



Weverij \ textile mill De Ploeg 1958, productiehal \ production hall [foto MS]



Mien Ruys, tuinaanleg rondom de weverij \ gardens surrounding textile mill De Ploeg 1958 [foto MS]

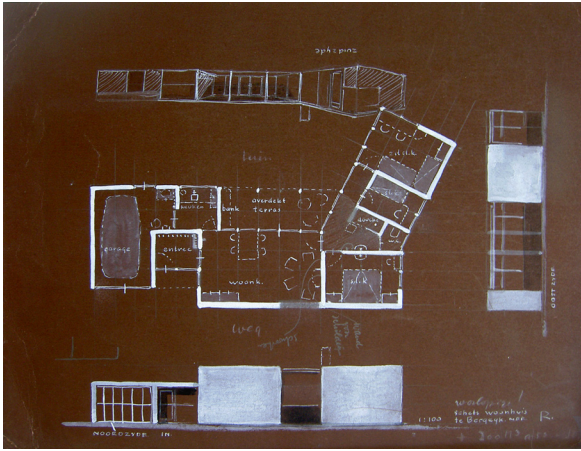


G.Th. Rietveld & G. Beltman, weverij \ textile mill De Ploeg, 1958 [foto MS]



Mien Ruys, tuinaanleg rondom het bedrijf \ garden design surrounding the mill 1958 [foto MS]

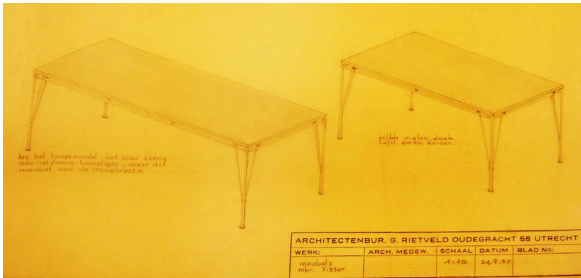




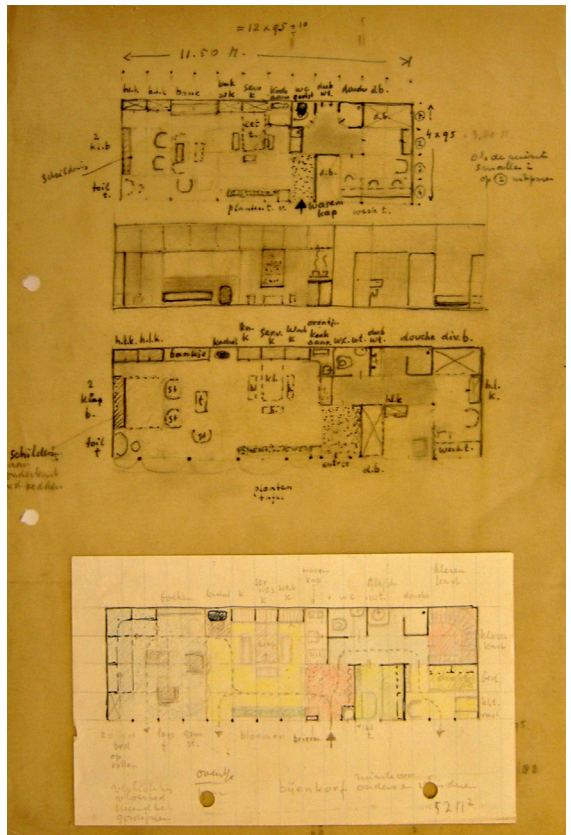
G.Th. Rietveld, schets woonhuis Visser \ sketch of Visser House 1954  
[archief \ archive Centraal Museum Utrecht, foto \ photo MS]



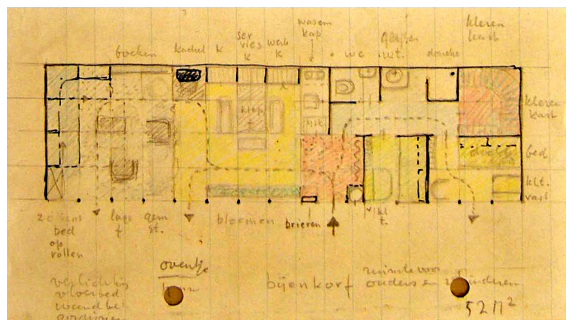
Mia Visser, Martijn Visser, Dorothea Fischer, Bruce Nauman, Sol LeWitt, Martin Visser, Geet van der Net  
in juni \ June 1968 [Museumjournaal 14/2 1969]



