

IIT S.R. Crown Hall, 1950–1956

Chicago, IL

(Project 5001) In 1950, more than ten years after he was commissioned to produce a master plan for the Illinois Institute of Technology campus (4000, 3900), Mies began work on the school's architecture building. By the time it was completed six years later, he had conducted his classes for almost two decades in places as variously makeshift as the attic studios of the Art Institute of Chicago and several offices in commercial buildings downtown. Only in 1947 did he move his academic quarters to Alumni Memorial Hall (4501) on the IIT campus itself. Indeed, once S.R. Crown Hall—the new structure—was finished, he spent only two years there before retiring from the faculty in 1958.

Nonetheless, Crown Hall represents everything Mies thought appropriate to a building devoted to architectural education. It is also his first large-scale, clear-span, universal-space building. Not coincidentally, central to his thinking about his profession was a place where all teachers and all students, regardless of their levels of experience, could come together and work, literally within sight and reach of each other (5001.63). Crown Hall would be such a locale—a super atelier, an equivalent in modern terms of the *Bauhütte*, that medieval shelter where designer, contractor, craftsmen, and laborers worked in close proximity. As nonhierarchical in implication as it was anti-Beaux-Arts, Crown Hall logically took the form of a unitary space in which, as Mies saw it, an assortment of functions and tasks could be carried out or modified or even changed, with optimal flexibility.

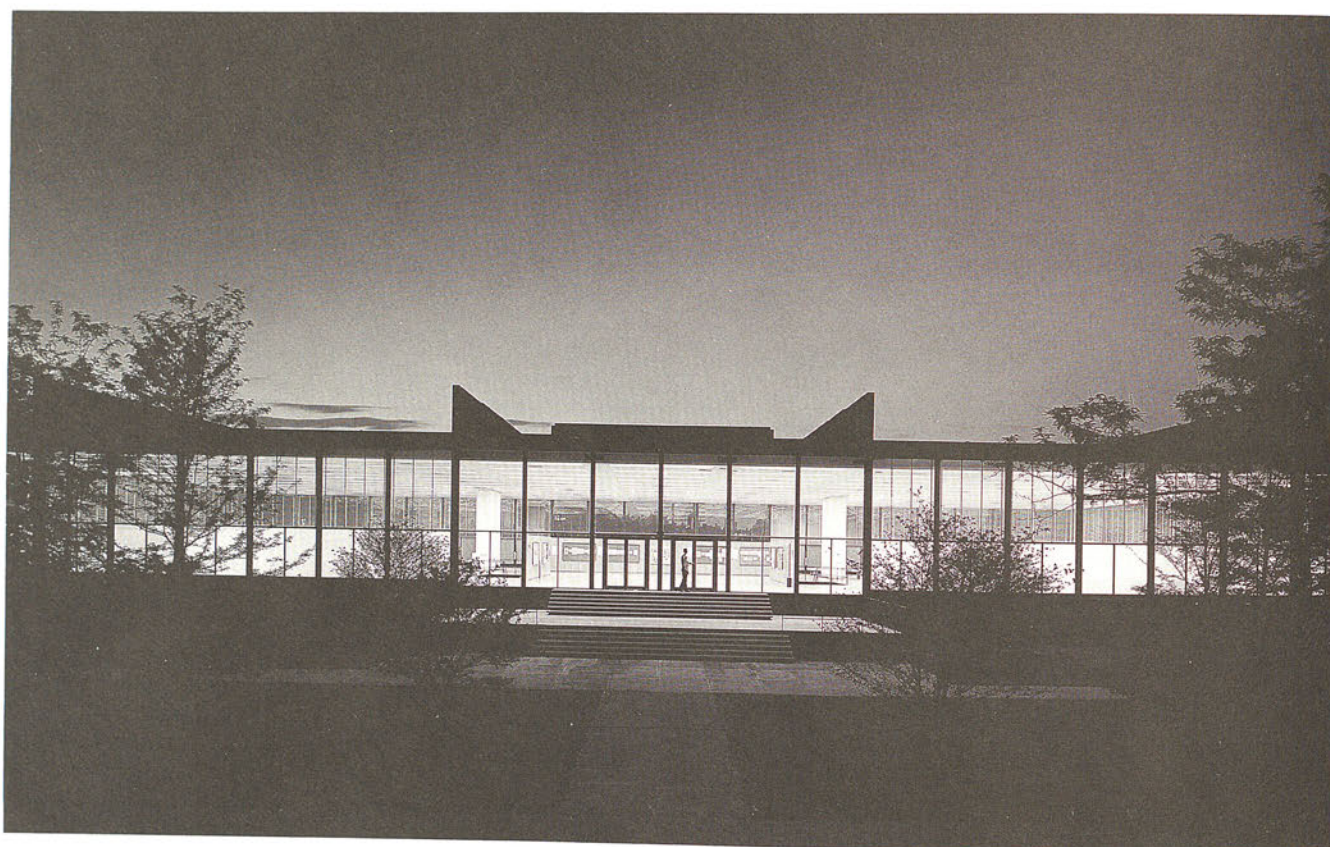
Discarding the modular grid system he had conceived in 1939 as the governing measure of ground organization at IIT, Mies produced an enormous room, 120 feet wide, 220 feet long, and 18 feet high.* It is raised 6 feet above grade, so that light and ventilation may be provided to the workshops on the ground floor (5001.22). The only fixed elements in the great hall are two staircases leading downstairs, two nonstructural service shafts, and a pair of areas defined by eight-foot-high walls but not enclosed, one for administrative activities, the other for student exhibitions (5001.1, 5001.54).

