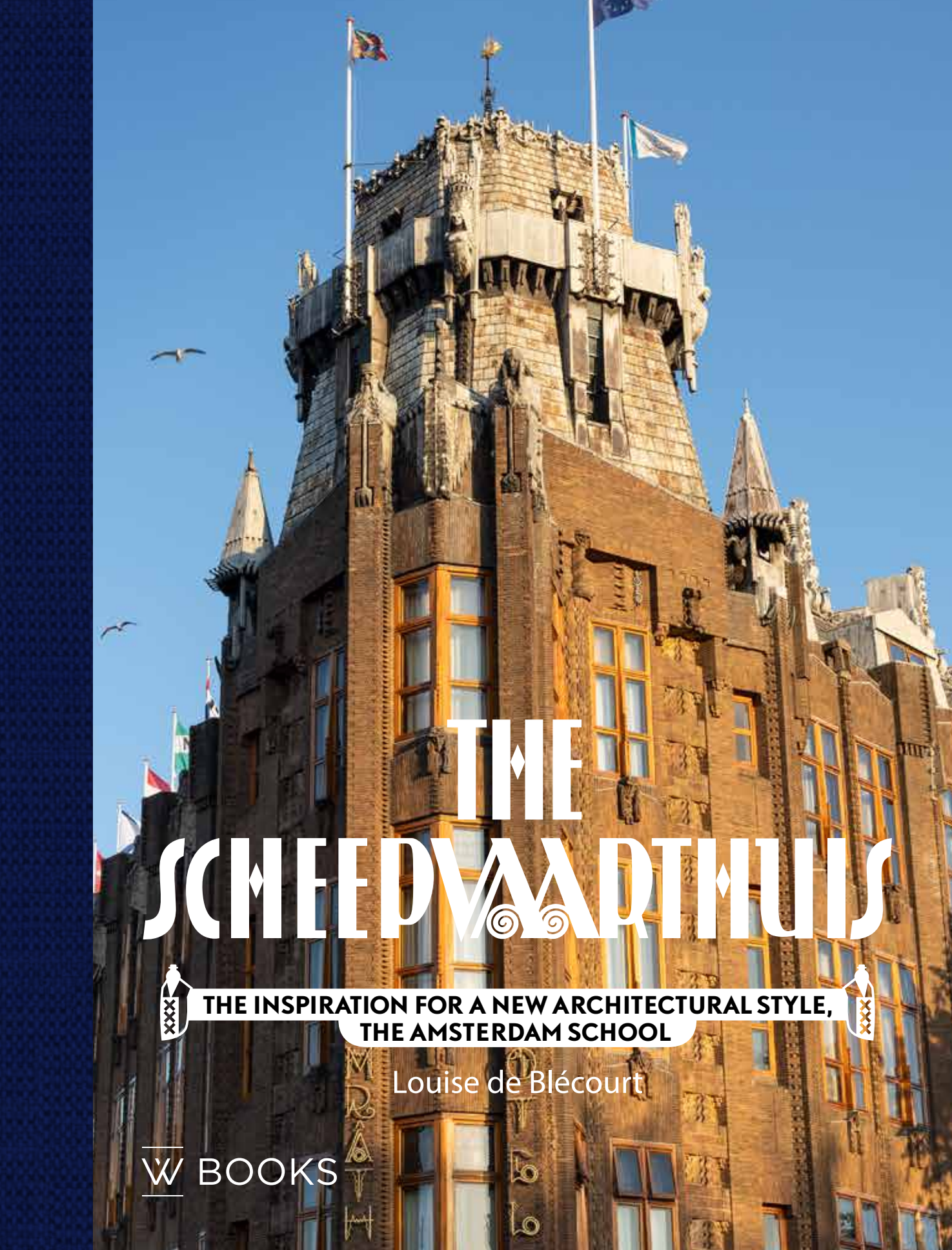




THE SCHEEPVATHUIS

THE INSPIRATION FOR A NEW ARCHITECTURAL STYLE,
THE AMSTERDAM SCHOOL

Louise de Blécourt

W BOOKS



“Unlike us, people back then did not yet know how the era would end.”

