

## ON LOCATION

## Rotterdam Renewal



1. The city sold a home in a troubled neighborhood to a designer eager to renovate.



2. The greenhouse on the roof, which houses a whirlpool tub but no plants, offers bathers a panoramic view of the city.



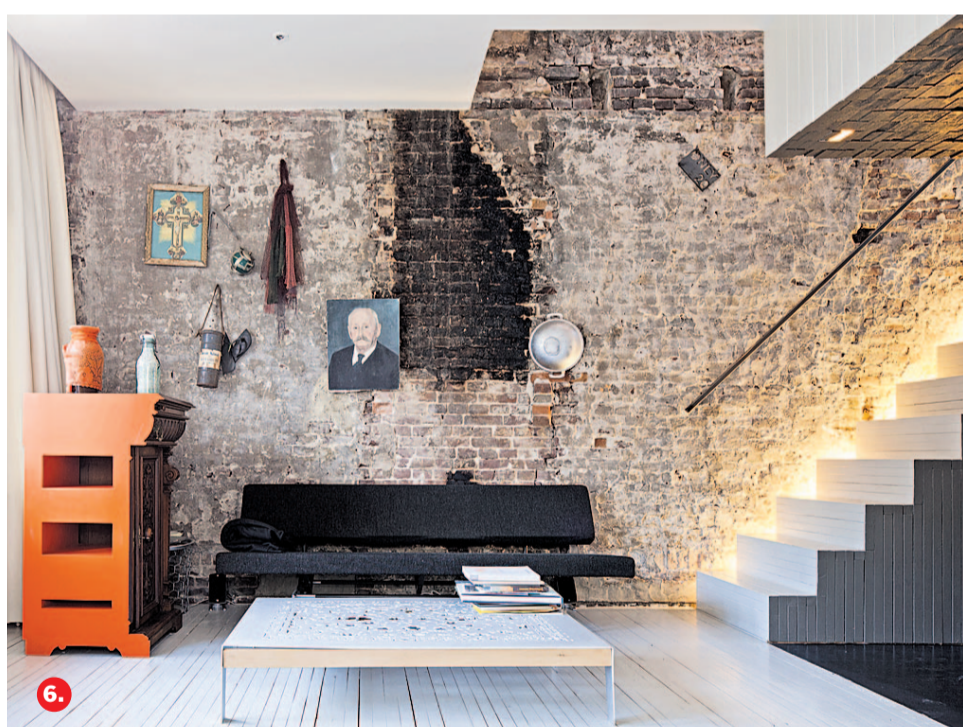
3. Mr. Bruggink and his dog, Bart, on the new stairs to the third-level sleeping quarters. The brick wall is original.



4. The antique dining table in the kitchen was modernized by Studio Rolf.fr, using orange laminate. The appliances are from Ikea, and the cabinet doors are made out of old wood salvaged from the house.

5. A sink designed by Roland Manders sits under the stairs to the roof garden, at right. On the left, a bathroom and walk-in closet off the sleeping quarters.

6. A living room wall retains scars from an earlier incarnation; the wood floors and stairs are new.



By NICK AMIES

WHEN the city of Rotterdam decided to sell homes in troubled neighborhoods at cut-rate prices, Rolf Bruggink, 38, a Dutch architect and furniture designer, seized the chance to buy one. He chose a house from the early 1900s in the Charlois district, a working-class area of terraced homes once inhabited by squatters and drug addicts.

"We had the opportunity to make a difference in a poor area," Mr. Bruggink said. "Plus, the price of the house was also very attractive." In 2008, he paid 35,000 euros (about \$49,00 at current exchange rates) for the three-story, 1,823-square-foot, crumbling town house.

"Nature had literally taken over, and there were actual plants growing throughout the interior," he said. "All the wood, which we hoped to reuse in the new construction to maintain a connection with the original house, was rotten and useless. So we gutted the inside and started from scratch."

The facade, too, was in danger of collapse. Mr. Bruggink and Zec Architects, a firm in Utrecht, submitted a proposal to replace it, but the city rejected their first idea. Finally, all parties involved agreed on a jet-black, oil- and pitch-painted brick facade, which inspired Mr. Bruggink to give the house a name: the Black Pearl.

The design they settled on also altered the facade's configuration. "The surrounding houses have facades with two windows on the first level, two on the second and one on the third," Mr. Bruggink said. "I wanted to create corridors of light through the interior, so we have one large window on the second level and one on the third. Light flows in from the front and out through the corresponding original windows at the back." The two additional windows in the front are framed in steel cubes that extend beyond the brickwork and sit next to blacked-out representations of the original windows, in a nod to the building's past.

The new three-floor interior, which cost 230,000 euros (\$326,000), was designed by Mr. Bruggink's company, Studio Rolf.fr, and his girlfriend, Yffi van den Berg, 39, an architect with the Dutch firm Heijmans Vastgoed.

Just inside the front door is a narrow staircase and Mr. Bruggink's workshop. The 16-foot-high open space, which was once a boiler



7. The view from the kitchen to the living room at the back of the house. The stairs at the right lead to the sleeping quarters; the ones at the left, to Mr. Bruggink's workshop.



8. A wooden volume separates the living area and the kitchen without creating closed rooms, which "expands a relatively narrow space," Mr. Bruggink said.

9. The windows in the bedroom on the third level open onto a small balcony; the shower is hidden in a closet to the right of the bed. The bench is a modernized antique.

room, runs the length of the building. Materials and tools used in Mr. Bruggink's furniture-design business are stored on floor-to-ceiling wooden racks. At the back, grand metal-and-glass doors open to a simple bamboo garden.

The second level, which houses the living room, retains its original brick walls; the wall on one side is painted white and the one on the other was left in its natural state, but both display gouges from the original beams.

On the second floor, a new timber structure conceals pipes and divides the living area from the kitchen without creating closed rooms. "We wanted to create a high level of spatial abstraction," Mr.

Bruggink said. "The central construction, along with the lack of balustrades, banisters and doors throughout, achieves this and expands a relatively narrow space."

A large skylight floods the kitchen with light, and the cabinet doors are made out of wood from the original house.

On the third floor are the sleeping quarters and the bath (which has a \$6,500 shower room with black limestone tiling).

Climb a final staircase to the roof, and there is a new greenhouse. But the plants are relegated to ceramic pots outside. The greenhouse itself is reserved for a \$1,300 whirlpool tub, which offers the bather a panoramic view of Rotterdam.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREAS MEICHSNER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES