

Reflection

Heritage & Architecture Graduation Studio

Vacant Heritage

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V&D Leiden: ***Crafting Layers of Time***

The structure of the following text is based on the guidelines provided in the Graduation Manual. The 5 main aspects to be answered were re-arranged in a different order so that the reflection can be presented in a more logical sequence.

Aspect 2 What is the relationship between your graduation (project) topic, the studio topic (if applicable), your master track (A, U, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS).

The topic of the graduation project is the reuse and adaptation of the former V&D department store in the city of Leiden. V&D, which stands for Vroom en Dreesmann, was one of the first Dutch department store chains that built vast department store units in many of the Dutch cities throughout the 20th century. Many of these department stores were located in the hearts of the historic centres, and the case of Leiden was no exception. Vroom en Dreesmann understood and valued the importance of architecture in the commercial success of their brand and thus hired renowned architects of the time to design their new department stores, such as Jan Kuijt and Leo van der Laan. These stores were many times of huge dimensions, occupying a significant portion of, or even an entire urban block. This was also the case for the V&D department store in Leiden. Today, the former department store occupies the “lion’s share” of a building block that stands between the streets Aalmarkt, Maarsmansteeg, Breestraat and Mandenmakerssteeg. The department store as it is today originated in 1936, when a new building designed by L. van der Laan (1864-1942) and his son J. A. van der Laan (1896-1966) was completed. This building was mainly situated on the side of the urban block facing the Aalmarkt street. With the passing of time, the department store expanded within the urban block resulting in either the demolition of several existing smaller buildings. (which were replaced by new extensions), or in the unavoidable preservation of some buildings which were protected due to their monumental status. Thus, the former department store as it is today is a fusion of buildings from different eras, spanning from as early as the 15th century (Vergulde Turk building) to the late 1960’s. This architectural diversity within the department store itself is something of great interest and value.

Since 2019, the former V&D buildings stopped functioning as department stores and became (entirely or predominantly) vacant, leaving “gaps” in many of the Dutch historic centres. The Heritage & Architecture Studio aims in finding a new functional use for the buildings that became vacant with a focus on sustainability. Sustainability can be cultural, social, environmental and economic. The new programmes should aim at solving social issues within the landscape, by resolving the demand for functional space and user requirements on the market while simultaneously striving for the preservation the cultural values within the building. At the same time, it is important to reduce the energy consumption and improve the climatization of these vacant buildings which is both environmentally and economically beneficial. Heritage is a key resource to make 'cities and human settlements more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'. This motto is at the heart of the 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the UN-Habitat New Urban Agenda.

The Architecture MSc track has as a fundamental goal to focus on the 'rich architectural culture of the Netherlands'. The MSc programme of the faculty as a whole on the other hand views design practice and engineering as a way of 'exploring innovative ways to create more sustainable development'. The way the Heritage & Architecture studio relates to both the Architecture Track and the MSc Programme, are two of its main focuses, these being history and sustainability.

Aspect 3 Elaboration on research method and approach chosen by the student in relation to the graduation studio methodical line of inquiry, reflecting thereby upon the scientific relevance of the work.



Figure 1: The Use of sandstone in the V&D building in Leiden, influenced by the sandstone-cladded façade of the historic Waag.

The graduation studio followed a specific structure and suggested a methodology in which research preceded the design procedure. In the beginning of the studio the students were able to choose between two research groups, namely the 'Spatial Building Typology' group and the 'Touch & Feel' group. My work within the 'Touch & Feel' research group of Prof. Wido Quist was focused on the analysis of two former V&D buildings (in Leiden and Enschede) and in more detail investigated the influence of the urban context on the architectural details and craftsmanship in the façades of these buildings. My subsequent analysis involved archival and literature research, as well as the creation of new detailed drawings of the buildings and of some of the surrounding architectural objects, based on photographs and older material. The outcomes of the research suggested that in the case of Leiden there seemed to be a clear connection between the craftsmanship of the facade and the urban context, something that was not the case in Enschede. The research was partially based on existing

data, but also contained suggestions, ideas and points of view which were not mentioned in any source I had consulted. The connection of the V&D in Leiden with the adjacent Waag has been documented, but the connection with the Townhall of Leiden has been my own theory and can be strengthened by several indicative similarities these buildings share. The research about the V&D building in Enschede on the other hand resulted in the finding of close ties between the architecture of Jan Kuijt with the architecture of Willem Dudok, a connection hinted by some recent and contemporary publications, but not yet looked upon in the detail it might deserve.

