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When officials at the Frits Philips Concert Hall, in the Dutch city of Eindhoven, decided to undertake a major renovation, the hall's project manager, Anastasia van Gennip, knew that a particular kind of firm was required. "Most architects think

in terms of space," she says. "We needed someone who thought about people and how they would experience the spaces." That job fell to Van Eijk & Van der Lubbe, a design firm headed by a pair of rising stars from the nearby town of Geldrop.



# DESIGN

Dutch designers renovate a music hall in Eindhoven, tackling everything from the interior spaces to the cups and saucers in the café.

Since graduating from the Design Academy Eindhoven in the mid-1990s, Niels van Eijk and Miriam van der Lubbe have become widely known in Holland for their product, interior, and exhibition design. Their furniture is produced by manufacturers such

as Arco and Habitat, as well as more boutique labels like Droog, Lensvelt, and Marcel Wanders's Moooi. "After the academy, we started off making more conceptual work, like the Cow Chair, a wet hide draped over a mold that hardens as it dries," Van der Lubbe says.

#### SEATS

The seats in the main auditorium in the Frits Philips Concert Hall, in Eindhoven, are a mix of 12 shades of gray and green—except for one seat, a tribute to Frits Philips, who used to attend concerts here and brought his own chair.

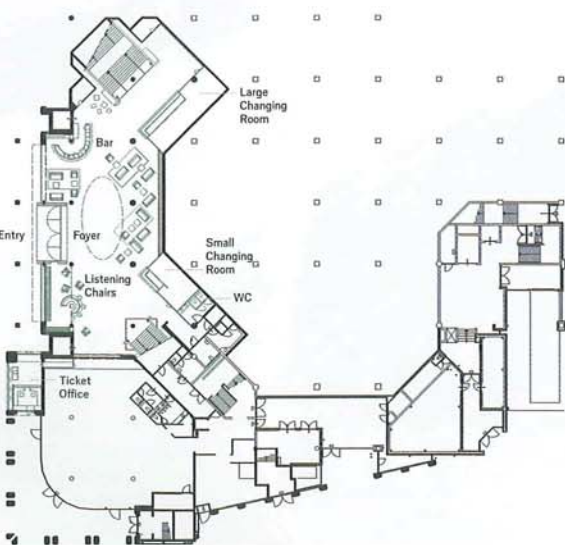


Left: The ground floor of the hall, open now to the public, features a café. The rear wall is a three-layered media screen capable of projecting still and moving images, show information, and live-streamed events.



The new glass facade creates a dazzling public presence for the hall. The *M* (for *muziekgebouw*, music hall) was created by graphic designer Gerard Hadders. It is one of five that appear throughout the hall.

## Ground Floor



“We’re children of the Droog generation.”

It was an exhibition design—1 of 25 they’ve done since starting their studio in 1998—that led to the concert hall commission. It featured the art-and-design collection of the Fortis Bank, displayed in 38 separate spaces in the bank’s Amsterdam office. “In one spot we extended the windows into a room by about five feet, creating a huge glass case that we put objects in,” Van der Lubbe says. “Then we covered the floor with glass marbles that you had to walk over in order to look at the display. That discomfort, and the unpleasant sound they made, made you very aware of the nature of glass.”

One of the visitors to that show was Menno Dieperink, then head of Philips Ambient Experience Design, a subsidiary of Philips Design dedicated to improving user experiences. (One initiative looked at making hospitals less scary for children.) The concert hall had hired him as a consultant to spearhead renovation of the building. Dieperink invited the designers to participate in an early workshop and this ultimately led to the commission. “We were confident they could handle the entire range of the visitor experience,” Van Gennip says. “The structure of the building hasn’t changed, but everything else inside has.” She calls the project a modern-day *Gesamtkunstwerk*: a total design of everything, from the public and performance spaces to the cups and saucers in the café.

