

Plesman neighborhood, urban design (and drawing) by Palmbout Urban Landscapes, zone on the right by Steenhuis Bukman Architects

Marc Bukman is an architect and owner of Steenhuis Bukman Architects, based in Delft, the Netherlands. He is specialized in public housing in inner-cities and developing areas. The following article, the third in a series of four, describes the reconstruction of an postwar area in Amsterdam West, The Netherlands.

A.U.P.

In 1934, architect and town planner Cornelis van Eesteren (1897-1988), at the time closely involved with C.I.A.M., designed the General Extension Plan (Algemeen Uitbreidingsplan) of Amsterdam, or in short A.U.P. It was a revolutionary plan for approximately 30,000 homes in a green residential city, also known as the Western Garden Cities. The plan included spacious, relatively autonomously situated residential districts in a green setting. The Plesman neighborhood in Amsterdam Slotervaart is one of these districts, built in the early 1960s.



*View on (existing) communal courtyards en characteristic 1960s housing
Photos by Steenhuis Bukman Architects 2011*

Reconstruction

After several decades, the neighborhood was in need of renewal. Since 50 years the vegetation had reached full maturity, but the public space was bare and used-up. In addition, the uniform supply of housing was no longer suitable: until then the neighborhood had only contained small, multi-storey apartments in the low-cost segment (social rental). Besides, the relationship of the houses with the living environment was quite inadequate. Storage units and shut facades defined the appearance of the street.

The diversification of the housing stock changed this by adding owner-occupied houses and single-family dwellings. In this manner, residents were able to make a "housing career" and therefore become more bonded with their neighborhood. By introducing new housing typologies and underground parking garages, the relationship between house and street could be improved and the original urban structure quality re-inforced. The urban design for the redevelopment of the Plesman neighborhood was drawn up by Palmbout Urban Landscapes. Steenhuis Bukman Architects was selected as the architect for this renewal in 2011. This task includes the demolition of approximately 180 homes in different types and categories, commissioned by housing corporation De Alliantie.



*New situation, with colors indicating various housing typologies
Drawing by Steenhuis Bukman Architects*

Architectural design

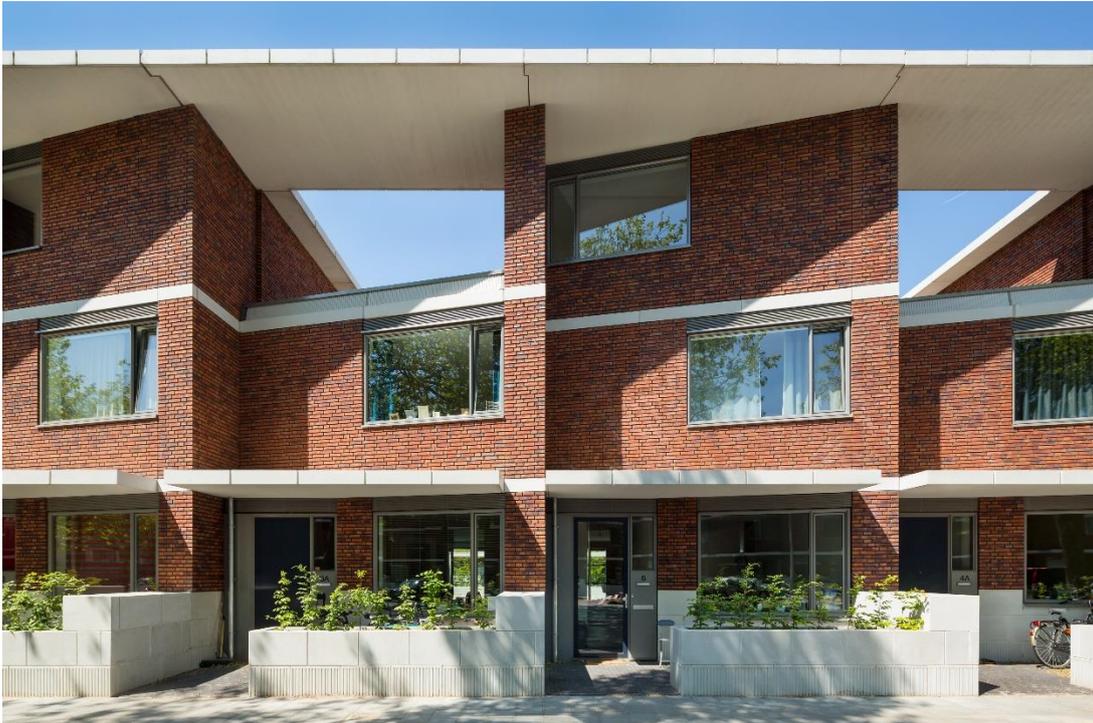
In the design by Steenhuis Bukman Architects, the existing greenery (still) forms the backbone of the neighborhood. The monumental street profiles have been maintained and are given more meaning by the low-rise houses that are situated next to them. The mature trees in the collective courtyards are spared by building back on the existing footprint as much as possible. The underground garages and storerooms are therefore simply placed in a U-shape around the courtyards. A very expensive operation, but the best possible way to preserve the existing vegetation.

