ISSUE 43 | JULY 2017

discover BENELUX

KENSINGTON

THE SOUND OF YOUR SUMMER

PLUS

RIFKA LODEIZEN

AMSTERDAM CITY SPECIAL

THE BEST OF DUTCH & BELGIAN ARCHITECTURE

BUSINESS, CULTURE AND TOURISM

Queen Mathilde Mother & Child Centre Edegem, hospital

Building for the future

TEXT: FRANK VANDENBROUT | PHOTOS: SVR ARCHITECTS

Based in Antwerp, SVR-ARCHITECTS is one of Belgium's leading international architectural firms, with 35 professionals working across a range of projects requiring highly specialised technical expertise and creative power. Ever since founder Jef Van Ranst won a competition to build the Antwerp University Medical Hospital in 1970, healthcare has been one of the four sectors comprising the backbone of the company's portfolio, together with their innovative work in laboratories, offices and housing.

Van Ranst hired technical specialists from the United States to help him build the hospital, which at the time was a revolutionary approach. "It reflects a mentality that has been an essential part of the company from the very start," says SVR's CEO Philippe Van Goethem. "We will always have our eye on the end goal: to meet the needs of the end users. And we'll do whatever it takes to realise this goal."

It is this very same vision on the role of architectural design that informed one of SVR's newest flagship projects, the Queen Mathilde Mother and Child Centre in Edegem near Antwerp, which was completed earlier in February this year. "We did away with some deep-seated dogmas in our design," Philippe explains. "We wanted to bring as much natural light as we could into the hospital's wards and rooms – not only for the patients, but also for the staff. Usually, hospital staff rest rooms are stuck away somewhere in the centre of the structure where no natural light can possibly get in. We took a radically different approach, from a belief that optimal healthcare for patients requires optimal conditions for nursing staff, to care for their patients and create a healthy, happy and positive environment."

Function before form

According to Philippe, it is this focus on the use of a building that sets SVR apart from many other firms. "We don't design iconic buildings just for the sake of it," Philippe explains. "Scale and volume should derive from the functional concept, not the other way around. Firstly, we look at the different groups of users a building needs to facilitate, the inside of the building, before we think about what it should look like from the outside."

SVR always follows this same philosophy and way of working. First they identify the goals the project needs to meet and make sure they have a clear and concrete understanding of these. Secondly, they set out how to achieve these goals, drafting a detailed plan of the process. "This includes budget planning, proactively gauging the risks and working out a clearly phased roadmap to avoid surprises and minimise costs," Philippe explains. "On the part of the architect this requires solid technical expertise as well as the ability to think creatively."

The third and final requirement is to focus on the end result. "We're not in this business just to publish our designs," says Jean-Pierre Van Lieferinge, the firm's other partner. "We're in this business to produce added value for our customers, to contribute to the success of their enterprise."

Scalable architecture

Part of the success of a project is the requirement to deliver buildings that are social, environmentally friendly and set up for new ways of working in the digital age. But first and foremost, the architect has a duty to deliver buildings that are scalable and adaptable to future needs, according to Jean Pierre. This applies to office buildings such as the building at 9 Rue Guimard in Brussels, which SVR redesigned and optimised, increasing its floor space by almost ten per cent; but it is even more important for the laboratory buildings SVR specialises in.

Hotel labs

One of their latest laboratory projects has been the design of a 16,000-square-metre so-called laboratory hotel building concept for a newly developed bio-tech campus. "The buildings are designed to accommodate a range of different laboratories, all with scalable sizes and adaptable functionalities." It is the kind of project that requires highly specialised expertise in front-end engineering design, where a comprehensive, complicated programming and long-term design process needs to be planned in detail.

In recent years, SVR's Laboratory Division has not only worked as architects on prestigious projects such as the Rega and Chem&Tech laboratories at the University of Leuven, the academic research lab for aquatic ecology and toxicology at the University of Ghent and a range of highly sophisticated R&D facilities for Procter and Gamble in Europe and Asia, they have also been asked by other architectural firms to contribute their expertise in various projects around the world. "Just like Van Parys more than 45 years ago, we are always open to new collaborations," Philippe concludes. "If we can add value to a project and deliver a design that can stand the test of time, we are in," he says. "In the end, we see it as our mission to build for the future."

For more information, please visit:
www.svr-architects.eu


Aquatic ecology Ghent, laboratory


Leuven Chem & Tech, laboratory


9 Rue Guimard, Brussels, offices


Neonatology Queen Mathilde Mother & Child Centre Edegem, hospital. Healthcare is one of the four sectors comprising the backbone of the company's portfolio.

Everyone deserves to enjoy the journey.

Our two Superferries sail by day or overnight from Harwich to the Hook of Holland - the most direct route to Holland by ferry from the south of England. Enjoy superb onboard facilities including two stylish restaurants and bars, a blockbuster cinema, luxurious en-suite cabins and our first class Stena Plus lounge.

Everyone deserves a break.

Book at stenaline.co.uk or call 08447 70 70 70

*£10 service fee applies to all bookings made by telephone. Subject to availability and restricted space. For full terms and conditions visit www.stenaline.co.uk

Stena Line