

NEW REALITY,

NEW FACTS

AM NAI PRIZE 2012

2012



AM'

NAI

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ARCHITECTURE
INSTITUTE

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NEW REALITY, NEW FACTS

AM NAI: THE SIXTH EDITION

The biennial AM NAI Prize was initiated by the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAI) in 2002. In 2004 AM property developers joined as a sponsor and financial partner. This year the prize is for the best building realized in 2010 or 2011 by a young architect, young being an architect under the age of forty. One of the judges notes: "Young is relative, forty is the age one becomes prime minister in this country, but do we ask that person if he/she has been prime minister before they get the position?" In this edition we saw young-young architects and recent graduates - trying to get noticed, some with rather innovative and inventive ideas and small interventions. We also saw 35-year olds, who after years of hard work and struggle finally managed to get a significant project built. Both the young-young and the 35-year olds illustrate the fight of talented young people to prevail, get a stake, and manage to survive and find new clues, new interests, and new opportunities. The AM NAI Prize aims to ignite those 'sparks' of creativity.

AM NAI: A FINGER ON THE PULSE

With this prize, AM and NAI aim to stimulate and support young talented architects to enter the contemporary public arena. This increases their chance of getting commissions and realizing assignments to develop their talent. In addition, the prize is a means of motivating and high-lighting activities in the field of architecture and keeping a finger on the pulse. Last but not least, all projects nominated are documented and added to the extensive and internationally renowned collection of the NAI. This is not only enrichment to the collection; as a series it is also quickly developing into an overview of the legacy of Dutch architects. As such this prize sends a message about and to Dutch architects. The jury is aware this message could also be important in an international perspective. We are being watched, as a result of the impact of the international reputation Dutch architecture has built up over the last decades. Important questions are: If the field of architecture needs to reinvent itself, how will the Dutch do it? Can we prove we are indeed as innovative, ground-breaking and problem solving as the world thinks us to be? This requires a renewal of the debate on the real value of Dutch architecture. What is the core of this architecture? Is it the tangible result that can be seen all over the world now? Or is it the tradition of making, thinking and dealing with a type of land, the claiming of the sea and finding opportunities by means of the entrepreneurial culture that is in this country's DNA?

Being a country with a lack of 'real' nature, on artificial land, that believes in 'social engineering' and in making from scratch, influences the way architecture is produced and perceived; it represents a cultural view. Why is it the Dutch go for 'gritty': is there no need for the sophisticated or the 'slick'? Do we really prefer chips over slow food? The multiple crises have launched this country - and a large part of the world, into a new reality and we need to deal with these new circumstances. As a result, the debate on the cultural significance of (Dutch) architecture can be, should be, and will be continued in a profound way.

With 49 projects submitted this year, the number of entries for the AM NAI Prize is on the same level as in 2010. The lack of support for young architects is clearly taking its toll though, and the number of courageous and inventive projects is rare. Many of the entries are good and sound, though often also 'more of the same'. Other projects illustrate that much of the potential is not fully exploited.

AM NAI: A 12 YEAR LEGACY

This 6th edition takes place under very different circumstances than the first editions. After presenting the AM NAI results as Fresh Facts (2002), Fresher Facts (2004), Bare Facts (2006), Facts & Forms (2008), and Facing the facts (2010) we now see in fact, a new reality. It's no longer a crisis to fight, it's a new reality to deal with. The struggle of having to deal with these new facts is visible in the submitted projects in various ways. More and more it becomes evident that the AM NAI nominees reflect the current archi-

tectural climate in the Netherlands. When looking at previous editions, the jury recognizes three stages over the past ten years. It started with the offshoot of the success of the late nineties, resulting in nominees representing frivolity, submitting projects that show space to manoeuvre and integrate humour and cheerfulness into the program, sometimes on the verge of a cynical approach. It showcases the productive climate in that period, stimulated by an actively involved Government, providing a relatively strong position and good opportunities for young architects.

In the second phase, the mid-zero's, a move to professionalism is detected. Large firms sent out their young architects to enter the AM NAI to claim authorship. Young architects get the opportunity to build. Those projects however, were not about the unique voice of the young architect; they rather illustrated one can do a proper, decent and good job. The jury tried to dissociate the AM NAI Prize from this trend.

