

# MICHEL DE KLERK'S DESIGNS FOR AMSTERDAM'S SPAARNDAMMERBUURT (1914-1920)

A CONTRIBUTION TO ARCHITECTURAL LYRICISM

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In late autumn of 1915 at the Amsterdam architectural association's (*Architectura et Amicitia*) sixtieth anniversary exhibit, the thirty-one-year-old architect, Michel de Klerk made his first major statement in urban design. A display of photographs and drawings illustrated the two housing blocks and shops which he designed facing each other across the communal park in the Spaarndammerbuurt workers' quarter of northwest Amsterdam. These were subsequently built, by 1918, and then, within the next two years, a third, larger housing block, also comprising a post office and meeting hall was added to the ensemble and had the singular virtue of creating an unique and unified urban setting. Together this group of buildings and city spaces (*figures 1-3*) constitute a memorable example of Dutch architecture and epitomize, as well, many of the finest values of the Dutch expressionist movement, the 'Amsterdam School'.<sup>1</sup>

For these reasons the area around the park, or the 'plantsoen' as it is called, has been the subject of many studies for the fifty years since its completion. Most of these have only been concerned with one aspect of the buildings, or, if more than one, in an offhand, generally superficial way. This paper intends to provide a fuller documentation by describing the buildings in detail, placing them in their urban context, discussing their historical and theoretic bases, and by considering aspects of the cultural and social milieu in which they evolved. Their commemorative record would be incomplete without some of the responses, positive and otherwise, that de Klerk's designs have occasioned, and several of

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on material from my doctoral dissertation on the work of Michel de Klerk (1884-1923) and the Amsterdam School, for Columbia University (1970), sponsored by Professor George R. Collins. Extended research on the buildings at the Spaarndammerbuurt was aided by a grant from the Penrose Fund of the American Philosophical Society. I am grateful to the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies and to Dr. Stanford Anderson, Eugene Santomasso, and Gregory Gale for contributing to research in New York. In the Netherlands I was aided by discussions with Dr. A.W. Reinink, Joost de Klerk, and A.W.F.M. Meij and assisted with the collection of material by Jan and Hansje Becker, Kitty van Groningen, Dr. C. Wegener Sleeswijk, Pieter Landweer, Petra ten Doeschate, Jaap Rietman, and Dr. W.H. Vroom. William Alex kindly offered editorial advice; William Rose typed the manuscript; and my husband, Richard Frank, took many of the photographs.

these are included. One such contemporary evaluation is useful to note at this point as a summary to the problems being addressed by the city of Amsterdam. It is complimentary to de Klerk and was made by the architectural critic of the Amsterdam daily, *De Telegraaf*, on completion of the second housing block: 'I am extremely happy with it because it can serve as a fruitful example; I want all who build in Amsterdam to see how one can relate buildings and open spaces, how one can attain unity between various street walls, how workers' dwellings can be the subject of monumental solutions, how the unity which is obtained excludes neither variety of form nor variety of color. The Spaarndammerplantsoen may pass as one of the ways in which the modern square [Dutch: 'plein'] can be solved.'<sup>2</sup>

Immediately after World War I local and national agencies of government in Holland, which could do little during the war years to alleviate the acute housing shortages, began to make financial means available for housing.<sup>3</sup> However, long before the war, uncontrolled urban growth had been brought to an end by the Netherlands Housing Act of 1901 which required every community of more than 10,000 inhabitants to draw up an expansion plan. The Act encouraged the sponsorship of low cost housing by private foundations and associations by making government financing available to them. Significantly, these were socially oriented groups. Also, by 1905, Amsterdam officials had drawn up rigid building codes that set high standards of safety, durability and hygiene for all new building.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, two commissions were in existence to advise the Mayor and Aldermen of Amsterdam on the esthetic quality of architectural projects. These were the 'Commission on Beauty', first organized in 1898 and

<sup>2</sup> Huib Hoste, Aan het Spaarndammerplantsoen, *De Telegraaf*, June 8 (1918).

<sup>3</sup> Building in the Netherlands was slowed down by wartime conditions despite the government's policy of neutrality. Trade embargoes by Germany and England caused shortages of fuel and building supplies. Sources for this information are: Richard Ratcliff, The Attack on Slums and Unfit Housing in England and Holland, in Mabel U. Walker's *Urban Blight and Slums*, vol. XII of *Harvard City Planning Studies*, Cambridge 1938, chapter 29; Dr. H.J. Romeijn, The Housing Problem, in H.B. Greven (ed.), *The Netherlands and the World War, Studies in the War History of a Neutral*, New Haven 1928, chapter 3 (vol. 4 of the series *Economic and Social History of the World War*, general ed. James T. Shortwell); E. Werkman (ed.), *100 Jaar bouwen - 50 jaar Nationale Woningraad*, Alphen aan den Rijn 1963; *50 Jaar Woningwet 1902-1952. Gedenksboek samengesteld in opdracht van de Centrale Directie van de Wederopbouw en de Volksbuisvesting van het Ministerie van Wederopbouw en Volksbuisvesting en het Nederlands Instituut voor Volksbuisvesting en Stedebouw*, Alphen aan den Rijn 1952; Ing. A. Keppler, *Woningwetbouw, Arbeiderswoningen in Nederland. Vijftig met rijkssteun, onder leiding van architecten uitgevoerde plannen, met financiële gegevens*, Rotterdam 1921, X-XIII.

<sup>4</sup> *Bouwverordening van Amsterdam*, Amsterdam 1914.

<sup>5</sup> The first commission was called 'Schoonheidscommissie', the second 'Stadsschoon'. *De Woningwet 1902-1929, gedenksboek samengesteld ter gelegenheid van de tentoonstelling gehouden te Amsterdam 18-27 October 1930 bij het 12½-jarig bestaan van het Nederlandsch Instituut voor Volksbuisvesting en Stedebouw*, Amsterdam 1930, 29, 35; Conflict Schoon-



*Fig. 1* NORTHWEST AMSTERDAM; DETAIL OF SPAARNDAMMERBUURT AND WESTERPARK. A. Plantsoen; B. Spaarndammerbuurt, first block; C. Second block; D. Third block. Map: Public Works Department, Amsterdam, 1920.

reorganized in 1915 with a greater representation of architects, and the semi-official 'Committee on the Appearance of the City', subsidized by the municipality which passed judgement on plans of privately financed buildings.<sup>5</sup>

The political leaders specifically responsible for the municipal building program of Amsterdam at the time under discussion were the Mayor, J.W.C.

heidscommissie and De Schoonheidscommissie, *Architectura* 22 (1914) 110-112. For the duties of the committee, see Reglement voor de Schoonheidscommissie te Amsterdam, *Architectura* 23 (1915) 69-70. The members of the 1915 Schoonheidscommissie may be found in *Architectura* 23 (1915) 139.



Fig. 2 SPAARNDAMMERPLANTSOEN; RENDERING OF FIRST (LEFT) AND SECOND (RIGHT) BLOCKS WITH A PROPOSED THIRD BLOCK CLOSING OFF THE PARK. Rendering, 1915.  
*Historisch topografische atlas Gemeentelijke Archiefdienst, Amsterdam, neg. nr. D 10798.*

Tellegen, the Chairman of the City Council's commission on housing, F.M. Wibaut, and the Director of the Department of Housing, Arie Keppler.<sup>6</sup> It was primarily due to Tellegen's initiative that well-considered city planning and building for Amsterdam came into being. Appointed Mayor in 1915 Tellegen came to this office with an education in engineering, a record of expertise in matters pertaining to housing, and a reputation for liberal political views. In 1900 he instituted a sweeping reorganization of building policy in Amsterdam.

<sup>6</sup> Tellegen was born in Groningen in 1859, graduated from the Delft Polytechnical School as a civil engineer in 1882; worked for the railroad (1882-1887); for the public works department in Arnhem (1887-1900); and as director of the Amsterdam Building and Dwelling Inspection Department from 1900 to 1915. His liberal politics and engineering background put him in good stead with artists and architects, but his views were mainly unacceptable to the town council. Information from the files at the Gemeente Archief, Amsterdam. Also see, Jan Gratama, *De nieuwe Burgemeester van Amsterdam*, *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 35 (1915) 71-72. Tellegen died in 1921.

Florentinus Marinus Wibaut (1859-1936) was the Wethouder, Alderman of Housing from 1914 to 1927. As a representative of the Socialist Party, the Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiders-partij, he voted especially for housing programs which would ameliorate the living conditions of the worker class. F.M. Wibaut, *Algemene Winkler Prins Encyclopaedie*, sixth ed., 1950, vol. 18, 499.

Arie Keppler (1876-1941) educated as an engineer, started his career with the municipal government in 1903. At that time he worked as a volunteer under Tellegen in Bouw- en Woningtoezicht; in 1908 he was made an officer. In 1915 when Tellegen became mayor, he appointed Keppler director of the Gemeentelijke Woningdienst, a post which Keppler kept until 1937. Keppler became renowned for the encouragement he gave to Amsterdam architects in the field of housing. Ir. P. Bakker Schut, *De Woningwet 1902-1952. De personen, 50 Jaar Woningwet, 1902-1952*, cf. note 3, 20.

He transformed the Department of Building and Housing Inspection, originally a division of the Public Works Department, into an independent agency, and he saw to it that the official building codes came into being. It was also Tellegen who authorized H. P. Berlage's 1915 plan for the extension of the southern part of Amsterdam. Also in 1915 he set up a separate department for housing, the Municipal Housing Service and appointed Arie Keppler director. Keppler, in turn, sought to have architects, and not contractors, receive commissions for the new housing blocks of Amsterdam. It was indeed Keppler who convinced de Klerk to accept the commission for the second building at the Spaarndammerbuurt; de Klerk was reluctant at first because of the difficulties inherent in the site.<sup>7</sup> Wibaut, as Alderman of Building in the city administration, was responsible for securing finances to support the housing programs, and as a Socialist he sought especially to ameliorate the conditions of the poor. His attempts to find ways of improving the impoverished conditions of large numbers of people were equalled only by his attempts to uphold a standard of artistry for the spiritual benefits it might afford.<sup>8</sup>

Other sympathetic officials were also enlisted in the effort to obtain the best possible architecture for Amsterdam. Thus, the commissioners for the Spaarndammerbuurt buildings played their part in the city's plans to improve the quality of dwellings. Acquisition of land at the Spaarndammerbuurt involved renting it from the city government which had expropriated land in this district and other large areas lying outside of the lines of the old city wall at the Singel canal in order to prevent it from being developed, as it had been since the 1870's, by contractors, whose primary profit motive had prompted them to use cheap and inferior materials and monotonous designs for their buildings.<sup>9</sup>

Hille and his partner Kamphuis, who were the contractors for the first Spaarndammerbuurt building, at the north side of the plantsoen, were exonerated from this category. Having supplied acceptable services over a period of years, Klaas Hille had gained a local reputation for the workmanship and materials of his buildings. Klaas Hille was also a proprietor and as such had recently worked with de Klerk who had designed an apartment building at the

<sup>7</sup> A. Keppler, [De Klerk Obituary], *Architectura*, 29 December 1923, 236.

<sup>8</sup> Wibaut was, in fact, very much concerned with the Spaarndammerbuurt. Apparently, the building expenses were called into question and Wibaut defended the additional expenditures before the city council. See J.P. Mieras, Eer aan een dooden en een levenden architect, *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 41 (1920) 246. Dr. A.W. Reinink called my attention to the extra costs of these buildings in August, 1970.

<sup>9</sup> Expropriation policies were based on those existing since the seventeenth century. Jhr. Ir. J.E. van Heemskerck van Beest, Honderd jaar Publieke Werken, *Ons Amsterdam* 2 (1950) 52 (Jubileum-nummer: 100 jaar Publieke Werken). Further information on contractors and matters pertaining to housing are in Prof. Dr. Ir. H.G. van Beusekom, *De particuliere bouwondernemer*, Voorburg [1967], chapters IV, V, VI.



