# Collecting Contemporary Home Life

**Mayke Groffen**

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## *Het verzamelen van eigentijdse van eigentijdse wooncultuur*

THESIS

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## Acknowledgements

# Contents

# Introduction

Cultural-history museums have a rich tradition when it comes to home life. Their collections include interior ensembles and single pieces of designer furniture, architectural models and dolls' houses, household tools for daily use and even banners protesting against rent increases. Although collections already in existence are regularly developed, updated and expanded with new heritage, there is little explicit or theoretical focus on the collecting of contemporary home life. This is remarkable, given that 'home' plays a key role in various scientific disciplines. Indeed, whether it be sociology, cultural anthropology, cultural or material-culture studies, social geography or design – they all specialise in the field of living. In *Making Homes* (2017), Sarah Pink et al. describe the importance of the home as follows:

> Home is where we experience significant moments of our lives and celebrate the rituals that punctuate the cycles and rhythms of our social worlds. It is also, importantly, where the intimate and mundane aspects of our lives are lived out. It is the site of those activities that people do not tell others about, perhaps because they are private, because they do not think that they are worth mentioning or because they feel too painful to recount. Yet it is precisely how we habitually live out our lives (...) that contributes to the key societal issues that social scientists and designers alike seek to confront.[1]

### Collecting Home Life

One of the few examples where collection strategies for contemporary home life are the explicit subject-matter is Harriet Purkis' *Collecting the Home in Different Ways* (2014), which is a chapter in a book on contemporary collecting in cultural-history museums. Purkis compares the ethnographic approach of the museums within the Home Pool of the former Swedish SAMDOK network to other perspectives. She first analyses how Swedish museums shifted their focus over three consecutive decades (roughly 1980-2000) from the everyday interiors of the average family to those of a variety of living cultures, and from objects to more intangible elements like consumption, identity and private space.[2] She then compares examples from everyday life studies and material-culture research, demonstrating that

expressions of direct relationships between homes and people's identities, or between things in the home and people's autobiographies, are inadequate in current collections. As Purkis concludes, museums should be inspired by other disciplines to better relate those intangible elements of living to the material culture of the home.[3]

Elin Nystrand von Unge also describes a project run by SAMDOK's Home Pool in the context of contemporary collecting. In contrast to Purkis, Von Unge did not adopt a diachronic approach, but instead provides a detailed description of an early, single project from 1979, including with images that show both the objects collected and the method of collecting. This collecting project is characterised as "a scattered whole", which refers to the multitude of objects and the variety of "translations", i.e., the inventory lists, photographs, punch cards, interviews etc. that describe and document the collected materials. Unlike SAMDOK's other projects at that time, the focus here was on the acquisition of objects, although Von Unge asserts that, in retrospect, the multitude of translations must be viewed as its most distinguishing feature. The extensive descriptions and photographs, she states, were intended to be "tools for objectivity", but in fact became objects in and of themselves.[4]

In 2000, inspired by the early strategy of the SAMDOK Home Pool, the Detmold Open-Air Museum set out to collect a representative sample of six children's rooms in Westfalen, Germany. Like the early ethnographic method, the focus was on selecting the participants. Its collection now comprises the totality of the objects obtained for each of the six rooms. For documentary purposes, the museum also conducted interviews and sourced floor plans and other materials. Unlike SAMDOK, however, the Detmold Open-Air Museum defined its own pragmatic framework. Seemingly relieved, the catalogue states that the collecting process did not have to take the views or collections of any collaborative partners into account.[5]

### Contemporary Collecting

Although the Swedish Home Pool inspired the Detmold Open-Air Museum, and possibly also many others, the cooperative model that it once proposed as a joint approach to contemporary collecting has rarely been imitated. In *Museums in a Troubled World* (2009), Robert R. Janes suspects that the degree of collaboration required is simply too daunting for many individualistically oriented Western museums.[6] My own view is that the necessary long-term commitment required and the

heterogeneity of collections also play a part in this. Nevertheless, the growing uniformity of Dutch cities[7] and the recurring plea to regard the Netherlands as one metropolis, as well as the increasing demand for manageable museum ensembles, could lead to the development by the country's city museums of a joint perspective on the creation of an overarching collection of urban living culture.

The Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency advises on national monuments and valuable interiors at a national level, but this mainly involves historic interiors under threat. The agency's criteria include unity, completeness, style purity, rarity and historical importance, and thus concern retrospective and art-historic perspectives.[8] These criteria are not, however, particularly helpful in relation to the choice of contemporary objects from a social-historic perspective. Current discussions about collecting in cultural-history museums adopt a more 'common' and a more 'contemporary' stance, in which relevance is no longer exclusively defined in terms of uniqueness, artistry or eminence, but also encompasses the ordinary and the everyday and their wide variety.

Selecting objects from the present hints at a proactive collecting policy, in which a museum develops a strategy for how it will obtain objects. In contrast, current valuation methods tend to be employed to make statements about specific objects. The approaches in the commonly used Australian *Significance* guide and *Op de museale weegschaal* (translated as *Assessing Museum Collections*), for example, seek to determine as a *first* step which objects, or group of objects, are going to be assessed; in active contemporary collecting, however, such decisions are, in fact, outcomes of previous choices and, therefore, one of the *final* stages in the process.

### Hesitancy

There is little scholarly literature on collecting contemporary home life, and nor does museum practice provide a template. While Von Unge and the Detmold Open-Air Museum value the well-structured and elaborate method adopted by SAMDOK, Purkis emphasises changes in the Swedish approach and suggests that museums should find ways to better relate the intangible aspects of living to the material culture of the home. In reasoning the opposite viewpoint, I would argue that it is the material objects that distinguish the museum as a "mixed media archive"[9] from other collections and the act of collecting deserves consideration. Should this collecting be done literally with the acquisition of complete interiors, each

consisting of thousands of objects and given an equally extensive file of descriptions? What alternative strategies can be examined and how would they affect a museum's collection?

Discussions about contemporary collecting in cultural-history museums generally take place at a higher level of abstraction, unrelated to home interiors or any other specific area of interest. The pursuit of richly varied collections and the goal of shaping them in a participatory manner are oft-debated issues, with a particular interest in stories and intangible heritage. The abundance of potentially relevant materials is paradoxically combined with a demand for manageable collections, but the lack of up-to-date selection criteria also makes contemporary collecting a very difficult task. Meanwhile, among curators, the many doubts about choosing the right objects and stories and, indeed, whether they are even the right person to do so, lead to a very reserved approach to active contemporary collecting.

This hesitancy is what motivated me to conduct this research into collecting contemporary home life, which is one of the wider aspects within my remit as a curator of Modern Urban Culture at the city museum of Rotterdam. Inevitably, my profession and experiences within the museum world will have an impact on the research. It thus seems to me to be better to explicate this bias where necessary, rather than trying to not use the experience I have acquired. The study will repeatedly reflect

1 ___ Pink et al. 2017: 1.
2 ___ Purkis 2014: 178-186.
3 ___ Ibid. 200-201.
4 ___ Von Unge 2019: 127-160 and 234-235 (English summary).
5 ___ Carstensen & Richartz 2010: 7.
6 ___ Janes 2009: 87.
7 ___ Abrahamse, Mil & Rutte 2014: 237, 241-256. In 2014, the *Atlas van de Verstedelijking* (Atlas of Urbanisation) concluded that cities in the Netherlands are increasingly similar. Since 1950, several memoranda on spatial planning have defined where and when cities should expand, and how their new neighbourhoods should be designed. These policy notes mark the different phases in post-war urban development: the Modernist urban expansions of the reconstruction period, the smaller-scale 'cauliflower' neighbourhoods with their winding paths and courtyards of the 1970s and 1980s, followed by the Vinex neighbourhoods with thematic residential areas between 1995 and 2005. As the authors state, Dutch cities have converged in terms of both size and appearance.
8 ___ Website https://www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/onder werpen/interieurs/waarderen-en-in-stand-houden-van-interieurs (last viewed 25 January, 2021).
9 ___ Purkis 2014: 198.

on both the collections and methods of working at Museum Rotterdam. Some readers will easily recognise elements, while for others questions may arise. I regard this as a positive. Indeed, it is my hope that this dissertation will give rise to a more in-depth debate about collecting contemporary home life in cultural-history museums. At the same time, I would like to help museum professionals to develop a sound collecting strategy and perhaps even explore mutual cooperation in the field. At a more theoretical level, with my findings my goal is to contribute to a reconsideration of important topics within museology, such as materiality, representation and participation.

**Evocative Ensembles**

In my search for a strategy for collecting contemporary home life, my focus is on what is probably the most debated and most reviled museum tradition in relation to home interiors: the period room. Originating in the 1870s, these constructed home interiors soon became emblematic in presentations of both decorative arts and social history. Recent examples show a renewed interest in contextual displays, either as stylish artistic interiors or socio-historical depictions of everyday life. They often involve artists' temporary installations or smaller assemblages in exhibitions, with the historically charged term 'period room' carefully avoided and reference instead made to 'evocative ensembles', 'immersive settings' or 'scenography'.

Although the period room is an eminently museological way of contextualising objects in an immersive setting, the concept has never been discussed in relation to collecting contemporary home life. This is remarkable given that, outside the museum, furniture stores, construction firms and estate agents try to seduce potential buyers using modern period-room-like displays. Consequently, my empirical research will examine three cases where commercial companies construct such contemporary domestic interiors:

- IKEA's room settings: the staged home interiors of world's largest furniture retailer.
- BAM's Homestudios: a limited collection of yet to be built houses, both exteriors and interiors, by the Dutch construction firm BAM.
- The funda House: a big-data dwelling created by combining information on actual purchases and web searches on funda.nl, the largest property website in the Netherlands.

These three cases reflect collections that differ in size, scope and materiality. Nevertheless, despite their differences, all the cases are representations of contemporary home life and are studied as a series of modern domestic ensembles that echo the concept of a period room. As an instrumental comparative case study, the cross-case comparison aims to uncover successful strategies for collecting contemporary home life that can be used by social-history museums into the future.

Accordingly, the main research question of this dissertation is: What insights into the museological collecting of contemporary home life can be acquired from the ideas and practices identified in the study's three cases?

**Overview**

There are three parts to this dissertation: the Theory, the Comparative Case Study and the Strategy. The first of these examines the two concepts underlying my research, i.e., contemporary collecting and the collecting of home life by museums.

Chapter 1 aims to establish starting points and identify important issues in contemporary collecting. As the topic is typically discussed at a higher level of abstraction and unrelated to domestic interiors, the chapter's gaze is on collecting the present on a meta-level. It first questions the definition of contemporary collecting and its relationship to museum collections and collecting in general, before then turning to the reasons for contemporary collecting and museum practices. As will become apparent, contemporary collecting is now considered to be an essential museum task, though collecting practices, purposes and even definitions vary.

Chapter 2 highlights the period room as an eminently museological way to contextualise objects in an immersive setting. Two main room types are distinguished to enable consideration of how this typology affects collecting and displays. After examining the various histories of and turning points for the period room, the chapter also scrutinises its recent revival. Examples of recently constructed interior ensembles illustrate the latest conceptions of this museum tradition. Arguing that its recent reappraisal is linked to highly valued aspects of contemporary collecting, Chapter 2 finally proposes the period room as a model for the collecting of contemporary home life.

The second part of the book contains the comparative case study. It opens with an introduction to the empirical research, before then explaining in more detail the design of the case study, including the framework built to evaluate the cases and the selection of the cases themselves.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 then provide in-depth descriptions of the cases selected to replicate the museological concept of a contemporary period room: IKEA's room settings, BAM's Homestudios and the funda House. Each chapter has a similar structure. After a brief introduction, the methods and underlying ideas behind the ensemble(s) are presented from the company's point of view, thus situating the staged home interior squarely in its original context. Next, the within-case theme analysis highlights four case-specific themes that relate the case to museum collecting. Where the body of the case description contains relatively uncontested data, the themes are directed towards encouraging debate, i.e., they explore the issues from a museum curator's perspective, aiming to understand their relevance for collecting contemporary home life in a museum context.

In the third and final part of the book, the insights gained are used to build a strategy for museums in their collecting of contemporary home life and the findings made are discussed on a higher level.

Chapter 6 sets out to synthesise the within-case findings on a higher level of abstraction. Structured around the five wider, overarching themes of the previously established framework, the cross-case theme analysis examines both replicative and divergent findings. In particular, it compares previous within-case outcomes, discusses differences and similarities and develops preliminary insights further. Each section concludes with a synthesis, containing several recommendations regarding the collection of contemporary home life by city museums.

The final chapter organises the insights gained, thus initiating a strategy for a proactive contemporary collecting policy. Distinguishing between a number of levels and steps, it particularly highlights elements that merit further debate. Consequently, the Conclusion & Discussion should not be seen as a final piece, but as a starting point for additional conversations and, hopefully, closer cooperation in this field.

Throughout the book, examples from Museum Rotterdam are laid out differently. Arranged in order of acquisition and described in a number of keywords, they depict fragments of the museum's cultural-historical collection relating to domestic interiors and home life. The illustrations visualise the museological paradigm that inspired my research and which, in fact, forms the fourth case in the dissertation. The choice of examples is, however, a personal one, and my fellow curators might well have presented a different series.

**1869**

Wooden chair from the study of poet Hendrik Tollens (Rotterdam 1780-Rijswijk 1856).

**11317**

# Theory

1

# Contemporary Collecting



1.1 This image is of the author's personal blog and photo on Instagram, which was where fellow citizens in Rotterdam were invited to share their experiences of working from home during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. Like many other museums, social media was used to call on people to participate in the collecting process. Contemporary collecting is not so much about preserving an endangered past as it is about selecting the relevant present. Moreover, relevance is no longer defined in terms of uniqueness or artistry, but instead stresses the ordinary, the everyday and their wide variety.
Source: Museum Rotterdam, screenshot Instagram (11 June 2020).

The coronavirus pandemic in 2020 led many to feel they were participating in a historic event. Globally, cultural institutions of all kinds began to collect a vast array of material, often using social media to call on fellow citizens to get involved in the collection process. Huge numbers of objects were collected in just a few months, including photographs of changed rituals, Facebook posts by people in isolation, testimonies on new services offered by creative entrepreneurs, mandatory signs in the public space and face masks. Like many other institutions, Museum Rotterdam began to collect objects reflecting the suddenly changed life in the city. Motivated by a long-cherished desire to highlight the worlds of present-day homeworkers, one of our initiatives aimed to document what this was actually like in Rotterdam during the first lockdown. A number of blogs, written by the museum's curators, aimed to encourage participation by providing examples and personalising the institution. Using the hash tag *#thuiswerkplek010* (in which 010 references Rotterdam's area code and 'thuiswerkplek' translates as 'home office'), we invited the city's inhabitants to capture and post images of their home office on social media, as well as share their experiences of working from home, maintaining contact with colleagues, home schooling and sharing space with family members.

Such a call on fellow citizens to capture everyday life and share their moments of happiness or concern with a museum seems far removed from previous collecting strategies, which have tended to focus on preserving an endangered past and favoured unique or important objects. In 1975, for example, Museum Rotterdam acquired stylish oak dining furniture and accessories from a grand home in the city. These items, which were made by the progressive furniture manufacturer Labor Omnia Vincit and were bought from a Rotterdam arts and crafts showroom in 1921, had been in use until the death of the home's owners, after which their heirs approached the museum with an offer to sell some of them and donate others. And this is what occurred: the ensemble was acquired and then documented in the necessary paperwork and a colour photograph was taken showing the dining room as it was in 1975. Precisely why the purchase was made is not recorded, but was probably for style-historical reasons. The furnishings represent the rather austere and sober design of Dutch *Nieuwe Kunst* (Art Nouveau). They also form an authentic ensemble, a unity bound by buyer, seller and producer. The modern colour television, which is clearly visible in the photo, was omitted from the museum collection. An assessment of value conducted in 2008-2009 concluded that parts of the

ensemble were of national importance, and the accompanying memo describes it as testimony to the good taste of 'well-to-do' citizens, complementing previously acquired Louis Seize, neo-Rococo, neo-Empire and Art Nouveau collections.[1]

Home interiors are still acquired and preserved in a similar fashion. In the Netherlands, the Cultural Heritage Agency advises on valuable interiors, which in practice relates mainly to historic examples under threat. The agency's website describes how it determines whether an interior does, or does not, qualify as cultural heritage, mentioning valuation criteria that include unity, completeness, stylistic purity, craftsmanship, artistry, condition, rarity, historic importance and narrative capacity.[2] Although such criteria may be valid from an art-historic perspective, they are



| 1.2 |
|---|

This somewhat discoloured photograph of a dining room in 1975 documents the acquisition of the discussed ensemble. The furniture and accessories, which had all been bought at the same time from a Rotterdam arts and crafts showroom in 1921, reflect the tastes of 'well-to-do' citizens and represent the rather austere and sober design of Dutch Art Nouveau. In current discussions about collecting home life, the perspective is often more 'contemporary' as well as more 'common'.
Source: Museum Rotterdam (documentation stored with the inventory number 31520 (1975)).

less appropriate for the contemporary collecting now being debated by museums of cultural history.

In current discussions about collecting, the viewpoint is both more 'common' and more 'contemporary'. Indeed, today's process is not so much about preserving the endangered past as it is about selecting the relevant present, which is no longer exclusively defined in terms of uniqueness, eminence or artistry, but also encompasses the ordinary and the everyday and their wide variety. It is important to note that most of the debate on contemporary collecting takes place at a higher level of abstraction, which is unrelated to home interiors or any specific area of interest. As a consequence, the rest of this chapter sets aside the domain of home life, instead turning the gaze to collecting the present on a meta-level. Examined first is what is understood by contemporary collecting and how this relates to collections and collecting in general. Next, the focus shifts to the purposes of contemporary collecting, before collecting practices and the controversies underlying relevant debates are addressed. It will be demonstrated that, although contemporary collecting by museums is now considered to be a key task, collecting practices, purposes, and even definitions, vary. In so doing, the aims are to establish starting points and identify important issues in contemporary collecting.

# Defining Contemporary Collecting

## Collections and collecting

Museums, collections and collecting are closely related. In fact, in 1946, the very first definition of a museum by the International Committee of Museums (ICOM) equated the institution to a collection. This definition has been revised repeatedly since then and is currently being reviewed again, although collections are still at its heart. Indeed, according to this international standard, acquisition, conservation, research, communication and presentation are considered to be core tasks, and all of them are applicable to collections.

Although collections are fundamental to a museum, ideas on what they might include have changed over time. While a collection originally related exclusively to material culture, whether artefacts or specimens, today it could equally comprise aspects of an intangible cultural heritage. This marriage is not without its issues. Some argue that material objects are what is special about museums. Steven Lubar, for example, is clear in *Inside the Lost Museum* (2017) that museums need objects to provide evidence and tell a bigger story, with these objects being their distinguishing feature.[3] In *The Return to Curiosity* (2016), Nicolas Thomas also considers material things to be at the core of a museum's purpose. Thomas elaborates on the dual nature of objects, which combine physical immediacy with "significant ambiguity", with the latter referring to the multiple meanings and types of knowledge that

1 ___ The objects included in this ensemble were registered separately (documentation stored with the inventory number 31520). Additional information includes a separate entry in the accessions register on 15 May 1975. The results of the assessment of value are recorded in the museum's database. The accompanying memo was written by curator Liesbeth van der Zeeuw in 2008 and revised in August 2018 as part of a statement justifying a deaccessioning proposal.
2 ___ Website https://www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/onderwerpen/interieurs/waarderen-en-in-stand-houden-van-interieurs (last viewed 25 January, 2021).
3 ___ Lubar 2017: 14-16.

objects can contain. "Material culture, in the museum setting, can be rich and suggestive", he writes, "but is also, paradoxically, unprescriptive: it stimulates and enables the imagination".[4] Others claim dominance for intangible heritage, following Laurajane Smith's adage that "all heritage is intangible" (2011). In *Museums and Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2020), for instance, Marc Jacobs argues that heritage is not about things, and warns against those who see intangible values as mere byproducts of monuments, objects or locations. Nevertheless, the safeguarding of material culture may be necessary, Jacobs concludes, not for its own sake, but to *express* the living, intangible heritage.[5]

Materiality will be a recurring theme in this dissertation, but is not the only element highlighted in the concept of a collection. Indeed, it is also important to recognise that museums have purposefully selected and assembled (series of) objects to build their collections. In this way, they differ from, for example, more organically grown archival fonds or archaeological finds. Albeit slightly abbreviated, the ICOM publication *Key Concepts of Museology* (2010) defines the concept of a collection as a set of material or intangible objects which have been assembled, selected, classified and preserved in a safe setting. Moreover, the publication adds, these sets of objects must form a relatively coherent and meaningful whole.[6]

Collecting can simply refer to the acquisition of tangible and intangible objects, but is nowadays more often used to describe the wider process of how a museum develops a collection, which includes the acquisition, classification, preservation, and even the presentation of objects, as well as deaccessioning policies like repatriation and responsible disposal. *A Companion to Museum Studies* defines collecting as "a practice in which the intention is to create a collection". This definition might seem tautological, the book explains, but also claims that it helps to "identify a distinctive type of object-oriented activity in which items are selected in order to become part of what is seen as a specific series of things, rather than for their particular use-values or individualized symbolic purposes."[7] Although elements of the wider process are occasionally discussed, in this thesis collecting is likened to such a selection of objects.

Given the importance attached to collecting, it may come as no surprise that it has been assessed critically. Indeed, it has become obvious that collections embody ideologies and that collecting is not a neutral act: by choosing objects, museum professionals, and especially museum curators, are 'making history'; they are deciding what will officially be retained for the future and, as a consequence, what will be omitted.[8] Meanwhile, critical questions about the objects collected and the methods of collecting them have led to the growing interest of museums in present-day society.

## Democratisation, contextualisation, visitor-orientation and activism

The orientation of museums towards the present can be explained using four different, albeit closely related, developments: democratisation, contextualisation, visitor-orientation and activism. The first three emerged in numerous museological publications and are embedded in various contexts, described in diverse terms and connected with slightly different periods of time. My choice of terminology and chronology largely draws on *Die Musealisierung der Gegenwart* (The Musealisation of the Present, 2014), which was published following a conference on contemporary collecting by social-history museums in Germany and the Netherlands. Although the publication mentions 'commercialisation' as a separate stage preceding visitor-orientation, in my view it has served predominantly as a catalyst for a focus on visitors and, as a result, the two phases have been combined in this dissertation. [9] My addition of a fourth development is prompted by museums' more recent, overt pursuit of societal change, which situates them even more strongly in the present.

The democratisation of museums began at the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s, following criticism that they were elitist and irrelevant. Museums thus started to pay more attention to everyday life, widening their scope from high culture to broader, more societal issues.[10] The focus of the newly founded Swedish museum network SAMDOK on working life in an industrialised society is a good example of this change of direction, as are Fred Schroeder's plea to acknowledge popular culture and the, then provocative, exhibitions on mass culture at the Municipal Museum of The Hague in the Netherlands.[11] Then, from the 1980s onwards, questions were raised about representation, identity politics, relevance and the authority of museums. These issues were clearly expressed in Peter Vergo's introduction to *New Museology* (1989), which is how the new approach became known.[12]

Contextualisation has been pinpointed as the second development turning museums towards the present. After the long-term dominance of modernist, object-centred presentations, museums have, from the 1990s onwards, increasingly collected and presented items in contextual settings. Functional contexts demonstrate the former type of use, and are often presented with biographies of the previous owners and the attribution of meanings. Interviews, photographs and videos have become important for documenting relationships to objects and, as stated by Elpers and Palm, have also brought the present into the museum setting.[13] Moreover, contextualisation has been identified as a decisive break from traditional museology, given its clarification that the meaning of objects is not static or inherent, but has to be understood as situated and contextual.[14]

Visitor-orientation has also been recognised as an important driver behind museums' growing interest in the present. As Elpers and Palm explain, the 1980s and 90s' boom and then reductions in funding meant that museums had to attract more visitors. They therefore attempted to entice new and bigger crowds by connecting with contemporary topical issues. At a later stage, from the 1990s onwards, museums began to view the *experiences* of diverse audiences as reference points – first in relation to exhibitions and then also in terms of participatory collecting practices.[15] The shift towards the notion of a public-oriented museum has led to greater engagement with people and coincided with a gradual move away from objects.[16] Visitors were assigned different roles in this process. Akker & Legêne have summarised how the perception of them changed: from passive observers to users, i.e., people interacting with objects, and then to participants, namely people involved in the construction of meaning.[17] This process has become even more apparent since museums engaged with intangible heritage in the 2000s. Although the concept of intangible cultural heritage does not dismiss material objects, its primary concern is the celebration of the immaterial elements associated with them. It is *living* heritage and is, by definition, situated in the present.[18]

Finally, I propose a fourth development that places the institution even more in the here and now: activism. Recent publications highlight the soft power of cultural heritage and suggest that museums should be relevant to the communities they serve. While this kind of critical engagement was met with scepticism only a decade ago, attitudes are now slowly changing, as Robert Janes and Richard Sandell write in their preface to *Museum Activism* (2019): museums are showing an increasing willingness to take responsibility as "knowledge-based, social institutions".[19] Such an overt strive for societal change certainly underlies the 2019 proposal for a new ICOM definition. Developed in discussions with numerous national and thematic committees, the revised definition concludes with the phrase that museums intend "to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing." This idealist proposal is, however, controversial, and the vote on whether it will be accepted, scheduled for the Extraordinary General Assembly in Kyoto 2019, has been postponed.

In Swedish museums of cultural history, societal change is an underlying aim of contemporary collecting practices, as Elin Nystrand von Unge asserts in her recent study *Samla samtid* (2019). Von Unge argues that participatory collecting is conducted performatively, and since such practices require instant communication via social media, they have to claim a presence in the public space. In short: museums need "to be *present* in the present".[20]

## The present and contemporary collecting

Democratisation, contextualisation, visitor orientation and activism have led to a growing interest in the present and can be regarded as important drivers of contemporary collecting. Yet how is the present understood? Furthermore, how can contemporary collecting be defined and what makes it different from collecting in general?

As previous studies lack a common definition, it is vital to consider the meaning of *contemporary* within the concept of contemporary collecting. As far back as 1980, SAMDOK proposed distinguishing between the present and the contemporary, defining both terms as follows:

4 —— Thomas 2016: 49-53; quote from page 53.
5 —— Jacobs 2020: 47-49.
6 —— Desvallées & Mairesse 2010: 26.
7 —— Macdonald 2011: 82.
8 —— See, for instance, Kavanagh in Knell 1999: 79, 86; Carbonell 2004: 311; Macdonald 2011: 4, Smith 2011:9.
9 —— Elpers & Palm 2014: 15-18.
10 —— Ibid. 15.
11 —— Rosander 1980, Schroeder 1981, and Overduin 1981.
12 —— Macdonald 2011: 2-4.
13 —— Elpers & Palm 2014: 16.
14 —— Macdonald 2011: 2.
15 —— Elpers & Palm 2014: 16-17.
16 —— Purkis 2014: 186.
17 —— Van den Akker & Legêne 2016: 8.
18 —— Blake 2020: 26-27, Jacobs 2020: 47-49.
19 —— Janes & Sandell 2019: [xxvii].
20 —— Von Unge 2019: 236-237, 238.

**1913**

Previously acquired using an artistic perspective, today's emphasis is on the coherence of the interior (1731-1733) and Van Belle's family history.

**36417**

*By* present day *is meant the period which has a cultural structure largely similar to that of today, i.e., just now the period since about 1950, while* contemporary *is the present moment and – from the practical aspect – a year or so back in time.*[21]

These definitions have not, however, been widely adopted. A survey conducted by the UK's Social History Curators' Group in 2012 revealed that some respondents used a specific timespan – varying from three to ten years – to define *contemporary,* while others were less specific.[22] An earlier, small-scale survey conducted by Rhys (2014) indicated an even wider time period, with responses ranging from the last five, 20 or 30 years to after WWII and an even broader definition of 'within living memory'. Rhys himself then defined contemporary as "the current time", "happening now" or "the immediate past".[23]

This variety is also found in the previously mentioned *Die Musealiserung der Gegenwart*, in which the authors attempt to define *the present*. In accordance with, but not referring to, SAMDOK, the introduction argues that cultural-history museums often regard the present as an open-ended period that starts with certain political, economic, social or cultural changes, which depend on the particular museum's perspective. As a consequence, the present might start with the post-war reconstruction of the 1950s, the mass consumption of the 1960s or the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989.[24] A distinction between 'the present' and 'contemporary' has not, however, been described.

In my view, the essence of *contemporary collecting* does not benefit from the establishment of temporal boundaries of the present or from distinguishing between 'the present' and 'contemporary'; instead, contemporary collecting can be better understood in terms of the contrast to retrospective collecting, as suggested by Meijer-van Mensch & De Wildt in their contribution to *Die Musealiserung der Gegenwart*. While the latter implies historical distance in selecting mainly individual and de-contextualised objects, this is lacking in the former, where choices are made without a critical distance from the original context of creation or use.[25]

It is precisely the absence of historical distance and the resulting issues with selection and assessing value that characterise the main conceptual challenge of contemporary collecting. The 2012 survey among social-history curators mentioned above expresses this anxiety:

*A common view is that all museum collecting is predicated on the idea that the material acquired has an innate cultural significance or value which justifies the institution bestowing special status on it, and dedicating the necessary resources to document, preserve and, in due course, display and interpret it. Furthermore, it has been assumed that such an assessment of cultural significance is often possible only after a period of time has elapsed and a consensus has formed. As a consequence, contemporary collecting usually means collecting material without this agreement from peers and so is an activity which presents risks (...).*[26]

As it has already become evident that meaning is contextual rather than inherent, it is improbable that something like "innate cultural significance" exists. Nonetheless, this quotation does suggest that the selection criteria used in retrospective collecting no longer suffice, and that cultural significance has to be assessed in a different way. Moreover, the second part of the quote hints that the selection of objects can be a somewhat objective process if steered by professional, curatorial expertise. It is precisely this conception that has been disputed over recent decades, and curators' contested authority will feature in Section 1.3 as one of the key issues in debates on contemporary collecting. The next section, however, examines the purposes of contemporary collecting. If it is so difficult, why do museums want to embark on the process?

# Purposes of Contemporary Collecting

In defining contemporary collecting and examining the orientation of cultural-history museums towards the present, it is clear that this has largely been driven by the goal of increasing their social relevance and that new criteria are required if they are to achieve this new purpose. This section will argue that this purpose can be viewed on two levels: the development of inclusive collections and, at a later point, how such collections will be used.

## Inclusive collections: diversity & participation

Although there are many reasons for the contemporary collecting practices of cultural-history museums, their purpose can be traced back to two basic ideas. In the first of these, the motivation is the desired outcome: creating a diverse, multi-faceted collection. In the introduction to *Collecting the Contemporary* (2014), Owain Rhys and Zelda Baveystock describe the rationale of contemporary collecting as follows:

*Contemporary collecting attempts to rectify past omissions, to give voice to those previously ignored, and to capture a fuller, more nuanced record of society whilst material is abundantly available. It seeks to future-proof the museum for as-yet-unknown exhibitions and research.*[27]

This goal originated in the desire to produce a more democratic depiction of society. Museums began to pay more attention to daily life around 1970 and, in doing so, both mass and popular culture slowly became part of their presentations and collections. Initially, criteria like 'ordinary', 'common', 'typical' and 'representative' were in much use when objects were selected. An analysis by Harriet Purkis (2014) demonstrates that these standards were not only applied to the items documented and collected, but also to the families represented.[28] During the 1990s, the need arose to become more inclusive by not simply capturing the lives of 'ordinary men', but women, migrants and

minorities, and everyone else who was hitherto unrepresented or misrepresented as well. This led to the recognition of issues related to gender, religion, income and other socio-demographic and socio-economic differences. Consequently, there was a shift in focus from the common denominator to cultural diversity. Moreover, recording the visible and tangible was no longer considered to be enough; documenting underlying values became more important in this process of contextualisation. Gradually, the gaze turned away from objects to the intangible and subjective instead, necessitating the inclusion of various social groups.[29] Although Rhys and Baveystock's goal "to future-proof the museum" seems doomed to fail, contemporary collecting can be seen as a way to encapsulate a wide spectrum of voices in museum collections, acquire different kinds of materials and interpret them from diverse perspectives.

On the other hand, contemporary collecting has not so much been motivated by the result as by the process itself, namely a desire to involve target audiences in the act of collecting. The same handbook on contemporary collecting quoted above also includes an article by Terwey (2014) in which it is argued that:

*Contemporary collecting can be seen less as a process for collections development, and more as an activity which places the curator as an agent within contemporary communities and networks, which can bring other benefits to the museum.*[30]

21 ___ Rosander 1980: 1.
22 ___ Terwey 2014: 71, 78.
23 ___ Rhys 2011/2014: 16. On page 74-75, the author mentions that the questionnaire was sent to the museums listed as members of the Urban Social History Contemporary Collecting Specialist Subject Network. The answers of the seven respondents varied greatly and led to these conclusions.
24 ___ Examples from Elpers & Palm 2014: 9-10.
25 ___ Meijer-van Mensch & De Wildt in Elpers & Palm 2014: 88.
26 ___ Terwey 2014: 79-80.
27 ___ Rhys & Baveystock 2014: 15.
28 ___ Although Purkis' analysis focuses on the SAMDOK methods used within the Pool of Home Life, a comparison with Bodil Axelsson's study of 2014 reveals that her findings reflect the developments within SAMDOK in general. Since changes like democratisation, visitor-orientation and contextualisation clearly resonate in Purkis' analysis, there is no reason to assume that such purposes and selection criteria are limited to Swedish museums.
29 ___ Purkis 2014: 178-187.
30 ___ Terwey 2014: 83.

These "other benefits" are to be found in the ongoing dialogue with the public. They range, according to Terwey, from research through to exhibitions, interpretations, communication, facility management and audience development.[31] The desire to involve target audiences has become a major factor in visitor-oriented museums. Indeed, social-history and city museums throughout Europe want to become more relevant as centres of civic dialogue, as junctions and meeting places, or as reference points for urban societies.[32] While conferences stress the value of museums as "institutions for empowerment and emancipation",[33] Nina Simon's *The Participatory Museum* (2010) has provided the tools with which to actively involve visitors. In museum practice, as well as in museology, participation has thus become a key concept.

Participation was initially centred around educational programmes and exhibitions, but was quickly applied to other aspects of museum practice, particularly in relation to contemporary collecting. In 2011, the first annual meeting of ICOM's newly-founded Committee for Collecting (COMCOL) was given the title *Participative Strategies in Collecting the Present.* The proceedings, published in 2013, mentioned two key principles underlying the enrichment of collections: networking and participation.[34] While the document focuses on the latter, contemporary collecting as such seems to be treated as a familiar task and remains rather blackboxed. This may be because COMCOL is the international successor to the Swedish museum network SAMDOK, and is thus embedded in the discourse on contemporary collecting. Despite this tradition, many of the "participative strategies" presented can be better described as experiments or best practices, since they suggest new possibilities for involving audiences, but lack the long-term planning that is essential to a sound strategy. Moreover, while the publication's cover mentions "*the* participative method of collecting", the various case studies clearly demonstrate the absence of such a single method.

The two motivations mentioned above – participation as a process, diversity as a result – not only underlie contemporary collecting, but must also, in my view, be regarded as two sides of what is nowadays often referred to as *inclusivity*. It is nevertheless important to note that where the former is essentially concerned with *how* to collect, the latter gives primacy to the issue of *what* should be collected.

## The intended use of collections

Currently, museums not only want to develop inclusive collections, but to also immediately use them (including during the collection process itself). In the early days of contemporary collecting, its benefits were projected for the future: the reason for acquiring everyday objects was to preserve a nuanced representation of present-day life, as reflected in the title of SAMDOK's 1980 publication, *Today for tomorrow*. However, around 2000, the gaze of contemporary collecting became more focused on understanding, illuminating and, thereby grasping, the present.[35] Sharon Macdonald, a professor of anthropology with a particular interest in cultural heritage and museology, went even further during the 2015 Falling-Walls Conference in Berlin, where she presented the project *Heritage Futures* and stressed that collecting and collections play an active role in defining and communicating present-day values:

*Museums are not only about the past. They are also about the present, and they're about the future. They're where we put the things that we think especially matter from the past and from the present, so they are where we're defining what we see as important values and identities from today.* [And, further on:] *What does matter to people, which objects, why, what kind of information that goes, goes with them? And these, these are questions really that matter very much to us in society today. Because really this... When we grapple with these questions, we're also grappling with... what kind of society do we want today. Whose voices, whose pasts, whose futures, whose are we keeping?*[36]

Macdonald emphasises the importance of collecting in seeking to convince her audience that communication about the collecting process is essential, thereby urging museums to open up and play an active role in dialogue with others. However, it is especially interesting that collecting is perceived as both making history and, at the same time, shaping today's society. This is closely related to the findings in Von Unge's *Samla samtid* (2019). A case study describes the collecting practices behind *Dokumentation 14:53*, which is a digital collection of reactions to the 7 April 2017 terror attack in Stockholm. The project was initiated jointly by Stockholm's city and county museums a few days after the atrocity, and also involved other cultural institutions, as well as city services, private companies and media channels. At first, the project was simply intended to capture the process

of public mourning, but with the benefit of hindsight, Von Unge unravelled three underlying purposes: collecting a material (or digital) basis for history-writing, communicating this material during the collecting process, and being part of the act of collecting itself. *Dokumentation 14:53* is thus making history of the ongoing present and, simultaneously, activating the collection by directly archiving and communicating the digital objects. Here, Von Unge refers to Aleida Assmann (Canon and Archive, 2008), who distinguishes between an active aspect of cultural memory practices (the canon), which transforms the past into a thing of the *present*, and a passive part (the archive), which collects and preserves the past as *historical* objects. In this case, canon and archive are activated at the same time, as is often the position with performative kinds of collecting.[37]

# Practices in Contemporary Collecting

The previous sections set out to define contemporary collecting and examine its purposes, demonstrating not only an increasing orientation towards the present, but also a confusion of voices regarding the definition of contemporary collecting and its goals. Diverse reasons for contemporary collecting also emerged, as did various intentions concerning the use of collections. Using some examples from museum practice, this section further examines the key issues in contemporary collecting. First, it is demonstrated that cultural-history museums are aware of the cost of collecting and that the fear of having large, unmanageable ensembles affects contemporary collecting policies – especially where they concern material culture. Second, the section contends that the early distinction between collecting and documenting still resonates in discussions about materiality in museums. The concept of post-material culture is suggested as a way of signalling the intertwinement between objects and their intangible elements, while simultaneously differentiating it from intangible cultural heritage. The final issue addressed relates to the decision-making process, in which the demand for compact collections is in conflict with the abundant availability of potentially relevant objects. Selection demands rational and active collecting policies, but the museum curator's traditional authority has been disputed and new roles are being explored. Nevertheless, the question of 'Who decides?' endures.

31 —— Ibid. 84.
32 —— Terms suggested by Kistemaker 2006, Stabel & Depauw 2007: 183, and Jannelli 2013: 65 respectively.
33 —— Kessel, Kistemaker & Meijer-van Mensch 2012: 8.
34 —— Meijer-van Mensch & van Mensch 2013: 8.
35 —— Purkis 2014: 186.
36 —— Viewed online, http://falling-walls.com/videos/Sharon-Macdonald-7199. Quotes from [1:04] and [13:37]. Last accessed on 17 November 2016.
37 —— Von Unge 2019: 229, 235-237.

## Compact collections

The notion of what qualifies for inclusion in a cultural-historical collection has broadened and museums now strive to have comprehensive collections that encompass a wide variety of perspectives on both historic events and everyday life. Nonetheless, there is an equally strong desire to take a careful approach when choosing objects, and crammed depots are described with disgust. Nineteenth-century encyclopaedic collecting is a spectre hanging over museums: like the hoarder, the compulsive collector lives in a dangerously overcrowded space with the objects they have acquired. Concerns about the stewardship of museum collections increased during the 1980s and 1990s, at a point in time when their disposal was taboo. The 1989 report on collection management in UK museums, *The Cost of Collecting*, calculated that collecting and preserving objects (and everything related to it) swallowed up most of a museum's resources.[38] Several initiatives expressed a similar fear of costly and unmanageable collections. A discussion on the disposal of museum objects thus began, slowly but surely leading to the acceptance of deaccessioning as an integral part of professional collection management. Simultaneously, methods to review existing collections were developed.

The first step was to control the expansion of collections by limiting the acquisition of objects. In 2001, the well-known Australian guide, *Significance*, warned its readers that the "high cost of collecting and storing items in perpetuity means that museums must carefully evaluate the merits of accepting donations or making particular acquisitions", implying that there is no such thing as a free gift.[39] Since then, the pressure to reduce the size of collections has only increased. While collecting was still considered to be a prerequisite in 2001, a decade later museums have the moral obligation to define their limits, as Birgit Donker – then director of the Dutch Mondriaan Fund for Visual Art and Cultural Heritage – suggested in her 2013 Reinwardt Memorial Lecture.[40]

Today, the value of objects in a collection is also measured by their actual *use*, emphasising the previously mentioned notion that museums must play an active role in cultural memory practices and not only preserve the past. In the Dutch *Heritage Monitor*, which was produced jointly by Statistics Netherlands (CBS), the Museum Association and the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, the visibility of collections is key. Digital accessibility and the location of objects are defined as important indicators. The publication also highlights that the most common reasons why an object is in a depot is that it no longer fits within a collection, while other causes could be its poor condition, its role as a study object, or that it was only recently acquired. By explaining why objects might *not* be exhibited, the *Monitor*, in fact, assumes most objects are on display. Nevertheless, the latest publication states that only 43% of the items in museum collections are actually exhibited. In cultural-history museums the number is slightly higher, while art museums are the main exception, with just 28% of their objects on display.[41]

Against this background, in which collections are measured against the yardstick of economic cost and immediate use, it is little wonder that the role of space-consuming three-dimensional (3D) objects has been questioned. Even as far back as 1968, Wilcomb E. Washburn, director of the Smithsonian's American Studies Program, was looking for alternatives when confronted with the rapid growth in the size of collections. In his opinion piece "*Are Museums Necessary*?", he suggested converting an object into information and asked, rhetorically: "Objects can be translated into the machine language, into visual description, into scholarly analysis... need one save objects at all?"[42] In the slipstream of the digital revolution, questions like these have increasingly been posed. High-resolution photography, 3D scans and chemical analyses have been promoted as solutions to the issue of already packed depots. The publication *Museums and the Future of Collecting* (1999) showcases a wide variety of opinions on the questions of what and how museums should collect, with pleas ranging from a focus on rational, systematic and self-conscious collecting to appeals to end the collection of 3D objects almost entirely. In this last view, information technology (still) plays an important role, providing collections with representations of objects, interpretations and opportunities for participation. According to Tomislav Sola, collections may thus become "smaller and less expensive to maintain", meaning that museums may be able to focus on the reasons why they were created in the first place. In this context, Sola uses the word "hypermuseums" to refer to the institutions that reach large numbers of people globally by providing genuine information with which to tell convincing and accurate stories; with just a few objects, museums can become flexible information spaces.[43] In 2010, Steven Conn describes this shift from objects to messages as a more general tendency. His book, with the provocative title *Do Museums Still Need Objects?,*

examines the role of objects in various types of museum. In relation to historical institutions, he signals that newly established examples like the Holocaust Museum or the Civil Rights Museum have *themes* rather than collections. In contrast to Sola, Conn is very critical of this trend. "Many institutions share a similar unease about objects", he argues, and they give prominence to the narratives of particular groups. His contention is that although these themes function as heritage projects, they are not always concerned with enabling an historical understanding. Conn goes on to suggest that the absence of objects may testify to their "subversive and less controllable epistemological power", before concluding that museums such as those he refers to leave little room for debate and polyphony.[44] It is, however, the particular need for inclusive, multi-faceted collections that has led to the building of enormous compilations of photos, stories and other expressions of intangible heritage. Due to the requirement that museums be visible, a variety of platforms and stages facilitate participatory collecting in plain sight. While it has become common to assess each 3D acquisition critically, constraints on size and scope are rarely placed on other items. Nevertheless, collecting in these other areas is also about sharing, making things accessible, and including objects within the broader context of a collection. Consequently, a strategy for collecting contemporary home life has to be pragmatic about the stewardship of every collection, whether material, digital or intangible. In other words, collections have to be compact.

## Post-material culture

In defining *collecting*, the phrase 'tangible and intangible objects' has been included in this dissertation without much comment thus far. Nevertheless, it is clear that the collocation of 'intangible' and 'object' can sound strange. This section therefore examines the relationship between material culture and intangible cultural heritage in more detail, and also considers the factor of digital heritage. The concept of a *post-material culture* will be proposed as a way to not only reflect how physical objects are intertwined with their intangible elements, but to also distinguish this from intangible cultural heritage as it relates to living heritage.

Early debates that differentiate between collecting and documenting still play a role in collection policies, and in these discussions materiality matters. When SAMDOK was established in 1977, the Swedish museum network from which it arose

explicitly chose a name that was drawn from the word sam*tids*dok*umentation* in a way that emphasised documenting, instead of collecting, the present. This outlook enabled it to acquire a wide variety of materials and record the selection process ethnologically, gather peripheral information, produce inventories, conduct interviews, take photographs and make research notes. This approach has been widely adopted by others, as reflected in the quotation below:

*It can be argued that the term contemporary collecting is rather referring to the collecting of objects only and therefore perhaps less suitable for catching the complex, multi-layered present day society. A more suitable term, offering more possibilities for collecting other evidence, such as biographical data and intangible heritage, could be 'documenting the present'.*[45]

Nonetheless, adhering to this distinction conceals the intangible dimensions of objects. Indeed, as 'collecting' in the 1970s and 1980s related exclusively to physical objects, new collecting practices logically required new terminology. Today, however, material objects are increasingly awarded a variety of interpretations to safeguard and diversify the contexts of their meanings. Memories, photographs, manuals, stories, etc. are all acknowledged as reflecting the intangible aspects of objects, and it makes perfect sense to incorporate these contexts within the concept of collecting.

The intangible elements of objects should not be confused with intangible cultural heritage. "Mind the gap", urges the recent companion *Museums and Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2020), warning that intangible cultural heritage is essentially a living heritage that is transmitted between at least two generations and is still being practised today. Moreover, it needs to be identified in close cooperation with its practitioners, who have to be actively involved in the process.[46] Intangible heritage only exists when it is being practised and expressed, and so the role of museums might not

[38] — Merriman 2008: 5.
[39] — Russell & Winkworth 2001: 17.
[40] — Donker 2013: 34.
[41] — The latest publication is dated 17 April 2020, and is based on figures from 2018. Erfgoedmonitor, website https://erfgoedmonitor.nl, last viewed 3 February 2021.
[42] — Cited in Mayo 1981: 14.
[43] — Sola 1999: 192-194.
[44] — Conn 2010: 44-48.
[45] — Meijer-van Mensch & Wildt 2014: 89.
[46] — Deric 2020: 108.

particularly be one of collecting and preserving (if that is at all possible), but instead one of *facilitating* intangible cultural heritage.

Collections also increasingly include digital heritage, which seems to take a position midway between tangible and intangible heritage. Although attention has been paid to collecting and preserving digital objects in art and design museums, there have been only a few publications on this subject within the context of cultural-history institutions. Those on museums and digital culture in general tend to be concerned with the interactions between museums and visitors at exhibitions and on websites. The discussions contained within them relate to improving access for many different kinds of user, adding sensory experiences, developing diverse data structures for improved cataloguing, or using digital technologies for the (virtual) repatriation of cultural heritage.[47] Though Haidy Geismar's *Museum Object Lessons for the Digital Age* (2018) describes digital as a new interpretive and imaging technology within museum practice, the book also makes a plea for this to be studied within the museum tradition of understanding the world through material objects. The digital, she argues, thus has to be considered not so much as intangible, but as material in the first instance.[48]

While Geismar's "object lessons" take the construction of knowledge as a starting point, Matthew James Vechinski studies collecting practices to suggest the intertwinement of material and digital culture. In his chapter "Collecting, Curating, and the Magic Circle of Ownership in a Postmaterial Culture" (2013), Vechinski analyses the social networking site Goodreads, where readers discuss books and share information, building an online collection of books as part of the process. In this kind of collecting, he argues, the material and virtual overlap, just as books themselves can be material objects and immersive experiences at the same time. Vechinski refers to this coexistence and partial overlap of the digital and material as a *post-material culture*.[49]

Although the early distinction between collecting and documenting still resonates in discussions about materiality in museums, the concept of a post-material culture refers to how objects are intertwined with their intangible elements. In my view, this would also be an appropriate term for use in museology, given that it not only links new collecting practices to existing, historic collections, but also distinguishes them from intangible cultural heritage. Consequently, in referring to objects, ensembles or collections in this disserta-

tion, I will do so with the concept of a post-material culture in mind, stressing their materiality if required.

## Contested authority

The combination of an abundance of contemporary, potentially relevant, objects (whether material, digital or intangible) and the increasing need for compact collections demands rational and active collecting policies. Curators have long conceived connoisseurship as an important aid when it comes to selecting the 'right' objects for museums' collections. Generally described in close relation to scholarship and expertise, connoisseurship refers to a skill that requires talent and training. In the words of Edith Mayo in "Connoisseurship of the Future" (1981), it is a gradually developed "instinct, grounded in sound (...) training",[50] and can also be used and developed in contemporary collecting. Discussing the problem of the sheer bulk of items relating to popular material culture and the ephemerality of artefacts, Mayo envisions another kind of curator and a different type of expertise:

> *I believe the museum profession must see the gradual emergence of a new breed of curator, and a change in emphasis from collecting of the past to a connoisseurship of the present and the future: a connoisseurship of anticipation.*[51]

Almost 20 years later, in 1999, Linda Young urged curators to reclaim connoisseurship as a unique and special skill, but to also free it from previous elitist connotations.[52] Such connotations are reflected in the intentionally created caricature of "the connoisseurial curator", who is described by Macdonald and Morgan (2019) as someone "fully confident of his (...) superior, refined taste, which he exercised in the formation of highly selective collections, imagined as examples of universal, incontestable quality and value".[53]

Yet the role of the curator in the process of selecting objects, as well as in describing and juxtaposing them, has been questioned. Indeed, it has become evident that actions like these do not occur without bias, and that collections embody ideologies. Hooper-Greenhill, for example, maintains that the curatorial voice was the only one to be heard in the traditional modernist museums that conveyed authoritative facts and histories. In the post-modern constructivist version, new professional roles have to be introduced, new voices heard, new narratives developed and new audi-

ences differentiated.[54] In search of more democratic practices, current models of curatorship accentuate collaboration with a variety of communities. References to 'the relational museum' and 'networked practices' indicate the multiplicity of networks in which curators and other museum professionals work. The idea of the curator as a connoisseur, scholar or expert has been replaced by a new role as collaborator, facilitator, mediator or broker.[55]

Today's museum curators are well aware of their responsibilities. They have also come to realise that passive collecting strategies largely depend on the suggestions of already well-represented communities, whether it be residents donating items they have hitherto retained, or private collectors and auctioneers offering objects that might be of interest. Consequently, in their desire to engage new social groups, museum professionals are exploring participatory strategies for forming their collections.

Sometimes, this approach results in a public call for objects. This strategy is generally adopted for a brief period of time, and is defined by a specific area of interest and certain conditions set by the museum relating to either contemporary or retrospective collecting. Two examples have already been highlighted: Museum Rotterdam's call for fellow citizens to share their experiences of working from home during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, and *Dokumentation 14:53*, the digital collection of reactions to the terror attack in Stockholm on 7 April 2017. In contrast, *The Great Donate* at the Beamish Museum near Newcastle-upon-Tyne (UK) was retrospective in nature and specifically aimed at material objects. That project demonstrates both the potential and limitations of such a collecting policy. Beamish had initiated a strategy of *unselective collecting* as long ago as the late 1950s or early 1960s. This is a kind of participatory collecting *avant la lettre*. Its 'you offer it, we'll collect it' approach aimed to build a representative collection of objects relating to the working and domestic lives of ordinary people in the north of England. Over three million items were acquired, dating from the early 1800s to the 1930s. The strategy was abandoned at some point, but then revived in 2013 when *The Great Donate* initiative aimed to expand the collection to include the 1990s. With over 1,000 items donated in the first week alone, the response was much bigger than anticipated. Although the collecting process was unselective in principle, the curator had to refuse items in poor condition, objects that duplicated others already in the collection, as well

as those not connected to the relevant part of England.[56] Not mentioned in the study is whether the strategy actually achieved the museum's goal of building a *representative* collection of objects relating to the working and home lives of ordinary people in a particular part of the UK.

Doubts about whether citizen participation can be compatible with museums' collecting activities have also arisen. Angela Jannelli, for instance, writes about *Stadtlabor* (City Lab), an exhibition format based on the principles of co-creation adopted by the Historisches Museum Frankfurt. Shared expertise underlies the approach: the cooperating partners are experts on the subject-matter and the museum professionals are experts at curating. However, this curating only concerns exhibiting – not collecting – with Jannelli describing the curators' inability to select objects as follows:

> *It would be self-contradictory if we made participants feel that all are welcome, whatever their specific abilities and powers of expression, while simultaneously making judgments as to which objects are 'worthy' to become part of the collection.*[57]

A final example of museum practice as it relates to contemporary collecting is drawn from Museum Rotterdam and illustrates several of the issues mentioned in this chapter. *Echt Rotterdams Erfgoed* (Authentic Rotterdam Heritage) is a participatory collecting project initiated by the museum in 2016 and builds on previously established networks. Its goal is to collect the city's contemporary heritage, with the aim being not so much to expand the collection or contribute to an exhibi-

47 ___ See, for instance, Van den Akker & Legêne 2016, Kenderdine 2016, Schnapp 2018, and Geismar 2018.
48 ___ Geismar 2018: xvii, 11, 105.
49 ___ Vechinski 2013: 14-15.
50 ___ Mayo 1981: 19.
51 ___ Ibid. 13.
52 ___ Young 1999: 141.
53 ___ Macdonald & Morgan 2019: 39.
54 ___ Hooper-Greenhill 2002: 563-564, 570; cited in Carbonell 2004: 413.
55 ___ Proctor 2010, Golding & Modest 2013, Van de Laar 2013, Longair 2015, Hoeven 2016, Macdonald & Morgan 2019: 38-39.
56 ___ Based on the case study by David Rounce in Rhys & Baveystock 2014: 211-212, and on the website of Beamish Museum http://www.beamish.org.uk/ explore-discover/open-stores/ (viewed 19 January 2018). Sometimes the information is inconsistent. The website suggests the practice of unselective collecting started in the 1950s, while the case study mentions the early 1960s.
57 ___ Jannelli 2013: 71.

1933

The Neo-rococo table is part of a large ensemble produced by the Rotterdam firm Schmidt & Co, which furnished a new build in 1865.

8213.1

tion, but to, primarily, connect to people. A council established specifically for this purpose, which includes the museum's programme leader but not its curators, assesses proposals for a new Rotterdam heritage. The selection criteria are subject to change, are not (yet) clearly defined and sometimes overlap, although they clearly stress contemporaneity, newness and connection to a community, as well as openness to other communities. The project involves participants who are actively committed to the city of Rotterdam and its inhabitants, and who express the process of 'active collection' on a specially devised platform, so-called *Story Cafes*.[58] The design of such a theatrical and dynamic setting promotes interaction and has been described as a core concept in 'heritage-making'.[59] The Authentic Rotterdam Heritage project belongs to the previously defined practice of performative collecting; its main goal is social and its collection is predominantly immaterial, relating, above all, to living people, contemporary traditions and artistic cultural activities.[60]

The Great Donate, City Lab and Authentic Rotterdam Heritage not only showcase different collecting practices, but also illustrate museums' struggles when it comes to combining their social objectives with the goal of shaping long-term collections that include objects in a post-material culture. In the contemporary collecting process,

cultural-history museums seem to delegate the decision-making, albeit acknowledging that criteria still need to be formulated, relevance judged, duplication avoided and – at a later stage – collections preserved, made accessible and used.

1.3

Authentic Rotterdam Heritage is a participatory collecting project initiated by Museum Rotterdam in 2016. The goal is to collect the city's contemporary heritage as a way of connecting people, and it does so in a performative manner. *Story Cafes* function as a platform upon which various participants can 'express' the active collection. The photo above shows such a meeting in June 2018, where Loving Day is celebrated with an event for youngsters with a variety of backgrounds. Source: Research database Museum Rotterdam (inventory number 1296). Photo Erik van den Akker (2018).

# Starting Points and Key Issues

This chapter has focused on contemporary collecting by cultural-history museums on a meta-level. It reveals an increasing orientation towards the present arising from four different, albeit closely related, developments: democratisation, contextualisation, visitor-orientation and activism. Arguing that the essence of contemporary collecting cannot be found in setting temporal boundaries or by distinguishing between the 'contemporary' and the 'present', contemporary collecting is instead defined as it stands in contrast to retrospective collecting, involving the selection of objects directly from the contexts of creation or the first use. Although such objects can take many forms, the starting point of this study relates to a post-material culture, *not* intangible cultural heritage.

In shifting the focus to the purposes of contemporary collecting, it became clear that these goals are on two levels. First, the approach is motivated by the objective of developing inclusive collections, which can be traced back to two different basic ideas: the desired result (a diverse collection), and the preferred underlying process (participatory collecting). While the former is essentially concerned with *what* to collect, the latter gives primacy to the question of *how* to do so. Both of these elements have to be regarded as two sides of what is nowadays often referred to as *inclusivity*. Second, the focus on the intended use of collections has shifted, or at least diversified. The adage of 'collecting today for tomorrow', which implicates the future use of contemporary objects, was replaced around 2000 by the desire to grasp the present, understanding and illuminating it at the same time. Nowadays, a performative kind of collecting reflects museums' need to be present in the present, which is sometimes even formulated with the idealist undertone of contributing to a better future.

