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STUDIO ROLF.FR removed the floors, interior walls and roof of a dilapidated building in Rotterdam and used timber and furniture of their own design to renovate the interior.

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PHOTOS **FRANK HANSWIJK**

IMMOTHS RECOVER

A HUGE SCULPTURE MADE COMPLETELY FROM SLENDER BOARDS DEFINES THE INTERIOR OF THE HOUSE THAT BRUGGINK AND VAN DEN BERG CALL 'BLACK PEARL'.

FOR THE DIVORCE CABINET IN THE KITCHEN, BRUGGINK USED A PIECE OF FURNITURE THAT HE INHERITED FROM HIS GRANDFATHER. HE SAWED IT IN HALF AND ATTACHED NEW SIDE PANELS, WHICH HE PAINTED ORANGE.



ROLF BRUGGINK USED FELT SOAKED IN EPOXY TO FINISH THE SECOND-HAND KITCHEN TABLE AND CHAIRS.

'WE HAD SOMETHING ROMANTIC IN MIND'



THE FAÇADE IS PAINTED COMPLETELY BLACK, INCLUDING WINDOW FRAMES AND WINDOWS. NEW WINDOWS FRAMED IN STEEL PUNCTURE ITS DARK SURFACE.



When Rolf Bruggink and Yffi van den Berg took on the task of fixing up a derelict building in the Dutch port city of Rotterdam – with an eye to living in the result – they had had plenty of practice in the smaller city of Utrecht, where a few years earlier they had converted a plumber's warehouse into an experimental home for themselves and their dog, Zumthor. The new project encompassed a somewhat higher level of complexity. The building in Utrecht had not been lacking a functional roof, whereas – with the exception of the exterior walls – the dwelling in Rotterdam was ready for demolition. The house had been vacant for 30 years. 'The holes in the roof were covered with a tarp that didn't prevent leakage,' says Bruggink. 'The beams had rotted and mould was growing on the walls. The wooden piles supporting the building were decaying as well. We had to renovate practically everything.'

The couple knew what they were getting into: both were educated as architects. In 2003 Bruggink set up Zecc Architects, together with cofounder Marnix van der Meer, but four years later he had had enough. Currently Bruggink designs and builds furniture under the name Rolf.fr. After working as an architect for a time,

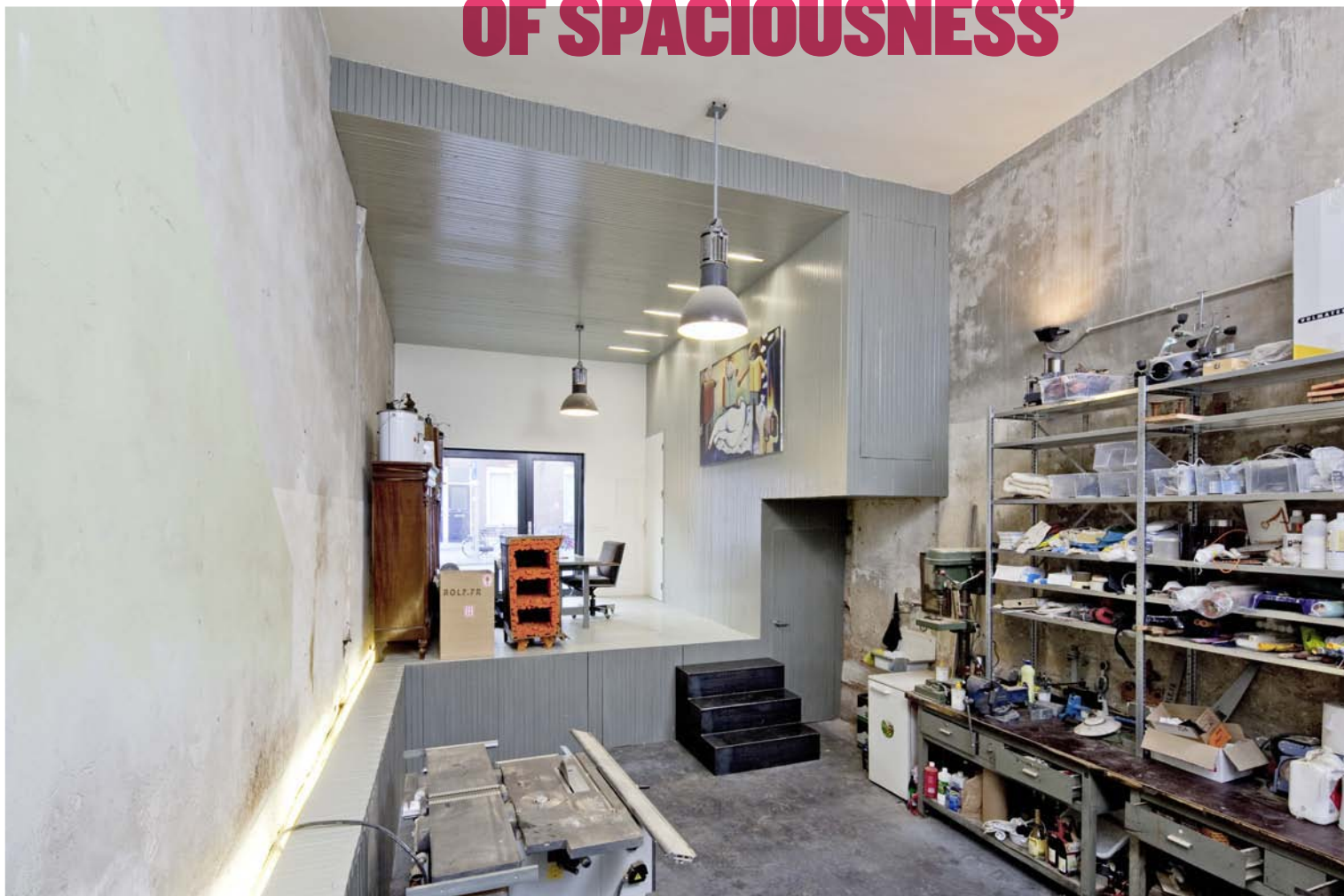
Van den Berg also left the profession for a career in an affiliated field; she now works for a large property developer. Their architectural know-how still comes in handy, however; in particular, it has allowed them to transform a near-ruin into the unique house they now occupy. They got the building free of charge from the municipality of Rotterdam, which offers similar DIY projects located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods for little or nothing to people who are willing to invest in the property involved. Restoring the foundation alone cost the couple €35,000, a figure that can be multiplied several times to calculate the amount needed to reconstruct the rest of the building.

