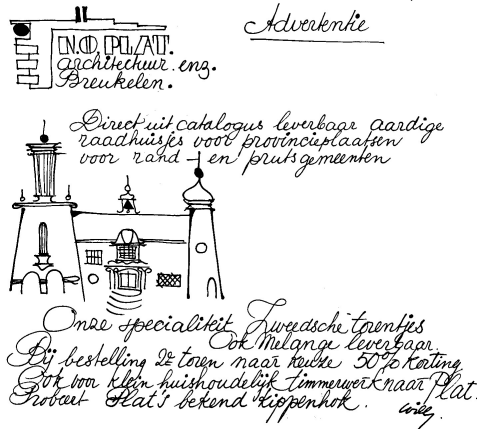


TOWN HALL COMPETITIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS BEFORE WORLD WAR II

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'advertisement' in: *De 8 en OPBOUW* of 1/4/1939 (Willy La Croix)¹

Rotterdam was the first major city in The Netherlands in the Twentieth Century to acquire new premises for their city offices. The design to be built was the result of a closed competition, presumably the first ever for a town or city hall in the country. It also meant the first failure in the eyes of many and indeed the building, which miraculously survived, nearly undamaged, the fierce German bombardment in May 1940, when almost the whole city of Rotterdam vanished, is not the best, architecturally speaking.

The competition took place in 1912.² A Delft professor and writer of a set of books on architectural history, Hendrik (Henri) Jorden Evers (1855-1929), won the first price.³ Much to the displeasure of many colleagues, Karel Petrus Cornelis de Bazel's and Willem Kromhout's entries (and those of five other architects) were put aside. Famous masters as H.P. Berlage (Exchange of Amsterdam) or P.J.H. Cuypers (Central Station and National Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam) had not been invited.

The history of the competition is indeed remarkable. Firstly, Evers had been invited by the mayor of Rotterdam to deliver a draught for a new city hall, which was adopted. But then the city decided to organize a closed competition, in which the ground plans as proposed by Evers were conditions *sine qua non*. So, Evers won the competition and the colleagues got angry. The building was finished in 1920, delayed as a result of World War I, which though did not affect the Netherlands directly.

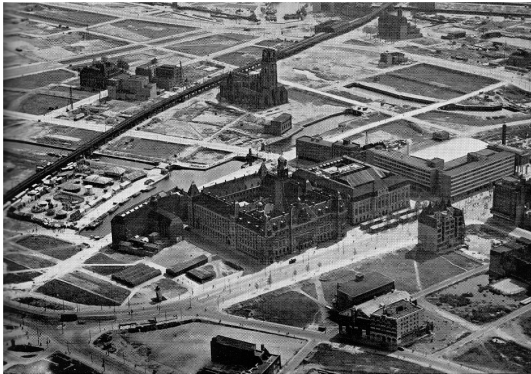
The famous functionalist couple Jan Duiker (1890-1935) and Bernard Bijvoet (1889-1979) were employed by their former teacher in the building of the city hall and may have had some modernizing influence, but as a whole the building became and has what a city hall for a world-famous harbour city was supposed to be and have: impressiveness overall, at an important new traffic artery with enough space in front for the gathering crowds, symmetry, an impressive clock-tower, large entry-doors, a wide hall, spacious stairs and an overwhelming Great Hall, much like formerly a royal palace was supposed to have. Of course the building is profusely detailed and provided with the necessary sculptures of famous men

¹ 'Nice little town halls directly from our catalogue, our specialty Swedish Towers. Melange also available. If wanted, second tower half price. Try Plat's well-known chicken run.' (etc)

² Documented in: *Bouwkunst*, 1913, pp. 89-173.

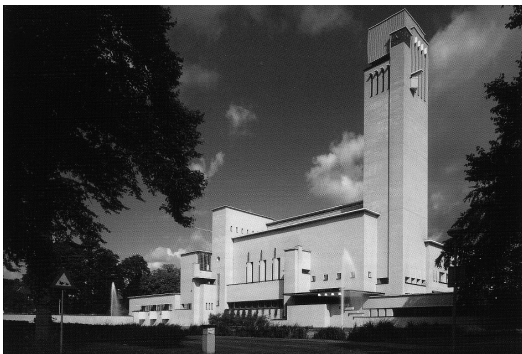
³ *De architectuur in hare hoofdtijdperken*, Amsterdam 1911/18.

of Rotterdam: the man of state Johan van Oldenbarneveldt, Desiderius Erasmus, the inventor of the printing letter Laurens Janszoon Coster etc. Stylistically the building may be called Global Eclecticism, possibly symbolizing the aspects of the harbour-city.



