

Between Progress and Tradition

Gendered spaces in Huis Sonneveld

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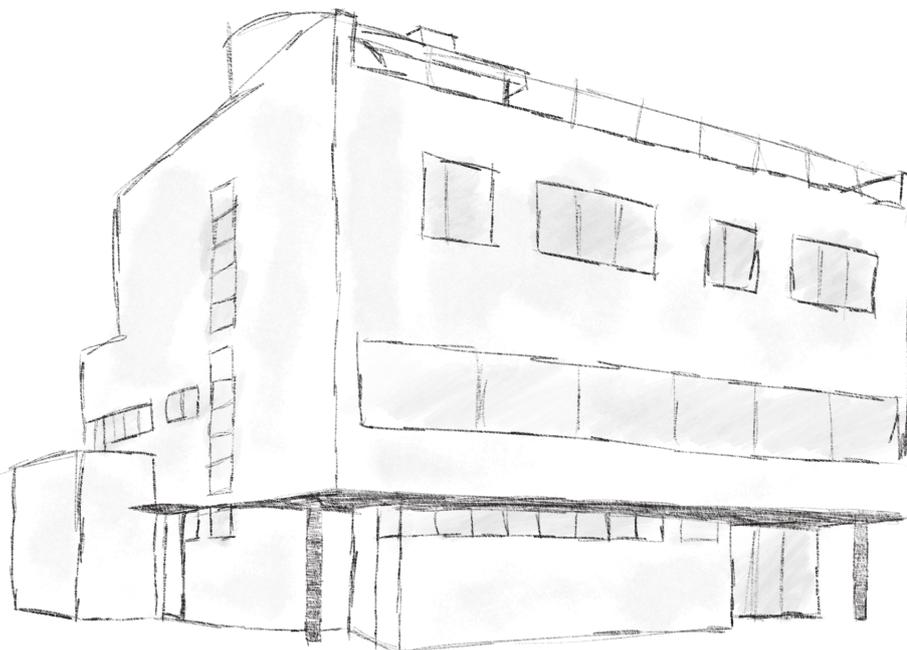
Abstract

This thesis takes a closer look at how the design and layout of Huis Sonneveld, a modernist villa from the 1930s designed by Brinkman and Van der Vlugt, reflects and reinforces the gender roles of that time. The villa was commissioned by Albertus Sonneveld for his wife Gésine and their two daughters. While the house was very modern for its time, it still says a lot about how people viewed the roles of men and women back then.

The research focuses on three main things. First, the gender norms that shaped domestic life in the 1930s. Then the design ideas of Brinkman and Van der Vlugt. And finally, how the layout and features of Huis Sonneveld tell a story about class and gender. Even though the house followed modern ideas like openness, light, and new technology, it also kept some very traditional ideas at the same time.

This becomes quite clear when looking at how the spaces were organized. There was a strong separation between public areas, private family rooms, and service spaces. There were also big differences between Mr. and Mrs. Sonneveld's work areas. And although the servants' quarters were well designed for that period, they still reflected a clear social order. Mrs. Sonneveld was very involved in running the home and used the modern systems, but her role was still mostly tied to domestic life.

In the end, Huis Sonneveld shows how a home can look modern but still carry old values. It proves that architecture does more than reflect style. It also reflects what people expected from each other, especially when it comes to gender and class.



Preface

Dear reader,

Before you lies my history thesis on gendered spaces in Huis Sonneveld. Over the past few months, I've had the pleasure of researching this fascinating topic. I proudly consider myself a feminist, and whenever I get the chance to work on a project that empowers women, I'll gladly take it with both hands.

But alongside my interest in women's rights, I'm also a true *Rotterdammer*. My whole family lives here, and I grew up in this city myself. I have a deep love for this amazing place, known for its unique and versatile architecture. Being able to combine these two topics, feminism and Rotterdam, has truly been a joy.

I hope reading this thesis brings you as much enjoyment as writing it brought me.

Wishing you much reading pleasure,

Lianne Bronder
Rotterdam, 17 April 2025

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Figure 1: Huis Sonneveld

Introduction

A good example of Dutch modernist architecture is the villa Huis Sonneveld by the architects Brinkman and Van der Vlugt. Huis Sonneveld serves as an example of how gender roles shaped the design of luxury villas in the 1930s. It was commissioned by Albertus Sonneveld, director of the Van Nelle Factory (Groenendijk & Vollaard, 2023). He designed the villa for his wife, Gésine Sonneveld, and their children. The villa was very innovative for its time, but even though it represented progress, it also still reflects the gender roles and societal norms of the 1930s. The design and spatial organization of Huis Sonneveld can actually provide insight into the gender roles and expectations that prevailed in the Netherlands during the 1930s.

The early 20th century was known as a time of cultural and social transformation. Modernist architecture started to arise and could be recognized by the use of clean lines, open spaces, and their lack of decorative styles (Van Rossem, 2008). Despite the architectural and societal progress of the time, traditional gender roles remained deeply ingrained in society. Men and women had distinct roles assigned in public life as well as private life. The role of the woman was mostly centred around domestic and caregiving responsibilities, while the role of men was centred around intellectual, professional, and formal activities. Inside the home, these roles were reflected in the design and division of living spaces, for instance, the clear separation between public and private areas of homes.

This thesis explores how different architectural elements of Huis Sonneveld reinforce gender expectations through its spatial organization, interior design, and room divisions. It also takes a closer look at Gésine Sonneveld's role in shaping daily life within this modernist setting. The connection between architecture, modernism, and gender roles will be examined, which brings up the main research question of this thesis: *'How do the spatial and design elements of Huis Sonneveld reflect and reinforce gender norms?'* To answer this, the study first examines how gender roles were perceived in the 1930s and how these ideas influenced villa design. It will then look at how Brinkman and Van der Vlugt incorporated these expectations into their work. At last, it will examine the house itself, Mrs. Sonneveld's lifestyle, and her influence in the house.

The study will be built on feminist architectural critiques, modernist theories, and historical analysis. Scholars like Dolores Hayden and Sarah Ahrentzen have extensively examined gender roles in domestic architecture. As well, Alice T. Friedman's work on women's influence in modernist homes offers a useful perspective for understanding how women shaped their own homes. In addition, primary sources like blueprints and historical records from Brinkman and Van der Vlugt allow for a deeper exploration of the architects' intentions. By using an interdisciplinary approach to conduct the research, it will use archival materials, site visits, and literature reviews to determine how the architectural choices at Huis Sonneveld reflected societal norms.

By placing Huis Sonneveld in a historical and theoretical context, this research will contribute to ongoing discussions about gender. There is a gap in the research when it comes to gender norms and their relation to luxury villas in the 1930s. This thesis aims to fill that gap by offering a new framework and drawing new connections. Looking at gendered spaces in Huis Sonneveld helps us understand how modernist architecture wasn't just about progress; it also reflected and, at times, reinforced traditional social norms.



