

Van Schijndel House



The house of architect Mart van Schijndel



Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the advice of the board members, who from the outset have helped to set up the Mart Van Schijndel Foundation, and who have subsequently welcomed the Iconic Houses Foundation which followed it.

The companies which have endorsed the mission of the foundation and given their help in kind in order to maintain the house at its best. Particular thanks are owed to the Utrecht companies Copijn, which renovated the patio gardens, and Sleper Schilderwerken which ensures that the house remains perfect in its appearance. The efforts of the Zeeland-based company Kitvoegen.nl, in taking on – with great enthusiasm – the renovation of the silicone-kit hinges are also hugely appreciated.

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I also want to thank all the architecture experts who have generously donated their time to lecture for the film series and the volunteers who assisted during these events. I am also grateful to the photographers who made their pictures of the house available so that the house’s message can be conveyed and the foundation can gain attention for it. Especially Imre Csany and Luuk Kramer who have dealt extensively with the house and whose many pictures are included in this book.

Mart loved to experiment with materials and detailing. He often did so in collaboration with Sjoerd Sakes, a technical adviser in façade technology. Together, they came with unorthodox solutions, as was the case in this house. And to this day Sjoerd has remained a great help in preserving them too, for which I particularly thank him.

Natascha Drabbe
Chair, Mart van Schijndel Foundation

Enclosed is the film about the house that was shown to the public at the presentation of the Rietveld Award 1995 to Mart van Schijndel in the Vredenburg, Utrecht. See the USB-card in the cover.

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The Pieterskerkhof Ensemble – Confusion Clarified

Natascha Drabbe



The medieval street plan of the Pieterskerkhof and Kromme Nieuwegracht seen from the air in 1997

If you go looking for the Van Schijndel House on the Pieterskerkhof in Utrecht, you discover it's not so easy to find. From the street, it's an effort to spot the modern house by architect Mart van Schijndel, and even when sighted it remains only partly visible, being largely hidden behind a striking striped façade on the square. This apartment building was also designed by Van Schijndel, three years after his own house was realised here. The 'gatehouse' on the square and the house of the architect behind it are clearly related to each other in language, form and material, and therefore should be regarded as an ensemble.

Looking through the wide glass door towards the inner courtyard, the horizontal grey and lavender stripes are visible on the house where Mart van Schijndel lived from late 1992 until his death in 1999. For the innovative design, Van Schijndel was awarded the Rietveld Award 1995. In 1999, the house gained protection as the youngest municipal monument of the city of Utrecht, and the Netherlands as a whole.



View on Dom church and Pieterskerk in 2012



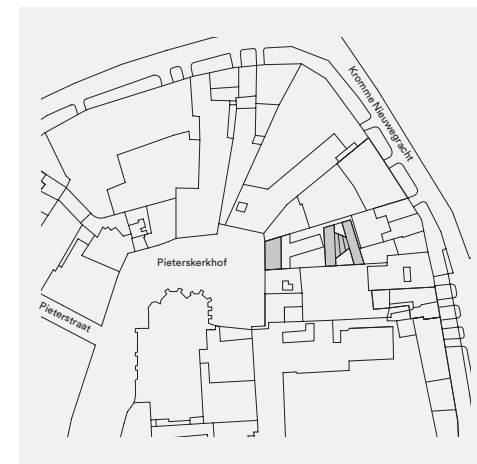
The square in 2012

The house is located just behind the cathedral, the Dom, between the Pieterskerkhof and the Kromme Nieuwegracht, in the heart of the city and one of its oldest built areas. The entrance is on the enclosed square of the Pieterskerk (or St Peter's Church), which was consecrated in 1048. This church forms the easternmost point of a cross of churches built by Bishop Bernold. The chapter monks lived in the area around the church, and had their kitchen gardens here.

In the 17th century, a canal, the Kromme Nieuwegracht, was dug around this area, and lined with merchants' mansions. These had deep gardens with coach houses to the rear, forming the wall of the Pieterskerkhof square. The great gates in the



Fragment of map of Utrecht, circa 1569 - 1572. The curve of the Kromme Nieuwegracht around the Pieterskerkhof reveals how the trapezoidal plots were created.



Situation gate house and Van Schijndel House

walls, which have been filled in with homes over the years, still reveal that horse-drawn carriages once rode in and out of them.

In 1979, Mart van Schijndel, who was then 36 years old, was commissioned by an art historian to restore number 7 on the Pieterskerkhof, the former coach house of the grand mansion at 43 Kromme Nieuwegracht, and convert it into a dwelling. Although it looks unassuming from the street, he transformed the coach house into a cathedral of light in which the owner's art collection could really come into its own. The project was published in the leading lifestyle magazine *Avenue* in 1983.

At that time, the Pieterskerkhof was rather untidy and full of parked cars. Because the square is a dead end, it was a perfect spot for junkies to congregate undisturbed. Van Schijndel saw past all this and realised the potential of the location. He set his sights on 8/8bis Pieterskerkhof next door, a glazier's warehouse with upstairs living quarters. This property included a storage depot for glass, which covered a large part of the interior courtyard.

Designed in 1939 by the architect Professor J. F. Berghoef, the Stichtse Glashandel warehouse was quite out of place in the otherwise historic square. It was even identified as 'visually disturbing' in Utrecht's so-called *quality map* – the city's evaluation of its own urban environment. So the idea of renovating the property arose. It was Van Schijndel's intention to house his architectural firm on the ground floor, with his living space above it. The site behind it where the warehouse was located could then accommodate the guest quarters: Van Schijndel liked travelling and had a wide acquaintance abroad, so he wanted to have space for visitors.

The property was owned by the city of Utrecht. After the glass business moved out, the city council had established the Grafisch Atelier here - a studio space where Utrecht's artists could create etchings and lithographs. When this was about to move in 1988 and the former warehouse at number 8/8bis became free, Van Schijndel, now 45, was finally able to buy it from the city council after eight years of waiting. He then left the place untouched for four years. He was busy making striking homes for his clients, such as the house for Gerard and Marjan Unger in Bussum (1981).