Contemporary collecting is a difficult, almost impossible, task for museums. This is because of the abundance of potentially relevant material, the pursuit of richly varied collections and the goal of shaping them in a participatory manner (involving

as many inhabitants as possible), coupled with the lack of historical distance and up-to-date selection criteria and the demand for compact collections. Meanwhile, among curators, the many doubts about selecting the right objects and stories, and whether they are actually the right person to make that choice, lead to a very reserved approach to active contemporary collecting. This is especially the case with post-material culture, which requires a marriage between space-consuming material objects and their digital or intangible dimensions, demanding a yet-to-be-developed expertise. Consequently, collecting activities relating to post-material culture remain rather passive, or are limited to experimentation. Indeed, long-term policies are often lacking, and it seems that all the good intentions are, in fact, paralysing.

58 — Van Dijk 2019: 8, 16-17.
59 — Knoop & Schwarz 2019: 48-49.
60 — Van Dijk 2019: 21.

# Home Life in Museums: The Period Room



2.1

Aunt Nell's living room at Prins Hendrikkade 117b in Rotterdam. The domestic interior was composed based on the biography of Aunt Nell, a fictional, but nevertheless realistic, character. In its original setting, visitors were invited to take a seat, chat and complete the jigsaw puzzle on the table. Source: Museum Rotterdam (documentation held under inventory number 82289). Photo Evelien van Dijk (2001).

In 2001, Rotterdam celebrated being the European Capital of Culture. Festivities included the manifestation *At home in Rotterdam* where, for over six months, 24 iconic houses across the city could be viewed as furnished museum homes. I saw all of them and particularly liked the one belonging to 'Aunt Nell', the widow of 'Cor', a skipper. This house was located at a quay near the river and was now inhabited only by Aunt Nell, who was born in the early 1930s. When Nell married Cor in the 1950s, the housing shortage caused them to move in with his parents. This was far from ideal, especially after their first child was born. Five years later, they were allotted their first apartment together and used their savings to buy furniture and turn it into home. Two further children soon followed, who all left home as adults long ago. In 1996, Nell and Cor relocated to their current home at the quay. Sadly, Cor died shortly thereafter, but Nell decided to stay because the neighbourhood was familiar to her and one of her daughters lived nearby.[1]

When the house was exhibited, the living room seemed to have grown along with Nell – it looked overcrowded with 'stuff' that was constantly being shuffled around and added to. The home's interior was not intended to be congruent with the architect's ideas, instead giving supremacy to those of its inhabitant. The chosen representative moment was neither the year the house was built, nor the point at which Nell and Cor had moved in; instead, the focus was the contemporaneity of 2001. During the manifestation, visitors were invited to take a seat, chat, leaf through books and magazines, or complete the jigsaw puzzle on the table.

Aunt Nell is a fictional persona invented by Marc Adang, a Dutch art historian, who wrote her life story and used it as a guideline in the construction of the interior. The ground floor apartment became an audience favourite. We (Museum Rotterdam's curators) all thought it was very convincing, as well as relevant to the city's collection. Consequently, when the manifestation came to an end, the living room as a whole was transferred to the museum. There was some publicity in the press about our acquisition, which was symbolised in a photograph showing the removal of an armchair from the property. Since then, parts of the collection have been integrated in temporary exhibits, but Aunt Nell's living room has not been on display in its entirety again.

Aunt Nell's living room can be regarded as an eminently museological way to contextualise objects in an immersive setting, thus representing different aspects of home life. While my first chapter discussed the concept of contemporary collecting, this one concentrates on home life in museums, focusing on what is probably the most debated and most reviled museum tradition in relation to home interiors: the period room.

Originating in the 1870s, the period room quickly became emblematic as a museological representation of both the decorative arts and social history. Object orientation and doubtful authenticity, among other things, led to its devaluation over the course of the 20th century. Many were dismantled in the 1970s and 1980s, but a recent revival can now be observed. These new museum displays often aim to be playful and interactive, and while authenticity used to be key, some of them now even grant fiction an explicit role. This chapter aims to explore how contemporary evocative settings relate to previous concepts of the period room. What was the period room's innovative strength at the end of the 19th century? What has, over time, been perceived as its

strengths and weaknesses? The example of Aunt Nell's living room touches on a variety of subjects that are explored further in this chapter, including the period room's typology, the burgeoning role of fiction, issues of representation and ways of connecting objects and ensembles with visitors.

First, the chapter addresses the definition of the period room. Distinguishing between two main types, it also considers how these forms affect collection and display. The second section provides a brief overview of the history of the period room. Starting with its origins in the 1870s, it considers turning points in its history and investigates the background of a renewed interest. Several examples of recent period rooms illustrate different concepts and highlight the latest conceptions. A valuation of the period room will be given in the third section, reflecting on its perceived pros and cons. The chapter concludes with a suggestion of the period room as a model for collecting contemporary home life, arguing that the recent reappraisal is closely linked with highly valued aspects of contemporary collecting, like visitor-orientation, contextualisation and the attention paid to diverse and individual narratives.

# Defining the Period Room

In this study, a period room refers to a constructed domestic interior that aims to represent aspects of home life at a certain time. Within the context of cultural-history museums, it is usually a single room in a building that can be either entered or viewed from one side, which is known as the 'missing wall'. Sometimes, the period room is set in an historic house, but is more often framed in a wider museum context, which is a container that is explicitly not its original context. It thus attains the character of an imagined space, even though the interior ensemble may well be preserved from an earlier historical framework.[2] Some consider a full-scale architectural setting, whether original or inserted, to be a defining element,[3] while others distinguish a period room from a period *setting*: while the first recreates the totality of a room and its contents, the latter uses the room, with its architectural and decorative features, as an illustrative background for mostly unrelated objects.[4] A period *environment* refers to a series of period rooms, often to broader surroundings, with the historical recreation of Kirkgate, the Victorian street at York Castle's museum, being an example.[5] This thesis will not discuss historic houses, period settings or period environments in depth; instead, the focus is on period rooms understood as individually constructed home interiors that aim to convey the totality of a room and its contents. They are collected – whether constituted from a previous context or especially constructed – to communicate aspects of home life at a certain period of time.

## The artistic and social period room

Two types of period room are generally distinguished based on the characteristics of their representation: artistic and social. The artistic period room refers to the display of a certain style in interior architecture and decorative arts, emphasising uniqueness, authorship, connoisseurship, quality and taste. Examples of such connotations are found in the Dutch and German languages, where the period room is commonly given the name *stijlkamer* or *Stilzimmer*, respectively. This word relates the room (*kamer* and *Zimmer*) directly

to the style (*stijl* and *Stil*), defining it from an almost exclusively art-historic perspective.

In contrast with the artistic period room, the social version is conceived as a generalised representation of everyday life, stressing the commonplace and the ordinary. The English term period room is more closely connected with this type, which is often simply referred to as a historical period room. When Edward Alexander made a distinction between the two types of room in 1964, he assigned them key characteristics: "quality, connoisseurship and taste" versus "an actual room as it once appeared".[6] Later, in paraphrasing Alexander, Bryant expounded the view that the historical period room might also represent a *typical* interior, "a space evocative of a social class in a specific town or region at a given age".[7]

Different types of period room exist, such as the artist's studio or an interior related to an historic event, but many authors generally just adopt the basic distinction between social and artistic period rooms, even if they refer to the two concepts in slightly different terms. Keeble, for example, mentions "*social historical*" and "*art historical*" period rooms,[8] while Smith and Tout-Smith argue that the period room might be an "*historical*" or "*aesthetic*" representation of a particular time period,[9] and Bowman refers to an "*historically accurate* and/or *stylistically consistent* arrangement".[10] In different words, but using the same line of thought, the 2001 manifestation *At home in Rotterdam* referred to Aunt Nell's home interior as a "*lifestyle interior*" in contrast to an "*architect's interior*".[11]

This study prefers the terms *artistic* and *social* period rooms, which is shorthand for art historical and social historical period rooms, but simultaneously opens the door to more contemporary interpretations. Although a review of several recent period rooms suggests that the previous sharp contrast between the two types has given way to hybrid forms and reinterpretations, a distinction between them is still useful for clarifying the choices made when collecting objects and constructing ensembles.

1 —— Adang 2001. The year 1996 follows logically from Adang's biography, but was added by myself for clarification purposes.
2 —— Aynsley 2006: 9-10.
3 —— Edman 2014: 19.
4 —— Parr 1963: 335.
5 —— Smith & Tout-Smith 2010: 42.
6 —— Alexander 1964: 273.
7 —— Bryant 2009: 80.
8 —— Keeble 2006: 3.
9 —— Smith & Tout-Smith 2010: 42.
10 —— Bowman 2003: 179-180, note 1.
11 —— Unknown, *Thuis in Rotterdam* 2001: 5.

## Historical moment of truth

Despite the fact that the underlying typology of a period room is seldom described in museum displays or databases, the choices made in the selection of objects indicate whether the ensemble has been constructed as an artistic or social period room. Often, the ensembles provide clues about the chosen perspective, with time probably being the most important. Several essays in *The Modern Period Room* (2006), a book containing many examples of modernist domestic interiors from the interwar years, highlight the choice of a specific moment in time. In his introduction to the book, Trevor Keeble states that both artistic and social period rooms have their specific "historical moment of truth". The moment of a room's creation often best represents the intended design of an interior, and will usually be adopted in an artistic period room, with its emphasis on authorship and style. This also implies that prominence will be given to production as a key decisive factor. Objects added to the interior in later phases are considered to be threats to the original design. In contrast, the social period room acknowledges accretions, and thus consumption, as part of its definition. Generally, this type of room will stress

2.2

The Rococo *stijlkamer* from 1761 is part of a series of three artistic period rooms illustrating 18th century interior design styles. The room originates from a wealthy merchant's house, located at a then busy commercial port in the centre of Rotterdam. Its acquisition in 1954 was driven by the desire to resurrect the former Museum of Antiquities and turn it into the proud Historical Museum of the City of Rotterdam, at the time housed in the Schielandshuis. This photo was taken during the temporary exhibition *A Rich Life*. Source: Museum Rotterdam, Exhibition Archive. Photo Karina Bogaerds (2011).

diachronic qualities, meaning that a moment much later in time will be chosen to represent the interior, including the changes made to it.[12]

The difference between the two concepts can be illustrated using two photographs of an interior ensemble acquired by Museum Rotterdam in 2007. Details of the image on the left were sent to the museum by email, along with a few older black-and-white photos of the living room, a detailed description of the furniture and additional information. All the furnishings were bought in 1953, when the family moved from the former Dutch East Indies to the Netherlands. Some pieces were produced at a now-closed Rotterdam factory, and all were chosen according to the principles of *Goed*

*Wonen* (Correct Living), an important movement in Rotterdam post-war housing. Following the death of the occupant, the Rotterdam house was emptied and the heir approached the museum to donate parts of the ensemble. A few days later, my colleague and I visited the house and took the photo on the right, which shows the 1953 ensemble on offer and reveals a bit more of the interior. The tea set was displayed intentionally. It had also been bought in 1953, the heir told us, while any broken parts had been carefully replaced ever since. Immediately catching the eye is the central IKEA coffee table, which was a quite recent addition to the interior. Obviously well used, the table was regarded as not being consistent with the earlier furniture and so was not included in the left-hand photograph.





Discussing the intended acquisition, we (as the museum's curators) chose to stay close to the time the room was created in 1953. The wood had darkened, the upholstery had been renewed and the teacups replaced, but these signs of age and use were accepted as almost inevitable. However, we acquired neither the very divergent lampshade, nor the contemporary coffee table – although, in hindsight, we could have made the argument for a diachronic approach in which the IKEA table was included as a later addition, and even as being a true heir to the Correct Living movement.[13]

When James Deetz wrote in 1980 about the interpretation of artefacts in history museums, he agitated against the "selection of furnishings that have primarily aesthetic appeal". Deetz advised museum curators to combine the old and the new, because he felt that ensembles needed to enhance our understanding of daily life: "Adherence to a strict time limitation in a period room's furnishings overlooks the obvious fact that in the past, as today, people had both heirlooms and articles that were brand new."[14] This idea clearly

favours the social-historical conception of the period room and simultaneously demonstrates opposition to the apparently dominant position of the artistic version. Is this justified? When and in what context did the period room originate? What was its innovative strength and how did the concept evolve? The next section will attempt to answer these questions by exploring the history – or rather histories – of the period room.

2.3

An important difference between artistic and social period rooms lies in the moment of historical truth. While the moment of a room's creation best represents the intended design of an interior, it emphasises authorship and style. The social period room acknowledges accretions and change, stressing diachronic qualities; therefore, a moment later in time is chosen to represent the interior. These two photographs of an ensemble partly acquired by Museum Rotterdam illustrate different moments of truth, affecting the decision about what to collect.
Source: Museum Rotterdam (documentation with the inventory numbers 83330-83331). Photo (left) sent by email; (right) taken during home visit (2007).

12 ___ Keeble 2006: 2-3.
13 ___ Both Cieraad (2014) and De Vreeze (2015: 14) have described IKEA in the Dutch tradition of Correct Living.
14 ___ Deetz 1980, in Carbonell 2004: 377-378.

# 1954

ACQUISITION DATE

This artistic period room from 1761 illustrates the Rococo style and is a demonstration of civic pride. (Photo Karina Bogaerds, taken during the exhibition *A Rich Life*.)

MUSEUM NUMBER

various, incl. 9463, 11074, 11081, 11306, 35368 and 35495

# Histories of the Period Room

In aiming to provide a brief overview of the period room's history, it soon became clear that the period room is a concept, or practice, that has been fiercely debated ever since its introduction in the 1870s. It is not only its valuation that has varied over time; even its origins have been interpreted from different perspectives. Clearly, there is no such thing as *the* origins; the period room originated in different contexts, following diverse trends. This section briefly explores the various histories of the period room. Starting with its origins in the 1870s, it considers turning points in its history and investigates the background of a renewed interest. Several recent examples illustrate different stances towards the period room and highlight recent conceptions.

## Origins

Given the close relationship between the artistic period room and the art-historical perspective, the birth of the period room is, unsurprisingly, often linked to the rise of art history as an academic discipline. When the period room emerged at the end of the 19th century, the art-historical method of categorising architecture and applied arts into style periods reached a climax.[15] Many art museums presented interiors, furniture and decorative arts because of their contribution to a history of style, thus giving style primacy over a range of other aspects, including function and clients.[16] It is, however, generally accepted the period room does not originate from art history itself.

The origins of the period room have been interpreted from different perspectives, often revealing a specific interest of the author. At a 1963 seminar in the Winterthur Museum, which is famous for its American decorative arts displayed in a wide array of rooms, E.A. Parr compared the period room to the biological habitat group. Working as a senior scientist at the American Museum of National History, Parr was "fairly certain" that the habitat group was the period room's predecessor. Both constructions have analogous curatorial motivations, he

argued, namely "a growing anxiety to relieve the tedium of specimens in endless and ever-growing rows", as well as "a desire to tell more about the life of species than its dead and stuffed remains alone could impart".[17] More recently, the Rotterdam Museum for Architecture and Design, *Het Nieuwe Instituut* (The New Institute), also placed the period room in the tradition of the habitat group. A leaflet there reflects on the artistic project *Design Diorama* by Studio Makkink & Bey (2016) and describes how period rooms have exploited the illusion of livingness or *lived-in-ness* to capture the audience, as dioramas did in natural history exhibitions.[18] Although the need for a more contextual display at the end of the 19th century is widely acknowledged, not everyone considers the habitat group to be key to the period room's conception.

The period room is also linked to the late-19th century Great Exhibitions, which were a series of world fairs showcasing the arts and industries from nations across the globe. Edward Kaufman, for example, mentions the kaleidoscopic collection of national pavilions in the 1867 Paris Exposition as a starting point for both the future open-air museum and the period room. He argues that the pavilions piqued an interest in traditional cultures and, increasingly, in the popular life of the past. Exhibits aimed to paint a picture of human life in evocative architectural settings, whether foreign or historic, and included a range of artefacts that were sometimes animated by people dressed in costumes or engaging in activities to bring the settings to life. Like many others, Kaufman also introduces the Swedish folklorist Artur Hazelius, who presented his ethnographical tableaux in various great exhibitions during the 1870s. Thereafter, Hazelius founded the *Nordiska Museet* (Nordic Museum) and the open-air museum in Skansen to house his ethnographic collections.[19]

Admitting that Hazelius was a pioneer in regional folklore museums, John Harris nevertheless cautiously suggests that too much emphasis has been placed on his innovations when the origins of the period room are considered. In *Moving Rooms: The Trade in Architectural Salvages* (2007), Harris demonstrates that there were many intertwining influences on the developing fashion for period rooms in European museums after the 1860s. The burgeoning interest in the collection and presentation of various decorative arts, the need for a more contextual display and the examples set by the private interiors of rich collectors all affected museum practices, where the aim was to transfer similar assemblages to their public galleries. So, when Amsterdam celebrated

its sixth centennial in 1876, architect Pierre Cuypers installed several 17th century period rooms at the Historical Exhibition of Amsterdam, combining old panelling and chimneypieces. In 1877, the artist J.E. van Heemskerck van Beest sold two panelled rooms from Dordrecht to the *Nederlandsch Museum* in The Hague; they were later installed in the new Rijksmuseum in 1885. In Leeuwarden, the Frisian Historical Exhibition of 1877 included a popular and much discussed Hindeloopen interior. According to Harris, these early Dutch initiatives "were probably far more important than the emphasis usually placed upon a tableau of the Madam Tussauds' sort exhibited by Artur Hazelius in 1878 at the Paris World's Fair".[20]

## Turning points

While a search for the period room's origins must lead to the conclusion that various ideas have contributed to its rise, it also highlights the importance to the concept of contextual display. The nature of this contextuality becomes clearer in comparisons to both its predecessor and successor. In his 2009 inaugural address, Ad de Jong, Professor by Special Appointment of the History of Dutch Culture on behalf of the Royal Antiquarian Society, did not describe a search for the origins of the period room, but instead tried to establish turning points in the presentation of Dutch museum collections in general. Two of these turning points are directly related to the period room. The first change took place in the 19th century and is characterised as the transition from the Enlightenment to Romanticism, from encyclopaedic collections to collections focusing on identity. De Jong exemplifies this transition using two presentations by the *Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen,* the Academy of Sciences of the Dutch province of Zeeland: their 18th century Wunderkammer and the 1882 regional 'Walcher' living room. The former presented natural and exotic curiosities in display cabinets to recreate the world in miniature, whereas the latter reflected regional identity in a genre scene, with individual objects being subservient to the overall image. The construction of such a characteristic regional interior reflects the 19th century intellectuals' romantic interest in regional culture, De Jong argues, and fits seamlessly within the museological representation of the nation.[21]

The second turning point mentioned by De Jong relates to the transition of Romanticism to Modernism in the early 20th century. Unlike the previous period, Modernism viewed individual museum

objects as autonomous works of art. Beauty was considered to be a universal concept, regardless of time and space. De Jong supports his argumentation with the opinions of, among others, the museum directors Adriaan Pit and Frederik Schmidt Degener. Pit was director of the former Dutch Museum for History and Art between 1898 and 1918. The museum was accommodated within the newly built Rijksmuseum, and Pit maintained that the lavishly decorated building would lessen the attention paid to the objects, as its ensembles would obscure the view of the individual exhibits. During the later directorship of Schmidt Degener from 1921 to 1941, aesthetics became explicitly valued over history or documentation. Schmidt Degener presented only the highest quality artworks, rearranged the rooms – juxtaposing far fewer paintings in symmetrical compositions against neutral backgrounds, and removed the captions.[22]

A similar Modernist approach is described by Sally Anne Duncan in the article "From Period Rooms to Public Thrust" (2002), which concerns Paul Sachs, businessman, museum director and developer of Harvard University's famous museum course. In the time between 1921 and 1948, each class had to discuss controversial issues regarding art museums, one of which related to the period room. The debates explored issues of context and authenticity, and questioned the practice of favouring a general museum audience over the tastes of the educated visitor. Proponents of the period room argued that the large majority of visitors have little museum experience or knowledge of the fine arts, but are able to relate the period room to their lives and understand it. Those opposed, including Sachs, asserted that a museum should offer a neutral backdrop, enabling visitors to focus completely on the object. As well as arguing that period rooms are inflexible, expensive and artificial, their opponents stressed that such genuflection to the average visitor would degrade the museum.[23]

15 ___ Laan 2015: [2].
16 ___ Aynsley 2006: 9, Laan 2015: [2].
17 ___ Parr 1963: 325-326.
18 ___ Shafrir n.d.: 1.
19 ___ Kaufman 1989, in Carbonell 2004: 274-275, 278-279.
20 ___ Harris 2007: 4-5, 123-124. Quote from page 4. Similar is Harris' remark on p. 123: "Here in the Netherlands rather than in Hazelius's tableaux should be seen the initiation of the European, and later the American period room."
21 ___ De Jong 2010: 13-14.
22 ___ Ibid. 15-19.
23 ___ Duncan 2002: 98.

The period room had become emblematic of a museological representation of both social history and decorative arts during the early 20th century,[24] but the shift from Romanticism to Modernism resulted in their removal from many art museums. It is often stated that cultural-history museums followed later, finally dismantling their period rooms during the 1970s and 1980s, when the once innovative displays were perceived as static and old-fashioned. In reality, though, plenty of museums continued to collect and display domestic interior ensembles. They were, perhaps displayed in a more reflexive manner, highlighting the period room's subjectivity by, for example, basing it on a family biography or explicitly presenting it as a generalised construction in a raised or viewing-box-like setting. Nevertheless, the period rooms' glory days were over, increasingly seen as old-fashioned, expensive to maintain, inflexible and not as authentic as previously thought. John Harris even called them "A scholarly embarrassment", after research demonstrated that many rooms were, in fact, compiled of objects with a variety of origins. In his 2007 book, *Moving Rooms,* Harris described museum period rooms as being under scrutiny. His visits to the Swiss National Museum in Zurich and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris were a "saddening experience", he wrote, whereas great interiors are in desuetude and the formerly admired sequence of rooms is dismantled.[25]

### Renewed interest

The period room has recently experienced a revival. As an example, when the previously mentioned Rijksmuseum reopened in 2013, it revealed the original, richly decorated walls and ceilings of the choreographed museum that Pit and Schmidt Degener so detested. Moreover, the museum now proudly presents the *Beuningkamer,* an 18th century rococo interior from an Amsterdam canal house, which had been in storage since 1976. The room, with its beautiful mahogany panelling, woodcarvings and original plaster ceiling, is exhibited as authentically as possible, reflecting the period of its creation from 1745 to 1748. To stress the quality and richness of the room, it has not been furnished with other objects.[26] Meanwhile, in 2014, the Louvre chose a different approach by renovating its decorative-arts galleries. Some ten years after the visit that so upset Harris, the museum now proudly present its 18th century decorative arts in a series of redesigned and reinstated period rooms. The website declares that the

reconstructed galleries are essential to reveal the beauty and convey the full meaning of decorative objects.[27] Finally, alongside these artistic period rooms, the *Folkhemslägenheten* (The People's Home Apartment) in Stockholm's Nordiska Museet must also be mentioned as a recent example of a social period room. Installed in 2013, the apartment is constructed with the fictive Johansson family in mind. It approaches the period 1940-1970 with nostalgia by focusing on the improved standard of everyday living in Sweden. The apartment is not, however, related to collections; it plays a role in reminiscence projects and is the responsibility of the museum's communication department.[28]

While authenticity used to be key, many new period rooms aim to be playful and interactive. Some recent experiments are focused on architecture and design, others on daily life; some give primacy to research, others to imagination. Several museums have invited artists to come in and refresh their thinking and approach. Even the authentic (and quite austere) Beuningkamer included the decor of a temporary installation by Daan Roosegaarde in 2014. His *Lotus Dome* consists of hundreds of ultralight aluminium foils, opening and closing in response to the warmth of passing visitors.[29] This high-tech work of art had an impact on how visitors experienced the period room, but both remained separate entities. Some other new museum displays, however, grant fiction an explicit and very important role.

An intriguing example of such an imaginative period room is *Tomorrow* (2013). This was a temporary site-specific installation by the artist duo Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, commissioned by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. *Tomorrow* transformed the former Textile Galleries into the apartment of Norman Swann, an elderly and disillusioned architect. In the fictional film script written by the artists, Swann has fallen ill and intends to sell his London home. Visitors were invited to enter the apartment, explore the collection of art works and the models of Swann's own visionary projects, and sit on the sofa and read the books and magazines. In doing so, the visitors played their role as a Peeping Tom, an invitee and a potential buyer at the same time.[30]

The trend towards fiction is remarkable. Authenticity and context had been crucial aspects in debates about the period room ever since it emerged. In recent publications, however, authors stress that it is *always* a construct, that it is *never* authentic in the sense of an existing or inhabited interior.[31] Marjorie Schwarzer had even discussed its literary dimensions in 2008, comparing the

period room with a novel and describing it as a composition produced with the aid of historical elements. In this way, Schwarzer argues, period rooms are better equipped to evoke empathy and connect visitors to history, as well as to their own lives:

> *Period rooms combine the literal and the literary. At once empathic, aesthetic, spiritual, and sensual, they propel us into worlds larger than ourselves and inside ourselves. (...) Their familiar contents, coherent design and human scale evoke a larger story and our desires for connection and possession. (...) Museum curators would do well to remember this oft-times overlooked museum archetype as a powerful storytelling tool.*[32]

The qualities of the period room as an immersive medium have been emphasised repeatedly. The previously mentioned debates at Harvard University show that the period room was perceived as an easy-access formula for visitors with little museum experience as far back as the 1930s. Nonetheless, its diminished appreciation in the last decades of the 20th century largely arose from the reproach that it was "a form of fiction posing as history".[33] In contrast, Schwarzer highlights recently installed period rooms that use the power of empathy, even when interweaving history and fiction, with examples being the bedroom in Daniel's Story in the Washington National Holocaust Museum, the immigrants' living quarters in the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, or Julia Child's kitchen in the Smithsonian Institution.[34]

Nowadays, the freedom to openly mix fact and fiction offers up new possibilities, supported by modern techniques. Under the heading "Scenography", which is a term that addresses the performative aspects of exhibitions, a 2016 article by Dijksterhuis in the Dutch museum magazine *Museumvisie* discusses the new trend of adopting a holistic approach to exhibitions. The magazine provides examples in which objects are presented in theatrical settings and interactive elements create individual experiences. Immersive installations use sound, projection and virtual reality to stimulate the senses. New media are rapidly conquering the museum, converting the 'white cubes' into 'black boxes', as Dijksterhuis remarks. He concludes that various disciplines contribute to the delivery of convincing narratives that are easily understood by the majority of the visitors and in which both objects and visitors play a key role.[35] Although the term and even any reference to the

underlying concept are carefully avoided, the analogy with the period room is striking.

24 __ Keeble 2006:1.
25 __ Harris 2007: 6, 145.
26 __ Van Duin 2010: 1-2, 7, 9; website Rijksmuseum, https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/BK-C-2007-1, last viewed 3 September 2020.
27 __ Website Louvre, https://www.louvre.fr/en/department-decorative-arts-new-galleriesfrom-louis-xiv-louis-xvi-art-french-living, last viewed 3 September 2020.
28 __ Axelsson 2014: 21; Edman 2014: 11-13; website http://www.nordiskamuseet.se.
29 __ Website https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/daan-roosegaardes-lotus-dome.
30 __ Elmgreen & Dragset 2013; website of the Victoria and Albert Museum; Edman 2014: 15-19; Marchand 2015: 22-27.
31 __ Laan 2015: [6].
32 __ Schwarzer 2008: 355-360, quote from page 359.
33 __ Bryant 2009: 75.
34 __ Schwarzer 2008: 355-360.
35 __ Dijksterhuis 2016: 31-39.

2.4

Images of the temporary installation *Tomorrow* (2013) by Elmgreen & Dragset at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The fictional film script tells the story of Norman Swann, an elderly architect intending to sell his apartment. When viewing the imaginative period room, visitors play various roles.
Photos Anders Sune Berg (2013).

# Valuation of the Period Room

The renewed interest in the period room comes with its own valuation, which is linked to current ideas about collecting. This section explores the perceived core qualities of the period room, aiming to understand its pitfalls as well as its possibilities for collecting and representing home life. It is argued that *contextualisation* has gained in importance once again, now implying coherent ensembles that contain not only material culture, but data and narratives as well. *Representation* is a second issue, and relates to both what and whom a period room represents. Although today's social period rooms tend to stress the individual lives of their inhabitants, highlighting identity and diversity, the concept of personal identity is intertwined with historical, social and cultural values. Finally, a *connection* to visitors is an important element of the present-day valuation of the period room. While its immersive capacities are generally acknowledged and the opportunities to enable individual visitor experiences praised, the apparent absence of interactions with the objects on display requires a closer examination of this type of room's connective qualities.

## Contextualisation

The need for a contextual display led to the emergence of the period room in the late 19th century in Europe, and the innovation was soon widely adopted to stress popular life and regional identity, or to emphasise a history of styles. However, in the Modernist museum of the early 20th century, and in art museums in particular, context came to be perceived as a hindrance that was thought to obscure the immanent beauty of individual works of art, as well as the significance of individual objects. Yet the renewed interest in period rooms reveals a new valuation. While Modernism stressed the importance of contemplating the individual object against the neutral background of the museum, Chapter 1 has shown that material culture has now become less crucial. The post-modern museum is oriented towards visitor-centred

experiences, in which meaning is considered to be contextual rather than inherent. Acknowledging that material culture inevitably has intangible dimensions, home life has gained in value over the domestic interior, as has visitor interpretation over object-orientation. How does this affect the ensemble?

In the wake of their much-discussed exhibition *ZimmerWelten* in 2000, the Detmold Open-Air Museum in Westfalen, Germany, collected six completely furnished rooms of children and adolescents. Striving to document the contemporary home life of a cross-section of young people in Westfalen, the museum documented almost everything related to these six rooms. They took measurements and photographs, interviewed the owners, established whether they were willing to keep a diary, and acquired all the furnishings – furniture, as well as contents, including paraphernalia like a collection of Kinder Surprise Eggs. Corresponding with the early SAMDOK strategy, the collection concerned the *totality* of things. The museum deliberately made no further selections, the catalogue states, because such a selection tends to focus on 'valuable' objects, with other aspects overlooked. In total, approximately 20,000 single objects were collected, exhibited, inventoried and preserved.[36] But then what? Although described and (information-wise) accessible, the ensembles are now stored in the museum's depot, not to be exhibited again, just like Aunt Nell's living room. A second catalogue, *ZimmerWelten_zwei* (2010), provides an update, presenting new interviews with the participants and photographs of their adjusted 'worlds'. It explains that the original ensembles will help to support this generation's memory in the medium term, but that their main value is in the long-term objective of answering manifold, as-yet-unknown, scholarly questions.[37] In this explanation, the catalogue is closely following the early adage of collecting today for tomorrow.

Nonetheless, the extensive survey of mere *things* and the realist form of display are in contrast with today's interest in people and their relationships with objects and spaces in the home environment, as expressed in the museum and academic worlds alike. Reflecting on the presentations in the London Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Lesley Hoskins notes different approaches in which some consider how the domestic environment reflects and forms social relations, others focus on how people form and transform their environments, and others still discuss the symbolic, metaphorical and personal meanings of home.[38] Could interior ensembles like

the children's rooms in *ZimmerWelten* display more than just 'facts'? Could they also be suitable for revealing social relations, subject-object relationships, meaning or underlying values?

A special release of the American journal *Museum Anthropology* sheds light on this discussion from a different perspective. This 2014 issue questions whether the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, with its combined natural history, anthropology and ethnography collections, should start to build a collection of contemporary urban material culture. A recurring theme is the explicit plea for the collection of ensembles (in this issue often referred to as *assemblages*) instead of individual objects. There are a variety of reasons for this cry. These include the ability of ensembles to reflect the complexity and diversity of a city, imbue objects with significance, offer more accurate interpretations, clarify connections, reveal the temporal context, create 'habitable settings' through which viewers can explore subject-object relations, help us to understand the interrelationships between people and their environments, and focus on the objects in use. Although the domestic interior was not a specific focus, several articles relate contemporary urban culture to the mundane life at home. Robert Rotenberg, the most outspoken advocate for collecting assemblages, elaborates on the agency of material objects and the power of ensembles to imbue objects with life. In his view, however, the ensemble not only consists of artefacts, but also of data collected during the acquisition process. Conversations, interviews, field notes or visual elements, to name just a few, are inextricably linked to the objects, and these materials should be collected and displayed as well. Furthermore, the term 'assemblage', which is favoured by the majority of the authors published in the special issue, indicates the deliberate creation of the ensemble; not only does it leave the door open to other-than-literal reconstructions, but it also permits the museum to limit the amounts of objects collected, as the concluding article stresses explicitly.[39]

Museums' renewed interest in contextual presentations implies a revived interest in the collecting of ensembles. Contextualisation now relates to the explicit reconstruction of coherent ensembles that comprise material culture as well as research data and narratives. These can either be literal reconstructions (acquisitions of complete interiors), or constructions based on research, possibly even containing fictional elements, but nevertheless needing to carry meaning and reveal, for instance, social relations or subject-object rela-

tionships. Somewhat problematic, however, is the number of objects involved and the amount of work required. Although the *ZimmerWelten* catalogue states that the project has been achieved within their pragmatic framework,[40] for a medium-sized facility like Museum Rotterdam, both the collecting process and the resulting collection would far exceed its finances, space and available staff.

## Representation: cultural values & personal identity

The late 20th century depreciation of the period room was largely due to the realisation that many rooms were not as authentic as previously assumed. Elements had been adjusted to fit the dimensions of a museum's space, ensembles were rearranged, furniture with a different provenance was combined, originals copied, et cetera. Today, however, many recent period rooms are openly non-authentic constructions; they are, as Schwarzer stated, creations made with the help of historical elements. Yet apart from authenticity, the apparent veracity concerned yet another aspect: a lack of realism. The reproach of being 'unrealistic' was frequently directed at the artistic period room, with its focus on the moment of creation. This is understandable, but somewhat unjust, since this type of room has little to do with reflecting daily life; it primarily highlights singularity, design, idea and production. In contrast, the social period room should, by definition, pay attention to daily life, the use of things and space, thereby providing a more realistic image of everyday home life.

Although the social period room aims to reflect ordinary daily life, its realism has also been disputed, with generalisation and exclusion being the main criticisms. Gaby Porter, for instance, describes the period room as "a convention, bringing together collections into a generalised arrangement" and questions the basis for this. She suggests specific case studies based on fieldwork and detailed research as an alternative approach, as the London Museum of the Home (the former Geffrye Museum) has explicitly adopted since the 1990s.[41] Its period rooms expressly distance it from sketching a generalised image through the

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36 __ Carstensen, Düllo & Richartz-Strasse 2000: 8-25; Carstensen & Richartz 2010: 4-11.
37 __ Carstensen & Richartz 2010: 9.
38 __ Hoskins 2006: 40.
39 __ Brumfiel & Millhauser, Lawrence-Zúñiga, Rotenberg, Rotenberg & Wali, and Wali in *Museum Anthropology* (2014) *vol.37 / issue 1*.
40 __ Carstensen & Richartz 2010: 7.
41 __ Porter 1996: 113.

**1955**
ACQUISITION DATE

The model of a large-scale urban expansion, given the name "City of the Future", was presented in 1955 but never realised.

MUSEUM NUMBER

**40543**

exploration of the home lives of different families over the same period of time, instead stressing the individual circumstances and conscious, personal choices of the inhabitants.[42] This also allows the museum to avoid the problem whereby representing 'the typical' easily leads to the exclusion, neglect and marginalisation of not-so-common communities. However, by explaining economic, social, cultural or aesthetic factors that have influenced the personal choices, the rooms nevertheless suggest common practices and preferences, thus referring to shared values that surpass individuality.

Remarks on generalisation and the variety of individual choices refer to issues of representation, which also reflect an interest in objects as a means of identifying with other people, or disassociating from them. As far back as 1954, Mary Zeldenrust-Noordanus conducted psychological research on taste preferences in home decoration, aiming to demonstrate "how much home furnishings, although being perceived as very personal, are dominated by social-psychological factors". The contradiction between individuality and social determinacy is only apparent, she argues, because experiencing individuality does not imply the absence of social factors in the formation of taste preferences.[43] Internationally, the interest in the social use of objects was greatly influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's *La distinction* (1979), especially since its initial publication in English in 1984. In the recent museum catalogue *Hin und Weg* (2018), Thomas Thiemeyer demonstrates Bourdieu's ideas through the reactions of designers and connoisseurs to a living room composed of Germany's best-selling furnishings, which they unanimously judge to be a paragon of "Biedersinn und Geschmacklosigkeit" (petty bourgeois and tastelessness). Everyday objects are not only functional, but carry symbolic meaning as well; as Thiemeyer paraphrases Bourdieu, things are representational and have a certain status, based on a social classification of taste.[44] Daniel Miller's studies on the material culture of the home in books like *Home Possessions* (2001) and *The Comfort of Things* (2008) also focus on the use and meaning of objects, highlighting individual consumption practices through the concepts of representation and appropriation. Miller writes in *Home Possessions*, "It is the material culture within our home that appears as both our appropriation of the larger world and often as the representation of that world within our private domain".[45] In 'Home', a lemma in *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (2018), Irene Cieraad asserts that consumer studies like Miller's introduce the

concept of identity to stress the personal nature of this appropriation, when, in fact, the essence of such a concept refers to its social character.[46]

Today's period rooms play intricate games at the interface between personal identity and cultural values. An example is Michael McMillan's temporary installations, such as *The West Indian Front Room* (2005) and *Van huis uit,* also known as *That's the way we do it!* (2007), both of which present migrant aesthetics embedded in everyday practices. His artistic interpretations of research data aim to reveal the complex and layered meanings in domestic interiors of migrant working class communities, reflecting personal as well as social, cultural and historical dynamics.[47] Moreover, Aunt Nell's living room, which was introduced at the start of this chapter, purposefully plays with the tension between personal identity and cultural values. The choice of furniture might reveal somewhat old-fashioned taste, yet it reflects the preferences of a large majority of Rotterdam women in the early 1950s, as contemporaneous psychological research by Zeldenrust-Noordanus indicates.[48] As one might expect, family portraits, images of her hometown and references to her husband's occupation largely contribute to the interior decor, as do some religious decorations. Aunt Nell's great affection for the royal family is, however, rather atypical for Catholic households in the Netherlands. This is explicitly mentioned in the accompanying text to explain the mix of Mary statues and decorative earthenware commemorating important events during the reigns of the country's three successive queens, thus stressing the individuality of the interior.[49]

While the period room's veracity has been doubted because of its contested authenticity and lack of realism, recent constructions tend to focus on convincing narratives. Instead of presenting generalisations, they might reflect the individual lives of their inhabitants, whether real or fictive. The cultural values related to 'the typical' seem to have given way to diverse, individual life-stories, highlighting the personal identity of the inhabitants' interiors. On closer examination, however, personal identity and shared historical, social and cultural values are closely interrelated.

### Connecting with visitors

As far back as the 1930s, the period room was perceived as an easily understandable type of display, connecting even visitors with little museum experience to objects. Contemporary period rooms stress their immersive qualities and value the

power in the persuasiveness of the narrative. Fiction can evoke empathy and an even closer involvement with history, while modern techniques appealing to different senses add to the immersive possibilities. Interactive elements might thus create the individual experiences visitor-oriented museums are striving for.[50]

Nonetheless, the supposed immersive qualities of the period room require closer examination. In a museum setting, its connective qualities are mainly due to somewhat passive activities, such as looking, passing through or listening. Touching is often prevented or explicitly forbidden, and more active pursuits like telling or (re-)creating are generally not facilitated. So, while in the original setting of Aunt Nell's living room visitors were invited to sit on the chairs, leaf through the magazines and put together the jigsaw puzzle on the table, the musealisation of the ensemble has ended such practices. Jeremy Aynsley argues that the period room's strength is to convey "ideas of form and structure", but it is less effective at expressing function. According to Aynsley, attempts to consider function by turning the period room into a performative space and animating it with people are likely to widen the gap between past and present, stressing the historical distance instead of bridging it.[51] How, and to what extent, does the period room then facilitate understanding, empathy and experience? What connective qualities underlie the constructed domestic ensemble? These issues require closer examination and will be addressed in Part 2.

# The Period Room as a Model for Contemporary Collecting

In looking at museum practice, the period room can be viewed as an eminently museological way to contextualise objects in an immersive setting, representing different aspects of home life. It has a long history and has been much debated over time. Perceived as being old-fashioned, many period rooms were dismantled in the second half of the 20th century, but a recent revival can be observed, with new techniques, the stressing of different qualities and the recounting of various narratives. This renewed interest comes with a new valuation that meets highly valued (though not undisputed) aspects of contemporary collecting, such as the supposed abilities to connect with visitors, address issues of representation, and carry complex meanings whilst merging material culture with its intangible elements.

Although the *concept* of the period room is not confined to the past, even the new versions can barely be related to contemporaneity. A large majority of rooms recount a distant past from the Middle Ages to the 19th century, while a few 'modern' examples relate to the Modernism of the interwar period. These interiors are all reconstructed in hindsight. Even the case of Norman Swann, staged in the contemporary narrative of *Tomorrow*, must be considered a retrospect interior. Admittedly, it takes the present day as a starting point, but the choice of objects is based on the past. The film

42 ___ Porter 1196: 113, Hoskins 2006: 35, website www.museumofthehome.org.uk/.
43 ___ Zeldenrust-Noordanus 1956: 2.
44 ___ Thiemeyer 2018: 46.
45 ___ Miller 2001: 1.
46 ___ Cieraad 2018: 5.
47 ___ McMillan 2009: 13. See also Dibbits 2007.
48 ___ Zeldenrust-Noordanus 1956: 16.
49 ___ Adang 2001.
50 ___ See, for instance, Duncan 2002: 95-98, Schwarzer 2008, Bryant 2007 and 2009, Dijksterhuis 2016.
51 ___ Aynsley 2006: 28

script states that Swann is "burdened with his cultural heritage, his snobbish family background, and a home filled with antiques and paintings collected by his ancestors".[52]

With the renewed interest in period rooms on the one hand, and the museological focus on contemporaneity on the other, it is remarkable that debates on collecting contemporary interiors have overlooked the concept of a present-day period room. This is all the more surprising because, outside the museum, the retail sector is convinced of the irresistible appeal of today's period rooms;[53] furniture stores, construction firms and estate agents try to tempt potential buyers with modern period-room-like displays. In my comparative study (Part 2), I examine three cases in which commercial companies present contemporary period rooms and analyse them through the eyes of a museum curator. Aiming to develop a viable strategy for collecting contemporary home life by cultural-history museums, I will question what insights can be gained from these commercial domestic ensembles.

52 __ Elmgreen & Dragset 2013: 5.
53 __ Bryant 2009: 77.

# 1973

The doll's house made by carpenter W. Gelderman between 1941 and 1944 includes a store where coupons on the counter reflect the new normal.

## 1627

# Comparative
# Case Study

2

# Introduction to the Comparative Case Study

Driven by democratisation, contextualisation, visitor-orientation and activism, cultural-history museums are increasingly oriented towards the present, as Chapter 1 demonstrated. Indeed, contemporary collecting is now considered to be a key task by museums, although purposes and practices vary greatly and can be motivated by either the coveted result (a diverse collection) or the preferred approach (participatory collecting). On a further level, contemporary collecting is driven by the desire museums have to play an active role in present-day society. The notions of what collections should contain and whom they should represent have also broadened, and museums are striving to encapsulate a rich variety of perspectives on both historic events and everyday life. Nevertheless, the wish to choose carefully and maintain *compact* collections is equally strong, as expressed by the need to actually use collections and guarantee long-term stewardship.

In Chapter 2, which shifted the focus to collecting home life, I argued that the period room is an eminently museological way to contextualise objects in an immersive setting. A recent revival of this reviled tradition can be observed, albeit this is one that uses new techniques, stresses different qualities and recounts a variety of narratives. The revaluation of the period room is closely linked with today's highly valued aspects of contemporary collecting, including demands for contextualisation, representation and connecting people to the museum collections they visit. It is therefore remarkable that debates on collecting contemporary interiors have overlooked the concept of a present-day period room. This is especially surprising since, outside the museum, furniture stores, construction firms and estate agents construct modern period-room-like ensembles to sell their products to potential buyers.

In this comparative case study, I describe three examples in which commercial companies present contemporary domestic ensembles that reflect museums' period rooms. Intending to develop a viable strategy for collecting contemporary home life by cultural-history institutions, I analyse these cases from a museum curator's perspective and ask what insights can be gained from them. Underlying the analysis is a framework built on my observations in the first two chapters. The first column in the matrix recalls the key issues established in Chapter 1, while the second summarises the findings from Chapter 2, distilled into keywords. Each column contains related issues in the rows. At a further level, the issues are grouped in relation to the categories and questions constituting the main framework for evaluating the comparative case study, and these can be found in the final column.

## Case study design

The comparative case study examines three cases in which commercial companies have constructed contemporary period-room-like ensembles for their own ends. By selecting examples that differ in aspects like size, scope and materiality, the case study offers maximum variation, thereby increasing the likelihood that it reflects diverse approaches. Through the selection of multiple cases and the decision to adopt a maximum-variation sampling strategy, the design of the study corresponds with the method advocated in Creswell & Poth's *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design* (2018, 4th edition) and Yin's *Case Study Research and Applications* (2018, 6th edition).

My first goal when examining the cases is to understand the methods used by the companies and the ideas that underlie each example. As my intention is to develop a viable strategy for use by cultural-history museums when collecting contemporary home life, several themes are then used to question what insights can be gained from each of these commercial domestic ensembles. My case study is therefore not intrinsic (i.e., the focus of the cases is on the cases themselves), but instrumental, which is a term used by Creswell & Poth to refer to case studies undertaken to understand a specific issue.[1]

The three chapters on the individual cases (3, 4 and 5) are followed by a cross-case theme analysis in Chapter 6 (Part 3). This aspires to synthesise the within-case findings at a higher level of abstraction, examining both replicative and divergent findings across the cases, while also aiming to uncover successful strategies for use in collecting contemporary home life.

## Data Collection

Although the domestic ensembles examined herein are partly based on market research or big data, the research itself employs a variety of only *qualitative* approaches. I have used multiple and different sources to provide corroborating evidence. As the details available for the three cases are not all described to the same extent in these sources, I discuss the specific one(s) consulted for each case in the relevant chapter. I also take account of the professional roles of my interviewees. In general, however, the data collection process involved the use of the following information resources concerning the companies and their domestic ensembles:

- *Expert interviews* with the people involved in creating the companies' ensembles. *Direct observations* made during visits and on digital platforms related to the cases.
- *Company documents* like reports, presentations, brochures, catalogues and websites that have been created by the company for internal or public use.
- *Popular-media documents* such as articles in newspapers and magazines, television documentaries, radio interviews, websites and blogs, created by someone other than the company and directed at a wide audience.
- *Scholarly literature* related to either the specific case or a relevant aspect advanced by it.

As the comparative case study is instrumental and the cases are being used to question the collecting of contemporary home life, the museum context serves as a kind of fourth example. I use my experiences in this field to discuss museum practice, as well as explore the viability of the ideas suggested by the commercial domestic ensembles. Sometimes, examples are taken directly from Museum Rotterdam; on other occasions, they relate to different museums and heritage institutions.

## Analysis

The comparative case study includes three main stages of data analysis and interpretation. The first involves providing a detailed description of the case and its original context, with the aim being to uncover the methods and underlying ideas of each company's domestic ensembles. The perspective chosen and terminology adopted are the company's, and relatively uncontested data is used to describe the ensemble in its real-world setting. As this is an instrumental case study, the analysis then seeks to establish important themes that relate the case to museological collecting of contemporary home life. The key issues presented here are directed towards debate and explore the case's viability for use in a museum context. This second stage blends an inductive with a deductive approach. In this, not only do I look for issue-relevant meanings based on each case's data, but I am also guided by the questions derived from the framework established previously. These questions, supplemented with an additional 'why-question', are as follows:

- What domestic ensembles has the company constructed?
- How has the company selected the objects and ensembles?
- What do the ensembles reflect?
- Who do they represent?
- How do the ensembles connect the clients to the company's products?
- Why has the company developed its ensembles in this way?

The final analytical and interpretive stage involves the cross-case theme analysis contained in Chapter 6 (Part 3). This analytic technique, advanced by Yin, enables me to compare initial within-case findings, discuss differences and similarities and examine preliminary insights further.[2] As this is an instrumental comparative case study, Chapter 6 is the conclusive element, and sets out to answer the question of what insights into the museological collecting of contemporary home life can be acquired from the ideas and practices identified in the study's three cases.

## Validation

Along with the use of triangulation as a validation strategy from my perspective as a researcher, it was also my view that it was important to seek feedback from the participants, as Creswell & Poth and Yin suggest.[3] Consequently, to check my findings and interpretations, I sent my interviewees 'their' complete chapter before it was finalised. I particularly asked them to check their personal descriptions and reflect on the accuracy of the case description. I also included the themes to see if these analyses, which were undertaken from an entirely different perspective, gave rise to any

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1 — Creswell & Poth 2018: 98.
2 — Yin 2018: 194-199.
3 — Creswell & Poth 2018: 260, 261-262; Yin 2018: 126-129.

| **Main issues from Chapter 1, Contemporary Collecting** | **Main issues from Chapter 2, The Period Room** | **Framework for Chapters 3-5, Part 2: Comparative Case Study** |
|---|---|---|

**Practices:**
- Compact Collections
- Post-material Culture

**Contextualisation:**
- Ensembles
- Material culture & data, narratives
- Meaning

**The Collection - What is selected?:**
- Size & scope
- Materiality

**Purposes**: Participation
**Practices**: Contested Authority

**Collecting - How is it selected?**
- Strategies
- Participants
- Who decides?

**Orientation towards the present:**
- Democratisation, contextualisation, visitor-orientation, activism
- Contemporary versus retrospective collecting

**Representation: cultural values & personal identity:**
- Perspective: artistic and social period room
- Generalisation, the typical, cultural values

**Reflecting - What is represented?**
- Perspective
- Cultural values & Personal identity
- Time

- **Purposes**: Diversity

- Individualism, personal identity, diversity

**Representing - Who are represented?**
- Target groups
- Methods of differentiation

**Purposes:**
- Participation
- Use of collections

**Connecting with visitors:**
- Immersion (understanding, empathy, experience)
- Interaction

**Connecting - How are clients connected to ensembles?**
- Qualities
- Use

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comments. In order to ensure their representation was acceptable to them, I sought the companies' permission to use relevant images.

### Selected cases

A period room within the context of cultural-history museums usually refers to a single room, or a series of individual rooms, that can either be entered or viewed from one side. Generally, the period room is framed as part of a larger museum collection, which is a container that is explicitly not the original context. The period room thus attains the character of an imagined space, although the presented interior generally includes authentic historical objects and aims to convey a historical ordering thereof. The commercial domestic ensembles studied in this chapter belong to a similar imagined space. Unlike a museum's period rooms, they do not aim to represent a certain era from the past, but to instead present contemporary (or even near-future) living. Three different cases have been selected to ensure variation in the approaches and ideas examined.

The first case is IKEA's room settings. These constructed home interiors include single pieces of furniture in various home backdrops relating to function, lifestyle, budget and taste. Like a museum's period rooms, they are presented as a series of accessible individual rooms framed within a larger collection. Stressing style and use simultaneously, IKEA's staged interiors seem to be a combination of an artistic and a social period room. The physical resemblance between these rooms and IKEA's room settings and the company's global success were the main reasons why this case was chosen.

Widening the perspective from furnishings to houses, the second case explores Homestudios, a concept created by the Dutch construction firm Royal BAM Group, which operates internationally. Homestudios produces a limited collection of houses available for purchase, with buyer options on offer for both the exteriors and interiors. The Experience Centre focuses on the inside space and incorporates five different studios that guide customers through the process of buying their new-build property. One of these studios presents

11 model homes, which unify the available choices relating to spatial use and stylistic finishes. To keep house prices affordable while simultaneously meeting the needs of different clients, Homestudios has to balance standardisation with diversity, which is an issue that is analogous to museums' interest in compact, but inclusive, collections.

The funda House is the final case. This is a virtual home developed by funda, the Netherlands' largest property website. Its big-data house encompasses information taken from both actual purchases and the features searched for the most by visitors to the site. As a virtual house, this case is the furthest away from traditional museological period rooms. Its explicit use of big data as the prime building material was the main reason for this case's inclusion, where consideration is given to not only a change of materiality, but also to the echoing of museums' interest in a bottom-up approach.

These three cases reflect collections that range in size from the many objects sold by IKEA to the collection of 11 homes presented by BAM and the single house designed by funda. In scope, the col-

lections include single pieces of furniture, entire homes and even projects with rows of houses. In terms of materiality, the collections include IKEA's material objects, funda's digital big-data house, as well as the objects and living spaces on offer at BAM's Homestudios. Despite the differences, all the cases are representations of contemporary home life and can be studied as a series of modern domestic ensembles echoing the concept of a period room. What insights can be gained from these commercial ensembles? To what extent can they inspire city museums in developing a viable strategy for collecting contemporary home life?

### Overview: Part 2

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 provide in-depth descriptions of the three cases, which have been chosen to reflect the museological concept of a contemporary period room: IKEA's room settings, BAM's Homestudios and the funda House. Each case has its own chapter, and each chapter adopts a similar structure:

- The first section introduces the case, its issues, purpose and method. It does not concern the general approach, which has been described in the present section, but is instead about more detailed, case-specific matters.
- The second section turns to the case and its context. It describes the commercial domestic ensembles, the methods and underlying ideas, as seen from the company's viewpoint. The case description is a body of relatively uncontested data.
- Third, the within-case theme analysis highlights certain case-specific themes that relate the case to museological collecting. Looking through the eyes of a museum curator, the themes are directed towards encouraging debate and explore the case's viability for use in a museum context.

The cross-case theme analysis is part of Chapter 6. It examines both replicative and divergent findings across the cases, and aims to synthesise the within-case discoveries on a higher level of abstraction. Although this final analytical and interpretive step is part of the comparative case study, it also provides the main building blocks of the collecting strategy I will propose. I have therefore chosen to incorporate this analysis in the final part of my dissertation (Part 3).

# IKEA's Room Settings

IKEA's room settings present their products in carefully arranged ensembles that suggest a particular lifestyle and taste. The ensembles are presented as a series of individual rooms within a larger collection. Their staging, the arrangement of objects, descriptive texts and references to style and habitation resemble museum period rooms. Photo Mayke Groffen (September 2019).

The 'blue box' that is IKEA Barendrecht is of a regular size and covers a surface area of circa 38,000 m$^2$. It is located close to two highways, the A15 and A29, and provides extra wide parking spaces near to the entrance for big family cars. While children can play in Småland, shoppers take the escalators up to the showroom on the second floor. The recommended route leads them through a maze-like display where they encounter a series of staged home interiors, arranged according to their spatial functions. After the living rooms, there are kitchens and dining rooms, home offices, bedrooms and children's rooms. Each interior is carefully illuminated to create a specific atmosphere and suggests a particular lifestyle and taste. Notices describe the overall floor space and the cost of the items within it, while labels mention designers, dimensions and other facts relating to individual pieces of furniture. Although all the products have price tags, not much can be bought in the showroom itself. Bin-like containers are scattered across the floor, filled with cheap commodities like BUMERANG hangers, FEJKA artificial potted plants and SAMLA storage boxes, but the actual purchasing of items happens on the first floor. Here, shoppers can find all kinds of home accessories. Again, the products are grouped in functional sections (bedding, lighting, home decoration, etc.), but this time the abundance of mass-produced goods accentuates their affordability. The zig-zag routing, friendly lighting, low ceilings and the opportunity to see and touch the products create a homely atmosphere. This changes when entering the self-service warehouse, where the recommended route takes people past products piled high on numbered shelves bathed in a cold light. Flat-packs reveal little of the actual products inside them, which have to be identified by their product codes. Here, customers can pick up their ready-to-assemble furniture, go to the cash desk to pay, and then load their purchases into their cars. In this area, every aspect – from self-service and flat-packs to the efficient storing of large quantities of items – expresses IKEA's goal of selling home-furnishing products at low prices.

