

A traditional building shines with a new splendour

Softly gleaming, pearl-white columns, jet-black terrazzo floor, high rooms suffused with daylight: The renowned Dutch master builder Dr. Hendrik Petrus Berlage (1856 to 1934) would have been delighted with the "Gebouw Berlage" in The Hague. The headquarters of the "De Nederlanden van 1845" insurance company which he designed in 1924 "slumbered" like an "architectural Sleeping Beauty" for seventy years. Important design elements and spatial concepts were lost to sight beneath plaster, wallpaper and gypsum plasterboard. Köllmann GmbH which also is represented in Holland acquired the impressive building with around 18,000 sq. m gross floor area in 1991. The Wiesbaden-based project-development company has thoroughly renovated and modernised indeed "revitalised" the property.

Architect Dipl.-Ing. Jürgen Willen of Willen Associates, Wiesbaden, when presenting the entire building modernisation project, explained how they peeled away the various layers, like the "annual growth rings of a tree" right down to the "structural shell" to reveal "Berlage's original, genial design". On behalf of Köllmann, his architectural consultancy firm elaborated the revitalisation concept - involving a volume of investment of 70 million marks - in cooperation with the Amsterdam architects Van den Oever, Zaaijer, Roodbeen & Partners.

One essential element of the original Berlage design revealed by the renovation work after the "beauty sleep" was the "daylighting grid" running criss-cross through the building. The "constructive expressionist" Berlage originally designed the monumental insurance palace with a "clear view" from one end to the other. Over the years, the proprietors soberly split the building into a large number of small sections with partition walls installed subsequently. "These 'visual barriers' have now fallen. There is now not one single office reliant on artificial lighting during the daytime", emphasised architect Dipl.-Ing. Thomas Vogel, Technical Director for Foreign Projects at Köllmann. "Individual offices or conference rooms are partitioned off with glass partition walls".

Natural daylight also streams through the four generously dimensioned patios and the broad Jugendstil glass domed rooflight. It crowns the impressive entrance hall in the shape of an octagon. Over 2,500 sq. m of double-glazed window areas also allow air and light to enter. "All of these were removed individually and then sandblasted and sealed to prevent corrosion", explained Anna Heep of the Product Design Department at Köllmann. "The professional albeit tedious reconditioning process for the listed window frames was such a success that the Heritage Conservation Authority itself has even indicated interest in the method we used".



The typical, individually adjustable sunshading awning blinds in front of the windows are another sophisticated architectural element. The 120-strong workforce of the Spanish Prime Contractor Contratas y Obras, The Hague / Barcelona also paid great attention to detail in refurbishing the old offices in the original style.

The Wiesbaden planners added modern elements very delicately and with great sensitivity wherever the original design and fixtures of the structural heritage no longer met the demands of the modern office. "We installed entire new utility nodes - modern air-conditioning, plumbing and communication systems were accommodated in suspended ceilings and floors", in the words of Vogel. Moreover, five additional lifts provide effortless vertical access to the extensive building's three levels. "The office space of at least 11,000 sq. m can thus be split into twelve self-contained units of 750 sq. m to 800 sq. m each without the future tenants getting in each other's way", says Jerry de Vries of the Jacobus Recourt brokerage firm, Gravenhage, responsible for marketing. The building offers space for up to 500 workplaces.

Service facilities such as canteen, post office, fitness studio, copy-shops, archive and the "fietz" (bicycle) parking area, a "must" in Holland, can be housed in the 3,500 sq. m basement, also daylight-lit, at the special request of the future tenants. In addition, underground car-parking facilities are also planned for the site which is located centrally with good road and air links - the motorways to Rotterdam, Utrecht and Amsterdam can all be reached very quickly, as can Schiphol International Airport. The inner courtyard will provide further parking spaces.