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Annual subscription per post £1 - 1 - 0 direct from the Secretary.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

The Journal of the Transvaal, Natal and Orange Free State Provincial Institutes of South African Architects and the Chapter of South African Quantity Surveyors.

202, Kelvin House, 75 Marshall Street, Johannesburg Telephone 33—1936

Volume Twenty Three Number Ten, October Nineteen Hundred and Thirty Eight



THE S.A. RESERVE BANK, JOHANNESBURG. MAIN ENTRANCE

THE SOUTH AFRICAN RESERVE BANK — JOHANNESBURG AGENCY

Gordon Leith & Partners—Architects

The completion of the new premises for the Johannesburg Agency of the South African Reserve Bank marks the fulfilment of another solution of a common, but by no means elementary architectural problem—a problem of combining, in one building, the utilities and requisites for the proper functioning of an essentially twentieth century business house, with the grace and dignity of a standard of architecture set by our predecessors—in short, a problem of providing a building of classical feeling combined with modern services.

In addition, the architects have, in this instance, been required to erect, on a site 70 feet by 100 feet in the heart of the city, a building of limited accommodation, but of size and proportion compatible with the existing adjacent structures. They have approached the problem with a broad and vigorous outlook and have left nothing to be desired in their treatment of an extremely difficult subject. With the introduction of a Classical facade with its colonnades, entablatures, etc., the restrictions in designs and layout are manifold, but the result notwithstanding is one of singular serenity and stability.

The elevations have been treated with a polished black granite plinth, superimposed by a string course and heavily rusticated dunted grey granite podium with semi-circular-headed fenestration, bearing pediments, architraves, sills and consoles reminiscent of the work of the masters of the Italian Renaissance, and with richly emblazoned iron grilles covering the window openings. The podium supports a 34 foot high freestone colonnade of fluted, coupled columns with carved capitals which provide striking relief to the simple flanking pavilions. Crowning the whole is a delicately detailed entablature and attic.

The centrally disposed entrance in Simmonds Street is framed in polished granite in a lofty arch forming a deep barrel vault, and supports a decorative "birds'-bath" motif above. An interesting iron grille in the background lends relief and richness to the severe treatment of the whole composition.

A glance at the ground floor plan will reveal the broad lines on which the building has been planned. The massive piers in the banking hall have been faced in marble to a height of 20 feet, panelled and entablatured. The dome is unique in that it has not directly followed the rules laid down by any of its prototypes. It is 51 feet in diameter and is constructed on eight main ribs springing from the piers at a height of twenty feet above the floor, and struck on true arcs, each from its own centre, and intersected, axially by 15 foot diameter barrel vaults, and diagonally by 15 foot diameter semi-domes, which by means of straight line intersections assume the form of semi-elliptical scollops, converging towards the centre, and eventually dying out as they approach the central eye-opening in the crown of the dome, which in turn is covered by a stilted regular domed bronze and glass canopy some 18 feet in diameter and with its crown nearly 50 feet above floor level. Altogether a majestic and inspiring conception.

Flanking the central banking hall to the east are agents' and sub-agents' rooms; to the south a circulation aisle giving access to the auxiliary staff accommodation on the west. To the north are lobbies connecting the lifts and stairs to the upper floors.

The basement and sub-basement are devoted, to the west, to sundry services, and the remainder to the extensive book room and treasury requirements of the bank. These latter are lofty apartments designed without any attempt to conceal the great protection they afford their deposits. The treasury proper is not a mere stronghold, but is also designed and fitted out to provide the directors comfortable accommodation for deliberating over, and examining the deposits, as it were, "on the spot." The staircases connecting the upper floors are worthy of comment in that they have been carefully designed and detailed so as to avoid the usual awkward twists in balustrades and unsightly intersections at the junctions of the soffites of landings and stairs. The stepped marble skirtings and wall linings reflect in their jointing the natural unit of staircase design—the risers—and are neatly treated at the junctions with the high gloss enamelled surface of the curved rising soffites above.