# Room Settings as Contempo-rary Period Rooms

Everything within IKEA's stores has been well planned and each detail carefully thought out, with all of these aspects contributing to the company's identity. Nonetheless, the staged home interiors within each showroom – the so-called *room settings* – must be regarded as their archetypal forms of display. The first-ever IKEA showroom opened in 1958 in Älmhult, close to where the founder, Ingvar Kamprad, grew up, and has housed the IKEA Museum since 2016. Its permanent exhibition is designed in an IKEA style, with short and simple descriptions, white peg-board and wood fibre-board construction materials, and an ample use of PATRULL corner bumpers. The museum showcases staff clothing from the late 1950s onwards, as well as several examples of early IKEA furniture, explicitly presenting the very first showroom as a "whole new type of shopping". Within this new ambience, the museum's written texts state, furnished rooms and printed catalogues inspired visitors, while co-workers greeted them, showed them around and offered interior design tips to suit their tastes and budget.[1] Although the company stresses the innovative character of the room settings, IKEA was not the first furniture store to use such realistic examples. Indeed, Marilyn Friedman (2003) has demonstrated that modern design, especially Art Deco, was shown in room settings in New York department stores during the late 1920s. However, these exhibitions promoted the manufacture of quality products and cannot really be regarded as *realistic* settings in the sense of being affordable. Closer to home, the prestigious *Nordiska Kompaniet* (Nordic Company) department store in Stockholm had already taken steps in the IKEA direction. Housing had become a political issue in Sweden from the 1930s onwards, and government experts used books, courses, exhibitions and magazines to educate people and attempt to convince them of the appeal of a clean, simple, light and airy home. Nordiska Kompaniet

also organised several courses on home furnishing between 1947 and 1965, and it was the first Swedish store to display furniture in a staged, but realistic, setting. These settings were IKEA's main inspiration, Sara Kristoffersson convincingly argues in *Design by IKEA* (2014), and Nordiska's artistic director, Lena Larsson, was even awarded a prize by her employer's competitor.[2]

IKEA was not the first to sell furniture through staged interiors, but its room settings have nevertheless evolved as a kind of trademark, featuring in both popular films and artistic projects. Indeed, I remember a scene from *500 Days of Summer* (2009), in which the main characters pretend they are living in their own home while visiting an IKEA showroom. The sink in the kitchen is broken, but "that's okay," a man says, pointing to the next room, "because that's why we bought a home with two kitchens".[3] This film is also mentioned by Garvey, who focuses on a funny bedroom scene: "Darling, I don't know how to tell you this... there's a Chinese family in our bathroom."[4] Sandberg, meanwhile, mentions Mark Malkoff, who was allowed to move into a model bedroom in a New Jersey store for a week in 2008. Interacting with visitors and employees, Malkoff consistently pretended that he actually lived at IKEA. This combination of comedy and installation art produced a series of 25 videos, which attracted a lot of media attention.[5] The staged interiors also feature in two IKEA commercials that were broadcast on US television in 2003. According to Sandberg, both show an uncomfortable family scene in which emotions are running high. Their discussion is interrupted when someone asks what they think about the room. The family's attitude then changes, saying that the rooms 'make them feel good' and so they are going to buy the furnishings.[6]

A connection between IKEA ensembles and museum displays has been identified earlier. Julius Bryant describes "feeling trapped in an unending nightmare of repetitive contemporary period rooms, back-to-back, on sale, as in that strange social syndrome called 'Ikea'".[7] In turn, Sandberg mentions the powerful "scenic logic" of IKEA's interiors in his chapter about the interactivity of the model home (2011), although he does not use the specific term *period room* at any point. These IKEA interiors suggest a fictional world that looks inhabited, he writes, a sense that is largely conveyed through traces of human presence. Sandberg relates this kind of housing theatre, this "culture of scenic immersion", to Scandinavian museums, model homes and commercial exhibitions in the late-19th and early-20th century.[8] In

*Unpacking Ikea* (2018), Pauline Garvey likewise describes IKEA showrooms as "tableaux vivant[s]" and agrees that their use is embedded in a regional – apparently meaning Scandinavian or even Swedish – history of housing theatre. In the previous chapter, however, I have already shown that this tradition of scenic immersion is not specifically Swedish or Scandinavian, but must instead be seen as a general museological concept that originated in Europe in the 1870s and was used a lot throughout the 20th century. As important instruments in this tradition, Garvey particularly mentions the traces of human presence and the recurring notion of design to invoke persuasive experiences.[9] Finally, Irene Cieraad directly links IKEA's room settings to a specific museum exhibition in her article on "IKEA and the Dutch Domestic Landscape" (2014). Questioning the company's innovative character, including its staged interiors, she refers to the 1947 exposition *This is how we live in Sweden* in the Stedelijk Museum, which is Amsterdam's municipal museum dedicated to modern art and design. This exhibition not only advertised well-designed and affordable Swedish products, but its presentation also foreshadowed the routing in later IKEA stores. Nevertheless, in contrast to the IKEA displays, visitors were not allowed to enter these staged interiors, Cieraad remarks, ironically adding that "however much museum director Sandberg wanted to get rid of his historical period rooms, (...) he got staged interiors in return."[10]

## Room settings as a possible source of inspiration

My goal in this chapter is not to trace the IKEA room settings back to their (museological) origins, but to instead understand them as a possible source of inspiration for the museological collecting of contemporary home life. As explained in the introduction to Part 2, I will: examine IKEA's room settings as a collection of home interiors, consider the act of collecting, the kind of home life reflected, the people represented and the ways in which the ensembles connect with visitors.

My main reason for choosing this case is the what may, on the face of it, seem surprising physical resemblance between museums' period rooms and IKEA's room settings, although the approximately two million annual visitors to an average Dutch IKEA store would be much to the envy of many museums![11] Like period rooms, IKEA's constructed home interiors contain single pieces of furniture in various home settings relating to func-

tion, lifestyle and taste. Similarly, they are presented as a series of accessible, individual rooms framed within a larger collection. However, while museums' period rooms contextualise objects in the past, IKEA's room settings present alternative contemporary home interiors. What characterises the room settings? What image of modern home life do they paint? Whose lives are they aiming to portray? How does the company construct its ensembles and select its products? And what can museums learn from IKEA's approach to contemporaneity?

A second reason for including the IKEA room settings in my comparative case study relates to their capacity to shift between the extremes of a global and a local market, all the while maintaining a national Swedish profile. How does this compare to the collections of city museums that combine a broader cultural-historical interest in urban life with the particularist dimensions of their specific city? What might museums searching for a local identity learn from IKEA's struggle with Swedishness?

My final, important reason for examining IKEA's room settings concerns the ways in which the ensembles connect with visitors. Museums stress the immersive qualities of period rooms and their powerful narratives, but they generally lack the interactivity of IKEA's staged home interiors. What is the role played by interactivity in its ensembles? What other connective qualities underlie the narratives in its room settings? Are these qualities limited to commercial ensembles or might they inspire museums as well? If so, how do they affect museums' collecting policies?

## Method

The popular films, artistic projects and scholarly publications mentioned previously represent just a tiny part of the overwhelming attention paid to IKEA. As my study is focused on contemporary

1 — Recorded during my visit on 13 August 2017.
2 — Kristoffersson 2014: 62 and footnote 47.
3 — Webb, Marc (2009). *500 Days of Summer*.
4 — Garvey 2018 / Unpacking: 6.
5 — Sandberg 2011: 63-64.
6 — Ibid. 63.
7 — Bryant 2009: 77.
8 — Sandberg 2011: 65 and further.
9 — Garvey 2018 / Unpacking: 72. Chapters 2 and 3 have showrooms as tableaux vivants and home staging as their respective subjects.
10 — Cieraad 2014: 64-65, quote from page 65.
11 — This visitor number compares to that of the Amsterdam Van Gogh Museum, which ranks in the top three of the most-visited Dutch museums.

museum collecting, I have ignored the numerous books and articles related to, for example, marketing and business studies, with my gaze instead on a cultural perspective. The recent publications by Sara Kristoffersson and Pauline Garvey in particular provide valuable insights into the company's practices from a historical and cultural perspective. In *Design by IKEA* (2014), Kristoffersson aims to unravel the firm's corporate storytelling from the late 1970s to the 2000s. Interviewing current and former employees, and using company documents like manuals and advertisements, Kristoffersson has adopted the company's perspective. Garvey, on the other hand, focuses her anthropological study on the consumers. *Unpacking Ikea* (2018) follows furnishings from the outstanding Stockholm store to the buyers' homes. In-depth interviews with a variety of householders reveal, for instance, the importance of interactivity in IKEA's showrooms and its contribution to the concept of inspiration.[12] A few other academic studies from different disciplines can also be related to IKEA's room settings, such as the articles by Colombo, Laddaga & Antonietti (2015) and Ledin & Machin (2019), which reflect on the 'readability' and interpretation of room settings from psychological and semiotic points of view, respectively. In my goal to relate the IKEA room settings to museological discourse, I have also used both the museological literature and my own experiences as a museum curator to discuss the ideas emanating from this case.

Apart from the scholarly literature, various popular-media documents have proved to be insightful sources of information. Several articles in newspapers and magazines contributed to a better understanding, as did some audio-visual resources, with the BBC's television documentary *Flatpack Empire* (2018) requiring explicit mention. I have also used many of IKEA's company documents, including various annual reports and catalogues, its website, several background videos on the internet and promotional videos about customers' frustrations with their home. Direct observations have also been made following several visits to the showroom.

Two expert interviews were important in giving me better insight into the methods used to construct room settings and their underlying ideas from a creator's perspective. My January 2019 interview with Biba Mijailovic-Pavic took place at the service office in Amsterdam, where she then worked as Deputy Country Communication & Interior (hereafter: ComIn) Design Manager at IKEA Nederland. Biba started as an interior designer at IKEA, soon became a team leader and then ComIn Manager at the Utrecht store. After a successful

store renovation, she worked as a Learning & Development Leader within the ComIn department, where she sought to secure and expand the knowledge level of her co-workers. In 2017, Biba was appointed Deputy Country ComIn Manager at IKEA Netherlands. She thus works on a national level within the service office and is the main point of contact for the Dutch IKEA stores.

Aiming to focus on a local level and delve deeper into the actual process of constructing room settings within one of IKEA's stores, in March 2019 I also interviewed Tamara Schouwenaars, Interior Design Manager at IKEA Barendrecht. Tamara told me about her team of interior designers who conceive all the room settings in the Barendrecht showroom. She described her main function within IKEA as more long-term and investigative, but she also assists or guides her team in the actual construction of the room settings. Although Tamara is still passionate about the design of these settings, she particularly values the long-term aspects of her management role, which encompasses the entire process from start to finish. After the first part of our interview, Tamara guided me through the Barendrecht showroom and showed me a variety of ensembles, clarifying the different approaches and the creators' intentions. Later, I returned to the showroom floor to take some photographs of the ensembles we had discussed, and a number of these are included in this chapter.

## Terminology

Although there are many parallels between IKEA's room settings and museum ensembles, the differences between a museum and a furniture store have influenced my choice of terminology. Where it seems perfectly appropriate to use the word *object* to refer to a chair, table or desk in a museum context, it makes more sense to use *product, item* or even *commodity* in the context of an IKEA showroom.

Similarly, the terms *public, audience* and *viewer* have been much discussed in museology and all carry different connotations. Nonetheless, they are not really appropriate in the IKEA context, where people can watch, test and buy the furniture on display. In 2011, Sandberg suggested the term *participant* when studying those encountering the model home displays, but this has acquired so much museological meaning over the past decade that I prefer not to use it in a commercial context.[13] Terms like *customer* or *consumer*, on the other hand, would stress the economic over the

social aspects of what can be a day-trip enjoyed with others; indeed, as Garvey has shown, the latter forms an integral part of many visits.[14] Consequently, like IKEA, I use the word *visitor*. In so doing, my intention is to adopt a neutral term that includes an enthusiastic shopper in a showroom, as well as a reticent, potential buyer viewing items on the internet.

In the overall context of my comparative case study, the IKEA ensembles are described as *contemporary period rooms* or *period-room-like displays* – which I use as an overarching term for the commercial domestic ensembles in the various cases. When trying to describe and fully understand a specific case, I consider it to be important to use specific language. In this circumstance, I adopt the term *room setting*, which is used by the IKEA managers I have interviewed. Although the distinctive term *room set* is contained in the URL of the company's website and is used in the documentary *Flatpack Empire* and by Garvey (2018), my interviewees explicitly stated that they always speak of a *room setting*. When asked about using *room set*, they stood firm, but acknowledged that this would probably also be correct.[15]

Following on from this line of thought, I have chosen to spell out the company's name using capital letters. Although there is much to be said for the alternative spelling, *Ikea*, especially when referring to the company as a cultural package from a consumer's point of view, as Garvey does,[16] I want to emphasise that I have adopted IKEA's perspective in this chapter. This is also my main reason for using the company's all-caps spelling of product names, which has the additional benefit of avoiding any confusion with people or places.

The IKEA perspective emerges particularly strongly in the next section, which aims to fully describe the company's methods and underlying ideas. In choosing the makers' point of view to describe the construction of the room settings, as well as their core philosophies, I not only situate the ensembles squarely within the original context of an IKEA showroom, but also mirror curatorial expertise in the construction of period rooms. In so doing, I explore the methods and ideas that could apply to and inspire museum collecting.

12 ___ Garvey also contributed to *Design Anthropology* edited by Allison Clarke; the book's second edition was published in 2018. Her chapter "Consuming IKEA and Inspiration as Material Form" is based on the same study as *Unpacking Ikea.*
13 ___ Sandberg 2011: 78-79.
14 ___ Garvey 2018 / Consuming: 108-109.
15 ___ Interviews 19 January [Part 1, 45:39] and 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 1:42].
16 ___ Garvey 2018 / Unpacking: endnote on page 9.

# A Series of Possible Worlds to Inhabit

With 378 stores, 166,350 employees and 706 million store visits over 2020,[17] IKEA is the world's largest furniture retailer. The company's product range counts approximately 9,500 items[18] covering the entire home environment. As the online brochure *This is IKEA* (2017) states, it offers a wide variety of "well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them". The brochure also communicates the company's vision: "To create a better everyday life for the many people". In fact, this mission statement reflects IKEA's agility in combining idealism and commercialism, as the BBC-documentary *Flatpack Empire* (2018) captures perfectly: it repeatedly shows the dominance of straightforward commercialism, which is rationalised and humanised by the goal of serving *the many people*.

The product range plays a crucial role at IKEA. This is a function that I feel tempted to compare to a museum's collection, since the identity of a museum is often based more on its collections than on, for example, its building or collaborators. Where IKEA aims to offer a wide variety of products, it simultaneously stresses the importance of a clearly recognisable profile. "The Product Range – Our Identity" reads the heading of the first chapter of Ingvar Kamprad's *Testament of a Furniture Dealer*. Although this foundational narrative was published as long ago as 1976, Sarah Kristoffersson convincingly argues in *Design by IKEA* that it still is a leading principle within the company.[19] In his chapter on the product range, Kamprad stresses that all commodities should be simple, durable, colourful and cheerful, reflecting an easier and more natural life. Furthermore, the products should be perceived as 'typically IKEA' in Scandinavia and 'typically Swedish' elsewhere. Additionally, while the products must be functional and well made, they should also be low-priced so that 'the many' can afford them.[20]

IKEA has long used three main channels to offer its products to the many people: its catalogue, website and stores. The annual catalogue was an important marketing tool from 1951 to 2020, and was released every August at the end of the company's financial year leading, allegedly, to a significant rise in sales in September. About a third of the product range was presented in the catalogue, which not only aimed to assert IKEA's brand identity but, above all, tempt readers to visit a showroom.[21] In reducing the distribution of the paper version, however, its readers are now increasingly directed towards the website, which is another important way for the company to offer its products. Website visitors – 3.6 billion over 2020 – can download the full catalogue[22] and find lots of information about the firm, including its history and current goals, the research it conducts and a variety of sustainability reports. Most people, though, are likely to search for specific products or seek inspiration from a variety of themes. All the products can be ordered with the click of a mouse, and appointments can be scheduled when extra expertise is required. Nevertheless, both the website and the (former) catalogue aim (aimed) to lure customers to the stores, which form the company's third marketing channel and its most important in terms of selling products. The 445 IKEA stores are located in more than 60 markets and attracted 825 million visits over 2020. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, this number was considerably lower than in 2019, when IKEA stores welcomed a billion visitors. The company is still expanding, planning more stores in existing markets and opening others in new ones.[23] The stores offer inspiration and expertise in interior design, as well as a leisure experience that can be enjoyed by families.[24] During our interview, Biba Mijailovic, the Deputy for Country Communication & Interior Design Manager, illustrated this last aspect as follows:

*Why go to a store when you can buy everything online? You have to have a reason to visit that store. And for a lot of people that is… it's very strange, but it's also a kind of day out. When the weather is miserable, well then we go to IKEA, get some inspiration, eat something and drink a cup of coffee. Yes, it's … the complete package or something. And that you also take home something nice, for a nice price… Then you've had your day again, you enjoyed yourself.*[25]

The stores have primarily been designed to sell as much as possible, which is primarily achieved by exhibiting items within the stores' domestic interior settings.[26] During our interview, Tamara Schouwenaars, the Interior Design Manager, confirmed that the products within the room settings are generally the ones that sell best. If some items need special attention, for example because there is a large stock of discontinued products, the company will take action and, sometimes, Tamara told me, displaying them within a room setting will be the best solution.[27]

Various contextual displays provide the products with either a functional or inspirational purpose, and the room settings are IKEA's most conspicuous type of display. Replicating the museum period room, these constructed home interiors present pieces of furniture in various home settings relating to function, lifestyle, budget and taste. Whereas the company's product range contains circa 9,500 unique items, which are mass-produced and sold worldwide, the room settings contain the products that have been specifically selected to appeal to the local showroom's visitors. The rooms may thus present a limited selection or, on the other hand, might include several of the same mass-produced items. In this sense, the sum of the room settings is more akin to a city museum's collection than a singular product range. Constructing a series of room settings involves selecting products from a wealth of possibilities to create a variety of coherent interiors – a series of possible worlds to inhabit – and this broadly resembles a curator's process of selecting objects and ensembles for a museum collection. How do the IKEA 'curators' construct their domestic ensembles and select the products? Who are they? On what information do they base their decisions? What are the room settings aiming to achieve? And why has IKEA developed these settings in this way?

## Constructing a room setting

IKEA's store exteriors are clearly recognisable and, likewise, the layout is similar across the globe. Just as the product range is developed by the central organisation, IKEA of Sweden also advises individual stores about the selection and presentation of the products within a range. These choices have to sustain a general image that captures the 'soul' of the company while allowing necessary adaptations for the local market. The local store manager thus has some freedom in relation to the final selections and presentation.[28] My interviewees formulated this explicitly from a converse perspective: although the Swedish database provides *international* examples, the local market often requires significant adjustments. So, individual stores increasingly tend to produce their own layouts.[29] Interior design manager Tamara accentuated the importance of a local approach:

*We have a kind of toolbox that contains a lot of information. We can get layouts from there and then fit and measure them in ours. So, we're working with that, although recently less and less, because we want to have it more focused on our market. Because… What's made in Älmhult is not, by definition, the Dutch market. From there, we still have a lot to tinker with, so sometimes we actually decide it ourselves – or often even.*[30]

The first four or five room settings within each showroom play an especially important role. Recommendations made by the Common Store Planning Group for a new store's layout cover about 90 per cent of these room settings, displaying the right mix of 'Swedishness' and adaptation to the local market.[31] Together, they constitute the so-called *showroom entrance*, formerly called the "First Five", which represents everything IKEA has to offer in terms of style and function for every target group. The *core areas* – living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms – have to be represented, preferably

17 — Numbers from the Ingka's *Annual Summary & Sustainability Report FY20*: 5. The IKEA Group's *Financial Summary FY20* (p. 2-3) mentions 445 stores, 217,000 employees and 825 million store visits over 2020. As regards website visitors, the numbers are 3.6 and 4 billion, respectively.

18 — Different sources mention different numbers, and these also vary over the years. The figure 9,500 is used in the *Yearly Summary FY17*: 17.

19 — Kristoffersson 2014: 15.

20 — Kamprad 1976: 4-5.

21 — Garvey 2018 / Unpacking: 33, Kristoffersson 2014: 26.

22 — In December 2020, IKEA announced it would no longer publish either the paper or digital catalogue. The 2021 version, released in August 2020, was the last traditional example. In autumn 2021, the company will release a special edition to pay homage to the iconic catalogue.

23 — *Financial Summary FY20*: 3.

24 — Kristoffersson 2014: 26.

25 — Interview 15 January 2019 [Part 1, 36:57-37:32].

26 — Kristoffersson 2014: 26, Garvey 2018 / Unpacking: 33.

27 — Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 45:39].

28 — Shove 2006: 138 & Garvey 2018 / Unpacking: 32.

29 — Interviews 15 January 2019 [Part 4, 3:05] and 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 31:26].

30 — Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 31:26].

31 — Garvey 2018 / Unpacking: 32.

3.2

These four photographs illustrate the showroom entrance at IKEA Barendrecht in July 2018. A living room of 20m$^2$ was followed by a smaller room of 15m$^2$ that combined living and dining and then, thirdly, there was a much larger combination of a kitchen-diner and living area of 32m$^2$. The fourth room setting was found on the opposite side, and comprised a large bedroom and dressing room (surface area not mentioned).
Photos Mayke Groffen (6 July 2018).

with the addition of a secondary area, like a bathroom, children's room or outdoor space. In contrast to the other sections, the showroom entrance has to epitomise the entire IKEA store,[32] although it is also part of the annual commercial theme and is changed accordingly. While the company concentrated on living rooms in 2018, using the slogan *Make Room for Life*, its focus shifted to bedrooms and bathrooms in 2019, with the slogan then becoming *Get Ready for Life.* The new theme thus highlighted sleeping, storing clothes and shoes and getting ready in the bathroom. Such a shift in priority was made visible throughout the stores and included a redesign of the entrance area.[33]

The redesign of the room settings, whether as a result of a new commercial theme or for other commercially motivated reasons, involves all the disciplines within the store. Driven by the sales and commercial teams, the management, logistics, customer service, communication and interior design teams are also all part of the process. Extensive market research precedes any decisions to redevelop part of the showroom, but the interior designers actually create the room settings, interior design manager Tamara tells me: "We invent them, draw them and really build them."[34]

Home visits, conducted by interior designers several times a year, underlie the room settings.

3.3

During my interview with Tamara, some of the room settings were still under construction. The living circumstances in this third home interior relates to a family with teenagers, Tamara told me. It will have a large fridge freezer and enough space to welcome friends. A space has been created for doing homework, where there is also room for dad to review it and help. There are many seating areas to lure the teenagers to the living room, without which, the home visits discovered, they can only be found upstairs. This room setting will thus provide relevant households with a solution to such issues.
Photo Mayke Groffen (22 March 2019).

During these visits, the researchers record the actual living circumstances of various households, answering a standard set of questions per room and occasionally measuring the space. They do not give interior design advice, Tamara says, but observe, ask and analyse. Home visits have a purpose of encountering real-life problems and inspire the designers to find solutions.[35] Moreover, although the store's room settings are not intended to be literal replications of real life, the entrance area in 2019 was in fact based entirely on specific home visits. At that time, IKEA selected four different living scenarios and explored the various needs of the inhabitants. To give them room to manoeuvre, they did not ask about preferred styles or tastes, instead limiting their ques-

tions to space and functional needs. These needs, the problems identified and possible solutions were then integrated in the four room settings subsequently put in place.[36]

The BBC documentary *Flatpack Empire* (2018) also captures the home-visit process in a period when the Wembley store in London was being refreshed. The visual manager Rickylee is seen conducting home visits, closely following a questionnaire that guides the procedure. Such visits aim to find solutions for real-life problems, Rickylee says. Later on, the documentary reveals that each new room setting is designed for a fictional character, most of whom are based on aspects of the people met doing home visits. The documentary shows Rickylee holding a biography of extravert Ben, a single 29-year-old tattooist with an annual income of 30,000 to 39,000 pounds. She and her team use this script to create a social connection to the room setting, which enables them to tell a convincing story and visitors to connect to their own lives at home.[37]

Whether or not the approximately 60 room settings per store represent the home interiors of fictional characters or, more directly, reflect contemporary living circumstances, they all aim to offer visitors imaginative solutions to real-life challenges. Scenarios enable the team to make a social connection and to choose the right furnishings for future inhabitants, which should, in turn, appeal to certain visitors. In order to attract different visitor groups and sell as many furnishings as possible, the room settings have to be based on a variety of narratives. To this end, the process of creating a room always starts with a *work brief*. This contains information about the inhabitants of the room, including their age, income, activities and needs. These factors underlie the interior design drawing produced for each room setting. Next, a *visual identity* is created, which is a moodboard-like visualisation of the general feel that the room setting is aiming to convey. The visual identity is then translated into a *scenario,* which depicts both the staged setting and the narrated story in quite some detail. This might describe a father or mother making dinner while their child sits at the dining table, half listening and doing some homework at the same time. The scenario is further developed from a functional perspective, and contains information on matters like living circumstances, spatial arrangements, solutions to problems and expressions of style. An inventory of needs generally results in a *product collage,* after which the room setting's specific furnishings are chosen.[38] This is in contrast to museums, which

start - as a rule of thumb - by choosing objects, while IKEA's process begins by defining the needs of the households to which they want to appeal.

## Differentiating between "the many people"

In order to attract a wide variety of visitors, IKEA's interior designers' approach to creating a room setting has to guarantee the development of a broad range of convincing narratives. These are situated in a number of spaces, such as living rooms, kitchens, bedrooms, bathrooms, children's rooms and home offices. Products are thus first grouped according to their spatial function. Internal considerations like a product's life-cycle and what IKEA calls the "range balance" (i.e., a mix of new and proven products) are also taken into account in the construction of the various ensembles. Nevertheless, in aiming to appeal to "the many people", IKEA uses three main ways to differentiate between them: taste (style groups); budget (price levels); and household (living situation).

As previously mentioned, a variety of living scenarios form the starting point for IKEA's home visits. This interest in households and lifestyles began in the 1970s, when the company realised that its aspiration to display familiar ensembles required thorough insights into people's habits and needs. More or less systematic research directed towards identifying real-life problems led to the concept of *Livet Hemma* (Life at Home), later called *Living Situations*, which came to function as a tool for monitoring the different stages of domestic life.[39] Today's types of household make a primary distinction between those with or without children. These are further categorised into families with children under the age of 12, divided into two groups: *baby/toddler* and *starting school.* Children older than 12 are categorised as *teens & tweens* or *20+.* Households without children are

32 __ Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 26:45 and 28:57].
33 __ Interview 15 January 2019 [Part 1, 46:04-48:34].
34 __ Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 3:24, 13:01 and 42:18].
35 __ Ibid. [Part 1, 8:55].
36 __ Ibid. [Part 1, 19:14].
37 __ *Flatpack Empire* (2018), Episode 3: 21.30-23.17 and 38.15-39.30.
38 __ The description in this paragraph is based on several pieces of information obtained from interviews conducted on 15 January 2019 [Part 1, 38:53, 40:45, 42:03] and 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 6:33, part 2, 4:42].
39 __ Kristoffersson 2014: 63.

# 1978

Triptych by Peter Trouwborst showing the demolition of houses on Gaffelstraat (Oude Westen) in 1976.

10955 - 10957

separated into *singles* and *together*. In the past, *starting singles* and *starting together* were additional categories, but the importance of this subdivision has diminished. Occasionally, it can be helpful to focus on specific home circumstances, Tamara (the interior design manager at Barendrecht) explained, but today's ageing population remains quite young at heart, and so there is often no need to differentiate in this manner.[40]

Different price levels are also distinguished to appeal to different visitors. Products within the room settings are sorted into the categories high, medium and low. These are not so much related to income, but to how much visitors are willing to spend in an IKEA store.[41] A fourth price level relates to single products only: "breath-taking items" are priced extremely low to make them irresistible to customers and encourage impulse buying.[42] These products, including the best-selling PLASTIS dish brush, are available in large quantities in bins or on pallets throughout the showroom.

Along with household and budget, the final main tool used to differentiate between IKEA's visitors is taste, whereby products are categorised into style

3.4

The lifestyle of a young household with limited finances is reflected in this room setting at IKEA Barendrecht. A large banner promises "more for less" and calculates that all the furnishings can be bought for no more than €1,000. Furniture can be used flexibly to ensure the space's 15m² are well used. IKEA has also added a few do-it-yourself tips, which explain how to paint your floor in a beautiful pattern, how to personalise the BRUSALI cabinet and how to make a coffee table using four KNAGGLIG boxes, four RILL wheels and an MDF board.
Photo Mayke Groffen (July 2018).

groups and stylistic expressions to incorporate the taste preferences of a wide variety of potential customers. Apparently, the stylistic expressions are applied at the interior designers' discretion. They might, for example, give a popular modern style a minimalist appearance or create an interior containing many more 'things' with the same modern styling.[43] In contrast to the stylistic expressions, the style groups are defined more precisely. An online video published by IKEA in 2017 represents the style groups as an overlay of two circles, the first with a traditional and a modern part, the second with a Scandinavian and a popular element. This produces four style groups



– Scandinavian Traditional, Scandinavian Modern, Popular Modern and Popular Traditional – which are weighted based on their global commercial prospects. The video then characterises the style groups as follows:

*Scandinavian Traditional is a contemporary interpretation of 200 years of Swedish home furnishing innovation. The products are simple, light, functional and well crafted. They're sturdy and rustic everyday basics, down-to-earth furnishings that are unmistakably Swedish.*

*The Scandinavian Modern style group expresses Scandinavian design of today. It's forward thinking, functional and simple, with innovative materials and Scandinavian colour accents. It's quintessential IKEA design.*

*Global and contemporary, Popular Modern is the largest IKEA style group. Taking its inspiration from international modern designs, it fuses the coordinated with the sophisticated, elegant lines with a mix of textures. Popular Modern can create a classic mood or make more of a contemporary impression.*

3.5

This fourth room setting in IKEA Barendrecht's entrance area is based on the living circumstances of a single woman aged 68. It reflects the Popular Traditional style, which is indicated by the many flowers, check patterns and bevelled edges. As Tamara, the IKEA interior design manager, remarked during our interview, this kind of over-decorating is in contrast to the clear and straightforward Scandinavian style.
Photo Mayke Groffen (22 March 2019).

*Inspired by European interiors of the 18th and 19th century, the Popular Traditional style group is warm and welcoming. A decorative and internationally oriented style, popular traditional widens people's perception of the IKEA offer. It mixes detailed decorative darker impressions with textile-intensive lighter moods.*[44]

40 — Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 4:32].
41 — Ibid. [Part 1, 6:00].
42 — Kristoffersson 2014: 28-29, 64.
43 — Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 24:53].
44 — My transcription of the video IKEA- *Style Groups*. In IKEA Systems 2017: [2:27-3:58].

The description in the video diverges slightly from the four main style groups mentioned in the scholarly literature. In 2018, Garvey thought it better to give them the names Traditional, Scandinavian, Modern and Young.[45] Earlier, Kristoffersson (2014) had chosen Traditional (formerly known as Country), Scandinavian Modernism, International Modernism and Young. However, a footnote mentions the groups according to their categorisation in 2012: Scandinavian Traditional, Modern, Popular Modern and Popular Traditional.[46] The names and precise descriptions seem to have varied slightly over time, but the 2012 classification closely resembles that in the 2017 video.

All of IKEA's products are developed within the style groups. Moreover, all the room settings express one of these styles. Items are thus grouped in ensembles that, in turn, convey a Scandinavian Traditional, Scandinavian Modern, Popular Modern or Popular Traditional style. Although a room setting may contain items from different style groups, one principal style dominates as a way to create coherence and, simultaneously, advocate the notion that all the products will match well together. To appeal to the tastes and preferences of as many visitors as possible, the first four or five room settings in each showroom comprise all the styles. Individual visitors are not, however, expected to recognise these various styles – in stark contrast to many museums' period rooms. Put simply, IKEA's objectives are to inspire different visitor groups by showing them diverse coherent settings and avoid boring uniformity.[47]

# Themes

The previous section describes IKEA's room settings in an attempt to understand the underlying ideas and perspectives. It demonstrates how interior designers use a fixed approach to construct the room settings, which enables them to tell convincing stories based on local living arrangements. Furthermore, it makes clear that categorisations of households, budgets and tastes are the main tools used to differentiate between visitors, while the narratives are situated in various functional spaces. It is also apparent that the ensembles aim to provide imaginative solutions to diverse real-life problems.

The current section relates the IKEA case more explicitly to museological collecting of contemporary home life. Four important themes within this case are examined to explore what museums can learn from IKEA's approach. The first of these investigates the real-life problems the room settings are said to resolve. In popular YouTube videos, IKEA claims to tackle the frustrations we have with our homes today, and its room settings similarly provide clever alternatives to challenging circumstances. What issues are raised? What solutions are suggested? Moreover, from which perspective are the ensembles constructed and how do they relate to time? Accordingly, the first theme examines the images of modern home life that the IKEA room settings reflect and compares them to museums' period rooms.

The second case-specific theme of *Swedishness* highlights the room settings' capacity to appeal to both a global and a local market, while simultaneously advertising a Swedish profile. This replicates the interest of city museums in building a collection that serves visiting tourists and local communities alike, as well as one that combines a broader cultural-historical perspective on urban life and a city's particularist dimensions. Moreover, when it comes to a collection that is related to home life especially, how and to what extent can it be framed nationally or locally? What insights can museums searching for a local identity acquire from IKEA's struggle with Swedishness?

The third theme further examines the contextualisation of objects in ensembles. Although the theme also relates to display techniques, my interest lies not so much in the presentation itself

as in the way presentations affect collecting practices. The IKEA case shows how, in a contemporary setting limited to the specific cultural subject-matter of the home, different ensembles convey different values. "Inspirational images, functional solutions" compares the contexts provided by IKEA's showrooms to those in museums and examines their underlying ideas. I will argue that museums must consider their display techniques in their collection policies, as well as pay special attention to coherent, functional ensembles where contemporary home life is concerned.

Finally, the fourth theme explores the museological issue of connecting objects or ensembles to visitors. The museum period room has long been perceived as an immersive type of display that connects even those with little museum experience to objects. Nevertheless, the sensorial repertoire of the period room is rather limited and lacks the interactivity of IKEA's room settings. What role is played by interactivity in the IKEA ensembles? What other connective qualities underlie their room settings? Are these qualities limited to commercial ensembles or might they inspire museums as well? Moreover, if so, how would they affect museums' collecting policies?

## Home frustrations

In YouTube videos lasting approximately five minutes, IKEA's designers tackle the frustrations we have with our homes today. In the videos, individuals initially complain about their way-too-small kitchen, awful garden or unsuitable attic. Then, after leaving for a few hours to allow for an IKEA makeover, the residents return full of anticipation. What will the room look like? What creative solutions has the IKEA designer used to deal with their problems? Amazed at the changes, the residents praise the designer's ingenuity in transforming their difficult room into a well organised, inspiring or comfortable space. The IKEA room settings aim to have a similar effect by providing clever alternatives to challenging situations. This first, home-frustration, theme further examines the image of the modern home lives that the IKEA room settings reflect and compares them to museums' period rooms. What issues are raised and what solutions are suggested? Which perspectives are used to construct the ensembles and how do they relate to time?

**Perspective and Time**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, museums generally distinguish two types of period room, depending on the perspective chosen: artistic and social. While the first of these refers to the display of a certain style – emphasising uniqueness, authorship, connoisseurship, quality and good taste – the latter is conceived as a generalised representation of everyday existence, accentuating the usual components of an ordinary home life.

IKEA's room settings combine the artistic and the social period room, stressing both style and use at the same time. On the one hand, the company uses four style categories to create coherent expressions that appeal to the tastes of different visitor groups. Each room setting expresses a specific style, accentuating design, quality and good taste. Implicitly, they allude to the IKEA designers,

45 — Garvey 2018/Unpacking: 32.
46 — Kristoffersson 2014: 64 and footnote 67.
47 — Interview 15 January 2019 [Part 1, 55:00]; also, Kristoffersson 2014: 64 & Garvey 2018/Unpacking: 34.

who are, according to Garvey, regarded by visitors as "a benign but largely anonymous collective whose creativity is foreshadowed in specific objects and arrangements of furniture".[48] Although a video on style groups can be found on the internet, it is explicitly *not* IKEA's intention to teach visitors to recognise these styles in the showroom, as the interior design manager Tamara Schouwenaars affirmed during our interview. This is in stark contrast to many museological period rooms, where the categorisation of furniture and decorative arts into stylistic periods can often be seen as the raison d'être for a type of *artistic* period room. On the other hand, IKEA's room settings stress functionality, realistic situations and real people's needs. In this sense, they bear more resemblance to *social* period rooms. This second type of room is conceived as a generalised representation of everyday life, which typically stresses the commonplace and the ordinary – or, to paraphrase IKEA: the everyday life of the many people.

The artistic or social perspective selected for period rooms affects the choice of a specific *historical moment of truth*, as argued in Chapter 2, although this point in time is not always explicated in museums. Artistic period rooms are usually represented through their moment of creation, accentuating authorship and style to convey the intended interior design. In contrast, the social period room focuses on how the home interior is actually used, acknowledging change and accretions as part of its definition, and therefore choosing a moment later in time. Nevertheless, while museums' period rooms generally contextualise their objects in the past, IKEA's room settings suggest alternatives for contemporary home interiors. More precisely: they project ideas for a better home life in the near future; a future filled with IKEA products. The company's key concept of inspiration also refers to time, indicating a continuous process of "making homes", as Sarah Pink et al. describe in their eponymous book.[49] Moreover, time not only relates to the chosen moment of truth, but also to the availability of objects. While museums present all objects as cultural heritage, room settings offer theirs as trendy commodities. According to Sandberg, the IKEA room settings must be regarded as "stage sets of the possible worlds and styles one might inhabit".[50] In contrast, museum period rooms do not offer a range of future opportunities and nor are they part of a process of home improvement; they are representations of worlds once inhabited by someone else. Consequently, a different moment of truth, combined with a different attitude towards objects,

entails a different meaning of home life in the ensembles. While it is difficult to change the aspect of object availability, it is relevant to further examine the home life that the ensembles represent. What issues are raised and what solutions are suggested by IKEA's room settings? What do their "possible worlds" look like?

### Solutions for Real-life Problems
IKEA began to conduct market research in the 1970s to gain insight into our habits and needs. Although this research is also used to both ensure styles are kept up-to-date and incorporate the preferences of a wide variety of potential customers, it is primarily directed towards identifying real-life challenges.[51] The company has published the findings of its global research since 2014. These are set out in its annual *Life at Home Reports,* which combine quantitative surveys with qualitative work. In the 2019 report, for example, IKEA describes engaging with 150 people online, conducting in-depth interviews over 75 hours during home visits in six cities (Shanghai, Mumbai, London, New York and Amsterdam), and interviewing 33,500 adults in 35 countries across five continents.[52] Last year, during the coronavirus pandemic, they interviewed 38,210 adults in 37 countries, virtually connected with 20 households and consulted four experts on interior design, sustainability, (in)equality and urban studies.

The first two *Life at Home Reports* concentrated on a specific theme (waking up) or space (the kitchen), but later versions have adopted a more abstract perspective. The 2016 report defined four key dimensions of home life (relationships, place, space and things), while that from the following year examined the interplay between them. This 2017 report described "common household battles", which were presented as tensions that affect most of us worldwide, for example "the feeling of home starting within us vs. the outside creeping in to distract us".[53] In 2018, the *Life at Home Report* considered five core emotional needs connected to the home: privacy, security, comfort, ownership and belonging. The general conclusion, that a feeling of home is not necessarily limited to the space people live in, was expressed in its theme overall: beyond four walls. The report in 2019 zoomed in on privacy, which was one of the previously established basic emotional needs. It argued that privacy is a need that is sometimes difficult to achieve, explored the obstacles to doing so, and offered tips on how it could be promoted both in and outside the home. Nonetheless, after this period of extending the

home to public places, the 2020 report returned the focus to the home itself. *The Big Home Reboot* is centred on the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures that have limited access to the outside world. "Practically overnight, the spaces in which we lived transformed into offices, schools, gyms, playgrounds, and social spaces", the report notes, and "people adjusted to an entirely new way of living, with home at the heart of their lives".[54] The report ultimately anticipates three global trends that are likely to affect life at home in the future: the need for optimised and flexible spaces (termed the *multipurpose home*), the use of local networks for physical and emotional support (the *local home)*, and the recognition of the role played by the home's quality on health and wellbeing (the *healthy home).*[55] It is not difficult to see how the last five years' global trends might change the company's strategy or serve as inputs to further develop its product range, but the implications for concrete room settings are more difficult to envision.

Research has also been conducted closer to home to identify customers' preferences and needs. Internet data have been analysed, models based on motivational lifestyle segmentation utilised and estate agents' websites viewed. During my interview at the Service Office, Deputy Country Comln manager Biba Mijailovic particularly mentioned the funda website as a source when reconsidering house types and the nature of the homes on offer. Annual research is also conducted to gather information about potential customers in each store's primary markets. Part of this systematic work involves the home visits made to customers in each IKEA's surrounding areas. During these visits – for which people can enrol and get a gift card in return – interior designers record their actual living conditions and ask in-depth questions about the use of space. "Many people don't expect they will face a challenge themselves," the interior design manager Tamara Schouwenaars told me. "They think: I've lived here for years; I've not got any problems. But sometimes we see things... oh, well, *that* could be done more practically. We'll notice that."[56] To give me a better idea of the nature of these inquiries, Biba talked to me about the questions asked during home visits:

*Quite a few years ago, we started to use the 'activity wheel'. The seasons often function as a guideline as well. Then you'll think about all things happening from summer to December: after summer vacation, people go back to work, children go to school, and they need stuff... all*

*kinds of solutions for that. It's getting colder. Where do you store your summer things, and where do all the winter things come from? What happens? And what's needed? We'll question these aspects down to the last detail. This includes the various life stages. Parents with schoolchildren get back to their old routines in September, but people with older children may well choose to go on holiday then. So, many different things happen between summer and New Year's Day. And then, a new period will start again.*[57]

In Barendrecht, Tamara added that the activity wheel relates to basic matters, like reading, sport, creating an outdoor living space or setting the table for a cosy dinner party. "You can think out-of-the-box and fantasise about all the possible things a person might do at home", she said, "but, in fact, we want to address the many". In following basic activities across the seasons and applying them to the room settings, IKEA aims to present easily recognisable scenarios to meet their customers' needs all year round.[58]

The differences between the home visits and the global research are quite remarkable, and I have not been able to establish the extent of their interplay. The two extremes are seemingly separate activities with their own dynamics. Home visits are intended to encounter local problems, but these seem somewhat trivial, mainly questioning the efficient and comfortable furnishing of a house. Allegedly, the biggest home frustration relates to the enormous amount of stuff people want to keep while maintaining a tidy interior. The nature of the solutions is typical IKEA: not decluttering, but the purchase of a practical storage system instead. The problems raised in the *Life at Home Reports*, on the other hand, relate individual homes on a higher level of abstraction to our lives

48 ___ Garvey 2018 / Unpacking: 29.
49 ___ Pink et al. 2017: 27-28. This underlines the role of "inspiration" in this process, quoting from Garvey's chapter Consuming Ikea (2010, 1st edition, p. 143): "(...) inspiration (...) does not necessarily imply transformation but rather gives names to a contemplation of possibilities".
50 ___ Sandberg 2011: 65.
51 ___ Kristoffersson 2014: 63.
52 ___ *Life at Home Report* 2019: 8.
53 ___ *Life at Home Report* 2017: 6.
54 ___ *Life at Home Report* 2020: 6.
55 ___ Ibid. 20-23.
56 ___ Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 8:55-11.10].
57 ___ Interview 15 January 2019 [Part 1, 18:40-20:19].
58 ___ Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 17:04 and 30:18].

Een woonkeuken met een (moderne!) Marokkaanse hoekbank
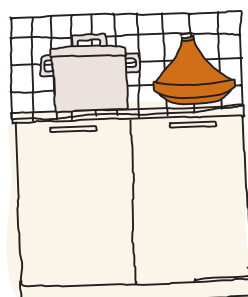
Een Amerikaanse koelkast

Een eigen tienerkamer voor Romaisa met een IKEA bedbank

Opvallende lamp met moderne uitstraling

Eetkamer met lichte plavuizen op de vloer

Brede luxaflex

Een mooie flatscreen tv aan de muur

Twee dezelfde fauteuils strak langs elkaar in de woonkamer

Een mooi kleed onder een strakke salontafel

ILLUSTRATIE CAROLINE ELLERBECK

3.6    The glossy magazine *Every Woman* (2011) visualises Habiba's future home in a neighbourhood overhauled by large-scale demolition and renovation. In accordance with the wishes of the participants, it was the future solution instead of the existing 'home frustrations' that was presented. Source: Museum Rotterdam, Exhibition Archive. Illustrations Caroline Ellerbeck (2011).

ROTTERDAM — Burger Weeshuis
Breizaal

1983

The postcard shows orphaned girls in a room for knitting at the Reformed Citizens' Orphanage in Rotterdam in about 1920-1925.

61294

as social beings. This research, conducted on a scale that individual museums can only dream of, results in the signalling of global trends that might also be of interest to city museums. Issues like security, belonging and comfort can easily be seen on the agenda of many a cultural-history museum, just like the concepts of the multipurpose, local and healthy home. Although the real-life problems presented in a museum, as well as their solutions, might differ from those suggested by IKEA, my main issue concerns the extent to which *solutions*, possible future situations, are relevant to museums. At Museum Rotterdam, as in many other cultural-history institutions, we tend to collect representations of actual living circumstances. However, in one exposition, it was not the actual situation, but the envisioned future home interior that we presented.

In 2010-2011, Museum Rotterdam examined the large-scale demolition and renovation of the *Velden* neighbourhood, which is one of the city's most disadvantaged areas. This co-creative project led to, among other things, the publication of a glossy magazine: *Every Woman*. One of the articles portrays Habiba, who moved in 12 years ago and almost immediately received a letter informing her of the intended demolition of her flat. "I haven't done anything about the house since then", she says in the magazine.[59] During the research phase, interviews were conducted and the house was photographed extensively. One photo in particular arouses curiosity, showing a baby's room filled with stacks of bags and boxes. Her daughter has outgrown the space, Habiba explained during the interview, and it is now used for storage. As the house is damp, everything is affected by mould. Consequently, to prevent health problems, the family intended to get rid of all their possessions (except the washing machine and dryer) when they moved. New, inexpensive items had been bought over the past year, and everything was very well packed and being carefully stored until the move. Habiba had not invested in furnishing the house for 12 years, but had instead saved her money for the family's new, long-awaited home.[60]

This magazine article does not particularly concern the house's deplorable conditions or the need to live for years in such an environment, but instead mainly relates to Habiba's eagerly anticipated move to a completely renovated property. In accordance with the express wishes of the women who participated in the project, their existing circumstances were not the magazine's starting point, but the future solution. A wish list was included and a double-page spread visualises the

new home, based on Habiba's scrapbook session with an interior stylist and illustrator. As noted about *Every Woman* in an essay concerning collecting contemporary culture, "the process of working with the community (...) was more important than portraying or documenting reality".[61] Yet for an urban history collection, the actual situation is at least as important. In that respect, there may be a difference between presenting and collecting. Dreams of the future may help to clarify the current circumstances, but the collection should also provide a nuanced picture of the present.

### Reflecting Contemporary Home Life in Museums

Museums do not easily relate to the future. Their interior ensembles play no part in a home-making process and the objects on display are not for sale either. The museum context alone causes an interior to be interpreted as a situation that had once existed or, at least, as one that might have done so. Although policies for contemporary collecting may include dreams of the future or 'solutions' comparable to IKEA's room settings, museum collections should not overlook actual living circumstances, since they constitute the framework within which museum collections are understood and interpreted.

Widely acknowledged themes – such as safety, privacy or multi-purpose living – can be the starting point of a contemporary collection policy. Such themes can be drawn from work already being conducted, like the annual *Life at Home* research, national studies on the rental and buying sector, or important local work like that related to the restructuring of residential areas, as in the Habiba example. To focus on a local profile, museums will thus have to invest in local research. Finally, the IKEA case suggests an alternative route for museum collecting: not starting from objects to acquire, but from a diversity of households and living circumstances to ensure the inclusion of a variety of social perspectives.

# Swedishness

Social history and city museums throughout Europe are striving to improve their social significance, focusing on the relationship between the local community and the museum. Closely linked in this way, the emphasis tends to be on the value of museums as institutions for empowerment and inclusion.[62] Simultaneously, city museums aim to attract tourists and serve as an 'introduction to the city', providing insight into its history and connecting visitors to its heritage. So, how can museums build an attractive collection for both target groups? Should they stress the particularist dimensions of the city, i.e., its uniqueness and exceptionalism, or concentrate on its universalist dimensions, sketching an image of its characteristics, whether or not they are different to life in other cities? And when it concerns a collection related to home life, how and to what extent can this be framed nationally or locally? One of the reasons for including the IKEA room settings in my comparative case study was the company's capacity to shift between the two extremes of a global and a local market, while also maintaining a national Swedish profile. The ensembles are said to reflect an easier, more natural life, perceived as typically IKEA within Scandinavia and as typically Swedish or Scandinavian in the rest of the world. How does this compare to the collections of city museums that combine a broader cultural-historical interest in urban life with the particularist dimensions of their specific city? What might museums searching for a local identity learn from IKEA's struggle with 'Swedishness'?

### Global Trends, Geographic Zones

IKEA pairs a global product range with showrooms attracting local visitors. While the former is based on research that charts macro-trends worldwide, additional work aims to differentiate between geographic zones, countries or even local markets. This means, for instance, that various editions of the annual catalogue were produced and there are different images on different IKEA websites. A lecture from Martin Enthed, digital manager at IKEA, about the production of photo-real images provides insight into the amount of tweaking required to appeal to diverse audiences.

Enthed told the *Develop3D* conference (2016) that all the images are created by IKEA Communications in its photo studio in Älmhult. This company, which has approximately 250 employees and is equally well known for the furniture's self-assembly instructions, started to develop 3D imagery in 2005. It was only in 2009 that they identified a viable way to create their digital library, and it has created volume since 2012. The vast majority of IKEA's images today include elements of computer-generated imagery (CGI), and to build its library of products, it first had to separate textures, materials and models (objects), and construct distinct libraries. Creating convincing images also required the combination of software from different industries to achieve a high image quality (film), use assets (gaming) and relate to size and scale (architecture). Moreover, IKEA developed specific tools, such as *pick-and-place* to simulate gravity and collision and the *earthquake-mode* to randomise objects and produce more naturalistic arrangements of cutlery in drawers or plate stacks. As Enthed explained, the main reason for all the time and effort expended on developing the product library was the enormous quantity of images needed when taking into account differences between countries. CGI is thus used as an alternative to the photographic recording of all the varieties of a product and the actual staging of interiors. Prior to the large-scale use of CGI, transporting real objects to the photo studio, photographing each product and building ensembles based on geographic preferences was very time-consuming and expensive. Now, however, different room settings that suit the global market can be created without changing actual

59 — Grievink 2011: 61.
60 — Information retrieved from the museum's research database and my personal notes.
61 — Reijnders, Rooijakkers & Verreyke 2014: 55.
62 — For example, the 2010 conference *City Museums on the Move* discussed "the city museum or the community museum as an instrument for empowerment and emancipation". Kessel, Kistemaker & Meijer-van Mensch 2012: 8. Another example can be found in the publication *Authentic Rotterdam Heritage (part 2)*, which explains its approach as follows: "Every year, we [Museum Rotterdam] develop a collaborative project with residents to present this contemporary heritage. Together with Rotterdam people, we survey the meaning of their activities and label it as heritage. The outcome is [that] people feel more connected to the museum and the city. We emphasise the importance of their activities and Rotterdam residents become more motivated in their commitment to the city." Van Dijk 2019: 8.

This screenshot from Martin Enthed's presentation shows a typical use of computer-generated imagery, where nine versions of the same kitchen are presented 'to cover the world'. The main differences relate to white goods, floor plans and colours.
Source: Screenshot Vimeo, https://vimeo.com/163789781 [15:29] (2016).

floor plans, physical white goods or the precise colours of the furnishings.[63]

Within the actual stores, as Deputy Country ComIn Manager Biba Mijailovic told me during our interview, IKEA focuses on life at home on both a national and a local level. Although many aspects of what people need are the same everywhere, cultural differences are nonetheless given careful consideration. In the Netherlands, for example, very few houses have a separate dining room or a large kitchen diner; instead, it is rather typical for the Dutch to have their dining table in the living room, close to the kitchen. Yet even within a small country like the Netherlands, regional differences have to be considered. "To our visitors, an IKEA store is simply an IKEA store", Biba stresses, "but when paying attention, you'll notice the differences between, for example, Amsterdam and Hengelo". Disparities relate to space and budget, as well as style, she further explained:

*When considering, for example, the way people live, IKEA Amsterdam very much focuses on small rooms. Low prices are, of course, important too, but they also focus on small rooms for people with a fat wallet. (...) In Hengelo it's the opposite: people have less to spend, but they have larger houses. So, you'll have to approach this differently. You may have a large living space, but you can't automatically furnish it according to your own desires and fantasies. You have to consider the people who visit your store. What houses do they live in, what do they expect and what do they have to spend? And how can we create this for them, in the most imaginative and functional ways? Stores like IKEA Hengelo and Heerlen are located near to Germany, and in Germany they have different tastes and different needs regarding styles. Generally, the Dutch taste is quite sleek, more modern... more minimalist. In Germany they prefer a somewhat more traditional design, more prints and patterns, and more textiles. We'll take all these things into account.[64]*

Consequently, local markets require local approaches to reflect real-world home situations and conform to local tastes. Nevertheless, "if you close your eyes and squint a little, it's all the same", Biba stated, "and that's for a good reason: it's really about recognition".[65]

## Antoinette, Capri and Texas

While IKEA succeeds at combining the extremes of a global and local approach, 'Swedishness' is equally part of the company's identity. IKEA's products must be "as simple and straightforward as we are ourselves", Ingvar Kamprad stated in *Testament of a Furniture Dealer* (1976), continuing that the items on sale must also be hard-wearing and easy to live with, reflect a relaxed and more natural life, and have a youthful accent that appeals to the young at heart. Moreover, the products should be perceived as typically IKEA in Scandinavia and typically Swedish elsewhere.[66] The video on style groups, published online in 2017, confirms this profile, clarifying that while the Scandinavian Traditional style group is admittedly the smallest and has the fewest commercial opportunities, it is nevertheless essential "in supporting the unique IKEA identity and making sure that people everywhere perceive our range as typically Swedish, or in Scandinavia: typically IKEA."[67]

Swedishness was also discussed in the interview with Tamara Schouwenaars at IKEA Barendrecht in response to a small display in the back office, presenting rocks against a photograph of a Swedish landscape. "Swedishness is very important to us", Tamara told me. It does not always have to be clearly visible, she explained, but "underlying values like *simplicity* and *togetherness* define our way of working and are also applied in our design language".[68]

In *Design by IKEA* (2014), Sara Kristoffersson analyses the company's corporate storytelling. The third chapter of her book explores the ideals, norms and values that are termed 'Swedish' by IKEA. Kristoffersson shows that its logo, with the yellow and blue corresponding to the colours of the Swedish flag, the food in the restaurants and the Nordic-sounding product names with their letters å, ä and ö serving as prominent Swedish markers.[69] Other, less obvious, aspects of a Swedish profile can be found in the romantic references to nature, the allusions to the country as a harmonious and modern welfare state, and the nationally embraced ideals of clean, simple and functional design. Nonetheless, as Kristoffersson demonstrates, the emphasis on Swedishness was not part of the original concept. Indeed, until 1961, the company's name was spelled with a French-like acute accent as Ikéa. Moreover, the early product names did not sound Swedish at all, with French, Italian or even American names being common – Antoinette, Capri and Texas, for instance.[70] Furthermore, although the logo is now a prominent national marker, it was only intro-

duced in 1983 or 1984, replacing a red and white variant.[71] As Kristoffersson asserts, it was actually only after the brand started to expand abroad in the 1980s that Swedishness gradually came to represent the core of IKEA's narrative, and it was the company itself that described many of its ideals as Swedish. Consequently, Swedishness is not so much discerned in the products themselves, as in the discourse and rhetoric attached to them.[72]

IKEA's Swedish profile has been subjected to extensive criticism. Irene Cieraad, for example, concluded in 2014 that the company's products are appreciated in the Netherlands due to their practicality and attractive pricing; their Swedish character, however, was going unnoticed.[73] Even more critical was Ursula Lindqvist in her 2009 article "The Cultural Archive of the IKEA Store", in which she exposed a wide variety of "hidden histories and repressed heterogeneities" within the company's narrative of Swedish exceptionalism.[74] Examples included Kamprad's embrace of racial biology, IKEA's "linguistic exclusiveness" and the resultant erasure of non-Nordic contributions, the marginalisation of immigrants, and the fact that the low prices enabling 'the many' to buy products

63 ___ Enthed 2016: [13:28-17:00].
64 ___ Interview 15 January 2019 [Part 1, 50:44-54:34].
65 ___ Interview 15 January 2019 [Part 1, 28:53 and 32:13].
66 ___ Kamprad 1976: 4-5.
67 ___ My transcription of the video IKEA- Style Groups. Inter IKEA Systems 2017: [1:45].
68 ___ Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 39:32].
69 ___ According to Kristoffersson (2014: 54), products are named systematically: Sofas and coffee tables are given Swedish place names; textiles take their names from places in Denmark or use girls' names; lamps get their names from seas and lakes; beds take their names from places in Norway; carpets generally have Danish names; chairs often have boys' names or Finnish names; outdoor furniture is named after islands in Scandinavia; children's products are given adjectives or animal names. Although Kristoffersson does not explain the mix of Swedish, Danish, Finnish and Norwegian names, it is undoubtedly comparable to the use of the term 'Scandinavian names': little importance is attached to individual Nordic countries, but instead their homogeneity is emphasised in a strategic alliance. Ibid. 62-63.
70 ___ Kristoffersson 2014: 51.
71 ___ Kristoffersson (2014: 54-55) mentions 1984, but the IKEA Museum dates it as 1983. The museum also shows an earlier yellow and blue logo in 1977; this was, however, succeeded by two blue and white logos (1978 and 1979) and by a red and white version in 1981.
72 ___ Ibid. 51.
73 ___ Cieraad 2014: 74.
74 ___ Lindqvist 2009: 52.

are achieved through the use of inexpensive labour in developing markets. IKEA's conception of Swedishness has thus been criticised because of its underlying valuing of Swedish exceptionalism and the consequential exclusion of certain groups. What can city museums searching for a local identity learn from IKEA's struggle with Swedishness? And what insights does the case provide about the combination of universalist and particularist aspects of contemporary home life?

