



ARCHITECTURE IN BELGIUM

wandering
and wondering
about
ar(t)chitecture

planopli
(on subtlety)

ARCHITECTURE
IN
Belgium

Dominique Pieters, editor and author
Filip Dujardin, photographer

MER. Books



Preface

“We shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us.”

WINSTON CHURCHILL

With the architecture travel organisation planopli, I have spent years taking the curious around the world into the often unnoticed rooms of buildings: hidden gems that, wittingly or not, rarely make it into an (overseas) magazine, yet undeniably deserve a story of their own. One day, MER. Books approached me with the idea of turning such a journey into a book: knowledge and experience gathered for the reader at home — Belgium first. That book was given the title *planopli (on subtlety)*. *Architecture in Belgium*, for subtlety is, to my mind, a typically Belgian trait. Where abroad the façade often does the talking, here we prefer to murmur from within. We rarely build exuberantly. We hardly ever talk loudly about what we build. And we would rather let the result speak for itself, in a whisper.

That quietness immediately became the starting point for the structure of this book. The buildings that *open* their doors to visitors were given a concise, factual text, with the references needed for anyone wishing to look further.

The buildings that prefer to keep their doors *shut* — for reasons of privacy, practicality, or simple obstinacy — were given a different approach: a short story, so that the reader can wonder and wander about the space. Only by a different route than the front door: through a fictional event, seen through the eyes of a fictional character who lives, works, or roams there. With one disguised exception, granted with permission, these characters exist only on the page. In this way, I have tried to sketch the overlap between space and lived space. Steel-strong and concrete-hard, sometimes velvet-soft stories display how idiosyncratic architecture from the last century can contribute to the comfort of living. It has become, I admit, a motley collection: romantic here, thrilling there, occasionally downright surreal elsewhere. I hope you take at least as much pleasure in reading them as I have had in writing them.

For the photography, we could draw on more than what was shot specifically for this book: Filip Dujardin's remarkably extensive archive, built up over many years, proved an invaluable resource. Some of the texts, likewise, are not entirely new — a number began as articles for professional magazines, which I have since reworked and condensed for this publication.

This is not the first time I have poured architecture into fiction either. An earlier, modest exercise in the genre existed only in a handful of copies, shared among best friends. This time, the exercise gained a publisher, a photographer, and a map.

Strictly ordered from west to east, accessible and inaccessible projects deliberately alternate, so that the reader's journey through the book takes in a few wonders along the way.

The greatest thanks, naturally, go to the architects and owners, who let us — literally and figuratively — into these treasures within Belgium's urban chaos. This well-considered selection has been seen through my eyes and, no less keenly, through the lens of photographer Filip Dujardin. For years of friendship, fine collaboration, and thoroughly enjoyable days on set: a heartfelt thank you.

Dominique Pieters



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE?

☐ Open to the public

This logo signifies that the building is publicly accessible. We encourage readers to go and discover it in real life. However, we still recommend checking the index in the back of the book for accessibility (opening hours, upon reservation, ...).

☒ Closed to the public

This logo signifies that the building is inaccessible: we are talking about private houses, offices, companies, among others. We do not encourage the reader to go and discover it, not even from the outside, in order to protect and respect the owner's privacy. Instead, this guide invites you to enjoy the building through the beautiful photography and the intriguing short stories. Let your imagination work.

- 12 ☐ DE PANNE
Westerpunt
studio MOTO
- 16 ☐ LO-RENINGE
Town Hall
noAarchitecten
- 20 ☐ OSTEND
Aachen Battery
aNNNo architecten
- 24 ☒ OSTEND
Duinhelm
Raamwerk with Robuust and
Atelier Arne Deruyter
- 30 ☐ OSTEND
De Grote Post
Gaston Eysselinck,
B-architecten with Guido Stegen
- 34 ☐ HOOGLEDE
Six Vaults
Gijs Van Vaerenbergh
- 38 ☒ ROESELARE
Agrotopia
META architectuurbureau with
Van Bergen Kolpa Architecten
- 44 ☐ ROESELARE
TRAX
NERO Architecten,
bildt. architecten
- 48 ☒ ZEEBRUGGE
Royal Belgian Sailing Club
Wim Goes Architectuur
- 54 ☒ BRUGES
House Rocas
Govaert & Vanhoutte Architects
- 62 ☐ MOUSCRON
**Museum of Folklore Border Life
(MUSEF)**
V+ (Vers plus de bien-être)
- 66 ☐ HARELBEKE
St Rita's Church
Léon Stynen with Paul De Meyer

