

PALAZZO RUBENS

The Intimate City



AR3AI045 - Interiors, Buildings and Cities MSc 3&4

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1. Open
2. In 2017 the vlaamsbouwmeester held a competition concerning the future of the iconic Rubenshuis. The city of Antwerp wants to develop an innovative vision on the reception, the experience course and the operation of the museum.
3. The competition brief asks the project to be “open, transparent, easily accessible, inviting, seductive, authentic, ... and to offers services that are personally experienced in contemporary, innovative and interactive ways.”
4. The Rubenshuis and the Rubenianum are sites that both have great heritage value and international appeal. However, the current facilities are no longer functional for contemporary demands.
5. The sites are fractured and feel the need to reassess their urban condition.
6. The competition asks for nearly 4,000m² of program distributed between the Rubenshuis Museum and Rubenianum Research center.
7. This amount of program is at first glance too large for the already crowded site. And led to a variety of different configurations presented by the entries to the competition. Each very different approaches to the same brief.
8. A benefit to my own response has been the overall year theme of the Intimate city, challenging what it means to dwell and move through urban spaces or “City Rooms”.
9. How can architecture facilitate the chance encounter? Or its own appropriation? How can it attract and invite, cause curiosity and engage a passerby? These have all been questions running through the design process this year. The Intimate spaces in cities, such as Paris, all have a unifying element Public Permeability.
10. This is what is currently missing from the Rubens site and has been the driving force for my own design; opening the gardens and courtyards to the public, allowing people to move through the space guided by different architectural elements.
11. Rubens, was a Flemish painter and the champion of Baroque painting’s dynamism, vitality, and sensuous exuberance. He spent many years in Italy under the influence of Carracci and Caravaggio, heralders of the new Baroque movement.
12. In 1610, after moving back to Antwerp, Rubens bought a large townhouse to which he annexed a

palatial studio, Classical portico, and garden pavilion— in essence an Italian villa transplanted to Antwerp. Rubens' concept landed in a typical urban expansion on the dense medieval city: a district at the time characterized by large gardens, courtyards, and meadows.

13. It all started as a small 16th century Flemish brickcottage on the Wapper
14. Over various owners it was extended. Here along the street ...
15. And here a larger addition to the rear at the garden.
16. This small cottage was added for the gardener of the estate. This is the state of the house and grounds as Rubens bought them in 1610.
17. He was quick to make additions to the building to suit his own tastes and needs. Firstly the semi-circular sculpture gallery extended the Kunst Kamer to house Rubens' own private collection of art.
18. Secondly, the Italian Palazzo provided a grand space for the atelier where Rubens and as many as twenty assistants worked daily.
19. To finish off his Architectural vision for the site Rubens built the Portico and garden Pavilion to close off the courtyard and entrance experience. (as I have talked about previously.)
20. Towards the end of his life Rubens' collection of books supplied by his friend Balthazar Moretus grew to such an extent that he purchased cottages at the end of his garden on the Hopland to house his library.
21. This is the reason for the existing form of the garden and its wall, added during the restoration process of the Rubenshuis in the 1940's
22. And so this completes the development of the Rubenshuis as it stands today. However the grounds of the former Kolveniers guild also constitute a large part of the available site today.
23. They started as the long Schuttershof firing range.
24. In the 1630's (around the same time Rubens was completing his own additions) The guild moved into a new building that faced down the length of the shooting range rather than the street.
25. As the city grew and increased in density the land Schuttershof was gradually portioned off. During its own restoration in the 1970's, part of the land was reclaimed for the Kolveniershof.

