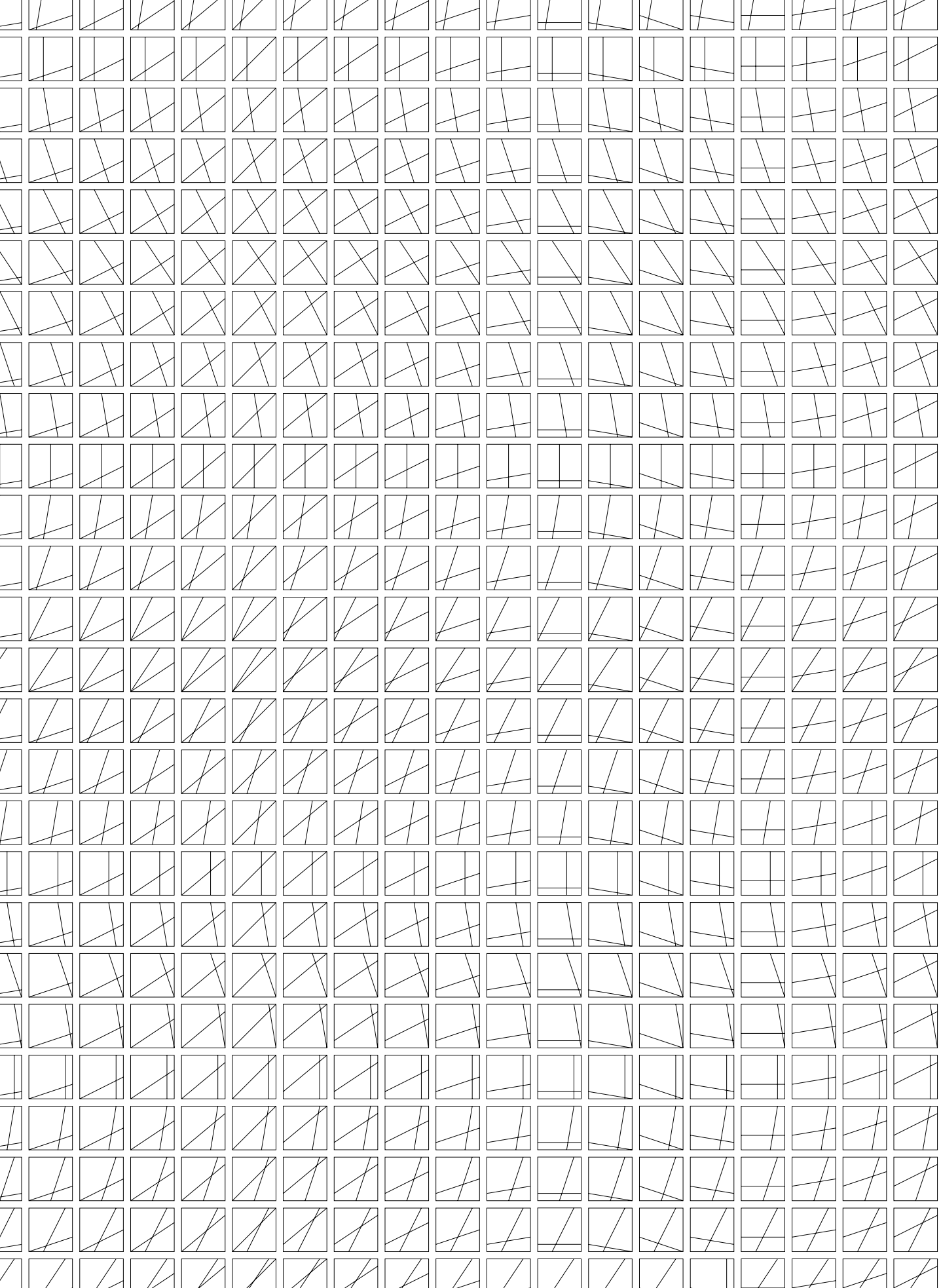




The Cube



The Cube

by Park Associati

Client
Electrolux Appliance S.p.A.

