Rotterdamse Werkplaats voor de Geest

Programme
Buddhist centre: meditation room, multifunctional foyer and services
Clients
Stichting Phuntsok Chö Ling

Location
Oostkousdijk 17b, Rotterdam
Completion date
May 2016
Size
325m²

Photo credits
Daria Scagliola

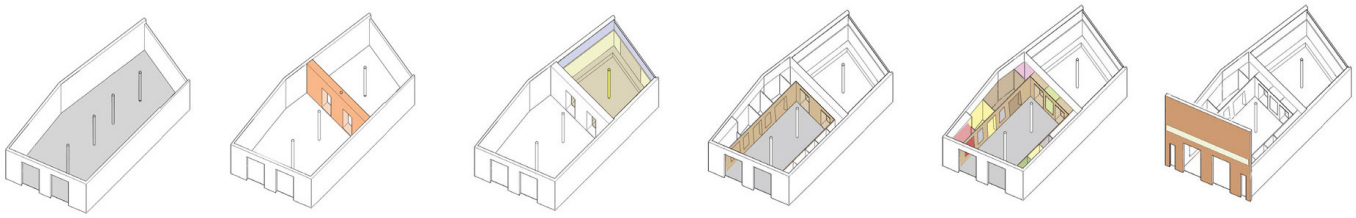
COFO Architects
Groshansstraat 4b
3023SB Rotterdam
cofoarchitects.wordpress.com

Contact person
Guillem Colomer
T 06 26409841
cofoarchitects@gmail.com

COFO architects

Meditation Room during a session with Lama Jigmé

Multifunctional Foyer during the coffee-break



1. Demolition
2. Division
3. Meditation Room
4. Foyer
5. Niches
6. Facade

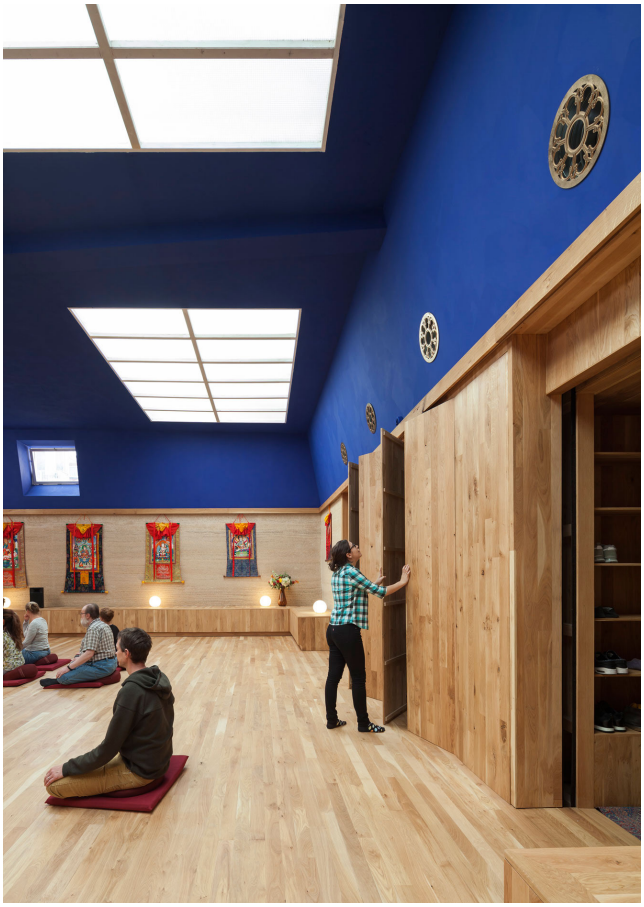
Rotterdamse Werkplaats voor de Geest is the new centre for the Tibetan Buddhist community Phuntsok Chö Ling. The urge for a bigger space together with the potentials of a new location in Coolhaven presented extraordinary opportunities both for the Buddhist community and the neighbours. Within the Tibetan tradition and Buddhist needs, the design creates a contemporary centre that aims to become an active member of the neighbourhood.

