

Transforming time

Abandoning his career as an architect, 'furniture transformer' Rolf.fr now spends his time giving new life to out-of-date pieces — but never sacrifices their antique charms in the process

TEXT: PATRICIA NELSON
PHOTOGRAPHY: FRANKHANSWIJK.NL

WHO Rolf.fr

WHERE Netherlands

KNOWN FOR The renovation of an old church in Utrecht

You are both an architect and a furniture designer – is this correct?

Yes, I was educated as an architect and worked as such for 10 years, four of which were with Marnix van der Meer at Zecc Architects. I recently left Zecc to pursue other avenues... I stopped working as an architect in general because of the massive legislation, demands and conditions attached to, and involved with, the profession. I discovered that this was not an environment where my creativity was best developed.

Do you see many parallels between your role as an architect and your current work as a designer?

I notice them in everything I do; I think and design as an architect. I conceive things in terms of space and I notice contrast and structure – I am far less concerned with decoration and ornamentation. By cutting a classic piece of furniture in half, I bring to the surface the bones of the original piece.

You have been called a 'furniture transformer' by the media – what does this mean to you?

For me, the term transformation relates to

projects in which existing items are renewed and given new functions. The contrast between the older parts and new elements plays an important role but I always strive to form a whole, cohesive entity. New and old must fuse somehow – they can't be totally separate things.

Do you ever create designs for completely new pieces of furniture?

At the moment I am focused on recycling and reusing old parts. I still have several ideas that I want to realise. However, of course I also have visions for original items – these occur quicker than I can actually manage at the moment.

Do you feel that by adapting these older pieces they become more relevant to a modern lifestyle?

Of course; by adding new elements the furniture becomes contemporary again. My cabinet 'Divorce' is a good example of that. It belonged to my grandfather and when he passed away none of his children wanted it. Although they had many associated memories, it didn't aesthetically fit into their current interiors

Through my transformation however, a new cabinet emerged; one that most of them would like to have in their homes. It took on a whole new appearance, without erasing the memories attached to it.

How was your experience at the Dutch Design Week late last year?

The Dutch Design Week is a great way to show your work to a wide, international audience. Judging by the positive reactions and media attention I received from it, I can say it was a big personal success for me. My next presentation will be in April in Milan at the Zona Tortona. The atmosphere there is also fantastic.

Previously, what types of architectural work were you involved in?

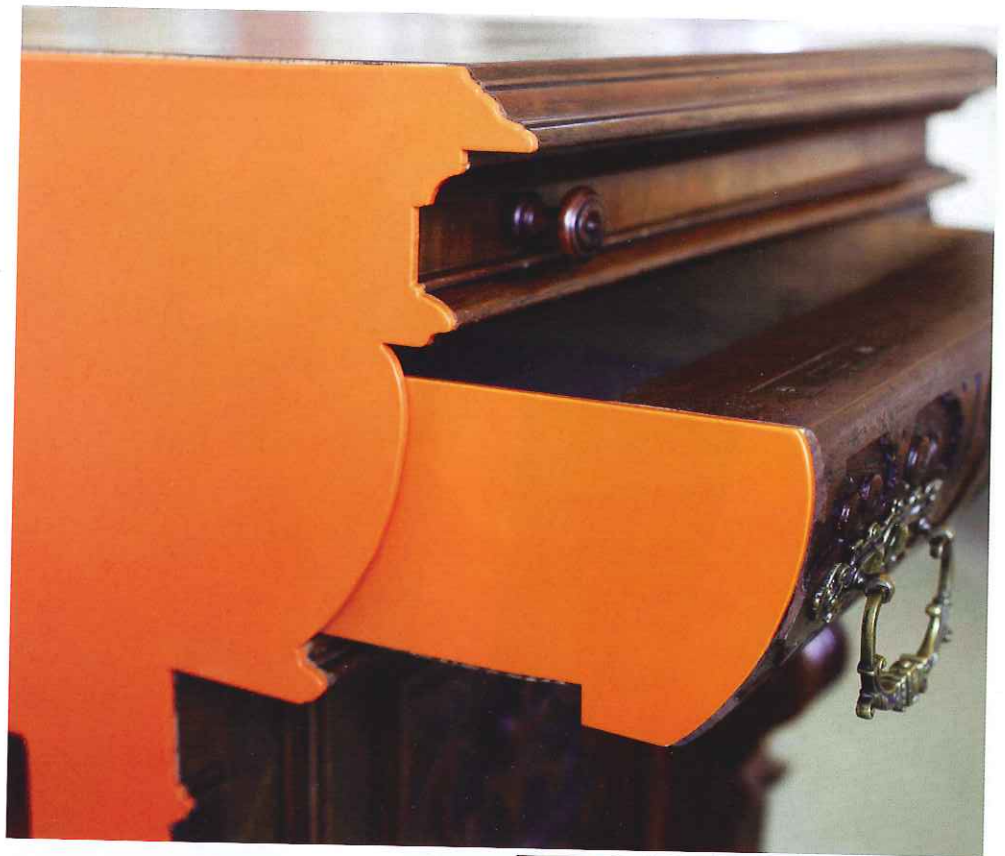
I mostly did relatively small but special projects. I often worked on the renovations of existing buildings, which is also a link to my current furniture practice.

