

LIFE CLASS

HANS VAN DER HEIJDEN 'I'd turn Rotterdam into a slightly boring modern city in brick'



LAKERLOPEN PHOTO: STEFAN MÜLLER

■ Which architect have you learnt the most from?

Álvaro Siza was working on his Hague villas in my Mecanoo time. His intuition for historic precedents, his grumpy dismissal of modernity and his beautiful drawing are still valid to me.

■ What "great" architecture leaves you cold?

Practically anything with a steel frame and lightweight cladding.

■ What is your best project?

The recent baby is always the most cute: I am quite happy with our urban renewal project in Lakerloopen, Eindhoven. It forms a habitat of diverse spaces, generous low cost houses with an architecture that is tolerant and imperfect, like the wrinkles that you find in the face of your lover.

■ What part of the design process do you most enjoy?

I most enjoy the period in which you win the project and outline its contents. I am not the type of architect who keeps polishing the design.

■ What is your Achilles' heel?

One's power is also one's weakness. I don't get easily upset about details.

■ Which house would you most like to live in?

I would not mind living in the Victorieplein skyscraper, designed by Arthur Staal in Berlage's Amsterdam South.

■ You can work in any city at any point in history — where and when would you choose?

I would like to have been engaged with the grand consistent urban enterprises of the Novecento movement around Giovanni Muzio in the Milan of the thirties, Auguste Perret's Le Havre of the forties and fifties and Hans Stimmann's Berlin of the nineties.

■ Who is your favourite client?

Bryan Biggs and Charlotte Myhrum of the Bluecoat arts centre. They approach architecture as art and curated as much as commissioned our design.

■ What would be your dream commission?

I would like to have a long-term com-



BIQ's Lakerloopen housing in Eindhoven, The Netherlands.

mitment to a city and work on its renewal with key values like consistency, solidity, humanism and urbanity. I would like to turn Rotterdam into a slightly boring modern city of fine, well proportioned brick buildings.

■ What one piece of legislation would you introduce?

A ban of demolition.

■ What is your favourite architectural book?

Aldo Rossi's *The Architecture of the*

City is one of the key works of the previous century. His rationalist programme has been dismissed too early.

■ What is your favourite novel?

Jean-Paul Sartre's view on modernity in *Nausea*.

■ What are you listening to?

Half of the time it is the vocal work of JS Bach, the other half varies from Nick Drake to Thomas Tallis.

■ Complete the sentence: At heart I am a frustrated...

...contractor. I would like to be more in the core of construction practice.

■ What does your family think of your work?

My father says I have lived up to my skills. My girlfriend enjoys my enthusiasm for work, but not the work itself.

■ Is it getting easier?

All the time. Architecture is a profession you can relax with as soon as you have some grey hairs and when you know more.

Hans van der Heijden is a partner at BIQ Architecten