

¡Tun, tun! Abre la muralla.
¡Tun, tun! Open the wall.

The Malatería of San Lázaro has historically been used for institutional and care-related purposes, a use that the competition guidelines propose to preserve as part of the building's new life. And it's true: it was founded as a leprosy hospital around the 13th century and maintained that function until the end of the 18th century with the eradication of the disease. It was then transformed into a charitable house, at which point the building we know today was erected. Finally, from 1892 to 2010, it housed a residence for the elderly, until its closure and abandonment.

However, despite having hosted social uses throughout its history, the Malatería has never been an open place; rather, quite the opposite: **a closed building, disconnected from the city.** This is also suggested in *The Small History of the San Lázaro Neighborhood*, by Nicanor Díaz Álvarez:

"The idea that lepers could contaminate the waters is reflected in the name change of the small Premaña River to Gafo, the name still used for the stream that flows at the foot of the Malatería."

Historically, it functioned as a place of isolation. And that feeling is still perceptible today. Walking through the Parque de Invierno, we see how **the Malatería remains above the old Vasco tunnel, elevated and closed like a contemporary fortress**. This perception can hardly be accidental, one might think, upon learning that the building played a key role in two historical events: the Asturian Revolution of 1934, as headquarters of the Revolutionary Committee, and a few years later, as a witness to the Spanish Civil War.

This critical reading of the place will be the foundation of our proposal: **how can we reverse the building's historical disconnection and isolation without distorting an image already established in the collective imagination?**

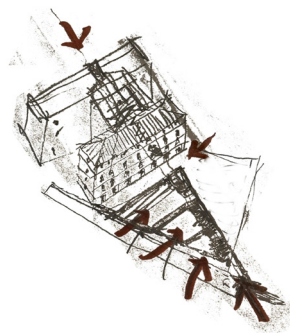
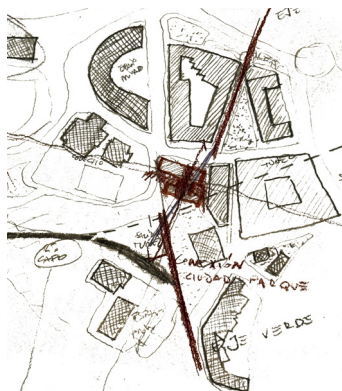
Therefore, the intervention begins with the surroundings. **A new axis is proposed to articulate a sequence of relationships between the neighborhood and the building:** the limit imposed by the southern bypass is broken, connecting Leopoldo Alas Street with Aurelio de Llano Street, which provides access to the ground floor of the Malatería. From there, a stepped staircase descends to the semi-basement level, transforming these lower floors of the building into a covered plaza on two levels. The path continues outside, stitching together new green spaces within the plot until they connect with the Parque de Invierno. Thus, the large stone wall that once defended the Malatería from the south is dissolved to allow access—an operation that not only resolves a level difference, but also turns the Malatería into a true threshold between the city and the park.

At the same time, the intervention within the building is guided by an inclusive attitude: to add without replacing, to complement without subtracting. **A second skin, light and transparent, allows the building to be recognized as it stands while serving as a catalyst for life.** Beyond its symbolic dimension, this intervention also aims to improve the building's thermal comfort. This new veil of the Malatería introduces a different way of inhabiting: enjoying good ventilation in summer while sitting on the terrace, or contemplating the winter landscape from the warmth of the gallery.

—What is it?
A building closed, elevated, isolated.
Close the wall!
—What is it?
A lived-in, open, shared plaza.
Tun tun! Open the wall.

—¿Qué es?
Un edificio cerrado, elevado, aislado.
¡Cierra la muralla!

—¿Qué es?
Una plaza habitada, abierta, compartida.
¡Tun tun! Abre la muralla.



¡Tun, tun! Abre la muralla.
¡Tun, tun! Open the wall.

It is necessary to rethink the traditional housing program in order to fulfill the aim of this proposal: to reverse the historical isolation of the Malatería. To do so, the public and the private, the domestic and the collective, the open and the intimate are combined within the same building. The different uses overlap and intertwine across the floors, forming a gradient of relationships that responds to different levels of intimacy.

Malatería

Public space: accessible to any resident of the neighbourhood or the city.

Housing building

Collective space: corridors, terraces or shared laundry rooms, where residents coexist on a daily basis.

Unit housing

Shared space: kitchen, living room or terrace, where one can make others part of one's private environment.

Intimate space: the most private area, where one can strengthen ties with oneself or with close ones.

