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Mirror, Mirror New Textile College in Chiasso

The project is based on the competition brief: Nuova sede del centro professionale tecnico del settore tessile (CPT) - CHIASSO.

With my project I want to articulate the character of Chiasso, using the palette of found colours, meanings, and forms which resonated with me.

I propose two buildings and a public space, which share the program of the college. The two college buildings blur the border between the urban and the railway. They remain in relationship both to the municipality office and neighboring buildings, as well as to the station. Their exact position and dimension relates to the surrounding buildings. The shed follows closely other railway buildings, whereas the box is slightly turned to mark the change in direction of the road, and dialogs with the municipality building. One of the neighboring warehouses is demolished and replaced. So that the scale of the new structure is kept in dimensions related to existing urban fabric. This way college is moves closer to the train station.

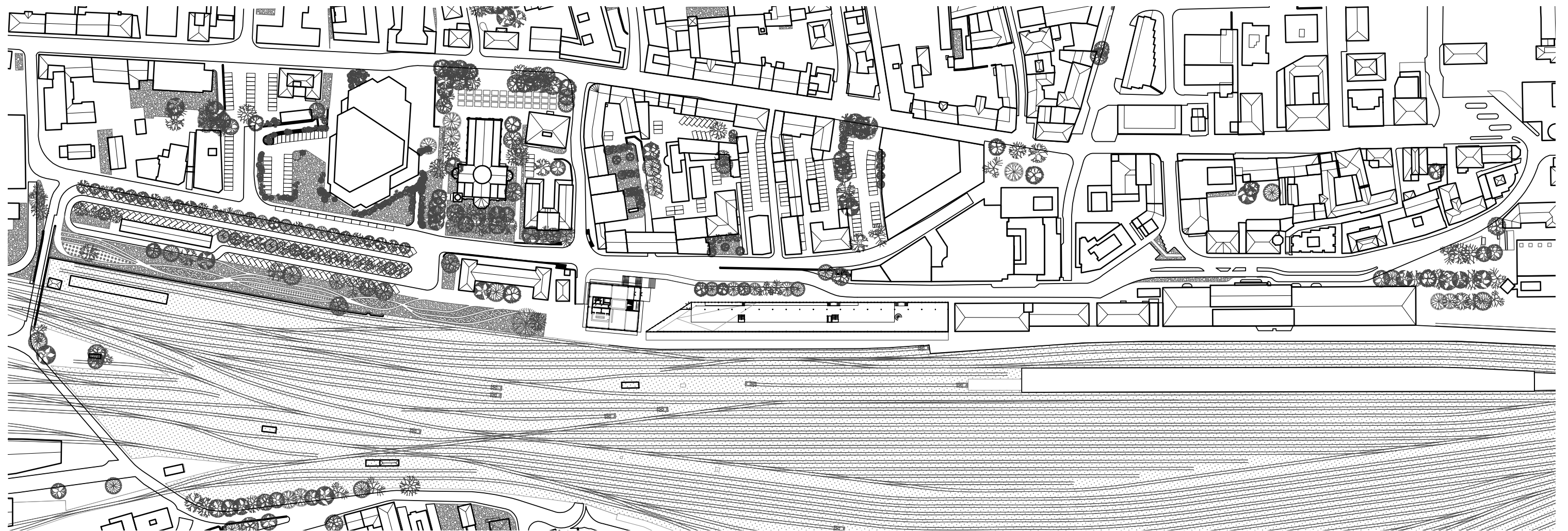
There is a strong charge between the buildings, yet they almost touch at the corner. The spaces between the two buildings are public and accessible to the city.

Open space workshops are hosted in the shed, with light workshops on first floor mezzanine, and classrooms on the top floor. The box hosts cafeteria, college library, college offices and a lecture hall, which can also work as a theatre for the city.

On the railway side there is a water basin with rocks, running along the building, which collects rainwater directly from the big sloping roof, reflecting back light into the building. Bees are welcome to come and drink the water on the rocks.

Designing a college as two buildings, in a counterpoint to one another, both in terms of program and architecture, has become an major theme of the project. Difficult unity comes from implicit similarities and explicit differences in architecture of the shed and the box. Living the college is a multifaceted and engaging experience.

