



# THINK C.A.S.H.

CONNECTING CONCEPTS



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THINK C.A.S.H.



*'Impossible and futureless were words that came to my mind,  
when I first saw the dated and vacant office building  
that is now Zuidpark.*

*With a 15 to 25% vacancy in office space in the area,  
not a chance of turning this unattractive complex into a hip  
and thriving place of work, I thought.*

*I stand well corrected.*

*With full occupancy and happy tenants,  
Zuidpark is a great example of transformation  
and entrepreneurship!*

*To all involved in commercial real estate  
and taking its future at heart,  
I recommend reading THINK C.A.S.H.  
It's inspirational.'*

JAN HAGENDOORN  
FORMER MANAGING DIRECTOR  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION AMSTERDAM (OGA)

*'Storytelling, meaningful experiences, social influence and co-creation.  
Making it happen. That is what will get earned attention.*

*Jan Huijbregts and Connecting Concepts have shown  
what it takes to get there.*

*By transforming a vacant office complex of 25,000 square metres  
into a powerful brand: Zuidpark, with full occupancy.*

*Commercial real estate wasn't the merchandise that first came  
to our minds, when we developed our notion of Earned Attention.*

*THINK C.A.S.H. shows how daring and effective  
branding make a difference.*

*In the making and successful marketing of Zuidpark  
I see a superb translation of our Earned Attention concept.  
Read all about it!'*

KLAAS WEIMA  
FOUNDER AND MANAGING DIRECTOR  
ENERGIZE



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# PROLOGUE



## PROLOGUE

*You can call me a dreamer, an idealist, a devotee,  
an enthusiast, an advocate, a booster, a supporter, an activist.  
You might even call me a fool. Which I am not.*

*The truth is: I am a believer.*

Where most, if not all, involved have lost faith, I firmly believe in commercial real estate. And, the bigger the building the better.

believe in commercial  
real estate

In our country alone, we have some seven million square meters of vacant office space. With a staggering rate of 15%, Holland scores a dubious first in Europe. Amsterdam's 18% is only surpassed by Athens.

For years we have continued to build without taking into account the potential demand. Very learned scholars in urban planning and economics conclude that this is why we find ourselves confronted with such a high vacancy rate. Also, these same academics infer that investors, project developers and urban councils have consistently underestimated the lack of demand.

high vacancy rate

In an interview with Knack, a Belgian current affairs magazine, Cor van Zadelhoff, the grand old man of Dutch real estate, blames the financial whiz kids for creating the glut of supply and the consequent crisis in the commercial real estate sector. "The market is totally overbuilt. Fiscal incentives and ample opportunities for leverage were leading clinchers - false reasons - to build. The resulting supply was thus divorced from the demand. Also, many of those projects were initiated by people that were only interested in money, not in quality. They bugged the market. Those people were not the real estate people. They were the financial whiz kids. Yes, it did all seem so great. Banks paying very little interest, the investors' community had few alternatives. Investments in real estate looked exceptionally attractive, with a distortion of the market as a result."

glut of supply

blaming does not solve the problem

Here I must add that brokers were quite happy to sell those buildings that investors were lining up to buy. So, the real estate people are not completely blameless. But then, blaming does not solve the problem.

Most experts call for the wrecking ball as a solution; demolish the buildings that are not finding tenants and the problem is solved. In any case, most of the buildings have already been written off in the developers' books.

I am convinced that thoughtless destruction will not solve the problem either. We really need to think more than twice before we decide that a vacant building should be knocked down.

lack of understanding

What we need most of all is to understand our lack of understanding the problem.

I know the facts and figures. I am still a believer in commercial real estate. Am I totally wrong?

What is belief? It's a (gut) feeling of being sure that something exists or that something is true; that something is good, right, or valuable. It is trust and faith, it's conviction. All of that is not necessarily - and usually not - substantiated by hard facts.

With all their diversity of beliefs, all major faiths teach that all human beings are immortal. Believers are sure, 100 percent, that eternal life exists. But there is no actual proof that it does. No one has ever returned from heaven (or hell either, for that matter) to bear evidence and not even testimonies of near death experiences substantiate the existence of eternal life.

believing in something means

Believing in something means that, for the full 100 percent, with all of your heart you know it to be true, but, while being convinced of the truth of it, you cannot - at the time - prove it to be a hard fact.

A proven fact does not need belief. It's just there, whether you like it or not.

Having faith is the foundation of our existence. Having faith, and it really does not make a difference whether you find faith in a religion or in humanism, or whether you find it in believing in your family, in yourself, in your ideas - makes you strong and gets you out of bed in the morning.

It is all about believing in what you feel, see, think and do.

We have totally lost faith in commercial real estate. That's a disastrous development as so much of our national capital is invested in this industry, involving the livelihood and wellbeing of so many.

a disastrous development

Before we even begin to take the first steps in a project, we want solid proof of a successful outcome. That's how it was and - unfortunately - how it still is.

We were, and still are, used to thinking in terms of spreadsheets with data that are confirmed by facts. Banks and investment committees demand that 100 percent verification before they venture into anything. That is understandable from their point of view and it is what we expect them to do. But in these days nothing is a fact.

So, first there should be belief: there should be faith in the good of our concept and, believe you me, while we are working out our ideas we will indeed find factual evidence of our project being good, right, valuable and ... profitable.

first there should be belief

Since the industry keeps hanging on to the 'old ways', nothing really happens in commercial real estate. There's no faith. No imagination. No creativity.

It is high time to change our approach!

high time to change



I find Albert Einstein's definition of insanity appropriate: 'Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results'.

Things will definitely not change if we keep on doing what we are used to doing.

We need to understand a changing world and a changing workforce, believe in the benefits of change and act accordingly.



We need to begin to understand that commercial real estate should no longer service the demands of the 'baby boomer' generation (that lives to work - most of that cohort has by now retired) but that we should aim to accommodate the X and even more so the Y generation, having different socioeconomic experiences and according life and work styles, with the X generation working to live and the Y age group 'expecting more'.

What I am saying here, is that I have concluded that we have for too long been catering for, and seeking, tenants that practically no longer exist! Further on, I will delve deeper into how important it is to understand what the two latter generations - in particular the Y's - expect their workplace to be. I will then also explain how to cater for their wishes.

tenants that practically no longer exist!

When you stop believing in what you are doing, throwing in the towel, that's when you lose most. We have lost faith in our industry, we don't trust each other. Still, even though we have lost our belief in the real estate market, we continue to persuade others to buy or rent the properties we don't believe in. That is called downright fraud where I come from.

Do not even try to sell a product you don't believe in to the Y's! Seeing right through your insincerity, they won't buy your sales pitch. This generation is masterful in recognising authenticity when they see it.

So, what should you do to put an end to this madness we find ourselves in?

Get rid of your property, sell it for whatever the market is willing to pay for it, thus paying the price of not being able to solve the problem or, begin working on a real solution.

begin working on a real solution

In this book I will take you along my recent journey in the commercial real estate market, beginning with me unexpectedly being confronted with 25,000 square meters of vacant office space in Amsterdam's metropolitan area.

Converted from a single tenant to a multi-tenant building, with facilities and amenities that suit the present workforce, 'Zuidpark' as we called it, is now thriving, with not a single square meter unoccupied.

If I can make miracles happen, so can you. That I know.



It begins with belief. Belief in the endless possibilities a big empty building has to offer, once you understand what is relevant and important in present-day society.

stop sitting still

Stop sitting still. Pluck up courage. Create a passionate concept.

Instead of just selling square meters to rent, have an inspiring story to tell.

You don't have to be a real estate professional to understand what this book is all about. Promise. I am a big devotee of keeping things plain and simple.

practical logic and clear thinking

Just practical logic and clear thinking should be enough to solve the problems we are facing.

One of my professors once told me that if you cannot explain your solution to the general public, it is not a solution but merely an attempt to cover up the fact that you do not know the answer yourself.

an open mind

What I am asking is that you keep an open mind and be prepared to see things differently.

I aim to help readers of this book work out a solution by creating a concept that is so powerful that no one can ignore it. Certainly not a potential tenant.

And that's what our business is about: finding tenants.

Believe you me, you will find them.

your own passionate story

Why do I think you will? Mainly because it will be your own passionate story that shows you are involved as an empathic landlord who knows what the new generation of tenants wants. That, in itself, clearly makes a difference between your building and most of the rest of the present market supply.

It only needs one signing tenant to lift your project off the ground, to make the miracle come true.

Granted, the process of getting there will not be painless.





If you bought a property at a price that presently does not reflect its actual value, you'll have to face that. But remember, once you take action and jump into what will be a first phase of a lot of hard work, you will give the miracle a chance. And do know that the initial work you put into your building is actually fun and rewarding and not that costly. And furthermore, you will see that you will retrieve most, if not all of the value that you thought was lost.

give the miracle  
a chance

With this book I hope to inspire:

- Owners of (a) big vacant building(s) desperate for cash flow
- Architects wishing to get involved in the noble art of transforming old buildings
- Brokers needing inspiration to get their clients on the roll
- Civil servants of real estate departments in cities that have big buildings standing empty
- Anybody interested in participating in the discussion on the vacancy problem in commercial real estate

inspire

I firmly believe in new lives for big vacant buildings. But giving those buildings a chance requires a different way of thinking; a different approach. It requires belief.

new lives for  
big vacant buildings

Here's to big office buildings; the abandoned ones, still having so much to offer; the ones that deserve our care.

If only one building will be saved because someone has been inspired by this book, it will all make sense and will have been worth the effort of writing it.

We often hear people complaining that we haven't seen the end yet of the worst financial crisis since 1929, believing that this economic downfall is the main reason for the real estate market still being so miserable. Self-pitying nonsense I call that.

genuine crisis

My grandfather had a thriving construction firm in the late 30's, established by his grandfather in 1873. Then the Nazi's occupied our country and confiscated it, lock, stock and barrel, while sending him off to forced labour, building the Atlantic Wall.

Now, that is what I call a genuine crisis.

one great lesson

My grandfather told me a lot of stories about what he met with in these hard times; anecdotes about both loyalty and betrayal. The stories themselves are not really relevant here and they were probably romanticized anyway, fit to tell his 13 year old grandson. However, his storytelling taught me a one great lesson:

By being creative and productive, by seeking and finding allies and by having the guts to face the facts and fight the problem, we manage to come out of any crisis, and be stronger than ever.

I dedicate this book to my grandfather after whom I was named. What a great storyteller and entrepreneur he was.

Jan Huijbregts





# SPIT, CHEW OR SWALLOW...

## I ACKNOWLEDGING THE PROBLEM: SPIT, CHEW OR SWALLOW...

*Accepting reality is what clever people do and faith in  
the human race will do the rest.  
Of that I am convinced.*

In 2008, the company that I was letting a big office and warehouse complex to told me that it was going to pack its bags and leave, before the actual end of their lease.

My ideal tenant would be moving out over a period of two years, beginning in 2009.

ideal tenant  
moving out

I had bought the complex 15 years before, with the company it was originally built for in it, which proved to be a perfect situation, my tenant taking care of the upkeep of the buildings.

I went to visit once, at the most twice, a year. That meant that I really didn't know the premises well and therefore, when push came to shove, I had to first get to know my buildings. But more about that later.

Anyway, I couldn't really deny my tenant of 15 years the right to leave.

The location of what is now 'Zuidpark' is more than perfect. It totals 4 hectares of prime development grounds, amidst great infrastructure, alongside the Amsterdam inner-city ring road, the A10, and within a stone's throw of a metro station connecting the complex to railroads. Amsterdam's Central Station is 15 minutes away. You can even get there by boat, as a nearby waterway connects to Amsterdam's famous canals and further.

location more  
than perfect

It was love at first sight for me. While enjoying the luxury of having a reliable tenant, I dreamt about the development possibilities the premises would offer the generations to come.

At the time the grounds were not used efficiently, largely serving the warehouse and distribution center, with trucks coming and going or parked.

Being a real estate developer & investor, all this time I secretly hoped my tenant would leave. It's been said so often: 'Be careful of what you wish for because sometimes your wish can be your worst nightmare'. That was so true in 2009.