G.Th. Rietveld, eetkamertafel familie Visser \ dining-table Visser family 1955  
[NAI archief \ archive Netherlands Architecture Institute Rotterdam]

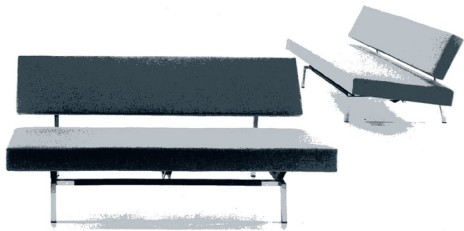


G.Th. Rietveld, schets tentoonstelling \ exhibition drawing OHOT 1954  
[archief NAI \ archive Netherlands Architecture Institute]



G.Th. Rietveld, schets tentoonstelling \ exhibition drawing OHOT 1954  
[archief NAI \ archive Netherlands Architecture Institute]

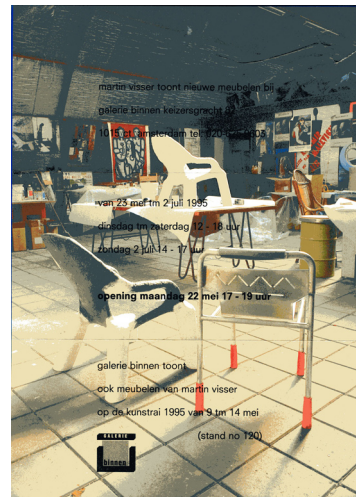




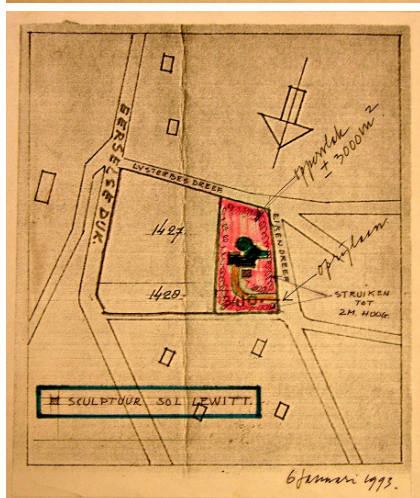
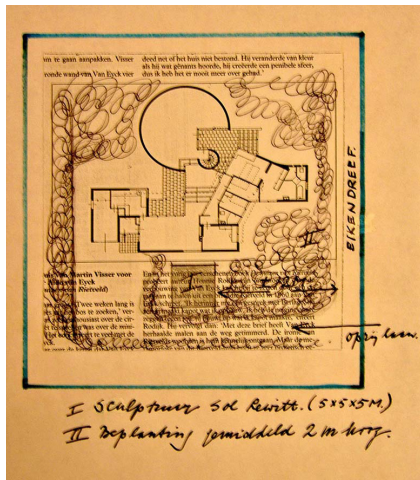
't Spectrum & Martin Visser, bank \ sofa-bed br02 versie | version 1988  
[H. Boterenbrood, Weverij de Ploeg 1989]



't Spectrum & Martin Visser, stoel \ chair Usselstein 1958 [foto MS 2008]



Martin Visser & Joke van der Heijden, stoelen \ chairs 1995  
[uitnodiging \ invitation Galerie Binnen, Amsterdam]



tekening aanvraag bouwvergunning voor sculptuur | building permit drawing for sculpture Sol LeWitt 1993, en situatie sculptuur \ and situation drawing [archief Gemeente Bergelijk \ archive Bergelijk community]



Daniel Buren in de nissenhut \ in the Nissen hut [P. van den Bosch, The Collection Visser at Kröller-Müller Museum 2000]



Martin Visser in de nissenhut \ in the Nissen hut [P. van den Bosch, The Collection Visser at Kröller-Müller Museum 2000]



't Spectrum & Martin Visser, stoel \ chair Cato  
[G. Staal, H. Wolters Holland in Vorm 1987]

