Studio Sergison
Accademia di architettura
Università della Svizzera italiana

Autumn Semester 2009
Inside/Outside

Contents

Introduction

During the course of the year, the studio continued its exploration of ‘normative’ architecture, taking a number of sites in the area of Bloomsbury in central London as the location for our research.

The studio focussed on the theme ‘Inside/Outside’, and projects explored proposals for an interior architecture that takes into account the tension between inside and outside space, a room’s relationships to the city. Emphasis was placed on housing programmes and notions of public and private space.

At the beginning of the semester students studied a painting of their choice portraying a strong sense of domesticity. They then produced models that recreate accurately the atmosphere observed in the paintings, and these were, in turn, carefully photographed. This was an exercise in representation, but also a means of engendering an understanding of how a powerful interior architecture can be created. Only the students’ reproductions of the paintings selected are included in this catalogue.

Another exercise involved the students in making accurate survey drawings of thirty-four anonymous domestic buildings in Bloomsbury at a scale of 1:20. The purpose of this exercise was two-fold: firstly to understand the local vernacular, materiality and weathering; secondly, to understand more fully the scale of 1:20 and its representational capacity.

Projects were developed on ten sites, at first as 1:50 models that explored an urban context and programme. Finally, projects were drawn at 1:20 in plan, section and elevation. A model was then made at this scale in a material that attempted to approximate the character of the buildings.

As ever, the studio was supported by a series of lectures and presentations by studio staff and guest speakers, which included guidelines on how to make a survey drawing and a draft of the paper that appears in the pages that follow.

During the students’ visit to London, Brad Lochore gave us an insightful tour of his house and studio, and Stephen Taylor showed us around his recently finished project on Charlotte Road. Stephen Taylor, together with Ricardo Bak Gordon, also acted as a critic at the end of semester reviews.

These words remind me of how dense our programme was. And yet, despite the challenges we set ourselves, the work of students more than exceeded expectations.

Aerial photograph highlighting the boundaries of Bloomsbury

Inside/Outside

Jonathan Sergison

The outlook a room has onto the city is a discreet form of negotiation. When that room fulfils a domestic role, this condition is more complex. In the European city a sense of what is a reasonable relationship between inside and outside has emerged through experience and the demands made by society and culture. Planning policy and statutory control regulate it. The city in which a room is located is always present. Even when heavy curtains are drawn over a window, the world outside contributes to the atmosphere the room holds, even if at a barely audible level. A tension exists between the public (the city) and private (the domestic interior) and a window plays a role in controlling and enhancing this relationship.

The domestic environment is deeply affected by the city it looks onto and in which it is located. Centuries of house building have ensured that the elements that negotiate this relationship are reasonable, even pleasant. The detailing of a window and its constituent parts is based on function, experience and practical need: to keep the cold out, provide shade from strong sunlight, allow ventilation, offer privacy and frame the view onto the city. Glass, shutters, curtains, blinds are elements that meet deeply embedded needs in our culture

Within a matrix of functional and decorative possibilities, the window profoundly affects the relationship between a room and the city outside. How a window is sized, and its opening positioned within a wall involves a complex set of decisions, for it determines the quality of the room and the manner in which it can be furnished and inhabited. It also contributes to the overall character of a building's facade, its appearance from the outside.

The issues we need to attend to when considering the character of a window do not end there. In contemporary construction, for reasons of thermal performance and cost, there is great pressure to place a window assembly near the outside face of a wall. This is particularly the case where an outer brick layer is no more than this - a non-structural decorative surface - because the insulation will sit between the outer non-structural layer and the thicker inner structural zone.

While different in detail, the same is true of rain screen construction, where, again, the outer surface serves a non-structural role. And this also applies to an insulated render system, where render is not much thicker than a layer of paint and the insulation is fixed to the inner structure. In all these cases the most efficient solution is to position the window system in plan in the same zone as the insulation, which inevitably leads to the window being to the outside of the facade. This results in a tightness that is experienced in much contemporary construction. It is as if the

A Georgian house on Mecklenburgh Square, Bloomsbury

building has only been designed in elevation and not in section. Buildings do not express the sense of weight or mass that exists when the external window reveal is deep and the material of the facade is returned to meet the window frames.

Modernist architecture gives priority to frame structures, where the wall is understood as an infill panel. It is logical, when thinking in this way, to envisage the wall surface as a skin and the glazing of a building in an equivalent manner. In this way, a building reads as an expression of the manner in which it is made. It displays a relaxed attitude to tectonic expression and celebrates the tightness of the outer surface.

The modernist attitude to constructional expression is underpinned by an ideological motivation. This more contemporary form of construction is based on an economic logic which often results in banal buildings. When a window is only 100mm from the outer face of the building it makes it clear that the purpose a brick wall serves is limited in ambition. This form of construction has become ubiquitous, almost a contemporary vernacular, although in vernacular construction there is always a dialogue between practical need and cultural traditions. It remains to be seen if much of what is being built today will hold the same value as the many regional building solutions encountered all over the world.

An interesting example of architecture based in local tradition can be found in Bath. In the 1720s, the city was a Georgian new town and a fine example of the picturesque tradition applied as an urban concept. Looking carefully at the sash window of a typical terraced house from the Georgian period, we notice that the timber window cill has been removed: the stone cill and the window frame meet without the additional timber element that a London sash window employs. Building experience demonstrated that, although necessary in a brick construction, this is an element that is prone to rotting in time. Bath is a city built from stone, a material that is not only more durable than brick, but also more versatile in the way it can be carved and shaped. It contributes more effectively to the weathering of a building and to keeping water out. This is an example of building experience affecting the detailing of a window, but the decision to remove a sightline results in a more abstract expression.

The act of forming an opening in a wall is never free from consequences. It can disclose the integrity of the construction and structure. It contributes to the image of a building - its architectural expression - particularly in the way that one window relates to others as part of a matrix of openings.

Further lessons can be learnt by looking at the detailing of windows from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the United Kingdom the sash window was favoured. The section sizes of these windows are very fine. In a relatively temperate climate it was considered acceptable to employ single glazing, which meant that the weight of a window is reduced. The current building regulations do not require additional background ventilation because it is recognised that a sash window allows for background air movement and is never airtight in terms of contemporary window standards and systems. Historically the double layer of casement windows encountered in Scandinavia or Eastern Europe were never deemed necessary.

A sash window does not need to accommodate the cantilevering affect of a casement window, as it moves vertically, not horizontally. The builders of these speculative houses wanted to remove as much unnecessary detail and as many sight lines as possible and the vertical proportions of the openings allowed them to fabricate windows of considerable size. A piece of glass was expensive and, for obvious reasons, it would have been impossible to transport large panes. To

compensate for this, the size of the timber mullion sections is as fine as it is possible to make it, and is painted a dark colour, in an attempt to mitigate the reading of the window as an element made from small glazed panels. Instead, the effect is to make the fenestration disappear when seen from the outside against the darkness of the internal room. These observations show that this way of thinking about a window in relation to the overall concept of the facade is deliberately abstract and sober. It could also be argued that from the interior of the room, the relationship between the inside and outside is important and that one always sees through and beyond the fine detail of the fenestration.

A similar set of observations could be made in relation to the cast iron railings that were employed as window-guards. These were necessary because the first floor windows were of such generous proportions, and often close to the floor level. When the bottom sash is raised up, the room is transformed into a balcony and has a generous and direct relationship to the outside. The railings were painted to protect them from rust, and by being painted dark they appear to recede against the darkness of the windows. From the interior of a room their ornate detailing offers a rich silhouette between the inside and the city beyond.

The size of a window affects the quality and amount of light a room receives, and is in turn affected by geographical location, season and orientation, as we all know. In a Georgian house the window size accords with the conventions of classical ordering, which in turn affect the organisation of the house in terms of the function given to rooms. The size of the windows on the piano nobile, as already observed, establishes a magnificent relation between room and city: standing at one of these windows involves us in a public relationship.

As a way of modifying or adjusting this connection between the inside and the outside, a carefully arranged assembly of elements was developed. The most permanent of these are the shutters that are built in to the window assembly. Depending on the exact arrangement of pieces, an extensive range of adjustments is possible, from fully open to fully closed through many stages in between, that have a direct bearing on the relationship of the room to the city outside. In London shutters are placed on the inside of windows. They affect the amount of light a room receives and enhance thermal performance a little. They do not contribute to the security of a building and in the summer months do not help in providing cooling in the same way louvred external shutters do. But then, it is never consistently hot in the summer months in an English city.

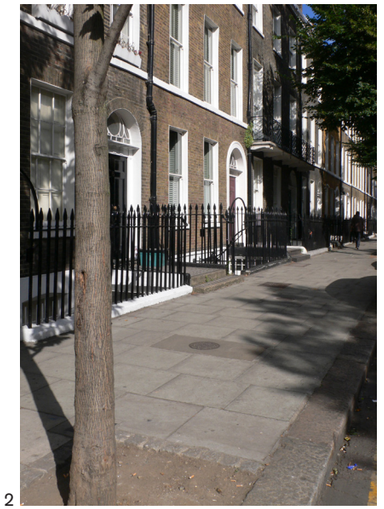
The window reveal is typically 220mm deep, painted with white gloss paint and it assists in the task of bringing soft winter light into a Georgian interior. Blinds are really redundant in the type of window being described above. Curtains, however, are not, because they not only contribute to the interior atmosphere of a room, but also provide a degree of thermal insulation. Like all the other elements that contribute to the decorative character of a domestic interior, their role is initially born out of practical need and then shaped by subjective preference. Another example of this is wall paper, which not only covers up the cracks that occur in a plastered wall, but also brings texture, colour and decorative character to a room.

A fibrous plaster cornice masks the joint between wall and ceiling. The junction is a challenge for a plasterer to form in a manner that is tight and straight, although in contemporary construction we unthinkingly take it for granted. Experience of building demonstrated that in time a crack would inevitably occur, and so the cornice was introduced as a way of masking this building defect. Only later would the decorative character of this element be considered. The same is true of ceiling mouldings, whose origin lies in the experience of how a building performs and the

frequency with which a plastered ceiling cracks over time.