26. During the 1970's the Rubenianum was built to house the research institute for 16th and 17th century Flemish art .
27. Here we can see the total ensemble of the site as it stands today.
28. I approached the project with three preliminary aims; first for the entrance to the garden to be freely accessible by the public,
29. second the three courtyards unified by the garden,
30. and last the connection and opening of the dividing wall between the Rubenshuis and Kolveniershof, are still important considerations of my project.
31. As a result of my studies post P2 I arrived at a sequence of interventions, or "acts".
32. an arcade that surrounds the garden so as to frame the space, seeks to recreate a sense of privacy and intimacy within the enclosed garden. Secondly the spaces of the pavilion on the Wapper will be transplanted into a pavilion that sits behind the arcade in the garden. It will rise only slightly above the roof of the arcade, in a way referencing the tiers of hedges and trees that surround typical renaissance gardens. the courtyard of the Kolveniershof and the Rubenianum is totally reimagined through the reinstated Schuttershof wall and a pavilion that will house and exhibit the Rubenianum's collection of books and artifacts. The arcade of the garden weaves through this space and onto the Kolveniersstraat, thereby completing the pedestrian link through to the Wapper. Finally a larger volume would hold much of the program and complete the façade of the Hopland.
33. These principles have been refined over the past five months, pushed and pulled to suit the site and its proportion, the arcades have been reduced to singular linear gestures framing the courtyard and garden. And allowing the existing vegetation to remain along the border of the garden.
34. The project acts strongly within the urban tissue, opening up hidden spaces to the city public and revealing Antwerp's heritage.
35. The pavilion along the Wapper that currently obscures one's view of the Rubenshuis
36. Will be removed, in an effort to clear the Wapper and create a pedestrian avenue from the shopping district of the Meir to the theatre district.
37. The Hopland elevation would be filled in.

38. The garden wall will continue to stand
39. The new mass is set back from the façade creating a new courtyard
40. openings in the wall
41. allow a visual connection through the site.
42. The Rubenianum Archive and reading room is set along the quieter Kolveniersstraat.
43. The existing 70's building will be removed
44. And replaced with a smaller volume and reinstated Schuttershof wall.
45. The site is incredibly sensitive and in order to design successfully for it has required an in depth study of the existing Rubens house and grounds.
46. From the floorplans we can see the development of the different areas; with the domestic smaller rooms of the Flemish cottage on the left and the public spaces of the atelier in the Italian wing on the right.
47. The two wings are grounded and joined together by the courtyard, which was used to move between the different spaces.
48. The distinction between Ruben's domestic family life and his public life is more clearly felt in ones experience of the of the floor tiles,
49. where smaller simpler patters of red and black ceramic tile characterize the domestic space
50. and more elaborate patterns of larger black and white marble tiles decorate the public interiors.
51. This experience is repeated on the first floor. We see again that the rooms flow into and through each other, with transition spaces of the stairwells and the linen closet acting as extended thresholds between the different rooms.
52. Again the tiling underfoot denotes ones sense of the domestic and public faces of Rubens' life.
53. The domestic Bedrooms
54. And Public loggia and Atelier
55. The second floor is more removed for the rest of the house by virtue of its vertical accessibility, a

private atelier and a larger workspace are today offices for the employees of the museum.

56. To help visualize this here is an example of the dining room, which acts as an in between space with the scale of the domestic and the lavish decoration of the public. The interior conveys a strong sense of wealth and extravagance.
57. On the other hand the bedrooms, with their plain white walls, the smaller tiles and rich wooden furnishings are much calmer and have a tranquil sense of intimacy.
58. The division between the Flemish cottage and the Italian palazzo is most prominent on the Wapper elevation.
59. Whereas within the garden one can read the building as an ensemble of elements and styles.
60. This section highlights the difference of scale between domestic and private.
61. The entrance is located symmetrically on the courtyard
62. In Rubens' time his home contained a series of 'city rooms'
63. The first, the Kunst Kamer, a gallery housing his own private collection of artworks. There were many Kunst Kamer's in Antwerp at the time, as they were popular amongst the wealthy classes. This painting by van Haecht is a collage of three different Kunst Kamers, the inclusion in the background of Ruben's sculpture gallery highlights the significance of this space within the city.
64. (plan)
65. Ruben's addition to the space was modelled after the pantheon in Rome.
66. It is a bright space characterized by the use of locally sourced white, yellow and red Marble.
67. Secondly the Loggia on the courtyard.
68. (plan)
69. This staircase provided a grand access to the viewing gallery for Rubens' clients. It is open to the courtyard and extravagantly decorated in the Baroque style.
70. (photos)
71. This artist interpretation of the atelier is what would have been waiting for them at the end of the stair, and is the third city room within the house.