**A City Museum's Local Identity**

IKEA combines the global and local. Cultural differences are acknowledged on different levels (geographic zones, countries, local markets) and reflected in the company's websites and stores. However, many aspects of what we need are similar worldwide, as seen in the international product range and the general image evoked by the showroom's ensembles. As the IKEA case suggests, even greater similarity can be expected on a national level.

With this in mind, it seems viable for regional and national city and cultural-history museums, including open-air museums, to join their collecting efforts together in order to cover the common aspects of home life in an overarching, national collection. At the same time, city museums could then develop a local profile in which they examine their individuality (their local identity) in a nuanced manner. They could therefore stress the uniqueness of their city, their exceptionalism, knowing that the universalist aspects – the characteristics of Dutch city life in general – are preserved on a national level. Such coordination would result in far less overlap than is currently the case and, at the same time, lead to more comprehensive collecting of contemporary home life.

In relation to the local-identity aspect, it is important to note that profiles are generally not inherent in objects and collections, but are devised and adjusted in accordance with commercial opportunities, or social or political demands. They might provide a somewhat clichéd image, as well as one that also changes over time. IKEA's conception of Swedishness has, however, mainly been criticised because of its underlying value of Swedish exceptionalism and the consequential exclusion of particular groups of people. It should thus be learned that while a focus on local identity can create a sense of home for certain communities, others will feel excluded. This is the negative side of so-called 'bonding performances', i.e., presentations that focus on an intrinsic community to confirm or celebrate community values. In contrast to these, 'bridging performances' aim to connect outsiders and community.[75] The advantage of a collection of home life is that it is able to bridge specific and general features, and in doing so it not only connects the various communities in super-diverse cities, but also serves as a bridge to link tourists with the city's history and contemporary heritage.

# Inspirational images, functional solutions

This theme further examines the contextualisation of objects in collections, both comparing the contexts provided by museums to the ensembles in IKEA's showrooms and considering their underlying ideas. Although this section relates to display techniques, my interest lies not so much in the presentation itself as in the way it affects collecting practices. I will argue that in both surroundings – museum and showroom – different display techniques convey different meanings, and that museums should take these into account in their collecting policies. Furthermore, I make a plea for museums to consider functional ensembles as a starting point in their collecting strategies concerning contemporary home life.

**Museum Objects and Contexts**

Chapter 2 has shown that the museological period room arose from the need for a contextual display and became emblematic of a representation of both social history and the decorative arts in the early-20th century. However, burgeoning Modernism prioritised the individual object and, especially in art museums, context was often perceived as a hindrance. Nevertheless, within the post-modern museum, visitors' relationships with objects have gained in importance, resulting in a renewed interest in contextual presentations. In her book *Museums and their Visitors* (1994), Eilean Hooper-Greenhill cites a study in which people were asked about their favourite exhibition techniques for three kinds of object: a piece of furniture, a sculpture and a small decorative art item. These visitors, who were carefully selected to represent a wide, representative audience, ranked four typical methods of display:

○ The individual object with its label.
○ A range of similar objects, each with their own label.
○ The object in the context of a room setting or vignette with a brief general description.
○ The object within a thematic presentation, which included layered text, graphics and artefact labels.[76]

Seeming slightly surprised, Hooper-Greenhill revealed that the last two display methods were, in all cases, preferred over the first two, including by well-educated visitors ("people with fine-art-related hobbies"); even in the case of an item of sculpture, its display in an aesthetic context was generally preferred. This, she concludes, "indicates a very consistent preference for informational contexts for objects".[77] This came as no surprise to Graham Black, who stated in *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-First Century* (2012) that: "Representations or re-creations of original *contexts* can support visitor understanding", continuing "particularly by enabling them to relate to their own lives and experiences". Black argues that conversations around collections lie at the heart of visitor engagement and, although they create their own meanings, object displays affect conversations. Space, for example, emphasises an object's importance, a group suggests associations and connections between objects, and providing original contexts aids understanding. "It is no surprise that furniture stores use contextualisation through setting up room displays to encourage sales", he casually remarks, because "people want to relate what they are viewing to their own lives – if they can imagine the objects in the context of everyday living, sales will increase."[78]

Later publications further examined the informational contexts, simultaneously widening the scope from the display method to the museum itself, and then, even wider, to the museum's discipline-specific value standard. In his article "Work, specimen, witness" (2015), Thomas Thiemeyer distinguishes between three types of object and connects them to specific scientific disciplines and corresponding display conventions. Consequently, he links the *work* to the fields of art studies and literary studies, which are based on aesthetic theories. Uniqueness and originality are emphasised by the seclusion of the object, which lends a piece of work an exclusive aura. Next, the *specimen* relates to the natural sciences. Based on

75 __ Hoebink 2015: 42, 149.
76 __ Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 75-76. Based on Lockett, C. (1991). Ten years of exhibit evaluation at the Royal Ontario Museum (1980-1990). *ILVS Review: A Journal of Visitor Behavior, 2 (1)*, 19-47).
77 __ Ibid.
78 __ Black 2012: Chapter 6 Conversations around Collections, 143-165; quotes from p. 149.

taxonomies, the core values of these objects are systematics and representativeness. As their meaning lies in the relationship between objects, specimens are typically presented in serial or relational modes of display. Finally, the object as a *witness* is associated with the field of general history. The authentic object functions as a source that enables visitors to comprehend the past, and its affective value increases when the object is directly connected to an important event or person. Additional information places the witness in a narrative that leads to the recognition of its importance.[79] These differences are not, however, related to an object's intrinsic value, but are the result of curatorial practice. By changing display conventions, Thiemeyer stresses, museums can affect the value and meaning of the objects. As an example, a painting can be presented in juxtaposition to other works of art in order to convey the idea of a certain school, while a mass-produced object can be displayed in isolation on a pedestal.[80]

Thiemeyer considers these types of object in terms of an historical approach related to different museum disciplines. The IKEA case, however, shows how, in a contemporary setting and limited to the specific cultural subject-matter of the home interior, different modes of display convey different values. Although the IKEA stores do not present their products as unique items ('works'), instead accentuating their affordability by offering them for sale in large quantities, both serial and narrative contexts can be found in the carefully planned showrooms. My interview with Tamara at the IKEA showroom in Barendrecht demonstrated that the presentation of "objects in the context of everyday living" is not as unambiguous as Black suggested, but alternatively involves various contextual perspectives.

**IKEA's Serial and Narrative Displays**

The interior design manager Tamara guided me through the showroom at IKEA Barendrecht during our interview. Highlighting a variety of product displays, she clarified how designers and visual merchandisers contribute to the diverse ways in which visitors encounter the merchandise, pointing out different serial and narrative contexts for the items on sale.[81]

The serial modes of display in IKEA's showrooms are part of the visual merchandisers' remit, and encompass *compacts*, *studios* and *shops*. *Compacts* are groups of similar products that enable visitors to test and compare related items in a range. Customers are encouraged to pick up and choose their favourite pieces, whether it be a

chair, bed or sideboard. Just like the compacts, *studios* and *shops* are designed to make it easy for people to decide between various products. While an IKEA *shop* generally sells smaller and simpler home accessories, a *studio* explains the process relating to the more complicated merchandise. Kitchens and PAX wardrobes, for example, are rather complex items that can be planned in a studio, either with or without paid services. The compacts, studios and shops resemble Thiemeyer's conception of the serial presentations of specimens insofar as they present a group of products (chairs) or a certain system (the PAX wardrobe) in which the individual item is subordinate to its generic qualities.

As well as the serial displays, the visual merchandisers also design various types of narrative display, such as the *range coordination collage, lounge area* and *activity podium*. The first of these focuses on one item and presents it in relation to other pieces in IKEA's product range. Collages like these can be found in a showroom's compacts and aim to have a high visual impact. The products used are selected not so much for their function, but for the colour and feeling they convey. More extensive narrative presentations can be found in the *lounge area* and on the *activity podium*. Both displays present limited editions, new products or other 'messages' closely linked to a temporary focus of attention. While the former can be found at a showroom's entrance, the latter are available throughout. All of these narrative ensembles aim to be inspirational, displaying the breadth of a collection or highlighting a special offer, but they do not provide the functional solutions that IKEA's interior designers seek to present.

While IKEA's visual merchandisers produce various types of commercial display, the interior designers create three sizes of functional context for the company's products: *home*, *room setting* and *vignette*. These contexts can be compared to Thiemeyer's narratives concerning objects as witnesses, although in this contemporary setting the products do not serve as an ontological link to the past, but instead contain the promise of a better future.

The largest of the interior designers' contextual displays is the *home*, which is a representation of a complete house. There were two different homes on show during my visit in March 2019, covering areas of 25m$^2$ and 35m$^2$, respectively. The largest represented a recently built loft in Rotterdam, where (future) inhabitants could choose the spatial layout, including the location of the kitchen and sanitary units. IKEA's proposal for *small-space living* was developed with trendy *fluid living* in

mind. The designers suggest a setting with a central wet-room surrounded by a fully furnished, but flexible, living area. Although the home is based on an existing project, the photograph on its outside walls does not reflect the actual premises; similarly, the image featuring the inhabitants presents a fictive couple.

IKEA's most conspicuous functional narratives are its *room settings*, which are this chapter's specific focus and represent the company's mid-sized functional displays. The room settings are displayed as a series of, more or less, independent entities, generally categorised according to spatial function. Each setting aims to provide visitors with imaginative solutions to real-life challenges experienced in their own home life. They might, for example, focus on a room with a slanted roof or on creating the right conditions for living in harmony with teenagers. Ordinarily, all the products in these rooms are available to buy on the lower floors, although props are occasionally used to add more personality, for example when a variety of old, historical cameras in a cabinet hints at an inhabitant's profession. Although the homes' narratives are captured in texts and photography, the room set-

tings provide less layered information. The juxtaposition of products reveals the underlying story (sporadically helped by props), while product labels provide essential information like price, dimensions, maintenance and location in the store.

*Vignettes* are the interior designers' third type of functional narrative. These displays stage part of a room setting and can be found alongside other presentations. Like the room setting, the vignette is also styled and decorated functionally, mentioning spatial dimensions and telling the stories of the (fictional) inhabitants. The vignette, how-

79 __ Thiemeyer 2015: 396-407.
80 __ Ibid. 406-407.
81 __ Unless stated otherwise, this section's description is based on the tour of IKEA's Barendrecht showroom. Comparisons between the showrooms and Thiemeyer's typology are, however, entirely my responsibility.

TEGEN HUUR VERHOGING

WEIGER HUUR VERHOGING

WEIGER MEE WEIGER SAMEN

**1986**

Banner used by residents from the Delfshaven district during their protests against rent increases in 1977-1978.

63927

3.9   The *vignette* on the left displays a functionally styled and decorated LARSFRID cabinet, which occupies an area of 7m². The *range coordination collage* on the right shows several range items, chosen to convey a specific atmosphere. Both displays can be found among other cabinets and sideboards in the IKEA showroom in Barendrecht. Photos Mayke Groffen (22 March 2019).



3.10   The functionally styled and decorated HEMNES TV-storage combo on the left occupies an area of 6m². This vignette presents a family situation and provides a solution to where to put family photos and knick-knacks. Next to the vignette, on the right, the BESTÅ TV-bench and the cabinets with VALVIKEN fronts are simply product presentations within a commercial display. Photo Mayke Groffen (22 March 2019).

ever, involves just one product, such as a LARSFRID display cabinet or a HEMNES TV-storage combo. In its compact presentation, the vignette superficially resembles the range coordination collage, but where the collage simply aims to have a high visual impact, the vignette provides customers with functional solutions.

Asked by Tamara for my opinion on the first vignette we encountered, I found it rather difficult to identify the differences between it and another TV-storage combo on the right. I initially interpreted the product presentation nearby as another vignette expressing a different style. Certainly, its habitation felt less articulated, but as someone who favours a minimalist interior, I was not unhappy about the absence of photographs and souvenirs. In hindsight, I had missed the clues that marked the differences between the two display methods, including the divergent background colours and the text that explicitly mentioned its surface area. The presence of just one vignette sufficed to suggest an overall contextual display.

At the end of our tour of the showroom, Tamara characterised for me the different approaches of visual merchandisers and interior designers: she went to an activity podium, stepped on it and sat on the bed with her head in a cloud of lamps, thus highlighting the different narrative contexts. She then explained:

> *Look – we interior designers wouldn't do this...* [while demonstrating that the lamps are hung impractically low.] *That's the difference between visual merchandising and interior design, actually. This is a very pretty, really cool image, but you can't do this at home. That's precisely the point where our displays differ: an inspirational image versus a functional solution.*[82]

**Meaningful Ensembles in Museums**

In aiming to sell as many pieces of furniture as possible, IKEA stresses its affordability and therefore avoids presenting its products as unique items. Instead, the showrooms contain a variety of contextual displays, created by interior designers and visual merchandisers. The latter produce serial displays to enable the easy comparison of similar products, as well as narrative displays to present the breadth of the collection or highlight a temporary focus on certain items. Visual merchandisers thus aim to create inspirational images for commercial displays. Functional contexts, on the other hand, are the remit of interior designers. Their *homes, room settings* and *vignettes* represent three different functional-context sizes, all

intending to offer functional solutions to present-day challenges. The interior designers' narrative displays are habitable settings loaded with meaning, which requires a coherent arrangement.

Display conventions can be changed in both museums and showrooms: objects can be isolated, various series created and different stories told. Nonetheless, it is barely possible to create meaningful, coherent ensembles if they have not been collected from the start. Chapter 2 has already acknowledged that ideas of form and structure are communicated effectively within traditional period rooms, but that function is less easily conveyed. Could this be due to the dominant strategies that are adopted, which favour the collecting of individual objects? Museum databases are certainly designed to describe single items, which often results in the deconstruction of home interiors into individual pieces of furniture. This is a practice that can hamper how ensembles are viewed and hinder what is understood of them. Functional contexts are the most critical element, and museums must consider the collecting of coherent, functional ensembles as a starting point to ensure variety in their future displays. This also means that they must surely have to take possible future displays into account in their collecting strategies.

In relation to materiality, it is also important to note that IKEA's differently sized functional displays contain diverse materials. The homes are explained more extensively by layered information: floor plan, texts and photos explicate the narratives suggested by the products. Room settings and vignettes rely almost entirely on the juxtaposition of objects, and my own confusion about the latter reminded me of the difficulty of deciphering the information implied in various contextual presentations. This leads to the preliminary conclusion that, in the acquisition or construction of meaningful ensembles, it is not only the objects, but also the research conducted and the data collected, that should be part of the ensemble, as should the narratives relating to them.

82 __ Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 2, 28:11].

During my tour of the showroom in Barendrecht, this contextual display epitomised the difference between visual merchandisers and interior designers, presenting an inspirational image instead of a functional solution.
Photo Mayke Groffen (22 March 2019).

3.11

# Animated by life

One of the reasons for examining the IKEA room settings concerns the ways in which the ensembles connect with visitors. Chapter 2 showed that the period room has long been perceived as an easily understandable type of display, connecting even those with little experience to the objects within it. Museums highlight these rooms' immersive qualities and value the power of the persuasiveness of the narrative. Nevertheless, the sensorial repertoire of the museum period room is generally limited and lacks the interactivity of IKEA's room settings. What is the role of interactivity in the IKEA ensembles? What (other) connective qualities underlie the narratives in its room settings? Are these qualities limited to commercial ensembles or might they also inspire museums? If so, how do they affect museums' collecting policies?

### Familiar Narratives and... Surprise

In search of what museums can learn from IKEA about connecting with visitors, my interviews addressed the essence of the company's room settings. My interviewees stated unanimously that it is the *life* that pervades each ensemble that characterises the room settings and distinguishes them from the interior ensembles in other firms' showrooms. Biba Mijailovic formulated this as follows:

> *Other home-furnishing retailers construct beautiful spaces, beautifully styled and beautifully decorated... but they contain little* life *– and life is something we strive for, and it mainly has to do with the fact that we zoom in on life at home.*[83]

As my interviewees emphasised, 'the familiar' is considered to be key to successful presentations. Reality underlies the room settings, including a variety of habits, seasonal activities, stages of life, needs and frustrations. And where IKEA starts by establishing similarities and trends in life at home across the world, further research aims to grasp this in different countries, regions and cities.

Although familiar narratives lie at the heart of IKEA's room settings, the staged home interiors simultaneously aim to surprise visitors with some-thing extra. Combining knowledge with creativity, the company seeks to provide ingenious solutions to inspire different groups:

> *We have considerable knowledge of home life... of what it means to live small, how to organise, how to live with children – these are all facets we know a lot about. The surprising aspect is that we're able to create just the right 'sauce' to make customers think: 'Yeah, that's handy! I want to have that – it's just what I need in my life!' These are a kind of... tricks, you know. And I think, concerning life at home, this is also the element that enlivens a room setting.*[84]

Familiarity and surprise contribute to the understanding of a room setting and to the act of exploring it further. As Colombo, Laddaga and Antonietti state in their psychological study on images of IKEA's room settings (2015), both of these factors are important in visitors' evaluations of a domestic environment. Their study draws on the psychological model of Kaplan & Kaplan, which describes comprehension and exploration as two consecutive steps in the examination of such an environment. While the former aims to help us understand the setting, the goal of the latter is to enhance this knowledge by action. As part of this process, the four factors determining a positive affective evaluation of the domestic environment are: *coherence* (the capacity to easily include the environment in a known scheme), *legibility* (the amount of information available to support comprehension and facilitate orientation), *complexity* (the presence of perceptual stimuli) and *mystery* (the features that invite further investigation).[85] The study measures the influence of IKEA's room settings on their perceived appeal and the willingness to buy, comparing this to the living spaces presented by other brands. Overall, the images of IKEA's room settings were found to be less boring, and were also viewed as promoting more active explorations than the living spaces presented by other brands. Nonetheless, some of the rooms were regarded as too complicated to understand: their detailed presentation diminished their legibility and instead caused confusion.[86]

Colombo, Laddaga & Antonietti added the concept of 'restorativeness' to the model, defining a restorative space as "a place that allows people

83 — Interview 15 January 2019 [Part 1, 16:36].
84 — Ibid. [Part 1, 38:53].
85 — Colombo, Laddaga & Antonietti 2015: 2261.
86 — Ibid. 2265.

to take their mind off and relax, that fosters positive affects and gives a break from [the] daily routine". Focusing on key elements within restorative settings, they conclude that neither doors and passages, nor natural elements greatly influence the willingness to buy. However, human figures and everyday objects attract considerable attention and have a positive impact on their perceived appeal. Variation has an additional positive effect, while the attention paid to elements specifically related to children was even greater.[87] Although the study is based on images instead of actual room settings, it adds a relevant perspective to IKEA's adage of *life*, demonstrating the necessity of striking a balance between easy-to-understand, familiar narratives and more challenging features that stimulate exploration. Moreover, everyday objects and human figures seem to affect the evaluation of room settings in a positive manner.

### Human Presence

The presence of human figures and everyday objects in IKEA's images leads to greater approval of the 2D room settings and a more attentive exploration thereof. Both of these elements have

3.12

This room setting, with its ample space, modern country kitchen and large window with a (fake) view over a green space, alludes to traditional country living. Spatial effigies convey a sense of habitation. The MÖCKELBY dining table, for instance, is set for four people; the in-between AGAM junior chair indicates the presence of a child too big for a highchair and too small for a regular dining chair. By visitors opening kitchen drawers, checking the worktop's height or testing the comfort of a sofa, the setting is further imbued with life.
Photo Mayke Groffen (July 2018).

also been analysed by Per Ledin and David Machin, albeit in a different way. In their article in *Visual Communication* (2019), they use a semiotic approach to analyse the kitchens in IKEA's catalogues from 1975 to 2016, arguing that a new semiotics of space evolved over time.[88] Their model of analysis includes the kitchen on a level of representation, i.e., as a depicted environment with material objects. Apart from the framing of space by objects and shapes, the model foregrounds 'interaction' (the interaction of persons) and 'indexing' (the use of things as signs), which is a principle that is further explained by the example of "a table set with four plates and wine glasses

[that] would indicate a dinner between adults, perhaps friends meeting."[89]

Within museology, the principle of indexing is perhaps better known as the concept of the *spatial effigy*, referring to objects or arrangements that serve as traces of human presence. As Sandberg argues in *Living Pictures, Missing Persons* (2003), spatial effigies can convey a strong sense of habitation, while simultaneously allowing visitors to mentally position themselves in the room. His book contains an extensive exploration of the concept of the spatial effigy, also known as a 'missing person' or 'absent presence', in relation to the late-19th century display practice of Scandinavian museums. In Sandberg's later article on the interactivity of the model home (2011), he relates the practice of scenic immersion to the IKEA showroom.

Each of IKEA's room settings is created with a detailed family scenario in mind. Sometimes, this is visualised in a direct manner, for instance using a large photograph to portray the (fictive) inhabitants and an (equally fictive) quote to invite visitors into the setting. More often, though, habitation is suggested through spatial effigies. Clothes in a wardrobe, some records on shelves and a pile of books on a bedside table might depict adult life in a bedroom. Similarly, a child's drawing on a blackboard, the use of extra storage space and special furnishings around the dining table indicate the presence of children. All of these carefully arranged objects suggest a human presence and hint at certain aspects of family life. The ensembles convey a strong sense of habitation through the use of spatial effigies, which enable visitors to picture themselves in the room and connect to the items on display.

IKEA's spatial effigies aim to establish an affective connection between visitors and the commodities on display, which is further enhanced by encouraging shoppers to test the furniture hands-on. Stickers urge people to press somewhere, look inside a drawer or lie on the bed. When these suggestions are followed, simple spectatorship is replaced by participation.[90] IKEA monitors its customer flows and conducts interviews to increase its awareness of the room settings' effects and to enable it to evaluate interactions. How do visitors move through the showroom, what do they see and what do they actually touch? "Sometimes, we show our visitors a photo and ask them if they've seen it", interior design manager Tamara told me. "If the visitors haven't noticed it, we did something wrong", adding: "or, sometimes, we may have defined the wrong target group".[91] Clearly, interactions between visitors and room settings are the

norm in an IKEA showroom. Indeed, particular attention is paid to ensuring that products are shown in the right circumstances and replaced if they are removed and that the room settings are kept in the appropriate order.[92]

Interaction is not limited to the agency of the products or room settings, but also extends to visitor behaviour. Although not mentioned by my interviewees, Pauline Garvey demonstrates that the sensorial interaction with products helps to enliven the room settings and accentuates the presence of others. In the chapter "Consuming Ikea" (2018), she stresses the importance of this interaction as follows:

*The rooms are uninhabited but the implied occupants of these living spaces are not entirely absent either. Rather, they are peopled in the presence of householders milling about, touching, comparing, and otherwise providing the injection of 'family' that the scenes might otherwise lack. Parents refer to their children lying on beds in Ikea showrooms in amused tones, as if they are being transgressive. In fact, Ikea management does not just tolerate customers sitting on beds, sofas, or at tables but positively encourages it.*[93]

Not only has the relationship with products been wrongly labelled as a solitary activity, Garvey argues, but the presence of visitors and their interactions also greatly contribute to the highly valued aspect of inspiration. Consequently, inspiration cannot be attributed to IKEA's designers and their well-thought-out room settings alone, but is also derived from social practices and distributed agency.[94]

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87 ___ Ibid. 2259-2266, especially 2261, 2265.
88 ___ Ledin & Machin 2019: 165-187. Ledin & Machin distinguish the personal, everyday kitchen of the 1970s, the ordered, functional and technical version of the 1980s and the lifestyle kitchen space developed at the end of the 1990s. They describe this room today as "the creative kitchen which offers solutions to what are depicted as common challenges." (Ledin & Machin 2019: 166). This conclusion underlines IKEA's ambition to provide imaginative solutions to real-life problems, but also places the objective in an historical and changing context.
89 ___ Ledin & Machin 2019: 172.
90 ___ Garvey 2018 / Consuming: 102-103, also Unpacking: 28.
91 ___ Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 14:06 and 16:02].
92 ___ Interview 15 January 2019 [Part 2, 1:25]).
93 ___ Garvey 2018 / Consuming: 106-107. See also Garvey 2018 / Unpacking: 13.
94 ___ Garvey 2018 / Unpacking: 29.

## Change

From IKEA's perspective, connecting with visitors not only requires familiar narratives and human presence, but also implies change. While museums' interior ensembles are collected for long-term purposes, the lifetime of an IKEA room setting varies between one and three years, depending on its position in the store. Interior design manager Tamara explains:

*They always say: you have to touch them [i.e., the room settings] within a period of two years. That's impossible. So, I usually make a vitality plan at the start of the year to plan changes over three years. Well, the focus may shift over time, so possibly a few things disappear from the plan. Together with sales, I'll decide on the rooms that will be altered and on more structural modifications. The first five we'll change every year. And the first room setting within a core area, the living rooms for example, will be changed every two years. This is because we have to offer visitors something new – otherwise the showroom will lack vitality. Most people visit IKEA at least twice a year. We have to keep that in mind and offer them something new.[95]*

Moreover, an IKEA room setting may also undergo a few minor changes during its lifetime, reflecting both seasonal activities and propagating partial refurbishment. The former includes the extra attention paid to gardens and balconies when spring is on the horizon; about the same time, tables are set to portray scenarios involving people who enjoy making and eating salads. So-called *vitality changes*, on the other hand, serve to demonstrate that small changes can have a big impact. A different carpet and some new sofa covers in an otherwise unchanged interior may convince visitors to buy just a few accessories that produce an almost effortless improvement.[96]

Vitality is a concept that is also acknowledged in museums, where it is generally referred to using the notion of 'dynamic collections.' Underlying this dynamic is the tripartite process of collecting, connecting with visitors and, finally, disposing of elements that have become redundant.[97] This last stage, however, has become extremely burdensome. And although museums might add seasonal references to their displays, the collected ensembles tend to be more static. In the example of Aunt Nell's living room in Chapter 2, should we have chosen to update the ensemble on a regular basis to maintain a renewed contemporary perspective? Should we, for example, get rid of the

heavy paper phonebook, replace the out-dated telephone set with a modern mobile phone, or add a laptop? On the other hand, would the changes be plausible given Aunt Nell's (fictive) age? What are the chances of her still living independently in the same house? Should we add other chapters to her biography and adjust the interior to reflect the changed situation? Or could we frame it better as a living room representing the circumstances in 2001 and consider the ensemble to be complete, similar to a closed find in archaeology?[98] In museum practice, the latter approach is generally the one chosen. A contemporary ensemble is perceived as a snapshot of a certain period, and new ones are added every so often. Over time, the ensemble's ability to bridge the distance (or even to accentuate it) will become essential.

## Connecting with Visitors

The essence of IKEA's room settings has been described as the *life* that pervades each ensemble, which relates to several aspects of connecting with customers. Firstly, the ensembles combine familiarity and surprise to establish an affective connection between visitors and products. According to the psychological research by Colombo, Laddaga & Antonietti, the opposites stimulate both comprehension and exploration. In order to connect to visitors, museums might therefore use the underlying model, in which coherence and legibility are paired with complexity and mystery, to construct their collections' ensembles. And they would do well to remember that it is important to carefully balance coherent and easy-to-understand narratives with challenging features that encourage exploration.

Most room settings also convey a strong sense of habitation through the suggestion of human presence. A variety of everyday objects (especially those related to children) and the use of spatial effigies animate the ensembles and affirm the previously established affective connection. The spatial effigies' method is already firmly positioned in museums' repertoires and, as the IKEA room settings suggest, should not be overlooked.

Interactions with objects, and the involvement of other visitors in this, are also connective qualities in the IKEA room settings. Not only do these elements imbue life, they also contribute to the ensembles' potential to explore function. Nevertheless, for museums, the interaction with objects challenges their commitment to preserving them; often, interaction and conservation are mutually exclusive. Replicas or 3D printing might offer temporal or educational solutions, but do not provide the 'historical sensation' museums strive for. In

general, interaction with original objects is only possible when foreseen in collecting policies and by the acquisition of extra objects. Given the high value of experience and co-creation in modern museology, investigating ways in which people can interact with objects is therefore worthwhile.

However, the acquisition of extra objects to enable interaction with authentic materials does not efface the essentially different role of consumerism. Sandberg describes shoppers' behaviour in an IKEA showroom as an acquired cognitive skill, in which visitors harmonise between spectating and participating. He writes:

*When trying out a new mattress in a showroom, one does not simply observe it from a distance, nor does one go so far as to fall asleep on it. Instead, the usual response falls somewhere in between: potential buyers give the bed a tentative bounce or two or, at the very most, take off their shoes and lie down for a few awkward moments. (...) Shoppers in showroom situations are technically invited in a scene, yet their relation to the space is in many ways tentative. It is the realm of pre-ownership (...).[99]*

Expectations in a museum environment are very different. Visitors consider the ensemble's objects as cultural heritage, not commodities; they have learned to just look and not touch, and certainly not to handle objects on display. When boundaries blur, signs are used to explain what is expected – disturbing the immersive experience the ensemble has tried so hard to build.

95 __ Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 2, 12:39].
96 __ Interview 22 March 2019 [Part 1, 17:04 and Part 2, 11:38].
97 __ Baveystock 2008: 96.
98 __ Comparison used in analogy with the reasoning of Mensch 1999: 88.
99 __ Sandberg 2011: 64-65.
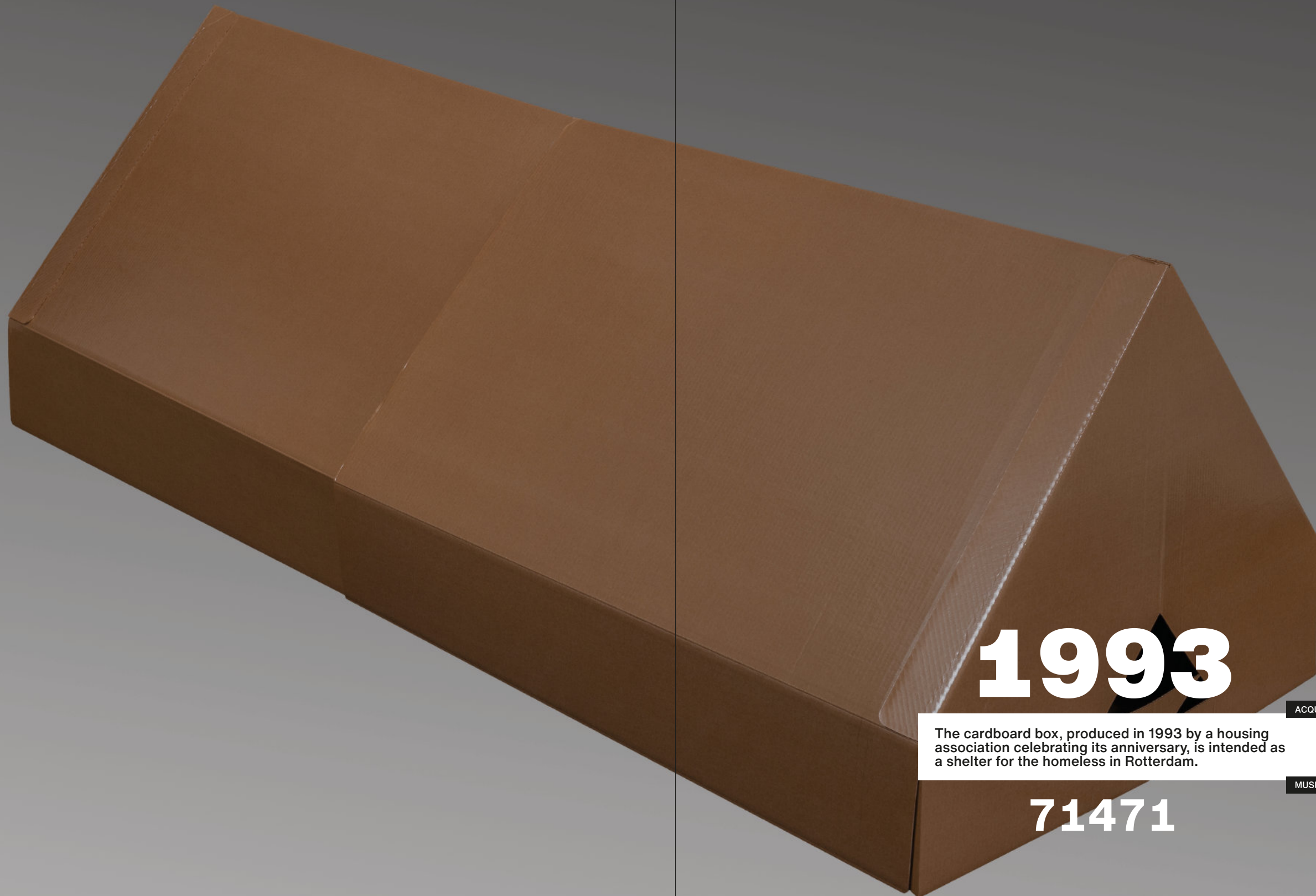
**1993**

The cardboard box, produced in 1993 by a housing association celebrating its anniversary, is intended as a shelter for the homeless in Rotterdam.

**71471**

# BAM's Homestudios

View in the Homestudios' Experience Centre. A small section of the Knowledge Studio can be seen on the left. Visible in the centre are some of the model homes available in the Inspiration Studio. Although the interiors of these homes have been fully furnished in a variety of styles and layouts, the exteriors are uniformly executed in boards and battens. On the right, the Introductory House shows the standard level of finishing on completion day and visualises the amount of work that still needs to be done before a house is ready for occupation. Photo Bram Petraeus (2019).

My second case is Homestudios, which widens the perspective from furnishings to complete houses. The Homestudios concept was launched in May 2018 by Royal BAM Group (hereafter: BAM), the internationally operating Dutch construction firm. Homestudios' most conspicuous element is its Experience Centre, which is located in a business area in the centre of the Netherlands. A large, modern building contains five different studios, as well as an almost full-scale 'Introductory House', which is a shell visualising the low-level finishes of a standard new-build. The five studios aim to provide prospective buyers of a new house with the knowledge, help and inspiration needed to make decisions about its spatial layout and finishes. In the Knowledge Studio, for instance, they can learn about practical kitchen layouts and identify optimal worktop heights, while so-called *theatres* use projections and moveable walls to provide insight into the effects of adding extra space. Another example, the Inspiration Studio, includes 11 model homes that unify all the available options in terms of spatial use and stylistic finishes. According to BAM's press release, the Homestudios concept was introduced to inspire and assist clients during their customer journey, from their initial thoughts about buying a new house to actually living in their new-build home. Supported by the Experience Centre, as well as an online platform and a personal advisor, the press release promised to offer advice and guidance to prospective buyers at precisely the right times in the process. Clients are thus able to experience their future home before it has actually been built.

# A Collection of Future Homes

Although Homestudios was presented as a new concept in 2018, it had two precursors that had previously attracted my attention: the BAM Smart Collection, introduced in 2013, and its seemingly identical Home Collection from 2014 onwards. Just like Homestudios, these earlier collections contained a variety of available homes that could be personalised by buyers in relation to spatial use, finishes and budget. I was fascinated by this concept of a collection of customisable future homes that would be built as part of various projects all over the Netherlands. What does the collection look like? Why have interiors been incorporated in a house-selling strategy? How has BAM connected architecture, living spaces and interior design?

This case focuses on BAM's collection of domestic ensembles, describing its content, the company's method of collecting and its underlying ideas. Themes address the issues of who the ensembles represent and the kind of home lives they reflect, as well as the ways in which the Homestudios' concept aims to connect with customers. As an instrumental case study, these key issues are discussed from a museological perspective, with the goal being to contribute to the development of a viable strategy for how cultural-history museums collect contemporary home life.

An important reason for including Homestudios in this comparative case study is BAM's need to produce a manageable collection that has a wide appeal. Keeping house prices affordable and simultaneously meeting different customer needs mean that it is crucial for the company to balance standardisation with diversity – a problem that resembles the interest of museums in compact, but nevertheless inclusive, collections. How does BAM appeal to different customer groups with what is only a limited collection of houses? Who is included in its ensembles? Could its strategy inspire museums?

The issue of representation is the second reason for choosing the BAM collection in this case study. While the period rooms of today tend to stress the personal identity of their inhabitants,

commercial model homes might want to have interiors that reflect more generally shared tastes and lifestyles. How do the model homes within BAM's Inspiration Studio aim to convey messages about its customers' future home lives? What messages are contained in the styles, furniture and interior decor available? What insights can museums gain from these model homes?

My final motivation for including Homestudios in this research concerns the prominence given to experiences. In general, Homestudios has just further developed the concepts of its precursors, simply changing the terminology and adapting the interiors to contemporary tastes. Most striking, however, is the addition of the Experience Centre: while the earlier Home Collection mainly made available 2D choices on paper, supported by only a few physical examples, Homestudios has been explicitly designed to guide future inhabitants by way of experiences. Why has BAM changed its approach? How does the Experience Centre contribute to connecting visitors to the company's products? And what might city museums learn from Homestudios' ideas and practices when it comes to developing a strategy for collecting contemporary home life?

## Method

In contrast to the plethora of publications relating to IKEA, there is little scholarly literature on the BAM collections. Two Dutch studies on housing included the Smart Collection in 2013-2014, one of which was conducted from the perspective of collective private commissions and the other on the functional, technical and economic lifespans of houses, but there is no relevant literature concerning the BAM collections and the issues identified in my work. When I broadened my literature search to the wider subject of model homes, I found many examples of themed houses relating to, for instance, dementia, energy efficiency or automation, but none that discussed the model home per se. The literature that does exist tends to focus retrospectively on the model interiors promoted in the 1950s by organisations that pleaded for people to furnish their homes with modern, light and airy finishes. An example of this from the Netherlands is the magazine *Goed Wonen* (Correct Living), which regularly proffered advice on the 'right' and 'wrong' interiors. However, these publications have little relevance to my questions. In searching for literature on similar concepts globally, including Richmond American Homes and the Swedish BoKlok, I encountered a reference to Ellen Avitts'

study on furnished model homes at the turn of the 21st century.

In *Live the Dream* (2006), Avitts has the goals of achieving an understanding of how builders market idealised values and interpreting the furnished model home within this context. She describes model homes as meticulously constructed messages, in which "carefully selected artefacts articulate carefully chosen values".[1] Avitts concentrates on the majority of house types in the US around 2000, characterising them as mass-produced, detached, single-family dwellings built in a suburban area.[2] These house types differ considerably from the standard Dutch terraced home and, as a consequence, the precise spatial layouts and particular furnishings are difficult to transfer to the Dutch context, as is their specific marketing rhetoric. Her overall conclusions, however, are important starting points for a closer examination of Homestudios' model interiors, and aspects of Avitt's approach will be applied in the within-case theme analysis.

Homestudios has received some attention in the popular media. Local news channel AT5, for example, filmed at the Experience Centre at the end of November 2018. In its audio-visual report, the director of BAM explains the new concept, supported by images of the various studios. An article in a national newspaper from February 2019 also reported on a visit to the Experience Centre. Under the heading "Emerging: the new build without choice overload", BAM director Siekerman had his say, while photos showed how the Homestudios concept is actually used. Some of these photographs are included in this thesis with the permission of the photographer.

This chapter's main sources of information are company documents in different forms, created for either internal or public use, but always voicing the firm's ideas. They include press releases by BAM and its partners announcing new developments, online brochures depicting new schemes, PowerPoint presentations providing background information or goals in relation to new building projects, YouTube videos illustrating interior design styles, and websites explaining the Homestudios concept, highlighting results and announcing new developments. The fact that the three consecutive home concepts, including the two referred to above, were presented completely separately was, however, problematic. So, an existing version never referred to its successor, while a newer one never did so to its predecessor: different collections therefore coexisted and older versions were just gradually replaced. To enable me to get a good

overview, the various information sources needed to be ordered chronologically, and I have maintained this chronological approach in the case description.

An interview with two experts together took place on 27 November 2018 at Homestudios' recently opened Experience Centre in Utrecht. There, I spoke to Henry Draijer and Ferdy Rijs in studio E, which is one of the individual cubicles within the Creation Studio, who supported what they told me with several PowerPoint presentations. Henry Draijer has worked as a Marketing and Innovations Advisor at BAM Housing (the present BAM Living) since 2013. The Smart Collection had just been launched at the time and Henry had contributed to the development of both the subsequent Home Collection and the current Homestudios. Ferdy Rijs has worked at BAM since 2016, and had participated in the development of Homestudios as a Communications Specialist. The two experts wanted to be interviewed together because of the complementary expertise that each of them had concerning the issues I was raising. So, while Henry spoke about developing the Smart Collection into the Home Collection, Ferdy clarified the rationale behind Homestudios. Ferdy was also the interviewee who took the lead in my tour of the Experience Centre. Later, to my horror, I discovered when I got home that my recording equipment only contained files of 0 bytes: somehow, my extensively tested equipment had failed. Consequently, a literal transcription of the interview was impossible. To limit the damage, I immediately wrote down everything I could remember, aided by my photographs. I fleshed out the notes I had made during the interview over the next few days. In addition, Henry and Ferdy sent me their Power-Point presentations and answered follow-up questions by email. I was therefore able to reconstruct the interview properly. In order to get information from another perspective, I also asked to speak to interior designer Victor Meuwissen but, unfortunately, was unable to do so.

Direct observations were my final information resource, and included not only my thoughts during the guided tour of Homestudios' Experience

1 __ Avitts 2006: 307-308. In a 2010 article on professionally staged homes and their constructed narratives, Avitts elaborates on her approach by applying it to the US resale housing market. The article "Home Staging in Twenty-First Century America: Doesn't It Look Like a Happy Place to Live?" is published in *American Studies in Scandinavia, 42:1*, 57-79, and is accessible online.

2 __ Avitts 2006: 6.

Centre, but also a personal account I created on My Homestudios. Although not intending to actually buy a house, I was nonetheless able to explore the options on offer at a project nearby and better understand the concept as it related to the house types, exteriors, spatial layouts and prices. This also gave me an impression of how the digital platform operated during the initial orientation phase participated in by prospective clients.

### Terminology

Homestudios was developed by the international construction firm Koninklijke BAM Groep nv (Royal BAM Group), which is run by two operating companies within the Dutch branch. Cooperation with external firms was essential to realise the Homestudios concept, and the case description will therefore also examine the contributions of these associated partners. In general, however, I refer to the concept as BAM's Homestudios and to the company as BAM.

To date, Homestudios is only available in the Netherlands. As a consequence, press releases, website information, text panels and other communications about it and its predecessors are written in Dutch. To ensure clarity, I introduce important concepts using their original names in italics, but then change to English equivalents with similar connotations. The name 'Homestudios' is, in fact, an anglicised Dutch term, and is used in this context as a singular proper noun.

As Homestudios is only accessible to those who are in the process of buying a house being built by BAM, the term *visitor* – which I chose for the IKEA case – is not entirely suitable. The Experience Centre is designed to guide buyers through the process and facilitate decision-making. Moreover, while a visit to IKEA can be just an enjoyable day out, a trip to Homestudios is less informal: buyers make decisions about important aspects of their future homes. As a consequence, I have adopted terms such as *customer* and *client,* which are also used by BAM.

I use the term *model homes* to refer to BAM's ensembles within the context of the Homestudios Experience Centre. The word *interiors* may concern both the 2D and 3D representations of domestic interiors in BAM's Smart Collection, Home Collection and Homestudios. The term *period room* is used specifically to refer to domestic ensembles in the museum context.

# Experiencing a House Before It Is Built

**CASE DESCRIPTION**

The image of a trendy DJ embellishes the cover of the brochure introducing the BAM Smart Collection in 2013. This DJ, though, is a fashionable elderly lady mixing her records against a backdrop of beige floral wallpaper. Home is a very personal matter, seems to be the implication; a house has to fit an individual's particular lifestyle and tastes. In accordance with this view, the brochure explains that the Smart Collection offers prospective buyers a variety of options in terms of architectural style, exterior, layout and finishes. At the same time, two managers working at BAM told the regional *Business Magazine* that the concept not only allows customisation, but also enables prospective purchasers to experience their future house before it is built. The prize-winning concept is based on the success of furnished model homes, which are, the managers asserted, the first to sell in almost every housing development.[3]

Fascinated by the notion of such a comprehensive and experiential collection of homes, this chapter aims to explore its potential relevance to how museums collect contemporary home life. This section therefore follows the development of the Smart Collection and the Home Collection into today's Homestudios, describing their main ingredients, methods and underlying ideas, as well as the changes made on the way. I will demonstrate that BAM initially concentrated on creating a coherent set of options for buyers (its collection), before gradually shifting the focus to the visitor experience, which became the distinguishing feature of Homestudios in 2018.

### Smart Collection (2013)

The Smart Collection and the later Homestudios were developed by BAM in the Netherlands, although the company also operates in four other European home markets: Belgium, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Germany. Furthermore, the BAM Group is active in niche markets globally. According to the profile on its website, BAM's two business lines – Civil Engineering and Construction & Property – employ approximately 20,000 people.[4] Within the Dutch branch of the latter, two operating companies have been the drivers of Homestudios, the area developer AM and BAM *Woningbouw* (BAM Housing), later called BAM *Wonen* (BAM Living),[5] although cooperation with external firms was essential to realise the concept.

Benedict Kraus is introduced in the 2013 brochure as the architect involved in the development of the Smart Collection. The text further explains that the collection is based on extensive market research that recorded the requirements of various potential buyers. These results were first translated into floor plans and then linked to three popular architectural styles: Old Dutch, 1930s and Modern.[6] In reality, however, only the Old Dutch and 1930s' styles were initially available. Indeed, it was not until March 2014 that the Modern style was presented online, designed in collaboration with the Dutch home interior-design magazine *vtwonen*. The new-build house was offered in eight different types, just like the other properties within the Smart Collection, and ranged from a starter home to a spacious semi-detached.[7] In contrast to the brochure, however, marketing and innovations advisor Henry Draijer told me during our interview in November 2018 that the architectural styles were not so much based on market research, but also on the architect's experiences of what clients actually like. Moreover, while the Old Dutch style had been inspired by archetypal 17th-century Amsterdam canal houses, the 1930s' version was a reflection of the immensely popular dwellings of this period. Similarly, the standardised floor plans were primarily based on the company's building experience. During an innovation trajectory directed towards conceptual building and product leadership, the company found that costly tailor-made schemes could be easily reduced to five or six basic floor plans. This limited number of options meant that BAM could offer customisation at a lower price in a shorter period of time.[8]

Meanwhile, extensive market research was conducted for a second innovation process that focused on clients. One of the main outcomes was a finding that customers want to buy a ready-to-live-in house and are prepared to pay for it. Henry Draijer told me during our interview that most households prefer a higher level of finish than the basic one available on completion day. As it became evident from the research that clients would not trust either the builder or the estate agent as an interior advisor, BAM immediately sought to cooperate with a freelance interior designer, Victor Meuwissen. In close collaboration, BAM and Meuwissen together developed a concept for the interiors based on a limited number of *Woonsferen* (Living Atmospheres) and *Leefwijzen* (Lifestyles).[9]

Five 'Lifestyles' were conceived to guide consumers in their decision-making concerning the layout of their new house. The first brochure from 2013 introduced these lifestyles and suggested a floor plan to accommodate them. The 'Culinary Lifestyle', for instance, suited sociable families who love to invite friends over for dinner. An extension could create extra space for cooking, and French doors could be added to provide an even lighter dining area. Of the five different lifestyles, two concerned the ground floor ('Culinary' and 'Living'), another two the first floor ('Wellness' and 'Hotel Suite'), and one both the first floor and attic ('Practical'). Accordingly, the various lifestyles were connected to spatial use and visualised through floor plans.[10]

The so-called 'Living Atmospheres' played an equally important role in the ready-to-live-in concept. Five such atmospheres referred to five different interior styles, described as 'Romantic', 'Classic', 'Natural', 'Resolute' and 'Design'. Each style had a limited number of colours, forms and materials that were applied to the chosen finish. So, those who preferred the Classic living atmosphere could choose traditional kitchen cupboards, wooden flooring, and a colour scheme with subdued colours and rich taupe as a striking colour accent.[11] Specifications were offered at three budget levels, relating to both the quality of materials and the level of finish. Clients could opt for a

3 — *Business Magazine* 2013: 60.
4 — Company profile on the website https://www.bam.com/en/about-bam, last viewed 18 January 2021.
5 — The BAM Woningbouw brochure of 2013 mentions both BAM *Woningbouw* (BAM Housing) and the area developer AM, while the press release of 14 May 2018 just refers to the overarching Dutch branch of *Bouw & Vastgoed* (Construction & Property). My interviewees mentioned BAM and AM as the drivers of Homestudios.
6 — BAM Woningbouw Brochure 2013: [4].
7 — Press release by AM, BAM and *vtwonen* on 24 February 2014; the AM website included a link to the house, http://www.vtwonenhuis.nl/#het-vt-wonen-huis.
8 — Interview 27 November 2018.
9 — Interview 27 November 2018 & PowerPoint (July 2013).
10 — BAM Woningbouw Brochure 2013: [14]-15.
11 — Example based on one of the videos on the Victor-VeniVidi Channel: https://youtu.be/glB80Ap8gJo, viewed 24 January 2019.

4.2

A spread in the first brochure on the BAM Smart Collection, presenting the *Old Dutch* architectural style. This is said to be based on 17<sup>th</sup>-century Amsterdam canal houses, with their wide and high windows accentuating the residential function on the ground floor. Individual buyers can choose their favourite house type and exterior from the options available within this architectural style. This kind of distinction appeals to the Dutch consumer, the brochure argues, who loves being able to point out: "Look, the one with the crow-stepped gable is mine!"
Source: BAM Woningbouw (2013). *Smart Collectie* [Brochure]: 8-9.
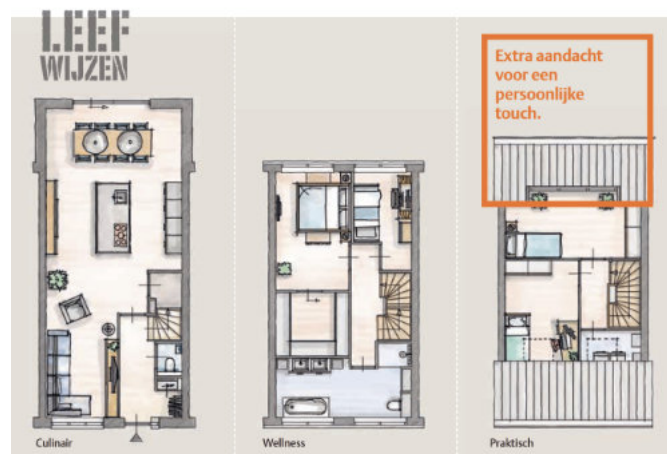
4.3

The Smart Collection contained various floor plans to accommodate buyers' preferred life-styles. This figure shows the three floor plans included in the 2013 brochure, sketching options for the ground floor, first floor and attic. The Culinary lifestyle, on the left, favours the kitchen (with island) and dining space; the lounge is limited to the corner on the bottom left side. The first floor offers ample space for the luxurious bathroom that is key to the Wellness lifestyle. Finally, the attic is divided according to the Practical lifestyle, where the optional dormer window creates a more functional space and extra walls provide separate bedrooms.
Source: BAM Woningbouw (2013). *Smart Collectie* [Brochure]: [14].

4.4

This screenshot from a YouTube video shows the interior designer Victor Meuwissen introducing the 'Classic' living atmosphere. He tells viewers about the background of the style, illustrates its characteristics, explains the available choices, and concludes by giving advice on decorating and furnishing the house in the Classic style.
Source: Screenshot YouTube, https://youtu.be/gIB80Ap8gJo (2013, viewed 24 January 2019).

**1998**

This armchair from Rotterdam city hall was used by mayor Bram Peper from 1982 to 1998.

**8558.2**

ready-to-live-in house, choose their preferred living atmosphere and then make their individual choices within this style concerning, for example, the floors, wall finishes, doors and handles, heating system, kitchen, and toilet and bathroom.[12]

As market research had highlighted that customers were most likely to respect the ideas of an independent interior designer, Victor Meuwissen was promoted as an experienced freelancer. First, and prominently, the interior concept was named after him – *Victor & Wonen* (Victor & Living) – and he was portrayed in the 2013 brochure describing the ready-to-live-in concept. Information about him could also be found on BAM's website, as well as on his personal website, which featured the BAM collection next to projects conducted for IKEA and the former fashion brand Mac & Maggie.[13] In addition, Meuwissen was visible on YouTube, where he presented various lifestyles and living atmospheres, and gave tips on decorating and furnishings.

## Home Collection (2014)

A press release in March 2014 announced the launch of BAM's *Wooncollectie,* the Home Collection. Somewhat confusing is the fact that its predecessor, the Smart Collection, is not mentioned at all. Nevertheless, the concept of the Home Collection is identical to its forerunner. According to Henry Draijer, one of my interviewees, its name change followed the company's shift in focus from its workflow and goal of building smart to individual clients and their future homes. Exteriors, lifestyles and living atmospheres were unaltered, and brochures concerning the interiors of various projects were very similar in appearance, with the same pictures used over and again.

The first *vtwonen*-houses actually built, which were designed in the new 'Modern' architectural style, were completed in IJburg (Amsterdam) on 30 September 2015. According to AM's proud press release, the completion marked the moment when a modern interior design was added to the BAM collection and was henceforth available to clients as the sixth living atmosphere. Nevertheless, even the new *vtwonen* living atmosphere was visualised in exactly the same format as the previous versions, suggesting the use of CGI.

A further aspect in the development of the Home Collection relates to the simultaneous construction of an online platform. This was created in cooperation with actual consumers using interviews, focus groups, analyses of existing communities and usability tests. First called *digitale huissleutel* (digital latchkey), the resulting portal



4.5

The brochure for a project near Vianen, probably published online at the end of 2015, depicted six living atmospheres. Captions characterise each one. Although intended to highlight individuality, each interior was visualised in exactly the same format.
Source: BAM Woningbouw [end of 2015]. *Victor & Wonen* [Brochure Hoef-en-Haag].

was eventually named *ditismijnthuis.nl* (thisismy-home.nl). Here, potential clients were informed about developments, buyers could communicate with their personal advisors and prospective purchasers could meet future neighbours. Clients could therefore now gain access to relevant information at different points in the process. Eventually, they could also use the portal to make selections from the Home Collection and have immediate access to prices and deadlines.[14]

Apart from the development of this platform and the expansion of the collection with the anticipated Modern style, the Home Collection, not least proved the appeal and success of the ready-

to-live-in concept. In the period 2014 to 2018, most future inhabitants had actually chosen a higher level of finish, Henry Draijer told during my interview, with them all spending a considerable sum of money on the interior. According to the website *ditismijnthuis* (thisismyhome), over 40 housing projects were being developed as part of the Home Collection at the end of 2018.[15]

## Launch of Homestudios (2018)

As I was preparing for my interview at the end of 2018 with Henry Draijer and Ferdy Rijs about the development of BAM's Home Collection, I was taken by surprise when they kindly invited me to their recently opened Experience Centre. I had not seen any press release announcing the launch of Homestudios and had not found any reference to it on the fully functioning website thisismyhome, upon which the Home Collection was still available. Nevertheless, Homestudios did not fail to impress. The Experience Centre is located at a business

park at the western edge of Utrecht, in the centre of the Netherlands, and is easily accessible by car and public transport. A large, modern building, covering a surface area of about 2,000 m$^2$, houses various beautifully designed studios. Often, the exhibits' design language and their accompanying clear texts reminded me of a pleasant, well-thought-out and rather expensive museum environment. This was something I first thought was due to my personal background, but it later transpired that it contained some truth. Five different studios at the Experience Centre aim to inspire people to buy a house built by BAM and support them during their decision-making. Homestudios' first customers, 51 households buying a new build in Almere (a stone's throw from Amsterdam), were welcomed to the centre in autumn 2018.

The most striking aspect of Homestudios is the addition of the Experience Centre. In many respects, though, it still resembles the previous Home Collection: it still offers various exterior, spatial layout and finish options to prospective buyers; clients are still guided by a personal home advisor, as well as by specific expertise; and a digital platform (renamed *Mijn Homestudios,* i.e., My Homestudios) still provides important information and serves as a planner, personal archive and place to meet both experts and future neighbours.[16] However, the company's cooperation with numerous different suppliers[17] has resulted in the availability of a wide variety of home product samples on show. While kitchens, bathrooms, furniture and accessories were explicitly *not* part of the earlier interiors on offer in the Home Collec-

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[12] — BAM Woningbouw Brochure 2013: 5, [12].

[13] — In 2013, it was possible to find information about these Living Atmospheres on bamwoningbouw.nl/victorenwonen, as well as on venividivictor.nl.

[14] — Interview 27 November 2018.

[15] — https://www.ditismijnthuis.nl, last viewed 30 October 2018.

[16] — Interview 27 November 2018 & PowerPoint (October 2018: 8, 18).

[17] — The BAM press release (14 May 2018) mentions: ABB/Busch-Jaeger (home automation and switch equipment), ATAG Benelux (kitchen appliances), Berkvens (inner doors and frames), Bosch Siemens Huishoudapparaten (kitchen appliances), Bruynzeel Keukens (kitchens), Douglas & Jones (tiles), Duravit (bathroom products), FAKRO (dormer windows), Hansgrohe (taps and showers), Hattelli Projects (floors, built-in wardrobes and window decorations), Ideal Standard (bathroom products), Knipping Kozijnen (dormer windows), Maretti Lighting (indoor and outdoor lighting), PPG/Sigma (paint), Rebellenclub (furniture, carpets and home accessories), Samsung (consumer electronics), and SieMatic (kitchens).

tion,[18] each exhibit within Homestudios is a commodity that can be bought. Moreover, whereas the Home Collection provided customers with floor plans and photographs, Homestudios combines virtual reality with physical objects and model interiors, thus not only stressing the importance of the visitor experience, but also the role of materiality. The introductory house and five different studios provide customers with a plethora of information and inspirational stimuli, which help them to make choices. These choices form the basis for further advice to facilitate the buyers' decision-making. Eventually, customers 'create' their future home. BAM thus gives its clients a realistic impression of their future property and guides them in the buying process as a way to sell functional houses.

