

An aerial photograph of Mexico City, showing a dense urban grid and a prominent highway interchange. The image is dark and serves as a background for the text.

POLANCO

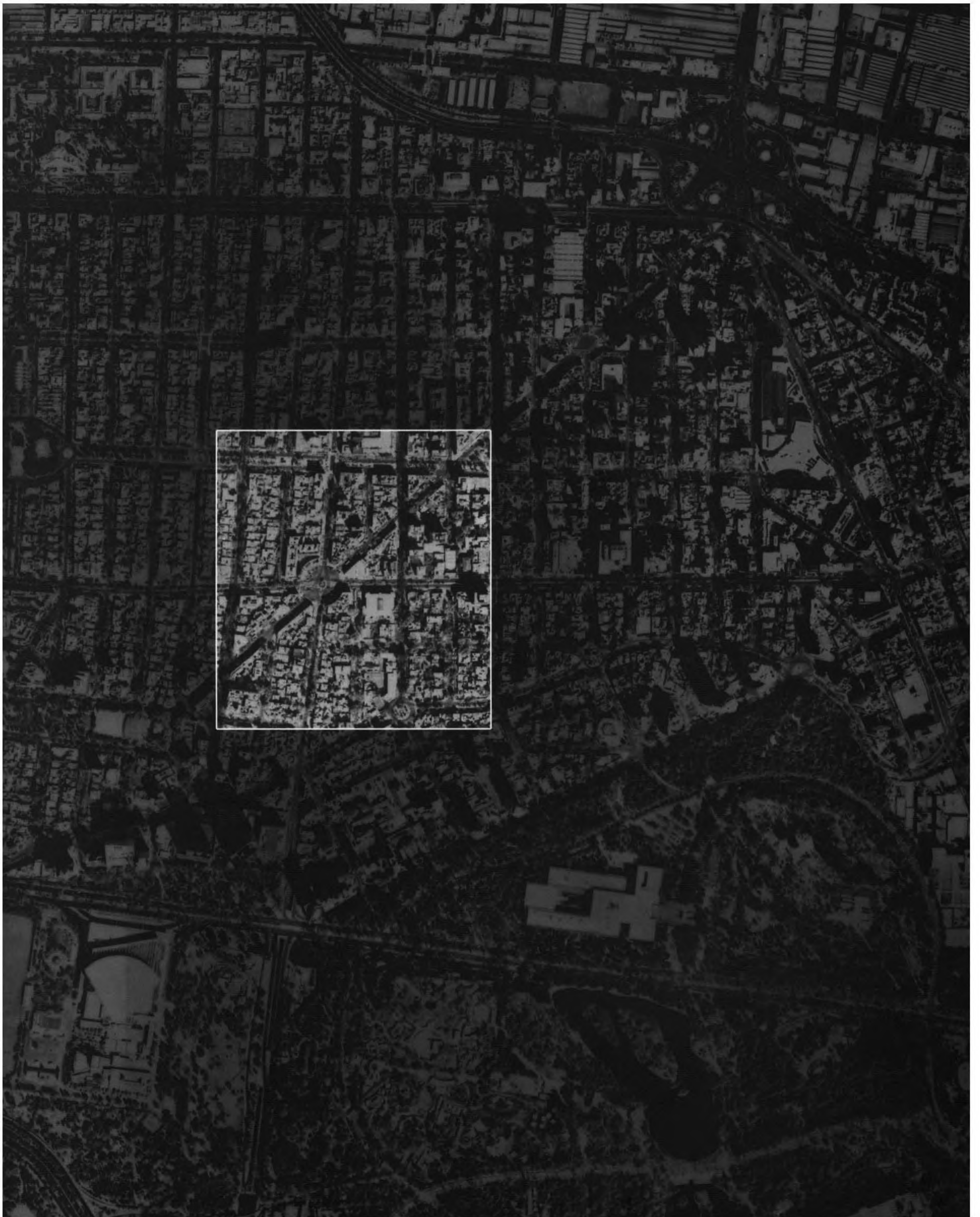
COLONIA IN THE DELEGATION MIGUEL HIDALGO, CENTRAL- WESTERN D.F., DIRECTLY NORTH OF CHAPULTAPEC PARK.

