City Campus

This project for the University of Antwerp began with an in-depth research into the relationship between the city and the student and the question of what the essence of such a cultural centre should be. The given brief of almost 10,000 m² / 107,639 ft² included the obvious studios for art, drama and dance, new media and computing. Furthermore, the brief also included a performance space, offices for student organizations and administration and a sport centre with a full-size swimming pool of 16x25m / 52x82ft.

The assigned site for the project lies in the University District, in the heart of Antwerp. This dense context presented itself as a collage of monumental buildings, after war dwellings and contemporary architecture.

THE BUILDINGS

Due to the urban concept and the different functions in the brief, the building program was split in three specific parts: the Cultural Center (A), the Student Office (B) and the Sport Centre (C).

The Cultural Center is the main building of the project and houses the spaces for cultural courses and events. The informal layout of the spaces on the ground floor exposes the centers events and also invites the general public into the cafe in front of the church and the restaurant over viewing the green courtyard. The previously unused and deteriorating church was incorporated into the Cultural Centre and now lends itself as a formal space for plays and concerts.

As well as for the outside as for the inside of the Cultural Centre, the design concept revolved around the theme of informality and how to introduce a green courtyard in the center.

The Student Office faces the universities administration building/aula on the other side of the street. Along its short side it emphasizes the urban life.

THE SWIMMING POOL

The Swimming pool is the Sport Centre, the second-largest structure of the project. The swimming pool, fitness center and sports halls for dance and yoga classes. Inside the Cultural Centre, the swimming pool does not play with associations of familiarity but aims to create a different world of its own.

The view of the orchard in front of the building and the unique placement of windows and roof lights creates the mysterious lighting inside the swimming pool, the concrete walls act as a strict barrier between the interior and the exterior. Students find themselves in a place of quiet away from demanding and noisy city life.

THE SPORT CENTRE

The Sport Centre was placed inside the green courtyard to encourage more impulsive and vigorous actions involving paint and colors. Unlike the Cultural Centre, the swimming pool, fitness center and sports halls for dance and yoga classes. Inside the Cultural Centre, the swimming pool does not play with associations of familiarity but aims to create a different world of its own.

The Student Office faces the universities administration building/aula on the other side of the street. Along its short side it emphasizes the urban life.

MATERIALITY

While the buildings shape and architectural elements suggest an oversized house, this association is also strengthened by the familiarity of the chosen facade materials and the idea that every block has been built by hand.

The combination of the concrete structure and the brick facade also support the feeling of being safe behind the thick walls.

INTERIOR

Entering the building, the students find themselves in an oblong structure of flowing spaces and actions. Along the central axis and overlooking the garden, there are some smaller interior rooms with the finishing (polished concrete floor and visible concrete construction) like the art studio in the attic.

On the other hand, there are also much larger spaces, with less sensitive finishing (polished concrete floor and visible concrete construction) like the art studio in the attic.

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