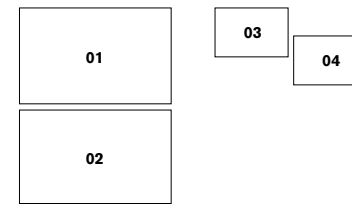


MIX & MATCH

FOR AN ART COLLECTOR, DAAN ZANDBELT AND ROGIER VAN DEN BERG BUILT A VILLA THAT JOINS A RICH TRADITION.

Text Arthur Wortmann / Photos Christian Richters



01. VIEW FROM THE SOUTHEAST. BECAUSE THE CLIENTS WANTED ONLY NATURAL VENTILATION INSIDE THE HOUSE, THE SOUTH FACADE HAS BEEN KEPT HEAVY AND RELATIVELY CLOSED; THE GROOVES ARE INTENDED TO REDUCE HEAT IN THE WALL DUE TO DIRECT SUN EXPOSURE.

02. VIEW FROM THE NORTHEAST. PLANTING WILL CONTINUE IN THE SPRING AND WILL INCLUDE BEACH GRASS, IN ORDER TO RECREATE A DUNE LANDSCAPE.

03. VIEW FROM THE SOUTHWEST. THE TRAVERTINE THAT RUNS OVER THE LANDING INTO THE HOUSE WAS PERSONALLY SELECTED BY THE CLIENT AND THE ARCHITECTS AT A QUARRY IN VERONA.

04. VIEW FROM THE NORTHWEST. THE STAIRS ON THE ROOF EVOKE CURZIO MALAPARTE'S VILLA ON CAPRI.



‘REVERSING DECISIONS IS A SIGN OF POOR BUSINESS SKILLS’

— Rogier van den Berg —

It is not often that an architect's first completed project is a detached villa of 500 m². Yet this is what happened to Daan Zandbelt and Rogier van den Berg, who had just graduated from Delft University of Technology and had not built so much as a dormer. At a family party, Van den Berg heard that his cousin and her husband were wondering what to do with their art collection. He decided to take a chance with a ‘cheeky acquisition’ and sent them an unsolicited sketch of a design for an exhibition space. Van den Berg: ‘I didn’t get any reply. But nine months later I suddenly got a text message. Asking whether I’d design a house for them.’

The clients, who own a chain of fashion shops, had bought a dream property in Hoek van Holland, near Rotterdam, on the outskirts of the town's built-up area. Cross the street and you're standing in a vast dune landscape, with as a special attraction countless ruins of the bunkers that once made up the Atlantic Wall. Beyond the dunes, 600 m away, is the beach along the North Sea. The couple were planning to tear down the bungalow that stood on the property and asked the young architect duo to design a new villa, a villa that would also house the art collection. Saying no was obviously not an option. Neither were the clients interested in whether the designers had the competence to

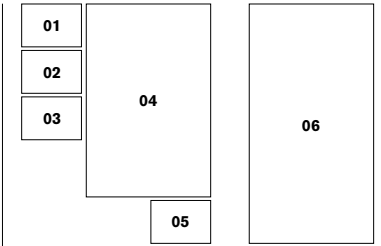
take on such a project from scratch. As long as they were *willing*, the job was theirs.

Their first building project has turned the two architects into a close team. If one starts a sentence, the other finishes it. In the car on the way to the completed villa they talk about the design process, which started by spending a whole day discussing the clients' sources of inspiration and asking them about their domestic habits. As soon as ideas began to take shape, it became clear that the cliché that the quality of the client largely determines the quality of the final result was all too accurate. ‘The clients proved to be professional decision makers,’ Zandbelt says. And Van den Berg adds, ‘They’re used to looking at things and deciding – the way they select collections to sell in their shops. They never changed their decisions. In their world, you felt from everything they did, reversing decisions is a sign of poor business skills.’ This must be music to the ears of any architect who works with private clients. But it meant

that there was no way back for the architects either. Their first proposal involved the idea of introducing a variation in the ground level – as a way of extending the nearby dune landscape onto the property, as it were – creating a ‘hole’ in the building volume. The clients were thrilled, and although the architects themselves had reservations at the time, the hole would have to remain in the design.

The husband was full of surprises. When he heard that Zandbelt and Van den Berg were travelling to Finland to visit the site of a European competition, he proposed joining them at his own expense. They would go look at a few highlights of Finnish architecture together. ‘Alvar Aalto's Villa Mairea in Noormarkku, from 1939, was an eye-opener,’ the architects relate. ‘Here he saw how art can be integrated with domestic life and how a house can be made to accommodate exhibitions and other social activities. He realized that that was what he wanted.’ The plans for the house increasingly evolved towards a ‘collective work of art’.

