



**VELUX®**

**A FOUND POEM**  
Refurbishment of a House, Aachen

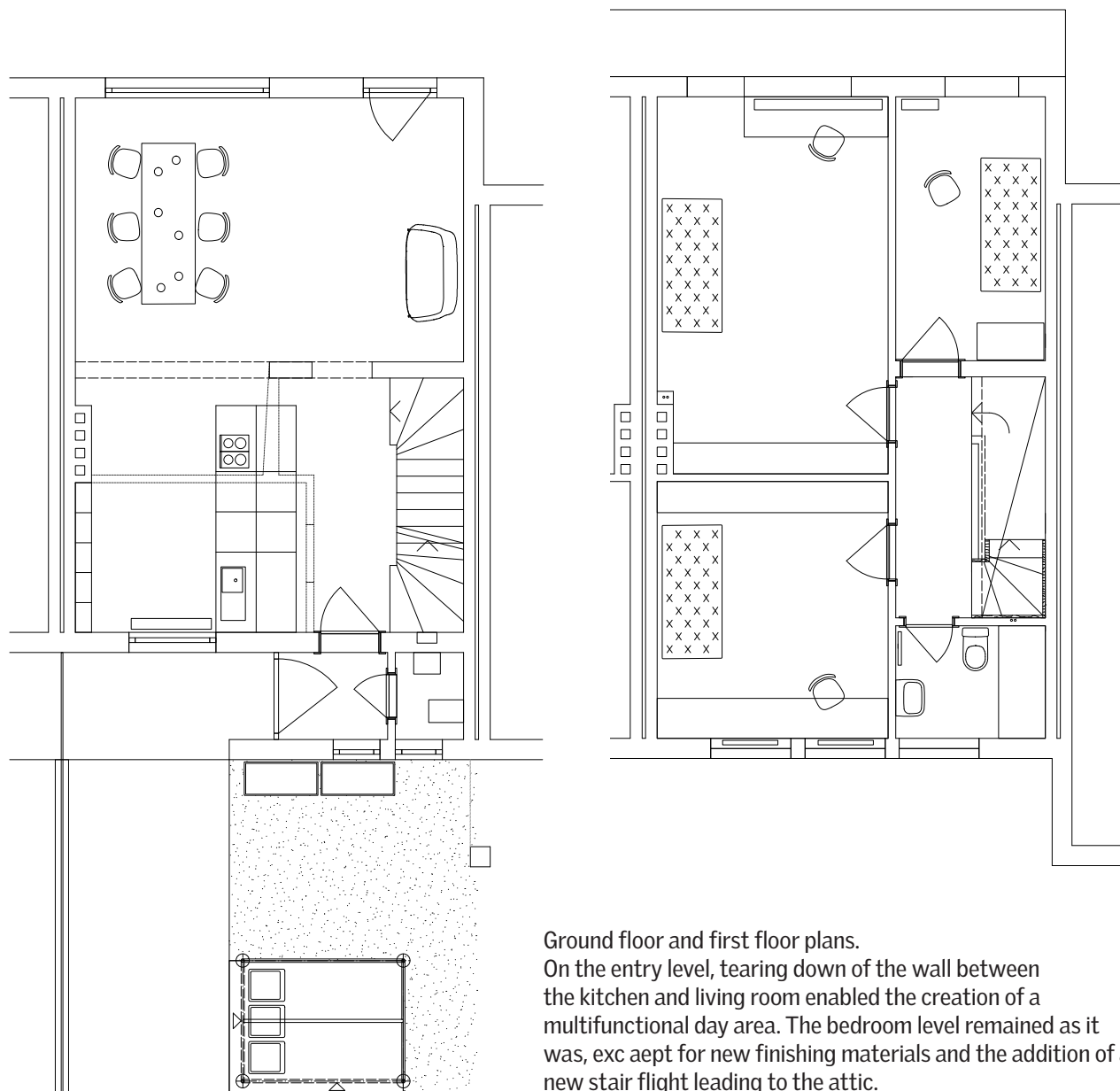


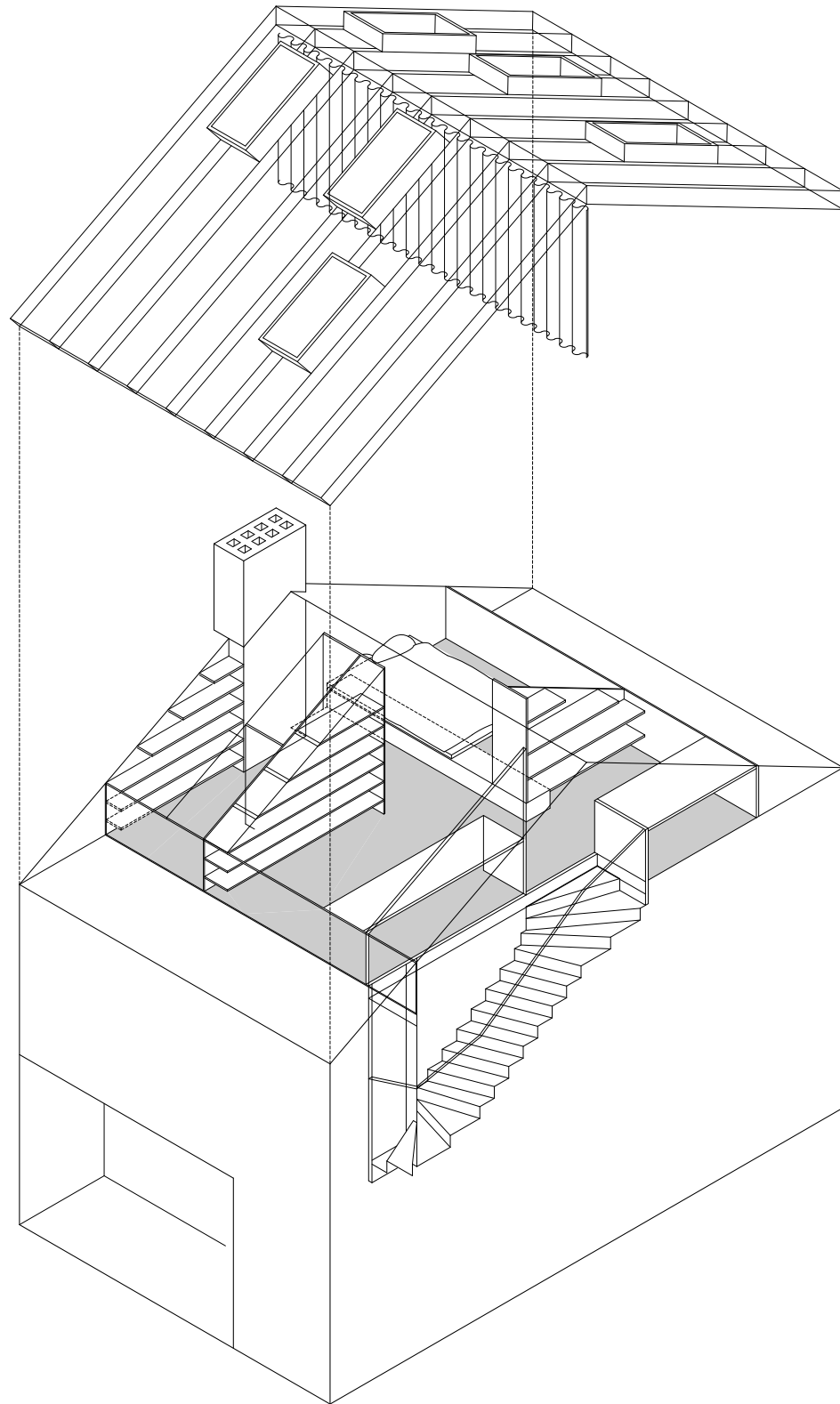
## LARGE IMPACT OF SMALL CHANGES

A collaboration between Jan Theissen and Sonja Nagel in Stuttgart and Björn Martenson in Aachen is a roof for independent ventures and collaborations. Under the name of AMUNT the trio, realise various projects in the fields of architecture, refurbishments, expertises and teaching. The projects come from various sources, often as simple as friends of office's former clients.

