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## Restoration of the Interior

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# 3 / RESTORATION OF THE INTERIOR

MARIE-THÉRÈSE VAN THOOR

Even before the restoration of the exterior was officially completed, the foundation's board started to reflect on what line to adopt with the restoration of the interior.<sup>1</sup> Should their starting point be the initial 1924 period, the current condition of the house, or something in between? There were quite a few differences between these periods; what was to be done with the kitchen, the beds, the floor coverings and colours, the desk below the windows, the piano, and so on. Key to all these deliberations was the decision about the house's future function. From June 1980 onwards, the restoration of the interior featured regularly in board meeting agendas. They spoke of 'internal restoration', but it was quite clear that this included both the restoration of the architecture and the refurbishment of the interior. They were interconnected, of course, but as will become apparent, each came with its own particular considerations and problems. Initially, three options were discussed: consolidation of the existing interior; reconstruction of a phase of the interior between 1924 and the current day (1980s); and reconstruction of the interior as it was around 1924.<sup>2</sup>

The board realized straight away that the first option, consolidation of the existing interior, was not only the option most in line with contemporary views on heritage preservation and restoration, but that it was also less prone than the other options to erroneous interpretations. The second option, requiring them to settle on a single intermediate phase, was fraught with difficulties. Two board members, Til Oxenaar and Benno Prensela, had lengthy discussions with Truus Schröder about the changes that had taken place inside the house, and many of

them proved difficult to date. Although the reconstruction of the period around 1924 was based on strong principles, it was also liable to deliver a very abstract result. Moreover, it was important that both the house as building and the house as an example of a particular 'domestic culture' should be visible. But whereas domestic culture calls for a dynamic presentation of life in the house over the years, the reconstruction of a single phase of the architecture is like a freeze-frame shot. It was decided to gather as much documentary evidence as possible in order to get a better picture of changes to the interior. Mrs Schröder inclined towards a restoration of the original state of the house, not so much in details as in concept. Discussion then turned to how the original functions of the spaces could be shown, without getting too bogged down in details.

In 1980 it had not yet been decided which architect should carry out the restoration.<sup>3</sup> Besides Bertus Mulder, Aldo van Eyck, Herman Hertzberger and Wim Quist had been mentioned and Han Schröder was invited to add other names to this list. In February 1981 the board considered the possibility of asking Mulder to oversee the process with advice from Han Schröder on the colours, when the time was finally ripe. Later that year, since it was considered desirable that the foundation should have a public voice with respect to the options for the restoration, the Commissie Bodon (Bodon Committee) was set up. It was made up of Alexander Bodon, Til Oxenaar and Benno Prensela, advised by Han Schröder. Its brief was to establish the guiding principles for the restoration.

The committee's first proposal was to prioritize the architectural aspect of the restoration and to appoint Bertus Mulder as restoration architect. This gave rise to two issues that needed to be clearly defined: the limits of the restoration architect's remit, and the desired end result of the restoration. The possibility of forming a supervisory committee made up of board members was raised. In addition, the Bodon Committee would need to decide on the period to which the house should be restored. Those present stressed that the board should make a decision about the restoration because of impending talks with the Utrecht city council regarding the latter's possible takeover of the Rietveld Schröder House.

At the end of 1981, the Bodon Committee proposed returning the house, in an 'abstract manner', to the situation of circa 1925–1930. The committee was of the view that Truus and Han Schröder should be involved in preparations for the restoration. Meanwhile, Mulder was already busy measuring everything inside the house and he was also involved in the plans for the garden drawn up by the garden architect W. Boer.<sup>4</sup> In early 1983 the choice of restoration architect was raised again, but the foundation still did not seem to regard this as urgent. It was not until October of that year that a formal decision was taken to ask Mulder to draw up a restoration plan and a budget, in consultation with the restoration committee.<sup>5</sup>

The foundation had already handed the Rietveld Schröder House over to the city council in a long-lease arrangement known as *erfpacht*. Over the course of 1984 and in early 1985, the board discussed the layout, furniture and floor coverings on several occasions. The house was to be restored as a museum house and it would be open for small groups of people. The council was keen to purchase the neighbouring building whose ground floor would be fitted out as a documentation centre and reception area for the museum.

