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NATIONAL GLASS MUSEUM

LEERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS
BUREAU SLA

TEXT BY KIERAN LONG
PHOTOS BY JERDEN MUSCH



The exhibition galleries of the National Glass Museum occupy two historic houses on the Royal Leerdam glass factory site. Now opened to the public, these spaces hold rotating shows of glassware from around the Netherlands. The bulk of the company's archive and permanent collection is now stored—and on display—in a series of bridges that span the gap between the two houses.

IT IS A DISTINCTIVE feature of northern European countries that citizens understand the value of their industrial heritage. Across Scandinavia, and throughout Germany and the Low Countries, the astonishing 20th-century flowering of manufacturers in glass, ceramics, and steel, and later in electronics and other consumer goods, is now recognized not just for its economic value, but because the objects produced are at the heart of the countries' modern identities. The Netherlands' new National Glass Museum in Leerdam, recently carved by Amsterdam architect Bureau SLA out of two 1910s villas, is evidence of this pride in a distinguished history of mass production.

The town of Leerdam, just south of Utrecht, is known for two things: a rather bland, mass-market brand of cheese (Leerdammer), and glass. Glass was first produced in the town in the 18th century, but it was after visionary industrialist P.M. Cochius became director in 1912 that the factory there—which became Royal Leerdam in 1953—began to attain its august modern reputation. He brought in new manufacturing techniques, but also a new modern style of glassware by architects and designers such as H.P. Berlage, J.J.C. Lebeau, and Andries Dirk Copier.

The two houses that the new National Glass Museum occupies on the Leerdam site were once home to Cochius and his finance director. A gallery was already in place in one of the villas, and the initial brief called for the removal of offices and storage to the newly acquired villa next door, expanding the exhibition spaces in the original one. Bureau SLA and its principal Peter van Assche suggested another solution. "We thought that it would be a shame if you couldn't see that the museum had become bigger, and we wanted to make everything public," he says.

Rather than taking the obvious route of creating a building to link the two villas, the idea of a number of bridges, with storage integrated, began to take hold. This allowed public access to every floor of both villas and transformed the scale of the complex from domestic to civic. You can now walk in a straight line from one gallery, over a bridge, and into another. The bridges are clad with an aluminum mesh skin over polycarbonate, and inside they provide open storage for the collection's archive, in display cases designed by Dutch furniture designer Piet Hein Eek. More conventional exhibition areas occupy the interiors of the villas themselves.

Structurally, the bridges are independent of the villas, with their own steel supports visible in the interior gallery spaces. Another happy coincidence of the bridge arrangement is that visitors have multiple means of escape in case of fire. This means that the building needs only one elevator, and also allows the timber structures of the houses to be exposed without running afoul of fire regulations.

