

# FRAME

Growing Interiors  
Ryue Nishizawa

Ins

Exploring

and

Spaces

Dots

in Between

Visionary Drawings  
Junya Ishigami

Hotel Panorama  
Isay Weinfeld

616.85 €11 - CHF 30 Switzerland - \$19.95 USA - \$29.50 Canada  
C\$14.95 - £26.99 Australia - ¥3,570 Japan - ₩10,000 Korea

00085



8 17 109 66 44 11 45

# Living



# Large

A trio of pavilions by Concrete has LED lighting programmed to respond chromatically to the seasons.

# Three design firms transform a public square in Amsterdam into a neighbourhood lounge area.

Words Femke de Wild  
Photos Ewout Hulbers, courtesy of Concrete





Drawings by Dijk&co show the development of a layered design (bottom) from the original, one-dimensional situation (top).



## The Greenery

Dijk&co  
Landschapsarchitectuur

Dijk&co was asked to make a sketch design for the whole square. Rob van Dijk also developed a plan for plantings and hardscape. 'It was my job to come up with a design that had the approval of the people living in the neighbourhood,' says Van Dijk. 'A fanatical residents' committee was involved, so in terms of participation we had a tough row to hoe.' A sizable wish list emerged from the various meetings that were organized.

The old square had been home to a youth centre: a facility that had to be part of the new place as well. Because two 'rival' groups often showed up at the same time, there was a need for two playing courts. The caretaker of the square was to have a personal pavilion. A playground for small children was required. And the main point of departure for the renovation project was to make the new public space as 'green' as possible.

'Before we entered the picture, the square had an overgrown feel, thanks to lots of tall trees and quite a bit of

### Plan.

1. Playground
2. Basketball court
3. Football pitch and skate zone
4. Youth centre
5. Main entrance parking garage
6. Teahouse
7. Pedestrian entrance parking garage
8. Planting

shrubbery. The residents wanted to maintain that atmosphere, no matter what,' says Van Dijk, adding that they replaced the existing shrubs but did not cut down the tall trees. As a result of the abundance of low plants that he chose to complement the old trees, overall visibility is much improved. 'In the city, it's important to be able to see what's happening,' he stresses, 'but we also nearly doubled the total surface covered by plants. Neighbourhood participation worked out exceptionally well in this case.'

Originally, Van Beuningenplein was bordered by four streets, two of which are now closed to traffic and used as a pedestrian zone. Here, enlarged gardens lining residential façades connect the square to neighbouring houses. Play areas on this quiet side of the square are for the youngest visitors. The caretaker's building was expanded to incorporate a teahouse with a ground-level patio and roof terrace. 'The inclusion of a spot for refreshments was an especially good idea,' says Van Dijk. 'It makes the location socially attractive. People can have tea or coffee while their children play.' On the other side of the teahouse, close to the main entrance to the parking garage, are two playing courts. Shielding these from the wide street that runs parallel to them is the youth centre, which is directly behind the main entrance to the parking garage.

The square is paved in the same type of clinker bricks found throughout the neighbourhood. 'By using clinkers, we made the surface part of the network of streets and created a smooth, uniform image,' says Van Dijk. Plants are in raised beds bordered in Chinese bluestone. Raising the planters was a way to prevent cyclists from racing across the square, but it also responded to the square's location on the roof of a parking garage. —

Two of the four streets originally bordering the square are now closed to traffic and used as a pedestrian zone.  
Photo Marleen Beek



Not too long ago, the neighbourhood around Van Beuningenplein in Amsterdam West was badly in need of some tender loving care. To give the area a friendlier and greener character, the municipality opted for a drastic reduction in kerbside parking space and for the construction of underground parking garages as an alternative. One of these garages was to be situated beneath Van Beuningenplein, a rather ominous patch of public space at that time. The entire square had to be excavated, to accommodate the garage, and completely redesigned. Together with Dijk&co landscape architects, district authorities worked out a general plan. They assigned the design of playing courts to Carve and made architecture firm Concrete responsible for the required pavilions.



Concrete approached the square as a space with various rooms, which they framed with steel and wooden beams. They incorporated seating in a timber-floored stage next to the tea-house.

## The Living Room

### Concrete

Three architecture firms pitched their proposals for the buildings that were needed on the square. Concrete won the pitch. 'We were asked to present a plan for three pavilions, but we went much further than that,' says Concrete partner Erikjan Vermeulen. 'This area of town is home to many families with children. We envisioned the square as the community living room. Rather than looking at the three pavilions as autonomous structures, we saw them as three parts of a whole.'

