

# FAMILIAR STRANGERS

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Light touch Marriott

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# STRANGER IN THE CITY

The Marriott hotel, originally known as Hotel Zürich, was built in 1972 as a first-class hotel in the city. Geared towards international travelers, the hotel was an ambassador of Swiss design and every detail down to the carpet pattern were designed by the architects Lehmann, Spögl and Morf. A selection of artworks made by artists from Zurich were also integrated into the design and guests could encounter various bronze sculptures by Erwin Rehm, decorated lift doors by Hanny Fries or a large tapestry by Lissy Funk. Apart from the guest rooms, the hotel further included a conference room, two restaurants, a bowling alley, a gym and a bar. The second building, called "la résidence", opened in 1990 as a luxurious extension to the main building and provided additional guest rooms, several congress rooms and a restaurant.

Apart from international tourists and businesspeople, the hotel was also popular among the inhabitants of Zurich. They would finish their night out in the traveler's bar situated next to the main entrance or would gather between friends and spend the evening playing bowling. The John Valentine Fitness club was also one of the first fitness clubs in the city, and a monthly pass granted outsiders access to its gym hall, swimming pool, sauna, and solarium.

In 1997, Marriott International took over the management of the building and adapted its look to the interior design familiar to Marriott clients all over the globe. In order to increase profits, the swimming pool was dismantled, and a larger congress room was built instead.

Nowadays the building stands as a stranger silhouette in the cityscape. Even though it remains the highest building in the area, few people really know what happens inside or even what it looks like. The bowling alley has been abandoned and the bar has become one of the multiple anonymous hotel bars populating the city. In summer, the Limmat bank next to the hotel is a popular swimming spot among locals. But the access to the hotel remains hidden and the facade hovers over the swimmers, with its anonymous grid of closed curtains.



postcard of the city of Zurich (unknown date)



situation plan

# RE-DESCRIBING THE HOTEL

"To re-describe is not to describe a state of things, nor a simple passage, but to equip an object with a relational thickness that marks the places where the things differ slightly and thereby become."  
*Ariane d'Hoop, Habiter le trouble*

When looking online at the hotel Schatzalp in Davos, the staged photographs showcase numerous objects hinting at the diverse activities that a guest could expect from their stay. On tables, croissants and orange juice, or glasses of red wines and bread promise pleasant moments around meals. Hiking shoes, bikes and binoculars suggest long excursions into the surrounding nature, while books and games provide alternatives if the weather happens to be capricious.

On the contrary, the Marriott pictures are spotless: the restaurants and congress bars are empty, and the reception desks are unattended and devoid of any signs. It is as if the hotel had never been used. For Marriott, nothing should be out of place and everything is planned down to the smallest details. "At 15 feet, make eye contact and smile. At 5 feet, maintain eye contact and say « good morning/evening »..."

However, at times, things differ slightly and disrupt the immaculate, deserted images of the hotel. Every day, things such as a tray on the floor, or clothes hanging on the windows show signs of life. A room might not be booked and stays messy a bit longer. The lobby might be in renovation and a makeshift panel will not entirely hide the work taking place behind. The stay of each guest will also be marked by its interaction not only with the staff, but with the other strangers sharing the building. Suddenly, the building is showed under a new light and becomes something else than what Marriott usually advertises.

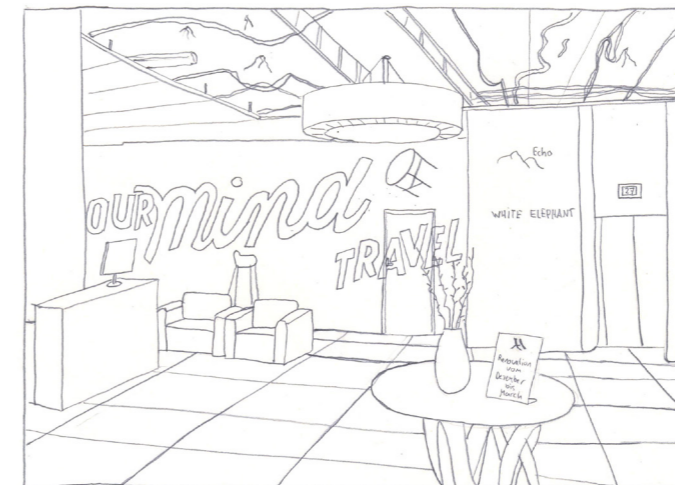
By re-describing the hotel through these moments, things start to differ, become ambiguous or are confronted with each other. Above all, they make perceptible the potential of the various rooms to be different.



hotel Marriott, reception desk



hotel Marriott, lobby



daily disruptions in the hotel



Schatzalp hotel, advertising for Swissair magazine

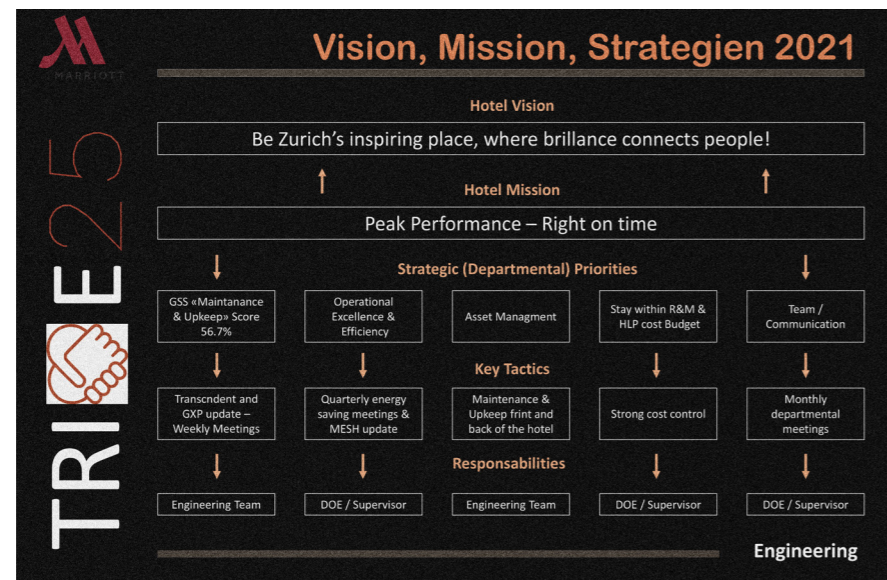
# FAMILIAR STRANGERS

In 2021 and still in the middle of a pandemic, the Marriott hotel has again an occupancy rate close to the 80% it used to have. Guests are still booking rooms and attending conferences. The model of international chain hotels that could have been thought soon-to-be obsolete has not said its last word and is still thriving. In a few years, the lease between the building owner and Marriott will most likely be renewed. Furthermore, the sustainability goals set by Marriott for 2025 didn't address the politic of renovating the hotel every seven years. Guest rooms will continue to be changed as usual, starting soon by the ones situated in "la résidence".

Nothing encourages the machine to behave differently and it will still work as it does in many other places around the world. But what if Marriott were to change its managing style ? Instead of erasing traces, Marriott could learn from the moments of disruption while still achieving its vision for the future to "be Zurich inspiring place, where brilliance connects people."

