

INTERIOR DESIGN

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church or state?

When it comes
to kitchen and
bath, contrasts
create compelling
combinations



chapel built for Catholic monks, the kitchen faces a dining table made from old oak pews.



This 100-year-old chapel in the Dutch city of Utrecht was designed to meet the needs of an order of Catholic monks. But legal advisor Valerie Houperichs and real-estate broker Robin Hagedoorn, who bought the redbrick building—part of a de-consecrated monastery—had a very different wish list, including luxurious kitchen cabinets and bathroom fixtures. The challenge would be to insert those indulgent amenities while maintaining the spatial, almost spiritual qualities that had drawn the couple to the space in the first place.

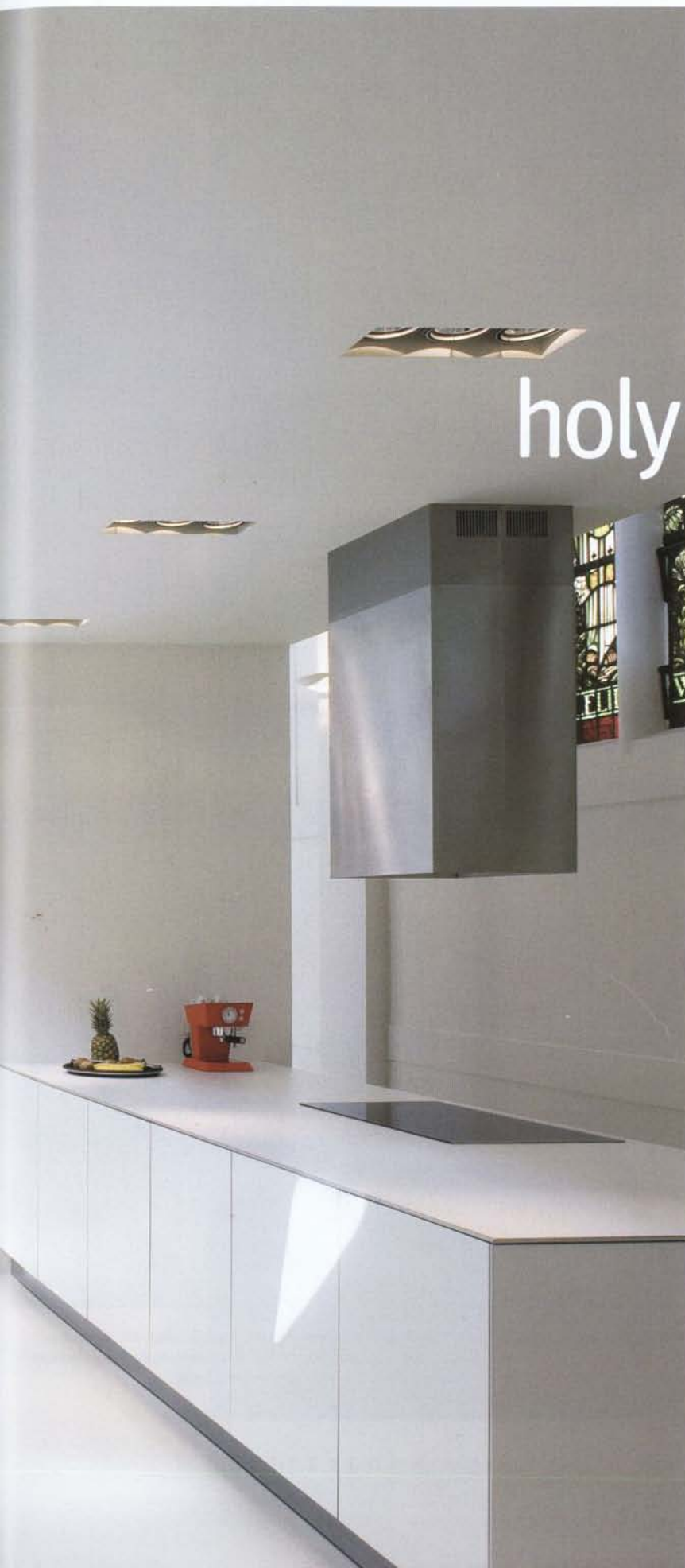
holy renovation

firm: zecc architects site: utrecht, netherlands

Zecc Architects's Marnix van der Meer, a 36-year-old architect, has made a name for himself with gutsy residential renovations. One of his first projects was to turn a water tower into a family home, its eight rooms stacked in a brick cylinder. Around the same time, he converted the top floor of a schoolhouse into a huge loft for Houperichs and Hagedoorn. No sooner had they settled in, however, than they found themselves buying the chapel.