Figure 2: Albertus and Gésine Sonneveld with their children Puck and Gé

Chapter 1: Gender and Domestic Spaces in the 1930s

1.1 Societal Conditions

The 1930s were highly impacted by the Great Depression, which had a major impact on daily life. Not just financially, but also in terms of social norms and values (Hayden, 1981). As a reaction to the crisis governments were trying different policies, and culturally, people were trying to balance old traditions with new and thus creating modern ideas. These shifts had a direct influence on gender roles and how families were organised inside the home.

Even though there were some changes in gender expectations, women were still largely expected to focus on household duties (Hayden, 1981). In the early 20th century, feminists had fought for economic recognition of domestic labour, but their efforts took a hit in 1931 when the Hoover Commission Report on Home Building and Home Ownership dismissed these ideas. This was a big setback for those pushing for more collective and socialized domestic life (Hayden, 1981). At the same time, companies encouraged skilled, white, male workers to settle in suburban homes, reinforcing a stable and conservative lifestyle where the woman took care of the home.

Back then, a married woman with a job was seen as something unusual. If she was working, people assumed it was either because her family was going through a rough patch financially or because she was putting her own wants ahead of what was considered her "real" duty. The message was pretty clear: working was just a phase for women, not something they were entitled to. Once they "grew up" or settled down, they were expected to return home where they belonged (Strom, 1983).

There was also this harsh belief floating around that married women in the workforce were part of the reason unemployment was so high. Some even pushed for married teachers and government workers to be fired and their jobs should naturally go to men or unmarried women instead (Strom, 1983).

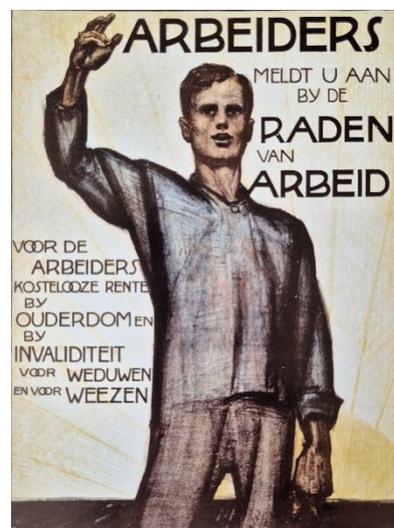


Figure 3: "WORKERS please register with the LABOR COUNCILS"

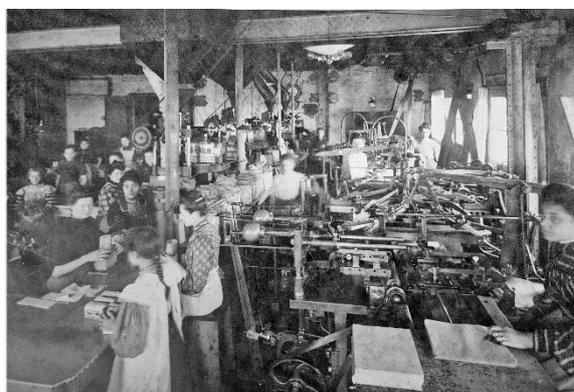


Figure 4: Working girls packaging tea and coffee

While more women were getting paid jobs, their roles in public life were still fairly limited (Hayden, 1981). The dominant social narrative continued to present women primarily as wives, mothers, and homemakers (Friedman, 2006). Even decades later, the picture of the full-time housewife and the image of the perfect Victorian home kept persisting, showing just how deeply ingrained these gender norms were (Hayden, 1981).



Figure 5: The New Woman – Wash Day

1.2 The Domestic Role of a Woman

In the 1930s, the expectation that women would handle household tasks like cooking, cleaning, childcare, and managing the home, was still very much prominent. This work was largely unpaid and performed within the home, which was considered the "spatial boundary of woman's sphere." The "economic boundary" of this sphere was unpaid domestic labour, were it remained invisible within the larger cash economy (Hayden, 1981).

That said, technological advancements and modernist thinking did start to change how these responsibilities played out, especially in wealthier households. New household appliances made daily chores much easier and more efficient. In luxury homes, these innovations were more easily available, reducing the physical burden of household tasks, though they didn't eliminate the expectation that women would be the ones doing them (Hayden, 1981).

Interestingly, not all women fit into the traditional housewife mould. A new group of independent women started to emerge, particularly unmarried or independent women. Some commissioned modern homes that suited more to their lifestyles (Ahrentzen, 2003). These houses were often designed for efficiency and functionality, marking a shift away from the standard domestic setup (Friedman, 2006). This change wasn't just conceptual, it was expressed within the modernist architectural movement (Ahrentzen, 2003).

1.3 How Women Shaped the Home

Even though they weren't always given credit, women played a big role in shaping their homes. Gender norms dictated the function of different rooms, but since women were the ones actually using these spaces daily, their influence was significant. Feminist research highlights how women's experiences and needs translated into real architectural choices (Ahrentzen, 2003).

In high-end housing, female clients had a particularly noticeable impact, especially as modernist architecture took off. Friedman (2006) states that "independent women clients" were "powerful catalysts for innovation in domestic projects during the modern movement." They worked together with architects, making decisions that reflected their own values and ways of living (Ahrentzen, 2003).

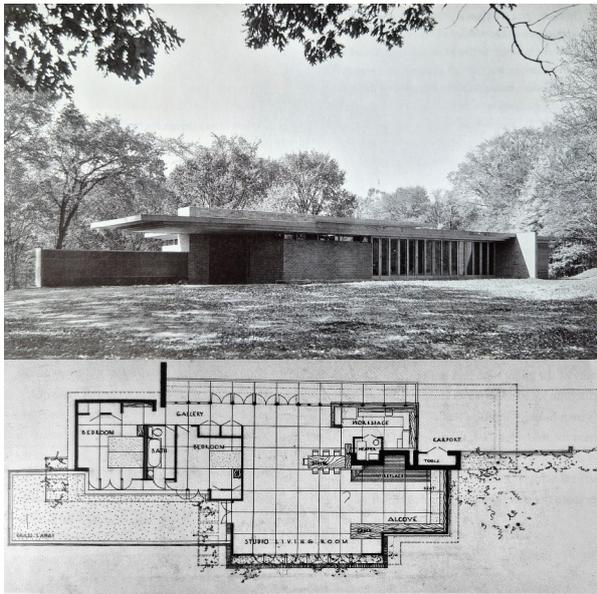


Figure 6: Goetsch-Winckler House

One well-known example is the home designed for Alma Goetsch and Kathrine Winckler, both were working women. They wanted a house that was stylish and practical, leading to a design that minimized traditional kitchen and dining areas, an unique choice at the time. Another example is the Rietveld Schröder House, where Truus Schröder was actively involved in the design process. She incorporated her feminist beliefs into the home's layout and was engaged in discussions about women's roles in society, as seen in her work with *De werkende vrouw* (The Working Woman) (Friedman, 2006).

This raises an interesting question: Did these modernist home designs actually challenge gender roles, or did they just actually reinforce them in a way? While some homes were designed for independent women and didn't use traditional layouts. The general trend in housing still reinforced the idea of the woman as the primary homemaker. Even when new technologies reduced the physical labour of housework, the overall expectation that women managed the home remained. So, while modernist villas introduced some changes, the dominant architectural trends of the 1930s largely upheld traditional gender roles (Hayden, 1981).



