

AJ

NEWS/Foster revises King's Cross

The final solution for Spitalfields?

BUILDINGS/Southwark nursery

Isle of Dogs self-build housing

PRACTICE/Liquidated damages





1 The 'soft' play room. The name 'Jumoke' was chosen by the workers, and apparently means 'Everyone gathers round to care for the children' in Yoruba.



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2 Both the main nursery and the first-floor crèche open on to a playground on the north of the site; the covered balcony is not used, as staff are afraid of children falling from it.

3 Rear elevation showing the existing building (left) and the smaller scale of the new brick extension (right).

4 Section AA.

5 Location plan.

6 The main entrance in Gaza Street. The canvas awning chosen by the staff conveys confusing impressions of restaurants or shops.

7 External roller shutters protect the large window of the soft play room, which overlooks a yard surrounded by workshops and other buildings owned by Lambeth Council.

8 Axonometric showing ground and first floors.

Key to 8

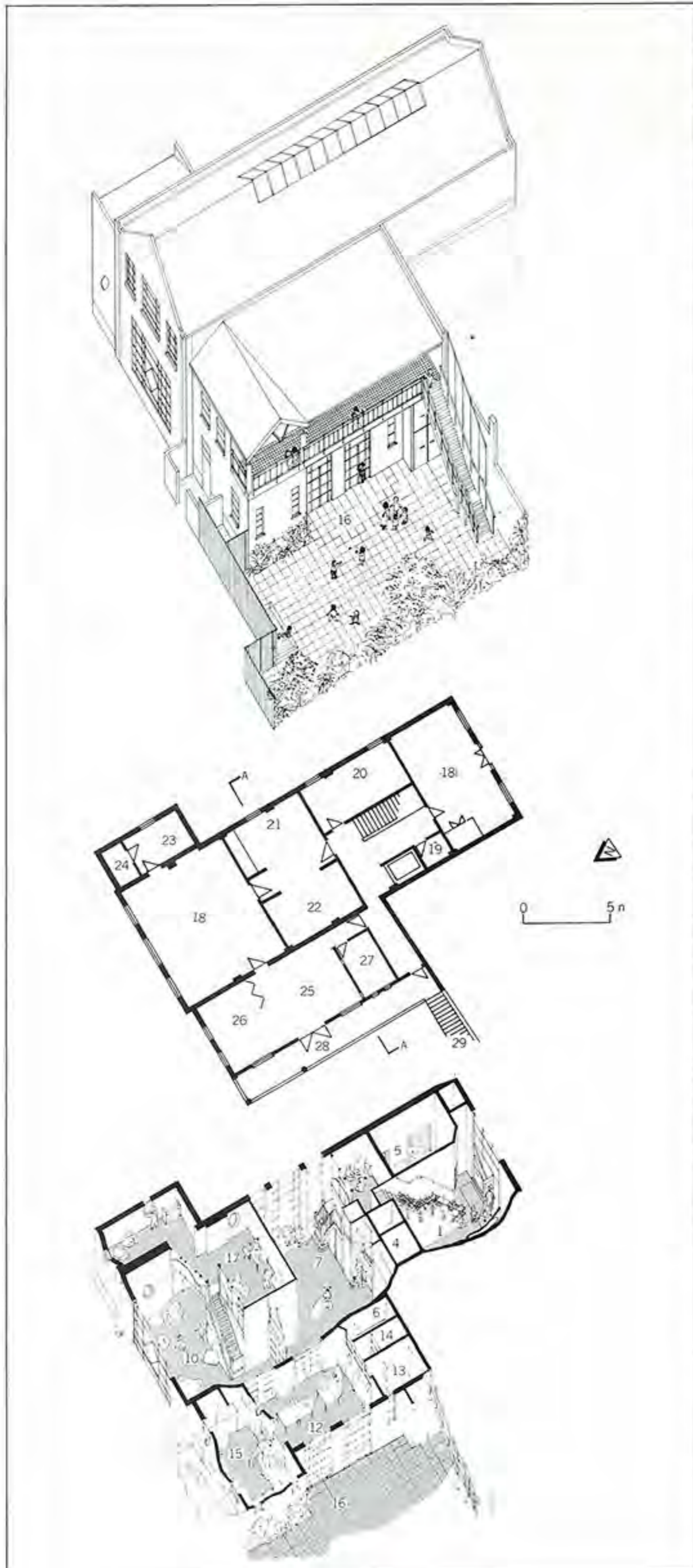
- 1 Entrance hall
- 2 Disabled access WC
- 3 (Under mezzanine) lobby/cloakroom
- 4 Lift
- 5 General office
- 6 Store
- 7 Main play room
- 8 Children's WC (under mezzanine, 17)
- 9 Nappy changing (under mezzanine, 17)
- 10 Soft playroom
- 11 Babies' sleeping (under mezzanine, 17)
- 12 Wet play
- 13 Laundry
- 14 Staff WC
- 15 Kitchen
- 16 Outdoor play area
- 17 Mezzanine play platform
- 18 Teaching
- 19 Adult WC
- 20 Office/staff
- 21 Lounge/coffee area
- 22 Library
- 23 Tutor's office
- 24 Boiler
- 25 Crèche playroom
- 26 Quiet area
- 27 Crèche WC
- 28 External covered balcony
- 29 Stairs to play area



