

# From the street, to the attic

## Louis Noel Villa

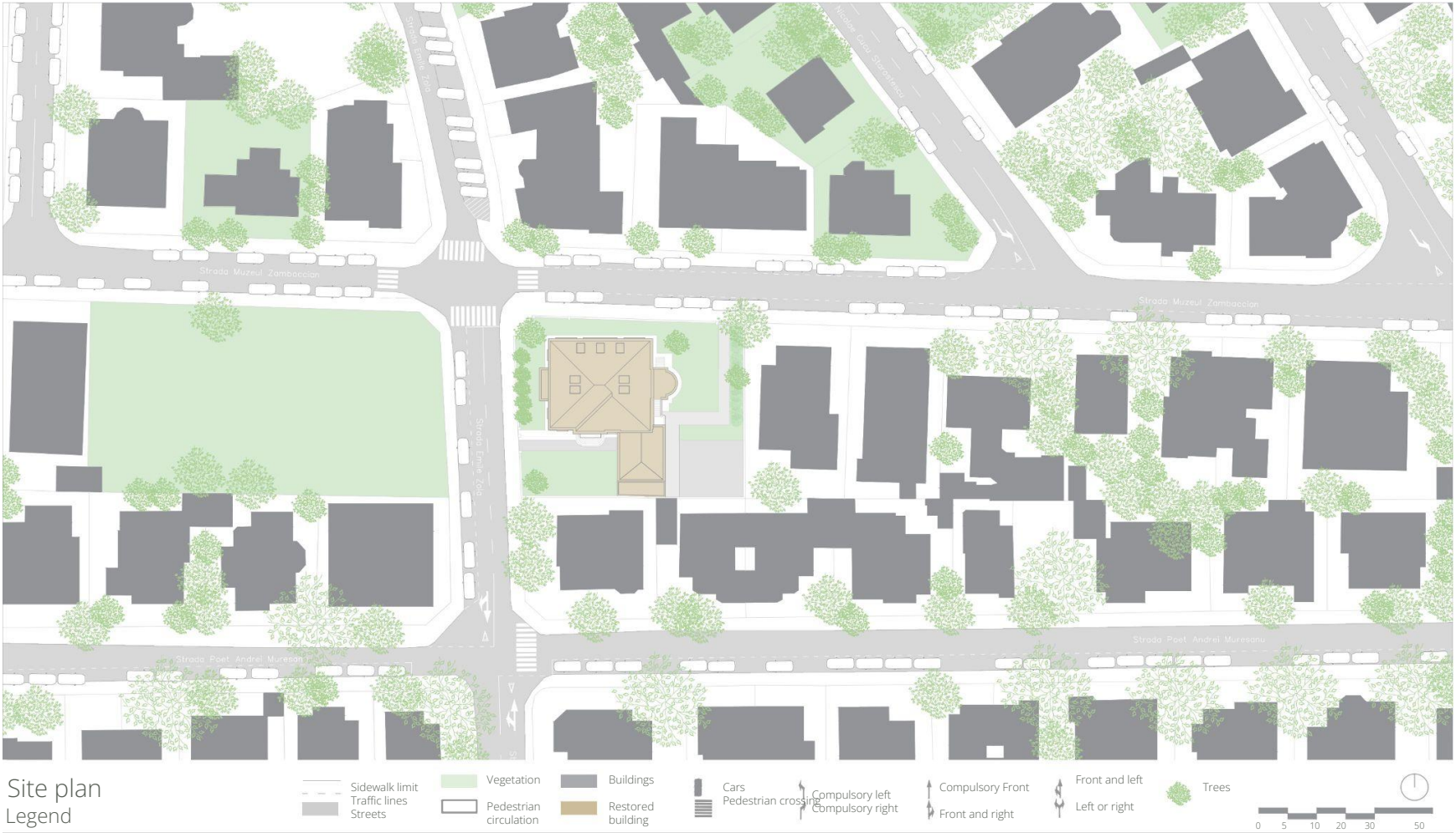
Emile Zola no. 6 street, Bucharest

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# What is Villa Noel?