Address
Bruxelles, 2011
Milan, 2011-2012
London, 2012
Stockholm, 2012

Year
Project and realization: 2010-2011

Area
sqm 140

Professional Service
Concept
Architecural project
Site Supervision
Artistic Site Supervision

Event Concept
Absolute Blue, Bruxelles

General Contractor
Nüssli-Hüttwilen (Ch)

Pop up architecture

Text and interview: Angelica di Virgilio

A welcoming and surprising place, a kind of high-tech white spaceship, where the table appears and disappears. Star chefs welcome guests preparing and presenting their dishes right in front of their guests. The small pavilion creates a new cityscape and a new skyline, even for a brief time.



The Cube is a pioneering venture, an opportunity to think outside architecture's classic patterns and methods. Words like nomadic, ephemeral, pop-up, and parasitic architecture have become part of a project's reflection and journey. A module had to be designed that could travel – and was therefore characterised by lightness and portability – and could also house a delicate and complex activity such as food preparation, thereby accommodating an international audience.

For Park Associati, taking up this challenge meant dealing with 360-degree research, and involved all aspects of design – from planning to construction, materials to graphics, through to the study of factors such as climate and transport – always bearing in mind the requirements of the client, whose intention was to convey his brand through The Cube.

The result is a structure that is both assertive and light at the same time.

In all its European stops, the itinerant restaurant has sparked much discussion. But when, after a few months, the pavilion disappeared from the view to move to the next location, something was absent and was missed. The challenge was won.

Travelling around Europe



In April 2011, on top of the Arc de Triomphe du Parc du Cinquantenaire in **Brussels**, a mysterious-looking small white building appears. The presence of The Cube, the restaurant perched just below the chariot is greeted with amazement but also with debate, between those who scream at the sacrilege of the contemporary pavilion's unbalancing of the historical structure with its perfect symmetry, and those who appreciate its conceptual originality. But even before passers-by and tourists can get used to the restaurant that invites you to observe the city from a completely different perspective, The Cube disappears.



It's July, and for months nothing more is known about the small architectural structure that had such a big impact.

Then, just before Christmas, it reappears next to **Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Piazza Duomo in Milan**, and the scenario is repeated. Pre-holiday shopping is interrupted by wonder and scepticism, mixed with the desire to be part of the exclusive event that is taking place amidst those white walls.

Nobody knows what it is, or even where it came from, but it prompts a desire to climb to the top of the nineteenth-century monument to unveil its secrets.



Day after day, the myth of the itinerant restaurant grows, and when it resumes its journey to appear **in the summer of 2012 simultaneously on the roof of Stockholm's Royal Opera House and on the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in London**, its fame is fully established. Even today, there are those who gaze at the skies hoping for a sighting.

Building a Concept



Starting with several initial doubts and very few certainties, Park Associati has been able to give physical substance to the concept created by the communication agency Absolute Blue for Electrolux. Right from the beginning, the practice had to deal with a difficult plan that involved translating the idea of a cosy nest without creating a 'den', restoring a feeling of exclusivity and luxury while working with the prefabrication of a temporary structure, giving an itinerant character to the restaurant function without knowing beforehand the stops of its journey, and – above all – drawing attention without 'screaming'.

The many 'without's' are precisely what gives life to the architectural concept – subsequently reworked for Priceless Milan – that combines the construction and timing requirements of a temporary structure with the exclusive, elite and privileged quality sought by its client.

Throughout its long journey, in true vagabond style, The Cube has always remained faithful to its nature. Nothing about its being, its architectural appearance, or its configuration or technology has changed to adapt to the different buildings that have hosted it. This identity has enabled the pop-up structure to live next to the most different architecture styles and environments.



