

loneliness and architecture

BINDER 1



abstract

Loneliness is becoming an even greater issue than in previous years. In 2019 the Norwegian government launched a strategy to prevent loneliness as a part of the Public Health Report.¹ The prime minister, Jonas Gahr Støre, pointed out that loneliness is a growing challenge in modern society.² The British economist, Noreena Hertz, states in her book, *The century of loneliness*, that the 21st century is the loneliest century we have ever experienced. As a result of this growing issue of loneliness, the U.S surgeon, Vivek H. Murthy, declared social isolation to be a public health epidemic and that loneliness is becoming one of today's greatest health threatening issues.³ Recent studies show that loneliness can be even more fatal compared to heavy smoking, obesity and physical inactivity.⁴

Loneliness is the feeling of being alone. Some people feel alone even though they are surrounded by other people, but most people feel alone because they experience social isolation. There are many reasons for social isolation in modern society. Urbanization is continuing to increase, more and more people live by themselves and are economically independent compared to only decades ago. Almost half of marriages in Oslo end in divorce, and with age both men and women experience to lose their life companion. Loneliness is a feeling that can rise in all phases of one's life and for many different reasons. But there is also an increasing group of people that experience loneliness all through their lives.

I will also add modern architecture as part of the problem. The architecture in the post-war years has contributed to a feeling of loneliness in urban areas. The pressure to meet population-increase in cities required high density of multistorey buildings and less focus on community aspects. Together with an increasingly focus on individuality in recent years, loneliness can occur as a consequence.

Being social is a fundamental component for feeling happy. Studies have shown that mental health is greatly affected by social and spatial surroundings. Taking action to relieve loneliness, can better the quality of life, good mental health and can even prevent premature death.

In Norway, approximately one million people live alone and 34,4% of those are above 67 years old, the age when most retire.⁵ In Oslo almost half of the inhabitants live alone, which makes Oslo the city with most single households in the country.

1 Det Kongelige Helse- og Omsorgsdepartement. (2019).

2 SSB (2021). Blir vi stadig mer ensomme?

3 Kim, G. (2017).

4 Østby, H. (2022)

5 SSB (2021). Nå bor over 1 million nordmenn alene

The worldwide life expectancy has increased in recent years and the senior demographic group grows. In 2020 the life expectancy for women in Norway was 84 years old and 81 years for men. By 2060 it is assumed that both genders will be expected to live beyond their nineties. The number of people above 67 years will increase from today's 670 000 to about 1.4 million by 2060.⁶

The intention of my project is to reduce and relieve involuntarily loneliness by proposing an architecture that encourages community and explores community living. My site is located in suburban Oslo, close to the important node Majorstuen. Based on the increasing group of citizens 60+ living alone in Oslo, my target group is men, women and couples older than 60 years old. In addition it is important that they actively seek community and togetherness in their way of living.

My personal inspiration to this project started with my aunt. She bought an old house to be torn down, where she instead wanted to create apartments with elements of community living. During development both architects and housing entrepreneurs opposed her plans, mainly because of commercial reasons. The economic consequences would be negative compared to ordinary, exclusive apartments west in Oslo. Unfortunately, she was convinced to leave her project. Instead it inspired me to continue her thoughts and wishes for alternative housing aimed for adults above 60 years old.

The feeling of belongingness and connection is in our nature and is important for our survival as human beings. With the growing awareness of loneliness there has been signs of a renaissance in community-living type of housing, both in Norway and many other countries. People are looking for housing where sharing and belonging is part of their everyday. Community-led living is one of those aspects that should be explored and challenged, in my opinion.

Architecture alone cannot solve loneliness, but I want to explore how architecture can help relieve it. In this thesis I will look into loneliness through literature and scientific articles, and explain how spatial environments and architecture can contribute to relieve loneliness. Some case studies will in addition support my thesis.

6 SSB (2020). Et historisk skifte: Snart flere eldre enn barn og unge

thesis

**How architecture can
contribute to relieve
loneliness?**

program

My project is for people above 60 years old who seek to create community with others. Many tend to have smaller networks as they get older. Retirement can in many cases lead to loneliness because they miss everyday interactions through work. Sickness, death of a loved one and divorces can also cause a stronger feeling of loneliness with ageing. Every age group can experience loneliness and social exclusion, but the older you get the more vulnerable you can be to mental and physical challenges in life. That is one of the reasons why I want to create housing for healthy “young-old” (60+) who actively seek to live together with others to create a meaningful feeling of togetherness.

