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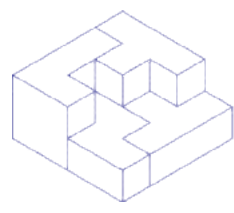
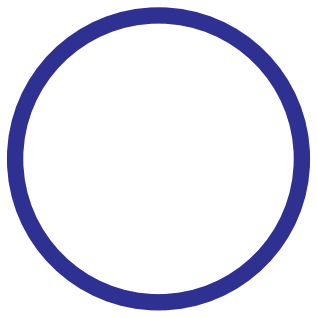
June/July 2019

**Special Edition: Brussels**



**URBAN.BRUSSELS HAS ITS OFFICES  
IN ONE OF THE BUILDINGS DESIGNED  
BY JULES GHOBERT IN THE LATE  
1940S FOR MONT DES ARTS.**

**THIS DISTRICT IS A HISTORIC  
PLACE AND THE HEART OF A MAJOR  
CULTURAL HUB OF THE COUNTRY.**



urban  
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BUH BRUSSELS URBANISM  
AND HERITAGE

**City Region, inhabited city and city of use, dynamic urban factory, Brussels is the product of a specific urban process. Consisting of neighborhoods with varying geometries, sites with multiple configurations, buildings revealing the diversity of its functions and coexistence of urban strata, the question of the quality of architecture in Brussels is regularly raised.**

**Talking about architectural quality one could retain certain principles, such as durability or functionality. But, in aesthetic terms, no absolute definition can be made. To circumscribe the notion of architectural quality would come down to making it outdated and to impede the renewal of creation.**

**What is certain, however, is that there can be no architectural quality without culture, education, discussion or collective construction. My goal is to turn Urban.brussels into a platform that is open to discussion and the exchange of ideas, but also a centre of expertise in its field. Urban.brussels must stimulate architecture, as an expression of culture, and participate in the cultural dynamic of Brussels.**

**Our mission for Brussels is both to ensure compliance with the legal and regulatory framework while stimulating the creativity and the quality of projects to meet the challenges and needs of Brussels and its inhabitants. In Brussels, as elsewhere, the urban fabric is continuously being renewed and the heritage of tomorrow will be the alliance of the perpetual and dynamic manufacture of the city, the reversibility of its facilities and the resilience of its urban forms.**

**Bety Waknine <sup>BE</sup>**

**A lawyer by training, Bety Waknine has been involved for nearly 15 years in the fields of urbanism and spatial planning. As the former deputy chief of staff of the minister-president of the Brussels-Capital Region, Rudi Vervoort, she has managed several projects, including the demographic PRAS (with the new business zones in the city), the master plans (premises of the future PADs), the launch of the Canal Plan and the redevelopment of this area, the project for Kanal as a cultural hub and the reform of CoBAT. For the past two years, Bety Waknine has been managing Urban.brussels, the new ministry for architecture, urban renewal and heritage.**

**Veronique Boone**

is a lecturer at the La Cambre Horta Faculty of Architecture at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB). She teaches history, theory and criticism of architecture, as well as the conservation of twentieth-century architecture. Her research focuses on the modes of representation and reception of modern architecture, on which she publishes regularly.

**Mark Brearley**

is Professor of Urbanism at The Cass in London and leads the Cass Cities initiative. He advises in Brussels on development that welcomes diverse enterprise, and is Ateliermeester for the programme Atelier Brussels, The Productive Metropolis. Until 2013 he was Head of Design for London. He is proprietor of London tray manufacturer Kaymet.

**Nathalie Cobbaut**

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**Aslı Çiçek**

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is associate professor at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture et du Paysage Lille and editor of Oase. Her research focuses on the theory and history of architectural publications in relation to the history of the postmodern. She is a visiting professor at the KULeuven since 2019, where she teaches 'Theory and Discourse'.

**Pieter T'Jonck**

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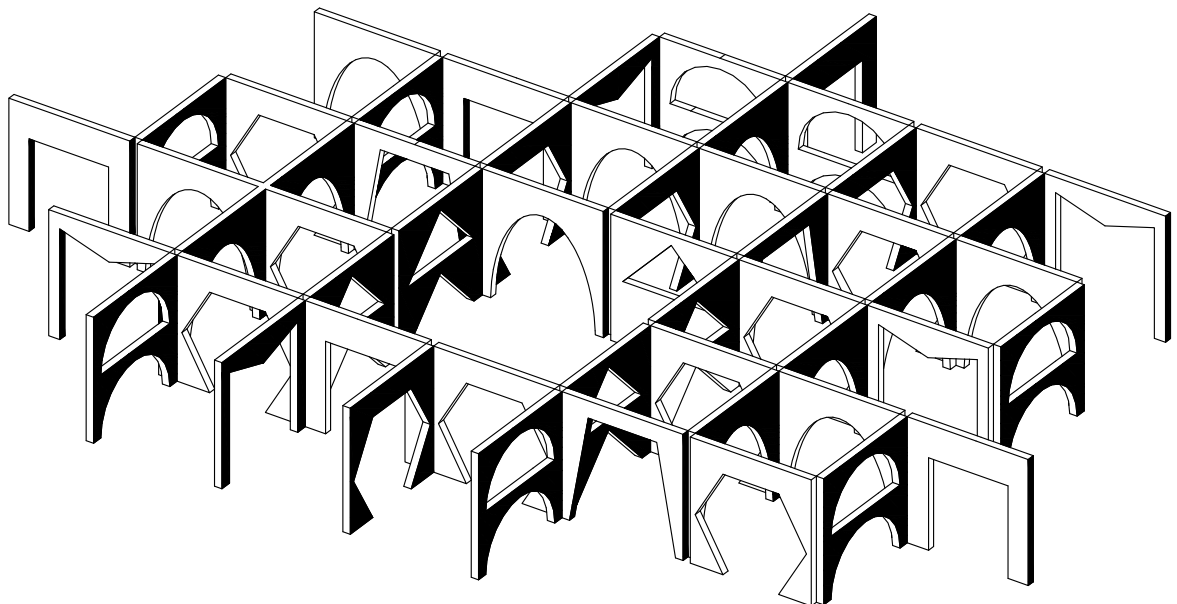
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↘  
**Pool is Cool, re-introducing public open-air swimming in the Canal Zone in Brussels, 2016**  
© Paul Steinbrück



# Editorial

*#Bruxellesmabelle*. If you believe Instagram, thousands of people think Brussels is beautiful. Only not always without irony, because in addition to the obligatory sunset over the Palace of Justice that rises above the city centre or the idyll of a summery pop-up bar, you will also find drab images of poverty, litter and traffic jams. It's common knowledge that Brussels is as attractive as it is unpleasant. While thousands of commuters from Flanders and Wallonia enjoy working in the city, they'd never want to make it their home. Most European officials only come to work in the capital for a limited period. (Trans)migrants come and go. The population is growing rapidly (20 per cent in ten years), but the territory is limited and constricted. Every year, countless families migrate to the 'Vlaamse Rand', the Flemish periphery. There's plenty of movement, except on the Ring road, which is always at a standstill. We know all this: it's the backdrop to everyday life for Brussels residents. But this is not what this issue is about.

The first special issue of *A+* is dedicated to Brussels because of the rich stratification of the city, the only one in Belgium with a metropolitan character. And because, in the light of the above, the Brussels-Capital Region is firmly committed to finding spatial solutions: not just for tackling territorial development, but also for the demographic, social and economic challenges it faces. Because there is thinking at a higher level, once again, about the strategic projects that make the city. Because people dare to talk about spatial quality as an antidote to economic and political interests. Because subjects such as the circular economy and temporary use are given a prominent place at international real-estate fairs like MIPIM.

Brussels is a city state with many masters. It is the capital of Europe, Belgium, Flanders and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, but also a Region that works on a day-to-day basis with 19 municipalities and two (linguistic) communities. This 'lasagna' slows down the decision-making process and makes everything more complex. Since its creation in 1989, however, the Brussels-Capital Region has undergone an impressive evolution in terms of spatial thinking, diversity and participation.

I'm a true *Brusselaar*. I belong here because it's not my birthplace. My children are being raised in a language pool of Dutch, French, German, English, Turkish and Arabic. Cultural diversity is the norm for them, and the minority is the standard. When I cycle to work, I curse the potholes in the road, the absence of bicycle lanes and the mentality of certain drivers. How could I not? But I also recognize that the city is making a huge effort to compensate for lost time and has great ambitions. Brussels is a young and progressive metropolis. A red/green enclave in a right- to extreme-right Flanders. An island in an increasingly conservative Europe.

'We don't need Brussels at all, we desire Brussels', said architect Julien De Smedt in *A+221*. That was ten years ago. In the meantime, we need Brussels more than ever and some of those desires are being fulfilled. Because she's showing us that things can be done differently. A test tube within the laboratory of Europe.

Lisa De Visscher  
*Editor-in-chief*



Overview of future Gare Maritime offices equipped with the Halio system

© Halio International - Gare Maritime, Extensa

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**‘For almost 40 years I lived in Antwerp. Despite its marketing motto *’t Stad is van A* (The city is yours), I never succeeded in becoming an *Antwerpenaar*. When I moved to Brussels, however, I felt like a *Brusselaar* from day one. The reason is that Brussels has no *Leitkultur*, everyone is part of a minority. A city that belongs to no one belongs to everyone. Brussels is a laboratory for that living together that every city will soon have to address. A perfect capital for Europe, reflecting its motto *In varietate concordia* (Unity in diversity).**

**Thanks to its border with Flanders, Brussels lacks an urban periphery. Everything takes place inside a limited area within the Ring road, where gentrification and impoverishment, rural peacefulness and metropolitanism are intertwined. This makes Brussels a genuine city: while other cities export their problems to the periphery to create a clean artificial centre, Brussels is mixed all over the place.**

**A lot still needs to be done. There is a backlog in public space, mobility solutions and public buildings. However, that is also an advantage: where building is complete, nothing can be done anymore, but where building is forthcoming, everything is still possible. A generational change is imminent: the millennials will soon take over the city, unhindered by traditional prejudices about Brussels. This fact, combined with the law of the stimulating backlog, promises a bright future for Brussels.’**

**Willem Jan Neutelings<sup>NL</sup>**

Willem Jan Neutelings (b. 1959, Bergen op Zoom) is a Dutch architect and the co-founder of Neutelings Riedijk Architects in Rotterdam (NL). He currently lives in Brussels. Neutelings Riedijk Architects completed the Herman Teirlinck building at Tour & Taxis in 2017. They are currently renovating the Gare Maritime building on the same site.

# Tour & Taxis

*Lisa De Visscher*

In 15 years, Tour & Taxis has grown from an abandoned customs area into a fully fledged new neighbourhood. In the master plan of Bureau Bas Smets, new homes and office buildings are given a place next to emblematic historical heritage such as the Royal Depot and the Gare Maritime. A large park, sports infrastructure and the Brasserie de la Senne make this district a new centre in Brussels.



→  
Master plan by  
Bureau Bas Smets

- 1 Royal Depot
- 2 Sheds
- 3 Gare Maritime
- 4 Residential buildings
- 5 Herman Teirlinck building
- 6 Leefmilieu Brussel Bruxelles Environnement
- 7 Brasserie de la Senne

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a then still young Belgium constructed a free port area in the heart of its capital. It was an enterprise that did little to hide its economic ambitions. Tour & Taxis comprised the largest freight station in Europe, an impressive customs building, a gigantic post office, and an almost 100-metre-long royal depot in a walled and controlled zone next to the canal. Thanks to its central location, it was able to serve a particularly strategic area.

The site lost its *raison d'être* in the 1980s due to the establishment of the customs union. In early 2000, after years of vacancy and decay, the large and strategically located 30-hectare site was purchased by three developers: Ackermans & van Haaren, Stak Rei, and Iret. The royal depot was renovated and brought into use in 2004. The rest of the site would languish for another ten years, however, until Extensa Group (Ackermans & van Haaren) purchased the terrains owned by their fellow developer and began to speed up the development plans.

The first challenge was to break open the site's closed character. For this purpose, a master plan was drawn up in 2015 for an area of 20 hectares, almost half of which was given over to a new public park – the largest to be laid out in Brussels since the nineteenth century – designed by Bureau Bas Smets. The new Picard bridge over the canal, on which construction will start this year, will provide quick pedestrian access to the Northern Quarter.

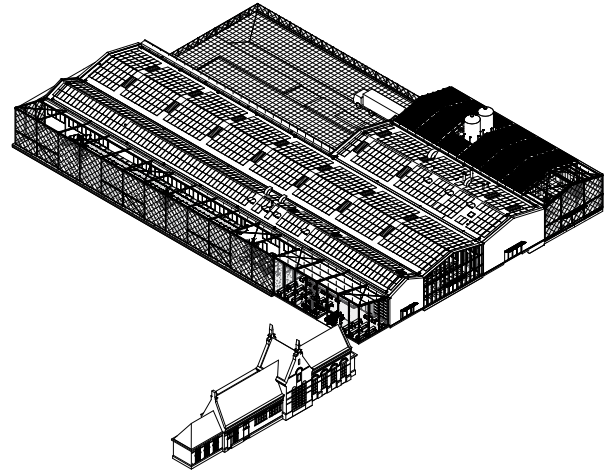
The master plan provided, on the one hand, for the redevelopment of the historical buildings on site – the Gare Maritime into retail units and offices, the Hôtel des Douanes into a 100-room boutique hotel, and the Hôtel de la Poste into a conference centre – and, on the other hand, for the development of a series of new buildings with an underground car park for 3,500 cars. Two office buildings have already been constructed: the BEL (popularly known as the 'toaster'), designed by Cepezed and Philippe Samyn and home to the offices of Brussels Environment, and the Herman Teirlinck building, which has housed the Flemish Government administrative offices since 2017 and was designed by Neutelings Riedijk Architects.

Several residential schemes are currently under construction: the Riva project by Architectes Associés on the Picard bridge, which is yet to be built, contains 139 apartments and promises luxurious homes with views of the canal. Following a competition, a residential care centre and 220 apartments were awarded to noAarchitecten, Sergison Bates architects and AWG. These are currently under construction just behind the Gare Maritime. 'We still have a potential of 1,000 residential units, or rather 85,000 m<sup>2</sup>, that can be realized', says Peter De Durpel, the COO of Extensa. 'On the triangular car park next to the BEL, the master plan provides for another 150-metre-high tower with offices and/or a hotel. It was originally intended to house the Flemish Government offices, but as they will eventually move into the WTC towers, we are currently looking at other possibilities.'

The new avenue between Avenue du Port and the residential area was divided into several concessions at the instigation of the Brussels Government Architect. The first of these is the Citroën-Peugeot garage, which is now open. There will also be a drinks wholesaler – a programme that accords with

the ambition to integrate more manufacturing industries within the residential and office blocks in the Canal Zone – and finally the Brasserie de la Senne, designed by L'Escaut / La Générale, which is currently nearing completion. Extensa also created a logistics hub in this area: a storage and distribution centre that offloads goods from articulated lorries and, using lighter electric cars or cargo bikes, distributes them to the various companies on the site. By the park, a 1-hectare area has been coloured in for public facilities with possibly a new school and sports infrastructure.

↓  
L'Escaut / La  
Générale, Brasserie  
de la Senne



↓  
noA – awg – Sergison  
Bates, residential  
buildings in zone C



Through these programmes, the Tour & Taxis site, which was still on the 'wrong side of the canal' in the late 1990s, once again demonstrates the same level of ambition that formed the basis of its existence a century ago, and thus resolutely claims its place within Brussels' ambitious development plan.▲■●

# Gare Maritime

*Lisa De Visscher*

**In this former freight station, Neutelings Riedijk Architects designed a new city where it will never rain. The impressive Art Nouveau steel structure that covers the whole was renovated by Jan De Moffarts and Bureau Bouwtechniek.**





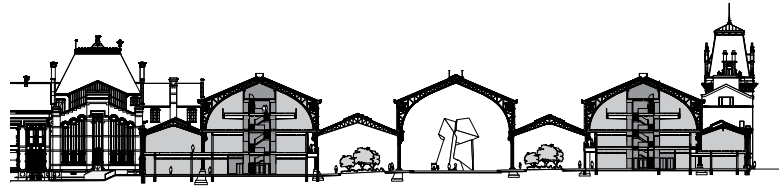
When it built the largest freight station in Europe in 1902, Belgium was not only raising its economic game but also demonstrating its engineering prowess. This impressive building was designed by railway engineer Frédéric Bruneel, who would later play a key role in establishing the North-South link in Brussels. The Gare Maritime is 280 metres long and 140 metres wide and comprises three large halls (with a span of 26 metres) and four small halls (with breadths ranging from 12 to 16 metres). On Rue Picard, the Gare Maritime is connected to the Hôtel de la Poste and the Dépôt des Colis. The load-bearing structure of the halls consists of a series of three-hinged arches. Comprising trusses with hinges at each rib and at the base, these absorb the movements of the steel structure. The structure was executed with ornaments in the then newly emergent art-nouveau style. Typical for the time is the engineer's approach to the decoration. Each ornament has a function. For example, the slanting connectors at the level of the gutters actually serve to absorb the transverse force.

Together with the Central Station in Antwerp, the Gare Maritime is the last example of railway architecture from this period to retain its original canopy. On the other hand, the structure and composition of its main and side walls, and the majority of the ornaments, were destroyed through the renovation works carried out by the national railway company, the NMBS/SNCB, which managed the building for just under a century.

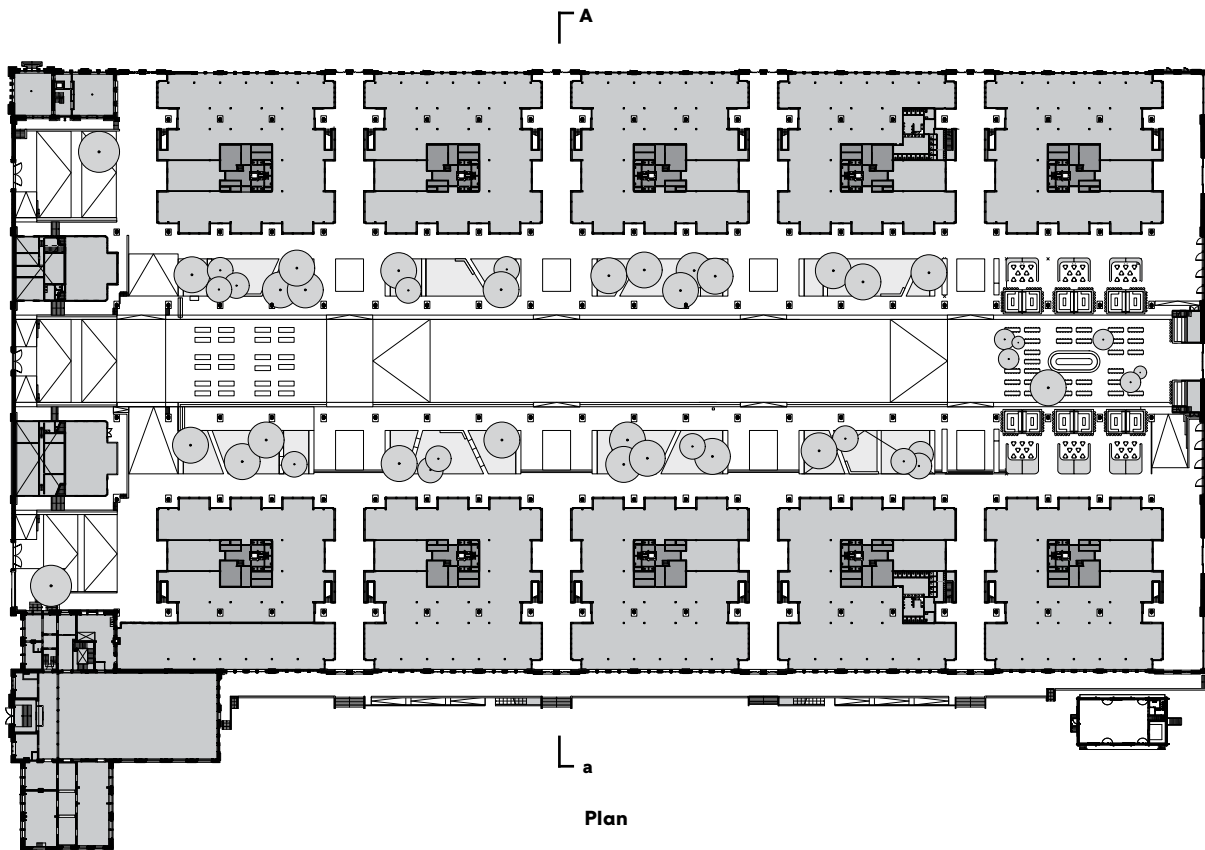
When Extensa purchased the Tour & Taxis site, the building was in a terrible state. The first challenge, therefore, was to restore this industrial ruin to its former glory. Architect Jan De Moffarts and Bureau Bouwtechniek were commissioned to renovate the building's steel structure, façades and roofs, and to develop a vision for the internal organization of the seven halls.

Together with Professor Inge Bertels (VUB), they immersed themselves in the extensive archive that had been passed down by the NMBS/SNCB. They found hundreds of plans with meticulous renditions of the construction details, all of which underscored the immense historical value of this exceptional station building. On the basis of this archival research, and in collaboration with the engineering firm Ney & Partners, it was decided to restore the original structure and composition but without reproducing all of the original ornaments. To ensure that the halls meet today's standards for ventilation and smoke evacuation, Studiebureau Boydens asked for 400 m<sup>2</sup> of mechanically controlled windows to be integrated into the façades and 1,200 m<sup>2</sup> into the roof. For Jan De Moffarts, the integration of these contemporary elements turned out to

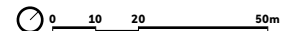




Section Aa



Plan



Architect  
**Neutelings Riedijk  
Architects**

Website  
**neutelings-riedijk.com**

Official project name  
**Gare Maritime**

Location  
**Tour & Taxis, Brussels**

Execution architect  
**Bureau Bouwtechniek**

Restoration architect  
**Jan de Moffarts**

Programme  
**Offices, retail, leisure,  
eating & drinking, public  
events**

Procedure  
**Direct commission**

Client  
**Extensa Group**

Lead contractor  
**MBG**

Landscape architect  
**Omgeving**

Public realm  
**Neutelings Riedijk  
Architecten**

Structural engineering  
**Ney & Partners**

Services engineering  
**Boydens Engineering**

Building physics  
**Boydens Engineering**

Sustainability  
**Boydens Engineering –  
Bopro**

Acoustics  
**Venac**

Completion  
**2019–2020**

Total floor area  
**75,000 m<sup>2</sup>**

Budget  
**n/c**

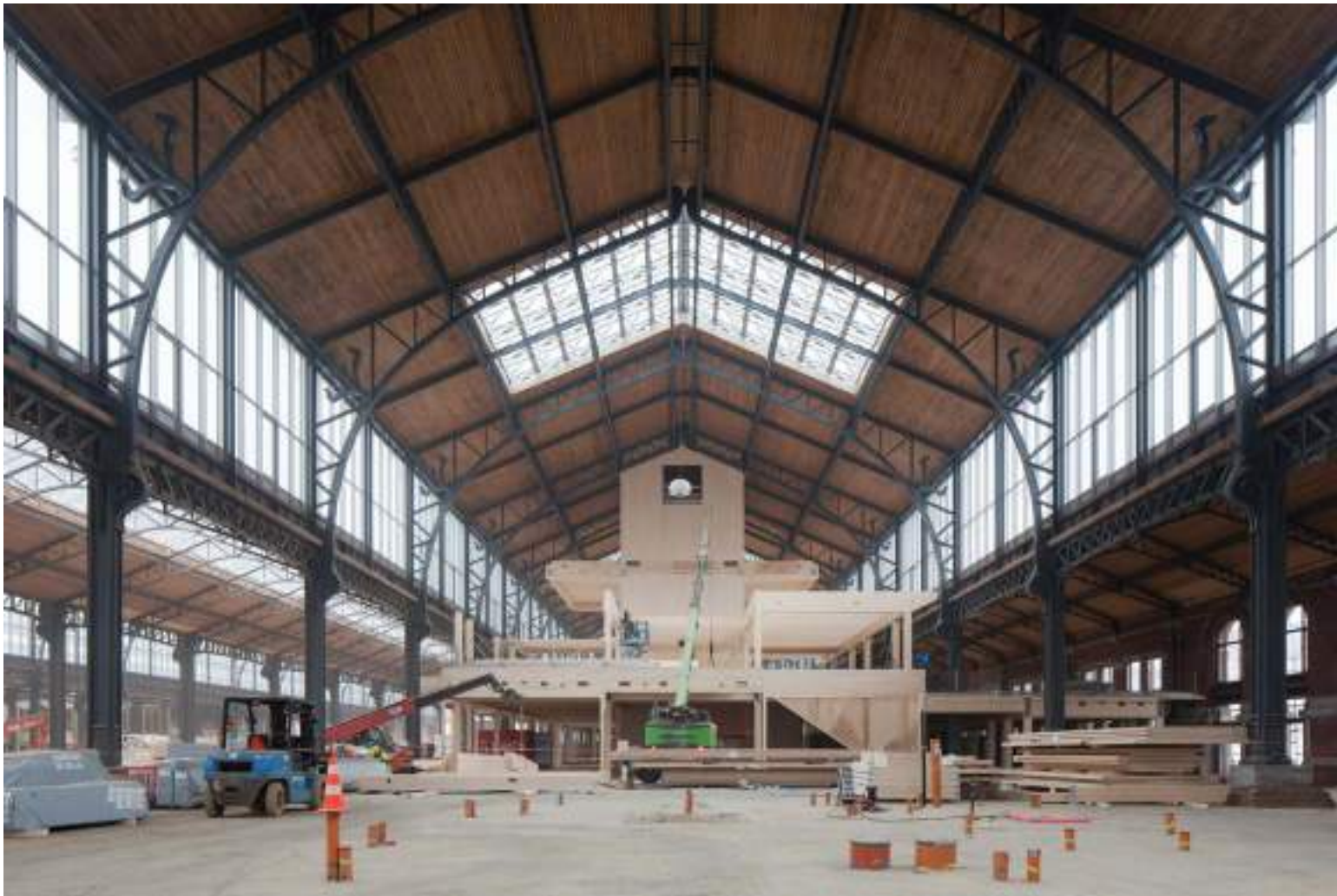
Supplier  
**Halio (glass)**

be an interesting instrument within the restoration process: 'We used the new elements to reconstruct the original composition – both in the end walls, in which we combined three windows from the original composition without disturbing the verticality of the façade, and in the side walls. Because the new components need to comply with EPB legislation and also need to be insulated, we had new bricks made in the same ornamental shape as the old ones, which we could then use as parament stones. We could use the Belgian bluestone elements, which were demolished in some places, to renovate the end wall.' De Moffarts and Bureau Bouwtechniek have also redrawn the axes within the halls and linked them to the site's principal trajectories.

The second phase of the project was commissioned from Neutelings Riedijk Architects. This office turned the former goods station into a 'city in a city'. By accommodating the requested programme of 45,000m<sup>2</sup> of offices and commercial spaces within 12 compact buildings on the periphery of the outer halls, they succeeded in keeping the three middle halls completely open. Not only does this preserve the majestic spaciousness of these halls, but it also creates a central boulevard surrounded by trees and plants. The 12 buildings dovetail naturally with this boulevard, and the arrangement enables the organization of a wide range of events. Five side streets and squares complete the urban structure and transform the Gare Maritime into a fully fledged (covered) district. As Willem Jan Neutelings claims: 'We've designed a new part of the city, a city where it never rains, but with a pleasant, temperature-controlled climate that follows the seasons.'

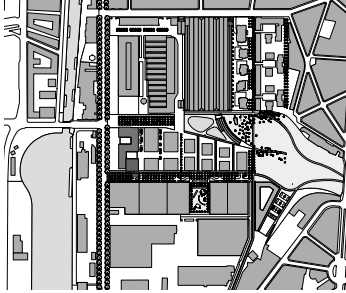
The new volumes consist of three storeys and are built entirely in wood (CLT). Thanks to a 1.20 metre modular grid, they fit into the existing 12 metre column rhythm of the halls with integrity. Measuring three bays long (36 metres) and 38 metres deep, these are separated by the side streets (one bay wide) and coincide with the arched windows in the side wall. The pavilions are entirely independent of the steel-column structure, the latter of which remains clearly visible, and they connect with the side walls while also running up to the ridge of the halls. 'It was a technical challenge, resulting in complex construction details as wood and steel will expand in completely different ways', says Willem Jan Neutelings. The lower two storeys are equipped with oak window frames and balconies with parapets made of oak slats. On the two upper floors, façades with slender metal window frames make the connection to the roof.

The new interpretation of the Gare Maritime breathes fresh life into an industrial monument. Not only through the respectful handling and intelligent reinterpretation of the existing structure, but also – and remarkably – through the creation of unprecedented perspectives. The new boulevard celebrates the monumentality of the building. The terraces and balconies offer unexpected close-ups of the structural details. Both the public and private open spaces bring, quite literally, a new dimension to the Gare Maritime. ▲ ■ ●



# Herman Teirlinck Building

Aslı Çiçek – Photos Filip Dujardin



In 2014 the Dutch architecture firm Neutelings Riedijk Architects won of the competition for the new offices of the Flemish Administrative Centre in Brussels. They formed a partnership with Extenza, the developers who would realize and pay for the building that the Flemish Administration would rent for the first 18 years.