We were in the middle of the financial crisis and I was left with a giant empty complex no tenant was interested in.

I decided to give the well-known saying a twist: 'Be certain of what you are working for; have a vision and have a plan'.

The nightmare turned out to be a blessing in disguise. But, to be honest, I didn't see that immediately; that really took a while.

Granted, I did at the time buy the property with the idea of tearing down the entire complex to erect what, in my mind, was to be the office building of the future, but I missed the momentum to demolish; the world economic crisis caught up with my plans.

Looking back, I can't help but wonder about the phenomenon. Is this latest financial and economic crisis an extraordinary catastrophe, or should we look at this crisis and its credit crunch as an ordinary development? Think of the first recorded financial bubble, the tulip bulb bubble in the 17<sup>th</sup> century! Tulip bulb prices were propelled by speculators to incredible heights before collapsing and plunging the Dutch economy into a severe crisis that lasted for many years.

What you need to do in any crisis of any sort at any time is to look in the mirror, admit that you have a problem and tackle it.

The main problem the real estate industry now faces is that we have these vacant buildings on our balance sheets at values that do not at all reflect their real market value.

Finding out the truth about the real market value of your empty (or soon to be tenant-less) building is like having to cope with a bad oyster in your mouth.

You then basically have three options: spit, chew or swallow

Let's look at your first option. You can immediately spit out your bad oyster and leave it where it landed, trying to forget the foul taste of it. That I call ignoring the problem. Waiting and praying for better times to come. If those days will ever come, it will take years and years. Or, as they say, until the cows come home.

The problem exists, and the worst part of it is that everybody else smells it and knows it exists.

The only one you are fooling is yourself (and your bank at that). It's right in your face but you refuse to see it. You are in denial. And you're a laughing stock as well. Your bad oyster is still where you left it, for everybody to see and its smell is getting worse and worse.

Moreover, in the end, you will have to get rid of the problem anyway. But by then you have wasted very precious time and it might be too late; you will not be able to get the necessary all hands on deck, as they have all left.



Surely you can disguise the problem and who knows, you might find a naïve buyer (there are very few around) who does not see the obvious. Remember my definition of fraud?

Or, you could bequeath your proverbial bad oyster to the next generation; dump your mishap on your children. I for one would certainly like to leave a different legacy.

Ignoring the problem leads to loss of respect and credibility and that is a certain road to bankruptcy. It is no option.

Finding a yawning gap between balance sheet and market value on your plate, or, a bad oyster in your mouth, you have a second option: chew it.

left with a giant empty complex

a blessing in disguise

tulip bulb bubble

the main problem

cope with a bad oyster

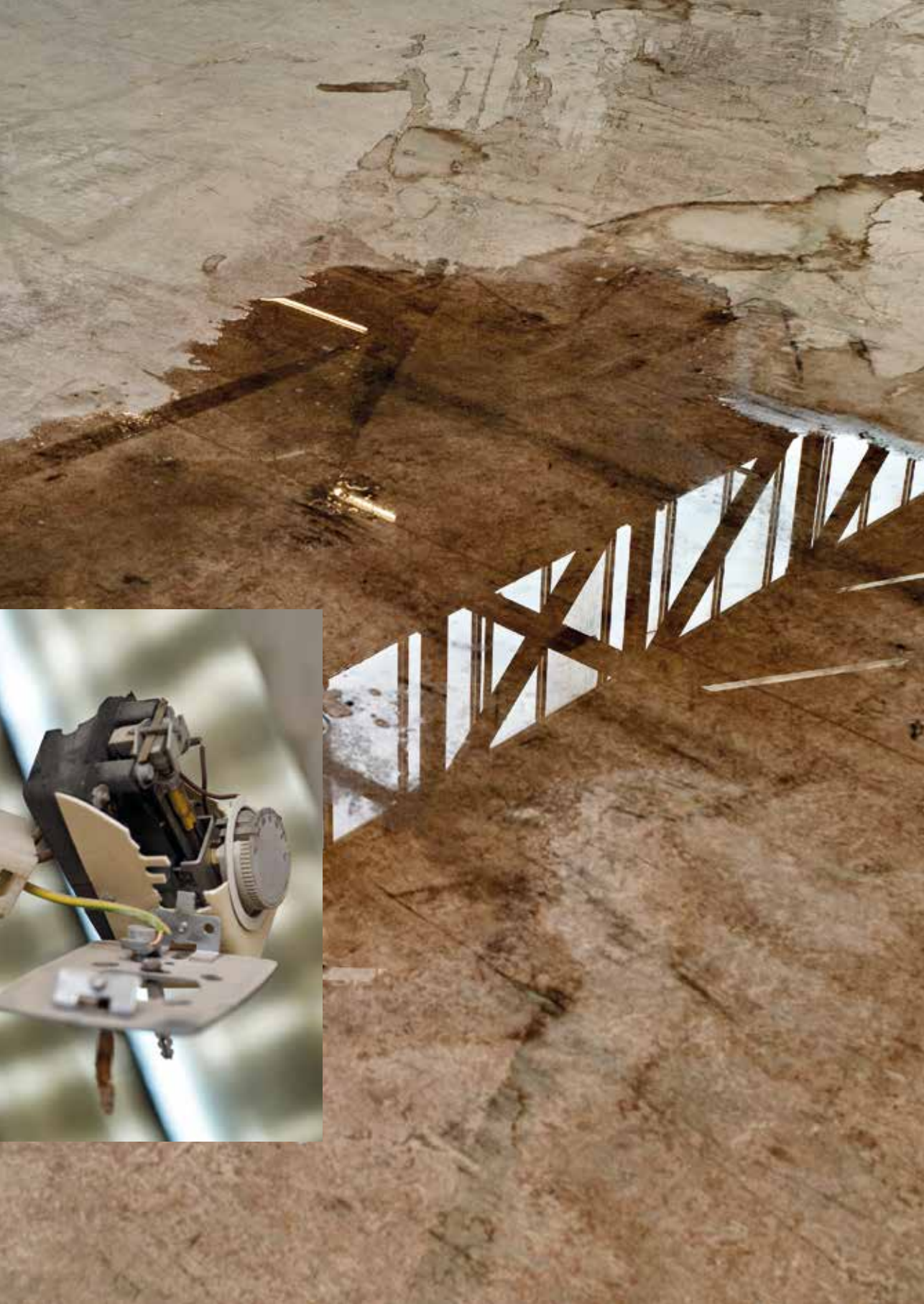
three options

first option

ignoring the problem

certain road to bankruptcy

second option



A lot has been said about chewing; chewing gum that is. Chronic chewing can lead to all sorts of problems. It is a health damaging habit, doctors tell us. At the same time a recent Japanese study reveals that chewing can boost alertness by 10 percent; chomping away leads to improvements in blood flow to the brain. Might that be why President Obama was chewing gum during the 2014 D-Day ceremonies in France? Twitter feeds worldwide exploded with criticism. The words ‘shameful’ and ‘vulgar’ were thrown around as social media networks lit up with outrage.

Seriously though, chewing over a problem, pondering, grinding and grating does not get you anywhere. That’s what nagging complainers do. They sit there, whining over the market, over fiscal rulings on real estate and all the rest, trying to find the ‘real’ culprit; something, or someone, to blame for having caused the problem. Self-pity never did anyone any good. It’s pathetic, if you ask me.

chewing over a problem

So there’s this bad oyster in your mouth. Spitting or chewing doesn’t get you anywhere. Those are no options.

I am offering you a third and best choice: you can swallow it. I guarantee you that gulping down bad seafood will make you quite sick, but it won’t kill you. You will feel awful, but I promise that you can, and will, deal with it and that you will get out of it feeling much better. You dealt with the problem and it is gone. It’s something of the past, just a memory. You came out a winner.

third and best choice

When we acknowledge the problem of the gap between balance sheet and market value, when we take responsibility and write off our loss, we definitely have some explaining to do. But the problem is there for all to see, it is the undeniable truth, so everybody has to accept it as a fact. Our brain is constructed to find solutions to problems, so we will.

undeniable truth

Accepting reality is what clever people do and faith in the human race will do the rest. Of that I am convinced. Remember that I am a believer. ‘Zuidpark’ proves that I was right to believe.

accepting reality

Once you have swallowed the problem, making everybody accept your solution, however painful that is, the only way is up and your crisis is over.

swallow and  
get your act together

large empty  
office buildings  
create turmoil

a place that was hot,  
a place that is not

recoup the difference  
between balance sheet  
value and market value

So, your tenants leave. And you have this vacant building on your hands that you bought at a much higher price than its present market value.

What do you do?

You swallow and get your act together.

I hope that by taking you along my journey I can help you there.

Nobody likes vacancy in commercial real estate. But large empty office buildings in particular create turmoil among all stakeholders involved and not least the general public.

We see these colossuses, empty and in despair. There are sitting in grass that is growing high and shrubbery that is not maintained. Windows are grimy, rubbish is not removed. These neglected buildings and their grounds immediately attract the wrong public; petty crime is rampant. That affects the entire neighborhood in no time. And to top it off, large billboards tell the world that on this 'prime location' there is ample space for rent. With all of this, the poor abandoned property is sending one, and only one, message: my owner does not believe in me anymore but we are looking for a sucker who does.

No user of a building wants to smell upcoming foreclosure in the vicinity, or wishes to see a dilapidated neighboring property. Before you know it, tenants of other buildings than the one standing empty will leave the once attractive spot (like the proverbial rats leaving a sinking ship) and the area becomes a ghost town.

A place that was hot, turns into a place that is not.

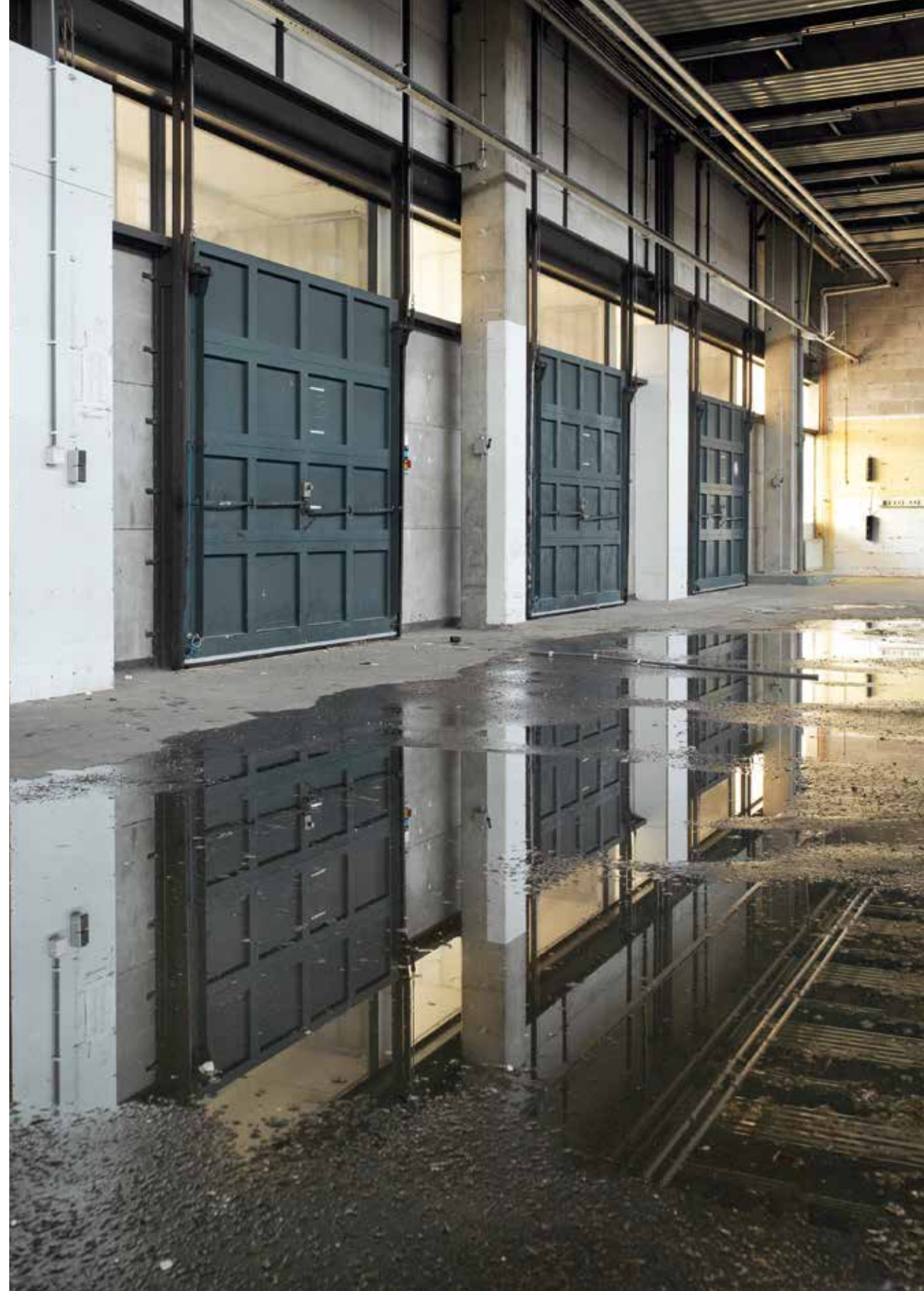
Capital in pension funds vanishes and we see mortgages going underwater.

