

S e q u e n c e s

Adding New Layers and Preserving Existing Values
in the Transformation of a Church Building



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Figure 1. Cover. The foyer.

Sequences

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Master Thesis

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Abstract

Sequences. That is, in many ways, what this project has focused on. Sequences in the sense of spatial experiences, where different rooms are linked together, but also sequences of events and histories unfolding over time within a building.

The specific case examined in this thesis is the transformation of the former Smyrnakyrkan in Gothenburg. One motivation for focusing on the transformation of an existing building lies in the challenges our society is currently facing. Today, the Western world faces the challenge of managing a large and often outdated building stock. Buildings that no longer fulfil a function or meet contemporary requirements are often at risk of demolition. As a result, layers of history and traces of previous generations may disappear if they are not actively preserved.

To safeguard the values embedded within existing structures, while also promoting sustainable development, this thesis investigates how architectural qualities within an existing building can become a resource rather than a limitation in the transformation process. In doing so, the project also contributes to the broader discourse on adaptive reuse and the transformation of existing architecture.

The research uses a *Research by Design* approach, focusing on the transformation of the former church building into a hotel and event facility. Within the

project, the hotel and restaurant programme functions as a framework through which the building's architectural qualities and limitations can be tested. One of the central challenges has been how to make efficient use of the large open spaces that once formed the church interior.

By converting the main church hall into two separate spaces, while still maintaining a sense of openness and spatial volume, the project proposes a building that is both more usable and more efficient. At the same time, the architectural qualities and underlying design principles of the original structure are preserved and further developed through the study of original drawings and reference projects. In this way, the building can continue to evolve while remaining anchored in its history. Previous sequences can be preserved, while new ones are added as the next chapter of the building is written.

Lastly, the research highlights both the challenges and opportunities involved in transforming existing buildings. Achieving a sustainable and efficient transformation often requires extensive adaptations, raising questions regarding feasibility. At the same time, older buildings frequently possess qualities of detailing, materiality, and craftsmanship that are rarely achieved in contemporary construction. By developing a deeper understanding of these qualities, existing architecture can become a valuable resource for future development rather than an obstacle to change.

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Keywords:

Adaptive Reuse, Building Transformation, Church, Hotel

**Om inte Herren bygger huset
är byggarnas möda förgäves.**

Psaltaren 127 (Bibeln 2000)

Prologue

I do not think I was more than seven years old when my Sunday school teacher one day told me, “Philip, maybe you will become an architect one day,” after seeing me sitting quietly with my coloured pencils, deeply focused on drawing houses. In reality, I do not think he meant very much by those words, but the idea that creative thinking could continue to be a central part of my life has stayed with me. Today, drawing and being creative are probably among the things I enjoy most.

As a child, I spent the majority of my Sunday mornings in church, which probably made my childhood somewhat different from that of many of my friends. Yet, I have never been able to let go of the church. My relationship with God has become a refuge and a source of joy. It is something I would not exchange for anything else. Therefore, this thesis has also come to mean something on a personal level.

In the master’s thesis presented on the following pages, I have investigated how the former facilities of the Smyrna congregation in Gothenburg could be transformed in order to remain usable and appreciated in the future. Even though I did not grow up within this specific congregation, I know that a church can become like a second home to many people. The concept of a church is not always simple and is certainly not without its

problems and shortcomings. However, I am genuinely struck by the selfless love that I believe many of the people I have met in church are characterised by. With that in mind, I know that a church building, for many people, is more than just a building. It carries traces of joy, of sorrow, of life-changing decisions, and of transformed lives.

So, how should one relate to a church building that is no longer a church? One part of me believes that it can be a disadvantage to approach the building’s next chapter with too much nostalgia. To me, no building is inherently holy, and in that sense a church building is fundamentally no different from any other structure. At the same time, however, I am convinced that buildings can carry deep emotional value for people. Therefore, I believe it is always important to approach our existing built environment with respect when making changes and adaptations, regardless of context or history.

On the following pages, you can take part in my interpretation of the transformation of the former church building. It does not claim to be the only correct solution to this specific case, but rather presents one possible future outcome shaped by my understanding of what has taken place within this building. I hope the project will encourage reflection on how existing buildings, and the traces they carry, can continue to find meaning in new contexts.

Philip Rosdahl, Gothenburg, 24 May 2026

I n t r o d u c t i o n

Chapter 01

Background and discourse

The Field of Building Transformation and Adaptive Reuse

One area within the field of architecture that has received increasing attention in recent years is *building transformation* and *adaptive reuse** (Lanz & Pendlebury, 2022). Although buildings have always been reused and transformed in various ways, recent years have seen a growing interest in working with existing structures. This field is no longer limited to locally rooted architectural practices but has also attracted the attention of internationally recognized architectural firms. In the architectural magazine *Arkitektur*, it is even stated that “building within what is already built is the new norm” (p.8, author’s translation) (Rörby, 2023).

This increased interest is driven both by an appreciation of the aesthetics often associated with transformations and by the growing need for a more sustainable building sector (Lanz & Pendlebury, 2022). At the same time, there is currently an imbalance within the building sector, with, for example, an oversupply of office space and a shortage in the housing market (Boverket, 2024). Despite this, existing structures continue to be demolished while entirely new buildings are constructed, which contributes to the significant carbon footprint for which the building sector is responsible (Boverket, 2024).

Today, several reasons make constructing new buildings rather than transforming existing ones the preferred alternative (Boverket, 2024). In the report *Omvandling av lokaler till bostäder* (Boverket, 2024), one reason mentioned is the economic uncertainty associated with transformation projects. Another important factor is the lack of knowledge and experience in the field.

In Gothenburg, the debate surrounding the possible demolition of Valhallabadet has attracted significant media attention (Karlsson, 2025), which, in this thesis, is seen as an example of how the value of existing buildings is often overlooked. Another telling example, and the main case of this thesis, is the proposal to replace the former church building of Smyrnakyrkan, also located in Gothenburg (Yousuf, 2021). In light of these examples, this thesis investigates the potential architects have, through their understanding of spatial and architectural qualities, to highlight the inherent value of the existing built environment.

*Adaptive reuse is defined by Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2019) as “the process of repairing and restoring existing buildings for new or continued use” (p. 2). In this thesis, the term “building transformation” is used more frequently to describe the same practice.

Why Preserving Existing Structures?

So why should we carefully consider alternatives to demolition? Given today’s challenges related to climate change and environmental degradation, the environmental benefits of reuse constitute a key argument (Boverket, 2024). At present, the construction industry is the sector in Sweden that generates the most waste after the mining industry (Naturvårdsverket, 2025). In 2022, the building and real estate sector accounted for approximately 22 percent of Sweden’s domestic carbon dioxide emissions, in addition to emissions from building materials produced outside the country (Boverket, 2025). According to a report published by the UN (United Nations Environment Programme, 2023), emissions within a building project can be reduced by 50–75 percent through the renovation and adaptation of an existing building rather than by replacing it with a new structure.

Another important reason to restore and reuse rather than demolish and build anew lies in the value of aging itself. In *Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage*, Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2019) argue that authenticity and traces of human activity are among the most valuable qualities a building can offer, especially in an era of prefabrication and digitalization, qualities that can only emerge over time.

Smyrnakyrkan

The building that serves as the basis for this investigation is the former church of Smyrnakyrkan** in Gothenburg. In 2020, the congregation sold the property after many years of searching for a new location for its activities (Yousuf, 2020). By that time, the building had accommodated the church’s various functions for nearly 80 years (Göransson et al., 1982). The property is centrally located at the border between the districts of Vasastaden and Haga (Göteborgs Stad, 2002).

Early on in the redevelopment process, several alternatives for the building’s future were discussed, including converting it into a hotel or housing (Yousuf, 2020). The most recent proposal for the site, however, was presented in 2021 and involves replacing the existing structure with a new office building on the same site (Yousuf, 2021). Since all previous proposals assume the complete or partial demolition of the existing building, it becomes particularly interesting to investigate a proposal that would preserve as much of the existing structure as possible.

**Since the building is no longer considered a church, it will hereby be referred to as Vasastaden 1:4, in accordance with the property’s official designation.

Research Framework

Aim

This master’s thesis aims to investigate how the former church facilitie of Vasastaden 1:4 can be transformed to meet contemporary requirements for hotel, restaurant, and conference functions, with a particular focus on the building’s common areas.

In doing so, the thesis also seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on building transformation and adaptive reuse by highlighting the inherent values of existing structures.

Research Questions

(1)

How can existing architectural values, along with traces of time and human activity in a building, be preserved and integrated to enrich a contemporary adaptation?

(2)

How can the former church building Vasastaden 1:4 be transformed to meet contemporary functional and aesthetic requirements for use as a hotel and restaurant?

Delimitation

The main focus of this master’s thesis is to investigate the inherent architectural qualities of an existing building and its potential for transformation. Accordingly, the research primarily addresses constructional, material, and aesthetic aspects, as well as their interrelationships. Other aspects, such as economic and ecological sustainability, are also considered but do not constitute the main focus of the thesis.

The design component of the project is limited to the parts of the block constructed in 1941 and 1982 (Vasastaden 1:4), including the former church building and its associated functions. The church hall is regarded as a key element in the transformation and is therefore given particular attention in the investigation.

The design proposal developed within this thesis should primarily be understood as an alternative to the partial or complete demolition of the existing structure. The existing detailed development plan is not considered in this design investigation.

Method

The majority of methods employed in this thesis are defined by the master’s thesis profile, *Building Design and Transformation*. One of the main objectives of the profile is to develop a building proposal that is as close to reality as possible. This influences the process by incorporating a high level of detail early on, with particular emphasis on architectural representation through conventional drawings, models, and visualizations.

Most of the work will be conducted as *Research by Design*, where the design process serves as the primary strategy for generating new knowledge and contributing to the discourse outlined in the background. In the early stages, there will also be a *Research for Design* phase, in which insights from case studies and literature inform subsequent design decisions (Frayling, 1993).

The general approach to both design and research is to minimize the number of methods used, focusing instead on achieving high-quality results. The main tools for investigating different design alternatives and for visualization will be sketching and model-making, both physical and digital. To further ensure that the design proposal is as realistic as possible, an important part of the iterative process will be ongoing dialogue with the property owner, who will be actively involved throughout the project.

AI-based tools are only used for language refinement, such as grammar and spelling. All ideas, arguments, conclusions, and design decisions are made by the author.

T h e o r y

Chapter 02

Relating to Existing Structures

Relating to Existing Structures

Today, we as a society face a growing demand to take care of our existing built environment. Across Europe and much of the Western world, there is a large building stock that often does not meet contemporary needs for efficiency and accessibility. At the same time, the building industry needs to adapt to promote more sustainable development. Therefore, the discourse surrounding building transformation and adaptive reuse has gained significant attention in recent years (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019).

A central theme within this discourse, both today and throughout the twentieth century, concerns how we should relate to existing structures and their history. During the nineteenth century, two main approaches to building reuse and preservation emerged. The first, represented by the French theorist and architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, suggested that the best way to preserve an existing building was to restore it to its “optimal state.” This did not necessarily mean that the building had to be an exact copy of its original form, but rather that the underlying ambition and intent of the original architecture should be valued. The other dominant approach of the time instead argued that the aesthetics of aging was an architectural quality in itself and that buildings should be preserved in their existing state (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019).

Today, theories within the field of building transformation and adaptive reuse have become more diverse, as the practice has evolved into a distinct field within the discipline of architecture. Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2019) summarize the current discourse on adaptive reuse by identifying two primary approaches to interpreting existing buildings: as monuments or as palimpsests.

Treating a building as a monument emphasizes conservation and restoration, aiming to preserve it in its original state due to its historical or cultural significance. In contrast, viewing a building as a palimpsest acknowledges its layered history and allows for new interventions, creating a dialogue between past and present. When materials and structures undergo use and human activity, the resulting wear and patina serve as a record of the building’s past. The layers of history can be addressed through different functional and aesthetic strategies; for instance, new interventions may either contrast with or imitate the existing layers (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019).

Imitatio, translatio, and aemulatio

Unlike in painting and music, copying and developing existing architectural ideas and works has sometimes been considered taboo within modern architecture. However, several approaches to adaptive reuse embrace the inherent qualities of existing architecture through imitation rather than contrast. Three strategies that represent an imitative approach are *imitatio*, *translatio*, and *aemulatio*, each reflecting a different degree of freedom in relation to the original model (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019).

In simplified terms, *translatio* can be understood as creating something similar to the original, *imitatio* as producing something equal to it, and *aemulatio* as improving upon the original model and its underlying ideas (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019).

Background architecture

To carry out a successful building transformation project, based on the previously mentioned theories, a basic understanding of the building’s underlying design principles is necessary. When it comes to the former facilities of Smyrnakyrkan and its architect, Ragnar Ossian Swensson, little has been written or published. In 2025, however, Caldenby et al. (2025) published the book *Bakgrundsarkitekterna*, which investigates the work of Swensson and two other Gothenburg-based architects.

The aim of the book is to highlight what the authors describe as background architecture (*bakgrundsarkitektur*), which, in this case, also includes the design principles that have informed the design of Vasastaden 1:4. The concept of background architecture could be seen as broad in its definition but mainly seeks to highlight the high-quality architecture that was built within Sweden between the interwar period and the 1950s. Architecture that did not necessarily aim to be spectacular or iconic, but rather aspired to be perceived as part of a larger whole. In that sense, the individual building is subordinated to its context, which together forms the urban background we define as the city. The term does not describe a specific architectural style; the buildings presented in the book range from modernist to more classically influenced designs. Instead, it describes an overall architectural approach in which the quality of a building is defined by its detailing and craftsmanship rather than by spectacular form (Caldenby et al., 2025).

When it comes to the design of Vasastaden 1:4, little of R.O. Swensson’s own writing has been found, and therefore Caldenby et al. (2025) primarily base their written reflection on analysis of the actual building. The former church building is probably one of Swensson’s most modernist works and a representative example of the architectural ideals of the 1930s. For instance, the revisions to the city plan in 1938 specifically emphasized lighting conditions. It was stated that the new building replacing the existing structure on the site was designed to improve lighting conditions within the block by departing from the traditional perimeter-block structure (Göteborgs Stad, 2002). Light is also described as an important aspect of the interior design; according to Caldenby et al. (2025), the bright interior of the church hall is “...among the most impressive in Gothenburg...” (p. 302, authors’ translation).

Active during the early decades of the twentieth century, R.O. Swensson experienced the transition from classical to modern architecture. However, he appears to have maintained a pragmatic attitude towards architectural style, designing both modernist and more classically influenced buildings at the same time. Why Vasastaden 1:4, situated within a historically significant urban environment, became one of his most modernist works is difficult to determine. It may have been a pragmatic response to the building’s program (Caldenby et al., 2025).

To gain a further understanding of the phenomenon of background architecture, two additional buildings presented in the book by Caldenby et al. (2025) are studied as part of the built reference catalogue on the following pages (Kaparen and Göteborgs konserthus). Vasastaden 1:4 is further analysed within the context chapter.

References

At Six

Year: 2017 (transformed)
Type: Transformation, Hotel
Place: Stockholm, Sweden
Architect: Urban Design Studio & White Arkitekter

Description: Office building transformed into spaces for hotel and entertainment. 343 guest rooms. Restaurants, conference, and event spaces.

(Universal Design Studio, n.d.)

Analysis: The transformation of the former office building has been carried out in a very subtle and elegant manner, enhancing and respecting the original architecture. As a visitor, it is difficult to distinguish which parts of the interior belong to the original structure and which are new additions. The overall impression is a coherent whole that both tells the story of the building's architectural heritage and also reflects contemporary ways of living. A new palette of materials and textures helps create a humanized architecture, despite many interior elements retaining a solid and heavy character.

Kaparen

Year: 1940 (built), 2022 (transformed)
Type: Transformation, Restaurant / Entertainment
Place: Gothenburg, Sweden
Architect: Nils Olsson (1940), Okidoki Arkitekter (2022)

Description: Cinema transformed into a large restaurant with a roof terrace for 900 people.

(Okidoki Arkitekter, 2025)

Analysis: What makes the transformation of the former cinema particularly interesting in relation to this thesis is that the additions and alterations introduced in the project are quite substantial, yet they do not appear overly eye-catching. Instead, many of the new elements feel as though they could have been part of the original design. Through the transformation, the building has shifted from having a closed and introverted character to becoming more open and welcoming, largely due to the new openings introduced in the facade. In that sense, the building has undergone a significant transformation in character while still appearing as a coherent and carefully considered whole.

Filadelfiakyrkan

Year: 1930 (built), 2020 (renovated)
Type: Adaptation / Renovation, Church
Place: Stockholm, Sweden
Architect: Birger Jonson (1930), Stig Axell (2020)

Description: Adapting the existing church to contemporary needs. Church hall with seating for 2 083 people.

(Filadelfia Convention Center, n.d.)

Analysis: The original building, whose architecture is an example of early modernism in Sweden, has been carefully adapted to meet contemporary needs for flexibility and spatial efficiency. New additions, sometimes quite large in scale, complement rather than compete with the original architecture.

By raising the floor of the main church hall by one level, a significant amount of valuable floor space has been created, while the hall still retains its sense of space and volume, although perhaps not as spectacular as the originally larger interior.

Göteborgs konserthus

Year: 1935 (built), 2001 (transformed)
Type: Adaptation / Renovation / Extension, Concert Hall
Place: Gothenburg, Sweden
Architect: Nils-Einar Eriksson (1935), White Arkitekter (2001)

Description: Recreated the original interior and adapted it to meet contemporary needs. A new extension accommodates supportive functions.

(White Arkitekter, n.d.)

Analysis: The transformation of one of Gothenburg's most renowned buildings has been carried out in a respectful manner. Within the original building, additions and adaptations are difficult to distinguish from the original architecture, thereby honouring Eriksson's original design intentions.

In the new extension, it is more evident what is old and what is new. The two parts, for instance, differ in materiality. However, both the old and the new parts appear to speak the same architectural language and, in that sense appear equal.

At Six



Figure 2. At Six hotel. (Liffner, A. & Meredith, A., n.d) *Used with permission.*

Kaparen



Figure 3. Restaurant Kaparen.

Filadelfiakyrkan



Figure 4. Church hall Filadelfiakyrkan. (Filadelfia convention center., n.d). *Used with permission.*

Göteborgs konserthus



Figure 5. Gothenburg concert hall.

C o n t e x t

Chapter 03

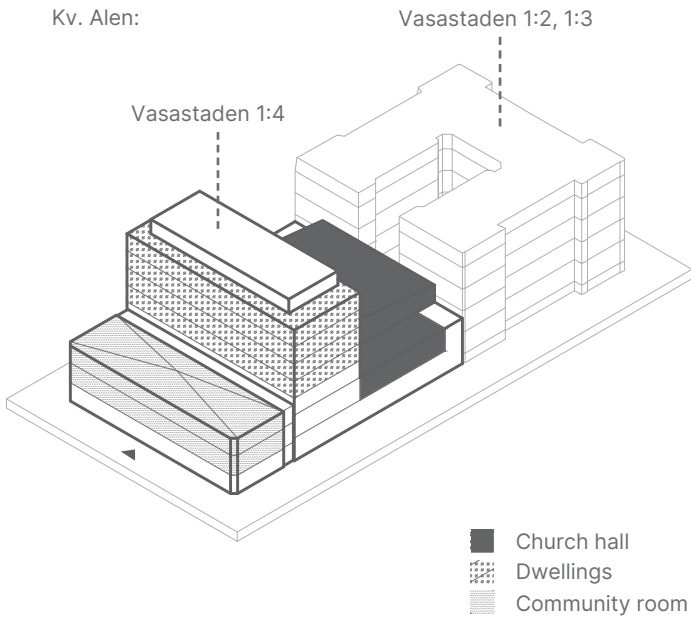
Overview

Smyrnakyrkan / Vasastaden 1:4

Year: 1941 (built), 1982 (extended)
Type: Multifunctional (church, dwellings, etc.)
Place: Gothenburg, Sweden
Architect: Ragnar Ossian Swensson (1941)
FFNS Arkitekter (1982)

(Roos, 2013)

Description: The building, in its current state, consists of one main part constructed in the 1940s and an extension built in the 1980s (Roos, 2013). From the time of its completion, it has been used as the main premises of the Smyrna congregation in Gothenburg (Göransson et al., 1982). Today, parts of the building, including the church hall, are rented out to an orchestra (Husvärden, n.d.). In addition to its public and commercial spaces, the building also contains rental apartments.



The site

Kv. Alen

Vasastaden 1:4 is part of the block Alen, which is located on the western edge of Vasastaden in Gothenburg. To the north, the block borders the green park area of Kungsparken, and to the west, Hagakyrkan and its surrounding parkland. In legal terms, Vasastaden 1:4 is included within the zoning plan for Vasastaden 1–9. The area is classified as being of national interest for cultural heritage (riksintresse för kulturmiljövård) due to its well-preserved building stock and the architectural coherence within the district (Göteborgs Stad, 2002).

The blocks along Parkgatan, of which Alen is one, differ slightly in character from the rest of the area. They are somewhat smaller in footprint and more detached. According to the original zoning plan, these buildings were intended to appear as a single architectural entity, facing Parkgatan and Kungsparken (Historiska museet Göteborg, 1974).

Analysis:

Due to its corner position facing Kungsparken and Hagakyrkan, as well as the slight curve of Parkgatan where it meets Haga kyrkogata, the western facade of Vasastaden 1:4 is particularly prominent in the urban landscape. The detached position of the block also contributes to creating an informal public space in front of the building.

