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# THE RESTORATIONS OF THE RIETVELD SCHRÖDERHUIS

A REFLECTION

MARIE-THÉRÈSE VAN THOOR

The Netherlands World Heritage List currently numbers ten sites, most of which are related to water. The exceptions are the Van Nelle Factory and the only private home on the list, the Rietveld Schröder House (1924) in Utrecht. In 1987 the house opened as a museum and since 2013 it has been part of the collection of Utrecht's Centraal Museum (fig. 1). For the inhabitants of the city the house is simply part of the Utrecht streetscape. But elsewhere in the world this one house (and that one red-blue chair) earned its architect, Gerrit T.

Rietveld (1888-1964), a fame equal to that of Le Corbusier or Mies van der Rohe. In late 2015, a Keeping it Modern Grant from the Getty Foundation enabled research to be carried out into the restorations of the house in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Until now there have been only a few publications devoted to these restorations, all personal accounts by the restoration architect, Bertus Mulder (b. 1929).<sup>2</sup> The new research project made it possible to put these accounts on a scientific footing and to enrich them by means of extensive archival research and oral history in the form of conversations with Mulder.<sup>3</sup>

The materialization of external and internal walls, in plaster- and paintwork played a key role in Rietveld's

▲ 1. The Rietveld Schröder House in Utrecht, Unesco World Heritage monument since 2000, photo Stijn Poelstra 2018 (Centraal Museum, Utrecht (CMU))





2. At the beginning of the 1970s the poor state of repair of the Rietveld Schröder House was clearly visible (Het Utrechts Archive)



3. Just before the restoration the Rietveld Schröder House, the grey values and intensity of the exterior colour scheme were scarcely discernible; moreover, the greys had acquired a 'bluish' tinge (Rietveld Schröder Archive, CMU)

design ideas. During the restorations, too, (problems with) the plasterwork and the choice of colour scheme proved to be major points of concern; in retrospect it is they, rather than the bigger, more structural interventions, that prompted this reflection. According to Mulder the house is now in its 'definitive original state'; he has, in his own words, turned it into a 'technically improved Rietveld'.<sup>4</sup> How do Mulder's restoration activities relate to the values and fabric of the heritage building? Is this 'technically improved Rietveld' the same monument as the original building, and what is still 'authentic'? Apart from addressing these questions, this article also touches on the role of the client and the heritage authorities. A house like the Rietveld Schröder House has to be frequently painted, and at some time in the future another restoration will undoubtedly be necessary. There is much to be said then for not focusing on a single aspect, but taking a broader, more holistic view of this 're-creation' of Rietveld.

#### THE SCHRÖDER HOUSE, WORLD-FAMOUS BUT WITH AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Rietveld designed the Schröder House in close collaboration with the client, Truus Schröder-Schräder (1889-1985). She wanted a house that accorded with her modern ideas on living and raising children, which differed markedly from prevailing views on how a traditional middle-class home should be organized, furnished and lived in. Together, Rietveld and Schröder came up with a design that, with its colourful, dynamic and yet simple appearance, has come to occupy a special place in the history of the twentieth-century family house. In November 1925, less than a year after completion, Theo van Doesburg (1883-1931) included a photograph of the house in *De Stijl*, with the caption 'G. Rietveld & Schröder, Maison de Mme Schröder a Utrecht'.<sup>5</sup> Later, in 1958, Rietveld talked to the journalist Bibeb about his contacts with *De Stijl*: 'I joined the *De Stijl* group and met people who were making the same kind of things as I was. It was in the air. Even Lissitzky, who came from Russia, made the same work.'<sup>6</sup> Right from the beginning the house was regarded as emblematic of *De Stijl* architecture, but that is a bit of an exaggeration. For a short while, Rietveld's work did indeed display certain similarities with that of other *De Stijl* artists and he also felt at home in this group, but by no later than the second half of the 1920s he had moved on from *De Stijl*.<sup>7</sup>

Truus Schröder lived in the Schröder House from 1925 onwards for over sixty years; first with her three children and, once they had left home, alone or occasionally with tenants. After Rietveld's wife Vrouwgien died in 1957, he moved in with Truus; at the beginning of his career (between 1924 and 1933), Rietveld had run

his practice from the house, in the ground-floor room overlooking the street, which had originally been conceived as a garage. He died in the Schröder House in June 1964, Schröder in April 1985.