Figure 7: Rietveld Schröder House

1.4 Conclusion

Although the 1930s brought change through new technologies and modernist ideas, the home remained one of the most traditional spaces. Women were expected to take care of the household, but at the same time, they were also quietly shaping it, influencing layout, design, and even architectural decisions. Though their efforts often went unnoticed, women played a crucial role in the functionality of the home. This shows that domestic spaces are shaped by everyday routines and responsibilities. To trace how gendered assumptions were woven into the architecture itself, the next chapter turns to the work of Brinkman and Van der Vlugt, the architects behind Huis Sonneveld, and how their designs reflected both modernist values and social norms.

Chapter 2: Brinkman and Van der Vlugt

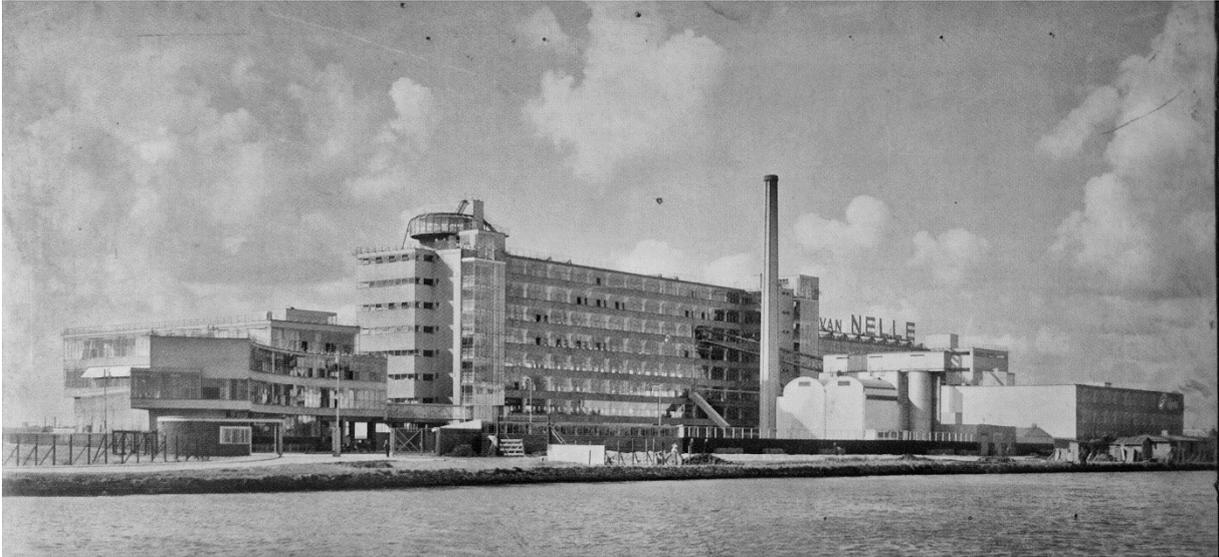


Figure 8: Van Nelle Factory

2.1 Brinkman and Van der Vlugt

The architectural firm Brinkman & Van der Vlugt played an important role in the shaping of modernist architecture in the Netherlands. While their famous projects, like the Van Nelle Factory, Feijenoord Stadium, and the white villas of Rotterdam, have been extensively covered, there wasn't really literature available about the firm itself for a long time. The first real effort came in 1983 with the exhibition catalog *Van der Vlugt, Architect, 1894-1936*, put together by Joris Molenaar and Jeroen Geurst after some initial archive research. Then in 2000, Molenaar got the opportunity to restore the Sonneveld House, a "superb example of luxurious modern urban living in the 1930s", which brought a spotlight back on the firm back (Molenaar, 2012).



Figure 9: Leen van der Vlugt

Leen van der Vlugt started his own practice around 1919, getting his first residential projects through his father's business connections. His early housing projects, like the residential blocks on Van Citterstraat and Beukelsdijk (1921-1922), caught the attention of architect Jan Wils. Wils saw them as important contributions to Rotterdam's modern residential architecture. He even pointed out their similarities (and differences) compared to the work of J.J.P. Oud (Molenaar, 2012). Around the same time, Van der Vlugt began collaborating with Jan Gerko Wiebenga, a specialist in concrete construction. Together, they designed projects like the St. Lucia Institute and the Technical and Industrial School in Groningen (1922), considered one of the first Dutch buildings in the Nieuwe Bouwen style (Adriaansz, 2001). This project even caught the eye of Kees van der Leeuw from Van Nelle (Zwikstra, 2020).

Michiel Brinkman (1873-1925), on the other hand, had already built a strong reputation in architecture before he teamed up with Leen van der Vlugt (1894-1936). His early career was focused on industrial and commercial buildings, but by the 1920s, he had also designed some villas and country houses. One of his major commissions came in 1913 when he was tasked with renovating the Van Nelle factory. From that point on, he became the company's go-to architect, handling various projects. His portfolio also included churches, offices, clubhouses, and hospitals, with notable works like the Dutch Reformed Koninginnekerk (1904) and the De Maas Rowing and Sailing Society clubhouse (1908). His country house *Dennenrode* (1922) was another key project (Molenaar, 2012).

In April 1925, Brinkman & Van der Vlugt officially started their own firm, merging Michiel Brinkman's established practice with Van der Vlugt's newer office (Molenaar, 2012). Sadly that same year Michiel Brinkman passed away. His son Jan Brinkman, who was studying civil engineering at the time, stepped in to take over. From then on, Van der Vlugt led the design work while Jan Brinkman focused on the technical aspects and client relations. The firm kept working on existing commissions, especially for the Rotterdam harbor and industrial sector. The biggest of these was the new Van Nelle factory (Zwikstra, 2020). In 1927 the firm moved to Nieuwe Haven and later relocating to Westerkade in the late 1930s (Molenaar, 2012).

