

# ARCHITECTURE OF THE PENINSULAR



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# LARGE-SCALE INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE AS CARRIER FOR NEW DEVELOPMENTS



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# 01 INTRODUCTION





# 01 INTRODUCTION

Merwevierhavens is an area of the city of Rotterdam where the potential for a new city is tangible and present. Long stretches of land fuse with the water in what is a productive heart of the city. A rhythmic landscape of water, bricks and concrete define a large portion of the city of Rotterdam. Here the first harbor expansion of the city took place. For years this place was a productive, logistic fulcrum. Goods were imported, reworked, stored in those same strips of man-made land.

In recent years with the disappearance of the productive entities of the port, and with an increasingly high demand for housing units, the area became a valuable option in the development of the future of the city.

In the last period, the municipality of Rotterdam started an in-depth study on the area and its future. How to integrate a new vision of a city and what type of social as well as natural environment will there be? What number of dwellings and what type of outcome will derive from this exploration? How to translate such defined area in a new domestic sphere?

This discussion integrates the work of designers as well as architectural historians, developers, artists and citizens who share a body of work and a vision for Merwevierhavens.

In March 2019, Archiprix NL and the Municipality of Rotterdam contacted us, Studio Verter, to provide an alternative vision, a different point of view on what are the potentials and the design challenges (and opportunities) of working in such condition.

The outcome, embodied in this booklet, is a set of recommendations, guidelines, advices called Architecture of the Peninsular.

The title is in itself a description, a mere statement on the basic condition of the area, yet a fundamental one when understanding the conditions of this project: a peninsula is a place that by default is differentiated, unique, secluded and living by its own rules.

With an identity of its own and developed from the inside outwards. Its condition and spatial allowances are peculiar and interesting in the framework of an architectural development.

The architecture of the peninsular could be interpreted as the architecture in vacuum, a continuous experimental field. Secluded from the city, an appendix where a sense of independent thinking and experimentation would be put into place. Pioneers within the city.

The aforementioned assignment frees us from any spatial limitation and gave us plenty of freedom of choice. Both Archiprix and the Municipality of Rotterdam pushed for a free interpretation, intuitive architectural exploration. Both parties were looking for young designers to challenge their position on design and deepen their research database with a fresh and unique addition.

Before diving into any architectural output, or before defining any concrete design objective, we as Studio Verter, started looking more in depth into the history, the morphology and the characteristics of the Merwevierhavens. The scope of this research was to create a comprehensive repertoire that could then propel a design phase, support architectural choices and finally rectify our assumptions when needed.

The research took into account a series of different factors, voices and previous projects about the harbor of Rotterdam.

This observation helped refine our architectural understanding of the area and its relations with the city.

This survey not only backs up and helps forming an argument for our contribution, but also serves as a testament for the future generations of professionals that are going to operate in the same environment. It is meant as a technical but also visual help to support the work of the Municipality and those concerned in the making of Merwevierhavens.

After the research and observation phase we confronted with the materials; the ideas were discussed, pictures compared, reference projects would be overlaid and juxtaposed to find a common feature, a typical trait or an underlying principle. We looked at the qualities and existing scenarios trying to understand how the contemporary project would fit into such an ecosystem.

The diversity of the materials that emerged from the first phase, and the determined timeframe for the entire project, made clear that our contribution and work would try to be a framework that acts as a support.

Rather than defining an additional fictitious scenario, where a new abstract version of Merwevierhavens would appear, we opted for a different architectural format, one shaped in a list of recommendations. We wanted to define a strategy of approach and define what we would regard as important points when working in such environment.

Since the beginning we wanted to focus on guidelines, ways to understand the area better, produce better tools for a more comprehensive approach.

After sifting through projects and proposals that concerned harbors and productive sections and different cities, we found only few comprehensive strategies towards the surroundings. Many opted for architectural projects which tend to appear as a tabula rasa in regards of the existing structures or identities. This approach denies a priori the existence of quality outside their sphere and language, and discourages the relation with such interesting typologies.

We believe that today, the identity of Merwevierhavens, although apparently rough and bold, is very fragile.

In the midst of the wind of change, many small spontaneous qualities can disappear, scales and proportion can be forgotten, relations could be broken and layers could be lost. This area is the product of many forces which have been the backbone of the city of Rotterdam. They have had a role in defining the city's reputation and history.

These recommendations are a memorandum of how to work in Merwevierhavens and how to preserve these small scale, as well as large scale, qualities. What to keep, how to see beauty, what is the identity and charm, and how to coexist and mix are just few of the questions we want to raise. Merwevierhavens and harbor architecture have characteristics which are unseen elsewhere in the city. Designers need to be aware of this and have a strategic approach.

# 02 HISTORY





## 02 HISTORY

Since the beginning of its inception, the city of Rotterdam used water as a strategic element to create its own economic and cultural identity.

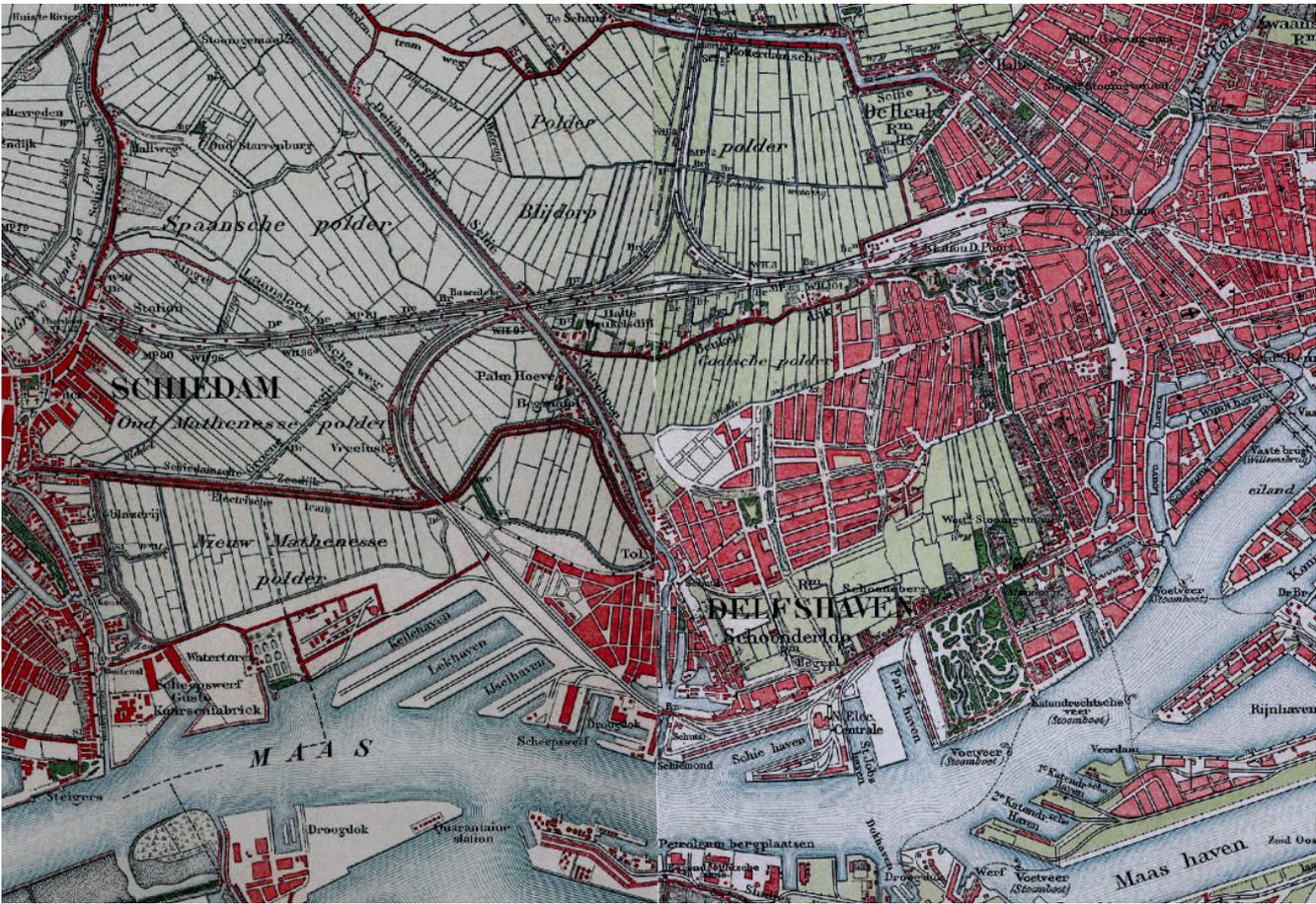
Already by 1600s the city has dramatically expanded, in what is so called Waterstad, comprising the areas called Oude Haven, Nieuwe Haven, Blaak, Haringvliet, Leuvehaven, Zalmhaven, Scheepmakershaven and Wijnhaven. In 1847 the first Willemskade's warehouse facilities were added to the city ones. Two decades after, new structures were required due to the new influx of goods and materials from the Rhur area. After the construction of the new Waterweg in 1872, the harbor finally boomed and opened possibilities that were until then untapped.

A new wave of construction invested the city and changed the edges of the water into a bustling, active location. New technologies were implemented and by the beginning of the 19th century, cranes and electric unloading eased the work of labor and increased productivity and speed. New construction materials like reinforced concrete were introduced and immediately offered a more stable construction solution.

In this period the harbor developed in a series of Warehouses into which goods were stored and collected mainly by workers and cranes. Cargo containers were still a new logistic solution and not yet implemented in Rotterdam. By the 1910s, the municipality started planning and construction of new facilities in areas like Parkhaven, Sint-Jobshaven and Schiehaven in order to host new typologies (storage and waterways) which would accommodate cargo ships and new containers.



