

INTERVIEWS
MECANOO / HOFMANN / PREGO

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EDUCATION EDITION



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4-9 INTERVIEW MECANOO

"Different people bring different kinds of expertise into the designing process. We, the architects, are the ones who know about space – or are supposed to – and about designing it. But we are not experts in how teachers want to teach, nor are we experts in the kind of space in which the users feel at ease. So it can help a lot when you talk to teachers and students or children."



10-15 INTERVIEW HOFMANN

"Children don't like neutrality. They want surroundings with a warm ambiance," according to Francine Houben and Ellen van der Wal of Mecanoo. Pupils and teachers must feel at home when at school, even when it's a large school community. "Architecture should touch all the senses."



16-21 INTERVIEW PREGO

Prego's outlook on education is still manifest in today's schools, even new ones. His aim is to break through the old constraints to some extent, and make everything a bit more flexible and adaptable. They do so by responding to the urban surroundings, because that is where you will find the source of revitalization.



22-35 PROJECTS

The interiors of several projects involving the use of floors and furniture surfacing from Forbo Flooring are included as a form of inspiration. The projects are located in various parts of the world and show the many possibilities provided by Forbo's products.



MECANOO:

'OUR SCHOOLS
COMMUNICATE THE
LOVE AND CARE
WITH WHICH
WE MADE THEM.
THAT REALLY WORKS.'





Amsterdam University College, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

“Children don’t like neutrality. They want surroundings with a warm ambiance,” according to Francine Houben and Ellen van der Wal of Mecanoo. Pupils and teachers must feel at home when at school, even when it’s a large school community. “Architecture should touch all the senses.”

Few architecture firms have such comprehensive experience in educational architecture as the Dutch office Mecanoo. Over the course of thirty years, Mecanoo has designed practically every type of school that the word can suggest: primary schools, schools for blind and autistic children, schools for children with diverse handicaps, secondary vocational schools and university buildings and libraries. Like their other work, their designs for the educational sector have frequently been honoured with prizes. The Fontys School of Sport Studies in Eindhoven, for example, recently won them the WorldArchitecture Festival Award for Schools. At their office in Delft, the founder and director of Mecanoo, Francine Houben, and one of the firm’s partners, Ellen van der Wal who specializes in educational projects, shed light on their successful approach. They started the interview by explaining how they deal with their clients.

Van der Wal: “Our educational buildings differ considerably from one to another because the target group is different in each case, as is the school’s vision on education. That is where our discussion with the client begins. Drawing up a schedule of requirements often helps them in defining that vision. But it can happen that the client is not yet sure how to formulate their educational concept. In such cases we join them in seeking it out.”

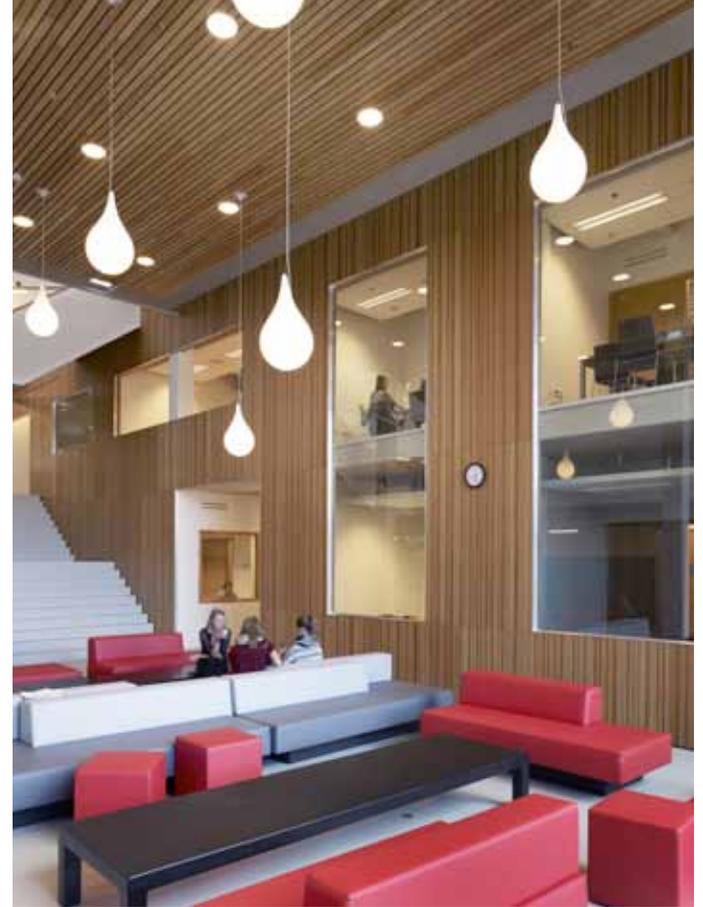
Houben: “At Amsterdam University College, for example, the educational model is organized into a number of ‘rings’. The innermost ring is knowledge transfer, the next one is collaboration, the one after that is ‘meeting’ or personal interaction, and the outermost one is the relation to the outside world. Our job is to translate that concept into architecture.”

- Education was long focussed on the transmission of knowledge. The school was a sausage factory, as it were. But the outlook has changed considerably in recent times. How does this affect Mecanoo?

Houben: “A good point, the current spirit of the times is a positive one. There was a period dominated by an enormous scaling-up process, and educational institutes were regarded as exam factories. That position is now being abandoned. School buildings can be more domestic in character. Teachers as well as pupils have to feel ‘at home’ while in the school, even when it is one of the larger school communities. There is also competition between schools. A school has to stand out; it has to do its best to attract pupils as well as teachers. In my view schools have become much better in recent years because of these changes.”

Van der Wal: “Just like the New Workstyle in the office world, education has its ‘new learning styles’. These are no longer solely concerned with transmitting knowledge.

Amsterdam University College,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands



Important aims now include meeting and inspiring one another, and developing social skills like collaboration and debating. This means educational environments have to be activity-related. The Sterren College secondary school for vocational education in Haarlem is a good example of this in practice. The traditional classrooms have more or less vanished, and instead there are 'learning contexts'. You can lay your hands on the car you are learning to repair, or you stand in the middle of the vegetable garden. Architecture has become thoroughly adapted to tightly interwoven doing and learning.¹

Houben: "Local residents can also benefit from the school. The school has a hairdressing salon and a restaurant run by students. This helps motivate the students and gets them involved socially. It is particularly relevant for VMBO schools, which combine vocational training with normal secondary subjects, because the pupils are a vulnerable category."

- Isn't it strange that school students are increasingly treated as consumers of education, and consumer satisfaction is paramount?

