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Mergenthaler Linotype Building

Chicago, Illinois

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Background

The Mergenthaler Linotype Building, located between an expanding downtown core and the new intown "Dearborn Park" housing project, is part of a series of renovations occurring in the southern fringe of downtown Chicago. Known as Printers Row, the area contains several printing lofts which have become vacant as a result of their former occupants' migration to the suburbs. The future focus of the district will be a landscaped and pedestrian-oriented Dearborn Street between Polk and Congress Street. Both the 1886 Mergenthaler Building (remodeled and added to in 1917 by Schmidt, Garden, and Martin) and the district in which it lies are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Essentially a new building within an existing shell, the design responds to a tight budget and the constraints of the old structure's spatial limitations. The conversion contains 21 housing units in the five upper floors and commercial space at ground level. A major concern was that of individuality while maintaining flexibility.

Solution

The intervention provides a rich variety of housing units with variations in area (1100-1800 square feet), type (single floor/duplex), layout, orientation, and articulation. Some of the duplex apartments face east to make use of a private terrace, but most of them are oriented south toward an adjacent landscaped



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yard. The south facing windows are reused, while the one-level studio apartments introduce slanted, clipped-on bay windows which visually extend the space. The new elements also maximize light and air, acting as small walk-on balconies or small greenhouses. Window openings on the west facade remain intact and consistent with the original design.

In the duplex apartments, the bi-level spatial division is articulated by

an overscaled cornice and is seemingly supported by Doric columns whose capitals are held apart from the sculptured cornice, revealing the actual steel support. Double and single height windows interact with the raised bedroom to create unexpected moments of expanded volume and light penetration within the raw shell. Each unit is designed as a flexible loft space with kitchens, baths, and dressing areas the only fixed elements. These core elements are designed as large pieces of fur-

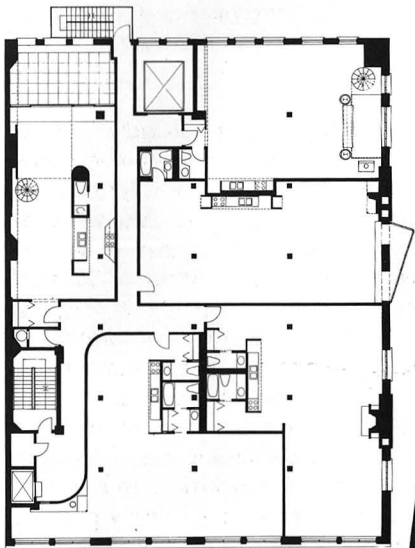
niture that float in space and serve a variety of functions: housing pipes and ducts, defining space, and providing kitchen facilities. Sleeping spaces are implied in the "L" plan or on the elevated duplex floors. Thus occupants may modify their unit with loft bedroom additions, galley kitchen additions, and closet dividers.

From the exterior, the intervention is apparent by the addition of several elements. The most obvious of these are the magenta-painted, protruding bays which break up the building's south elevation. A steel post-and-lintel system has been interfaced on the entryway, hinting at its contemporary transformation and a layering of old and new. The former Tom's Grill on the adjacent lot was gutted and left as an isolated shell to give definition and vitality to the street corner. Newly planted ivy will grow over the fragmented structure, reinforcing the idea of an urban ruin.