Rotterdam after the cleaning of the May 1940 bombardment debris; town hall in the centre

Hilversum got its superb town hall differently without any competition. It may be a sign to future planners of city premises that the result here was so much better than in Rotterdam. Hilversum had the good taste to attract a real master in contemporary building as its municipal architect and town planner.⁴ This turned the village-on-the-heath into a green National Radio Town. It took one-and-a-half decade, from 1916 till 1930, to produce one of the most beautiful town halls in the world. Stately enough for an important building, it has all the qualities one may expect from a functional building, as it was expressed in the program for another, much smaller town hall in nearby Huizen. But in Hilversum an effective ground plan, good illumination and other functional conditions were apparently more important than symbolism. Although, it is interesting to see that in the overall orthogonal ground plan there is one exception: one of the wings ends in a triangle, pointing due North. It contains the room for the surveyors. Even the tower in Hilversum is more functional than in Rotterdam, as it shows from far where the building is hidden in the suburban villa town with its endless winding streets and alleys and numerous trees.



Town Hall Hilversum by W.M. Dudok

Leiden's renaissance city hall, designed by Lieven de Key (1560-1627), burnt down on 12 February 1929. In first instance W.M. Dudok received a commission for rebuilding, but his cubicle design with a massive tower, based on his Hilversum town hall, was not appreciated. On 11 July 1932 the Leiden City Council invited five members of the League of Dutch Architects: C.J. Blaauw, A.J. Kropholler, H.F. Mertens and two Leiden based architects B. Buurman en J.A. van der Laan. The latter would win later on the Eindhoven competition. Main condition in Leiden was the conservation of the renaissance main façade. C.J. Blaauw's traditional 'clear design' would be executed.

⁴ Since Hilversum never received city-rights I make here the distinction between city hall and town hall, while in fact there is no difference in the main function: a local authority, though one can argue that the difference sits in British (town) and American (city) English.

Stockholm (SWEDEN) We must not forget that in the meantime Ragnar Östberg had produced his national-romantic historicist city hall for Stockholm, which would cause a tremendous backlash on architecture in the Netherlands in general and more specifically on town and city halls, as we will see later. In his unpublished diary the modern architect ir. Albert Boeken called it ‘The Swedish Disease’!

Usquert is to be mentioned here as one of the smallest villages in the country with one of the best town halls built in the Twentieth Century (1930). The chosen architect was Hendrik Petrus Berlage. Mayor and council, though from opposing political parties, choose in harmony the best architect they knew: the mayor because of the master’s artistic qualities; the council because of his political inclination.⁵ No problems and a proud village. The function of the well-preserved little building has changed, merely because Usquert became part of a larger municipality, but is kept in very good conditions.



Town Hall Usquert by H.P. Berlage

Den Haag -s’Gravenhage- The Hague Before WW II the residential city of the national government was the quietest of the three bigger cities of the Netherlands. It may be the reason that the competition, which took place here, has not kicked up so much dust as in other occasions happened. Yet, neither was it a fairy tale with a happy end. Whilst in 1938 the architect J. Luthmann (1890-1973) was still working on his plans, the building-complex was fully torn down within 60 years, substituted by a living quarter at the same place and followed by the huge white administrative building right in the centre of The Hague after a Richard Meyer design. Not a trace was left of what was a not too modern, but carefully detailed building complex. In fact, Luthmann’s proposal was never fully realized.

