however, there may be a limited number of basic strategies and an experienced designer such as Michael Wilford may be pretty confident that all the major ones have been found. Identifying all these major alternatives may well be extremely valuable both for discussions with the client and for establishing some firm foundations for the rest of the design process. The tutor in a design school is usually only too well aware of this. When setting a class of students the same problem, it often seems that there are only half a dozen or so valid and sensible basic solutions with many variants and combinations.

Parallel lines of thought

The development of alternative ideas by experienced designers may often be rather more sophisticated than the simple generation of a range of options. When we examine the drawings done during the design process it is often possible to detect, what we might call 'parallel lines of thought' (Lawson 1993a). These parallel investigations represent examinations into different aspects of the design. Thus Eva Jiricna, who likes to work from materials, also has to plan her interiors in organisational terms (Fig. 12.4). The design process cannot simply proceed either from detail to spatial concept or the other way round; both are developed in parallel:

> It is a spatial concept but it goes really parallel to the selection of materials that do exist and the details and they are all joined together and it changes.
>
> (Lawson 1994b)

Robert Venturi echoes this with his characteristically ironic aphorism (quoted more fully in Chapter 3) that 'sometimes the detail wags the dog'. What Jiricna and Venturi are both emphasising here is that, for them at least, design proceeds by investigating both detail and larger-scale issues in parallel. The central issue here is the designer's ability and willingness to allow two or more of these parallel investigations to take place without necessarily trying to resolve them too early.

However, it is not simply a matter of detail or general. Designers can be seen to develop and sustain many incomplete and nebulous ideas about various aspects of their solutions. Sketches done by Robert Venturi for the famous Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square in London show this quite clearly (Fig. 12.5). There are plans which deal with the problems of circulation, of getting large numbers of people into the new building and connecting it satisfactorily with the axial arrangement of the original Wilkins building.

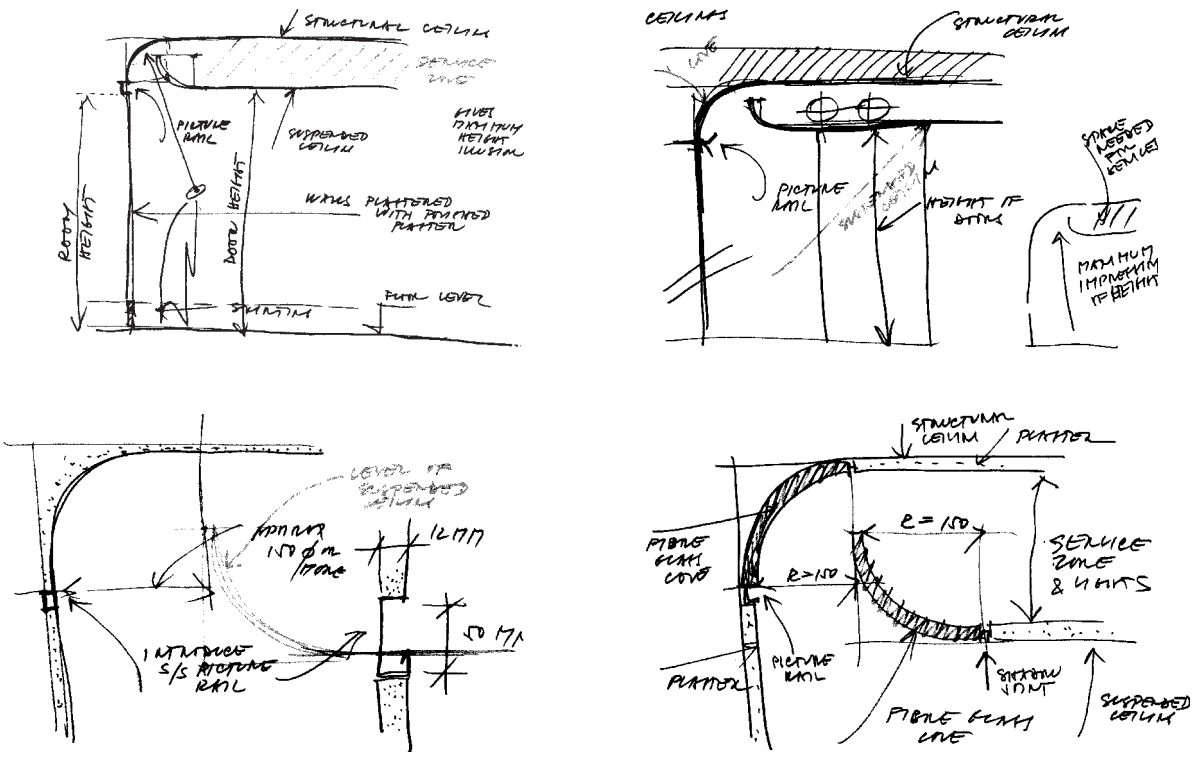

Figure 12.4
Early sketches from Eva Jiricna's design process showing a line of thought about the junction between wall and ceiling

There are also sketches of the elevations, particularly those seen from Trafalgar Square where the new and old buildings come together (Fig. 12.6). The development of this second line of thought about façade makes a particularly interesting case study for us here:

> The main idea for the National Gallery façade, for instance, came on the second day I was thinking about it in London. I was standing there in Trafalgar Square and it came like that, and it has lasted, although it took many months to refine it.
>
> (Lawson 1994)

This comment reminds us of the way an idea can appear suddenly but then need extensive refinement as we saw in Chapter 9. However, it is quite clear from Venturi's description of the whole design process that much of the refinement is carried out in parallel with that of other ideas without attempting to resolve them too soon. The sequence of images shows how Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown use a wide variety of techniques for this refinement process. In this case they put the columns from the existing building on to their computer which enabled them to reproduce