

An Urban Villa

by

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Abstract

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Committee Chairman: J. Holt
Architecture

(ABSTRACT)

The title of this thesis is more a convenience than a description. It is borrowed from some recent housing projects in Berlin, which, like the project presented here, are urban structures which contain more than one residence, though seldom more than six. The project here contains four. The residences are of different sizes and spatial configurations. It is intended to be a place for individuals as well as families. It is an attempt to gather, to shelter — to provide and enrich.

Acknowledgements

The project which follows is but a period on a sentence many have helped me to write. It would be too simple to say that this project is the culmination of three years of study. There is much in the project that predates my study of architecture, and by no means did all that I have been exposed to find its way into the project. I have been educated by the too-long lecture and by the passing comment, by rough criticism and sincere encouragement, by patience and by insistence that I learn. I wish to thank those who pushed me, those who led me, and those who wanted for me.

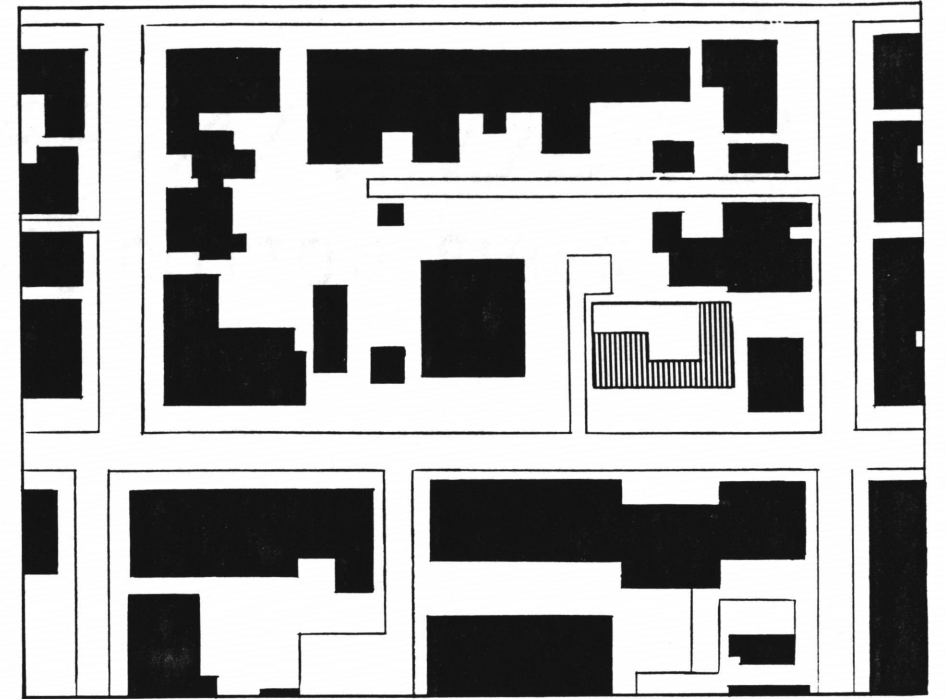
Chapel Hill, 1988

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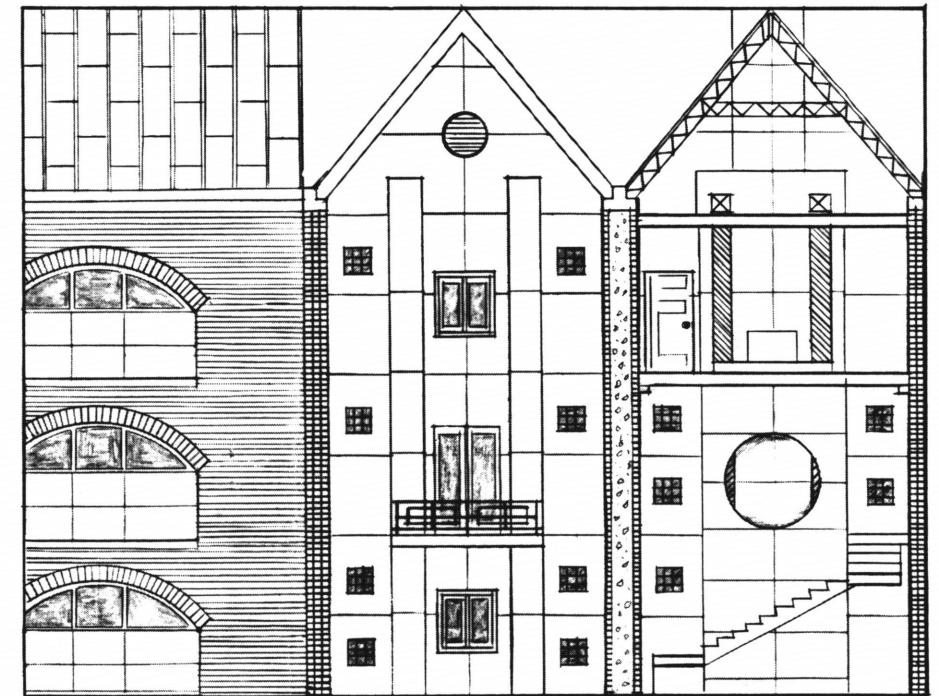
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Introduction

Georgetown, in Washington, D.C., is a neighborhood primarily of residences. It is, for the most part, a place of nineteenth century structures. There are individual homes, and there are rows of rowhouses. Federalist works — neat, handsome brick houses — stand beside clapboard homes, built and then inevitably and irregularly added on to. There are later nineteenth century works, with turrets and tall windows, small rooms and asymmetry. Those structures that are not of the nineteenth century, if they are not earlier, have been made to appear as if they were so. Prospect Street is an avenue of such homes — all of these are there.