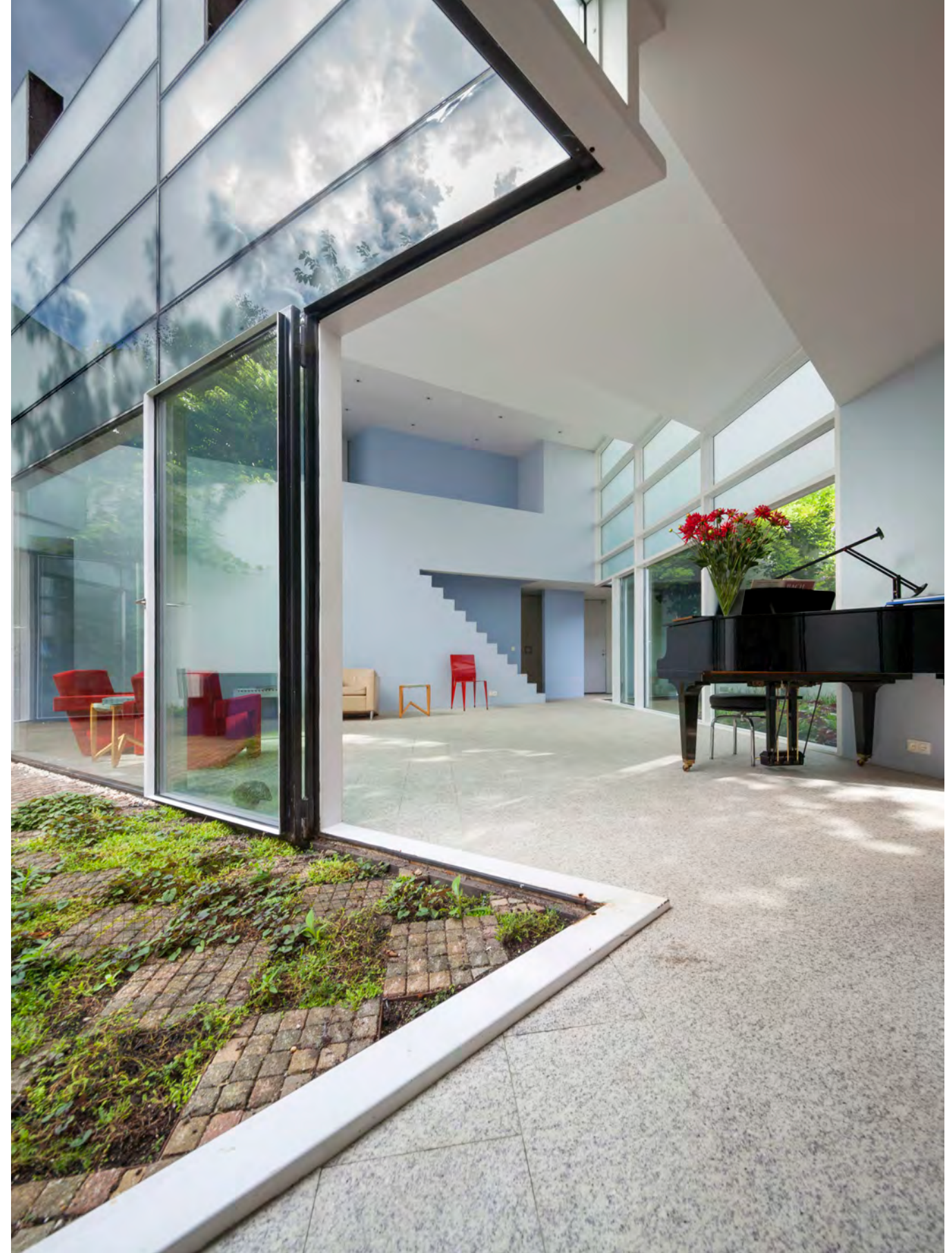
The House as a Psychological Self-Portrait

Arjen Oosterman

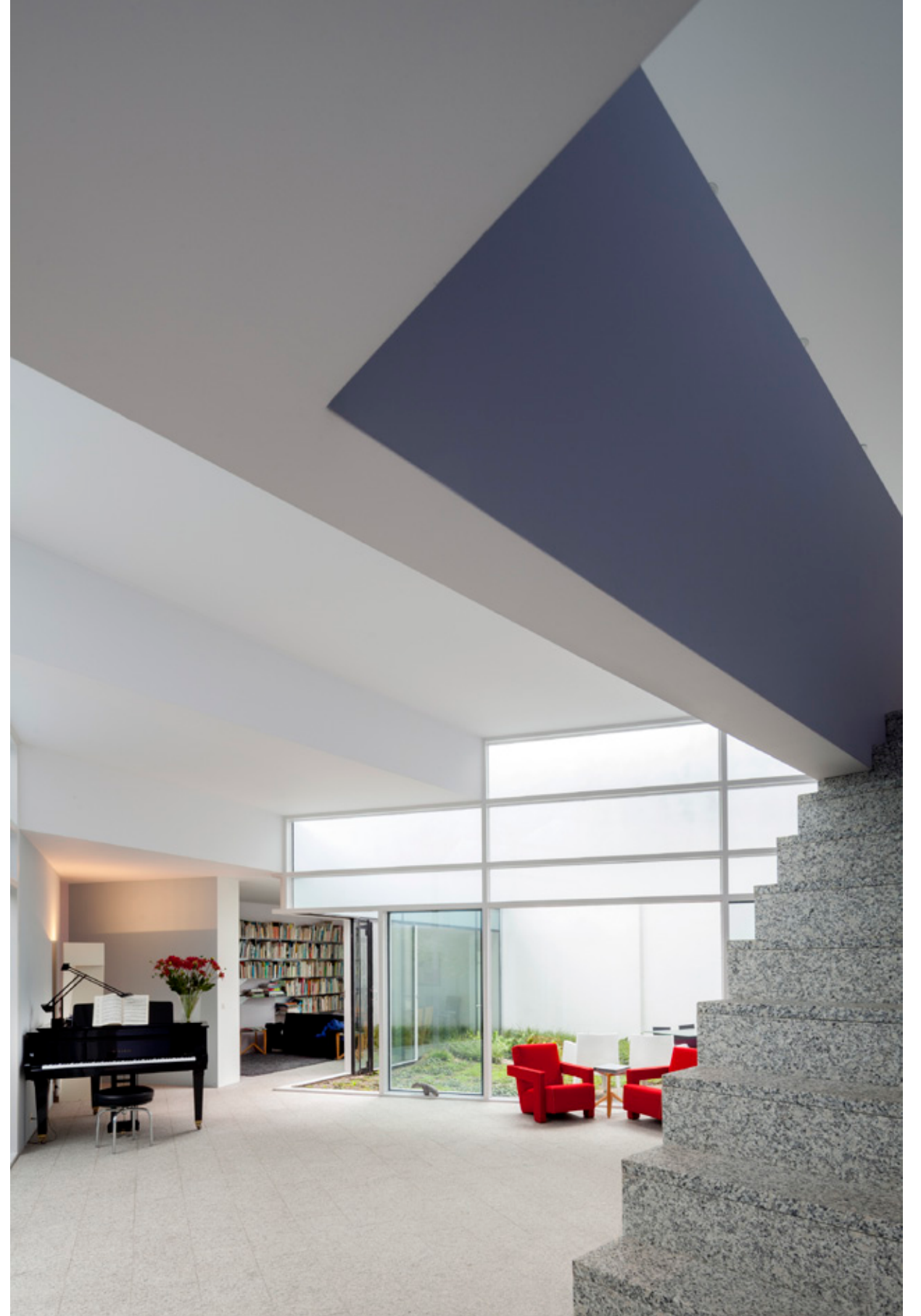
‘Der gestaltende Handwerker unserer Zeit muss diese beiden Prinzipien des Technisch-Organisatorischen und des Künstlerisch-Schöpferischen in sich verbinden.’ Franz Rickert











