4 / THE HOUSE OF TRUUS SCHRÖDER: FROM HOME TO MUSEUM HOUSE

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On 3 April 1987, the Rietveld Schröder House finally opened its doors to the public, ready to fulfil its new function as a study object and museum house. The heritage building had been handed over to the City of Utrecht in a long-lease arrangement (*erfpacht*), and the Centraal Museum had been entrusted with its management and upkeep.[1] The role of the foundation receded into the background.

Anyone visiting the Rietveld Schröder House today in its role as museum house will find the interior laid out and furnished as it was in 1925-1930. That, at least, is the suggestion that is created. Is that picture accurate, or are visitors getting a misleading impression? More than thirty years after it was opened to the public, we now know so much more about the history of the house, owing to new discoveries in the archives and conversations with people who were involved at the time. Moreover, thanks to the passage of time we are able to reflect more dispassionately on the choices they made back then. From today's perspective we are now able to state that the house in its current presentation does not do full justice to either the design or the occupants. What changes could be made that would improve the interior design and inform the visitor more fully?

During her marriage to Frits Schröder, Truus Schröder-Schräder lived at Biltstraat 135 in Utrecht. In common with many houses at that time, the interior of the mansion was crowded. Heavy curtains hung at the windows, there were multicoloured carpets, and the furniture was heavy and dark. It was not to Truus Schröder's taste. When her husband died in 1923, she asked the young furniture maker Gerrit Rietveld to remodel and furnish a house for her. Rietveld and Truus Schröder had known one another for several years. In 1921 Rietveld had redesigned one of the rooms in the Biltstraat house for her and they had discovered they were kindred spirits. When no suitable house could be found, they decided to build a house from scratch on a plot on the outskirts of Utrecht, with an unimpeded view over the polder landscape. When Truus left Biltstraat for good in January 1925, she sold nearly all the furnishings, taking only a chair, the bathtub, a heater and a piece of brown linoleum with her to her new house at Prins Hendriklaan 50.[2]

In its early years, the Schröder House was the home of a young widow and her three children, Binnert, Han(neke) and Marjan. There would have been toys lying around, books were read, music was made, and homework was done. Friends came around, there was a daily help, a neighbour dropped by to play the piano and Gerrit Rietveld, who had his studio in the house, worked there every day. In short, it was a house brimming with life.

Truus Schröder lived there virtually uninterrupted for sixty years. First with her children, later with tenants and later still, after his wife died in 1957, with Rietveld. Over the course of all those

years the house changed along with its chief occupant. When she died on 12 April 1985 the house was no longer the house it had been sixty years earlier. Schröder lived exclusively upstairs, her original bedroom had become a kitchen, some of the sliding walls could no longer slide and the house was crammed with plants, boxes, books, cuttings, a television and the sorts of things designed to make an elderly lady's life more comfortable, such as an adjustable plastic garden chair with a thick cushion. This is in marked contrast to the way the house is now presented to the public by the Centraal Museum: empty, sterile, and with few signs of life.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE LAYOUT AND DESIGN OF THE MUSEUM HOUSE

As indicated in the previous chapter, the restoration and the future of the house had been discussed at meetings of the Rietveld Schröder House Foundation since the 1970s.[3] The talk was about the restoration of the exterior and the interior but less about the furnishings: in other words, the layout, and occasionally the walls and the floors, were discussed but not so much the furniture that would occupy the spaces.

In 1973, when he was commissioned to supervise the restoration of the exterior of the Rietveld Schröder House, Mulder had looked through a series of black-and-white photographs of the interior together with Truus Schröder and Gerrit-Jan de Rook.[4] A short record of this meeting can be found in the foundation's archive.[5] Apart from the colours, the main topic of discussion was the interior design as well as the origin and relative importance of various interior elements, such as the origin of the bookcases in the girls' bedroom.[6] Schröder indicated that she was very attached to the lamp that hung from a steel rod beside the front door. Mulder concluded at the time that it would be a good idea to record the historical situation by making drawings of all the internal walls of the house showing where everything was. A good suggestion, of course, since the lack of any clear structure in the records of these conversations means that the details come across as somewhat random. Unfortunately these drawings do not appear in the archives and it is unclear whether they ever in fact existed.

The board's first discussion of the interior design of the museum house took place during a meeting held in June 1980.[7] Ideally, two aspects should remain clearly recognizable: the unique architecture of the house, and the house as an example of a distinctive domestic culture.[8] What exactly was meant by 'distinctive domestic culture' was not explained.

In addition, Truus Schröder informed board members of her preference, which was that the house be returned to its original state as a living testimony to Rietveld's work and ideas.[9] Schröder effectively relegated herself to the background with this decision, even though Rietveld and she herself had often referred to her as co-designer. The important thing was to capture the essence, the concept of the house, rather than endeavouring to restore as many details as possible. The meeting reached a number of conclusions. The kitchen should be removed from upstairs and reinstalled on the ground floor. Instead of attempting to recreate a detailed replica of the interior, the restoration would concentrate on the abstract image. There was no need to reinstate the piano, cupboards, and washbasin with mirror, and while it was not important whether the light switches and taps dated from the 1920s, it was essential to bring back the black-and-white floor covering.

The board then turned its attention to the desirability of in some way showing how the house had changed over time along with its occupant. Han Schröder felt that the house should be more of a workplace than a carefully preserved home. Photographs and architectural drawings were mentioned as sources; the drawings would serve as a model for the desired abstract presentation.[10] It is possible that they were referring to the architectural drawings made by Rietveld's practice in 1951 for the De Stijl exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (photo on page 9).[11]

It was almost a year later before the board discussed the internal restoration again.[12] The board members insisted on the formulation of a clear statement about the interior design. This would then need to be tested against future operational possibilities, on which front the board was hoping for a concrete proposal from the City of Utrecht; the Centraal Museum was not yet in the picture as a possible custodian.

When the decision was taken in 1981 to present the 1925–1930 situation in an 'abstract manner', this idea was put to Truus and Han Schröder. Around this time, board member Til Oxenaar reported back on several tours of the house she had made in the company of Truus Schröder. Her aim was to gather detailed information about the interior design in the chosen period. She recorded everything Truus could recall about this early period, from the colour and fabric of the curtains to the telephone wall plates. These reports were then annotated with comments by Han Schröder.[13] Sometimes the two women's memories confirm what we can see in the early photographs, sometimes not, which is a salutary reminder to be cautious when using these memories as a source for our analysis.

In 1982 Frank den Oudsten and Lenneke Büller interviewed Truus Schröder on several occasions for hours at a time. They talked about the first encounter between Truus and Rietveld, their motivations and ideas, and how they arrived at the decision to build the house. There was very little mention of the future of the house. The only comment Truus Schröder made about its future use after her death was: 'You could, of course, say: I'll furnish that room properly ... I don't think that it's necessary to do that now anymore, because it will quite probably be treated differently later on. ...you could also say we'll furnish it, and also that young people will come along later and say: hey, what an interesting chair, how does it fit together? Can I take it apart, can I have a look, hold it upside down, and so on? ...That kind of approach is much nicer, I think. ...And none of that's been resolved and I don't think it'll be resolved for the time being. How it should be. One person thinks it should reflect the earliest condition, someone else says no, it should reflect the condition after you'd lived in it for a long time, but with the children, and then it naturally becomes a very different sort of space.'[14]

It was not until two years later that the internal restoration was raised once again.[15] It was noted that there were still many unresolved questions about the furnishings. In order to get a better oversight, the series of photographs of the interior circa 1925-1926 would be used as reference. These were the same photographs that Mulder had looked through with Truus Schröder in 1973, when he had received the commission for the restoration of the exterior, but it was only now that it was decided to treat them as a key source. An important argument for doing this was to avoid creating a sterile living environment.

The minutes of a board meeting in late 1984 record another discussion of the future interior design of the house.[16] It was noted that 'movables', which is to say furniture, needed to be added to the restoration budget. To that end, Mulder drew up an inventory of the movable and immovable components of the interior. Also raised at this meeting was the question of whether the floor coverings should be adapted to suit the future museum function. The conclusion was that it would be good if the white rubber flooring could be relaid, but it turned out that white rubber was no longer available. At a meeting in October 1985, white vinyl or a not entirely white rubber were considered as possible alternatives, but no decision was made.[17] It should be noted that neither the budget nor Mulder's inventory could be found in the archive, which raises the question of whether they ever existed.

On 28 May 1985, a little over a month after Truus Schröder's death, Mulder made of list of household effects that were to remain in the museum house.[18] The heirs, Schröder's three children, gifted these items to the Centraal Museum since it was by now clear that the museum would take over the management of the house. The heirs looked for a different destination for the remaining items in the house.