The centre is organized in two main spaces with distinct characters: an enclosed meditation room with a specific spiritual purpose and a multifunctional foyer oriented towards the street. Their separate treatment matches their respective purposes while both spaces complement each other through a deliberate contrast.

A thick wall divides the centre into these two main rooms. Its depth absorbs an existing column, enhances the entrance experience to the sacred space, and provides a generous storage space that works as a thermal and acoustic barrier. The two big doors are strategically aligned with the front facade openings, ensuring a direct visual connection from the street.

The Meditation Room is the treasure of the community. Its spirituality is enhanced by the careful articulation of its dimensions, the daylight entering through the generous skylights, and the combination of extraordinary materials. The diverse amount of elements required by Tibetan meditation is organized by three proportioned horizons, which ensure the calm atmosphere required for mind focus.

The generous Foyer is a meeting space where the bonds within the community are reinforced. A perimeter wall defines a clear empty space directed towards the street to ensure the interaction between the community and the neighbourhood. All the essential functions are placed in niches to ensure maximum flexibility in the multifunctional central space. Each of these auxiliary spaces serves a specific purpose and has its own character. However, together they define a strong image that expresses the diversity of the community.



The generous storage works as a thermal and acoustic barrier

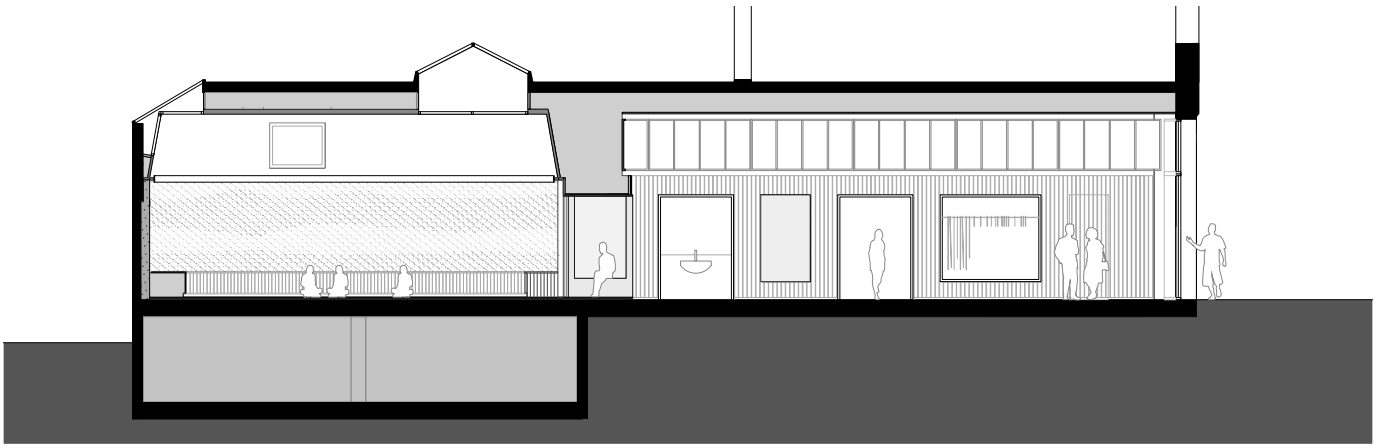
The entrance enhances the transition to the sacred space

The library is integrated in the division wall at the core of the Centre

Complementary experiences

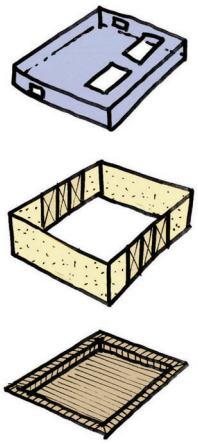
The treasure of the community is an enclosed sacred space with a calm atmosphere

The colorful perimetral wall provides an unmistakably domestic atmosphere in the foyer



Buddhist identity

In the Meditation Room the use of the hemp wall goes beyond its thermal, health and acoustic properties. Its natural roughness evokes the perfect mystical ambience. The continuous joint-free wall appears impressive and solid. The horizontal layers reveal its building process and define a centrifugal movement around the central column. Its irregular porosity makes it extremely sensitive to lighting variations, which enhances the time dimension of the spiritual space. The colour of the hemp is the perfect background for the colourful Buddhist ornaments, contrasting with the intense blue ceiling and the soft oak bench.