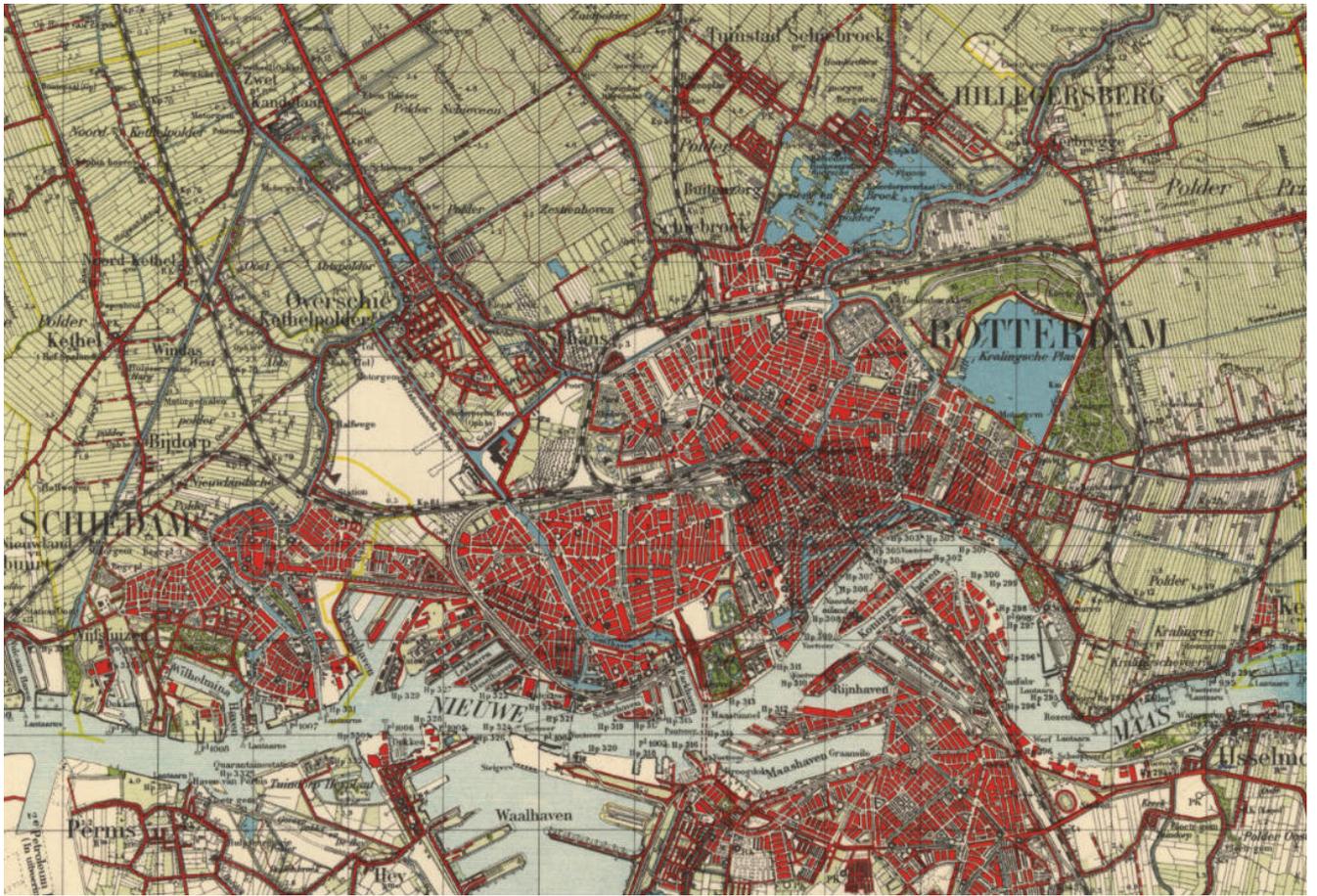




Plan of Rotterdam 1901-1925



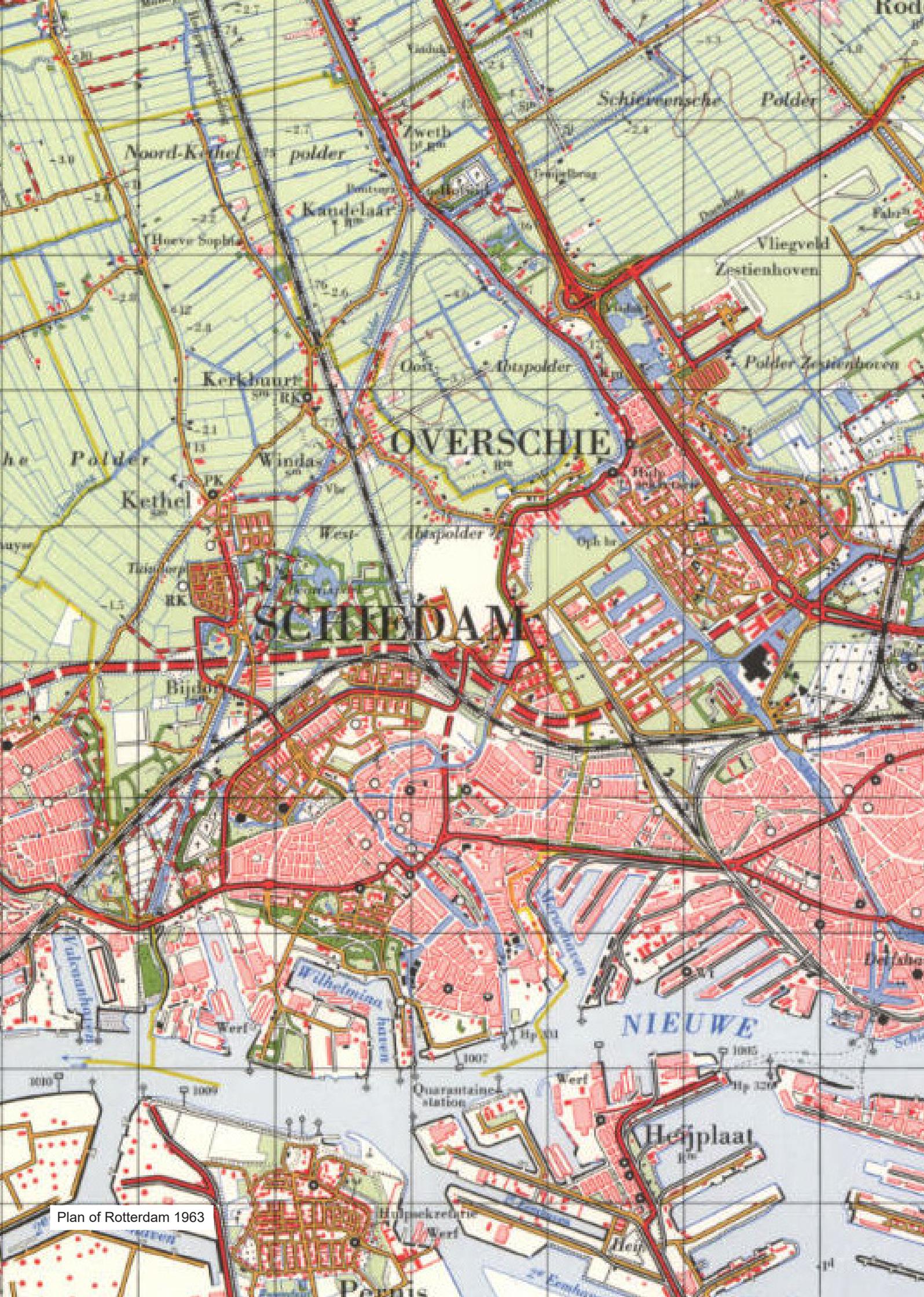
Plan of Rotterdam 1939



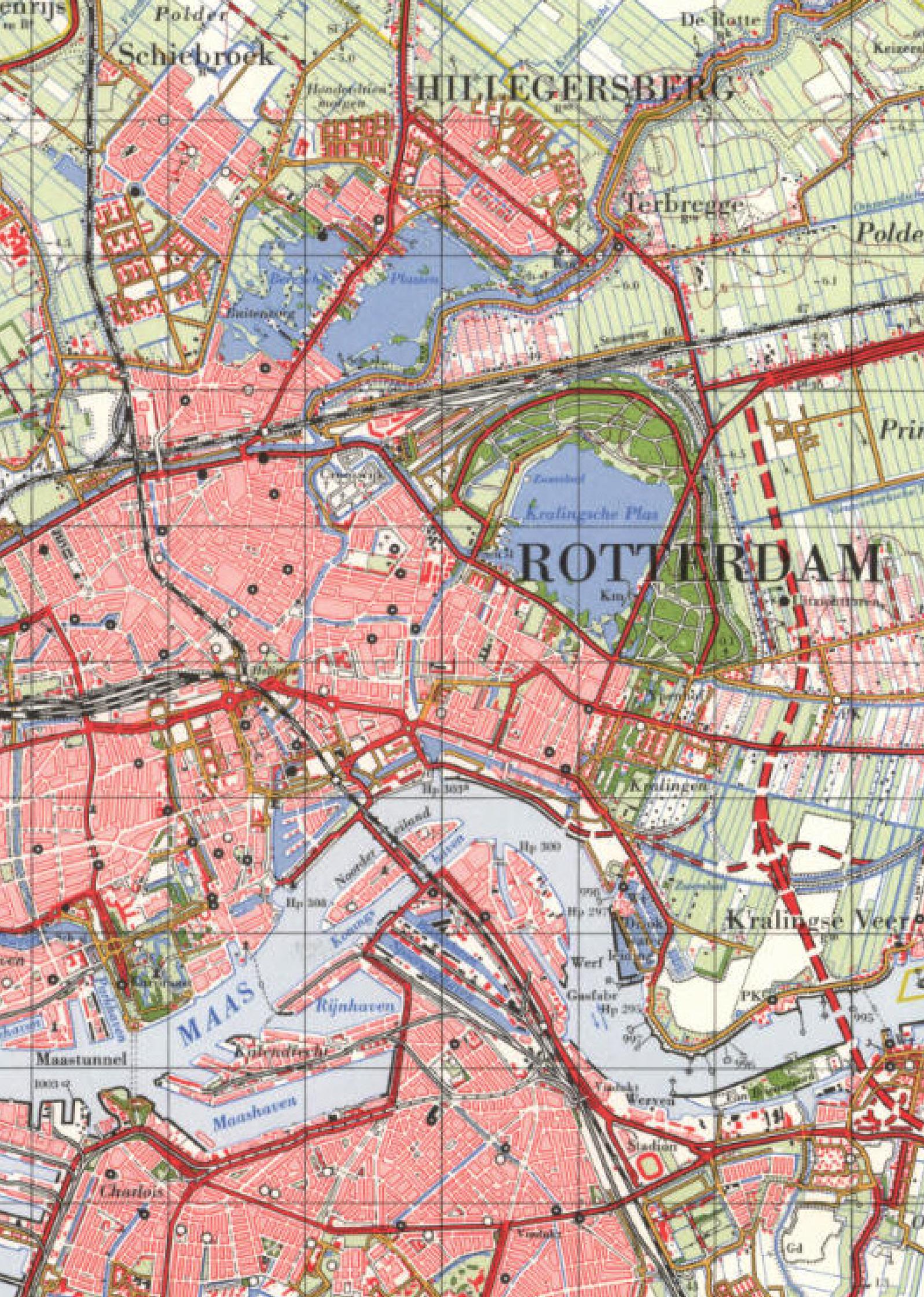
Plan of Rotterdam 1949



Plan of Rotterdam 1958



Plan of Rotterdam 1963



Schiebroek

HILLEGERSBERG

Terbregge

ROTTERDAM

MAAS

Kratingse Veer

Charlois

Stadion

Gd



Aerial view of IJsselhaven, 1925



Aerial view of Merwevierhavens, 1980s

By the beginning of 1912 the plans to build new structures along the Vierhavenstraat were approved. The area on the edge of the city, near the border with the city of Schiedam would be the perfect location for the new warehouses and docks. Due to the first world war and an issue in policy and land acquisition, the project got delayed.

Finally, by 1925, the Merwehaven complex construction started. Works ended by the year 1932, amounting to 37 hectares in size.

Throughout the first decade and second decades of the 20th century many other important buildings were built in the surrounding areas.

Power stations, petrol storage and biscuit factories were built. A gas factory and electricity plant in 1935 were also opened.

At the same time, Marconiplein started developing as an industrial center for companies and factories, exploiting the close proximity to raw material access through the water. A Ford factory opened in 1928.

A cotton storage facility, designed by Rotterdam's architect J.J. Kanters, was built in 1920. Such buildings incorporated an advanced water sprinkler systems that would prevent fires. Merwehaven was a prime example of successful design. Its layout and structures still remain unchanged nowadays. Its diagonal layout provided an excellent maneuver port for boats. With the development of the Merwehaven, the area of Marconiplein grew incredibly fast and many companies and factories wanted a place for their business.

The second world war brought wrath and destruction upon Europe, and Rotterdam was not spared. On the 14th of May 1940, the German air force bombed the city and flattened part of the city center of Rotterdam.

Part of the harbor area was destroyed, many buildings damaged and business was put on a halt. Partly during German occupation and later after the war, the municipality was able to rebuild most of the structures and refurbish the existing infrastructure. By the early 1950s the ports in the inner part of Rotterdam increasingly specialized in fruit and citrus fruit specifically.

By the year 1955 the Rotterdam Citrus Auction building was completed. The building, designed by H.A. Maaskant, hosted a series of auction spaces as well as offices for two trading companies.

By the mid-1970s office buildings started developing around Marconiplein. The Europoint towers, designed by Chicago based architectural office SOM, created more than 100.000 square meters of office spaces. Finally, by 1986, the metro station at Marconiplein was opened.

Later in the years Merwehaven, together with the other inner city harbor areas became obsolete. Cargo shipping took over as the way to transport and store goods. It was decided to gradually shift the specialization of the whole area to storage, shipment and the processing of fruit and juices.

In the 1990s more sketches and discussions for the future developments of the area were laid out. The area was subdivided into three defined programmatic areas: Offices, Food (and port related companies) and lastly Service and Research. By the mid-1990s, many of the sheds were empty, crime and prostitution took over.

Due to the low rental prices, artists and creatives moved in, creating an alternative environment. Atelier van Lieshout played a pioneering role in the repurposing of old structures and revalidating complete neighbors.



View of Merwehaven from Marconistraat, 1920s



View of Rotterdam's piers, 1940s



Interior of a stockhouse on Merwehaven, 1921



View of Keileweg, 1930s



# 03 CONTEXT





## 03 CONTEXT

At a superficial reading, the area would appear a homogeneous assemblage of factories, large buildings, empty lots and water. This statement is true, but on a deeper level, one finds more.

When walking in this vast area, many of the buildings are actually experienced from a distance: most of them are protected by fences or the access is separated by a parking lot. Streets and logistic corridors define borders where people hardly walk by. Its distances are large, generous and wide. In this context, Merwevierhavens and the corresponding sub-areas, appear stretched out, distant, impersonal, uncivil, apart from the city. On the contrary, several occasions of contact exist. On those particular moments, it seems that the productive city is caught in the act of being busy, focused, automatized and functional.

A sense of disorientation hits at first, but after a first questioning look, it appears clear that Merwevierhavens it is only an additional expression of Rotterdam. Going around the big boxes, cruising along the water, crossing the streets feels different.

The experience of the city is amplified and enlarged. This is underlined by the scale and appearances of the buildings. Undisturbed arrays of blind facades render an unmeasurable street: the familiar elements of residential and of the service buildings are omitted creating a long sequence of closed surfaces.

In alternative to that, large forgotten splashes of empty land are available all around for the eye to see. Ample patches of concrete, spontaneous greens and forgotten elements accompany the localized attempts to advertise, brand and market facades. These



large open spaces become the undefined ground for encounter and exchange.

In its spontaneous behavior, Merwevierhavens retains something unique which modern architecture has lost a long time ago. That is the ability to thrive in a undefined environment, where the rules of the market do not fully apply.

Merwevierhavens is a part of the city where a different urbanization took place. The hand of centralized design has not yet touched a final decision here. In a sense, one could experience the potential of the future and of the past at the same time. Things have not happened yet, and everything is part of the new and the old at the same time.

Its social strata, the users and the encounters vary and differ. A majority of male workers, usually in their mid to late thirties. The logistic or the construction workers, the harbor people: so definable yet so generic.

In normal days you would see them walking silently, wearing their uniforms, modern day armors. Flashy yellow belonging to that company, dark green to the municipality. Recognizable, always at work.

And then there are the creatives. Those young ones, who often interact with the former group, sheltered in their clusters like Galileistraat, or van Helmontstraat.

Concentrated in buildings once dedicated to logistic and harbor facilities where now facades differentiate themselves from the rest. They, before the new generation of creatives, led the way to make this area easier to understand.

Before everybody else there were the artists, then came the makers and tomorrow somebody else who could lead the gentrification game

once again. Parked cars with loud speakers would appear in the landscape and color the evening. Memories of a short pit stop would manifest in a pile of equally distributed garbage on two parallel lines, where once a car parked.

Merwevierhavens is a lot of things and it is embodied in different people.

At the architectural level many of the buildings and clusters can be categorized as part of a larger or a smaller scale.

The fragmentation pervades all scales and informs the nature of many of the buildings.

Openings and recesses reveal spatial compromises that tell us stories of owners, renters. They also reveal the freedom to define their own spaces and define their own identity as independent entities.

Without much romance and a sense of attachment, spaces were carved and shaped. Buildings found alignments along main routes, but inevitably developed their internal scheme according to the dedicated activity and related logistics.

Aesthetics are just a byproduct, something that is attached by the viewer, rather than the opposite.

Facades and elevations often reveal the historical differences between developments of the areas. Different eras carry their particular characteristics. Brick buildings, simple and utilitarian, defined by localized details and bare ornaments. Larger, newer built enclaves render their overwhelming scale and inaccessibility.

Companies as well as users find themselves in this constant balance between city, harbor and water, where the interaction is different.



Entrances and recesses, Keileweg



View on Keilehaven



Marconi towers from Benjamin Franklinstraat



Walkway connecting Galileistraat and Benjamin Franklinstraat



Traces of tram lines, Galileistraat



Elevated view of IJsselhaven



Marconi towers from Van Helmonstraat



Old and new structures, Keilestraat



High voltage station, Galileistraat

# 04 THE SITE





## 04 THE SITE

Although our project and the self-defined assignment apply in many of the cases in the area of Merwevierhavens, we decided to focus our attention to one a specific area.

We wanted to approach the assignment from a point that would encapsulate the essence of the history and the present condition of Merwevierhavens. When choosing where to focus, we decided to look for conditions where history, nature, architecture would come together and create a unique, yet representative for the whole, situation.

With that in mind we selected the pier of Radiostraat.

As our title explains, we wanted to focus on the architecture of the peninsular, on an architecture that is peculiar, independent yet representative of the whole because of the program and architecture.

The buildings, rebuilt in 1948 due to consistent damage of the bombings, are nowadays recognized as familiar images for the whole area. Their masonry and prefabricated concrete structure, coupled with the colorful doors of the storage warehouses create a recognizable image in the eyes of the user.

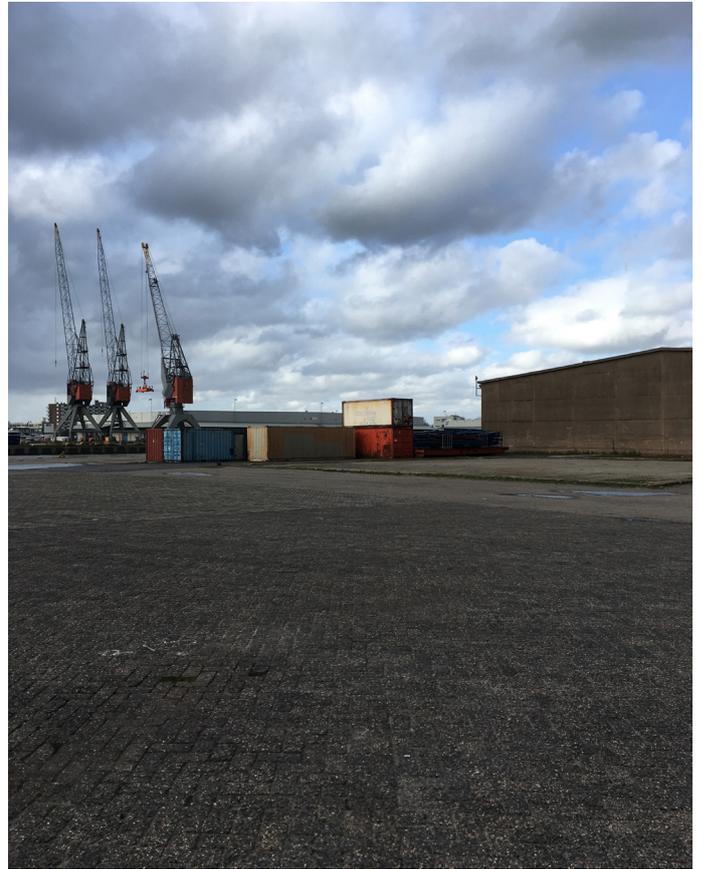
From our view, this area represents an interesting condition of the industrial presence in the surroundings. This peninsula collects a variety of buildings and open spaces peculiar to the development of the early harbor expansion. The five storage buildings are coupled with small facility buildings where offices, cantine and primary facilities were hosted. Here both interiors and exteriors show a certain quality in both construction and decoration. A sense of heroism and nostalgia, pervades the empty interiors of the cafeteria, that was once inhabited by exotic goods, workers and clients.



Stockhouses on Radiostraat



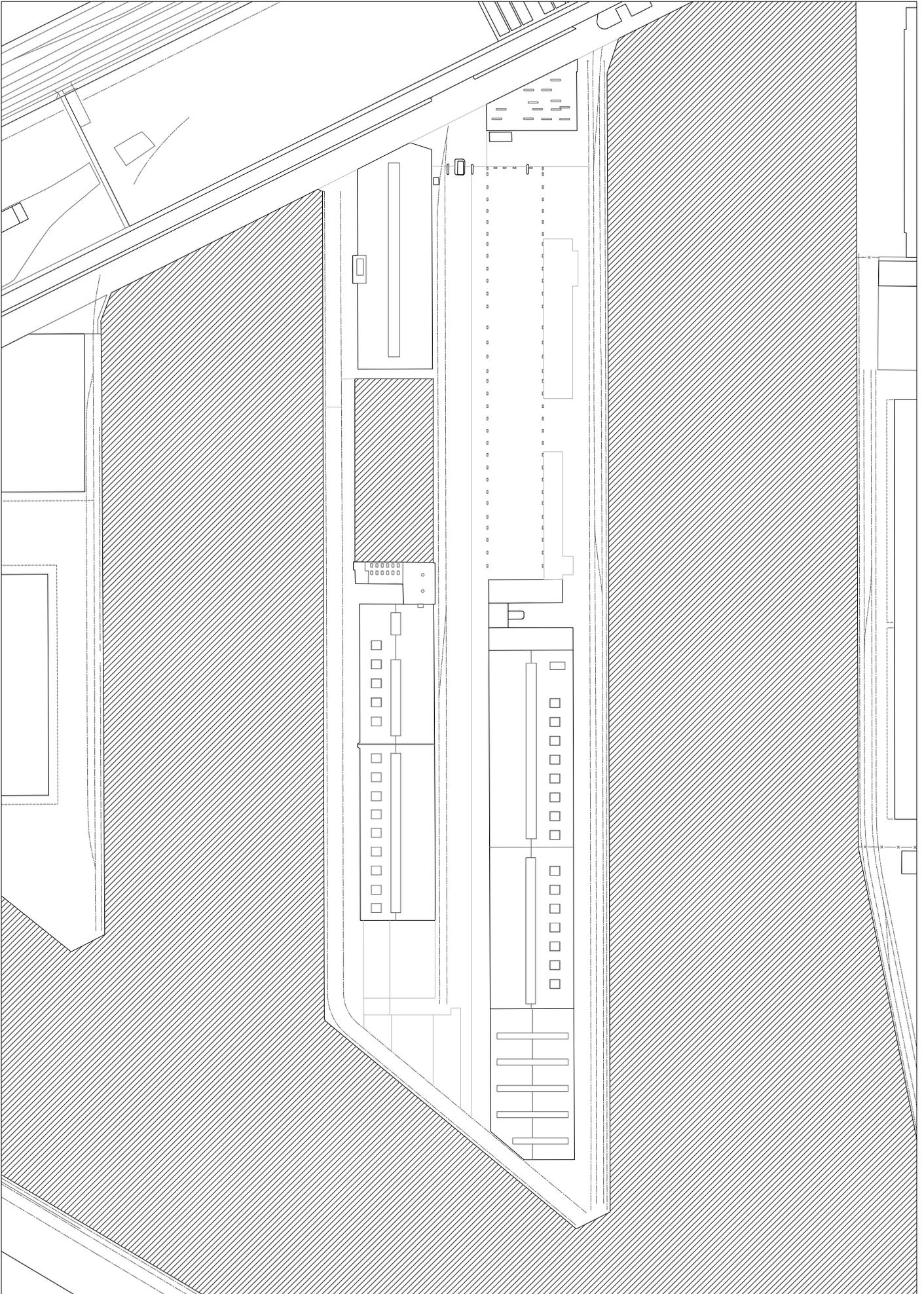
Stockhouse and materials on Radiostraat



End of the Merwehaven



Central perspective of Merwehaven



Plan of Merwehaven

Along these buildings strips of concrete serve the buildings. These alleys create a paved transition from water to indoor space.

The waterways, built in a later stage, are spacious and allow cargo shipments. Those connect to the Nieuwemaas downstream.

On the pier, several cranes stand proudly. Those are used for transportation of goods from the boats to the warehouses, and at the same time create landmarks along the edge, creating a rhythmic sequence of vertical objects. A particular memory reappears right under our feet: we can find the presence of train tracks around the built premises of the peninsula. They used to connect with the railway service on the Marconistraat and provide distribution. Those are to be found all around the area: they create a network of connections that unveil the old organization of the area.

From the outside, the peninsula can be read as a small microcosm, an ecosystem designed to provide efficiency, outdoor space and storage facilities.

These boxes, although designed with the practical scopes, retain qualities that go beyond the utilitarian. They are able to frame views of the water, their scale is balanced in regards of the overall scheme and their internal organization reveals an alternative dimension of the whole. The architecture of the strip can be read as a small masterplan where the role of space is very strong and defined.

In the Peninsula, the notions of city scale get reinvented and readjusted. Open and closed space enlarge and swell along the paved concrete alleys. Such abundance is an incredible opportunity in today's cities. This

scale, this openness and generosity is usually encountered in large open parks, stadiums or perhaps museums.

The water and its proximity on both sides represents an added value to bring forward in any future implementation.

From the water, or from afar, the buildings sit on a concrete pedestal: the calm water around the peninsula present the strip as an idyll, where horizontal and vertical constructions play a role in the profile.



