



Forum voor Architectuur en
Stedenbouw in Amersfoort

Hofjes in Amersfoort



Courtyards come in all shapes and sizes. They can be very old or brand new, with a mix of housing types or, all identical homes. There are courtyards where residents share facilities, such as a kitchen or a laundry room, and others where only the courtyard itself is communal. There are residential communities where residents share commonalities in terms of age, family structure and/or beliefs. But there are also places where people seem to share nothing more than an address. Whilst in the 17th century it was often wealthy benefactors who founded courtyards for the less fortunate, nowadays empowered citizens sometimes take the initiative themselves.

It is certainly possible to live (and work) in a hofje, but why does it happen relatively rarely? In a country facing a housing and care crisis, the courtyard home may well be part of the solution. As a concept, the courtyard holds great promise in cities facing regeneration and densification challenges: it offers a sense of security, tranquillity and greenery within a wider context. This architectural map explores the quality and diversity of courtyards in Amersfoort through the ages. It is an anthology rather than a comprehensive overview.

Please note: courtyards are enclosed semi-public or private spaces. Please bear this in mind when visiting a courtyard.

Courtyards are characterised by various spatial features. The courtyards on the map meet at least four of these criteria:

1. communal facilities, such as a play area or a vegetable garden;
2. designed for pedestrian and cycle traffic and for lingering;
3. an enclosed and semi-private atmosphere;
4. front doors opening onto the courtyard;
5. at least three facades designed as a cohesive whole enclose the courtyard;
6. a sense of ownership amongst residents;
7. the transition from the dwelling to the courtyard is carefully designed;
8. a transition point between the street and the courtyard, e.g. a gate or narrow passageway;
9. sometimes there is a single entrance, sometimes there are two.

From the 13th to the 19th centuries, charitable courtyards provided a form of care for the elderly and the poor. The initiators were often wealthy benefactors. However, foundations, churches and local authorities also established courtyards within the existing city.



1 **‘Armen de Poth’ Court**, 15th century, 19th century, 20th century



This old, listed court was founded by the ‘Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit’. They cared for the sick and provided ‘the poor confined to their homes’ with bread, butter and other produce from their own land. The present-day hofje consists of the 15th-century main building (Provenhuis), St Roch’s Chapel (1525) and 48 dwellings dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Half of the dwellings have their front door facing the street (the ‘Buiten Poth’).

The dwellings on the inner side of the complex (the ‘Binnen Poth’) are accessible via one of the three gates on the surrounding streets. The dwellings (45–60 m²) have been renovated, have two habitable storeys and a private (front) garden. The flats are still intended for elderly people living alone and a few two-person households on a modest income. The caretaker manages the day-to-day running of the complex, and the residents’ committee welcomes new residents.

Around 1920, a new expansion plan for Amersfoort was drawn up by landscape architect H. A. Poortman and Director of Public Works C. G. Beltman. This plan provided various types of housing. In various parts of the city, architects employed the courtyard as a building form to improve housing for workers and the middle classes.



2 **Miereveldstraat Courtyard**, 1921
Architecture: W.K. de Wijs in collaboration with M.J. Klijnstra, H.A. Pothoven and G. van Hoogevest



This courtyard consists of rental properties. It was built as part of a municipal housing project to serve as a model for well-maintained, affordable housing. The modest dwellings (approx. 57 m²) are built around a landscaped patch of public green space and face it, featuring large windows and a low parapet. At the time, they were intended for the elderly, single people or small families. Today, they are social housing units let by De Alliantie. Architect De Wijs had mainly designed villas in the Bergkwartier before he was commissioned for this project. A small bell tower with a gate forms a lovely central feature within the urban ensemble.



3

Van Ostadeplein, 1923

Architecture: W.K. de Wijs in collaboration with M.J. Klijnsstra, H.A. Pothoven and G. van Hoogevest



A housing association for the middle class commissioned the construction of these 30 dwellings. The centrally located gateway building contained not only two entrance gates to the courtyard complex but also two mixed-use residential and retail units. With shallow front gardens, the dwellings (approx. 95 m²) border the courtyard, which used to be landscaped with greenery. For a long time, it was a stony basketball court, but there are plans to reintroduce greenery. The homes have been renovated and made more sustainable by Omnia Wonen in consultation with the SHOW Tenants' Organisation Foundation.