The venue has two auditoriums: one seats 1,250, the other 400. Built 19 years ago as part of a large shopping mall in the center of town, it was incorporated so seamlessly into





*"We were confident they could handle the entire range of the visitor experience," says Anastasia van Gennip. "The building's structure hasn't changed, but everything else inside has."*



**Above:** A view of the ground-floor lobby and café, through a chandelier designed by Murano glass artist Fabio Fornasier. **Left:** A dressing room for choir and orchestra members.



**LISTENING CHAIRS**  
 Located in the music store on the ground floor, the chairs offer song-selection and volume controls embedded in the armrests.



**PROGRAM BINS**  
The wood-and-leather strapped holders are hung on banisters throughout the hall.



**Below: The felt-clad acoustic tiles conceal lights that not only change color and intensity but act as way-finding devices and cues for audience members to take their seats.**



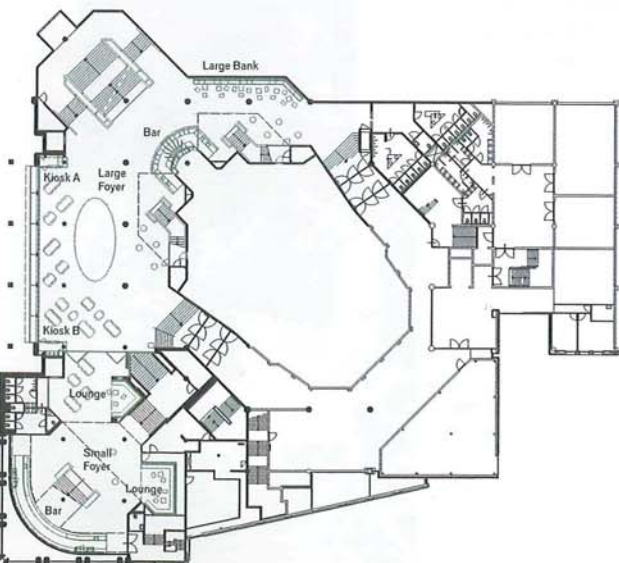
the complex that the hall had become virtually invisible. The entrance was difficult to find and the interior spaces had the allure of a nondescript office building. Van Eijk & Van der Lubbe's new entrance—the concert hall reopened last fall—features a striking glass facade 82 feet wide and 43 feet high.

The redesign gave the lobby a new role as an urban foyer. It now includes a café open to the public. (Visitors don't present their tickets until they go upstairs.) There is also a music store with Van Eijk & Van der Lubbe-designed listening chairs. The chairs are large, boxy enclosures lined in felt that surround the listener, who can then operate a small touch screen embedded in the armrest to choose music and control the volume.

Light plays an important part in the user experience. The long, curved rear wall of the lobby has a three-layered multimedia screen displaying light and color patterns, show information, and live feeds from the concert halls. The projectors are hidden from view on felt-covered acoustic tiles that hang just below the ceiling. The lighting also serves as a way-finding device. "The numbers of the doors and the time left until the performance starts are projected on the walls so that people feel oriented and know whether they need to hurry or not," Van Gennip says. "Lighting in the ceiling also changes as an intuitive cue that the performance is about to begin."

The coffee cups and saucers in the café are decorated with image fragments of historical and modern musical instruments and equipment: flutes, violins, headphones, electric guitars. "We created six different patterns in two colors on seven different background colors," Van der Lubbe explains.

## First Floor





Left: The handrail was redesigned to create the sense of one flowing movement through the building. Below: The long couch is covered in a coated metallic material; the buttons have LEDs that light up when visitors sit down. Bottom: The green lounge on the first floor.



*The designers rethought the hall's interior spaces and used new elements within those spaces to create distinct feelings. "Furniture influences the way people interact," Van der Lubbe says.*



**M-COLLECTION**  
The carpet, designed by Van Eijk & Van der Lubbe and produced by Leox, is part of a collection created especially for the concert hall and launched commercially at the 2011 Milan Furniture Fair.





To create intimacy, the designers deliberately turned the love seats on the second floor away from the bustling foyer. When visitors sit down on them, the lights dim automatically.



**TABLETOPS & CUPS**  
Left: The knots on the wood table, manufactured by Skitch, were removed and replaced with poured silver.  
Right: The designers created 512 variations on the coffee cups by changing motifs, colors, and backgrounds.

