



A New Quality Instead of Compromise: the Funeral Chapel of Házsongárd Cemetery in Cluj

The funeral chapel of Házsongárd Cemetery in Cluj, inaugurated in 2024, represents an attempt to create an intimate, sacred space from a forgotten part of the historical cemetery's fabric. The concept envisioned a space where the site's inherent constraints and the simplicity of materials and forms do not imply compromise, but instead create a new quality.

The chapel is the product of a dialogue with a site of complex conditions. On one hand, there is the Lutheran section of Házsongárd Cemetery, with its exceptionally dense patterning; on the other, a neoclassical guardhouse and storage building from 1877, which, along with other neighboring structures, was slated for demolition due to its deteriorated condition. The demolition was not complete, as the heritage authorities insisted on preserving the neoclassical façade, likely modeled on a monumental family crypt. The client, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Cluj-Napoca, requested a multifunctional building with a funeral chapel and a columbarium in the basement. It was also important for them to include office spaces within the building.

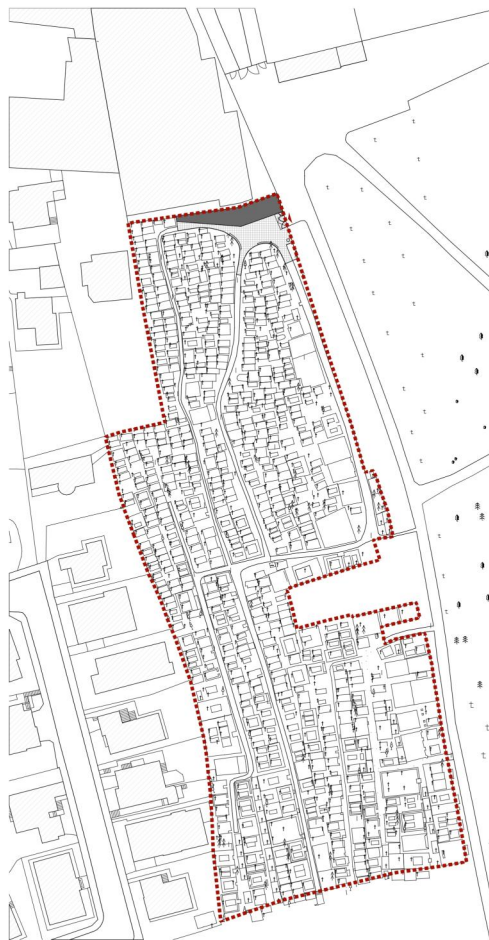
The building is a prime example of how architecture can create ideal conditions without relying on complex systems or costly materials. Its archaic simplicity and massing generate a distinctive atmosphere, and as one moves through the building, layer upon layer of experience gradually unfolds. Rising steeply above the preserved gable wall, the bell tower subtly interrupts the solidity of the monolithic block. To ensure that this massiveness does not become oppressive, solutions were found by harnessing the immense, enduring possibilities inherent in brick.

This building once again explores the full range of one of its defining materials: brick. The loosely laid raw brick cladding creates a rhythmic pattern across the façades, and by leaving the material exposed, it simultaneously allows the brick's natural character and earthy qualities to assert themselves. And this is not true only of the exposed brick; granite, wood, concrete, and corten steel are all left similarly raw and uncovered - each enriching the composition with its own color and texture. Brick reappears inside as well, in the structural elements: the vaulted ceiling of the refectory, built from brick, was laid using repurposed bricks from the former guardhouse.



