

D : STIGMO

STEFAN WÜLSER +

HOUSE IN ZUG

As a result of numerous historical adaptations, conversions and consolidations, the 600-year-old house at the entrance to Zug's Old Town has neither a dominant temporal condition nor well-defined structures. The strategy of subtraction takes on a space-defining significance, as today—after a phase of careful removal—unexpected spaces open up.

By informing one another through architectural dissection and constant speculation, new spaces, spatial connections and subtle thresholds are established within the conglomerate building mass. In this sense, the first of three projects has been completed and the house 'between the times' has been found. What follows are two more projects with different temporalities: first, the necessary structural reinforcement and expansion that will (hopefully) last for the next 600 years, and second, the addition of light infrastructure and components to allow future occupants to utilise these newly found spaces.

Drawing perfect plans to control details is next to impossible in both processes; precision of fit can only be achieved by abandoning the idea of dimensions and working with a rule-based design approach. The friction between digital state-of-the-art planning and organically grown building mass confronts us with the core challenge of resource-conscious construction: the relationship, both cultural and economic, between our labour and the material.

The first 12 months of the four-year process were purely subtractive. New spaces were found in the 600-year-old, organically grown structure.

This phase was a precise dissection, in which all building fabric no longer of value or damaged was removed.



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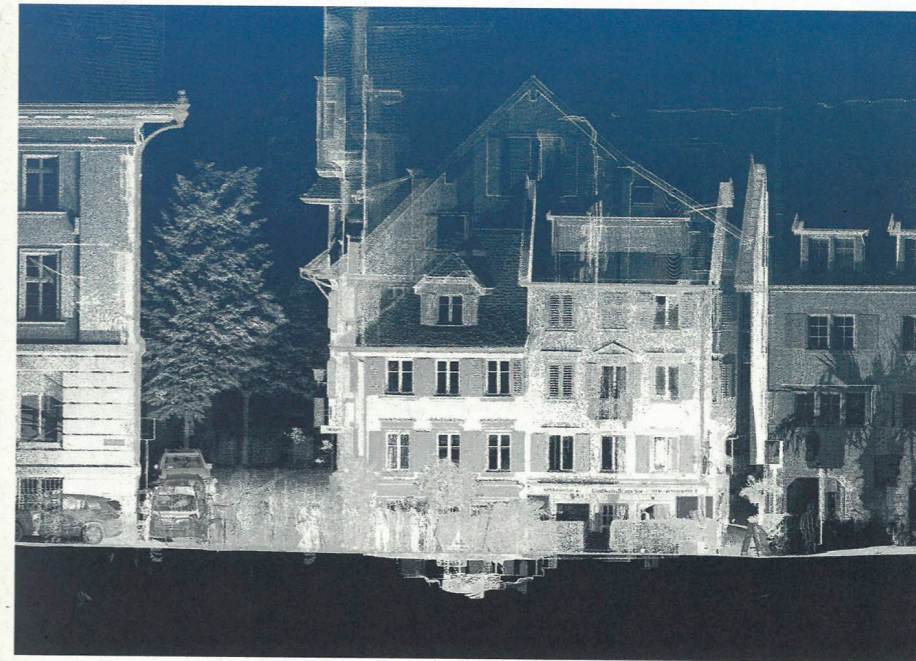
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The scars and fractures of the building, which had been remodelled more than 30 times in the course of its history, suddenly become spatial qualities. The former alleyway opens up into an atrium and gives the house a generous feel.



TRIAL AND ERROR

The spaces found between the different time periods were digitally mapped and measured.