This project developed around the question “To build or not to build” and it followed the consolidation of the unique character of Villa Louis Noël, located on Emile Zola 6th street in Bucharest. Villa Noël was originally built in the late 1930s. The villa was designed by architect Ernest Doneaud and was commissioned by Louis Noël, a French aviator who settled in Romania after World War I. The villa features a modernist architectural style with decorative elements that reflect the profession and passion of its owner. The facades include decorative friezes with classical scenes, columns, and a prominent cornice, evoking an antique harmony. Today, Villa Noël houses the Centre Régional Francophone d'Études Avancées en Sciences Sociales (CEREFREA), a regional center for advanced studies in social sciences. The villa has been renovated to include conference and seminar rooms, a library, individual offices, and accommodations for residents. Villa Noël serves as a hub for the Francophone academic community in Bucharest, hosting various events, seminars, and research activities. It plays a crucial role in promoting cultural and academic exchange in the region. The art deco style is highlighted in the facades, featuring geometric shapes and patterns, such as the circles placed on top of the windows, strong and bold lines highlighting the cornice level and the presence of decorative motifs, such as the friezes. The columns evoke a sense of classical architecture, reminiscent of ancient harmony. Furthermore, the art deco style is enhanced by the craftsmanship of the blinds, decorations at the ceiling level of the interior and the original stained glass preserved after the 2014's renovation. Some cracks are still visible following the restoration, which emphasize the age and character of the construction.







## Identified problems of the villa:

### A. Based on site visit

- **unused attic that can be restored to host activities;**
- **the reading room's size is limited and doesn't allow larger interactive events;**
- **current access to the attic is only a small ladder in a cramped room;**
- **the "staff" area in the back of the villa has a narrow corridor that barely allows 2 flows of people to circulate;**
- small cracks in the walls, perhaps posing structural issues;
- malfunctioning heating system;
- bad odor in the basement due to heaters;
- the building is mostly vacant, except for when events are hosted;
- the housing units take up a lot of space that could be used to expand the activity spaces;
- beautifully designed stone flooring is only present in a small room that is currently only used for storage.

## B. Based on user's feedback

- the main space gets crowded easily during conferences and doesn't meet the necessary capacity for all the guests;
- the main entrance gets crowded;
- during summertime, the main conference hall gets really hot;
- people sometimes need to be housed elsewhere due to the small amount of housing units;
- it can be hard to concentrate when the conference space is filled up;
- existing entrance is not covered, snow and ice can build up on the stairs.



# Criterias for interventions

1. Permit obtaining
2. Resources required by the intervention
3. The visual impact of the intervention

## 1. Permit obtaining

One of the criterias could be influenced by the permit issued by the city hall. This permit often comes with specific restrictions and guidelines on what modifications or restorations can be carried out on the plot. These conditions can dictate aspects such as the building's height, facade design, or structural changes to ensure the restoration aligns with the city's planning and preservation standards. Adhering to these restrictions is essential to obtain the necessary approvals and could impose constraints on the concept.

## 2. Resources required by the intervention

Another approach could be in relation to the extent of resources required by the intervention. This includes both the limits generated by the financial assets and the manpower available. Such conditions could have an impact on the quality of the final work, either referring to the materials themselves, the timeframe or the skills necessary for its completion.

## 3. The visual impact of the intervention

This criteria refers to the aesthetic harmony between the new and existing elements, ensuring that the restoration or modification seamlessly integrates with the surrounding environment. It involves assessing how the intervention alters the visual character of the site, including the facade, landscaping, and spatial organization.

## 1. Minimal sized interventions

Ideal if space constraints are not critical and the focus is on preserving historical value. This approach focuses on restoring the original architectural elements while adapting the interior spaces to meet new functional needs.

## 2. Medium sized interventions

The best balance between preservation and adding needed functional space. This type of intervention is based on the rearrangement of the entire space in order to provide a better quality of it, and to be used at its maximal potential.

## 3. Big sized interventions

A large intervention is to be considered if substantial additional space is needed, but compromises preservation slightly. This approach seeks to create a visually distinct yet complementary extension that accommodates significant functional needs while preserving the historical and artistic integrity of the original Villa.