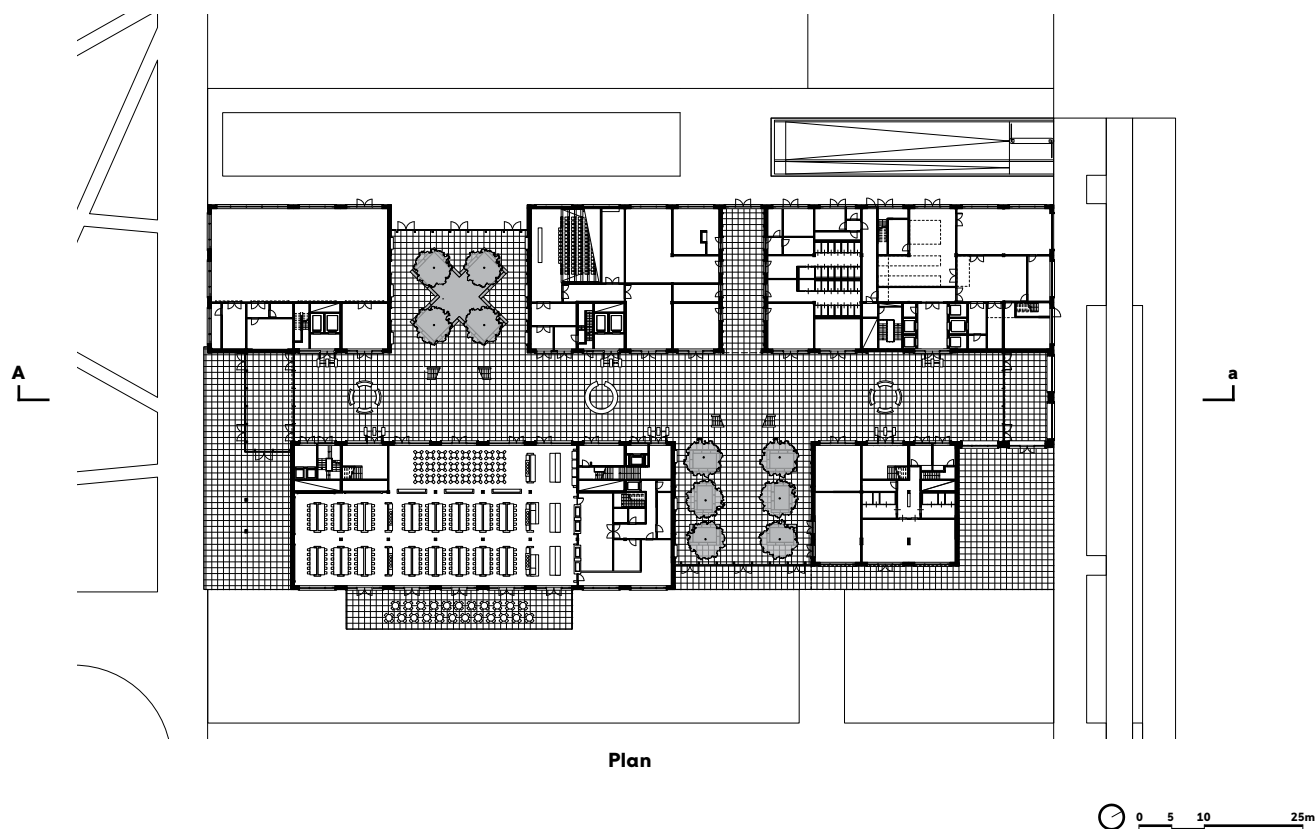
→ Neutelings Riedijk Architects underline the importance of integrated artworks along the internal street being the backbone of the design.





The office's proposal to erect a new building on the site of Tour & Taxis stretching along the canal was a risky one, given the financial limits of rental contracts and the conditioned maximum walking distance of 1,000 metres to the closest railway station for commuting civil servants. The other three competition entries had proposed the pragmatic reuse of empty buildings around the North Station. The office advocated a building that would not lose its identity as soon as it emerged from the ground; in other words, they wanted to avoid yet another uncommunicative, unusable plinth like many of the towers lining the big boulevards leading to the North Station in Brussels have. They also won the jury over with a 60,000 m<sup>2</sup> building that would be the largest energy-neutral structure in Brussels, would offer a semi-public, lively ground floor on a relevant historical site, and would represent an objective in quality for a government building – at least for the 18 years the administration would be housed there.

Since the proposal of the edifice derived from the building's accessible, lively ground floor, this area is clearly that on which Neutelings Riedijk Architects has concentrated the most. It marks the ground floor of the six-storey plinth which accommodates offices alternating with the glass-roofed, high openings that wash the internal street and its interior gardens with daylight. Described as 'meandering' throughout the design process, the spaces of the building also profited from this consciously chosen shape on the floor plan: the four climate-regulating gardens are to be seen, and two of them to be accessed, from the office floors. The office floors of the civil servants have been conceived as flexible working spaces that enable 'Het Nieuwe Werken' defined by the Flemish Government. Maximum flexibility in office structures experiments with better working conditions for the staff but also aims to indicate the building's open future.



Plan

Architect  
**Neutelings Riedijk Architects**

Website  
**neutelings-riedijk.com**

Official project name  
**Herman Teirlinck**

Location  
**Tour & Taxis, Avenue du Port**

Execution architect  
**Conix RBDM Architecten**

Programme  
**Multifunctional office building for the Flemish**

**Government with open and closed offices, a reception area, an auditorium, meeting rooms, a restaurant, a public information centre, exhibition spaces and an underground car park**

Client  
**VAC De Meander (Extensa Group, Participatie Maatschappij Vlaanderen)**

Lead contractor  
**Van Laere**

Public realm  
**Bureau Bas Smets**

Landscape architect  
**Bureau Bas Smets**

Structural engineering  
**Ney + Partners**

Services engineering  
**Studiebureau Boydens**

Building physics  
**Bureau Bouwtechniek**

Acoustics  
**Scala Consultants**

Safety  
**Probam**

Controlle  
**Socotec**

Artists  
**Henri Jacobs, Pieter Vermeersch, Sophie Nys, Aglaia Konrad**

Completion  
**August 2017**

Total floor area  
**66,500 m<sup>2</sup>**

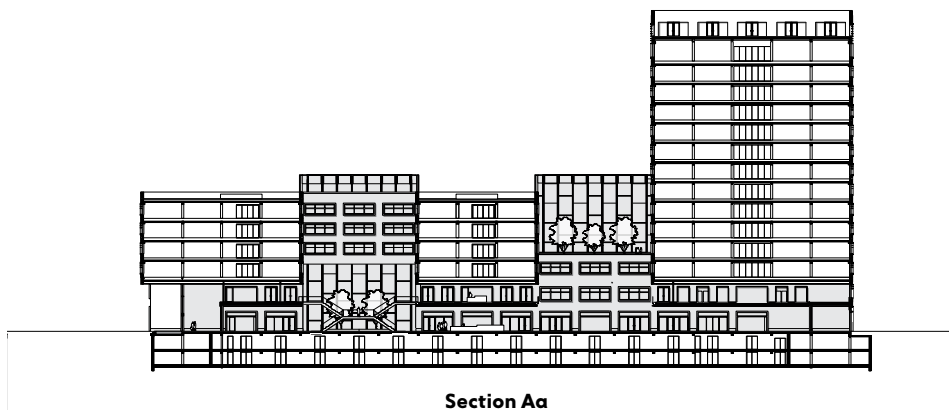
Budget  
**n/c**

Suppliers  
**Reynaers, Stone**

At the north-west end of the plinth, a compact tower reaches a height of 60 metres and offers delightful views over Brussels, not compromising on the cadence of the same windows surrounding the plinth. They frame each sight rhythmically through the tower's open office spaces. This sense of rhythm is heightened on the façade of the building that is covered with yellow bricks. The architects composed a repetitive pattern by turning every third brick by 90 degrees. The yellow brick turns around the corner of the outer walls, becomes the ceiling over the cantilevers (which mark the entrances), runs to the inside of the structure, before taking another upward turn to repeat the exterior façades. On the outside, the cadence of the windows is stressed with

the concrete frames that make deep exterior windowsills. Upon closer inspection, they carry the lines drawn by the Brussels-based visual artist Henri Jacobs. Also, the interior façades bare the traces of Jacobs' line drawings and highlight once again the importance of the effortless perception of the inner street. The office's focus on this aspect of the shared public interior space relates to the citizen's eyesight rather than the (mainly) bird's-eye perspective of urbanism. By doing so, the overall experience of the building relies on the moment of a generous arrival and exit. ▲■●

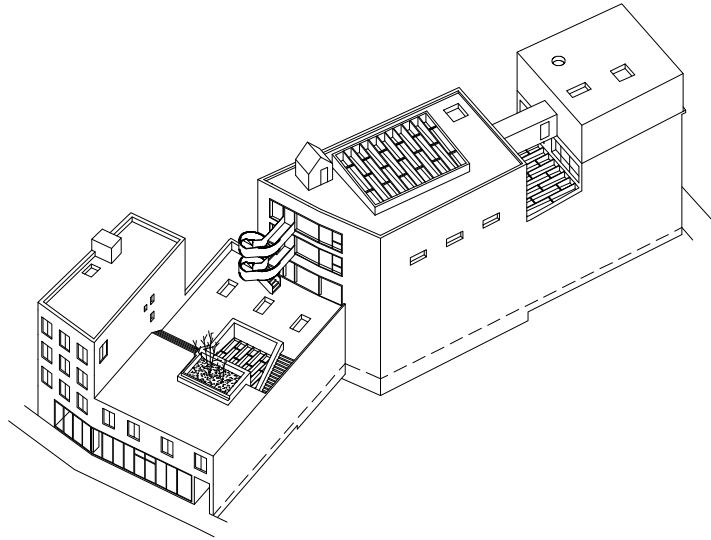
*A longer version of this text was published as 'Bouw-kunst' in A+268, October–November 2017, pp. 6–10.*



# MAD Museum

*Gitte Van den Bergh – Photos Maxime Delvaux*

**In April 2017 the Brussels Fashion and Design Platform MAD opened the doors of its new building on Place du Nouveau Marché aux Grains. It was designed by V+ and Rotor.**

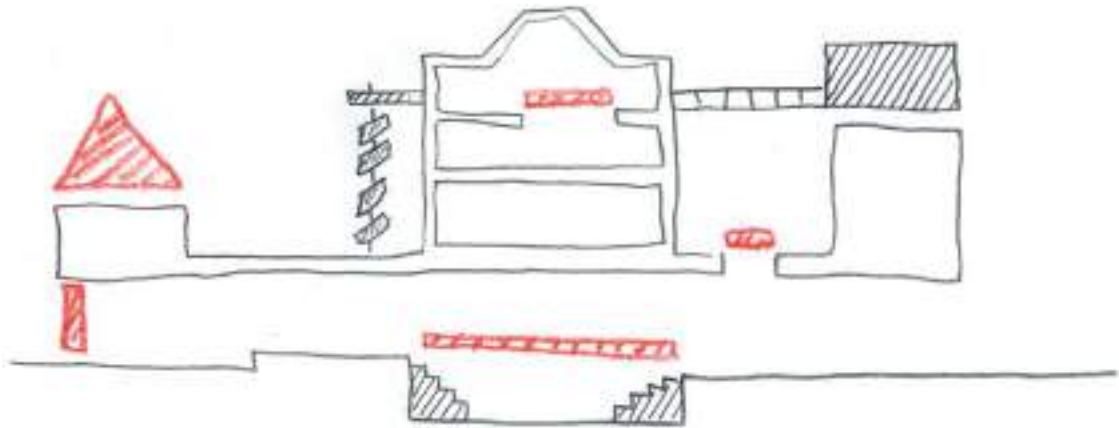


← **Despite the succession of different concepts and rooms, it is not a labyrinth. The publicly accessible ground floor runs right through the three buildings and connects Place du Nouveau Marché aux Grains with the Papenvest.**



On an international level, MAD wants to be seen as the heart of the Brussels fashion and design scene. The strength of the ambition called for a suitably strong design. After a competition in 2012, the Brussels architectural firm v+, in collaboration with Rotor, was appointed as the designer of MAD. Rotor, which is known for its recycling of building materials, opted in this case for the reuse of the three buildings on the site. Together with v+, it took up the complex challenge of connecting a modernist building, a classical building and an industrial warehouse with studios, exhi-

tion spaces and offices. Each of the three buildings had undergone numerous renovations in the past. Instead of opting for a *tabula rasa*, the architects decided to take the existing fragmentation as the starting point of their design. 'Paradoxically, and looking back on it, this decision gave us just that little bit more scope', says Jörn Aram Bihain of v+. 'Actually, this isn't one design, it's three thousand. This richness allows the staff to select the context in which they display a particular chair or silhouette.'





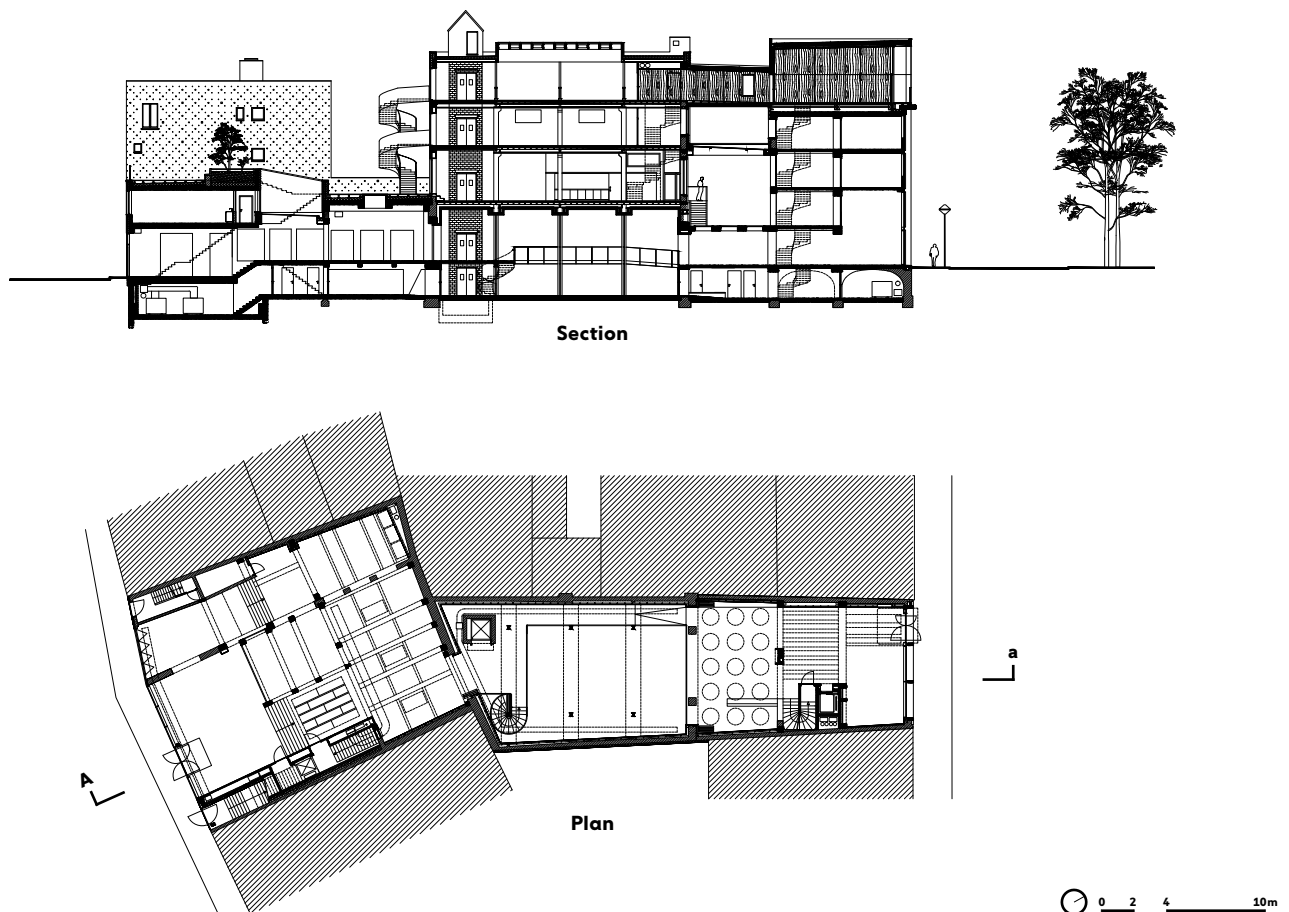
Despite the succession of different concepts and rooms, it is not a labyrinth. The publicly accessible ground floor runs right through the three buildings and connects Place du Nouveau Marché aux Grains with the Papenvest. The bustling Dansaertstraat can thus be continued up to the canal, giving MAD a face on either side of the building block. Each room makes visual contact with one or more other spaces. The decision to use white as a common thread for the finishing touches is based on the idea that the building wants to highlight, not itself, but the designers and their work. This restriction in colour is compensated for by a palette of materials, patterns and tones, along with a number of nods to Brussels, such as the metro tiles in the stairwell.

The meticulous handling of the cutting and pasting of existing elements led to unavoidable complexities during the five-year construction process. Bihain describes the replacement of the cast-iron columns by concrete pillars as ‘one of the most difficult moments of the build’. These columns were recovered from the upper floor. The result of

their thoughtful approach is a symbiosis of old and new, a fact that the architects reinforce by shaping new elements in such an iconic way that it seems as if they have always been present. For example, the white metal external staircase was manufactured specifically for this project, and an elevator clad in grey marble is an eye-catcher in the hall on Place du Nouveau Marché aux Grains.

The project was drawn six months after Rotor’s participation in the Venice Biennale. The ‘traces of use’ theme that they researched for the exhibition was taken into account when designing MAD: ‘We hope that the project will change and that other visual qualities will develop’, says Gielen. Traces of the past, such as filled holes in the floor, have been deliberately left visible to encourage further use in the future. ▲ ■ ●

*A longer version of this text was published as ‘MAD(e) in Brussels’ in A+265, April–May 2017, pp. 26–27.*



Architect  
**V+, Bureau Vers ce plus de bien-être**  
Designer  
**Rotor**  
Website  
**vplus.org**  
Official project name  
**MAD Brussels Fashion and Design Platform**

Location  
**Place du Nouveau Marché aux Grains 10, Brussels**  
Execution architect  
**Bureau Bouwtechniek**  
Programme  
**Cultural centre for fashion and design, including exhibition and events spaces, offices, a cafeteria, studios for artists in residence**

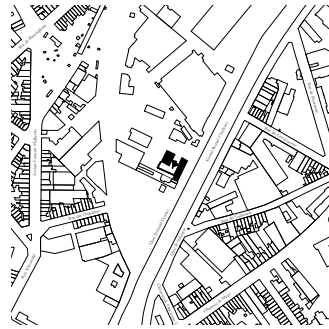
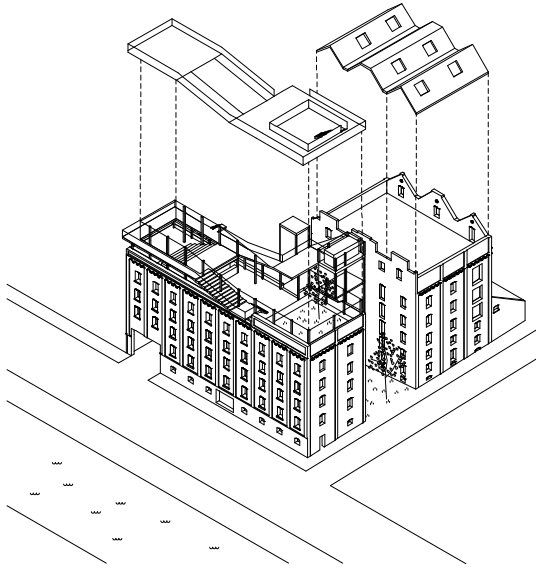
Client  
**City of Brussels**  
Lead contractor  
**Jacques Delens**  
Structural engineering  
**Greisch**  
Services engineering  
**Ecorce**  
Building physics  
**Ecorce**  
Sustainability  
**Ecorce**

Acoustics  
**Daidalos Peutz**  
Completion  
**December 2016**  
Total floor area  
**3,097 m<sup>2</sup>**  
Budget  
**€ 4,680,000 (excl. VAT and fees)**

# Coop

Thibaut Paggen – Photos Luca Beel

Set along the canal in the municipality of Anderlecht since 1903, the Moulart flour mill is one of the last witnesses of the industrial past of Brussels. At the time of its inauguration, the building was a jewel of industrial architecture and one of the first concrete-structure buildings in the city.





The intervention of the architects of Bogdan & Van Broeck acts modestly on the architecture of the former mill. They first rid the two main built bodies of the many extensions interfering with their interstice, before emptying them out in order to retain only the main structural elements.

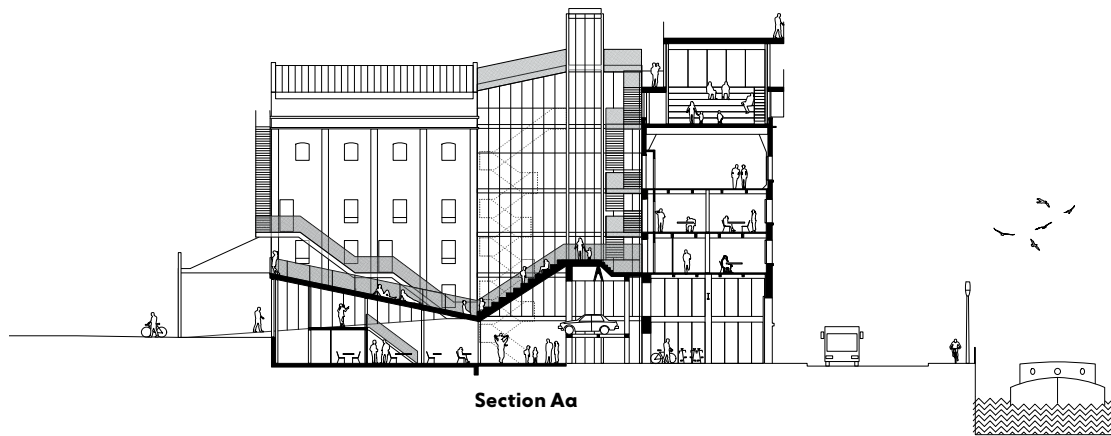
The programme included two independent entities: an incubator for SMEs and an interpretation centre aimed at providing the canal area with a cultural facility that retraces its history. From this perspective, the architects' proposal enables optimal use of the existing building. The ground floor is occupied by reception rooms reserved for the administrative offices of the interpretation centre, while the workspaces that accommodate the SMEs occupy the upper levels of the former mill via a subtle series of movable walls that offer all the flexibility necessary for offices.



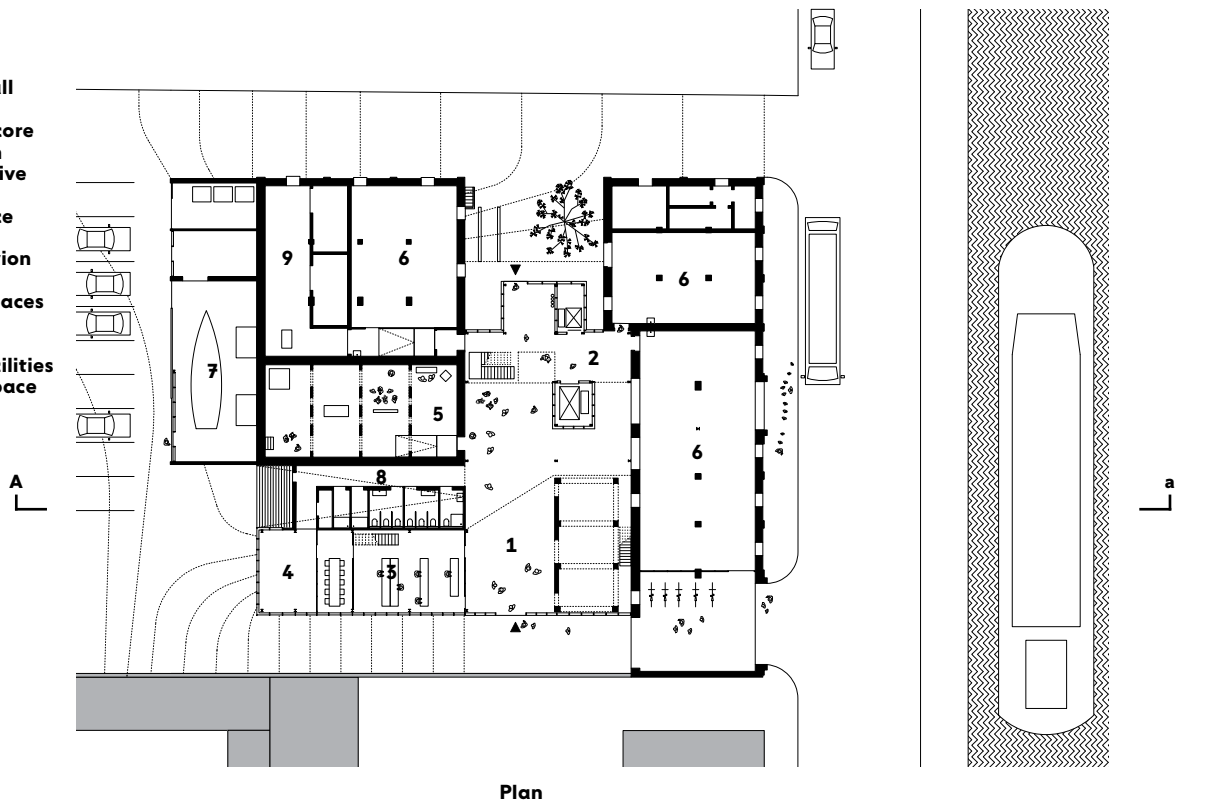
But it is in the gap between the two main bodies of the mill that the architects truly gave shape to the project. Where once a series of different extensions was stacked up, they have placed a deformed but homogeneous body that supplies all the functions. This vertical *circulation machine*, materialized by tall black aluminium frames, turns on the roof to double its surface area and accommodate functions dedicated to the interpretation centre, but also shared functions, like a cafeteria.

Bogdan & Van Broeck's project is surprising, but not shocking, because it borrows its language from industrial architecture, without ever making literal use of it.▲■

*A longer version of this text was published as 'De la farine aux services' in A+262, October–November 2016, pp. 28–29.*



- 1 Entrance hall
- 2 Central circulation core
- 3 Information (administrative offices)
- 4 Maintenance workshop
- 5 Silo (projection spaces)
- 6 SME workspaces
- 7 Innovative shipyard
- 8 Sanitary facilities
- 9 Technical space



Architect  
**Bogdan & Van Broeck**  
Website  
[bogdanvanbroeck.com](http://bogdanvanbroeck.com)  
Official project name  
**Coop**  
Location  
**Quai Demets 23,  
Anderlecht**

Programme  
**Conversion of a former  
mill into an interpreta-  
tion centre and an  
incubator for SMEs**  
Procedure  
**Open competition  
organized by the client**

Client  
**Anderlecht Moulart**  
Lead contractor  
**CFE Brabant (now BPC)**  
Structural engineering  
**Ney & Partners**  
Building physics  
**CES**

Completion  
**September 2016**  
Total floor area  
**5,099 m<sup>2</sup>**  
Budget  
**€ 6,026,193  
(excl. VAT and fees)**  
Suppliers  
**Reynaers, AG Plastics,  
Velux**

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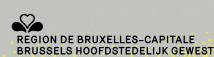
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**‘Brussels is vast, fragmented and brutal.**

**It has Gothic churches held captive by grand royal gestures; dense working-class districts obliterated by abstract post-war office precincts; charming art-nouveau villas overlaid by inexplicable traffic systems.**

**Belgium reached maximum empire rather late, between the two world wars, and the damage inflicted on its capital has its origins then, in a lethal combination of modernization and imperial pomp. Unlike other cities, London for instance, the mess of Brussels cannot be blamed on post-war reconstruction and modernism.**

**The exaggerated heterogeneity of Brussels has become a symbol for its equally diverse population: both Eurocrats and families from the former colonies can find a place in this city. Artists and other pioneers also flourish in these cracks, and Brussels has become a magnet for young people looking for some space in which to breathe. The potential of the open-ended and the unfinished is something we know well from London. We also know that property speculation can also take root and flourish in these conceptual gaps, and supporting the ongoing existence of a rich urban life requires more than simply allowing the markets to operate.’**

**Adam Caruso<sup>UK</sup>**

Adam Caruso (b. 1962, Montreal) is an architect. Together with Peter St John, he founded the architectural firm Caruso St John in 1990 in London. In 2018, together with 51N4E, they took part in the competition for the conversion of the former Citroën garage into the Kanal – Centre Pompidou museum in Brussels.

# Brussels, compact city

*Julie Mabilde*

**Brussels is a compact city. In part, this is born of necessity: the city is wedged into a tight straitjacket between Flanders and the Ring road, its population is rising steadily, and the pressure on housing is already high. But its compact nature is also a deliberate policy choice: the decision to opt for a city of proximity, of lively quarters with a mixture of residential and commercial functions (including industry), and with access to green space and public services. The compact city is designed for pedestrians, with a sufficiently high density to allow public transport to function efficiently. It is important, however, that this compactness should take shape in a variety of ways, with a range of typologies, so that living in the city is also both feasible and attractive for a diverse audience, including families with children.**



Density in Brussels does not always run according to a clear vision. The larger conversion and densification projects are developed on parcels of land that are freed up when other functions cease to be operational. In the meantime, a creeping but harder-to-map densification is taking place through small-scale projects such as splitting or adding storeys to existing homes, merging terraced houses to create apartments, redeveloping warehouses into lofts, or supplementing urban blocks by constructing on still-undeveloped plots.

Taking into account demographic evolutions such as reduced family sizes, the population becoming both younger and older, and also the diversity of housing requirements, densification operations can deliver a fine example of high-quality and collective housing types. Moreover, densification goes hand in hand with a growing need for (public) open space and community infrastructure. Brussels residents do not generally have their own gardens, and increasingly make their voices heard when new development and densification projects are mooted. The existing classic (metropolitan) urban parks, which in the summer often resemble crowded beaches awash with Brussels residents in search of somewhere to cool down and relax, are supplemented by more diverse, smaller-scale and more 'programmed' open-space initiatives. The case for greater variation therefore applies to open spaces and to housing typologies in equal measure. To what extent does this diversity already play out on the ground, in the specific urban projects that are further densifying the capital?