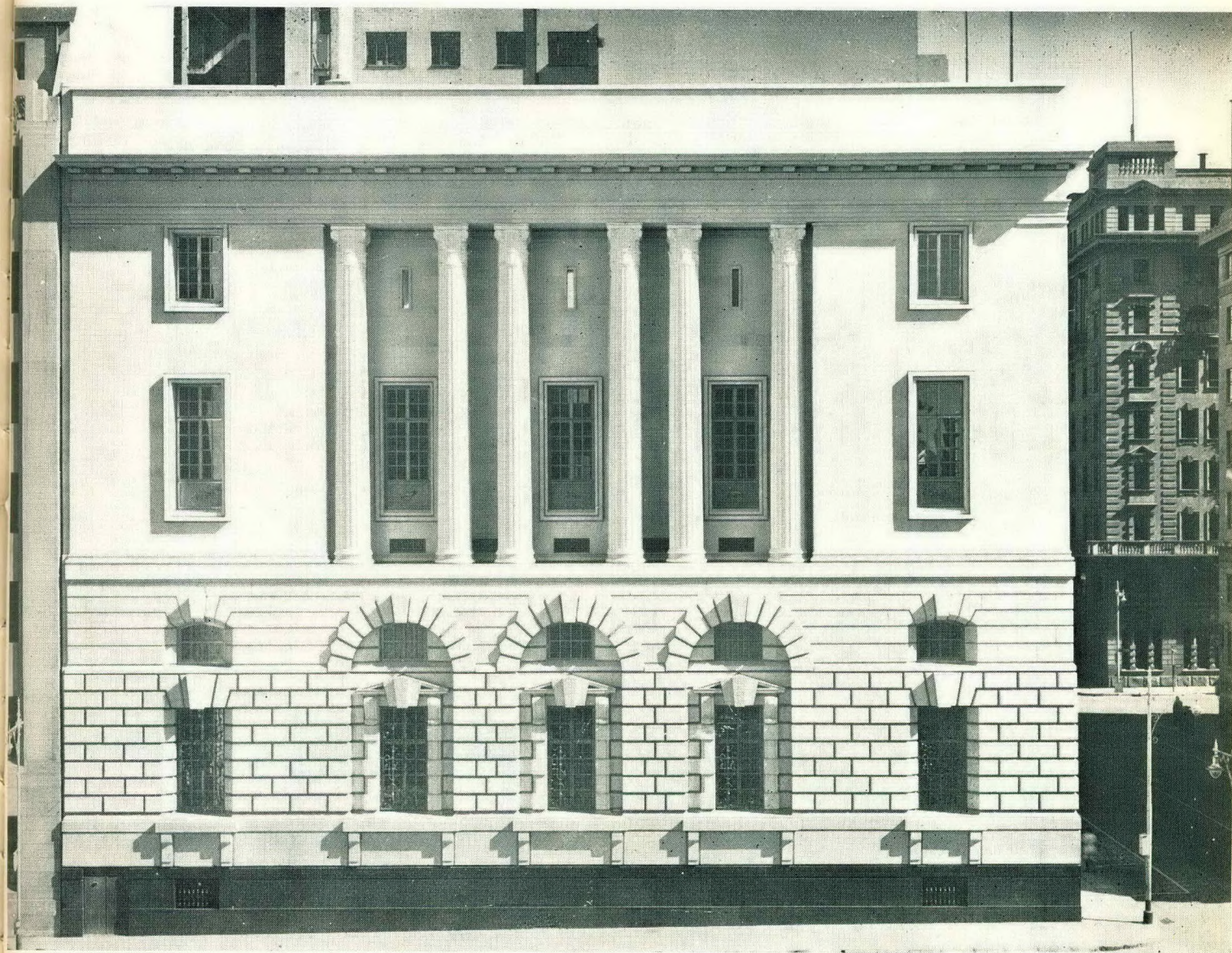
The first floor—18 feet in height—is devoted to the three secondary departments of the bank:—The clearing house, which is a transfer market for handling cheques among bankers; the counting house, where money transactions are counted; and the note department, where bank notes are counted, scheduled, indexed, renovated or destroyed. These three departments are for the convenience of representatives of commercial banks and are not available for the general public. Each department is overlooked by a long "supervision gallery" on a mezzanine floor, from where the movements of the entire staff may be scrutinised.

The second floor houses a large Board room with marble fireplace and macassar ebony panelled walls and some interesting wall mosaics. This floor and a second mezzanine floor also provides retiring rooms and cloakrooms for the staff.

The first and second floors, with their mezzanines, are arranged round a central court containing the glass eye of the banking hall dome, the upper part of which court is colonnaded on three sides by 14 slender square columns faced in marble with exquisitely detailed caps, and a light cornice in rough texture coloured plaster.

By virtue of its very character, this building will no doubt invoke criticisms from contemporaries and future generations, but, whatever the critics postulate, there can be no doubt that the architects have at any rate created a monument worthy of, and reflecting for the time to come, the stability and security of the institution it houses.

