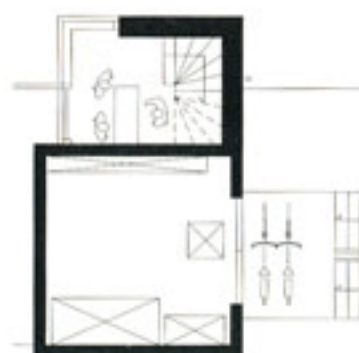




↑ Upper floor interior



↑ Section



↑ Ground floor

DUTCH BRIDGE KEEPER'S HOUSES



Sweets by Space & Matter, Amsterdam, 2001



Bridge keeper's house by BAR Architecten, Middelburg, 2004



Naviduct control tower by Zwarts & Jansma, Enkhuizen, 2004

Bridge keeper's house, Haarlem

Marjolein van Eig reinvents Dutch infrastructure that is rapidly falling into disuse.

NETHERLANDS — TEXT: KIRSTEN HANNEMA, PHOTOGRAPHY: ALLARD VAN DER HOEK

Is there life after 'SuperDutch'? Following two decades of architectural spectacle, a time of sobriety and modesty appears to have arrived. Despite the slim pickings of previous years, a small group of relatively young Dutch firms have been able to generate work from the small-scale projects they have received, or which they created themselves, bottom-up. These offices apply themselves to working with existing typologies and realizing projects. Now, after years of laying the foundations, this hard work is finally paying off for these firms. In 2015, Studio PROTOTYPE, Monadnock, and Happel Cornelisse Verhoeven were able to complete their very first 'large' buildings.

Architect Marjolein van Eig also belongs to this list of achievers. While working at Inbo Architecten, she was awarded the Jonge Abe Bonnemapijs (a prize for young architects) in 2014 for the brick dome she built on the country estate De Overplaats in Heemstede. She

designed the folly, brick by brick, using computer software (see A10 #63). Later that year, she won the design competition for young architects in the Haarlem municipality for the design and construction of a new bridge keeper's house. This would be the impetus to launch her own firm.

Van Eig named her design 't Melkhuisje ('the Little Milk House'), and the building can be seen in the historic centre of Haarlem on the banks of the Spaarne. 'The name is a combination of the bridge keeper's house and the Melkbrug, the bridge associated with it,' explains Van Eig. 'I came up with the name myself, but it has a familiar ring to it. This is what I tried to relay in my design as well. I wanted to create a type of architecture that suits the historic context, yet also adds something new.'

The design competition came with a few conditions. The building footprint was not permitted to be any larger than

that of the old, now demolished, bridge keeper's station. On the ground floor a 3x3x3-metre space for the transformer had to be incorporated. The building also needed a cornice. Van Eig combined all these elements into a design that she describes as a contemporary interpretation of the archetypal house.

'I find it interesting to delve into the possibilities of existing architectonic models, and then to push these boundaries. The most problematic part was the electrical room, which I elegantly tried to incorporate into the "belly" of the building. As the gutter was not allowed to be higher than five metres and the ground floor was mostly taken up by the installations, the next obstacle was the creation of sufficient height and outlook on the first floor. I solved this particular problem by placing the bridge keeper's post above the entrance, with a split level leading to the working space, kitchen, and the toilet in the rear.' This gives the bridge keepers a clear view of the bridge and the river through a panoramic window, while they are also protected from the sun by the overhanging eaves. The roof, which has been fitted with perforated wooden panels on the inside, not only provides for pleasant acoustics, but also airs the compact space.

Van Eig paid a great deal of attention to the detailing and materials that were used. The brick facades were given a

subtle relief, and the solar panels that the municipality requested as part of its ambition to build more sustainably have been beautifully integrated into the slate roof. Notable is the green that was used for the wall panels of the electrical room, window frames, and rain gutter. 'This colour was inspired by the green colour of the bridge,' explains the architect. 'I love colours that have an "old" feel to them. For the interior, I was inspired by the Sonneveld House in Rotterdam, built by Brinkman en Van der Vlugt in the early 1930s. The tone-on-tone effects, Bakelite handles, and linoleum flooring can all be found in this design as well.'

The bridge keeper's house is a notable feature, not only for its prominent roof, pronounced 'belly', and fluorescent green accents, but also because so few such houses are being built nowadays. More often one hears that they are standing vacant. As more bridges become automatically operated, the need for bridge keepers is declining. Van Eig took this trend into consideration and, with a few small adjustments, this building could easily be converted into a single-room hotel. ◀

'T MELKHUISJE, 2014-2015

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