Could you give me some examples of your work?

Our first Zecc project was the transformation of a water tower in the town of Soest. We cut open the tower on the backside to bring in more light. In the former water basin on the top of the tower, we created a sculptural object that includes a place for sleeping, a study and a sauna. Quite a well-known project, and the last that I worked on with Zecc, was the renovation of a church in Utrecht. It is a very good example of how to tastefully combine the old and new.

Can you tell me about the current renovations to your house and studio in Rotterdam?

This is the only architectural project that I have actually worked on over the last two years. It is a



transformation of an existing 19th century house. We took out all the walls, floors and only left two sides and the front façade standing. The existing façade has been painted completely black – including the windows – and this serves as the base for the new exterior. The black layer stands as a shadow of the original shell and new holes have been cut out of the structure in which glass has been placed to form new windows. In this way, a symbiosis of the existing front façade and the new interior comes into being.



From top From an old cabinet no one wanted, to this contemporary piece that works in a modern interior • Rolf.fr
 • The Divorce cabinet **Opposite page** Old pieces of furniture are deconstructed and new parts are added

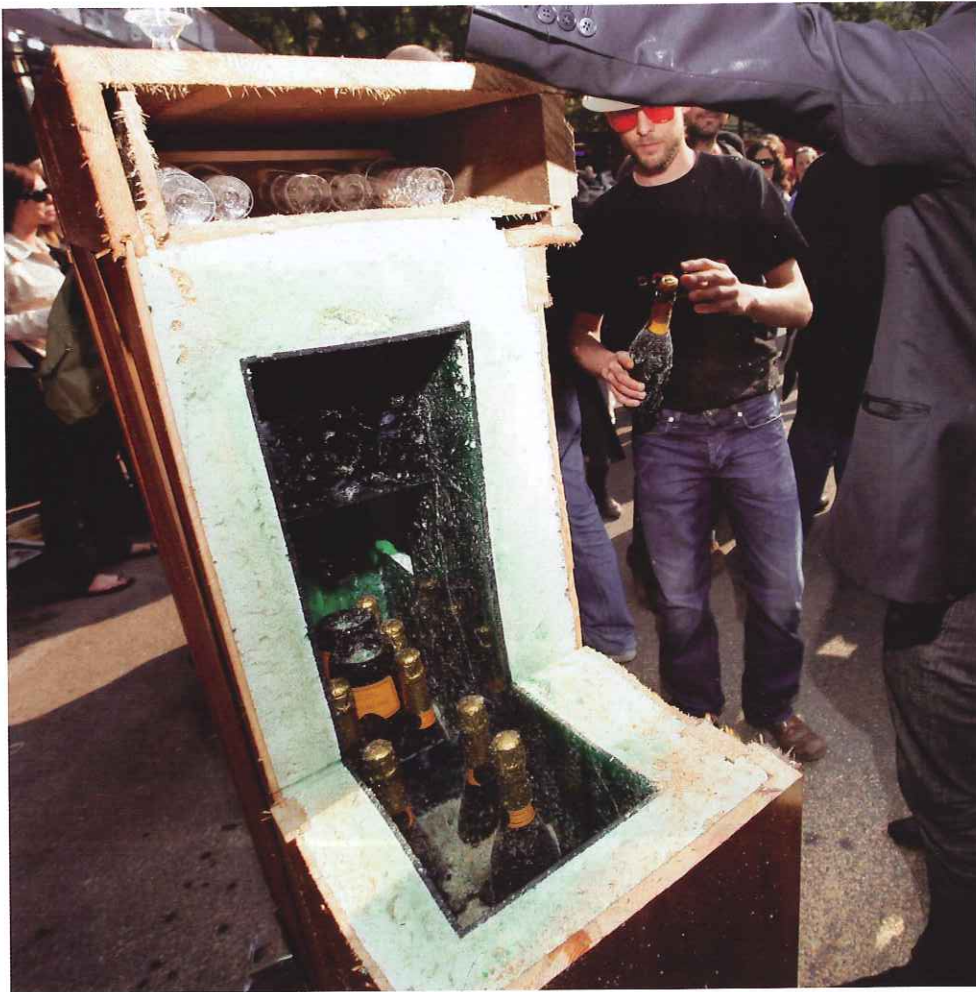
What has it been like working on such a personal task?