During a board meeting on 6 February 1985, the restoration committee proposed (via Pieter Singelenberg) that Mulder's

plans for the 'internal restoration' be approved. From May 1985 onwards, Ida van Zijl was also invited to attend board meetings. As the 'future custodian' of the house she had intensive contact with Mulder, the foundation and Hanneke Schröder.

For their part, the heritage authorities were initially, and understandably, less than happy with the proposal to reconstruct the interior to its 1924 condition with a view to a museological function. Reconstruction of the 1924 condition would ignore the history of Truus Schröder's occupation of the house. Schröder had lived in the house from its completion until her death in 1985 and had had considerable influence on the interior design and any changes made to it over the years. Moreover, many of those changes were carried out by Rietveld himself, and were thus, 'in more than any other modern house', part of the heritage value, according to an advisory report by Wim Denslagen.<sup>6</sup> Reconstruction of the initial 1924 situation would make it impossible to evaluate any later changes introduced by Schröder and Rietveld. And, the report continued, visitors would be unable to understand how the house was lived in. Denslagen advised that any government grant for this restoration should contain the proviso that the work be confined to the reinstatement of the existing situation. He further advised against the proposed ground-floor break-through to the neighbouring house as it would compromise the internal space.

From correspondence in the following months it appears that Denslagen's advice was not adopted; the city council and government decided to adopt the foundation's guiding principles and to present the original concept rather than the history of the house and its occupation.<sup>7</sup> Initially a degree of reticence was recommended, but later on both council and government agreed to the proposed reconstruction, including the 'absolutely essential' passage through to the neighbouring house. The RDMZ also advised that the starting point for the restoration should not be the situation immediately after construction in 1924, but rather the period around 1930, by which time several improvements had been made, including a wholesale reconstruction of the kitchen on the ground floor.

## MULDER'S INTERPRETATION OF THE RESTORATION CONCEPT

The Bertus Mulder archive contains various descriptions, budgets, proposals and letters relating to the approach to the interior of the Rietveld Schröder House. These have recently been supplemented with a 'Memo' containing Mulder's recollections (2018) and with records of recent conversations with him. If one focuses on references to the approach to the plasterwork and paintwork in these documents, one is struck by a degree of inconsistency.

It is possible that a 'description with budget' of the restoration of the interior of the Rietveld Schröder House, from December 1984, was in fact the plan the foundation finally approved in February 1985.<sup>8</sup> Earlier that year Mulder had articulated his views on the restoration of the interior, in a 'memo concerning a more detailed description of the task'.<sup>9</sup> In it he writes that he is in agreement with an approach that would show the house as it appeared in the 1920s: 'To convey the essence of the house it is by no means necessary to wipe out all traces of its history'.<sup>10</sup> But the proposals that follow relate mainly to reconstructions of parts of the house in the interests of restoring the earlier spatial picture, such as the removal of the kitchen that Rietveld had made in Truus Schröder's former bedroom in 1936, and the reconstruction of the kitchen on the ground floor. Mulder's focus is clearly more on the interior layout and refurbishment than on the (architectural) restoration of the house, because he touches on a variety of minor details and features, such as the kitchen table, the delivery window, the speaking tube and the food lift. 'It is certainly so that the removal of the kitchen means that something very nice will disappear. On the other hand, the concept of a succession of continuous spaces around a core will be much clearer.' Evidently this concept had remained intact with the redesign of the bathroom (1936), because according to Mulder it did not need to be altered. He did, however, think that it was very important for the spatial picture that the division of the floor surface be restored. This concerned the floor of the upper storey of the house, where the plasterwork also needed to

be completely renewed. Of the ground floor plasterwork, Mulder noted that it should be 'renewed or repaired'. And all the interior walls of the house needed to be repainted.

