

FRAME

Heatherwick
in Hong Kong

3 Amsterdam
Hotels

Baths, Bars,
Budapest

Issue 86

The Great Indoors

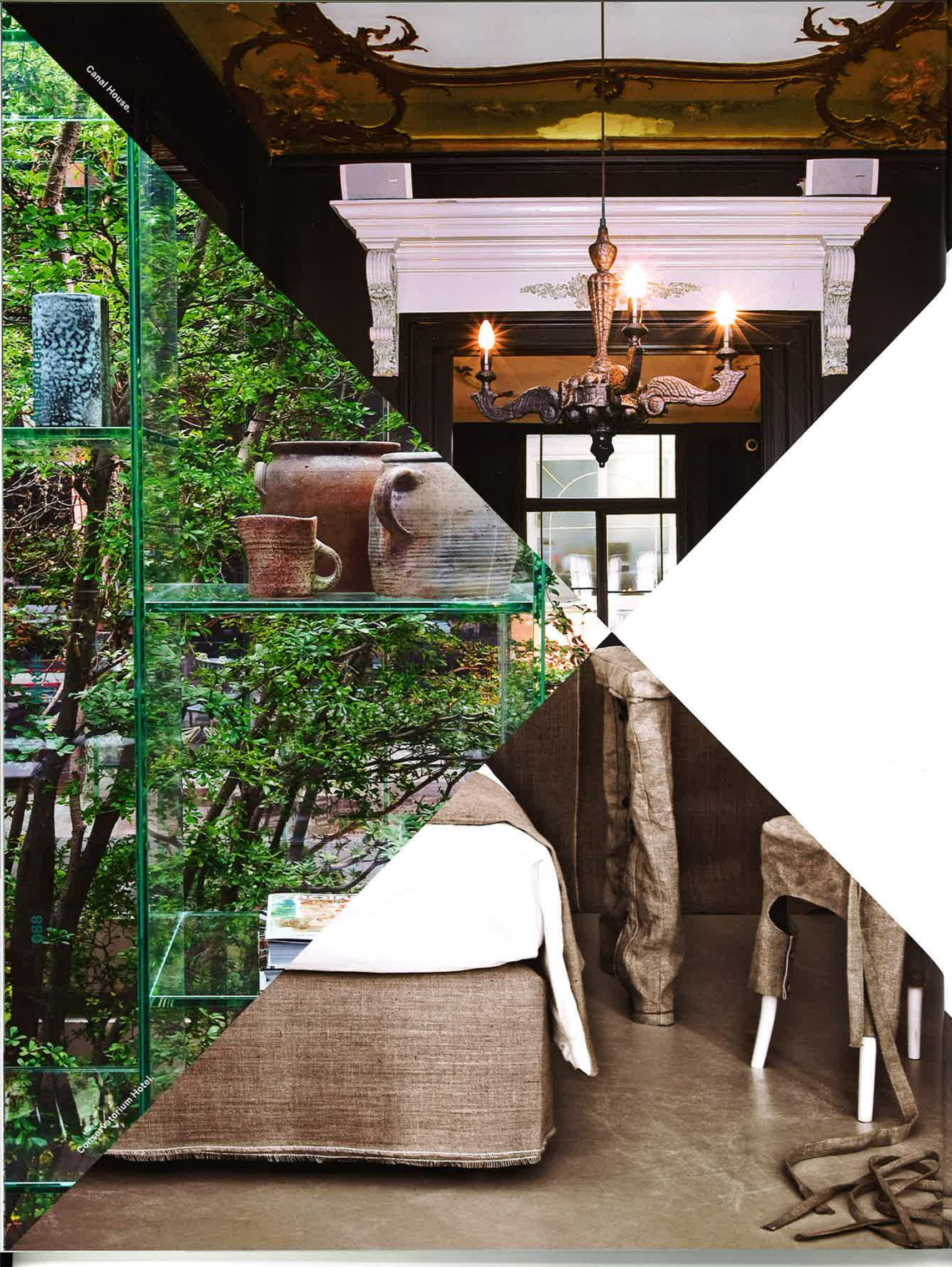
The End of Trends

The Frame Moooi Award
juror talks design, fashion
and the future



€19.95 EU - CHF 30 Switzerland - \$19.95 USA - \$29.50 Canada
£14 UK - \$28.99 Australia - ¥3,570 Japan - ₩40,000 Korea

Canal House.