- 70 ☐ TOURNAI
LOCI Faculty of Architecture
Aires Mateus
- 74 ☒ SINT-JAN-IN-EREMO
de Boerekreek
Coussée-Goris-Huyghe
architecten
- 80 ☐ OUDENAARDE
Mustard factory Camp's
WONDERSTAD
- 84 ☒ GAVERE
House BS
Graux & Baeyens architecten
- 90 ☐ ZWALM
St Dionysius Church
urbain architectencollectief with
STUDIOBONT architecten
- 94 ☒ DEINZE
Serra
Theo De Meyer and
Stefanie Everaert
- 102 ☐ DEINZE
Gallery House
Wim Goes Architectuur
- 106 ☒ SINT-MARTENS-LATEM
House Van Wassenhove
Juliaan Lampens
- 112 ☒ GHENT
Transients pavilion
MAROEL architecten
- 118 ☐ GHENT
Elders
luum architects & luum interiors
- 122 ☒ GHENT
House Van Hee
Marie-José Van Hee
- 132 ☒ GHENT
Melopee
XDGA

- 138 ☐ GHENT
De Wasserette
Architectenbureau
Bart Dehaene with Peter Geldof
(2PK-architecten)
- 142 ☐ GHENT
Stadshal
Robbrecht en Daem architecten
with Marie-José Van Hee
architecten
- 146 ☒ GHENT
Twiggy
architecten de vylder
vinck taillieu
- 152 ☐ GHENT
Architecture Library
OFFICE Kersten Geers
David Van Severen
- 156 ☐ GHENT
Boekentoren
Henry Van de Velde,
Robbrecht en Daem architecten
- 160 ☐ LEDEBERG
Ledeberg Car Park
Havana and L.U.S.T. Architecten
- 164 ☒ MELLE
Caritas
architecten de vylder
vinck taillieu
- 170 ☐ GHENT
Wonderwoud
URA
- 174 ☐ HORNU
MAC's
Pierre Hebbelinck
- 178 ☐ WAASMUNSTER
Roosenberg Abbey
Dom Hans Van der Laan
- 182 ☐ TEMSE
VBDCK Brewery (Kerel)
IO-architecten

- 186 ☐ PAJOTTEGEM
Paddenbroek
jo taillieu architecten
- 190 ☒ LENNIK
House Roelants
Willy Van Der Meeren
- 196 ☐ DILBEEK
Westrand cultural centre
Alfons Hoppenbrouwers
with Rudy Somers
- 200 ☒ DILBEEK
Chapel of Blossoming
tcplus
- 204 ☐ PUURS-SINT-AMANDS
Valke Vleug winery
Vincent Van Duysen
- 208 ☐ BEERSEL
Water Silo
BEL architecten with bureau
d'études Weinand
- 210 ☐ NIVELLES
Orival Service Station
Philippe SAMYN
and PARTNERS
- 214 ☐ MEISE
Green Ark
NU architectuuratelier with
archipelago architects
- 218 ☒ GRIMBERGEN
Aircraft Hangars
Alfred Hardy
- 226 ☐ BRUSSELS
Gare Maritime
Neutelings Riedijk Architects
with Jan de Moffarts
- 230 ☐ BRUSSELS
Building Materials Village
TETRA architecten
- 234 ☒ BRUSSELS
Zinneke
Ouest Architecture with Rotor