Such was the case of the refurbishment in Aachen. The clients, a teacher and a researcher specialised on the history of comics, asked for small enhancements of their inconspicuous 60-ties concrete-walled row house, which they could partially execute themselves. The budget was very limited, very much in line with the motto of the project: celebrating the simplicity of found elements, rather than trying to introduce a new aesthetics. The couple needed an extra guest bed, working spaces for themselves and space for their vast collections of books.

The ground floor has been opened to create an open kitchen and living area, the bedroom floor did not change much. The star of the refurbishment is a new space in a cold, unused attic, that has been hiding behind a ceiling trap door.





Axonometric view of the attic.  
 Built-in furniture replaces the walls, providing at the same time storage space for the homeowners' library, and dividing the space into cosy nooks.

## LUCKY DISCOVERIES

"Upon emptying the attic space, we have discovered a concrete beam sticking out on the floor, on top of a load-bearing wall on the floor below. Although I can't explain why it has been introduced, this element turned out to be crucial for the design: in its newly added function as bed leg, the beam stands for the way we connect old and new."

Björn Martenson, AMUNT

The project is a result of strategical planning, which makes best out of discoveries throughout the process, with all upsides and downsides that came along in the process.

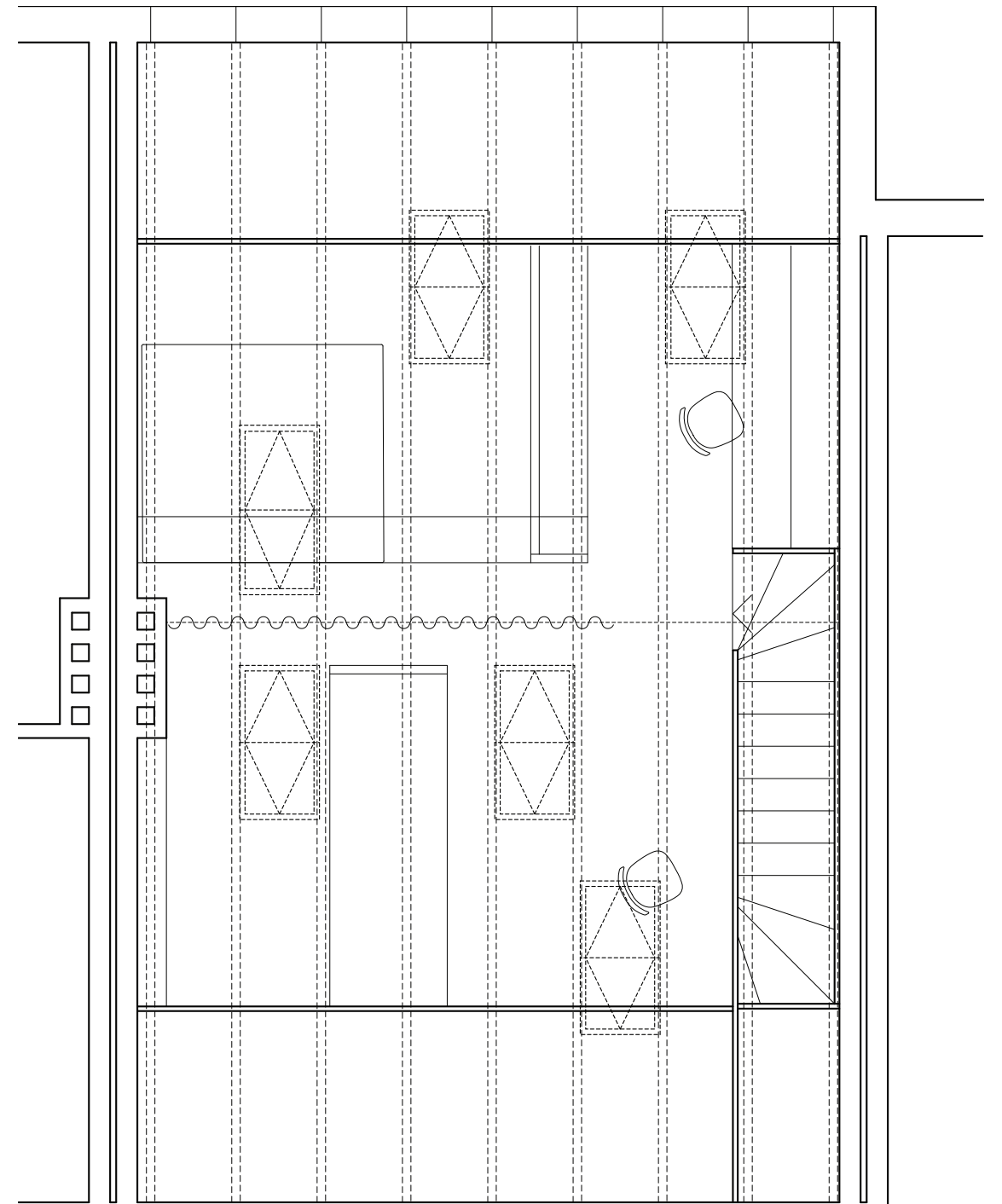
A major lucky coincidence was the fact, that the distances between the existing roof beams just perfectly matched the width of a standard VELUX window. A new roof insulation has been added above the plywood roof girders; between them, there was just enough space for smaller standard sized VELUX windows. The architect planned five of them, ensuring a variety of views as well as optimal daylight and ventilation of the space.