SITE BEFORE INTERVENTION





SITE PLAN / 1:2000



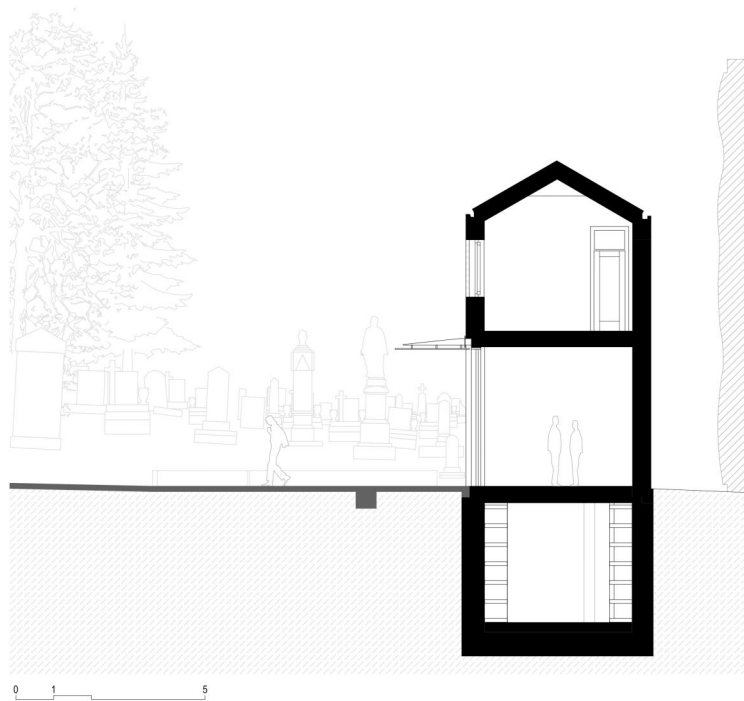
This expression of respect for the surroundings culminates in a sense of familiarity and the use of local materials, framed by modernity and refinement. While the aesthetics are undeniably clean and raw, the chapel's atmosphere is textural, open, and masterfully orchestrates transitional effects: darkness and light, enclosure and openness, life and death.

At first glance, the chapel's interior remains concealed, but as the heavy, manually operated corten steel door swings open, it reveals that the granite paving of the exterior forecourt continues seamlessly into the chapel space. The standout elements of the interior are the functional wooden sculptures: the pulpit, the crucifix, and the movable catafalque. A puritan, rigorously stripped-down space, yet one that does not lack intrigue. Taking full advantage of the site's orientation, light is used to convey meaning within the space: rays of sunlight entering from the east and west fall upon the crucifix and the coffin.

The funeral chapel must simultaneously convey both "heritage" and "future": the former is associated with the contemplation of mortality and tradition, while the latter is expressed through creativity, technology, and dramatic effects of light. The architectural solutions were conceived in the spirit of this duality. Although the building appears as a closed block from the outside, it behaves differently within: the openings are set behind the gaps in the raw brick cladding, allowing the interior spaces to receive ample natural light. Tradition is important on multiple levels, beginning with the design challenges and the respectful integration of the new building volumes into the existing environment. It is also evident in the reuse of bricks from the demolished structures and in the carved Kalotaszeg motif on the metal frame of the movable catafalque.

The seemingly simple spatial design thus conceals numerous intriguing details, suggesting a presence in the landscape that is at once assertive and modest, helping to reframe the perception of time and space. The building serves not only as the physical setting for ceremonies but also as their spiritual space: a zone where visitors can quietly reflect, leaving the noise of the outside world behind.