5

Dreyershofje, 1937

Architecture: C. B. van der Tak



This courtyard was intended for residents of temporary emergency housing in the Soesterkwartier that was due to be demolished. The scheme comprised 34 dwellings, including two for the elderly and four gatehouse dwellings. The dwellings were not large (approx. 60 m²) and featured, on the ground floor, a single kitchen-diner with a recess for cooking and washing, and three bedrooms on the first floor – or four in the case of a gatehouse dwelling. The elongated green strip in the centre of the courtyard was replaced by parking spaces in the 1960s but has since been restored. In the 1970s, the complex narrowly escaped demolition. On the initiative of De Alliantie, the courtyard was transformed from a 'no-go area' into the charming place it is today. In the process, some homes were merged.



4

Palmstraat, 1927

Architecture: N.J. van Tiene



Palmstraat ends in a small courtyard on both sides. The houses (approx. 70–90 m²) were built on the initiative of the Housing Association for Railway Staff. The cheaper houses, intended for carriage cleaners, for example, were situated on the long Palm (Palmstraat). The small squares were intended for those in higher-ranking positions, such as foremen. In the 1970s, the houses were sold and the Palmstraat/Hulststraat Neighbourhood Association was founded, with its own community centre on Palmstraat. As part of climate adaptation measures, Palmstraat has been redesigned, improving its rainwater retention capacity.



6

Onze Lieve Vrouwe ter Eem, 1933

Original architecture: B. J. Koldewey and W. C. A. Kroes; repurposing: ZEEP architects and urban designers

The former convent of Onze Lieve Vrouwe ter Eem is a listed building complex. The last nuns left in 2008 and work is now underway on its repurposing. The complex consists of an elongated building with side wings at right angles to it, enclosing a series of courtyards. As part of the redevelopment, seventeen luxury homes and a catering establishment are being developed around one of the courtyards.



7

Het Gildenhof, Zon en Schild, 1928–1940

Original urban planning & architecture:

G. van Hoogevest, J. G. and P. K. Mensink

Urban planning redevelopment: Vollmer+partners

A courtyard offers not only a place to live, but also a place to work. As was customary for institutions at the time, Zon & Schild was organised according to the pavilion system, with each function having its own building. The Gildenhof was built as a kitchen block with a courtyard garden. For many years, care was provided in the building, and it served as a meeting place for daytime activities and rehabilitation. But now that GGz Centraal is transforming the specialist care complex Zon & Schild, this courtyard building will also take on a new function.

In the past, courtyards often consisted of identical, ground-level dwellings arranged in a regular pattern side by side. However, a courtyard can also be created with a mix of dwellings, both multi-storey and ground-level. It is important to note, however, that the more dwellings there are, the more space is required for storage and parking. This leads to new ensembles.



8

Townhouses and multi-storey car park, 1981–83

Architecture: Klijnstra & Sanders



This large housing complex, featuring a mix of housing types, consists of two parts. The perimeter development of maisonettes along the city wall, together with a building block, encloses a green inner courtyard. The garages are situated at a lower ground level. As a result, the street-level dwellings do not directly adjoin the courtyard. The second courtyard has a stony appearance. The buildings in the central area are grouped into several enclosed blocks situated on top of an underground car park. Here, the flats are partly situated on a raised ground level with retaining walls along the street.



9

Van der Glashof, 1998

Urban planning and architecture: AGNOVA architects



On the site of the former Hapam factory, the architect designed a new courtyard in close collaboration with local residents. Even the colour scheme was decided in consultation with them. Surrounding the courtyard is a mixed housing programme ranging from the private sector to affordable rental accommodation (from 55 m²). Flats, semi-detached houses and terraced houses are situated around a green playing field. The tree was donated by the architectural practice at the time. The project was initiated by the developer Heilijgers in collaboration with AGNOVA; the local council primarily provided guidance. A separate car park has been constructed for parking. In addition, parking takes place on private land between front gardens, meaning the dwellings do not directly border the courtyard.