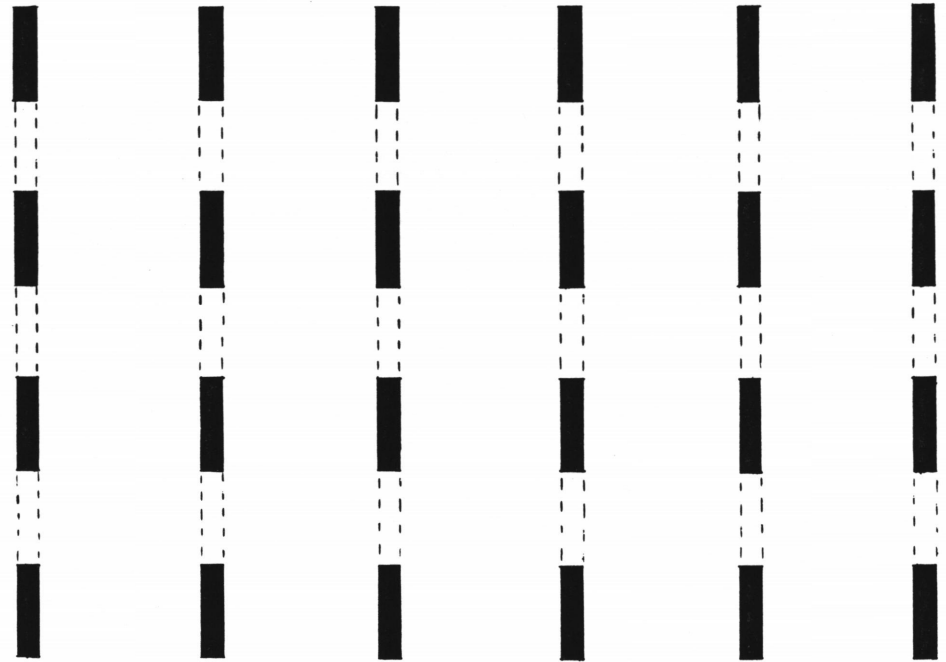
The project is an assemblage of residences — contextually correct, but not in the too simple look-alike sense of the word. The notion of context is not one of unmistakable imposters around an original, nor is it one that includes works that combine contemporary and historically correct elements that in the end, like oil and vinegar, separate and were combined once only by the forced and vigorous efforts of short-lived fashion. Time intervening and time irretrievable can not be ignored: a contextual work is a sympathetic addition, responsive equally to its surroundings and to its own time. The twentieth century, in Georgetown, has been reduced to air conditioning and traffic lights, to hot tubs and haircuts — things of fashion, superficial order and convenience.



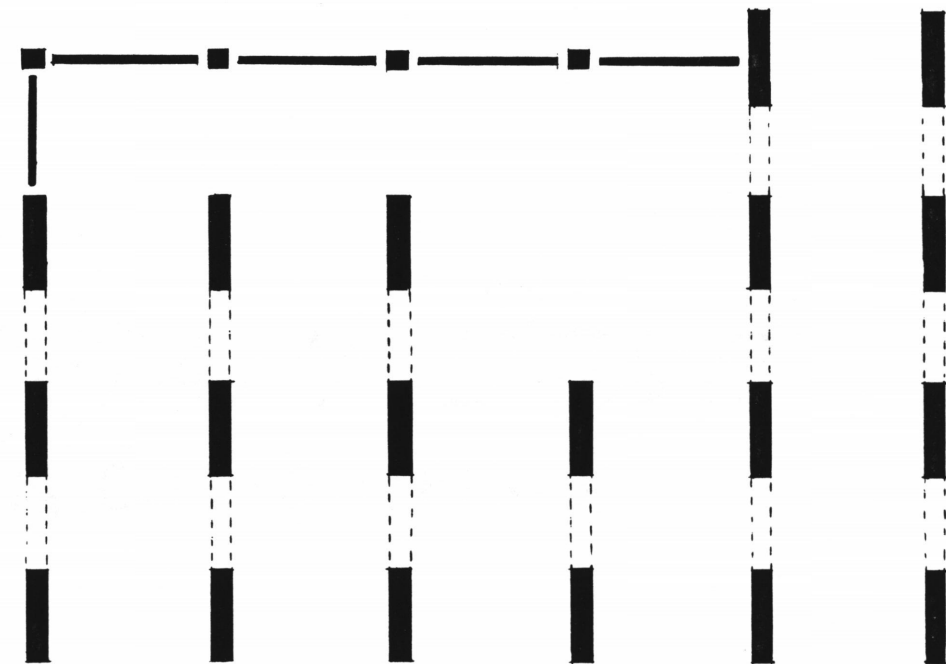
Explication

The project is best understood by considering the six concrete-filled masonry walls, identical in length, and with identical arched openings in them. The walls are parallel with one another, and are spaced evenly across the site. These are old walls, in their material and in their method of construction. They are archetypal, as are the openings in them. The associations are many and varied rather than pointedly referential. These walls are the starting place. They are rich in capability — they may be open or closed, they may separate or bind, they are able to support great loads or simply a visual rhythm. These walls do not predate the project, but throughout the project they were thought of as being so.

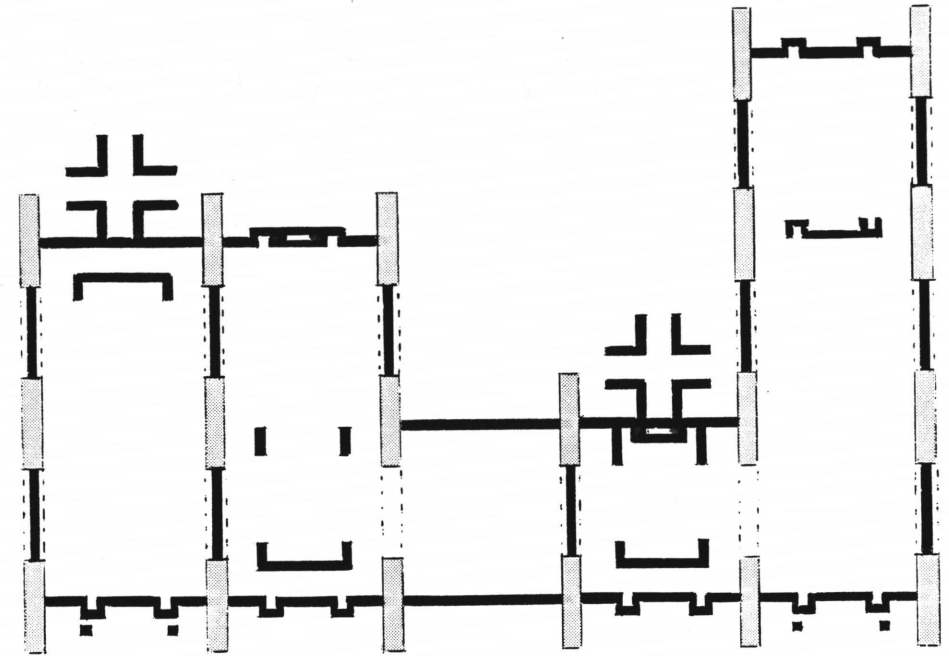
These walls, though, are obviously insufficient in themselves. They provide not even the most rudimentary of shelter. These walls make only the possibility of a project — much can take place within their bounds. They are a handful of clay to be made into a brick or a vase.



