Alexander von Branca
Deutsche Pfandbriefanstalt (Depfa), Wiesbaden
1980 - 1991

Semesterarbeit von Simone Calenzo
im Rahmen des Seminars
‘Architektur sammeln, dokumentieren und präsentieren - Der Architekt Alexander von Branca
im Archiv des Architekturmuseums’ im
Sommersemester 2019
Signature: bra-203
712 drawings in the Archive of the
Architektur-museum der TUM

Fig. 1 - External view

Aereal view

Project:
Deutsche Pfandbriefanstalt (Depfa)

Architect:
Alexander von Branca

Address:
Paulinenstrasse 15, Wiesbaden, Germany

Construction period:
1980‘s / 1990‘s

During the 1980s, a competition was issued for the construction of the new headquarters of the Deutsche Pfandbriefanstalt (Depfa), to be built in the city of Wiesbaden, in the central-western part of Germany. The architect Alexander von Branca, who won the competition for the project, found himself constructing a building in a well-defined project area, bordering a nearby residential area and a public park. In 2001, the bank that commissioned the project was divided into a public finance bank (now Depfa Bank plc, based in Dublin) and one of the real estate financing division, Aareal Bank, which effectively became the owner of the property.

Fig. 2 - Aerial view (Google Earth)

Project area

Fig. 3 - External view of the entrance

Fig. 4 - Internal view

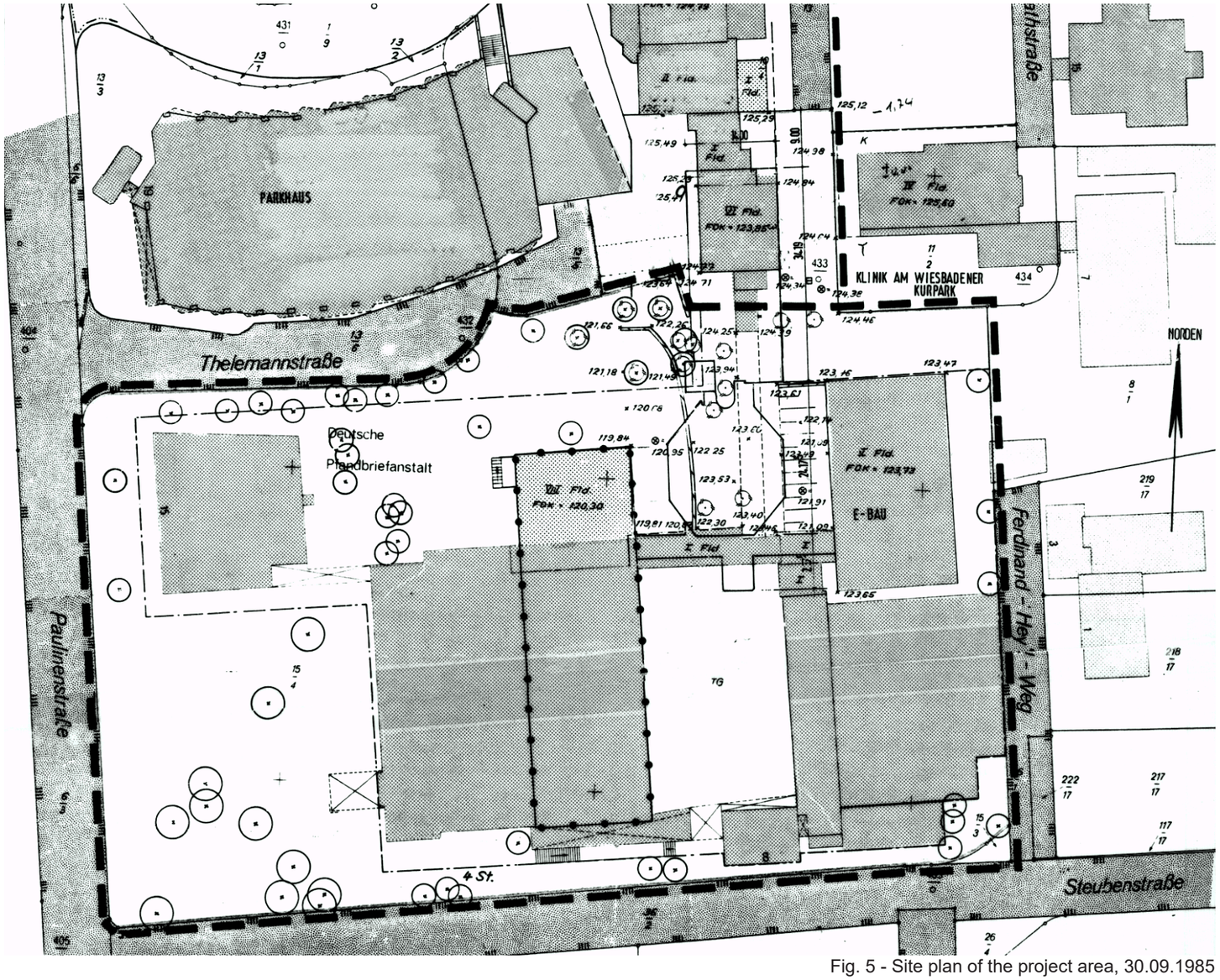


Fig. 5 - Site plan of the project area, 30.09.1985

First project ideas

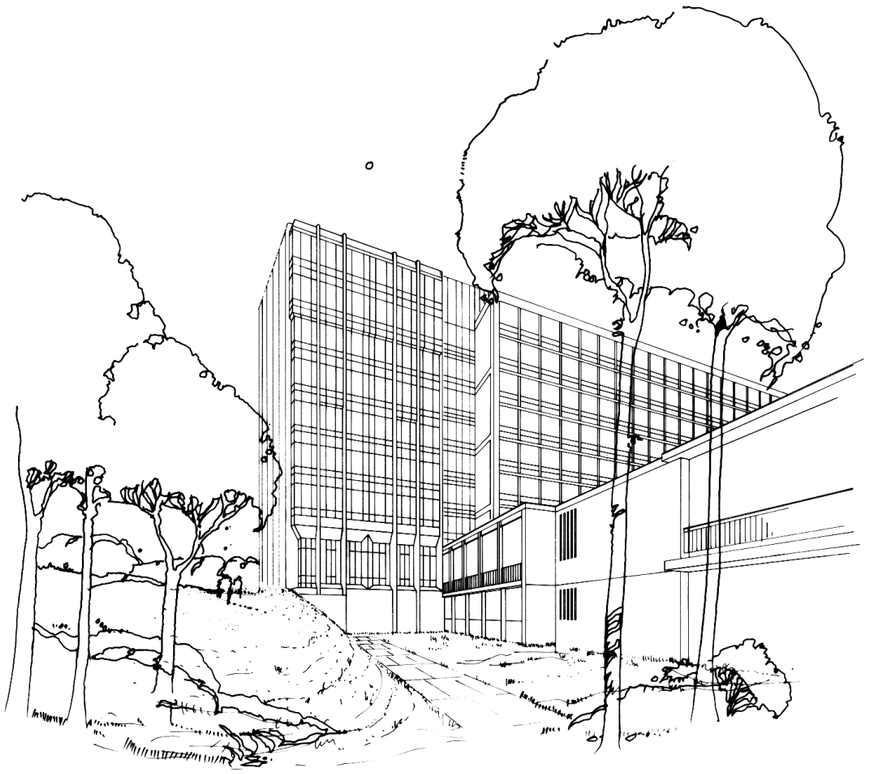


Fig. 6 - First project idea, 1980's

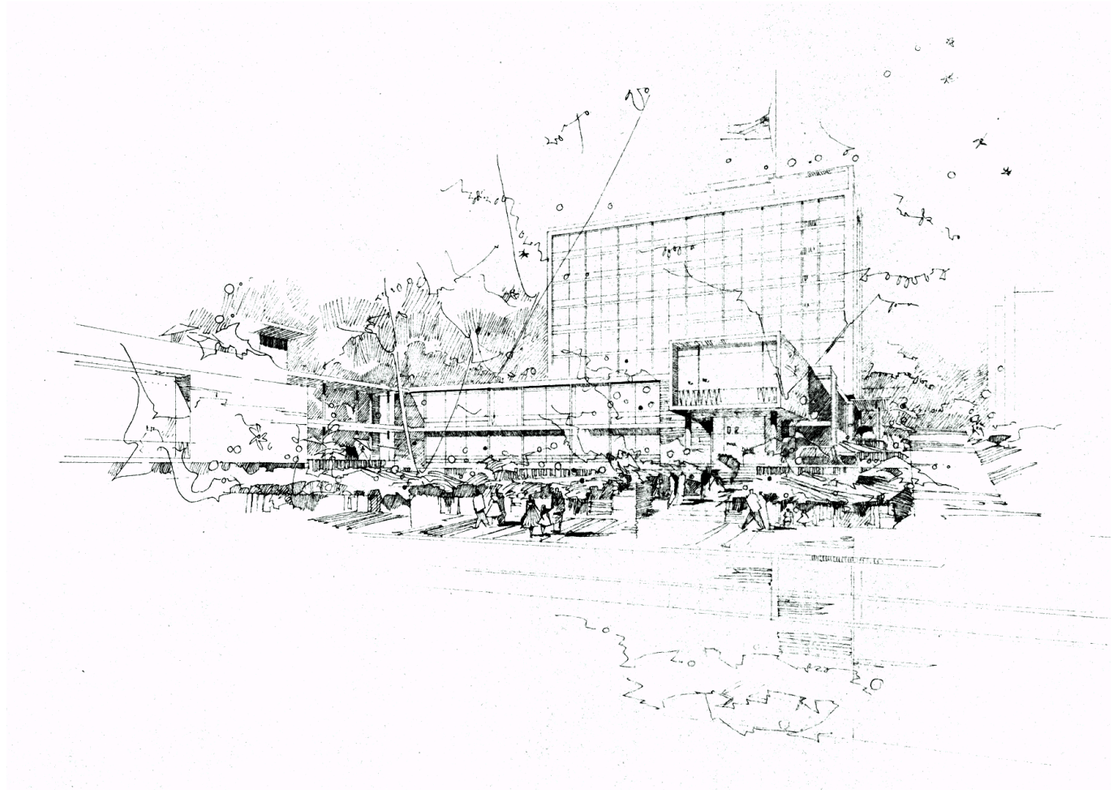


Fig. 7 - Second project idea, 1980's

Project ideas

The construction that can be observed today actually derives from a series of preliminary studies and project ideas that most likely did not convince the client, if not the architect himself. In fact, Alexander Von Branca developed two ideas, both widely detailed with numerous drawings, which in some parts recall the design of the final project.

The first idea was to create an imposing structure, which exceeded 9 floors in height, a very compact building with simple lines. The second idea, on the other hand, had attached to the imposing part, diminished in size, other more basic buildings that also created an external space prior to the bank.

Site plan

Project development
Looking at the site plan of the final project, it is possible to immediately understand how this is the result of previous studies that concerned the realization of the first two project ideas. In fact, we are faced with a set of characteristics deriving from the latter, such as the creation of an outdoor space in front of the bank, surrounded by a green area. The actual construction, on the other hand, is developed on different heights, sometimes very different from each other. The L-shaped plan is in fact divided into two areas, the first in the lower south-west that best relates to the space of the square, while a second develops in height, almost to delimit the visual space enclosing the limits of the building. In addition, in plan as in elevation, is easily visible a wide use of glass, with portions of the roof that become skylights to better illuminate the internal areas of the bank otherwise very dark due to the large size of the spaces. Moreover, it is already possible to see the different design of the two areas of the bank, being clear the semicircular development of the area to the south-west.