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Matrix had already designed child care buildings, carried out feasibility studies, and was writing a guide for those setting up nurseries about how to obtain suitable accommodation.¹

Two buildings were offered by Southwark Council: a 1970s portal frame industrial building near Tower Bridge and a two-storey brick workshop in a group of council-owned buildings near Elephant & Castle. Eventually the brick building was chosen. However, it was semi-derelict, with a roof and walls but no surviving joinery. Portions of one end wall had been built by bricklaying trainees, and most had to be redone.

Once appointed, Matrix faced the usual challenge of enabling the client committee to participate fully in design decisions. 'We put up a ribbon marked as a metric tape on the wall of the room they usually met in,' says Julia Dwyer of Matrix. 'We did an overlay of the meeting-room at the same size as any drawings, to provide a point of comparison. We held a session on the building process and put up some A3 explanatory sheets. And we also used a model.' The design evolved over 18 months of monthly meetings. The committee had progressive ideas on child care and wanted the building to embody them. They wanted the building to be accessible to disabled adults, workers or children. They expected a large proportion of the eligible children in this deprived inner city area to be black, and wanted this to be a non-racist, non-sexist and non-hierarchical nursery. The design process explored how these aims should influence the building.

Workers' decision

One controversy was over alternative ways of organising the nursery: should the children be divided into age groups, or should there be 'family groups' of mixed ages? In the end this decision was left to the workers, who were not appointed until four months before the nursery opened—too late to influence the building layout. This meant that the spaces were considered (and labelled) according to the activities they would house, not the children they would accommodate. 'It was strictly "soft play" and "wet play", never "under-twos" and "over-twos",' says Sheelagh McManus of Matrix. The exception was the babies' sleeping room, furthest from the entrance, designed for the requisite number of cots.

The committee wanted the various play rooms to have contrasting characteristics. 'We all had different ideas of what was ideal. We wanted rooms that would be different from each other and not clinical, so that the children would not be in the same sort of space all day,' recalls committee member Sue Emerson. She also remembers spending a long time working on contrasting colour schemes for the play rooms. 'We wanted a homy atmosphere,' says Sue McNally of Southwark Council's employment and training division. We wanted colours like grey,

BUILDING FEATURE

not the primary colours you used to see so often in nurseries.' Some ideas did not come to fruition: 'We wanted solar energy, but the building was facing the wrong way. We wanted women builders, but we couldn't find anyone to co-ordinate the different trades, so we had to use a conventional contractor in the end.'

Building form

Some decisions were influenced by the form of the building: for instance, it was too narrow to have a circulation route with rooms off it, and access had to be through the main play spaces. The height of the ground floor led to the idea, arising during discussions, of creating child-height mezzanines or 'play platforms', 11. 'We wanted individual play spaces that felt more like theirs,' says Sue McNally. To allow the workers to make their own decisions about shelving for storage, once they had experience of using the building, £5000 was deducted from the building budget for them to spend later.

The completed building, which has now been in use for a year, has pitched roofs and timber windows, and despite its scale presents an appropriately domestic face to the world. The entrance is emphasised by a canvas awning selected by the staff, 6. Matrix's preference for a steel and glass canopy was rejected as impractical, since vandalism is a problem on this secluded site. All major ground-floor windows



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9 The main play room. The high ceiling and huge windows give an immediate impression of light and air. Note the low height of the window sill on which children can sit.

10 The 'soft' play room. The carpeted floor is proving hard to keep clean. Despite staff efforts to keep food out of the room, there are inevitably accidents and spillages.

