

# In Amsterdam, Tijmen Ploeg wedges an unabashedly modern house between historic neighbors

By Tracy Metz

**T**he most extraordinary thing about the house that Tijmen Ploeg designed on Amsterdam's Princes Island must be its footprint. It is seven times longer (112 feet) than it is wide (16 feet) and had to be shoehorned into its lot on a narrow street between two existing buildings. This simple but inexorable fact presented two obvious problems for the architect: how to let enough light in and how to avoid the effect of living in a tunnel.

The fact that this house was built for a private client is unusual in Amsterdam, which has a strong tradition of government housing and where there are very few sites for private commissions. In fact, architect Tijmen Ploeg, who himself lives just around the corner, had already designed a building on this spot for a housing society. When the designer and collector Benno Premsele and the architect Friso Broeksma bought the project, he redesigned it to their needs by reducing the number of apartments from five to three, among other things. "I was already involved in the house, but of course they didn't have to take me as their architect. Fortunately, they liked my design, and we worked together very well," says Ploeg.

## Friends living together

Premsele and Broeksma wanted a house where they could comfortably grow old in the company of friends. Part of the ground floor is a fully equipped studio for the potter Alexander Lichtveld; the two upper floors

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are inhabited by potter Babs Haenen and music critic Hans Heg, and the two floors in between are the clients' own living and working space. There are shared amenities in the form of a laundry room, a guest or nurse's room, and a roof terrace. All the halls, doorways, and bathrooms are wheelchair-accessible.

Ploeg found a simple solution to the dearth of daylight: he sunk a light well along the white-plastered southern wall all the way down to the glass ceiling of the ground-floor studio, providing the potter with the

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**Project:** Premsele-Broeksma house  
**Architect:** Tijmen Ploeg  
*Architecten—Tijmen Ploeg,  
partner-in-charge; Kurt Boomgaard,  
contributor*  
**Engineers:** Strackee bv

*Bouwadviesbureau*  
**General contractor:** *Bouwbedrijf  
M.J. de Nijs en zonen bv*  
**Gross square footage:** 7,150  
*square feet*



shadowless light artists need. The light well, made of wired glass in galvanized metal frames, is on the "far" side of the stairwell. As a consequence, though the house is narrow, you don't feel robbed of the space that the light well takes up. The stairs and elevator are slightly skewed to enlarge the light well and to articulate the space.

## Keeping some perspective

Entering the Premsele-Broeksma house is an experience in itself. Not until construction started did the builders discover that the next-door neighbor had a beautiful old brick wall with the 18th-century cast-iron "anchors" still in place. It now forms the interior wall down one side of the very long entrance hallway and provides a warm, sculptural surface behind white columns placed progressively further apart as you proceed into the house. "The idea behind the spacing of the columns was to create a sense of perspective," Ploeg explains. "When you come in, the hallway looks short; but when you leave it looks long. I thought