

VAN MAERLANT CONVENT 1993 - 1999

Conversion of a centennial convent into an office building rue van Maerlant in Brussels.



Site
Rue Van Maerlant, 18 Å 28 1000 Brussels

Client
CFE Promotions

Structural engineer
Setesco

Services engineer
Solitech

Contractor
CFE Entreprises

Budget
16 000 000 EUR htva

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The convent dating from the beginning of the 20th century (but abandoned by the nuns in 1974) was bought by CFE in 1989. It was, at that time, in a state of complete ruin. In 1993, city regulations stipulated mandatory conservation of the ensemble. The building is composed of three main volumes : the church, the convent and its chapel, re-entrusted as a place of worship midway through the renovation.

Access is through a lowered passageway, situated between church and convent. A large glass roof covers the central shared patio, visually uniting the said volumes, and distributing natural light to all offices. Generous sunlight, delicate brick detailing of the church façades, and their stark contrast with the metallic structure of the atrium convey strong character to the space. The extensive use of raised access floors, integrating all services, allows full floor-to-ceiling windows. Principal circulation cores look out onto the patio at every floor ... the sheer volume of the church is therefore very present as you move inside the project, the ancient arches and buttresses still present to emphasize the monumental character of the building. New columns and metal girders discretely positioned give free reign to the ancient stone pillars, the new highlighting the old.

Today, the convent houses the administrative headquarters of the Ministry of Culture of the European Union. The church is home to the European Economic Community's central library (upper levels), and to the visitor's center for the European public (ground level).