11 The low height of the play platforms makes access difficult for staff. Small groups of children are taken up for specific activities such as story-telling or watching TV, rather than being allowed to go up alone.

12 The lever taps, installed to allow disabled people to use the sinks, have been treated roughly by the children, and are being replaced with smaller versions as a compromise.

13 Looking from the kitchen serving counter into the 'wet' play room, which doubles as the dining-room. The complexity of windows, doors and stairs in the play rooms creates a 'busy' effect which absorbs the plethora of shelves and ad hoc noticeboards everywhere.

14 Lunch-time for the children. The French windows give access to the playground.

have external steel shutters, 7, and rendered walls have been painted with anti-graffiti paint. The lobby, 16, overlooked by the downstairs staff office, gives access to both the upstairs training centre and the downstairs nursery. There is a lift for disabled visitors, and the stair has child-height handrails. After leaving their coats on named pegs in the cloakroom while their parents park the buggies, the children enter the main play room, 9, which is joined by double doors to the 'soft' room ahead and the 'wet' room to the left.

The glazed doors give both adults and children a view from room to room even when they are shut. The ceiling is high and the immediate impression is of light and air. The huge window looks out on to a grassed area belonging to the adjacent primary school. Unfortunately the day nursery children do not have access to this, but a low, deep sill allows them to sit by the window and appreciate the view.

A timber-balustraded stair behind leads to the smaller of the two play platforms, over the cloakroom. Gates at the top and bottom mean the staff can control when the children use it. Unsupervised use is not encouraged; instead small groups are taken up to listen to stories or watch television. The toilet and baby-change room is ahead. The soft play room is differentiated by its carpeted floor, 1, and it is here that children pull out mats to have an afternoon nap. The babies' sleeping room leads off it.

The wet play room has a sink at child height and a washable linoleum floor with a drain set into it. It doubles as a dining-room, 13. The work of the cook in the kitchen is clearly visible through the hatch, and a low-level counter on the play room side allows children to play at cooking. The committee was keen to do away with the usual hierarchical relationships of staff. Here the nine child care/education workers are paid the

same as the cook, and the cook is encouraged to have contact with the children, for instance by taking small groups of them shopping with him.

French windows give access to the playground, a small area on the north side of the building which is overshadowed for much of the day. Originally paved in concrete, extra funding has been received to cover it with a safety surface, 2. Toys are packed away in an external store overnight.

It is on the first floor that the architects have been able to play the scale game most obviously. The main building contains facilities for adults: two teaching rooms, 18, a lounge-cum-library area, 17, and two offices. The timber king-post roof trusses in the existing building were something the committee was particularly keen on, so they have been preserved and revealed wherever possible. The new extension is given over to the crèche, and has low sill heights (600 mm) to give views out to the children. Miniature versions of the timber trusses of the old building are visible under the roof. It seems a pity that the sheltered balcony intended for outdoor play is not used, since crèche workers see it as dangerous, 2. The training facilities on the first floor are currently underused, as no development worker is yet in post to organise them, 18.

Contrasting characters

Notions of child care are always in a state of flux. Day nurseries were once seen mainly as a holding operation, keeping children clean, fed and happy while their parents were at work. Today there is a great concern for fostering child development, and even education. Tomorrow other priorities may come to the fore. It is probably a good thing, then, that the clear political aims of the client did not translate into a single formal idea. Perhaps it was the fact of the refurbishment which precluded this. The Jumoke building does not dictate a forward-looking, non-racist, non-sexist, non-hierarchical child care policy, but care has been taken to ensure it does not prevent one.

As a building, it is a subtle and interesting place for an adult to be. The changes in ceiling heights, colours and floor surfaces, and the differing orientation and outlooks of the play rooms succeed in giving the contrasting characters which were required. The complexity of the windows, doors, and stairs creates a busy effect which allows the plethora of untidy shelves and *ad hoc* notices to be absorbed into the design without destroying it. Details such as the round windows in the play platform are charming without being twee. The workers are enthusiastic about the building, which is so different from the Portakabins and church halls often used for child care, and although one can only guess at the attitudes of the children, it seems likely that the variety, and the safe nooks and corners, bright light and views meet with their approval too. ■





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15 The first-floor circulation space is top-lit by rooflights inserted next to the ridge.

16 The stairs leading directly up from the main entrance (right) have a special low-level handrail for the children to use.