Five months later, Mulder reported the discovery of the old deliveries shelf and kitchen-sink unit.[19] The worktop had been found, sawn into pieces, in the basement. The question of the piano was broached, be it much later.[20] Everyone involved was agreed that the piano should return, despite Truus's objection to this idea five years earlier. In November 1986 the architect duly set about trying to track the piano down. Mulder recently stated that the piano had stood for many years in Rietveld's own home on Vredenburg.[21] When Rietveld moved in with Truus in 1958, Bertus Mulder and his family moved into Rietveld's former home. Rietveld had left nearly all his belongings behind. Mulder allowed Rietveld's children to take whatever they wanted and the rest, including a piano that had previously stood in the Rietveld Schröder House, became Mulder's property. Mulder had sold the piano. In 1986 he placed advertisements in the papers in an effort to buy it back for the Rietveld Schröder House, but to no avail.[22]

From conversations with Bertus Mulder, Ida van Zijl[23] and Wim Crouwel,[24] it is clear that Mulder had a free hand and that the Centraal Museum was only involved in the final detailed phase of the interior design. The museum's role, as revealed by the foundation's archive, had not yet been legally formalized. The museum executives and curator were present at board meetings as observers and talked mainly about security and the opening of the house to the public rather than the interior design as such. There were hardly any board meetings during this final phase of the restoration. Mulder updated the foundation once a year and board members met only sporadically. Wim Crouwel referred to the complete trust placed in Mulder and noted that there were no meetings during the restoration. This was because the foundation met in the house and this was not possible while internal restoration work was going on.[25] Mulder confirmed the complete trust vested in him. No one asked critical questions and he was allowed to go his own way. Every now and then he reported back to the board and that was duly noted. Mulder kept records of this process. They contain many details about the interior design, such as the ordering of the blinds and washbasins. Mulder's archive was gradually transferred to the Centraal Museum; the final items were handed over in 2018.

THE HOUSE IN 1925-1926 VERSUS THE CURRENT MUSEUM HOUSE: SOURCES

In evaluating the refurbishment of the interior, it is a good idea to follow Mulder's example and compare historical photographs of the situation in 1925-1926 with how the interior looks today. The presentation of the house in 2018 is pretty much the same as the situation in 1987 when the house was first opened to the public. We can therefore use the current situation as a starting point for a comparative analysis.[26] Where does the presentation differ from the old photographs and why? When the situation differed from that of circa 1925-1926, or still more from that of circa 1925-1930, Mulder was wont to argue that 'it wasn't important for the spatial picture'.[27] But what the concept of 'spatial picture' actually meant was never specified. We may assume that it refers to the composition of the house: the arrangement of the space and the division of the surface and distribution of colour. Not just the composition of floors, walls and fixtures, but also the arrangement of the movable objects. Yet it is hard to resist the suspicion that pragmatic considerations often weighed more heavily than the reconstruction of this spatial picture; or that decisions were arbitrary. Arbitrariness also hovered over decisions about the future, which is why it is also important for the current custodian to know what is meant by the terms 'domestic culture' and 'spatial picture'.

In addition to a series of early photographs, we have the Bodon Committee's principles and Truus and Han Schröder's memories from the early 1980s, as collected by Til Oxenaar. A letter from Han Schröder to Corrie Nagtegaal[28] begins thus: 'This is what I recall and what I think. That doesn't necessarily mean that it's true. Take it with a grain of reality. Since then it's got mixed up with a lot of experiences.'[29] It is important to realize that memories are unreliable sources. The memories of the very elderly Truus Schröder dated from almost sixty years earlier and those of Han Schröder from her childhood. Personal matters also played a role. Mulder and Han Schröder did not enjoy a warm relationship and Han's remarks were ignored by Bertus Mulder on more than one occasion.[30]

FIG. 4.1 Upper floor interior, view from girls' room, c. 1925

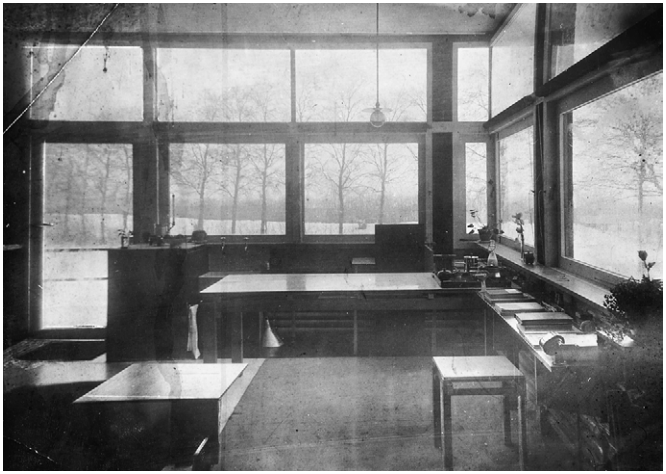

FIG. 4.2 Upper floor interior, view from dining area, c. 1925

It would have been logical to have given Gerard van de Groenekan a bigger role in the reconstruction of the house, given that he had worked with Rietveld as furniture maker and in 1925 had even worked in the house helping to finish the interior. If anyone knew how the house looked in the earliest years, it was Van de Groenekan. Yet he was scarcely involved in the restoration and reconstruction.[31] We can only guess at the reason for this.

During the process concerning the reconstruction of the interior design, those involved had recourse to the aforementioned photographs, a number of drawings and Schröder's memories. Over the years more sources from a variety of archives have been added, enabling us to reflect on the decisions made back then. For the following space by space discussion, the series of photographs that were a major source for the reconstruction were once again examined. Also consulted were the interviews with Truus Schröder, Han Schröder and Bertus Mulder, as well as notes and comments in the Rietveld Schröder and Stichting Rietveld Schröder Huis archives and drawings from both the 1920s and the 1950s.

A TOUR OF THE HOUSE

Normally speaking it would be logical to begin a discussion of a house on the ground floor. This is also how nearly every publication about the Rietveld Schröder House proceeds, but for this study it is more logical to examine it from the top down. The upper floor was the primary focus of the restoration of the interior; it was the heart of the house. That was where people lived and that was also where a modern concept of space was to be found. The lower floor was secondary. The fact that ten years after the house was finished Truus Schröder lived almost exclusively on the upper floor demonstrates that for her this was what it was all about: upstairs, openness, pure space.

THE DINING AND LIVING AREA, 1925-1926

This corner of the house appears to have been Schröder's favourite place. In photographs of herself in the interior she is often seen sitting at the dining table, close to the corner window. In the 1920s a military table stood in this space, with two Berlin chairs [FIG. 4.1/4.2].[32] The table top was covered with white rubber, which Schröder thought worked beautifully against the grey felt on the floor.[33]

FIG. 4.3 Upper floor interior, view from dining area, c. 1925

FIG. 4.4 View from Binnert's room, undated

For the children there were military stools.[34] Their colour is unknown but what we do know is that the cross bars and legs were a different colour from the seat and the ends of the cross bars. In drawings the stools are always coloured black and white.[35]

Next to the dining table, attached to the wall below the window ledge, there was a blue fold-up reading and writing desk with holes for ink pots. Strip lights mounted below the window ledge provided light to study by [FIG. 4.2].

Vases of flowers and small pot plants stood on the window ledges. The blinds were made of blue Lancaster fabric.[36] Above the table hung a lamp consisting of a light bulb topped by a circular sheet of glass [FIG. 4.3]. This lamp was designed especially for the house.

Against the top of the stairwell stood a wide, fairly heavy couch upholstered in a red fabric [FIG. 4.3]. Couches, also known as day beds, were a common feature of living rooms in those days.

According to Schröder, Jacob Bendien, who lodged with Truus's sister An and her husband Rein Harrestein in Amsterdam, had an identical couch. The Schröder House couch was scattered with cushions in two different colours. The children could move the couch up to the desk and sit on it to do their reading and homework. There are photographs in which the couch stands beside the heater and others in which it has been moved to the desk. In some photographs there is a divan table in front of the couch [FIG. 4.3].

The heater in this room [FIG. 4.8] was the one that had originally stood in the Schröders' house on Biltstraat. Next to the heater stood an elongated metal side table[37] and on it a table lamp[38] of the same design as the one Schröder and Rietveld had designed together in 1925 for the hi-fi cabinet for René Radermacher Schorer. Schröder recalled that the lamp had often stood on the window ledge and we can indeed see that in one of the photos. It is clear from the photographs that many items of furniture had no fixed place but were moved around as required.

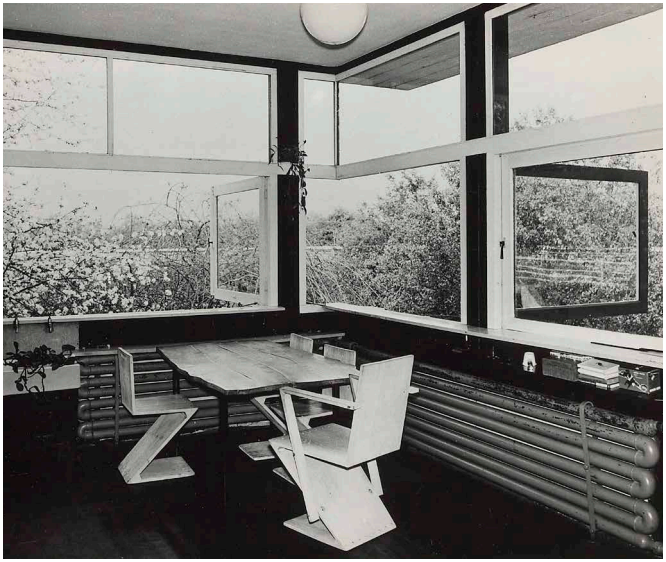

FIG. 4.5 Upper floor interior, dining area, undated

It was a house that was actively lived in and that was able to adapt to the needs of the occupants.