Although most of Mexico City's neighborhoods grew incrementally from Aztec or Colonial villages until they were subsumed by the metropolis, Polanco remained farmland until the city's vertiginous growth prompted its development in the twentieth century. Part of an estate granted by the King of Spain to the explorer Hernán Cortés in 1529, the land remained a single plot until the 1920s.

As the city expanded in the early twentieth century, a series of neighborhoods, Roma, Roma Norte, and Condesa developed radially from the city's center along the Paseo de la Reforma. Proximity to this major avenue provided easy access to the commercial and cultural activities that remained in the Center.

Capitalizing on Mexico City's robust economy and an influx of wealthy European immigrants in the 1930s, the city's two most prominent developers joined forces to create the city's most exclusive neighborhood. Their previous experience engineering and designing Condesa and Roma enabled Polanco's transformation from farmland to prestigious neighborhood within one year, 1937-1938. The project's success resulted primarily from the developers' decision to dedicate one third of the land to public parks, gardens, wide avenues, and streets. Provisions for commercial properties were conspicuously absent and contributed both to the community's air of exclusivity and its isolation,

The viability of the project is evident in the large neo-baroque residences built in the late 1930s that persist as the neighborhood's predominant building type. In the last ten years, redevelopment along the major avenues has introduced hotels, art galleries, restaurants, and fashion design houses into the once entirely residential fabric.





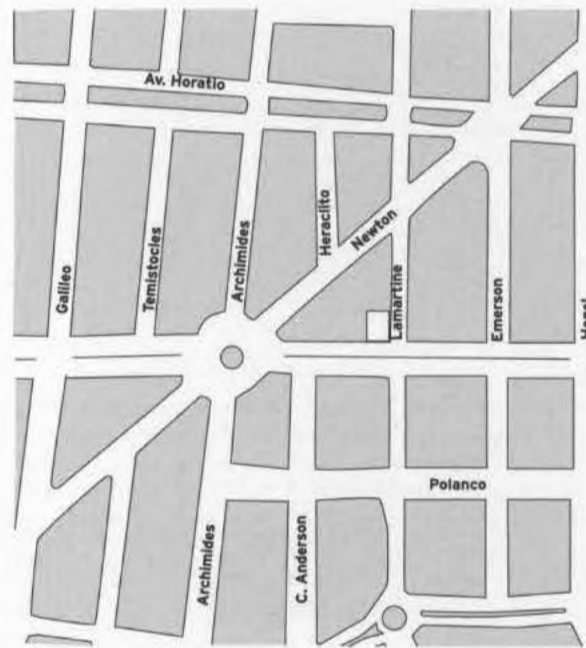
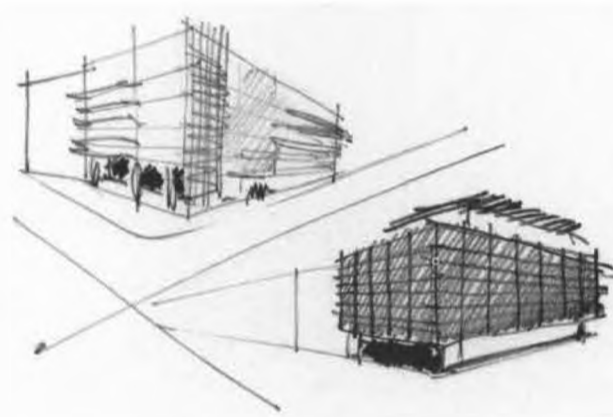
HOTEL HABITA TEN ARQUITECTOS

In a lecture presented to the Architectural League of New York, Enrique Norten spoke about working in Mexico City, "Today Mexico City represents not only a new physical condition, but a new urbanity [composed] of political, financial, and socio-economic forces. It can only be read through a cubist condition of transparency where these very rich layers are superimposed." Although some critics contend that the work of his firm is materially, technologically, and formally 'non-Mexican,' by foregrounding the project's relation to and effect on the surrounding urban condition, Norten contextualizes his work in the "new urbanity" politically, financially, and socio-economically. TEN (Tallier Enrique Norten) Arquitectos' Hotel Habita responds to its context operationally rather than imitatively.