SECTION / 1:200

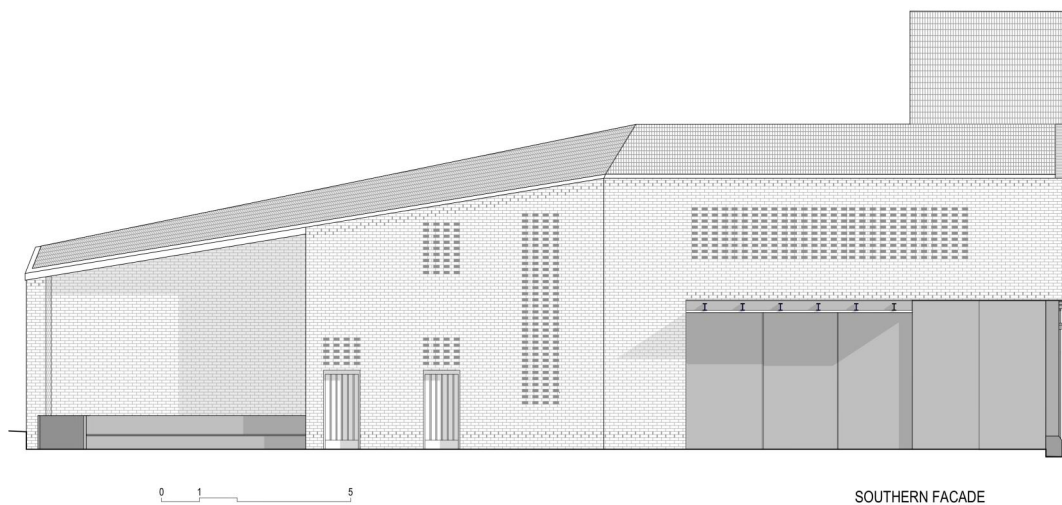






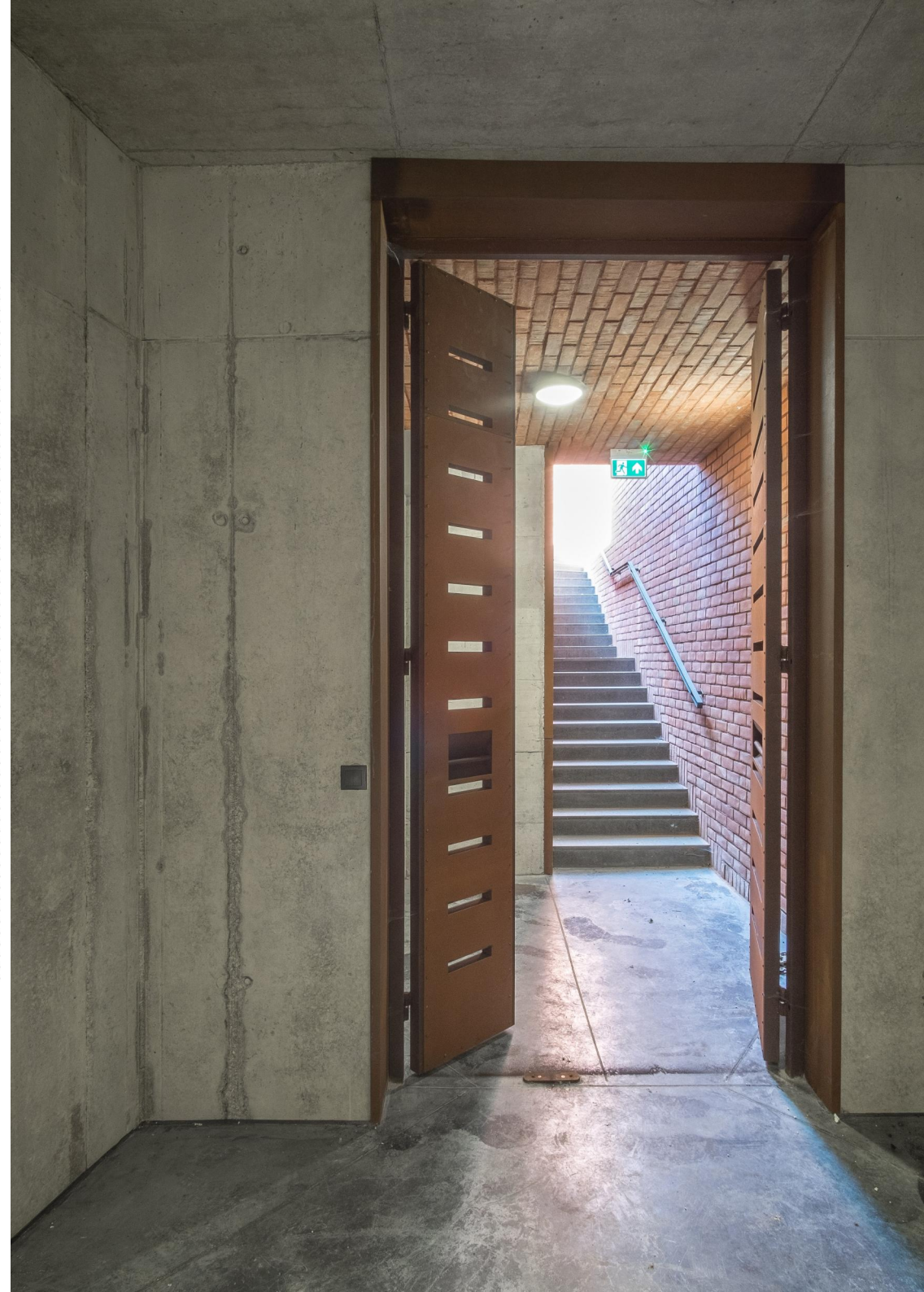
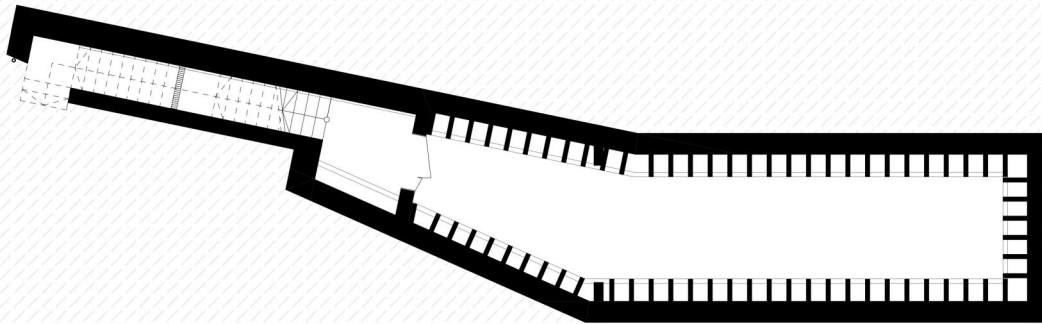