## Guided Tour through the Studios

At the conclusion of our interview at Homestudios, I was escorted round the Experience Centre by both Henry Draijer and Ferdy Rijs. Ferdy, who had participated in its development as a communications specialist, took the lead during the tour, pointing out certain aspects and talking about the rationale behind the displays. The following description is based on this tour, his explanations and my observations, occasionally complemented with extra information.

Each visit to the Experience Centre starts at the *Introductiehuis* (Introductory House), Ferdy

explained. This building, on a scale of 1:1, represents a house as it is normally finished on completion day, with bare floors and ceilings, roughly finished walls and a staircase that has only been primed. Apparently, not many customers expect a house to be finished to this low a level. Quite the opposite: market research indicates that approximately 45% of customers expect a new build to be almost completely finished.[19] The Introductory House thus functions as a way to manage expectations and equally whets many clients' appetite for the ready-to-live-in concept, promising convenience in the process of buying, building and inhabiting a new-build property.

The first of the five studios within the Experience Centre is called the *Kennisstudio* (Knowledge Studio). Interactively, customers can learn about ergonomics in the kitchen and decide on their preferred worktop heights, establish their priorities regarding their flooring, and discover the optimal height of the toilet for them. With the help of projections and moveable walls, two so-called *theatres* visualise the effects of adding a dormer window to the attic and extending the ground floor by either 1.20 or 2.40 metres. Preferences can be saved on a personalised computer tablet, thus assisting customers with their decision-making

along the way.[20] Although the information provided in the Knowledge Studio is said to be brand-independent, all the examples on show are supplied by Homestudios' associated partners.

The *Inspiratiestudio* (Inspiration Studio) is next, and contains 11, almost full-scale, furnished model homes – seven houses and four apartments. The seven houses are arranged over two floors: the kitchen and living room are on the ground floor, and the bedroom, bathroom and attic are on the upper level; one floor has thus been omitted, which requires some tweaking. The apartments occupy just one floor and range in size from 40 to 160 m², with the latter representing a luxurious penthouse with a breath-taking (albeit virtual) view. Because the model homes are presented in a uniform and rather abstract architectural setting, they direct the immediate attention towards the interior space. The former terminology of Lifestyles and Living Atmospheres has been replaced by a more practical reference to variations in layouts *(indelingsvarianten)* and styles *(woonstijlen)*. Although the layout options remain unchanged, the styles have been completely updated to satisfy contemporary tastes. Their names have also been changed, now covering a wider range of associated emotions, as Ferdy told me.[21] Moreover, these styles are not expressed through a limited number of photographs, but instead by the careful selection of products and their grouping into ensembles. Together, the 11 model interiors unify all the available choices in terms of spatial use and stylistic finishing. It is the Inspiration Studio that most recalls the idea of a museum with several contemporary period rooms. I will discuss the values that the interiors reflect and their method of connecting with visitors later in this chapter.

The *Creatiestudio* (Creation Studio) is where buyers shape their future home, advised by experts. Here, individual cubicles are equipped with large computer screens that can be connected to the personal tablets. The customers' preliminary choices can be reviewed, supported by the samples of materials that are all around the cubicles, including doors, taps, floors and colours that can be scrutinised, compared and eventually selected. While previous choices serve as a funnel, this studio enables customers to make their final decisions.[22]

The fourth studio is generally reached around noon. Once there, a group of customers, who typically spend the whole day at Homestudios, prepare lunch with a professional chef in the *Kookstudio* (Cookery Studio). During this session, they also familiarise themselves with kitchen layouts, materi-

als and appliances. Clients not only have the opportunity to ask the chef any questions they might have, but can also experience various options themselves, including the feel of the diverse worktops, the sound level of devices, and how different ovens operate. The group has lunch together, which is a social event that is supposedly especially enjoyable when customers are expected to become future neighbours.[23]

All these aspects come together in the final area, the 3D Studio, which was, unfortunately, not accessible during my visit. According to Ferdy, the individual choices made in each studio are saved on the personal tablet and projected in three dimensions in this room. In view of my experiences in the other *theatres,* I assume that the space will be adaptable, enabling the floor plan to be changed to fit the house bought, walls and windows to be put in the right places, the rooms customised virtually based on the client's choices, and everything presented in a convincing manner. This vision of the 3D Studio remains speculative, although the few photos found on the internet provide a glimpse of what is on offer and do not contradict this viewpoint. Of primary importance is that customers see the effects of their choices and their future home before it has been built.

The distinguishing feature of Homestudios is, in effect, its focus on the visitor experience. Whereas the previous Home Collection provided choices on paper with the help of a few physical samples, today's Homestudios' concept is designed to guide future buyers via experiences. Photos and CGI have been replaced with an impressive array of large samples of materials, fully furnished model homes and virtual reality. Future purchasers make their decisions step by step, with each studio referring to the phase of the process in which the customers find themselves. The increased materiality of the objects on display, the hands-on exhibits and the explanatory texts therefore connect Homestudios more closely to the museum.

18 — The brochure accompanying the previously mentioned project in Vianen (end of 2015), for example, says that the depicted kitchen, bathroom, furniture and accessories are included for inspiration purposes only and do not form part of the Living Atmospheres on offer. BAM Woningbouw [end of 2015]: 21.

19 — Guided tour: Homestudios, 27 November 2018.
20 — Ibid.
21 — Ibid.
22 — Ibid.
23 — Ibid.

4.8 The Knowledge Studio encourages customers to discover, experience and learn. This photograph provides a view from the section related to bathrooms and toilets. Blue circles on the floor indicate spots where clients can retrieve information on their tablets and save their preferences. In this section, the choices relate to flushing and waste systems and bathroom lighting. The display on the right is designed to let buyers experience what toilet height suits them best.
Photo DST-experience agency.



4.7 The Inspiration Studio comprises four flats and seven houses. Each house has a living room and kitchen on the ground floor, and an upper level with bedrooms, a bathroom and attic. The photo shows two customers visiting the model homes. One of them measures the space that the table and chairs will occupy, assisted by the personal advisor on the left, who is recognisable from the badge she is wearing.
Photo Bram Petreaus (2019).

4.9 View in the Creation Studio. While previous choices, established priorities and preferred styles function as a funnel, here is where customers make their final decisions. A large number of samples of materials, including doors, taps, floors and colours, enables them to compare various products.
Press photo BAM Homestudios.
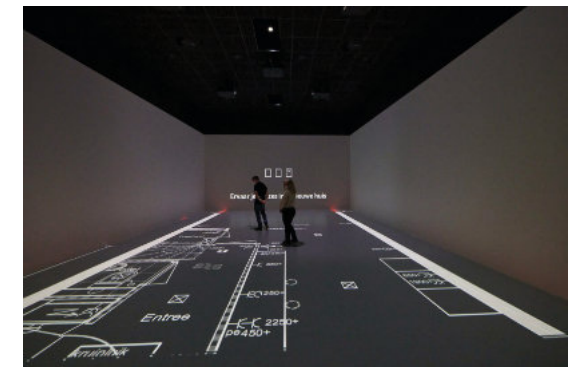
4.10    The website of DST, one of Homestudios'
co-designers, has two photographs of the
3D Studio, thus providing a glimpse into the
customer experience. All the individual choices
made during the process are projected in three
dimensions, enabling buyers to see their future

4.11    View in the Cookery Studio, where a professional
chef makes lunch with customers. Clients there-
fore have the opportunity to experience using
various kitchen appliances and ask questions.
Photo Bram Petraeus (2019).

**2001**
ACQUISITION DATE

Participants in psychological research conducted in 1954 revealed a preference for armchairs like Aunt Nell's.

MUSEUM NUMBER

**82289.A**

# Themes

In an attempt to identify BAM's underlying ideas and methods, the previous section described the development of the Smart Collection and the Home Collection into today's Homestudios. Architectural styles, layouts, the standard of finishes and styles of the interiors can all be seen to be the main ingredients of the company's contemporary collection of homes. Where it first focused on the creation of a coherent set of options, the Homestudios' concept shifted the emphasis to the customer experience. In order to sell functional houses, BAM therefore offers its clients a realistic glimpse of their future home and guides them in their decision-making.

This within-case theme analysis relates this second of my cases more explicitly to the museological context of collecting contemporary home life. Looking through the eyes of a museum curator, it further examines four important case-specific themes as a way to explore what museums can learn from BAM's approach. The first theme addresses visitor orientation, one of the main drivers of museums' orientation towards the present. It particularly examines BAM's method of selecting products and ensembles while maintaining the focus on its clients' involvement in the selection process.

Customers are also central to the second theme. Just as museums are searching for compact yet inclusive collections, it is essential for Homestudios to combine a manageable collection with a wide appeal. Balancing standardisation with diversity keeps houses affordable while simultaneously meeting different clients' demands. Zooming in on the Inspiration Studio, I use this theme to ask who the model homes represent. How does the company aim to appeal to different groups of customers whilst maintaining a relatively limited collection? Could their strategy inspire museums?

The third theme addresses issues of representation. Adopting Ellen Avitt's position that furnished interiors articulate cultural values more than empty houses, consideration is given to the use of style and the selection of objects within the Inspiration Studio. Recently constructed period rooms in museums might stress individuality, but what values are conveyed by the visual vocabulary of these model homes? And what insights can

museums acquire from the style and storytelling accessories used in these model homes?

As experience is valued highly by museums in their efforts to form connections with visitors, the final theme focuses on the striking aspect of experience in the Homestudios concept. In particular, the principles upon which this is based are examined and the methods used to establish an experiential connection between customers and the products on offer are analysed. Linking Homestudios' approach to the notion of the museum as a creative technology, the theme investigates what the latter could learn from BAM's ideas and practices, arguing that Homestudios' trifold concept of knowledge, inspiration and creation suggests an interesting direction for museums to incorporate within their collecting policies.

# Customer orientation

Visitor orientation has long been a major driver of museums' interest in the present, with the result being greater engagement with the public. As argued in Chapter 1, visitors have been assigned different roles ever since the 1980s, changing from a passive audience to interactive users and then to participants.[24] The experiences of diverse visitor groups came to be viewed as reference points, which also contributed to a revival of contextual presentations and a renewed interest in the museological period room, as Chapter 2 notes. However, the shift towards a public-oriented museum has proceeded in fits and starts. Indeed, it has proved to be difficult for museums to refrain from simply using their own perspective, their cherished collections or their main messages, and to instead position the visitor at the centre of exhibitions, let alone collections. Striving to reconnect with the public, museums have occasionally sought to learn from marketing and communication agencies, where everything appears to revolve around the customer. Consequently, it seems to be perfectly logical that an international construction firm like BAM would have incorporated a similar customer-centred approach.

### An Excellent Customer Experience

The customer is at the heart of BAM's Homestudios concept, which aims to offer guidance and experiences throughout the buying process – from the initial contact to actually purchasing and living in a property. In the 2018 press release announcing the launch of Homestudios, BAM states that its main aim is to provide an excellent customer experience:

> Homestudios inspires and facilitates future residents through a unique digital and physical customer journey. The main starting point is to offer customers an A*-grade experience, providing them with the right information and inspiration at exactly the right moment, and guiding them to their own personal homes.[25]

BAM's approach is partly based on customer need, as identified in a client-oriented innovation

pathway known as *De klant centraal* (Our Client at the Centre). Market research showed that customers were looking for support when making difficult decisions and, above all, convenience. The desire of clients to buy a ready-to-live-in house with a high level of finishes, as well as their readiness to pay for it, led to the introduction of the Smart Collection in 2013.[26] Even in that first series of new-build homes, the majority of buyers chose a ready-to-live-in finish. The company therefore rapidly adopted the concept and implemented it more widely, with the name of the group of properties on offer changed to the Home Collection in 2014. The focus on clients also included charting customer relationships, with four residential phases distinguished, each of which had an appropriate verb assigned to it: orientation (captivate), interest (bind), buy & build (support) and habitation (no verb). Today, the concept of a 'customer journey' has replaced the previous notion of the customer relationship, and Homestudios now discerns eight different residential phases, with 'awareness' preceding orientation, while the other stages are currently in the process of being further refined. Finally, the digital latchkey has been succeeded by Homestudios' online platform, which was developed in consultation with actual buyers and used various methods of qualitative research to do so, including interviews, focus groups and usability tests.[27]

The transition from a production-oriented construction firm to a customer-oriented approach with complementary products and services is clearly expressed in the names chosen for the BAM collections. In 2013, the Smart Collection clearly referred to a smarter building process, while the later Home Collection name stressed the future lived-in properties of individual consumers.[28] This transition is also noticeable in the January 2017 name change of the operating company from BAM *Woningbouw* (BAM Housing) to BAM *Wonen* (BAM Living).[29] The process of transition affected the roles of the employees as well, as Henry Draijer remarked during our interview: where builders had

24 — Van den Akker & Legêne 2016: 8.
25 — Press release 16 August 2018.
26 — Market research, conducted by Motivaction, showed that 78% of customers would prefer a ready-to-live-in ('woonklaar') house and 69% were ready to pay for this. Only 8% would choose a house with the basic finish ('behangklaar'). Interview 27 November 2018 & PowerPoint (July 2013).
27 — Interview 27 November 2018.
28 — Ibid.
29 — Press release 9 January 2017.

previously controlled the company, marketing and communication specialists now have considerable influence. As Henry asserted:

*Technical skills alone are no longer enough. It's become increasingly important to understand what customers want and translate this into products that meet their needs. This requires different skills.*[30]

Despite BAM's emphasis on the customer, initial ideas about limiting house types and floor plans were actually the result of the firm's efforts to improve its workflow. While the architectural styles adopted were primarily based on the BAM architects' extensive experience of client preferences, the standardisation of floor plans followed a revision of the company's common practices. Preceding the client-oriented pathway, the first innovation process was directed towards conceptual building and product leadership. Costly tailor-made designs – sometimes with only a few centimetres difference in the placement of walls – were translated into a limited number of basic floor plans, with the aim thus being to build in a smarter, more intelligent way. BAM further developed its concepts into product lines between 2011 and 2014, resulting in a limited collection of house types, floor plans and exteriors.[31] In relation to the interiors, designer Victor Meuwissen developed a construct that combined five options for a property's spatial layout with five interior design styles. It was in this way that the starting points for an easily attainable and affordable dream home (the ready-to-live-in house) were created.[32] Thereafter, associated suppliers (with samples available in the Homestudios' Inspiration Studio) were used to provide furnishings and other products from their ranges that reflect the prices and styles of the fully furnished model homes.[33]

Moreover, while the Utrecht Experience Centre focuses on a home's layout and interior finishes, and prioritises the interests of individual consumers, BAM's institutional clients are nevertheless still important to the company. Project developers, municipalities and investors first make decisions about the overall architectural style of a housing project; next, individual buyers can choose their preferred house type and specific exterior from a palette of options. These consumers thus also have to consider the issue of architectural style, with the Old Dutch and 1930s' property types dominating, although there are several further options on a home's exterior available. Many of the early Home Collection presentations that can still be found on the internet are targeted at institutional clients, with the focus on explaining the benefits of the Homestudios' concept in terms of planning, cost, use, quality, sustainability, comfort, customisation and time to market.[34] Even today, the website explicitly addresses project developers and builders in a section headed "Homestudios voor uw klanten", which highlights the benefits of the concept to institutional clients.

### Consultation and Institutional Clients

In the process of moving towards a visitor-oriented perspective, museums aim to involve visitors and residents in participatory collecting. Meanwhile, BAM's approach is based on consultation, which is a strategy that seems to be less prominent in museological thinking. Following Nina Simon's seminal publication, *The Participatory Museum* (2010), museums have distinguished consultative from co-development projects. In the former, experts and/or communities advise a museum, which then develops a new presentation of any kind; in the latter, museums and participants work together to co-create a new programme.[35]

In the development of Homestudios, market research was used to consult prospective house-buyers. Previously, such research had led to the new concept of a ready-to-live-in home, and BAM's online platform was also developed in consultation with users. Though city museums sometimes question the authority of museum professionals in their pursuit of a visitor-oriented approach, BAM's strategy is based on the company's specific knowledge and that of its partners. In-house expertise from the firm and its associated architects was used for the standardisation of projects, while an interior designer was deployed to develop the customisation process – first as an independent expert, later as part of BAM. The selection of suitable suppliers was also an important task for Homestudios, with associated business partners now responsible for selecting products to match the various model homes. Homestudios' customer orientation is expressed in its objective of providing an excellent customer journey. It can also be seen in its collections, which are based on the demands and preferences of individual buyers, as identified in market research and through sales figures, i.e., based on consultation instead of co-creation. Customer experiences and sales then measure the success of these contemporary period-room-like ensembles.

Another lesson to be learned from the BAM case is to not underestimate institutional clients. Municipalities, investors and project developers con-tinue to play an important background role at BAM, although their presence is not that obvious in the company's presentations. No houses are built, no collections are created without these institutional clients. Moreover, it is them that determine the architectural styles of the homes in which individual customers will live. Along with individual visitors, "institutional clients" are also very important to museums, although they are seldom mentioned as target groups. While funding contributors and sponsors are acknowledged in special projects, municipal governments also play a key role behind the scenes. For city museums, the granting of subsidies is essential for the performance of core tasks like collecting and collection management. Even though municipal councils and politicians have no direct influence on museums' collection policies, their indirect impact is nonetheless considerable. It thus seems sensible to provide a more detailed explanation of the roles of such institutional clients in museums' collection plans.

# Eleven fictive households

An important reason for including Homestudios in my comparative case study lies at the interface between collections and customers. In order to keep its houses affordable while simultaneously meeting different client needs, it is essential for BAM to balance standardisation with diversity. This problem replicates museums' interest in compact, but nevertheless inclusive, collections. Who is represented in the ensembles? How does BAM aim to appeal to different groups of customers while maintaining a somewhat limited collection? Could its strategy inspire museums?

### Compact yet Inclusive?

A crucial aspect of the BAM approach is to provide house-buyers with customisation and personalisation options while also ensuring that production is manageable and house prices are affordable. To achieve this balance, BAM developed a number of standard variations in the house types, lifestyles and living atmospheres on offer in its 2013 Smart Collection. Although today's revised concept – Homestudios – provides clients with much more detailed information, it nevertheless still combines standardisation and diversity. Answering a follow-up question, Henry Draijer emailed:

30 __ Interview 27 November 2018.
31 __ Interview 27 November 2018, also shown in a PowerPoint Presentation from October 2014.
32 __ PowerPoint Presentation from July 2013.
33 __ Follow-up question answered by email, 9 January 2019.
34 __ See, for example, a PowerPoint presentation published around 2013/2014: https://docplayer.nl/66662443-Bam-wooncollectie-smart-collectie-drs-ing-m-strijdonk-projectmanager-bam-woning bouw.html. A YouTube video explaining the advantages of the BAM Home Collection addresses developers and investors specifically: https://youtu.be/6SfcUwtxhVk (published 21 March 2014), last viewed 11 March 2021.
35 __ Simon 2010: 235.

*In essence, Homestudios' approach doesn't differ much [from the previous approach]. We still offer a limited number of options per choice that can be made. Combining those options creates a huge number of possible variations (...) – still based on a limited number of options. This allows us to keep production transparent and manageable (and therefore also costs).*[36]

Homestudios' collection has a limited number of options for the future homes that will be newly built by BAM in the Netherlands. There is no local differentiation; the options on offer aim to meet the demands of customers throughout the country. With three architectural styles, eight floor plans, three types of interior finishes and five interior-design styles, the collection involves both the exteriors and interiors. Architecture, however, is within the remit of institutional clients like project developers and municipalities. Homestudios' Experience Centre, meanwhile, focuses on individual buyers and home interiors: layout and space, finishes and interior design.

One of the areas within the Experience Centre, the Inspiration Studio, contains 11, almost full-scale, furnished model homes. Seven houses plus four apartments are presented in a uniform architectural setting, directing the immediate attention towards the interior space. During my guided tour through Homestudios, communication specialist Ferdy Rijs told me that a matrix underlies the model homes. This combines not only the available house types, with their variations in layout and style, but also encompasses 11 fictive households that characterise contemporary family units and lifestyles. Each model interior has been based on a specific household type, acknowledging particular needs at various stages of life; the 11 households overall reflect mainstream family units in the Netherlands.[37] Consequently, the 11 homes present 11 different, albeit very recognisable, home scenarios.

To my surprise, all the households except one involve two adults: there is just one single-person home, a young male inhabiting a small 40 m$^2$ starter apartment; there is also no single-parent household of any kind. Seven of the 11 households represent families with children, including a baby, a toddler, two eight-year-old twins, a few teenagers and several whose age has not been mentioned. One piece of text references a family just starting out, with no children "as yet", another mentions a lesbian couple without children and one represents a 'DINK' couple (double income no kids). In relation to the last two households, the



matrix mentions that one of them could instead be characterised as empty nesters aged over 50.[38]

Clearly, this distribution of households does not correspond with Dutch statistics. Moreover, BAM's housing projects are mainly located in the west of the Netherlands, around the major cities. This is purely because of the commercial point of view adopted, Henry Draijer explained; that is where most people live and so is where there are the most sales. Nevertheless, the layout of the houses does not take into account the cultural differences that can be found in cities. For example, not one house has a divide between the living room and kitchen, and nor is there one with separate rooms for men and women on the ground floor, even though such floor plans are thought to better suit the preferences of many people with mainly Mediterranean origins.[39] In his response to this observation, Henry wondered whether the company should indeed have more of an eye on diversity than is currently the case.[40]

According to Ferdy Rijs, the matrix underlying the Inspiration Studio has been based on three different insights: BAM's experiences with its

Homestudios' predecessor and the knowledge it gained from the buyers of its Home Collection; the shared experiences of its interior design team in relation to contemporary Dutch households. Indeed, both Jann van Eck and Victor Meuwissen (who previously worked explicitly as an independent designer, but has now been appointed Head of Interior Design) are mentioned as drivers of the matrix's design; and, finally, the specific needs of IKEA consumers at various stages of life. Although this perspective was established by IKEA for its clientele in the Netherlands, my interviewee added that these findings were *therefore* relevant for the entire Dutch home-furnishing market.[41]

The translation of the matrix, with its various households and their preferences, into interior design concepts started on a functional level. "In the end, of prime importance to us is that our residents buy a fully functional house", Henry remarked, "and that's what we're mainly aiming at".[42] So, it was only after deciding household needs that the functionalities were turned into styles fitting both the products and prices offered by BAM's associated suppliers. Next, each supplier

4.12

This interior belongs to model home number 6, which measures 5.40 by 12.40 metres, including an extension. Its fictive household consists of parents and a teenage boy. Matching the layout of the Living variant, the kitchen is situated next to the front door. The ground floor interior has been designed according to the Rustic & Serene style. On the second floor, the family has opted for the extra-large bathroom that is key to the Wellness layout. This specific bathroom had sound effects of someone showering. Press photo BAM Homestudios.

36 ___ Follow-up question answered by e-mail, 9 January 2019.
37 ___ Interview 27 November 2018.
38 ___ The contents of the matrix were sent to me by email on 14 January 2019.
39 ___ In 2002, both Bouma and Dijksterhuis wrote about the introduction of the so-called 'salonhalwoning' (salon hall house), designed to meet the needs of various groups, especially immigrant residents, in Dutch cities.
40 ___ Interview 27 November 2018.
41 ___ Follow-up question answered by email, 14 January 2019.
42 ___ Follow-up question answered by email, 9 January 2019.

**RANDSTEDELIJKE GEMAKS ZOEKER /**

"GENIETEN VAN ALLEDAAGSE DINGEN."

FAMILIEMENS
HUISELIJK
COMFORTABEL
TRADITIONEEL
GEZELLIGHEID

**DIT BEN IK/**

Anneke is een echt gezelligheidsmens. Ze komt oorspronkelijk uit Crooswijk maar 15 jaar geleden is ze samen met haar man verhuisd naar nieuwbouwwijk Prinsenland. Ze zijn daat gaan wonen vanwege de buitenruimte. Bijkomend voordeel is dat er veel familieleden van Anneke in de buurt wonen. Vrije tijd is ontspannen, thuis zijn en het liefst lekker niks hoeven. Zomers is het genieten in de tuin en van etentjes samen met vrienden.

IK WOON MET:

FAMILIEBAND IS BELANGRIJK
"Ik heb veel contact met mijn familie. We lopen regelmatig bij elkaar binnen!"

"Ik voel me niet zozeer een Rotterdammer maar eerder Crooswijker. Ik voel me verbonden met mijn wijk."

BIJ ELKAAR ZIJN, GEWOON GEZELLIG

**MIJN ROTTERDAM/**

GEBOORTESTAD
CROOSWIJK
OUDE HAVENSFEER
HARDE WERKERS
SKYLINE

VROEGER
"Het is ook ontzettend veranderd, ik werkte vroeger bij de haven op de Kop van Zuid. Nu staat daar ineens allemaal van die hoogbouw."

Dit vind ik mooi aan Rotterdam: oude nostalgische plekjes zoals Delfshaven

"Ik reis altijd met de auto. Het is snel, droog en ik kan lekker muziek opzetten. Geen gedoe!"

Zo reis ik het liefst: met mijn auto

SHOPPEN
"Ik kom weinig in het centrum. Heel af en toe ga ik naar de koopgoot, maar vaker ga ik shoppen daar bij Alexandrium. Dan neem ik m'n dochter mee."

**MIJN VRIJE TIJD/**

Anneke houdt van volledig verzorgde uitjes. Een goed kop koffie, makkelijk parkeren en een gezellige lunch horen erbij voor een compleet dagje uit. Zulke dingen onderneemt ze met haar zus of echtgenoot. Dit kan iets cultureels zijn maar het kan ook net zo goed een dagje welness zijn. Ze bereidt dit goed voor door alvast online kaartjes te kopen en de route uit te printen.

MIJN INTERESSES:

SOCIALE ACTIVITEITEN
"Afgelopen zaterdag met vrienden uit eten geweest, dat was erg gezellig!"

HUISELIJK
"Agenda's zitten altijd erg vol bij ons. Iets cultureels doen is weer iets erbij in de agenda, het komt er vaak niet van. In de avonduren kijken we meestal tv of we lezen wat."

VERMAAK
"Eens per jaar doen we iets met het hele gezin zoals een musical of het kerstcircus."

Dit is voor mij ontspanning: lekker borrelen aan de keukentafel

"Het hoeft van mij geen 5 sterren te zijn."

ZO BLIJF IK OP DE HOOGTE:
* Ik haal veel informatie uit tijdschriften
* Internet
* Actualiteiten hoor ik viavia of uit het nieuws
* TV, de wereld draait door

**NAAR HET MUSEUM/**

TYPE BEZOEKER

SAMEN ●○○○○ ALLEEN
INSPIRATIE ○○●○○ INFORMATIE
PERSOONLIJK ○●○○○ ERVARINGEN DELEN

GEMAK

"Neem Ikea als voorbeeld, ontbijt en lunch, niet duur, gratis WC en de kinderen kunnen zichzelf vermaken."

GEEN VASTE PRIK
"Ik ben geen platloper van musea, ik vind eigenlijk dat ik te weinig ga."

HIGHLIGHTS
"Ik wilde al heel lang een keer de nachtwacht zien. Als iedereen het erover heeft wil je er ook heen. Alleen het eerste jaar ben ik niet naar het Rijksmuseum gegaan omdat ik geen zin had in al die drukte."

Dit hoort erbij: koffie met taart

GEWOON

DIT MAAKT MIJN MUSEUM BEZOEK GESLAAGD:
* Gastvrij ontvangst
* Goede faciliteiten en duidelijke routing
* Sfeer en het gebouw zijn belangrijk

Deze persona's zijn ontwikkeld in een samenwerking tussen:

MUZUS  museum ROTTERDAM

---

was asked to select furnishings for the properties from its product ranges. Due to its previous careful selection of partners, the company was able to secure a complete and appropriate supply of items for consumers in the middle- and higher-income segments.[43]

**Museum Personas**

The matrix underlying the model interiors within Homestudios' Inspiration Studio combines the available house types with their variations in spatial use and stylistic finishes. Eleven fictive households provide the scripts to encompass all the options on offer and represent the overall home collection. Although these households are said to reflect mainstream households in the Netherlands, they are biased towards larger families with children, as well as to those with middle and higher incomes. Moreover, they lack cultural awareness. It is likely that the families reflect BAM's target market, i.e., prospective buyers of its newly built houses. The choice to target these groups seems to have been made without any trace of embarrassment. In order to survive as a commercial con-

4.13

This image visualises one of the six personas developed by the research agency Muzus and Museum Rotterdam in 2014. The fictitious characters are described in five keywords in the column on the far left. Four other columns describe the personas' social context, their relationship to the city of Rotterdam, favourite leisure activities and wishes regarding museum visits in general. Source: Museum Rotterdam. Exhibition Archive (2014).

struction firm, BAM just needs to sell its houses to a large group of customers. Within museology, however, such decisions are an extremely sensitive issue. Museums, and especially city museums, are held accountable for being inclusive. The accusation that certain groups are excluded is always unwelcome, while favouring a certain elite is an equally sensitive matter.

Away from the specific decisions made by BAM, any investigation of the use of fictive households as part of a collecting strategy that aims to include a variety of target groups in the representation of home life is worthwhile. Although Homestudios chooses to represent 11 larger families with middle to high incomes, city museums aim to achieve a

better reflection of city demographics. The approach reminds me of the visitor matrix that Muzus developed in 2014 for Museum Rotterdam. Although the research agency generally starts with target groups and then develops segments, in this case they used a segmentation model that had already been developed by Mosaic (currently Whize). This had been specifically created for cultural organisations and their target groups in Rotterdam, and was already replete with qualitative data. Aiming to reach more than the traditional communities, Muzus and Museum Rotterdam set out to elaborate on distinct typologies. The intended visitor matrix was based on the idea of the customer journey, which has also played a role in Homestudios. Although fairly new at the time, the idea to encompass not only the visit itself, but also the preparation and process thereafter, is now widely accepted, as Neele Kistenmaker, director and co-founder of Muzus, told me.[44]

In the development of the visitor matrix, the Museum Rotterdam typologies were loaded with results from qualitative research. First, a profile of each character was written, after which five to seven people per profile were selected for the details. The research participants started their work independently, using a toolkit based on the technique of context mapping that was produced by Muzus. The researchers were given personal texts, photos and stickers by the participants. During subsequent interviews with museum staff and Muzus researchers, the respondents were able to reflect on their activities and ideas. Ultimately, all the data collected in the field were used to create six personas, i.e., fictitious characters based on the known features of the target audiences. The top three target groups (*urban omnivore*, *active father* and *culture lover*) represented traditional audiences, while the other two (the *convenience seeker* and *colourful fighter*) were groups the museum explicitly also wanted to reach. The *city tourist* was excluded from the original segmentation model, but was added to our matrix as a logical extension.[45] Although the final personifications are abstractions, with fictive names and photographed models, many of the small images added were provided by the respondents, as were the quotes. Looking at them some five years later, Neele Kistenmaker concluded that the personas definitely required updating. "A persona like the *colourful fighter* really is no longer possible in today's society," Neele noted, asserting that the goal today would certainly be to include a much more diverse group, including not only

fighters, but definitely also successful people of colour.[46]

Could the use of personas, updated and adjusted to represent life at home, contribute to a more inclusive collection policy? These personas might relate to households instead of individual persons – just like those of BAM, only better suited to a city museum's target groups. They would instead be based on city demographics and loaded with meaning by various respondents, thus resulting in characters that are abstract and personal at the same time. Can personas be created without being too much of a cliché? Could they help a museum's collection to reflect the home life of various communities? I therefore recommend a future study of whether an approach like this could involve meaningful interactions between visitors, citizens and contemporary collections in city museums.

43 — Ibid.
44 — Description based on museum documentation, personal memory and an interview conducted on 27 June 2019 with Neele Kistemaker. The definition of 'personas' is derived from the online edition of the Macmillan Dictionary, viewed 14 March 2019.
45 — Interview 27 June 2019.
46 — Ibid.

# Individuality and conformity

As Chapter 2 asserts, the renewed interest in museum period rooms is related to their ability to address issues of representation. Instead of presenting generalisations, recently constructed rooms tend to reflect the individual lives of their inhabitants, whether real or fictive. The cultural values relating to 'the typical' have largely given way to diverse, individual life stories, highlighting the personal identity of the inhabitants' interiors. Commercial model homes may, however, be aiming for more generally shared tastes and aspirational lifestyles in order to reflect their buyers' preferences.

The selection of home furnishings and choice of styles within model homes is vital, Ellen Avitts argues in *Live the Dream* (2006). Avitts analyses the texts of adverts, brochures and other printed sources, the meanings conveyed by spatial layouts, and the narratives embedded in the selection of artefacts in American model homes around 2000. Though the objective of a model home is to sell houses, she asserts, what is actually being sold is the "idea of a home"; model homes create a vision that revolves around "ideas of family cohesiveness, safety, and status".[47] The American advertisements given as examples in Avitts' study differ widely from what is typical in the Netherlands, just as the houses themselves are considerably different. American detached houses with porches, picket fences and manicured lawns do not resemble the average Dutch terrace in the slightest, and nor do the large foyers, separate dining rooms or finished basements form part of the standard repertoire of Dutch homes. Chapter 5 of *Live the Dream* examines the decorative detailing and storytelling accessories within American model home interiors. Although concrete styles and objects are difficult to translate to the Dutch context, the overall conclusions provide important starting points for comparing the deliberately constructed period rooms in museums with the concept behind BAM's Inspiration Studio. More important than the house itself, Avitts concludes, is the interior's "visual vocabulary", i.e., the selected styles and objects, which convey messages better than empty houses. As Avitts writes:

*An empty house tells [us] relatively little about the cultural values of those who reside within it. (...) It is through furnishings and decorative detail that messages are carried to the interior of the house. This concept is the underlying reason for model home merchandising. In model homes of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, carefully selected artifacts articulate carefully chosen values. Through them an identity and a lifestyle are constructed, ones that resonate within the target market as representative of the achieved or desired self.*[48]

Right from the first Smart Collection to the present-day Homestudios, BAM's concept has been based on the success of furnished model homes. While this was initially done with floor plans and CGI, the current Experience Centre is equipped with actual model interiors. The theme at hand in this section of my study turns to these properties in the Inspiration Studio. How does their visual vocabulary help customers to connect emotionally to their future home? What messages are conveyed and what kind of home life is reflected?

**The Inspiration Studio's Visual Vocabulary**

The 11 homes within the Inspiration Studio represent all of the house types that BAM builds in various locations throughout the Netherlands. Showing properties either with or without an extension, with floor plans of all the available options, the model homes exemplify the various layouts. Customers can thus view a model home that corresponds to their future property, experience the options in the different spatial arrangements, and weigh up the pros and cons of, for instance, the Living and Culinary variants. Along with house types and spatial arrangements, style is the Inspiration Studio's most eye-catching tool for helping customers to envision their future home. According to the Homestudios' website, the model home interiors are designed to offer visitors a familiar environment – a space in which they recognise their personal tastes, wishes and dreams.[49] Though Avitt's *Live the Dream* describes just two templates from which merchandisers create the American model home interiors discussed in her book ("White" and "Old World Charm"),[50] Homestudios distinguishes five styles to match its customers' tastes: "Colour & Rich", "Rustic & Serene", "Scandinavian & Light", "Slick & Stylish" and "Sturdy & Industrial". These styles are further elaborations of the Living Atmospheres used previously in the Home Collection, where each style was visualised in a photograph

and described in a short text. The styles now cover a wider range of meanings and are expressed through the careful selection of products and their grouping into ensembles. When I visited the Experience Centre in November 2018, a textual explanation of the new styles was lacking, but Homestudios later published style descriptions on its website between October 2019 and January 2020. As an example, the characterisation of the Colour & Rich style reads as follows:

*In contrast to the mainly sturdy and sober interiors of recent years, there now is a shift from 'sturdy' to 'elegant'. And that elegance is clearly visible in the Colour & Rich style. This style is all about detailing, refinement and richness. Not a literal wealth, but a warm colour palette and luxurious materials – with a nod to the Art Deco era.*[51]

The online style description provides advice on the materials, colours and forms for both generous and tight budgets. This information relates to the finishes of the walls and floors, the selection of furniture and the choice of accessories. The article, written by one of the company's interior designers, ends with several "tips & tricks" and urges customers who like this style to take a look at two specific model homes.

Styles are introduced online and applied in the home interiors. Storytelling accessories also contribute to the model homes' visual vocabulary, as will be seen in my description of the first house, which is largely based on notes taken during the interview on 27 November 2018 with Henry Draijer and Ferdy Rijs. The house is one of the largest model homes, and has a generous floor plan that includes a large extension measuring 6.0 by 12.40 metres. Due to the limited height of Homestudios' building, the house is arranged over two floors, although in reality it would have three. Nevertheless, the house feels very spacious. An open-plan ground floor combines the kitchen, dining space and living room in a typical modern Dutch configuration. The kitchen is at the front of the house, in accordance with the Living house type. In the quite formal living room, the few, but large and stylish (and presumably expensive), pieces of furniture communicate distinction and grandeur. The matrix sent to me after my visit to Homestudios states that the house has been designed for a family with three children; it is aimed at the middle and higher end of the market, and the matrix labels its feel as 'International Design', which matches the current Slick & Stylish style.[52]

From a curatorial perspective, it is noticeable that the rather minimalist interior avoids being overly personal. In fact, there are no family pictures in sight and the shelves of the impressive sideboard have remained almost completely empty. The shelving unit near the kitchen has just a few books and decorative vases. There is no reference at all to the three children in this fictive household. Two empty wine glasses on side tables work as spatial effigies: they invoke the presence of two adults, relaxing in comfortable armchairs – albeit too far apart to converse. Spotlights and ambient lighting affirm the suggestion of a somewhat later time of day, as does the large, flat-screen television, clearly offered for sale by one of Homestudios' suppliers. Further storytelling accessories include flowers and plants, expressing homeliness, although their artificiality has, in my opinion, a slightly detrimental effect. Eye-catching is the enormous reproduction of *The Threatened Swan,* a mid-17th-century masterpiece by Jan Asselijn from the collection of the Dutch Rijksmuseum (National Museum). The choice of this imposing 'angry bird' stands in stark contrast to the pleasant Impressionism Avitts mentions as being the most selected genre for the fine-art prints in the formal model living rooms in the US.[53] The style description on Homestudios' website, added in January 2020, explains this finishing touch purely from a decorative point of view. Like many old masters, the text states, this print contains "the hues so characteristic for the Slick & Stylish living style".[54] I suspect the link to a world-

47 ___ Avitts 2006: 126. See, also, page 219: "Selling new houses in America today has less to do with the house than with creating a vision of what an American home and an American family should be (...)."

48 ___ Ibid. 307-308.

49 ___ Website https://homestudios.nl/portal/open/article/woonstijl-scandinavisch-licht, viewed November 2020.

50 ___ Avitts 2006: 240, 243.

51 ___ Website https://homestudios.nl/portal/open/article/woonstijl-kleur-rijk, viewed November 2020.

52 ___ An email of 14 January 2019 answering my follow-up question about the model homes and their underlying households contains a description of the matrix's contents. Its terminology does not coincide entirely with Homestudios' current idiom, so I have interpreted the layouts and styles according to the style description of 20 January 2020, retrieved from https://homestudios.nl/portal/open/artikelen (viewed 20 November 2020).

53 ___ Avitts 2006: 240.

54 ___ Website https://homestudios.nl/portal/open/article/woonstijl-strak-stijlvol, viewed 20 November 2020.

Model home number 1 has been designed for a family with three children. The ground floor combines kitchen, dining space and living room. The selected furniture and some storytelling accessories aim to convey a sense of quality and status. The space is, however, not very detailed. Its underlying scenario is articulated through the introductory text more than its storytelling accessories.
Press photo BAM Homestudios.

4.14

famous painting also aims to convey quality and status; it might even add a sense of tradition to the predominantly minimalist home.

Although the home interior shows visitors a space in which they can recognise their personal tastes and aspirational lifestyle, it is not very detailed. The few, but large, pieces of furniture communicate distinction and grandeur. Some accessories, such as the flowers and wine-glasses, suggest occupancy, but the sideboards and drawers are empty and relatively few sensorial stimuli have been added. This scenario is articulated through the introductory text, layout and furnishings, as well as, albeit to a lesser extent, through

storytelling accessories. There is just enough detail to give the interior some individuality, but not so much that it would obstruct conformity. Visitors should be able to easily envisage their new home, not hindered by too many details or colours. In balancing individuality against conformity, this model home is presented as a commodity, as are its furnishings. If the interior designers have done a good job, a certain number of customers will identify with the presented lifestyle and tastes, helping them to make decisions about the available options for the layout and finishes of their new home.

The notion that a certain style appeals to some visitor groups, and simultaneously alienates others, is used in Homestudios' home-buying process, which is designed as a funnel to enable decisions to be made easily. The online style descriptions guide visitors towards specific model homes, which then aim to establish an affective connection with potential buyers. Interiors perceived to be unattractive by future inhabitants can simply be ignored. Style is also used as an educational tool to help clients create their own home.

The BAM interior designers are explicitly mentioned and quoted within Homestudios. Their expertise is acknowledged in the showroom's texts, the online explanations of styles, blog posts and online advice about the creation of a personal home, often with a portrait-type photo added. More than in typical model homes, then, style is explicated.

### Styles and Storytelling Accessories in Museums

Model homes are based on the notion that furnished properties with decorated interiors, including those that are deliberately constructed, articulate cultural values more than empty houses. Spatial arrangements, styles and selected objects form a visual vocabulary that appeals to groups of visitors, helping them to connect emotionally with the property on display.

In the museological period room, style and taste are charged concepts, directly relating the interior ensemble to the traditional art-historical type of room. Many city museums focus on social period rooms, ensembles that are meant to represent everyday life, and want to know very little about

the stylistic perspective. Yet style and taste seem to be important aspects in connecting interior ensembles and visitors. This can certainly be taken into account in collecting strategies without making style the sole point of departure. Where IKEA integrates style implicitly in its ensembles, BAM turns it into an educational tool and teaches visitors to understand styles and to apply them in their future home. The latter approach is within the remit of museums, where the challenges lie, on the one hand, in the selection of a variety of styles in the process of collecting, and on the other in ensuring that 'unattractive' interiors are not just passed by when presented to visitors, but are viewed with different eyes. In so doing, the social and artistic period rooms converge, even if they have a different purpose.

While museums present their objects as cultural heritage, as things worthy of preservation, Homestudios present theirs as commodities, things that can be bought. In order to speak to a wide variety of buyers, the Inspiration Studio's interiors aim to balance individuality and conformity. In contrast, recently constructed period rooms in museums often intend to address issues of representation, reflecting the individual lives of their inhabitants, whether real or fictive. These ensembles are commonly packed with personal details, aiming to convey the idea that the residents have just walked away. This enormous amount of detailing was expressed in "Everything except your PIN code", which was the intriguing title of a lecture on the new acquisition policy of the Nederlands Openluchtmuseum (Dutch Open-Air Museum).[55] Yet would it perhaps be better to strive for a less detailed basis in our collection policies, in which more space is left open to the visitor himself? To what extent do storytelling accessories add valuable information, and where do they prevent people from easily empathising with the narrative?

55 — Lecture by Hans Piena (2012), curator at the Dutch Open-Air Museum, explaining the museum's new collection policy to professionals in the field of home interiors as cultural heritage. Mentioned on the following website: https://www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/onderwerpen/interieurs/documenten/publicaties/2019/01/01/overzicht-eerdere-interieurplatforms.

**2002**

Ron van der Ende created this relief (2002) of the Parkflat. In 1958, it was considered to be the best possible realisation of the standards promoted by *Goed Wonen*.

**80779**

# Experience, feel and dream

Experiences are key in BAM's house-selling strategy. Even at the start of its Smart Collection in 2013, two managers declared that its prize-winning concept had been based on the success of furnished model homes, which are the first houses sold on almost every housing development. "That's because one can really experience the house like already living there", they explained in the regional *Business Magazine*.[56] Architectural drawings showed the available future exteriors and floor plans visualised the options for the spatial layout, but the new concept emerged most clearly in the images representing interior styling and the finishes in the house: they painted aspiring buyers a picture of their future home, aiming to convince them that their dream property is, in fact, obtainable and affordable. By choosing extras, the house could be customised according to buyers' specific wishes, and on completion day they should be able to move straight in, with no DIY required and without having to visit a large number of showrooms. They would also have complete certainty over costs. Not only was the collection of home-interior images intended to sell BAM's ready-to-live-in concept - it equally aimed to convey a convincing idea of a future home life. BAM proudly stated in *Business Magazine*: "Time and again, one can add a layer of finishing to the interior and thus add experience." [57]

The launch of Homestudios in 2018, however, seems to indicate that the experience provided by only photographs and CGI did not ultimately suffice. Images are still available online, but in the decision-making process they have been replaced with impressive amounts of samples of materials, the extensive use of virtual reality and 11 fully furnished model homes. Homestudios is explicitly designed to offer prospective buyers a realistic impression of their future home and guide them through experiences. As Mario Broos, director of one of BAM's operating companies, said: "You'll experience your new house before you're actually living there."[58] While today's claim is still the same as in 2013, the degree of realism has increased enormously.

As experience is highly valued in the desire of museums to connect to visitors, the current theme examines the conspicuous aspect of experiences in Homestudios. It considers the principles that underlie the concept and draws attention to the three main steps used to establish an experiential connection between customers and the products on offer. Finally, the theme turns to the question of what museums might learn from Homestudios' ideas and practices. It is argued that a contemporary collecting strategy has to consider the visitor experience, with Homestudios' trifold concept of knowledge, inspiration and creation suggesting an interesting direction for museums' collecting policies.

**Experience Principles**

The Homestudios' concept spans the entire (prospective) buyer journey and includes the Experience Centre, as well as an online platform and personal advice. The journey starts online. A digital platform presents each of BAM's building projects and provides detailed information on the exteriors and layouts of the new-builds for sale. After a house is bought, a personal account on My Homestudios is created, serving as a planner, personal archive and place to meet both experts and future neighbours. At a certain point, the buyers are invited to the Experience Centre. Welcomed by their advisor, the visit begins by activating the personalised tablet that saves information on all the decisions made during the tour. Customers are guided through the Introductory House and the various studios, their decision-making supported by the interactive exhibits, personal advisor and additional expert advice. They prepare lunch with a professional chef and enjoy eating it in the company of fellow buyers. At the end of the day, they get tailored advice in the Creation Studio, where they can compare samples of all kinds, review their choices and link them to their online account.[59]

Homestudios' most distinguishing feature is its business-to-consumer Experience Centre which, despite the limited access, seems very museum-like. During my tour there, the construction, routing and text, especially in the Knowledge and Inspiration studios, frequently reminded me of interactive museum exhibitions. Homestudios has been designed and built with the assistance of external partners, some of which are actually also linked to museums. Indeed, on the internet, I discovered that Hypsos, a well-known player in the design and construction of museum interiors and exhibitions, has similarly contributed to the development and installation of various elements in the

Creation and Knowledge studios.[60] During my interview with him, communication specialist Ferdy Rijs also mentioned that DST, an organisation rooted in education and presently positioning itself as 'the experience agency', is a partner in the process of conceptualising and designing Homestudios. Its website features projects related to brands, employees, young people and leisure. Frequently, the projects combine brand knowledge with museological expertise, as in the Heineken Experience, the Royal Auping Heritage Room, the Zaanse Schans cheese farm, and the Cube Design Museum. On its website, the agency shares its experience principles, which – albeit slightly abbreviated – read as follows:

○ *The recipient at the centre – Always put yourself in the position of your target audience. (...).*
○ *Storytelling – (...) For us, it is an imperative. No story, no experience. (...).*
○ *Co-creation – (...) When people co-create their experience, they are more engaged and focused. Even more so when they can personalise their experience.*
○ *The encounter – One-on-one contact remains the most effective form of communication (...).*
○ *Reason and emotion – (...) But try to let your heart do the talking first. From experience, the brain will follow automatically.*
○ *Sensory perceptions – The more you appeal to the senses, the better you enter the hearts and minds of your visitors. (...).*
○ *Layering – Reading, watching, listening. Or just playing, trying, doing it yourself, discovering for yourself? Experience is in line with different learning styles of visitors and allows for layering.*[61]

It is not hard to see how these principles underlie Homestudios' Experience Centre. With the customer journey as the starting point, the five studios combine reading, watching and listening with layered, multi-sensory participation in trying, discovering, comparing, cooking (tasting and smelling) and, finally, choosing. Storytelling can be found throughout in the combination of narrative texts, objects and interactive exhibits, while face-to-face encounters are scripted from the individual welcome to personal guidance and expert advice. As Homestudios offers buyers support to make individual decisions in the house-buying process, co-creation and personalisation are its essence. Finally, the four pillars of experience that are also mentioned on the DST website –entertainment, education, aesthetics and escapism – clearly

underlie the full-day visit to the entirely designed Experience Centre, a building in a Utrecht business area that reveals nothing and can only be entered by invitation.[62]

**Knowledge, Inspiration and Creation**

While Homestudios offers options to prospective buyers relating to both the exterior and interior of their future house, the Utrecht Experience Centre concentrates on domestic interiors. Here, visitors are guided through their individual decision-making in three main stages: gathering knowledge, finding inspiration and using both to create a future home. Three studios have been named after these steps, referring to the phase of the process in which customers find themselves.[63]

First, the Knowledge Studio aims to provide visitors with the information needed to make educated decisions. A short piece of text at the studio's entrance, very much resembling a museum exhibition's A-text, encourages buyers to discover, experience and learn. "Here you will gain insight into the practical, ergonomic, and comfortable organisation of your house", it reads, so "be curious and ask questions".[64] In reading, trying and comparing, customers can learn in an interactive manner about various aspects of their new home, such as kitchen ergonomics, bathroom layouts and home automation. With the help of projections and moveable walls, the effects of adding a dormer window to the attic and extending the ground floor can also be visualised. Along the way, buyers set priorities and save preferences on a personal tablet, which is linked to their Homestudios account.

56 ___ *Business Magazine* 2013: 60.
57 ___ Ibid.
58 ___ Cited on the website of DST https://www.dst.nl/en/project/homestudios, last viewed 19 November 2020.
59 ___ Interview 27 November 2018 and website https://dst.nl/en/project/homestudios/ last viewed 19 November 2020.
60 ___ Website https://hypsos.com/project/homestudios-by-bam/ viewed 20 November 2020.
61 ___ Website DST https://www.dst.nl/en/experience-principles/, last viewed 19 November 2020. The website mentions "Free of resources" as a final experience principle, indicating that target group, story and relevance are more important than the means. In the context of this study, however, the means (contemporary period-room-like displays) were the starting point.
62 ___ Website DST https://www.dst.nl/homestudios-unieke-experience-toekomstige-bewoners/, last viewed 19 November 2020.
63 ___ Follow-up question answered by email, 9 January 2019.
64 ___ Recorded during my visit on 27 November 2018.

Next, the Inspiration Studio contains 11 fully furnished homes set within decor that is very exhibition-like in the explicit language of boards and battens. The result is a somewhat abstract, uniform architectural setting that immediately directs visitors' attention to the use and furnishing of the interior space. "Experience, feel, and dream", the introductory text advises, adding: "Here you'll find the inspiration for combinations of styles, colours, and materials. Look, feel, and sense the atmosphere. Use your imagination."[65] Of the five studios, the Inspiration version most resembles the idea of a museum with several contemporary period rooms. A showcase at the entrance to each model home provides a mood-board-like atmosphere, while accompanying text reveals the underlying script. This text easily compares to a museum's B-text, describing the homes' inhabitants, introducing the designer and explaining the layout and style of the house in less than 200 words. The inspiration to be derived from the Inspiration Studio relates primarily to the spatial qualities of the interior. Interaction with objects is not of prime importance, although all the products on display are available to buy. Customers' interactions with other visitors are also limited, taking place only during lunch in the Cookery Studio. Direct contact with a personal advisor is, however, a common feature, clearly distinguishing this set

4.15

View in the Knowledge Studio, where visitors decide how to prioritise various aspects of three different types of cooker. Their scores produce a preferred outcome, which is saved on the tablet and linked to their personal online account. Photo DST-experience agency.

up from the IKEA room settings. The model homes can be visited only by future residents and only under the guidance of a home advisor, which creates the optimal conditions for a profitable one-on-one encounter in line with the experience principles. Style is also an important tool to connect visitors to the home interiors. Here, style is not just intended to appeal to a variety of people, but is also used in an educational way to encourage them to create a personal home. The texts found in the Inspiration Studio, as well as online, provide expert tips and tricks on this subject. Consequently, inspiration at Homestudios is not so much the result of extensive interactions with products or interpersonal connections with other visitors, but is instead steered by expert guidance.

Creation is the final step in the Homestudios' concept. Advised by experts, buyers imagine their future home in the Creation Studio. There, the text urges clients to combine, create and decide. The knowledge acquired previously and the inspiration on offer are now used to create a home. "Here you'll bring ideas to life", the text promises.[66]

Previously set personal priorities, preferences and preliminary choices can be viewed on the large computer screens in the studio's individual cubicles. Customers can check and reconsider their choices, supported by the large number of samples available in the studio. While earlier choices served as a funnel, this studio enables customers to make their final decisions.

**The Museum as a Creative Technology**

The increased materiality of the objects on display, the hands-on exhibits and the explanatory texts all relate Homestudios to the museum. Even its name associates it with the concept of a museum as a studio or laboratory. Answering a follow-up question, Henry Draijer clarified that the name 'Homestudios' most importantly refers to the five different studios that form the Experience Centre. Yet the name also alludes to a workroom in which something beautiful is created.[67] I would add that the change from 'collection' to 'studios' further advocates an active over a passive approach. To create something in a workroom, after all, involves more active connotations than preserving something in a collection – although anyone taking care of collections will object that this is also hard work. Finally, a studio also suggests the notion of working together, implying a participatory approach.

4.16

View in one of the Inspiration Studio's bedrooms. The uniform exterior has been executed in boards and battens, directing the attention immediately to the interior space. These interiors have been fully furnished in a variety of layouts and styles. The Inspiration Studio can only be visited by future residents, and only under the guidance of a home advisor, creating optimal conditions for a profitable face-to-face encounter. Photo Bram Petreaus (2019).

Here, a parallel with the Rijksstudio springs to mind. This is a digital application containing over 600,000 high-resolution images of the Dutch Rijksmuseum's (National Museum) collection, which includes the 17th-century *Threatened Swan* that is part of the decor in BAM's first model home. The online images can be downloaded for free. They can also be 'liked', shared and printed, with users able to zoom in on a detail and print it on a sticker, T-shirt or phone case. Rijksstudio encourages visitors to be inspired by the museum's works of art, create their own masterpieces and share them on its website. Moreover, a

65 ___ Recorded during my visit on 27 November 2018. The Dutch text is also visible in a video by DST on YouTube, https://youtu.be/whzAXg6kSmg (viewed 24 March 2021).
66 ___ Ibid.
67 ___ Follow-up question answered by email, 9 January 2019.

biannual design competition invites people to create a new masterpiece based on the museum's collection. Prizes include money and a feedback session with a well-known artist or designer.[68]

Rijksstudio is a fine example of Nicholas Thomas' plea to consider the museum both as a method and a creative technology. In his book *The Return of Curiosity* (2016), Thomas discusses museums as both valuable sources for reflection and creative technologies with which visitors might create new things.[69] First, he describes the museum as a *method*, which he characterises using three specific moments or acts: discovery, captioning and juxtaposition. Discovery relates to the selection of objects, which, although prompted by a particular interest, is ultimately determined by curiosity and unexpected encounters. Captioning then refers to the act of giving meaning to an object, which can coincide with the literal writing of a caption or can be the result of implying meaning by context. Finally, juxtaposition is the development of arguments by the composition of objects in mutual relationships.[70] In the next chapter, Thomas argues that this museum method is an activity of discovery and reflection in which everyone can participate:

*Yet entering collections, finding things, connecting and juxtaposing them is emphatically not a set of activities that specialists of whichever kind monopolize. The 'museum as method' is a business that ordinary visitors and others interested in collections can make their own, motivated by very diverse interests and to very varied effect. (...) Artworks and collections do not just inspire, as museum advocates routinely, if rightly, claim; the collection is more particularly a technology that, quite simply, enables people to* make new things *[emphasis by Thomas].*[71]

Homestudios' trifold concept of knowledge, inspiration and creation matches ideas about the museum as a studio, laboratory or method, and suggests an interesting direction for museums' contemporary home life collecting policies. Knowledge and inspiration tie in well with the existing view of museums and the role that collections play within them. Where interactions with objects served to connect visitors with interiors in the IKEA case, at BAM's Homestudios the link is established in a different way. With many material objects in fairly static ensembles and the use of props in interactive displays, Homestudios and museums are not so different. Moreover, Homestudios' expert guidance resembles the deployment of

guides, educators or curators in museums, albeit applied much more intensively due to BAM's strict admission policy. However, as the BAM case indicates, besides knowledge and inspiration, creation must also be recognised as an important aspect of the visitor experience. To this end, BAM not only built an online platform, but also invested in facilitating material research and actively supporting decision-making. Museums might also present their collections on a connecting platform, as done by Rijksstudio. Thomas' museum method, including discovery, captioning and juxtaposition, could be pivotal to this, although it mainly concerns the use of existing collections. Could something similar be possible in the process of collecting? Could the sharing of museum ensembles in the form of, for instance, images, attractive descriptions and stories about collecting give rise to a multi-perspective discussion on contemporary home life? Could it lead to visitor suggestions of things-not-to-be-overlooked, private ensembles that shed a new light on museum collections, or potential new perspectives that should be added? And could this also give direction to the expansion of a contemporary museum collection?

