



Returning to former glory

THE FACADE AND ROOF OF THE AMSTEL HOTEL IS CURRENTLY UNDERGOING EXTENSIVE RESTORATION WORK. BURGJ BOUWBEDRIJF, THE FAMILY-RUN BUSINESS OPERATED BY LEIDEN-BASED CONTRACTOR KASPER BURGJ, WAS GIVEN THE HONOUR OF CARRYING OUT THE RESTORATION. THE GOAL WAS TO MINIMISE INCONVENIENCE FOR HOTEL GUESTS.

'Our company was founded in 1932, which is three generations ago,' says Kasper Burgj. 'When I joined the company, we performed a range of construction activities, but eventually you have to follow your passion. In our case, that was restoration. We became a certified and specialised restoration contractor. These days, that's all we do, together with our one hundred employees. Our projects have included Kasteel de Haar in Haarzuilens, the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden, Panorama Mesdag in Scheveningen, De Nieuwe Kerk in Haarlem and Museum Oud Amelisweerd in Utrecht. We won the 2016 Europa Nostra Award for the latter - a coveted EU cultural heritage prize of which we couldn't be prouder. Our next project is the Amstel Hotel. This is the proverbial icing on the cake! What makes the Amstel Hotel so special is its status, class and image. When we tell people we're restoring the hotel, they say: "Oh, the Amstel" It's a real icon. The first thing we did when we won the contract was open a bottle of champagne.'

A BIG CHALLENGE

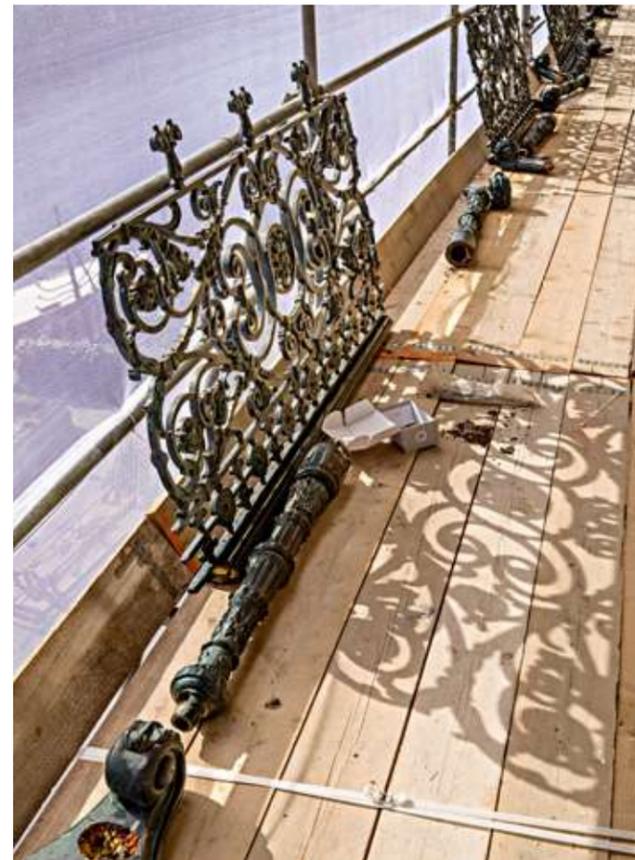
The restoration will take a year to complete. What makes this particular restoration so challenging is that the hotel will remain

open for guests. That means we have to keep any inconvenience to a minimum. We discussed how we could go about doing this while continuing to view the building as an object in its own right. After all, we're here to restore the building and make it beautiful for the next thirty to fifty years. The hotel operates at a high level, so our biggest challenge is figuring out how to match that level. We need to stay on good terms with hotel management, which prioritises its clientele, while continuing to work efficiently and stay within budget. It's extremely important to implement the entire operation in phases. This will prevent us from working on the conservatory and the terraces when guests are outside. Our goal is to draft a plan that hotel management will be happy with. We're erecting the scaffolding near the entrance during the summer months, so guests can continue to use the terrace. Some 35 people will be working on the restoration and they'll all be bringing special equipment with them. There'll be plenty of drilling and hammering going on. We started by doing acoustic tests with demolition hammers, pneumatic drills, chisels and saws. Anita Bos, the hotel director, positioned her employees at strategic locations throughout the building to take noise measurements. After all, they're the ones who will have to explain things when

clients complain about the noise. We eventually came up with a to-do list. Instead of using a demolition hammer, for example, we'll use a drill to keep noise to a minimum. We also found a smaller sawing machine. Together, we discussed all the possibilities that would help us keep the noise to a minimum. The noise tests made Anita feel more comfortable about the restoration, which I'm happy about.' As Kasper Burgj explains the plans, the sheer scale of the restoration becomes clear. The large-scale and small-scale restoration activities will have to be carefully coordinated.