Over the years the house underwent several alterations. In 1936 Rietveld renovated the upstairs bathroom and turned Schröder's adjoining bedroom into a kitchen, enabling her to live on the upper floor and to rent out the ground-floor rooms. In that same year Rietveld designed a rooftop room for Schröder to which she could withdraw if she so desired and where she was invisible to the inquisitive gazes of architecture aficionados and other passers-by. The rooftop room was dismantled ahead of the first major exhibition on Rietveld's work in the Centraal Museum in 1958. As long as he lived, Rietveld himself decided what maintenance work should be done, how repairs should be carried out and which colours should be used each time the house was repainted. The exterior of the house was painted to Rietveld's specifications for the last time in 1963 by the Utrecht firm of J.F. van Santen. Van Santen also carried out the first repainting after Rietveld's death – probably in the late 1960s – to precisely the same specifications and to Mrs Schröder's satisfaction. She appreciated the fact that Van Santen, who had started out as a vehicle spray painter, had enjoyed Rietveld's confidence. However, she was not at all impressed by Van Poppel, the firm that painted part of the exterior eight years later.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1950s and '60s there was renewed interest in *De Stijl*, Rietveld and the Schröder House. There was even talk of a veritable 'revival' of *De Stijl*, which was presented abroad as a national Dutch style.<sup>9</sup> In the same period the Schröder House started to exhibit more and more defects and it was, certainly after Rietveld's death, in a very poor state of repair (figs. 2 and 3). World famous, but not yet 'old' enough for heritage status and owned by an elderly lady, the house was facing an uncertain future. This changed in 1970 when the Stichting Rietveld Schröder Huis was set up and three years later purchased the house from Mrs Schröder. Henceforth the foundation was responsible for the conservation, maintenance and (forthcoming) restorations of the house and for securing an appropriate future function for the house, which was no longer called the Schröder House but the Rietveld Schröder House.<sup>10</sup> Mrs Schröder, along with her children, was initially closely involved in the Stichting Rietveld Schröder Huis and in the important decisions relating to the restoration of the house. The foundation's members included experts from the world of design and architecture, such as Pieter Singelenberg, Hugo Isaac, Alexander Bodon and Willem Sandberg.<sup>11</sup> In 1975, thanks in part to the efforts of the Stichting Rietveld Schröder Huis, the house acquired national heritage

status along with various grants; these, supplemented by private donations, made the restoration possible. In 1973, Bertus Mulder had received the commission to supervise the restoration of the exterior, and this was followed ten years later, in October 1983, by the commission for the restoration of the interior, which was not carried out until Truus Schröder had left the house.<sup>12</sup>

The foundation chose Mulder because he was familiar with Rietveld's work and had even worked for him for a few years in the early 1960s. He had no expertise in restoration.<sup>13</sup> The local heritage department raised objections to Mulder because he was considered to have 'destroyed a heritage building' with an earlier renovation, but the national heritage body, the Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg (RDMZ), let it be known that the city should keep out of things.<sup>14</sup> Mulder was acceptable to RDMZ, which did not even appoint a supervisor or send anyone to inspect the work on site. The fact was that there was nobody with experience in the restoration of recent architecture. According to Mulder, the acting director general, Cees van Swighem, had even forbidden his officials from getting involved. It was enough that the foundation's members included people who understood modern architecture.<sup>15</sup>

#### THE RESTORATION OF THE EXTERIOR, 1974-1975 AND 1978-1979

It is hardly surprising then that Mulder himself, in consultation with Truus Schröder, determined the principles for the restoration, without any input from the heritage authorities, but with the approval of the foundation. He did not feel constrained by internationally accepted restoration principles, like those laid down in 1964 in the Venice Charter.<sup>16</sup> According to this charter, the historical layering of the building fabric is fundamental to a monument and its restoration. For their part, Schröder and Mulder immediately agreed that the house should be returned 'to its most original state'. This, they believed, was the best way of doing justice to the essence of Rietveld's work in which the spatial effect was paramount.<sup>17</sup>

The restoration of the exterior was carried out between March and September 1974 (fig. 4). The house was not stable and was beset with problems that could be attributed to the unusual experiments with and combinations of traditional and modern materials (brick, steel, concrete) and to their properties. Moisture and rust had caused serious damage to walls and roof. In his contribution to *Het Rietveld Schröderhuis*

(2009) and in a recent *Notitie* (2018), Mulder described how he tackled these problems invasively and using contemporary materials and techniques. He did not approach the task like a restoration architect, but 'in part by reconstructing the form in a technically superior manner.'<sup>18</sup> This proved effective because the house is currently still in a structurally sound condition and there is no sign of subsidence.<sup>19</sup>

In 1974 the brickwork and render were cracked in many places due to moisture and rust. In dealing with these problems, Mulder was advised by J.F. Geerken from the Stichting Onderzoek en Voorlichting, a research and information body for firms specializing in plastering, terrazzo and plasterboard. Geerken advised on the method and the specific composition of the materials. To repair the cracks in the brickwork, Mulder used a synthetic mortar that was coated with a synthetic dispersion to ensure that the rendering coat would adhere. Where only the plasterwork was cracked, a new rendering coat sufficed. Like Rietveld, Mulder had the plasterer sand the render.<sup>20</sup> In July and August 1974, the walls were painted. But that was not the end of the restoration of the exterior.