### **A string of new densification projects in the Canal Zone**

Today the Canal Zone forms a string of new, large-scale developments in what is already an incredibly dense environment, with its strikingly large proportion of small apartments in generally closed urban blocks, inhabited by a socio-economically vulnerable population.

p. 8

↙  
Density



↙  
Access to green space



The extensive amount of hard surfacing tends to generate a high level of heat stress in the summer, and there is little accessible greenery to provide breathing space or an opportunity to cool down. And yet a large number of new densification projects continue to be concentrated in this Canal Zone where former industrial sites become available and existing buildings are obliged to make way for upscaling, driven by rising land prices. Along the waterfront, which is an attractive place to live, densification becomes more rational, affordable and profitable for project developers. Moreover, project developers are less likely to be confronted by outspoken individuals in the central Canal Zone who see their own dream homes threatened by densification and an increase in scale. The last remnants of open space and greenery are systematically gnawed at in successive phases of the plans – as demonstrated by the developments at Tour & Taxis. Despite the need for affordable





homes for the existing population, including for larger families, developers systematically choose to build a one-sided offering, aimed at the upper middle classes and investors, of small one- and two-bedroomed apartments, a typology that delivers the highest profit per square metre. To assuage the most pressing need, in the densified Canal Zone we chiefly see scraps of leftover space, snippets of green or short-cuts transformed into small-scale parks tailored to the local area, such as the four pocket parks beside the L50 train tracks, or the Parc de la Senne at Masui.

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### **The mixed-use building:**

#### **hyper-urbanity in the station quarter**

Yet there are also a number of interesting examples of new quarters in the Canal Zone that integrate innovative architectural and urban-design concepts in their projects. The repurposing of the WTC I & II towers could serve as a catalyst to achieve the objective of once again making the Manhattan quarter around the North Station a lively, mixed and dense residential and commercial area, located beside one of the best-connected stations in Belgium. The architects – a consortium of 5IN4E, l'AUC, and Jaspers-Eyers architects – will transform the monofunctional office block into a mixed-use building in which living and working alternate per floor like a millefeuille. With its lively and publicly accessible plinth, which will house both commercial functions and a greenhouse and sports facility, the WTC will become a section of the city on the scale of a building.

p. 28, 55, 57

p. 30

### **The productive urban block**

Further to the south in this same Canal Zone we find Urbanities, one of the new projects in the quarter around the Biestebroek Dock. It is currently an underdeveloped and less-accessible quarter, but this is all set to change in the coming years. The architectural concept for Urbanities, which MSA, Plusoffice and B2Ai will

p. 30

be designing, tackles the stacking of functions in an innovative way. Three aligned tower volumes are oriented towards the canal and are linked to the other, lower-rise residential buildings by means of a productive base that provides space for light industry. The integration of industry into the urban fabric is an explicit ambition of the Brussels-Capital Region: this can only be achieved via an entirely different construction typology. Here, it is essential to combine the different scales demanded by production and residential activities in a liveable way. On the roof of the base there is also space for a shared garden with urban agriculture and a greenhouse, and the ambition is to recuperate waste flows from the industrial activities (heat and CO<sub>2</sub>). The proximity principle of the compact city, with the combination of living and working, production and consumption, is applied here on the scale of an urban block.

### **Completing the urban fabric: sustainable and affordable**

Further north along the canal, on the Tivoli site, we find a project that aims to create a mix of affordable homes for sale and social homes for rent. The new development, made up of five urban blocks that are being tackled by different design teams, is a textbook example of an ecologically and socially sustainable quarter: it is a high-density neighbourhood with a mixture of target groups and functions, but which also provides space for trade, crèches, collective (laundry) areas, vegetable patches, green roofs and a conservatory; all homes are passive and some are even energy-neutral, and grey water is recuperated. However, in terms of urban planning and architecture, the project is insufficiently daring. The ensemble of the five rather classical, closed urban blocks, with little difference in building height, fills up the existing urban fabric, and adds little new dynamism to the public domain. Through traffic is not permitted in the inner streets, admittedly, but there is a missed

opportunity here to knit together the five urban blocks into a single superblock following Barcelona's example. A total ban on motorized traffic would open up possibilities for creating a new type of public space, instead of the classic street or (semi-)private courtyard or garden.

### **Campus becomes a lively city quarter in a park-like setting**

A number of larger urban-regeneration projects are also accumulating at sites beyond the Canal Zone. More widely dispersed across the city, they occupy the spaces that became available due to the disappearance of large-scale functions, or via a change in the way the area is organized. At several of these sites, the campus model is being exchanged for more mixed and urban typologies. The relocation of the Flemish and French-language radio and television broadcasters VRT and RTBF to the Reyers site prompted the development of a new city quarter in which residential dwellings are slotted into a park-like environment. The same trend is also visible in the renovation projects of larger ensembles, often social-housing blocks, with new building volumes that create a different scale and expand the range of amenities. Dierendonckblancke architects added two residential volumes to a social housing project on Condorlaan in Molenbeek, but they also succeeded in activating the somewhat undefined green space between the buildings. This was orchestrated by inserting a smaller-scale collective pavilion as a link between the various residential properties. The fact that it's not just the Canal Zone that is being considered for larger developments is a positive thing. Yet the campuses or former infrastructure zones that have been promoted to the development pool happen to be the very few places in Brussels with an 'excess' of public and green space. If we are to avoid squandering these areas, it is essential that the regional and municipal authorities provide

greater guidance on a third type of densification project: the incremental compaction of not only the contiguously built-up historic and nineteenth-century tissue, but also of the twentieth-century built environment.

### **Twentieth-century belt: opportunities for collectivism**

Although a great deal of capacity for densification still exists in the twentieth-century belt, there is still a paucity of vision and methods when it comes to achieving sustainable projects. Indeed, the location for the development of specific projects not only depends on the guiding hand of the authorities, but also on the underlying business models and forms of commissioning or ownership. Moreover, the existing urban fabric, road network and plot size also determine which densification typologies are possible. In a number of garden quarters, projects experiment with densification and a different scale through the introduction of collective residential buildings, such as in the design by Low architects for the social-housing quarter Mariëndaal. On privately owned sites, these kinds of projects are less easy to find, and it is also harder to persuade individual owners to commit to building new typologies. In other cities, however, investigations are under way as to how to arrive at a better balance in the distribution of the advantages and disadvantages of densification by also tapping into the potential of the twentieth-century belt.

p. 122

p. 33 ↗

p. 33 →

### **From compact to polycentric**

The ongoing development of Brussels into a compact city is no easy task, and the debate about densification and urban renewal is fuelled by a large number of considerations that can be used to either justify or reject the selection of sites and urban forms. Quarters must be accessible, but mobility should not be the only guiding mechanism. The physical



underlayer itself also plays an important role: the soil and the water system, and the open space in and around the city. New challenges thrown up by climate change must also be taken into account, such as heat stress, drought and flooding, as well as those around bringing the city closer towards food production. The city's economic and industrial backbone determines the possibilities for densification; but the capacity of the urban fabric, street network and the public space also plays a vital role. To ensure that the city continues to be liveable, green and porous, a polycentric model of urban development is more desirable than a concentrically expanding metropolis with a one-sided orientation towards the Pentagon, the city centre of Brussels. In a polycentric city, densification is concentrated in multiple cores which are connected to one another via a network of public transport and cycling infrastructures, and the twentieth-century belt therefore also needs to be incorporated. This is all the more important because of the space that still exists here for a target group that all too often flees the city: families with children in search of more innovative forms of stacked homes, which are more spacious than those being offered by private developers in the city, and more affordable than classic family homes. Moreover, the twentieth-century belt also offers the potential for a new kind of open space, as the buildings border on large 'residual spaces' which can blossom into full-blown metropolitan landscapes. These are green spaces that are easy to open up, which stretch into Flanders, and offer genuine breathing space; and to which compact city dwellers have just as much right as the occupants of the villas on the city's outskirts. ▲■●

**‘Studio Paola Viganò and Studio Secchi-Viganò have dealt with Brussels – a territory in which the notion of “horizontal metropolis” emerged during our “Brussels 2040” study – because to us Brussels already seemed to be close to a “horizontal metropolis”, i.e. an extended urban space organized by complementarity, loose hierarchies and territorial synergies, a place where the notions of centre and periphery give way to the notions of isotropy, redistribution and horizontality. But if Brussels continues to become more attractive, more geared towards more exclusive social groups, it will become a lot less horizontal and inclusive. It is once more time to raise the question of its horizontality, which we had interpreted as a quality, this time on the basis, inside the Capital Region, of the great figure of the “Garden of the West”. On a larger scale, it is urgent to conduct a stronger reflection on the possibility of guiding the effects of the ongoing polarization on the rest of the Belgian territory towards the construction of a Horizontal Metropolis and against the idea of territories serving the metropolis.’**

**Paola Viganò <sup>IT</sup>**

**Paola Viganò (b. 1961, Sondrio), architect and urbanist, is professor of Urban Theory and Urban Design at EPFL (Lausanne) and IUAV (Venice). In 1990, together with Bernardo Secchi, she founded Studio Secchi-Viganò. Viganò won the Grand Prix de l'Urbanisme in 2013, was made *Doctor Honoris Causa* at UCL in 2016, and won the Ultima Architecture Prize (Flemish Culture Award) in 2017. One of her recent publications is *The Horizontal Metropolis: A radical project* (2018).**

**‘Integrating serious productive plants in the urban landscape, maintaining a functioning slaughterhouse in a central position densifying its space, converting obsolete industrial zones into incubation nodes of productive urban enterprises, finding room for a large beer factory in the urban context that demands it, ensuring that ground levels can accommodate economically viable productive functions like plumbing warehouses, implementing commercial-scale urban agriculture and fish farming, converting existing scrap-management activities into a public spectacle of recycling.**

**Using a mix of tools to achieve this, cultural constructions and political debates, the Government Architect’s soft power, project-based urban planning, or the innovative use of traditional planning tools.**

**In scope, content and method, Brussels Productive Metropolis is an example to the world.’**

**Carlos Arroyo** <sup>ES</sup>

Carlos Arroyo (b. 1964, Spain) is an architect, urbanist and teacher. Based in Madrid, his office won the competition for the Performing Arts Academy in Dilbeek in 2006. A member of European Europe’s Scientific Committee, he developed a theory of present-day productive cities.

# Brussels, productive city

*Mark Brearley – Photos Bas Bogaerts*

**In the future, it is hoped that the economy will be more equitable, clean and local, and therefore have more potential to become urban. For economic, special and social reasons, it is good to keep productive enterprise in the city. In Brussels, awareness of the fact that production activities are also part of the city led to a series of interesting projects.**



At De Neckstraat 29, between nice nineteenth-century houses, there's a roller-shutter door, much like thousands across Brussels. A circular sign notes the 3.5m height. Through this opening in Koekelberg, a few strides along from café Violon du Parc, is a way into the giant Godiva factory, deep glimpses as you walk past. It's where all ingredients and equipment enter, unloaded from goods vehicles on-street.

Around the other side of the block, adjoining the Simonis metro station, is the impressive 1960s flank wall, with a small office entrance and two dispatch doors from which lorries are loaded with chocolates. On a third side, among shops and restaurants, is the Godiva outlet store, a place to catch confectionery bargains.

Until just a few decades ago, such a mixed chunk of city, with industry participating in the dance of urban life, was normal and accepted. But since the 1970s the push-out has been relentless, hastened by a belief that such arrangements were anachronistic, that a slice of our shared economy had become leprous, should be elsewhere, that manufacturing was finishing its departure, that the restructuring of logistics and production could, and should, lead to full exile to places far away, behind greenery. In many cities, such as Copenhagen and Munich, the 1930s functional city dream of separating industry and its people from all else has at last been realized. The tragedy is that the late stage of a long destructive journey has coincided with the awareness that in fact there is much merit in what had been seen as irrelevant or evil, that good cities have it all, embrace the full range of activity, provide welcome for all who want to be there, are coincident rather than divided.

In Brussels more than any other city, the mixed fabric has survived, along with a large portion of the industrial activity that it hosts. That economy is denuded for sure, gone are many of the old factories and the coarser grained logistics, but enough has made it through those dark decades to now be recognized as a big contributor to what makes this

the city of miracles, Europe's greatest example of how to do full mix, a setting of remarkable diversity in which we can distinguish myriad seeds for the future, lucky finds to study and help, rather than last scraps waiting to go.

Staying with sugar, the Leonidas factory in Anderlecht is embedded much like Godiva; Vanparys make dragées in their wonderful Schaerbeek premises; Milcamps waffles and Dandoy biscuits, as well as more cocoa delights by Marcolini and Neuhaus, emerge from closer to the city's edge. The colossal Audi plant abuts the mixed fabric of Forest, while aircraft parts are magicked by SABCA in Haren. Meanwhile the industry of daily city support is woven-in everywhere; vehicle menders, building material suppliers, bespoke fabricators, wholesalers, the urban end of long logistic chains, last-mile courier depots, waste collectors, laundries and bakeries, caterers and event-equipment providers.

Walk eastward from the Gare de l'Ouest through Molenbeek and you will soon find the Serck metal recycling plant, a colossal tram depot, the big Cinoco drinks wholesaling building with its crazy sculpted concrete walls, Maison Vervloet's factory, the Oxfam warehouse, local government vehicle depots, carroseries by the dozen, timber merchants and meat processors, all of them through doors from the street like the one on De Neckstraat, together with the rest, abutted and overlapped, walked past and incidentally experienced by all. With satisfying symmetry, it was in Brussels 89 years ago that Le Corbusier first presented his Ville Radieuse segregated utopia, and it is in that same city that the current case for industry in cities first crystallized, came to be welcomed, is now being followed by bold action.

In 2012 the secretary of state in charge of urbanism for the Brussels-Capital Region supported an international research-by-design masterclass titled 'Re:work, considering the place of industry, wholesale and logistics in the city'. The success of that venture





© unknown





p.44 aligned with preparation of the Canal Plan that was adopted by the Region's government the following year, reaffirming the place of industry and establishing new mixed-development aspirations for a major piece of the city. In 2014 at the Festival Kanal, this author had a first stab at structuring the practical arguments in support of this new thinking, with reference to tough experiences in London.<sup>1</sup>

p.8 Over the four years since, there has been a run of exploratory workshops on the topic, and Atelier Brussels Productive Metropolis picked up where 'Re:work' left off, tested possibilities on live sites, and in 2016 mounted the exhibition *A Good City Has Industry*, featuring Matthew Gregorowski's totemic yellow factory and house model, a simple reminder of an objective and a challenge to past thinking. Politicians and public agencies, straddling state borders, have aligned in support of the mission to retain and enhance the industrial economy, while current Brussels Government Architect Kristiaan Borret and his team work tirelessly to nurture and steer development towards these same goals.

p.30 Many cities are now attempting the climb up this particular mountain, reversing entrenched ideas about how things should be, what should happen where. Brussels is ahead, early onto the foothills, now looking likely to be first to achieve a handful of projects that demonstrate a way forward, devise new types, resolve today's challenges in fresh ways.

p.48 The ambition of the Brussels Abattoir in Anderlecht is the most breathtaking. They plan to reshape their 12 hectares by the canal to house slaughtering and meat preparation, workshops and kitchens, food and general markets, sport and hospitality, with some housing thrown in. This is one to watch, four design teams now commencing a contest to devise a mighty new building christened *Manufakture*, with industrial meat facilities, parking for the entire site, and a roof landscape perhaps incorporating a

swimming pool, all public facing, urban.

A flurry of other projects are asserting the positive role of industry, for example the already constructed Materials Village that Tetra architects designed for the Port of Brussels at Vergote Dock, and the Atelier 229-designed depot for regional waste-management agency ABP by the canal in Neder-Over-Heembeek. Such projects are emerging across Brussels, hosting the uses we were until recently driving away, doing it with flair, at once pragmatic and celebratory.

In the areas around Dieudonné Lefèvrestraat, near the Tour & Taxis renewal area, weaved together with the TIR freight facility, a remarkable urban ensemble is being shaped. On Port Authority land, a run of extrovert industrial buildings is emerging, ready to face new residential across a street, each abutting its neighbours and touching the city, no shrubs or fences, no hiding away over there. Already there is the big Peugeot-Citroën garage, under construction the Générale-designed 4,000 m<sup>2</sup> brewery for Brasserie de la Senne. Next to come is the Vizyon Drinks building, and more emerges as each year passes.

Nearby is Citydev's Greenbizz building, designed by architectesassoc. This one's what I call a reconciliation building, making the interface between housing and industrial in a way that has dissolved the threat of encroachment and resolved adjointment challenges. In this case, the Citydev-led Tivoli residential area is the immediate neighbour on one side, on the other a world of heavy goods vehicles and beeping forklifts. This delicate ply-clad industrial building, home to a couple of dozen ground-floor businesses in 5,000 m<sup>2</sup> of workshops, is organized around two covered wander-in vehicle yards, with a floor of small-unit offices on top. It's a charming and well-crafted building, but what's remarkable is the urban job it does, and the testing of an obvious but unfamiliar mix and innovative configuration.

In fact the Greenbizz and Tivoli combo was just a warm-up for Citydev, the Brussels Regional Development Agency led by Benjamin Cadranel. They are now going further, revealing themselves as the greatest heroes in the mixed-city adventure, going up paths that private developers alone do not yet dare to tread. City Gate 1, City Campus and Novacity, all in Anderlecht, are each building the idea of that captivating yellow model, housing above industry, done at scale with sophistication and panache. Give it five years and for sure Brussels will be the city others look to as an exemplar, a good city that has it all, with everywhere big doors as well as small, open and proud.▲■●



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↘  
**The building acts as a  
geometric interface  
between the city, the  
water and the sky.**



# Materials Village

*Veronique Boone – Photos Filip Dujardin*

**Tetra Architects have provided a new landmark for the Vergote Dock in Brussels: the 'Materials Village' between Tour & Taxis and the canal. A reinterpretation of the warehouse typology with a sawtooth roof forms the cornerstone of their refined design.**





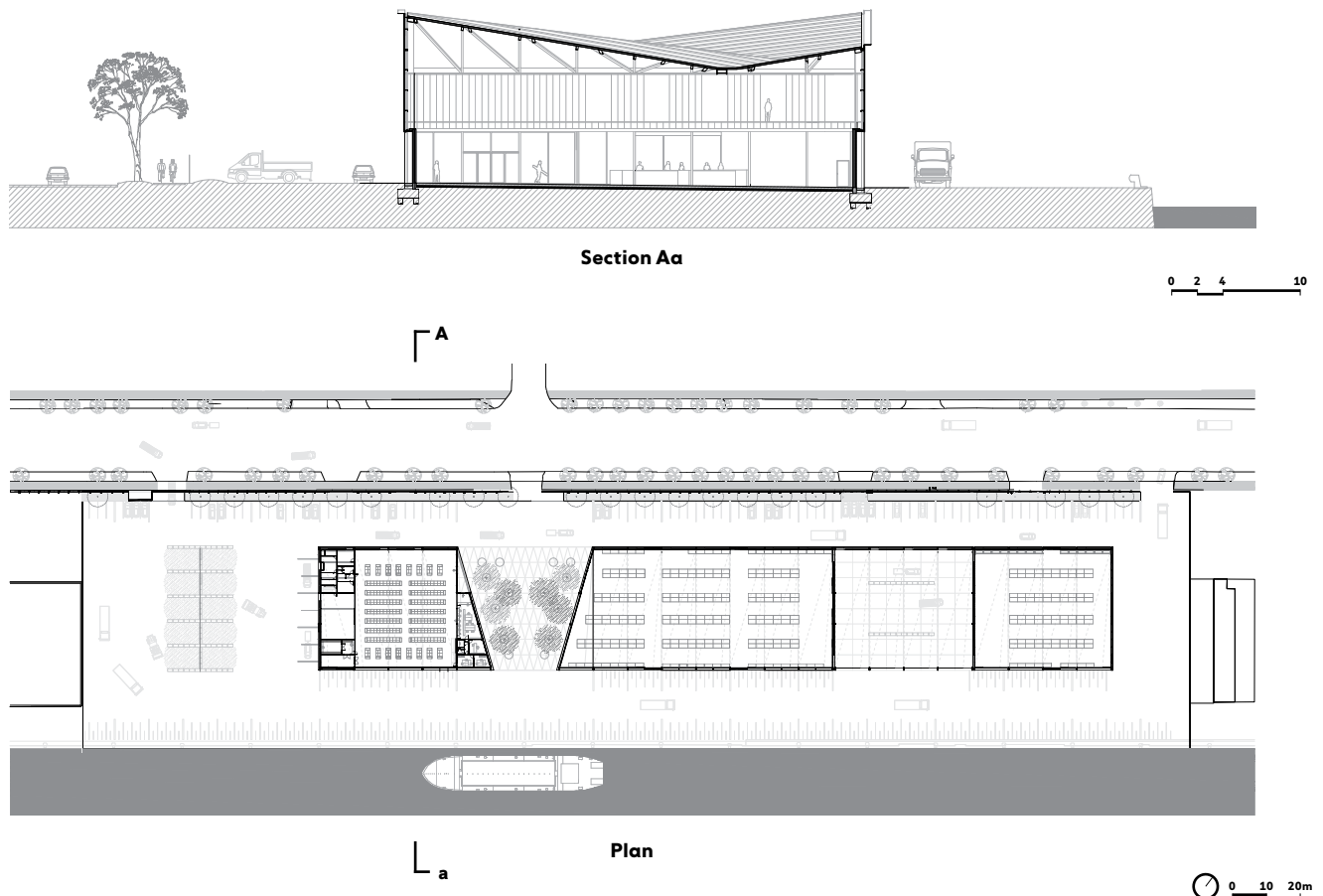


The warehouse building designed by Tetra architects for Mpro is set on a long, smooth concrete strip between Avenue du Port and the Vergote Dock. The architects have created a giant beacon for the surrounding area. Sawtooth roofs fashioned from polycarbonate sheets wrap around the upper part of the steel structure and rest upon an initial layer of prefab concrete panels. The latter are brushed on the outside, adding a subtle texture that emphasizes the density of the material in contrast to the smooth, ever-changing colours created by the fall of light on the polycarbonate sheets. The building acts as a geometric interface between the city, the water and the sky. Illuminated at night, its polycarbonate crown becomes a radiant cover in the surroundings.

Yet the architects have gone further than merely designing a landmark gesture: they have refined the building in every possible respect, up to and including the smallest details, so as to achieve architectural excellence and an exceptional user experience. Rational dimensions have

been used, based on the 20-metre intervals between the quayside bollards. This determined the grid, the structure and the sizes of the prefab elements, as well as the materials and the building itself. The steel structure was designed in-house, right down to the profiles, allowing all cabling to be concealed, and thereby freeing up the space to the maximum. When it came to the finishing of the interior of the retail section at the end of the construction phase, 'standard' and 'prefab' were the magic words for Grafton – the international building material distributor, of which Mpro is a subsidiary – leading to a knocked-together result. This contrasts all the more starkly with the architecture that has been created and demonstrates that there is still a long way to go before the business world is willing and able to deploy this degree of quality on a large scale.▲●

*A longer version of this text was published as 'Het industriële icoon heruitgevonden' in A+272, June–July 2018, pp. 8–9.*



Architect  
**Tetra architecten**  
Website  
**tetraarchitecten.com**  
Official project name  
**Three warehouses for the port of Brussels**  
Location  
**Brussels**

Programme  
**New construction of warehouses and shops for traders in building materials, urban and landscape design with integration in the city**  
Procedure  
**Competition**

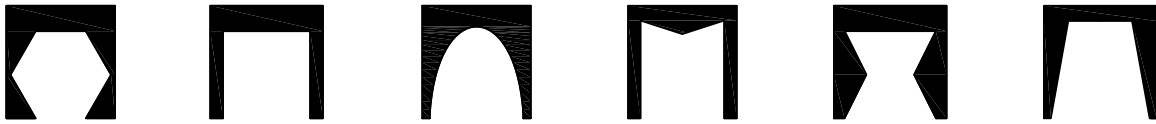
Client  
**Port of Brussels**  
Lead contractor  
**Groep Cordeel**  
Landscape architect  
**Landinzicht, Atelier Ruimtelijk Advies**  
Structural engineering  
**Mouton**

Services engineering  
**HP Engineers**  
Completion  
**2018**  
Total floor area  
**6,840 m<sup>2</sup>**  
Budget  
**€ 8,476,856 (excl. VAT and fees)**

# Foodmet

*Pieter T'Jonck – Photos Filip Dujardin*

**The Abattoirs of Anderlecht are unique in Europe. The meat industry is still prominently present alongside the historic abattoir hall of 1888, bringing a food market, reception halls and much more in its wake. While other capitals are banning these kinds of 'dirty' industries, in Brussels they are expanding. ORG's Foodmet was the first step in a major plan for the future.**



The abattoirs are only 1.6 km from the Grand-Place in Brussels, but when the 100 m<sup>2</sup> hall was constructed, this was still an open space between the Canal and the Bergense Steenweg, the twin arteries of the capital city's industrial heartland. While the neighbourhood has since been urbanized, the exodus of industrial enterprises from the 1960s onwards also led to impoverishment. However, the slaughterhouse survived.

From 1983 on, Abattoir SA/NV, the owner of part of the 10-hectare site, developed ambitious plans to turn the slaughterhouse into a centre for the area. Director Joris Tiebaut added markets and cultural events to the activity of the meat industry, and a reception hall was built in the cellars. In 2012 he asked ORG for a master plan for the future. Among other things, they devised a large city square in front of the central hall, with urban warehouses for the meat industry to its left, and a new food market, the Foodmet, to the right.

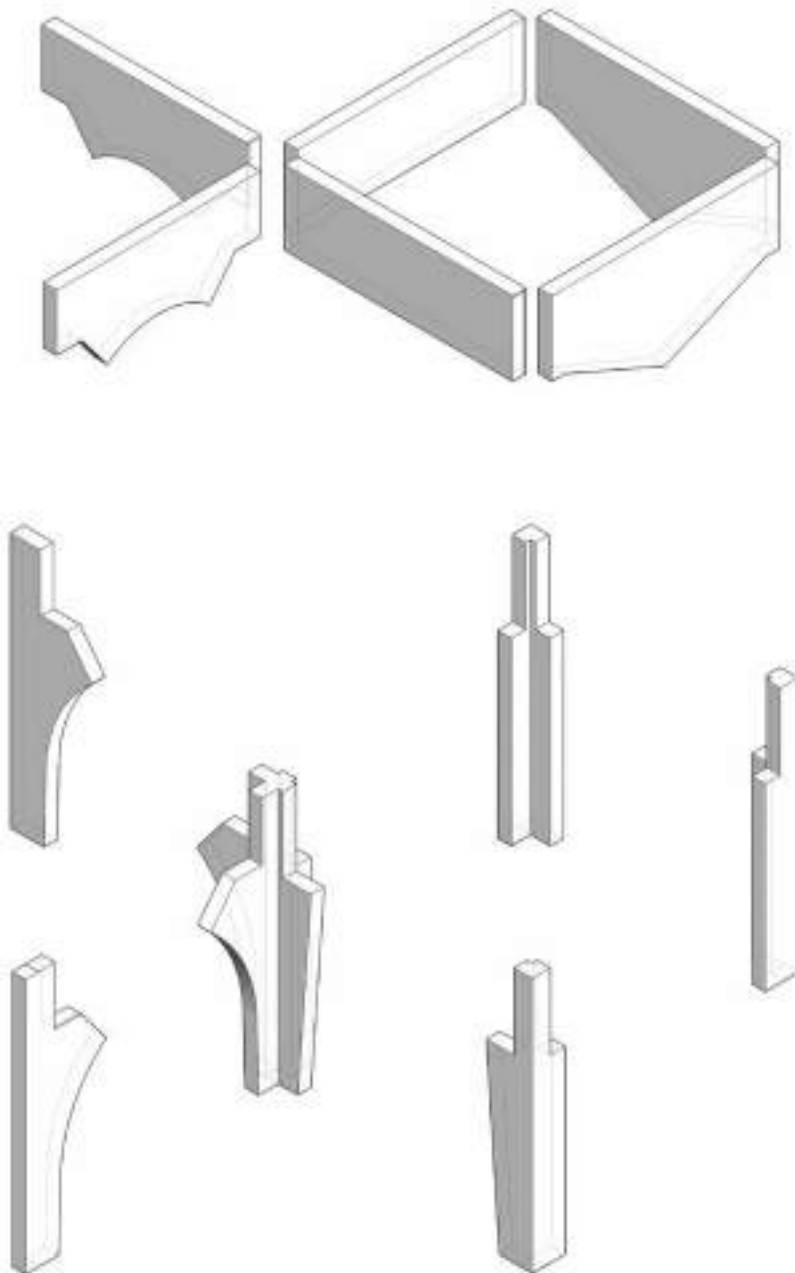
→  
A covered food market, modelled on the Spanish mercado.



The Brussels-Capital Region backed the plan, which took off gradually. Tiebaut didn't delay in building the Foodmet. Also designed by ORG, it is a large, covered food market, modelled on the Spanish *mercado*, whereby multiple traders operate from individual stands. There is room for larger, open sales floors on the patios between the stalls. At first glance, it was not a 'nice' task for the architects: the new construction had to bend itself around the existing Freshmarket, an anonymous warehouse measuring around 40 by 50 metres.

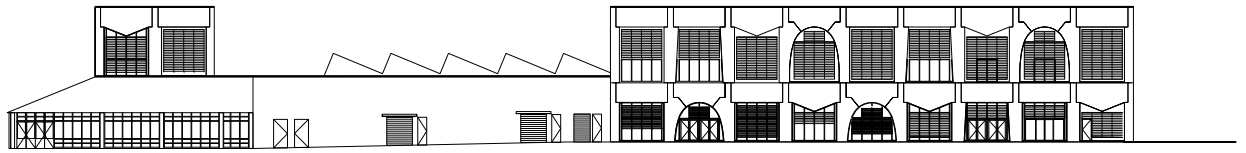
Nevertheless, the result is remarkable. On either side of the existing shed, a two-storey building arose, each measuring two bays deep and respectively six and nine bays long. Behind it, a one-storey building completes the picture, thereby turning this into a building of about 75 by 104 metres. In the roof of the lower part, two skylights allow light to flood the patios. On the level of the perimeter blocks, one finds a restaurant and also a view of the agricultural roof.

↘  
Elements of the  
platonic panels.

