Projects

VUB, Brussels
Hendrik Conscience, Brussels
kOsh, Herentals
Werf 44, Schilde
— CONIX RDBM Architects projects in Brussels

01. VUB, Brussels, Education
02. Hendrik Conscience, Office
Brussels is often regarded as an interesting melting pot of cultures, languages and people. By accommodating more or less 74,000 students, it's the largest student city in Belgium. The Vrije Universiteit Brussel aims at efficient services and has the ambition to occupy a leading role in the development of a sustainable, ecological and high-quality future minded campus. This new campus entails a compact cluster of buildings with a variety of functions located alongside the Triomflaan, reinforcing the inherent qualities of the transparent and green campus. The newly built complex comprises 650 student rooms, new auditoria, a council room and cultural infrastructure containing among others a concert hall, a cultural café and an exposition room.

**Context**

In general, it can be said that all conditions have been respected, in the masterplan for the campus, in the vision of the community and in the vision of the VUB.

In deciding on the layout of the buildings, the aim to create a greener campus was taken into account, as was the possibility of further expansion in the future. The layout has allowed for the creation of a green zone on the Triomflaan that links to the central zone of the campus via a green thoroughfare. There are also various (smaller) access ways between the buildings, ensuring convenient circulation while acting as green fingers and creating extra connections between the different zones on the site. The ground floor below the student rooms has been designed to make connections that are interesting visually as well as functionally.

**Concept**

The combination of education, research, culture, living and working will create an integral campus boosting the university's identity and unity. The green and easy accessible campus is the starting point for CONIX RDBM Architects global vision. The current student accommodation, nowadays combined all together in one central student village, is no longer adjusted to today's standards. It will be omitted in favour of a green landscape on site.

The new student accommodation is an elongated volume located alongside the campus' boarder at the Triomflaan. Its position reinforces the urbanity of the campus while the same protecting the green heart of the campus. However the transparency towards the city remains preserved at all times by the buildings intriguing volumes and the fact the green boulevard runs throughout the campus.

The creation of cut-offs in the volumes of the living units and the creation of crossing ways at the ground-floor level provide several views of the general landscaping of the site.

Trough well-thought decisions the linear volumes will adapt a permanent relation with the urban environment. Its design, part by using pillars, part by withdrawing it slightly, results in a generous, recognizable and highly accessible entrance. On one hand it’s an entrance for the city, her visitors and inhabitants, on the other it’s a gathering spot for students. As a result the buildings become part of the campus, protect the inner student life from the public street and adopt the same architectural language as the surrounding buildings.

The creation of two ‘landmarks’ at the two ends of the inner street. The first is the culture café, which is in relation with the city. The second is the research centre that completes and extends the existing circular layout of the VUB campus buildings around the future central green outdoor space.
Model of the cultural tower

Two campus landmarks have a crucial role in going from the city towards the campus. On one side there's the cultural tower inviting everyone to participate in the university's activities, on the other there's a research tower, part of phase II of the construction process, representing the VUB as a highly acclaimed center conducting quality research.

Also the student houses’ façade aims at stressing the bilateral image – city vs. inner campus – of the context. The big bow-windows are responding to the city's scale and increase the identity of the living areas of the student units organized in groups of six. At the rear side of the student facility one can find a playful combination of stairs serving as informal gathering spots. The use of these stairs is a solution to various architectural demands: multiple dilatations, shared balconies and meeting points, a playful façade in dialogue with the park and a useful way to prevent overheating.

The project can be regarded as highly functional with a pure and strong architectural identity. CONIX RDBM Architects has taken into account the need for logical structures and technical specifications, which in turn not only ease life at the VUB, but also positively influence budget and planning. The materials are deliberately modest, durable and closely linked to the campus' urban approach.

But equally important it stresses the determination of the VUB to become a role model in this field.

CONIX RDBM Architects’ approach sees the campus as city within the city finding a well-balanced equilibrium between urbanity and human scaled education. It opens the campus towards the city and maintains its own identity at the same time. Thanks to this new campus the VUB is now fully ready for the future.

