

SAINT BAVO'S ARCHITECTURE - PROJECT BY BRESSERS ARCHITECTS

When addressing the restoration projects, there were three main missions that required consideration. Namely: retaining the Cathedral as a church for the Bishop and the parish, maintaining the Cathedral as a cultural treasure for all visitors and finally retaining the Cathedral in dialogue. Starting from this latter mission, the church council's aim was to ensure that the Cathedral is open to all, on an equal basis.

The main starting point was the Cathedral as a liturgical centre. All existing and present art, and in particular, the world-famous Ghent Altarpiece, had continue to form an integral part of the Cathedral, for which it was originally intended. The Ghent Altarpiece has been exhibited in the Villa Chapel since the 1980s. After restoration, the altarpiece will be returned to its original sacred context. Although this will not be in its original Vijd Chapel (due to the limited space and the strict conditions for climate and light control), its new positioning will be close by, in the eastern-most crown chapel, namely the Sacrament Chapel. The original design of the retable, an altarpiece, the "table of the Eucharist", is the main starting point here. Taking into account its strict storage conditions, and air-conditioned display case.

As well as the religious significance of opening the Altarpiece, the revelation of its cultural richness was the second most important starting point of the mission. A new visitor centre will be developed in the crypt and choir area and will provide an area for visitors to learn all about the remarkable history of both the Ghent Altarpiece (including the current restoration campaign) and St. Bavo's Cathedral through modern audio-visual means (augmented reality). The final highlight of the visit is the opportunity to admire the original Ghent Altarpiece in the Sacrament Chapel.

The new visitor centre and access to the Sacramental Chapel required optimal access. Only the lower church was accessible and this needed to be extended to the whole Cathedral. The project made it possible for both the crypt, the choir and the apsidal chapels, including the Vijd and Sacrament chapel, to be made accessible by means of a new external circulation volume (elevator and stairs. The adjacent chapter house was also opened up and fully integrated into the visitor centre (to provide spaces for workshops, meetings, etc.).

Hospitality and dialogue, the third pillar of the cathedral's mission, can now unite both the liturgical and the cultural tourist, as seamlessly as possible.

STARTING POINTS OF THE ARCHITECTURAL INTERVENTIONS

The architectural interventions for St Bavo's Cathedral were based upon two important principles. Firstly, the principle of continuity was used. By consistently repeating an unambiguous architectural language, an attractive and readable route was designed.

In order to keep the architectural language itself legible, the principle of confrontation was also put forward. All new interventions aimed for a maximum integration into the existing architecture. They were conceived to be supportive and facilitate admiration (and astonishment) for the high-quality architecture of the cathedral. The confrontation between new and existing elements is always conceived from a "joint". The absence of material turns these seams into

fascinating connections that initiate the dialogue between mass and lightness; without being empty itself.

The consistent application of the materials also plays a major role in the confrontation. Brass forms the golden thread that embroiders the new interventions in the historical framework. It guides the visitor through the project. The oak furniture only plays second fiddle. Where brass clearly claims its presence, the wooden interventions rather subtly give shape to the necessary furniture.

Because brass and oak elements were already frequently visible in the cathedral, they again contributed to the creation of a continuous whole. Finally, concrete as the overall support, in which it never dominates but always supports. The soft, grey tone of the concrete, keeps the visitor's attention on the natural stone elements of the cathedral.

BRESSERS ARCHITECTS

Since the beginning of the last century, Bressers Architects have keenly embraced a patrimony of local heritage. With great expertise and specialisation in the broad framework of tradition, it is always striving for a future-oriented result in order to (re) integrate assets into a current context. Since 2000, the office has been headed by Philippe Depotter and Peter De Smet and is supported by a 30-person strong multidisciplinary team of architects, engineers, interior architects, historians and designers.

Bressers Heritage focuses on heritage and their own expertise and developments within the world of heritage management are central to this. They pride themselves on viewing historic buildings from a different perspective. With a fascination for the existing, buildings are thoroughly observed and analysed. To decide what is valuable and qualitative to develop, central vision is central. Together with their clients, they investigate what is important and adjust accordingly. "we always look for the best solution for the interpretation of the building. This is the only way to create a strong concept".

BLAD (Bressers Laboratory Architecture Design) focuses on innovation in architecture and design to create qualitative and sustainable contemporary projects. The investigative design process in close collaboration with the client and the architectural experiment form the basis of their designs.

Bressers Architects is also responsible for the restoration and refurbishment of Ghent's town hall. Other projects include the reconstruction and redevelopment of the Sint-Niklaaskerk in Westkapelle, the restoration of the Menin Gate in Ypres and the renovation and redevelopment of the post office in Lokeren.