

# FABIAN VAN DER LEER

## AN EXCELLENT BACHELOR ALUMNUS WHO WANTS TO MAKE ARCHITECTURE HIS PASSION - NOT HIS JOB

**SOFTSPOKEN AND SLIGHT - FABIAN SAT DOWN ACROSS FROM US IN A CROWDED CAFE IN AMSTERDAM. THOUGH JUST TWENTY-TWO, HE POSSESSES THE CALMNESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF A MUCH OLDER SOUL. FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS HE HAS BEEN TRAVELING AND DOING INTERNSHIPS AT ARCHITECTEN DE VYLDER VINCK TAILLEU, ATELIER BOW-WOW AND IS ABOUT TO START WORKING FOR PETER ZUMTHOR. HIS GOALS AND APPROACH TO NOT JUST THE PROFESSION, BUT TO LIFE, PROVIDE AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE RUSHED AND STRESSED EXISTENCE MOST ARCHITECTS ARE ALL TOO USED TO.**

BY DAPHNE BAKKER

**What happened after you graduated from the Bachelors? What is the first thing you did?**

I went to France for three months and I lived there by myself on farmland. Thereby I missed the bachelor diploma ceremony, but I enjoyed the peaceful surroundings of France. There were days where I didn't speak to anyone. Except at the bakery in the morning.

I thought in silence about what to do, where to go and where to work. I didn't feel like starting the master, because I was and am very young. The impression I had from the Bachelor was that it was far from reality. Within this imaginary world, or let's say imaginary BK City, we become able to dream in a creative way, which is a fantastic quality, but by internships I wanted to test my dreaming in reality.

**Were you sure that you wanted to be an architect?**

I really love architecture and I'm happy that I did this study. But as I look at it now, I don't want to be an architect. I associate the word architect with money. I love architecture too much to make it into my job, because then it means if I want to eat, I need to do projects. This dependency and pressure I want to exclude in my way of working. The architecture I work on, should be free from my financial situation. I want time for architecture without money pressure from my side.

**Do you have enough money to work like this?**

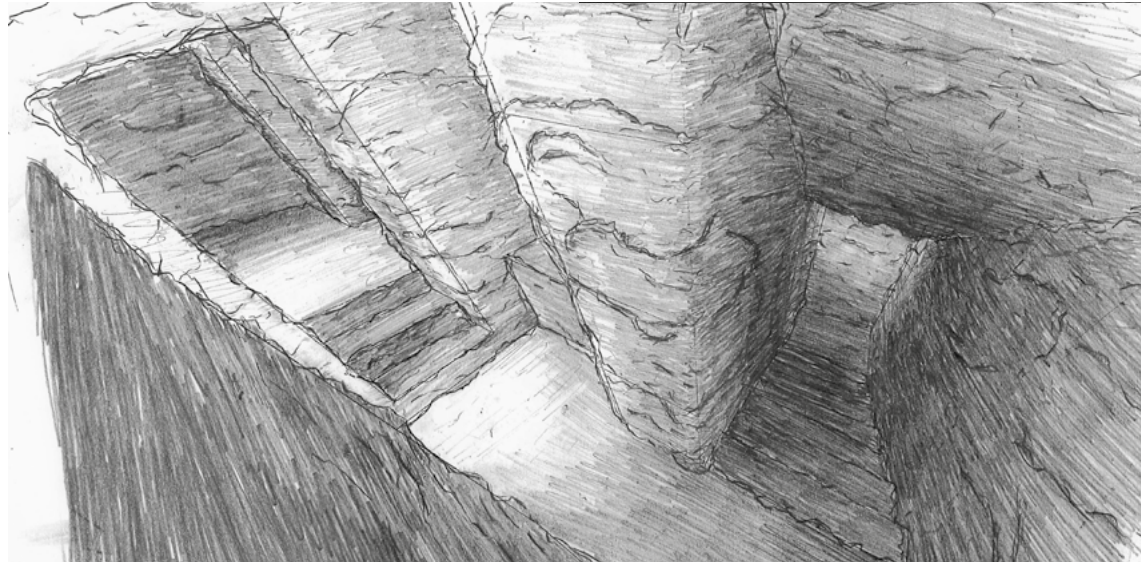
Not yet. But I'm working on it. I try to keep my life as simple and pure as possible. I drink only water, no alcohol, no drugs, no (a)social media, no phone and no other contracts that demand money every month except health insurance. Not out of greediness, but out of a search for purity. I hope to find a way of life, that remains simple and basic without benefiting or relying on others. Independence is important for me. At one point I hope to be able to live independently in a small home or hut, working at for example a bakery for a fewdays, just to have enough money to eat and sleep. And hopefully then, with the time remaining I can work on my passion for creating, in a pure way.

