Heritage and Architecture studio Rotterdam Harbour Heritage

Reflection

Architectural analyses, Building technological analyses and Cultural Value

Jiska Bonte
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Tutors: Lidy Meijers, Bas Gremmen and Nicholas Clarke

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Introduction

The project

The Rotterdam Harbour is one of the most economical and crowded environments of the Netherlands. But the harbours like the Rijnhaven are no longer the industrial harbours. The industry has moved to the west making room for housing, social aspects, offices and tourism. The old industrial buildings are abandoned and in need of redevelopment. One of these harbour buildings is the Fenix II warehouse (former San Francisco Warehouse).

Figure 1 - Birdseye view - Google Maps

The Fenix II warehouse is located in Katendrecht on the quae of the Rijnhaven. The location is shown in figure 1. The Fenix warehouse was built in 1916-1922 for the Holland Amerika Lijn. The architect of the Fenix warehouse is C.N. van Goor. Van Goor was an important architect, not because of his 17 buildings in his portfolio, but for his contribution to the architectural world through his work for the BNA. At the time of the construction of "the San Francisco Warehouse", it was the largest warehouse in the world. In the 40's the building sustains a lot of damage, first by the bombing of Rotterdam in 1944 and later in 1947 by a fire within the building. In 1951 the renovation is completed and the name changes from "San Francisco warehouse" to the Fenix I and Fenix II warehouses. The name change is a symbolic one, to show how the building has risen from its ashes. In 1969 the Provimi Company settles in a part of the building and they add an extra silo. When Steinweg Handelsveem leaves the Fenix II in 2012 it becomes a place for new functions like the Fenix food factory, Codarts and Circus Rotjeknor. Fenix I will become a new dwelling complex and is planned to be complete in 2018.

The assignment

In this reflection, I will look back on my design process and determine my position within heritage. By reflecting on my design process I want to determine what pitfalls I have in my process, and how I could possibly avoid them in the future, and what helped me during this process. And in the chapter on my position within heritage, I reflect on the triangle of Heritage and Architecture and place myself within that field.

The design process

Looking back on the project and its design process the start was very linear and mostly based on research. After the values, starting points and essence of the building are determined the process becomes more circular.
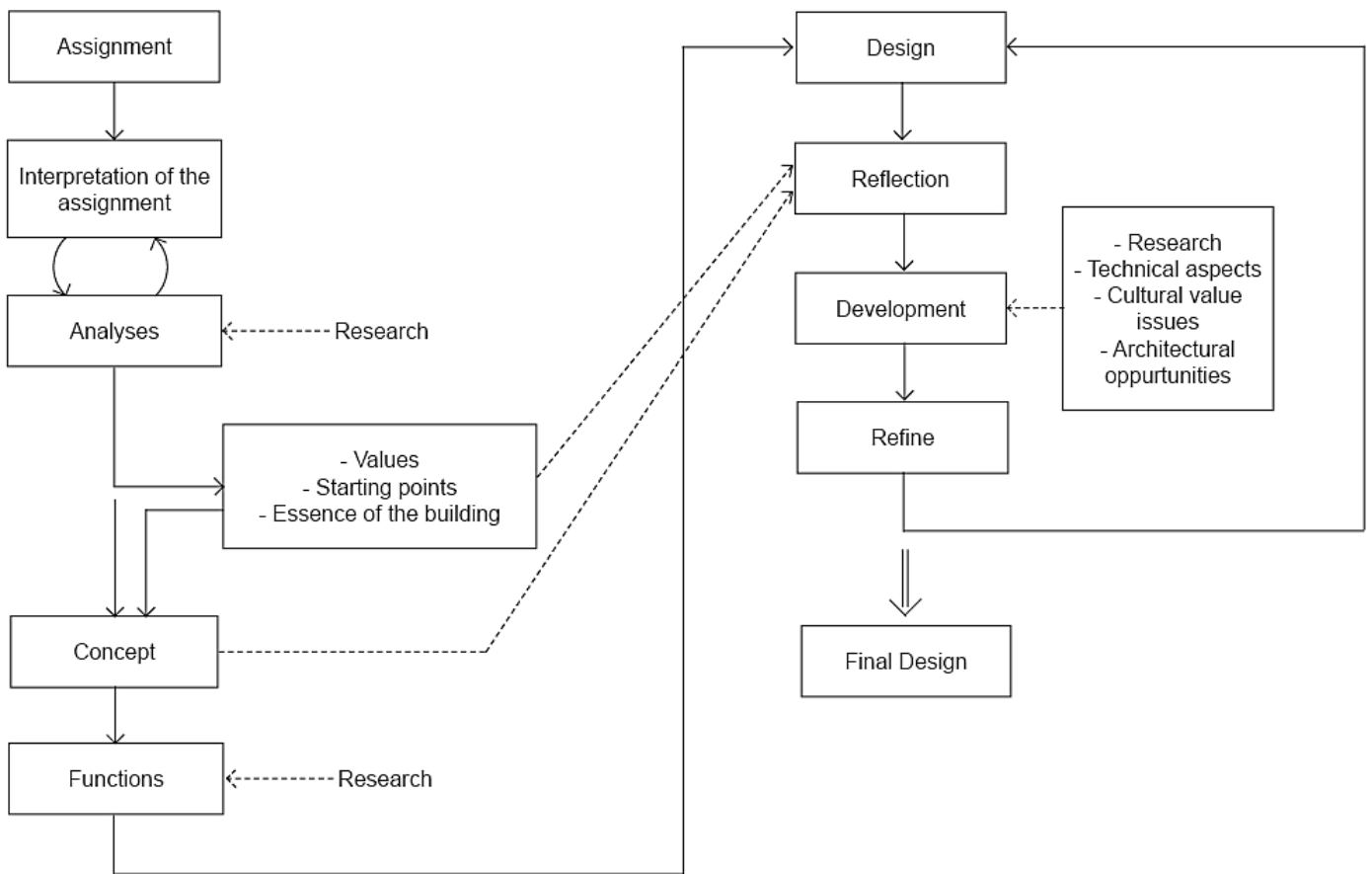

