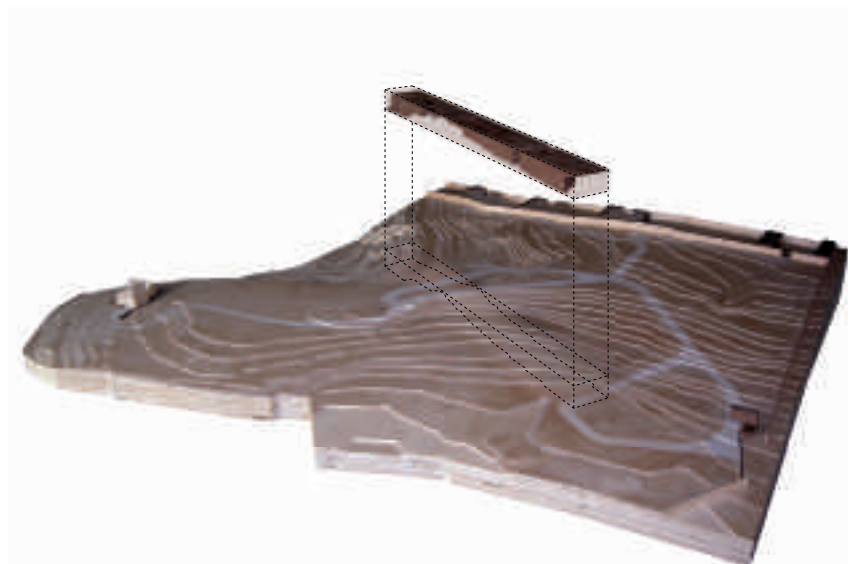
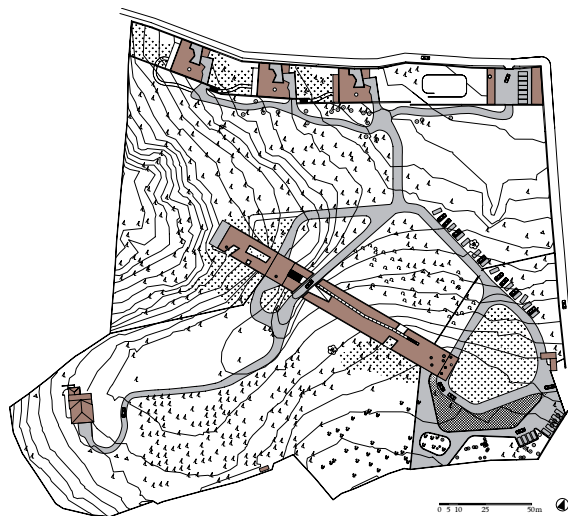


Royal Netherlands Embassy

Addis Ababa
Ethiopia

Dick van Gameren and
Bjarne Mastenbroek



Introduction

The embassy complex lies on the southern outskirts of Addis Ababa, in a dense eucalyptus grove set amidst urban sprawl. The main building, an elongated horizontal volume, cuts across the sloping terrain on an east-west axis. Around one third of the way down its length, a driveway passes through it at first-floor level, separating the ambassador's residence from the chancellery. The flat roof that unites the two parts is a roof garden accessed from elevated pathways.

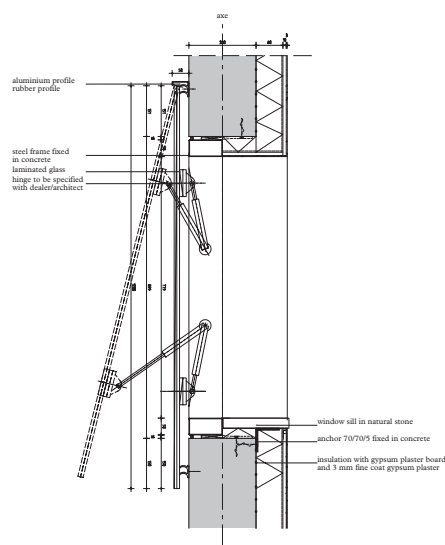
Inside the chancellery, offices flank a ramped corridor that climbs the gradient of the site, ending in a patio linked to the roof. Walls, floors and ceilings are pigmented the same red-ochre as the Ethiopian earth and are uniformly composed of concrete, creating the effect of a cave-like space. By contrast the roof garden, with its network of shallow pools, alludes to a Dutch water landscape. Other contemporary Dutch themes are expressed in the building's programmatic diversity, its crisp transparencies and its oversailing cantilevers.

