

Residential domain and housing design as carriers of distinction in Amsterdam and its hinterland, 1870- 2004.

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the drive for distinction

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1979), in stratified society dominant classes and class fractions aim at maintaining, reproducing and improving their superior position. They do that by acquiring capital. To merely possess that capital is not enough. It is essential that they communicate to others that they belong to a privileged social group. They demonstrate their group identity by using *symbolic* capital, a combination of behaviour and the display of mobile and immobile artefacts. Each class and class fraction apply their symbolic capital in their *life style*, which allow them to be identified as group members. In other words, they aim at visible and audible *distinction*.

Roughly speaking, Bourdieu discovered that there are two groups of 'capitalists' with their relevant symbolic capital: those in search of or command of substantial economic (or financial) power, and those in possession of cultural capital.

The distinctive strategies of the first group were analyzed long ago by Thorstein Veblen. In his *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), Veblen labelled the life style of America's upper class and particularly the *nouveaux riches* as *conspicuous consumption*. They sought to impress by showing costly artefacts, by visiting exclusive places of entertainment and, more generally, by demonstrating that leisure, not hard work was their main occupation. Veblen saw artists, intellectuals and journalists as mere servants of these capitalists, providing them with 'tasteful' artefacts and teaching them the 'right' manners.

In the 1980s however, Bourdieu considered these developers of 'good taste' cultural capitalists. The group size of professionals with a degree in the humanities, arts, music and media studies justified Bourdieu to allow them an almost autonomous position in contemporary society. Many are engaged in defining the expressive, 'tasteful' vocabulary of distinction, while others are the mediators and communicators of that strategy to the broader public. An important aspect of their work is to constantly reinvent and recycle the elements of a 'tasteful' symbolic capital.

Just as Veblen, Bourdieu did not pay attention to housing design as an element of symbolic capital, although he did refer to the residential domain as a carrier of distinction, a line of research that was further developed by Pinçon and Pinçon- Charlot (1989, 2001) in Paris. Outside France, Bourdieu's conceptual framework has been applied in a modest, though increasing number of *gentrification* studies (see e.g. Butler & Robson 2001, Ley 2003, Wagenaar 2003). They convincingly demonstrate that the choice for downgraded urban areas cannot be reduced to an economic housing strategy and should also be interpreted as a distinctive, non- conformist statement.

Gentrifiers usually belong to the class fractions of cultural capitalists. Bourdieu's conceptual framework has rarely been applied to the residential domains of financial capitalists, be it 'old' or 'new' money (but see De Wijs- Mulkens 1999 and Gram- Hanssen & Bech- Danielsen 2004). In most studies the analysis of individual housing design hardly plays a role, let alone in a historical context.

Both Veblen and Bourdieu responded to periods of rapid social change which saw the emergence of new class fractions seeking for social recognition and respect. In this contribution I will focus on two such periods in Dutch history. The first, sometimes nicknamed the 'Second Golden Age' (1870- 1914) and the second, the years 1990- 2004, roughly correspond to the contexts of Veblen and Bourdieu.

During the first period both the residential domain and housing design were essentially left to market forces and individual preferences. After a sustained intermezzo of top- down state control over the built environment, a gradual relaxation set in during the second period. Thus, in both periods the financial and cultural elites were relatively free in formulating their distinctive residential strategy.

In this contribution I will explore two sets of questions. How did the *nouveaux riches* of both periods define residential domain and housing design as part of their distinctive vocabulary? How did they

establish the rules of admission to these domains? And which design language was developed as a carrier of distinction?

Similar questions have to be answered for the cultural elite. Finally, I aim to explore how the cultural elite's 'right' residential taste was mediated to class fractions that were culturally and intellectually less educated.

While the establishment and meaning of expressive and exclusive residential domains has been the subject of some historical research (see e.g. Olsen 1976 and Fishman 1987), housing design requires that we decode the meaning of artefacts as carriers of distinction. I will illustrate these themes with Amsterdam and its suburban hinterland as case studies.

The legacy of the Golden Age

Between 1600 and 1670, Amsterdam experienced its 'first' Golden Age. The city was both protagonist and hub of merchant capitalism and the cradle of numerous sizeable fortunes. Such was the growth of this class of wealthy entrepreneurs that local government decided to develop a new, prestigious residential area, the canal belt. It acquired a broad ribbon of land stretching from the Y to the river Amstel on which three canals were projected, offering the elite an attractive alternative for the squalid, crowded Medieval core.

The project was successful. Not only were the standard building plots of 8 meters wide bought massively by the elite; some of the very wealthy bought twice this size, particularly on the Herengracht near the Amstel river.

Within a few decades, the canal belt from which polluting craft shops and industries were strictly banned gained the status of an exclusive residential area. Socially however it was far from uniform. The radial streets were the domain of the middle classes, while back streets, mews and courts were the habitat of



labour. This residential mix was dictated by the need for employer and employee to live within walking distance of each other. Thus, for example, the Kerkstraat, running parallel to the prestigious Prinsengracht and Keizersgracht, was home to coach drivers and their stables, where they could be hired at any time by their elite neighbours. The facades of the canals and streets were socially segregated, while the area as a whole was mixed.

The elite further underlined its status with their houses.

Distinction could be expressed in three ways. The first was *volume*. As mentioned above, the very rich demonstrated their wealth by buying a double building plot. The second was *building material*. Using stone, which had to be imported and therefore was considerably more expensive than domestic brick the owner further emphasized his wealth. And finally there was *design* as a distinctive feature. Here, Dutch Renaissance architecture proved the ultimate carrier of conspicuous consumption. No other building style allowed for such exuberant use of ornaments. Elaborate stone scrolls, ornate end gables and cartouches underlined the economic power of the building patron.

After 1670, a period of consolidation set in. The nouveaux riches of the first wave became established patricians, and were less driven by conspicuous consumption. Many

remodelled the somewhat flashy facades of their parents with a more sober vernacular. Classicism turned out to be the ideal style to show that one did not care to show off.

What was more, the elite embraced Protestantism as its favourite religion. By its very nature, Protestantism discouraged the open display of wealth. Opposite to the Catholic countries of Southern Europe, where both churches, monasteries and private housing openly demonstrated the affluence of their building patrons, in Amsterdam the well-off were caught up in the 'embarrassment of riches' (Schama 1987).