17 The library and lounge on the first floor, showing the exposed timber trusses of the existing building.

18 The teaching room on the first floor is unfortunately underused due to the lack of a development worker to co-ordinate events.

Reference

1 Building for Childcare: Making Better Buildings for the Under-5s, 1986, GLC/Matrix.

Credits

location 42 Braganza Street, London SE17
client Jumoke Nursery Group
funded by Southwark Aid and London Borough of Southwark
architect Matrix Feminist Architectural Co-operative
quantity surveyor Peter W. Griffiths and Associates
services engineer (to tender stage) Max Fordham and Partners, *post-contract* Matrix, in association with Fulcrum Engineering Partnership
structural engineer Vincent Grant Partnership
main contractor Bell & Webster

Building data

total floor area 472 m²
contract sum £333 402
work started 6 April 1987
practical completion Mid-April 1988

Erratum

Photo 1 caption – omit 'apparently'.

Photo 7 caption – for Lambeth read Southwark.

Credits – for Peter W. Griffiths read Peter W. Gittins.





JUMOKE







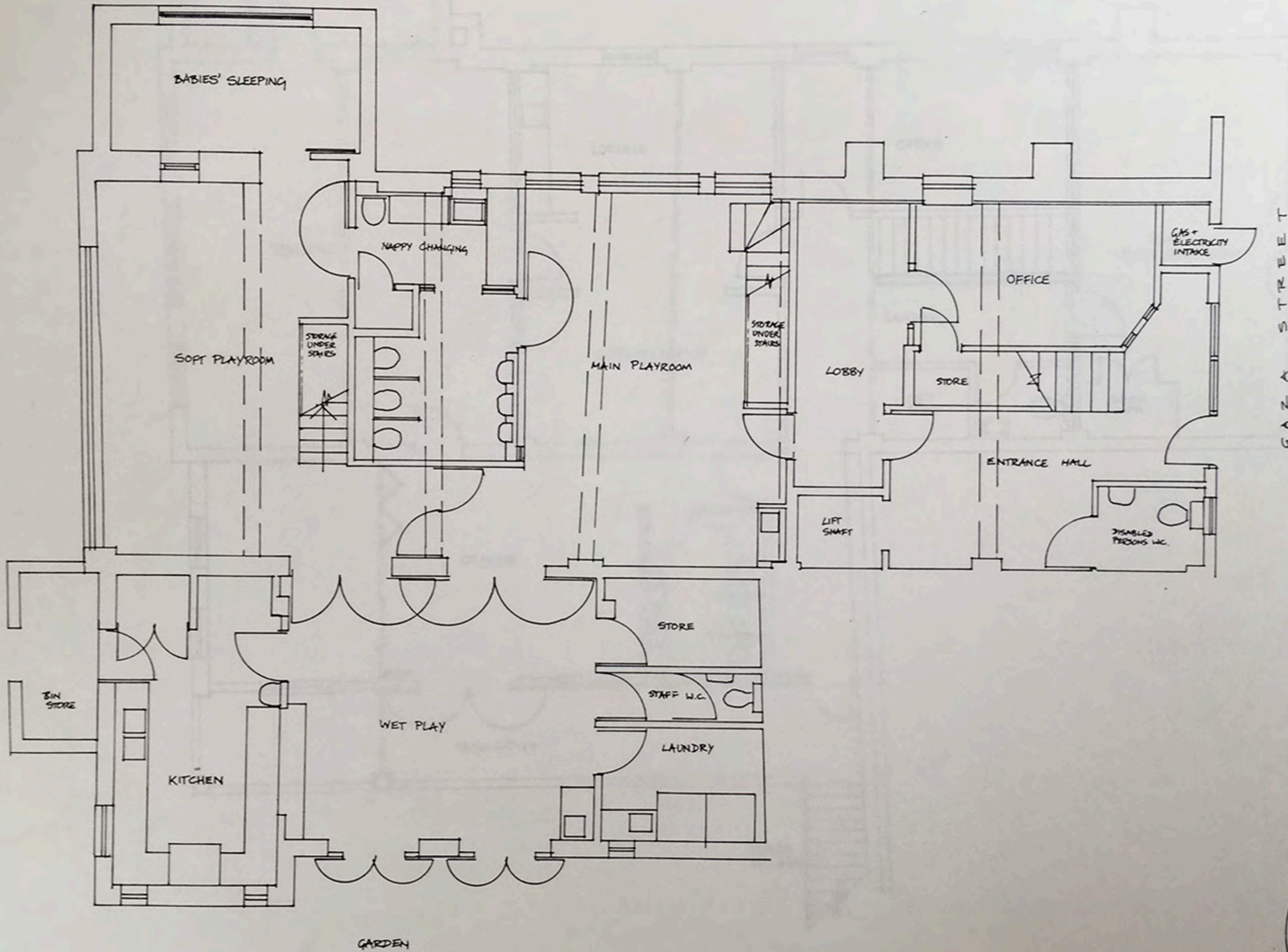




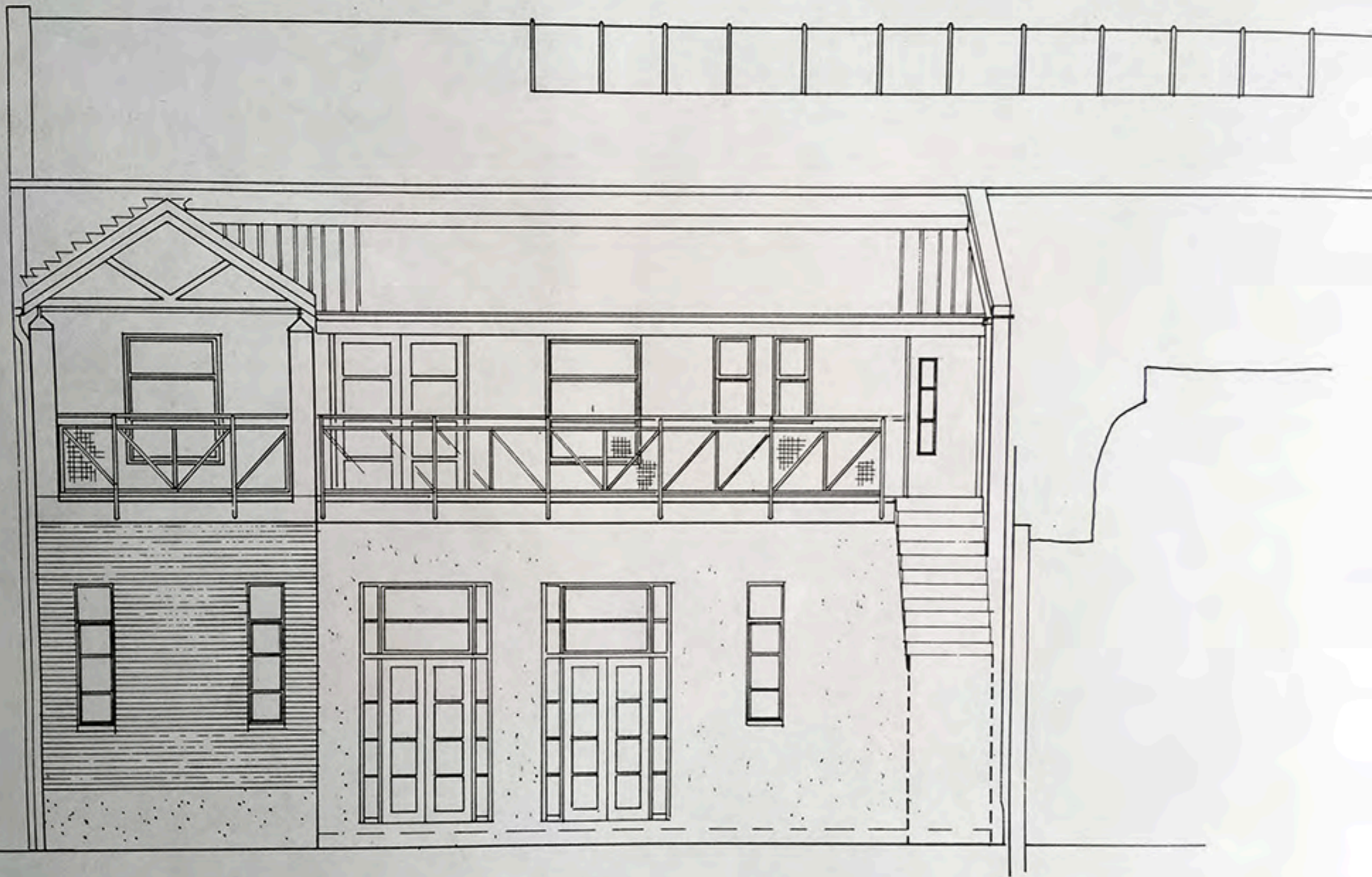
notes

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- 2 No dimensions to be scaled from this document
- 3 This drawing is to be removed from circulation immediately a revised version is issued.