Stockhouses and concrete surfaces on Merwehaven



Communal spaces above the stockhouses



Gate on the Radiostraat



Pier of the Merwehaven



Entrance plate to the office building



Offices on the Radiostraat



Historical traces on the corner of the stockhouse



1 - KNSM building, Diener Diener Architects, Amsterdam



2 - Groothandelsgebouw, Hugh Maaskant, Rotterdam



3 - Bijenkorf department store, Marcel Breuer, Rotterdam



4 - Market building, MVRDV, Rotterdam



5 - De Rotterdam, OMA, Rotterdam



6 - Paperclip building, Carl Weeber, Rotterdam

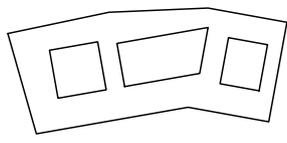


7 - Pireus building, Kollhoff en Rapp architects, Amsterdam

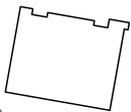


8 - Zalmhaven towers, Diederik Dam van Dam, Rotterdam

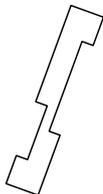
## Large scale buildings in the Netherlands



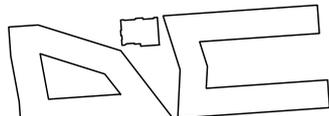
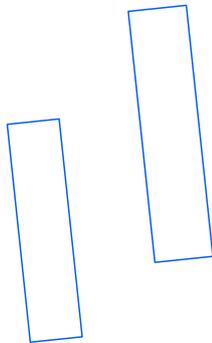
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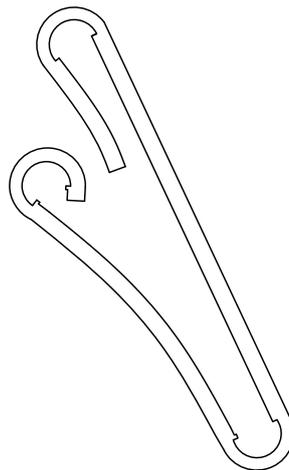
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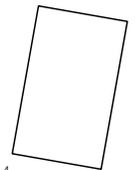
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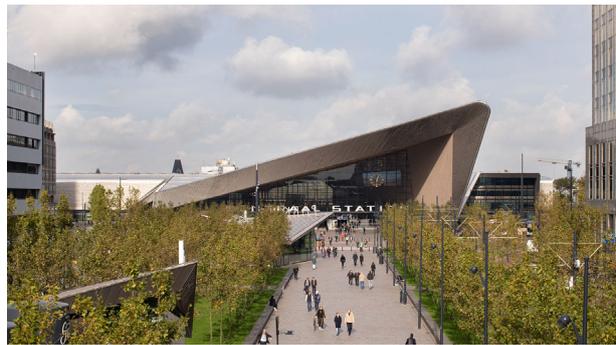
Size comparison with Merwehaven stockhouses (blue outlines)



9 - Hofplein, Rotterdam



10 - Koopgroot, Rotterdam



11 - Centraal Station, Rotterdam

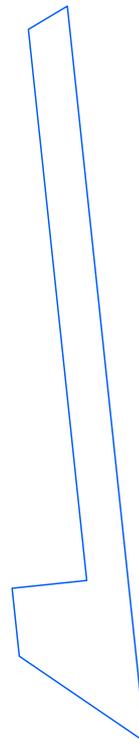
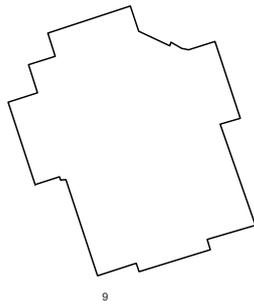
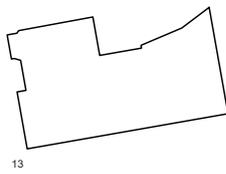
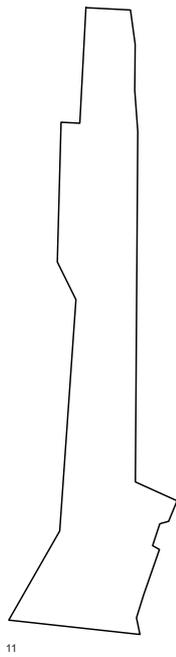


12 - Binnenrotte, Rotterdam



13 - Schouwburgplein, Rotterdam

Large scale open spaces in the Netherlands



Size comparison with Merwehaven open space (blue outline)

# 05 TENDENCIAS





## 05 TENDENCIES

When approaching the topic of the architecture of the harbor, we first wanted to create an index of different projects, attitudes and forms that interacted with the theme. We wanted to see how professionals and the practice in general positioned towards the topic. We researched projects, laws, masterplans and local initiatives.

By researching the projects, we discovered tendencies in harbor architecture. We understood that different contexts dealt with the typology in different directions. In most cases, after an architectural intervention, the image of the harbor was replaced by an artificial, new, sanitized concept of city.

In few other cases the new was crafted around the notion of continuity: Materials would adapt and reorganize the DNA of the original, creating a fresh new typology able to propose something new and at the same time prolong the dialogue between the parts. In these cases, the harbor became part of the city and the other way around. Both benefited from the mutual exchange of style and the product is a testament to this commitment.

In the context of Merwevierhavens, the city of Rotterdam will expand and provide new dwellings in the area. We believe that in moment like these, when a city bleeds into an area with such characterized identity and language, designers and municipalities, have to take extra measures to allow a sustainable and sensitive development.

Areas like this one are very fragile and open to any consideration. We believe that the harbor architecture needs to be extended to the next generations, to the future of the city of Rotterdam.

By the end of 19th century Amsterdam, the peninsula of Java was built to accommodate an increasing amount of goods arriving by boat into the port. Java island was built as a long strip of 1.2km, only 120m wide and hosted a large amount of warehouses. By the 1970s, companies moved out, and squatters moved in.

In the early 1990s the city planning department of Amsterdam decided to redevelop the area and approached the project with a rather dismissive approach towards the identity of the area. Long strips of medium-high buildings was assembled all around the edge of the peninsula: behind it an inner courtyard simulated a city canal setting. The new architecture carried little of the previous settlements. Its tradition and history was severed and forgotten.

In this approach a city loses the opportunity to create a dialogue with different part of the city. Not only a city must retain diverse expressions throughout time, but also stimulate designers and citizens to confront with different declinations of urban environments.

In the late 20th century, many other cities which developed in proximity or on the water, saw an increase in residential demand. The need of a productive city became smaller and similarly other cities adapted a strong position towards harbor architecture.

Examples like the Kaai in Antwerp or the Hafencity in Hamburg, are two interesting ones in our view. In Hamburg a part of the Speicherstadt area (or Hafencity) was eventually kept in its original form and preserved. Both the city and the harbor remain separate, one preoccupied in its own future, and the other a memory of the past.

In the case of Antwerp, both the area of Kaai and the one of West Kaai, opted for a diversity of typologies, programs and organization. The interesting mix consists of diverse and punctual moments of new and old mixed together: old warehouses and new residential typologies coexist in the areas of Kaai. A series of towers, designed by a set of international architects, challenge the identity of the harbor and open up a dialogue.

When looking back at Merwevierhavens and the case of Rotterdam, we see a great deal of potential. Rotterdam is a city which is proud of its social and economic relation to the harbor. Committing to extend the language, the scale and the expression of harbor, is to celebrate the identity of Rotterdam.





Hafencity, Hamburg (DE)



Philharmonie and the harbour, Hamburg (DE)



New developments in Hafencity, Hamburg (DE)



Harbour of Hamburg (DE), 1920s



Deutzer Hafen Koln new development, Cologne (DE)



Deutzer Hafen Koln new development, Cologne (DE)



Current existing structures, Cologne (DE)



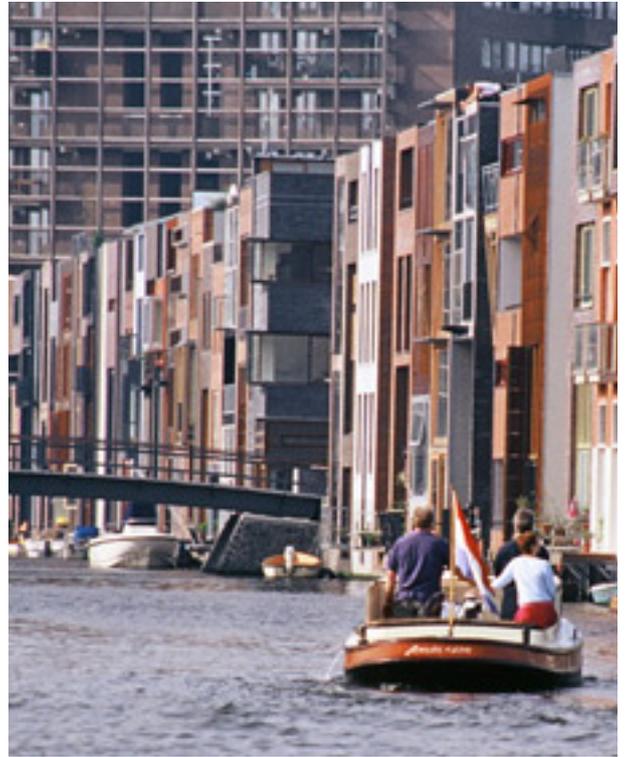
Historical structures on the harbour, 1930s, Cologne (DE)



Harbour structures in East Amsterdam (NL), 1960s



Borneo Island current situation, Amsterdam (NL)



Borneo Island, Amsterdam (NL)



Harbour structures in East Amsterdam (NL), 1960s

# 06 STRATEGIES





## 06 STRATEGIES

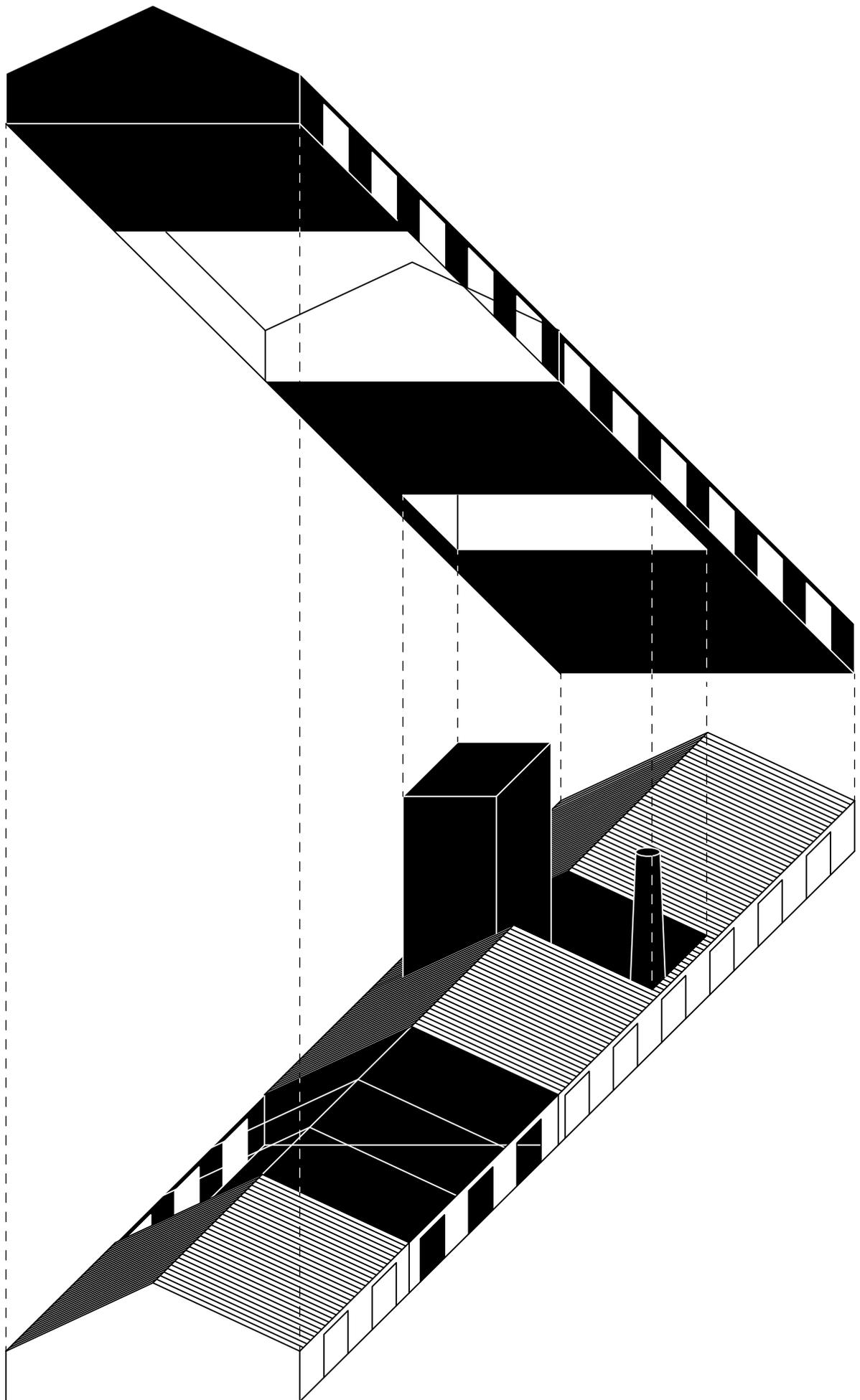
The redevelopment of the Merwevierhavens area raises a lot of questions. How can a former harbor area become part of the city? What does a possible redevelopment look like? Should large-scale industrial heritage become part of this redevelopment? What is worth keeping and what is not? How do you interact with the existing architecture and infrastructures? How can working and living find a place?

Instead of focusing on a single building and its architectural elaboration we have zoomed out and considered the site as part of a whole, as part of an area that is united by its former identity as a harbor. We have formulated eight strategies for the development of the site that each consider what new architecture can mean in relation to the existing.

The eight strategies consider how to build a productive neighborhood that uses its large scale industrial heritage as a carrier for new redevelopments. The strategies provide keys for possible architectural elaborations that deal with the existing conditions in a sensible and sensitive way.

1

CHERISH THE SCALE AND  
GENEROSITY OF THE  
INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE



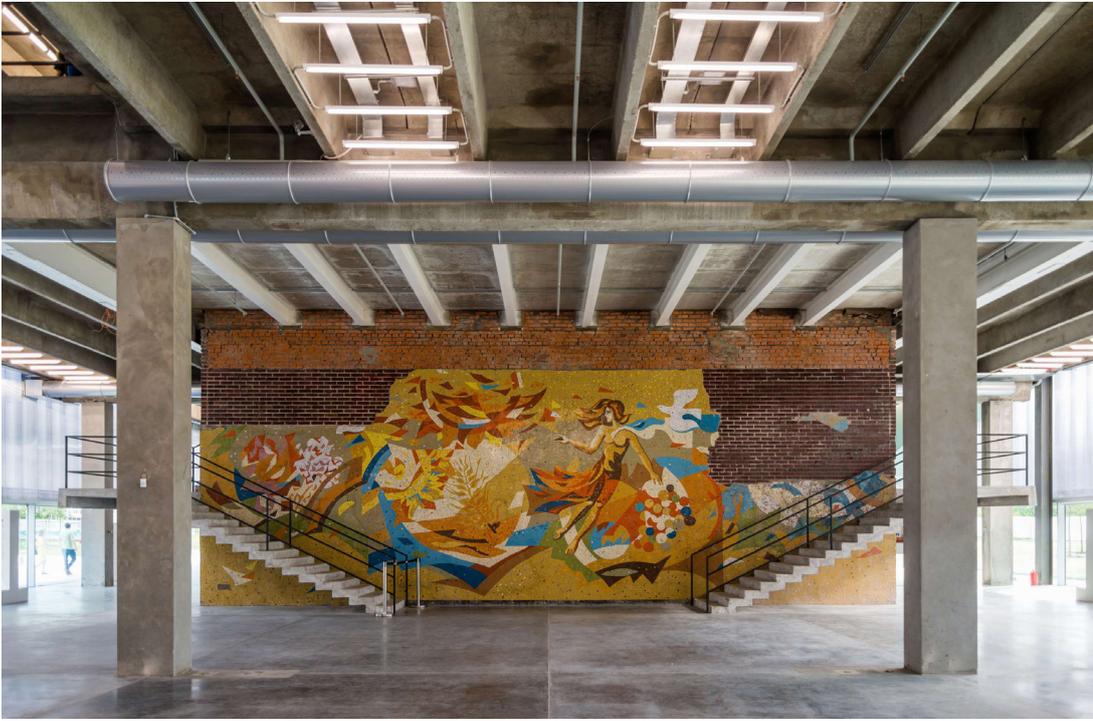
# 1 CHERISH THE GENEROSITY OF THE INDUSTRIAL SCALE

The typologies present in the Merwevierhavens are characterized by their generosity of scale. Large warehouses, office buildings and wide open spaces populate the area. Visiting the Merwevierhavens it is the presence of this large scale that stands out, open space, scarce in many other city neighborhoods is ubiquitous here. This open space lends the area a desolate character.

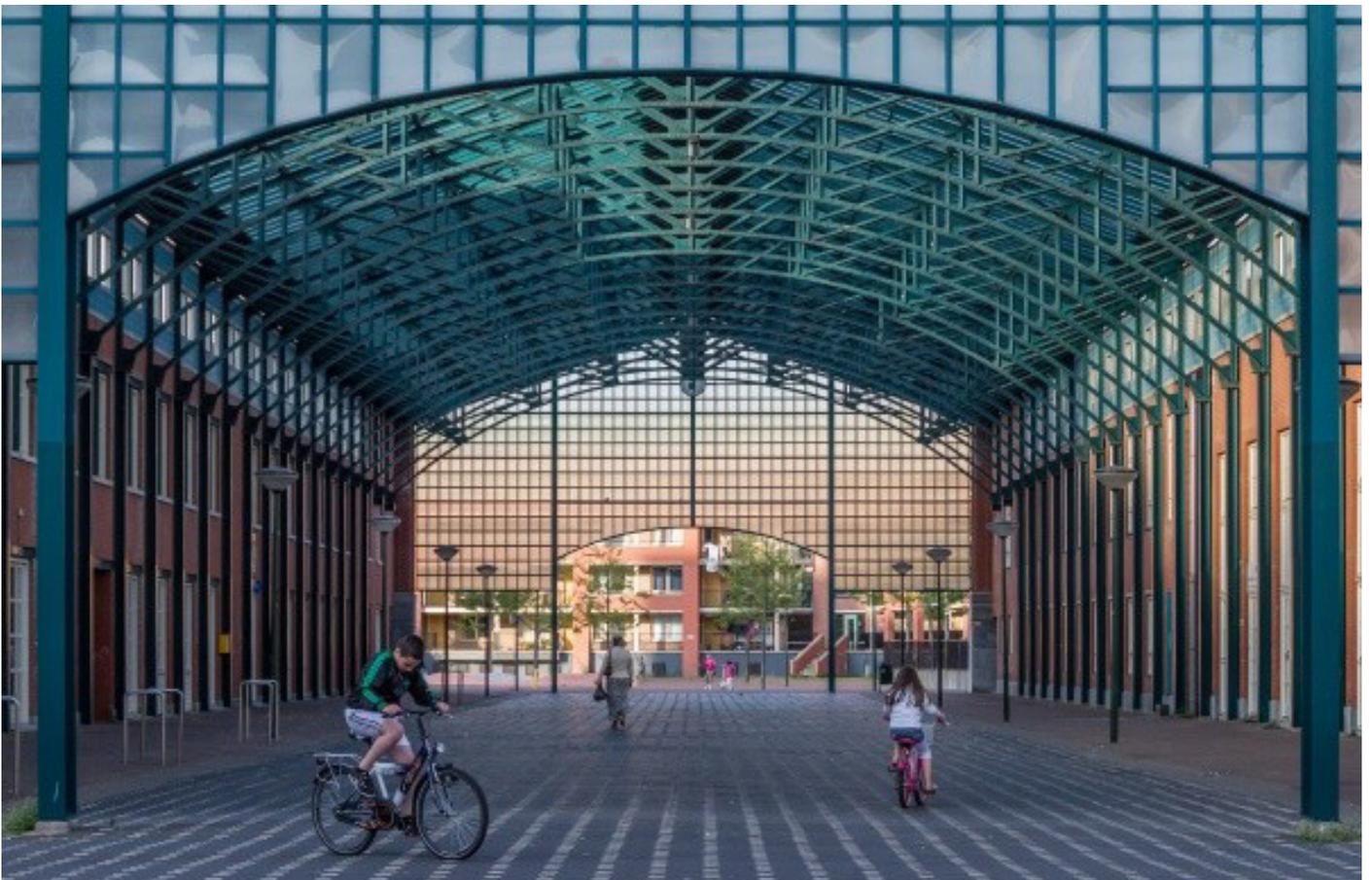
The openness of the spaces emphasizes their emptiness, imbuing the area with an abandoned quality. At the same time the generosity of the existing scales makes everything seem possible. The large open spaces have potential to become anything, their abandoned and unpolished nature seem to invite a personal appropriation of the space.

