



Trends in Architectural Photography - 2020

Rob van Esch
Architectuurfotograaf



“The true architectural photograph is primarily an instrument of communication between the architect and his audience.”

Ezra Stoller

Trends in
Architectural
Photography



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Foreword

In 2015, I started as a fulltime professional photographer with the company name “Ruimtes in Beeld” (Images of Spaces). A lot has changed since then. From zero clients to dozens in the course of the years. The most frequent of those being architectural firms, interior architects and construction companies. However there are many more categories of clients who feel comfortable with the style and feel of an architectural photographer such as hospitality companies, communication agencies, marketing agents. I am grateful to all of them for enabling me to do what I love: assisting them to distinguish themselves in their markets with beautiful images.

The fifth anniversary brought a change of name of my company. No longer “Ruimtes in Beeld”, from 2020 on I work as “Rob van Esch | Architectuurfotograaf”. The most important reason is that I was able to acquire the url www.architectuurfotograaf.nl (which is the Dutch equivalent for architecturalphotographer.com). Good for the findability of my site. A more appropriate and easier to remember name is not possible so I have gladly changed my company name to pick the low hanging SEO-fruits.

In 2017 I published the eBook “Trends in Architectural Photography”. It has been praised at Apalmanac (thé website for architectural photograhpers) and a recent article in Architizer has been largely based on the book.

This eBook is an updated version of the first edition. Many new images have been added to illustrate the trends and texts have been updated according new insights and feedback from my clients. I really hope this eBook can be useful to you!

Rob van Esch, april 2020



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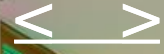
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Introduction

Good and beautiful pictures help clients, in my case often architects, to distinguish themselves in their market. Images can assist in many ways:

- As a showcase of craftsmanship on the website. When pictures express emotion, express the right story, they provide confidence and the click with new potential clients is made more easily.
- Beautiful pictures increase the chance of free publicity. Relevant platforms are interested in showing projects if there is good imagery available. The same goes for magazines.
- Promotional activities, such as banners at industry shows or ads.
- During tenders you must show your portfolio as beautiful and accurate as possible to present your work to the best of its abilities to entice potential clients to choose you.
- In addition to the above external reasons, it is also important to have your own documentation and archiving of projects accurately in place.

The meaning of *Good and beautiful pictures* is of course enormously subjective. To use photos to show your portfolio is quite a step: you design three-dimensional buildings and spaces, and a photographer cuts off a dimension. He or she makes creative choices. Speaking for myself: I try to combine the perfect composition with the perfect moment (quality of light, but also the spirit of the image, the liveliness). Different photographers, different choices. That means you have to think carefully about which photographer you want to engage with. But still, photos remain subjective. The purpose of this eBook is objectivation of the latter. We'll try capturing the spirit of time in a limited number of trends. I notice those, as a specialised architectural photographer, hearing the questions I get when discussing assignments. Added to literature research and in-depth interviews, I identify the following trends: In Use, Warmth and Surprise.



In use



Traditionally, people were left out of architecture photographs. Speaking of the earlier iconic architecture photos, the editor of Architectural Record writes in 2012: "The drama in their photos came from the brilliant use of light and shadow in images of sweeping grandeur or of minute details... Their photos glorified majestic exteriors and serene interiors, unsullied by human use. Yet in keeping with a shift in 21st-century architectural values, where buildings are seen not so much as idealised sculptural objects but as part of the fabric of places, photography, too, is changing. Documenting architecture is often less pristine these days... photos are alive with the pulse of real places. "

As cited in Michael Chusid
[Photos - Unsullied by humans?](#)

Thus, architectural photographs must be brought to life. That premise seems to be getting stronger since 2012. The question that almost every client is asking is: let your images show how my spaces are used! Photographers have to do that subtly because people have to add a 'usage dimension' to the image and should not become the main subject. This can be done in several ways: people do not even notice that a picture is being taken, they actively use the space and go along at the photographer's request and thirdly it is that they are asked to play a role in the image that the photographer has in mind.

Compositions with spontaneous moments

Sometimes the environment is not suitable for directing an image and the photographer has to wait for spontaneous moments. An example being that the larger train stations in the Netherlands are equipped with called so-called *meeting clouds*: artworks of light that are very recognisable and replace the boring 'meeting point' signs. Such a cloud of light is applied in the renewed Utrecht Central Station (see next page). I had chosen a composition that shows both the cloud and the station. I then waited ... until two people hugged each other exactly under the cloud of light.

The next example is the immense atrium of the Amsterdam World Trade Centre in Amsterdam. The spontaneous moments really illustrate the functionality of the space: work, social contacts and mobility.

Trends in
Architectural
Photography

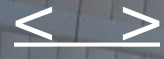


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In Use



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Photography



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In Use



Three more examples are displayed on the following pages. In 2018, I was hired by EGM Architects to shoot the completely new hospital Erasmus MC in Rotterdam, the largest construction project in the Netherlands in decades. During one of the shoots, we wanted to capture a waiting space and bring forward the lightness of the space combined with the view on the city. Suddenly a doctor on a small scooter appeared and he was completely fine with driving through the waiting space once again to make an image. This element of the image emphasizes the size of the hospital and therewith really has an added value in telling the story of the architecture (apart from the fact that it also a nicer image with him in it).

In the second example the home-owner swinging around with his little daughter adds endearing and emotional value to the image.

Thirdly an office space in the completely renovated city hall of Putten in the Netherlands. When on shoot with the architect, we passed this spot ten minutes earlier but there was nothing going on. When we walked back, the covered space was being used and an employee was making a phone call behind the glass wall in another office. And suddenly, the multi-functionality of the design could be told in one picture.