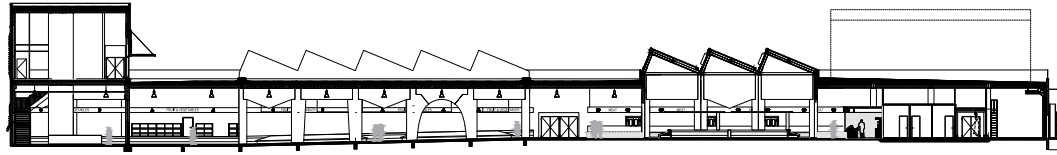


↓  
The new construction  
had to bend itself  
around the existing  
Freshmarket, an  
anonymous  
warehouse measur-  
ing around 40 by  
50 metres.





Facade



Section Aa

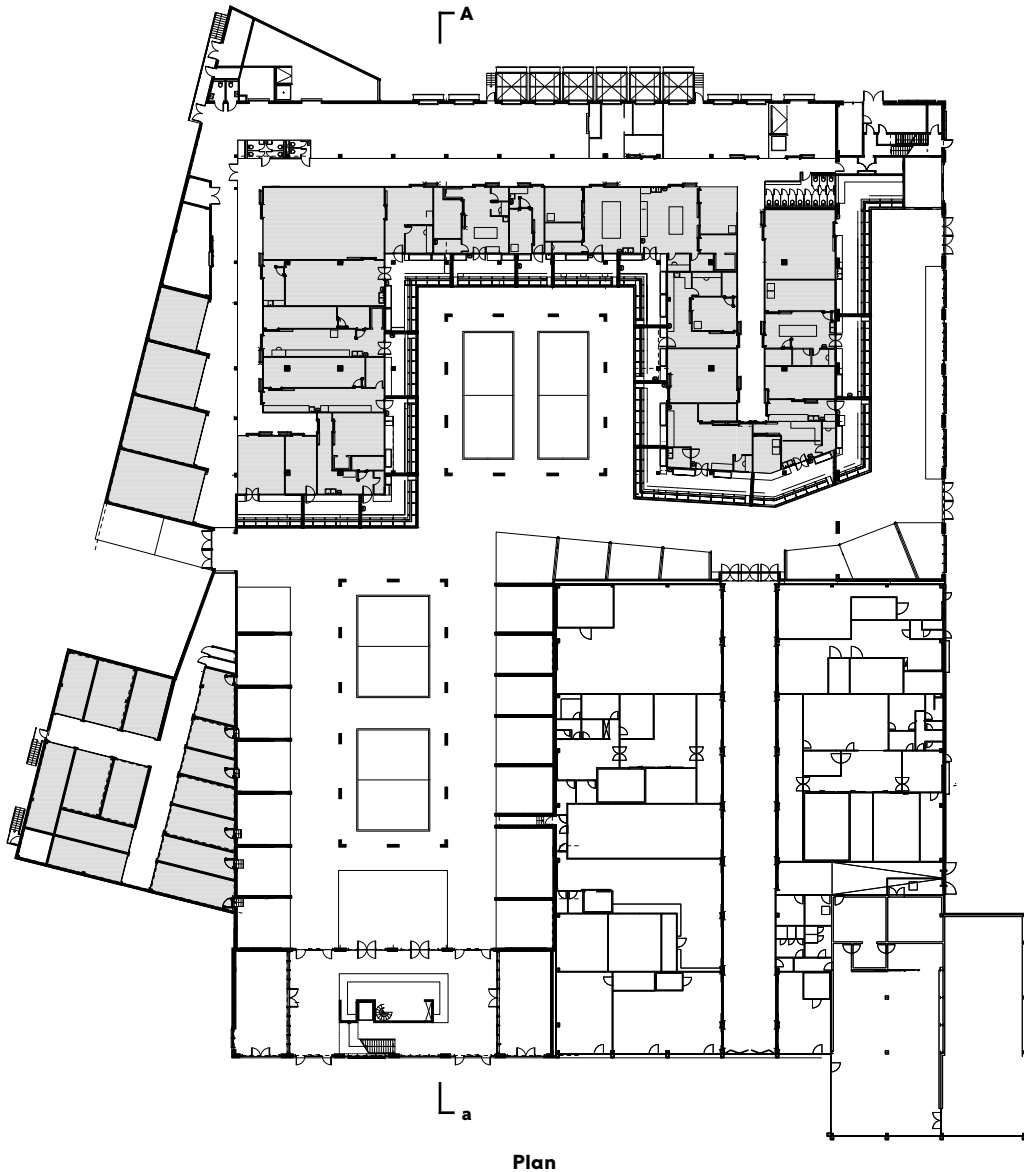
0 2 4 10m



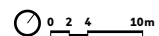
The most striking thing, however, is the construction of the new wings. These comprise prefab concrete elements, modulated at 5.8 metres in both width and height. Each wall forms a portal: two legs supporting a beam. Yet you do not see a standard skeleton: the oversized prefab elements evoke classic natural stone bonds because the beams do not rest on the legs but fit into their recesses. The openings are

sometimes rectangular, sometimes arch-shaped or crowned with an inverted triangle.

The result is a monumental figure, and that was ORG's explicit intention. The porticoes lend the construction a dignity that extends to the activities that take place in the space. It confirms that the meat industry is here to stay. ▲■●



Plan



Architect  
**ORG – Permanent Modernity**  
Website  
**orgpermod.com**  
Official project name  
**Foodmet**  
Location  
**Anderlecht**

Programme  
**Food hall with a restaurant and roof garden, including associated logistic and technical areas; outdoor areas**  
Procedure  
**Direct commission**

Client  
**Abattoir**  
Lead contractor  
**Jacques Delens**  
Structural engineering  
**VK Engineering**  
Services engineering  
**VK Engineering**

Completion  
**June 2015**  
Total floor area  
**23,436 m<sup>2</sup> (incl. outdoor areas) – 12,905 m<sup>2</sup> (excl. outdoor areas)**  
Budget  
**€ 16,000,000 (excl. VAT and fees)**



ARCHITECTS  
& ENGINEERS



Foodmet by ORG Organisation for Permanent Modernity continues the tradition of the Abattoir-site in Anderlecht, as a food market with 17 butcher shops of the 45 shops in total. VK provided structural and M&E engineering, as well as acoustical consulting.

Platonic panels are merged to form various porticos, creating a very flexible structural system, most apt for a dynamic mixed-use environment. The plates featured in 2016's Venice Biennale as an art installation, for which VK also designed the structural concept.

[www.vkgroup.be](http://www.vkgroup.be)

**‘Brussels is the capital of the European Union not only in politics but also in architecture. The city has an interesting history and its fabric is made up of a stunning array of architectural styles, from famous detailed art deco buildings to contemporary buildings of all scales. I have only one wish while planning for the future, and that is to improve the public realm by reducing the number of cars in the city.’**

**Monica von Schmalensee** <sup>SE</sup>

**Monica von Schmalensee (b. 1956) is an architect based in Stockholm. She is a partner at White Arkitekter. In 2017 she was appointed ‘Mayor’s Design Advocate’ by the Mayor of London.**



# From sustainable to circular Brussels

*Pieter T'Jonck*

**It happened so quickly. Fifteen years ago, sustainability was not a top priority in Brussels. But since then, one drastic policy decision after another has turned the tide. The first step was the obligation to build passively from 2015 onwards. This was followed by the insight that sustainability also requires a good living environment, jobs for everyone, and less traffic. These issues are closely related to our patterns of consumption and production, and thus to the flow of materials and goods. Since March 2016, the Regional Programme for a Circular Economy<sup>1</sup> has been committed to a change of direction in this sense. Awards for exemplary buildings point the way.**



Everyone in the Brussels-Capital Region has been able to compete for the title of ‘exemplary building’ since 2007. Four criteria played a role: energy efficiency and renewability, environmental impact, feasibility and repeatability, and architectural and urban quality. The reason was obvious: in 2007, buildings were still responsible for 72 per cent of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, while transport ‘only’ accounted for 23 per cent. At 4 per cent, industrial emissions were almost anecdotal. If the Region wanted to be climate-neutral by 2030, the built heritage had to be adapted. This policy proved successful: passive buildings are no longer the exception but the norm, both for residential and office buildings.

From 2016 onwards, however, the formula of ‘exemplary buildings’ was modified. Under the banner of ‘Be.Exemplary’, the criteria shifted. The emphasis was placed on architectural quality and the way in which a design contributes to the circular economy. This chimes with the new policy direction established by the GPCE. Its programme aims to reconcile environmental objectives with economic development within the Region itself. This is also about job creation. And it is also how you automatically achieve a circular economy.

As far as construction is concerned, the time is ripe. Rotor, the organization that has been advocating the reuse of building elements for more than a decade, notes that the enormous mass of rubble ‘produced’ by the Region is still disappearing into depots and processing plants further afield, only to be reintroduced later. The explanation is that the pressure on land prices within the Region makes it difficult to operate profitably.

In fact, according to Lionel Devlieger of Rotor, this construction waste is still going in the wrong direction – not only in Brussels, but throughout Europe. While in other sectors the waste stream has remained stable over the past 20 years, construction waste has doubled. Eu-

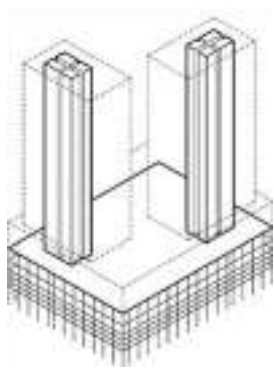
ropean legislation in this area, which was introduced in 2008, is not helping. Under pressure from the German construction industry, the regulations removed the distinction between ‘reuse’ and ‘recycling’. It only stipulated that 60 per cent of construction waste should be recycled or reused. According to Devlieger, however, it is a vital distinction: ‘Reuse means that all of the building components, such as tiles and façade elements and the like are repaired and made ready for use.’ This labour-intensive process creates jobs for low-skilled workers. This is exactly what the Region needs. On the other hand, according to Devlieger, ‘recycling’ destroys materials and then processes them in other industrial applications. This is of little benefit at the local level.

With its 111 measures, the GPCE is very ambitious. There are positive incentives, like a favourable regulatory framework. But it also includes concrete interventions such as the TIR centre and the TACT project along the Canal, near Tour & Taxis. The TIR building comprises approximately 160,000 m<sup>2</sup> of storage space for companies that transfer goods from water to road. TACT accommodates businesses that wish to establish themselves in the city, such as the new Citroën building and the Brasserie de la Senne. As a result, industrial and residential areas are once again becoming more closely entwined.

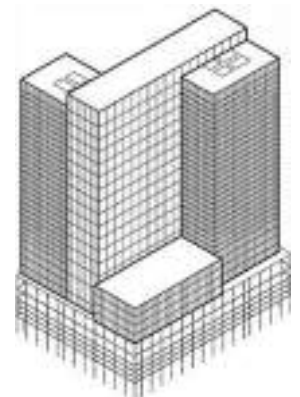
On the ground, however, things are not changing nearly as fast as the policymakers would like. Bad examples abound. Rotor did manage to rescue a number of valuable elements from the former Generale Bank on the Ravensteinstraat prior to demolition, but the levelling and reconstruction work in a project by Baumschlager & Eberle is ‘business as usual’: everything is new. The same goes for the Boudewijn building, until recently the home of the Flemish Community. Parking 58 was also demolished to make way for a new administrative centre for ... the city of Brussels. That’s not very ‘circular’.



situation 1972

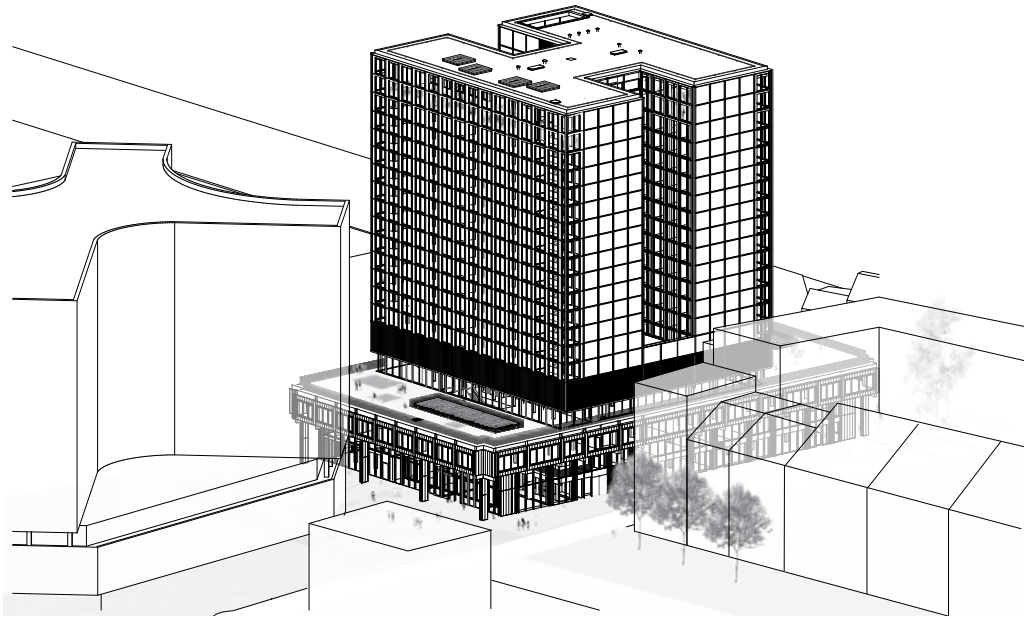


situation 2020



situation 2023





There is another way, however, and this can also be seen in action. Through a competition such as 'Be.Exemplary', 'circular' construction projects receive considerable support from the GCPE. The winners receive a subsidy of between 150 and 250 euros per built square metre. The amount can be as high as 325,000 euros for a public project and 475,000 euros for a private scheme. The Multi building – the former Philips tower on Place De Brouckère as renovated by Conix-RBDM Architects, which was awarded the prize in 2017 – is a good example of where this can lead. From the outset, the target was to incorporate at least 2 per cent of reused materials. Rotor assisted the client in this respect. Devlieger estimates that the target of 2 per cent might actually rest somewhere near 4 per cent, if not even higher. He says: 'It doesn't look like much, but it's actually a lot. After all, that percentage only concerns the decoration, not the skeleton. For example, I-beams from the demolition are reused as part of window constructions. That's exceptional.'

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A project like Multi sets a trend that will be increasingly difficult to reverse. This was recently demonstrated during the presentation of the renovation of the WTC I and II towers in the Northern Quarter, a project by 5IN4E and Jaspers-Eyers for Befimmo. Contrary to expectations, 63 per cent of this colossus will be reused, as opposed to being dismantled. This is less drastic than it seems: from the pedestal upwards, only the central cores of the towers are preserved. The steel structure of the floors, on the other hand, will be rebuilt in concrete and supplemented by a transverse wing inserted between the two double-height towers. In terms of reuse, the project targets are less than those for Multi. The symbolic value, however, is enormous. After all, the building will be mixed use, with residential facilities and a hotel as well as offices. This punctures the accursed mono-functionality of the 'Manhattan plan'. The new configuration means that should the purpose of the building change in the future, it can easily be adapted.

According to Olivier Cavens, the project manager at 5IN4E, there is a simple explanation for dispensing with the existing floors: 'The sagging in the floors differed so much that reuse would have caused uncertainties in terms of budget and planning. Moreover, it is difficult to make this kind of steel structure compliant with the new legislation on fire safety, acoustics and stability. The current regulations are just about the strictest imaginable. On the other hand, it does mean that this building is future-oriented: it can accommodate any type of infill.'

Here, Cavens touches a sore point. After all, circular construction and reuse are not easy to reconcile with the ever-stricter standards, based on new materials. This is what scares clients away. As a result, and above all else, the objectives of the GCPE amount to voluntarism. Other than in a handful of cases, such as Multi, reuse still tends to be a marginal phenomenon. Yet this voluntarism is important. After all, no one believed in large-scale passive building 15 years ago. Today, however, no one is surprised. With a circular view of the construction economy, it may well be the same way to go. The Brussels-Capital Region could then immediately claim a leading position in the European arena ...<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Regional Programme for a Circular Economy is a collaboration between Brussels Environment, Urban.Brussels and the Brussels Government Architect.

**‘The capital of a nation, let alone of a grand and visionary collection of nations, should be an inspiring place that leads by example, not just in politics but in urban planning and design. Such a place should be a showcase for what is good and right. Which is why Brussels, for me, is a massive facepalm. To be completely honest, if I have to go to the city for work, there is no registered increase in activity in the ventral tegmental area of my brain – basically, the part of my brain that controls pleasure. From an urban planning and transport perspective, Brussels is useful. It is, in effect, a museum of failed urban-planning practices, outdated traffic engineering copy-pasted from the Americans in the 1950s, and techniques prioritizing cars over people.**

**I have friends in the city. I know cool bars and restaurants on quiet European streets. But the Big Picture of Brussels doesn’t instil in me a sense of urban awe and wonder. Even when looking at an architecturally impressive building in the city centre, you simply can’t unsee the traffic, the lack of best-practice bicycle infrastructure or the stunted growth of vibrant street life. The capital of Belgium and Europe is barely recognizable as Europe. You’ll find me at the Central Station, waiting for a train to Antwerp.’**

**Mikael Colville-Andersen <sup>DK</sup>**

**Mikael Colville-Andersen (b. 1968, Canada) is a Canadian-Danish urban designer and urban mobility expert. He is the CEO of Copenhagenize Design Co., and he works with cities and governments around the world in coaching them towards becoming more bicycle friendly. He is the host of the urbanism TV documentary series ‘The Life-Sized City’.**

# Kicking the car habit

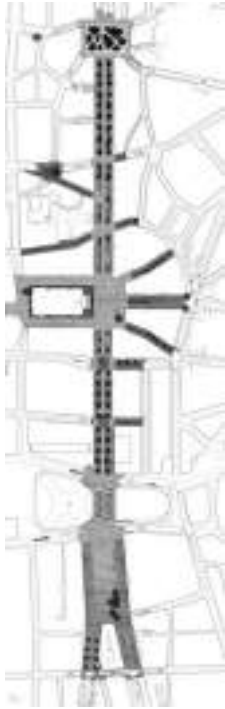
*Laurent Vermeersch*

**Few European cities have embraced the car as enthusiastically as Brussels. After decades of muddling through, there is at long last a policy shift towards alternative mobility and a redistribution of the public space. Yet there is still a long way to go, and with political decisiveness in short supply, the key impulse often comes from the bottom up.**



*You are not stuck in traffic. You are traffic.* This was one of the slogans that emerged in the summer of 2012 during the campaigns organized by 'Picnic The Streets', a citizen movement that was fighting for a car-free Place de la Bourse, the beating heart of the city.

A few well-attended picnics in the middle of the public road attested to the growing awareness amongst more and more Brussels residents that things simply couldn't go on as they were in their city. Brussels was usually doing well in the wrong city lists, such as those with the worst traffic jams. A wider context of strong population growth and the continuing importance of work-related commuting fed into the doomsday scenario of total gridlock.



The picnickers' message was heard loud and clear and the next city administration oversaw the creation of a large pedestrian area. Not only did Place de la Bourse become traffic free, but also a significant section of the Anspachlaan. When the tram was moved underground in the 1970s, this road was laid out as a four-lane highway cutting straight through the city centre. At its far ends, the Fontainasplein and

Place de Brouckère were also slated for redesign. The city authorities claimed that together with the existing car-free streets around the Grand-Place, this was now one of the largest pedestrian zones in Europe.

In the meantime, the construction works are nearing completion and no one wants to go back to the days of the city motorway. Nevertheless, this was a hard-won revolution. The first temporary interventions provoked a raft of criticism and even legal proceedings, but all in all, despite these obstacles and the tardy start to the redevelopment work, the principle held up well. A few concessions were made, but there proved to be scant political will to turn back the clock.

The pedestrian zone in the city centre garnered the most media attention. Now, however, steps have also been taken elsewhere in the city towards a different kind of mobility and reclaiming the public space from the car. The Reyers Viaduct in Schaarbeek was demolished and places such as the Parvis in Saint-Gilles and the Koningin Astridplein in Jette were transformed from car parks into multifunctional squares in which residents and visitors can meet.

In the latter case, the metamorphosis also went hand in hand with the construction of a new tramline, which proved an overnight success. After years of political deadlock, a tram was ultimately *not* introduced on Chaussée d'Ixelles, but the second most important shopping street only became vehicle-restricted. Other major roads were left undisturbed but generous cycle lanes were added. One was built along the Inner Ring road, for example.

The city also gained some new parks, chiefly in the densely built-up neighbourhoods along the canal, such as the Parc de la Senne and the green network on and around the site of Tour & Taxis. At the Porte de Ninove, until recently a sinister no man's land, a new park is currently under construction.

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In the meantime, further new plans are being drawn up and citizen movements are keeping the status of the car firmly on the political agenda, in terms of both traffic safety and, in particular, air pollution. This has led to the creation of a growing number of 30 km/h zones and several streets will probably be closed to cars at the beginning and end of the school day. After residents came up with an idea to this end, Saint-Gilles' new local authority is even keen to outlaw all through traffic from an entire neighbourhood around Brussels South Station. This will offer a foretaste of the new regional mobility plan entitled 'Good Move', part of whose remit is to create more liveable neighbourhoods.

It is not as though Brussels is suddenly abandoning cars altogether. The Bois de la Cambre, one of the city's largest parks, still acts as an entry and exit road to and from the capital as an extension of Avenue Louise. Monuments such as the Cinquantenaire or the Palace of Justice are still being misused as car parks. A large number of dated traffic tunnels, which according to experts are the equivalent of rolling out a red carpet to cars, are also being renovated and will therefore continue to be used for decades to come, at a minimum.

Furthermore, a series of ambitious plans for the public space are proving very slow to get off the ground, such as the redesign of Avenue de la Toison d'Or, another important shopping street, or Rond-point Schuman in the European Quarter.

Despite the evident progress, much remains to be done if Brussels wants to keep up with international front-runners. Admittedly, the city has already come a long way. Indeed, few European cities have embraced the age of the car so enthusiastically. In the lead-up to the 1958 world fair, in particular, Brussels was equipped with new, car-based infrastructure in record time. At the time, this represented the height of modernity and played a starring role in the run-up to the expo, which crystal-

ized Belgium's post-war ambitions. Belgium aspired to be the crossroads of the Western world, literally.

The political will and rapid decision-making of that era stand in stark contrast to today's slowly-dawning realization of the car's problematic encroachment upon the city. Although minds are gradually focussing on the issues, the cultural shift is by no means complete and it is often still citizen initiatives that act as the catalyst for change. If decisions are made, putting them into practice can often still prove a major ordeal. This is sometimes due to a lack of political courage, but the complicated structure of the Brussels and Belgian governments are also to blame.

Brussels comprises 19 municipalities, each with its own mayor and councillor for mobility and public works. All too often the various agencies of the Brussels-Capital Region, which since its foundation in 1989 has gradually sought to increase its power, work alongside one another rather than together. Moreover, because of the poor financial situation, many projects are dependent upon federal funding. Mobility policy is also hopelessly fragmented between the different regions and the federal government. But collaboration is essential if Brussels is to get a grip on the key commuting flows from Flanders and Wallonia. ▲■●



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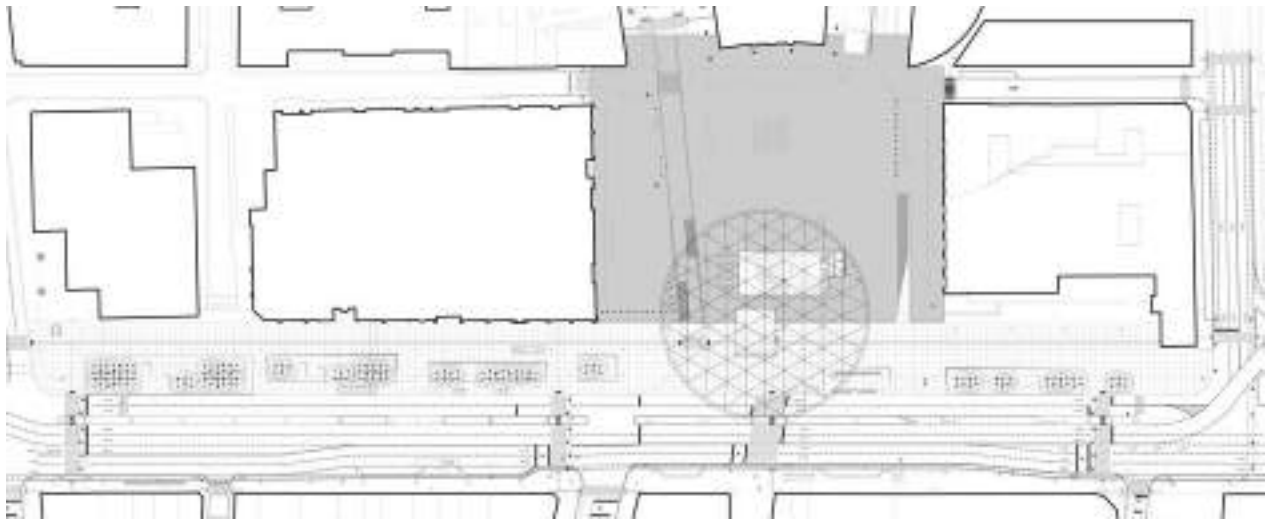


# Place Rogier

*Véronique Patteeuw – Photos Matthias Van Rossen*

**Place Rogier in Brussels is not just any square. Once called the Place des Nations and a gateway to the former North Station, it welcomed the first cars and electric trams amidst stately hotels with melodious names. The square breathed to the rhythm of the metropolis and managed to reconcile the bustle of city life with a human scale.**

a 7



Plan

A 7

0 10 20



The construction of the North-South connection shunted the North Station a few hundred metres further along, in the process creating space for a square with international ambitions. When the beautiful 117-metre-high international Rogier Centre, with its offices, housing, theatre and sky bar, was demolished on a sad morning in 2001, Brussels lost yet another piece of its metropolitan identity.

For this reason alone, the XDGA, Ney & Partners and Michel Desvigne project is immensely valuable. Because in a city that breaks down rather than builds up, Place Rogier quickly became a place of residual spaces, with a mysterious pyramid in its centre, an invisible underground conference centre, and hotels whose prestige had long since faded. XDGA's project aimed to restore the square's metropolitan character in a boisterous and radical manner, and it undoubtedly does so.

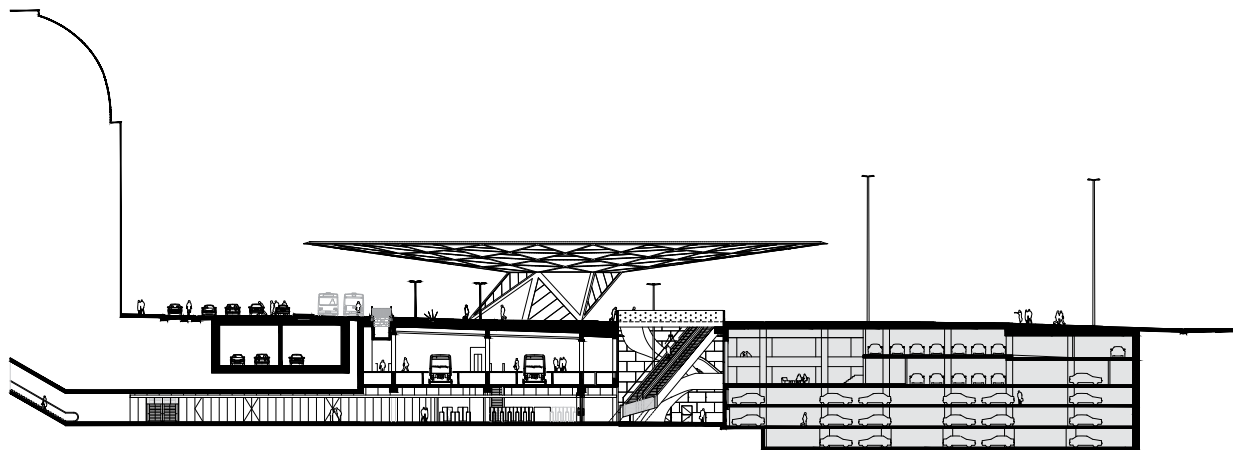
The strength of the design, however, is not to be found in the eye-catching canopy or its radical form. It resides neither in the ingenious feat of engineering that holds up the 64-metre-diameter in an infernal balance, nor in the outsized dimensioning of the square: XDGA, who managed

to stretch the square far beyond the usual conventions, have realized a 360-metre-long and 22-metre-wide spot for the metropolitan *flâneur*. With its dark, glossy stone and large concrete floor slabs with inlaid cobbles, Place Rogier is a pedestal for the buildings and it even creates, for a brief moment, the illusion of a Mediterranean *rambla*.

No, the strength of the design lies in the square as a vertical space, a space between surface and underground, where daylight enters the metro platforms via a wide patio; where the square makes itself felt in the organized tangle of an urban hub; where it connects subterranean user groups and allows for a mixed programme (shopping facilities, conference centre, car parks, hotels); where it connects the municipalities and elevates them to a higher level. With the XDGA project, the former Place des Nations has regained its metropolitan ambitions and is resolutely committed to the future. ▲ ■●

*This text was previously published as 'Bevlogen plein' in A+275, December 2018–January 2019, pp. 69–71.*

↘  
The eye-catching canopy with a diameter of 64 metres, held up by an ingenious feat of engineering, is only the starting point of a 360-metre-long and 22-metre-wide spot for the metropolitan flâneur.



Section

0 10 20m

Architect  
**Xaveer De Geyter Architects**  
Website  
**xdga.be**  
Official project name  
**Place Rogier**  
Location  
**Place Rogier, Brussels**

Programme  
**Reconstruction of Place Rogier and Avenue Botanique, with redevelopment of the metro station and commercial spaces**  
Procedure  
**Competition**

Client  
**Brussels-Capital Region – Brussels Mobility**  
Lead contractor  
**In Advance – Louis Dewaele + Viabuild**  
Landscape architect  
**Michel Desvigne Paysagiste**

Structural engineering  
**Ney & Partners**  
Services engineering  
**Boydens Engineering**  
Completion  
**April 2019**  
Total floor area  
**45,000 m<sup>2</sup>**  
Budget  
**€ 20,000,000 (excl. VAT and fees)**



# Place Dumon

*Eline Dehullu*

The redesign by Artgeeneering and H+N+S of the area between the Place Dumon and the Stokkel metro station was completed in 2018. After a long process and much resistance, the square that previously served only as a car park was finally transformed into a meeting place for residents. A truly shared space, open to pedestrians, cyclists, trams, buses and cars.