In a subtractive act some of the walls are shortened in their length. The shortening is such as to reinforce the regular intervals of length between the arched openings. In the place of the removed walls there is a garden, a garden to be shared and sat in, to be walked through on the way to the car. Something like remnants of the removed wall portions are to be found in the low wall which encloses the garden — small piers that were once part of the greater walls.

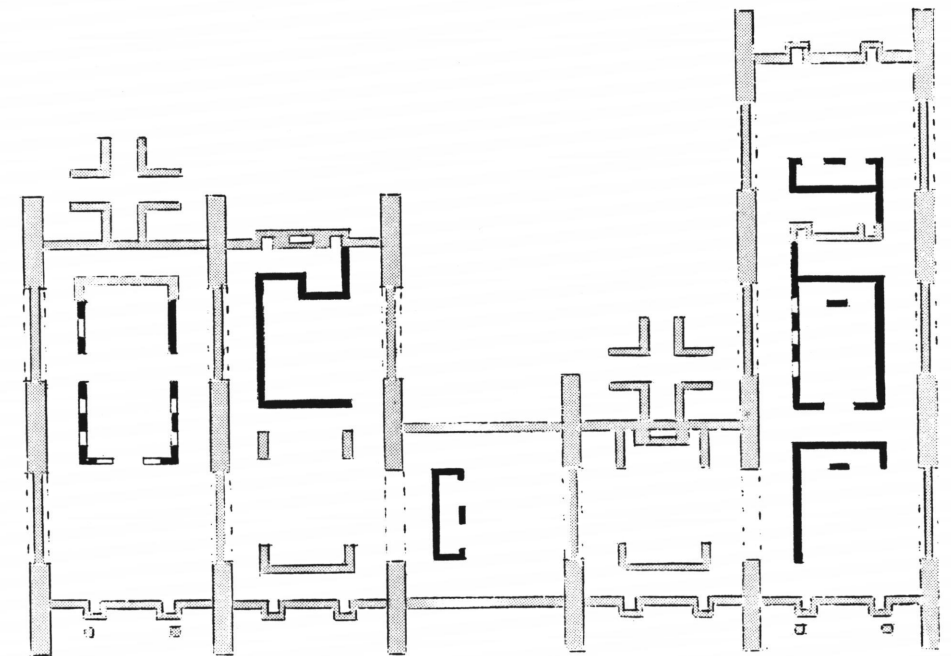


Enclosure is provided by a second set of walls. These are concrete walls, and they are within the bounds of the concrete-filled masonry walls. These concrete walls, reinforced with steel, are directly joined to the concrete within the masonry walls. It can be said that the perimeter wall of the project is a concrete wall — some places shuttered with brick and, at other places, the concrete is exposed. The closure of the arched openings in the perimeter wall is accomplished with temporary formwork, and the concrete which closes them is continuous with the concrete contained by the permanent masonry shuttering. Some of the arched openings within the perimeter are closed in the same manner and some are left open. Not one of the residences is completely between two of the concrete-filled masonry walls. The project may appear as rowhouses from the vantage of Prospect Street, but actually the residences occur not between the concrete-filled masonry walls, but around and through them. This is an instance of the effort to achieve a greater spatial richness than is typically found in rowhouses. The concrete-filled masonry walls are great and permeable bearing walls. The exposed concrete walls are made to contain mechanical chases, chimneys, and are reinforced to provide openings for light and ventilation, as well as to complete enclosure.