In Use

Wachtgebied 5G



In Use



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Photography



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In Use





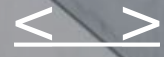
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In Use

Schools are, of course, grateful subjects for spontaneous moments that show the architectural designs in use. Particularly in schools, the rule is that children should not be recognisable. Longer shutter speeds are very helpful in that respect.



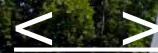
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In Use





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In Use



The requirements for architectural photography have dramatically changed since 20 years ago. Then, glamour photos were the trend. Beautiful sunshine, light blue sky, if you walk by the project you would not even recognise the architecture. The image, as an icon, became more important than the building itself. When we were looking for a photographer for our office, we did not want a sterile photographer, not that clinical. We wanted to go back to the basics: recognisable buildings, of which you can see that they are used.

Ernst René van Tatenhove
Oomen Architecten



In Use



Carry-on-with-what-you-are-doing-moments

At other times, a photographer is working on a much smaller scale, and you can actually be in touch with the people around. They often find it fun to cooperate with the photographer to create the image that he/she has in mind. They do not have to act: they can just continue doing what they were doing. Like cleaning a car, drinking coffee in a meeting space or working in an office.





In Use



In Use

Directed images

Sometimes a photographer arrives in a space intended for particular use, but at the moment no one is there. Asking friendly is normally enough to get it filled, almost everyone wants to cooperate. Here you can see a picture of a library in a school where children can read in a hammock, so it is nice if the space is being used .



Roof garden Erasmus MC, Rotterdam
EGM architects

In Use

Three examples are depicted on this page. On the left two images of a series I made for EGM Architects, who designed the largest hospital of The Netherlands, Erasmus MC in Rotterdam. On top of the building a terras garden is available for patients. Just before the official opening of the building, a group of figurants helped showing the function of the terrace. If you then encounter a group of individuals who like being within the photo in the operation room, this makes the day for a very happy architectural photographer!

Sometimes also the architect takes care of a group of children modelling in the newly designed library of a school (below).



Operation Room Erasmus MC, Rotterdam
EGM architects

Architectuur
fotograaf



Library of a school, Amsterdam
Studio Samira Boon

“

For us, the ideal picture is the one in which the building is beautifully portrayed, but at the same time you can see it's alive. That's a big difference with the past. Then, images were always sterile, without people.

For us as architects, the importance of beautiful images has been greatly increased in the last decade. Think of the website, displaying reference projects for selections, promotional activities at industry shows, they all cannot do without.

Harm Korfker
Korfker architects



In Use

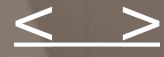
Visualise the scale of architecture

This is traditionally the most commonly used goal of people in architecture photos: allowing them in the image to get a better idea of the scale of the architecture.



In Use





In Use



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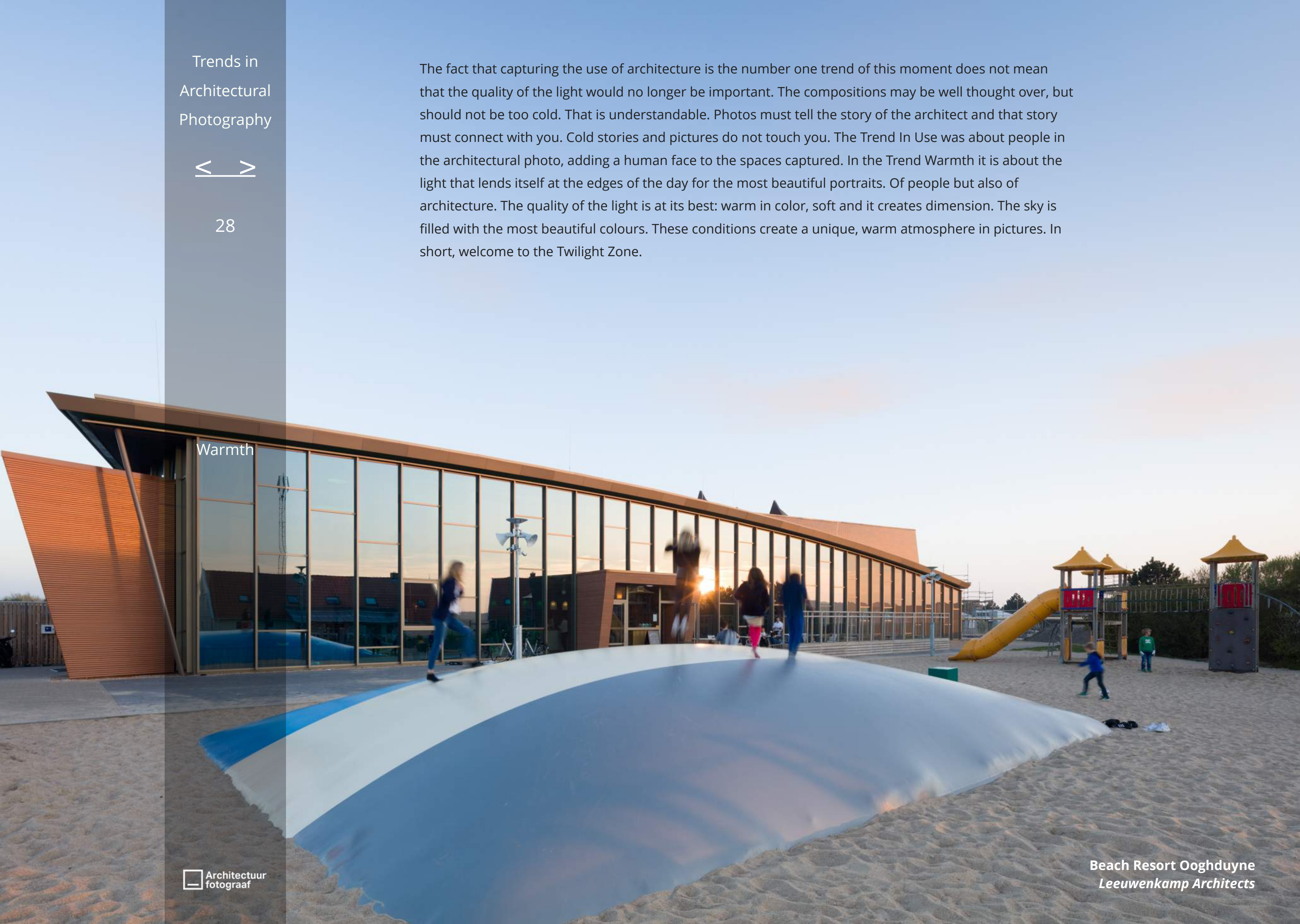
Breda

