

**A modern bourgeois villa from 1933, presented ‘as if nothing has happened’:  
Sonneveld House Rotterdam (abstract)**

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In the centre of Rotterdam, next to the Netherlands Architecture Institute stands the Sonneveld House. This white villa from 1933 was designed by the firm of J.A. Brinkman (1902 – 1949) and L.C. Van der Vlugt (1894 – 1936) for the Sonneveld family and servants. The client was vice-director of Van Nelle factory, designed by the same architects in 1925 – 1931. The house was designed in the style of the famous house for Van Nelle director Kees van der Leeuw (1928-1930), including all furniture and interior decoration as a living machine for modern bourgeois family life in the thirties. The interior of the house included colour schemes designed for each specific room and the first serial production of tubular steel furniture of the Dutch designer W.H. Gispen, this together with the textiles and upholstery chosen from the Metz & Co collections makes this interior design an unique example of Dutch modern interior history.

The preservation of the Sonneveld House as Rotterdam cultural heritage, was the motivation for the purchase by the Rotterdam Foundation of Volkskracht Historische Monumenten in 1997. After the departure of the Sonneveld family in the late fifties, the house has served as residence of the Belgian consul, with maintenance aimed only at conservation. Much of the original fixed furnishing of the house had remained intact under new decorations; the house called for drastic restoration.

The office of Molenaar & Van Winden architecten in Delft made an inventory and description of the Sonneveld House in 1997. The information based on archived research contained lists of the interior furnishings with data on the colour scheme, lighting, furniture, upholstery and fabrics. However, the ‘jigsaw puzzle’ was still too incomplete to be able to reconstruct a fully authentic picture. The house itself was then made the main source of research. Addition to this from the Sonneveld family, including original furniture, made the puzzle almost complete.

In the mean time the search for reuse and management of the building was started. It was decided by Volkskracht to start collaboration with the neighbouring Netherlands Architecture Institute. A commission was set up to supervise the restoration. Although the inventory made reconstruction possible, this was not obvious at the beginning. Ideological preoccupation of commission members with the idea the house was a compromise and not the most radical example of Modern Living of the time, led to ideas of reuse as a museum of design prototypes in stead of reconstruction. Happily the debate led at the end to the conviction that a complete reconstruction of the house in its original 1933 state as modern family house, as if nothing had happened, was preferable to inform a general public about modernity of these days, and therefore to exhibit it as a collection item of the Netherlands Architecture Institute. All the choices made during restoration are based on this principle.