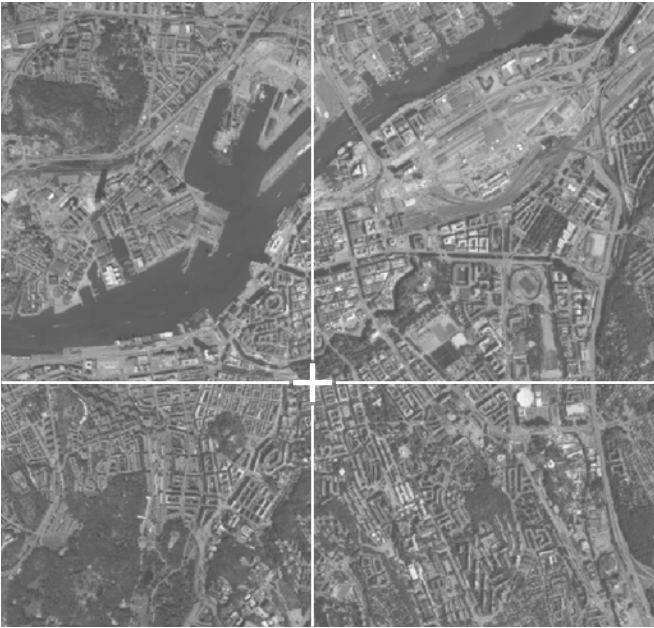


Figure 7. Position within the city of Gothenburg. Eddited image from ©Lantmäteriet (n.d.) CC BY 4.0

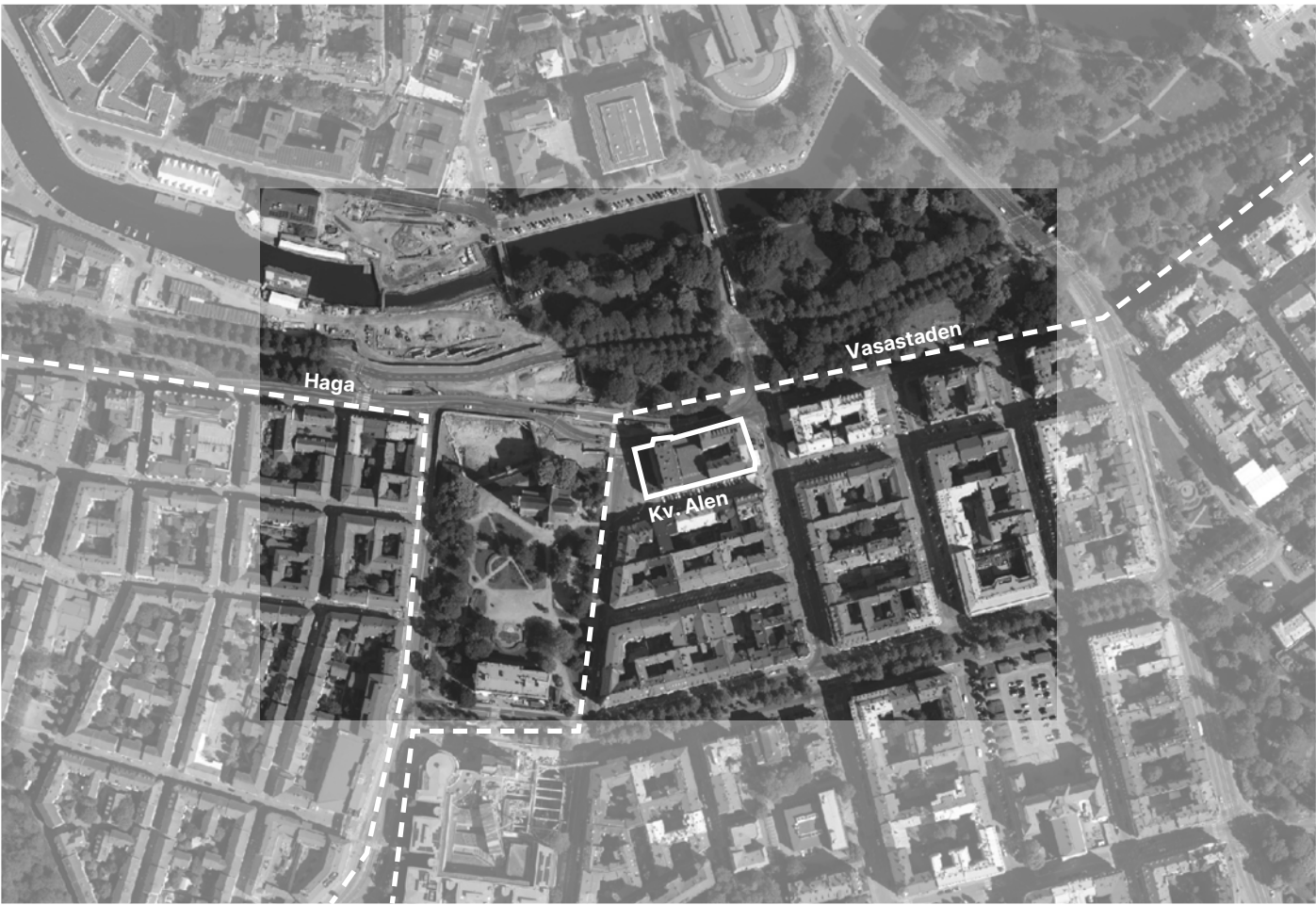


Figure 6. The position of Vasastaden 1:4. Eddited image from ©Lantmäteriet (n.d.) CC BY 4.0



Site plan 1:2000 The future appearance of the site according to the current detailed development plan.



Figure 8. Perspective looking along Storgatan from Haga kyrkogata. Vasastaden 1:4 is visible in the left corner.

Architecture

The buildings in Vasastaden were primarily constructed in the Neo-Renaissance style or other types of revival styles from the late 19th century (Historiska museet Göteborg, 1974). Common features of these buildings include facade geometry and ornamentation inspired by classical ideals, with clearly defined window frames and a pronounced roof line (Björk et al., 2021). The ground floor, middle floors, and top floor are distinguished by horizontal divisions in the facade. The corners of the blocks are cut at a 45-degree angle (Historiska museet Göteborg, 1974).

Transport and communication

Vasastaden is a centrally located district that is well-connected to the surrounding areas. Thanks to its location, the area benefits from good accessibility and public transport connections (Göteborgs Stad, 2002). The closest tram stop to Vasastaden 1:4 is Hagakyrkan, located just a few meters from the building's entrance (Göteborgs Stad, 2019). The ongoing construction of Västlänken, a new railway tunnel for local and regional trains, will result in a new station in close connection to the site. Furthermore, Parkgatan functions as an important route for car traffic in the central parts of Gothenburg.

Photo inventory: Materiality and Character of Vasastaden

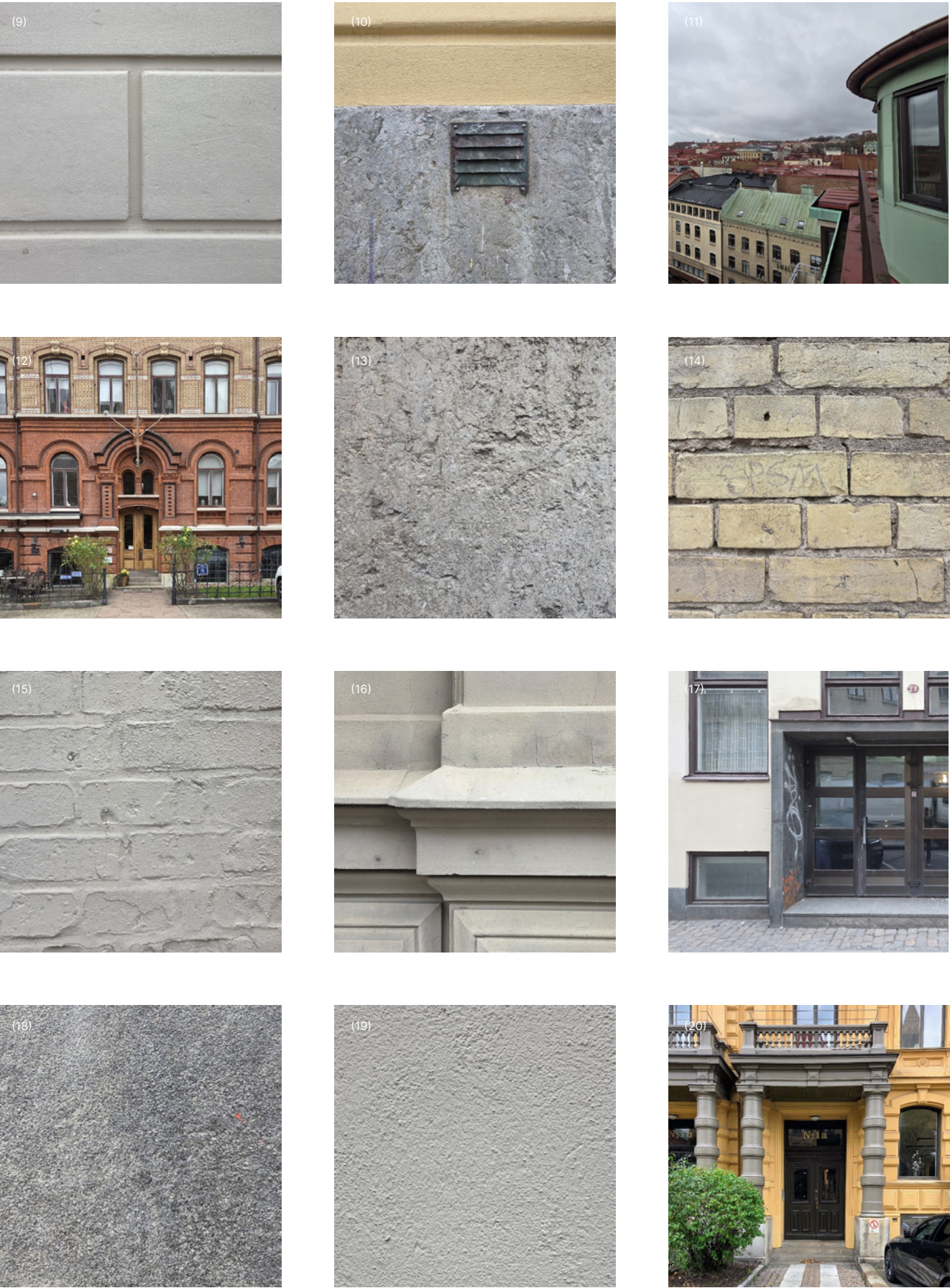


Figure 9-20. Photo inventory: Materiality and Character of Vasastaden

The building

History and Character

The construction of Smyrnakyrkan / Vasastaden 1:4 began with the demolition of an existing building on the site in 1938. Despite challenges such as the Second World War, the new church could be inaugurated three years later, on 9 March 1941. The construction cost amounted to approximately 2 million SEK (Göransson et al., 1982).

Like many evangelical churches built at the same time, this church building is integrated into the urban block structure, which distinguishes it from the adjacent Hagakyrkan (Caldenby et al., 2025). The large church hall originally had a capacity of up to 2 000 people and constitutes the main space within the building (Roos, 2013). The structure is based on a concrete pillar system, most visible in the church hall, where the pillars are exposed (Caldenby et al., 2025).

The facade of the building is covered in light yellow plaster. A variety of window types are used throughout the building, some original and others altered; however, all are painted brown (Roos, 2013).

Space distribution

Originally, the building consisted of two main volumes: a lower one facing Parkgatan and Storgatan, and a higher one along Haga Kyrkogata (site plan, p. 19). The church hall (A) is the largest space in the building, extending through the first floors of both volumes. Surrounding the church hall, there were originally smaller shops along Parkgatan and office spaces towards Storgatan (B). The upper floors of the higher volume were originally used for dwellings, one of which has today been converted into additional office space (C). In 1982, the church was extended with a new volume toward Haga Kyrkogata (D), which included a new entrance area and two smaller gathering halls (Roos, 2013).

Timeline: Vasastaden 1:4

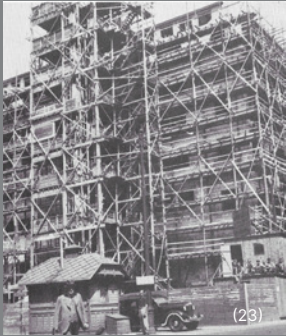


(22)

With influences from Paris

In the late nineteenth century, Vasastaden was developed based on ideals from European cities such as Paris and Vienna.

(Historiska museet Göteborg, 1974).



(23)

Demolition and Construction

The Smyrna Congregation bought the building at Parkgatan 1 in 1936 and began demolition work in 1938 to make way for their new church.

(Göransson et al., 1982)



(24)

A new church

The new church, designed by architect R.O. Swensson, was inaugurated in 1941. At that time, the building included a church hall with 2,000 seats, as well as offices and residential functions.

(Roos, 2013)



(25)

Changes and Additions

Throughout the years, several renovations and adaptations have been made to the building. The largest one, completed in 1982, included a three-storey extension that, among other things, added a new entrance hall.

(Roos, 2013)



(26)

The Beginning of a New Chapter

In 2020, the Smyrna Congregation sold its church building, opening the door to a new chapter for the building.

(Yousuf, 2020)

20th century

21st century

Figure 22. Historiska kartor Göteborg. (Göteborgs stad., n.d). Figure 23-25. (Göransson, A., & Lundberg, H., & Nilsson, L., 1982) Figure 26. Current appearance of Vasastaden 1:4.

The building

Interior

The church hall is the main space within the building, stretching across a large part of the ground floor and extending vertically through three storeys. In its original appearance, it was lit by daylight from three directions. Today, some of these windows remain, featuring their original leaded glass and marble window sills.

The large space is divided into two main levels: the parquet floor, which is connected to the foyer and entrance, and the balcony level, which contains most of the seating and extends towards the street facade. What contributes to the character of the room are the slightly curved columns that make the space feel more intimate and create an interesting spatial contrast to the rest of the building, which is more restrained and linear in its design.

The most significant changes to the space were carried out during a renovation in the 1980s. Among other things, a new and larger stage was built, and the gallery railing received wooden decorations designed by artist Kjell Sjögren.

(Roos, 2013).

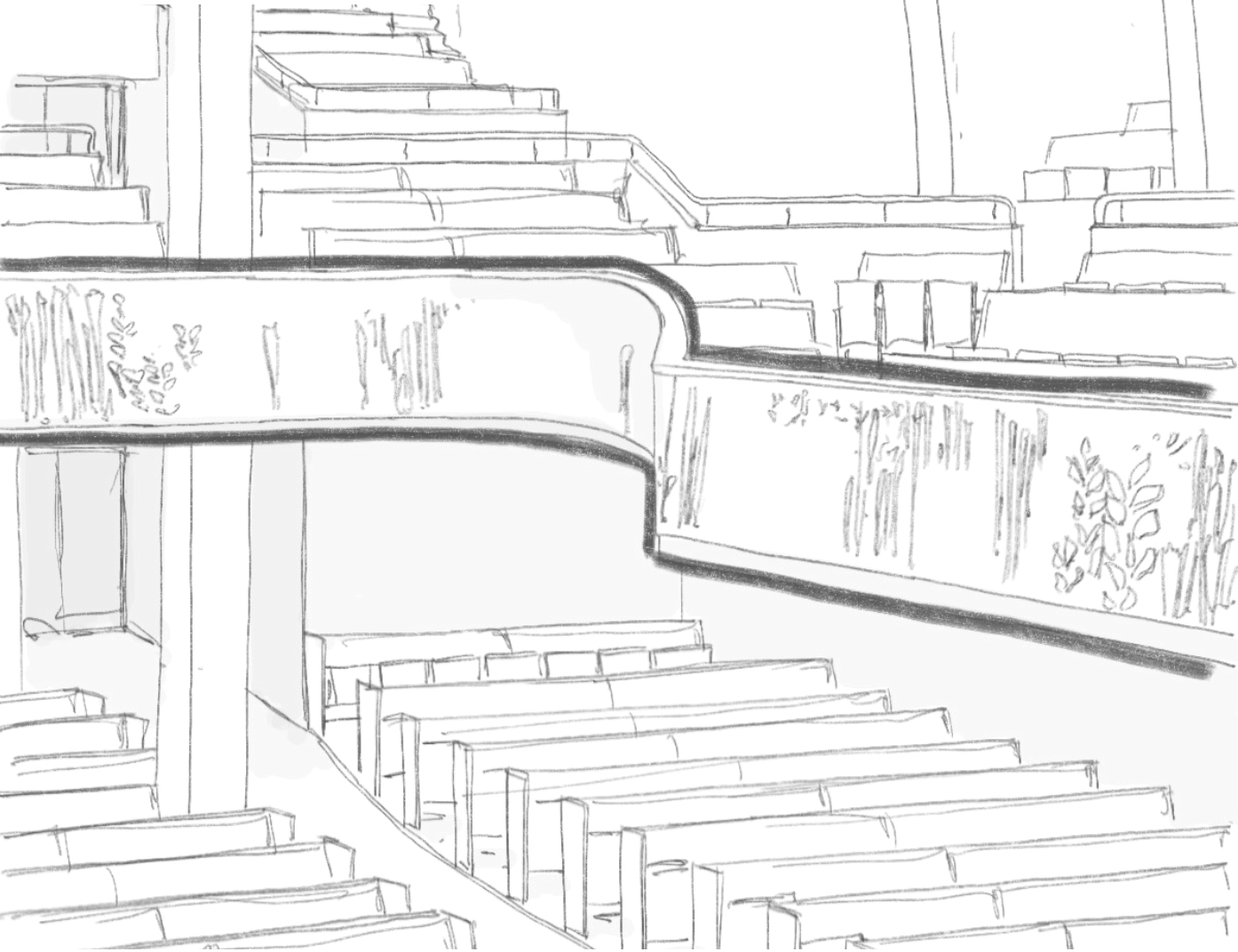


Figure 27. The interior of the church hall with the decorated gallery railing.

Photo inventory: Interior details

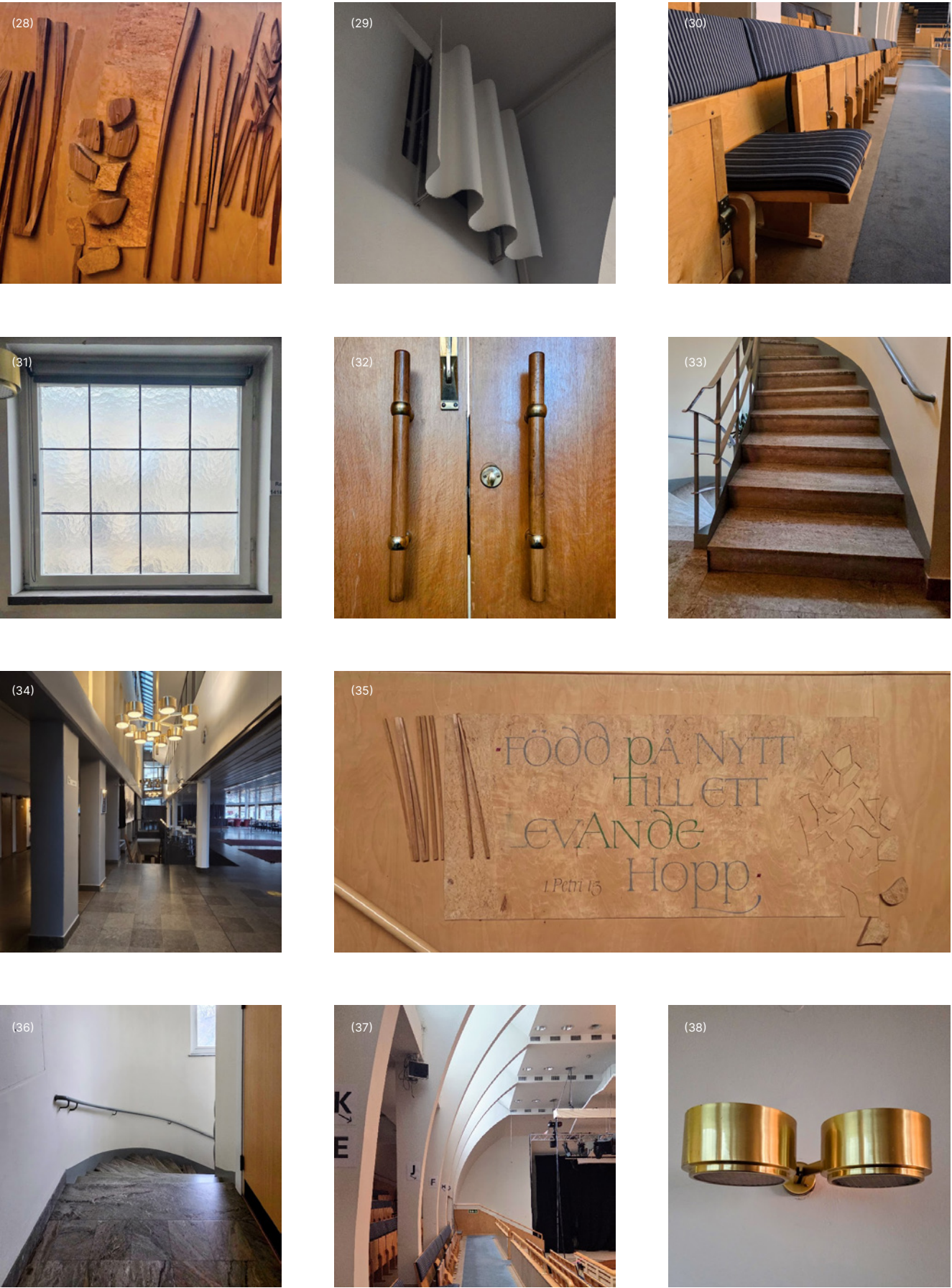


Figure 28-38. Photo inventory: Interior details

The building

Drawings

The drawings illustrates the original design of the ground floor and the first floor of the building. From Haga kyrkogata, visitors entered a small foyer before accessing the main level of the church hall. The upper parts of the hall were reached via staircases located at both ends of the foyer.

More original drawings of the building can be found in the appendix.

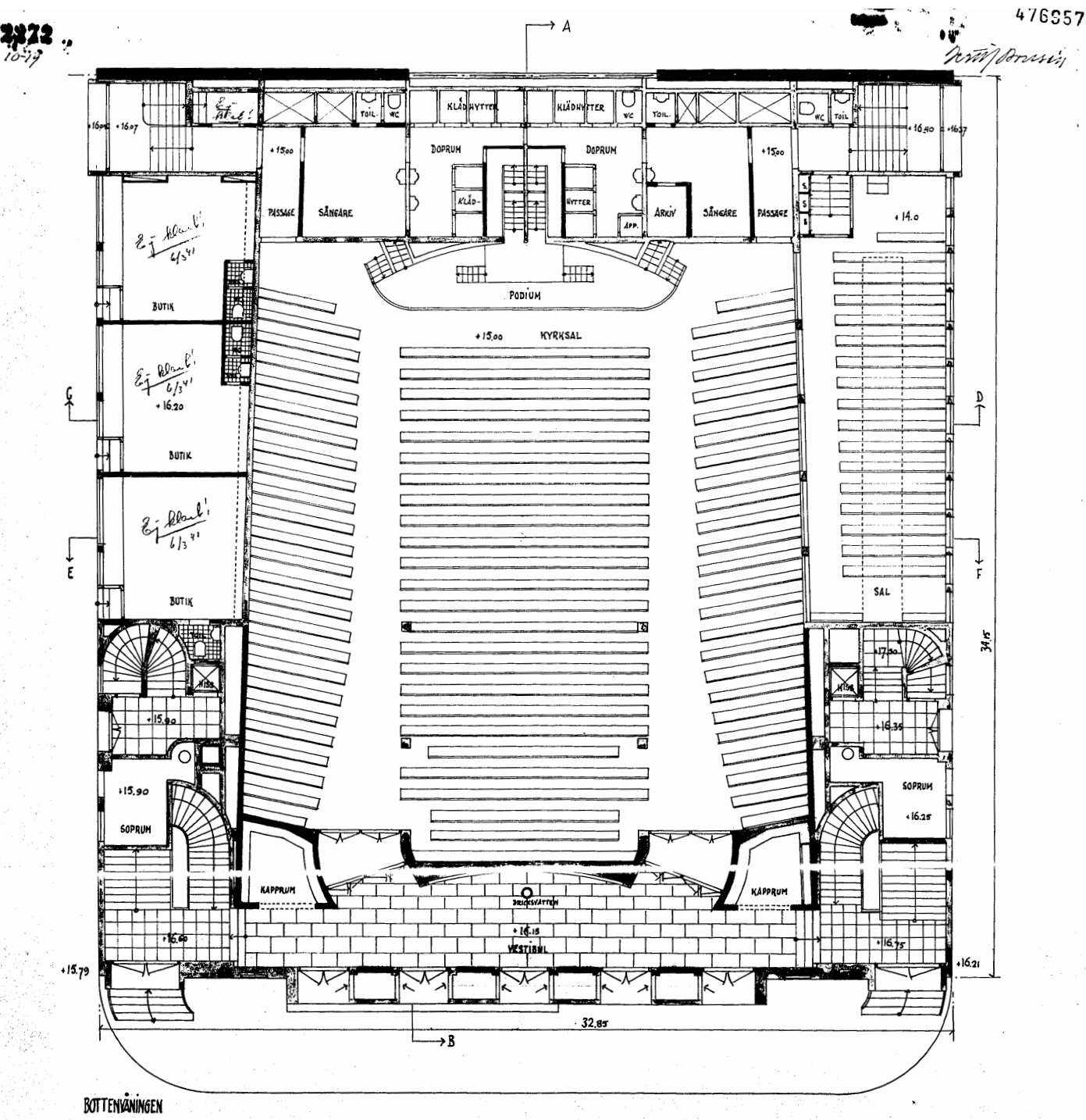


Figure 39. Original drawing (1940), ground floor. (Göteborgs Stad., n.d.)