10

Hortensiahof, 1997

Architect: not known to us



This pleasantly designed public space is bordered on two sides by 18 flats. The flats (approx. 90 m²) were built on the site of a former school and feature a front garden facing the courtyard on the ground floor, alongside a modest backgarden. They are connected to the courtyard via large windows in the façade. On the first floor, the flats have wide balconies. As the flats are not positioned parallel to one another but at a slight angle, this reinforces the intimate character of the space. Low garden walls narrow the entrance, and undulating hedges around the gardens bring the whole area together.

‘Centraal Wonen’ is a form of housing in which a group of residents living in separate flats share various communal facilities. Multiple generations live together whilst their individual privacy remains guaranteed. This form of housing was introduced to the Netherlands from Denmark in the 1970s.



11 The Hallehuis, 1976–1984
Architect: Dolf Floors



Six residential groups spread across two blocks form a courtyard with the front doors opening onto it. Each resident has their own flat. In addition, each residential group has a shared kitchen, dining room and living room. Residents can make use of the laundry room, the guest room, two large gardens, the balcony and a communal space for parties and meetings. The project was developed in collaboration with the future residents. The preparation period lasted eight years. The project has a flexible design: basic units (approx. 35 m²), suitable for one to two people, can be combined with other rooms. This makes the complex suitable for households of various sizes. Each group interprets communal living in its own way, meaning that the groups differ from one another in character, social interaction and activities.



12 Hof der Toekomst, 1992
Urban planning and architecture: Bureau Kristinsson
(now Maas Kristinsson Architects)



This Centraal Wonen Project comprises 61 terraced and detached dwellings set around a communal garden. Two-thirds of the dwellings are intended for rental, and one-third for sale. The aim is to achieve a ‘mixed composition’ with a balance between young and old, and single-person and multi-person households. The homes (ranging from approx. 75 m² to 130 m²) face the courtyard. Residents have their own private homes and also share communal facilities, such as a large kitchen-diner, laundry room, workshop and guest rooms. The Hof der Toekomst is a resident-led initiative developed in close collaboration with the architect and the housing association SCW. In the garden stands a circular building used for communal activities. Terraced houses on either side mark the entrance to the courtyard. New residents are selected by a committee. As car ownership is low, part of the car park could be converted into a play area.



13 Soesterhof, 2021
Architect: Archi3o



The Soesterhof is a CPO project (collective private commissioning). On its own initiative, the Soesterhof Association has developed a social and sustainable neighbourhood comprising 30 owner-occupied homes (70–130 m²) and 12 social housing units (approx. 60–80 m²) with a communal space and a shared garden. Although the homes form a unified whole, no two are alike. The design was developed through joint workshops and individual sessions. Externally, the homes’ appearance ties in with the industrial heritage of the carriage workshop. Residents’ gardens flow naturally into the communal garden. The courtyard is car-free; parking and storage areas are clustered at the edge of the site.

The Kattenbroek extension is renowned for its unique urban design by Ashok Bhalotra. Laan der Hoven is one of the neighbourhood’s ‘backbones’. Courtyards are found in both intimate and open forms. The intimate courtyards contrast with the large open spaces in the neighbourhood and offer a secluded living environment.



14 Courtyard of Remembrance, 1992
Urban design: Kuiper Compagnons, Architecture:
ZEEP architects and urban designers



On one side, the oval-shaped courtyard is bordered by arcades and on the other by a row of columns. Although the transitional zones were specially designed, in practice they tend to function somewhat as storage areas. The ground-floor façades on the courtyard side have relatively small windows. The 40 dwellings (approx. 80–100 m²) can be extended by adding an extra storey, and this has now been done on numerous occasions. As a result, the spatial proportions of the courtyard have improved over the years. The courtyard offers opportunities for play and has space for parking on one side. On the residents’ initiative, proposals have been put forward to create a wadi in the courtyard to collect rainwater.