Client: Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Location: Pleinlaan 2, 1050 Elsene
Subject: New construction
Programme: Student rooms, auditoria & cultural infrastructure
Completion: 2018
Gross surface area: 25,000 m²
Construction costs: € 39,218,000 (Excl. VAT)
Stability: Talboom
Technics: Talboom
Safety coordinator: OCB
Energy: 3E
Landscape: Dirk Vandekerckhove Landschapsarchitect
Acoustic: VENAC

Team: Ben, Bernard, Christian, Christiaen, Constantin, Frederik, Gert, Guy, Karen, Karin, Koen, Matthias, Maxim, Pierre, Ratafia, Stefan, Steven, Valerie, Wil, Wim and with the support of the sales support team.
The Hendrik Conscience building is located in Brussels, near the Sint-Joost-ten-Node neighbourhood. The original building, designed by Jaspers-Eyers, was completed in 1998. Today, it is home to the Education and Administration services of the Flemish government and is the property of AXA Real Estate. CONIX RDBM Architects is performing a complete renovation that promises to give the building an entirely new look. Our focus is on ensuring the building embraces its environment and serves as a guarantee of openness and transparency that symbolises the working of a modern-day governmental building. We are achieving this openness by means of a new, transparent and low-threshold main entrance that also functions as a semi-public meeting place while inviting visitors to enter the building.

**Concept**

On the outside, the entry is being architecturally emphasised by a funnel shape rendered in a striking colour. This helps in making its role clear to everyone; more than ever before, visitors are able to experience the entry hall as pleasant meeting space that closely connects with the outdoor patio, is bathed in daylight and that, thanks to the new design, is more attractive and accessible. The entry is being moved and an imposing awning is being built. The main entry is to be found between the two towers and lies in the extension of the existing outdoor patio. It is going to increase the visibility from the walking passage running from outside to inside the building. The entry hall is being fitted with dome lighting through which natural sunlight can come flooding in. The new access way is also broader and therefore clearer, with a greater capacity for receiving visitors. This is necessary seeing the number of building occupants is set to increase.

The lower storey is being opened and stripped of all but the necessities. It is to become an open space for a diverse variety of functions. The ground floor lobby is being revised and expanded, with a new reception desk area, counters, a coffee and sandwich bar and two lounge zones. The reception and meeting place for visitors and civil servants is to become the new nerve centre of the building. This too is an open space suitable for diverse functions. New sight lines and walking passages ensure it is experienced as impressively spacious, and that it facilitates the internal traffic. On one side, the reception desk, and on the other, the sandwich bar, are taking focus positions. They form the two most important volumes around which different activities can take place.

**The programme**

The current entry—in the middle tower—is being closed with a new curtain wall. We did create a mega-billboard on which a serigraph image of Hendrik Conscience will be displayed.

The restaurant is completely renovated and enlarged. The current janitorial building and printing office has been removed, allowing the restaurant to expand and increase its daily service capacity to 1,200 meals.

The auditorium on the ground floor, the first floor will be completely dedicated to meeting rooms and—just like the ground floor—semi-accessible to the public. We are aiming for a balanced mix of different types of meeting rooms, supplemented with training rooms, lecture halls and spaces suitable for other activities.
The storey dedicated to offices is being completely revised and tailored to the wishes of the users. During the design process, there was close collaboration and consultation with the facilitating company and the Flemish government authority responsible for the building. The storey dedicated to offices is being set up to embrace ‘The New Way of Working’ that became Flemish government policy in 2013. The New Way of Working is a workplace-organisation concept that responded to the question of how staff members—who are increasingly pure knowledge workers working independently of time and place—optimally function in a digital community and achieve offer the best service for all their clients. In this sense, The New Way of Working is a process that continually adjusts to the interplay between physical work environment, efficient ICT and information management, and a stimulating HR policy (also known respectively as the ‘Bricks, Bytes and Behaviour’). The goal of this approach is to increase workplace comfort and reduce the number of empty workspaces. It is set up with a mix of open island workplaces, screened-off workplaces, concentration cockpits and consultation zones.

An important aspect taken into account during the design phase is accessibility for people with disabilities. “Design for All” is a design philosophy based on acceptance of human diversity and striving for social inclusion and equality. The goal of Design for All is to give equal opportunity for participation in society. Achieving this goal requires the building environment (as well as everyday products, services, culture and information, etc.) to be accessible and suitable for everyone. This holistic and inclusive approach is a creative and ethical challenge for the design team.

The outdoor patio area plays a role that supplements surrounding functions and even reinforces them, improving accessibility. The large central vegetation feature is being replaced with a number of organic planters, spread about the patio.

Circularity
A circular approach strives for positive effects in a process of continuous quality improvement. A predominant aspect of this renovation project for the Hendrik Conscience building is the variety of innovations that are to significantly improved the level of sustainability. The project aims to formulate an answer to the strong desire to increase sustainability.