In Use



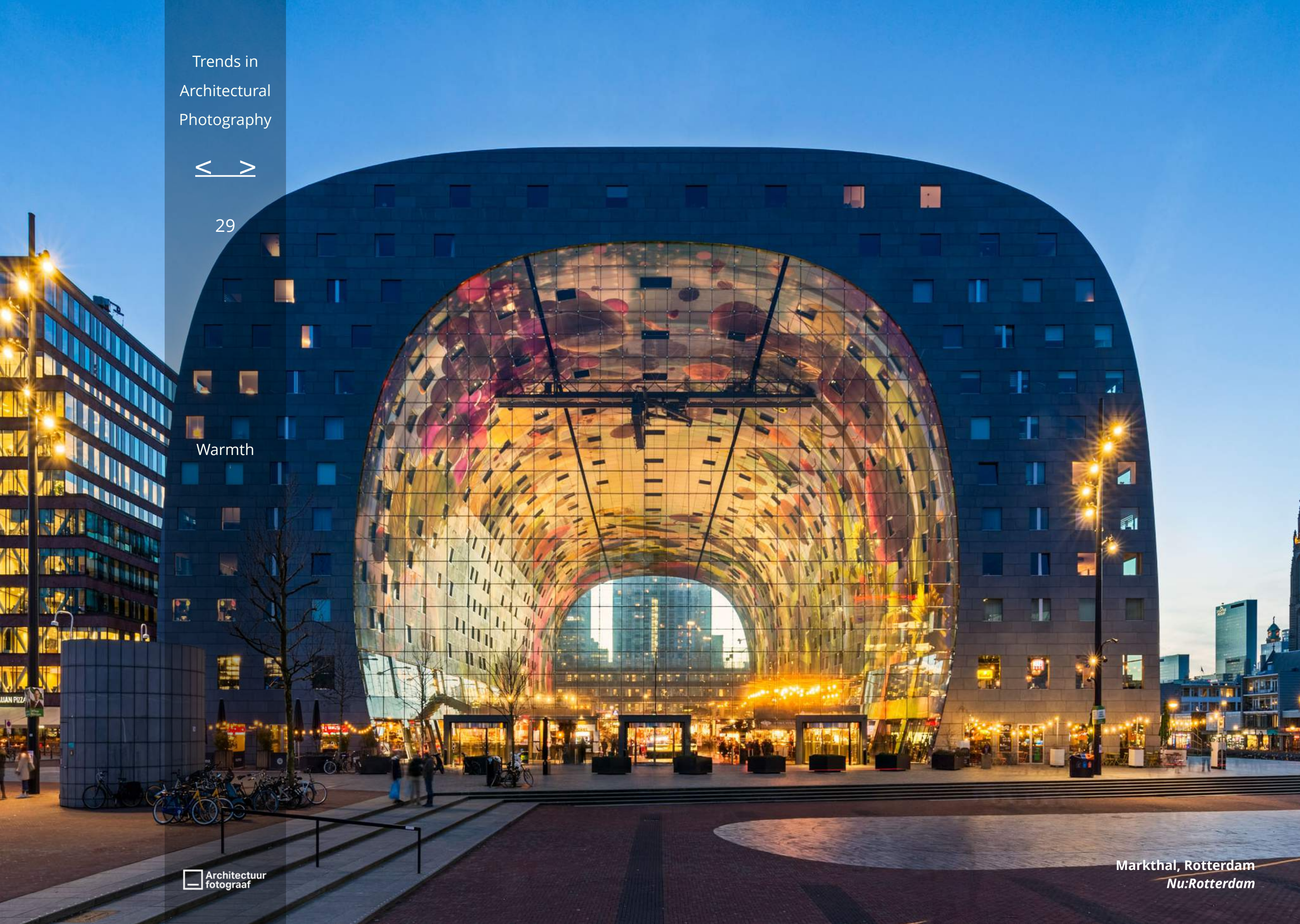
The fact that capturing the use of architecture is the number one trend of this moment does not mean that the quality of the light would no longer be important. The compositions may be well thought over, but should not be too cold. That is understandable. Photos must tell the story of the architect and that story must connect with you. Cold stories and pictures do not touch you. The Trend In Use was about people in the architectural photo, adding a human face to the spaces captured. In the Trend Warmth it is about the light that lends itself at the edges of the day for the most beautiful portraits. Of people but also of architecture. The quality of the light is at its best: warm in color, soft and it creates dimension. The sky is filled with the most beautiful colours. These conditions create a unique, warm atmosphere in pictures. In short, welcome to the Twilight Zone.

