

# reflection paper

case study: Santos, Rotterdam



**H&A Graduation Studio, spring 2017**

student: Hester Slager, 4161831

date: 29/11/2017

tutors: A. de Ridder, F. Koopman, S. Stroux

board of examiners delegate: J. J. Trip

This reflection paper is written in the period just before the P4, and it looks back at the approach I have been using throughout the project, and whether or not I feel like this method worked for me.

It starts with an introduction to the project, then a short reflection upon the method that is used within the Heritage & Architecture graduation studio, and finally a reflection on the relationship between research & design, and the relation between the theme of the H&A graduation studio and the chosen case study.

## introduction of the project

My chosen site for H&A Rotterdam Harbour Heritage is Santos, a vacant warehouse located on "de Pols", Katendrecht. Santos was built in 1904, and functioned as a coffee storage facility. Santos is recognized as a monument, for both its typological function as a warehouse and its architecture, in particular its facades which are very ornamental.

Santos is also one of the few links to the historic past of Katendrecht as a harbor. Since the harbours of Rotterdam, together with their industry, have moved towards the west, the city of Rotterdam has been expanding slowly on these old harbor sites. A good example of a fully developed harbor is the Wilhelminapier, where there aren't many traces left of the past. To make sure this doesn't happen in Katendrecht, it is crucial that the few links to the past are preserved. Yet if we look at the plans that the municipality has for Katendrecht, it is clear that creating high density areas is more important than preservation of the spirit of place. It is for that reason that Santos (and Fenix, and Codrico, the other two links) becomes a relevant building again.

Therefore, my research was focused on how to preserve Santos and its character/spirit of place, through the use of making it relevant again.

As the relevant new function, I chose the creative office. It seemed interesting to continue Santos as a working building, although the type of work has definitely changed. Aside from that, there's already an active network of creative offices in Rotterdam, and it seems to be a formula for success. Because of Santos' location in a (to be) developed residential area, and its vicinity to a metro station, it seemed suitable.

My main design challenge was therefore to how I could change a building that was meant for storing goods, with an industrial spirit of place, suitable for people. Important here was to retain as much of the spirit of place as possible, to ensure that Santos as a link to the harbor past is retained.

## method Heritage & Architecture

The method used in the H&A studio relies on three different aspects: design, technology and cultural value. These three aspects are continuously present throughout the process.

The studio started with an analysis of the existing, both the building and its surroundings. It was important to not only look at the current situation, but also at the history. After this analysis phase, the results form the base for the cultural value assignment.

Cultural value is that which sets the H&A studio apart from others, and it is used as a tool for decision-making and reflection. The Cultural Value assignment looks at the essential qualities of the existing building, and what these qualities represent. The assigning of values manifests itself in a Cultural Value Matrix, where the essential qualities are grouped and given either high or low value. Throughout the design phase, the cultural value matrix can be used as an argument for interventions, but it should not be thought of as a restriction. Everything is still possible, as long as you come up with strong arguments why you go against the cultural value matrix.

After the initial analysis and set-up of the Cultural Value Matrix, the design phase starts. It became quite clear that the analysis-phase is never really done, as you keep discovering new aspects of the building that were overlooked the first time. During the design phase, it is important that you achieve a balance between preservation on one hand, and development into relevancy on the other. Through a continuous system of research, design and reflection, on all three levels (design, technology, cultural value) the design proposal slowly surfaces.

## research & design

- *relation between research and design.*

From the semester manual: "research is a substantial part of the design process"

The relationship between research and design is a very natural one; you can't really have one without the other, or at least not in the Faculty of Architecture.

I feel that my approach was very research driven, where research and design were always connected. This was something I intended to do from the start, because I felt that in previous projects my research- design approach was a little lacking, and it was something I wanted to practice a bit more. The method in which I used research in my design process was through the use of analyzing reference projects, creating variations and investigating the existing building when needed.

## reference projects and variations

Especially throughout the design phase, I tried not to settle for the first thing that popped up in my mind, but really tried to look at an array of possibilities. The product used for this were not just drawings, but also physical and digital models. Often, I stuck with my original idea, but every now and then the method directed me into an option I had not considered at first. An example of this is the roof shape. To come up with multiple variations, I made extensive use of reference projects. What helped me were quick analyses in order to single out the concept behind it, and then testing these concepts for my own situation. The Cultural Value Matrix played a role in this testing phase, as it provided me with conditions that I wanted to fulfill.

I feel that by using research throughout the whole design phase, I now have underlying arguments to a lot of my design decisions. Yet during the first half of the studio, before the P2, the method of using research and design interconnectedly was not always working in my favour. I did make use of variations, but often in a limited way, without exploring really the extends of the possibilities. It were more variations on the same theme. An example of this can be found in my P2 presentation, where I came up with a couple of ideas for the configuration of the space, that were all equally terrible for the new function. As a result, I had to retake my P2, which was a good eye-opener for me, and helped me re-evaluate what I was doing, and how my method could be better.

The interconnected method is in my eyes a combination between Research by Design, Design by Research. Research of reference projects, the analysis of the existing, the cultural value matrix all form input for the design, but through the use of variations there is also the notion of researching through the design itself.

## Santos and its (non-)relationship with the waterfront

- *relation between theme of graduation lab and the case study chosen within this framework.*

The theme for this year's studio was Rotterdam Harbour Heritage. Since the movement of the harbor towards the west, the old harbours of Rotterdam are left without a function. These partially-vacant harbor sites are the topic of the studio.

The thing they all have in common is their connection to the water. In the H&A semester manual, the following questions are asked in relation to the waterfront: "how to value the waterfront?", "how to integrate the element of water in the design", "can you create a connection between the hinterland and the water".

It is clear that the relation building-waterfront is one of the themes of the studio, and it's a

theme that can be found in cities all over the world. Famous examples of waterfront development are Hamburg, or Copenhagen, where it plays a major role in the design of the urban tissue. Often, the waterfront is redesigned into pleasant public space, with buildings that compliment this.

It is interesting that for Santos the waterfront does not seem like such a distinctive theme, at least not throughout my design process. Santos was built as a second-row warehouse, which means that there is quite some distance between the building and the water (some 60 meters). Back when it was functional, there was a logical connection with the water, since it was where the coffee came from. Santos completely depended upon the water. But now that it is without function, the connection has gotten rather thin (at least in my opinion). With the function I've chosen, and the new developments happening around Santos, my focus was not on this waterfront.

Reflecting, this is an area where I perhaps could/would have done some more with, to fit the theme of the graduation studio a bit more. At the moment, I lightly designed a square in front of Santos, to at least retain the view from/to the water, but this could have been designed more deliberately. It might have also been interesting to add a complementary new building there, that connects Santos with the waterfront.