

# NEWSLETTER 3: RFH ON TOUR

*space | learning and sharing | connecting*

## Wonderful moments

Encounters are a part of our lives. On a journey like this you come into contact with a wide variety of people. Curiously enough, it always seems that you meet the right people at the right time. Somehow you cross paths with someone who gives you – in words or gestures or even with just look – exactly what you needed in that moment.

Incredibly special, something to be cherished. I'd like to share one such encounter with you all. My birthday this year went differently than anticipated. It was a challenging morning with an angry fellow traveler suddenly driving off with absolutely no explanation.

An unexpected gift came the next day as I was preparing to leave Spitzkoppe. I wanted to give my hosts something in return for all their hospitality and delicious food. But with limited availability of goods and no stores close by, I hadn't found something fitting. To which Frans responded: you've already given us something wonderful: the space. The space to be who we are, to think about buildings and spaces we've been in in a wholly different way and space for wonderful conversations.

Amazing to hear that, for some one who aims to build places all over the world where people experience space to be themselves.



*Dome-day in Kasese, with a large audience who joined in after all.*

## Space for the Other

At Roof for Humanity we create spaces. We build places for social activities, where people come together. These community spaces welcome everyone and give them the space to be themselves. Architecture cannot talk, at least not literally. Still, I believe - together with many other architects and designers - that buildings can speak to us. They really can convey something, create an atmosphere, emphasize a feeling, and in so doing, buildings can tell stories.

To create a welcoming feeling in our spaces we use elements like openings which are inviting and pique the curiosity of people passing by. The construction process is also an extremely important part of the project in our work method. By involving the community, the end users from the very beginning, you can already help people feel comfortable and welcome during the building phase. Material and color choices also play a role in the creation of an enjoyable place where people want to be and where they can be themselves.

We also need space in our daily lives when interacting with other people around us. Space to be who we are. How do you actually do that though? And how do you help create space for another to be completely themselves as well?



## Learn from challenges

Building days come with their fair share of challenges. Both on dome-days and on site of the office building for Ahava things are always unfolding differently than planned and expected. This requires a flexible attitude on my part, as well as from the builders and participating villagers.

We try to go with the flow together and work toward the best solution, tactic, or answer with what we have at that moment. Roof for Humanity believes in coming together in these situations and discussing the challenges with the team.

This is partly because I, Narda, am very conscious that there is much I don't know and am not aware of in life. Of course, I'm trained as an architect and have more theoretical knowledge in some cases than others in the team. But practical experience is essential here, and I believe in all creative (construction) processes.

Involving people in the design and decision-making process helps create a sense of responsibility and ownership and shared understanding of the project during construction. This fosters a positive work environment and buildings self-esteem and pride in what we realize by working together.



Adam tells about planting the trees

## Seeing and hearing each other creates connection

Every day we see and hear all kinds of things. Here in Malawi, I'm lucky to wake up with beautiful bird songs each morning. I often hear the same types of birds, but there are still some that spring out more on a given day and surprise me with their unique beauty. Unfortunately, I don't know exactly what they have to say, but listening to their music brings joy and a nice beginning of the day. For a large part of our lives, we also hear and see other people on a daily basis.

It is not always easy, however, to really see and truly listen to one another. It has been fascinating throughout the RfH Tour to experience this with others and talk about it in different countries and communities. Funny to discover that, even when you do speak the same language, it happens that you don't really (want to) hear what someone has to say. This can lead to a huge communication gap, a barrier and the resulting inconvenient or awkward situations which arise from it.

On the road there is often a literal language barrier, which I see as a fun challenge in my work. Of course, it doesn't always go well and unfortunately that can mean restarting a part of the build, but it also leads to some very comical misunderstandings.

For example when, after a week, you discover that one of the builders keeps mixing up me/I and you, saying: "when you have a question, then come to my house". Puzzled, I ask "why would I go to your house when you're here at Ahava working? A strange conversation followed until I realized what he meant. He was saying "if I have a question, I'll come to your house (meaning the room where I'm staying and working here at Ahava). Haha, we had a good laugh and shook hands in agreement. Questions are always welcome, and we understood one another again.

Thinking of my favorite painting, the Tower of Babel, Pieter Bruegel de Oude, I regularly ask myself: what can we learn from that story?



The brick and bottle walls keep growing higher!

Great work everyone!

## Every one is valuable

While on the road, the term 'sharing' often comes to mind. Funnily enough you might think of sharing mostly in terms of objects, food or other physical things. But, in truth, we share much more with each other. That has become suddenly clear to me on this journey.

Sharing the road or a campsite, for example, a space, your time, thoughts or emotions, knowledge and experiences. The list goes on. Sometimes I've thought if we could share everything and actually *did* that, things in this world would be much more fairly distributed.

But is that really possible, to share everything with one another?

It's also interesting that we can't actually always share intangible things... worlds and cultures can be so different that the meaning and understanding of wanting to share something gets lost in a shallow interaction. The very thing you'd like to convey gets lost in the process.

Sharing something material is, however, always possible! It has brought many wonderful moments on this RfH Tour!.

## Continuing RfH on tour

Timing-wise this newsletter is a bit behind the daily reality of the Tour. Once the roof of the office building at Ahava has been built, I'll be on the road with my buddy once again. For now, my lovely house on wheels is waiting patiently until we get underway again.

Just like me...because I'm looking forward to the next steps too :-)

## Construction process at Ahava Ministries

We're doing well! In addition to building bamboo domes in villages around Lauji, I'm overseeing the construction of an office building on the grounds of the Ahava Ministries health clinic, which will be getting a new meeting room.

We're creating a very special and unique building, together with the building team, mister Kevin, Thomson, Smart and occasionally two other men from the Ahava team as assistants.

Walls made from reused bottles and bricks create a lovely atmosphere when the sun shines through them. A completely new building technique for me which has made the whole design and build a major learning process for everyone. Super cool, it's going to be awesome!

The form of the build is also far from a conventional rectangle. This choice was because a space with rounded corners gives people a different feeling than 90-degree angles. The curves provide a softer, more comfortable effect that helps people to feel welcomed into the space.

## Where do you feel welcome?

Our mission on this RfH Tour is to collect experiences and information, and who knows, even answers to important questions for our creative and architectural work. One of the key feelings in all of this is the sense that you are welcome, that you can feel at home somewhere and can be completely yourself. Send us your answer by [email](#)!



## Still 1 dome to go!

The last dome is planned on Ahava Ministries. Where we will be building the dome, together with the whole team, the nurses, the gardeners, the builders, the cook, the laundry and soap making ladies for the last time in Malawi. Very much looking forward to it.

More about it in our next newsletter!