One can imagine making things here, taking something out of the workshop and building it on the waterfront, it is not difficult to imagine large gatherings, people enjoying the sun together or small gatherings, a table moved out for a neighborhood barbecue. The existing buildings might seem worthless in a way, with little architectural quality, badly maintained and in various states of neglect but these existing spaces and infrastructures form stimulating and affordable contexts for new initiatives. The generosity of scale is to be cherished, to allow production to become part of the new urban paradigm. The large scale is important to the area, it is part of its history and its character, it is what makes the area currently attractive to start-ups and new initiatives of makers. It is able to accommodate production, housing and shared public spaces.

By strategically choosing for conservation and reuse of buildings and infrastructures it is possible to strengthen the urban and economic dynamic.



Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, OMA, Moscow (RU)



Openbaar Gemeentelijk Slachthuis, Aldo Rossi, Den Haag (NL)



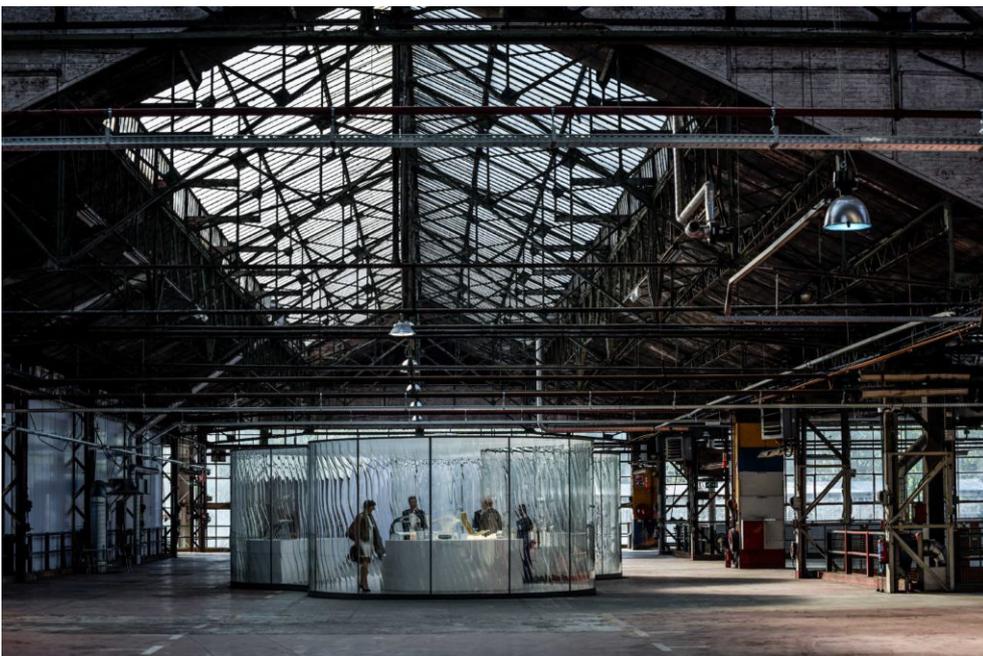
Interior view of the Goudsesingel building, Hugh Maaskant, Rotterdam (NL)



Interior view of Piazza Ceramiche housing complex, Jo Janssen and Wim van den Bergh, Maastricht (NL)



Courtyard view of Kortrijk Expo, OFFICE KGDVS, Kortrijk (BE)



Interior view of Kanal Centre Pompidou, Brussels (BE)



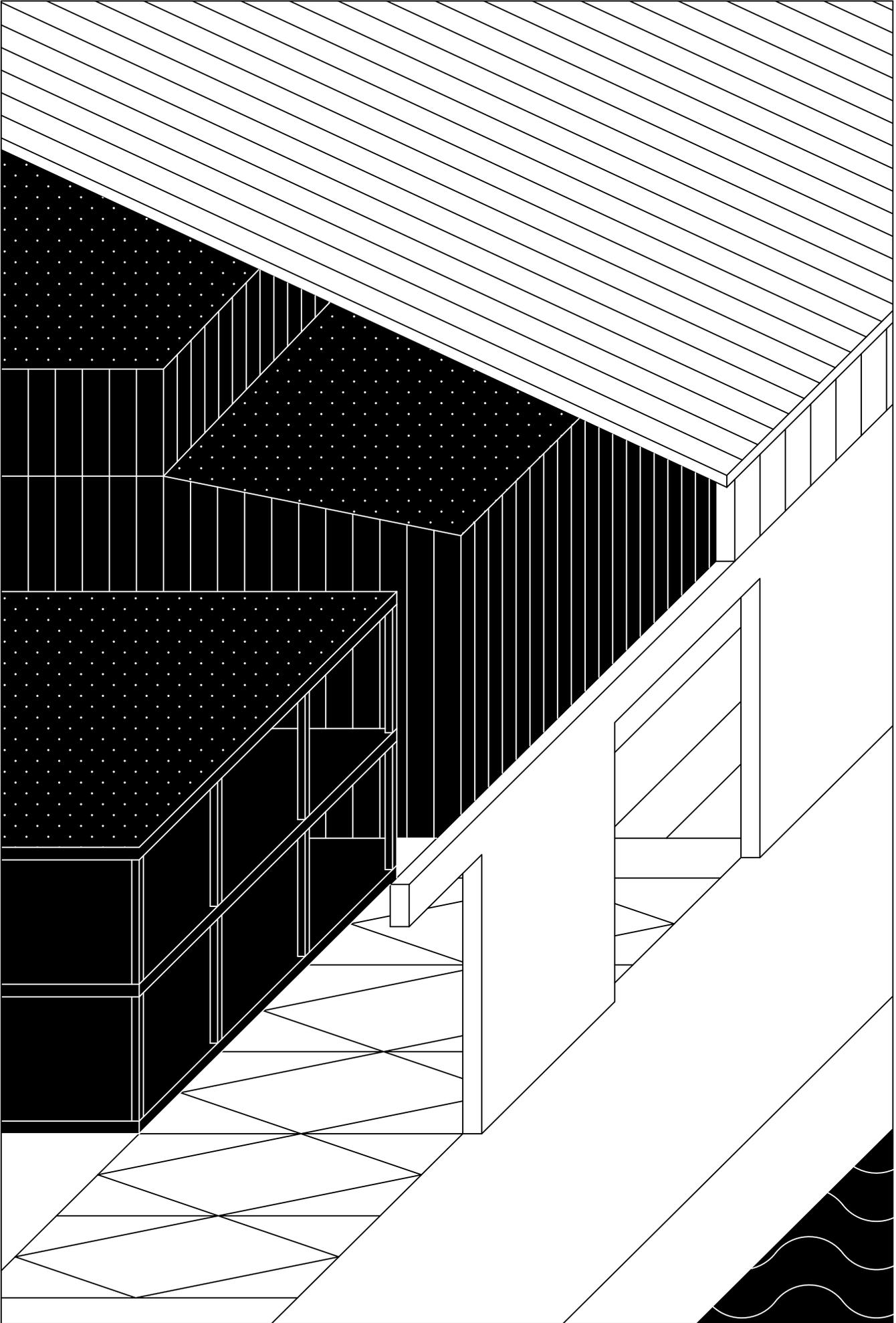
Large scale spaces contribute to variety and richness of architectural possibilities



Interiors expand, allowing generosity in our everyday activities

2

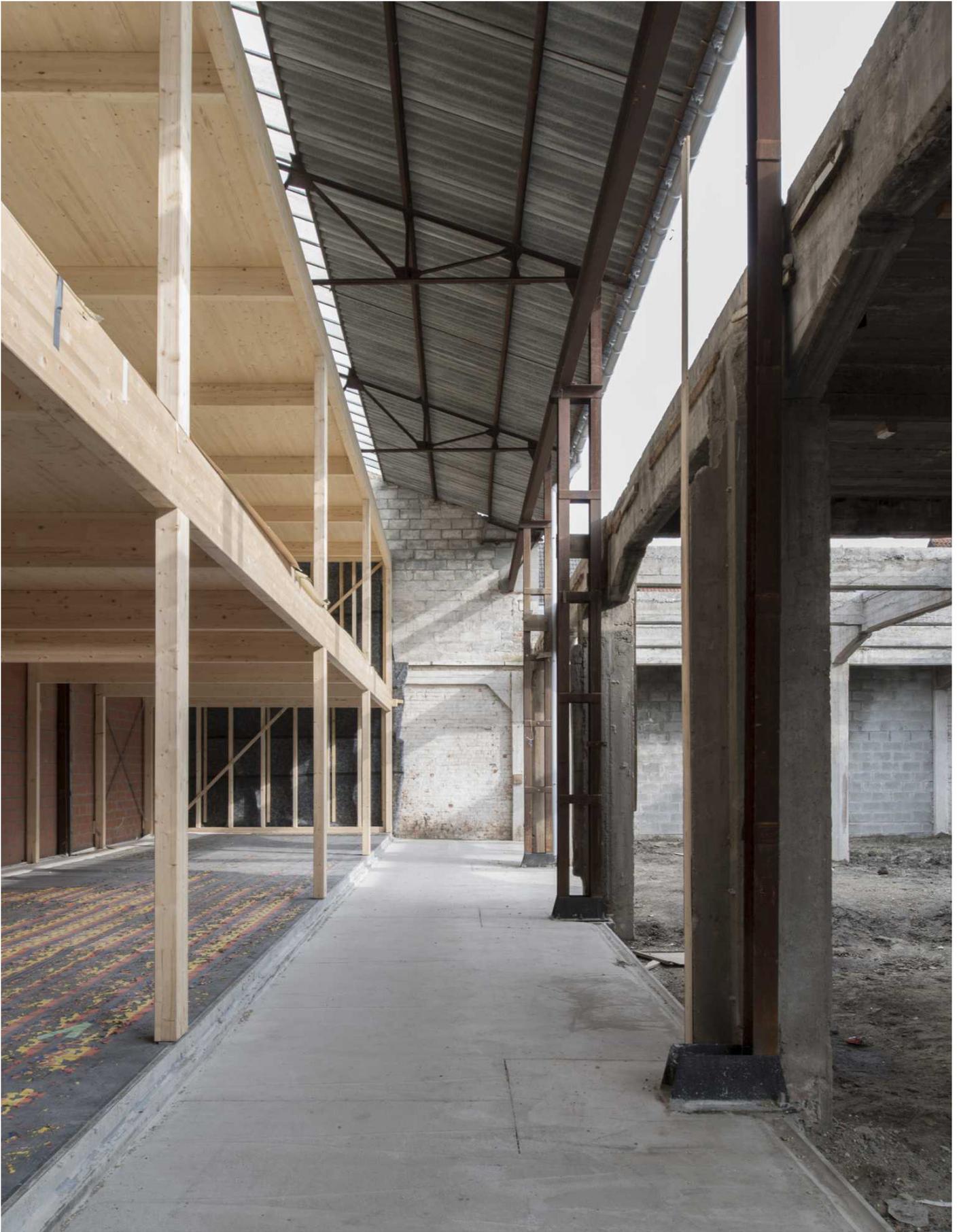
**STRIVE FOR LAYEREDNESS  
AND INTERSECTION**



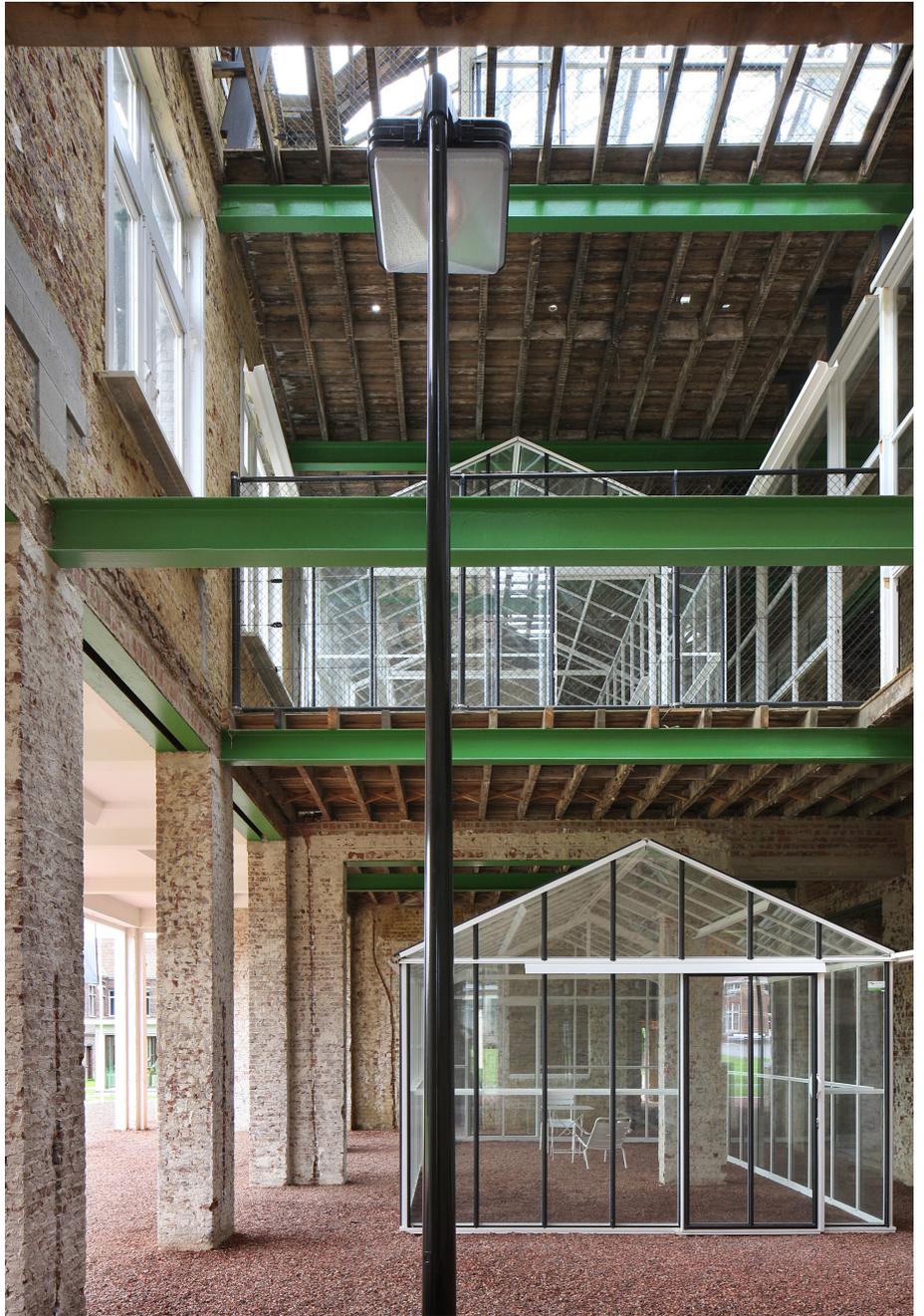
## 2 STRIVE FOR LAYEREDNESS AND INTERSECTION

The Merwevierhavens is an area with history, it has a distinctive character, it is a former harbor with an industrial past. This history is reflected in its morphology, the piers surrounded by water, the large open spaces allow transport of goods. It is also reflected in the buildings on the site, warehouses occupy the site, low brick or concrete buildings stretched along the piers, large openings to accommodate the moving of goods in and out of the buildings. To approach the site as a blank slate, or tabula rasa, would mean getting rid of this history, to deny the area its past and to squander its character.

The redevelopment of former harbor areas is usually characterized by this tabula rasa approach combined with the conservation of some picturesque 'harbor elements', an old crane, a beautifully restored historical building with a café, gallery or restaurant and the presence of water, the minimal conservation justifies the eradication of historical structures. The large-scale industrial heritage of the site is considered more a burden than an opportunity. The buildings are not beautiful enough to keep as a token conservation, not special enough to repurpose as a café, creative hub or restaurant. We would like to promote another type of thinking, we want to consider the large-scale industrial heritage not as a burden, but as a carrier for new developments. This is a conservation that is not about preserving a beautiful building in a pristine state, isolated from any new development. We propose a conservation that is about creating layeredness, that allow new and old to interact and become a new whole. To conserve some buildings, to imbue the neighborhood with its existing character and qualities and to retain part of its important history. Once the existing is embraced it will give rise to interesting architectural solutions.



