

ARCHITECT	<b>B+O ARCHITECTUUR INTERIEUR</b>
CLIENT	<b>FORTOP AUTOMATION &amp; ENERGY CONTROL</b>
LOCATION	<b>ZWARTSLUIS, THE NETHERLANDS</b>
DURATION	<b>NOV 2009–MAY 2012</b>
FLOORSPACE	<b>640 SQM</b>
COST	<b>UNDISCLOSED</b>



# MAN AND MACHINE

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“This building fits the client like a jacket,” says Arnoud Olie, founder of B+O Architectuur Interieur, with a rather Dutch-sounding turn of phrase. But you have to admit, that just about sums up this saw-toothed HQ the practice has created for industrial parts manufacturer forTop in Zwartsluis, a small city in the northern Netherlands. The new-build brick and concrete building functions simultaneously as both an office and a warehouse, with the interior set-up

comprising around 50% offices and meeting rooms, 25% storage and 25% workshop space. It has an explicit and planned simplicity that expresses a snug efficiency; there’s something so pleasing about this, almost like a toytown factory where everything fits perfectly and precisely. The large numbers on the brick facade correspond to the company’s different distribution centres, allowing delivery drivers to easily locate their cargo, drive in and drive out of the wooden garage door; and

*Using simple materials to dramatic effect, this skilfully blended factory and office splits its two functions physically, but not visually*

the workers slot into their working day through the glazed entrances with just as much efficiency.

The striking, jagged roof design that bites into the blue skies above is partly in homage to a 1950s weaving mill created by Dutch architect and designer Gerrit Rietveld, which references the making tradition of the Dutch region. Rietveld is a hero of Olie’s, and the architect explains how the distinctive form had its own economical and practical reasons as well as aesthetic ones.

“The client wanted to build a special office building for a limited budget,” he says. “They didn’t want the building to be the typical ‘square box’ that is very common in this area, and the country. The curved saw-tooth roof gives the building a unique character with minimal expense. It is formed of conjoined modules, each one roughly defining certain functions of each space. The slanted pod aspect of the roof is also something of a pragmatic move, as the



↑ Numbers recessed into the brickwork are for delivery drivers to easily locate their cargo

→ The building's saw-tooth profile was in part inspired by the de Ploeg weaving mill, designed by Gerrit Rietveld in the 1950s



straight parts of the roof are glazed and north facing, allowing daylight into the building while preventing direct sunlight, eliminating the possibility of overheating.”

The materials – brick, concrete and glass – have a raw, robust, oversized and industrial feel and complement the building as well as the company itself, which supplies and develops automation and energy-control technology. Olie says that the whole building has the identity of a machine, or a component of a machine.

The architect worked closely with forTop to observe the way that the company worked in their existing office environment and also how they wanted the team to function in their new base. As a result, the internal layout has been set up with integration as a founding factor, both between the

workers and in the purpose of each area. “The client requested open spaces, so that the employees could easily communicate with one another from all over the company,” says Olie. “They were also very keen to let the workshop space and storage space be as visually important as the office areas, so that there would be no sense of hierarchy.”

Through the glazed entrance doors, visitors enter a central hall space and are immediately met with the vast high ceilings, which give the space a somewhat cathedral-like atmosphere, with the concrete underside of the saw-tooth roof in the raw. In fact, almost all of the materials used have been left in their natural state wherever possible, so as to keep the unity between the industrial and administrative side of things free flowing and undefined by the interior design.

This open entrance hall also accommodates a canteen and kitchen, so it acts as a breakout space for communication and relaxation for all the employees. Through a bank of half-height internal windows over the kitchen counter there is a direct view of the workshop, giving the production side of the business a constant presence, especially when people are making refreshments or holding meetings.

Here, Olie and the client have championed Dutch design with the specification of Piet

↑ The main entrance area is a cathedral-like full-height space

Hein Eek's rough wooden tables, their sheer size encouraging collaborative work as well as sociable lunchtime meet ups.

Eek's design is called Canteen and, like much of his eco-aware designs, it's made from scrap wood, all very much in line with Olie and B+O's sustainable ideals. The decision to have a glazed roof structure that would bring in more natural light, was also put into place as an energy-saving device. The architect explains his sustainable philosophies in the context of Nietzsche's description of the free spirit, as "an authentic and autonomous personality who is not afraid to sail his own course. One who embraces the best in themselves and looks deeper, with the ultimate goal to make the world a better and more humane place, especially thinking ahead of the future generations. I try to inspire both my employees and clients to do this through architecture."



On the left side of the building is the open office space, furnished with minimal white-topped desks set on chunky timber trestle legs. These have been teamed with mismatched, domestic-looking rugs to break up the expanse of concrete floor and add some warmth and texture.

The simplicity is emphasised by utilitarian filing cabinets and industrial-sized white pendant lights hanging overhead as well as exposed ventilation systems – a constant reminder of the wider factory setting in which employees are working.

On the right side there is a door to the storage space, which in turn leads through to the workshop itself. There is also a first floor that houses one open and two closed meeting rooms, for when a little more privacy is needed.

There is definitely something warm and honest about what is, in many places, a raw and rough

↑ Rugs, and a Piet Hein Eek's Scrapwood table and bench, soften the hard-edged concrete

building, both inside and out. Despite its crude makeup, for Top's new headquarters actually feels all the more earnest and mindful because of the way it has been streamlined into what is essential, and in the stripping back of the materials and shapes that have been used to create its form.

There is a lightness and transparency created by the high-ceilinged spaces, internal and external glazing and semi-opaque materials, which give a sense of connection between the employees and the machines that generate their jobs. Any extras have been carefully extracted and the bold beating heart of the business is set in pride of place. ■

↑ Clerestory glazing faces north to reduce overheating, with curtains to screen off ground-floor windows



↑ Exposed ducts and trestle desks echo the wider factory setting