That did not prevent the very wealthy from buying landed estates in Amsterdam's hinterland. The Gooi, at some 40 kilometres east of the city, soon became one of their favourite areas. Contrary to Amsterdam

with its unattractive peat and clay soils, here they found a sandy and hilly terrain, an area of rare natural beauty in flat Holland. Annually, barges and coaches carried patrician families and their staff to their estates to spend the summer months. Although most country houses were modelled after the canon of classicism, their sheer volume conveyed the message of opulence. Size stood for specialized functions, each requiring separate rooms, which could amount to 25 or more. A separate coach house and gardener's cottage were common.

Size and design of the estate were additional carriers of distinction. Husbandry was subordinate to pastoral aesthetics, and by devoting substantial amounts of land to gardening the owner made clear that his estate was there for sheer pleasure.

However much the elite emphasized virtues such as frugality and soberness, it could not hide the fact that maintaining both a country estate and a town house cost the equivalent of some hundred times the annual labouring wage (Van Lennep, 1962).

From 1700 to the middle of the 19th century, Dutch society gradually slipped from stagnation into decline. Upward social mobility, so characteristic of the Golden Age, all but disappeared. Amsterdam's patricians were remarkably successful in reproducing their capital. Their position remained uncontested for generations. Both by behaviour and by residence their status had become self-evident. It was, as many clergymen preached to their flock, a God-given social order that no one dare to challenge.

Timid fortunes

From 1870 to 1914, Amsterdam experienced a period of sustained economic growth. The population size trebled. The growth of new fortunes was as impressive.

These *nouveaux riches* were the new entrepreneurs. They were the craftsmen that transformed their workplace into a factory; the retailers that turned their shop into a department store; the planters that made a fortune in the Dutch East Indies.

Most were self-made men, who won fortune not by pedigree but by hard work, by inventiveness and guts. Only a handful had a degree in higher learning. Traditional patricians regarded these upstarts condescendingly. They excluded them from their clubs and family life.

No other group in Dutch society met with so much contempt as these *nouveaux riches*. And no other group suffered so much from its insecure social status. Most were of humble descent. Many were Jews or Catholics, an added reason for suspicion amongst the traditional elite that adhered to Baptism or the Dutch Reformed Church, until 1848 the State church. As a result, Jews, Catholics and non-conformist Protestants had been denied high-ranking posts in civil service, the law courts and as diplomats, a tradition informally continued after 1850. The wave of publications on 'good taste' and 'proper manners' mirrored their insecurity in social life.

Conspicuous consumption became their life-style. It marked them from the lower classes they stemmed from. It was the more emphasized now that it became difficult to visibly identify the labouring classes. They traded their second-hand clothing for products of the new garment industry, their flea-market furniture for machine-made equipment, and generally traded their servility for a more self-assured attitude.

As in the 17th century, these newcomers looked for a respectable domain and housing design to underline their wealth. Around 1870, the Canal belt was unquestionably the most prestigious residential area. But acquiring a house here was far from easy. Patricians proved loyal to their 'natural habitat'. When a house came on the market, one had to compete with banks and insurance companies which fought for a place in this respectable area. Thus, only very wealthy upstarts were in a position to 'invade' this territory. An early example of such an 'invasion' was given by Elias Fuld, a German Jew, who was the successful general manager of Amsterdam's branch of the Rothschild Bank. After acquiring Keizersgracht 452, he hired Cornelis Outshoorn, a leading architect of the time, to transform this stately but rather dull classicist house into a fitting homage to his fortune. Outshoorn did this by lavishly applying terra-cotta decorations, huge balconies and an oversized entrance with an elevated double stone doorstep. Outshoorn's interventions resulted in a house that clearly stood apart from its neighbours.

But it was nothing compared to the mansion that Jacob Nienhuys commissioned. Having made an astronomical fortune as a planter he retired from the Dutch East Indies. In 1883 he commissioned Abraham Salm (1857- 1915), a young architect, to build a suburban *palazzo* in Baarn, at the Eastern periphery of the Gooi.

But clearly, just as the old elite, a man of such standing required a town house as well. In 1885, Nienhuys bought a double building plot at Herengracht 380- 382 after a fire destroyed the former premises. With an almost unlimited building budget he gave young Salm every opportunity to show his talents.

And these Salm had in large measures. His final training at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* in Paris, the world's leading school of architecture, made him a master of eclecticism. He had an excellent command of all fashionable building styles (Kuyt et al. 1997).

Salm's work was finished in 1889. It completely satisfied his patron. The house obeyed to all the characteristics of an upstart residence. The double plot enabled Salm to realize a distinctive volume, all of it built in Oberkirchner sandstone, which had to be imported from abroad. But what strikes even today's visitor is the overwhelming power of Salm's design.

He applied the François- I design language of the castles along the Loire. François' rule stood for "(...) modernization of society in a Renaissance spirit with a strong nationalistic and individualistic mentality ...

in the 19th century this style symbolically stood for the idea that true economic and cultural modernization could only be brought by millionaires. They were (...) seen as the princes of their era. This they sought to express in their housing style. Both the Rothschilds and Vanderbilts applied this 'millionaires' style" (De Wijs 1986: 4-5).

