

**Leiden City Hall:
adding a layer to an already deeply layered building**



The new city foyer

So how do you make a once-modern building modern again? Leiden’s City Hall has been renovated and made more sustainable. Adapted to the new working methods of local government, the City Hall offers the municipality an appropriately rich and welcoming stage – and once again reflects the original allure of this historical monument.

While Leiden’s City Hall has been on Breestraat as an ever-expanding collection of buildings since the 14th century, its most dramatic moment took place rather recently. On a -15°C February night in 1929, the coal heating ovens were working hard and likely

provided the spark for a fire that burned the entire complex to the ground.

Only the monumental facade from 1595 by master builder Lieven de Key was saved. Ironically, this facade was originally built to disguise the ad-hoc buildings behind it – it was literally a facade. Today, it rates as the longest Renaissance facade in the Netherlands. And what arose behind this facade after the fire is what Office Winhov sought to unpack.

‘A very modern building’
‘Our departure point is always to ask:
What is our role as architects in terms



The new extension



View on the new courtyard, from the foyer

of the history of this building?” says Jan Peter Wingender from Office Winhov. “After all, many architects preceded us. So, what exactly can we add to all these layers of history? What can we remove? How can the old and the new co-exist?”

In the case of Leiden City Hall, the future came early as it was rebuilt after the fire. Offered a relatively clean slate as starting point, the commissioned architect C.J. Blaauw set out to design a very coherent building based on the typology of a traditional ‘Beaux Arts’ city hall with two courts.

“It was actually a very modern building for its time and Blaauw’s 1935 design really

became the guiding light for our own design,” says Jan Peter. “With a reinforced concrete construction, it could be clad on both sides: the exterior brick aligned with the surviving 16th-century Renaissance facade on Breestraat, as well as the adjacent old centre.”

Meanwhile, the interior was program-facing that used a rich and varied palette of marble floors and walls, wooden panelling, stucco ceilings and various decorations to give hierarchy to the different spaces. As befitting a democracy and as places where “memories are made”, the public Citizen’s Hall and Wedding Hall were on top and as such the most over-the-top in terms of decoration.



Tulip tree in the new courtyard



Attic with the concrete hull in sight

“And it’s these different layers that we wanted to highlight,” says Jan Peter. “For instance, in the newly installed office spaces in the attic, we exposed the original concrete construction fully – revealing this hidden layer of the building.”

Aligning the old and the new

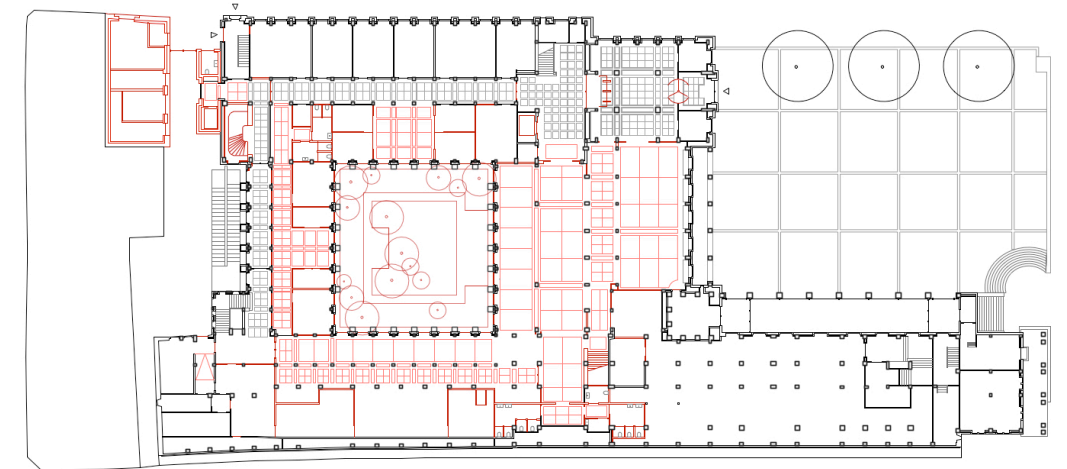
Blaauw never saw his magnum opus completed. He died in 1947. His successor H.T. Zwiers finished the interior and while following a more reserved approach, he also left his own mark – including a remarkable wooden inlay by M.C. Escher.

“When it was our turn to be entrusted the building, our design process was largely informed by Blaauw’s original topology

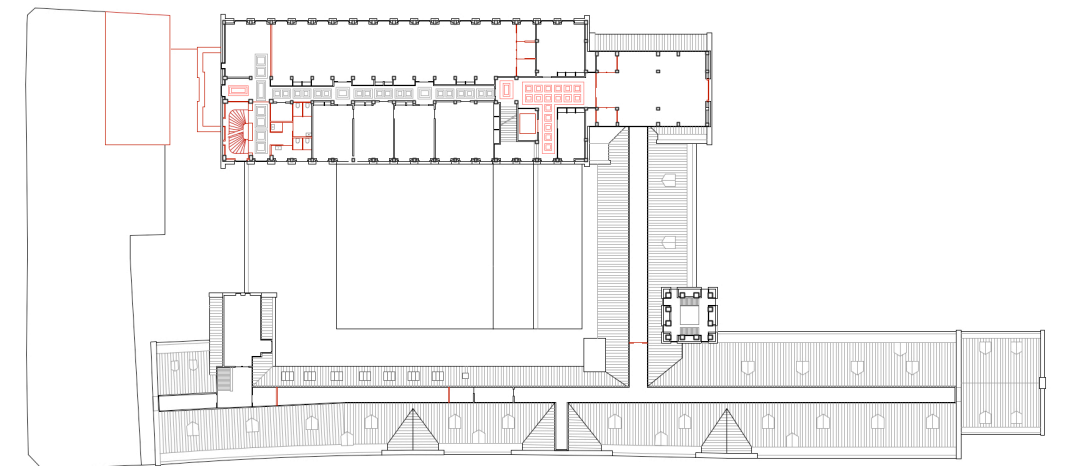
of these complex set of spaces. But we also needed to address how some spaces had grown obsolete and how new spaces were required to deal with modern needs,” says Jan Peter.