"Familiar strangers" proposes a scenario that slowly transforms the hotel and its management style, learning from the daily disruptions and misuses. Alterations spread over time are accumulated on top of each other, creating and discovering other uses of the building. Instead of renovating one building at a time, renovating floor by floor, or room by room, allows for each action to feeds the transformation process and transmits information onto the next steps. After all, embracing change is one of the core values of the company.

Like stage sets, hotels and their lobbies catch attention and provide a backdrop for human interactions. Rather than forcing contact between guests, a new model is put into place by letting visible traces of usage: objects are slowly put on display, voluntarily or not, and become screens onto which imaginative stories of lives past and present can be projected. Temporary kinships are created, and the building and its users becomes familiar strangers. Gradually, the rooms are transformed into something that can be different and the building is reconnected to the city, fulfilling Marriott's vision for the hotel.

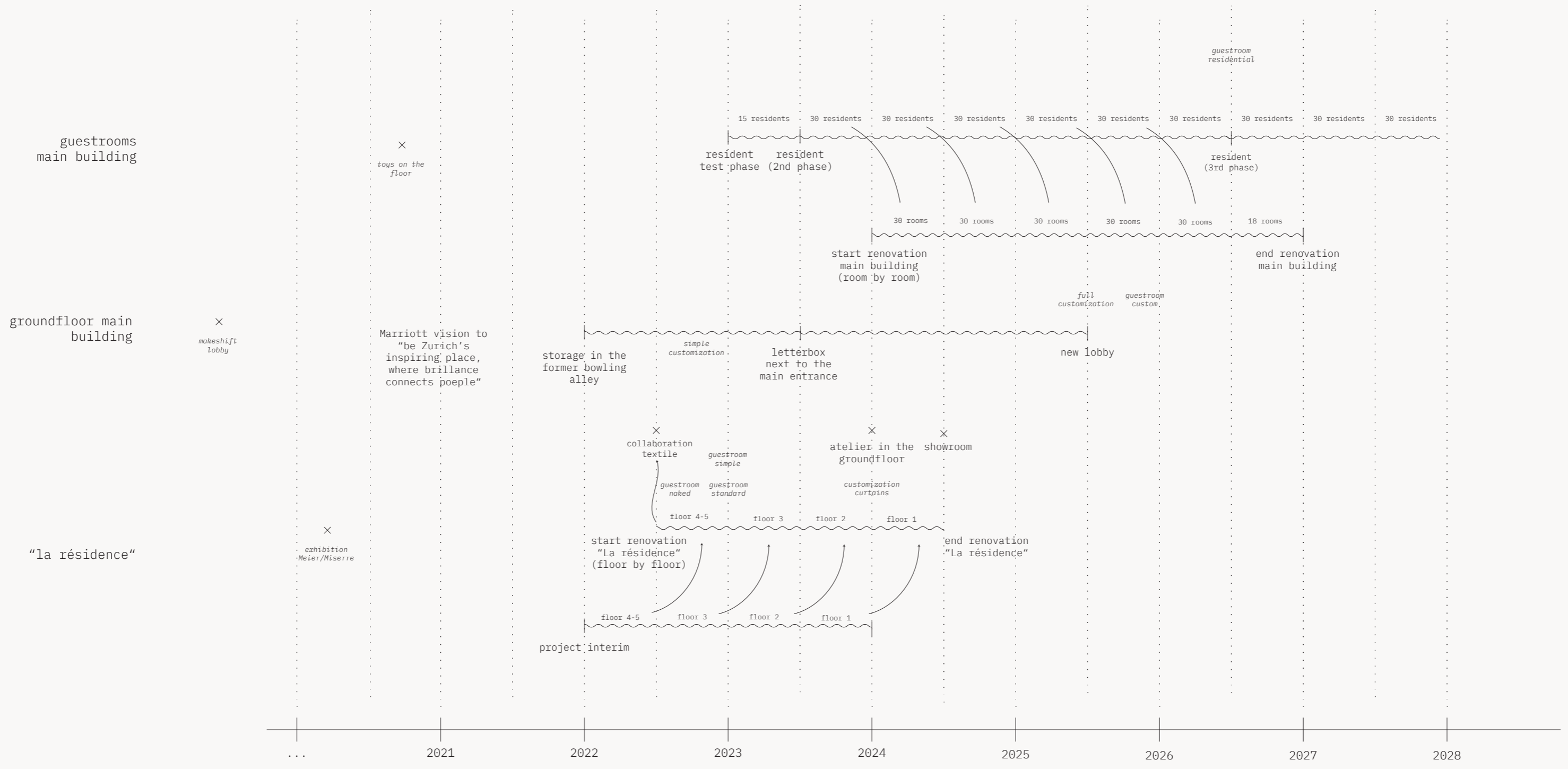


Marriott vision for 2025

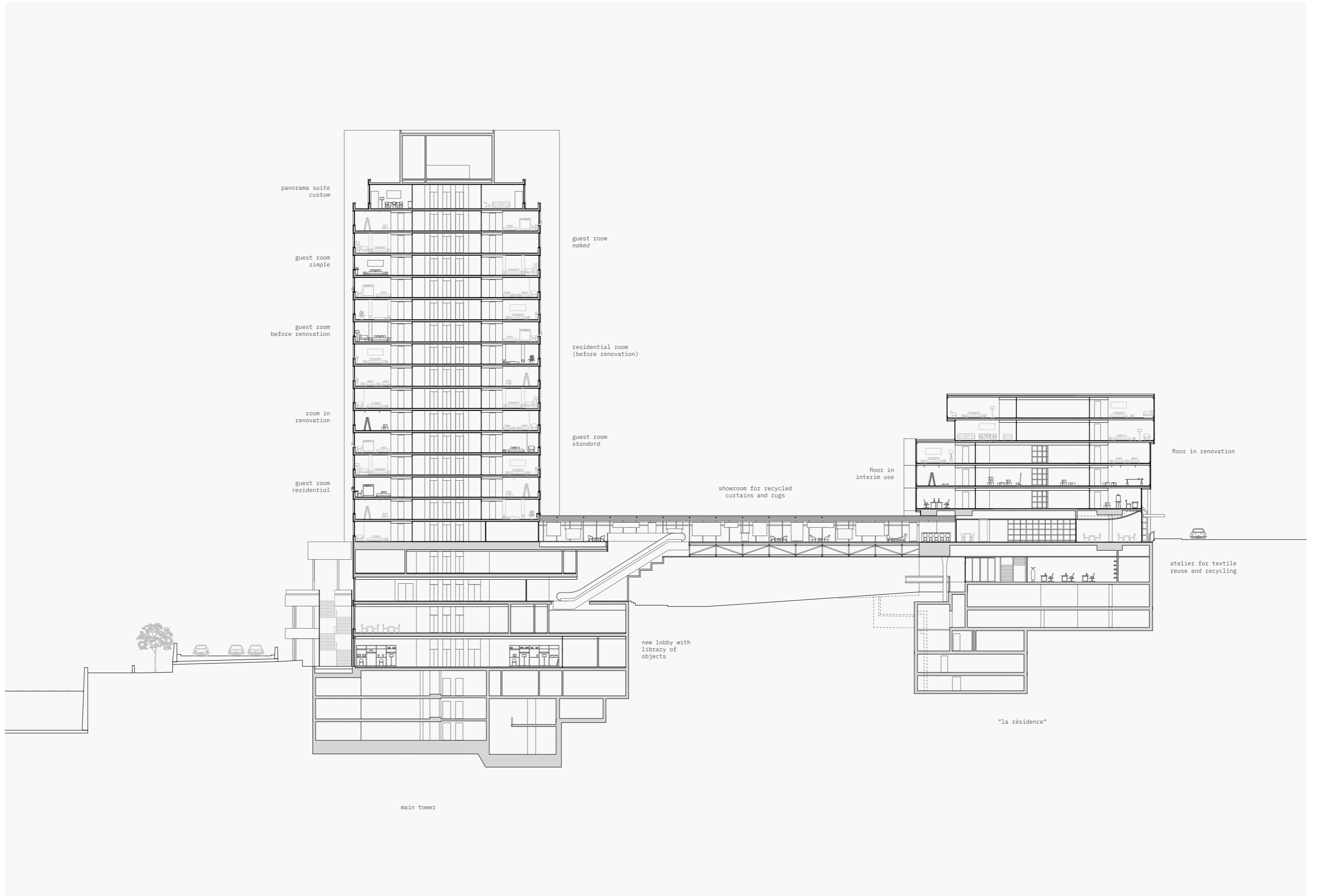


The Hotel, Room 28, Sophie Calle, 1981

potentials to be different



timeline of the hotel transformation



section with various stages of the hotel transformation

# 1. PROJECT INTERIM

Starting in 2022, and with the uncertainty of the economic situation, Marriott decided to wait and to only renovate "la résidence" one floor at a time. Even though the hotel was almost back to its 80% of occupancy rate, it still meant that about 20% of the guest rooms were staying empty. Influenced by what has been done in other places, Marriott decided to rent out one floor to project interim and to wait 6 months before renovating this floor. Starting from the top, and going a floor down every 6 months, the rooms in interim use could act as a buffer zone between the renovation work and the regular guest rooms.

