

Reality check



APeldoorn (NL) — The users haven't moved in yet, but the building is as good as finished. The Omnizorg residential centre (which was published in the Start section of

A10 #9) will house the most vulnerable denizens of this provincial city in the middle of the Netherlands: drug addicts, the homeless and clients of the mental health services. The concierge-cum-security guard who took up his post in the building in the final construction phase and can therefore be regarded as its first occupant, is enthusiastic about the architecture but voiced concern as to whether this rather luxurious accommodation would offer the future residents sufficient stimulus to reintegrate into society. It is not inconceivable that it might prove to be a very pleasant environment for a target group that has, willy-nilly, been without a permanent home or address for varying periods of time.

The building still lacks neighbours to the south and northeast, so for the time being it has blank walls on these sides. To the rear of the complex, Korte Kanaalstraat is as yet unchanged so that the route from Stationsstraat – through a gateway into the courtyard and then out through a second gateway – leads to a place with little to offer anyone. Let's hope that the laundrette, gift shop, bicycle repair shop and florist that are due to occupy the building's street level spaces, will attract other businesses to what may seem an unlikely location.

It is already clear that it is the courtyard, with its solitary tree, that organizes the building in a logical manner. The high gateway in the Stationsstraat facade, which offers a good view of the courtyard, involves Omnizorg with the outside world, but there is still enough intimacy to give the residents the safe feeling of being off the streets.

The architecture is straightforward with here and there a light touch, as in the border along the brick facades, the perforated shutters painted in pastel colours and the vertical garden on the courtyard facade. It doesn't look vandal-proof and that is a welcome relief in this kind of commission and evidence of the optimistic faith of clients and architects in the beneficial effects, especially for these residents, of beauty. (HANS IBELINGS)

Omnizorg multi-focus reception centre, 2003–2008. Architects: FBW Architects. Address: Stationsstraat/ Korte Kanaalstraat, Apeldoorn. Info: www.fbwarchitecten.nl