Van der Wal: "I see nothing at all wrong with that. The pupil or student can be at the centre of things as far as I am concerned. What is more, I see them as central to our designs. They after all are meant to benefit from education. Of course, the children aren't the client – the client is the school, with its educational vision."

- Your project discussion is with the school board of management. But the users are the pupils, teachers and other staff. Can that lead to conflicts?

Houben: "Rarely. In the end, the school managers are equally concerned that the children can successfully learn and that the staff can do their work properly. Educational visions are inclined to change, so we always try to build in a capacity for change. We try to create spaces that are inherently flexible, for example. But neutrality must never become insipid."

Van der Wal: "Sometimes we do play an intermediary role. We can do so because of our great experience with educational buildings. The schedule of requirements for KIEM

Education with Care, a school in Dordrecht for children with special needs, specified two gyms. That turned out to be wholly impractical. So we proposed replacing one of the gyms with a sheltered outdoor space. Now the school had an excellent place where these vulnerable children can play in springtime and in autumn. In that instance, we succeeded in bridging the gap between the children and the school board."

- How do you react when a school board wants an iconic design, something that will make a striking impression?

Houben: "It's important to us to design a building which has character. I think that all our buildings do have that, even in cases where the building needs to have a relatively quiet feel. Iconicity has gained something of a negative connotation; I associate it with extravagant forms like those of Zaha Hadid. But should a project like our School of Sport Studies, for instance, be considered an icon? Everyone is proud of the building, among other reasons because it has such an inviting atmosphere. But I don't care whether or not you call it iconic. Don't forget that the clients who opt for Mecanoo know in advance that we aim to deliver quality within the typically limited Dutch budget."

Van der Wal: "The brief for Fontys was, in effect, to build an iconic building. We concentrated first and foremost on how the sports academy would function. We wanted the building to be a sociable, friendly one. The solution we came up with was to raise all the sports halls to first floor level, except one sunken to the ground floor in the middle of the building. That proved to be the biggest expense. But the tower of the climbing gym does turn out to function as a kind of landmark."

- Should a school be maximally connected to the surrounding district? Or does Mecanoo prefer to design the school as an enclave?

Van der Wal: "That depends on the school. But it's clear that primary schools, at least, are increasingly bound up with the residential surroundings. They are gaining new functions like day care, after school care for children in need of remedial Dutch language teaching, postschool care

and adult education. In this respect the school becomes increasingly important to the neighbourhood. It's the primary place where neighbours meet, like the church used to be."

Houben: "We designed a large school complex in The Hague. It consisted of two adjacent schools, a Montessori school and a Protestant Christian school. The school buildings aren't used outside daytime hours, so we situated the playground on the outside. As a result it functions as an open playground for local children, in a neighbourhood which has little else to offer in that respect."

- Is the notion of "open or closed" relevant to Mecanoo's educational architecture in other respects too?

Houben: "That notion is important in every school project. On one hand you want to feel protected, while on the other you want to feel connected to the outside world. It plays a part both in the scheduled requirements and in the architecture. Classrooms used to have high ceilings and high-placed windows so that the children wouldn't be distracted. That is no longer acceptable, but the notion of open and closed is still an issue."

Van der Wal: "We are currently designing a school for children with autism. We have placed the school rooms as far back from the site boundary as possible, so the children won't be overstimulated by what is going on in the street outside. For KIEM Education with Care, on the other hand, we consciously avoided doing the same. It caters for children with all kinds of handicaps, ranging from chronic illnesses to learning difficulties. The educational vision of the school governors holds that these children must be prepared for life in a society rich in stimuli. In other words, set-back school rooms were undesirable. But this school too has variations in the degree of exposure, because not all the children cope with it equally well."

- Are there certain principles that Mecanoo always applies to the way their schools are spatially organized?

Houben: "Here too, it's the educational vision that prevails. But a clear structure is essential. The building interior mustn't be chaotic, because otherwise the children will get confused."

Van der Wal: "In the case of hospitals, people speak of a 'healing environment'. That means above all stress reduction, and way finding is one of its most important ingredients. Daylight and outside views, for example, contribute to easier way finding. This is no different for schools; you have to figure out how to design a learning environment in the same way."

- What do you think of the school building as the 'third educator', alongside the teacher and the students' or children's peer group?



Sterren College secondary vocational education, Haarlem, The Netherlands



Van der Wal: "You can support teaching with good architecture. You can also challenge children to take care of their school. In the case of Amsterdam University College, we asked the client if we could use wood for the study locales. 'Of course,' they replied, 'our students aren't going to carve graffiti into the wood.' By making the building a little less robust, we let the school interior play a specific part in the students' education."

Houben: "Our schools communicate the love and care with which we made them. That really works. I myself was a pupil at the Maartens College in Haren, where we were surrounded by trees and meadows. Out of the window, you could see a foal being born. You never forget things like that. Children learn to use their senses by the time they reach about five years old, and the architect must respond to that receptiveness; to things like the experience of the changing seasons and the excitement of riding a bicycle in the schoolyard for the first time. We don't make a fuss about it, but we deliberately take experiences like that into account. Architecture should touch all the senses."

- You mean it shouldn't be too minimalist?

Houben: "I rarely go for minimalism, and certainly never for children. Children don't like neutrality. As an architect, you can enjoy the aesthetic of bare concrete, but nobody appreciates it in a school; neither the children nor the parents and teachers. Children want an environment that radiates a certain warmth. We also want the teaching staff to feel inspired by the building. They have to enjoy working there; and they are much more important to the children than the building is."

Van der Wal: "Something we do aim for is a tangible sustainability. That can be seen as part of the education. We might resort to exposed concrete or other hard materials when they are part of an energy-saving system. In that situation we would add acoustic ceilings and wood-clad walls, because they contribute to a sense of comfort. We always aim to establish good balance."

Houben: "What I sincerely hope is that the children and teachers will come to love our school buildings."

FONTYS SCHOOL OF SPORT STUDIES, EINDHOVEN

The first thing that strikes you about the Fontys School of Sport Studies is the transparency of the ground floor. The building is constructed in black brick except for the glazed plinth, which is not what you expect of a building consisting largely of sports halls. For various functional reasons, the latter have to be opaque. So it was a smart move on the part of the Dutch architecture office Mecanoo to raise most of the sports halls to first floor level. Now the purpose of this educational institute is not only indicated by the athletic figures silhouetted on the facade, but by the explicitly showcased activities of the students and teaching staff: "here is a place where study and sporting prowess go hand in hand," the building proclaims all around. At daytime the school is united with its surroundings through its transparent skin; at night, when the sports halls are in use by the co-owner, the Municipality of Eindhoven, the level of social control is enhanced in the surroundings, a very quiet park consisting only of sports facilities. Anyone walking past or lurking in the vicinity of the building is immediately visible.

