

Paul Meurs

## Rotterdam: from Port City to Harbor Landscape

The port of Rotterdam does not have and never had any warehouse-area comparable to the Speicherstadt in Hamburg. At first sight, the Speicherstadt looks like an architectural work, based on the typology of dense and vertical warehouses, grouped together into one homogeneous urban complex. The water and public spaces seem to be carved out

wood and fuels), manufactured cargo and passengers. During the period 1880–1910 the port of Rotterdam was smaller than those of Hamburg and Antwerp. The city opted for a strategy to compete on speed, concentrating on the mechanization of handling goods and the rapid transit of cargo – which in many cases was directly loaded into smaller ships.



Figure 1: *Nieuwe Waterweg*, a direct connection from Rotterdam to the sea was completed in 1872

of these volumes, as streets in a historic city. Other port cities, like Liverpool, are more urban in their layout, having the docks and harbor basins as dominant public spaces within the urban tissue. Rotterdam partly has a similar urban layout, but from 1895 onwards developed into a different direction – creating a harbor landscape of such a scale and impact, that it gradually lost contact with the city. The 20<sup>th</sup> century port of Rotterdam developed as a maritime landscape, dedicated to transit cargo (without much need for storage on land). The warehouses that were developed stand as isolated objects in the wide and open landscape of the port.

There are some major developments that gave an impulse to the development of the port of Rotterdam in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. On the long run Rotterdam even became the biggest port in the world. The first development was the creation of a direct access to the sea, with the completion of the *Nieuwe Waterweg* in 1872. From that moment on ships could reach Rotterdam directly, without the need to pass locks or docks – as the tidal difference is only one meter. Second, the intensification of global commerce and the rapid industrialization in Europe meant a continuous growth in transportation and Rotterdam happened to be very well located. The city had and still has an enormous hinterland, including the German Ruhr-area. Rotterdam could develop into a gateway for raw materials (grain, coal, ore,

This was the third development: Rotterdam opted to become a transit harbor and this choice made the harbor competitive and successful. Innovations were achieved in mechanization, civil engineering, infrastructure – and incidentally in the construction of large scale warehouses (with big concrete spans).

Up to 1872, the harbors of Rotterdam were a part of the city and located on the northern bank of the river Maas. The so-called Watercity (the city built outside the protection of the dikes) showed a mixture of warehouses and quays with luxurious merchant's houses and the major public spaces of the city. The riverfront, stretching along the old city core and beyond, was the stage for harbor activities, as well as the place to be for the *Rotterdammers*. They could enjoy the beauty of the river in a series of linear parks and green public spaces. That is the reason why the riverfront is called *Boompjes* (Little Trees). After the inauguration of the *Nieuwe Waterweg*, the modernization of the harbor took mainly place at the south bank of the river Maas. There was plenty of space available here. In just a few years' time, the southern shores of the Maas faced a complete makeover. New harbors were dug out of the land – creating a functional landscape. The land between the water basins was covered with infrastructure of quays, rail, roads, storage areas and warehouses. The *Koningshaven*, *Bin-*



Figure 2: Haringvliet, one of the harbours in the watercity



Figure 3: Boompjes, riverfront as port area and urban public space



Figure 4: Boompjes, riverfront with the major green space downtown

nenhaven, Entreporthaven and Spoorhaven were realized from 1874 until 1879, creating a new island in the river Maas ('Noordereiland') and the area known as 'Kop van Zuid' ('Head of South'). The interventions were the fruit of public-private investments, initiated by the entrepreneur Lodewijk Pincoffs (1827–1911), founder of the Rotterdamse Handelsvereniging (Rotterdam Trade Association) in 1872. Part of these works was the construction of bridges by the city to connect the north bank with the Noordereiland and

the south bank (1878). The trade association (RHV) opened office and storage buildings in 1879. The offices were in the 'Poortgebouw' ('gate-building'), designed by the architect J. S. C. van de Wall. For storage, the RHV opened entrepot 'De vijf werelden' ('The Five Worlds'), a large complex of warehouses for coffee, tea, sugar and spices, designed by T. J. Stieltjes. The harbor developments initiated by the trade association RHV differ from the older harbor installations at the north bank, creating a world on its own, opposed to the old city. But the investments never paid off. The enterprise collapsed in the same year, 1879, in financial scandals. Pincoff fled to America. The possessions in the harbor were passed over to the municipality in 1882.