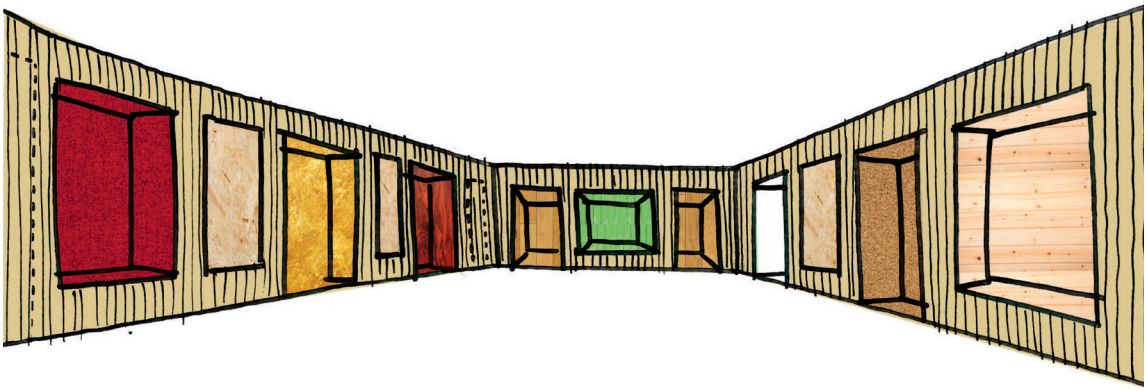


The tripartition of the room establishes three different horizons, each of them symbolising one of the Buddhist Jewels: *Sangha* (the community), *Dharma* (the teachings), *Buddha*. Beyond its symbolism, the horizons are a strategy to keep the room organized since an extremely diverse and vast amount of elements are required for the liturgy.

Meditation Room during an evening session

Rotterdam recollection

The wall enclosing the central space in the Foyer is a continuous colourful strip that provides an unmistakably domestic atmosphere. Its intricate materiality is achieved by reusing and combining the wood planks left by the previous users. Each of the niches has its own distinctive expression as they are made out of different rescued materials: the construction fence of Central Station, the old doors of a cigarette factory, the exhibition walls of a museum… The Foyer is a collection of Rotterdam fragments that resonates with the ambition of the Centre to become a vivid part of the city while contributing to the local identity.



Service niche looking towards the Foyer

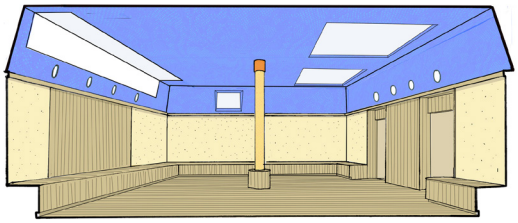
Red bench integrated in the wall

Integral design

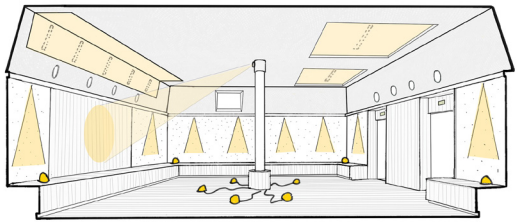
The building is an integrated composition, where all aspects: functional, technical, environmental, financial… come together in one clear architectural solution that is well thought out at all levels. This result was achieved through honest dialogue between client, users and architect. Although this cannot be always quantified in numbers, it can be seen in the way the community feels at home in its new environment.

The building is an exemplary energy neutral design. Thanks to a close collaboration with the building physics engineer, In2ecobuildings, all technical demands are integrated. The comfort in the building is obtained by a combination of passive solutions together with an efficient system of artificial ones. The installations form part of the architecture design and have a prominent role in its expression. In the Meditation Room the oak bench hosts the heating system, the tilted cavity behind the blue sky hosts the air ducts, and the eight golden lotus flowers are the ventilation inlets and outlets.

