

BUILDINGS: WINGENDER HOVENIER

Urban outfitters

Wingender Hovenier's Amsterdam mixed-use Galenkop scheme articulates the practice's ongoing research into the tectonic manifestation of brick, writes **Hans van der Heijden**

Pictures by Stefan Müller



Over the past decade, Amsterdam-based firm Wingender Hovenier Architecten has developed an extensive portfolio of housing projects, characterised by a sense of durability, self-evidence and connection to their surroundings. Practice partner Jan Peter Wingender's research as professor of material and design at the Academy of Architecture of the Amsterdam School of the Arts has played a particularly important role in defining the theoretical framework within which these schemes have been developed.

Wingender is conducting an ongoing research project into the tectonic manifestation of brick in contemporary architecture. The first fruits of this came in a small exhibition, *Brick Dresses*, in which he and his students presented a series of brick-clad housing projects, all constructed in the Netherlands after 1994. This was the year in which Hans Kollhoff completed his canonical Piraeus building in Amsterdam's former docks (*Inspiration* October 2, 2009) — a project which, at a stroke, re-engaged Dutch architecture with a lost tradition of crafted masonry construction.

Brick Dresses illustrated each building with exploded axonometric views which explained how the projects were assembled. The meticulous line drawings followed the standards of Peter Eisenman's building studies but it was not their form that caused surprise. What was radical was the focus on architectural design as a performative practice. By that, I mean a practice that interrogates abstract concepts against the reality of construction. Or, to put it at its baldest, a practice that is the result of both design intent and compromise.

Particularly interesting was seeing the effect of increasing

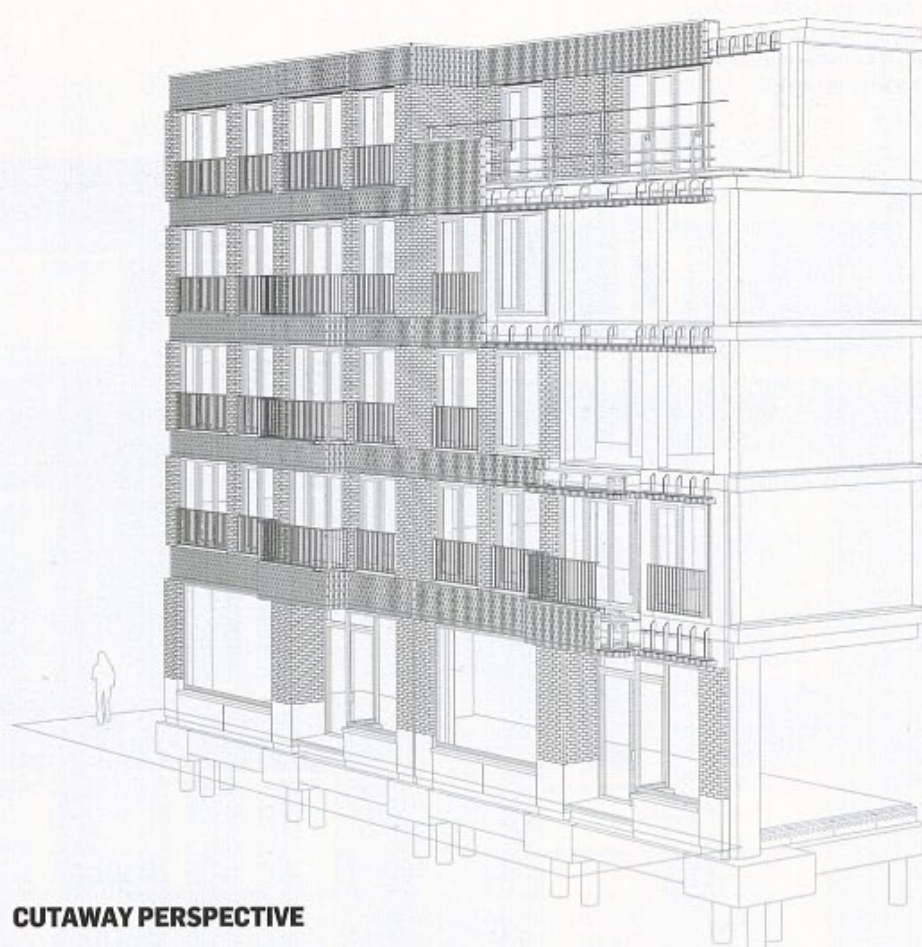


The building responds to the long brick facades of the De Baarsjes district.



PROJECT TEAM Architect Wingender Hovenier Architecten, **Client** Ymere Amsterdam, **Engineer** Bouwadviesbureau Strackee, **Contractor** Coen Hagedoorn Bouw **SUPPLIERS** Main structure Albeton, Calduran, VBI, Dycore, **Precast concrete** Betonfabriek HOP, **Aluminium frames** Alcoa, **Bricks** AKA Keraba-Albert, WDF Dalem, **Concrete plinth** Split Mountain, **Gates** FEK Metaal

The elevation to Jan van Galenstraat changes rhythm and height midway along its length.