The walls of Crown Hall are totally glazed (5001.22); in form the building is a rectangular parallelepiped (5001.37, 5001.52). Four steel columns, located at 60-foot intervals on one long side, are connected by six-foot-deep girders to the tops of four columns on the opposite side. The roof, cantilevered 20 feet beyond the end supporting members, is suspended from these girders (5001.23). While the stern symmetry of the long facade and the vertical rhythm of columns and mullions recall Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Altes Museum in Berlin, the main entrance of Crown Hall, on its south face, brings to mind Mies's treatment of the Farnsworth House: a broad flight of steps rises to an apparently floating platform, thence to the twin portals of the symmetrical facade (5001.23, 5001.26, 5001.28). A similar but not identical subordinate entrance is located on the long north side of the building.

The Archive's drawings include a number of variations in the support system. Prior to deciding on the four overhead plate girders, Mies considered four open trusses (5001.39), or five (5001.45), or even six (5001.43). Most likely earlier still, before the clear-span structure became fixed in his mind, he worked on sketches of a columnar grid that reflected the usage he had followed in the other campus buildings. In these drawings the bays vary in number and width (5001.34, 5001.50–.51), as does the treatment of brick infill and twin entrances (5001.40–.41, 5001.46), both notions being finally abandoned. One drawing, 5001.41, which shows a mezzanine level, is especially close in concept to the Library and Administration Building project.

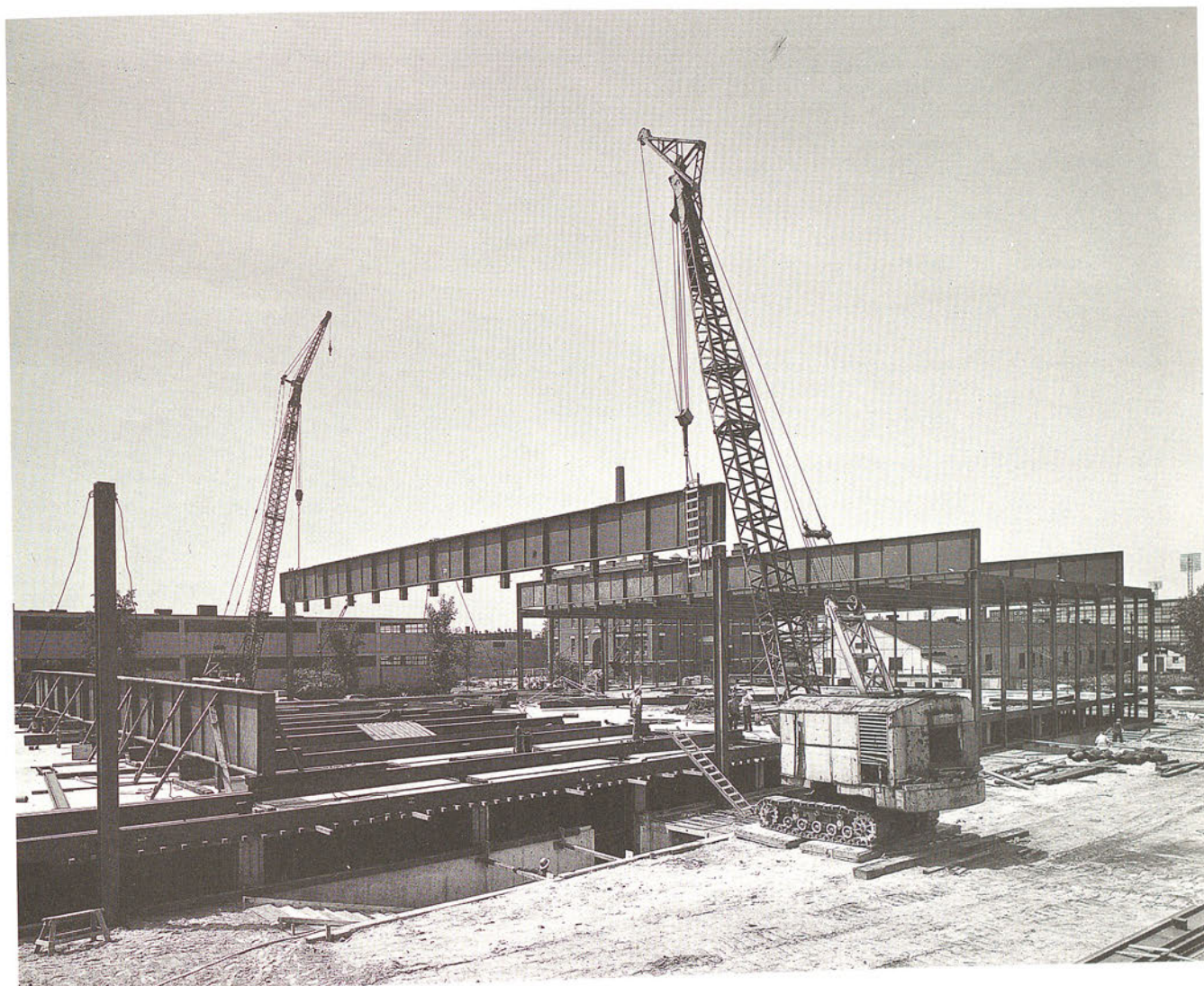
*According to Donald Sickler, who was part of the staff working on Crown Hall, a need for increased space for air conditioning and heating systems obliged Mies to lower the ceiling of the great room a few inches beneath its original height.

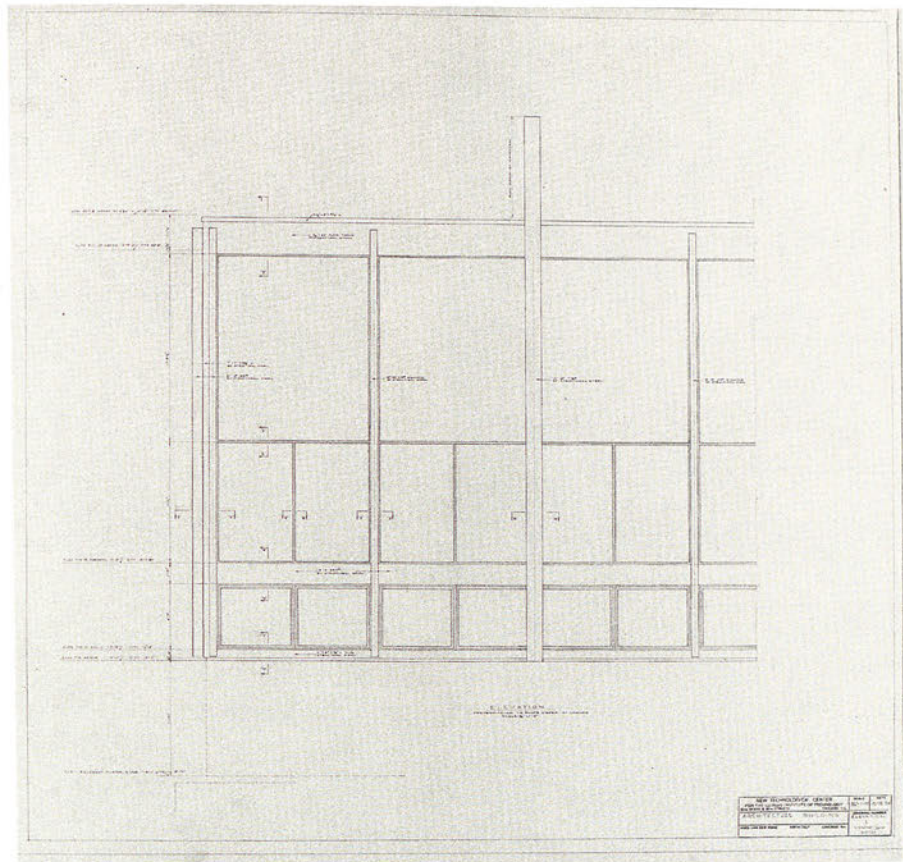
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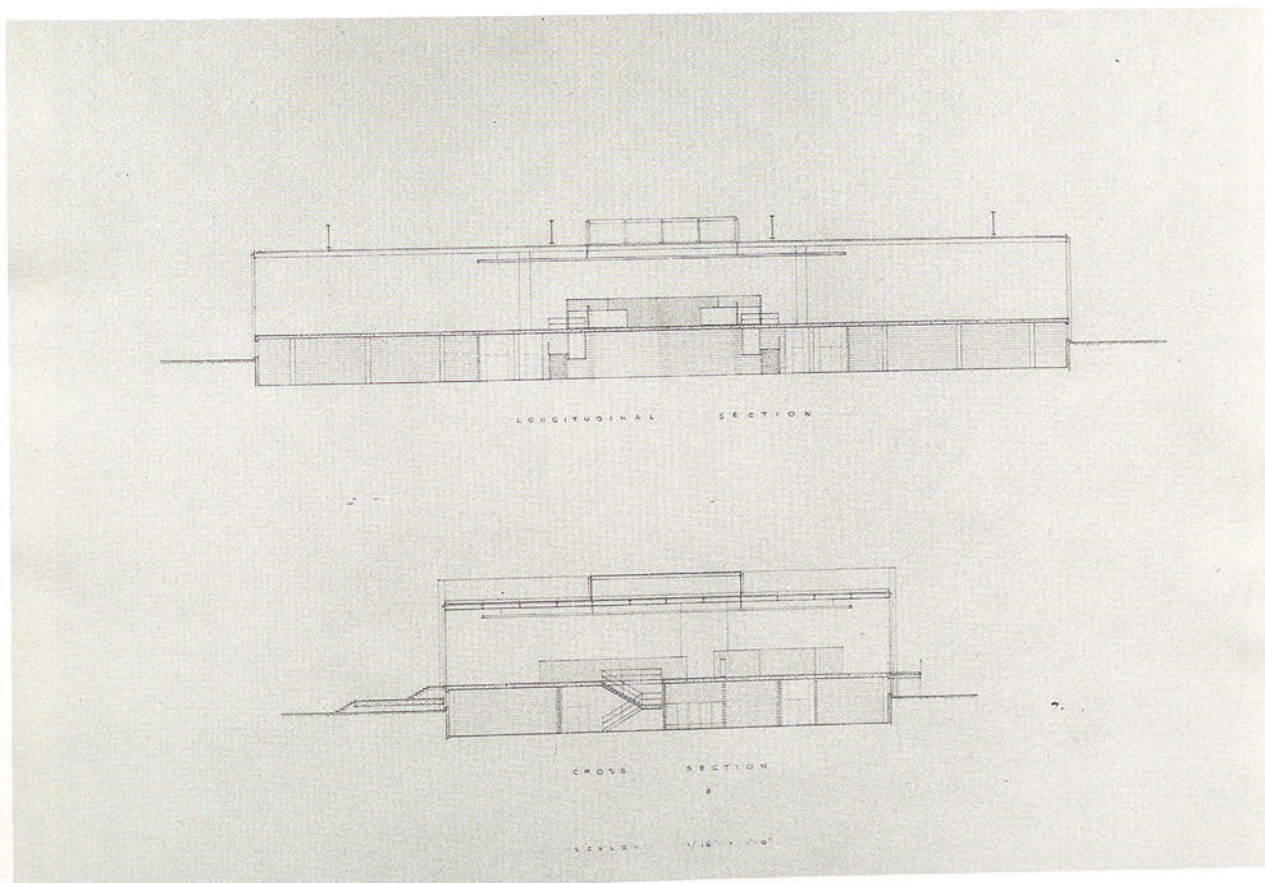




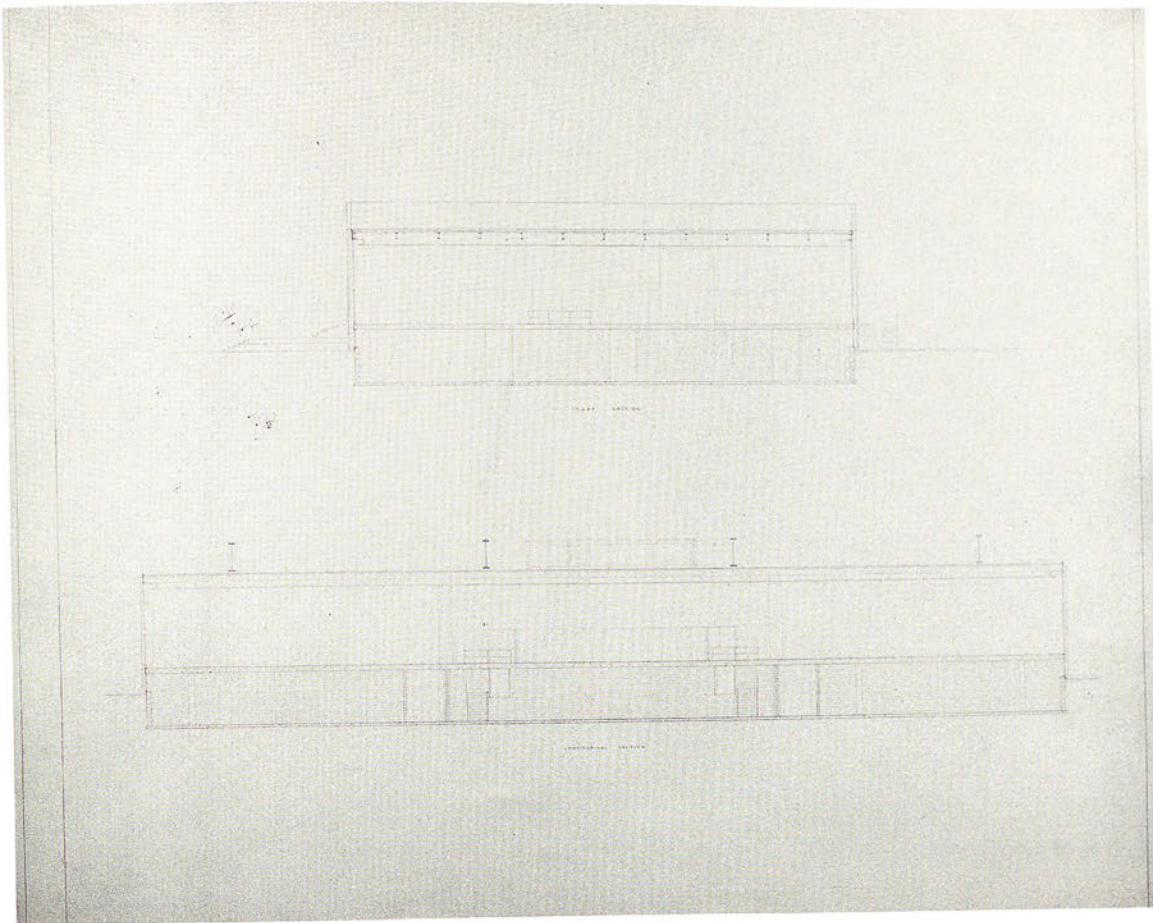




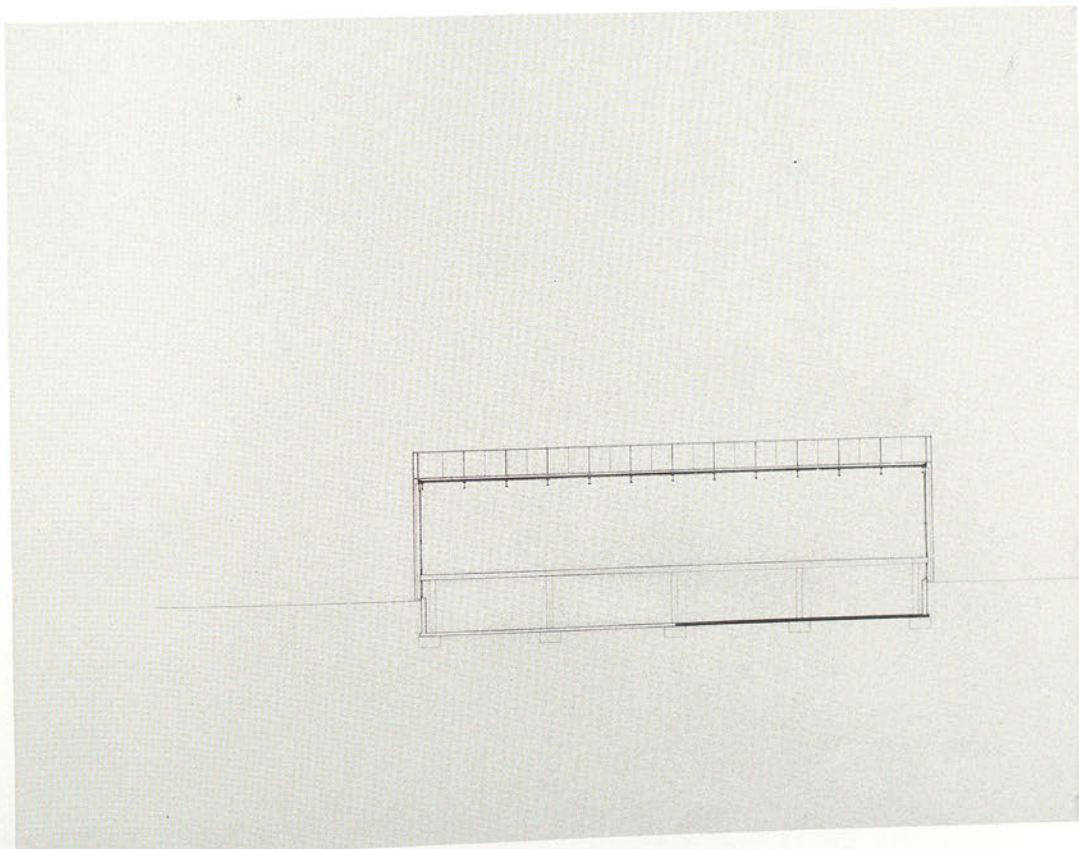
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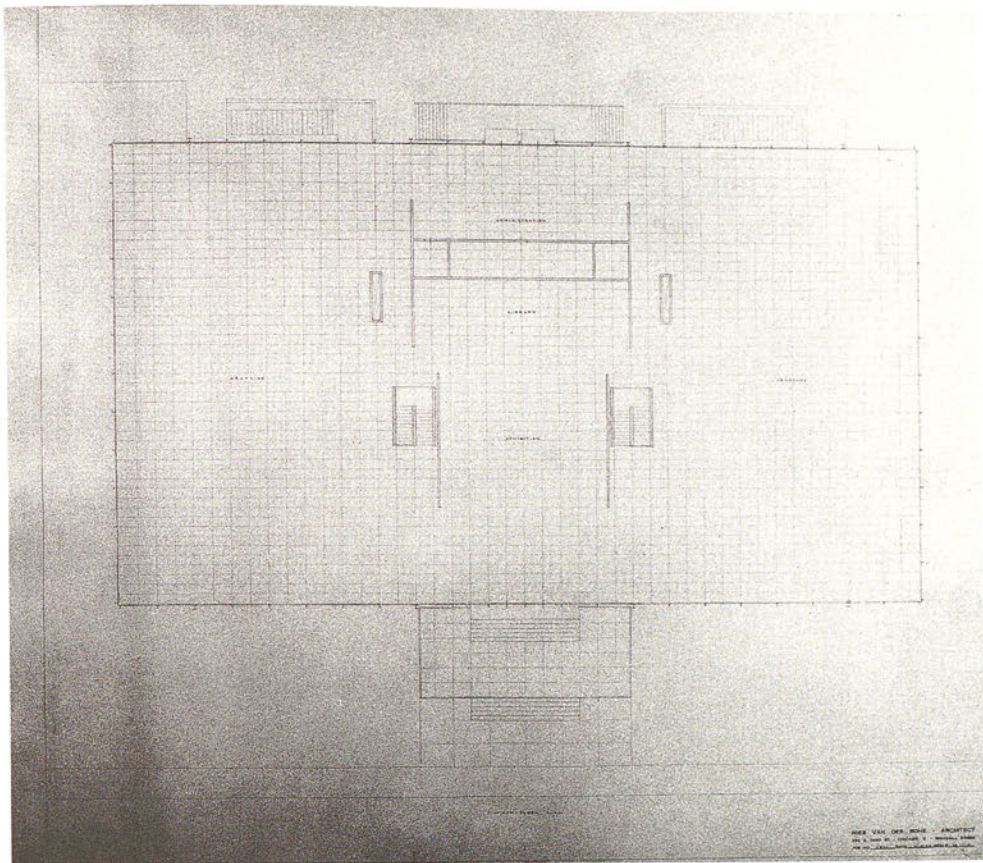
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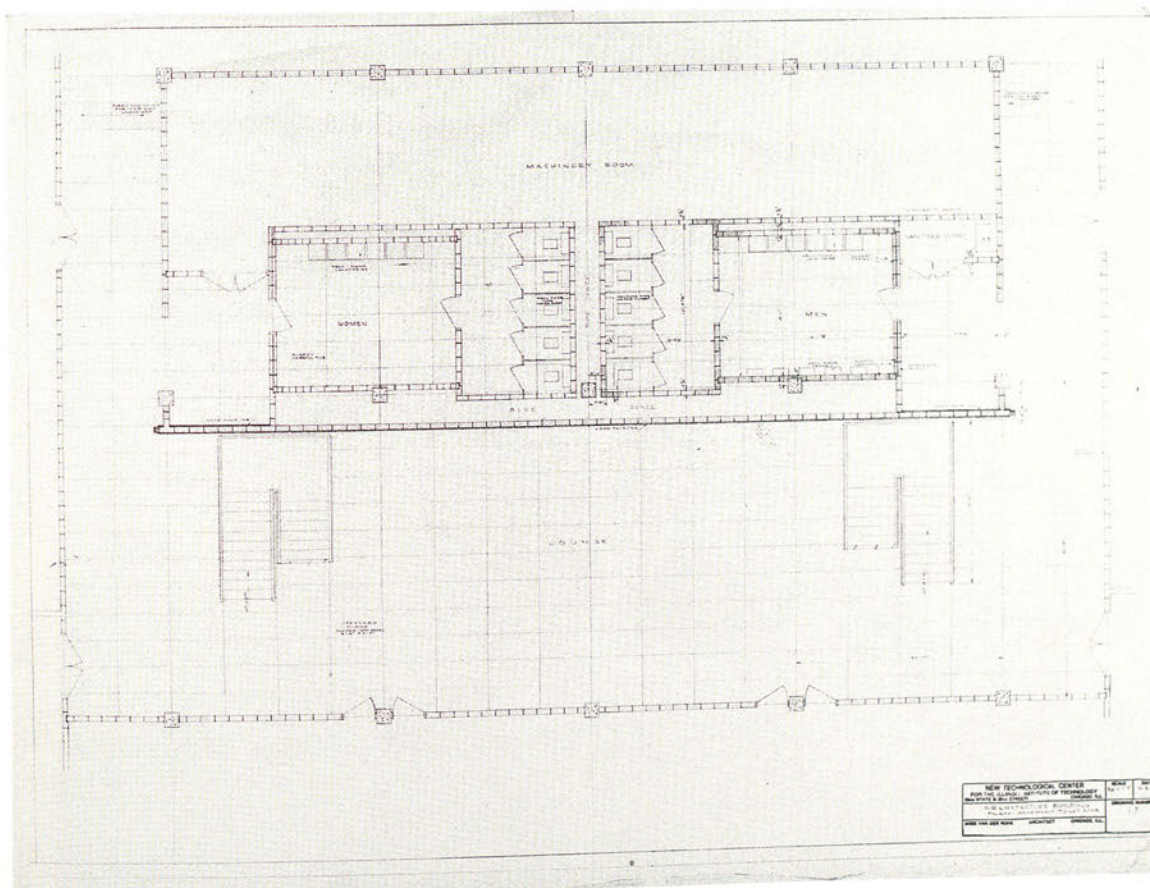
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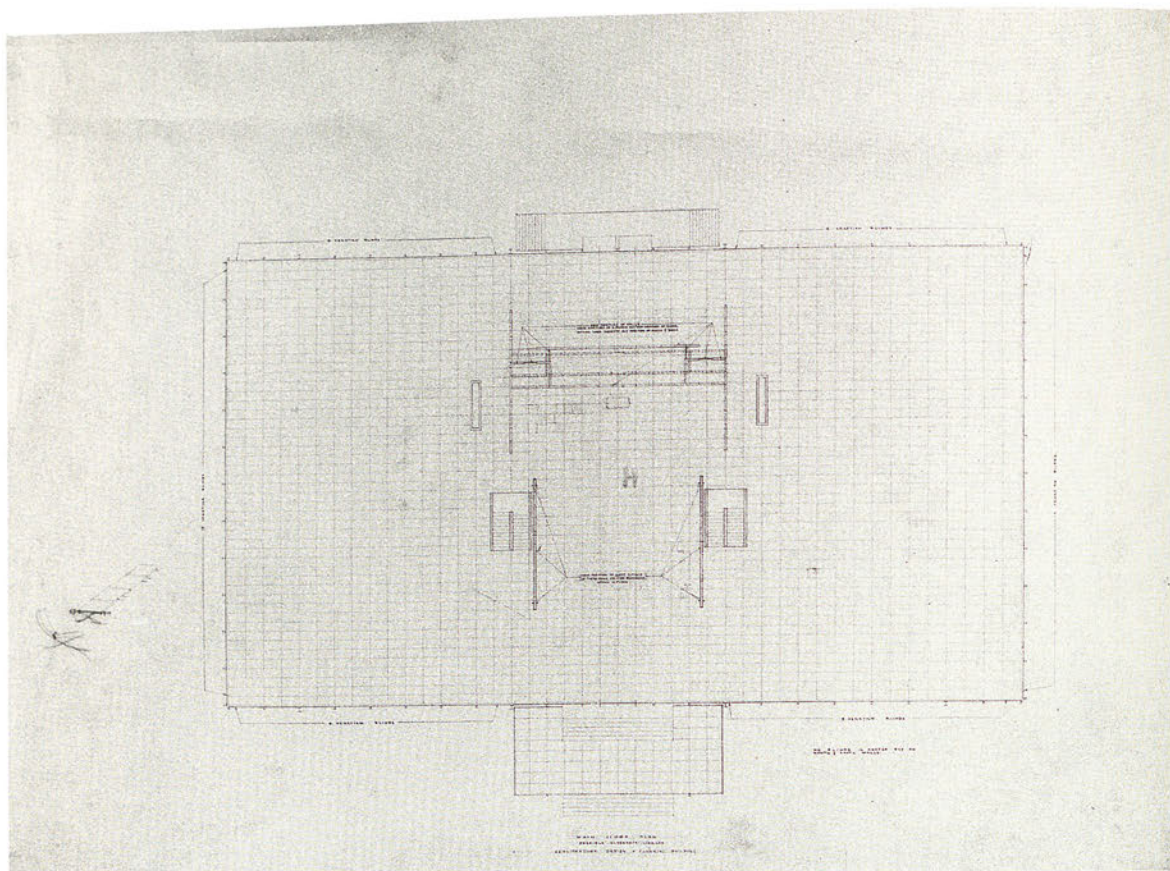
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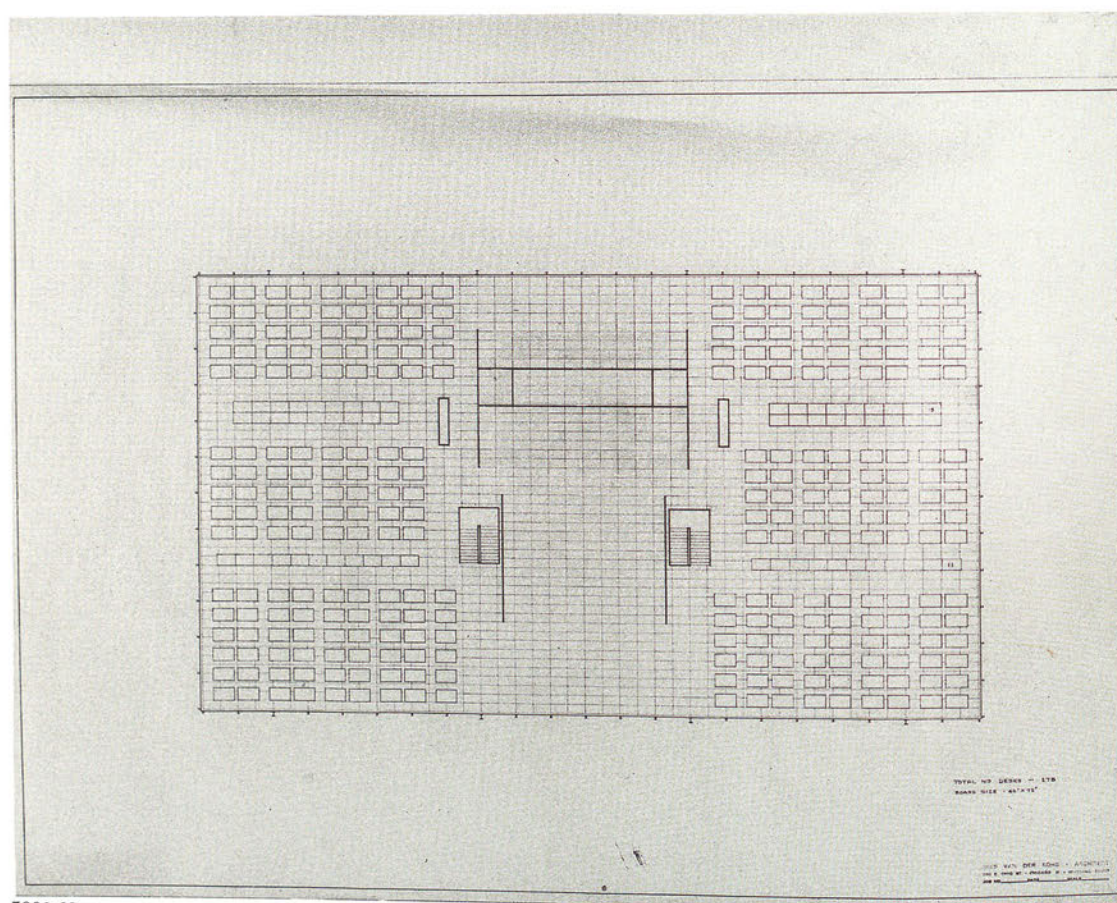