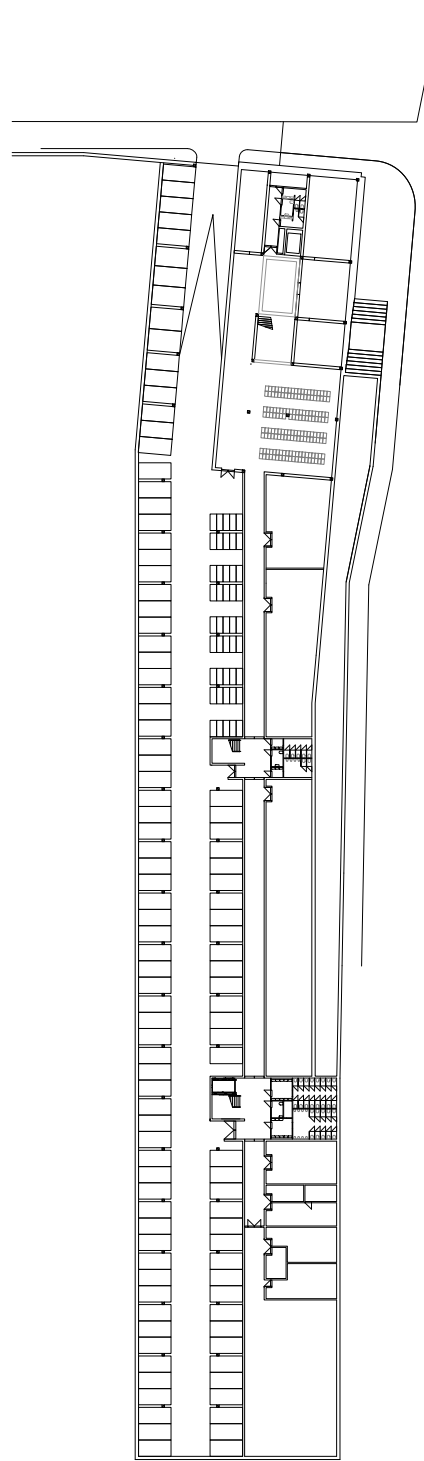
Expression of metalness ties the college to the railway infrastructure, and lets Chiasso look at itself in a mirror.