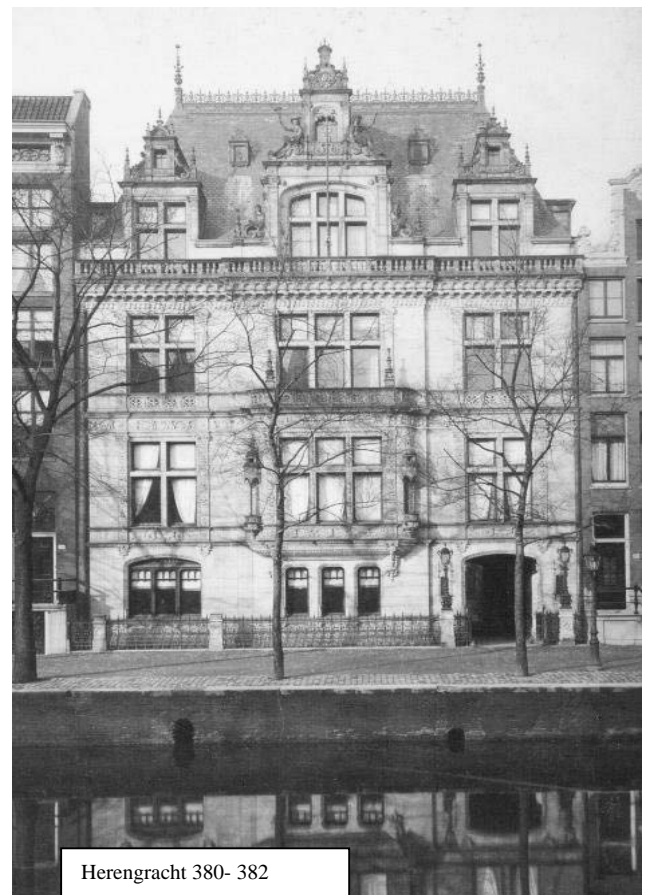
This tycoon's palace was also remarkable for its interiors. Each room had its own style: Moorish, with much stucco and mosaic; German, with abundant use of rustic mock wooden panels; and ornate Dutch Renaissance. All were equipped with modern lighting, provided by private electrical generators. In the back garden Salm designed impressive stables with the coachman's dwellings on top. It could be reached via a gate in the façade, which was slightly too small for the coach to make the turn in one time; a source of derision for the patrician neighbours.

The application of the François- I style remained exceptional. But from the 1880s *Dutch Neorenaissance* became extremely popular. Everywhere in The Netherlands it was the dominant design language for housing for the well- off. It is sometimes suggested that its popularity was caused by the wave of nationalism that flooded The Netherlands after German unification in 1871. The clear reference to the

Golden Age served as a moral exhortation to once again believe in the nation's power and greatness.

Whether this sufficiently explains its popularity is doubtful (see e.g. Van der Woud 1997; Pey 2004). In my view its attraction lies in the opportunity to apply an expressive decorative programme that Classicism, which dominated until 1850, denied. Just as the nouveaux riches of the first Golden Age, the Neo-Renaissance vernacular allowed for the lavish application of ornaments that referred to the resident's affluence. Next to traditional distinctive building materials like imported stone, new elements were added, such as balconies and costly plate glass, a late 19th century innovation that replaced the traditional glazing bar windows.

That Dutch neo- renaissance was the ultimate carrier of distinction was further underlined by Eugen Gugel, the nation's first professor of architecture at recently established Delft Polytechnic. In 1887 he published a lavishly illustrated handbook on architectural design, which for years was the most authoritative codification of building styles and architectural concepts in this country. Gugel also taught his readers the basic laws of representative proportions. He prescribed that for large and deep rooms an 'harmonious' ceiling height is calculated by the formula: length by width divided by a factor 3.



Thus, for a living room of 4 meters wide and 8 meters deep, ceiling height would come out at 4 meters- indeed very common measures for bourgeois housing. Of course such heights required large windows, and preferably two fireplaces to comfortably heat such spacious rooms, considerably adding to the conspicuous consumption of its resident. For servant's rooms, Gugel added, these requirements could be relaxed. A standard height of 2.30 meters was quite sufficient, allowing to economize on fuel (Gugel 1887 vol III: 24 ff.).

Gugel's lessons were not only taught to the first generation of academically trained architects. They were diffused via numerous handbooks used by master brick-layers, carpenters and contractors that realized the bulk of bourgeois housing.

But where to build? The canal belt offered only few opportunities as we saw. That implied that the nouveaux riches were forced to opt for a more peripheral location. But investment in a stylish house in a domain that as yet was not coined as solidly 'upper class' was hazardous. Opposite to the 17th century, local government left the development of prestigious new quarters to the free market, further adding to the investment risk.

Urban villas

One way to reduce that risk was the urban villa, the single most powerful carrier of conspicuous consumption. The larger its garden, the more it referred to the resident's economic power since land prices were very high in Amsterdam.

In the villa that father and son Springer built in 1874 for a wealthy owner of several insurance companies, we can trace all characteristics of distinction. This villa was detached, emphasizing its volume. Richly decorated with stone ornaments and niches containing bronze sculptures, this neo-renaissance showpiece boasted a glass house and a separate coach house.

Its location, facing Amsterdam's spacious zoo, was well chosen. This area was developed by private contractors, obviously following the age-old rule that every location with a view offered an opportunity for more expensive, better quality housing. Although the area as a whole was rather mixed, the façade facing the zoological gardens turned into a 'golden fringe'.



Urban villas on the Weteringschans

Several of such fringes were developed during the fin-de-siècle. Thus, the Weteringschans, part of the former fortifications, suddenly acquired a high status when it became known that it would be facing the *Rijksmuseum*, the National Gallery, built between 1877 and 1885. Developers eagerly sought building plots opposite to this national temple of art. Between 1882 and 1884 a number of ornate villas was built here. Their impressive volumes hid the fact that they contained three separate

dwelling. Designed in an abundant renaissance vernacular they were equipped with balconies, elaborate banisters, bay windows and turrets. The towers undoubtedly housed separate servants' staircases that minimized contacts with their employers.

Such domestic separation was extraordinary, as two members of Amsterdam's top patrician families wrote in a memoir (Van Eeghen & Voûte 1983: 169). In houses of the old elite, both maids and patrons used the same stairs and front door. 'Old Money' was familiar with having servants and not infected with the fear for contacts with the lower classes that was so typical for upstarts.

Golden Fringes

For many who were slightly less fortunate, the single family row house offered the best alternative. Again, piece-meal building brought the risk that the neighbouring premises could become of a poorer quality

and thus devalue one's investment. It could be reduced by selecting premium sites with a view. In Amsterdam, these typically were waterways, broad streets, squares and the rare parks. Here, individual owners would probably go for superior housing quality. But only large developers could really guarantee uniform quality along these fringes.

One such developer was Samuel Sarphati, an energetic Jewish doctor, who was obsessed by stimulating Amsterdam's economic and social recovery. One of his projects, situated at the Southern fringe of the city, was the construction of a great exhibition hall, clearly modelled after Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace in London (1855). Sarphati succeeded in acquiring a continuous building terrain along two streets facing his hall. On these prime sites his architect Outshoorn realized two impressive ensembles.

Years later, in a critical essay on the poor quality of Amsterdam's new quarters, architect Hendrik Berlage (1883) praised Outshoorn's design as one of the rare examples of a monumental ensemble.