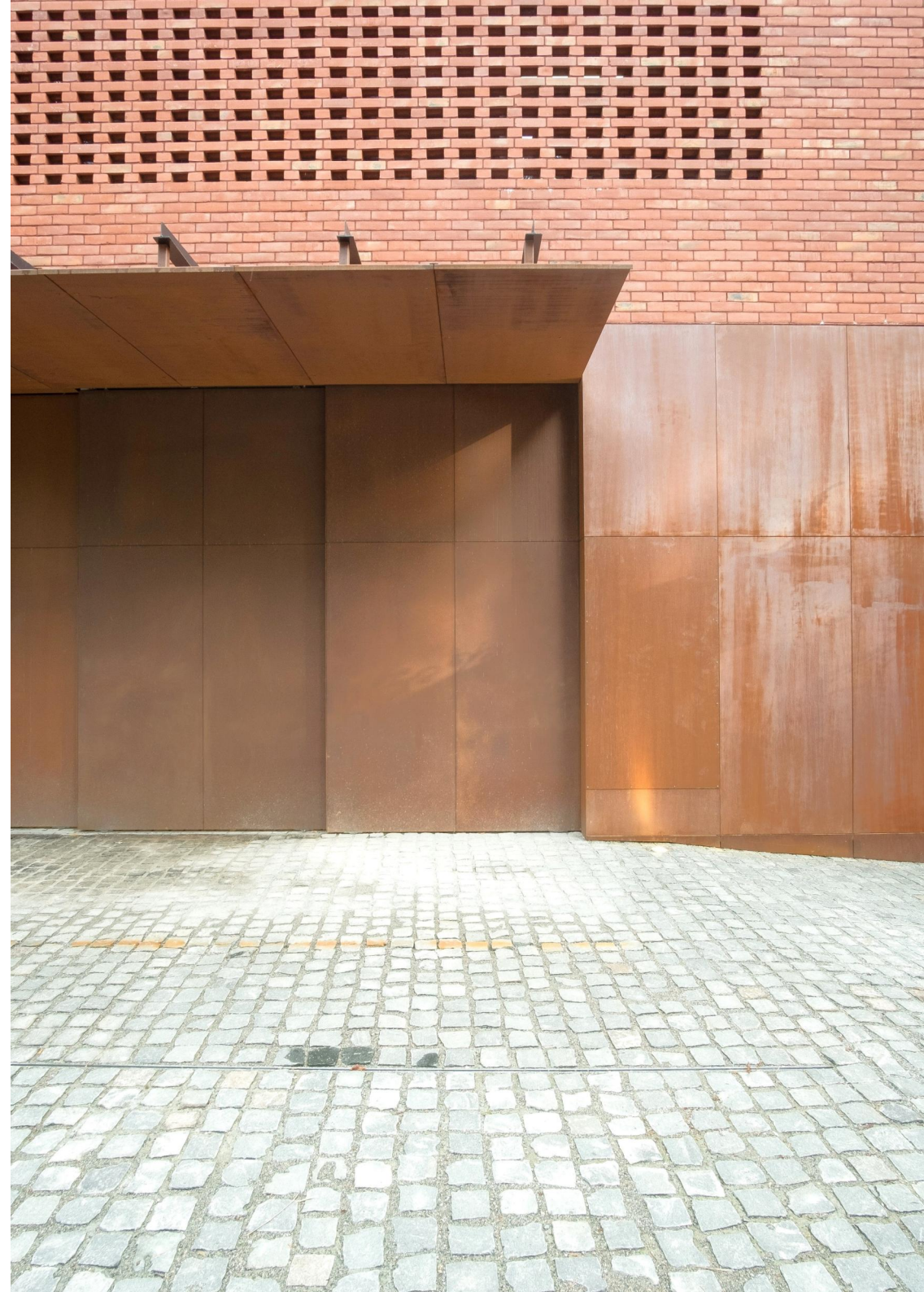
