

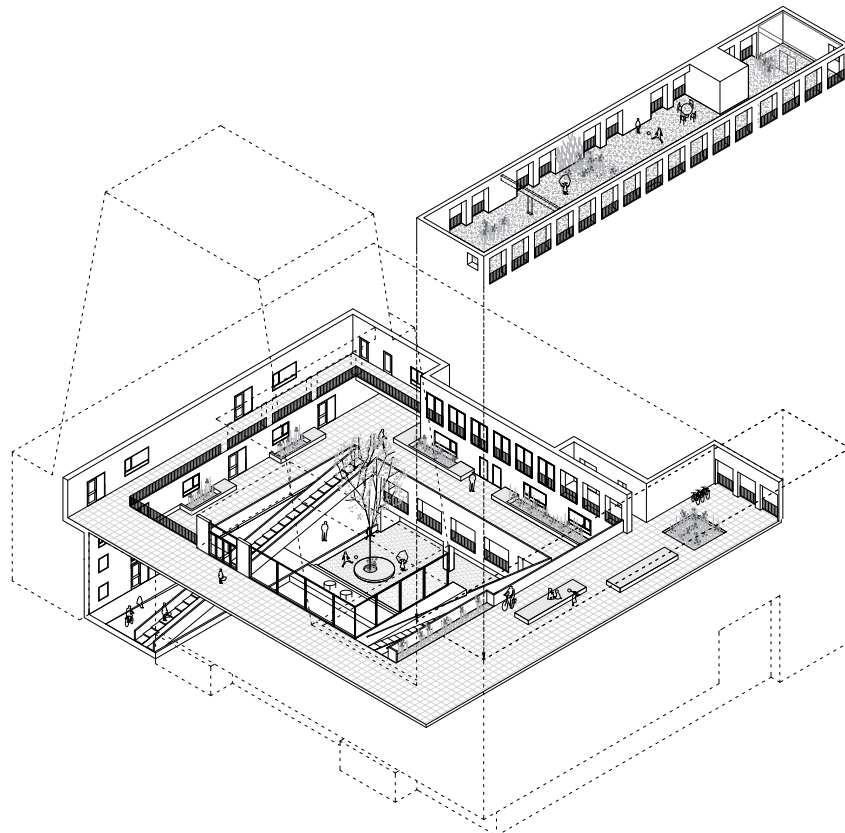
280

October/November 2019

Special Edition: Collective Housing



	5	Editorial	<i>Lisa De Visscher, Stefan Devoldere, Peggy Totté</i>
Opinion	6	Housing block: the helplessness to design the collective	<i>Erik Wieërs</i>
Projects	8	Collectief Noord , De Drukkerij, Antwerp	<i>Gitte Van den Bergh</i>
	14	Wim Depuydt , Cohousing dsDS, Ghent	<i>Joep Gosen</i>
	24	Havana , De Schilders, Sint-Amandsberg	<i>Guy Châtel</i>
	30	stekke + fraas , Brutopia, Forest	<i>Peggy Totté</i>
	36	MVC – anno , Hof Ter Beemt, Zingem	<i>Sara Vermeulen</i>
	40	Denc!-studio – BLAF , Waasland, Sint-Niklaas	<i>Gitte Van den Bergh</i>
	68	ectv , Jean, Sint-Amandsberg	<i>Jolien Naeyaert</i>
	72	URA , 't Wisselspoor, Leuven	<i>Lisa De Visscher</i>
	78	Trans – MSA – v+ , Dockside, Molenbeek	<i>Pieter T'Jonck</i>
	82	Epoc , Tivoli, Laeken	<i>Véronique Boone</i>
	86	Bovenbouw , Zilverlaan, Ostend	<i>Stefan Devoldere</i>
Photo essay	51	<i>Brecht Van Maele</i>	
Subjects	18	Collective housing as urban building stones	<i>Glenn Lyppens</i>
	46	Cohousing without community?	<i>Ruth Soenen</i>
	62	Cohousing: architects as programme and process directors?	<i>Pieter T'Jonck</i>
	92	Re-allotment dialogues	<i>Oswald Devisch, Barbara Roosen and Liesbeth Huybrechts</i>
	102	Cooperative and innovative dwellings in Zurich	<i>Peggy Totté</i>
Interview	96	EM2N	<i>Lisa De Visscher</i>



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Guy Châtel

is an architectural engineer and a senior lecturer in architecture in the Department of Architecture and Urbanism of Ghent University.