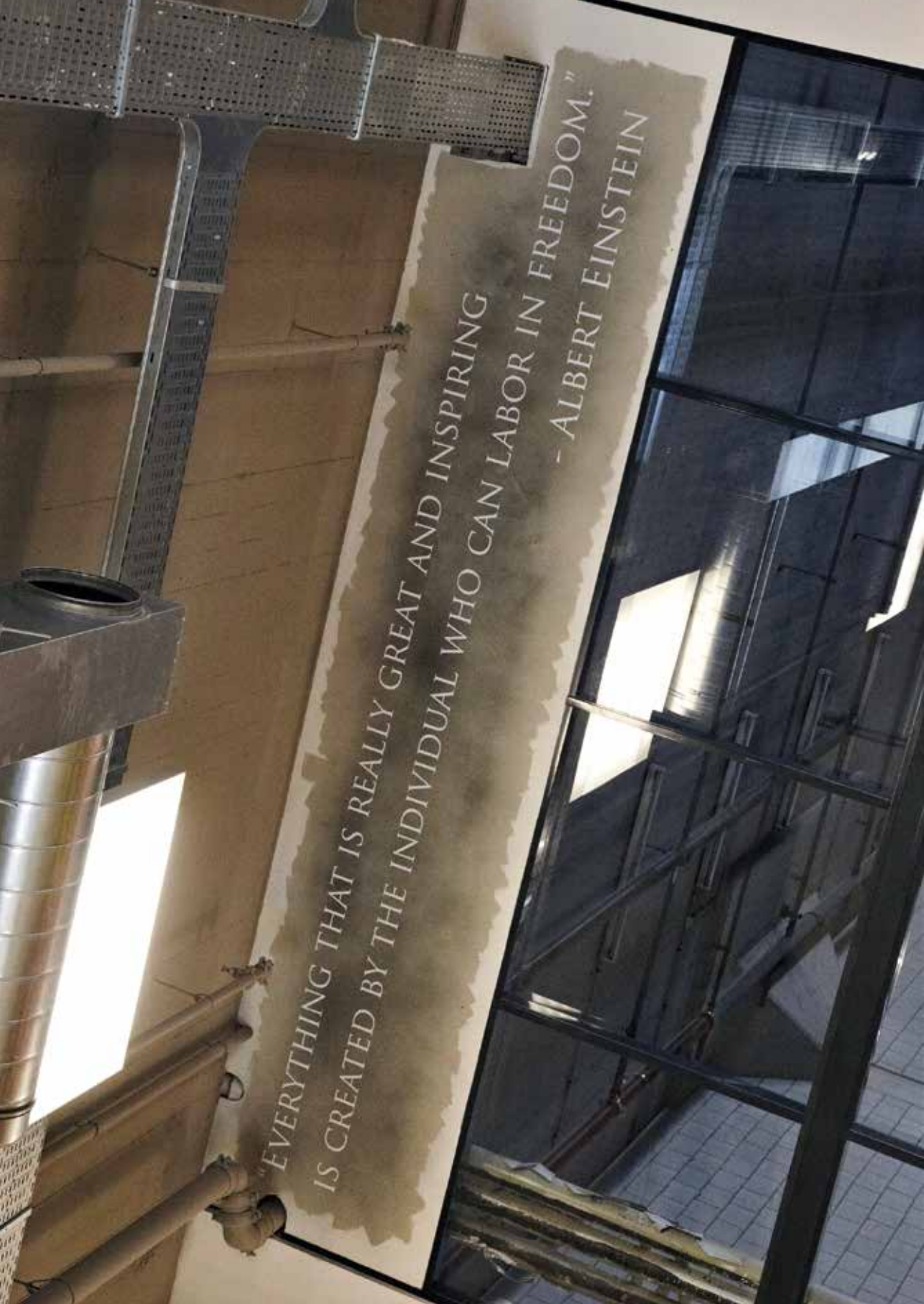
Owners whose outstanding mortgage balance exceeds the actual property value know that it's pointless to try to refinance.

All of that and more, began with that one owner who did not take responsibility, refusing to mow, trim and clean. It doesn't cost that much to do the caretaking, but the owner is just not interested.

They are clearly sitting still, the owners of these buildings. They either spat the bad oyster out, or are still chewing on it. Those who don't dare to swallow will taste defeat and defeat alone.

Not always, but as a rule you will be able to recoup the difference between balance sheet value and market value by resuscitating your building, by giving it its rightful soul.





Why don't big empty offices find tenants? Fortunately some of us know the answer to this question. The answer is simple - and you don't need an exceptionally high IQ to work it out.

These buildings no longer meet a demand. That's the very simple answer to a simple question.

simple answer to a simple question

The majority of these now vacant buildings were originally constructed to fit the needs of a single tenant. They served as the headquarters of a large company or institution, and were probably even designed for these specific users with the technology and comfort of the time: 20 or more years ago.

These days you won't find a new single tenant for an office building of more than 10,000 square meters. We should understand why and act on this understanding.

Over the last 20 years expectations regarding the work environment have - drastically - changed. Compared to the office of, let's say, the year 2000, the today's office needs to serve different demands concerning space, comfort and sustainability, to name but a few key factors.

different demands

New ways of working require new work environments and situations. This by the way holds true for all office buildings, not only the big ones. It is only over the last five years that we have been - painfully - confronted with that change in demands.

What used to be the best place to work 20 or even 10 years ago, might now be the worst place to work.

At least 50 percent of all Dutch companies are using some form of new work, introduced more than a decade ago.

Did we not see it coming?

The new way of working and the technology that comes with it will result in a reduction of approximately 40% of the floor space needed.

The recession we faced over the last seven years has resulted in a further reduction of people on the office floor.

Even with improving economic conditions, we might not be needing more office workers. The greying of our society is another factor that has an impact on the amount of office space needed.



Nobody knows what technology will bring to the office floor over the next 5 to 10 years. With the speed that technology develops and enters our work environment it simply cannot be predicted.

What we do see is a new generation of workers that grew up with new technology: the Y-generation that probably doesn't know a fax machine from Adam.

This age group has totally adopted new technology and has different needs to those of the baby boomers (now either retired or near retirement) or even those of the preceding X-generation. The Y's, born after 1980, are an established new workforce entering the labour market. For these workers we need to create offices that suit their expectations and wishes.

Generational changes have had a far bigger effect on office space not meeting the demand than the recession has.

Does this mean that office buildings are bad investments, that they have no future? I don't think so at all. Why am I convinced that for most office buildings and their owners the prospects are excellent? I will get to that later.

Let's however not ignore that we do not need the current supply of square meters.

The fact remains that many office buildings are standing empty, or face vacancy in the next few years. Recent foreclosure auctions show there are not many buyers. We have said it before: one can understand that the traditional financiers, like banks, are not enthusiastic investing in commercial real estate; there is no attractive exit when there is no view of a certain and constant cash flow.

Since commercial real estate is capital-intensive, we find ourselves in a vicious circle: less financing means lower prices, and lower prices mean less financing.

All of the above, we know. Yes, the facts are grim. We've got a crisis on our hands. I say: never let a good crisis go to waste!

That has been, and still is, my message to all. To other real estate entrepreneurs, to investors, to banks and authorities alike.

It all starts with faith, in believing that after a tenant leaves, your building still has a good future and will indeed generate a constant cash flow. So, do not despair!

Swallow, if need be twice, break out of that vicious circle, understand what's really happening, dare to think out of the box, get your act together.

For those who are seriously willing to swallow the problem, the future looks bright. And, of course, especially for those smart entrepreneurs who bought an empty building complex at the actual market price because the former owner could not find the right solution to this problem.

If you put creativity, passion and faith in your project, being a real entrepreneur, your gains will be enormous.

For those who dare to embrace change, who wish to learn and share, who are prepared to convince others by alluring concepts, prospects are more than promising.

To quote Albert Einstein: 'Everything that is really great and inspiring is created by the individual who can labor in freedom.'

new generation  
of workers

new technology

certain and  
constant cash flow

never let a  
good crisis  
go to waste

break out of  
that vicious circle

the future looks bright

a real entrepreneur



# WHY WE SHOULD CATER FOR THE Y GENERATION

## II WHY WE SHOULD CATER FOR THE Y GENERATION

*I do not see many of us landlords  
(for the better part so called baby boomers)  
being aware that demands  
and expectations have changed.*

In the previous chapter, I pointed out the major reason why, in Holland, we have millions (and worldwide, billions) of square meters of vacant office space. Supply and demand don't match. And that is first and foremost a question of older generations not understanding the needs and expectations of younger generations.

A lot has been written on generation gaps or the culture shock between generations. This phenomenon has its impact on work relations and consequently requires not only a relevant work culture but also the workspace to go with it.

generation gaps

It is not only a matter of how older generations can adapt to the life and work style of the under 40's, and even the under 30's, but also of how office buildings can be adapted to work for today's businesses; how office design will suit today's workforce.

Yes, it's about leadership styles, about management of multigenerational companies. I dare, however, bet on the actual built environment, the office space where one spends an important part of one's life, being the prime factor in enabling new ways of working.

When I had acknowledged the fact that I was not going to find a tenant for my office & warehouse complex, as it then was, I came to realize - helped by talking to many younger people, most of them creatives - that I had to read up on what researchers, led by demographers and sociologists, have over decades come up with concerning generational characteristics.

getting a good grasp

Getting a good grasp of what different age cohorts moves is not only important for marketers and the advertising agencies, it is equally important for project developers; for owners of commercial real estate wishing to exploit their properties profitably.

Though I might be pushing at an open door, I do not see many of us landlords (for the better part so called baby boomers) being aware that demands and expectations have changed.

specific preferences, beliefs, life and work style

For each generation there are particular experiences that mould their specific preferences, beliefs, life and work style.

I am drawing here from *Overcoming Generational Gap in the Workplace*, by Casey Carlson and Deloitte & Touche. This study was designed to give us a better insight in what it means to have three generations in today's workforce, and how management can cope with their different perspectives on work and life.

The study tells us about a desired office culture wherein all workers will thrive. At the same time it tells us a lot about the physical workplace that would enhance such a culture.

Here is a brief description of each generation and their socioeconomic experiences and how these have impacted their attitude and approach.

baby boomers

The baby boomers, born between 1945 and 1965, were brought up in a post-war economy, that became healthier and more abundant as years went by, making for an egocentric generation. Work is the defining part of both their self-worth and their evaluation of others. Their lifestyle revolves around the fact that they live to work. Their work environment is the office only, where they spend long hours.

They expect others to have the same work ethic and work the same hours. There's no time for socialising in the office and if found, it tends to be with the likeminded.

Baby boomers do not deal very well with negative feedback. They are motivated by salary. They use the telephone to reach clients. As far as technology goes, they have their documents prepared by juniors, use email primarily in the office and use the web to 'google'. Their career goals are to excel and build a perfect career.