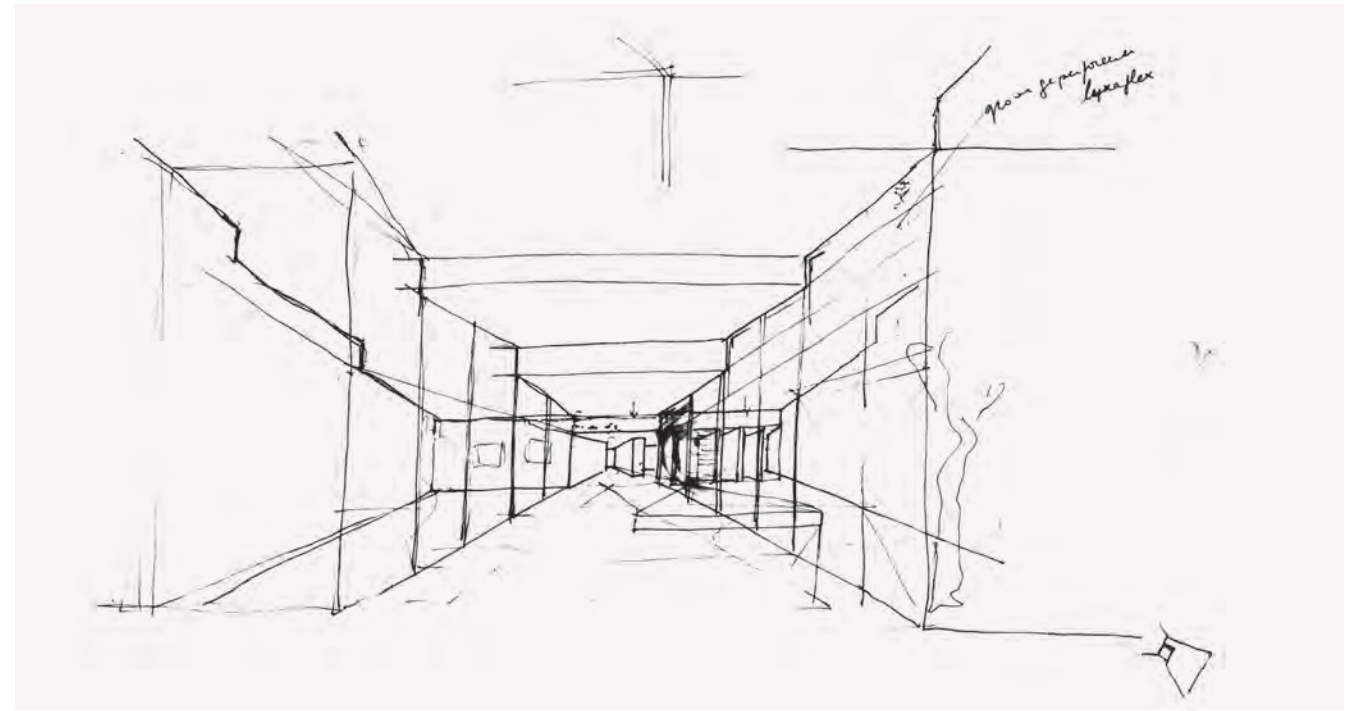
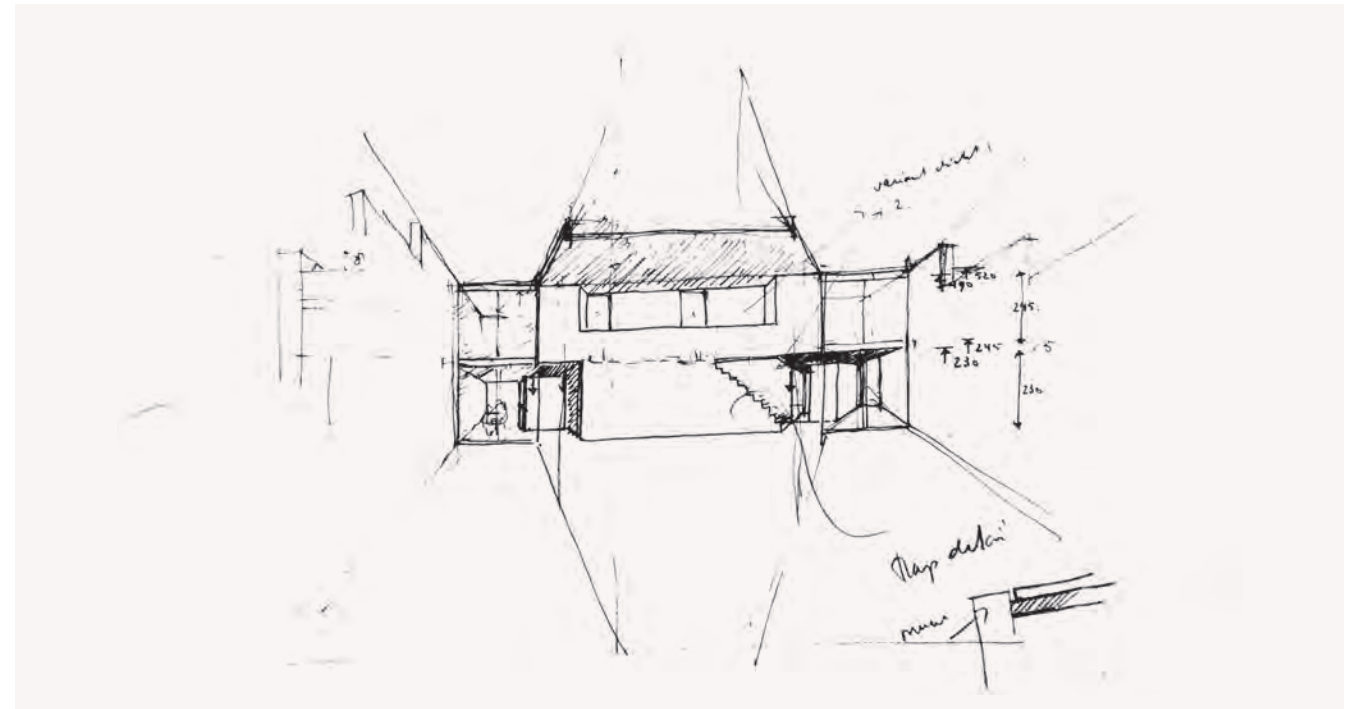
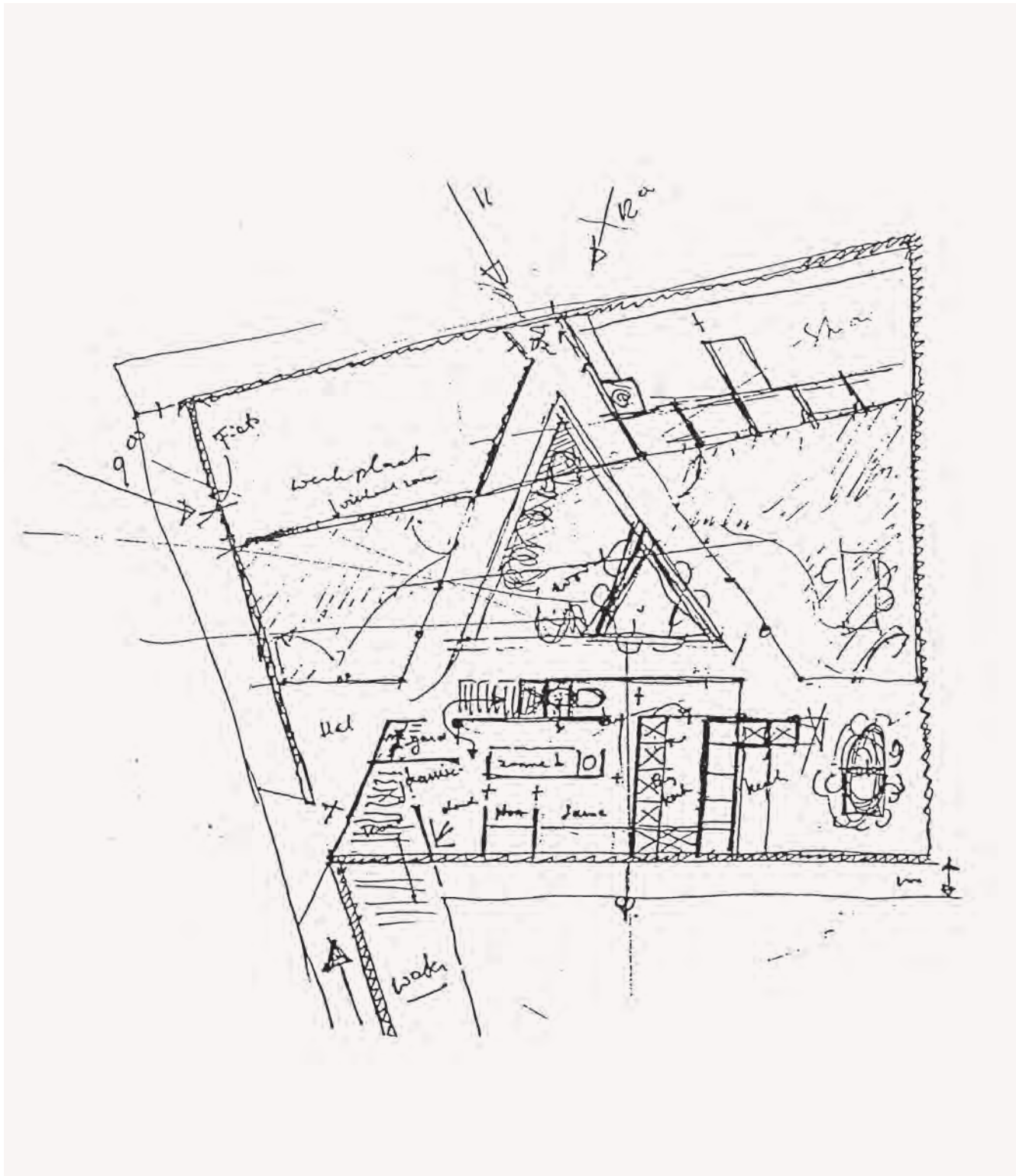