I believe that random encounters and informal meetings can help against everyday loneliness which is what I seek to show in my project. I want to create homes and surroundings that encourages these encounters and interactions between the residents. My intention is that such architecture can create positive communication and a safe community between them.

I have worked with visual connection and sightlines, and the use of daylight as tools to create random encounters and informal meetings.

Having visual connection between the residents the threshold for socializing will be lower and encourage interacting. Seeing activities outside your front door and knowing that you can easily join if you want to, can bring a sense of belonging as well as spontaneous interactions between residents. This can also contribute to safety and inclusiveness.

I have sought to create generous outdoor areas, one atrium and a terrace in addition to green areas. I have made this priority because the apartments are fairly small and because I believe that outdoor areas are natural places for gatherings. Common areas inside, like shared kitchen, living room and dining room are available all year, but especially for the colder seasons.

Common house

Living room (1st floor)
Living roomd (ground floor)
Dining room (multipurpose room)
Kitchen
Laundry room
Guestroom
Common storage unit
WC

Apartments

Living room
Kitchen
Bedroom
Bathroom

Other

Bike shed
Workshop
Greenhouse
Parking space

Numbers

Site: 1 968 sqm
Floor area: 546 sqm
Floors: 2
Apartments: 6
Apartment: 51 sqm
Common rooms: 240 sqm



Model 1:50

atrium

The atrium was the first building block for the design process, and it soon became the “heart” of the project. Early in the process I was inspired by Norwegian “klyngetun”. A tun is often used to describe a spatial arrangement of houses. It is buildings concentrated around an outdoor space.

In my project the atrium is meant to be what connects the residents. To leave or enter the apartment, they all have to pass through the atrium. The atrium is where the random encounters happens more than anywhere else. I imagine that sunlight is also important for a duration of such a random meeting. Therefore I have been very conscious of how the sunlight meets the atrium during the day.

The atrium is not only connecting the apartments but also connecting the apartments to the common rooms. The advantage of an atrium is the visual contact it creates. I believe if people see each other on a daily basis, the threshold to knock

on the neighbor’s door becomes each time lower. One of the serious problems with modern apartment housing is that neighbors never see each other, and sometimes do not even know that they are neighbors.

I have also had thoughts about how my project, if succeeding, can have positive repercussions on the whole neighborhood. Maybe also all the other neighbors can be included in summer parties and other festivities.



Model 1:50

common house

The common house in my project plays an important role in how the inhabitants can create community. It sticks out from the building mass and creates an immediate impression when entering the atrium. The idea is maximum availability to encourage the residents to use the rooms regularly. The common house consists of a kitchen, two living rooms, dining room (multipurpose room), guestroom and a laundry room. In addition I have designed two small workshops, one by the bike shed and one next to the storage units. A greenhouse is also for common use, located on the ground floor.

My intention is that the residents feel that the common rooms are part of their homes. Almost like an extension of their private space. With that I mean that common rooms are not meant only for big events, but more for everyday use.

Instead of having one big common room I have chosen to have three smaller ones. This gives the

common rooms more flexibility for the residents as they have different needs. Some rooms can also have various functions.

There are many spaces where random encounters can take place, like picking up your mail or parking your bike. Having a common laundry room can also make an opportunity for those meetings.

apartments

There are three buildings arranged around the atrium, and in each of them there are two apartments. The apartments are identical and counts 51 square meters each. The apartments are equipped with a bathroom, kitchen, bedroom and living room. There can be up to two inhabitants per apartment, which means a minimum of residents to live here are six and a maximum are twelve.

There are what I call extroverted rooms, and introverted rooms in the apartments. By extroverted I mean rooms that connect to the atrium, and the introverted are further back and dividing the apartments in a front part and a back part.

The extroverted space is the kitchen, and the introverted are the living room and bedroom. The extroverted space is faced towards the atrium, and gives the opportunity to have an overview of activities there. The introverted spaces can be for a wish to retreat.

With a kitchen facing toward the atrium with double doors that can open towards it, makes it is easy to open your home for neighbors that might pass by or stop for a chat. This indoor-outdoor effect is both social and can give you a feeling of more space.

A study shows that those who have private balconies in high-rise buildings are less social than others, and those who most frequently use the parks in the cities are those with no balconies. It is important not to forget the big impact choices of design can have. Deliberately I have chosen to design apartments with no private balconies.