Recent research has shown that the problems with the plasterwork soon returned. The paintwork was again exhibiting cracks, the new coat of render had failed to adhere, and there were dark patches in the coat of paint. In October 1975, therefore, the new plasterwork was partially removed and redone. But the hairline cracks returned once more. Eventually, in late 1978, Mulder and the client decided to strip the problematical wall back to the brickwork. That substrate proved to be homogeneous and of reasonably good quality. The earlier repairs with synthetic mortar had held up well. Mulder's report on this (1980) contained a notable sentence: 'The other plasterwork that had remained in place during the restoration had to be removed as well in order to obtain a single homogeneous layer of render and to avoid bonding problems between old and new work.'<sup>21</sup> This statement would appear to imply that Mulder stripped all the walls and then had them replastered and repainted, which is what the photographs also appear to show (figs. 5 and 6). But if we examine the photographs more closely, we can also see areas with the render still intact, such as the wall below the ground-floor window overlooking Prins Hendriklaan. Mulder recently recalled that plaster remained in place on the wall beneath the kitchen window and on parts of the white surfaces of the front entrance wall and the rear wall (fig. 7)<sup>22</sup>

4. The Rietveld Schröder House in the scaffolding during the restoration of the exterior, 1974 (Rietveld Schröder Archive, CMU)









5. In 1979 the Rietveld Schröder House was once again scaffolded after the reappearance of the problems with the plasterwork. Large areas of render were first chipped away, after which a new coat was applied (Bertus Mulder archive)

6. The bare brickwork of the wall on Prins Hendriklaan in 1979. On the wall below the window of Rietveld's former studio (bottom left) render is still visible (Bertus Mulder archive)





7. Only the render on the upper part of the white wall beside the front door of the Rietveld Schröder House was chipped away in 1979 (Bertus Mulder archive)

#### DETERMINING THE COLOURS

After the problems with the plasterwork had been rectified, the house was repainted in 1979 (fig. 8). Mulder used a durable wall paint from Sikkens – Alphetex 1Q – which he considered suitable for a house with single-leaf brick walls that ‘ventilate on all sides’.<sup>23</sup> After a bit of experimenting, Rietveld had opted for paint from Alphaverf, later taken over by Sikkens, which has supplied the paint for the (Rietveld) Schröder House ever since.<sup>24</sup> Mulder repeatedly stressed that deciding on the colour scheme, especially the shades of grey, was the most difficult task of the entire restoration.<sup>25</sup> The reflection of light on walls and in colours was very important for Rietveld. From the 1920s onwards he

wrote and spoke regularly about architecture and space; in a lecture in 1963 he underlined the importance of the sensory experience of architecture. The visibility of space and surfaces required matter and above all colour, because the light reflection of matter is caused by colour. In using different shades of grey, pale grey or conversely very dark grey, Rietveld was aiming to achieve different spatial effects. He did not work according to fixed rules and nor did he decide on the greys beforehand; there are no drawings showing the original colour scheme. Instead, Rietveld determined the final colours on the spot, together with the painter.<sup>26</sup> It is likely that the composition and intensity of the greys were readjusted each time the house was





8. The exterior of the Rietveld Schröder House in a new colour composition to a design by Bertus Mulder, photo 1981 (Het Utrechts Archive)

repainted. According to Mulder, the walls were supposed to be repaired and repainted every five years. New coats of paint were then applied over the existing ones or, if the paint layers were too thick they were sometimes removed.<sup>27</sup> An examination of the historical photographs of the Schröder House from the period 1925-1975 confirms that over the years, the house had started to look quite different and that the composition and colour intensity of the various grey and white walls varied.

Mulder set great store by Truus Schröder's opinion when determining the colour scheme.<sup>28</sup> In addition he relied on his own experiences while working with Rietveld. Nevertheless, he also carried out his own colour

research on the house. Despite having been prepared to find that the earliest layers had been removed, he in fact encountered various finish coats and colours, for example on the chimney and the wall below the kitchen window (figs. 9 and 10). He analysed samples taken from these areas and took the results into account in his deliberations.<sup>29</sup> Afterwards he threw the samples away (fig. 11).<sup>30</sup> He painted the steel components of the house in yellow and black; frames, windows and doors were also painted black, with accents in yellow, white, red and blue. He then developed the colour composition of the plasterwork using five shades of grey plus white. In so doing he had, in his own words, reinstated the earlier colour contrast 'in the spirit of Rietveld'.<sup>31</sup>



9. In several places, such as here on the chimney, Bertus Mulder discovered various remnants of render and finish coats (Bertus Mulder archive)



10. Various shades of grey came to light on the window below the kitchen window. Bertus Mulder based the grey for this surface on the dark grey in the top right corner (Bertus Mulder archive)



11. Samples of render and colour were initially collected and sorted for the colour research; afterwards they were thrown away (Bertus Mulder archive)