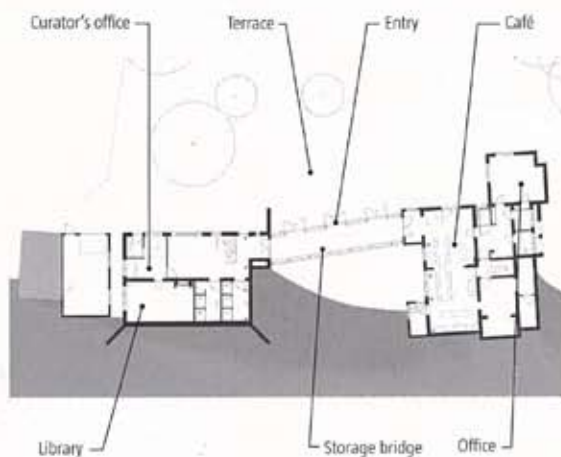
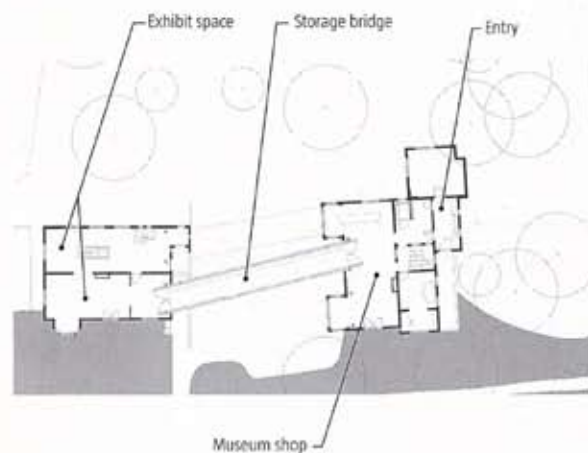
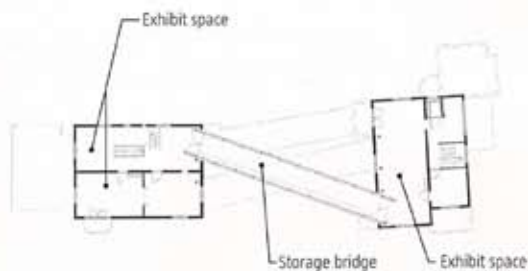
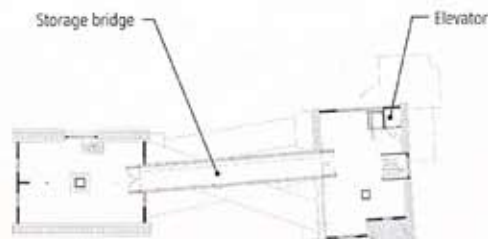
The visitor's experience of the museum is now an unlikely but elaborate *promenade architecturale*. The museum is built into the side of a dike, and the main entry is at the top of the slope on the second floor. Visitors zig-zag across the bridges, from villa to villa and from floor to floor. The exit is on the ground floor and opens onto a riverside plaza.

Before the expansion, the museum normally received around 15,000 visitors per year. In just the last five months, attendance has been 85,000. Van Assche says that the building's openness has transformed the institution and the visitor experience of it: "People now spend more time in the storage bridges than they do in the exhibition. I think it's because you can see the timeline of the Leerdam factory there, and because people can recognize things that they have at home." □





The museum is built into a dike, so its main entry is actually on the south side (this page) and on the second level. The ground-floor exit on the north facade (opposite top) opens onto a garden court. Inside each bridge, interruptions in the polycarbonate walls offer views of the site (opposite bottom) through the powder-coated aluminum mesh cladding.

Ground-Floor Plan**Second-Floor Plan****Third-Floor Plan****Fourth-Floor Plan****Project Credits**

Project National Glass Museum, Leerdam, the Netherlands
Client Kleurrijk Wonen (daring design and construction); National Glass Museum (occupant that assumed post-completion ownership)
Architect Bureau SLA, Amsterdam — Peter van Assche (architect); Mathijs Cremers (project architect); Gražina Bendikaite, Gonçalo Moreira, Tereza Novosadová, Mick van Essen (project team)
Interior Designer Bureau SLA
Structural Engineer Sineth Engineering; Konstruktiebüro Krabbendam-Boerkoel
Electrical Engineer SchreuderGroep Ingenieurs/Adviseurs
Geotechnical Engineer Inplijn-Blokpoel Ingenieursbureau
General Contractor Aannemersbedrijf J. Van Daalen
Climate Engineer SchreuderGroep Ingenieurs/Adviseurs
Lighting Designer Bureau SLA
Project Management BLOEII Project Development
Furniture and Showcase Design Piet Hein Eek
Size 10,800 square feet
Cost €1.5 million (\$1.96 million)

Materials and Sources

Adhesives, Coatings, and Sealants Sigma-Aldrich Co. (coatings) sigma.com
Appliances Miele miele.com
Ceilings plasterboard and paint
Exterior Wall Systems SABIC Innovative Plastics (Lexan polycarbonate) sabic.com
Fabrics and Finishes Kabel-Zaandam (color-coated aluminium mesh) www.kabelzaandam.nl
Flooring poured polyurethane floor
Furniture Piet Hein Eek pietheineek.nl
Gypsum Xella International (Fermacell) fermacell.nl
Lighting Wever & Ducre wever-ducre.com
Paints and Finishes Sigma-Aldrich Co. sigma.com
Plumbing and Water System copper and PVC piping
Structural System steel