**Tell us about what happened after your stay in France?**

I had three portfolios with me in France ,which I sent it to three offices - one in Belgium, one in Japan and one in Switzerland. In the end these were the offices where I was invited to work. The first in Belgium was *architecten de vyllder vinck tailleu*. I had a wonderful time. In the Bachelor you easily create the impression that you understand things, but you're not experiencing reality. It is good for your development to do an internship, because you realize how limited your knowledge is. By the Bachelor, you know almost nothing, but you get to learn what to know.

**What did you learn during your internship, what stuck out for you?**

All of my internships were short, three to six months, just so I could orientate myself. For me architecture in the end is too personal to collaborate for a longer period. My ideas about architecture relate to a way of life. I did not regard my internships as an expression of that, it was an addition to it. What I really liked about my internship experiences was that I got to know the social part of architecture. In the university, it's more about your books, drawings and presentations, but in an office you deal with clients, discussions and the influences of culture on the way of debating. For me it was very interesting to discover the conversations that were needed to connect the different perceptions in architecture.



**After de Vylder, did you go to Japan straightaway?**

There was a month in between, some rest and traveling again, and then off to the crazy Japan. It was shocking. I grew up in the Dutch culture, regarding it as a matter of course. But if you go to Japan, suddenly everything that is normal to you is gone. In Japan it is completely different and it's working. Cultures in general felt vulnerable to me after Japan.

**How was it in the office of Atelier Bow-Wow?**

I think I was really lucky with this office. I heard some stories about Japan and the working conditions, but Atelier Bow-Wow is really kind to it's employees. We had barbeques on the rooftop of the office, watched football in the office while drinking champagne.

But in Japan as an intern you work mostly for free, a quite difficult and strange condition. Some people say that I should be ashamed, because I supported this system of not paying interns, resulting in unfair competition with other countries. But on the other hand, I gained so much from this working experience. It was worth it. I spent my internship mainly making models. In the beginning they make you do a test - making a perfect one by one cm cube. It was like in a martial arts movie, where you have to wash a deck over and over again, "wax on, wax off" [laughter]. Then they know what your skills are and they place you in a group working either with very difficult models, easier models or sketch models. I made a model of 1:20 and worked on it for six weeks. The model had to be of an amazing detail level, precision and sense of materiality. Afterwards I worked a project in Chile entitled Ocho al Cubo. For which I joined a meeting in the SANAA office, where all top young Japanese architects like Ishigami, Fujimoto, Kuma and Nishizawa and Sejima were present. Once again, I got to observe the social side of architecture relating to the hierarchy among the architects and their employees. Japan compared to

"I DON'T WANT TO BE AN ARCHITECT. I ASSOCIATE THE WORD ARCHITECT WITH MONEY."



Western countries, is quite exceptionally traditional in the office's hierarchy. The boss is the guru, who takes all responsibility. Then older staff, younger ones and at the bottom interns without responsibility. The difference with Europe is that the period of time to grow from intern to employee or boss, is much longer in Japan. It takes a while before you get more responsibility.

**What else did you learn?**

The 1:20 model I worked on was for a very large holiday home, that would be used only a few months each year. I felt uncomfortable with the luxurious aspect of this project. But it brought money into the office, to keep the office running. At the same time, they make humane architecture for everybody. I like these projects, but I realized that to make this kind of public architecture, they need architecture for the rich to finance it. It was striking to experience that this is depending on that. I would like not to have this dependent relationship in my own work.

**Do you see yourself than as a humanitarian architect?**

No, just as a passionate person that wants to express himself in a creative way. It could be art or architecture for the richer or for the poorer. It's not black or white, it's grey. But they shouldn't depend on each other. It should depend on my opinion. I want autonomy within my work.

**What did you do after your internship?**

After my two and a half month internship at Bow-Wow, I spent the final ten days of my visa travelling through Japan. I wanted to experience what it is like to live without a home, so I slept outside at night. It was about seeing if I could do without and to find the origin of architecture, which is sheltering. Have we as humans - after ten thousand years of evolution - become so weak that we cannot live outside anymore? Do we need these thick walls and these hyper-technical windows with insulated glass and high-tech solar panels, feeding our plasma televisions? It's all really complex and we're making it complex for ourselves. Sometimes I'm bothered by this. It's so complicated. Maybe it could be more easy.

**So how did it go for you, sleeping for two weeks on the street?**

I slept under bridges, in playgrounds, temples, along rivers and in the Church of Light by Ando. The special thing is that even if you sleep under a bridge, this becomes a place and you get attached to it. If I go back, maybe it will still feel a bit like home. It happens so quickly - totally anonymous places, suddenly become meaningful.

