

P4 REFLECTION PAPER

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Introduction

About one year ago, I was carefully considering different graduation studios. I was looking for a challenge, something new and that would make me a better designer. The Architecture of the Interior seemed a good fit. I had always been good enough at the start of a design process, making the big decisions, but I was lacking in follow through, to care for the smallest detail in the design. An Interiors studio would therefore push me out of my comfort zone and teach me to follow through with a project to the end.

The Building

The VROM building was anything but a typical Interiors building. With its immense size and extensive program, it seemed unlikely that I would even get to the design of small details. The building had some big problems that asked for strong answers. Due to the size and the repetition, the building exuded impersonality. The strong rhythm also impeded the orientation inside. Furthermore it was a pity that the atria were not very accessible. These grand gestures lost a great portion of their power this way.

The Users

Dealing with an impersonal building, I was interested in the reactions of the future users. I observed both the civil servants of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and those of the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment. I looked for items of personalization in their workspaces and had them fill out a questionnaire on personalization and flexible work spaces. I learned that even though flexible workspaces were accepted by all, there was a common desire to have some sort of zoning in the building which would make it easier to find colleagues. Specific to the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment was a wish for project rooms. Project teams would be able to appropriate these rooms on a temporary basis.

Design

My main design ambition consisted of making this enormous building easily understandable and readable for the users and visitors. The discovered desire for zoning thereby had an immediate influence on my design. I divided the office part of the building into four zones. These zones are architecturally identical but can be distinguished by the colours used in the interior. Each zone exists of four floors which are visually and physically connected through a central stairway. By this zoning the enormous VROM building effectively gets divided into smaller, understandable pieces, which also increases the personal character of the building.

Furthermore I wanted to increase the use of the atria. I decided to move them to the ground floor and make them completely public. In combination with the open, fordable ground floor of the actual building, they transform the ground floor into one big interesting public interior.

On top of the building I added two floors. They span over the complete building and form a roof over the atria. These floors house large public functions which would not fit in the slim slabs of the existing building, namely a meeting centre and a public restaurant. These not only serve the building but they serve the city. The restaurant is publically accessible and the meeting centre can be used by all kinds of institutions. This building

creates enormous amounts of pleasant (interior) public space in a part of the city which is burdened with heavy infrastructure.

Reflection

I am convinced that the basis of my design is strong thanks to the user research we were able to conduct in the course of Irene Cieraad. I believe architecture should be guided by user experience, so for me the research course was a very pleasant experience. It immediately guided my design in a certain direction, knowing that users preferred zoning over complete flexibility.

As mentioned in the introduction, I wanted to gain an eye for detail in this studio. To be honest, I am still not yet satisfied with my eye for detail. For a long time the design was mainly focused on big interventions. I believe this is mainly due to the scale of the assignment. The size of the building makes it overwhelming and inconceivable. It invites to think about large interventions but discourages thought of detailing. However I have learned the importance of detailing for a good design in this studio by looking at examples and other students, and I certainly respect and appreciate it more than before.

During the course of this design I did learn to work in a different way. During previous design studios I was used to designing in BIM, but I would present my project mostly in plans. This studio taught me to design – and present – more in views. It was my first time rendering before the final week of a project! I definitely see the benefit of this way of working. It forced me to think about materialization and therefore also about detailing and realization in an earlier stage. It helps prevent inconsistencies between plan, section, detail and 3D image. It does not come naturally for me to move so quickly to views, but from now on I will be using this method more often.

Conclusion

The assignment was not very typical for an Interiors studio. It was not the sort of building I was expecting when signing up, but I did enjoy working on it thoroughly. It enabled me to start off in my comfort zone - big interventions - and taught me along the way to think more about materialization and detailing – the things I wanted to learn from this studio. However to really become fluent in this sort of detailing, more practice is still necessary. I did learn a different way of working, using a lot more views, and based more on user experience. I learned to look away from the plan. Overall I am very glad I chose this studio. It really did enrich me.