As the renovation started, some textile workers, which had been using the hotel as interim office, decided to collaborate with Marriott and to repair and recycle the textiles heavily present in the room design, rather than throwing it away. They also suggested that the carpet could be re-used as rugs for future rooms.

Textile was by far not a stranger theme in the building. Long before, the place used to be a fabric dyeing factory and the material had also been a topic largely worked with for the first interior design of the hotel. The carpet motif had been carefully designed by the original architects and a large colorful tapestry made by Lissy Funk was ornamenting the foyer of the conference room.



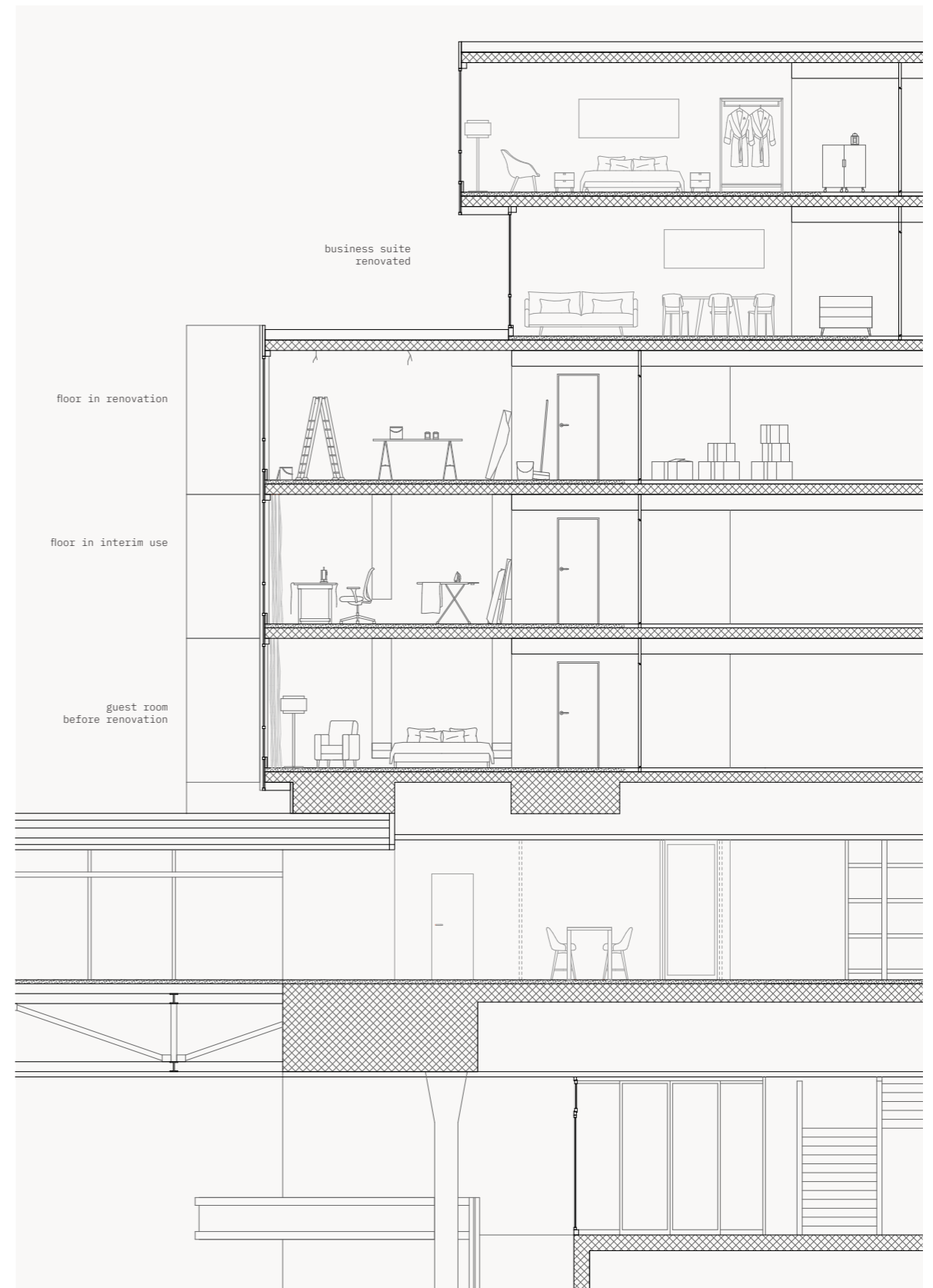
tapestry from Lissy Funk



view of the fabric dyeing factory, 1878



curtains and carpet in the guest rooms



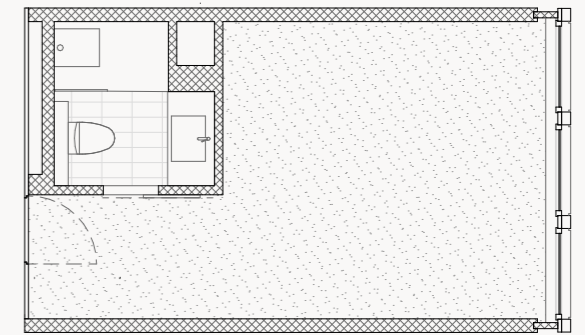
section of la résidence during the renovation

In response to the guests' feedback, the new design of the rooms bore no carpet, which was mostly found old-fashioned nowadays, and used only rugs, some of them being recycled from the previous design. Instead of choosing wooden floor, which gets damaged quite fast, the rooms were brought back to a naked state, with the damaged concrete polished and sealed. The customization of the guest room had already been started in 2005, by adding different size pillows on beds. In order to further continue the personalization of the guest rooms, Marriott introduced two different types of room : simple and standard. While the standard one kept the same amount of furniture as the previous design, the simple room allowed for more space in the guest room, while renouncing to elements such as the desk or lounge chair, since a lot of customers preferred to spend time and work in the lobby rather than in their guest room.