Nieuwland is one of the first sustainable neighbourhoods in the Netherlands, primarily due to the large-scale use of solar energy. The neighbourhood can be divided into four distinct quarters, each with its own identity. In 'De Lage Hoven', many homes are situated around low-traffic, green courtyards with play areas.



15 Robertskruid, 1997
Urban planning: Bureau Wissing. Architecture: INBO



Sixteen homes (approx. 140 m²) with front gardens border the triangular, largely car-free courtyard. Thanks to the full-height façades, the homes are well connected to the green courtyard, which is laid out as a lawn with trees. Private gardens are situated at the rear. The access path to the courtyard is flanked on one side by corner houses. The transformer shed in the courtyard has been thoughtfully designed.



16 Heelkruid, 1998
Urban planning: Bureau Wissing. Architecture: Henk Klunder



Viewed from above, the green circular space, with a diameter of approximately 100 metres, resembles a courtyard, but the sense of a traditional 'hofje' is less pronounced. Of the façades of the 52 ground-floor dwellings surrounding the courtyard, only the front door and a garage door directly border the courtyard, which features a play area in the centre. The living room is situated on the first floor and has a balcony overlooking the courtyard. Parking is provided on private land, resulting in a road running between the courtyard and the dwellings.

Even large, detached houses can form a courtyard. It is a form of courtyard that may be a far cry from the modest courtyard dwellings of yesteryear. Yet here too, the building layout reinforces a sense of community.



17 Zwartsluiskade, 2008
Urban planning: West 8, Architecture: Molenaar & Co



A gate provides access to this courtyard, which lies like an island in the water. Although the paving gives the impression that the road continues through it, a sign indicates that the courtyard is private property. The space is managed by the owners' association, including street lighting, parking, drainage, etc. 20 spacious semi-detached houses (approx. 150–175 m²) surround the central space. To ensure cohesion, agreements have been made regarding the colour scheme and integration with the courtyard. For example, pergolas are not permitted. The courtyard itself is landscaped with seating areas but, due to the combination with parking spaces, feels somewhat less like a meeting place.



18 Bos Uytterlindew, 2017
Urban design: Deltavormgroep; various architects: Maaskrinstinsson Architects, DDP Architecture, DPRW Architects, OOK Architects, StudioM.



On the former site of a youth care institution lies a unique residential neighbourhood set in the woods. The urban design sought to strike the right balance between individual space and life as a small community. Part of the development is a courtyard enclosed by 12 detached villas on free-standing plots and 4 terraced houses (approx. 200 m²). All the homes feature a low-level front garden, a private rear garden and an underground parking space. As the neighbourhood borders the Utrechtse Heuvelrug ecological network, strict building regulations have been applied. The neighbourhood exudes a sense of unity and tranquillity, and communal ownership of the surrounding woodland reinforces its communal character.



19

Galvanistraat, 2020

Urban planning and architecture: INBO architects



On the initiative of the builder/developer Trebbe and the architectural firm INBO, four terraced and five detached bungalows (approx. 170–200 m²) have been built around a communal green. The option of a bathroom and bedroom on the ground floor makes the homes suitable for all stages of life. The homes have their own private outdoor space, which is limited in size and bordered by green hedges. Cars are parked on private land. The homes are wide, leaving sufficient façade width for a direct view of the shared green space. In addition to this courtyard, the residents share a strip of garden at the rear. The owners' association is responsible for managing all the visible greenery, ensuring it retains a communal character and appearance.

The village-like, green layout with a wide variety of neighbourhoods is characteristic of the Vathorst expansion district. Various courtyards have been created within this development. They provide small-scale, secluded spaces for living and socialising.



20

Sprengenberghof, 2009

Urban design: West8, Architecture: AGNOVA Architects



A route for pedestrian and cycle traffic runs diagonally through a courtyard comprising 26 ground-level terraced houses (approx. 115 m²). The corners are beautifully designed, but the path does not narrow, giving the courtyard the feel of a public rather than a semi-public space. The homes have gardens in the back and a car park nearby, meaning the back door is often used as the front door. A pavement forms the transition between private and public space. The ground-floor windows on the courtyard side are relatively small, but thanks to the connection with the dormer windows, it still feels as though there is a good view of the courtyard from inside the homes.



