

# House with a Tree

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Concept / Idea with Pierre de Meuron

Basel  
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Maintaining the tenderness and charm of the existing house from the 1930's that was covered by wild greenery and almost hidden by a large red beech when we started to work on the project, our intention was to

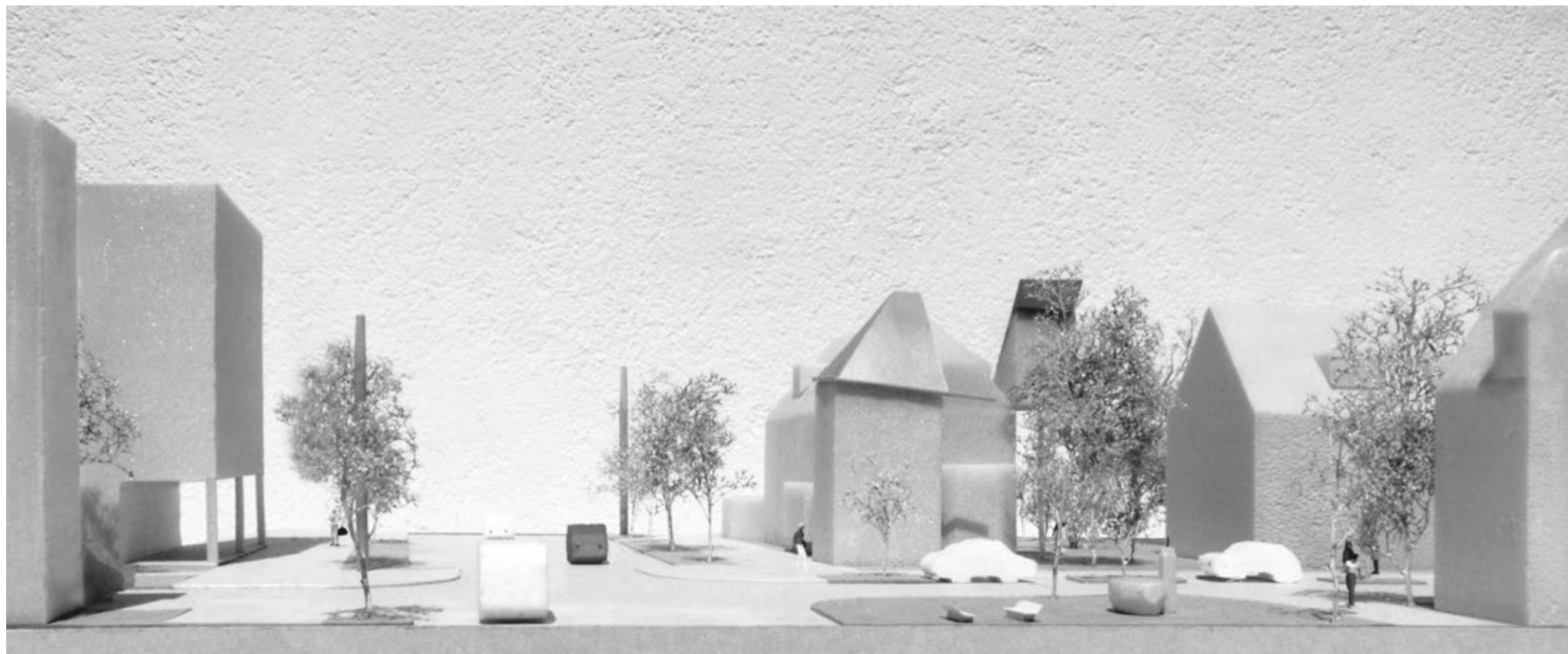
- (1) gently renovate / restore the existing structure
- (2) enlarge the building through a series of micro-scale additions that follow the logic of the existing spatial division into small rooms, and reach the maximum building envelope in a punctual manner
- (3) entangle the existing, the tree and the new in a joyful composition
- (4) improve the house's energy-balance by modernizing all technical installations using exclusively renewable energies (solar and geo-thermal); insulating the facade with an additional layer of volcanic plaster; and adding a new window layer on the inside to achieve a triple-glazing value
- (5) carefully relate the house to its surroundings, both natural and urban.