088

Consejo Internacional Hotel

The Dutch capital ups the stay-in-style stakes with three dramatically different hotels.

Amsterdam

Hotels

089

Suite
Dreams

About three years ago, the city of Amsterdam decided it needed 9000 new hotel rooms, and fast – by 2015, to be exact. It appointed a ‘hotel tsar’, earmarked scores of potential locations in the city, and produced a 46-page booklet designed to simplify developing a hotel in the stad.

Whether or not these steps have been a real help to the developers whose hotels we review in this issue is a moot point – certainly, they haven’t done away with complaints about the city’s bureaucracy and red tape. In any case, developers could see quite clearly, even without help from the municipality, the gaps in the market that were contributing to Amsterdam’s slide down the rankings of city-break destinations and to its reputation for low-quality, overpriced hotels.

Be that as it may, the city is getting what it wished for: more hotels, in a greater variety of styles, in all sectors of the market. The flamboyantly fashion-themed Exchange, the theatrical historicism of the Canal House, and the serenely minimalist Conservatorium could hardly differ more from one another. *Frame* talked to owners and designers about these three divergent approaches – and for extra perspective we asked designer Karim Rashid and Design Hotels founder Claus Sendlinger for their take on the topic. –

conservatoriumhotel.nl
canalhouse.nl
exchangeamsterdam.com

City Salon

With his new Conservatorium Hotel, Piero Lissoni has created a dramatic public space for Amsterdam.

Words **Jane Szita**
Photos **Daniel Nicolas**

Piero Lissoni



Does it work?

Karim Rashid: I like the idea of contemporary interiors juxtaposed with such a monumental building in Amsterdam. It seems well designed and detailed with regard to lighting, wall finishes, and spatial proportions. The strong delineation of the two periods works well and I like the use of contemporary materials – such as glass in diverse finishes – with the rustic brick work and barn-like wood floors, dark wainscotting and beams.

I am surprised, though, by the choice of furniture and upholstery in the lobby, the restaurant and some of the rooms. I see antiquated pieces, and classically ornate dining chairs. It seems like Piero (with all due respect) is being persuaded by the postmodernists and maybe even slightly influenced by Marcel Wanders and Philippe Starck.

I prefer Piero's sacred geometry and pure modernism, and I prefer hotels that are really contemporary, that make me feel alive in the 21st century. I think a great hotel would be a collaboration of Piero with Sottsass or Roy Lichtenstein!

The fact that the hotel was a conservatory for music would have inspired me to think more about the music – possibly speaking about our new digital age against an analog backdrop. The result could possibly be brighter, slightly more optimistic in tonality, as the palette has too many browns and sand colours.

The hotel could have used some greater contrasts, and the volume could have been pumped up a bit, so you could hear more electronica and less classical.

When the old music school on Van Baerlestraat closed its doors for the last time, awaiting its transformation into a luxury hotel, many local residents assumed that Amsterdam's Museum Quarter would be losing a hub of local life, while high-end international travellers would be gaining an exclusive enclave off limits to city dwellers. Fast forward to 2012, and the same local residents are flocking to the light-filled glass lobby of the newly opened Conservatorium Hotel, a 500-m² 'living room' – in the words of its architect, Piero Lissoni – with adjoining bar and restaurant.

'Last Saturday, there were 600 people here, and they had to close the doors,' says Lissoni, sipping a cappuccino in the lobby. 'They were queuing outside. I'm so happy to see the hotel like this,' he adds, nodding towards the various chattering groups of

Amsterdammers occupying the Le Corbusier chairs and Italian sofas. 'People really bring it to life. I liked the idea of designing a public space with a human touch. I wanted the lobby to feel like my own home.'

When Lissoni, who has built a reputation designing flawlessly minimalist hotels, first saw the building, a former bank designed by Daniël Knuttel in 1901, it was still functioning as a conservatory. 'It was filled with music,' he recalls. 'The atmosphere was wonderful. But the treatment of the building was a disaster. The courtyard, which is now this lobby, was abandoned.' The idea of adding a glass box to the building had been proposed by a previous architect, and when it was bought by the Alrov Group for its luxury-hotel portfolio, the concept came with it. Lissoni, who had worked on the group's Mamilla Hotel in Jerusalem, was the natural choice for the project.

