

Headline

This housing project fulfills the local authorities double ambition: to represent the urban revalidation scheme with a landmark at the entrance of the city and to provide exemplary apartments for large families. The building develops passive bright apartments and establishes a dialogue with the infrastructure and a the heritage neighbourhood.

General description

Located at one of Brussels main entrances, the building is a social housing operation and a flagship project for the new identity of that neighbourhood. The building provides a solid and comfortable basis for families in need and stands with an open angle, welcoming commuters entering the capital. It advocates for a strong desire for architecture for all.

This one-piece construction closes a steep triangular block, and develops a smooth textured brick façade playing with the light of the ever-changing Belgium sky. This scripture echoes with the surrounding, full of details, art Deco perennial buildings and stands up to the impressive road and railway infrastructure.

Concept/ Context and strategy

As most projects in Brussels, the building had to face a fascinating but difficult context. To face the small, irregular, noisy and mainly northern orientated plot, the building uses key architectural features. It develops long folded apartments around a southern opened courtyard and a complex staircase that intertwines with individual stairs, allowing internal volumetric movements and kilometrical views to the surrounding landscape. The plans articulations, intricate as lace-work, and the progressive section, passing from split-level to inverted duplexes, provide all the apartments of this perennial construction with light from 4 orientations exposition, outdoor spaces, impressive views and numerous spatial experiences.

Being a visible part of a broader scheme, great expectations, local and regional, were put on the shoulders of this building. An exhaustive participative process was followed to establish a dialog with the inhabitants and the different competent administrations. It enabled to explain, develop and amend urban and architectural issues, diminishing recurring Brussels' conflicts and allowing to exceed strict building regulations.

Construction/ Materials and structure

Because the building shelters people in need and because social housing shouldn't be treated differently than more prestigious building, the project is developed in order to provide a solid basis to live in. The construction is comforting and perennial, you can sleep soundly and nails can be banged in the walls.

With super insulated envelope, soundproofing, triple glazing, balanced ventilation with heat recovery from exhaust air and solar panels for hot water production, the building is passive < 15kwh/m2. The inhabitants comfort and low consumption are ensured, while they're still able to open all their windows.

The maintenance costs have been reduced to the maximum by avoiding air conditioning through calibrated exposure, by allowing natural light in nearly all the spaces and by the absence of an elevator, which the inhabitants didn't notice, their ascension being eased by the spatiality and powerful views.

Special details, avoiding thermal bridges, and on site worker's formations were developed to assemble the subtle white brickworks in order to obtain this strong but smooth texture to play with light and pay tribute to the heritage art-deco façades of the area.