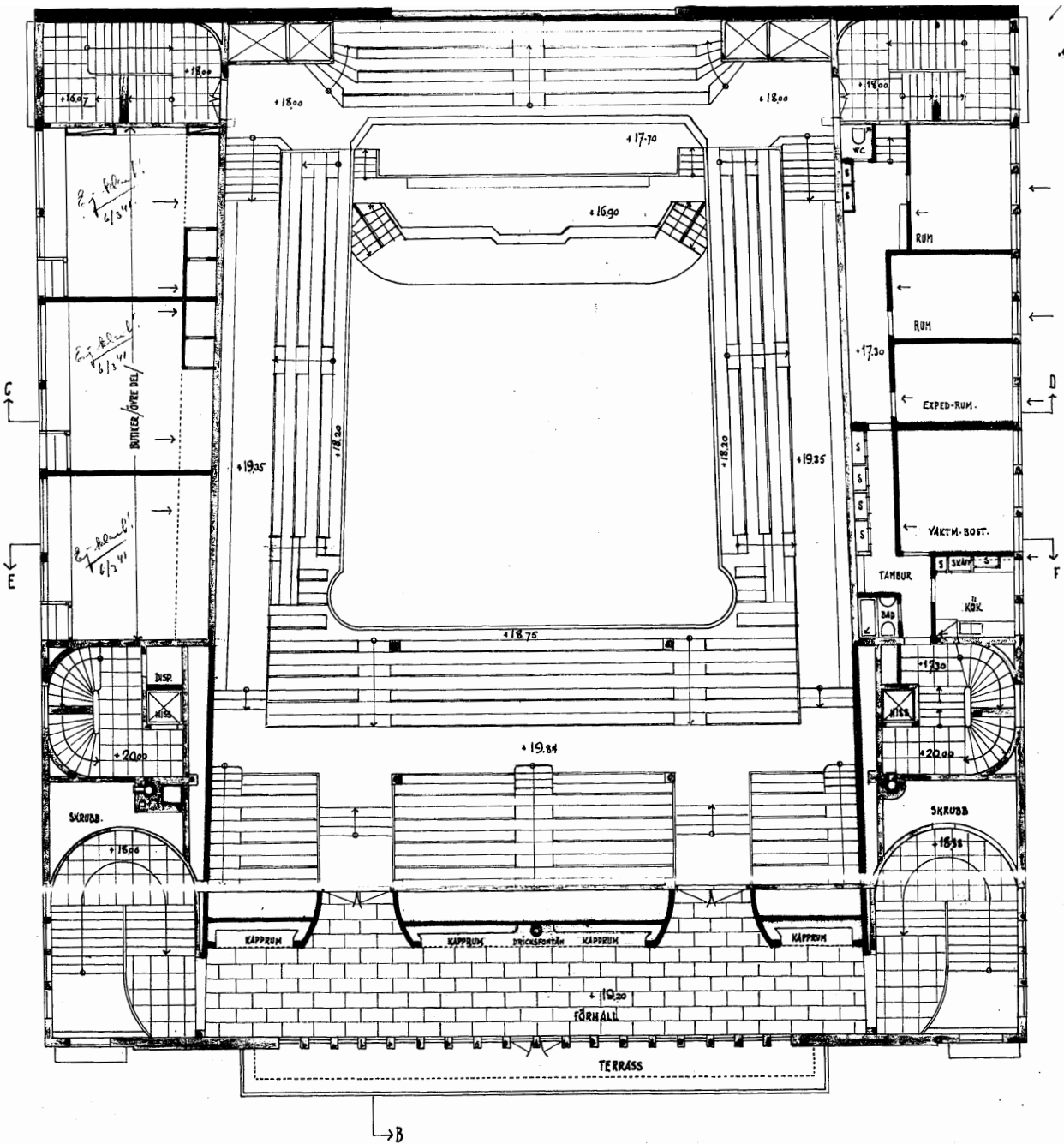


Figure 40. Original drawing (1940), first floor. (Göteborgs Stad., n.d.)

The congregation



Figure 41. The interior of the church hall during the First Sunday of Advent, 1981. (Göransson et al., 1982)

The Smyrna congregation (Smyrnaförsamlingen) was founded in Gothenburg in November 1922 by 123 people. As part of the Pentecostal movement in Sweden, the congregation experienced significant growth in the following years and had to relocate its various activities several times before the new church building on Haga Kyrkogata was inaugurated in 1941.

Over the years, many different activities have taken place within the building. At its core, however, worship services have always remained the central activity. On Sundays, the large church hall was typically filled with people for this purpose.

(Göransson et al., 1982)

Analysis:

In its current state, there are both arguments for and against a transformation of Vasastaden 1:4. One challenge in preserving and adapting the existing building is how to make efficient use of the existing spaces in order to achieve a sustainable building economy. Another challenge lies in the level differences, mainly within the church hall, which could make it difficult to achieve accessibility while still preserving the character of the interior. One argument for retaining the existing structure is its architectural qualities and the traces of human activity visible through wear and patina. The church hall in particular is, in many ways, unique in its design and represents both an architectural era and a historical movement that could be considered worthy of preservation.

As one of the few buildings within the context of Vasastaden that does not follow the original perimeter block structure, it stands out and can therefore be perceived as a local landmark. At the same time, the building could also be seen as somewhat poorly adapted to its surroundings, which probably is partly a result of the multiple renovations and adaptations that have been carried out over the years.

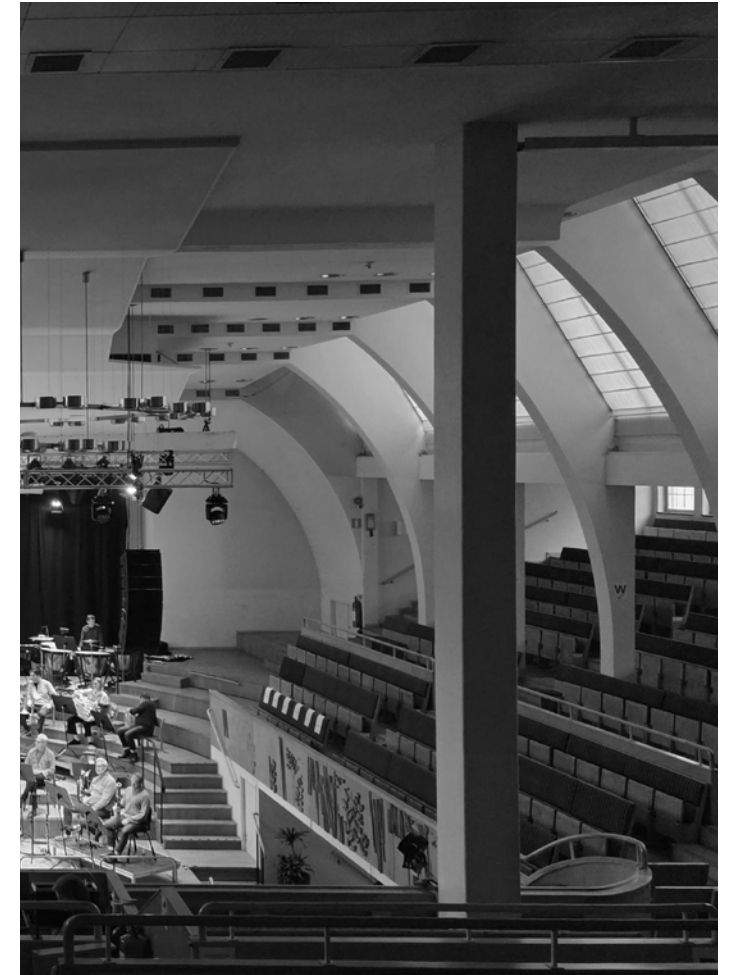


Figure 42. The interior of the church hall in its current state.

R e s u l t s

Chapter 04



Sequences

In many ways, this project has come to focus on the different sequences that form part of the building. In this context, the term *sequences* has a dual meaning: it refers both to the sequence of spaces experienced when visiting the building and to the historical sequence of events that have taken place there, shaping people's perception of it.

By transforming a building with such a clearly defined original purpose as a church, both the end of one chapter and the beginning of another become distinct and visible, which I believe is particularly important in this case. At the same time, one aim with the design has been to ensure that the next historical sequence taking place within the building is arranged in a way that feels respectful towards the existing structure and the traces of human activity it carries.

R.O. Swensson's original ideas have served as the main guiding principles for new additions and major interventions, with the aim of creating a more coherent building than exists today. At the same time, new additions have been given the freedom to reflect a more contemporary expression. In other words, the design of this project allows itself to move freely between the three concepts of *imitatio*, *translatio*, and *aemulatio*, as presented in the theoretical framework.

The following pages present the project in detail, beginning with a short overview and then introducing the building by moving along its main axis and the surrounding sequence of spaces.

Overview

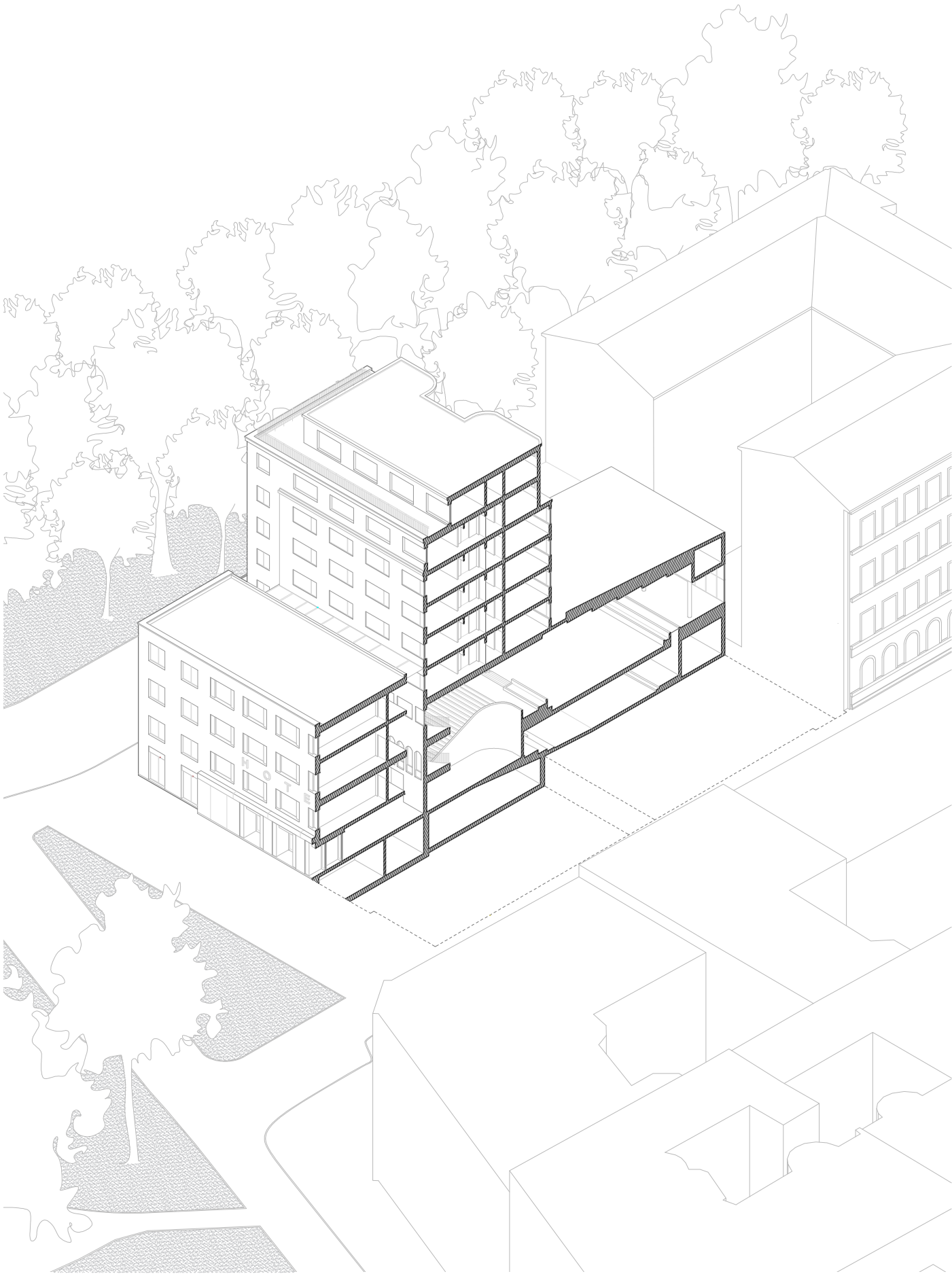
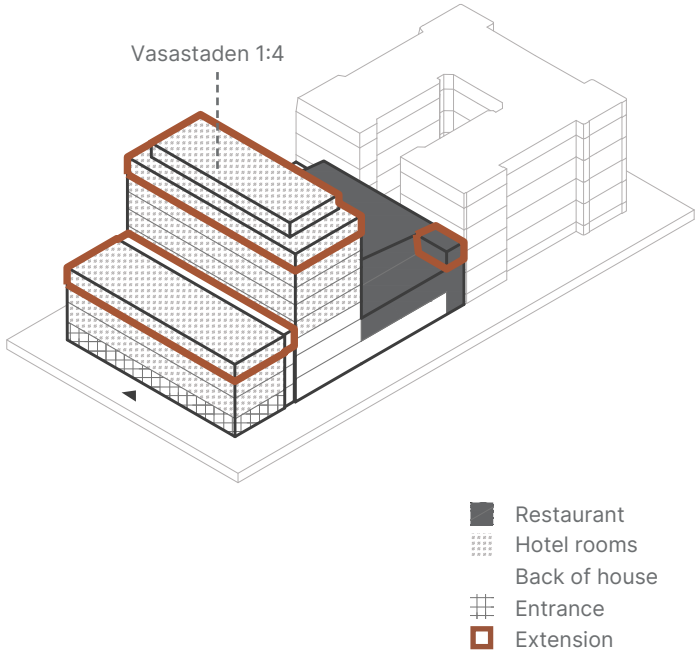
Hotel and Restaurant Development / Vasastaden 1:4

Type:	Transformation, Hotel/Conference/ Restaurant)
Place:	Gothenburg, Sweden
GFA:	7490 sqm
Hotel rooms:	95
Conference:	4 rooms, up to 307 seats
Restaurant:	524 sqm, 200 seats

Description:

By adding two new floors while replacing the existing top floor of the lamella structure, additional space for hotel rooms is created. By also adding one level to the extension from the 1980s, it becomes possible to replace the existing glass facade with a brick facade that relates more closely to the building's context.

Internally, more usable space is created by dividing the large church hall into two levels. On the apartment floors, as much of the original floor plan as possible is retained when the spaces are converted into hotel rooms.



Building axonometry 1:400



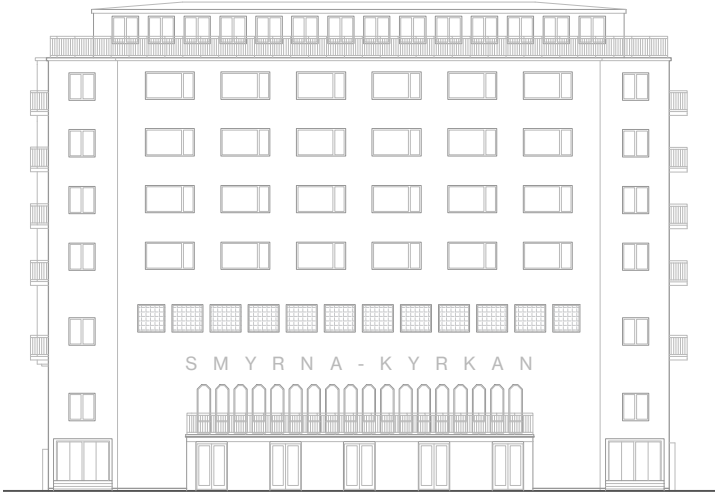
Site plan 1:2000

Exterior transformation

1941

The original building from 1941 is clear and rational in its form. The light plaster facade connects to the facades of the surrounding older buildings.

Much of the building’s character comes from the west facade, where the main entrance is marked by a stone frame. The first and second floors are articulated with leaded windows that differ from the rest of the facade, reflecting the interior spaces of the building.



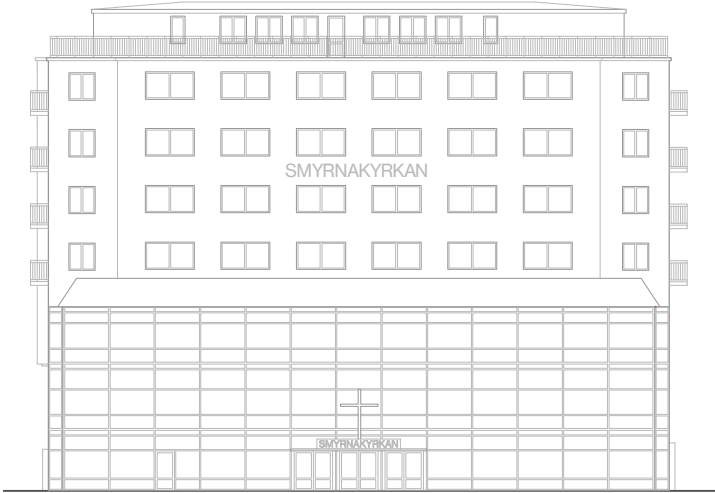
West elevation (1941)



South elevation (1941)

1982

The extension from 1982 contrasts with the original structure through its glass facade. At the same time, it also seeks to relate to the existing surroundings with its gables clad in plaster. The original west facade is largely preserved in its original appearance thanks to the glazed shaft that separates the two volumes.



West elevation (1982)



South elevation (1982)

Future proposal

By adding one new floor to the original lamella structure and one to the 1980s extension, a sense of strength and verticality is reintroduced to the building.

The new facade of the 1980s extension refers back to the original facade by reintroducing a more timeless design. By using light-colored brick as the facade material, the extension is also distinguished from the rest of the building. It reflects the diverse yet coherent material palette of the surrounding area.

The two new floors on top of the lamella structure are more in line with the original architecture and mainly differ in the design of the panoramic windows.



West elevation (future proposal)

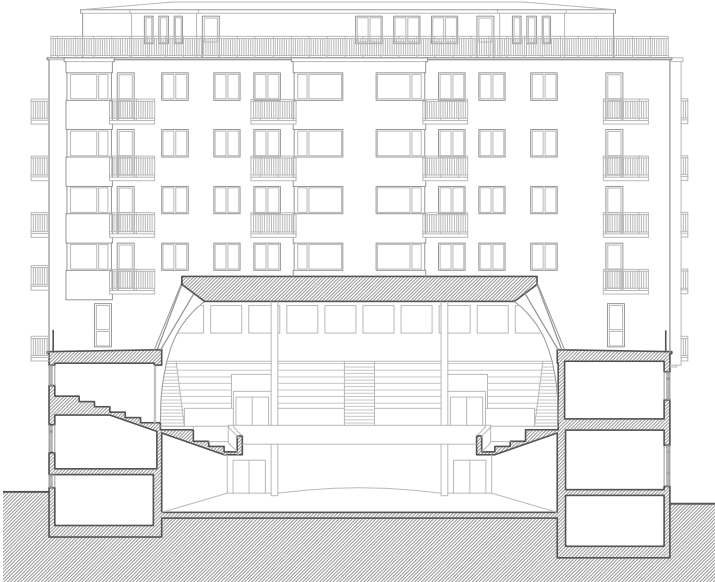


South elevation (future proposal)

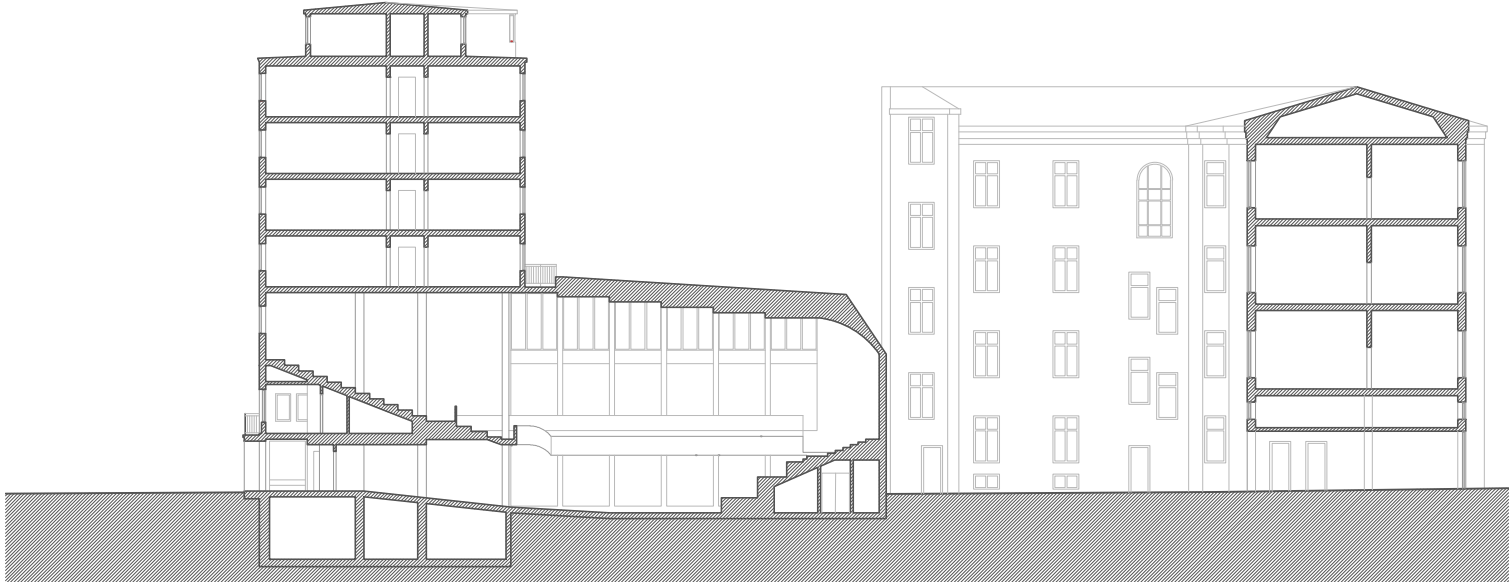
Interior transformation

1941

The original interior of the building is restrained yet elegant. The church hall is the largest space within the building and extends across three levels and the full length of the structure. Although it has capacity for a large audience, the space is still experienced as intimate, thanks to the configuration of seating on two levels.