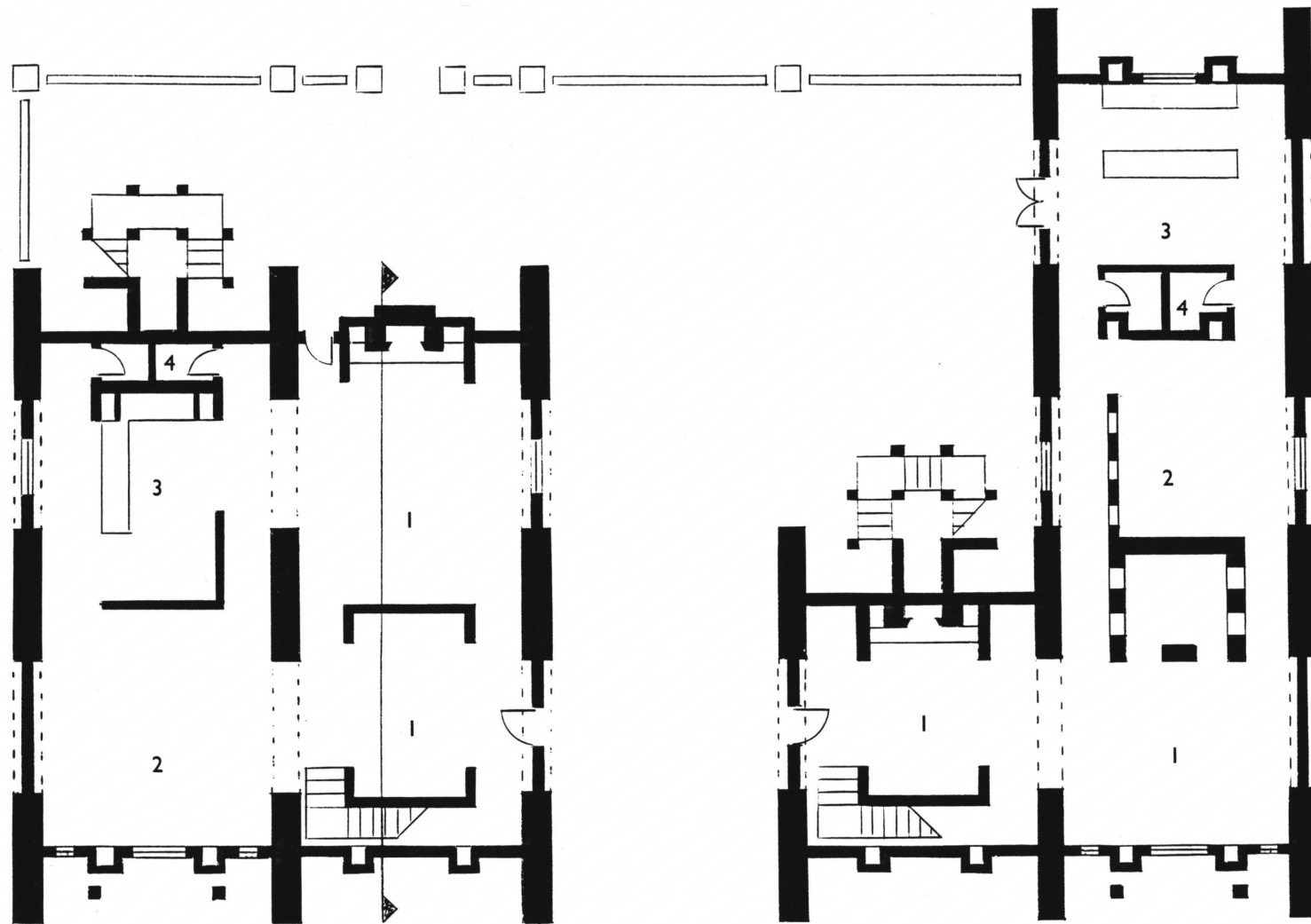
The large enclosed spaces are divided by a third kind of wall. If the exposed concrete and masonry shuttered walls, which provide shelter and enclosure, services and separation between residences, are seen as a hard order, the third set of walls can be seen as a soft order.

These are wooden walls — panels of wood in metal frames — and they are positioned to accommodate the demands of daily life. They provide privacy and storage, they make a dining room or a bedroom, with panels removed they make shelves — a library. They are walls, they are closets, they make bathrooms and bookcases.



Presentation

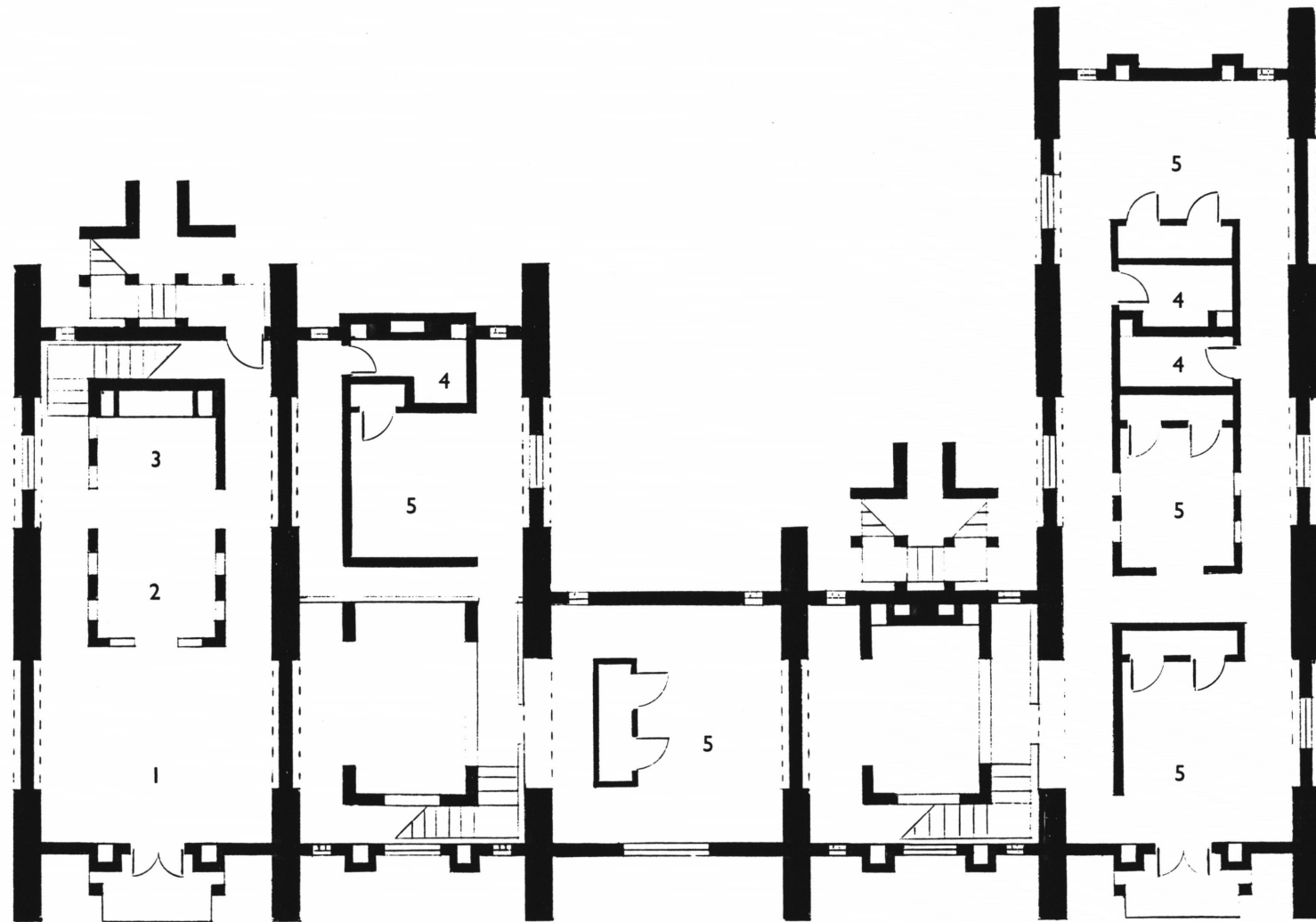
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1. living 2. dining 3. kitchen 4. w.c.