# Types of interventions

1. Minimal sized interventions
2. Medium sized interventions
3. Big sized interventions

# Criteria for decision

1. Heritage
2. Functional needs
3. Site constraints
4. Aesthetic and architectural interventions

## 1. Heritage

Preserving the integrity of the villa's historical and artistic value is the top priority in any intervention. Any extension or modification must respect and retain these elements, ensuring that additions do not obscure or diminish the original architectural expression.

## 2. Functional needs

Since the villa will serve as a French school, its spaces must be functional, adaptable, and comfortable for students, faculty, and guests. The design must balance academic requirements (seminar rooms, library, study areas) with communal and administrative spaces while ensuring efficient circulation throughout the building.

## 3. Site constraints

Any intervention must consider the physical constraints of the site and the structural integrity of the villa. Since historic buildings often have fragile foundations and load-bearing walls, extensive structural modifications could compromise their stability.

## 4. Aesthetic & Architectural interventions

To maintain the villa's visual harmony, any extension must respect the principles of Art Nouveau architecture, meaning that any new addition should either blend seamlessly with these aesthetics or introduce a subtle, respectful contrast. The scale and proportions of the new structure should be balanced and proportional, ensuring it does not overwhelm or overshadow the original building.



# Scoring system

Criteria	Minimal sized interventions	Medium sized interventions	Big sized interventions
1. Heritage (40%)	5	4	3
2. Functional needs (20%)	2	4	5
3. Site constraints (20%)	5	5	3
4. Aesthetic and Architectural interventions (20%)	4	5	3
Total:	42	44	34

This scoring system helps compare different intervention options by assigning a score (1 to 5) for each key criterion. Higher scores indicate a better fit for the project's goals.

## Conclusion of the scoring system:

**Best option:** Medium sized intervention **(44%)**

**2nd option:** Minimal sized intervention **(42%)**

**3rd option:** Big sized intervention **(34%)**

## Proposed interventions:

- 1. The attic's restoration**- it can host some of the existing function in a better quality;
- 2. Create separate circulations** for activities to lower the crowdedness of the entrance;
- 3. The main space's reorganization**- it can be larger in order to host all the activities with a big number of people;
- 4. Create a wind circulation in the main space** so that this space is ventilated during the