- 240 ☒ BRUSSELS
Nieuwkinderland
Burobill with ZAMpone
Architectuur
- 246 ☐ BRUSSELS
Hôtel van Eetvelde
Victor Horta
- 250 ☒ BRUSSELS
FRAME
BAUKUNST with Bruther
- 258 ☒ SINT-LAMBRECHTS-WOLUWE
La Mémé
Atelier Lucien & Simone Kroll
- 264 ☐ WATERMAAL-BOSVOORDE
Royale Belge
Bovenbouw Architectuur
with Caruso St John Architects
and DDS+
- 268 ☐ ANTWERP
**Kielsbroek, Luchtbal, and
Borgerhout Recycling Centres**
Bovenbouw Architectuur
- 272 ☒ MERKSEM
Speelpleinstraat
51N4E
- 278 ☐ ANTWERP
Arena neighbourhood
Renaat Braem with
Octave De Koninckx
- 282 ☐ ANTWERP
M127
ono architectuur
- 286 ☒ ANTWERP
Maison Guiette
Le Corbusier
- 292 ☐ ANTWERP
Het Huis
Robbrecht en Daem architecten
- 296 ☒ BERCHEM
The Human Link
Eagles of Architecture

- 302 ☐ ANTWERP
Elite Sports School
Compagnie-O
- 306 ☐ MORTSEL
Town Hall
Eagles of Architecture
- 310 ☒ BOOM
Droogloods
Roland Piffet and
Sofie Buggenhout
- 316 ☒ GRIMBERGEN
House Verbrande Brug
architecten de vylder vinck
taillieu with doorzon interieur
architecten
- 322 ☐ MECHELEN
Cinema Lumière
Architectuuratelier Dertien12
- 326 ☐ MECHELEN
Het Predikheren
Korteknie Stuhlmacher with
Callebaut Architecten
- 330 ☐ CHARLEROI
Chapex
AgwA with architecten
jan de vylder inge vinck
- 334 ☐ LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE
Musée L
André Jacqmain; Michel Le Paige
& Carole Deferrière
- 338 ☒ OUD-TURNHOUT
House J&J
Low architecten
- 344 ☐ KASTERLEE
Hostel Wadi
Studio Bernardo Secchi &
Paola Viganò
- 348 ☐ KASTERLEE
Urban Camping
import.export architecture

- 352 ☐ TURNHOUT
De Warande
Beel & Achtergael Architecten
- 356 ☐ KASTERLEE
Community centre
Dierendonckblancke
architecten
- 360 ☐ GEEL
Pedico
murmur architecten with
Robbrecht en Daem architecten
- 364 ☐ SCHERPENHEUVEL-ZICHEM
Maagdentoren
De Smet Vermeulen architecten
with Studio Roma
- 368 ☐ HASSELT
Z33
Francesca Torzo
- 372 ☐ HASSELT
Beguinage
Bovenbouw Architectuur with
David Kohn Architects
- 376 ☐ LIÈGE
Guillemins Station
Santiago Calatrava
- 380 ☐ SERAING
Footbridge Gaston Onkelinx
AgwA
- 384 ☐ LIÈGE
Sart-Tilman Sports Complex
Charles Vandenhove
- 388 ☐ DILSEN-STOKKEM
Negenoord Observation Tower
De Gouden Liniaal Architecten

Westerpunt

studio MOTO
2024



A lens on the landscape

At the westernmost point of De Panne, where the dunes give way to beach and sea and where Belgium quietly meets France, Westerpunt rises up as a beacon that doesn't impose its presence, but offers it. Studio MOTO set itself a paradoxical brief: a structure that feels as though it has always stood there, yet unmistakably adds a new layer to the landscape.

The 'tower' is positioned on the slope of the dyke, in line with the footpath, so that the climb is a natural continuation of the route the visitor is already following. The structure takes the form of a slightly elongated pentagon, built up from identical staircase runs meeting at an angle of 108° . Landings form between the flights, each with a different view. Where the walk along the dyke is linear today, this near-circular loop introduces a new dynamism and spatiality: the changing direction of the stairs lets the walker experience the surrounding landscape features differently each time, with ever new perspectives. Anyone descending automatically returns to the dyke or beach.