12. The bedroom of the Schröder daughters around 1925, with the beds in the night-time position. The grey of the vertical strip beside the door continues through onto the balcony wall (Rietveld Schröder Archive, CMU)



13. The Schröder daughters' bedroom in 2018, photo Stijn Poelstra (CMU)



#### THE INTERIOR, THE SAME, BUT NEVERTHELESS DIFFERENT?

In 1986, while stripping back the walls on the upper floor of the house, Mulder discovered below a layer of white paint in what had been the daughters' bedroom, a different shade of grey from the one he had used in 1979 for the adjoining balcony. Because this wall was supposed to run from inside to outside in the same colour, as can be seen in historical photographs, he had the exterior of this wall repainted (figs. 12 and 13). This meant that he ended up redoing the entire composition of greys on the exterior.<sup>32</sup> Mulder's aim was to create a balanced, harmonious and impeccable image with colours and surfaces that would restore the original spatial impression. In 1981 the Stichting Rietveld Schröder Huis had decided that the guiding principle for the restoration of the interior should be 'to return the house in an abstract manner to the situation of 1925-1930'.<sup>33</sup> Truus Schröder, too, believed that after her death the house should not be presented 'as if she had just left', but as a manifesto of a new architecture and a new way of living. Initially there was some resistance to this from RDMZ. Wim Denslagen argued that the future museum house would in that case ignore the history of Schröder's occupancy and of Rietveld's

alterations to the house, which were part and parcel of the heritage building. However, his objection was 'overruled'.<sup>34</sup>

The unimpeded spatial experience that the recreation of the 1925-1930 situation was intended to deliver was most evident on the upper floor, which was to be returned to the original situation.<sup>35</sup> Although she agreed with this decision, it nevertheless pained Truus that the alterations Rietveld had carried out so lovingly for her would have to be sacrificed.<sup>36</sup> The traditional layout of the ground floor was not altered.

Bertus Mulder had become so familiar with the house over the years that he knew exactly where to look for original traces and other clues of importance for the reconstruction. He set to work rigorously: the walls were chipped back to the bare bricks and the ceiling was demolished, after which the brickwork and plasterwork were repaired and renewed as with the exterior (fig. 14). Before allowing the old plaster to be carted away and destroyed, Mulder examined it with respect to colour and composition. The plasterer, H. van de Kant, prepared the new plaster using the correct composition and sanded the base coat 'with jute on a wooden board' in a circular motion in order to achieve the same grainy effect as under Rietveld.<sup>37</sup> Because the

14. During the restoration of the upper floor of the Rietveld Schröder House in 1985-1986, Bertus Mulder completely stripped the walls and ceiling (Bertus Mulder archive)





15. In October 2016 a piece of plaster came loose on the south wall of the study on the ground floor of the Rietveld Schröder House, photo Edgar Riessen (CMU)



interior had been less frequently painted than the exterior, Mulder's 'scraping' in search of underlying layers of paint yielded more information about the original colours. This information formed the basis of his new 'harmonious' colour scheme.<sup>38</sup>

Mulder proudly maintains that there is not a centimetre of colour that was not determined by him. Most of the colours were reconstituted in consultation with the Sikkens laboratory. Only in those parts of the ground floor that were not demolished or reconstructed – in particular Rietveld's former studio and the small study – did Mulder have walls and ceilings

repainted in the same colours that he encountered there. The ground floor was, in his eyes, of less importance for the architectural value.<sup>39</sup> In October 2016 a piece of plaster came loose from a wall in the study (fig. 15). This turned out to be a blessing in disguise because it provided an opportunity to have the plaster analysed by TU Delft and the TNO (Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research). TNO concluded that the sample could well be a remnant of the original plaster.<sup>40</sup>

In 2018, as a result of more extensive historical research and conversations with Mulder, it seemed

reasonable to surmise the continued presence of some original plaster plus finish coats on both the exterior and the ground-floor interior (fig. 16). Accordingly, TNO and Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg (SRAL) conducted a limited follow-up investigation (fig. 17).<sup>41</sup> The results confirmed the supposition: the Rietveld Schröder House still contains material remnants of the exterior and interior skin from the 'Rietveld period', be it highly concentrated in specific areas. SRAL was also able to state that parts of the ground floor had been repainted three times since the restoration, in colours that deviate from both the restoration period and the period(s) before that.<sup>42</sup>

#### WHAT IS AUTHENTIC?

According to the nomination dossier for the Unesco World Heritage list, the significance of the Rietveld Schröder House – as historical document and as mon-

ument – lies not in the occupational history, but in the originality of the ideas and the design concept. It was built as a manifesto of De Stijl principles. Therefore, according to this dossier, the house satisfies all aspects of authenticity as formulated for Modern Movement buildings. The monument is not merely authentic in idea and design, in form, in spatial organization and in appearance; it is also authentic in construction and details, and even in materials.<sup>43</sup>