Reconversion of an industrial site, GAFFA architects, Ghent (BE)



PC Caritas, Architecten De Vylder Vinck Taillieu, Melle (BE)



Bomastraat apartment, NU Architectuurstudio, Ghent (BE)



Entrance to weekend house, OFFICE KGDVS, Merchtem (BE)



Fondazione Prada, OMA, Milan (IT)



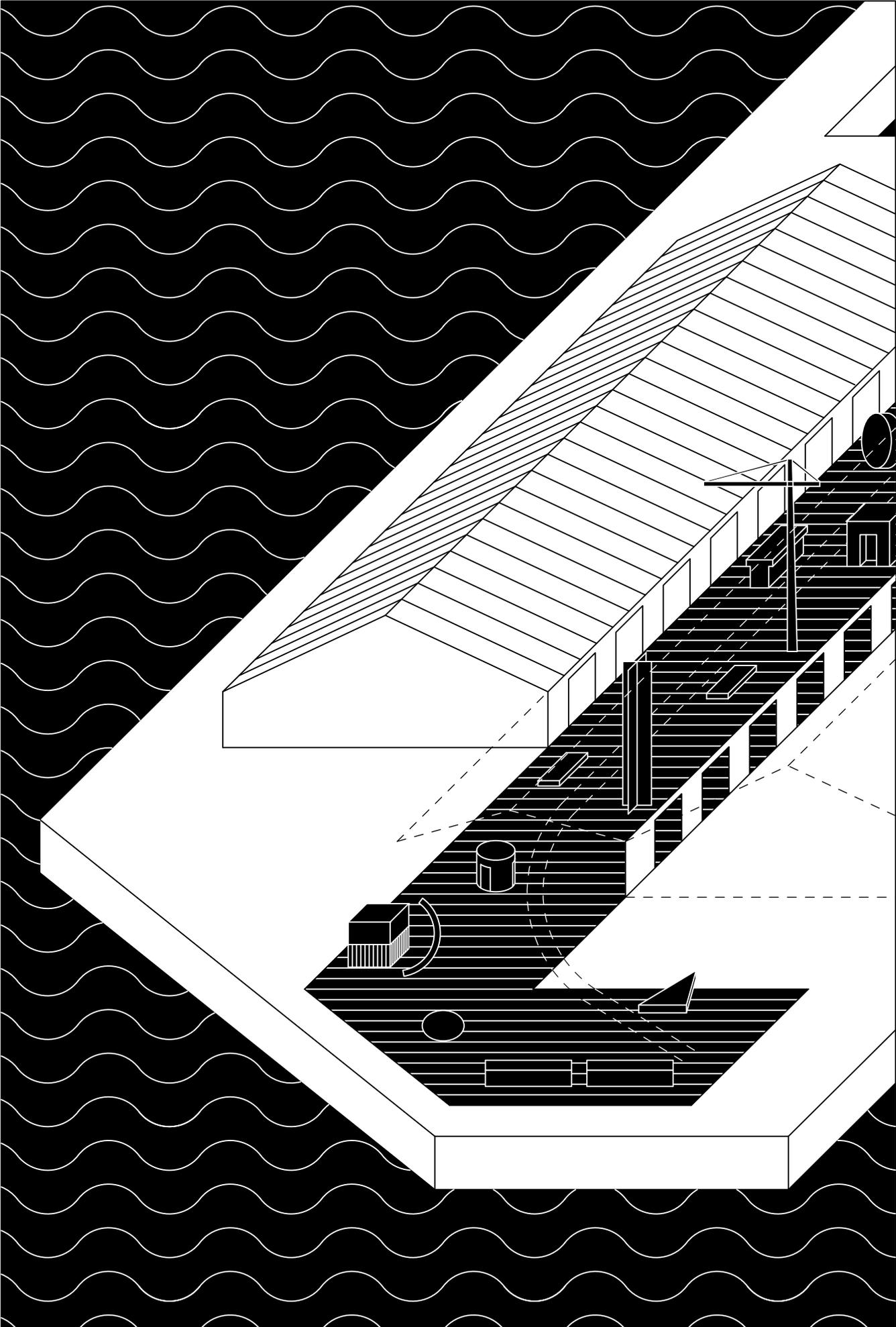
New layers add values and new identities to the existing structures



The whole becomes an organic work-in-progress

3

# REIMAGINE, REPURPOSE AND REUSE EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE



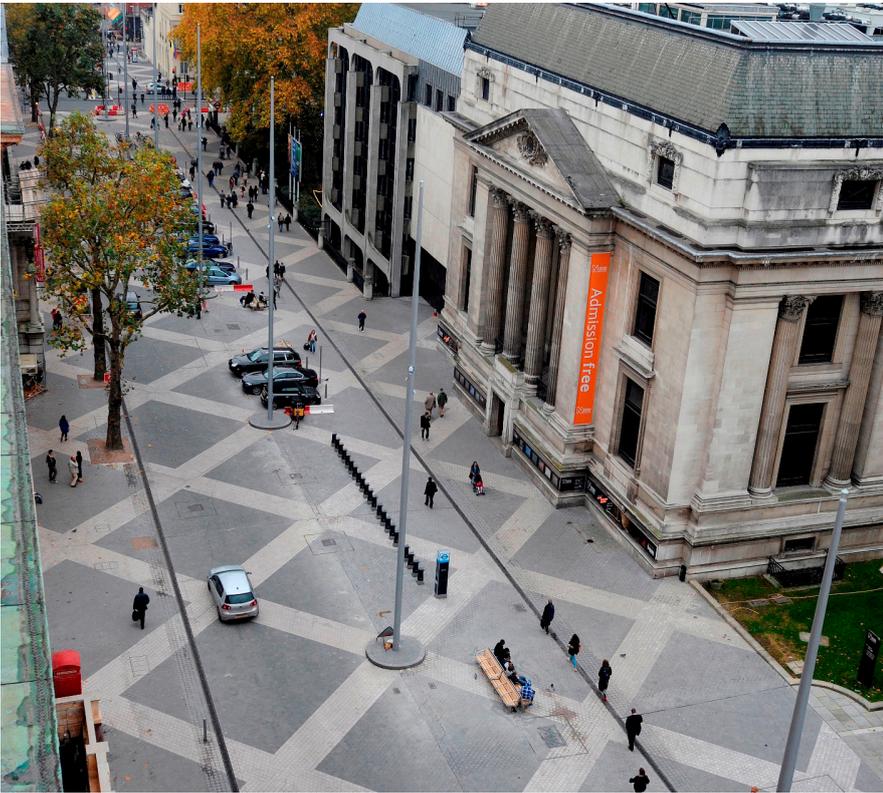
### 3 REIMAGINE, REPURPOSE AND REUSE EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

The Merwevierhavens area is united by its large scales. The buildings are large, the streets are wide, the open spaces ample. The site has an existing central infrastructure, an access route that is currently used for the transportation of goods and the storage of all kinds of items.

The central strip is characteristic for the site it is an iconic structure that defines the images of the site. The infrastructural strip is a direct result of its history. Future developments should consider the qualities of the existing infrastructures on the site, reimagining the existing would allow for a development of the area without losing its characteristics and distinctive nature. These specific qualities can serve as an inspiration for future developments.

The scale of the strip allows for a variety of uses, it has the potential to be a public space in itself and to present different public qualities. The space can be used by soft mobility users and their industrial counterparts. Reimagining the industrial strip as a truly shared space for the area, it can accommodate the industrial as the most public spaces.

By reimagining, repurposing and reusing the existing infrastructure the strip can become a central public space of the new development, one that retains its history and allow a variety of functions to exist in the new neighborhood.



Shared profiles in Kensington high street, London (UK)

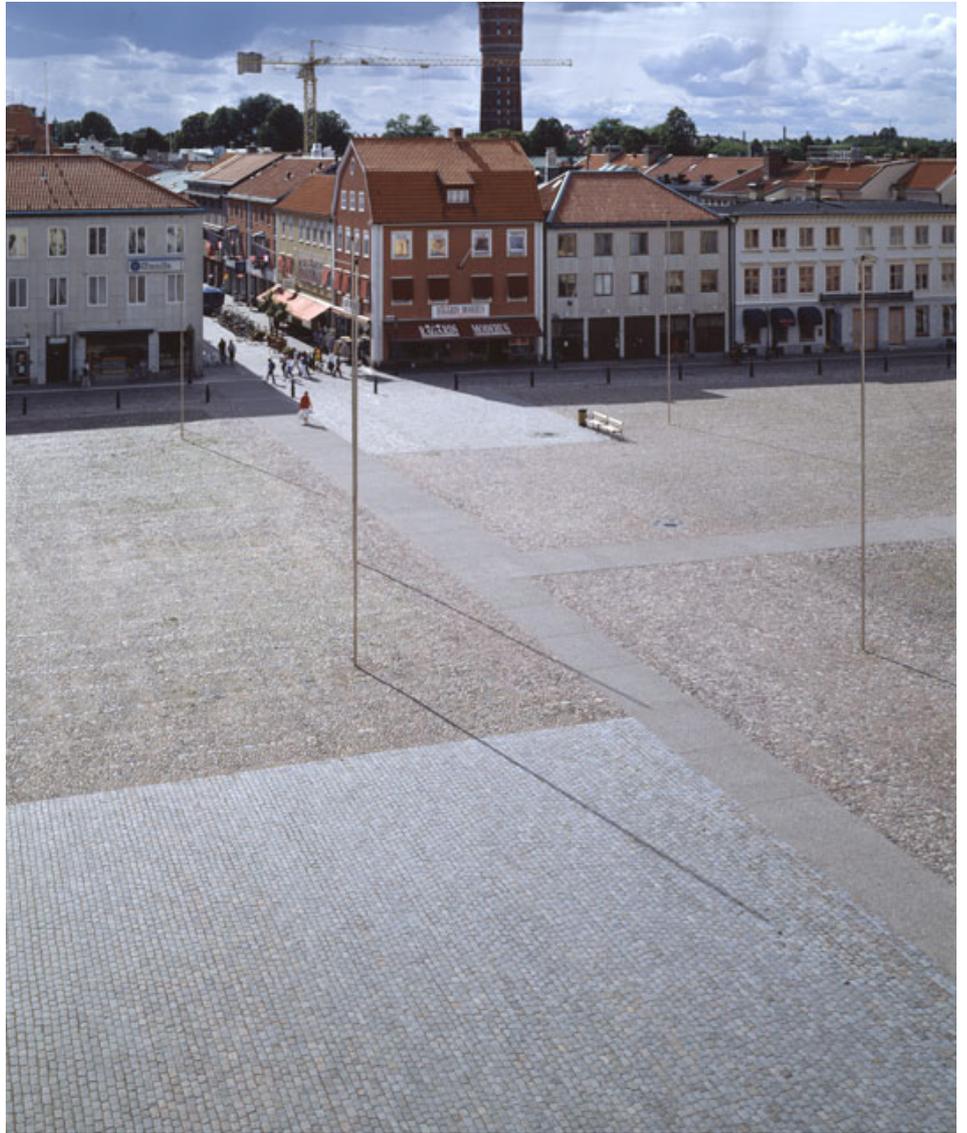


Das zebra streifen, Gerhard Lang, Kassel (DE)



Skanderbeg Square, 51N4E, Tirana (AL)





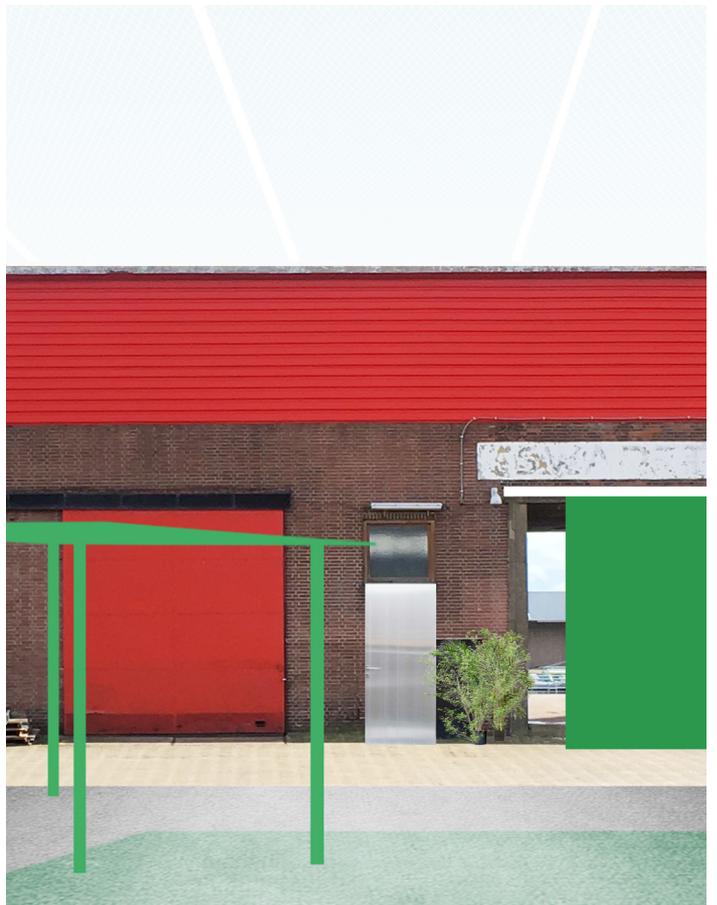
Stortorget square, Caruso st John, Kalmar (SE)



The central spine as a carrier of communal activities and inner connection



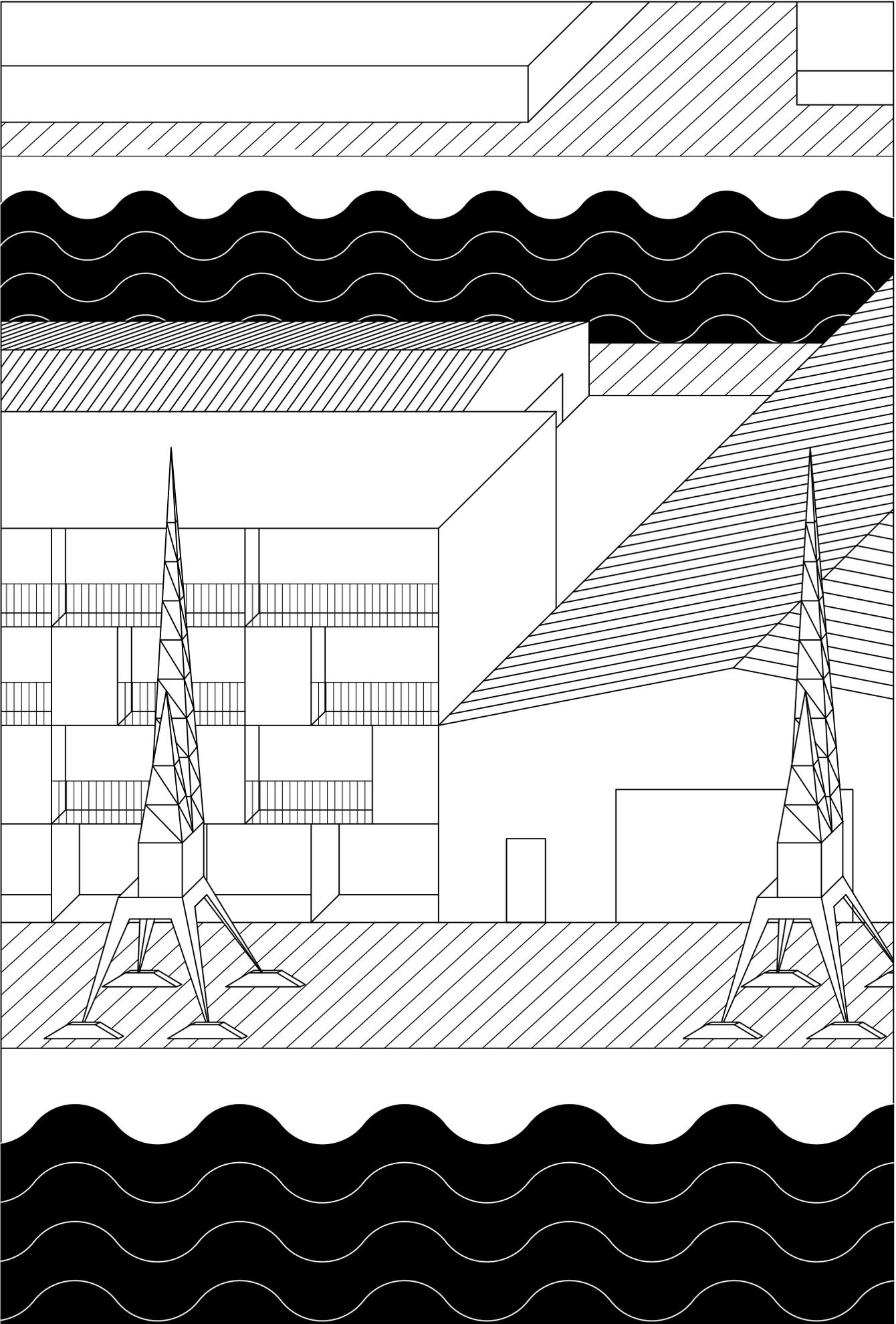
A container for public activities where every day life unfolds



Public amenities and communal furniture

4

RETHINK THE PROXIMITY OF  
LIVING AND WORKING AND  
ITS POTENTIAL



## 4 RETHINK THE PROXIMITY OF LIVING AND WORKING AND ITS POTENTIAL

The large existing scales of the site invite a radical rethinking of the proximity of living and working and its potential. To preserve the site's character as a productive area it is crucial to maintain a balance between living and working. The division between living and working, one of the dogmas of modernist urbanism has been problematic in contemporary service economy. People travel to work and back every day, putting a huge pressure on infrastructures and the environment. At the same time more and more people are working from home, in homes that were never designed to accommodate it. Organizing living and working in close proximity demands a rethinking of the house, or apartment. It means incorporating larger spaces in buildings for productive activities, as well as polyvalent rooms in apartments to accommodate a personal workspace. The existence of both living and working environments in the area will diversify the use of the public space. Historically work, production and living took place side by side, contemporary projects rarely address the issue. In new developments housing is getting smaller and smaller, young starters are supposed to live in a hotel room typology, a minimal space with shared facilities, living and working is excluded from this typology. The inhabitant of these spaces has to rent an office space and eat out at restaurants. This lack of flexibility poses a threat to the future, it is not surprising that it is especially heritage projects that provide the spatial qualities to organize working from home. To work from home a certain generosity and flexibility of space is needed. The generousities of space that exist on the site, in infrastructure and in buildings, can be used to organize work and living closely together to be part of a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable working practice.