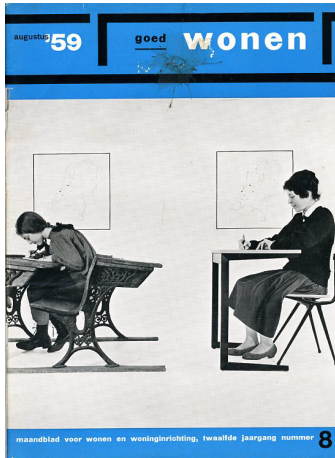


Martin Visser, Bumpertafel versie 2008 \ Bumper table version 2008 [foto MS]

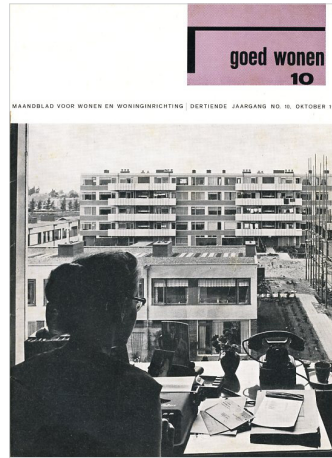




Goed Wonen 3/1958 omslag | cover



omslag | cover Goed Wonen 8/1959



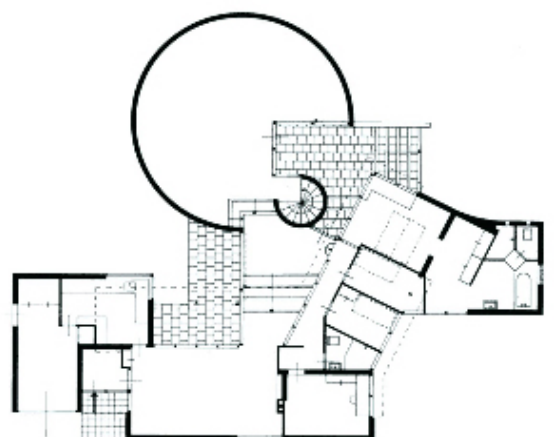
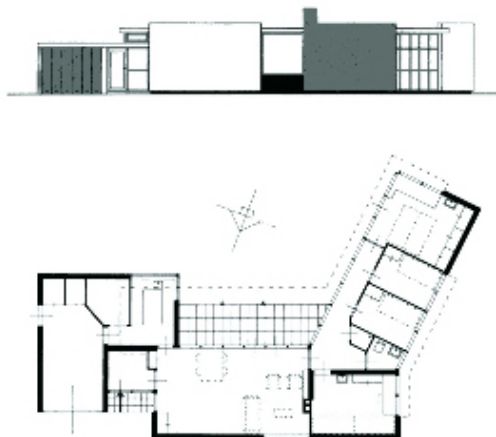
omslag | cover Goed Wonen 10/1960



G.Th. Rietveld & H. Schröder, woonhuis Visser | Visser house, Bergijk 1955 [Forum 3/1958]



G.Th. Rietveld & H. Schröder, woonhuis Visser | Visser house 1955 [Forum 3/1958]

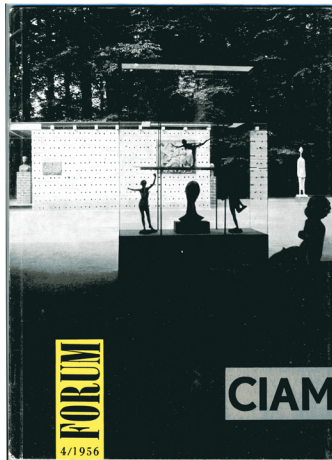


G.Th. Rietveld, plattegrond | plan woonhuis Visser | Visser house 1954, en | and extension by Aldo van Eyck 1967 [G.H. Rodijk, De huizen van Rietveld 1991]





omslag \ cover Forum 3/1958



omslag \ cover Forum 4/1956



G.Th. Rietveld & G. Beltman, weverij \ textile mill De Ploeg 1958 [foto MS NvV]



G.Th. Rietveld & J.B. van Grunsven, woonhuis Van Daalen \ Van Daalen house Bergeijk 1957 [foto MS]

G.Th. Rietveld, klok en bushalte \ public clock and bus stop, Bergeijk 1963 [foto's \ photos MS]



omslag \ cover Vrij Nederland 1992  
[archief Gemeente Bergeijk \ archive Bergeijk community]