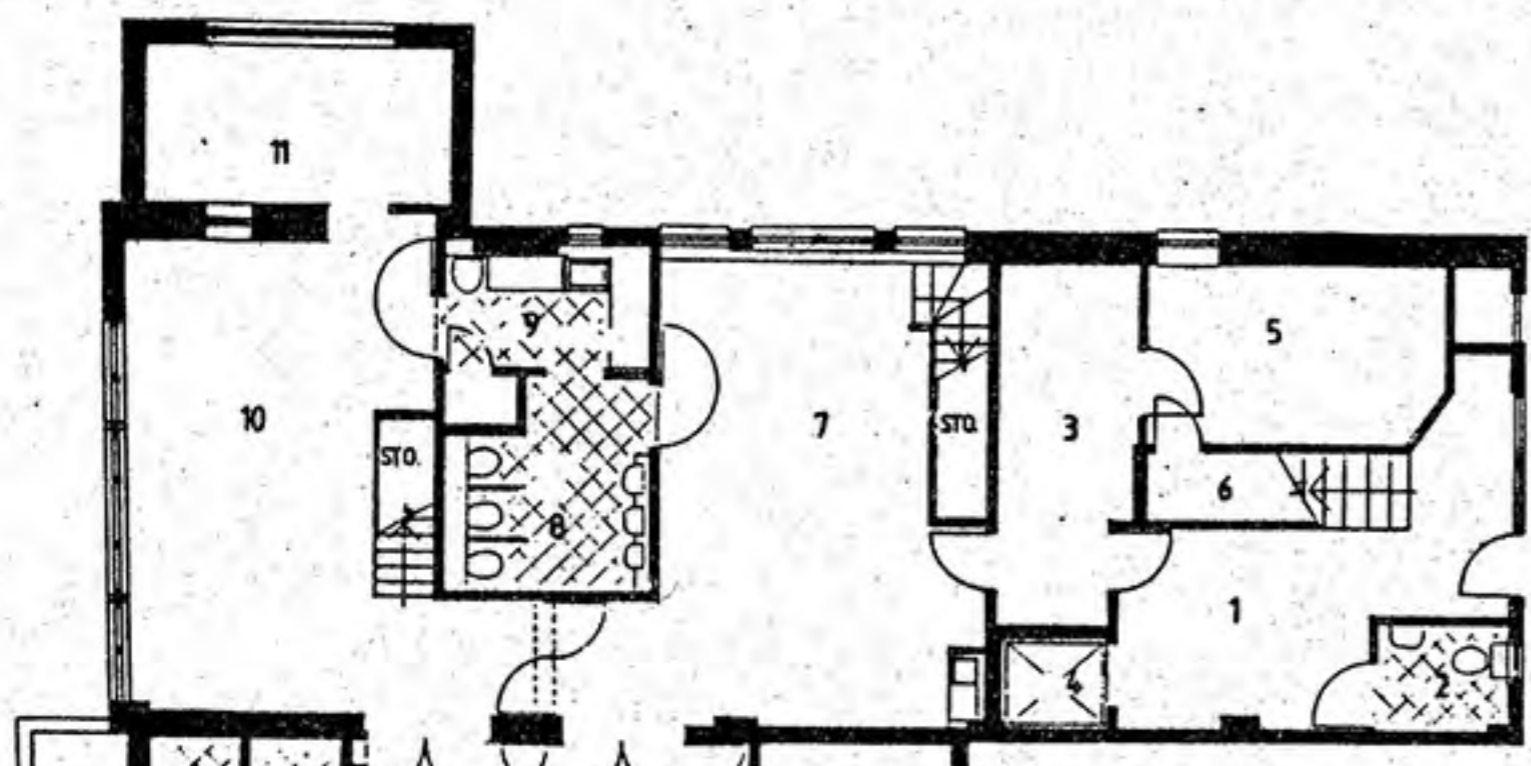
revisions



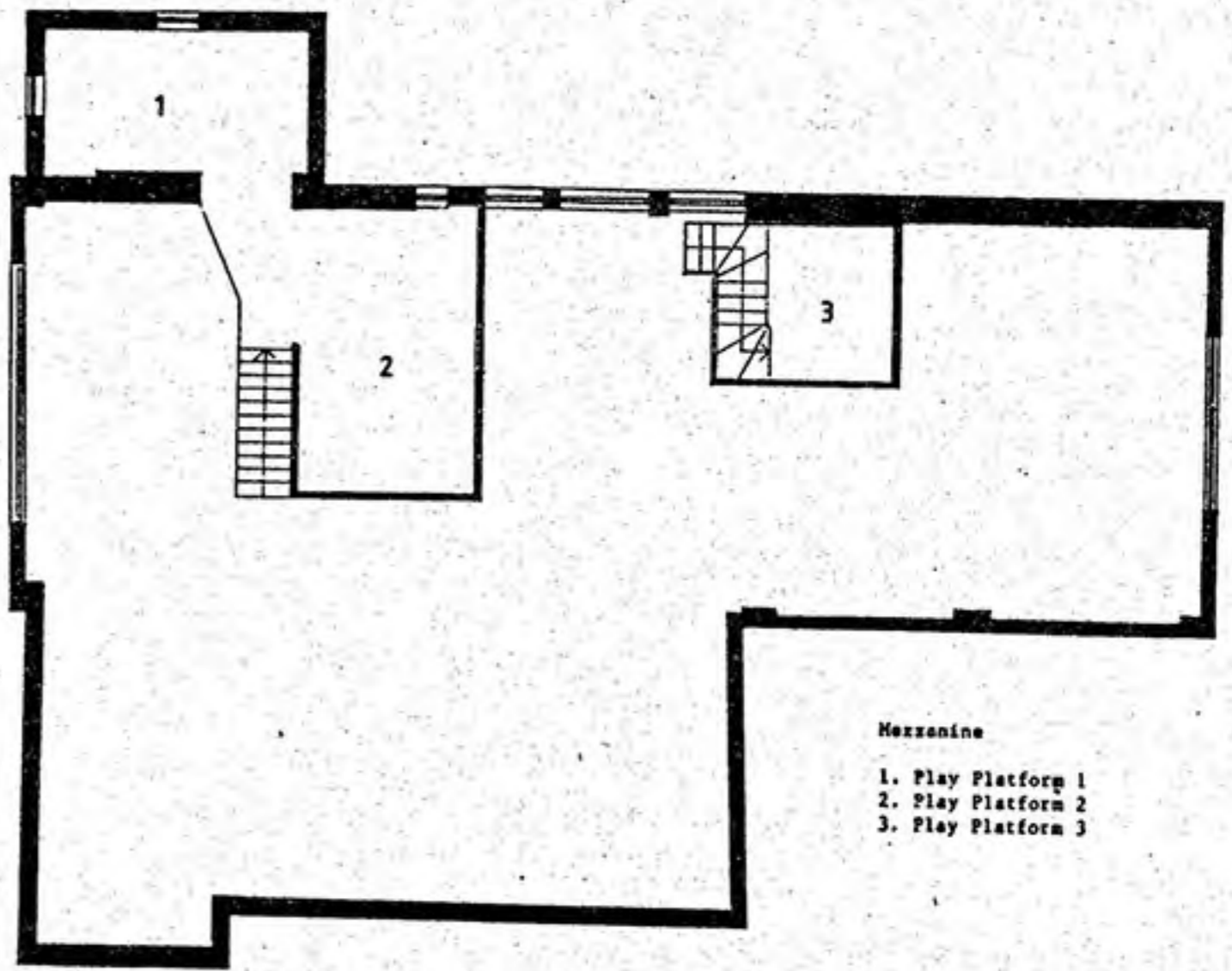
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Matrix