As far as offices go, they are the generation of post-war reconstruction, with its cold and unimaginative architecture, the generation of the huge colossuses and the open-plan offices; the office building that is no longer wanted.

generation X

The generation X, born between 1965 and 1980 was brought up in the shadow of the influential boomer generation. They grew up with a high rate of blended families. They saw their parents make great sacrifices for their companies (it's all about work).

The outcome is that they developed behaviours of independence, resilience and adaptability more strongly than previous generations. Where baby boomers live to work, gen X works to live.

X-ers work both in the office and at home, wanting a flexible schedule. Security is their motivator and both security and salary keep them with the company. They are self-reliant and can live without feedback. They use email to communicate with clients. They are techno-literate, creating their own documents, using mobile phones, laptops, tablets and the internet to research and review; they are 24/7 linked to email and mobile phones. Their career goals are to gain a variety of skills and experiences and build a transferable career.



With generation X entering the job market, new working entered the world.

Office and home have become complementary work environments. This calls for flexibility of design in existing and new office buildings. And flexibility calls for creativity.

new working entered the world

The Y generation (or the Millennials), born between 1980 and 2000 is the fastest growing segment of today's workforce. Neither employers nor owners of commercial real estate can ignore the needs, desires and attitudes of this vast generation.



generation Y

connected 24 hours  
a day, 7 days a week

Generation Y grew up with technology and rely on it to perform better. Armed with laptops, tablets, smart phones and other gadgets, Y-ers are connected 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This generation communicates with clients through email, instant and text messaging.

The fast-track has lost much of its appeal for generation Y which is willing to trade high pay for fewer hours, flexible schedules and a better balance of work and life. They want to maintain a personal life and find family more important than work.

Nurtured and pampered by their parents, these Millennials are confident, ambitious and achievement-oriented. They have high expectations of their employers, seek out new challenges and are not afraid to question authority. Generation Y wants meaningful work and a solid learning curve. It's the 'expecting more' style that characterizes this generation.

As children, Generation Y participated in many group activities. They value teamwork and seek the input and affirmation of others. Part of a 'no-person-left-behind' generation, Generation Y is loyal, committed and wants to be included and involved.

Generation Y craves attention in the forms of feedback and guidance. They appreciate being kept informed and involved in the decision-making process and seek frequent praise and reassurance.

So far, so good. But how did knowing all of this affect me, and even more importantly, how did it help me develop a concept that would work?

It opened my mind and my eyes. It changed my attitude, my approach. It made me realize that I should have a very good look at my building, to see if it had a future, a future for the Y generation, my future tenants!

It's the responsibility of the landlord to enhance the productivity of the tenant!

So, one should cater for the nowadays and not for the soon-to-be yesteryears!

The present workforce will definitely not be productive in the office of - much - older generations.

one should cater  
for the nowadays

The basic conflict arises from trying to fit an increasingly non-traditional workforce into a largely traditional workplace.

The problem is that most developers and investors belong to those older generations and tend to stick to their generation's way of thinking, their attitude and their approach. Afraid of out-of-the-box thinking, they stay boxed in, not understanding why their buildings are standing empty.

Why should we cater for the Y generation? Because if we don't we will not solve our problem! It's as simple as that.

In *The Future of Architecture*, the architect Herman Herzberger writes that the architecture of the future should more than ever take into consideration the people that are supposed to use it. Who are the buildings meant for is the key question here.

Herzberger declares mega-architecture obsolete. People should have a say in the design of their own environment. That might be inconvenient for architects, but it is, writes Herzberger, "our most important task. In the golden years we have seen the rise of an elite of architects everywhere dunking entirely superfluous castles in the - nothing but hot - air."

I couldn't agree more with the famous architect and his ideas on multifunctional architecture of a human scale.

No longer does the architect dictate. Creative thinkers get a say in their own workspace. Yes!

In the study *Culture Shock, Generation Y and their managers around the world* by Sue Honoré and Carina Paine Schofield, I found a quote that struck me: 'It is very easy to change buildings. It is very difficult to change people.'

It is obvious: offices that were designed for baby boomers and the early generation X do not appeal to the Y gen. So, we need to change the workspaces.

mega-architecture  
obsolete

no longer does the  
architect dictate

we need to change  
the workspaces





# IDEA SEX & THE BIRTH OF A CONCEPT: ZUIDPARK

III

## IDEA SEX\* & THE BIRTH OF A CONCEPT: ZUIDPARK

*It all begins with ambition, inspiration, a dream  
- and a little madness.*

So, I was left with a giant empty complex no tenant was interested in. I did see that I was dealing with supply and demand not matching. But how would I go about dealing with this collision of what is and what should be.

Obviously, I wasn't going to sell my product as was. Trying to thrust it down the throats of potential lessees was definitely not a solution.

It was clear to me that I needed to do some serious rethinking. I knew I had to defy the current 'rules' of commercial real estate. And that I needed help in getting me where I wished to go.

I needed feedback, I needed to inspire and be inspired. I needed to get away from people talking in square meters and find the ones I could share my dreams with.

So I invited the not middle-of-the-road, the not stuck-to-conventions. The daring; artists, TV producers, fashion designers, photographers, writers, web builders and other creative people. Let's call them the 'mad ones', the 'outlaws'; misfits, at least in the commercial real estate world.

It all begins with ambition, inspiration, a dream - and a little madness. Doesn't it?

I had this gut feeling that I needed to free myself from existing real estate notions and go beyond the trodden paths that would surely lead me nowhere.

serious rethinking

inspire and be inspired

ambition, inspiration,  
a dream

\* Idea Sex: When two, or more (if there's a lot of chemistry) people's ideas combine to make another. From: *The Urban Dictionary*

Meanwhile bankers and my 'friendly competitors' in the real estate industry were beginning to consider me as at least slightly insane. I had to find others that were as mad as I was and preferably madder. I was sure they would see things differently than your regular project developer and could help me co-create. Together we could make a difference.

I sought these others; to see whether my ideas were shared, whether I should re-adjust my vision, whether my ideas were feasible and within reach.

These were the people I had 'idea sex' with. Not that much later, the Zuidpark concept was born. We named it C.A.S.H.

In hindsight (and a lot of what I am writing here is a matter of retrospection) I think I was looking for people I could, and would, recognize and respect. People that would not make my stomach or heart turn, but would make it jump for joy. People that I could spar with. That I could share with.

Much later I read *The Creative Personality* (2000) by David H. Lyman, an essay on what characteristics lead to greater creativity.

Lyman came up with a list of traits that seem to be common among creative people.

Lo and behold, I found myself and my sparring partners defined!

Taking from Lyman's list, these are the people you should be looking for when you find yourself at a fork in the road. People that are curious, different, playful. People that do not take things too seriously, not even serious things.

People that do not play by 'the rules', that want to keep inventing, are bored by meeting with the same thing over and over; are fun to be around; are independent, enthusiastic, idealistic, responsive and passionate.

Lyman states: "Some consider creative people to be hyperactive, suffering from ADD, or absentmindedness or single-mindedness, or arrogance, or an inflated ego."

And further: "Creative people are bold, they act with the confident, charge-ahead, single-mindedness of people who have important work to do and know what that work is, even if others don't. They are free with their opinions because they like to test ideas and see if someone will challenge them".

After the fact, I recognised myself and the people I co-created Zuidpark with. What a joy!

What struck me most in Lyman's essay, and I quote:

"Sitting and dreaming is fine, for it's often where ideas come from, but action is what creates. Dreamers often refuse to begin the work until they have thought up what it is they are supposed to do. They 'think' too much without acting. It takes phone calls, drawings, letters, proposals, work prints, rough drafts, a model, a note to, or a conversation with, someone to get the creativity started. Thinking is fine, but do not just think, act! Get started. Build momentum, even if it is the wrong direction, or you are confused about the direction. Even mistakes can lead you toward your goal. It's easier to change direction once moving than to get started, so get started."

That's what we did.

"Work every day at what you do. Do not wait for inspiration to come and get you started. Work, so that when inspiration does come you will already be working. Working each day, regardless of how you feel. This discipline keeps your skills sharp."



There is no better advice and I followed it without ever having read Lyman's essay. It's in my genes, I suppose. Reading the essay made me realise. I am fortunate.

There wasn't a day that I was not 'getting my act together'. Against quite some odds I would say.

Again in hindsight, it was the best choice I made: to listen to and learn from a generation and professionals I was not fully familiar with; to get out of my generational and professional box!

the Zuidpark concept

share

creative people

independent, enthusiastic, idealistic, responsive and passionate

thinking is fine, but do not just think, act!

work every day at what you do

against quite some odds



It's obvious that I do not belong to the generation that is now looking for suitable workspaces. Most project developers do not. Most refuse to learn, refuse to get acquainted with the present cohort of office space dwellers. And that's exactly why we have these millions and millions of square meters standing empty. Learn is what we should do in our line of business, each and every day.

that's exactly why

Resting on one's laurels will surely not only result in unpleasant encounters with clients and banks, but also with the present generations that expect more than vague promises. They wish to feel sincere involvement, they wish to sense a passion for the merger of sustainability with practicality and efficiency. The Zuidpark concept is aimed at these generations and our efforts are not based on yesteryear's marketing tricks but on the sincerity and integrity that I consider to be the very foundation of today's marketing. To fully understand our modern societies is the condition without which we cannot build and renovate for the future.

sincere involvement

I learned a lot. Did I learn a lot! I learned to think in concepts instead of concrete. I learned to believe in the story, instead of the product. Value began to have a different meaning. I learned about myself and the world around me; about generation Y, its lifestyle and its workspace needs. I learned that understanding the differences between the generations is fundamental if one wishes to develop office space that works for all between the ages of 20 and 65. Indeed, each generation, X, Y or Z has its own experiences that lead to specific preferences, expectations and styles of working.

think in concepts instead of concrete

This learning process resulted in a concept that would not fail, and it did not.

a concept that would not fail

Using many different techniques while brainstorming, having, what the Urban Dictionary calls 'idea sex', we found in the end four all-important adjectives to cover the relevant characteristics of workplaces that would (and do!) attract the Y generation. These are: Creative. Authentic. Social. Hospitable. In short: C.A.S.H.!

four all-important adjectives

C.A.S.H.

Here I must mention and thank the renowned Dutch brand strategist Klaas Weima, author of *Earned Attention*, which describes an alternative way to build brands in this digital and social age.



We looked at our office complex to be as if it were a brand that needed to earn the attention of our future ‘consumers’, tenants that is.

According to Weima, each brand has its specific voice, character and truth. It’s a matter of finding these, so that brands can relate to their audience on a human level and truly earn their attention. We need to be talking with people, instead of talking at people.

There is no such thing as a golden formula to earn attention. However, most important are storytelling, meaningful experiences, social influence and co-creation. In finding the right strategy that will take you to earned attention, you should stay with the values and the DNA of your brand, stay with its identity. Be authentic. Weima tells us that being authentic is the marketing trend of this day and age.

What is vital: make sure that promises will become facts through concrete behaviour and actions. We’ll get to that in the next chapters and more specifically in chapter VI: THE MAKING OF C.A.S.H...

Klaas Weima gave us the first three letters of C.A.S.H..

As for the H of hospitable, that’s my contribution to the creative process! I find it extremely important that our tenants and visitors feel welcome and when entering the lobby find an atmosphere that radiates hospitality.

The Zuidpark concept became more and more clear to all involved in our brain dump sessions. A building that would offer a work environment that functions like a social network, designed to ‘sow, weed and harvest together’, a meeting place, a hub of co-creation.

And perhaps most important, a building giving room to companies to create and express their own culture and identity and yet still be part of the larger tenant community. A building that would connect, that would be the connection itself.

A building that would invite, would encourage creativity and co-creation, would have an authentic look and feel, would inspire social networking, a building that would be truly hospitable, embracing the new generation of entrepreneurs; where sharing is more important than having; where fun and a non-competitive and non-hierarchical work atmosphere go hand in hand, hence favouring cooperation and social cohesion.

