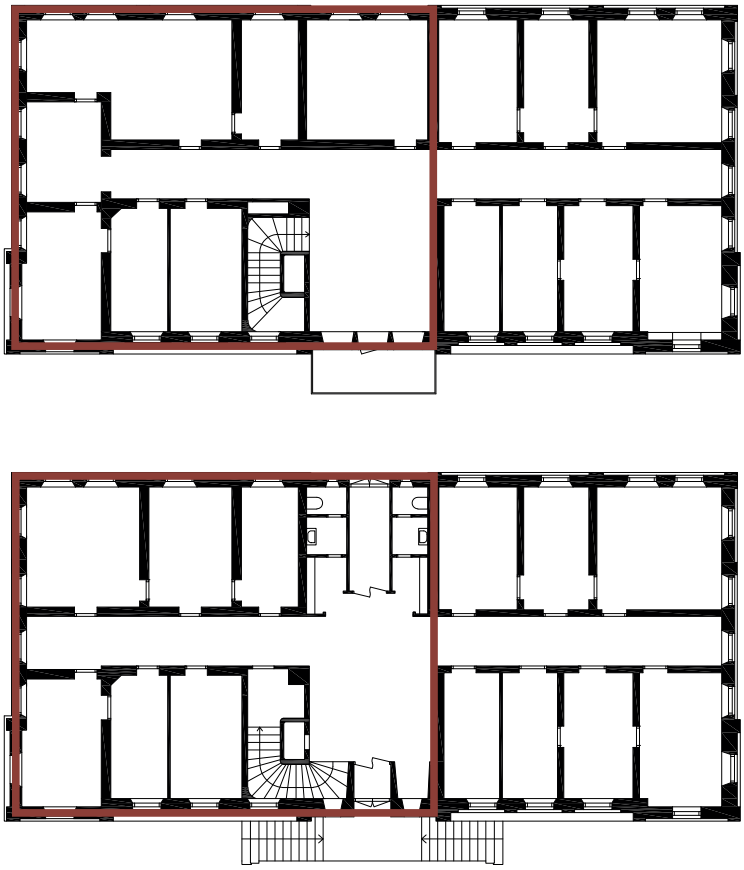


Figure 18. Plans of the old office. Original plan indicated in red.

Current State

The Old Office

In the 2020 fire, the wooden roof construction was completely eradicated, along with the timber floor structure in the original part of the building. The steel beams have been deformed from the heat and are at risk of collapse. The same applies to the balcony on the western facade, which is considered to be at serious risk of failure. All installations are assumed to be unusable and there is a prevailing risk of smaller building parts falling down. Apart from these damages, the exterior and interior brick walls remain in good condition despite the fire, showing limited signs of deterioration. The same applies for the concrete interior walls. Overall, the structural system is assessed to be stable and its load bearing capacity intact (Wallin & Holm, 2020).

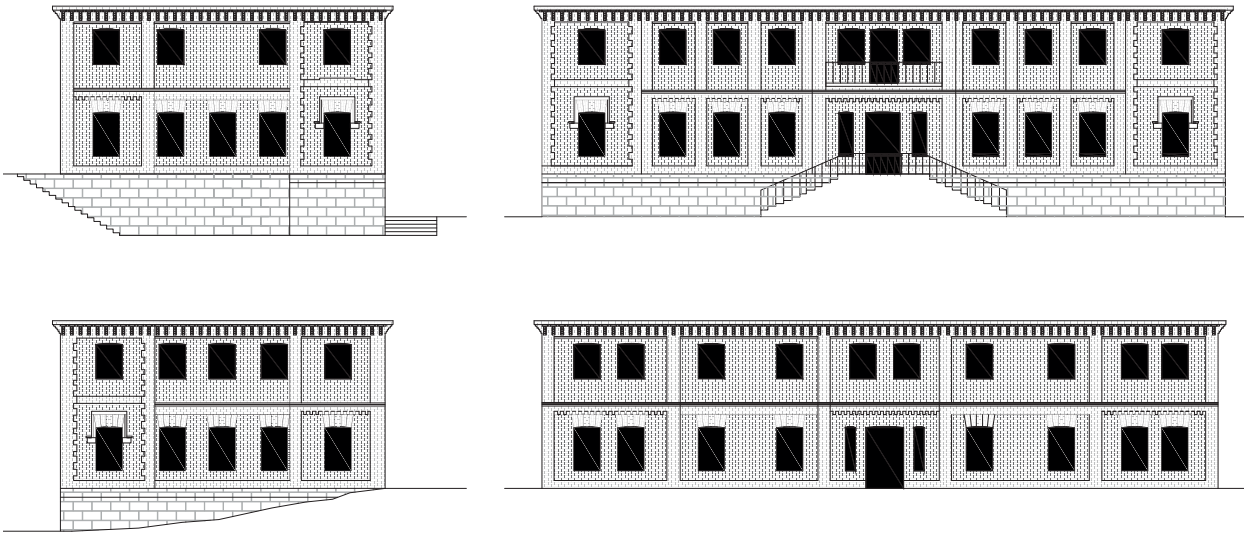


Figure 19. Facades of the old office, current state.

Figure 20. Photograph of the old office.

Figure 21. Photograph. Part of east facade.

Figure 22. Photograph. Windowsill.

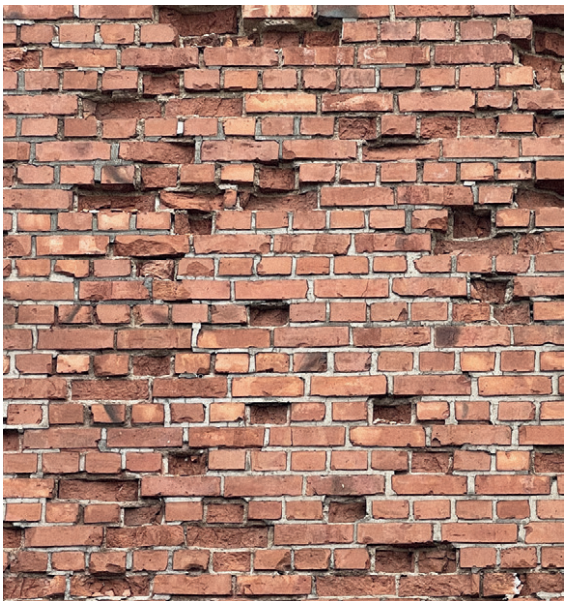


Figure 23. Photograph. Brick facade.

Figure 24. Photograph. South facade.

Figure 25. Photograph. Part of west facade.

Figure 26. Photograph. Brick details.

Figure 27. Photograph. Part of east facade.

Figure 28. Photograph. Brick details.

The Gate

The gate was constructed around the same time as the old office, similarly in red and yellow brick. Before the canal was filled in in the 1940s, the gate stood at the end of the bridge connecting Vargön to the mainland (Bergström, 2009). Thus, all workers passed through the gate when arriving at and leaving work, giving it a strong symbolic value. After the canal was filled in, its symbolism became less prominent. However, it remains a strong identity marker for the old mill. The sign on the gate showcasing a wolf is the symbol of Wargöns AB, 'varg' in Swedish meaning 'wolf'.

The adjacent gatekeeper hut is a small brick cottage. It appears to be in good structural condition, but has been exposed to vandalism over the years.

Figure 29. Photograph of the gate.

Figure 30. Photograph of the gate.

Figure 31. Photograph of the gate.

The Site

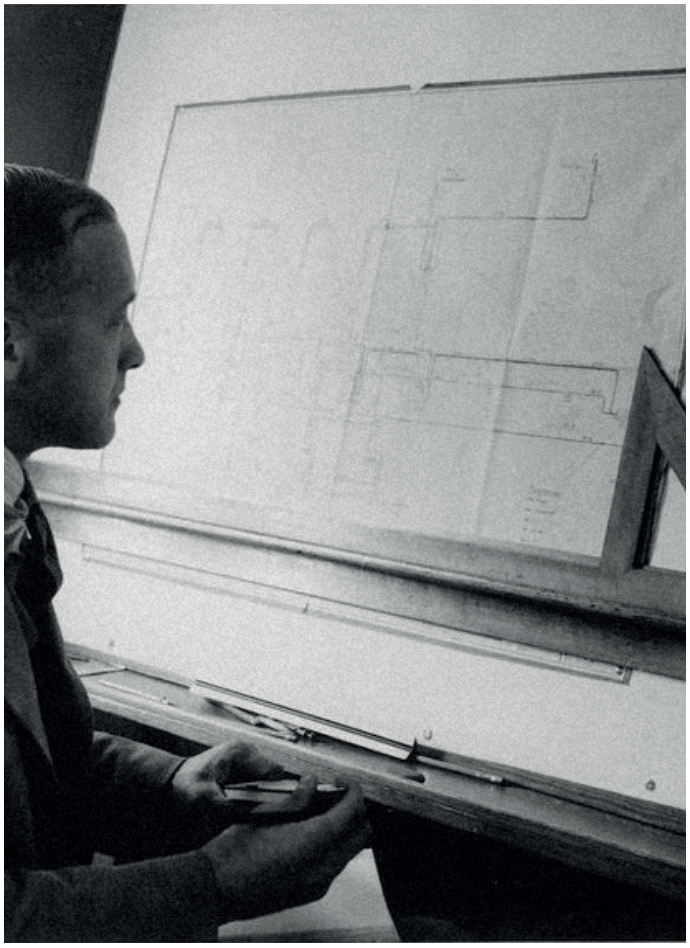
The 20 000 m² site housed many different buildings during the active years of the mill. As they all were demolished following the closure of the mill, only foundations and traces of the former structures are visible at the site today. The topography varies with large height differences, telling a story in its rough, post industrial landscape. Over the years of abandonment, the site has developed into a space for informal culture. Today, it hosts, among other things, an impressive graffiti collection and a skate park.

Figure 32. Photograph of the site.

Figure 33. Photograph of the site.

Figure 34. Photograph of the site and west facade of old office.

Figure 35 (opposite). Archive photograph from Wargöns AB.



PART IV

Design

Design Framework

In this thesis, the existing building is treated as a *palimpsest*, where traces of time are preserved and reinterpreted. Through continuity, reimagination and addition, the proposal is grounded in an *adaptive reuse* strategy where the aim is to extend the building's life by introducing a new layer rather than returning it to a former state, aligning with principles defined by Plevoets and Van Cleempoel.