 TRAINING GROUND FLOOR
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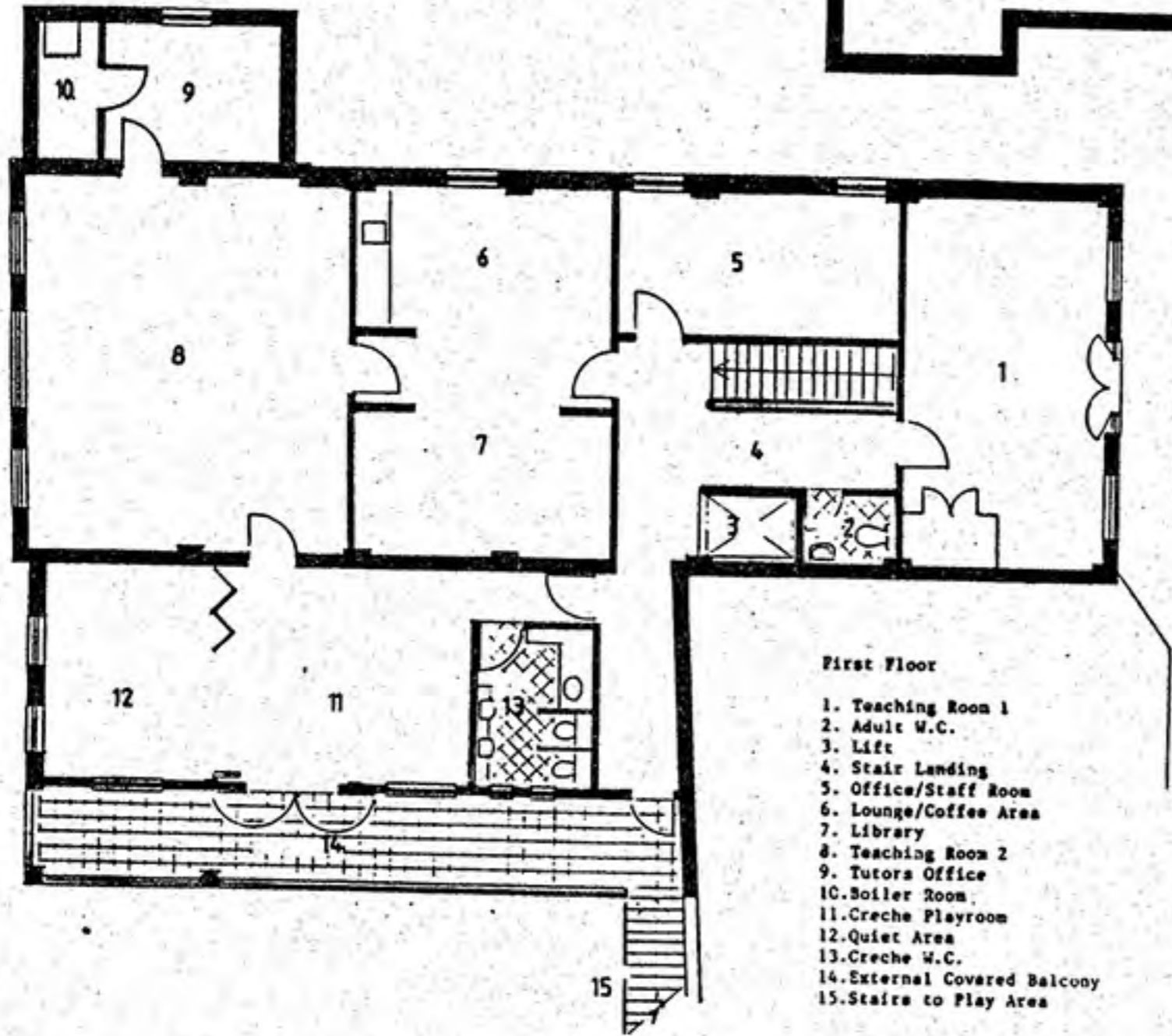
NORTH - EAST ELEVATION