In his 'description and budget' Mulder noted meticulously for each floor and for every space and for every part or surface of that space, what needed to be dismantled, disassembled, taken down, renewed, repaired, or reconstructed. Included were plumbing, metal structures, wiring, carpentry, plasterwork and painting, as well as permanent furnishings, from cupboards and shelves to the umbrella stand. The detailed survey was preceded by general remarks in which explicit mention was made of the plasterwork and paintwork. All the walls and ceilings in the house were plastered and painted and the plasterwork on the walls was coming loose in many places. Mulder noted that the ceilings, which consisted of plaster on reed matting, were cracked in several places. He suggested renewing all the plasterwork in the house. The plaster-on-reed ceilings could be demolished and replaced by plaster-on-wire mesh. The plaster on the brick walls would need to be chipped off by hand and the walls replastered with a base coat which could then be sanded.<sup>11</sup>

In autumn 1985, there followed a new description for this second phase of the house's restoration, which was scheduled to start in November.<sup>12</sup> In this document Mulder called the walls and ceilings – the stable, imperforate elements separating inside and outside, ground floor and upper floor – the elements of primary importance. Their plastered surfaces were to be painted in a colour that reflected light. Because these elements are so important for the overall spatial picture, the architect felt that they should be restored to a high standard, without cracks and irregularities. In his view, spot repairs of plasterwork were rarely if ever flawless. Accordingly, he again advised that all the plasterwork and paintwork on walls and ceilings be replaced so that the original spatial picture would once more be clearly visible. An added advantage would be that the metal conduits (for the electrical wiring) above the reed-mat ceiling of the upper floor could be replaced by PVC conduits, and the roof could



be properly insulated. The brickwork could be repaired and replastered as before and sanded in the rendering mortar. This, too, would result in a texture more like the original. In the checklist drawn up a month later we read that the contractor would be given the task of removing the plaster from walls and ceilings on the upper floor and carrying it away in plastic bags.<sup>13</sup> Before that, samples of the paint layers on all wall surfaces were to be placed in PVC bags for safekeeping. With regard to the rooms on the ground floor – the hall, the study, the former kitchen, the (help's) room and the studio – it was noted that the contractor and architect should remove the plasterwork from the walls and ceilings 'as necessary'. Here, too, samples of paintwork were to be taken and carefully stored. The reasons for dealing with the ground and upper floors in different ways are not entirely clear.

November 1985 saw the beginning of initial dismantling work in aid of further research, and in December, after the departure of the last tenant, Corrie Nagtegaal, the actual work commenced.<sup>14</sup>

It appears from the minutes of the first work meeting, in January 1986, that the work had got off to a good start. The first floor had been cleared, and the furnishings and floor coverings had been stored on the ground floor. 'All the plaster has been stripped from walls and ceilings and taken away.'<sup>15</sup> The cleaned brickwork turned out to have a lot of cracks and it had proved necessary to 'inject [it] structurally'.<sup>16</sup>

In March work ground to a halt because no agreement had been reached with the fire service regarding the fire safety and security system. Mulder wanted a system that would not be visible in the house, but that – like the problems with the brickwork – entailed additional, unbudgeted costs.<sup>17</sup> While waiting for a solution to this issue, he was keen to press on with the laying of the conduits so that the plasterers could set to work. 'I very much hope that we will then no longer have to look at those bare brick walls,' he sighed [FIG. 3.5/3.6/3.7].<sup>18</sup> Once the wiring was laid, the roof had been repaired and the plasterwork on the upper floor was finished, Mulder would be able to present the board with a new time schedule. It was

also agreed with the board that the building committee would 'in due course' discuss the extent of reconstruction on the ground floor.<sup>19</sup> For the restoration of the interior, unlike for that of the exterior, there were regular work meetings with the building committee.

## THE UPPER FLOOR WITH BARE BRICK WALLS

Truus Schröder died in the Rietveld Schröder House on 12 April 1985. The day after her funeral Bertus Mulder had the interior of the house photographed as a record of how Schröder had lived in the house towards the end of her life.<sup>20</sup> Together with his assistant Paul Koster he proceeded to measure the house in an attempt to draw the original condition. Ever since the restoration of the exterior, Mulder had been a frequent visitor to the house and he had also helped Truus Schröder with a variety of maintenance tasks. This had given him the opportunity to talk to her about the house, its history, and the future. As the next chapter will show, Schröder's memories were to prove vital for the layout and furnishing of the museum house. Schröder was also able to tell Mulder a lot about architectural and other changes that the house had undergone over the years. She felt that after her death the house should be presented not as she would leave it, but as a manifesto of a new architecture and a new way of living. This was most clearly visible on the upper floor, which was actually one large space that could be divided up by means of sliding walls into landing, living room, and bedrooms for Schröder herself, her two daughters, and her son. The fact that a reconstruction of that situation would mean demolishing the kitchen in her former bedroom 'that Rietveld had so lovingly made for her' pained her deeply. But she understood that it was a necessary sacrifice.