Similarly to how Chipperfield Architects viewed the years Neues spent as a ruin as just as important as any other epoque in its history, this thesis aims to do the same. Interventions should not be an act of erasure, but rather an act of directing and expanding on the existing character of the site. Furthermore, there will be a clear distinction between old and new. The clear visibility of time and change creates a balance between memory and presence. Through this design approach, the proposal allows a dialogue between the past and the present. By letting memory and renewal coexist, the transformation aims to not be a replacement, but rather a continuation. Thus, the new additions do not replicate the past, but respond to it, balancing remaining and introduced elements.

Design Strategy

The design strategies are formulated as following:

- Respect all phases in the history of the building, including the time as a ruin. Transform existing buildings with careful adaptations that improve accessibility, functionality, and spatial quality.
- Strengthen the identity of the area by highlighting historical traces, spatial sequences, and important points of arrival.
- Introduce new architecture that relates to the scale, rhythm, and atmosphere of the environment without replication. Additions take inspiration from the existing structures and from the history of the mill, but do not mimic.
- Create a dialogue between past and present where existing structures and new additions complement each other.

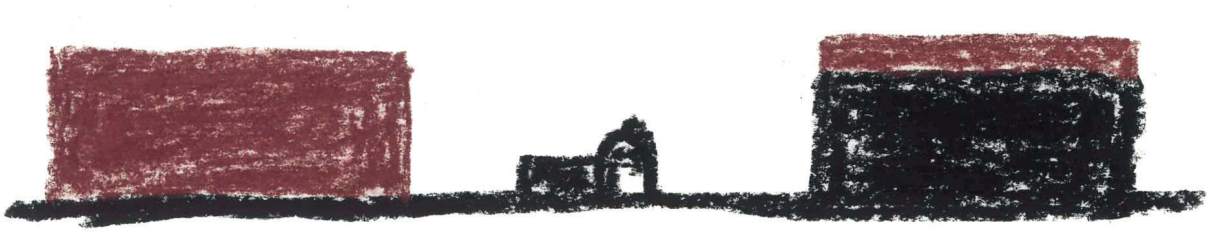


Figure 36. Interventions in facade. Red marks additions.

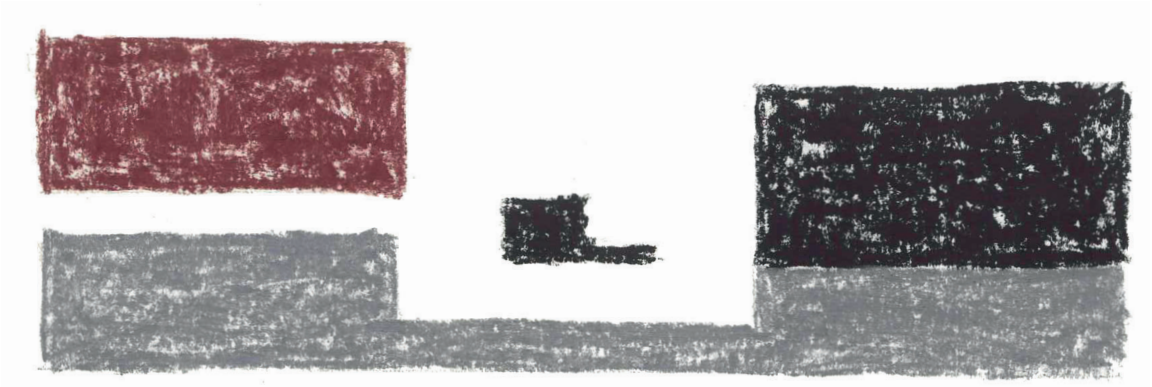


Figure 37. Interventions in plan. Red marks new building. Grey marks reindroduced water.

Figure 38. Exterior perspective.

Figure 39. Site plan 1:2000.

Program

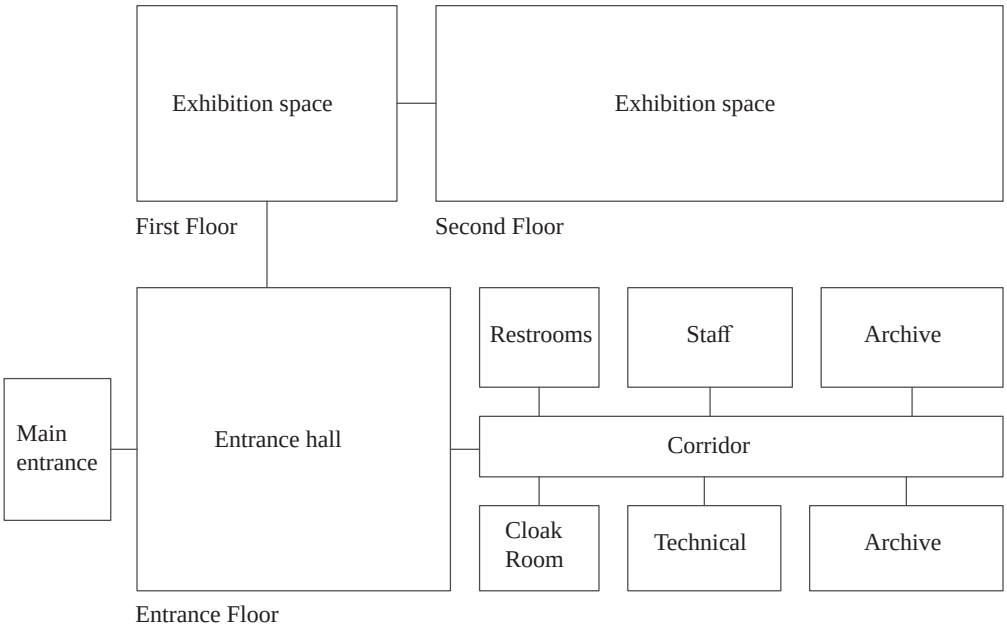
Old office

Entrance hall	150 m²
Reception & shop	20 m²
Restrooms	25 m²
Cloakroom	17 m²
Staff	33 m²
Archive	63 m²
Technical	22 m²
Exhibition space	470 m²

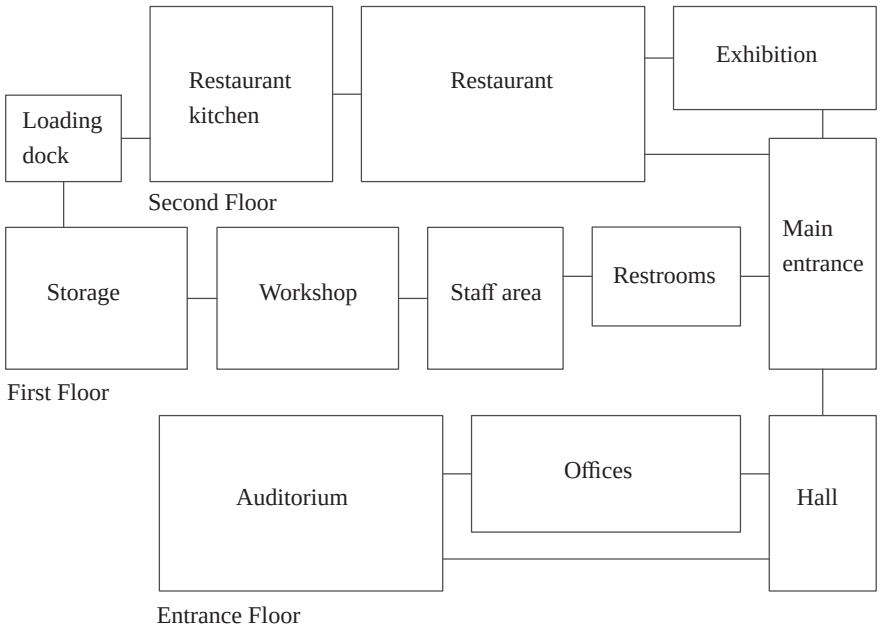
New building

Entrance	37 m²
Workshop	36 m²
Restrooms	20 m²
Loading dock	10 m²
Storage	30 m²
Waste	13 m²
Ventilation	20 m²
Staff changing room	21 m²
Restaurant	85 m²
Restaurant kitchen	41 m²
Exhibition	55 m²
Auditorium	66 m²
Restrooms	16 m²
Offices	46 m²
Conference room	28 m²
Staff cantine	35 m²

Space Program



Old office



New building

Figure 40. Approaching.

Locating the Project

Water is reintroduced at the site as a homage to the former canal that once separated Vargön from the mainland, aiming to reconnect to its history as well as providing reflections of the buildings. It also helps steer the movement towards the gate to achieve a new entrance sequence. A core idea of the transformation proposal is to strengthen the gate's position at the site and once again let it serve as the entrance to the area, thereby reconnecting to the history of the site.

