

execution of the building project as an independent party. As a result of the close ties between design and execution, many architectural practices have succeeded in creating an idiosyncratic oeuvre, sometimes with meagre resources. The concern for architectural craftsmanship is expressed, for example, in both the pared-down town houses by Marie-José Van Hee<sup>19</sup> and the adventurous mannerism of architecten de vylder vinck taillieu.<sup>20</sup>

#### Architecture and the building industry

This second part focuses on building materials and the building industry. Once again we take a look at a firm that has won international acclaim in recent years, is only indirectly concerned with architecture and, when it was started up, was able to rely on a broad institutional network. When it was established in 2005, Rotor described itself as a designer collective whose members shared an interest in flows of materials, design and architecture, industrial production processes and the building industry.<sup>21</sup> Out of a critical consciousness and a strong ecological awareness, Rotor shed light on the material underpinning of the architectural discipline. In this regard, the collective acted not only as a designer, but also created exhibitions and carried out research for governmental organisations and administrative bodies. In 2013, Rotor became a cooperative organisation and founded a spin-off company called Rotor Deconstruction (Rotor DC), which provides specialised advice to third parties and in addition operated as a demolition contractor and trader in second-hand building materials.<sup>22</sup> For Rotor, architectural craftsmanship took on a completely different meaning and was moreover conceived in a new professional configuration.

#### Architectural activism

In the early years, Rotor looked for a *modus operandi* in which second-hand materials and industrial leftovers were given a new life. Their first finger exercises were rather small-scale actions and were mainly commissioned by artists, smaller cultural bodies such as Zimleke, and nomadic art events such as *Kunstenfestivaldesarts*. At first sight, this type of client is different from the individual person. Yet these organisations, like the abovementioned clients, also carry out projects with vision and boldness, limited financial resources and little support from

policy-makers. Under these circumstances, Rotor operates in a network of local manufacturers. It experiments with building temporary, ephemeral structures and has been working on a database that catalogues the residual products of industrial processes. By pointing out to clients the possibilities of reuse and presenting them with highly unusual but pragmatic design solutions, they surreptitiously demonstrate how large-scale industrial production degrades extremely precious raw materials into waste products without consideration.<sup>23</sup>

#### Material metamorphoses

Rotor's method is invariably rooted in a broader cultural reflection on material culture. This is apparent from, among other things, the clever title of their entry for the Belgian pavilion at the 2010 Venice Architecture Biennale, designed at the request of the French Community and Wallonie-Bruxelles International. When discarded materials were transferred to a white exhibition space, they underwent a metamorphosis.<sup>24</sup> Their reuse in a museum setting aestheticized them and placed the distinction between wear (*usure*) and use (*usage*) into perspective. Under the lights of the museum room, all the attention was focused on the tactile qualities of the material shown: softness or hardness, lustre, a rich range of colours, fascinating patterns of scratches or dents. Wear is literally the physical trace of intensive use. In this way, erosion becomes the subject of aesthetic consideration. Wear is not necessarily unsightly, nor does it make the material unusable. Just as waste can become a raw material, wear can also be seen as a patina. The exhibition made it clear how much our appreciation or our value judgement is influenced by the context.

#### Hands-on research

In addition to participation in such cultural events as the *Biennale Architettura* or the Oslo Triennale, a major part of Rotor's research is focused on the facilitation and actual application of reuse. The collective has a clear, almost ideological mission, but its actual approach remains literally hands-on: practical, down-to-earth and extremely pragmatic. Rotor is very much aware of the political economics of the building industry. Judicial barriers, laws of economics, historical contingencies and simple practical obstacles determine