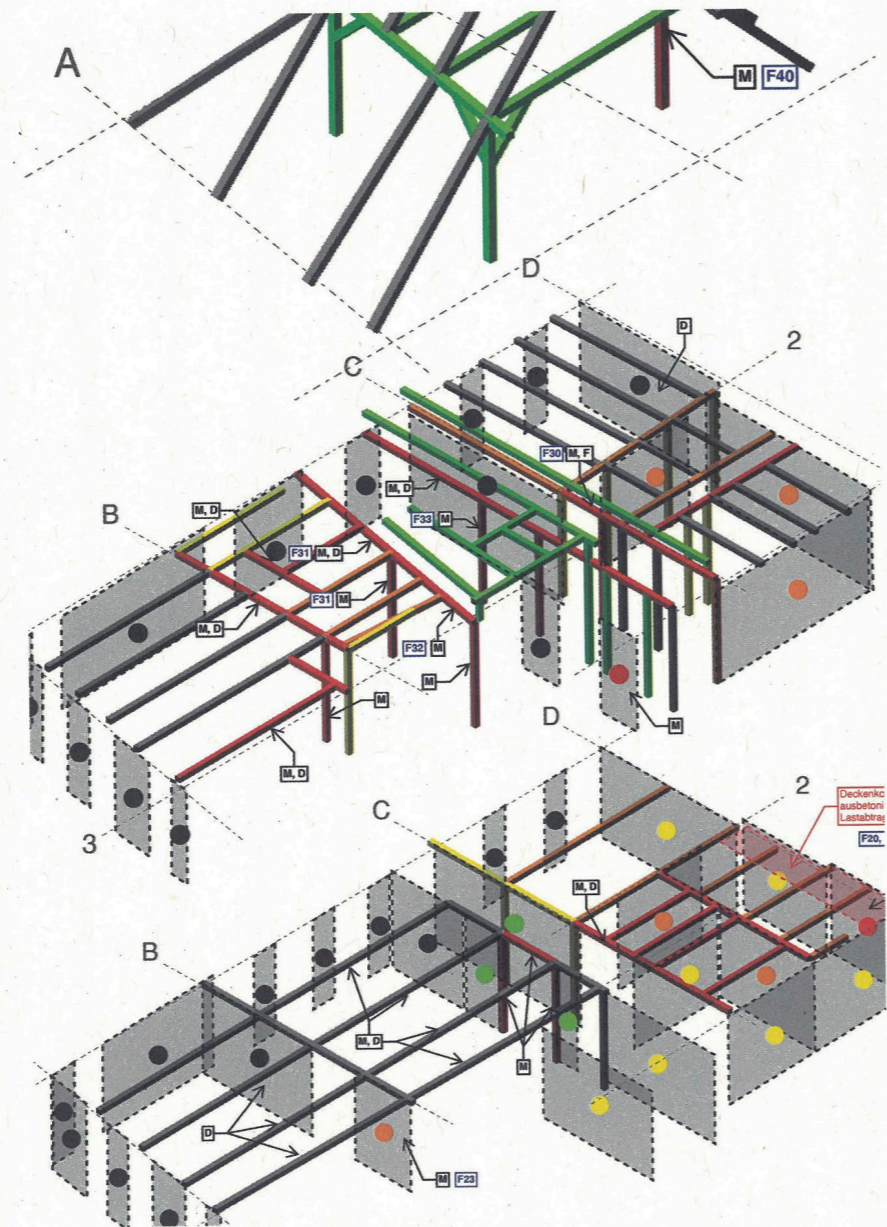
Oliver Cretton I'm interested in the dichotomy you present in this project's methodology—the confrontation between low and high tech. Could you elaborate?

Stefan Wülser What we appreciate most about this project is the importance of constantly reflecting on our own methods. Three-dimensional scans of the intermediate states, precise drawings, or mock-ups of the joints that ultimately define the sense of value the conversion will have, and the spontaneous direction on-site have become interdependent. Far too often in our profession, plans and images become an end in themselves and are not developed from the need to carry out the physical work on the house. Over the course of four years, this house has taught us exactly that: we work on the built reality mentally but understand everything else (that's produced) as a means to get to that end.

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By superimposing a condition analysis, it was possible to determine which components continued to fulfil their function and which needed to be replaced.



TRIAL AND ERROR

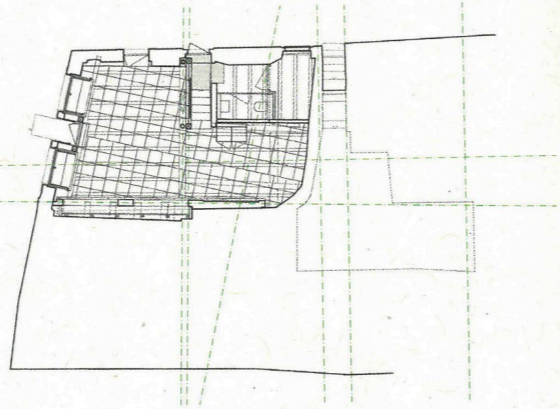
Like our predecessors, for whom the cost of material was worth more than labour, we repaired all removed components and reused them directly in the house wherever possible.