The private-public transition plays a significant role in the plan. Single-family houses take up more space than apartment buildings due to the presence of private gardens. To avoid these gardens taking up too much space, they are compactly designed. With concrete planters and pergolas, they have become enclosed patios, a kind of outdoor rooms, which are part of the architecture. In this way, the all-sided appearance of the architecture is emphasized and chaotic back-side situations are eliminated.

The plan is designed as a single ensemble and as such recognizable. It is a combination of linear building blocks, with a quiet restrained expression. The architecture of the new buildings is based on the characteristics of the urban zone. The blocks are therefore designed as a total composition with a subtle articulation of the individual house. Garden walls, hedges and planters keep the free-standing blocks together within the new stamping pattern and provide an attractive connection between the buildings and the living

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environment. They mark the difference between the public street and the communal courtyards and at the same time provide a view of this unique collective domain. The new buildings are full of new housing typologies. For instance, there are apartments in all shapes and sizes, large and smaller single-family homes and care homes, all in both the free and social rental sectors. A choice was made not to emphasize the different categories in an architectural manner. All homes in the project have the same architectural appearance, masonry in a blended red-brown brick, white precast concrete and lots of glass in aluminum window frames with thin profiles.

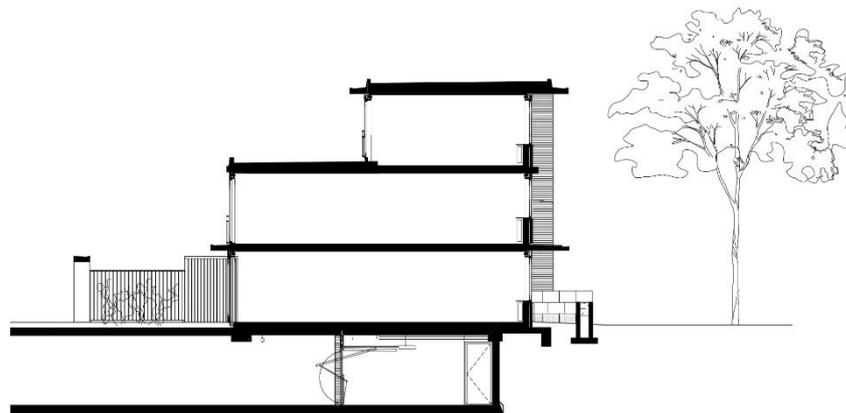


Row housing, both free and social rental sector, with carefully designed transitions tot he street

Photo by Jannes Linders



*View of communal courtyards, with framed backyards of row housing (patios)
Photo by Jannes Linders*



*Section of row housing, with underground parking garage en framed backyards
Drawing by Steenhuis Bukman Architecten*

Participation

Resident participation played an important role in the design process. During the plan developments, workshops and consultations were organized with the representatives of residents, also called 'neighborhood heroes'. This has resulted in several portraits of these 'heroes', eternalized in prefab concrete and prominently incorporated in the outer walls.



Portraits of neighborhood heroes, integrated in brick facades
Photo by Jannes Linders

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