



RAU ARCHITECTS
Thomas Rau,
Founder and Director

Towards one planet architecture

Over 16 years ago, Thomas Rau made the move from his home country of Germany to the Netherlands. It was a well thought out, strategic decision. Determined to set up his own architectural firm that would distinguish itself through the sustainability of its designs and concepts, he had considered every aspect of his future location. First of all, he'd reasoned, no one else knows the power of nature - and therefore also its laws - quite like the Dutch. "When you spend some time here, you notice that the Dutch have a very particular relationship with their environment," he explains. "Partly, it's that they have literally had to win their land from nature. But this has also had the consequence that they are aware of their responsibility for their biotope - more than many other cultures, I believe. In the Netherlands, there's a better understanding of the message that the built environment must be in harmony with the natural surroundings." In addition, Rau notes that Amsterdam has many other advantages, including its compact scale, the presence of many different creative talents here, and the fact that the Netherlands has a broad and internationally oriented design tradition. Young Dutch designers have put new life into the reputation of Dutch

design worldwide, and in their wake Thomas Rau has witnessed the rise of a new architectural dynamic. "The Netherlands has always had internationally renowned architects," he says. "Think of Berlage, Rietveld, and, more recently, Van Berkel and Koolhaas. They have paved the way for the international acceptance of a new generation of architects, who want to distinguish themselves not only through their choice of forms and materials, but also through their awareness of the fact that a building always has a cultural and social impact." Add to this the fact that the Netherlands is making major investments in its infrastructure, and that the 'green city' will get a major impulse here in the coming years, and Rau's decision to locate in the Netherlands - more specifically on the southern bank of the Amsterdam IJ - seems to have paid off relatively quickly. "So far, I haven't been disappointed on a single point," he agrees. He's speaking in his office, which was designed according to the latest principles of sustainability. "In fact," he continues, "I'm in the most stimulating setting imaginable for my work. Right now, Amsterdam is Europe's centre for sustainable building, and I am convinced that in the long run, we can

also claim that position worldwide. Especially if the demand for sustainably realised construction projects continues to develop as positively as has been the case over the last few years."

EYECATCHING

RAU Architects is one of the trendsetters in a rapidly expanding niche in the Dutch architectural tradition. In and around Amsterdam, there are an estimated 500 architects specialising in forms of sustainable architecture. While this is already an interesting development in itself, what is even more important for the investment climate is that the development of energy-neutral and biodegradable real estate is starting to become a much sought-after export product. Or as Thomas Rau puts it: "People everywhere are now becoming aware of the need to build sustainably. Of course, this is mainly because existing buildings and houses are enormous energy wasters, responsible, for example, for more than a third of global CO2 emissions. But it's also because the residual value of sustainably realised projects will be higher in the long run. The current energy prices are helping us to persuade investors and buyers that there is great material value in designs which return measura-

- Almere will grow according to the cradle-to-cradle Philosophy as defined in William McDonough's book, "Cradle to Cradle". The book is a manifesto calling for the transformation of human industry through ecologically intelligent design. Through historical sketches on the roots of the industrial revolution; commentary on science, nature and society; descriptions of key design principles.
- Almere Principles are key in the challenge to double the City size of inhabitants and create an extra 100,000 jobs.

bly more energy than they use. Above all, by 2020 people will just no longer have the funds for energy-gobbling houses and industrial buildings." The architectural proofs of this proposition are meanwhile rising in and around Amsterdam. Last year, a number of creative media companies took up residence in the Kraanspoor building in North Amsterdam, a renovation project realised entirely with sustainable materials and new construction techniques in the northern harbour area of the city. A few kilometres further north, environmental consultancy Search recently opened an office designed and constructed to work as a zero-energy building, and Stadshaven Minerva will soon have a "sustainable incubator" for new creative companies. Sister city Almere will shortly get the world's first energy-neutral supermarket. Close to Schiphol Airport, in Hoofddorp, work has begun on a business park based on the cradle-to-cradle concept as developed by German chemist Michael Braungart and American architect William McDonough. All materials used must be able to be recycled eventually, or must biodegrade naturally. What's more, a kind of return policy has been agreed with the builders and project developers, stating that they must dismantle and remove the building in 30 years time for an agreed price. RAU Architects, meanwhile, has some of the most striking sustainable designs

outside the Netherlands to its name. In China, Thomas Rau and his 40 employees are developing a completely sustainable city district, and in Lyon, France, they are supervising the world's largest energy-neutral residential and retail project. "And so much more is still in the pipeline," says Rau. "Not only for us, but also for our colleagues elsewhere in the city."

THE NEXT STEP

While Thomas Rau and his peers are convinced that sustainable architecture is experiencing a heyday, Rau believes that now is the perfect time to take the next step forward. "If we want to keep up our current lead, then we must, as internationally oriented architects, look to what I call 'One Planet Architecture.' We should look not only at what we can gain in sustainability within the construction industry, but also at the surrounding factors involved in our designs. How, for example, can we keep unnecessary commuter traffic to a minimum, and what contribution can we make as architects of the built environment to increasing the pleasure of our users in their home and work lives? And what can we do to anticipate people's changing needs with respect to their work-life balance? These are just a few of the questions that we must ask ourselves as architects, if we view our buildings as a temporary covering of the planet." Rau believes that the Netherlands is an ideal laboratory for developing such fresh concepts and testing them in the

context of daily reality. Not only are people here used to making the best use of scarce living space, while the congestion problem forces the finding of solutions, but a form of thinking 'outside the box' is possible that, he says, still astonishes and inspires him. "On some points," he adds, "Dutch legislation and the construction sector can be just as stuck as in other countries, but when a problem is seen to affect everyone, then everything suddenly becomes fluid. Nothing is impossible, and even the most envelope-pushing solutions are seriously considered. This was how it was decided to build the Delta Works, which is still the world's largest coastal reinforcement project, and now serious consideration is being given to the idea of mooring an artificial island in the form of a tulip off the North Sea Coast. "Perhaps it will take a couple of years, but that tulip island is definitely coming," continues Rau. "And it goes to show that the Netherlands is still ahead when it comes to knowledge and experience in the field of water defences. This is just the sort of pioneering work the world needs in order to find the right sustainable solutions."

RAU ARCHITECTS
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN THE NETHERLANDS
 ESTABLISHED IN THE AMSTERDAM
 METROPOLITAN AREA SINCE 1992
EMPLOYEES 40
INDUSTRY ARCHITECTURE
ACTIVITY EUROPEAN HEADQUARTER