

REFLECTION PAPER
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DWELLING GRADUATION STUDIO: DUTCH HOUSING 2016-2017

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The Dutch Housing Graduation Studio of the Chair of Dwelling set the primary outlines for the research and the design. Living and working was supposed to be explored as a theme and has to be connected to the graduation site: The Apple Market in Amsterdam. In groups the site was analyzed on three distinct topics: past, present and future. In side courses we studied and analyzed multiple case studies that feature or used to have work-living combinations. The site analysis and the case studies set the foundations of the individual graduation project.

Where to start?

This was the number one question during the first weeks of the individual project. The amount of information generated by the group sparked numerous creative ideas but a solid theme was absent. When I found a graph indicating an enormous influx of people over the age of 65 within 20 years I was triggered. The idea that elderly people are in the near future one of the most dominant groups on the housing market was completely new to me and therefore very intriguing. After some more research on this target group and the demographics of Amsterdam in relation to the graduation site I came to the conclusion that the site is perfect for the demands of an ageing population. New residential buildings in the city center of Amsterdam are rare and most houses don't have elevators. To imagine that in the next 20 years there are roughly 12.000 people in the city center of Amsterdam over the age of 65 and almost no housing stock that meet the mobility demands for this group is a strange idea and thus an interesting and relevant topic.

Sober retirement?

Currently there are two options for elderly living in the city center who wish to move to a new house that meet their mobility demands or need of care. One can move outside of the city center to many newly build residential projects, or go to a nearby sober retirement home but research done by the municipality of Amsterdam shows that more and more people over the age of 65 want to stay in the neighborhood they currently live in. Many examples are present in which large residential projects in newly developed areas had trouble being fully occupied. Add to that the notion that the square meter prices in the city center are the highest in the country and on average this group has relative low housing cost and financial means a different approach is feasible.

Luxury retirement

Retiring around the corner from where you live in a building that meets the needs of comfort and mobility that are lacking in your old canal house but have the same craftsmanship feel to it. That is my guiding theme for this graduation studio and forms the base of my research and design.

To be able to come up with a design that meets the demands of the target group and that of the city of Amsterdam I decided to do research on the recent history of luxury buildings in Amsterdam and compare them with worldwide counterparts with the following research question:

How can the expression of contemporary luxurious residential buildings in Amsterdam be defined?

Different case studies showed that there is a distinct difference between luxury architecture in Amsterdam versus other cities in the western world. The most recent Amsterdam projects show a clear obvious focus on luxury in the interior rather than the exterior but after close examining there are subtle differences from regular residential buildings. The attention to detailing in the façade in cohesion with the chosen material shows the effort just like the level of attention in a luxurious blazer in fashion would do. The biggest difference with luxury residential buildings in Amsterdam versus buildings in London or New York is that the Amsterdam case studies are far more subtle and integer. The typical Dutch saying: "*Doe maar normal, dan doe je al gek genoeg*" ("*Just act normal, that's is already crazy enough.*") is perhaps so embedded in the Dutch culture that extravagant luxurious buildings like there are in major western cities across the world don't really stand a chance. Yet.

Design assignment

Looking at the history of the site, The Apple Market has always been part of a transition zone between the old city center and 19th century expansion of Amsterdam. A clear structure has never been kept and it has been changed many times through the ages. By removing the rather 'infamous' parking garage and smaller buildings attached to it, the site becomes a large void in this transition zone. Approaching this empty plot as an open green space next to the water is a grand gesture to the city of Amsterdam and its inhabitants and offers new design challenges. Viewing the site different than normal I can now add buildings to this green space instead of adding green to the buildings. In a city center with hardly any green public space or good penetrable soil for stormwater, this approach can offer quality on many levels. I set up the following design assignment:

Design luxurious dwellings for elderly with financial means that incorporate the green expression of the site in different ways. The green character is part of a quality of living on an individual dwelling level.

Design

Based on the formulated characteristics of the plot I 'landed' three volumes in the green space that all have a different approach of bringing the green into the dwelling and resulted in a different typologies. A underground parking garage meet the mobility need of the dwellers but is shaped in such a way that it follows the contours of the building footprints and occupy as little as possible of the permeable ground. The three buildings offer three possibilities for incorporating the demands of the target group as well as using green as a individual living quality. Due to the composition of the buildings the site offers a large public park that connects the Marnixstraat to the Singelgracht. All three buildings have a different beige tint of travertine cladding that stand out from its surroundings but at the same time fits the sites earthly color pallet. On the ground floors of the buildings health and care related functions are placed to make the entire ground floor level publicly accessible and fit the wish of Amsterdam to cluster sort a like functions. Amenities and services for the residents of the three buildings are located on the first floor of the setback tower and the luxury gallery block. Based on my research, the buildings all have a style and materialization that can be defined as subtle chic. The carefully designed rhythm of the façade, the natural stone cladding and overall level of finishes gives the building a luxurious feel without being extravagant and out of place.

Reflection

The relationship between research and design.

The results of my research in defining the contemporary expression of luxurious architecture in Amsterdam are used in almost every aspect of the design. But since the project is much more elaborate than just the implementation of the results I think it is not fair to say my design is a clear end product or exploration of just the research component.

The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object).

The guiding theme of the Design Studio was work-living combinations and as mentioned earlier side courses focused on this aspect by means of case study analysis. My design is definitely a work-living combination in terms of functions and program but due to my target group (people over the age of 65) clear-cut work-living typologies are not present.

The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework.

Simply put, the methodical line of approach was from large scale to small scale, starting with rough sketches and 1:1000 mass models. Depending on the type of research the outcomes can be implemented on the large scale or/and on small scale. For me this was the most difficult part of the graduation studio. Many choices a made in an early stage turned out to not be corresponding with my research outcome and therefor many preliminary designs were scrapped. The last phase of the methodical line is the interaction between the different domains in the field of architecture. Constructions, space, sustainability and concept need to be in balance with each other and therefor I had the switch countless times between the domains.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context.

My project can be viewed in a wider social context in two ways. On the building level it shows that luxury architecture in Amsterdam is much more subtle and modest in its expression than foreign counterparts but is meeting the worldwide trend of offering exclusive luxury amenities to its residents. Private outdoor space is, opposed the other foreign examples, a much more defining part of luxury than total floor space and thus an integral part of luxury dwellings in Amsterdam. On the larger scale I tried the flip the common approach to an empty plot. Instead of looking at a plot full of buildings and later adding some public green spaces, I looked at it the other way: a green empty plot and 'land' three buildings. With this approach my graduation project can be viewed as an example of what will happen when an empty urban project site is suddenly seen as a an empty public green site.