

WINDOW ON A HIDDEN RIVER

The fortified walls reinstated around 'La Vila'

The historic fortification of a loop of the river Jucar, and the slender "istmus" that once occupied the thinnest point of the meander and its remarkable surviving battlements, is no longer legible. These proposals aim to recover and redefine the town walls within their riverside context. The footings of the original "almohade" walls and towers are to be recovered and extended up using the traditional 'tapial' shuttering technique. The existing park is extended along the town walls simulating a modern day moat. It is landscaped with new pedestrian routes leading towards the river.

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The drawbridge

The river Jucar has carved deeply into a flat landscape, and flooding of the town sees the river levels rise in excess of 10m. Alzira is protected from flooding by a tall embankment wall dating from the early 20th century. To create a physical connection with the river, we propose to make an incision through the embankment.

Sited at the former St Gregori bridge, the new opening is protected by a medieval drawbridge. This lowers to provide a window onto a hidden river. The natural riverbank and landscape is framed between two distinctive triangular plinths. Statues of two saints whose names were given to the church and bridge mark the former point of entry to the town.

Alzira 1/4

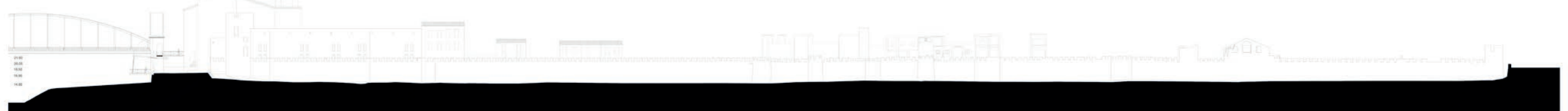
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The original street layout

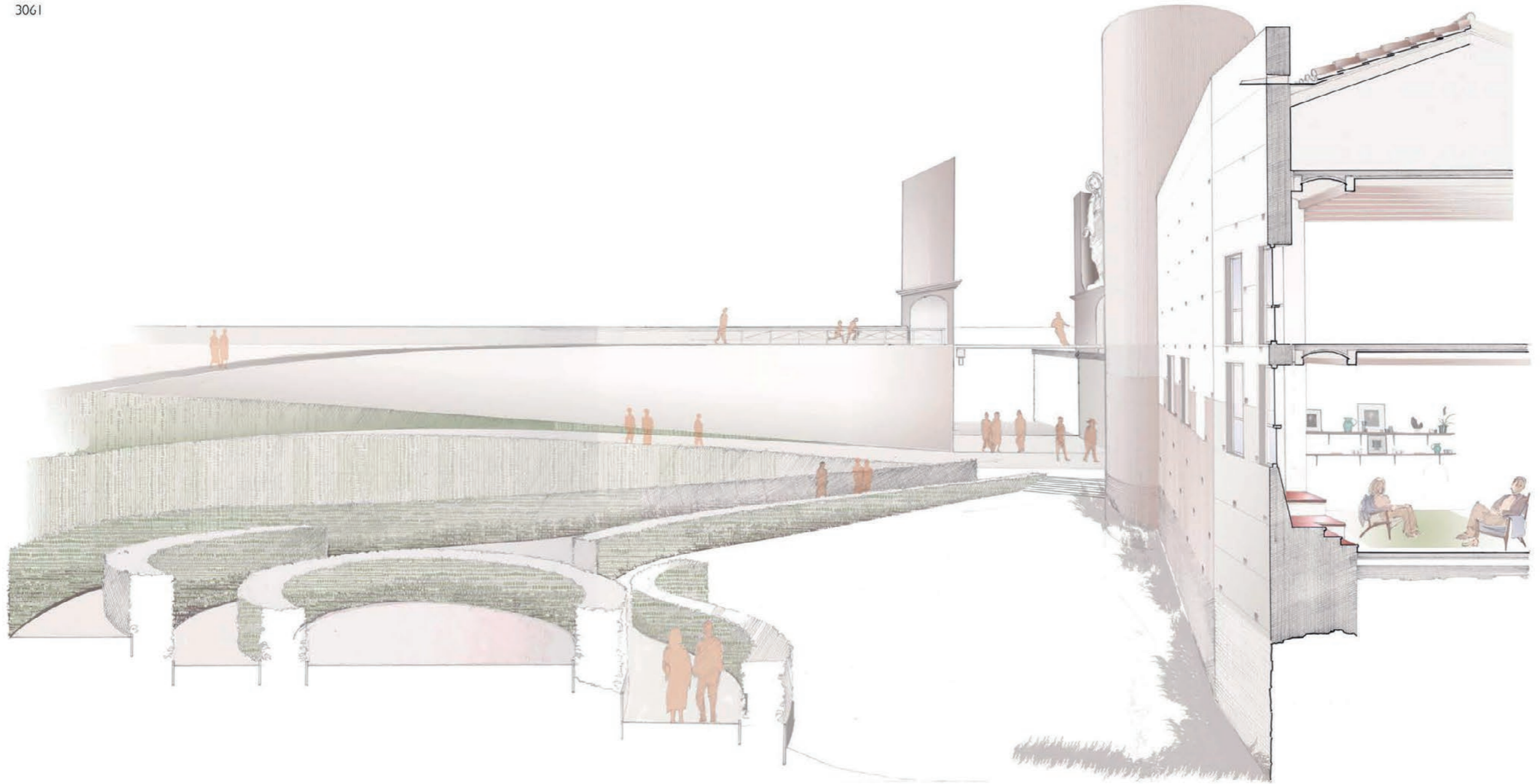
The original street layout of La Carrer Major Santa Maria, including the smaller alleys and public spaces, are reestablished. The streets dictate the arrangement of 26 new courtyard houses. Additionally, the reconstructed walls of the Santa Maria Church provide open towards the river and drawbridge, providing a new square and venue for events.