The failure of the private trade association RHV made the city of Rotterdam reconsider its role in the development of the port and municipalize the harbor. G. J. de Jongh, director of public works from 1879 until 1910, took up the public task to extend the harbor. He is seen as the visionary and main architect of the modernization of Rotterdam around 1900. De Jongh was a leading figure in the city, leaving a strong mark on today's appearance of both the city and the port of Rotterdam. He was responsible for the construction of a number of harbors west of the inner city: Parkhaven (1893), Jobshaven (1908) and Schiehaven (1909). For De Jongh, the economy of the harbor was this important, that he did not hesitate to bring railroads into the richer residential areas. For him, Rotterdam was a city of work, where money had to be earned. Those who longed for historic cities should go to Delft or Gouda, those who wanted luxurious living areas should better move to The Hague – as he publicly stated. The main achievements of De Jongh were realised at the south bank, with the creation of harbor basins of unprecedented dimensions: Rijnhaven (1895, 28 ha), Maashaven (1905, 60 ha) and Waalhaven (1907–1930, 310 ha). Pictures of these ports in the pre-war period show that the innovation was in the harbor itself, where very large cranes and floating elevators could handle bulk cargo very quickly and reload it in river vessels.

The main warehouses constructed over the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are large in scale, but remained isolated landmarks in the landscape of the port. Some examples are the Blauwvoedenveem in the Jobshaven (architect J. J. Kanters, 1912) and the Grainsilo in the Maashaven (JP Stok, 1906; extension M. Brinkman, 1919). The Wilhelminapier, created by the construction of the Rijnhaven, is perhaps the most urban part in this area. No wonder, as it housed the major passenger terminals of the city, operated by the Holland America Line (HAL). The space along the pier is divided in lower warehouses along the Rijnhaven and the river Maas, separated by a row of higher warehouses in the centre. The head of the pier contains the former head office of the HAL, built from 1901 until 1919 (architect C. B. van der Tak). Other buildings at the Wilhelminapier are Pakhuis Meesteren (warehouse, 1940), Las Palmas (workshops HAL, 1950–1953) and the passenger terminal Rotterdam (1946–49).

The destruction of Rotterdam during the Second World War affected the inner city and many of the port installations. After the war, the port expanded westwards towards

the sea and eventually into the sea with the construction of the Maasvlakte, more than 40 kilometres away from the city centre. The main large-scale warehouses of the pre-war period survived the war, but meanwhile have lost their original function. Most of them are now listed monuments and have been refurbished into apartments (Blauwhoedeneveem, Poortgebouw), a shopping area (Entrepotgebouw), discothèques (Maassilo), a hotel (HAL head offices) or a cultural centre (Las Palmas). New urban development has come to the Kop van Zuid and some other harbor areas – bringing the city into the former areas of the port. If a comparison with the Speicherstadt would have to be made, only the area of the Kop van Zuid and the Wilhelminapier can be taken in consideration. But both in layout, age of warehouses, urban fabric, architecture and current heritage this region differs from the Hamburg case.

### Abstract

#### Rotterdam: Von der Hafenstadt zur Hafenlandschaft

Der Hafen von Rotterdam hat nie ein mit der Hamburger Speicherstadt vergleichbares Lagerhausviertel besessen. Bereits auf den ersten Blick bildet die Speicherstadt eine architektonische Einheit. Dafür sorgt die Typologie der verdichteten und vertikalen Lagergebäude, die sich zu einem homogenen städtischen Ensemble zusammenfügen. Wasserflächen und öffentliche Räume in der Speicherstadt wirken, als seien sie aus den Gebäudekomplexen herausgeschnitten – wie Straßen in einer historischen Stadt. Andere Hafenstädte wie Liverpool sind stärker urban angelegt, da Docks und Hafenbecken hier den öffentlichen städtischen Raum strukturell beherrschen. Rotterdam hat eine ähnliche städtische Struktur, jedoch ging die Entwicklung dort seit 1895 in eine andere Richtung: In Rotterdam wurde eine Hafenlandschaft von so großen und eindrucksvollen Ausmaßen geschaffen, dass der Kontakt mit der Stadt allmählich verloren ging. Der Rotterdamer Hafen hat sich dann im 20. Jahrhundert zu einer maritim geprägten Industrielandschaft weiter entwickelt, die hauptsächlich dem Umschlag von Transitwaren gewidmet ist (so dass wenig Bedarf an Lagerkapazitäten an Land bestand und besteht). Die vorhandenen Lagerhäuser stehen jeweils isoliert in der großen offenen Fläche des Hafengeländes.