It would have been easy, Van der Meer says, to carve up the 2,700 square feet into a relatively conventional house, obscuring much of what made the building unique. At the other extreme, he says, "We could have put in a bed and called it a home." Instead, he sought a middle ground: addressing domestic functions without inserting any more walls than needed.

His biggest intervention was to create an alcove for a kitchen beneath a mezzanine study, supported from below so that it doesn't touch the walls. A larger replacement for the original organ loft, it's reached by a dramatic stair with cantilevered treads. "Sometimes we call it the stairway to heaven," he jokes. Indeed, the mezzanine's nearly 10-foot height provides an opportunity to appreciate the building's ethereal architecture from an aerial perspective. ➤





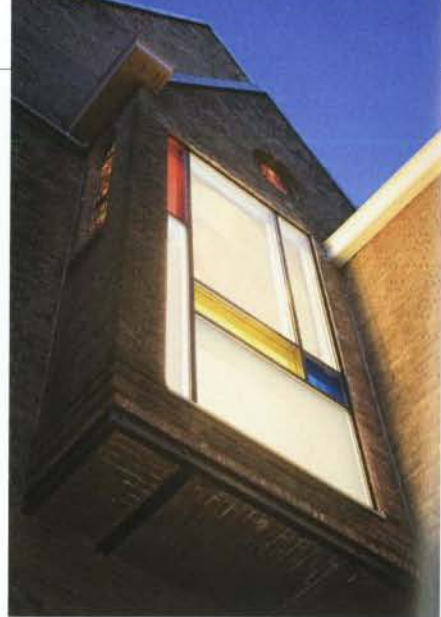
Directly below the mezzanine, Van der Meer designed an alcove kitchen to be as unobtrusive as possible, without so much as a drawer pull to detract from the minimalist order. There are no upper cabinets—just leaded-glass windows where there might have been cereal bowls and stemware. Like the monks, Houpperichs and Hagedoom aren't opposed to kneeling.

In addition to the nave, the building includes a room that Van der Meer outfitted as a combined master bedroom and bath, complete with fixtures by Philippe Starck. His sink and tub are such pure forms that they resemble sacred objects, as if Van der Meer had found a baptismal font and a pair of stoups in the church basement.

Once Van der Meer had laid out the various spaces, he faced the challenge of lighting them. All the existing windows were leaded glass, not exactly a good source of daylight. Instead of simply inserting clear glass, he says he painted the walls the "whitest white we could find." Now, the windows festoon the interior with colorful images that travel as the sun moves through the sky. "We actually intensified the windows' effect," he says. ➤