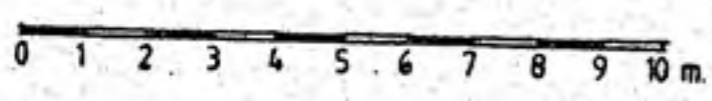
- Ground Floor**
1. Entrance Hall
 2. Disabled Access W.C.
 3. Lobby/Cloakroom
 4. Lift
 5. General Office
 6. Store
 7. Main Playroom
 8. Childrens W.C.
 9. Nappy Changing area
 10. Soft Playroom
 11. Babies Sleeping Room
 12. Wet Play Room
 13. Store
 14. Laundry
 15. Staff W.C.
 16. Kitchen
 17. Outdoor Play Area



- Mezzanine**
1. Play Platform 1
 2. Play Platform 2
 3. Play Platform 3



- First Floor**
1. Teaching Room 1
 2. Adult W.C.
 3. Lift
 4. Stair Landing
 5. Office/Staff Room
 6. Lounge/Coffee Area
 7. Library
 8. Teaching Room 2
 9. Tutors Office
 10. Boiler Room
 11. Creche Playroom
 12. Quiet Area
 13. Creche W.C.
 14. External Covered Balcony
 15. Stairs to Play Area



PROJECT: JUMOKE TRAINING NURSERY
 ARCHITECTS: MATRIX

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