This catalogue of why domestic interiors developed in the manner they have refers to a practical understanding. The profiling of skirting boards, architraves and dado rails all anticipate the long-term movement of timber. The same is true of the decision to form a door or shutter out of panels. In the hands of a skilful architect, master builder and tradesmen, the handling of these elements can be deeply moving. When, at certain times in history, the expression of these elements contributed to a domestic interior becoming elaborate, it was for reasons of effect. Construction was deeply understood and tensions between idea and technique were carefully considered. In the history of architecture, construction is never pure and the image a building projects is achieved in the most reasonable, rather than the most honest, manner.

When one looks at the paintings of the domestic interiors the Danish artist Vilhelm Hammershøi made while living in London, the city is rendered as a place of decorum. The same can be said of the rooms represented. Hammershøi paints an image of domestic order and a retreat from the city outside. His rooms seem an extension of an urban concept of the city where domestic architecture is a background, and the home a place imbued with dignity.



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1, 2
Doughty Street, Bloomsbury

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A communal garden off Malet Street, arranged in a picturesque manner

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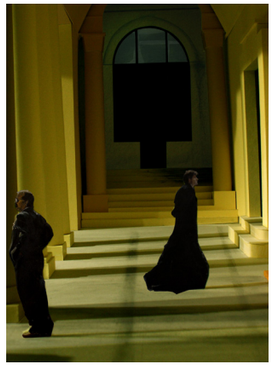
Bedford Square, Bloomsbury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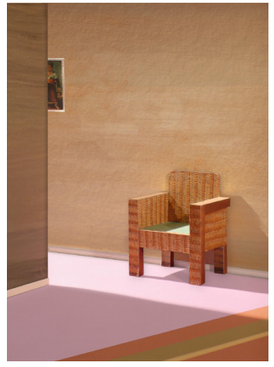
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1
Bruno Almeida after Eric Fischl, ‘The Confessions of a Mafia Don’

2
Matteo Arno after Vilhelm Hammershøi, ‘White Doors’

3
Silvia Baro after Edward Hopper, ‘Room in Brooklyn’

4
Florence Harbach after Monika Hubmann, ‘Blauer Raum’

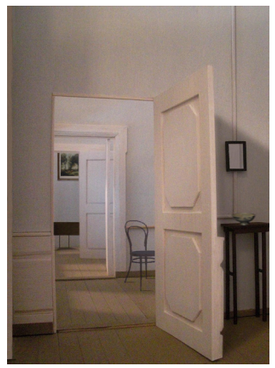
5
Antonion Ippolito after Marc Chagall, ‘Nora à table’

6
Valerie Bischofberger after Matthias Weischer, ‘Chair’

7
Carlo Zucchia after Vilhelm Hammershøi, ‘Interior with easel’

8
Steven Schenk after Rembrandt, ‘A man, seated at a table, reading in a lofty room’

9
Elvire Thouvenot after Gianni Berengo Gardin, ‘Giorgio Morandi’s studio’



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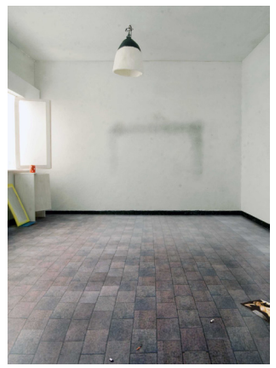

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Paolo Bugatti after Rembrandt, ‘Philosopher in meditation’

11
Alessandra Bertoli after Vilhelm Hammershøi, ‘The four rooms’

12
Ludovica Benedetto after Vilhelm Hammershøi, ‘Dust motes dancing in the sunbeams’

13
Claudio Pozzoni after unknown

14
Sebastian Carella after Johannes Rochhausen, ‘Atelieransicht V’

15
Cecelia Fossati after unknown

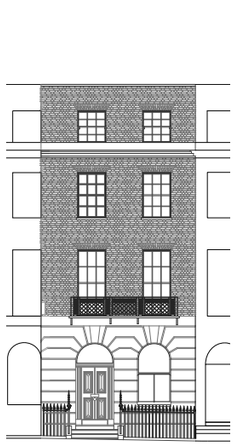
16
Filipa Saraiva after Edward Hopper, ‘Eleven a.m.’

17
Fulvio de Bastiani after Matteo Massagrande, ‘La veranda’

18
Elad Meirom after Henry Wallis, ‘The room in which Shakespeare was born’

Survey: site plan

1 2 Duke's Road
2 30-31 Cartwright Gardens
3 5 Burton Place
4 7 Burton Street
5 17 Gordon Square
6 39 Gordon Square
7 80 Marchmont Street
8 13 Leigh Street
9 17 Thanet Street
10 56 Argyle Square
11 30 Argyle Street
12 5 Cromer Street
13 8-16 Cromer Street
14 House on Seaford Street
15 3 Regent Square
16 85 Judd Street
17 91 Judd Street
18 11 Mecklenburgh Square
19 21 Bernard Street
20 23 Brownlow Mews
21 15 Bedford Square
22 11-13 Gilbert Place
23 28 Bedford Place
24 44 Russell Square
25 6 Queen Square
26 32 Old Gloucester Street
27 61 Great Ormond Street
28 30 Orde Hall Street
29 9 Northington Street
30 7 Guildford Street
31 Block at north-west end of Northington Street
32 27 Great St James Street
33 14 Rugby Street
34 29 John Street



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2
Valerie Bischofberger
30 Cartwright Gardens

3
Pietro Marsciani
5 Burton Place

4
Fulvio De Bastiani
7 Burton Street

5
Luca Sartori
17 Gordon Square

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Paulo Bugatti
39 Gordon Square

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Leo Collomb
17 Thanet Streeta

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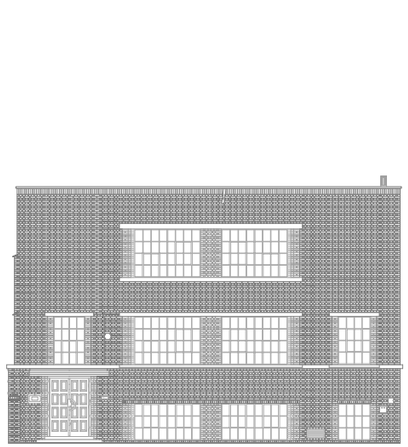
Claudio Pozzoni
56 Argyle Square

11
Alice Busani
30 Argyle Street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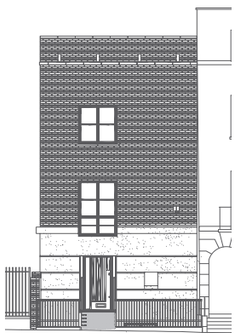
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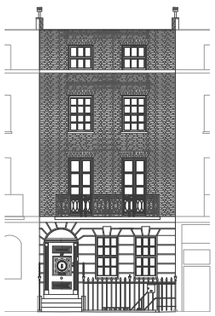
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Elad Meirom
8–16 Cromer Street

14
Marco Bonfatti Paini
House on Seaford Street

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Elvire Thouvenot
85 Judd Street

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Florence Harbach
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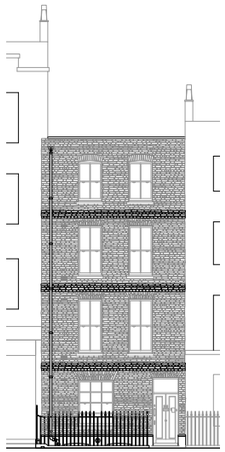
6 Queen's Square



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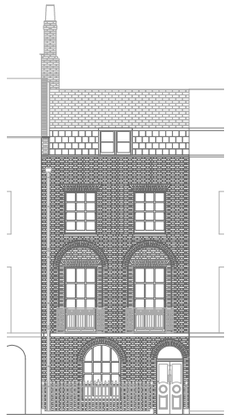

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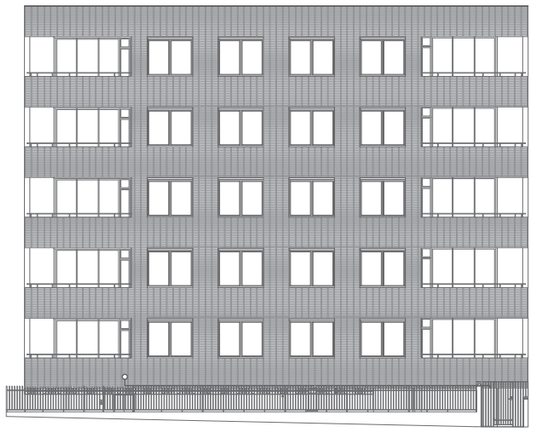

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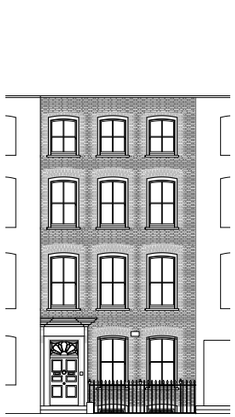

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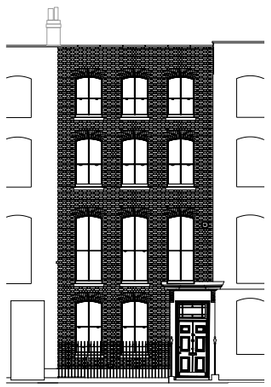