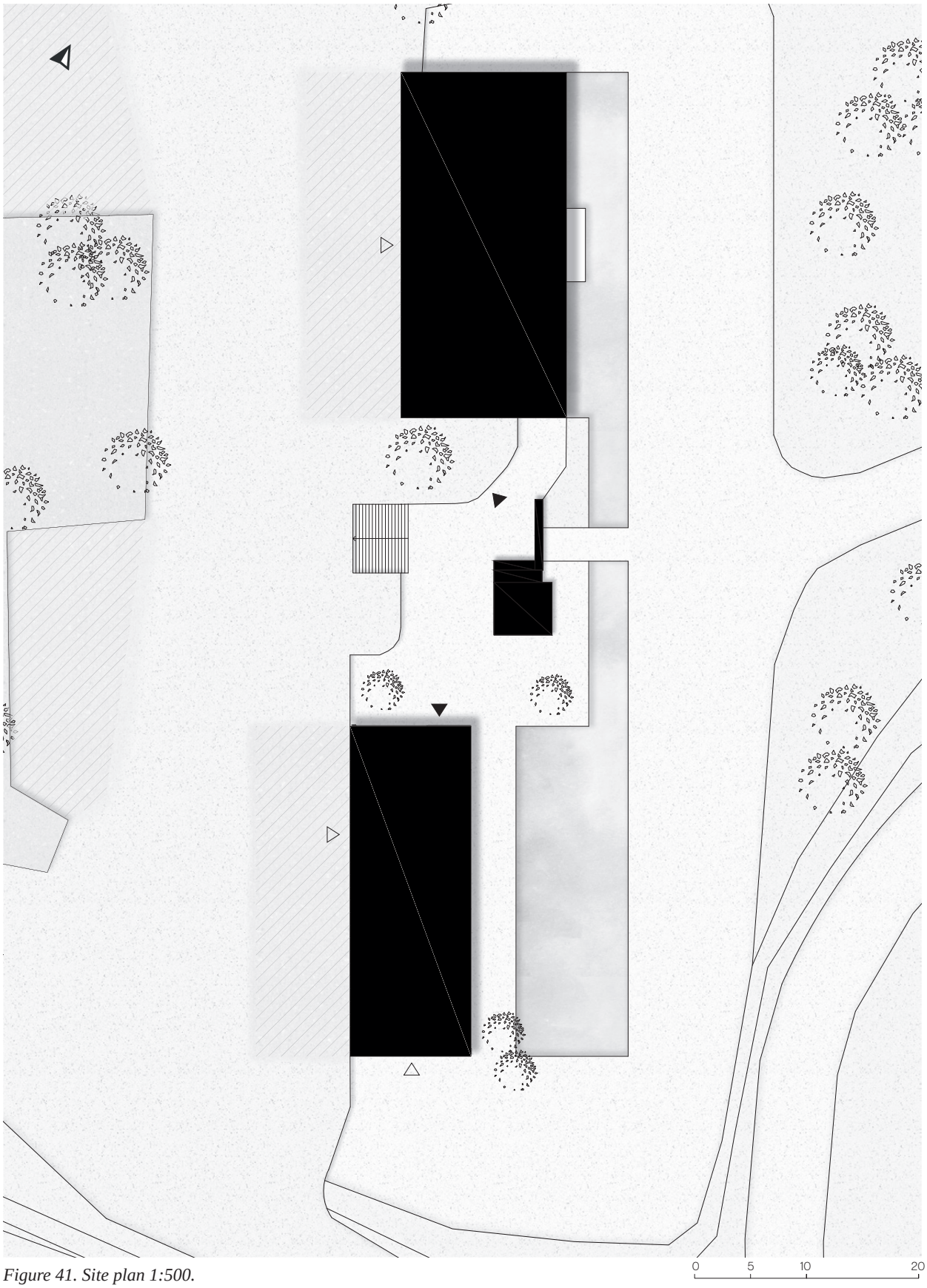


Figure 41. Site plan 1:500.

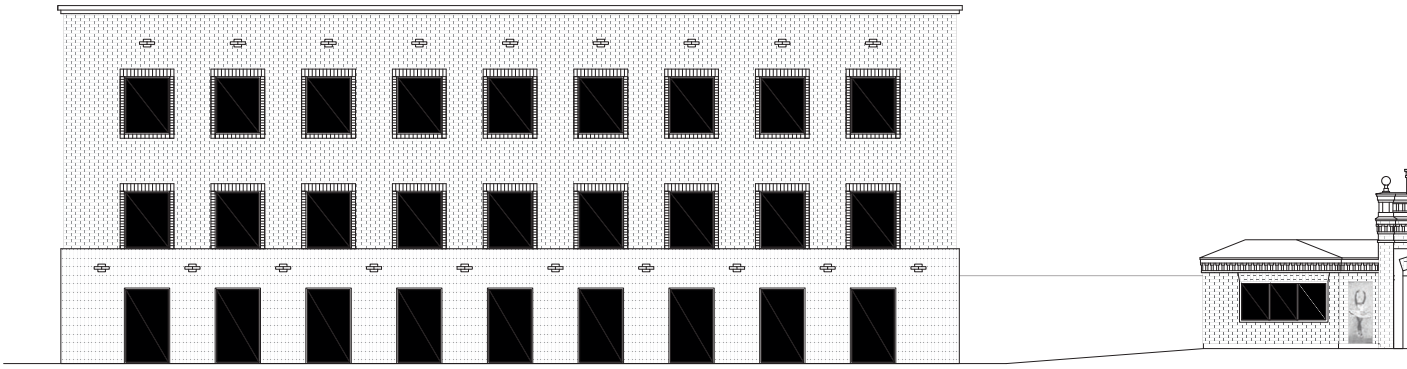


Figure 42. East elevation 1:250.

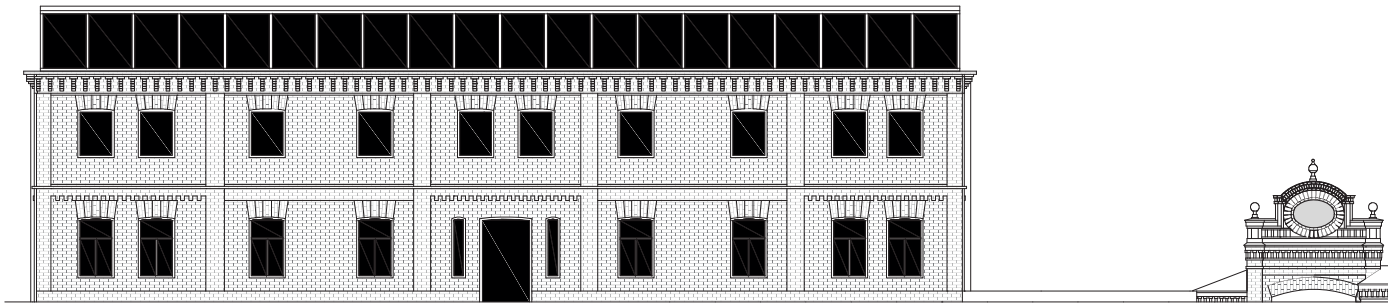
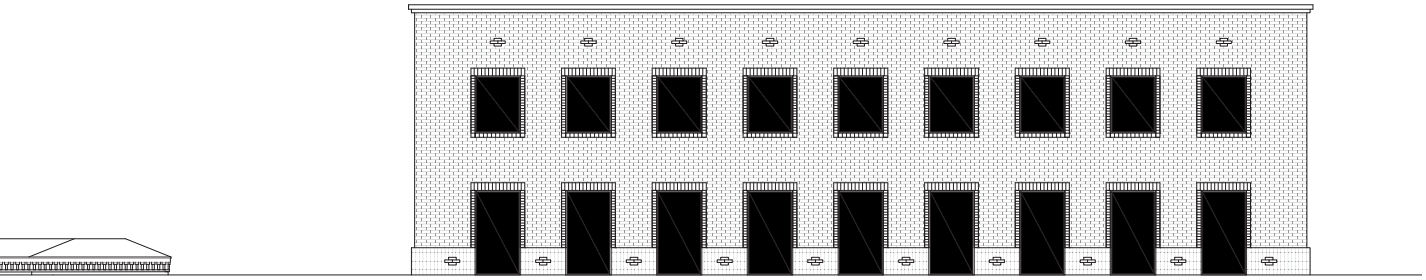


Figure 43. West elevation 1:250.



0 1 2 3 4 5 10

The Old Office

To recenter the gate as the primary entrance to the area, the main entrance of the old office had to be moved. An accessible main entrance is created on the southern side of the old office through utilising the existing landscaping to form an extension for the entrance room. After passing through the low and dark entrance room, the visitor enters a double-height hall in the former basement of the building, creating a dramatic contrast in the arrival sequence. A set of double staircases leads up to the first floor - former ground floor - where the exhibition continues. Here many of the original inner walls are preserved. A central staircase, introduced in the corridor from the original plan, guides the visitor to the second floor. The second floor has a similar floor plan to the original office. Here the new roof structure is visible with large windows bringing light from above into the exhibition spaces and creates a clear distinction between new and old, heavy and light.

The new floor structure consists of a composite steel and concrete system, supported by the existing walls as well as by additional steel beams and columns where required. Where additional columns are necessary, they are integrated within a wood fibre board which also serves as interior insulation. The interior insulation improves the old office's energy performance and is finished with plaster, creating a cohesive interior expression. Space for installations are provided within the suspended ceiling.

Figure 44. Entering the old office.

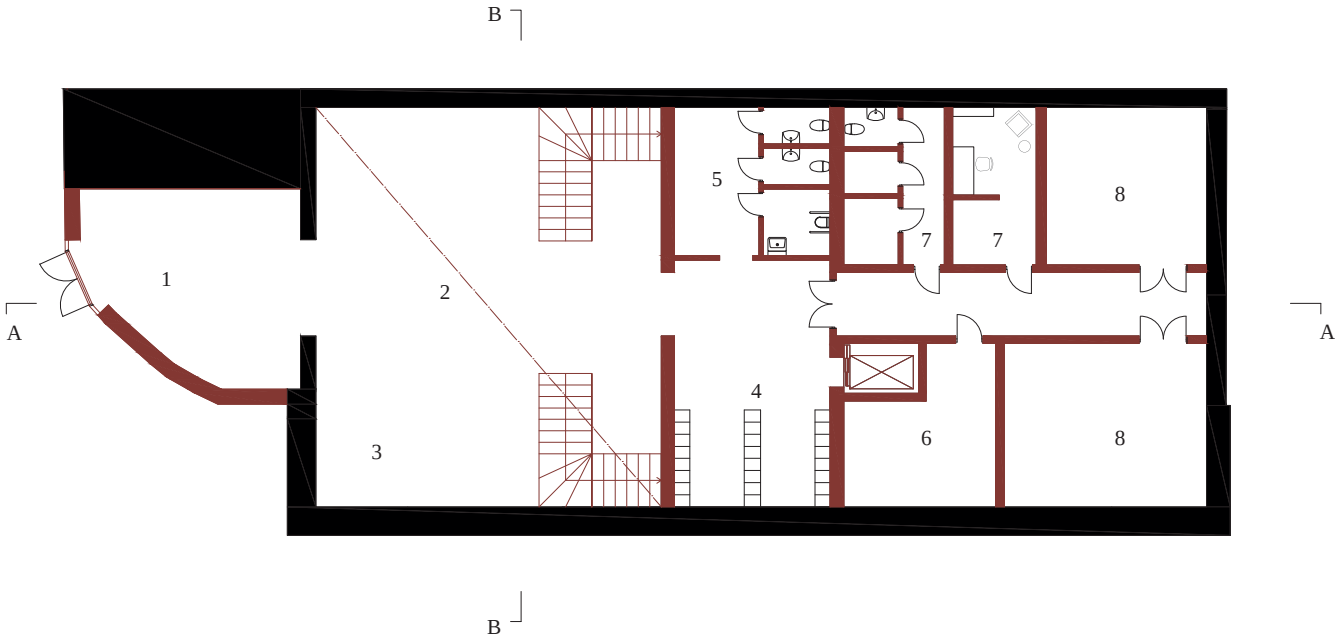


Figure 45. Entrance floor 1:250.
1. Entrance, 2. Entrance hall, 3. Reception/shop, 4. Cloakroom, 5. Restrooms, 6. Technical, 7. Staff area, 8. Archive.