Studio MOTO deliberately uses the ring shape as a symbol for the connection between people and nature and between two countries. The view through the structure works like a lens, focusing the gaze on what lies beyond — from De Panne towards Dunkirk, and vice versa. In this way the structure, despite its modest scale, becomes a landmark and a destination in its own right. 'The road is the destination', wrote Confucius, and that quotation sums up how the walker experiences Westerpunt: not as an end point, but as a resting point before continuing the journey.

At the end of the concrete promenade towards France, De Panne



Town Hall

noAarchitecten
2011



Markt 11, 8647 Lo-Reninge



The soul of the place, captured

The market square of diminutive Lo-Reninge is home to an ensemble that fuses modesty and precision into a small but eloquent urban gesture. The former sixteenth-century convent has been transformed and restored to serve as the new town hall: administrative and ceremonial functions, including the council chamber housed in the former chapel, keep the heritage fabric alive and legible. Following the demolition of a 1950s wing, noAarchitecten appended a new volume. A glazed corridor links the two masses like a transparent hinge, while old and new remain legible as distinct entities.

The new volume was conceived as an elongated, open structure, borne by a rhythmic skeleton of laminated pine columns and beams. These columns organise the ground floor asymmetrically: they lend structure to workstations and the flow of visitors without dictating either. At the same time, they carry the roof and, tucked beneath it, the municipal archive, so that the building's functional logic remains directly legible in the construction itself.

The façade, clad in local, reclaimed yellow brick — pointed with lime mortar and finished with a subtle slurry wash — refers unmistakably to the historic convent and the region's brick-building tradition, yet resists mere imitation. The positioning of the columns reveals, from the outside, that the brickwork bears no load; it is a warm cladding rather than a wall. This candour about construction is characteristic of noAarchitecten's approach.

Timber as the primary structure, recycled paper as insulation, locally reclaimed brick as skin: the palette of materials weds sustainability and historical rootedness as two faces of the same coin. The Town Hall of Lo-Reninge is not merely functional, it is a reflection of communal value and continuity in the Westhoek.

Aachen Battery

aNNo architecten
2019

Scars as a legible landscape

Anyone setting foot on the dunes of Raversyde will stumble over more than marram grass alone. Hidden beneath a blanket of sand and scrub lies a military anatomy that, more than a century ago, was meant to command the North Sea. Aachen Battery, built by the German army during World War I as part of a coastal defence belt, was gradually reclaimed by the landscape after World War II. Bunker openings disappeared behind bushes, and concrete gun emplacements grew together with the dune grass.

In restoring the site, aNNo architecten chose not to break that silence, but to articulate it. Where restoration practice all too often lapses into a nostalgic urge to repair — repointing cracks, reproducing original finishes — the architects here posed a different question: what does the decay itself have to say? The concrete that cracks, the edge that crumbles, the technical space that ages: none of this is masked, but presented as evidence. It is an approach that doesn't so much preserve as slow down, confronting the visitor with a heritage that bears its own scars.

The footpath linking the gun emplacements deliberately keeps to a shallow gradient, a curving passage through a system once closed to the outside world. Here, architecture mediates not between old and new, but between memory and new experience, between the military, the human, and the landscape.

A particular chapter in this story is the 'Groen Geruite Huis' (Green Checked House), which embodies the site's historical complexity as a layered palimpsest. Begun as a lighthouse keeper's cottage, altered by Prince Charles of Belgium and converted by the painter Alfred Bastien: every use



left its mark. aNNo opened up the interior and put the museum experience centre stage — not as a backdrop, but as a vehicle for multiple layers of meaning. The new fit-out supports the story without writing over it. The building's entire envelope serves as a canvas for the artist Lily van der Stokker, who clad roof and façade in a poetic, razzle-dazzle-inspired pattern: a reference to the camouflage technique deployed in World War I to disorientate ships. The visual pattern this creates makes the building both recognisable and enigmatic: visibly present, yet hard to grasp.