Much has already been written about authenticity, in particular with regard to modernist architecture and the reconstruction of modern heritage.<sup>44</sup> The acceptance of the reconstruction of ideas and design principles as an authentic intervention is a welcome and useful legitimization where the reinstatement of the original materials or constructions is virtually impossible. But it is also at odds with previously mentioned principles aiming at conserving a monument together



16. The south wall of the study on the ground floor of the Rietveld Schröder House, undated historical photo (Bertus Mulder archive)



with its physical qualities as far as possible and to show the various chronological layers. In 1994, in recognition of the enormous cultural diversity in the world and the associated interpretation and treatment of heritage, the *Nara Document on Authenticity* distinguished various kinds of authenticity.<sup>45</sup> This opened the door to multifaceted and often personal interpretations of heritage. Yet however important and interesting the theoretical discussion about authenticity may be from a scholarly point of view, it does not actually provide any solid principles for practice. That remains an accumulation of casuistry lacking any clear direction.

As far as Bertus Mulder was concerned, re-creating an impeccable spatial image was the main purpose of the restoration. The material was of secondary importance.<sup>46</sup> From that perspective the current, renewed material can indeed be construed as 'authentic'. But all in all Mulder's view is at variance with the importance Rietveld placed on the materiality, which was crucial for the spatial expression and the perception of architecture. On the other hand, the materials and the colours were subject to ageing and wear and tear, which in turn had repercussions for the intensity and the light reflection. The area around the Schröder House changed too over the course of the years, and with it the light penetration. So there is much to be said in favour of restoring the interior and exterior skin in the spirit of Rietveld. That was difficult enough in the absence of documentation or formulas. But it will be even more problematical in the future when there is no longer any architect or craftsman who worked with Rietveld.

Fortunately, original plaster and finish coats have

been discovered on the interior and exterior of the house. To get a well-balanced picture for the overall colour composition of (one of) the Rietveld period(s), those remnants need to be thoroughly analysed for reference material. On the upper floor and the exterior that would amount to stripping away the entire 'Mulder layer', and so removing a phase that has since become part of the history of the house. Moreover, it is reasonable to suppose that Mulder's interventions have destroyed so much that there will be very little original reference material to be found. The choices that the Stichting Rietveld Schröder Huis faced back in 1980 will continue to recur: consolidation of the existing situation, reconstruction of one (or more) phase(s) between 1924 and the current time, or reconstruction of the situation in the late 1920s based on new information.<sup>47</sup> To this a fourth option can be added, namely one in which justice is done to each of those choices in different parts of the house.

#### NEW RESEARCH

A study of the house's museum interior found that there was no clear-cut interior design plan. Bertus Mulder also played a major role in the layout and furnishing of the museum house. Meticulous comparison of photographs from different historical periods yields a picture of a furnishing concept that was not always consistently applied, but from which the occupational history was rigorously excluded.<sup>48</sup> Truus Schröder did not want to be visible in the house after her death. Yet it was *her* house, she was the client and she lived in the house for sixty years (fig. 18). Below the photograph in *De Stijl*, her name was alongside that of Rietveld and at that time they had a joint practice,

17. In 2018 TNO and Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg took samples from specific areas of the exterior and the interior of the Rietveld Schröder House. The photograph shows a sample from the balcony wall on the east elevation (photo author)





18. Interior photograph of the upper floor of the Rietveld Schröder House in the 1970s; the objects are indicative of the way Truus Schröder lived in the house at that time (Bertus Mulder archive)

Rietveld & Schröder. Mulder's restorations were clearly influenced by Truus Schröder. But Schröder's role in the design and furnishing of the house, as also her part in the rest of Rietveld's oeuvre, has yet to be fully researched.<sup>49</sup>

We cannot, of course, judge the restorations of the Rietveld Schröder House in the 1970s and 1980s entirely according to current standards or principles. Especially with respect to the exterior, Mulder had to fulfil a pioneering role. 'It didn't occur to anyone to interfere, or to do it differently', he says; Mulder did everything 'on his own initiative'.<sup>50</sup> It is remarkable that the heritage authorities and the client placed all responsibility with the architect and even relinquished control over research and documentation. In the event of a fu-

ture restoration they will undoubtedly follow current custom and commission research into the construction and colour history of the house and take the findings of the recent technical and structural survey into account, before an architect is brought on board. But they would do greater justice to the 'world heritage' designation if, instead of merely cataloguing the material history of the house, they were also to re-evaluate the current Rietveld Schröder House from an architecture- and art-historical perspective. There is no shortage of research themes: the historiography, the house and De Stijl, the role and significance of Truus Schröder as designer, the occupational history of the house, and the interior design concepts for the museum house.