Interior view of the atelier/house of artist Paul Grégoire, Amsterdam (NL)



Interior view of office/apartment in Piazza Ceramique, Jo Janssen and Wim van den Bergh, Maastricht (NL)



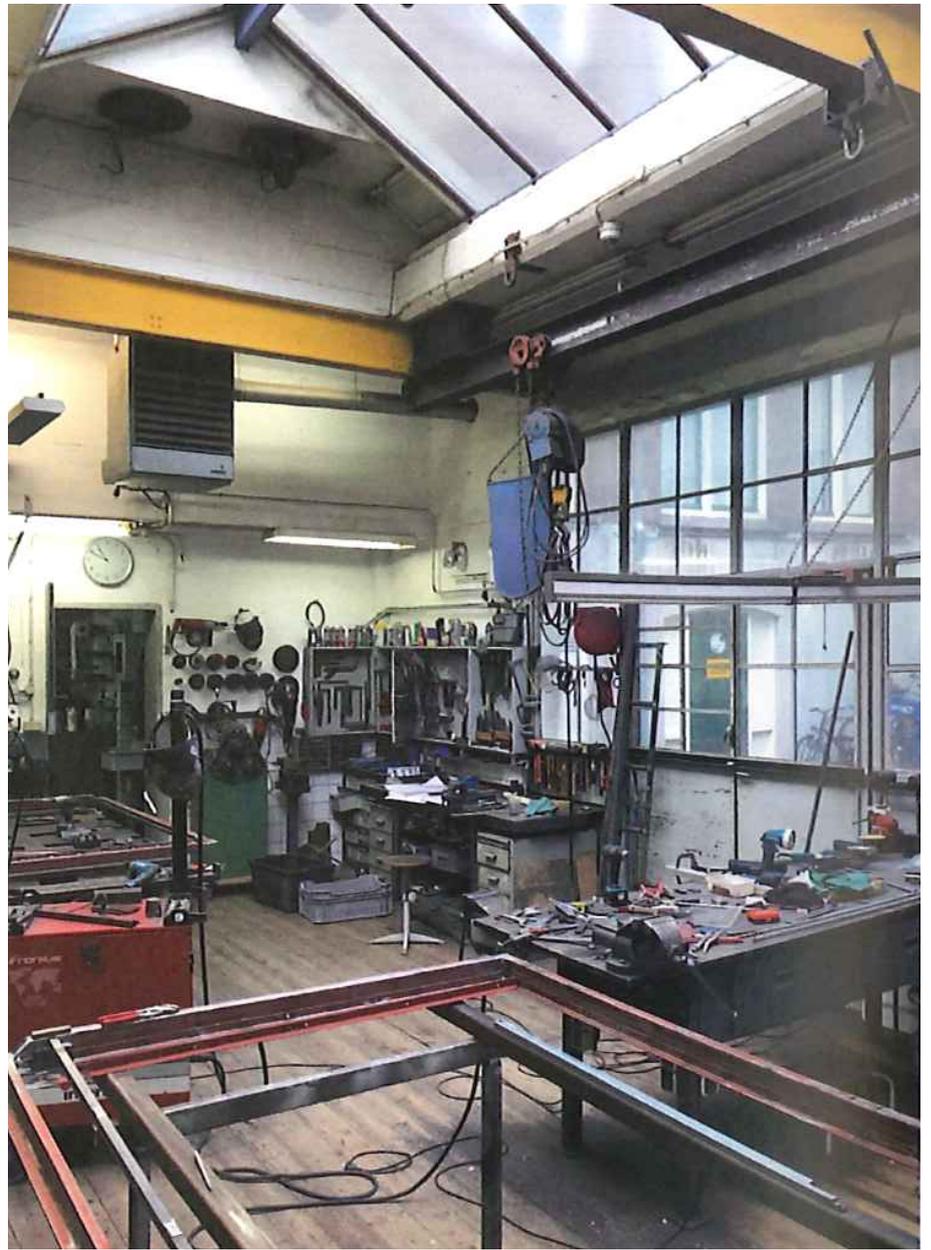
"Falling Back to Earth", Cai Guo-Qiang



Interior view of atelier/apartment IBeB building, Heide & Von Beckerath, Berlin (DE)



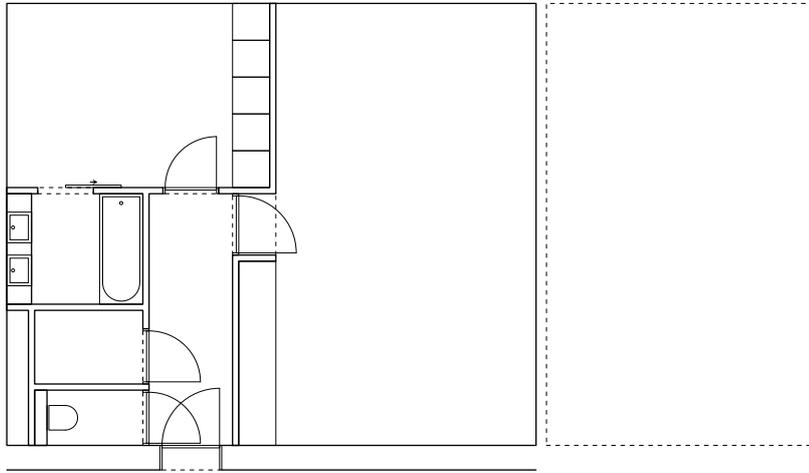
Blackhorse yard workshop, Assemble Architects, London (UK)



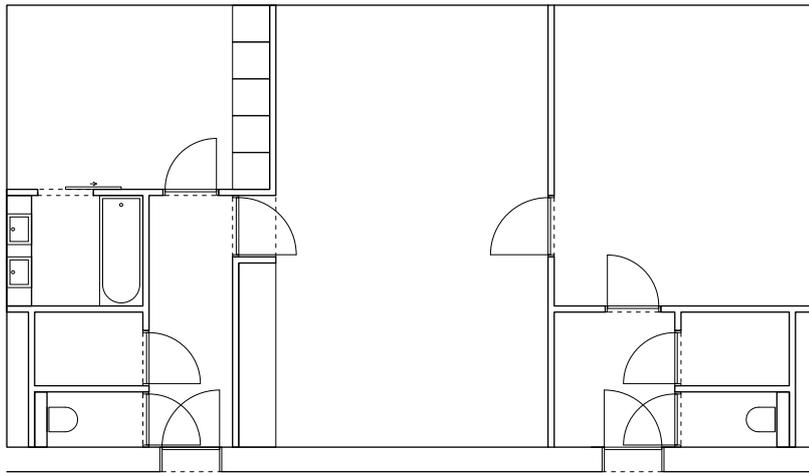
Interior view of the metal workshop of WoonWerkPand Tetterode, Amsterdam (NL)



Interior view of a working studio in Toni Areal complex, EM2N, Zurich (CH)



Typical apartment floor plan



Adding the possibility of a working space with independent access connected to the apartment



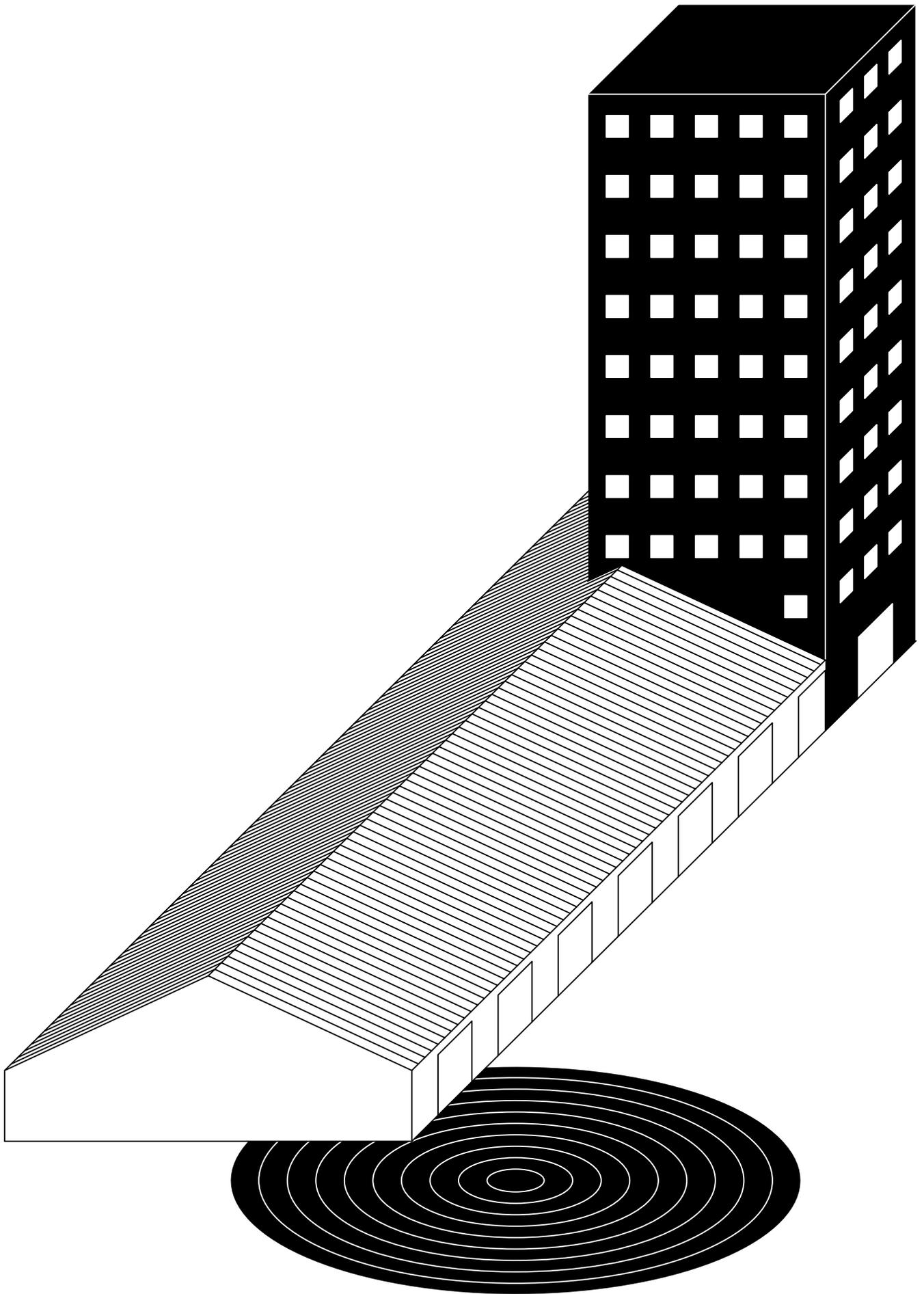
An apartment where working and living are distinct entities



A potential for profession and life to interact

5

PUNCTUAL DENSITIES ALLOW  
GENEROSITIES ELSEWHERE

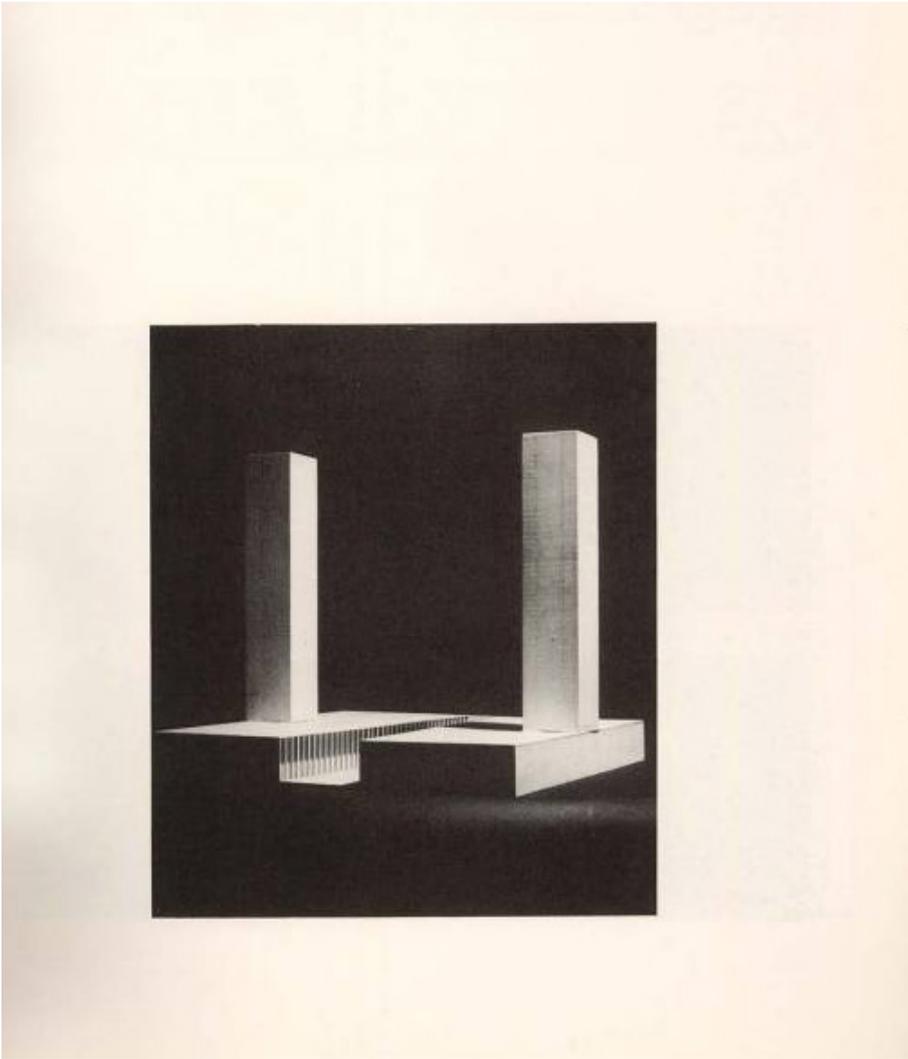


## 5 PUNCTUAL DENSITIES ALLOW GENEROSITIES ELSEWHERE

There are several ways of dealing with density in an area that is to be developed. One way is to evenly spread the planned square meters over the site, creating a homogeneous neighborhood of equal densities. Another way is to work with local densities, denser areas, that can generate more space for areas of a lower density. The large scale and the generosity of this scale is of a crucial importance to the Merwevierhavens area. The scale is related to its history and character, it can allow a variety of activities to take place and support the introduction of productive activities to the area.

Conserving the large scale is crucial to the future success of the site. If one were to introduce the planned squared meters and divide them equally over the site, there would be little space for open or generous spaces. By introducing density in a punctual way in certain places, generous spaces can exist elsewhere on the site. In this way the large scale can be maintained while the demands for density are met.

Larger buildings blocks can bring the density of the site to the desired level while at the same time functioning as reference points on the islands, towering above the rest. Their large scale and monumental character is able to engage in a spatial connection with the surrounding islands.



Palazzo della Ragione, Antonio Monestiroli, Milan (IT)



Borneo Sporenburg masterplan, West8, Amsterdam (NL)



Johanneskerk in Tzum (NL)

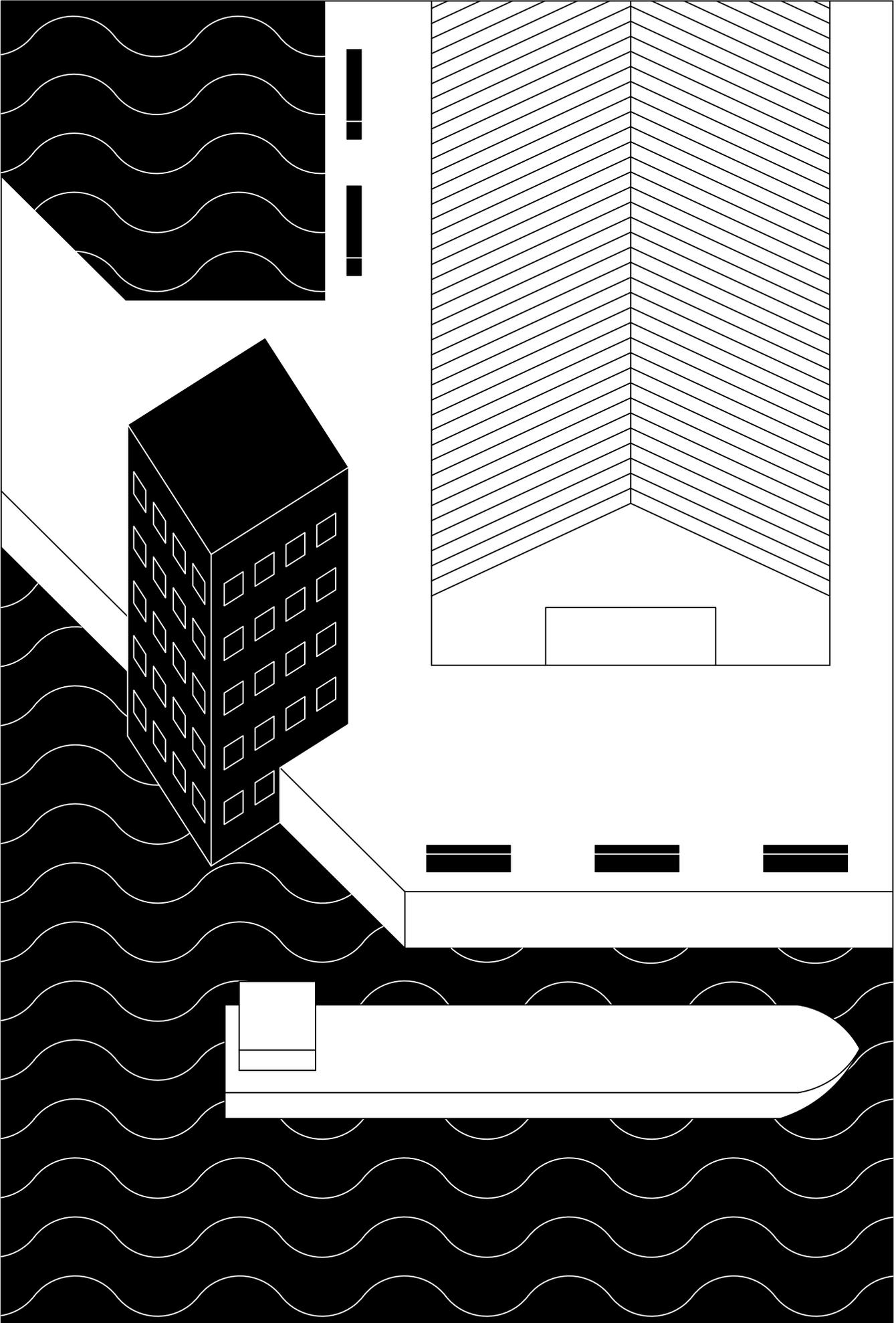


The peninsula, surrounded by the water allows verticality and higher profiles



6

REINFORCE EXISTING  
PHYSICAL AND VISUAL  
RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE  
WATER



## 6 REINFORCE EXISTING PHYSICAL AND VISUAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE WATER

As a former harbor area the Merwevierhavens and the site are characterized by the presence of water. Water is everywhere and surrounds you as you walk down the piers. The strong presence of water is a unique quality that should be cherished in the new developments.

Water forms a direct link to the history of the site and its past as a harbor. Surrounded by water the piers, or islands become isolated entities, this is comparable to the image of the medieval town, a densely built city surrounded by open space. It is essential to reinforce existing physical and visual relationships with the water to conserve this link with the past. This does not mean that every building or house should have a direct relation with the water. You don't have to be confronted directly and constantly to feel connected with the water.