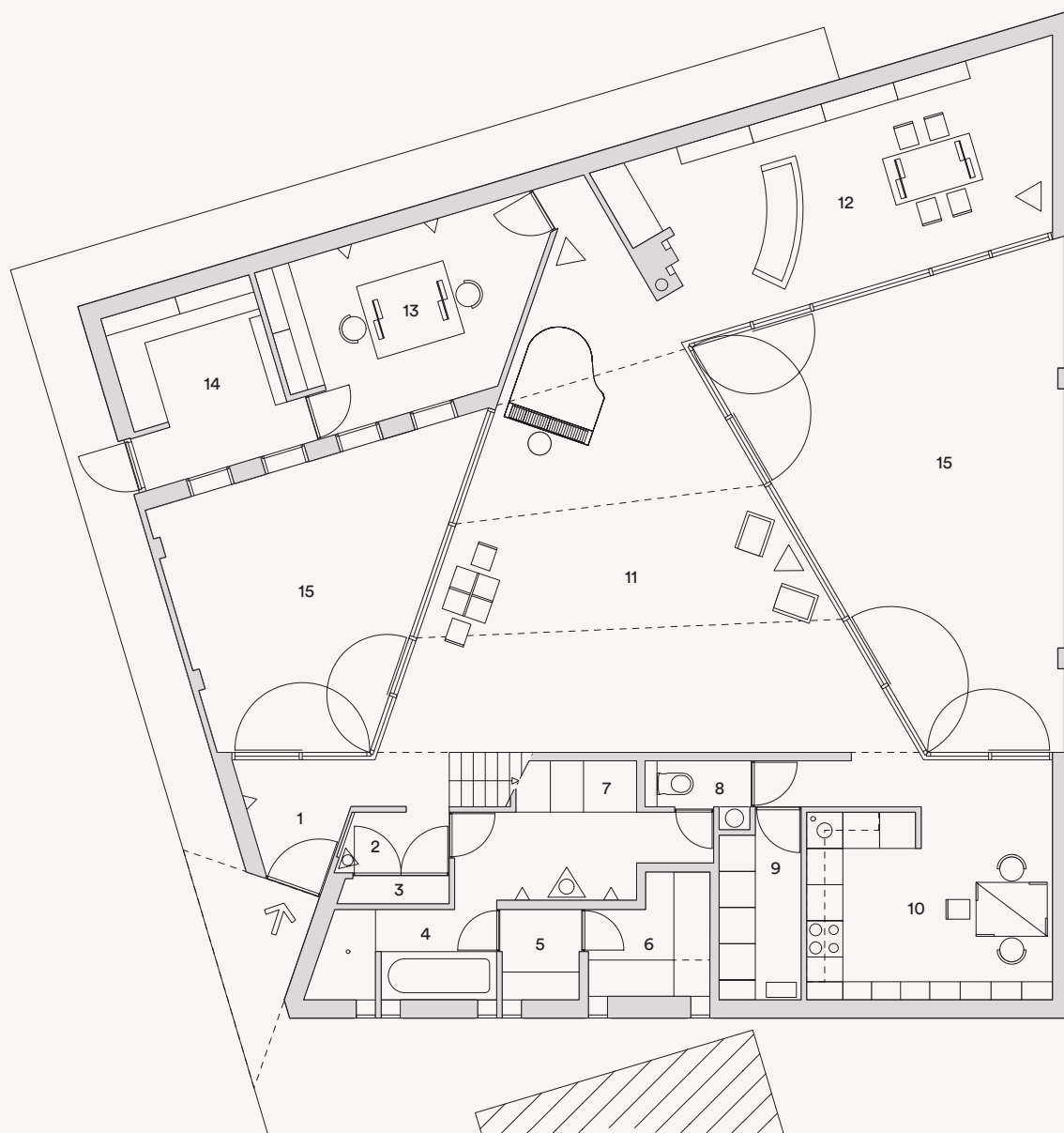




Sketches and Drawings

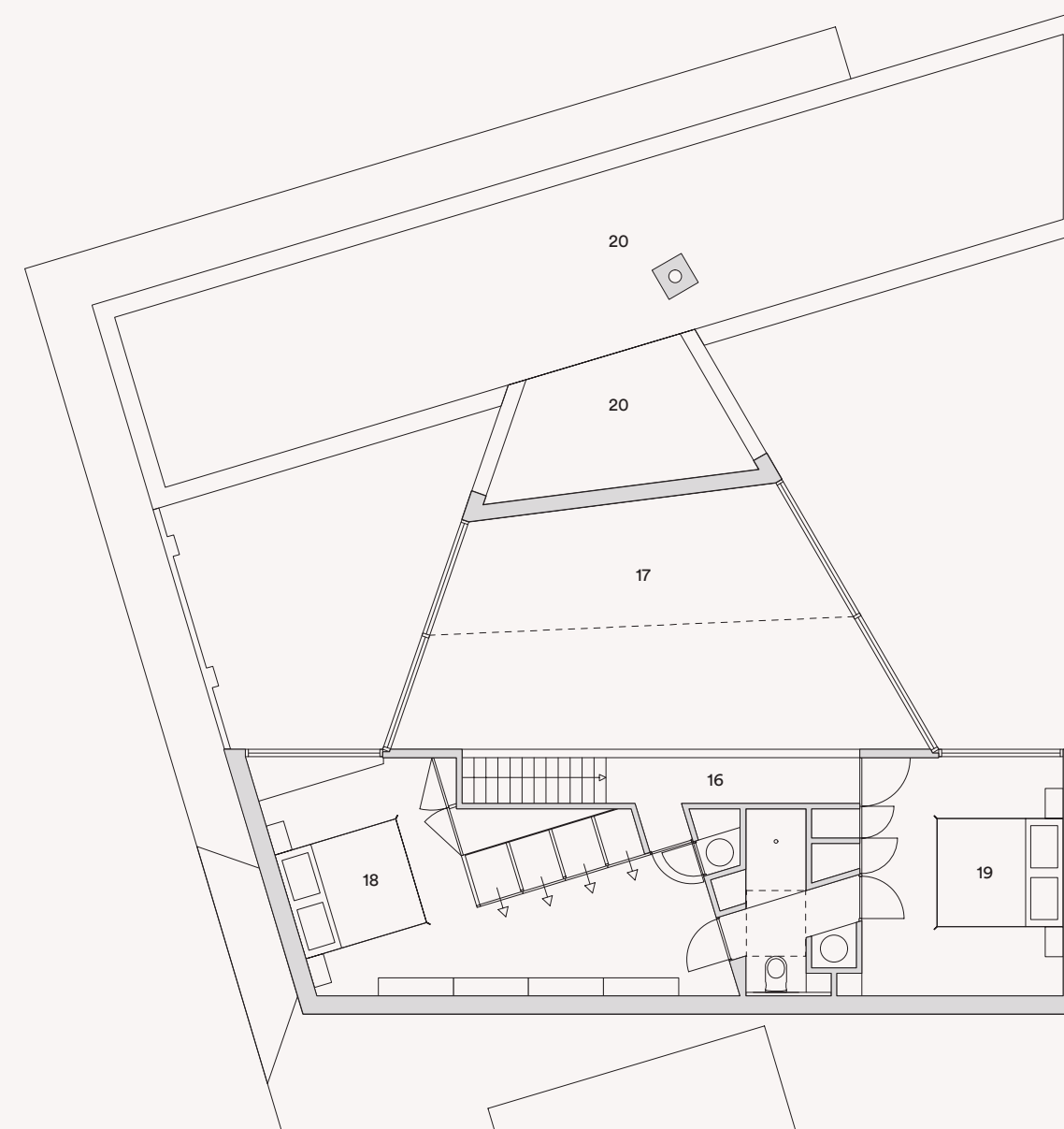
'I won't get the plan into my head that easily, but the house is marvellous. The colours that are and are not there and keep changing all the time!' Wim Crouwel