4.17    The Creation Studio contains several cubicles equipped with large screens for buyers to view the individual choices made during their visit. A large space next to these booths provides customers with a variety of samples available for comparison. This is where the clients make their final decisions. This photo shows two buyers comparing samples.
Source: DST-experience agency.

68   Rijksstudio was launched in October 2012, then containing about 125,00 images. In March 2019, 662,651 works of art were included along with 463,129 groups - so-called *studios*. The latter included 100,839 studios added by the museum itself. Website https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/zoeken?p=1&ps=12&st=Collections&ii=0, last viewed 14 March 2019.
69   Thomas 2016: 17.
70   Ibid. 101-110.
71   Ibid. 117.

**2007**

This nest of tables, produced at a now-closed Rotterdam factory, satisfies *Goed Wonen*'s 1953 demand for furniture with a light and airy feel.

**86097**

# The funda House

The final case in this study is the funda House, a big-data home developed by the property website funda. As the largest such company in the Netherlands, funda has about 90 per cent of the country's housing supply on offer on its website. In 2016, it had a million visitors a day, adding up to almost one billion houses viewed every year. Two architects were invited to design a property based on the big data collected by funda on the homes these visitors viewed. The funda House was presented on 24 January 2017 as a property not created with bricks and mortar, but instead "built of data and dreams". The home was based on the website's best-selling properties on the one hand and the features searched for the most by visitors to the site on the other. The outcome was a terraced house with a spacious, castle-like feel to it – a *terraced castle*, as it was named.[1]

See figure 5.1.
Press image funda (2017).

# A Single House Co-Created with Millions of Visitors

As an occasional recreational visitor to funda, i.e., not looking for a property but enjoying browsing the website for quirky homes, I noticed the big-data house soon after its presentation in January 2017. Fascinated by the concept and its architectural renderings, I could not help wondering if it was really what a contemporary home would look like if future buyers had their say. How many people had been involved in the creation of this conceptual property, and who are they? Could this explicit use of big data as the prime building material also be attractive to museums, given the resemblance to their interest in a bottom-up perspective? Would it enable museums to include the ideas of more residents in their collections than is normally feasible in small-scale participatory projects? Answering these questions was why I was persuaded to include this case in my study.

A further key reason relates to the house's existence as a digital object, a virtual model home questioning the living preferences of the average website visitor. Of the three cases in this study, the funda House is the most dissimilar to traditional museological period rooms. This material factor became more important in June 2019, when funda announced its intention to expand the concept and actually build the house, which it had previously and explicitly said it did *not* want to do. What are the potential consequences of this change from digital big data to bricks and mortar? Do the concept and meaning alter in view of this development? What insights can be gained concerning born-digital objects when considering the funda House from the perspective of a museum wanting to collect contemporary home life?

The final reason for including the funda House in this comparative case study is the interest museums have in compact collections. While the IKEA room settings and BAM's Homestudios have

already hinted at their feasibility, the funda case seems to suggest the possibility of a truly XS collection: a single house that represents the ideal home of the general Dutch population. Why has funda chosen to create just one conceptual home from the enormous amount of data available to it? What ideals have emerged from the comparison between purchases and searches, and what cultural values does the funda House represent?

This chapter studies the funda House as a constructed home with a domestic interior that aims to represent a modern version of home life; or, in museological terms, a contemporary period room. The case has not been selected just for the sake of it, but because it is instrumental in exploring viable options for how museums can collect contemporary home life. Consequently, I examine the ensemble constructed by funda, how it was created, the ways the house aims to connect to visitors, the home life reflected and the people embodied. In so doing, I am replicating museological issues relating to collections, the act of collecting, ways of connecting and key aspects of representation.

## Method

Like the other cases in this study, this one benefits from my use of a mixed-design method. Although no scholarly research on the funda House has been published to date, it has nonetheless attracted a great deal of attention in the popular media. Along with business documents, I have therefore used these popular texts, websites, images, videos and audio files to gather information. The launch of the funda House on 24 January 2017 triggered a flood of media coverage. Articles in newspapers and magazines, short interviews on radio and television and blogs on various websites quickly responded to the new housing concept that was cleverly revealed by funda. Its press release described the project and also provided links to: additional information, e.g., a video about creating the funda House; the specific funda webpage (www.funda.nl/fundahuis), with images and extra text; and the websites of the two architects involved. A second gulf of publicity followed in June 2019, when funda announced its intention to actually build the big-data house. A new video about this was made available to view and the press highlighted the company's invitation to municipalities about identifying a suitable location for the project.

I conducted interviews with two key experts to enable me to gain better insight into the method

and underlying ideas behind the funda House: data analyst Jurriaan van Gent and architect Jeroen Atteveld. I interviewed Jurriaan on 8 July 2019 at the funda office in Amsterdam, where he had been working in funda's marketing department for five years. At the time of the interview, he was head of the business-to-business team, but in his previous position of data analyst had studied both customer and market data. The two sides of the platform were equally important, Jurriaan explained, because funda aims to serve both estate agents and prospective house buyers; matching supply and demand is therefore key. As a data analyst, it was Jurriaan who had come up with the idea of the funda House and he was directly involved in its development.[2]

I interviewed Jeroen Atteveld on 15 July 2019, at the offices of Heren 5 Architects in Amsterdam. Jeroen is a partner at Heren 5 and in our discussions used various examples of previous design-focused studies concerning people and their living preferences. For the funda House project, Jeroen worked closely with architect Dingeman Deijs, who has his own firm. The two met during their training at the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture and since then have worked together on several schemes. Jeroen said that their synergy is especially prominent in the initial phases of such schemes, involving the imagination and invention of concepts, and characterised their cooperation as "One plus one equals three". As housing is Heren 5's main strength, it was largely responsible for developing the funda idea.[3] Sometime after the interview, it became clear that Dingeman Deijs was also actively involved in visualising the interior of the funda House, and so he later answered some additional questions on this subject via email.[4]

Due to the different expertise of data analysts and architects, the interviews with Jurriaan van Gent and Jeroen Atteveld had slightly different focuses: that with the former concentrated on the underlying data and the development of algorithms, while that with the latter emphasised translating the data into an architectural concept. Not only did the interviews provide valuable insights into the methods used and the underlying ideas and their development, they also raised interesting questions about the roles of curators and guest curators in a parallel museum context.

## Terminology

In my efforts to describe and fully understand each of the three cases in the study, I have taken care to use terminology specific to it. Con-

sequently, the company's name in this final case is written throughout the chapter using all lower-case letters (i.e., funda). Furthermore, the project's name is also described according to the company's preferred spelling: the funda House.

Although the term *visitors* was used in the IKEA case to include both website visitors and showroom shoppers and *customers* or *clients* peopled BAM's Homestudios, the term *visitors* is adopted in the funda case to describe those who visit the website funda.nl. This group includes both 'fun' viewers (those just surfing the site for recreational reasons) and 'serious' home-seekers (prospective buyers or, less often, tenants). A differentiation between these groups is made in the chapter, if required.

Finally, the funda House is described as a big-data, digital or conceptual house. These terms stress different aspects of its nature, depending on its development over time (from the initial idea to the blueprint of the actual house) and the context within which it is situated. Sometimes, I stress the data from which it originates, its materiality or its final design. Such situational differences will be expressed in my characterisation of the funda House.

1 __ Funda (24 January 2017) video viewed at http://www.funda.nl/fundahuis/#video.
2 __ Interview Jurriaan van Gent, 8 July 2019 [06:55, 13:50].
3 __ Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [04:06, 06:21-08:42, 09:45, 11:36].
4 __ Email by Dingeman Deijs, 20 November 2019.

# A House Built of Data and Dreams

The explicit use of big data as a prime building material sparked my interest in the funda House. While many museums create rather small-scale and intensely mentored projects as a way to involve residents in the heritage of the contemporary city, the funda House seems to propose an alternative bottom-up approach. Its primary goals of stimulating debate, encouraging various parties to make better use of the available data, and advocating a more demand-driven approach bear a resemblance to the aims of museums to improve their relevance, become centres of civic dialogue and honour community-driven initiatives. The next section explores what museums might learn from funda regarding collecting contemporary home life, but this one first describes the case and its context. This is a body of relatively uncontested data, presenting the methods and underlying ideas of the funda House in its real-world setting.

### Celebrating fifteen years of funda

Ever since its creation in 2001, funda.nl has been the largest property website in the Netherlands. Founded by the *Nederlandse Vereniging van Makelaars* (NVM), a branch organisation representing about 60% of Dutch estate agents, the website originally only included properties offered by its members. This changed in 2007, when funda opened up to other estate agents as well. Over 5,000 agents are now represented, with the website now offering for sale (or rent) over 90% of all the available houses in the country. As a platform, funda aims to serve estate agents and consumers in equal measure. With a 'top-of-mind' brand-awareness figure of 93% and around 43 million visitors a month, it seems to deliver on this goal, attracting four to six times the numbers of its nearest rivals, JAAP.nl and Huislijn.nl.[5] Despite occasionally harsh criticism from consumer organisations,[6] even a major critic from the national Own Home Association has described the website as "an

instrument generally perceived to be almost indispensable by everyone aiming to sell or buy a home".[7]

Fifteen years after its launch, funda decided "to do something" with the data it had been collecting. During our interview, data analyst Jurriaan van Gent told me that the plans were initially rather vague:

> We'd been thinking about this idea for some time: yeah, it's really cool having this large a public and getting so many queries on our website – couldn't we do something nice? Couldn't we do something... creative with it? Out of this, the idea arose: can't we just design a house based on all those queries on our site and all those data we have been collecting?[8]

Underlying the notion of a house founded on data was the strong suspicion that there was disparity in terms of supply and demand. The question "Does Holland build what the Dutch are really looking for?" broadly expresses the main idea as it was formulated retrospectively in funda's annual report over the course of 2017.[9] According to architect Jeroen Atteveld, although he was contradicted by Jurriaan, the idea of the funda House may also have been motivated by the NVM's goal of gaining a foothold in the market for new-build homes. In this sense, the idea was commercially driven, Jeroen assumes, adding that he nevertheless strongly favours the concept of reconsidering the standard new build.[10]

As a tech company, funda of course required help from architects to design a home. To this end, the firm chose to organise a competition, eventually appointing the firm Heren 5 Architects, which had previously conducted research on living requirements and housing preferences. Indeed, Jeroen Atteveld had actually used various examples of earlier design-thinking studies during our interview. "Doing research on the way people want to live is in our DNA", he asserted.[11] Heren 5 subsequently asked architect Dingeman Deijs to join the team. The architects told me they had questioned conventional floor plans in the past and shared funda's interest in exploring a new housing concept to meet the needs of future residents. Moreover, they were also keen to work with big data, which was something they had never done before.

### Funda's big data

In recounting the development of the funda House during my interviews, Jurriaan and Jeroen sketched out a process in which they - as architect and data analyst - worked closely together formu-

lating queries, gathering and interpreting data, presenting graphics and statistics, and asking further questions.[12] One of the first things to attract their attention was a visual summary of the 30 most-viewed houses in 2016: with a few exceptions, these were all high-priced villas, manor or canal houses, and castles. As Jurriaan told me while showing me an image:

> These were the 30 most-viewed houses in 2016. Well, there are a few exceptions, but most remarkable is that they're very expensive, large houses. [Pointing:] *Castle, castle... A few houses went viral because they had something quite unique, like strange furnishing, or... being a celebrity's house. But apart from that, (...) what really stands out, is that they're really big. That was one thing that struck us. But this isn't, of course, really big data; this is just... 30 houses.*[13]

The next interpretive step was to differentiate between various visitors to the funda website. While some are serious in looking for a place to live, many others – including a category of self-confessed funda addicts – are just there for fun, without any intention to buy. In order to distinguish between the serious and fun visitors (or 'dreamers'), funda had previously developed an algorithm based on their distinctive behaviour on the website. This algorithm records each visitor's journey on the site and links the interactions to a single, albeit anonymous, individual. Each interaction is weighted, depending on its value in predicting an actual sale. Viewing photographs rates rather low, because almost everyone does this; watching a video or downloading a brochure indicates a higher level of interest and results in a higher score, as do sending an email or contacting the estate agent. The algorithm, Jurriaan van Gent told me, thus allocates a particular score to each visitor. If a house is revisited on the website, the personal score increases; otherwise, it gradually decreases. Each anonymous individual gets a unique daily score for every house viewed on the site. After defining the cut-off point, funda is then able to distinguish between serious visitors and dreamers.[14]

In probing the wishes of serious home-seekers, the algorithm can, for example, provide insights into the amount of interest per dwelling or the houses competing with each other. The company has also developed a tool to aggregate the data (then called 'market scanner', now 'demand scanner'). In relation to the Netherlands overall, these aggregated data have identified that most of the

serious home-seekers are looking for a detached house. A comparison with actual transactions, however, revealed a discrepancy: while the majority show significant interest in a detached property, in reality what they buy is a terraced house.[15]

Key to the concept of the funda House has been the remarkable disparity between dreams, demands and reality. The company's big data suggest that consumers have to compromise repeatedly: where their dream is of a castle with more than ten rooms on a plot of over 1,500 m² for a price upwards of two million euros, the serious home-seekers seem to manage their expectations, i.e., they show interest in a six-room, albeit *detached*, house on a 150 to 200 m² plot for a price between €225,000 and 250,000. In reality, the dwelling sold the most is a terraced house with five rooms on a plot of 100 to 150 m² costing from €175,000 to 200,000.[16] The question, therefore,

5 — Based on: Niels 2018; funda's annual reports; the funda website https://content.funda.nl/over/funda/ (last viewed 13 August 2019); and the interview with Jurriaan van Gent (8 July 2019). These sources provide overlapping information and sometimes present different details; the information is mainly complementary, not contradictory.

6 — In 2018, for example, *Consumentengids* published an article about funda's representation of houses. It revealed shortcomings on the website and gave readers concrete advice on ways to check the information provided. Previously, the Vereniging Eigen Huis (Own Home Association) had pleaded for more transparency through the equal treatment of all estate agents, whether members of the NVM or not.

7 — Mulder 2012, quote from the plea by the Own Home Association mentioned above.

8 — Interview Jurriaan van Gent, 8 July 2019 [07:59].

9 — Funda 2018: 8.

10 — Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [36:15].

11 — During the interview, Jeroen mentioned: *Thuis* (At Home), a publication including photographs of people in their homes before and after demolition and other building transformation processes [year of publication unknown]; *Nestelen in de stad* (Nestling in the City), about families with a desire to live in city apartments (2013); and *Stadsveteranen* (City Veterans), a study on ageing happily in the city (2016). Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [04:06, 06:21, 07:51].

12 — Interviews Jurriaan van Gent, 8 July 2019 [09:16], and Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [14:58]. During the interviews, however, the focus slightly differed. The one with Jurriaan concentrated on the underlying data, while that with Jeroen highlighted the translation from data to an architectural concept.

13 — Interview Jurriaan van Gent, 8 July 2019 [19:43].

14 — Ibid. [20:30, 22:38].

15 — Ibid. [25:30].

16 — Ibid. [27:04], plus Fact sheet (2016): funda data at a glance.

was: would the architects be able to design a house that fits within the dimensions and cost of a standard terrace, but better reflects present-day consumer demands?

## A terraced castle

The conclusion reached by the architects Jeroen Atteveld and Dingeman Deijs based on searches on funda.nl was that people are essentially looking for a sense of freedom and space. In particular, as Jeroen told me in our interview, search terms like 'bungalow' or 'stables', as well as the common 'plot size' and 'outside area', must be regarded as indicators of a clear desire for space in the very densely populated Netherlands.[17] Consequently, in their efforts to convey the sense of a castle within the limitations of a standard property, the architects designed a terraced house with a spacious, grand feel to it – a *terraced castle.*

Describing the idea behind the funda House, Jeroen Atteveld explained the layout of a castle as having one or two grand meeting rooms with thick, enveloping walls that accommodate the auxiliary spaces in the so-called 'poché'. Inspired by the castle dream of the visitors to funda.nl, the architects produced an alternative layout within the conventional building envelope.[18] This consists of a large open space, intended to be a grand living room, and a poché with much smaller supporting spaces. Functional rooms, such as the bathroom and bedroom, have thus been designed to be compact, much smaller than these rooms in a normal terraced house. Simultaneously, each room has been given a strong identity to emphasise the striking difference from a conventional property. According to Jeroen Atteveld:

> *At some point, we asked ourselves: couldn't we create one single space to be the beating heart of the funda home, with a poché to cater for all those different rooms we need to live comfortably? And we also... at some point we said: yes, it's also very important that those rooms are really characterful and distinctive. They don't all have to be that large. Actually, I believe that's precisely part of it... those rooms being different from the standard... say... bedrooms in just any terraced house. Well, otherwise it would be impossible to obtain this highly valued grand living space.*[19]

Funda presented its newly designed house on 24 January 2017 as the first-ever Dutch big-data property, a home "built of data and dreams".[20]

Since then, the funda website has contained a link to a short video that visualises the process of creating the house, sketching out its underlying ideas and introducing the concept. High-quality architectural renderings with intriguing names can also be found on the website, accompanied by brief descriptions. The 'walk-in bath' and the 'see-through attic' are introduced here, as well as reinterpretations of older concepts like the box bed and a tower room, the latter now featuring an upright dormer window. Moreover, various links take interested readers to additional background information on the process of data analysis and interpretation. Finally, a section with frequently-asked-questions provides insight into the project's motivations and goals. While my interviewees stressed the importance of advocating a demand-driven approach, the funda website accentuates its aims as being to inspire, stimulate debate and encourage "other parties" to make better use of the available data. It also explicitly states that funda does not intend to design any other houses of this kind, nor build or sell the one discussed.[21]

## From big data to blueprint

Despite the explicit statement that it did not intend to build or sell the house conceived from its data, on 4 June 2019 funda announced a U-turn. While the architects had always been keen to build the property, funda was less so: as a tech company, it had neither the ambition nor the interest in turning the virtual house into a physical building. Its aims were simply to make a statement about the importance of data, stimulate debate and advocate a demand-driven approach. However, the many positive reactions in the press and on social media, as well as the enthusiasm voiced by consumers, builders, estate agents and other chain partners persuaded it to facilitate the process, as Jurriaan van Gent told me.[22] According to Jeroen Atteveld, the architects had always made the case for the manifestation of their design, which would enable them to test their ideas, influence public opinion and provoke further discussion.[23] These differences between funda and the two experts show that diverse parties can have a range of interests, which is an issue that may also affect the outcomes of a museum's collecting policies.

A team had already been assembled to construct the property at the time of my interviews in early July 2019. This consisted of funda and the two architects (Atteveld and Deijs), the builder and developer Van Wijnen, and Nieuw Wonen Neder-

land, an organisation of NVM-agents specialising in new builds. A municipality where the project would be located was to later complete the team, with cities invited to enrol in a competitive process before 5 August 2019. The short video *Ontdek de kracht van de keten* (Discover the Strength of the Chain) introduces the project's partners, their involvement and their individual aims. The overarching objective is formulated as an adaptation of the original goal behind the funda House, and is described in the video in 2019 as follows:

> *Now we're ready for the next step: from big data to blueprint. We are really going to build the funda House. (...) Our goal: further demand-driven project development through intensive co-operation between all chain partners in a local new development, based on each other's data, knowledge and expertise.*[24]

The deadline for applications from municipalities was initially postponed to 30 September 2019. Then, between October 2019 and January 2021, the website carried an announcement stating that this phase had come to an end: "The selection procedure has now started and in-depth discussions are taking place". However, by the end of March, this had disappeared.[25]

Although the change in materiality from big data to bricks and mortar has not yet occurred, my within-case theme analysis nevertheless returns to the transformation from a 'digital concept-for-discussion' to an 'actual house-to-be-built'. Three other themes, focusing on either the method or the result, also examine the funda House as a constructed home that resembles a contemporary period room, simultaneously shifting the perspective from the funda case to the museum context.

17 __ Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [14:58].
18 __ The idea was visualised in several slides in a PowerPoint presentation. Atteveld [2018].
19 __ Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [14:58].
20 __ Probably, the restriction to 'Dutch' was added because the Swedish property website 'Hemnet' had previously designed a house based on website-visitor searches. However, according to Jurriaan van Gent, the Swedish house applied the big-data concept to a lesser extent.
21 __ http://www.funda.nl/fundahuis/het-funda-huis-in-10-antwoorden, last viewed 16 August 2019.
22 __ Interview Jurriaan van Gent, 8 July 2019 [11:16, 39:47].
23 __ Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [38:46].
24 __ Video *Ontdek de kracht van de keten* 2019 [00:29-0:56] on the website https://www.funda.nl/fundahuis/realiseren/, transcribed 1 July 2019.
25 __ Website https://www.funda.nl/fundahuis/, viewed on 4 January 2021 and again on 25 March 2021. When I sent the chapter to Jurriaan van Gent in April 2021, his response was that the funda House might still be built, although the plans are not yet set in stone.

5.1

Funda presented its big-data house in January 2017. This was based on a combination of the best-selling properties on its website and the most sought-after interior designs. The outcome was a terraced house with a spacious, castle-like feel, i.e., a 'terraced castle'. The image shows a vertical section of the funda House within a row of traditional homes.
Press image funda (2017).

1



2



3



4
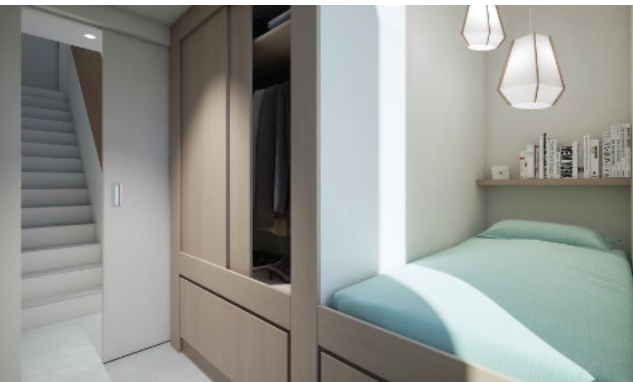


5
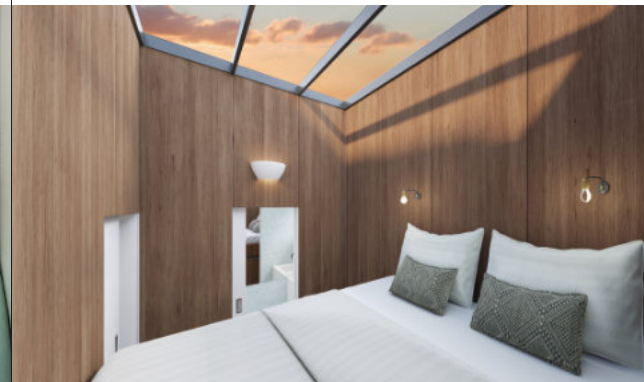


6



7



8



9

## The funda House

In 2017, the funda House was presented as the very first Dutch big-data home. The newly designed house needed to fit within the dimensions and cost of a standard house, but also needed to better reflect the demands of present-day consumers. With their terraced castle, architects Jeroen Atteveld and Dingeman Deijs aim to convey a sense of freedom and space within the limitations of a typical Dutch terraced property. The architectural renderings presented in these images have been created as a way to visualise the new concept.

Images 1 and 3 situate the funda house within a row of similar properties. Its frontage (1) guarantees privacy, but the open masonry nevertheless provides the residents with light and a street view. The rear facade (3) suggests openness, with two-storey-high double doors to the garden.

The cross-section (2) shows the grand living room surrounded by various small rooms, reminiscent of a castle's great hall with its supporting spaces in the poché.

A high-ceilinged entrance hall leads to the extraordinary light and large living room (9), which includes an open-plan kitchen and built-in storage space. The open landing (8) affords a view through the house, while simultaneously connecting all the rooms.

To achieve the grandeur of the living room, the other rooms are necessarily small – 'compact' is the word used by the architects. All of these rooms have been given a tantalising name and a characterful and distinctive design.

The 'see-through attic' (4) enables daylight to shine down into the living room. The attic has been furnished as a children's room, playfully integrating the slanted roof in the design.

While the 'box-bedroom' (5) exemplifies both the small size and privacy of the individual bedrooms, the 'walk-in bath' (7) stresses the level of luxury and comfort that the funda House offers to the whole family.

Finally, the tower room (6) has been designed as the master bedroom. It has an en-suite bathroom, a wardrobe (stored under the bed), and a tilting dormer window with a glass ceiling to offer sky views.

Press images funda (2017).

# Themes

The case description above highlights how the celebration of funda's 15th anniversary led to the construction of the funda House, a big-data home designed by two architects and a data analyst and co-created with millions of visitors. Prompted by the disparity between dreams, demands and reality, the newly designed 'terraced castle' aims to meet present-day demands while also fitting within the dimensions and cost of a standard house. It also hints at a future in which the big-data home will become a normal part of a row of houses. While the previous section described the context and concept of the funda House from the makers' perspective, as well as the methods used, the underlying ideas and how it was developed, this one examines four key issues that relate the case to museological collecting.

The first theme explores the use of big data as a bottom-up approach and an alternative route for museums in relation to contemporary and participative collecting. While many city museums aim to include a wide spectrum of voices by giving visitors and residents an active role in collecting projects, funda's big-data house departed from 'warm data' to ensure that it was more inclusive. I will argue that the use of big data is an opportunity to transcend the individual level of small-scale participatory collecting, and I will therefore propose an alternative, communal approach.

The second, closely related, theme discusses the interpretation and expertise required to develop a future vision on the basis of visitor searches. It demonstrates that the use of big data risks path dependency, that interpretation is crucial and that expertise is needed to prevent a process of designing 'more of the same'. What strategies have the data analyst and architects developed to prevent history from mattering too much in the development of a new proposal? How do their roles compare with those involved in museums' collecting strategies? And what can be learned from the funda case regarding the museum curatorial voice in particular?

Materiality is the subject of the third theme and concerns the change from a virtual model home to an actual house. The intertwining of ideas, language, images and models, as well as its possible future realisation, indicate that the funda House

cannot be fully understood without its digital counterparts. Moreover, the case suggests that contemporary collecting necessitates the inclusion of digital objects to build coherent ensembles, however daunting this prospect may seem to many museums.

Finally, the fourth theme focuses on the result and dwells on the funda House as a constructed home explicitly replicating the idea of a museological period room. While the previous cases encompassed a variety of home interiors to appeal to a variety of customers, the current case proposes a single home to represent the ideals of the Dutch population in general. Aiming to expose the disparity in supply and demand, the funda House offers an alternative that nevertheless fits within standard building practices. What kind of alternative does the newly designed house suggest? What image of contemporary home life does it paint? This theme traces the cultural values embodied by the house, addressing both exteriors and interiors, and questions the lack of immediate interest in common objects and ensembles at the moment of collecting.

## Big data as a bottom-up approach

The funda House's explicit use of big data as its prime building material was the main reason for selecting this case. While many museums create rather small-scale and intensely mentored projects as a way to involve residents in the heritage of the contemporary city, the funda House seems to propose an alternative, bottom-up approach. Although the big-data house started as just a general idea about using the information that funda had been collecting for 15 years, the company eventually came to be an advocate for a more demand-driven approach within a somewhat conservative and supply-centric construction industry. In retrospect, architect Jeroen Atteveld formulated the aims as follows:

> Well, like I said, this [terraced] house is still being produced, it's being built everywhere. Family structures change, households change, but the same house still sells. Why? Is it because people really want it? Is it because they don't know anything better? Is it because there are no alternatives? Are we looking as far ahead as we need to? These are all questions that go with it, and... and the funda House has been an opportune moment to dwell on them and to connect them to such a design.[26]

In the process of designing a property that would better meet the demands of consumers, the funda House used the website's big data as a starting point, presuming that the combination of actual house sales and information-seeking behaviour would provide insight into the wishes and requirements of Dutch residents. Moreover, when it was announced that the conceptual house would actually be built, two and a half years after it was first presented, the new partners publicly endorsed their belief in the use of big data to uncover what customers want, even though the outcome differed from the original expectations of experts and consumers alike. As Maaike Arns from the construction firm Van Wijnen said in the funda video:

> Well, yes, we do believe that the addition of big data in a housing development and realisation process might eventually lead to a different kind of house than first conceived, and maybe even what the resident imagined. So... that it will generate new insights that, yeah, may eventually surprise everyone, but perhaps offer even nicer homes to eventually live in.[27]

**Visitor Participation and Representation in the Museum**

Just like the construction industry, the museum is often perceived to be a conservative stronghold cleaving to its former authority and paying too little attention to visitors' demands. In terms of museum collecting, the authoritative voice of the curator is questioned and a redefinition of roles proposed, suggesting a shift from the idea of curators as experts to one where they are collaborators or brokers.[28] Many city museums aim to encompass a wide array of voices and perspectives in their collections by giving visitors and residents an active role in collecting projects. Nevertheless, these museum professionals have identified that experiments with participatory collecting present challenges. As an example, participants might submit, often old and precious, items they assume would be of interest to a cultural-history museum, as they are similar to the objects they see presented in exhibitions or online. It is also quite difficult to acquire contemporary objects, even when these are sought out in a straightforward manner, because contributors can be reluctant to donate such items or may be unaware of the significance of objects that play an important role in their contemporary, day-to-day lives. Another issue that is commonly described by museum professionals is the proffering of very personal objects that have very little relevance to the lives of other people.

A well-documented experiment in participatory collecting, which touches on many aspects of the collecting process, involves the projects *Give & Take* (2008) and, in 2009, *Wonderkamers* (Room of Marvels). In the experiment, the city museum of Zoetermeer invited residents to donate objects that symbolised a characteristic aspect of the town and to explain their choice. A great deal of time

26 ___ Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [37:00].
27 ___ Maaike Arns, at the time Director of Identity and Market at Van Wijnen in the video *Ontdek de kracht van de keten* [02:18-02:48].
28 ___ Proctor 2010: 35. See also Meijer-van Mensch & Tietmeyer 2013, Van de Laar 2013, Longair 2015, Hoeven 2016.

was invested in an intensive collaboration with fewer than 100 participants. Although the museum was happy with the authentic stories the experiment delivered, the 86 objects collected did not tell a coherent, let alone complete, story of Zoetermeer. To make matters worse, the resulting exhibition failed to attract many visitors. One of the conclusions was formulated as a rhetorical question: "To what degree is the general public really interested in objects that not long before were still stacked in their neighbours' attics?"[29] This small group of objects is still treated as a separate entity in the museum's collection – a *Fremdkörper,* one might critically say.

At an international museum conference in 2008, Zelda Baveystock, then a lecturer in Museum Studies at Newcastle University, addressed current museological thinking about relevance and the representation of visitors. Many participative collecting projects are based on the notion that people need to see their own lives mirrored in museum collections, but Baveystock opposes the idea that museum relevance can be found in representation on an individual level. The participatory process can be valuable for contributors, she argues, but the outcomes of this kind of contemporary collecting are of little significance to others if a broader historical context is missing.[30]

Should museums pay less attention to individuals or small groups of participants in their contemporary collecting strategies, instead trying to find common ground on a higher level of abstraction? Could big data, made accessible by partners, help to establish the broader context required to start collecting?

### Warm Data versus Big Data

The architects Jeroen Atteveld and Dingeman Deijs had previously conducted research on the living requirements and housing preferences of future residents. They had worked with "family portraits, mental maps and, simply, a good conversation with local residents and future inhabitants",[31] which are strategies that resemble some of those adopted by museums. However, the large amount of funda data available to them enabled (or compelled) the architects to work at a higher level of abstraction. "Warm data versus big data", as Jeroen Atteveld described the two different approaches,[32] which is an unusual conceptual pairing.

The concept of 'warm data' is more widely known in the field of information management, where it generally refers to data that are analysed as frequently, but not constantly, in motion. As

such, it differs from both 'cold data', i.e., data that are not often accessed or actively used, and 'hot data', referring to information that is accessed frequently and constantly in transit.[33] Looking for a term to exemplify the contrast to 'big data', the popular radio show *Spijkers met koppen* used the notion of 'little data'. Dolf Jansen, who also is a well-known comedian, asked the architect he was interviewing the provocative question: "You haven't been working with big data before? Do you work with little data, or just by the seat of your pants, or what?"[34] It is, though, more common to contrast 'big data' with 'small data'. The former is then associated with 'adequacy and completeness' and the latter with its opposites.[35]

Jeroen Atteveld, though, prefers the contradiction of 'warm' and 'big' data, thus contrasting connotations of warmth, personal interest and intimacy on the one hand, to cold, detached and large-scale implications on the other. He told me that this alternative approach, shifting the focus from people to data, had been essential when developing the funda House: to be able to design a new home for the Dutch population in general, the architects had to free themselves from warm data, from specific target groups and from existing people.[36]

While the funda House has incorporated the web searches of many millions of visitors, socio-demographic information has explicitly not been taken into account. Importantly, this would simply be impossible with the data available and, as data analyst Jurriaan van Gent stressed, Funda does not require its visitors to leave such information anyway, because it values non-committal, impersonal searches.[37] Moreover, the architects felt strongly that some kinds of socio-demographic data could all too easily lead to exclusion or stereotyping, when their intention was to design a house for much more flexible living. In a brief paraphrase of Jeroen Atteveld's argument, a contemporary terraced house should enable today's manifold ways of living.[38] In this sense, the funda House departed from diversity while also aiming for inclusion.

Consequently, funda's big-data house provided the opportunity to transcend the individual, personal level and propose an alternative, communal perspective. To develop this broader idea, the architects had to free themselves from warm data, specific target groups and existing people. In Jeroen's argument, partly out of necessity and partly by choice, the funda House departed from socio-demographic diversity while having the goal of achieving inclusion. Seemingly surprised, Jeroen concluded that they took an entirely differ-

ent approach, having not spoken to a single website visitor or future resident, but nevertheless managing to design a home that appeals to many people.[39]

### An Alternative Collecting Strategy

Although the notion of warm data is much more closely related to present-day museum practices, which aim to establish personal relationships, involve intensive collaborations with individual participants, and the collection of personal objects or stories, the funda case suggests that the use of big data could give museums an alternative collecting strategy. This may be an opportunity to transcend the individual level of small-scale participatory collecting, instead finding common ground at a higher level of abstraction. It would thus be valuable to explore whether such an approach provides a broader context that speaks to residents, producing a collection in which they can either recognise or oppose themselves.

29 __ Koch 2009: 157-158.
30 __ Baveystock (2008). Relevance and Representation. In: Fägerborg, *Connecting Collecting,* 96-100.
31 __ Atteveld 2017, blog on https://www.dearchitect.nl/architectuur/blog/2017/11/blog-big-data-en-warme-data-101184739.
32 __ Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [8:42, 38:00].
33 __ https://www.techopedia.com/definition/32622/warm-data; the same source is used to define cold and hot data.
34 __ NPO Radio 2, Interview "Funda Droomhuis" 2017 [2:43] Literally: "Jullie hebben nog nooit eerder met big data gewerkt? Jullie werken met *little data*, of gewoon op gevoel, of wat?"
35 __ Schnapp 2018: 423.
36 __ Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [08:42].
37 __ Interview Jurriaan van Gent, 8 July 2019 [29:40].
38 __ Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [26:53].
39 __ Ibid. [38:00].

ACQUISITION DATE

The home-office where politician Pim Fortuyn carried out most of his work, photographed after his murder on 6 May 2002. Among the items preserved are his chair and his desk, as well as the items on it.

MUSEUM NUMBER

**87131-87149**
**and other numbers**

# Interpretation, expertise and subjectivity

While the previous theme discussed the use of big data as a bottom-up approach providing museums with an alternative strategy for participatory collecting, this theme further examines the decision-making aspect of such a methodology. The realisation in museums that collecting is not a neutral act has challenged traditional curatorial authority. Doubts about the objects chosen for preservation and the stories considered to be relevant led to a simple question: Who decides? On the other hand, participatory collecting strategies also present challenges, including path dependency and individualism, as the previous section has shown. Can big data support a more objective decision-making process, in which the interests and demands of many stakeholders are included? And to what extent can big data be used as a tool to avoid path dependency and develop a vision for an up-to-date collecting policy? By looking more closely at the roles of the data analyst and the architects in the funda case and applying them to the museum context, this theme explores the effects of interpretation, expertise and subjectivity in the process of collecting.

## Avoiding the Pitfall of Path Dependency

During our interview, the architect Jeroen Atteveld described the funda House as an ambassador of a demand-driven perspective. Nevertheless, both Jeroen and the data analyst Jurriaan van Gent stated that using funda's big data to develop a future vision is not an obvious approach. Instead of finding new, surprising insights, the data could just as easily lead to 'more of the same'. "After all, very many terraced houses have been built in the Netherlands, so these are the houses many people are looking for", Jurriaan told me.[40] Jeroen stressed likewise:

*When looking for a house on funda, almost all the houses on offer... they are, simply, existing dwellings. And it is, of course, quite difficult to generate from this existing market a wish for future building. (...) And the story of the funda*

*House was very much about, well, all these data funda has been collecting... can't we somehow use them to look forward, to see what we can do with them in the future? So, regarding the data, you could say... if you enter these data in a model, as it were, you actually won't want to end up with the same house that all those people have bought up till now.*[41]

Consequently, funda's data were not necessarily suited to the development of a future vision based on visitor searches. On the contrary, the risk of designing the same average house was as great as museums being offered objects that their collections already contain: a real and present risk that is not only mentioned in participatory projects, but has also been encountered as an everyday reality in my own email contact with potential donors.

To avoid the pitfall of designing the same house over again, the architects first chose a higher level of abstraction and translated concrete findings into a more general idea. As an example, they translated the variety of high-priced villas, manor houses and canal properties most clicked on by website visitors into the more general concept of an expensive and large house, which was, in turn, translated into an even more abstract notion of 'a sense of freedom and space'. Next, while the data show there are three main categories of visitor (the fun viewers, serious home-seekers and actual purchasers) with slightly different interests, the communication on the funda House highlights the differences between the two extremes, thus establishing a stark contrast between dream and reality. Finally, the concept has been captured in precise words with strong emotional associations: a 'terraced castle' merges a castle with a terraced house. The architects did not choose just a big house, mansion, canal house or palace; they chose a *castle*, a specific conception with connotations of grandeur, strength and protection – quite different from, for instance, a palace with its associated refinements, luxury and glamour. Meanwhile, the terraced house *(rijtjeshuis)* could have been called a *tussenwoning* (a 'linked' or 'town' house) – it is the same type of property, but has a different emotional value.

The method of abstraction, highlighting contrast and choosing emotionally charged concepts, reveals that interpretation of the data was crucial in the development of the funda House. According to the data analyst Jurriaan van Gent, the large amount of information available could have easily enabled various conceptual funda Houses to be designed, each with their own story, each based

on the same data.[42] Data do not speak for themselves, Jurriaan stressed repeatedly. Instead, how it is interpreted plays a decisive role and the outcome is thus susceptible to being influenced by personal views. As Jurriaan told me during our interview:

*We've always said: If we had two other architects, then a very different design would have emerged, probably. It's, of course, well, these data don't speak for themselves... you know, the kind of house it will be... It's more the interpretation of the architect who comes for a design, and that's also, to some extent, the creative part in it.*[43]

Although based on data relating to millions of website visits, interpretation and creativity have played a large role in the development of the funda House. The house may not even depict the demands of visitors directly, but is instead context-specific. It invites clients to consider housing preferences from the perspective of the construction industry. Underlining this hypothesis is the slightly different example of sustainability. In order to build an energy-efficient, sustainable house, the architects included solar panels, a heat pump and a pellet stove in their design. However, visitors to funda rarely used sustainability as a search criterion in 2016, despite the fact that the energy label could easily have been used as such. The goal to create a sustainable house reflects not so much the wishes of consumers, but instead seems to stem from the responsibility felt by architects and the construction industry.

## Who Decides?

Museums are aware that collecting is a delicate process and try to avoid speaking in an authoritative voice, instead struggling to find more objective ways to develop their collections. Different strategies are used to this end. First, attempts are made to circumvent the personal stamp of individual curators on a collection. In my (and many other) museums, decisions about possible acquisitions are therefore taken by joint curators, recorded on a form and signed by the director. In practice, however, such decisions mainly concern the objects on offer, with this kind of passive collecting dominated by communities that are already well represented in a collection, as well as by a retrospective, instead of a contemporary, view on collecting. In a more active policy, guest curators are sometimes asked to reflect on part of a museum's collection. These professionals can also be recognised experts or critical artists who are commis-

sioned to carry out the work. However, this normally applies to incidental collaborations that lead to an exhibition or the acquisition of a few objects, rather than issues relating to building long-term collections. The generally small-scale participatory projects that aim to involve citizens in the act of collecting are based on voluntary cooperation and usually revolve around the process rather than the result.

The funda case suggests an alternative route, combining curatorial and subject expertise with the voices of citizens and urban communities. It is not an easy option, since big data are not necessarily appropriate for developing a vision of collecting contemporary home life. The funda House moved to a higher level of abstraction to prevent a return to familiar territory, magnifying the contrasts between dreams and reality and translating general ideas into a specific and emotionally charged concept. While big data have allowed the voices of a large number of visitors to be heard, expertise was nonetheless needed to interpret it. The roles of data analyst and architect can be compared to those of curator and guest curator, respectively. Curators within a cultural-history museum are often generalists who care for diverse collections relating to more than one field. As 'problem owners', they call in specialist help from an external expert or guest curator if necessary. The architects of the funda House are such external experts, trained as designers of houses and interested in demand-driven design, thus complementing in-house expertise. Moreover, they brought creativity with them, which was essential for transforming the idea into a convincing visual format. In this, they were assisted by another agency that specialised in creating convincing architectural renderings, a role comparable with that of an external designer in the museum context. Undoubtedly, specialists also collaborated to ensure the proper communication of the concept, including the carefully developed language.

When considering the creation of the funda House as a collection process, it becomes clear that the voices of millions of visitors can be a viable starting point, but that interpretation is nevertheless crucial, expertise is still required and the outcome remains susceptible to personal biases. As such, this kind of collecting differs very little from other strategies. Its improvements can

40 — Interview Jurriaan van Gent, 8 July 2019 [30:11].
41 — Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [35:06].
42 — Interview Jurriaan van Gent, 8 July 2019 [49:30].
43 — Ibid. [35:35].

be found in the wide variety of interconnecting voices through which collecting becomes part of networked practices, something occasionally referred to as the 'networked' or 'relational' museum.[44] Collecting requires conscious choices concerning perspective, transparency and reflexivity. Yet the funda case shows that someone still needs to make a choice after all, a choice that is by definition context-bound. So, why not entrust the curator with this task?

# Intertwining material and digital culture

Where the previous themes have focused on method, examining the use of big data as a bottom-up approach and the interpretations required to prevent path dependency, the final two turn to the result: they consider the funda House as a constructed home, explicitly replicating the idea of a museological period room – albeit a contemporary version. The theme in this section, meanwhile, considers the materiality of a collection. As a virtual model home built by asking average visitors to the funda website about their living preferences, the funda House is the furthest away from the traditional museum ensemble of the three cases in this study. This factor gained in importance when funda announced its intention to actually build the house. What consequences can a change in materiality, from big data to bricks and mortar, have? Do the concept and meaning alter in the development of a digital concept into a real house?

On the funda website, an animated house – intended to be viewed using virtual-reality glasses – encourages visitors to watch a video about the funda House. The property has been presented as a conceptual model, a virtual house "built of data and dreams", ever since its introduction in January 2017. To communicate its ideas, the funda House largely relies on the high-quality architectural renderings that are not only included in the introductory video, but were also circulated as part of the press release and published in the media. These are the visuals (in a way, the materialisation) of this case's period room.

The animation not only suggests intangibility, but the website also explicitly states that funda does not intend to build or sell the property, nor design any other houses of this kind.[45] Nonetheless, funda announced a U-turn in June 2019 regarding the construction of the property. To this end, a team was put together and municipalities wanting to enable demand-driven housing by having the property built in their area were invited to register. In the view of my interviewees, not much will change during the process of actually building the funda House. Of course, as Jurriaan
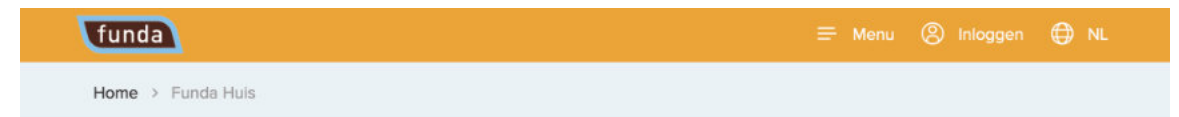
## Het funda Huis

Gebouwd van data en dromen
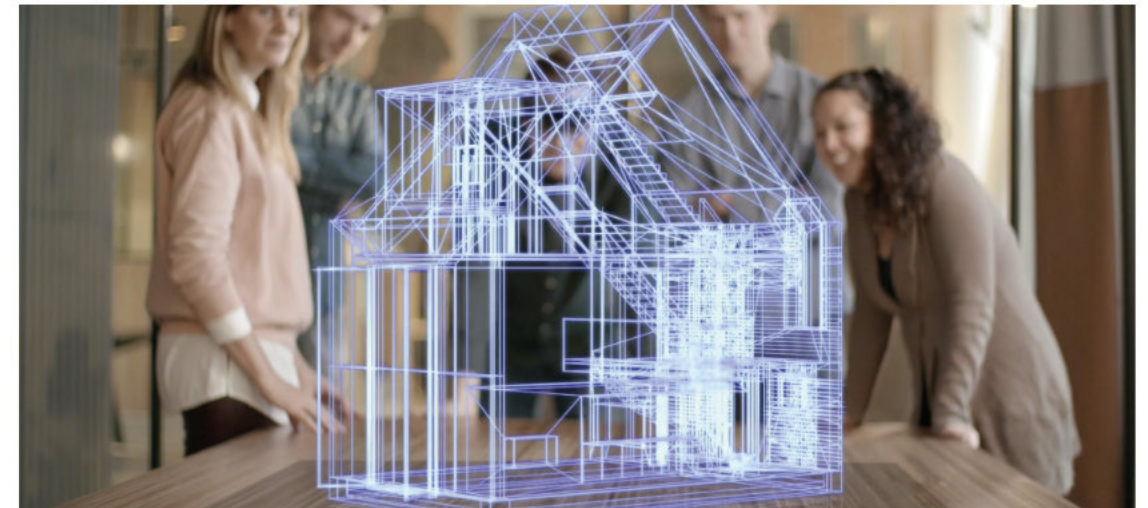


van Gent told me, house prices are very dependent on both location and the scale of production, which will affect the overall cost, but the intention has always been, and remains, to design a home that fits within an average budget.[46] To bring the concept to life, the project's partners are aiming to build a row of houses that includes at least one 'funda House Original'. The others in the terrace, so-called 'funda Houses Local', will be adapted to reflect local preferences, i.e., they will be based on the latest local data instead of national data from 2016. As both Jurriaan van Gent and Jeroen Atteveld stressed, this small series of conceptual houses may therefore vary, but their overarching theme must match the concept of a demand-driven approach based on big data.[47] To them, this realisation of the funda House seems to be just the next step in a process, and is a step that is fully in accordance with the original idea. Indeed, the architect is even imagining possible further stages, like testing the actual use of the house or monitoring real home life to generate new data that can be used in a future design.[48] However, the deadline for municipalities to enrol was postponed – the selection procedure apparently delayed – and the message about the intention to build the funda

5.3  This screenshot shows a still from the animated house that aims to induce visitors to watch the video about the funda House. The person in the background, hidden behind the model, is actually using a pair of virtual-reality glasses to watch the animation.
Source: Screenshot website funda, https://www.funda.nl/fundahuis/ (viewed 16 August 2019).

House had disappeared from the website by the end of March 2021, as had the video.[49]

Looking at the funda House from the perspective of a museum aiming to collect contemporary home life, the combination of ideas and concepts, language, digital objects and materiality is noteworthy. The conceptual design of the house, its online video presentation with the architectural

44 — For example, Hoeven 2016 and Longair 2015: 4.
45 — http://www.funda.nl/fundahuis/het-funda-huis-in-10-antwoorden. Last viewed 16 August 2019.
46 — Interview Jurriaan van Gent, 8 July 2019 [12:11 and 36:42].
47 — Interview Jurriaan van Gent, 8 July 2019 [12:11] and Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [40:33].
48 — Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [41:20].
49 — Website https://www.funda.nl/fundahuis/, viewed 4 January 2021. When viewed again, on 25 March, any reference to building the funda House had disappeared.

renderings, a 3D-printed model (held up for view by one of the partners in the 2019 video *Discover the Strength of the Chain*), and the eventual built property are all named the funda House. This makes a strong case concerning the intertwinement of material and virtual culture in post-material culture, as suggested by M.J. Vechinski in his article about Goodreads, a social network relating to books. Vechinski further contends that collecting does not, by definition, entail the "ownership and control of physical objects", with online information instead able to provide an alternative to collecting material items.[50]

Material artefacts traditionally form the core of cultural-history museums' collections. In the funda case, since a house is obviously too large, my museum would probably choose to collect the 3D model, adding the images and video presentation as accompanying documentation. Yet an approach like this, where a small element – almost a byproduct – becomes key, would not do justice to the essentially digital-born house. On the other hand, the funda case also suggests that just displaying information is not enough from a museological point of view. Indeed, a present-day information-display is simply no guarantee of the continued conservation and accessibility of digital objects, which is fundamental to collections. As a way to ensure continuity, UNESCO distinguishes no fewer than four levels when it comes to understanding and managing digital objects: "as physical phenomena; as logical encodings; as conceptual objects that have meaning to humans; and as sets of essential elements that must be preserved in order to offer future users the essence of the object".[51] Consequently, collecting digital objects involves finding the means to secure their preservation and future accessibility, which requires specific expertise, as well as resources.

In contrast to Vechinski, and more in line with UNESCO, Haidy Geismar pleads for us to consider the digital as also being material, not intangible. Her book, *Museum Object Lessons for the Digital Age* (2018), aims to place digital media within a historical and material museum context. Defining object lessons as "arguments about the world made through things",[52] an important part of the book relates to the construction of knowledge and the role of museums as institutions that both produce and represent it. The object lessons Geismar describes explore the innovations that digital media entail, as well as older ideas and techniques upon which they are based. For instance, a deaccessioned box, once used to store lantern-slides, could be studied from the perspective of know-

ledge-making, visual perception and shifting values at a time long predating digital. Conversely, a newly created digital pen for use by visitors to the Cooper Hewitt Museum is embedded within a tradition that addresses reproduction technologies in the decorative arts.[53] The digital is not separate from the analogue, Geismar states, but must be understood as part of a material trajectory.[54]

Digital heritage seems to take a middle position between intangible and material culture, in which digital objects combine ideas and matter, transience and physicality. Nevertheless, collecting digital objects in city museums is, in my experience, still problematic. Articles and books on museums and digital culture (or digital heritage) are certainly being published, even more than it is possible to read,[55] but most of them relate to the interaction between material objects and visitors, not to collecting. Instead, they include articles on: virtual museums to which anyone can contribute; providing access to many different users; the use of new media in the museum; the addition of sensory experiences; the creation of immersive and interactive environments; digital repatriation; and the development of different data infrastructures to connect a detailed knowledge of individual objects with cultural arguments on a macro scale.[56] Archives have been working with e-depots for some time now, and in museums for art and design the importance of digital objects is acknowledged as well (however problematic their conservation might be). Nevertheless, many city museums still hesitate when it comes to collecting digital heritage. Although the funda case suggests that contemporary collecting necessitates the inclusion of digital objects to form coherent ensembles, it remains a daunting prospect for many smaller institutions.

# The funda House as an evocative ensemble

The funda House not only differs from the other cases in this study in relation to materiality, but is also an extreme example given its size, nonetheless hinting at the possibility of achieving an extremely small collection. Chapters 3 and 4 have shown that both IKEA and BAM construct a variety of home interiors, but the funda House takes a rigorous approach by suggesting a single house as the representative of the ideal home of the 17 million people in the Dutch population, equating to almost 8 million households. While IKEA's room settings and BAM's Homestudios differentiate between various household groups, the funda House has been created from web searches by visitors of all types, whatever their socio-demographic characteristics. Moreover, the architects and the data analyst rejected the early concept of an 'option house' – a basic home adaptable to specific demands – in favour of a more outspoken property to accommodate the average resident. As the architect Jeroen Atteveld told me:

> Once we had a kind of 'option house', because... yeah, the Dutch are hard to capture in just one... so, we wondered: couldn't we design one basic house into which all sorts of things can be plugged, and done, and...? But eventually we had the feeling this would be, in fact, very weak – because it would also be good to design one single house for the Dutch and not all sorts of options and possibilities, or something.[57]

The desire to create just one home from the enormous amount of data available was probably also driven by the primary goal of stimulating a debate about the importance of data. From this perspective, the urge to make a statement is easy to understand. But what statement has actually been made? What are the values questioned by the funda House, and what tenets does it, in turn, represent? Comparing the funda House's exterior and interior to similar examples in Sweden and

Germany, respectively, the present theme traces the cultural values embodied in the house. In doing so, it explores the perspectives an ensemble may adopt and the image of contemporary home life it may reflect, thus increasing awareness of collecting practices and the collections that are the result.

**The Terraced House as a Cultural Value**
An initial, albeit somewhat implicit, cultural value underlying the funda House is the ideology of home ownership, formulated as "the widely held and deeply rooted idea that buying a house is a crucial step in human life, bringing security, prestige and satisfaction".[58] The Dutch government has increasingly withdrawn from the housing market since the 1950s. Due in part to a national mortgage guarantee, the share of owner-occupied homes in the overall housing stock increased from 28% in 1948 to almost 60% now.[59] For the funda House, only the interactions relating to properties for sale have been included; these visitors are therefore potential buyers, not tenants.[60]

A more outspoken cultural value is the terraced house, which – according to the architects – mirrors Dutch culture. There seems to have been little discussion about the house type chosen, despite the global urbanisation trend, demographic change and the potential implications for future housing demands. Funda's big data indicate that ground-bound dwellings (detached and semi-detached; terraced and end-of-terrace) are the most sought-after properties in the Netherlands. The

50 ___ Vechinski 2013: 14-15.
51 ___ https://en.unesco.org/themes/information-preservation/digital-heritage/concept-digital-preservation
52 ___ Geismar 2018: xv.
53 ___ Ibid. Box and pen are described in chapters 3 and 4, respectively.
54 ___ Ibid. xvii-xviii.
55 ___ On 14 October 2019, my search on Google Scholar for publications about "museums & 'digital culture'" produced 1,180 results from 2019 alone. Ten days later, this number had already increased to 1,220.
56 ___ See, for example, Van den Akker & Legêne 2016, Geismar 2018, Kenderdine 2016, McTavish 2006, Rossi 2019, and Schnapp 2018.
57 ___ Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [23:46].
58 ___ Polak 2017, viewed online on https://decorres pondent.nl/7521/dit-schuilt-er-achter-je-funda verslaving/771052920-b8f61519, viewed 20 March 2021.
59 ___ Ibid. Figures checked for 2020 on https://lon greads.cbs.nl/nederland-in-cijfers-2020/hoeveel-woningen-telt-nederland/, viewed 29 March 2021.
60 ___ Email: Jurriaan van Gent answering a follow-up question, 18 November 2019.

NAAST ELKAAR
**Anders dan het doorsnee huis**
Het funda Huis is uniek, het biedt de ruimte van het kasteel en is toch zo ontworpen dat het in elke straat met rijtjeshuizen ingepast zou kunnen worden.



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**Anders dan het doorsnee huis**
Het funda Huis is uniek, het biedt de ruimte van het kasteel en is toch zo ontworpen dat het in elke straat met rijtjeshuizen ingepast zou kunnen worden.

type of home that sells best is still the terrace, followed at some distance by apartments. As architect Dingeman Deijs explained in a radio interview, about 60% of the Dutch population live in a terraced property, which he illustrated by sketching a picture of one long street running from Amsterdam to Beijing, with terraced homes on both sides.[61] Apart from this quantitative argument, and probably equally important, both of the architects spoken to consider the terraced house to be a mirror of Dutch culture. When asked why they decided on this type of home instead of, for example, an apartment, Jeroen Atteveld explained:

*The share of terraced houses is much larger than the share of apartments. And we also felt that it [i.e., the terraced house] would be a kind of translation for this feeling of freedom. People having a front door facing the street, a garden with a back entrance, these are such Dutch living concepts... they're ingrained in our culture, in my opinion. And in the Netherlands, we have no culture of families living in apartments, which is pretty common – quite normal in, for example, Paris, New York and London.[62]*

Several architectural renderings visualise the newly designed funda House as integrated within a row of typical Dutch homes, clearly demonstrating how well it fits within existing building practices while simultaneously stressing its divergent character. One of the visuals on the special webpage contains an image with a slider: moving the slide to the left replaces the cutaway funda House with a similar view of the average terraced dwelling.

The terraced funda House may not be a very spectacular solution, but gains in meaning and character when compared to its Swedish counterpart, the *Hemnet House of Clicks* (2015). Just like

| 5.4 |

"Different from the average house" proclaims the header on the webpage. The screen opens with a cutaway view of the funda House. Moving the orange slider to the left reveals the cross-section of a typical terraced property. Moving it back to the right shows the funda House again, thus inviting visitors to identify the differences between them.
Source: Screenshots from the funda website https://www.funda.nl/fundahuis/ (viewed 16 August 2019).

the funda House, the Hemnet House is based on big data emanating from visits to the country's largest property website. Data scientists analysed over 200 million website clicks, and Hemnet then asked two architects, Bolle Tham and Martin Videgård, to design the country's most-wanted type of home. The result was "a 1.5 storey home featuring a red wooden façade and a private rooftop terrace".[63] The architects explain the underlying ideas behind the *Hemnet Home*, as they describe it, on their website. The property combines Swedish statistics, including surface area, layout and price, with two national icons: the falun-red wooden cottage and the white functionalist box. The resulting cube thus reflects the wishes of consumers as well as cultural values. As the website of Tham & Videgård states, the house echoes "history, local sources, crafts and national building traditions", and simultaneously stands for "modernity, optimism, industrial development, the welfare state and international ideas".[64] Benefitting from differences between Swedish and Dutch housing traditions and archetypal homes, the comparison with the Hemnet House of Clicks clarifies some of the values underlying the funda House, thus loading the standard terraced property with meaning and character.

