REMPART DES MOINES 2018 - 2019

Competition : Housing and community facilities rue du Rempart des Moines in Brussels



Site
Rue du Rempart des Moines 1000 Brussels

Client
Le logement Bruxellois

Structural engineer
BAS

Services engineer
DÃ©tang Engineering

Budget
64.127.000 EUR htva

In association with
51n4e, Duplex Architects (ch)

What happens when we question borders? When we see them not as places to secure and protect but instead as opportunites to articulate and connect, not as reason to alienate factions but instead as potential to repair fractures? The Rempart des Moines housing project replacing 5 worn out post-war mega-blocks in Brussels' otherwise compact city center is imagined with these questions in mind, recognizing the possibility to transform what our intuition tends to label as likely conflict into what could in fact become joyous in-between moments. At sidewalk level between existing and proposed unbuilt space. At cornice levels between those present since ages and those foreseen today. Indoors and at all levels between what is everyone's _ communal areas _ and what is mine. Within my own flat between me inside and all the not me's outside I relate to peering out my curtains. And finally at rooftop levels between each building's planted top-floor terrace and the cityscape it is part of. The result is a singular form with a unique identity all its own, because born from how the proposition aims to initiate qualified made-to-measure relationships at all these strikingly diverse in-between moments, at what we call thresholds _ not borders. An organic serpentine made up of high and low volumes where appropriate, interspersed with cantilevered terraces when overlooking calm enclosed gardens or with sunken loggias when a protective step back from street animation below is needed, punctuated with intimate courtyards for rest and busy bustling squares for play. In short massing that takes the form of a conglomerate procession of opportune connections with the diversity encountered, weaving itself into its wonderfully heterogeneous site.

So what was at first glance a ragged breach of fragmented left-over space along the Rue du Grand Serment becomes a real plaza, a coherent federating entity uniting what's left and right. What was a confrontational vis-Ã -vis along the two other side-streets of the triangular plot is softened by gated tree-filled setbacks of varying shapes and sizes. And what was an endless ribbon of bland disengaged facades ground floor is replaced by functions activating the public realm: shared accesses to small-sized buildings organized around carefully calibrated light-filled landings, private entrances to lower-floor flats, community locals, a day-care center, a senior citizens' center, convenience shops and a modular sports hall that can morph into a town-hall. Or even into a see-thru market-hall you could walk through when open, like a short-cut connecting two otherwise separate parts of the project. Similar geometries derived from the pentagon do instill a mutualized language, just as the extensive planting theme and the delicate palette of muted earth-hued bricks used throughout do.

Floor plans of the 350 housing units are extremely varied, from small flats to large family homes. Each typology focuses on a special relationship with something outside itself, that something being non-built and collective: a rooftop terrace, a courtyard, a garden, a streetscape, or the plaza. Daylight penetration and functionality, mandatory three-part phasing atop a single-phase underground parking level, quality and budget control, energy performance and material choice all impact the proposed design. But the concept remains resilient, striving to reach all these technical benchmarks imposed across the board as well as producing a profoundly empathetic ensemble capable of triggering a shared sense of place tailored to this specific site's specific needs.