Aachen Battery proves that heritage need not be mythologised. aNNo architecten has delivered a reinterpretation that is accessible without simplifying, human in scale without infantilising, and that tolerates the complexity of the past without resolving it. The landscape shows its age and it is precisely therein that lies the dignity of the intervention.





Duinhelm

Raamwerk with
Robuust and
Atelier Arne Deruyter
2023

Ordinary,
where it can be

The first time Manu saw Mae, she was washing a window with butter.

Not with a cloth. Not with soapy water. With butter, from a small yellow packet she had brought from the kitchen. She spread it across the glass methodically with the flat of a knife. She did it so earnestly, with concentration, with the precision of someone who knows exactly what she's doing and expects no further questions. Manu stood still in the corridor. Watched. Said nothing.

Mae looked up. Looked at him. Looked back at the window. 'The light comes through better', she said. Manu looked at the window. The light did indeed come through differently — not better, not worse, just differently, buttery and faintly gleaming, with little streaks that intercepted the sun before it fell inside. He nodded.

Both lived in the same house. Each had a room of their own on the sleeping floor. Manu's room faced west, the evening light. Mae's faced north, a calmer, more even light that lasted throughout the day.

They had never discussed it. But one morning, Manu had noticed that at half past nine Mae always sat in the communal space, exactly where the light lingered longest. He began sitting there too. Not beside her. A few chairs along. After a week he moved his chair one position closer. After two weeks they sat side by side. They sat in the light. They didn't talk.

In spring they discovered the patios. The roof seemed to simply carry on overhead — same line, same material — but at

the patios, it was interrupted. An opening that didn't look like an opening. Being outside without being outside. Sheltered, but not enclosed.

The curve of the building hadn't been chosen at random. Cesar had once explained it, on a day when nobody had asked him to, because he had apparently had to work out for himself why it felt so pleasant here: a straight corridor feels longer than it is, but a curved corridor keeps its secret to itself — you never quite know what's coming around the bend. And that same curve also embraced the garden between the two volumes, enclosed it as something the residents had earned for themselves, a secret held between walls that leaned towards one another without ever touching.

There, one afternoon, beneath a sky that couldn't decide whether it wanted to be grey or blue, they had their first real conversation. 'Do you think clouds are lazy too?', Mae asked. Manu thought about it. For a long time. 'Clouds aren't lazy', he said at last. 'They're slow-thinkish. That's something else.' Mae nodded as though that were the most logical sentence ever spoken. 'Slow-thinkish', she repeated, tasting the word. 'Just like the rain, before it falls.' 'And you', said Manu, 'are you quick- or slow-thinkish?' 'Feel-thinkish,' said Mae. 'I think with my stomach first.'

They went on talking about clouds and thinking and stomachs until the sky finally settled on grey and the first drops clattered against the roof. Manu sat down in the patio with



his bare stomach against the timber wall. Before long, his own warmth had crept into the wood. And back again. Mae did it differently. She laid her cheek flat against the wood and waited. That was how they were standing when Cesar passed by. Mae with her cheek against the façade. Manu with his navel. 'Are you two coming in?', the carer asked. Mae looked up. Manu looked up. 'Not yet', they both said. Cesar looked at them. At the building. At the roof that carried on, yet was in fact interrupted. 'Fair enough — see you shortly', he said, and went on his way.

One Tuesday morning, Manu stood in the dining space. He had found bread and cheese, fetched an iron from the storeroom. He set the iron on the table and began. Upstairs, on the sleeping floor, Mae stood at the railing. The building had been designed so that from the sleeping floor one could look down into the dining space below. Not because anyone wished to spy — but because the spaces flowed into one another so completely that the house remained a single whole, day and night, upstairs and down. The timber niches, wall cladding, cupboards, skirtings, and handrails — all in the same warm material, all of it connected.

Mae looked down. Saw Manu. Saw the iron. As she padded softly down the stairs, she asked, 'Which setting will you use for the toastie?' Manu thought hard. He looked at the dial. Cotton. Linen. Silk. Synthetic. 'Cotton', he said. 'Cheese is