Since some of the furniture could be re-used or could still be a replacement in case anything in the other rooms broke, the former bowling alley was transformed into a storage facility for the furniture of the various guest rooms.



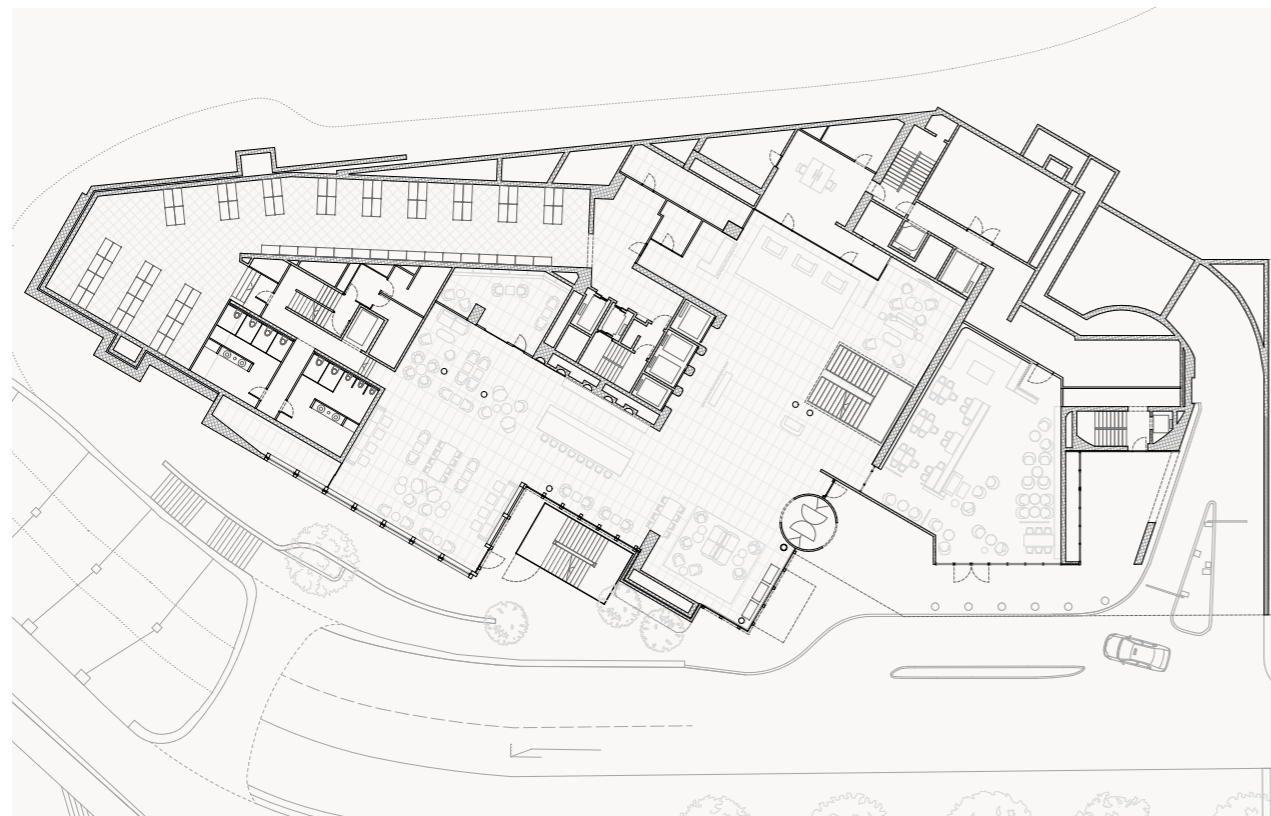
Guest room in renovation



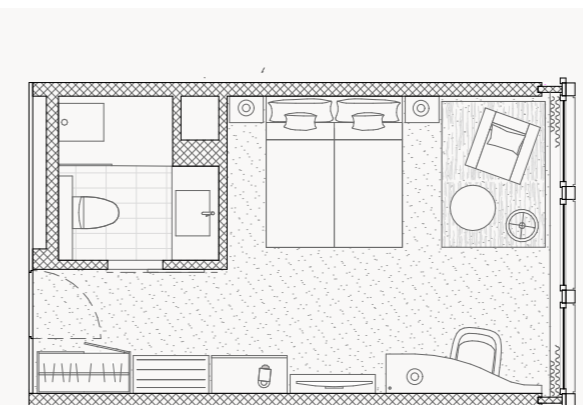
Room amenities

- Add/Remove piece of furniture
- Add/Remove smaller equipment
- Add Decoration (curtains, artwork,...)
- Rent devices or furniture

guest room *naked*



Groundfloor of the lobby with storage in the formal bowling alley

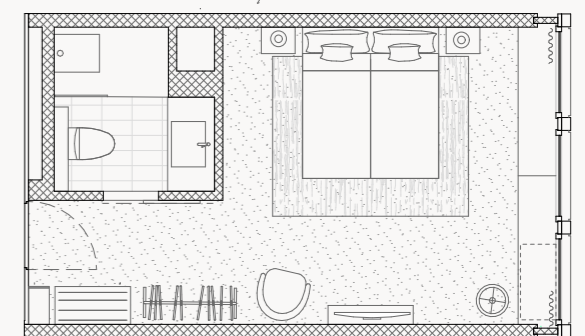


Room amenities

- mini-fridge
- wardrobe
- bed + beddings
- two night tables
- two bedside lamps
- desk lamp
- floor lamp
- chair
- lounge chair
- television
- desk
- blackout curtains
- white curtains
- towels

- Add/Remove piece of furniture
- Add/Remove smaller equipment
- Add Decoration (curtains, artwork,...)
- Rent devices or furniture

guest room *standard*



Room amenities

- mini-fridge
- wardrobe
- bed + beddings
- two night tables
- two bedside lamps
- floor lamp
- windowsill desk
- chair
- television
- blackout curtain
- towels

- Add/Remove piece of furniture
- Add/Remove smaller equipment
- Add Decoration (curtains, artwork,...)
- Rent devices or furniture

guest room *simple*



## 2. RESIDENTIAL GUEST ROOMS 1ST AND 2ND PHASE

As the renovation of "la résidence" was still taking place, Marriott decided to test another interim use, this time residential, for its unoccupied space of the main building. As it was done with the Swissôtel in Oerlikon, and starting with about one room per floor, students, workers and other residents moved into the hotel for a test period of 6 months. The rooms were still equipped with their standard design, but after a few complaints by the residents, the hotel manager gave them the special handle that allowed in every room to open the middle window. As soon as they were opened, it was like the room had lost its fourth wall and the residents weren't isolated anymore, as the whole city was now coming inside.