This **topography of relationships** is defined by the difference in elevation of both the terrain and the building itself. Public spaces are located on the northern side of the ground floor and the southern side of the semi-basement level, where there is direct access to the outside. The remaining floors and areas, accessed independently through one of the patios, host the communal spaces that lead to the dwellings.

A closer look at **the section reveals how the relationship between public and communal space is possible on every level**, without direct communication, thus ensuring the safety and privacy of the residents. To achieve this, the central volume that previously connected the two original wings of the Malatería is emptied and transformed into a stepped plaza across several levels.

To resolve the new circulation scheme, the second skin —the veil— plays a key role: it penetrates the central volume to provide access to all the dwellings and articulates the connection between the two perpendicular wings, encouraging interaction between floors and the public space. It also stitches together the old communication cores on the north façade —facing Gil de Blas street— with a new core to be placed in the southwest corner of the building, which will also function as a lookout toward the Aramo mountain range.

Like the veil, the **new plaza** serves not only a symbolic purpose but also a climatic one: **it works as a greenhouse in winter, capturing solar radiation and transferring heat to the interior of the dwellings, and as a chimney in summer to promote natural ventilation.**

The intervention on the Malatería can be summarized as the sum of a series of added elements: one of them, the new layer —the double skin— as previously described, responds to a threefold purpose: climatic, by improving thermal performance through passive strategies; symbolic, by bringing life back to the Malatería without distorting its image; and functional, by redefining and optimizing the building's circulation flows. The other consists of a series of wooden modules within the interior space, which reorganize the layout and define a system of flexible, **adaptable dwellings that can be configured into multiple typologies.**



¡Tun, tun! Abre la muralla.
¡Tun, tun! Open the wall.

The housing units have been designed to adapt to the changing needs of young people, with the aim of offering a space in which to develop a medium- to long-term life project. This housing system is based on the two previously defined types of spaces:

Shared space: an open and flexible area of approximately 25 m², to which 12 m² of terrace/gallery can be added. Located between the modules, this area can be freely organized according to the preferences of its inhabitants.

Intimate spaces: distributed in two types of prefabricated wooden modules — one housing a bedroom (11 m²) and two bathrooms (5 m² each), and the other housing two bedrooms (11 m² each).

The floor plan is configured according to the alternating position of these two types of modules —one placed, one left empty— until completing a maximum of four dwellings per floor and per building volume, for a total of 28 units across the complex.

Each dwelling is assembled by linking the module spaces (bedrooms and bathrooms) to a single shared space, allowing for a wide variety of configurations.

The system admits dwellings with the number of rooms or spaces required at any given moment: studio (S), one-bedroom (1B), two-bedroom (2B), or three-bedroom (3B) units. As such, **there is no fixed number of units per typology**; instead, the layout remains open to multiple possible combinations, such as: **2 x 3B + 2 x S; 1 x 3B + 1 x 2B + 1 x 1B + 1 x S; 3 x 2B + 1S; 2 x 1B + 2 x 2B; 3 x 1B + 1 x 3B...**

These independent modules, built with a wooden frame and clad in wood panels, are prefabricated in workshops to streamline the construction process. Each is designed with four openings that will be completed on site, either with a door or a blank panel, depending on the desired configuration. Both are removable, enabling a living space that is not static, but capable of evolving with the changing circumstances of young residents.

The lightweight character of the intervention —in contrast with the existing building— becomes the project's leitmotif. On the exterior, **a metallic structure made of slender steel profiles and thin steel floor plates is chosen not only for its formal coherence with the intent of preserving the building's original image, but also for reasons of proximity**. Gijón and Avilés form one of the country's most important steel-producing regions: this local availability, combined with the durability and recyclability of steel, reduces the environmental impact of transport and maintenance.

Although the project seeks to preserve the existing building as much as possible, it is necessary to carry out selective demolition or replacement of certain elements that, if kept, would compromise the project's objectives. In line with the overall strategy, **the resulting construction waste will be reused as infill for gabion walls in the new green spaces on the site**, which form part of the connection axis between the city and the park. This action not only reduces the volume of waste and the impact of transport, but also transforms these walls into habitats for diverse species of plants and animals. As on the façade, **this second veil —the gabion walls— shapes the terrain: facilitating connection with the building while also catalyzing new forms of life**.

The choice of materials, the configuration of uses, and the mode of intervention all respond to a single question: how can we reverse the building's historical disconnection and isolation without distorting an image deeply rooted in the collective imagination? To answer this, harmony is needed between the existing and the added, between new ways of inhabiting and a rigid inherited space, between public and private, between the building and the city

To open the walls of the Malatería without erasing its past, and in doing so, transform the fortress into an inhabited plaza.