**Cultural Values Related to the Interior**

The illustrations of the exterior of the funda House focus on the applicability of the new concept, visualising a seamless fit with standard building practices, while the floor plans communicate the spatial planning. However, the sense of space and freedom pursued in the 'terraced castle' is most clearly conveyed by the 360-degree images of the interior, which can be viewed through virtual-reality glasses. Yet the interior was not based on funda data, the website disclaims in its Q&A section:

*Furnishings serve as inspiration only and have been created by an art director. The funda House can be furnished as expensively or cheaply as desired, just like any other house. Obviously, tailor-made furniture, cabinets or details are, generally, more costly than mass-produced furniture.[65]*

Funda is obviously aiming to sell the house as a commodity. Data analyst Jurriaan van Gent pointed out that these illustrations are just meant to communicate the space on offer. He also noted that the renderings could have just as easily shown a classic interior, but added after a little while: "When visiting funda, you increasingly see... this is a bit... it's almost become the common type [of interior]".[66] From Jeroen Atteveld's slightly different perspective, however, the interior drawings accentuate the extraordinary design. Admittedly, these drawings did not originate from big data and the eventual furnishing of the house was not considered to be that important; nevertheless, designing specific and distinctive rooms was crucial, and it was just as important to emphasise their outstanding design through the use of inventive names as well as interior renderings. The drawings of the interior, which were produced by specialists at *De Beeldenfabriek* (The Image Factory), help to create a vision that is strikingly different from a conventional house. As Jeroen stated:

*At the moment... the first floor of an ordinary terraced house always contains 'bedroom 1', 'bedroom 2' and 'bedroom 3'. And we were like, well, these rooms are named in such a generic way, that you don't actually know what it's about. So, we said: it would be really good if each bedroom had a strong identity of its own... if you could, somehow, identify with those spaces. And that has been the starting point for the domestic interior, that's why every space should be really different. So... the spatial perception, but also the*

*furnishings, materials, perspectives, the way the light enters – that's been the starting point. And whether it's wood or tiles... we haven't expressed our opinions on that very much. I feel that's less important, actually.[67]*

A follow-up question, however, revealed that it had been architect Dingeman Deijs who was primarily involved in the interior's materialisation. According to his email, their major concern was indeed to emphasise the difference between the standard house and the funda House, which included highlighting the spatial qualities of each room as well as its unique character. As an example, the bathroom's tone-on-tone bluish-green tiles create a world apart, with its overall design accentuating space, while the colour simultaneously refers to water and the room's use. The attic, often the space that is finished the least, has also been given a special character, with a high-quality finish of warm and durable wood. Moreover, Dingeman Deijs explained, the daylight entering the living room through the see-through attic is warmly coloured due to the reflection of the wood.[68]

Even though funda's data do not extend to home interiors, the property website advises prospective sellers and estate agents on the presentation of the houses on offer. Various funda webpages give advice on, for instance, the colour of the walls ("white, white and white!") and suggesting there is lots of storage space ("the shelves should be half-empty; stuff can be stored elsewhere"); it also has tips on photographing interiors successfully under the header "less is always

61 — NPO Radio 2, interview 28 January 2017. The analogy originated from Hulsman & Kramer 2013: 11.
62 — Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [between 28:53 and 31:44]. During the interview on NPO Radio 2, Dingeman Deijs also mentioned the backyard and front door as typical Dutch cultural values, but the interviewer was quick to make a joke out of these remarks.
63 — Website https://primegroup.com/case-study/the-house-of-clicks/, last viewed 29 March 2021.
64 — Website Tham & Videgård arkitekter, https://www.thamvidegard.se/work/houses/hemnet-home/, last viewed 29 March 2021.
65 — Quoted from the Q&A section from the funda website https://www.funda.nl/fundahuis/het-funda-huis-in-10-antwoorden/, last viewed 16 August 2019.
66 — Interview Jurriaan van Gent, 8 July 2019 [14:15].
67 — Interview Jeroen Atteveld, 15 July 2019 [12:37].
68 — Follow-up questions answered by email by Dingeman Deijs, 20 November 2019.

more".[69] The architectural renderings of the funda House present an interior furnished in a remarkably similar way: it is very white, empty, Modernist and rather minimalistic. Many of the items on display allude to design, such as the Alessi kettle, Apple laptop computer and white Revolt chair – a famous Modernist design by Friso Kramer dating from 1953, but reintroduced in 2014. Even the books relate to art, architecture and design, with titles referring to Alvar Aalto, Arne Jacobsen and Jasper Johns, the cities of Chicago and Rotterdam, and subjects like fashion, graphic design and home interiors. In museological terms, the funda House must thus be regarded as an artistic period room, displaying the architects' vision of space and freedom, and also highlighting a certain modern style, quality and taste.

The funda House's interior also seems to acquire meaning and character in comparison with another example: *Deutschlands häufigstes Wohnzimmer*, which is a typical German living room, presented by the advertising agency Jung von Matt in 2004, and updated in 2009 and 2016.

| 5.5 |

These images show the Hemnet House of Clicks, the Swedish big-data house presented in 2015. With an indoor terrace and a double-height living room, the "1.5-storey" house meets the demands of the website's visitors. Architects Tham & Videgård explain that the house combines statistics with two national icons: the falun-red wooden cottage and the white functionalist box.
Source: Tham & Videgård, Stockholm Sweden (2015).

The room was created to enable the agency's employees, clients and visitors to experience the material world of the average German. It has been used for meetings and discussions on a daily basis and continuously updated, leaving nothing to chance. The main goal was to familiarise people with its fictive inhabitants, Sabine, Thomas and Alexander Müller, who represent the standard family, according to statistics. Their names are the most common, just like the location of the house and the family's daily routines. The Müllers live in a rented apartment of 89.4 m$^2$, laid out over three and a half rooms and situated in a block of flats built between 1949 and 1978.[70] Over time, regular minor changes kept the interior up-to-date, with more fundamental makeovers in 2009 and 2016. During the last transformation, a modern grey sofa replaced the former yellow corner sofa, carpeting gave way to laminate flooring, and the laptop and smartphone were within constant reach. Motivated by research showing that at least one piece of furniture always endures, the coffee table has remained unchanged since 2004.[71]

Jung von Matt's typical German living room gave rise to comments of all kinds, some questioning its accuracy, others remarking on the tastes of the average German family. Thomas Thiemeyer used the interior to explain the symbolic meaning of commodities according to Pierre Bourdieu's magnum opus *La Distinction* (1979), stressing the subtle social messages the objects convey based on inherited value judgements.[72] In the context of this study, the German period-room-like ensemble serves as a counterpart to the funda House's interior. First of all, the interior points to the cultural differences between the neighbouring countries – differences so large that it is difficult for me to place Jung von Matt's successive interiors in their social-historical context. Moreover, the German interior was intended to be a social period room, a concept in which the interior changes over time and adapts to use. The funda House, meanwhile, sprung from an artistic idea, expressing the architects' vision and stressing the moment of creation.

69 ___ Examples given on https://www.funda.nl/thuis/verkopen/10-tips-voor-de-verkoop-van-je-huis/ and https://www.funda.nl/voormakelaars/artikel/6-tips-voor-geslaagde-interieurfotos/, viewed 10 October 2019.
70 ___ Jung von Matt 2006: [1-4]. In later descriptions (2009, 2016), the name of the son, Alexander, had been changed to Jan, while an article in the *Westdeutsche Zeitung* (2013) mentions only a daughter, Maria. Similarly, Sabine is also later called Claudia.
71 ___ Jung von Matt 2016: *Pressemitteilung* and *Projektbeschreibung WoZi 3.0*.
72 ___ Thiemeyer 2018: 44-47.

## Reflecting Home Life in Museums

Aiming to represent the ideal home of the many, funda used the archetypal Dutch terraced house and minimalistic interiors as its starting points. The new house seamlessly complies with existing building practices and its interior also reflects expectations of modernity. However, such a 'common' design means that differences need to be emphasised to attract attention and even provoke discussion. Comparisons with the Hemnet House of Clicks and Jung von Matt's interior clarify some of the values underlying the funda House, suggesting different housing traditions, archetypal homes and interior decorating, thus loading the standard terraced home with meaning and character.

The need to stress differences in order to experience and appreciate the contemporary design is also indicated by the visual slider that funda introduced on its website. This alludes to a quintessential problem in museums' contemporary collecting policies, which is the sometimes-uninspiring ordinariness of everyday life at the time it is lived. Common objects are grouped in ordinary ensembles, which lack immediate interest right at the time of collecting. Although this is not a problem when collecting is understood as preserving today for tomorrow, it can be an issue when collecting functions as a performative act, as is the preference today (see Chapter 1). The funda case suggests that the addition of an alienating element might help us to understand the meaning of contemporary home life. Inserting an element of estrangement from the familiarity of the contemporary home would be in line with Irene Cieraad's repeated plea regarding, what she calls, "the anthropology of domestic space".[73] Whereas traditional cultural anthropology has thrived on differences between 'us' and 'the others', the study of contemporary domestic space would profit from the addition of an historical dimension, she argues in a lecture recorded on YouTube.[74] For city museums, it would be logical to link a contemporary acquisition directly to the historical collection, whether this is done in a playful way using, for instance, a visual slider, or by presenting it in combination with a 3D historical ensemble. Such a historical and museological comparison helps to create immediate distance from everyday life, urging museum professionals and participants to reflect on the intended acquisition and clarify its perceived interest. Conversely, the explicit addition of a contemporary home interior breathes new life into an existing collection. Regular reinterpretations of historical collections open up new per-



5.6

In 2004, advertising agency Jung von Matt constructed "Deutschlands häufigstes Wohnzimmer", the typical German living room. The main goal was to familiarise employees and clients alike with Sabine, Thomas and Alexander Müller, fictive inhabitants representing the standard family, according to statistics. Regular adjustments kept the interior up-to-date, while versions 2.0 and 3.0 refer to the living room's major makeovers in 2009 and 2016. Comparing the 2016 interior to that of the funda House increases awareness of the different cultural values, as well as the different underlying concepts.
Source: Jung von Matt (2016).

spectives, encourage polyvocality and retain the dynamism of existing ensembles.

73 ___ See, for instance, Cieraad 2006: 3 and 2017: [12:29].
74 ___ Cieraad 2017: [7:00-12:40].

# Strategy

3

# Collecting Contemporary Home Life

In Part 2, chapters 3, 4 and 5 provided in-depth descriptions of the three cases chosen to replicate the museological concept of a contemporary period room: IKEA's room settings, BAM's Homestudios and the funda House. Each chapter was directed towards understanding the methods and underlying ideas behind the company's ensembles, as well as exploring their viability for use in a museum context. Moreover, each chapter highlighted certain case-specific themes and discussed them in relation to the prevailing thinking and discourse on museological collecting and the representation of contemporary home life.

The present chapter aims to synthesise the within-case findings on a higher level of abstraction. It examines both replicative and divergent findings across the cases, thus comparing initial within-case findings, discussing differences and similarities, and examining preliminary insights further.[1] The cross-case theme analysis is structured around the five wider, overarching themes of the previously established framework: the collection, collecting, reflecting, representing and connecting. This framework, albeit slightly amended for the purpose of the current cross-case comparison, is reintroduced below to remind readers of these themes, questions and issues.

As an instrumental comparative case study, Part 3 aims to identify successful strategies for use by city museums in their collecting of contemporary home life. To this end, I build on the findings of the cross-case theme analysis to propose an approach that is discussed in the final chapter.

| Theme | Question | Issues |
|---|---|---|
| The collection | What domestic ensembles have the companies constructed? | Size & scope |
| | | Materiality |
| Collecting | How have the companies selected their objects and ensembles? | Strategies |
| | | Participants |
| | | Who decides? |
| Reflecting | What do the ensembles reflect? | Perspective |
| | | Time |
| | | Cultural values, personal identity |
| Representing | Whom do the ensembles represent? | Diversity |
| | | Target groups |
| | | Methods of differentiation |
| Connecting | How do the ensembles connect visitors to the collections? | Qualities |
| | | Use |

1 ___ Yin 2018: 194-199.

6.1

# The Collection

The starting point in my search for a strategy for collecting contemporary home life was domestic ensembles, which replicate the concept behind museums' period rooms. My goal in selecting three cases with collections that differ in scope, size and materiality was to encounter a variety of approaches. It thus seems appropriate to first examine the firms' 'collections', which is a term that clearly reflects the museological perspective adopted in this cross-case comparison. The concept of collections is fundamental to museums, although notions of what they may contain have changed over time. City museums now strive to create multifaceted ensembles, which include various perspectives on both historic events and everyday life. Paradoxically, the fear of having collections that are too large and unmanageable has led to a reluctance to actually acquire objects, especially space-consuming material items. Size therefore matters. Collections not only have to be diverse, but compact as well.

This section compares IKEA's room settings, BAM's Homestudios and the funda House from the museum perspective on collections that are explicitly related to the field of housing culture. In the context of this comparative case study, the collections of these commercial enterprises can be loosely defined as coherent and meaningful sets of objects, assembled, selected and presented to reflect contemporary home life. What do these collections comprise? How do they look? Which domestic ensembles have the companies constructed, what objects have they selected? The theme compares the scope, size and materiality of these collections, while also reflecting on the reasons why the ensembles are composed and the purposes they serve. My concluding synthesis then formulates the insights acquired, relating them to the collecting of contemporary home life.

## Scope, size and materiality

### IKEA Room Settings: Single Pieces of Furniture in Functional Contexts

At first glance, the IKEA collection can be likened to its product range, i.e., a series of items grounded in so-called 'democratic design' and reflecting the company's identity. Approximately 9,500 unique products cover the entire home environment and serve a global market. On further inspection, however, the range more closely resembles an art museum's collection of unique designs. The room settings in a store are composed of the company's actual mass-produced commodities, which are selected from the product range to appeal to a local showroom's visitors. On the one hand, a limited selection of products is on display, while on the other several of the same mass-produced items are also present and available for purchase. In this sense, the sum of the room settings is more akin to a city museum's collection, reflecting local needs and tastes at a particular point in time, not through unique designs, but via common, mass-produced objects. Moreover, like a museum's period rooms, the IKEA versions are presented as a series of individual rooms framed within a larger collection.

The somewhat typical Barendrecht showroom accommodates about 60 room settings. These are primarily grouped according to their spatial function, with three core areas defined: the living room, kitchen and bedroom. During my first observational visit in 2018, approximately 20 room settings related to the kitchen, 15 to the bedroom and another 15 to the living room (albeit sometimes combined with a kitchen). The room settings can also be grouped in other ways, for example based on underlying styles, budgets or households. However, in terms of the *size* of the IKEA collection, the area where visitors enter the showroom is of particular relevance, with four or five room settings on immediate display that are tailored to the regional market and epitomise all IKEA has to offer. The items in these rooms can therefore be viewed as representing the minimum size of the IKEA collection, i.e., in museum terms, it is the company's 'core collection'.

Room settings are IKEA's most important strategy for selling as many individual pieces of furniture as possible. The staged home interiors provide imaginative solutions to familiar, real-life problems. Visitors encounter a series of possible worlds to inhabit, in which functional narratives are paired with the high attention-value of the presented products. So-called 'homes' do not rely on the juxtaposition of objects alone, but also include floor plans, text and photos to explicate the narratives, thus making the whole easier to understand. Along with these functional narratives, the showroom also contains other contextual displays, like the inspirational ensembles created by visual merchandisers. As can be argued from the IKEA case, changing display conventions might alter the

**2011**
ACQUISITION DATE

In 2011, Erno Wientjens photographed some of the residents of Roggestraat, including Tonny and her grandson.

MUSEUM NUMBER

**91154.3**

meaning of objects – they can be isolated, various series created, different stories told – but it is not really possible to create meaningful, coherent ensembles if objects have not been collected right from the start.

### BAM's Homestudios: A Collection of Future Homes

The Homestudios collection consists of a limited number of options for homes that will be built in the Netherlands by BAM, the Dutch construction firm. The collection comprises three architectural styles, eight floor plans, three standards of interior finishes and five interior design styles. There is no local differentiation: taken together, the options available are expected to meet the needs of the many BAM customers in the country.

Although the collection relates to the possible exteriors and interiors of the prospective new-builds, the available architectural styles are in fact within the remit of institutional clients like project developers and municipalities. Homestudios' Experience Centre focuses on individual buyers and then, in particular, on interiors: on layouts and space, finishing and interior design. One of its studios contains 11, almost full-scale, model homes, which unify all the available options in terms of spatial use and stylistic finishing. The Inspiration Studio can thus be regarded as a synopsis of Homestudios' entire collection, reducing its size to 11 dwellings. Nevertheless, this still adds up to a significant collection of at least 11 combined living rooms and kitchens, 11 bathrooms and 22 bedrooms.

At an object level, the model homes present the products of BAM's associated partners. All the furnishings on display are available to buy, from floors to dormer windows, from paint to individual pieces of furniture. Unlike IKEA's room settings, which aim to sell individual pieces of furniture, Homestudios' model homes serve another goal: supporting buyers to make decisions about their future property. In helping clients to envisage their home before it has been built, BAM intends to sell well-valued, functional new-builds.

### The funda House: An XS Collection Built of Data and Dreams

The smallest collection of the three cases is, by far, the funda House: a newly designed property based on big data taken from the interactions of visitors to funda.nl and the homes they view there. The funda House was created from a combination of the best-selling properties and most sought-after features on the company's website. Unlike

IKEA and BAM, which produce various home interiors to appeal to a variety of visitors, funda offers a single house that it says represents the ideal home of almost eight million Dutch households.

The ensemble communicates the architects' vision of space and freedom, a vision to better reflect the demands of today's house buyers while simultaneously being a good fit with current standard-build properties. At a higher level, the funda House serves as an advocate for a demand-driven approach to project development, which is a greater degree of abstraction than that seen in BAM's customised building practices.

Ever since its introduction in January 2017, the funda House has been presented as a conceptual model, a virtual house "built of data and dreams". The express use of big data as its prime building material and its existence as a mainly digital or virtual collection mean that this case is the furthest away from the traditional museological period room. Consistently discussed using carefully chosen words and visualised through a series of digital architectural renderings, the funda House vividly evokes its underlying ideas. Various videos and website images present the newly designed home, while a 3D model is part of a more long-standing architectural tradition. The intertwinement of ideas and concepts, language, materials and digital objects, demonstrates its coherence and provides proof of the requirement to regard it as an ensemble composed of different materials.

## Synthesis

### Domestic ensembles can provide objects with different meanings.

The cross-case comparison first demonstrates that ensembles can serve diverse goals, enabling objects to function at different levels: they can highlight individual objects or, in contrast, accentuate a context for use; they can reveal a functional cohesion and allow visitors to experience space; and they can even initiate a debate about housing. Moreover, and particularly important to museums, they also have the ability to imbue objects with a variety of different meanings.

### Functional relationships need to be collected from the start.

Linked to the issue of contextualisation, the analysis had also discovered that it is difficult to create meaningful, coherent ensembles if their constituent parts have not been collected from the start. An object can be placed on a pedestal in isolation and an inspirational image can be com-

posed of unrelated items, but a functional context is less easily created. If museums want to represent home life in functional ensembles, they must consider coherent narratives in their collecting policies. Furthermore, these contexts not only have to include material objects, but underlying narratives and research data as well.

### A relatively small collection can represent contemporary home life.

The comparative case study provides an indication that a relatively small collection suffices for representing contemporary home life. Indeed, reducing the companies' collections to their essence reveals that they vary in size from 11 model homes to the representation of either a single house or even four or five individual rooms. Although the contents of 11 homes would exceed the pragmatic space limitations of an institution like Museum Rotterdam, the periodic acquisition of up to five coherent ensembles ought to be acceptable, especially if the collecting is conducted in collaboration with other museums.

### Contemporary collections require post-material and digital culture.

In relation to materiality, the ensembles present a variety of objects. While IKEA's room settings focus on material culture and can be easily compared with traditional museum ensembles, BAM's Homestudios combine material culture with virtual reality, personal advice and a digital platform. Nevertheless, increased materiality distinguishes the Experience Centre from its predecessors. Many samples of materials and fully furnished model homes replace the CGI of the company's previous Smart and Home Collections, thus making a strong case for the inclusion of material culture in a collection. The funda House is a born-digital ensemble presented in videos and websites, expressing its ideas about freedom and space through digital architectural drawings and a consistent language, simultaneously using a 3D-printed model to position itself within an architectural tradition. This shows an overall intertwinement, urging us to consider the house as a coherent ensemble composed of different materials. Although the preservation of digital objects requires museums to have specific tools, skills and knowledge, it is surely unimaginable not to include them in contemporary collecting.

### Coherent ensembles must play a greater role in internet presentations.

The interweaving of objects or images, language and ideas, should also be better expressed in museums' presentations on the internet, where individual objects dominate, described in the language of a thesaurus that provides a context. Complete interiors and ensembles are 'dissected' into separate parts in our databases for management and conservation purposes. Each part is then described in a standard way that was once essential for retrieving information from card indexes. This makes perfect sense given the origins of the museum, but in fact obscures the view of meaningful ensembles and makes them harder to understand. This need not be the case, since the technology available today enables meanings to be transferred in more compelling ways.

# Collecting

It is not only the result that counts in contemporary collecting; the process of 'doing' the collecting is just as important. Curatorial authority has been contested ever since it became evident that collecting is not a neutral act. In search of more democratic practices, current models of curatorship accentuate collaborations with a variety of communities. Participatory strategies are explored to engage new social groups and, as Chapter 1 argues, the desire to involve residents in the process of selecting materials for an ensemble has been one of the main drivers of contemporary collecting. Set out below, this overarching theme addresses the act of collecting. It first compares the processes used by the three companies in the comparative case study to create ensembles and select products. What collecting strategies have the firms chosen? Who has been involved in the process of creating and selecting? Who decided on the objects and stories included in the domestic ensembles? The insights gained are outlined in the concluding section, which aims to synthesise the findings from a museum perspective.

## Strategies, participants and decision-making

### IKEA's Room Settings: A Method to Create Diverse Ensembles

At IKEA, the central organisation decides on the product range, store layout and annual commercial theme. To capture the soul of the company, IKEA of Sweden also advises on the selection of products and their presentation in the showrooms all over the world. However, the international advice often requires extensive changes to ensure that the products recommended appeal to local visitors. As a consequence, individual stores tend to create room settings tailored to the needs of the local market. This process of choosing 'the right' products from a wide variety of options in order to create a series of coherent, relevant home interiors broadly replicates the process whereby curators select objects and ensembles for a museum's collection.

The construction of IKEA's room settings involves all the disciplines available to a store, but it is the interior designers who actually invent,

draw and build the interiors. Home visits provide them with essential information about the actual living situations, habits and needs of local residents. Underlying the room settings, therefore, are the shared real-life problems that inspire the designers to come up with attractive solutions. To guarantee crucial diversification, the designers adhere to a method in which the work brief, visual identity, scenario and product collage all precede the final choice of items. Contrary to what is the norm in museums, the company starts by defining the characteristics and interests of its target markets and then brings the process to an end by selecting the objects.

IKEA's process of creating ensembles thus aims to construct divergent, though clearly recognisable and convincing, narratives. Local residents, who can apply for a home visit, are consulted in this process, but they are not involved any further. Although the research relates to local living situations, the room settings are explicitly not a result of co-development with residents, instead being created through the expertise and creativity of IKEA's interior designers and constructed within the company's framework and using its product range. Sales indicate whether the room settings are appealing to the target market, as do the results of occasional retrospective evaluations that use interviews to measure the constructed rooms' effectiveness.

### BAM's Homestudios: Customer Consultation and In-house Expertise

Like the IKEA method, Homestudios' strategy is also based on consultations with potential buyers. Advance market research resulted in the concept of a ready-to-live-in house, while BAM's online platform was developed in consultation with actual buyers. Customer satisfaction and sales figures function as clear indicators of the success of the scheme.

Despite the absence of a participatory approach, the individual customer is the fulcrum of the Homestudios concept. Client orientation is reflected in both the goal of providing an excellent customer journey and in the collection, which is built on the wishes and preferences of the target groups. However, where city museums might question the authority of museum professionals in the pursuit of a visitor-oriented approach, BAM's strategy is based on in-house expertise. The construction firm's knowledge and experience were employed to standardise floor plans and architectural styles, and it also used an interior designer (first as an independent expert, later as part of the

organisation) to enable it to offer customisation. Furthermore, Homestudios' carefully chosen partners are now responsible for selecting the specific products furnishing the Experience Centre's model homes.

Notwithstanding the focus on individual customers, institutional clients continue to play a background role. Although their presence may not be particularly obvious in Homestudios' presentations, without municipalities, investors and project developers no houses would be built and no collections would be formed. Moreover, it is the institutional clients that determine the overall architectural style of the homes in which individual house-buyers will live.

### The funda House: A House Co-created with Millions of Visitors

While there is visitor involvement in the room settings of both BAM's Homestudios and IKEA, this is mainly limited to consultation. The funda House, however, is a reflection of a higher level of participation. After all, the interactions of nearly a billion visitors with the houses on offer on funda.nl produced the big data upon which the newly designed house is based. Echoing museums' interest in a bottom-up approach, the express use of big data as a prime building material was the main reason why I included the case in this study.

Fifteen years after the launch of its property website, funda decided to use the data it had been collecting and sought the help of architects to create a novel home. The architects had in fact themselves previously questioned the design of conventional housing and shared funda's interest in exploring a new concept to meet the needs of the residents of the future. Normally used to dealing with the 'warm data' of specific target groups and real people – and similar to a museum's approach to participatory collecting – their focus now shifted to big data. Partly out of necessity and partly by choice, socio-demographic data was explicitly not taken into account. This proved to be essential to the development of the so-called funda House, providing an opportunity to transcend the individual, personal level and instead propose an alternative, communal idea.

The funda case also demonstrates that big data do not, by definition, secure an objective decision-making process. Indeed, to avoid the pitfall of path dependency, the architects moved to a higher level of abstraction, magnifying the contrasts between dreams and reality and translating general ideas into a specific and emotionally charged concept. In the process from data to design, the voices of

funda's website visitors were combined with those of a data analyst and the architects. It became clear that the result was affected not only by the data used, but also the expertise involved, the interpretation adopted and even who was doing the interpretating. When the many positive reactions prompted funda to announce that it would actually build the house, chain partners entered the process as new participants striving to further the development of the demand-driven project. Although the intention to produce a row of funda Houses can be viewed as just the next step in the process, it nevertheless means that there will be new choices that are, once again, context-bound and will change the ensemble.

### Synthesis

Make the roles of 'institutional clients' in collecting policies explicit.

Despite all the efforts of the three commercial companies to focus on individual consumers, it became clear that institutional clients, like chain partners, project developers and investors, also play their part in the background. These clients are also very important to city museums, although they are rarely identified as target groups. Exhibitions mention the contribution of special funding and sponsors, but municipalities also play a key role behind the scenes. Their granting of subsidies is essential for the performance of core tasks like collecting and collection management, while fellow institutions also affect the boundaries of a museum's collection policy. Although the influence is only indirect, it nonetheless seems sensible to specify the roles played by such institutional clients in a museum's collection policy and thus provide a better understanding of networked practices.

Consider both co-developing and consultative collecting strategies.

Where many city museums now endeavour to produce collaborative or co-creative projects, the collecting strategies adopted by the three commercial firms in the study involve consulting their target groups through home visits, market research and data analyses. Within museums, the distinction between consultation and co-development (referring to the participants' advisory and cooperative roles, respectively) was initially seen as indicating only a methodological difference, but it now seems to have developed into a hierarchical distinction with "progressive steps towards a model of 'maximum participa-

tion'".[2] Over the past decade, the issue of who decides has become increasingly prominent, resulting in a greater appreciation of co-creation. This case study demonstrates that the three companies use 'only' consultative strategies to acknowledge their clients' demands. It is thus clearly time to let go of the traditional hierarchy and instead decide on a case-by-case basis which method of collecting is the most appropriate and how it affects a collection.

Start by defining households and end by selecting objects.

If museums want to create a variety of ensembles, they could start their contemporary collecting by defining the characteristics and interests of the households or communities they aim to include, and end it by selecting objects and constructing ensembles. Loosely following the IKEA method and adjusting it to the museum context, this strategy is closely related to the personal approach familiar to museums and may enhance both visitor orientation and diversity.

Big data can provide museums with an alternative collecting strategy.

Although present-day museum practices are orientated towards personal relationships and intensive collaboration, resulting in the collection of individual objects or stories, big data provide an opportunity to transcend the individual level of small-scale participatory collecting and instead find common ground on a higher plane. It is certainly worth exploring whether such an alternative strategy could produce a collection with a broader base, in which residents and visitors can either recognise or oppose themselves.

Contemporary collecting requires museum expertise.

Finally, all three cases suggest that in-house expertise is indispensable and objectivity is only ever apparent. Even when using big data, and thus including many voices, interpretation is crucial, expertise is required and the outcome is susceptible to the influence of personal ideas. Objectivity is an idée fixe; the reality is that any method of collecting requires some kind of 'curatorial voice'. A transparent way of collecting, based on a clear strategy and explicit criteria, offers opportunities to collaborate in different ways, and at different times, with different partners – both colleagues and external stakeholders. Reflection on the collecting process is also necessary to interpret a collection's significance at a later stage. Collecting

thus requires continuity, a conscious choice to adopt a variety of perspectives, transparency, and reflexivity. For all of this, museum expertise is required.

2 —— Simon (2010:235) used the expression to indicate an unwanted value judgement, clearly stating "there is no 'best' type of participation".

# Reflecting

Contemporary collecting, Chapter 1 argues, is not so much about preserving an endangered past as it is about selecting the relevant present. Furthermore, this relevance is no longer exclusively defined in terms of historic importance, uniqueness or eminence, but also encompasses ordinary, everyday life and its broad tapestry. These two extremes gained in meaning when the artistic and the social period room were distinguished, each with a different perspective on home life, each with its specific historical moment of truth. Yet where museums' period rooms generally contextualise their objects in the past, the commercial cases in this study were selected to explore the concept of a contemporary period room. Moreover, museums have become increasingly uncomfortable with generalisation and now prefer individual life stories, which makes representation an important issue. Accordingly, my third overarching theme relates to the interpretation and depiction of home life. It asks what kind of home life is reflected in the ensembles of the companies. What perspective(s) do they adopt? How do the ensembles relate to contemporaneity, or to time in general? What cultural values underlie the ensembles and how do they express personal identity? The final section synthesises the findings on a higher level, asking what museums can learn.

## Perspective

The constructed domestic interiors of museums are generally categorised as artistic or social period rooms. The social perspective is mainly chosen to reflect the typical lifestyles of large groups of people, stressing not the intended design of an interior, but its everyday use and the gradual changes that occur. In contrast, the artistic perspective tends to underline the original design, emphasising its uniqueness, quality or the impeccable taste of the room's inhabitants.

The funda House and Homestudios' model homes both adopt an essentially artistic perspective. The former quite literally displays the architects' vision of space and freedom, its architectural drawings untroubled by either actual use or unintended accretions. The virtual outcome highlights a minimalist, modern style, with a bespoke interior

permeated with art, architecture and design. Similarly, Homestudios' model homes express coherent styles, which have been developed by BAM's interior designers to appeal to the tastes of a variety of house-buyers. The designers explain the five different interior styles to future residents and give them advice on creating a personal and stylish home. Here, style is both a means to create coherent home interiors and an educational tool to help customers make decisions about their future dwelling.

Style is also an important aspect of IKEA's room settings. Four style groups create different atmospheres and each room setting expresses a specific version, just like the model homes at BAM's Experience Centre. However, unlike Homestudios and museums' artistic period rooms, IKEA does not explain its use of styles to the showroom's visitors. The main objective is to create coherent interiors that attract different visitor groups and prevent boring uniformity. In line with the artistic perspective, the room settings accentuate design, quality and good taste, simultaneously suggesting that all IKEA products work well together. On the other hand, the room settings also resemble museums' social period rooms by accentuating familiarity and the everyday life of "the many people". The staged interiors stress functionality, authentic living situations and real people's needs. Consequently, the room settings are a combination of the social and artistic period rooms, with attention paid to use and style at the same time.

## Time

A significant difference between the artistic and social perspective in museums' period rooms is seen in the choice of a specific moment of truth. Whereas the moment of a room's creation emphasises design and authorship and best represents the artistic perspective, a later point in time is usually chosen in the social period room to accentuate changes in how it is actually used. In its examination of museum practice, Chapter 2 also established that the period room is generally used to contextualise objects in a historical setting. The three commercial home interiors studied here, however, were specifically chosen because of their contemporary context. How do these ensembles relate to time? How does contemporaneity affect the choice of a particular moment of truth, the selection of objects and the construction of ensembles?

Present-day living situations form the starting point of IKEA's room settings, although the staged

interiors paradoxically offer future-oriented solutions. After all, the company's research is directed towards identifying common challenges and the room settings then suggest a variety of alternatives for a better home life in the near future. The company's key concept of inspiration is also linked to time, as both Garvey and Pink et al. argue. Inspiration here means that visitors weigh the range of possibilities presented by the room settings,[3] which implies a continuous process of 'making homes' and reflects the idea of the home as project.[4] Constant change was also mentioned by my interviewees as being an essential part of the room settings, referring not only to how the rooms adapt to seasonal activities, but also – and more in line with the processual concept of inspiration – to "vitality changes", i.e., the regular, minor changes that propagate partial refurbishment.

In its desire to give buyers a good impression of their future home, Homestudios explicitly relates to the future. A visit to the Experience Centre starts at the Introductory House, where bare floors and roughly finished walls demonstrate the typical new-build's basic finishes. Managing expectations and, at the same time, interesting buyers in a higher standard of finishing, the Experience Centre offers a more convenient process for buying a home and moving in. The various studios then support the client in making decisions about their yet-to-be-built house. Unlike the IKEA room settings, however, the model interiors in the Inspiration Studio do not so much suggest a home as a work in progress. Instead, they visualise the future dwelling in its finished, peaceful state, marking the start of the buyer's new home life.

The funda House, just like the IKEA room settings, is grounded in the present while also aiming for a point in the future, offering a realistic proposition that is a good fit with existing standard-build properties. The proposal is based on data taken from web searches in 2014, but also reflects more fundamental cultural values like the ideology of home-ownership and the terraced house, thus incorporating a longer past. Nevertheless, funda developed a strategy of abstraction, contrast and emotionally charged concepts to help it avoid the pitfall of path dependency and design a new house that better meets the demands of visitors to its website. Moreover, the concept of the funda House is open to future renewal: where the design presented in 2017 is now called "the funda House Original", the company's goal of expanding demand-driven project development implies the house will be redesigned based on up-to-date and local data.

## Values

Representation was identified in the study as an important aspect of the renewed interest in museums' period rooms, and relates to the tension between generalisation and individualism, cultural values and personal identity. Cultural-history museums tend to favour the social over the artistic perspective, yet *generalisation* – a characteristic element of the social period room – is now viewed very critically. Democratisation and visitor-orientation led to an attempt to attract new and diverse visitor groups, with museums increasingly focused on cultural diversity. In this process, personal identity (and its diversity) gained in importance. Many recently constructed period rooms represent individual life stories that highlight the individuality of the inhabitants. Is this similar to the commercial home interiors, or is the depiction of more generally shared tastes and aspirational lifestyles the goal? What individuality or shared values do the commercial ensembles reflect?

### IKEA Room Settings: Local Challenges, Worldwide Trends and Swedishness

A wide variety of detailed scenarios underlie the IKEA room settings, helping the interior designers to construct convincing interiors and connect showroom visitors to their lives at home. The interpretation of contemporary home life is largely based on local home visits, which are part of IKEA's more or less systematic research. This includes questions about basic activities and the use of space and often has a seasonal aspect. The aim of the home visits is to encounter everyday problems, which have been given the name "home frustrations", although they seem rather trivial and mostly relate to the efficient and comfortable furnishing of a house. At the other end of the scale, global research, conducted annually and presented in *Life at Home Reports,* aims to identify worldwide trends that will affect life at home in the future. These reports relate individual homes to the issue of social life on a higher level of abstraction, addressing, for instance, basic emotional needs or the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for future living. It can be assumed that changing global trends result in amendments to the company's overall strategy or provide the input to further develop the product range; meanwhile, the home visits serve to connect the international collection with the local market.

While IKEA combines the extremes of both a global and a local approach, 'Swedishness' is also part of the company's identity, resembling the focus of city museums on the particularist dimen-

sions of urban life. IKEA's products and ensembles are intended to reflect an easier, more natural life, which is perceived as typically Swedish. Indeed, the 2017 video on style groups clarifies that while its 'Scandinavian Traditional' style provides the fewest commercial opportunities, it is essential "in supporting the unique IKEA identity and making sure that people everywhere perceive our range as typically Swedish or, in Scandinavia, as typically IKEA."[5] As Kristoffersson demonstrated, the emphasis on Swedishness was not part of the company's original concept, only gaining in importance as the firm expanded into global markets. Furthermore, Swedishness is not so much found in the products themselves as in the discourse and rhetoric attached to them.[6] This Swedish profile has been extensively questioned and criticised, not only because of its commercial opportunism or clichéd image, but also because of its underlying valuing of Swedish exceptionalism and the exclusion of certain groups of people that is the result.

### BAM's Homestudios: A Basic Visual Vocabulary

At Homestudios, the model homes in the Inspiration Studio present all the house types on offer by BAM. These combine the available floor plans and spatial layouts, and use interior design up to the highest level of finishes to connect with customers. From the first Smart Collection to today's Homestudios, the concept has been predicated on furnished model homes, which are in turn based on the idea that home interiors (including deliberately constructed interiors) articulate cultural values more than empty houses. As Avitts argues in *Live the Dream* (2006), spatial arrangements, style and chosen objects form a "visual vocabulary" that appeals to different groups of visitors. The model homes offer clients a space in which they must be able to recognise in floor plans and layouts the lifestyle to which they aspire. Personal taste is addressed in the five interior styles, which are used to differentiate between customers. Centred on the idea that a certain style appeals to some visitors and simultaneously alienates others, these styles serve as a funnel to enable clients to make decisions easily. Inspection of the objects within the model homes' interiors quickly reveals that the underlying scenarios are not presented in a very detailed way. Some items suggest occupancy but, in comparison to IKEA, there are relatively few sensorial stimuli or storytelling accessories. There is just enough detailing to give an interior some individuality, but not so much that it would obstruct conformity. Visitors should be able

to envisage their future home, unhindered by too much detailing or character. While museums present their objects as cultural heritage, as things with a history worthy of preservation, the BAM Homestudios present theirs as commodities.

### The funda House: Searching for a New iconic House

With its goal of representing our ideal home, the funda House adopts the owner-occupied, terraced property as both a realistic proposition and important cultural value. The funda data, which relate almost exclusively to owner-occupied homes (comprising almost 60% of today's housing stock), reveal that the terraced house is the type of property that sells the best, especially outside cities. Along with this quantitative argument, the architects who designed the funda House also considered the terrace to be a mirror of Dutch culture, although I would argue that it is only in comparisons to other countries, for example Sweden's Hemnet House of Clicks, that it can be appreciated in this way, rather than taken for granted as something boring or commonplace.

Although the architects and data analyst confidently chose the terraced house as a template for their new design, they were less certain about how to depict the interior. The inside of the property was not based on big data, but primarily aimed to achieve a maximum contrast with the average Dutch interior. Its characterful and distinctive rooms highlight the differences between a standard new-build and the newly designed funda House. Simultaneously, the drawings express the architects' vision of freedom and space through their portrayal of a bespoke interior in a white, minimalist style that reflects a general Dutch modernism. Although it is stated that the interior "serves as inspiration only", it is nevertheless an important aspect of the property. While the illustrations of the exterior demonstrate that the house is a good fit with standard builds, it is the interior drawings that direct the attention towards its individuality and convey the sense of space and freedom pursued in this 'terraced castle'.

3    Garvey 2010: 143.
4    Pink et al. 2017: 27-28. In *Making Homes*, Chapter 2 considers temporalities of the home, part of which is set out in the section "The project of home".
5    My transcription of the video *IKEA- Style Groups*. Inter IKEA Systems 2017: [1:45].
6    Kristoffersson 2014: 51.

## Synthesis

### Style can be a powerful tool, even in interiors constructed from a social perspective.

While city museums tend to prefer a social type of period room to reflect the everyday lives of ordinary people, all three of the cases in this study adopt a more or less artistic perspective in their contemporary ensembles. Style is used to highlight newness, create coherence and differentiate between visitors on the basis of their tastes. As hybrid forms of period room, they combine style and taste with everyday life, which is clearly relevant to a city museum's contemporary collecting strategies. Although challenges may lie ahead in relation to the categorisation and subsequent selection of tastes, the explicit use of style to construct a contemporary interior could add coherence, ensure variety and link new ensembles to existing collections. In this way, social and artistic period rooms converge.

### Museum collections relate better to the present than the future.

The study's cross-case comparison revealed that the three cases examined, which were specifically chosen because of their contemporary context, all look ahead to a point in the (near) future, even if they are grounded in the present. Loosely following Sandberg, their ensembles can be regarded as a series of possible worlds that one might inhabit.[7] Museums, on the other hand, do not easily relate to the future. Moreover, their interior ensembles play no part in a home-making process and the objects on display are not for sale. The museum context alone causes interiors to be interpreted as situations that once existed, as worlds once inhabited by someone else. Although policies for contemporary collecting might include dreams of the future, as the case of Habiba demonstrated in Chapter 3, museums should not overlook actual, present-day living, since this constitutes the framework within which collections are both understood and interpreted.

### Museums might wish to address social issues.

The images of contemporary home life depicted in the commercial ensembles reflect a somewhat carefree life and do not address painful issues such as prejudice, disrepair or homelessness. Similarly, other social topics like safety, privacy or sustainable living are also ignored. Relevant social themes can, however, form the starting point of a museum's contemporary collecting policies. Indeed, such themes can be identified in studies already being conducted, although museums will have to invest in local research to sharpen local profiles and apply them to a collection of post-material culture.

### Balance individuality and conformity.

Recently constructed museum period rooms often reflect the individual lives of their inhabitants, whether real or fictive. Their ensembles can be packed with personal details, documenting the totality of home life and aiming to convey the idea that the residents have just walked away. Would we be better to strive for a less detailed approach in our collection policies, in which more space is left open for visitors? To what extent do storytelling accessories add valuable information, and where do they prevent people from easily empathising with the narrative? The three commercial ensembles in this study are inconclusive. IKEA does create complex ensembles and narratives in which personal stories are emphasised, although occasionally its presentations are too complex to comprehend. On the other hand, funda has kept the interior of its house fairly white and empty, while Homestudios' model homes also prioritise conformity over individuality. Based on this research, I would now be tempted to resist too much detailing and instead only collect an interior's essential elements.

### Create tension and spark interest.

The importance of a certain tension between everyday reality and the constructed ensembles is acknowledged in all three cases in the study; differences need to be stressed for the domestic interiors to be appreciated. A similar problem in the contemporary collecting policies of museums is the sometimes-uninspiring ordinariness of everyday life at the moment it is lived. As a result, ensembles may not always attract immediate interest at the time they are collected, which can be problematic when collecting functions as a performative act, as is nowadays preferred. As the comparative case study suggests, magnifying differences, adding surprise or inserting an element of estrangement from the familiarity of contemporary home life might help visitors to understand the meaning of an ensemble. City museums can achieve this effect by choosing extremes, clearly different households and diverse living situations, which together paint a picture of urban reality. It would also be logical for these museums to link an intended contemporary acquisition directly to the historical collection. This would help to create immediate distance from everyday life and encourage reflection; from the converse perspective, the regular addition of a contemporary home interior could breathe new life into an existing collection. Indeed, regular reinterpretations of historical collections open up new perspectives, encourage polyvocality and keep existing collections dynamic.

### Join collecting efforts.

In acknowledging cultural differences on diverse levels, while also reflecting similarities through its international product range and the general images evoked by its showrooms' ensembles, IKEA combines the global and local. BAM's Homestudios and the funda House affirm that even greater similarity can be found on a national level. With this in mind, it would seem to be a viable option for local, regional and national cultural-historical museums to combine their collecting efforts in order to ensure that the common aspects of home life are covered in an overarching collection or platform. At the same time, city museums could develop a local profile in which they examine their local identity in a more nuanced way. They could therefore stress the uniqueness of their city, their exceptionalism, all the while knowing that universalist aspects – the characteristics of Dutch city life in general – are preserved on a national level. Such coordination could ensure far less overlap than is currently the case and, at the same time, lead to more comprehensive collecting of contemporary home life.

### Combine a local identity with supralocal interest.

In relation to the issue of a local profile, it is important, finally, to note that profiles are generally not inherent in objects and collections, but are devised and adjusted in accordance with commercial opportunities and social or political demands. They might offer a cliched image, as well as one that changes over time, but the most important threat is that focusing on a local identity creates a sense of home for some communities, but makes others feel excluded. This is the negative aspect of so-called 'bonding performances', i.e., presentations that focus on an intrinsic community to confirm or celebrate community values. In contrast, 'bridging performances' aim to connect outsiders and community.[8] The advantage of a collection of home life is that it is able to link specific and general elements, not only connecting the various communities of super-diverse cities, but also serving as a bridge to connect tourists to the city's history and contemporary heritage.

# Representing

This theme turns to the people who are represented in the ensembles, which can be related directly to the diversity sought by city museums. As Chapter 1 argued, contemporary collecting is considered to be a tool for encompassing a wide array of voices, obtaining different materials and interpreting them from diverse perspectives. It is thus largely prompted by the desired result: achieving a multifaceted collection. There is, however, a limit to the representation of individuals. Not only is it impossible to understand the wishes of everyone in each community of interest, but too individual an approach may also mean that the results are of little significance to others. This fourth overarching theme relates to the target groups of the companies in the study and the ways they cluster people in order to diversify their ensembles and connect to as many visitors or buyers as possible. Whom do the commercial companies represent in their immersive ensembles? How do they differentiate between the various communities of interest? And what can museums learn from them?

## Target groups and methods of differentiation

### IKEA Room Settings: "The Many People" Differentiated by Household, Budget and Taste

With a target group defined in a global context as broadly as "the many people", diversity is essential at IKEA. A variety of familiar narratives underlie its ensembles in order to inspire different visitors. These narratives are situated in several domestic environments, where the kitchen, living room and bedroom have been defined as the core areas. The room settings take the spatial functions of objects into account and then use three main tools to differentiate between the many people: household, budget and taste.

Households are sorted by types of living situation, which are related to the different stages in life. Today's typology makes a primary distinction between households with and without children. This is followed by further categorisation relating

7 ___ Sandberg 2011: 65.
8 ___ Hoebink 2015: 42, 149.

to either the children's age or to the binary choice of single or together. The typology is based on the company's own research and deviates from national or local classifications. It must be noted, however, that the work brief, which is the first step in the collection process, may also cover socio-demographic characteristics.

Next, budget is translated into four price levels (low, medium, high and breath-taking), all of which link the budget not to the visitor's income, but to product prices and the money someone is willing to spend instead.

Taste is the final tool IKEA uses to differentiate between its customers. To reflect a broad variety of global taste preferences, all the products are categorised into four main style groups, which are weighted in relation to their commercial possibilities. So, *Popular Modern* is the largest style group and *Scandinavian Traditional* the smallest.

### BAM's Homestudios: Buyers of a New Build and Institutional Clients

The Homestudios' concept is orientated towards individual buyers of a house that will be built by BAM in the Netherlands. The company uses a limited set of variables to differentiate between its customers, which suggests that it is, to some extent, influenced by IKEA. Nevertheless, its first variables, i.e., house type and layout, are unrelated to any staged interiors and primarily defined by the new builds on offer. The eight different house types and five layout variants match the limited set of floor plans from which the buyers choose.

Budget is another Homestudios' variable. This relates to the three standards of finish on offer and is somewhat similar to IKEA's four price levels. In both cases, the budget does not relate directly to income, but to the money that clients have available to spend. As the Homestudios' concept is directly linked to the purchase of a house, the price levels can nevertheless be expected to reflect income to at least some degree.

Taste also plays an important role. Five interior design styles with names like "Colour & Rich" or "Rustic & Serene" aim to cover a broad range of connotations and appeal to customers' taste preferences. These styles, created by the company's interior designers, who had both previously worked for IKEA, are the most eye-catching way of helping customers to connect emotionally to the houses on display. As Homestudios is designed as a funnel to enable decisions to be made easily, the idea that styles appeal to some people and simultaneously alienate others is clearly in use in the home-buying process. Moreover, where IKEA integrates

style implicitly in its ensembles, BAM turns this into an educational tool to help clients create their own, personal home.

Households are the final variable explicitly used to differentiate between customers. Where the Inspiration Studio combines all the house types, layout variants, standards of finish and interior design styles in the model homes, 11 fictive households provide the scripts to encompass all the available choices and represent the complete home collection. In terms of how they are classified, BAM indicates that its underlying matrix acknowledges specific needs at various stages of life and has been drawn from IKEA quite literally. Although these households are said to reflect the mainstream in the Netherlands, they in fact favour larger families with children, as well as those with middle and higher incomes. The decision to use these target groups seems to have been made without any trace of embarrassment. In order to survive commercially, BAM has to sell its houses to a large number of customers. Within museology, however, this is an extremely sensitive issue.

Despite individual house-buyers being Homestudios' most important target group, the influence of institutional clients cannot be underestimated, as the cross-case comparison's second theme has already mentioned. Project developers, municipalities and, for instance, investors decide the overall architectural style of housing schemes, as well as their location and size. Institutional clients are thus another target market for BAM – perhaps less visible, but present nevertheless.

### The funda House: Inclusion over Socio-demographic Diversity

Two different customer groups can also be distinguished in the funda case. One consists of prospective house-buyers in the Netherlands, generally individual consumers, the other of professional chain partners in the construction industry. Unlike Homestudios, however, it seems as if the relative importance of these groups has been turned on its head: where BAM's Experience Centre clearly takes the individual consumer as its starting point, funda's goals mainly concern its professional partners. After all, the funda House's main objectives are to stimulate debate, encourage the use of big data by different partners in the chain and further demand-driven project development. Only its underlying question of whether the Netherlands builds what the Dutch are looking for brings the perspectives of individual consumers to the fore.

The funda House aims to represent the ideal home of the Dutch population in general. Where

both IKEA and BAM construct a variety of home interiors, here, a single house represents the ideal home of the 17 million Dutch, which equates to almost eight million households. Probably driven by the goal to stimulate debate, the architects and the data analyst dismissed the early concept of an "Option House" (a basic dwelling adaptable to specific demands) in favour of a more outspoken property, the terraced castle, to accommodate the average resident.

While IKEA's room settings and BAM's Homestudios differentiate between various household groups, the funda House includes the outcomes of searches made by all visitors to its website, regardless of socio-demographics. Socio-demographic data were not specifically collected, although the architects were, in any event, clear that their use in these circumstances could easily lead to exclusion or stereotyping. Wanting to design a house fit for today's manifold ways of living, they departed from the idea of diversity, instead aiming for inclusion. Nevertheless, their interpretation of the data did involve the issue of how visitors were represented, because only interactions with houses available for sale were included in the process, necessarily excluding renters.

### Synthesis

Develop suitable methods of differentiation.
While it makes sense for commercial firms to target groups of relatively well-off households, many museums – especially city museums – are committed to representing society better in their collections. The accusation that people are excluded is always unwelcome, and favouring a certain elite is perhaps even more sensitive. It is simply unacceptable for museums to focus exclusively on home-owners; other residents must also have a place in collections. This also means that museums cannot rely on the differentiation methods used by the commercial firms in this study, but must instead determine their own, possibly with reference to official local or national standards.

Identify substantial variables to define diversity.
All three of the commercial cases considered benefit from appealing to a diverse audience, but diversity is rarely defined as *cultural* diversity, unlike the position in museums. An example of this is the 2020 verdict of the *Rotterdamse Raad voor Kunst en Cultuur* (the Rotterdam Council for Art and Culture) on local cultural institutions. While acknowledging that museums focus on colour and

origin, the Council made a plea for this diversity to also include age, gender, sexuality and disability.[9] Apart from the question of whether the Council is correct in its observation, it must be noted that funda does not want to be restricted in relation to such socio-demographics. In the other two ensembles, the households that are distinguished resemble basic demographic categories, albeit that the groupings in both of these cases tend to view age as irrelevant. So, at IKEA, an earlier differentiation between "starting-out singles" and "singles" is now largely ignored, while the BAM matrix equates couples without children to empty nesters aged over 50. The other tools used to distinguish between visitors, like the money they are willing to spend, their tastes and preferred floor plans, shift the attention from socio-demographic to more substantial factors. Such an alternative, namely targeting a limited number of distinguishing features relevant to the topic instead of just using background variables, is worthy of further exploration.

9 — Rotterdamse Raad voor Kunst en Cultuur [2020]: 73. Accessed online, 19 February 2021.

# Connecting

In today's evaluations of the museological period room, the concept has been praised for its immersive qualities and its potential to enable and support individual visitor experiences. The renewed interest in period rooms seems to suggest that such ensembles can deliver convincing narratives that are easy to understand, evoke empathy and connect visitors to history. Nevertheless, as Chapter 2 argued, the apparent absence of visitor interactions with the objects on display requires a closer examination of their connective qualities. This fifth, and final, overarching theme focuses on the ways the commercial cases use their domestic ensembles to establish a connection between their visitors and clients on the one hand, and their products on the other. How, and to what extent, do the contemporary period-room-like displays of IKEA, BAM and funda facilitate understanding, empathy and experience? What connective qualities underlie these constructed domestic ensembles? After presenting the findings across the cases, discussing differences as well as similarities, I relate the ensembles' connective qualities to the museological concept of social objects and propose a refined model. I also argue that a contemporary collection strategy has to consider the visitor experience and I suggest a trifold conception to incorporate in museums' collecting policies.

### IKEA Room Settings: Affective, Interactive and Interpersonal Connections

The life that pervades each IKEA ensemble has been described as the essence of the company's room settings and relates to several aspects of connecting with visitors. On the first level, the rooms' familiar yet varied narratives aim to establish an *affective* connection between visitors and products. IKEA's ensembles aim to provide solutions to real-life problems and use variations in style, price and living situations to prevent uniformity and inspire different groups. Most ensembles also convey a strong sense of habitation through the suggestion of human presence, referred to by Sandberg and Garvey as the concept of "spatial effigies" and by Ledin & Machin as the principle of "indexing", which facilitates visitors being able to envision themselves in the room and connect to

the items on display. A positive affective valuation of IKEA's ensembles was also identified in Colombo, Laddaga & Antonietti's psychological research, insofar as the easy-to-understand narratives were combined with not-too-complex presentations, and especially when everyday objects and human figures were included. Although the study was based only on *images* representing domestic environments, it also valued the presence of perceptual stimuli. In the actual showrooms' constructed home interiors, the abundance of perceptual stimuli is even larger and the invitation to investigate even more explicit.

On closer inspection, a second type of connection can be found in the *interactive* link between visitors and products. When people follow the suggestions made to press or look inside something, or just to try the furniture, the room settings' affective connection is intensified and becomes interactive. The staged interiors stimulate interactions and value the testing of products over just looking. Although this interactive connection is designed by IKEA, the room settings' agency is not based on display techniques alone, but is also evoked by the presence and activities of visitors to the showrooms. Garvey highlights this interpersonal aspect as an important part of the inspiration IKEA aims to provide and argues that it falls partly outside the remit of the company, because "(...) inspiration is embedded squarely within a nexus of social practices and distributed agency rather than being evoked purely through the choreographed actions of management."[10] Nevertheless, the room settings facilitate those *interpersonal* connections, which can be seen as a third kind of link.[11]

### BAM's Homestudios: Affective and Experiential Connections

While Homestudios provides prospective buyers with options relating to both the exterior and interior of their future home, its Experience Centre concentrates on the latter. Just like the room settings at IKEA, the model home interiors are designed to offer visitors a familiar environment in which they can recognise their personal tastes and aspirational lifestyles. Moreover, while "inspire" is the word typically used by IKEA to describe the effect it wants its room settings to have, this is echoed in Homestudios' collection of 11 model homes, which has been given the name the Inspiration Studio. Consequently, in focusing on home interiors and using a variety of familiar narratives to inspire a diverse group of clients, BAM aims to establish an affective connection between customers and the company's products.

In comparison to IKEA's room settings, Homestudios' model homes are far less detailed. Scenarios are articulated through introductory texts, layouts and furnishings, rather than storytelling accessories or sensorial stimuli. Interpersonal connections with other visitors are not a common feature of the model homes, but face-to-face contact with experts is. Home advisors guide future residents through the Experience Centre, facilitate their decision-making and might even coach them in developing a personal style. Where IKEA's style groups simply intend to appeal to a variety of visitors, BAM's Homestudios' concept explains the styles, encourages buyers to recognise themselves and gives "tips & tricks" for creating a harmonious personal home interior.

