

### Beyond withdrawal: A new space of togetherness

Somewhere during winter when it's snowy and dark outside, a visitor suddenly enters the house. Without speaking to anyone, he goes to the fireplace and sighs with relief: "Oh warmth"! As I was 14 years, I was a bit afraid who that is, though after observing the person who had entered the house for a moment, we realize it was our uncle! It was rather funny to look at this situation before telling him the fireplace wasn't lit. Nevertheless, he had already felt warmth by the mere thought of fire.

House Dedel is a jewel of a residential building in the center of The Hague and one could say I was rather lucky to have the chance to design for a house like that. Visiting the house the first time, I was surprised about the cold inside the museum.

The house is an old monument building from 1642, most likely designed by Jacob van Campen. Originally it was built as a family residency for the family of Jan Hudde Dedel. Walking through the house wrapped in a coat, breathing out clouds of warm steam into the cold air, was a kind of a romantic experience. It's as if I had been transported into a moment in time where I could almost hear the small children depicted on the wall as frescoes, yelling and running around the corridors, despite being almost alone in the house. I was so taken up the old impressive wallpapers, ceilings, paintings, wall reliefs and furniture that I almost forgot it's officially a graphic design museum. Being in the living room, my attention was drawn to the architecture of the place, instead of the graphic design collection on show in the museum.

Being in the living room and hearing about mister Dedel being the mayor of The Hague, and his ambitions turning The Hague into a comparable or greater city than Amsterdam, having this house as the first house to represent that status, listening to the story, all the interiors was just gaining value, even though parts we couldn't have seen as they were sold out though time. The tour guild was telling us about the missing tapestry of The abduction of Zeus. A Greek myth of a beautiful lady Europa who was kidnapped to Europe. As Europa was kidnapped, so was the painting. I could say the same about how life vanished from the house, the only reminder of it being an empty fireplace with a small 20th-century stove in solitude in front of it. Even though times have changed, the architecture remains in its original form. Only now, the fireplace is not surrounded by people, but by graphic design posters showing the great modernization of 100 years ago.



“There is a strong identity between naked skin and the sensation of home. The experience of home is essentially an experience of intimate warmth. The space of warmth around a fireplace is the space of ultimate intimacy and comfort. Marcel Proust gives a poetic description of such a fireside space, as sensed by the skin: ‘It is like an immaterial alcove, a warm cave carved into the room itself, a zone of hot weather with floating boundaries.’ A sense of homecoming has never been stronger for me than when seeing a light in the window of my childhood house in a snow-covered landscape at dusk, the memory of the warm interior gently warming my frozen limbs. Home and the pleasure of the skin turn into a singular sensation.”<sup>1</sup>

Already 1,5 million years ago people used to gather around a campfire, and 2500 BC and earlier around central hearths in Greece. The element of fire giving warmth, intimacy and comfort is an old ritual people had grown with, creating all kind of stories and beliefs to that ritual.

#### ‘HESTIA, GODDESS OF ARCHITECTURE

*The fireplace appears in the form of a Greek goddess, who teaches men how to build houses around her. She proves to be more mobile in reality – rather a portable piece of technology than the fixed and central role assigned to her in the myth.*

*...Hestia -her name synonymous with hearth - is almost invisible and yet ubiquitous in Greek mythology and everyday life. Present in the everyday home as a domestic altar, the first and last liberations and morsels of food are offered to her, and any offering to other gods goes through her.’<sup>2</sup>*

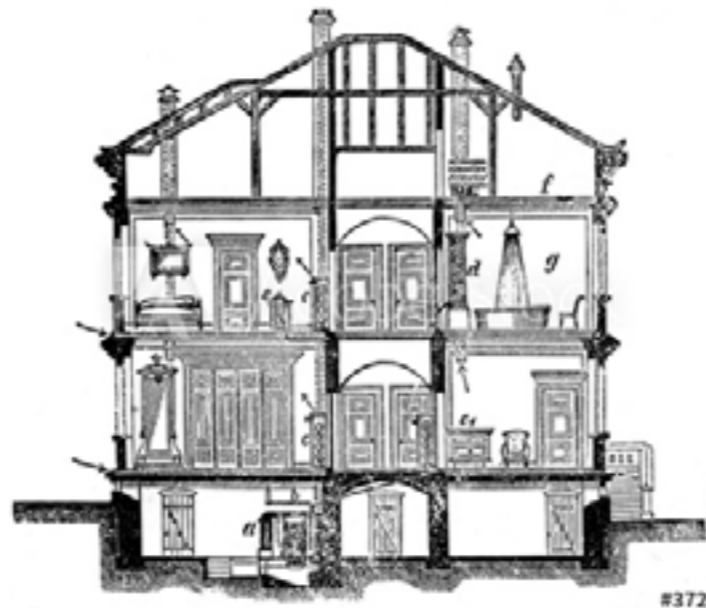
This excerpt from Elements of architecture 2 written by studio OMA shows that a fireplace has a long tradition. A tradition that’s becoming a lifestyle and thus almost every house has a place, where to make fire and heat.



*‘If you had to summarize it in a sentence, you could say that the history of private life is a history of getting comfortable slowly. Until the eighteenth century, the idea of having comfort at home was so unfamiliar that there wasn’t even a word for the condition. ‘Comfortable’ meant merely ‘capable of being consoled’. Comfort was something you gave to the wounded or distressed. Nowhere in the house is the spirit (if not always the actuality) of comfort better captured than in the curiously named room in which we find ourselves now, the drawing room...’<sup>3</sup>*

And with the drawing room mentioned is nowadays the living room. People’s spending time together at home has changed over time, alongside with the functions of a living room. Nowadays, the fireplace is often replaced by television while the heat is provided by central heating. I would call it an evolution of a certain kind of luxury, but also of individualization, where people can even in winter spend time in all kinds of rooms that have a heating element.

Fireplace is an element in the house that had gone with people for centuries, that was providing a practical meeting point for people to gather around heat, and have more light.



“Because fireplaces were so inefficient, they were constantly enlarged. Some became so enormous that they were built with benches in them, letting people sit inside the fireplace, almost the only place in the house where they could be really warm. Whatever the losses in warmth and comfort, the gains in space proved irresistible. So the development of the fireplace became one of the great breakthrough moments in domestic history. Suddenly it was possible to lay boards across the beams and create a whole new world upstairs.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus I ask myself the question whether it’s possible to bring back the community-enforcing qualities of the formal fireplace into the house?

So that one hears lots of voices through the house sharing stories of visitors and creating better bonds with one another and simultaneously with the house.

The house is a monumental building has a great priority of being restored and seen. Opening the house for the public would be thus a great solution and that means, the living room would become a public living room.

In my future museum, people walk through the house appreciating all the beauties of the house and in need of warmth getting back to the living room where they come. Taking the coat off will be the symbolical act of people getting comfortable and habituating the place.

<sup>1</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa; *The eyes of the skin* (p.58-59). by John Wiley & Sons Ltd 2005

<sup>2</sup> Rem Koolhaas; *Elements of Architecture - Fireplace* (p. 25,26). by Marsilio Editori Spa 2014

<sup>3,4</sup> Bill Bryson; *At Home A short history of private life* (p.150). by Transworld Publishers London 2010