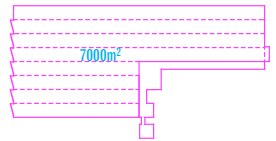
## Rietveld at Bergeijk



G.Th. Rietveld & G. Beltman, weverij | textile mill De Ploeg 1958 [foto MS NvV]



G.Th. Rietveld & H. Schröder, woonhuis Visser | Visser house, Bergeijk 1955 [Forum 3/1958]



Van Eyck uitbreiding | extension woonhuis Visser | Visser house, Bergeijk 1967

In celebration of **Gerrit Rietveld's** 70th birthday in 1958, Forum magazine published an issue dedicated to him. Two pictures of the textile mill designed for De Ploeg in Bergeijk were publicized though the building was not yet complete.<sup>1</sup>

The De Ploeg mill was in use until 'De Ploeg' closed its doors in 2007. In March 2008 the buildings and land were sold for 4,5 million Euros to a foundation whose objective is the building of public housing projects.

Two of the three buildings in Bergeijk designed by Gerrit Rietveld are on the preliminary list of modern historical buildings for preservation: the De Ploeg textile mill, designed together with the architect G. Beltman and the Visser home, later expanded by Aldo van Eyck.<sup>2</sup> In the same town of Bergeijk there is another house by Rietveld, as well as a public clock. The selection of these two Rietveld buildings demands not only answers as to why we should preserve these buildings but also whether there should be a plan for their future use if they are to be preserved.

**Piet Blijenburg**, the director of De Ploeg, a trading company dealing in textile products, was Rietveld's client.<sup>3</sup> Blijenburg became acquainted with the De Ploeg cooperative during his stay at a vegetarian health spa in Bergeijk. Blijenburg began work at De Ploeg in 1923 as a part-time sales representative.<sup>4</sup> He was described then as a 'tall friendly smart man with a good sense of humour, a man of few words with idealism and belief in the cooperative'.<sup>5</sup>

In 1937 Blijenburg became the director of De Ploeg. Because there was a shortage of textiles during the Second World War Blijenburg changed the business' focus to industrial arts.<sup>6</sup> Piet Blijenburg had a talent for organising, he had vision and ambition; a networker. As a member of the board he was involved with 'Goed Wonen' (Good Living), established in 1946 by retailers, manufacturers, designers and architects presenting a healthy modern lifestyle within the reach of everyone's budget.<sup>7</sup>

- 1 Forum 3, 1958, Architectura et Amicitia Amsterdam
- 2 archive Bergeijk community, 167-125, 1971/118
- 3 Piet Blijenburg (1896-1967)
- 4 H. Boterenbrood, 1989, *Weverij De Ploeg*, 010 Rotterdam, p 17
- 5 *Goed Wonen* magazine, January 1968
- 6 H. Boterenbrood, 1989, *Weverij De Ploeg*, 010 Rotterdam
- 7 interview Bé Niegeman-Brand 16 03 2004
- 8 interview Martin Visser 31 01 2008
- 9 *Goed Wonen* magazine, 1964, p 23
- 10 I. Boelema, 2005, *Otto van Rees*
- 11 Bernard Bijvoet (1889-1979)
- 12 *Museumjournaal*, 1986, p 59
- 13 *Goed Wonen* magazine, 1964, p 23
- 14 Forum 4, 1954, Architectura et Amicitia, Amsterdam p 183
- 15 I. Montijn, 1995, 't *Const*, de Bijenkorf Amsterdam, pp 30-32
- 16 NAI archive G.Th. Rietveld 1924/1964
- 17 Forum 3, 1958, Architectura et Amicitia Amsterdam pp 90-91
- 18 NAI archive G.Th. Rietveld 1924-1964 0150 278/279 letter 24 08 1955
- 19 J. Clarijs, 2002, 't *Spectrum*, 010 Rotterdam, pp 60-103
- 20 *Goed Wonen* magazine, 1964, p 23



After the war Blijenburg reorganised the textile production and sales of upholstery, curtain and clothing fabrics. His growth estimates for De Ploeg were based on the yearly housing production and the large glass surfaces used in the post-war 'nieuwe bouwen' architecture. Afterwards he began to develop the industrial arts division known as 't Spectrum. He hired **Martin Visser** to be programme director and designer for the furniture division.