For their investment, they got a large four-storey building that was theirs to convert into the house of their dreams. Only the exterior was subject to the municipality's standard rules and regulations. The façade is now painted completely black, including window frames and windows. New windows framed in steel puncture the façade. In truth, the couple had envisioned something totally different. 'Initially, Yffi and I had designed a façade that was to be completely clad in Corten-steel panels,' says Bruggink, 'but the building inspector thought it differed too

much from the other buildings on the street. We were so disappointed. On the very day we got the bad news, Marnix dropped by for a beer. And that evening we came up with a new concept: we decided to use the existing façade as a new underlay, which forms a shadow of the original façade, as it were. Working from inside the house, we penetrated that "shadow" with new windows. I'm very pleased with the result. This façade corresponds much better to the theme that dominates my work as a designer.'

The theme he refers to is reuse. In his workshop on the ground floor of the house, Bruggink uses existing objects to make furniture and other functional products. He saws old cupboards in half, for example, and reinforces each piece with epoxy resin or aluminium, leaving the method used to construct the original cupboard clearly visible in the cross section. He transforms the elegant form of a porcelain coffeepot by capturing it inside a block of poured concrete, which he saws in half. He creates a tabletop from table legs sawn in half – here, too, exposing the baroque forms and mortise-and-tenon joints. 'These pieces demonstrate my love of the cross section,' says Bruggink. 'In architecture, a cross section is an important >>>

'THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITY OF THE INTERIOR IS ITS SENSE OF SPACIOUSNESS'



aid, which provides an insight into a design and facilitates its construction. A cross section is often very distinctive, but nearly always invisible, unfortunately. By revealing the cross section in my furniture, I enhance the original character of the piece.'

Old materials have been given a new aesthetic in the house in Rotterdam as well, in an interior that the couple designed while on holiday in France. They left both side walls, for example, virtually untouched. 'We left one side wall exactly as we found it,' says Bruggink. 'All traces of the original construction are visible; we dusted off the surface and that was that. We painted the other wall white, but even there you can see all signs of the earlier building process, such as areas of plasterwork and old handrails. We added new areas of plaster in only two places, for the projector and the light switches.'

The most important quality of the interior, however, has little to do with their use of materials: what strikes you is the spaciousness. Together with their contractor, Eugene Schenkels, the couple tore out all the floors and walls, leaving only the shell of the building standing. Inside they created a huge sculpture made completely from slender boards.