The Forum, the reception and meeting place for visitors and civil servants, is the nerve centre of the building. The plan for the ground floor shows the area being opened, with anything unnecessary being removed. It is an open space in which diverse functions can be carried out. New walkways and sight lines give a sense of spaciousness while facilitating internal circulation. The reception desk on one side and the sandwich bar on the other create a central area. They are the two most important features around which other activities take place. The ground floor is not just a place to be passed through, but a place where people can happily linger. It is a reception and meeting place for visitors and civil servants and very much the nerve centre of the entire building.

The building is designed to be accessible to the public. It has two access ways: one via the main entry and one via the underground car park. Besides this, there are three different zones: a limited public zone (green), a larger semi-public zone (orange), and the largest section, a controlled zone (red). Access through the main entry runs via the central entry for both visitors and staff. The space from the entrance zone up to the reception desk and the touchscreens for self-registration can be considered to be specifically for the public. Visitors effectively have free access to the semi-public zones on the ground floor and the first floor. These areas are the Forum, lounge, restaurant, outdoor patio, auditorium, reception.
Back to School, August 24, 2018

and the storey of the building dedicated to meeting rooms.

A new work environment

The storey of the building to be used for offices is also being set up to embrace The New Way of Working. This approach is determined according to the following principles:

- creating diverse workplaces
- adapting the design of the workplace to the activity performed there
- discouraging the allotment of workplaces to individual employees
- creating possibilities for homeworking and working from satellite offices

The goal here is to increase work comfort and avoid empty workspaces.

The design is a mix of open island workplaces, screened-off workplaces, concentration cockpits and consultation zones.

The establishment of a planning space and the arrangement of the different storeys of the building to meet the principles of the New Way of Working has been planned out in close consultation with end-users. As such, the first floor has been completely dedicated to meetings and, like the ground floor, is semi-accessible to the public.

There is a balanced mix of different types of meeting rooms provided, supplemented with training rooms, lecture halls and spaces for other activities. The surface area of the first floor is approximately 5,500 m², of which 3,465 m² is considered to be ‘primary area’. The maximum occupancy is 864 people.

The outdoor patio is being completely refurbished. The aim is that it is made more functional and accessible, for use in nice weather. Instead of a central plant feature, a number of organic planters are being spread across the patio. These plants stand out against the finish of the terrace and are to be planted with low grasses or ground-cover plants; these plants are being restricted to slow-growing or middle-sized evergreen trees or bushes to give extra volume to the patio. They plants may include bamboo or conifers, as well as simple pine trees.

The materials

The staff restaurant is also being refurbished. Different flooring will be used to differentiate between areas for foot traffic and sitting. The circulation zones will be given the same floor finishing as the entry hall: large format tiles. A light-coloured wood—oak or beech—is planned for the flooring in the sitting areas.

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— CONIX RDBM Architects projects in Antwerp
01. KOSH, Herentals, Education
02. Werf 44, Schilde, Education, cultural
The design creates an open campus with a central community square. It is for the first-grade levels of a secondary school (the 7th and 8th school years), located between the Ieperstraat and the Lierseweg in Herentals. It will bring the school and the central KOSH services together. The school is attended by 1,000 pupils.

The school is aiming to offer security on a modern-looking campus, with light and air, an open character, good accessibility and innovative, energy-efficient buildings.

Context
The campus grounds are surrounded by back gardens and homes. The school is integrated in the residential district in such a way that the school doesn’t dominate. In agreement with the guidelines of the Flemish master builder, using the organising power of the school and AG RE COPID NV, the school was designed to fit in with the scale of the neighbouring buildings to the greatest extent possible. The starting point of the design was an open campus with a communal square at the heart of the school.

Concept
The school creates a world for young people aged from 12 to 14, with an open structure that remains easily controlled. A somewhat playful environment in which the students’ transition from primary school to a secondary school can be made seamlessly.

Layout of play areas: central location interwoven between buildings, partially covered, with minimum intrusion to the surrounding residents. Openness and transparency are a constant theme found throughout the campus. It is also present in the broad passageways that can function as places to congregate in the winter months. Architecture with a modern appearance and that is suited to the KOSH environment has been deliberately implemented, while a powerful volumising effect has been used to reduce the height of the buildings to two storeys. The two wings are linked to each other by two “bridges”, one of which is covered.