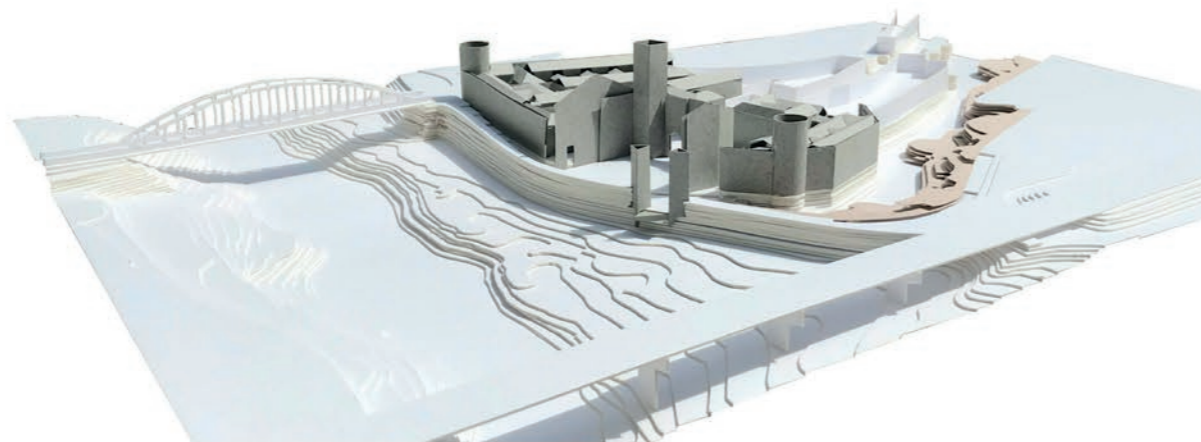
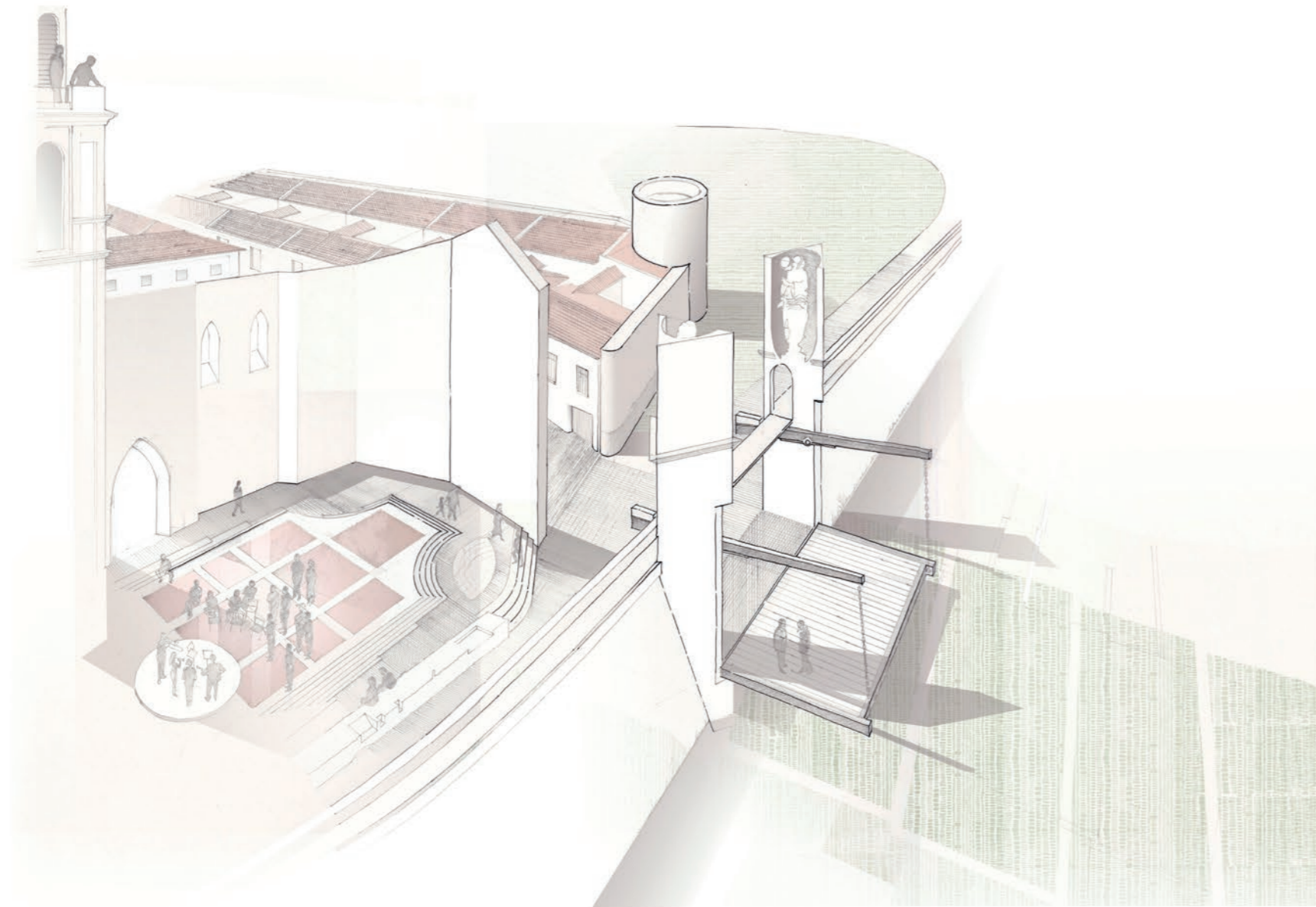
The courtyard townhouse