On an active street in Polanco, TEN renovated a virtually derelict apartment building from the 1950s into a thirty-six room boutique hotel. Designed for a specific sector of the tourist market, the hotel includes a rooftop spa, gourmet restaurant, and technologically savvy rooms. Perhaps more remarkable than the building's transformation has been its effect on the immediate area. The hotel has stimulated the opening of several businesses nearby transforming what was the fringe of a high-end shopping area into consolidated urban fabric.

The existing building's sound reinforced concrete structure and the spatial similarity of new and old program necessitated minimal changes to the interior. Instead TEN focused on the exterior: recladding the building with a thick, occupiable skin that mediates between the need for guests' privacy and the architects' desire to activate the surrounding area. By extending the existing balconies to form a continuous gallery and attaching a new translucent glazing system to the outer edge, the façade of the building is effectively displaced five feet beyond the original building line. Measuring three meters by one and a half meters, individual glass panes are attached to the balconies with steel components designed by TEN Arquitectos as low tech solutions that accommodated both the budget and the skills of the labor market.

Comprised of a full height transparent glass interior wall and a translucent glass exterior wall, the thick façade amply lights the interiors while affording visual privacy, while still registering movement, light, and shadow. The building's life is especially externalized at night when the occupancy of the rooms creates a random illuminated pattern on the façade. Reciprocally, the city is internalized in the building through tactical location of small clear glass windows that afford carefully framed views. —Ashley Schafer