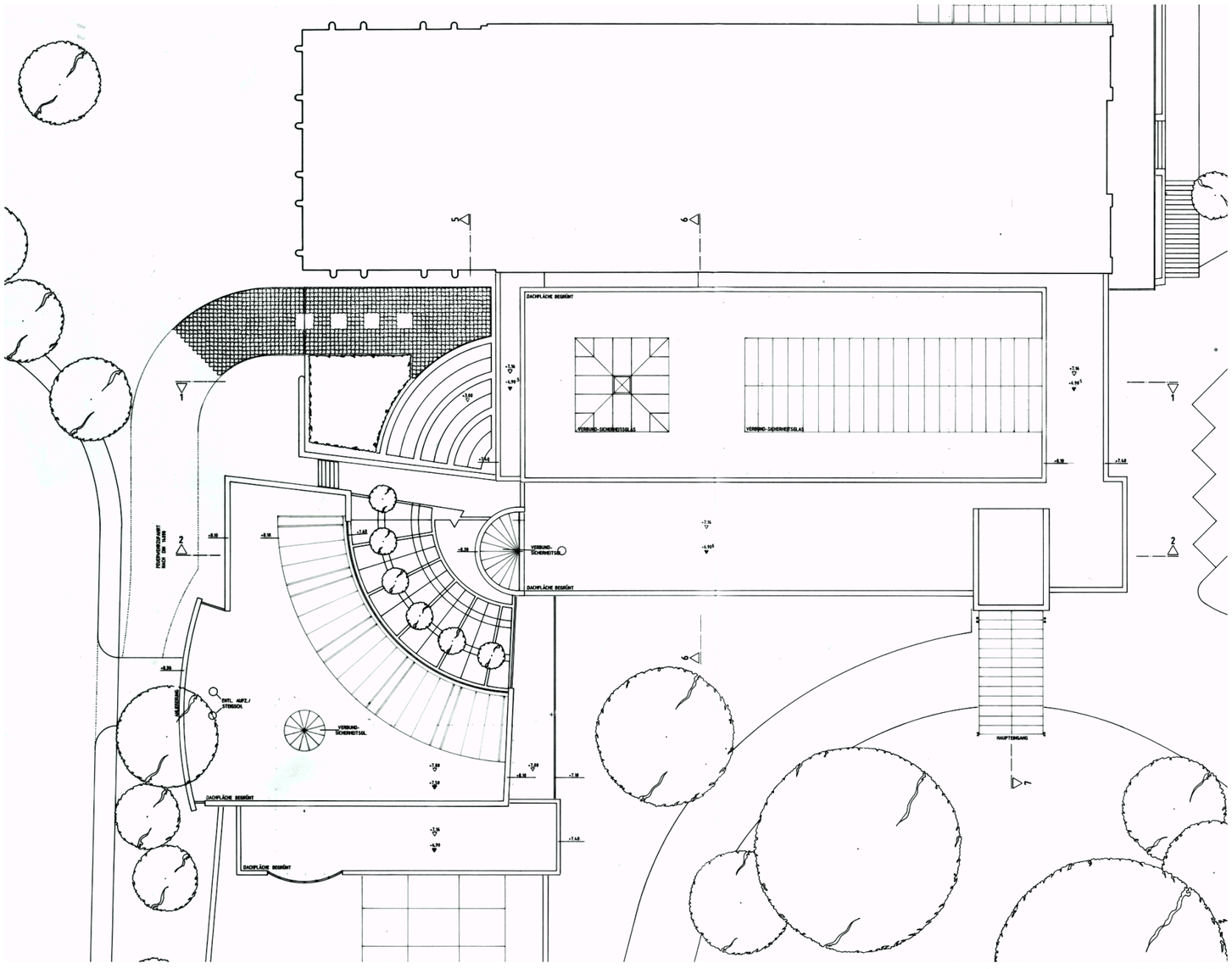


Fig. 8 - Final site plan, 08.02.1991

Plans

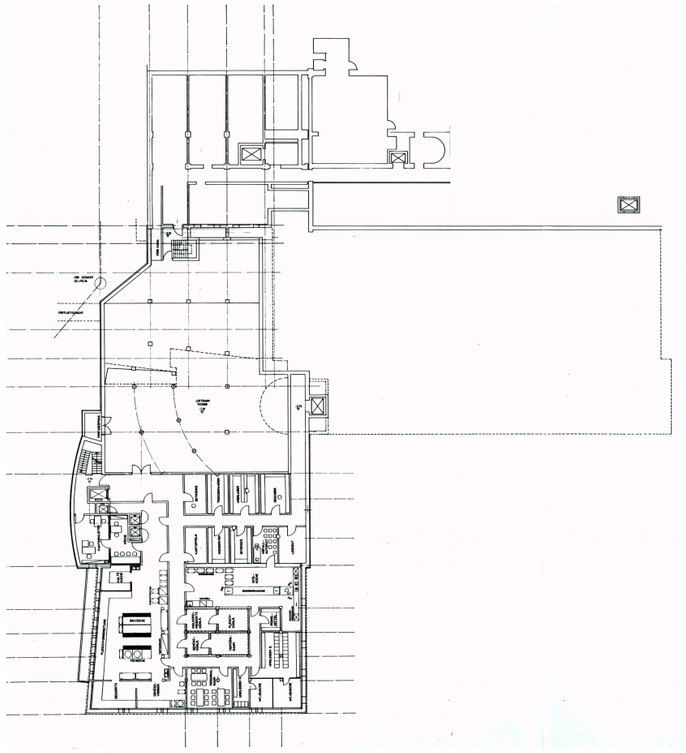


Fig. 9 - Underground plan, 14.01.1991

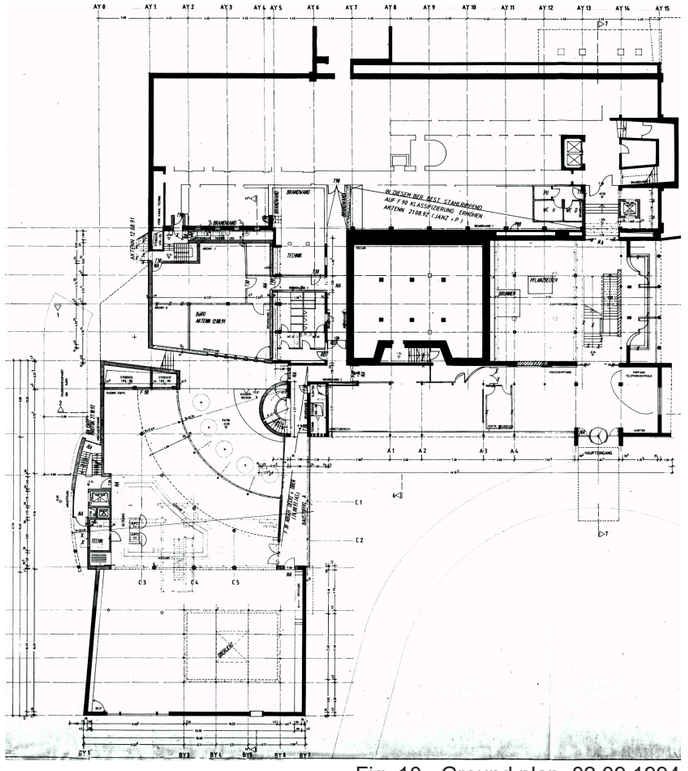


Fig. 10 - Ground plan, 02.09.1994

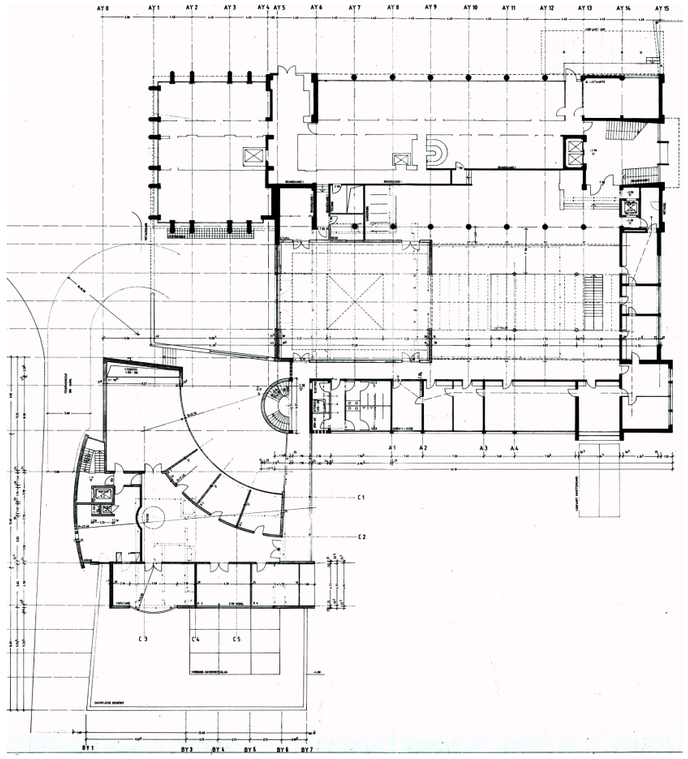


Fig. 11 - First floor plan, 08.02.1991

Plans development

The building is mainly made of reinforced concrete and glass, the latter used for the construction of large windows from the first floor onwards in order to create brightly lit interior spaces. The building has two underground floors, and from the floor plan it is easy to see how the spaces, arranged essentially in the shape of an L, are divided into two strongly opposed areas. In the first, to the south-west, we have large, illuminated spaces, with the presence of countless meeting rooms, all characterized by a semicircular plan not visible from the outside. This is a peculiarity of the project, much free and different from the north wing part, in which are concentrated essentially all the offices or services needed, all made on a much more linear design and simple characters.