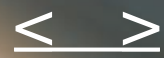
Warmth





Warmth





Warmth

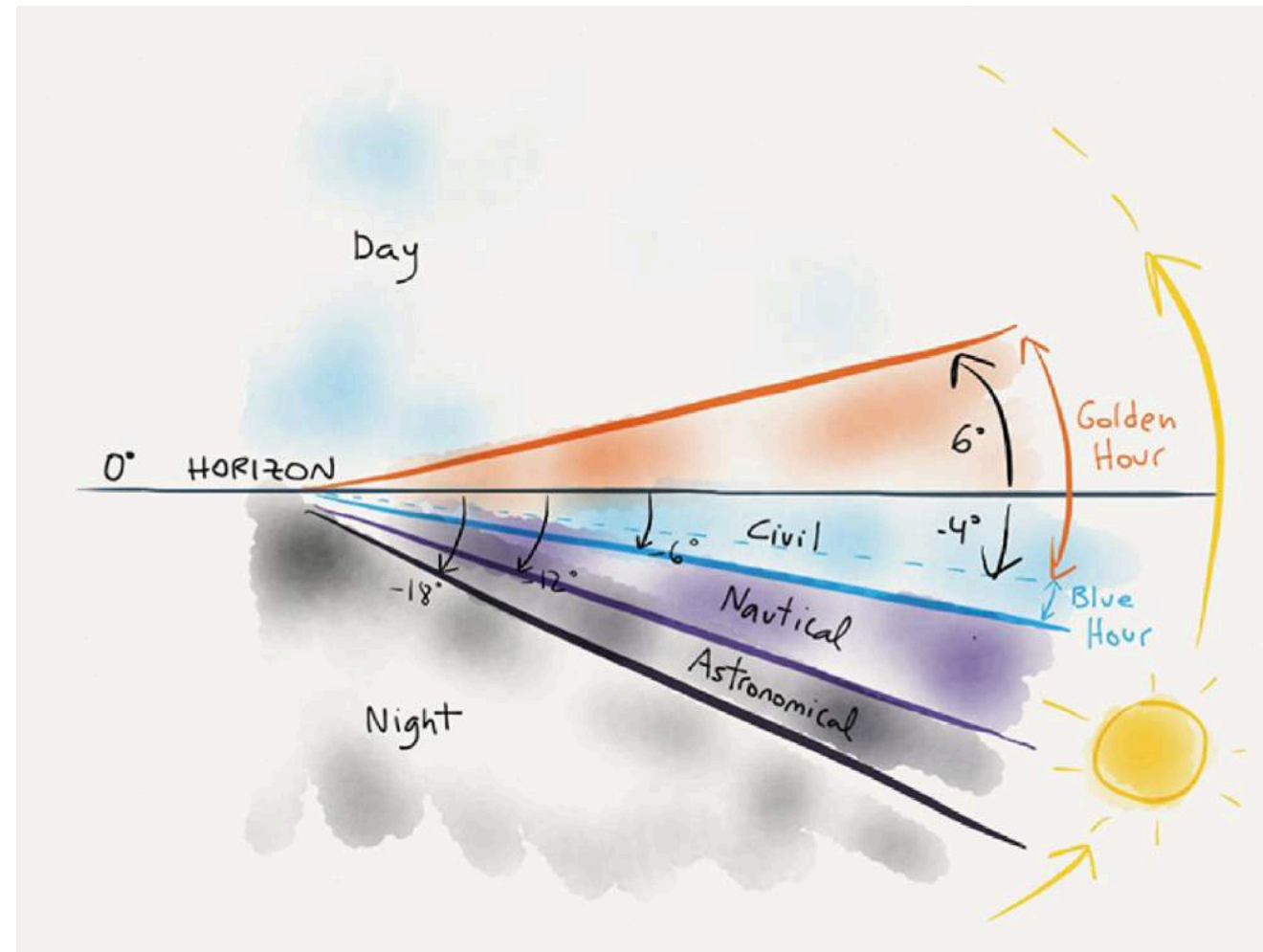


A good picture reflects the ideas of the office. In the imagery that rages on the internet, you can only distinguish yourself with very good pictures.

Rob Wesselink
rudy uytenhaak en partners architecten

The Twilight Zone

The twilights are the periods just after sunset (and vice versa, just before sunrise). For in depth knowledge about the behaviour of light, [this article about the gold and blue hour](#) is interesting.



Source: [Understanding Golden Hour, Blue Hour and Twilights; Photopills](#)

Essentially, there are different periods at the end of the day: the golden hour, the civil twilight which hosts the famous blue hour. When I work at the edges of the day, I have a certain image in mind that I would like to create. In the evening, I focus on the golden hour and a very small timeslot after sunset. That is the time I can add the warm atmosphere to my photos. (By the way, when the blue hour starts, which is also popular for many photographers, I usually leave). All this means that there is often very little time to take the image I have in mind, sometimes just a few minutes to hunt for the right moment. Good preparation is therefore essential.



The Golden Hour

Warmth and dimension are the keywords of the light during the golden hour. Details start shining, and sometimes even facades on the north are beautifully lit in the light of a setting sun (and of course also with the first sunbeams of the day). Below are some examples. The detailed cover of the facade of the Postillion Hotel in Amsterdam comes no more into its own than when the soft last sunrays of the day shave along.



Warmth

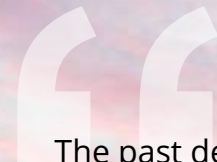
Panorama Florence
Vrij werk

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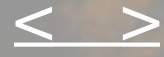
Warmth



The past decade has changed a lot in how we deal with pictures. By the way, we now see people in the picture, but also the building in its surroundings. Both the quality and quantity of the pictures have increased. We now have website, social media, banners, panels, booklets, go ahead. Previously all photos were in one book!

