

METROPOLIS

The Metro

A Tale of Two Port Cities

redevelopment

A Dutch urban-planning firm—instrumental in the redevelopment of Amsterdam's waterfront—has its eye on Brooklyn.

Two decades ago Amsterdam—like many other cities—embarked on an ambitious planning process to redevelop its waterfronts. What had once been a sprawling industrial port fell into decline as manufacturing interests decamped and consolidated. The scarred landscape repelled people from the city's most important natural resource—indeed, its *raison d'être*—choking off all other waterfront uses, be they commercial, residential, or recreational.

The southern part of Amsterdam's waterfront is now regarded as a model of large-scale urban redevelopment. It combines light manufacturing uses with high-density low-rise housing (both affordable and market-rate) in buildings with copious public access and innovative architecture. The transformation, though long in the making, is nothing less than stunning. Rather than erasing the waterfront's industrial heritage, Amsterdam has embraced it, converting former silos into living spaces and incorporating still existing port functions into newly created neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, across the pond, the world's most self-important city is notable for what it hasn't done with its waterfronts. "For thirty years I've been in the urban/regional planning business," says Robert Yaro, president of the Regional Plan Association (RPA).

"And what really jumps out at you when you go to Paris, London, Boston, or Chicago, is that urban waterfronts are focal points for revitalization. Everywhere but New York. Why is New York here? Because it's an archipelago. The Dutch settled for that reason."

Why New York has been so slow to recapture its waterfronts is open to debate. But a key component to Amsterdam's successful redevelopment effort was the planning process itself, and the public-private partnerships that were formed to move the master plan from concept to reality. For ten years the urban-planning firm in charge of keeping the partnerships for several projects intact, the politicians on board, and the public informed and engaged was De Lijn, a small but important niche player in the Netherlands. Indeed the role the firm played is such a foreign concept that it might be tough for the American development community to grasp. To use an analogy, De Lijn didn't provide the project's DNA—or even the muscle, bones, or organs—but rather the tendons and ligaments that held it together.

"We've proven that by being an intermediary we can make large projects work," continued on page 33

Brooklyn's Red Hook waterfront (left), has the potential to follow in Amsterdam's footsteps (which include MVRDV's Silodam residential project, above).



Top, Rob Y. Hart Fotografie; bottom, courtesy Pandion Aerials

A Tale of Two Port Cities

continued from page 30

"I think for Brooklyn you always need a working waterfront," Hereijgers says. "It's not a good idea to make it only housing or only culture."

says Ad Hereijgers, founder of De Lijn, who now splits his time between Amsterdam and New York. With a touch of historical symmetry Hereijgers set up shop in New York in 2002 with his eye on Brooklyn (or Breuckelen, as the Dutch settlers named it in the early 1600s). Recognizing the same potential that his ancestors once did, Hereijgers named his New York venture New Amsterdam Development Consultants (NADC).

NADC took its first step toward helping New Yorkers recreate the southern Brooklyn waterfront by teaming up with RPA on what they called the Waterfront Exchange. Last year representatives from the New York City Planning Commission, including commissioner Amanda Burden, as well as developers from the private and nonprofit sectors, went to Amsterdam to see firsthand how large-scale waterfront redevelopment can radically transform a decrepit urban landscape. "The idea was to have the Americans go to Amsterdam first," Yaro says, "and then have their Dutch counterparts come here and make recommendations."

The trip was designed not just to show the New York group a beautiful mixed-use waterfront, important though that may be. It was also about understanding a different planning process, one that might actually result in large-scale redevelopment of the Brooklyn waterfront—particularly the southern section facing Lower Manhattan and Governors Island, and farther south in Red Hook, where the least amount of planning and redevelopment has been undertaken.

The Brooklyn waterfront currently resembles Amsterdam's of 20 years ago—sprawling industrial interests, mostly but not exclusively container shipping, that need only a fraction of the space they once did—its unused piers crumbling into the harbor. But convincing American planners to allow housing, recreation, and commercial uses to mix with port functions is a tough sell.

"The debate is, do you still need container terminals in Brooklyn and do you still need manufacturing jobs? Or is this the beginning of residential and commercial redevelopment?" Hereijgers asks. "I think for Brooklyn you always need a working waterfront. It's not a good idea to make it only housing or only culture. In the Netherlands

we love to mix. But it's really a challenge here."

Whether or not New York is ready to accept the idea of mixed-use redevelopment on the southern Brooklyn waterfront is merely a speed bump compared to the challenge NADC faces when it comes to the morass that is New York City planning. Just ask architect and urban designer Allen Swerdlowe, who has been involved in the Brooklyn waterfront since the mid-1980s. As a trustee of the Brooklyn Bridge Park Coalition—an umbrella organization of no less than 50 groups—he's seen firsthand how long it can take to get a park from plan to completion, to say nothing of a large-scale mixed-use redevelopment scheme.

"I still can't believe in 2003 most of our waterfront is still chained off," Swerdlowe laments. "There have been several master plans for the downtown Brooklyn waterfront. But it's not like in Europe, where a master plan is made and largely adhered to. Here there seem to be so many odd agencies and interest groups that want to bring their vision to the plan. We've been working very hard to make a better connection between the groups."

This is the role that NADC sees as its entry point. Having spent the better part of ten years coordinating the various interests involved in Amsterdam's waterfront—the not-for-profit housing sector, government agencies, private developers and architects, and of course the public—the firm's ambition is nothing less than to change the way New York approaches redevelopment.

"American developers are plot developers," Hereijgers says. "We have an area-based approach. We develop and redevelop whole areas, both public and private. Right now in New York, everyone is their own island. We understand [changing this approach] is going to take a long time, and it's not going to be easy. What we need to do is show people it can be done."

To that end NADC is working with a major Dutch financial firm that was involved in waterfront development there to look for investment opportunities on the Brooklyn waterfront. While it is too early to discuss specifics, with the backing of Dutch money NADC is hoping to coordinate a "signature" project to show New York that affordable and market-rate housing, commercial, industrial, and recreational uses can coexist.

"There is a big buzz about foreign models now in New York," says Frank Uffen, senior project coordinator for NADC, who runs the day-to-day operations of the New York office. "The city understands that it needs to reexamine its development policies. And developers are starting to understand that they simply cannot reproduce everything the way it has been. It's not sustainable."

—Lisa Chamberlain



Eames Storage Unit



Aalto Dining Chair



Meinecke Collection



Eames Molded Plywood Chair



Eames Lounge Chair & Ottoman



Goetz Sofa



Capelli Stool



Nelson Coconut Chair



Aalto Lounge Chair



Eames Chaise



Eames Walnut Stool



Nelson End Table



Noguchi Table



Eames Sofa Compact



Nelson Marshmallow Sofa



Aalto Tea Trolley



Aalto Paimio Chair



Nelson Platform Bench

For more information regarding these products, or the Herman Miller retailer nearest you, call 1 866 866 3124, or visit our website at HermanMiller.com/hmhome. ©2003 Herman Miller Inc.

Herman Miller