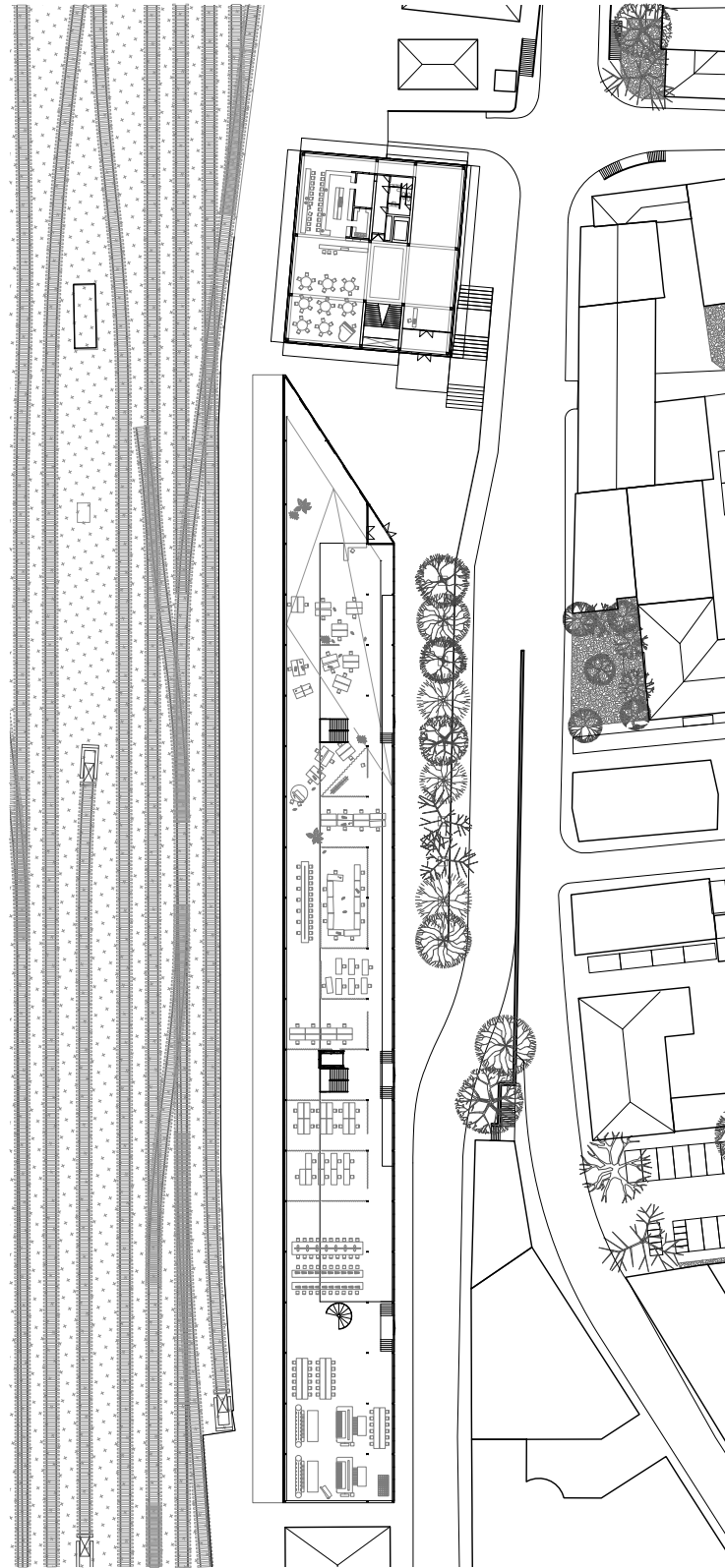
Situation plan

I believe that architectural identity of Chiasso in major part comes from the presence of the railway, and its architecture, which I find to be fascinating.

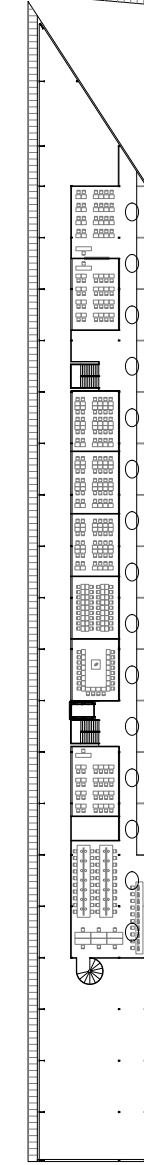
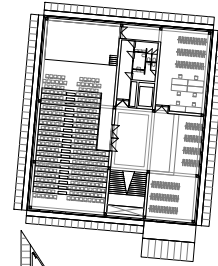




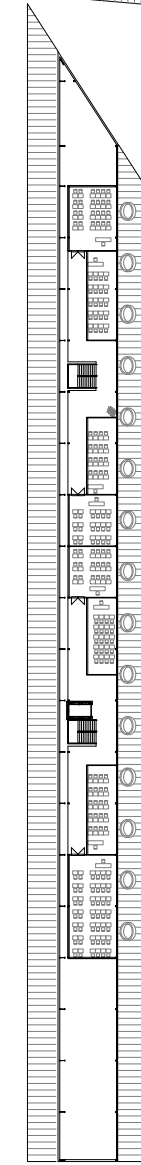
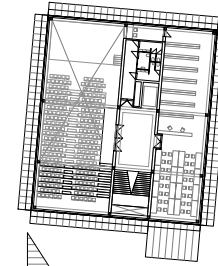
Basement plan



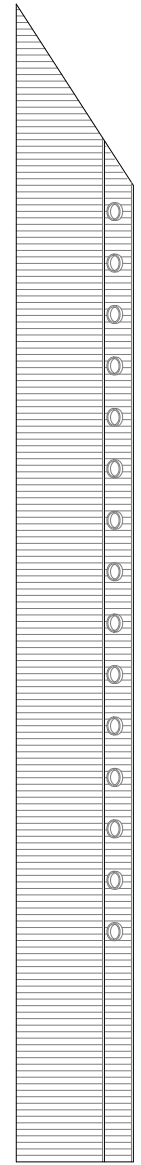
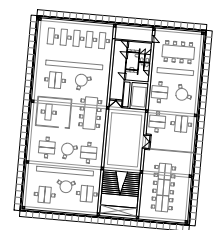
Ground Floor Plan



