

A m s t e r d a m g e t s a n e w s k y l i n e

Overhoeks project

A new frontier

On the north bank of the IJ, opposite Amsterdam's Central Station, Overhoeks – a new urban area with its own unique identity – is being built. It will eventually have every imaginable facility to live and work. Who were jointly responsible for the creation of Overhoeks and how did they do it?

By Nathalie Driessen, photography: Sjaak Henselmans

Just across the water from Amsterdam's Central Railway Station an entirely new urban quarter is being built. Overhoeks, named for its prominent tower designed by Dutch architect Arthur Staal, was previously used by Royal Dutch Shell, first as an oil depot and later as the location of one of its research centres. Shell's state-of-the-art New Technology Centre (NTC), which is currently under construction, requires 20 ha less land than the

old facility. The surplus land was sold to the Amsterdam municipality, and a consortium of ING Real Estate and Ymere (a housing corporation) was appointed to redevelop the area for residential, commercial, cultural and recreational purposes. A total of 2,500 apartments, 70,000 m² of office space, 35,000 m² of commercial space and 25,000 m² of cultural and other non-commercial space will be realised in the area. As Overhoeks will also boast a waterside park, this requires

high building densities. The area will include high-rise offices and apartments, providing Amsterdam with an entirely new skyline.

Common interest

It was clear from the outset that creating a totally new urban quarter so near the historic city centre was going to be a challenge. Although the site has a lot going for it – proximity to the city centre, waterside location, sunny side of the water, great views



Shared vision

Starting in 2004, Placebrands worked with the Overhoeks brand partners to develop a shared vision for the area. From the various and sometime disparate views held by the partners emerged a vision of a place that is an authentic, lively, waterside quarter of Amsterdam. It combines the convenience of a central location with the space, views, facilities and calm of the best suburbs. It's a gem of a neighbourhood, protected from the noise and confusion of the city by the water where smart, eco-friendly science combines with modern culture to create an eclectic urban mix that's always fresh, always surprising. This vision, together with research among potential residents, investors and visitors to the area, was used as input for the brand strategy. The brand is the promise that when people come into contact with the Overhoeks, they will always find the same, unmistakable character. The brand strategy that was created describes Overhoeks as being different from other parts of Amsterdam due to its unique high-rise skyline and its waterfront park, as having a lively, buzzing atmosphere, and a friendly, creative and stimulating character. A marketing and communications plan was drawn up to guide the brand's implementation starting by the end of 2005. The first visible activities have been publicity and sponsorship (e.g. Sail Amsterdam,

– it is located in an area with a poor reputation. Although north Amsterdam is currently undergoing great changes it still suffers from an image of being dull, drab and deprived. Would Overhoeks, in such a setting manage, to attract the necessary affluent residents, visitors and businesses? The municipal and district governments, Shell Research and the developers were joined by Vesteda (a rental housing company) and the Dutch National Film Museum to form a partnership of interest under guidance from Placebrands, a company that specialises in brand strategy services for cities, regions and countries. This eclectic group of stakeholders realised that they had a common interest in seeing Overhoeks succeed. The aim of the partnership was to position the area as more than just a successful construction project, by creating a new city quarter with its own distinctive character. But the aims also included ensuring that Overhoeks is seen to contribute to the life and appeal of the whole city, and as a first step in establishing north Amsterdam as a valued and integral part of the city.

Strong setting

Seven different parties come together in The Overhoeks team: Overhoeks being an area in the north of Amsterdam, an obvious first choice was Amsterdam Noord urban district, with urban district chairman Rob Post and urban district administrator Kees Diepenveen. Number two is Noordwaarts planning office, the official commissioning body for this project on behalf of the Municipality of Amsterdam and the Amsterdam Noord urban district, headed by director René Grotendorst. Third is Huub Smeets, chairman of the board of Vesteda, and Nico Mol, director of the Vesteda project; they signed an agreement in 2003 to buy 350 non-subsidised rented homes. Shell, represented by site manager Jo Peters, is of course also party to the cooperation agreement with the municipality and ING. The advantage for Shell is that the company stays in Amsterdam and the 100-year-old infrastructure of 40 scattered buildings will be transformed into a 7-hectare New Technology Centre as well. That will bring about a complete cultural change within Shell, but all in a good cause. The Executive Board of the Ymere housing corporation – Wienke Bodewes – is another participant. The Film Museum was already known in 2004 as a user of what was to become the new Film Museum on the IJ. Director Rien Hagen contacted ING Real Estate about the need for new accommodation, for which there was an excellent solution.