The yellow modular cupboard [FIG. 4.1] was made when the house was already occupied, but not yet finished. It was probably made by Gerard van de Groenekan. Truus had been keen for the design to include removable boxes. There were three, one for each child perhaps: two in grey, one in white. The cupboard held the gramophone and a film projector. Next to the cupboard, which Rietveld considered too sculptural, stood a small, two-shelf cabinet designed by Schröder in 1926.

THE DINING AND LIVING AREA, 1930S–1980S

For one brief period the space fulfilled a different function. From 1933 to 1936 Schröder rented the house to a Montessori school and during this time the upper floor was used as a classroom for infants. During the long period when Schröder herself lived in the house, this space was always a dining area. It was here that she usually sat, at the dining table, first in the Berlin chair at the military table, later in the zigzag chair with armrests at the table with the irregular-edged wooden top, dating from around 1940 [FIG. 4.5].[39] In the 1930s or thereabouts, the modular cupboard was replaced by an open bookcase because more space was needed for books [FIG. 4.4]. The red couch had already been replaced around 1928 by the current smaller couch that can be extended lengthwise [FIG. 4.4]. The original couch was a solid, heavy piece of furniture and may not have suited the flexible, light spatial concept. It would also have been rather heavy to move back and forth to the desk.

The heater from Biltstraat was replaced by a round, coal-fired heater. By the 1930s, the food lift between the upper floor and the kitchen on the ground floor was no longer used and had been locked in place on the upper floor to be used as extra storage space. The hanging lamp was replaced by a spherical ceiling lamp [FIG. 4.4/4.5]. The floor became all one colour and the grey felt disappeared.

THE DINING AND LIVING AREA IN THE MUSEUM HOUSE, 1987 TO THE PRESENT

The original military table, which Schröder had loaned, minus the white rubber top, to the Centraal Museum in 1959 was returned to the house in 1987. A copy of the Berlin chair was placed beside the table. Above it hangs a replica of the original lamp. While the children's stools are no longer there, the desk has been reconstructed, but without the strip lighting and the holes for ink pots [FIG. 4.6].

The original small extendable couch is still there, upholstered in a dark grey fabric.[40] The divan table has been replaced by the side table with blue-painted plywood top and metal base, a design of Gerrit Rietveld from around 1932 [FIG. 4.6].[41] The metal table still stands beside the heater, without the table lamp.[42] The round coal-fired heater stands in front of the chimney and above it hangs a strip light that did not appear in the early series of photographs.On the mantlepiece stands a photo of Gerrit Rietveld. The modular cupboard has been partially reconstructed.[43]

FIG. 4.6 Upper floor interior, dining area, 2018

One of the removable boxes, which was retained by Marjan Schröder, is original. New blue blinds can be lowered to shut out the light. The food lift has been drawn up to this floor and is displayed empty. The adjoining cabinet contains cups and glasses that belonged to Truus Schröder in order to convey the purpose of the cabinet. These items do not date from the 1920s.

TRUUS SCHRÖDER'S BEDROOM, 1925-1926

Schröder's bed was yellow, the same colour as the yellow field on the wall. Above the bed was a graphic work by El Lissitzky [FIG. 4.7]. In combination with the narrow red shelf on which Truus put her watch at night, it made for a wonderful division of the wall plane. There was a cupboard with a washbasin, and lighting in the form of a simple pear light bulb. Under the window, a fold-out shelf with telephone gave Schröder a small desk in her bedroom.

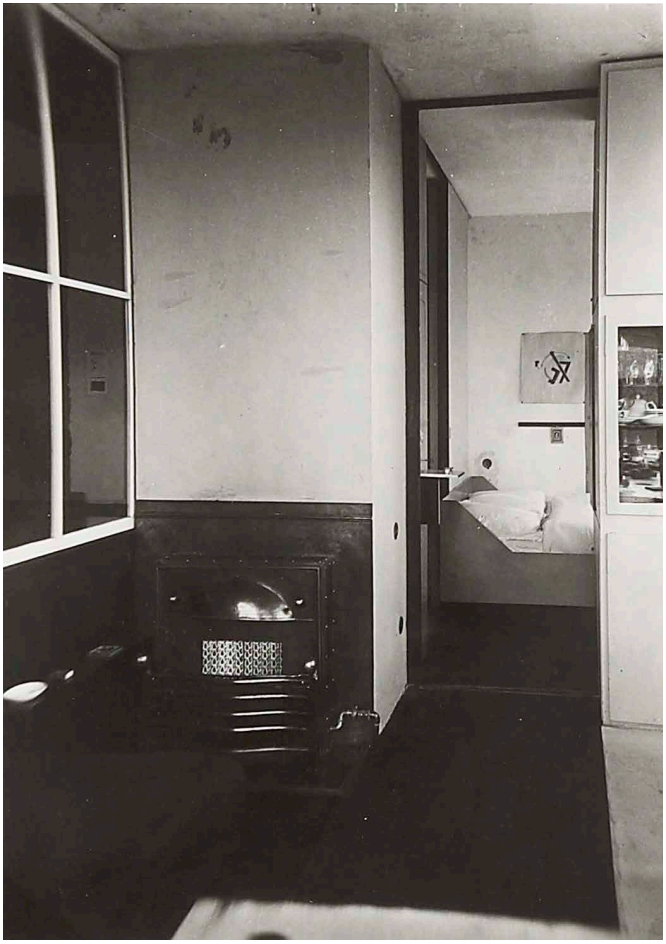

FIG. 4.7 Upper floor interior, Schröder's bedroom viewed from dining area, c. 1925

FIG. 4.8 Upper floor interior, Schröder's bedroom, c.1925

There was another folding shelf in the opening to the living room. In one of the drawings from the early 1950s, a military chair is drawn up to the desk below the window. The divan table stands beside the bed in one of the early photographs [FIG. 4.8].

TRUUS SCHRÖDER'S BEDROOM, 1930S–1980S

When Schröder returned to the house after the children had left home (c. 1936) and the contract with the Montessori school had ended, she decided to live upstairs. She moved the kitchen into what had been her bedroom [FIG. 4.9]. Rietveld built a blue kitchen counter with sink below the window and a cupboard with yellow sliding doors; two individual gas burners stood on top of the blue counter and another two on a counter with square white tiles.[44] The cupboard with washbasin had remained intact so the kitchen had two sinks. The room was chock-full and in the photos some of the many pans, saucepans, jugs and dishes can be seen on the wall shelves.

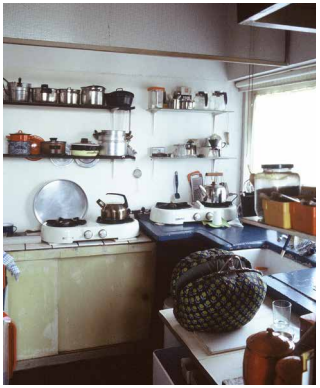

FIG. 4.9 Upper floor interior, kitchen, 1985

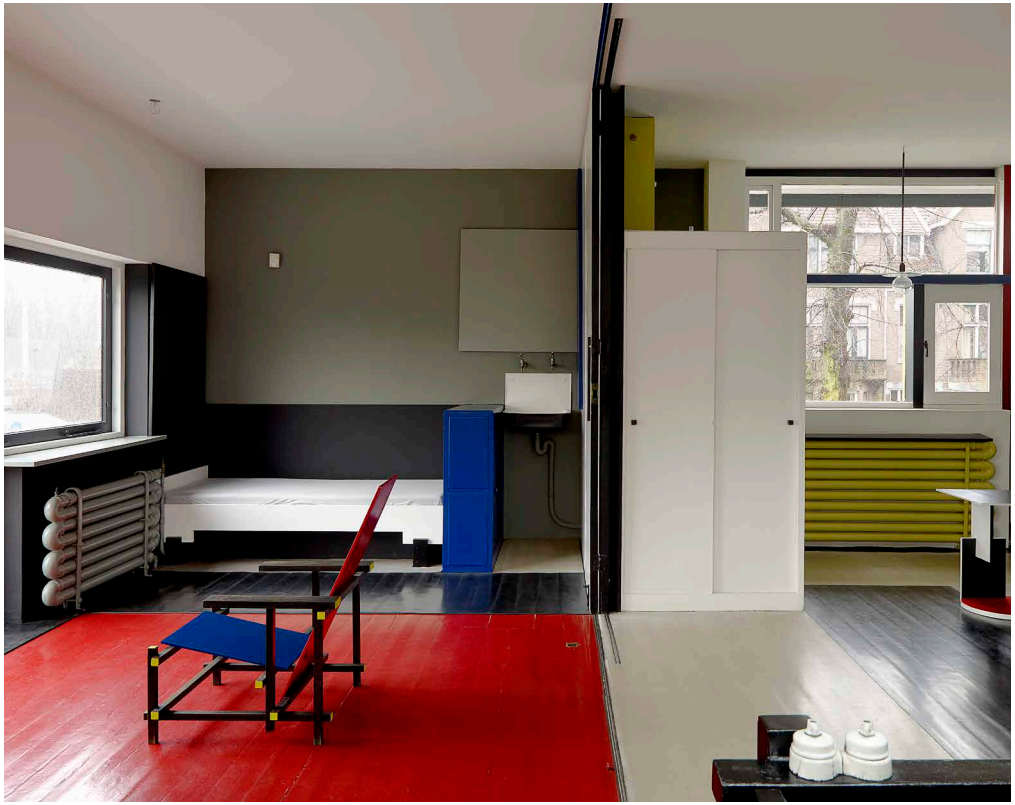

FIG. 4.10 Upper floor interior, Binnert's room, 2010

TRUUS SCHRÖDER'S BEDROOM IN THE MUSEUM HOUSE, 1987 TO THE PRESENT

The current bed differs in colour from the original, which was yellow. In a photograph from 1925-1926 [FIG. 4.7] it is obvious that the bed is a different colour from the white wall. Now the bed is white, like the wall. This bed also seems wider than the original one. In all the drawings, whether from the 1920s or the 1950s, it is clearly a single bed. And in the older photographs the bed does not extend beyond the left-hand window; now it does [FIG. 4.11]. The current bed is some 20 centimetres wider than the original single bed. The desk below the window has been reinstated, as has the desk near the doorway. The red shelf has been reconstructed.