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Silvia Baro
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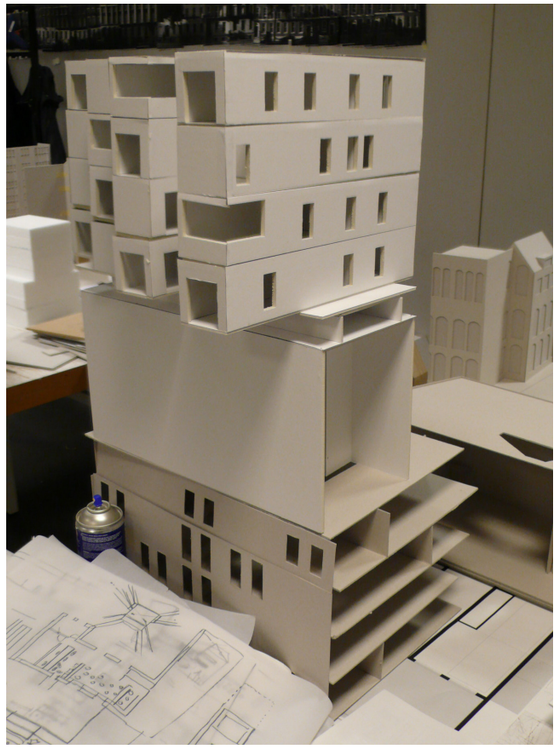
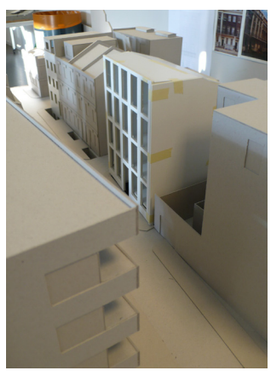
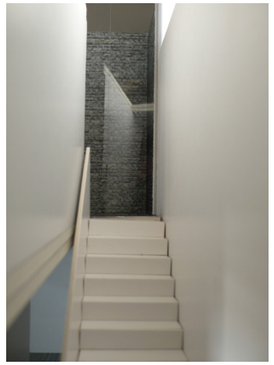
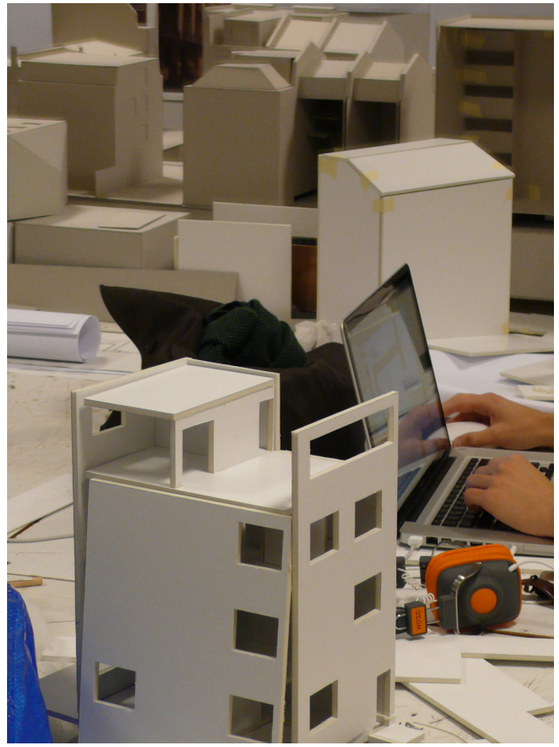