The previous edition already marked the beginning of a new phase, where limited conditions, struggle and crisis monopolize the conversation. Pampering is over; 'haute couture' is no longer much facilitated. Where the previous edition still included projects with pre-2008 budgets and possibilities, this time the vast majority of projects illustrate the impact of a changed practice. They are about re-use and/or small scale and/or low budget. Young architects build for private parties and individuals, and rarely for governments anymore.

THE FOUR NOMINEES IN THE RUNNING FOR THE AM NAI PRIZE ARE:

1. The Faculty Club (Tilburg)
by Shift architecture + urbanism
2. Schieblock (Rotterdam) by ZUS
3. Noorderpark Bar (Amsterdam)
by bureau SLA en Overtreders W.
4. Black Pearl (Rotterdam) by
Zecc Architects in cooperation
with Studio Rolf.fr

Back in 2010, the main discussion topic when choosing a winner was: "What is the stand a young architect should take to remain relevant: a 'smart' or a fundamental one?" The jury stood for a similar question this year. In 2010, the jury chose two winners, a Janus face-as it were. Many of the projects submitted this year take the 'smart' approach, but simultaneously incorporate the downside to this smartness. Out-smarting the previous generation of ideas by giving a solution which is just a bit more suitable, economic, or funny, does not make the project truly new or innovative - even though it can be strong in itself. This year, the jury decided to nominate four projects. The selected projects embody a similar dichotomy as the 2010 projects.



AM NAI PRIZE 2012:

WINNER

BLACK PEARL

**ZECC ARCHITECTS IN
COOPERATION WITH
STUDIO ROLF.FR**

BLACK PEARL

This house was basically a ruin when it was bought in 2008. It was one of the properties sold within a neighbourhood regeneration program of the municipality of Rotterdam. Conditions for buying the property were: renovate it within one year and live in it for at least two years afterwards.

The property, once a water-heating facility for the neighbourhood, is being reused as much as possible. The facade – stemming from the beginning of the 20th century - has been covered with black shiny oil; new windows have been punctured in new places relating to the inner requirements - a literal palimpsest. Inside, a complete restructuring of space took place. All original floors were removed and the new division creates three main areas: the studio, the home, and a roof terrace. Traces of the past remain visible throughout the entire house showing both old and new layers of the house, again as a palimpsest. A large sculpture functions as a 3D room divider. Made out of small wooden boards used as construction method and wall finish it creates separate yet connected spaces throughout the entire house.

After thorough deliberation and votes, the jury decided to grant the AM NAI Prize 2012 to Zecc Architects and Studio Rolf.fr for their joint efforts resulting in the Black Pearl. It is an intriguing project of an individual, stimulated by a government programme to maximize use of individual creativity, money and time for the sake of a bigger regeneration project. Through these projects, the government encourages young architects to take the opportunity to show that it is in fact possible to fight back, invent, create and

imagine through architecture. This clearly talented outsider came into this particular neighbourhood, and - together with Zecc Architects - transformed this property into a one-of-a-kind house. The facade shows an innovative way to deal with existing buildings. The interior mainly shows architecture as sculpted space satisfying individual needs. The street facade has two functions: it allows the personal requirements of the interior to 'burst' out, searching for light and for views, while at the same time respecting the established streetscape and the culture of the collective. In terms of its architecture, this project combines both traditions discussed before while reviewing the projects: construction, detailing and craftsmanship with idiosyncratic individuality and character. Simultaneously, the building maintains its position within the whole of the street, area and building block. It is inventive, experimental and daring: it shows new possibilities. Considering how this project provides an example of what can be the result when young architects seize the opportunity of making architecture: the Black Pearl is truly inspiring to all young architects.





COLOFON

This is a limited publication made specially for the awards ceremony of the AM NAI prize 2012, held on December 12th, 2012.

More information: www.nai.nl/amnai

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AM NAI: THE FUTURE

For the next edition in 2014 the jury, as well as encouraging all young talent to submit next time, would explicitly like to challenge more of the young-young to submit their projects, and not to be intimidated or discouraged by previous winners. The jury also urges all parties in practice to come up with other ways of stimulating young talent to build and reinvent the practice of architecture. Society is constantly changing, and as such, architectural concepts need to be constantly re-considered and re-evaluated, to realise if and when we need to do things differently. Do we need new building typologies? Do we need new buildings at all? Why not see all empty and seemingly redundant buildings as a new form of currency. As, next to financial support, Trusts and Starting Grants, other types of currency can provide young architects with the opportunity to develop and redevelop. A good commission is still the best start for interesting architecture, whether the commission is given by a commercial or governmental client or invented by the architects themselves.