The concept became reality. The present-day Zuidpark is much more than an office building: it is an environment for people by people; a meeting place where people communicate and share and exchange experiences.

It is a community; so much more than just a workplace. And it’s a huge success. We have not a single vacancy.

It proves that one can turn an ugly concrete Moloch into an attractive, sustainable place of work, where tenants can make their own choices in designing and furnishing their offices and can make their dreams come true.

Each of us could just as well work from home, so going to the office needs to be hyper-attractive.

An office is more than a workplace. It is a world where everything becomes possible. The new way of working that I so wholeheartedly support involves inspiration. Zuidpark offers space and air, both literally and figuratively. At Zuidpark people are in high spirits. Why? We have created synergy between energy and inspiration through design, the experiences we offer and the ideas that we share.

It hasn’t been easy to get there, but then ‘no guts no glory’, and as I said earlier, one needs to have faith. Creativity requires faith. Faith in your vision; faith in your skills; faith in your expertise, and faith in those of others with whom you can truly share your ideas (but beware of pretenders!). Creativity also needs courage and willpower.

Sow, weed and harvest together, that’s my motto. Joining hands in getting things done and reap the benefits of joint efforts, that’s what I find it is all about.

I was inspired by an interview with the philosopher Roman Krznaric in *The European Magazine* of February 2013 and I quote:

“I am an optimist. Hope is an inspiration for change. We don’t need false optimism, but we should recognize our ability to enact change. We can look to history to see people who have defied authority, who have challenged social norms. We can see people who have discovered within themselves a healthy form of madness.

If you just talk to yourself about the very real possibilities of failure, you are probably not going to be as mad as you should be.”

Failure is not an option and yes, one needs a little madness to keep going!

a huge success

tenants can make their dreams come true

synergy between energy and inspiration

should recognize our ability to enact change

failure is not an option

make sure that promises will become facts

‘sow, weed and harvest together’

the concept became reality

Zuidpark is not so much a product as it is a story; a story that sells well. We succeeded in writing a bestseller.

The beginning of all writing is a blank page. My building needed to become that blank page that I could write our story on. So, I decided to find that blank page by completely stripping my building. As a true writer of a saga, I began with extensive research into the subject of my storytelling.

get to know  
your building

This is my solid advice: do not begin writing your story before knowing your subject inside and out! In other words, get to know your building!





# GET TO KNOW YOUR BUILDING

## IV

## GET TO KNOW YOUR BUILDING

*An old building will always have free gifts,  
hidden treasures;  
the issue is to find these.*

I said it earlier, I didn't really know the office complex I owned. For years I had a single tenant that never missed a beat in paying rent and took care of the upkeep. I visited the premises once or twice a year. The ideal situation, you would think. Not if one quite unexpectedly finds oneself confronted with 25,000 square meters vacant, and you have come to the painful conclusion (swallowing it) that you will never find a tenant for your building as is.

When brainstorming with my fellow 'mad men' on the future of my building, it became clear to me that no matter what dreams we might have and what explicit ideas and concepts we arrived at, I needed to explore and find out whether the building would allow me to come up with a story that would convince. But then, how was I going to tell my story when I was really not familiar with its building blocks?

Exploring was called for! And that's what you should do. Or, quoting T.S. Elliot: 'We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.'

You never know what you're exploring until you know the place, and you don't know the place until you have explored it. If you do not explore, then you do not know. The objective of my sightseeing; to know my building for the first time.

In the following I will take you along the steps I took in getting to know my vacant office complex, built in the 70s of our past century. These can serve as pointers for anyone owning a vacant old building and wishing to create a success story, a story that will sell.

explore

create a  
success story

key characteristics

When I set off to discover, I kept in mind what it was that I was looking for. I wished my building - once converted - to express, give room for and enhance a creative, authentic, social and hospitable setting and mindset; key characteristics we came upon as a result of my many brainstorming sessions with young professionals outside the real estate business. In other words, I was looking for C.A.S.H!

carbon footprint

Remember that each and every building erected in steel, concrete and glass has its staggering carbon footprint and wrecking it makes it even worse. The building & contracting industries are the number one contributors to global warming! The construction and later demolition of a building account for 68% of its CO2 footprint. Heating, air conditioning, waste, etcetera for another 32%.

If we decide to no longer demolish, we will really significantly reduce CO2 emissions. So, if your building can be adapted to present day trends & fashions: go for it!

While you are at it: do also learn to look differently at matters of furniture, waste, heating, transport to and from the offices, efficiency and transparency of the costs involved.

The idea of creating an office-building that will attract the new generation of entrepreneurs will only work if you are sincere in everything you do, including taking sustainability seriously throughout the whole process.

Surely I was not able to sit with the architect, building engineers or draftspersons, to hear their stories. They were no longer amongst us. But I was able to find original documents in relevant archives and did have the opportunity to speak with the former owner/tenant.

find the authenticity

So this is what you do when getting familiar with your old building: find out whatever there is to know about its history: find drawings, applications, permits, photos, stories of tenants, etc. Gathering this information will help you find the authenticity you are looking for.

You are trying to find the true grit of the building.

It will also give you an idea of why certain decisions were made at the time. Why the low ceilings? Why all these partitions? Why beautiful brick walls covered in plaster? Decisions that were usually not foreseen by the original architect, but taken by interior designers, at the time complying to trends and demands in commercial real estate.

Investigate what is original. It will give you authenticity.

investigate what is original

So, I gathered all information that gave me a good insight in the history of my building. Material that I could later use to substantiate my story, in a presentation, in brochures, a website. My next step was to engage a professional photographer.

If you are thinking of taking the journey I took, I advise you to do as I did.

Your photographer should take pictures of every nook and cranny of your building, following the entire process of 'what was' into 'what is'. Go for details and construction.

Show the photos to your team of 'mad men', the persons that you trust in thinking out-of-the-box, in being there with you, when it comes to creating for the present and preferably for the future as well. You'll find that you should not demolish all! Presently, 60's and 70's design is hot, ask any small local antique shop that is not able to sell its 'regular' 18th or 19th century desk or sideboard, but will make a bundle on so called retro or vintage furniture. So, cherish those original tiles. Learn to appreciate original walls found behind layers of plaster.

you should not demolish all

Show and tell, that's what is all about, all along your journey of discovering and when that moment comes when you can finally present your building in its new found glory.

the 'before and after'

How great to be able to show the 'before and after'. It'll give added value. Get those pictures!



Do not let yourself be carried away! This is my solid advice: get solid advice!



Call in a building engineer to find out what is constructional and what can be demolished, keeping in mind that the tenants that you are looking for and that you wish to seduce with your story, your show and tell, go for, and fall for, industrial style and heights (let's call it 'authentic breathing space'). Have your building engineer investigate concrete floors, to know where one can go 'floating' with an atrium of two floors, or where build open staircases.

At risk of being repetitive: do go for heights and find how far and high you can go.

By now you must have gotten the gist of my story: go far, long and high, both in the figurative and literal sense. Go to the limit.

Literally, find out what your maximum height looks like after the acoustic ceiling systems are removed.

go far, long and high

An old building will always have free gifts; the issue is to find these. My biggest find: the huge thermal wheel, also known as heat recovery wheel, installed in the equally huge rooftop engine room when in the 70s the headquarters of what is now known as V&D department stores was built, commissioned by Anton Dreesmann (1923 - 2000), the grandson of the founding father.

biggest find

huge thermal wheel  
commissioned by  
Anton Dreesmann

Far ahead of his time, the illustrious captain of industry and affiliate professor of economics at the University of Amsterdam was eager to find energy efficiency, and found it in the thermal wheel.

Today, still operational, this installation that uses waste heat energy to deliver a fresh air stream, provides the building with a healthy indoor climate at low actual and environmental cost. A gift literally blowing your head off!

To pay tribute to the visionary Anton Dreesmann, I named the auditorium at which is now Zuidpark the Anton Dreesmann Connectorium. Honor to whom honor is due.

There were smaller gifts, equally rewarding. I am sure you will find those in your building. In mine I found what I consider modern art: collections of pebbles embedded in concrete walls. Those pebbles alone have a story to tell. I would like to know which glaciers or rivers or seas they came from.

there is no way back

Beginning to strip an entire building, is like crossing the Rubicon. Like Julius Caesar did, you are passing a point of no return; there is no way back.

We demolished all non-supporting walls and ceilings, giving us over 160 huge containers of what was not relevant or authentic, keeping in mind the generation of tenants we aimed for. The more space we created, the more inspiration the old building gave us.

Against all odds: love your building and love the story you are writing. Love hurts. Be prepared. You'll encounter writer's block. You will encounter envy, disbelief and total lack of understanding. Like most do who dare. Nothing new, is there?

share

You are the owner of the building. That makes you caretaker. Doesn't it? Find others that will support you in caretaking and share your sense of care, pride and responsibility. And passion.

a building has a spirit

A building has a spirit, personality, character. It has a story one should listen to and that should be told. It was conceived on a drawing table. An architect's dream come true? What do we know of the people that actually built it? There were successive owners and tenants and users. The building saw different times, people, trends and fashions, and ... administrations.

Your building has a lot to say if you are willing to listen. Get to know its spirit. Make it your work of art. Show it in its newly found splendor. And tell its story that is also yours.





# PICTURES SAY MORE THAN WORDS



## PICTURES SAY MORE THAN WORDS

*In the blink of an eye, an image can express an idea or an emotion which will stay much longer than the words on a page.*

Show and tell all along the way and when you can finally present your building in its new found glory. How great to be able to show the 'before and after'. It'll give added value. Get those pictures! If you are thinking of taking the journey I took, that's what I advised you to do in the previous chapter.

Our brain can process images 60,000 times faster than it can process words. In the blink of an eye, an image can express an idea or an emotion which will stay much longer than the words on a page. Think of the potential impact!

Images shouldn't be an afterthought. Your pictures should be part of your visual content strategy. To get your message across, in print or digitally, images must be compelling enough to click, share or read more, and meaningful enough to stand on their own.

Ask a professional photographer, and brief well.

get those pictures

think of the potential impact

images must be compelling



In the next pages, you will find only a very small selection of the grim that was then (though we saw its promises) and the inspiring that is now.

You will, at a glance, appreciate the efforts and energy that went into the making of Zuidpark, or, the making of C.A.S.H.

the making of Zuidpark









# STRIP, TEASE AND CONNECT

V

## STRIP, TEASE AND CONNECT

*Yes, you should have a great story that you believe in.  
And it should be brought to life with examples..*

These days, we're all overdosed with rhetoric.

ADSL connection, fiber optic cable and satellite give us access to countless TV channels and movie choices, commentators, blogs, innumerable email blasts and millions of websites - each one competing for a position in our lives, a share of our minds, just 30 seconds of our eyeballs. YouTube, Facebook, Twitter are household names in social media.

Now, more than ever, if you can't tell a story in a way that grabs people's attention and sticks with them, you may as well not even begin telling it. As simple as that.

But then, nothing can be more fulfilling than being good at telling a story and truly connecting with your audience.

truly connecting

In the following I am quoting freely from the British entrepreneur and TED curator Chris Anderson in *How to Give a Killer Presentation* (Harvard Business Review 6, June 2013). I can wholeheartedly advise you to read the article in full.

Anderson (as does Klaas Weima when talking about building brands) tells us that our success in business is all about effective storytelling. Why is that? Simple. Media overload, communications overload, gadget overload. There's no way you can give a good talk unless you have something worth talking about. Compelling presentations are the ones that take an audience on a journey. A successful talk is a little miracle - people see the world differently afterwards.

The most engaging speakers are superb at 'speed dating'. They are able to introduce their topic in a few words, then to explain why they care so deeply about it, and convince those present that they should, too.

explain what can be explained

Yes, you should have a great story that you believe in. And it should be brought to life with examples. Tell and show! Or show and tell. Explain what can be explained. Connect with your public, your consultants, future tenants, banks, investors and the media. That's what I did and what you should do.

I began 'undressing' the lobby (yes, indeed thinking in terms of the hospitality business) and its connecting floor, as I knew from the very onset of my journey that it was there that I could best explain the C.A.S.H. concept to my target audiences.

