

Santos as part of the waterfront landscape

Reflection Paper

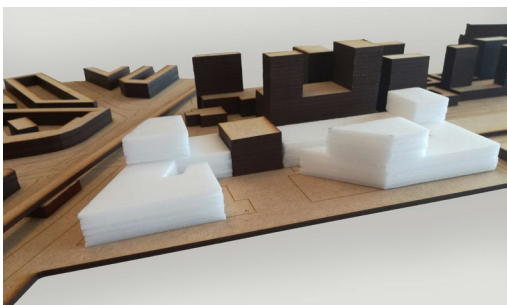
Heritage & Architecture studio

In the Heritage studio, the existing building and its surrounding have the main focus. Not only in the way the building is now, but also how it was in the past and will be in the future. For the graduation project that started in February 2017, we could choose between five old harbour buildings in Rotterdam. I chose the Santos building in Katendrecht. This building has been built between 1910-1902 as a warehouse for coffee and spices. These days, the building is almost out of use. Therefore it needs a new function and a design intervention. In this reflection paper, I explain how the research I did influenced my design. This research is divided into the analysis part of the building and its surrounding in the past, the present and the future and a more general research about the connection between the building and its waterfront surrounding. Besides the research, the relation with the wider social context is described. At the end, you can find a description about the critical decisions I made during the design process.

Research & Design – The Analysis & Value assessment

Because the Heritage studio is about an existing building, you first have to understand this building. That is why we made an analysis of the building and its surrounding in the past, the present and the future. Some of the surprising outcomes were how the urban future plan of the area of Santos will look like in the future, that the building originally was designed as one in a row of more warehouses, that Santos was a second-row warehouse and how this worked with the goods that arrived from the water and how the size of the bricks influenced the design of the building. As you can see, the analysis focused on different scales and therefore influenced the design on different levels as well.

With the results of the analysis, we made a matrix of the different values of Santos. Within this matrix, the aspects are classified in low, medium and high values. An important value are the North and South facades that are designed in a precise way considering the function and appearance of the building. Because of their high value, I didn't want to make big interventions in these facades. In this example, it becomes clear how the different values influenced the design process. Another example is the design for a new urban plan. I decided to make a new urban plan because the existing one did not connect with some of my high valued aspects, like the view from Santos to Kop van Zuid and the connection between Santos and the water. During this design process, I found out that different values can conflict with each other. One of the conflicts I had was with the value that Santos was designed as one in a row of more warehouses, so in the new urban plan I could design it in such a way that it would be one in a row of more buildings. On the other hand, in the end, the building was standing on its own. Besides that, it was also the highest warehouse of its time in Rotterdam. So these values show that Santos has always been really visible and perhaps the should keep this attention. By making different urban models, of which you can see two in the photo below, I was able to see the influence of the different values. One of my conclusions was that it was more important to me that Santos, as one of the few old harbour buildings left on Katendrecht and with the visibility it always had, would deserve its attention. Therefore I did not design it as one in a row of more warehouses, but as a free-standing building.



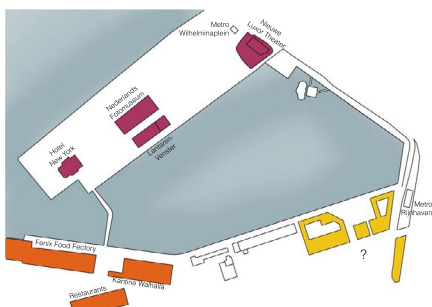
*Santos as one in a row
(model made by R. de Vries)*



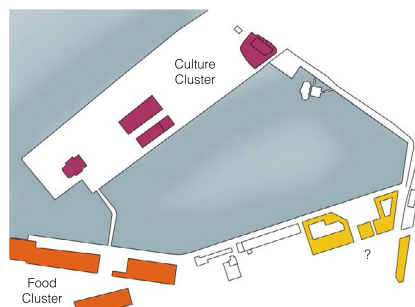
*Santos as a free standing building
(model made by R. de Vries)*

Research & Design – Creating a relation between the building and the waterfront landscape