West
Model 1:200



Site model
Model 1:200



Facade facing west
Model 1:50



Atrium
Model 1:50



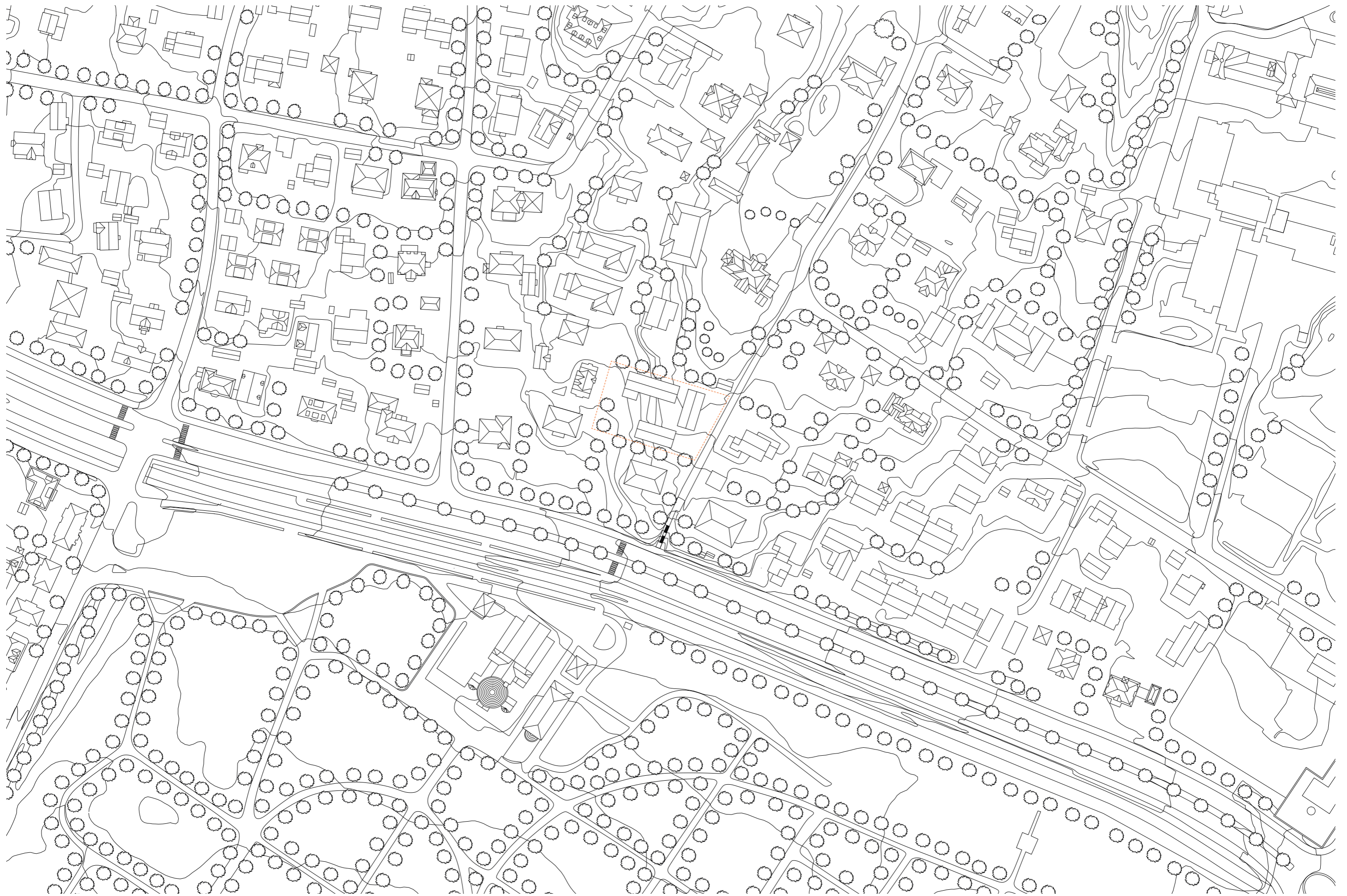
Common house