**What motivated you to go for Zumthor?**

I have two reasons. First because it came on my path. I met a friend of Zumthor during my journey through Europe and she thought my character would fit in the Zumthor's office and therefore she recommended me to him. The second reason, relating to his work, I find more difficult to find the words for. Maybe at the same time it's easy, I liked what I saw, felt, smelled, and heard, while visiting his projects. Like the first two steps while entering the Shelters for Roman Archaeological Site in Chur, Switzerland, sounding like Prokofiev's Dance of the Knights.

Beside his work, it appears to me that he is one of the few architects who has become able to resist the financial pressure in the architecture profession, resulting in a what I regard as a pure form of architecture.

**You don't want to practice architecture in the traditional sense?**

I don't really have this goal of creating buildings for the sake of creating buildings. For now, my dream is to make my own house. This is the only building I really want to make. For the rest I have no other architectural dreams. In the meantime, I want to be inspired by other people and cultures. But I do feel attracted to traditional sense of an architect as a craftsman. At the moment I'm doing studies on different crafts and materials by visiting craftsmen, traditional production factories of bricks and wood and by working at a construction site in Amsterdam. So I do see my lifelong education as an architect in a traditional sense.

**What do you think about the government obliging students to gain two years of work experience in order to become an architect?**

I'm not sure if I agree or disagree on the obligation. Most important is that students are supported and encouraged to do so. An obligation would only work when they consider each person individually and carefully, but probably there is no money and time for that. However it should be up to the students to think about developing themselves in an extracurricular way, because as we all know, not everything can be learned in university. But as soon as it becomes obliged, the individual creativity and the ensuing variation might be in danger.

While this individual creativity and variation, in the end, make architecture beautiful. I personally don't like it when things are obliged. After my bachelor period I really enjoyed the freedom of following my own path, doing internships, started to study materials and crafts, worked at construction sites, traveled through Japan and Europe.

I'm not telling this to brag, but to illustrate the chances and freedom without the government or university obligating us things. I enjoyed that I could go my own way and this process on itself is really useful and important for my development as a person and as an architect.

I think within the freedom that we have without the obligation, students should realize that becoming an architect is not only about getting your diploma, it's also about becoming strong enough to choose your own path without losing empathy towards others and the understanding of the social importance in architecture.

**Do you have any tips for bachelor students? How can they keep their integrity intact during their studies?**

It's hard to give a general tip that could relate to all bachelor students, since we all have different backgrounds and characters. My tip would not be about to do this or that, but about trying to find your own way within the numerous possibilities that we have as students from the TU Delft. Don't be afraid for wrong choices, because by these choices you know what you don't like and thereby you are one step closer to what you like. Whether you're going through life partying or being serious and thoughtful. It doesn't matter, as long as it fits you. Go for that.

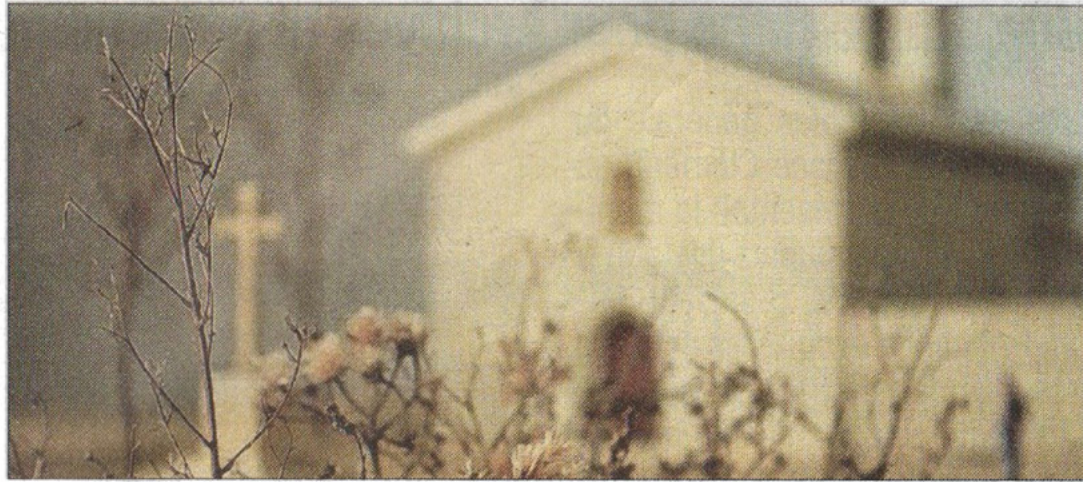




**ROCHEBAUDIN** Un projet porté par Fabian van der Leer

## Vers une rénovation du jardin du presbytère

Fabian van der Leer, fils du propriétaire de l'ancien presbytère qui jouxte l'église Notre-Dame de Sénisse envisage de rénover le jardin du presbytère. Avec son bureau d'architecture : Atelier van Heemskerk, il examine la possibilité de rendre une partie du jardin ouverte au public. Il souhaite que son projet soit en harmonie avec les lieux, avec l'histoire du village mais aussi en phase avec la valeur émotionnelle que représente cet endroit pour les habitants de Rochebaudin. Il a donc décidé de s'adresser à tous les habitants de Rochebaudin avec un courrier qu'il es-