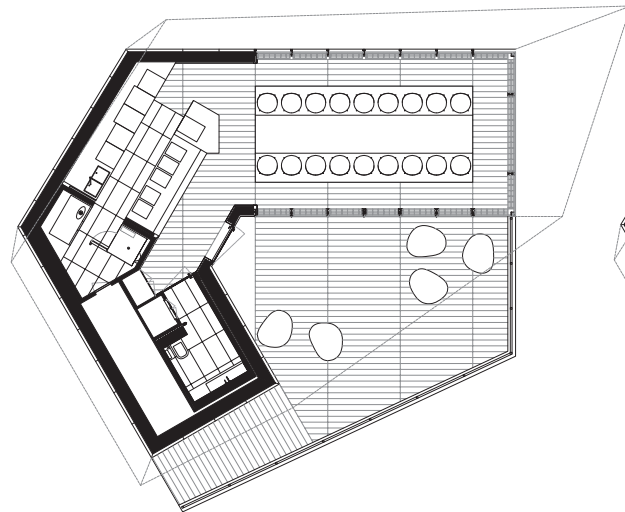


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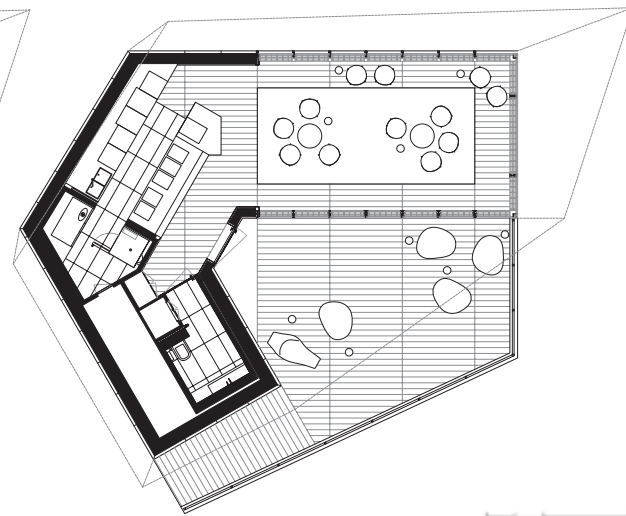
The secrets of The Cube

The Cube is a 140 sqm, semi-prefabricated architectural micro-structure consisting of elements that can be assembled in ten days and dismantled in five, according to a partially industrial construction procedure.

Dinner configuration



Event configuration



Despite its name, the structure has nothing to do with a cube box, its shape recalling instead that of a nest. Its interiors are arranged around a 50 sqm panoramic terrace, creating in plan view an irregular pentagon and in three-dimensional view a partially closed space that seems to wrap around itself in a protective embrace. The rectangular dining room is glazed on three sides, while the technical rooms – the toilet and the kitchen – are protected by a white aluminium skin.

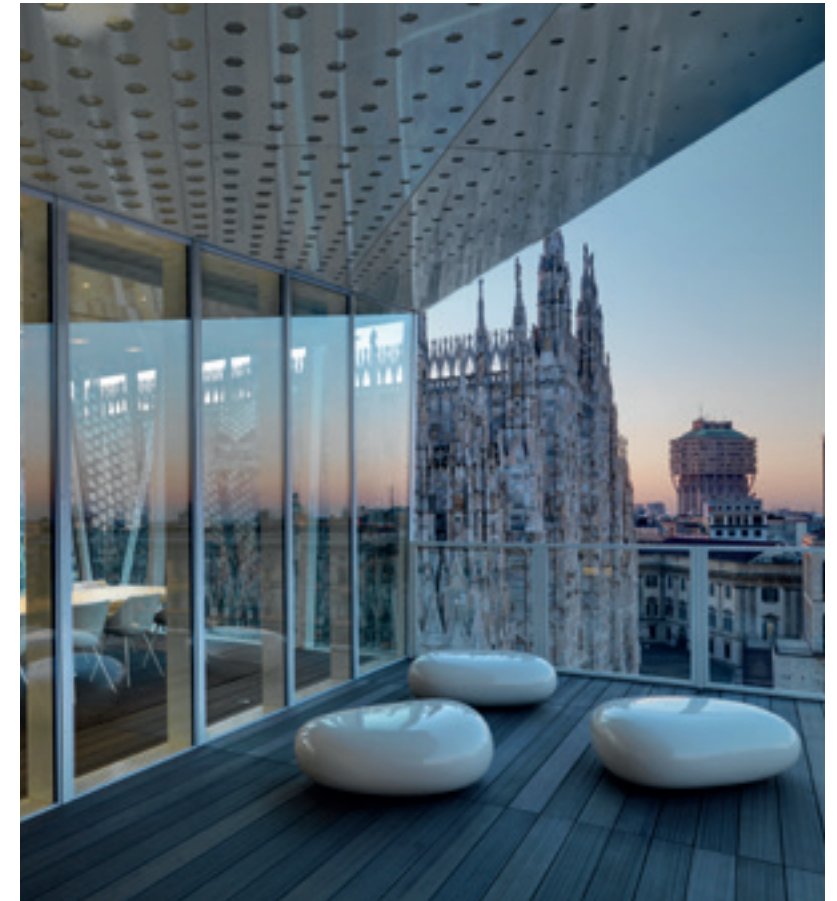
Partly in view, the latter is the absolute protagonist of an architectural structure that appears discreet or flamboyant depending on the time of the day. Created by Milan's FM graphic studio, the texture of the aluminium surface features hexagonal holes and takes inspiration from the restaurant's logo.