Mulder had consequently become very familiar with the house over the years and was able to form a reasonably accurate picture of the original situation. He also knew whereabouts in the house to look for more traces of the earliest period. In November 1985, he and Koster made a cautious start on the dismantling, after which the building contractor removed the rest of the plasterwork.



FIG. 3.1 The dismantling of wall, floors and ceiling yielded a lot of information about pipes, connection points and the attachment of furniture





FIG. 3.2 The floor gave an indication of the division of the floor surface and the position of the beds

The survey of the now stripped-back house yielded a lot of new information [FIG. 3.1].<sup>21</sup> For example, pencilled lines and painted and stained areas were discovered on the floors, which provided insight into the division of the floor surface and the position and size of the beds [FIG. 3.2]. Holes in the walls indicated where cupboards and other items of furniture had been fixed to the walls. Mulder also recovered original parts of the former kitchen. And during the inspection of the electrical services, a 'strangely insulated hot water system' was discovered under the floor.

The hot water pipes ran under the floor inside ducts insulated with sawdust. After the plasterwork had been removed, the chased pipes for the wash basins came to light in the brickwork, together with the attachment points of the beds in the girls' room. With the removal of the reed ceiling, the wooden beams on the underside of the rooftop extension were exposed and its structure could be studied, measured and drawn. All these discoveries were invaluable for the reconstruction and re-furnishing of this floor.<sup>22</sup>





FIG. 3.3 The partially dismantled upper floor

The most visible and radical aspect of the restoration of the upper floor was the stripping of the walls and ceiling, the elements that were so crucial to the spatial picture [FIG. 3.3/3.4]. Stripped back they revealed only 'bare brickwork' and a bare soffit [FIG. 3.5/3.6/3.7]. 'The [foundation] and I were of the opinion that we would only be able to make the original spatial picture clearly and definitely tangible if the delimiting surfaces that determine that picture were once more of impeccable texture and colour,' Mulder later wrote. Even the possible withdrawal of the RDMZ's grant did not persuade the foundation to change its mind according to Mulder.<sup>23</sup> In 2016 Mulder still recalled a visit to his office by Ida van Zijl and Wim Denslagen. There was further discussion of the rigorous approach, which according to Denslagen did not correspond to what RDMZ was used to. Mulder explained once more that for him the original spatial experience went hand in hand with the restoration of space and surfaces. 'Denslagen disappeared, and that was the end of it'.<sup>24</sup> And so Mulder proceeded to reprise the reconstructive approach he had previously applied to the exterior.



FIG. 3.4 The corner window during the restoration, with a view of the viaduct and the houses on Erasmuslaan

He secured the assistance of a small team of trusted tradesmen who worked under his direction at a steady pace. The most important of them was Jan Zwaak, the sole employee of the building contractor C. Moolenbeek, who had also been Rietveld's regular contractor and had even been involved in the construction of the Schröder House. Zwaak himself had also worked for Rietveld and helped him build various stands for international trade fairs. Because Mulder was unimpressed by the painting of the exterior by Van Santen, he was now working with a painter from Bilthovens Bouwbedrijf De Jong B.V.<sup>25</sup> Unlike the exterior (with the exception of alterations carried out in the 1930s) the finishing of the interior was still pretty much original. Occasionally bits of paintwork or plasterwork had been damaged. Mulder related how Schröder's cleaning lady would then buy a pot of paint and patch up the damage.<sup>26</sup> After the house had been cleared out, however, the full extent to which the plasterwork was damaged, cracked, had come loose or been repaired, became clear. Rietveld had evidently never been bothered by this in all those years, but for Mulder it was incompatible with the impeccable spatial picture he was so set on recreating.