BINNERT'S ROOM, 1925-1926

Truus Schröder called Binnert's room 'the red room' because the floors were painted red. Binnert's single bed was white and according to Schröder upholstered in blue fabric. In drawings from the 1950s the covering is black. The wall had been lined with soft sheet material so that the boy didn't have to sleep up against the hard brick wall.[45] At the foot of the bed stood a small cupboard in which to hang towels so that they were out of sight [FIG. 4.12]. During the day the mirror could be covered with a shutter that was placed against the window in the evening. A second shutter, needed to darken the room at night, was attached to the sliding wall, and at the head of the bed there was a third shutter.

FIG. 4.11 Upper floor interior, Schröder's bedroom, 2018

FIG. 4.12 Upper floor interior, Binnert's room, c. 1925

FIG. 4.13 Upper floor interior, view of Binnert's room with piano, c. 1925

FIG. 4.14 Upper floor interior, Schröder's desk, 1978

FIG. 4.15 Upper floor interior, children's room, 2010

Above the bed hung an abstract still life, *Bowl with apples*, by Bart van der Leck [FIG. 4.12].[46] There were pot plants on the window ledge and a military stool served as bedside table. Two stringed instruments hung on the sliding wall and there was a tall, fitted black wardrobe [FIG. 4.13].

From the dining section of the living area there was no direct view of Binnert's bed, which was hidden behind the piano [FIG. 4.12/4.13]. Piano players had their back to the bed. The piano had been adapted: a shelf for books had been installed beneath the piano and the edge of this shelf and the piano lid were both painted a light colour. Behind the piano stood a piano chair fashioned from black poles with blue ends and with a leather back and seat.[47]

BINNERT'S ROOM, 1930S–1980S

After the children left home, this space was turned into a study. The piano vanished from the interior furnishings.[48] The bed, the washbasin and the towel cupboard were removed and replaced by a free-standing spare bed. The desk that Rietveld and Truus Schröder had designed in 1932 was positioned over the radiator. For a while a reproduction of a female portrait by Pablo Picasso hung above the bed. Bart van de Leck's *Composition '18-'19* also hung in the room.[49] The floor was still red: the floorboards were covered with red felt. The space was increasingly filled with piles of paper. From the mid 1970s a red-blue chair and an Amersfoort chair stood in this corner. There were net curtains that are closed in nearly every photo [FIG. 4.14].

BINNERT'S ROOM IN THE MUSEUM HOUSE, 1987 TO THE PRESENT

The white bed no longer has any cover, just a white fitted sheet covering the mattress. The towel cupboard was still in Marjan's possession and was returned to the end of the bed. It is painted blue [FIG. 4.10], as in drawings from the 1950s, although in the early photographs it appears to be lighter in colour. On the spot where the piano stood prominently in front of the bed, the red-blue chair now stands [FIG. 4.10]. Visitors expect to see this chair in the house, yet it was not part of the interior furnishings in the 1920s. The only photo from the 1920s in which the chair can be seen is a photo of the exterior where the chair, along with the divan table, stands on the balcony attached to Schröder's bedroom.[50] The first photograph showing the chair in the interior dates from 1974.

FIG. 4.16 Upper floor interior, girls' room, c. 1925

FIG. 4.17 Upper floor interior, girls' room in daytime position, c. 1925

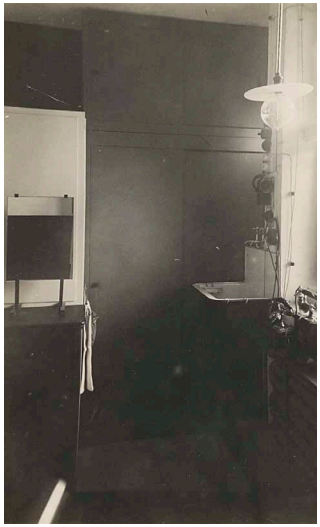

FIG. 4.18 Upper floor interior, corner wash basin in girls' room, c. 1925

HANNEKE AND MARJAN'S ROOM, 1925-1926

Here, as in Binnert's room, the wall behind the beds was lined with a soft sheet material [FIG. 4.16/4.17], providing a warm buffer between beds and wall. There were two single beds, one each for Schröder's two daughters Hanneke and Marjan. A pear-and-milk-glass lamp like the one in the living room hung from the ceiling [FIG. 4.2/4.18]. During the day the beds were covered in blue baize.[51] In Van Doesburg's coloured-in photographs the bed against the wall is upholstered in black and the bed against the sliding wall in blue (photo on page 54).[52] In drawings from the 1950s the beds are also blue and black (photo on page 9). Red, yellow and grey pillows were propped against the wall.[53] The beds had a night-time position in which the bed heads and ends were protectively folded up [FIG. 4.16]. During the day they were folded down, the beds encased in slip covers and lined with large cushions, thereby allowing the beds to be used as couches [FIG. 4.17]. Below the beds were drawers.

In one of the photographs [FIG. 4.18] there are two telephones on the window ledge; the house had three telephone connections in all. Schröder had ordered the two wall cupboards used as bookcases in America [FIG. 4.16/4.17]. There was a chest of drawers referred to as the 'Montessori chest'. On it was a standing mirror specially designed for this house [FIG. 4.18]. The window ledge contained various pot plants. Schröder recalled a blind. In the photo there are dark, open-weave curtains rather like the curtains in Binnert's bedroom. Against the radiator stood a child's chair of unknown design.

Schröder remembered the wall cabinet as being yellow.[54] On the wall was an early drawing by Douwe van der Zweep. Van der Zweep gave it to them just after they had moved into the house.[55]

HANNEKE AND MARJAN'S ROOM, 1930S–1980S

In the 1930s, this became Truus Schröder's bedroom. Her single bed, covered with a spread and scattered with thick cushions, was placed behind a chest of drawers [FIG. 4.19], and a large desk, covered with a tablecloth, was positioned in front of the window [FIG. 4.20]. Various chairs have stood at the desk, including the piano chair designed by Rietveld and a black metal chair of unknown design.[56] The hanging lamp near the window made way for a spherical ceiling lamp [FIG. 4.19/4.20].

