

# Closer to God



Previously used as a house of snakes, a place for parking bicycles and a temple for celebrating carnival, Maastricht's 13th-century Dominican Church has opened its doors once more. Not to parishioners but to customers of Selexyz Dominicanen, a bookshop in which Merkkx + Girod Architects recently transformed a 750-m<sup>2</sup> floor area into a retail space that covers 1200 m<sup>2</sup>. The architects rejected an idea to crisscross the space with footbridges, which they felt would nullify the spacious character of the interior. Instead, making the most of the soaring ceiling and Gothic architecture, they built a triple-level, walk-in bookcase. They positioned the colossal installation asymmetrically across the nave and one side aisle. Standing on the top level of the new volume, one has a view of the church rarely seen by members of the

former congregation: the climb provides an impressive experience that's sure to make the more spiritual visitor feel closer to the Almighty. The simple lines of the steel installation, together with the other interior furnishings, form a pleasant contrast to the yellowish marble walls of the church. After making a purchase, the reader can prolong her enjoyment of the new bookshop with a cappuccino or light lunch in the former sanctuary of the church, which also serves as a cultural platform and exhibition space.

In other words, visitors have more than one reason to linger in this 'chapel of wisdom' before returning to the streets of Maastricht as enlightened souls.

— Words: Alexandra Smith  
Photos: Roos Aldershoff



Chapel of Wisdom:  
Merkkx + Girod  
Architects inserted  
a 1200-m<sup>2</sup> retail  
space into a 13th-  
century church  
in Maastricht,  
giving the client a  
walk-in bookcase  
that nearly  
reaches heaven.