OLD COLOURS

'We'll be restoring the entire facade, the roof and the woodwork. There's a lot to do and we'll be working with experts from around the country. Like Jobse, a roofing company from Middelburg. This company has mastered the craft and is the undisputed leader in its field. Even our initial conversations were inspiring. At this point, we're still determining the type of stone we'll be working with. We also carried out a colour test on the paint layers on the window frames and casements. That was particularly interesting: the building was painted white and dark green, but carefully sanding away the top layers revealed other colours. We now know the building was painted various colours in the past: yellow and brown, black and even a bit of white. This was extremely stressful for the monument conservation authorities, who visited three times to make sure we didn't make a mistake. After all, the exterior colour has a huge impact on the overall atmosphere of the street. After examining several old photos, we noticed that the building was once flanked by lion heads, which are no longer there. These were grainy black-and-white photos taken before the war, so it was hard to see. The roof used to have corner ornaments, but





these have been badly weathered. You have to get really close to even tell it's a lion. It's worth mentioning that the lion heads were carved from wood and then cast in lead, which means we have to restore them with care.

The professionals who will be working on the hotel include zinc experts, lead experts, two sculptors - one specialising in wood and the other in stone - a plasterer, a restoration expert and professional painters, carpenters, masons and re-pointers. A good understanding of the historic building materials is also necessary. The mason, for example, has to know what the mortar joints looked like and what colours were used. We suspect the mortar joints used to be painted with a small brush. If you look under the drip mould, which is rarely exposed to water, you can see traces of ochre paint. That was relatively common in those days.

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

The project kick-off was really special. We organised it together with Van Hoogevest Architecten, all of the sub-contractors, the hotel employees and the hotel's general manager, Anita Bos. It's extremely important to explain at the very start of the

project what everyone will be working on alone and together. We need to understand the stakes and interests involved. We also discussed issues like social media and privacy. If you spot a celebrity at the hotel, you can't post photos on Twitter or peek through the window from the scaffolding. The Amstel Hotel has to be able to ensure the privacy of its guests. Mutual understanding is also important. After all, everything will run more smoothly if we try to understand each other. Good collaboration between us, the contractor and the architect is essential. Without collaboration, things will fall apart. I've never worked with Van Hoogevest Architecten before, but I have a good feeling about it. We understand each other. The same applies to Anita, she's very pragmatic, which is exactly what you want as a contractor. The contract is there for emergencies. It gives us something to fall back on if things go wrong. However, most issues can be resolved without it. Nobody wants to hear things like: "Well, the contract says we're in phase two, so we're going to set up the scaffolding on the deck." That would be terribly inconvenient in the summer months. Our goal is to ensure the highest possible quality. In a sense, we're responsible for the building.

Restoration can be interpreted in two ways. If you spot damage on a listed building, you have to replace it with the same materials, even though you know it will break again at some point. Another method is to determine the cause of the damage, so you can replace it with something else. For example: the lead flashing was hammered into wooden columns. To me, this is not very convenient. The columns are made from pine and if the lead starts to leak, the wood could expand under the wrong weather conditions. We weren't allowed to use a more tropical hardwood, like iroko, because it wasn't authentic. At the same time, you want to prevent leaks and fungi in the complex wooden construction, given that you won't be able to access it again. The solution we came up with was to mount a lead bowl to a fibre pen and then hammer the lead upwards. This gives the wood underneath a chance to dry out in the wind. I think this solution helped us double the building's durability. We've maintained the original craftsmanship and combined the modern with the classic. To me, it's all about the details, it's about applying the knowledge we've gained over the years and pairing it with new knowledge.'

ENJOYING THE JOB

Kasper Burgy knows what he's talking about. His love of the profession is clear in every word. His company in Leiden is one of the few to offer permanent employment and has its own carpentry factory that saws and moulds cornices, rebates and

wooden ornaments according to traditional methods to create the perfect relief and shape. A well-equipped and certified paint department carefully sprays the wood with layers of paint, to allow it plenty of time to absorb.

'I can come up with as many plans as I like, but the professional craftsmen are the ones who have to carry them out with passion,' says Burgy. 'They have to want to create something beautiful. We were on the roof of the Amstel Hotel yesterday in the pouring rain and wind. We were soaking wet and starting to get a little grumpy, but the boys were in a great mood anyway. They're proud and they just keep working. They also wear the right clothes to keep them dry.'

One of our sticking points is that we have to have all of the necessary knowledge in-house. That's unusual in a market that tends to outsource everything. We have our own machines, our own masons and re-pointers and our own carpenters. I want to understand the entire restoration process and I want to have people around me, including my sub-contractors, who share that same mentality. There's nothing wrong with temporary workers, but it's hard to instil in them that same mind-set. They just don't have the industry knowledge. You can't just become a restoration carpenter in a few years' time, it takes ten to fifteen years to build up that kind of knowledge. Our people, our enthusiasm and our expertise is what sets our company apart from the competition.'

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