

THE LATEST AMSTERDAM SWIMMING

TEXT ARTHUR WORTMANN PHOTOS LUUK KRAMER

'What prompted the construction of Sportplaza Mercator in Amsterdam,' says architect Ton Venhoeven, 'was the borough's aim to upgrade a shabby neighbourhood.' A joint venture of a public-private nature involving the Sportfonds, a Dutch organization responsible for around 125 swimming pools in the Netherlands, resulted in a new swimming complex with two outdoor pools, two indoor pools, a therapeutic pool, a fitness room, a sauna, a party room, a café and a fast-food facility. The complex replaces two existing swimming pools: an old municipal outdoor pool that previously occupied the site and an indoor of the new pool will not think immediately of Sportfonds pool nearby.

The architect describes the interior of the new building as 'a city in a grotto'. Clustered beneath an irregularly shaped roof, the vari- esting aspect of the building: it undermines nected within an open plan. The most striking to 'green' in the city. part of the design, however, is the skin of the complex. Exterior walls and roof harbour a system of plants inspired by the work of French

botanist Patrick Blanc (known for, among COMPLEX, A DESIGN BY VENHOEVEN C.S., other things, the vegetal façades of the Musée IS A CREATURE THAT'S SWALLOWED A CAVE. du quai Branly in Paris) and developed by garden specialist and landscape architect Copijn, a firm that will also supervise the growth of these plants for the next 20 years. Dozens of types of hanging and earthbound plants are flourishing within a relatively light framework of metal, plastic and membranes. They are nourished by means of an integrated watering system. It's been just three months since the greenery was introduced, and the effect is already quite convincing. Venhoeven fondly refers to his building as 'a beast hiding under the ground'.

His choice of the word 'beast' says it all. One requirement of the brief was the realization of a 'green building' that would compensate for the loss of the sunbathing area adjoining the original outdoor pool. Observers a well-kept lawn, however, but rather of rampant plant life nearly impossible to control. This sense of unbridled profusion is an interous programmatic components are intercon- the traditional calming, tranquil role allocated

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