Jury Citation

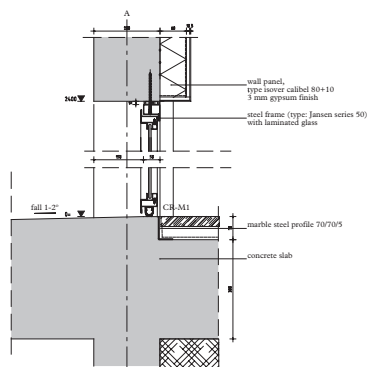
An unashamedly contemporary and simple organisation of spaces, the Dutch Embassy in Addis Ababa overcomes the complexities of security and surveillance normally associated with the design of embassy compounds, intersecting with the landscape to create new and unexpected relationships with the host site – a walled eucalyptus grove in the city. The massif architecture, at once archaic and modern, belongs as much to the Muslim, Christian and indigenous peoples of Ethiopia as it does to its Dutch homeland.

In its conception and daily operation, the building responds to its social and physical context with inventive design and poetic sensibility. This is an architecture that works with its environment, reducing the use of mechanical services and relying instead on natural ventilation and high insulation. The project's sensitivity to process has left its mark in the raw character of its formation – another delicate reminder of how buildings, as formations of material culture, can register and enhance spaces of encounter.

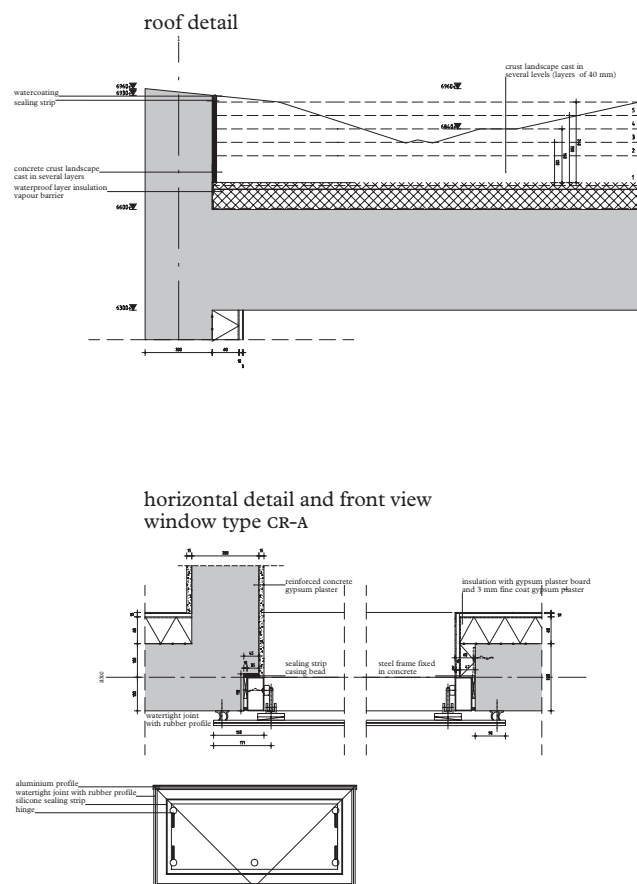
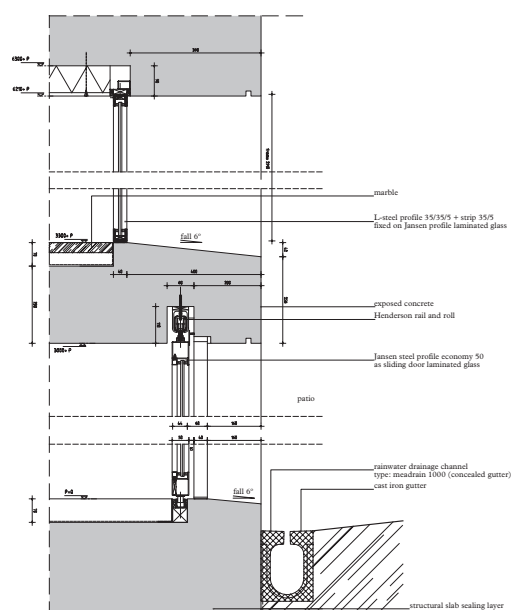
vertical detail
principal detail window type CR-A