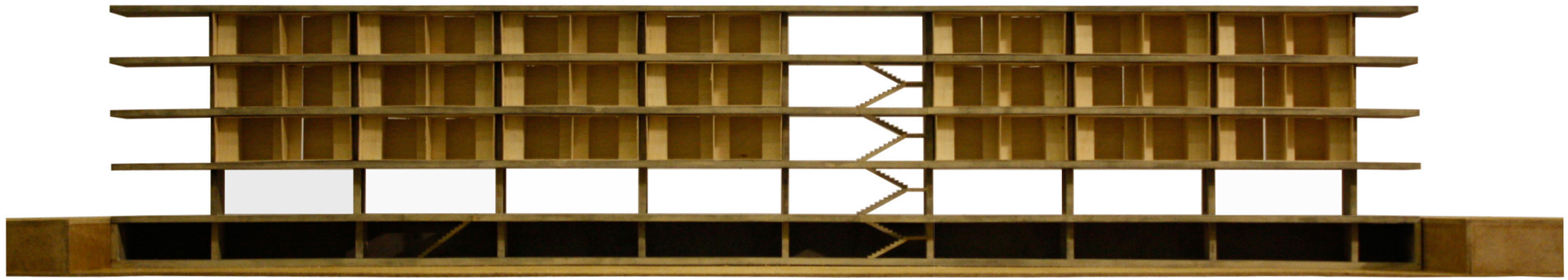


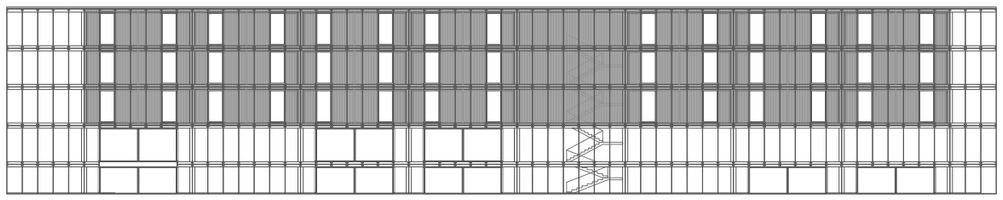


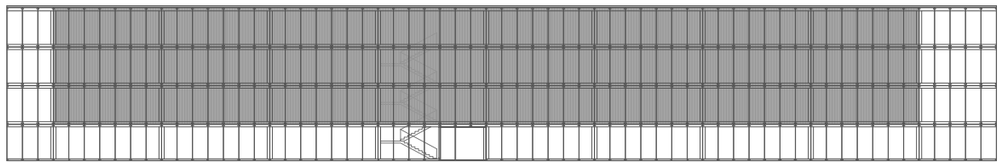


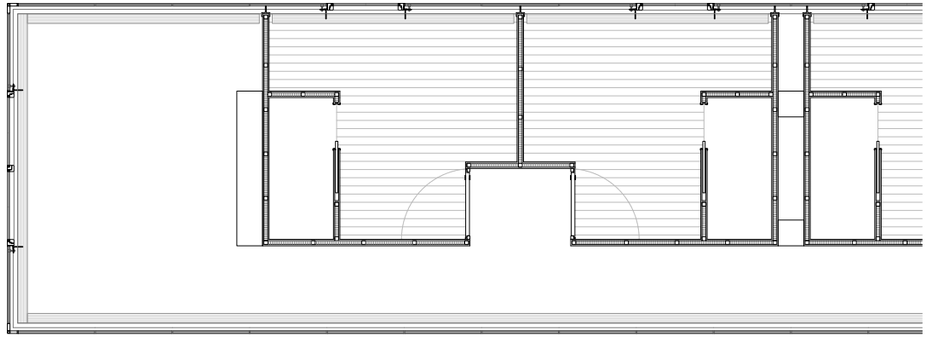



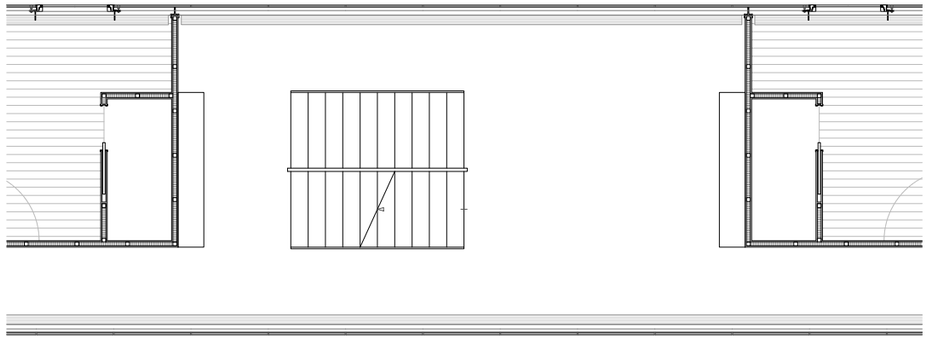


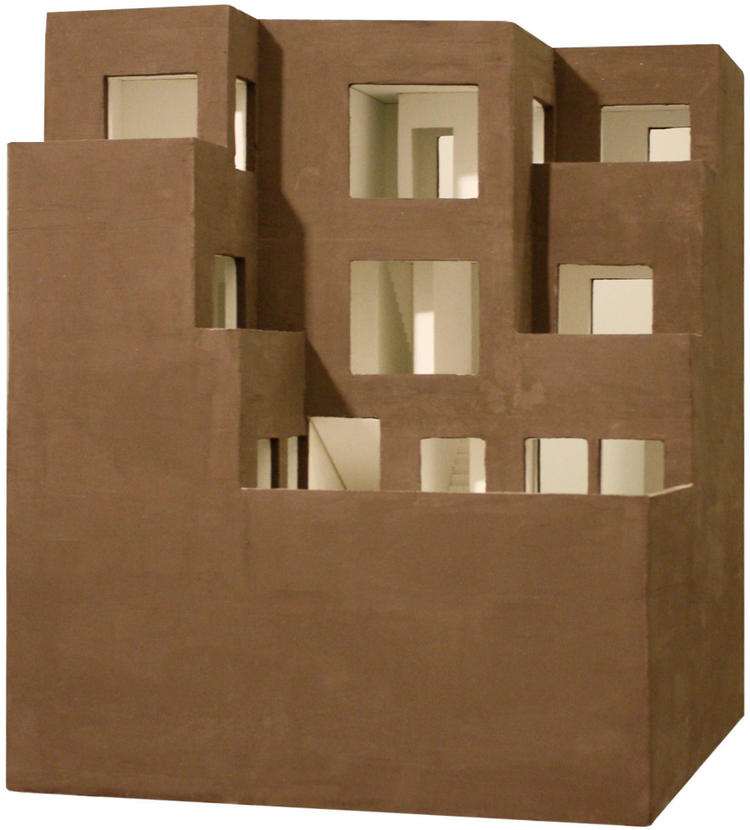


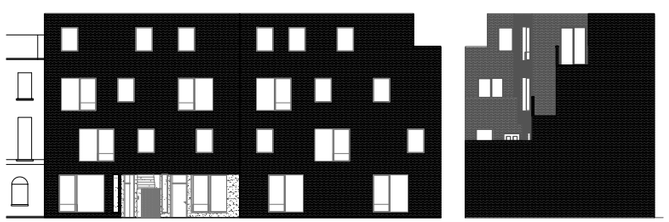




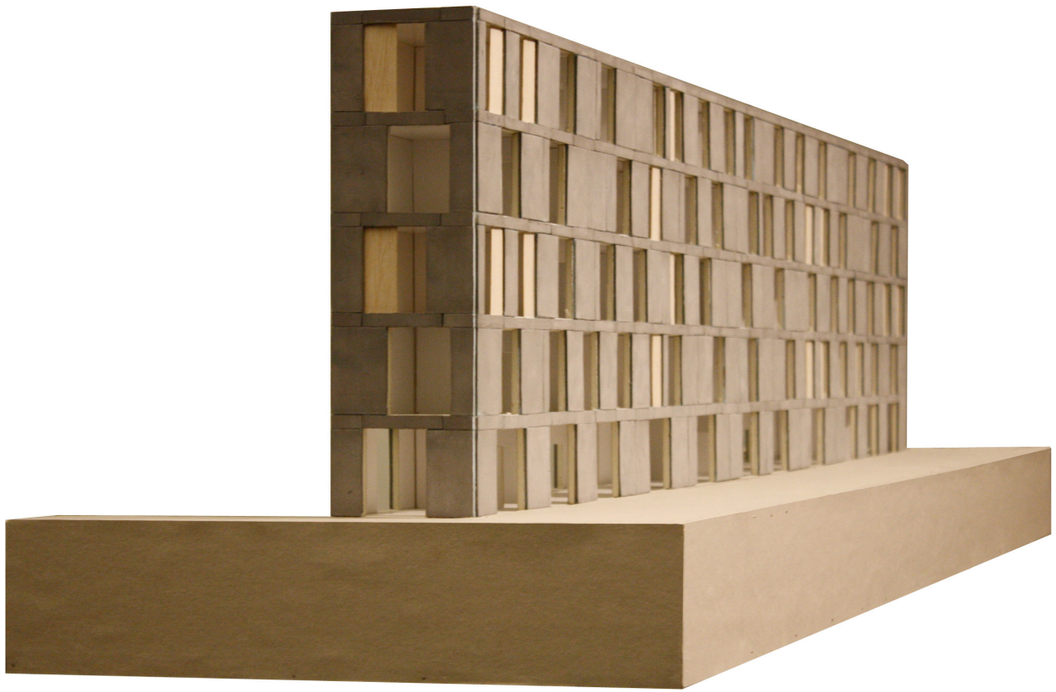


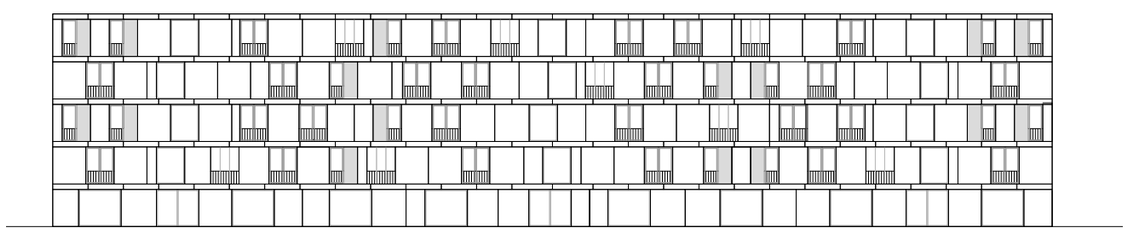
Silvia Baro

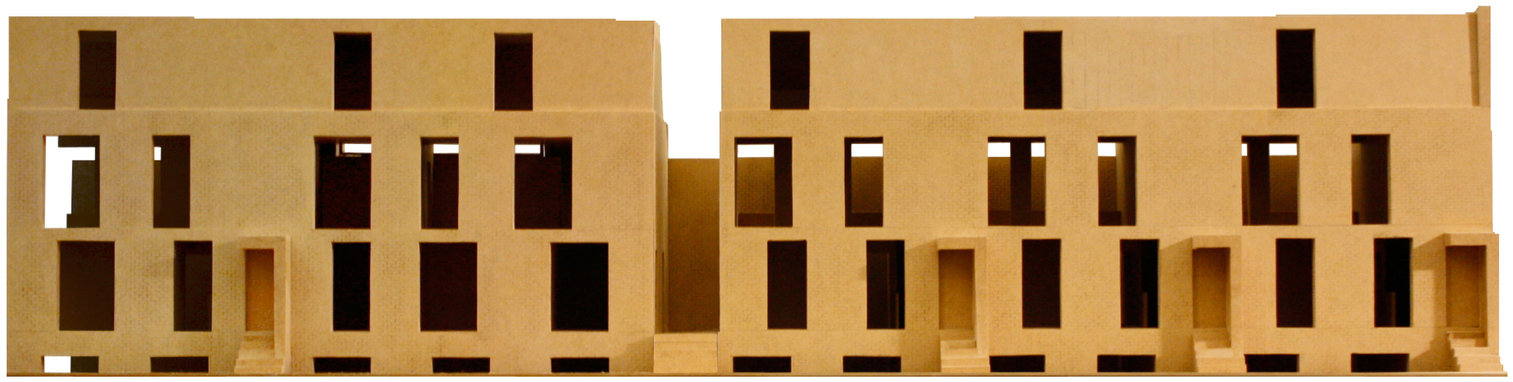


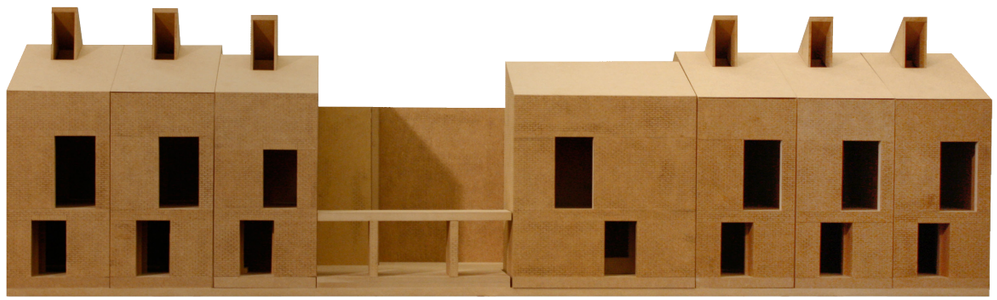


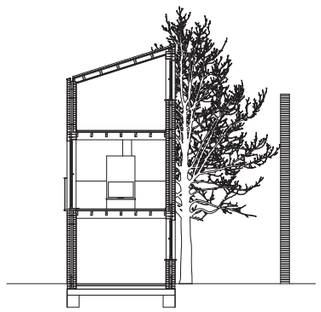
Ludovica Benedetto