At that time Martin Visser was head buyer for furniture at the Bijenkorf store in Amsterdam. His department also sold De Ploeg products. Blijenburg himself came to the Bijenkorf a few times. Visser: *'...He told me a lot of stories about Bergeijk. He was so enthusiastic that I said, I'll come have a look some time... you wouldn't believe how amateur they are there. That's when I said, I can do this better'.*<sup>8</sup>

Visser came to work at Bijenkorf by chance. After designing a set of furniture for a friend, he ordered a few extra sets to be made and tried afterwards to sell them. A.A.R. (Bram) Verhoog, a buyer for the Bijenkorf, bought everything and offered Visser a job.<sup>9</sup> Visser was already an active art collector. While visiting the painter Otto van Rees in Utrecht for that reason, he met Gerrit Rietveld.<sup>10</sup> It was a revelation for Visser, *'the aluminium folding chair was being made'*. Also having an interest in architecture, Visser travelled with Bernard Bijvoet to Paris after the war.<sup>11</sup> It was his first acquaintance with the Maison de Verre, built by Pierre Chareau with Bijvoet, and with the work of Le Corbusier. At the same time, Martin Visser and his wife Mia got to know other collectors such as Wim Beeren and began to buy artworks from the Cobra-group, mostly from Constant.<sup>12</sup>

Visser introduced his acquaintances to his home furnishings department at the Bijenkorf. He organized an annual interior design exposition called OHOT; Our House Our Home. As Visser says, *'It was actually a continuation of what 'Goed Wonen' did: letting people know that things needed to change'*.<sup>13</sup> At the 2nd OHOT in 1949, Visser hung Cobra paintings above the furniture. For the 1952 show he invited Aldo van Eyck and Hein Stolle to participate; in 1954 Rietveld furnished a model home with an open kitchen with a brilliant colour scheme by Constant.<sup>14</sup> These expositions got a lot of attention.<sup>15</sup>

In 1954 Visser left the Bijenkorf to work for De Ploeg in Bergeijk.<sup>16</sup> There the Vissers bought a plot of land and asked Aldo van Eyck to design a house for them.<sup>17</sup> Aldo refused the commission, but Rietveld accepted. Rietveld also designed furniture and lamps.<sup>18</sup> The Vissers' complete collection of Cobra artworks, at this point about 100 pieces, were stored in a depot at the nearby Eindhoven Van Abbe Museum while they moved.

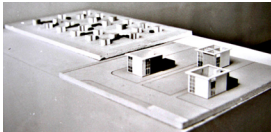
Visser enthusiastically began with his own design work and the organisation of the production of 't Spectrum. The designers with whom he had worked in Amsterdam, such as Hein Stolle, Constant and Gerrit Rietveld, were commissioned for the 't Spectrum Collection. Visser also became known for his own designs for 't Spectrum. In 1958 some of his pieces were part of an exhibition in the Amsterdam Municipal Museum. In these early years he had already designed and developed his bestsellers, still in production; the sofa-bed, the easy chair and the dining chair with their thin stainless steel frames.<sup>19</sup> In an interview Visser explained; *'We worked with specialist suppliers, ... we sometimes work with 4 or 5 different suppliers for one piece of furniture'*. Visser had contact with, amongst others, Nebato a steel parts manufacturer in Bergeijk.<sup>20</sup>



Piet Blijenburg  
[H. Boterenbrood, Weverij De Ploeg 1989]



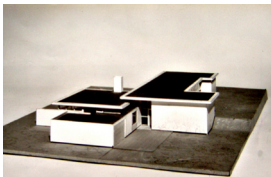
Jan Blijenburg, De Ploeg bouwverslag met gevel-  
detail \ building report with front detail [archief  
\ archive Centraal Museum Utrecht, foto MS]



G.Th. Rietveld, stedenbouwkundig plan woning-  
bouwplan \ town planning housing Bergeijk 1955  
[NAI archief \ archive Netherlands Architecture  
Institute]



G.Th. Rietveld, woningbouwplan \ housing  
Bergeijk 1955 [archief \ archive Centraal  
Museum Utrecht, foto MS]



