



ALUMNI

MARC

KOEHLER

SMALLNESS

"I am more interested in how you can bring the qualities of the small, of the personal and of the precise to the large scale."

16 Agenda

8/9 Project

02_Inhoud Plat Zwart

10/11 Research

02_Inhoud Plat Wit

MARC KOEHLER

Behind the facades of the old merchant houses and buildings of Amsterdam there lie many successful architectural offices, one of the youngest among them, and arguably one of the Netherlands most ground breaking firms, is that of TU Delft Alumni and educator Marc Koehler. Marc Koehler has recently been selected as one of the candidates of the longlist of the prestigious 2014 Prix de Rome.

In the last two years, since Marc Koehler decisively left his teaching position at the TU Delft, where he incubated ideas and a research approach, his practice has tripled in size. The long tables in the office are full of energized and completely engaged staff, precious, highly alluring books, and exquisitely made architectural models. Among older and more experienced architects there are many fresh faces. Interns one would think? No. That's not Marc Koehler's approach he believes in young talent and in giving excellence a platform. Two outstanding recent graduates from the TU Delft, for example, are now being trained

for project architect positions. Despite the obvious intensity of the workload, these young people seem to glow.

SUPERLOFTS

Though Marc Koehler's projects are many and diverse one that is on the tip of everyone's tongues right now are the Superlofts. A project that Marc Koehler is realizing in collaboration with the Hoofden*. The project consists of 3 plots with a total of 70 lofts in the Houthavens of Amsterdam West. Next to that Marc Koehler architects are developing a third

plot with 20 lofts in the Buiksloterham-area in Amsterdam-Noord. What makes these projects so special? Well, outside of proving to be highly desirable to people looking to buy a house in the city right now, it represents innovation in housing design and development. The Superlofts project combines a recent CPO (Collectieve Particulere Opdrachtgeverschap/ Collective private commission) model with a new development model set up by Marc Koehler architects and The Hoofden, based on community building and crowdfunding. It is also a new mixed architectural typology, utilizing the type of the oversized, open 5 m tall lofts, usually only possible in the redevelopment of old industrial buildings, in combination with a multiple family housing complex.

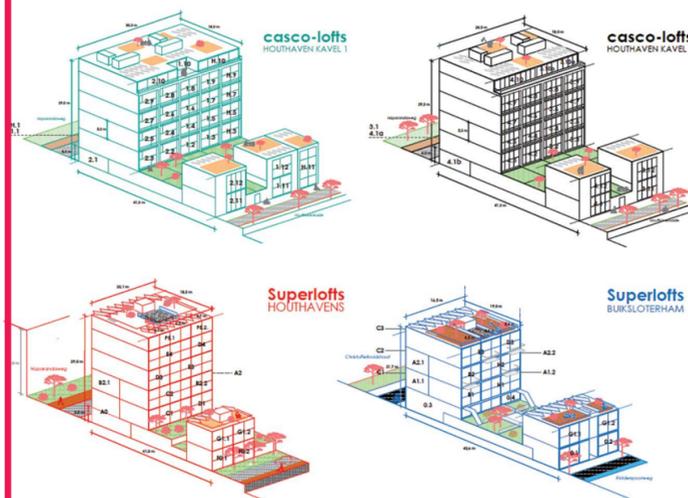
In the office I stand before a 1:50 3D section of the Superlofts. A wide variety of interiors and layouts boggle the imagination. Marc explains that they needed to develop a new system for the installations and services to ensure each loft could be unique but also part of the whole. The idea is that a group of people collectively commission the casco of the building, then each individual loft owner commissions an architect to design their interior (or of course they can do that for themselves). It is up to the client to determine the interior design, the setup of the floorplan, the size and place of the floor intersecting the large space. Marc tells me, that as a building community there are several advan-

tages: you can jointly buy building materials and housing equipment, share a jacuzzi, or a vegetable garden on the roof. It makes a lot more possible.

Of the 70 new loft dwellings in the first Houthavens complex, 22 clients also choose for Marc Koehler architects also for the interior design of their homes. It shows that Marc's firm, by no means a merely conventional practice, has won the hearts, minds, imagination and confidence of their clients.

Marc aims for his office to be capable of working across all phases of the design and realization cycle. They work now as mediators connecting different roles in the design and building process, uniting a strong and diverse network to create innovative projects. On the back of this ambition, and hybrid architectural ideas and development models, Marc Koehler architects have hit on something completely new. The following are excerpts from an interview with Marc Koehler where we discover the mechanism and motivations behind his innovations and architectural practice.