Fig. 3 SPAARNDAMMERBUURT; THIRD BLOCK ALONG ZAAANSTRAAT, AT APEX OF TRIANGULAR SITE LOOKING NORTH. April, 1958.

*Historisch topografische atlas Gemeentelijke Archiefdienst, Amsterdam, neg. nr. 27603.*

Johannes Vermeerplein (1911-1912) for him.<sup>10</sup>

De Klerk's second client, the building company 'Eigen Haard' (A Hearth of One's Own), also purchased land from the city. Part of their building costs were subsidized by the government and these subsidies were granted on a long lease basis. The Eigen Haard association was originally formed by rail workers, but the members were basically interested in comfortable dwellings and not only in the common link of a skill; thus, by the 1920s many artisans and other skilled but low paid workers could be counted in their ranks. The members' non-profit cooperative policies dealt with ways of using the net profits from rents to improve their buildings and even to finance social activities.<sup>11</sup> Many of these plans would have been made in the association's meeting hall, located at the rear court of the third block.

<sup>10</sup> Permission to build at the plantsoen was granted to Hille and Kamphuis on June 11, 1914 (Dossier 25973 no. 428 B.T. 1914 at the archives of Bouw- en Woningtoezicht, Amsterdam). According to Arie Keppler, Hille and Kamphuis were going to erect three blocks at the north, east, and south sides of the park—which might explain the illustrations de Klerk made for the 1915 exhibition (*figure 2*), but the outbreak of the war brought a halt to these plans (A. Keppler, *De Klerk Obituary*, cf. note 7, p. 236). Information on Hille was supplied by the late Berend Tobia Boeyinga, 'Architect M. de Klerk' (unpublished manuscript presented to the author on November 17, 1964).

<sup>11</sup> This association was founded in 1909 and was dedicated to the improvement of workers' housing. Association events were held in the hall on Spaarndammerstraat 64; these included St. Nicholas celebrations for neighborhood children, and crafts and drawing lessons. Excursions to the Tuschinsky theatre, a brewery, and the Palace were also organized. *Eigen Haard, Maandblad van de Woningbouwvereniging 'Eigen Haard' Amsterdam* 5 (1929) no 9. 78ff., 105. The second block was constructed by Smit en Co. The decision to grant a loan for the estimated building costs of this building, fl. 287.464,50, was made by the city council on October 18, 1916. The contractors of the third block were D. Tijmensen and R. Oudes, who were granted a loan to build on April 24, 1918; their estimated building costs were fl. 839.500,—. Information from official letters filed at Bouw- en Woningtoezicht.

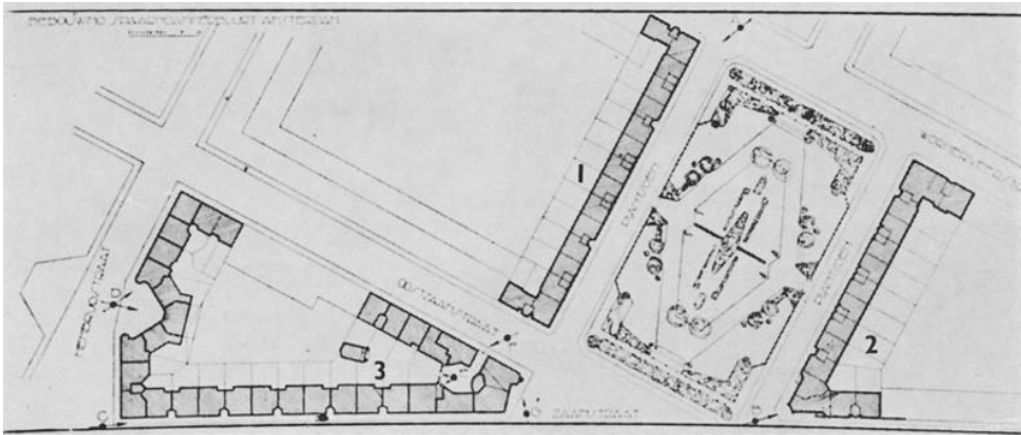


Fig. 4 SITE PLAN OF THE THREE SPAARNDAMMERBUURT BUILDINGS AND PARK DESIGNED BY MICHEL DE KLERK. (Block 1, 1914-1915; block 2, 1915-1918; block 3, 1917-1920) Plan of site: *Wendingen*, vol. 6, nos. 9 and 10 (1924), p. 9.

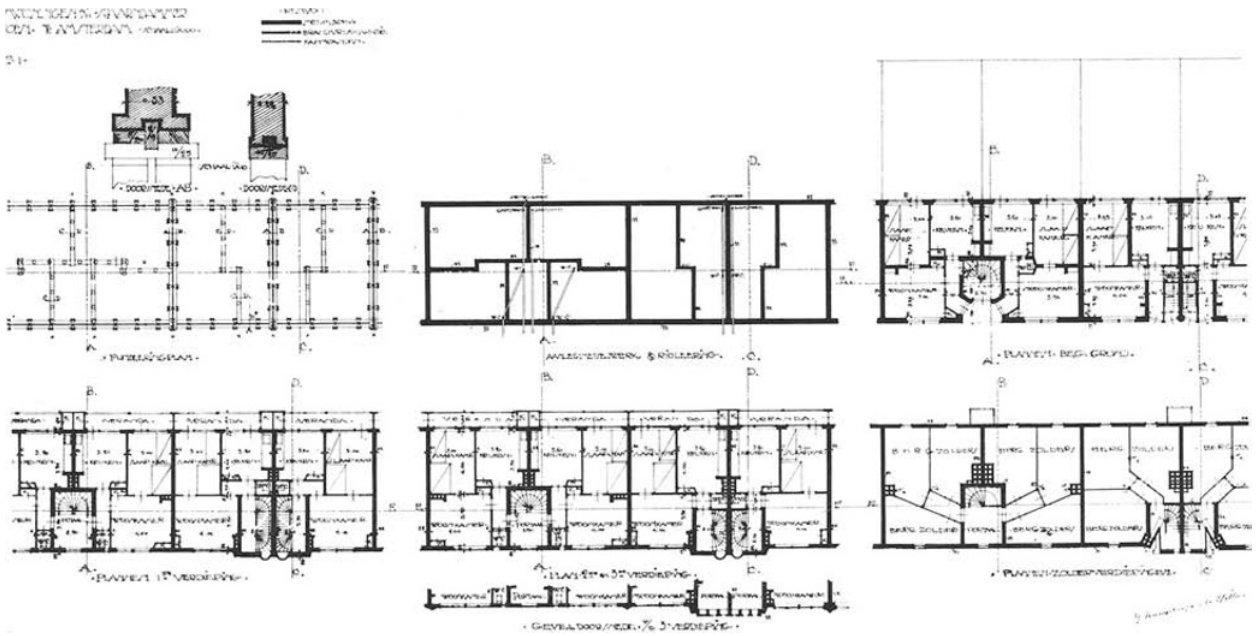
The Spaarndammerbuurt is a triangular plot of ground in the northwest part of Amsterdam, of approximately fifty-four acres, bordered by the Spaarndammerdijk, Spaarndammerstraat, and Zaanstraat, and, at its southern periphery, by the tracks leading from the Central Station (*figure 1*). The layout of the district first appears in the 1875 extension plan by J. Kalff, Director of Public Works from 1873-1881.<sup>12</sup> During the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century the southeast section bordering Spaarndammerstraat was gradually built up. De Klerk's colleague, Johan Melchior Van der Meij, as esthetic adviser to the Public Works Department, submitted a plan in 1912 for further development of the district.<sup>13</sup> He was severely criticized for omitting a communal park, for including long unbroken street-lines with 'chamfered' corners, and placing the playground along a major traffic artery. Van der Meij thereafter adjusted the street-lines and public recreation areas which now exist basically in accord with his revised plan, which was published in 1915.<sup>14</sup>

The three blocks of buildings by de Klerk were built in the central portion of this district, between 1914 and 1920, and were in accord with the requirements conveyed in the Housing Law of 1901 and the Amsterdam Building Codes of

<sup>12</sup> For an illustration and discussion of Kalff's plan, see Jhr. Ir. J.E. van Heemskerck van Beest, *Honderd jaar Publieke Werken*, cf. note 9, pp. 36-38.

<sup>13</sup> For an illustration of this original plan, see Arie Keppler, *Een nieuw uitbreidingsplan*, *Bouwkundig Weekblad*, 32 (1912) 432-433.

<sup>14</sup> *Uitbreidingsplan der Spaarndammerbuurt te Amsterdam*, *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 33 (1913) 72.



*Fig. 5* FIRST BLOCK: TYPICAL DETAIL OF PLANS IN CENTER OF BLOCK INCLUDING FOUNDATIONS, DRAINAGE SYSTEM, AND UPPER STORIES.  
 Plans: *Bouw- en Woningtoezicht, Amsterdam.*



*Fig. 6* FIRST BLOCK; PLANTSOEN FAÇADE WITH VIEW OF PARK IN FOREGROUND, ca. 1920.  
 Photograph: 'Stichting Lichtbeelden-Instituut' Amsterdam.

1905 in regard to the quality of their spaces, materials, drainage and water supply, gas and electricity, construction and appearance. Thus, each of the Spaarndammerbuurt buildings was ventilated with windows in every room, and insulated with hollow bricks; each was supplied with the appropriate metal pipelines for kitchens and W.C.s; each was soundly constructed with carefully laid piles and a wood-framed, masonry constructed superstructure<sup>15</sup>; and each subscribed to the limitations on heights (21 meters), frontages (buildings were required to border on the street lines), and had the required rear courts and gardens.<sup>16</sup> The Spaarndammerbuurt blocks were conceived as three separate projects and were built over a six year period.

The first housing block and shops, commissioned by Kamphuis & Hille in 1914 and finished by the following year, was designed as a symmetrically arranged, 'U'-shaped building ninety-five meters long by seventeen deep; the central rear court area used for gardens measuring eight meters deep at ground level. The main façade fronts the north border of the park while the rear faces an extensive open space beyond the court area, formerly built upon, now used as a playing field by children. The rectilinear shaped plans for the apartments are not unusual for the time; their front room living areas, rear kitchen and bedroom, and W.C. off of the side corridor (*figure 5*) can be closely identified with prototypes stemming from the housing law of 1901 and also relate to the spatial arrangements of middle income apartments in row houses around the largest of Amsterdam's nineteenth-century urban parks, the Vondelpark, located to the south of the old city walls. The communal or semi-public spaces of the first block include twelve stairways at the front and side façades, attic storage spaces, and the gardens and balconies at the rear (*figures 6 and 7*). The two- and three-door entrance ways at the stair wells are provided as safeguards for the privacy and self sufficiency of the tenants, and also serve as transitional zones between inside and outside, as well as nodes for conversing and shelter (*figures 8 and 9*). Only the corner shops are truly public; these spaces were meant to carry goods for daily household needs—groceries, meats, hardware, and the like (*figure 10*). Most of the apartment windows are multipaneled casements which, although of

<sup>15</sup> Wood joists anchored to the inner walls support all floors. Concrete was employed in the second and third projects to strengthen the foundations and, in the third building, for the floor beams of the ground story and for posts from which the pleated window bays are projected. These details and all other structural aspects may be seen in de Klerk's line drawings filed with Bouw- en Woningtoezicht, Amsterdam and in the descriptions of the materials used for the second and third blocks filed at Gemeente Archief, Amsterdam. I did not locate structural data on the first block.

<sup>16</sup> *Bouwverordening van Amsterdam*, Amsterdam 1914, articles 91, 77, 79 respectively.



*Fig. 7* FIRST BLOCK: REAR FAÇADE WITH BALCONIES AND GARDENS ON GROUND, FLOOR, CA. 1920.  
 Photograph: 'Stichting Lichtbeelden-Instituut' Amsterdam.

moderate size, provide the residents with adequate exposure to sun and air (*figure 6*), while the stair well windows, although elaborately shaped with curved profiles and polygonal perimeters, are too small and only admit a dim, diffused light (*figure 11*).