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grew up in a single detached family house in the suburbs. Since he became a researcher at Hasselt University he has been exploring how to make this Flemish dream more livable. Despite of countless experiments, he has not yet found the answer.

Stefan Devoldere

is dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Art at Hasselt University. As president of the 'Stadsatelier Oostende' (from 2016) and as former deputy and acting Flemish Government Architect (2011–2016) he stimulates the quality of the built environment in Flanders. A former editor-in-chief of A+ (2004–2010), he has curated several international architecture exhibitions.

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is an architectural engineer. He is a writer and photographer of architecture and landscapes. In 2016 he created a series of images on architecture in the Kempen for the Ar-Tur centre for architecture in Turnhout.

Liesbeth Huybrechts

is Associate Professor and works in the areas of participatory design and spatial transformation processes in the Arck research group at Hasselt University. She also co-founded the living lab 'The Other Market', a platform for participatory reflection and action on sustainable urban futures where work, living and nature work together.

Glenn Lypkens

is an urbanite, architect, writer and academic researcher. His PhD-study at the University of Antwerp focuses on the robustness of collective space within historical residential projects. He currently works for POLO Architects/Labs as research coordinator.

Jolien Naeyaert

is an architectural engineer and visual artist, based in Brussels. She graduated from the Ghent University (2012) and subsequently studied design at the KASK School of Arts Ghent. Since 2015 she has been working at Robbrecht en Daem architecten.

Barbara Roosen

is an architect doing research and teaching at Hasselt University. Her main research topic concerns collaborative urbanism and mapping in suburban contexts.

Ruth Soenen

obtained a master's in Educational Sciences and a PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology. She is a senior ethnographic researcher specialized in the study of everyday life. She is the owner of the research and consultancy office Simply Community, where, among other things, she translates anthropological insights into architectural practice.

Pieter T'Jonck

is an architect. He works on architecture, the visual arts and the performing arts for several Belgian and foreign newspapers and magazines, and has also written several books. He works for Klara Radio and is a former editor-in-chief of A+.

Peggy Totté

is an architect and urban designer who works on the theme of collective building and cohousing for Architectuurwijzer. She brought the exhibition 'At Home. Building and Living in Communities' from DAM Frankfurt to STAM Ghent (2018) and C-mine Genk (2017). Today she is the curator of the exhibition *Housing Apart Together* on collective housing in Flanders.

Gitte Van den Bergh

obtained a master's degree in Dutch-language cinematographic, theatrical and literary arts in 2011. In 2015 she obtained a master's degree in architecture and cinema as an architect at the University of Antwerp. She has worked at re-st since 2016. Until 2018 she was a member of the editorial board of A+.

Brecht Van Maele

started photography in 2006 and works for the leading newspapers *De Standaard* and *De Tijd*, among others. Though not an architecture photographer as such, he is surrounded by architects in his daily life.

Sara Vermeulen

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Erik Wieërs

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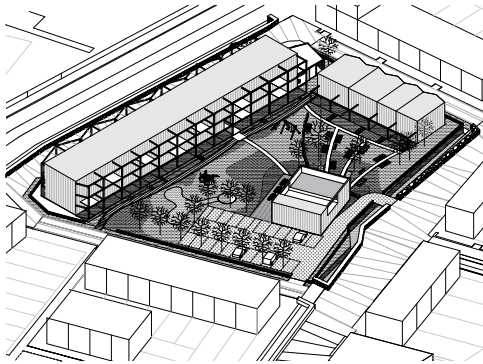
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Strategic collectivity

