

SANTOS

Reflection Paper  
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Reflection for the preliminary results of the research and design in the graduation phase

Faculty of Architecture  
Delft University of Technology  
Harbour Heritage Graduation Studio 2017/18  
Santos House of Jazz

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## **Structure**

In this reflection paper, I will reflect on the process and design of this graduation year and my position towards heritage and architecture in general.

I will start with my personal vision and position, move on to a general introduction of the overall product, answer the four questions in the graduation manual and conclude with a progress review.

## **Vision**

I have always felt romantically inclined to historic buildings and their architectural re-interpretation on both conceptual and material level. Most heritage buildings and old places carry a deep sense of nostalgia and always manage to move me and communicate on a deep psychological level. Their transitory character requires a receptiveness for the intangible and a shift in vision, welcoming apprehension by all senses and empathy towards our environment. This fascination is my driver and encourages me to do the same; to create places and spaces that touch people and reinforce an understanding of the importance of the past in the future.

The MSc3 Harbour Heritage Studio in Rotterdam provides a good framework for me to do, allows me to explore my personal interests and to connect it with my greatest passion: music.

## **Position**

I feel an emotional distance in contemporary architecture due to the fact that many buildings seem to base only on aesthetic and functional criteria, rather than stories and resonant backgrounds. Just like a piece of music or a book, I think that architecture should still strive to move us and touch our heart and soul. What is a piece of music without evoking emotion, rather than that we simply do not like it? Or what is a book without evoking emotion? Probably just feels like a trivial report in a journal. Architecture is about emotion and about telling a story that deeply resonates within us and provokes our imagination. Architecture, specifically heritage architecture should strive to move us in such a visceral way that we experience and keep strong memories about it.

'Heritage', an 'inheritance of the past', means to me that a building or a site that is 'reborn', comes with a specific knowledge about the past. This knowledge should be taken with both hands, recreated in a way that the most intrinsic story becomes tangible again - and in turn reinterpreted to 'survive' the future. Heritage is not about a continuation of the past, but about evoking parts of the past and reinterpreting them in such a way that they can be applied to a new program. I like to call this a 'nostalgia for the future'. While nostalgia helps you appreciate and memorize the past, it brings with it the problem of dwelling too much on it, over-romanticizing the past and seeing things out of scale and perspective. So when a heritage site is to be 'reborn', it is opening a new chapter - which means it should be strengthened by its past but looking towards the future.

This 'nostalgia for the future' runs through all scale levels, from program choice, program definition to technology and materiality, meaning that architecture, building technology and the cultural value should be intertwined in such a way that they complement each other and form one coherent whole. It is always about taking what exists, transforming it and pushing innovation - in order to 'survive' the future and not getting caught up in the past. I think it is important to be a small rebel at heart and engage in new ways of thinking. I always seek to change the way we see things; in this specific case of Santos: I could have just turned Santos into a Jazz club as we know it, but I knew that this would not survive the next ten years. And then? Probably new chapter. When a heritage project is 'reborn', it needs to be equipped with the best possible program and technology, analogical to 'the survival of the fittest' which is Darwin's theory of biological evolution. That is why it was so important to me to dive into the history of Jazz, find out what it was before, what it is now and capture in one building what it could become in the future. This task was really difficult because Santos itself is already loaded with information and stories itself - and then to combine it with a different story and making it technically feasible (at least on paper) was very challenging. I really see heritage projects and my design for Santos as a journey you experience, and get in touch with glimpses of the past, combined with the new. This duality excites me. It is about time and motion, a narrative that pulls and pushes different senses, and a very powerful way to complement this journey is by playing with light. It seems such a trivial thing, but if you think about it: Light is a fundamental sign of human being's existence and illuminates the natural world we live in. I therefore believe that light is such a powerful tool to create desired atmospheres and the feel for a place. At the end of the day, heritage is about provoking emotion, imagination and thought - and ultimately bringing people together. In my design for Santos I attempted to do exactly that.

## Background

During WWII, Jazz music was banned in Rotterdam because it was associated with people of racial stereotypes. The district of Katendrecht was the only one of lawlessness and disobedience and so became the only place where Jazz music survived. The Belvedere Verhalenhuis in Katendrecht was the only Jazz club back then - as a symbol of hope that Jazz would not die, and that people could go there and play Jazz amidst the terror of the war. Today, the Belvedere does not function as a Jazz club any more, but houses a restaurant and space for events.

This nostalgic revelation will turn Santos into the heart of Jazz in Katendrecht and revive a piece of history that is currently not commemorated.

It poses a great opportunity to bring back something to the community that was taken away from it - a place of togetherness and collective culture as the Belvedere Verhalenhuis embodied exactly that during WWII.

