



Ingangspoort kantoor- woonhuis te Schaijk

Huis Jan de Jong (Stichting Hendrick de Keyser):

<https://www.hendrickdekeyser.nl/de-huizen/huis-jan-de-jong>

Huis Jan de Jong (Jan de Jong Stichting):

<https://www.jandejongstichting.nl/jandejonghuis.html>

Historische interieurs:

<https://www.historischeinterieursamsterdam.nl/blog/woonhuis-jan-de-jong-in-schajjk-1967-1968/>

uitgebreide informatie over het huis, buiten en binnen (een heel cahier):

<https://www.yumpu.com/nl/document/view/20176950/het-jan-de-jong-huis-de-jan-de-jong-stichting>

(published in *C3* (Special Issue: Transcendental architecture), 2018 )

## **COMING HOME**

**Jaap Dawson**

### **The dog knows which space fits him**

When I was eight, my parents finally let me have a dog. Before I brought him home, I found a large box that the neighbourhood grocery store had discarded. I placed a towel in it and set it on the kitchen floor under a work table. It would be a perfect nest for Rocky, the Boxer puppy!

But Rocky would have none of it. He didn't feel at all at home in the box I had rigged up for him. Instead, he crept into a box not very much larger than he was, a box that had contained a toy truck sent to me as a birthday gift. Rocky chose with his body. He chose without thinking. He knew where he felt at home.

Even at the age of eight I realized I could learn from Rocky. He didn't think – at least not the way humans think. He knew. He trusted his body and what it needed, what he needed.

### **The young architect doesn't know how to design a space that fits him**

After years of building and drawing, of studying and wrestling with styles, I finally became an architect. But what did I know? What did I really know? Did I know what Rocky knew when he was only six weeks old?

No. I had been taught to copy the designs of other contemporary architects. I had been encouraged to value the age I lived in as though it were holy. I had learned to regard and conceive buildings as technical things, as functional arrangements, that we could improve and perfect by thinking about them.

Wasn't there anything more that an architect needed to know?

Rocky provided the answer: knowing without thinking; knowing where he felt at home; knowing the right size, the right design, the space that nourished him.

The space that nourishes us: Isn't that the definition of a space that feeds us in an essential way? A space that brings us home? A space that fits with who we are, who we really are?

Who are we, really?

We can think about it. We can speculate. But we can also experience it. In built spaces we can experience who we really are. In the spaces we build we can experience our built-in nature, our life in both the material and the spiritual world.

Which spaces, which buildings, give us the experience of both material and spiritual worlds? Which spaces, which buildings, bring us home? Which spaces, which buildings fit us?

### **The architect discovers a space that fits him**

One of my absolute favourite spaces comes to mind. I feel utterly at home in it. It's not only my body that feels at home: it's my whole self. The space fits my body and my soul, my physical frame and the inner world beyond my day-to-day consciousness. The space makes me glad to be alive. The space brings me to worship.

The space is the main level of a house in Schaijk, the Netherlands. It is not a church or a mosque or a temple. It is not a building conceived to fit in an inherited spiritual tradition. And that's what makes it ever more timeless than a building built to draw us nearer to a particular god or tradition.

Here is a picture of the main living level:

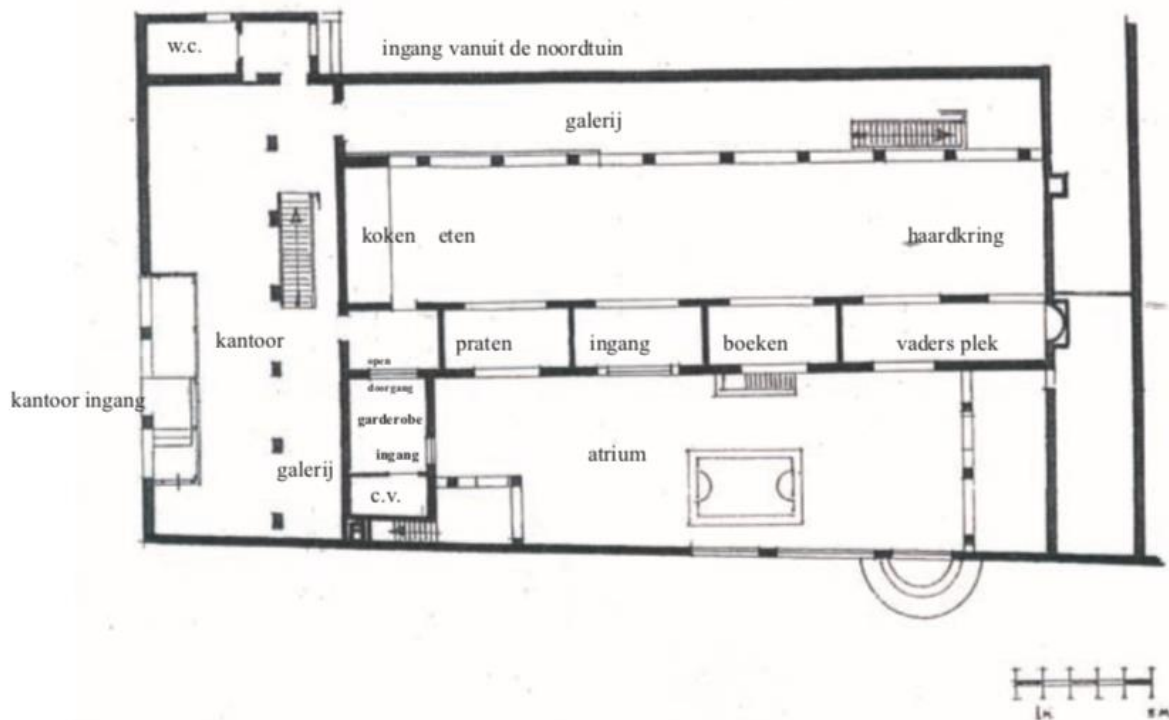


The architect, Jan de Jong, built the house for himself, his wife, and his five children. Actually he built it in order to test a theory of proportion which his mentor, Dom Hans van der Laan, had discovered through years of experiments and analyses of existing buildings. But now I am speaking like an architect who thinks too much. Let me return to the example that Rocky provides. Let me feel how the spaces fit me, what they do with me, where they bring me in terms of my awareness.

