

Rotterdam

Arhitectura contemporana

West 8: Schouwburgplein

1990/1997



The position of Schouwburgplein—in the heart of the city, between shops, offices and Rotterdam Central Station, and flanked by the municipal theatre and the concert hall complex—is in itself promising. Yet until of late it was a dilapidated, cheerless place with no character to speak of. It sits on the roof of an underground car park long due for an overhaul (the roof was caving in and cracks were appearing). West 8's design of 1990 signified a major breakthrough in the decision-making process in the city, in that it revealed the square's qualities as a void, while the concept of an ultralight floor ruled out an expensive renovation for the parking garage. 1992 saw the emergence of the scheme to erect a megacinema in the square, and west 8 were asked to modify their original proposal to accommodate it. The objective of the design is to intensify the square's use. It interprets Schouwburgplein as the city's stage with the skyline as both its decor and its physical limits. The design retains the void and activates only the ground plane by raising it 35 centimetres above street level.

The layout of the square is based on the sunlighting and the expected uses contingent on it at different hours of the day. This arrangement into zones is expressed in the mosaic of materials on the floor. The zone along the development on the west side has a poured epoxy floor with silver leaves; that on the east side, which is sunlit the longest, is the most logical place for a long bench, and is further executed in warm materials like wood and rubber. The ventilation towers of the parking garage in the strip beyond are clad with gauze structures fifteen metres high and graced with clocks, advertising facilities and geraniums. The central area of the square has a deck of metal panels and a hardwood play area. Connections for electricity and water, as well as facilities to receive tent posts and fencing for temporary events, are built into the floor. At night fluorescent tubes below the partially perforated deck transform the square into a nebula of light. Lighting set beneath the edge of the raised deck gives the suggestion that the square is floating. An additional attraction is the quartet of hydraulic lighting masts 35 metres tall whose configuration changes every hour. Members of the public can change the position of the lights themselves by inserting a coin. In summer there is a water feature for children comprising a stream, a geyser and hidden sprays all embedded in a strip of granite. Thus, the square changes at the hands of its users from hour to hour, day and night, summer and winter.

