

UNILEVER COMES TO RCD

Unilever is one of the biggest iconic multinationals, and it's part of the fabric of Rotterdam. Now, after 15 years, the company has traded its riverside offices in deBrug for the hustle and bustle of Rotterdam Central District. Architecture firm Mecanoo gets the credit for transforming the 6 top floors of its new base in a 60s-era building on Hofplein into a miniature Unilever City.

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JOANNY LIJBERS



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ARNE LIJBERS

AT THE HEART OF THE ACTION IN ROTTERDAM

RCD welcomed the big-league player this summer, when Unilever closed a chapter of its history at the Nassaakade. From its new home at Hofplein, the company turns a fresh face to the future. Conveniently closer to consumers, shops and restaurants – where Unilever-products are sold and used - here the company also benefits from better city and regional public transport possibilities, better suiting both the companies health and sustainability targets. Unilever HR director Joanny Lijbers and her brother Arne Lijbers, associate partner at Mecanoo, tackled the interior transformation. 'The collaboration was excellent and it's great to now be at the heart of all the action in Rotterdam', enthuses Joanny. 'The fact that we were able to pivot smoothly with the municipality of Rotterdam ensured a fast and flexible transition.' The building's identity as a whole revolves around several key themes, explains

Arne: 'connectivity via open spaces, integrating agile working through a variety of workspace settings, lots of planting, promoting health, and showcasing the Unilever brands. That's all tied in with the "Unilever City" concept, centring on links with the city.'

ACTIVITY-BASED WORKING

Dating from the 1960s, the building on Hofplein has a vertical orientation in which all the levels link together. Mecanoo's design draws on all the concrete features to create a horizontal street, in a layout made to maximise multifunctionality and flexibility. Arne states, 'We wanted to take the Unilever supermarket feel of the old location, frame and showcase that. A modular cabinet system has been used to carve out departments and functional spaces and creates a consistent identity and unity throughout the building. There are plenty of co-working spaces as well as

different rooms to make phone calls undisturbed, work quietly or just take a break. And of course, everything has now been set up in a totally Covid-proof way.'

OFFICE HOTSPOTS

The building also boasts two hotspots in the form of the 'Lipton Bar', where staff can grab a drink with colleagues or clients, and 'The Townhall', meant as a gathering-space for knowledge-sharing. There are also Brand Hubs celebrating Unilever's products and articulating its distinct identities. Joanny explains, 'The beauty and personal care department has a small hair salon, the home care department has a washing machine and dishwasher for product tests, and on the top floor are professional kitchens for our foods business.. So, the office is equipped with everything we need, located in a great part of the city amidst creative agencies, start ups and other large companies. It's a wonderful space to be.'