Gitte Van den Bergh

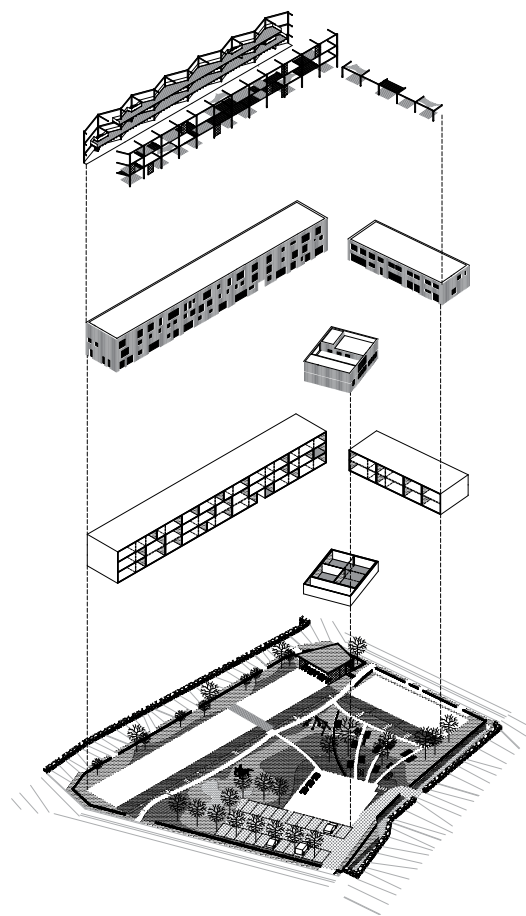
Looking for neighbours, resident Elke organized a first information session on Cohousing Waasland in 2011. Thanks to the support of Samenhuizen vzw, the initiative was able to grow and in 2016 five residents appointed Blaf Architecten and Denc!-studio after a competition. An intensive process of co-creation generated a concept in which a mix of types results in a compact project that sets out to protect the open space.



The search for a location ultimately led to a plot of land in the Clementwijk², an urban expansion area on the northern edge of Sint-Niklaas. The cohousing residents saw their desire for an affordable and ecological construction reflected in the vision set out in the master plan that postulates a green, sustainable residential area with about 700 housing units, a park and various collective facilities.

For the architects, the preservation of the open space in this new urban environment was central. Unlike demand for ground-level units, BLAF and Denc! proposed during the competition a compact volume with a flexible structure. They gradually elaborated the design over the course of an intensive process of co-creation. In addition to four classical ground-level homes, 18 units were ultimately realized in a stacked volume with duplexes and apartments on a limited footprint. The protected volume is rectangular, with neither staggering nor overhanging, the advantage being reduced material use, small energy requirements and a lower construction cost. In terms of stability and acoustics, the architects opted for a massive load-bearing structure made of concrete and sand-lime bricks with large spans. This structure made it possible to create a huge range of types, individually tailored to each resident.

In order to avoid cold bridges and complex details, a secondary construction in wood was placed on both the north and south sides to create terraces and a gallery. Residents were free to choose their own window size, the playful stratification of the wooden construction preserving a sense of unity within these variations. The sustainable cladding with thermally modified wood was extended to the four



ground-floor units and the collective pavilion. This lends the site as a whole a strong sense of identity and distinction.

On the garden side, the interior of the wooden structure consists of an alternation of terraces and voids, dimensioned as desired per unit. The structure of the private terraces allows for more seclusion, but retains interaction with the green outdoor space: 'When you talk about collectivity, the private sphere may become more important precisely', says Bart Vanden Driessche of BLAF. 'The terraces are not screened, but the structure is strong enough to allow residents to provide their own screen if they think it's necessary.'

On the north side, the circulation is defined by v-shaped elements in concrete that create meeting areas. A steel safety net contains window-like openings that give onto the open landscape and are also used for removals. All entrances are

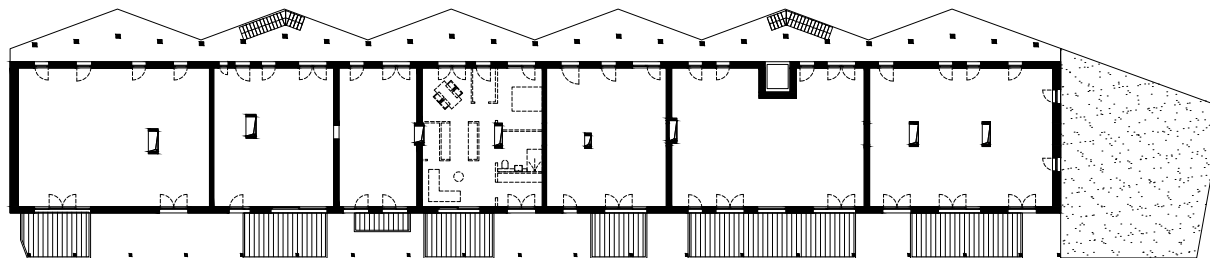
connected to the bicycle line and park promenade, and a path to the garden makes the site passable. Living streets and canals further demarcate the site, and traffic is rightly directed to a grouped car park on the edge.

