

Amersfoort-Otto Scheltus (NL)

Build on Otto Scheltus!

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introduction:

One of the greatest challenges architecture faces today is the question of how to deal with our built environment and how to use it to address the crises our cities are already facing and will continue to face in the near future. The demolition and construction of entirely new buildings is not suitable response to these challenges, not only for ecological reasons but also for social and historical ones.

The competition entry “Build on Otto Scheltus!” centers around the reuse of the post-war modernist, residential building, the Otto-Scheltusflat in Amersfoort, Netherlands. Completed in 1976 and designed by Dutch architect G. Pothoven, the building was based on the principles of modernism. Its most striking features include the façade with its alternating rhythm of bay windows and balconies, cross walls clad in yellow brickwork, and prominent concrete beams.

Despite its distinctive façade and spatial qualities, the building has drawn criticism for its monofunctionality, a floorplan designed exclusively for a single user group, and its disconnection from the surrounding urban fabric.

The stated goal of the competition entry is to build on the existing structure, emphasize its strengths and, through carefully considered interventions, transform it from an introverted, mono-use building into a hybrid structure that opens up to the city and accommodates a diverse range of users.

the urban context:

To strengthen the “Snouckaertlaan” as the entrance to the city center for pedestrians and cyclists, the proposed design making it car-free from the intersection with Stationsstraat to the intersection with “Burgermeester de Widtstraat”. This will create a more inviting street for walking and biking. Furthermore will be the surface of the existing parking area and the section of the “Burgermeester de Widtstraat” that runs alongside the property dismantled and transformed into a small park. If needed, the existing parking spaces will be relocated to a parking garage directly adjacent to the site on “Burgermeester de Widtstraat”, connected to the Stadsring 65G building.

functions:

After the transformation, the building will provide mainly five functions:

- A tourist information center oriented towards “Van Asch van Wijckstraat”.
- A café on the ground floor of the front building with access to the inner courtyard, and a dining hall in the lower ground floor complemented by a courtyard oriented towards Snoukerlaan with both an indoor and outdoor stage.
- Attached to the café, two commercial units.
- Compact social housing units starting from the first floor of the front building and from the ground floor of the back building, designed for one to four inhabitants.
- Vertical extensions on top of both building sections with maisonettes for four to five occupants, accessed via the rooftop gardens.

tourist information center:

On the ground floor, accessed from “Van Asch van Wijckstraat” via a new stair structure, the design incorporates a tourist information center. Due to the importance of this intersection and its location on the route from the train station to the city center, the Otto Scheltusflat provides a perfect opportunity to establish an information point for visitors of the city.

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café:

The café, located next to the tourist information and extends over two floors: on one hand, the café on the ground floor with a terrace and direct connection to the inner courtyard, creating a publicly accessible yet quiet space; on the other hand, a dining hall in the basement offering affordable and healthy food options for workers in the surrounding area, commuters, visitors and residents. In the evenings, it can become a venue for various cultural events such as live music, poetry readings, rallies, and lectures, due to its outdoor and indoor stage.

Also located on the ground floor are two commercial units for small local businesses, such as a florist, bookstore, or hairdresser. The ground floor is complemented by a new elevator and a ramp in the courtyard to ensure easy access for people with disabilities. The connection between the tourist information and the café allows guests to walk through the entire ground floor parallel to Snoukerlaan.

social housig units in the existing building:

The residents' entrance is located at the junction of the two building sections and leads into a central lobby. From the ground floor upwards, the lower part of the building is dedicated entirely to residential use, while the taller section becomes residential starting from the first floor. The units are accessed via the existing staircases.

To promote a more diverse resident structure, the design reorganizes the apartment layouts within the existing framework. Instead of identical ca. 54 m² units, the layout now alternates between ca.38 m² and ca.70 m² units. This is achieved by interlocking the apartments and placing private rooms behind the bay windows. The aim is to attract a more heterogeneous group of residents, encouraging a vibrant and socially diverse community within the building. Special solutions for the corners of the building allow for the integration of additional apartment types.

The apartment design is based on several carefully coordinated measures that enhance spatial quality and attractiveness. Each unit features a private outdoor space and a kitchen directly connected to the living area, allowing for an open and generous living atmosphere.

In the 38 m² units, the sleeping area is separated by a curtain, while in the three-room apartments this space becomes an additional, flexible room. It offers a wide range of uses. For example, as an extra sleeping area for occasional visitors (such as children of single parents on weekends), a play corner for children, or a home office.

The residential units are further complemented by shared facilities such as a laundry lounge on each floor and a new rooftop garden that serves as a communal space for all residents.

façade renovation concept:

The existing façade will be replaced by a new design that reinterprets and reintroduces the building's iconic bay window structure. The concrete beams will be insulated, and a new curtain wall façade will be installed in front of the floor slabs, ensuring a continuous thermal envelope.

The surface of the façade will consist of anodized aluminum panels in three different shades. The thermal insulation layer will create subtle projections around the beams, which will serve as mounting points for vertical red textile sunshades.

By recessing the façade, the former emergency balconies are transformed into loggias, providing each apartment with a private outdoor space.

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vertical extensions:

The two- to three-story high extension connects to a rooftop garden and is accessible via the existing stairwells that extend up to the roof. The maisonette apartments are designed for four to five people. The kitchen and living area are placed in a split-level layout to overcome the existing parapet. The bedrooms located on the floors above.

The façade facing the courtyard features a canopy that doubles as an outdoor corridor. This space serves as a communicative area and retreat for the inhabitants, offering multiple ways to enter and exit the apartments. This design makes the apartments ideal for both shared living communities and families.

The extension is constructed as a timber frame structure with cross-laminated timber ceilings. The façade of the extension references the new façade of the existing building, reflecting its structure and bay windows as a relief. This is also echoed in the choice of materials, notably the suspended anodized aluminum façade, the reused-balustrades with mesh infill, and the red textile sunshade.

vision:

The aim of this design is to work with the existing structure, to highlight its strengths, and to transform the building in response to both contemporary requirements and historical lessons. From an ecological standpoint alone, reusing and repurposing the building is imperative. However, the architectural value of the existing structure, with its strong framework, also makes it a valuable foundation for future development.

Trough the conversion the building is opens up to a more diverse range of inhabitants. The resulting overlap of different groups allows for the development of synergies that not only ensure a sustainable future for the building itself, but also contribute to the advancement of the entire neighborhood.

This continuation respects the existing by highlighting its qualities, such as the naturally lit corridors, the distinctive bay windows, the interior materiality, and the private outdoor spaces. The design strengthens and preserves its architectural character while transforming it through carefully considered interventions into a sustainable, ecological, and socially resilient building that is viable for the future.

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