

IOWA

Architect

Issue No. 02:242 Five Dollars



Potluck



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Molengracht, Pella, Architects Smith Metzger



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Above: The drawbridge leads visitors to Pella's glockenspiel.

Above: Masonry detailing is drawn from Dutch vernacular building.

Right: Horizontal sunscreens protect the southern wall of the Story County Human Services Building in Ames.

Architects Smith Metzger did their research during the design of the Molengracht commercial complex in Pella. Architect Kent Lutz, in discussing the development of the typical Dutch gable, noted he was “shocked to find there was so much meat to it.” The steep, two-dimensional gables typical of much historic Dutch architecture were developed to hide the steep roof slopes on the long, narrow buildings.

Careful research and diligent participation from the community produced the Molengracht, which is a cluster of commercial buildings along a canal just south of Pella’s town square. Each building has its own identity, but they all are compatible with the late-nineteenth century Dutch architecture that lines the perimeter of the town square and adjacent blocks. Gable designs unique to each building distinguish it from its neighbors, while brick masonry façades recall very common Dutch building materials and methods.

The canal boasts an operational drawbridge and, while it is shallower than canals found in Holland, it is used for a variety of community events. The bridge is on axis with the town’s existing glockenspiel, a primary tourist attraction just off of the town square. The complex as a whole strives for a density typical of urban Dutch communities. The combination of water and growing population produced this density in Holland as a necessary solution to housing the population on small patches of land. In Pella, an Iowa farm town, this density nestled along the canal embodies a gesture of recognition of the history of the town’s Dutch immigrant population. The emigration of these Dutch elements—the gables, the masonry construction, the canal, the building scale—has transformed them into symbols of a Dutch heritage that this town, and the tourists who flock here each spring, treasure.

ANN SOBIECH MUNSON



The canal, drawbridge, gables and a tower animate the central space of the Molengracht.

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