Sections

Height development

Looking at the development of the building in section, the architect‘s intention is now much clearer. In fact, from the outside the building looks very low in height, almost going against the classic canons that we imagine when we think of a bank, it is the result of a choice in my opinion very intelligent. In fact, it is developed on two underground floors, obviously not visible from the outside, a stratagem aimed at not limiting the space needed for the various functions, but that in this way links in a much more homogeneous way the building with the surrounding context. Mainly from the east section it is possible to see how the entire complex gradually binds with the space in front of the square, almost accompanying the gaze of the visitor. In addition, the various skylights that have been placed in correspondence of the less illuminated central spaces are easily identifiable, which almost tend to blend in with the surrounding context as well as giving from the inside, in addition to a lot of lighting, also a view of nature.

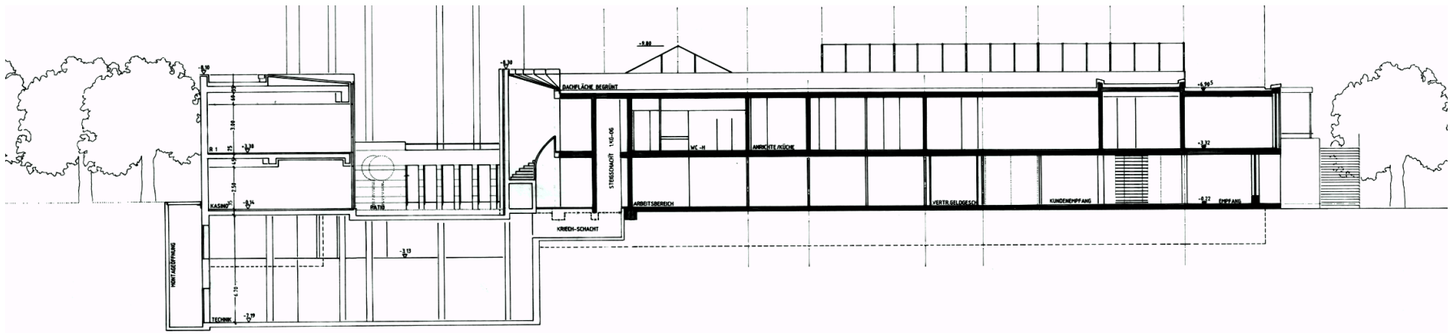


Fig. 12 - North section, 08.02.1991

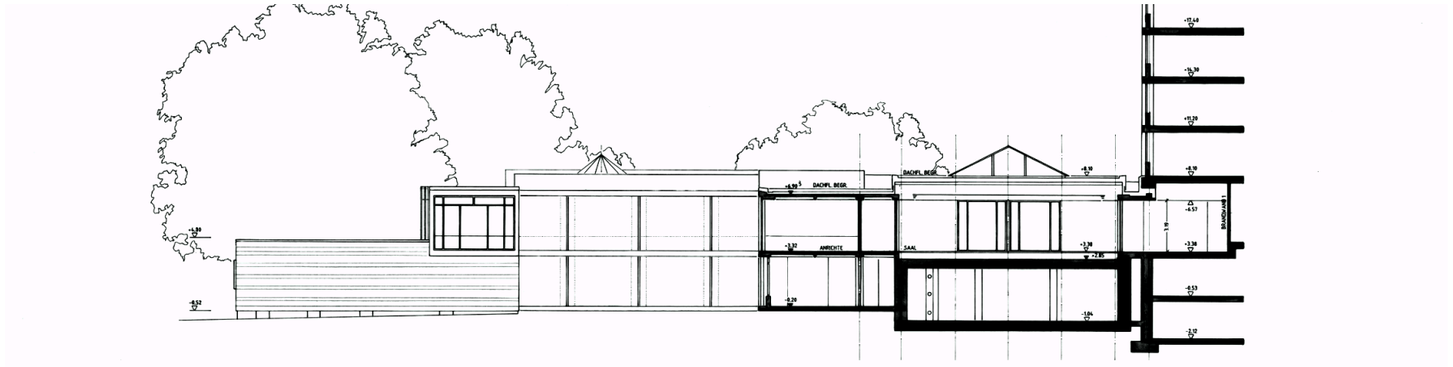


Fig. 13 - West section, 08.02.1991

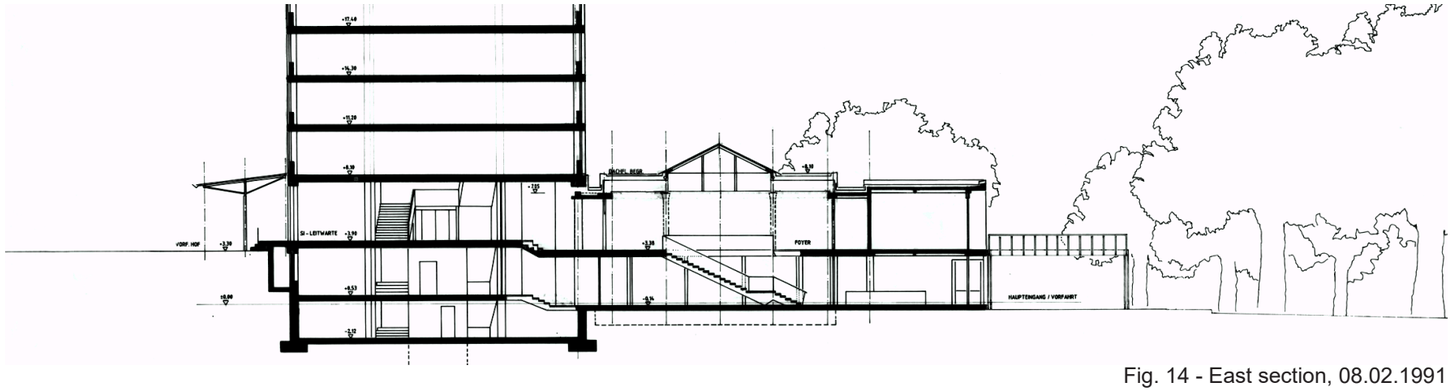


Fig. 14 - East section, 08.02.1991

North elevation

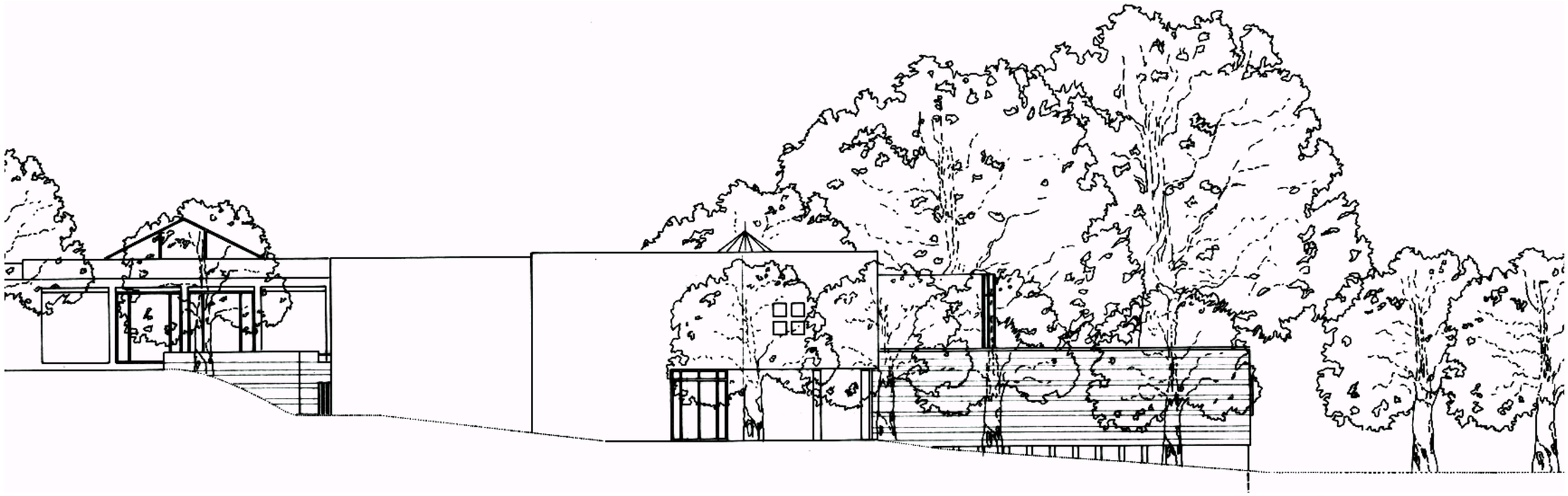


Fig. 15 - North elevation, 08.02.1991

Ground development

Looking at the building to the north, a very special feature immediately catches the eye, which clearly derives from a very careful study by the architect from the environmental point of view. The project area is not on flat ground, but on a slope. Instead of completely flattening the area as you would think, von Branca decided to develop his own project adapting it to the nature, as it is clear from the design in its development that gradually decreases in height as the height of the land drops. It is in fact a classic example in which it is not nature that has to adapt to man, but it is man who in this case adapts to nature, creating an harmonious composition of spaces that almost blend with the surrounding context.