7  
By demarcating the inner zone of the square with a concrete bench around the perimeter, the architects create a place in which to linger, relax, meet people.

At the southern end, a green space with trees, benches and a fountain. At the northern end, a canopy with a pavilion that houses a chip shop and a café.





The reconstruction of Place Dumon did not go without a hitch. And that is an understatement. In 2013 the municipality of Woluwe-Saint-Pierre launched an architectural competition. The aim was to bring a new dynamic to the area and to make the square more appealing. Pascal Smet, the Brussels minister for mobility and public works, wholeheartedly supported the plans and made them even more ambitious. In order to improve the quality of city life, he wanted to divide the public space in a radically different manner: cars would no longer have absolute priority, and more space would be given to public transport, cyclists and pedestrians.

↓  
The *genius loci* of Place Dumon is its oval shape, because it

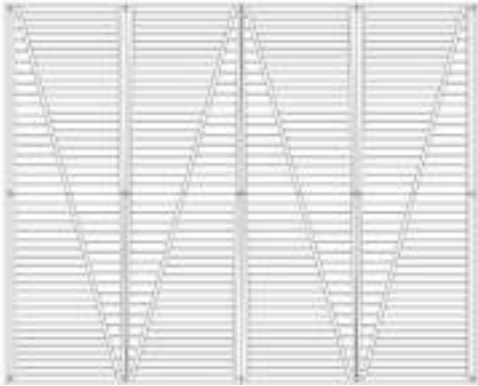
used to be a turning point for the tram.

Place Dumon was built at the start of the twentieth century as a turning point for the tram. The *genius loci* of the square is its oval shape. The local residents used it like a typical English village green: a shared open space in a densely populated neighbourhood. In the design for the reconstruction drawn up in 2015, Artgineering evoked these features, the *raison d'être* of the square. The urban-planning office decided to retain the typical oval shape and to emphasize it with a concrete bench around the perimeter. By demarcating the inner zone, they create a place in which to linger, relax, meet people. At the southern end of the square is a green space with trees, benches and a fountain. At the northern end, a canopy with a pavilion that houses the old Friture Charles chip shop, a new café and an ice-cream stand.



Architects Els Claessens and Tania Vandenbussche drew the architecture of the pavilion and the wooden canopy in collaboration with Util and covered it with white zinc. On the side of the square, the canopy resembles a pair of saddle roofs; on the street side, it looks like two interlinked butterfly roofs. The primary structure consists of ridge and gutter beams that form triangles. In-between are identically sized beams, although the distance between them varies depending on the span: the longer the span, the narrower the gap. The top and bottom of the canopy follow the same pure, simple logic. The canopy marks out a place on the square and lends it a homely feel.

The outer zone, on the other side of the uninterrupted oval bench, is dedicated to commerce and traffic. All traffic is condensed into a single lane, making manoeuvres and double parking impossible. Cars, buses and trams share the only available lane not only among themselves, but also with pedestrians and cyclists. There is no space for long-stay parking, there is no open tram verge, there is no separate bicycle path, there is no pavement with raised curbs and there are no pedestrian crossings. This is one space, stretching from façade to façade, and executed in one and the same material. It is also a 20 km/h zone, in which traffic is reduced to the same level. Here, all types of users are included. This is a shared public space, where everyone has to adapt their speed and behaviour to one another. The tram and the pedestrian determine the scale.



←  
**The primary structure consists of ridge and gutter beams that form triangles. In-between are identically sized beams, although the distance between them varies depending on the span: the longer the span, the narrower the gap.**



The plans for redevelopment of the square generated a great deal of controversy. The STIB/MIVB (Brussels Intercommunal Transport Company) was unhappy because there was no separate bedding for the tram. Cyclists grumbled because there was no 'safe' cycle path. Local residents and shopkeepers were downright furious. The square was an important intermodal hub for tram, metro and bus. However, many of the families in this rich municipality own, not one, but often two cars, which they tend to use for short trips. The retailers feared that the loss of parking spaces would cause their turnover from the local middle-class residents to plummet. In 2016 they launched a petition that collected 5,000 signatures and they lodged an appeal with the Council of State: they asked for the design for the reconstruction of the square to be destroyed. The 'residents of the square' were opposed to the 'square for the residents'.

After an independent study (conducted by Atrium) showed that only 24 per cent of visitors arrived by car, and following much consultation, the municipality and the merchants reached a compromise. During a transitional phase – which will last until the underground car park at the nearby Stockel Square shopping centre gains an additional 200 parking spaces – the municipality will also allow short-term

parking within the oval of the square. The municipality does not mark out parking spaces or use barriers and is gradually increasing the number of concerts and festivals held in the space. You could call it a sweetener, but it's one that allows the inhabitants to swallow a bitter pill. In the meantime, they have noticed what such a collective, sheltered place for meeting and relaxation gives back to the neighbourhood. Seeing comes before believing.

'This is Brussels. We've accepted the dominance of the car in the public space for far too long', says Stefan Bendiks of Artgineering. He can draw comparisons with other European capitals as he works in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. In the latter country, he is a member of the Dutch Cycling Embassy. He continues: 'This is not a preliminary master plan or mobility scheme with multimodal traffic, as seen in the Netherlands and other European countries. In Brussels – and by extension in Belgium – things are the other way around. Small projects are meant to bring about a greater revolution.' The transformation of a small car park into a collective public space needs to lead to a broader outlook in terms of mobility in this city and the wider country. In this sense, Place Dumon is a pioneering project. ▲ ■ ●



Plan

0 10 20m

Architect  
**Artgineering –  
H+N+S – ectv**  
Website  
**artgineering.eu**  
Official project name  
**Place Dumon**  
Location  
**Place Dumon,  
Woluwe-Saint-Pierre**

Programme  
**Refurbishment of a  
square and its adjacent  
streets, construction of a  
canopy and pavilion for a  
café, ice-cream stand  
and chip shopProcedure  
Invited competition**  
Client  
**Commune de Woluwe-  
Saint-Pierre**

Lead contractor  
**Krinkels**  
Landscape architect  
**H+N+S  
landschapsarchitecten**  
Public realm  
**Artgineering**  
Consultancy public space  
**Atelier voor Ruimtelijk  
Advies (ARA)**

Structural engineering  
**Util**  
Completion  
**June 2018**  
Total floor area  
**11,000 m<sup>2</sup>**  
Budget  
**€ 4,300,000  
(excl. VAT and fees)**

# Parc de la Senne

*Eline Dehullu*

The Parc de la Senne, which forms the natural border between the municipalities of Schaerbeek and the City of Brussels, is not so much a park as an elongated garden. A 'promenade' for strolling, foraging and gardening, but all in public view. It is the first link in the new Green Small Ring to the north of Brussels.



⌞  
The Parc de la Senne is the first part of a much larger urban development: a new green promenade, more than 1.5 km long and 1 hectare in size, before ending in a new pedestrian and cycle bridge over the waterway, which continues to the Royal Estate in Laeken.

As the name suggests, the park is situated on the former bed of one of the river Senne's tributaries. In the nineteenth century, many businesses, breweries, laundries and industrial activities clustered around this meandering river that flows through Brussels. It became a popular neighbourhood, characterized by a medieval fabric of streets and alleys. Due to unhygienic conditions, epidemics and floods, this part of the Senne was covered between 1931 and 1935. At the start of the twenty-first century, the undevelopable land between the blocks of houses on the riverbed was left fallow. The soil was polluted and the area was neglected and returned to the wild.

In 2014, under two sustainable neighbourhood contracts ('Masui' in Schaerbeek and 'Koningin-Vooruitgang' in Brussels), the Brussels-Capital Region decided to transform this wasteland into a park for local residents. La Compagnie du Paysage, a Paris-based agency, drew up the plans. The landscape architects were assisted by other design offices for aspects such as urban sociology, infrastructure, lighting design and playground equipment.

The Parc de la Senne begins at the corner of the Avenue de l'Héliport and Avenue Albert II. From there it makes its way behind the blocks of houses to the Masuistraat. The park spaces are inserted between the residential blocks. As a result, they compensate for the acute shortage of green areas in this densely built-up area of the city.

The park is actually more of an elongated garden, a 15-metre-wide promenade with a high ecological value. It is a corridor for soft mobility, in the middle of the busy Canal Zone. Users may walk or cycle at their ease. The landscape architects prioritized the development of biodiversity. In-

digenous and foreign trees, large shrubs, woody and bulbous plants, ferns and other species: the planting was chosen in such a way that the surroundings look colourful all year round, with an exceptional and long flowering time at the end of spring and in summer. Here and there, the park opens onto allotments and squares behind the residential blocks, with allotment zones, picnic tables, seating areas, playgrounds and sports fields on both sides of the path.

In 2017 the layout of the first phase of the Parc de la Senne won the first prize of the Golden Rules competition organized by the Brussels Town Planning Federation (FBU/BFS). One criterion was the way in which a project both subscribes and adapts to the urban environment. The new park is the first part of a much larger urban development: a new green promenade, more than 1.5 km long and 1 hectare in size, which will run from Masui in Schaerbeek, through a series of renovation projects in the north of Brussels along the Canal, on to a new cycle and walking route on the railway verges along the Sibelga site, before ending in a new pedestrian and cycle bridge over the waterway, which continues to the Royal Estate in Laeken. In the long run, this will create a Green Small Ring across a number of densely populated neighbourhoods that will connect to the regional Green Network.

A new term exists for this elongated park: 'urban landscape'. This concept encompasses a new way of thinking about the relationship between the built environment and nature, on the scale of the entire city. The benefits for the inhabitants are paramount. After all, this is the only way we can renew the city and keep it liveable.▲■●



© Landscapes

Architect  
**La Compagnie du Paysage**  
Website  
**compagniedupaysage.com**  
Official project name  
**Le Parc de la Senne**

Location  
**Brussels and Schaerbeek**  
Execution architect  
**La Compagnie du Paysage**  
Programme  
**Parc**  
Procedure  
**Invitation to tender**

Client  
**Environment Brussels**  
Landscape architect  
**La Compagnie du Paysage**  
Services engineering  
**Infra Services - Agence On**

Building physics  
**Montois Partners**  
Completion  
**September 2016**  
Total floor area  
**3,393 m<sup>2</sup>**  
Budget  
**€ 2,045,984 (excl. VAT and fees)**

# Deconstruct and reuse: building differently

Let's start with the good news: the construction sector has never been so ambitious in its will to reduce its environmental impact. Through the PREC (Regional Circular Economy Programme), Brussels dares to dream of a "zero waste" sector by 2050.

Yes, energy consumption for residential and commercial buildings remains an issue. However, a major programme to promote energy efficient buildings in our capital has made Brussels one of the world leaders in sustainable construction.

Rome wasn't built in a day: the sector continues to produce 33% of all waste and we use 50% of all natural resources extracted on a global scale.

Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed. And this change is known as the circular economy. Numerous recent projects in the Region confirm that this dream is not so crazy. Slowly but surely, we are moving from the experimental stage to the operational stage. Both start-ups and existing businesses, small and large, are embarking on the adventure. The keyword? Cooperation. Because, when one person's waste becomes another person's raw material, it is impossible to complete a project alone.

This is demonstrated by various Dzerostudio Architectes projects, from Tomato Chili, to Be-module Inside; it is only by co-creating that we can achieve truly environmentally friendly, social and, above all, affordable solutions. This is where our ecobuild.brussels cluster comes in. Creating links between the various stakeholders in the value chain, it plays a pivotal role in encouraging members to catalyse innovative projects with the potential to become the solutions of tomorrow. Damien, David and Olivier have chosen to make reuse their job. Do you want to build differently too? Discover their stories\* and write your own with ecobuild.brussels, the sustainable construction and renovation cluster for Brussels!



*"The circular economy approach is crucial if we are to combine financial and environmental concerns, so our customers don't only consider economic value when making decisions, but also the impact of their choices on the environment."*

**Olivier Breda – Dzerostudio Architectes**



*"We remove the frame, and salvage the double glazing to make single glazed panels. We then reuse these in projects such as Tomato Chili (greenhouse), or Be-Module Inside (collapsible, modular office boxes built using MODs and salvaged materials)."*

**David De Nutte – Home Perspective**



*"For us, the circular economy is an obvious choice. The principle? Salvage materials, and remanufacture or transform them in some way for use in other building projects."*

**Damien Verraver – Retrial**

**‘The stone city, the European city, has become, in the eyes of the prophets of mobility at all costs, a synonym of dangerous, deadly inflexibility, perhaps even a sign of laziness. While European cities are being ruined mercilessly by the brutal construction of the new infrastructures of the advanced industrial state, the architectural profession has entered a crisis from which no one has been able to escape since 1968.**

**The daily struggles of the inhabitants of European cities threatened by “modern” urban planning have led them to form committees of inhabitants which, in the best of cases, have federated in order to oppose a united front to the inevitability of capitalism. In Brussels, for example, the only ones who have really developed an overall alternative project to industrial voracity are the inhabitants themselves and not the authorities, whether socialist or not.’**

**Léon Krier<sup>LU</sup> and Maurice Culot<sup>BE</sup>**

Excerpt from 'L'unique chemin de l'architecture', *Archives d'architecture moderne*, 1978 – reprinted in *A+267*, Aug.–Sept. 2017, pp. 65–68.

Léon Krier (b. 1946) is a Luxembourgish architect, architectural theorist and urban planner, the first and most prominent critic of architectural Modernism and advocate of New Traditional Architecture and New Urbanism. Krier was the inaugural Driehaus Architecture Prize laureate in 2003.

Maurice Culot (b. 1937, Seville) is a Belgian architect and urban planner. In 1968 he founded the Atelier de Recherche et d'Action Urbaines (ARAU). Maurice Culot is chairman of the Fondation pour l'Architecture.

# Building the city, bottom up and top-down

*Nathalie Cobbaut*

**They're all over Brussels: dozens of citizen initiatives have been taken in order to transform the city and develop the urban space. But are they being taken seriously? Do they have the ears of decision-makers? How do historical organizations such as BRAL, Inter-Environnement Bruxelles (IEB) and ARAU position themselves with regard to these citizen movements? The situation seems to be changing and participation seems to be increasingly on the programme, despite the fact that territorial planning mechanisms are still deeply rooted.**





With issues relating to the climate, mobility, sustainable food supplies and other concerns linked to a different way of looking at the economic and social development of our societies, more and more individuals want to make their voices heard and representative democracy no longer seems to be the only way for them to express themselves. Witness the climate demonstrations: in the opinion of the people, political decision-makers are clearly not going far enough, fast enough. This desire to make their voices heard also concerns the planning of the city, the use of public and green spaces, housing, mobility, and much more. Instead of making demands or opposing, as provided for in urban-planning regulations, among others through public inquiries and possible appeals, the citizens of Brussels are mobilizing their capacity for action by setting up concrete but also reflexive projects with an eye on building the city differently.

### Bottom-up processes

p. 4, ← 78

Among recent initiatives, ‘Pool is cool’, a non-profit organization founded in 2014, aims to organize bathing areas in the city as fun spots of social and cultural interaction centred on the hedonistic pleasure of water. As architect Paul Streinbrück, one of the movement’s initiators, explains, ‘we initially carried out spontaneous actions in the city, like swimming in fountains and ponds, but also more structured projects such as the construction of a swimming pool along the canal in August 2016 [now included in the third inventory of Wallonia-Brussels Architecture – ed.] or on Bozar’s summer terrace in 2017’. As a result, this year, the Brussels environment minister, Céline Fremault, decided to try out six bathing spots in Brussels (mainly ponds and a section of the canal), following a study carried out by Brussels Environment last year.



Another action that received a lot of media coverage was ‘Filter Café Filtré’, launched in 2018 following a Greenpeace study on air pollution around schools and the impact on children’s health. Annekatrien Verdict, the architect behind the project: ‘We were shocked and with other parents we reacted quickly, closing the street around our children’s school. This action was reported in the press and spotted by a number of political decision-makers. The movement grew, and 137 schools were mobilized last year. New actions were launched again in March 2019, on the eve of the elections. Some municipal authorities have authorized the closure of streets around schools at the start and the end of the school day.’ But the objective lies elsewhere: it is a question of designing lasting facilities around schools for childcare and appropriate mobility plans, but also of rethinking the place of the car in the city, among others by targeting company cars, ‘which requires action from the political authorities, both courage and concrete actions on their part’.







← p. 80 Another example of this desire to transform the city, the collective ‘Bye bye, Petite Ceinture’, launched by two urban planners, Rien Van de Wall and Wim Menten, brought together citizens, academics, students, BRAL and ARAU over four Fridays in November and December 2017, in order to reflect on developments to return the Little Ring road to the citizens of Brussels and to further unify the city beyond this barrier created by the movement in the 1960s that prioritized cars. The proposals that emerged from walks and co-construction workshops were mapped out and presented in the context of the *You Are Here* exhibition held at WTC 1 in the context of the Brussels Biennale for Architecture and Urbanism. But for Rien Van de Wall, ‘it is still difficult to get the population and the public authorities to look at the Little Ring differently, as if this node of mobility was something we could not depart from’.

← p. 80

### Moving the boundaries

As we can see, a lot of initiatives have been taken, and the above projects are only the tip of the iceberg. Whether at the level of the street, the area, the municipality or the region, the citizens of Brussels have gathered to flower their houses, set up urban vegetable gardens, convert wasteland into a meeting place, temporarily occupy a building or even try to have a wider impact on the city’s organization. For Michel Hubert, urban sociologist and professor at Université Saint-Louis, ‘these projects are on different scales and have had various levels of success.

But the more targeted they are and the more rooted in reality, the more likely they are to hit home. Things are more difficult when the objective requires a greater level of abstraction, as for ‘Bye bye, Petite Ceinture’, and concerns several levels of power: local, regional, federal. Among project initiators, there are also many architects and urbanists, with a certain expertise and a heightened awareness of the city and a desire to have an impact on it. This desire to make proposals is perhaps also more prominent in the Flemish than in the French-speaking culture.’

While they all believe in their projects, this involvement alongside their professional activity can be burdensome, and beyond getting people involved, the aim is also to reach political decision-makers in order to push through other ways of conceiving things, other procedures by which to imagine the city. And here again, there is unanimous agreement that institutional complexity is a barrier to many advances, even if participation seems to be becoming more commonplace thanks to mechanisms that make it possible to involve the population more closely in decision-making processes (consultations, forums, participatory budgets).

As Petra Pferdenges, an architect involved in the ParckFarm social-farm project on the Tour & Taxis site, which aims to achieve the participatory development of the green public space, points out, ‘bottom-up actions are of course wonderful, but they need better support from the institutions. Bottom-up actions cannot be sustained without top-down intervention’.

### Facilitation, power and opposition

How do historical organizations such as BRAL, IEB and ARAU react to these new ways of acting and of moving the boundaries? Of the three, BRAL is probably the closest to these initiatives. Pier Van Meerbeek, in charge of the Participation department within BRAL, confirms: ‘For the past seven or eight years, citizen groups have emerged that are proactive rather than

just reactive. And we believe it is important to act as a facilitator between the grassroots movements and the institutions in order to support this new wave. It provides answers for a better, more sustainable use of the city's resources, with mutual assistance and a sharing economy. A paradigm shift is also taking place, with the need for a new stance to be taken by the public authorities, no longer as officials with the power to authorize major development plans, but in a progressive and more transitional urban approach.'

While the historical DNA of IEB resides in the federation of neighbourhood committees, the organization clearly sees its role as that of the opposition and casts a critical perspective on the transformation of the city. For Catherine Scohier, project manager at IEB, 'citizen initiatives are excellent, but they do not address crucial issues such as dualization or the need for social housing. In this respect, anything related to the temporary occupation of buildings is being hijacked by city-marketing approaches to promote neighbourhoods in transition. In addition, we are witnessing an efflorescence of regulations, but at the same time, major projects are being developed that depart from urbanistic rules. The forums for consultation and appeal are no longer sufficient for a democratic debate in the face of watertight projects. We should beware of a bottom-up approach that is all show and a top-down approach that is fiercer than before.'

Lastly, as regards ARAU, Isabelle Pauthier is in favour of action, as was last year already Ann Descheemaeker, the former coordinator of BRAL who became chief of staff for the councillor for urbanism Bart Dhondt (Groen) in the city of Brussels. His presence on the green political lists in Brussels emphasizes the need for a balance of power to obtain changes: 'Rather than preach in the wilderness or be reduced to introducing appeals that move urbanistic issues into the legal field, I think

that for me it was the moment to tackle on a political level some crucial issues in the Brussels Region, namely mobility and the place of the car, the profitability of real-estate projects for developers and the maintenance of a place for the poor in the city. And to achieve this, citizen participation is going to be essential, with thoughtful and articulated mechanisms, so as to turn Brussels into a concerted and inclusive city.' ▲■●

# PREPARE YOURSELF FOR TOMORROW'S MARKETPLACE

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- Partial and phased renovations // 2d
- Heating and domestic hot water // 4d
- Lighting : design and regulation // 2d
- Reuse of materials and construction elements // 2d
- Energy management // 3d
- Wood construction in Brussels // 2d
- Energy : fundamental principles // 2d
- Urban agriculture and sustainable buildings // 2d

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[facilitator@leefmilieu.brussels](mailto:facilitator@leefmilieu.brussels)

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**‘There are many advantages to the temporary use of vacant buildings. It prevents degradation pending the start of the construction project, provides fresh impetus to the neighbourhood, and can even amount to a test phase aimed at discovering new ideas that can be implemented in the subsequent and final project. But the positive atmosphere surrounding temporary use also requires some qualification. While many people in Brussels are looking for affordable housing and while homeless people and immigrants are forced to spend the night in the street, there are countless square metres of empty space. Several pilot projects have demonstrated, however, that “interim accommodation” is possible when the necessary support is in place. The Region recently freed up funds to allow a number of initiatives to grow, but most temporary projects are still angling towards the hipster environment of start-ups, co-working and festival bars. Temporary use should increasingly become a requisite step in urban development, especially in Brussels, where projects take an inordinately long time to get off the ground. It is essential that the commissioning of temporary use projects is coupled with transparency, professionalism and responsibility. Temporary use should not be reduced to a mechanism exclusively aimed at attracting the middle classes and must also take into account the other social needs of Brussels.’**

**Kristiaan Borret**<sup>BE</sup>

Team Government Architect [Frederik Serroen and Kristiaan Borret] in *Bruzz*:  
‘Leegstaande gebouwen verdienen een ruimer perspectief’, 14 Dec. 2018

Kristiaan Borret (b. 1966, Ghent) has been the Government Architect of the Brussels-Capital Region since 2015. An architectural engineer by training (KU Leuven), he holds additional degrees in philosophy (KU Leuven), political science and public affairs (UCL), and a master’s degree in urbanism (Barcelona). From 2006 to 2014 he was the Government Architect of the City of Antwerp. He has been a visiting professor in urban design at Ghent University since 2015.

# A glass Trojan Horse

*Roeland Dudal*

In 2018 Architecture Workroom Brussels (AWB), a 'think-and-do tank' for innovation in architecture and urbanism, moved into a temporary office in the WTC I tower in the Northern Quarter in Brussels. As curators, they also organized the cultural event 'You Are Here'. To achieve this, they teamed up with various associations, administrations and entrepreneurs. A year later, and after many developments, AWB look back at this period and take stock. With an eye on the future, they question their position on the temporary use of vacant premises, while also outlining the attendant pitfalls and challenges.



The temporary use of vacant buildings and underused urban space is on the rise in Brussels. From a policy viewpoint, the increased interest in stimulating this type of activity is hardly strange. Five years ago, the public commissioning authority Brussels Environment took the first steps by awarding public contracts for temporary-use projects. Good results were achieved via initiatives such as Allee du Kaai by Toestand (a non-profit organization) and ParckFarm (within the framework of Parkdesign 2014) by Alive Architecture and 1010 architecture+urbanism. However, it took some time to get used to this for the city activists of Toestand with their inevitably anarchistic touch.



© Toestand



© Parkdesign

Since then, the ball has kept rolling. At MIPIM in Cannes, one of the world's largest international real-estate fairs, a range of actors from the Brussels-Capital Region presented their approaches: Citydev, SAU-MSI, Hub.brussels, the Brussels Government Architect, and 51N4E for Befimmo. Temporary use chimes with the image of Brussels as the new Berlin. So it's nothing but good news. Five years ago, this convergence of people, event and theme would

have been far from obvious. For a long time, temporary use was the preserve of harmless sociocultural organizations and urban activists, and not high on the agenda for policymakers or property brokers.

The success of 'See U' in USquare and Studio Citygate confirms the rumours that vacant properties in Brussels are set to become a thing of the past. Vacancy will no longer be tolerated; the clamour for social spaces justifies the temporary takeover of dilapidated buildings. These can be used by people waiting for new projects to get off the ground, which will generate an explosion of creativity and new encounters. But is that the end of the story? And is the ball rolling in the right direction? Furthermore, is it even the right ball?

Due to the increased attention given to temporary-use projects, we are also witnessing an important shift in both the agenda and the context in which they are organized. It is not just old factory buildings, empty sheds or old railway beds that are being activated. Temporary use has also found its way into parts of the city with higher development pressure, such as the former Actiris building at the Stock Exchange in Brussels or the city's Northern Quarter. The boundary has become blurred between meeting the needs of fragile sociocultural actors and the more property-driven 'placemaking' as a way of paving the way towards added economic value.

Nowhere is this field of tension more tangible than in the Northern Quarter, where multiple forms of temporary use were tested in vacant office buildings in 2018 under the impetus of Up4North. According to the traditional media sources, there seems to be a consensus about the future of the Northern Quarter. The outdated, single-function office district, which remains empty and grey after office hours, will be mixed, multiple, resilient, urban and innovative in the future. This shouldn't prove difficult, given its excellent location in the Brussels metropolis, situated as it is between the busiest train station

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p. 118 and the future contemporary art museum in the iconic Citroën garage – and where, to boot, the strongest players in the Brussels real-estate world have the bulk of the land ownership sitting in their portfolios.

The Northern Quarter is a district with a precarious and painful history. With great fanfare, it was heralded as the Manhattan of Europe. Created as part of a flat clean-up policy, it was completed at a time when speculation in the city was the dominant logic, which means that the balance between public and private interests was not achieved as proclaimed. Vast amounts of precious raw materials were sunk into a neighbourhood that, just 30 to 40 years later, is once again poised for a thorough transformation. It is an ailing district.

p. 28, 55, 57

Many point to the momentum generated by linking the ongoing conversion of this district to the social transitions and needs that feature on the agenda with ever-increasing prominence. The Northern Quarter as a laboratory for the future of the city. *The Future Is Here*. But what does this really mean? Whose future is it? What added values are being created and who is riding the wave of success? More and more people are concerned about the answers to these questions after calculating the results of the first rush of attention.



© KU Leuven

2018 was brimming with initiatives that saw renewed potential in the Northern Quarter, all of which aimed to contribute, in their own way, to a vision for the future of the district. The Faculty of Architecture of KULeuven set up a

temporary school space, Samenlevingsopbouw began testing new housing forms in old offices, Marcel Bike Cafe set up a temporary social bicycle repair area, an urban roof garden arose between the glass towers ... Each of these initiatives aims to examine how things can be done differently and better. They're valuable and fragile at the same time. After all, they share a common agenda that's not very clear and there is no public mandate. The creation of this agenda is not publicly shared. Research projects overlap and precious time is lost.

Precious time, since the Northern Quarter is already in the throes of transformation: buildings are being demolished, rebuilt or renovated. With Zin in Noord, the future project for the WTC I and II towers, the transition to a new real-estate trend may prove final. But changing urban-development practices takes time. The consequences of today's real-estate decisions will only become visible further down the line and policy innovation is slow, while social emergencies and socio-spatial issues are accumulating ever more rapidly. Making the right connections between public needs and private dynamics is difficult because of the different speeds involved.

Critical proximity. This describes the experience of many of the temporary users who occupied WTC I for 18 months. But is this really possible? Can you be critical of the surroundings in which you are embedded? Can you distance yourself from the comfort of the creative ecosystem of which you are a part? For example, with the exception of 51N4E, none of the users of WTC I had any say in the plans that were drawn up for the premises. The future of the building was determined by a procedure. The procedure led to secrecy. It was impossible to instigate an open and transparent process of co-design for the building. How could we fool ourselves into working on the future of the city without a mandate to actually shape that future?

While the shoe of principle might have

pinched, the coat of pragmatism fitted like a glove. The generosity of the building owner, Befimmo, who made thousands of square metres of space available almost free of charge at a prime location with a phenomenal view of the city, who indirectly placed their best minds at our disposal and for whom no practical question was too much, is praiseworthy. Of course, this also served their own agenda. That was not a secret. It was clear from the outset.



You Are Here © Max Creasy & OK-RM

Were we naive when we enthusiastically saw *The Future Is Here* appear on the façade of WTC I? Naturally, the dynamics of such initiatives increase the development potential and consequently the market demand for the activated sites. Yes, it is problematic if only trendy, creative and artistic practices are given access to the precarious-use projects, while real needs, such as the humane reception of refugees, affordable housing for vulnerable groups and space for socio-economic initiatives, for example, find no place within the temporary city. This is the most pressing question of all: for whom, and for whose benefit, are we making these efforts?

Real-estate logic that only utilises temporary use as a cover for problematic vacancy management and advocates the traditional profit models is unacceptable. We must up the stakes and raise the bar. But this bar must be set by the public authorities, which serve the general interest, not by the private parties (alone). In order to realize these ambitions, new collaborations and alternative practices need to

emerge that transcend the traditional dichotomy between private and public interests. To this end, temporary use as an in-between space offers a unique opportunity to arrive at new agreements, value frameworks and real-estate models through unexpected encounters and experimental alliances.

City movements such as Bral and Inter-Environnement Bruxelles detect in the WTC I temporary-use project, and by extension in many other schemes in Brussels, merely a diversionary tactic that disguises the urgent need for change with a hint of good intentions. But we can also read the application of temporary use as a glass Trojan Horse. An offer for a social revolution and a spatial transformation from the inside out. Not hostile and closed, but open and transparent.