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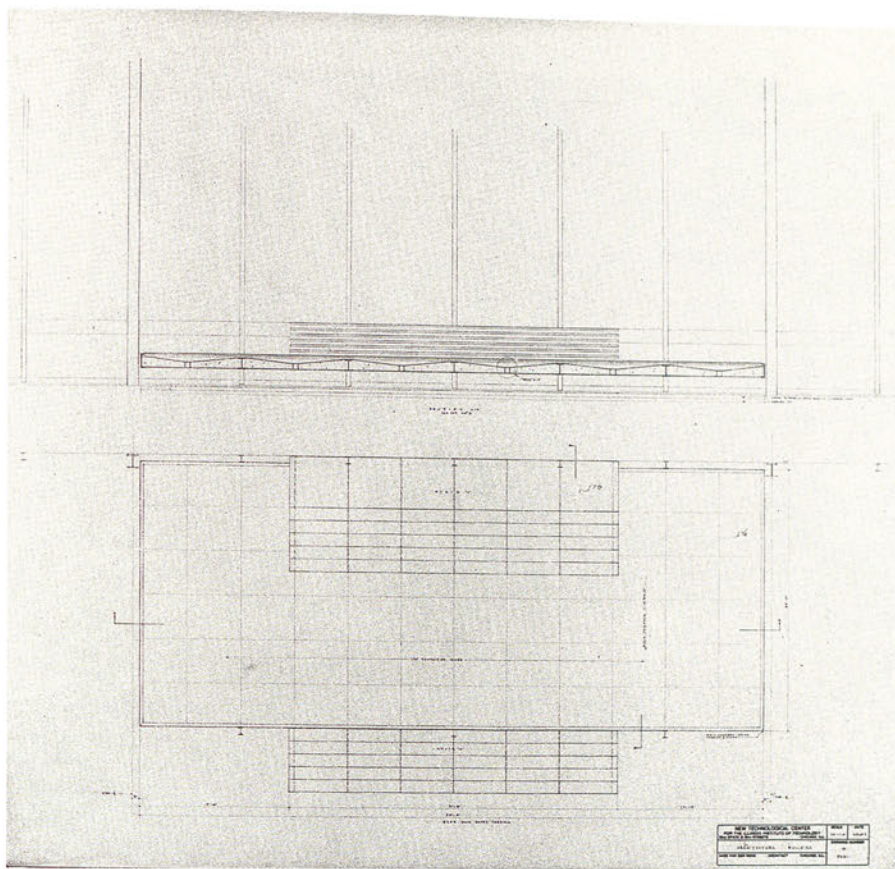
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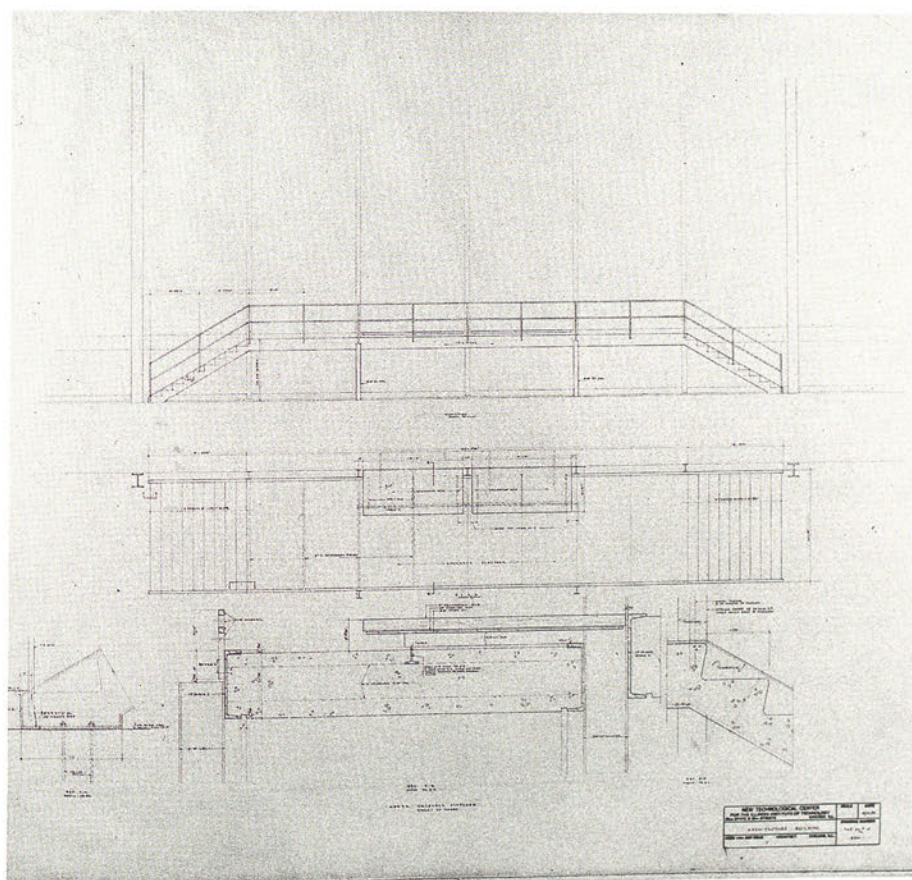
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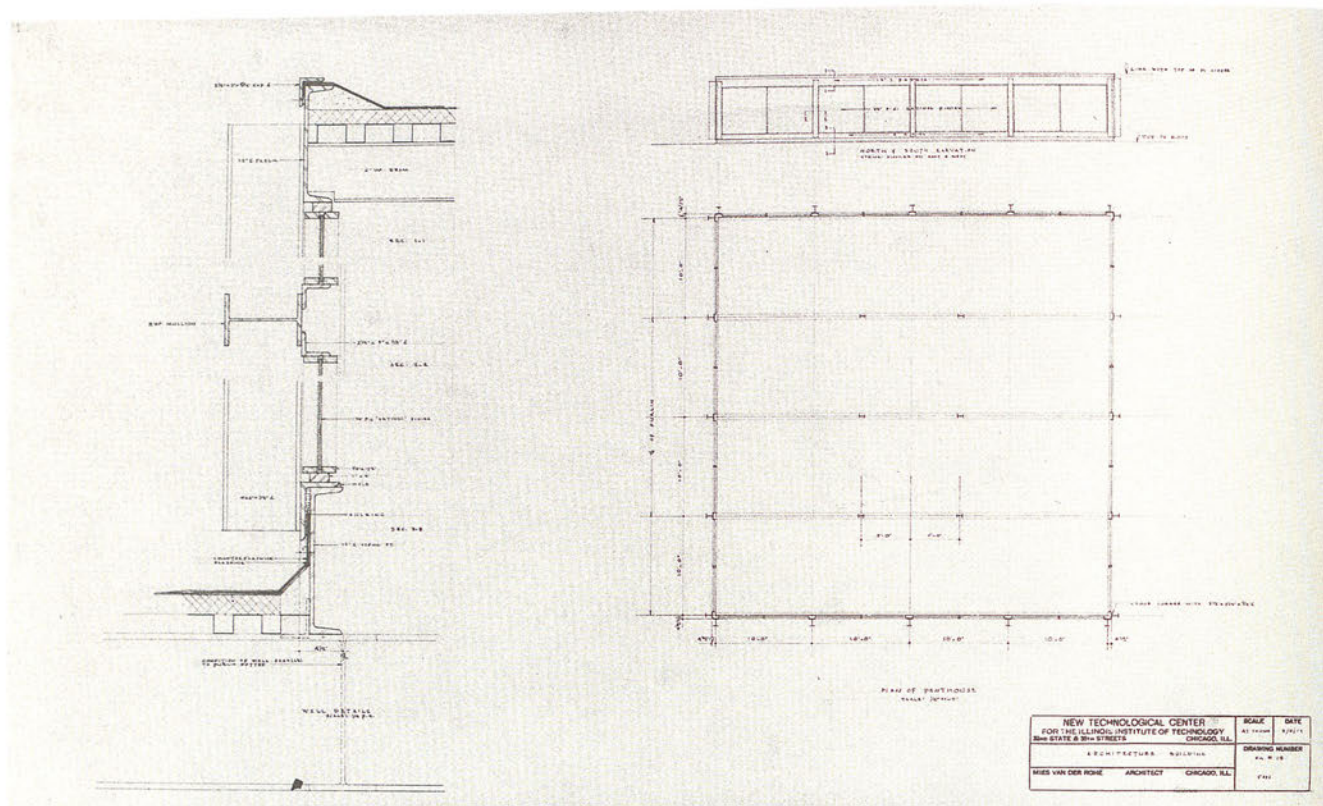
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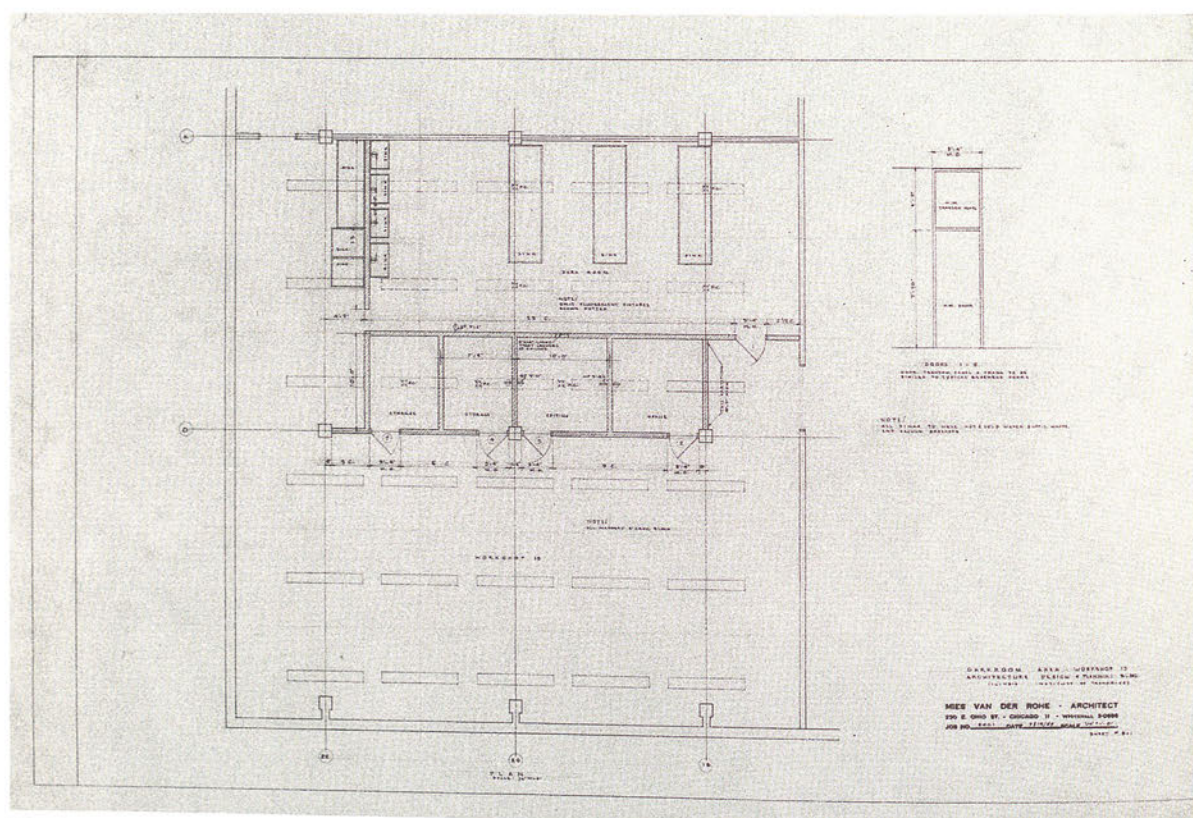
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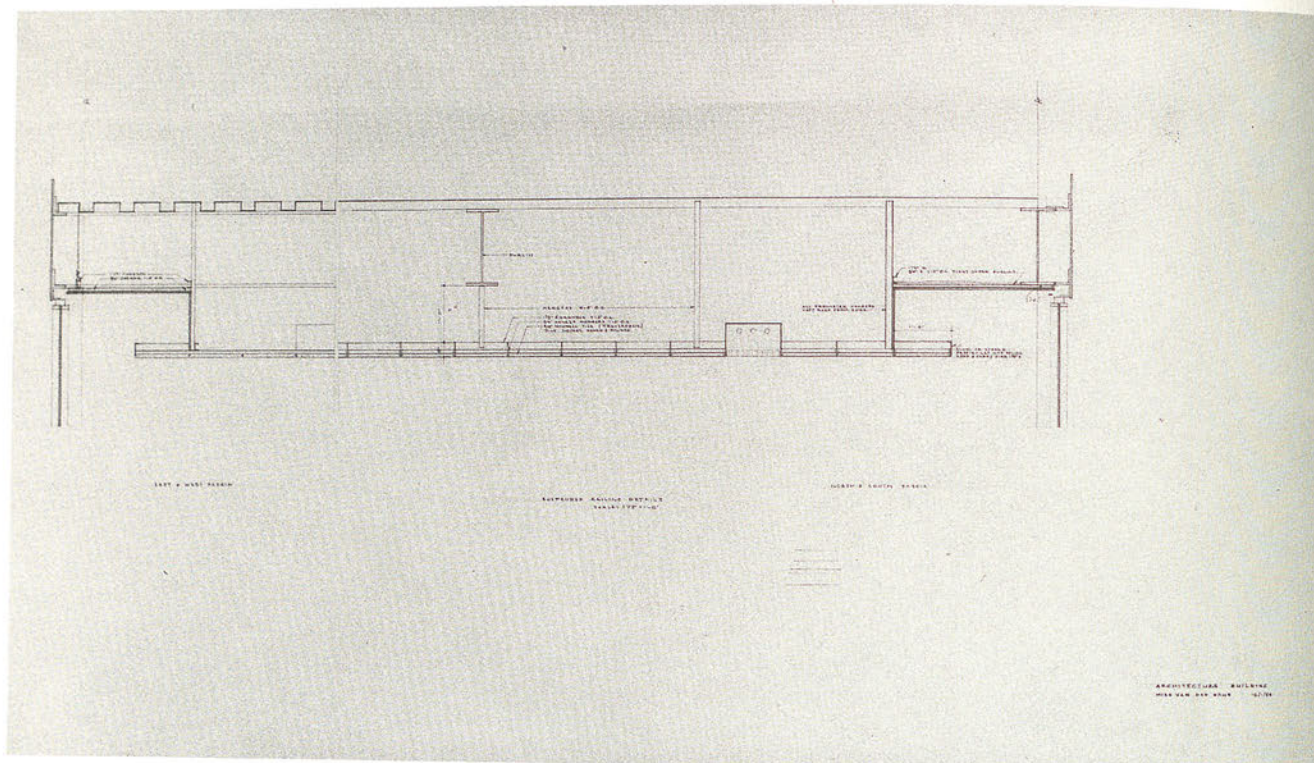
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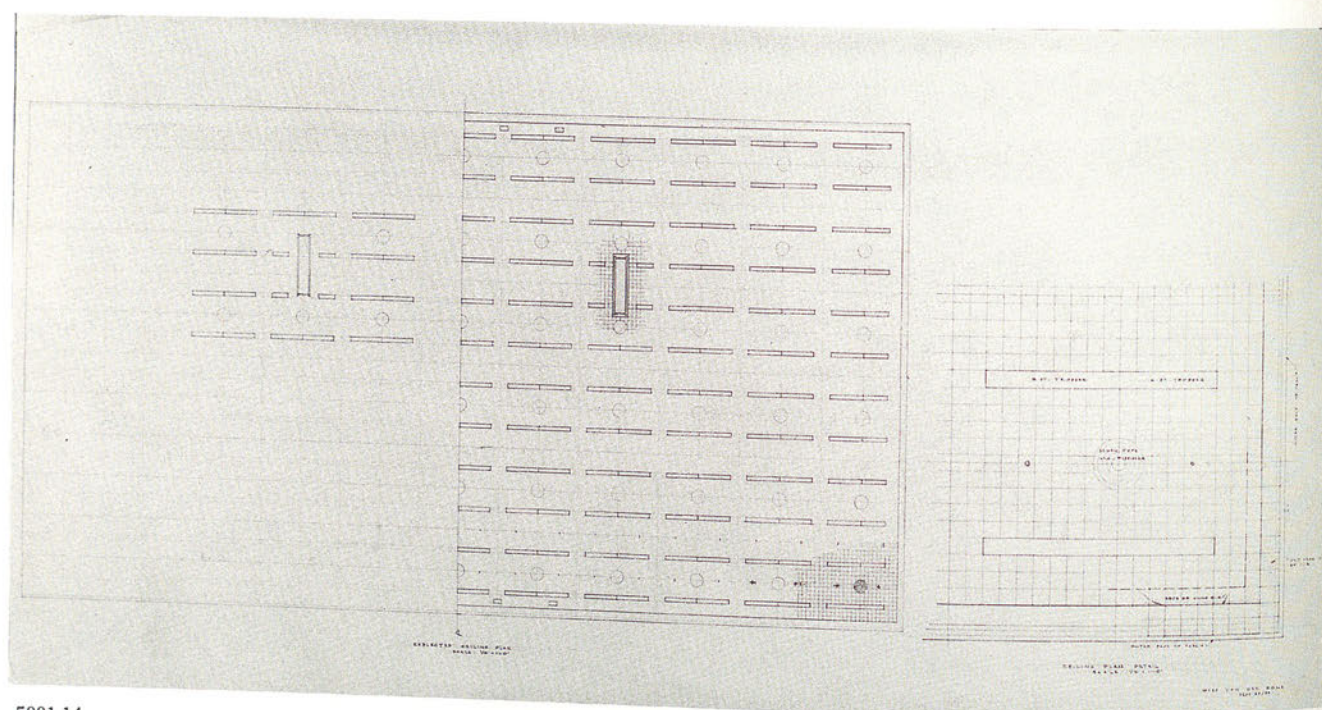
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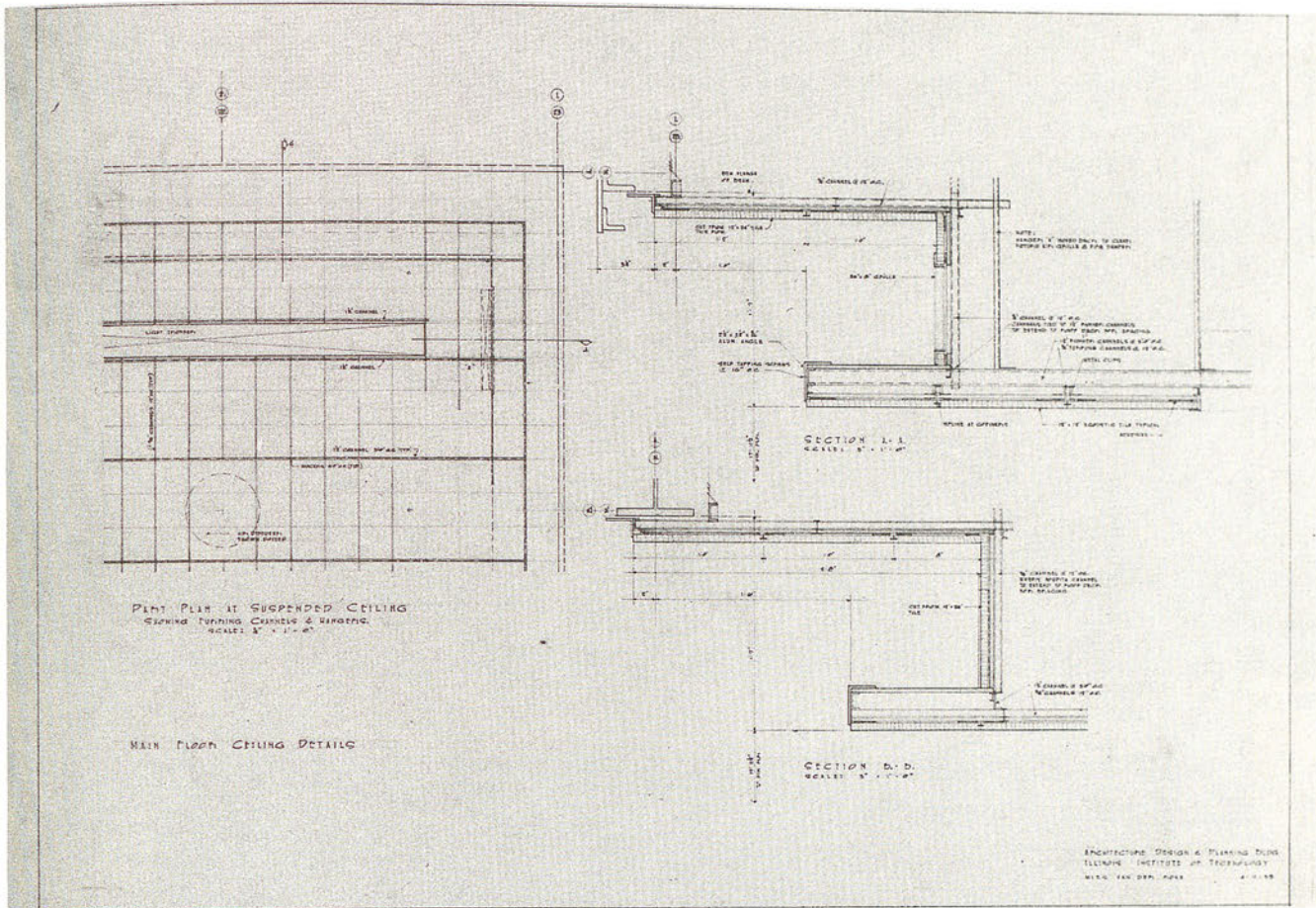
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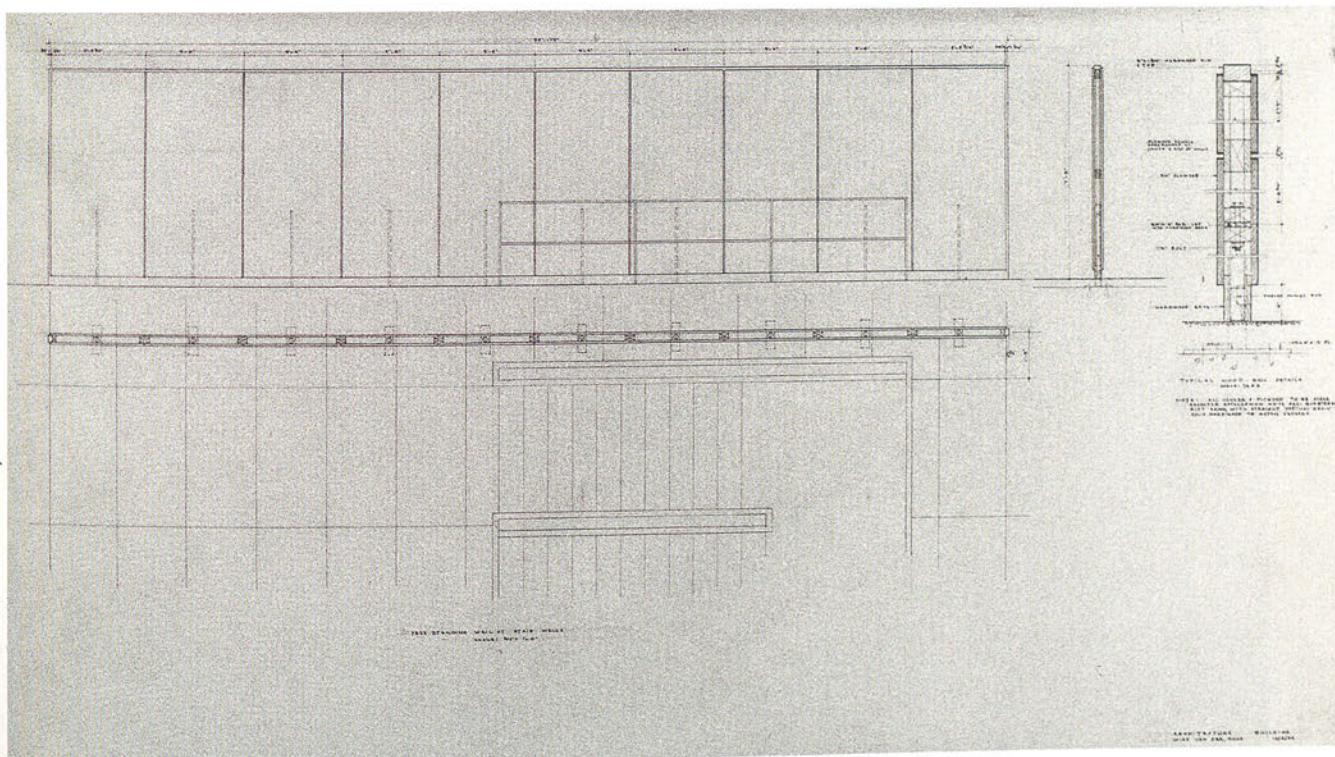
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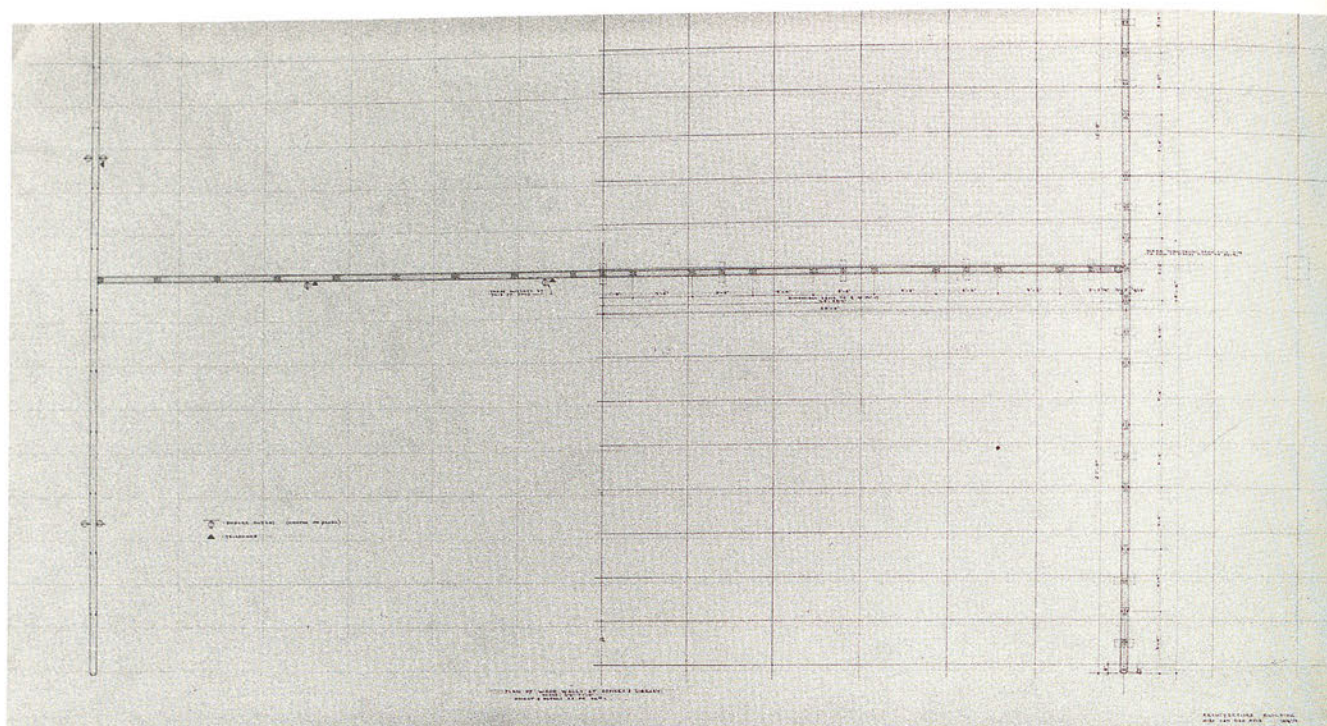
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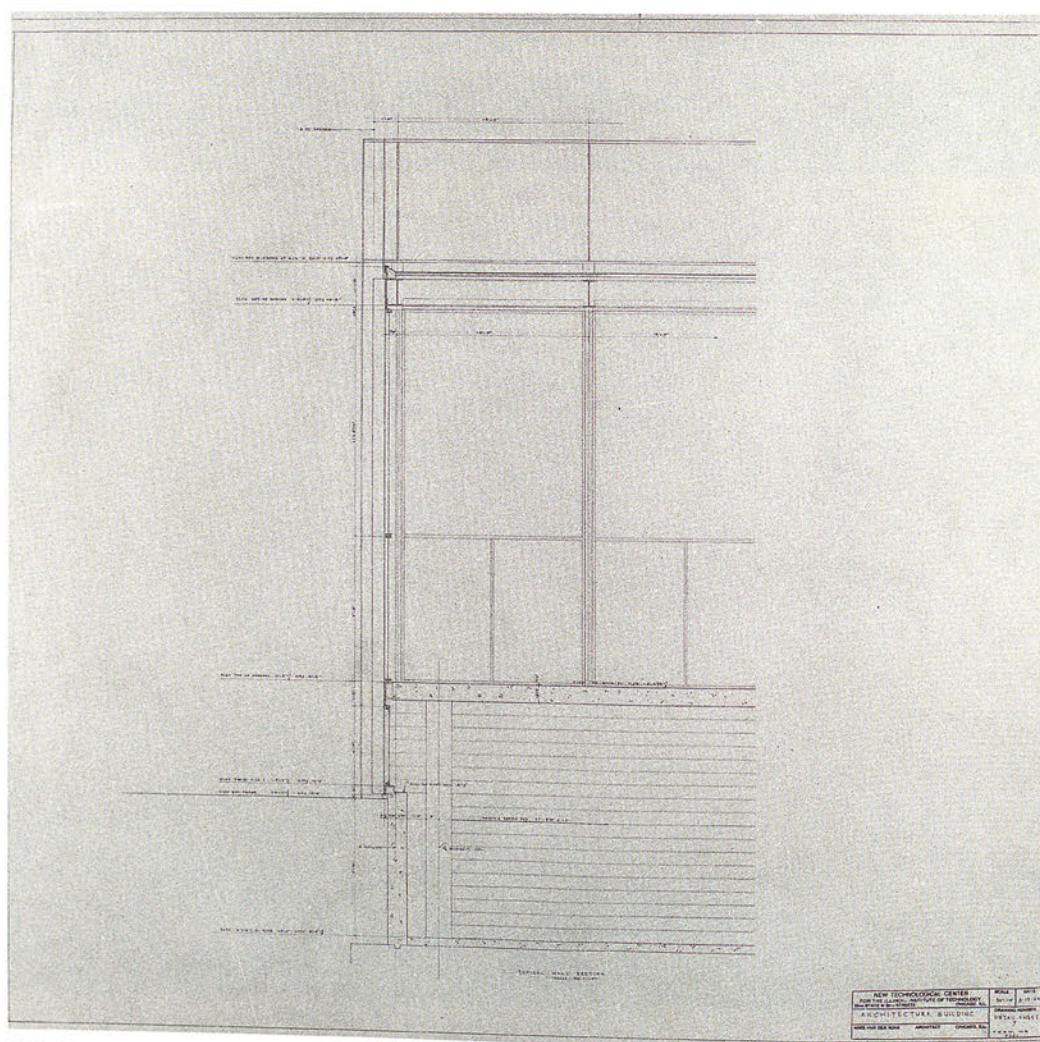
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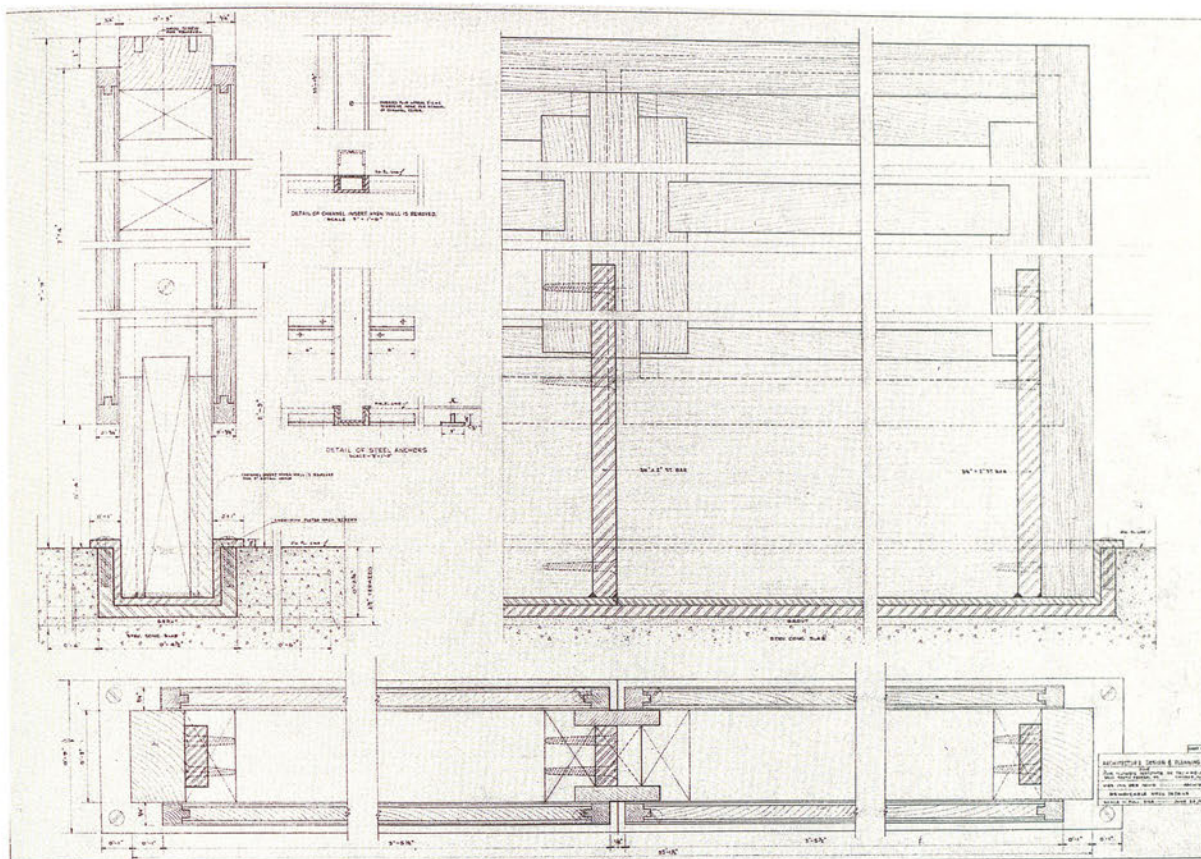
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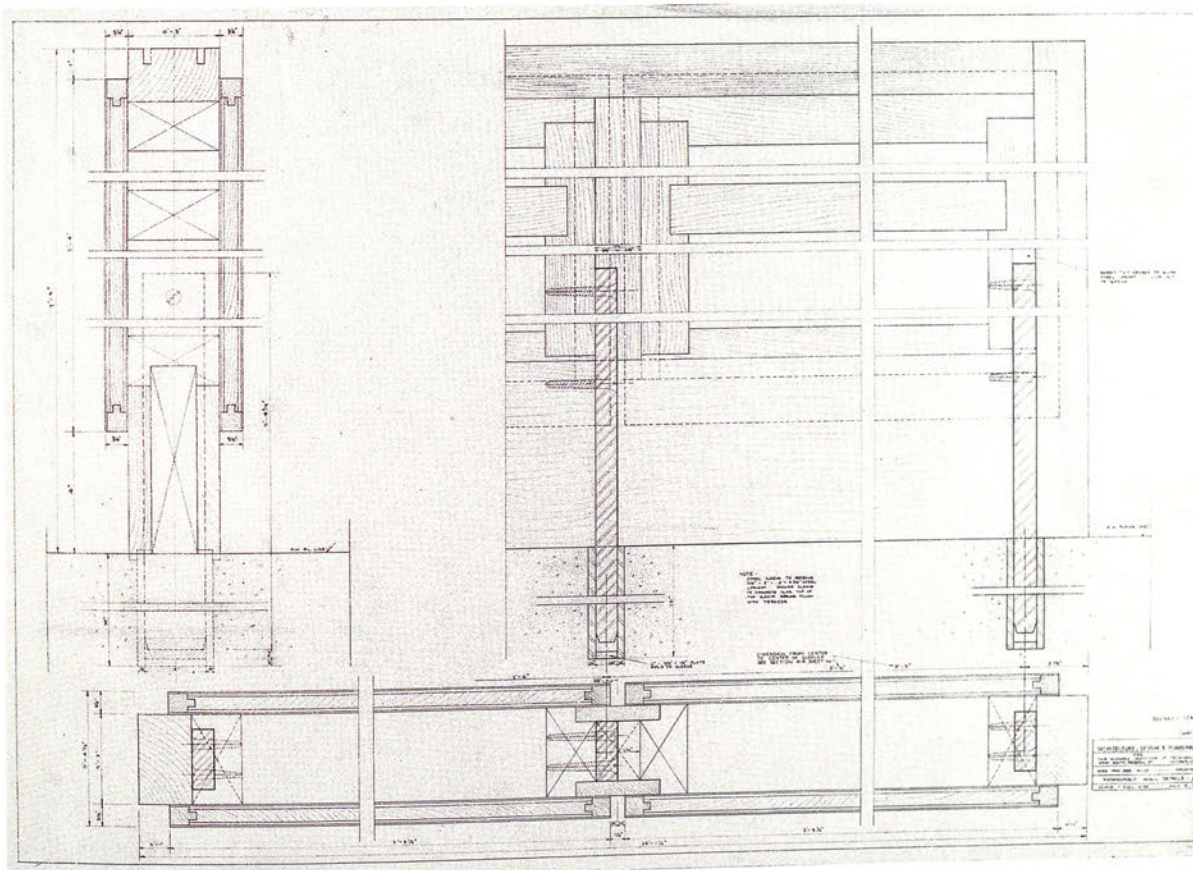