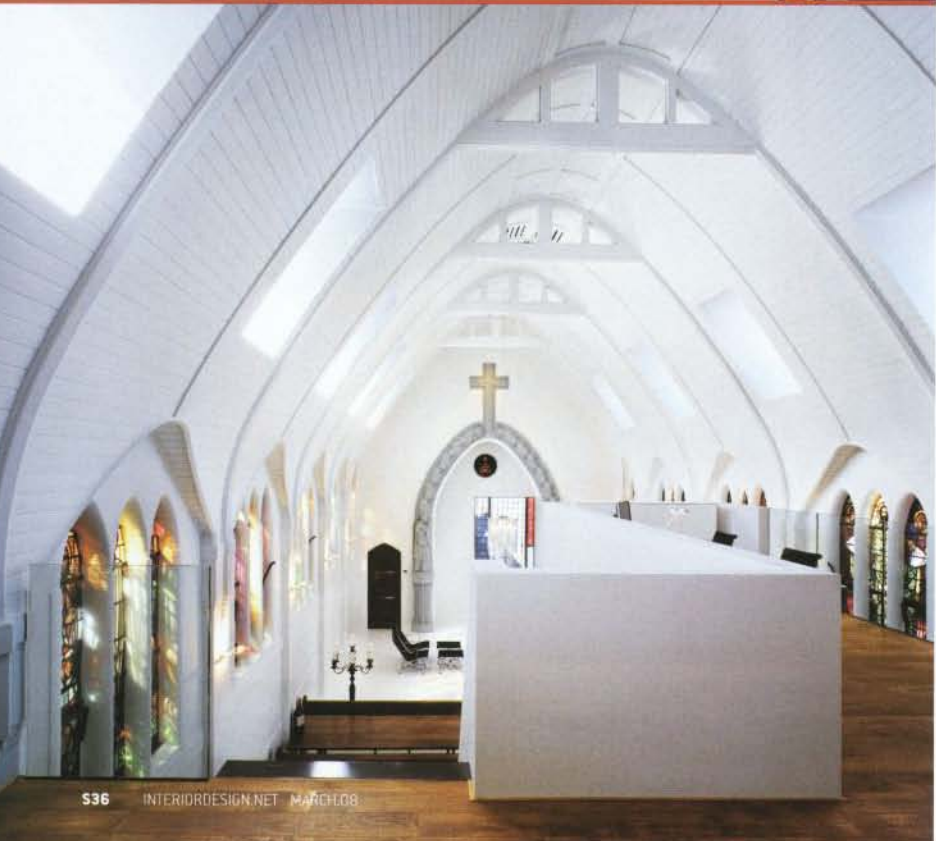
From top: A stainless-steel hood is positioned above a range set into the plastic-laminate kitchen counter; the cabinet doors are also laminate-clad. In the living area, a chandelier by Angelo Mangiarotti supplements sunshine from 10 new skylights. The study still contains the chapel's original organ.



At the same time, he added 10 skylights and a front window, which also offers a view of a street-side courtyard. The largest panes are regular window glass, but smaller ones are tinted primary colors, recalling the work of Utrecht native Gerrit Rietveld. (His Schröder house, a landmark of the de Stijl movement, is a mile away.) To illuminate the kitchen work area and bathroom sinks, Van der Meer installed incandescent spotlights in the ceilings.

Lessons learned here may soon come in handy again. Houpperichs and Hagedoorn are serial renovators. "They can't sit still," Van der Meer says. Already, they've purchased another, larger, Utrecht church, which will become their next home. Redoing it, the architect says, "will be our third project together, and it probably won't be our last."

—Fred A. Bernstein



FROM FRONT GELDERLAND GROEP; CHAISE (LIVING AREA). BULTHAUP; CUSTOM CABINETRY, SINK FITTINGS (KITCHEN). SIEMENS; RANGE. WAVE DESIGN; HOOD. DELTA LIGHT; RECESSED CEILING FIXTURES. PORRO INDUSTRIAL MOBIL; CHANDELIER (LIVING AREA). ARTEMIDE; SCONCES. VITRA; CHAIRS, DITTMANS (LIVING AREA). CHAIRS (STUDY). DURAVIT; SINKS, TUB, FITTINGS (BATHROOM). LIGHT; SCONCES. THROUGHOUT ORKA BOUWCHEMIE; EPOXY FLOORING. DE HDUTFABRIEK; WOOD FLOORING. SPRINGERS WOMEN; LIGHTING CONSULTANT. MOBIUS CONSULT; HEATING CONSULTANT. COMFORT & INSTALLATIE; ELECTRICAL CONTRACTOR. THE-SIS BOUW; GENERAL CONTRACTOR.

From top: A 6½-by-13-foot window was cut into the front of the building. Bought by the monks in the 1950's, a steel chandelier now hangs in the all-in-one master suite, between Philippe Starck's sinks and tub. The mezzanine study has a new oak floor.