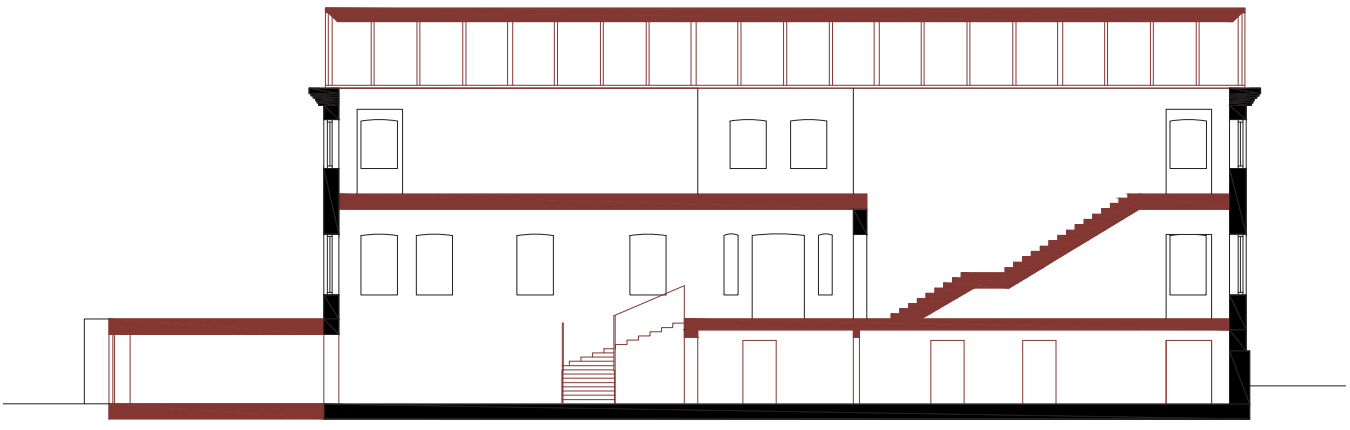


Figure 46. Section A-A 1:250.

0 1 2 3 4 5 10

Figure 47. Entrance hall.

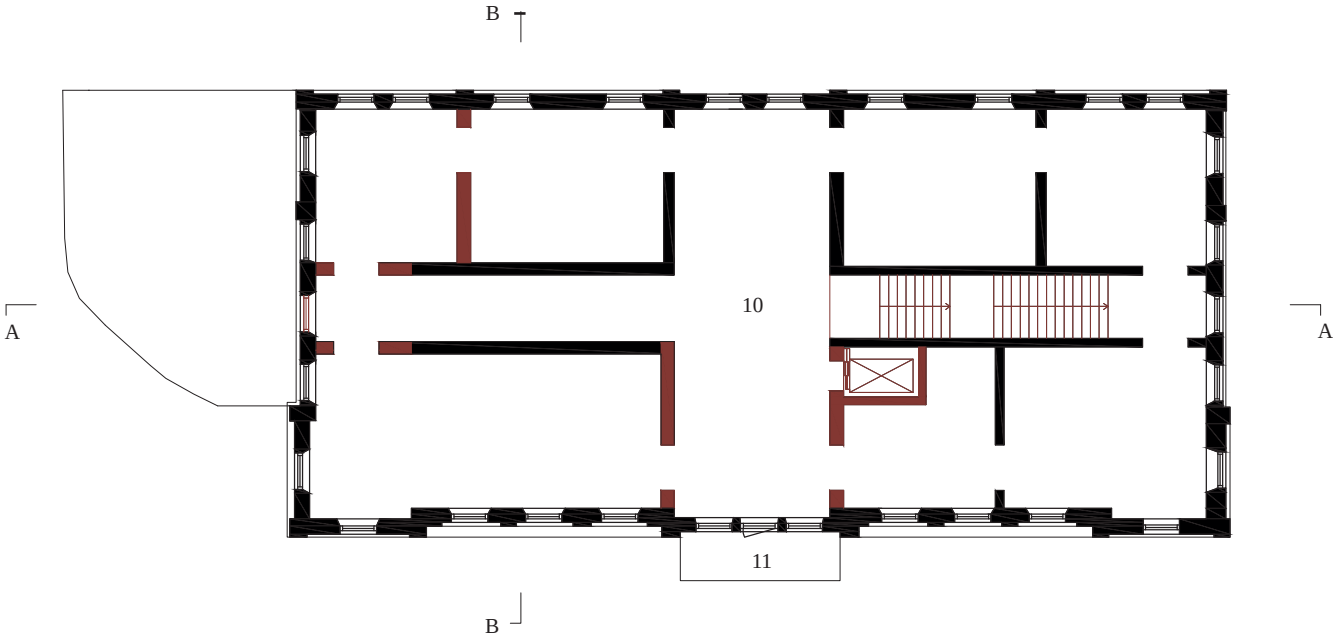


Figure 48. Second floor 1:250 .
10. Exhibition space, 11. Balcony.

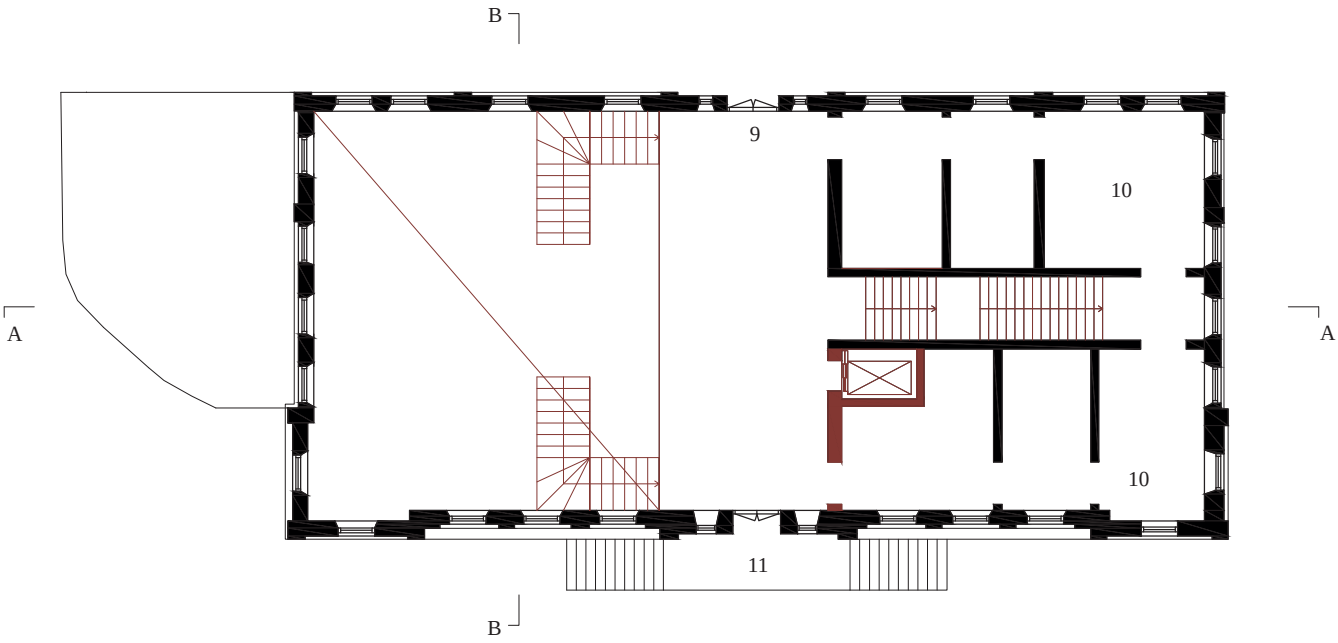


Figure 49. First floor 1:250.
9. Second entrance, 10. Exhibition space, 11. Balcony.

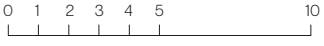


Figure 50. Exhibition space.

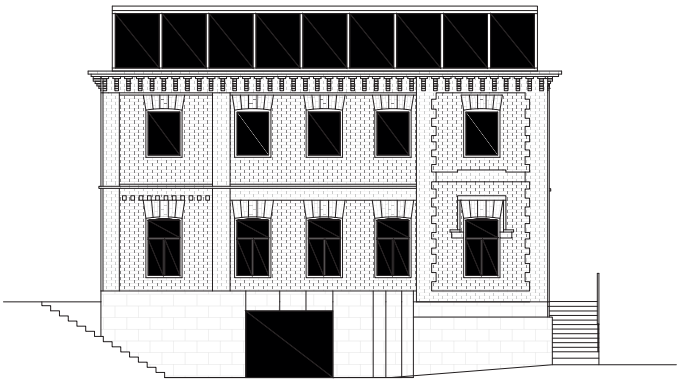


Figure 51. South elevation 1:250.

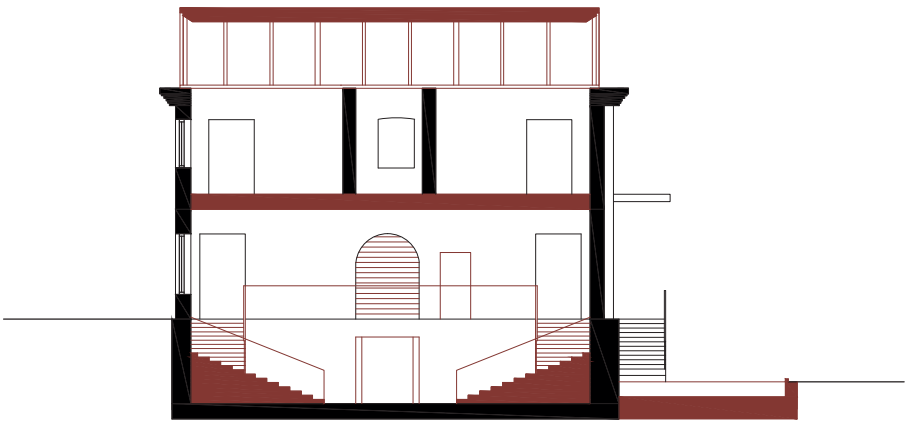


Figure 52. Section B-B 1:250.

0 1 2 3 4 5 10

Figure 53. Exhibition space.

Figure 54. Detailed elevation, old office.