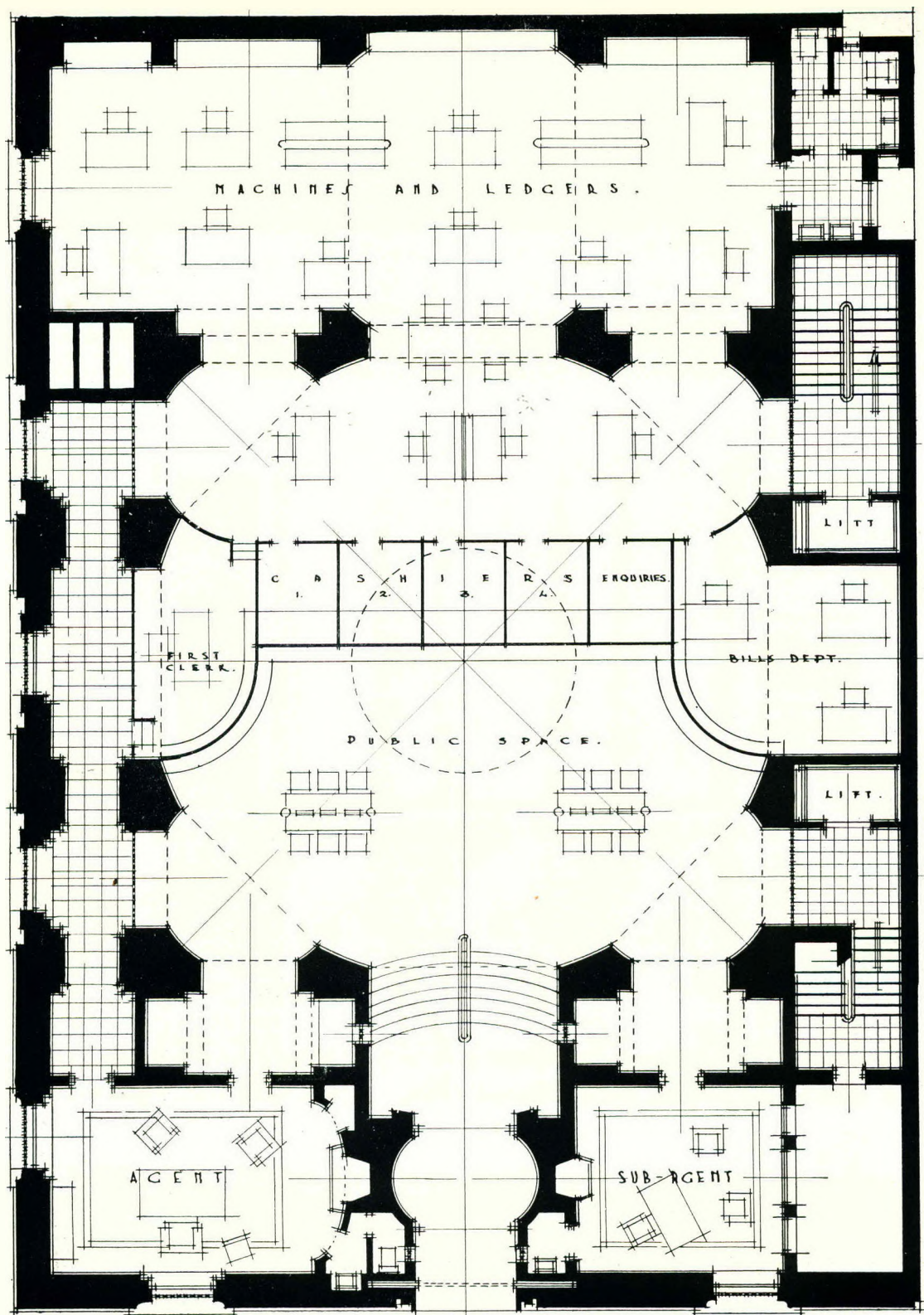
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