The proximity, also without a direct view, is already an important quality. By making the waterfront publicly accessible the water can become another public space, a place for leisure and a qualitative place in the development of the area. The public waterfront guarantees a connection with the water without having to orient every building to the water, creating a generous space that relates directly to the water rather than creating many limited or partial views from buildings.

Wide quays bordering closed building blocks with open spaces behind them differentiate the public space in a clear and qualitative way. Decks, piers and other water-related structures can make the water itself accessible as a public space.



Floating swimming pool on the Maas river, 1950s, Rotterdam (NL)



Floating swimming pool at Island Brygge, BIG, Copenhagen (DK)



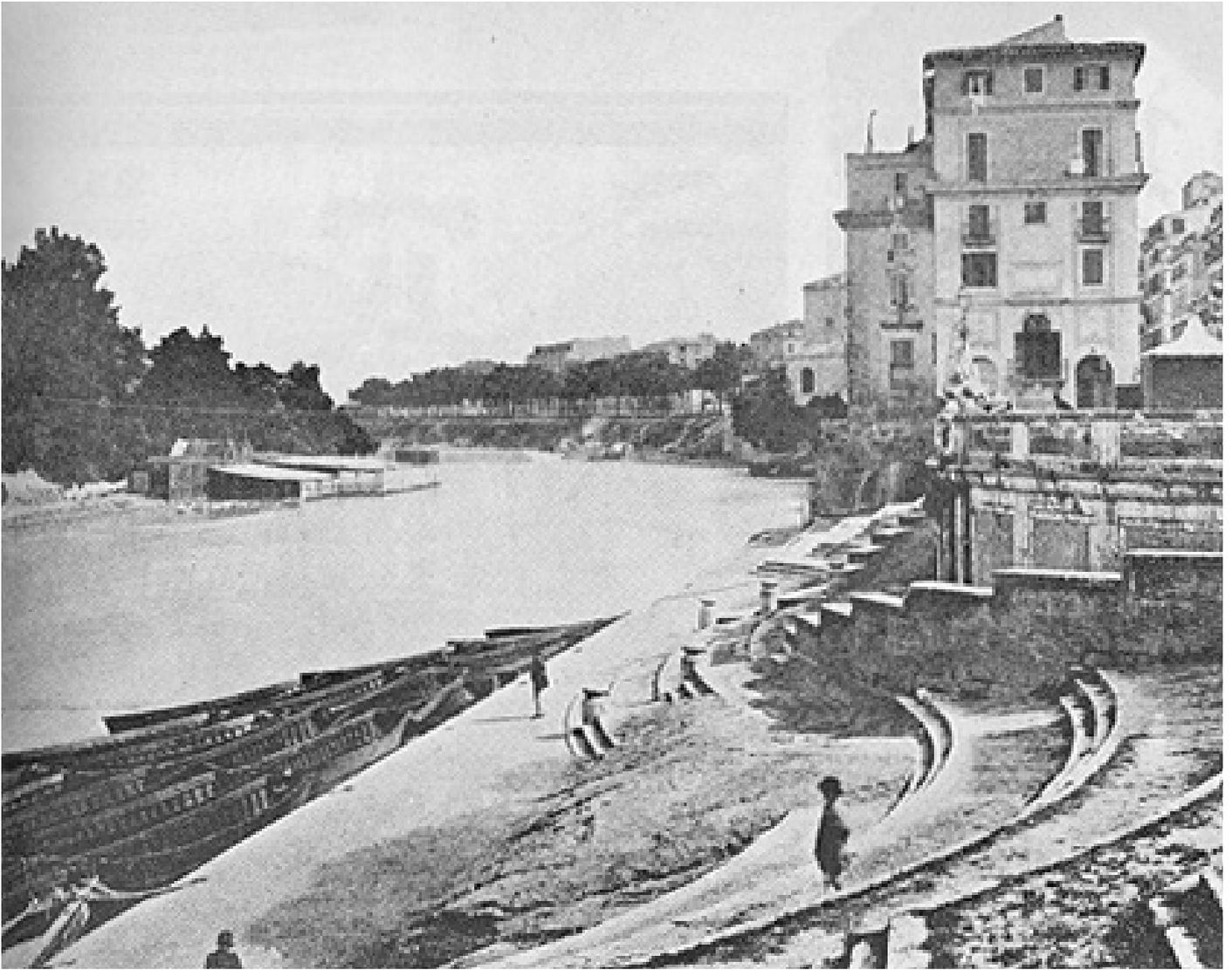
Breakwater park, Claude Cormier Architects, Kingston (CA)



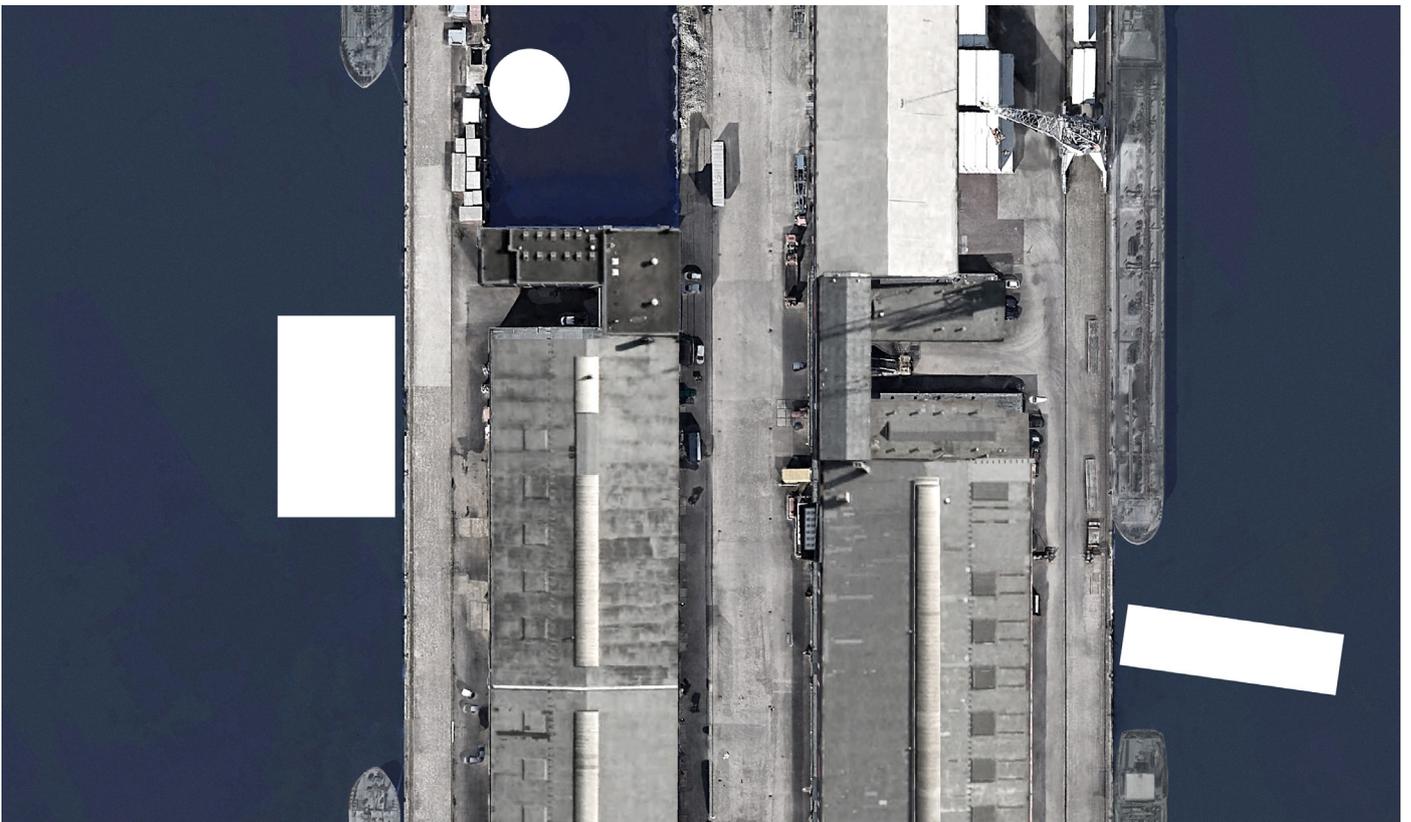
KNSM Island, 1980s, Amsterdam (NL)



Pier on Borneokade, Amsterdam (NL)



Porto di Ripetta, 1860s, Rome (IT)



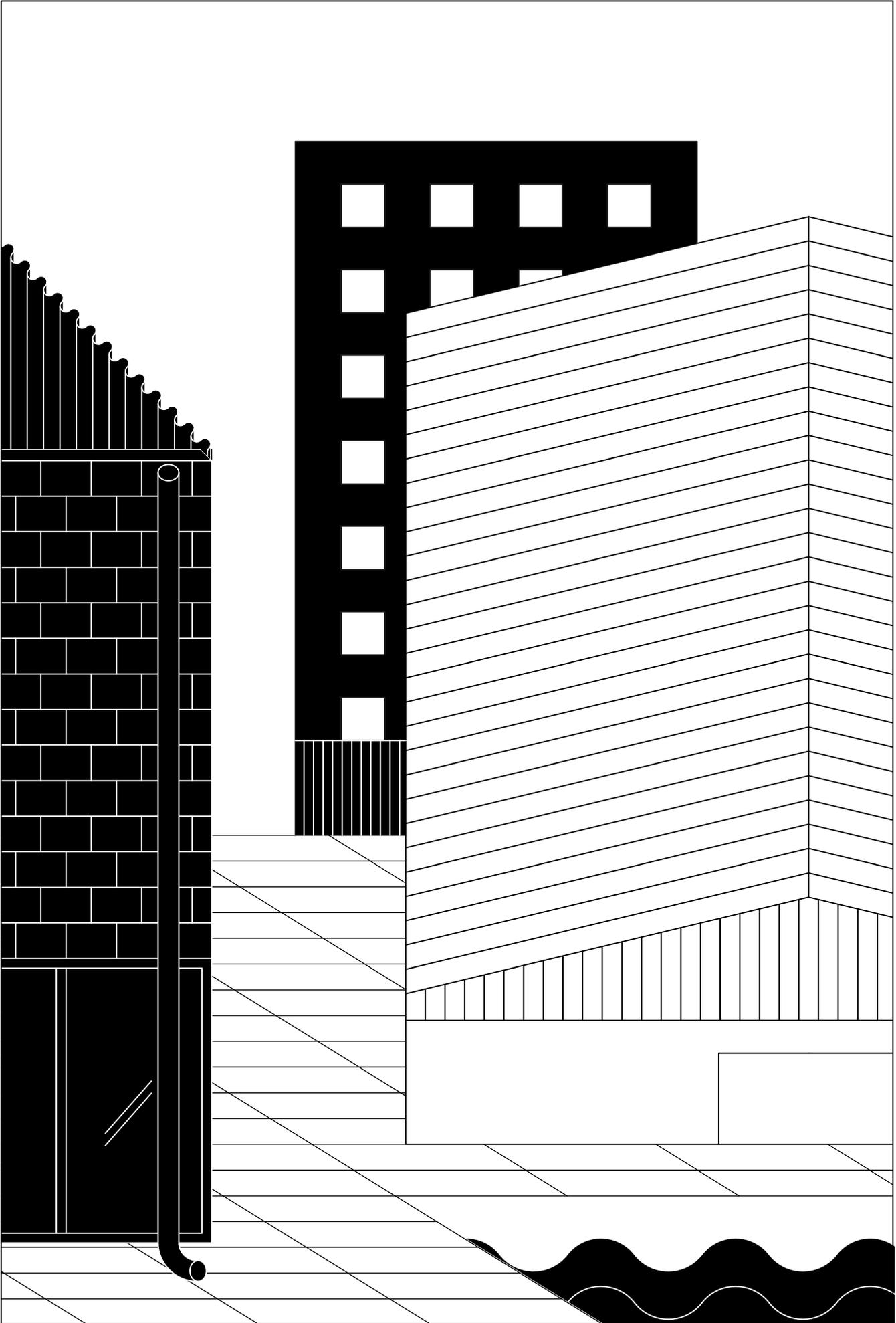
The perimeter of the pier is enriched with new floating program



Water can be used by the community and serve public activities

7

CONTINUE A DIALOGUE WITH  
THE PAST THROUGH THE USE  
OF MATERIAL AND FORM



## 7 CONTINUE A DIALOGUE WITH THE PAST THROUGH THE USE OF MATERIAL AND FORM

The architecture of the Merwevierhavens and the site is defined by its utilitarian nature. As an industrial site the architecture that is present consists of mostly warehouses, brick and concrete buildings without too much embellishment. In the redevelopment of the site it is inevitable that some things will disappear.

Not every building is kept, some of the infrastructures will be replaced. This means a lot of the redevelopment will hinge on architecture that is yet to be build, new constructions will populate the area and change the way it looks and the way it feels. In many redevelopments this results in a clean break with the past, in with the new, out with the old.

Former harbor areas end up looking like any other new development of the same time, with only slivers of water to remind you of the history of the area. It is important to establish a dialogue with the past, and to keep the dialogue going in the redevelopment of this old harbor area.

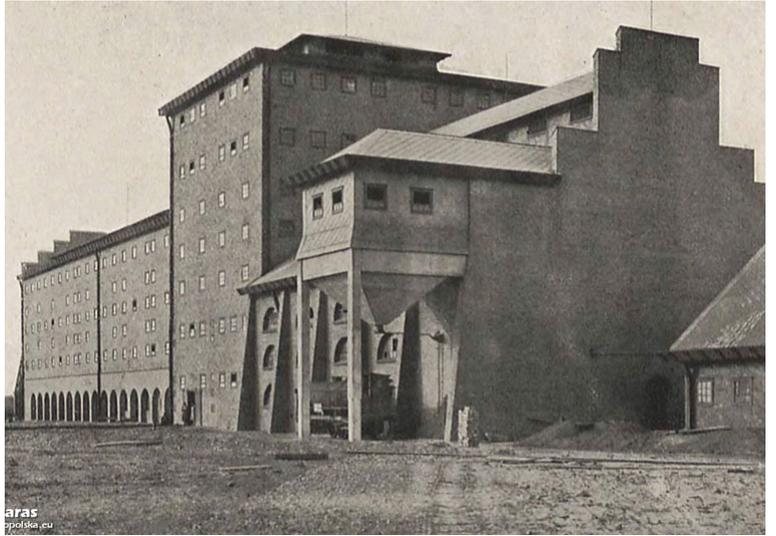
Material and form can be used as tools to continue the dialogue with the past. It is important to consider the existing morphology of things, buildings can disappear but form and visual structures can be repurposed in the new, outlines of buildings present in new buildings, open spaces as a reminder of the past. Material is another means of creating continuity, to look at the materials that are present on the site, to capture their utilitarian nature and imbue the site with the spirit of the old.



Weekend house courtyard, OFFICE KGDVS, Merchtem (BE)



FRAC Exhibition center, Lacaton & Vassal, Dunkerque (FR)



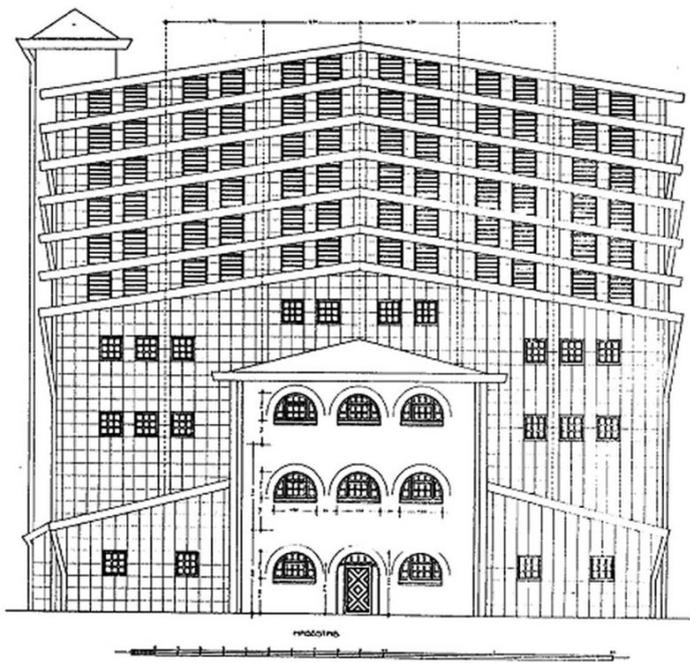
Sulphuric Acid Factory, Hans Poelzig, Luboń (PL)



"Red Against the White", Charles Sheeler



Balcony of the Cite manifeste, Lacaton & Vassal, Mülhausen (FR)



