



## Private Housing Interview

*In this sit-down interview, Bert Bulthuis, Founder and Principal architect of STUDIO SITEC talks about his firm's private housing segment.*

**BB:** Clients have many questions about designing and building a new house. Sometimes, they have already bought a piece of land. At other times, they want me to advise them. One of the first questions for clients who have yet to buy land concerns the acquisition of land.

In these cases, a client often approaches us with more than one option. But, be it one or many, our role is the same — to see what the possibilities are for each potential plot. Whether you would like to build a house in The Netherlands, the Miami coast or somewhere in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and so forth, we help you understand the differences of what can be built on each piece of land. We look at the general planning code and what it allows, what we need to do to change it; and what the potential difficulties of the site might be, for example, the gradient of the slope or the attractiveness of the view, the direction amount of light.

Another route clients take is to buy a lot with a house on it. We can demolish it and build a new house on the land (See Houses P and H on our website). In the first case, the land was bought and in the second, it was inherited.

Sometimes, we refurbish the property, that is, we change or add something, for example, House E, where there was a 19<sup>th</sup> century family residence. We added a house for the parents and it became a house for three generations.

**SS:** **Can you describe the process from meeting the client to completion of the project?**

**BB:** Every part of the process has its interesting features and I think that it's important for the client to take the time for it. If a client approaches us, it's usually because they've seen houses that we've built or they know people who live in houses I've built. The first thing we do is talk about what they want, their family, the ambitions they have for their home, what kind of roles it must straddle: will they work in the house? Do they play musical instruments? Are they sporty? Some clients want a swimming pool. Within

a few sessions, we confirm a Program of Requirements (POR) before we start with the design process. What we also do at this stage is get a feel for what the client likes architecturally through mood boards and artist impressions. This determines the design direction.

**SS: What, apart from swimming pools, are some of the things you've incorporated into residential designs?**

**BB:** In itself, a house is a simple thing, it's for people to live in, eat in, sleep in. Some people have aspirations to work in their house as well. Others want to work separately from the main house, so we make a separate area. And, there are always things that people aspire for beyond the basic functions of a residence, for example, indoor or outdoor swimming pools. We can implement 24/7, 12-month a year heated pools, for colder climates, with an insulated floor that goes on top to keep the water warm. You push a button and the swimming pool is revealed... Pool houses where you can relax on beds suspended by ropes...

We've built houses with indoor cinemas, gyms. Some people are fascinated by musical instruments so we've built sound-insulated music rooms. There are people who are concerned about security, so we've built special safe rooms into their homes. Nothing is beyond the imagination if it's discussed in the early stages.

We can also talk about special mood elements you want to feature like indoor and outdoor fireplaces. We can integrate everything you want into the house you'll be living in for many years to come.

In all our projects, we strive towards sustainable circular architecture where we incorporate sustainable materials and technical installations like solar panels, floor heating/cooling with in-depth heat exchangers to save money for the client and safeguard the planet.

**SS: Which creatives have influenced your designs?**

**BB:** I personally find inspiration in architects like Alvar Aalto, Frank Lloyd Wright or Rietveld. These are architects who were very famous and at the same time, they really dove into the private client market. They really listened to what their clients wanted, and transformed this into architecture connected to the landscape. At Studio Sitec, we really like to listen to what people want, build on it and transform it into something they never would have expected, but, really, really like.

**SS: So, how long does it take to build an entire house?**

**BB:** The process varies depending on the client. Some want to take a lot of time over the conceptual design (the initial POR) and we can take a lot of time for this stage because it solidifies the later design stage. Then, we go on to the detailed design stage and talk about materials. How long this takes is also up to the client — some want to dive deep into, say, the tiles that are going to be used.

How long it takes to get permits differs a lot from location to location and country to country. In Holland, it takes between two to four months. In other countries, it takes less long if there's a general planning code and you simply fulfil it. In other places, you might need to change the planning code which can take up to a year.

The next part is the tendering stage which involves getting the contractors in place. The building process then starts and it takes about a year for a house to be built. Sometimes it's a little bit more, sometimes a little less depending on the complexity of the house. I would say, you usually need to take two years from the beginning of the design process to the realization of the project, although it can take longer.

**SS: All of the private residences you've worked on seem to be in The Netherlands. What are your ambitions?**

**BB:** Our Hong Kong office has been around since 2013 and we've done a few smaller projects in Hong Kong and Manilla for private clients. We're certainly interested in building in Asia, in southeast Asia or Australia and we can facilitate this very well from Hong Kong. We're currently talking with a client about a house in the Caribbean.

**SS: Any final comments?**

**BB:** If you have the opportunity to build your own home, it's a fantastic experience and I would advise you to go for it.