

# A factory becomes an airy home

AMSTERDAM

## Design adds an atrium to brighten up interiors of Amsterdam residence

BY NICK AMIES

When Janneke Heerkens and Sven Pinck started looking for a building in the historic Prinsengracht neighborhood of Amsterdam to renovate into a home, their search ended with a former factory building that once housed the printing press for the Workers' Free Press newspaper.

Built as a free-standing structure with a courtyard, the four-level building had been surrounded by new construction over the years. "The building is in the middle of a tightly built block, which completely cuts it off from the bustle of life in the city outside," said Mr. Pinck, 40, director of the Dutch human resources company Hollandse Peper.

They bought the dilapidated building for €825,000, now \$1.1 million, in August 2008. And then they sought out the architects Ad Bogerman and Thomas Dill.

"The building had four floors, which were connected via ladders and trapdoors," Mr. Bogerman said. "It had low ceilings and small windows, which let in very little light. Our idea was to create an open, three-story-high atrium in the heart of the building, which would open up the house and flood the interior with light."

But the task was more daunting than the couple had envisioned. In this neighborhood, the facade could not be changed because of historic preservation codes. But the crumbling interior came close to requiring a gut renovation.

"Some of the walls were just held up by plaster and the sacks of rubbish stacked against them," said Ms. Heerkens, 38, a manager of the Hendrikje Museum of Bags and Purses in Amsterdam. "At times when we were clearing everything out, I began to wonder what we'd gotten ourselves into."

The effect of the €175,000 conversion, a striking clash of old and new, could not fully be appreciated until the couple moved in December 2009. "We've taken this old printing works and written new chapters in its history," Mr. Pinck said. "It's also become part of our story as a family."

Outside the building, bell-ringing bicycles and hordes of tourists noisily wander the historic canal streets. But inside, an air of serenity seems to pervade the cathedral-like space. The architects, utilizing the former factory's open plan interior, industrial beams, heavy-duty wooden floor and exposed red brick walls, carved out floors and staircases and rooms where none had existed.

The entrance is on the ground floor

through a pair of bright-red industrial doors. Directly ahead, a staircase of varnished honey pine from one of Amsterdam's oldest timber importers, Van der Stad, seems to offer a tantalizing promise of natural light around a corner.

To the left of the stairs in the foyer, a pine structure made from the same wood rises up two levels, providing a storage and boiler room on the ground floor and a bathroom and second utility room upstairs.

The foyer also has a plain wooden door leading down two concrete steps to Mr. Pinck's office. It is an austere room with bare white walls and ceramic floor tiles, furnished with a brown leather

### The house has "become part of our story as a family."

couch, a coffee table and a wooden desk.

Up the pine staircase is the heart of the house, a large rectangular kitchen-and-dining-room space. The long oak dining table is positioned directly under a central atrium carved out of the middle of the building's top two floors. Light comes into the room from a skylight at the top of the house and a double-height window.

Another flight up, the atrium is flanked on one side by a living room featuring the building's original pine floor boards and on the other side by Ms.

Heerkens's work space. In addition to the standard office desk and bookshelves, there is an old upright piano and toys belonging to the couple's daughter, Ella, 2.

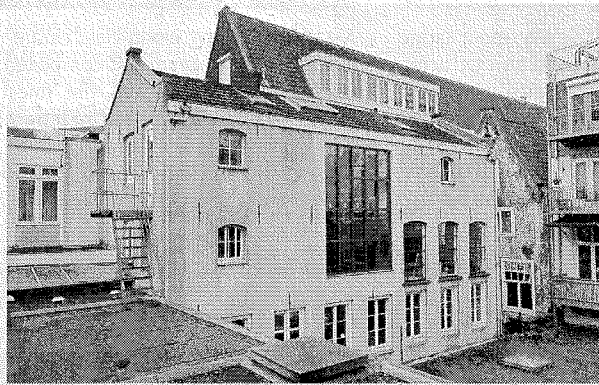
"One of the things we love most about the house is the connection between the spaces," Mr. Pinck said. "The atrium allows us to have contact with the life going on in the house wherever we are."

A flight of steel steps leads to the house's top floor, which has a bedroom and bath on each side of the atrium. To cross the open space there is a bridge, lined with sturdy steel cables as a safety feature.

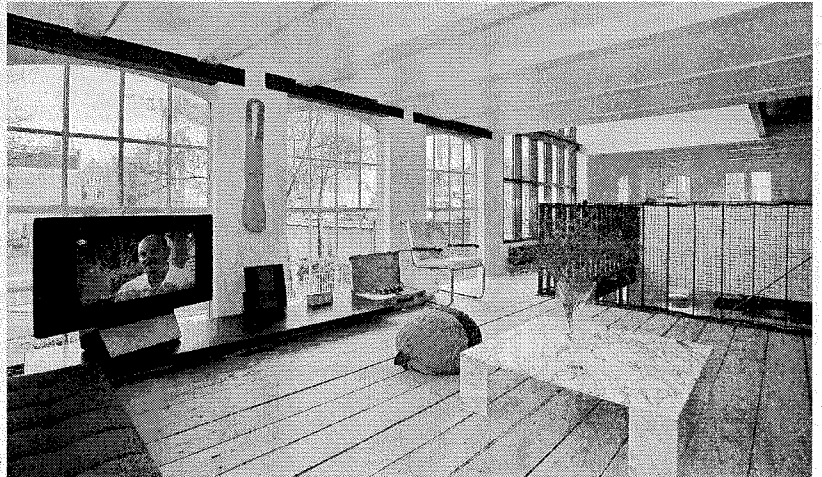
Ella's bedroom is a mix of beams and angular corners, providing perfect hideaways for her many stuffed animals and toys. A yellow and red plastic swing hangs from the main ceiling beam, while the ornate antique steel-framed bed takes up most of one corner.

The master bedroom is another angular white room created from the reclaimed ceiling space. Clothes hang on open racks beside the double bed; a small mirrored bureau, a family heirloom, offers the only storage space.

Outside, people navigate the bustling canal streets, and a tour barge chugs past on an adjacent canal. As Mr. Pinck takes it all in, he says his family has found its oasis of calm. "They say that this is Amsterdam's Eden. If that's so, then our home is a little slice of heaven."



Left, the exterior of the converted factory that Janneke Heerkens and Sven Pinck now call home. Below, the living area of the house features the building's original pine floor boards.



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