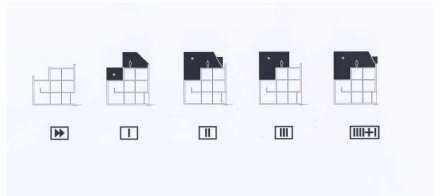


# VATHORST - DE LAAK, THE CANAL CITY

1997-2010, Amersfoort, The Netherlands









West 8 together with Kuiper Compagnons were responsible for the masterplan of the former Vinex site Vathorst in Amersfoort, The Netherlands. Subsequent to the masterplanning phase, De Laak, one of the four zones contained in the masterplan has been designed in detail by West 8. At De Laak (Canal City), West 8 in the role of urban planner, landscape architect created a glorious homage to the traditional Dutch canal cities with 4000 dwellings. They also supervised the project's implementation to ensure quality execution of this special area.

De Laak is a high density housing area situated along the former waterway known as the 'Laak', which connects with Nijkerkernauw and the IJsselmeer lake on the Western boundary of Vathorst district. West 8's urban plan, which follows the theme of a 'Water City', transforms this once diminutive channel, into a 20 meter wide canal. One side of which is connected to the 'World of Difference' the built up area of Vathorst and the other abuts an expanse of open landscape.

### **The Metamorphosis of the theme of 'Living with Water'**

West 8's urban plan for De Laak creates a modern version of the iconic and atmospheric Dutch canal. A high quality of living is evident in De Laak, residents can easily step into their private boats directly from their living rooms and are able to enjoy the water on a daily basis. The navigable watercourses are also the source of inspiration for the diversified housing typology. The result is the introduction of elevated plinths, marinas and floating piers at the back of the houses.

At the center of De Laak, in between the well-structured canal, is a romantic meandering watercourse called 'the small Eem'. The meander of this short river/stream is designed with natural banks from the boulevard to the open landscape. 'The small Eem' also forms the address for loose parceled villas located on the water's edge.

Functioning as public space for the community, the waterways are equipped with green slopes and planted embankments, which invite people to stay fishing, boating or just hangout. These public spaces are compact but powerful. Sturdy bridges connect the intricate urban grids and the different housing typologies that lie along the water. The railings elements were given much attention by the designers of West 8, and feature custom designed details and motifs. This compactness of the overall design for the area provides an distinctive community atmosphere where interaction between residents and neighbors are encouraged.

Housing typologies in De Laak are varied: from the traditional canal house; to free standing houses overlooking the landscape; some are compact waterfront homes with basements, while other houses incorporate a garden, a patio or a gatehouse on the water's edge. The diversity of housing typologies is a key component of the strategic development plan. West 8's urban plan for De Laak, also incorporates the concept of a (light weight) roof-top building extension ("Optoppen" in Dutch). These houses are designed and constructed with a carrying capacity that can support a structure of up to three floors. Although the initial construction of these properties only reached two stories. This gave the property owner the option to add an additional floor, if and when they are financially ready for the extension. This planning idea has proven to be a sound solution for property sales and now several years on, most owners have added a top floor to their properties. This not only brings a diversity of quality facades but also allows property owners to invest in the house and area where they have been living. By prolonging the time residents spend in the town it naturally fosters a

steady growth of community.

Another intention of West 8's design was to break the mono-functional dogma of clustering only residential activity within the suburb. This is achieved by introducing a building typology that designates the ground floor for other functions or programs, such as restaurants, guesthouses, or small business or even a daycare. West 8 believes that only with such subtle mix of programs can De Laak grow into a genuine city.

Another significant feature within the urban plan is the removal of parking from public commons to give way to play areas for children. Parking is instead, provided at strategic locations, either in the backyards of the properties amongst trees plantings or inside carports or garages. As a result the streets are free of parked cars. The streetscape of this district has a clearly defined human scale enriched with allees of trees, wide canals or green avenues. These public areas influence the type and design of each building. Although the buildings of De Laak are situated in close proximity of one another, each has a vibrant facade facing the public space with a clearly identifiable entrance. To achieve this effect, a number of reputable architects were pivotal in creating such an architectural work of art. Their efforts in combination with a rich and well connected public realm have been instrumental in defining the identity of this new urban development.

#### client

Ontwikkelings Bedrijf Vathorst

#### team

Edzo Bindels, Christoph Elsässer, Adriaan Geuze, Rikus Beekman, Martin Biewenga, Helen Day, Eric Douma, Joost Koningen, Rob Koningen, Ard Middeldorp, Pieter Rabijns, Kees Schoot, Ruby van den Munckhof, Bas van der Vinne, Ronald van Nugteren