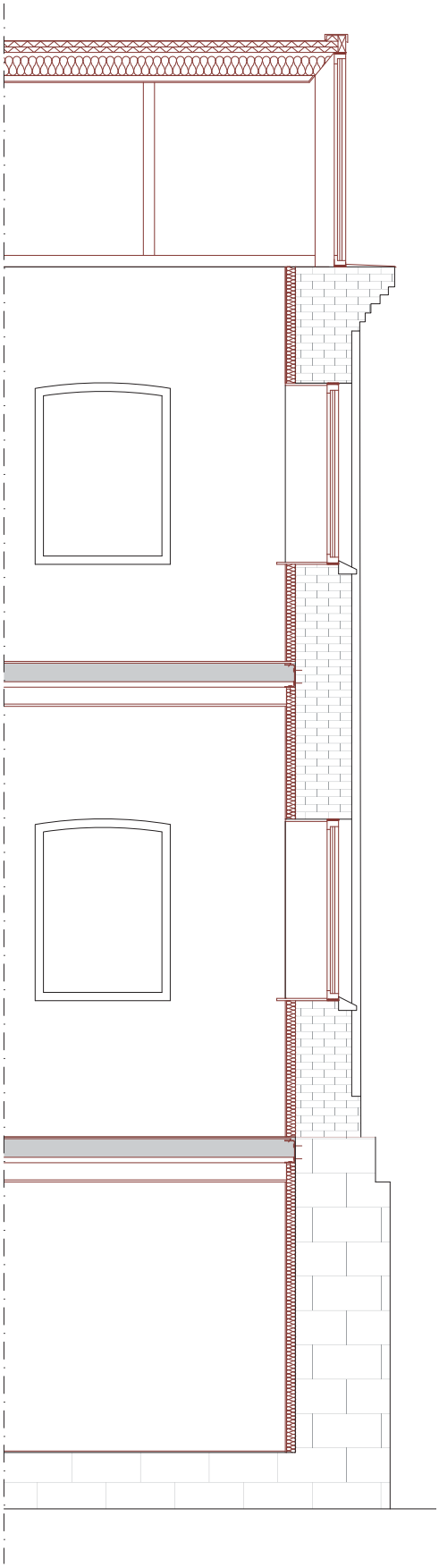


Figure 55. Detailed section 1:60, old office.

The New Building

The new building is located south of the old office and is recessed compared to the old office, both to indicate secundarity but also to break up the sequence when approaching the two buildings. The new building accommodates functions that could not be integrated into the old office, such as a restaurant, workshop space, an auditorium and offices. Its main entrance is located opposite the new entrance to the old office. The entrance hall is a double height space with a staircase leading the visitor to the first floor. On the first floor the restaurant is located, together with a kitchen and a temporary exhibition space. Another entrance is located on the first floor as well, allowing visitors to move more freely around the buildings. It also connects to the restaurant's outdoor seating.

While the historic structures of the mill have been load-bearing brick construction, the new building adopts a contemporary structural system of autoclavated aerated concrete blocks. This approach acknowledges the local building tradition while adapting it to current construction standards.

Figure 56. Entering the new building.

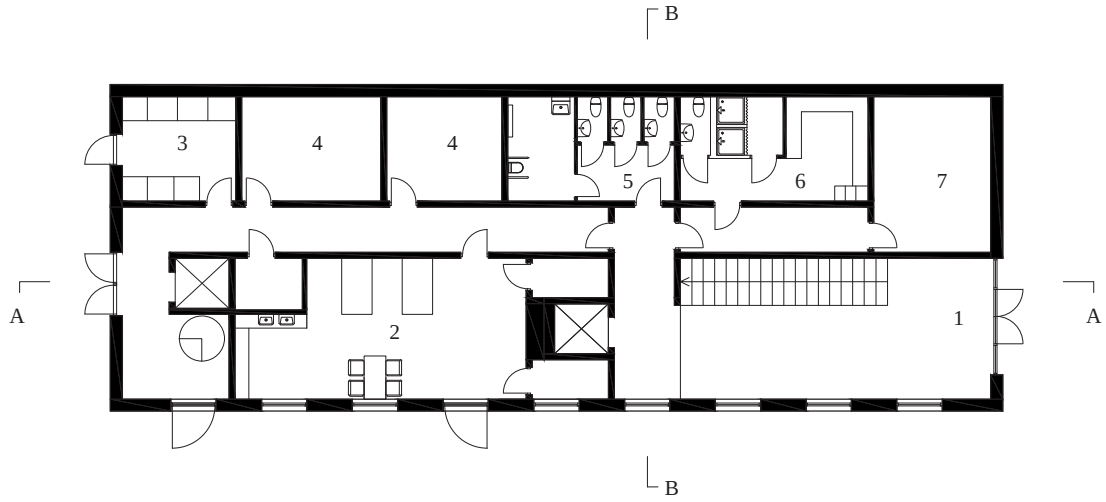


Figure 57. Entrance floor 1:250.
1. Entrance, 2. Workshop, 3. Waste, 4. Storage, 5. Restrooms, 6. Staff changing room, 7. Technical.

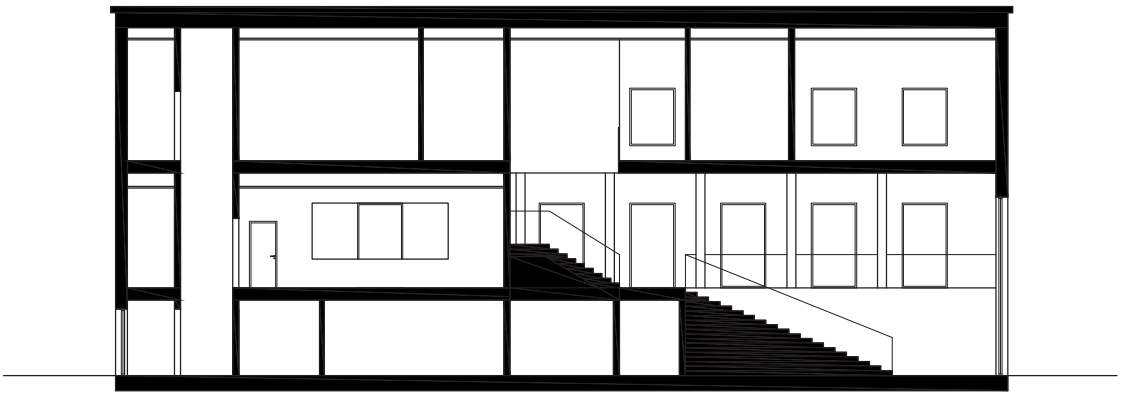


Figure 58. Section A-A 1:250.

0 1 2 3 4 5 10

Figure 59. Entrance hall.

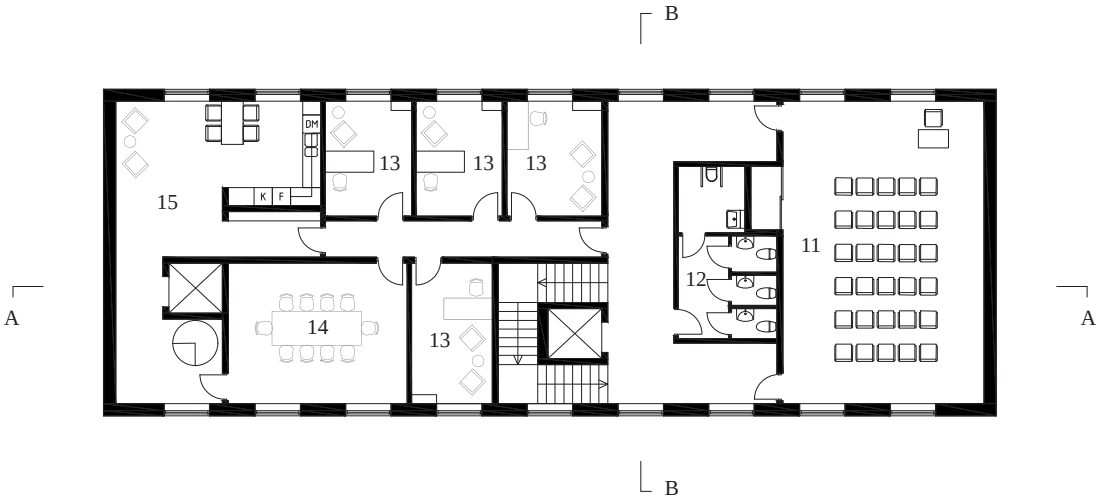


Figure 60. Second floor 1:250.
11. Auditorium, 12. Restrooms, 13. Office, 14. Conference room, 15. Staff canteen.

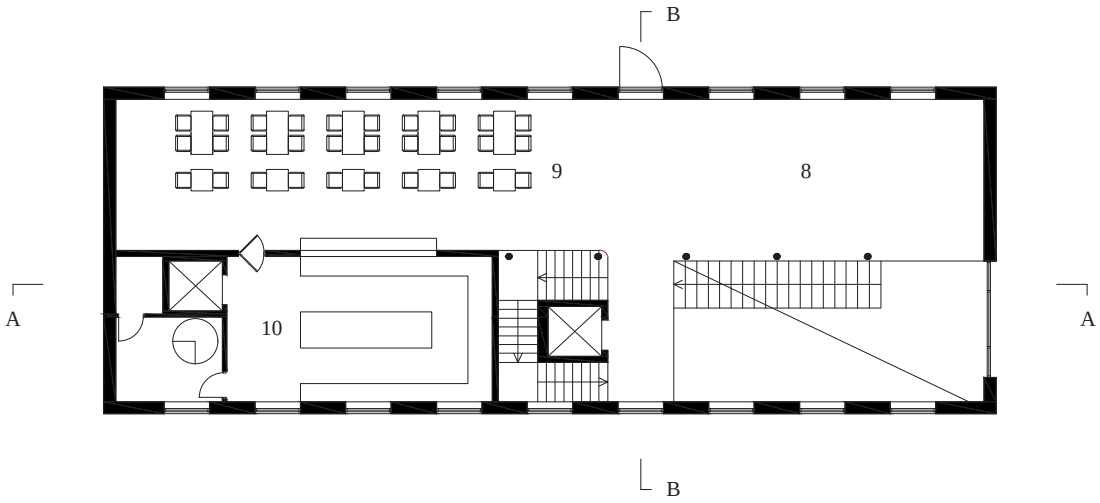


Figure 61. First floor 1:250.
8. Exhibition space, 9. Restaurant, 10. Restaurant kitchen.

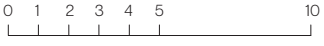


Figure 62. Restaurant and temporary exhibition space.