Plan arrangements became progressively complex from building to building as the sites became more of a design challenge. In order to accommodate maximum spatial efficiency and linear coordination within the perimeters of the awkward site plan of the second block (*figures 12-14*) careful adjustments to shapes of the individual plans were worked out.<sup>17</sup> The result of equalizing the spaces of the apartment plans is that the entire block is given the demeanor of a

<sup>17</sup> In the second block the acute angle (60°) at the chamfered corner at the plantsoen and Zaanstraat causes a series of asymmetric spatial divisions in the four plan types represented at this corner. Although the general outline of the site plan is similar to the block across the plantsoen (both parallel the plantsoen and extend a short distance down the subsidiary blocks), the two buildings differ slightly in size, and considerably in their detailing at the contours, and in the actual plans of the apartments. Comparative measurements between the first and second blocks show the second to be smaller in length at the side facing the plantsoen (81,74 meters), but slightly longer at each wing (20 meters along Wormerveerstraat and 27,17 at Zaanstraat) and out of its 60 apartments (15 to a floor) there are nine types (as against the three types of the first block).



*Fig. 8* FIRST BLOCK: EXTERIOR DETAIL OF STAIR WELL, WITH ENTRYWAYS INDICATED AS TRANSITIONAL ZONES BETWEEN INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR AND NODES FOR CONVERSATION.  
*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*

thoughtfully balanced jigsaw puzzle. The series of four types of plans at the angular corner has the most intricate interconnections within the block, worked out according to a close coordination of perpendicular and angular lines. These individual plans are, in turn, contained within a roughly symmetrical grouping: the bilateral placement of projecting stair wells (of apartments 'G' and 'J') and the centering of the five-sided rear wall lend a loose sense of order to this end of the block. Additional coherence of composition is supplied by the alignment between the outer edges of these corner stair wells and the rear walls of apartments 'F' and 'H' that slope inward toward the center of the court. Still another agent used to unify the spaces of the second block is the series of arcs at the three major stair wells along the plantsoen (seen on plans of the third floor). The radii of these arcs are at the center of the building and, although the inner walls at the stair wells separate one row of apartments from the next, the circle suggests a conceptual bridge between the two spaces.

The third block, which is the largest of the three and most intricate in its spatial interworkings, is built on the site bordered by the Oostzaan-, Zaan-, and



*Fig. 9* FIRST BLOCK: DETAIL OF ENTRY AT STAIR WELL.

*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*

Hembrugstraat, and the northwest corner of the plantsoen. It covers the whole triangular block, except for the pre-existing school. The complex includes one hundred two dwellings, a meeting hall for Eigen Haard and a post office at the acute angle of the site (*figures 15-20*). There are nineteen different types of apartment plans plus slightly modified derivatives of three of these main types. Moreover, subtle adjustments have been made to the spaces at each level of the building so that one becomes aware of a tour de force quality when totalling up the number of individually conceived and composed areas. These are especially evident at the inner courtyard (behind the post office) and the small right-angled, wedge-shaped plaza at Hembrugstraat. Awesome also is the quantity of spatial divisions marked by entrances and apertures, and the bold wall masses that collect these into a unified design (*figures 18-20*). Linear adjustments have been made similarly and as effectively as at the second block, although there are one or two round-ended spaces here, for example the elipsoidal apartment space above the post office, which seem to lack linear co-ordination and appear as expeditious solutions (*figure 16 above*).



*Fig. 10* FIRST BLOCK (WITH THIRD IN BACKGROUND): DETAIL OF STORE AT THE CORNER.  
*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*

Designing the spaces of the post office to achieve internal coherence as well as conformity to the lines of the site seems to have presented the greatest challenge to de Klerk (*figure 16 below*). He resolved the problem by building up the area with a system of canted and perpendicular lines, regularized into a mirrored grouping with polygonal sides. In order to arrive at this regularized polygonal space that defines the interior, the angle of the end wall at the plantsoen had to be turned several degrees northward away from the line of the plantsoen (*figure 15*). Then, de Klerk extended the post office vestibule tower out to the tip of the triangular site to reaffirm the frontage line and stress the significance of the urban relationship between the first and third blocks. Adding to the complexity of linear relationships is a spatial one involving the barrel vaulting within the post office (*figure 21*). This rectangular form is enclosed by the polygonal space; the coincidence of these right angles—the vault and the walls at the far corners of the offices and waiting room—shows de Klerk's concern with co-ordinating shapes within a limited area (*figure 16 below*). This metamorphic development from the floor plan to the vaulting gives a sense of the intricate and complicated



*Fig. 11* FIRST BLOCK: DETAIL OF STAIR WELL FROM INTERIOR.  
*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*

way de Klerk approached almost every formal problem.<sup>18</sup>

It was, indeed, de Klerk's belief that the composition of architectural forms was of utmost importance, and his advocacy of 'the play and language of form'<sup>19</sup> as a *modus operandi* is clearly conveyed in the Spaarndammerbuurt designs.

Thus, although of related design, the three blocks at Spaarndammerbuurt are articulated differently, the inherent value of each conveyed by structural and decorative qualities that are rhythmically varied to establish a specific character. De Klerk distinguishes his designs by bold contrasts in shape and by changes in texture and color, evident as discussion now turns to the architectonic qualities of the buildings.

The first housing block—probably the most conventional of the three because of its symmetrical ordering—conveys through linear means a sense of restfulness on its expansive main façade. The building's horizontality is emphasized

<sup>18</sup> Gregory Gale of the Institute for Architecture and Urban studies brought my attention to linear relationships in the plans of the second and third blocks.

<sup>19</sup> This is from an article written by de Klerk on Berlage, on the occasion of the latter's sixtieth birthday in 1916 from *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 36 (1916) no. 46, pp. 331-332. It appears in the form of a polemic espousing individuality of form in contrast to the social and philosophical strivings of Berlage which seemed to manifest themselves in anonymous designs.

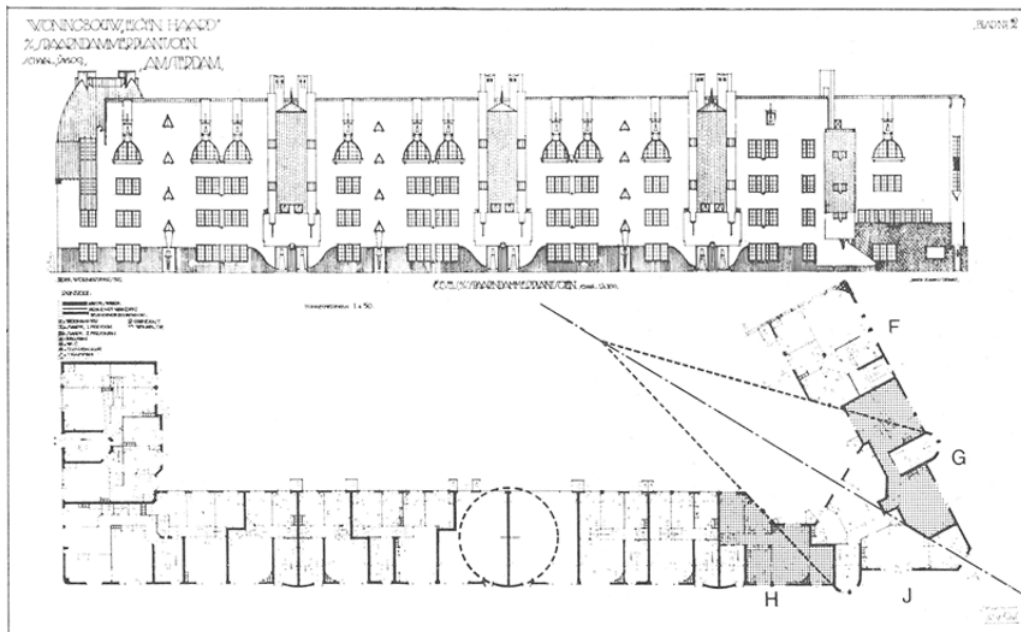


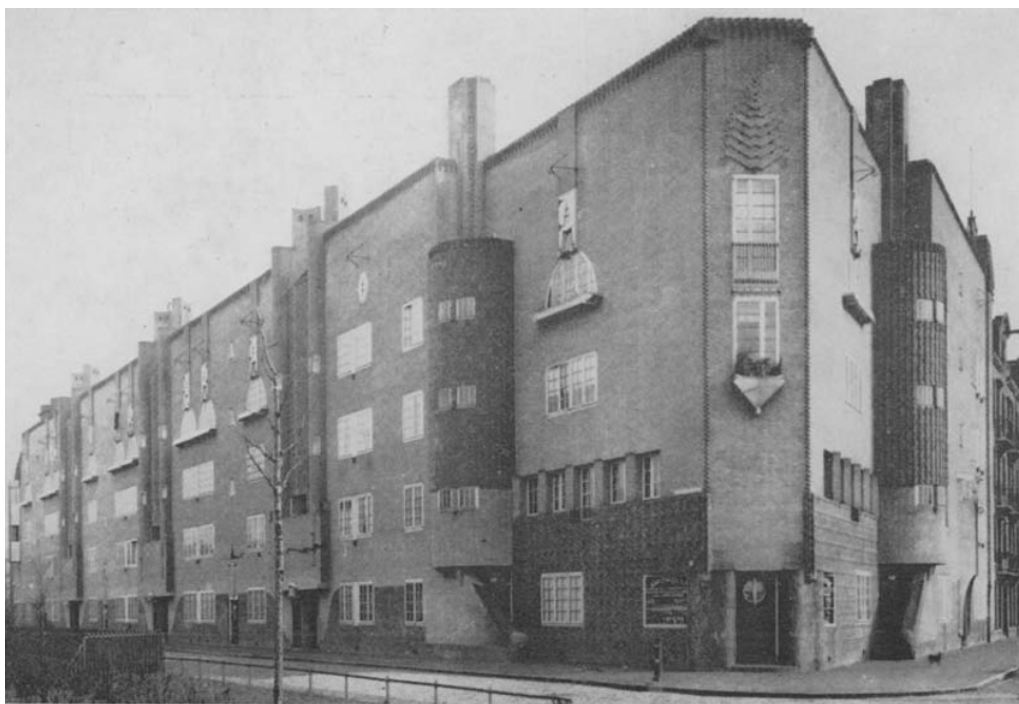
Fig. 12 SECOND BLOCK: ELEVATION AND PLAN OF THIRD STORY (WITH DIAGRAM INDICATING GEOMETRIC LINEAR RELATIONSHIPS).

Photocopy: *Bouw- en Woningtoezicht, Amsterdam*; diagram: Gregory Gale, New York.

by bands of red tiles on the attic story and by the row of long slender windows beneath the attic. These windows continue in the same line, with minor interruptions, across the parabolic gables of the major stair wells. Although parabolic termini of the stair wells break the roof line, their graceful curves and planar quality suggest a sense of calm (*figure 6*).

Along the wall there are elements in the design which neutralize rising verticals. While the major stair wells rise above the horizontally-oriented skyline, the corbelled brickwork at the ends of the two slender hemicylinders gives the illusion of a downward thrust, like stalactites (*figure 22*). On those two stair wells that are distinguished by rows of polygonal windows the upper, shield-shaped, windows point downward as do the triangular panels of hexagonal windows (*figure 6*).

Slight variations in the distribution of stair wells and windows along the bilaterally symmetrical main façade enhances the sense of poise. A central bay is set apart from the others by placing two stair wells close together, while at either end of the block the last two vertical rows of windows are varied in size so that indications of contraction and expansion conclude the rhythm of the wall elevation.



*Fig. 13* SECOND BLOCK: EXTERIOR SEEN FROM CORNER OF ZAANSTRAAT AND PLANTSOEN, CA. 1920.

