

NEW HERITAGE

Since 1988, the Heritage Days have been one of the most keenly anticipated cultural events, drawing in thousands of visitors from all walks of life, whether they are from Brussels, Wallonia, Flanders, or abroad.

For this 36th edition, Urban has carefully selected a theme that, despite its rich heritage, is still little-known to the general public, the period of 1970 to 2000.

These Heritage Days are an invitation to look at a near past that is still very present in our daily lives and the city that was built and transformed from the 1970s until the beginning of the 21st century. Half a century of upheavals following successive crises, the effects of which we are still suffering, but also half a century of a city showing its resilience and a specific materiality we have inherited today.

This «New Heritage» theme aligns with our awareness-raising policy and needs the need to inform and reflect on the past, so that we can better understand the future. It also integrates into the theme of «materiality» - the common thread running through Urban's various actions throughout 2024 - which aims to reflect on our relationship with materials, our environment and the nature of our connection with architecture.

We invite you to explore these new heritages, whether built, movable, intangible or living, through a wide range of guided tours and cultural events.

In addition to the sites and activities related to this theme, Urban also invites you to discover or rediscover many of our capital's iconic heritage sites.

Thanks to my teams, the owners and managers of these sites and grassroots associations, we are once again offering you a rich and varied programme this year. For that, I thank them wholeheartedly.

I wish you all a rewarding time of enriching discoveries!

Bety Waknine,
Director General Urban

After the Second World War, Brussels resolutely embarked on a policy of large-scale development, characterised by a functionalist vision of urban planning and supported by favourable legislation, the age of 'car is king', the boom in the tertiary sector with the reign of the International Style and curtain walls... all alongside preparations for Expo 58. This was a time of optimistic consumerism that bolstered the welfare state.

The construction of the North-South Junction (1910-1952), the Small Ring Road (1857), the 1960s regeneration projects to the detriment of local residents (such as the Manhattan Plan in the North District and the creation of the European Quarter) and the construction of the metro in the 1970s brought significant changes to the city. These upheavals, known as 'Brussellisation', have left a lasting mark on the city. Their impact sparked a wave of popular protests, peaking in the late 1960s with the «Battle of the Marolles». Several urban heritage protection associations emerged, advocating for a 'return to the city' and an integrative architecture. From then on, residents' opinions had to be taken into account.

The 1973 oil crisis marked the end of a period of continuous growth (the Trente Glorieuses) and the start of a deep economic crisis, a radical shift in society and a critical reassessment of the modern movement; the crisis initiated the first energy performance measures in construction. Architecture had to, and did, reinvent itself and innovate. In the 1970s, alternatives emerged for a more user-friendly approach, with a reduction in scale, a return to brick, ecological awareness and, above all, user participation.

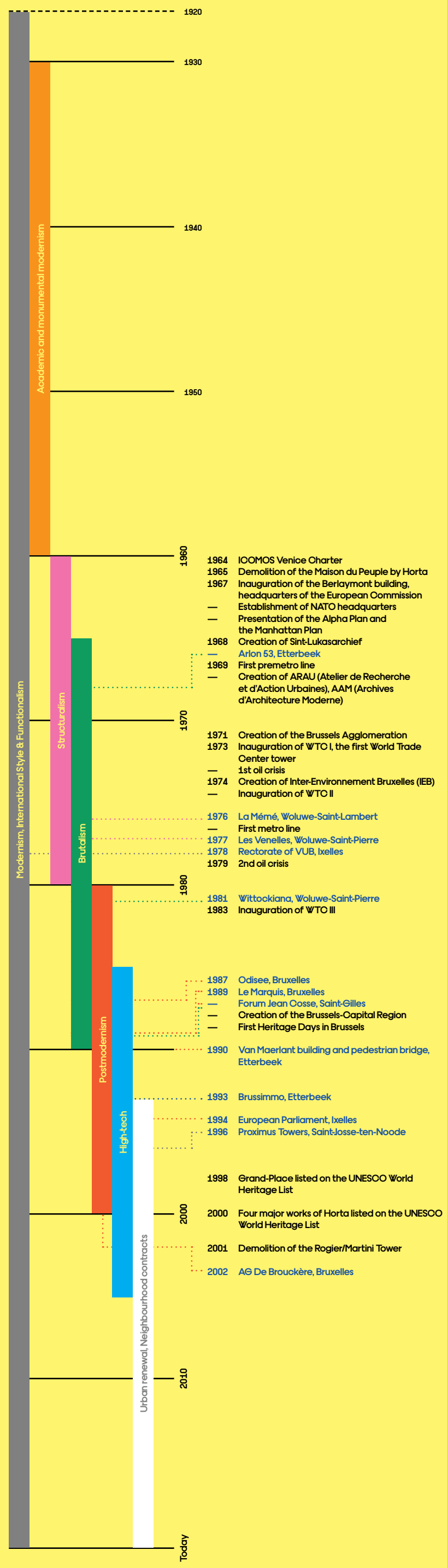
However, this was not the end of Brussels' «The Internationalisation of Brussels (home to the headquarters of the EU, NATO and countless multinational companies), federalisation and then regionalisation demanded ever more office space. The Belgian glass and cement industries offered new standardised products that would dominate the urban landscape: high-performance glazing (air-tightness, Stovpra), prefabricated concrete architectural elements in various forms (structural, exoskeletal, decorative). Many Brussels architectural firms specialised and competed in this field. Some gems emerged among the public facilities (social, cultural, health, school, security, sports...), residential and office buildings and private homes in the architectural expressions in vogue: functionalist (glass and aluminium), brutalist (concrete), vernacular (brick)... The post-modernism of the 1980s and 1990s moved away from concrete, restoring high-quality materials such as stone and marble; architectural vocabulary reinterpreted past codes and attempted to integrate into the surrounding urban fabric. High-tech and a certain new functionalism have dominated and endured since the 1990s, with some formal and constructive boldness.

The regionalisation of 1989 led to the development of new urban planning tools for better control over the quality of our built and landscaped urban environment; urban renewal through neighbourhood contracts; citizen participation through public surveys and concertation commissions; and a necessary and effective heritage policy, showcased by the Heritage Days, held since 1988.

Today, in the face of this significant recent architectural production that has shaped our built environment, Urban invites you to reflect on the place of this New Heritage in the regional identity, on its historical and heritage representation. The popular, public, participative and associative aspect of the Heritage Days contributes fully to the recognition of these young, sometimes little-known but rich and diverse heritages, witnesses of our recent collective heritage, the heritage of tomorrow.

Jean-Marc Bosyn,
Urban

STYLES AND MOVEMENTS IN BRUSSELS



Heritage Days

Journées du Patrimoine

Open Monumentendagen

14-15 Sept. 2024

