



Cultuurpark Westergasfabriek AMSTERDAM

Westergasfabriek, a nineteenth-century factory on the outskirts of central Amsterdam, halted operations and in 1981 the site was rezoned as recreation space. Kathryn Gustafson won the commission with “Changement,” a proposal produced in collaboration with Francine Houben of Mecanoo architects. In 1997, Gustafson opened an office in London and with partner Neil Porter began to translate concept into detailed design.

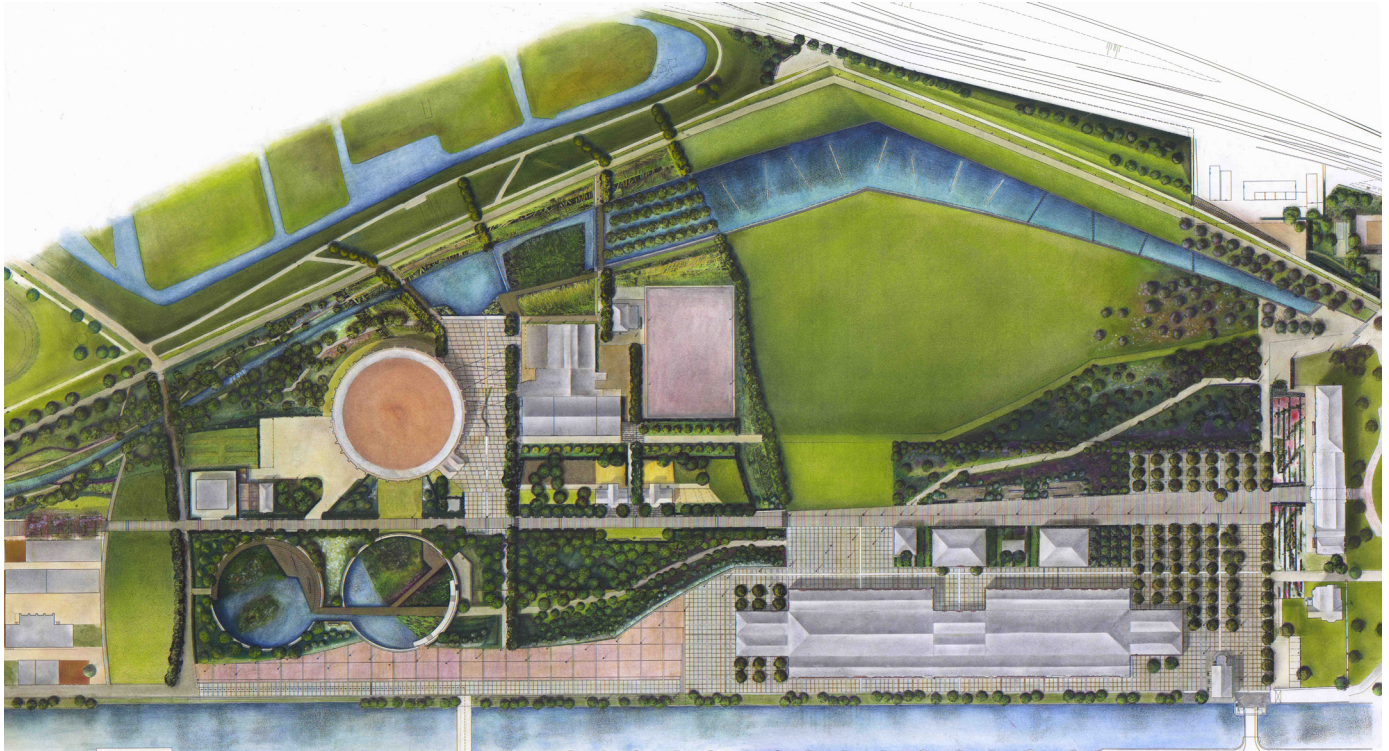
Cultuurpark Westergasfabriek is one of Gustafson Porter + Bowman’s defining projects, and is considered as a model of brownfield reclamation within a physically dense urban context and a complex set of stakeholders. Using ‘Changement’ as a foundation, the scheme establishes a delicate balance between contamination and accessibility, invention and interpretation, restoration (of contaminated land) and revelation (of the potential of a post-productive site). Today it is a vibrant cultural center for the arts and a meeting place for surrounding communities.

The masterplan (and subsequent detailed design) for the 11.5-hectare site creates diverse spatial and temporal experiences anchored by an axial promenade that transitions from a formal urban plaza in the east, to an open and naturalized framework to the west. It includes trails and gardens, an events field for 10,000 people, a playground, a waterfall, a bridge, and an artificial lake that can be drained to accommodate large festivals. The design also took into account the pedestrian experience, bicycle trails, and the vehicular needs of the many arts organizations located in the historic buildings. The existing grounds were reverted to a green, recreational park. Local residents were envisaged as the main users, and natural environmental qualities had to be strengthened. A one hectare open-air events area was added. We were able to draw on

experience of landforms, hydrology, and horticulture to address these complex challenges while focusing on the need for a wide range of cultural, recreational, and ecological programming of the new park.

Following the approval of our masterplan, we subsequently developed a detailed design that creates a series of park zones that relate specifically to existing site elements and contexts. At the renovated Stadsdeelraad (town hall), the plaza’s layout is a cultivated expression of order. At the heart of the scheme is the Events site. The Paddling pond that borders the field fills and empties in response to the park’s needs, alternately reaching up the beached edge or draining to accept crowds. Along the Haarlemmervaart Canal, a popular access point for neighbourhood residents, a wide, linear plaza provides public recreation space and connection to the adjacent Market Square. To the west, two historic gasholding structures adjacent to the Cité des Artistes complex frame displays of aquatic plants, fish and reflective water. In the park’s northwest corner, proximity to an active agricultural polder generates an explicitly ecologically oriented circulation scheme and water feature. In its attentiveness to external circumstances, the design coalesces uses – civic, social, commercial, cultural, recreational, ecological – serving as a synecdoche for the city rather than the sequential circuit or continuous fabric of a conventional park.

The success of the project can be attributed to an effective design process which incorporated public input and site-specificity from its beginnings. The process of design included a full year of well-organized public consultation process and also incorporated the transformation of industrial areas to the south of the site into a mixed use housing development.



AWARDS

- 2010 EU Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Award (Conservation)
- 2009 Green Good Design
- 2007 Landscape Institute Awards Winner – Design over 5ha
- 2007 International Urban Landscape Award, Topos
- 2006 Finalist, European Prize for Urban Public Space
- 2005 2nd Place Winner Built Project, RIBA Urban Space By Design Awards
- 2004 Golden Pyramid, Netherlands National Architectural Award

"The new park on the Westergasfabriek is certainly a fantastic new amenity. It is a meeting place for everyone, a park which is open all day every day, year in and year out. It forms a seamless whole with the buildings it surrounds... The buildings themselves were designed over one hundred years ago by Isaac Gosschalk. Kathryn Gustafson has been supremely successful in reflecting and complementing their form and character in the surrounding grounds, with all the beautiful and very special areas she has created."

Evert Verhagen, Project Manager, Westergasfabriek Culture Park, 1993-2003



- BUDGET
£7m (Initial) EUR23M (Final, due to delay of 2 years to resolve contamination)
- CLIENT
Westerpark District Council and the City of Amsterdam
- PROJECT DURATION
1997-2005
- SIZE
13.5ha
- ARCHITECT
Mecanoo (Led by Frances Houben)
- ENGINEERS
ARUP
Pieters Bouwtechniek
Tauw
- PROJECT MANAGEMENT
Northcroft Belgium sa
Tauw
- CONTRACTOR
Marcus bv