- | | | | | |
|------------------|--------------|----------------|-------------|------------------------|
| 1 entrance | 5 steam bath | 9 pantry | 13 study | 17 double-height space |
| 2 cloakroom | 6 sauna | 10 kitchen | 14 workshop | 18 bedroom |
| 3 meter cupboard | 7 lounge | 11 living room | 15 patio | 19 guest room |
| 4 bathroom | 8 lavatory | 12 library | 16 landing | 20 roof |

Ground floor



First floor

The acute angle

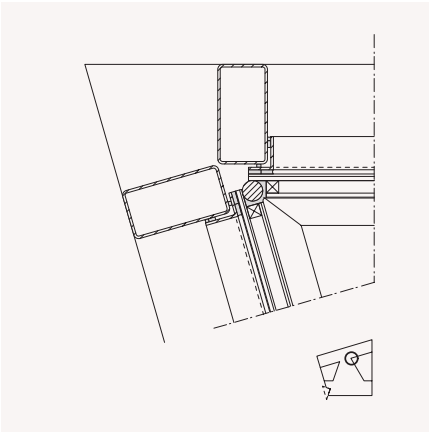
Van Schijndel was fascinated by the opening-out corner in the Rietveld-Schröder House, created by opening both of the corner windows in the dining area on the first floor.

For his own home, he invented a variant. The patios have three glass corners in which the corner panels can be opened outwards. This was very simple in two cases, because of the obtuse angles, i.e., angles greater than 90 degrees. The third angle, in the library, is an acute angle, smaller or ‘sharper’ than 90 degrees. In this case, the panels could not simply be opened outwards – they would get in each other’s way.

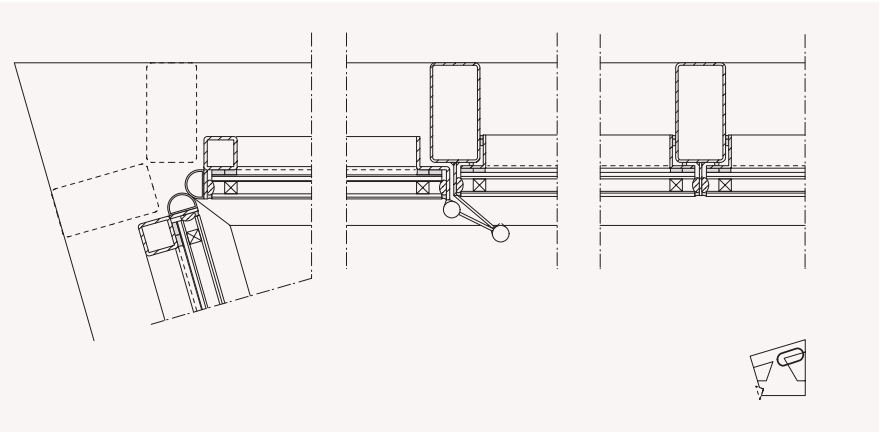
To overcome this problem, he came up with a double hinge on one of the two doors, so that the double-hinged door can be first pushed a few centimetres to one side. This creates just enough room to allow it to open outwards. After which the second door can be opened without any problem.