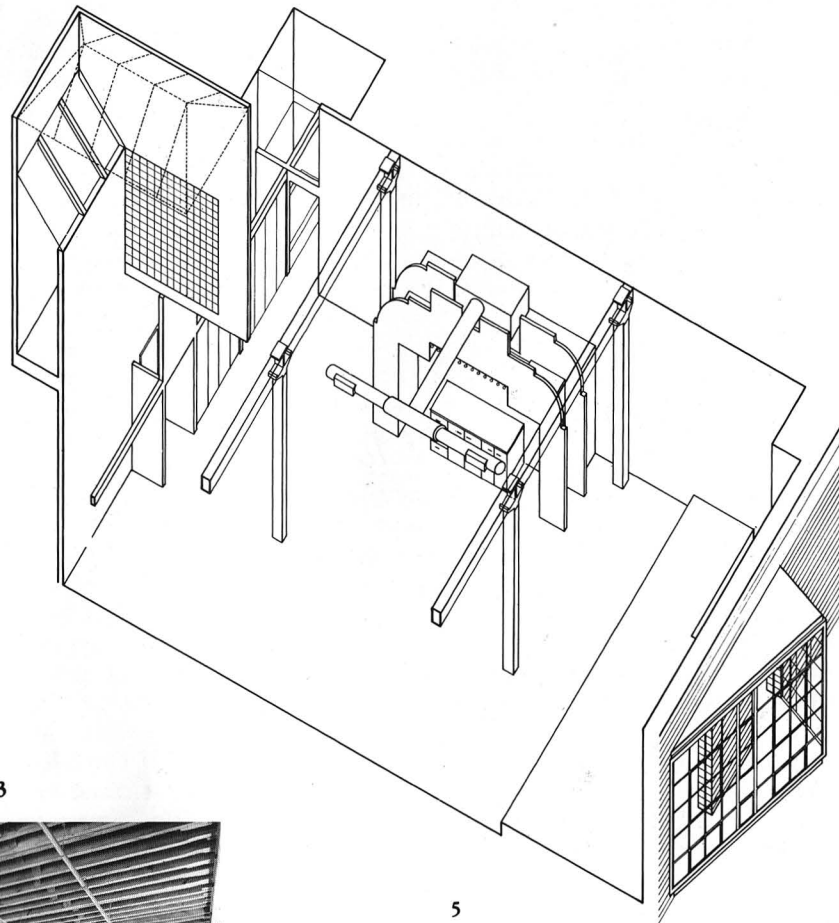
1. Southwest view. Photo by Ron Gordon.
2. Two-story duplex apartment. Photo by Sadin/Karant.
3. Second and fourth floors.
4. The units' interiors are designed as an 1893 shell into which the new interventions are placed. Here movable closets define sleeping space and the fireplace enclosure recenters an existing flue in the space. Photo by Sadin/Karant.
5. Axonometric of a studio unit. The bath/kitchen module is freestanding from the walls and ceiling. The demising walls slide behind the column/beam frame to emphasize the concept of layering.
6. Sixth floor



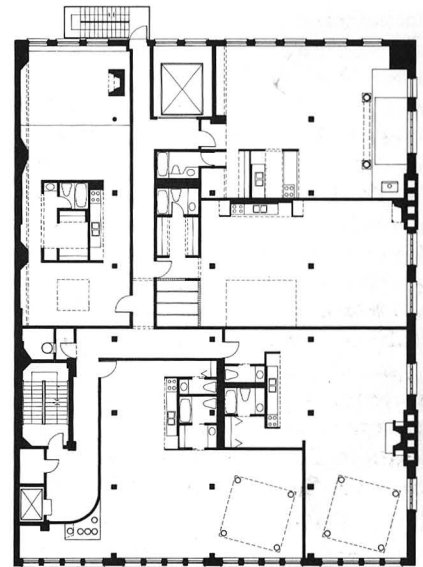
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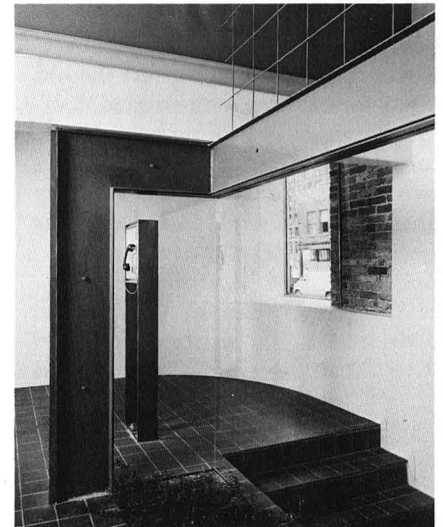
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7. The lobby interior recalls the steel windows of the exterior. The steel bent is treated as a "layer" adjacent to the existing cove ceiling of the lobby. Photo by Sadin/Karant.