BELMONT COURT 2002 - 2006

Heavy Refurbishment and rooftop extension of the Ministry of Employment building rue Belliard in Brussels.



Site
City block defined by the rue Belliard 49-51 / 55, rue Marie de Bourgogne, rue Montoyer and rue d'Arlon 1040 Brussels

Client
Axa Belgium sa

Structural engineer
Setesco

Services engineer
VK Engineering

Contractor
Herpain Entreprises sa

Budget
30 000 000 EUR htva

Artist
Jean Glibert

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From the onset, the ambition to develop the potential of the city block in its existing form and to defend sustainable solutions within the city center - drove the team to consider complete rehabilitation of the former ministry, instead of demolition + new-build. Indeed, the existing building was found sound ... so technical and spatial adaptations seemed sufficient in order to gracefully ease the complex into the 21st century.

Certainly this option avoided the production of an impressive quantity of non-recyclable waste matter, but the choice also generated a series of defying challenges: how to create inspiring workspaces in what seemed to be a very dull carcass? ... how to establish markers inside the existing labyrinth, allowing occupants to find their bearings? ... how to bring new character to presently uninspiring spaces?

The first step is to ban all cars from the central courtyard, transforming it into an urban garden, and recuperating as such the existing street-side porch in order to re-organize a transparent entry. This creates a new, permeable link between the noisy, car-ridden boulevard and the surprisingly tranquil and leafy inner court. Access to the various entities all thread through this garden decked with a shimmering metallic access floor.

Each entity is discreetly individualized: space is redefined through the use of light and color imagined with the artist J. Glibert. New window frames incorporating colored glass establish a filtered relationship between inside and out. The seemingly random apparition of color (in fact carefully positioned following the interior layout) brings a playful note to the rigid grid of the existing faÃ§ade ... what goes on inside becomes the clincher when seen from the outside, making redundant any added gesture or formal intervention on the faÃ§ades ...

The MET has clearly benefited from the open-mindedness of its client. The result is a sensitive collective response to a brief none-the-less conditioned by a speculative office market in Brussels where rentals are half those common in Paris or London.

Distinction
Winner of MIPIM Awards 2007