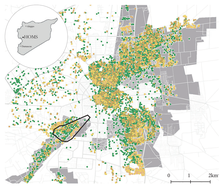
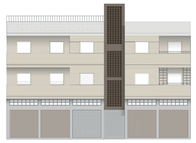
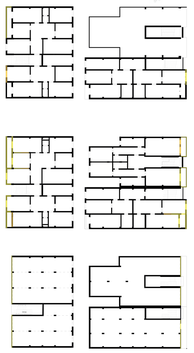
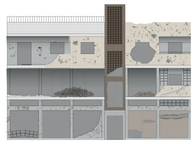
RETURN TO HOMS:
POST CONFLICT RECOVERY OF DAMAGED BLOCKS IN SYRIA



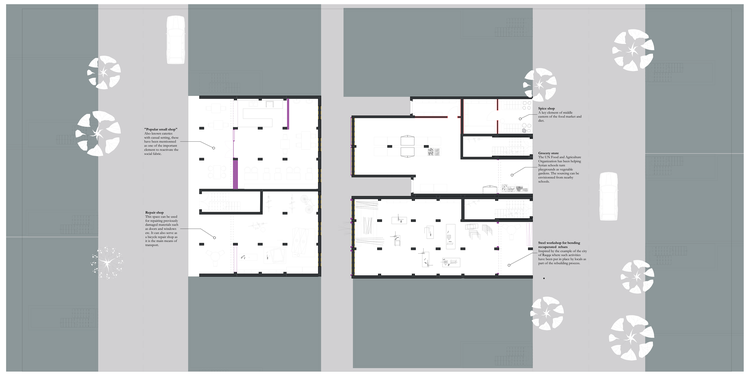

North facade
pre-conflict
1:100

South facade
pre-conflict
1:100

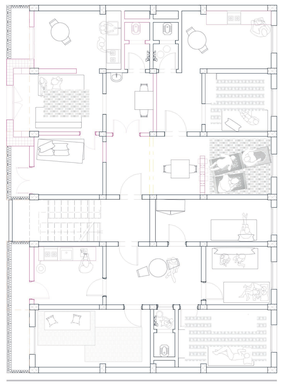

Plans existing situation
1:200
Completely destroyed
Partially damaged

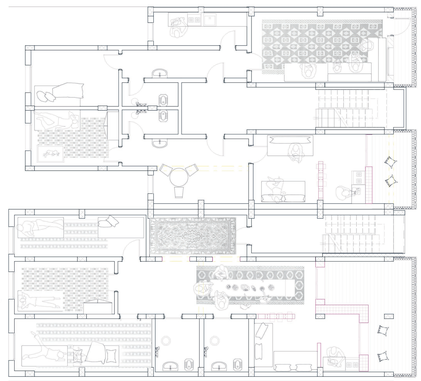

North facade
post-conflict
1:100

South facade
post-conflict
1:100



Plan ground floor
1:100



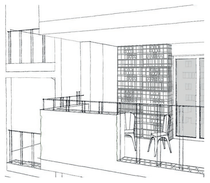

Plan 1st floor
1:50

Plan 2nd floor
1:100

North facade post-recovery
1:50

Perspective section
1:50

South facade post-recovery
1:50

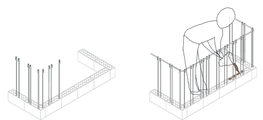


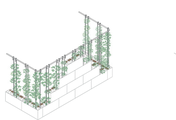
Exterior facade

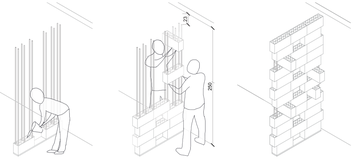
Several homes of families who have returned have stacked bricks as a temporary wall feature. The makeshift walls of the project follow the similar idea with recuperated metal rebars bent in the ground floor workshop, assembled with tie wire of 1,5mm diameter then stacked with damaged bricks. The width is of at least 40 cm considering two rows of bricks, one of which exposes the brick holes as a motif on the exterior side. This is considers that cement is too costly to be used to rebuild conventional walls. The height of a module isn't more than 50-60cm in order to facilitate the arrangements for the bricks by bending down.

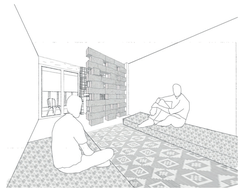
Balcony railing
Interior wall

Looking into the various gazing levels (sitting on floor, squating, standing), the interior wall is visually permeable allowing different levels of privacy while also maintaining sunlight within the houshold.
The balcony "brings back life" by welcoming climbing plants in the crevices of the bricks.

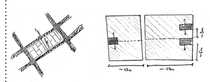








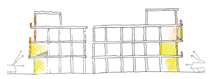
Understanding the built environement



Given the ambigusous legal statut of informal settlements, it was not possible to have official drawn plans of the existing buildings. Therefore, satellite images and photos were mainly used to determine the existing state. The buildings are in fact stacked along a cartesian planand. The general width is of 30m and a single building's length ranges from 12-20m. We find common configurations in relation to the stair access, three of which were adressed for the project.