En arrière plan, la chapelle Notre Dame de Sénisse.

sayera de remettre en main propre où il expose ses intentions et invite chacun à l'accompagner, par ses connaissances, ses souvenirs, ses idées. La réalisation du projet sera adressée égale-

ment à Rochebaudin, à la recherche de matériaux, d'artisanat et du savoir-faire du village. Une initiative originale, bien dans l'esprit de convivialité qui anime le village.



**ROCHEBAUDIN** Jardin du presbytère

## La rénovation prend corps



Le futur jardin du presbytère en voie de rénovation.

Fabian Van der Leer, rochebaudinois de cœur et architecte de profession, avait convié les habitants désireux de donner un coup de main pour ce beau projet qu'il a imaginé : dégager l'espace devant sa maison située à l'ouest de la chapelle Notre Dame de Sénisse.

Les valeureux participants ont bravé le froid et le vent pour s'attaquer au chantier de rénovation. Il s'agissait dans un premier temps de couper les arbres,

les buissons et autres plantes envahissantes dans ce terrain laissé à l'abandon depuis des décennies.

Intrigué par le bruit et l'agitation, un agriculteur au volant de son tracteur s'est arrêté pour aider. Grâce à l'efficacité du broyeur, il a pu débarrasser l'emplacement du futur jardin, des ronces tenaces qui l'avaient envahi.

D'autres étapes suivront avant de pouvoir complètement réor-

ganiser ce jardin témoin s'il en est de l'histoire du quartier Notre Dame. La propriétaire, Madame Avias, veuve de Pierre Guilton et sœur du prêtre a souhaité, à sa mort en 1904, léguer le presbytère, la tombe et le jardin à la commune de Rochebaudin.

Fabian a conçu un projet en lien et en harmonie avec la chapelle et le cimetière auquel a adhéré une poignée de volontaires. Si l'aventure vous tente, venez les rejoindre.



**ROCHEBAUDIN** L'exposition du travail de Fabian

## Dans le futur jardin du presbytère



Notre-Dame de Sénisse en toile de fond, le jardin au premier plan.

Dernièrement, Fabian a reçu ses invités dans l'espace qui deviendra le jardin contemplatif, tel qu'il l'a imaginé dans son projet. Des tables disséminées çà et là sur lesquelles ont été posées des planches réunissant de la documentation, des photos, retraçant l'histoire du lieu, de la chapelle et du cimetière voisins. Ce lieu de vie a inspiré l'auteur par la diversité des paysages, des levers et couchers du soleil, des plantes, de la terre et d'autres matériaux encore mais aussi par l'harmonie qui s'en dégage, le sentiment d'appartenance à cet ensemble.

L'exposition se poursuit à l'intérieur dans l'atelier de Fabian, où la maquette reproduit



Fabian ou le perfectionnisme à l'état pur.

avec exactitude les moindres détails des bâtiments ; plus loin, les dessins sur les murs laissent entrevoir les bases du projet, alors qu'une vidéo tournée lors du débroussaillage permet aux spectateurs d'apprécier le travail réalisé. Interrogé sur la suite de ses

observations, l'architecte répond que la seconde phase consiste en la conception du projet à développer, aidé en cela par les services de l'UDAP, puisque la chapelle est inscrite à l'inventaire supplémentaire des monuments

historiques depuis 1926.

Le jardin, en bordure de la route départementale sera abrité des regards et du bruit, entouré par des plantes locales, idéal pour se reposer, contempler la nature alentour. Les rochebaudinois se sont montrés intéressés, curieux et fascinés par le travail accompli, la finesse et la minutie déployées par Fabian, l'état d'esprit et la générosité dont il a fait preuve, toujours en quête de souvenirs, lettres, informations, autant de rappels du contexte religieux et spirituel de cet endroit. Si vous désirez adhérer à cette entreprise, si vous avez des questions, n'hésitez pas à le contacter : [contact@ateliervanheemskerk.nl](mailto:contact@ateliervanheemskerk.nl). Cette exposition très complète et fournie pourrait être présentée à un plus large public si Fabian Van Der Leer y est favorable.



La maquette exposée avec la chapelle et le cimetière attenant.