## 1. Relationship between Research & Design

Starting off with the studio, we needed to find a suitable program for the chosen building that reflected the needs of the neighborhood, in this case Katendrecht. Determining the program for Santos as a *House of Jazz* was really more of a gut feeling first, without having done extensive research on what the district or the city was in need.

My personal research and design method was far from linear, as I believe designing is never a linear process. It is one full of emotions, up's and down's - but eventually you get to conclusions. The important thing is to stop yourself every now and then, look back at what you have explored and back it up with a methodical approach.

For me, this division of 'Research Semester' (1st) and 'Design Semester' (2nd) never really existed because it was a constant interplay of researching-designing-backing up with research again-and redesigning. It can be seen as a never-ending loop. Research to design. Design to research. Sometimes in the process, I also felt I was stuck in a rut so it was more like a trial and error, because then at least I knew how I had to continue. In moments of doubt, I would try to empathize with the building itself and ask myself: What would Santos want? That always led me to various answers. If there was one answer on how I came up with the re-design of Santos, it is through analogical thinking. I am a person that draws connections between various domains and applies them to architecture. That non-architectural research gave me a lot of confidence in what I was doing.

Three main aspects influenced my design:

1. My summer holidays in Portugal and Morocco, where I was touched by several experiences so I just knew, I had to apply them to my design.
2. A book I read which is called "This is your brain on music: Understanding a human obsession" by Daniel Levitin.
3. And the structure of how books and narratives are built.

I will briefly share here one lesson learnt about the neuroscience of music:

'Whether you like a song or not is based on your expectations and ability to predict what is next. Great musicians play with your brain and expectations in the way that they get you to expect something, and then surprise you, before taking you back to comfortable terrain. When a song repeats certain patterns over and over again, until you expect it to do nothing else and then, at the last chance it gets an unexpected rhythm break or an unfamiliar chord catches you off guard.' (Levitin, 2006)

(In narrative language, this phenomenon is called 'subverted expectation'.)

Whether its a piece of music, a book or a building - they all are a construction and have a certain rhythm. This theme of the 'unexpected' was already very apparent due to my research question, but the subverted expectation is in Santos' case the *Explore Lab* where I break out of the building's rhythm and finally create some air to breathe. The *Piano Restaurant* with the best view on to Rotterdam's skyline is the *happy ending*.

## 2. Relationship between the theme of graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object)

At the beginning of the 'Harbour Heritage Graduation Studio', I visited the site without having done any prior research. What I instantly noticed was the intangible connection to the water. The building itself seemed very rigid and expressive in character, despite its many openings it seemed very closed off from the outside, which is ironic due to the fact that it was built for the purpose of an entrepôt and warehouse. Looking at the warehouse typology of the Rotterdam harbour building development during the 20th century, one may notice that there are two distinctive physical proofs, namely the winch houses on top and the open doors on each level where the goods were lifted into designated storage spaces. As a second-row building, it makes sense that this conjured up activities from Santos towards the doc and implied that, despite its closed and rigid character, it was so much more than the building confines itself.

This led me to the realization that I had to reconnect Santos to the waterfront again and through that strengthen its identity.

Within the context of the 'Harbour Heritage' Graduation Studio, Santos - as one of the few remaining harbour heritage buildings in Rotterdam - demonstrates the city's development of one of the world's largest ports and forms the essence and identity of Rotterdam.

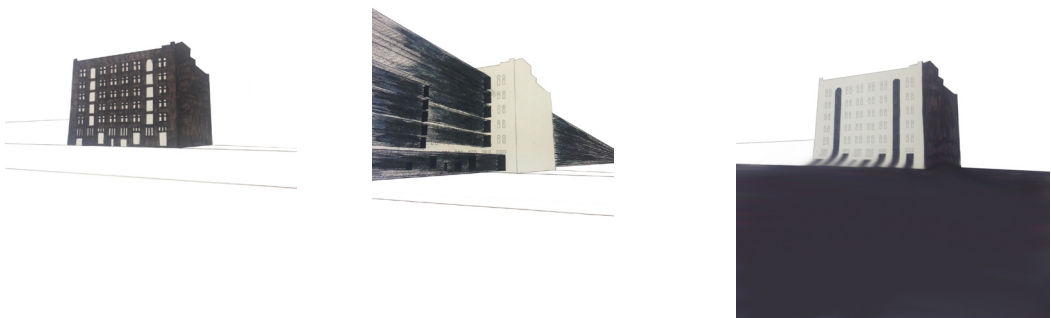


Fig 1: Rigidity, closed off despite many openings

Fig 2: How can Santos open up to its surroundings?

Fig 3: How can Santos become part of its surroundings?