Corner window, Rietveld-Schröder House, Utrecht, 1924



Details, horizontal



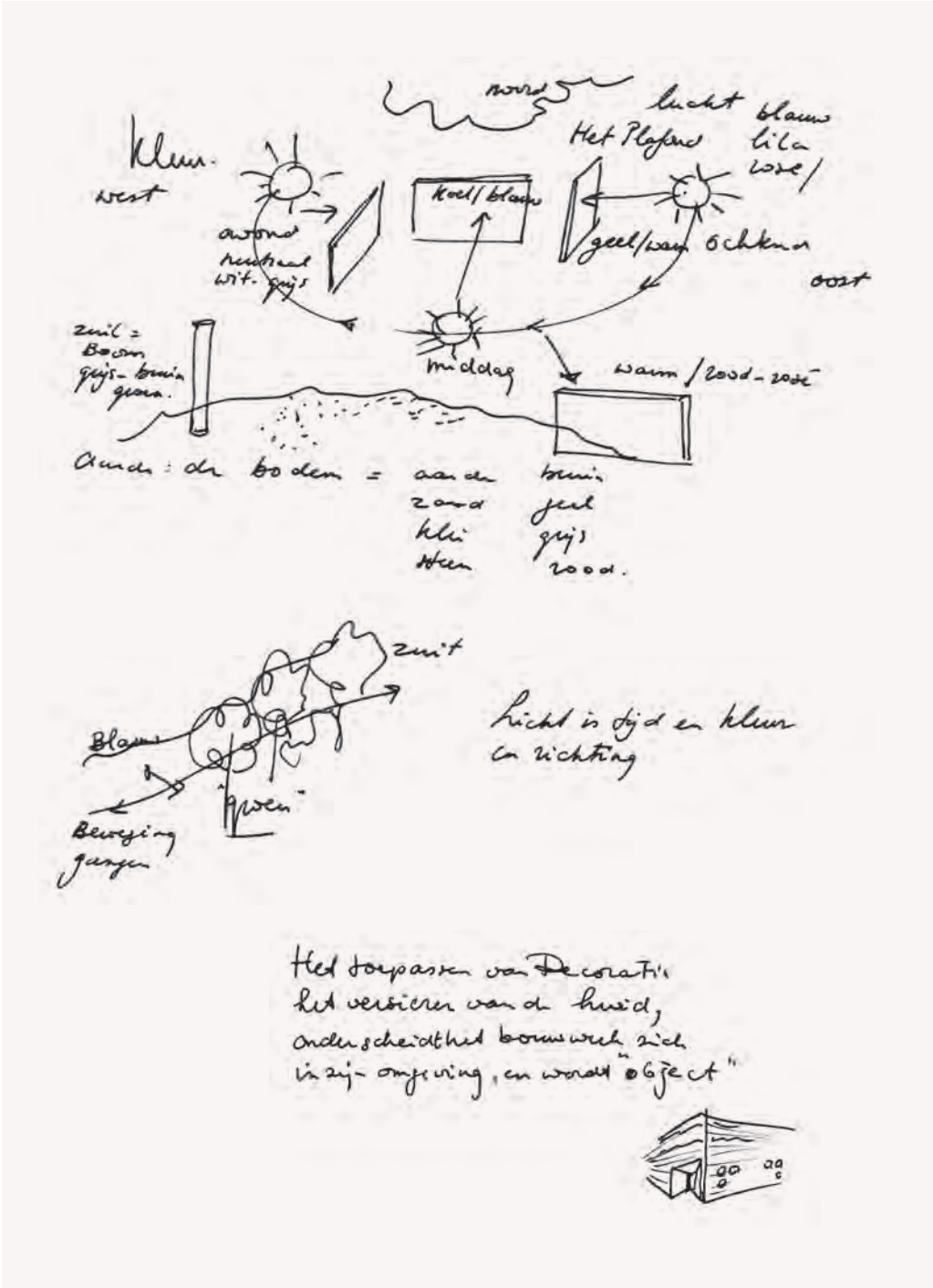
Wall colours

The interior of the house has a particular use of colour. It determines the light and therefore the atmosphere in the house. At first glance, however, all the walls and ceilings seem to be a soft white colour. Because very light pastel shades are used, the colours are not explicitly present. They emerge only when two colours come together. The intention here was to achieve, through a combination of light and colour, a warm atmosphere at any time of the day. Light and colour affect each other. Van Schijndel took advantage of this. Through the soft hues on the walls, the light gets a special accent.

The compass direction from which the light enters determined the reflection surface. As the sun rises in the east patio, Van Schijndel wanted to wake up in the morning in the house feeling mildly energised, and so all the walls where the morning sun shines have a soft yellow tone. All the walls where the afternoon sun shines, such as the staircase and landing, are a cool lavender. All the walls where the evening sun shines he made white, grey or green in tone, and so neutral. And all the walls where the sun never shines are done in warm colours, softly pink.

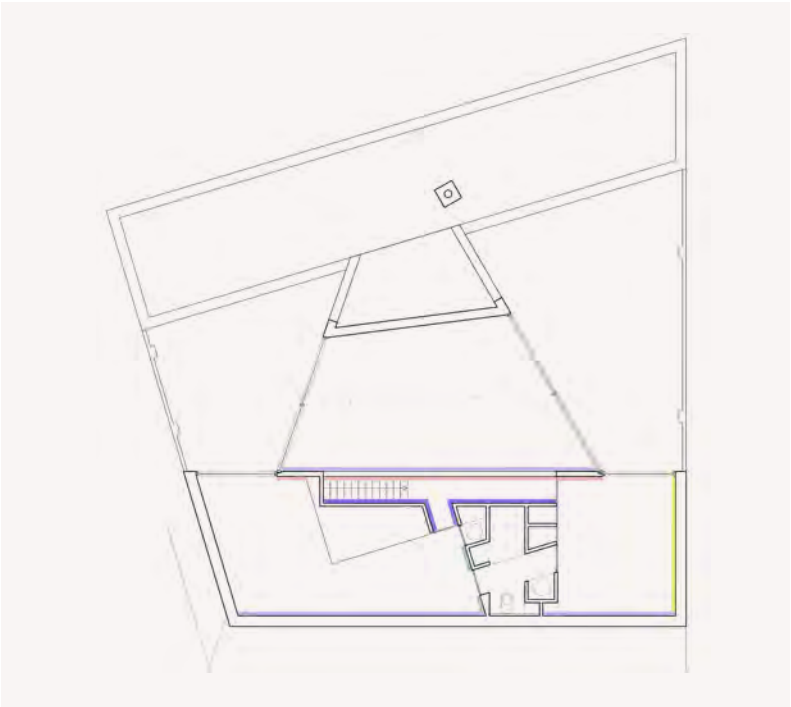
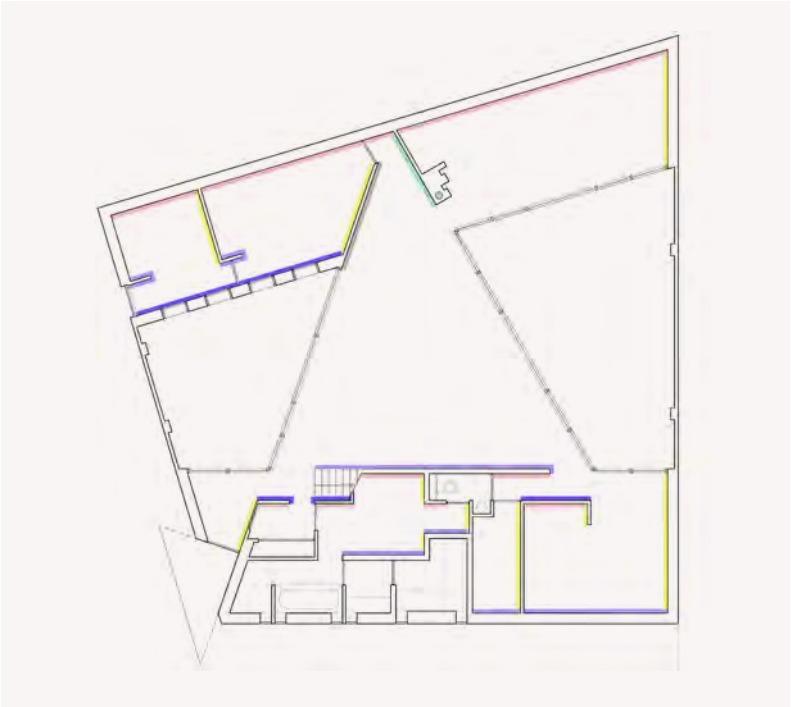


Mart van Schijndel sitting in the shell of the house on a Saturday morning, determining the colours of the walls.



Sketch from the exhibition IN/TUSSEN, 1996

For the ceilings, he mixed three parts white with some red, so that they were tinted with 'sunset glow', as he called it: 'After a lovely warm summer day, when you've finished working around five and you feel like just sitting on a terrace and looking at the sky, you see that the sky is sometimes a pinky purple. That's always a nice feeling in your memory, so if you make a house where such a colour is on your ceiling, you always have a reference, a reminder of that fine summer day. The colour of the ceiling refers to that.'



Furniture



Delta Vase



Slack 1 standing lamp



Shofloat wall lamp



Side table



Wood trestle table, indoor version



LOKV canteen table



Three Points stool



Seven chair



Fulfil stackable chair



Aluminium trestle table, outdoor version



Kitchen table

Room for New Views

Jane Szita in conversation with
Natascha Drabbe

‘The house should not just be the architect's
memorial but keep inspiring others as
a laboratory for creating new ideas.’

On the death of her architect husband in 1999, architectural historian Natascha Drabbe became the custodian of the house he built for himself and where they had lived together for seven years. Since then, she has embarked on a mission to not only share her house with architecture enthusiasts, but also to create a supporting network for the caretakers of similar modern architects’ houses worldwide. She set up the Mart van Schijndel Foundation in 2008 and the Iconic Houses Network in 2012, along with the related iconichouses.org website, a resource for travellers and lovers of 20th century homes. She still lives part of the time in the home that she has named the Van Schijndel House.