"You have to make good choices, when planning on a tight budget; we chose to install one more VELUX window more, instead of equipping the house with automatic system or remote controls."

Björn Martenson, AMUNT

Björn Martenson sees low-budget solutions as a chance, not a limitation caused by financial restraints. An economical approach pushes towards ecologically conscious solutions, achieved through saving on unnecessary decoration and complicated multi-step finishings.

The entire roof extension – structure, finishings and build-in furniture – has been done by one carpenter company. The now exposed existing roof structure has not been designed as a part of a living space – leaving them as they are requires embracing the imperfection.



Floor plan of the attic. A staircase replaced the former hatch in the ceiling. Five VELUX windows, located on both sides of the roof at different heights, ensure not only an optimal, but also differentiated daylight in the space and provide necessary ventilation.





"One cannot explain poetry in architecture, especially not to a client. It's something that just happens as a result of functional and appropriate spacial and material solutions in hands of an experienced architect. People just feel, that there is something special about certain spaces, even very mundane ones."

Björn Martenson, AMUNT

# ALL IN ONE

The attic space consist of niches and alcoves, opening towards the centre; it feels generous, despite being rather small. A curtain, which can be closed along the line of the roof ridge, transforms the open plan into two separate areas.

Björn Martenson stresses out the importance of the immaterial design elements, with focus on the daylight. It's a central topic both in his practice the design courses he is teaching at the Architectural Department of the University of Munich.

**"A room changes its character together with the daylight throughout the day. Each daytime has a specific colour and intensity of light; having openings on various sides enriches every space."**

Björn Martenson, AMUNT

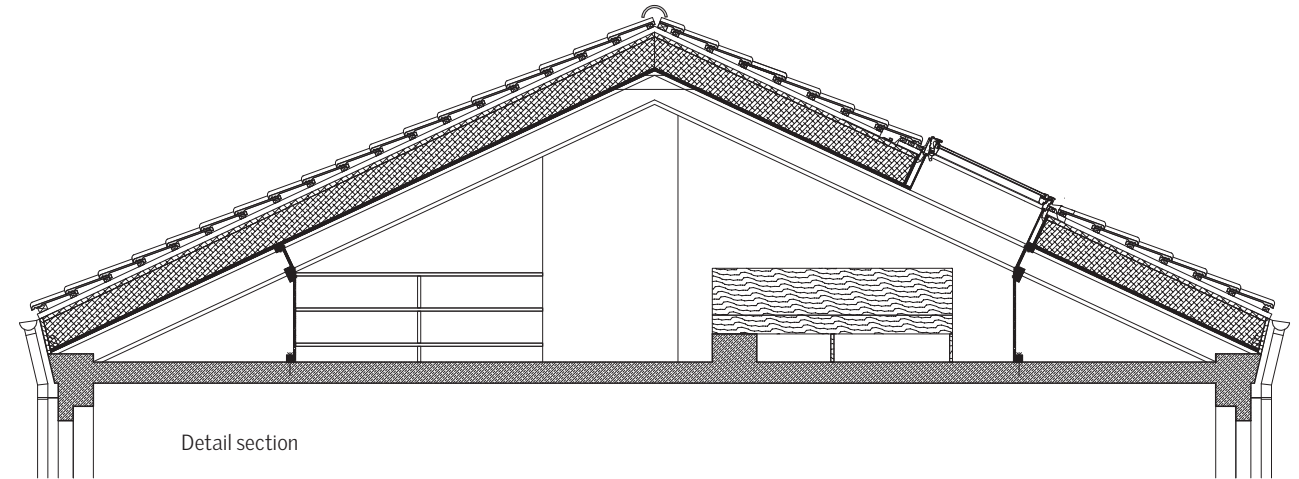
The architect praises daylight from above for its actual and felt intensity. He stresses out the importance of the tools calculating the amount of daylight in the rooms as a way of controlling a possible overheating. Thanks to openable VELUX windows, though, the stale, overheated air is expelled through the roof.