Monumentality stood for regularity, symmetry and uniform façade design. It was the highest form of architectural beauty, Berlage wrote, since it obeyed to eternal laws of proportion and dignity. The Picturesque came second. It stood for irregular facades, for the unexpected and the bizarre. It was, he continued, after nature, and nature knows no rules. Amsterdam's canal belt was one of its best illustrations. The Picturesque appealed to the heart. The Monumental was rational and obeyed to abstract canons. No other city offered a monumental townscape as impressive as Paris, which Berlage found one of the world's most beautiful cities. Not surprisingly, contemporaries hoped that one of Outshoorn's streets would in due time become Amsterdam's *Rue de Rivoli* (Wagenaar 2001, p.160).

But alas. Elsewhere, near to Sarphati's prestigious hall that added considerably to the attraction of this area, individual plots were bought, many by wealthy members of the Jewish community. By hiring fashionable architects and by insisting on using expensive building materials and a generous use of ornaments they succeeded in assuring a *nouveaux riche* enclave which held its status for years to come. Stylistically the result was chaotic. No house design even attempted to harmonize with the neighbouring premises. Few aesthetes would have valued the result as picturesque. But whether the building patrons cared very much is questionable. Just as in Victorian London, it seems, they valued their unique facade as the expression of unrestrained individualism, not harnessed by a government- controlled aesthetics board that demanded strict visual uniformity as was the case in Paris. In London, the individual façade stood for "(...) the special creative vision of its designer, just as the house represented the independence and identity of the family it contained" (Olsen, 1979:68). In *laissez-faire* Amsterdam it was no different. Although the *nouveau riche* design preferences in Sarphati's project were all realized by architects, it set the tune for speculative contractors elsewhere. Along the golden fringes of the new quarters they realized double apartments in four storey houses for those slightly lower on the income ladder. These properties were rarely owner- occupied and custom built. They were rented out by landlords who were no less concerned about the visible carriers of standing in the façade, knowing how decisive they were to attract well- to- do tenants. These demanded a spacious flat as well. Six rooms, three on every floor, was seen as the minimum for a decent family (Montijn 1998).

The first new quarter outside Amsterdam's old defence line, De Pijp, was the testing ground for this building practice. Building densities in the long, monotonous back streets were extremely high. The three to four storey houses provided back- to- back single room apartments for the working classes.



Sarphatipark 75- 77. Notice the contrast with the neighbouring façade on the right, much more common along this golden fringe.

The few open spaces in this new quarter were even more valued than in the old city. Thus, along the moderately sized Sarphatipark, the quarter's only green space, speculative builders fought for building plots. They bought rarely more than three in a row, given their modest investment power. Here, the carriers of distinction were of a more unassuming character. Each double apartment was equipped with a balcony or bay window. The representative first and third floors had high ceilings, and thus, obeying to Gugel's handbook, large plate glass windows. This alone demanded a substantial volume, which on street level was decorated with ornate blue stone panels. Almost all had a three- step portico as an entrance, decorated with tiles and terra- cotta ornaments. Houses were crowned with elaborately carved corniches and rafter- supported eaves.

Only a few of these double- apartment row houses were the work of an architect, such as Sarphatipark 75- 77, designed by Jan van den Ban. It is exceptional also by its Dutch Neo- Renaissance ornaments, although more moderately applied than in previous examples, and of poorer quality since they are made of plaster instead of stone.

The status of the golden fringes, however, was insecure.

When landlords found double apartments hard to let, they

sometimes converted them to single dwellings. Therefore, in Utrecht for example, a developer who wished to buy municipal land wanted the local council to forbid this practice so as to prevent devaluation of his investment (Pey 2004: 150). Secondly, the working class tenants of the back streets tried to escape their overcrowded dwellings as often as they could. They took to bars, to loitering on the street or to vandalising the park, thus harassing the decent families along the golden fringe with their improper behaviour.

Building practices in De Pijp were copied in most 19th century quarters. For those who wished to escape from the proximity of the lower orders entirely, there was one new neighbourhood that offered that opportunity.

Like with like

In 1864, a committee of wealthy Amsterdammers appealed to their fellow citizens to donate for the construction of a new park. Motivated by civic pride, their call proved successful. The committee bought more property than it needed for this prestigious project. By selling surrounding land for building purposes they covered the costs for a proper landscaping of what soon was named the *Vondelpark*. Auctioning these building plots proved successful. That was remarkable, since conditions were very strict. They stipulated that the prospective owner "(...) may not build on his property working class housing, and shall not establish in or near the premises craft shops, nor storage for fuel or any other hazardous materials"(quoted in Wagenaar 1990: 270). Thus, they effectively ruled out the sort of back street development mentioned earlier. Conditions were even stricter for plots bordering on the park itself. Here, the committee stipulated that permission would be given only after approval of the building plan. These rules hardly restrained prospective buyers. The new park, of a considerable size, proved a powerful incentive, just as its well chosen location. An extra stimulus came from the abolition of indirect taxes which until 1864 were levied at Amsterdam's city gates. They locked at 10.00 p.m., thus preventing residents of the new quarters to visit theatres and restaurants in the old city.

North of the park, the prominent architect Pierre Cuypers developed the Vondelstraat, where on one side he designed impressive villas, often with a private entrance to the park. Its facing flank was reserved for single family or double apartment row houses.

Cuypers, a protagonist of the Catholic revival in Amsterdam, attracted mainly fellow believers as investors in this project. As a result, this area became more or less a Catholic haven, just as Sarphati's development was dominated by Jews (De Roever, 2001).

Who were the residents of this new street? Virtually all were wealthy newcomers, many of them born outside Amsterdam (Hofland, 1998). The villa residents belonged to the world of large- scale retail, trade

and industry. The opposite flank housed solicitors, doctors and the odd building contractor. Only rarely the old elite took residence here. The few that did saw it obviously as a temporary address. The sooner circumstances permitted them to leave they returned to the canal belt. There, old patrician families condescendingly referred to this area as 'the polder' (Bruin & Schijf 1984).

The park's south side was also successfully developed as an upper- class district, with a similar mix of detached, semi- detached and row housing. In 1914, the Amsterdam Bureau of Statistics concluded in its income tax survey that the whole area around the Vondelpark 'is of a sharply profiled uniformity' (Statistische Mededeeling 1915: X). Indeed, it was the city's first single- class district.