Model 1:50



Ground floor
Model 1:50

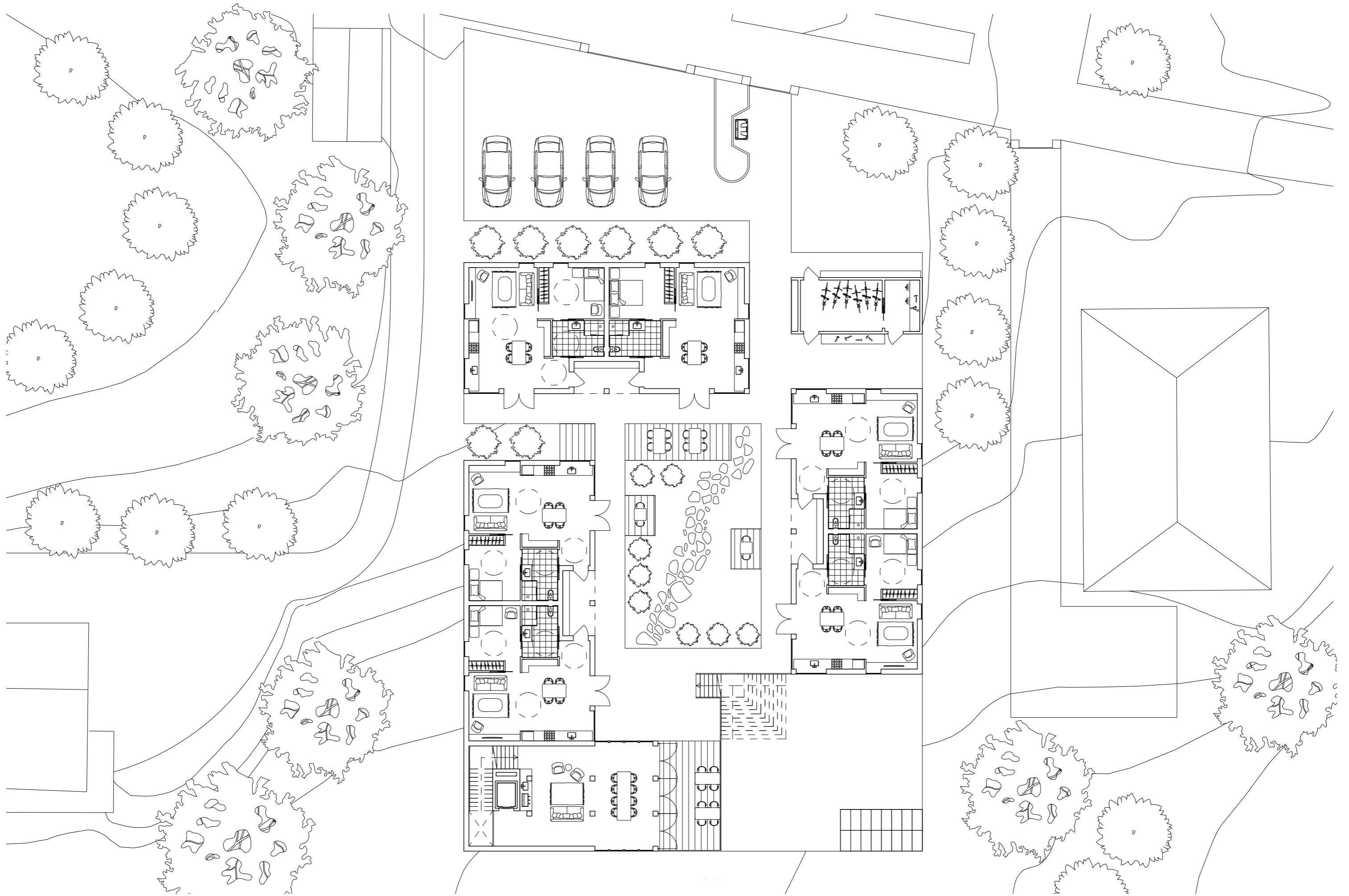


Facade facing north
Model 1:50



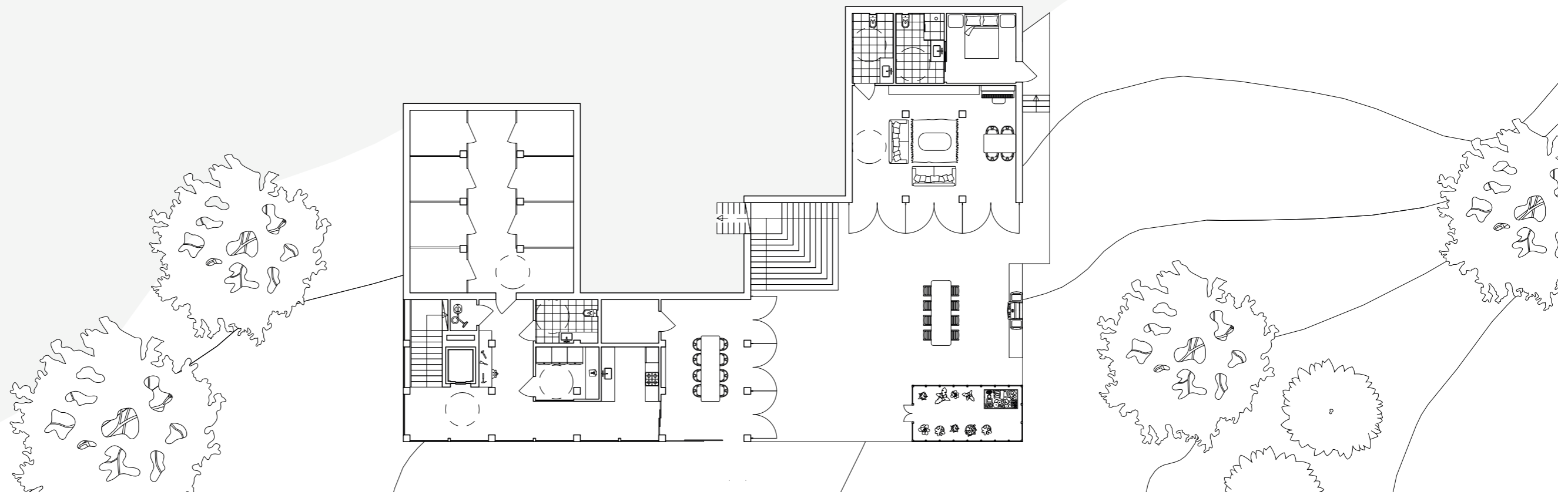