The collective pavilion with kitchen, play area and roof terrace partly hides the car park from view, and so the three buildings together embrace the interior garden with gully, sunken seating area, play zones and picking garden. The pavilion and the garden make up the engine of the collectivity, but the architects have also organized strategic meeting places. Places used for everyday activities – the laundry area, bicycle shed, letterboxes, compost heap, storerooms – all feature a slight excess that encourages people to have a chat, without turning it into something compulsory.

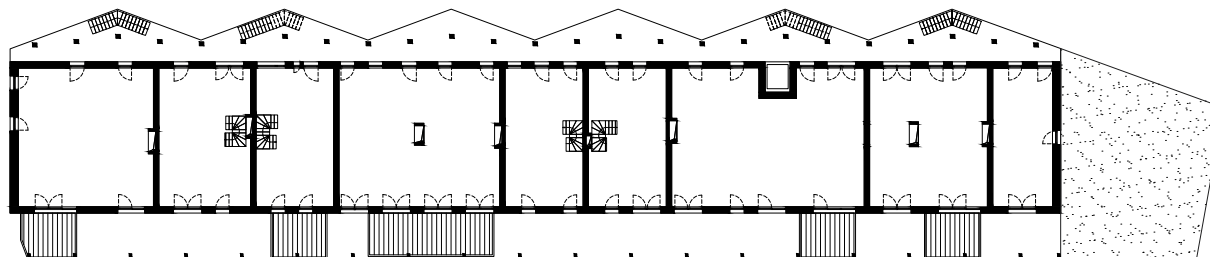


In addition to these collective spaces, the project includes a guest unit. Each unit can also make use of storage space on and in the pavilion, and technical facilities such as the elevator, rainwater pump and circulation pump are grouped together. As a result, the living space of the individual units is limited, ranging from 80 m² to 165m² gross. 'It could certainly be even more compact, but we have already used up the reserve', Vanden Driessche makes clear. 'Thanks to the mix of types, young and old can find something to their liking here and support each other, so that cohousing also implicitly entails the care concept.'

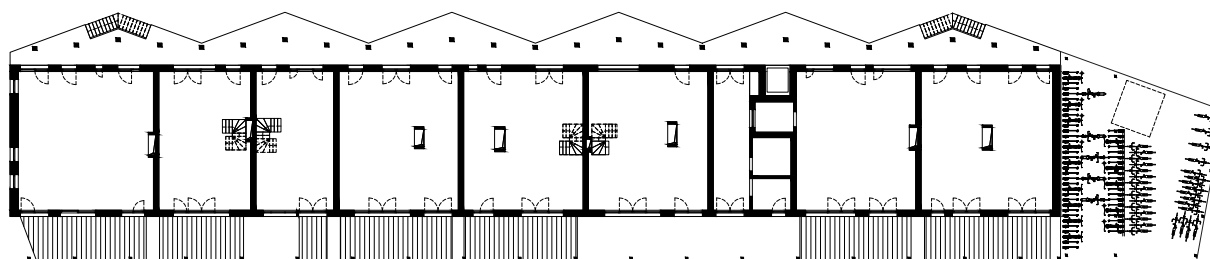
Cohousing Waasland is currently an 'association of co-owners'. The participatory process certainly stimulates the team spirit; from the start, residents set up workgroups around everyone's field of expertise, and these groups still exist today. During the construction phase too, residents were asked what they themselves could do. This work method gave the architect a novel position, in which his role mainly consisted in channelling and translating the various ideas into an unambiguous concept. ▲■●



Floor 2



Floor 1



Floor 0



Architect
Denc!-studio – BLAF
Website
denc-studio.be – blaf.be
Official project name
Cohousing Waasland
Location
Sint-Niklaas

Programme
Newly built cohousing project with 22 private housing units: four single-family houses, 18 apartments + collective spaces: one community house, one guest house, a technical room (with a heating network) and a bicycle storage

Procedure
Competition
Client
Cohousing Waasland VZW
Lead contractor
G-build – LAB15
Structural engineering
SEC
Building physics
Denc!-studio

Sustainability
Denc!-studio
Completion
2018
Total floor area
3,064 m²
Budget
€ 4,500,000 (excl. VAT and fees)