Katja Wachtelborn
LEVS Architecten

Warmth



Warmth



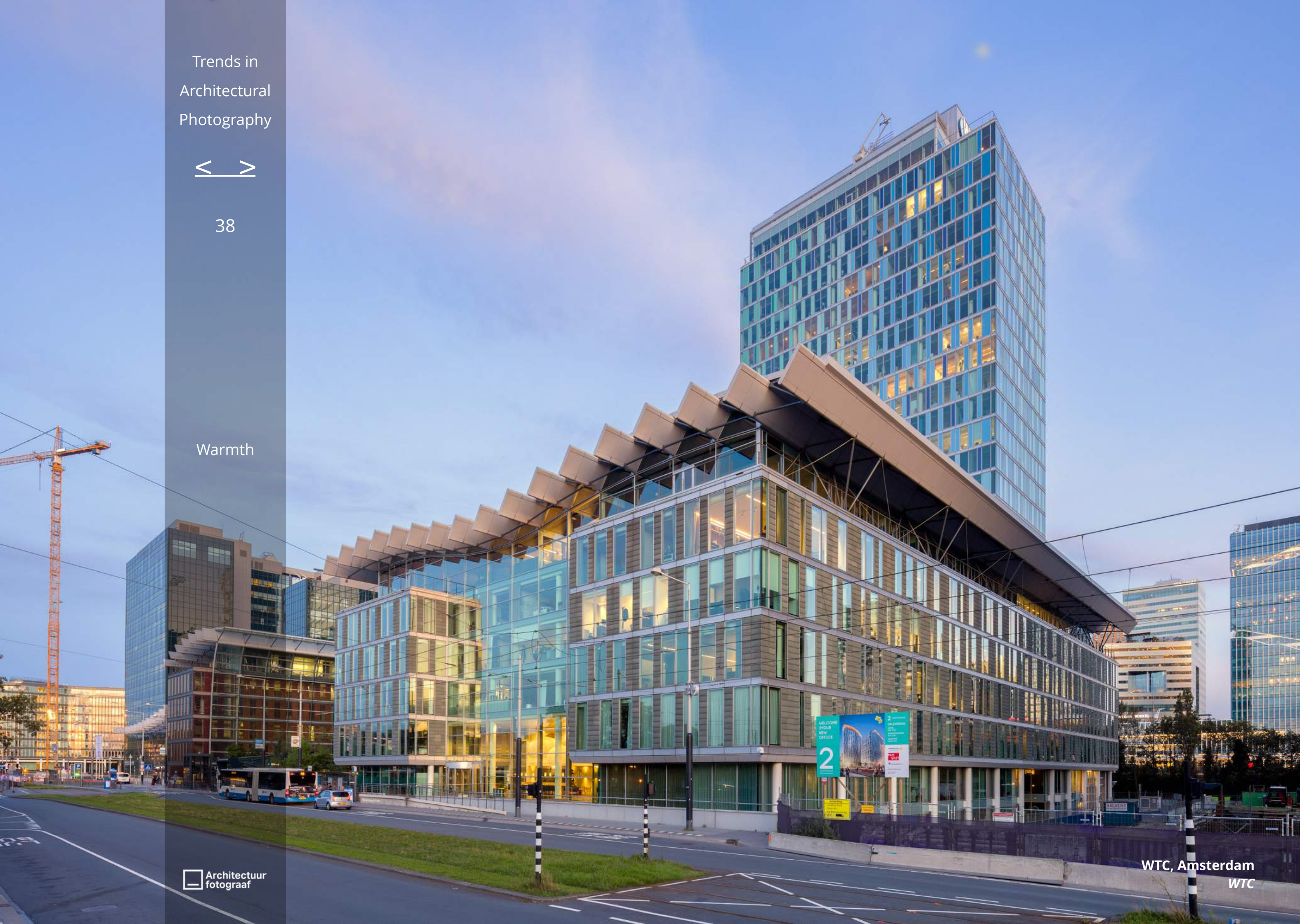
Civil Twilight

If the sun has disappeared behind the horizon, or just arrives, the sky often fills with beautiful colors. This certainly applies if there are some clouds that capture the orange-pink glow of the coming or disappearing sun. Using the light behind the windows of buildings creates a balanced mix of interior, exterior and surroundings. Civil twilight is hard to beat!