*Photograph: Historische topografische atlas Gemeentelijke Archiefdienst Amsterdam, neg. nr. D697.*

Only two disquieting features are introduced. The scale of the projecting stair wells is unrelated to human size, and the eye is led abruptly from small detailing to large wall expanse. At the center of the block, above the pair of third story windows, the wood trim and the peaked gable define an area with a pair of small apertures and a slender, vertically projecting form, creating a strange mask-like image (*figure 6*).

The decorative patterning of materials adds to the planar character of the building and makes the tonal gradations more apparent. Diaper ornamentation along the attic and dado bands emphasize the overall flatness of the exterior wall. The diffused tones of the grey-violet bricks and dark grey mortar in the middle wall area are picked up by the flickering lights and shadows that play over notched roof tiles, corrugated dado clinkers, and in-and-out bond of the brickwork at stair wells. Finally, the precise and fresh quality of the architectural design is enhanced by the crisp combination of bright red tiles, cool brickwork, and cream-colored wood-work.

The vigorously expressive character of the second block (*figures 13, 14, 23*) contrasts dramatically with the quietude of the first. Vertical block-like chimney



*Fig. 14* SECOND BLOCK: MAIN FAÇADE SEEN FROM EAST SIDE OF PLANTSOEN (WORMERVEERSTRAAT IS AT LEFT), ca. 1920.

*Photograph: 'Stichting Lichtbeelden-Instituut' Amsterdam.*

stacks and tall hemicylindrical shapes flanking stair wells on the plantsoen rise above the roof line in a forceful, stepped arrangement. A variation of these arrangements occurs at either side of the truncated wedge-shaped corner where single chimney stacks emerge above heavy wall junctures with their more fully curved stair wells. Secondary accents are introduced in minor forms. Angular shapes of window frames, window separators, and the wood and brickwork decoration on the truncated wedge-shaped corner act as counterparts of the larger masses. Further adding tension to the dominant upward-directed lines, the bottom parts of the hemicylindrical forms separating the windows, and the lower line of the center window in the second-story window band on either side of the 'chamfered' corner are dropped slightly below the prevailing horizontal.

There are biomorphic forms here which are more lifelike than the mask-like image in the center bay of the first block. Indeed, some are explicit: two square tipped tongues sag from drooping mouths, carved on the corbels that project just above the brick hemicylinders that separate the entrances of two of the three individual stair wells along the square (*figure 24*). Another example has expressive yet less lifelike features: at the stair well along Zaanstraat the two

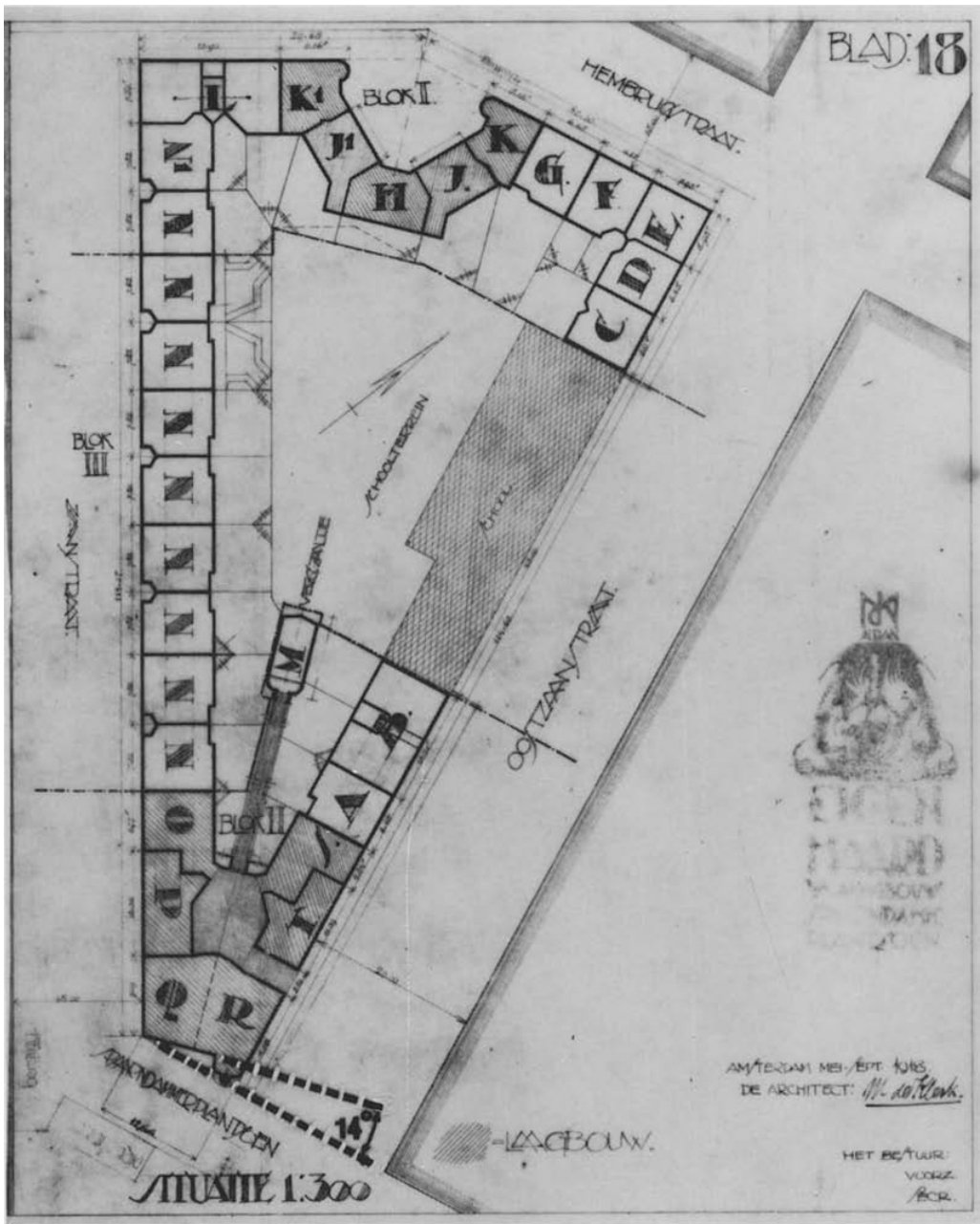


Fig. 15 THIRD BLOCK SITE PLAN; letters indicate the different types of apartment plans (19 in all with 3 variants); hatched area indicates pre-existing school; the  $14^\circ$  angle indicates the symmetry of the post office plan and the linear relation between the tip of the post office tower and the frontage line of the first block.

Photocopy: *Bouw- en Woningtoezicht, Amsterdam*; diagram: Gregory Gale, New York.

close-set windows, the thin layer of brick at the center of the angled mass, and the parabolic arch above the door suggest the image of a wide-eyed, flat-nosed, gaping mouthed creature.

Vibrant colors and diverse textures support the animated rhythms of the groupings. The purple clinkers of the dado complement the ochre bricks, while the rep tiles of the stair wells enhance these forms. Shadows that are cast by overlapping notched tiles produce quivering stair-well patterns, and serrated and sinusoidal lines of brickwork introduce other energetic rhythms. Finally, the dynamic relationship between larger elements is suggested in the brickwork of the dado at either side of the 'chamfered' corner, where shadows caught in the square cavities interplay with the intricate surface pattern of the surrounding stones (*figure 23*).

The strong homogeneous impression of the third block results from the repetition of line and of surface planes. Parallel horizontal bands run along the building, punctuated by swelling shapes (*figures 19-20*). White limestone, wood, and dark tiles and clinkers underline the horizontal disposition of the walls and roofs. Rows of black tiles high on the cylindrical post office tower form an uninterrupted line with the ridge of the interpenetrating roof at the side of the tower. Brickwork throughout is double-stretcher Flemish bond. The dark tones of the vertical stretchers in the sunken courses line up in horizontal bands, thus strengthening the cohesive function of the courses on the five-story high street walls (*figures 19, 20, 25*). This dominant horizontality is relieved chiefly by chimney stacks, slanted windows at stair wells, and, most emphatically, by the tall, twenty-eight-meter high tower at the Hembrugplein. By virtue of its bulk this decorative feature appears to bring the sweeping lines of the balconies and the white limestone strip that runs above the dado to a sudden halt.

From the inner courtyard the tower can be seen behind and to the side of the meeting hall, as part of a picturesque arrangement with stage-set qualities. A pair of bow windows with projecting tile-clad gables and the brick gate with sloping wall act as repoussoirs and funnel the eye to the perspective view of path, meeting hall, and tower (*figure 26*).

Esthetic features of noted effect! But the importance of the buildings' forms also lies in being carriers of a number of separate and special, open-ended, changing patterns and responses of life's contingencies. And these perceptual experiences are conveyed through the shaping of minor forms. For example, the series of flush and angularly projecting panels of the parabolic window on Oostzaanstraat, at the post office, offer an almost multimedia awareness of scenery and events because of the variety of directional planes framing fields

of vision to the exterior (*figures 17, 27*). The same extension of perception occurs in the apartment windows at the second and third stories on either side of the post office, where horizontal windows with pleated and three-sided profiles, projected over the sidewalk, bring the inhabitants into a more immediate relationship with outdoor events (*figures 17, 28*). Other examples of multifaceted bow or angled windows are vertically oriented and have close parallels in the row houses built around the Vondelpark; these appear on the first story apartments at the Hembrugpleintje (*figure 29*) and also at the second block, one each on the corner of Wormerveerstraat and Plantsoen (*figure 14*); quietly tucked behind balconies in the first case and in the other boldly stated as corner reliefs.

De Klerk, with a lack of pretense, emphasizes true human scale. In all three buildings the wall masses of stair wells are projected out over the sidewalks, reaching just over human height (*figures 23, 30, 31*). Thus, his use of stair well overhangs (*figure 23*), which required the introduction of metal flanges embedded in the wall, was his way of conveying the direct physical presence of mass along the street, above the pedestrian. Moreover, his first floor windows are, like most Dutch houses, low, making for close communication between interior and exterior (*figure 32*).

De Klerk's concern with the comfort of the users of his buildings extended even to matters like the angle of backward slope of the post office bench to secure comfortable seating (*figure 33*) and placing the overhanging horizontal transom of the post office windows just above average height, not interfering with the line of interior-exterior vision (*figure 34*), keeping it in accord with the human scale he uses throughout.

The foregoing interpretations are based on messages within the forms themselves. But as an intrinsic part of the architecture de Klerk included, perhaps even celebrated, local folklore, heraldry, seafaring traditions and the like in an overt, almost medieval fashion. This is done by way of architectural form, as well as by sculpture and relief decoration by noted artists and craftsmen of the day. Thus, frigate-like bowed windows and wavy-line decorations at either side of the post office corner have earned the third building the nickname of 'ship building',<sup>20</sup> the impression strengthened by the relief of birds resembling sea gulls at the post office corner of Zaanstraat (which is five blocks away from the wharves and docks at the IJ), a relief carved in brick and attributed to the

<sup>20</sup> Joost de Klerk (cf. note 1) qualified this point. He maintains in a closely observed study that the parallel between the windows on the third building and slanting stern ships is very superficial. The ship's shape stems from the poopdeck, developed as early as the fourteenth century, to act as a balance or brace for the mizzensail. Letter to the author of Sept. 6, 1970.