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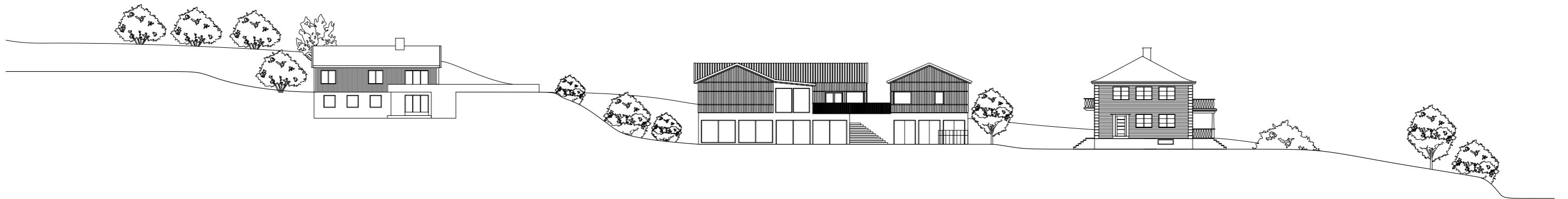
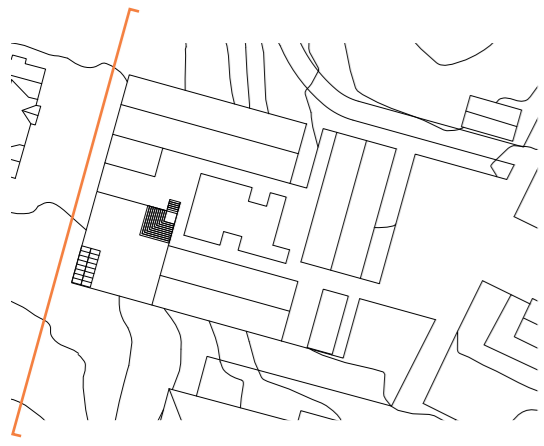
Floor plan // 1st floor