The horse may have been put in the stable a while ago, but it's still there. Who is willing to join this adventure, to argue from within – in all transparency – as the foot soldiers of everyone's interests, and to change the model of city-making? Who's going to give the people in power a thorough shake-up? ▲●

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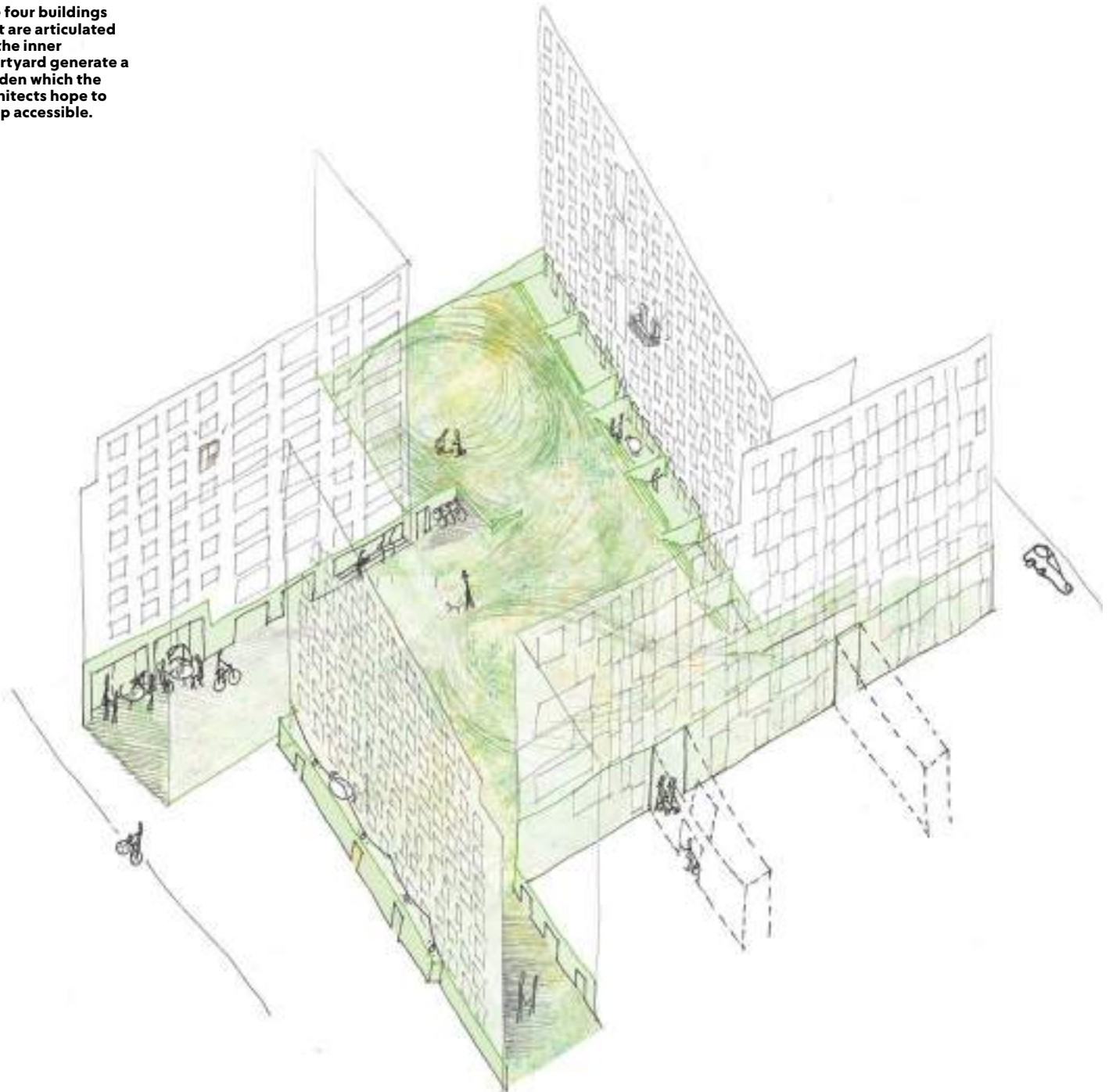
CANADA

# Canal Wharf

*Cécile Vandernoot – Photos Filip Dujardin*

**The Brussels Canal Zone is still characterized today by its former industrial use with the waterway as its infrastructural backbone. Now the waterfront has regained interest as a potential site for residential development. Located on the site of the former national postal service Bpost, Canal Wharf by 51N4E is one of the first developments on the master plan by Stéphane Beel Architects.**

↙  
The four buildings that are articulated by the inner courtyard generate a garden which the architects hope to keep accessible.



In 2013 the Brussels Region adopted the general guidelines of the Canal Plan. The UP-site tower was already under construction at the time. Since then, control over the development of the territory along the canal has been fiercely disputed. Power struggles between public authorities and private developers, between reasoned urban density and desired profit margins, between preservation of the existing situation and demographic issues. Little consideration for the inhabitants of these areas, but many actors involved to preserve its qualities and the diversity of its activities, and to ensure the public character of the spaces waiting to be transformed. In late 2013, AG Real Estate, in partnership with the Antwerp property developer Vooruitzicht, asked three architectural firms – Stéphane Beel Architects (SBA), architectesassoc. and 51N4E – to draw up a master plan for the Canal Wharf site, located between UP-site and Citroën. The client, AG Real Estate, tasked SBA with its design, coordination and execution, and called on the same three offices to build the four buildings resulting from the proposal. In due course, the complex will comprise 270 housing units (from studios to three-bedroom units) on the site of the building purchased from Bpost.

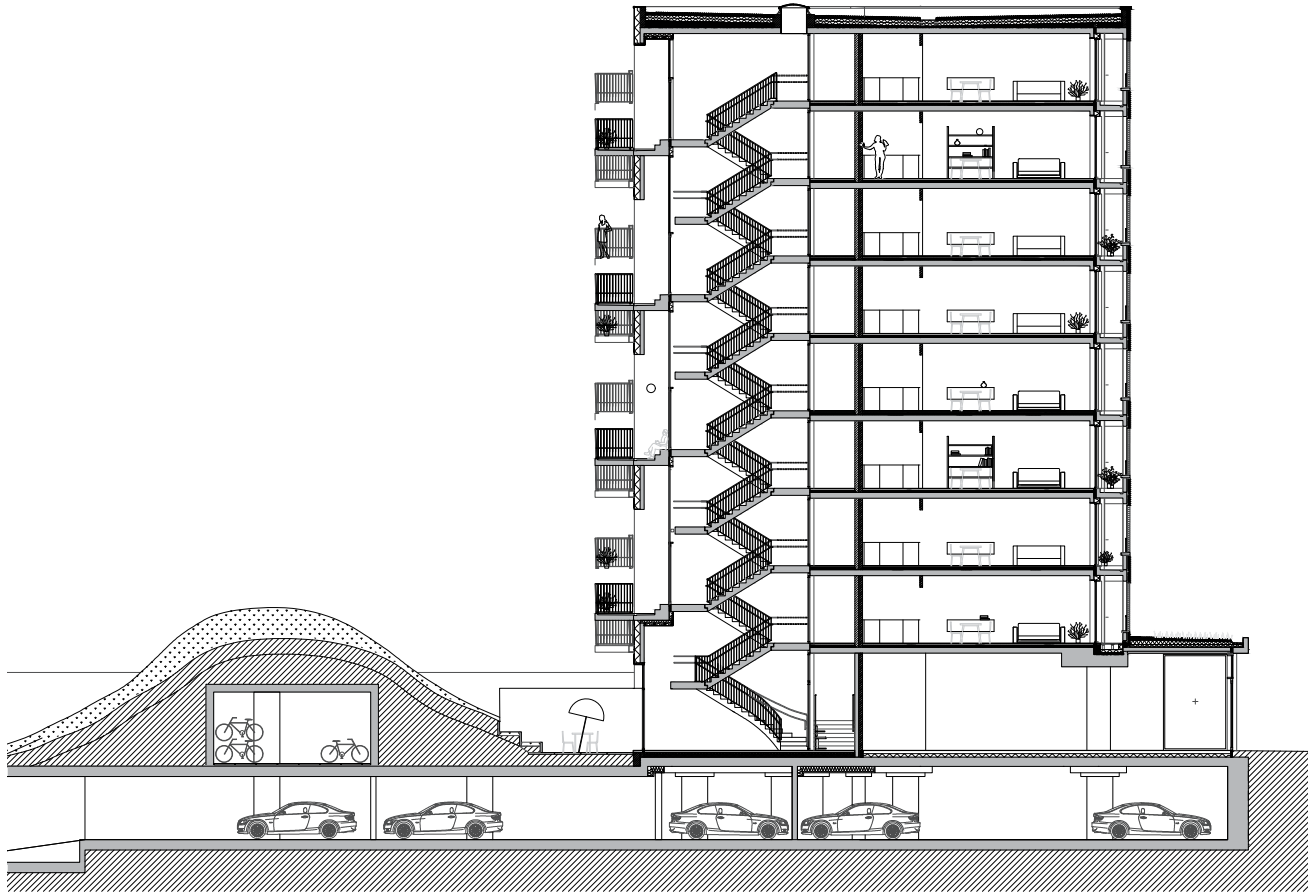
The point of departure is an urban configuration that takes into account the potential of this section between the Quai des Péniches and the Quai de Willebroek. The four buildings that are articulated by the void generate an interior garden which the architects hope to keep accessible. They

designed it as a room in the city that shields itself from urban life to acquire its own identity. For the first construction phase (140 housing units), SBA and 51N4E worked closely together on how to translate the master plan into a common architectural language.

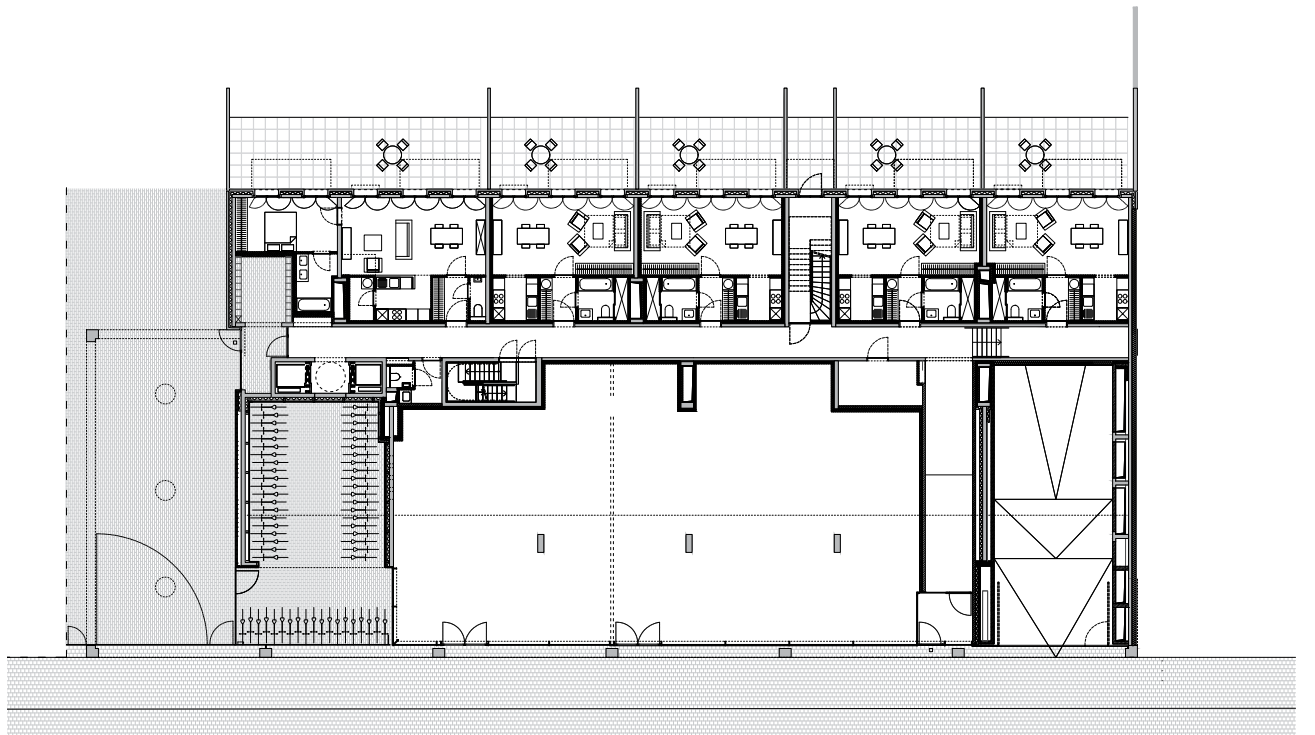
While the layout of the various volumes helps to create specific places, the heights (GF+8), which are all identical, limit the constructions in their relationship to the canal. Some therefore clearly have better views or a better orientation. Although it is tempting to analyse the entire development of Canal Wharf – the complacent support of the public authorities, the possible interpretations of the legal framework and the phasing of the permits issued have drawn a lot of criticism – it is more a question of focusing on the architect's position in such a process. At these points of friction between the interests defended by the public sector and those defended by the private sector, how do architects participate in the construction of the city? How much room for manoeuvre do they have to guarantee a quality space? It is interesting to observe 51N4E's commitment to this project at different levels of reflection: conversion of the master plan in architectural terms (in collaboration with SBA), typology, materials, finishes. As the project progressed, the objectives set down on paper had to be redefined and argued with the client, and some decisions reviewed with the Government Architect. 51N4E's desire to integrate social concerns into the project, for example through the intro-



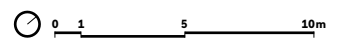




Section



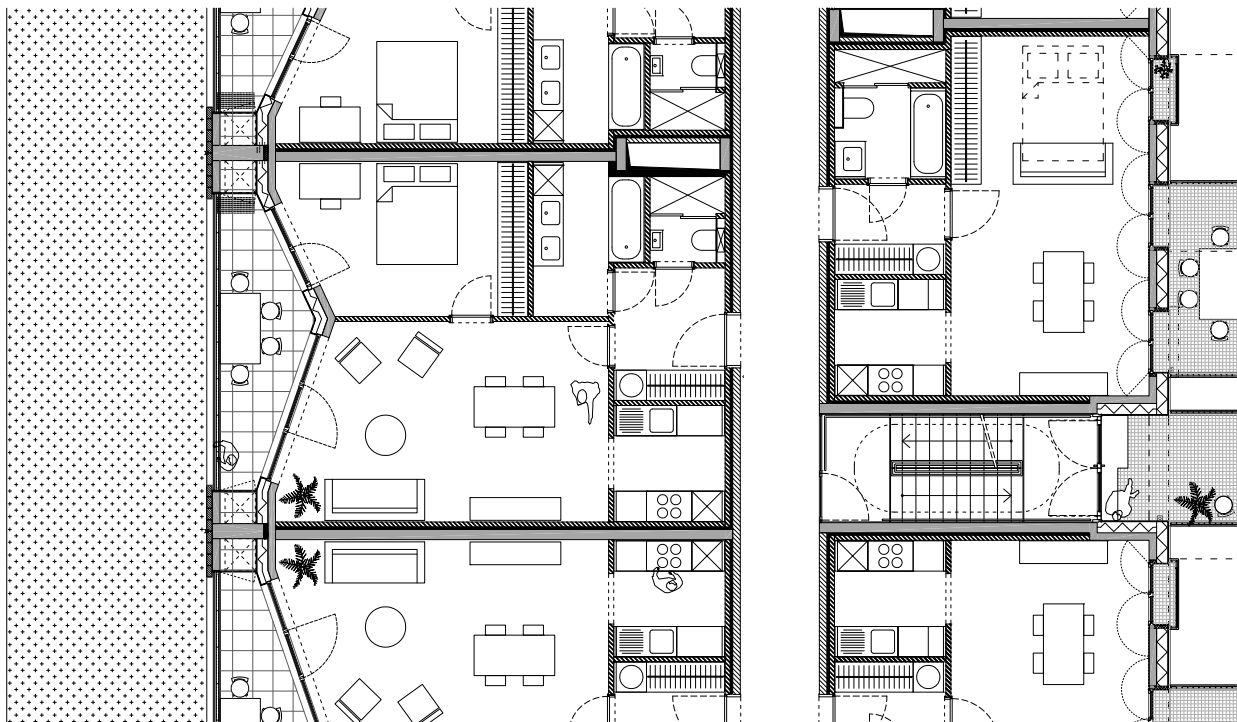
Plan



duction of collective spaces, led the architects to hang on and to be inventive in the face of the doctrine that seeks to maximize the buildable square metres. Although they have been limited, their intentions are still present: installation of vertical distributions enabling the generous entry of natural light into the corridors, collective balconies for moments shared with neighbours looking out on the canal, details anticipating probable developments, etc.

51N4E composed the Bpost building with pragmatism. The two main typologies seek qualities of use under imposed minimum surface conditions and despite their mono-orientation. The studios (43m<sup>2</sup>) face the garden, while the one-bedroom dwellings (59m<sup>2</sup>) give onto the Parc Maximilien and the Quai de Willebroeck. The spatial invention of the latter resides in a loggia (8m<sup>2</sup>), which became a third room in the apartment owing to its triangular shape. It is not much more expensive, but it generates enormous added value. In the long term, this loggia could even be glazed in,

depending on what the future inhabitants want. For all the façades, the choice of colour for the materials is the result of a joint reflection: the exterior surfaces respond to their immediate environment, while those facing each other, oriented towards the garden, are light shades so as to benefit from the reflection of light. Bpost's façade on the park side is therefore composed of glazed green bricks and it has been systematically pierced with large openings that frame the Northern Quarter from inside the dwelling. The fact that the volume is set back from the street and the base, combined with the thickness of the loggia, provides the dwelling with the necessary sound protection. The interior façade, facing west, is punctuated by projecting terraces and a large number of vertical windows, all of which open to 180 degrees to enlarge the interior space. More domestic and playful than the street front, it is also the one that makes people smile: powder pink, it is not afraid to show that the city must be able to reinvent itself. ▲■●



Typical floor plan



Architect  
**51N4E**  
Website  
**51n4e.com**  
Official project name  
**Canal Wharf**  
Location  
**Quai de Willebroeck 22,  
Brussels**

Programme  
**Studios and one-  
bedroom apartments,  
commercial facilities**  
Procedure  
**Invited competition  
(private)**  
Client  
**AG RED (Vooruitzicht –  
AG Real Estate)**

Lead contractor  
**Valens**  
Landscape architect  
**Stéphane Beel Architects  
– Atelier voor Ruimtelijk  
Advies (ARA)**  
Structural engineering  
**Establis**  
Services engineering  
**Istema**  
Building physics  
**Istema**

Sustainability  
**Istema**  
Acoustics  
**Scala acoustics**  
Completion  
**September 2019**  
Total floor area  
**8,400 m<sup>2</sup>**  
Budget  
**€ 5,500,000  
(excl. VAT, fees and  
finishing)**





# The Cosmopolitan

*Eline Dehullu*

**This year, the inconspicuous office building near the Royal Flemish Theatre in the heart of Brussels was converted into a residential tower comprising studios and apartments. The brand-new project is called The Cosmopolitan. Bogdan & Van Broeck drew the plans.**



Two worlds collide in the streets around the Royal Flemish Theatre (KVS). On the one hand, there are artists, actors and theatregoers, established architectural firms and start-ups. On the other hand, one finds drug users and dealers, prostitutes and pimps, petty vandals, and gangs of kids loitering around. The Alhambra Quarter has been struggling with this problem for several years now, which has migrated from the North Station and Place Rogier, and is shifting further towards the canal.

This is the quay district, where docks were built during the Middle Ages for the inner port of Brussels. Majestic warehouses were erected on the quays of the Hooi- and Arduindok. The KVS building itself was also once a warehouse, built in the eighteenth century. In 1910, it was decided to fill in the canals because the harbour was too small. Yet the original buildings still bear witness to this maritime history: the large warehouses provide an uninterrupted façade on both sides of the square.

In the 1960s, the insurance company Assubel disrupted the status quo. It constructed a squat 12-storey office tower with a hospital on the first four floors (the ULB-Polyclinique du Lothier). The building tries to break through the scale of the long, continuous façade of the filled-in dock by making a passage between the Arduinkaai and Vaartstraat. The block is the tallest building in the area but is barely noticeable.

In 2010 the hospital moved to the site on the Boudewijnlaan. In 2013 the real-estate developer Besix Red – the new owner of the building – organized a closed design competition as a private initiative. Five architectural firms were invited to participate. Upon his appointment as Brussels

Government Architect in 2015, Kristiaan Borret announced his intention to encourage more initiatives of this kind, in which developers organize architectural competitions for private projects.

Bogdan & Van Broeck's winning proposal responds to the site as a crossing point. On both sides of the tower they retain the passages connecting the Arduinkaai with the Vaartstraat. These are semi-public: while they can be closed by a transparent fence, non-residents and casual passers-by can also use the passages as shortcuts.

When renovating the existing tower, the architects had neither any planning-permission papers nor any documentation material to rely on. They gradually discovered that the building's concrete structure was rotten and filled with asbestos. It would have been faster and cheaper to raze the tower and start over. But the architects calculated what they would gain by maintaining and strengthening the structure of the existing building: fewer construction costs and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in relation to the production and transport of old and new building materials to and from the city centre. By preserving the skeleton, they also won on an architectural level: the concrete column structure allows for an open and freely fillable plan, and the height between the floors is over three metres. Furthermore, the strength of the structure drove architectural design decisions: together with stability engineers Util, the architects looked for an infill as light as possible (like non-load-bearing walls in gypsum plasterboard) and for materials as light as possible (like thin fibreglass panels for the façade finish).

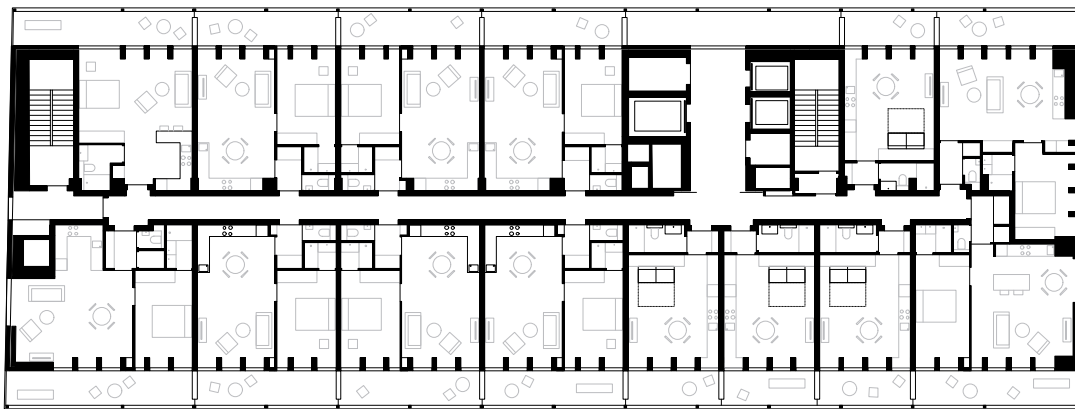


On the ground and first floors there is room for offices (co-working spaces) and small shops (a coffee bar, an organic shop, a bicycle repair garage). The residential tower also offers studios and one-bedroom apartments. Two luxurious penthouses occupy the top floor. On both sides of the building – to the east and west – wide terraces have been installed along the entire length with a glass balustrade and sliding awnings. For those who are not afraid of heights, the view of the city is phenomenal.

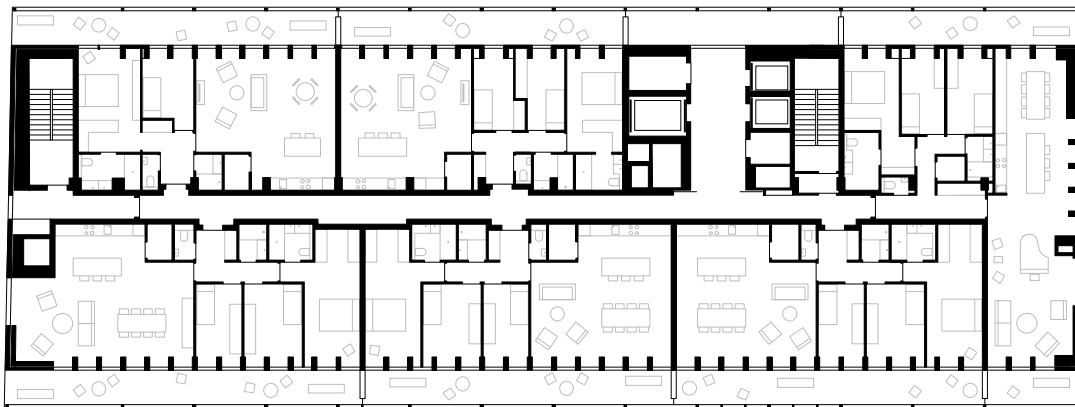
For a total of 156 residential units on 15 floors, there are 'only' 50 parking spaces for cars. The developer, however, had insisted from the outset on one parking space per residential unit. But the office of Leo Van Broeck, the Flemish Government Architect, took a firm stand. The future city dweller will travel by metro, tram, bicycle or foot. The ar-

chitects dedicated the space freed up by drastically reducing the number of proposed parking spaces to greenery and a large bicycle shed.

The project is situated between the Dansaert district, one of the capital's trendiest neighbourhoods, and Saintelette, where the new Kanal – Centre Pompidou museum will open. The name of the building alone – The Cosmopolitan – and the range of studios and small apartments are especially attractive to young couples, singles and yuppies. The residential tower looks set to be the driving force behind the further gentrification of this district. But is this what Brussels requires in this area? Families and the middle classes will not find what they are looking for here. And yet they are exactly the kind of critical mass that a real city needs. ▲■●



Typical floor plan, small units



Typical floor plan, large units



Architect  
**Bogdan & Van Broeck**  
Website  
[bogdanvanbroeck.com](http://bogdanvanbroeck.com)  
Official project name  
**The Cosmopolitan**  
Location  
**Quai au Pierres de Taille  
16 & Rue du Canal 28,  
Brussels**

Program  
**Transformation of a  
high-rise office building  
in the centre of Brussels  
into mixed-use housing**  
Procedure  
**Invited competition  
organized by the client**  
Client  
**Besix Red**

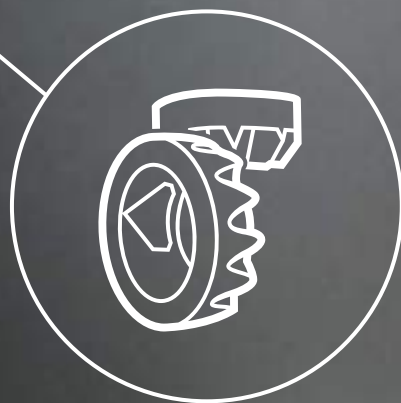
Lead contractor  
**Vanhout**  
Structural engineering  
**Util**  
Building physics  
**Concept Control**  
Acoustics  
**ASM**  
Completion  
**April 2019**

Total floor area  
**16,000 m<sup>2</sup>**  
Budget  
**n/c**

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**‘Brussels is a city of paradoxes, a city of contrasts, of happy and unhappy juxtapositions, a city that is undoubtedly multifaceted. This is what makes its charm so special, a charm that hardly meets the global standards of attractive cities. This charm comes above all from its inhabitants who, unlike in the rest of Belgium, are neither strictly Flemish nor strictly Walloon, and mix many ethnic groups, cultures and nationalities, both immigrants and international executives working in connection with the European capital. Brussels is manifestly surreal, self-critical, full of humour and nuances because it juxtaposes wealth and poverty, luxury and degradations of the urban space.**

**An international city, it is truly paradoxical. The most cosmopolitan city in the world after Dubai, home to 184 nationalities, 200 NGOs and 900 demonstrations per year, its heart has not been gentrified because the poor are in the centre and the rich on the outskirts. The new mayor, Philippe Close, is determined to offer Brussels residents all the facilities within a ten-minute walk: schools, shops, services and leisure facilities. This is a path that should be followed by many French cities whose centres are becoming gentrified or are being deserted. How can we ensure that Brussels once again becomes the city of uses, the productive city (as the Canal project is seeking to do), and not only the city of services and the international city, qualities that characterize it today? That is what is at stake. Proud of its architectural and urban heritage, with few striking contemporary achievements, Brussels is nevertheless pursuing major developments like the Neo project around the Atomium and the site of the 1958 world fair in its search for the ingredients for a new urban dynamic. Let’s wager that this will be a quality development, that it will not be the source of boring, soulless urban areas such as those so often produced by contemporary urban planning, and that it will hold onto what makes the Brussels spirit, a sense of surprise and diversity!’**

**Ariella Masboungi<sup>FR</sup>**

**Ariella Masboungi (b. 1948, Beirut) is Chief government architect and urbanist, and Inspector general of sustainable development. In 2016 she was awarded the Grand Prix de l’urbanisme.**

# Brussels, European capital

*Ludovic Lamant*

Writing in his *Memoirs* (published in 1976), the ‘founding father’ Jean Monnet recalls that he used to dream of a separate city that would host all the institutions of the proto-European Union. In the 1960s, ‘the time seemed right’, he wrote, ‘to give the European Community the dimension and status of a genuine capital that would emerge from the ground as Europe was emerging from history, new and all in one piece. Convenient, it would also be a symbol of unity’. Monnet’s wish did not come true. Under pressure from the member states, eager for economic repercussions, existing cities – Brussels, Luxembourg, Strasbourg – welcomed the first institutions of the future Union. In Brussels, Europe took possession of a square in the heart of the city, a stone’s throw from the Royal Park. This is what distinguishes above all the Brussels European Quarter from any other political capital in the world, and what explains in large part why the adventure was so painful.





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In Geneva, the UN institutions were built outside the city, in Ariana Park. In Luxembourg, the Court of Justice of the European Union, partly designed by Dominique Perrault, is located on the Kirchberg plateau, far from the centre. In Strasbourg, the European Parliament occupies a spot on the banks of the Ill, at a reasonable distance from the city centre. In Brussels, the unique strategic choice of an international enclave in the city was accompanied by a total lack of coordination. It is an 'anti-Brasilia', in the sense that it is impossible to grasp the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches when you examine the plan of the area. This laissez-faire approach comes down to a simple reason, well known to Brussels urban planners: it was not until 1992 and the compromise of the Edinburgh European Council that the member states officially confirmed the location of the seats of the Council and the Commission in Brussels.