Harald Jähner¹



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BECALMED

Behind glass the coral, a woven sea of pallid waves.
Stacked with care, the stair of waves heaves free.
Crosswise the surf rolls up

and he, this architect of careful concrete masses,
paints with brick, a facade black with steam,
installs a wooden table, its grains at loggerheads.
Inside it swarms with ships.

A seahorse on the wall changes colour,
makes of itself a spectrum of greys and browns.
Never shall it try, with brightened hues,
to bring a detail to the fore.

Hidden behind the builder's stony mass
four turtles sink their jaws into the ceiling,
a lobster is tabled (an octopus observes),
mussels link to cables and the seahorse
hitches its curly tail and flounders.

They have returned, with many
to the deepest of this ghostly edifice.
Gouged in dark wood panels,
Neptune has planted his trident.

Is this the seaweed that sways along the stairs?
Floors align, eliminating seams.
Standing on the tower I descry sails,
mark two waves for every step.

Come, ply this marble sea
aboard this ship of variegated glass.

Miek Zwamborn



When a client commissions a building, their role, ambition and wish-list are key in determining the final result. That was true for the Scheepvaarthuis as well. The shipping companies had long been important players in Amsterdam's economy and society, and it was only fitting that they should occupy a central and highly visible location in the city. After assessing the financial feasibility of the project and selecting an appropriate site, they needed to find a builder and an architect. The interaction between the client and the contractor is crucially important for the resulting building. In the case of the Scheepvaarthuis, there were multiple clients, namely the collaborating shipping companies. Can the influence of these clients be seen in the final result, and were the individual clients all on the same page? Did they stay united during the two construction phases? The specification of what the clients wanted was a determining factor here. Incidentally, this also applies to their role during the process and as the owners and managers of the building.

SELECTING A JOINT LOCATION

The shipping companies needed to find a location for their building. In the early sixteenth century, the waters around the Amsterdam district of Lastage had been deepened to allow more ships to moor there. As a result, the Oude Waal canal began to clog up, and by around 1645 it was decided to partly fill it in. This led to the Nieuwe Waels island. In 1646, twenty-nine plots on the island were auctioned off. Eventually thirty-eight houses were built, at this point without any street names or house numbers. Those were only added in 1796. A century later, at the start of the 1900s, the shipping companies decided they wanted to build their new office premises here and so they started buying up the properties one by one. But not everyone was willing to concede immediately, and the negotiations were sometimes lengthy as a result.⁴⁷ Rozenbroek has conducted extensive research on the owners of the plots and houses on the site where the Scheepvaarthuis was built and all the changes in ownership. There was a cafe called Skandinaviën in the corner house at the point where Prins Hendrikkade and Binnenkant streets meet. It can be seen in a photograph taken shortly before the demolition of these buildings in about 1911/1912.

The map below shows the situation of the plots in 1832. The plots were bought up one by one from 1909 onwards with the intention of constructing the Scheepvaarthuis there. Van der Meij archive, Nieuwe Instituut.



To the left (of the Schreiers Tower) is the part of the water where the Scheepvaarthuis would later be built and from where the sixteenth-century explorer Cornelis de Houtman set sail. The artist has shown everything as true to life as possible. The authentic colouring makes this map unique: no other copy of this version is known. Detail of 'Amstelredamum Emporium Hollandiae Primarium Totiusque Europe Celeberrimum', 163?. By Balthasar Florisz. van Berckenrode. Allard Pierson Museum.











department in 1916, a post he would hold for no less than forty years. In addition to his work for the municipality, Krop carried out commissions and independent work in his own studio. So many of his architectural sculptures appeared in the streets of Amsterdam that it earned him the honorary title of Amsterdam's City Sculptor in 1956.

The prestige that Van den Eijnde acquired with the Scheepvaarthuis project let him start his own studio in 1917.