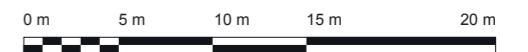


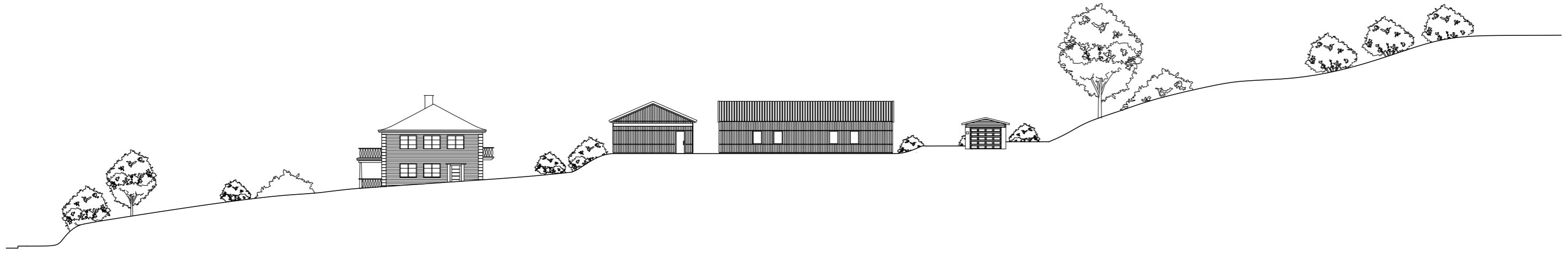
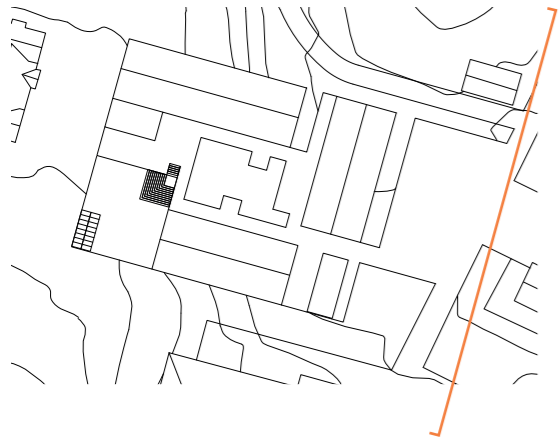
Floor plan // 1st floor





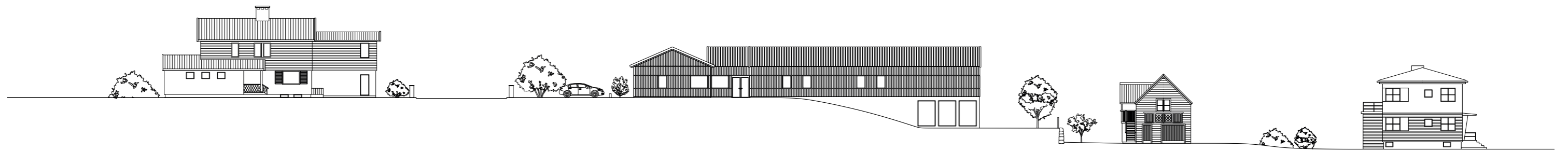
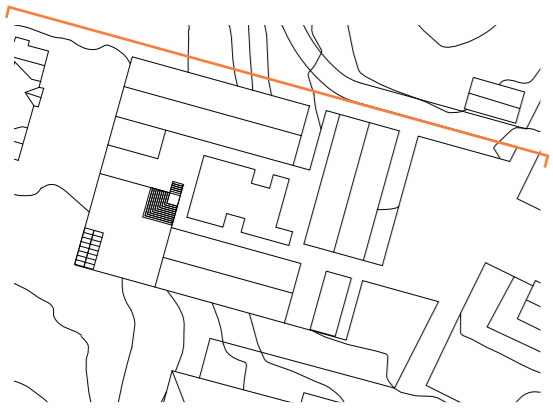
Elevation // West