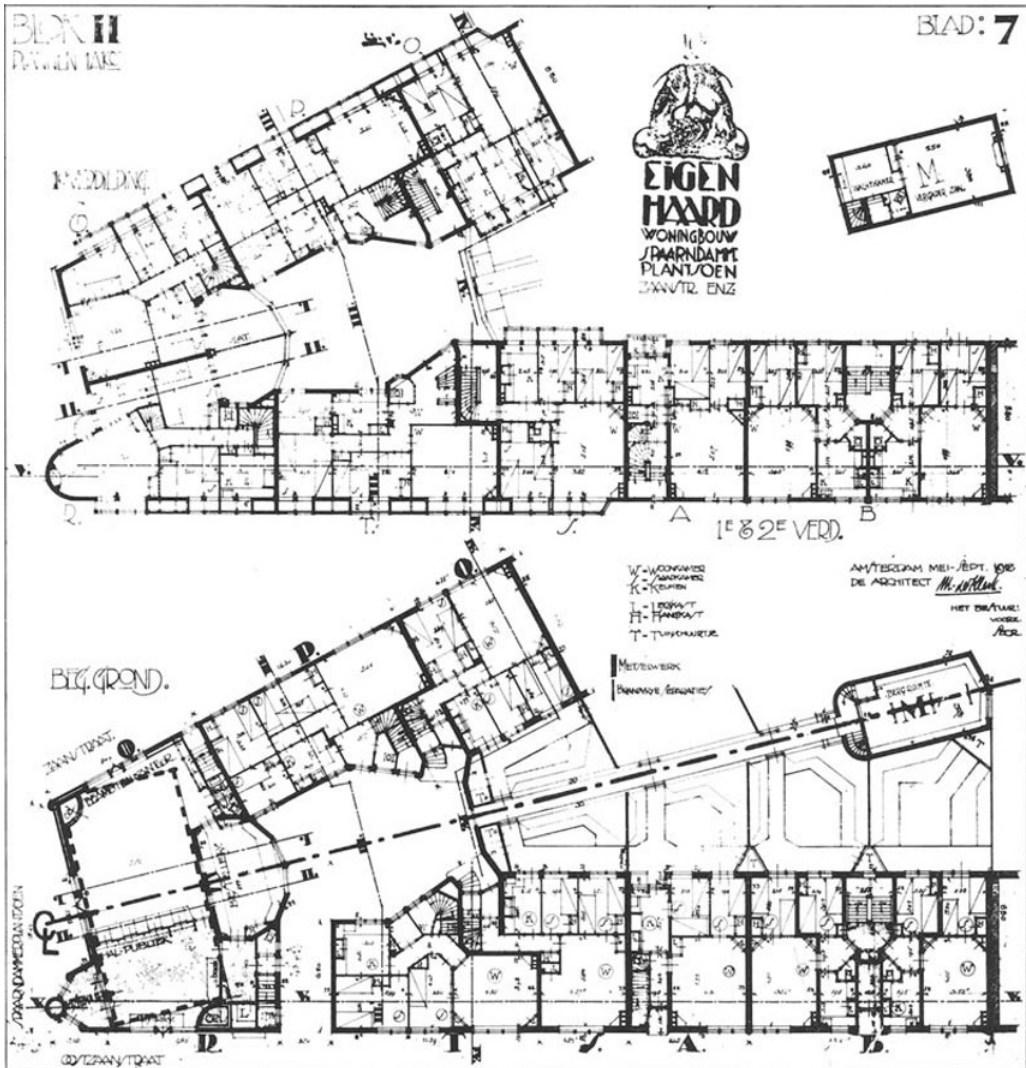


Fig. 16 THIRD BLOCK; PLANS OF APARTMENT TYPES O, P, Q, R, S, T, A, B and M ON GROUND, FIRST AND SECOND STORIES. Rectangle of barrel vault in post office indicated by dotted lines; bilateral symmetry by center line.  
 Photocopy: *Bouw- en Woningtoezicht, Amsterdam*; diagram: Gregory Gale, New York.

sculptor, John Raedecker.<sup>21</sup> The detailing on the first block, on the corner of Oostzaanstraat and the square is said to have been designed by another well-known Dutch sculptor, Hildo Krop.<sup>22</sup> De Klerk's salute to folklore combines with a salute to geography in this block, where, on either corner bearded dwarfs

<sup>21</sup> J.J. Vriend, *Nederland bouwt in natuur- en baksteen*, Utrecht 1951, caption to illus. 77; Dr. F.M. Huebner, *Nieuwe Hollandsche beeldbouwkunst*, Amsterdam [n.d.], p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> H(ui)b H(oste), Spaarndammerplantsoen, *De Telegraaf*, January 12 (1916).



Fig. 17 THIRD BLOCK: POST OFFICE CORNER SEEN ALONG ZAAANSTRAAT, CA. 1920.  
 Photograph: 'Stichting Lichtbeelden-Instituut' Amsterdam.

sit, as on a perch. These North European 'Kabouters'<sup>23</sup>, or spirit-keepers of land and water, doing good rather than evil at the moment, hold between their knees the emblem shields of the cities of Krommenie and Oostzaan after which the block's two side streets are named (*figure 35*). That of Krommenie displays four carved lions while Oostzaan's shield shows three cheeses on a trident.<sup>24</sup> For support the dwarfs hold on to two tree trunks similar to the poplars which are planted at the west edge of the plantsoen to shield it from the noise and dirt of the railroad.

Still other images are more specifically related to site and function of the building, as a relief with a wind mill on Oostzaanstraat (*figure 36*), which can be associated with the corn mill, 'de Bloem'<sup>25</sup>, visible to the southwest on Haarlem-

<sup>23</sup> These Kabouters not only play a role in Germanic folktales, but also in the popular satire *De kleine Johannes* by Frederick van Eeden (1887), which affected de Klerk.

<sup>24</sup> The Krommenie shield is silver with two red lions and two black ones. Lions heads also appear on chimneys in the third block. The Oostzaan shield is gold with a black trident and green cheeses. See *Nederlandsch Heraldisch Album, I: Provincie- en Gemeentewapens*, Hilversum 1924, nos. 48 and 50.

<sup>25</sup> The mill was originally built in 1614, and rebuilt in 1768; it was moved to Haarlemmerweg in 1878. For its history, see *Molen de Bloem, Ons Amsterdam* (1966) 42-43.

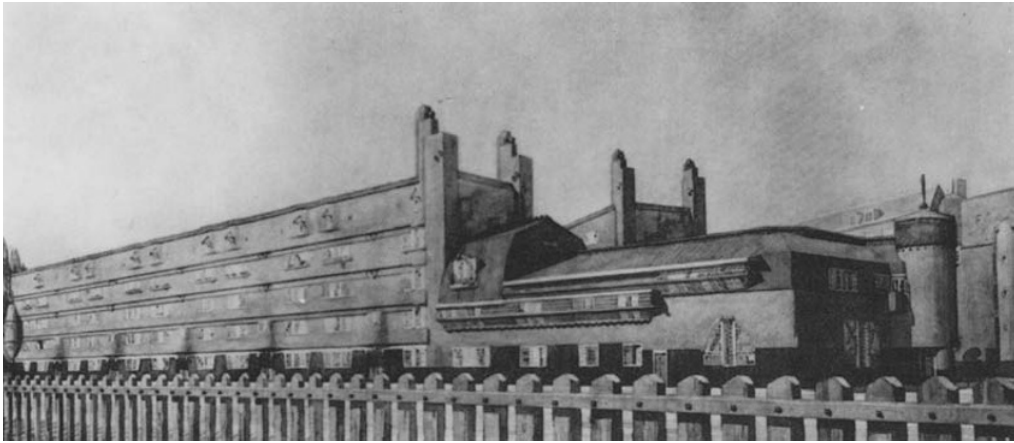


*Fig. 18* THIRD BLOCK: DETAIL (RENDERING) OF HOUSING BLOCKS AT REAR FAÇADES; view is from direction of the Eigen Haard association's meeting hall, July 1917. *Historisch topografische atlas Gemeentelijke Archiefdienst, Amsterdam, neg. nr. D12813.*

merweg (*figure 30*). At the post office he uses communications symbols: grayhounds denoting speed, on the keystone of the rear window (*figure 37*) and lightning bolts representing electrical communication, on imposts of the parabolic windows (*figure 38*).

As noted, the tallest and most prominent shape in the Spaarndammerbuurt is the spear-like Hembrugplein tower meant to be visible from several spots in the district and placed on axis with and framed in the archway (*figures 1, 4, 39*) of the Zaanhof (1919–1921), the large apartment complex just north of the Eigen Haard triangle base.

The underlying inspiration for de Klerk's designs at the Spaarndammerbuurt may be found in the writings of his forerunner H.P. Berlage and also in the diverging views of Berlage's contemporaries, J.H. de Groot and Willem Kromhout, among others. Berlage's dedication to architectural principles of rationalism for which he employed the term, architectural truth, and to the planning concepts of Camillo Sitte find verification here; but equally influential were the theories with an expressionist cast concerning the recollection of local



*Fig. 19* THIRD BLOCK: PANORAMA OF ZAAANSTRAAT STREET WALL SEEN FROM BEHIND RAILWAY EMBANKMENT FENCE, JULY 1917.

*Historisch topografische atlas Gemeentelijke Archiefdienst, Amsterdam, neg. nr. D12800.*

and exotic traditions, the evocation of moods (also conveyed to some extent by Berlage), as well as values freer and less systematic than Berlage's, namely picturesque irregularities of form and color.

Berlage's understanding of truth in architecture, frequently expressed in three of his major written works, is clarity of plan and construction.<sup>26</sup> His adherence to this principle meant that interior spatial divisions were to be perceptible on the building's exterior, and that materials were to be joined carefully and made visually distinct. Sensitive to the value of legibility in architectural design de Klerk adopted the idea of truthful expression for the Spaarndammerbuurt. Storage spaces are defined by steeply sloping, upright, and curved roofs and set off with hoists and sheathing of red and black tiles, and with timber planking; chimneys and stair wells are projected from the wall planes as sculptural entities; hemicylindrical separators in the second and third projects signify interior walls; and, masonry and wood are treated with emphatic variations of color, texture, and pattern. Also, following the lead of Berlage at the Beurs, the paradigm of architectural rationalism in the Netherlands, de Klerk employed granite at points in the brickwork construction taking great stress (as the corners of overhanging stairwell walls), and used regular geometric forms (circles and equilateral and isosceles triangles) for unifying effects in the ground plans.

As regards construction, the concept of rationalism also involved a thorough

<sup>26</sup> *Gedanken über Stil* (Thoughts on Style) (1905), *Grundlagen und Entwicklung der Architektur* (Foundations and Development of Architecture) (1908), and *Beschouwingen over bouwkunst en hare ontwikkeling* (Observations about Architecture and its Development) (1911).

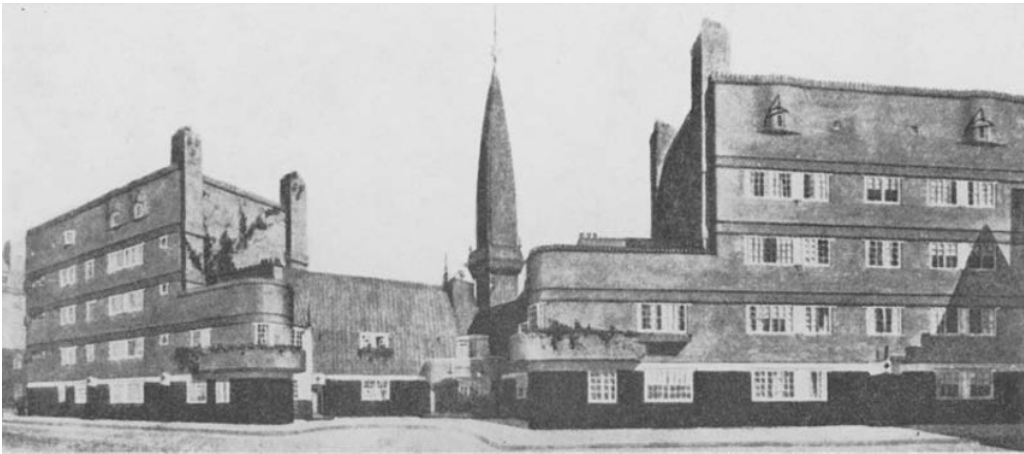


Fig. 20 THIRD BLOCK: VIEW OF RECESSED SPACE AND TOWER ON HEMBRUGSTRAAT, Aquarelle by L. Zonneveld.  
'Stichting Lichtbeelden-Instituut' Amsterdam.