This wooden enclosure contains a storage cupboard, a dressing room and a WC. The remaining spaces revolve around this sculptural core in a continuous motion, while voids further amplify the sense of space. The dressing room, which hangs from the ceiling, appears to hover about a metre above the floor of the bedroom level.

The residence culminates in a greenhouse on the flat roof, where a bathtub offers a view of the surrounding urban landscape. 'This is where we imagined stepping out of the modern world,' says Bruggink. 'We had something romantic in mind. We omitted everything associated with design - and that's why you're looking at an ugly, old-fashioned bathtub tap.' But in the hands of Bruggink and Van den Berg, even a vintage tap trickles a suggestion of beauty.

THE FLEXIBLE DESIGN OF THE GROUND-FLOOR WORKSHOP FORESEES THE CONVERSION OF THIS SPACE INTO A SEPARATE APARTMENT, MADE POSSIBLE BY SUSPENDING A MEZZANINE LEVEL IN THE SPACE. BEHIND THE LOWER DOOR IS A WC; THE UPPER DOOR LENDS ACCESS TO WHAT WILL BE A SHOWER STALL.

BLACK PEARL ROTTERDAM

LOCATION Pompstraat 44, Rotterdam, the Netherlands
CLIENTS Rolf Bruggink and Yffi van den Berg
DESIGNER Studio Rolf.fr (rolf.fr); façade in collaboration with Zecc (zecc.nl)
MATERIALS Standard timber beams, boards, steel
FURNITURE Studio Rolf.fr
LIGHTING Standard tubes
FLOORING Steel (Staalstudio)
AREA 180 m²
BUDGET €180,000
COMPLETED September 2010

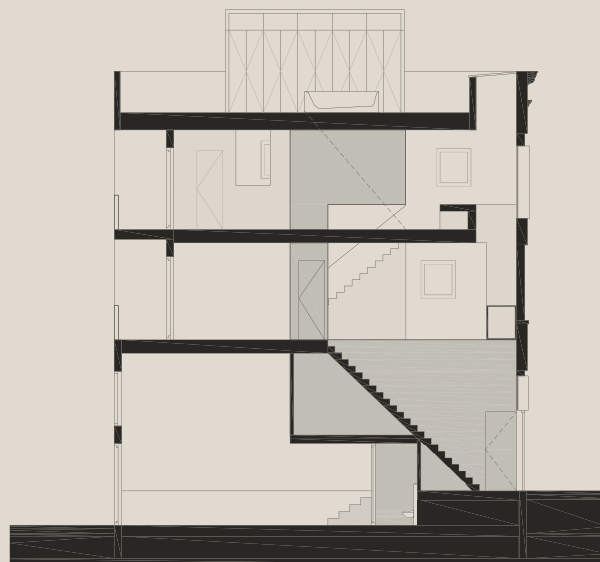


BLACK PEARL IS LOCATED IN AN OLD WORKING-CLASS NEIGHBOURHOOD THAT THE MUNICIPALITY IS TRYING TO REINVIGORATE.
PHOTO SKY-CAMERA/LITTLE PLANET

NOW PAINTED BLACK, THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE FORMS A SHADOW, AS IT WERE, OF THE ORIGINAL FAÇADE.

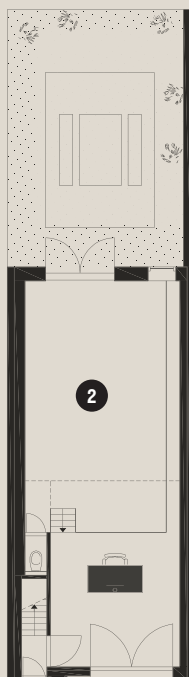


CROSS SECTION.



LONG SECTION.

- 1. ENTRANCE
- 2. STUDIO
- 3. KITCHEN/DINING ROOM
- 4. LIVING ROOM
- 5. STUDY
- 6. WALK-IN CLOSET
- 7. BEDROOM
- 8. BATHROOM
- 9. TERRACE



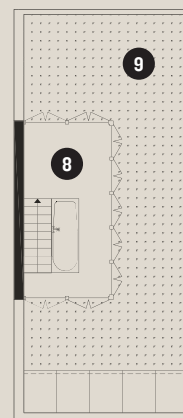
GROUND FLOOR.



FIRST FLOOR.



SECOND FLOOR.



THIRD FLOOR.