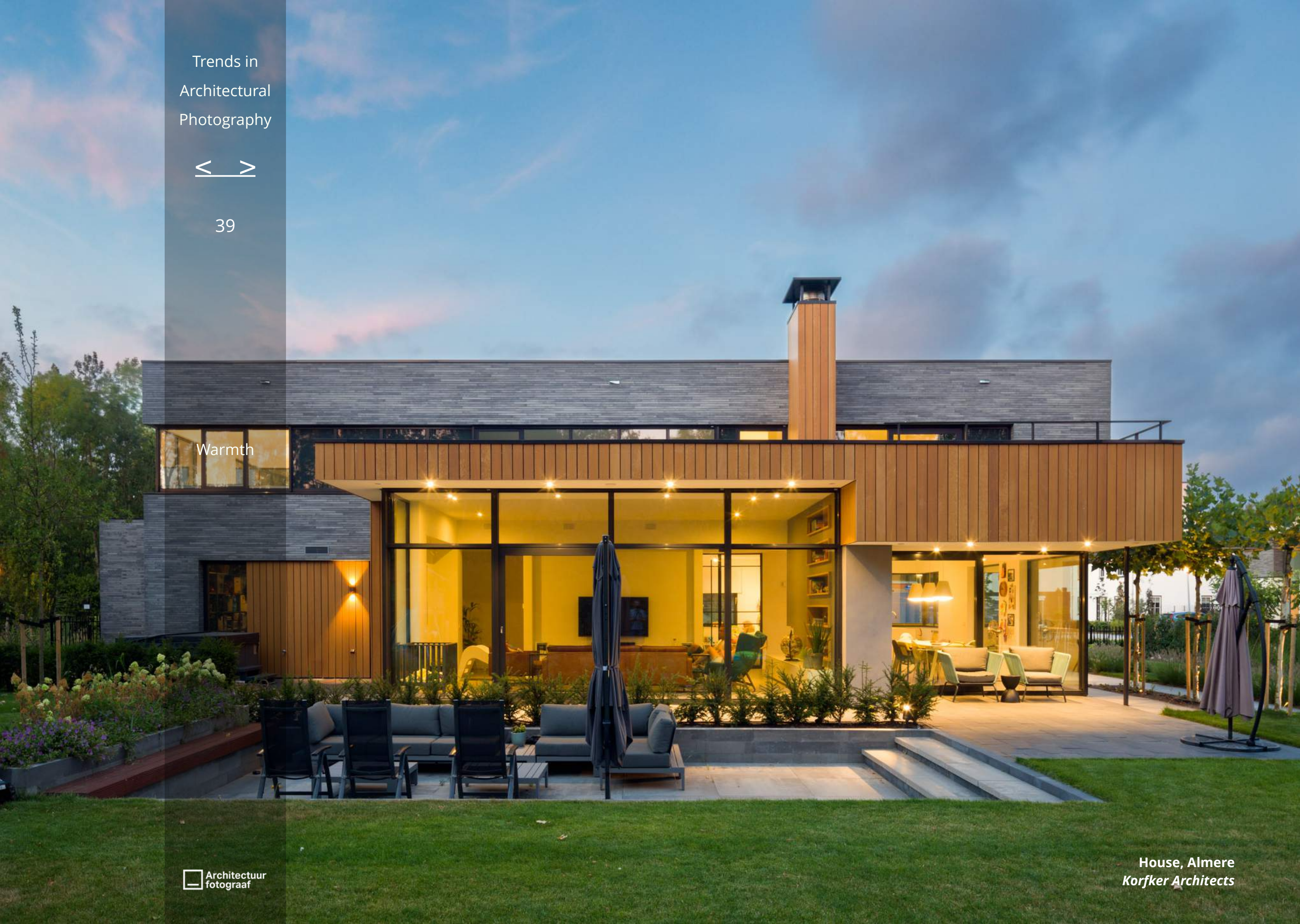


Warmth





Warmth



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Warmth



gemeente Putten

Warmth

More beautiful than in reality? The reality at its most beautiful!

Certainly when photographing in the twilight zones, architecture photos can get glamorous. Glamor means: enchanting gloss. But also: magical glow. Additionally, the images in this eBook always get a nice Photoshop workout, and you run into a question that every photographer regularly encounters: is the image moving away from reality?

Two comments are in place. First, most people do not see the buildings and spaces during the twilights. In addition, the time window available for those pictures is really very narrow. So it's no wonder most people have never seen the buildings like the image. Secondly, post-production in Photoshop is simply necessary because the cameras we use are very good, but not as good as the human eye. The dynamic range of image sensors has risen sharply in the past decade, but it is often not possible to deal with excessive contrast differences. My response to the question "More beautiful than reality?" is therefore: no, it's the reality at its finest!

Surprise!

When going out for an assignment, every brief with a client ends with the words: "... and don't forget to make photos that you like yourself." It is even very frequent that this is the only direction that a photographer receives. How to fulfil such an assignment is of course very personal, depending on the creative capacity of the photographer. Speaking for myself, I can say this. Although, as a standard, I make some categories of images on site as the necessary hero shots and some more detailed ones. I rely on my '*photographic eye*' to do its work. Even after the necessary preparations, it's only when I'm on location and doing my first explorations that I will start seeing what kind of surprising images I could create - even though the chance of surprising clients will get a bit smaller after publishing this eBook.