1st Floor Plan

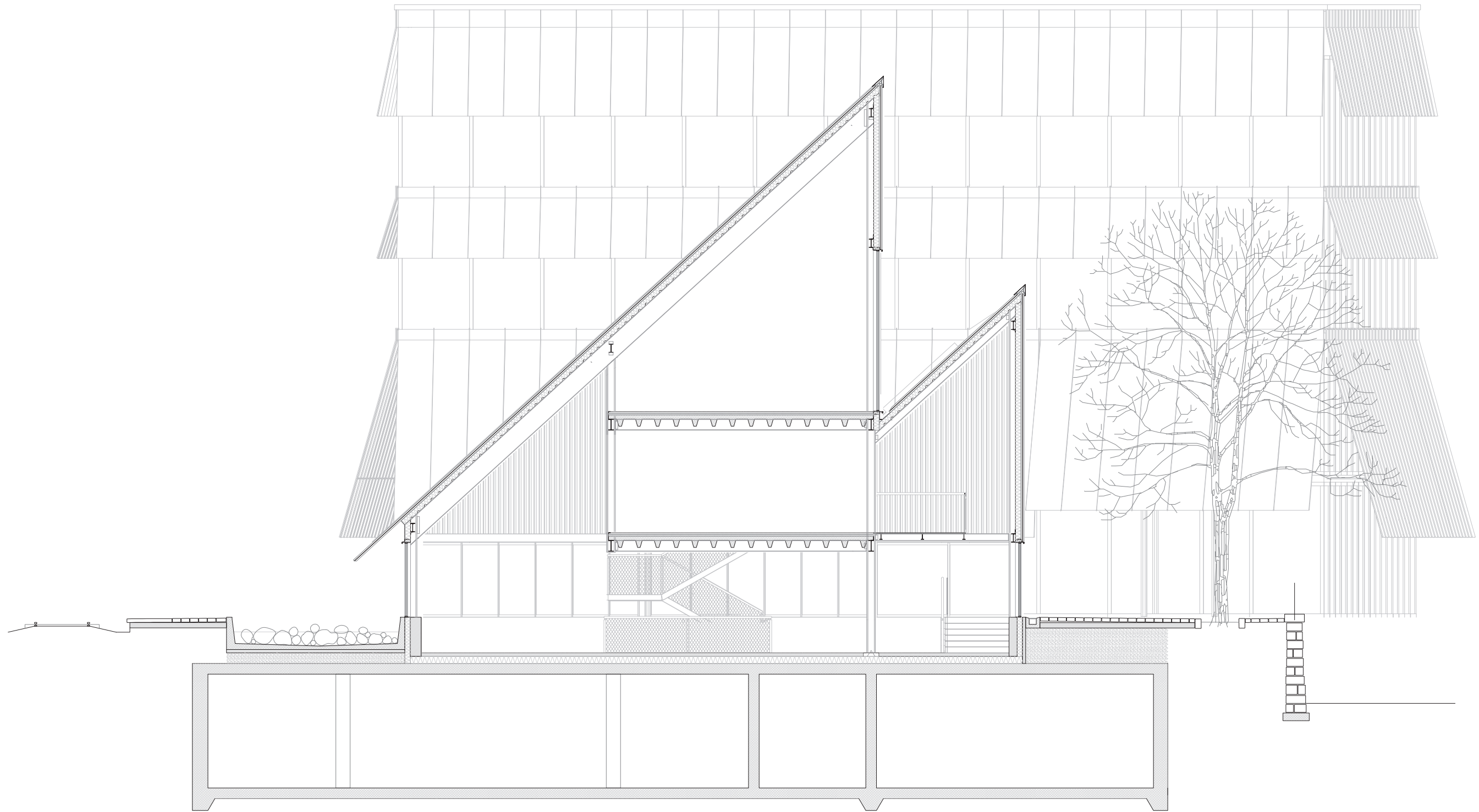


2nd Floor Plan



3rd Floor Plan

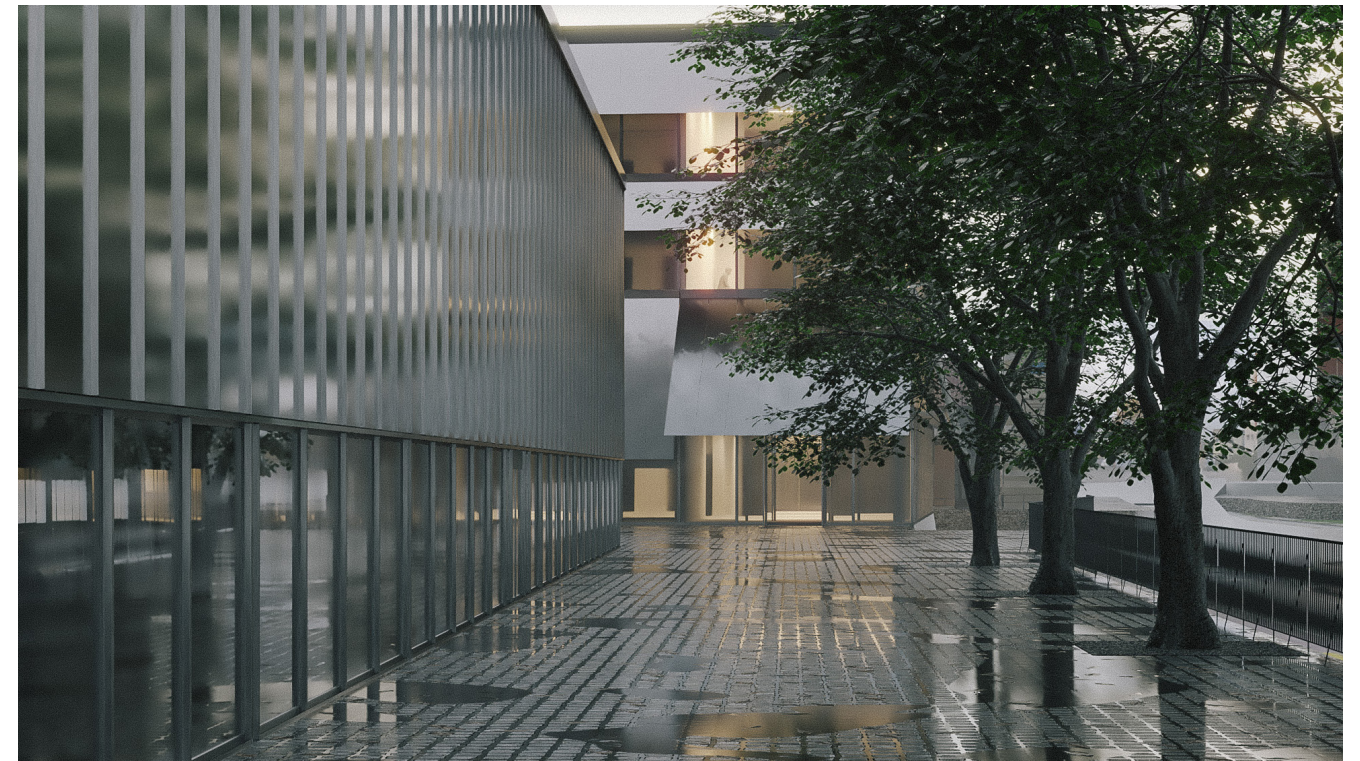




Section



The sloping façade of shed plays with the railway infrastructure and shimmers when looked at from a passing train. It becomes the first thing one sees when coming to Switzerland.