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#### NOTES

- 1 The grant was extended to the Centraal Museum Utrecht, the custodian of the Rietveld Schröder House, which in turn commissioned Delft University of Technology (TU Delft) to carry out the research.
- 2 B. Mulder, 'Het huis als monument', in:

I. van Zijl and B. Mulder, *Het Rietveld Schröderhuis*, Utrecht 2009, 68-93; B. Mulder, 'Het reconstrueren van gebouwd erfgoed', in: S. Stroux et al. (eds.), *Reco. mo.mo. Hoe echt is namaak, hoe dierbaar is het origineel?*, (May 2011) 2, 46-51. See also B. Mulder's contribution to: R. de Jong, I. van Zijl and B. Mulder, *Rietveld*

*Schröderhuis*, Utrecht/(*Rietveld Schröder House*, Utrecht) Netherlands, Utrecht/Zeist 1999, 26-31: <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/965.pdf>.

- 3 The findings of the research project have been published in book form and in various reports. See M.T. van Thoor (ed.), *Colour, Form and Space. Rietveld*



- Schröder House challenging the future*, TU Delft 2019: <https://books.bk.tudelft.nl/index.php/press/catalog/book/681>; M.T. van Thoor, *Conclusions and recommendations from the research Colour, Form and Space. Rietveld Schröder House challenging the future*, Delft 2018, with six appendices detailing the individual results of technical and historical colour research, carried out by TU Delft, TNO and the Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg (SRAL).
- 4 M.T. van Thoor in conversation with B. Mulder, 25 March 2016.
  - 5 *De Stijl* 6 (1924-1925) 10/11, 444. The photograph appeared below the heading 'Het fiasco van Holland op de expositie te Parijs in 1925' (The fiasco of Holland at the exhibition in Paris in 1925) by T. van Doesburg, but was unrelated to the contents of that article.
  - 6 Bibeb, 'Wij maken maar een achtergrond. Gesprek met architect Rietveld' (We only make a background. Conversation with architect Rietveld), *Vrij Nederland*, 19 April 1958. See also: I. Nevzgodin, 'Perspective from the East: Rietveld's Impact on the Soviet Union', in: R. Dettingmeijer, M.T. van Thoor and I. van Zijl (eds.), *Rietveld's Universe*, Rotterdam 2010, 212-225.
  - 7 The relationship and contacts between Rietveld and the other De Stijl members have been well described by Marijke Küper. See M. Küper, 'Gerit Rietveld', in: C. Blotkamp et al., *De beginjaren van De Stijl 1917-1922*, Utrecht 1982, 263-284, esp. 282-284; M. Küper, 'Gerit Rietveld', in: C. Blotkamp (ed.), *De vervoljaren van De Stijl 1922-1932*, Amsterdam/Antwerp 1996, 195-240, esp. 215-218 and 237-240.
  - 8 Centraal Museum Utrecht (CMU), Bertus Mulder archive, BM 068, notes of five conversations, note 1, 30 October 1973. These are records of conversations that Bertus Mulder had with Truus Schröder in 1973; also present was Gerrit-Jan de Rook.
  - 9 See I. van Zijl, 'De Stijl as Style', in: Dettingmeijer, Van Thoor and Van Zijl 2010 (note 6), 226-249. Rietveld played an important role in various exhibitions on De Stijl. In 1964 he received an honorary doctorate from TU Delft.
  - 10 CMU, Copy of the memorandum of association of the Stichting Rietveld Schröder Huis, Utrecht, 28 August 1970.
  - 11 Pieter Singelenberg was architectural historian with the Kunsthistorisch Instituut of the Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht; Hugo Isaac was director of the Bijenkorf department store; Alexander Bodon was an architect and Willem Sandberg was the former director of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.
  - 12 Bertus Mulder archive, unnumbered, letter from P. Singelenberg, 16 October 1973. Stichting Rietveld Schröder Huis (SRSH) Archive, minutes of board meeting, 21 December 1983. Truus's daughter Han(neke) Schröder was a consultant on the restorations on behalf of the foundation.
  - 13 Bertus Mulder took over the commission from Jan Veroude of the Utrecht-based Architectengroep 5, voor Architectuur en Stedebouw.
  - 14 The 'destroyed monument' was a student parish building on the Nieuwegracht. M.T. van Thoor in conversation with B. Mulder, 25 March 2016. SRSH Archive, minutes of board meeting, 15 October 1973.
  - 15 M.T. van Thoor in conversation with B. Mulder, 25 March 2016, 21 April 2016 and 31 August 2017; Mulder 2011 (note 2), 46; B. Mulder, 'Notitie betreffende de restauratie en reconstructie van het Rietveld Schröderhuis naar aanleiding van het Getty onderzoek door Marie-Thérèse van Thoor', Utrecht 3 April 2018.
  - 16 [www.stichtingerm.nl/doc/Charter%20van%20Venetië%20-%20restauratieladder.pdf](http://www.stichtingerm.nl/doc/Charter%20van%20Venetië%20-%20restauratieladder.pdf).
  - 17 See also Mulder 2009 (note 2).
  - 18 Mulder 2009 (note 2); Mulder 2018 (note 15).
  - 19 S. Pasterkamp, *Het Rietveld Schröderhuis, Utrecht. Constructieve analyse*, TU Delft report 2018.
