

Redesign of the UN North Delegates' Lounge: a careful editing of history.

Louise Schouwenberg, 2013

Text from the book made on the occasion of the opening of the UN North Delegates' Lounge on 25 September 2013 in attendance of Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the UN and Queen Máxima of the Netherlands.

A word of welcome (by Frans Timmermans, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands)

The Netherlands is delighted to have been involved in the revitalization of the UN headquarters. This building could not have existed without the contributions of the Member States. The Netherlands knows this from personal experience, being the host state of the International Court of Justice, one of the six principal UN organs. This year we celebrate the centennial of the Peace Palace, the building in which the Court is housed. The Netherlands is grateful to the world community for the generosity with which it contributed to the establishment, design and construction of the Peace Palace. It remains one of the architectural gems of The Hague.

Days at the UN headquarters can be long. At all times of day, people all over the world need the UN. They ask for peace, for justice, for development. Thousands of delegates from many countries come here every year to help address these requests. The strength of this building is that it contributes to this process. Its architecture and design help establish a basis for cooperation, peace and friendship – something that the Netherlands is keen to promote. To this end we brought together a high-caliber project team that embodies the Dutch flair for design and architecture. Their combined talents have resulted in this central meeting area where delegates work to give the world a better future. Welcome to the new North Delegates' Lounge.

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Introduction

The United Nations Headquarters, located on the east side of Manhattan, was designed by a team of architects, including Le Corbusier, Oscar Niemeyer, Max Abramovitz and Wallace K. Harrison, and built between 1949 and 1952. The complex comprises the General Assembly Building, the Conference Building, the Secretariat Building, and the Dag Hammarskjöld Library (built in 1961). The buildings were renovated between 2009 and 2014 (Capital Master Plan). The North Delegates' Lounge, one of the large spaces in the Conference Building, was redesigned by the Netherlands.

Gesamtkunstwerk

In February 2011 four Dutch teams, consisting of at least one designer, one architect (or interior architect) and one artist, were asked to submit designs for the Lounge, which is used as a meeting place for thousands of policymakers and diplomats from the 192 member states. The designs were assessed by a selection committee headed by the Netherlands' Chief Government Architect. A key criterion was whether the design team took an interdisciplinary approach, in keeping with practices of the original team of architects mentioned above. The aim of the re-design was to transform the North Delegates' Lounge into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that puts the Dutch creative industries in an international spotlight. The winning design was submitted by a team made up of Hella Jongerius (designer), OMA (architect), Irma Boom

(graphic designer), Gabriel Lester (artist) and Louise Schouwenberg (theorist).

A careful editing of history

The redesign of the North Delegates' Lounge grew out of a careful 'editing' of the room's history, the addition of new accents and a keen focus on material details. The Lounge plays a key role in the way the UN works. It is an unofficial space where conversations are informal and unrecorded. While the major decisions are taken elsewhere, it is here that many deals between nations are actually made. Friendships are born, or renewed, and animosities are assuaged. The design team consciously took account of a number of key factors, such as social conventions, functionality, comfort, timelessness and ambience, as well as the question of how to safeguard the delegates' privacy while facilitating encounters. The team's plans also incorporated the original design, furnishings and color palette, and the changes they have undergone since 1952.

In line with this concept – respect for the conventions and history of the lounge – and the conviction that Dutch design has always been embedded in a larger international context, the team proposed:

A tribute to the original design:

- restoring the original architectural space;
- repositioning existing furniture;
- choosing a mix of Dutch and international furniture;
- putting a new perspective on the existing artworks

The addition of new designs:

- new furniture that meets the specific needs of the delegates, such as privacy and mobility;
- curtains, carpet and upholstery with striking colors and material details.

In 1952 the architects succeeded in creating a masterpiece of interior design, which neatly merged their individual visions. Aware of this tradition, the Dutch team developed all its plans as a group. Individual touches can be linked to individual names, whose voices were prominent in the final designs, but until the last moment, all suggestions were open to debate and questioning by all members of the team. The result is a Gesamtkunstwerk that offers both old and new perspectives on 'A Workshop for Peace' (the expression architect Wallace K. Harrison used to describe both the design process of the UN buildings and the global organization itself).

Architectonic alteration: removal of the mezzanine

The main architectonic alteration was undertaken in tribute to the original design of the lounge. In 1979 a mezzanine was added to the space. It created a pocket of intimacy, but at the same time it broke up the vastness of the overall space and compromised the view of the East River, which was the point of the original design. A small but rather important gesture by OMA – the removal of the mezzanine – restores both the monumental character of the original space and the view of the East River.