Figure 2 - Diagram design process - Own illustration

Pitfalls
During the process, there were several pitfalls where the process got stuck. These pitfalls are:
1. Doing too much unnecessary research.
2. Being too critical of the work done and second-guessing the decisions made.
3. Losing sight of the main concept during the changes.

To avoid these pitfalls in the future is mostly to talk to other designers for their opinion on the project. Fresh eyes helped me to get out of these pitfalls during this project.

Decisive moments
To make the right decision for the design there were three motivators that helped.
1. 5 minutes sketches to determine the problem.
2. Inspiration from reference projects.
3. The visiting the building.

These tools gave inspiration and motivation to make the design as it is or how it should be. They showed the possibilities and possible problems that needed to be fixed.

My position within Heritage

Within heritage, re-use and intervention there are three principles on which we base our analyses and designs; Design, Cultural Value and Technology.
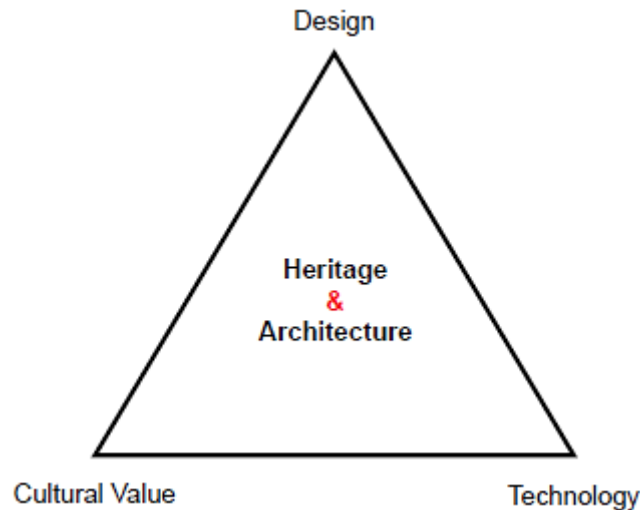
These interconnected principles mean, in order to make a good (re)design you have to respect the history and values of the existing and only add to these. The interventions need to be coherent with the existing building and the cultural values that are already present. When you have an existing building you need to dive deep into the history of the building, but also its surroundings. What has happened in the past that make the site and the building so special that it needs to be preserved? What techniques have been used to construct this building? What is the cultural value? The building is leading for the right approach.

Once these questions have been answered you have to ask yourself the most important question; what do I as a designer find the most valuable in the building? The answer to the question varies per building, per person and per year. In the designing process, the values are the leading aspects of the whole design. If a designing decision demolishes or lessens the value it should not be acceptable. It does not mean that there cannot be any large interventions, on the contrary, but the interventions should not lessen the found values.

Conclusion
My position is in order to make a good (re)design you have to respect the history and values of the existing and only add to these. The interventions need to be coherent with the existing building and the cultural value that is already present. It does not mean that there cannot be any large interventions, on the contrary, but the interventions should not lessen the found values.

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