G.Th. Rietveld, maquette huis Van Daalen \  
model of the Van Daalen house, 1957 [archief \  
archive Centraal Museum Utrecht, foto MS]



G.Th. Rietveld & J.B. van Grunsven, woonhuis  
Van Daalen \ Van Daalen house Bergeijk 1957  
[foto MS]

De Ploeg was divided over several locations in Bergeijk when Visser started work there. Blijenburg planned a growth in staff from 140 to 500 persons within the following 5 years. The original cooperative De Ploeg was wound up and De Ploeg and 't Spectrum became limited liability companies. The SWB – Bergeijk Work Collective Foundation – became the executive director of those two companies. The SWB also had a social and cultural goal, financed by the received dividend.<sup>21</sup> Expansion of the accommodation was necessary.

The municipality of Bergeijk sold De Ploeg a 23 ha plot of land on which to build a new factory and 30 homes.<sup>22</sup> Rietveld, who was building the Visser home in Bergeijk and Gerrit Beltman, who was already in contact with De Ploeg, were commissioned to build the De Ploeg building.<sup>23</sup> The landscape architect Mien Ruys was involved in the planning from an early stage. Rietveld was also commissioned for the 30 family dwellings and for the houses of the De Ploeg directors Blijenburg and Van Daalen. In the end the Blijenburg House and the family dwellings were not realised.

Beltman was exceptionally experienced in the design of textile mills and factories. Rietveld and Beltman used an industrial building system: 'Dijwidag' a roof design for factory buildings that optimized the amount of daylight. The construction drawing for the building permit showed four rows of north lights roofs measuring 144 m each and four exactly half that length. It could not have been simpler. The craftsmanship of the architects is visible on the façade. The rounded roof has been extended just outside the rafters, the fronts are placed at a slight angle.<sup>24</sup> The material surfaces on the rear elevation are the same concrete blocks as those used for Rietveld's 1955 Sonsbeek Exhibition Pavilion for Sculpture.

21  
ir. Z.Th. Fetter speech conference Stichting Werkgemeenschap  
Bergeijk 02 07 1965

22  
NAI archive G.Th. Rietveld 1924-1964 0059-348

23  
archive Bergeijk community, 1956

24  
drawing 28 04 1956

25  
drawing no. 68 29-10-59

26  
M. Küper, I. van Zijl, 1992, *Gerrit Th. Rietveld*, Centraal Museum  
Utrecht, cover

27  
H. Boterenbrood, 1989, *Weverij De Ploeg*, 010 Rotterdam, p 113

28  
NAI archive J.A. van den Broek, 1919-1978, 506.3

29  
*Goed Wonen / Wonen* magazine, December 1968

30  
*Museumjournaal*, 1968, pp 60-62

31  
*Museumjournaal*, 1968, p 59

32  
Dirk van den Heuvel, Madeleine Steigenga, Jaap van Triest,  
2002, *Lessen/Lessons*, Sun Amsterdam, p 62

33  
Van Abbe Museum Eindhoven, info

34  
P. van den Bosch, 2000, *The Collection Visser at the  
Krölller-Müller Museum, Otterlo*



After completion of the building a new drawing was submitted to the local authority. This drawing showed the addition of the freestanding entrance canopy and a reception area and a large showroom with meeting rooms.<sup>25</sup> These changes give a clue to the philosophy of De Ploeg. Everyone is welcome and equal in this building under the same roof, whether a dyer, a weaver, a director, office personnel, a housewife on a daytrip or a participant in the social and cultural activities of De Ploeg.

In 1963 De Ploeg celebrated its 40th anniversary. In celebration De Ploeg presented the municipality of Bergeijk with two benches (destroyed), a bus shelter and a public clock designed by Gerrit Rietveld. In 1964 Rietveld died unexpectedly.<sup>26</sup> Piet Blijenburg had already officially retired as director of the company. Until his death in 1967 Blijenburg dedicated himself to the activities of the SWB, particularly for the 2-years series of weekend conferences. The showroom was used as the conference hall.<sup>27</sup> The 4th conference was in preparation when Piet Blijenburg died. Professor H.J. van den Broek of Delft University took charge of the organisation.<sup>28</sup> The changes in content and tone of these conferences were described in the magazine 'Wonen', the successor of the magazine 'Goed Wonen'. The conferences went from a biannual conference which concluded with recommendations to the government to a congress infiltrated by student protest, where participation and a 'say' in decision making was demanded for residents, and where common ground and agreement seemed unattainable.<sup>29</sup>

Martin and Mia Visser's collection of Cobra artworks remained in the depot. The reason for this according to Visser was, '*In the beginning this house by Rietveld was confusing to us. We didn't know how to make it a home... that poor shabby Cobra. They all painted with cheap paint on cheap linen. That's the feeling you get*'.<sup>30</sup> Then Visser bought an artwork by Piero Manzoni.