FIG. 3.5 The upper floor of the Rietveld Schröder House in dismantled state



FIG. 3.6 Bare brick wall and stripped ceiling

Before the walls were replastered, the cracks in the brickwork were, like those in the exterior, filled with synthetic mortar. The new metal lath ceiling was suspended from the joists using a (floating) steel network in order to minimize the chance of cracks.<sup>27</sup> The plastering was carried out by the firm of H. van de Kant Afbouwbedrijf Zeist B.V. H. van de Kant recalled that the existing plaster had to be carefully removed and placed in bags in plastic trays, sorted according to wall area and colour. This enabled Mulder to carefully examine the plaster and layers of paint on top of it.<sup>28</sup> After that examination the old plaster was carried away and destroyed. Although the abovementioned memos from 1984 and 1985 refer to a specific plaster mix, Mulder and Van de Kant stated, when asked, that the exact proportions of cement, sand and lime were decided on site. Ultimately, it was the plasterer who determined this, just as in Rietveld's day. After applying the plaster, the plasterers had to sand the base coat 'with jute on a wooden board', to achieve the same effect as under Rietveld. It resulted in a smooth surface with here and there a stray grain of sand, but without any traces of repair work or restoration.

## THE COLOURS OF THE PAINTWORK ON THE UPPER FLOOR

In the photographs taken in the 1970s and '80s, it is obvious that the plasterwork on the upper floor was at that moment painted white [FIG. 3.3/4.14/4.19/4.20]. The only exception was the chimney. The interior had been less frequently repainted than the exterior and significantly fewer different shades emerged when Mulder started to inspect and 'scrape' in search of underlying coats of paint. The greys were less bluish than those he had encountered on the exterior, while the red, blue and yellow were less vivid than on the exterior, especially the yellow, which was 'softer'.<sup>29</sup> On the plasterwork, and also on wooden and metal elements like the window seat in the living area, on cupboards, on the newel post, behind sliding walls, on the floor, on radiators and on the rails of the sliding walls, Mulder found the remains of what was very probably the original paintwork. These traces formed the basis for the new colour scheme in which the colours used to paint the plasterwork were white, yellow, blue and two shades of grey, while the woodwork and radiators were painted in white, black, red, yellow, yellowish green, blue and grey [FIG. 3.8].

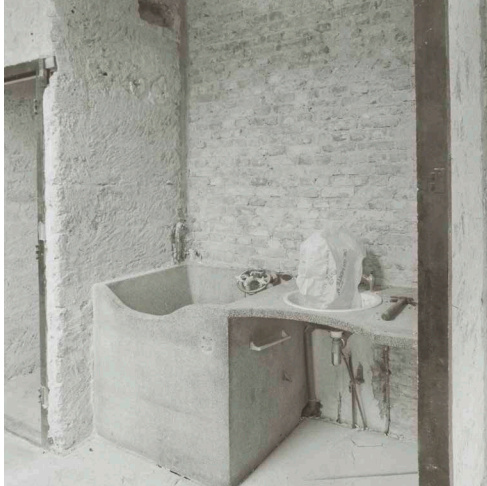


FIG. 3.7 Stripped bathroom with 'lavette'