FIG. 4.19 Upper floor interior, Schröder's desk and bedroom, undated

FIG. 4.20 Upper floor interior, Schröder's desk and bedroom, 1978

FIG. 4.21 Upper floor interior, girls' room, 2005

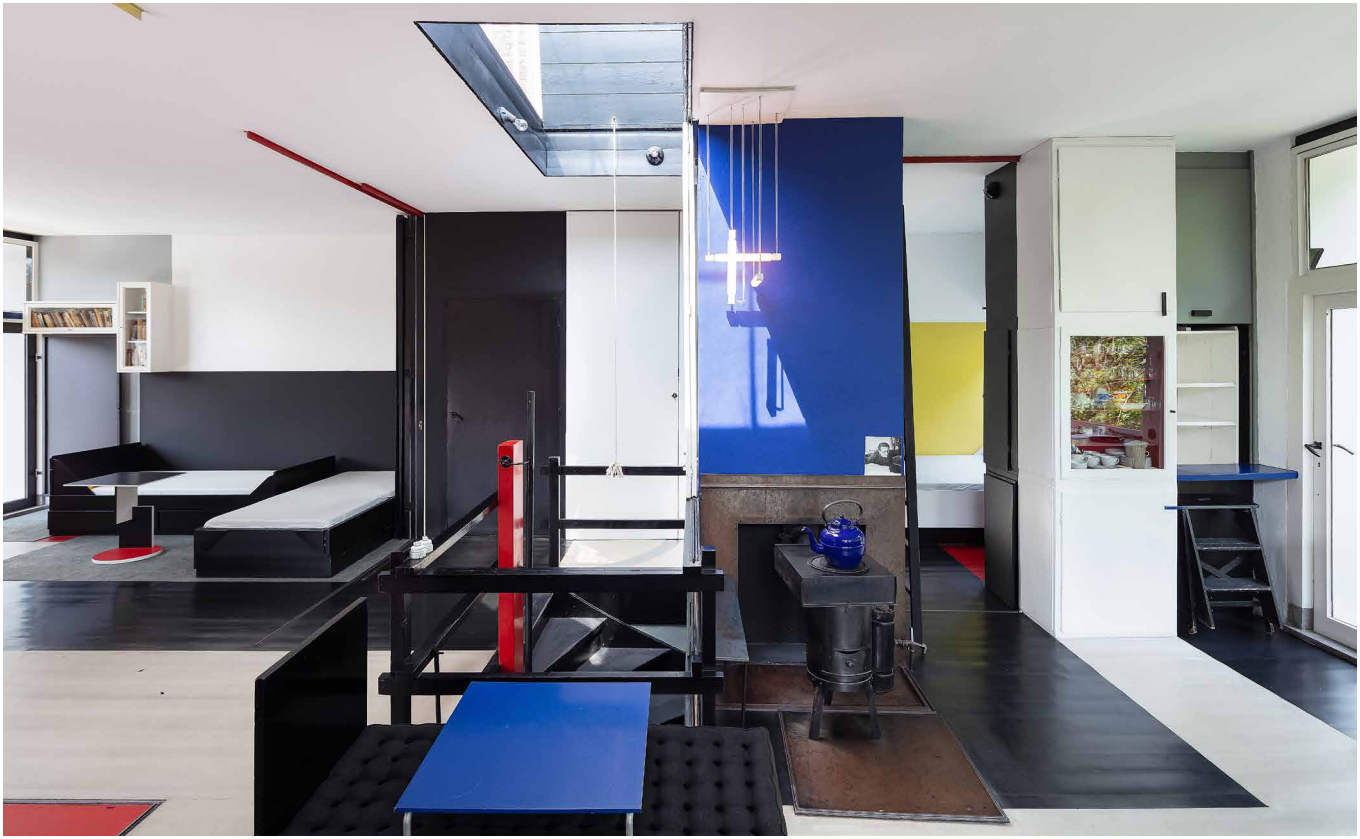

FIG. 4.22 Upper floor interior, girls' room, 2018

Further illumination was provided by typical 1970s desk lamps in black and white. In the 1970s this corner looked fairly empty, but by the 1980s it was filled with books, papers and a television. Other items intended to make life easier for the ageing Schröder were added, such as a magnifying glass and an electric radiator [FIG. 4.19/4.20].

HANNEKE AND MARJAN'S ROOM IN THE MUSEUM HOUSE, 1987 TO THE PRESENT

The beds were made by Mulder based on old photographs and, like Binnert's bed, are displayed with just a mattress and white fitted sheet[FIG. 4.15/4.21/4.22]. There are no coloured pillows or pillow slips. A replica of the divan table stands beside one of the beds and until 2012 an original red military chair stood beneath the window [FIG. 4.21].[57] The wardrobe is original and has always stood there [FIG. 4.21].[58] Behind the wardrobe is the washbasin. A replica of the original lamp hangs from the ceiling. There are no curtains anymore. Hanging on the wall are replicas of the bookcases, filled with books from Schröder's bookcase [FIG. 4.21/4.22]. The books do not date from the early period of the house; their purpose is to convey Schröder's interests and more particularly the function of the cabinets.

FIG. 4.23 Upper floor interior, bathroom with bathtub, c. 1925

FIG. 4.24 Upper floor interior, bathroom with 'lavette', c. 1936

THE BATHROOM, 1926-1925

One of the few items Schröder brought with her from her old house on Biltstraat was a bathtub on legs, a typical late nineteenth-century bath. In her new bathroom the bath was concealed behind wooden partitioning and surrounded by cupboards [FIG. 4.23]. The cupboards were in different colours; the partitioning was light-coloured. Against the right-hand wall was a dark-coloured cupboard with four doors, and to the left a tall cupboard.

THE BATHROOM, 1930S–1980S

In the 1930s, Rietveld modified the bathroom. He removed the cupboards on the left and right sides and put in a modern bathroom-cum-laundry sink unit ('lavette') and a granite washbasin [FIG. 4.24]. He made a new storage space below the washbasin. During the war a nearby explosion caused almost all the glass in the house to break, including the thick frosted glass of the letterbox. Rietveld used remnants of this glass to make two shelves in the bathroom with rounded edges echoing the sinuous edges of the sink unit and the washbasin [FIG. 4.24].

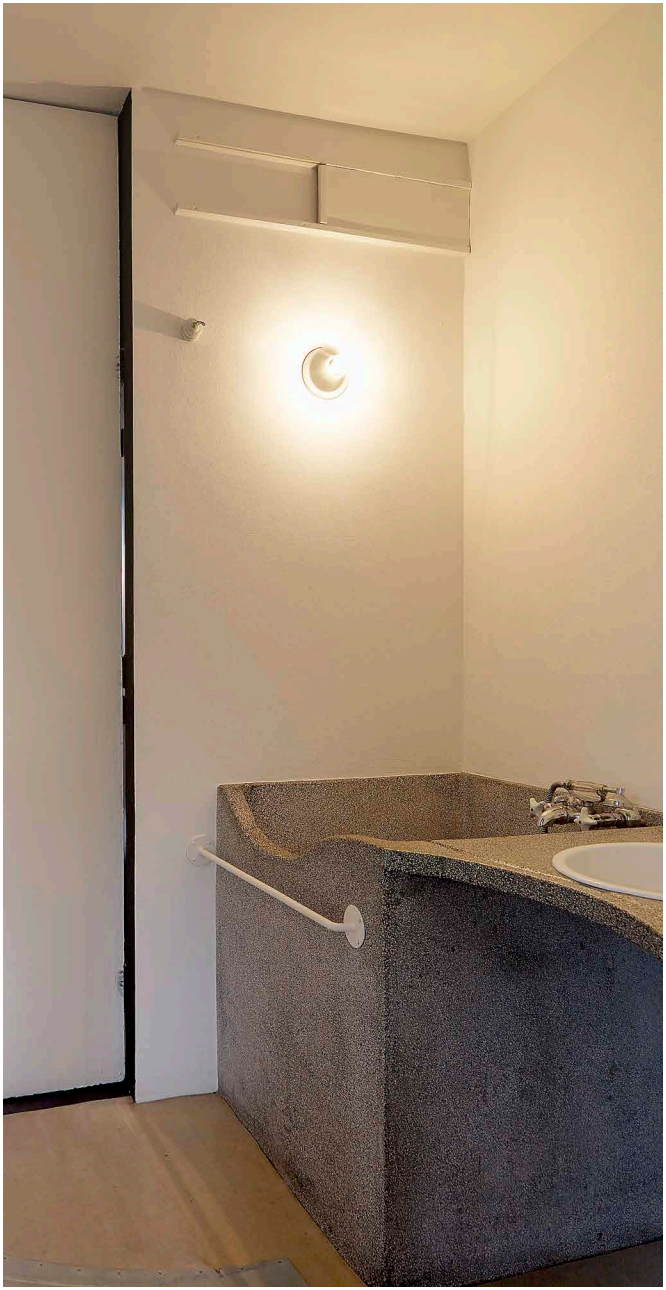

FIG. 4.25 Upper floor interior, bathroom with 'lavette', 2010

THE BATHROOM IN THE MUSEUM HOUSE, 1987 TO THE PRESENT

In 1982 Han Schröder suggested leaving the bathroom as it was and illustrating the old situation with photographs. It was indeed decided to preserve the 1930s bathroom in the museum house [FIG. 4.25]. Both Mulder and Van Zijl stated that this option was chosen because this bathroom was more of a Rietveld design than the original bathroom. To remove it would be to 'remove Rietveld'. The bathroom was so beautiful that it would have made no sense to remove for the sake of recreating the original situation.[59] According to Mulder the bathroom was not an essential element of the spatial picture and was consequently of less importance. Paul Koster endorsed this view at the time in an article in *De Volkskrant*.[60] The bathroom was self-contained and Koster agreed that the interior designed by Rietveld was much more interesting than the anonymous bathtub.

FIRST FLOOR TOILET, 1925-1926

Photographed by Paul Citroen in the 1920s, the toilet was later described by Han as a cosy nook. She suggested making the passage through to the neighbouring house (the visitor centre at Prins Hendriklaan 48) here. And if not, considering reinstating the old toilet design.
Interestingly, the wooden toilet seat was placed crosswise on the toilet, resulting in a larger sitting area.

FIRST-FLOOR TOILET, 1930S–1980S

There is only one early photo of the toilet; thereafter no photographs were taken of this room. At a certain point the toilet was modernized. The washbasin is original, the pipes have been concealed.[61]

FIRST-FLOOR TOILET IN THE MUSEUM HOUSE, 1987 TO THE PRESENT

The modernized toilet was not altered for the museum house. Visitors do not get to see the toilet unless they ask to.

FIG. 4.26 Entrance with lamp and letterbox, c. 1925

FIG. 4.27 Ground floor, hall with letterbox, c. 1925

THE HALL, 1926-1926

Above the entrance hung a simple pear light bulb at the end of a rod [FIG. 4.26]. To the left of the door the number of the house – 50 – was painted in dark numerals.