Over the past three decades, the European Quarter has developed in an anarchic way, without any preconceived plan or political will on the part of the Europeans. It was given over to real-estate groups in a rush to rent buildings to Europe. All the more since the Brussels Region did not exist at the time – it was created in 1989 only. The reluctance of both the local authorities and the residents to build towers in a post-Brusselization context, as well as the increase in the EU's competences with the passing of new treaties and the enlargement of the EU to new member states, did the rest: the European Quarter has spread like an oil stain, displacing dwellings and opening up new thoroughfares. Today, it resembles, above all, a US-style business district. These traumas are still palpable. The international presence in Brussels was initially synonymous with concrete constructions and with destruction.

Since the early 2000s, the methods have changed. The Brussels Region has appointed a mediator who liaises with the European au-

thorities to discuss the form of the area, an issue which Europe ignored for a long time. After decades of opacity, public tenders were finally launched, the most tangible result at this stage being the Europa building designed by Philippe Samyn, which has hosted the meetings of the heads of state and government since 2016. The structure's oval shape was largely dictated by the constraints of the underground, where trains and metros operate – which says a lot about the difficulty of building, even today, in the European Quarter. Not far from there, Place Jean Rey is gaining in visibility as a rather mixed living space, an alternative to Place du Luxembourg, even if it still remains to be imagined how to connect it and open it to Parc Léopold, on the other side of Rue Belliard.

The 2016 attacks – with one bomb exploding in the Maelbeek metro station, in the heart of the European Quarter – accelerated the trend of heightened security, which further complicates the daily lives of the few Brussels residents who still live in the area. The pressure in this regard comes mainly from the European institutions themselves, which are making increasing demands on the region. The quarter has not (yet?) become an entrenched camp with maximum security like the US Embassy in Brussels. But the parliament, for example, managed to rush through the pedestrianization of part of Rue Wiertz, with modular blocks at either ends intended to prevent car attacks. The parliament has also completely overhauled its entrance on the side of the Gare du Luxembourg. Parking spaces in front of European buildings have been removed, often replaced by flower boxes, for example on the side of Avenue de la Joyeuse Entrée, facing the Cinquantenaire.

How can we ensure that this demand for heightened security does not hinder the area's attempts to reconcile with the citizens of Brussels? That the international presence does not result in a 'bunkerization' of the 80 mainly post-modernist blocks that make up the district?

Some institutions, not least the Council and the Commission, seem to care little, obsessed as they are with the size of their offices and with the comfort of the bureaucrats who work there, instead of with their integration in the city and their contribution to Brussels urban planning.

In this respect, the way in which the Rond-point Schuman has been handled – this empty central reservation located in the heart of the European Quarter – is rather damning. With its elegant way of raising the asphalt of the road to form two tiers, the project of Xaveer De Geyter and his office XDGA (2010) had the merit of opening up a brand-new space that citizens could appropriate at the foot of the EU institutions. The project also tried to reconcile the supporters of a ‘hard capital’ (who advocate monumental architecture to embody the European project in Brussels) with those of a ‘soft capital’ (who prefer a more flexible and dispersed European presence in the city). Indeed, the symmetry of the two tiers reinforced the monumental axis that leads from Rue de la Loi to the arch of the Cinquantaire in the distance. But perforations had also been made at the foot of the structure, to enable residents to cross the square on foot on an everyday basis.

The XDGA project was abandoned in part for budgetary reasons. It has given way to a less ambitious design that should be carried out by Cobe + Brut, a Danish office and a Brussels one. Their Rond-point Schuman, fitted with a canopy covered with mirror steel – perhaps inspired by Norman Foster’s *Ombrière* in Marseilles? – is content with a more anecdotal surface treatment of the roundabout. Above all, this proposal does not solve the specific challenge of this square, namely the distance from the emblematic façades that are supposed to run along it and help shape it – the Berlaymont (Commission) and the Justus Lipsius (Council). However, it does provide for the construction of a green wall against terrorist attacks between Rue de la Loi and Avenue de Cortenbergh (European diplomacy).

The Rond-point Schuman is all the more frustrating as the ‘Loi Urban Project’ project for the redesign of Rue de la Loi, which was launched in 2009 and is attached to it, has been slow to materialize. The Frenchman Christian de Portzamparc, the laureate, redesigned the district’s master plan, authorizing higher-rise constructions (see the tower *The One*, which combines offices and housing on 40 floors), but also by setting future buildings back from the road in order to create new public spaces. Nothing tangible has so far materialized, however, while the budgetary constraints, already evoked, have only increased.

Other institutions have shown themselves to be more proactive, trying to turn the page on past mistakes. Parliament seemed to have become aware of the symbolic weakness of European buildings in Brussels. Under the impetus of its secretary general, the German conservative Klaus Welle, it transformed the splendid Eastman building designed by Michel Polak in the 1930s into a highly consensual House of European History on the slopes of Parc Léopold. In architectural terms, it is an elegant façadist operation carried out by the French office Atelier Chaix & Morel. This renovation revives some of the failings associated with Brusselization – façadism – as if European bureaucrats knew nothing about the city they live in and its traumas.

But the parliament still faces major work in the coming years, since cracks appeared in 2012 in a wing of the Paul-Henri Spaak building, which is only about 30 years old (which says a lot about the life cycles of new constructions in the European Quarter). Should it be destroyed and a new construction built? Or should we opt for a more discreet (and probably just as expensive) renovation? Things are heating up on the subject, and this will undoubtedly be one of the first decisions of the new parliament, which will be formed in the summer of 2019. ▲■●

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# Brussels, urban governance for a metropolis

*Lisa De Visscher*

**Over a period of 30 years, the Brussels-Capital Region has evolved from a body responsible for regulation to a player that is shaping a metropolis. In addition to the municipalities that supervise and direct many projects, the Region is also seizing the initiative when it comes to large-scale urban development. What instruments does it use to ensure that spatial quality takes precedence over political and economic interests? What are the merits of 'soft-power mechanisms for design improvement' and in which kind of climate can they thrive?**



The Brussels-Capital Region is a relatively young entity. It did not become a fully fledged region until 1989, when it took its place alongside its Flemish and Walloon counterparts. In just 30 years, however, the Region has been compelled to develop a robust policy by which to address the challenges faced by many cities: strong demographic growth, increasing multiculturalism, challenging mobility, and a lack of services. The complex political and administrative structure, also known as the 'Brussels lasagna', does not make the situation any easier: in addition to the Region, there is also, on the one hand, federal level involvement, and, on the other, 19 municipalities, two (linguistic) communities and a series of agencies.

Urbanism and urban planning are powerful tools for lending a face to a policy. Yet they can only make a difference if the ultimate goal, namely the quality of the built environment, is championed over the economic and political interests that inevitably play a role in every large-scale urban project. In order to safeguard this quality, the Region created the office of Brussels Government Architect (BMA: *Bouwmeester/Maitre Architecte*) in 2009, thereby following the examples of the Flemish Government Architect and the City Architect in Antwerp. The role of the Government Architect, however, was not a random development. During the first decade of the new millennium, several large municipalities such as Molenbeek, Forest and Schaerbeek, among others, worked on an architectural policy which, whether through Neighbourhood Contracts or in collaboration with the regional administration, formed the basis of an interesting contemporary patrimony. Here, too, the need for a Government Architect who could take a global approach was raised time and time again.

The Government Architect's principal task is to support clients with regard to architectural quality, urban planning and public space. The Government Architect operates independently

of all other urban-development services and can thus work across the board. The importance of this transverse approach should not be underestimated. From an independent and neutral position, the Government Architect has the opportunity to talk to the various authorities and services and to gather their representatives around the table. As the overseer of quality during these discussions, it is up to the Government Architect to always advocate the theme of spatial quality and to test the projects in terms of their integration into the urban fabric, functionality and user-friendliness. Good governance, therefore, is about developing the right tools so that these discussions not only happen effectively, but also contribute to a generally accepted definition of what spatial quality actually means.

The first Brussels Government Architect was Olivier Bastin, who held the post between 2009 and 2014. He laid the foundations for the Government Architect's task by concentrating on competition procedures and the selection of designers. In so doing, he set the tone for a positive architectural climate. As the first Government Architect, he also forged the initial links between the multiple players. 'The biggest challenge was to overcome the resistance caused by an established climate of mistrust between the different levels of power', says Bastin. 'In principle, the Brussels-Capital Region is the dominant party, but when you realize that the City of Brussels holds a larger budget than the Region, the balance of power is a little more complex. For more peripheral municipalities such as Berchem-Sainte-Agathe, Uccle or Woluwe, the Region is like a difficult mother-in-law who imposes social housing quotas. And talking to Flanders about, for example, the Canal Zone on the border with Vilvoorde, ultimately proved to be impossible.'

For a long time, the fragmentation of the various levels of power was also reflected in the Region's spatial policy. It did not develop any

major projects during the first 20 years of its existence, let alone an overall structural plan. The development of larger sites, such as the European Quarter or the surroundings of the South Station, always ended up being the sum of many small or independent projects without a clear coherent story. This absence of grand projects is striking in comparison with other key European cities. A lack of global vision caused by a fragmented decision-making system only partly explains the situation. Brussels suffered extensively in the aftermath of radical large-scale post-war urban development projects such as the North-South link, the Northern Quarter, the Administrative Centre or the administrative towers on Place De Brouckère, which are still experienced as deeply traumatic. These schemes, which were accompanied by a process of demolition, expropriation and destructive land speculation, led to a distinct lack of support for greater urban-development projects during the first decades of the newly established Region. Given this climate, it is logical that an instrument called the Neighbourhood Contract was developed, a four-year programme for the urban revitalization of deprived neighbourhoods. As Mathieu Berger writes in *Le Temps d'une politique*<sup>1</sup>, the Neighbourhood Contract became an 'emblematic instrument in Brussels' government actions as a structural and structuring policy'. The twenty-fifth anniversary of this instrument, however, is also an occasion to acknowledge its limitations and to reiterate the need for a transformation of the policy.

'For 25 years, [the Region] has experienced a strong dynamic of urban renewal, in particular through the Neighbourhood Contracts (...) and has attracted the interest of private investors. But the various public and private initiatives are not yet working towards a common project or a well-considered overall vision<sup>2</sup>: this is the motto of the 2014–2019 Brussels Coalition Agreement. And that has to change. The po-

litical ambition is to work on a larger scale and across borders. This is reflected in a series of new measures that came into effect during the previous legislative term: now, more than ever, the government has turned the Canal Zone into a priority area and also launched 10 new priority development poles 'which require a global and transversal strategy in order to advance local development opportunities in the short and medium term'.<sup>3</sup> The poles are: Schaerbeek-Formation and Tour & Taxis sites, which are complementary to the development of the Canal Zone, Heysel, Reyers, Southern Quarter, West Station site, Josaphat, Delta-Vorstlaan, the barracks sites in Etterbeek and Ixelles, the prison sites in Saint-Gilles and Forest, Avenue Leopold III and the NATO site. The traditional Neighbourhood Contracts have been extended to include five Urban Renewal Contracts that gather a number of much larger actors and, as such, also transcend the boundaries of the municipalities.<sup>4</sup> In order to manage this, the administration was also restructured. To this end, the government wanted to develop a territorial platform in which the myriad existing players could be grouped into two levels: one for planning and one for execution.<sup>5</sup> In the end, a third tier was added and today we have three agencies: Perspective.brussels drawing up the plans, the Urban Development Corporation (SAU/MSI) buying and developing the land, and Urban.brussels granting the permits and managing the historical patrimony.

'The government has placed an important focus on territorial development during this legislative term', says Bety Waknine, director of Urban.brussels. 'The reform of the Brussels Urban Planning Code, which came into force in September, also fits into this picture. This reform will simplify procedures and speed up the case management process. Of course, this is only possible if the administration is up to the job. Hence the whole administrative reorganization that preceded it.'

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The second Government Architect, Kristiaan Borret, who leaves office this year, took up his post just as the new legislation came into effect. He says: ‘There is a clear evolution in the vision and policy of the Region, which dares to think on a large scale once again. The resources are on the table. I want to tackle this large scale within a transverse project-based operation.’ Unlike in the past, when a project was transferred from one department to another, according to the stage it had reached, the divisions between the three above bodies are now gradually being removed. The staff from the various departments are consistently collaborating on the projects in hand. The ‘Canal team’ – a collaboration between Perspective, Urban, SAU/MSI and the BMA – is a pioneer of this new way of working. It was assembled after Alexandre Chemetoff had devised the urban development plan for the Canal Zone. ‘I pleaded for the emancipation of the administration and for capacity-building within that administration. A government needs an external urban planner to formulate a plan, but it must then be able to apply it itself’, says Borret. Thanks to this transverse approach, it has not only become possible to work quickly, but also efficiently and transparently. A developer who arrives for a meeting will immediately find all the key people at the table, including those from the research-by-design department and the people responsible for issuing the permits, for example. In recent years, the results have been reflected in the dynamics within the Canal Zone.

This work method did not come about without a struggle and it is still being resisted by some administrations. It seems astonishing, given that it accords with the coalition agreement and that all the administrations involved report to the minister-president (Rudi Vervoort, Socialist Party). The transverse, project-oriented approach is replicated in the formula of the ‘project group’ that is now being

applied to a series of schemes. The next step is to extend the interlocutors within this project group to include Brussels Mobility and Brussels Environment. In Borret’s view: ‘This is essential for some projects. The project group for the Hermann-Debroux urban renewal contract includes the demolition of a viaduct. In this case, it’s logical that Brussels, too, should sit down at the table to discuss mobility.’

The Urban Renewal Contracts (CRU), such as the one for the Hermann-Debroux project, are a collaboration between Perspective and Urban (as extensions of the traditional Neighbourhood Contracts). In addition to the schemes at the neighbourhood level, the government has also invested in ten new priority development poles. Says Waknine: ‘This shift in scale also demands new instruments. In place of the former *schéma directeur* [master plan], the PAD has been developed [*plan d’aménagement directeur*, or master development plan]. This not only formulates the strategic vision of the site, but can also, if desired, combine it with a regulatory framework. This is useful, for example, if a specific programme mix is required on a particular site. Perspective is currently working on a series of PADs. The purpose of this instrument is to develop a particular area more quickly and efficiently.’

One of the spearheads of the coalition agreement is the development of the Canal Zone and the strengthening of the waterway as an important structuring spatial figure. Since the coherent design of the public space is a decisive factor in the perception of this spatial figure, Kristiaan Borret proposed that an Image Quality Plan (BKP) should be drawn up for this space. The competition for this task was won by the team assembled by ORG2 and Bureau Bas Smets. The above competition became the basis for a handbook, known as the ‘guidelines’, which were once more elaborated by a transversal team. It was approved at the end of March 2019. The recommendations give

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Brussels Beer Project © Office Kersten Geers David Van Severen

shape to an overarching vision for public space within the entire Canal Zone and ensure that it can be consistently applied to each new project. Metrolab Brussels, an interdisciplinary academic research group that unites various faculties of the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and the Université catholique de Louvain (UCL) and is supported by the Brussels Region through the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund), dedicated a study afternoon to the BKP. At the event, the various partners working on the plan – Urban.brussels, Perspective.brussels, SAU/MSI and BMA – explained this unique collaboration.

In the coalition agreement, the Brussels Government Architect's commission was extended to public and private projects on a regional scale. In order to ensure that this is properly managed, Kristiaan Borret established a chamber to oversee the quality of building projects. This too is a transverse initiative that is primarily concerned with spatial quality. In addition to the BMA, the chamber comprises the designated official and both the political and administrative levels of the municipality. It discusses strategic construction projects for which planning permits are being sought. In contrast to the 'Quality Chambers' in other cities such as Antwerp, Ghent and Ostend, the Brussels organization does not call upon the services of any external architects. This is unfortunate, as their presence would allow the debate on spatial quality to be broadened yet further.

Such transverse discussions make a visible contribution to the quality of the final project. In the meantime, they have also been incorporated into law. The new Brussels Town Planning Code (BWRO/CoBAT) stipulates that any applicant for a permit has the right to a project meeting, which has the same composition as the quality chamber, extended with a representative of Brussels Mobility and Environment Brussels. Furthermore, for all projects exceeding 5,000 m<sup>2</sup>, the applicant must also seek out

the BMA's opinion. In this way, developers are encouraged to organize a competition or a prior consultation process.

Based on the conviction that the government must be able to draw and design, Kristiaan Borret also established the Research by Design team. This design research might be reactive, in which a project developer's proposal is tested for height, density, open space, etc., but it can also be anticipative, whereby the possibilities are explored in areas that have not yet been developed. Borret elaborates further: 'Designing is about finding answers and building arguments. If you want to talk to a developer, you need those arguments to be able to jointly achieve a quality project.'

Since its creation, the Brussels-Capital Region has focused on the urban development of its territory. In the last decade, however, a shift has taken place. Whereas previously the focus was on the municipalities, the Region has increasingly started to take charge through an expansion of scale and ambition. Under the influence of successful programmes like the Neighbourhood Contracts, but also (academic) research and the arrival of the Brussels Government Architect, there has been an evolution in both the perimeters of the project areas and the mechanisms by which they are developed. After years of focusing on the regulatory framework, the transverse project-based approach is increasingly being used to discuss quality. This transformation is already bearing fruit and will continue to do so if the method of transverse conversations is continued. ▲■●

1 Mathieu Berger, *Le Temps d'une politique*, CIVA, 2019.

2 See the Government Declaration by the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region, 2014–2019, p. 33.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 100.



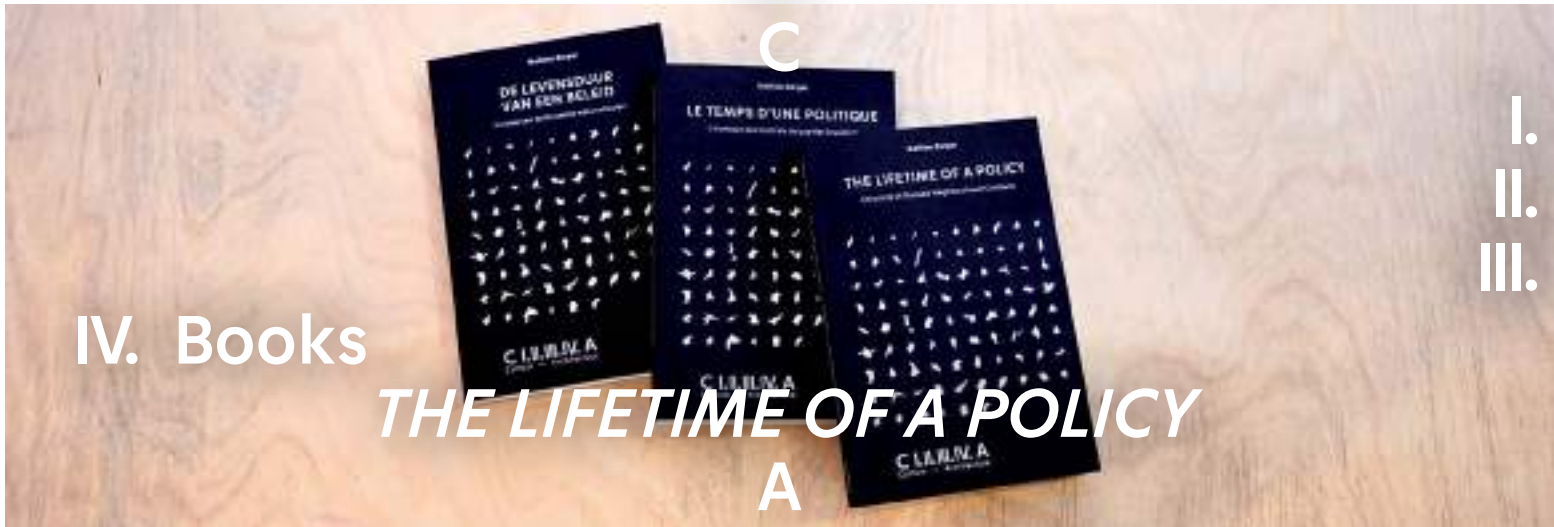
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# Rue de la Loi

*Laurent Vermeersch*

**Back in 2009, Christian de Portzamparc won a competition to completely redesign Rue de la Loi in Brussels' European Quarter. The idea was to combine the wish of the European Commission to concentrate 400,000 m<sup>2</sup> of offices along the street and the regional government's desire to revive the traffic-clogged and administrative area with housing. Ten years later, things are slowly taking shape.**



© Philippe van Gelooven

← An old hotel was demolished to make way for 'The One', commissioned by Atenor and designed by B2Ai. It is a double tower with offices on Rue de la Loi and houses overlooking the Jacques de Lalaingstraat at the back.

Christian de Portzamparc's plan was to eradicate, above all else, the 'sombre, monotonous and lifeless corridor' of the contemporary Rue de la Loi. The street needed to be lighter and more attractive, especially for pedestrians. Buildings were to alternate with squares and 'pocket parks'. The new public space was also to provide better connections between the popular Saint-Josse municipality to the north and the once very elitist Leopold area to the south. Rue de la Loi has traditionally formed a barrier between the two. Once the building blocks had been thrown open, it would be possible to build upwards. The height restrictions depend on, among other things, the building's distance from the street. The more public space one leaves, the higher one can build.

The Brussels Government Architect, Kristiaan Borret, had reservations about the feasibility of the 'Loi Urban Project', but agreed with the plan in principle. It represented an attempt to reconcile the needs of the district with those of the international institutions. 'It is a search for a third way between the dismal architecture that currently prevails and the plea to turn it into a small-scale and cosy residential area', says Borret. The latter was simply not a realistic option for the European Quarter. 'We must accept that it has a metropolitan vocation. It's pointless to force them into the straitjacket of the standard formula: houses with a small square and a café around the corner. You have to go for grandeur in the Rue de la Loi; it is one of those places in Brussels where Leopold II's thinking still makes some sense.'



Meanwhile, an initial project has become a reality thanks to the bridge over the Etterbeeksteenweg. An old hotel was demolished to make way for 'The One', commissioned by Atenor and designed by B2Ai (formerly Buro II & Archi+1). It is a double tower with offices on Rue de la Loi and houses overlooking the Jacques de Lalaingstraat at the back. There is also a high tower in the pipeline with Realex, and further towards the Little Ring there is another project with Copernicus, in which an older office building will make way for a new one. It will be higher and will create a little more public space.

The big question is whether any of these projects will live up to their expectations. Borret is doubtful and has previously spoken of experiencing 'the greatest disappointment' since his arrival. 'The towers will be among the tallest buildings in Brussels, but the quality is very low. "The One" still has the advantage that the typology is innovative, with back-to-back homes and offices. But Realex seems very banal. The plinth, which is vital for connecting towers to the surroundings, is not missing and the planned public passage between the two towers is far too small in relation to the density of the projects. The passage will be very unpleasant because of the downward draughts created by the towers.'

'We have worked with the architects to make their projects fit into the scheme for the Rue de la Loi', says De Portzamparc. 'The Brussels-Capital Region was also involved in several workshops to monitor the schemes and to grant the permits. Unfortunately, we can only follow the projects and advise the Region.'

The European Commission's own initiative is situated on the so-called 'lot 130', a large building block between Rue de la Loi, Chaussée d'Etterbeek, Rue Joseph II and Rue de Spa, and it might yet offer a recovery. An international design competition was organized for this very purpose. 'We would like to set a good example here and apply De Portzamparc's plan in a coherent way', Borret adds. The winner is due to be announced this summer.

Meanwhile, the regional planning department, Perspective, is also working on a new urban development plan (PAD-RPA) as a way of facilitating the evolution of De Portzamparc's scheme. 'The RPA still follows the philosophy of that plan, but there are a few evolutions that address some of the concerns', says project manager Pierre Lemaire. 'It means lower density, more houses and proportionally more free space.' ▲ ■ ●

*A longer version of this text was published as 'Wetstraat: wachten op een nieuwe wind' in A+260, June–July 2016, pp. 60–63.*



←  
In Christian de Portzamparc's plan, high-rise buildings alternate with squares and 'pocket parks'.

→  
Assar Architects, Realex

# Kanal – Centre Pompidou

*Pieter T'Jonck*



The genesis of Kanal, the institution for contemporary art and architecture in the former Citroën garage on Saincteletteplein in Brussels, is an improbable story of quarrelling governments, a failing national museum policy, and a bold leap forwards by the Brussels Region. Yet they got it right: even though the building is not ready for use, it has won over the hearts of Brussels residents thanks to a 'test period' called 'Kanal Brut'. In the meantime, the final renovation plans for 'Atelier Kanal', a joint venture between Sergison Bates (London), noA (Brussels) and EM2N (Zurich), are on the table ...





In 2011 the art-loving Brussels public reacted with shock and disbelief when Michel Draguet, director of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (RMFAB), announced the closure of his institution's collection of modern art. Given that Brussels boasts more artists per square metre than any other city and that the country is bursting with top collections that are kept under lock and key, it seemed absolutely crazy – and above all short-sighted when every single European metropolis is committing to culture as a way of putting itself on the map.

Tate Modern in London has shown that it pays: in its short existence, visitor figures have shot through the roof. Its success is proof that people are not just interested in the art, but also visit the museum as an alternative public space for (self-)expression. If Kanal Brut is anything to go by, Kanal takes that potential and elevates it to new heights. But it hasn't all been plain sailing.

The plan for an alternative Museum of Contemporary Art run by the Brussels Region started to circulate in 2011, with the initial idea to maybe take over the role of the RMFAB. The iconic but dilapidated Citroën garage from the 1930s on Place Sainctelette quickly became the favoured location, although decontamination and redevelopment were far from self-evident due to soil pollution and the enormous size of the complex: the garage occupies around 80 per cent of a building block measuring some 100 x 200 metres.

The garage is located right in the heart of the Canal Zone, however, and boasts a magnificent view over the Canal and Quai des Péniches. A museum on this site, analogous to Tate Modern, would evidently contribute to the revitalization of this impoverished former industrial zone. This is also a spearhead of the regional policy. Moreover, the internationally renowned Kaaithheater, which has been striving for years to reinvigorate the neighbourhood, is located within the same block.

The federal government, however, threw a spanner in the works. All kinds of political motives were at play but the then minister, Elke Sleurs, and her advisers, alighted upon a seemingly insurmountable issue: environmental conditions within the building. The project would never be able to meet museum standards. In doing so they mainly demonstrated a lack of insight and imagination, as the current plans show.

Nevertheless, Rudi Vervoort, the minister-president of the Brussels Region, pushed the plans through at the end of 2014. A problem remained, however: a museum without a collection ... is not a museum, but an art gallery. In 2016 the Region found a way around this sticking point by hiring the services of the Pompidou Centre in Paris for ten years for the considerable sum of 11 million euro, of which 2 million go towards the salaries of the staff based in ... Paris. It was not the most elegant solution and remains controversial to this day. Critics speak of 'cultural colonization'.

But the input from the Pompidou Centre put wind in the project's sails. In May 2018, Kanal opened its doors with a 'collection', newly commissioned artworks and loan agreements with Belgian collectors. In so doing, the Region outperformed the federal government, which managed to elevate 'treading water' to the status of an art form vis-à-vis museum policy.

In the meantime, the results of an internationally acclaimed competition were announced. It was won by the team of noA, Sergison Bates and EM2N, and this was no coincidence. The architects intuitively understood that additions or changes to the existing building and its patina should be kept to a bare minimum, simply because the existing structure already seems to have been conceived as a public building.

This is obvious in the showroom on Place Sainctelette. It is a colossus, with a plinth measuring 20 by 50 metres and a height of 25 metres. In 1933, Alexis Dumont designed the



façades as a transparent skin of steel columns and glass, running from pavement to roof, without any intermediate floors. This resulted in a magically light form, a modern beacon in the city. The introduction of mezzanine floors would later diminish this impression, but it remains a small miracle.

The workshops and offices behind the showroom offer even greater opportunities. These comprise two floors (six floors at the level of the offices) measuring more than 120 by 100 metres. Here too the spaces are enclosed by streamlined steel walls, with rounded corners and acres of glass. The interiors, with their sloping roofs and steel trusses, look less modern, but remain hidden from the outside by the high roof edge. Furthermore, the roofs have been fitted with skylights so generously that the entire building is bathed in light.

The great advantage of the workshops, however, is their organization: a 15-metre-wide street cuts through the complex from Quai des Péniches to the Avenue de l'Héliport. Voids reveal the full height of the complex. At right angles to this axis, impressive ramps, voids and a raised roof define the interior circulation. The 'street' and the 'nave' thus define four easily traversable quadrants.

The problem remained that the volume was far too large for the basic programme: a museum, a library, archive and exhibition space for CIVA (Centre International de la Ville et de l'Architecture), and a 'rassembleur' (convening point) for lectures, offices and so on. It was almost impossible to adapt the entire building envelope to the strict conditions required for museum spaces. The design skilfully avoids this problem, which the federal government had made such a fuss about, by meticulously inserting new beam-shaped volumes between the rafters in three of those quadrants. These rise above the eaves yet are unobtrusive. The fourth quadrant, behind the Kaaitheater, remains more or less open.

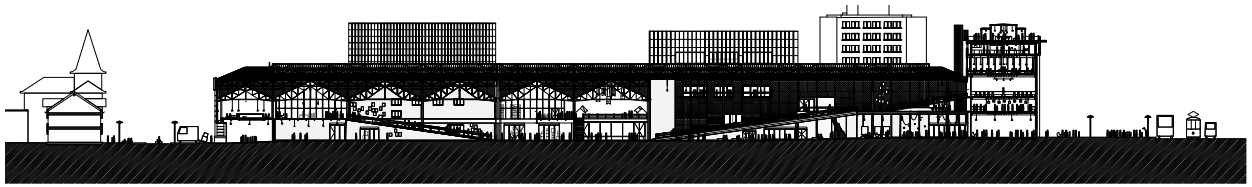
The new 'boxes' are perfectly air-conditioned. Where they sink through the old floors, heavily glazed walls demarcate a second, partly air-conditioned space. The remainder of the building serves as a buffer between the indoor and outdoor climates, as was once the case in the workshops.

