



MVRDV, Heatherwick, and Mecanoo Among Finalists to Design a New World Wonder for Climate Action

Amsterdam, May 6th, 2025 — Shift, the steward-owned social enterprise dedicated to igniting massive climate action, today announced the five finalist teams advancing to Stage Two of its international architecture competition.

Launched in January with a prize pool of €250.000, the Shift International Architecture Competition seeks to design an iconic landmark that will become a “new world wonder” – one whose design and visitor experience fosters deep emotional connection and inspires large-scale behavioral change in response to the climate crisis.

Shift emphasizes that the landmark should envision the next level of sustainable architecture. Within this new space, a permanent program curated by Shift will encourage and nurture sustainable behaviors. Using immersive experiences, it will highlight the authentic stories of climate and sustainability champions.

The competition is overseen by New York-based agency, DVDL. Teams from 50 countries downloaded the brief, 80 teams submitted a proposal. Three of the five finalists were selected by a diverse jury of eleven experts in architecture, sustainability, biodiversity, culture, and impact investment. Incorporating a wide range of perspectives in the jury deliberation, they have voted to send the following three teams to the second stage of the competition:

[Mecanoo](#), headquartered in Delft, the Netherlands, is an international architecture practice led by Francine Houben and partners. Their designs prioritise people, place, purpose and poetry—creating spaces that are inclusive, sustainable, innovative and touch all the senses. Their projects—like the Natural History Museum in Abu Dhabi,

Kaohsiung Station, and the TU Delft Library—aim to inspire and connect communities through meaningful design.

[MVRDV](#) is a globally renowned architecture and urban design practice, founded by Winy Maas, Jacob van Rijs and Nathalie de Vries, known for bold ideas that challenge conventional city-making. With a focus on sustainability, data, and social interaction, their work spans buildings and spaces that are imaginative, experimental, and contextual. Notable projects include Valley in Amsterdam, Markthal in Rotterdam, and the Tianjin Binhai Library in China.

[Office for Political Innovation](#), founded by Andrés Jaque, is an architecture practice based in Madrid and New York that embraces architecture as an intersectional practice. Notable works include the Ocean Space in Venice for TBA21–Academy, the Babyn Yar Museum of Memory and Oblivion in Kyiv, and the Reggio School in Madrid.

Together with the three firms, two more finalists had been preselected ahead of the open call to signal the range and caliber of talent to Shift’s key stakeholders:

[Heatherwick Studio](#) is a team of over 250 problem solvers dedicated to making the physical world around us better for everyone. Based out of their combined workshop and design studios, they create buildings, spaces, objects and infrastructure. Notable projects include the UK Pavilion; Expo 2010, the Olympic Cauldron; 2012, and the Vessel; NYC.

[Ecosistema Urbano](#) is a Madrid and Boston based firm co-founded in 2000 by architects Belinda Tato and José Luis Vallejo. Ecosistema Urbano defines its approach as “urban social design,” focusing on creating environments that enhance self-organization, social interaction and environmental connectivity. Notable works include the Eco-Boulevard in Madrid and Polinature, a climate prototype designed to mitigate urban heat and attract pollinators.

Each team, including the two pre-selected ones, will receive €40,000 to expand their vision ahead of the final jury presentation. The winning concept will be awarded an additional €50,000 and will form the foundation for the first Shift Landmark, to be built in the Netherlands.

“Architecture today must do more than solve problems—it must spark imagination, shift behavior, and foster new forms of community. The five selected proposals each do this in their own way. They challenge conventions, embrace complexity, and show how design can become a catalyst for systemic change. This is the kind of thinking our future demands.” said **Ben van Berkel**, architect and a jury member.

Carice van Houten, actress, and environmental advocate and a jury member, added: *“Real change doesn’t happen in isolation—it happens in community. What excites me about these finalist designs is that they go beyond sustainability checklists. They invite people in and create space for connection, reflection, and shared responsibility. We need places like that—places that bring people together and remind us what we’re fighting for.”*

Shift founder **Don Ritzen** remarked: *“The finalist teams show what’s possible when design meets purpose. Each concept has the potential to spark millions of ‘satori moments’—personal awakenings that fuel real-world change.”*

The teams will move ahead and start refining their designs in phase two of the competition.

Shift’s landmark project is part of a larger mission: to move people from passive awareness to active participation in solving the climate crisis. Through immersive experience, emotional storytelling, and community engagement, Shift aims to trigger a social tipping point—where sustainable living becomes the new normal.

For more information on Shift Competition, visit competition.shift.world.

Shift Competition Jury Members

[Aric Chen](#), Director, Nieuwe Instituut

[Astrid Leyssens](#), Founder, We Are Impact Collective

[Ben van Berkel](#), Founder, UNS

[Carice van Houten](#), Activist, Actress

[Clemens Brenninkmeijer](#), Head of Sustainability, Redevco

[Dr. Lewis Akenji](#), Executive Director, Hot or Cool Institute

[Géke Roelink](#), Director, NEMO Science Museum

[Lodewijk Hoekstra](#), Ambassador and Presenter

[Matthias Schuler](#), Founder, TRANSSOLAR

[Mireia Luzárraga](#), Co-Founder, TAKK

[Nicole Maarsen](#), Real Estate Investor and Trusted Advisor

About Shift

Shift is a social, steward-owned enterprise founded by entrepreneur Don Ritzen. Ritzen believes that behavioural change is one of the biggest challenges when it comes to climate change and that it is overlooked because of the controversy. That is why he set out to find an approach that could inspire millions.

Shift is one of only 80 Dutch companies to have passed the accreditation process of the Social Enterprise Code, which means impact comes first.

Before starting Shift, Ritzen co-founded Amsterdam-based accelerator Rockstart, which has offices in Bogota, Copenhagen and Amsterdam. Since its founding in 2010, Rockstart has invested in more than 350 early-stage startups, including many impact-oriented companies such as Peerby, Sympower and Hubs. Today, the Rockstart companies combined are worth EUR 1.7 billion.

About DVDL

The competition advisor [DVDL](#) is a New York-based agency of cultural planners working on visitor experience, placemaking, cultural strategy in North America, Europe and the Middle East