East-west section (1941)



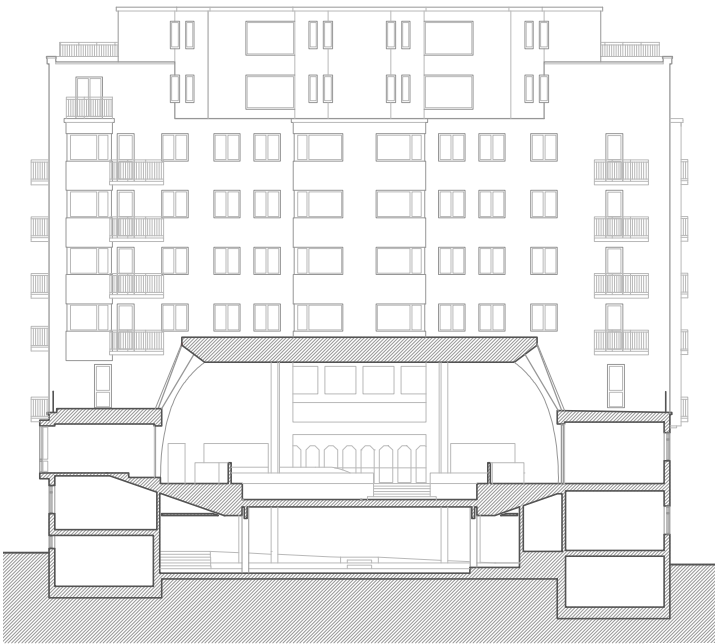
South-north section (1941)

Future proposal

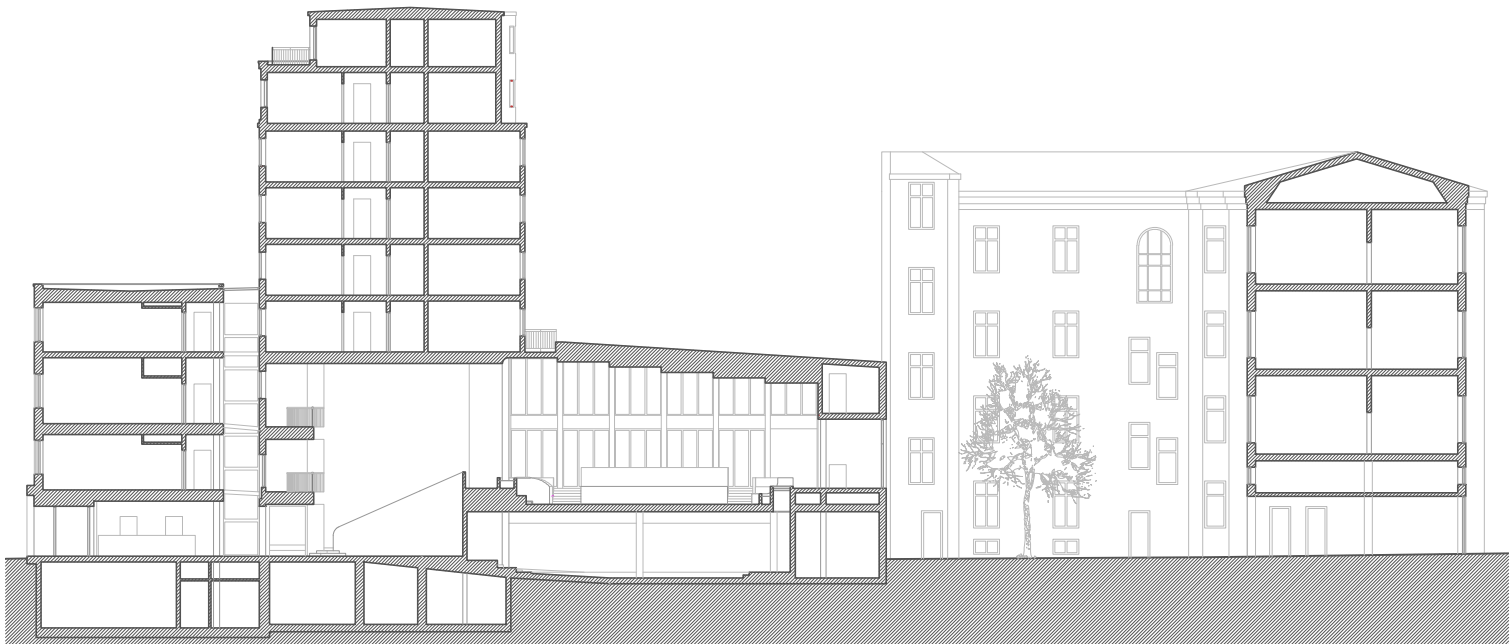
In the future proposal of the building, the large church hall is divided into two different spaces by adding a new floor that connects to the balcony seating. The enclosed space beneath the new floor becomes a conference area and benefits from the existing slightly sloping floor.

On top of the added floor, new possibilities for seating are introduced as part of the new restaurant area. The original height differences are, to some extent, retained.

By dividing the large church hall into two different spaces, the new staircase gains an important function as a link between the main restaurant and the entrance level.



East-west section (future proposal)



South-north section (future proposal)

Floor plan - Basement

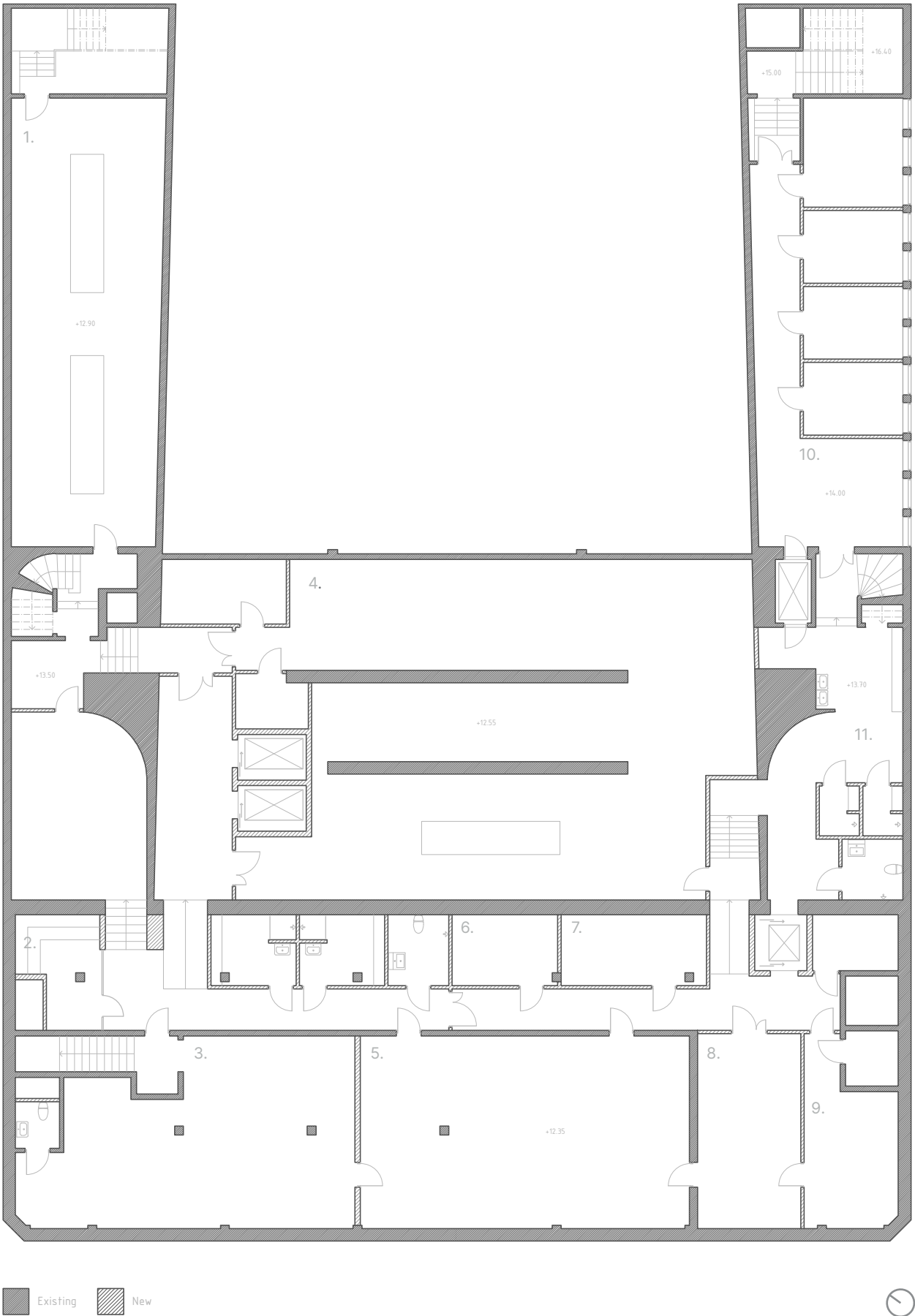
Description

In the basement of the building, logistics and back of house functions are handled. The two service elevators are located in the south-east part of the lamella structure. This makes the storage areas for the kitchen (10.) and hotel (5-8.) easily accessible from the loading area on the entrance floor.

Furthermore, a fitness area (3.) is placed in the basement, with a sauna and gym located within the existing shelter (skyddsrum). Existing spaces for technical installations (4.) are retained and complemented by converting a former storage area (1.) into a ventilation room.

Room Legend

- 1. Ventilation
- 2. Sauna
- 3. Fitness area
- 4. Technical room
- 5-8. Hotel storages
- 9. Laundry
- 10. Kitchen storages
- 11. Changing room, staff



Floor plan, Level -1

Floor plan - Ground floor

Description

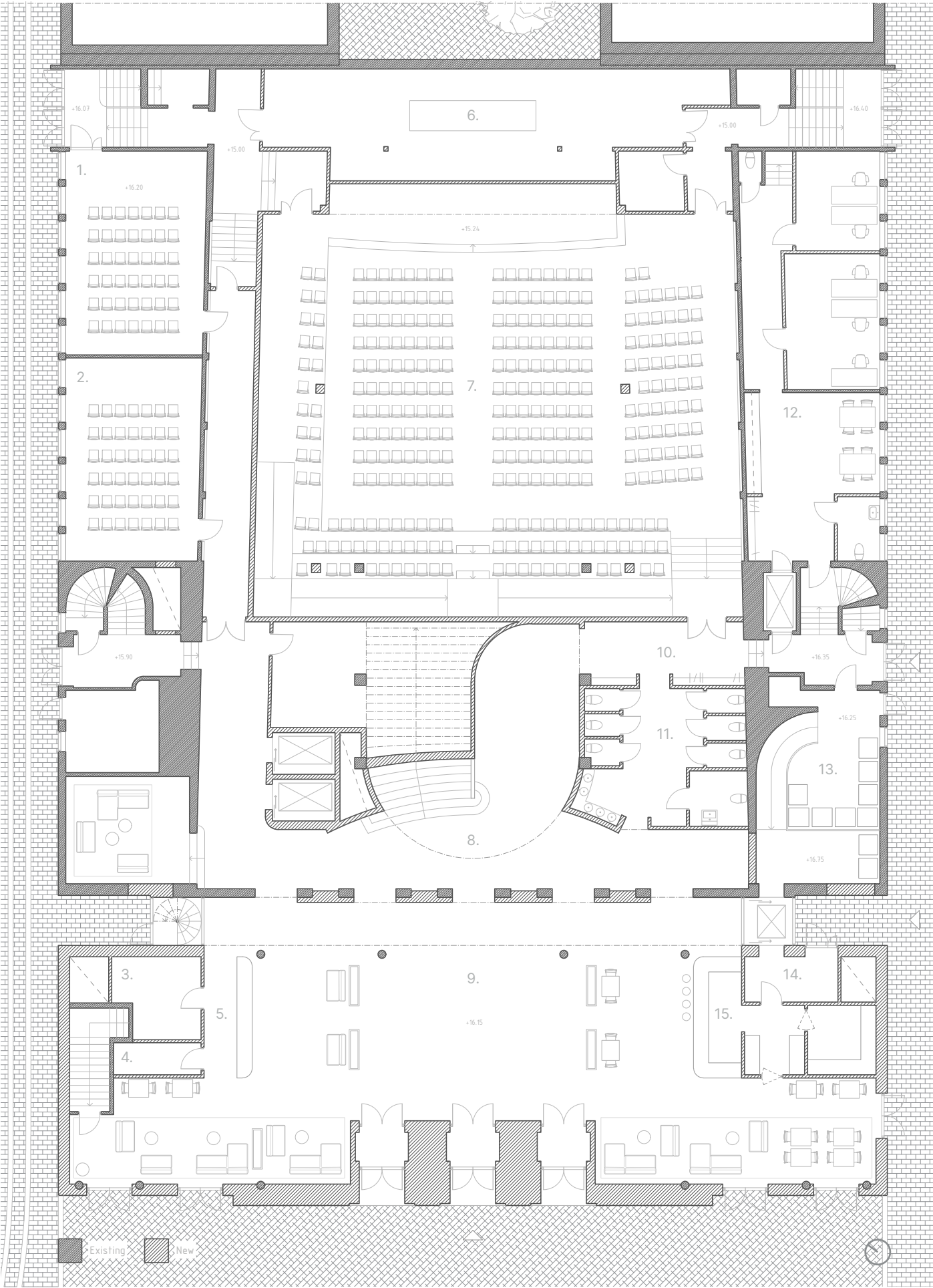
Entering the building from the small square in front of it, the visitor first experiences a more intimate atmosphere in the lobby space (9.). This initial room is then contrasted by the glass-covered shaft that divides the 1980s extension from the original building. The foyer (8.) becomes the central point of circulation within the building, linking the lobby on the ground floor with the restaurant on the first floor and the conference area (7.).

The original floor plan by R.O. Swensson is characterised by rationality and simple geometrical forms, particularly the circle and the square, and the ground floor in particular has a rather subtractive appearance. The new opening (8.) between the ground floor and the first floor is inspired by these shapes and is, in that sense, related to the two existing smaller staircases, which are converted into other functions (13.).

The form of the foyer (8.) reflects its original spatial geometry. However, what is today a closed wall is transformed into an opening through the introduction of the new staircase.

Room Legend

- 1-2. Conference
- 3. Back office
- 4. Luggage room
- 5. Reception
- 6. Ventilation
- 7. Conference
- 8. Foyer
- 9. Lobby
- 10. Cloakroom
- 11. Restrooms
- 12. Staff office and lunchroom
- 13. Recycling
- 14. Loading area
- 15. Café / bistro



Floor plan, Level 0

Floor plan - First floor

Description

As a first-time visitor, you will likely enter the first floor of the building via the main staircase, which leads to the “living room” (5.), the main restaurant within the building. The remaining parts of the former church hall have been converted into other functions, such as restrooms (1, 6.), conference space (2.), and kitchen (9.), in order to achieve a more space-efficient configuration. Despite this, the majority of the space is still experienced as one large, continuous room (5.).

The existing differences in floor levels within the former church hall have been partly levelled to improve accessibility, while in other areas they have been further articulated to create a varied spatial experience.

Through the new opening between the ground floor and the first floor, the characteristic windows of the original facade (10.) become visible within the restaurant.

To make the activities within the building more visible from the outside, a new bay window has been added to the south-east facade, facing Storgatan.

Room Legend

1.

Restrooms
2.

Conference
3.

Hotel room (former staircase)
4.

Hotel rooms
5.

Living room (main restaurant)
6.

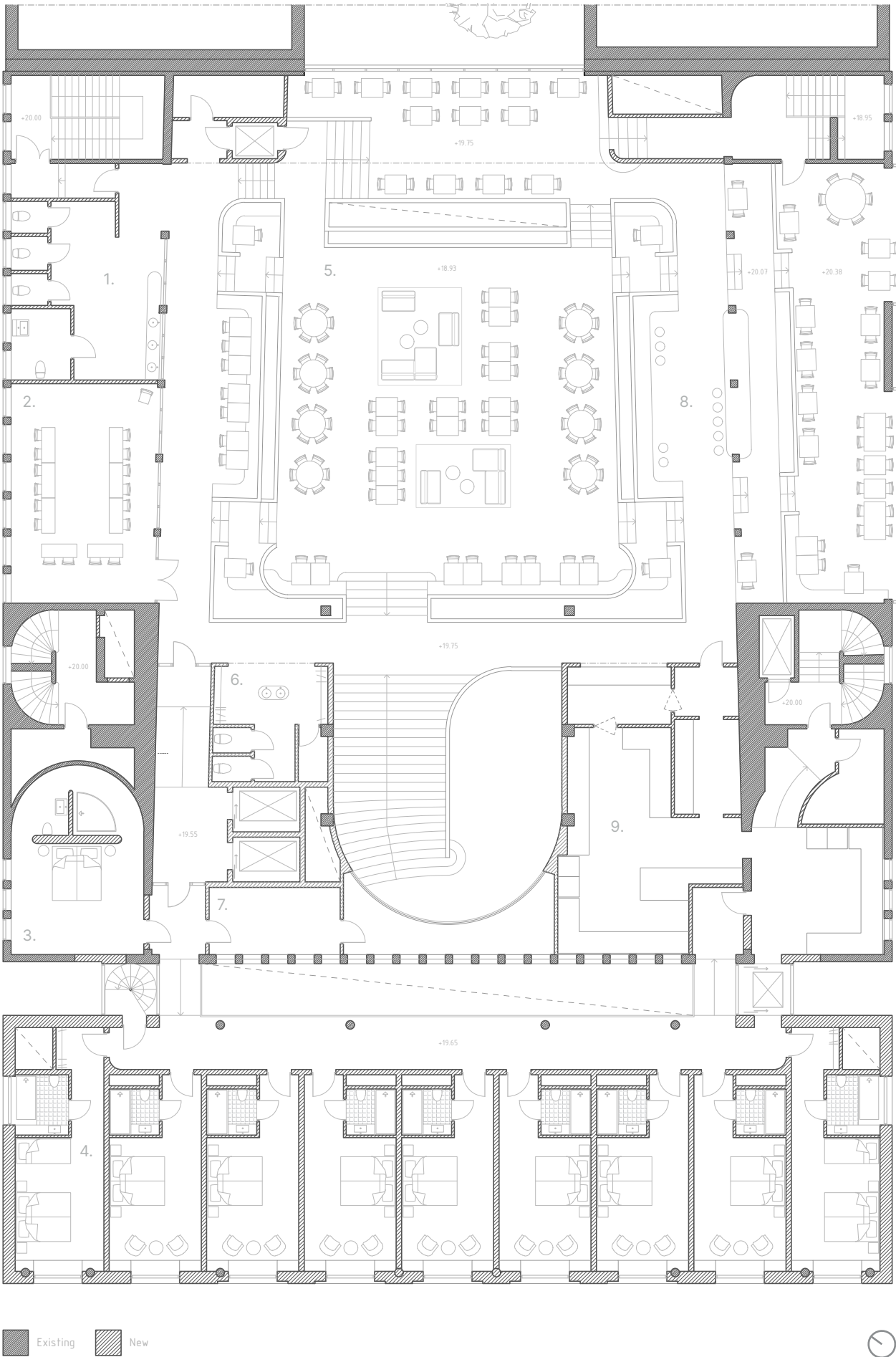
Cloakroom
7.

Linen storage
8.

Bar and buffet
9.

Kitchen
10.

To view the original first-floor windows, see Figure 72 in the appendix



Floor plan, Level 1

Floor plan - Second floor

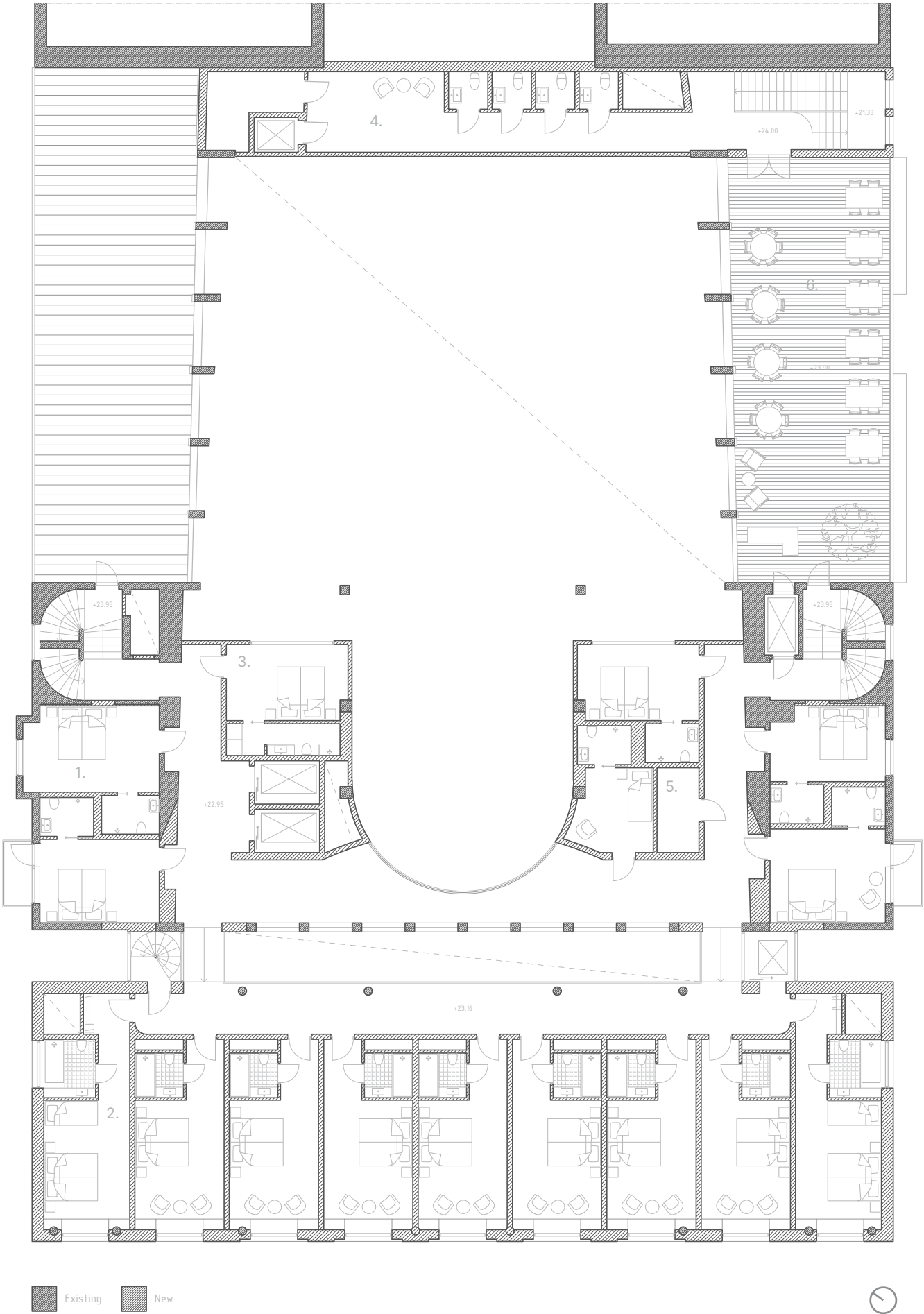
Description

On the second floor of the building, there are 16 hotel rooms. The smaller rooms (3.) face the restaurant, while the larger ones (1, 2.) face the surrounding streets. The rooms are generally generous in size. In the corridor in front of the hotel rooms, within the extension from the 1980s, the original facade of the lamella structure from 1941 becomes visible.

