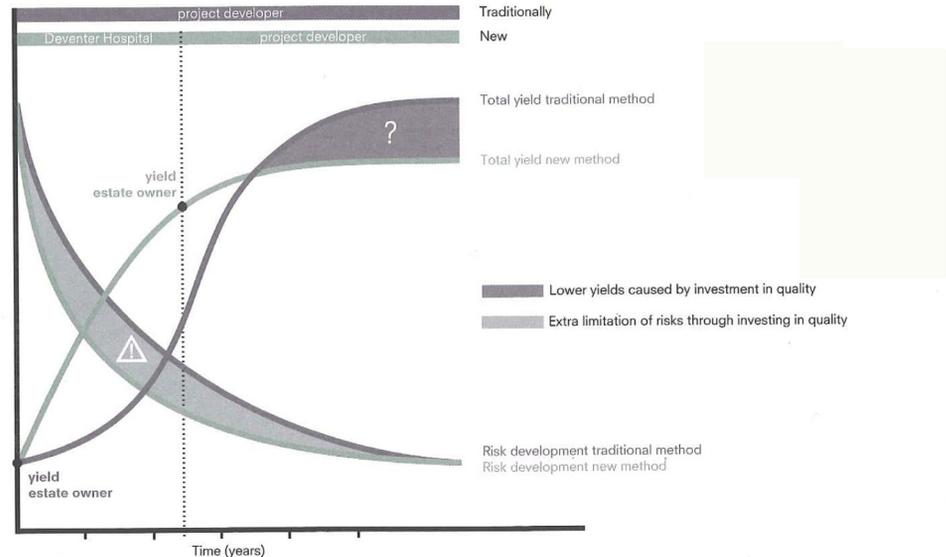


# Architect – Matthijs Bouw

The architect must play the game called architecture on the chessboard that matters, the project developer's, for example. Matthijs Bouw on risk reduction, investment space and lobbying politicians.

## Edwin Gardner What is the difference between One Architecture and other architectural firms?

**Matthijs Bouw** We are concerned with the following question: How can you create space for an architectural practice that is more comprehensive, a practice that enlarges the field of play for architecture? I believe, there are three ways of doing this within architectural practice. The most eye-catching is what you can call the 'signature practice'. These are architects who have a characteristic handwriting in their designs, and are invited for assignments on the basis of their signature. This gives them more scope to conduct their practice.



Second, there are the extra-large firms. Thanks to their format, they have all kinds of expertise and can create more operational space. Finally there is consultancy. This architectural practice enlarges its field of play by intervening in the building process at a different moment, namely during the formation of the first ideas and the formulation of a scenario or assignment. The focus in this approach is on the conditions and potential, and in fact you are working on the question of where the demand for architecture comes from.

## EQ How do you enlarge the field of play for architecture?

**MB** The Geertruidentuin project in Deventer is a good example of how we work. The old site of the Deventer Hospital had to be developed because the hospital moved to a new location. We then talked to the directors of the Deventer Hospital to develop a plan and a sales strategy for the site in a new way. The concept was to

formulate a high quality urban plan fast while still giving space to the developers to do their thing. Our urban proposal leaves the old hospital building intact, except for the demolition of a wing that had been added later. The old brick building, consisting of a courtyard with wings, dates from the 1930s. As such, they are in harmony with the rest of the residential neighborhood. We planned a repetition of this typology on the site to accommodate the new housing program. The site was subsequently auctioned with a zoning plan and a visual quality plan in place. The zoning plan describes the building envelopes in detail, but also gives margins for phasing and housing differentiation. The extensive visual quality plan was drawn up on the basis of historical research. One of the aspects that this touched on was the question of how to handle the ways in which the building volumes are connected.

## EG To what extent do you do the work of a developer?

**MB** Whether we have encroached upon the developer's



terrain depends on your perspective. We drew up a plan that a developer would never make. The developer would probably have preferred to demolish all the buildings and then to divide up the site into extremely compact plots and to build 1930s-style villas, because they sell the best. So with our plan the total financial yield of the project was lower by comparison with the approach of a regular project developer. If there was any encroachment, it was in the fact that we solved a good many problems in consultation with the hospital, the neighborhood and the municipality that would normally be the responsibility of a developer.

A developer normally buys strategic land. A large number of risks are tied to a purchase of that kind. For example, the zoning plan is not yet what it will have to be (in our case the function was still that of a hospital) and it may be necessary to carry out some demolition work. This can lead to unpleasant surprises like asbestos.

The more risks there are, the less a developer will be prepared to pay for a piece of land.

Together with the hospital, local residents and the local authority, we soon came to an agreement and plan that met with the approval of all parties. This meant that the change of the zoning plan could be dealt with quickly. Since we had removed many risks, the hospital was able to sell its land for a much higher price. Even though the total yield was lower, the hospital made more money. One could say that part of the value of the site was invested on the site, and part went into the hospital fund.

**Arjen Oosterman** How do you prevent the project developer from still trying to implement his own plans?

**MB** In theory they can still do that, as the auction had few conditions. We did lay down, however, that right from day one the other parts of the hospital had to be demolished. Besides the other plan documents, this is a built-in guarantee that developers will implement the plan in accordance with the framework laid down by us, because they have to invest from the start, and drawing up a new plan, and getting this approved, would simply take too much time, with the interest meter running. For a project developer assumes an enormous risk if he decides to alter a zoning plan that has only just been altered. It hardly pays off, precisely because he has initially already had to pay a good deal more for the land. Within the framework that we laid down, however, there is still plenty of freedom for developers. The freedom lies in the housing differentiation, marketing, programming, breakdown into stages, and building sequence.

**EG** Do you also have examples from your practice in countries where the regulations are not so sharply defined?

**MB** We came into contact with the biggest project developer in Georgia; the largest local bank is allied with him, as well as the largest exporting corporation, Borjomi. He commissioned us to make a design for a building complex in the centre of Tbilisi. It was to have a FAR<sup>1</sup> of 8. After carrying out studies, our reaction was that it would be completely irresponsible to build with that density on that location. In our view, the maximal FAR was four. We bounced the ball back to the client by telling him that he should develop the different plots of land that he owned in the centre of Tbilisi with a coherent urban development vision, because the city runs the risk of becoming an unattractive area where no one wants to be. This is not in the interests of our clients, because they are in Tbilisi for the long term. On the basis of this criticism, we were commissioned to develop a master plan for a larger area. This unsolicited criticism enabled us to redefine the assignment.

Besides, we also went further. In Tbilisi there is an enormous influx of venture capitalists who throw themselves en masse upon real estate. This has led to uncontrolled proliferation in the city. It is a totally irresponsible development without any quality. To chart this development and to make people aware of the imminent plans, we created the New Map of Tbilisi (by analogy with the New Map of the Netherlands) showing all of the plans for new buildings. So it was unsolicited in the hope of activating the local middle management.

**1** Floor Area Ratio indicates the amount of square meters allowed on the site.