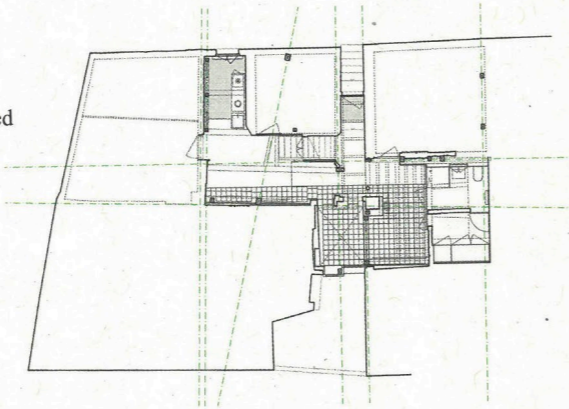
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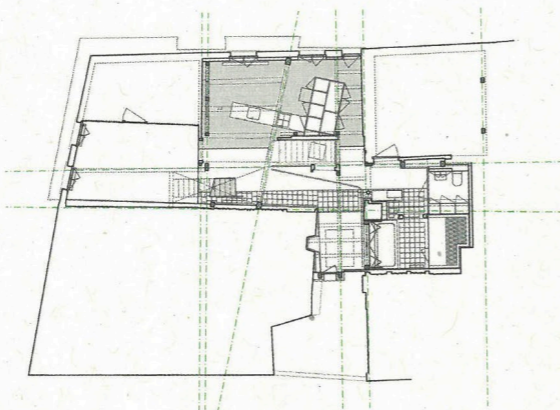
The ground floor becomes the foundation of the building. A new Vierendeel beam stabilises the structure and opens up spatial possibilities on the upper floors.



On the entrance floor, the atrium brings light into the formerly dark rooms at the rear, which were trapped by neighbouring houses.



On the upper residential floor, views open up diagonally through the former chamber floor plan. The orientation of the functional objects is radically opportunistic and resembles an appropriation rather than a design.



TRIAL AND ERROR

Old beams, Cartesian supplementary structures and new objects overlap to form a network of geometries. The house is understood as a cluster of local systems of order.



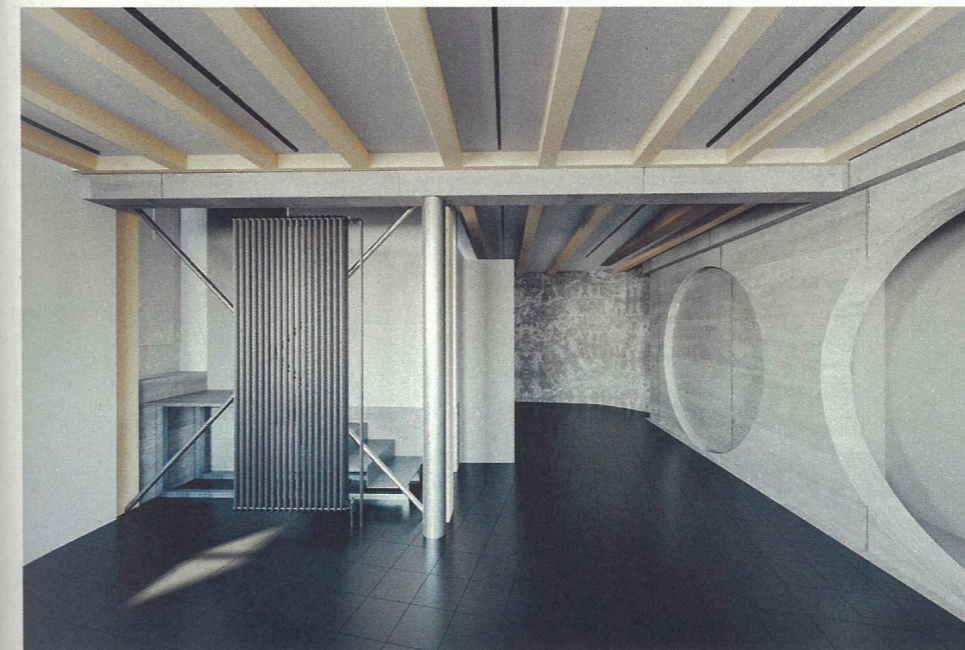
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Late in the process, the first digital images were created to check the material affiliation of all elements in space.

Material transitions, such as the floors, are not subordinate to functional areas, but rather define the spatial functions.

The rooms are constituted as montages, not collages; independent objects in dialogue.



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The second and third years of the project were dedicated to repairs. The house underwent upgrades for its long-term performance—far beyond the next phase of use.

Somewhere between order, a showy understanding of space, and the preservation of the greatest possible potential, the result seeks spatial equilibrium—structurally, materially, and historically.