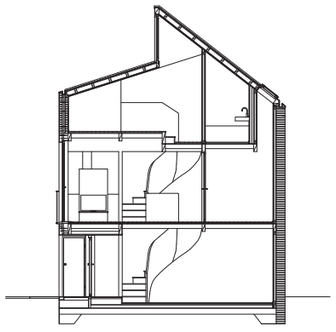


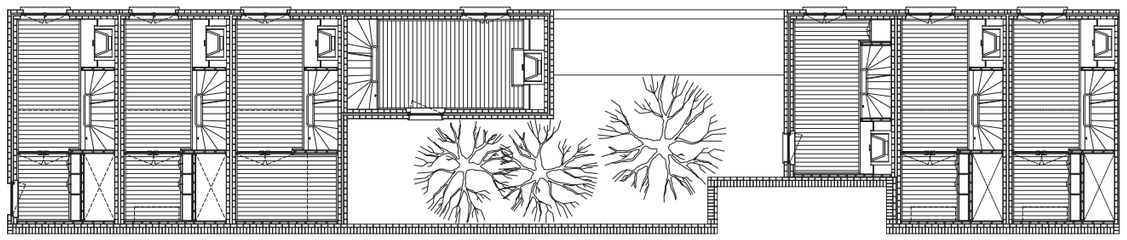


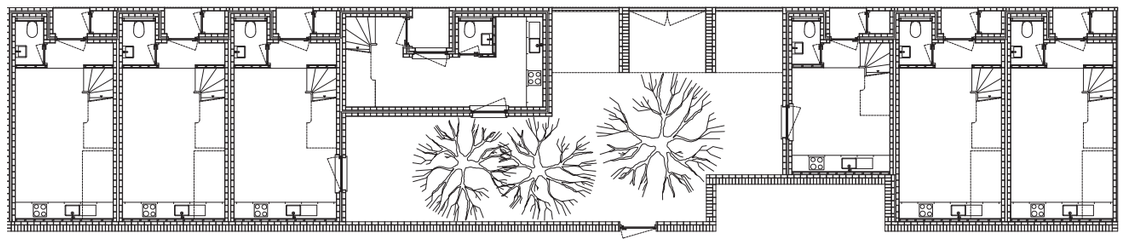


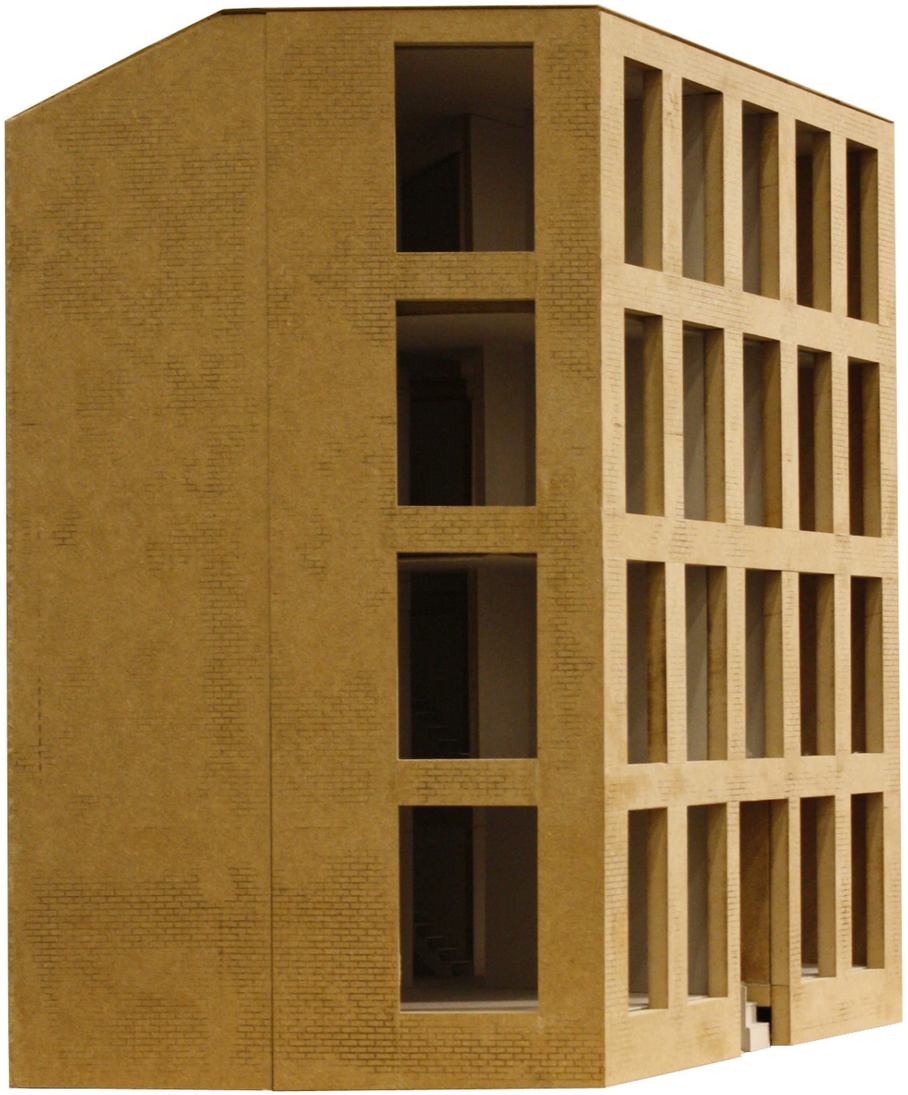


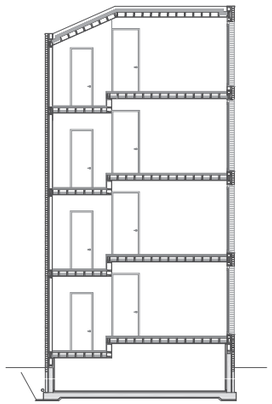


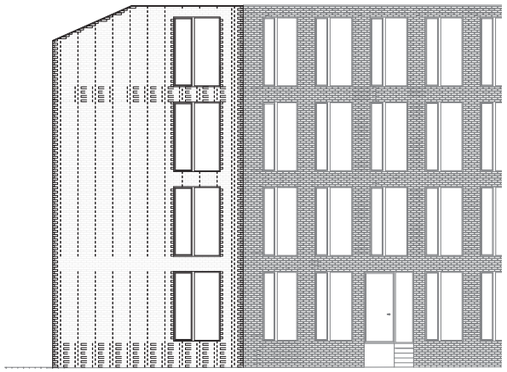


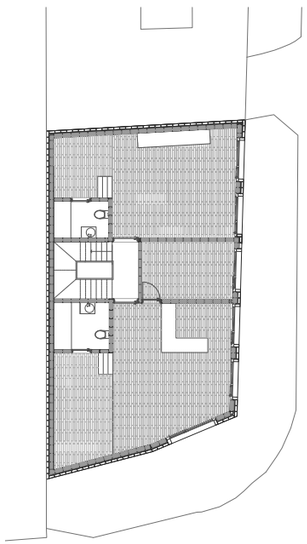


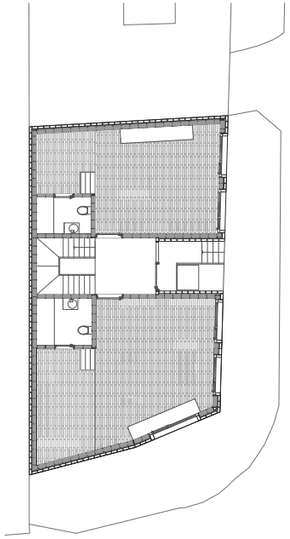




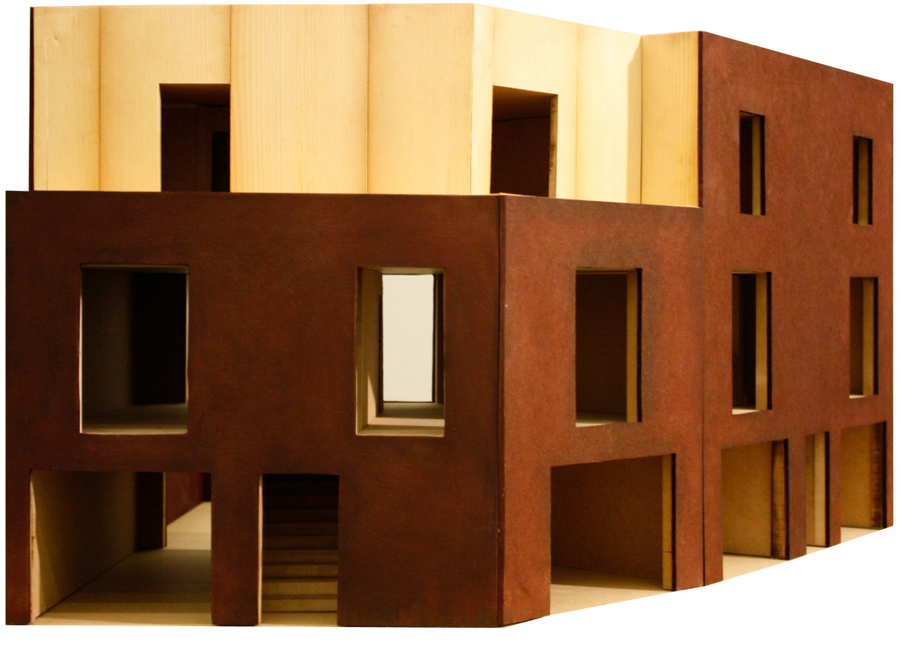




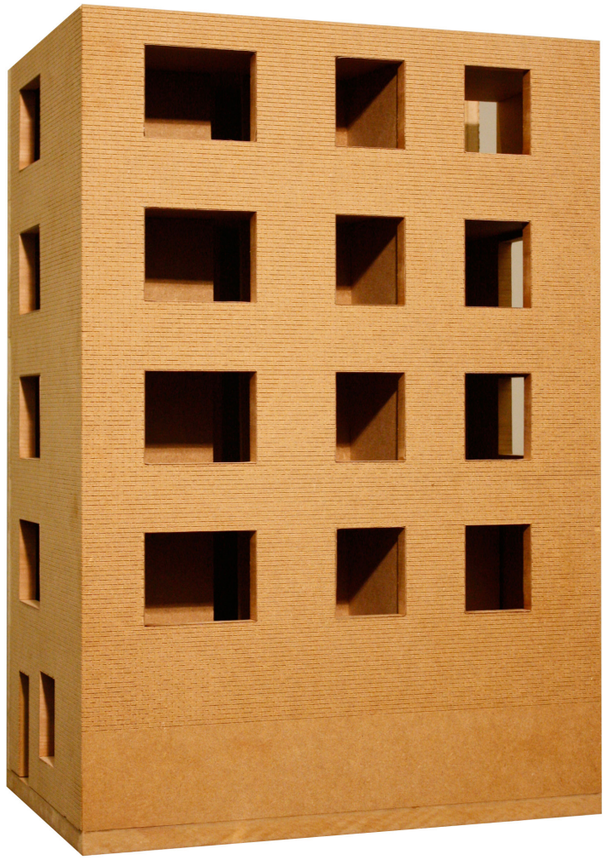


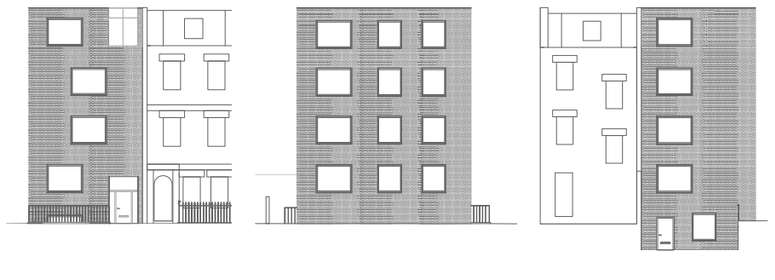


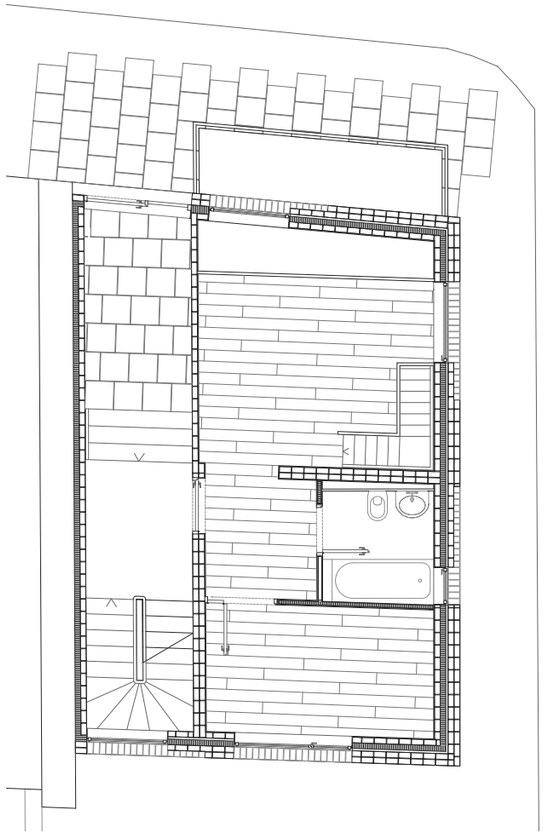
Filippo Santoni