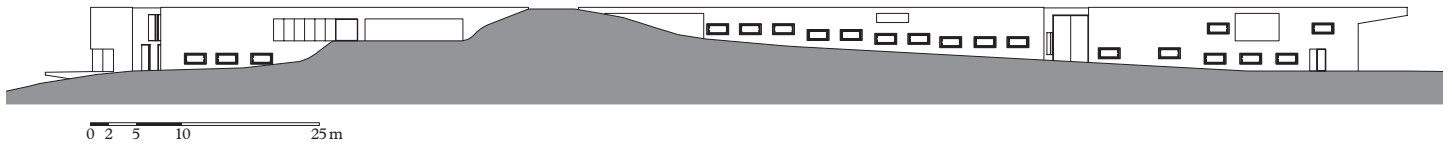
vertical detail
room number: R.007



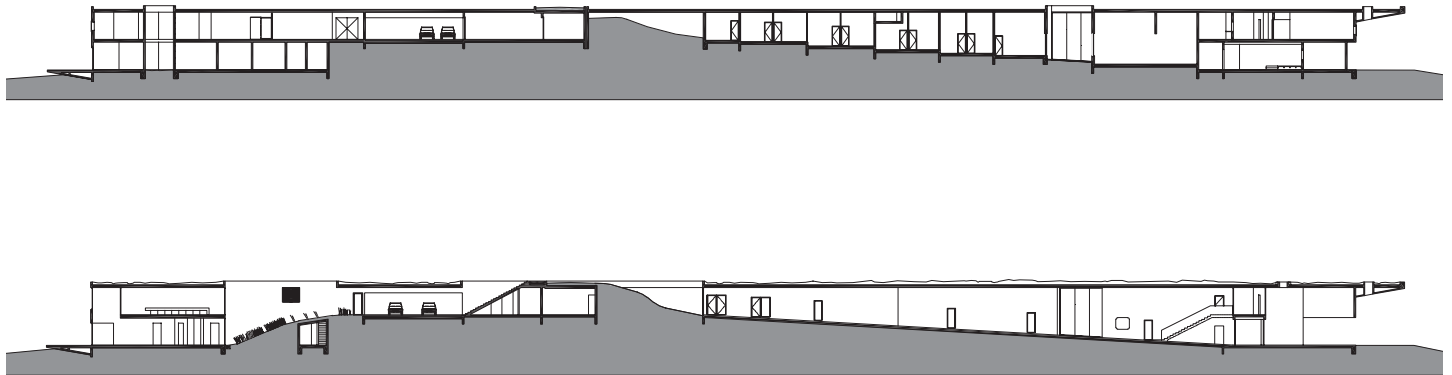
vertical detail
room number: R.I.07/R.O.08



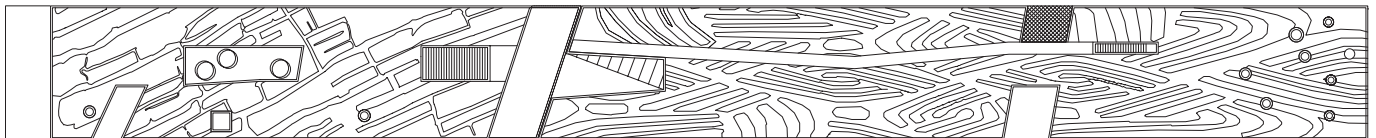
south elevation



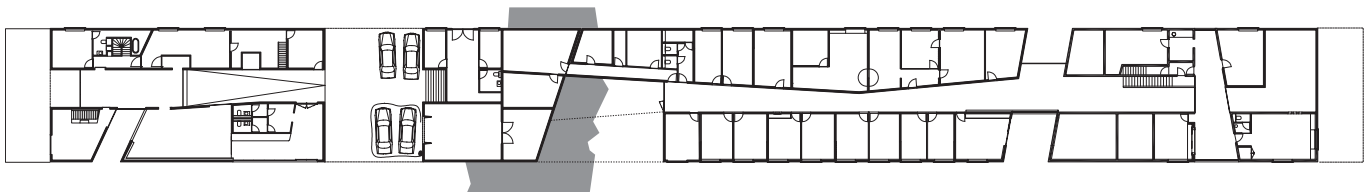
cross sections



roof landscape



upper level of chancellery and residence



lower level of chancellery and residence



Project Description

The project was commissioned in 1998 by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of a programme to construct new embassy buildings that would represent contemporary Dutch culture and at the same time respect the local environment and create meaningful collaborations with local professionals and firms. The diplomatic compound had been in use since the 1940s, but the existing chancellery was housed in a temporary building while the ambassador's residence was in a dilapidated old villa. The brief called for the construction of a new chancellery, ambassador's residence and three staff houses, as well as the refurbishment and expansion of the old villa to accommodate the deputy ambassador. A small school building and gatehouse were later added to the programme.