Redisplaying existing artworks

The south wall is clad with sanded aluminum panels. Originally, various artworks, donated by different countries, covered the walls of the Lounge. These have been re-located and aligned in a gesture of artistic appropriation by visual artist Gabriel Lester. Suspended from the wall,

the artworks are now subject to gravity, much like sculptures. By means of a grid construction, a gap has been created between the works and the south wall, affording viewers a glimpse behind these grand pieces and revealing the hitherto hidden reality of the context from which the artworks originated.

Information desk and coffee bar

Both the bar and the information desk were designed by OMA. They are made out of a translucent layer of resin. The two longitudinal forms are similar in shape and expression and mirror each other, as they are positioned on opposite corners of the lounge.

Entrance area

The west wall, in the entrance area of the North Delegates' Lounge, is composed a grid of MDF panels and a series of screens displaying the UN journal – a design by OMA. The screens consist of e-paper displays (231 small screens), which will show news updates and relevant information (e.g. meeting agendas). The word 'information', in the traditional lettering found elsewhere in the UN building, has been repositioned behind the information desk.

Information Desk chairs: two specimens of an iconic American design have been placed in the entrance area (Charles & Ray Eames, Aluminum Group Side Chair, 1958).

Carpet

The industrially produced grid carpet was specially designed by Hella Jongerius, in close cooperation with the Dutch firm Desso. It is made of wool, in accordance with the sustainable cradle-to-cradle principle, and consists of two shades. The color in the entrance area follows on from that of the carpet in the corridor: a plain dark brown. The color subtly changes in the open area, thanks to an intricate two-tone weave, which combines the dark brown of the entrance area and a more grayish brown shade.

Furniture

One existing design, the Knoll Chair from the fifties, had previously been upholstered with imitation leather. The chair has been re-upholstered with real leather in a hue that recurs in other furniture.

Two classics of Dutch design have been re-upholstered with specially designed duo-tone fabrics in green hues, including the UN lounge chair and the Polder Sofa, designed by Hella Jongerius. The four Polder Sofas are assembled from a special series of green hues which allude to the lushness of the typical Dutch polder landscape.

A special version of a new chair design by Hella Jongerius: the movable UN Lounge Chair, suited to various settings. The chairs are upholstered partly in leather, partly in the specially designed blue Daphne fabric.

A special version of a new table design by Hella Jongerius: the Sphere Table. One of the requirements was a table with desktop computers, allowing delegates to work within the open space. The striking hoods create a private workspace within a public area.

A fabric from the archives of the Dutch textile manufacturer De Ploeg has been re-

interpreted by Hella Jongerius (Daphne, 1962/2013). The new duo-tone fabrics, which have been used for the (re-) upholstery of chairs and sofas, create varieties of hues. The duo-tones not only offer subtle variations in color. Metaphorically, they also refer to the creation of families or networks, in which each individual specimen varies from all the others, while simultaneously contributing to a unified whole.

For the café and side tables an existing design by Joep van Lieshout, a well-known Dutch artist/designer, was chosen (AVL Workbench, 2006). The tables were produced in special sizes and colors, in close cooperation with the Dutch company Lensvelt.

Café chairs: an iconic French design (Jean Prouvé, Fauteuil Direction, 1951/2011) has been re-upholstered with white leather.

Some existing furniture designs have been restored: Hans Wegner, Peacock Chair, 1947; Harrison/Abramovitz, Floor Lamp, 1950s; UN Clock, 1950s.

Curtains

The towering windows of the North Delegates' Lounge call for semitransparent solutions that guarantee the delegates' privacy without obstructing the view. Two types of curtains, with the clear signature of both a graphic designer and a product designer, have been specially created for this location.

Curtains - north side

Graphic designer Irma Boom devised the Knots & Grid Curtain for the north façade of the Lounge. The curtain includes many references, including Dutch maritime history, the grid of New York City and the patterns of the UN buildings. The curtains are connected to the ceiling and floor by stainless steel cables. Handmade fishermen's knots in bright blue link the screens to the cables and create striking accents. The curtains are hung parallel to the slanted windows, reinforcing the tilted effect. When total darkness is needed, a second layer of light-transmitting fabric can be added (special events curtain). When this second layer is used, the Knots & Grid Curtain will be slightly visible.

Curtains - east side

The windows of the east façade are covered by the Knots & Beads Curtain, designed by Hella Jongerius. The curtain consists of knotted yarn (referring to Dutch maritime crafts) and thousands of handcrafted porcelain beads (referring to Dutch ceramic crafts). The beads were produced by the Royal Tichelaar Makkum, the oldest ceramic company in the Netherlands. The beads literally bear the marks of their manufacture, such as traces of handwork, the color of the unglazed clay and evidence of a characteristic glazing process. The project offers a new perspective on locality within a global context, with the curtain literally bringing a piece of the Netherlands to New York.