21

Vathorst De Laak Courtyard, 2019

Urban planning: West8, Architecture: Zecc Architects



The timber cladding on the inner side of the courtyard contrasts with the robust brickwork on the outer side of the 17 courtyard dwellings (approx. 100 m²). The rental properties are owned by the Alliantie housing association. A double-height entrance gate marks the transition from the street to the courtyard. The gateway features front doors and windows. From within the homes, large windows offer a good view of the courtyard. The transition zone from the homes to the car-free courtyard has not been further developed. A number of homes feature a senior-friendly layout with a bedroom on the ground floor.



22

Herwijnenhof, 2021

Urban design: West8, Architecture: Mulleners & Mulleners



This courtyard has the appearance of a classic residential courtyard with 23 ground-level homes (approx. 150 m²). It is currently situated on an open polder in the Laakse Tuinen, a sub-plan in the west of Vathorst. The transition between private and public space has been carefully designed as a small pavement with a decorative frame in the façade or as a front garden with a low hedge. The car-free courtyard features a green play area for young children. Parking is provided in a parking pod at the rear, beneath solar-powered carports.



23

Tegelenhof, 2022

Urban planning: West8, Architecture: IRIS architects

Eight lifetime-adaptable homes surrounding a courtyard form an 'architectural highlight' in De Laakse Tuinen in Vathorst. Each home (approx. 140 m²) has a double-pitched roof. A fairly wide path runs through the car-free courtyard. The homes have shallow backyards and parking in a parking pod nearby. As a result, the back door is often used as the front door. The homes face the courtyard with spacious façades. The boundary between private and public space is not clearly defined and offers little privacy given the open nature of the courtyard.



25

Lorentzhof, 2024

Urban planning: Vollmer+partners, Architecture: VMEZ



In the inner courtyard of an existing 1930s housing block, on a former industrial site, a residential courtyard has been created comprising 6 social housing flats (approx. 70 m², De Alliantie) and 11 single-family homes (approx. 110 m², Ready for Living). The homes face the courtyard, which has been designed as a communal space featuring a dry riverbed, a play area and a bench. Distinctive corner houses mark the corner plots. Parking has been arranged so that cars do not obstruct the connection between the homes and the courtyard. Adjacent to the plot, one parking space forms part of the private property; the remaining land belongs to the local authority.

Courtyards were already a form of urban infill in the 17th century. At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the courtyard is once again being used as a building form to incorporate new homes into the existing city. This requires careful planning. How do you deal with the surrounding buildings, existing trees and green spaces? How do you make the site climate-resilient and encourage social interaction? And once again, the question of space: where do the cars go?



24

Weltevreden, 2008

Architecture and urban planning: Pouw & Dillen Architects and Op ten Noort Blijdenstein Architects; landscape design: Haver Droeze



Where a Citroën garage once stood, a mixed-use residential development comprising 124 drive-in homes, townhouses, live-work units and flats has been built. Together with a number of commercial spaces, they enclose a courtyard atop a two-storey car park. The courtyard consists of a communal garden where people play and where there are benches. Overgrown pergolas and trees provide shade, and the lifts to the car park have been designed to blend in with the communal garden layout. The transitions from the homes to the courtyard have been carefully designed. The gates in the garden walls were not originally planned, but were added on the initiative of residents who often use the garden gate as their front door.

Credits:

- Editors: Johan Galjaard, Irene Edzes, Gaby ten Hove
- Acknowledgements: Amersfoort City Council, Jaap Bodd, Pim Kupers, Trudy de Mooy, Jojanneke Tap, Gerard Plug, Jojanneke Tap, Paul Versteeg
- Archive images: Eemland Archive
- Photography: Dirk Verwoerd Architectural Photography
- Aerial images: via Google Earth Pro
- Graphic design: Studio Jesse
- Printing: Printing Amersfoort

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- www.jojannekeclarijs.nl

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- kfHeinfonds, Cultuurfonds, gemeente Amersfoort, Armen de Poth