Two other embassies – those of Saudi Arabia and Cameroon – are located to the south of the five-hectare site. The rest of the neighbourhood is characterised by a mix of undistinguished low-cost housing, small shops and a ring road. In this context, the compound is a small oasis of greenery. The architects' guiding principle was to preserve this quality, minimising the impact of the new construction. Existing contour lines were maintained, and care was taken not to disturb the vegetation or wildlife. The arrangement of the individual programme elements is designed to create maximum privacy, as if each building stood alone in this beautiful natural setting.

The gatehouse signals the embassy's presence from the busy ring road. As a gesture of transparency and accessibility, a perforated panel gives a view of the main building's projecting roof even before the moment of entry. A winding driveway leads through the lavish greenery, with a series of views of the building unfolding along the way. The road then intersects the building, passing underneath its roof to connect with the deputy ambassador's house at the western end of the site.

The northern boundary of the site is marked by the small school building and three staff houses, placed one behind the other as on a terrace, so the occupants can enjoy unobstructed views from their elevated position.

The main building's horizontal mass measures 140 x 15 metres and sits on a ridge of sloping ground, cutting into the topography at this ridgeline and adapting its base to the rest. The driveway that passes through the building divides it into two, with the ambassador's residence in the smaller western portion and the chancellery in the east. The roof garden, with its contoured, landscaped surface covered with a series of pools, unites the two parts. At its eastern extremity, the roof juts out to form

a daring 11-metre canopy that defines the public face of the building, the point of arrival and entry.

The eastern third of the chancellery is two storeys high; the ambassador's offices are upstairs, with views over both the outside porch and the long internal corridor. The offices are linked to the residence by a rooftop path. On the ground floor, a ramped corridor flanked by offices gently climbs the gradient of the site, from the entry hall to the far end of the building. The course of this corridor changes twice, first enlarging to become a small foyer with a patio on two sides, then deviating slightly towards the middle to accommodate the swelling of office sizes on one side. It terminates in a sloped patio that in turn connects to the roof.

The two-storey residence at the western end of the building has a tripartite layout with internalised core spaces – the private quarters of the ambassador at the lower level and formal reception spaces above. As the building conforms to the sloping terrain, both levels can be entered from various points outside. A sloped patio at the formal entrance to the residence links the two floors, and a flight of stairs leads from the patio to the roof. The floors are connected internally by three concealed staircases.

Daylight is funnelled into these spaces through the sloped patio, which is cut deeply into the building. There are a number of further incisions along the length of the block, which draw indirect northern and southern light through their transparent edges. Apart from these incisions and the restrained fenestration, the building mass is almost monolithic. The red-ochre walls (pigmented with ferrous oxide) have a rough texture created by misalignments in the concrete formwork, making it seem as if the structure has been carved out of the ground.

The architects have said that the formal vocabulary of the design stems from an encounter of traditional Ethiopian architecture with Dutch cultural and architectural themes, with the aim of inspiring 'an exchange of ideas between two worlds, Europe and Africa'. The primary cultural reference is the rock-hewn architecture of the Coptic churches in Lalibela, which are dug down to a depth of two to three storeys, interconnecting with the landscape, then vanishing into it.

The second major cultural reference comes from the architects' homeland. The sculptural rivulets of the 'roof/pool' allude to the Dutch way of managing water and the polder landscape. During the rainy season the roof becomes a shallow pool. At other times it resembles a dried-up riverbed.

The main building's structure is a reinforced concrete flat slab and shear wall system, unencumbered by columns or beams. It is structurally divided into four

parts, with three expansion joints. The concrete technology is straightforward, almost conventional, except for the entrance cantilever.

All the concrete was poured in place, using a handmade formwork in natural wood. To give the material an individual touch, each of the 14- or 15-centimetre planks was slightly tilted to make recesses and projections and create a striated texture, which is accentuated under the play of sunlight. No standardised measure was specified for this purpose; the planks were misaligned using a stick or by hand.