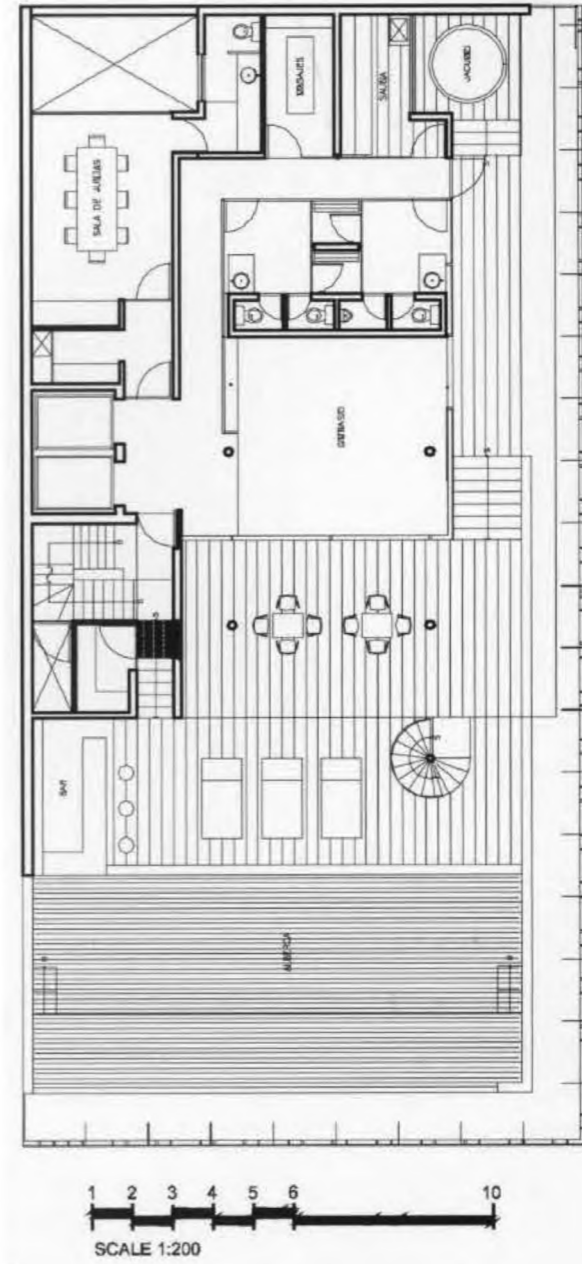
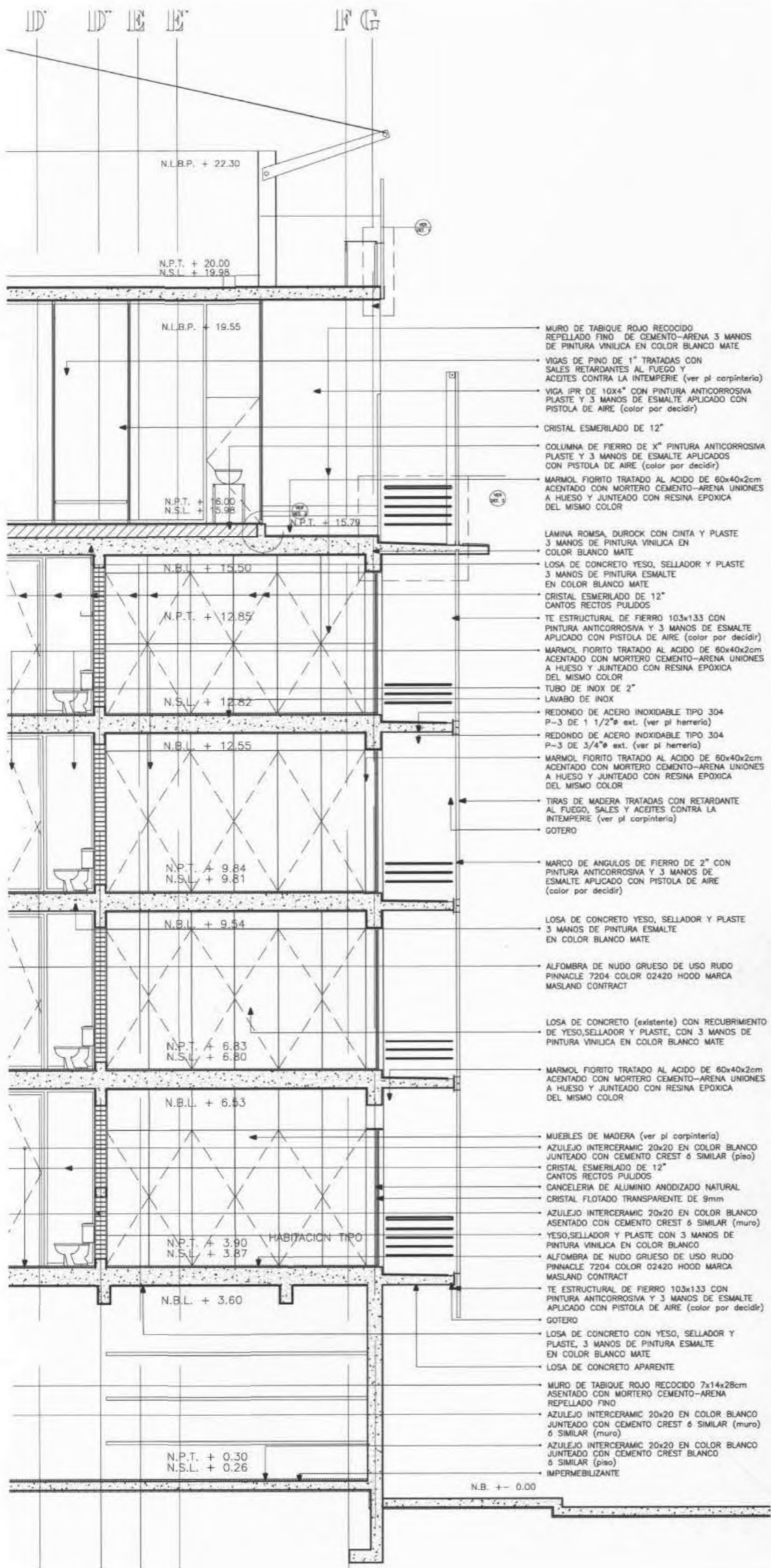