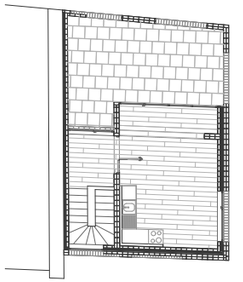


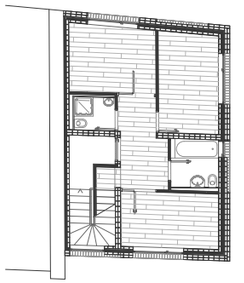
Carlo Zucchia

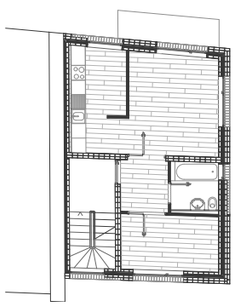


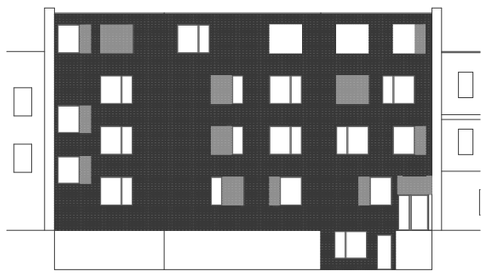


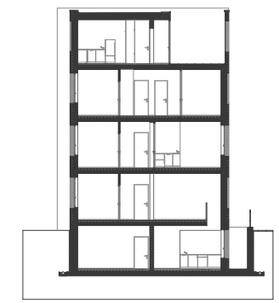




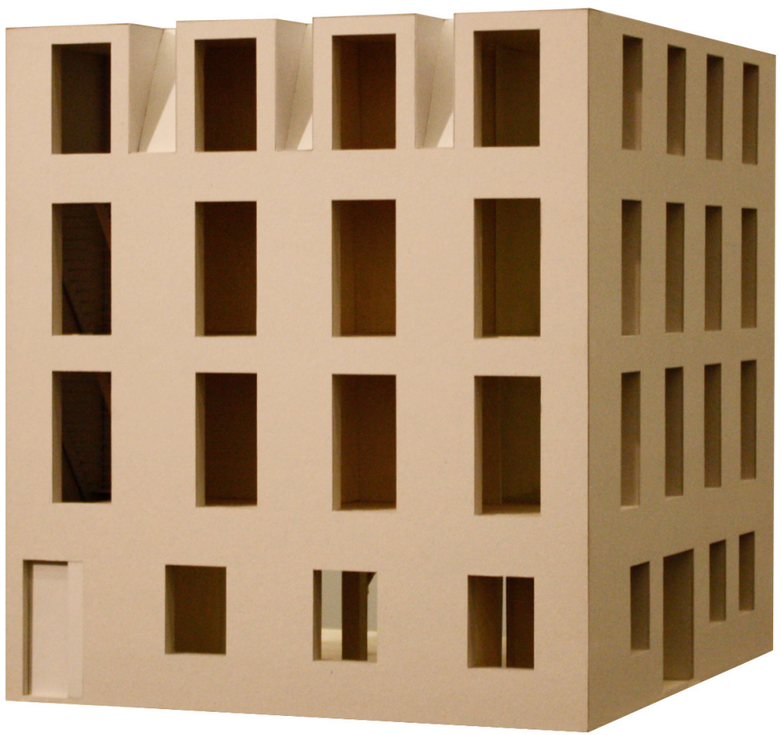








Luca Sartori



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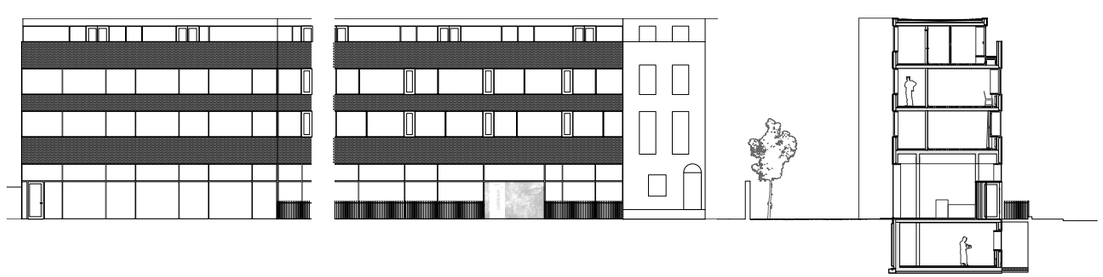
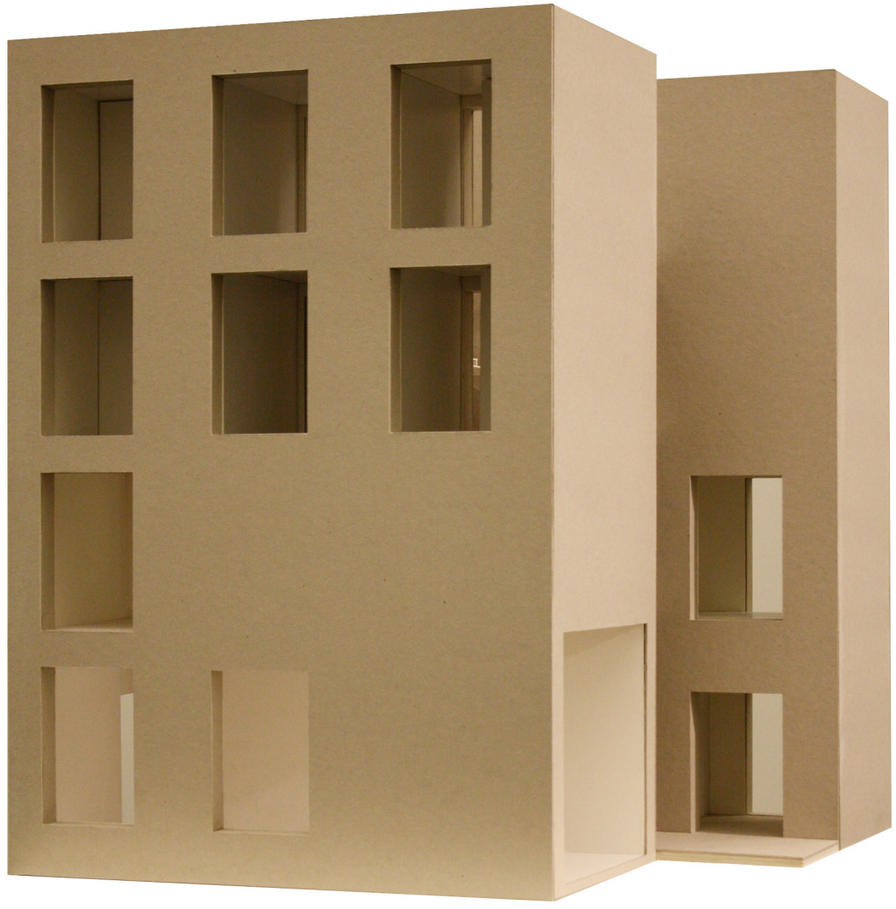
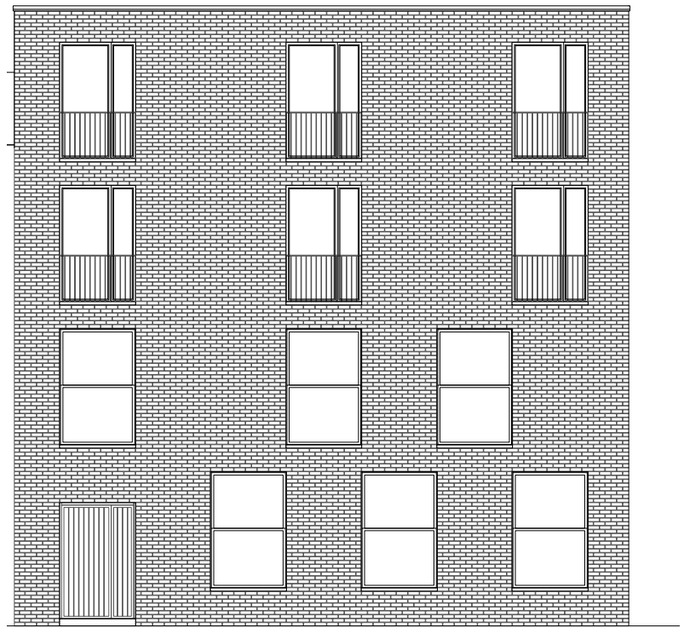
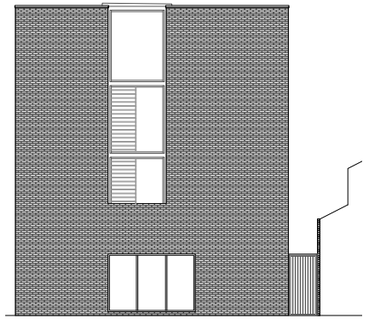
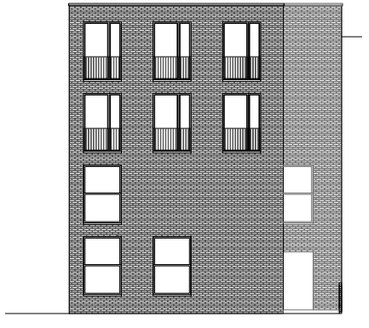