The prize-winning design is compact and sculptural, but also testifies to a certain restraint. The climbing gym projects above the main volume, and has a large window through which practising climbers can be seen clinging to the wall. Wherever possible, an effort has been made to give equal transparency to the interior. The smaller rooms have windows that look out onto the sports halls. So staff

attending a meeting, or students working together on a project, need only turn their heads to be reminded that sporting skills are what this building is all about. With astonishing daring, Mecanoo has sunk a transparent sports hall into the heart of the building. Whatever you are doing – walking around its outside to reach another hall, sitting on one of the benches with your friends or taking lunch in the cafeteria – there is continual visual contact with fellow students playing basketball or some other indoor sport. This intimate interaction between wholly different functions has an energizing, exciting effect. It is almost impossible to ignore it and it is hard to suppress the urge to run after a ball yourself. The line pattern on the floor is dynamic, bearing references to the markings on the sports hall floors; this too works as a cue to participate in vigorous activities.

An exciting aspect of the Fontys School of Sports Studies is that it is one of the first educational buildings to be entirely adapted to the latest didactic methods. The number of lecture rooms has been minimized. Throughout the building there are niches and rooms with computers, tables and seats where students can study privately or discuss projects. The building is so thoroughly imbued with this open, flexible model that not even the staff have their own offices; a workstation is wherever someone has a task to do at a given moment, or wherever someone puts down their laptop.





Fontys School of Sport Studies, Eindhoven, The Netherlands



HOFMANN:

**'EVERY SCHOOL HAS
A UNIQUE SPIRIT.
I TRY TO FIND AND
EMPHASIZE THAT
SPIRIT.'**

Photo: ChungVu, 030DesignStudio

The Taka Tuka Kindergarten in Berlin Spandau has an architectural concept based on the Lemonade Tree from the stories of Pippi Longstocking. The architect Susanne Hofmann and a group of architecture students developed this narrative together with children from the kindergarten. 'It's a kind of *Wunschvorstellung*, an imaginary world the children would like or desire. They love the story of the Lemonade Tree because it appeals to their imagination in many ways.'



Kindergarten Taka Tuka Land, Berlin, Germany
Photo: Jan Bitter

User participation takes a central place in the design process of Berlin-based architect Susanne Hofmann. For kindergartens and schools, this means among other things collaborating closely with children. But she casts her net wider than that. In a series of live projects called *die Baupiloten* ("Building Pilots"), she invites architecture students from the Technical University of Berlin to participate in her collaborative design process. She finds the input of ideas that are quite unlike her own enriching for the resulting work. Not that she is narrow-minded about her architecture: "Of course I am not totally free of preconceived ideas," she said in an interview at her office in Berlin, "but I don't believe in the one *veritas* of architecture. If there is any *veritas* at all, it is that you have to get to know the community that will use that building."

- Can you explain why you place so much emphasis on participation? Many architects would be a bit suspicious about it, because they do not think that users have enough architectural knowledge or understanding to participate productively.
"They are absolutely right. The function of the workshops isn't to design the interior spaces together with the users. Different people bring different kinds of expertise into the designing process. We, the architects, are the ones who know about space – or are supposed to – and about

designing it. But we are not experts in how teachers want to teach, nor are we experts in the kind of space in which the users feel at ease. So it can help a lot when you talk to teachers and students or children, and hold workshops together with them. The purpose is to understand their ideas of a building, especially regarding the character and the atmosphere of the spaces. For instance, we can learn whether they prefer a rugged environment or a cosy one."

- There are many users of a school building, including the pupils, the teachers, the administration and the school board. Each of them may have a different view of what kind of atmosphere of the interior needs. How do you deal with these differences?

"We have to work quite abstractly. It's very important not to ask people outright what their preferences are. If you do you will get a list of wishes that you can never satisfy. A more successful strategy is to work out the atmospheric qualities together with them. Normally we try to talk to all the different categories of user at the same meeting. That helps us find a common ground, the 'socially robust knowledge' of the what we call 'Building Family', all the people involved in our collaborative design process."

- So when you talk with them, what exactly are you looking for as a designer? Can you be more specific?
"I try to understand the programme of the spaces. When we worked with the Erika Mann Primary School here in



Kindergarten Taka Tuka Land, Berlin, Germany
Photos: Jan Bitter

Berlin, for example, it was important to the teachers that the hallways could be used by the children for working or just for hanging around, for communicating informally. After all, I have to know how they would like to use the school. That is where it all starts.'

"The Erika Mann School was our first project, completed about twelve years ago. They approached us because the children wanted the school to be more colourful. At first I wasn't really interested. I hadn't tried this kind of participation process before, but I wanted to have a project to work on with my students, but just making a school more colourful is not exactly a suitable project for students studying for a master degree. Then I met the school head, and she had some interesting things to tell me. She wanted to get the children involved in what the school would look like, although she wasn't really sure what would come of it and whether there would be enough money. Since it was my job to teach students, I took the opportunity to turn it into a university project in which the students worked with the children. This was the start of 'die Baupiloten', a series of workshops I held with a changing group of students from the Technical University in which they collaborate with me on my projects. Unfortunately the workshops are ending soon, because they don't fit in with the current university programme."

- What form did the participation take?

"The school had children from twenty-five different immigrant minorities, so we asked the children to draw pictures of their homeland. The school head considered it vital for these cultures to get together and have a positive exchange. The haptic element was also important, because the children's command of the German language was often very poor, so they needed other ways of communicating.

Unfortunately, the little exercise of drawing pictures of their homeland didn't work out very well. The children drew things like their football field or the little room they lived in. To them, their real homeland was in Berlin. So instead we started making collages. At the university, I tried out the same technique with my students. It was a good way for them to loosen up, and to get away from preconceived ideas about space. The collages worked in everybody's favour in the design process of the Erika Mann School. It gave the children a means to express what kind of surrounding they wanted, and for the students it was a way to stimulate unconventional thinking."

- What did you yourself learn from "die Baupiloten"?

"The best thing about working with the students is that they are not like me. Mature architects worry about the budget and all the rules and restrictions. We tend to exclude ideas from the outset in the interest of efficiency. But the students don't. They sometimes come up with what at first seem like absurd ideas, so you think 'oh no, that is going to cost far too much'. But I try to listen to them and give them the space to develop their ideas, and finally we find ways of working them out within the budget."

- You have often introduced stories into your designs.

There's a dragon for the Erika Mann School, the Lemonade Tree for the Taka Tuka Kindergarten and the Dream Tree for the Dream Tree Kindergarten. What is the function of these stories in the design process?

