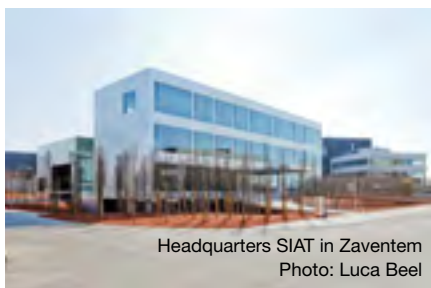




De Nieuwe Dokken in Gent
Photo: Schipperskaai Development



Museum M in Leuven
Photo: Jan Kempnaers



Headquarters SIAT in Zaventem
Photo: Luca Beel



deSingel International Arts Campus
in Antwerpen. Photo: Luca Beel



KMMA in Tervuren: view from the new Welcome
Pavillion towards the Museum. Photo: SBA

STÉPHANE BEEL ARCHITECTS:

Iconic simplicity

TEXT: CHARLOTTE VAN HEK

With a portfolio boasting iconic buildings such as the Rubens House and art campus deSingel in Antwerp, Museum M in Leuven and recently housing project De Nieuwe Dokken, Stéphane Beel Architects has helped shape Flemish identity for over three decades.

He is among Flanders' most renowned contemporary architects: his work has featured in numerous international magazines and has bagged prestigious international prizes. Most importantly, it has formed the Flemish cities of today. Founded in the early 1980s, SBA's works include private residences, urban planning, offices, and cultural buildings.

Beel is a prominent representative of the New Simplicity movement that was developed during the last decades of the 20th century, characterised by the revival of architectural minimalism. Design's integration in the everyday is a constant essence. "All elements in design are autonomous, yet linked at the same time," Beel starts. "The old and the new, the design and

its surroundings: they mutually influence each other. This applies to the small-scale nature of a chair, but also translates to whole cities." Leuven's famous M Museum underlines this hallmark: by stitching together new elements with historic features and creating public elements opening up social possibilities, the museum has become part of the everyday, enabling people to meet and connect.

Among current projects is the expansion and renovation of the Royal Museum for Central Africa (KMMA) in Tervuren (re-opening in 2018). "A sensitive project, as our colonial history is not a light topic," Beel continues. "Architecture is about reflecting on relevant issues in human life. How can you get that right? The building should do justice to what people feel when taking in KMMA's collection."

'De Nieuwe Dokken' is one of SBA's recent housing projects: some 400 homes alongside community buildings such as a school and sports centre, set at the Schipperskaai waters in Ghent. "Essential

in De Nieuwe Dokken is its integral nature: residents should consider it their home, something that is part of their city." Sustainability is at the core of each project, something reflected by the recently completed 'De Balk van Beel'. Dubbed the first and most sustainable residential building in Europe, it comprises 101 low-energy apartments with a strong spotlight on sustainability and innovation.

Having practiced his profession for over 35 years, Beel recognises developments that are of passing nature. "Architecture represents a way to explore and heighten life. This enables us to synthesise complex problems, to provide an unconventional response to what was asked but not always what was expected.

"Architecture equals to problem solving – it does not save the world, but it certainly contributes to it."

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