After elaborating his winning entry for the closed competition, Luthmann commented on his definite plan in *Bouwkundig Weekblad Architectura* and added some General Remarks about Architecture. Posing as a modern architect he wrote: ‘In professional circles, as well as under laymen, the right of the modern architectural conception to manifest itself in buildings as this is questioned. This is based on the fact, that modern building art lacks the fundament of a tradition. Reasoning in this way, one overlooks that the town hall in his contemporary form does not have a significant tradition. Never in history did municipal administration take a shape like today. Its house has to fulfil the requirements of any modern administrative building. This, I think, cannot be achieved without bringing into being an organic division

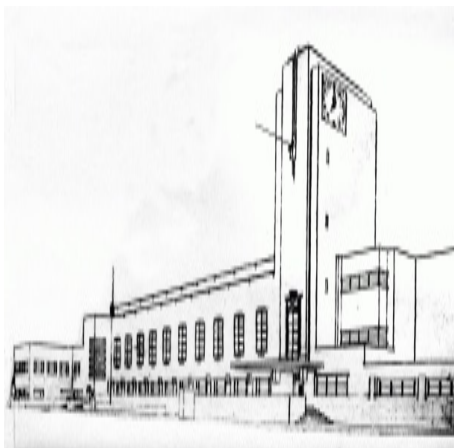
⁵ As is well known in Russia, Hendrik Petrus Berlage (1856-1934) made a trip to the Soviet Union in 1929. His Amsterdam Exchange building was more like a labour union assembly hall than an exchange.

between the representative and administrative section of the town hall.⁶ Luthmann was right, but -as we will still see in following competitions- it was first of all Pomp and Circumstances that administrators liked to have in their buildings and History, be it honest or false. The public liked much more the proposal by Kropholler because of its apt historicism and its symmetry than the square 'boxes en chests' of the other proposals. The critique said that the building comity privileged the unknown architects and had passed those with a good reputation, like Kropholler. Comparisons were made with the competitions for the Amsterdam Stock Exchange and the city hall of Rotterdam. On 30 April 1934 the jury presented its report. The bids were made ten days before the Germans invaded the country; the realization of an adapted design started in April 1947. Building stopped in 1958. In 1968 there appeared a new design, without a tower, in which the representative part was combined with a high-rise. It was not executed.



The Hague Town House as it was built

Enschede In the early competition for the town hall of this northern-easterly industrial town Luthmann was the winner with a design in which we recognize Dudok's Hilversum town hall. The composition of the cubical masses, the bay-window-like vertical windows, the tower and the entrance are witnesses. But differently from Dudok, Luthmann used many traditional means to reach monumental effects.⁷



Luthmann's Dudok in Enschede

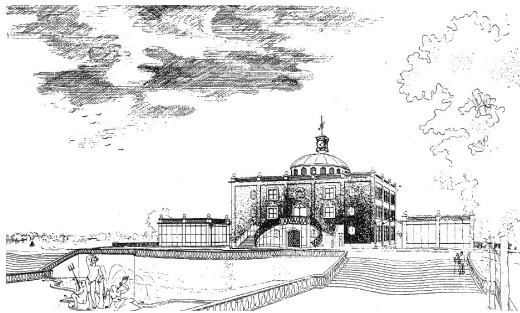
Huizen (North-Holland) changed in the Thirties, with the enclosure of the Zuiderzee, from a purely pious fishermen's village into the living place for a mix of Calvinist natives and well-off commuters from light-footed Amsterdam. The local administration invited, in January 1938, two not too modern architects and a Delft School professor as professional members of the jury. From the published answers to questions from potential competitors it becomes clear, that the jury members agreed with the wish of the administration to have a town hall that would be typified by dignity, and ... by 'the sobriety, that the circumstances of the time

⁶ J. Luthmann in his explanation in *Bouwkundig Weekblad Architectura* nr. 24, 11 juni 1938, p. 197.

⁷ Literature: Clercq, S. de, 'Rapport van de commissie van beoordeeling der ingekomen schetsplannen voor een raadhuis te Enschede', *Bouwkundig Weekblad Architectura*, 50 (1929.03.23)12, pp. 89-96
- Clercq, S. de, 'Rapport van de commissie van beoordeeling der ingekomen schetsplannen voor een raadhuis te Enschede', *Bouwkundig Weekblad Architectura*, 50 (1929.04.06)14, pp. 105-110.

dictate'. The jury received 82 entries. The four selected entries were look-alikes of Dutch National Romanticism, as could be expected. But the shock came with the publication of the drawings of a non-awarded entry by two young members of the progressive group 'De 8', Arthur Staal and S. van Woerden. As the diehards of the functionalists, like Mart Stam and Han van Loghem, found their neo-baroquish proposal an unacceptable betrayal of the modern principle, the two and a few others left the group. We must see this in the context of the far more important contemporary competition for the Amsterdam city hall, which was to become a real heroic fight that I shall discuss later.