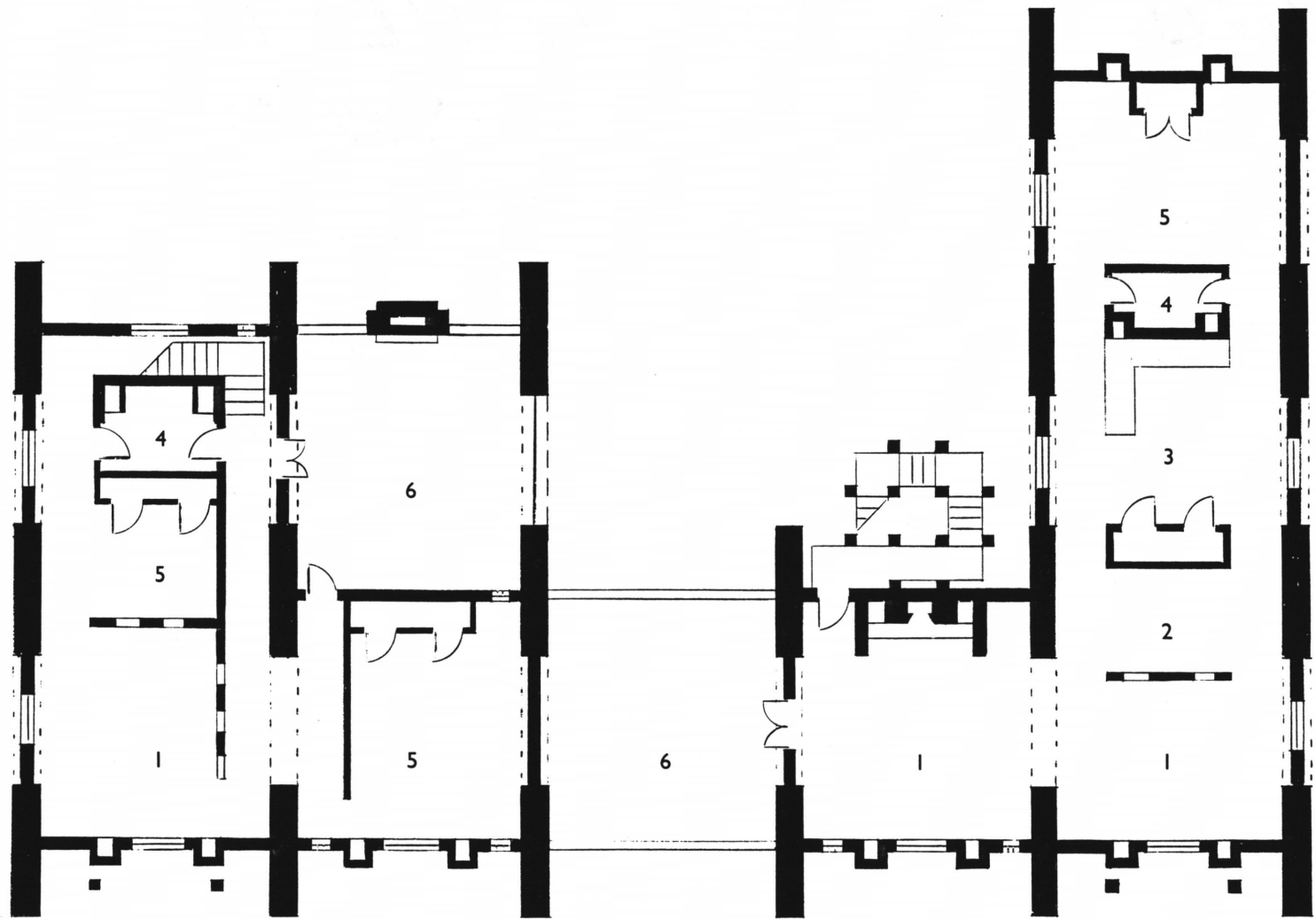
First Floor Plan



1. living 2. dining 3. kitchen 4. bathing 5. sleeping



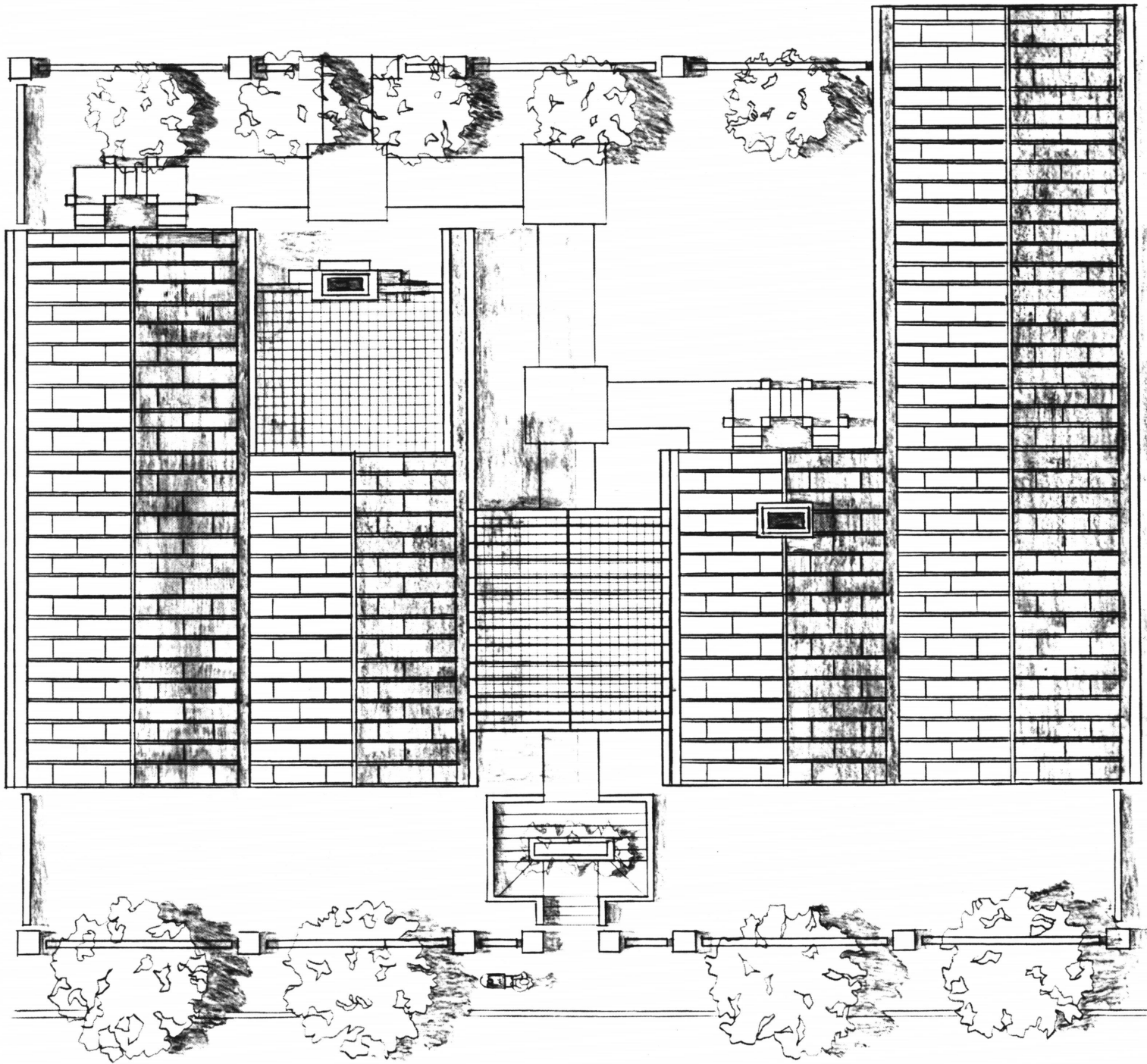