As a consequence of this gentle strategy of urban densification at least three fourth of the original facades remain intact, while the interior is mostly kept in its original state. Tuned in on the fine nuances of natural light and water's imminent powers, the contact with the building's ground is equally cautious: Only four point foundations discharge the structural forces of the new interventions, and, thus, minimize their impact on the sturdy red beech that stands in the plot's northwestern corner. In line with these considerations, the annexes are all conceived as lightweight structures: a prefabricated wooden construction with a cladding of 'recycled' fir boards in the new corner tower facing north; a hovering though massively built bay window with a pronounced horizontal expression that mediates between the crystalline formal language of the facade renewal, and the abstract window stripes of the office and factory buildings in the east; and lastly, steel for the filigree loggia with its

inclined south-facing roof consisting of transparent photovoltaic panels in the western garden. Both a 'dream'- and a 'tree'-house with regard to its relation to the house and the red beech, one reaches the loggia standing on one pillar only via a small bridge high up in the air. Connected to the sky through its reflective aluminium roof, as well, the new tower confidently accentuates like a scale-less, archetypal object the hybrid urban condition at this specific corner of the Wettstein neighborhood. As a contemporary answer to the corner-tower-typology of the Gründerzeit, it conciliates between the different urban scales, and tries to relate with the large free space of the public park on the opposite street side. Also from the inside precise visual connections are established to the exterior, for instance, to the fountain and its surrounding square at the park's southern edge.

Both corner-tower and loggia recline against the existing building and interlace with the later. Balance-like old and new condition one another, while in the interior the tower's new wooden spaces add a meditative calm to the existing rooms' patina. Spatially, the connections from the house to the additions were made in a careful manner by enlarging already existing facade openings only. Assimilated in color, the natural materials used and their sober expression, besides certain proportional approximations in terms of the window formats and the general form, the micro-interventions in combination with the old building and tree create a new 'ensemble' with spatially juxtaposed gable lines. At all times, the old house with its embedded history should in 'ghost'-like quality remain discernible (e.g. the characteristic half-hip roof remains legible in essential parts or the old wallpaper was maintained with its many traces of where pictures were once hung), while the new additions emphasize cer-

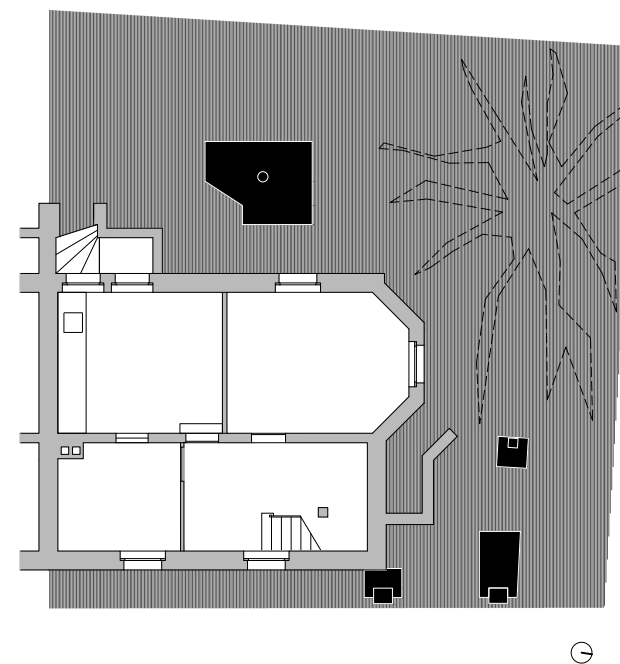
tain memories from the past – the existence of a no longer present, near-by wood factory, for instance, that served as an inspiring playground for the children that once lived in the house. Not engaging in a critical reconstruction, the design aimed at establishing a respect- and playful dialogue between existing and new, where each element maintains its own identity and voice in the process of their mutual activation. The beech was protected as well as possible throughout the entire process in order to become an integral part and cornerstone of the design: Like the tree, also the house grew by hand of the multiple extensions, which ultimately frame the beech's impressive stature, and engage the interior with its lively presence.