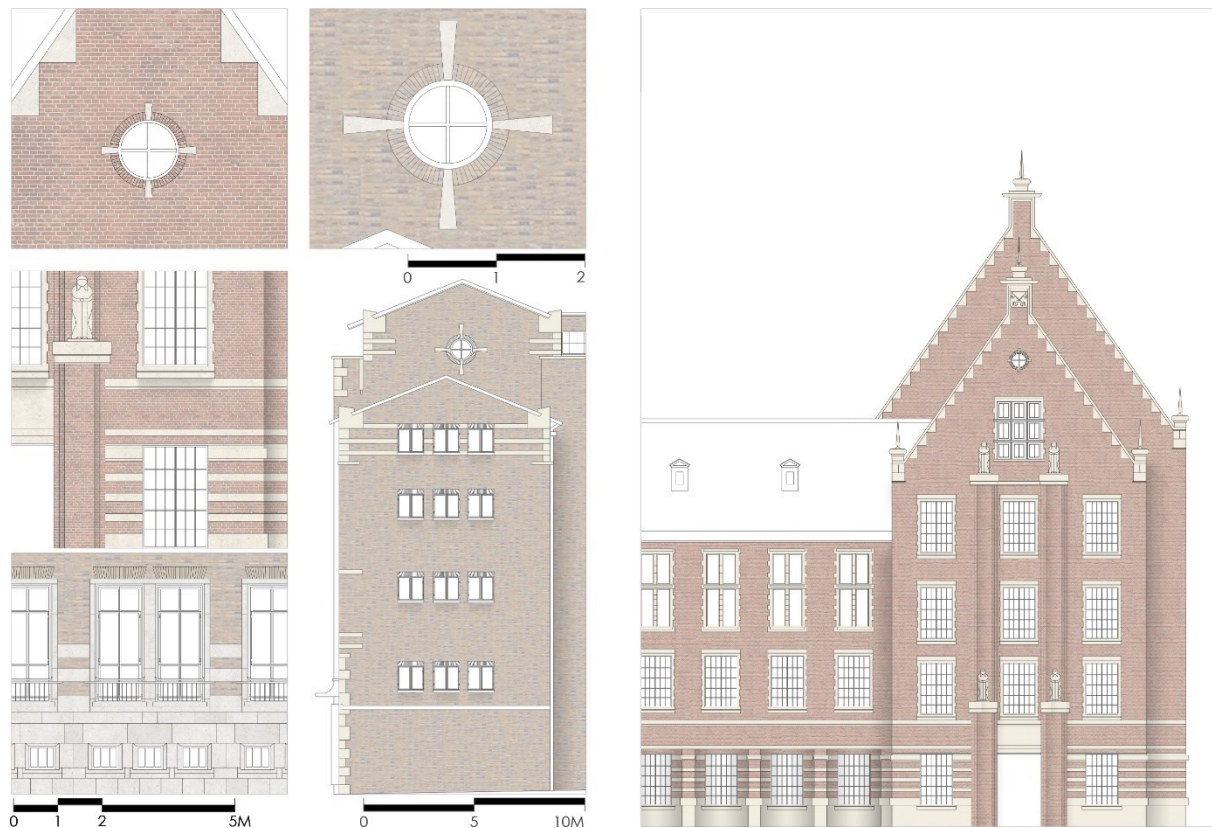


Figure 2: The similarities found in the alteration of sandstone and brick and the round windows in the V&D and the Townhall of Leiden.