In full daylight the difference between one side and the other is minimal, but in the evening the texture's richness reveals itself and helps to transform the small building into an evanescent lantern that demands attention. The artificial light explodes through the main hall's windows, and filters in different ways through the skin's holes, creating lighting gradients that emphasizes The Cube's mysterious charm and disjointed shape.

A table show



Initially hidden from the eyes of customers, the table draws all the attention when, with a spectacular visual effect, it descends from the ceiling thanks to a system of retractable cables, thus transforming an empty space into a room for 18 diners in a matter of seconds.



The greater and smaller sizes of the laser-cut holes and their variable frequency creates a more compact and tighter skin by the outer sides and service areas, and a lighter, more permeable one near the dining area.

Whereas the temporary nature of this pop-up structure is revealed to experts through construction techniques, assembly, materials and technical details, this is cleverly hidden to most thanks to the interior design, which has paid attention to every detail and is every bit as good as classic restaurants.

With the exception of the wooden floor and the carpet (hand-woven by Kasthall), everything is focused on white, as is the case with the outer skin. Walls and surfaces, which are mostly made of reflective material, are all white, as are the Lagò chairs (by Philippe Stark, 2004) distributed by Driade, the stone-shaped outdoor benches from the Koishi series (Naoto Fukasawa, 2006), the Ibla lamp (by Park Associati for Zumtobel Light, 2010) the extractor hood (by Max Fire) and the kitchen – which has been finished in lacquered wood with appliances supplied by Electrolux.

Above all, white is the colour of the single Corian table that is the true protagonist of the cooking show staged by The Cube.

Tommaso Arrigoni

Innocenti Evasioni Chef



Courtesy Tommaso Arrigoni

ADV: In 2011, after its first appearance in Brussels, The Cube showed up in Milan, appearing amidst the roofs of Piazza Duomo. While for most people observing it from below, the small building remained a mystery, those who have the privilege of climbing up there discovered a small restaurant where the best young chefs offered a unique culinary event. You were one of them. How did you find the experience?

TA: It was an exceptional occasion; cooking in front of the Duomo with a priceless view was a privilege I will never forget. Every morning when I went up to start working I realised how lucky I was.

I was undoubtedly in the most beautiful and most exclusive place in Milan and that came with great responsibility: me and the boys were part of the team that would give a lucky few the opportunity to live a unique experience. The whole experience was lived with the kind of 'good fright' that can be an accelerator of enthusiasm, passion and desire to do well, indeed better than what you are able to do in everyday life.

ADV: The whole concept of The Cube revolves around the idea of experience; that is, giving the customer an extraordinary and exclusive moment of escape to remember, among unusual urban landscapes and high-quality cuisine. And your restaurant, your entire culinary creativity, seems to play on the same themes. In your opinion, is this affinity with the search for an 'escape' from the daily routine what made the Cube experience so special for you?

TA: Our restaurant was conceived with the idea of offering an experience that goes beyond the ordinary. Our location offers a unique view over an enchanting garden. Bringing our kitchen to The Cube was an 'upgrade' in every sense, and it allowed us to live and make people live an experience that was as unusual as it was extraordinary.

ADV: What is the most vivid memory of those days, and what was the crucial moment of a single evening?

TA: Definitely the table's appearance. When, after the aperitif, the table descended from the ceiling, I felt the same emotions a theatre actor would feel when the curtains open. I closed my eyes for a moment, concentrated, then our show started. Every meal was a 'première', for 15 days, with the audience one metre away from us. And it was also great to watch the tourists strolling among the spires on the cathedral's roof, right in front of us, and to notice that they were as intrigued and fascinated by The Cube as they were by the surrounding scenery.

ADV: Was your menu somehow affected by the extraordinary conditions of the kitchen?

TA: Not at all, the dishes were intended to be made with the available spaces and equipment, nothing was improvised, we were part of the attraction for the whole time and there was no room for error.