I think that another member of 'De 8' was right where he wrote in the group's own magazine: 'What is really important is the way in which this design completely negates the question. This 'beautiful rustic building', that got its inspiration from the estates along the Vecht, is now accidentally called town hall of this municipality at the former Zuiderzee, it fully turns its back to the village and is by no means connected with its lay-out. In this woody landscape a building has been designed with baroque gardens, stairs, ponds and sculptures.'⁸ These items may precisely have been the jury's reasons to negate the further functional qualities of the design, even though this shows (too much of) the dignity that the program had asked for. Apart from all that, Van Woerden and Staal did not design a democratic building, as a town hall of the 20th Century should be.⁹



Huizen, the much discussed, but rejected proposal by A. Staal and S. van Woerden

Intermezzo The tsunami of town hall competitions also flooded the schools of architecture. In Amsterdam the H.B.O., best translated as 'evening-courses for architecture', asked their superior-course students to design a town hall for a provincial town. Functionalism was far out of sight. All five students delivered a project which can be described as Regional Romanticism, completely the opposite of the projects which another jury had selected in a competition held at the same time by the Amsterdam based society *Architectura et Amicitiae* (A&A) for a bus-to-boat transfer station. Yet, also here the jury cannot be blamed for a too progressive incline: 'in many cases the façades give a mannerist impression; many of the submitters have yet to understand that the architectural importance of a design is not proportional to the applied quantities of concrete and glass.'

In the case of the evening-school it is important to realize that the chairman of the administration was Ir. A.J. van der Steur, while the teacher had been Ir. H.T. Zwiers.¹⁰ The last had just been chosen as one of the four submitters for the Amsterdam City Hall competition, who would enter the second round. Van der Steur was a moderate conservative architect, who made at the beginning of the war in 1940 the 'Delft School' extension to the Gothic Haarlem city hall, while Zwiers became a professor of architecture in Delft.¹¹ It must

⁸ Willy La Croix, *Over krantenberichten* (What the newspapers say) in: *De 8 en OPBOUW*, 10 (1939) 2.

⁹ It is interesting to see, that the editors of *De 8 en OPBOUW* do not mention the correlation with an advertisement in *De 8 en OPBOUW*, which -already for about half a year- showed an aerial picture of the royal 'baroque' palace Soestdijk in its park, not far from Huizen. Self-censure?

¹⁰ Ir. means engineer (ingenieur), the title that students in Delft obtain, also the students in architecture and urbanism. Ir. A.J. van der Steur is not Ir. A. van der Steur, who built in Rotterdam, f.e. in 1935 the Museum Boymans (now Boymans van Beuningen), one of the buildings influenced by the Stockholm city hall, or: 'infected by the Swedish disease'.

¹¹ Among the competitors were also Kropholler, G. Holt, H.T. Zwiers(!) and F.A. Eschauzier.

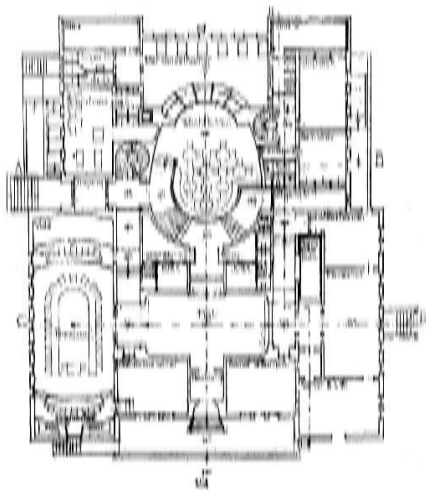
also be remarked, that the progressive Ir. Han van Loghem, well known in Russia as the Dutch architect who had been working for the AIK Colony in Kemerovo, had been teaching here till the year before with quite different results, in which reflected his earlier and modern entry for the infamous competition for the Palace of Soviets in Moscow.