Its attraction was further enhanced by remarkable institutions like the Dutch Riding School (1881) and the *Concertgebouw* (1888), soon to become one of Europe's leading musical stages. Both were privately funded, just as the Vondelpark itself. The riding school offered local residents the opportunity of keeping horses without a private stable, and of making a ride through the park which thus was used as a collective estate. In 1881 a consortium presented its plan for the last phase of the Vondelpark district. Contrary to the first phase, this part, the Willemspark, was carefully landscaped with meandering roads, green squares and lush trees. The park occupied 26 hectares, of which only 14 were to be given out exclusively for detached villas. The investors hoped that the Willemspark would provide an alternative for suburbia.

Soon, however, the consortium lowered its ambitions. Building contractors demanded higher densities, allowing for semi- detached housing. As a contemporary noticed in 1904, for the price of a single villa plot one could buy at least ten times as much land at less than half an hour's train ride from Amsterdam (Wagenaar 1990, p. 281). The call of the suburbs had become almost irresistible.

The call of the suburbs

Years before the Amsterdam- Amersfoort railway opened the Gooi for commuting (1874), wealthy Amsterdammers with a flexible time budget discovered Hilversum. Its attraction lay not only in its exceptional natural beauty. On its Western fringes it bordered to the great patrician estates which gave the area a solid elite status. Along the only surfaced road to these estates major villas were built. In 1861 a residence was built for the successful Catholic patron of Amsterdam's first department store, with a neo- Gothic design that was associated by contemporaries as a clear statement of Catholic revival.

On the same road, closer to the village of Hilversum, we find the mansion for B.W. Blijdenstein, manager of the recently established *Twentsche Bank*, which successfully financed the nation's textile industry. Its abundant neo- Renaissance design came from Isaac Gosschalk, an undisputed master of picturesque architecture.

The colossal size of his villa alone sufficed to underscore the owner's fortune. It contained 34 rooms, 3 bathrooms and 2 kitchens. A joining tower offered wide views over surrounding heather fields and woodlands. Contrary to the neo- Gothic villa nearby, this design offered ample opportunities to include an almost overwhelming decorative programme. Horizontal white stone bands further enhanced the villa's volume, which was expanded by balconies and glass- covered verandas.

The villa was surrounded by an estate where the owner displayed his collection of rare pine trees. To hide the estate's relatively small size, its designer, Hendrik Copijn, made a clever use of the techniques developed in English garden architecture. Meandering footpaths and the odd pond offered continuously changing views. Maintenance of both house and garden required a substantial staff. Blijdenstein employed ten gardeners, a coachman, groom and six maids (Coops, 2000).

Although Blijdenstein's villa boasted an enormous size, it was not unique. What changed after the coming of the railway was that investors now bought up large estates which were redeveloped as villa parks. They offered prospective buyers several benefits. Developers often hired skilled landscape architects such as Copijn for the park's plan. Thus, all building sites enjoyed the beauty of a picturesque environment. Most



Blijdenstein's villa designed by Isaac Gosschalk

plans avoided through traffic, offering an isolated area of peace and quiet. By the very plot size, sometimes up to 1 hectare or more, developers also guaranteed that all residents were of substantial wealth. Strict zoning regulations ruled out any form of undesirable land use. Parks for the very wealthy were located at quite a distance from the railway station. Thus, they could only be reached by private coach or by a horse-drawn tram. As in England, *distance* was another technique to secure social exclusiveness (Fishman, 1987). Villa parks close to the station usually had smaller plots and catered mainly to middle-class commuters. Although developers of prestigious parks emphasized stylish diversity, most villas show remarkable similarities in design. Their asymmetrical plastered facades were livened with red brick relief arches. Roofs were often covered by (expensive) glazed tiles. A lavish use of timber, both as mock timber frame, veranda and richly ornamented ridge beams, also indicated the resident's fortune. Timber stood for costly, labour intensive maintenance, just as the sizeable lawn, as Thorstein Veblen also noticed (1899, pp. 133 ff.), and was therefore part of the vocabulary of conspicuous consumption. To make sure that these carriers of distinction were clearly visible to all who visited the area, developers stipulated that no villa should be obscured by closed hedges or fences (De Haan, 1990). Who were the residents? Almost invariably *nouveaux riches* that had made a fortune in Amsterdam or the Dutch East Indies, and now belonged to the leisure class.

bourgeois-bohème

Around 1900 this unashamed display of private opulence and exclusionary domains met with increasing disapproval. The critics were the artistic and intellectual avant-garde of the 1880s, who by 1890 traded Amsterdam for Het Gooi. Not for Hilversum, to be sure, but for the tiny rural village of nearby Laren. In 1882 a steam tram linking Laren to the train stations of Bussum and Hilversum brought it closer to Amsterdam. Although not suitable for daily commuting, the tram was essential for incidental contacts of these artists with patrons or editors.

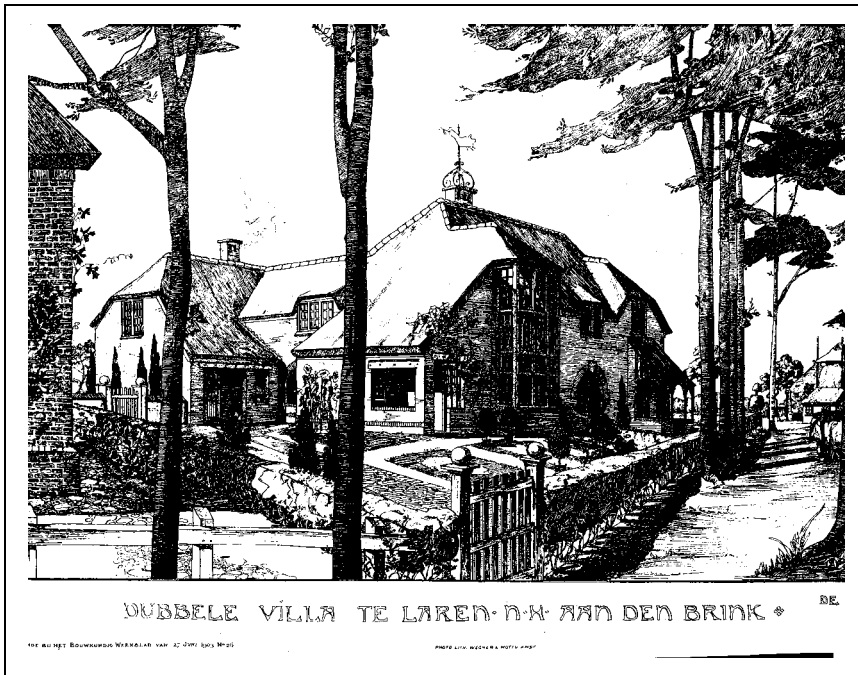
Laren's charm lay in its archaic pastoral outlook. The signs of modernity were almost absent. Opposite to Hilversum, it had never been touched by Amsterdam's wealthy. The village was dominated by shepherds and crofters of an appalling poverty. The poor sandy soil resulted in land prices that were a fraction of those in Amsterdam.