By opening up these windows, the anonymous grid of the façade was suddenly disrupted, and passerby could easily differentiate between the hotel guest rooms and the residential ones, which had sometimes clothes or a towel left to dry hanging from the window.



hotel Zürich, 1972



disrupting the façade



opening the window

The hallways also started to be appropriated by the long term guests, as shoes were sometimes left in front of the door. Even though some hotel guests complained about it, most of them were rather pleased since it showed a sign of life and would break the anonymity of the corridors and the doors otherwise looking all exactly the same.

After the test phase, the experience was renewed, with residents occupying a room for 6 months before moving into another one in order to let the renovation continue. This time, the room were emptied out and let to total appropriation by their users. This offered a rather cheap room for the residents, and Marriott was not afraid of damage since the place was going to be renovated afterwards anyway.



shoes laying in the hallway



Gotham handbook, Sophie Calle, 2000



groundfloor of the guestrooms during renovation



residential guest room 2nd phase

### 3. SHOWROOM + ATELIER RECYCLING

Since the collaboration between Marriott and the textile worker was a success, and the renovation of "la résidence" was coming to an end, the hotel created a bigger workshop for textile repair and recycling in the former ground floor of the building. The larger space allowed for the hotel to also work with the textile of the other Marriott hotels in the city: the Sheraton and the Neues Schloss. The bridge connecting the two buildings was also transformed into a showroom for curtains and rugs.

This gateway had previously been used as an exhibition room and with its glazed walls, it proved to be the perfect vitrine for the new activity of the hotel. During the day, as the light was reflected on the glass, only the people walking through the space or enjoying a coffee there would see the textile hanging, but at night the place would transform into a lantern that was also visible from the exterior, inviting passerby to come inside and have a look.

The showroom also provided a next step into the customization of the rooms. By having the different curtains and rugs displayed, guests could also choose their preference directly, which they found better than having the regular three layers of curtains usually hanging in each room.



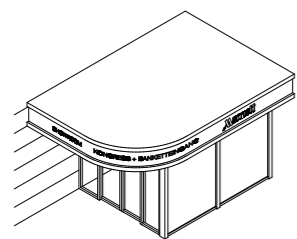
new atelier in the ground floor of "la résidence"