Our proposals develop the courtyard house pattern – with internalized openings into a private patio, and selected windows through the town walls. The dwellings are densely packed against the inside of town walls, recalling the historical pattern of Arab town housing.



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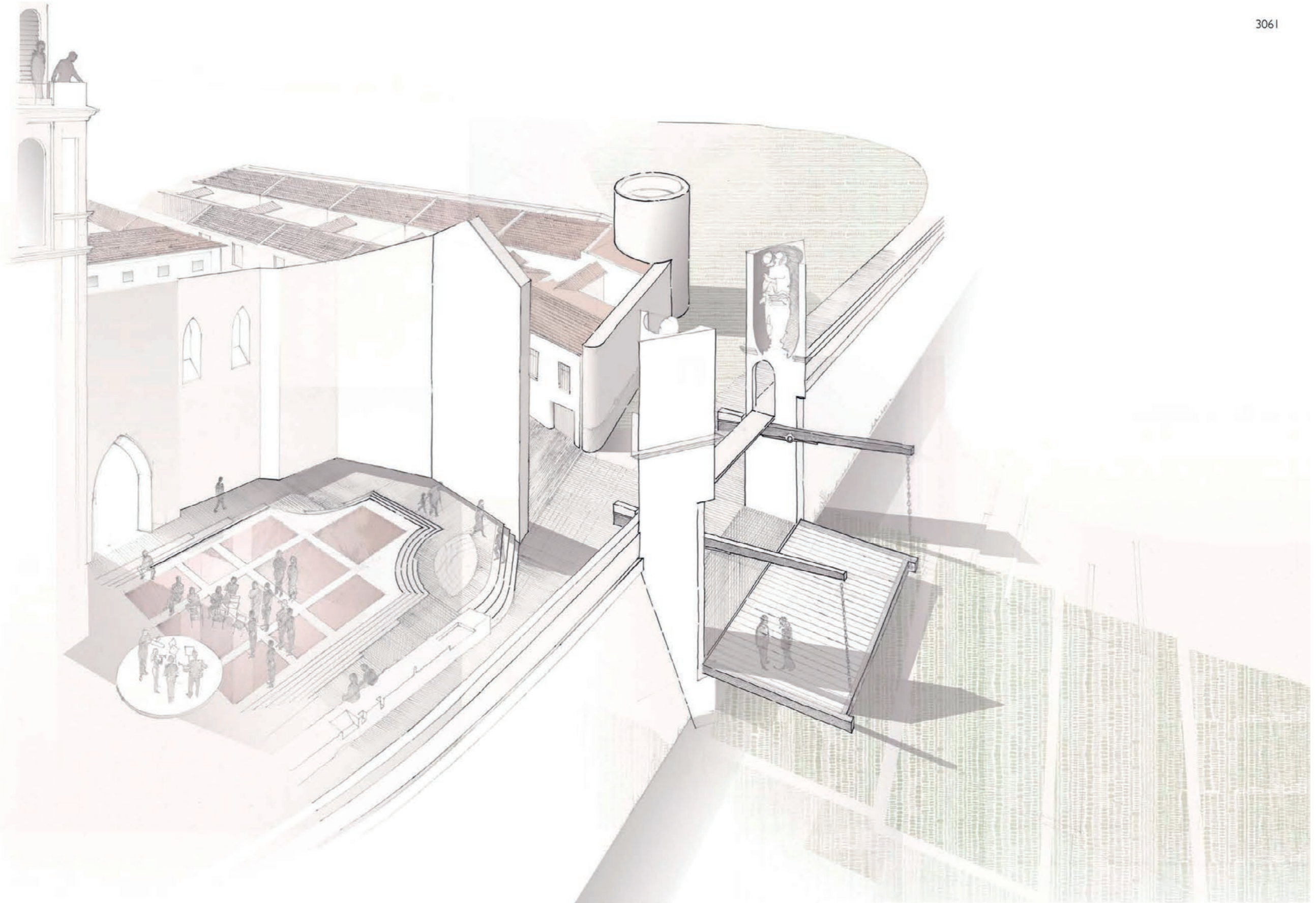
The drawbridge