The existing roof terrace (6.) of the building is made accessible by adding a small new volume (4.) at the end of the former church hall, connected with a new elevator. The roof terrace is oriented towards the south and is located just two storeys above Storgatan, which makes the activities taking place within and on the building more visible to its surroundings.

Room Legend

- 1-3. Hotel rooms
- 4. Entrance room, roof terrace
- 5. Linen storage
- 6. Roof terrace



Floor plan - Third floor

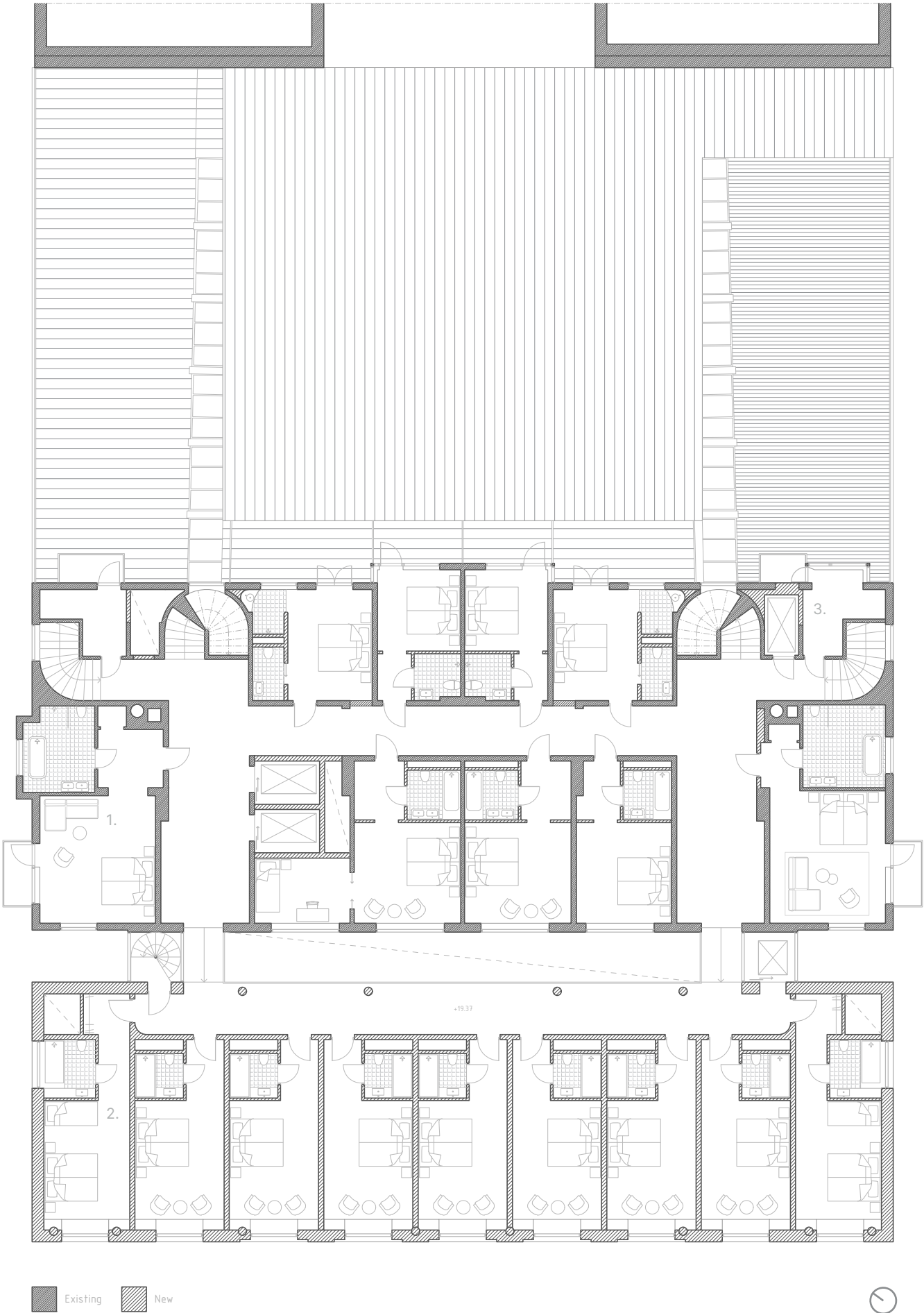
Description

The third floor is the first level that was originally used for dwellings. The new floor plan, in which the apartments have been converted into hotel rooms (1), has been designed so that as few changes as possible are made to the original layout. One major intervention is the introduction of a new corridor that links the two existing staircases.

On top of the 1980s extension, an additional level is added with hotel rooms (2.), similar to those on the floors below.

Room Legend

- 1. Hotel rooms, based on the original apartment floorplan
- 2. Hotel rooms within a new extension
- 3. Linen storage



Floor plan, level 3

Floor plan - fourth to sixth floor

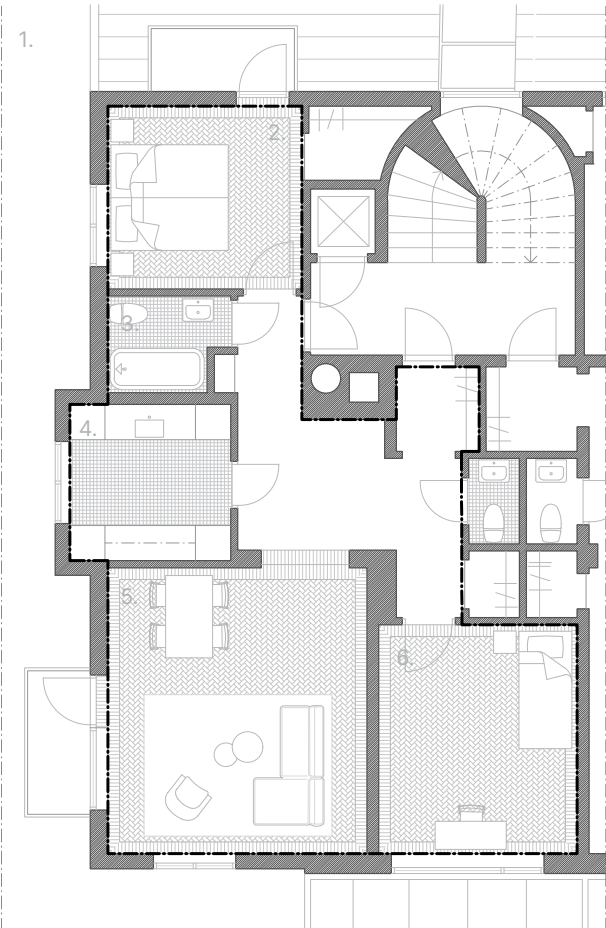
Description

From the fourth to the sixth floor, the same floor plan is repeated. The design of the hotel rooms is based on the original apartment layouts, creating a diversity of rooms in different sizes and with distinct character. The largest rooms are located in the southwest and northwest corners of the building.

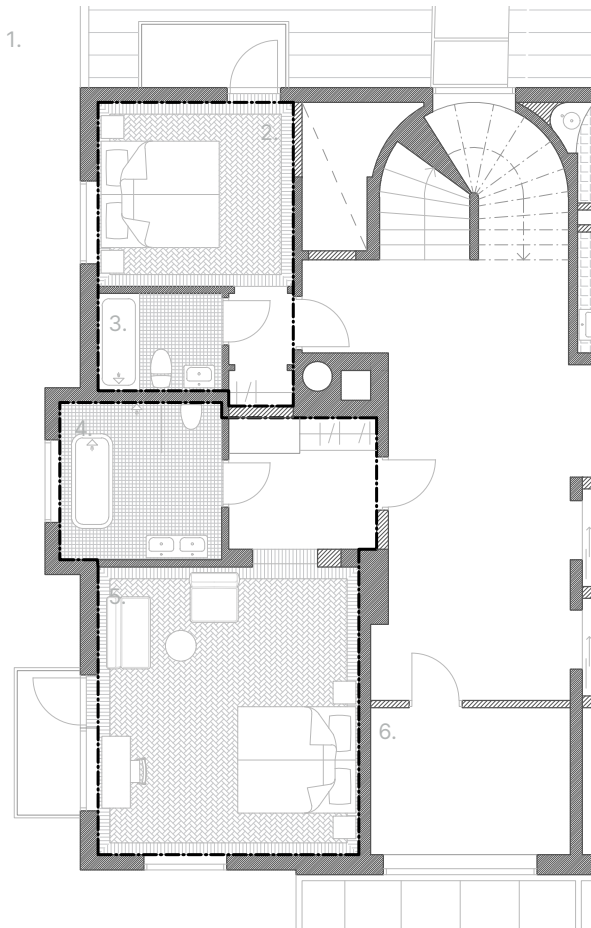
In the drawings below, it is shown how a two-bedroom apartment has been transformed into two hotel rooms.

Room Legend

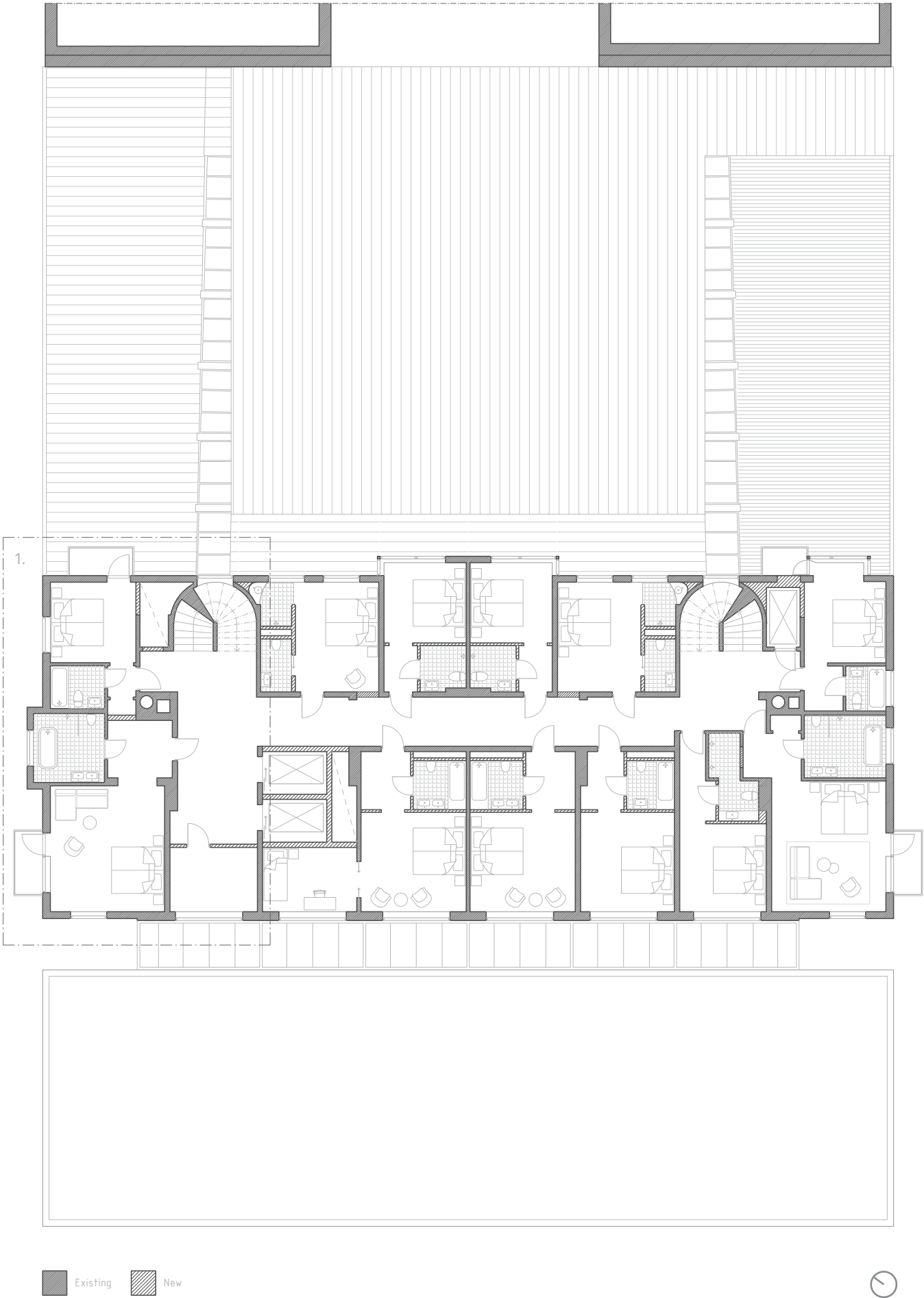
- 1. Floor plan cut-out, northwestern corner
- 2. Bedroom (1941), bedroom (future proposal)
- 3. Bathroom (1941), bathroom (future proposal)
- 4. Kitchen (1941), bathroom (future proposal)
- 5. Living room (1941), bedroom/living room (future proposal)
- 6. Bedroom (1941), linen storage (future proposal)



Floor plan, fourth floor (1941)



Floor plan, fourth floor (future proposal)



Floor plan, Level 4-6

Floor plan - Seventh floor

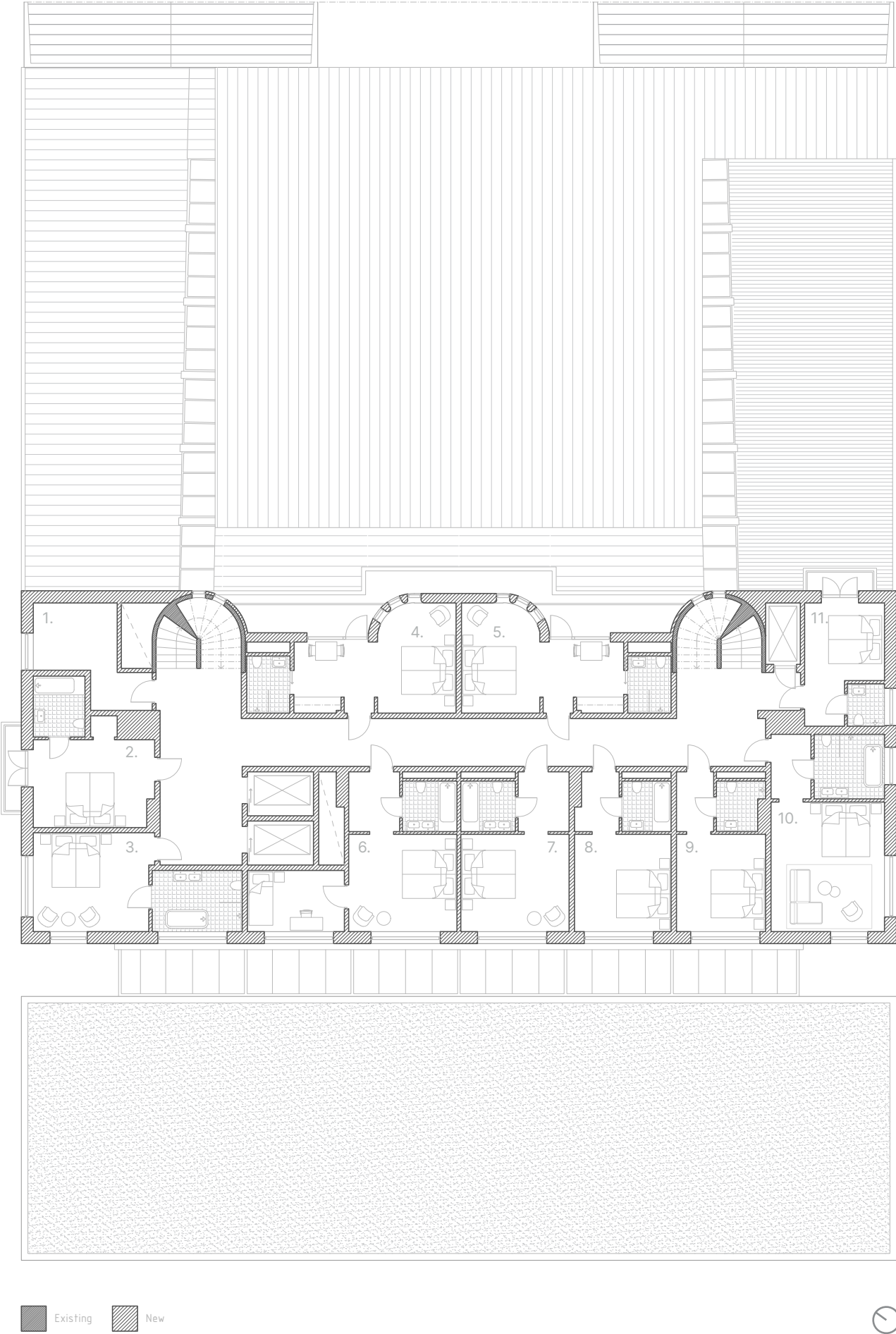
Description

The seventh floor is the current top floor of the lamella structure, but it is today only used for laundry and storage. In this proposal, the existing structure on this level is replaced with a new floor plan with a larger footprint, in order to create as many hotel rooms as possible with views over the city. The configuration of the floor plan follows the same logic as on the previous levels.

The largest hotel rooms are located towards the west and feature large panoramic windows that capture views over the city.

Room Legend

- 1. Linen storage.
- 2. 2-bed hotel room, 20 m²
- 3. 2-bed hotel room, 24 m²
- 4-5. 2-bed hotel room, 25 m²
- 6. 3-4-bed hotel room, 32 m²
- 7. 2-bed hotel room, 24 m²
- 8. 2-bed hotel room, 21 m²
- 9. 2-bed hotel room, 19 m²
- 10. 2-3-bed hotel room, 32 m²
- 11. 2-bed hotel room, 14 m²



Floor plan - Eighth floor

Description

The eighth floor will be the new top floor of the building and is where the largest hotel rooms are located, some with their own roof terraces overlooking the city.

The volume is recessed and clad in copper, making it similar to the current top floor on the seventh level. However, the windows are more generous in size, creating a cleaner appearance and framing the views in the best possible way.