The outcomes from the research could potentially lead to new interesting discoveries regarding 20th century Dutch architecture, the influence architects had on each other and the role craftsmanship played in this. In the case of the design, the research was certainly productive, since it revealed much information about the architect's original ideas and design principles which were greatly considered in the subsequent design phase. It is often the case that architects neglect the technical details of a building, but my methodology showed me that there are many stories and interesting information to be found. This is something which could be considered more in future adaptations of heritage buildings. Architects should not only concentrate on the 'big picture', but also consider the small details for potential large findings.

Aspect 1 The relationship between research and design.

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, my work within the 'Touch & Feel' group was centred around the craftsmanship found in the facades. In the case of Leiden, the craftsmanship was implemented in the form of materiality. The building skin is comprised of two materials, bricks and sandstone pieces, which are masterfully dimensioned, as well as aligned and positioned towards one another. The aim behind this form of craftsmanship was to 'blend' the building in with the immediate urban context. This was a pragmatic decision in the way that the building would aesthetically appeal to customers from especially the upper classes of the city, who were raised within the tradition of monumental and historic architecture. In this way, the design was partially a way in which Van der Laan wanted to assure the financial success of the department store.

The results from the research provided solid starting points for the design. The key words of the relation between research and design are *craftsmanship* and *reference*.

Craftsmanship.

One of the fundamental aims of the design is to test if the craftsmanship of the original architecture can be 'recycled' in a new contemporary manner, which will challenge a major present-day challenge in re-use projects, namely the *sustainability* of the intervention. In the same way that Van der Laan used craftsmanship as a means to achieve commercial success of the building, the craftsmanship in the re-use phase focuses on the underlying issue of overall sustainability of the new design. The basic idea for the materialisation of the new facades is to use a contemporary form of craftsmanship seen in brickwork, as a modern-day response to Van der Laan's design. Over the last decades, a new form of craftsmanship in brickwork can be seen in the form of prefabricated brick-panels. Each brick is punctured by a steel rod which is then attached to a steel frame. These prefabricated panels are mass produced which means that they can be made in large amounts at lower prices and don't have to be assembled on-site, which is sustainable in both an environmental and financial way. Another sustainable characteristic of these panels is that they can be easily disassembled from the structure and re-assembled in other buildings. The relationship between the research and the design could be characterized by the terms 'Gestalt Recycling' as coined by Petzet and Heilmeyer in *Reduce Reuse Recycle*.¹ Gestalt Recycling happens when 'the imagined or actual design of an existing structure can be reproduced and reused, while *historical and traditional typologies and designs can be recycled by transposing them into the present day.*' The traditional designs were observed in the research, and their recycling and transposition into the present day was what the design wanted to test. The contemporary craftsmanship of the project focuses on making the brick cladding re-usable. This also contributes to the creation of an aesthetic of temporality. For a long time, craftsmanship has always been intertwined with durability. The good quality of the construction would endure through the ages. In the project, the craftsmanship also focuses on the idea of withstanding the test of time, but not by being fixed on a certain place with a firm solid construction, but rather through its mobility. This is due to the realization that our cities are continuously changing, and the timespan of the project itself is uncertain.

Reference.

The building complex is a mixture of different buildings, something which is almost entirely perceived through the exterior facades. One aim of the re-design was to create a courtyard where this 'collage' of different parts would be readable from inside the urban block as well. The shape and materials of the courtyard's facades do also refer to older elements of the site (like Van der Laan's façade towards

¹ Heilmeyer F., Petzet M., *Reduce Reuse Recycle: Architecture as Resource*, (Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012)

the Vispoort and the back extension of the historic Vergulde Turk building), that do not exist anymore. In this way, not only can the visitor define the different buildings that make up the complex, but at the same time 'read' the history of the site. One of the main outcomes of the research was that Van der Laan used reference as a design strategy. This strategy is reinterpreted in the new interventions, where the contemporary building skin refers to the external materiality of the different buildings of the complex (creating a bridge between old and new) as well as to older designs and structures (generating conscience about the history of the site).



Figure 3: The courtyard. The cladding of the new facades is a present day reinterpretation of craftsmanship in brickwork. The structure clad in red brick is the rebuilt extension of the Vergulde Turk building.