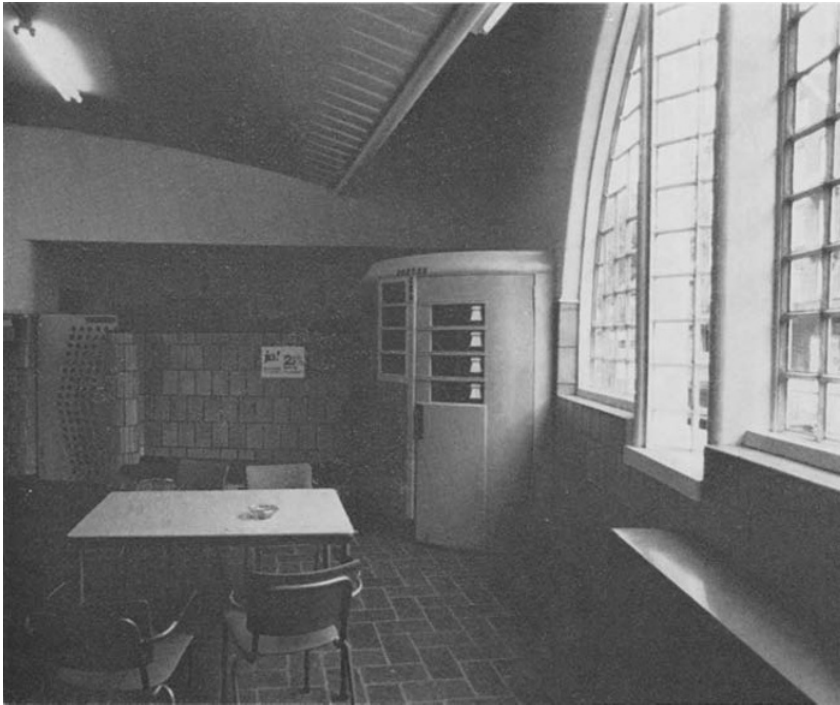
understanding of all aspects of structural supports, in order to keep up with the rapid changeover, wrought by industry, in the building trades.<sup>27</sup> De Klerk was not as sympathetic to this viewpoint as Berlage. He did not foresee any need to accept more accelerated processes and continued to think of architecture according to the traditional craft building practices that were propounded in the writings of John Ruskin and William Morris.

The planning of the Spaarndammerbuurt buildings as a group of façades enclosing and defining communal spaces follows the ideas of the Viennese architect and author Camillo Sitte<sup>28</sup> which Berlage had helped popularize through a series of articles in the 1890s and his own extension plans for Amsterdam in 1896-1904 and 1915. According with certain ideas of Sitte and his followers de Klerk designed his buildings with regard for the recreational benefits and pictorial effects of greenery, and other spaces screened and enclosed by what were currently called 'street walls'<sup>29</sup>, keeping well within the contemporary

<sup>27</sup> For a cogent summary of Berlage's ideas concerning industry and the building trades, see H.P. Berlage, *Grundlagen und Entwicklung der Architectur*, Rotterdam 1908, 66ff., 85.

<sup>28</sup> Camillo Sitte, *Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen* (1889) (English translation: *City Planning according to Artistic Principles*, by George R. and Christiane Crasemann Collins, New York, 1965). Berlage's Sittesque ideas are presented in 'De Kunst in stedenbouw (Voordracht, gehouden door den heer H.P. Berlage Nzn. in de vergadering der Afdeeling Amsterdam, op 25 maart 1892)', *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 12 (1892) 87-91, 101-102, 121-124, 126-127.

<sup>29</sup> 'Street wall' deals with the concept of buildings defining large urban areas and having their façades and other appurtenances act as space-unifying and space-activating entities. It is a term which has been prominent in architectural and city-building treatises since the turn-of-the-century. The expression seems to have been used at first by Camillo Sitte as a way of describing the monotonous appearance of large-scale city projects of the time. By 1911 Walter Curt Behrendt gave a more positive meaning to large-scale buildings with unifying effects. In



*Fig. 21* THIRD BLOCK: DETAIL OF POST OFFICE INTERIOR FROM ENTRANCE; DETAIL SHOWS CONNECTION OF BARREL VAULT WITH EXTERNAL WALL.  
*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*

building codes, and traditional local requirements of densely populated urban areas.

Apart from de Klerk's conscious striving to achieve an orderly, large scale urban framework for the blocks, there came into play strains of mysticism and transcendentalism, local pride and tradition, and emphatic theories of form and color, all of which exerted an influence on his designing. Some of these have already been mentioned.

Spiritual currents stemming from the Catholic Church, symbolism and pacificism, and several occult sects as well as the interest of Hegelian followers

Holland in the first quarter of the century the idea was used to describe: 1) ways of controlling vistas and giving direction through closed-off spaces; 2) buildings as settings with ornamentation (e.g. patterning of wall surfaces and rhythmic variations of apertures and stair halls and corners). These ideas are closely associated with Sitte's principles of the visual laws governing basic needs of urban space. Sources including word: Camillo Sitte (with Theodor Goecke), 'An unsere Leser,' forward to *Der Städtebau* 1 (1904) 3 (p. 193 of Camillo Sitte, *City Planning according to Artistic Principles*, [transl. by] George R. and Christiane Crasemann Collins, New York 1965); Walter Curt Behrendt, *Die Einheitliche Blockfront als Raumelement im Stadtbau; Ein Beitrag zur Stadtbaukunst der Gegenwart*, Berlin 1911, 12; Piet Kramer, De bouwwerken van M. de Klerk, *Wendingen* 6 (1924) nos. 9 and 10, p. 3.

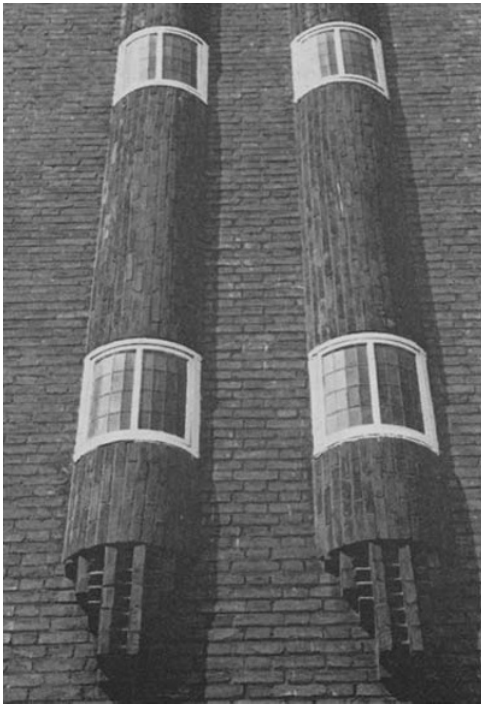


Fig. 22 FIRST BLOCK: DETAIL OF STAIR WELLS WITH HEMICYLINDERD AND 'STALACTITE-LIKE' TERMINALS.  
Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.

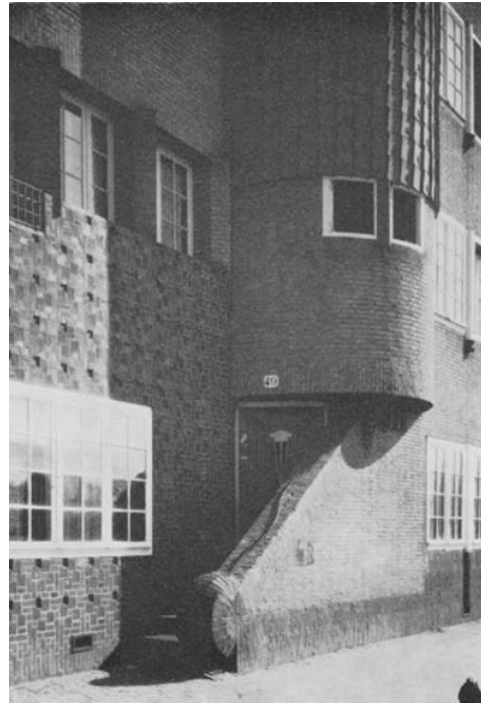
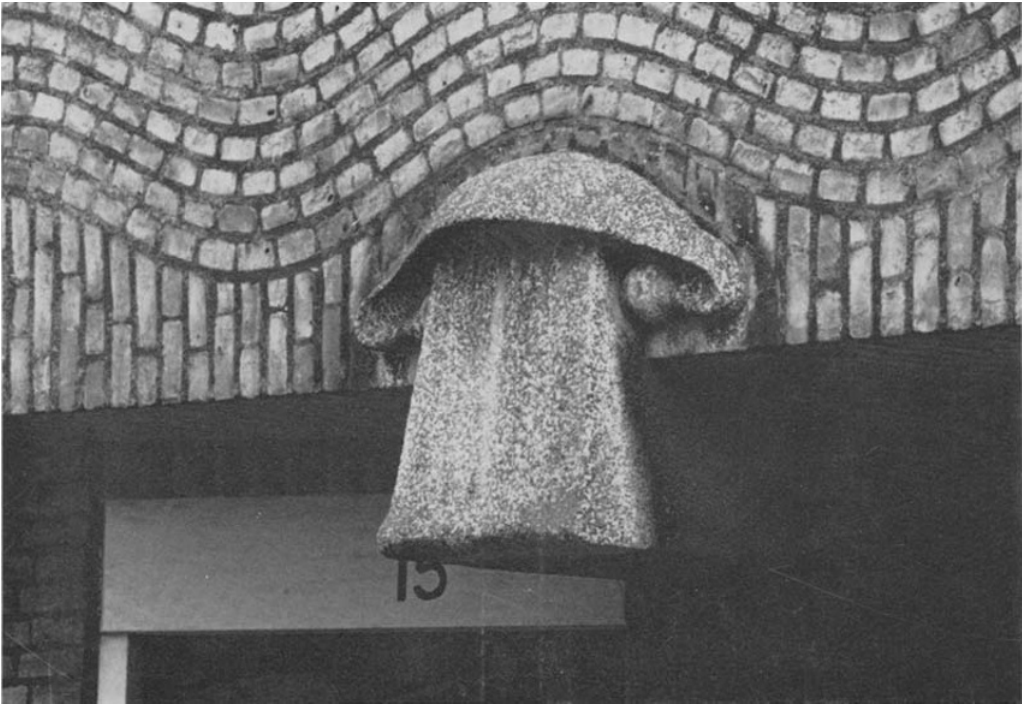


Fig. 23 SECOND BLOCK: CORNER ON ZAAANSTRAAT SHOWING CYLINDRICAL STAIR WELL AND BRICK DETAILING, ca. 1920.  
Photograph: 'Stichting Lichtbeelden-Instituut' Amsterdam.

in universal norms and the beliefs of transcendentalists in the truth and vitality in nature appear in the architectural literature of the time as well as in their own spheres.<sup>30</sup> De Klerk's awareness of these currents through the pages of such magazines as *Bouw- en Sierkunst*, *Architectura*, and *Wendingen* is evident in his

<sup>30</sup> Information on the influence of Dutch Catholicism is included in Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, vol. 1, New York 1958, 429-431; D. de Boer en Joh. de Vries (ed.), *Moderne geschiedenis van Nederland*, Amsterdam 1965, 166ff.; W.L.M.E. van Leeuwen, *Honderd jaar Nederland 1848-1948*, Hengelo 1948, 62-63; information on mysticism from symbolist and occult sources in literature and the fine arts is in Bettina Polak, *Het fin-de-siecle in de Nederlandse schilderkunst. De symbolistische beweging 1890-1900*, The Hague 1955; Dr. A.W. Reinink, *K.P.C. de Bazel-Architect*, Leiden 1965; information on the pacifist leanings of Dutch intellectuals, which perhaps only incidentally influenced the government's decision to remain neutral, from Dr. A.W. Reinink, *K.P.C. de Bazel*, chapter VI. Later anti-militarist protests are manifested in the writings of the architect H.Th. Wijdeveld, De Rijks-Academie voor Beeldende Kunsten een Waardebepaling, *Wendingen* 4 (1921) no. 12, p. 11; information on Hegelianism is from David Friedman, Philosophy and Religious Trends, in *The Netherlands*, ed., Bartholomew Landheer, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1943, 224-225; G.J.P.J. Bolland, *Algemene Winkler Prins Encyclopedie*, sixth ed., 1950, vol. 4, pp. 498-499; Hegelianisme, *Algemene Winkler Prins Encyclopedie*, sixth ed., 1950, vol. 10, pp. 450-451; B.H.C.K. van der Wijck, De wetenschappen, *Nederland in den aanvang der twintigste eeuw, geschetst in woord en beeld door verschillende schrijvers*, ed. Jhr. Mr. H. Smitsaert, Leiden 1910, 262ff. J.J. Poortman, *Repertorium der Nederlandse Wijsbegeerte*, Amsterdam 1948, 194-197. Dutch transcen-



*Fig. 24* SECOND BLOCK: DETAIL OF EXTERIOR STAIR WELL WITH SINUSOIDAL BRICKWORK PATTERN AND 'MOUTH-AND-TONGUE' CORBEL.

