

Reflection: De Timmerfabriek

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The following review aims to describe my design assignment, research and products from a personal point of view, in order to reflect on the graduation process. This will be done by first giving an introduction to the project followed by a critical reflection on the methodology, design, research and process.

Introduction

My project is part of the studio Heritage & Architecture and focuses on the redevelopment of 'De Timmerfabriek', an industrial warehouse, situated in Belvédère. Belvédère is an urban undeveloped area in Maastricht which provides possibilities to grow and promote the city. The municipality has already started here with redevelopments and tries to transform the abandoned area into an active urban place. New programs like cinema and restaurants have already been established and future plans for student housing, retail and offices must further stimulate this area. De Timmerfabriek is an essential element in this area redevelopment as it is interlocked within this, De Timmerfabriek must therefore be transformed into a public building in order to further stimulate this area.

Currently the building is used by De Muziekgieterij, founded in 2013 as a temporary pop stage. De Muziekgieterij is a small to medium provisionally developed pop stage (± 500 people) but at the same time one of the few popstages in the area of South-Limburg. The lack of a medium or big stages in the province results in high demands which exceeds the supplies of the building. New developments are therefore necessary to provide a viable future for the building. The design assignment will therefore focus on transforming De Timmerfabriek into a public building 'Het Podium van Maastricht'. A big pop stage suited for 1400 people, focusing on an international scope. A design that will aim to keep and enhance the historic character and the qualities of the building. Making a place with an identity and meaning, a place where history has been entrenched.

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

The methodical approach of research at the studio of the chair of Heritage & Architecture shows a focus on developing a historical analysis and use this to support the new design. During the studio the importance of finding and preserving the cultural values of the building and location are constantly questioned and makes me interested in discovering what a place was, is and can be. This resulted in a process of design by research, starting with analyzing the project on different scales, from city to detail. Morphology, infrastructure, society and functions were investigated together with an historic reconstruction of the area. Followed by a more detailed research in the building structure, materials and atmosphere, all done by using various historic images, maps, engravings and literature. I questioned the values of the building, and used the publication of J. Roos (*Discovering the assignment, 2007*) and P. Meurs (*Heritage-based design, 2015*) to learn from their approaches. As the finalization of the analysis approached, new insight into the strengths and weaknesses (cultural value) of the building became more evident. These illustrated the material and immaterial value of the building and needed to be preserved and enhanced in the new design. It gave me more understanding of the possibilities for the new design.

The relationship between research and design.

The redevelopment of De Timmerfabriek focusses on the transformation of an industrial artifact into a pop stage while preserving the historic essential characteristics of the site and the building. This new function inevitably demanded changes to the existing. As stated above, the research into the cultural values is used as a starting point for this. Here I discovered the most valuable aspects of the building which provided a number of backdrops for the design process:

- The important function of the building as industrial magazine in the enormous sphinx company.
- The expressive architecture of the formal front façade and the informal back facade.
- The tectonics of construction and roof.
- The spatial qualities of the interior.
- The potential public space outside and inside the building for the area

But beside the research in the existing I researched the new function in order to merge the building qualities with the new design. For this I researched precedents to discover what others did and to position myself in this. I visited projects related to heritage, such as: C-Mine in Genk, De Hallen in Amsterdam, Strijp-S in Eindhoven. Projects related to the new function: De Effenaar in Eindhoven, Poppodium Grenswerk in Venlo and Het Patronaat in Haarlem. But also projects which combined the two: Energiehuis in Dordrecht, De Kampanje in Den Helder and Théâtre de Liège. This gave me a lot of helpful and practical insight in how to deal with transforming our heritage into a public building. Foremost demonstrating to me the value of the continuation of the old design. This approach became more relevant as the design evolved from the urban scale to the building scale.

In the course of time the project became more complex as the requirements for the new function started to play a big role in the design. The functions in the building attracts large public crowds to different parts of the building, resulting in all kinds of logistic problems, including access and connection, safety and orientation. The activities also demands carefully integration of the building physics, taking into account the issue of noise, and energy use. For all of this it was the assignment to maintain the cultural values of the building.

During the design it became evident that I continuously wanted to preserve the spatial qualities of De Timmerfabriek, and to make the program to be experienced by the visitor. It needed to be possible to experience the separate parts of the program and also the entire program. My ambitions were to create a big space where the user was able to orientate himself in and the creation of a gradual transition from outside to inside in order to connect the outside area with the interior of the building. From the research grew the understanding that the center street – which served as logistic entrance for the train and distribution of products – could be reinterpreted as entrance foyer for the building and to use it to link the different functions of the building. This street gathers the people and functions, and shows the most historic valuable elements of the building. By doing this the inner street not only satisfies the wish for a spatial organization, orientation and cultural value, but also enhances this.

From the inner street the spatial perception of the original complex and the new functions would be revealed in a dynamic, interesting perspective. Unfortunately, in this process of design I got blindfolded for the existing by my own design ideas. I often wanted too much intervention to favor the experience of the public, which resulted in a lack of attention to the story of the past. Fortunately I became aware of this and did a step back. I reviewed my design with careful attention to the existing characteristics. This resulted in the repositioning of the most technical function in a new extension. This made it possible to design these space with more care and in the meantime keeping the existing building more as it is. This extension was the next big challenge in the design task. How to design something that fits the current urban context, the historic building and the new program. An extensive design by research was followed resulted in different options. Eventually I chose the option which best suited my intuition as well as my reason.

In the end more time could be spent on the specific details of the façade to make it more refined. Also the public area around the building could have been made better on the scale of material. And also the question of how the building will look like in the future when the function is gone remains unanswered. It are interesting questions which unfortunately extend beyond this project. The most important question of the project however, is how the new program can be integrated in the building while maintaining the industrial character of the building. I think that this has worked out well in the final design as the building still hold a strong industrial character. Especially the inner street and the functions inside the building makes the visitor experience the building much stronger. The new addition reflects my position within the field of redevelopment and will give the building a new life were not the products of the sphinx are distributed, but the music.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context.

The project is relevant in a wider social context because it addresses two relevant contemporary themes. In the first place because it is a transformation of an existing building with a cultural significance. Second because it is an attempt to revitalize the area of Belvédère and Maastricht with a public building.

Nowadays projects are more focused on the outskirts of cities, expanding their borders, densifying the cores or re-using existing structures. The question of how to deal with the existing structures and how we can re-use them makes this project therefore very relevant. This is also proven by the fact that a large percentage of current design assignments is set within an existing context, or considers an existing building (*Architectuur in Nederland 2014/15, 2015*). Within this we can see a change in the way that heritage is appreciated. People value the history more and want to keep the identity of a place. My project is in this context an example of a potential approach toward these design assignments. I tried to take the most valuable parts of the existing building into account but also allowed adjustments by removing or adding new parts to create a new whole that can facilitate its new functions for a pop stage sufficient. In this process it was important to make architecture that is based on congruence with the existing, not on the difference. The new design becomes part of the whole.

With the transformation of the building it became visible how this function can work in this building and how it activates the area with public activity. The pop stage is a function that will give a boost in this area by adding catering industry, public squares and places for events. It illustrated the possibilities for this area so that it will become part of the historic inner city of Maastricht.