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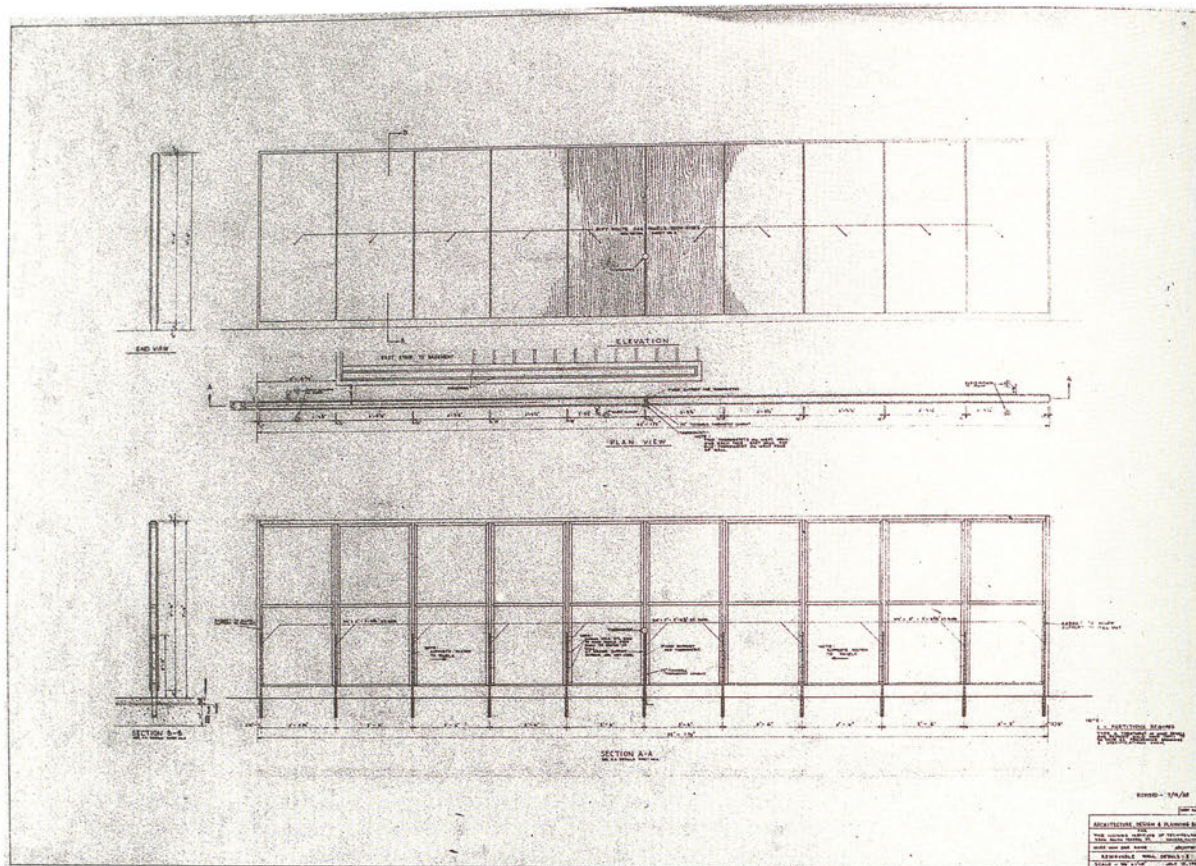
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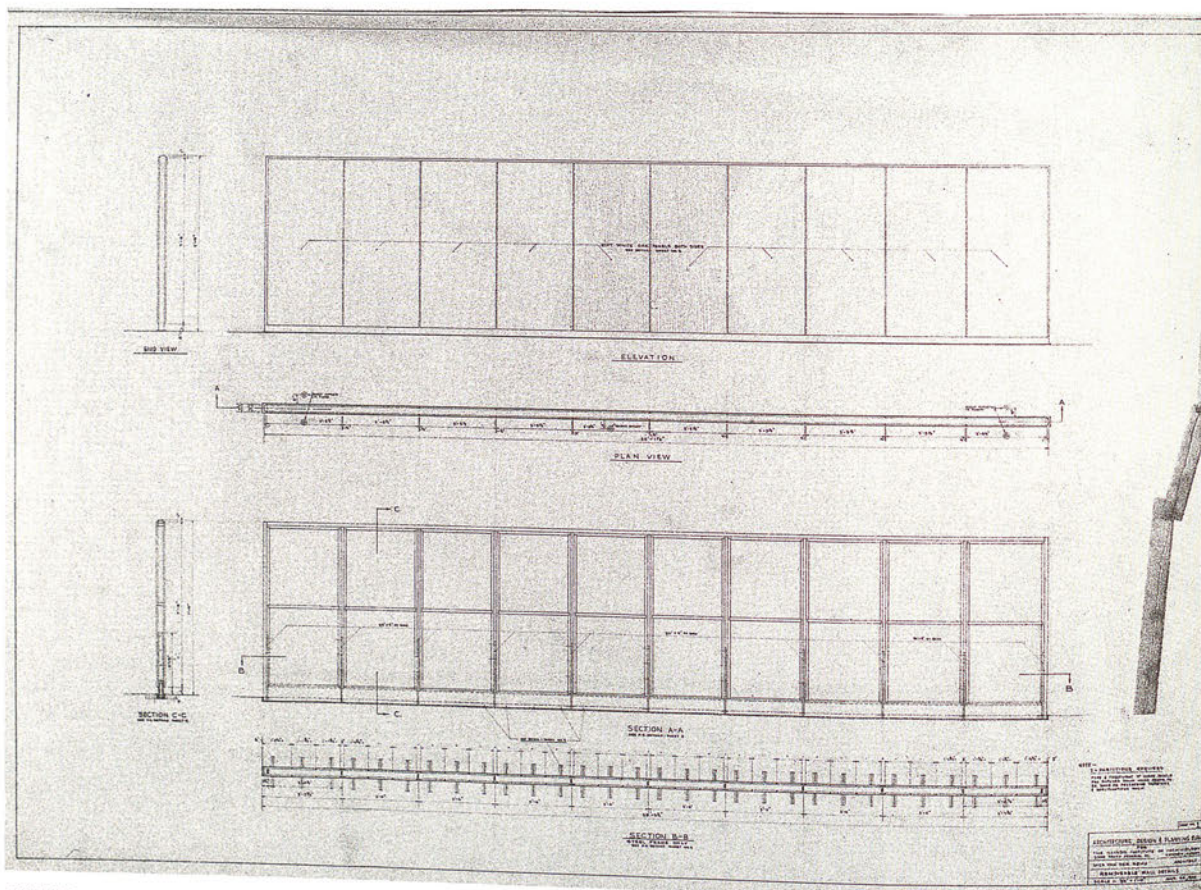
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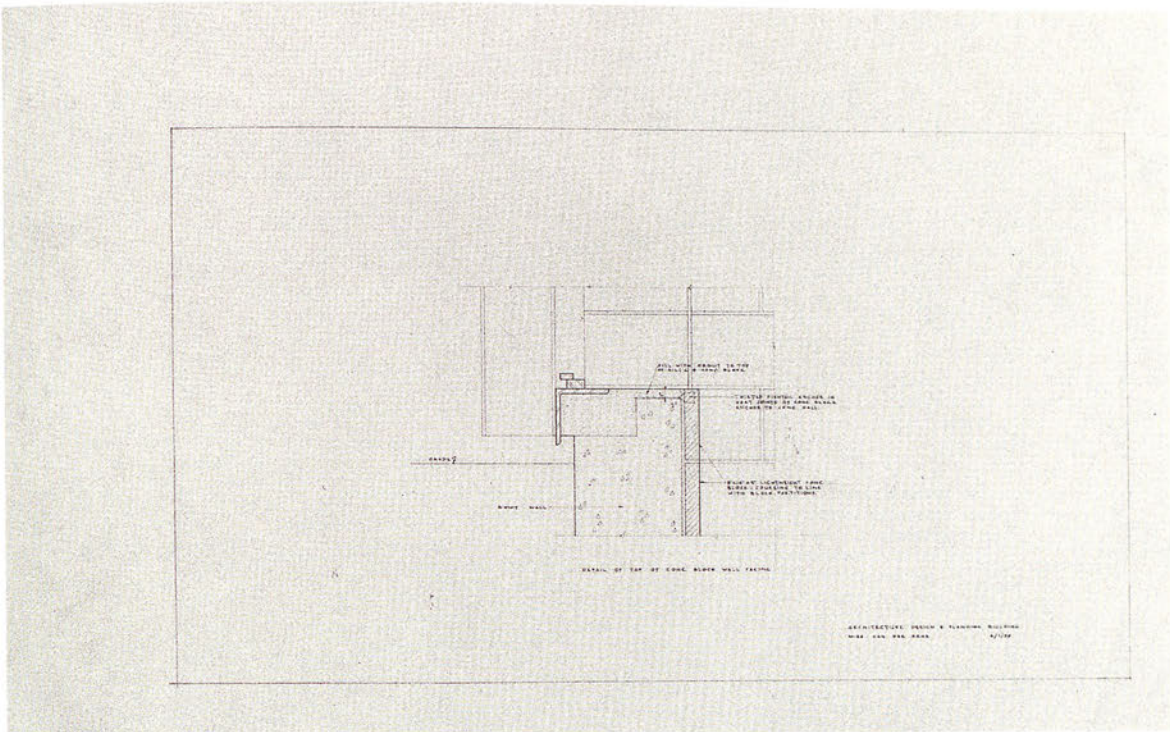
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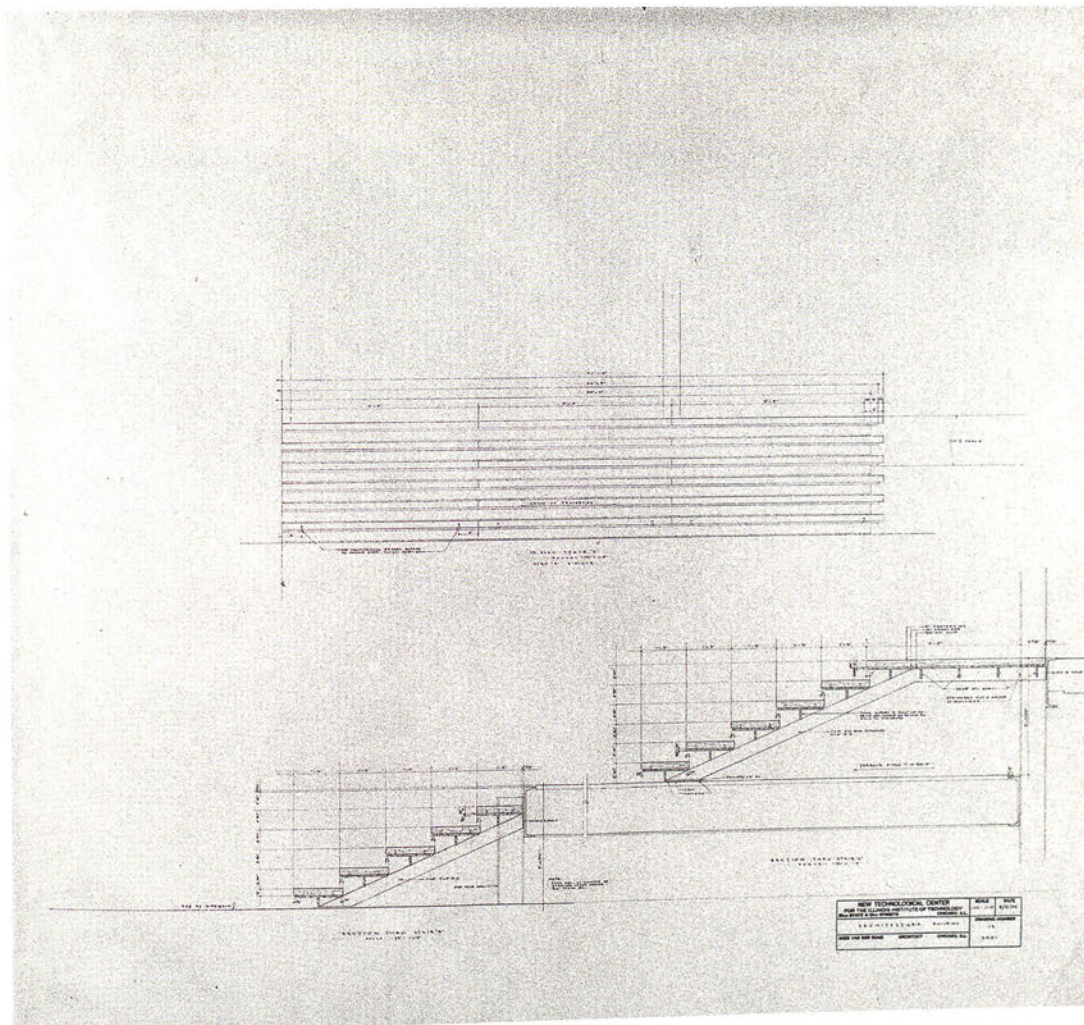
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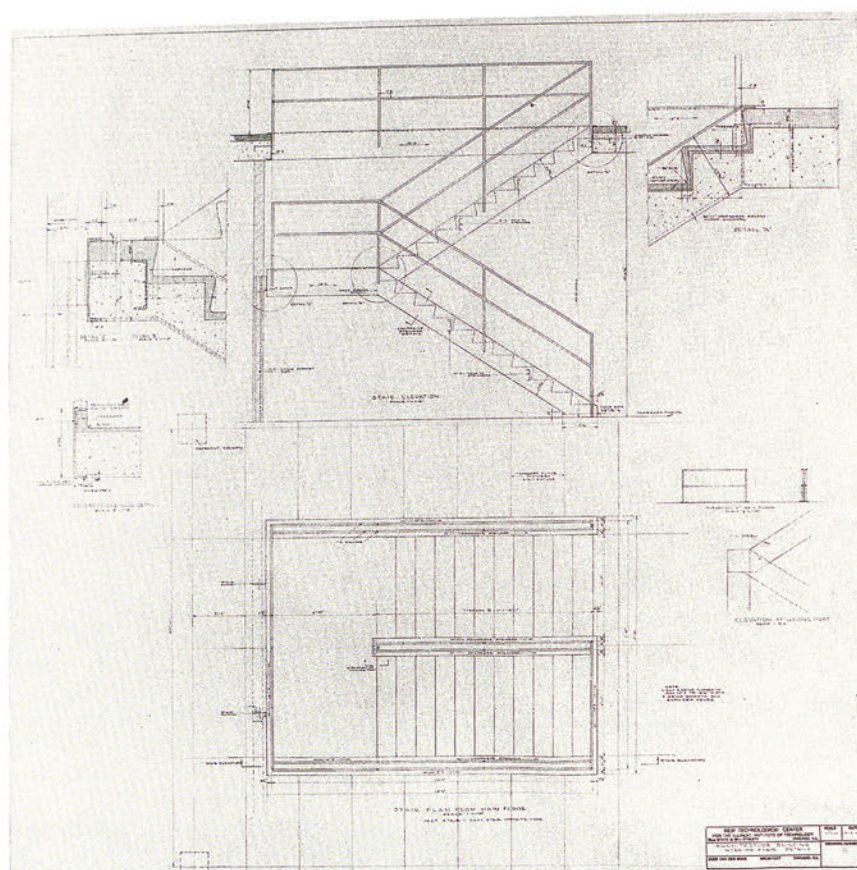
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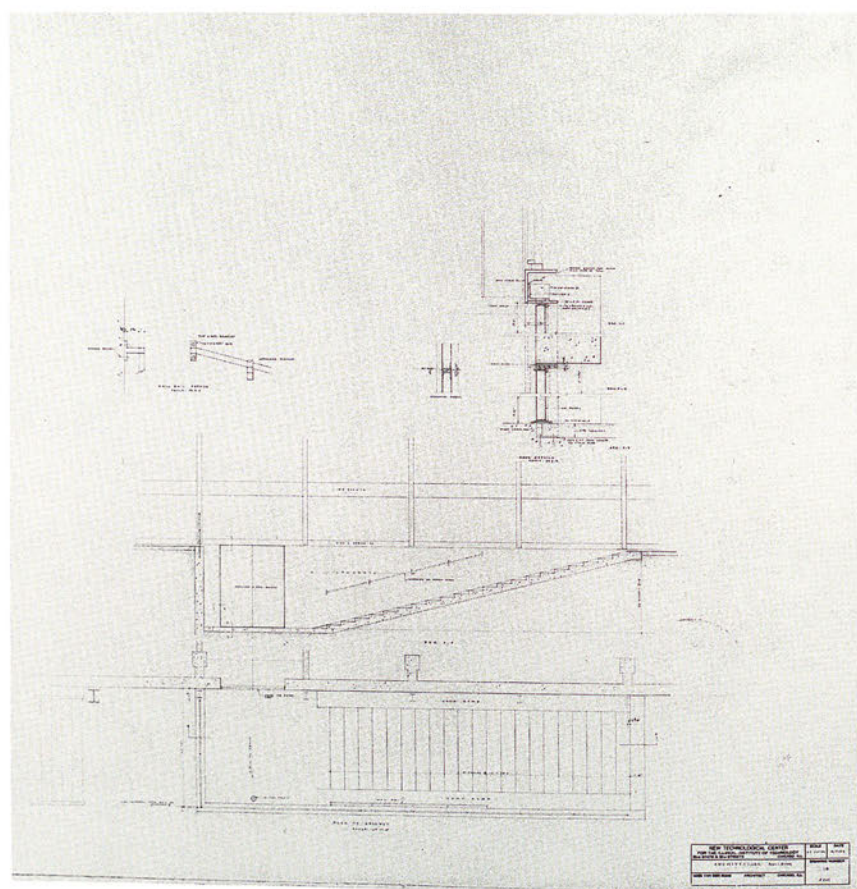
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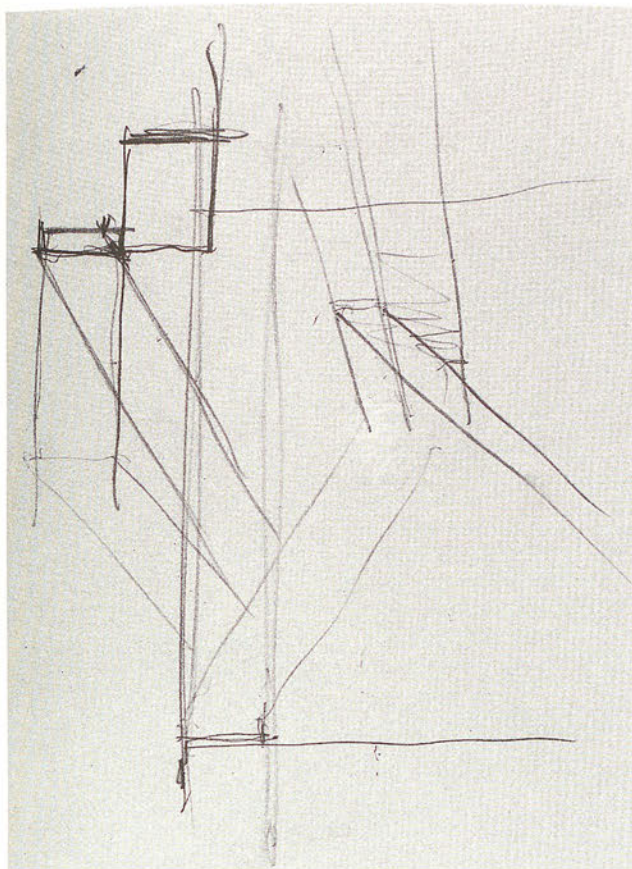
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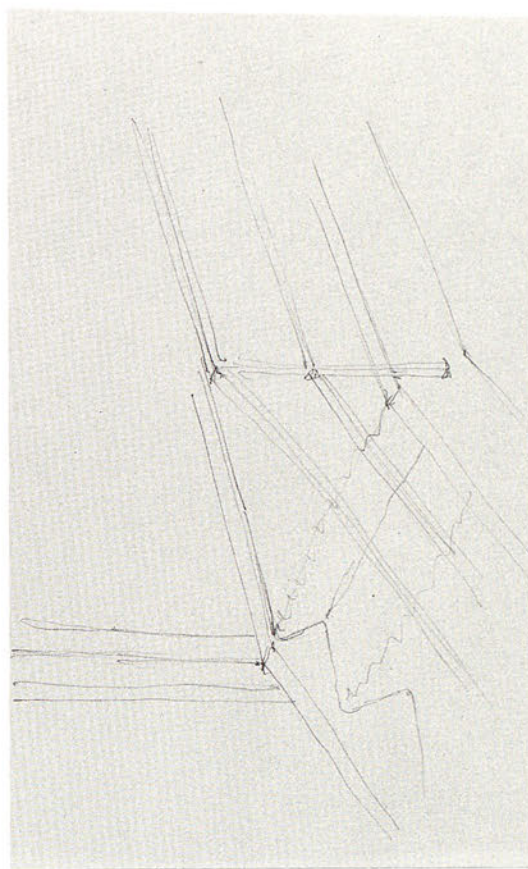
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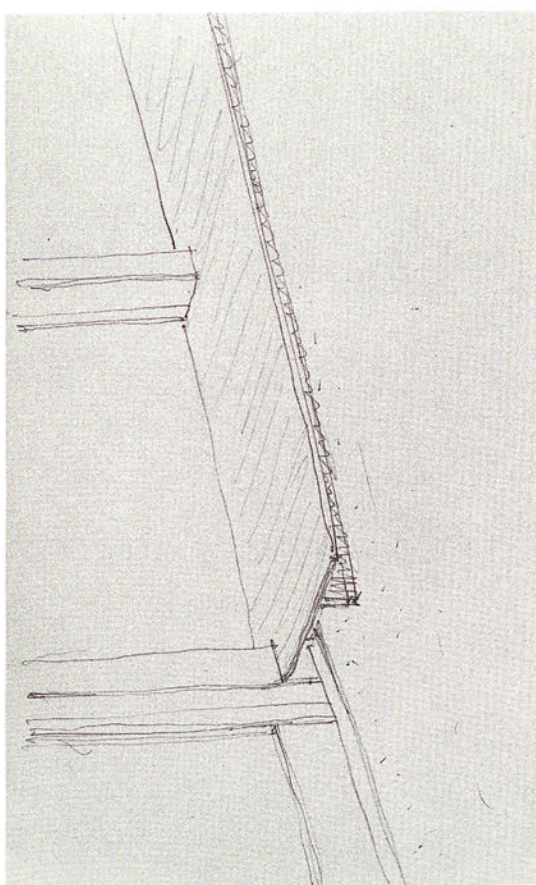
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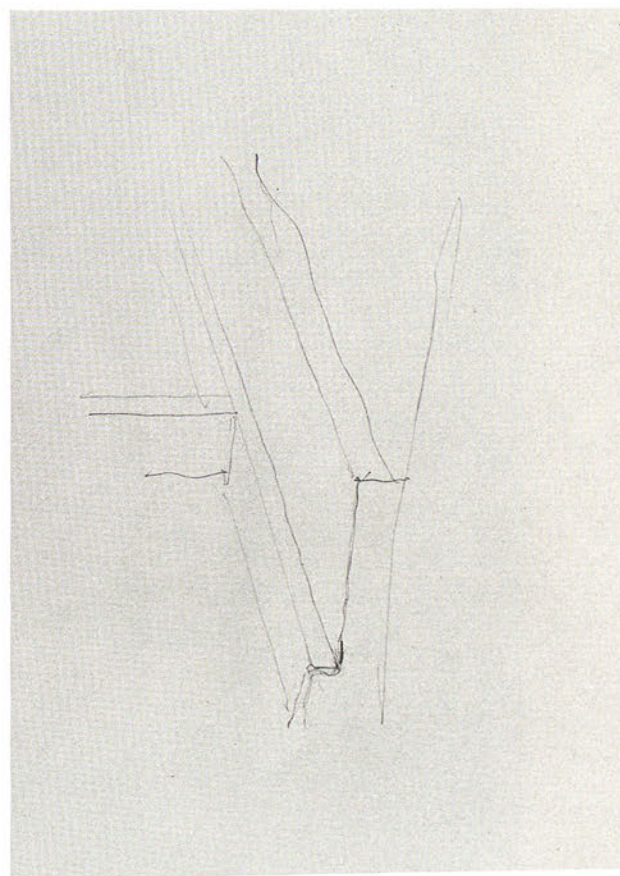
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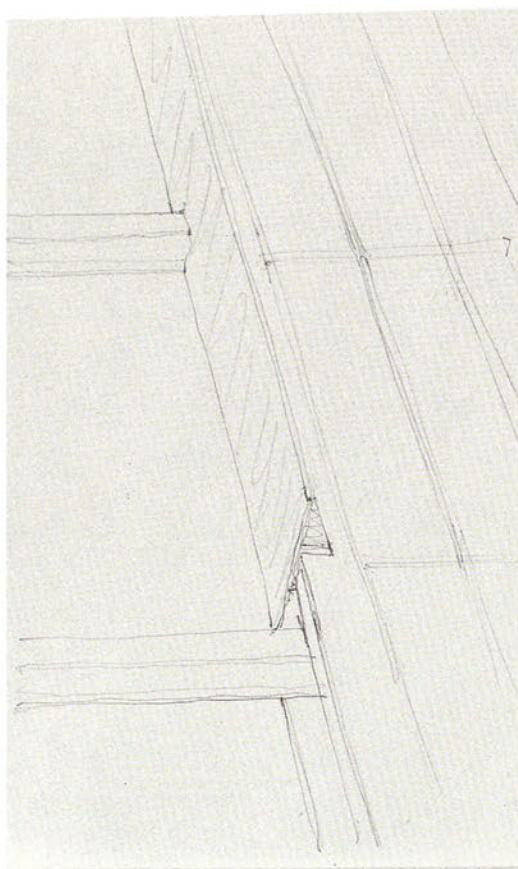
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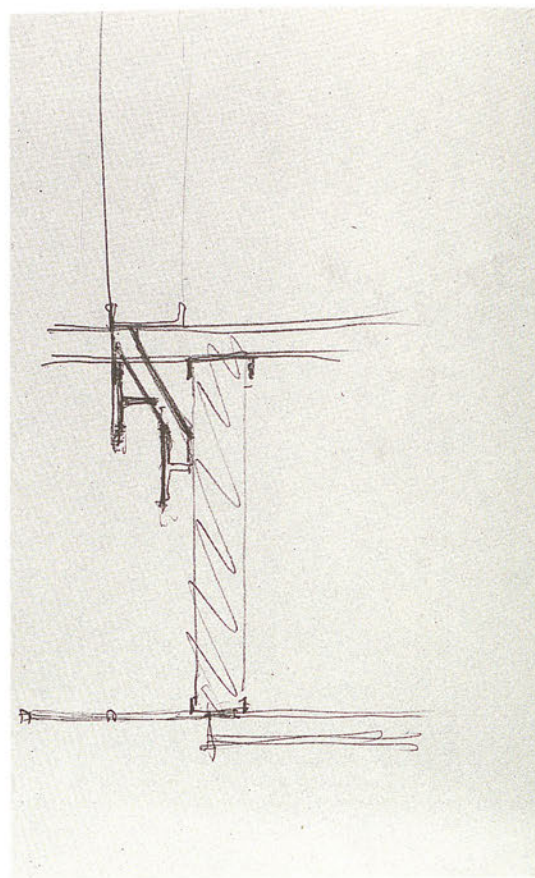
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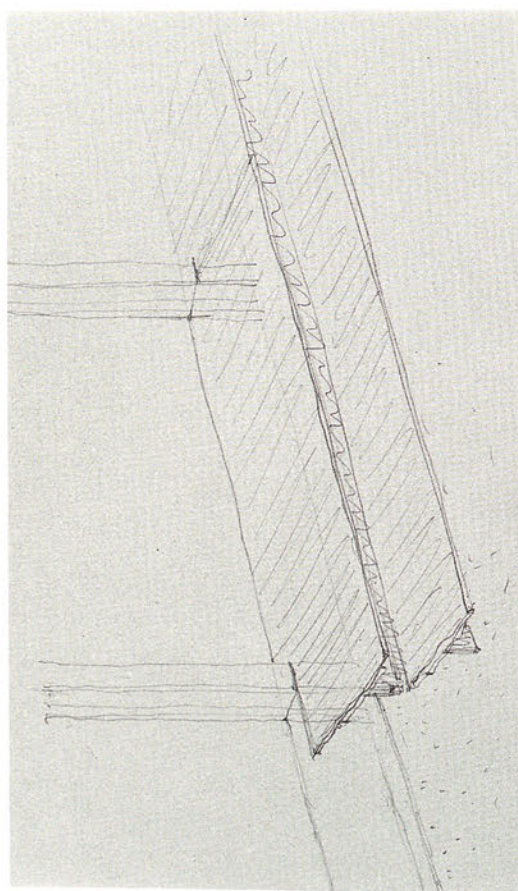