Explain what can be explained.

One should both be a dreamer of dreams and a planner of plans! Never lose the vision of reality! Do not let anyone tell you sarcastically to dream on; tell you that you have no chance in hell of ever achieving. Always be able to show that you are not 'just' a dreamer.

While stripping, I was able to show and reach my audiences, not even halfway my journey. I was able to tease and connect. I knew I had a story to tell, that couldn't wait to be told (remember swallowing the bad oyster).

Obviously, my story needed a title, my building a name. If you can capture the essence of your message in a few words, do not waste more!

Together with my trusted team of creative aces I found it. We opted for the clear and simple 'Zuidpark', with a small but strong caption: Stay Connected.

Some explaining might be needed here. The literal translation of Zuidpark would be South Park. Now, do not immediately think of the adventures of the four little guys in Colorado, though I love the sitcom and it's common last phrase: "You know, I have learned something today..."

South stands for Zuidpark's location in South Amsterdam. Park refers to lots and lots of parking space, inside and outside, as well as to our green ideas (which we successfully implemented, about which more later).

The caption Stay Connected covers what I think is the key factor in today's way of working as well as day-to-day life. It is really what I wished to achieve (and did so): my building would give every conceivable opportunity to share, get involved and connect, in fact my building itself would be the connection, the network!

Fact: the Zuidpark complex as such is extremely well connected; it is, from any direction, as accessible as one could wish for, by any public or private transport, as shown in our video teaser 'Zuidpark - Stay Connected'.

The logo of Zuidpark did not take that long to develop and says it all: a green square in the middle of different lines of communication and transport.

With a name, a caption and a logo I had, first and foremost, the absolutely necessary tools to make sure that my story would not only linger in the minds of my 'preview' audiences, but that it would literally stay with the early visitors in the forms of print (including business cards!) and visuals we would hand out.

Needless to say that name, caption and logo were, and still are, the pillars of all (visual) Zuidpark's communications.

Now, let's go back to the scene of my story.

The stripped entrance and its floor; that's where first I could and would tease my target audiences and that's where our present tenants (we have a waiting list!) and visitors still find and experience those four keywords: creative, authentic, social and hospitable.



The following are some of my thoughts on what entering a building should bring: a WOW, a smile on your face, a warm welcome, a sense of belonging, an invitation to a world where anything is possible, where tenants and visitors can create a realm of their own and at the same time be able to connect.

a dreamer of dreams and a planner of plans

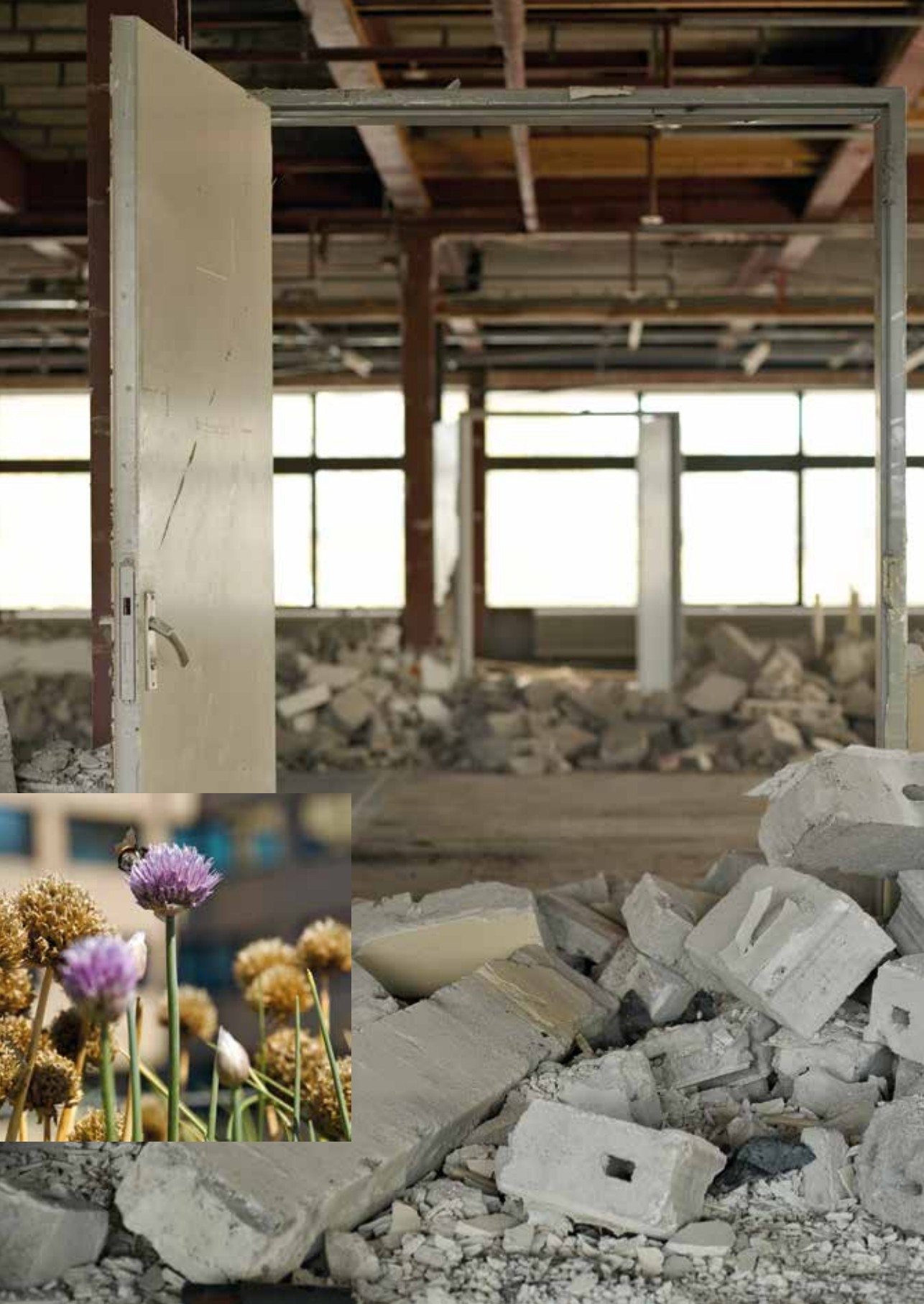
tease and connect

'Zuidpark' Stay Connected

a name, a caption and a logo

tease my target audiences

entering a building



A building is a story in itself; the beginning and the end are what people remember best. The entrance is both the first and the last page of the novella. So have the lobby and connecting spaces reflect the true spirit of the entire building and make sure to create a lasting impression, which visitors and tenants alike take along, both upon arrival and when they are leaving.

the true spirit

All senses should be triggered to create that WOW factor: sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing. Though here's a word of warning: jaw dropping experiences should not be an end in themselves. Functionality is a keyword here, and probably a prior condition.

Nothing more welcoming than the smell of fresh coffee and bread springing from our coffee corner in Zuidpark's lobby. At the same time, enjoying a healthy sandwich with your freshly brewed coffee is highly functional!

In my presentations of what would become Zuidpark, I made sure to include my ideas and convictions on sustainability; beginning with the indisputable fact that an ecological friendly building will have more value, in all senses of the word, than a wasteful one. I would talk of the interior climate solutions already in place (Anton Dreesmann's thermal wheel!) and our approach of saving energy and waste management.

an ecological friendly building

Here's another fact for you: sustainable enterprises are more inventive and innovative than traditional ones. A company that works in a sustainable environment creates goodwill with customers, banks and investors alike! So, if you wish to attract inventive and innovative tenants, make sure your building can live up to their expectations concerning sustainability and social responsibility. Remember that you cannot sell a story you do not believe in.

you cannot sell a story you do not believe in

You must believe in your story. If you don't, do not even try to convince others.

I presented my target audiences with a building that would guarantee an environmentally friendly and healthy workplace with lower service-costs and less sick leave. A workplace that would boost the reputation of tenants.

A workplace that would be much more than a workplace, that would be a meeting place branded creative, authentic, social and hospitable, with

selling a concept

'Stay Connected' a salute to new ways of working. A place that would attract talented employees.  
I was not selling my building. I was selling a concept. With 100% occupancy and a waiting list, I did.

we put Zuidpark on the map

I mobilized my network of creative professionals, my 'mad men', and together we put Zuidpark on the map.

Our stripped floor was the battlefield of 'Holland's Best Fashion Designers', a primetime TV show, which generated large and great publicity.

tools to tease

I had several short videos made (including artists' impressions, as we were still in the stripping phase). More tools to tease!

You do not put your building on the map by hammering a billboard to its facade or in the undergrowth surrounding it, promising 2,000 or more square metres of prime location. That is so of the past.

get connected

Get connected with today and you might even get connected with tomorrow.  
And just don't sit there.

Go beyond what's on your balance sheets. Forget about appreciations. Find a different approach. If possible, do not involve your bank, as you will lose precious time in convincing pin-striped cookie cutters that your vision will definitely show profit, even financially!

connect with innovative entrepreneurs

I 'happened' to connect with innovative entrepreneurs, such as the founders of Taxi Electric (or Taxi-E). We soon agreed that Zuidpark would host Europe's largest charging centre for electric taxis and, while we were at it, also provide park & ride facilities. Taxi-E has meanwhile circled the earth more than 25 times, and more and more tenants and visitors of Zuidpark connect their cars to the 40 electric charging points we provide.

Taxi-E

Having Taxi-E establish itself at Zuidpark underlines my firm belief in sustainable solutions, as does Zuidpark's urban farming roof of 3,000 m<sup>2</sup>.

Europe's largest urban farming roof

Together with Biet & Boon ('Beet & Bean'), kitchen garden specialists, great innovators in growing organic and fresh vegetables for and by all, I designed what was to become Europe's largest urban farming roof.





In our urban farming roof one finds all my ideas and convictions combined! Here again, you'll see the C.A.S.H. principle working and our 'slogan' Stay Connected governing.

Sustainability, social responsibility, leading-edge entrepreneurship and the new work philosophy all in one. Zuidpark residents have ample opportunities for mutual encounters and to find inspiration in shared spaces. These include access to our unique urban farming rooftop, a place to unwind and do some, literally, hands-on sowing, weeding and harvesting.

Sow, weed and harvest together, that's my motto. This relates to the urban farming project on our roof, as well as to the business culture of the tenant companies. Joining hands in getting things done and reap the benefits of joint efforts, that's what I find it is all about.

This building is dedicated to matching and melding human energy and creativity: the building is the network!

By now I should have convinced you of the importance of having a good story and linking with creative others in the making of it. Of how to support your story, getting it across, by showing and involving your public. Of how important it is that you are a firm believer, with a lot of backbone, as there will always be sceptics amongst us.

Your story, your building, will be a success if you and your story, your building, are one. And it should be clear to all that what you say is what you do.

So, cut the grass, host your strip show with the confidence of someone who knows what he is talking about, tease the imagination of your public and connect!

Enough said about what a good story can and should do. It's about time to go a step further: the actual making of Zuidpark and how my ideas and ideals came to life.

I couldn't agree more with Gandhi, when he concluded that happiness is when what you think, what you say and what you do are in harmony.

sow, weed  
and harvest together

the building  
is the network

what you say  
is what you do



# THE MAKING OF C.A.S.H.

## VI

THE MAKING OF C.A.S.H.  
or how to shape a creative, authentic, social  
and hospitable setting

*The project is successful in every sense.  
Zuidpark is fully leased, where countless other office buildings  
are standing empty.*

Yes, naturally we contrast the two: our C.A.S.H. concept and what we consider to be totally outdated cash-thinking, which is about greed, and also about fear, fear of losing it all. Our C.A.S.H. concept is about inspiration, about hope, about belief, it's about daring. Daring to embark on a journey, not as a reckless adventurer, but as a creative entrepreneur who knows how to deal with the demands of today's tenants.