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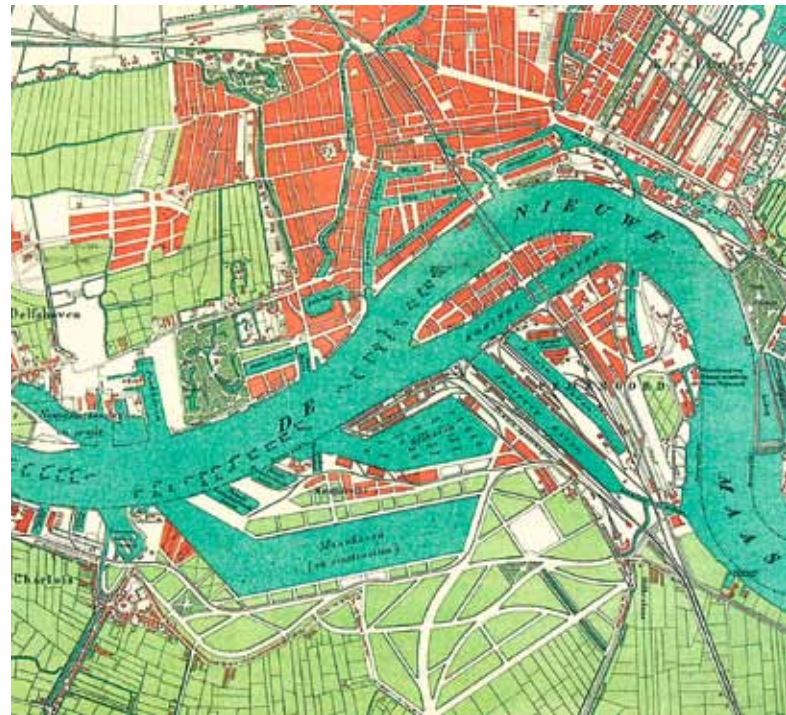


Figure 5: Rotterdam in 1898, showing the extensions of the port on the southern bank of the river



Figure 6: De Hef and the Koningsbrug, two bridges in the Koningshaven

Figure 7: Rijnhaven, 1910



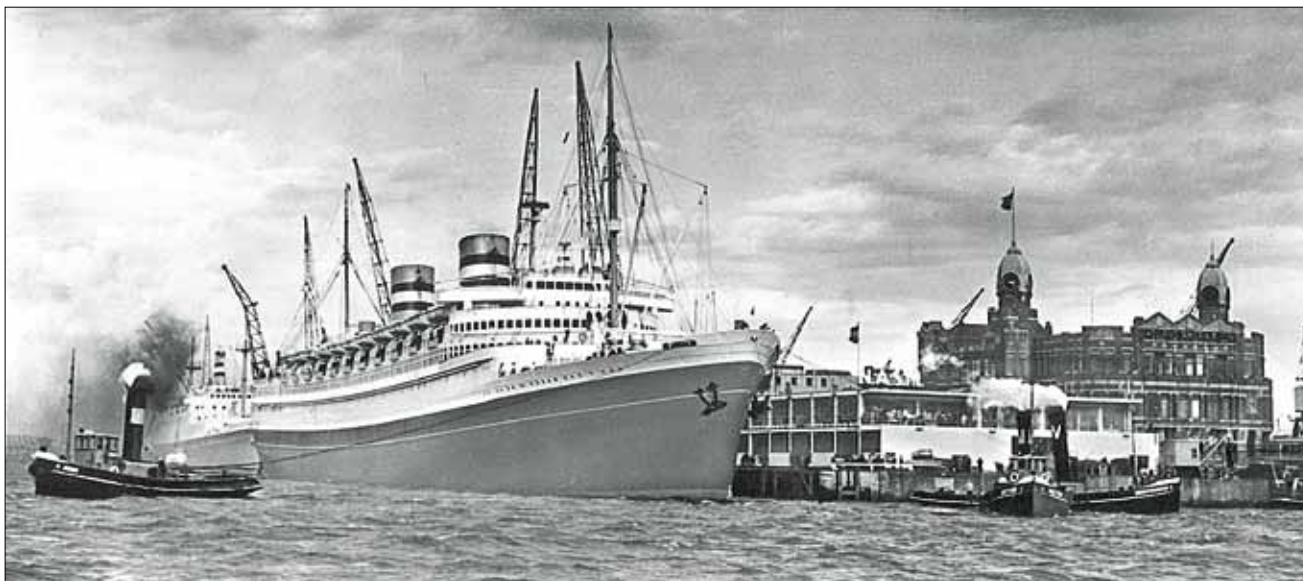


Figure 8: Office building Holland Amerika Lijn, Wilhelminapier



Figure 9: Rijnhaven, grain silos Nederlandsche Veem, built in 1900



Figure 10: Warehouse Jobsveem, constructed in 1912

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### Sources of illustrations

Fig. 1: VOOGD, A. and RINGLEVER, W., Rotterdam 1911

Fig. 2 to Fig. 10: Collection SteenhuisMeurs