Room Legend

- 1. 2-bed hotel room, 26 m²
- 2. 2-bed hotel room, 21 m²
- 3-4. 2-bed hotel room, 25 m²
- 5. 3-bed suite, 52 m²
- 6. Linen storage
- 7. Private roof terrace

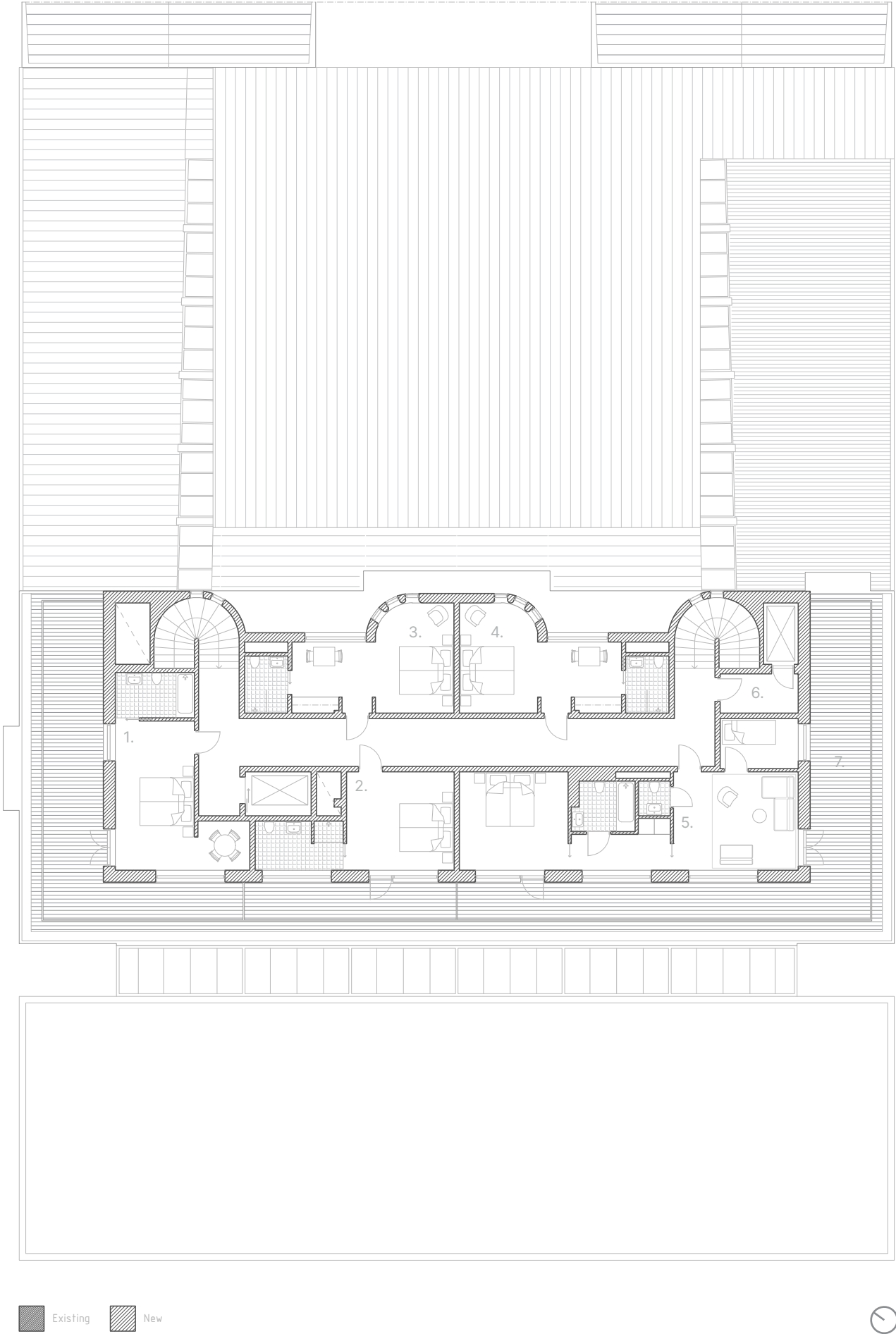


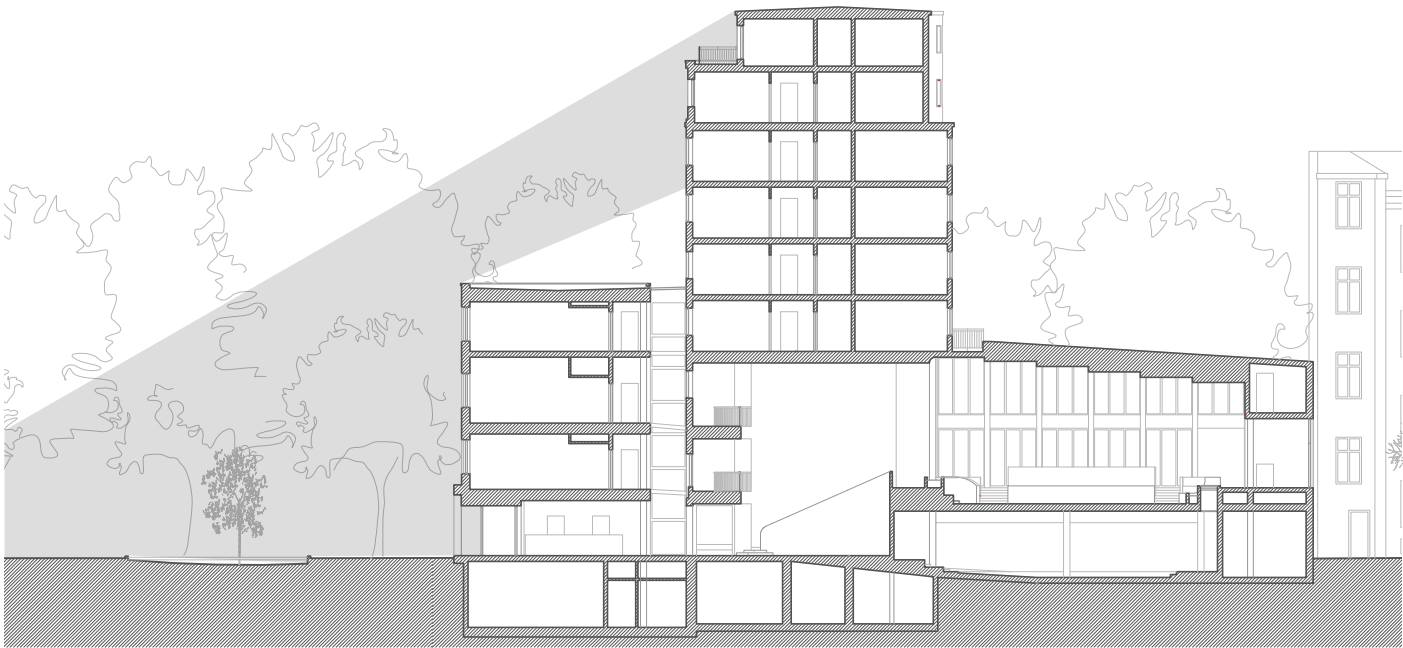


Figure 43. Vasastaden 1:4 seen from Hagaparken.

The exterior

When standing in the park on the backside of Hagakyrkan, it becomes visible how present Vasastaden 1:4 is within the urban landscape, due to both its position and its height. By adding a new level to both the lamella structure and the 1980s extension, some of the dignity carried by the building’s original appearance is reintroduced.

The new facade of the 1980s extension is designed with Swensson’s original ideas in mind, as well as with the ambition to relate more closely to the surrounding turn-of-the-century architecture. The facade is clad in a light brick that contrasts with the woodwork of the windows. The main entrance is marked by a stone frame, similar to the one that once existed on the original facade.



- 1. To view the current appearance of the western facade, see Figure 71 in the appendix.

To view R.O. Swensson’s original facade drawing, see Figure 48 in the appendix.





Figure 44. Main entrance to the hotel and restaurant.

The entrance

Stepping closer to the building, the small details that enrich the otherwise simple overall design become more apparent.

The stone frame, expressing weight and stability, is contrasted by its relief inspired by the decoration of the wooden railing inside the church hall. Other details that refer back to the original architecture include the width of the window niches, which enhance the building's horizontal character, and the door handles, which replicate those leading into the church hall today.



- 1. To view the original 1941 appearance of the main entrance, see Figure 72 in the appendix.
- 2. Stone décor inspired by the existing wooden décor inside the church hall, see Figure 28 in context chapter.
- 3. Replica of the existing door handle leading into the church hall, see Figure 32 in the context chapter.





Figure 45. The foyer, linking the lobby and reception on the left with the conference and restaurant areas on the right.

The foyer

The foyer is today a relatively enclosed and dark space. Previously, it was directly connected to the street outside the building. By opening up towards the second level of the former church hall, more light and air are introduced into the space, helping to create a natural movement from the lobby and foyer on the ground floor to the main restaurant on the first level.

The shape of the new opening is inspired by the distinct circular form of the original staircases in the building. The walls are clad in plaster, and the original limestone flooring is complemented by a new grand staircase in the same material.



- 1. To view the foyer in its existing state, see Figure 73 in the appendix.
- 2. The tapestry that previously formed the front motif together with the cross at the front of the church hall has been given a new position in the new proposal.
- 3. The Orchestra chair by Sven Markelius is one of the pieces of furniture that the congregation used in the building.





Figure 46. Main restaurant and “living room” of the building.

The living room

The final stop within the sequence of spaces, starting from the square outside the building, is what was once the church hall. The existing curved columns, together with the large and tilted windows, contribute to a calm yet impressive space.

The original railing of the balcony level, with its wooden panels, now marks the boundary of the raised floor in the middle of the room. At the end of the room, a new window opens towards the small courtyard on the adjacent property. In this way, the outside world becomes an even more present element within the room.

In its new appearance, the church hall has become the new living room of the building, with the possibility of functioning as a restaurant for up to 200 people.



- 1. To view the church hall in its existing state, see Figure 74 in the appendix.
- 2. The existing original chandelier, designed by Hans Agne Jakobsson, remains in place, see Figure 38 in the context chapter.
- 3. The existing wooden décor by the artist Kjell Sjögren, see Figure 28,35 in the context chapter.



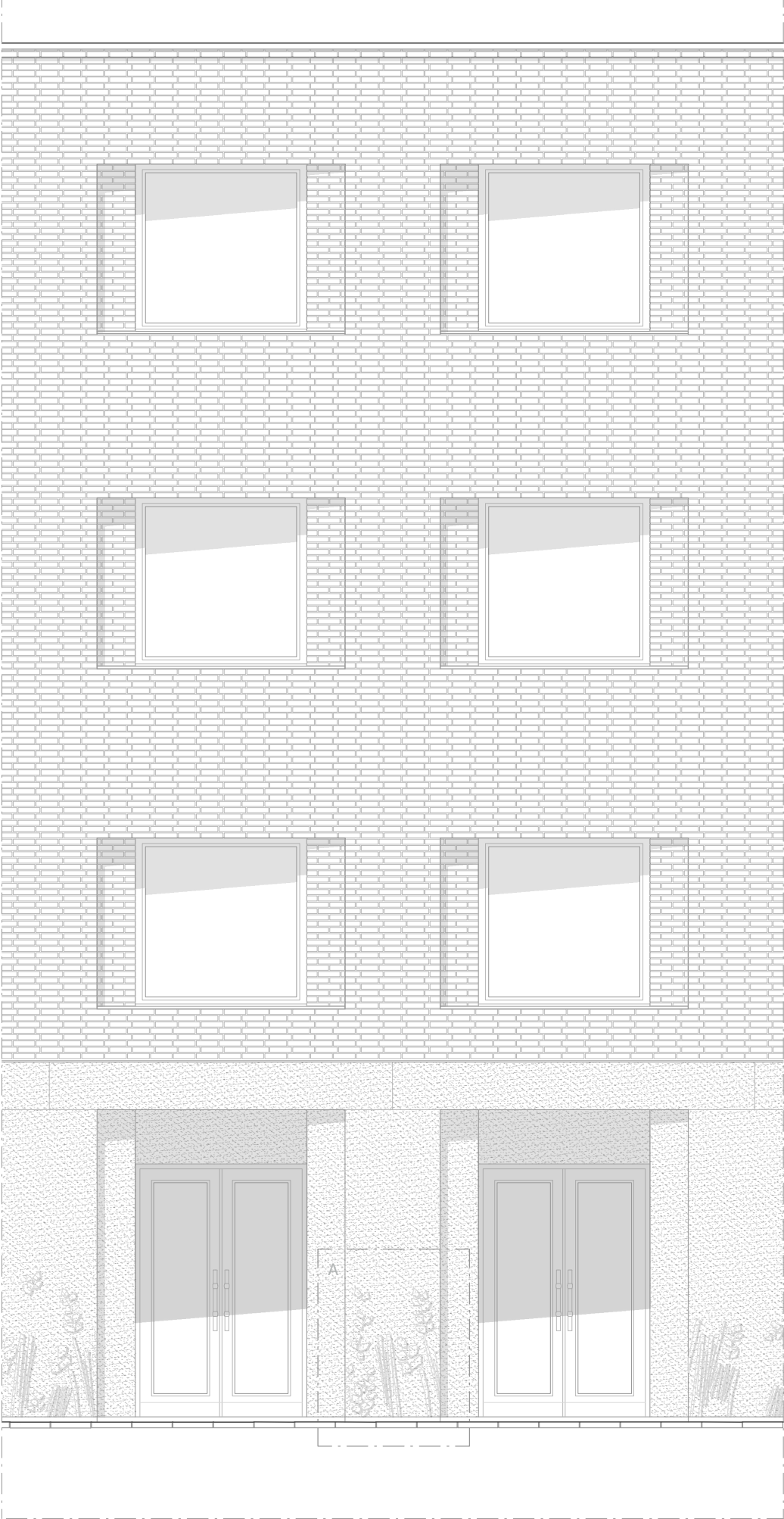


Figure 47. The eastern part of the restaurant space.

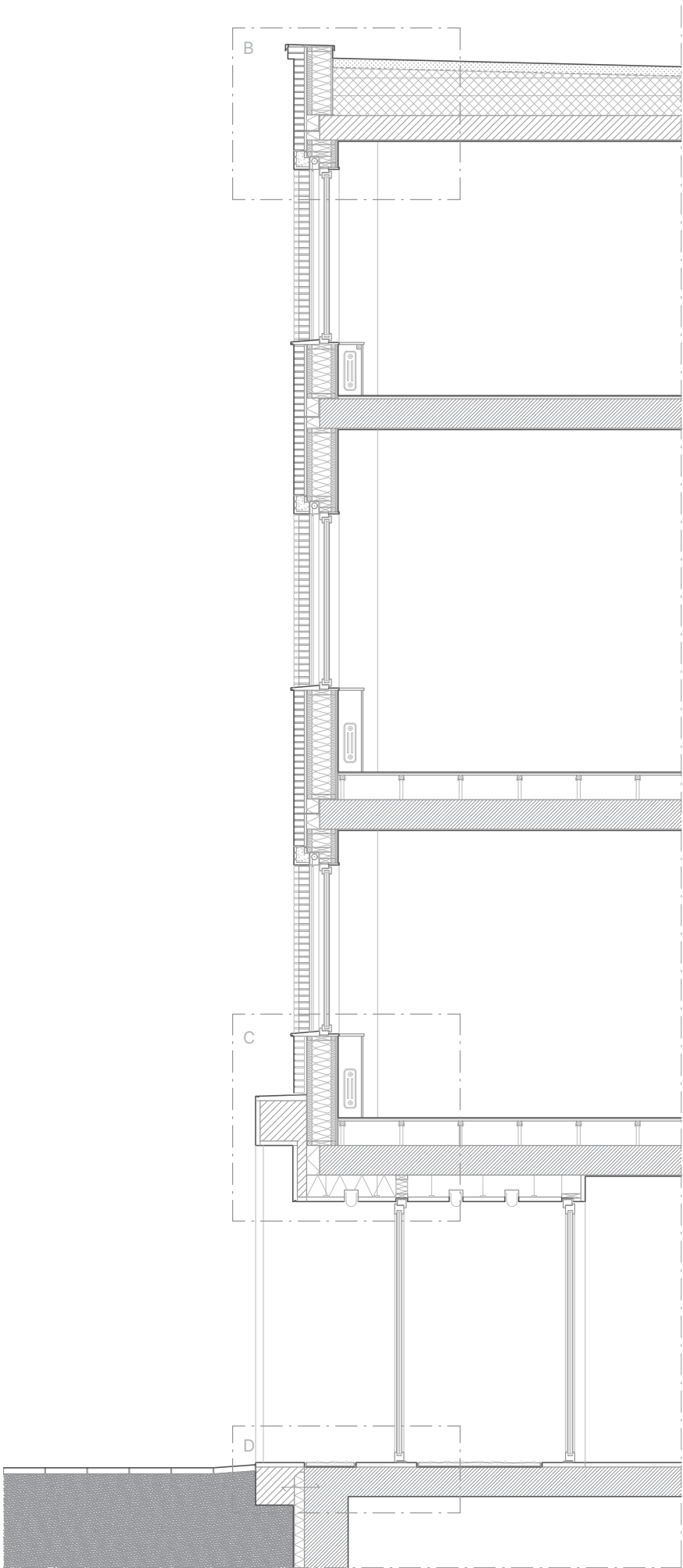
The stage

What once served as the main stage or podium within the church hall has been replaced by an elevated seating area, framed by wooden panels that conceal circulation spaces, ducts, and storage. In front of the elevated seating area, a shallow water mirror recalls the baptismal pool that was originally integrated into the former stage construction.





Detail, elevation 1:60



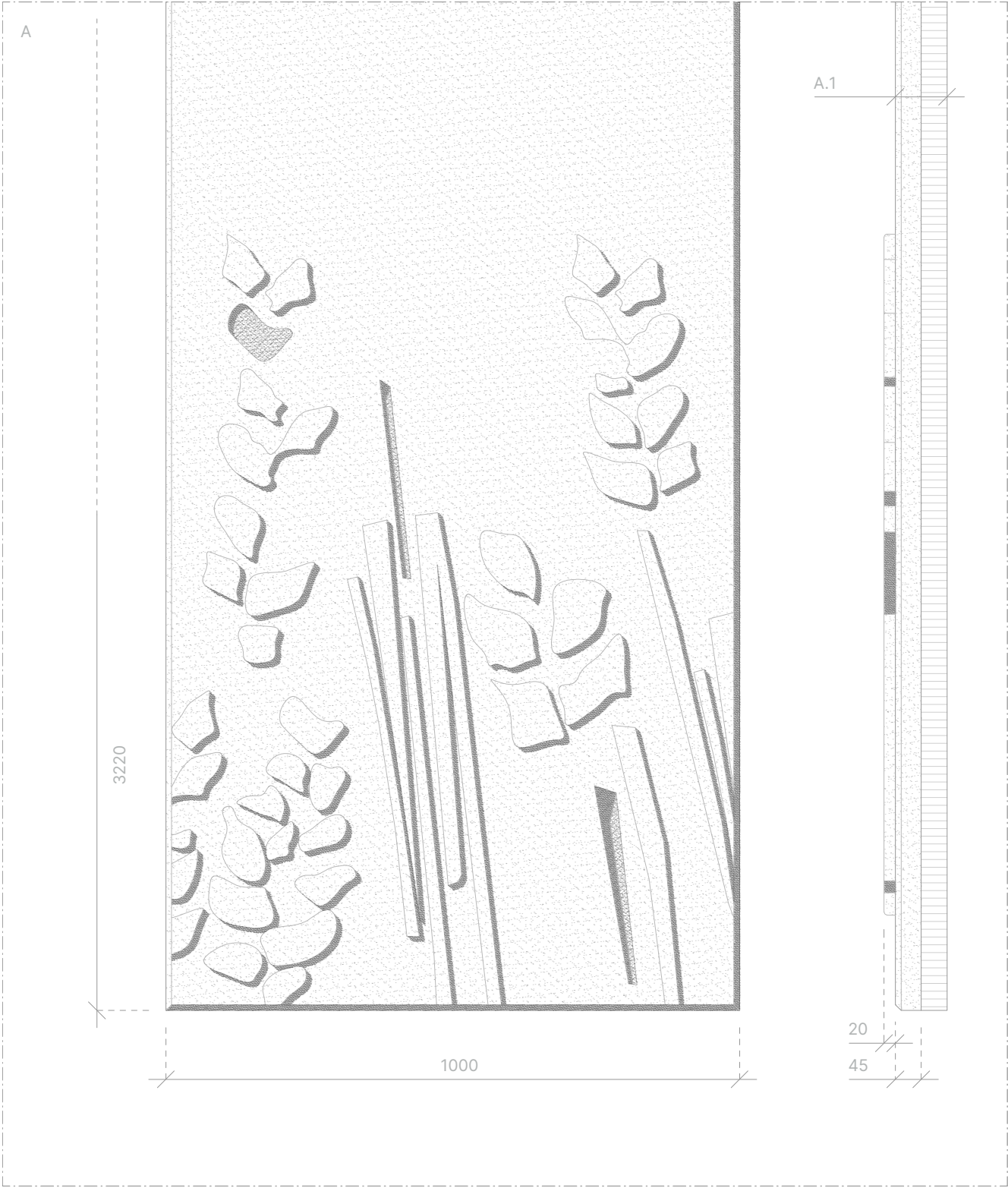
Detail, section 1:60

In the same manner as R.O. Swensson’s original west facade, the new facade of the 1980s extension plays an important role in welcoming visitors into the building, while also contributing to the surrounding public space.

Based on the ideas of “background architecture” (Caldenby et al., 2025), the facade has been given a restrained expression, where simple geometric forms are brought to life through the clear materiality of the brickwork, the timber window frames, and the granite entrance surround.

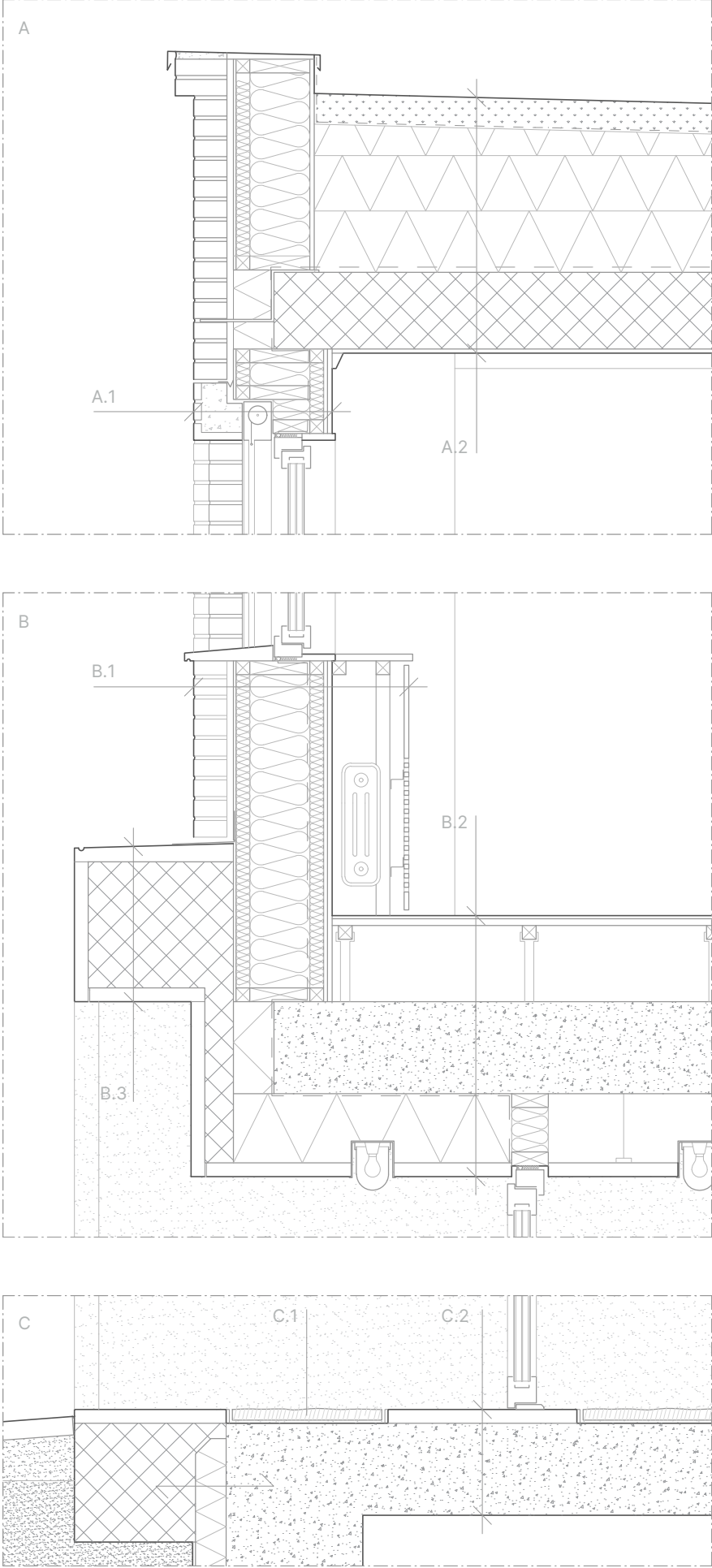
The only exterior ornamentation of the building is found here on the western facade, in the reliefs carved into the granite panels of the entrance surround.