The banal catering of services has become something of the past. Today's tenants demand more and more from their landlord. They are looking for a complete and meaningful experience, a constant update and interaction coming from the property-owner on all rental related matters and wish to be convinced of the landlord's social responsibility. Having said that, you must however not fall into the trap of being totally identified with your building, having the world think that its - continuing - success is directly related to you personally and your constant presence. In fact, my advice is, once you feel everything is in place, to retreat and become a 'silent partner'. Make it clear to all that it is the C.A.S.H concept (developed by a creative team) that makes for success, not the actual owner of the building.

What this means is that you should find yourself a keen executive who will be available at all times to explain your underlying concept and the way it is worked out in your office block. Engage an enthusiastic Millennial, preferably with a hospitality and marketing background. This always present 'hotelier' is the true representative of the building, one could say IS the building, is the all-important communicator and able to translate promises into behaviour

totally outdated  
cash-thinking

creative entrepreneur

it is the C.A.S.H concept  
that makes for success

'twitter proof'

and actions, crucial in this day and age of sharing experiences. The management of your building should be what I call 'twitter proof'.

room for the true and authentic identity and culture of tenants

In previous chapters we talked about giving room for the true and authentic identity and culture of tenants. That's what we do. Instead of selling square meters, we are selling a total concept.

make dreams come true

Zuidpark tenants can make their identity and culture tangible and visible, to their own co-workers, as well as their clients.

With our support they can make their dreams come true.

we co-create

This is because we deal in shells. We provide sustainably renovated, or one could say rehabilitated, space, definitely with all state-of-the-art facilities and amenities that can be expected, but we completely leave interior design, furnishing and decorating of that space to our residents.

We co-create; we help our residents make their office truly theirs.

We pay the bills, up to a year's lease, for interior decoration and fittings, writing that off in ten years (the duration of the lease). The only condition is that upon ending the contract the space rented should be left as a 'virgin' shell, for the next tenant to make a dream come true. Dreams differ, don't they?

all about connecting

There's more in the contracts. It's all about connecting and learning from each other.

presentations Anton Dreesmann Connectorium

We ask our residents to make an annual presentation of their company to the other tenants and invitees. The venue for these presentations is the Anton Dreesmann Connectorium, a great meeting place and auditorium, that is, we feel in itself proof of how different 'species' can be different *and* get along.

each chair has a story to tell

I found the chairs for the Connectorium in the showroom of a Belgian furniture factory. I saved them from finding their end on a dump. Each chair has a story to tell. We have tagged them, so visitors know where in the world to find the sister of the chair they are sitting on: whether it is in a Belgian Casino or a German Kulturhaus.

meetings with all tenants

We have regular general meetings with all tenants, not just to talk about practicalities. Zuidpark belongs to all and is in itself the connexion between all, even though our residents each have their own space. We believe it is highly important to hear and discuss matters with all tenants together.

Zuidpark belongs to all

We need to know what's in and on their minds, we need to know their ideas on benefitting even more from the setting that our office complex offers.

We, as a landlord, need a sparring partner, to know whether our ideas are met with - preferably a little more than - approval.

In fact, I would say that owning and managing an office building of - and for - this day and age means being involved in an ongoing creative process, where landlord and residents alike and together strive to reach the ideal balance between work and life (remember that we are far past the era when work was life and life was work).

That's why our lease contract asks for attendance at our resident meetings.

One could compare our tenants with owners. Even though they are not actually owning the complex, we do share the concept of C.A.S.H. thinking and own it together.

Last, but not least, the lease contract stipulates that residents become members of the Garden Club.

Earlier, I talked about 'sow, weed and harvest together' being my motto. Our urban farming roof offers yet another great opportunity to connect and join hands. In working on our roof, for none of our tenants their regular line of business, our residents find quite some satisfaction and a sense of achievement, when they can actually reap the fruits of their efforts. It's also a great place to socialize, between colleagues and between companies.

Our urban farming project shows our social responsibility and involvement in the protection of the environment, and of our residents alike.



Zuidpark's coffee corner offers delicious soups and sandwiches with ingredients straight from the roof.

The benefits of our urban farming roof are manifold!

ongoing creative process

share the concept of C.A.S.H. thinking

Garden Club

great place to socialize

protection of the environment

benefits are manifold





I said it before, the roof represents all of what we mean by ‘think C.A.S.H.’ and therefore, if you allow me, I will delve further into the making of it.

Yes, I know, it was a bold plan. The urban farming projects that I had heard about and visited were designed and taken care of by citizens with a passion for gardening. To inspire residents of an office complex to work the soil would be another matter, so I was told. Still, I decided to go ahead and create our 3,000 square meters kitchen garden, making it the largest vegetable roof garden in Europe.

The project is successful in every sense. Zuidpark is fully leased, where countless other office buildings are standing empty.

I do think that our concept, our formula, if you will, of sustainability and horticulture on the roof has played an important role. Being the largest urban farming project on an office building in Europe, it received a huge amount of media coverage. Having it inaugurated by the Dreesmann family, grandmother and grandson, gave it an extra for the assembled press. Always look for that extra angle.

The roof made the address: ‘the office building with the roof’. Our residents, management and employees alike, are advertising this and take pride in being part of it. They love to take their visitors there and the 10 meter high roof with a spectacular view has become a sought-after venue for afterhours events.

Do I need to say more on branding and earned attention?

As ‘Stay Connected’ is Zuidpark’s caption, it goes without saying that there’s WiFi connectivity in every nook and cranny of the 3,000 square meters rooftop. You should come and visit!

From our roof the members of our Garden Club gather a wide selection of fruits, vegetables and herbs, to take home.

The gardener (we do need professional support to maintain the roof) supplies our coffee corner and brings down crops to the lobby, there to take away.

The gardener’s salary and other expenses for maintenance of the our urban farming roof, such as electricity and water, the automatic irrigation system and all other maintenance activities make up part of the rental fee.

a bold plan

largest vegetable  
roof garden in Europe

sustainability

huge amount  
of media coverage

branding and  
earned attention

200,000 litres  
of topsoil

Our vegetables and red fruits, and even fruit trees, grow in troughs. For planting those we needed 200,000 litres of topsoil. Naturally, we first investigated the carrying capacity of the roof!

For those interested in further details:

We mounted a roof leakage system that, through sensors, provides instant distribution of water, in case of a leak. The system allows us to find the exact location of the leak. Concrete tiles are the last cover, on which we placed our large planters.

The topsoil we used is lightweight, with high biological nutrients.

The troughs are watered by an electronically controlled irrigation system. What we plant is governed by the seasons; there are always flowering plants or vegetables or fruits to harvest.

people that know  
their business

I love to work with people that know their business. I was fortunate to find them, and not only for realising our rooftop urban farming project, I must add.

making the concept  
a visible,  
tangible reality

Earlier I mentioned my team of 'mad men' that helped me develop our C.A.S.H. concept.

Needless to say, that in making the concept a visible, tangible reality, I also needed the input and support of others.

This is my advice: Always look for people that know what they are talking about and are willing to share their experience and knowledge. Respect their know-how. Do not ever think that you know it all! That will take you on the road to failure, even disaster.

However, there is no harm in questioning. I am not talking about blind trust.

find your partners

But what fun, and how inspirational and motivating it is to deal with authentic, true professionals and undertake a journey together, sharing your dreams. Find your partners!

all about hospitality

Our coffee corner is all about hospitality. The smell of good coffee and fresh bread. People that know what it means to render a warm welcome. It is run by a small company, that fully backs our C.A.S.H. concept. Their coffee is Blue Label, which supports various good causes. Breakfasts, brunches and lunches are for a good part made up of what's harvested on our roof.





To be on the very pragmatic and worldly side (never lose that!), they are licensed. So, we can have Friday night happy hours at our Olympic Lounge, and cater fully for events, whether on our roof or in any of the other communal areas.

Think C.A.S.H. does not mean that you should forget about financial feasibility.

In fact I am convinced that thinking C.A.S.H. and making it happen, is a sure way, if not the only way to economic success, or future-proof investment.

Another partnership I am very happy with, is that with Taxi Electric (or Taxi-E). As mentioned before, Zuidpark is hosting Europe's largest charging centre for electric taxis and provides 40 electric charging points for our tenants.

Yes, having Taxi-E establish itself at Zuidpark underlines my firm belief in sustainable solutions, as does our urban farming roof. And there again, making it happen gave us a lot of great publicity. Again, manifold benefits.

And again, a testimony of 'putting your money where your mouth is'. And again, proof of how important it is to find partners in making what think C.A.S.H. means: promoting a creative, authentic, social and hospitable environment and make it happen.

I sometimes ask myself whether we missed an opportunity to show that our ideas and ideals are sincere. I honestly can't say we did.

We did not - and do not - miss a beat in following our C.A.S.H. concept. It works.

Being convinced of that (by the actual figures!), I decided to create the consultancy Connecting Concepts and found a great partner in Mosgan Tofghi, a Y-generation jurist who has earned her spurs in labour legislation, a keen researcher on shifts in the labour market, out-of-the-box thinker and a great connector.

Why reinvent the wheel.  
We found it.

pragmatic and worldly

the only way to  
economic success  
future-proof investment

money where  
your mouth is

Connecting Concepts



# ABOUT CONNECTING CONCEPTS

VII

## ABOUT CONNECTING CONCEPTS

*Really, all buildings have - hidden - potential.  
One only needs to see. With a little help.*

While creating Zuidpark as it stands now, with full occupancy and happy residents, I became more and more convinced that with our C.A.S.H. concept we had found an infallible method for making a difference.

making a difference

That's what it is all about, making that difference, as that is why a potential tenant, lease and location being almost equal, chooses one future place of work over the other.

I firmly believe in our concept and since I set off, together with other believers, on my journey to transform 25,000 square metres of untenanted office space into a sought after address, I have known that I would make my experience and know-how available to all who have vacant commercial real estate on their balance sheets.

experience and  
know-how available

I envisioned a consultancy, Connecting Concepts, that would offer our creative talents supported by our lessons learned. Why reinvent the wheel, when there's a proven track record to show.

Well into my journey of transforming the 25,000 square metres of untenanted building that I found myself with, I met Mosgan Tofighi. With her background and enthusiasm, it was only natural that Mosgan would take on the daily management of Zuidpark, and become a partner in Connecting Concepts.

Connecting Concepts is about passion. Our passion lies in re-energising a tired old building. Therein lies our strength and our expertise as well; one could even say our self-chosen responsibility. We care about old dormant buildings, sleeping beauties, waiting to be kissed alive. Well, to be honest, it might involve a rough awakening, but we can promise a rewarding future. We know how to achieve added value.

re-energising a  
tired old building

achieve added value

we can be your partner

C.A.S.H. concept is leading

we know how

offering solutions to prospective tenants

In the preceding chapters I have been talking about the creatives, my 'mad men' I got myself surrounded and engaged with, and how important it is to find people that, like you, believe, and dare to think out-of-the box, with one goal in mind: to give this building, its owner and its tenants, a future.

I established the Connecting Concepts consultancy, just to give that creative stimulus and energy to owners of commercial real estate coping with vacancy, looking for solutions.

We know, by experience, that finding the right partners gives a boost. Sitting on a vacant building? Don't know what to do? Why reinvent the wheel.

We can be your partner. We will put together a dream-team. We will show you the way to a future-proof investment.

We do not pretend to know it all, but we do know which lines to follow. Our C.A.S.H. concept is leading. We know how to implement. We know how to create the distinctive.

If you wish your building to be welcoming and embracing; hospitable, promoting creativity and connectivity: Do think beyond the square metres and even the location you offer. We can help you find unseen opportunities in your building.

What Connecting Concepts does: Together with the owner, we go on a discovery tour of what we can do to implement C.A.S.H. factors. How do we make a building nurturing, promoting a creative, authentic, social and hospitable place of work? A place that is sought after by the present and future workforce?

By now we know how. We know the present labour market and the needs of its different sectors, and we know the present labour force. We keep abreast of developments. Our point of venture is the Y generation; its needs and wishes.

How do we make a building into a C.A.S.H. building? How do we immediately give it added value, for a prospective tenant rather than for the owner? This might seem paradoxical, but only if they see opportunities for improving their business, will your targets consider renting. So, first and foremost think of offering solutions to prospective

tenants; what will your prospects gain by moving into your building? How will your building be different from others? How will it earn attention? How will it become an address, the talk of the town?

