

New heritage: D/DOCK infuses an iconic 1980s office block with social value

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Working closely with the site's original designer, the creative studio unveils a mixed-use community space within an Amsterdam landmark.



Known for its bold, integrated approach and keen focus on sustainability, studio partner Thomas van Leeuwen describes D/DOCK as a team of 'design incubators'. The Amsterdam-based collective places great value on creating meaningful community through spatial design, and its latest initiative is no different: completing a new blended concept in the Amsterdam-Zuidoost district, the studio has breathed new life into a much-loved city landmark. Zandkasteel, first conceived in 1986 as a vast office building and receiving heritage status in 2017, is now home to a collection of mixed-use professional, residential and hospitality spaces, each bestowed with a welcoming, semi-public character.

Not a 90-degree angle in sight, Zandkasteel is characterised by a free-form configuration and organic silhouettes, a purposeful departure from the uninspiring, angular cubicles typically associated with a conventional 1980s office block. This incorporation of loose, flexible elements was also informed by

D/DOCK's close collaboration with Max van Huut of Alberts & Van Huut Architecture, who originally designed Zandkasteel almost four decades ago. van Huut's firm set the unique condition of avoiding any fixed items to the floors or walls, a decision that not only respects the building's original character, but also serves as a lesson in future-proofing new projects with flexibility and modular elements built-in. This approach, combined with D/DOCK's signature focus on community and sustainability, helped Zandkasteel earn the Geurt Brinkgreve Award for Best Heritage Redevelopment Project in 2023.

The in-house auditorium is an excellent example of the building's dynamic culture: available for office tenants to host meetings or presentations, the space becomes a community cinema by night, while central atriums used for coworking double as music venues for local artists. The abundant natural greenery, already incorporated in the original design by Alberts & Van Huut, was also revisited by Amsterdam-based initiative MOSS (Makers of Sustainable Spaces), introducing new plants that match the colour palette of each specific area. Circular seating modules surround leafy, sprawling trees, helping to create the atmosphere of a serene, airy public park.

As well as core principles of biophilia and soft, undulating shapes, D/DOCK also followed the guiding concept of an 'internal city' during the redevelopment, incorporating spaces inspired by the city's streets, squares and parks. A large corridor on the first-floor acts as the main artery of the building, connecting office and coworking spaces, meeting rooms and hospitality venues as well as inviting residents from the 263 apartments above, for a seamless blend of private and public spaces. Going beyond aesthetics, this internal city concept inspired an overall user-centric approach to the interiors, prioritising functionality, spatial awareness and adaptability wherever possible. This helped the studio navigate the building's vast footprint, infusing human-centric elements in order to balance the imposing architecture with a sense of intimacy and accessibility.