"It is a narrative we developed with the children. That narrative becomes an ingredient of our architectural concept, one that we didn't have before. The narrative can be considered as a *Wunschvorstellung*, the representation of a wish, an imagined world they would like or desire. After



the initial workshops, we have feedback workshops. The *Wunschvorstellung* plays an important part in every phase leading up to the last one, the construction phase.”

- What can go wrong in this process?

“The danger, especially with complex projects, is that some people don’t trust this way of designing, and that there are changes in the people you talk to. It becomes really difficult if they are not part of the Building Family from the very beginning – if you are not part of the story we have already written together. They might well think that what we are doing is crazy!”

- New users will have to live with the stories of their predecessors. Isn’t that a problem?

“Not in our experience. At the Erika Mann Primary School, new children coming in every year identify with the story and give their own interpretation to it. That has happened at the other schools too. The Taka Tuka Kindergarten was finished nearly seven years ago. The story we developed there, together with the children, was based on Pippi Longstocking’s Lemonade Tree. Here in Germany, children use the word *limonade* for all kinds of brightly coloured sweet drinks. We did some experiments, and observed how the children and teachers reacted. The children loved this story. The Lemonade Tree appeals to their imagination

in many ways. Later the kindergarten continued changing their interior on the same visual theme, for example when putting up new shelves. As an architect I could get upset about that, but you can’t expect them never to change anything. The kindergarten is accepting more and more children, and now there is even a waiting list. Maybe it sounds stupid, but we put a lot of love into that project. My experience is that every school is different. Individual children and teachers come and go, but the school remains a community with a distinct atmosphere and identity. Every school has a unique spirit. I want to find and emphasize that spirit.”

The reactions of Susanne Hofmann’s architectural colleagues to her radical approach are mixed. She first came into contact with the approach during her education at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, which encourage an experimental outlook. But some people at the university of Berlin consider it outrageous.

“Most of my fellow architects don’t take it seriously. I have even had a few insulting comments, such as that the result is merely decorative. Obviously I don’t agree with them. Through this architecture we dramatically change the atmosphere of the spaces.”



Erika Mann Primary School II, Berlin, Germany
Photos: Jan Bitter



KINDERGARTEN LICHTENBERGWEG

Rainbow and volcanic landscapes lie at the basis of the design for kindergarten Lichtenbergweg in Leipzig. For this first, entirely by Susanne Hofmann Architekten* designed building, participation of the pupils was also guiding. Together with her colleagues Hofmann observed that the kids showed, in their drawings, a remarkable preference for rainbow gardens and volcanic landscapes. Subsequently the architects asked them to build models from diverse material of the kindergarten's material boxes. After this model-making, the kids told them vividly about their imagined worlds. The identified atmospheric and spatial qualities triggered the design.

Later in the design process the architects communicated with the children through models, photomontages and stories. They did not discuss concrete problems with them, they were interested in their imagination and concerns about their surroundings. Their slogan was: form follows kids'fiction. At the same time the architects integrated the outcome of a specially developed planning game with the parties involved in decision-making: the city of Leipzig, the youth welfare office, the kindergarten's operator, head and teacher. The game was a tool to establish priorities regarding pedagogical, programmatic and building requirements, but also served to generate their ideas of spatial atmospheric qualities.

To maintain the park-like atmosphere of the site was another intention of the design, partly inspired by observing the children playing outside. The kindergarten has been carefully placed between the mature trees to create a distinctive entrance and frame pleasant views from the inside into the courtyards. Each of the courtyards has a different character, sometimes opening up to the outside, sometimes conveying a comforting and sheltering atmosphere. The volume of the building, its colours and the

mirrors mounted in the facade, create an integrated and simultaneously distinctive presence amidst the trees. By using a timber frame construction and load-bearing walls adjacent to each other, each volume has got a different character. This is further expressed by different colors and a playful variation of window sizes.

Although the design is colorful and intriguing, stimulating curiosity of the children was not the paramount concern of the architects. But it seems logical that the building does make children curiously exploring it. The windows are designed to match their scale. They offer views of the internal spaces through to the outside, and therefore establishing a relation with the surrounding trees. They are installed at a low height, so that their sills turn into benches. Roof lights provide orientation by opening up views – in the single-story volume directly to the outside and in the other areas through the upper floors and to the sky. On the upper floors, the windows provide close views directly into the treetops.

Some of the skylights are designed to refract the rays of the sun, creating a play of changing light. This idea has been developed further by using pivoting reflective sun louvers that encourage the children to explore and experiment with the effects. On the upper floors, the windows provide close views at the treetops. Some of the skylights are designed to refract the rays of the sun, creating an interesting play of changing light inside the building. This idea has been developed further using pivoting reflective sun louvers, that encourage the children to explore and experiment with different lighting effects. The colors generate an atmosphere of comfort and protection, but also encouraging exploration.

* Since the beginning of 2014 Susanne Hofmann Architekten is called "die Baupiloten".



- What can be learned from designing for children?
"Spaces have to be differentiated. Some children are shy and need their own protective surroundings. Others are extroverted and need a different kind of space: some of the young children need to burn off energy and run around all the time. Others like to sit at a table and learn. Some children learn best while moving, and others like to study while lying down. It is amazing how different their ways of learning can be. In the Erika Mann Primary School we made an abstract 'cave' where two children can sit together and read. We also designed *der Hochsitz*, a raised seat where children can enjoy an view over the whole space. Of course you can't make different furniture for each child, but you can offer them more possibilities than just one. The building that houses the Erika Mann School was built back in the days of the German Empire when the pedagogic system was totally different from today. Children were drilled to

act as soldiers, workers, civil servants and so on. Today we want to make them capable of thinking for themselves."

- What can architects learn from working with children in the designing process?

"The most important thing is how to communicate with children. But the same applies to communicating with adults. When we started making collages, the children told us about their imaginary worlds in a way that made us feel what they were like. They were able to communicate an atmospheric quality. When children tell a story they do so in a way that goes with their age, but adults have stories to tell us too. What I learned was how the children's or adults' story telling helps us to tune into the conditions of architecture better. I learned to talk more about activities than about the kind of spaces needed. So maybe this way of designing helps the architect to develop more appropriate spaces."



Kita Lichtenbergweg, Leipzig, Germany
Photos: Jan Bitter

**PREGO
(BP ARCHITECTURES):**

**'WE WANT
TO MAKE
CHILDREN
EAGER
TO GO TO
SCHOOL'**





La Maison de la Petite Enfance - Epinay Sous Sénart (2009)
Photo: Luc Boegly - BP Architectures

The smaller children are, the more you can stimulate them by using soft materials and special colours, according to the Parisian architect Ignacio Prego (BP Architectures). As they grow older, you need to make their surroundings more neutral. Prego endeavours to make the rigid French educational system more pliant and more open through his architecture, and as far as possible to boost the social function of the school.