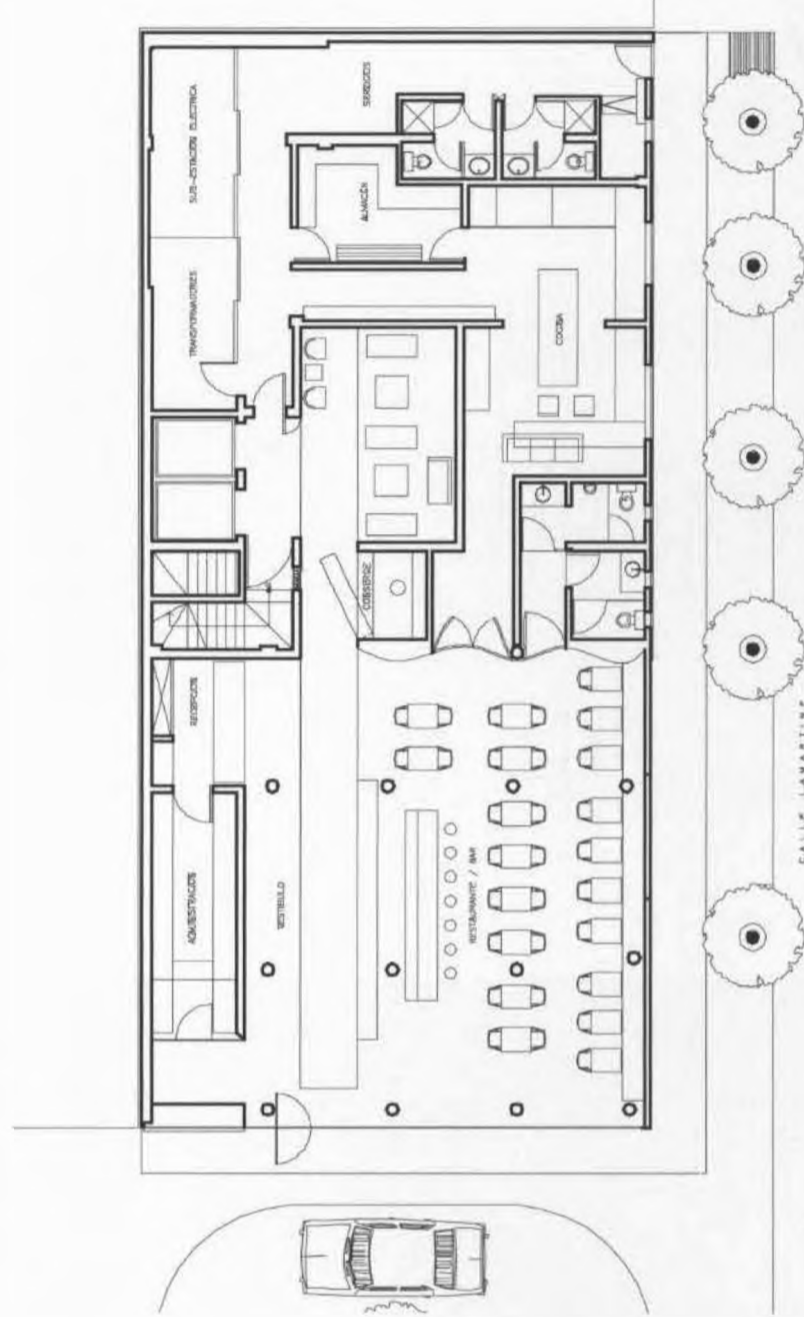
BELOW LEFT : Prior to its conversion into a thirty-six room hotel, the 1950s structure was vacant except for two ground floor commercial tenants.

BOTTOM LEFT : Sketches studying the façade transformation. The balconies were extended and wrapped in a translucent glass skin that provides both light and privacy to the rooms.

FACING PAGE : The building above the ground floor is re-clad in translucent glass. Areas of transparent glass are tactically located to carefully frame desirable views, and screen the unattractive views.







FACING PAGE ABOVE :
Terrace/Spa Level Plan.

FACING PAGE FAR LEFT :
Section through a typical
room and balcony designed
as an interstitial space
between the new and exist-
ing façades.

FACING BELOW : Detail view
of the hand-crafted steel
fasteners that attach the
translucent glass panels to
the balcony edges. The steel
"cornice" provides support
for window washing.

LEFT : Typical floor plan
and ground floor plan.

BELOW : Views of the
appended façade space on
the fifth floor spa level (left)
and at a typical room (right.)
In addition to providing light,
minimal detailing at the
interior glass expands the
space of the room.