'I didn't want to do a straightforward restoration,' says Lissoni. 'That's not what I do. Instead, I respected the old building, while adding new elements to it.' The architect certainly didn't feel obliged to attempt a Netherlandish complement to Knuttel's tiled interiors and expansive bow windows. The hotel's 129 rooms and suites, in Lissoni's usual neutral palette, come complete with Italianate luxuries like bathrooms of travertine, brushed-oak

'I don't like architecture that denies its context'

floors and sleek storage units designed and fitted by Cassina. You would hardly know you're in Amsterdam, but for the occasional Delft-blue plate on the wall.

'Is it so very Italian?' responds the architect. 'Well, of course it's been informed by Italian taste. But I've tried to make the hotel a chimera – an animal made out of parts of other animals, if you like. ...

Hotels

090



Piero Lissoni

Hotels

091

The lounge-like, glass-covered atrium of the Conservatorium Hotel, formerly a courtyard exposed to the elements, is proving popular with locals as well as guests.



Lissoni has achieved a dynamic and dramatic balance between the old and new elements of the building.

... If you look around the lobby, you'll see chairs by Marcel Wanders and lamps we designed ourselves – together with antique African stools. I don't find the idea of beauty subjective. For me, it's an objective thing; it's like a code.'

Then again, Lissoni could argue that the hotel has no need to flaunt a symbolic Dutchness, when it embraces its context so thoroughly. The huge windows of Knuttel's original building draw the city inside, while Lissoni's glass box opens the hotel to the city. Daylight even penetrates the spa in the basement, via a greenery-filled shaft soaring up through the lobby floor. Through its proportions and transparency, the new glass addition flatters rather than obliterates the old brick structure. 'I don't like architecture that denies its context,' says the architect.

So what does he think of the new white-hatted Stedelijk Museum, known as 'the bathtub', taking shape across the way? 'It's a bit too aggressive in my opinion.' Would he care to expand on that? He certainly would. 'The last ten years in architecture and design have been about being strange,' he says. 'All these horrible buildings by Daniel Libeskind and Zaha Hadid. I don't follow fashion. One Philippe Starck is enough, two Philippe Starcks are too many, and three Philippe Starcks are a nightmare – I love the original, but I hate to spend the night in a bad copy of a Starck hotel.'

He is scathing, too, about architects who focus on making a grand monument, while abandoning the interior to its fate. 'We chose every one of these details,' he says, pointing at glass shelves stacked with design books and white Dutch pottery. 'To me, it's completely unacceptable to separate the interior and exterior of a building. We do everything on a project like this one, even getting

'I hate to spend the night in a bad copy of a Philippe Starck hotel'

involved in the technical stuff. Those good acoustics you've noticed aren't an accident; we engaged sound engineers – from London, because that's where you find the best ones – in the project from the start. A hotel should be neither too noisy nor too silent.

'But what I enjoy about this hotel,' he continues, 'is that it's not too formal. You feel happy to stroll in just for a drink in the lobby.' Here, indeed, Lissoni has perfectly gauged the casual Amsterdam context – this is no city for Ritz-like levels of decorum. And his glass 'winter garden' structure makes the most of a less than clement climate: 'You don't really know if you're inside or outside,' he says. 'I really like that.'

lissoniassociati.com



Rooms are mainly duplex, taking advantage of the high ceilings of the former bank and music school.



Does it work?

Claus Sendlinger: A meticulous transformation of one of Amsterdam's most iconic buildings. Following the success of Jerusalem's Mamilla Hotel, visionary owner Georgi Akirov and designer Piero Lissoni have teamed up for the second time to create another one-of-a-kind hotel. The result: a classic and contemporary aesthetic with great aplomb in Amsterdam's prime location.

(Note: The Conservatorium is a member of Design Hotels, of which Sendlinger is a cofounder.)

Piero Lissoni

Hotels



View from the restaurant in the lobby. The dark glass box contains meeting rooms and other facilities.