A.1
Honed Bohus granite
Reinforcement plate



Detail, stone panel facade 1:10

- A.1
158 Brick lintel
90 Recessed awning
120 Insulation
- Vapor barrier
45 Insulation
13 Gypsum board
15 Wood panel
- A.2
100 Vegetated roof
- Waterproofing membrane
450 Foam glass insulation
250 Precast concrete (new)
13 Gypsum board
- B.1
54 Brick
9 Exterior gypsum board
45 Insulation
195 Insulation
- Vapor barrier
45 Insulation
13 Gypsum board
15 Wood panel
15 Perforated wood panel
- B.2
13 Parquet flooring
22 Particle board
248 Granab floor system
300 Precast concrete (existing)
- Vapor barrier
225 Foam insulation
45 Granite stone
- B.3
45 Granite stone, slope 2 °
410 In-situ concrete (new)
45 Granite stone
- C.1
- Recessed entrance mat
- C.2
45 Granite stone
300 In-situ concrete (existing)



Detail, section 1:20

D i s c u s s i o n

Chapter 05

Discussion

This thesis began as an attempt to investigate the inherent potential of existing structures and to highlight the possibility of transforming them rather than replacing them. The starting point for the research has been the positive aspects of building transformation presented in the background chapter. In the context chapter, the specific case of this thesis, Vasastaden 1:4, was introduced and further analyzed. The challenges identified during the analysis, together with the qualities of the existing structure, were subsequently examined and tested through a design proposal for transforming the former church building into a hospitality venue, with a focus on hotel and restaurant functions.

Since the case of Vasastaden 1:4 is positioned in relation to the complete or partial demolition of the existing structure, much of the work has focused on developing a realistic proposal in which space efficiency and logistics are resolved in a logical manner. The resulting drawings present a proposal containing 95 hotel rooms, 4 conference rooms, and a restaurant seating 200 guests. The proposal also presents an approach to the organisation of back-of-house functions. Most importantly, however, it demonstrates one possible way of addressing and developing the building's existing architectural values.

Drawing upon the principles of *imitatio*, *translatio*, and *aemulatio*, the proposal seeks to honour the original design ideas of R.O. Swensson by using them as a basis for adaptation and extension (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019). The pragmatic approach to architecture associated with the background architects (Caldenby et al., 2025) has also informed the project's relatively free interpretation of these principles. Each strategy has been applied where it appeared most logical and appropriate.

The extension of the original lamella structure is an example of *imitatio*, where the existing plaster facade has been extended by an additional floor. At the same time, the panoramic windows at the new top of the building depart from the original window design and are more contemporary in their expression, and could therefore be described as an example of *translatio*. The part of the building that differs most clearly from the original 1941 structure is probably the redesigned facade of the 1980s extension. Both the window proportions and the facade material differ from the original building. Still, the new facade has, in many ways, more in common with the 1941 structure than with the previous 1982 facade. It captures more of the restrained yet elegant character of R.O. Swensson's original design. A high level of detailing, in which the craftsmanship of the stone and brickwork becomes more visible, is another aspect that connects the proposal to the philosophy of background architecture. Altogether, this can be described as a design decision primarily informed by *aemulatio*.

The original interior of the building, with its curved corners and softer material palette, contrasts with the straight and rectangular exterior. In the interior adaptation, this relationship has served as a guiding principle, as seen, for instance, in the design of the new staircase. Its overall form is inspired by the building's original main staircases, while its character also draws inspiration from Göteborgs konserthus, which was analyzed in the reference chapter.

Reflecting on the proposal's outcome, the project could be considered successful in that it presents a concrete example of transformation in which the building meets contemporary functional and aesthetic requirements for use as a hotel and restaurant. Furthermore, it demonstrates one possible approach to using existing architecture, together with traces of time and human activity, to enrich a contemporary adaptation. At the same time, one could argue that the proposed interventions are too extensive, raising questions regarding feasibility. The thesis does not attempt to determine the most suitable future use of the building after its transformation. From an environmental perspective, it is of course preferable to preserve the building as close to its current state as possible (United Nations Environment Program, 2023). With that in mind, it might have been more appropriate to retain the building as a public venue or concert hall. Within this research, however, the hotel and restaurant programme has primarily functioned as a tool for investigating the building's inherent qualities. It is also a result of the dialogue with the property owner and the ambition to develop a proposal that is both realistic and achievable.

B i b l i o g r a p h y

Chapter 06

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All drawings and illustrations in the context and results chapter belong to the author unless otherwise stated.

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Design Systems – ACE445
Residential Healthcare – ACE520
Building Tectonics 2 – ACE515

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A p p e n d i x

Chapter 07

Elevations

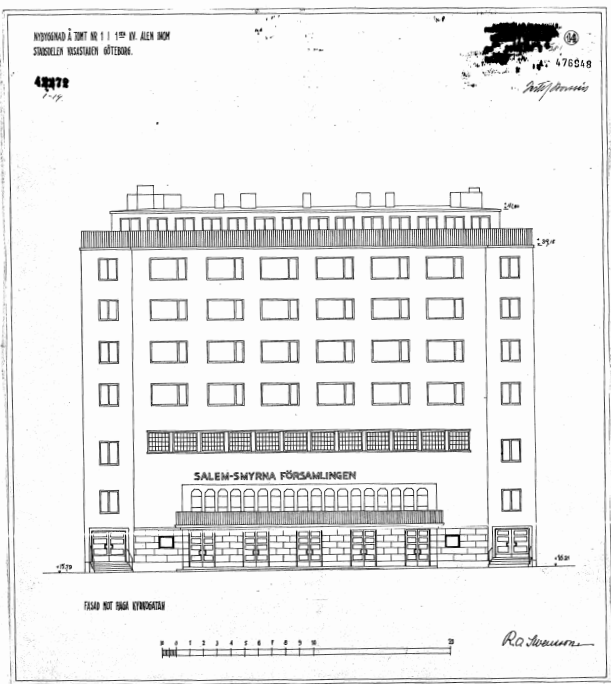


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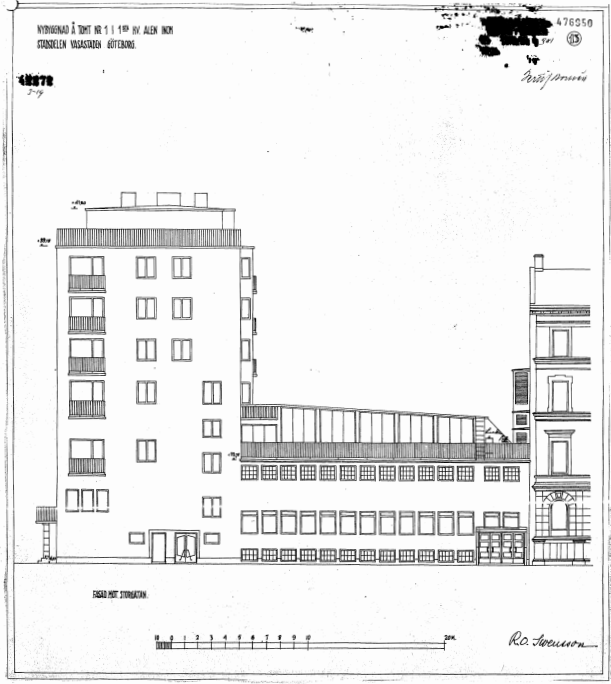


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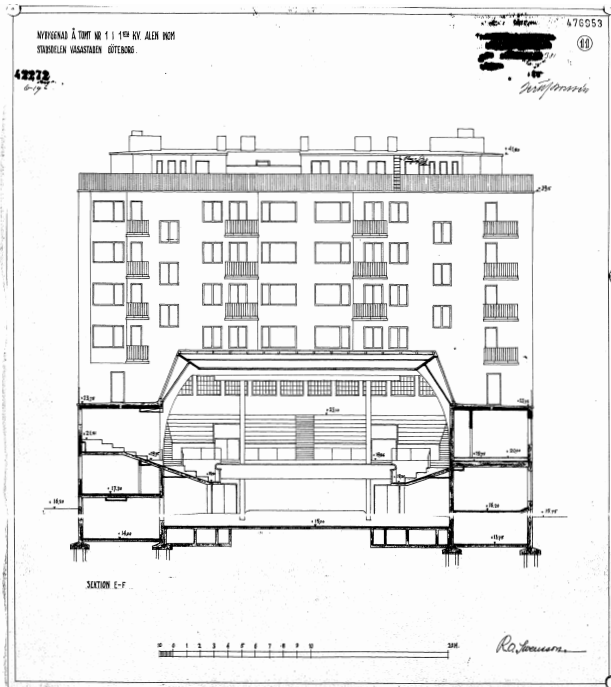


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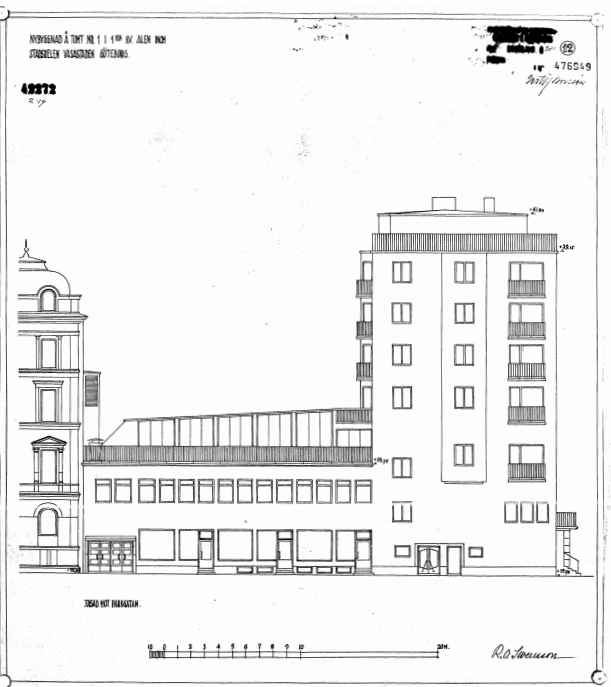


Figure 51. North elevation. Original drawing (1940) (Göteborgs Stad., n.d.)

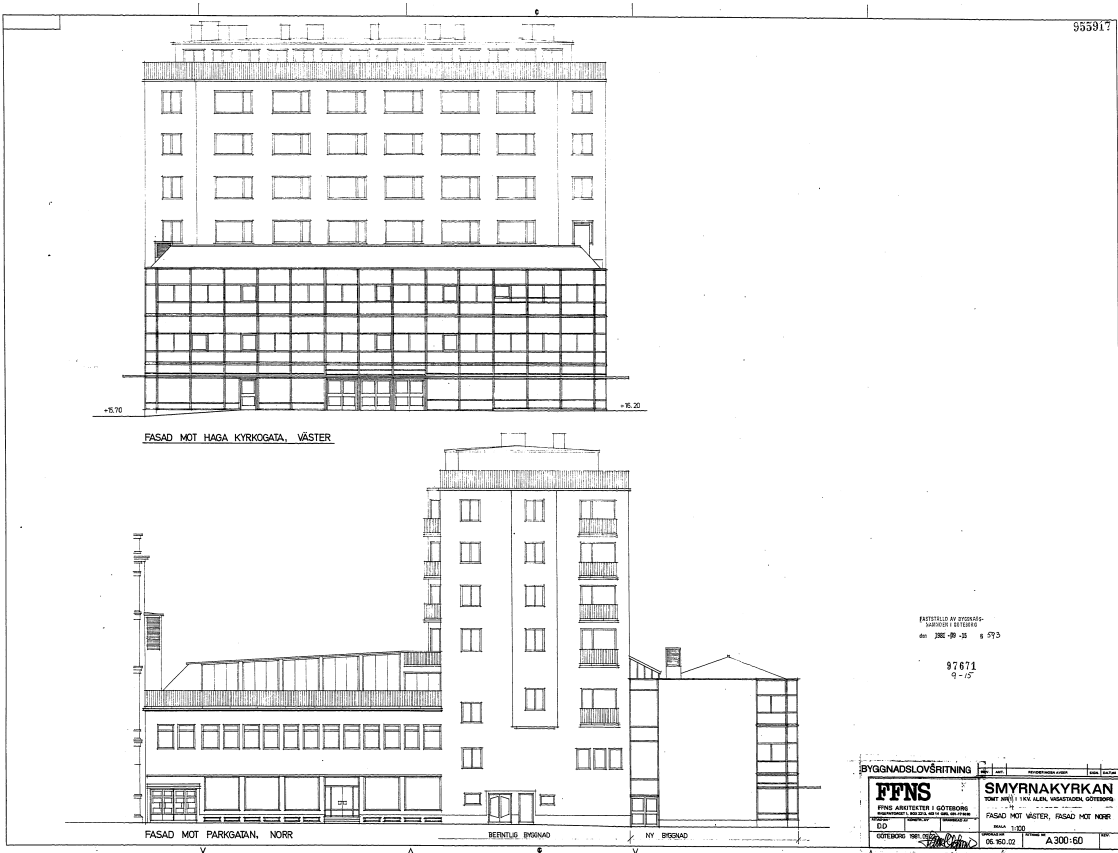


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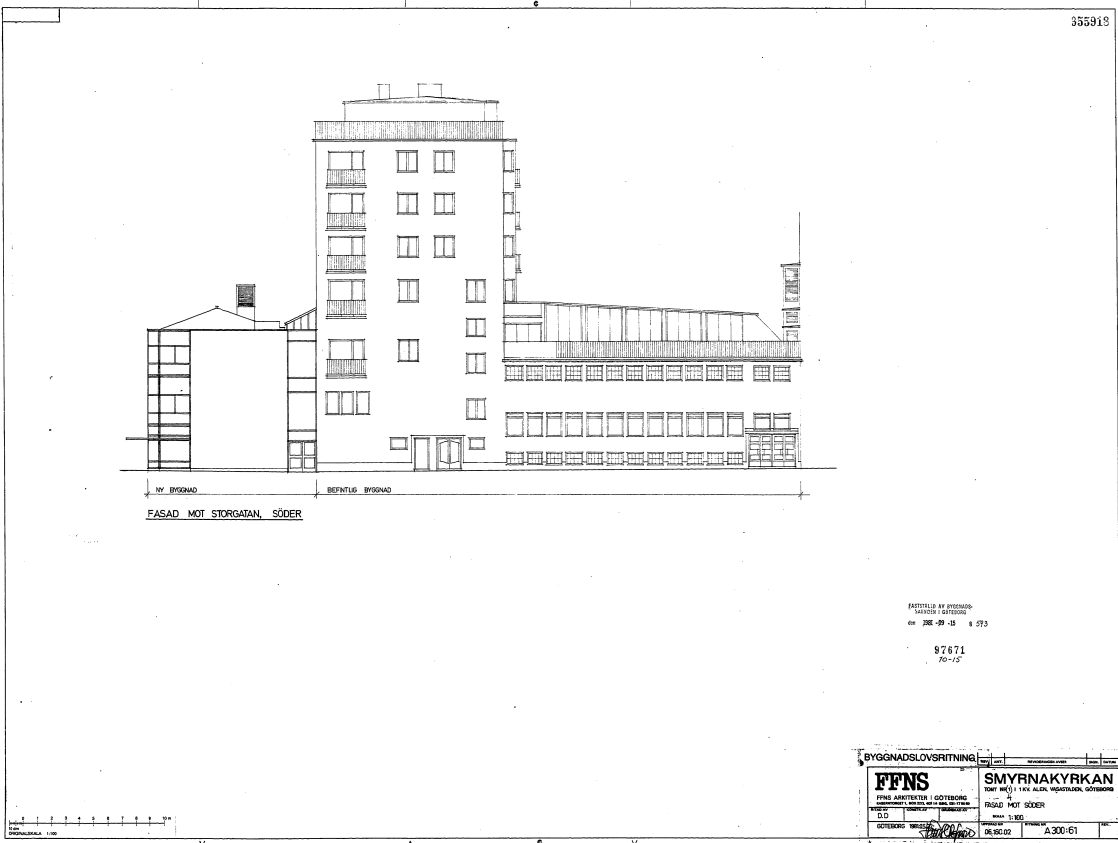


Figure 53. South elevation. Original drawing (1981) (Göteborgs Stad., n.d.)

Floor plan - Basement

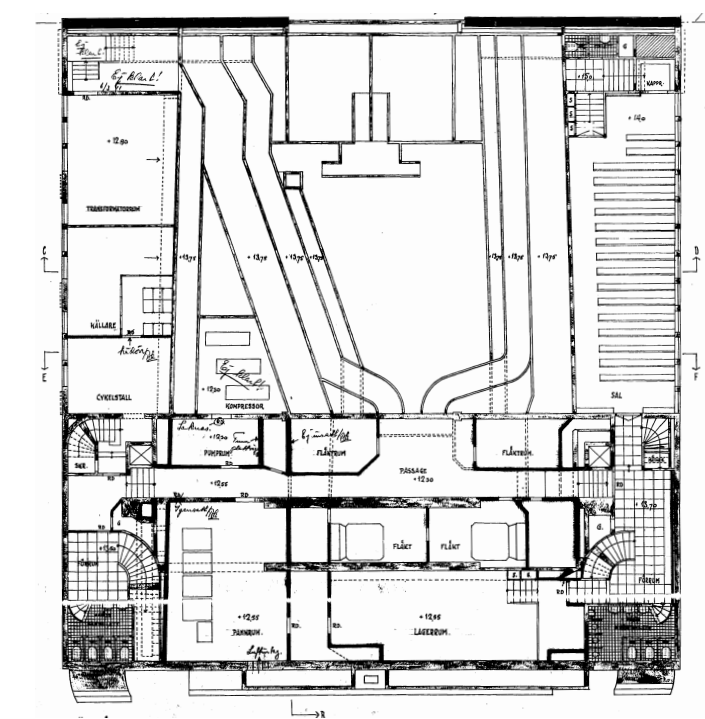


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Floor plan - Ground floor

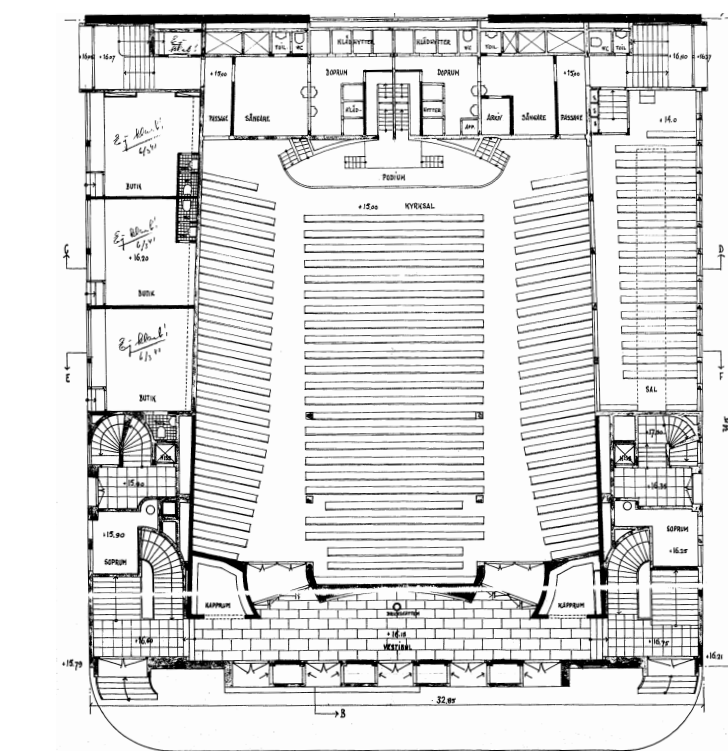


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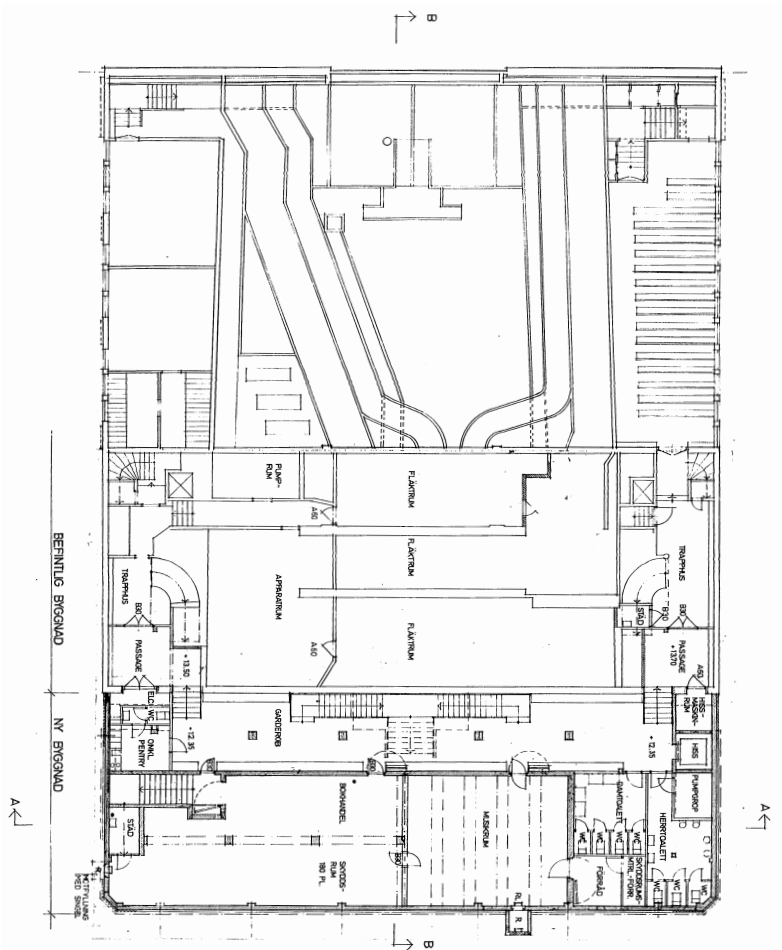


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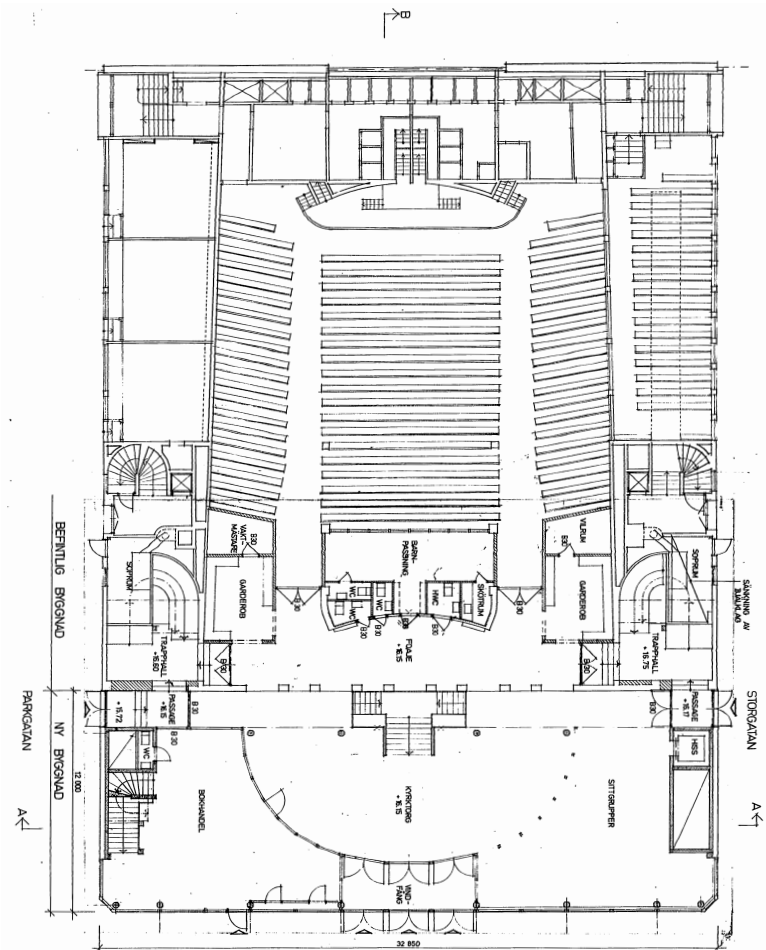