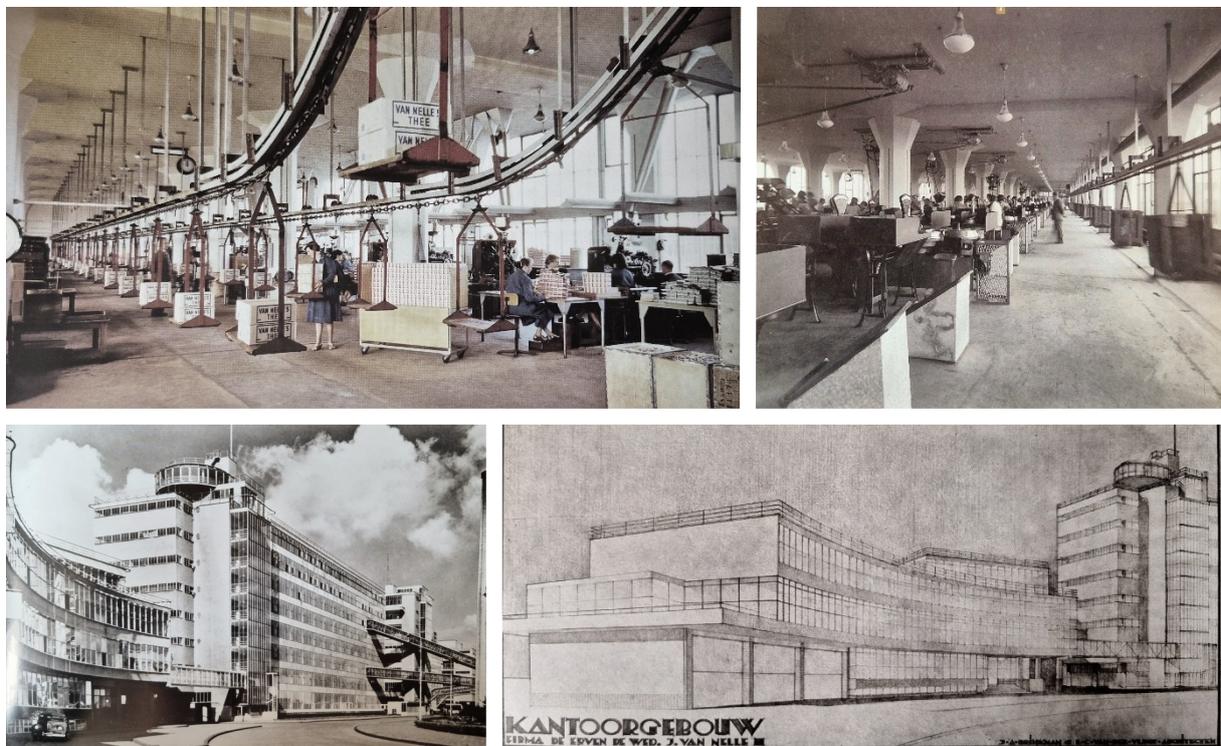


Figure 10: Van Nelle Factory

2.2 Their Design Principles

Brinkman & Van der Vlugt were fully committed to modernist architecture, particularly the *Nieuwe Zakelijkheid* (New Objectivity) and the International Style (Giersbergen & Spork, 2016). Their number one priority was mostly functionality. Everything in their buildings was designed with a purpose in mind (Molenaar, 2012). This was especially important in industrial projects like the Van Nelle factory, where they created an efficient and healthy workspace inspired by Kees van der Leeuw's social ideals (Groenendijk & Vollaard, 2023).



Figure 11: Shared facilities in the Justus van Effen complex

Another big theme in their designs was light and openness. They used steel and concrete construction skeletons and combined them with large glass surfaces. This way there was as much natural light as possible to create a sense of space. The Van Nelle factory's glass curtain walls are a good example of this (Zwikstra, 2020). They were also obsessed with efficient use of space and materials. You can see this in the Justus van Effen complex, where central staircases and shared facilities helped reduce unnecessary construction (Molenaar, 2012).

In their residential projects, these principles translated into modern living spaces focused on comfort and hygiene. The Sonneveld House, for instance, featured cutting-edge domestic technology, clean design details, and a logical layout (Adriaansz, 2001). They were also big on maximizing sunlight exposure, integrating roof gardens, and embracing open floor plans, ideas that echoed Le Corbusier's theories (Zwikstra, 2020).

Regarding gender roles, their buildings reflected the norms of the time. In the Van Nelle factory men and women had separate bathrooms and even separate staircases. This highlights the social conventions of the era (Zwikstra, 2020). In their residential designs, the separation of servants' quarters from the main living areas followed these traditional hierarchies. Kitchens and service spaces were carefully planned, clearly considering the roles of women and household staff. Features like a dedicated "knitting room" in the De Bruyn House suggest they tailored spaces to specific gendered activities (Molenaar, 2012).