Second Floor Plan



1. living 2. dining 3. kitchen 4. bathing 5. sleeping 6. sunning



Third Floor Plan

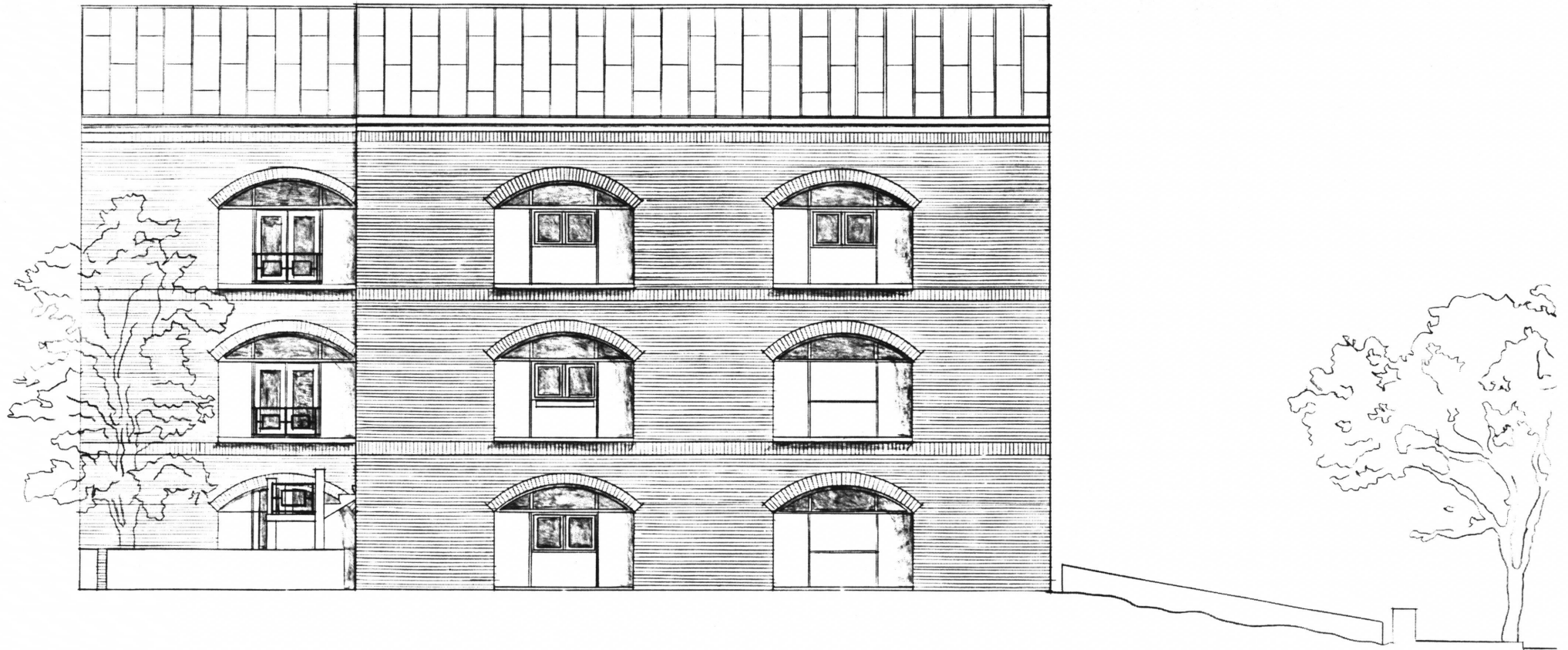


Roof Plan