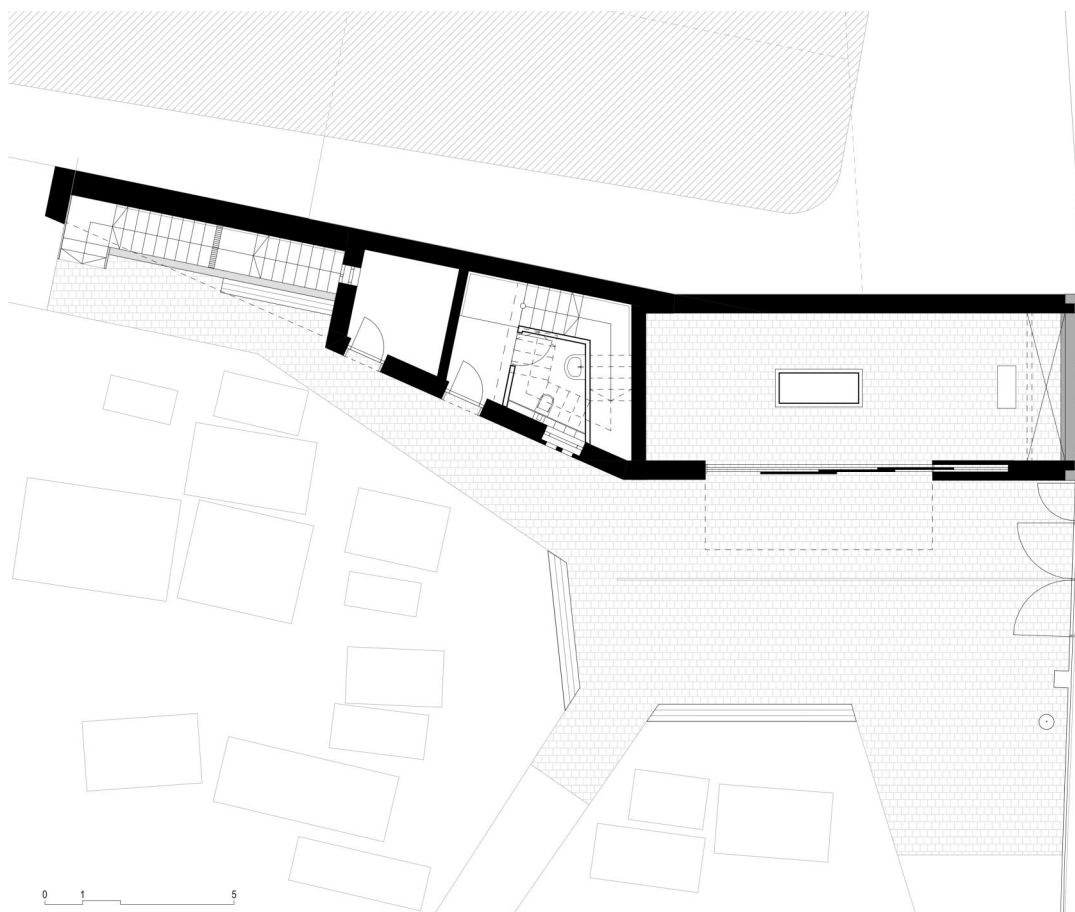
EASTERN FACADE