Curled up like a snail shell, the crèche on Rue Picard nestles among the buildings at the foot of Montmartre. With its playfully sloping roofs and appealing colours, it stands out amid this low-income multicultural neighbourhood. Here is a place to escape from the hardness of life, the architecture seems to say. The design is typical of the approach of the Paris office BP Architectures, whose designs for schools and crèches always engage in an enticing dialogue with the urban context.

The founding partners of BP Architectures, Jean Bocabeille and Ignacio Prego, have now parted ways but the educational designs still fall under their joint responsibility, Prego explains. He points out that they are not specialized in building schools, nor have they drawn up a set of principles for them. "But there is of course a basic premise: when you design for children, you have to respect a certain proportion of scale, a certain ergonomics. You have to make allowance for comfort, lighting and acoustics. These aspects are always involved when we build for children. It means allowing for the everyday life of a child in a school peer group. When many children are together, there will always be a lot of noise, whether in the classroom, the canteen or the playground. With good acoustics, children observably

attend better to the lessons and concentrate better. The decibel level in a room influences how people behave towards one another. They speak more loudly or softly, and may walk faster or slower: noise has a tangible effect.

- As an architect, what is the first question you ask when you speak to your client?

Usually it is quite impossible to discuss things with a client at the outset. French educational projects always start with a public call for tenders, and each participating architecture office receives the same specifications. Discussions cannot take place until the tender has been accepted. But by then there is little leeway to modify the design. Despite this handicap, our aim is to add more value to the project and to encourage the development of French education. Historically, France has had a tightly organized, centralized educational system. Compulsory education for all French children was introduced in the 19th century. Jules Ferry, the minister of education at the time, was one of the founders of the present French school system. His outlook on education is still manifest in today's schools, even new ones. Our aim is to break through the old constraints to some extent, and make everything a bit more flexible and adaptable. We do so by responding to the urban surroundings, because that is where you will find the source of revitalization.



La Maison de la Petite Enfance - Epinay Sous Sénart (2009)
Photos: Luc Boegly, BP Architectures

- Do you mean that the change does not come from within, through the way space is organized, but from outside, from the urban context?

Yes, you could put it like that. What we did in Courbevoie is an interesting example. In the first instance, the requirement was for an extension, a single building serving two neighbouring schools. A link was required between the two schools. We decided to make something that was rather airy, with more space and openness to the outside, so that the schools could blend with the surroundings. At the same time, we wanted to achieve a contemporary result, a design of today. The whole effect had to be lively and harmonious. So we took the risk of going beyond the specifications. We proposed building not one but two volumes, one extension for each school. These would still have the same general construction, and would thus refer to each other. This way we gave the entirety a new dynamic. By building two blocks, we created an open space which made contact possible between different generations and among parents mutually. In this way we have placed much greater emphasis on the social role of the school. Our thinking was that the Paris region, in particular, is in the grip of a demographic revolution. The population of some arrondissements is now largely from outside France. The conventional picture of the white schoolboy with his satchel is a thing of the past.

- In your view, then, is an important function of the school to bring people together?

It isn't just our idea; everyone agrees about it. The school is the child's access route to the collective lifestyle, to the French community. The French integration model is very different to its Anglo-Saxon counterpart. In the UK, and in the Netherlands as well, the ideal is much more one of separate communities who live alongside one another. In France, a school is the place where everyone integrates, regardless of religion. But it isn't easy to create the desired

social cohesion. We have tensions here which are aggravated by the present economic crisis. That makes the social function of the school, as a place where people get to know one another and learn common values, all the more crucial. As architects we don't have all that much elbow room to actively support these processes. But we do what we can.

- I am struck by how your school and crèche designs stand out visually from the surrounding neighbourhood, in an almost emblematic way.

We want to make children eager to go to school. We try to give them a light, optimistic school – a place where they can meet other children. Schools are sometimes rather dull and depressing. They can be institutes where children are forced to attend, where mind and body are drilled, where they are trained like performing ponies. This atmosphere is still present in the French school system. You only have to look at the classroom furniture. The tables and chairs are always positioned in a certain way. It is a cultural constant, which is very difficult to change. The Ministry of Education has purchased a stock of school furniture intended to last twenty years. Parents, too, often place a brake on development. They think that their child must go to a school which looks like the one they themselves attended as children. Experiments with other educational systems have taken place, but not much has come of them yet. There is no differentiation between the different kinds of space that are needed for modern teaching, for example to allow children to work in smaller groups or to work separately on computers. This is a consequence of the specification, in which the exact measurements of each classroom are detailed. These dimensions are once again a reflection of the centrally established pedagogical model. As architects, we have more room for creativity in designing the facades and volumes.

- It is sometimes said that there are "three educa-





Deux écoles elementaires, Courbevoie, France
Photo: Kozloxiski

tors”: the teacher, the peer group of children and the building. The last is entirely a matter of space, light, colour and tactility. Do you endorse this view of the function of school architecture?

Describing the architecture as the third educator is putting it a bit too strongly. The pedagogy depends primarily on the teacher and the child. But the architecture can provide a comfortable learning environment, which makes teaching and educating easier. An architect can stimulate the children’s curiosity, put them at ease and help them concentrate well. It is done by among other things the choice of materials and the ergonomic design, for example by making rounded corners which improve the acoustics.

- I can picture two models. One is where the rooms are made as quiet and neutral as possible. The other is where the room stimulates the child in all kinds of ways – it keeps the child’s senses busy with tactile surfaces, light and colour.

I think there has to be a mix of those two approaches which varies according to the age of the children. The younger they are, the more you can stimulate them by using soft materials and special colours. The older they get, the more neutral the surroundings need to be. Higher education is best done in neutral surroundings.

- What strikes me most about the work of BP Architectures is the way the schools and crèches all relate to the urban context. On the one hand the buildings shrug off the surroundings and offer pro-

tection to the children. On the other they enter into a clear dialogue with the surroundings.

Yes, that is the in many cases the main idea. The crèche on Rue Pierre Picard, for instance, is in a rather strange location. It is overshadowed, tucked in between tall buildings. The problem was to design a building which was necessarily a stranger in those surroundings due to its scale. That’s why we adopted the snail-shell shape. It’s colourful, and it has something temporary or ephemeral about it, a bit like a circus tent. We also chose an unusual solution for the entrance. You have to go deep inside before you can enter the school itself, instead of coming straight in from the street. The result is that you practically circle round the building. It has two floors, which meant we were able to elevate part of the playground and make it larger and lighter.

- Are the pitched roofs an allusion to the way children usually draw houses?