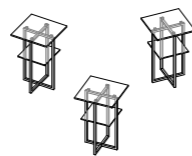
still from "au bonheur des dames", 1943



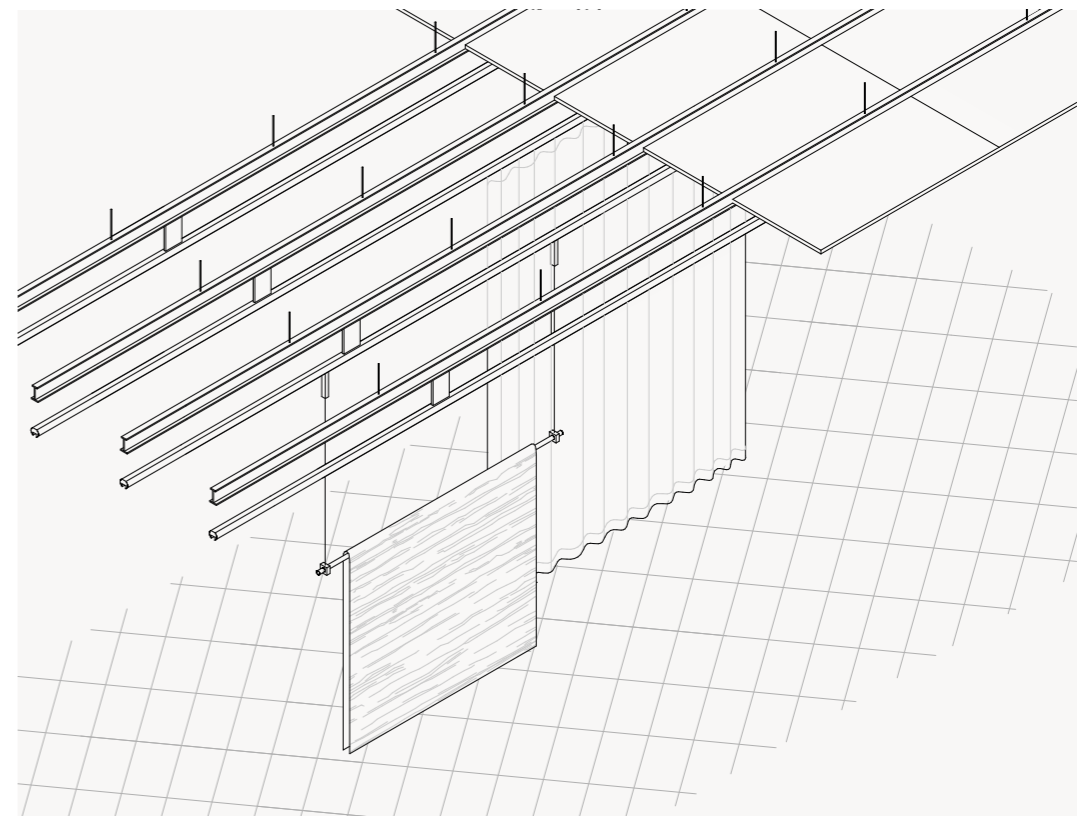
exhibition Meier/Miserre in the bridge



Entrance leading to the escalators



buffet table found in the bridge



curtain railing

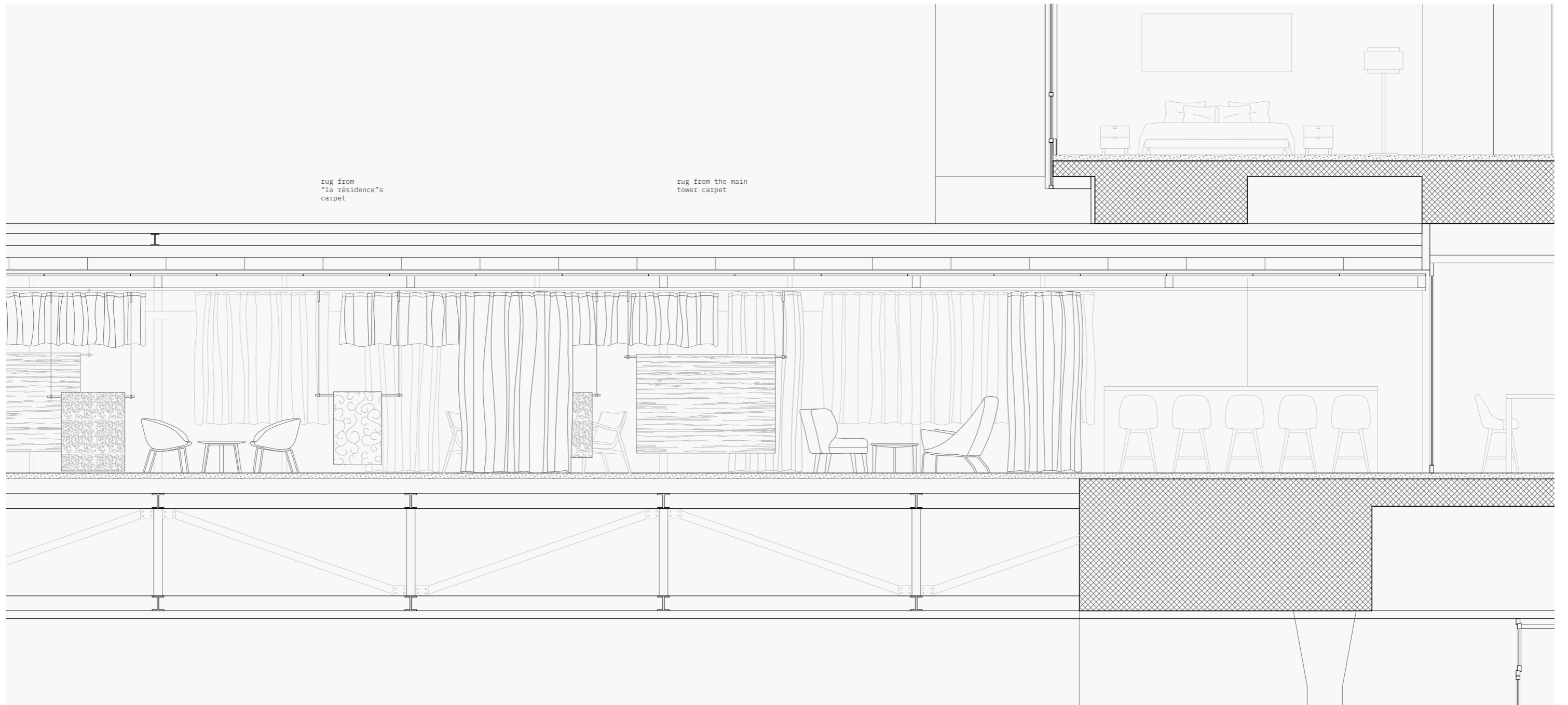


café/bar

buffet table

escalator leading to the second entrance

floor plan of the showroom



rug from  
"la résidence"s  
carpet

rug from the main  
tower carpet

section through the showroom and the café



## 4. LOBBY

In the meantime, the lobby had already slightly been adapted to the new uses and letterboxes had been added next to the entrance. The hotel, which for long only had the Marriott logo on its façade, was now displaying names of some of those living inside its walls, connecting the building to its residents.

In order to fully implement the customization of the rooms that had been gradually put into place over the last three years, the storage room in the bowling alley had to be extended. Rather than hiding the items from view and keeping the process hidden, the whole lobby, which for Marriott was slowly in need of a new design, was turned into a library of objects. Small pieces of furniture, devices, robes, slippers or other objects would be kept in shelves and then be taken upstairs. Working with a system similar to the Sitterwerk, each piece, equipped with a tag, could be stored anywhere in the lobby.

As the space was filled with objects, the life in the hotel became visible. Each shelf represented an arrangement of items made by one of the previous guest or resident. Empty shelves would reveal how the hotel was occupied, in a similar way as the absent keys behind the reception would inform on how many people were staying in the old grand hotel. In the middle of the lobby, in front of the elevator, three scanners allowed the digitalization of each composition of objects, so that each guest would have its preferences saved for a future stay.

Since not all the items were always in use, the library was opened to people from Zurich, who could also borrow some things, from a chair to a television set, or rent a vacuum or an ironing board, widely used by the residents upstairs. In order to still be able to have new furniture, or if the grade of the objects was not up the Marriott standards anymore, every other day, articles would be put on sale on the shelves next to the revolving doors and the orange blind outside would be opened to signify their availability.