Prospect Street

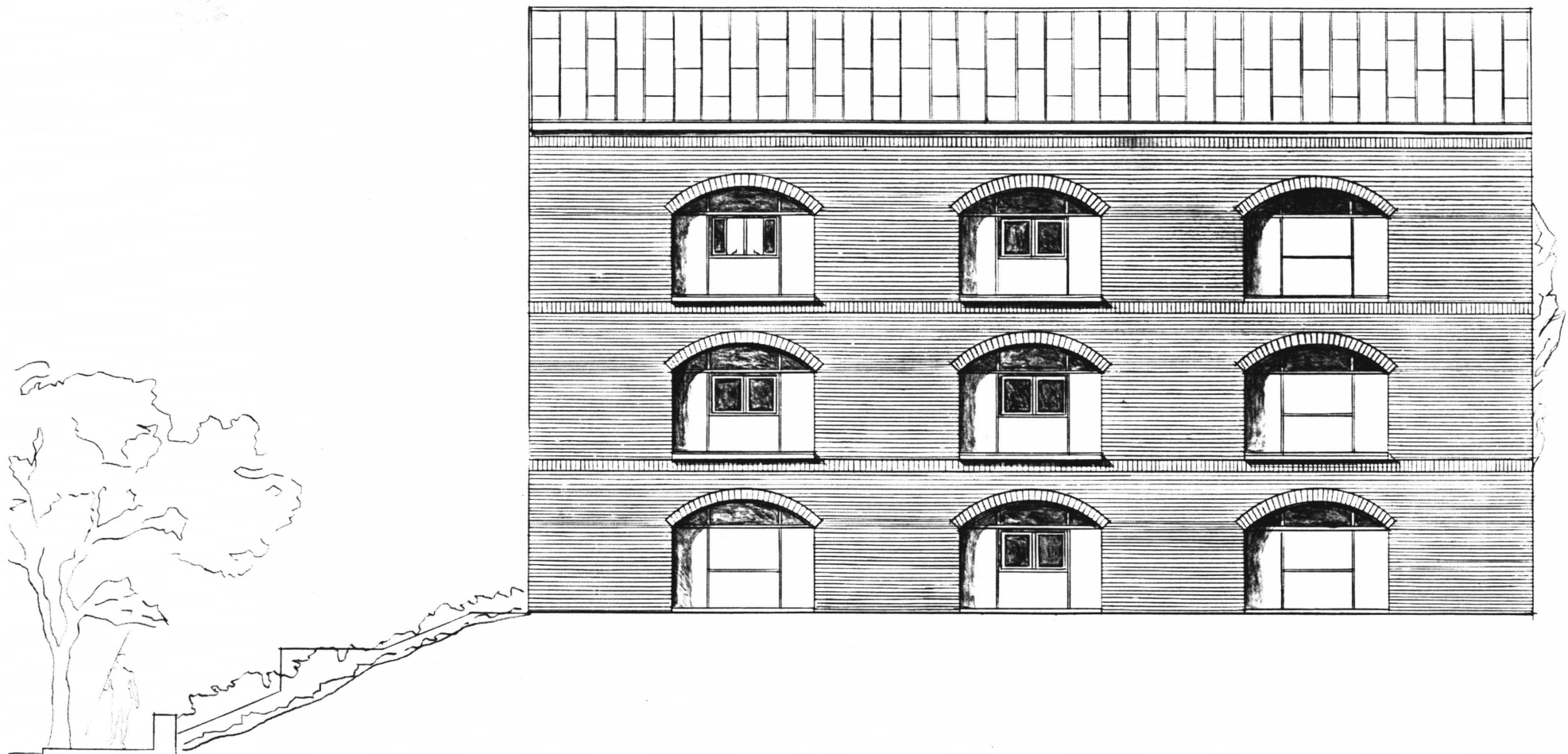
South Elevation



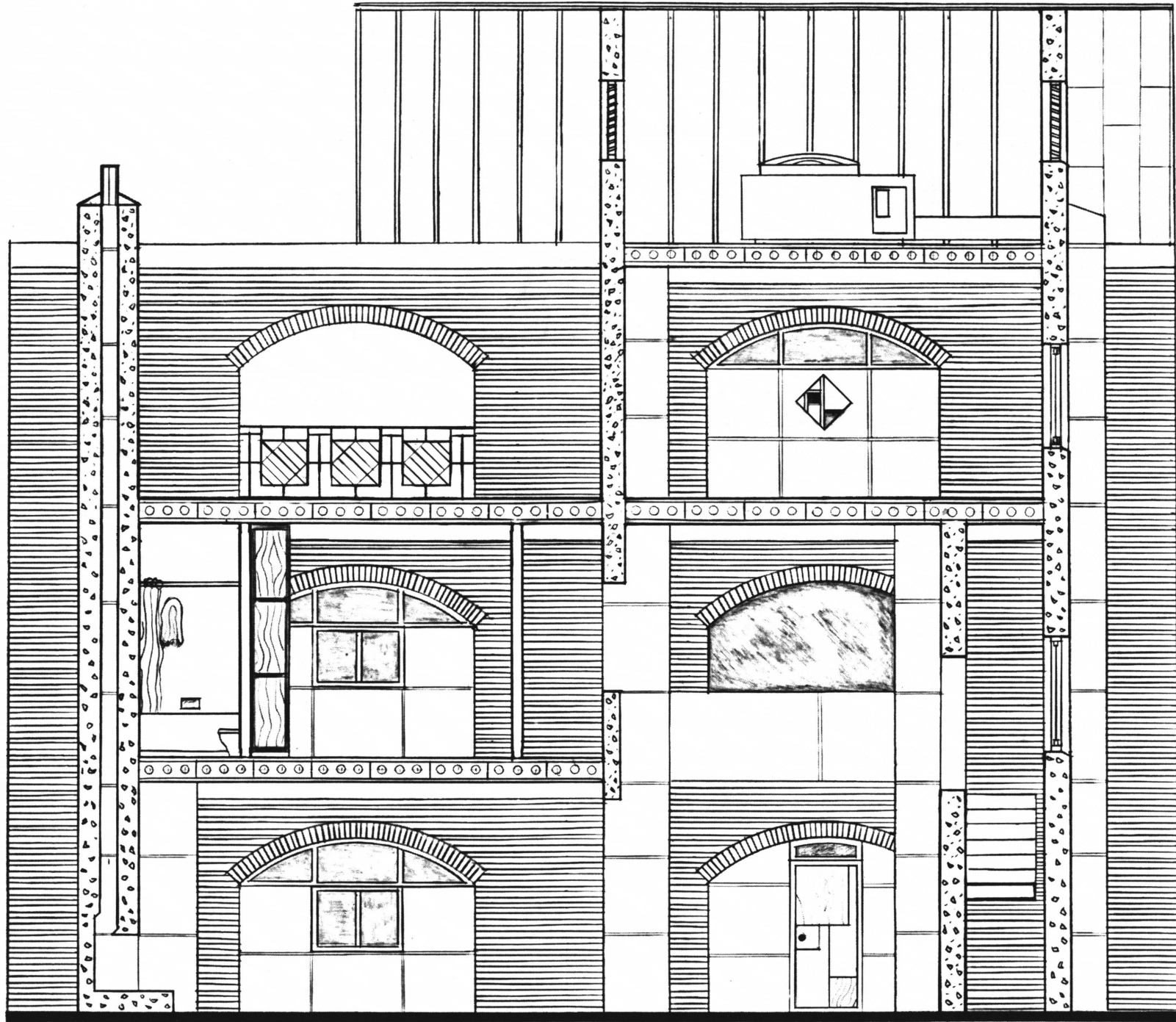
West Elevation