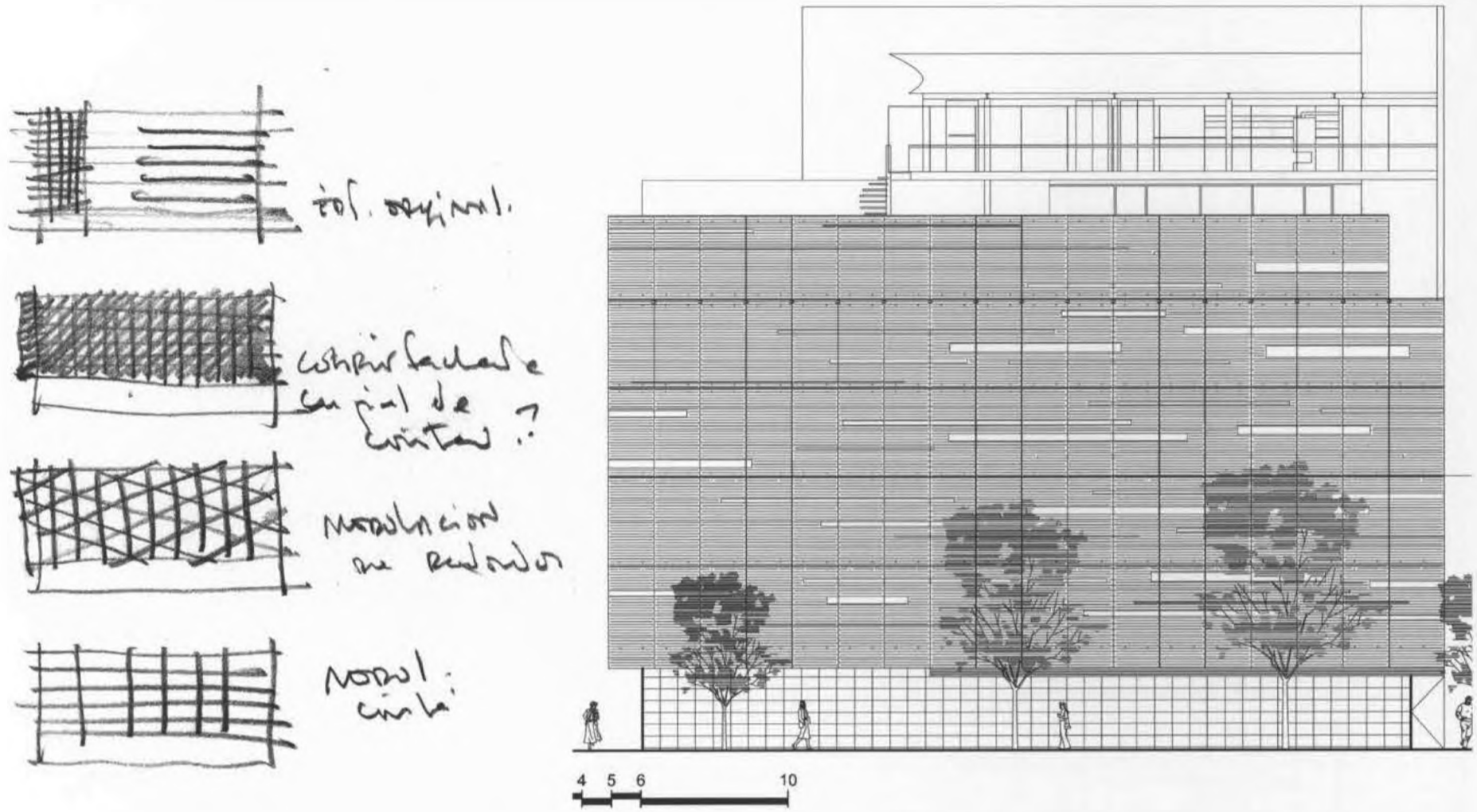


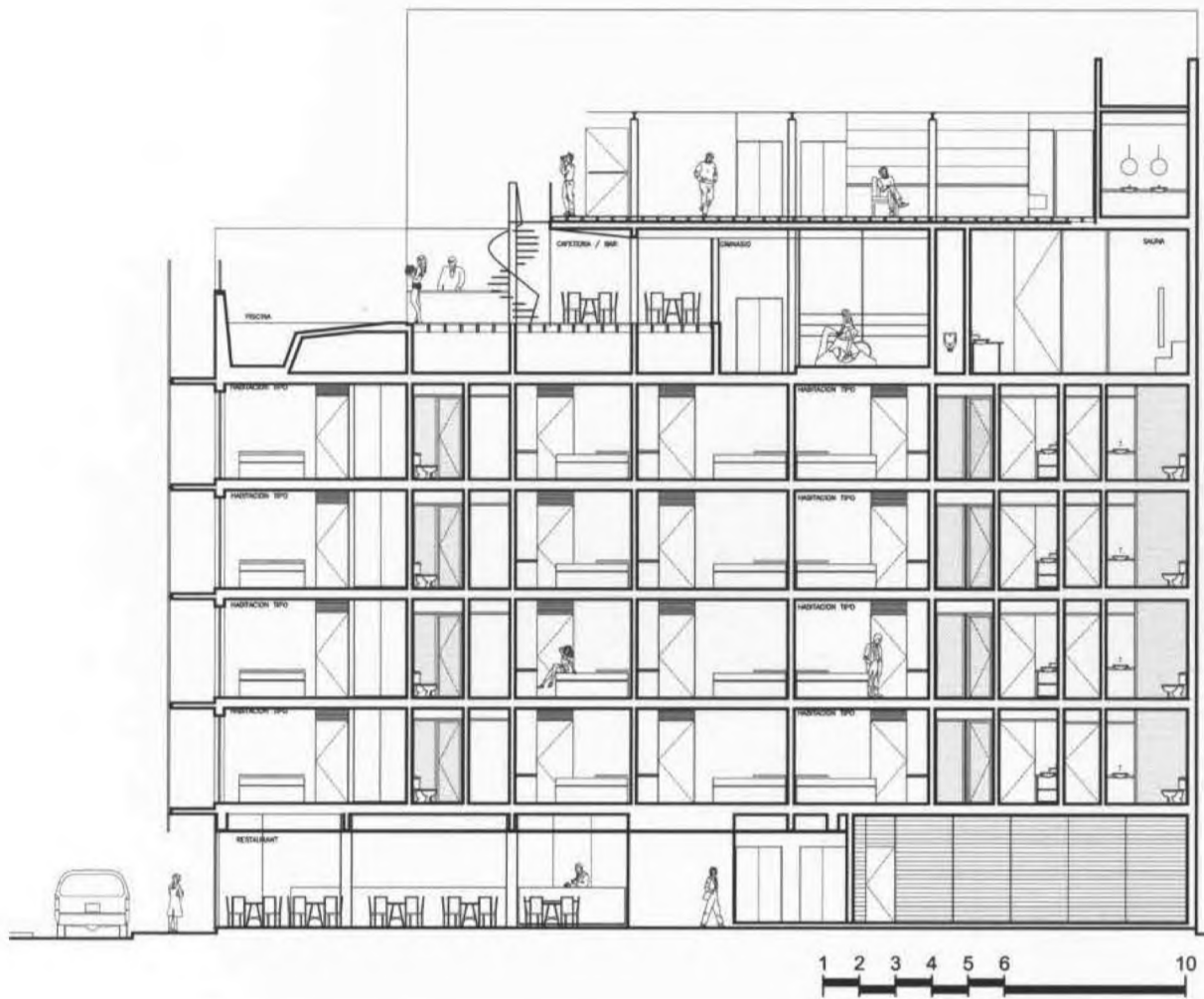
RIGHT : Studies of alternative façade systems. An earlier version employed a slatted redwood screen as the exterior skin.

FAR RIGHT : Lamartine Street elevation. The seemingly random pattern of clear glass in the façade actually derives from areas specifically selected to frame panoramic views of the city.

FACING PAGE ABOVE : The section reveals the project's planning strategy: guest rooms are sandwiched between the public spaces of the building—the ground floor restaurants and the rooftop spa.

ABOVE : Roof deck with swimming pool. The continuous glass skin rises above the building to create privacy on the roof terrace, while providing the an uncommon opportunity in Mexico City: panoramic views.





PROJECT TEAM

TEN Arquitectos : Enrique Norten,
Bernardo Gómez-Pimienta Aaron Hernández,
Sergio Núñez, Francisco Pardo, Hugo Sánchez,
Claudia Marquina, Carlos López, Martine Paquín,
Adriana Díaz, Rubén Garnica

CLIENT

Carlos Couturier, Moises Micha, Rafael Micha,
Jaime Micha

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

Colinas de Buen

MECHANICAL ENGINEER/LIGHTING DESIGN

Houbard & Bourlon

CONTRACTOR

Construcciones Gavaldón

DESIGN

1996-1998

COMPLETION

December 2000

BUILDING AREA

2,500 sq meters / 27,260 sq ft