Certainly, they are. We wanted the architecture to have a domestic scale, so that school feels to the children like a house. The view of pitched roofs is very familiar in Paris. The 18th Arrondissement lies a bit higher than the surrounding area, so you can look down on the roofs of the rest of the city. That’s also why we used zinc, because it’s a material widely used for roofing in Paris. At first we thought of building the design in timber, with wooden joists. Wood has a pleasant smell and is calming. It also suggests that the building is like a toy. Unfortunately we were unable to do



Picard Nursery, Paris, France
Photos: Courtesy, BP Architectures



that. The funding available to us wasn't sufficient to allow a timber construction.

- The connections which your projects develop with the surroundings also seems to have an implicit pedagogical element. The school in Rue des Grands Moulins nestles in the inner angle of the multifunctional project. But strikingly it also provides some glimpses of the outside world. I suppose it is meant to remind the children now and then of the city where they live.

That is correct. We see the school as a relatively protective environment, which gives the children a chance to be away from their families for a while. After all, home life is not always ideal. At school, the child is relieved from family pressures. But the school also educates children to become citizens, and to know about the larger context around them. We want to make the children aware of that through our architecture.

SCHOOL AND NURSERY IN M9-C PROJECT, PARIS

There were two challenges in designing the M9-C project: having to mix four different uses on a complicated plot, and addressing the issues of density and shaping the city on the edge of Paris's 13th arrondissement. It was impossible to spread the four projects side by side over the whole plot. By superimposing them, the designers created a new "upper" city landscape, above the railway tracks leading to Gare d'Austerlitz, connected to the ground-level lower city along Rue Chevaleret by a lift for pedestrians.

The project's distinct urban outline, the varying styles of façade and the strict structure imposed by the immediate vicinity of the railway tracks make this a unique building. The combination of architecture and civil engineering conceal its complexity, so allowing the variety of public and private space and the attention to detail to shine forth, as well as creating an element of surprise. The M9-C plot contains a nine-class school complex with two staff flats, a three-level theatre, 66 social housing units and an underground car park. Seen from Avenue de France, the building seems closed off, wrapped in a uniform cloak of chocolate-colored brick that glitters in the sunlight. But from Rue des Grands Moulins its complexity and variety are dazzlingly apparent. The theatre's stone facing contrasts with the brick and metal of the other parts of the building.

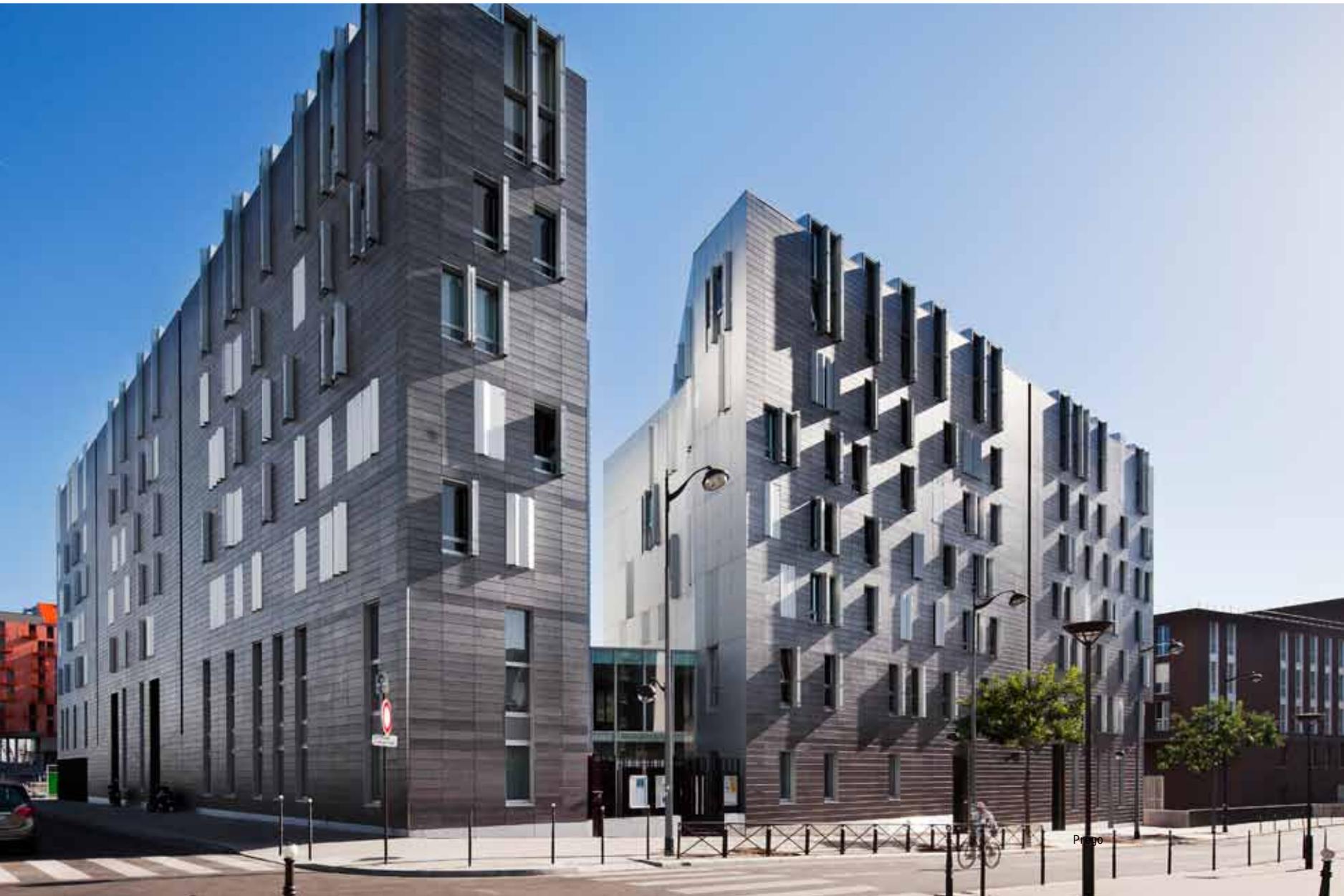
The school seeks refuge, as it were, within the complex. Although partly protected by a hedge of apartments, it opens up to the urban context at the rear where the school playground is situated. On this side, the flats are designed as a series of stepped volumes with canopies which shield the residents from the commotion of the playground. Besides also protecting the pupils from any objects that might fall from the flats above, the sculptural canopies shelter the edges of the playground from the weather. The fragmentation of the canopies helps maintain a light and lively impression. The playground is separated into two sections – primary and nursery – by wooden panels alternating with giant flowerpots. It has a delta shape which points towards the south of Paris, and culminates in a curtain of vegetation that will gradually colonize the wall separating the schoolyard from the street.