We have referred to the construction techniques detailed in Viollet Le Duc's Encyclopédie Medieval, and specifically to the drawbridge details at the Chateau of Coucy in northern France.

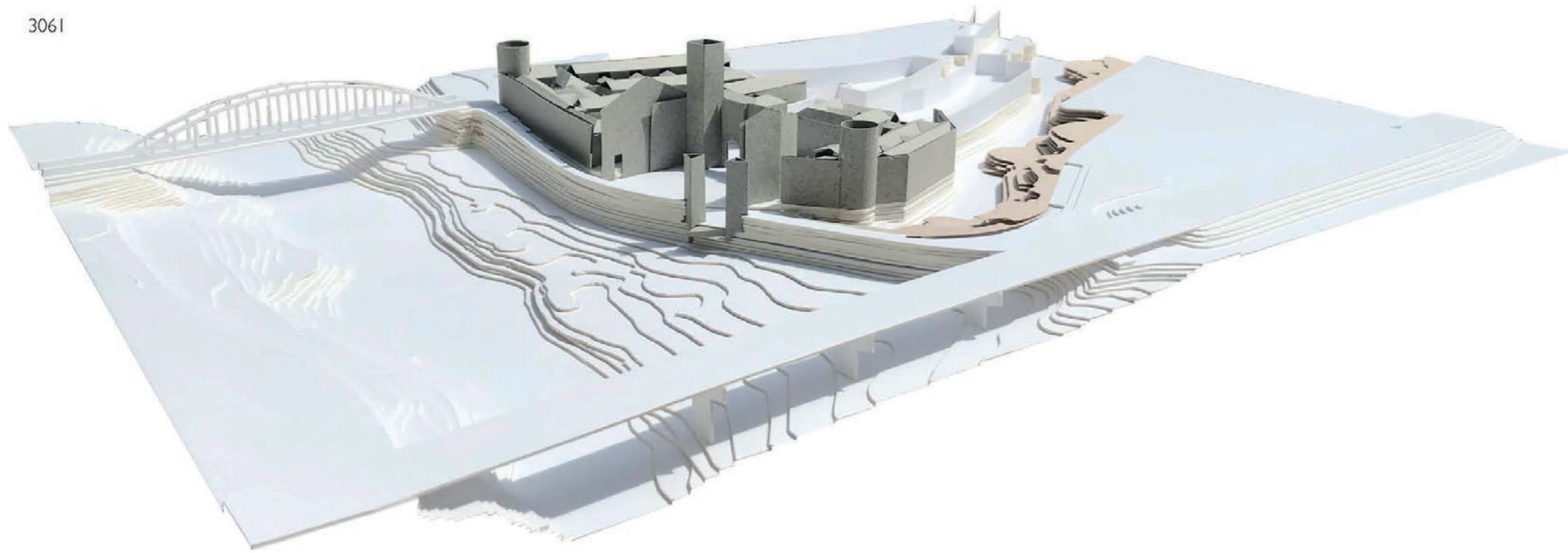
The drawbridge also incorporates further adaptations. Using the relatively simple technology of the canal lock, the bridge closes against rubber seals so that it is capable of retaining the weight of river water when it is raised.

The drawbridge is sited where the former St Gregori bridge once guarded access into the town. The presence of the bridge is indicated by two triangular plinths, one surmounted with a statue of the Virgin Mary, the other with St Gregori - giving greater height and vertical emphasis at the point of incision. This position coincides with the new route along the spine of 'La Vila', the open church of Santa Maria, and with the landscaped moat from which the drawbridge and opening are visible.