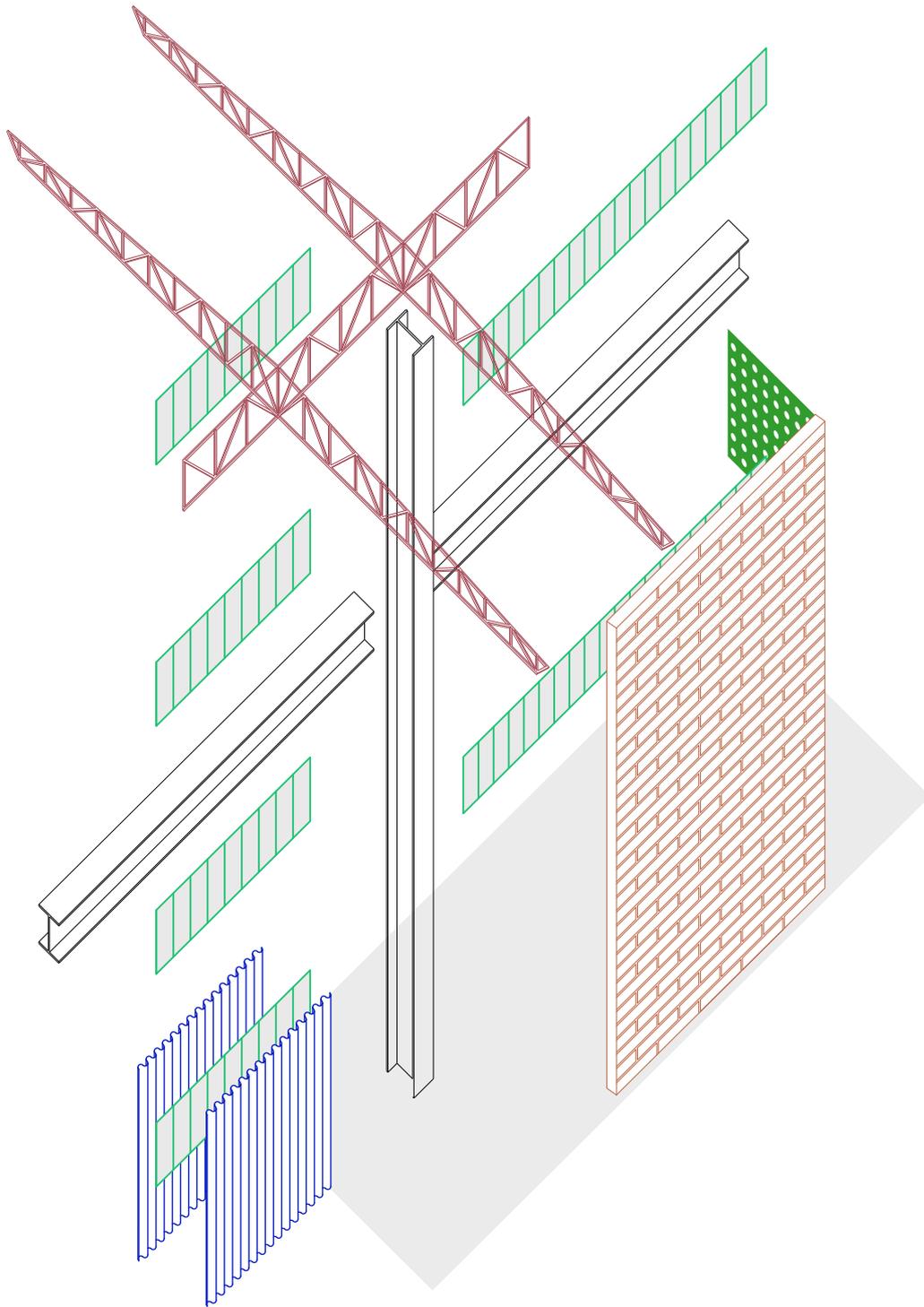
Sulphuric Acid Factory, Hans Poelzig, Luboń (PL)



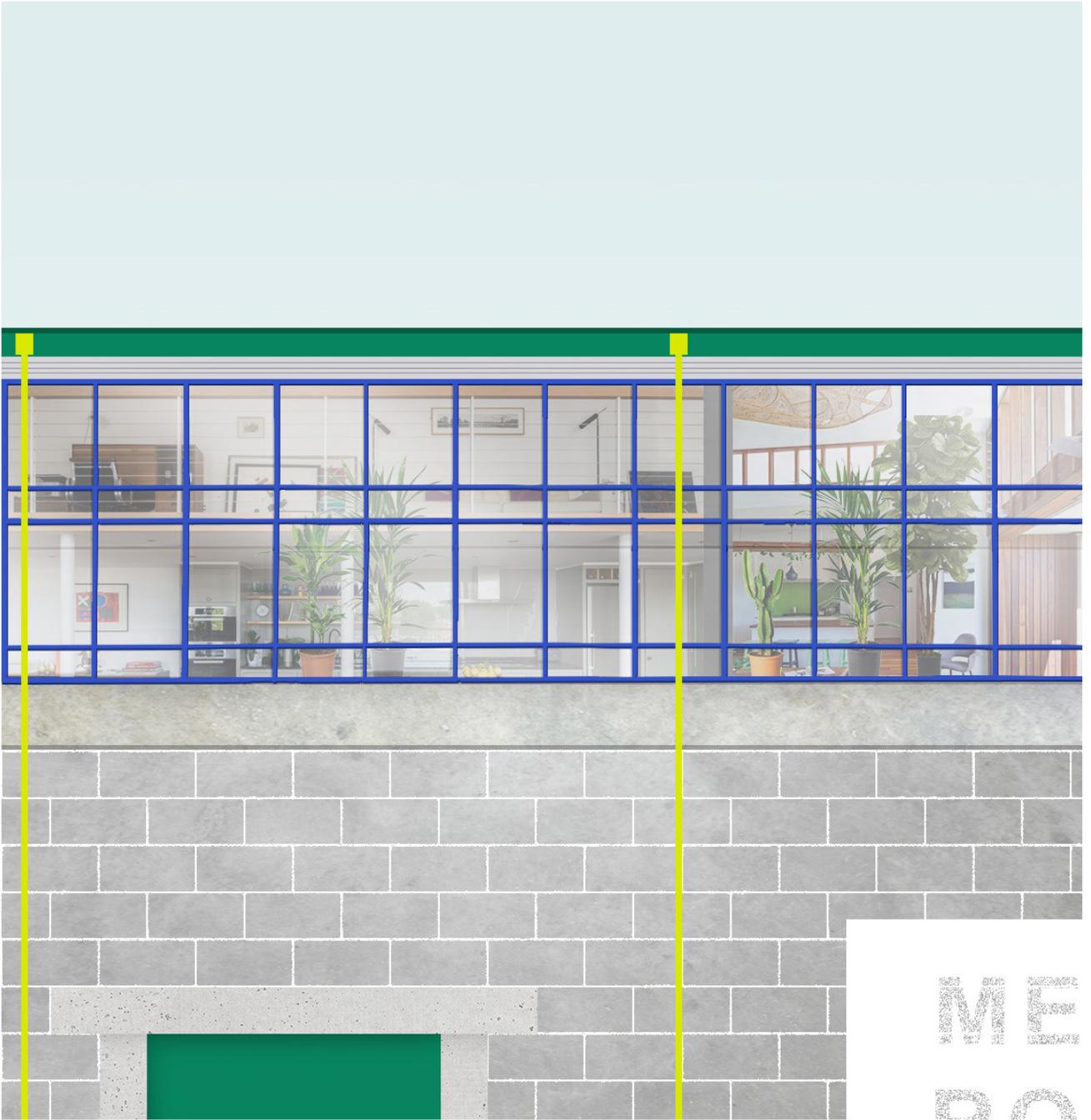
Chamber of Commerce, OFFICE KGDVS, Kortrijk (BE)



Industrial facades, Hilla Becher



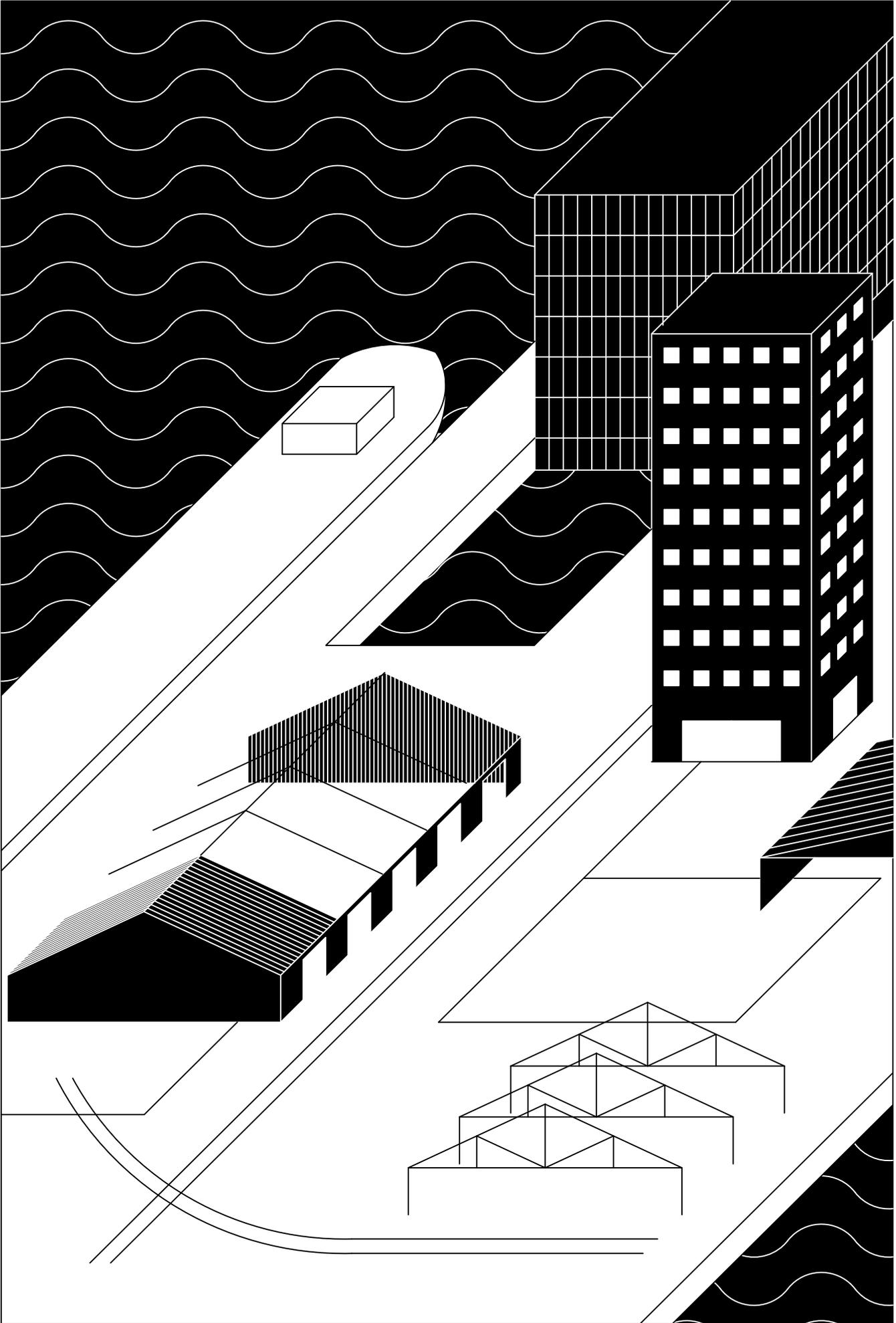
Materials, constructive systems evoke the spirit of the place



By embracing expressions and language, new additions prolong the identity and history of Merwevierhavens



# LIVING WITH THE DECAY, UNDERSTANDING CHANGE AND POTENTIAL



## 8 LIVING WITH DECAY, UNDERSTANDING CHANGE AND POTENTIAL

Buildings will inevitably decay. Time and the elements get a hold of buildings and start breaking down their materials, forces of nature are continually attacking the built environment, in the end there is no amount of care in design that can overcome the inherent tendency of materials to decay. Decay is an inevitability that architects have difficulty reckoning with. At the same time decay appeals to the imagination. Decay exists somewhere between past and present, they invoke memories and imaginations while at the same time suggesting a potential future. In them they summarize the passing of time, they are not a fixed image but an evolving process.

The tendency is to take the old, polish it up, renovate it, paint it and fix it in a certain point of time, to make history static and conserve it in a singular moment. But the past is not composed of singular moments and perfectly preserved architecture. What happens if we embrace the inevitability of decay in new redevelopments and consider these imperfect and incomplete fragments of the past essential to the present? With decay it is possible to establish a direct relation with the past as it sits at the intersection between past and present, between representation and idea. With decay you can create interesting and specific spaces that are not defined by their perfection, but in progress, existing with the passing of time.

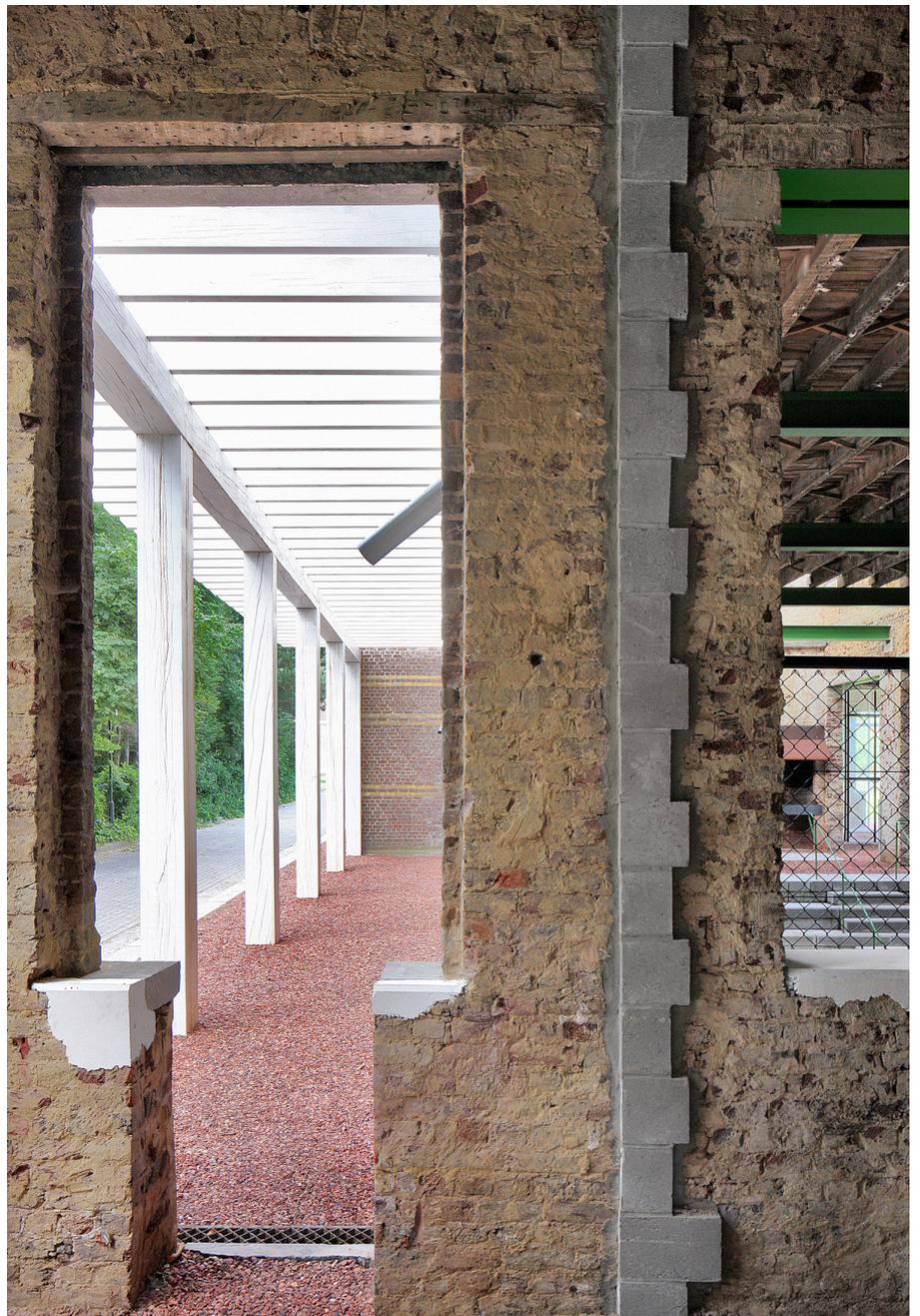
Decay embodies the potential of what might be, the city of decay is yours because it is not defined and restricted in a certain shape or form, the city of decay is adaptable and flexible and invites a personal connection to what is already there.



Bank of England, Joseph Gandy



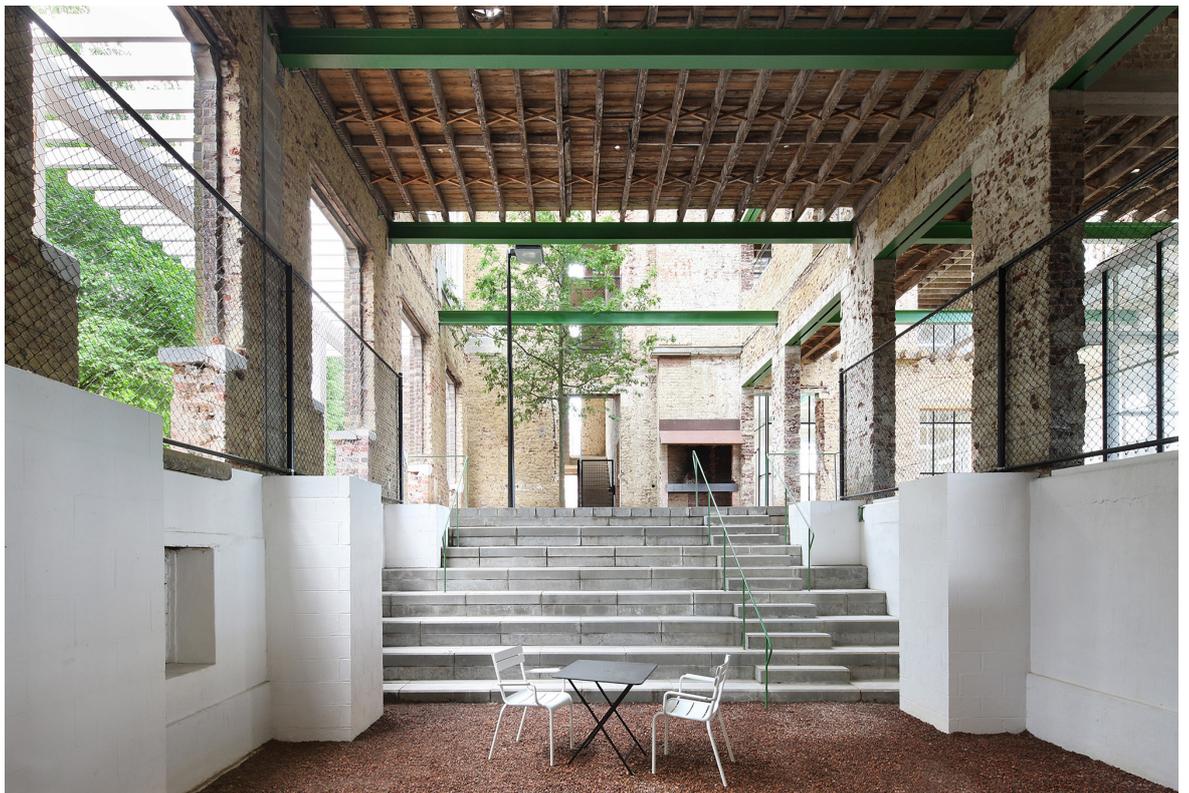
Atelier van Lieshout, Keilestraat, Rotterdam (NL)



PC Caritas, Architecten De Vylder Vinck Taillieu, Melle (BE)



House Rot Ellen Berg, Architecten de Vylder Vinck Taillieu, Braives (BE)



PC Caritas, Architecten De Vylder Vinck Taillieu, Melle (BE)



Reconversion of an industrial site, GAFPA architects, Ghent (BE)



Life and the understanding of temporality is a crucial factor in cities and communities



New and old coexist, live together and feed each other



Architecture of the peninsular:  
large-scale industrial heritage as carrier for  
new developments

A research study by STUDIO VERTER

In collaboration with Archiprix Nederland and  
Gemeente Rotterdam

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