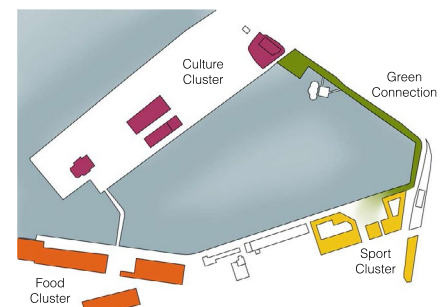
Besides the analysis of the existing building and its surrounding I also did an investigation that was influenced by the theme of the graduation studio, the harbour area. This research is about the connection between the water, the landscape and the building. I focused on this theme because in the past, when Santos was used as a warehouse, the relation with the water was of importance as well. All the goods that were stored in the building were transported over the water. Besides that, a well-designed waterfront landscape can give a lot of value to the urban area. It can make this area a place where people will stay and meet each other. This was one of my goals that I had for this area at the start of the design process. So my research question was: "How to connect Santos, the adjacent public space and the water with each other?". Therefore, I first compared different reference projects on how they connected the existing quay and the water. One of the outcomes is the use of different heights between the water and the original quay. In this way, people can come closer to the water and interact with it. Another aspect that inspired me in some of the reference projects was the routing along the water with a division into different kind of clusters. When we look at the area around Santos you can see a sort of routing along the Rijnhaven. In this routing, you can already find two kinds of clusters. First of all, the culture cluster in the area of Kop van Zuid that includes a cinema, theatre and a museum. Secondly, there is a food cluster in the neighbourhood of the Fenix loods, west of Santos. With these clusters in mind, I started searching for a function for the area of Santos that was public and where people want to spend there free time as well. This was how I came up with the idea of a sport cluster. In this way, I could also make a connection with the water by including the facilities and storage for outside sports in Santos. But the function did not only fit in the urban division, it also fits the building really well according to my values. The open floors like they are now are really characteristic for the building. With a sport function, I can keep this characteristic visible. So, the sport function not only came from the research in the connection with the waterfront but also from the analysis and the value assessment.



*The different kind of functions in the surrounding
(drawing made by R. de Vries)*



*These can be divided into these two clusters
(drawing made by R. de Vries)*



*The area around Santos will focus on sport
(drawing made by R. de Vries)*

The main new intervention I will make in the building is a public stairway to the roof of the building. This design came from the idea of connecting the building to its surrounding landscape. Besides that, also the values of Santos played a role in this design solution. The view from Santos to the Kop van Zuid was one of the things I valued as medium important. The goal that followed from this value was that I wanted to give people the opportunity to enjoy this view as well. The best place to have this view is on the rooftop. This design idea was not there in the beginning, it all started with the idea of making an atrium to bring in some natural daylight. This light had to come from the roof or the side facades because I valued the North and South facade really highly and did not want to make big changes in it. My designs of the atrium were really rigid in the existing grid of the building. On the moment my architecture tutor said that I had to try to make this intervention more interesting I encouraged myself to do something more extreme. That was the moment I came up with a slope to the roof, in the end, this became a stairway. This intervention was designed in such a way that the high valued North and South facade did not need any changes. Besides that, I tried to keep a part of the West facade, where the intervention takes place. In this way, people can understand the original building and where the existing building and the new intervention meet each other.

The project and its wider social context

As told before it is important for me to create a place where people like to stay and meet other people. Besides that, a sport place like the one I designed can help the people from the surrounding to spend their time well. Especially the neighbourhood the Afrikaanderwijk, that is located next to Katendrecht, is an area with lots of social problems. So many people in this area have a low income, the percentage of social housing is much higher compared to other areas and there are problems with a big group of young adults that cannot find a job. Because of these issues, I wanted to create a place where these people can meet each other and spend their free time in such a way that they do not give any disturbance. For this kind of projects sports like boxing are working really well because of the discipline that is needed and asked for.

Critical design choices

During a design process there are always moments that you change something that influenced the design in an immense way. I already described a few of them. First of all, the choices to make a redesign of the urban future plan, because the existing one did not fit with my values of Santos and its surrounding. Besides that, the function of the building was something I struggled with in the beginning, but due to my research about the connection between the waterfront landscape and the building I came up with a function that fits the urban situation, the building and that reacts on social issues in the surrounding. Also, the new intervention that started as an atrium but ended up with a public stair to the roof influenced my design in an immense way. Besides decisions on the urban, functional and architectural scale there were also some decisions on a structural scale that influenced the design. One of them is about the construction in the area underneath the new intervention. In this area, I first tried to keep the existing structure as much as possible, due to its value. But in the end, I found out that it was better to make a new construction that was designed for this new intervention.

Conclusion

For a heritage project, the analysis and value assessment is of great importance. Only if you understand the building and its surrounding you can make a new intervention that fits the existing building. The research I did on the connection between the building, the landscape and the water influenced my way of looking at the project. The conclusions from this research helped me to find a design solution for the public space, where I wanted to create a place where people like to stay. So the topic of the research has to be something that fits the project and the design aim you have for it. And the last main thing that I learned and realised again, was that it can be good to take a step back from your project and look at it in a different way and always stay critical on the choices you made.