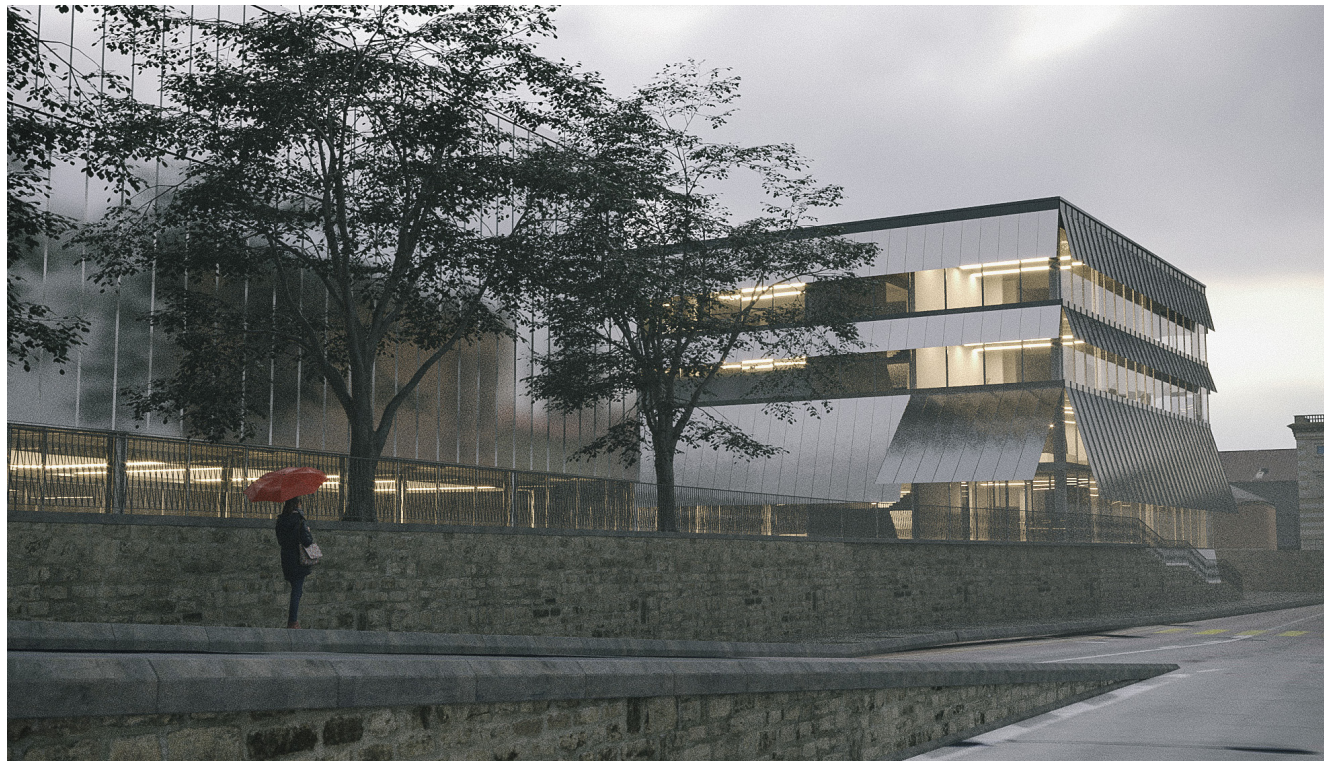
The college approached from the station.



The shed is chamfered to make way for the square where public life of the school takes place. The square is also accessible from the stairs at the crossroads. This way the college becomes a part of public life of Chiasso. Life happens between the buildings which is natural to the Ticinese culture. The square continues inside both buildings. The piazza between the two buildings is where the students meet. Railway landscape is the backdrop, and the space opens towards the city. Articulated silhouette of the shed becomes apparent. Thanks to slight turn the box encloses the piazza.



The façade is finished in standing seam sheet metal, which reflects the surroundings. Expression of metalness is placing the college in close relationship to the railway. At the same time the way in which the buildings are wrapped and clothed recalls the art of tailoring and sewing, with architecture of seams, patterns and stitches. Chiasso looks at itself in the mirror-like robe.



View from via Livio.



Café which opens to the square and overlooks the railway landscape, offering unusually close vicinity to the tracks.



Generous entrance hall to the shed is sloping inside to extend the square inside of the building. In the ground floor of shed there are the workshops, divided informally according to the needs of the school. Since the mezzanine is suspended on the roof frame, most of the ground floor is free of columns, this structure allows for great flexibility and variety of uses. The building is sunken to the ground so that the windows start at the level of the pavement, externally giving an impression of being lifted up. It is both transparent and intimate. One feels exposed to the city and protected at the same time.



At the end of the building there is the full height industrial workshop with heavy machines and laboratories. Big windows and span of the structure make the space feel very generous. The shed is a light steel structure with a suspended mezzanine. Walls and roof are made of sandwich panels with corrugated sheets facing inside. The basement forms a plinth of the shed. Particular care is placed upon sustainability. The building uses conventional technologies, and straightforward solutions. Since it is almost entirely built in steel it can be disassembled and recycled easily.



The classrooms are generously lit by the shed windows, which however remain hidden to the city.



Lecture hall, hosting 361 seats, with its double height also benefits from indirect light.



Corridor to the classrooms, contrasts with the open ground floor. Indirect light creates intimate ambience in spite the raw industrial character of the structure.



Staircase in the box. Thanks to the façade panels the light inside is very soft.