



# Urban resources

AMSTERDAM'S VOLKSKRANT BUILDING IS REINVENTING ITSELF AS A HOTBED OF CREATIVE ACTIVITY.

BY TERRI J. KESTER

**W**hen *De Volkskrant* left its offices on Amsterdam's Wibautstraat early last year, no one had any idea what would become of this landmark building. A year later, the logo on the roof is all that remains of the newspaper which occupied the building for 32 years. After lengthy negotiations its new owner, housing corporation Het Oosten, signed a contract with non-profit organization Urban Resort, which set itself the task of repopulating the building with creative individuals eager to work in a stimulating environment surrounded by likeminded people.

Jaap Draaisma, the director of Urban Resort, explains that the income-linked rents paid by many of the tenants are among the lowest in town. But there are strings attached: "All tenants have to share in the responsibility for the organization and management of the building. We made it a condition that they registered as groups and were willing to present themselves collectively, for example by jointly organizing parties and other events. They are expected to actively contribute to their units and to the building."

Around 50 percent of the occupants must be artists or work in culture-related fields. Some space has also been allocated to people working in technology, education, trade and services. And a generous part of the building has been reserved for shared use by the tenants, their guests and other visitors. Since Urban Resort is rooted in the squatters movement, it's no surprise that the tenants are expected to build their own workspaces and solve most of their own problems. Plenty of candidates proved eager to accept this challenge: 270 enterprises were invited to move in, out of a total of more than 2,000 applications.

The emerging Volkskrant community is a very diverse mix of people and their spaces. Some tenants are perfectly happy to operate with little more than a notebook computer, a folding chair and a borrowed desk. For others, a suitable workspace requires a much greater investment. James Marsden for example, a musician who also runs the main reception for Urban Resort, has installed a soundproof room crammed full of keyboards. Josephine Jansen teaches belly dancing at Studio Luce, a spacious room she built together with friends. And Goran Baba Ali, an Iraqi writer and painter who publishes an online magazine for exiles, is content with a compact office-cum-studio.

The tenants talk passionately about their hopes and dreams. They all know their neighbors, but collaborations are mostly at the incubation stage. An exception is Christian, a sculptor inspired by iconic originals like Michelangelo's David: he is teaming up with a garden architect based on the same floor. Club Canvas, the panoramic restaurant on the top floor, is the perfect environment to network, hatch new ideas and fine-tune existing plans. The smell of fresh newsprint may have disappeared from the Volkskrant building forever, but creativity is there to stay. ✕

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