



On this page: The redesigned Rabobank branch in Gelderse Vallei, Barneveld, connects the community.



# The face of your ambitions

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Your office reflects what your company stands for and what its ambitions are. So you want to design it in such a way that your clients understand your company's visions and your employees feel 'at home' enough to help accomplish them. "To come to that design, you have to understand the organisation completely, from management to the employees. Only then will you be able to create the perfect working environment that showcases these ambitions," explains Eric Wezenberg, architect and owner of Zenber Architects.

For every project, Zenber uses three principles to come to the perfect design: dialogue, creativity and pragmatism. "It is not enough to only listen to a client's desires when it comes to style or colours, and then just start drawing," continues Wezenberg. "You need to find out where they come from. That is why we never take up a pencil right away. Through dialogue we find out what the organisation aspires to be."

That can lead to new insights for the client as well, as Wezenberg found out with their client Rabobank. The bank is in the process of changing itself from an 'old fashioned' bank to a bank that is a connecting institute, with regional branches that are at the heart of the community. Zenber designed the new office for the Gelderse Vallei branch in Barneveld, in the centre of the Netherlands. They created a dynamic, open plaza with meeting rooms and conference rooms with information stands, and a catering facility which is open to both clients and employees. "The new office had to be welcoming to both private clients and companies, as well as civil societies who want to use the office for seminars and conferences. The branch now embodies the connection to the community, and clients feel that the bank is there to support them."

## Involving the employees as well

Once the vision and ambition are defined by the management, Zenber involves the employees by asking what kind of office

or room they think can help them accomplish these ambitions. Using a scale model, they then visualise that. "The time of cubicles and poorly ventilated work spaces is over," says Wezenberg. "So the question we ask employees is; how do they envisage the perfect working environment with which to achieve their goals?" A lot of this depends on the work processes of the company.

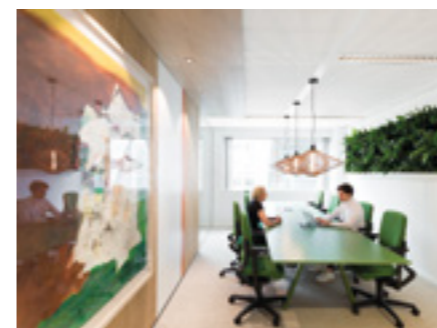
In the case of Rabobank, employees often work directly with clients, so openness is very important. For NN Group, specialised in amongst other investments, financial



On this page: NN Group's new office perfectly matches their work processes.

planning and IT-development, their offices also needed to have an open feel to them, as well as having the services that benefit these processes, such as innovative conference rooms and break rooms.

An office always has to be tailored to its specific department. Wezenberg: "The financial experts needed rooms where they could hold staff meetings, but also places where they could concentrate easily. For the IT-department, it was impor-



tant to have meeting rooms where they could hold scrums, short daily meetings. We designed 'standing rooms' for them, with writable walls and digital screens, to visualise their projects and progress."

After this dialogue process, the actual designing starts. "Our inspiration comes from everyday life in the city and from more quiet places in the countryside, because an office is not just an office any more. It is a micro society, where work,

study and even forms of leisure come together. A good design combines this; a lively office with all the services required, together with possibility for staff members to go outside, into a garden, for instance, or a common area, to recharge."

Of course, plans need to be achievable and within budget. "We are very open about that and keep the clients closely informed on progress and costs. But we are pragmatic enough to adjust plans to that." During the designing phase, Zenber often comes up with acoustic solutions that are also suitable for people's homes. They develop these acoustic felt products in their own product design office, WoOL.

By understanding the ambitions of the client, Zenber reflects these in the perfect office interior. "To your clients, your office is the face of your ambitions," smiles Wezenberg. "At the same time, for your staff, it is the body that helps them realise these ambitions. They have to feel involved, valued and at home at the office, as if it is their own. If an employee prefers to work at home rather than come to the office, then you will never achieve those ambitions."

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