### **The space that fits us makes physical centres that reflect our spiritual centres**

Roam with me through the central space. You know immediately that it's the central space because two rows of spaces on either side of it flank it. The space feels both open and protected. It's not endlessly wide like an auditorium or an airport terminal. It's as though the columns on the left side and the wall segments on the right side were alive, were living beings who arranged themselves in a dance. And the goal of the dance was to establish a centre, and to make that centre come alive in our experience.

How do they do it, these dancers? Let's answer the question by standing between them. We'll start with the gallery on the left. If we begin with the perforated wall that the columns form by standing at a modest distance from each other, we see and feel and discover a centre between every two columns. A row of dancers whose dance makes centres, lines the central space of the living level.



But there's also a space between the row of dancing columns and the windowless wall beyond them. What does it feel like to walk back and forth in this space? First the feeling; then the reflection. My feeling is that the space fits my body, which is more or less the same size as the columns, the built dancers. When I ask myself why the gallery space feels so right – not too wide and not too narrow – I notice that the width of the space is a modest measure of a number of column widths. The massive elements that define the space, that truly give birth to the space, make the space alive too. After all, living beings have made the space according to their own measure.

If I pause to reflect on the fit I feel, then I become aware of another centre. The living space is a centre between the row of living columns and the wall on its other side. I don't need to see the thickness of that wall in order to assume it's the same as the thickness of

the columns. The wall works together with the columns to form a spatial building block. Since my body feels at home in it, I can feel without thinking or reflecting the measure of a larger space as long as the spatial building block is present in it. I'm inhabiting a world I can not only feel: I'm inhabiting a world I can know.

A world I can know: isn't that the goal of any building or space that brings us in contact with a world beyond our conventional awareness? Knowing that world means relating to it, deriving psychic energy from it.

But there are more spaces that help me to know, help me to relate, help me to feel at home in this house. To the right of the central space is a series of tiny rooms. I can sit in them alone or across from the architect's wife or daughter. They remind me of side chapels in a timeless basilica. They remind me of an elementary cabin. They remind me of the houses I built as a boy in the woods. How do they do all that?

### **The thickness of the walls allows us to experience the width of a space**

Again I pause from what I feel, what my body knows. I take a look at the measures, at the ingredients in this recipe for an elementary space. And I discover two key elements that I've already discovered earlier in this spatial dance: wall thickness and centres. The thickness of the wall segments is like a living body rather than an abstract plane. And the walls between the tiny rooms form centres: the rooms themselves.

If I just look at the surfaces of the materials that form the whole dance, I miss the complexity of the dance. But if I collect my experience of the spaces, I can reflect on the composition, the choreography. Now I know at a deeper level than bodily feeling alone. Now I'm fully aware of the dance of centres. Columns make a row of centres. Together they form a wall with openings. That wall stands opposite the blind wall, forming a spatial centre between the two. And the whole unit – the walls with clear thickness and the space they bring to life between them – gives measure to the larger central space. We can know that space as well as feel it. And the row of tiny rooms on the other side of the central space gives us centres perpendicular to the main space.

After reflecting, I return to all the spaces. I fit in them. I experience them as living, as alive, whether I walk through the gallery on the left, whether I sit and talk in one of the tiny open rooms on the right, whether I myself dance through the the main central space. Till now I've experienced the spaces from left to right and then back again. But now I discover that the central space gives me a centre in its long length. At one end stands a table with chairs. At the other end the kitchen. In the middle is a centre, unexpectedly (and thankfully) empty, save for a chandelier. The chandelier sheds light on the vertical dimension of the dance.

### **A physical space can bring us in contact with a spiritual space: our home**

Now it's time to reflect on my experience: now it's time to discover why I chose this house as a prime example of a building that puts me in touch with God. Yes, I've suddenly given the deity – my centre – a name. And the reason is simple. Regardless of the stories and rituals we inherit, and in addition to the dreams we receive, we all revolve psychically around a centre. That centre may be the heart of a sand painting. It

may be the middle of a star. It may be the point where the arms of a cross intersect. It may be a fountain. It may be an intricate tile design. It may be the belly of a being we don't meet on earth but in the images we inherit. The essential point, the clear truth, is that the centre is our own heart. Psychologically it's the unconscious heart that gives rise to our ego. But our ego doesn't really live, doesn't really feel at home, if it forgets the heart that gave birth to it.

I almost forgot: I'm not a Boxer dog. Neither am I just a man who feels at home in a particular house. I'm also an architect. And that means I've learned a lesson. In what I design, I don't want to look at forms or styles alone. In fact, I don't want to look. I want to feel. I want to feel what massive materials can do to create spaces that come alive for me and for other people. I want – no, I feel the need in myself – to design centres that put me in touch with my own centre, with the centre of life itself. I want to design buildings that invite me to come home.