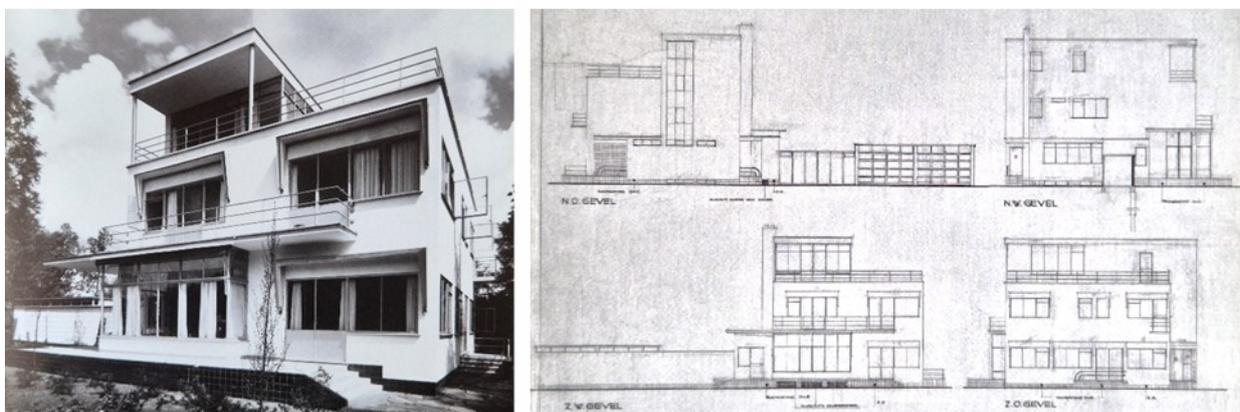


Figure 12: De Bruyn House

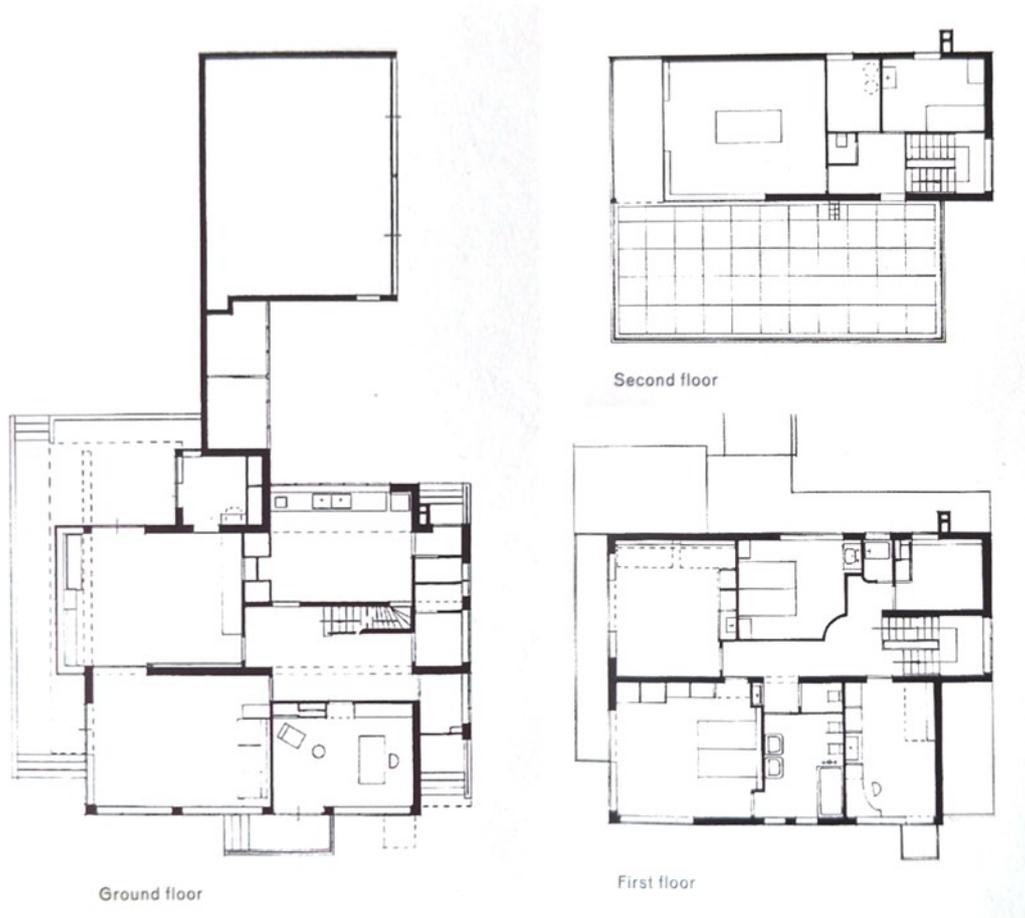


Figure 13: Floor plans of De Bruyn House

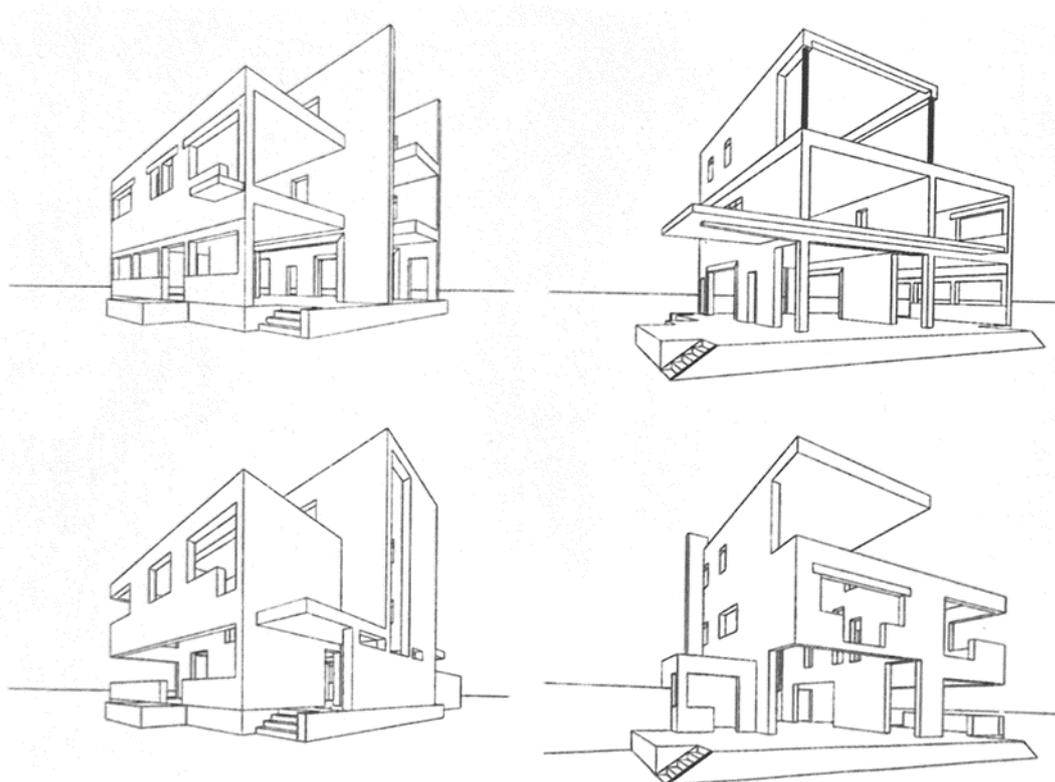


Figure 14: De Bruyn House

2.3 Their Architectural Approach

Brinkman & Van der Vlugt's approach blended modernist aesthetics with practical and technical considerations. Their work in industrial design, especially for Van Nelle, heavily influenced their broader architectural philosophy (Molenaar, 2012). They embraced new technologies like steel-framed construction, concrete, and innovative materials. They even used steel tubing for furniture (Zwikstra, 2020). The Sonneveld House for example, was designed around the flexibility of steel-framed construction. This made horizontal strip windows possible and an open floor plan (Molenaar, 2012).

Their designs were also shaped by the earlier mentioned social changes of the 1930s. There was growing interest in improving living conditions and embracing modern lifestyles, which can be seen in the Sonneveld House's focus on hygiene, comfort, and luxury, essentially a *machine à habiter* (Adriaansz, 2001). They were very precise with details, from spatial organization to furniture choices (often working with Gispen) and color schemes (Molenaar, 2012).

If you compare the Sonneveld House to the Van Nelle Factory, you can see common themes: both prioritize function, both use modern materials like steel and glass and both embrace new construction techniques (Adriaansz, 2001). That said, they express modernism differently. The Van Nelle factory is all about transparency and industrial efficiency. No unnecessary decoration. Sonneveld House, while modernist, is more refined, with a richer color palette and more luxurious materials, fitting for a high-end family home (Zwikstra, 2020).



Figure 15: The Van Nelle Factory

2.4 Conclusion

Brinkman and Van der Vlugt were important figures in Dutch modernist architecture. Their designs focused on functionality, openness, and new materials, but they also included the social structures of the 1930s. In both their industrial and residential projects, you can see how space was divided by purpose, class, and even gender. Take for instance homes like the De Bruyn House. Certain rooms were clearly meant for specific roles like a knitting room or separate servants' areas. Even as the architecture was progressive, it remained tethered to traditional expectations around gender and labor within the home.. These tensions become even more visible when we take a closer look at Huis Sonneveld itself. In the next chapter, the focus shifts to the layout and lived experience inside the home, especially how Mrs. Sonneveld navigated her role within this modern, but still structured space

Chapter 3: Huis Sonneveld



Figure 16: Mrs. Sonneveld, Mr. Sonneveld and Mrs. Sonneveld with her daughters Puck and Gé

3.1 Mrs. Sonneveld

Mr. Sonneveld often had to travel for extended periods of time. Mrs. Sonneveld was in charge of running the household while her husband was away, assisted by two live-in servants (Familie Sonneveld, n.d.). Jeanne Schreuder, who started working for the family in 1931 at the age of nineteen, and Josephine 'Finie' Müller, originally from Germany. They handled the daily chores. (Familie Sonneveld, n.d.).

Mrs. Sonneveld took an active role in managing the household. She personally handled grocery orders and planned the family's meals. She had practical mindset which could be seen for instance in her choice of a gas stove instead of the electric models promoted in the current advertisements. Gas was simply cheaper and faster (Familie Sonneveld, n.d.). This decision reflected her preference for efficiency and cost-effectiveness. She liked to maintain a clean and tidy home, a quality she shared with her daughters (Adriaansz, 2001).