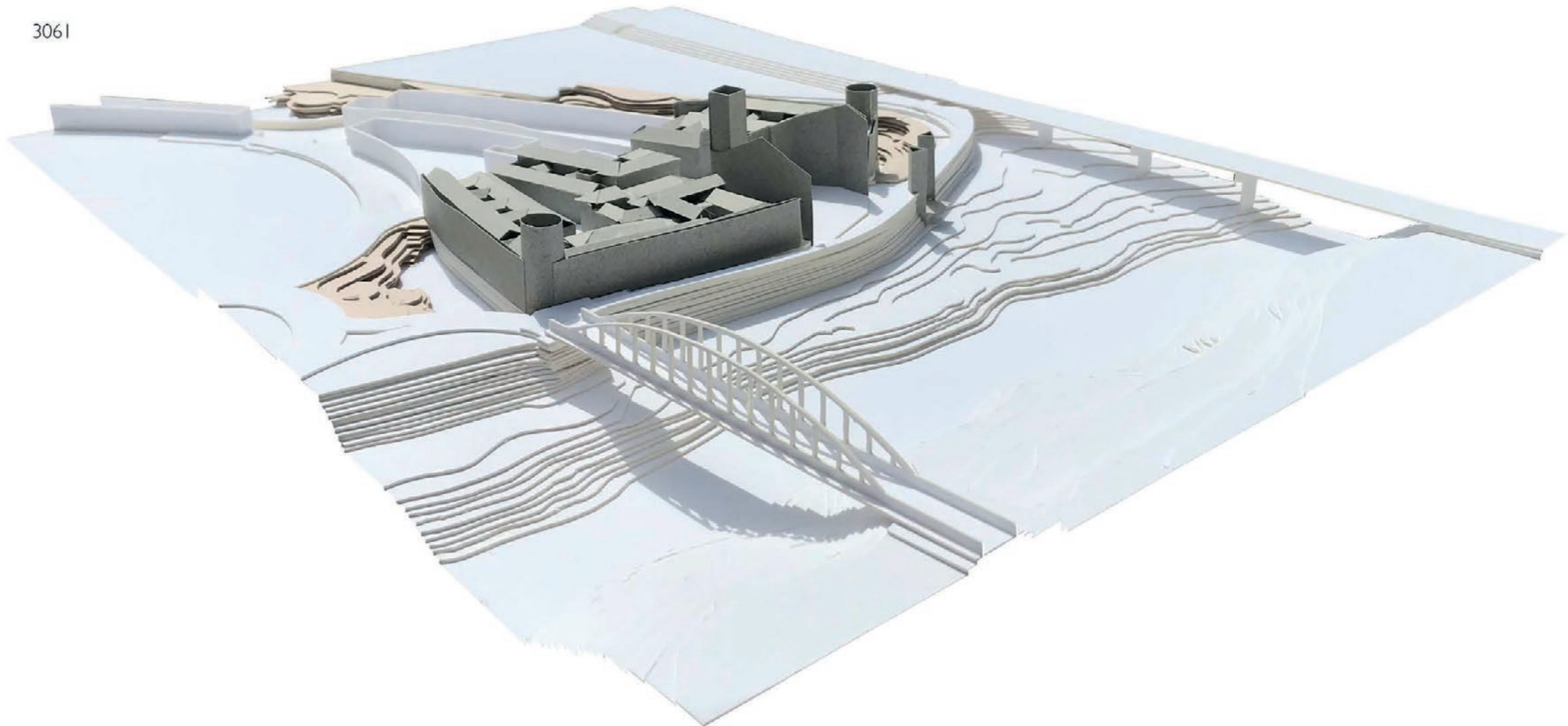
The bridge is lowered to provide a belvedere from which the riverbank can be admired. It acts as a window rather than a door, and is not intended to provide a point of access. It is elevated two and a half metres above the general riverside, with the open deck resting on wood piers. The river landscaping is to be maintained as a natural setting.