SOUTHERN FACADE

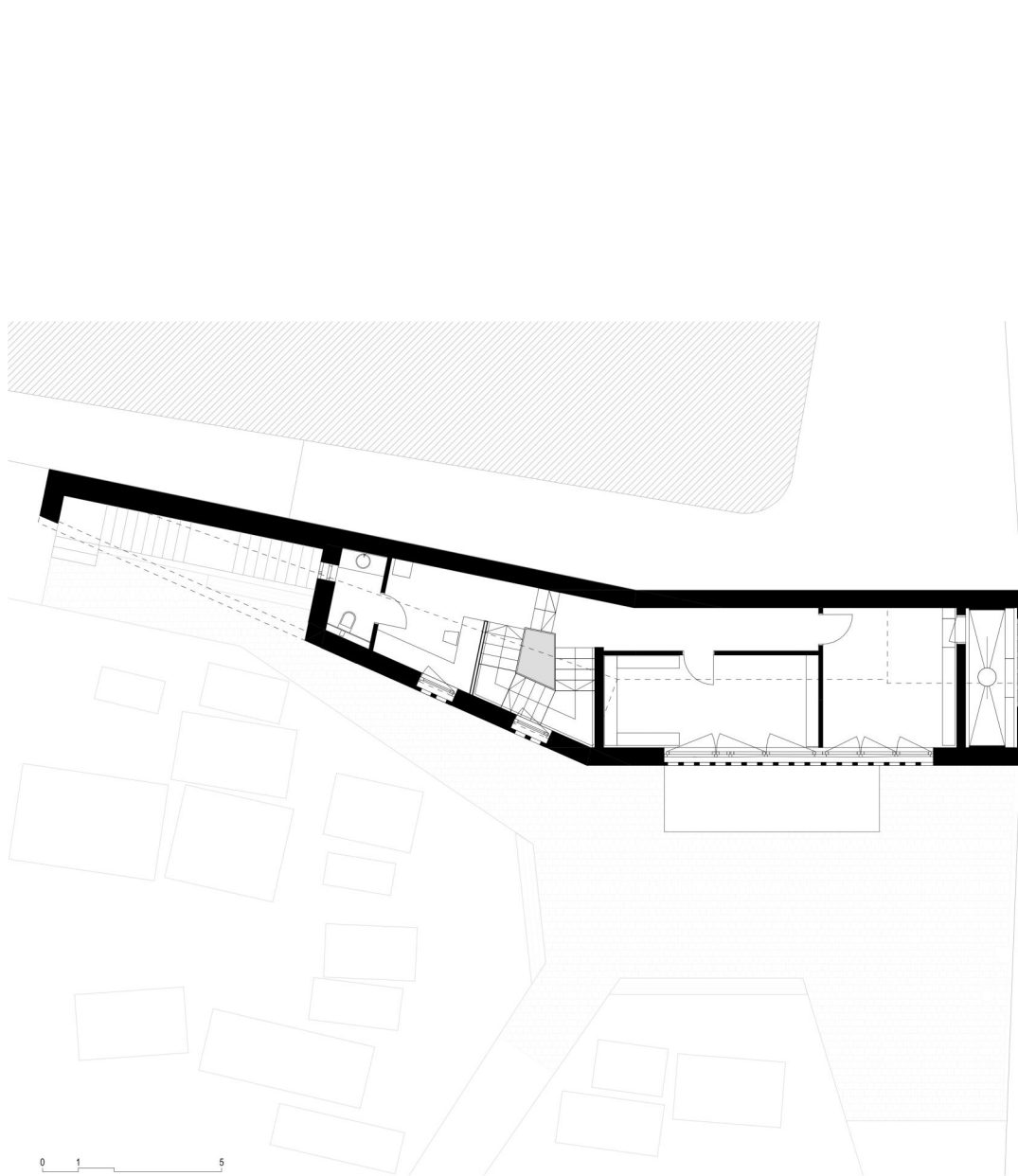






GROUND FLOOR PLAN / 1:200





FIRST FLOOR PLAN / 1:200



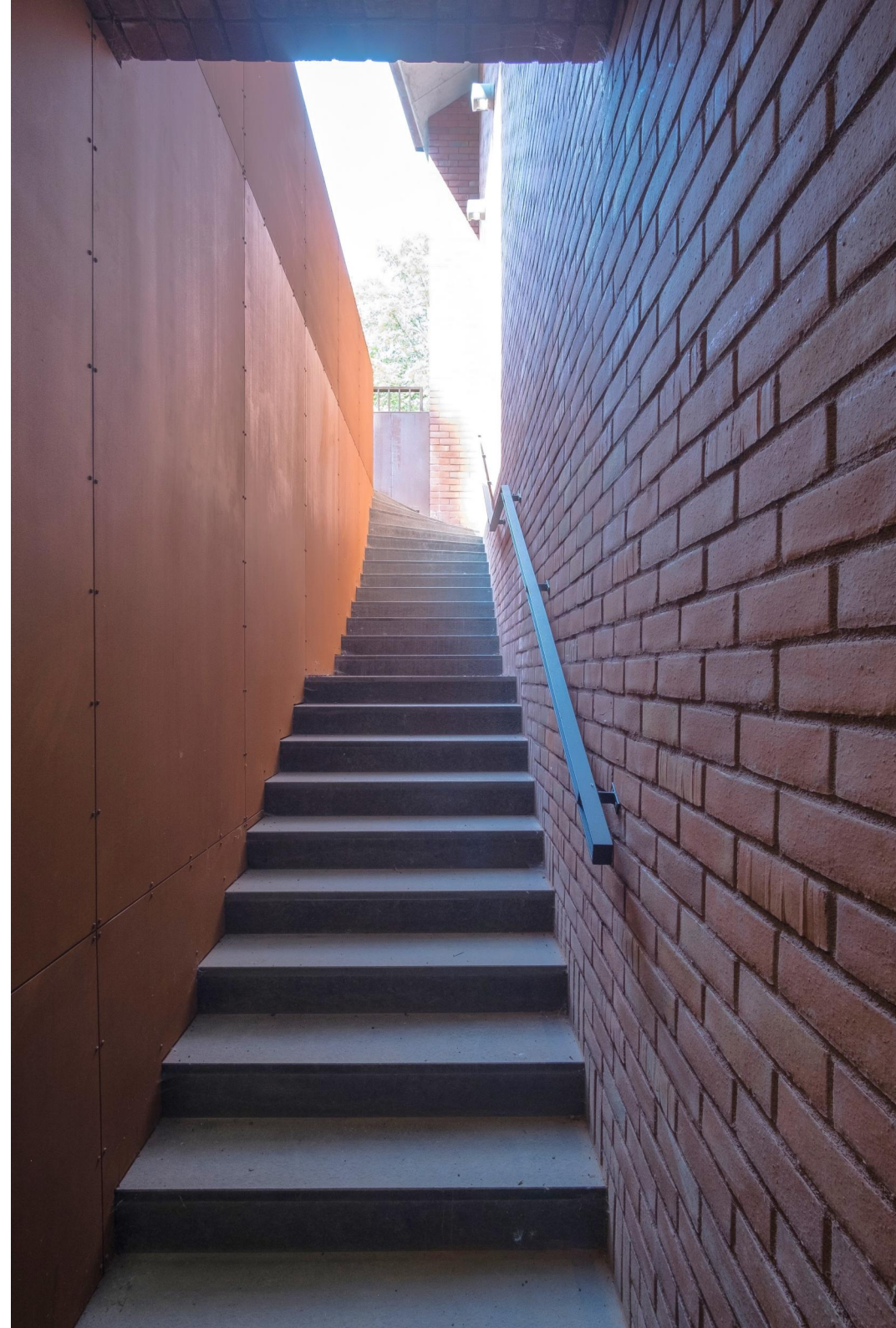


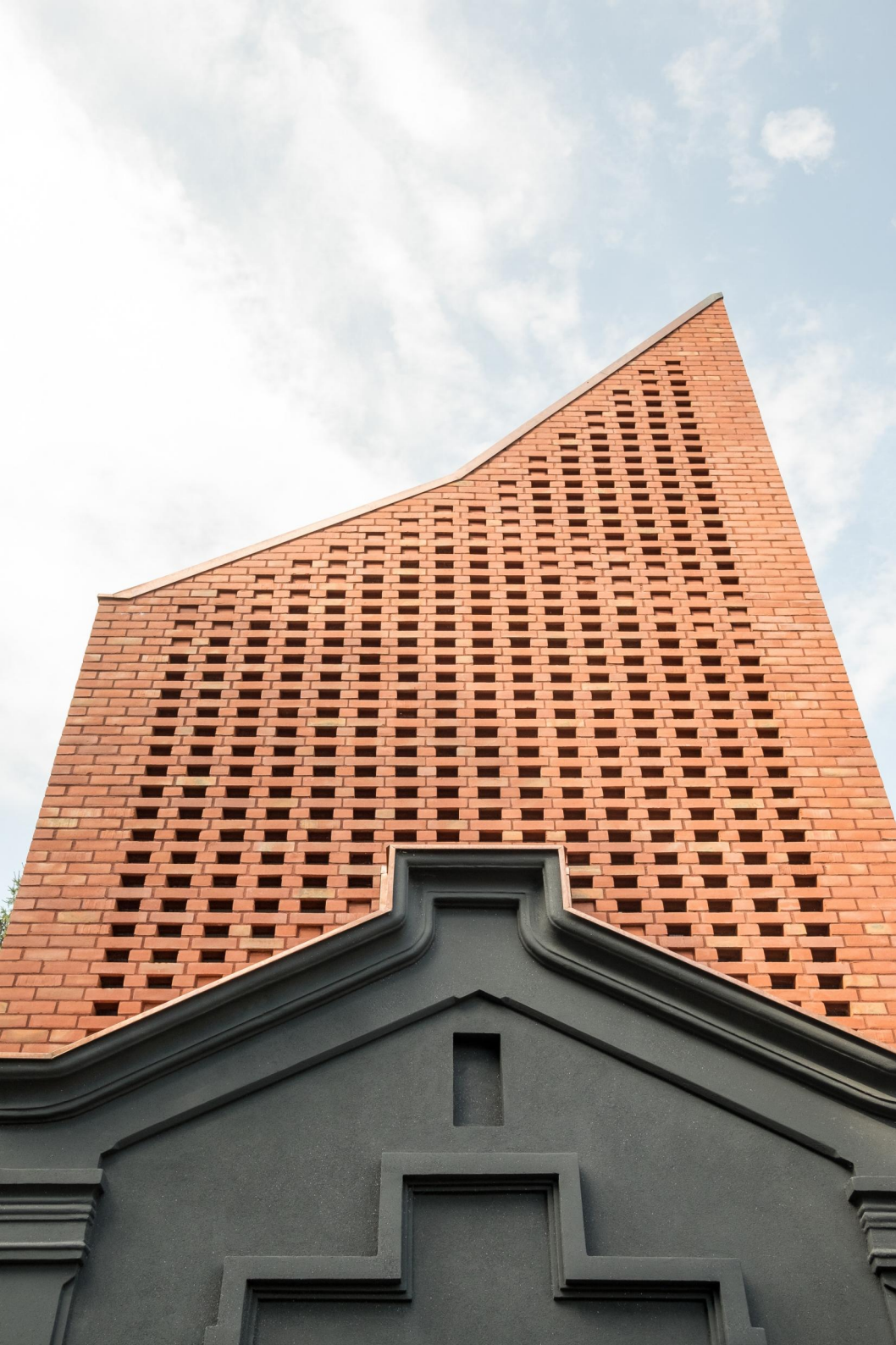
















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JÓZSA GY
CSALÁDI SÍRHELY

LAZARUS
CSALÁD

BORZEU TIBORNE
MÉRTŐSÁGI ELSŐBET
1904 - 1932
BORZEU TIBOR
1907 - 1932

III. nyugalószék
OLTYÁN PETER
HENTES MESTER
1890 - 1931
OLTYÁN SANDOR
HENTES MESTER
1891 - 1932
OLTYÁN JÓZSEF
MESZÁROS MESTER
1904 - 1932
Nyugalószékünk érembevétele
E sírkövet emeltette
edek maguk
OLTYÁN GYULA
1894 - 1948