It turned out to be the beginning of their new collection. The Vissers retrieved a few of their Cobra paintings out of the Van Abbe depot and traded them with Manzoni's work.<sup>31</sup> Their collection got a different direction and their contacts and acquaintances multiplied. Vissers' youngest brother Geertjan bought his first artwork, a Constant painting, from the collection of Martin and Mia and went on to build his own collection. Martin and Geertjan occasionally traded paintings and when necessary Geertjan financed Martin and Mia's purchases.

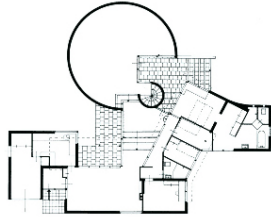
One of Martins brothers is the sculptor Carel Visser. The three Vissers were on the list of invitees for the BSK (Architecture study group) reunion in 1962. The theme of this weekend was 'autonomous architecture'.<sup>32</sup> One of the students who organised this weekend, Jean Leering, became two years later the director of the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven. The names of the artists whose work make up the Visser collection are also to be found on the list of exhibitions which took place under the direction of Leering: Schoonhoven, Christo, Constant, Fontana, Beuys, Manzoni, Arman, Judd, Manders, Warhol, Panamarenko, Carel Visser and Nauman.<sup>33</sup>

When the Vissers bought a work of Carl Andre's the place and the size were determined by Andre in their house. Nebato, one of the manufacturers who worked for 't Spectrum, was invited to produce this artwork. Later that year when Sol LeWitts work was also made by Nebato, Mia Visser was asked to introduce these two artists. Not only were works by Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt being manufactured in Bergeijk but also those by Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman and Walter de Maria.

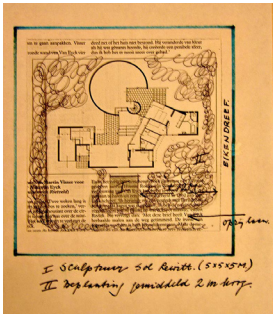
In an industrial park in Bergeijk the Vissers erected a Nissan hut where artists could work. Among others the Belgian Panamarenko, Sol LeWitt and Daniel Buren worked during the day in the hangar and lived with the Vissers in their house.<sup>34</sup>



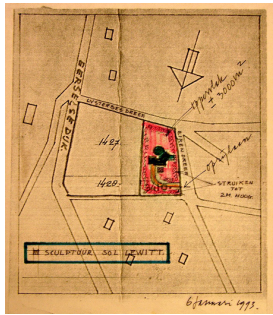
interieur uitbreiding Visser huis \ interior of the extension of Visser House 2008 [foto MS]



Aldo van Eyck, uitbreiding huis Visser \ Visser House extension 1967 (P. van den Bosch, The Collection Visser at Kröller-Müller Museum 2000)



tekening aanvraag bouwvergunning voor sculptuur \ building permit drawing for sculpture Sol LeWitt 1993, en situatie sculptuur \ and situation drawing [archief Gemeente Bergeijk \ archive Bergeijk community]

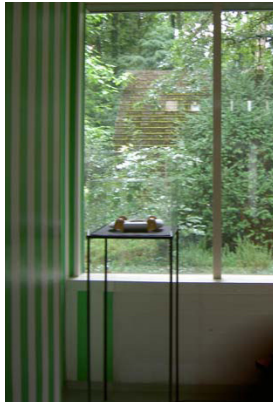


In 1967 Aldo van Eyck accepted a commission from the Vissers and designed two extensions of the Rietveld House. The extrovert Rietveld House had now become introvert. The reversal of Rietveld's concept was reinforced when the view from the living room window in the Rietveld part of the house was blocked by a sculpture by Sol LeWitt.