Here, avant-garde artists found the frugal environment that contrasted sharply with the vulgar conspicuous consumption that was so obvious in both Amsterdam and suburban Hilversum. Most of them renounced the principle of art for art's sake, which they increasingly identified with the egoistic individualism so typical of *laissez-faire* capitalism. They aimed for art serving society just as their fellow artists from the *Arts and Crafts* movement in the UK, their main source of inspiration. They valued the applied arts higher than commodified paintings produced for the market. Although their political orientation ranged from Catholic revival to radical socialism, they shared a profound disgust for the liberal parties and a devotion for a more collectivist approach of society. Liberalism stood for anonymous *Gesellschaft*. They aimed at reinforcing *Gemeinschaft*. (Tibbe, 1994; Wagenaar, 2001).

To translate their ideological and aesthetic preferences into housing design they relied on the few architects who shared their visions on art and society. Here we again meet Hendrik Berlage. In 1902, Richard Roland Holst, a protagonist of the Dutch arts and crafts movement, and his wife Henriette, a well-known poet and radical politician, commissioned their friend Berlage to build a villa in Laren. Richard wanted his house to be simple and pure, 'almost cottage-like'. He substantially influenced Berlage's design (Sprenger, 1996).

The result must have satisfied him. The villa, located on a dirt road, had a vast, low reaching thatched roof, covering the asymmetrical ground plan. Significantly, all windows had glazing bars, a statement against modern, expensive plate glass.

To the smallest detail the villa quoted local building vernacular. Thatched roofs referred to the crofter's cottage, for whom tiles were too costly. With low reaching roofs, crofters economized on expensive brick, just as their small windows cut back on glass. Naturally the Roland Holst villa was not an exact replica of a local cottage. That would have prevented the modern residential comfort that even this anti-bourgeois couple would not give up.



In 1903 this rural vocabulary was further developed when two young architects published their award-winning design for a country house, including a studio. They commented that they had avoided the modern villa-type as much as possible, and were inspired by the typology of the local barn instead (De Clercq & Gratama 1903: 273). However much the artistic building patrons emphasized the modest, unadorned outlook of their country houses, these did not come at a bargain. The villa illustrated above came at f 12. 500. The sober cottage Berlage built for the socialist politician Henry

Polak came at f 10. 000 ¹. The same counted for furniture and interior decoration. It had to be 'honest', hand- made by craftsmen. Industrial production was too vulgar, as Veblen (1898) noticed as well (159 ff.). To lead the simple life however, one had to be rather well- off.

Therefore I labelled them *bourgeois- bohème*. Almost none of the artists who settled in Laren were poor. Both by talent and training however, they were first of all cultural capitalists. They underlined their non-conformity by opting for building materials and design that were clearly inspired by unpretentious local cottages, barns and sheep pens.

Laren presented an unequalled opportunity for display of cultural distinction. Not only were the costs of land and labour a fraction of those in Amsterdam, the village itself was a distinctive domain as well. Mrs. Roland Holst, who previous to moving to Laren had lived in Hilversum, was happy to 'leave the disappointing contacts with estate owners behind'(Etty 1996:156).

Indeed, Laren offered them quite the opposite. It was a mixed community. Although the number of artists and intellectuals increased significantly, they still lived amidst local farmers and shepherds. Wealthy upstarts avoided this village, which would undermine their status.

But Laren's status as a bohemian enclave proved insecure. After 1918, Amsterdam bankers and merchants saw the village as an attractive alternative for mediocre nouveaux riche communities. Commuting was now facilitated by private car. Media coverage of Laren's artistic production had made it sufficiently middle- of- the- road to make it compatible with the taste of the financial elite (Heijting, 1994: 239 ff.).

At a time when the true bohemians left the village for new distinctive domains and the revolutionary architecture of the Amsterdam School, skilful local architects exploited the rural vocabulary and adopted it to the taste of their wealthy clients. The thatched roof and glaze bar windows had become mandatory. To these they added 'rustic' shutters.

¹ One should realize that around 1900 the buying power of the Dutch guilder was 25 times as much as in 2000, the year it was traded for the Euro. See <http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/calculate.html>

Window sills should be oiled, not painted, to emphasize their natural grain. As a building material, they often used brick from demolished old farmhouses to enhance the 'age- old' nature of these villas. Facades were gunwaled with tarred timber, clearly referring to the local barn. The garden was 'pastoralized' by professional landscape architects. Fences were made by using the irregular sized planks of an unbarked tree to enhance its picturesque outlook.

afb. 9. "Huize Zevenende" , Vredelaan - Laren, 1925-1927.Voorgevel.



Although the Laren-style country house sometimes reached enormous volumes, the international crisis of the 1930s raised the demand for more modest ground plans, as households economized on servants. Modernist design, with its emphasis on functionality and efficiency, was far better equipped to serve shrinking budgets. But modernist architecture, with its visible use of steel and concrete, flat roofs and a complete absence of ornaments and 'rustic' building materials rarely

pleased building patrons. What was more, in the few cases that they preferred a modernist architect, it met with fierce resistance from local aesthetics boards, as Gerrit Rietveld experienced (De Haan 1986; Heijting 1994).

Around 1940 the triumph of the Laren country house was almost complete, and not just in The Gooi. It dominated wealthy suburbs in Holland from Bloemendaal to Wassenaar. The pastoral illusion was complete.