The embassy building's interior design is a direct outcome of its architecture, constituting a plain backdrop for the artworks and artefacts on display; it is the minimalist surfaces alone that create an architecture of planes, both solid and transparent.

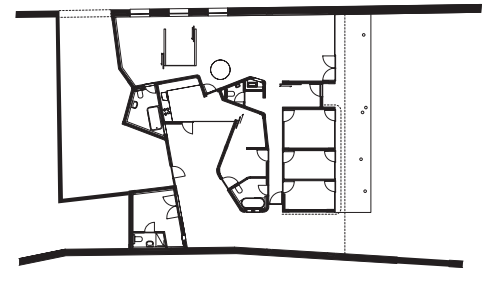
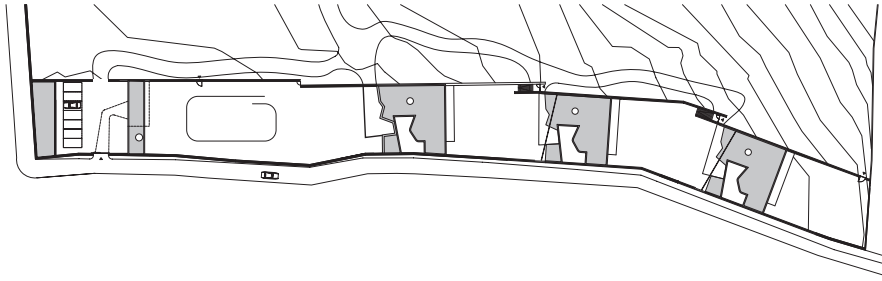
The building has no mechanical heating, ventilation or air-conditioning system, except in the reception spaces of the ambassador's residence where there is a limited HVAC system (used only for ventilation, to minimise energy consumption). Environmental control issues are generally solved in a natural way, mainly through the insulating properties of the earth and the added layers of insulation in the walls, ceilings and floors. Chimneys are provided in every space, some with fireplaces, in case the need arises for additional heating.

This sensitivity to place is also reflected in the project's engagement with the local workforce and building industry. The project was built by local contractors using the predominant local construction material – concrete.

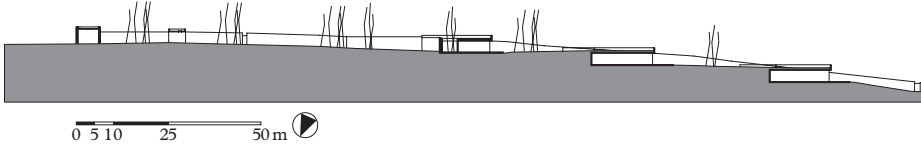
The embassy complex took eight years to realise. The delay between the start of the design, in May 1998, and the start of construction, in December 2002, was necessary for the two sides to become familiar with each other's way of working and for Dutch procedures of tendering to be adapted to local ones.