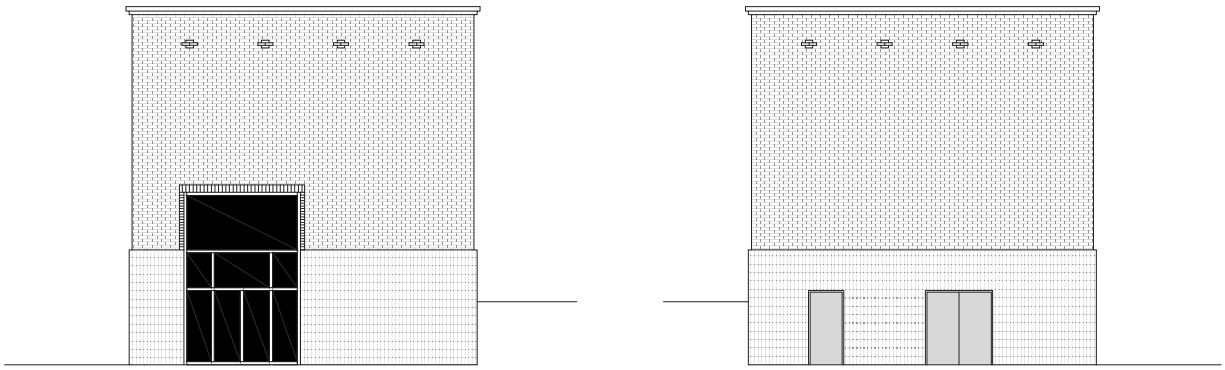


Figure 63. Elevations 1:250.
North Elevation (left). South Elevation (right).

Figure 64. Section B-B 1:250.

0 1 2 3 4 5 10

Figure 65. Table for two.

Figure 66. Detailed elevation, new building.

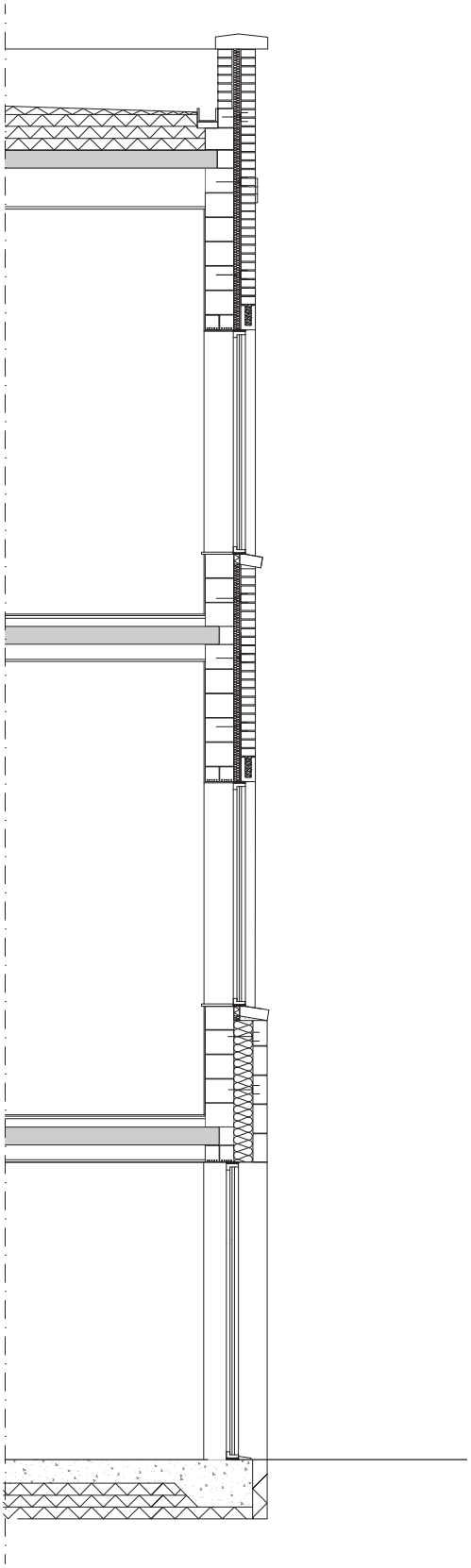


Figure 67. Detailed section 1:60, new building.

Figure 68. Glasskiosk.

Figure 69. Outdoor seating.

Material, Models and Details

The proposal has further been developed through detailing and built models, to strengthen our work and explore it in more detail. A cast of the wolf symbol of Wargöns AB sits at the entrance of the new building. Four different floorings have been designed, for both the old office and for the new building. The window detailing for the new building incorporates both elements found from the old office as well as details found in historical pictures, to further anchor the proposal.

Figure 70. Entrance sign.

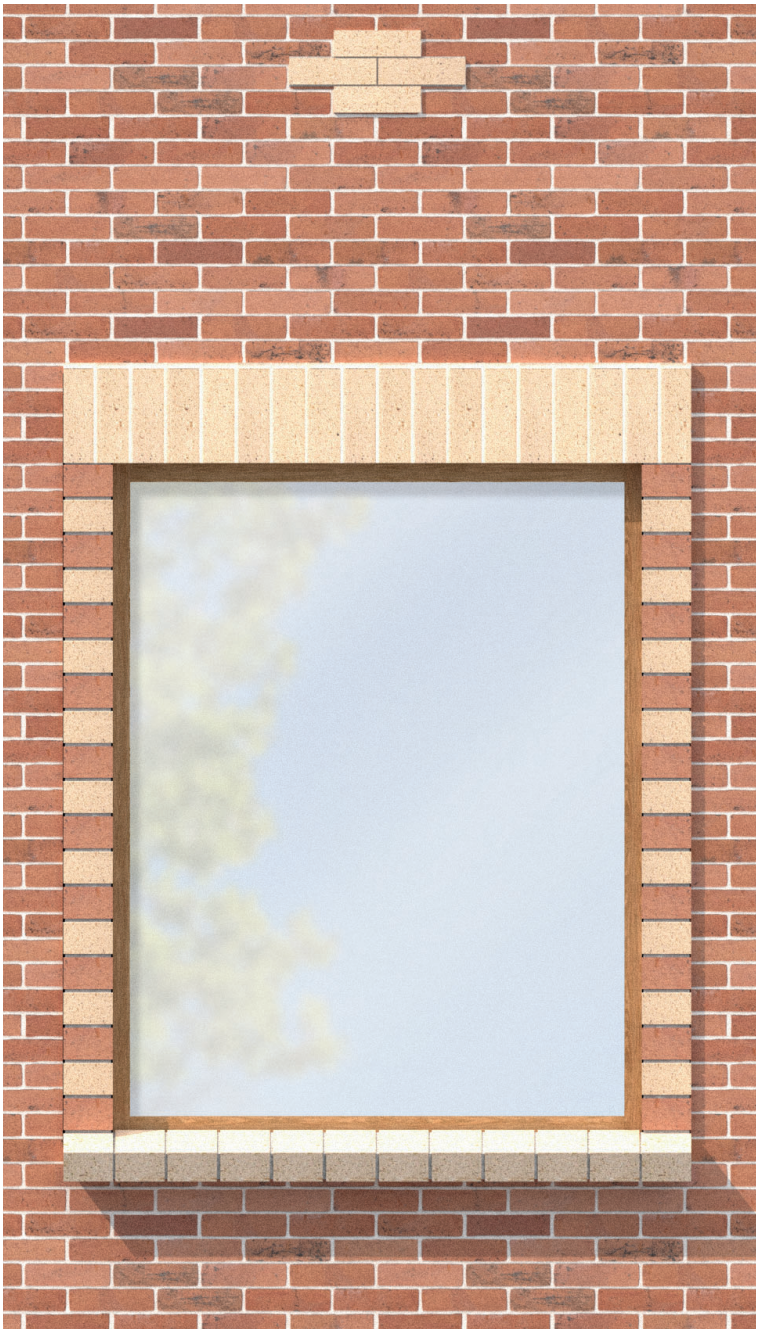


Figure 71. Window detailing, new building.

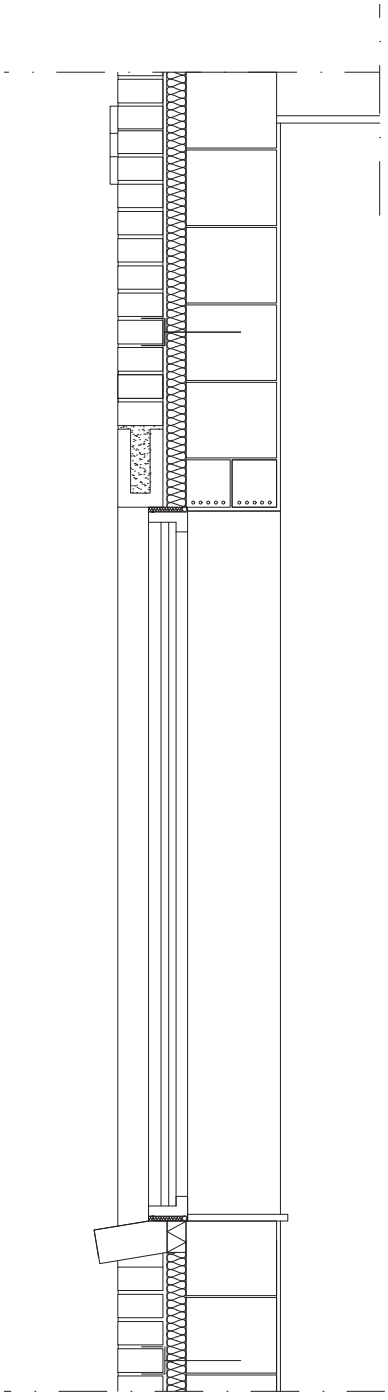


Figure 72. Detail 1:20, new building.