Meagre years

After 1918 Amsterdam embarked on a major extension plan, developed by Berlage. The city made eager use of the new 1901 Housing Act which enabled compulsory purchase of the whole planning area. It gave the city unprecedented development powers. Thus, the Labour- controlled local council stipulated that most land in this area was reserved for multi- storey housing. Building sites for villas were modest and limited in number. The council could even enforce its aesthetic preferences. Planning permission was given only if housing design conformed to the canon of Amsterdam School architecture (Stieber 1998), which effectively ruled out the Laren country house style.

At the same time, the continuing growth of the central business district in the historic core further limited the number of prestigious dwellings as offices replaced residential use. Again, it stimulated the suburban exodus.

Post- war developments further limited building for the well- off. The Western Garden Cities, realized between 1950 and 1965, gave maximum priority to public housing. The Bylmermeer, Amsterdam's last major extension area where building started around 1970, limited privately owned housing to 10 percent. The rest was public housing situated in high- rise upper- deck access flats.

Although left- wing local governments stimulated public housing as their favourite tenure, it is fair to say that during the reconstruction years it was the dominant strategy for the nation as a whole. Housing became part of a government controlled, top- down command structure unparalleled elsewhere in Europe (Schuyt & Taverne 2000: 204). Public housing was seen as the key to solve the nation's severe housing shortage. Private developers were confronted with strict rationing of building materials.

Modernist design became the preferred carrier of reconstruction housing. With its Fordist emphasis on repetition of standardized units, the use of pre-fabricated building elements and its veto on ornaments and decoration, it was ideally suited for mass housing. At the same time, modernism became the exclusive style paradigm taught at national schools of architecture.

Until 1960, nouveaux riches seeking for distinctive new housing were rare. The few that did emerge during the reconstruction era had to content with existing villas. But voluminous suburban villas of around 1900 became rare. In Hilversum, one after another was torn down as a result of sharply progressive income and property taxes, lack of servants and high maintenance costs. The large solitary villa was demolished and the plot subdivided to make way for modest bungalows.

Outside the 1940 perimeter of communities in Het Gooi, there was no room for further expansion. It was effectively blocked by conservationist organizations and local government that wanted to preserve what remained of natural beauty.

Around 1975, the national planning agency announced a major policy shift. From now on it stimulated satellite towns around the four largest cities as the main building locations. What was more, for the first time since 1945 it gave substantial room for private ownership. Those who had hoped for a more relaxed attitude to individual preferences in terms of volume, building materials or housing design were disappointed, however. Although scarcity of building materials and serious housing shortages were over, modernism continued to be the favourite design language of local aesthetics boards. What added to its attraction, it seems, was that it was the ideal vehicle for the levelled society the Netherlands was in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, only a handful of experts could see the differences between privately owned and public housing. The visual distinction between these forms of tenure was reduced to almost nil.

New harvest

The patronizing attitude of both national and local government towards the building preferences of private owners met with mounting criticism. In 2000, a neo-liberal government responded with some relaxation of the rules. The power of local aesthetics boards was curtailed. On new government-assigned building locations so-called 'free sites' were made obligatory, which allowed the buyers substantially more freedom to build as they pleased (Mensen Wensen Wonen 2000). Given the very high land prices, it was clear that only higher incomes would benefit from this liberalization. Since The Netherlands experienced a period of high economic prosperity, this met with little opposition.

The results were striking. In the Haarlemmermeer villapark Den Hout, the new petite bourgeoisie expressed their recently acquired wealth with expensive building materials, voluminous houses and garages for 2 cars, often occupying two thirds of the 'free plot'. On only two of the 40 free plots the owners commissioned a modernist architect (Te Selle 2004: 79).

The design of all others was distinctly nostalgic, often referring to the detached middle class villas of the 1930s. To evoke that style, architects applied large rafter-supported eaves, high gabled roofs covered with glazed tiles, bay windows and porches above the elaborately worked front door. Although all windows have glass bars they are of double glazing quality, while the frames are made of hardwood. The modest gardens are often cobble paved to reduce maintenance, sometimes adorned with a trained tree. Wrought iron fences complete the romantic impression.

Although it is doubtful whether the building patrons consciously referred to this middle class suburban housing design of the 1930s, they stated that they definitely did not want modernist architecture, which they qualified as cold, unfriendly and 'impersonal'. They preferred an intimate, cozy and warm style, which they obviously associated with the vernacular of the 1930s (Te Selle 2004).

That leading architectural journals just as high-brow newspapers ridiculed these neo-traditionalist design preferences will come at no surprise. The modernist canon is still firmly implanted in all schools of architecture. Accordingly, the worst an architect can do, is to imitate the past. If one prefers traditional design, one should go for the 'real stuff' instead of a reproduction. Den Hout is what happens if one leaves design to the taste of uneducated individuals. It can only be avoided by strict supervision of professionals on local aesthetic boards.

Who were the building patrons? The majority had a commercial or technical training, with both partners working in the private sector. This is typical for all building patrons on 'free sites' in The Netherlands. They fit in the typology developed earlier by De Wijs-Mulkens (1999) for post-1970 suburban housing. As a demonstration of conspicuous consumption, Den Hout is modest compared with Almere-Overgooi, a recent luxury development South of the new town Almere, at some 35 kilometers East of Amsterdam. The name itself is indicative of its pretensions. Nearby Het Gooi is by far the most prestigious suburban

area. But as we saw, new development there is out of the question. Here, estate agents offer the new 'captains of industry' an alternative although opposite to sandy Het Gooi, it has a clay soil. Plot sizes range from 1800m² to 4500 m², with prices from € 400.000 to € 550.000. Each plot is reserved for a villa of a 'unique design' (http://www.almere.nl/map_overgooi/index.html).



Two villas in Almere- Overgooi. The one at the right is still under construction.

Few other recent suburban areas offer such a panorama of conspicuous consumption. Next to expensive building materials as hand- made brick, the thatched roof reemerges, this time however as a carrier of wealth. While reed was the cheapest roofing material for the poor in 1900 Laren, today it is far more costly than tiles. Often, it has to be imported from Hungary or Poland, while artisan thatchers cost a small fortune. Yet, to comply with the mock- Gooi status of this area, it is applied to many a villa. Their volumes are further enlarged by integrating the garage, whereby its doors, ostensibly visible from the road, are indicative of the number of cars. Although made of plastic, shutters also refer to the Laren country house, as do the dormers and chimney caps, suggesting at least two fireplaces. Next to the Laren country house, other mansions suggest different notions of wealthy residences. The *Dallas* or *Dynasty* style, copied from popular American sit- coms, also satisfy the owner's desire for luxurious distinction. Finally, the gardens testify to the owner's expensive taste. Huge granite blocks, imported from Scandinavia, cobble- stone mosaic and 'antique' lamp posts are all clearly visible from outside.