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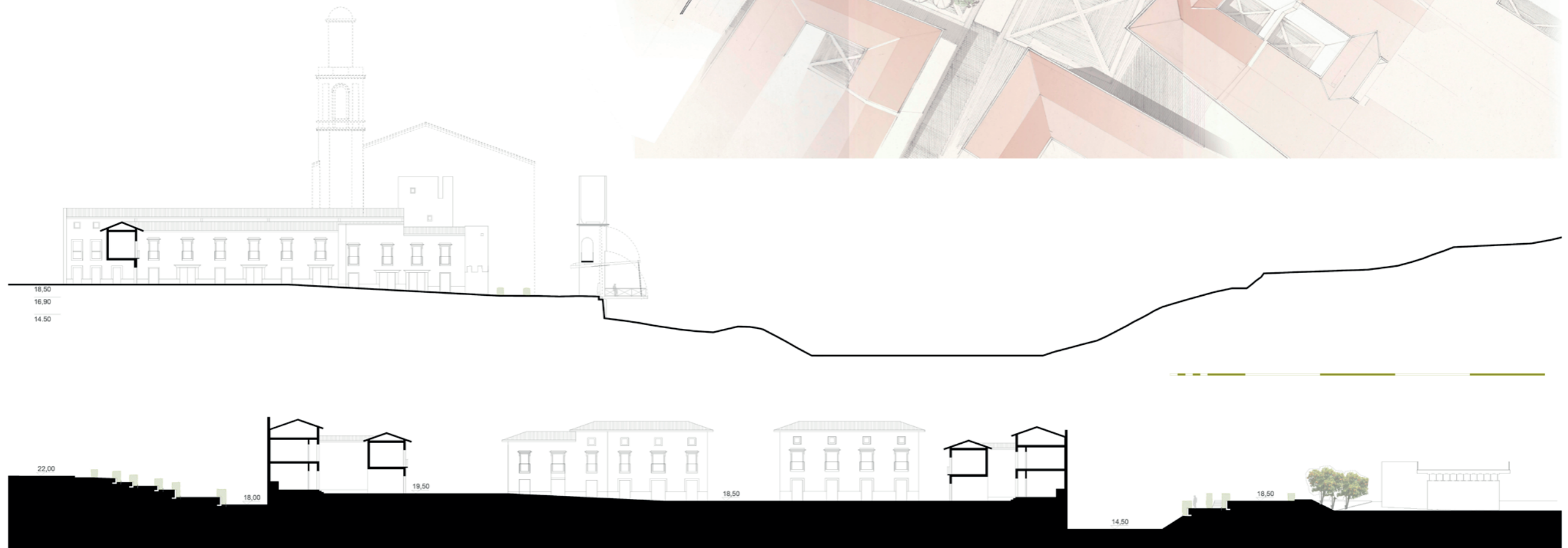
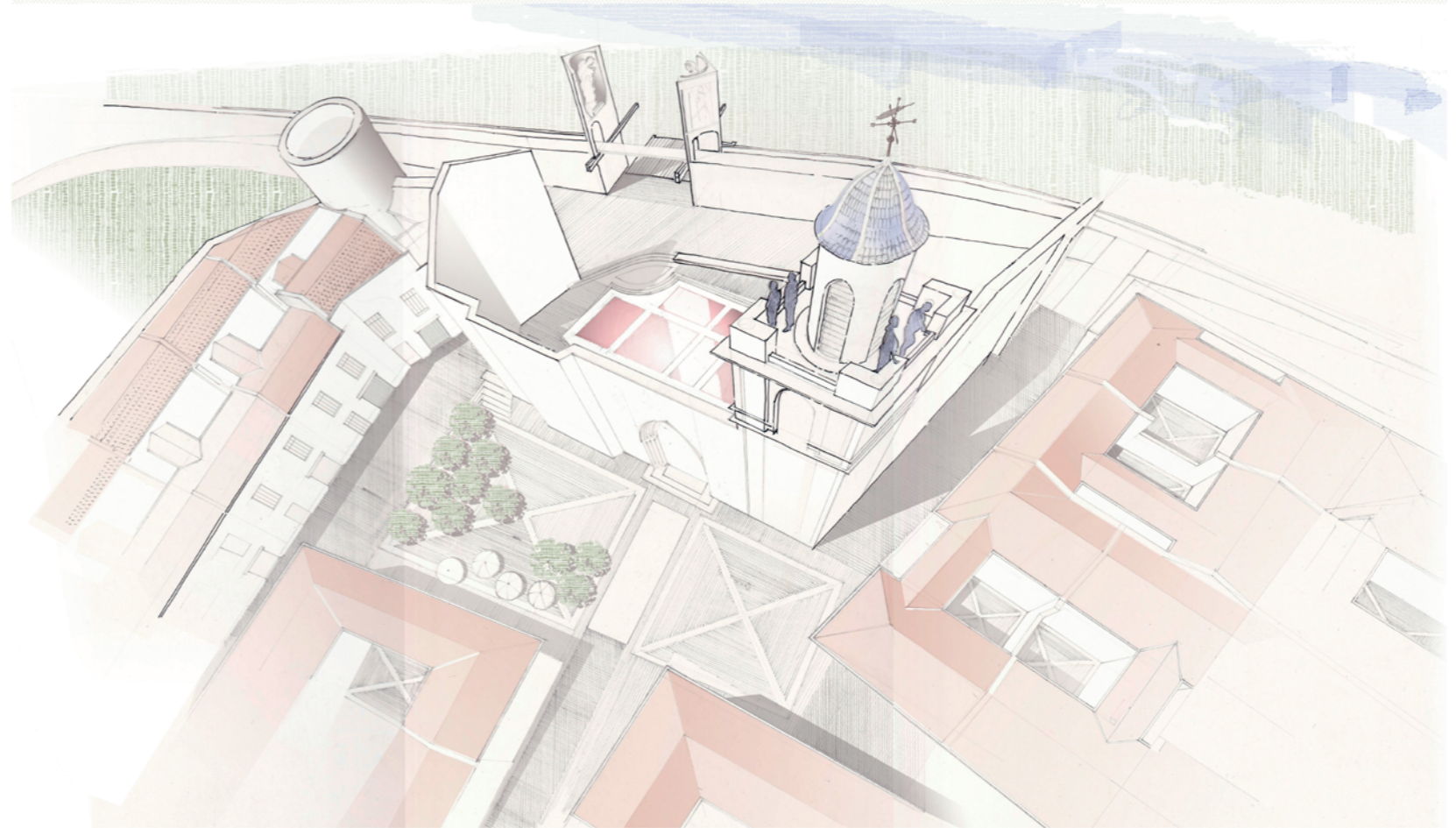
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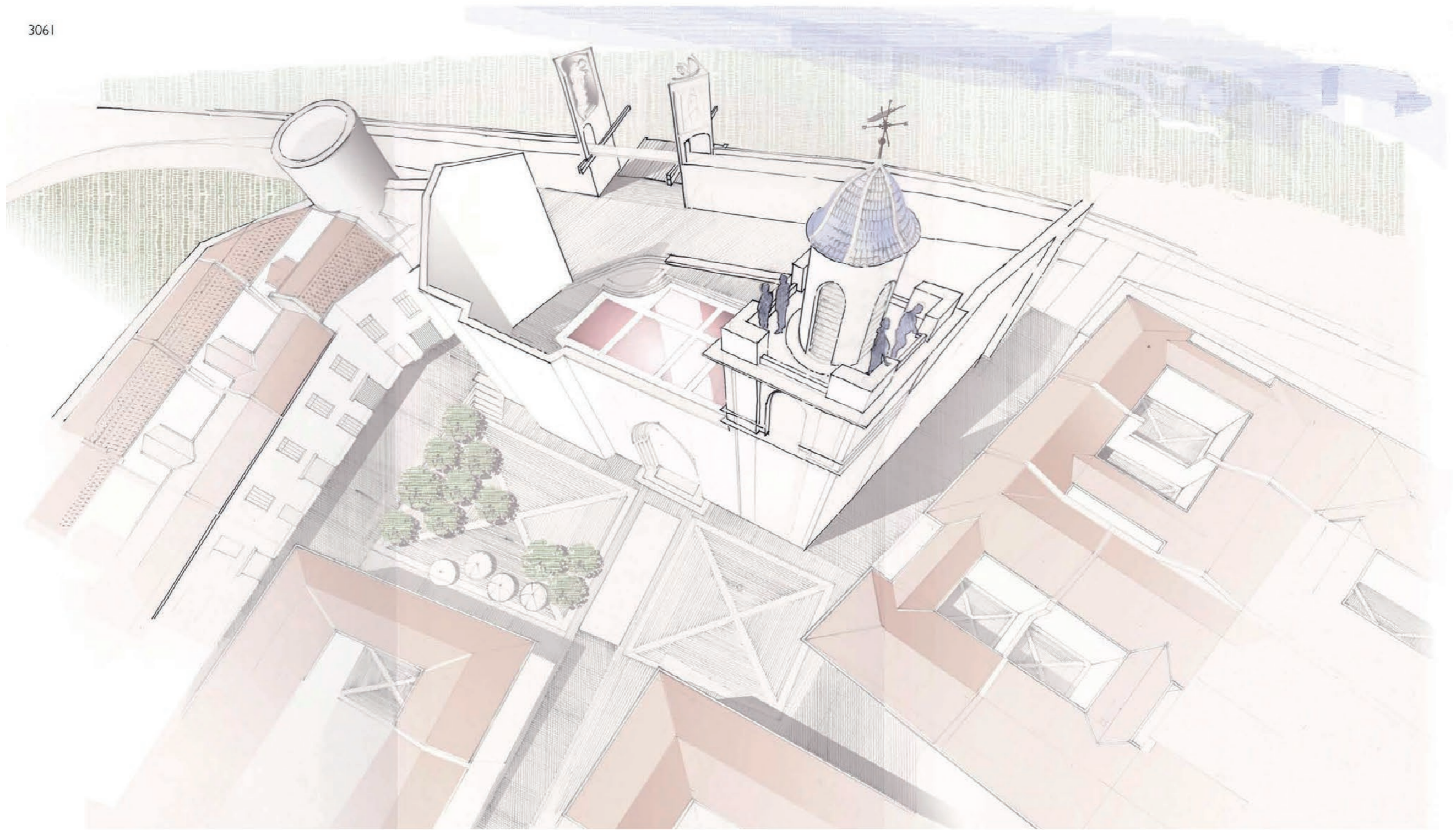