Mrs. Sonneveld was aware of her social position as the wife of a Van Nelle factory director and upheld a lifestyle that reflected it. She had a taste for luxury, often seen wearing jewellery, a fur-collared coat and a hat when going out. Moving into the new villa allowed her to engage with Rotterdam's cultural elite and keep up her role as a director's wife (Familie Sonneveld, n.d.).

While managing the household and overseeing the servants might be seen as traditional roles, Mrs. Sonneveld embraced the modern conveniences of the new home, such as the telephone and the call-bell system (Familie Sonneveld, n.d.). Her practical nature most likely made her appreciate the efficiency and ease the modernist designs offered (Adriaansz, 2001). While she fulfilled conventional roles within the home, her embrace of advanced technology and a functional layout provided a new kind of autonomy. The structured and cohesive interior design of the house also suited her "rigid personality" (Adriaansz, 2001).

Mrs. Sonneveld left her own distinct mark, one of precision, ritual, and a deep commitment to propriety. Tea wasn't simply offered, it was served by her from a dedicated trolley, as a point of pride and principle. Cleanliness mattered. She was known to keep the glass shower door spotless with no streak or smudge left behind. Yet her strictness had a softness in moments. After the bombing of Rotterdam, she took coffee and tea out to those in need, serving from the less precious china stored in the garage. Despite her generosity, she was reportedly very strict with the maids, insisting on thorough daily cleaning and personally inspecting their work. Interestingly, at dinner, she would grill the meat herself because she didn't trust the maids to do it properly (Huis Sonneveld, 2025).



Figure 17: The glass shower door, tea trolley and gas stove

3.2 Layout and Design

Huis Sonneveld's layout was a reflection of modernist principles (Familie Sonneveld, n.d.). The ground floor functioned as a reception area and included a studio for the daughters, a double garage and the servants' quarters, which had their own entrance. This ensured a clear separation from the family's living spaces which was ideal for privacy for larger households.

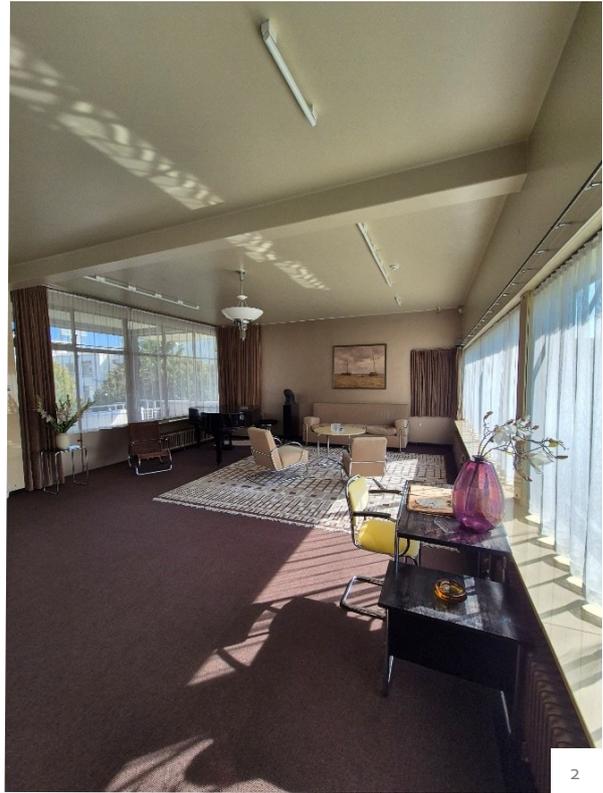
The main living areas were on the first floor. This was a modern concept because it provided better views of the surroundings (Molenaar, 2012). This level also featured an open-plan space combining multiple functions like the salon, music room, veranda, dining room, boudoir and smoking room. Older villa's would have separate rooms for each. Mr. Sonneveld's desk and library were tucked into one corner, while Mrs. Sonneveld had her own writing desk in its own area overlooking the lawn (Adriaansz, 2001). The kitchen was also positioned on this floor (Familie Sonneveld, n.d.).

The second floor housed the family's private quarters, including two large double bedrooms with a shared bathroom, a guest room and two single children's bedrooms with another bathroom. A big roof terrace sat above this level (Molenaar, 2012). The house had a vertical organization with public spaces below and private areas above. It was a quite different from the Sonneveld family's previous 19th-century herenhuis which had a more compartmentalized layout (Familie Sonneveld, n.d.). The new arrangement with its open plan and emphasis on natural light, signalled a shift toward modern living (Adriaansz, 2001).

Figure 18: Pictures from Huis Sonneveld



1



2



3



4

- 1: Front of the house with the main entrance (right) and the service entrance (left)
- 2: Living Room
- 3: Kitchen
- 4: Studio

The vertical layout of the house clearly defined different zones within the home with public, private, and service areas. The ground floor acted as a semi-public and service-oriented space, the first floor as the primary living and entertaining area, and the second floor as the family's private retreat. The separate servants' entrance and quarters reinforced the societal norms regarding the distinction between household staff and family (Adriaansz, 2001).



Figure 19: Sections of Huis Sonneveld

3.3 Distinctive Features

Huis Sonneveld stood out for its modernist architecture and carefully designed interior (Adriaansz, 2001). The villa's white stuccoed walls and steel window frames characterised its Nieuwe Bouwen aesthetic, fitting seamlessly into the Dijkzigt villa park (Familie Sonneveld, n.d.).

The interior was designed as one cohesive whole by the architects. Built-in furniture played a major role with pieces designed by the architects and produced by Allan & Co. The house was largely furnished with series-produced steel-tube furniture by W.H. Gispen & Co., inspired by *De Stijl* artist Bart van der Leck. The colour scheme was devised by Van der Vlugt and emphasized earthy tones in the living areas and coloured accents in each room (Molenaar, 2012).

Inside of the home, several details stand out that reflect the family's lifestyle, values, and the architectural choices of the period. In the studio, for example, the parquet flooring was chosen so the daughters could dance freely. Music played an important role in the household, with speakers installed throughout the home. However, the radio, which controlled all the speakers, was located in the daughters' studio, highlighting their influence over the musical atmosphere in the house (Huis Sonneveld, 2025).