* The Hoofden is a collaboration between architectuurcentrale Thijs Asselbergs, ILA, De Architecten Cie. and Marc Koehler Architects. // www.dehoofden.nl



The Superloft concept
a self-initiated community housing project with apartments that are over 5 meters tall, 18 meters deep and 6 meters wide.



INTUITION

Basically I have always been a very hands on person. I become inspired by everything that comes across my path. If there is some kind of creative synergy I can become very quickly engaged. My partner is an artist and choreographer and I realized this morning that we work very much in the same way. We both become inspired by many different things and mix many different influences in our work. He is highly intuitive and in some mysterious way manages to connect many different things into different projects. Art can be so rich and layered, but it seems that architecture can't, it has to be so conceptual and straight. I find the richness that we sometimes lack in architecture, can be found again if you can let yourself be influenced by many different things. This allows you to break free from a top down design approach. To be inspired, be intuitive, and shape your designs and ideas organically, intersecting ideas and working across many different disciplines.

I try to stay very well connected to the normal concerns of activities of everyday life, and at the same time to special people and recent, extraordinary cultural developments that interest me, and then to interlink them. So for example, we are now going to buy virtual reality glasses so our clients can walk around in the buildings we design for them before they are built. I would never have come to the idea of this possibility if I had not had an earlier research project at the TU Delft on gaming and online communities. Everything always informs everything else. Everything is connected. I believe it is important to follow your instinct,

to follow your intuition, and to explore your interests.

NETWORK

I think looking around in all the directions that fascinated me linked me to people that I would in the end make architecture with. My network, because of these broad interests and connections of my mine, is extraordinary at the moment. Real estate developers come to me and tell me that my special quality is my network. I have always chosen to do a lot of things for free, just because I found the work interesting, because I could really learn something, and that through this work I was able to meet people. You meet people who share your interests, or are impressed by your enthusiasm. From these relationships something positive always emerges in the end. Years later you may think, "that person; I can call him or her because I know they are an expert on a question I have for instance." I would say having a good and diverse network is very important.

RESILIENCE

By working on many different things and not just a single direction or product our practice is also more resilient. This is important for the cross breeding of ideas, while it also brings flexibility which allows you to continue as a practice when one or more projects fall through. This broad level of attention also means you can always find work even when other sectors are going out of business. On the other hand it is also very important to find a common thread in everything you do. I

think a portfolio can be very diverse from product design to interior design to urbanism, landscape and even economic regions and models but it all needs common thread that makes those projects meaningful in relation to each other and to your practice. This is difficult to achieve. I work very intuitively and often say yes to projects simply because I like the challenge. I think the common thread in everything I do is the need for creative exploration. We link this to a set of fascinations that recur and are reformulated in each new project. The question of lasting beauty in an age of throwaway culture, design-authenticity in the context of mass-culture, sustainability in a context of mass-production and the power of design as a social instigator are repeating themes in every project our studio takes on..

SMALLNESS AND BOTTOM DOWN DEVELOPMENT

Smallness is a change of strategy that comes with a different economic mode than architecture is currently operating in. Before the crunch of the crisis architectural projects were often based on a top down development model in which entire urban areas are redefined on a macro scale with a macro investment, based on a single concept. In our current time after the crisis, and in the crisis. (I think we are in a post crisis era and that there is no crisis anymore.) There is a new model, based on micro investments, crowd funding, collaboration and something I'd call a 'bottom down' process. Not bottom up, because I don't believe in the idea that by starting with something really small that this will become bigger and bigger organically. What bottom down is, is thinking of a

grassroots approach that aims to influence things on a larger scale. 'Bottom down' processes are sensitive to small things but on a large scale. It's thinking from inside out, it's thinking in a modular way. In systems that are powered by individuals in order to influence the larger scales, of the neighborhood, or the city etc. It is based on individual initiative and the principle of collaboration and sharing. 'Bottom up' processes, on the other hand, always have a sense of small thinking by traditional players, in that they want to be small, that they want to oppose the larger scale. I am more interested in how you can bring the qualities of the small of the personal and of the precise to the large scale. Smallness is about large impact by a multitude of precise, connected and coordinated small actions. There is a vacuum, an absence of investment and initiative in the real estate sector today. We can use this vacuum as an opportunity to re-invent the discipline of the architect as a social mediator and innovator to build the cities of tomorrow.

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