



New life for the RDM building

The former headquarters of the Rotterdam Dry Dock Company (RDM) in Heijplaat has been brought back to life. CityPorts Rotterdam has transformed the historic building into the Droogdok 17 development, providing offices, conference facilities and studios.

History

The RDM was established in 1902 as part of the Maatschappij de Maas (the Maas Company) in the Heijplaat area of Rotterdam on the right bank of the River Maas. The shipyard flourished and went through several phases of extension, so the site was in a more or less constant state of reorganisation, alteration and construction. The buildings date from different periods after 1902. At first, the RDM provided a ferry service from Schiedam for its employees, but as the number of employees grew and commuting distances increased, the decision was made in 1914 to construct the purpose-built garden village of Heijplaat.



By the time World War II began, the site had quadrupled in size to approximately 40 hectares and the RDM had become one of the largest shipyards in Europe. However, at the end of the 1950s, shipbuilding in Europe began to run into problems, mainly due to the boom in air traffic and competition from low-wage countries. The RDM began to concentrate more on the defence industry, although it also carried out some work for the offshore and energy sectors. Several mergers followed and the company finally ended up as part of the RSV group, which went bankrupt in 1983.

Heijplaat village

The history of the garden village of Heijplaat is closely linked to the development of the RDM. There are about 850 dwellings in the village, mostly dating from 1914 up to the 1950s.

The designs for the original town plan and the first houses were drawn up by RDM's own in-house architect, H.A.J. Baanders, and were inspired by the English garden villages. The inhabitants of this factory village all worked at the RDM. When the RSV group ran into financial problems in 1980, the village was sold to a housing association (now known as Woonbron). At this point, the workforce began to dwindle rapidly and this, coupled with the housing association's rental policy, weakened the bond between the RDM and Heijplaat.

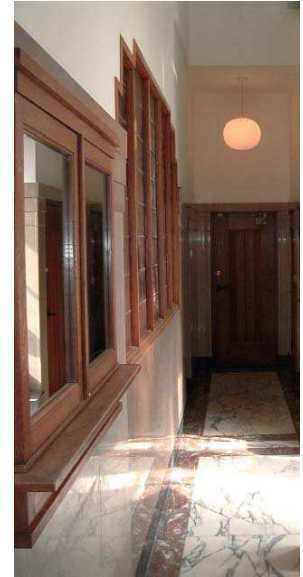
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The RDM Building

The former headquarters is housed in a development which wraps around the shipyard and effectively forms a boundary between the shipyard complex and the village. The series of buildings which make up the development were erected between 1912 and 1952. The most notable of these date from 1913-1916 and include the main employees' entrance and the monumental directors' floor, with its special entrance and adjoining boardrooms. The first floor drawing offices and the second floor technical department were completed in 1916.

Directors' floor

The former RDM boardrooms, where the board of directors met for years, are a good example of the Dutch Art Deco style. The directors' floor occupies approximately 400 m² and consists of an entrance hall, reception rooms, the boardroom and the executive boardroom. It has managed to withstand the test of time. In the central hall, the four elements of fire, water, earth and air are still depicted in leaded glass and the marble floor sports the RDM logo in its centre. Plaques on the walls bear witness to the company's illustrious past. The boardrooms still have their original parquet floors, wood panelling, fireplaces, plaster ceilings, paintings and leaded glass windows.



Cultural heritage

The RDM site and buildings, together with the Quarantaine site and Heijplaat garden village, form an extraordinary enclave in the middle of a modern and dynamic port. Like Delftshaven and the Scheepvaartkwartier (Shipping Quarter), it's considered to be an important, culturally historic docklands area. Some of the buildings on the RDM site have fallen into disuse over the last few decades, but recent years have seen a revival of interest in industrial heritage. The Port of Rotterdam bought the RDM site in 2002 in order to develop it as part of the CityPorts area, which includes Waalhaven, Eemhaven, Merwehaven and Vierhavens. CityPorts Rotterdam is the organisation in charge of the redevelopment.



New life

CityPorts Rotterdam has been renting most of the former directors' building since 2004, as its location right in the middle of the development area makes the RDM an ideal base for them. CityPorts' presence here reinforces the philosophy of reusing historic buildings: now the RDM building has been preserved and made accessible to the public. The redevelopment of the building has been carried out in phases. The first phase, which involved the provision of new office space and a dining room, along with renovation of the former boardrooms on the ground floor, was completed in 2004. Despite limited funds, the boardrooms have been more or less restored to their old splendour. The new dining room has become a central space, popular with all users in the RDM building. The kitchen and dining room can also be used for catering for the former directors' floor. The second phase began in 2005 and involved the provision of offices on the third floor and renovation of the central entrance area (known as the tiled hall). The old lift shafts were also refurbished and new lifts put in.

About CityPorts Rotterdam

CityPorts Rotterdam is a small organisation which hires in expertise as necessary from various Rotterdam services, the Port of Rotterdam and other companies. The workspace is open plan, with enough room for both CityPorts staff and their external colleagues. There is also a special area for staging workshops. The aim was to provide an atmosphere which is conducive to creativity and innovation, inspiring designs for the development of the area. The workspaces in the former drawing offices on the first and second floors go a long way towards achieving this goal. There is also a central reception room, which is ideal for staging presentations to interested parties from both home and abroad.

Photography: Daria Scagliola, Stijn Brakkee