Figure 20: Huis Sonneveld

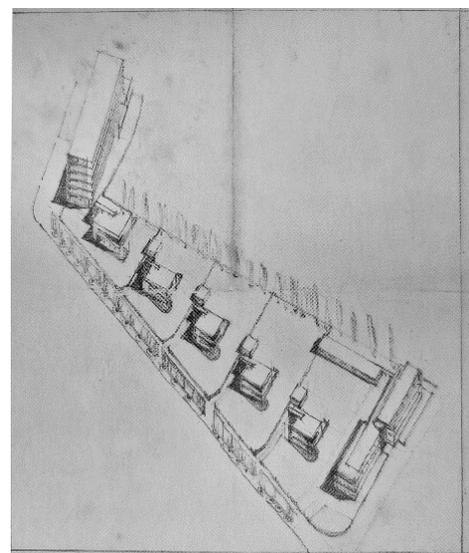
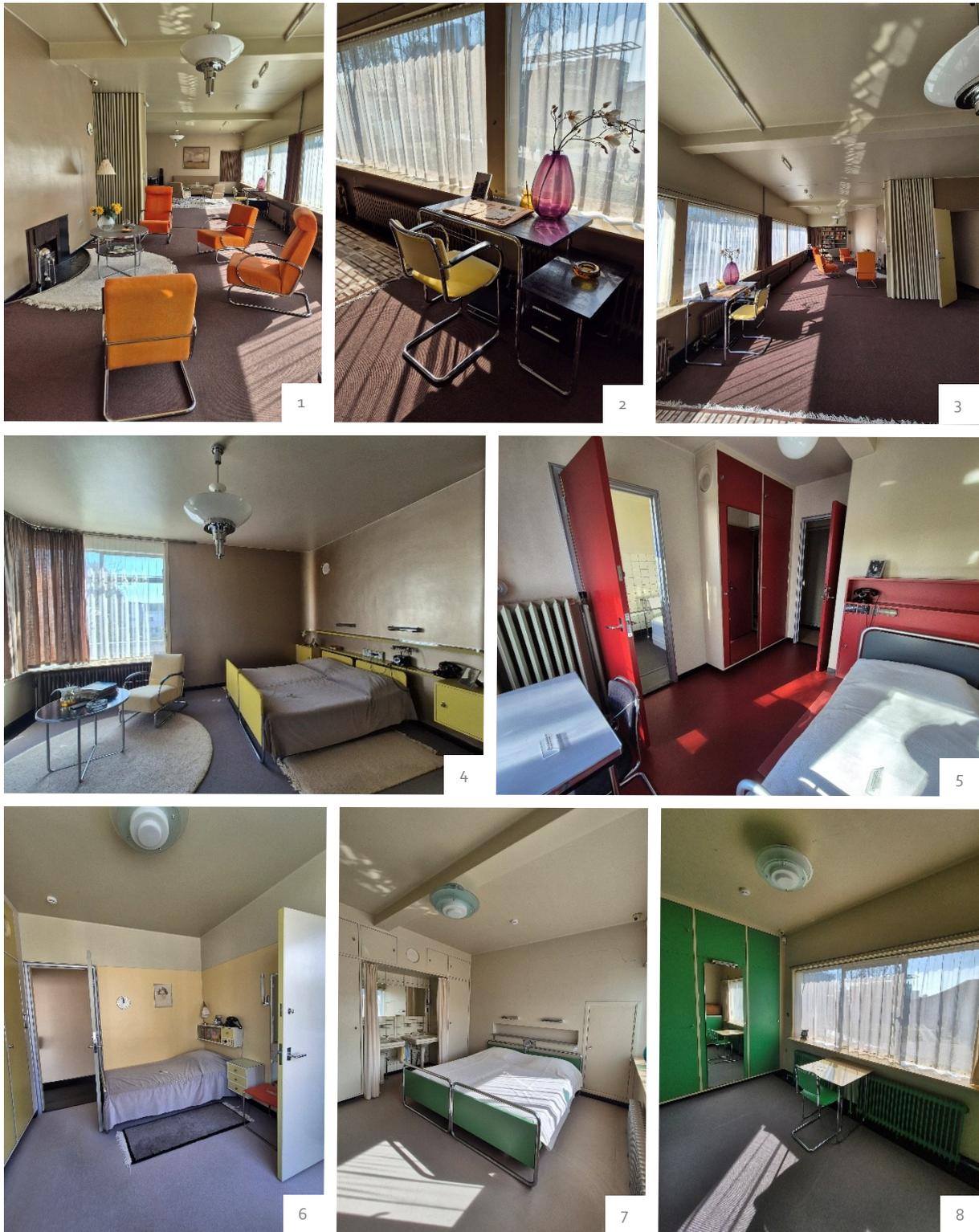


Figure 21: Dijkzigt villa park

Figure 22: Pictures from Huis Sonneveld



- 1: Chairs in Mr. Sonneveld's office
- 2: Mrs. Sonneveld's desk
- 3: Mrs. Sonneveld's desk and Mr. Sonneveld's office
- 4: Main bedroom
- 5: Maids bedroom
- 6: Puck's bedroom
- 7: Guest bedroom
- 8: Mr. and Mrs. sonnevelds dressing room

There's a telling contrast between Mr. and Mrs. Sonneveld's workspaces. His was formal and expansive, complete with the only fireplace in the house. The seating was as much about symbolism as comfort: two chairs with high backs for men, and two low-backed for women. Hers, on the other hand, was modest, a small writing desk tucked into the living room, no larger than the desk in their walk-in closet (Huis Sonneveld, 2025).

The servants' quarters reveal even more about the invisible architecture of social norms at the time. Both rooms were painted red, a colour linked to domestic service, rooted in old etiquette. Yet these rooms were nearly as spacious as the youngest daughter Gé's bedroom. This reflected Mr. Sonneveld's belief in equal living conditions for all members of the household, although this principle seemingly did not extend to himself. Mr. Sonneveld occupied by far the largest bedroom in the house, complete with a private bathroom and walk-in closet. His study, too, surpassed the size of all the other bedrooms. Even the guest room, reserved for visitors of importance, was more spacious than the rooms of the ladies of the house (Huis Sonneveld, 2025).

The house was also equipped with several technological innovations for its time. It had a modern telephone system, a call-bell system with indicator lamps to signal where staff was needed and built-in radios in various rooms. Including the bedrooms and servants' quarters. The kitchen was a "paragon of functionalist design" (Familie Sonneveld, n.d.). The bathrooms featured high-end foreign sanitary, including a multi-spray shower cabin in the master bathroom (Molenaar, 2012). Even the servants had a shared bathroom with a bathtub which was considered a luxury (Adriaansz, 2001). A discreet bell system at the dining table allowed Mrs. Sonneveld to call for assistance from the kitchen during dinners (Familie Sonneveld, n.d.). The house also included a service lift for transporting food and chutes for laundry and waste disposal and built-in sunscreens provided shade for all the windows (Zwikstra, 2020).

Together, these elements made Huis Sonneveld a *machine à habiter*. A carefully planned and technologically advanced home that maximized the latest developments in materials, installations, and building physics (Molenaar, 2012). While features like separate servants' quarters and a call-bell system reinforced traditional domestic roles, the overall design emphasized efficiency, modern technology, and a forward-thinking approach to everyday living.

