



## The Gerardus Majella Church (Gerardus Majellakerk)

Obiplein 4, 1094 PX Amsterdam

Date of building: 1923-1926  
Architect: Jan Stuyt (1868-1934)  
Commissioner: Diocese of Haarlem, priest Gerardus Hogeman

### Restoration

Restoration: Completed in 1993  
Restoration architect: André van Stigt  
Commissioner: Amsterdam Monuments Fund

### At present

national monument  
Owned by: Stadsherstel Amsterdam after a merger with AMF end 1999  
Tenant: Dutch Philharmonic Orchestra (since the fall of 2012)  
Renovation managed by: André Van Stigt en Zaanen Spanjers C.S.

### The architect

Jan Stuyt designed a great number of churches (particularly in the South of the Netherlands), schools, hospitals, city halls and residences. He cooperated often with Jos Cuijpers, the son of architect Pierre Cuijpers. Stuyt designed in Amsterdam the Rosenkrans church in the Jacob Obrechtstraat and the Boerhaave clinic in the Johannes Vermeerstraat for example. The St Jacob church in Den Bosch, Sacrament church in Copenhagen and technical school in Heerlen are famous examples of his work.

### The design

The church is built in the centralizing style, combining elements of a basilica and a cross-in-square dome church. This church shows, like many of Stuyt's other churches, that his visit to the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul influenced his design work for the rest of his life. The planned tower, inspired by the tower on the St. Mark's Square in Venice, was not built due to money shortage, although the foundations, which are still there, were laid already. The details, inside as well as outside, were derived from the Roman style.

**The church in the 'Indische buurt'** (neighbourhood with streets named after Indonesian islands)  
When the 'Indische buurt' was built early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, priest Gerardus Hogeman was asked to found a church for catholic parishioners. The church is named most likely after the name saint of this priest, the Italian Saint Gerardus Majella from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The reason to choose Stuyt as the architect may have been that he already had a design for a church in the Pijnackerstraat ready (where the Peace church by architect Jos Bekkers is located now). It is not totally clear why Stuyt withdrew from the Peace church, but supposedly the repeated changes in the order have played a role.

The Gerardus Majella Church was consecrated in 1927. The huge monumental building offered space for 1400 worshippers and it turned out to be a heavy burden for the parish rather soon. The composition of the population turned out to differ from what was expected. The neighbourhood no longer attracted prosperous people, and financial problems started already in the early thirties. The secularization from the sixties on increased the problems.

The last mass took place in 1992 and the parish moved to a smaller building. The owner Haarlem Diocese looked for a different destination for the church, but made high demands sticking to a social cultural use.

The peripheral location and the demands of the diocese made the Majella church into an object that was hard to sell. From a city building and architectural point of view however it was of great value. Finally the International Information Centre and Women Movement Archive (at present 'Aletta, institute for women's history') was found as a main tenant. In the fall of 2011 this institute moved to Vijzelstraat 20 and after renovation the Dutch Philharmonic Orchestra moved in. Office rooms are housed in the nave, and the dome part is suitable for rehearsals and concerts. Instead of a raised platform, the 225 seats are placed in a lowered tray. This way instruments can be transported on ground floor level for the most part.

The appearance of Amsterdam is largely characterized by monumental and historic buildings. 'Stadsherstel Amsterdam N.V.' takes care of sustainable preservation of disintegrating monumental and representative heritage within the defence line of Amsterdam ('Stelling van Amsterdam'). The main activities are restoring buildings, giving them a new purpose and managing them with care. Stadsherstel contributes considerably to the preservation of heritage for the next generations and helps to keep alive the craft of restoration.

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