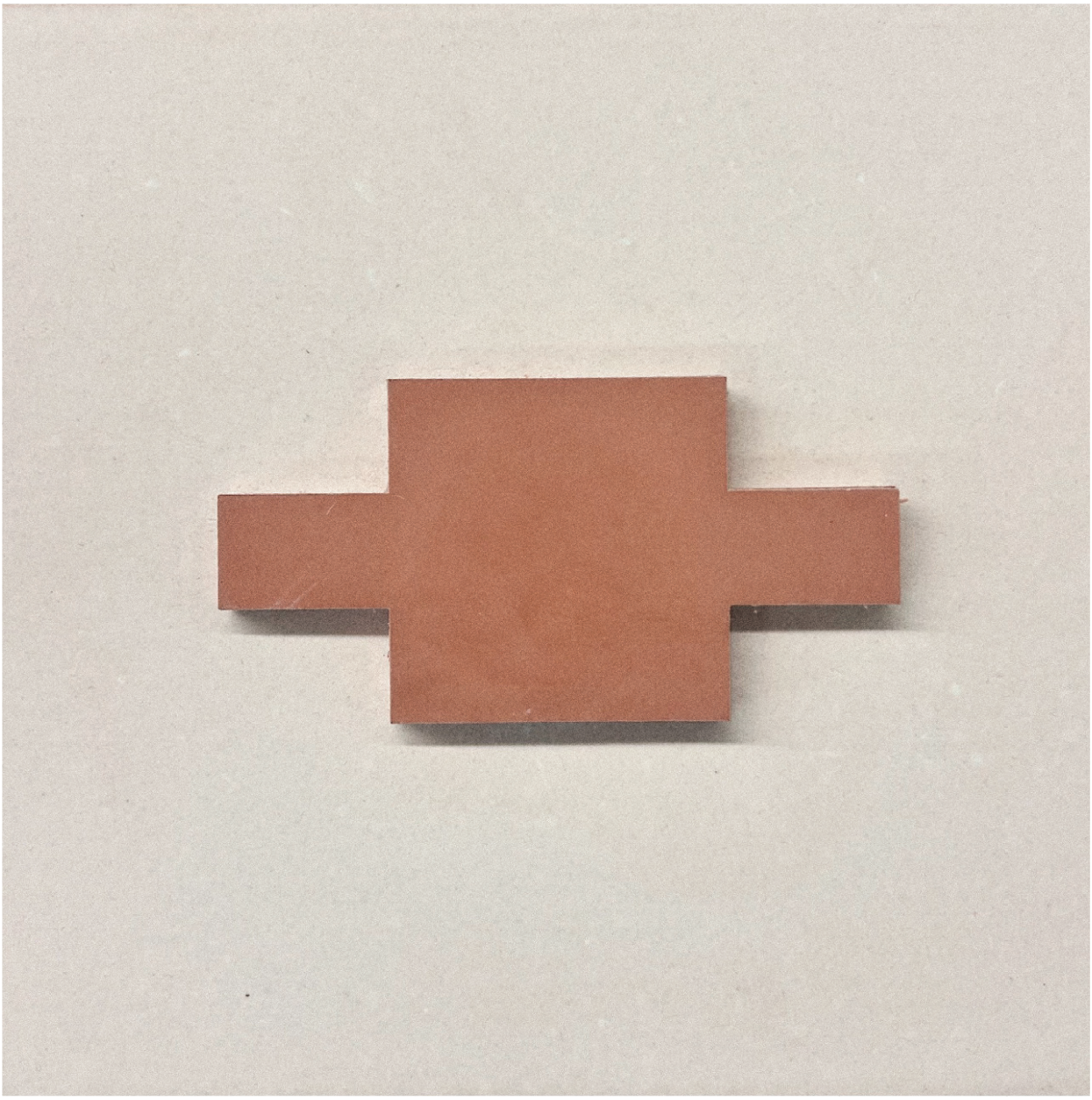


Figure 73. Brick detailing, new building.

Figure 74. Entrance sign, new building.

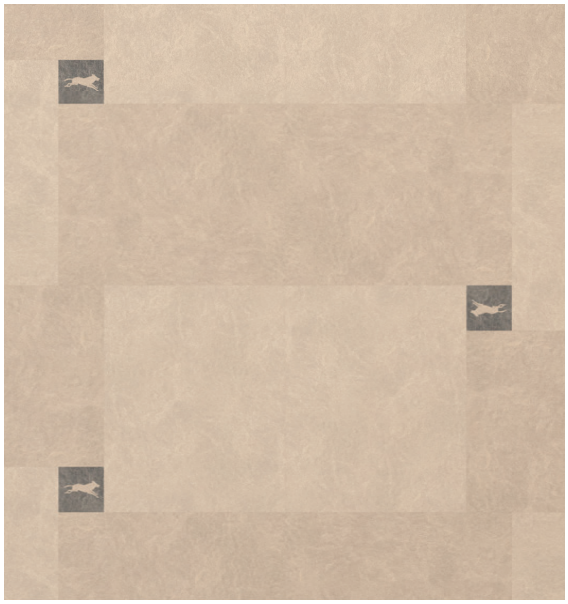


Figure 75. Floor in exhibition space, old office.

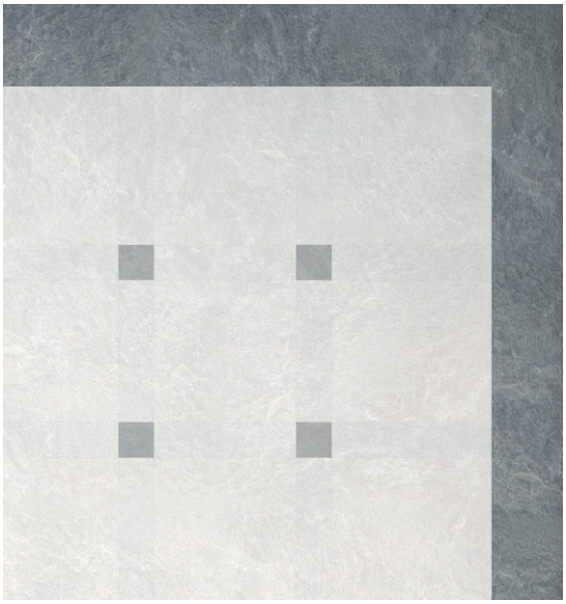


Figure 76. Floor in entrance hall, old office.

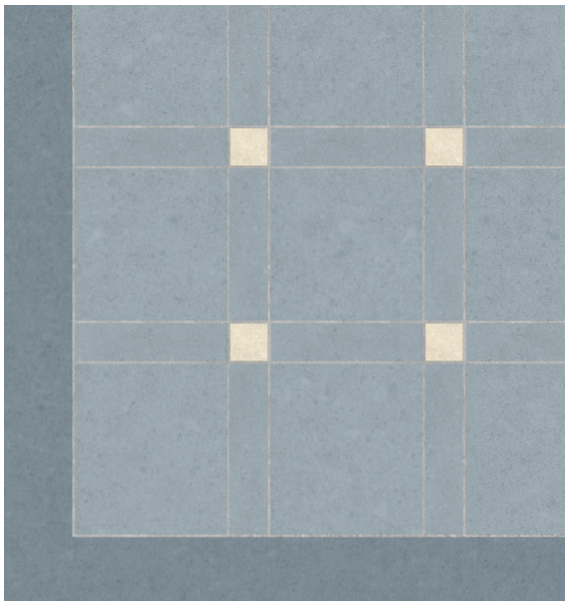


Figure 77. Floor in entrance, new building.

Figure 78. Floor in restaurant, new building.

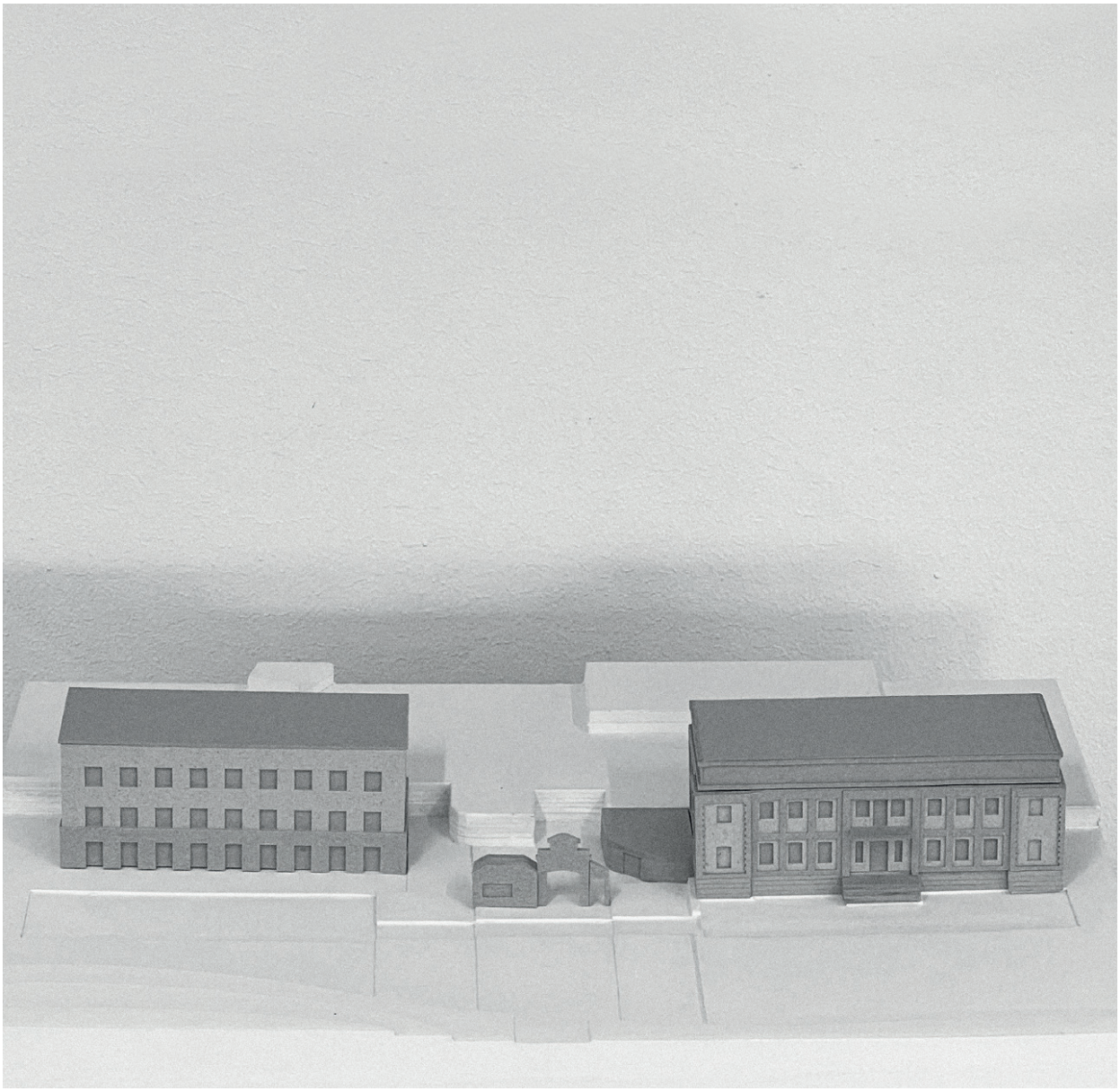


Figure 79. Model.