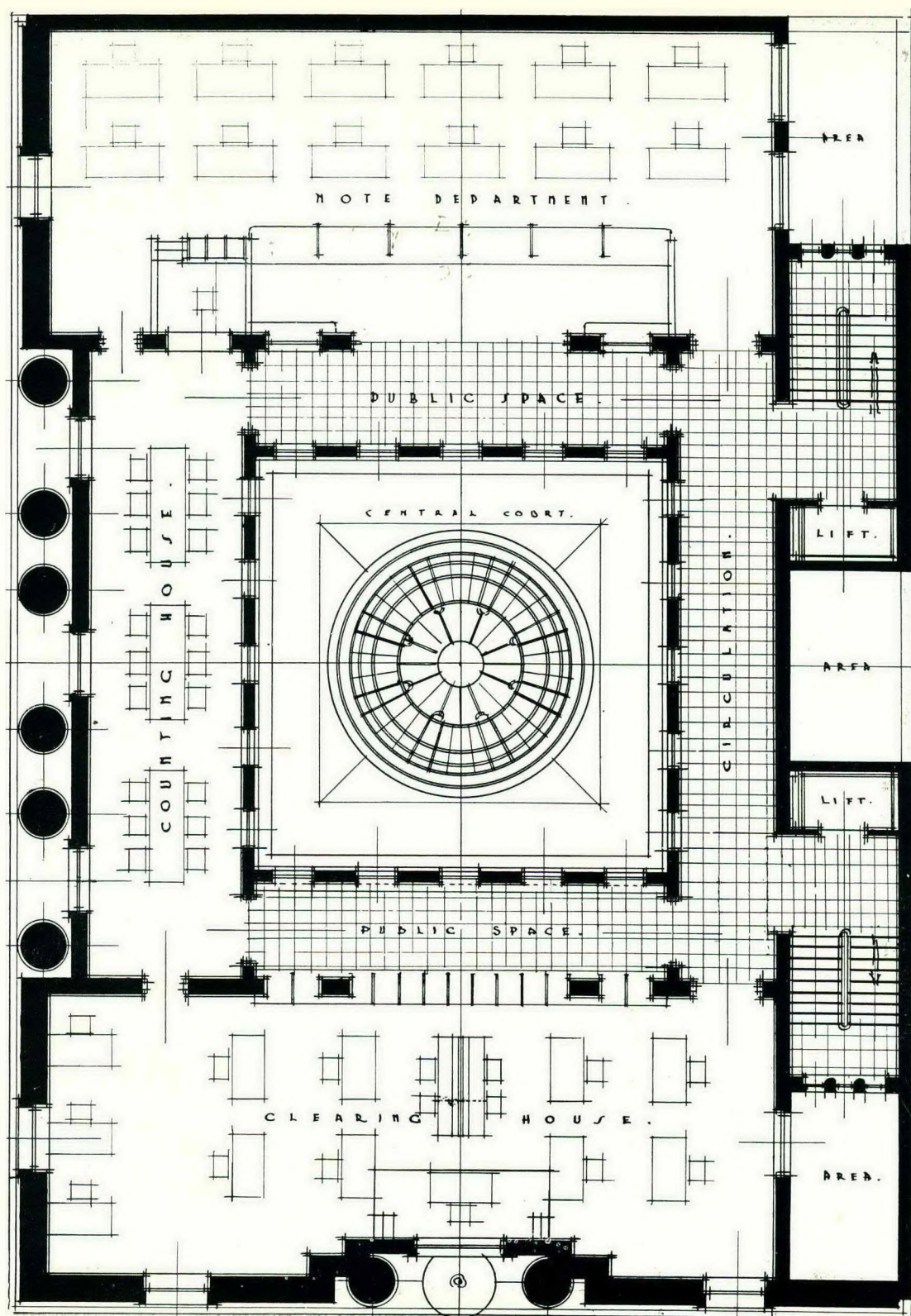
THE RESERVE BANK, JOHANNESBURG