Doetinchem



comment on entries for the town hall competition Doetinchem by W. La Croix in: *De 8 en OPBOUW* (1939)

Willy La Croix, one of the editors of the only progressive Dutch architectural magazine in the pre-war years, *De 8 en OPBOUW*, drew this striking comment on the entries for the competition for a town hall in a small town in the eastern province Gelderland. Indeed the projects made at the H.B.O. in Amsterdam would have fitted. The jury received 179 entries. There was no first price given while the second went to H. Sutterland and once more A. van der Steur. The jury gave them the advice to rework their project, which had a too complicated floor plan. The adaptation to the site and its surroundings was very adequate, the hall most attractive.¹²



ground floor plan Raadhuis Doetinchem

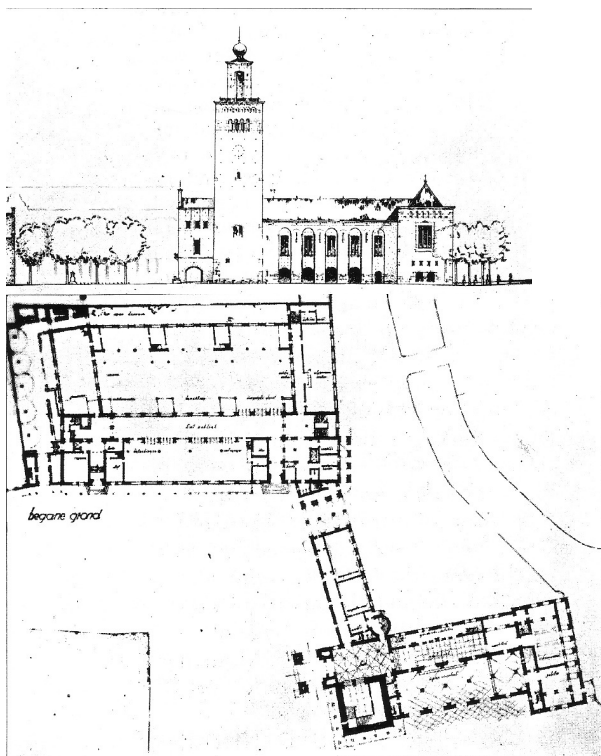
A bombardment by the Allied Forces during WW II by mistake ruined the old walled city. This did not fade out the result of the competition though, as it had not been built, precisely due to the outbreak of the war. In later years a rather modern building was built without a competition.

Loghem, J.B. van, *Uitbreiding van het Haarlemsche raadhuis*, in: *De 8 en Opbouw*, 8 (1937) 4, 5; pp. 22-28.

¹² *De prijsvraag voor een nieuw stadhuis te Doetinchem*, in: *Bouwbedrijf en openbare werken*, (1939.09.15), p. 256-258. Hierin opgenomen: 8 tekeningen van ontwerp, *Prijsvragen, Raadhuis voor Doetinchem*, in: *Bouwbedrijf en openbare werken*, (1939.09.15), p. 218.

Eindhoven On 8 January 1938 an announcement was made for an open competition for a town hall for the rapidly growing community around the famous Philips Radio and Electric Equipment Factories in the eastern part of the province Noord-Brabant, centred round the village of Eindhoven. Eindhoven in 1938 still was a conglomerate of several villages with a majority of national immigrants. The competition was held right after the first (open) phase of the Amsterdam competition and counted 110 entries, but there was no first or second prize.¹³ Only four third prizes were given, the entries were not recommended for realization, but the price winners were invited for a second round. All entries were on show at the local Van Abbe Museum during the summer of 1939.

One of the four price-winning competitors was prof. ir. H.Th. Zwiers, who in those years was unbelievably lucky in town- and city hall competitions. It may be because he was a sort of middle figure, not really conservative, neither really progressive. After all, not one of his entries was built. In the second round in Eindhoven for instance Zwiers was second after Ir. Jan van der Laan, basically because of the good urban concept of Van der Laan's plan. On 16 April 1940 the City Council accepted Van der Laan's elaboration of his design, but the outbreak of war stopped further developments. After the liberation in September 1944 the devastated city needed an extensive reconstruction, which also affected the design for the town hall of which only a small part would be built. In 1957 Van der Laan admitted that his plan was outdated and he made a new design. It was only on 11 May 1965 that actual building could start. Exactly 25 years after the liberation, on 18 September 1969, the new building was finally opened.¹⁴



¹³ 20 Dec. 1937, decision Amsterdam; 8 Jan. 1938 announcement Eindhoven.

¹⁴ - Molenaar, N., Na de prijsvraag voor het nieuwe raadhuis te Eindhoven, in: *Het Rooms Katholiek Bouwblad*, 10 (1939) 25, pp. 389-402.