Once the clients' wish list had been drawn up, the architects had to get to work. When one looks at the final result of their efforts, one can easily explain, in retrospect, that the designers' research background was pivotal to the progress of the design process. The duo »



01. THE GUEST QUARTERS ON THE GROUND FLOOR CAN ACCOMMODATE FOUR PEOPLE.

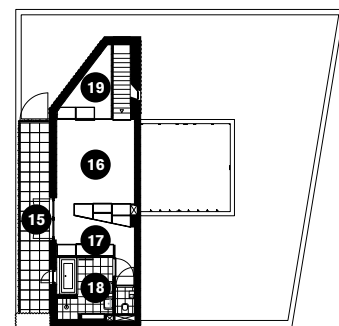
02. CORRIDOR TO THE LIVING ROOM.

03. LIVING ROOM, WITH STAIRCASE UP TO THE SLEEPING QUARTERS.

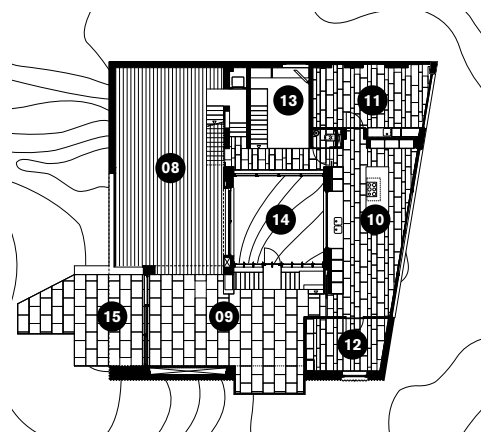
04. THE STAIRCASE LEADING UPSTAIRS FROM THE ENTRANCE HALL PIERCES THROUGH A WALL HALFWAY UP, RESULTING IN A VARIETY OF PERSPECTIVES.

05. IT WAS NOT INCLUDED IN THE SCHEDULE OF REQUIREMENTS, BUT THE ARCHITECTS FELT A VILLA COULD NOT DO WITHOUT IT: THE FIREPLACE.

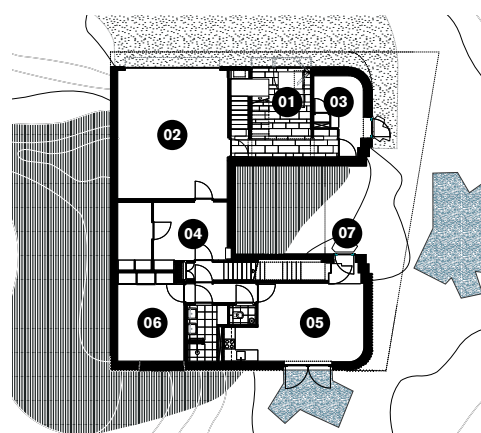
06. THE GUEST QUARTERS HAVE THEIR OWN ENTRANCE, BUT ALSO A QUICK STAIRCASE INSIDE UP TO THE DINING ROOM.



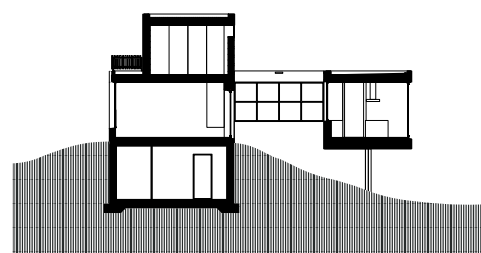
SECOND FLOOR.



FIRST FLOOR.



GROUND FLOOR.



SECTION.

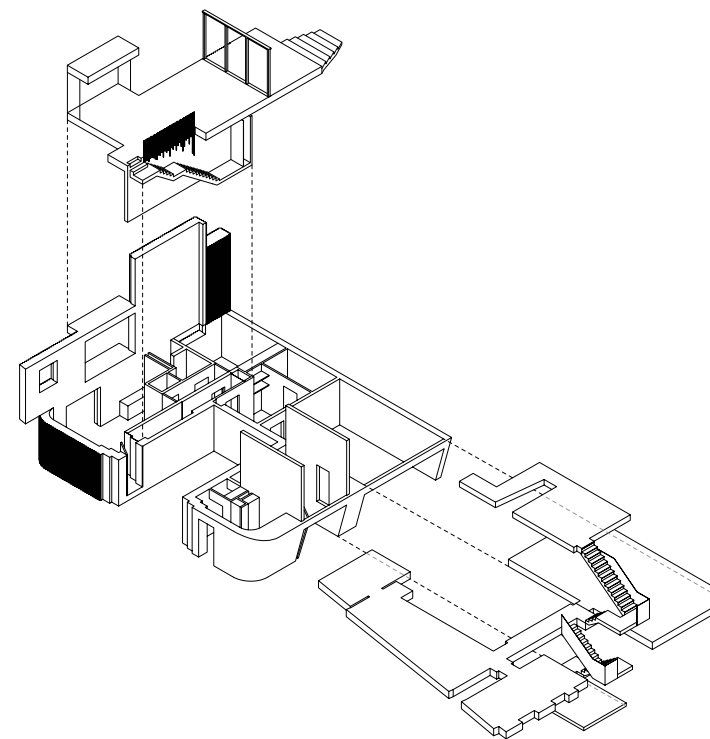
‘GOING TO SLEEP AT SOMEONE ELSE’S HOUSE IS FINE, BUT WAKING UP ISN’T’