Little by little de Ploeg got into financial problems. The fabric division kept going until 2004. 't Spectrum was found to be unprofitable and was liquidated in 1974.<sup>35</sup>

Martin Visser lost everything that he had built up as a furniture designer. The copyrights were part of the holdings of 't Spectrum. Around the same time Mia Visser became gravely ill and died in 1977. Wim Beeren was by this time director of Boymans Van Beuningen Museum and an admirer of Visser's: *'... his driving force being his curiosity and admiration for the creativity of top artists and architects.'* Beeren invited Visser to become chief curator in his museum. Martin accepted: *'It was finished here.'*<sup>36</sup>

't Spectrum made a restart twice. The Visser furniture remained bestsellers in the collections. Visser also continued to design furniture. When Sol LeWitt left aluminium tubes behind in the hangar Visser and his new partner Joke van der Heijden used them to make a table that became part of the 't Spectrum collection.<sup>37</sup> Together with Joke, fabric designer and lecturer at the Eindhoven Design Academy, Visser continued his quest for art. They are still exceptional patrons for new generations of artists and designers.



interieur Visser huis \ interior of the Visser House 2008 [foto MS]

35  
J. Clarijs, 2002, 't Spectrum, 010 Rotterdam, p 79

36  
W. Beeren, 1989, Martin Visser, 010 Rotterdam, pp 4-20

37  
J. Clarijs, 2002, 't Spectrum, 010 Rotterdam, p 102



When the fabric division of the De Ploeg began to falter, the complete Visser collection of 600 artworks, including pieces belonging to Geertjan Visser, was transferred to the Kröller Müller Museum to become part of its prominent collection of modern art.

Social reality had caught up with the ideals. This had already happened during the series of conferences that were held in the showroom of Rietveld's and Beltman's De Ploeg. And the same happened with the legacy of De Ploeg.

In April of 2008 at a fabric market on the Lange Voorhout in The Hague, De Ploeg was being sold at € 5 per metre. The concept of name branding by De Ploeg had worked perfectly.

The building however, once the heart of the company, of a philosophy, of the daytrips of thousands of housewives, now stands empty and silent waiting in an overgrown landscape strewn with rail-sleepers and the full grown trees which had been so carefully selected by the landscape architect Ruys.

What significance is left?

Piet Blijenburg, Gerrit Rietveld and the Visser family all played an important roll in the recent history of Bergeijk. A local history of idealism, art and design; according to the ideals of De Ploeg in service of the individual and for the common good. Buildings set here, the Nisson hut; atelier of famous artists and of design fabrics and furniture; what are we preserving? Is 'name branding' as with the fabrics not enough?

## colofon

deze tekst werd gepresenteerd tijdens \ this paper was presented  
at the 10th International Docomomo Conference, September 2008  
Rotterdam en gepubliceerd in \ and published in:

*The Challenge of Change – Dealing with the Legacy of the Modern  
Movement* IOS Press, Amsterdam 2008 ISBN 978-1-58603-917-2

onderzoek en tekst \ research and text ir. Madeleine Steigenga  
bronnen \ sources:

zie noten en bijschriften en ook \ see notes and credits and as well:  
interview Marja Visser 20 november 2008

R. Stenvert, *Ontwerpen voor wonen en werken, 125 jaar bureau Belman*,  
1996 Matrijs Utrecht

ondersteund door Atelier Rijksbouwmeester, Ministerie VROM  
\ with support of the Atelier of the chief government architect,  
Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment,  
The Hague

vertaling \ translation Janel Trinchitella & Paul Willcox

dank aan \ thanks to prof. H. Heynen, drs. H. Wolters,  
drs. ing. Dirk Baalman, dr. Cees Somer, Jaap van Triest,  
Dirk van den Heuvel, Kees van 't Hof, ir. Niek van Vugt

Rietveld in Bergeijk is een uitgave van \ published by  
Architectenbureau Ellerman | Lucas | van Vugt, Rijswijk  
[www.elv.nl](http://www.elv.nl)

Jean Désert rem. bureau voor architectuur, Den Haag  
[www.jdrem.archined.nl](http://www.jdrem.archined.nl)

ontwerp \ design Jaap van Triest, Amsterdam  
set in typeface Legato by Evert Bloemsma