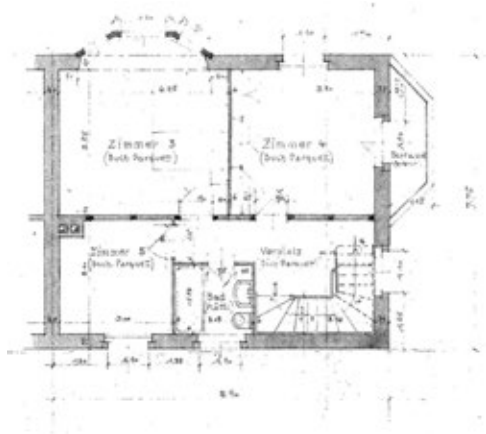
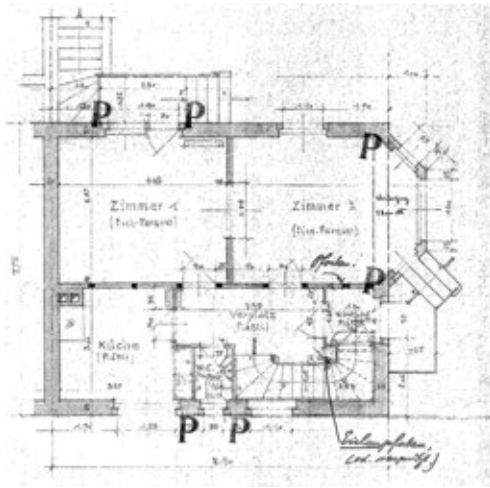


Basement 1:200 (W. Kehlstadt, 1930)

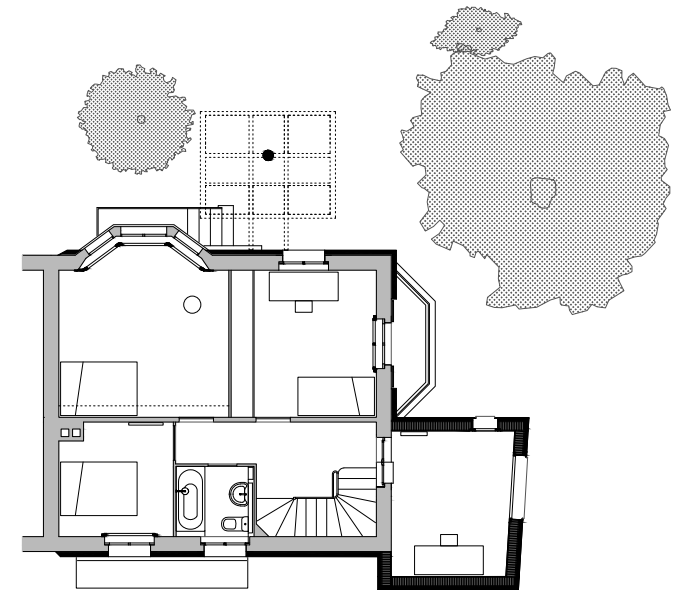
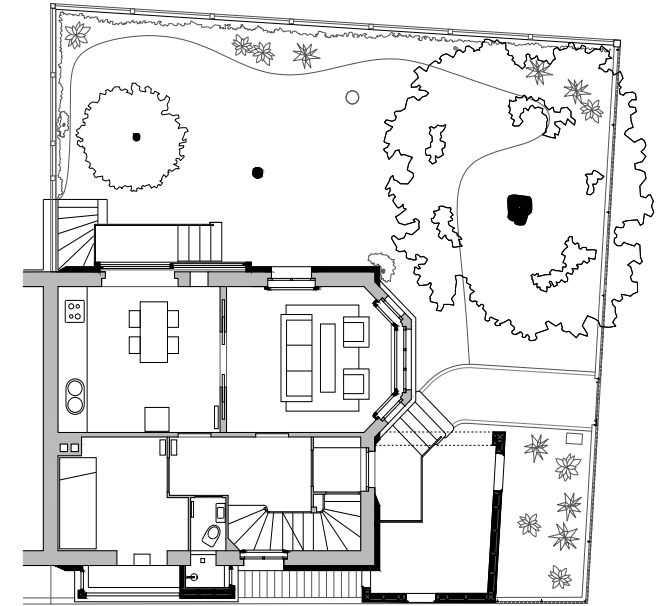