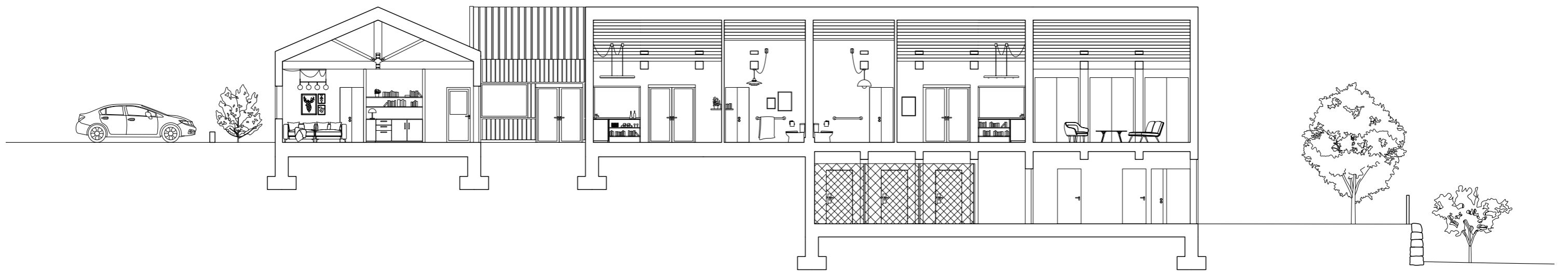
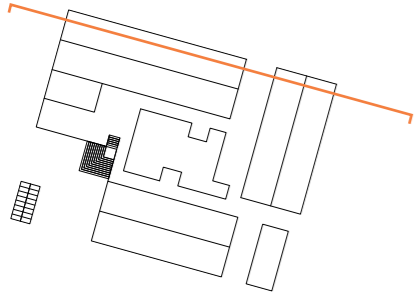
Elevation // East





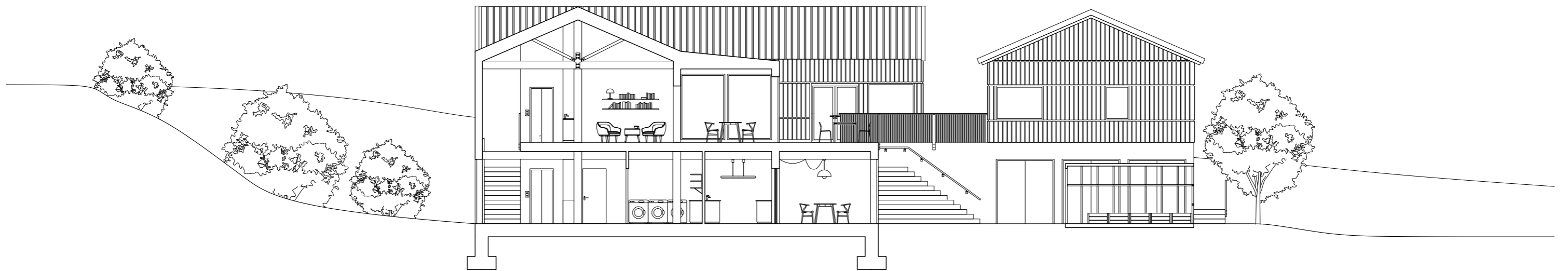
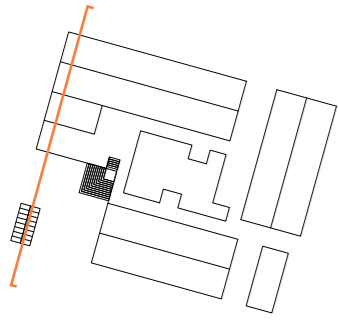
Elevation // North





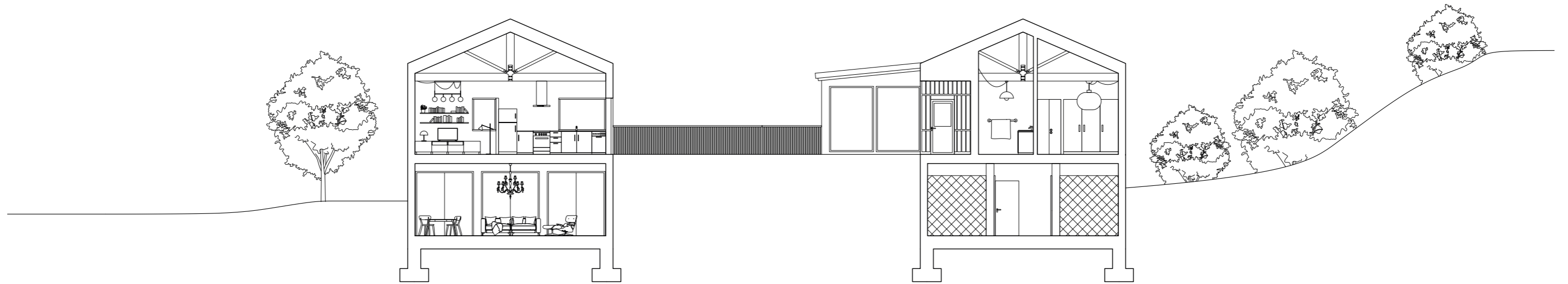
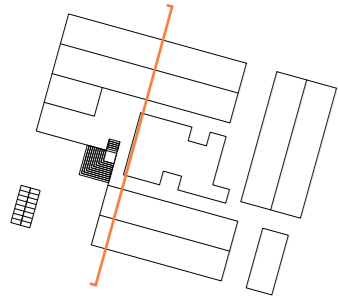
Section // North