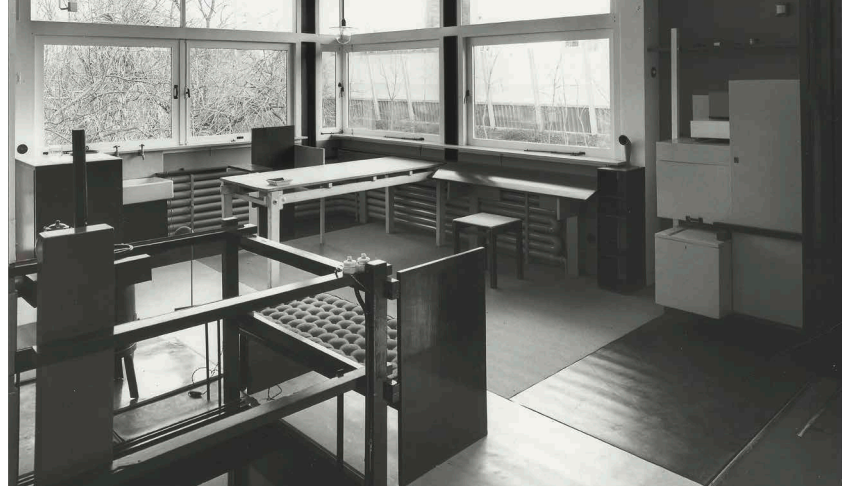


FIG. 3.8 A black-and-white photograph of the upper floor after the restoration shows the new spatial composition and colour scheme

When it came to the chimney, Mulder deviated from the original colour. His colour research had shown that the chimney was first painted yellow (in the same shade of yellow as elsewhere on this floor), then lavender blue and finally blue.<sup>30</sup> Mulder initially considered lavender blue for the new coat of paint, because that was also used on the ground floor. After consulting Rietveld's oldest daughter Bep, he eventually opted for the darker ultramarine blue. Bep Rietveld had convinced him that lavender blue in combination with the other colours would be too 'muted'.

What mattered was the entire composition of colours and surfaces, which was supposed to restore the original spatial experience. During the removal of the plasterwork in the girls' bedroom, Mulder had discovered a grey that matched the compositional image of the space. The wall, which ran from inside to outside, had been white on the inside back when Mulder had devised the colour scheme of the exterior in the 1970s. When the painting of the interior was completed, however, it turned out that the grey on the inside of this wall was different from the grey of the exterior section. Because it was important for the overall image

that the wall should be the same colour inside and out, Mulder had the exterior repainted [FIG. 3.9]. But it didn't end with the repainting of the balcony wall on Prins Hendriklaan; the entire composition of greys on the exterior had to be determined all over again.

In the minutes of the meetings with the building committee and with the board of the foundation we read that the readjustment and repainting of the greys would result in considerable additional expense.<sup>31</sup> Yet the colour research and the overall colour composition were not raised. 'Even with the restoration of the interior, it didn't occur to anyone to interfere or to think of doing things differently,' according to Mulder [FIG. 3.10].<sup>32</sup> He did everything 'on his own initiative', but he felt that he had the full support of the foundation. As with the exterior, Mulder did not record his research findings, and the samples were thrown away once the work was finished. He says that at most one piece of the plaster from behind the heater was preserved.<sup>33</sup> Before being repainted, all the original woodwork and metal was thoroughly cleaned and sanded. The only place where there might still be older coats of paint, according to Mulder, was on the yellow window ledge below the corner window.





FIG. 3.9 The wall in the girls' room runs from inside to outside, so B. Mulder had both the inner and outer sides of the wall painted in the same shade of grey, 2015



FIG. 3.10 The colour composition of the floor, 2018



FIG. 3.11 Hall, 1985

Although the colours were once again 'precisely determined in consultation with the Sikkens laboratory', no information about this phase of the restoration has been found in the paint manufacturer's archive.<sup>34</sup>



FIG. 3.12 Hall, 2015

### THE GROUND FLOOR, AN INCOMPLETE RECONSTRUCTION

In the very first conversations we had with Bertus Mulder, the emphasis was on the reconstruction of the original condition of the Rietveld Schröder House. With the interior, discussions focused on the restoration of the experience of uninterrupted space on the upper floor.





FIG. 3.13 The plasterwork at the top of the south wall of the study was damaged and came loose in October 2016

Most of the illustrations in *Het Rietveld Schröderhuis* were of this floor, plus one or two photographs of the reconstructed kitchen or freshly painted hall on the ground floor. If we compare the hall in its current state with a photograph taken in 1985, immediately after Truus Schröder's death, the differences in colour are obvious [FIG. 3.11/3.12]. The architect repeatedly stressed that everything in the interior was created by him, that he had stripped the inner surface of the walls back to the structural shell, and

that he had 'recreated' the walls and ceilings as impeccably as possible. We therefore assumed that the ground floor had been restored in the same manner as the upper floor. The documents we consulted tended to support the impression of a full reconstruction of the interior finish throughout the house. In the minutes of the discussion with the foundation and the building committee, 'the extent of reconstruction of the ground floor' was mentioned only in relation to the furnishings. There was just one sentence in *Het Rietveld Schröderhuis* that deviated: 'For the rest everything [on the ground floor], including the plasterwork, was repaired and repainted.'<sup>35</sup>