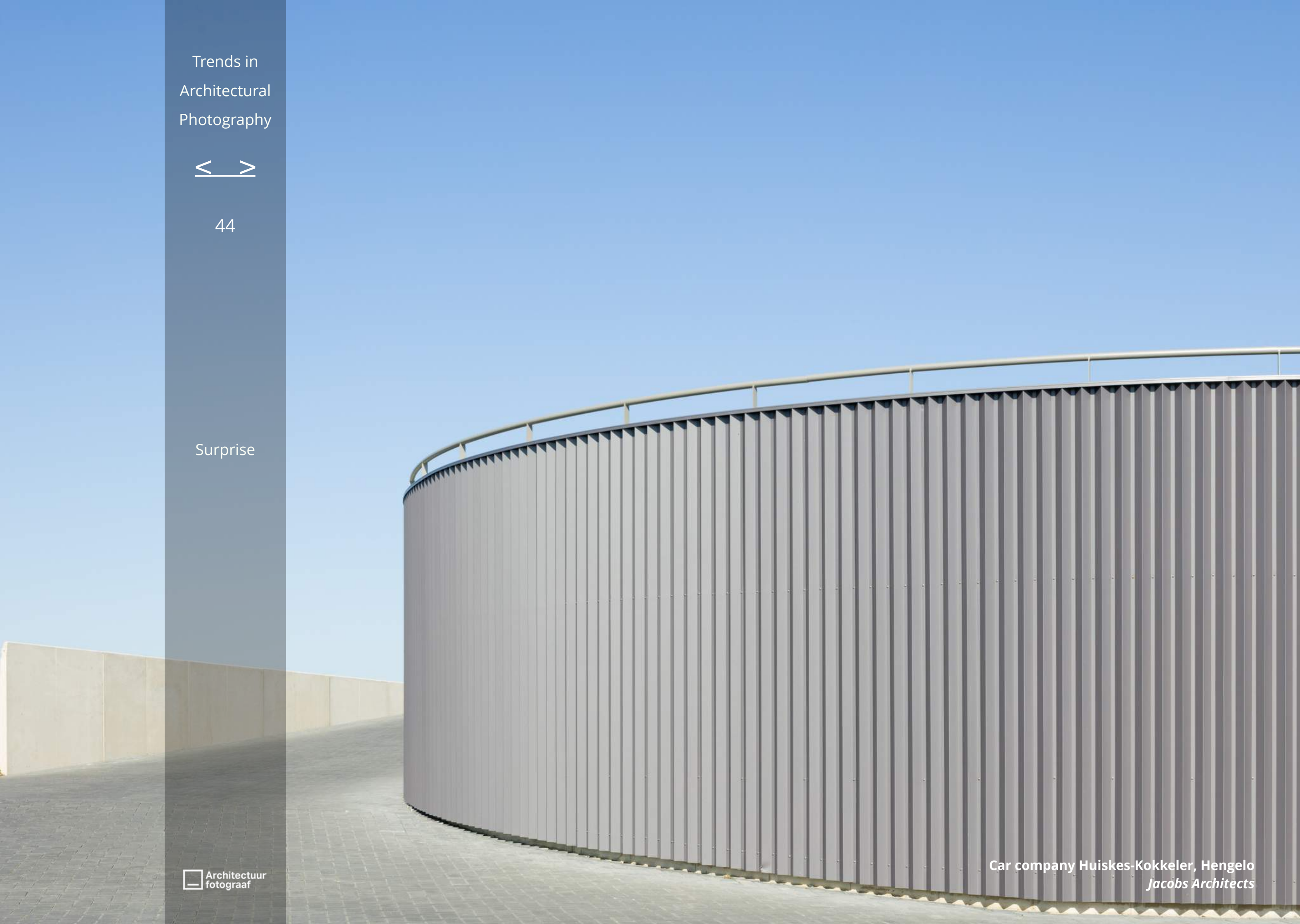
Without excluding any other possibility, I always look at:

- structures that can lend themselves to abstraction
- symmetry
- water and skies that lend themselves for long shutter speeds
- details

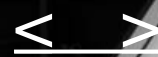
Some examples are presented on the following pages.



Surprise



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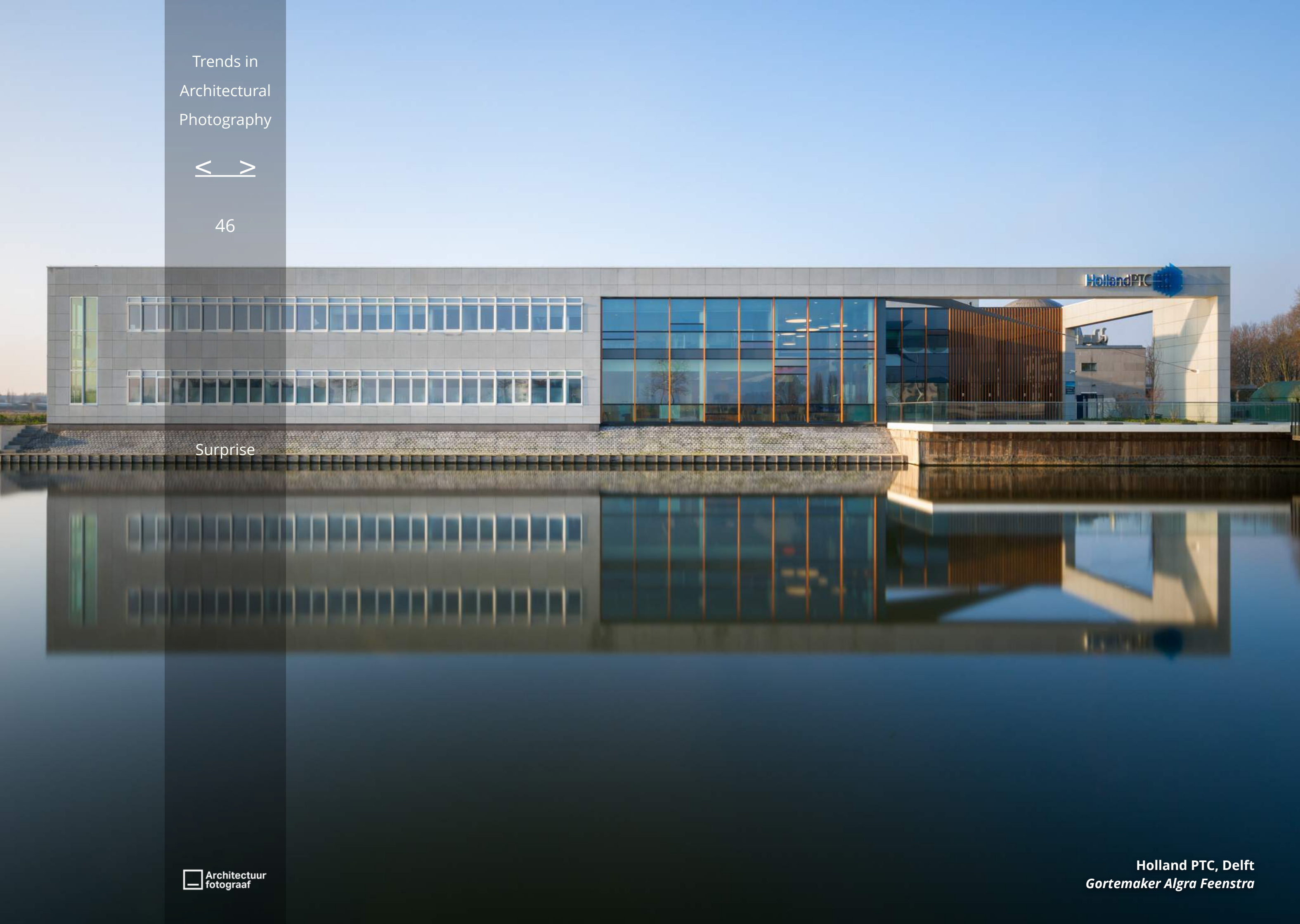