### **3. Relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework**

The methodical line of approach can be divided into the given method of the Heritage & Architecture Chair and my personal method. The group started off Semester1 with a very linear approach; we were encouraged to follow a strict structure of research. I believe this methodical research approach provided a good foundation for our further individual research and design. Furthermore, the Riegl Brand Matrix offered the opportunity to classify relevant heritage values at various scales. This allowed to create my personal framework of transformation based on a specific combination of highly valued aspects.

The fact that we had to follow a linear approach and hand in certain products in time, encouraged me to not get lost in the process but to constantly challenge myself into thinking critically and pushing things forward. While this system was quite rigid, I feel we were also given a lot of freedom, in a way that I always felt understood about my research and my intentions.

Parallel to the studio's approach, I developed my own which can be divided into three parts: Fascination, Story and Exploration.

'Fascination' indicated my first impressions of Santos without having gained any background knowledge about it yet. The aim was to grasp the spirit and feeling, without being influenced, and to try and sense what message the place conveys. This was done through sketches and atmospheric studies.

'Story' comprises the (group) analysis in relation to my design and my personal value assessment divided into 1. Cultural-Historical Value 2. Architectural Value 3. Typological Value and 4. Nostalgic Value. Parallel to this, I created a network diagram about the 'Sense of Place' to understand my design process better. 'Exploration' comprises references, starting points and research according to my personally chosen guiding themes of the design, which are: Atmosphere, Light(ing), Nostalgia, Jazz and Acoustics.

I will not go into detail about how this research was conducted, as this was already partly answered in pt.1, but I can share some insights on my post P2 period. The time after P2 gave me the opportunity to re-evaluate my ideas and thoroughly answer my main research question on a nostalgia for the future and what this could possibly mean. I did this by keeping a journal by my side where I organized my personal experiences and thoughts on nostalgia. Nostalgia can mean several things, but in the end it is always about the past being transformed for the future, which answered my researched question. My whole design changed again. Until P3 and P4 I continued my research on the already mentioned themes, using 'trial and error' to get forward and constantly complemented the design with additional research.

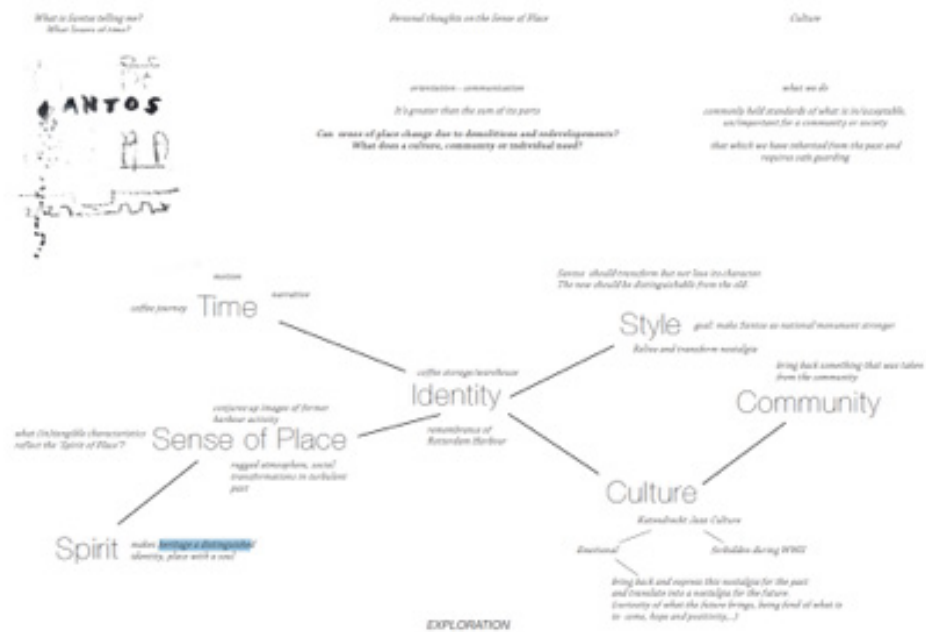


Fig1: Sense of Place Brainstorm

#### 4. The relationship between the project & and wider social context

I believe that the conservation and transformation of historical buildings and sites are a growing industry and one of the main focus points of the future. It is a very complex field because you need to deal with so many different aspects. In order to re-design a building of historic value, there is a need for great empathy towards our environment and especially towards the people we intend to build it for. A heritage redesign specifically reacts to a certain social need within that area, and so the socio-economic facts were a crucial trigger for the redesign of Santos.

Katendrecht poses a great opportunity to bring back Jazz culture to the community that was taken away from it - a place of togetherness and identity as the Belvedere Verhalenhuis embodied exactly that during WWII.