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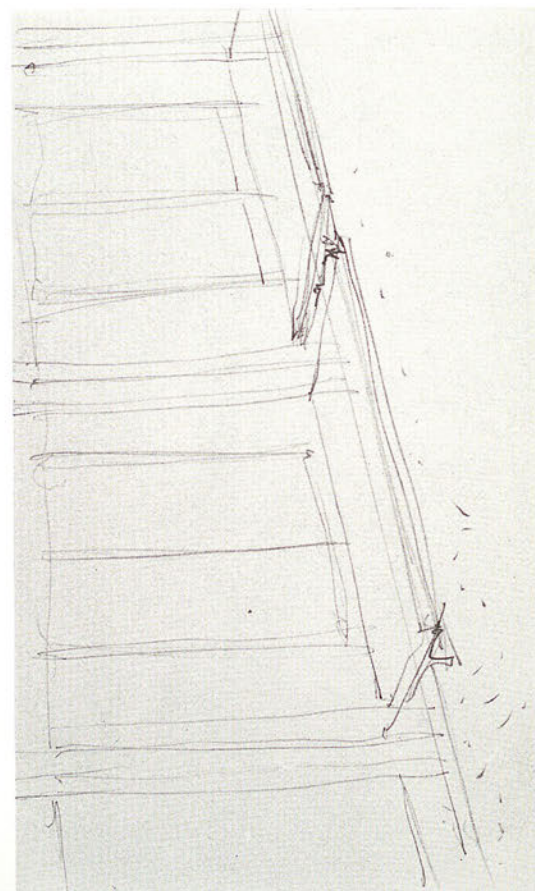
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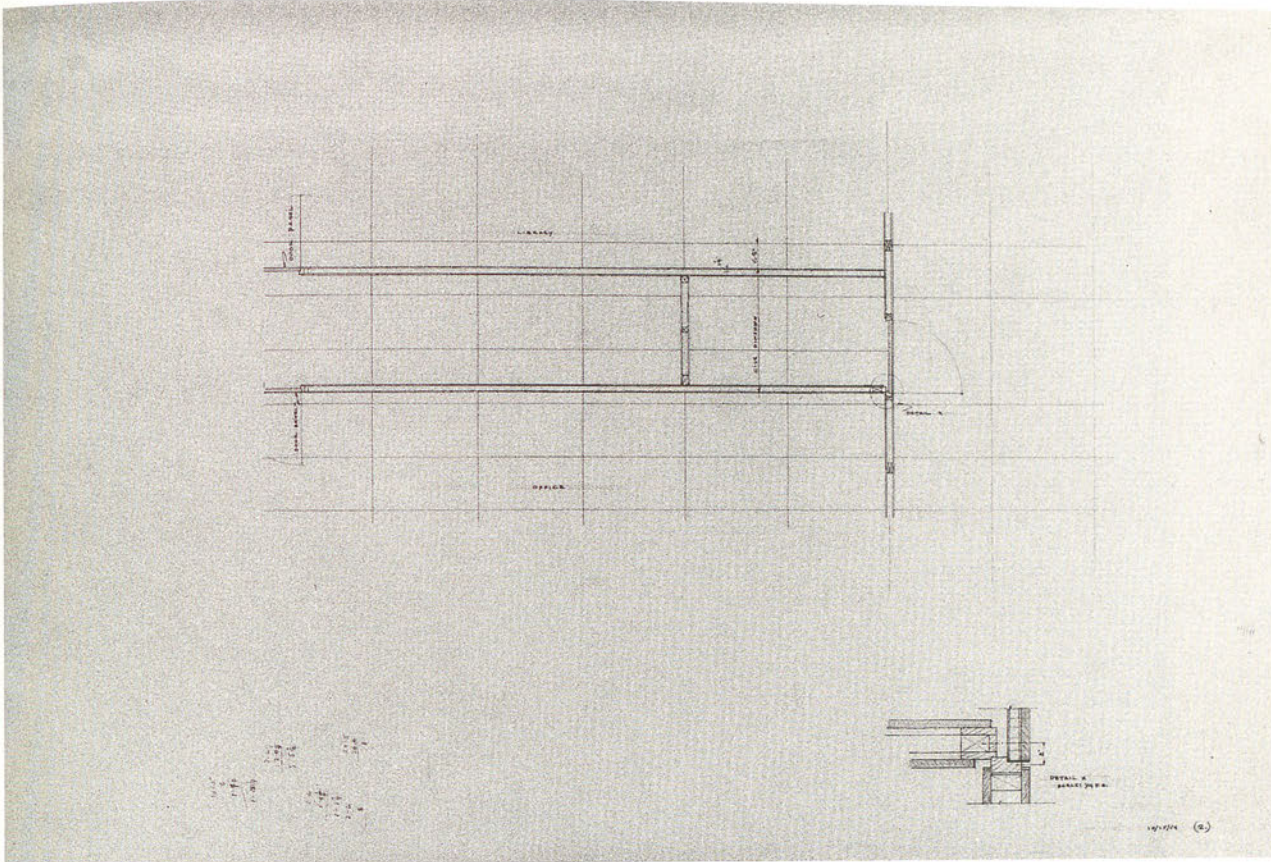
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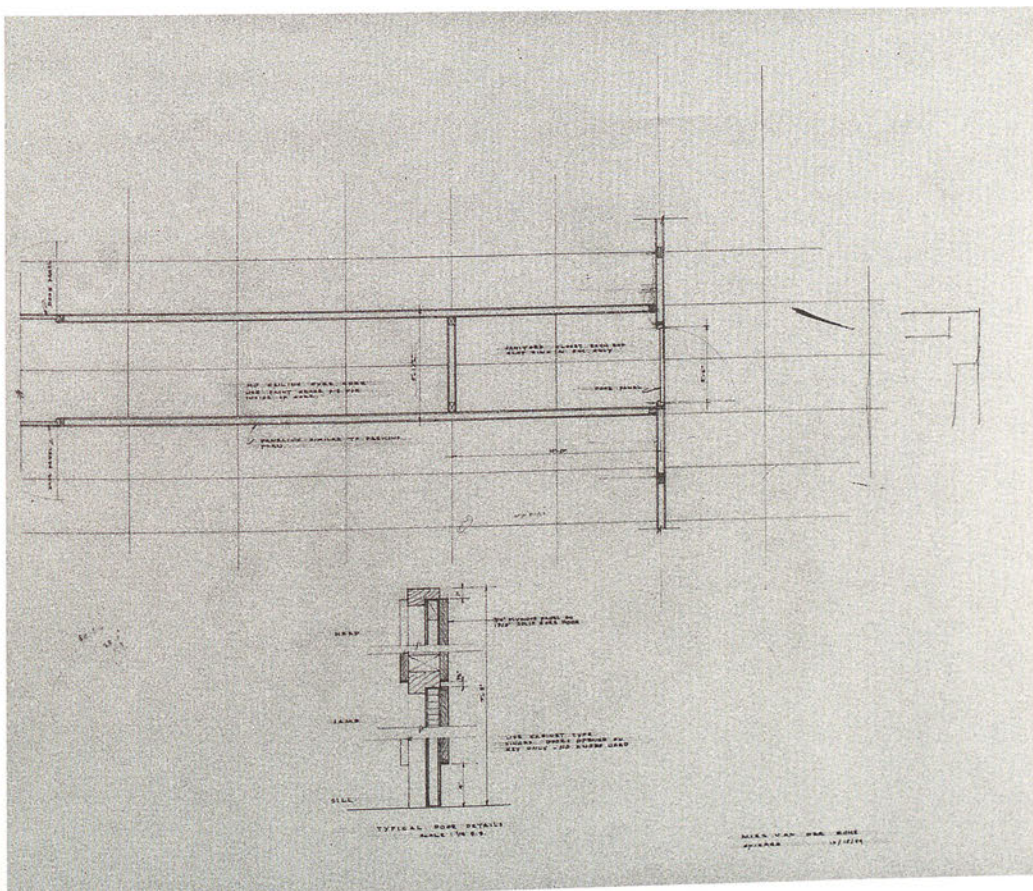
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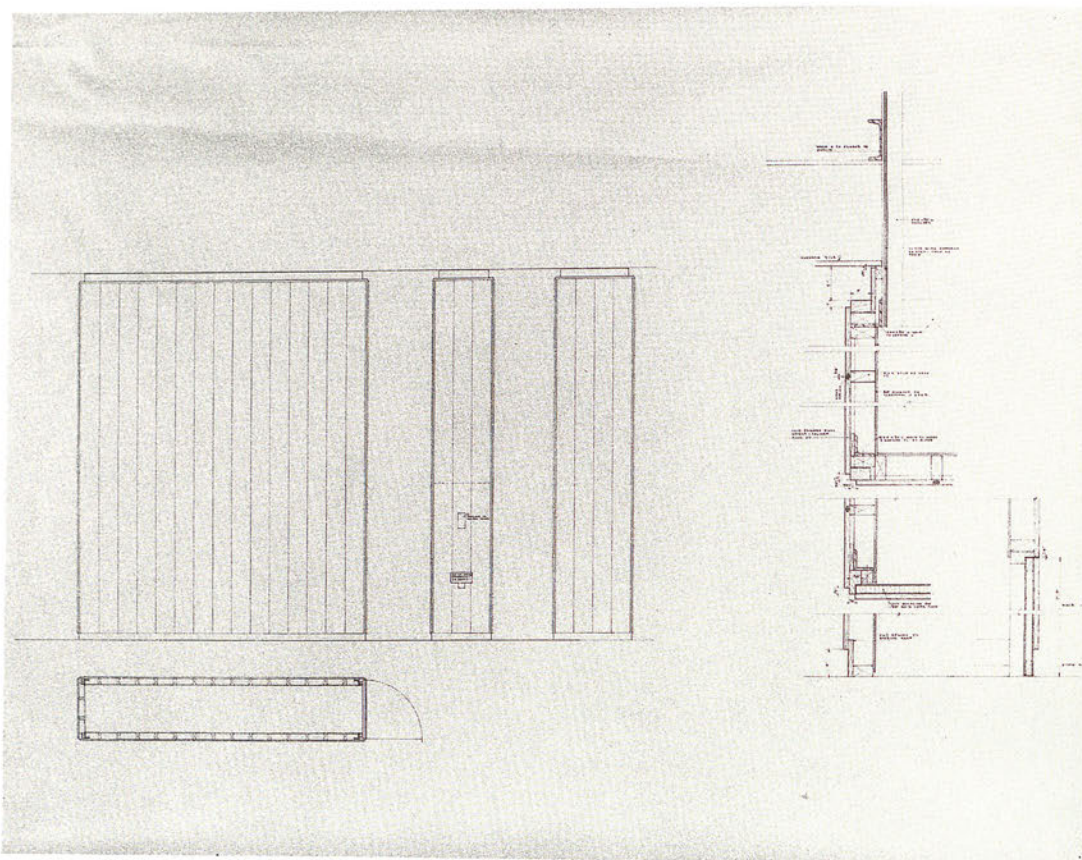
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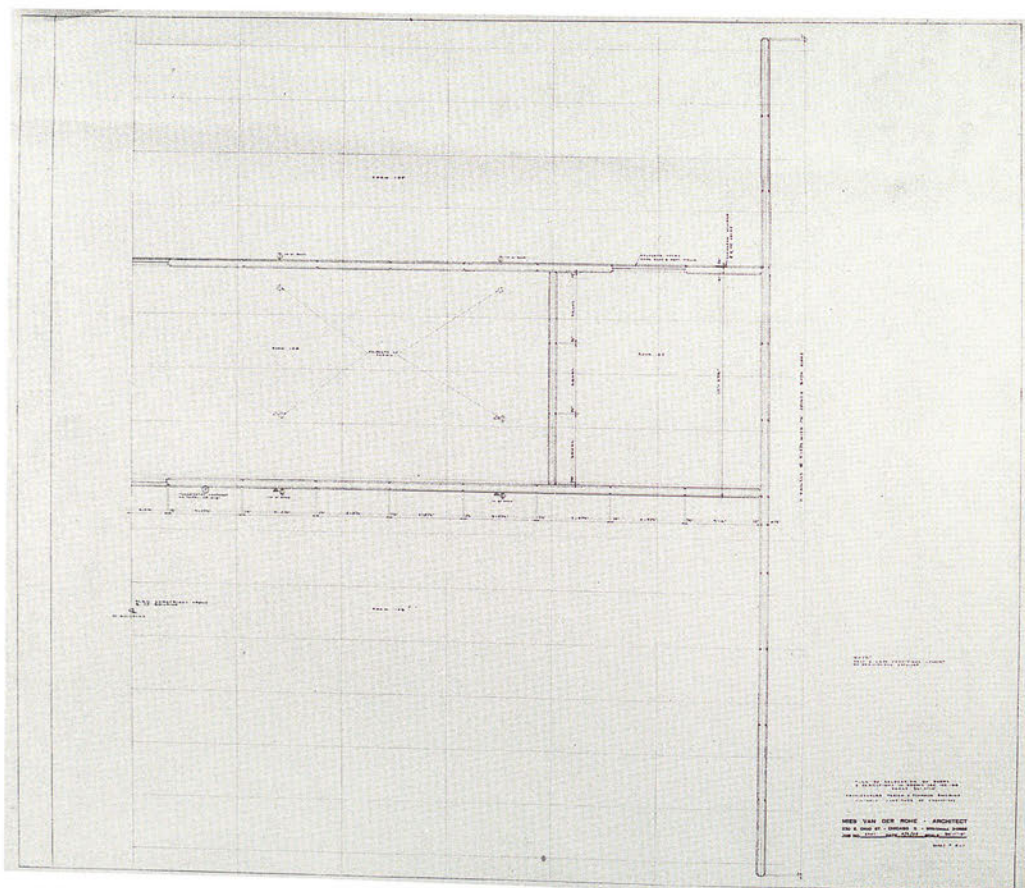
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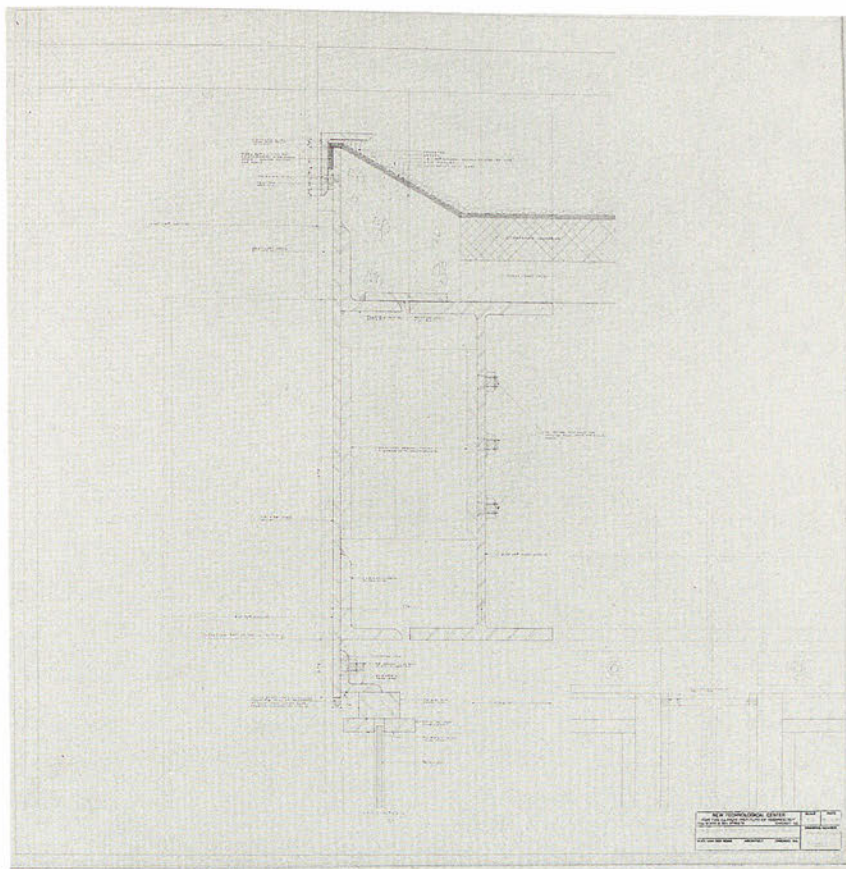
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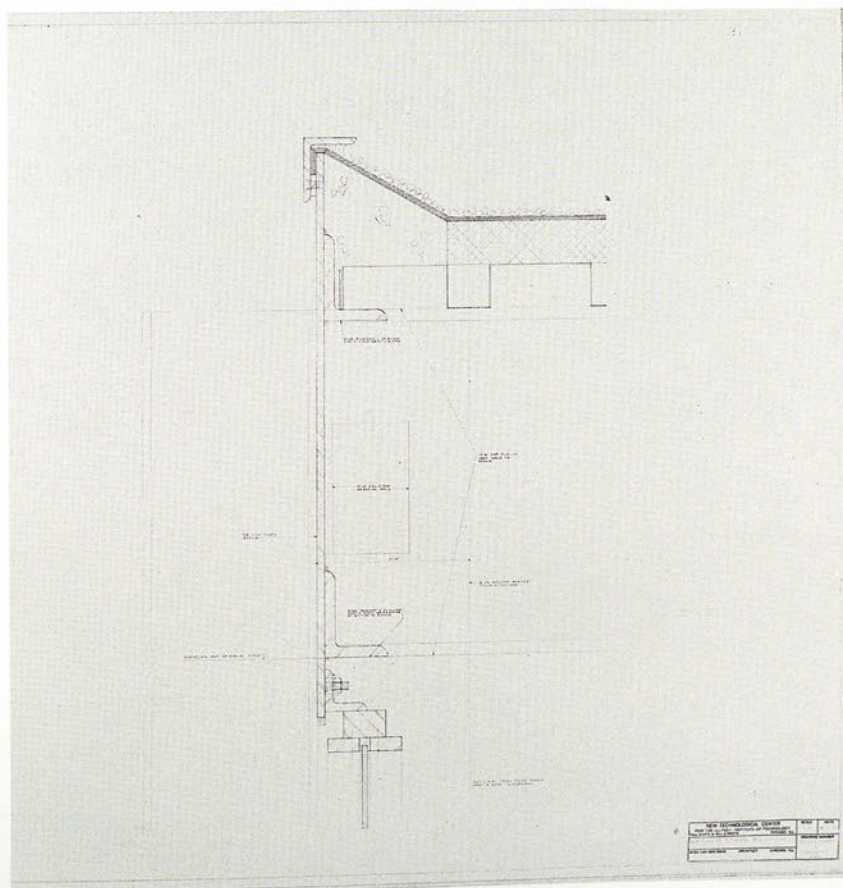
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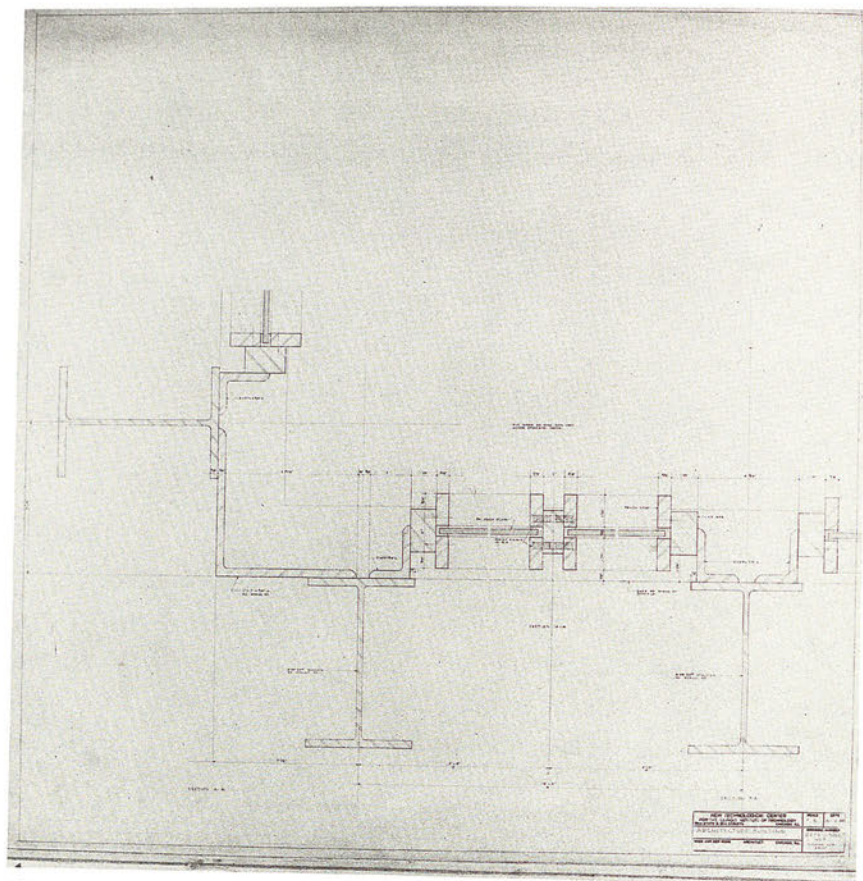
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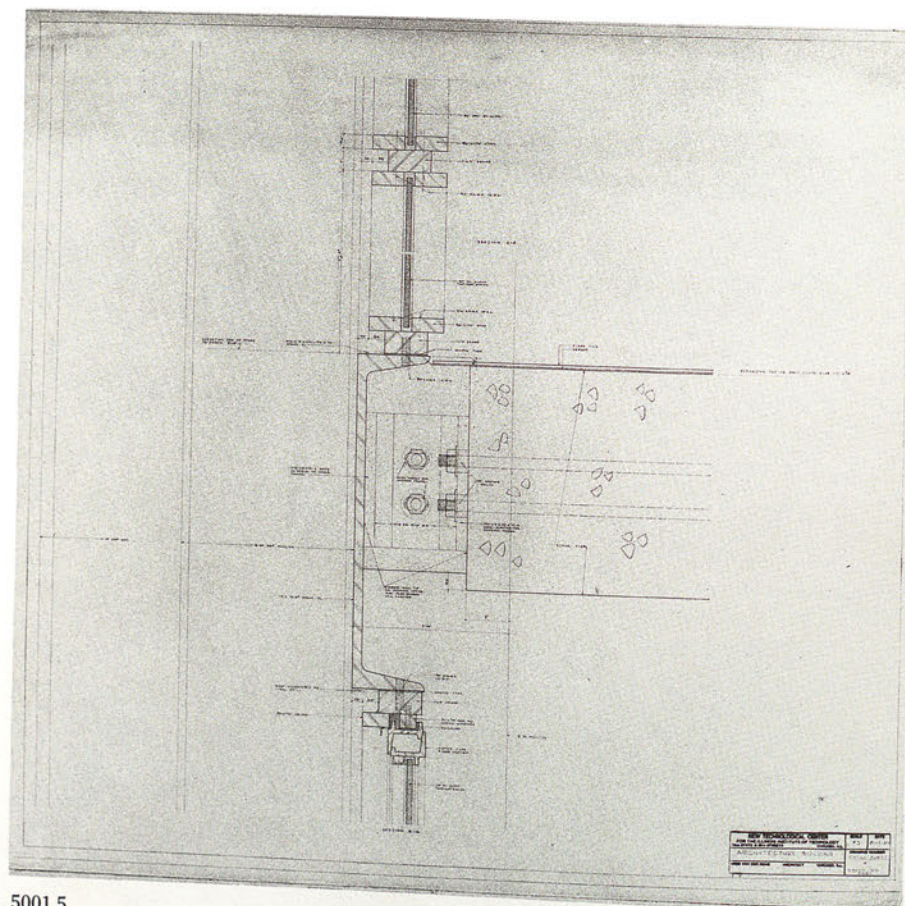
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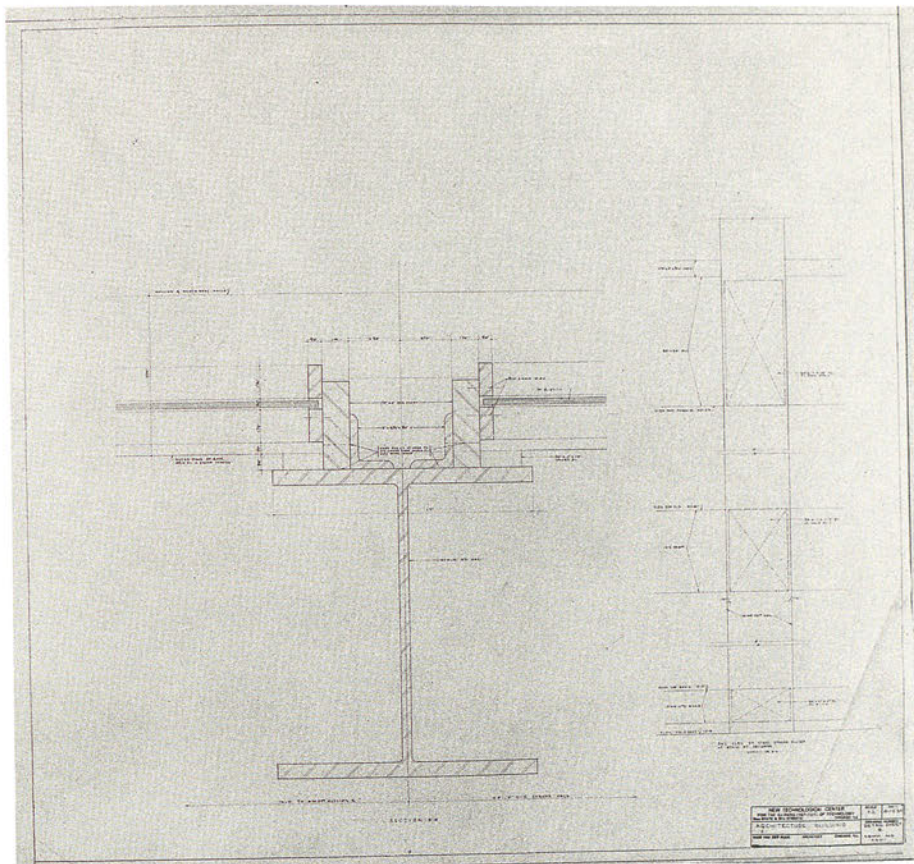
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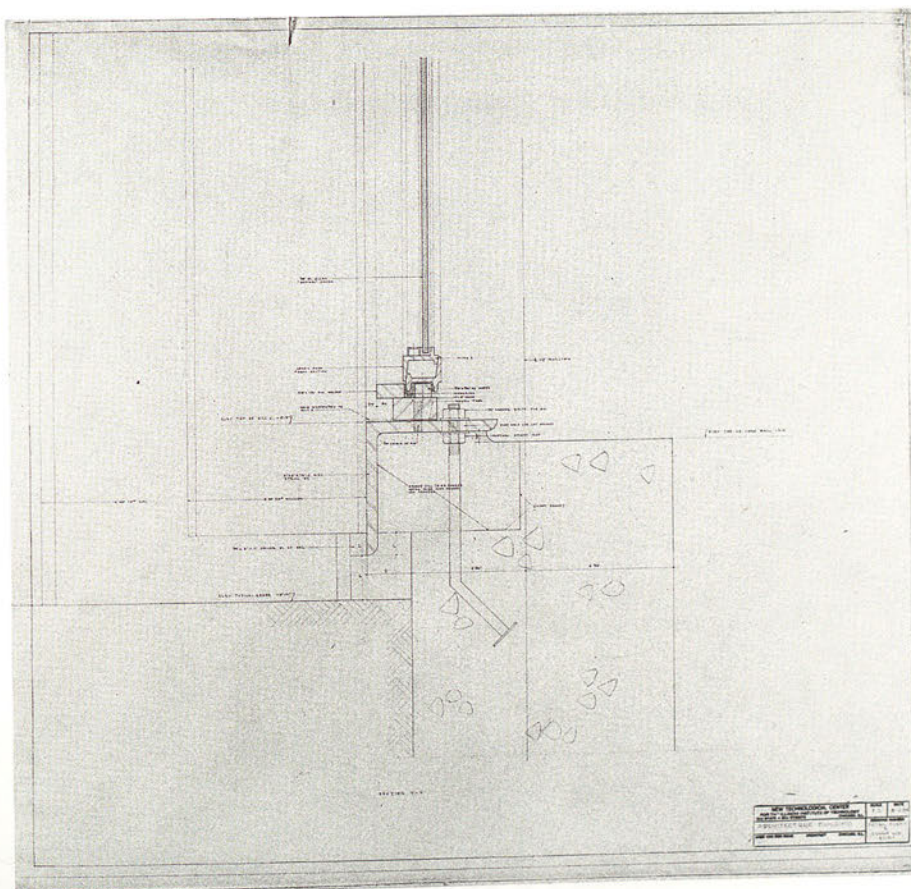
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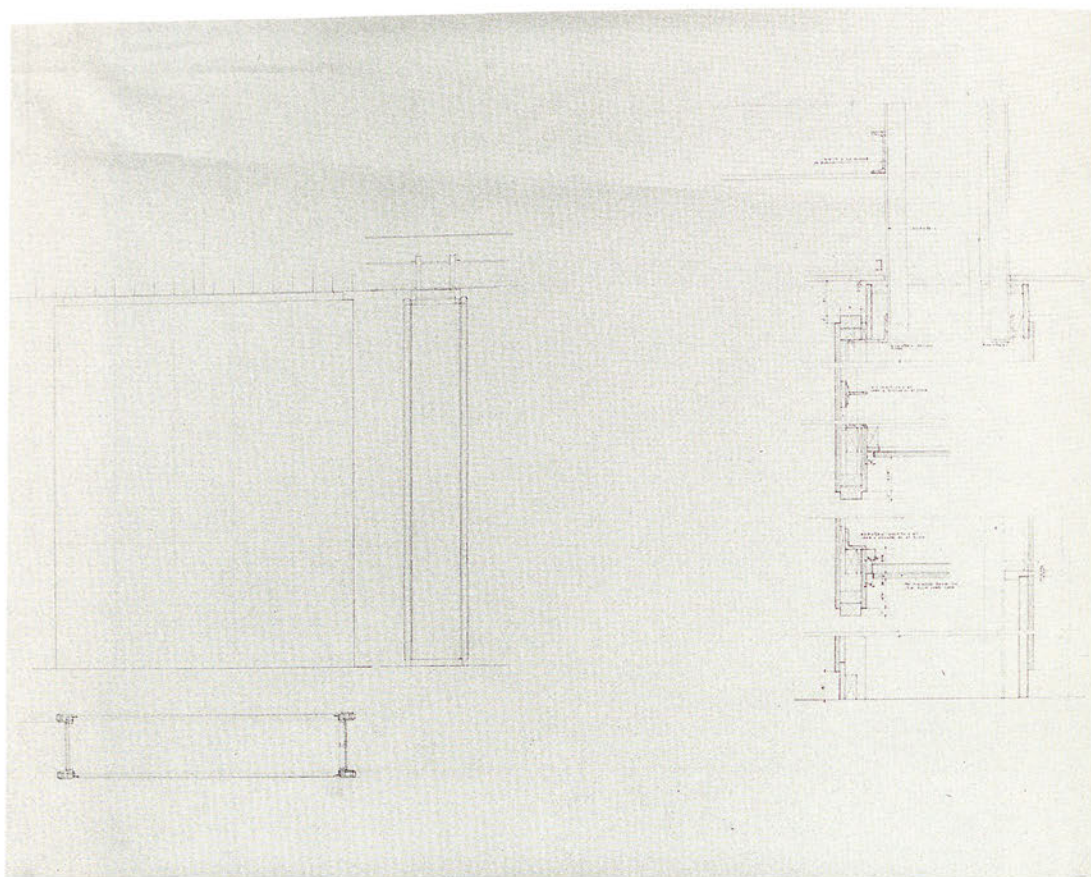
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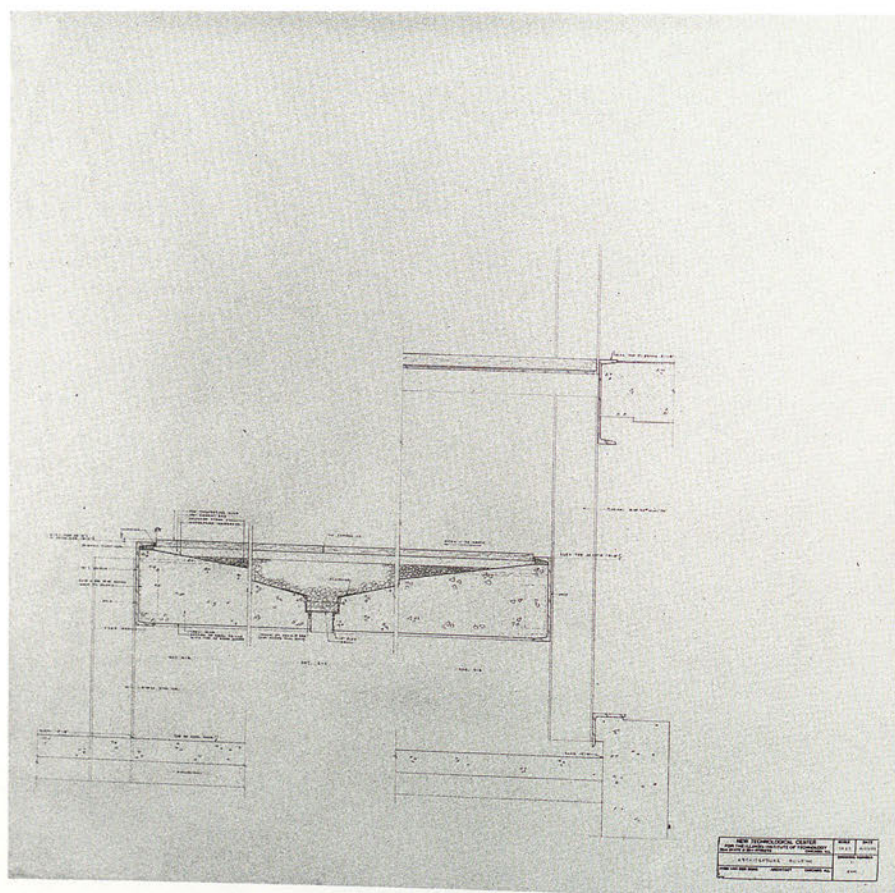