To create a strong link between the pavilions and their context, Concrete placed steel beams at a height of 4 m, connecting these members to the

buildings. 'We approached the square as a space with various rooms, three of which we framed with steel beams,' says Vermeulen. 'This allowed us to create a sense of intimacy. We rejected the notion of open space. We want visitors to feel safe and secure without losing sight of what's happening around them. The beams evoke the illusion of a ceiling.'

The architects used expanded-metal mesh to protect the large glass walls. 'You'll find a bunch of little rascals hanging around here,' says Vermeulen. 'This construction can take a lot – and it's not at all suitable for graffiti. What's more, the mesh is ideal for climbing plants, which will make the pavilions look even friendlier.'

Outdoor furnishings beneath the beams – including benches, picnic tables and a small timber-floored stage next to the teahouse – were also designed by Concrete, which also equipped the beams with decorative LED lighting.



Outdoor furnishings next to the teahouse, all designed by Concrete.

Thanks to a simple but effective lighting scheme, the square remains as attractive and safe at night (above) as in the daylight hours (below).



'We programmed the lighting to respond chromatically to an annual cycle of seasons,' says Vermeulen. 'Beams are blue in the winter, yellow in the spring, white during the Christmas holidays and different colours for other holidays. Street lights in the neighbourhood have been adapted to the scheme and do not interfere with the colours.'

Concrete has built up a reputation based on architecture and interior architecture. This is the firm's first encounter with the design of public space. 'The brief asked for three pavilions, but we turned it into a larger project,' says Vermeulen. 'We added the overall public space to our part of the project, but a clean separation of disciplines has never been our thing anyway. It makes no difference whether you're designing an interior or an urban square – in both cases you want users to have a good general view of things as well as a sense of intimacy.'

# The Playgrounds

## Carve

To realize playing courts with the exact specifications required, Van Dijk brought design and engineering agency Carve on board at the outset. 'Elements like sports fields and playing courts are often added to a plan at the last minute,' says Elger Blitz of Carve. 'When that happens, the design can never be a coherent entity. In this case, all parties worked together throughout the project, making certain our plans were well coordinated.'

'Filling in the details of play and sport facilities is our forte, but here our job overlapped quite a bit with what Rob [van Dijk] was doing,' he continues. 'We also focus on connecting our work to the public space around it. Similar projects often feature functions that are so unrelated to one another that what you get, as it were, is a sports park with a series of isolated components. By integrating all elements into the existing context, you get a much better result.'

## Van Beuningenplein

**Location** Amsterdam, the Netherlands

**Plan** Park, playing courts, playgrounds, youth centre, parking-garage entrance

**Design** Sketch design: Dijk&co (dijkenco.nl) in collaboration with Westerpark District (Peter Ulle, Stephanie Klein); landscape and greenery: Dijk&co (dijkenco.nl); playing courts and playgrounds: Carve (carve.nl); parking-garage entrance, neighbour pavilion, teahouse, caretaker's pavilion, architectural model: Concrete Architectural Associates (concreteamsterdam.nl)

**Client** Westerpark District, Amsterdam

**Area** 7200 m<sup>2</sup>

**Budget** €450,000

**Completed** 2011



Expanses of blue identify the play areas.

Meetings with neighbourhood residents had clearly shown a need for two playing courts; the adjacent field is equipped with a number of low goals and three blue circles on its surface, two of which spout jets of water during the summer months. 'If you're going to do something, you should go about it in a professional way,' says Blitz. 'A basketball court should have the correct dimensions, but you also need to give kids the freedom to discover how they want to use the play area in question. Quite a few elements are "hidden" in this design.'

To prevent cyclists from riding their bikes across the square, Carve lowered the playing courts below ground level and edged them with multifunctional borders. Visitors can sit on the low walls, a net integrated into the concrete steps balls, and certain areas invite skateboard use. 'Our design is made so that kids can't damage anything. We used reinforced concrete for added strength; users can do virtually anything they want here,' says

Blitz. 'Our design is well thought out, right down to the last screw, so to speak - we totally rejected the idea of a generic plan. That's what makes the project interesting.'

The playground for little children is a rolling blue landscape with an installation high off the ground. 'Kids often find a single grand gesture much more interesting than a lot of separate activities, which is why we built a tower,' says Blitz. Hammocks suspended from Concrete-designed beams serve as swings, but are proving to be just as much fun for toddlers as they are for 14-year-old girls. 'These swings have a more or less ambiguous function; they're exactly the kind of thing we most like to design. It's nice when not everything spells out exactly how it should be used.'

According to Blitz, playgrounds are not required to satisfy any general conditions other than prescribed safety regulations. A design depends on the playground's location. 'For the most part, playing in a city revolves around offering kids space. That concept doesn't apply to places outside the city, though. Ultimately, all that's relevant is functionality. This design works - the square is always full of people.'

The play tower is a grand gesture that provides a challenging environment for kids. Photo Marleen Beek