As someone who still lives here, what do you most enjoy about the Van Schijndel House, and what do you especially want to convey to visitors?

The silence and the light, I always want people to experience the light falling in a certain way – those moments the house was designed for. The way that the light sometimes comes in through the glass fronting the patios is like someone in heaven is flicking a switch.

I suppose the house has an amazing capacity to renew yourself and when you enter, you forget the past and you are oblivious to the city outside – you leave your everyday concerns behind. You’re in a completely different world. It’s a totally introverted and closed house, a house without an exterior view. Yet then you hear the sound of the cathedral bells and it reminds you that you’re here in the heart of medieval Utrecht. If you see the gatehouse for the first time, probably you see lots of architectural references. But once you’re inside this house I think the quality of serenity here is what really endures.

If there is a ‘best’ way for people to enjoy the house, I suspect that it’s alone. In 2008, the house was open to visitors for the first time, and we organised individual One Minute Visits. People could spend a single minute alone in the house. They would first see the film of Mart’s tour of the house, taking about forty-five minutes, then they would be in the house for just sixty seconds – but all by themselves. We were overwhelmed with five hundred visitors in one weekend, each one spending their minute in the house. I think that format allowed them

to appreciate the tranquil qualities of the house. In general, I’m looking for alternatives to the guided tour – because on them, I find most people are too polite to look away from the guide. And you should of course be looking at the architecture and its details. On the other hand, the personal story and the opportunity to interact, to ask your questions, these things are also important. I’m the one who shows the house to people and who can tell its story first-hand. I also think it’s important that I know who has been here, since they come into my private domain. So this makes a visit here a very personal thing, for the visitor and for me.

Essentially, you’re trying to keep a 20th century house alive, and yet basically unchanged, in the 21st century. What’s the biggest challenge?

There are many, but maintenance is one pressing concern –after more than 20 years, you need to do something, in fact several things, to keep the house in shape. This year, we are restoring the glass doors and panels of the kitchen cabinets and some of the glass panels and doors in the bathrooms. The doors are hingeless – they are fixed in place only by silicone sealant, and some needed replacing so we decided to replace them all. The back-painted glass panels also need to be touched up – like every job on the house, it’s complicated, because you have to identify the exact colours, materials and techniques that were originally used. So that’s the job for this year.

Previously, we’ve renovated the two patio gardens, and created a green roof as an attempt to lower the energy consumption and enhance our neighbours’ view of the house. Luckily, it’s possible to get support. We work with a few companies who have offered to do these jobs pro bono because they sympathise with our mission and we bring them good press in return.

But the really fundamental challenge is to create an awareness of the house, so that people are drawn to visit. To keep Mart’s architecture on the radar. He wasn’t very prolific: he split his time three ways, between architecture, teaching and product design, so his finished buildings are comparatively few. This house is a rare and important example of his built work. And it still has an impact on people in the way that Mart would have liked. He taught for many years, and although he’s not here any

more, his house still has the capacity to convey his ideas to students and other architects.

Also part of the challenge is to give visitors multiple reasons to visit, reasons to return. On a first visit, you can enjoy the house, the architecture and interiors, for a couple of hours. But the space also offers an intimate, small-scale platform for other artists. We have music, screenings, lectures and art here. The ideal, I think, would be for students to come here and interact with the house and come up with new ideas as a result.

So the house needs to be more than a museum?

It should not just be a memorial to the architect – it ought to be able to keep inspiring others as a laboratory to create new things. It has to have a life of its own. There is something denuded about a home that becomes a museum – with empty bookshelves and walls. It’s as if its soul has disappeared. I often think the best modern houses to visit are those hybrid places which are still partly homes, where people still live – like Jean Prouvé’s house in Nancy, the house of Renaat Braem in Antwerp or the Umbrella House, designed by Paul Rudolph, in Sarasota. You have to contact the owners to schedule a visit and you get to see how people actually live in the house. It feels like a more exclusive experience, too – it takes a bit of effort, you don’t just turn up and buy a ticket. When I invited the photographer, graphic designer and author working on this book to stay here for a day of 24 hours in order to experience the house, they were surprised to find the kitchen fully equipped. To really understand a place I think overnight stays are the ideal way to experience a house – several of our Iconic Houses Network members offer this possibility. I don’t, by the way – I only made a one-time offer for the production of this book!

Also, on a practical level, a museum costs money. In the Netherlands even the Rietveld-Schröder House, a Unesco monument, costs rather than earns money. There are very few modern houses around the world where this is not the case – Fallingwater, the masterpiece by Frank Lloyd Wright, is one notable success, in the USA. But there, modern houses are competing in a much smaller heritage sector. We don’t have that luxury in the Netherlands. Anyway, the house museum is not a sustainable model for running this particular house.

How did caring for this particular house lead you to set up the Iconic Houses Network?

It all started with a comment in our visitors’ book, referring to how experiencing such autobiographical houses, like those of Eames, Rietveld, Chareau, Cattaneo, Malaparte and Eileen Gray, always exceeds expectations. Suddenly, I became aware that there were lots more such houses, and that they are hugely significant because in them their architects could be true to themselves and their own ideas.

It also was a case of pragmatically looking for a template for this house – how do other people run a house like this, with all their limitations, and convey their meaning successfully, I wondered? Of course, every situation is different. Mostly, the houses are donated, sometimes in the USA together with an endowment. This case is quite different – there’s still a mortgage on this house. But we can learn a lot from each other and mutual support is vital – it’s often a fight to preserve these modern homes, and custodians often feel isolated. Now it has become clear that they are all part of a large family of architects’ houses worldwide. We have about hundred and fifty members in the Iconic Houses Network and their house museums are presented on the website. How many have I visited? It must be more than hundred over the last five years.

What sorts of activities are particularly successful in the house?

In fact, these houses are huge, walk-in installations that embrace the visitor with space, light, details, stories, and the life once lived in the building. They offer access to the history of architecture and design, the history of building techniques and materials and the family history of the architect.

Arjen Oosterman writes that the central hall of the house has no programme (page 26) – yet it adapts itself so beautifully to many uses. Of course, there are limitations as it’s a small space and can only hold about forty-five people, so we have to do quite small-scale things. The direct relationship with architecture and design will always be present in the things we programme ourselves. We put on architecture lectures and films in the winter. In addition, the space lends itself well to music, and we like to work with it when we are asked to do so.

Publications about the Van Schijndel House

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- ‘House’, Ruud Brouwers, **Architecture in the Netherlands Yearbook 1993-1994**, NAI Publishers Rotterdam 1994, cover, p. 82-85.
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- ‘Een lavendelblauwe bunker van licht en ruimte’, Marieke van Zalingen, *Eigen Huis & Interieur*, 09 1994, cover, p. 54-59.

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- ‘Mart van Schijndel architect?’, Arjen Oosterman, **Rietveldprijs 1995**, Uitgeverij Thoth, p. 24-29.
- ‘House as Polemic’, A. Bussel, *PA Progressive Architecture*, June 1995, USA, p. 57.
- ‘Wohnhaus in Utrecht, Holland’, *DBZ Deutsche Bauzeitschrift*, # 4 1995, Germany, p. 59-62.
- ‘Architect ontwerpt zijn droomhuis’, Xandra Feije, *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, 22 07 1995.