This three-part organizational plan allows for a diverse range of uses. The buffer space is a semi-public sphere, and thus resembles the Turbine Hall in Tate Modern, only much larger. It has the potential to be a stage for neighbourhood activities or even a market. The partly controlled spaces, on the other hand, enable every form of contemporary art to be shown, up to and including 'live art'. And there is plenty of room for 'top-notch art', but also for a library, lectures, theatre performances, etc.

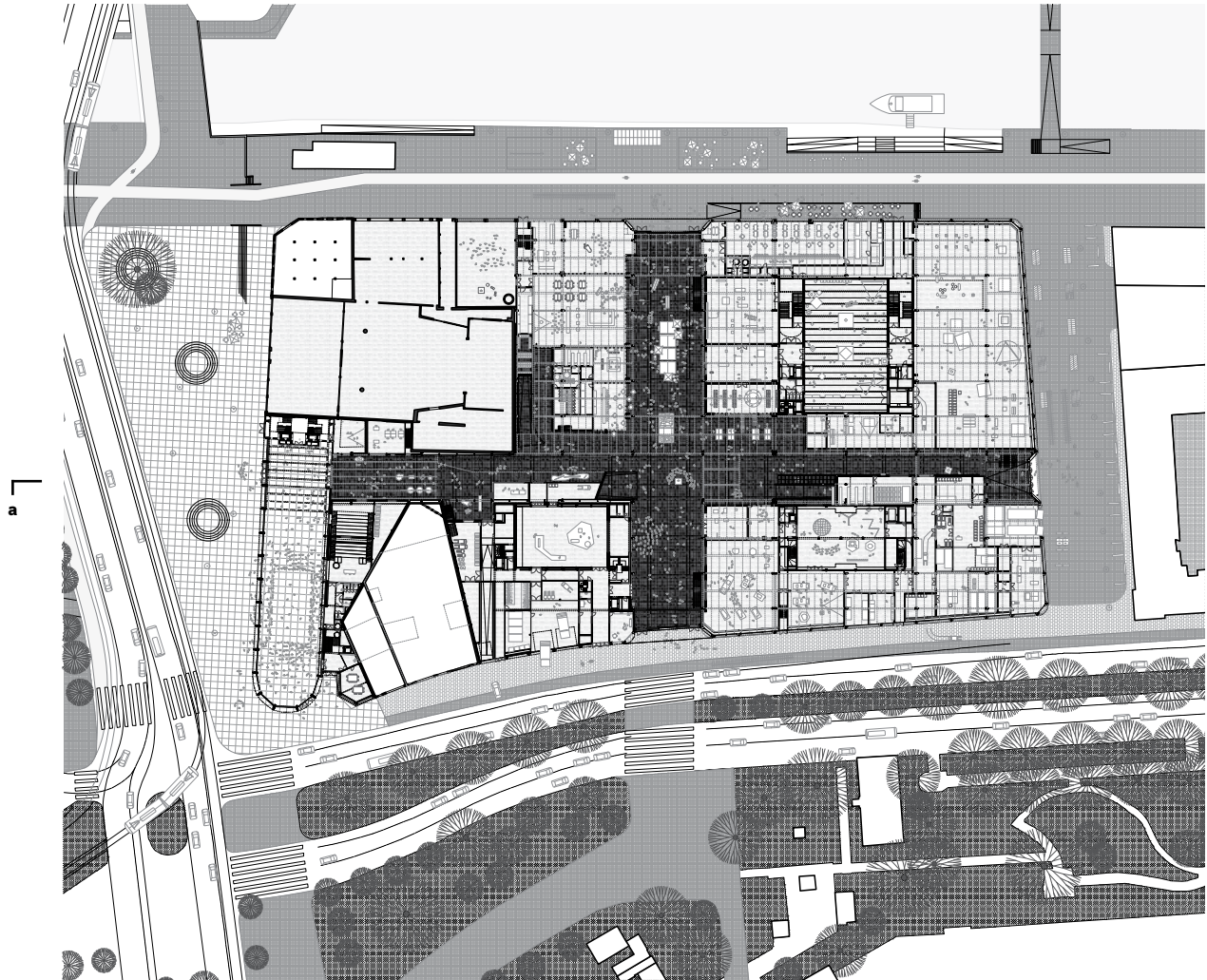
It all seems perfectly logical, but the plans are actually the result of painstaking efforts to strike the right balance between new elements and the conservation of the existing building. What makes the design truly unique, however, is that the architects set up camp in the building and actually tested the validity of their competition ideas on site and in real circumstances during Kanal Brut. The design bears the traces of the many artistic interventions and wide-ranging activities that took place at Kanal in just under a year. Indeed, close inspection of the plans shows that they respond to this artistic diversity in a seemingly casual, but cunning and clever way.

One must pay tribute to the Region for taking this grandiose gamble against a narrow-minded approach to museum policies. This 'museum' will make history. ▲■●

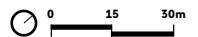




Section Aa



Plan



## Architect

**Atelier Kanal** founded  
by **noA**Architecten EM2N  
Sergison Bates  
architects

## Official project name

**Kanal -  
Centre Pompidou**

## Location

**Quai de Willebroeck 6,  
Brussels**

## Programme

**Transformation of the  
former Yser Citroën car  
factory into an arts and  
cultural centre**

## Procedure

**Competition, 1st prize**

## Client

**Fondation Kanal**

## Completion

**2023**

## Consultants

**Arvico, Buro Happold,  
Cartlidge Levene, Egeon,  
ELD, FESG, Gevelinzicht,  
Greish, Kahle, iArt,  
Up&Cie**

## Total floor area

**45,000 m<sup>2</sup>**

## Budget

**€ 125,000,000  
(excl. VAT and fees)**

# Mediapark Reyers

*Pieter T'Jonck*

The Mediapark on Boulevard Reyers in Brussels is one of the spearheads of the Brussels-Capital Region's urban development plan. The Flemish and French-language radio and television broadcasters still share a huge building on the site, which was once a shooting range, although it now falls short of contemporary needs and requirements. A master plan by the Paris-based agency François Leclercq proposes a new Mediapark for the terrain. This can be interpreted literally: a whole host of media companies will share a park with a range of support companies, shops and hotels as well as an impressive number of homes.



The Mediapark is the result of a revolution that unleashed digitization into the media landscape. In the past, media companies, especially public-service broadcasters, were high in the pecking order because they controlled the distribution channel. This is no longer the case and, in media parlance, everything now revolves around 'content' production. Programmes reach consumers via multiple channels. Media companies work closely with the 'content' suppliers, therefore, which can range from small enterprises to large production studios. They also outsource a wide variety of this type of work. For Leclercq, the media world has become an ecosystem in its own right.

It would seem logical, therefore, to bring these companies into closer physical proximity in order to strengthen the synergy. The idea of a park landscape or a green campus is obvious, especially since the 20-hectare site is still heavily wooded at the back. The total development will extend far beyond 2030, but the first steps have already been taken.

Boulevard Reyers is already being completely redesigned. In addition, both the Flemish and the French-language broadcasters, VRT and RTBF respectively, have organized a competition for the construction of a new broadcasting centre. Once built, the old complex will disappear and the site will be further developed. The Brussels-Capital Region has also provided an impetus by launching a competition for a 'Media House'. This will be located on a derelict corner of the site, right on Boulevard Reyers, next to two fairly recent office colossi.

The designs for the new VRT and RTBF buildings couldn't be more different. v+ and MDW won the competition for the latter's headquarters with an 80 m by 80 m glass box. This simple shape is distinguished, however, by the slight curvature of the façades and by the remarkable interruption between the plinth and the upper floors. The plinth is slid into the slope at the edge of the terrain. It possesses a strong public character at the front, if only because it opens up to the heart of the site in such an expansive way. The buried rear, by contrast, provides space for the blind recording studios.

Despite the plinth's grand welcoming gesture to its surroundings and all the glass of the façades, this is a rather introverted building. Inside, a large and deep patio hollows out the building from the roof. Although the patio is somewhat constricted on the lower floors, it even extends into the ceiling of the entrance. A section of the highest patio floor was completely made of glass. This floor allows plenty of light to enter the two-storey central 'newsroom' below. This is the heart of the building, the real eye-catcher. And yet it is barely noticeable from outside ...

The partnership of Robbrecht en Daem and Dierendonckblancke, on the other hand, opted for an extremely extrovert building for the VRT. Its footprint resembles a boomerang. On the ground floor, however, a large trapezoidal strip – the 'kiosk' – remains open, like a covered events square. This accords with the sloping terrain behind the building, which becomes an open-air theatre. The kiosk is further charged by the interconnected public functions, such as a multipurpose hall or a restaurant.

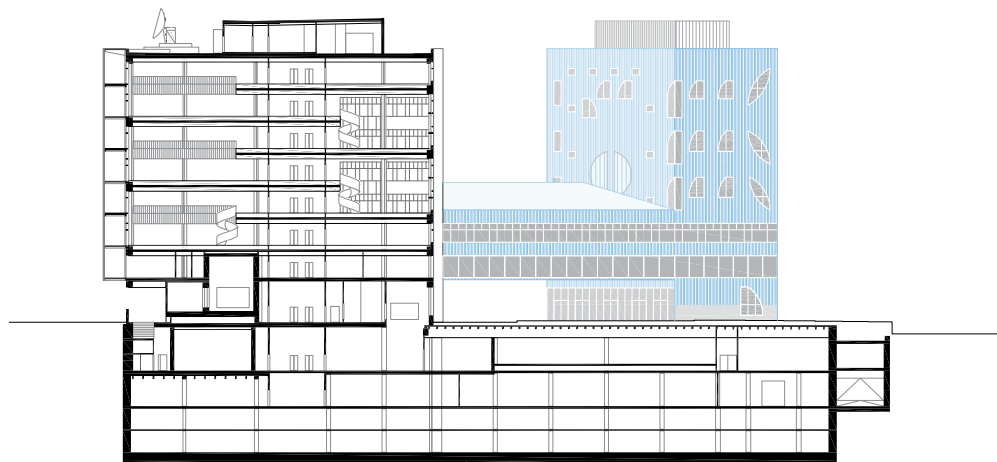
↓  
VRT, the 'Kiosk' square



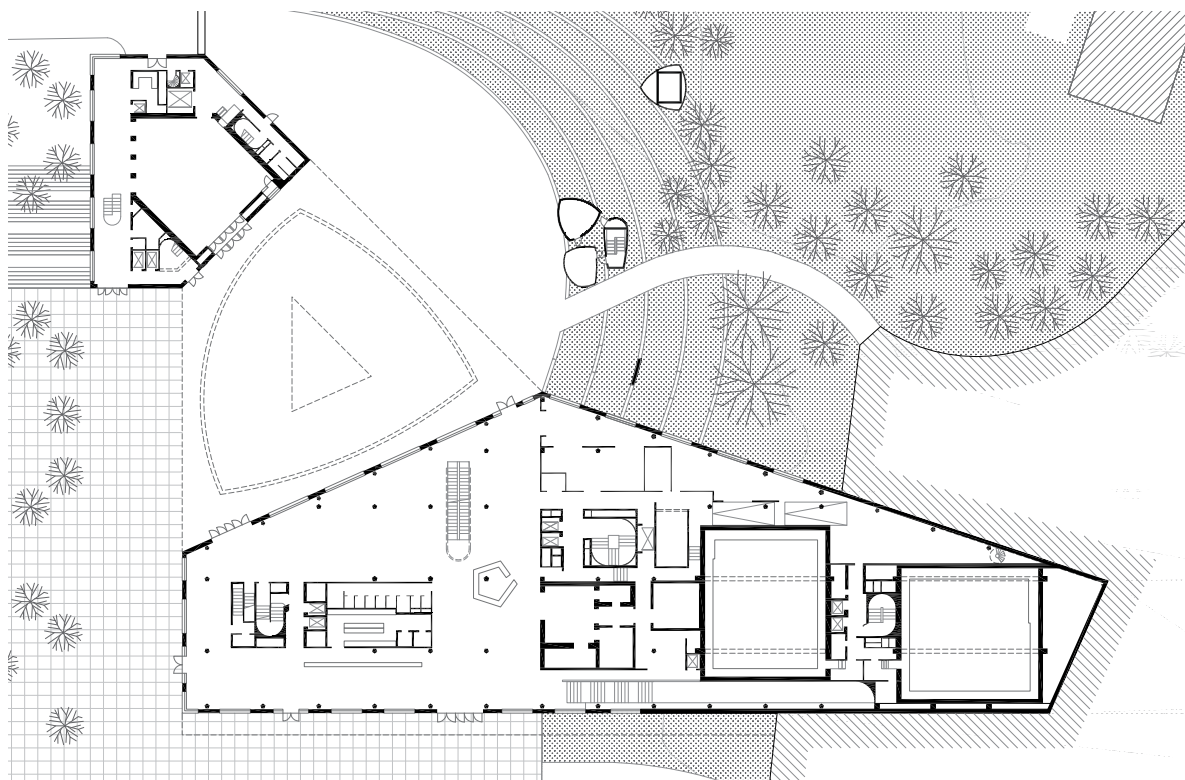
The fact that there are only two floors above this square places yet more emphasis on the kiosk. These levels are crowned with a roof landscape in which an enormous light well has been left open. On either side of the kiosk, the building continues into the air. On the north side, a slender tower rises with a floor plan in the form of an irregular pentagon. On the south, you find a 140-metre-long wedge-shaped volume. The form of the latter, in particular, focuses strongly on the environment through an ingenious system of staggered voids, double-height windows, and a 'hanging garden'.

The confrontation between these two buildings, which border the same central square of the site (yet to be constructed), promises architectural fireworks. It is radically different to the gloomy, fenced-in nature of the current situation. The Mediapark's two central blocks probably won't be completed until 2023. The Media House on the edge of the Park won't be that long in coming. It will house various media companies like the local television station BX1, but will also accommodate Screen.Brussels, the regional service for the audiovisual sector, for example. The use of the building can therefore change considerably over time.





Section Aa



Plan



## Architect

**Robbrecht en Daem -  
Dierendonckblancke  
architecten**

## Website

**robbrechtendaem.com  
- dierendonckblancke.eu**

## Official project name

**VRT Vlaamse Radio- en  
Televisieomroeporgan-  
isatie**

## Location

**Reyers site, Schaerbeek**

## Execution architect

**Robbrecht en Daem  
architecten, Dierendon-  
ckblancke architecten  
in collaboration with  
Bureau Bouwtechniek**

## Programme

**Headquarters for VRT  
(Flemish Radio and  
Television Broadcaster):  
flexible office spaces,  
multi-track studio,  
(mobile) production, con-  
trol rooms, foyer, event  
space, kiosk square,  
bistro and restaurant**

## Procedure

**Competition**

## Client

**VRT (Vlaamse Radio-  
en Televisieomroep-  
organisatie)**

## Landscape architect

**Bureau Bas Smets in  
collaboration with VK  
Engineering**

## Public realm

**Robbrecht en Daem  
architecten, Dierendon-  
ckblancke architecten**

## Structural engineering

**VK Engineering - Arup**

## Services engineering

**VK Engineering - Arup**

## Sustainability

**VK Engineering- Arup**

## Acoustics

**VK Engineering - Arup**

## Interior architect

**Robbrecht en Daem  
architecten, Dierendonck-  
blancke architecten  
in collaboration with  
Muller Van Severen**

## Budget and quality control

**Sweco**

## Completion

**2021**

## Total floor area

**75,000 m<sup>2</sup>**

## Budget

**€ 105,000,000  
(excl. VAT and fees)**



Architect  
**V+ and MDW Architecture**  
 Website  
**vplus.org –  
 mdw-architecture.com**  
 Official project name  
**RTBF**

Location  
**Reyers site, Schaerbeek**  
 Programme  
**Headquarters for RTBF  
 (French-speaking  
 Belgian Radio and Tele-  
 vision Broadcaster)**  
 Procedure  
**Competition 1st prize**

Client  
**RTBF (Radio Télévision  
 Belge Francophone)**  
 Engineering  
**Tractebel –  
 Bureau Bouwtechniek**  
 Acoustics  
**Kahle**

Completion  
**2021**  
 Total floor area  
**38,000 m<sup>2</sup>  
 (without car parks)**  
 Budget  
**€ 71,500,000  
 (excl. VAT and fees)**



Baukunst (Adrien Verschuere, Brussels) and Bruther (Paris) put forward the perfect answer for the Media House in their competition design. In essence, their scheme is a stack of large, uninterrupted floors with 360-degree glazing. Stairs, elevators and vertical ducts on the north and east sides are external to the volume, as independent elements – like a mini version of the Pompidou Centre in Paris, minus the escalators.

The building, again like the Pompidou Centre, certainly resembles a machine. Yet it responds with far greater sensitivity to the context. Each façade has a different expression. On the south side, there is a huge frame with sun-protective glazing on heavy concrete legs in front of the building. The

wall rises far above the roof terrace, thus shielding it from the noise of the adjacent motorway. On the west side, the glass walls are angled outwards. The east and north sides form the ‘technical’ face of the building.

Of particular note is the ground floor, which includes public functions such as a restaurant and cinema. This room’s ‘footprint’ is smaller than that of the floors, and the walls can be slid open. As a result, the public space seems to simply continue into the building. Here, the building convincingly reflects the basic idea underlying Leclercq’s organizational plan: the world of the media is no longer a closed bastion, but an open ecosystem. ▲ ■ ●



© Maxime Delvaux

Architect  
**Baukunst with Bruther**  
Website  
**www.bau-kunst.eu**  
Official project name  
**Frame**  
Location  
**Reyers site, Schaerbeek**

Programme  
**Co-working places, television studios, cafeteria, auditorium**  
Procedure  
**Competition**  
Client  
**SAU**

Landscape architect  
**Landinzicht**  
Structural engineering  
**Bollinger + Grohmann**  
Services engineering  
**Bureau d'Etude Pierre Berger**  
Client  
**Bureau d'Etude Pierre Berger**

Acoustics  
**Kahle Acoustics**  
Completion  
**2022**  
Total floor area  
**12,000 m<sup>2</sup>**  
Budget  
**€ 16,000,000**  
**(excl. VAT and fees)**

**‘Whenever I visit Brussels, I have a deep sense of familiarity. It’s not just the feeling one gets from visiting somewhere frequently. It’s more a sense of profound cultural connection. My home city of London is built upon the principle of negotiation, fuzzy in its logic and uncertain in its outcomes. I find comfort in the similarly raw energy and generalized activity I see across Brussels: the jostling of landownership and tenure patterns that manifests itself in the juxtaposition of building frontages; the vibrant and rich layers of the many cultures that have become part of it over time; and, tying it all together, the seemingly endless, ambitious re-working of the public realm.**

**In the many years we have been working in Belgium, one recurring phrase, “a Belgian compromise”, seems particularly telling. It is said, often with a wry smile, by the Belgian people in the room, as a way of explaining that the answer lies in some sort of in-between solution rather than in any of the options on offer. I find myself thinking how appropriate this strategy is – grown-up and realistic, yet rich and complex. Like the European city should be ...’**

**Mark Tuff<sup>UK</sup>**

**Mark Tuff is a partner at Sergison Bates architects, the award-winning architecture practice based in London and Zurich. In 2018, together with noA and EM2N, they won the competition for the conversion of the former Citroën garage into the Kanal – Centre Pompidou museum in Brussels.**



From 2019 onwards, *A+ Architecture in Belgium* is published 4 times in the form of a classic issue and 2 times in the form of a special issue (instead of 6 classic issues)

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**A+276 Building Sites**  
February–March

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April–May

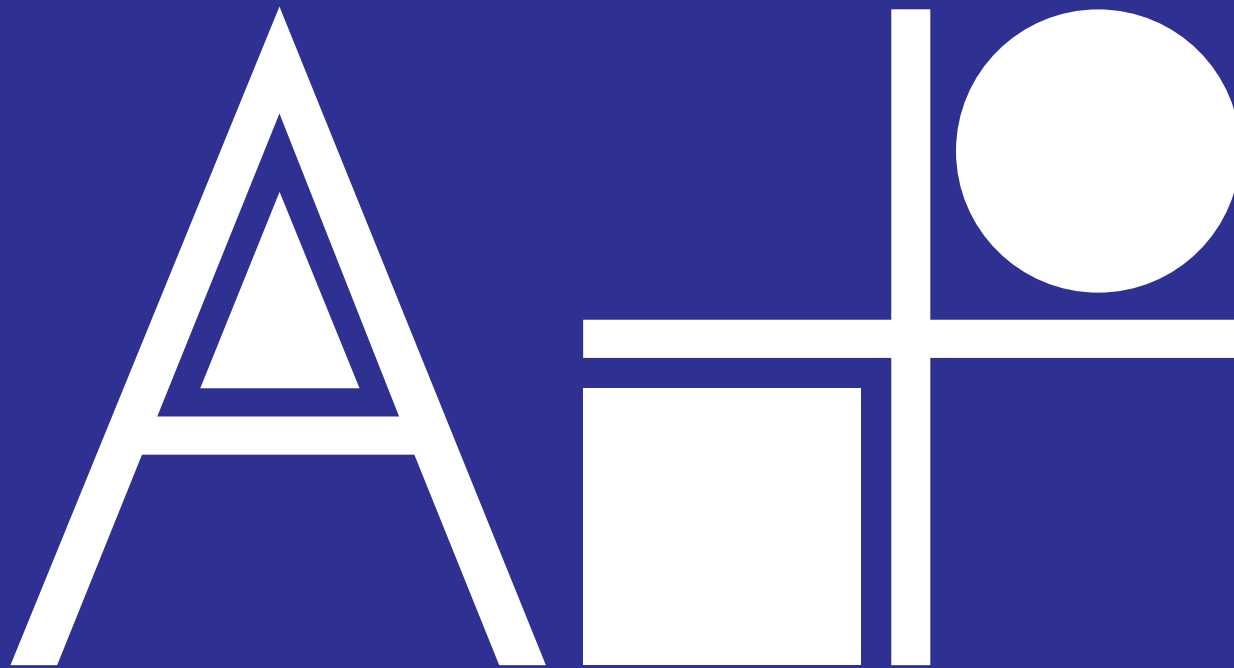
**A+279 Schools**  
August–September

**A+281 Silence**  
December 2019–January 2020

**Themes 2019**

**A+278 Brussels**  
in cooperation with Brussels-Capital Region  
June–July

**A+280 Collective Housing**  
in cooperation with Architectuurwijzer and UHasselt  
October–November



2019

**05.04-23.06**

**PRAXIS –  
DIERENDONCKBLANCKE  
ARCHITECTS**

Exhibition, Bozar – Foyers  
A+/Bozar

**24.09**

**ADRIEN VERSCHUERE**

Bozar – Hall M  
20:00, in English  
A+/Bozar

**24.09-05.01.2020**

**BAUKUNST:  
PERFORMANCE AND  
PERFORMATIVITY**

Exhibition, Bozar  
A+/Bozar

**10.10**

**GIUSTO VAN CAMPENHOUT**

*Introduction by OFFICE Kersten  
Geers David Van Severen (tbc)*

ACROSS Antwerp  
deSingel – Blue Foyer  
20:00, in English/Dutch  
A+/VAi

**15.10**

**STUDIO BASAR**

Bozar – Hall M  
20:00, in English  
A+/Bozar

**17.10**

**FVWW : FREDERIC  
VANDONINCK WOUTER  
WILLEMS ARCHITECTEN**

*Introduction by Pierre Blondel*  
ACROSS Liège– Galerie Opéra  
19:00, in English/French  
A+/ULiège

**22.10**

**DAVID CHIPPERFIELD**

Bozar – Hall Henry Le Boeuf  
20:00, in English  
A+/Bozar

**14.11**

**PERNEEL OSTEN**

*Introduction by  
Olivier Bastin (L'escout)*  
ACROSS Liège– Galerie Opéra  
19:00, in English/French  
A+/ULiège

**19.11**

**GO HASEGAWA**

Bozar – Hall Henry  
Le Boeuf  
20:00, in English  
A+/Bozar

**26.11**

**BUREAU NORD**

*Introduction by  
Marie-José Van Hee*  
ACROSS Antwerp  
deSingel – Music Studio  
20:00, in English/Dutch  
A+/VAi

**05.12**

**AMUNT**

Bozar – Hall M  
20:00, in English  
A+/Bozar

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BRUZZ

Transformation de 530 logements, bâtiments G, H, I, quartier du Grand Parc - Lacaton & Vassal, Druot, Hutin / Transformation of 530 dwellings, block G, H, I © Philippe Ruault

# 279

## Schools

The Flemish movement 'Schools of Tomorrow' for new school infrastructure was created and laid down by decree in 2006 in Flanders. In the meantime, 160 projects have been carried out and are in use. In Wallonia and Brussels, many schools have also been renovated, expanded or newly built over the past ten years.

A+279 examines the 'most successful' trajectories and projects, and examines how new pedagogical programmes (teenage schools, method schools, partner schools) are being translated into the architecture. How can a school also be part of a mixed programme, and be used as a catalyst for the revival of an urban building block? And what will the broader school environment look like in the future in terms of traffic safety, air quality and urbanity?



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- II Heysel and Neo, KCAP
- III Reyers, François Leclercq (p. 122)
- IV Zuidwijk
- V West Station site, Taktyk – Alive Architecture – 51N4E
- VI Josaphat site, MS-A – Asymétrie (p. 109)
- VII Delta Herrmann-Debroux, ORG2 – D'ici (p. 111)
- VIII Barracks sites in Etterbeek and Ixelles (Usquare), evr-architecten – BC Architects (p. 109)
- IX Prison sites in Saint-Gilles and Vorst
- X Leopold III-laan and the NATO site

— Canal Zone, ORG2 – Bureau Bas Smets (p. 106)

### Other poles

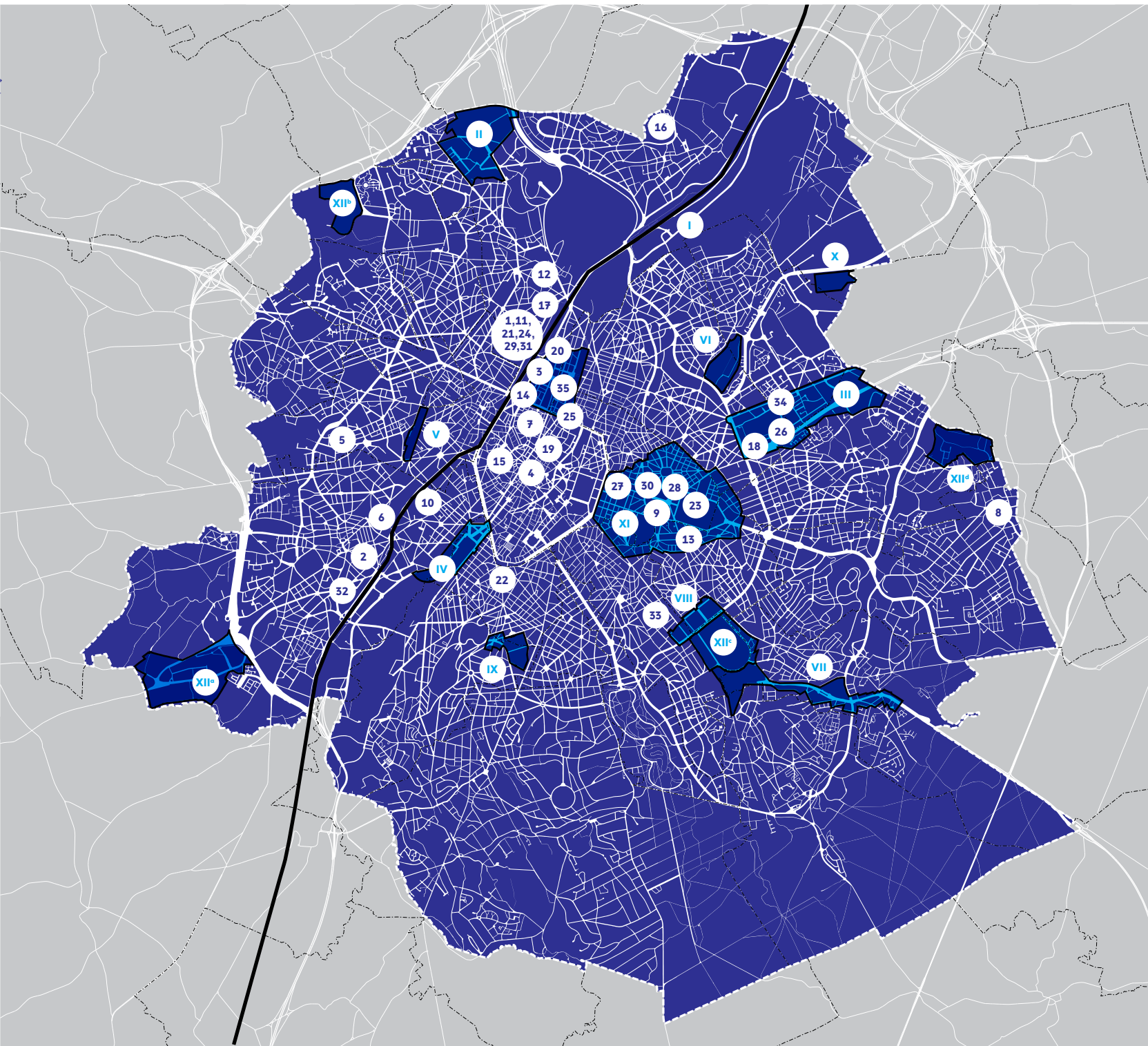
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- XII<sup>b</sup> Campus Laarbeek
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**The very first issue of the series of A+ special editions is dedicated to the capital city of Brussels. A+278 is an issue in which architecture and urban transformation take centre stage as powerful political instruments by which to improve social cohesion, quality of life and prosperity in the contemporary city. This publication examines a number of exemplary projects that can inspire urban development across Europe: Gare Maritime, Place Rogier, the new buildings of the VRT and RTBF, the museum Kanal - Centre Pompidou and the conversion of the WTC towers. Brussels as a laboratory for the future European city.**

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