- Loghem, ir. J.B. van, Onze 20-ste eeuwse architectuur, Opmerkingen over de uitslag van de Raadhuisprijsvraag van Eindhoven, in: *De 8 & Opbouw*, 10 (1939)15, pp. 154-158.

- Moorsel, C.M. van, De '8' en de Gotische mode, in: *Het Rooms Katholiek Bouwblad*, 11 (1939)3, pp. 40-44.

- Prijsvraag raadhuis Eindhoven, in: *Bouwkundig Weekblad*, 58 (1940)27, p. 214.

- Boer, ir. J.A.M. den, De Prijsvraag voor een stadhuis te Eindhoven, in: *Bouwkundig Weekblad*, 58 (1940)31, p. 245.

Maassluis is one of three old seafaring cities and fishermen harbours along the former Oude Maas, today the Nieuwe Waterweg, that connects metropolitan Rotterdam with the North Sea. It is a typical Hollandish small city, with a Calvinist majority. One could not expect an ultramodern city hall here. In fact Maassluis kept till today its old city hall in Dutch Renaissance, in spite of the competition, intact as a museum.

The jury once more consisted of moderate and conservative members, except ir. C. van Traa, who would become in 1944 the designer of the post-war 'Basisplan' for the rebuilding of the flattened Rotterdam city. His 'opponent' was A.J. van der Steur, who, in this case being a jury member, could not win the competition. The winners, the Kraayvanger firm from Rotterdam, presented a nowadays incredibly romantic design, which can be classified as Dutch Blood and Soil ('Blut und Boden') and surpassed even Van der Steur's Haarlem city hall extension. Two other entries were mediocre intentions, though better in scale. But even more incredible than the prize-winning proposal was A.J. Kropholler's entry, though it must be admitted that his solution was the most personal and as such certainly more appreciable. Yet while personal, it could have been designed for any small town in the Netherlands. In March 1939 the entries were exhibited, but again the outbreak of war prevented realization. As late as 1975 Maassluis opened a new 'City Office' (stadskantoor) by Bureau Kraaijvanger, presumably better adapted to contemporary needs.



the old city hall in Maassluis

Vlaardingen is another old city between Rotterdam and Maassluis at the waterway from Rotterdam to the North Sea. A closed competition for an addition for the city hall of Vlaardingen was held in 1939. A. van der Steur from Rotterdam was an important jury member. Invited were the Amsterdam School architect C.J. Blaauw, the The Hague School disciple L.H.H. van de Kloot Meyburg, E.H. and H.M. Kraayvanger from Rotterdam and an unknown fourth architect. Van der Kloot Meyburg ended first, the Kraayvanger firm second. But, war came and nothing was build for many years.

Amsterdam pre-war The competition for a new city hall for Amsterdam was by far the most important competition held in the Netherlands after the Amsterdam Stock Exchange and the Peace Palace in The Hague. But it was another competition without a definite result.¹⁵ Typical of those pre-war years is the fact that only domestic architects were allowed. It prevented foreign Nazi and Stalinist entries, but not national historical romanticism. Reflecting this time and circumstances is a very critical article by Han van Loghem that appeared in *De 8 en OPBOUW* on August 5 of 1939, reading Van der Laan's Eindhoven project as an invention from the Middle Ages, designed by the famous 'Knight Radboud'. Van Loghem begun with a citation from Hitler's speech at the opening of the exhibition *Entartete Kunst* in Munich:

¹⁵ H.P. Berlage, who after a long time and some political intrigue, in the end received the commission, though he had not won the competition.

‘If we want it or not, the preceding eras will have their say and particularly when, as is the case in architecture, the goal of the builder is not new and indeed formerly used to be present and already then found an architectural form.’ But even without Hitler, the tendency in the Netherlands was in fact Back to the Invented Past.

