

Office of the Public Prosecution Service, Assen

DAAD's architecture is deliberately unspectacular which is why it merges seamlessly with its equally unexceptional surroundings.

NETHERLANDS — TEXT: HANS IBEING, PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRISTIAAN DE BRUIJNE

The architects of DAAD know all about building on what is already there. Since 2003 the practice has operated from an industrial building converted to its own design in Beilen, a village in the province of Drenthe, far removed from the hustle and bustle of the western Netherlands. It is currently intensively engaged in the design and construction of rooftop units. The firm has designed lightweight timber dwellings that are suitable for industrialized production and that can be fairly easily placed on top of existing buildings, so resulting in a consolidation of the city.

The first scheme of four such dwellings is nearing completion in Groningen. These student dwellings, which will sell for less than 100,000 euros, span two storeys and comprise some 20 m² of floor space. Another special feature is that they can be made by a sheltered workshop. (The same institution is currently building DAAD's first series of portable summer houses.)

The offices DAAD has built for the Public Prosecution Service in Assen, directly opposite the law courts, is another instance of adaptive reuse. Behind the brick facades, whose brickwork bond is a modest ode to the adjoining 1950s housing block by

the Groningen architect F. Klein, stands the loadbearing structure of a former printing works. The printery, a building thirty metres deep, was made up of two sections. The older section, next to Theater Diana, was fourteen metres wide. Later on the remaining six metres between the printery and the housing block was also filled in.

DAAD broke open this six metre zone and turned it into a patio thus ensuring an adequate supply of light to the offices. The demolished volume was rebuilt on top of the old printing works, an operation made possible by the more than adequate supporting structure of this building. During the design phase a second storey was added when it became clear that the PPS needed twenty more workplaces than the original total of 65. As a result the building now comprises some 2000 m², basement level included.

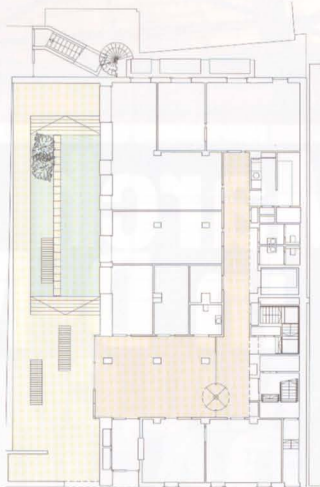
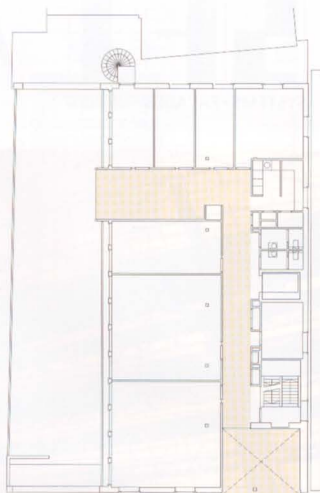
In a reference to the structure's former life, the brickwork bond changes at the place where the building rises above the original height of the printing works. The same applies to the stucco on the patio facade.

This patio facade faces south and is fitted with wooden louvres to keep out the sun. The outer wall is eighty centimetres thick which offered the opportunity of using deep-set windows to achieve a strong sculptural effect and to reflect sunlight deep into the offices via the substantial transoms.

The architects conceived the corridors as the backbone of the building. Rather than simply being used for circulation they are wide enough to encourage people to linger and socialize. The premise is a dangerous one with an organization like the PPS, which is constantly expanding at present. And indeed, it has already proved to be an open invitation to commandeer the corridors for permanent use as a workplace or for storage. Even the large conference room facing the street has been partially sacrificed and now does duty as an office for the Chief Public Prosecutor. ←

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC PROSECUTION SERVICE, 2000-2004

Architects: DAAD Architecten, Beilen
 Client: Rijksgebouwendienst
 Address: Brinkstraat, Assen
 Artwork: Pjotr van Oorschot
 Info: www.daad.nl



↑ Ground floor (bottom) and second floor



↑ The office is located in one of Assen's main streets.

↓ Second floor corridor

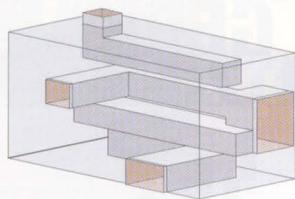


Diagram of the corridors that structure the building ↑