DESIGNS, DESIGNERS, PRODUCERS:

X	Title	Name designer	Year	Producer
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Architecture (architectural interventions and designs; incorporation of existing artworks)

Removal Mezzanine	OMA	2013	
South Wall	OMA/Gabriel Lester	2013	
Constr. Artworks	OMA/Gabriel Lester	2013	
Info Wall	OMA	2013	Chilin (Taiwan)
Info Desk	OMA	2013	
Coffee&Liquor Bar	OMA	2013	

Seatings

8x	Peacock Chair	Hans Wegner	1947	Re-use
4x	Knoll Chair	Anonymous	1950s	Re-use
20x	Utrecht Chair XL (Italian/Dutch)	Rietveld/Jongerijs	1936/2013	Cassina/ De Ploeg
4x	Polder Sofa XXL (Swiss/Dutch)	Hella Jongerijs	2005/2013	Vitra / De Ploeg
20x	RE-Lounge Chair (Swiss/Dutch)	Hella Jongerijs	2013	Vitra / De Ploeg
83x	Fauteuil Direction (Swiss/Dutch)	Prouvé/Jongerijs	1958/2013	Vitra / De Ploeg
2x	Side Chair	Ray & Charles Eames	1958	Herman Miller (U.S.)

Fabrics

x	Daphne	De Ploeg/Jongerijs	1962/2013	De Ploeg (Dutch)
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Tables (internet, side-, cafe-)

14x	Bubble Desk	Hella Jongerijs	2013	Vitra (Swiss)
24x	AVL Workbench	Joep van Lieshout	2006	Lensvelt (Dutch)
27x	AVL Workbench	Joep van Lieshout	2006	Lensvelt (Dutch)

Lamps, Clock

7x	Floor Lamp	Harrison / Abramovitz	1950s	Re-use
1x	Clock	Anonymous	1950s	Re-use

Carpet

	Grid Carpet	Hella Jongerijs	2013	Desso (Dutch)
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Curtains

	Knots & Grid Curtain	Irma Boom	2013	Knoll (U.S.)
	Special Events Curtain	Irma Boom	2013	Sefar (Swiss)
	Knots & Beads Curtain	Hella Jongerijs	2013	Royal Tichelaar (Dutch)

CREDITS:

Design Team

Hella Jongerius, Designer
Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Architect
Irma Boom, Graphic designer
Gabriel Lester, Artist
Louise Schouwenberg, Theorist

- On behalf of Hella Jongerius: team of Jongeriuslab: Siska Diddens, Arian Brekveld, Edith van Berkel, Claus Wiersma, Iris Toonen and experts of the companies: De Ploeg, Desso, Royal Tichelaar Makkum, Vitra
- On behalf of Rem Koolhaas/OMA: Saskia Simon, Ippolito Pestellini, Mafalda Rangel, Paul Allen, Sarah Moylan, Green van Gogh, Valerie Lechene, Wes Thomas, Boris Tikvarski, Katharina Barunica, Adrienne Lau, and others.
- On behalf of Irma Boom: Irma Boom Office, Knoll, Sefar
- On behalf of Gabriel Lester: Marco Giacomelli (architect)
- On behalf of Louise Schouwenberg: Peter Mason (translation Dutch > English)

Principal

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Project Team:

Ming-Feng Ku, Project Manager
Heleen van der Gugten, Interior Architect
Philippien Noordam, Curator
Ferro Halussy, Project Assistant
Dennis Huntink, Procurement Advisor

Advisory Committee: Iris Thewessen and Charles van Marrelo, Advisors on Architecture and Urban Planning – Studio of the Chief Government Architect

Selection Committee:

Mels Crouwel, Chair of the Selection Committee/Architect, former Chief Government Architect
Aaron Betsky, Director of the Cincinnati Art Museum
Els van Odijk, Director of the Rijksacademie, an international artists' institute in Amsterdam
Bruno Ninaber van Eyben, Designer
Elco Brinkman, Chair of *Bouwend Nederland*

Project management, auxiliary services and coordination of the design team

After the selection of the winning design, the design team was enlarged to include experts from the international firm of consultants and engineers: Royal HaskoningDHV.

On behalf of Royal HaskoningDHV:

Harry Meijer jr, Senior Project Manager
Daniël Schiffelers, Project Manager
Rien Prins, Senior Cost Manager
Theo Simmerman, Senior Structural Engineer
Isolda Strom, LEED AP

Presentation Documents

Texts: Louise Schouwenberg

Graphic Design: Vijfkeerblauw / Ministry of Foreign Affairs