I tremendously enjoyed being focused on one architectural project so intensely, especially as I did a lot of the construction myself. After two years, it's now very near completion. I expect to be able to show the photography of the house by April.

Over the coming years, do you see yourself continuing with the same kind of work or do you have plans to explore other avenues?

I still have a lot of ideas for some furniture pieces in which other themes determine the design. I find it important that the designs are formed around a central theme or concept. Besides that, I am open to taking on and handling small scale, special architectural projects now and again – but they will need to have a clearly sculptural or artistic approach.





"I am far less concerned with decoration and ornamentation. By cutting a classic piece of furniture in half, I bring to the surface the bones of the original piece"

Left The cupboard now functions as a working bar **Below** At the moment Rolf's main focus is redesigning furniture **Opposite page** New and old elements are fused to make a modern piece



逆轉時間

離開建築界，半途出家轉投傢俱設計的Doris有一「傢俱變法師」之稱，過氣舊物被他賦予新生，仍然保存古董韻味

撰文：PATRICIA NELSON
攝：FRANKHANSWIJK NL

WHO Roll:fr
WHERE 荷蘭
KNOWN FOR 翻新烏特勒支一座舊教堂

你是建築師兼傢俱設計師，對嗎？

對，我是建築系畢業的，之後做了十年建築師，在NecC建築事務所與Marink van der Meer共事四年。近日我離開NecC另覓新發展…不想做建築師，主要因為這一行有大量法規、要求、條件等需要遵從。我發現這種情況下，我的創意得不到最大發揮。

建築師與你現在設計師的身份，有什麼異同？

我覺得兩個身份都是做同一件事，我以建築師的角度思考及設計。我的構想從空間出發，注重對比及結構，卻對裝飾點綴等不甚在意。我覺得把一件經典傢具砍半，可以展現它的靈魂所在。

傳媒稱你為「傢俱變法師」，你有什麼感想？

對我來說，「變法」就是將現有的物品翻新並賦予新功能。舊與新的對比很重要，但我会努力做到整體呼應。新與舊某程度上必須融合一起，不能各不相干。

你有試過由零開始設計一件新傢俱嗎？

目前，我專注於回收及再用舊物。我還有好幾個構思想實踐。當然我渴望做自己的原創，不過現在做卻是言之過早。

你覺得舊物新用，能夠配合現代的生活空間嗎？

當然，加入新元素的傢俱會重新時尚起來，例如我設計的Divoce櫃子。它本屬我祖父所有，但祖父去世後，他的兒女都不願接收。雖然他們對這個櫃有很多回憶，但它的外貌就是不匹配他們現在的家。不過，經過我的改造後，它變成了一個他們喜歡、樂於放在家中的新櫃子。全新姿態，當中的回憶卻完好無損地保留下來。

你去年參與荷蘭設計周，有什麼見聞？

荷蘭設計周是介紹作品的好途徑，你可以接觸世

界各地的訪客、層面廣泛。觀乎大家及媒體給我的正面反響，我可以說這是我個人的一項大成就。我四月會發佈新作品，地點是米蘭Nona Tortonà。那裡的设计氣氛當然是一流的。

過去你設計過什麼類型的建築物？

主要是小規模但有特色的項目。我常常翻新一些現有建築，造就了現在從事翻新傢俱工作的我。

可以談談你的建築作品嗎？

我的首個NecC項目是改建位於Soest的一座水塔。我們把水塔從背部切開，好讓更多自然光線能透射入內。原來水塔頂部的水盆位置，我們設計了一個甚有雕塑感的空間，讓人在裡面睡覺、讀書及焗桑拿。我在NecC最後一個項目挺有名的，是翻新烏特勒支的教堂，一個新舊完美結合的好例子。

你正在翻新自己鹿特丹的家及工作室，一切順利嗎？

這是我過去兩年來唯一的建築項目。要改造十九世紀的住宅，我們首先拆掉所有牆壁、地板，只保留兩側及前幅外牆。這幅外牆包括窗戶全部漆上黑色作為底色。黑色的表面宛若原有建築物的影子，此外還在外牆鑿上好幾個大洞，再鑲上玻璃成為新窗。這樣，舊有的前幅外牆與翻新後的室內空間也就合二為一了。

設計自己的家有甚麼感覺？

我極度享受如此專注地工作，尤其是我親手做了很多工序。經過兩年時間，工程接近完成。我希望能夠在四月的發佈會上展示新房子的照片。

未來的日子，你會繼續目前的傢俱工作，還是有其他新發展？

我對某些傢俱的設計主題仍然有很多想法。我認為，環繞著中心主題或構思來設計很重要。此外，我目前不介意接一些小型又有特色的建築工程，不過它們必須是採用雕塑或藝術手法來表現的項目。E