Despite of the concentration on primary elements, Björn Martenson is a master in choosing materials and colours. The concrete floor of the attic, brushed-up and covered in light green paint looks fresh, yet calm. The combination of the colour and light-coloured wood recalls, according to architect's words, the feeling of a holiday house.

He stresses out his belief in the crucial decisions being part of the raw, primary structure of a project. This is a sustainable approach, guaranteeing that a project will keep its most important qualities even if altered by future inhabitants with unmatching colours or textures. Luckily, the inhabitants' of the house in Aachen excellent taste matches the tailor-made architecture created for them.

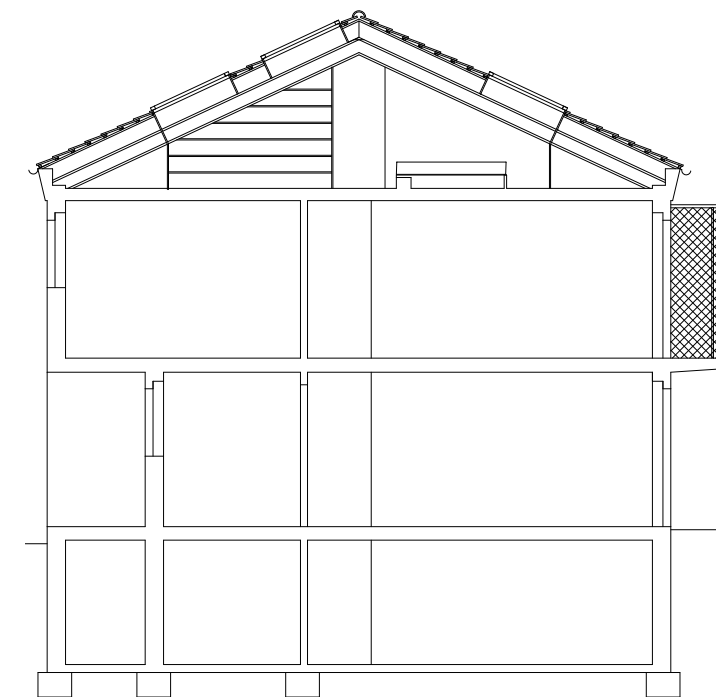
A curtain running along the ridge allows for creating multiple rooms within one. The open space morphs into cosy niches – a bedroom and a library.

The tiny project has won the 2020 edition of the VELUX competition for architects, confirming Björn Martenson's thesis, that the quality of architecture cannot be measured in square metres.



**"Is this my first project with VELUX windows?  
Oh no, it's the other way around: I did only one house without them."**

Björn Martenson, AMUNT



The section reveals the simplicity of the measures taken: VELUX windows, added insulation, cut-off narrow corners between the roof and the floor, as well as built-in furniture were enough to create an elegant, airy feeling in what used to be a muffy attic.







## PROJECT DATA

Project: Refurbishment of a row house  
Location: Aachen, Germany  
Architects: AMUNT, Björn Martenson, Aachen  
Year: 2019

Photos: AMUNT

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