The cafeteria has a central location on the campus and can also be used as a multi-purpose room. Great attention has been paid to the quality of accommodations for the pupils. The two “bridges” create covered play areas, with various indoor spaces, each with its own character.

The interior is open and playful, with particular attention paid to transparency throughout the building. This creates numerous opportunities for contact between students from all study trajectories. By working with a lot of glass as well as the spacious corridors, KOSH has ensured there will be considerable visual interaction.

A number of teaching areas have been included on the first floor. The corridors are broken up by groups of lockers, with every student having access to a locker of their own in the vicinity of their classroom.

The new KOSH Campus in Herentals is an example of a sustainable and environmentally friendly campus:
- Aquifer thermal energy storage (ATES);
- energy-efficient (free) cooling;
- CO₂-controlled ventilation;
- LED lighting;
- automatic sun protection;
- materials used for the shell of the building have a high degree of thermal insulation.

Architecture
The energy concept for the KOSH campus is best described as modern. The building is not just fitted with a highly insulative thermic “shell”, but also energy-efficient LED lighting, automatic sun protection and CO₂-controlled ventilation with heat recovery.
Besides this, the school building has an ATES installation for thermal energy storage. As a result, there is not just sustainable heat available for the building, but also sustainable and energy-efficient cooling (so-called free cooling). This is unique in Flanders, the kOsh campus being the first secondary school fitted with an ATES installation.

The water use in the school building is very sustainable. The school has been provided with multiple underground rainwater tanks with a total capacity of 240,000 litres. After filtering and storage, this rainwater is used for flushing toilets and for washing machines.

Furthermore, the outside grounds also have infiltration facilities and sizeable underground buffer tanks that slow the drainage of rainwater. The goal here is to limit the peak demands on the community sewerage system. Even in the area of energy performance, the newly constructed campus has attained a K-peil of 31 and an E-peil of 54.

Various requirements were set for the materials to be used. They had to be:

- honest, pure and less taxing for the environment (not just in production, but also in the event of demolition and reuse);
- sustainable over time, require little maintenance and offer a long lifespan;
- in-line with fire and acoustic requirements.

The structure of the architecture is simple and sustainable, with the clearest possible image being formed of the functionality of the building by the different materials used. The new school campus will have a barrier and a green buffer to separate it from the surrounding homes. A drop-off zone will be established on the Lierseweg side of the school.

Design for a secondary school campus: ‘A campus where students feel at home’

Client: Scholen van Morgen DBFM nv
Location: Herentals
Assignment: New campus buildings for a first-grade secondary school
Programme: Secondary school for 1,000 students in the first grade (the 7th and school years)
Provisional delivery date: 29 November 2018
GFA: 9,910 m²
Building costs: 17,120,000 euro (excl. VAT)
Estimate for the works: 16,062,202 euro (excl. VAT)
Energy performance rating: K-peil 31; E-peil 54 (ATES)
General contractor: MBG
Stability: Bureau Van Ransbeeck
Technical: van Zanten Raadgevende Ingenieurs (ZRI)

Team
Arjan, Bernard, Christian, Constantin, Frans, Gerrit-Jan, Gert, Jean-Paul, Nathalie, Sara, Stefan, Stephanie, Steven, Wendy, Wil and with the support of the sales support team.
Werf 44 is a new construction project characterised by sustainability and energy-efficient construction. The underlying philosophy of the project is to bring people and culture together in the town. The centre houses various functions that are clustered together based on functionality. Architecturally, the design has resulted in an easily accessible culture centre when the materials radiate sustainability and functionality.

**Concept**

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**Context**

The building is in an important place in the community. The site functions as an intermediary, connecting the new with the old. With its square shape, the site creates, as it were, a more expansive central area.

The community centre is at the head of the grounds, on the Schoolstraat. The building has three facades: on the Schoolstraat, the Petrus Bogaertstraat and the meeting square. The community centre makes a connection with the school and the water towers on the other side of the intersection.

The plain has been functionally divided into two connecting squares: the meeting square (a market place where people come and go, a parking place, etc.), and the square connecting with the school (across the intersection with the Schoolstraat). Throughout the entire area, from north to south, we want to make the connection between the old and new in Schilde more tangible. The connection has a literal translation in the architecture of the buildings: the corner of the community centre closest to the Schoolstraat has become a transparent connection. Here we see a glazed section in which there is a lounge or cafe. It allows people to look through the building to the meeting place, or on the other hand, to allow people from the street to see the movement in the lounge and entry of the large interior hall.