72. It occupies the entirety of the Italian wing.
73. The façade onto the courtyard would have been painted by Rubens' (or more likely his assistants) in the tromp l'oeil fashion of Genoese palazzo's, however it was interpreted in the 20th century restoration as a relief façade. This has been one of the key features influencing my own design of facades.
74. This section shows the relation of the balcony and anti-chamber to the larger volume of the atelier, but you can see it is disconnected from the private workspace above.
75. Today it is used as the largest exhibition space of Ruben's paintings.
76. Lastly, and most significantly for my project; the courtyard. In this painting you can see how the facades were a colorful affair in the time of Rubens, this is an element that we will cycle back to later.
77. (plan)
78. Rubens designed his courtyard with a specific intent; to show off his genius, wealth and power. It, rather than the frontage, provided the vista.
79. As the unifying factor between the two wings the courtyard acts as the anti-chamber to the garden.
80. The framing of the Pavilion through the portico is a unique and powerful experience, and example of how architecture and perspective can have an intimate impact on the body.
81. The new buildings I have proposed sit in the background and to the side acting as part of the scenography and allowing for Rubens Pavilion to remain center stage.
82. This continues from the courtyard and
83. Into the garden
84. the 17th century renaissance garden symbolized love, fidelity and fertility. Also power and collection in one's ability to display a wide variety of plants. for Rubens it was a paradise for him and his family. The garden was an intimate space of recreation and will be at the heart and center of future interventions.
85. Today however it is characterized by a patchwork of overlooking extensions.

86. The arcades, ticket pavilion and offices face directly towards the garden,
87. the layering of these architectural elements and their recession into the back of the garden replaces the lost “Vue a l’infinite” of the 17th century garden.
88. As previously mentioned, a key element of my proposal is to open the site to an un-ticketed public, allowing for varied pathways through the courtyards and gardens, unifying the site and allowing for an intimate exploration of the interior oasis. The primary entrance remains along the Wapper, as Rubens designed it, however alternate access for the local visitor is also facilitated through the arcade on Kolveniersstraat and the cafe/shop on the Hopland. Each of the new thresholds has been inspired by the original access perspective.
89. The site would of course need to be closed at different times. The visitors center and museum have a standard opening time from mid-morning until early evening. Employees are able to access the offices through a separate entrance and thus this remains open longer. Whilst the site of the Kolveniershof as a place of gathering and event will be used to house functions in the evening, and when not in use for an event the restaurant on the ground floor will also remain open later into the night.
90. There is a certain complexity to the site, the degree of public access decreases as you move vertically away from the ground plane.
91. The Rubenshuis will continue to function as the main exhibition and experience route, the atelier spaces on the second floor are freed by the removal of office spaces allowing for a new extended exhibit of the house, the experience parcours asked for in the brief would be served by this space at the end on ones journey through the house, a virtual reality app will guide visitors and educate them if they wish thought the spaces of the house.
92. The ground basement and first floor of the Hopland mass house the visitors center and all its servant functions such as shop, cloak, waiting point etc.
93. whilst the higher floors house the offices for the employees of the Rubenshuis and Rubenianum. These have their own external loggias and roof terrace allowing greenery to move vertically thorough the site. And providing necessary solar shading to the southern façade.
94. The former Kolveniershof acts as a festive space where the restaurant, lecture hall and seminar rooms can be used either separately throughout the week or together for larger conferences. These are served by the large courtyard that would allow these functions to expand into the space during warmer temperatures.