CUTAWAY PERSPECTIVE



SITE PLAN

demands for thermal insulation, not just on successive buildings' technical performance, but on their appearance. Such environmental requirements limit the role of bricks to little more than a shell, a "dress", covering and protecting the building. Unlike monolithic structures, such shells expand and shrink in response to external temperature. As a result, current brick facades need vertical expansion joints and horizontal steel brackets to transfer the loads to the main structure at regular intervals.

Brick Dresses illustrated how designers have responded to that situation. The underlying research

was factual and explorative, the objects of study reflecting divergent tectonic principles and architectural convictions. It also demonstrated how impure construction practice has become. In some cases the structural connections between the brick shell and main structure only partially followed the presented architectural logic.

Brick Dresses was produced at an art school, but the show demonstrated an appetite for objective analysis more characteristic of an engineer than an art student. There is a comparison to be made between the Brick Dresses

programme and Sergison Bates' 2007 book *Brick-work: Thinking and Making*. Both take as their starting point an enthusiasm for the routine work of architectural practice and elevate the humble brick to pride of place in their theoretical conjectures.

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programme and Sergison Bates' 2007 book *Brick-work: Thinking and Making*. Both take as their starting point an enthusiasm for the routine work of architectural practice and elevate the humble brick to pride of place in their theoretical conjectures. Sergison Bates presents the work of its own studio. Built work, unrealised projects and competition entries are given equal status, even if some detail drawings appear underdeveloped. No contextual references are offered. Considerable energy has been spent on the rendering of the detail drawings, the making of design models and their photography. Rafael Moneo observed that architecture has fallen under the spell of a "theoretical anxiety" in which designers believe that theory and style can be individualised. Brickwork reads as such an exercise in introspection,

mystifying and obscuring construction practice rather than seeking to confront reality and manipulate it.

By contrast, the theoretical labour of Wingender Hovenier holds to the notion (still common in science and engineering) that ideas and styles are shared intellectual property. It is at ease with extra-architectural preconditions, such as building codes and developments in technical performance, holding them in a dynamic reciprocity with the autonomous practice of architecture.

This is not to say that Wingender Hovenier's own buildings are

free of idiosyncrasy. The practice's latest project, comprising 24 apartments above business and retail units on Jan van Galenstraat in Amsterdam, is informed by a highly particular tectonic principle in which the brick shell's connection to the main structure is articulated through ornamentation.

Rising from a bluestone plinth, its facades are composed from brick piers, which are supported by horizontal prefabricated concrete lintels, finished with bricks on edge. The practical necessity of fixing the piers to the concrete frame introduces the lintel as an architectural opportunity — an

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The Admiraal de Ruijterweg elevation adjusts to the scale of the adjacent 19th century lot housing.



ornamental link reconciling the building's type with its material manifestation. The space between the piers is largely fenestrated, with full-height glazed doors opening onto precast concrete balconies that are again subjected to a brick-on-end treatment. Near the corners, however, recessed brick planes are introduced between the piers.

No explicit articulation of the "brickness" of the brickwork is demonstrated; a regular stretcher bond is employed and identical bricks repeated where possible, arriving at a strong, solid form, rather than a free, additive, composition. The colour and flat sur-

face of the specified brick is common to that of the De Baarsjes district. The material quality, the volumetric manipulation of the building's mass and the proportions of the windows all obey an

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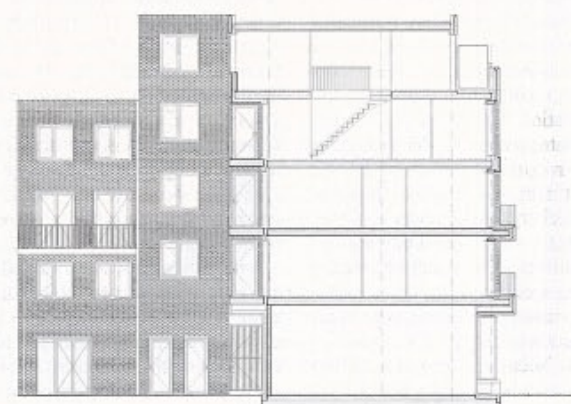
overarching tectonic idea. In the Brick Dresses show, the scheme was presented as a composition of stacked floors reflected by the lintels with bricks on edge. The completed edifice maintains a reading of the primacy of this tectonic principle.

That said, the building is unmistakably part of a very specific urban territory. It closes the narrow end of an elongated block, presenting a long frontage to Jan van Galenstraat and shorter ones to the two streets that extend off it. One of these streets is dominated by 19th century lot housing, the other by an Amsterdam School ensemble designed by Jordanus

Roodenburgh. Wingender Hovenier's building replaces elements of both fabrics. The junction between them fell midway down Jan van Galenstraat – a break both in architectural language and building height. The new building maintains that transition, changing height and facade rhythm midway along its elevation. Similar transitions are introduced along the shorter elevations too. The facades do not replicate the original speculative parcel structure but they do reflect the high degree of architectural variation that is characteristic of the surrounding streets.