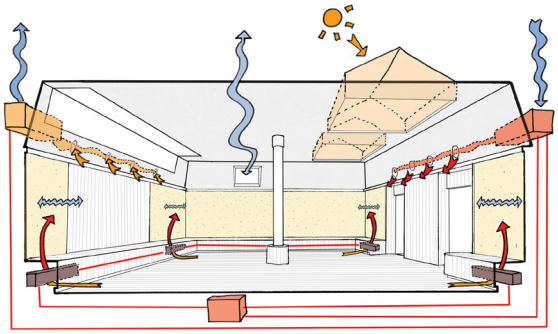
The community feels at home in its new environment



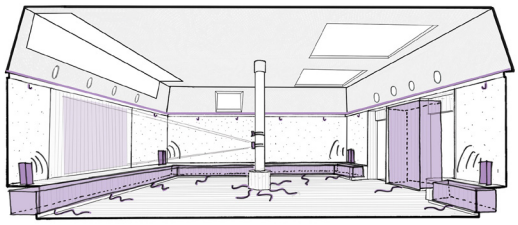
Tectonics



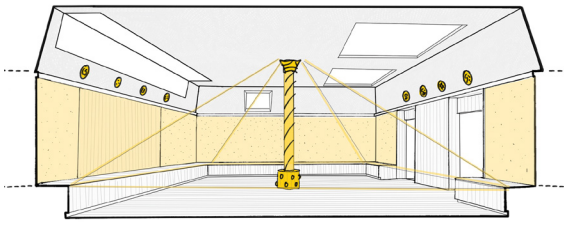
Lighting



Climate



Logistics



Symbolism

Collective process

By means of a participative process the community itself has transformed this former industrial-printing house into their centre. This has created a very special and intimate bond. The limitations and opportunities of this type of process have had an important impact on the design. The architectural solutions had to be adapted to the skills and capacities of the community. The building process consisted of a series of intense workshops with the community. Professional services were employed for specific or complex tasks. This type of process provided good quality solutions while still remaining within the low budget.

The community is a diverse group of people from all ages, interests, incomes, studies, origins and backgrounds. The vision affects and involves not only clients and end users, but also all society. The building process provided an excellent chance to connect the diversity within the community with the neighbourhood since good architecture should be generous, inclusive, and, above all, human. Beyond the strict fulfilment of the programmatic requirements, the design strives to generate activity and stimulate social interaction.

Design workshop

Demolition workshop

Wood assembling workshop

Niche workshop

Hemp wall workshop

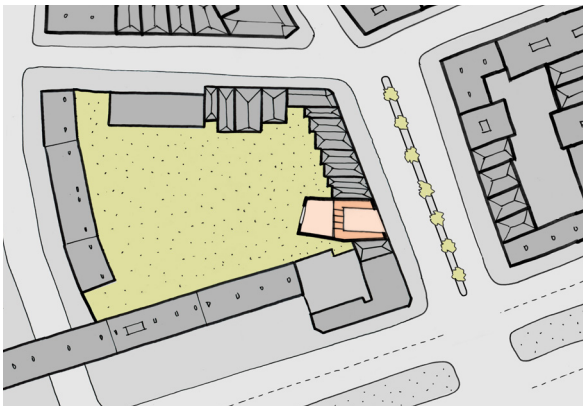
Blue ceiling workshop

A collective work made by a diverse group of people from all ages, interests, incomes, studies, origins and backgrounds

Public ambition

The centre is the first step of a three-phases plan. The total operation ambitions to turn the interior of the block into an active and unique public space. Together with different parties, the Buddhist community will take care of the maintenance of the new garden. The design is currently under development. It will incorporate strategies to reactivate the entire block and to reduce the ecological footprint of the neighbourhood.

The centre will soon undertake an integral façade renovation. The aim is to recover its original qualities in order to restore the street's identity. The renovation will not only provide the opportunity to improve the lighting conditions inside, it will also ensure that the strong identity of the Foyer has a significant presence in the street. Its transparency will guarantee the desired interaction between the Buddhist community and the neighbourhood.



The Center will reactivate the interior of the block

The interior of the block will become a garden for the neighbourhood

The facade renovation will open the Centre to the street, coming next October 2016