The letterbox beside the door was made of glass so that it was possible to see from a distance whether there was any mail [FIG. 4.27]. Above and below the letterbox there was space to put things like outdoor toys.

The hall coat stand had two shelves for hats and the like and there were two rods with hooks: a high one for adults and a low one where the children could hang their coats [FIG. 4.28].

To the left of the coat stand was a cast iron umbrella stand. It was ornamental, so Rietveld had attached it to the wall upside down with the plain part at the top so that it looked more modern.

FIG. 4.28 Ground floor, hall with coat stand, c. 1925

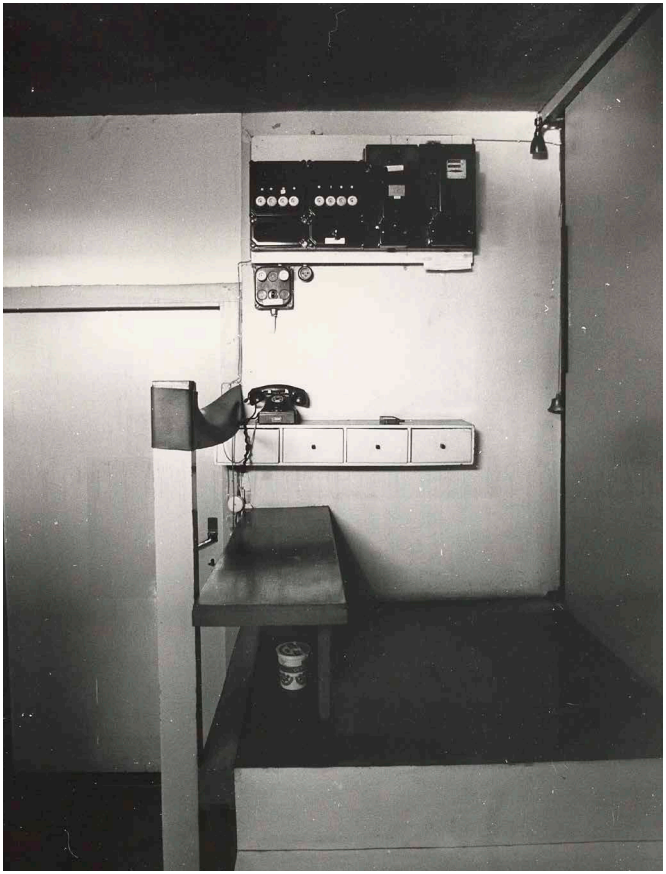

FIG. 4.29 Ground floor, hall with fuse box and platform, undated

Schröder called the space below the platform between the stairs ‘the little landing’. It was where the dirty washing was kept; in a photograph from around 1926 a laundry basket can be seen there.[62] There was a bench with a leather back on the platform. Against the wall was a shelf and below that four small white drawers, one for each member of the household. A telephone stood on the shelf. On the wall hung a dark fuse box [FIG. 4.29]. There were a great many fuses because there were two circuits per room, as back up in case one blew.

THE HALL, 1930S–1980S

The lamp in front of the front door was very important for Truus Schröder; Han Schröder also mentioned it on several occasions. Han was keen for it to be reinstated. The lamp still features in photographs from 1974. The panel in front of the shelving beside the front door is of glass. The original glass had to be replaced after a munitions vehicle exploded nearby during the Second World War. The new sheet of glass was put in upside down, with the result that the letterbox ended up closer to the front door.

FIG. 4.30 Ground floor, hall with fuse box and platform, 2010

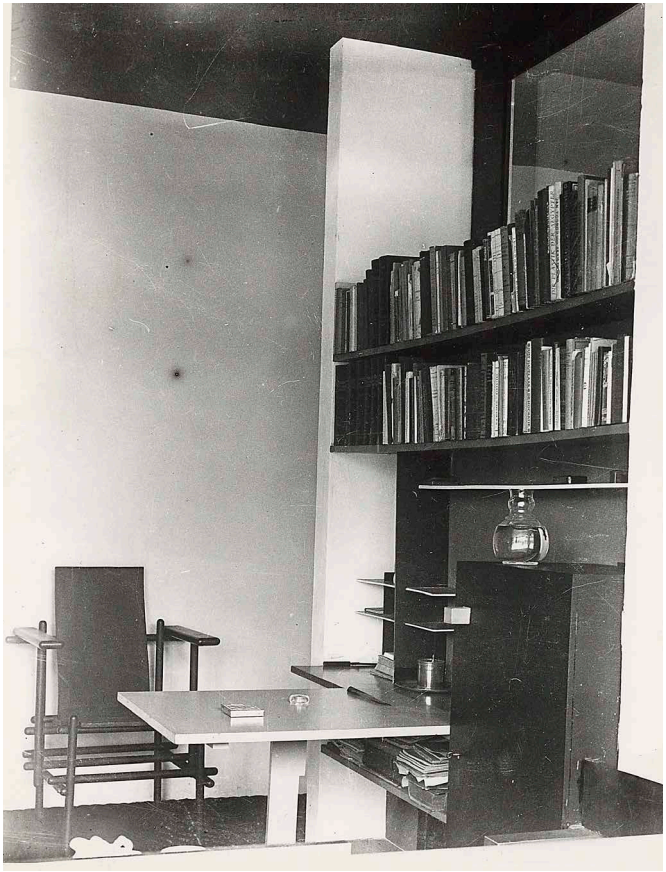

FIG. 4.31 Ground floor, study, c. 1925

FIG. 4.32 Ground floor, study, c. 1925

One clear difference is the fuse box. The original box, which remained in place until the mid 1970s, was black with white fuses. The current fuses are mounted on a pale stone backplate [FIG. 4.30].

THE HALL IN THE MUSEUM HOUSE, 1987 TO THE PRESENT

No attempt was made to find the original fuse box. Mulder explained this by saying that he thought the new pale stone was more attractive.[63] The lamp beside the front door that was so important for Truus and Han was not reinstalled and the glass in front of the shelving/letterbox remained exactly as inserted in the 1940s. The coat and umbrella stands remained unchanged.

THE STUDY, 1925-1926

Schröder called this room the ‘Rietveld room’. She remarked that she considered this the most ‘homely’ room in the house [FIG. 4.31]. There were coarse black curtains [FIG. 4.32], which look like the curtains in the children’s bedrooms [FIG. 4.12]. The space above the window, beneath the balcony was hollow [FIG. 4.32].

FIG. 4.33 Ground floor, study, c. 1974

FIG. 4.34 Ground floor, study, c. 1974

Schröder was irritated by the space and quite early on had it closed off with sliding doors [FIG. 4.33].[64] Among the furniture in this room is the piano chair that originally stood behind the piano upstairs. When it started to creak and intrude on the music it was quickly moved downstairs. We also see the armchair, which was specially designed for this room. In another photo this chair stands beside the dining table.

THE STUDY, 1930S–1980S

The furnishings did not change at all during those years. The shelves became more crowded, chiefly with work by and mementoes of Rietveld. In photographs from 1974 we can see that the shelves are crammed with books and with several architectural and chair models by Rietveld [FIG. 4.34]. Schröder worked on the ground floor organizing the archive.

THE STUDY IN THE MUSEUM HOUSE, 1987 TO THE PRESENT

When the house was opened as a museum, the red chair with sprung seat stood behind the table.[65] In 2006, it was replaced by the black armchair that originally stood here. The piano chair, which had migrated to the study early on, probably stood there for a long time; it appears in the photos taken in the 1970s. Although the piano chair is part of the Centraal Museum's collection, it has not been in the house since 1987.[66] Han Schröder suggested that the foundation should try to find a piano chair to take its place.[67] A few books have been placed on the shelf to indicate that books had once stood here [FIG. 4.35]. There are no curtains.