Section // West





Section // East





Illustration // Arriving the atrium

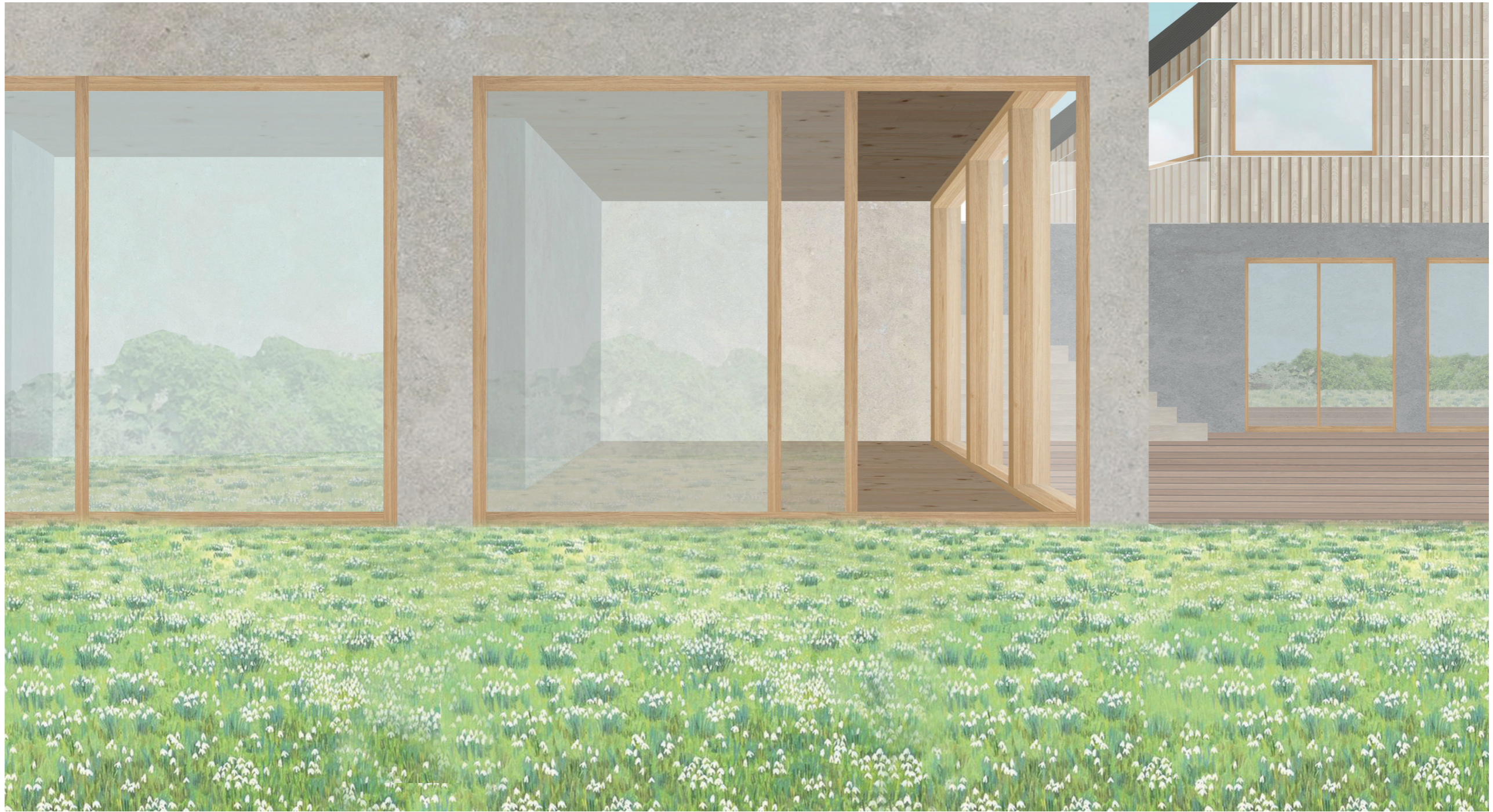


Illustration // Ground floor





Render // Looking out to the atrium

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