



Abstract

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Céramique district, Maastricht

In 1987 Jo Coenen & Co. was commissioned with the urban design for a former industrial plot: the Céramique site. For over a century the Céramique, a 23-hectare area once used for ceramic production, formed a blind spot in Maastricht's city structure. The aim of this project was to add a new, suitable quarter to the inner city and, at the same time, to create a natural link to the vicinity. The two parts of the city, separated by the Maas River, should be connected by a new bridge for cyclists and pedestrians located near the historic perimeter of the town walls. The redevelopment of the site is nearly finished and the results give us the impression that after all it is possible to create a synthesis between the traditional "corridor" and the radical open urban structures which the founders of the CIAM movement dreamed of. The profiles of the relatively closed and narrow streets relate to the spatial conditions in the historic city of Maastricht. In contrast to this, the squares, arcades and enclosed gardens, interconnected by a system of pedestrians walkways, offer surprising views and provide a very open structure at ground level. We had the opportunity to open up the former factory site to various different urban functions such as living, working, recreation and public buildings. From the beginning, the public areas were to play an important role in the urban design because we wanted to insert this site into the wonderful system of public spaces, squares, streets, alleys and buildings of the old city of Maastricht. The coherence of this system in the city on the left bank of the Maas River is established by three big squares with their public buildings around them. We found a way to continue the linking pedestrian streets to the right bank and in so doing to integrate the plan naturally into the system mentioned above, where the unique character of the historical centre of Maastricht has been extended. This strategy went together with the elaboration of the two most important zones to the north and south. These so-called "nodes" create links with the neighboring districts and offer a wide variety of functions: to the south the Bonnefanten Museum and to the north the Centre Céramique, with its library, public offices, international institutions and theatre. The execution of all this demanded our full attention for years, while we were also involved as a supervisor for the other areas, and, at a distance, providing assistance to the architects working on the parts. It is also important to bear in mind that although the master plan and contract were drawn up twenty years ago our office is still working on its completion. The realization of the project requires some flexibility because of the many unexpected developments that arise, and the changes that need to be made as a result, without spoiling (but indeed improving) the overall plan. As urban design co-ordination for the many master architects, who we know personally, involved in the scheme, we try to bring out their best qualities for the benefit of the specific areas they are working on. This means doing all we can to put them in a position where they can give fully of themselves. This kind of co-ordination requires constant concentration and diplomacy, conviction and willingness to accept change. In our frequent meetings we have examined the design in great detail, particularly in the teamwork between the various architects, the supervisor and the actors in the proper perspective. Maastricht now possesses a renewed urban quarter, where the results that have been achieved, are visible.