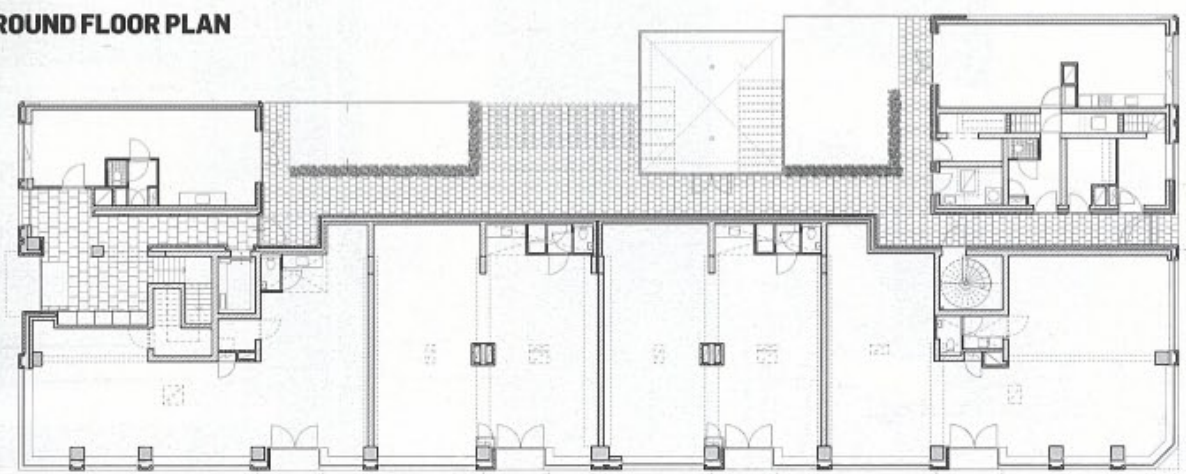
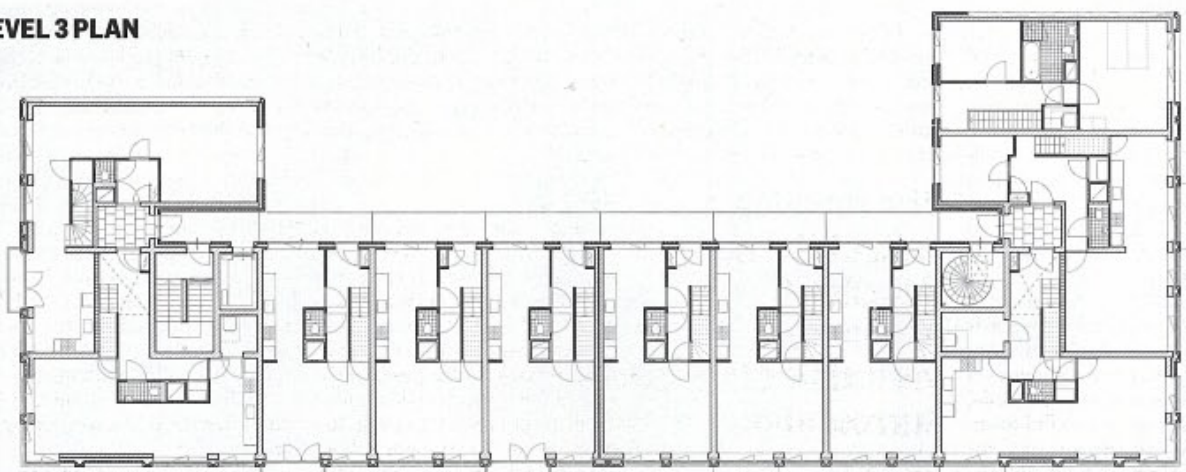
The building is specific to its

SECTION





The intersection of Jan van Galenstraat and Bestevaerstraat.

FACADE**GROUND FLOOR PLAN****LEVEL 3 PLAN**

location and its time too — its language is reliant on techniques that are only available today. Wingender Hovenier regards architecture as a matter of proposing a structure on the basis of a strong rational foundation. However, this project illustrates how its work transcends an introspective fascination with purist, tectonic facade making. If the brick forms the module of the facade, the dwelling establishes the module of the block. The block, in turn, is a component of its immediate urban environment and the city as a whole. At Jan van Galenstraat, the conventions of building and dwelling have been accepted and transformed into an architec-

ture of compact solidity. The block has been articulated as part of a larger urban reality — the grid of De Baarsjes district with its long straight facades. That contextual choice is as clear and unambiguous as can be.

Wingender Hovenier's "brick dresses" discard personal artistic fascinations in pursuit of a deeper connection with construction practice and urban reality. The practice advocates a modernised architectonic culture in which the domestic programme and material substance are the main points of departure. The practice's aim is not to construct individualised shapes, but rather a coherent city.