The classrooms are oriented towards the playground and bathe in light. Green and orange are the dominant colors in the corridors. Wooden panels line the walls. Although the children are shielded from the city while inside, a view of the surrounding streets and buildings suddenly opens here and there, as though to make the children aware of the outside world they must enter one day.



M9-C Building, Paris, France

Photos: Laure Vasconi - Luc Boegly, BP Architectures



PROJECTS

Should you like to see more of these Forbo Flooring projects visit our website at www.archidea.com

ELIM CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

Location Botany Downs, New Zealand

Flooring material 2500 m² Flotex Cord, Flotex Montana

Photos: Alanah Paterson



Flotex Cord 520017



Flotex Montana 296003



Flotex Cord 520006



Flotex Montana 296044



Flotex Cord 520018



Flotex Cord 520011



CENTRO UNIVERSITÁRIO DA FEI

Location São Bernardo do Campo, SP, Brazil

Architects Paulo Sophia

Flooring material 5121 m² Marmoleum Real, 566 m² Marmoleum Sport

Photos: Joel Dasso



Marmoleum Real 3055



Marmoleum Real 3136



Marmoleum Real 3139



COLÉGIO STOCKLER

Location São Paulo, SP, Brazil

Architects Paulo Sophia

Flooring material 756 m² Marmoleum Real

Photo: Joel Dasso



Marmoleum Real 3136



Marmoleum Real 3222



HONG KONG ACADEMY – SAI KUNG PRIMARY SCHOOL

Location Sai Kung, New Territories, Hong Kong SAR

Architects Collaborate Limited

General contractor Leighton Asia & IBI

Flooring contractor Infinity Finishes Limited

Flooring material 2380 m² Eternal Digital Print and 60 m² Marmoleum Walton Cirrus

Photos: Pocky Chan - Infinity Finishes Limited



Walton Cirrus 3362





GYMBOREE CHINA Early Childhood Education Center

Location Shanghai Wujiaochang, China

Interior & floor designer Cogitoimage International Co., Ltd.

Flooring material 400 m² Marmoleum Striato

Photos: Jessie Yan



Marmoleum Striato 5225



MEDATECA LIBRARY

Location **Meda, Italy**

Architects **Alterstudio Partners & Arch. Maugeri**

General contractor **Municipality of Meda, Italy**

Flooring material **900 m² Walton Cirrus**

Photos: Alterstudio Partners



Walton Cirrus 3354



Walton Cirrus 3355



CENTRO D'INFANZIA Z.I.P. NURSERY SCHOOL

Location **Padua, Italy**

Architects **arch. Luisa Fontana -FONTANAtelier**

Flooring contractor **Euganea Pavimenti s.r.l.**

Flooring material **1.000 m² Marmoleum Fresco**

Photos: FONTANAtelier



Marmoleum Fresco 3846



OBS LATERNA MAGICA

Location Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Architect Jeanne Dekkers Architectuur, Helga Snel