Figure 23: Floorplans from Huis Sonneveld



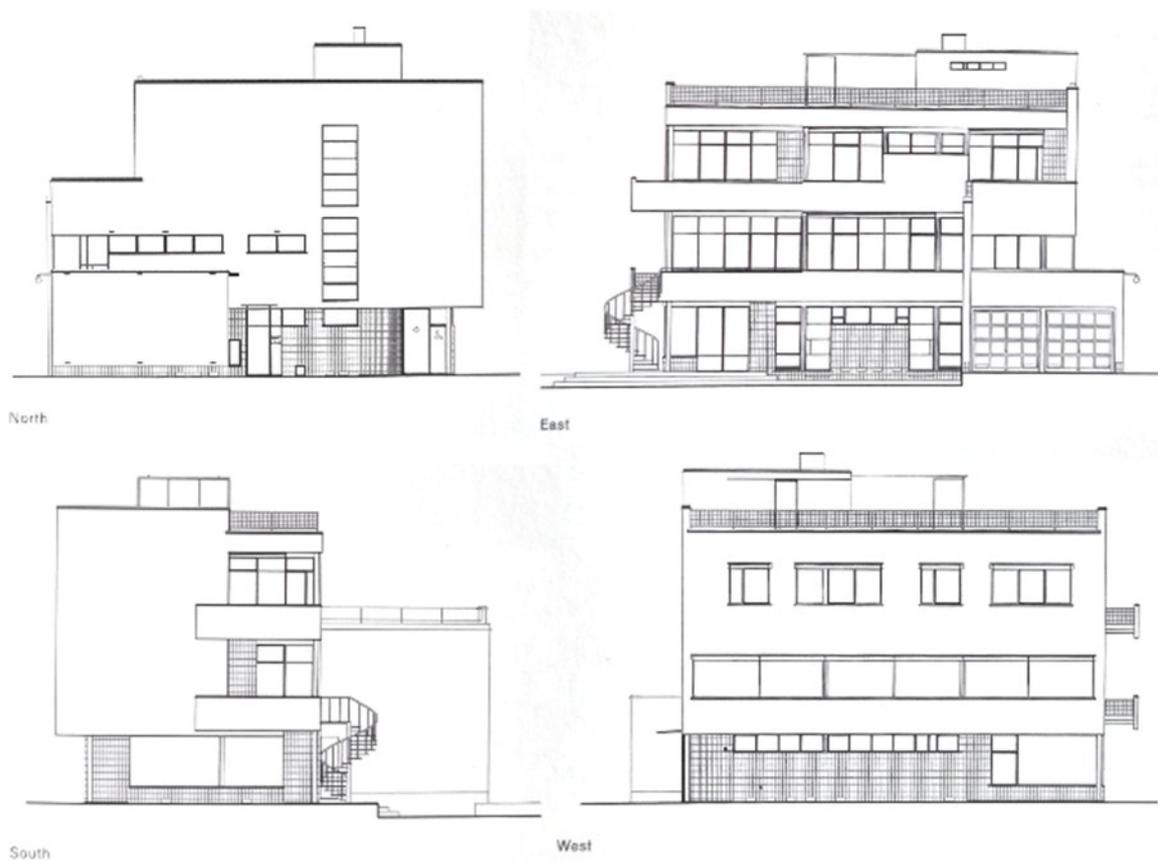


Figure 24: Elevations from Huis Sonneveld

3.4 Conclusion

Huis Sonneveld is a good example of modernist design, progress, comfort, and technological efficiency. But it also upheld existing social structures. This can be seen in the separation of public and private spaces, the placement of the servants' quarters, and even the size of individual bedrooms. They all told a story about class and gender. Mrs. Sonneveld lived a life that fit many traditional roles, but she also used the house in practical and sometimes personal ways that show her own preferences and values. Whether it was grilling the meat herself or carefully choosing a gas stove over electric, she left her mark on how the home was lived in. Even the smallest details speak volumes: the strictness of the cleaning schedule, the tea trolley, the contrast between her modest workspace and his more prominent one. These elements illustrate how architecture became a vessel for reinforcing social norms. In the final chapter, these insights will come together to answer the main research question: *'how do the spatial and design elements of Huis Sonneveld reflect and reinforce gender norms?'*

Chapter 4: Conclusion

4.1 Conclusion

The main research question in this study was '*How do the spatial and design elements of Huis Sonneveld reflect and reinforce gender norms?*'. By examining the societal conditions of the time, the design principles of Brinkman and Van der Vlugt, and the specific layout and features of Huis Sonneveld, it becomes clear that the house radiates modernist ideals but it also enforces the social structures of its time.

In 1930s Netherlands gender roles were quite clear. Women belonged in the home and men in the public sphere. These expectations could be seen in the architectural design. Even modernist architects like Brinkman and Van der Vlugt, despite their progressive vision, reflected these norms in their work. Whether it was factories or private homes, spaces were shaped around gendered divisions and roles.

Huis Sonneveld offers a glimpse into the balance between progress and tradition. The villa's layout was clearly divided into different zones: the ground floor reserved for formal reception, the first for living and entertaining, and the top floor for private family quarters. This vertical organization looks rational and modern. But beneath it, the design subtly enforces separation of function, of status, and yes, of gender. The live-in staff, for instance, had their own entrance, clearly delineated zones, and their own color-coded rooms.

Furthermore, a closer examination on individual spaces reveals even more. Mr. Sonneveld had a large, formal study, complete with fireplace and heavy furniture. Mrs. Sonneveld, on the other hand, was given a small writing desk placed not in a private office but in a communal living area. His space: controlled, impressive, closed. Hers: exposed, modest, shared. The difference in room sizes between Mr. Sonneveld and the "ladies of the house", the guest room's prominence, and even the red-painted servants' rooms, all point to embedded social norms within the architectural details.

Despite these reflections of traditional gender roles, the sources also reveal Mrs. Sonneveld's active role in managing the household and her embrace of modern conveniences. She made practical decisions like choosing a gas stove over an electric one, managing the house with precision, and embracing modern technology like the telephone and the call-bell system. Yes, these tools may have reinforced her role as domestic manager, but they also allowed her a form of control and efficiency. So, her role, while shaped by the architecture, was also shaped by her own decisions within it.

What does all this tell us? Huis Sonneveld is not just a symbol of modern Dutch design. It is also a physical narrative of the time in which it was built. Within its walls, progress and tradition lived side by side. And while Mrs. Sonneveld played a significant role in shaping the home's day-to-day life, the architecture around her showcases the collision of gender, space, and power in early 20th-century domestic life.

4.2 Reflection

During the research, other topics came up that couldn't be included but might be interesting for future research. Brinkman and Van der Vlugt designed many villas that were in some ways similar to Huis Sonneveld. Huis Sonneveld is a special case because it has been preserved in the same state it was in when it was first designed. Since then, societal roles have changed a lot, and so has the design of luxury homes. The other villas by Brinkman and Van der Vlugt have been renovated and adjusted to modern standards. A nice continuation of this research could be looking into how those villas have changed over time: what exactly has changed, and how would Huis Sonneveld have looked if it hadn't been preserved?

Another topic that would be nice to explore further is the impact of the interbellum. Huis Sonneveld was built between two wars, but what happened afterward? How did the Second World War impact gender roles and villa design?

Lastly, an interesting research topic to expand on is the role of the servants' spaces. How were service areas designed in wealthy homes, and what can that tell us about gendered labour, class, and visibility?

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