  - 20 Bertus Mulder archive, BM 006, werkplaats voor architectuur bertus mulder, 'Rapport over de gang van zaken met betrekking tot de reparatie van het stucwerk van het Rietveld Schröder Huis', with appendices, 10 April 1980; BM 141, bertus mulder architect, 'restauratie rietveld schröder huis', 6 October 1975. For a detailed description see Van Thoor 2019 (note 3), 17-20.
  - 21 Bertus Mulder archive, BM 006, werkplaats voor architectuur bertus mulder, 'Rapport over de gang van zaken met betrekking tot de reparatie van het stucwerk van het Rietveld Schröder Huis', 10 April 1980. In the nomination dossier for the Unesco World Heritage list it was noted that the cautious method had proven to be untenable, see De Jong, Van Zijl and Mulder 1999 (note 2), 29.
  - 22 M.T. van Thoor in conversation with B. Mulder, 31 August 2017; Mulder 2018 (note 15).
  - 23 M.T. van Thoor in conversation with B. Mulder, 31 August 2017; Mulder 2018 (note 15).
  - 24 Bertus Mulder archive, notes on five conversations, note 1, 30 October 1973; SRSH Archive, various correspondence. Unfortunately, the archive of Sikkens in Sassenheim contains no documentation pertaining to the Rietveld period.
  - 25 Mulder 2009 (note 2); M.T. van Thoor in conversation with B. Mulder, 31 August 2017; Mulder 2018 (note 15).
  - 26 G.T. Rietveld, 'Nieuwe zakelijkheid in de Nederlandsche architectuur', *De Vrije Bladen* 9 (1932) 7; CMU, Rietveld Schröder Archief (RSA), G.T. Rietveld, 'Kleur in architectuur', in: *Studiedag Mens, Kleur, Ruimte*, curated by the v.b.k.a., Vereniging van Belgische Kleurenadviseurs, Antwerp, 16 November 1963; M.T. van Thoor, 'Factors of the Visible. Rietveld's Ideas about the Renewal of Architecture', in: Dettingmeijer, Van Thoor and Van Zijl 2010 (note 6), 154-173. Bertus Mulder archive, notes on five conversations, note 1, 30 October 1973 and note 4, 22 November 1973. The notes record, for example, how Rietveld went about determining the shades of grey for the Slegers house in Velp. See also De Jong, Van Zijl and Mulder 1999 (note 2), 30.
  - 27 Then a new coat was painted over the base coat; that might be the original base coat but might equally be a newly applied base coat. M.T. van Thoor in conversation with B. Mulder, 25 March 2016.
  - 28 Bertus Mulder archive, notes on five conversations, 30 October-29 November 1973.
  - 29 De Jong, Van Zijl and Mulder 1999 (note 2), 31; Mulder 2018 (note 15).
  - 30 Mulder says that in retrospect he is glad that he threw all the plaster and colour samples away as there can be no debate about them in the future. M.T. van Thoor in conversation with B. Mulder, 27 June 2016.
  - 31 M.T. van Thoor in conversation with B. Mulder, 25 March and 21 April 2016.
  - 32 M.T. van Thoor in conversation with B. Mulder, 21 April and 27 June 2016; Bertus Mulder archive, BM 019, 'De restauratie van het interieur van het Rietveld Schröder Huis', undated: Mulder 2009 (note 2), 88-90.
  - 33 SRSH archive, minutes of board meeting, 18 December 1981.
  - 34 Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed (RCE), DS 6138, Monument number 18329, memo W.F. Denslagen, Kunst-historische Afdeling, restoration advice, 22 April 1985.
  - 35 M.T. van Thoor in conversation with B. Mulder, 27 June 2016.
  - 36 The small kitchen Rietveld had created in the former bedroom made way in turn for a bedroom. On the ground floor a kitchen was fitted out in accordance with the original kitchen. The upstairs bathroom was retained as created by Rietveld in 1936.
  - 37 Information from a telephone conversation between M.T. van Thoor and H. van de Kant in Zeist, summer 2017.
  - 38 The plasterwork was painted in white, black, yellow, blue and two shades of grey; the woodwork and radiators in white, black, red, yellow, yellowish-green, blue and grey.
  - 39 M.T. van Thoor in conversation with B. Mulder, 11 September 2017.
  - 40 T. Nijland, *TNO-rapport 2017 R10902. Petrografisch onderzoek pleister Rietveld Schröderhuis te Utrecht*, Delft 2017. See also B. Lubelli and R.P.J. van Hees, *Onderzoek naar het pleisterwerk van het Rietveld Schröder Huis*, TU Delft report, Delft 2017.
  - 41 T. Nijland, 'Petrographic investigation of the plasters & renders from the Rietveld-Schröderhuis', Utrecht, TNO report, Delft 2018; A. Friedrichs, C. Junge and

N. van der Woude, *Beperkt kleurhistorisch onderzoek Rietveld-Schröderhuis*, SRAL report, Maastricht 2018.

42 Although Mulder determined the colours in consultation with Sikkens, there is no surviving documentation on this from the period of the restorations. After the restorations, Mulder had Sikkens record the formula. The recently unearthed archival documents relating to this concern the years 1992, 2004 and 2010. For detailed information on this see Van Thoor 2019 (note 3).

