Villa VPRO
MVDRV is a young firm based in the Netherlands that specializes in a pragmatic approach to design. They bring a massive amount of both quantitative and qualitative research to bear on all of their projects, and from this research they distill a number of parameters that they call a “datascape” which forms the basis for the design.

For Villa VPRO, the project entailed bringing together the 12 separate “villas” that made up the various arms of the VPRO network, including TV, radio, and other programming, all into one central office building. This meant that the project would have to be an efficient, centralized space, but would also have to maintain some of the diversity and separation accorded by the old villa offices.

Climactic considerations in Hilversum were not particularly demanding: MVRDV at first proposed installing hot air blowers at the edges of the building instead of windows to maintain a comfortable temperature in the mild climate, but zoning did not allow it. This resulted in 27 kinds of glass reflecting interior program.

In constructing the datascape, programmatic needs for a large, diverse office space needed to mesh with Dutch zoning code limiting height to five stories and mandating access to natural light and outdoor space for workers. The small site resulted in “the deepest office building in the Netherlands,” a dense five story cube punctured by voids that brought in both natural light and a variety of outdoor spaces. This void-making strategy was named “precision-bombing,” probably reflecting the punctures they created in the “landscape” (see below) of the building.

An MVRDV diagram of the building as a geological formation, terminating at a second ground level that meets the sky

continued
While MVRDV likes to appear agnostic in terms of architectural ideology, it is probably fair to say that Villa VPRO incorporates a number of loosely related architectural ideas that are visible throughout. The next section will explore some of these in more depth through sketching, but I will underline the ideas that I followed throughout my exploration of the building:

“precision bombing”
utility cores
floor as facade
a Spartan language of solid concrete slabs and minimally invasive glass

**sketch model**

This model helped to understand the structural and organizational logic of the building, especially where service and plumbing cores ran through the building (visible as orange and yellow sections), as well as the “precision bombing” used to create verandas, balconies and other outdoor spaces (the cut out sections that pierce through the solid of the building.)
Condition sketches

These sketches were used to study moments in Villa VPRO that related to the architectural ideas and decision making process that went into the building.

Meeting the Ground

Villa VPRO sets up a language of the floor simply continuing the plane of the ground for most of the building, but makes an exception for the recording studios (the section with a concrete bearing wall) where the building sinks into the topography. This continues the idea of the building as extruded landscape.
Making the Corner

Plan, floor 3
interior corner condition

Plan, floor
exterior corner balcony

Perspective showing various ways of making the corner - completely enclosed, partially pulled back, and completely open

Perspective of the corner balcony. Combined with the “precision bombing,” these spaces ensure all occupants have easy access to the outside. Also notice that the floors create the continuous pattern of the facade, rather than the spaces between them.
Making the Wall and the Opening

Wall section showing how mullions are recessed and insulation is manipulated to keep a spartan appearance of solid slabs spanned by glass.

Perspective looking out. MVRDV puts in considerable effort into recessing mullions to keep the appearance of a continuous surface running to the edge of the building. The wall is the opening is the space between floors.

The floor is the facade
The windows are the wall.
Meeting the Sky

Detail of the roof composition.
Again, effort is put in to make this complex system look like a simple concrete slab - even the flashing tries to continue the line of the precast facing to create a continuous surface meeting the sky.

floor slabs simply continue until the building stops. No special moves to meet the sky except flashing, which is minimized.

The railing on the roof is pulled back to preserve the appearance of floor slab meeting sky.
Sketches for Final Model

Sketches done with the help of a consultant to understand how structure comes through the thickened section of the joint visible in the center of the photo below right.

Studying the triangular joints and how where the interior and exterior of the precast concrete panels work.
deconstructing the section from an exterior photo - the logic of keeping the confusion of the meeting of orthogonal and diagonal hidden from view
Final model:

Meeting the Sky
After sketching how Villa VPRO meets the sky from various angles and drawing types, it seemed that the hardest to understand, but most interesting moment occurred at the meeting of the regular building logic (column meets floorplate) with a portion of “precision bombing” where the regular roof is gone, replaced by a plane that angles back toward the interior working with photos and incomplete section drawings of the condition, I tried to work out how structure came down through the angled portion of the roof.

The key was the thickened part of the joint connecting the flat roof to the angled slab. This kind of thickening wasn’t part of the language of the rest of the building, so there must have been a significant reason to make such a change. I decided that this must be where a bundle of rebar connected the roof structure in the flat roof, then stepped down and carried through the angled slab. This kind of joint would also allow the precast concrete panels above and below it to maintain their regular function of forming the facade and meeting the sky.