

The Eilandje skyline permanently redrawn 1,000 new residents for the Cadix district

The first residents have moved into the new ‘Cadiz’ housing block on the Kattendijk dock. Designed by POLO Architects and META architecture office, this building, together with the adjacent neighbourhood square (yet to be realised), forms a new reference point in the redeveloped Cadix district in Antwerp.

Cadiz as landmark

The construction of the Museum aan de Stroom (MAS), the opening of the Red Star Line Museum, and the makeover of streets, squares, and quays brought an end to the decades of dilapidation in Antwerp’s Eilandje district. Thanks to the new government incentives, project developers also took an interest in investing in the old port area. The construction of residential high-rises on Kattendijkdok (Diener & Diener Architecten) and the Cadiz project on the other side illustrate that transformation. A new, trendy urban neighbourhood is born. More and more residents are finding their way to the Eilandje. Cadiz is a mixed-use project with more than 40,000 m² of houses, a healthcare centre, catering and shops on a spacious block in the Cadix neighbourhood.

Cadiz was constructed on the site of the former Customs Authorities building. Although the brutalist edifice designed by architect Etienne De Pessemier in the 1970s was not without qualities, it proved unsuitable to accommodate housing. It was especially hard to give each apartment sufficient natural light. Moreover, the building was situated in the middle of the block and was surrounded by parking spaces and scraps of greenery. The building lacked the required urban qualities to bring life to the new residential neighbourhood. This piece of cultural heritage was demolished.

A nuanced monolith

The task at hand was complex: to create a large number of residential units in a deep block, while ensuring that each individual home still had sufficient light and a view. At the same time, the project had to bring life to the new city district. POLO Architects and META architectuurbureau found a way to untangle this knot. The result is a remarkable block with a typology that is unprecedented in Belgium.

Niklaas Deboutte of META architectuurbureau: *‘It’s important that Cadiz enters into a good relationship with its surroundings, and on different scales. On the scale of the city, the building block is visible from afar; on the scale of the neighbourhood, it is in a direct relationship with the square and its surrounding streets.’*

Cadiz has two faces. From close by, at the street level, one can only see the plinth of the building facade with its stores. The dark plinth forms a contrast with the cantilevered claustra of the first and second floors. These white concrete façade elements screen the functions that lie behind from the street but, at the same time, provide transparency via the alternating recesses. They surround the block and unite it into a solid whole.

From the street, you can catch a glimpse of the communal inner garden. The entrances to the residential units are located here. This central zone, which is draped over the underground parking on the one hand, and the supermarket that runs from the façade plinth to the ground floors on the other, has a contoured landscape with birch trees and forest vegetation. A green ramp binds the communal inner area with the private gardens on the plinth, where the residents can enjoy views of the harbour and city in the distance.

From a distance, Cadiz offers a different and more monumental impression. Four towers are set further back from the building line, kneeling on the roof of the base with their feet in the garden of the inner courtyard, situated on a lower level. The typology of the existing warehouses on the Eilandje inspired the choice of materials used in the four living units, which were executed in brickwork and pre-cast concrete.

A city within the city

The plan integrates different types of residential units: apartments, luxurious duplexes, studios and social housing. All residential units are equipped with terraces or roof terraces. The apartments in the towers benefit from balconies on all four sides, which are staggered so they receive the optimal amount of sunlight. Outdoor staircases link the rooftop terraces with the underlying sun terraces.

Mauro Poponcini of POLO Architects: *‘The interweaving of the residential and other urban functions of the building creates a small city within a city.’*

POLO Architects

POLO Architects is a multidisciplinary team aspiring to carve out a distinct profile for themselves as conceptual designers for a wide range of programmes, with the appropriate sense of reality to seek out and find concrete solutions in due consideration of the specifications and wishes of the principal, the budget available and the constructional requirements put forward.

The design-focused practice has expertise in urbanism, architecture & interior design. POLO Architects' assignments are particularly wide-ranging in nature: urban studies, residential projects, offices, schools, care centres, cultural, commercial and industrial projects - including both new-build as well as renovation projects for private and community buildings alike.

In all cases, the tried and trusted methodology that is adopted for each of these dissimilar assignments is identical, regardless of scale. POLO's architecture steps forward as a consistent logic that links and integrates specifications, construction, design and surroundings. The design as the outcome of the critically considered answer in response to the specifications held out and determining the relationship to the surroundings, setting out from an in-depth analysis of the surroundings and the social context.

From an architectural perspective, the designs set out in search of qualities that will stand the test of time, on a quest to strike the right balance between shape and space, melted with contemporary conditions.

POLO Architects was founded in 1991 by Mauro PoPONCINI & Patrick Lootens. Today, the organisation consists of a team of 65 members operating from offices in Antwerp & Brussels.

www.polo-architects.be

META architectuurbureau

For META, the essence of architecture is building, nothing more and nothing less. Architecture is a craft, a métier. For every problem a solution is devised that, if necessary, deviates from the beaten track.

As a designer, you have to be ambitious. Designing with the intent to build for eternity is the starting point. Each building is designed to be perfectly adaptable in terms of function and interpretation. A sound building is a building that is designed for unpredictable events. The designs can then be temperamental, offer resistance and sometimes also break free, but they are always well-thought-out.

META has won several architectural prizes including the Belgian Architecture Award and the Belgian Building Award. In 2016, the Flemish Housing Association [VVH] awarded the Inspiring Social Housing Prize to the Gildenhuis in Beveren.

Recent projects include: the Falconrui residential development, the Boshhoek social housing in Boechout, the Gildenhuis in Beveren, the Montigny live-work units, the Datacenter for KU Leuven, and buildings O and M for the University of Antwerp.

META was founded in 1991, is led by partners Niklaas Deboutte and Eric Soors, and has approximately 15 collaborators.

www.meta.be

for additional information and high resolution images

POLO Architects - An De Dycker
add@polo-architects.be, +32 (0)486 56 24 91
Tavernierkaai 2 bus 28, B 2000 Antwerpen, +32 (0)3 225 18 84

META architectuurbureau - Siska Claessens
siska@meta.be, +32 (0)476 99 15 54
Grote Kraaiwijk 3, B 2000 Antwerpen, +32 (0)3 213 51 60