43 De Jong, Van Zijl and Mulder 1999 (note 2), 16-17.

44 See for example D. van den Heuvel et al.

(eds.), *The Challenge of Change. Dealing with the Legacy of the Modern Movement. Proceedings of the 10th International DOCOMOMO Conference*, Delft 2008; W. Denslagen, 'Authenticiteit en spiritualiteit', *Bulletin KNOB* 109 (2010) 4, 135-140; Stroux et al. 2011 (note 2); B.G. Marino, 'La materia dell'architettura, l'architettura della materia', in: A. Alveta and B.G. Marino (eds.), *Restauro e riqualificazione del centro storico di Napoli patrimonio dell'UNESCO, tra conservazione e progetto*, Naples 2012, 97-139.

45 [www.icomos.org/charters/nara-e.pdf](http://www.icomos.org/charters/nara-e.pdf).

See also: H. Stovel, 'Origins and Influ-

ence of the Nara Document on Authenticity', *APT Bulletin* 39 (2008) 2/3, 9-17.

46 M.T. van Thoor in conversation with B. Mulder, 25 March 2016.

47 SRSB archive, minutes of board meeting for 2 and 25 June, and 3 October 1980

48 N. Dubois, 'The house of Truus Schröder. From home to museum house': Van Thoor 2019 (note 3), 54-89.

49 Truus Schröder recently received attention in: J. van Geel, *I love you, Rietveld*, Amsterdam 2018. Jessica van Geel made use of Schröder's own archives, which offer new starting points for research into the designer Truus Schröder.

50 M.T. van Thoor in conversation with B. Mulder, 25 March 2016.

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## THE RESTORATIONS OF THE RIETVELD SCHRÖDER HOUSE A REFLECTION

MARIE-THÉRÈSE VAN THOOR

The Rietveld Schröder House (1924) in Utrecht is the only private home among the ten UNESCO World Heritage sites in the Netherlands. In 1987 it was opened to the public as a museum house and since 2013 it has been part of the collection of Utrecht's Centraal Museum. The world-famous house was designed by the architect Gerrit T. Rietveld (1888-1964) in close collaboration with the client, Truus Schröder-Schräder (1889-1985). During the 1970s and '80s the house was comprehensively restored by the architect Bertus Mulder (b. 1929), who had worked with Rietveld for a brief period in the early 1960s. Thanks to a Keeping it Modern Grant from the Getty Foundation these restorations have now been put on a sound scientific footing by means of archival research, technical analysis and oral history.

The materialization of internal and external walls, in plasterwork and paintwork, was a crucial aspect of Rietveld's design ideas. Unsurprisingly, problems with the plaster and the choice of colour scheme turned out to be key areas of concern in the restorations. During the restoration of the exterior, Mulder largely stripped back the external skin of the house. Although he investigated the composition of the existing plaster, the finishing coats and the colours, this can no longer be verified because no samples or documentation relating to these matters were preserved. Mulder consulted experts about the composition of the restoration plaster, but he determined the new colour scheme himself, relying on his familiarity with Rietveld's work and use of

colour. Mulder and Mrs Schröder were both very keen for the restoration to restore the house as much as possible to its original condition in the 1920s. When it came to the restoration of the interior, which was carried out after Schröder's death in 1985, Mulder and the client, Stichting Rietveld Schröderhuis, adopted the same guiding principle. The key concerns were not the history of the house and its occupation, but Rietveld's original design and his ideas about space. Accordingly, the upper floor was completely stripped back and its inner skin fully renovated. Remarkably, the heritage agencies did not take issue with this approach and nor did they supervise the work.

During the recent research project, remnants of the original plaster and finishing coats dating from one or another of the Rietveld 'periods' were discovered on external wall surfaces and in a couple of ground-floor rooms. These provide possible starting points for material research for a subsequent restoration. The article reflects on the various meanings of the concept of authenticity that are employed to legitimize certain choices in restoration work. They contribute to casuistry, but offer no clear guiding principles for restorations. Instead of emphasizing a single aspect, there is much to be said for taking a broader, holistic view of this 'recreation' of Rietveld. And for that there are any number of research themes worth pursuing, such as the historiography, the house and De Stijl, the role and significance of Truus Schröder as designer, the occupational history, and furnishing concepts for a museum house.