Flooring material Marmoleum Vivace and Marmoleum Real

Photos: Bas Beentjes



Marmoleum Vivace 3411



Marmoleum Real 3136



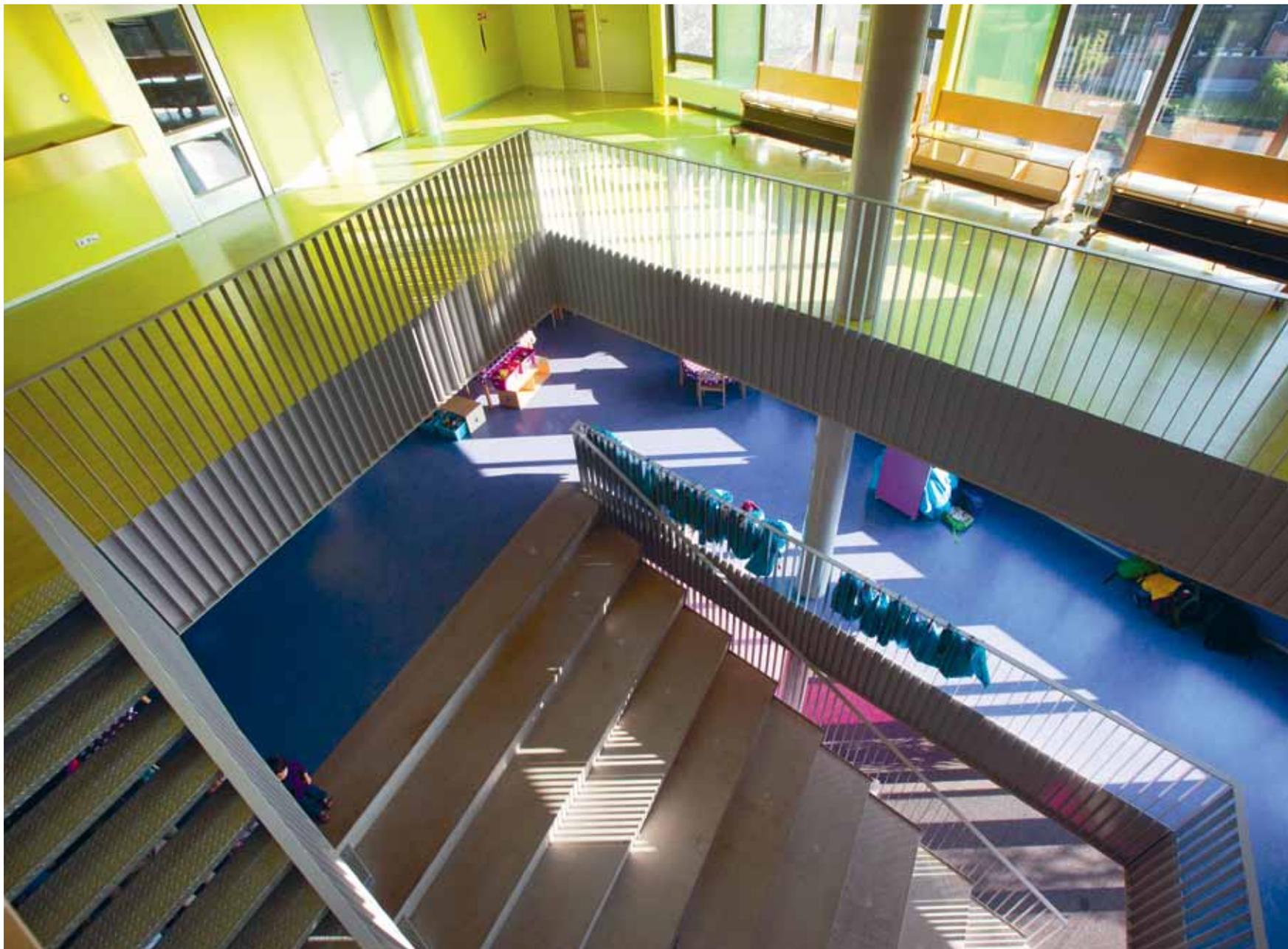
Marmoleum Real 3224



Marmoleum Real 3221



Marmoleum Real 3231



ALSOP HIGH SCHOOL

Location **Liverpool, UK**

Architects **Martin Shutt, 2020 Liverpool**

Flooring material **590 m² Sarlon, Marmoleum Real**

Photos: TBC



Sarlon Canyon medium grey 432209



Marmoleum Real 3220



CROXTETH PRIMARY SCHOOL

Location **Liverpool, UK**

Architects **Martin Shutt, 2020 Liverpool**

Flooring material **1516 m² Surestep, 263 m² Tessera, 89 m² Coral Duo**

Photo: Charles Coleman



Tessera Teviot 127



Tessera Teviot 107



Tessera Teviot 133



This project won the Highly Commended Prize in the UK 2012/2013 Fly Forbo competition.



SOCIAL- OG SUNDHEDSSKOLEN

Location **Herning, Denmark**

Architects **Aarstidernes Arkitekter A/S**

Flooring material **1000 m² Furniture linoleum**

Photos: Maibritt Høj Clausen



Furniture linoleum charcoal 4166

Constructing Architect **Bent Veller Hansen**.
"We wanted a robust environment. And then we had a desire to contribute to a good acoustics. We considered several materials, but chose furniture linoleum".



ARCHIDEA

HELSINKI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY – KAISA-TALO

Location Helsinki, Finland

Architects Anttinen Oiva Arkkitehdit Oy

Flooring contractor Lahden lattia- ja seinäpäällyste Oy

Flooring material 10700 m² Linoleum Unexpected Nature

Photos: Andreas Janett



Unexpected Nature 3565



INTERDISCIPLINARY COMPLEX OF UNIVERSITY OF RZESZÓW

Location **Rzeszów, podkarpackie province, Poland**

Architects **Edward Lach, Jan Matkowski**

General contractor **Skanska SA**

Flooring material **2500 m² Marmoleum Real**

Photos: Bartosz Makowski



Marmoleum Real 3126



Marmoleum Real 3205



Marmoleum Real 3146



SZKOŁA PODSTAWOWA

Location **Książenice, Poland**

Architects **PALK architekci, Piotr Hardecki (główny projektant), Marta Czarnomska-Siecke, Krzysztof Łaniewski-WoŃk, Łukasz Stępnik**

General contractor **Dorbud S.A**

Flooring material **3000 m² Marmoleum Real**

Photos: Bartek Makowski



Marmoleum Real 3858



Marmoleum Real 3224



Marmoleum Real 3125



Marmoleum Real 3205



Marmoleum Real 3131



Marmoleum Real 3126

RIGA TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning

Location **Riga, Latvia**
Architects **SIA Valeinis un Stepe**
General contractor **RBS SKALS**
Flooring material **5042 m² Marmoleum, 35 m² Nuway, 105 m² Bulletin Board**
Photos: Vilnis Zilberts



Marmoleum 3871

LATVIAN ACADEMY OF CULTURE, THEATER AND AUDIOVISUAL ART DEPARTMENT

Location **Riga, Latvia**
Architects **Renāte Truševska, SIA Arhitektu birojs Krasts**
General contractor **SIA Re & Re**
Flooring material **Allura 330 m², Marmoleum 120 m²**
Photos: Vilnis Zilberts



Allura s62416



This project got the first prize – Riga’s architecture of the year Award 2013 – for the valuable input in Riga architecture, especially for the highlighting of wooden architecture.

KINDERGARTEN TO RIGA'S EZERMALAS SECONDARY SCHOOL

Location Riga, Latvia
 Architects Anna Vasiljeva, Rigas Domes ipasuma departaments
 Flooring material 830 m² Eternal Palette
 Photos: Vilnis Zilberts



Eternal Palette 40352

KINDERGARTEN TO RIGA SECONDARY SCHOOL NR 95

Location Riga, Latvia
 Architects Anna Vasiljeva, Rigas Domes ipasuma departaments
 Flooring material 400 m² Sarlon Sparkling
 Photo: Vilnis Zilberts



Sarlon Sparkling 43224



Sarlon Sparkling 43223

CREATING BETTER ENVIRONMENTS

MEDIZINISCHE LESEHALLE, MUNCHEN

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

Location **München, Germany**

Architects **Markus Schmitt, Staatliches Bauamt München 2**

General contractor **Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst**

Flooring material **1300 m² Linoleum Walton Uni at the floor and on the tables**

Photos: Sebastian Arlt



Walton Uni 169



Creating better environments begins with caring for the environment. In this section Forbo Flooring is presenting unique projects which feature better indoor environments.



AN ALL-ROUND SUCCESS

RENOVATION OF THE MEDICAL READING ROOM, MUNICH

One hundred years after its construction by architect Emanuel von Seidl as an art dealership known as "Brakls Kunsthaus," the Medical Reading Room on Beethovenplatz has been completely renovated and is once again in use by students at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität. Now a listed building, it was considered the most beautiful art dealership in Germany, architecturally and spatially, when it was built.

The art dealership was one of Munich's first buildings to be built using fair-faced concrete. The façade was designed in light grey roughcast cement and the interiors designed in unobtrusive colors. Light monochrome linoleum flooring and fabric coverings on the walls of the showrooms, in black, beige and dark red, offered a consistent background for the artworks. Interior doors and passageways were in mahogany veneer, with window frames were glazed to match. The window sashes were finished in white to provide contrast. The goal of the renovation was to integrate historical references to past use and materials, and to interpret these in a contemporary way. Original elements were to be retained and new ones shown as contemporary supplements; any elements now missing were not to be reconstructed. The floor covering used in the reading rooms was a light beige linoleum that can also be found on the U-shaped tables. Their edges and inner surfaces were finished in walnut veneer. This provided a reference to the natural wood edging used in the original design. At the same time, the tables seamlessly merge with the floor to become part of the space rather than dominate it. This is also meant to serve as an allusion to the former use as a gallery consisting primarily of unfur-



nished rooms. "A very important detail in the execution of the table finishes was to ensure that the linoleum was not bordered in trim but was instead miter-cut to meet the pedestal. The transition from the horizontal to the vertical linoleum surface was mitered as well. Achieving the effect of flooring and table as an uninterrupted whole was only possible through this exact detailing," Markus Schmitt, an architect with the State Construction Authority in Munich, points out. To achieve a continuum between the table and floor finishes, the linoleum used on the reading tables was not Desktop brand furniture linoleum but Walton Uni flooring instead.

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