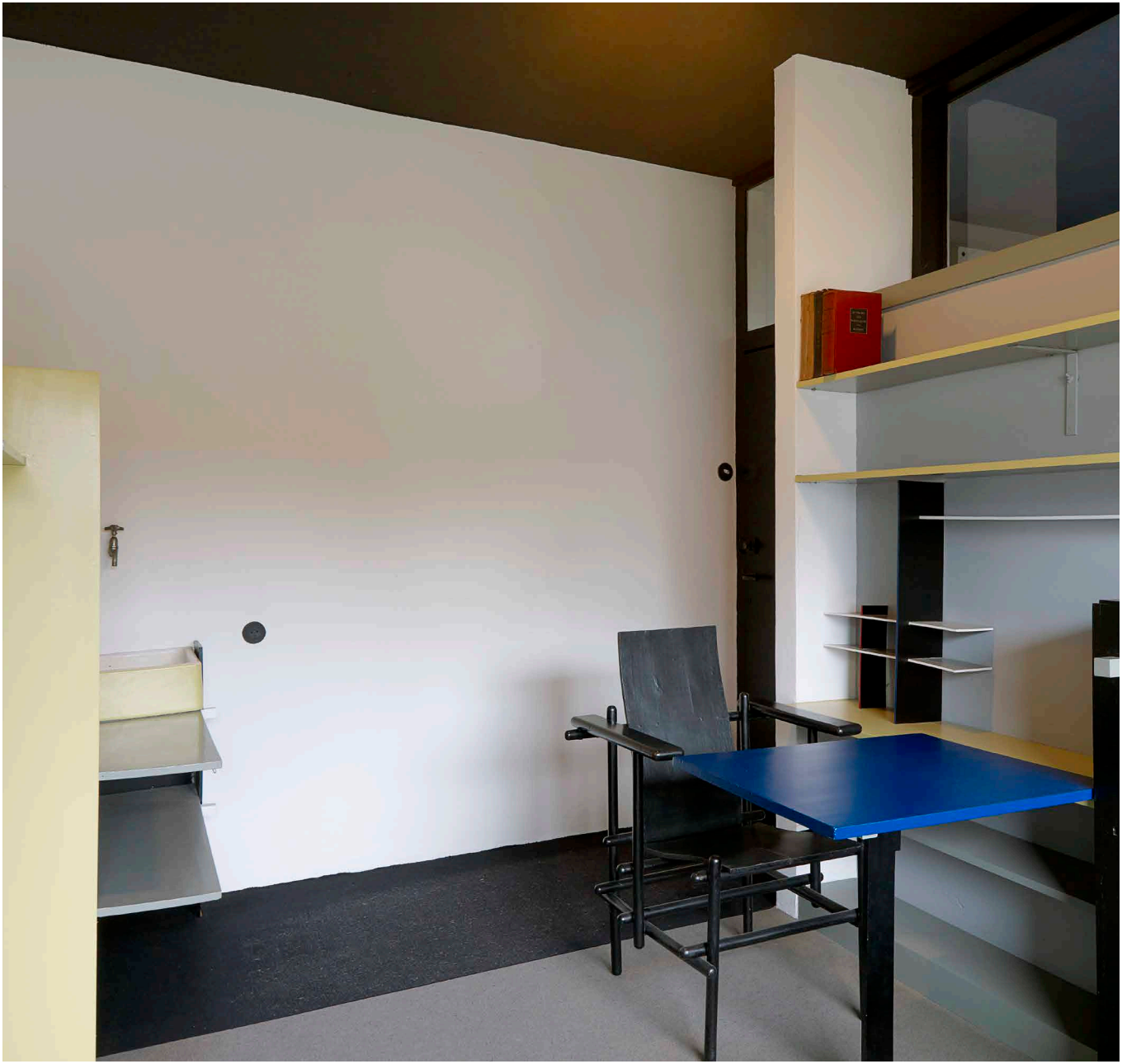

FIG. 4.35 Ground floor, study, c. 2010

FIG. 4.36 Mart Stam and El Lissitzky with Gerrit Rietveld at entrance to studio, 1926

FIG. 4.37 Ground floor, studio, c. 1925

THE STUDIO, 1925-1926

A photo from 1926 shows Mart Stam and El Lissitzky visiting Rietveld [FIG. 4.36]. The visitors are standing in front of the half-opened door of the studio, Rietveld stands on the other side of the door. The photo provides a glimpse into this room. It is just possible to make out artworks hanging on the wall [FIG. 4.36]. Unfortunately, the photo is not sharp enough to identify the works, but they display a close affinity with Theo van Doesburg's designs for La Maison Particulière (1923). At any rate, they are architectural and in the De Stijl mode. Truus Schröder recalled a display case in the studio window space. A photo of the interior [FIG. 4.37] reveals that the window ledge was closed off on the inner side with glass panels with vertical posts. No photograph showing works displayed in the case has been found. We must rely on the memory of Truus Schröder, who said that the window was used as a display case in the early years. Its purpose was to make contact with the outside world and to cultivate understanding for the new. One practical advantage of the display case was that it shielded the interior from the gaze of passers-by. The display case was made of frosted glass mounted in aluminium. Works displayed there included a drawing by Jacob Bendien. The window of the display case could be opened in the room and behind it were blinds.

There was a long table on wheels. In a photo of the interior [FIG. 4.37] there are two black rectangles against the wall and the radiator. They cannot be painted surfaces because they overlap the radiator. They could be wooden panels, possibly used to extend the square table. The light-coloured floor covering consisted of diagonally placed Genemuiden mats.

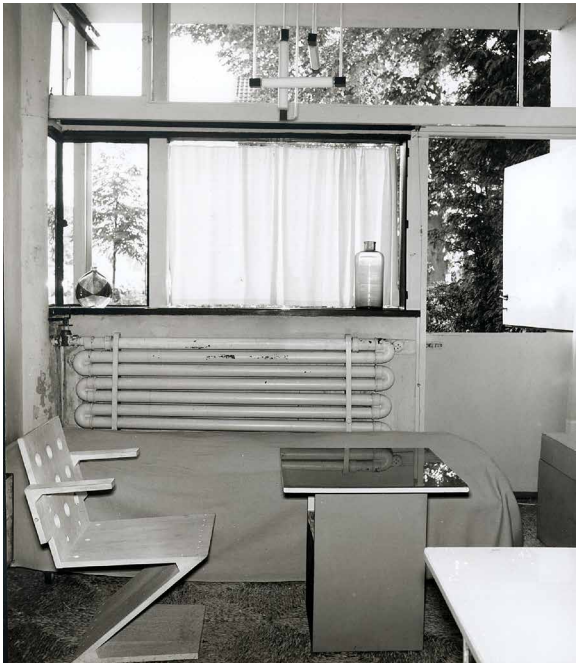

FIG. 4.38 Ground floor, studio, c. 1938

FIG. 4.39 Ground floor, studio, undated

The photograph of the interior shows the studio while Rietveld was still using it. On the desk are a ruler and setsquare and the stackable cabinets designed by Truus Schröder in 1926 are stacked against the wall. The strip lamp hangs in front of the window and behind the work table stands a tube-framed chair. This photo must have been taken after 1926, since Rietveld designed the tube-framed chair in 1927, and before 1933 when Rietveld relocated his office to Oudegracht.

THE STUDIO, 1930S–1980S

The Genemuiden rugs can be seen in photographs from various periods [FIG. 4.38/4.39] when the room served as a bedroom and study for tenants. A bed stood beside the window, there were curtains and Rietveld furniture: the zigzag chair with holes and arm rests, the piano chair and the upright armchair. Rietveld designed the desk in 1931 together with Truus Schröder, but the side table is attributed solely to Schröder.[68] Corrie Nagtegaal rented this space from 1983 to 1985. Not long after Schröder's death in 1987 it was cleared out and the Rietveld Schröder House Foundation gave the furniture on loan to the Centraal Museum.[69] Up to that point, the part of the ground floor rented by Nagtegaal[70] contained the following furnishings: two red military chairs, a black table on steel legs, zigzag chair with holes and arm rests, a desk, a blue side table, a Steltman chair, a hanging lamp consisting of three strip lights with black blocks, a white cupboard from the former kitchen, and on the wall two steel-framed glass display cases (one in grey, the other black).[71]

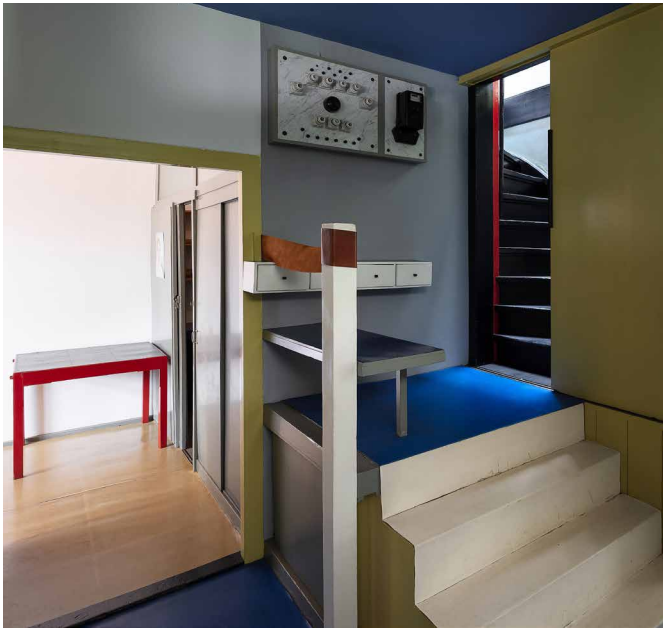

FIG. 4.40 Ground floor, studio, 2018

FIG. 4.41 Ground floor, studio, 2010

THE STUDIO IN THE MUSEUM HOUSE, 1987 TO THE PRESENT

In the first years of the museum house, this room was used for consulting the archives – by staff, researchers or members of the public [FIG. 3.15]. When the Rietveld Schröder Archive was complete, it was transferred to the library of the Centraal Museum at Agnietenstraat 3.[72]

Today the studio is presented with a wooden dining room table [FIG. 3.15] that stood for a long time upstairs in the dining area, together with the zigzag chairs.[73] In the 1980s the table stood in the studio and, according to Ida van Zijl, simply stayed there. The original strip light was still there as was the painting that Elisabeth (Bep) Eskes-Rietveld, Rietveld's daughter, made of Truus Schröder around 1935.[74] There is also a square black table with red base [FIG. 4.40/4.41]. The room is no longer reminiscent of a studio.