Text updated from a report
by Aydan Balamir

staff house

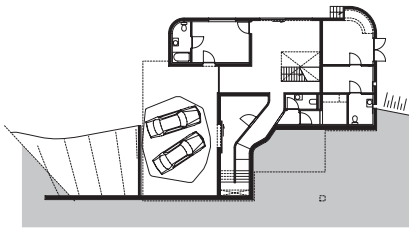


floor plan

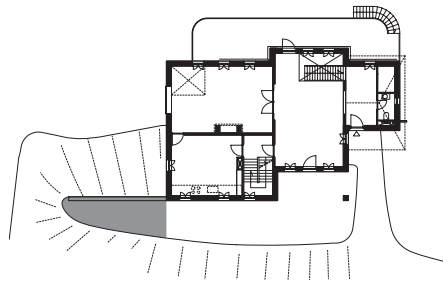


section

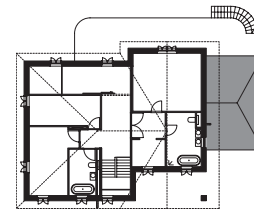
deputy ambassador's house



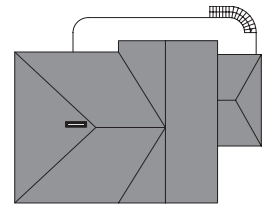
ground floor



first floor

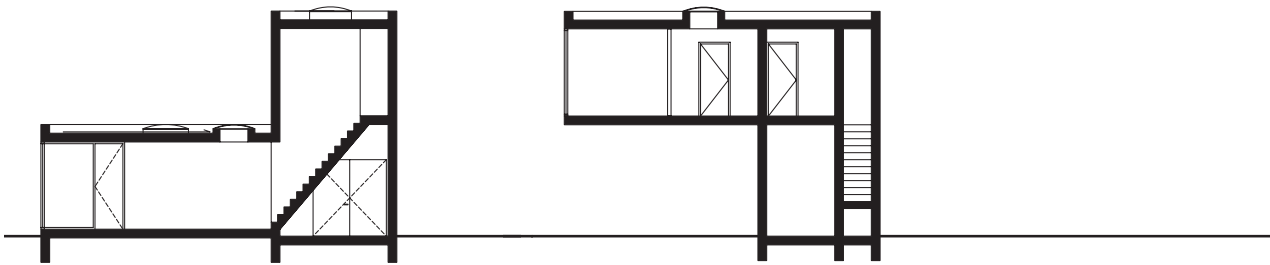


second floor



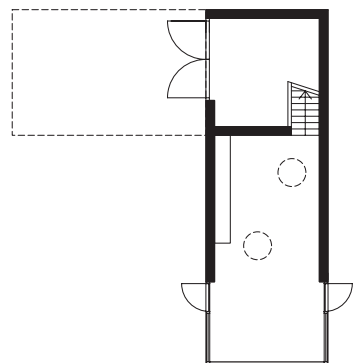
roof

entrance pavilion

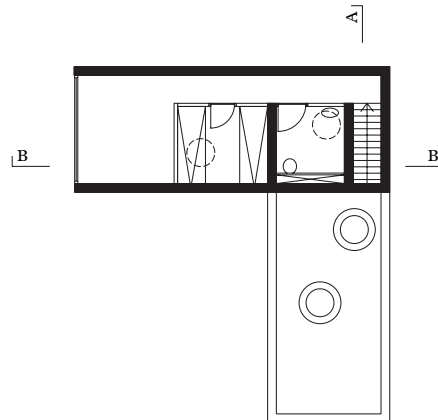


section A

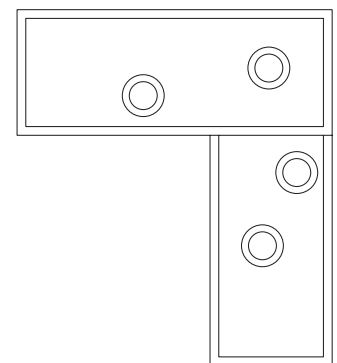
section B



ground floor



first floor



roof

Royal Netherlands Embassy
Old Airport Zone W24, K13,
House 001, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Client
Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
The Netherlands

Architects
Dick van Gameren and Bjarne
Mastenbroek, The Netherlands;
ABBA Architects, Ethiopia: Rahel
Shawl, local architect

Local Project Manager
Gary Campbell, Ethiopia

Engineers
Arup Associates, engineering
consultant, UK; Campbell Manage-
ment Project Services: Yared
Belayneh, resident engineer; San-
Mech Consult: Worede Melaku, local
sanitary and mechanical engineer;
FASTEK Consult: Fessahaie Kelati,
electrical engineering consultant;
OTT Consulting Architects &
Engineers: Mr. Mesfin Bereded,
resident architect

Contractor
Elmi Olindo & Co Plc, Ethiopia

Project Data
Built area: 3,300 m²
Site area: 55,000 m²
Cost: US\$ 7,332,000
Commission: May 1998
Design: May 1998–May 2002
Construction: December 2002–
April 2006
Occupancy: June 2005

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www.dickvangameren.nl
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Dick van Gameren (b. 1962)
graduated from Delft University of
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office with Bjarne Mastenbroek in
1991, and two years later they joined
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He now runs his own office, Dick
van Gameren Architecten bv. His
work has won several prizes and been
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by OIO in 2001 and NAI in 2005. He
was appointed Professor of
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ersity of Technology in 2005.

Bjarne Mastenbroek (b. 1964)
studied in Delft and worked first for
Mecanoo in Delft and then for Enric
Miralles in Barcelona. In 1991 he
founded an office with Dick van
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together 30 international architects
and designers. SEARCH develops
architectural and urban projects and
undertakes research on architecture,
landscaping, urbanism and new
building products and materials.



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