Basement 1:200



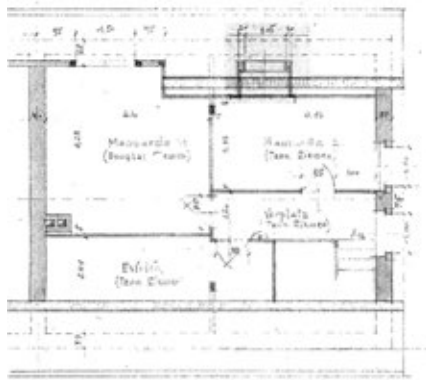


Ground Floor / 1st Floor 1:200 (W. Kehlstadt, 1930)

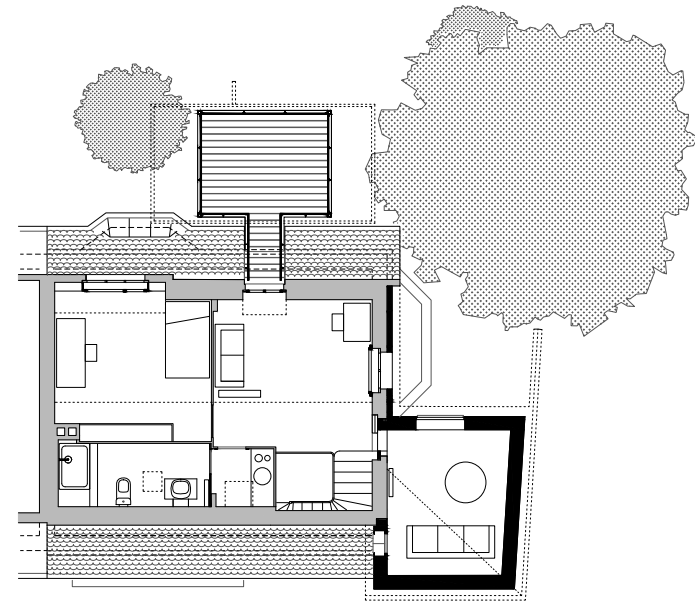


Ground Floor / 1st Floor 1:200

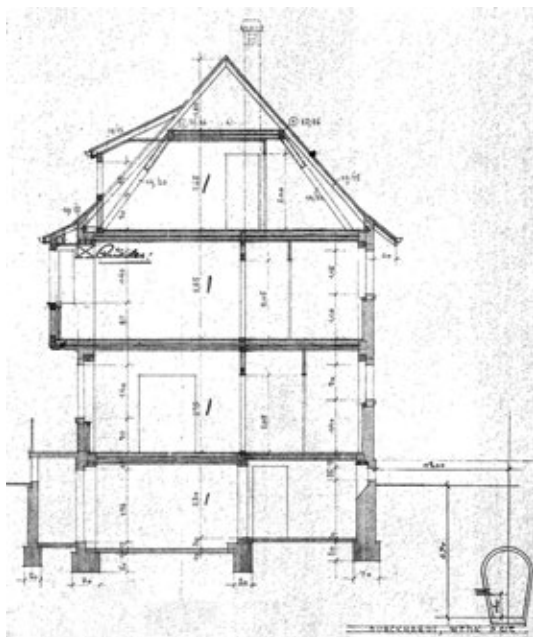




2nd Floor 1:200 (W. Kehlstadt, 1930)



2nd Floor / Roof 1:200



West-East Section 1:200 (W. Kehlstadt, 1930)



West-East Section 1:200