“If you multiply that times the different kinds of cups and saucers—coffee cups, espresso cups, and plain white ones—you end up with 512 unique combinations. Each is different but related. Every time you come to the concert hall, chances are that you will have a different one.”

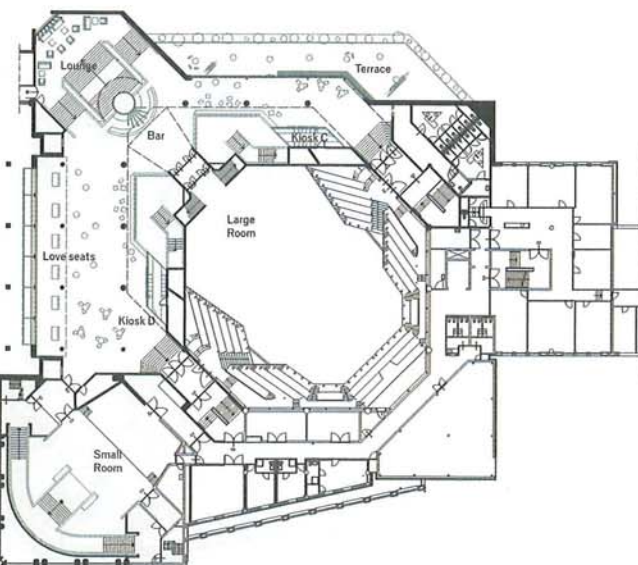
According to Van der Lubbe, they took the same “unity in diversity” approach to the ushers’ uniforms, giving them a choice of several different cuts and color combinations. “They have to be recognizable for the visitors without being reduced to faceless anonymity,” she says. “The better they feel in their company clothes, the more hospitable they will be.”

The designers not only rethought the hall’s interior spaces but used new elements within those spaces to create distinct feelings and identities. “Furniture influences the way people interact,” Van der Lubbe says. “We designed love seats where the lights dim when you sit down but also a long couch where thirty or forty people can sit. We wanted to offer our audience a variety of experiences. We also wanted the different lobbies and lounges to have their own identities: ‘I’m in the green lounge’ or ‘Let’s go sit on the long couch.’” These pieces may now have a commercial life: the firm debuted the M-Collection at this spring’s Salone, in Milan. The line includes armchairs, sofas, poufs, listening chairs, love seats, tables, even the cups and saucers and the carpet.

The redesigned auditoriums accommodate both the audience and the performers. “In the big hall, the seats used to be a bright blue, and from the stage the empty ones were very visible,” Van Gennip says. “Now they’re covered in twelve shades of green, gray, and sea blue—darker toward the stage and lighter toward the back—and one bright yellow one. If you look at a room full of people, you see an undifferentiated mass, but this seat says that they are all individuals. The nephew of the founder of Philips, Frits Philips, used to come to concerts here and brought his own chair with him. That single yellow chair is a tribute to him.”

Van Eijk & Van der Lubbe’s portfolio of interior commissions continues to grow: It is currently redesigning a museum in the town of Vlaardingen and the children’s ward of the Maastad Hospital, in Rotterdam. But the firm might be hard-pressed to re-create the special conditions that made the Frits Philips Concert Hall experience so singular. “The first was the opportunity we had to apply our vision to everything affecting the visitors’ experience,” Van der Lubbe says. “But the other was the great feeling of trust they put in us. That’s perhaps the rarest gift of all.” ■

## Second Floor



Drawing courtesy Van Eijk & Van der Lubbe



*"We wanted to offer our audience a variety of experiences," Van der Lubbe says. "We also wanted the different lobbies and lounges to have their own identities."*



**Above:** In addition to the stainless steel bar, Van Eijk & Van der Lubbe designed the usher and bartender uniforms.

**Left:** Audience members don't have to show their tickets until they reach the second floor. The lobby opens out onto a roof terrace. **Below:** A lounge on the second floor utilizes ambient lighting on the walls and ceiling.