— Daan Zandbelt —

- 01 ENTRANCE HALL
- 02 GARAGE
- 03 VESTIAIRE
- 04 LAUNDRY ROOM
- 05 GUEST QUARTERS
- 06 GUEST BEDROOM
- 07 ENTRANCE GUEST QUARTERS
- 08 LIVING ROOM
- 09 DINING ROOM
- 10 KITCHEN
- 11 STUDIO
- 12 OFFICE
- 13 VOID
- 14 PATIO
- 15 TERRACE
- 16 BEDROOM
- 17 WALK-IN CLOSET
- 18 BATHROOM
- 19 STORAGE

might not have built anything since they had graduated, but they had not been idle. In part thanks to one of their professors at Delft, they had become part of a research circuit in which they carried out studies into urban and metropolitan phenomena for local authorities and development companies. They approached the villa project with a similar mindset. Because the focus of the clients’ art collection is on art from the period between the two world wars, famous villas from this period played a role as their personal sources of inspiration. They even speak fondly of the ‘mini-Malaparte’ they put on the roof, after the Curzio Malaparte house on Capri, with its famous reverse-pyramidal exterior stairs leading to the roof terrace. The green marble of the façade of the top storey and the floors of white travertine (unfilled, so full of random holes) that wend their way through the house allude to Mies van der Rohe. The routing of the stairs is reminiscent of Adolf Loos. There are hints of Aalto in the attention to such things as stair gates, and the gigantic windows of the living room of course feature a ‘Rietveld corner’ (although in this case the windows cannot be opened).

On a more conceptual level, the house is a blend of two organizational principles. Horizontally, three different kinds of space are stacked on top of one another, as in OMA’s house in Bordeaux, for instance. The bottom storey, half underground, is a bunker, in an attempt at a connection with the bunkers in the neighbouring dunes. In many places we see untreated concrete, with characteristic stag-



gered lines and rounded corners. This bunker contains the entrance and the guest quarters, complete with a separate entrance and kitchen. ‘The clients love to entertain overnight guests,’ says Zandbelt, ‘but they have their reservations: “going to sleep at someone else’s house is fine, but waking up isn’t,” they told us. So we came up with this solution.’ The very first guest in the bunker quarters was architecture photographer Christian Richters.

On top of the bunker is a patio bungalow. The various living quarters are arranged around the ‘hole’. The ground level variation introduced allows the living room to be at ground level at the front of the house, while the kitchen at the rear is suspended above the ‘dune garden’. The husband and wife each have their own work spaces in the side wings.

The top floor, with the bedroom, is a somewhat secretive private domain. The stairs leading to it come out into a set of wall cupboards. The bathroom can be reached through the walk-in closet. Dirty washing vanishes down a chute to the laundry room in the ‘bunker’. And if you open a gate on the terrace and walk around the corner, you find the concrete ‘Malaparte staircase’ poured on site. It doesn’t lead anywhere, but it is a lovely look-out point. It wasn’t the builders’ favourite break spot for nothing, the architects say.

In addition to this horizontal thematic division, there are vertical elements that create connections instead. This is especially true of the use of materials. On the outside, for example, the south façade is made entirely of concrete poured

on site, with grooves. Inside, the white travertine runs from the dining room onto the landing and down the stairs to the guest quarters. The main stairwell, featuring steel balustrades, acts as an autonomous element. It is these tactile interventions that give the house something of its atmosphere of a collective work of art. Besides the integration of art and design, of course. For one of the walls of the patio, for instance, Dutch artist Hetty Heyster created a scene representing three leaping fish, evoking the proximity of the sea. A painting by Charley Toorop was purchased especially for one of the walls in the dining room, because other paintings from the clients’ collection would ‘not hold their own’ here. The architects were involved in the purchase of new furniture (in the kitchen, several designs by Borek Sipek, from the clients’ former home, were just barely allowed), and they are working on the design of a carpet for the living room, because what is there now ‘really won’t do’. On entering the guest quarters, one of the architects rushes to remove a doormat that covers the concrete floor in an undesirable way. When we walk into the garden, the architects note that it will take at least two seasons before it will have the desired dune-like atmosphere. It is remarks and incidents like these that show how much dedication the occupants and the designers have put in to building something here. The clients are building the house of their dreams. The architects are too – and it’s only their first project. <

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