



Encased in a greenhouse, the rooftop bathtub offers an arresting view of the neighbourhood

Photographs courtesy: FRANK HANSWIJK

REBORN IN ROTTERDAM

A 100-YEAR-OLD MÉTIER HOUSE ABANDONED FOR THE PAST 30 YEARS IS REINCARNATED BY A TEAM OF THREE. BY SANHITA SINHA CHOWDHURY

The city of Rotterdam in Netherlands makes you time travel into the future. Skyscrapers have emerged from rubble heaps that the port city was reduced to during World War II. Intent on creating instead of recreating, the Rotterdammers turned everyday living into a spectacular event and decorated their horizon with architectural marvels which tell tales of successful urban renewal projects.

One such spectacle is the home of Rolf Bruggink. The Dutch architect purchased an early 1900s townhouse in 2008. Situated in a troubled locale, the three-storey facade which

housed smaller apartments, was initially in a state of disrepair and neglect. The municipality wanted to sell it to moneyed individuals on the condition that they would transform it into one house within a specified period, a request quite unheard of in today's crowded cities where a single residence is split up into smaller ones.

Bruggink purchased the crumbling 180 sq m house for a throwaway price of €35,000 (₹22.78 lakh) and invested nearly six times the amount €200,000 (₹1.3 crore) and three years to restore it. When asked what he found attractive about it besides



the obvious low cost he says, "There is a lot of potential in these worn out buildings. They are completely mouldable. We retained the exterior walls and put a fresh volume into the empty box."

The new home in the century-old cover has a different design and configuration. The existing floors and walls were demolished to create a five-metre-wide, 10-metre-long and 11-metre-high hollow shell. To create a high degree of spatial abstraction, a geometric object composed of small wooden slats was constructed. Without using banisters or doors it cleverly partitions the open living spaces besides concealing wiring and piping. "The sculpture is made in such a way that all rooms are visually connected but form a separate area. For example, there is no door between the kitchen and dining area and the living room, but because of the

The wall on one side has been left in its original state (above left); metal framed glass windows contrast sharply against the black-painted brick facade (above and left)

block in the middle there is a distinction between both spaces," Bruggink elaborates. Floors, walls, stairs and ceilings blend together to create a look which seem to be a pullout from the drawing book of famed Dutch graphic artist M.C. Escher.

Three worlds are stacked around the box-shaped structure. Bruggink's studio occupies the first floor which was previously a boiler room. Wooden racks used for stacking his everyday wares are set against the wall and run along the length of the room. This works as a brilliant space saving manoeuvre and elevates the sense





of openness. The workstation ends at a simple bamboo garden. Old tiles salvaged from the roof have been scattered on the ground, retaining nuances and traces of the structure's past.

The living and dining spaces are intelligently spread across the second level. The wall on one side has been white-washed and adorns paintings while the opposite side has been left completely untouched to flaunt gashes and scratches which narrate a pictorial account of a distant era. The sleeping quarters and bath occupy the top plane and a staircase from there leads to the terrace.

The grass carpeted floor, potted plants and colourful blooms provide much-needed respite from muted tones which were chosen for the interiors. The focal point of the roof but is the greenhouse where the flora has been replaced by a jacuzzi. A photograph studded wall provides privacy from the row of houses which shoots out from the left, but the floor to ceiling glass on the other three sides offers the lucky bather a commanding panoramic view of the metropolis.

Bruggink's workshop opens up to a bamboo and tile garden. The tiles strewn on the floor were retrieved from the roof of the townhouse.

While interiors were done by the owner's company, Studio Rolf.fr in collaboration with his girlfriend Yffi van den Berg, the facade was designed over three years in partnership with Zecc Architecten. The bewitching jet black exterior is the inspiration for its name—Black Pearl. Explaining the rationale behind the choice of colour Bruggink says, "It is a reference to the historical way of painting facades in Dutch cities such as Amsterdam. Both masonry, frames and windows are covered with a shiny black oil which in the past was used to make canal houses waterproof." While the gloomy, dark hue shadows the original constructions, the piercing transparent windows which have been adjusted to the new levels of the dwelling announce a new time and residency.