Elevations

Fig. 16 - South elevation, 08.02.1991

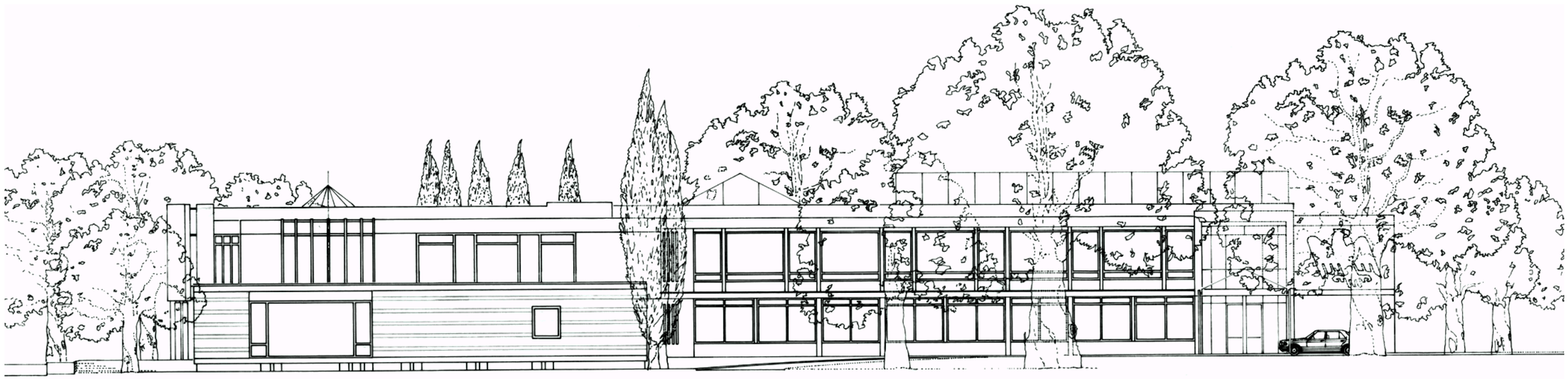


Fig. 17 - West elevation, 08.02.1991

Detail study

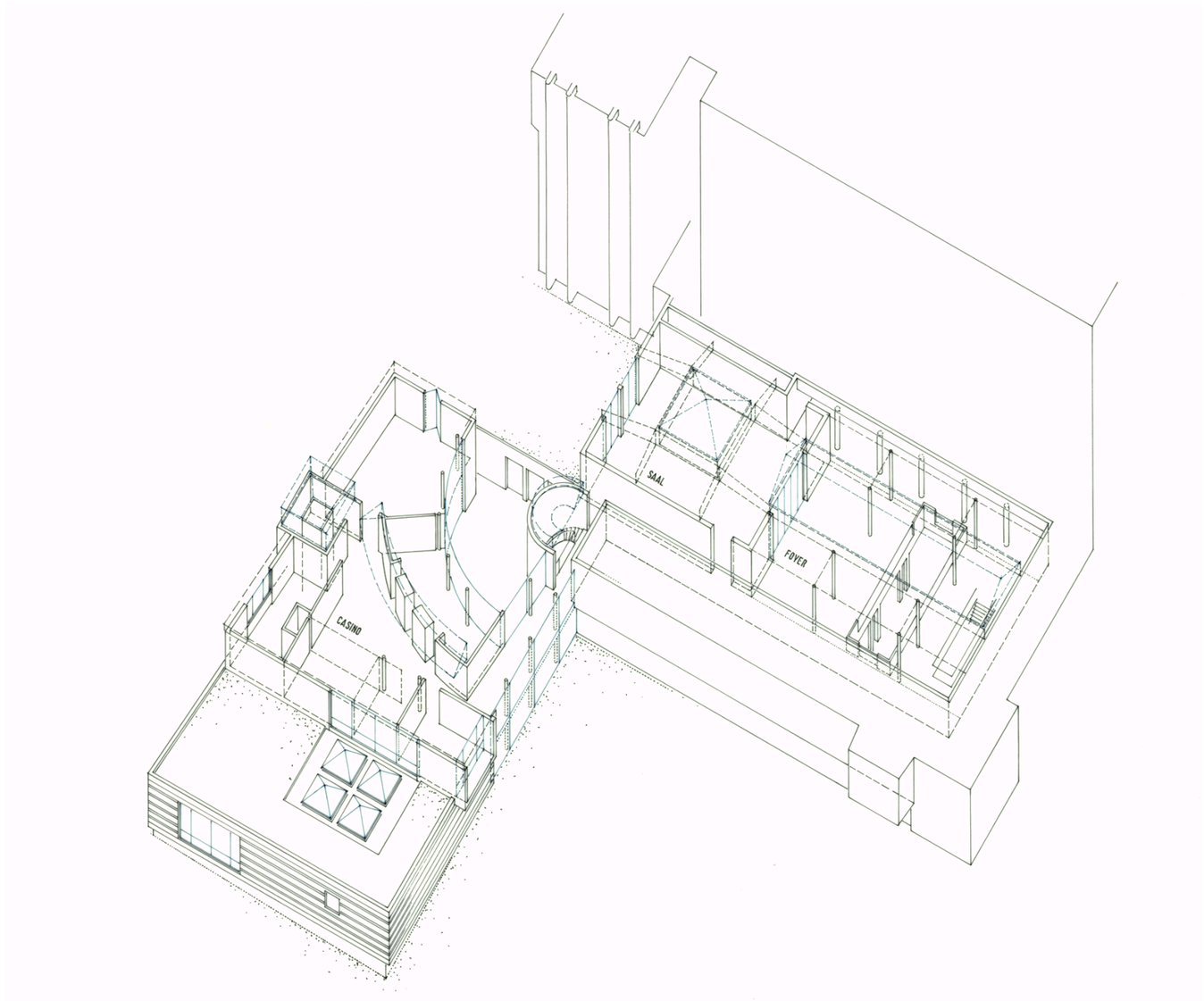


Fig. 18 - Axonometric view of the inside spaces, Feb.1990

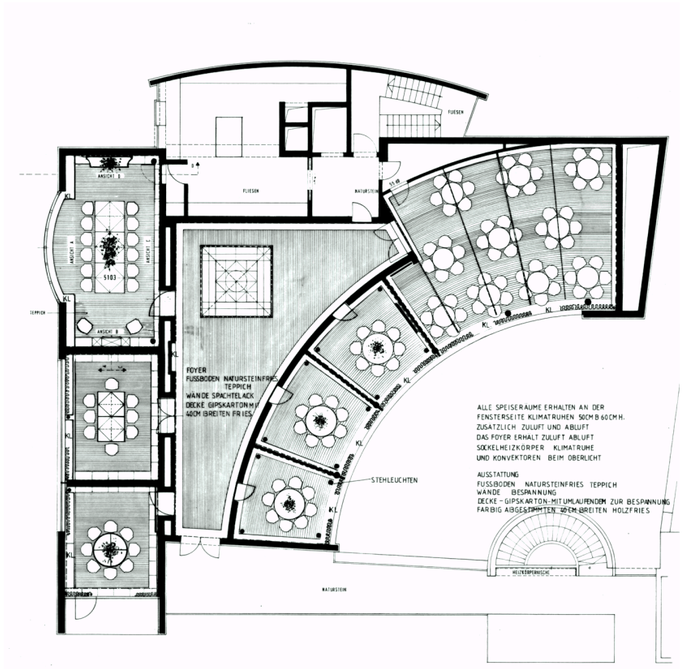


Fig. 19 - Plan detail, 20.12.1991

3D study

Alexander von Branca also studied his own project three-dimensionally, never losing sight of the function that each space should have. In fact, the location of the supporting structure, here easily identifiable, is placed in such a way as to hinder as little as possible, giving space to vast open spaces.

