

UNITY IN VARIETY



Project: Vesalius Residential Complex, Leuven (BE)
Completion: 2016
Product: TONALITY® NATUR
Architect: Jasper-Eyers Architects

Through the constant pressure of young people moving to university cities, these areas are constantly being brightened up and undergoing change. This is also true for the Belgian city of Leuven, which after all is the oldest university in Belgium. Since 1425 the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven – in short KU Leuven – has distinguished the development and the image of the city. Because new buildings had to be constructed time and again not only for students, but also for the growing branches of the university.

And so it was that Jaspers-Eyers Architects from Leuven designed the legendary Groep T buildings 20 years ago for the engineering college in the Old Town in the heart of this Belgian city.



NEW, LIVELY DISTRICT

Whilst the Engineering College continued developing, life in the city almost came to a standstill in the district immediately adjacent to it. Above all empty buildings which in part also needed renovating determined the image of the city here. In order to bring this important part of the district back to life, the planning department of the City Office in Leuven (BUUR) developed plans for construction work in this dismal area. This was converted by Jaspers-Eyers Architects into a new, lively region of the city.

LIFE, LIVING, WORKING

During the new design phase for this area, the greatest challenge presented to Jaspers-Eyers Architects was transforming this enclosed, unattractive, plot of land into an open, contemporary district, which would attract people instead of driving them away. Now the buildings have assumed different functions, from living and working environments through to commerce and the service sector right through to cultural and training activities. New free spaces were created at the same time as construction was underway. This extended not only the proportion of green spaces, but also created new visual references to neighbouring districts. In so doing, a positive effect was created working contrary to the graffiti which was frequently encountered through the choice of materials for the facades. For the TONALITY facade tiles used have integrated graffiti protection thanks to the KERALIS® sinter firing process, which remains in place throughout the entire working life.



NEW CONNECTIONS

The buildings provided space for 68 apartments on different floors – including social housing – as well as 60 student flats. Precisely in the areas used as living quarters, the TONALITY facade tiles make an important contribution to structural fire protection, and with this to added safety with their classification in Building Materials Class A1 according to EN 13501-1.

There are two cinemas situated in the basement area and an auditorium has been installed there with 740 seats. Parking spaces for cars and bicycles are likewise situated in the basement level. Care was taken to consciously direct the heights of the buildings to the constructions already present. A large, circular internal courtyard forms the centre of this plot of land.



CONNECTING CONTRADICTIONS

The Groep T buildings served as a reference point for the design of this new area. The spatial experience in the Groep T buildings is concentrated around a central atrium. A similar spatial experience is transmitted by the atrium with its constantly dark shades of colour in the Vesalius Complex. The contradictions connect one another at the same time: Light and dark, enclosed internal spaces and free, open spaces.

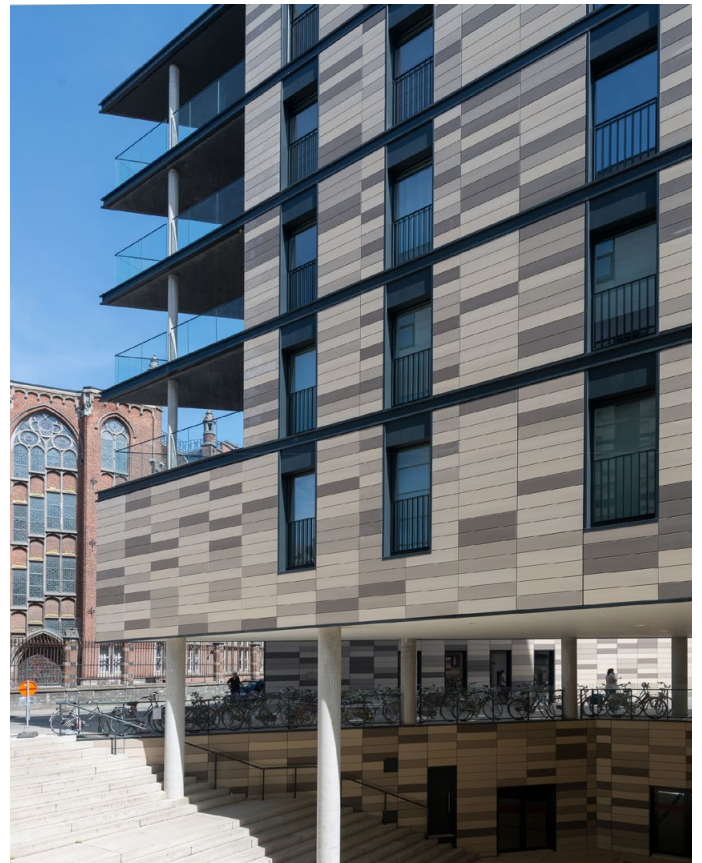
Some of the buildings present on this piece of land have Listed Building status. In particular, these include facades from the 17th and 18th century, which had to be retained in the new project at all costs. For this reason first of all the facades were renovated, in order to integrate them into the new buildings ensemble afterwards. In this way the whole project became an interchanging image between new and renovated buildings, in which the contemporary character encompasses a historical legacy.

FACADE FORMED FROM SANDY SHADES OF COLOUR

The architects consciously decided against the uniform colour of brickwork and masonry for the external walls of the new buildings, and opted for smooth, ceramic facade tiles in three sandy shades of colour from TONALITY. The effect achieved in this way is interchanging and airy, emphasizing the unity in variety. Thanks to the high quality surfaces, the colour intensity of the facades is retained throughout their entire period of use. For the surfaces of the selected German Westerwald clays fired at over 1,200° C are not only resistant to scratches, but also are permanently resistant to UV light. These facades which are resistant to weathering and environmental influences quite consciously contrast both with the spaciousness of the Groep T building as well as the small detailed structure of the surrounding brickwork buildings. The reverse is true with the variety of colours on the Vesalius facade allowing the surrounding buildings to blossom with their contrasting uniform appearance. The “new” and the “old” connect harmoniously with one another.

INTEGRATION AND INDEPENDENCE

The Versalius Complex came into being through the construction work in this area, previously distinguished by buildings lying empty in the immediate vicinity of the monoliths of the Groep-T buildings, and it is highly regarded by all parties. Along with the free spaces, new visual references to the church close by and to other historical buildings also distinguish this built structure. In conjunction with the colourful, richly diverse facades one could also detect an independent language of shape, colouring and materials. For this new area does not stand alone, but also created references to its surroundings on different levels. And at the same time even becomes a new part of the urban togetherness.



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