Sitterwerk, St-Gallen



letterbox for the 30 residents

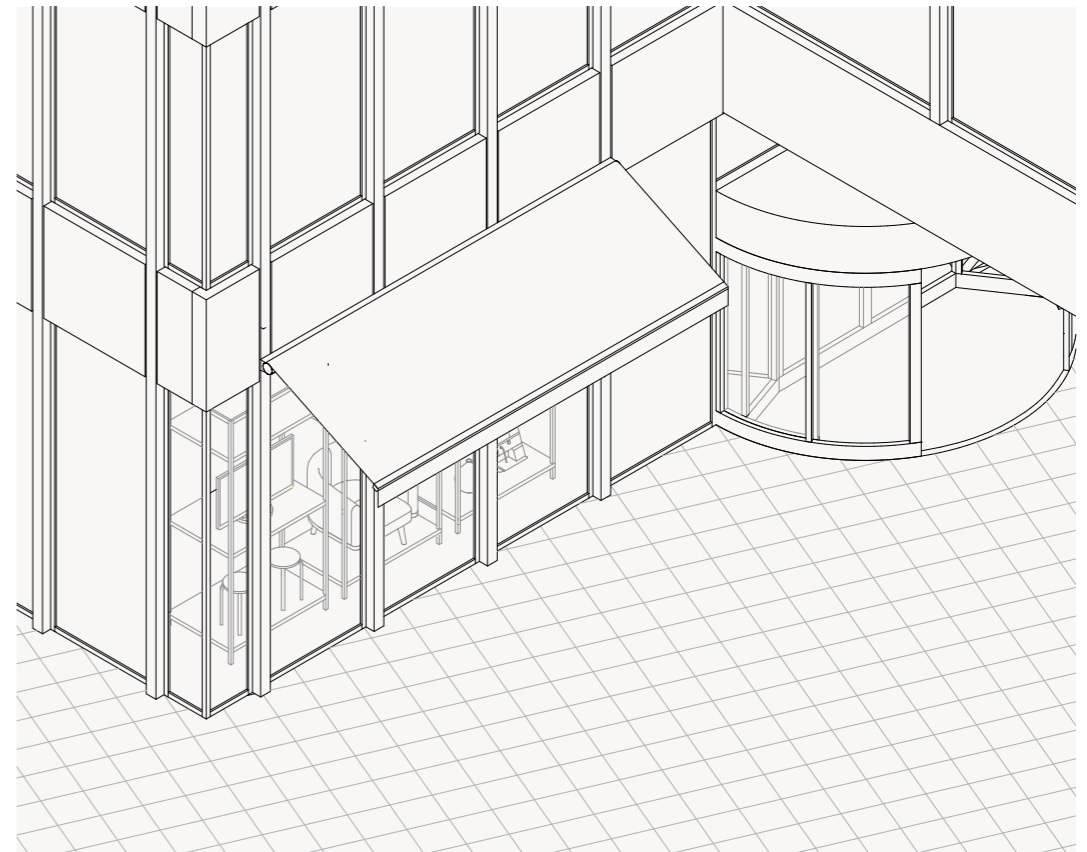




areal view of hotel Zürich, 1995



lobby of hotel Zürich



vitrine for objects on sale



floor plan new lobby



Section through the new lobby

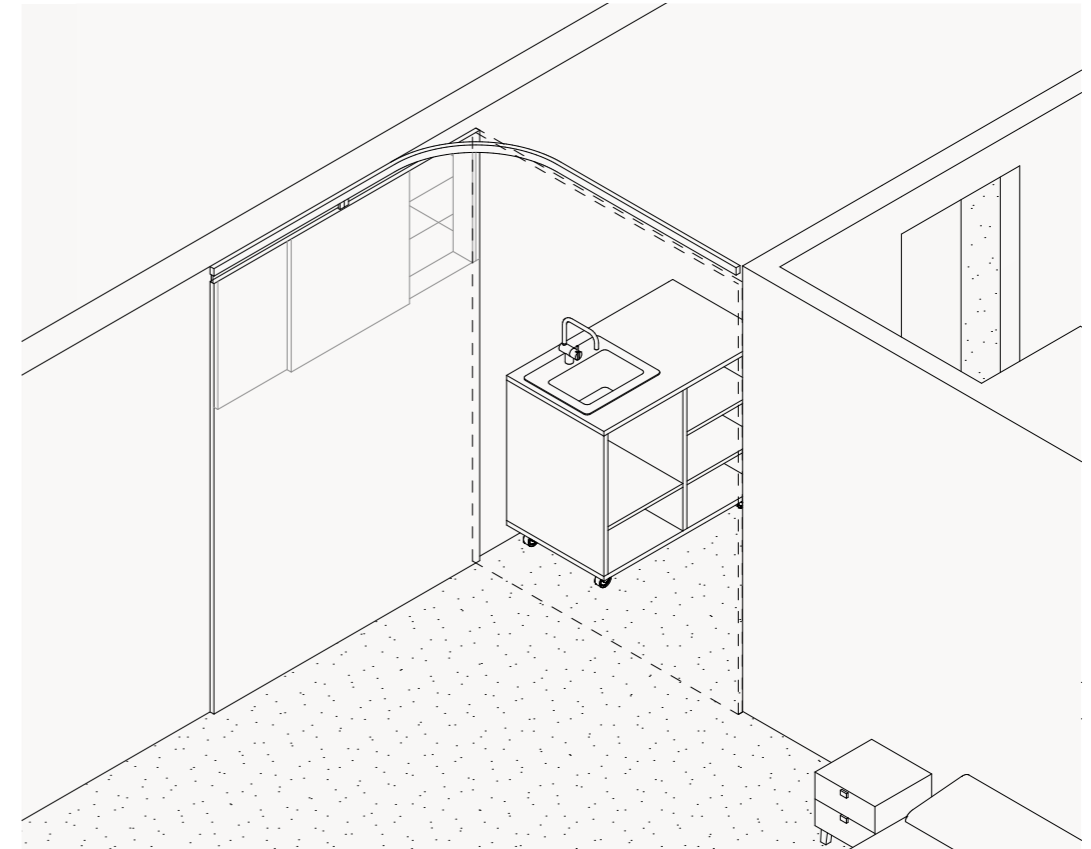


## 5. GUEST ROOMS

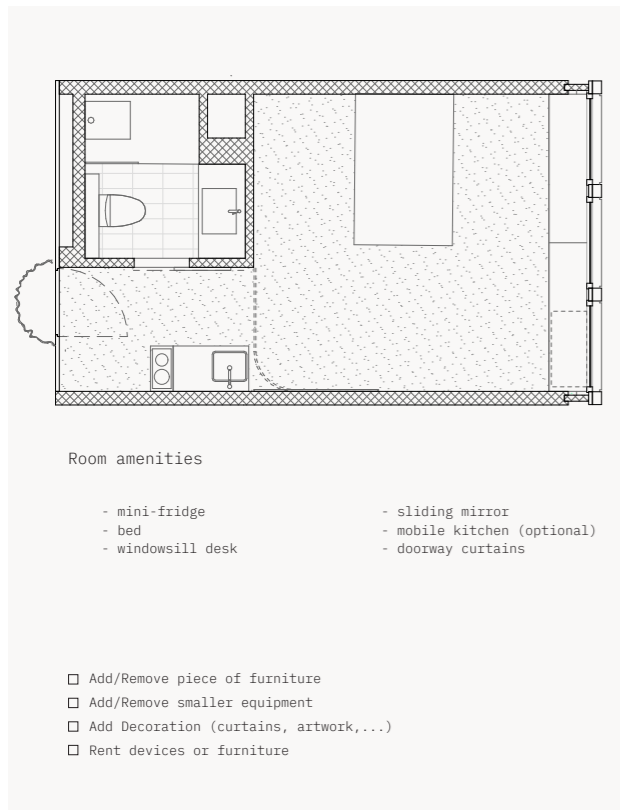
Nearing the end of the renovation and with the feedback given by previous users, the residential rooms were adapted as permanent residential rooms. With simple measures such as a windowsill desk, a sliding mirror or a mobile kitchen, the rooms were transformed for a third phase of use. A white curtain was added in the hallway, in order to mark the entrance and to allow natural ventilation without disclosing the interior of the room. With a windowsill desk, security rods were added to the windows, allowing for a flower pot to be hung on the façade at the same time.

With the full system of customization now in place, each room was different according to the needs of each guest. Some elements that were added for the residents also found their way into the hotel guest rooms. For example, the mobile kitchen was often asked for in the fully customizable suites. Feet and wheel were also added onto the previously non-movable furniture to allow different room organizations.

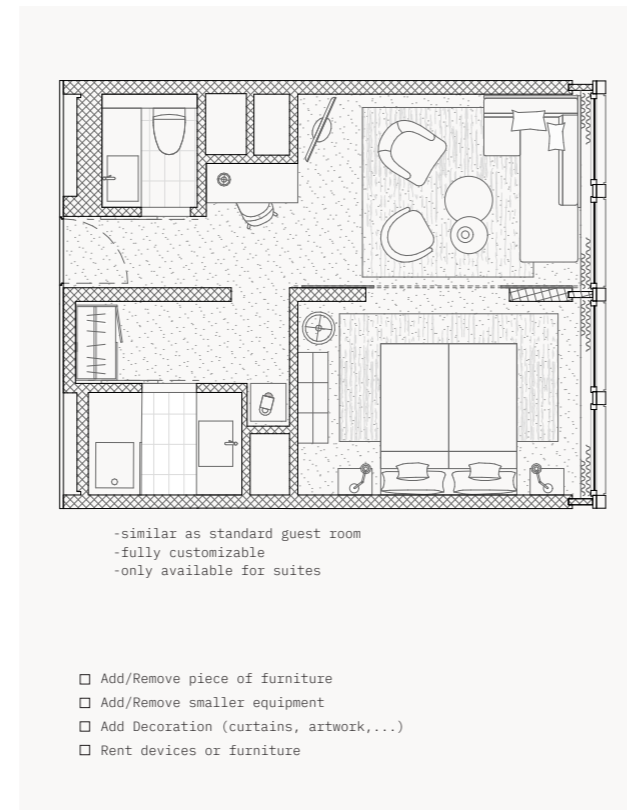
Since the naked rooms were anonymous in their style, the need to redo a complete renovation of the rooms every seven years subsided and the furniture could be easily resold and replaced once in a while, according to the guests' taste. When not used, the naked state meant that the rooms could easily be transformed into temporary offices for the Marriott workers, or maybe just a nice lunch room with a view.