Detail study

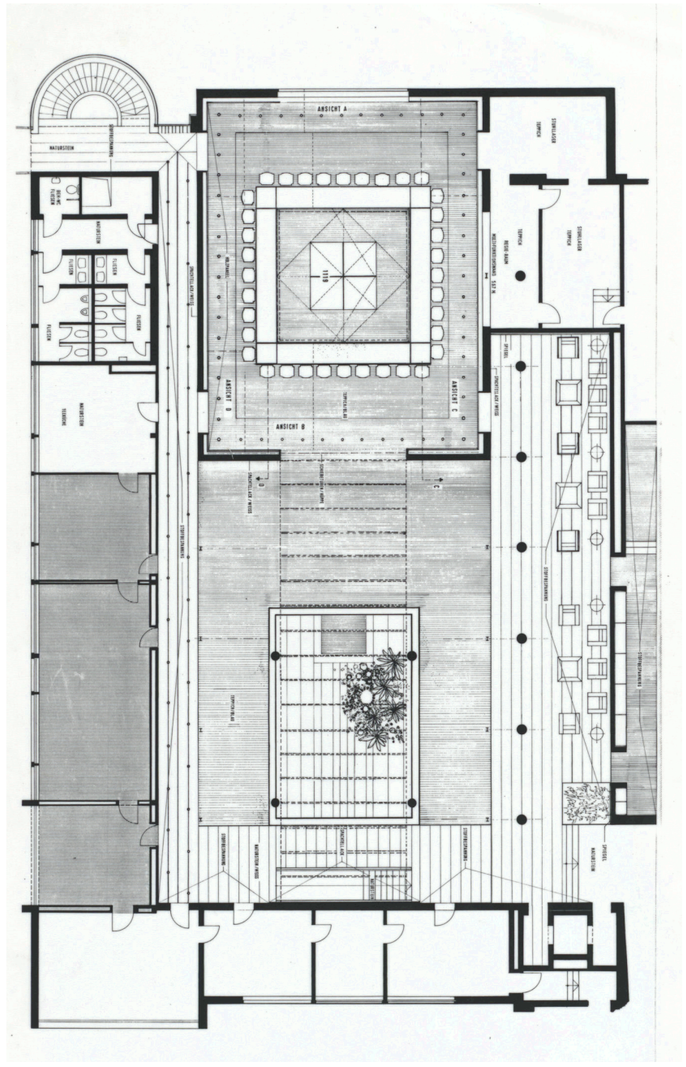


Fig. 20 - First floor plan detail, 20.12.1991

Fig. 21 - Section detail, 31.01.1992

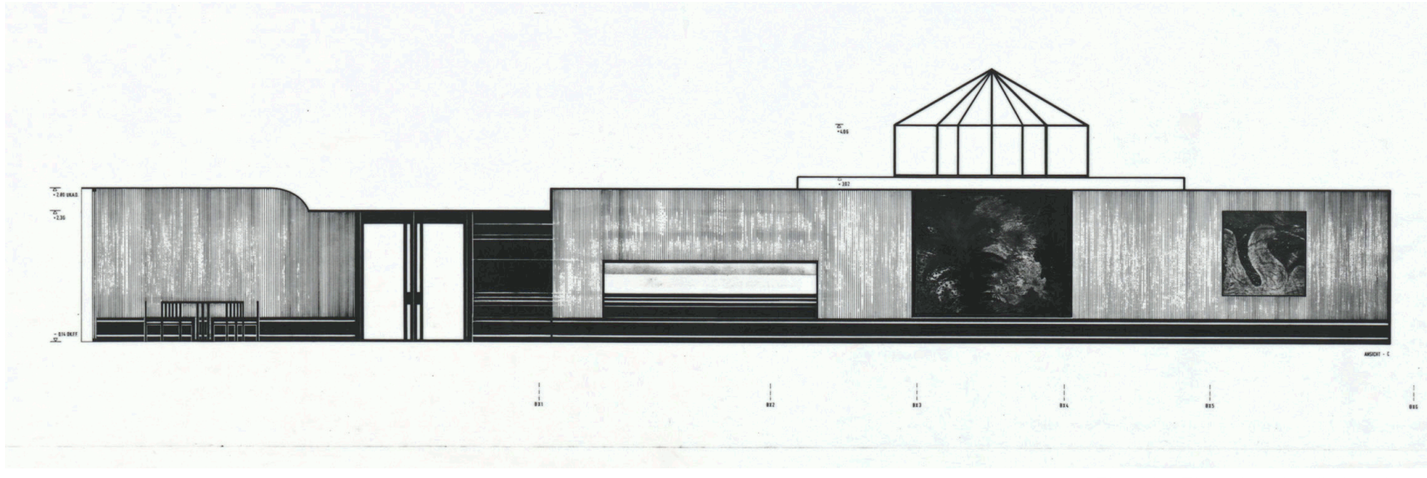


Fig. 22 - Elevation detail, 09.12.1991

Sketches

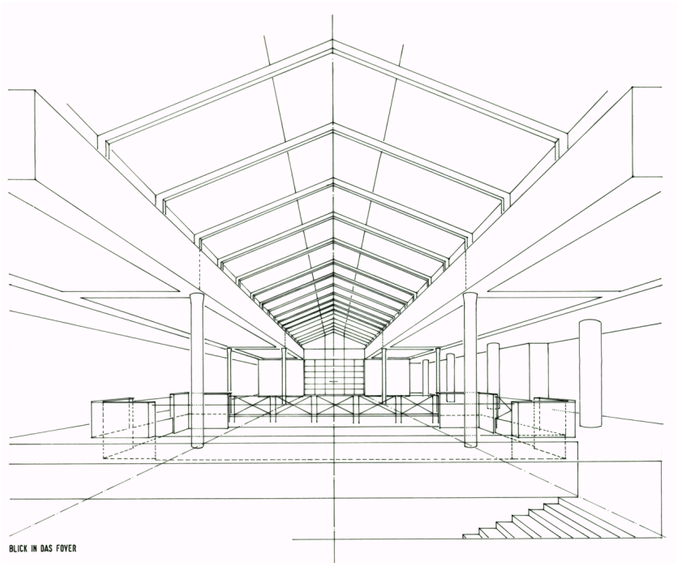


Fig. 23 - Perspective, Feb. 1990

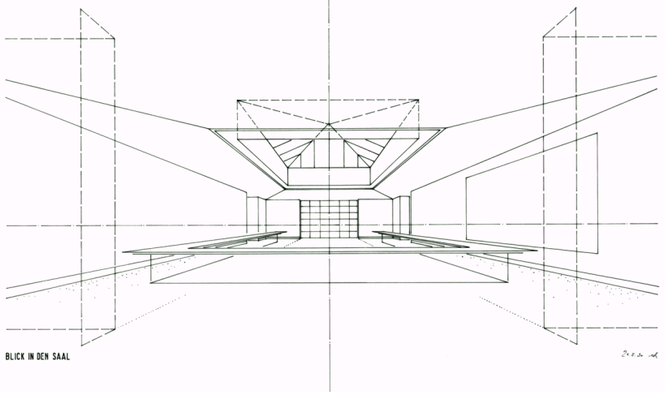


Fig. 24 - Perspective, Feb. 1990

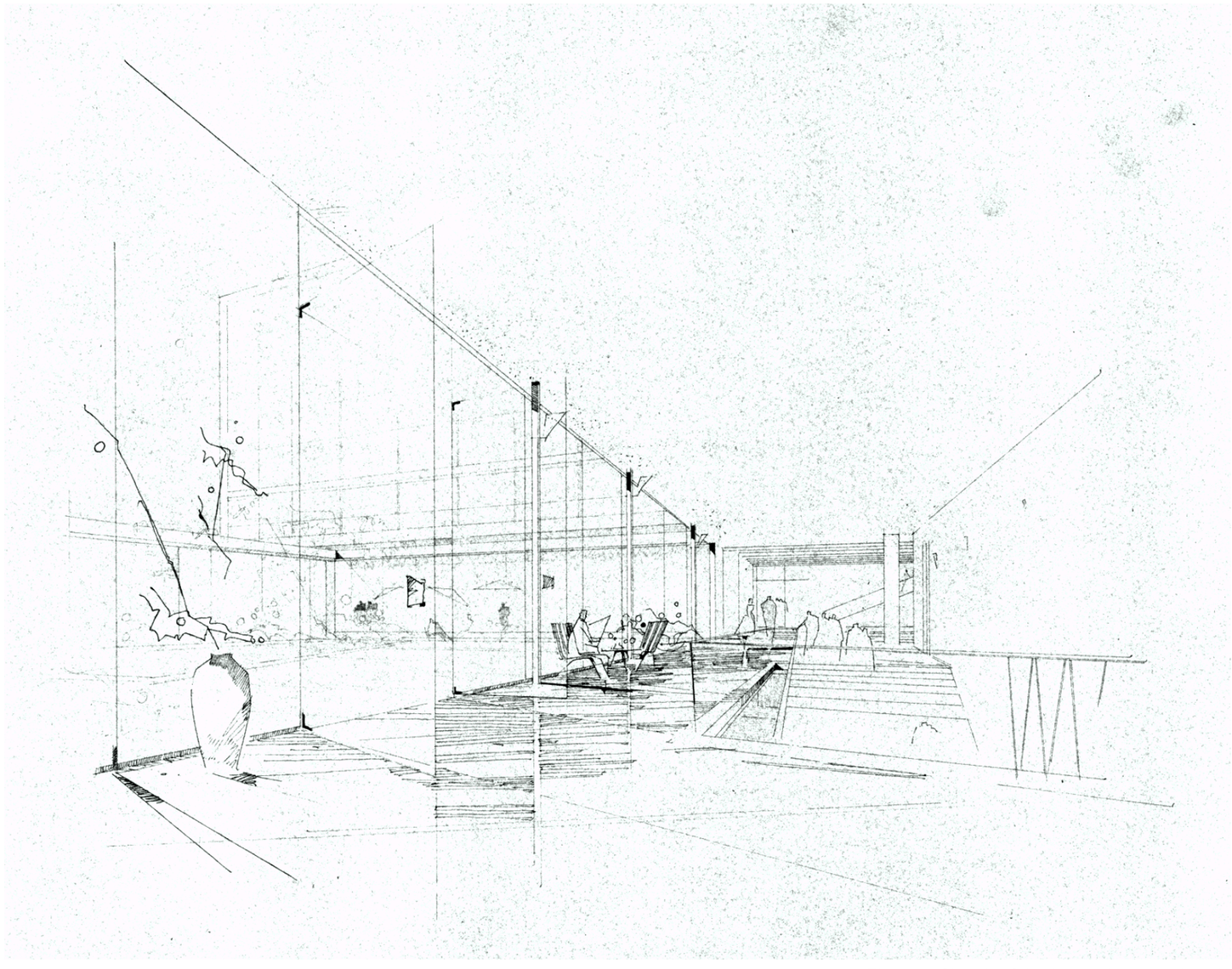
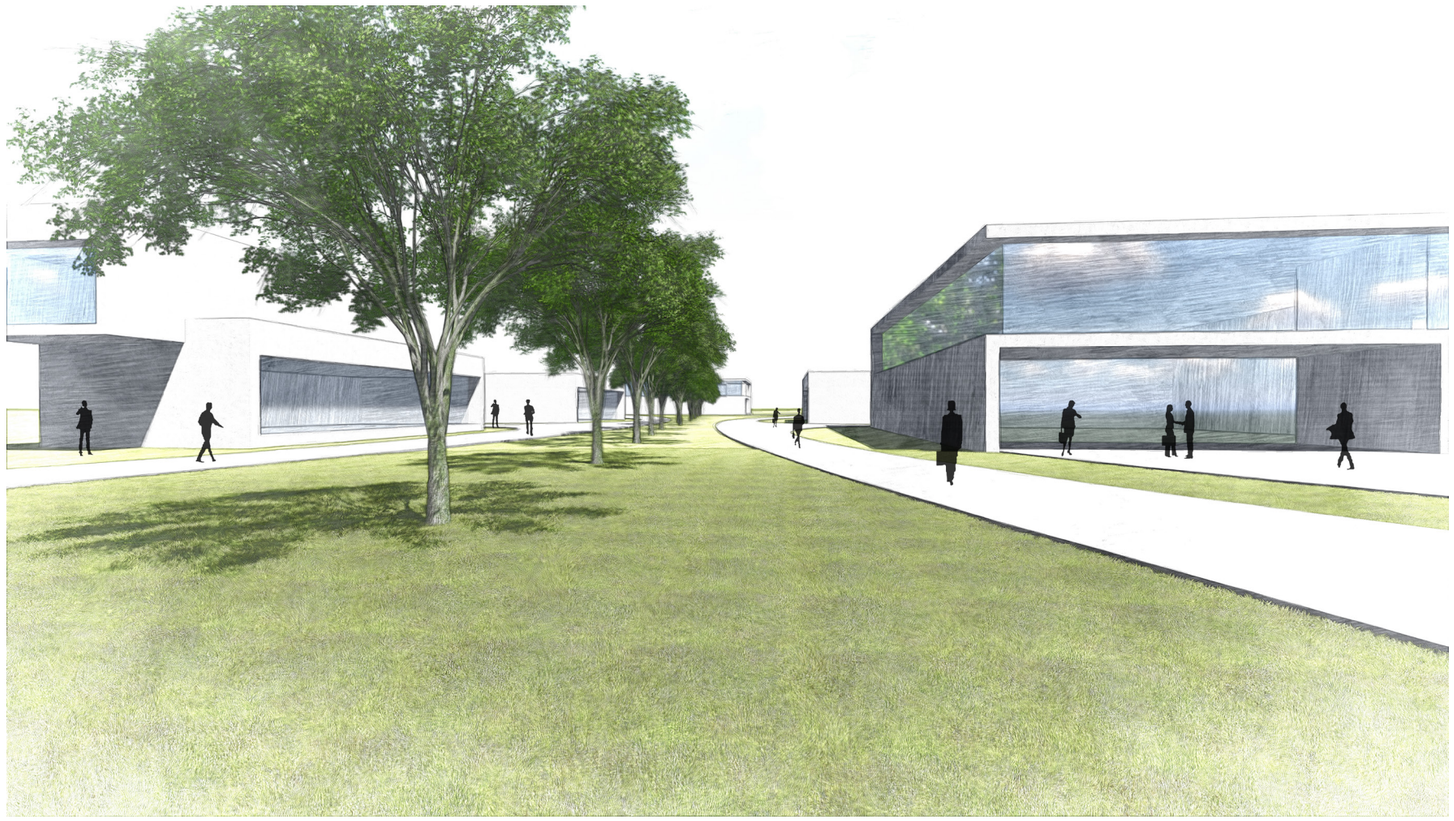


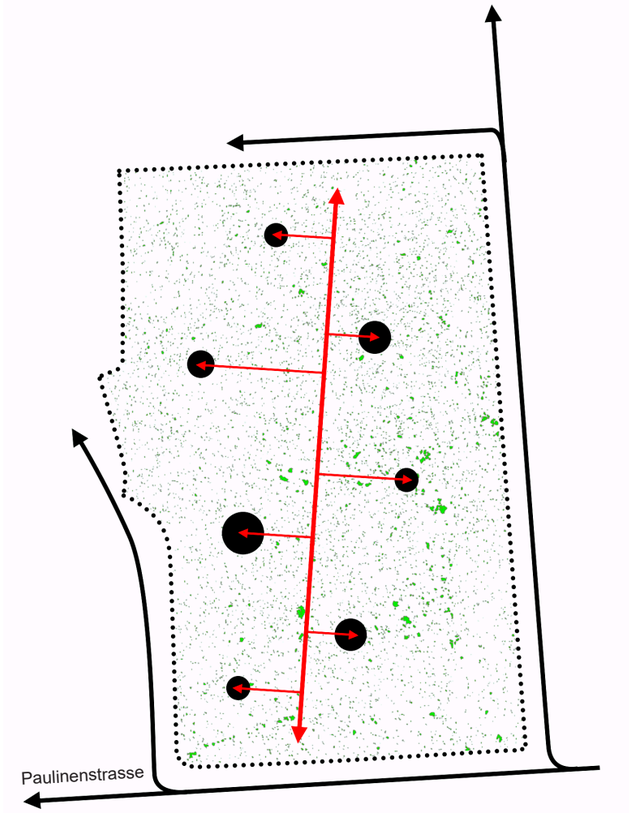
Fig. 25 - Sketch of the internal space, 1990‘s

Project idea



Design: Simone Calenzo

Fig. 26 - External sketch



Design: Simone Calenzo

Fig. 27 - Schematic plan

If the project was commissioned today and I had been entrusted with its design it would have been completely different from the ideas of architect Von Branca. This is not because his project was not successful, in fact I personally think it is also very innovative, mainly in the way it was conceived, for the 80‘s/90‘s.

The motivation lies in the fact that nowadays, in an age of great changes also in architecture, it would be nice to clear the classic ideas that come to mind when we think of a bank, in this case. Why everything should be within a single building? I personally think it would be nice if it was not a huge concrete building that controlled the visual and perceptive space, but rather many small buildings that almost go to create a micro-city inside. It would be the nature to divide the spaces, waiting outside the competent building, thus creating less crowded and more illuminated spaces, naturally ventilated, directly in contact with the outside.