The kitchen and all the equipment withstood the stress with us, and the results were outstanding.

ADV: Would you repeat The Cube experience? And if so, what would you change about the way you faced this challenge and what would you like to be different in the kitchen? What design advice would you give to Filippo Pagliani and Michele Rossi?

TA: The advice I can give them is to separate the kitchen spaces from the service spaces as much as possible.



Photos:
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Carl Kohen

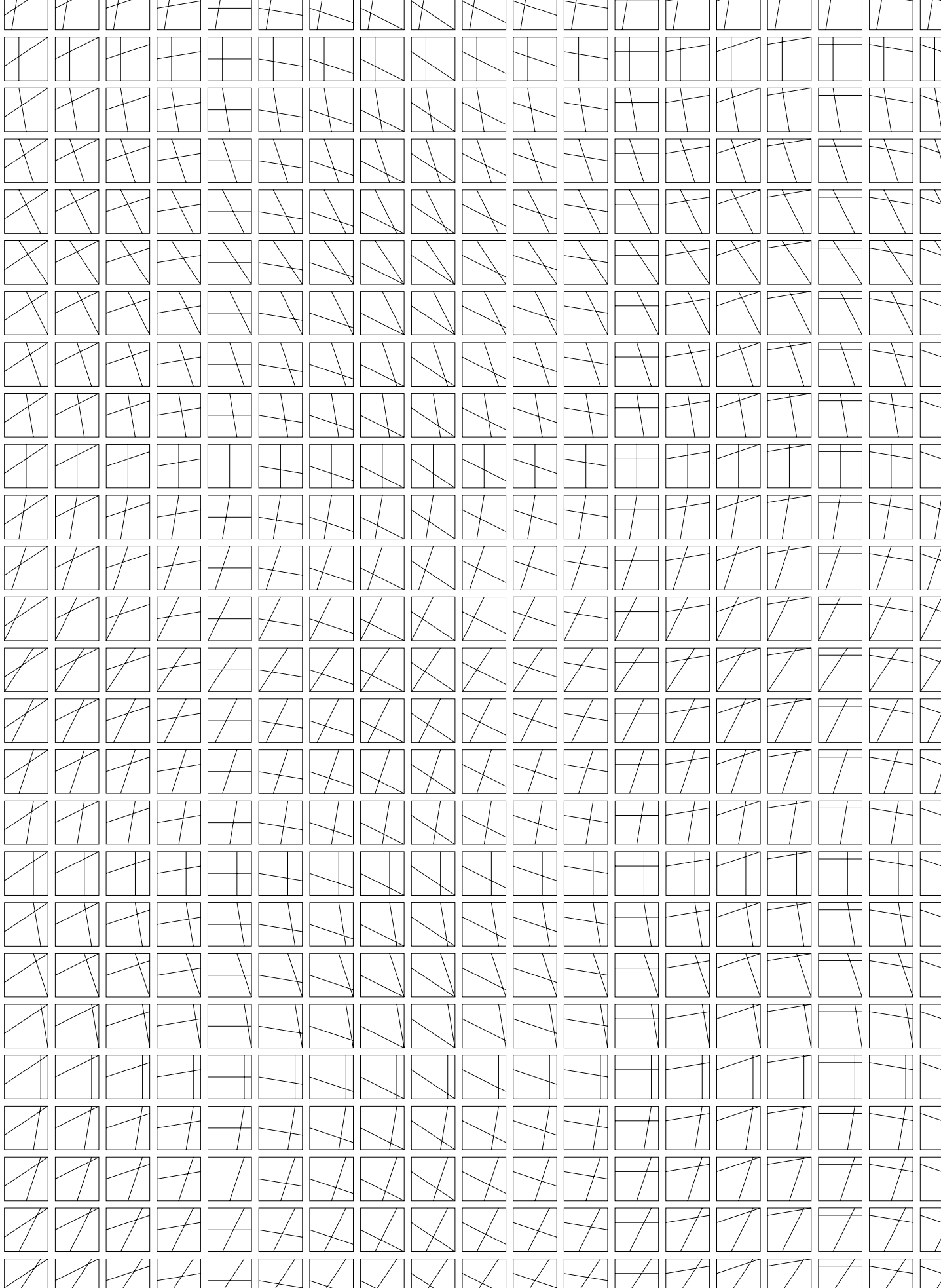
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