Overhoeksfestival and Grachtenfestival), but the plans encompass much more.

Authenticity

The brand strategy influences the urban plan to incorporate restaurant facilities and boathouses. It influences the architecture to combine modern buildings and landscaping with a sense of Amsterdam authenticity. It guides the development programme for the area to include new cultural institutions, a designer hotel and public spaces suited to small music, theatre and film events. It also helps the area's developers pick and choose businesses and institutions that are 'on brand' themselves, ranging from TV production companies to renewable energy entrepreneurs and fashion designers. Residential sales for the first phase of Overhoeks start in early 2007 with buildings designed by internationally renowned architects: Alvaro Siza, Tony Fretton, Banake Van der Hoeven, Coenen & Co, Mecanoo and Geurst & Schulze. These first waterfront apartments will be ready for their occupants by 2009 at the same time as the brand new National Film Museum building, a striking design by Austrian architects Delugan Meissl. Office and commercial space will come online from 2010 onwards, with the project to be completed by 2015.

Unique cooperation

Since developing the brand strategy and the subsequent plans, the Overhoeks Brand partnership continues its unique cooperation. Its development team meets on a monthly basis and its leadership team meets on a quarterly basis to plot the development of the area and to plan their individual and joint actions to manage the Overhoeks brand.

For more information about Overhoeks, please visit www.overhoeks.nl. To order a free book on City Branding, including a mini case study of Overhoeks, visit www.placebrands.net



Building consensus



As Chairman of the Dutch Social and Economic Council (SER) – the main advisory body to the Dutch government and parliament on issues relating to social and economic policy – Alexander Rinnooy Kan is responsible for building consensus between the diverse and often conflicting points of view of the SER's member organisations. As such, he is uniquely qualified to provide his views on the importance of cooperation.

Photography: Sjaak Ramakers

'Cooperation is the vital ingredient of what we're trying to achieve at the SER. Our effectiveness depends upon the ability of huge parts of the Dutch economy [mainly employers' and employees' organisations] to reach unanimity on and commit to policies that will affect the social and economic landscape of the entire country. This is a unique role and during the SER's 56-year existence we have often led the way in vital changes and transformations. We provide advice on a large variety of topics, many of which are controversial, and the only way we can do this is by relying on the ability and willingness of our members to work together and not against each other. The SER's job is to build consensus by persuading very different groups to recognise and accommodate each other's points of view, enabling them to co-exist.

When I was appointed to this post, in August 2006, I noticed that certain peripheral groups - such as environmental groups, the Consumer Association and Senior Citizens - were involved in the SER, but others were not. One of my pet projects has, therefore, been to set up a Youth Panel, to give youth groups a voice in the policy-making process. The Youth Panel is a mirror

of the SER format, with representatives of student unions, entrepreneurs, independent experts, etc. involved in serious discussions on a variety of topics, with the SER's support. This not only gives Dutch youth a voice, but it also helps us to gain genuine insights and a clear perspective on issues with a strong youth-oriented dimension.

Before I joined the SER, I was a Board Member at ING for ten years. During that time, ING Real Estate transformed itself from a predominantly national organisation into a predominantly international one. A large part of ING Real Estate's success is built upon cooperation between the Development, Investment and Finance departments within a single organisation. I still view ING Real Estate with interest and confidence, and am often reminded of the way its departments worked together when driving past buildings that they helped to create. This cooperation has yielded so much already and I'm sure it will continue to yield much more in the future.'

Alexander Rinnooy Kan