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Floor plan - First floor

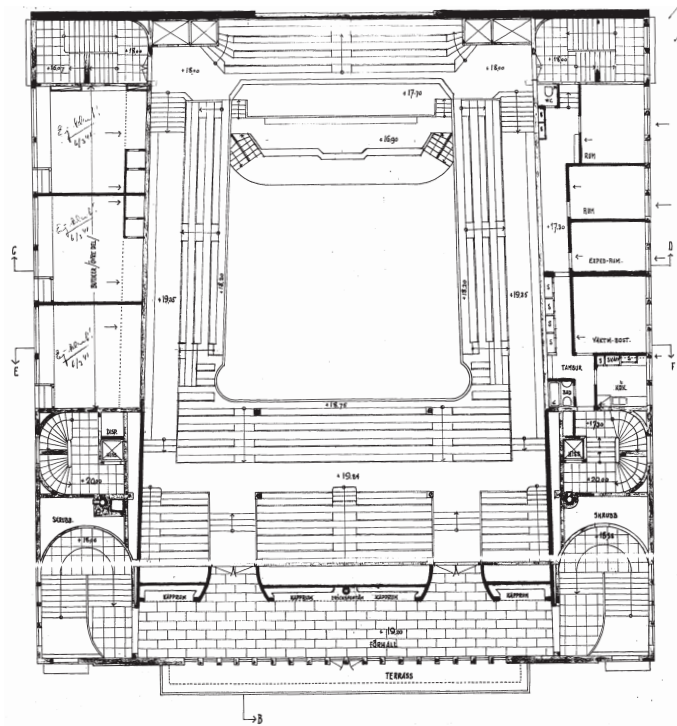


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Floor plan - Second floor A

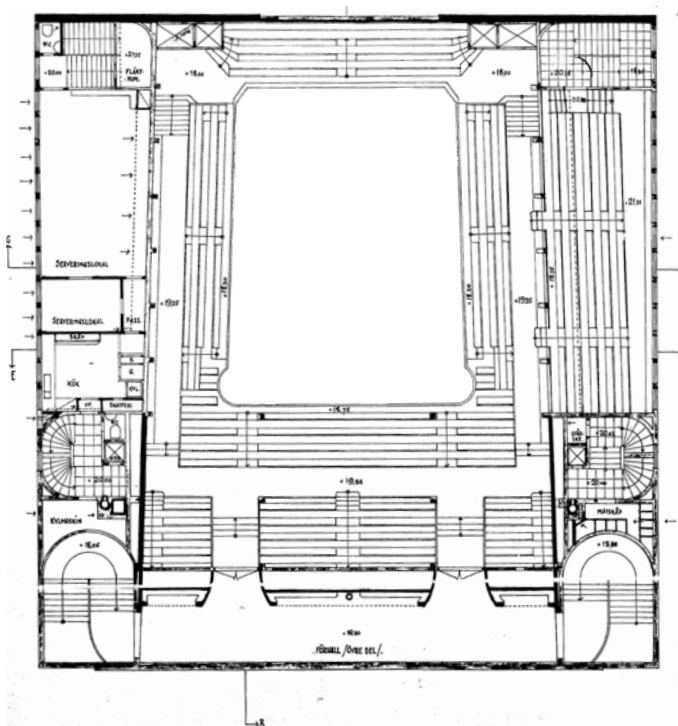


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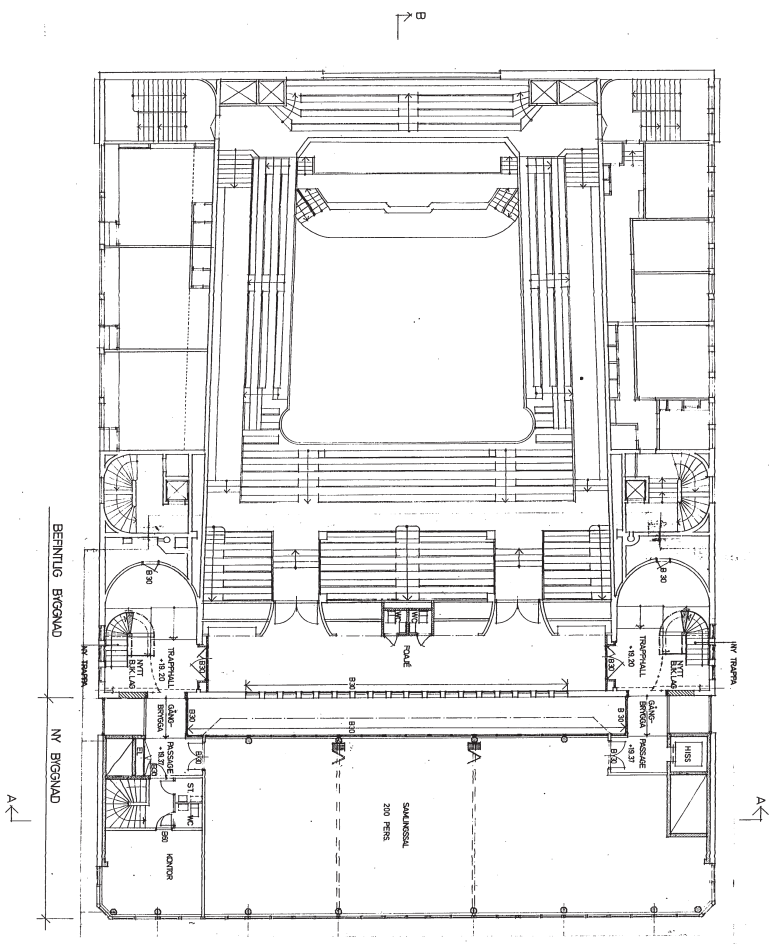


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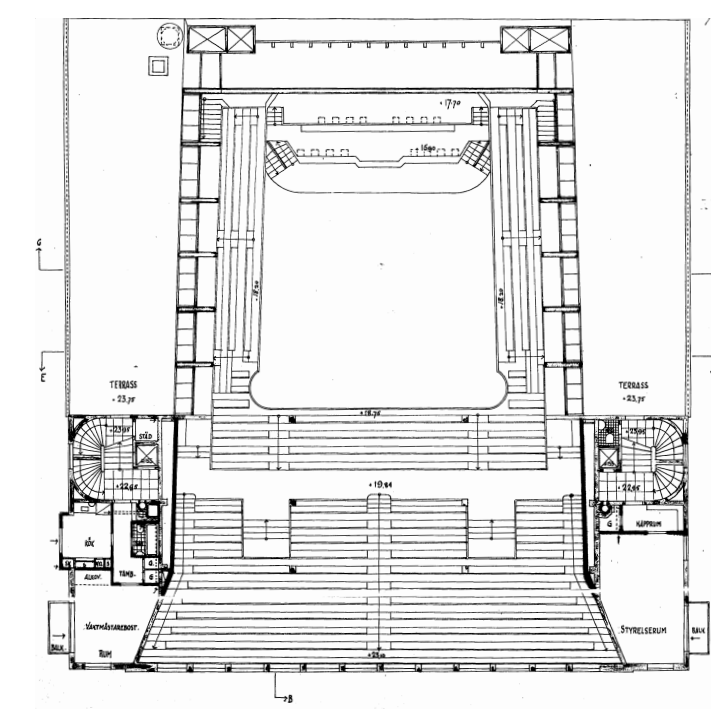


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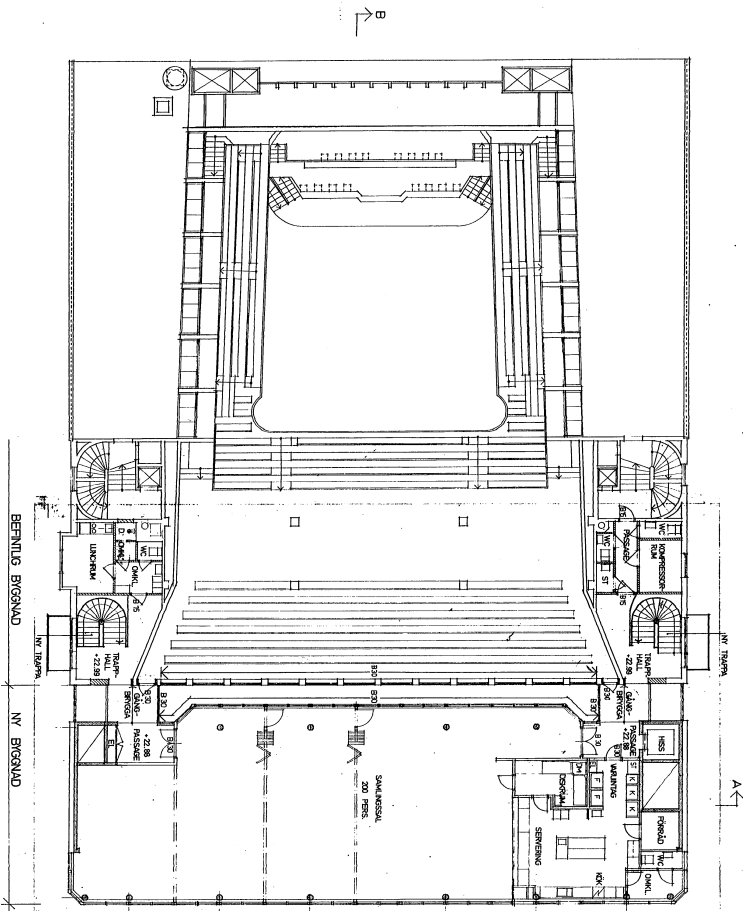


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Floor plan - Third floor

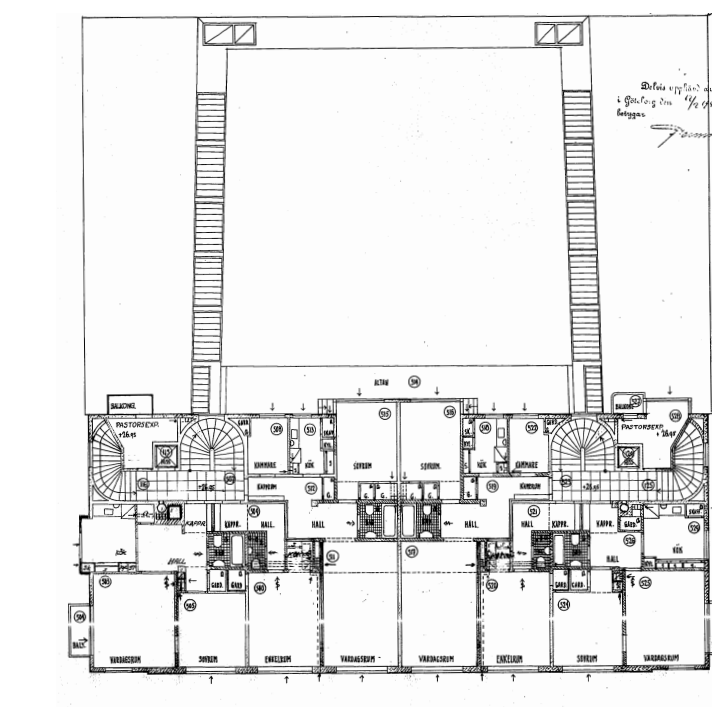


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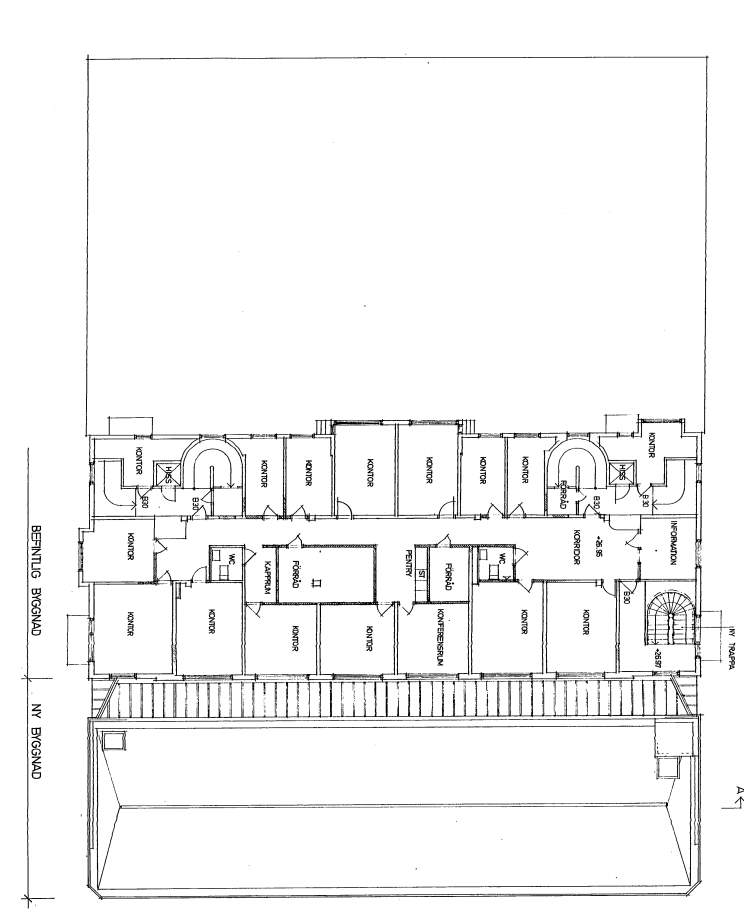


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Floor plan - Fourth and fifth floor

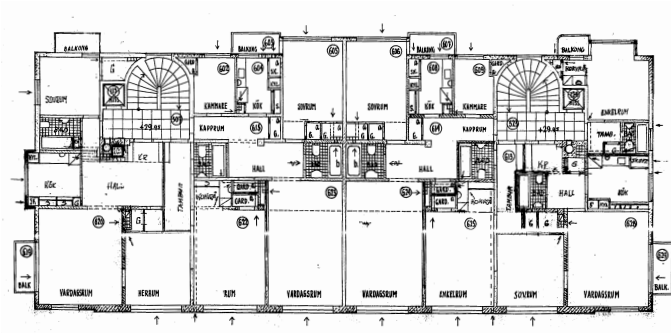


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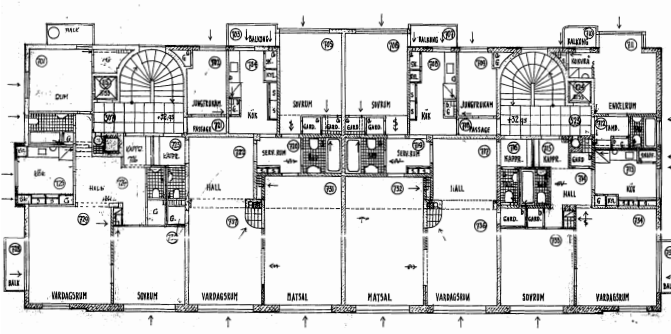


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Floor plan - Sixth and seventh floor

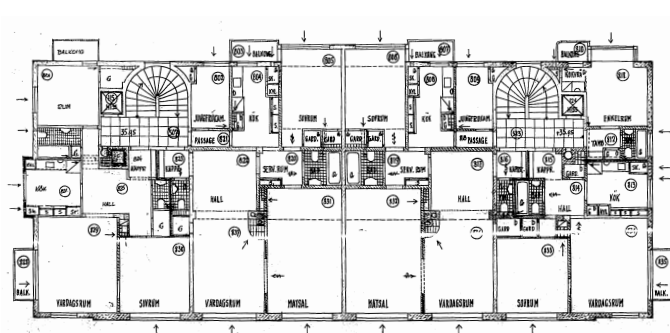


Figure 67. Original drawing (1940) (Göteborgs Stad., n.d.)

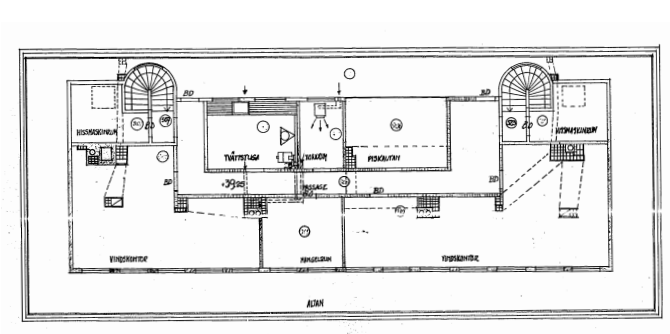


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Sections

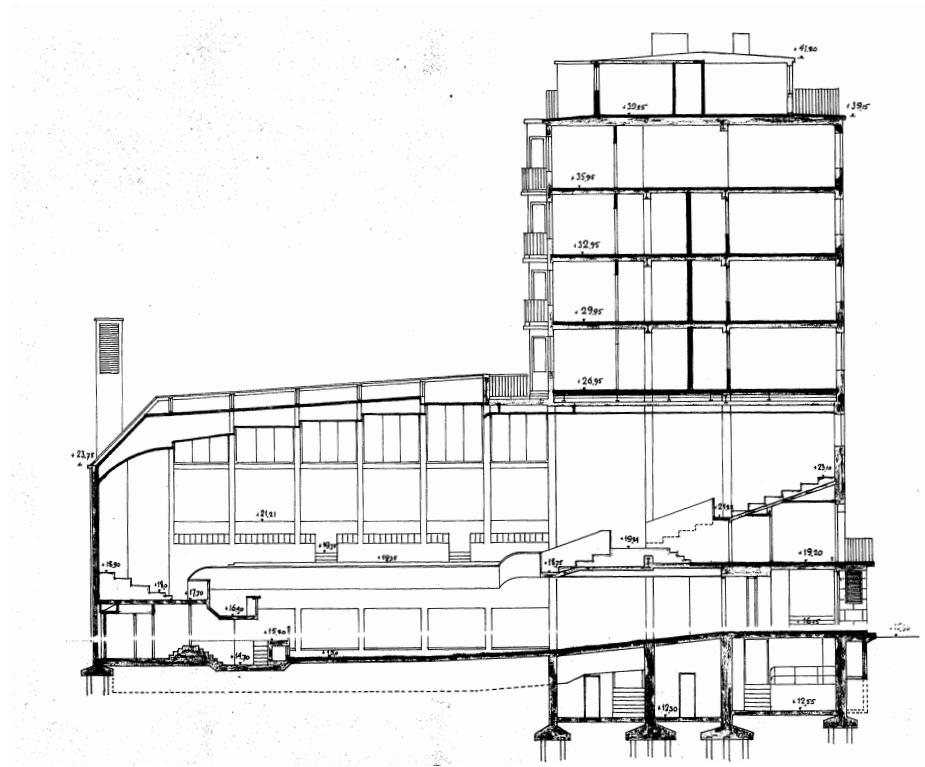


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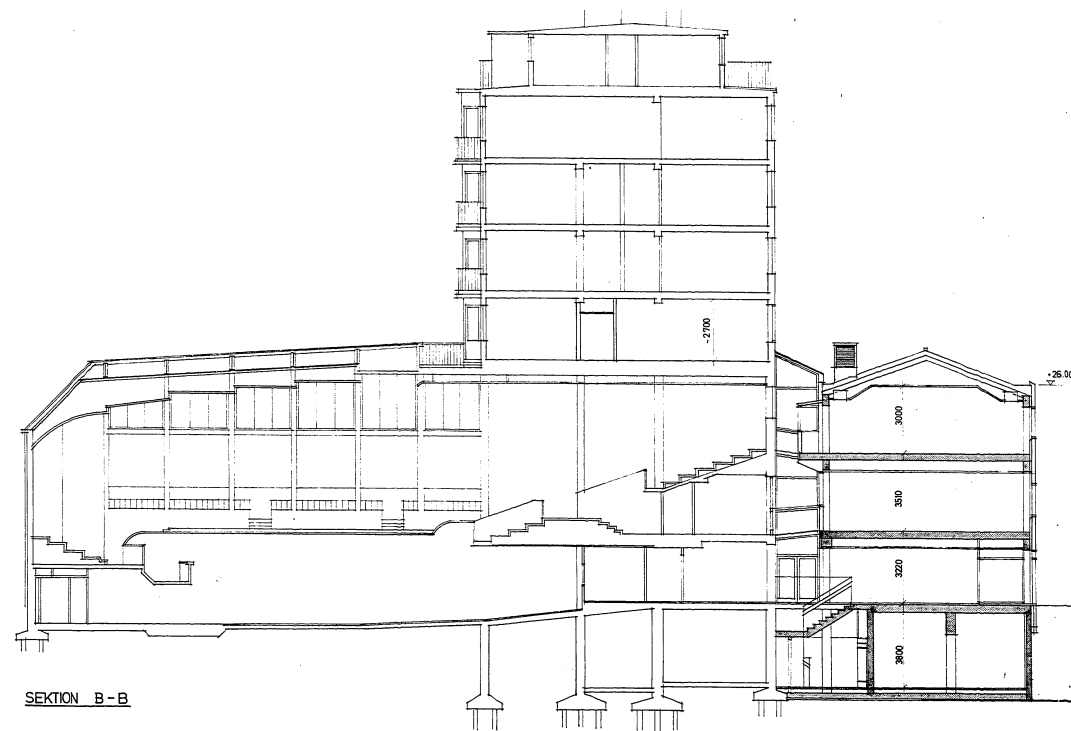


Figure 70. North-south section. Original drawing (1981) (Göteborgs Stad., n.d.)

Images



Figure 71. North elevation. Original drawing (1940)



Figure 72. Current appearance of Vasastaden 1:4.
(Göransson, A., et.al., 1982)

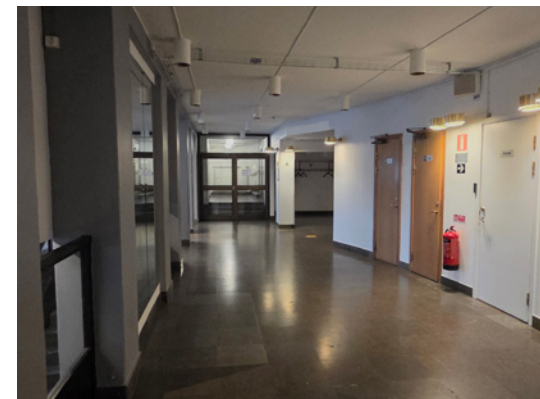


Figure 73. The foyer in its existing state.



Figure 74. The church hall in its current state.