*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*

references to exotic sources—primitive, folk, and Indian art—in the meeting hall and tower, the biomorphic mask shapes, and the legendary dwarf reliefs.

In his third block, de Klerk uses elements of the same medieval tradition as Cuypers used in St. Maria Magdalena—the large Catholic Church which was designed in the latter part of the nineteenth century, just at the entrance to the district—namely the horizontal brick banding lines that make for picturesque yet formal decoration. The buildings also share the same triangular site shape.

Any design connection between the Spaarndammerbuurt building, and the Magdalena Church would be part of a broad spectrum of influences on de Klerk (more pronounced than exoticism in his vocabulary) of the art traditions of the Netherlands and indeed all of northern Europe. A resurgent national preservationist movement that began in the late nineteenth century and even reached

dentalism came via the writings of Frederick van Eeden and H.P. Berlage; references to Frederick van Eeden: *Algemene Winkler Prins Encyclopedie*, sixth ed., 1950 vol. 7, p. 783; H.P. Berlage, *Amerikaansche reisberinneringen*, Rotterdam 1913, 5. Many references to these sources may be found in an article by H.Th. Wijdeveld, *Illusies van de komende schoonheid*, *Architectura* 23 (1915) 264-269.



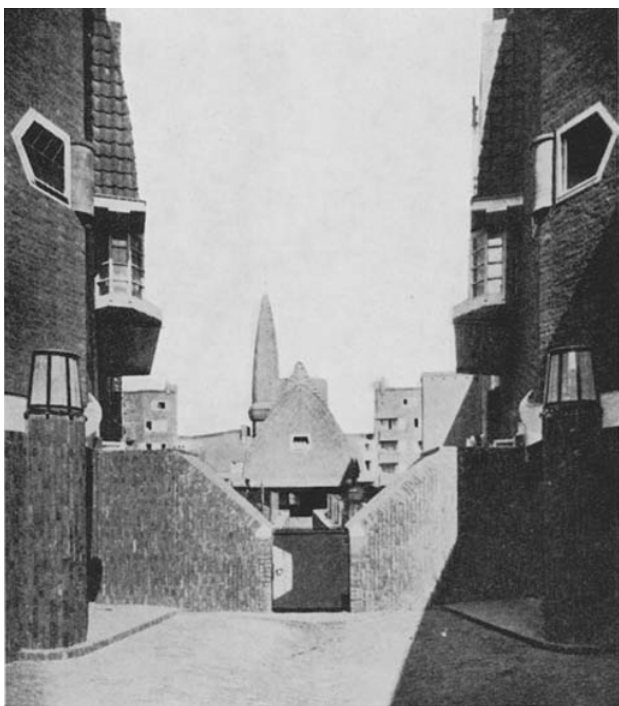
*Fig. 25* THIRD BLOCK: EXTERIOR DETAIL OF CORNER AT HEMBRUGSTRAAT AND ZAAANSTRAAT.

*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*

down into the art history courses taught in officially supported schools<sup>31</sup> brought into current architectural usage details like sloping roofs, the emphasis of white-painted multipaned windows and the sort of minute detailing found in merchants' houses lining the Amsterdam canals. This preservationist swing toward medieval traditions was supported by chauvinistic political overtones in the polemical writings of Berlage and the German architect Hermann Muthesius.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> W. Martin, *Herleefde Schoonheid, 25 Jaar Monumentenzorg in Nederland 1918 - 10 Mei - 1943*, Amsterdam 1945. Historians, emphasizing a broad knowledge of art history, exerted considerable influence on their students, who were not only taught national attributes of architecture, but stylistic characteristics based on the expressive content of forms. Knowledge of architectural styles was not only required of students at Dutch academies (described by J.H. Plantenga, in *De Academie van 's-Gravenhage en haar plaats in de kunst van ons land, 1682-1937*, The Hague 1938) and entrants in Prix de Rome competitions, as might be expected, but also of architectural surveyors and draftsmen (information from M. Sirag Jzn. en H.B. Broekhuizen, *De gewijzigde examens voor het diploma van 'Bouwkundig Opzichter B.N.A.'*, Amsterdam 1925, 3).

<sup>32</sup> H.P. Berlage, *Eenige beschouwingen over klassieke bouwkunst* (Voordracht gehouden in de jaarvergadering van het Genootschap van Leeraren aan Gymnasia 1908), *Beschouwingen over bouwkunst en hare ontwikkeling*, cf. note 26, pp. 4-5, 7.



*Fig. 26* THIRD BLOCK: EXTERIOR DETAIL OF MEETING HALL AND TOWER (AT HEMBRUGPLEIN) SEEN FROM COURTYARD.

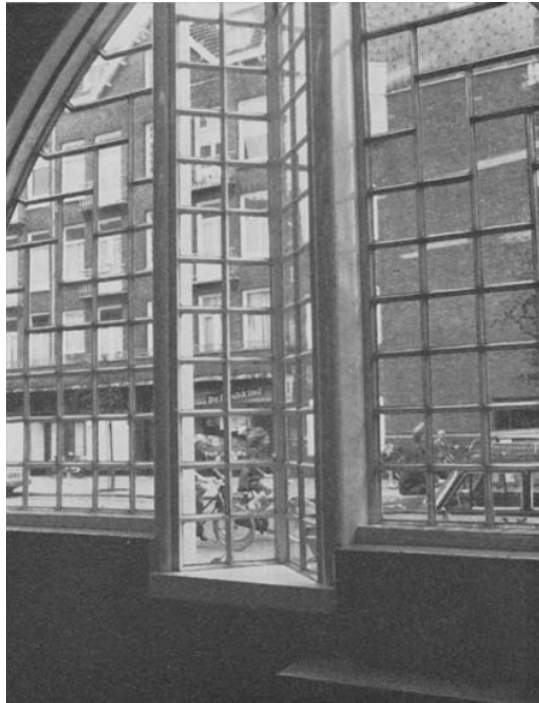
Photograph: *Wendingen*, vol. 6, nos. 9 and 10 (1924) 2.

However de Klerk was as sympathetic to ideas that conveyed fancy and wit in the massing of walls and cityscape silhouettes. Such sentiments were long held by the architect Willem Kromhout<sup>33</sup> and vividly expressed in his colorful American Hotel of 1898-1900 in Amsterdam. De Klerk's penchant for the picturesque would also explain a resemblance the Spaarndammerbuurt buildings have, say, to nineteenth century free-standing dwellings in America (exemplified in the Shingle Style<sup>34</sup>) as in both cases an impression of the buildings is only gained by viewing them from different angles and encountering the variety and multiplicity of visual effects in massing, roof lines, and courtyards, and from impressionistic, pictorial values of directional lines, muted tones, and tactile surfaces in the treatment of wood and masonry.

Another offshoot of this taste for the piquant which has affinities with most

<sup>33</sup> Willem Kromhout, *Letteren en kunst. Brief over bouwkunst. Tentoonstelling van Berlage's werk in den Rotterdamschen kunstkring, III*, *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, February 28 (1904).

<sup>34</sup> This comparison has been made by Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Baltimore 1958, 357.



*Fig. 27* THIRD BLOCK: DETAIL FROM INTERIOR OF POST OFFICE (WINDOW AT OOSTZAANSTRAAT SIDE).

*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*

expressionist currents and strong parallels with the Spaarndammerbuurt buildings was the belief of Dutch theorists in the capability of architecture to arouse moods of feeling by way of specific arrangements of architectural elements.<sup>35</sup> Thus, after 1910 de Klerk no longer employed systems of triangulation and quadrangulation which had become popular in the three previous decades,<sup>36</sup> but turned to the theories of the Amsterdam architect, J.H. de Groot, whose method involved the directional qualities of curved and angular lines to attain architectural control and harmony.<sup>37</sup> De Groot had relied on the systems stressing a network of regularly repeated geometric shapes in the 90s but during the first decade of the twentieth century became interested also in the diversity of

<sup>35</sup> H.P. Berlage, *Gedanken über Stil*, cf. note 26, pp. 24ff., 30ff; H.P. Berlage, *Iets over de moderne Duitse architectuur en de Brusselsche tentoonstelling in 1910*, *Beschouwingen over bouwkunst en hare ontwikkeling*, cf. note 26, p. 40; H.P. Berlage, *Baksteenbouw*, *ibidem*, pp. 117-121. For an account of theories on empathy, see Alice Fischer, 'Herman Obrist and August Endell's Essay' (unpublished manuscript), Columbia University, New York, c. 1962.

<sup>36</sup> See Dr. A.W. Reinink, *K.P.C. de Bazel*, cf. note 30, pp. 38ff., 73ff.. De Klerk used a system of triangulation in a competition design of a cemetery (1910).

<sup>37</sup> J.H. de Groot, *Vormharmonie*, Amsterdam 1912.



*Fig. 28* THIRD BLOCK: BOWED WINDOW DETAIL: VIEW FROM INTERIOR LOOKING OUT ON ZAAANSTRAAT.

*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*

effects secured by using linear patterns with angles and conic sections. Berlage also undertook the attainment of harmony through rectangularity until, after 1910, he expressed a belief in the power and brute force of machines and their symbolic expression in stepped, angular forms. It is likely that de Klerk followed the example of both de Groot and Berlage in his use of angular, sinusoidal, elipsoidal, and parabolic lines in structure and decoration.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, in 1911 de Groot had written on color harmonies, and his advice to control contrasting colors—using the primaries and their complementaries to attain freshness or liveliness and to always consider the nature of the material in determining the choice of color combinations—may have also proved to be a source

<sup>38</sup> There are also architectural examples with shapes similar to these which may have served as models for de Klerk: the rounded, corbel mass at Zaanstraat and Hembrugstraat is comparable to the turrets of Richard Norman Shaw's New Scotland Yard in London (1887), the parabolic gables of the first block may stem from Joseph M. Olbrich's project of a hotel at Königswart (1902) (illustrated in *Architektur von Olbrich*, Serie II, Band 1, Berlin 1908, pls. 31-38), and the Hembrugplein tower is comparable to the tower of the Palace Hotel in Copenhagen by Anton Rosen, (with the base similar to that of the German Parish Church in Copenhagen of



*Fig. 29* THIRD BLOCK: WINDOW AT HEMBRUGPLEIN; BALCONY AT UPPER LEFT.  
*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*



*Fig. 30* FIRST BLOCK: EXTERIOR DETAIL; STAIR WELL IN RELATION TO HEIGHTS OF INDIVIDUALS.  
(WINDMILL IN BACKGROUND.)  
*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*

for de Klerk. The three buildings are made up of tonal variations of the three primaries—the first one having a blue cast in its violet brown brick tone and the second and third having shades of yellow and red even closer to the pure primaries. De Groot also advises the yellow and purple combination of complementary colors that de Klerk used for the second block.<sup>39</sup>

Of all de Klerk's projects the Spaarndammerbuurt complex was given the most extensive coverage in literature. This was due to the importance of housing blocks at that time and the unusual character of the district, as well as de Klerk's design.