In October 2016 a piece of plaster came loose at the top of the south wall of the study [FIG. 3.13]. This provided an opportunity to have both the cause of the loosening and the composition of the plaster investigated by, respectively, TU Delft and TNO.<sup>36</sup> Quite by chance it was possible to show a sample of this plaster to Hans Geerken, who had been involved in the restoration of the exterior. He thought it looked as if it had been composed of coarse sharp sand from Buslo with putty lime and cement; he thought the sand dated from the 1970s. In addition, the top layer of paint was probably Alfatex IQ latex.<sup>37</sup> Thus it looked as if the plasterwork on this wall had been renewed. However, TNO's petrographic analysis indicated that the sample did not contain any cement and consisted of lime mortar base coats, lime mortar finishing coats plus two top coats. 'It's possible the sample was a fragment of the original plaster,' was TNO's conclusion.<sup>38</sup>

Armed with this information, we spoke again with the architect and took another look at the archival documents. We also obtained access to previously unavailable documents and photographs.<sup>39</sup> Given that the kitchen and adjoining daily help's room had been radically renovated, we focused on the study, next to the entrance, and on Rietveld's former studio, on the Prins Hendriklaan side. The latter was conceived as a garage, but was first used as studio and later served a number of different purposes. Various colour schemes can be gleaned from the historical photographs, all with an emphasis on white [FIG. 3.14].



FIG. 3.14 Undated photograph of the studio with view of Prins Hendriklaan; predominantly white colour scheme



FIG. 3.15 In 1985 the lower sections of the studio walls are grey; the inner side of the door to Prins Hendriklaan is painted black

However, a photo taken in April 1985 shows the lower sections of the walls painted grey, and the inside of the door onto Prins Hendriklaan in black rather than white [FIG. 3.15]. Upon inquiry Mulder recalled that he had based the colour scheme of the ground floor on what he had encountered there.<sup>40</sup> The studio was therefore repainted in the colours of the top coat, without searching for traces of the original colours and also without

stripping away the plaster. The colour scheme of the adjoining study, in particular the greys, appeared to have changed little over the course of time, to the extent that this could be established based on historical photographs [FIG. 3.16/3.17]. Mulder recalled that the black ceiling in this room had looked pockmarked and had to be repainted. He had the other surfaces in this room repainted in the existing colours as well.





FIG. 3.16 The study painted in white, black and shades of grey, c. 1974



FIG. 3.17 Undated photograph of the study

In Mulder's view the ground floor, with its rather traditional layout, was not so crucial to the value of the architecture. The layout had been necessary in order to obtain planning approval (in 1924), but it contributed little to the spatial picture, which was all-important for the house. This was why he treated the ground floor differently from the upper floor. The walls and ceiling were not dismantled, just repaired, with visible repairs being tolerated.<sup>41</sup> In 2018, in order to verify this, TNO and the Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg (Foundation Restoration Atelier Limburg/SRAL)

were asked to analyse the composition of the plaster and finish coats [FIG. 3.18/3.19]. On that occasion samples were also taken of the exterior; these have already been discussed in Chapter 1. Supplementing TNO's conclusions, the SRAL analysis confirmed that there were probably still traces of coloured layers of plaster in several places on the exterior, in two shades of grey. The visual composition and the properties of these layers seem to point in the direction of the stipulations in the Specifications for the Schröder House (1924).<sup>42</sup>