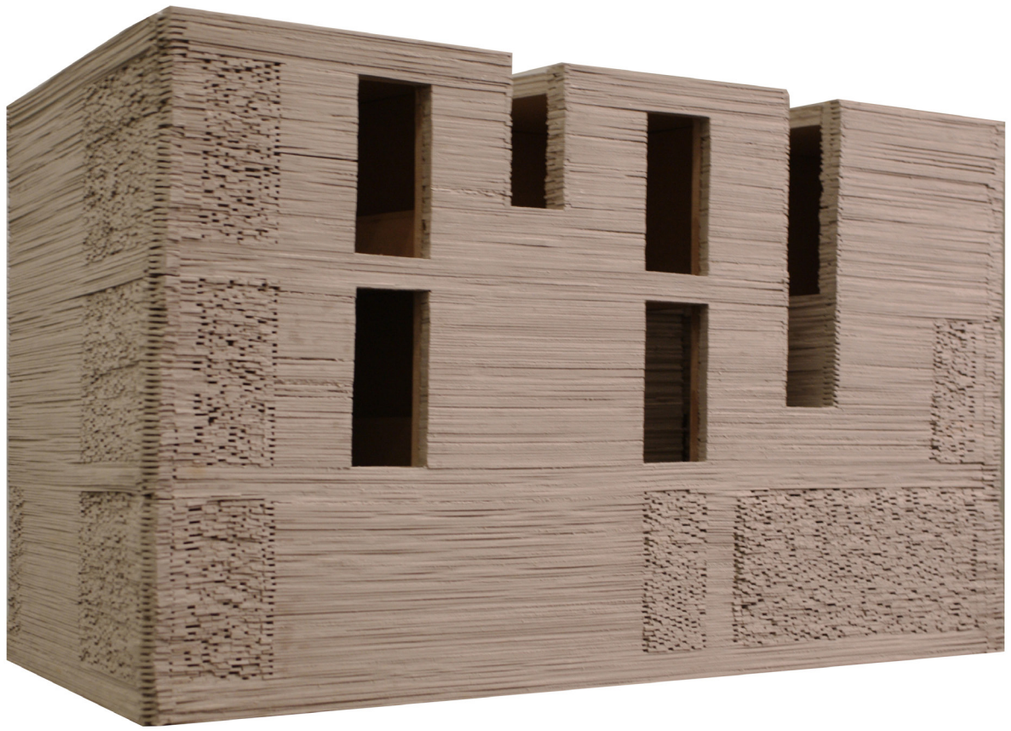


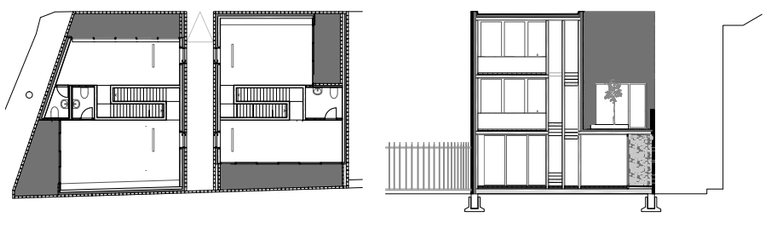


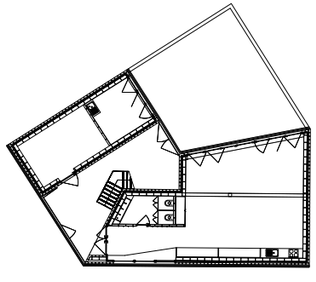


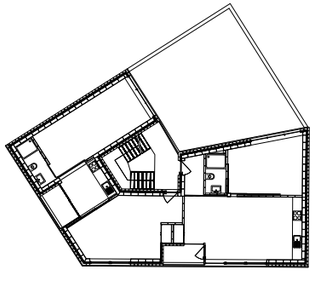
Fulvio De Bastiani

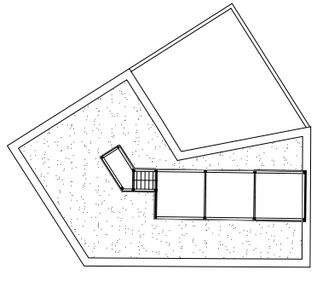
Cecila Fossati

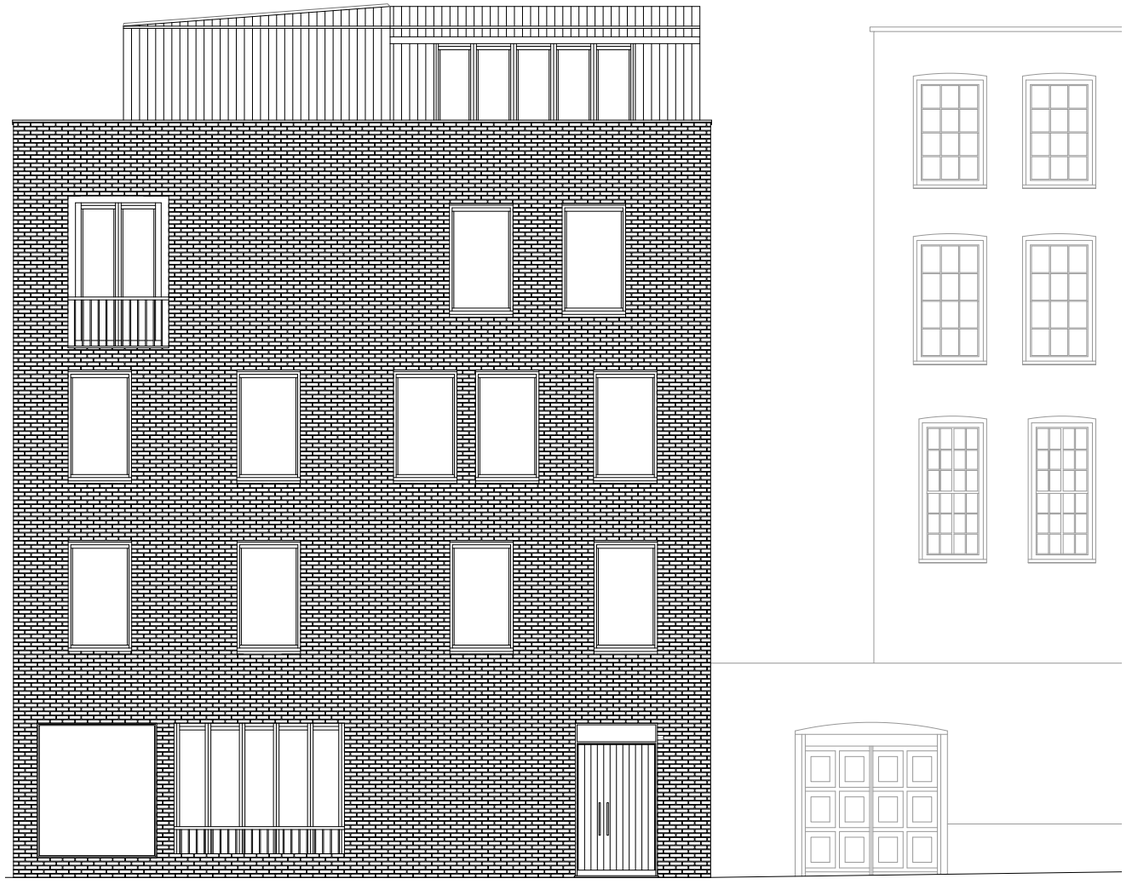


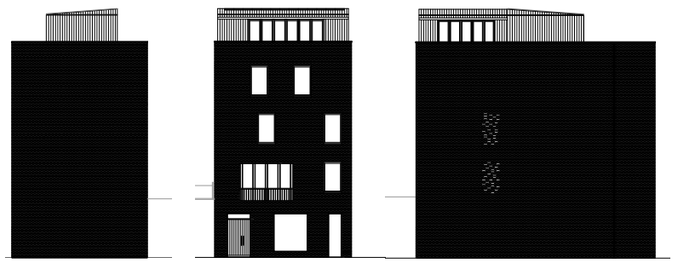


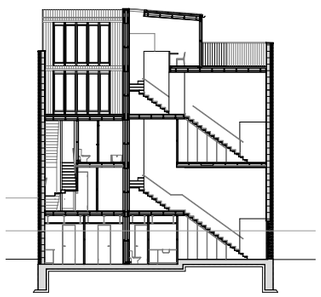


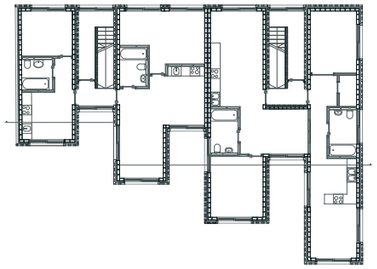


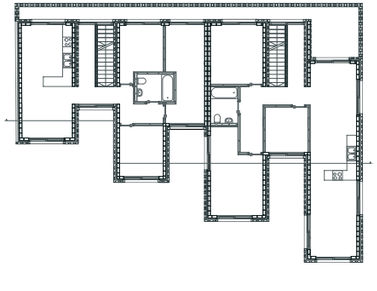


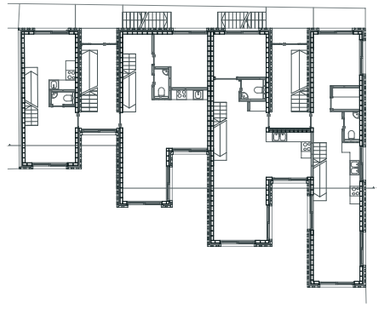


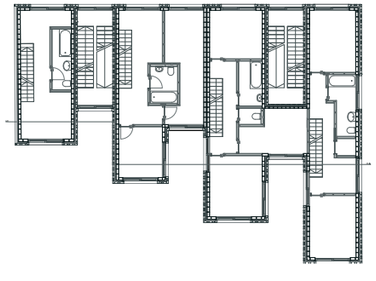


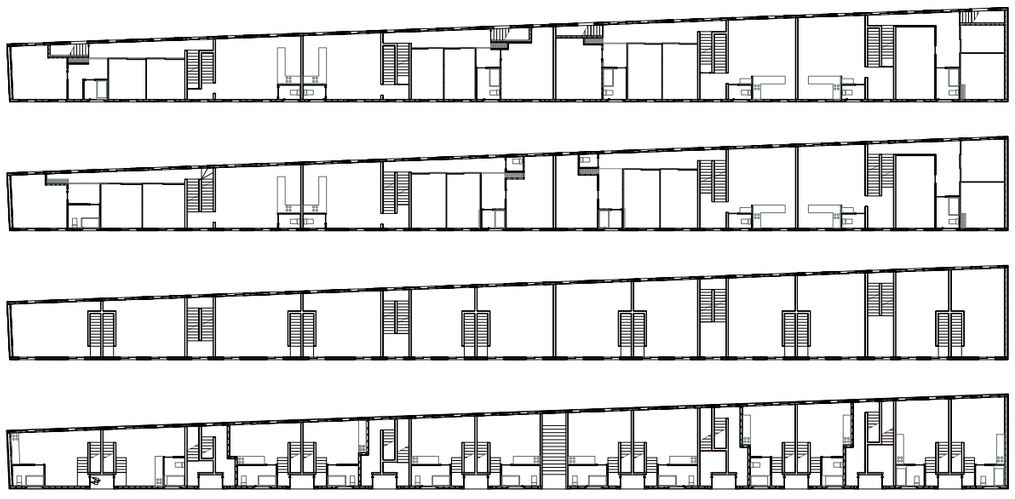


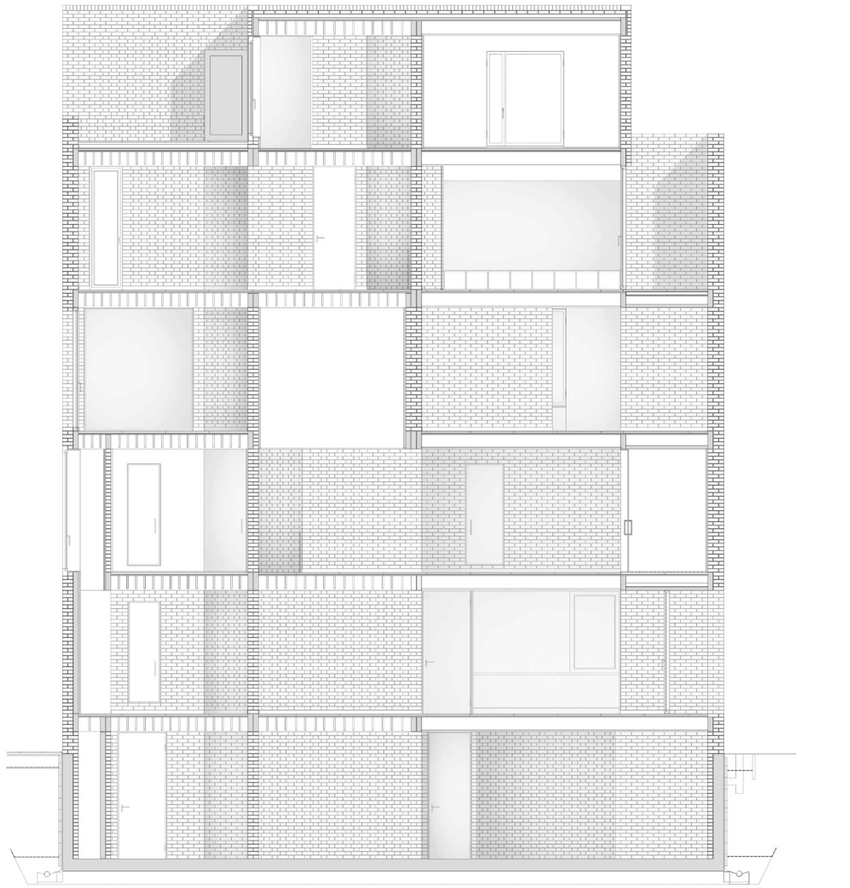


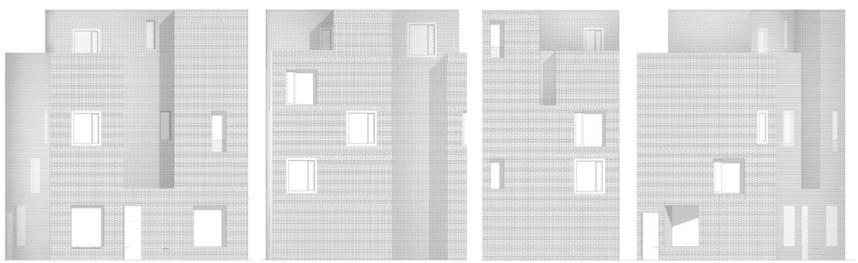






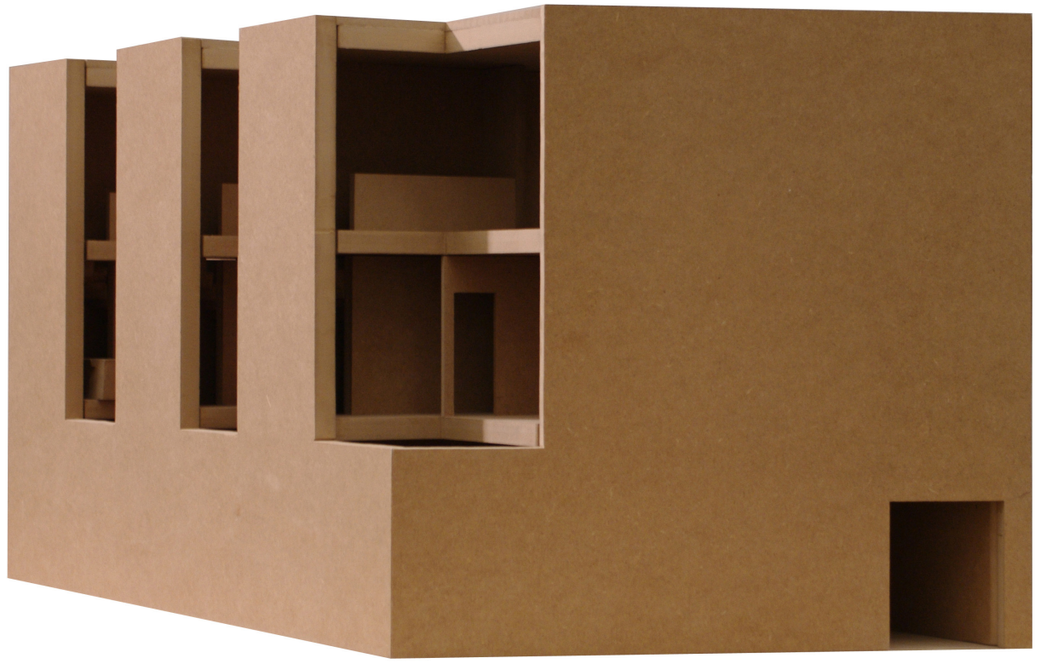


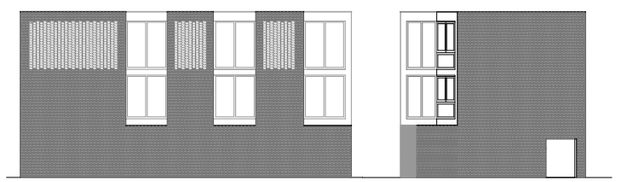




Claudia Martini

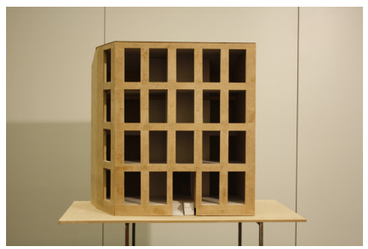
Claudio Pozzoni





Marco Bonfatti Paini p28–29

Silvia Baro p30

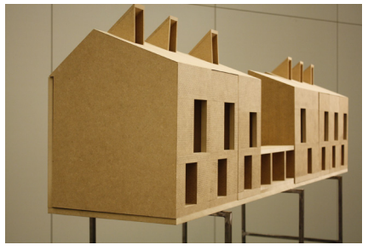