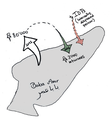
The buildings are mainly built in a generic concrete structure of column and slab or column beam, making it an open plan where the walls are non structural. The exterior and interior walls are made of concrete blocks/bricks. We find cantilevered balconies also built with bricks with a level of privacy maintained through the guard railing. Many blocks seem to vertically expand with added columns on the top floor. Roof spaces were also widely used for activities such preparing food, cleaning and gardening.

Understanding Destruction



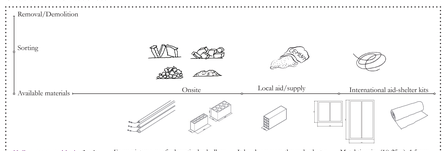
The project addresses partially destroyed buildings that have been hit horizontally from tank shells. Although the destruction may seem relatively random, we can bring out a pattern. Given the deep length of the building blocks, the most damage is from the main street, leaving the interior walls relatively intact. The windows along with the frames are the first to disappear. The first floor's balcony railing as well as the facade tends to be nearly completely destroyed. Keeping in mind that the damage can be totally random where sometimes only the last floor is effected.

A story of Hope and Determination



Sabah is a woman who escaped with her family when her house in Baba Amr was shelled and who was among the first to return after the fighting:
"*All my good and happy memories are in this house. I didn't want leave it and lose all these memories.*
She will rebuild but it will be costly. To survive and also help others, she rents two of her three floors. This family fled multiple times, most recently from Raqqa.
I feel their pain. They struggled, they fled, left their homes. I help those displaced as they don't leave our country.
[...]All the new residents supporting each other in tough times essential to bringing life back this area.
Having all been displaced at least once, the displaced and returnees are now collaborating to reclaim Baba Amr." (UNHCR, short report 2016)

Understanding resources



Hollow concrete blocks (both intact and damaged) and used rebars are main materials that can be directly recuperated from damaged buildings.

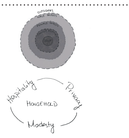
From pictures we find particular hollow bricks of two kinds.
The rebar dimension would correspond (those used in slabs and columns. Rubble from completely destroyed buildings can be sorted according to their sizes. Bigger elements could be used as furniture.

It has been seen through photos that some locals started to rebuild namely with red bricks that may come from a local supply.
Cement is also widely used for house repairs. Windows may be found in local market.

Metal tie wire (10-25m): 1,5mm diameter *can be used for binding and for reinforcing structures*
See through plastic film used to cover windows or openings.
Two types of standard windows can be found for repairs.

Understanding domestic and social lifestyle

Low rise seating is common in a syrian houshold. As they are easily movable, the mattresses allow flexibility between sleeping and living spaces.
Hawset, floor mats covering entire space of a room allow to sit directly on the floor for gathering and dining. It also serves as protection for mattresses. Although they can be provided in shelter kits, in some areas, syrians are turning plastic waste into mats for a living.



hospitality, a dwelling with opportunities to extend hospitality to neighbours and enhance relationships with the society.
modesty, a home [...] defined by humility in design through commonial and sustainable designs
privacy, a safe and private place for personal and family's sanctuary
(Othman, Aiah, and Bayu, 'Privacy, Modesty, Hospitality, and the Design of Muslim Homes')

- Rooms around a hall that also serves as living albeit without windows
- Two "living" rooms, one for guests
- Kitchen and living space often on opposite sides

Drawings from book "The Battle for Home" by Ali Sabsouni

Some interviewees mentioned popular small shops, and stressed the importance of re-opening them as a key element to bring the city back to its pre-war situation and to encourage Syrians to exile to return. (Azzouz, 'A Tale of a Syrian City at War')

Small businesses consisting of tiny shops and grocery stores, along with workshops for clean industries such as carpentry, tailoring and black-smithing were dotted in between the dwellings.
(Ali Sabsouni, "The Battle for Home")

Destruction in Baba Amr, May 2 2012 (Joseph Eid /Getty)

Houses destroyed from syrian government shelling at Baba Amr neighborhood in Homs © AP/Local Coordination Committee

Homs city destruction ©Reuters

Umm Mohammad, and her husband Abdek collect at their destroyed home. ©Samer Al-Doumy

Some Homsites works in residents reconstruct their damaged homes in an Alawite neighborhood of Al-Qusayr following years of conflict, on July 6, 2013 (AFP via Getty Images)

Sabah, the woman from Baba Amr asking to rebuild her severely impacted home, where damaged bricks are stacked. (capture from youtube video report UNHCR)

Workers bound metal rebars collected from the rubble of destroyed buildings (AFP)

Children play football on a street in Baba Amr, Homs, Syria in February 2016. © UNHCR/ Andrew Mc.

Syrian refugee family sit in the only furbished room of the home they rent in Zarqa, Jordan. © UNHCR/David Azia