Aspect 5 Discuss the ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered in (i) doing the research, (ii, if applicable) elaborating the design and (iii) potential applications of the results in practice.

When designing there are always challenging and even difficult decisions the architect has to make. In the specific case of the graduation project the decision to demolish a portion of the building in order to create a courtyard was a dilemma. This was due to the fact that this action would be irreversible and as a consequence a portion of the building's history would be lost. The courtyard was designed not only with the aim of allowing more sunlight to the interior of the building block or in order to create a new public green space for the city, but (as already stated) also with the aim of reviving some of the history of the site. Willemijn Wilms Floet writes that the traditional Dutch courtyard, the 'Hofje' can be used in the present time to 'reconstruct pieces of the existing city'.² The courtyard allowed for the reconstruction of a demolished part of the monumental Vergulde Turk building. The dilemma was

² Wilms Floet W., *Het Hofje: Bouwsteen van de Hollandse Stad 1400-2000*, (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2016), pg. 28

if it was worth to 'sacrifice' a part of the 1967 extension in order to recreate a demolished part of the Vergulde Turk building. It is often the case that in architecture *ethics* are directly linked to *aesthetics*. The demolished part of the Vergulde Turk had high aesthetic qualities, which were lacking in the specific parts of the 1967 extension. The criterium for which part of the history to revive and which one to sacrifice was thus handled with aesthetic as a criterium.

Aspect 4 Elaboration on the relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework, touching upon the transferability of the project results.

There are different heritage approaches that an architect can follow in a specific project. A heritage approach could be *contrast* for example, in which the architect wants his interventions to stand out and contrast to the existing architecture. Another approach can be *reference* in which the architect wants to make use of the original architecture in his own design with the aim of creating a harmonious outcome and coexistence of new and old elements. My personal approach towards heritage was clearly in the second category. Before the graduation studio it was often difficult to find a way in which the new architecture could refer to the old without falling in the 'trap' of imitation.

One design principle which can be transferred to most of the adaptive reuse projects in heritage buildings, is that in order to achieve reference without imitation, one should not recycle the exact material assembly, form or details of a building, but rather recycle the *principles and ideas behind these*. In this way, a new balanced outcome can be created while at the same time the new and old parts are clearly distinguishable. In my graduation project it was not the craftsmanship itself that was recycled and re-interpreted, but rather the idea that the craftsmanship had a functional role to play in the architecture, which in both cases was pre-occupied with handling a major issue of the time.

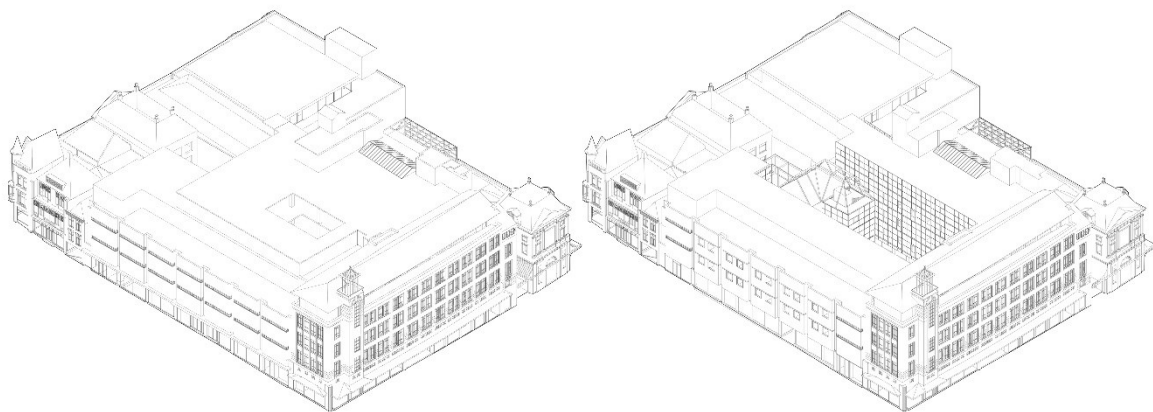


Figure 4: The V&D complex before (left) and after (right) the intervention.