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- ‘Mart van Schijndel tussen room en space’, Robbert Roos, *Trouw*, 27 01 1996.
- ‘Architect van Schijndel blij verrast’, H. Aalbers, *Gelders Dagblad*, 21 02 1996.
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- ‘Rietveldpreis’, *Deutsche Bauzeitschrift* # 03 1996, Germany, p. 24.
- ‘Dwarsligger in de architectuur’, Wim de Wagt, *Haarlems Dagblad*, 23 04 1996.
- ‘Sobere esthetiek bij Van Schijndel’, Hans Ibelings, *NRC Handelsblad*, 09 08 1996.
- ‘Mooi ontstaat door het onverwachte’, Cor Hospes, *Algemeen Dagblad* and *De Dordtenaar*, 10 08 1996.
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- ‘Feilloze perfectie en innoverend denken in hedendaagse architectuur’, Ann Maes, *Villa’s* # 52, article 10, 1996 Belgium.
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- ‘Geometrische eenvoud en technisch vernuft’, Hans Ibelings, obituary in *de Volkskrant*, 01 10 1999.
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- ‘Ontwerpen als vak’, Tracy Metz, obituary in *NRC Handelsblad*, 01 10 1999.

- ‘Eigen woonhuis en simpele vaas als meesterstukken’, Robbert Roos, obituary in *Trouw*, 04 10 1999.
- ‘Mart van Schijndel: De Deltavaas voorbij’, *De Gelderlander*, 22 10 1999.
- ‘Mart van Schijndel 1943-1999’, Sjoerd Soeters, *de Architect* # 11, 1999, p. 22.
- ‘Mart van Schijndel (1943-1999) schiep ruimte voor leegte’, Jaco de Visser, *Intern* 99 # 4, p. 15.
- ‘Esthetisch technicus/technisch estheticus’, Catja Edens, *Post Planjer* # 21, 1999, p. 20-21.
- ‘In memoriam Mart van Schijndel (1943-1999)’, Peter van Kester, *Items* # 7, 1999, p. 69.
- ‘In memoriam Mart van Schijndel’, Nico Hendriks, *GevelRaad*, # 12 1999.

2000

- ‘Death of an Architect’, Judith Arango, *Metropolis*, # 06 2000, USA, p. 56, 58.
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2010

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- ‘Biografie van een vormgever’, Bernard Hulsman, *Museumtijdschrift*, juni-juli 2011, cover, p. 34-37.

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- ‘Duurzaam dak op Van Schijndelhuis’, Marein Kolkmeijer, *Bouwwereld* # 10 2012, p. 48-51.
- ‘Ingetogen groen dak op jong monument’, *Cobouw* 99, 01 06 2012, p. 8.

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- ‘Home from home, 20th century icons of architecture’, Lise Coirier, *TL mag* # 17 2013, Frankrijk, p. 100-101.

2014

- **Total Design: The Modern House as a Complete Work of Art**, George H. Marcus, Rizzoli USA, 2014.

The complete publication archive from 1969 to 1999 can be consulted in Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam.

For further research, the office archives can be consulted at Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam. Online, the inventory can be found at: www.martvanschijndel.nl

All publications appeared in Dutch in The Netherlands, unless otherwise indicated.

Selection of work

- 1969*** De Kargadoor, Utrecht
- 1974** Pauwstraat apartments, Utrecht
- 1974** Katreine tower, Utrecht
- 1980** Bedaux residence, Utrecht
- 1981** Unger residence, Bussum
- 1985** LOKV-office, Utrecht
- 1986** Lumiance, office and industrial building, Haarlem
- 1987** Renovation artillery stables into exhibition halls, Centraal Museum Utrecht
- 1987** Curation and design of opening exhibition, Centraal Museum, Utrecht
- 1987** ‘Holland in Vorm’, exhibition design, The Hague
- 1987** NIVEL office, Utrecht (demolished in 2013)
- 1988** Auditorium Centraal Museum, Utrecht
- 1988** Joods Historisch Museum, Amsterdam (contest)
- 1989** Luchtbrug Uithof, Science Park Utrecht University, Utrecht
- 1990** Oudhof Effecten, office Rokin, Amsterdam
- 1990** FSB laboratory and educational building, Science Park Utrecht University, Utrecht
- 1991** Ethology-station, Science Park Utrecht University, Utrecht
- 1991** City Theatre, Breda (plan)
- 1991** Potten & Pannen shop front, Utrecht
- 1992** Villa ‘Ode an...’, Meerbusch, Germany (plan)
- 1992** Het Koorenhuis, Art Center, The Hague
- 1992** Hof residence, Amersfoort
- 1992** Van Schijndel residence, Utrecht
- 1994** Mobach shop front, Utrecht
- 1994** Town Hall Almelo, renovation and interior
- 1994** Verder, office and industrial building Haan, Germany
- 1995** Radio mast KNSM-island, Amsterdam
- 1995** Pieterskerkhof apartments, Utrecht
- 1997** De Berckepoort, Cultural Center, Dordrecht
- 1997** Extension The Dutch Parliament's House of Representatives, The Hague, multiple assignment (plan)
- 1999** De Gruitpoort, Center for Art Education, Doetinchem
- 1999** Design public space and public lighting, Leiden (plan)
- 1999** Headquarters National Land Registry, Apeldoorn
- 2001** Domus Cornelia, Swaak residence, Bloemendaal
- 2001** Center for Art and Culture (CKC), Zoetermeer

*year of completion

Selection of product designs

Items of furniture in the Van Schijndel House designed by Mart van Schijndel. Most were produced under the MARTECH label. The Delta Vase is still on the market.

- 1963** Three point stool
- 1964** Side table prototype
- 1979** Work lamp
- 1979** Slack I lamp (big) and Slack II lamp (small)
- 1979** Seven chair aluminium
- 1979** Table supports, aluminium exterior version
- 1981** Bishop desk lamp
- 1981** Delta Vase
- 1982** Seven chair wood
- 1982** Table supports, wood interior version
- 1984** Shofloat wall lamp
- 1984** LOKV cantine table
- 1996** Fulfil stackable chair

Furniture designed for the Van Schijndel House

- 1995** Washbasin (small in bedroom unit and large in bathroom)
- 1995** Lounger
- 1995** Kitchen table to match the Seven chair
- 1995** Book shelves
- 1995** Wine rack
- 1995** Bed frame

‘Where a glass warehouse used to stand, in an interior courtyard shut off from the outside world, architect Mart van Schijndel has realised a virtuoso sculptural design for his own house. With this building, Van Schijndel demonstrates an extensive spatial awareness. He also experiments with technical innovations. The glass windows and doors, for example, have no hinges, but swing on silicone-kit hinges. In addition to a cabinet-maker’s technically oriented passion for experimentation, the house exudes the search for an as yet unknown experience of space. Furthermore, it is remarkable, and exemplary, to see how much spatial quality he conjures up in a place that is totally enclosed.’

From the jury report for the Rietveld Award, 1995.

This richly illustrated book includes new, extensive photography of the house, historic images of the location, and previously unpublished sketches from the personal archive of the architect Mart van Schijndel (1943-1999). Using these as well as material from his interviews and writings, the book portrays an architect’s creation of his own special world, innovatively adapted to the various restrictions of the site.

For the first time a book thoroughly documents the experimental techniques, innovative material applications and ingenious details found in the Van Schijndel House (1992) in Utrecht, the Netherlands’ youngest architectural monument. Together with the enclosed film which offers the architect’s own commentary, the book offers a unique insight into an inspiring house.

‘The house holds a certain magic. Tucked away, it is a hidden jewel and full of delightful surprises: some striking, like the extraordinary silicone hinges, and others more subtle, such as the play of light from two sides against the gently colored walls.’

Henry Urbach, director, The Glass House,
New Canaan, USA