In addition, he was an architectural sculptor for the Government Buildings Agency from 1917 to 1923. In that capacity, he also worked on the sculptures and decorations for the transmitting station Radio Kootwijk (1922), where the first radiotelegraphic contact between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies was established. Long-distance telephony took off from there from 1929 onwards.²³³

Kramer also designed furniture from 1914 onwards, including items for the Scheepvaarthuis. This was in a sober style at first that became more expressive after 1917, closer to the style of De Klerk and Krop.²³⁴ The firm Jansen & Nusink (1909–1916) manufactured most of Kramer's furniture from 1914 onwards. Jansen & Nusink had been

Top right: sheet of paper on which Van der Meij drew a study for a floor plan, showing which type of wood should be used in which room. In the meantime, De Klerk was working on the same sheet, sketching as he searched for the right shapes for furniture, c. 1914. Amsterdam City Archives.

Sheet of studies with several furniture sketches, including an armchair to the right of centre. What stands out is a small portrait in profile at the bottom right. Could that be the love of De Klerk's life?

located at Looiersgracht 43 in Amsterdam since it was founded in about 1909, until its studio went up in flames in 1916. Nusink then continued the business as the company Nusink & Zonen at Looiersgracht 41.

SMN'S DIRECTORS' OFFICES

The directors' offices on the second floor, occupied by the SMN company, was a clear example of close cooperation between the project team members. That is evident for instance in several study sheets on which both Van der Meij and De Klerk left their mark. On one sheet of studies, De Klerk seemed to be looking for the right shapes for furniture, whereas Van der Meij put on his managerial hat and sketched part of a floor plan at the bottom left of the sheet with instructions on which type of wood to use in which room. Van der Meij also sketched something with lions at the top right of the sheet — perhaps for the rear facade of the second building phase, or perhaps for another commission he was working on at the same time that had nothing to do with the Scheepvaarthuis.²³⁵ After all, they would all have been working on multiple assignments at the same time.

Plywood, which was a new material then, was used in two sofas, a stool, an armchair and a table designed by Kramer. All these items of furniture have the same decorative elements.







Top row, left: extension being built onto the Scheepvaarthuis, Prins Hendrikkade side, January 1927. Internationaal Persfoto Bureau NV, Amsterdam City Archives.

Middle: By December 1927, the second part of the building was well advanced, judging from the facade on the Prins Hendrikkade side. The advertising sign for Warners, the contractor who did the job, can also be seen. Internationaal Persfoto Bureau NV, Amsterdam City Archives.

Right: The concrete skeleton is ready and the roof is already nicely under way, 1927. Amsterdam City Archives.



Middle row, left: Prins Hendrikkade side in August 1927. On the left-hand side of the building — the Prins Hendrikkade side — you can see that work is being done on the second part of the building. August 1927, Amsterdam City Archives.

Right: Binnenkant side, with a gap visible where buildings have been demolished for the construction of the second part, c. 1915. The gap is between the Scheepvaarthuis on the left and the houses on the right that are still standing, almost as far as the corner. Amsterdam City Archives.



Bottom row, left: Prins Hendrikkade side with the extension being added on the left, 1927. The flag on the new extension signifies "topping out" — the highest point of the structure has been put in place. Internationaal Persfoto Bureau NV, Amsterdam City Archives.

Right: Binnenkant side, with the concrete skeleton of the second construction phase visible, c. 1927. Amsterdam City Archives.













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The relief entitled 'Samen sterk' (Strong Together) shows Stan and Max van Eijl, and commemorates the laying of the first brick for the expansion of the hotel in 2017.



About the author

Louise de Blécourt studied museology at the Reinwardt Academy and art history at Leiden University. She became involved with the Amrâth collection as a curator; much of that collection is in the Scheepvaarthuis. Through this book, she seeks to enhance the identity of the building and its current incarnation as a hotel.

In addition to her job as a curator, Louise also works as a design manager. She started out in stand construction and educational publishing before progressing to become a design manager for strategic projects. She uses that perspective to build up concepts and brands. To improve her ability to see and assess aesthetic aspects, she practices Asian calligraphy, for which she has now obtained her sixth dan at the academy in Tokyo.





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