95. Finally the Rubenianum is serves a variety of researchers with its new reading room and extensive archives and restoration atelier.
96. This sits behind the Rubens Pavilion and will be a visible element of the entrance experience from the Wapper. This section cuts through the entrance perspective that Rubens designed and towards the spaces of the Reading rooms behind the garden pavilion. You can see the similarity of the reading room section to that of the atelier, with its larger volume that is broken up by the mezzanine. The restauration atelier below the courtyard is served by roof lights to allow natural daylight into the space.
97. The Reading room serves as a new City Room within the site, one with a more specialized and intimate purpose. The Architecture of the new buildings derived from a study of the old and started with the facades of the Rubenianum. It was a period of trial and error, with many different paper models allowing for rapid decision making and design.
98. During this time I was also look back as Rubens's paintings in search of some inspiration, also at the techniques he used. One that particularly grabbed my attention was the different use of colors and pigments. As you see in this very intimate painting of rubes with his first wife the general tones are very earthy and rich,
99. So I did a small study of the pigments that slowed for such a rich palette, these were divided into three categories; mineral, earth and organic.
100. So this research began to take an effect on my thinking if the facades, reflecting on how Rubens had originally employed painted Trompe l'oeuil facades and how perhaps I could use color to create a festive and intimate connection to the historic facades with my own. Here you see that the rich decoration of the baroque architecture was highlighted by the use of blue painted borders.
101. So after much experimentation I arrived at a logic that was very heavily influenced by the original house, reinterpreted to reflect the contemporary nature of the buildings.
102. The rhythm of the façade is as you can see clearly derived from the existing with vertical and horizontal elements more decorative ones. Because of the calm composition and color of the façade the new relates to the old without taking attention away from it.
103. The interiors too are characterized by their similarity to those of the Rubens house, simple spaces allow for decoration with feature pieces of furniture or exhibition cases. The ceilings continue the use of color to the interior with each function receiving its own pigment.

104. The use of pattern and tiles will also transfer into the new architecture, however instead of ceramic or marble these will be made of terrazzo. Linking to a more contemporary style.
105. I have designed a steel structure that employs the use of the slimline floor system to integrate services in a concealed manner. The facades would be precast and pre glued together in larger panels that would then be hung from the primary structure, allowing for a highly controllable and efficient construction process. The elements are assembled in such a way that they can almost all be demounted and reused in the future. They also allow for creative reuse of the spaces in the case of changing program and needs of the Rubenshuis and Rubenianum. Stability comes from the concrete cores that contain the stairs and lift shafts. The slimline system allows for long spans due to the hybrid steel-concrete diaphragm. The basement needs mass to make sure the building doesn't float up and achieves this through an in-situ concrete construction and the above steel construction.
106. The climate system employed is a highly active one, again the slimline floors integrate low temperature heating in winter and high temperature cooling in summer. During hot summer months the floor heating will switch to ceiling cooling that is also integrated in the slimline floors. Air is delivered to the space from the floor and extracted at the top of each space through built in rasters in the shaft. When the warm air is extracted it returns to the technical room where an air to water heat exchange unit recovers as much energy as possible for use again in the floor heating. Grey water is collected from the roof scape for use in the toilet as well as a large reservoir for ensured watering of the garden in case of draught.
107. The archive and restauration room are separated from the main system due to the delicate nature of the objects housed within, a black box as you will. The climate control for this space is served by a single separate air handling unit that both heats and cools, dehumidifies and filters the air that circulates through the archive. This system is supported by solar panels on top of the pergola and arcades. Green roofs cool the area and have a beneficial effect on efficiency of the solar panels. I mentioned before how the south façade of the offices is served by a loggia for solar shading, for the reading room screens would be integrated into the façade build up.
108. Model
109. Model
110. Model – thank you