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Surprise

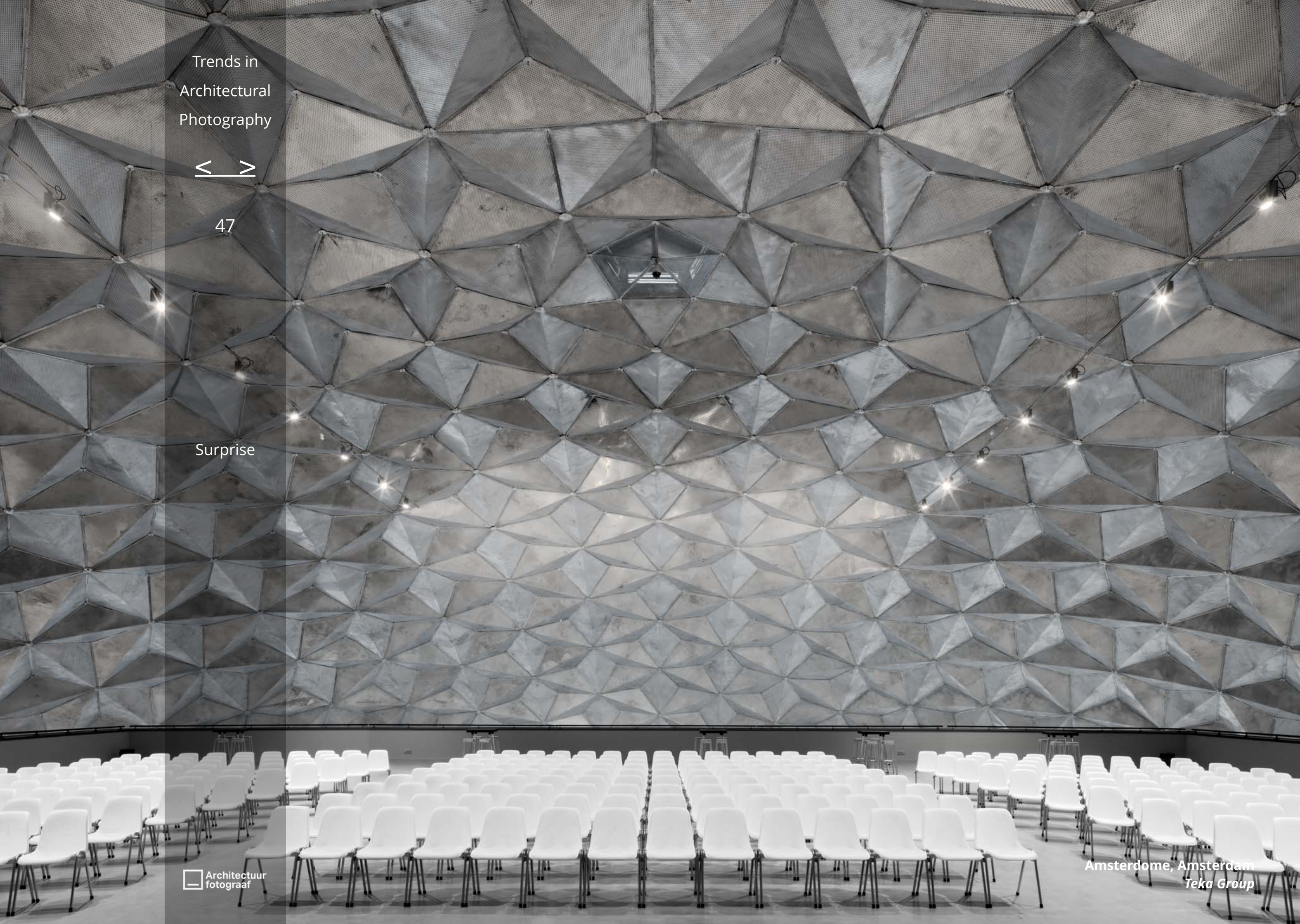


Surprise





Surprise







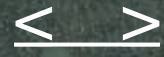
Surprise

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Surprise



Surprise



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Photography



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Surprise



Epilogue

The trends described in this eBook are based on own experiences, literature research and internet research. This eBook is an update of the one published in September 2017.

Over de auteur

I am working as a fulltime architectural photographer since the beginning of 2015, primarily for architectural agencies, real estate - and infrastructure companies. In addition, my work is represented by Offset and Hollandse Hoogte.

Feedback on this eBook will be much appreciated!

Rob van Esch, April 2020

Contact

W: www.architectuurfotograaf.nl

E: rob@architectuurfotograaf.nl

T: +31620600535