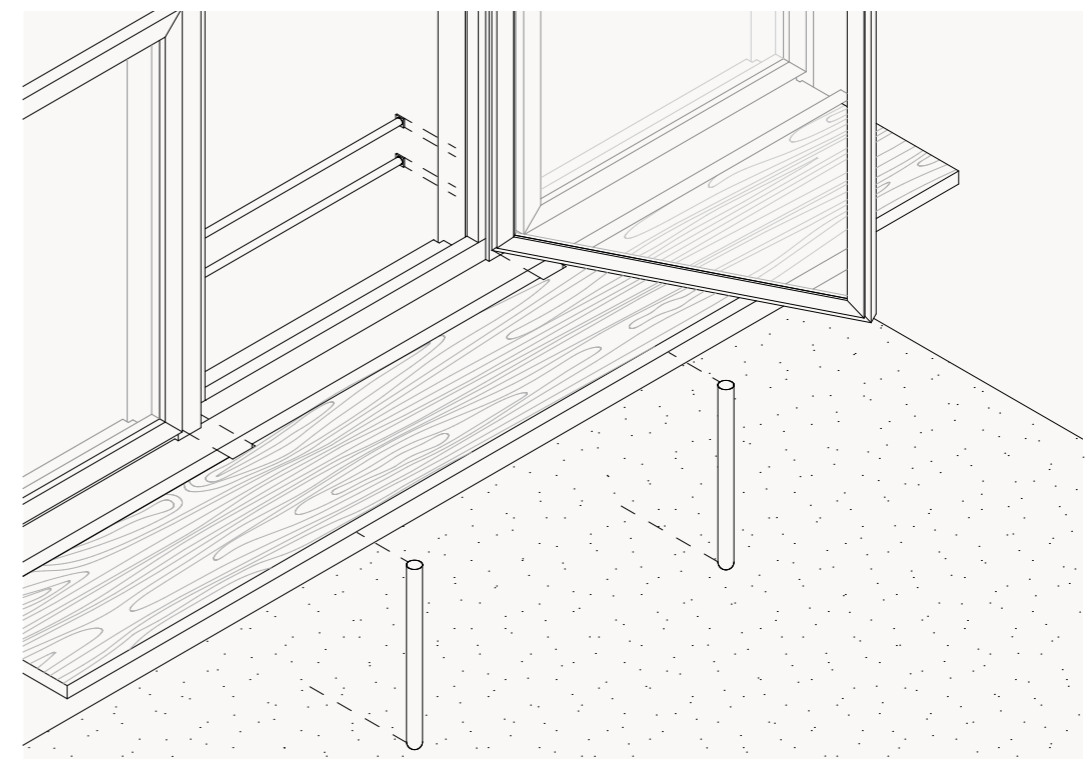
sliding mirror



guest room residential



guest room custom



windowsill desk







temporary office in  
guest room *naked*

guest room  
*simple*

guest room  
*residential*

guest room  
*standard*

sliding mirror

mobile kitchen

old desk with  
new feet

section through the main tower guest rooms

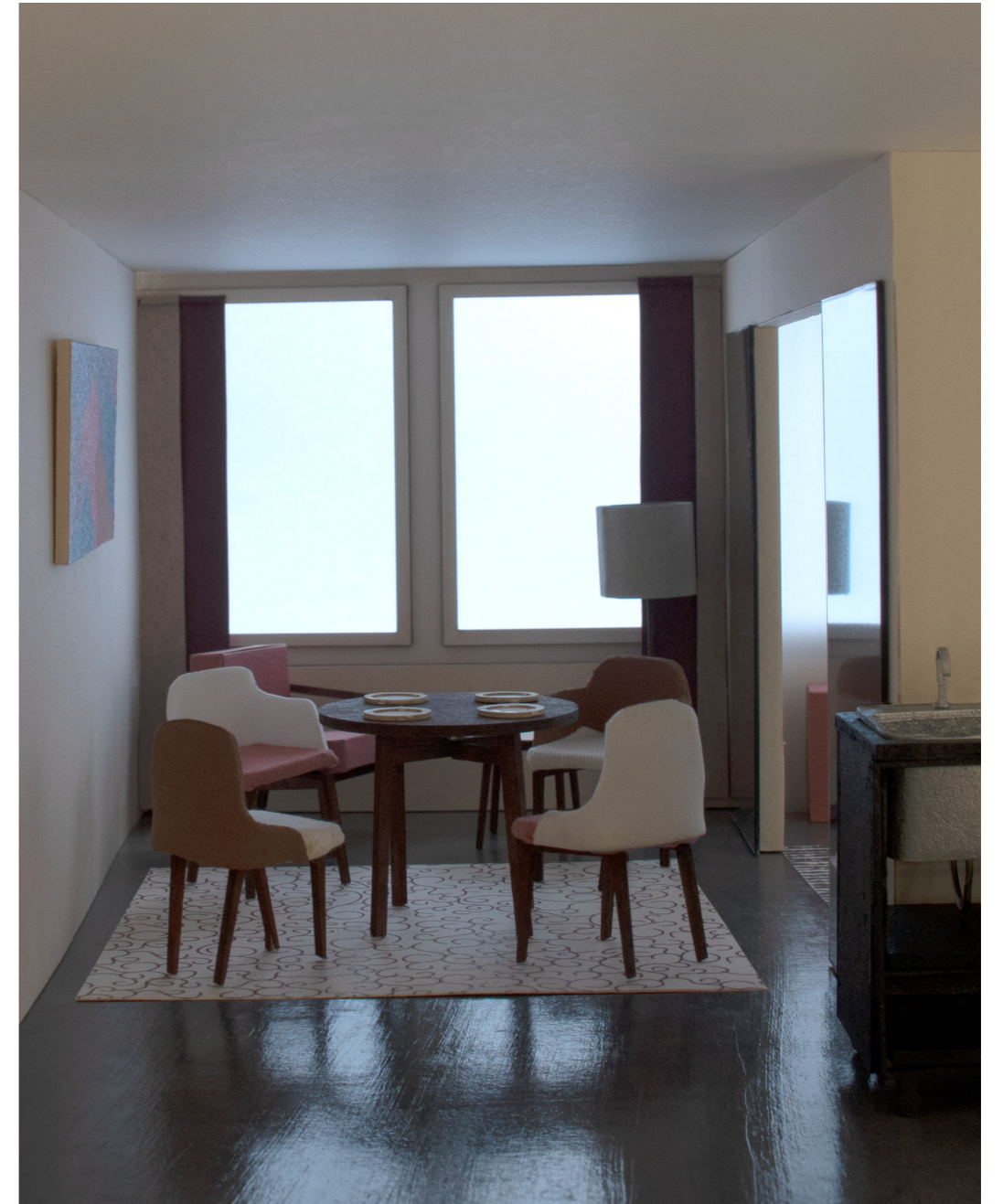




guest room simple



guest room standard



guest room custom



guest room residential

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