

Exploded axonometric concept drawing

ARCHI-TECTONICS

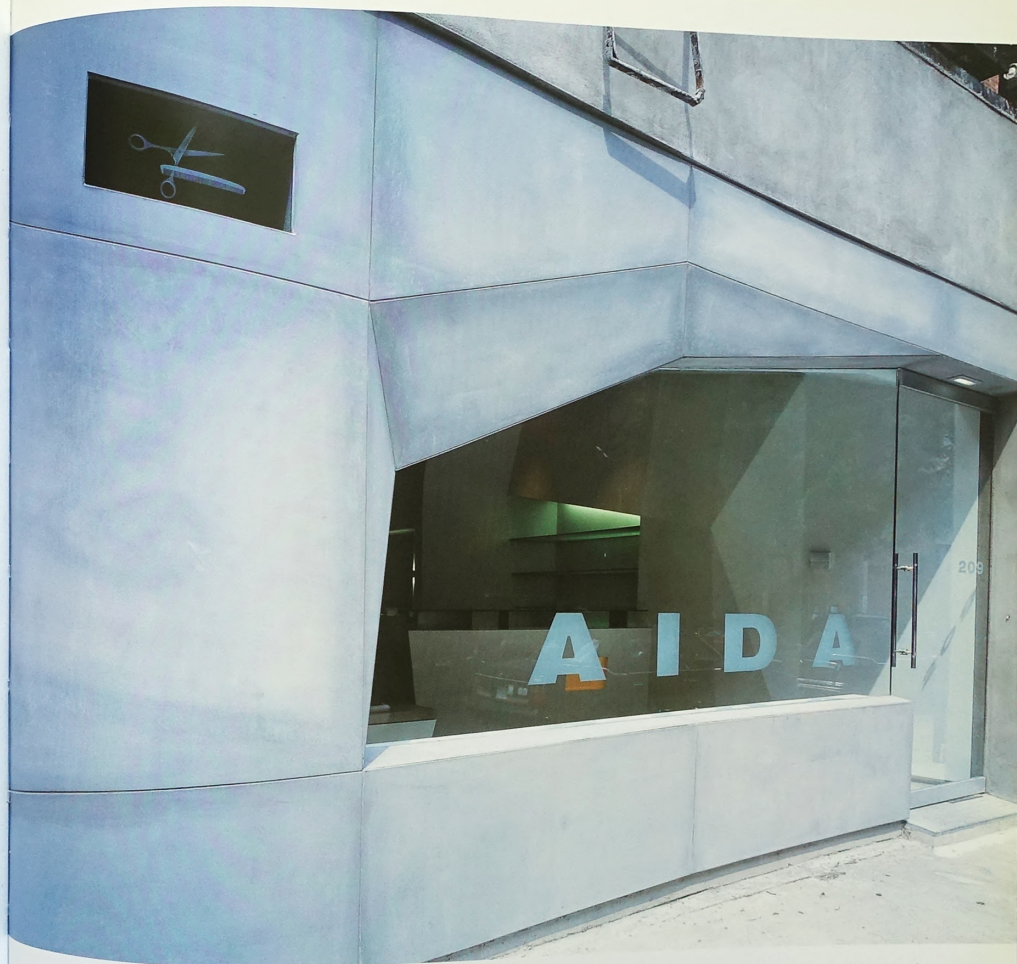
AIDA'S HOUSE OF BEAUTY NEW YORK

Amidst the requisite buttoned-down brownstones on a side street in Manhattan's conservative Upper East Side, Aida's House of Beauty looks as if it might have touched down from another planet. For all its modern drama at first glance, however, the tightly conceived space is truly a study in subtlety. By virtue of maintaining the scale of its neighbors, the new bluestone façade for the

deep and narrow space doesn't actually disturb its proper surroundings, just provoke them—the architectural equivalent there of, say, wearing white after Labor Day.

Architect Winka Dubbeldam, of Archi-Tectonics, has been raising academic eyebrows for a decade with her inventive theories. Seeing some of them realized in a succinct, 2,000-square-foot (186-square-meter) endeavor like Aida is cause for celebration. A small scissors-and-comb motif on the salon's exterior recalls shop signs from centuries past. Here, it also foreshadows an interest in the deformation of the volume inside, which appears cut and folded, like a sophisticated origami vertebrate. In creating the carefully sculpted void, a series of wrapping and folding operations have rendered the salon's interior flanking walls "smart;" that is, they embody a system that integrates innovative lighting, heating and cooling equipment, plus sound and storage components. The stark white surfaces focus attention on where each of the planes is joined. Their seams, articulated with crisp mitered edges, become almost ornamental in the spare composition.

The dramatic façade acts as a transparent interface with the street outside, drawing people in and making the street life part of the salon. The plan for the space blooms at the entry and rear, clearly revealing its intention that these areas function in a more social capacity; an inviting garden in the back houses clients in the warm months while they wait their turns. Because the savvy design encourages, above all, a smoothly functioning environment, the salon may be enjoyed by those who know nothing about architectural theory. Perhaps it is fitting that the receptionist has no idea who designed the place, or even that this elegant and sophisticated space is remarkable for its thoughtful concept.



A simple gesture speaks volumes, literally, as the heavy bluestone wall of the façade accepts the glass window and door without fanfare, and the whole is visually realized as the sum of its parts.