Overgooi is an exclusive domain as well. Opposite to virtually all post- 1970 developments which contain a mix of public housing, private rental and owner- occupied housing, Overgooi offers only the last form of tenure, guaranteeing social uniformity. The suburban plan excludes through traffic by offering only a few access roads. Strangers arouse suspicion, as this author experienced several times.

The creative knowledge- based city

Professionals from the cultural, creative or intellectual sectors are absent in the two recent developments discussed above. Over the past 20 years they are increasingly concentrated in Amsterdam. On the one hand we find here cultural capitalists with a substantial income made in the advertisement and marketing business, the media industry, leisure and entertainment, the arts and as professors in the humanities and social sciences. On the other hand there are the aspiring young who just began their career in these branches as well as students on universities and art schools.

What are their favorite areas? For the 'settled' cultural capitalists the canal belt is a prime location, thus qualifying as the oldest successful elite area of this country. The exodus of large- scale offices and banks from the central business district led to massive conversion into luxury flats and apartments, adding considerably to the residential floor space of this area. 19th Century Southern Amsterdam is equally attractive. While between 1870 and 1914 the new quarters flanking the Vondelpark were the preferred domain of financial and commercial upstarts, today's cultural *glitterati* find them desirable, and are paying extravagant prices for double or triple apartments. Whereas their cultural predecessors spoke condescendingly about the display of wealth in housing design, contemporary cultural capitalists praise the richly ornamented high ceilings and the variety of facades in this neighborhood.

Next best are the *gentrification* areas such as the Jordaan. Around 1975, this downgraded blue collar neighborhood was invaded by students and artists who found residential niches that were denied them elsewhere by Amsterdam's rigid housing allocation system. That the neighborhood had a down- and- out

image did not bother them. To the contrary. Opting for the Jordaan was an anti- bourgeois, non-conformist statement.

Many of them decided to stay after graduation and their first job. Their rising income attracted a 'critical infrastructure' of second- hand shops, alternative restaurants and take- away outlets. Lifestyle magazines and television programs discovered the area as an alternative for the rather dusted downtown entertainment cluster. Many of the gentrification pioneers bought and restored their house, benefiting from generous subsidies for this 17th century preservation area.

Today, the Jordaan has become a well- off neighborhood. Upcoming gentrification areas are invariably 19th century former working class neighborhoods that undergo a similar process of refurbishing, rising incomes and the creation of a new consumptive infrastructure (Wagenaar 2003).

What all these areas have in common is that from the 17th century until 1914, local government did not interfere significantly in the building process. Of course there were technical requirements, but volume, building material (with the exception of inflammable timber) and design were left at the patron's discretion. Contrary to post- 1914 building practices dominated by repetitive uniformity, housing shows a remarkable degree of expressive individuality. In the Jordaan and the canal belt, few premises are similar to the neighboring ones. The built environment is characterized by the irregular, the unexpected and the quaint- the key defining terms of the Picturesque, further enhanced by a patina of age. For those seeking distinction by living in a unique house in a *romantic* (the emotional experience of the picturesque) residential domain, both areas offer ample opportunities.

Admittedly, this variety is less in the 19th century belt, especially down the straight long back streets with their speculative housing. Its poor design qualities and moderate decorative programme is compensated by a variety in use at street level, where many former shops and workshops now accommodate the gentrifiers' 'critical infrastructure'. Again, the contrast with post- 1914 development which banned mixed use and concentrated retail in shopping areas is remarkable. To enhance individual identity, residents often create small façade gardens at ground level. Its climbing plants serve as an extra decoration. Sometimes they add a garden bench, thus furthering the romantic and nostalgic experience of the area.

For the cultural, creative and intellectual establishment the preference for an Amsterdam address is on itself a distinctive statement. For the price of a multi- storey apartment in their favorite quarters they could easily have bought a detached house in one of the satellite towns, with ample parking facilities or a private garage. By opting for an urban apartment in a city that middle class Dutchmen identify with vice, crime and squatters, they underline their non- conformist bohemian orientation.

Residential distinction- concluding remarks

This contribution illustrates that the distinctive residential vocabulary is constantly 're- invented' and recycled by cultural and economic capitalists. Whereas in 1900 the first group looked with disdain to the new quarters around the Vondelpark, with its large volumes, exotic building materials and extravagant Neo- Renaissance gables, contemporary cultural capitalists value the area as highly attractive. The Anglo- Saxon world has experienced a reassessment of Victorian housing which is remarkably similar (see e.g. Bridge 2001).

For suburban Laren we saw a similar reshuffling of connotations. While the bourgeois- bohèmes of 1900 adopted the vernacular of crofters' cottages to express their disdain for nouveaux riches opulence, after 1918 that vocabulary was exploited and annexed by wealthy Amsterdam commuters. The thatched roof, once the ultimate signifier of sober rural life, today is the hallmark of economic upstarts.

This essay owes much to Veblen's and Bourdieu's conceptual framework. However powerful their influence on the social sciences, their impact on housing studies in The Netherlands is marginal, as opposed to France and the Anglo- Saxon world. This might be explained by two Dutch peculiarities. On the *supply* side of housing and residential domain, the strictly functional top-down State control until 1990 produced Fordist mass- produced, standardized and pre- fabricated dwellings in anonymous residential environments that almost excluded any residential distinction. The *demand* side was for a long time limited by reconstruction strategies in which income leveling by sharply progressive taxation played a dominant role.

What I suggest is that only in times of high economic prosperity in a (moderately) liberal political climate that no longer prevents income disparities, and no longer adheres to Fordist building techniques, there will be room for the residential domain and housing design as carriers of distinction. That counts for both periods covered in this contribution.

Although social scientists suggest that Bourdieu's framework is specifically developed for contemporary society I suggest it can also be applied in historical research. A recent publication on distinctive vocabularies of a Flemish noble family in the years 1680- 1740 may serve as further proof (De Vlieger- De Wilde 2004).

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