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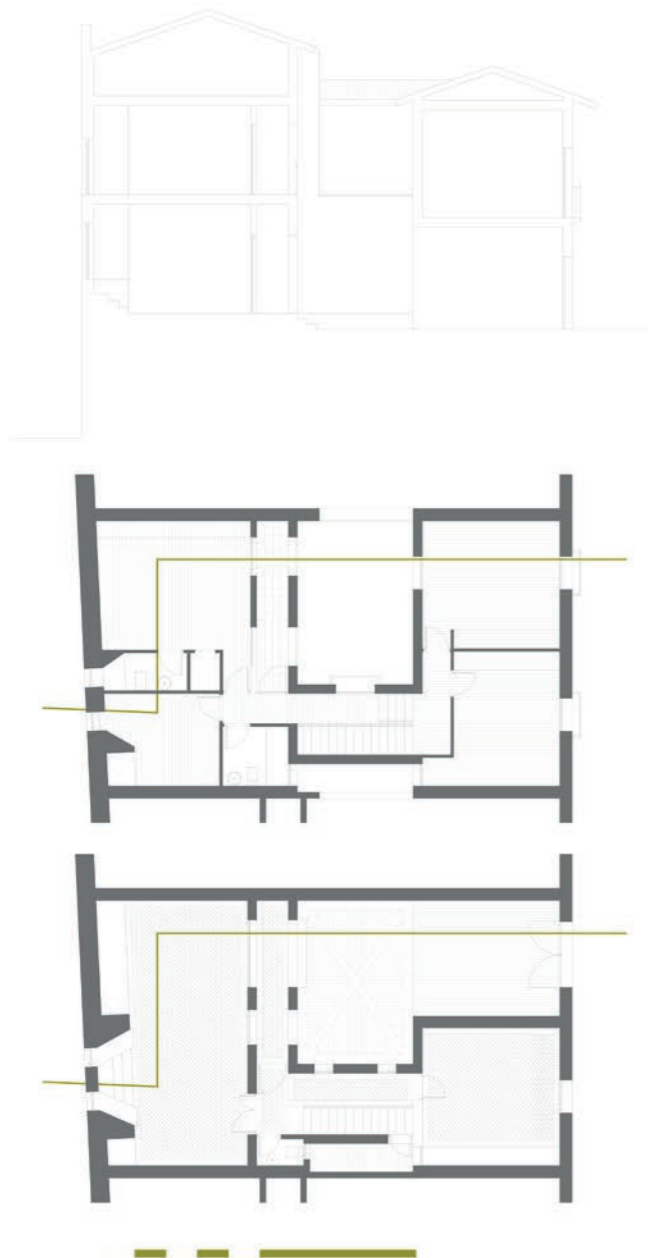
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OUTLINE CONSTRUCTION SPECIFICATION