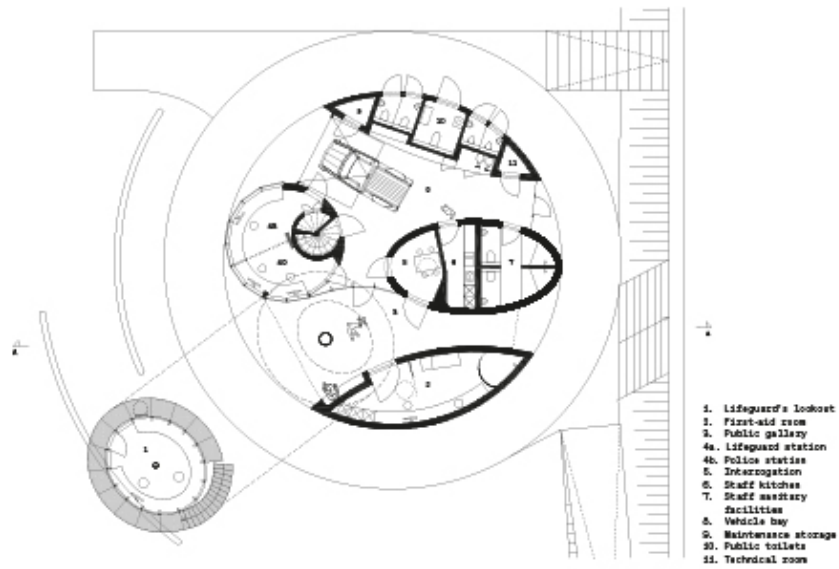


Standaard site

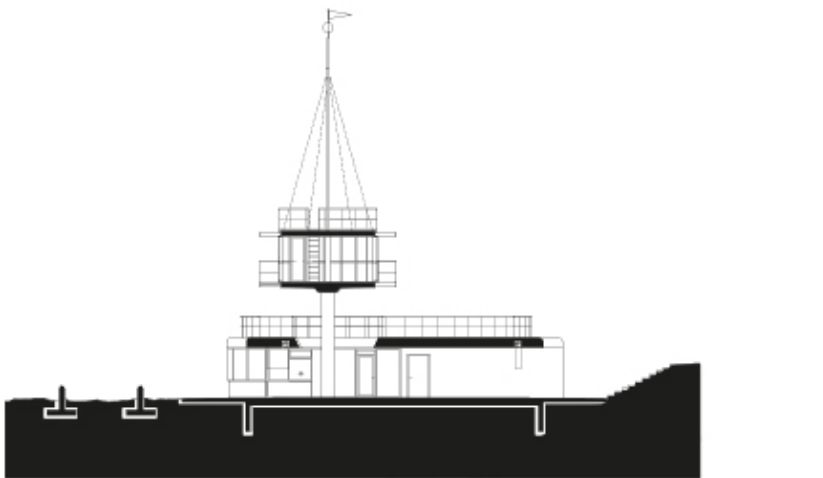


PROJECT

Ground floor and Level 1



Section Aa



and is therefore a topical issue within architectural discourse.<sup>5</sup> The intensive collaboration between architects and photographers is examined extensively,<sup>6</sup> and the once young architects of the 35m<sup>2</sup> series of exhibitions now play a leading role in the international publications that address such cross-fertilisation.<sup>7</sup> Apart from the specialist literature, social media and blogs are a seemingly inexhaustible source of reference material, but they also provide a platform for communication about the work itself. For architecture, as for other fields of activity, the importance of these individual channels has increased tremendously whilst institutionalised media has come under considerable pressure. This gives rise to a chaotic echo chamber for everykind of architecture, and this within a field where the number of voices to be heard has only increased over the last fifteen years. It is not only the context that architects work in that is subject to change, but also the context of the architectural discipline itself.

What follows is an overview of three different architectural practices, each on the basis of a recent project. It is no coincidence that each one is 'young' in the most conventional and arbitrary sense of the word. The architects are part of a generation for which communication through individual channels has become natural when setting up their own practices. However, viewing 'young' architecture solely in the light of such topical circumstances still does not take us very far. This means that Delbeke's question – what makes architects 'young'? – still stands as a framework within which we can focus on the actual architecture. The question of 'being young' is thus one of the meaning that is generated by the work, first and

<sup>5</sup> Lisa De Visscher, 'Editio' in *A+ / Architecture in Belgium*, 274, 2018, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Veronique Boone, 'Koppelwerking' in *A+ / Architecture in Belgium*, 274, 2018, pp. 40-43.

<sup>7</sup> The cross-fertilisation between the architects and photographers in these pairings: OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen and Bas Prinsen, and architecten de vylder vincetallieu and Filip Dujardin, is discussed at length in Jesse Vassallo, *Seamless: Digital Collage and Dirty Realism in Contemporary Architecture* (Zurich: Park Books, 2016).

foremost, and which gauges the designers' architectural position. A position that inevitably translates into a stance towards the media, both within and beyond the field of architecture.

## ABLE TO CREATE SOMETHING

Project file 40 4

From one of the pathways at the Fondatie van Boudelo, a superb nature reserve in Waasland, the walker can spy a dark-green, wooden watchtower through the trees and undergrowth. It stands amidst the shrubbery at an angle to the lane. A path entices the walker to stray from the route by several metres and to approach the entrance. Light seeps inside through the gaps between the planks of the walls and illuminates a staircase that winds up invitingly round the central column. The steps to the top already offer a number of views of the surrounding natural beauty. This is further facilitated by the pleasing horizontal orientation of the planks in certain parts of the walls. Yet the true reward is to be found at the top of the stairs: an impressive vista of fields, lakes, woods, birds and, if you are in luck, a herd of roe deer.

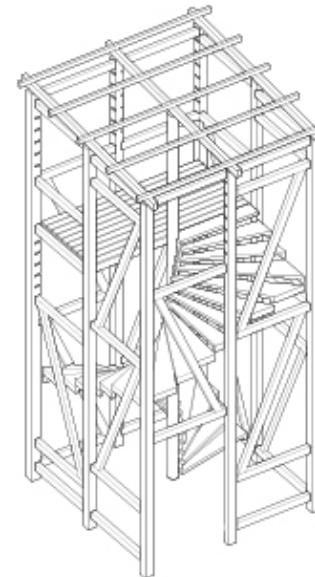
At first sight, the comprehensible construction of wooden beams, columns, wind-bracing and planks calls to mind a building in the local vernacular, a variant on the traditional agrarian architecture of the polder landscape. However, the precision of the construction reveals it to be far more resonant. The supporting structure and infill are not the successive layers of a building process, but are



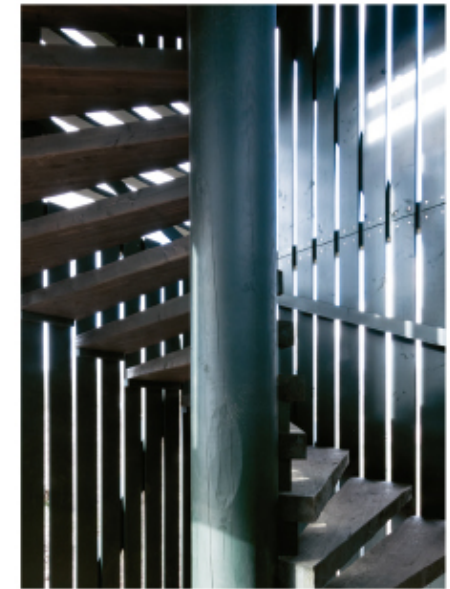
Baeten Hylebos architecten – Fondatie van Boudelo lookout tower, Sint-Niklaas

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Baeten Hylebos architecten – Fondatie van Boudelo lookout tower, Sint-Niklaas: axonometric projection



Baeten Hylebos architecten – Fondatie van Boudelo lookout tower, Sint-Niklaas