# Garden and new access

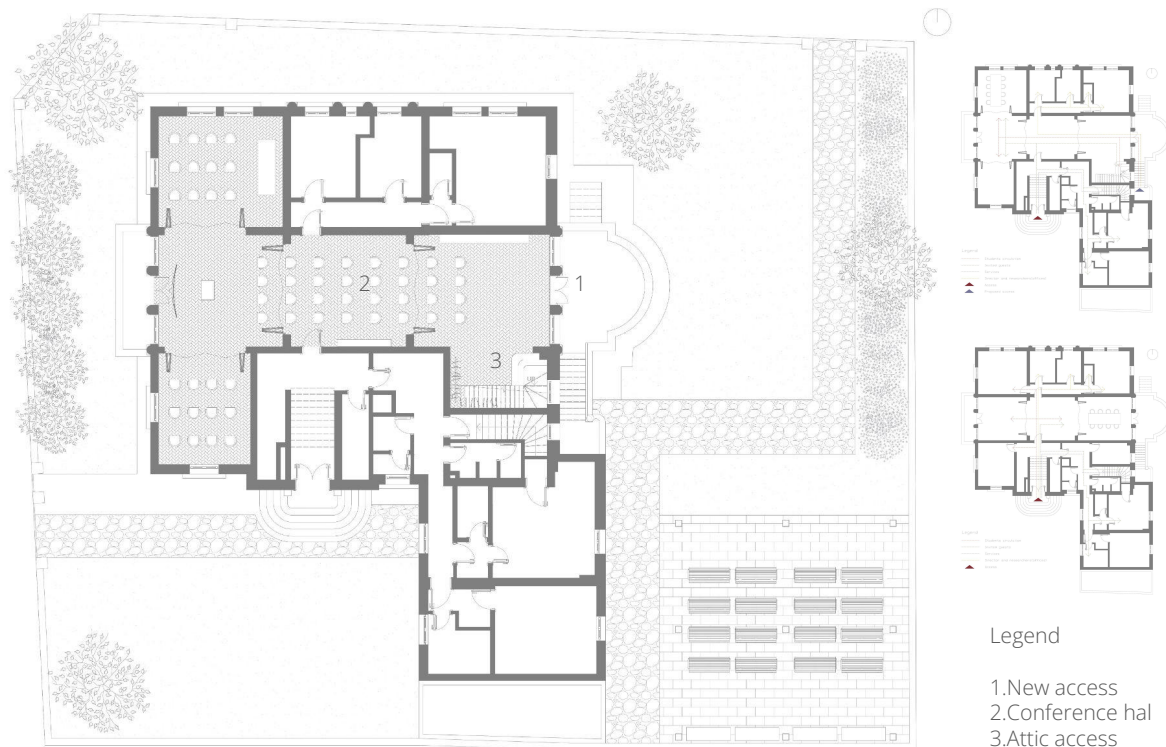


A definite start for the concept is the street: the Villa's only entrance is currently from a secondary street, the main one having no openings whatsoever. While this was beneficial in the original design to make the courtyard more private for the inhabitants, its current use urged the usage of the landscaping elements and processes to connect the existing entrance and walkway to a new circulation, open directly from the main street. A thick layer of vegetation, new pavement and a complete re-thinking for outside activities led outlined the proposal. A new gate, chosen to keep the same design language as the original fence but slightly different to mark our intervention, opens up towards the newly-paved walkway. Following the stone tiles you reach the courtyard, now sprawling with various trees, flowers and plants. The wooden structure in the back-most area of the courtyard now hosts events and conferences outdoors, the wooden deck and inter-changeable furniture adding a convenient and ergonomic character to the place.

