

MANSION



BALANCE SHEET



A HOUSE WITHOUT BORDERS

Architect Hans van Heeswijk creates a vertical loft of glass on an Amsterdam island, with triple-height ceilings and almost no inside walls

BY J.S. MARCUS

HIGH CEILINGS ARE a dramatic attraction in any house, but when Dutch architect Hans van Heeswijk recently built his own home—a three-story glass villa in eastern Amsterdam—he took it up a notch. Triple-height ceilings mean a glance from his bedroom to his dining area is 9 meters down.

The 275-square-meter house, finished in 2011, is on the artificial island of Rieteiland Oost, about 6 kilometers east of central Amsterdam. Designed by Mr. van Heeswijk for himself and his wife, Natascha Drabbe, an architectural historian and public-relations professional, the largely wall-less house is in effect a vertical loft.

Mr. van Heeswijk, 62 years old, conceived of the house from the inside out. He wanted to maximize space and emphasize unobstructed views, so he created a floor-to-ceiling service core in the center, concealing

ample storage space, three half-bathrooms and a dumbwaiter.

“I wanted to leave out as many inner walls as I could,” says Mr. van Heeswijk, known for his work on Dutch museum projects, such as the renovation and extension of the Mauritshuis, an Old Masters collection in The Hague that opened earlier this year.

He decided to cover the three-story service core with slats of solid wenge, a tropical hardwood. He says he used the expensive wood on the area “so it would look like a piece of furniture instead of a piece of the building.” The warmth of the wood contrasts with the cool aesthetic of materials he used elsewhere, like concrete, aluminum and stainless steel.

Construction and furnishing costs for the four-bedroom, two-bathroom, three-half-bath home totaled €1.88 million.

Rieteiland Oost is part of a larger cluster of new islands, collectively



SEE, BE SEEN Clockwise from above left, the exterior of the 275-square-meter home; clear views from the top floor sleeping area; Dutch architect Hans van Heeswijk

known as IJburg. Mr. van Heeswijk’s island is reserved for single-family homes and has quickly established itself as an affluent neighborhood. A postal code for the island now has one of the highest per capita incomes in the Netherlands.

Mr. van Heeswijk is a pioneer in the area, which is filled with stylish villas. He first saw the Rieteiland Oost lot in 2008. “It was just a deserted island,” he says. “There was not a single building on it.”

Mr. van Heeswijk bought a small lot of just 405 square meters that had restrictions on how much cubic space he could build. But he was drawn to the possibilities.

“I immediately saw it was an ideal site to build my dream house,” he says. “I found this site the most interesting, because it’s oriented toward the west. You have a sunset every afternoon. And across the water there is a park, which meant we would always have a nice view.”

He bought the plot for about €750,000 just before Amsterdam real-estate prices began their five-year, 17% decline. Prices started to recover in the third quarter of 2013, but today, a nearby waterfront lot somewhat larger than Mr. van Heeswijk’s sells for about €667,500.

Mr. van Heeswijk, who opened his eponymous architecture firm in 1985, had fantasized about creating his own house for decades, he says.

When the opportunity arose, he wanted to do more than just the building, and went on to design everything from the aluminum bookcases to the stainless-steel door handles. “I thought it would be fun to see how far I could go,” he says.

The upward flow of the house “is based on how we spend our day,” he says. “When we come home at six, we take a glass of wine and we cook together” in the ground-floor kitchen. “After that we read the paper and work a bit,” he adds, point-

ing at the second-floor sitting area and the his-and-hers office spaces.

“Then we sleep.” The vertiginous, top-floor sleeping area, facing west, has a short glass railing to preserve the view. “On this level,” he says, “the views become panoramic.” The ground floor has three small, conventional bedrooms, suitable for visits by the architect’s three adult children from a previous marriage. When there are no children or guests, Mr. van Heeswijk may use one of the enclosed spaces to play

his guitar there, or Ms. Drabbe, 48, makes phone calls. One unexpected cost relatively late in the project was the introduction of bold paint colors. Although he has an affinity for the neutral colors of steel and concrete, “when we constructed the house, I thought it was becoming a bit dull,” he says. He found the solution with an Amsterdam company that produces paints in vivid fluorescent tones. Now, each utility space is color-coded—half-baths are green, clothes closets are blue, and a walk-through area for office kit is fire-engine red.

Special attention was paid to the glass because west-facing glass walls mean the home can get hot. Mr. van Heeswijk used coated glass to reflect the sun. He also frosted the south-facing windows: “I was fond of the view,” he says of the sacrifice, “but I didn’t want my neighbors visiting every day.”

The glass facade cost €147,000, plus €38,000 for special shades. The views extend into the master bedroom, where a strategically placed bathtub faces west, while offering easy access to the dumbwaiter—a €12,000 amenity. Mr. van Heeswijk admits he prefers showers, but takes pride in the setting: “You can take a bath and look at the stars—and have your glass of Champagne brought up on the dumbwaiter.”

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