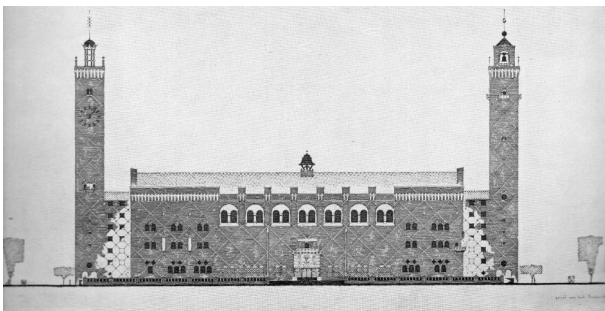
On 20 Dec. 1937 the decision in Amsterdam fell. There were four awarded entries, varying from moderate modern to ‘Eclectic Historic Inventionism’.¹⁶ The winners were Marinus Duintjer and Auke Komter, Jan F. Staal and his son Arthur, J.F. Berghoef and ir. J.J.M. Vegter, and ir. H.T. Zwiers, who would also be one of the winners in Eindhoven.¹⁷ J.J.P. Oud and many more failed. Why? Who knows. Oud’s entry was not bad.

A scandal arose immediately as a national newspaper had prematurely unveiled parts of the jury report, which appeared on 18 February. It took a year before the exhibition of the entries opened at the Stedelijk Museum. Meanwhile the four winners of the open competition had elaborated their proposals for the final round. It did not result in a winning plan, but the jury thought that two projects had the qualities for a final working out. Zwiers and Staal were lucky: they were thrown out, which was saving them the further pain that the others would suffer. Due to the threatening of war and the misery that would come over the country their plans weren’t executed either. After several years another competition would be held. Among the architects who contributed were such modern architects like A. Bodon and W. La Croix, A. Boeken, W. Tijen, H.A. Maaskant, M.A. Stam and L. Beese, H. Salomonson and W.S. van de Erve, but they stayed like Oud far out of view. But also more conservative architects like J. Crouwel, A. Eibink, D. Greiner, W.A. Maas, P.L. Marnette en Van Nieukerken were put aside.

On 9 February 1940 the decision was made to have a third round. Date of delivery 07-11-1941. Because of mobilization and war Duintjer could only pay minimal attention. The third round designs were published two years after the war, in 1947. Berghoef and Vegter won. They presented a definite project in sketch form in 1961. So much time, so much work and no building. But in the meantime also Berghoef had managed to become a professor in Delft.



motto meron; M. Duintjer and A. Komter



motto Belfort; J.F. Berghoef and ir. J.J.M. Vegter

Amsterdam after-war, the Opera House competition

The City Fathers had one more problem, the building of an Opera House. Another dream complex for which the capital held a few competitions. Already during the 20s the Wagnervereniging Amsterdam had organized a competition for an opera building, which J.F.

¹⁶ A term I coin here, as I haven’t met it before.

¹⁷ Berghoef had not yet finished his studies in Delft at that moment!

Staal had won with a design in front of the famous Concertgebouw. But the city preferred at that moment the Frederiksplein, the place where in the late 30s, as described before, the city hall was supposed to be built. This was where the Palace of Popular Industry stood until it burnt down (1859-1929). Nothing happened with the idea of building an opera house, till after WW II, when Bernard Bijvoet, close friend and associate till the early death of Jan Duiker, got a commission for an opera building in Amsterdam-Zuid.

Amsterdam after-war, the City Hall competition By the end of the 60s a new competition was held; one of the reasons being that the selected pre-war plans were fully out dated. 803 Designs were filed and after three selection rounds 20 designs remained. The jury members all settled on the same design. Practically everybody else protested. Architects, the action group Provo and the Pacifist Socialist political party, came with an alternative on the Dam. In 1972 the city council finally decided to have the winning proposal built. But because of the bad financial situation building was postponed during several years.

The End

The last competition ended hilariously with the opening of the winner's motto letter. The gossip travelled quickly. The complete jury, much to their bewilderment, had selected the unknown Wilhelm Holzbauer (from Vienna) and not famous Alvar Aalto, as they had presumed. In 1979 the decision fell to combine the future city hall and the opera building. It would be a combined effort of Holzbauer for the city hall and Bijvoet for the opera. All together it was really like a paraphrase of Richard Strauss' opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*, where a rich man in Vienna has a party organized in his house and decides that an opera and a theatre play shall be performed at the same time so that the fire works to end the party won't have to be delayed. In December 1979 Bijvoet passed away and Cees Dam, the son-in-law of Bijvoet's contemporary companion Holt, took over the commission. In 1980 the city council of Amsterdam accorded the combined design, followed in 1981 by the deputy state of Noord-Holland and the national government. The construction was ready in 1986. Two years later the City Fathers had to declare that the costs had risen to nearly the double of what had been foreseen.