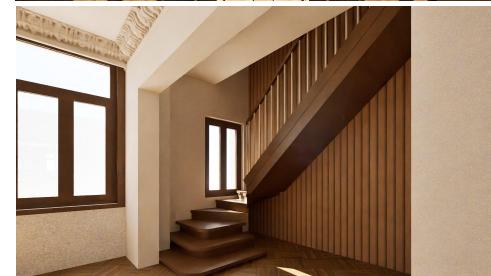




# Ground floor renovation

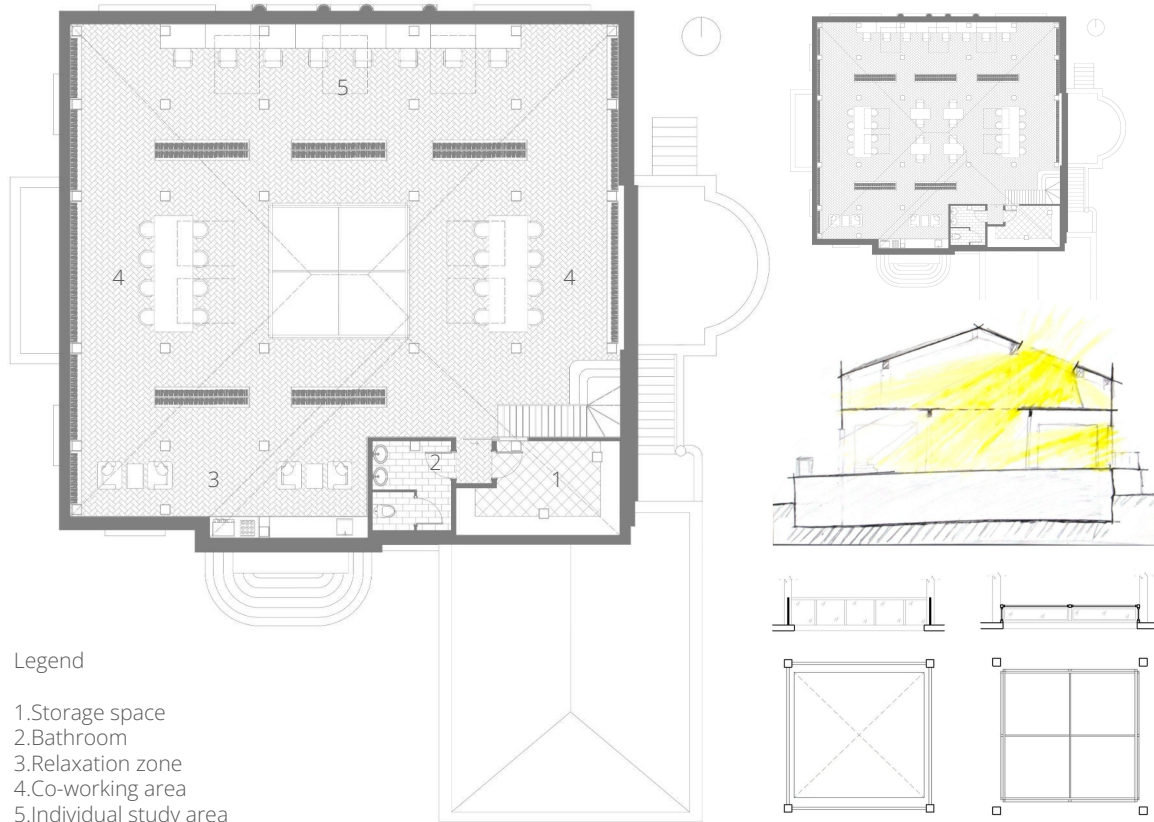


The secondary phase of this intervention has as a main objectives the circulation and the extension of the conference area. Arguably the most important and daunting space inside the villa, the conference room serves as the main activity space where all of the events take place. While being beautifully lit and furnished, it is evident that the original intention of the space simply does not fit the required capacity for all of the invited guests. By breaking down two of the walls to create a T-shape an access to 2 essential rooms which currently are not used to their full potential is gained. Therefore, a new and improved meeting area is created, as well as an extension of the most used function: the conference space. However, this intervention is not exclusively beneficial for a functional point of view. The breaking of the walls allows for a lighter circulation and flow of people, as well as responding to a user problem that was articulated early in the visit: the temperature and airflow during the summer.

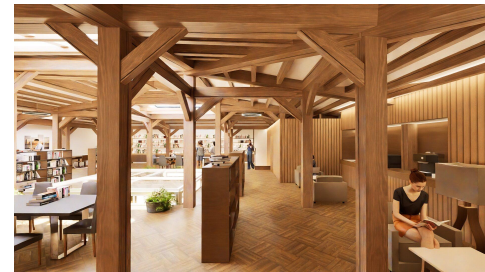




# Attic restoration



The attic intervention marks the end destination of the renovation proposal. The desire to resurrect this space is based on numerous reasons. First and foremost, the cramped reading spaces and rather small conference room were not originally designed to fit as many people inside as they do now, hence an extension was necessary. The original site visit led to the discovery of an unused attic, left in the dark and forgotten by time. Ever since first stumbling upon the attic it was clear that this could be the missing piece that the villa needed, making a perfect addition to the conference room downstairs. More than that, it could also serve as a workshop and co-working space, enriching students' experience. For this purpose, a key element was keeping the original wooden structure of the roof but strengthening it with additional columns, beams and rafters for the extra windows and skylights that we would add in order to light up the space. The staircase to the attic is found next to the entrance, allowing direct access from the outside. The skylight found on the slab allows sunlight to shine through directly to the ground floor, enhancing and softly connecting the two spaces.







Score System

Criteria	Score	Weight	Total Score
1. Location	1	1	1
2. Design	2	2	4
3. Construction	3	3	9
4. Materials and construction	4	4	16
5. Cost	5	5	25
6. Environmental impact	6	6	36
7. Social impact	7	7	49
8. Cultural impact	8	8	64
9. Historical value	9	9	81
10. Aesthetic value	10	10	100

Criteria for decision

1. Location
2. Design
3. Construction
4. Materials and construction

### From the street, to the attic

Louis Noel Villa  
Renovation of a historic building in Bucharest  
Project by [Name] and [Name]