“This all required a certain give-and-take and the process required an open attitude. It starts from a level of understanding, and respect for, the existing space. So, in that way your work becomes informed by those who came before you. For us, it was about Blaauw. For Blaauw, it was about the architect of the surviving facade, Lieven de Key.”

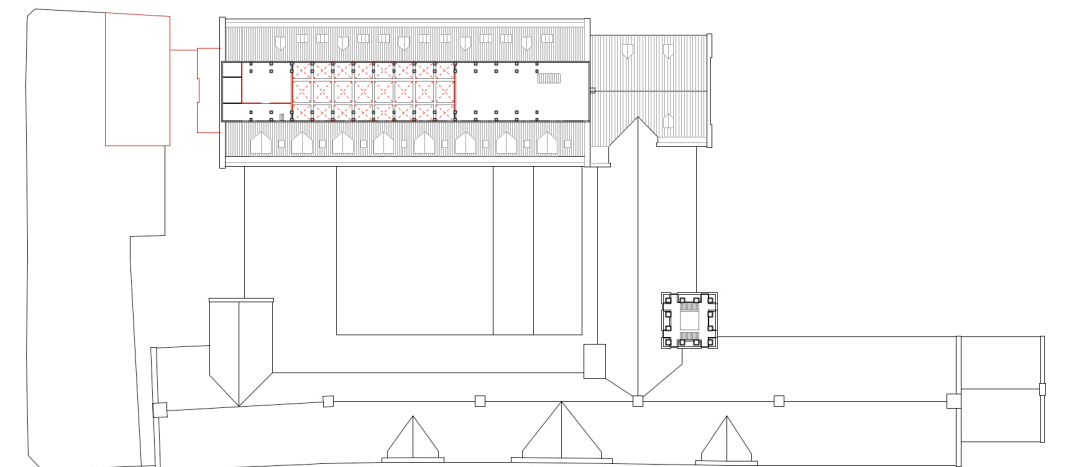
And to create an attractive, comfortable and professional space for municipal employees, the city council and visitors,



Ground floor



Fourth floor



Attic



The Wedding Hall viewed from the Reception Room



An MC Escher in the mayor's room



The Council Chamber

more layers needed to be added. “Beginning with the visible interior layer, we worked with Paul from Studio Linse to create subtle but visible transitions from old to new material,” says Jan Peter. This assimilating approach resulted in the new terrazzo following the original marble patterns, wallpaper reacting to the original panelling, or the new stucco reflecting the proportions of the original natural stone cladding.

Folding in the future – invisibly

In adapting the complex to modern life, the function and functionality of each room had to be rethought – may it be more flexible workplaces, a new public reception in the City Foyer, or new Committee Room and Meeting Centre.

“And yes, we had to confront that contemporary paradox of design: the enormous amount of creativity – and budget – that goes into making the infrastructure ‘disappear’,” says Jan Peter. “It’s that essential layer you don’t see that takes 75% of the work. It took a lot of energy to rejuvenate City Hall and make it more sustainable and comfortable – and this involves everything from Wi-Fi to climate control.”

Citizen-facing grandeur

Blaauw’s original design not only established the building as more of an intrinsic part of the city by using matching brick and natural stone for the exterior cladding. He also cut open the outer courtyard of a traditional two-court structure to literally opened the city hall to the people it was meant to serve. He also made each wing into independent buildings that better fit the proportions of Leiden’s historical centre.



Terrazzo frames at the stairwell



New steel staircase with terrazzo steps



The new vide

The glass roof constructed over the courtyard in the 1990s proved redundant. Now removed, the courtyard has been transformed into a public garden, complete with a spectacularly blooming tulip tree similar to the one Boerhaave once planted in the city's Hortus Botanicus. "With Blaauw's original design, the courtyard was not completely worked out. We made a real garden out of it as a tribute to Leiden's leading past when it comes to Natural History. And as the green heart of the building, it's both a peaceful place in an otherwise busy environment, but it's also a restful view for those inside."

Bring the hall back home

Now the garden, together with the adjoining City Hall Square, forms a direct connection with the city and its rich history – inviting citizens and guests to the administrative heart of the city. "It was an amazing opportunity to bring the stadhuis – this 'city home' – back to its former glory. It's once again a welcoming middle point of the city – of democracy." says Jan-Peter.

"And actually, it was truly a group effort of all involved. Thanks to everyone's commitment, historical awareness and professionalism, we have managed to put this puzzle together – and make the city hall modern again for the coming decades."

The design for the renewed Leiden City Hall was a collaboration between Office Winhov and Studio Linse. The courtyard garden was designed by H+N+S Landscape Architects. Photography: Stefan Müller and René de Wit