1.1 Fortified Town Walls

Tapial construction. Modular timber shuttering, adapted to match the thickness of the base of the original walls. Shuttering is secured with wooden pins (mechinales) that pass through the wall. Clay with a lime mortar add-mixture is rammed into the formwork. The completed wall is neatly punctuated by the modularised pattern of pins, regulating the pattern of the crenellations and window openings within the wall.

1.2 External Walls generally

The external walls are cavity walls of load bearing brick with a lime render coating. Hollow clay blockwork to inner leaf with cavity insulation, and plaster-finished to interior face. Base of walls clad with limestone plinth up to 1m high, with rounded reveals at main entrance opening.

1.3 Roof and Eaves

The roofs are a purlin construction, with a substrate of penny-spaced softwood sarking boards laid over timber rafters. Timber battens laid ridge-to-eaves regulate the setting-out of half-round clay tile roof coverings. Exposed rafters extend 600mm clear of external walls to form eaves, with half-round zinc gutter mounted on timber fascia.

1.4 Windows

Full-height hardwood casement windows, comprising paired, bi-folding leaves opening inwards against the internal window reveals. Window mid-rails and transoms feature ornamental carved dentils at the mid-point. Glazing bead-fixed. Stone sill of local limestone, providing anchor points for cast iron balustrade guarding the window opening.

1.5 External paving

Cobble stones bedded and pointed in a dry cement mortar, laid to falls towards central gutters dressed in local limestone, 400mm widths.

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