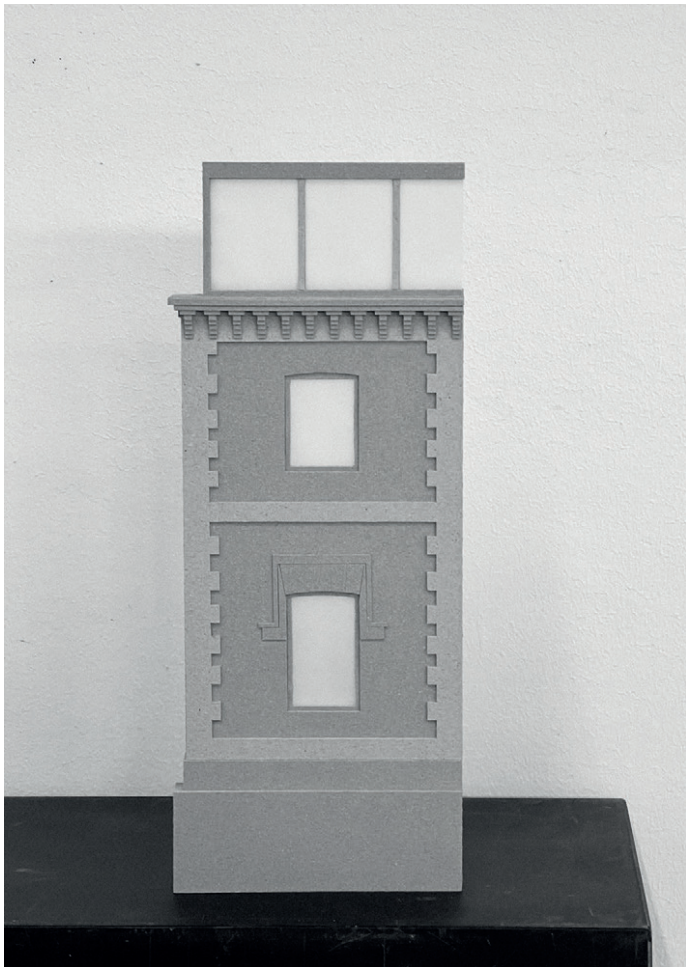
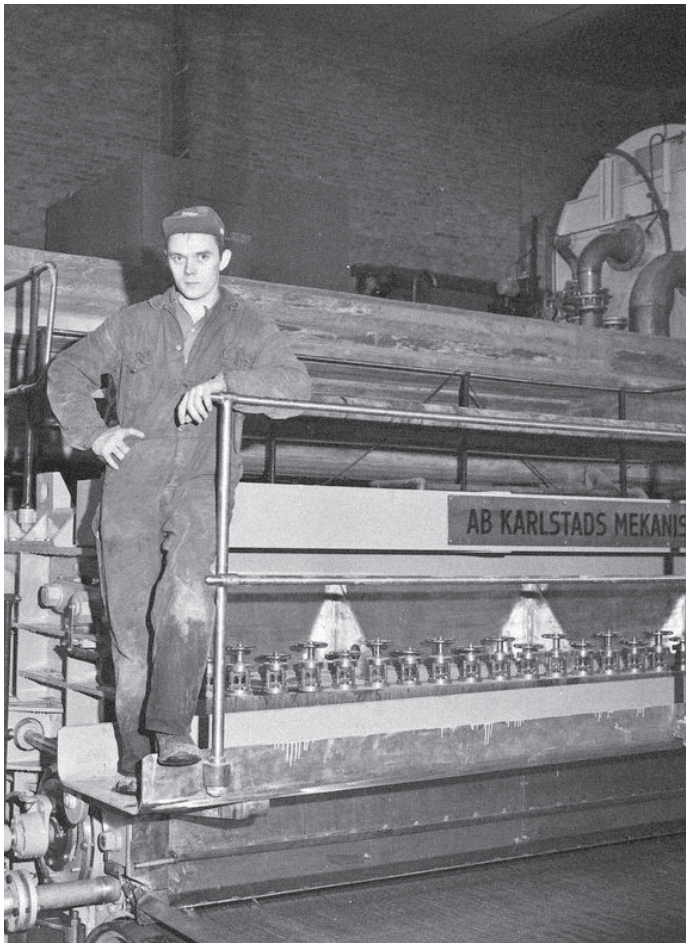


Figure 80. Model, old office.

Figure 81 (opposite). Worker at Wargöns AB.



PART V

Conclusion

Discussion

This thesis set out to explore (01) how the industrial remains of Wargöns AB could be transformed into an art museum in order to reclaim local identity, and (02) how a new building could be introduced in dialogue with the existing structure. These questions have been addressed through our design proposal.

In relation to the first research question, the project demonstrates how *adaptive reuse* can mediate between past and present. The old office is approached as a *palimpsest*, where historical layers are preserved and reinterpreted rather than erased. This aligns with an understanding of *adaptive reuse* as a process that allows transformation while maintaining continuity. Through this approach, the proposal seeks to re-establish a connection between the site and the town of Vargön.

Rather than pursuing a nostalgic reconstruction, the interventions aim to highlight existing qualities while enabling new spatial experiences. This is evident in the introduction of a new lightweight, fully glazed roof structure. Instead of replicating the former roof, it clearly differentiates between old and new. In line with our design framework to acknowledge all phases of the building's history, including the last years of abandonment, the new roof becomes a way of retaining the memory of loss by not fully reconstructing what was removed. While its exterior expression relates to the current post-fire condition, it creates a refined and elegant interior, contrasting the state of decay found today.

Similarly, interventions such as opening the entrance hall into a double-height space and inserting a new staircase within a former corridor showcase a more flexible reinterpretation of the building. Rather than strictly following the original floor plan, it enables new spatial experiences.

The reconfiguration of the entrance sequence is a further example of how we have attempted to reconnect the site to both its history but also to the town of Vargön. By directing visitors through the gate and reintroducing water as a spatial element, the proposal builds on the site's earlier layout and seeks to evoke memories that extend beyond the last years of abandonment and strengthens the local identity.

However, the extent to which architecture alone can "reclaim" local identity remains uncertain. While the proposal investigates and establishes spatial conditions for renewed engagement, the reactivation of identity depends on broader social, cultural, and economic processes. The introduction of a museum and a public restaurant is intended to attract both local residents and visitors, yet their long-term viability would obviously require sustained support which is difficult for any municipality to provide. In this regard, alternative programs, such as offices or industrial use, may prove more economically feasible. However, within the scope and delimitations of this thesis, the museum program served as an exploratory proposal through which the spatial qualities of both the old office and the site could be investigated.

Regarding the second research question, the new building is conceived as both complementary and autonomous. Its design draws on the material and architectural language of the existing old office, particularly through the use of brick and brick detailing, establishing visual continuity. At the same time, inspiration is also found in historical images of previous buildings on the same site and their relationship to the old office.

We believe that our design proposal shows that it is possible to successfully introduce a new structure in dialogue with the existing building, without overshadowing it. The new building maintains a secondary role, reflecting the hierarchical relationship between the two as observed in earlier site configurations. However, it should be emphasised that this subordinate position does not imply a lesser level of architectural care. On the contrary, the detailing of the new structure has been inspired by the attention to detail seen in the old office, aiming to create a building of comparable longevity and architectural quality.

More broadly, the thesis positions itself as a critique of the decision to alter the protected status of the former main office of Wargöns AB. By proposing an alternative future, the project argues that the existing building holds values that extend beyond its current state of decay. The introduction of a new building illustrates the potential for continued development on the site, showing how new interventions could support future use and enable a new beginning. However, the feasibility of such a transformation - economically, technically and socially - remains largely unresolved. The project should thus be understood as a speculative exploration rather than a definitive solution. It aims to initiate a broader discussion on the role of industrial heritage in shaping local identity and to argue for a reconsideration of demolition as the default response, advocating for a second life for Wargöns AB.

Figure 82 (opposite). Wargöns AB.

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Figures

Figure 1. Authors' own image. *Exterior perspective* [Rendering].

Figure 2. Unknown. (1949). *Wargöns AB* [Photography]. Digitaltmuseum, Vänersborgs museum. https://digitaltmuseum.org/021015686108/wargons-ab. In the public domain.

Figure 3. Rosenberg, C.G. (n.d). *Wargöns AB. Ritkontoret. I förgrunden Ing. E. Kulander och ritkontorschefen ing. R. Söderberg.* [Wargöns AB. Drawing office. In the foreground Engr. E. Kulander and head of the drawing office Engr. R. Söderberg] [Photography]. Digitaltmuseum, Vänersborgs museum. https://digitaltmuseum.org/021015686410/wargons-ab-ritkontoret-i-forgrunden-ing-e-kulander-och-ritkontorschefen. In the public domain.

Figure 4-5. Authors' own image. *Valencia, Dorte Mandrup* [Photograph].

Figure 6. Skatt, E. (2025). *Staircase in Neues Museum* [Photograph]. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 7. Ranch, J. (2025). *Facade of Neues Museum* [Photograph]. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 8. Authors' own image. *Found at site* [Photograph].

Figure 9. Authors' own image. *Map of Sweden* [Drawing].

Figure 10. Authors' own image. *Map of Region Västra Götaland* [Drawing].

Figure 11. Authors' own image. *Vargön 1:10 000* [Drawing].

Figure 12. Authors' own image/Lantmäteriet. *Aerial view of site* [Photograph]. Adapted by the authors from map data provided by Lantmäteriet.

Figure 13. Unknown. (n.d.). *Wargöns AB.* [Photograph]. Digitaltmuseum, Vänersborgs museum. https://digitaltmuseum.org/021015686038/wargons-ab. In the public domain.

Figure 14. Unknown. (n.d.). *Wargöns AB.* [Photograph]. Digitaltmuseum, Vänersborgs museum. https://digitaltmuseum.org/021015687446/wargons-ab. In the public domain.

Figure 15. Ateljé Wahlberg. (1949). *Wargöns AB. Wargöns pappersbruk. Ritkontoret, Stora kontoret och sulfiten* [Wargöns AB. Wargön paper mill. Drawing office, Main office and sulphite building] [Photograph]. Digitaltmuseum, Vänersborgs museum. https://digitaltmuseum.org/021015686121/wargons-ab-wargons-pappersbruk-ritkontoret-stora-kontoret-och-sulfiten. In the public domain.

Figure 16. Frick, A. (2018). *Huvudkontoret för Holmens bruk i Vargön* [Head office for Holmen mill in Vargön [Photograph]. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 17. Authors' own image. *Facade of the old office (right), the gate and additional office building (left)* [Drawing].

Student Background

Johanna

2020 - 2023 BSc Architecture and Engineering

2024 – ongoing MSc Architecture and Urban Design, courses including:

ACE480 Building Tectonics 1
ACE420 Architectural Competitions
ACE575 Sustainable Building Transformation
ACE515 Building Tectonics 2

Wilma

2020 - 2023 BSc Architecture and Engineering

2023 - 2024 MSc Structural Engineering and Building Technology

2024 – ongoing MSc Architecture and Urban Design, courses including:

ACE480 Building Tectonics 1
ACE420 Architectural Competitions
ACE575 Sustainable Building Transformation
ACE515 Building Tectonics 2

Figure 83. Johanna.

Figure 84. Wilma.