Make sure that your future tenants will not find anything even comparable anywhere else. Make renting office space in your building essential to your tenants' success story. Theirs will be yours.

Connecting Concepts can help make the transition happen. We have the hard skills and the soft skills!

We know how to create experiences. Experiences will attract people. We know how to discover the soul of a building and give it its voice; to make a mute building tell its story.

Connecting Concepts is a consultancy. Our logo is a jigsaw piece. We help make the puzzle complete.

We are there for all those who have commercial real estate on their balance sheets, directly or indirectly. Private and public owners and investors, investment managers, banks, brokers and architects alike. For all those that have to deal with vacancy.

We are there for those who have a problem and want to solve it; who are prepared to swallow the bad oyster, but want to survive.



Vacancy hurts. But then, you only have to sell your story, or the story of your building (but it needs to be a good one!) to just one candidate tenant. Having signed, the value of your building will substantially rise.

your tenants' success story

create experiences

make a mute building tell its story

make the puzzle complete

swallow the bad oyster

vacancy hurts



Yes indeed, the bigger the building the more opportunities for C.A.S.H., and yes, it's true, it takes numbers to run a profitable espresso bar, let alone a restaurant and hospitable places where people connect. And yes, investing in an urban farming roof of 3,000 square meters might be too much.

But then, we are convinced that the owner of even the smallest of suffering commercial properties can learn from just reading THINK C.A.S.H., to find ideas and guidelines that might inspire and motivate.

ideas and guidelines

Connecting Concepts is there to help you plan and to accompany you on your journey to success.

We are believers in commercial real estate and want to make a difference, for you. We'll talk the talk and walk the walk, with you.

Let's get connected!

let's get connected



# EPILOGUE



## EPILOGUE

*With the sale of Zuidpark we stepped out of a dream that we made true, making room for other dreams, ours and those of others.*

On October 8 of this year I signed Zuidpark over to Rockspring, a European property investment manager with a portfolio of € 8 billion.

What can I say more than that this sale of Zuidpark ultimately shows that our C.A.S.H. concept is indeed viable and our investments are future proof.

In a press release, Rockspring specifically mentioned the fact that Zuidpark is 100% let to highly regarded companies and that it enjoys excellent tenant covenants.

Well, if you have read the preceding chapters, you will know that I am convinced (and now even more than ever) that this full occupancy by innovative key players in different markets is entirely due to the way and the spirit in which we transformed a, let's say sad, barren building with no identity of its own, into an authentic, distinctly hospitable setting, stimulating creativity and social networking. Correct me if I'm wrong!

What does the sale mean to me? I cannot deny that I feel a bit like a parent seeing a child leave home. But then I know that we have given Zuidpark, our 'child' if you will, a solid, if not the best ever, foundation to do much better than just survive. We taught it to be creative, authentic, social and hospitable. That will certainly support Zuidpark in its future.

Will I suffer from empty nest syndrome? Definitely not!

Together with my partner in Connecting Concepts and others that we found and will seek out, I can now dedicate myself to develop other projects. With Zuidpark having found a new owner, we have other dreams that we are determined to make come true.

sale of Zuidpark

what does the sale mean to me

develop other projects

Behind the Zuidpark premises we own a building site that we cleared when we took on the transformation of the old office and warehouse complex. It is ideal for development. For years and years I've been dreaming of getting that started. Now is the time.

Together with architects renowned for their pioneering and inventive approach in the transformation of vacant industrial buildings, we are now developing blueprints for a future community centre, an iconic meeting place for the creative industry.

This is how the architects translated our first briefing and brainstorm session together.

“The objective of Connecting Concepts is to put up a building that will be unique of its kind, imagined and developed by and for creatives. A building that offers an experience. The building should bring innovation and radiate open-mindedness and tolerance. It is a big creative melting pot of both think and make enterprises in sectors such as IT, fashion, media, architecture and industrial design, to name some.

The building is a polyculture of large successful companies and start-ups together.

It is an industrial building with a floor height of 6 metres, giving resident companies freedom and space to fulfill their own wishes and needs. A building that can breathe in and out, with floors that can smoothly be inserted or taken out.

Above all, the building should be future proof and therefore multifunctional; to easily be partially or entirely converted into apartments and a shopping centre.

Connecting Concepts does not know where we will be in 30 years; what our needs will be. What will take us to work: car or public transport; by road, railway or waterways? All of the above should be embraced by the building proper, as well as its location in the Amsterdam metropolitan area.

Connecting Concepts wishes plans to realise this ambitious building behind Zuidpark, along the A10 motorway and the Duivendrecht canal, connecting Amsterdam with the Overamstel industrial zone.”

The architects could not have better translated our ideas. They came up with a great design, that is now on a 'road show' along potential investors.

As I said before, what a joy to find the right team, to work with people that know what they are talking about and are willing to share their experience and knowledge. And what fun, and how inspirational and motivating it is to deal with authentic, true professionals and undertake a journey together, sharing your dreams.

So, this is it: with the sale of Zuidpark we stepped out of a dream that we made true, making room for other dreams, ours and those of others.

To all those that have from the onset been and still are believers in our C.A.S.H. concept and have been inspirational and loyal supporters; my team of 'mad men', builders, suppliers, staff, residents, my family: a heartfelt thank you.

I do hope that THINK C.A.S.H. will inspire you to fulfill your wishes and ambitions.

But remember this, and I am quoting Colin Powell: 'A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work'.

Jan Huijbregts  
Amsterdam, December 2015





## ABOUT JAN HUIJBREGTS (1963)



Jan Huijbregts is the fifth generation offspring of an entrepreneurial family par excellence, active in construction since 1873.

First and foremost an entrepreneur, Jan has a keen eye and is always looking for opportunities to add value and knows how to seize and create these.

With degrees in both Architecture & Construction Management and Law, a very open mind and a hands on approach, Jan Huijbregts is a genuine all-rounder, who is always eager to learn, privately and professionally. He is both a passionate people person and hard driving business developer.

After finishing his studies in 1990, he joined the family construction business, to learn the ropes. He took along his ideas for business and concept development and while he was CEO, from 1993 to 2001, the family business grew into a booming enterprise.

In 2001 the family shares were sold, opening the way for other projects and ventures, such as the establishment of a private equity and real estate development firm and the acquisition of the then headquarters of the biggest Dutch chain of department stores, Vroom & Dreesmann.

A pioneering spirit, Jan Huijbregts transformed this 25,000 square metres office and warehouse complex into Zuidpark, which became a major success, showing his daring, and at the same time solid, concept to be viable and his investments to be future proof. This was underlined by the recent sale of the 'building with the green roof' to Rockspring, one of the largest European property investment managers.

He is now dedicated to Connecting Concepts, a consultancy he created to advise existing and future owners of commercial real estate on how to turn properties into future proof investments.

Jan is a born communicator and persuader, superb at mobilising others to join him in his projects, his ideas and ideals, whilst always having a good ear and respect for the knowledge and expertise of the professionals he seeks to connect with, continuously looking for and creating positive energy.

He is a doer and a searcher. For the authentic. For finding creative solutions. For creating social and hospitable environments.

His motto: "Honesty is the best policy".

*All buildings, even the neglected, have potential. One just needs to have an eye. And a heart. And the gumption to seize the opportunity.*



## ABOUT MOSGAN TOFIGHI SHIRAZI (1975)



Mosgan Tofighi was born into two cultures. Her Iranian father studied at Delft University of Technology, married his Dutch sweetheart and settled in The Netherlands.

Mosgan is a broad and imaginative, out-of-the-box thinker. It is in her genes. And character.

She studied Law at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam and built an impressive expertise in intellectual property law, contract and corporate law. She found her way from an accountancy firm to the Dutch Federation of Trade Unions (FNV), always being involved in creative solutions, whether in business development or disputes.

It was at KIEM, one of FNV unions, that she represented and promoted the interests of members involved in the arts, the information-industry, entertainment and the media.

Mosgan Tofighi is a registered negotiator and business mediator, with experience of working in a corporate environment.

She is passionate and creative, at the same time a razor-sharp observer, being solid on matter and lenient on a personal level, driven by a great sense of justice and empathy.

Mosgan is actively involved in Cinema Culinair: watching a top movie (from *Estômago* to *La Grande Bouffe*) and tasting the food being served on the screen simultaneously; eating with the leading actors and enjoying the same dish, at the same time.

Cinema Culinair's slogan is 'good film, good food, great timing'.

Always into developing concepts, Mosgan Tofighi is now active in commercial real estate as a partner in Connecting Concepts, a logical next step from her involvement in the daily management and marketing of Zuidpark.

Her motto: "Let's turn creative ideas into earned turnover".

*The future is about creating space in our minds and hearts, for ideas and ideals.*



# DEAR READER

Dear reader,

I hope you have enjoyed sharing my ideas and ideals.

The proceeds of THINK C.A.S.H. will be donated to the Kopan Monastery, a Tibetan Buddhist monastery on the outskirts of Kathmandu, Nepal.

Kopan is renowned for teaching Buddhism to visiting Westerners, including the author, who, having visited before, spent two weeks of June 2015 at Kopan, returning to Amsterdam reborn and with a new zest for life.

As with countless dwellings in Nepal, the monastery was seriously damaged - destroying its Gompa - by the earthquake of April 2015. Kopan is in urgent need of funding for the rebuilding of its place of worship, meditation and learning.

Kopan monks come from all parts of Nepal. To support the people of the destroyed villages of their youth, they set up the Helping Hands Fund, first to bring immediate relief and now focusing on helping with reconstruction.

If you wish to contribute further to the rebuilding of the Chenrezig Gompa or to the Helping Hands Fund of the Kopan monks, please donate generously to the Yonten Foundation, IBAN NL36 TRIO 0390 3249 65, mentioning KOPAN.

Connecting Concepts will see to it that your greatly appreciated donations will be properly spent.

Thank you!

Jan Huijbregts

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# NOTES

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## COLOPHON

Concept	JAN HUIJBREGTS, MOSGAN TOFIGHI, ALIDA MEURSING
Author & co-author/editor	JAN HUIJBREGTS, ALIDA MEURSING
Photography	HANS MORREN
Design	FRANCIEN VAN MAASDIJK
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## **This book is a tribute to abandoned big buildings.**

Jan Huijbregts tells us that it is high time that we acknowledge and salute those buildings for what they offer. We should give those vacant buildings a fair chance of becoming the ultimate place to meet and share, satisfying the expectations and demands of the new workforce.

In 2009 the author saw his single tenant leave, and found himself the owner of a vacant office complex of 25,000 square metres. Time for a rethink and appropriate action. With a good eye and ear for the Y-generation, he managed to turn this property into Zuidpark, a sought after work environment and meeting place, with not a single metre untenanted. Jan Huijbregts learned how to open doors for present and future demands and seize the opportunities big vacant buildings offer.

THINK C.A.S.H. is meant for all who have commercial real estate on their balance sheets. It is about a conceptual - and profitable - approach to vacancy. Instead of spread sheet thinking, the author encourages readers to dare to think in storylines; letting a building tell its true story; the story a prospective tenant will believe in.

Pitching for a tenant? Smart prospects are looking for opportunities to improve business results, at lower costs. That's what in the end makes prospective tenants choose, nothing else. Your story should truly answer those demands. Smart prospects will see through a pitch that lacks a solid concept. C.A.S.H. is such a concept.

Instead of thinking cash, the author tells us, we should think C.A.S.H., or making a building a creative, authentic, social and hospitable place to be. A place that will definitely attract and keep tenants!

This book aims to serve as a guide to making that happen. It shows the way to future-proof investments in commercial real estate.

So, here's to vacant office buildings. The ones that can make a difference, if you would only see.

***Will our C.A.S.H. concept always work? We strongly believe so. It is simple and universal. Vacancy is a choice. Make it an opportunity!***

The proceeds of THINK C.A.S.H. will be donated to the Kopan Monastery, a Tibetan Buddhist monastery on the outskirts of Kathmandu, Nepal (see page 99).



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