**Programme**

On the ground floors, there is a cafeteria, including two kitchens, one of which is suitable for meetings, with a lounge/foyer space and a restaurant. On the outside, there is a space south-facing terrace that gives the building an extra dynamic and sense of perception. Central to all this is the large concert or theatre hall. It has a capacity of 300 people. A second hall offers place for another 120 people. A small ticket office with a counter and window is suitable for ticket sales and providing information.

The first floor includes the caretaker’s residence, space for checks and safety, and several multipurpose rooms and meeting rooms. Different organisations will be able to find space here and make use of the rooms. One of the most prominent users is the music academy. The planning of all activities will run such that the community centre will be available for as many different meetings as possible at all times, strengthening the interaction between all users.

The car park next to the community centre offers 76 parking spots. On the side entrance of the building, there is a ‘Kiss & Ride’ drop-off zone, as well as four parking spots for disabled persons. 30 bike parking brackets will be distributed between a plant box garden near the car park and the corner of the Schoolstraat and Petrus van Bogaertstraat. Along the side of the terrace, there are another five bike parking brackets and a recharge point for electrical bikes.

The landscaped road along the rear of the building serves as an emergency access road and is only accessible for loading and unloading. Poles will be set up to prevent inappropriate traffic from entering.

**Architecture**

The design creates a highly accessible centre where people and culture connect with each other: it

Accessible cultural centre brings people and culture together in the town centre
WERF 44

is a place where people can meet each other within a setting of culture, whether they are from businesses or other organisations, or there for personal relaxation.

The building is suitably articulated and to the greatest extent possible, it fits in with the scale of the neighbouring buildings. Particular emphasis has been placed on a strong relationship between the inside and the outside. The materials used indoors and outdoors correlate, and the wind screening on the ground floor opens the building to its environment. Large windows on the upper floor add to this effect. The design is based around functionality and creates meaningful spaces. The building forms a "landscape" with multifunctional boxes (exhibiting the union of musical and decorative arts). The rooms for human traffic can also be used as exhibition spaces. The lines of sight raise the fordlability and dome lights allow for natural daylight.

Materials
The different materials and colours used create a particular dynamism in the appearance of the façades themselves. The materials are simple and exemplify sustainability. The largest part of the surface of the façades has been finished in ceramic tiles with a light beige colour; a smaller section has been profiled in dark anthracite. The different materials emphasise the different functions of the building.

Functional development of the plan to the best extent possible, the spaces are clustered based on function and to guarantee a logical workflow. There is a clear division between public spaces and logistic functions that are situated along the loading and unloading zone at the rear of the building.

The two halls are seen as volumes within one primary volume, emphasised by materials. The development of the circulation has been designed so that the volume of the large hall is clear from the ground floor as well as the first floor. This hall functions as a core to the building, surrounded by classrooms and multipurpose spaces. These multipurpose spaces can be divided with use of mobile walls.

Grounds
The surrounding environment offers a living, green and flexible area suitable for all sorts of activities. It brings a sense of balance between the parking places and is extremely user-friendly. Different functions will find their places here: parking, weekly markets, circus tents, etc. This multipurpose use of the grounds has been made possible through strategically placed plant boxes that separate the car park and accommodation spaces, while also maintaining the unity of the grounds.

Vegetative buffers are kept low such that visitors always have an overview of the grounds and are easily able to find their way to the entrance. Diagonally across the square, and partly within the building, the lines of the former anti-tank channel have been worked into the surface. This provides the square with an extra dimension and identity.

BEN
BEN stands for ‘almost energy neutral’. As from 2021, the BEN principles will be the standard for new constructions in Flanders and across Europe. A large number of technical interventions have made the community centre a BEN building.

Sun protection
By using slanted walls, there is less need for expensive technical acoustic materials. The height of the rooms has been calculated based on acoustics and a human scale (the Golden Ratio).
Client: Gemeente Schilde
Location: Schoolstraat, Schilde
Assignment: New construction
Programme: Multipurpose community centre, caretaker residence, conference centre and music school.
Completion: May 2017
GFA: ca. 3000 m²
Construction costs: ca. €8,500,000 (excluding VAT)
E-Peil: E40
K-Peil: K20
General contractor: Van Roey
Stability: Raymond Van Soens
Technical: Cenergie

Team:
Bernard, Constantijn, Frédéric, Gert-Jan, Guy, Jean-Paul, Koen, Mark, Nathalie, Sara, Steven, Wendy, Will and with the support of the sales support team.