Most persons familiar with architecture of the early twentieth century have a visual image of the Spaarndammerbuurt buildings. They were the subject of extensive photographic coverage in the Dutch magazine, *Wendingen*. Photo-

1574), from both of which de Klerk made travel sketches.

<sup>39</sup> J.H. de Groot, *Kleurharmonie*, Amsterdam 1911, 48ff.



Fig. 31 THIRD BLOCK: EXTERIOR DETAIL  
ALONG ZAAANSTRAAT.  
Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.



Fig. 32 THIRD BLOCK: INNER COURTYARD;  
DETAIL.  
Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.

graphs, ground plans, elevations, and perspective renderings accompanied K.P.C. de Bazel's general (and vague) article in 1919 on the nature of de Klerk's architecture.<sup>40</sup> Later, a site plan and a more ample collection of photographs were included in the commemorative issue on de Klerk's executed buildings in 1924.<sup>41</sup> Hereafter, these basic studies were used by several writers discussing significant architecture of the century.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> K.P.C. de Bazel, *Onze tijd en het werk van M. de Klerk*, *Wendingen* 2 (1919) no. 2, pp. 3-12.

<sup>41</sup> Michel de Klerk: *Uitgevoerde bouwwerken*, *Wendingen* 6 (1924) nos. 9 and 10, pp. 2, 6-17.

<sup>42</sup> Werner Hegemann, *Aus der Amsterdamer Schreckenskammer*, *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst* 9 (1925) illus. 11-13; Willem Kreis, *Aus der Amsterdamer Schreckenskammer*, *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst* 9 (1925) 210; Howard Robertson, *Modern Dutch Architecture*, [with photographs by F.R. Yerbury], *The Architectural Review* 52 (1922) 46-49; J.P. Mieras and F.R. Yerbury, *Dutch Architecture of the Twentieth Century*, London 1926, pls. 48-50; J.J.P. Oud, *Holländische Architektur* ('Bauhaus Bücher', nr. 10), Munich 1926, illus. 14; *Nieuwe Bouwkunst in Nederland* [met inleiding van architect Aug. M.J. Sevenhuijsen] Blaricum [n.d.], cover, pp. 20-21; J.G. Wattjes, *Nieuw Nederlandsche bouwkunst*, Amsterdam 1926, pp. 53-60; J.J. Vriend, *Nieuwere architectuur. Beknopt overzicht van de historische ontwikkeling van de bouwkunst*, Amsterdam 1935, 149, 151. *Catalogus van de tentoonstelling Nederland bouwt in baksteen, 1800-1940*, Rotterdam 1941, illus. 102; J.G. Wattjes and F.A. Warners,



Fig. 33 THIRD BLOCK: INTERIOR DETAIL:  
POST OFFICE BENCH.  
Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.



Fig. 34 THIRD BLOCK: EXTERIOR OF POST  
OFFICE WINDOW AT COURTYARD.  
Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.

Apart from extensive coverage at the hands of Dutch critics, these housing blocks seem to have gained considerable popularity in London, Berlin, and Vienna between 1920 and 1922.<sup>43</sup> However, the only specific appraisal from abroad was made in 1922 by an Englishman, Howard Robertson, then chairman of England's Architectural Association, who had journeyed to Amsterdam to

*Amsterdams bouwkunst en stadsschoon*, 1306-1942, Amsterdam 1943, figs. 698-703; Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Baltimore 1958, fig. 156; George R. and Christiane Crasemann Collins, *The Architecture of Fantasy, Utopian Building and Planning in Modern Times*, New York 1962 [translated and revised edition of *Phantastische Architektur* by Ulrich Conrads and Hans G. Sperlich, Stuttgart 1960] 6; Dennis Sharp, *Modern Architecture and Expressionism*, London 1966, 137-138; Giovanni Fanelli, *Architettura moderna in Olanda*, 1900-1940, Firenze 1968, 283-285.

<sup>43</sup> Jan Gratama, *Kroniek LXX*, *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 36 (1915) no. 33, p. 244; H(uib?) H(oste?), Spaarndammerplantsoen, *De Telegraaf*, January 12 (1916); Huib Hoste, Aan het Spaarndammerplantsoen, *De Telegraaf*, June 8 (1918); J.P. Mieras, Eer aan een dooden en een levenden architect, *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 41 (1920) 246; Piet Kramer, De bouwwerken van M. de Klerk, *Wendingen* 6 (1924) nos. 9 and 10, p. 3; J.F. Staal, M. de Klerk. Bouwmeester 1884-1923. Beschouwing over zijn werk, *Maandblad voor Beeldende Kunsten* (1926) 181-182. Information about the acclaim de Klerk's buildings received in Europe from J.P. Mieras, *Ontwerp Clubgebouw Koninklijke Amsterdamsche Roei- en Zeilvereniging 'De Hoop'*, *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 43 (1922) 515.



*Fig. 35* FIRST BLOCK: EXTERIOR DETAIL;  
SCULPTURAL RELIEF, ATTRIBUTED  
TO HILDO KROP.  
*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*



*Fig. 36* THIRD BLOCK: EXTERIOR DETAIL;  
WINDMILL ORNAMENT ON ZAAANSTRAAT.  
*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*

open an exhibition of work of the English organization. Robertson's impressions of the Spaarndammerbuurt along with photographs by F.R. Yerbury who accompanied him were published in *The Architectural Review* shortly after their return to London. Robertson's position was fairly objective; although prejudiced against the oddities of the ornament, he commented on the sophisticated way in which materials were handled. Moreover, he criticized those features which did not serve useful purposes or which seemed to break with ideas of structural honesty. His observations on general matters pertaining to housing in Holland and the particulars of de Klerk's designs for the Spaarndammerbuurt were incisive and valuable.<sup>44</sup>

After the 1920s these buildings were illustrated in several books, but few writers discussed them. Two exceptions are the historians, Dr. F. van Thienen and Reyner Banham, whose critiques were not as perceptive as many earlier

<sup>44</sup> Howard Robertson, 'Modern Dutch Architecture', pp. 46, 50. Information about Robertson's and Yerbury's visit in *Architectura*, vol. 1, no. 27, NS (July 1, 1922) n.p.



*Fig. 37* THIRD BLOCK: EXTERIOR DETAIL;  
ORNAMENT OF GREYHOUNDS ON  
COURTYARD WINDOW  
POST AT REAR OF POST OFFICE.  
*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*



*Fig. 38* THIRD BLOCK: EXTERIOR DETAIL;  
ORNAMENT AT IMPOST OF WINDOW OF POST  
OFFICE ON OOSTZAANSTRAAT.  
*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*

ones. Van Thienen wrote briefly on the buildings in a section called ‘Fantasten’ in his 1936 article<sup>45</sup> on Dutch architecture of the period 1885 to 1935, calling attention to the formal qualities of the projects, commenting on the suggestion of movement in the horizontal lines of the street walls of the third block, in the streamline, Futurist sense, and the charm of the curved shape and the colorful materials of the tower at Hembrugplein. Then, some twenty-five years later, in *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (1960), Reyner Banham, imposing his standards for ‘mass-housing’ on these earlier examples, criticized them for their look of luxury.<sup>46</sup> Banham also included the buildings in his *Guide to Modern Architecture* (1962) where he mentioned that de Klerk was astutely aware of spatial complexities, but he did not explain the particular way in which de Klerk organized the spaces, and suggested that because of their unusual decora-

<sup>45</sup> Dr. F. van Thienen, *De bouwkunst der laatste halve eeuw*, in H.E. van Gelder (ed.), *Kunstgeschiedenis der Nederlanden*, Utrecht 1936, 509-510.

<sup>46</sup> Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, New York 1960, 164-165.



*Fig. 39* THIRD BLOCK: HEMBRUGPLEIN TOWER SEEN FROM ARCHWAY OF ZAAANSTRAAT APARTMENT BLOCK TO THE NORTH OF THE TRIANGLE BASE.

*Photograph: Dick Frank, New York.*

tion the buildings had little in common with the major monuments of the twentieth century.<sup>47</sup>

Nowadays, many look at these buildings like Banham. Few bother to analyse the artistry in the use of decorative forms or the masterful way de Klerk distinguished between and related different spatial areas. Recently (1968), however, the Italian historian, Giovanni Fanelli, gave due praise to the Spaarn-dammerbuurt buildings.<sup>48</sup>

It should be stressed that these designs were de Klerk's finest achievements in the field of housing, an area in which he did not further develop his skill. The bold masses and the colorful decoration which give these designs such a peppery flavor gave way to larger, more simplified, and often repetitive solutions. Also there was no major change from the type of plan with fixed partition walls in the conventional sense and in this respect it should be noted that de Klerk never equalled the efforts of his de Stijl confrères in Rotterdam and elsewhere in Europe and America in the planning of interpenetrating spaces that might engender more flexible living patterns. His ties to traditional artistry did not extend to the use of skip floor levels, as in merchant dwellings of old Amster-

<sup>47</sup> Reyner Banham, *Guide to Modern Architecture*, London 1962, 53-56.

<sup>48</sup> Giovanni Fanelli, *Architettura moderna in Olanda*, Firenze 1968, 88-90.

dam, nor did he venture to explore ways in which street walls might be varied so as to break down the traditional usages of front and back façades, opening them to more light and air. Despite these (and other) limitations de Klerk's Spaarndammerbuurt designs stand out as special monuments of the social ideals of their time and as examples relating to creative, promising, present-day currents in Dutch architecture and planning<sup>49</sup> which bear witness to the persistence of architectural principles that honor human sensibilities.

A different atmosphere pervades the Spaarndammerbuurt today, now more than half a century since de Klerk's buildings were constructed. At that time people's expectations were lower-keyed and the area was quieter, offered more privacy and was maintained with a greater sense of propriety. Although still predominately made up of individuals with modest incomes and strong family ties, the population density is far greater, the ethnic mixture richer, and the residents have more freedom with their time.<sup>50</sup> Few changes have been made to de Klerk's designs, although the area shows the effects of a period of rapid transition: the plantsoen is littered with the refuse of disposable consumer goods and is stripped of all but one of the original four peripheral benches. The iron fence once surrounding it is gone, so that 'brommers' or motor cyclists take the opportunity of riding across the grass at top speed. Automobiles also crowd the street and emit fumes contaminating the air of these narrow streets. For the time being however, social conditions remain relatively hospitable. Different age groups are represented and there are honest and helpful responses to strangers. The possible reasons for this are numerous and fall beyond this study. They probably include the high rate of employment, cooperation of the residents of the buildings, access to other areas, and the proximity to shopping and public transportation facilities. Another significant reason is de Klerk's designs and that both residents and passers-by have either known or sensed the thought and careful attention that he gave to the planning and detailing of the buildings.

De Klerk died in 1923. It is not too much to say that he would have received a greater degree of fulfillment if he could have read the many eulogies and critiques focussing on the uplifting moments occasioned by this work.

<sup>49</sup> I refer to contemporary works like Piet Blom's Student Union of the University in Enschede and Aldo Van Eyck's clusters of geometric pavilions at the Amsterdam orphanage. Illustrations and information on Piet Blom's student union: 'Mensa te Enschede' [by P. Blom, R. Blom van Assendelft, L. Lafour] *Plan, maandblad voor ontwerp en omgeving* 1 (1970) 42-56. Illustrations and information on Aldo van Eyck's orphanage in Amsterdam is in Oscar Newman, *CIAM '59 in Otterlo*, Stuttgart 1961, 28-34.

<sup>50</sup> Statistical information on the Spaarndammerbuurt in *Verbetering Spaarndammer- en Zeeheldenbuurt*, rapport 2 (November 1969); the individual buildings have been photographed and documented by W.J. Kossen of Amsterdam and are in the archives of Amsterdam.



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