Alessandra Bertoli p36–37

Filippo Santoni p38

Ludovica Benedetto p31

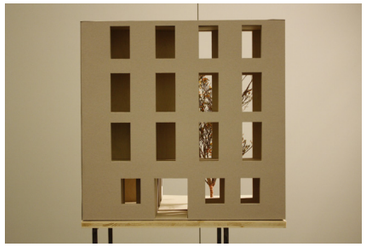
Bruno Almeida p32–33



Antonio Ippolito p34–35

Carlo Zucchia p39

Valerie Bischofberger p40–41

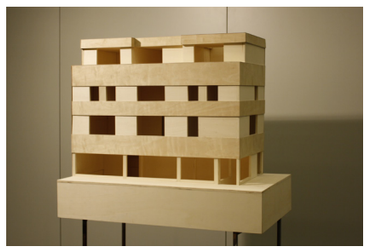


Luca Sartori p42

Leo Collomb p43

Paolo Bugatti p44–45

Catalogue



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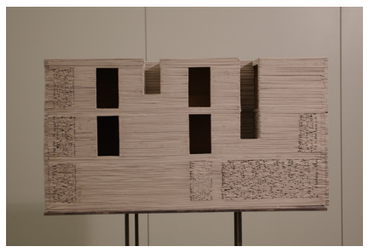
Matteo Arnone p48

Florence Harbach p52–53



Cecila Fossati p47

Elvire Thouvenot p49

Daisuke Hattori p54–55

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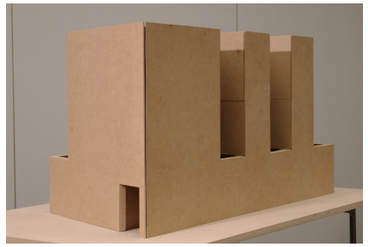
Steven Schenk p56–57

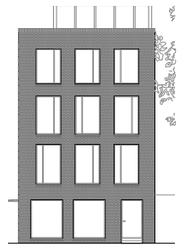


Claudio Pozzoni p59

Claudia Martini p58

Alice Buscani

Pietro Marsciani



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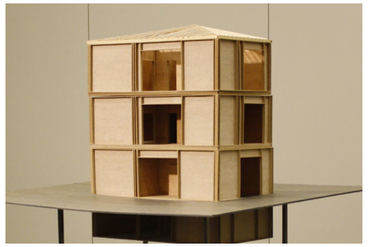

Sebastian Carella

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