The black table stood in this room in 1985 and, like the wooden table, simply remained there. In dimensions and design it looks very like Rietveld's original work table, as seen in an early photo [FIG. 4.37]. It is difficult to determine whether it really is the same table.

IN-BETWEEN ROOM, 1925-1926

There are no early pictures of this room. It was originally Rietveld's darkroom. It does not appear in the blueprint submitted with the building permit application.[75] In the drawing it is part of the studio and identified as 'storage/bicycles etc.'.

The room was set up for developing photographs and films. Rietveld soon added a workbench where he made all kinds of chairs; it was a kind of mini workshop. The deep wardrobe was already there in 1925. The room was also used as a laboratory by the children.

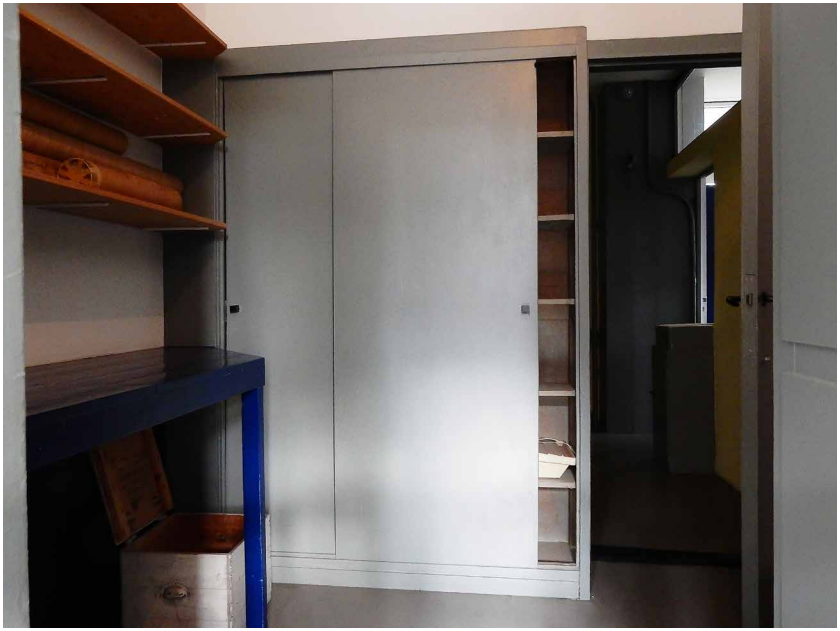

FIG. 4.42 Ground floor, in-between room, 2017

FIG. 4.43 Ground floor, kitchen with deliveries shelf, c. 1925

IN-BETWEEN ROOM, 1930S–1980S

Drawings from the 1950s show a washbasin in this room, which is logical given its darkroom function. When Schröder rented out the ground floor this space became the tenants' cooking and shower space. There was a small counter with cooking facilities on one side and opposite it a shower. This layout is known from drawings in the Bertus Mulder archive.[76]

IN-BETWEEN ROOM IN THE MUSEUM HOUSE, 1987 TO THE PRESENT

From 1987 onwards this room was presented with a blue workbench and no washbasin [FIG. 4.42]. In the open-fronted cupboards are a few (empty) design drawing cylinders and a typewriter. There is nothing to suggest a darkroom; it is more redolent of a storeroom or archive room.

THE KITCHEN, 1925-1926

The most striking thing about this space is the hinged blue deliveries shelf near the window [FIG. 4.43], which was apparently Schröder's idea. Milk and groceries could be handed through the window and placed on the shelf. This was clearly indicated outside on the wall above the window: 'deliveries here' and 'deliveries // ring first, if no answer use speaking tube'.

In the mid 1920s a lamp with a pendulum [FIG. 4.43] hung above the kitchen table. The was also a square red folding table. At least two original military chairs in the colour red were drawn up to the kitchen table [FIG. 4.43]. According to Truus, the worktop was ugly and the sink too deep, but it was a good height. Above the worktop were cupboards with glass sliding doors through which the crockery was visible [FIG. 4.44].

FIG. 4.44 Ground floor, kitchen, c. 1925

Next to the worktop was a dishwasher [FIG. 4.45], a gift from the director of Pegasus, the Utrecht electricity company. Installing such a modern machine in this very modern house was good publicity for the company. There was a free-standing stove [FIG. 4.46] and above it a rack for pots and pans.

The floor was covered with yellowy-brown linoleum, which the thrifty Schröder had brought with her from the old house on Biltstraat.

FIG. 4.45 Ground floor, kitchen with daily help, c. 1925

FIG. 4.46 Ground floor, kitchen, c. 1925

FIG. 4.47 Ground floor, kitchen with Marjan Schröder, c. 1985

THE KITCHEN, 1930S–1980S

From the 1930s onwards, this room was a guest room. It was also let to students. From 1958 to 1964 Rietveld had a workplace here and there was a drawing table. After his death in 1964 it reverted to guest room and archive space. The stove had long since disappeared; likewise the worktop and the wall cupboards above it [FIG. 4.47]. The cupboards beside the door to the help's room and the large standing cupboard at the entrance to the kitchen remained in place throughout all those years.

THE KITCHEN IN THE MUSEUM HOUSE, 1987 TO THE PRESENT

The kitchen worktop and the glass-fronted cupboard were reconstructed, but the two shelves to the right of the cupboard were not [FIG. 4.49].

FIG. 4.48 Ground floor, kitchen, 2005

FIG. 4.49 Ground floor, kitchen, 2018

Crockery and pots and pans were placed in the cupboard to illustrate its function [FIG. 4.48/4.49].

Like the cups and glasses upstairs, these do not date from the early 1920s, but are a medley of household goods found in the house after Truus's death.

Mulder discovered the deliveries shelf under the stair in the hall and had it reinstated, together with the notice on the outside.

The square red table is part of the Centraal Museum collection but has not been returned to the house.[77] Mulder knew of the original table's existence but felt it was too small for a family with three children.[78] Yet the red surface of the table was clearly part of the spatial picture. The decision to replace it with a larger, uncoloured 1930s table design is at odds with the foundation's principles and shows the extent to which Mulder had free rein.

There are now zigzag chairs drawn up to the table [FIG. 4.49].[79] In 1987, two earlier zigzag chairs from upstairs were placed in the kitchen. In 2006, one of these chairs was removed and is now frequently on display in the Centraal Museum. One of the military chairs stands in the kitchen, against the wall where the dishwasher previously stood [FIG. 4.49].[80]

On the spot where the stove stood is a photo of the original stove. There is no longer any hanging lamp.

HELP'S ROOM, 1925-1926

'There were always curtains in this room, green and open-weave,' Schröder recalled.[81] Later, shelves were installed. Perhaps Schröder meant shutters? Or the grey shelf above the radiator [FIG. 4.50]? The floor was yellow but Schröder did not say what kind of material it was.

There is not a single photograph of this room from before 1987. It is the only room of which we have no idea how it looked in the mid 1920s. Nor do we know how the room was used. Perhaps the wash hung here to dry, or the daily help had a rest here now and then, or Rietveld incorporated this room into his studio.[82] In drawings from the 1950s the shape of a single bed or daybed has been sketched.

HELP'S ROOM, 1930S–1980S

Nothing is known about the use to which this room was put during this period, although tenants have remarked that this space was also let and used as a study.

HELP'S ROOM IN THE MUSEUM HOUSE, 1987 TO THE PRESENT

After the house was opened to the public in 1987, there was a door here connecting the ticket office at Prins Hendriklaan 48 with the Schröder House. It was used as entrance and exit by security personnel. This connection was closed off in 2007 when the ticket office was temporarily relocated to Erasmuslaan 5.[83] The room is now shown in an empty state. There is nothing to recall its original function.

THE MUSEUM HOUSE TODAY

When the museum house opened in 1987, Paul van den Akker and Marijke Küper took issue with the restoration, pointing out the downside of the chosen restoration concept. In their view, such a restoration and reconstruction could not but result in a heritage building riddled with historical contradictions.[84] And indeed, when we examine the guiding principles of the refurbishment, many questions about the final design of the museum house arise.

The notions of 'spatial picture' and 'domestic culture' were liberally deployed, but never defined. We may reasonably assume that spatial picture refers to the basic concept of the house, to the form, the colours, the composition and the interplay between inside and outside. But what is meant by domestic culture? Perhaps it means a Spartan lifestyle stripped of everything superfluous. Or is the Rietveld Schröder House actually an example of an extremely modern way of living? For the client and the architect of the restoration it was in any event clear that it was Rietveld and his design that should be visible, not Mrs Schröder. The house should not look as if the occupant had just stepped outside. But in the final phase of the reconstruction, the interior fit-out was supplemented with items designed to illustrate function, such as a book on a bookshelf, or a pot on a pot rack. But why no bottle of milk on the deliveries shelf or inkpots on the desk? And why didn't they abide by the period 1925-1930 when selecting such functional decoration? The furniture, too, is a mixture of original and reconstructed. The originals are now more than ninety years old and have acquired a different patina.

The furnishing of the interior was based on the early series of photographs. But sometimes it was decided to deviate from what could be seen in the images, even when the original furniture was still available.

Whatever the case, it is clear that the extent to which the interior layout is inconsistent, it is because several different principles were employed.

FIG. 4.50 Ground floor, room for the help, 2018