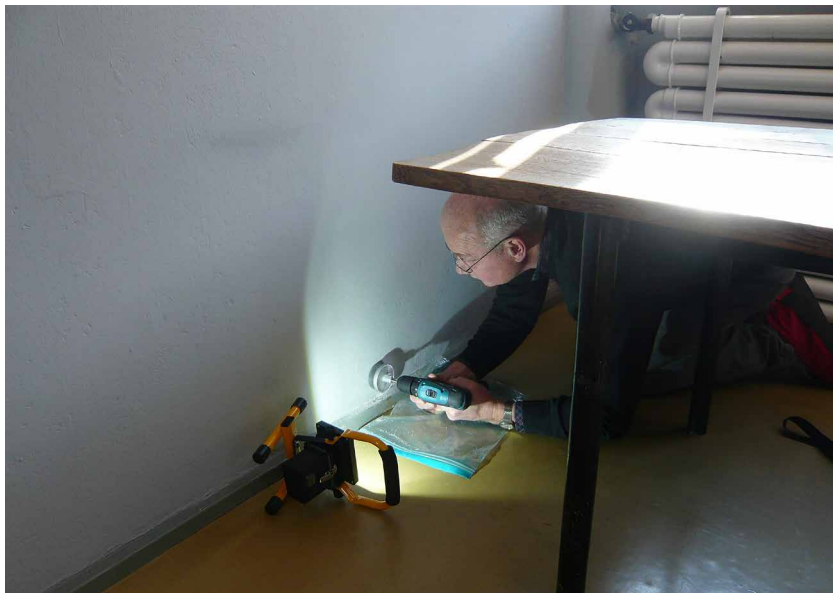


FIG. 3.18 SRAL specialist taking a sample from the east wall of the studio



FIG. 3.19 Plaster sample from the wall below the studio window on Prins Hendriklaan

Samples were taken on the ground floor from the south wall of the study and from the east wall of the studio, and on the upper floor from the south wall of the girls' room. These provided insight into the possible differences in composition and finishing of the plasterwork, which turned out to be definitely not (upper floor), and possibly (ground floor) original. The TNO analysis produced one unexpected result: the two plaster samples proved to have the same stratigraphy, which would seem to indicate that both are instances of renovation plaster.

Yet one of the two samples was from the same south wall of the study from which a piece of plaster had come loose in 2016 and in 2017 been declared a possible remnant of the original plaster. But the stratigraphy of the 2016 sample turned out to be far more complex. Accordingly, it is possible that the wall in the study comprises both original and renovation plaster.

The SRAL investigated not just the finish coats of the samples concerned, but also carried out a limited visual inspection elsewhere on the ground floor. In the samples from the rooms on the ground floor remains of 'the original layers of paint from 1925' were discovered. 'These are matt finishes with a clearly visible brush stroke, in which calcium is predominant'. During the visual inspection, the SRAL discovered two finish coats, which date from before the restoration of the interior, in other words from the Rietveld period. The SRAL was also able to establish that starting with the restoration, the interior had been repainted three times with a synthetic wall paint. It was noted that the current colours differ from both the original colours and the colours from the restoration period. In addition, the smooth texture of the current, roller-applied coats differs from the surface of the original coats which 'have a clearly streaky and matt texture'. The last two coats were probably applied during the repainting in 2004 and 2010, to which R. de Jager from Sikkens referred.<sup>43</sup>



## IN CONCLUSION

Mulder only applied the principle of an impeccable interior finish to the upper floor, which was reconstructed in an 'abstract manner'. The idea was more important for him than the material. According to this view, the authenticity of the Rietveld Schröder House rests on the concept and the spatial picture, which have survived thanks to the 'recreation' of Rietveld's design. The material is of secondary importance. Yet by merely repairing the original interior finish in certain parts of the ground floor, Mulder has in fact preserved the material authenticity in those places. Paradoxically, this puts him in accord with other, more generally accepted restoration ideas, and with 'what the heritage authorities are used to'.

This (more) original materiality could serve as a starting point for future repairs or restorations in these parts of the house. In order to gather reference material, however, a more extensive material investigation of all the walls and ceilings of these rooms would then be necessary, given that the historical documentation has proven to be very scanty in this respect. This applies equally to the restorations by Bertus Mulder (and the subtle alterations since then) which, after the passage of decades, have also become part of the history of the house. Unless, of course, it is decided to adhere to Mulder's views and, instead of adopting the principle of material authenticity, to pursue the restoration of an abstract and impeccable image.