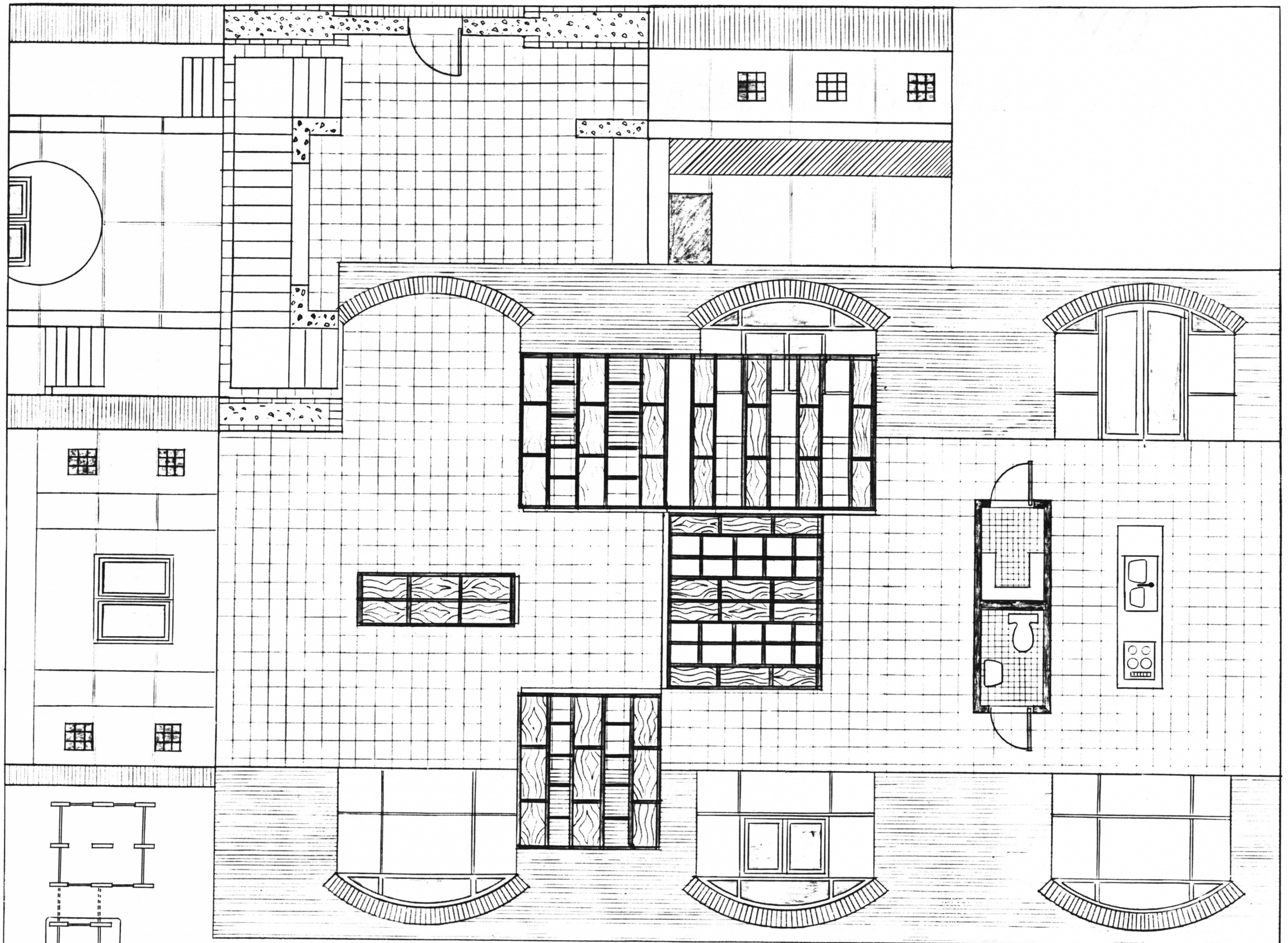
North Elevation



East Elevation



Section



First Floor

Interior Elevation

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