

A theatre merges with a pop music stage in the heart of Amsterdam

Designing on square centimeters

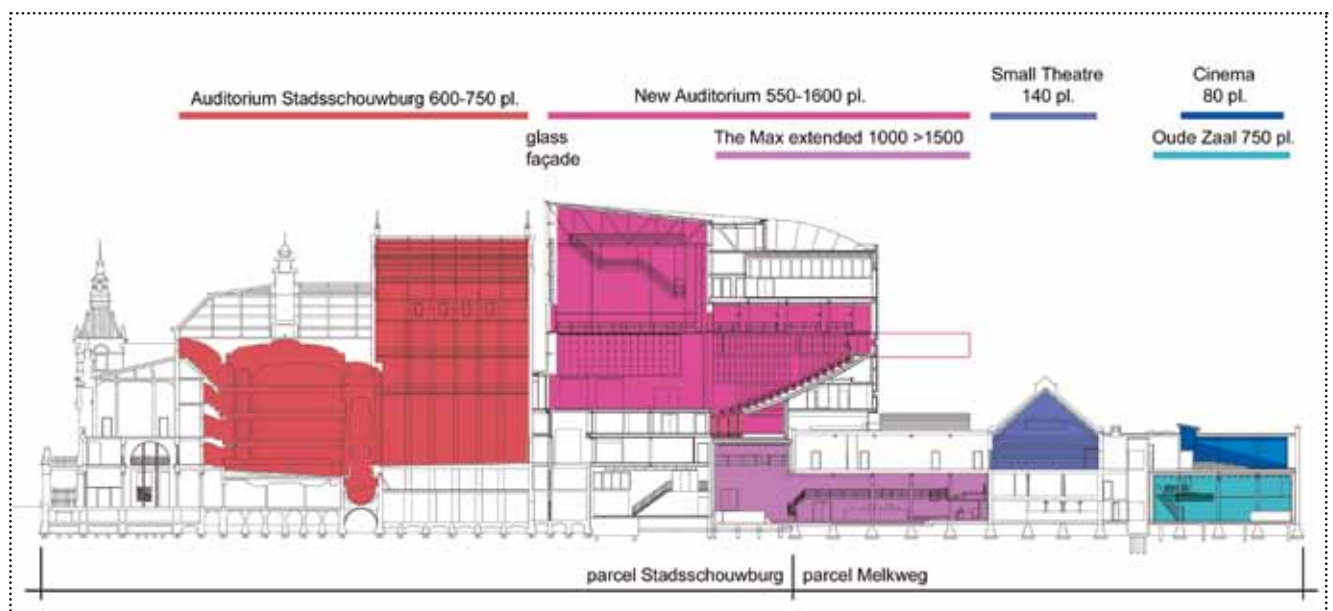
For the Dutch exhibit at the PQ 2011 the architects of Oistat Netherlands have chosen one project by Jonkman Klinkhamer Architects: the extension and renovation of the Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam and pop music stage the Melkweg. The exhibit focuses on how the old and new buildings in the middle of Amsterdam have been harmonized, on the multifunctional character of the centre that has emerged, and on the interaction and connection with

the urban environment. In his design, architect Jim Klinkhamer had to take into account the interests and artistic needs of three quite different users: the Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam, which is the main theatre in Amsterdam, the in-house theatre company Toneelgroep Amsterdam and the pop music centre Melkweg. Major challenges were the very limited space that was available - this was designing and constructing on square centimeters. Especially the new

Raboozaal, the rehearsal studios and the office spaces are a truly sensational design and architectural achievement.

Plan development

It was Cor Schlösser, manager of the Melkweg, who invited architect Jim Klinkhamer to find a solution for two apparently unsolvable problems: extending the Stadsschouwburg with a complete new auditorium, and at the same time expand the largest concert





The new theatre hall 'suspended in air', on the right the entrance of the Melkweg | PHOTO: © JONKMAN KLINKHAMER |

hall of the Melkweg, the Max, to bring its capacity from 1000 to 1500 persons. Both buildings were lacking space for extensions. Klinkhamer took up the challenge and came up with an amazing solution. He lifted the new auditorium up, and situated it partly on the parcel of the Schouwburg and partly above the Melkweg, 'suspended' in air. He projected the extension of The Max below this new hall, and partly on the grounds of the theatre. Thus he created an overlap of thirty meters between both buildings. Finally, he designed an extra entrance to the new auditorium, which is now called the Rabozaal, with box office and cloakroom at the Melkweg side. Challenged by this design, the three partners decided to a joint exploitation of the Rabozaal. As a result, Amsterdam now boosts a unique cultural centre with eight halls and studios of different sizes for over 5000 visitors. The Rabozaal was completed in 2009. It can be used as a theatre with fixed, sloping seats, but also as a concert hall with a standing capacity of 1600, or 850 seats. Or it can be used as a black box theatre with different floor- and stageplans. A few adjoining buildings that already belonged to the Schouwburg have been

turned into office space, connected by a meticulously designed staircase. And finally, the rather obsolete surroundings of the old entrance and box offices of the Schouwburg have been converted into an open and modern Grand Café.

Interaction with the city

The Schouwburg is situated at the Leidseplein, one of the hottest areas of Amsterdam. Jim Klinkhamer: 'An important aspect is the way in which the building has been anchored in its location: radical new architecture between and above the nineteenth century buildings, different in scale, but fitting in the old colour pattern. We developed a double layer metal cladding, inspired on 'changeant' fabric. Another new element in the environment is the strong visual contact between the street and the indoor activities. From the introvert traffic spaces of the old Schouwburg, you suddenly arrive in a different architecture: a glass corridor which has literally been suspended in the street interior. One staircase up, all of a sudden, you step into the completely shelled space, surrounding the new hall. There you have one imposing view: from the Rabozaal you look through the huge

glass rear wall at the back of the stage, to see the brick façade of the old stage tower and on the side the trees of the Leidseplein.'

The architecture is in line with the characteristics of modern theatre: a high degree of transparency and unpredictability, in which the audience plays completely different parts. The conversion already starts at the entrance. Where there used to be a threefold barricade to enter the building – passageway, ticketing section and hall – there is now a Grand Café and a theatre bookshop which makes the building accessible to the public all day. And it works: the Schouwburg has suddenly become a lively meeting place, integrated into the dynamics of the Leidseplein. ◀

www.jonkmanklinkhamer.nl

This project was selected by Oistat Netherlands, with a special thanks to Martien van Goor.

A scale model of the project is shown at the architecture exhibit. The model was sponsored by the Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam, DHV Consultancy, Theateradvies BV, Trekwerk BV and Bureau Jonkman Klinkhamer Architects.