

Oxfordlaan 70 (formerly Universiteitssingel 70)

The building on Oxfordlaan 70, part of a single building with Universiteitssingel 60, was added to the Randwijck campus in 2005, forming the third section of the so-called 'city wall' of the *Medizinische Kleinstadt* (medical district). Serving as an 'incubator', Oxfordlaan 70 provides office spaces and laboratory facilities to startups in the domain of the Life Sciences. The street address of this building used to be Universiteitssingel 70 (UNS70), but it was changed because the entrance section of this part of the building is actually located on Oxfordlaan.

To gain insight into how these buildings were developed it is necessary to consider their realization in connection with two other buildings on Universiteitssingel, called UNS40 and UNS50, as well as with the location and various buildings of the Academic Hospital Maastricht (AZM).

First it is useful to offer some more background on the location and positioning of these buildings. In the 1970s, Randwijck, a new urban development of Maastricht, was quite a jumble, having new southward-oriented blocks of housing adjacent to the Maas River bank interspersed with vacant lots and meadows. A first effort to fill part of the empty space resulted in a new building on Peter Debeijplein 1. Next, the AZM was realized more or less adjacent to the area's eastern edge and the MECC on its northern edge. As more buildings were added, it became clear that the divergent ways in which they were erected conflicted with each other. In response, the city called for a reassessment and adaptation of the zoning scheme for Randwijck, and to that end it hired a German consultancy firm, Ungers/Von Brandt.

This firm developed a new master plan aimed at putting in additional buildings of Maastricht University (UM), the AZM and a host of interrelated businesses and institutes. This plan was translated into a new zoning scheme, which was meant to ensure the mutual cohesion of the projected new buildings in the area, also in relation to their immediate environment.

One of the scheme's starting-points was that Randwijck involves a Maas River bank district marked by a wide bedding along a north-south axis. On quite some photographs of this area from the 1930s one can see fields and meadows inundated by the river. Like the river, the nearby highway and railway follow a north-south trajectory. All this infrastructure can in fact be linked to the old waterway pattern.

A nice detail is that along this same north-south axis there also used to be an ice skating lane during winters, if at least the river water inundated the meadows and temperatures were below zero. In such conditions, it was possible to skate along the longitudinal axis of what today is Universiteitssingel. In fact, one would be able to do the same today on roller blades, by entering Universiteitssingel 40 and skating straight until reaching the line of chestnut trees found at Universiteitssingel 60.

A basic idea of the master plan involved the creation of a kind of city wall in a north-south direction, as constituted by UNS50 and, later, UNS40 and UNS60/70: the *Medizinische Kleinstadt* would thus become a walled-in city district situated along the highway. In this concept, the round library building and the east-building of UNS40 serve as bastions, emphasizing the fortified character. The buildings are linked to each other through elevated walkways,

which serve as gates in the city wall that allow you to enter the medical city behind it.

The fortress-like character is also reflected in the shapes and sizes of the buildings. For example, one section of the 'wall', Universiteitssingel 50, is a seven-story building with a length of 240 meters and a width of only 23 meters. The architectonic design was executed by Aan de Maas Architects, which decided to do all buildings constituting the wall in white, or at least give them a white look.

The white exterior walls of these buildings, with red color accents, can be viewed as a kind of upholstery, given that their fronts do not have a load-bearing function. The concrete skeleton of the buildings – a construction based on columns, disks and floors – does not need the exterior walls as supporting walls (whereas in a traditional brick building, for instance, inner and outer structure are dependent on each other).

Like the other buildings of that part of the *city wall*, Oxfordlaan 70 and UNS60 are narrow, elongated buildings consisting of five stories. Unlike the other buildings, which have fronts made of concrete or concrete elements, Oxfordlaan 70 has a stucco façade. A striking feature on this building's eastern side involves an old landscape element, a lane of chestnut trees, which has been retained. As a result, this building has a direct link to the four seasons. The building on Oxfordlaan 70 was designed such that its different functions – teaching, housing, offices – may easily be altered through simple interventions; it is thus not limited to one kind of user. This building, housing various startups today, is part of the above-described *Medizinische Kleinstadt*, and therefore a similar white exterior was applied.

It proved quite a challenge for the architect to give the two different parts of the building a look of their own within the confines of the master plan. The outcome is quite a massive structure, rendered in a smooth white sheet finishing and a tapering window pattern. The shape and pattern of the windows move from large rectangular openings – which refer to the design of UNS40's façade on the north side (UNS60) – to elongated low openings on the south side (UNS70). The entrance of UNS60 is marked by a glass surface and a simple porch integrated in the east front, thus forming a single whole with the wall formed by university buildings UNS40, UNS50 and UNS60. The entrance section of UNS70 (currently Oxfordlaan 70), located at the building's head on Oxfordlaan, provides the incubator a look and identity of its own through its front, which is slightly set back on the two lower stories, and the slanting glass surface that goes on to the roof structure.