The connection sought by Homestudios is not directly linked with the individual pieces of furniture on display, unlike the position with IKEA's room settings. Admittedly, all the products on display are available for purchase, but Homestudios' main goal is to guide customers through the house-buying procedure. The staged home interiors have to enable clients to think about their desired finishes, feel the spatial qualities of diverse layout options and so experience their future homes before they are actually built. The Inspiration Studio is explicitly part of a wider process that aims to establish an *experiential* connection when buyers visit the five different studios. Principles relating to experiences underlie the Homestudios concept, and three main steps help buyers to make their individual decisions: gathering knowledge, finding inspiration and using both to create a future home. While the first three studios (Knowledge Studio, Inspiration Studio and Creation Studio) were named after these steps, the Cookery Studio focuses on a separate element, applying all three stages to the kitchen. Then, by presenting individual choices in virtual reality, the 3D Studio supports the overall process of knowledge, inspiration and creation. This immersive presentation is intended to help clients to finalise the details of their property by letting them experience the effects of all their decisions before their home is actually built.

### The funda House: Affective and Provocative Connections

Like BAM's Homestudios and IKEA's room settings, the funda House first aims to establish an affective connection. Its ensemble is based on actual house purchases made by visitors to funda.nl, as well as data on the houses and features viewed the most. The outcome, the terraced

castle, aims to convey a sense of freedom and space within the limitations of a standard dwelling. Similar to the other cases, the funda House combines a familiar narrative with ingenious solutions to meet the demands of contemporary consumers. Likewise, it attempts to establish an affective connection with visitors by presenting family scenarios. The architectural renderings present a fairly neat home in which a human presence is suggested in a modern and minimalistic style. Although the master bedroom, children's attic and box room play out a specific family scenario without portraying the inhabitants, the short accompanying video focuses on the variety of people involved: all those looking for their dream home, as well as the team seeking to ensure that these searches are sucessful. The two-minute video shows no less than 13 different people, including eight website visitors and five creators: the data analyst, the two architects and the project leader.

The funda House communicates on a higher level of abstraction. Its affective connection is not related to the ensemble's furnishings, and possibly not even to the actual new-build home it represents. Instead, it aims to establish a connection between visitors to the website and the idea of living in such a different house, as well as (equally) between professional partners and the notion of developing homes that better suit the demands of consumers. Funda's primary aims of stimulating a discussion, encouraging the better use of available data and advocating for a more demand-driven approach suggest that the big-data house is essentially aiming to establish a *provocative* connection, making the property, above all, a topic of debate.

### Synthesis

Redefine the connective qualities.

The various kinds of connections the companies are aiming to establish resonate with the qualities Nina Simon attributes to "social objects" in the fourth and eponymous chapter of *The Participatory Museum* (2010). Simon builds on the notion of object-centred sociality, which is derived from cognitive sociology and was disseminated by Jyri Engeström in a blog in 2005. Engeström argues in the blog that successful social networks are built

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10 ____ Garvey 2018 / Unpacking: 29.
11 ____ Surprise and change are also elements that both of my IKEA interviewees described as ways of connecting with visitors. I have highlighted these aspects in the cross-case theme on Reflecting, but they could also have been accentuated in this one.

around specific shared objects, like photos on Flickr, events on Upcoming.org and URLs on (the former) del.icio.us.[12] When Simon introduces the concept of social objects into museology, she roots it firmly in collections, defining objects as physical items and distinguishing between those that are active, personal, relational and provocative.[13] Although active objects do not play a role in my comparative case study, the other qualities are easily recognisable in the affective, interpersonal and provocative connections the commercial ensembles want to establish. Interactive and experiential qualities can be identified as useful additions to this range of social or connective qualities. Moreover, the comparative case study leads me to propose that the existing model should be refined and the terminology slightly adjusted to identify (besides active qualities) affective, interactive, interpersonal, experiential and provocative attributes as connective instruments.

### Establishing an affective connection is a crucial first step.

The cross-case theme analysis demonstrates that affective connections are an essential first step in relating visitors to products. In all the cases, this connecting starts with the establishment of an affective relationship by presenting objects in a recognisable, familiar narrative. While a complete understanding of the ensemble is served by coherence and legibility, added elements of complexity, surprise or alienation (as proposed in the cross-case theme "Reflecting") can also lead to exploration, creating a higher level of comprehension.[14] Everyday objects and (a suggested) human presence, especially of children, further strengthen the social qualities of ensembles. Striking a balance between these factors produces easy-to-understand narratives that stimulate further investigation. This could also serve as a model for museums, helping them to create ensembles that establish affective connections with visitors.

### Think about a future display during the process of collecting.

Although the subject of connecting is closely related to the presentation of objects and ensembles, museums need to think about a future display as early as the collecting phase. After all, the value of objects in a collection is nowadays measured by their actual use. Different methods of connecting require different engagements with objects and will therefore affect collecting policies.

If, for example, interaction is desired, the actual employment of objects has to be taken into account during the process of collecting. Nevertheless, even though the acquisition of extra items might enable (future) interactions with authentic materials, it does not erase the fundamentally different perception of objects-as-commodities and objects-as-heritage. Sandberg convincingly describes the behaviour of showroom visitors as an acquired cognitive skill, in which the tentative testing of furniture belongs to "the realm of pre-ownership".[15] The visit to a museum can be viewed as a similar acquired skill, in which visitors have learned not to handle or even touch objects, but just to observe them in silence. When boundaries blur, signs are used to explain the rules, thus disturbing the immersive experience the ensemble has tried so hard to build.

### Encourage active engagement with collections.

As the cross-case comparison demonstrates, establishing an affective connection is generally followed by the forming of further bonds. Although physical interactions with objects might be problematic in a museum environment, IKEA and BAM have clearly designed their showrooms and the Experience Centre with interaction in mind. Their physical displays are supported by digital platforms that also offer active engagement, especially in the case of Homestudios, where the online tool functions as a combined planner, personal archive and meeting space. BAM's trifold concept of knowledge, inspiration and creation offers an interesting direction for museums to incorporate in their collecting policies, matching ideas about the museum as a studio, laboratory, method or creative technology. As the BAM case indicates, while knowledge and inspiration already correspond with traditional ideas about the role of museum collections – as do the material objects in fairly static ensembles, the use of props in interactive displays and the expert guidance offered – creation must also be acknowledged an important aspect of the visitor experience. To this end, Homestudios not only facilitates material research, but also designed an online platform to support decision-making. Museums could also present their collections on both offline and online platforms, not prompted by the sole desire to tell their story about their objects, but by the intention to create somewhere visitors can find each other through the interest they share in certain items.

### Explore the use of platforms for collecting purposes.

An online platform like Rijksstudio can be a source of inspiration for how to use a museum ensemble creatively, thus giving meaning to collections over and over again. Such a platform matches the "museum method" of discovery, captioning and juxtaposition described by Nicholas Thomas in *The Return of Curiosity* (2016). This method does, however, seem to be limited to the use of existing collections. Could something similar be possible for the process of collecting? Could the sharing of museum ensembles in the form of, for instance, images, attractive descriptions and stories about its collecting give rise to a multi-perspective discussion on contemporary home life? Could it lead to visitor suggestions of things-not-to-be-overlooked, private ensembles that shed a new light on museum collections or potential new perspectives that might be added? And could this also give direction to the expansion of a contemporary museum collection? These questions are certainly worthy of further investigation.

12 ___ Engeström, Jyri (2005). Why some social network services work and others don't. Blog on zengestrom.com, last viewed 11 November 2019.
13 ___ Simon 2010: Chapter 4, footnote 1 and pages 127-129.
14 ___ Colombo, Laddaga & Antonietti (2015: 2261) draw on Kaplan & Kaplan's model to define coherence as the capacity to easily include the environment in a known scheme; legibility is defined as the amount of information available to support comprehension and facilitate orientation. The authors further mention complexity and mystery as the constituent factors of exploration. They relate complexity to the presence of perceptual stimuli, while mystery concerns the features that invite further investigation.
15 ___ Sandberg 2011: 64-65.

# Conclusion & Discussion

In exploring viable options for how city museums can collect contemporary home life, this dissertation relates to two main concepts, contemporary collecting and collecting home life. These were investigated in Part 1. After Chapter 1 established the main principles of and controversies concerning contemporary collecting, Chapter 2 proposed the period room as a model for collecting present-day home life, arguing that its recent reappraisal is closely linked with highly valued aspects of contemporary collecting. Next, the comparative case study (Part 2) examined three cases from outside the museum context: three period-room-like ensembles with which a furniture retailer, construction firm and estate agent try to tempt consumers to buy. Each of these commercial cases is first described in its original context and then analysed from a museum perspective, examining the insights that could be gained from them. Part 3 began with a cross-case theme analysis in which replicative and divergent findings across the cases were discussed, leading to a synthesis at a higher level of abstraction. These insights are, however, quite dissimilar. While some relate to the reference framework, others concern policy principles and others still offer concrete tools for selecting objects and constructing ensembles. The current chapter orders these insights and gives them a logical home, thus aiming to provide impetus for a shared contemporary collecting strategy. As the details can be found in the previous chapter, I will emphasise the main points here and, in particular, highlight the issues that merit further debate.

During an expert meeting I organised in June 2020, a similar approach was discussed with colleagues from the heritage sector (due to the coronavirus restrictions, this took place online). Various experts in the fields of modern urban culture, domestic interiors, participatory collecting and collection valuation discussed the concept model that I had sent to them earlier. The majority of the curators present appeared to assess concrete acquisition proposals against the Dutch valuation method *Op de museale weegschaal* (Assessing Museum Collections), but were also looking for ways to grasp the selection of contemporary heritage, which is a step that precedes the

valuation approach. One of the participants briefly summarised the main questions: "How do you enter the city, how do you obtain the ensembles, and how do you establish your criteria there? (...) And are *you* [the museum professional] the right person to embark on this quest?" They shared the need to have a proactive collection policy, although doubted the possibility of establishing a shared model and favoured a process-based strategy instead. This chapter therefore not only concludes my dissertation, but also builds on the discussion described. It must not be understood as a final conclusion, but as the start of a further debate.

## Towards a proactive collecting strategy

The starting point of an active collecting strategy in the field of contemporary living culture is the desire to periodically expand an existing collection with objects and ensembles that paint a picture of home life in the present – not guided by what happens to be on offer, but prompted by a rational and proactive collection policy. In this study, the context for such a strategy is formed by city museums and cultural-historical collections that have an interest in domestic interiors or, more broadly, home life. Three main steps are distinguished below, which together form a cyclical process in which the selection of objects and ensembles gradually becomes more concrete. Ultimately, the actual acquisition proposals can be assessed using a valuation method and further action can then be undertaken as appropriate.

Such a strategy is based on the premise that contemporary collecting requires museum expertise. This certainly does not exclude cooperation, and nor does it implicate the caricatural and pretentious connoisseurship of the past. I want to emphasise that the act of collecting in a city museum requires a commitment to current residents and future users, as well as expertise in helping to select and preserve heritage, make it accessible, interpret it and reflect on the entire process. Moreover, returning to the questions posed earlier, this includes the responsibility of museum professionals to identify what is worth preserving and make decisions about it.

Although the curator's authority has been contested, with the point made that collecting is not a neutral act, the notion of a wholly objective way of creating a collection is an idée fixe, as I concluded earlier. Even if large numbers of visitors are involved in the process, interpretation is still necessary, expertise required and the outcome

is inevitably susceptible to personal ideas and beliefs. The process of collecting can, however, be made transparent, the criteria explained, various collaborations entered into, and both the act of collecting and the choice of objects reflected on. Transparency, a conscious choice of varying perspectives, continuity and reflexivity all require museum expertise and need to be embedded in a museum's collecting policy.

## Step 1: Determine the substantive and pragmatic starting points

The first step in the type of contemporary collecting process referred to above is to establish the policy framework and determine both the substantive and pragmatic principles behind the proposed acquisition. Referred to as "The Collection" in the scheme underlying the comparative case study, this step is subdivided into matters pertaining to scope, size and materiality. As the cross-case synthesis concluded, ensembles can imbue objects with different meanings, making it important to determine the scope of an intended acquisition. Does it concern a home's interior, the daily life taking place inside it, or is it (for instance) about making yourself at home in a new environment? Taking the need for compact collections as a starting point, the synthesis further concluded that a selection of four or five ensembles can provide a reasonable impression of contemporary home life at a particular point in time. Furthermore, along with size and scope, a museum also has to consider any special requirements or restrictions regarding manageability, an important aspect of which is materiality.

My main plea regarding the policy framework concerns materiality. It is important in a contemporary collecting strategy that contextualisation forms part of the construction of coherent ensembles that combine material objects with their immaterial elements. Including a variety of materials not only contributes to more layered ensembles with different sensorial qualities, but also helps to ensure they are understood more completely. Although the intertwining of material culture and intangible elements requires further examination, it does not mean that these elements should be at the heart of museums' collections. In an attempt to encompass the lived experiences of as many individuals as possible in the heritage of everyday life, curators currently collect large numbers of personal stories from many different locations. This produces a mountain of data of a very personal nature, sometimes without any sense of cohesion

or an overarching context, or with selection criteria that remain unclear. While websites, archives, books and radio programmes all acquire personal stories and contribute to the shaping of cultural heritage, material objects are what distinguish museum collections from other ensembles. Indeed, they should be the focus of a cultural-historical museum's collecting strategy. Where today's emphasis is still on individual objects, museums should pay more attention to the different and changing meanings of their collections – meanings that are not inherent in objects, but are situated and contextual instead. Presentations on the internet often testify to the management role of museums, with objects individually photographed and described in a standard manner. Here, too, the expression of how objects, images, language, research data and the deliberations underlying acquisitions are interwoven could be improved.

## Step 2: Develop method and criteria

Once the substantive and pragmatic starting points have been established, a more precise collecting strategy can gradually be determined. This relates to both the method of collecting and the selection criteria. Earlier, these aspects were referred to using the terms 'collecting', 'representing' and 'reflecting', with questions about how a museum aims to collect, whom it wants to represent and what kind of home life it plans to reflect. As these three elements are closely related, they must be approached and weighed together.

### How to Collect?

When it comes to the method of collecting, previously subdivided into strategies, participants and decision-making, a museum first defines its own contribution and determines how it wants to relate to other stakeholders. For example, who will be approached for collaboration? To what extent will the collection criteria be predetermined? How will these decisions be made? A museum's role can be fulfilled differently per project, depending on matters such as the objectives, available in-house expertise and resources. Along the way, the actual process must be recorded, including the precise roles the participants play and why particular decisions are made.

It is striking that collaborative and co-creative projects still set the tone in the debate about collecting, even though they are not necessarily the most appropriate. Co-developed collecting projects often strive to achieve a kind of 'maximum participation', based on the notion that the rele-

vance of museums can be found in representation on an individual level. A variety of short-term, small-scale projects feature residents working intensively with a museum, with individual participants contributing personal objects or stories. Representation at such an individual level is not, however, feasible. Indeed, perhaps even more importantly, the results have little relevance to others if an overarching context is lacking. Moreover, from a resident's point of view, participation is a right, not an obligation, and even if citizens do not want to participate actively, they must know that their interests are represented. We need to take a fresh look at the ways in which our collecting strategies do justice to many different residents. Consultative strategies, including market research and the use of big data, should be regarded as serious alternatives to co-developed projects. It is certainly worth exploring whether such alternatives could provide opportunities to transcend the individual level of small-scale participatory collecting and instead find common ground on a higher level; or, at the very least, consideration should be given to whether different strategies could produce a collection in which residents and visitors can either recognise or oppose themselves. Museums should make case-by-case decisions about which method of collecting is the most appropriate and how this affects the collections that are produced.

Such reconsiderations could also lead to the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders and participants in the collecting process: not only individual city residents and visitors to museums, but also external experts, companies, 'institutional clients' like municipalities, and fellow heritage bodies. The possible roles of various stakeholders could then be examined, and the network mapped out, at the start of the process of updating a contemporary collection.

### Whom to Represent?

It is not only the method of collecting that deserves re-evaluation; the concept of representation should also be re-examined. I have argued that representation at an individual level is neither feasible nor desirable. Nevertheless, a collection that reflects only a very limited segment of the population is also unacceptable. A city museum's ensembles should be a reasonable representation of the city in which the museum is located, as well as one with which many different people can identify. Finding a balance between individual identities and shared values is crucial in this. In the scheme underlying the cross-case comparison,

this dilemma involved both 'reflecting' and 'representing'. The latter aspect of this pertained to diversity, and it is clear that the three companies investigated focus on target groups as well as methods of differentiation.

As the cross-case theme analysis concluded, while it makes sense for commercial firms to target relatively well-off households, city museums have a commitment to achieve a more accurate representation of society; consequently, museums must develop their own methods of differentiation. What is interesting, however, is that the companies examined attempt to attract as many different customers as possible while using only a limited number of substantive variables. In contrast to the museum sector, in which diversity is primarily defined as cultural, the variables distinguished in the cases do not so much relate to the rather static issue of their customers' backgrounds as they do to the products on offer: the type of house, the function of a space, the style of furniture or interior decoration and the price of the items available to purchase. As the use of socio-demographic variables in a collection strategy can be restrictive, especially given the increasing diversity in cities. It may therefore be attractive to follow the example set by the study's commercial cases and identify a small number of collection-related variables to differentiate between visitor groups. Diversity thus becomes less dependent on visitor backgrounds and more focused on distinctive characteristics within collections or sub-collections.

Balancing individual identities and shared values also relates to the issue of representation. Where museums sometimes collect in great detail, thereby explicating the individuality of real or fictive inhabitants down to their smallest elements, the importance of finding an equilibrium between individuality and conformity has emerged. Although the ensembles of the three commercial firms are not definitive, I am inclined towards avoiding too much detailing. Indeed, I would now collect the essential, visible parts of an interior in an overall narrative that is coherent and easy-to-understand, adding just a few storytelling accessories to facilitate exploration.

As a final topic for discussion in this regard, I suggest that personas, which should be especially constructed to represent family life at home, would contribute to a more inclusive collection strategy. Such fictitious characters may relate to households instead of individuals – just like those in Homestudios, but better suited to a city museum's target market. They could therefore be based on city demographics and loaded with meaning by a

variety of respondents, resulting in character families that are abstract and personal at the same time. It is certainly worth investigating whether this would help museums to reflect a number of different contemporary home lives.

### What to Reflect?

Representation not only concerns the people included in a collection, but also the kind of home life reflected. One of the difficult issues when developing a contemporary collecting strategy involves making decisions about a specific angle and subject-matter. The commercial ensembles in this case study combine a focus on ordinary, everyday home life and the artistic perspective of design and style. In doing so, they highlight newness, create coherence and differentiate between their visitors through taste. In this way, they depict a somewhat carefree life, in which painful issues or social topics are avoided. For city museums, however, social subject-matters can be a relevant starting point for any periodic collection updates. Issues previously mentioned include working from home during the coronavirus pandemic, home life in a neighbourhood facing large-scale demolition and renovation, as well as topics related to safety, privacy or sustainability. Although research into subjects like these will generally use insights from existing studies, museums may have to invest in local research to sharpen a local profile and apply it to a collection of post-material culture.

The comparative case study has further suggested that collections of contemporary home life benefit from being an antidote to the sometimes-uninspiring ordinariness of everyday life. In order to be appreciated, all three of the companies scrutinised make an effort to create tension between everyday reality and their constructed home interiors. As is nowadays preferred, when contemporary collecting is not only perceived as 'collecting today for tomorrow', but also as a performative act, ensembles should spark an immediate interest. Magnifying differences, choosing extremes, adding surprise or inserting an element of estrangement could achieve this and also improve what is understood of an ensemble's relevance. City museums can do this by constructing a few ensembles simultaneously and choosing clearly different households and living situations as a starting point. They might also link acquisitions to their historical collections, providing a diachronic comparison that delivers both a temporal context for the contemporary home interior and breathes new life into the existing collection. Regular reinterpretations of historical ensembles open up new

perspectives, encourage polyvocality and ensure that the dynamism of current collections is maintained.

## Step 3: Encourage active engagement with collections

Having a proactive contemporary collection policy means that a performative form of collecting contributes to the desire museums have to actually be present in the present. Although museums tend to adopt a predominantly longer-term perspective when building a collection, there is added value in making an ensemble immediately visible and, preferably, ensuring it is a topic of conversation and debate. To this end, connecting visitors to objects and ensembles is crucial.

Relating visitors to collections starts with the establishment of an affective relationship by presenting objects in a recognisable context. As the case study demonstrated, contextual ensembles must primarily be comprehensible, which means that they need to fit easily within a familiar context and contain enough information for them to be 'readable'. Added elements should then stimulate exploration, implying the inclusion of perceptual stimuli and features that invite further investigation, like mystery, surprise or alienation. A suggested human presence, especially in relation to children, also enhances the affective qualities of ensembles. Striking a balance between comprehension and exploration results in easy-to-understand narratives that encourage evaluation, perhaps serving as a model for constructing ensembles that establish affective connections with visitors.

Depending on the engagement with objects envisioned, any intention for an interactive, interpersonal, experiential or provocative relationship to follow on from the affective connection may influence collecting policies further. As a consequence, a collection strategy needs to consider the use of an acquisition, with a decision made about whether or not it will affect the objects and ensembles to be collected in the future.

If a connection to visitors is to be achieved, acquisitions must actually be displayed, whether online or offline. Museums mainly do this by presenting objects in the physical space, or by making them accessible on their websites as part of a collection. Sometimes, more active engagement with collections is encouraged, for example by organising regular meetings or setting up a digital platform in such a way that ensembles can be used as creative technology. The Rijksstudio

website, for instance, encourages the application of digitised, famous artwork from the Rijksmuseum. In doing so, it makes use of the notion of discovery, captioning and juxtaposition which, according to Nicholas Thomas, underpins the "museum method". Something similar is conceivable with the objects in collections relating to home interiors. Indeed, it would certainly be worth investigating whether contemporary furnishings and floor plans can also give rise to an interactive way of 'looking' and prompt a multi-perspective discussion on contemporary home life.

### Final remarks

As noted earlier, this chapter should be understood not so much as a final conclusion, but as the start of an ongoing debate. I would therefore like to develop this strategy further in collaboration with other cultural-history museums. An investigation of whether such a method can be generalised and incorporated within the existing, commonly used, valuation method is therefore recommended.

Finally, I am of the view that museums of cultural history should develop a joint perspective on forming an overarching collection of contemporary home life in the Netherlands. Such a vision may initially be limited to a joint valuation framework, which could be created in conjunction with a proactive collection strategy. In essence, this involves the development of a shared 'language', a combination of good questions and substantive criteria, which each museum can apply to its own collection policy. In the longer term, harmonising such policies would be advantageous. In view of the increasing uniformity of Dutch cities, I am inspired somewhat by SAMDOK and the collections of my study's three cases to suggest that local, regional and national museums could unite their collecting efforts and, at the very least, design an umbrella platform in which home life is central. Such coordination at different levels should result in considerably less overlap, while also leading to a more comprehensive collection of contemporary home life.

**2018**

Residents in a student house in Kralingen in 2018, as photographed by Malou van den Berg for the series *Rotterdam 6.30 pm*.

**91693.14**

# Summary

Cultural-history museums have a rich tradition when it comes to home life. Nevertheless, despite the constant development of collections that already exist, there is little explicit or theoretical focus on collecting contemporary home life. The current criteria for valuing interiors include completeness, style purity, artistry, rarity and historical importance, demonstrating a focus on retrospective and art-historic perspectives. Today's debate about collecting, however, adopts both a more 'common' and a more 'contemporary' stance: the process does not particularly concern the preservation of an endangered past, as it does the selection of the relevant present. Moreover, this relevance is no longer exclusively defined in terms of eminence, but also encompasses the ordinary and the everyday and their wide variety. The abundance of potentially pertinent materials is, paradoxically, combined with a demand for compact and manageable collections, but the absence of up-to-date selection criteria means that contemporary collecting is a very complex task.

## Part 1 / Theory

This dissertation aims to identify successful strategies for collecting contemporary home life that can be adopted by social-history museums. The first part examines the two concepts underlying my research: contemporary collecting and the collecting of home life by museums.

Chapter 1 turns the gaze on collecting the present on a meta-level, revealing that such an orientation is a growing trend arising from democratisation, contextualisation, visitor-orientation and activism. Although contemporary collecting is now considered to be an essential task for museums, collecting practices, purposes, and even definitions, vary. This dissertation defines contemporary collecting as it stands in contrast to retrospective collecting. While the latter implies historical distance, the former involves the selection of objects directly from the contexts of creation or first use. In shifting the focus to its purposes, it becomes clear that contemporary collecting is not only motivated by museums' need to be present in the present, but also – on a collection level – by the objective of developing inclusive ensembles. The latter can be traced back to two different basic ideas: the preferred underlying process (participatory collecting) and the desired result (a diverse collection). The abundance of potentially relevant materials, the pursuit of richly varied collections and the goal of shaping them in a participatory manner make contemporary collecting a difficult task for museums. Among curators, their (many) doubts about selecting the *right* objects and stories, and even whether they are actually the right people to be making such decisions, lead to a very reserved approach.

Chapter 2 shifts the focus to collecting home life, and highlights the period room as an eminently museological way to contextualise objects in an immersive setting. Modern evocative ensembles use new techniques and emphasise different qualities. Nevertheless, they are unmistakably part of the same tradition – even if the term 'period room' is carefully avoided. The revaluation of the underlying concept in today's museum presentations is closely linked with the current highly valued aspects of contemporary collecting, including the demands for contextualisation, representation and connecting people to the museums they visit and the objects on show. It is therefore remarkable that debates on collecting contemporary interiors have overlooked the notion of a present-day period room. This is especially surprising since, outside the museum setting, furniture stores, construction firms and estate agents try to seduce potential buyers using modern period-room-like displays.

## Part 2 / Comparative Case Study

The second part of the book contains the comparative case study, which examines the contemporary period-room-like ensembles of three commercial firms: IKEA's room settings, BAM's Homestudios and the funda House. These chapters have a similar structure: after a brief introduction, the ensembles are presented, the methods used by the companies are described and the underlying ideas are discussed from their points of view. Next, adopting a museological perspective, four case-specific themes relate each ensemble to controversies concerning the collecting of contemporary home life by museums. The choice of examples that differ in aspects like size, scope and materiality means the case study offers maximum variety, thereby increasing the likelihood that it reflects diverse approaches. The development of a viable strategy for how cultural-history institutions collect contemporary home life involves an analysis of the cases from a museum curator's perspective and asks what insights can be extracted from them. This is reflected in the main research question: What insights into the museological collecting of contemporary home life can be acquired from the ideas and practices identified in the study's three cases?

Chapter 3 discusses IKEA's room settings, i.e., its staged home interiors in which individual pieces of furniture are placed in various home backdrops relating to function, lifestyle, budget and taste. Like a museum's period rooms, these settings are presented as a series of accessible individual rooms framed within a larger collection. The company claims to provide visitors with imaginative solutions to familiar challenges. These real-life problems are central to the first theme, which applies a museum perspective to the images of modern home life that the rooms reflect. In their construction of the home interiors, the IKEA designers use a fixed approach to connect to the experiences of different customer groups. With local home visits and a worldwide product range, the room settings appeal to both a local and a global market, while simultaneously also promoting a Swedish profile. The theme *Swedishness* investigates what city museums, which are often searching for a local identity, can learn from this. The third theme focuses on the contextualisation of objects and argues that museums should consider the collection of coherent *functional* ensembles as a starting point to ensure variety in future displays. Finally, the fourth theme explores the connective qualities of period rooms, which are traditionally renowned for their ability to connect visitors to exhibits, by comparing them to the vast sensory repertoire offered by IKEA.

Widening the perspective from furnishings to houses, Chapter 4 examines Homestudios. This concept was created by the Dutch construction firm BAM and consists of a limited collection of houses available for purchase, with buyer options on offer for both the exteriors and interiors. Architectural styles, layouts, the standard of finishes and styles of the interiors are the main ingredients of the company's contemporary collection of homes, and the first theme addresses the involvement of clients in building these ensembles. Just as museums are searching for compact, but inclusive, collections, Homestudios has to balance standardisation with diversity. The second theme explores to what extent BAM's approach, which uses 11 fictional households to unify the available choices, can inspire museums in their pursuit of manageable collections with a wide appeal. The tension between cultural values and personal identity is discussed in the third theme, where BAM – much more than museums – seeks a common denominator and is cautious about the degree of detailing of the model interiors. While the company initially focused on creating a coherent set of options, its Experience Centre shifted the emphasis to the customer's involvement. Prospective buyers are now escorted through five different studios and are guided by a personal advisor in making their decisions. The last theme relates to the striking aspect of experiences and links the trifold concept of knowledge, inspiration and creation to the notion of the museum as a creative technology.

Chapter 5 examines the funda House, a virtual home developed by the property website funda. The house is based on a combination of the best-selling properties and the features searched for the most on the site. Prompted by the idea of co-creation, the first theme analyses the use of big data as a bottom-up strategy and argues that it provides an opportunity to transcend the individual level of small-scale participatory collecting. Asking if big data can support a more objective collection process and serve as an alternative to curatorial authority, the second theme finds that interpretation is nevertheless crucial, expertise is still required and the outcome remains susceptible to personal biases. Materiality is the subject of the third theme, which is inspired by the difference between traditional museological period rooms and this house "built of data and dreams". The theme suggests that the funda House cannot be fully understood without its digital counterparts and proposes that the digital aspect is part of a material trajectory. Finally, the fourth theme focuses on the cultural values underlying the outcome of the funda project – a terraced house with a spacious, castle-like feel – and concludes that the collection of common objects grouped in ordinary ensembles would benefit from adding an element of estrangement. In this, museums' historical collections can play an important role.

## Part 3 / Strategy

In the third and final part of the dissertation, the insights gained are used to build a strategy for how museums can collect contemporary home life and are discussed on a higher level.

Chapter 6 sets out to synthesise the within-case findings at a greater level of abstraction. Structured around the five wider, overarching themes of the previously established framework, the cross-case theme analysis examines both replicative and divergent findings. In particular, it compares previous within-case outcomes, discusses differences and similarities and develops preliminary insights further. Each section concludes with a synthesis containing several recommendations regarding the collection of contemporary home life by city museums. The framework below briefly sets out the research questions and the important issues related to the themes.

| Theme | Question | Issues |
|---|---|---|
| The collection | What domestic ensembles have the companies constructed? | Size & scope |
| | | Materiality |
| Collecting | How have the companies selected their objects and ensembles? | Strategies |
| | | Participants |
| | | Who decides? |
| Reflecting | What do the ensembles reflect? | Perspective |
| | | Time |
| | | Cultural values, personal identity |
| Representing | Whom do the ensembles represent? | Diversity |
| | | Target groups |
| | | Methods of differentiation |
| Connecting | How do the ensembles connect visitors to the collections? | Qualities |
| | | Use |

The final chapter organises the insights gained, emphasises the main points and highlights the issues that merit further debate. Distinguishing between a number of levels and steps, the aim is to provide an impetus for a contemporary collecting strategy. The starting point is the desire for periodic expansions of existing collections with objects and ensembles that paint a picture of home life in the present – not guided by what happens to be on offer, but prompted by a rational and proactive collection policy. Such a strategy is based on the premises that contemporary collecting requires museum expertise and that curators bear the responsibility for this. Absolute objectivity in this process is impossible, but transparency, continuity, reflexivity and a conscious choice of varying perspectives can indeed be embedded in a museum's collection policy.

The first step in this contemporary collecting process is to determine both the substantive and the pragmatic principles behind a proposed acquisition. Along with the scope and intended size of a new collection, a museum also has to consider any special requirements or restrictions regarding manageability. My main plea is that while museums should (continue to) focus on material culture, they should also combine these material objects explicitly with their immaterial elements. Where today's emphasis is still on individual items, museums should pay more attention to the different and changing meanings of their collections. The expression of how objects, images, language,

research data, underlying ideas and meanings are interwoven could be improved.

A more precise collecting strategy can gradually be determined in a second step, which relates to the selection criteria as well as the methods employed. When it comes to the latter, I argue that representation on an individual level is neither feasible nor desirable, concluding that consultative strategies should be viewed as serious alternatives to co-developed projects. In relation to the former, two main questions arise: *whom* does the museum want to represent and *what* type of home life does it want to reflect? It becomes clear that the issue of representation involves striking a balance between individual identities and shared values. The case study also demonstrates that diversity can include a focus on a limited number of collection-related, substantive variables, rather than on socio-demographic characteristics. Concerning the issue of *what* a collection reflects, it seems that while the three commercial cases examined in this dissertation depict a somewhat carefree life, city museums can instead choose societal subject-matters as a relevant starting point and place them as part of a diachronic perspective. Above all, a specific point of view must be formulated from the start.

The third step sets out to encourage active engagement with objects. In line with the notion that collections must actually be 'used' in order to be relevant, it is essential to connect visitors to objects and ensembles. This starts with the establishment of an affective relationship. Depending on

the engagement envisioned, any intention to establish a further relationship, whether interactive, interpersonal, experiential or provocative, can influence collecting policies. As a consequence, a strategy must consider the future use of an acquisition, with decisions made about whether or not it will affect the objects and ensembles to be collected.

These three distinct steps form a cyclical process wherein the selection of objects and ensembles gradually becomes more concrete. Ultimately, the actual acquisition proposals can be assessed using a valuation method and further action can then be undertaken as appropriate. Consequently, it is recommended that such a proactive collection strategy should be developed further in collaboration with various cultural-historical museums. It should also be incorporated within an existing, and often used, valuation methodology. In the longer term, museums should additionally develop a joint perspective on forming an overarching collection of contemporary home life in the Netherlands.

# Het verzamelen van eigentijdse wooncultuur

## Samenvatting

Cultuurhistorische musea hebben een rijke traditie op het gebied van wooncultuur, maar hoewel zij hun collecties verder ontwikkelen, is er weinig expliciete of theoretische aandacht voor het verzamelen van eigentijdse wooncultuur. Bestaande criteria voor het waarderen van interieurs, zoals compleetheid, stijlzuiverheid, vakmanschap, zeldzaamheid en historisch belang, verraden een retrospectief en overwegend kunst-historisch perspectief. Bij veel cultuurhistorische stadsmusea is het perspectief echter 'alledaagser' en 'eigentijdser': het gaat er niet zozeer om datgene te bewaren wat dreigt te verdwijnen, maar om datgene te selecteren wat relevant is voor het heden – en die relevantie is allang niet meer uitsluitend gedefinieerd in termen van bijzonderheid, maar omvat ook het gewone, het alledaagse en de grote verscheidenheid daarbinnen. Paradoxaal genoeg gaat de overvloed aan potentieel relevante voorwerpen gepaard met een vraag naar compacte en goed beheerbare collecties, waarbij het ontbreken van actuele criteria het verzamelen van eigentijdse objecten extra lastig maakt.

### Deel 1 / Theorie

Dit proefschrift verkent verschillende strategieën voor het verzamelen van eigentijdse wooncultuur door stadsmusea met een cultuur-historische collectie. Deel 1 onderzoekt allereerst de beide concepten die ten grondslag liggen aan deze studie: het eigentijds verzamelen en het verzamelen van wooncultuur.

Hoofdstuk 1 richt zich op het eigentijds verzamelen op metaniveau en maakt duidelijk dat democratisering, contextualisering, bezoekers-oriëntatie en activisme achtereenvolgens bijdroegen aan een toenemende oriëntatie op het heden. Ondanks dat hedendaags verzamelen tegenwoordig als fundamentele museumtaak wordt beschouwd, verschillen definities, doelstellingen en verzamelpraktijken. In deze dissertatie wordt eigentijds verzamelen gede-finieerd in tegenstelling tot retrospectief verza-melen en gaat het om de selectie van objecten uit de context van hun schepping of eerste gebruik. Verder komt in dit hoofdstuk naar voren dat de doelstellingen op verschillende niveaus spelen. Eigentijds verzamelen wordt zowel ingegeven door de wens van musea om een zichtbare rol in de samenleving te spelen, als – op collectieniveau

– door het verlangen om inclusieve collecties te ontwikkelen. Dat laatste wordt soms gemotiveerd door het gewenste proces (participatief verzamelen), soms door het beoogde resultaat (een diverse collectie). De overvloedige beschikbaarheid van mogelijk relevant materiaal, het streven naar rijkgeschakeerde collecties en de wens om die samen met inwoners te vormen, maken het eigentijds verzamelen een moeilijke opgave voor musea. Bij conservatoren leiden de vele twijfels over de vragen of ze wel de *juiste* dingen selecteren en of *zij* eigenlijk wel de aangewezen persoon zijn om die keuze te maken bovendien tot een uiterst gereserveerde houding.

Hoofdstuk 2 verlegt de aandacht naar het verzamelen van wooncultuur en argumenteert dat de stijlkamer een bij uitstek museale manier is om objecten op een aansprekende manier van context te voorzien. Moderne evocatieve ensembles gebruiken nieuwe technieken en benadrukken andere kwaliteiten, maar staan onmiskenbaar in dezelfde traditie – ook al wordt de term 'stijlkamer' angstvallig gemeden. De herwaardering van het onderliggende concept is nauw gerelateerd aan belangrijke aspecten van het eigentijds verza-melen, zoals de behoefte aan contextualisering, het verlangen om bezoekers te verbinden met de collectie en de mogelijkheid om kwesties omtrent representatie en identiteit aan te snijden. Met enerzijds de vernieuwde interesse in stijlkamers en anderzijds de museale nadruk op het heden, is het opmerkelijk dat discussies over het verzamelen van wooncultuur voorbijgaan aan het concept van de eigentijdse stijlkamer. Dat is extra opmerkelijk omdat bijvoorbeeld makelaars, woningbouw-bedrijven en meubelzaken *buiten* de museumwereld overtuigd zijn van hun onweer-staanbare aantrekkingskracht; zij proberen consu-menten te verleiden met moderne, stijlkamer-achtige presentaties.

### Deel 2 / Vergelijkende casestudie

Het tweede deel onderzoekt de eigentijdse woonensembles van drie commerciële bedrijven in een vergelijkende casestudie: IKEA's *room settings*, BAM's Homestudios en het funda Huis. Elk hoofdstuk heeft dezelfde opzet: na een korte introductie worden de ensembles, hun methodes en onderliggende ideeën beschreven vanuit de oorspronkelijke context; vervolgens zijn telkens vier thema's uitgelicht die de casus relateren aan controverses binnen het museaal verzamelen. Door casussen te selecteren die een verschillende omvang, reikwijdte en materialiteit hebben, biedt de casestudie maximale variatie en neemt de kans

toe dat het onderzoek verschillende benaderingen weerspiegelt. Om een goed onderbouwde en haalbare strategie voor het verzamelen van eigentijdse wooncultuur te ontwikkelen, analyseer ik de casussen vanuit het perspectief van een museumconservator. De hoofdvraag van mijn onderzoek luidt: Welke inzichten voor het verzamelen van eigentijdse wooncultuur door cultuurhistorische stadsmusea kunnen worden verkregen uit de ideeën en praktijken die in de drie casussen van het vergelijkend onderzoek naar voren komen?

In hoofdstuk 3 komen de room settings van IKEA aan bod, geënsceneerde woninginterieurs waarin individuele meubels in verschillende functionele samenhangen zijn geplaatst en gerelateerd aan leefstijl, budget en smaak. Net als veel museale stijlkamers worden ze gepresenteerd als een serie toegankelijke kamers binnen een grotere collectie. De interieurs moeten bezoekers verrassende oplossingen bieden voor herkenbare problemen. Deze "woonfrustraties" staan centraal in het eerste thema, dat het huiselijk leven zoals dat in de room settings wordt geschetst in museaal perspectief plaatst. Bij de constructie van de interieurs volgen de ontwerpers van IKEA een methode die erop gericht is om aan te sluiten op de belevingswereld van uiteenlopende groepen bezoekers. Met onder andere plaatselijke huisbezoeken en een wereld-wijd productassortiment beweegt het bedrijf zich tussen lokale en globale uitersten, terwijl het zich tegelijkertijd als Zweeds profileert. Het thema *Swedishness* onderzoekt wat stadsmusea, die veelal op zoek zijn naar een lokale identiteit, daarvan kunnen leren. Een volgend thema gaat in op de verschillende contextuele presentaties en toont aan dat *functionele* samenhangen van meet af aan verzameld moeten worden. Ten slotte bediscussieert het laatste thema de verbindende kwaliteiten van stijlkamers, die van oudsher geroemd worden om hun vermogen bezoekers te verbinden met de tentoongestelde voorwerpen, door vergelijking met het uitgebreide sensorisch repertoire dat IKEA biedt.

Met Homestudios verbreedt hoofdstuk 4 het perspectief van woninginterieurs naar complete woningen. Het concept is ontwikkeld door bouw-bedrijf BAM en bestaat uit een collectie nieuw te bouwen huizen, waarbij kopers verschillende opties hebben voor zowel het exterieur als interieur. Architectuurstijlen, indelingsvarianten, afwerkingsniveaus en interieurstijlen vormen de belangrijkste bestanddelen van de wooncollectie. De betrokkenheid van de klanten bij de totstand-koming van deze collectie is het onderwerp van

het eerste thema. Zoals musea streven naar compacte en tegelijk inclusieve collecties, combineert Homestudios standaardisatie met diversiteit. Elf fictieve huishoudens tonen de beschikbare opties voor een compleet afgewerkt huis. Het tweede thema onderzoekt in hoeverre deze aanpak musea kan inspireren in hun streven naar beheerbare en toch inclusieve collecties. De spanning tussen culturele waarden en persoonlijke identiteit komt aan de orde in het derde thema, waar BAM – veel meer dan musea – een gemeenschappelijke deler zoekt en terughoudend is in de mate van detaillering van de model-interieurs. Met de opening van het Experience Centre kwam de nadruk te liggen op bezoekers-ervaring. Kopers worden nu door vijf verschillende studio's begeleid en persoonlijk ondersteund in hun besluitvormingsproces. Het hoofdstuk eindigt met deze aandacht voor *experience* en verbindt het drievoudige concept van kennis, inspiratie en creatie met het idee van het museum als creatieve technologie.

Hoofdstuk 5 betreft het funda Huis, een virtueel huis dat ontworpen is op basis van de best verkochte woningen en de meest gezochte kenmerken op de Nederlandse huizensite funda. Aangespoord door het idee van co-creatie beschouwt het eerste thema het gebruik van big data als bottom-up strategie en laat zien dat dit een mogelijkheid biedt om het persoonlijke niveau van kleinschalige participatieprojecten te ontstijgen. Het volgende thema stelt de vraag in hoeverre dergelijke gegevens een objectief verzamelbeleid kunnen bewerkstelligen als alternatief voor de 'autoritaire stem' van de conservator. Interpretatie blijkt ook hier echter cruciaal, expertise vereist en het resultaat afhankelijk van de inbreng van slechts enkele personen. Materialiteit vormt het derde thema, dat ingegeven is door het verschil tussen de traditionele stijlkamers in musea en dit huis "gebouwd van data en dromen"; het maakt duidelijk dat het digitale moet worden begrepen als onderdeel van de materiële cultuur. Het laatste thema onderzoekt de culturele waarden die ten grondslag liggen aan het resultaat – een rijtjeshuis met het ruimtelijk gevoel van een kasteel – en merkt onder andere op dat het verzamelen van eigentijdse, alledaagse ensembles gebaat is bij de inbreng van een vervreemdend element. De historische collectie van musea kan daarin een belangrijke rol vervullen.

| Thema | Onderzoeksvraag | Kwesties |
|---|---|---|
| De collectie | Welke woonensembles hebben de bedrijven geconstrueerd? | Omvang en reikwijdte |
| | | Materialiteit |
| Verzamelen | Hoe hebben de bedrijven hun objecten en ensembles gekozen? | Strategieën |
| | | Participanten |
| | | Wie beslist? |
| Reflecteren | Wat reflecteren de ensembles? | Perspectief |
| | | Tijd |
| | | Culturele waarden, persoonlijke identiteit |
| Representeren | Wie representeren de ensembles? | Diversiteit |
| | | Doelgroepen |
| | | Differentiatiemethodes |
| Verbinden | Hoe verbinden de ensembles de bezoekers met de producten of collecties? | Kwaliteiten |
| | | Gebruik |

### Deel 3 / Strategie

Het derde deel van deze dissertatie gebruikt de opgedane inzichten om een strategie te ontwikkelen voor het verzamelen van eigentijdse wooncultuur in cultuurhistorische musea en bediscussieert de bevindingen op een hoger abstractieniveau.

Hoofdstuk 6 vergelijkt de bevindingen uit de drie casussen. De analyse is gestructureerd rond de vijf overkoepelende thema's die eerder zijn vastgesteld: de collectie, verzamelen, reflecteren, representeren en verbinden. Eerdere inzichten worden per thema vergeleken, overeenkomsten en verschillen besproken, en de voorlopige conclusies onderworpen aan een nader onderzoek. Elk thema eindigt met verscheidene aanbevelingen voor het verzamelen van eigentijdse wooncultuur door stadsmusea met een cultuurhistorische collectie. In het bovenstaande raamwerk zijn de onderzoeksvragen en belangrijke kwesties bij de thema's kort verwoord.

Het slothoofdstuk ordent de inzichten, benadrukt de hoofdlijnen en haalt punten naar voren die nadere discussie verdienen. In drie stappen schets ik bovendien de contouren van een eigentijdse verzamelstrategie. Uitgangspunt hierbij is de wens om bestaande collecties periodiek uit te breiden met eigentijdse wooncultuur – niet gestuurd door wat toevallig wordt aangeboden, maar ingegeven door een rationeel en proactief collectiebeleid. Een dergelijke strategie is gebaseerd op de stelling dat eigentijds verzamelen museale expertise vereist en dat conservatoren daarvoor de verantwoordelijkheid dragen. Absolute objectiviteit in dit proces is onmogelijk, maar een bewuste keuze voor wisselende perspectieven, transparantie, continuïteit en reflexiviteit kunnen wel degelijk worden ingebed in het museale collectiebeleid.

De eerste stap in zo'n eigentijds verzamelproces betreft het vaststellen van de inhoudelijke en pragmatische uitgangspunten van de voorgenomen verwerving. Niet alleen moet de inhoudelijke reikwijdte van de nieuwe collectie worden afgewogen, ook moet worden bepaald wat de beoogde omvang van de aanwinst is en welke speciale vereisten er zijn ten aanzien van de beheerbaarheid. Mijn belangrijkste pleidooi is dat musea zich (blijven) richten op materiële cultuur, maar daarbij meer aandacht besteden aan de verschillende en veranderende betekenissen van de objecten. Het accent zou daarom moeten verschuiven van individuele voorwerpen naar een contextuele samenhang waarin de verwevenheid van objecten, beelden, taal, onderzoeksgegevens, onderliggende ideeën en betekenissen beter tot uitdrukking wordt gebracht.

In de tweede stap wordt geleidelijk een preciezere collectiestrategie uitgestippeld, die zowel betrekking heeft op de selectiecriteria als op de methode van verzamelen. Wat dat laatste betreft concludeer ik onder meer dat co-creatie als ideaal geldt, terwijl voor het vinden van een bredere gemeenschappelijke deler consultatieve strategieën een serieus alternatief kunnen zijn. Ten aanzien van de selectiecriteria spelen twee kernvragen: *wie* wil het museum representeren en *wat* (welk soort wooncultuur) wil het museum reflecteren? Duidelijk wordt allereerst dat musea in hun representatie een balans moeten vinden tussen een verscheidenheid aan individuen en gedeelde waarden. Bovendien moet diversiteit niet zozeer worden gezocht in sociodemografische kenmerken, maar meer in collectie-gerelateerde, inhoudelijke variabelen. Als het gaat over *wat* de collecties reflecteren, blijkt dat de commerciële casussen weliswaar een tamelijk zorgeloos dagelijks leven afspiegelen, maar dat stadsmusea met hun ensembles wel degelijk sociale onderwerpen kunnen aansnijden, die ze bovendien in een diachronisch perspectief kunnen plaatsen. Het is van belang om daarvoor specifieke invalshoeken te formuleren.

De derde stap is gericht op het stimuleren van een actieve omgang met objecten. Aansluitend bij het idee dat museale collecties daadwerkelijk moeten worden 'gebruikt' om relevant te zijn, is het essentieel om bezoekers te verbinden met objecten en ensembles. Dat begint met het vestigen van een affectieve connectie. Als de aanwinst daarnaast bedoeld is voor interactie, het aangaan van interpersoonlijke relaties, het laten beleven van een ervaring of het uitlokken van een reactie, heeft dat gevolgen voor het verzamelbeleid. Al tijdens het verzamelproces moet daarom rekening worden gehouden met de voorgenomen wijze van presentatie.

De drie onderscheiden stappen vormen dus een cyclisch proces waarin de keuze voor specifieke objecten en ensembles geleidelijk gemaakt wordt. Concrete verzamelvoorstellen kunnen vervolgens via een bestaande waarderingsmethodiek worden getoetst en verdere actie kan worden ondernomen. Het verdient dan ook aanbeveling om een dergelijke strategie voor een proactief verzamelbeleid verder uit te werken in samenwerking met verschillende cultuurhistorische musea en te incorporeren in een bestaande, veelgebruikte waarderingsmethodiek. Daarbij zouden musea op langere termijn een gezamenlijk perspectief moeten ontwikkelen op het vormen van een overkoepelende collectie eigentijdse wooncultuur in Nederland.

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8 July 2019: Jurriaan van Gent (data analyst) at funda, Amsterdam.

15 July 2019: Jeroen Atteveld (architect) at Heren 5, Amsterdam.

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27 June 2019: Neele Kistemaker (director and co-founder) at Muzus, Delft

9 July 2020: Tessa Luger (heritage specialist at the Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency), online

**Expert meeting (online due to coronavirus restrictions)**
4 June 2020:
- Boers, Thijs (curator at Amsterdam Museum)
- Elpers, Sophie (discussion leader, researcher Ethnology at the Meertens Instituut, Amsterdam, and researcher at the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage)
- Groffen, Mayke (initiator and organiser of the discussion on behalf of the PhD research at Erasmus University, curator at Museum Rotterdam)
- Kube, Marjonne (curator and educator at Museum De Voorde, Zoetermeer)
- Luger, Tessa (heritage specialist at the Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency)
- Smeets, Tim (curator at the Dutch Open-Air Museum, Arnhem)
- Van Asseldonk, Nancy (lecturer and researcher Cultural Heritage at the Reinwardt Academie, Amsterdam)
- Van der Vaart, Merel (curator at Stedelijk Museum Schiedam)
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## About the author

Mayke Groffen has worked as a curator at Museum Rotterdam since 2000 and is responsible for collections relating to Rotterdam's businesses, technology and personal lives. In recent years, she has made extensive historical collections accessible through research in a variety of areas, including housekeeping, historical production processes, toys, personal hygiene and public health. The results have been presented in exhibitions and publications, and have also contributed to the museum's contemporary collection policy. In 2016, the domestic interior became a spearhead when Mayke started her research on collecting contemporary home life as an external PhD candidate at Erasmus University Rotterdam, funded by a Museum Grant from the Dutch Research Council (NWO).

Mayke has previously worked as: an historical researcher in the field of environmental soil research for the municipality of Rotterdam; the registrar for the corporate collection of the printing firm Vrijdag in Eindhoven; guest curator at the Textile Museum Tilburg; a researcher at the former Haags Gemeentemuseum; and a scientific staff member at the Social Historical Centre for Limburg. She obtained her master's degrees in Cultural Studies (Museology) and Art History & Archaeology at the University of Amsterdam, for which she undertook internships at the Allard Pierson Museum, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam and Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem.

## Portfolio

### Courses followed during the PhD project

**2016**
- Making you research proposal work for you, October 2016 – January 2017 **(2.5 ECTS)**
- Doing the literature review, November 2016 – March 2017 **(2.5 ECTS)**

**2017**
- Your personal PhD work-life balance: How to do less, but achieve more. January 2017 **(1 ECTS)**
- English Academic Writing for PhD candidates, February 2017 – May 2017 **(2.5 ECTS)**
- Professionalism and integrity in research, September 2017 **(1 ECTS)**
- Open interviewing, November 2017 – March 2018 **(1.5 ECTS)**

**2018**
- Self-presentation: presenting yourself and your research, March – April 2018 **(2.5 ECTS)**
- Shut up and write, November 2018 **(1 ECTS)**

**2019**
- Photovoice, May – June 2019 **(1.5 ECTS)**
- Visual exploration of scientific literature with VOSviewer, December 2019 **(1.5 ECTS)**

**2020**
- Participatory action research (PAR), April 2020 **(1 ECTS)**

**2021**
- Making an academic poster that stands out, April 2021 **(1.5 ECTS)**
- Maximize your visibility as a researcher!, April 2021 **(0 ECTS)**

### Research output during the PhD project

**2017**
- Conference presentation "Collecting Suburbia: The Period Room as an Inspiring Concept?" at the SIEF Congress "Ways of Dwelling" in Göttingen (Germany), 26-30 March 2017. (SIEF: Société International d'Ethnologie et Folklore)
- Conference presentation "Collecting Suburbia" on my PhD-research at NWO's Smart Culture Conference in Amsterdam, 23-24 November 2017.
- Conference presentation "The Period Room as a Model for Contemporary Collecting" at the COMCOL Conference "Guardians of Contemporary Collecting & Collections" in Umeå (Sweden), 5-9 December 2017.

**2018**
- Guest lecture "On Authenticity: On Period Rooms and Collecting" at the Reinwardt Academy Amsterdam (Master of Museology), 5 March 2018.
- Interview by Jasper Bongers (NWO) for the publication "Museumbeurzen – Programma 2015-2018", 20 March 2018.
- Conference Poster "Collecting Contemporary Home Life", presented at the conference " 40 Years of History" at Erasmus University Rotterdam, 9 November 2018.

**2020**
- Position paper "Hedendaags verzamelen van stedelijke wooncultuur", discussed at the Expert Meeting of 4 June 2020.

### Museum objects acquired during the PhD project, selection (in Dutch)

**2016 (from September)**
- **91590** Emaillen reclamebord "Rotterdamsche Kolen Centrale" (1930-1940)

**2017**
- **91575** Naamplaat "De Rotterdammer" (1930-1940)
- **91579** Doos gloeilampjes Verenigde Industrieën Rotterdam (1950-1965)
- **91581** Wandbord firma A. Helders (1950-1960)
- **91640** Miniatuur schoolklasje (1972)

**2018**
- **91656** Plaquette De Ark, woonvoorziening voor kinderen met polio (1960)
- **91660** Asbak van hoedenfabriek Grabo (ca. 1950)
- **91661** Gasmeter van ERMAF (1908)
- **91670** Poppenwieg uit Rotterdamse Blindeninrichting (1949)
- **91679-91682** Leermiddelen Rotterdamse Volksmuziekschool (ca. 1955)
- **91683** Demontabele kinderstoel (1955)
- **91684** Gipsen matrijs voor bedrukking van huurzakken (1900-1913)
- **91695** Verpakking pijnstillers ("Slikkertjes") van Clezo (1940-1960)
- **91686** Serie van 12 foto's van Malou van den Berg, "Rotterdam 18:30 uur" (2016)
- **91688** Harmoniumloper van de firma Joh. de Heer (ca. 1930)
- **91693** Opdracht aan Malou van den Ber voor nieuwe serie van 24 foto's, vervolg "Rotterdam 18:30 uur" (2018)

**2019**
- **91828** Houder met lachgaspatroon (2019)
- **91713** Tegel en zwemdiploma Sportfondsenbad Rotterdam (1951)
- **91967-92003** Rotterdamse speldjes (1960-1969)
- **91732-91749** e.a. Van Nelle: geschenkartikelen met Piggelmee (1915-1997)
- **91865** Keukenmachine gespaard met Premie-van-de-Maand-Club (ca. 1965-1970)

**2020**
- **91852** Model metrotrein voor kleurkeuze treinstellen (1965-1966)
- **91900** Figuurzaagmodellen woninginterieur (stofdoekkistje, cactusrekje, schemerlamp, pijpenrek), uitgegeven in Rotterdam (1930-1939)
- **91904** Envelop met artikelen gerelateerd aan COVID-19 van Coffeeshop Trefpunt, geadresseerd aan omwonenden (2020)
- **91911** Flesje Akker Abdijsiroop (1918-1930)
- **91912** Vijf miniatuurtegels in een verpakking van Driessen chocolade (1960-1975)
- **91913** "Detective Legpuzzle No.2 van Remolux" (1938)

**2021 (till June)**
- **91920** Vijf gebreide maandverbanden (1945-1946)
- **91953** Stoel "Bits and Parts" van Joris Laarman, 3D geprint tijdens tentoonstelling "Echte Rotterdammers" (2014)
- **91955-91959** Bal, kleding en kunststof stoepranden om buiten te spelen (2017)
- **91963** Growkit van RotterZwam (2017)
- **91966** Schotelantenne (2015)
- **92007-92013** Geboortekoffertje Maasstad Ziekenhuis voor baby's die ter adoptie worden afgestaan (2015-2017)
- **91924** Damesrijwiel R.S. Stokvis (ca. 1925)
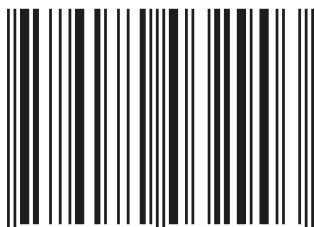- **91961** Twee mondkapjes door Gemeente Rotterdam verzonden aan medewerkers tijdens de coronacrisis (2020)

# Collecting
# Contemporary
# Home Life

With a renewed interest in evocative ensembles on the one hand, and a museological focus on contemporaneity on the other, it is remarkable that debates on collecting contemporary home life have overlooked the concept of a modern period room. Outside the museum context, however, furniture stores, construction firms and estate agents try to tempt potential buyers using modern period-room-like displays. This book examines three such commercial cases: IKEA's room settings, BAM's Homestudios and the funda House. Aiming to develop a viable strategy for how cultural-history museums collect contemporary home life, Mayke Groffen analyses these cases from a museum curator's perspective and explores what insights can be gained from them.

Mayke Groffen works as a curator at the City Museum of Rotterdam. She received a Museum Grant from the Dutch Research Council (NWO) to conduct PhD research at Erasmus University Rotterdam.