The strategy of the design assignment on an urban level strives to re-connect Santos with the waterfront and to tie it up with the surrounding new developments. At its current state and within the future masterplan 2020, Santos seems to be a loose entity while its surroundings form a new layer within the urban fabric and do not stand in any connection to the existing. The aim is to weave a stepped landscape between Santos and the waterfront and to integrate it into the new developments, in order to create a place of togetherness. This open space should symbolize the heart of the district, strengthen a new sense of place and commemorate the past by revealing the intangible connection to the water. This regained connection to the waterfront suggests to 'rewrite' the port, to rethink port culture and turn the empty current into a backdrop for modern culture and the port's history. Despite the many tensions Katendrecht has gone through and how historically abused it has been, in every new chapter there is a new sense of hope, a nostalgia for the future.

## Process

I would like to share with you my personal process during this year, how I have got to know myself better and what valuable lessons I have learnt that I can hopefully pass on to fellow students.

Generally said, this whole graduation studio has for me been the most difficult in my entire architecture studies. That is because it is the first project where I am really able to explore my interests, through that explore myself as a person, and in turn position or start to position myself as a (future) architect.

Starting off with the studio, I had some very clear goals in mind which I believe were changed and adjusted during the (design) process. The main idea is still there, but what I have learnt is that I needed to strip this goal down to its bare core, to 'kill my darlings' and start strengthening it from different perspectives. I have spent a vast amount of time on training my sensibility for atmospheres, leading me to have a good overall idea of how I want the building to feel and be experienced.

For me, a good building manages to move me. It does not necessarily need to be a pleasant emotion, but an emotion that moves me so much that I remember it long after. It is just a certain feeling that I have when entering a building. Sometimes it can be explained - sometimes not, which in my case may sometimes lead to 'floating arguments' in the design. Floating arguments in my case mean that I have made a decision based on my intuition and am not able to back it up with a grounded argumentation (yet). Though I have learnt that intuition can take you very far and should not be something to be pushed aside as it can open you to layers that other might not see. I think as a (future) architect it is really important to trust your own process, meaning to close your eyes and follow your gut feeling about certain things, trusting that in the end it will work out - because in the process you find those answers. If I look back at my first on-site impressions and intermediate ideas, it is fascinating to see that all little things and ideas somehow added up in the end now, even if it meant putting them aside first and thinking I won't need them any more.

In the course of the studio, I have always felt very challenged in finding a balance between accepting and processing feedback or/and standing up straight for my idea. Still until now I am learning how to find that balance, if that is even fully possible. I believe it is very important to always remain open to feedback, as it is nothing personal nor is it criticism, but a test how strong your ideas and plans really are. This in turn will let you re-evaluate and strengthen your design, and also train yourself into saying 'no'. 'No' to certain feedback, because you have re-evaluated it already and stand your ground. Especially later in your professional career, people will always bombard you with 'better' ideas and give reasons why something would not work out. By knowing this, you can train yourself in becoming stronger and calmer about external stimulation.

By knowing this, you can also train yourself in being more flexible about your ideas. And that is what I mentioned in the previous page, to always have your main goal in mind that is stripped down to its bare core - and from there on, this leaves some space for flexibility. As future architects, we should have probably been much more trained in being flexible about certain things - as we will need to acquire that skill later on in our career.

To be honest, P3 has really opened my eyes. P3 has really taught me that in order to make a 'good' building, it needs to be grounded in a technical foundation and grounded argumentation. I have been learning how to balance and switch more between both sides, the poetic and the utilitarian. I am very surprised because I found a part in myself that really enjoys the technical/technological part in architecture - because it just makes my project so much more tangible. I have been experiencing that a broader technical understanding made my project so much better, because it actually strengthened my spatial concept, instead of undermining it (which I always thought was the case before). I have learnt that detailing and structural systems can also be really poetic - so my biggest learning is that for me there is no differentiation between the poetic and the utilitarian aspect any more. It is all one whole. I am really thankful for everything that this year has taught me, because I feel I am so much more knowledgeable than one year ago. And this, of course, is an ongoing process. I think the beauty of studying architecture and being an architect later on, is that you never stop learning - which means there is always more to discover about yourself, about people and how the world works in general.

To conclude this reflection paper, I would like to share one final insight that has really helped me in the re-design of Santos. I think that all domains and systems are connected, which means that you can draw inspiration from any field and apply it to architecture. That is why I believe it is so important to sharpen your sensorial antennas to anything outside of what you study, as it can serve you in your design. The most trivial experiences, such as going to the supermarket, can become a source of inspiration. Or the way you tackle certain things in your private life can be analogical to your design. It is just a matter to train yourself in becoming receptive to those phenomena. You can basically draw inspiration from anywhere - and in the course of the design you will find grounded answers.