SOUTH ELEVATION

ARCHITECTS: GORDON LEITH AND PARTNERS



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



THE INTERIOR



THE STAIRCASE



V I E W T O W A R D S E N T R A N C E



DETAIL OF MAIN DOORWAY



EAST ELEVATION

By Nancy Courtney Acutt

The road from Amsterdam to the reclaimed land of the Zuyder Zee is a delight, teeming with interest, pictorial and historical. At the very outset there is the excitement of crossing the river Amstel on a pontoon—the solitary motor set amongst dozens of bicycles, all in a tearing hurry to set off as soon as the shore is reached.

Everyone has his favourite method of visiting places. Those with little time are forced to whisk along by car through many villages in one day, thus acquiring mental indigestion. This may be unsatisfactory, for the peace of old ports in North Holland is quite destroyed by the eternal haste. Bicycles are used by many in that level country, and are useful for exploring each hamlet in turn and chatting with the inhabitants.

Where time is no object and a love of water prevails, there is the barge—a slow, but comfortable means of progress, which can be hastened by choosing one with an engine. The traveller sits at ease on the deck, watching the low banks glide past, at times crowded with humanity in picturesque costumes, or floating between tall trees in quiet solitude. Constant pauses are made, while waiting for bridges to be opened, where canal and road intersect, but then there is much gossip between various crews, indulging in noisy badinage.

But it was far to the great dyke on the Zuyder Zee, and we were content with a luxurious Mercedes. The road was charming, running tree-lined beside the canal, until we were stopped by a man shouting at us, only to point out the way to Marken and Volendam, beloved by trippers, constantly photographed and become artificial by this over-attention. Before reaching Monikendam, once a port, now merely an inland village, the pictured idea of all Holland confronted us—low thatched farmhouse, wheat fields, cobbled street, windmill, canal. Was ever anything so complete?

Beyond lay the tourists' delight—the island of Marken—which will be part of the mainland, when the draining of the huge polder is complete. Tales were told of former days, when it had been possible to skate right across the frozen sea to Marken, during a severe winter. Near the reclaimed shores are many cottages, most beautifully thatched, where all live under one roof—farmer with his family, cows, horses, sheep, in happy proximity, stables verging on bedrooms. The fashion in this province is to have part of the roof tiled—tiles are smarter than grass—then the thatch, with which the major portion is finished, comes down in a pattern, containing the same curves as are seen at the ends of old gables, such as we know well—all as neat as a doll's house. Volendam is an enchanting place to the visitor, even though the Dutch view it with disdain. All the inhabitants are in the streets, waiting eagerly for the visitors' cameras; women in lace caps that should be laid aside for fête days; old salts standing in lines, their red faces shining under peaked caps; boys in baggy breeches and huge clogs; even babies posing and preening, until they sulked away in disappointment.

Edam is nearby—the home of cheese, well known to the outside world—a pretty village. A little boy, with tow coloured hair, hands in the pockets of his large trousers, walked along idly whistling the "Big Bad Wolf," and



staring at the strange cargoes appearing on barges, now that harvesting was in progress—oats, sugar, beet, lucerne. Grown out of the sea. Stolen from the salt water, which constantly engages experts, planting crop after crop of grass to sweeten the soil.

Dead cities that once bustled with life—ports sadly submitting to the change that has removed the wide seas from their wharves, leaving but restricted canals. Hoorn, one of the foremost ports in Northern Europe two or three hundred years ago, now slumbers, dreaming of the past—of navigators and caravels, of argosies and merchantmen, of Jan van Riebeeck, setting out bravely to the Cape of Storms. Fine old houses, relics of once prosperous days, now lean heavily over, supporting one another, as though unwilling to give in to new-fangled ideas.

Yet a fisherman, bent and worn, still mends his nets, though wheat now flourishes where he cast into the waves, and he eyes the lonely pedlar with sympathy, knowing that all Hoorn must submit to the encroaching land and the young must learn new trades.

The dyke forms a road along newly-reclaimed fields, where crops have been cut and formed into probably the neatest stacks in the world. There is just room for two cars on the narrow wall, one side still open sea, the other being drained. At Weiringen the dyke starts right across the sea—an endless road stretching to the mist on an unseen shore, that is Friesland—a stupendous effort, finished with a tower put to mark the last portion on May 28th, 1932. Gigantic effort, inspired with infinite vision. A farmers' festival proceeds at Middenmeer, which will attain the eighth birthday of its reclamation in August. Races for ungainly tractors proceeded, enthusiastically cheered by the audience; troops of riders on well-groomed horses vied with one another; young women gossiped; children sang "Sarrie Marais," an exotic tune—all under a sun as hot as ours in Africa.

Fine homesteads in long rows have been built near a central store for the farmers, many of whom have been fishermen, forced to learn an inland trade. Easier for youth to change from sailing and hauling to riding and ploughing. Old sailors haunt the canals, reviling that wall across their sea. They gloat when salt water is drawn from the wells and engineers have to lay pipe lines to secure a pure water supply. Acres of wheat and lucerne are not to their liking. Hundreds of strange men and women, prospering in thousands of reclaimed acres, do not conform to their order of things.

Thus Holland does not join other over-populated countries in their cry for more land. Her colonies are the fruit of this amazing travail and her people are trained to work on the land, striving for a self-supporting country, content in her victory over nature.



O V E R L E A F

Design for a house at the sea by GIO PONTI

From the architectural periodical "DOMUS," Milan, February, 1938.

Journal of the SA Architectural Institute

PUBLISHER:

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

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