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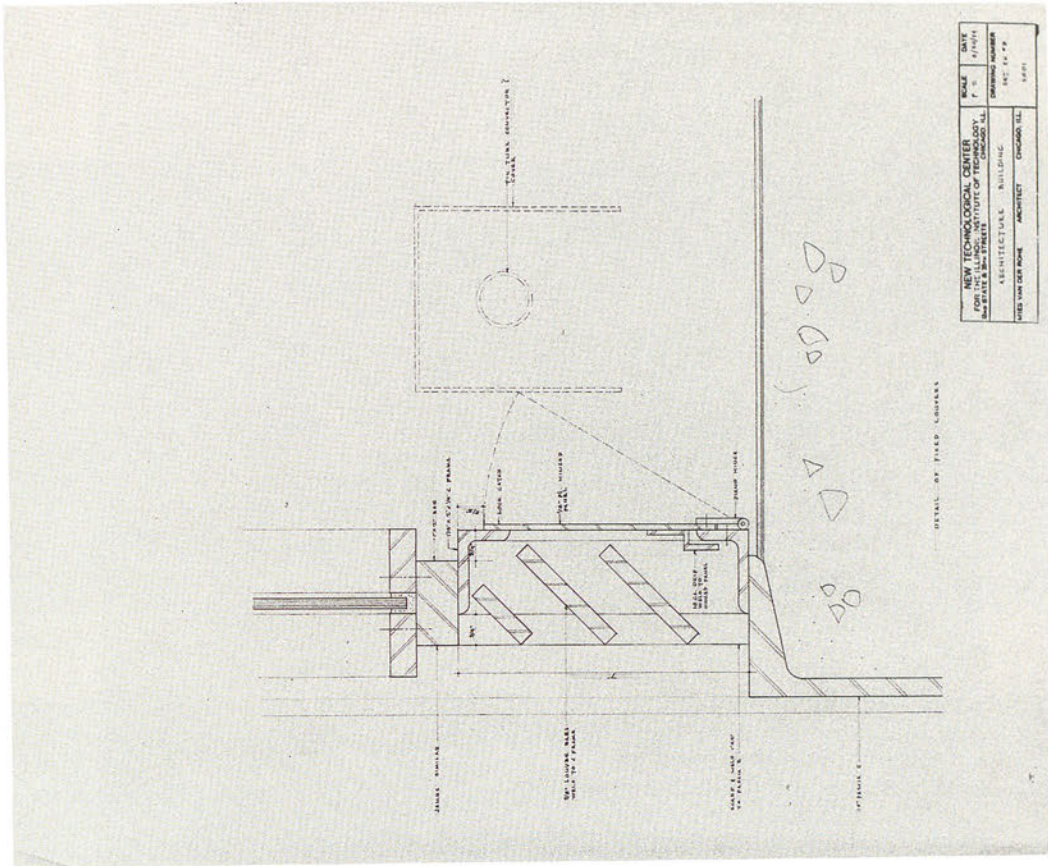
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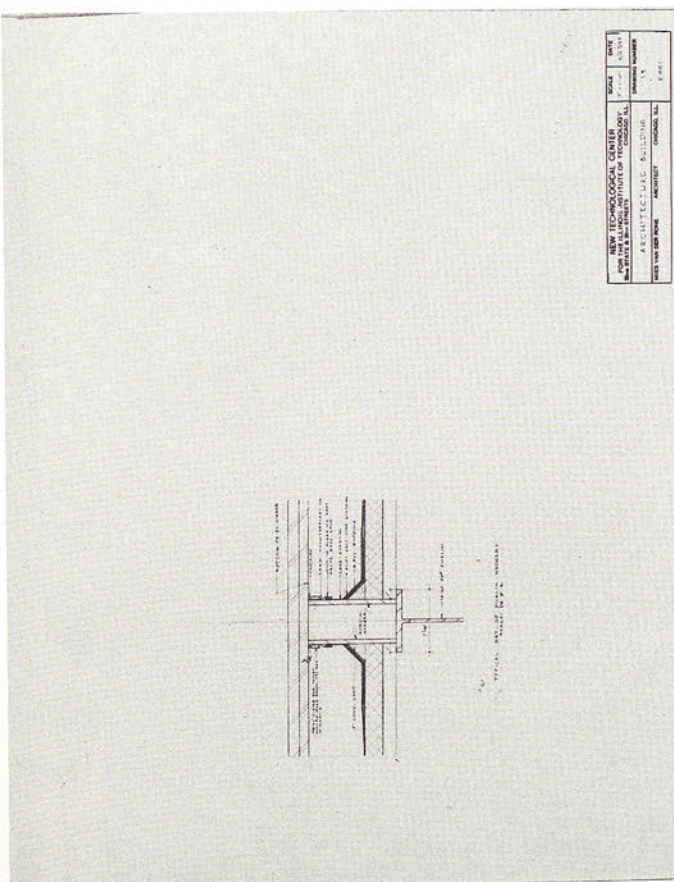
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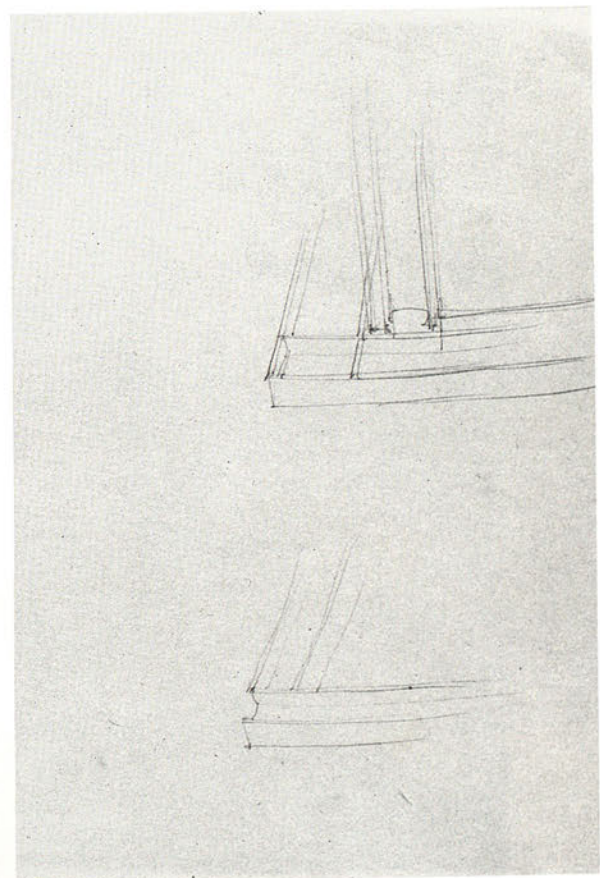
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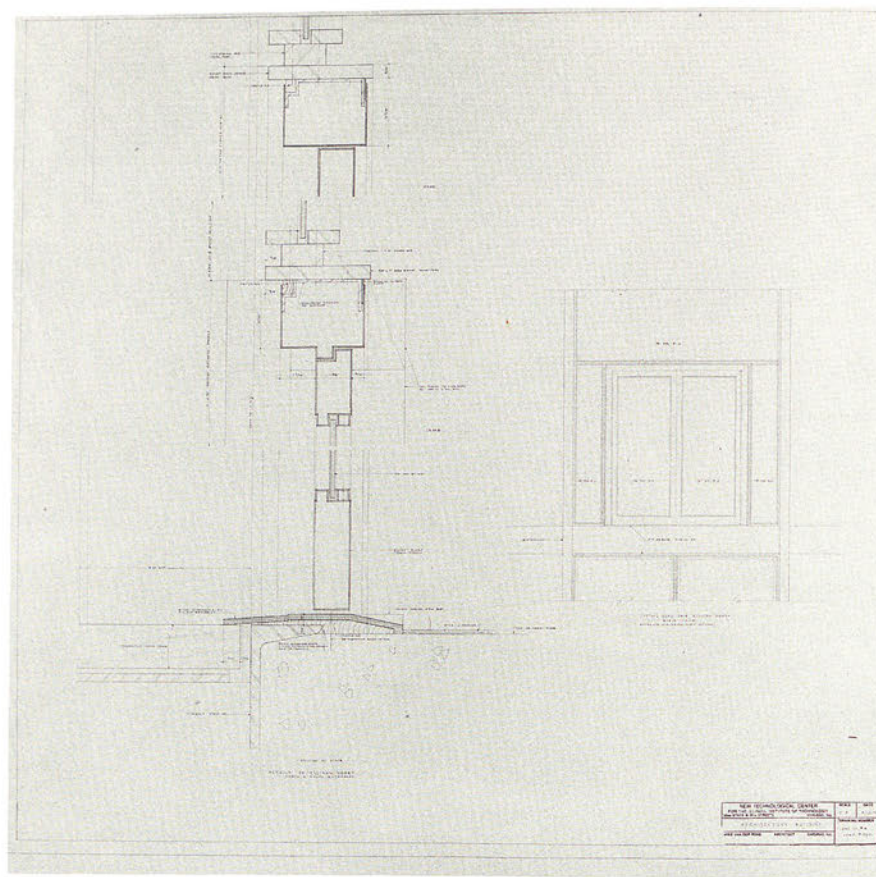
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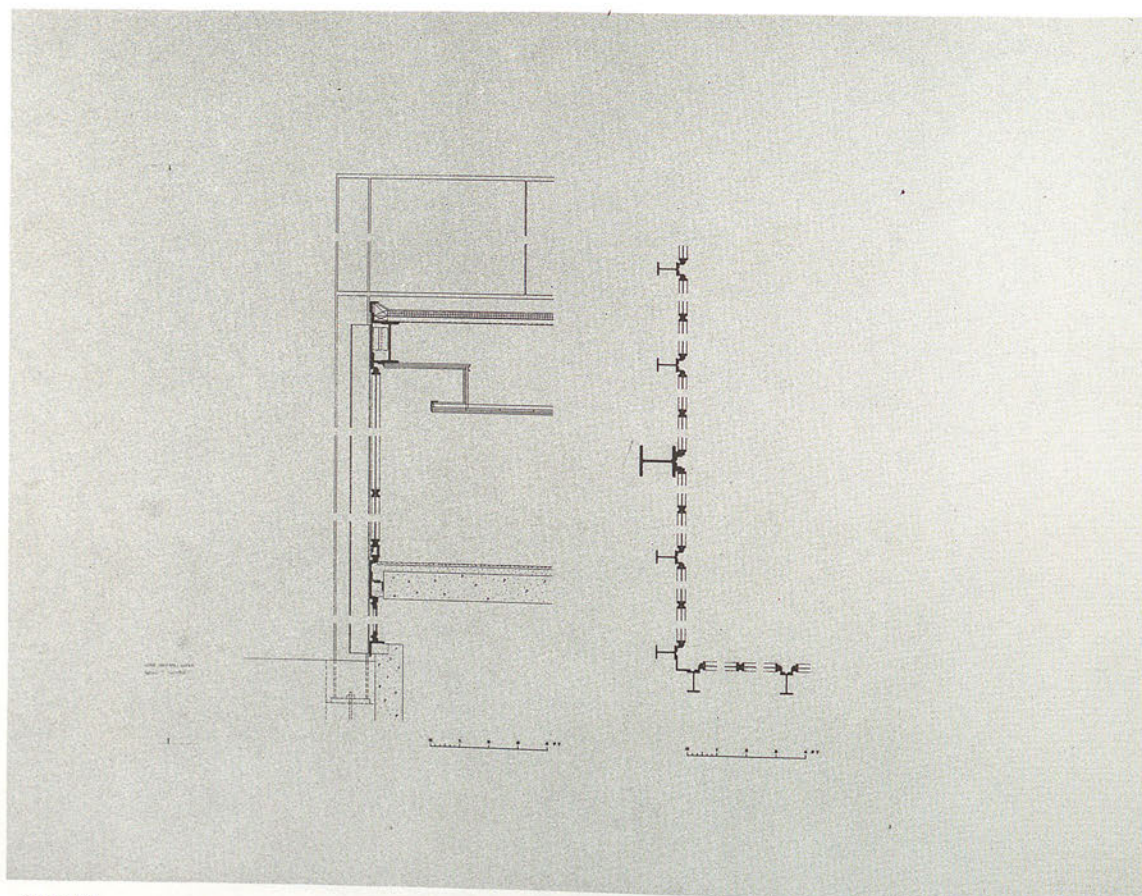
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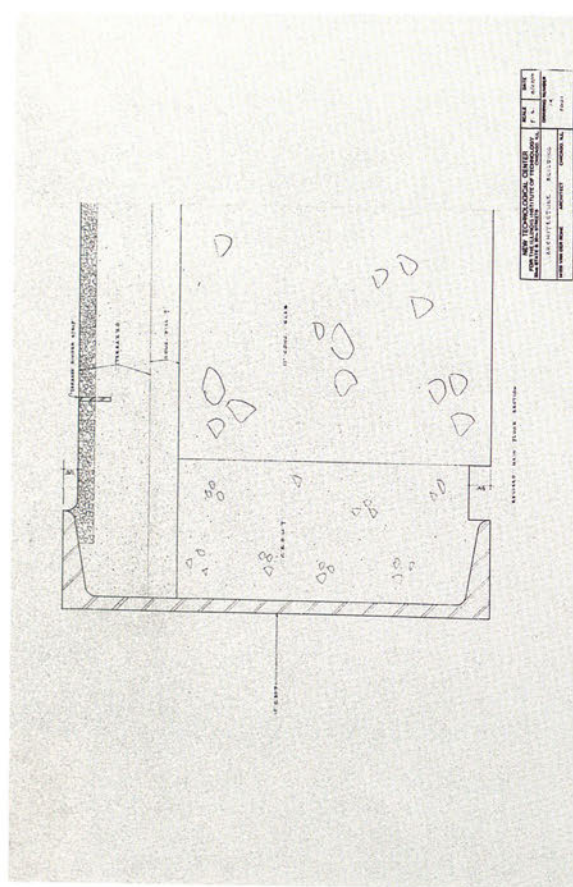
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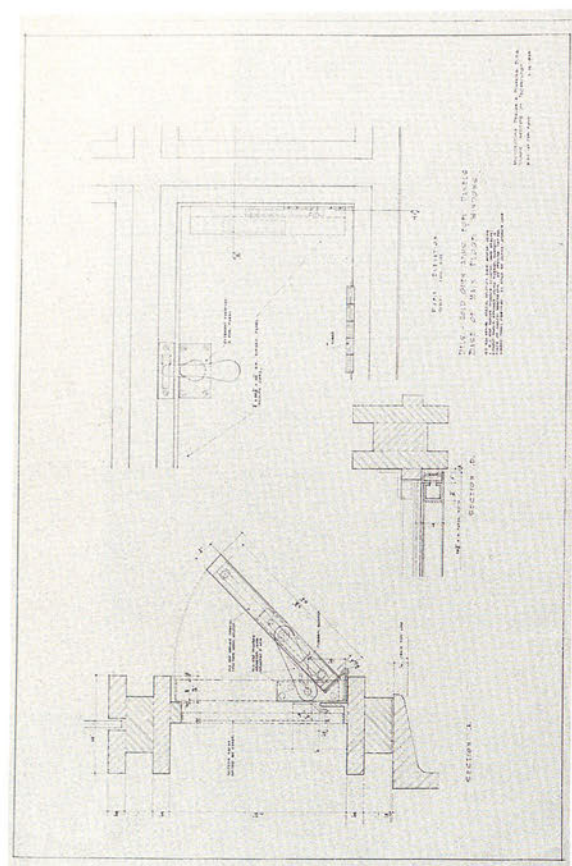
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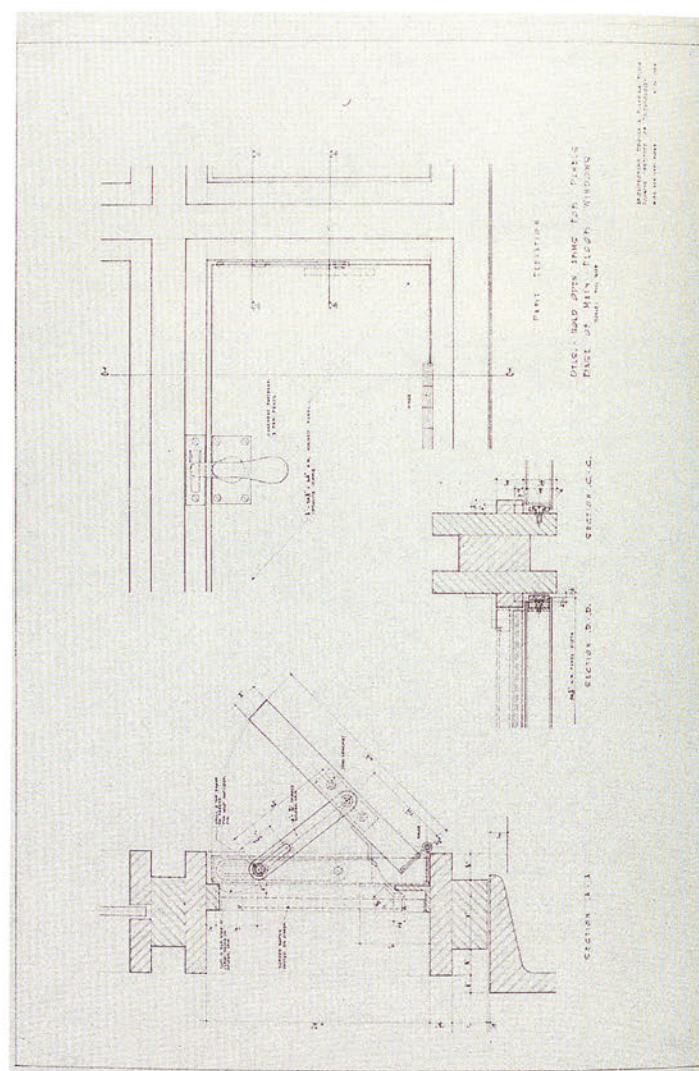
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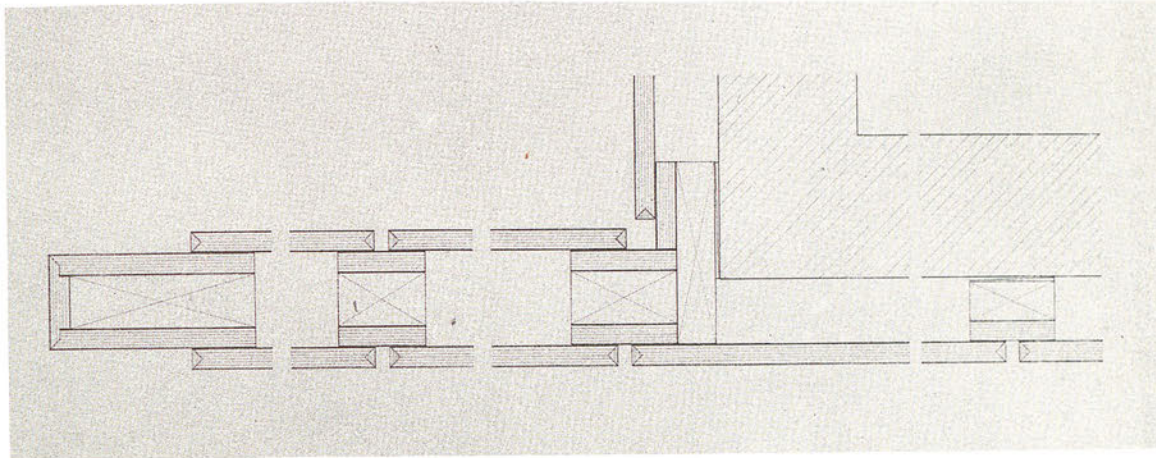
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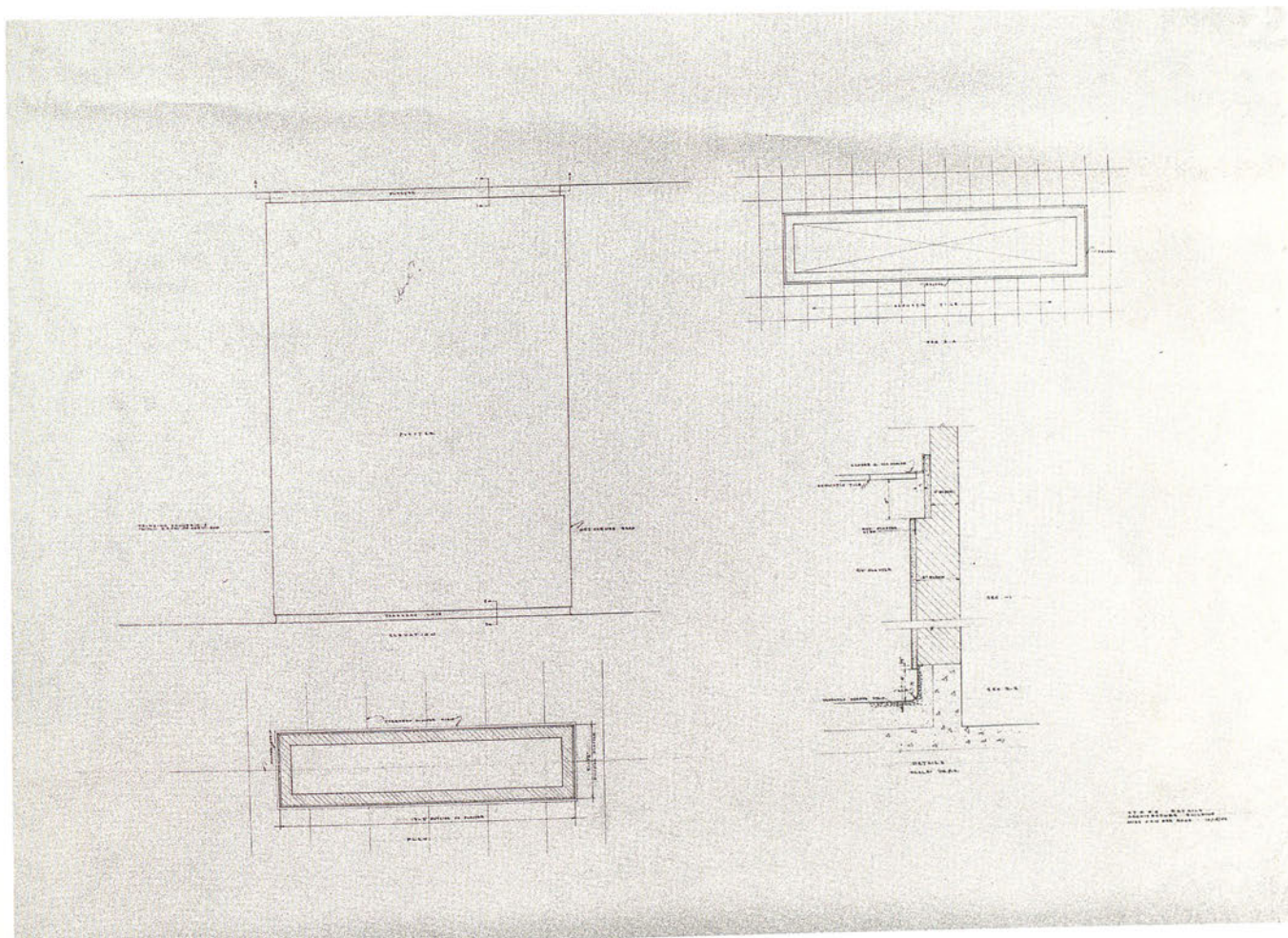
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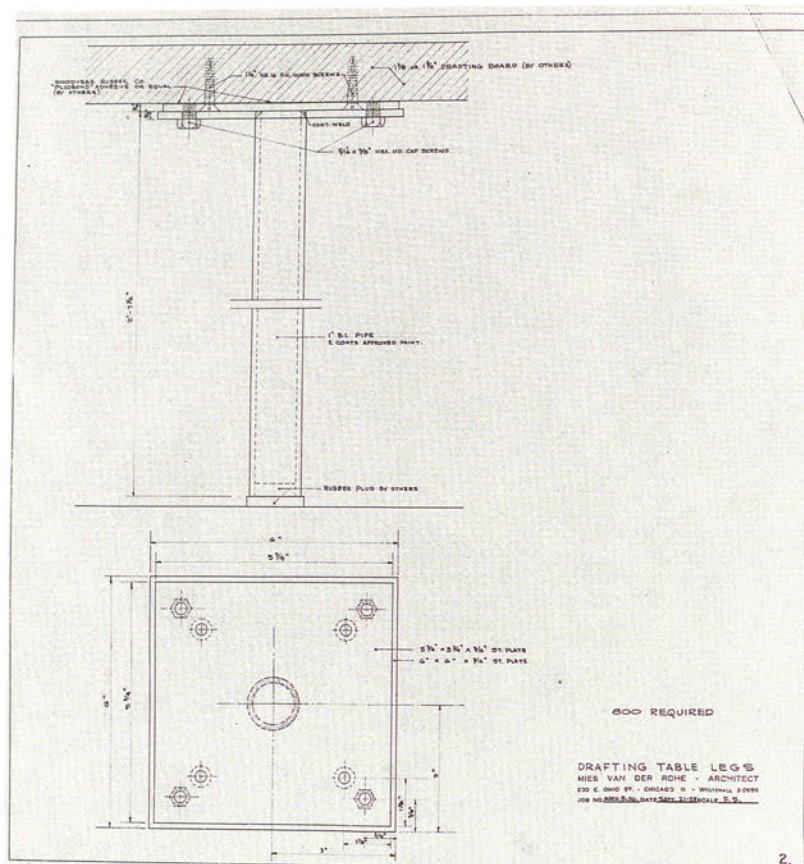
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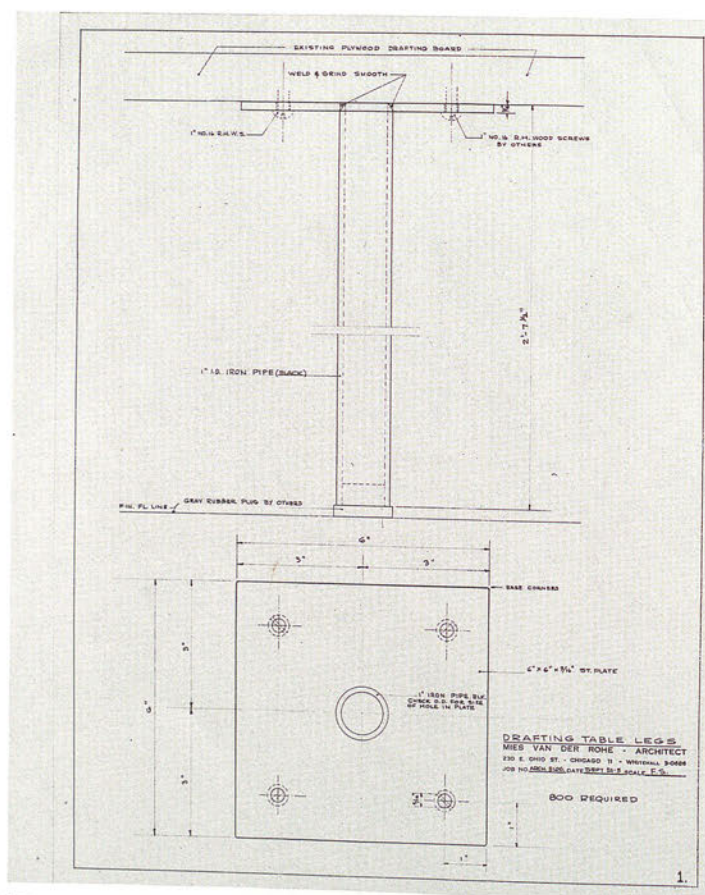
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