PRESS RELEASE

The Flanders Architecture Institute (VAi) presents the latest edition of the Flanders Architecture Review: *Building • Culture*

Building is always a cultural practice

The *Flanders Architectural Review*, the biennial showcase of architecture from Flanders and Brussels, is published this autumn under the title *Building • Culture*. Featuring more than sixty selected projects and eighteen textual and visual essays, this new edition offers not only an overview of recent architectural output, but above all a critical exploration of the underlying building culture. The VAi will present the book on 12 November at VTI Ostend.

Flanders Architectural Review No. 17. *Building • Culture*
Available from 12 November 2026 at vai.be or in good bookshops

Book launch & press preview
12.11.2026 at 20:00, VTI Ostend

Unlike most architectural surveys, which tend to focus on completed buildings as autonomous objects, *Building • Culture* consciously adopts a broader perspective. Architecture is the result of complex negotiations between designers, clients, public authorities, users, regulations, materials, infrastructure and societal challenges. The book explores how these diverse forces influence one another and how contemporary building culture emerges from these very tensions.

'Architecture does not exist in isolation', the editors state. 'Every project is the result of a complex interplay between designers, clients, public authorities, users, regulations and available resources.'

More than just an overview of buildings

The biennial *Flanders Architectural Review* documents the most relevant architectural projects from Flanders and Brussels. In this seventeenth edition, however, the editorial team explicitly asks what contemporary architecture means today. In their view, architecture

cannot be viewed in isolation from the historical, social, political and ecological context in which buildings are created and function.

The title – *Building • Culture* – refers to this reciprocity. After all, building is never merely a technical act, but always a cultural practice. Every building is embedded in a network of regulations, labour, the economy, climate, heritage, infrastructure and collective values. The built environment is therefore not composed of disparate objects, but is a multilayered web of narratives, systems and relationships.

As a result, the book deliberately focuses on processes, collaborations and contrasts. The central question is not which architecture is 'the best', but how architecture is created, used, discussed and appreciated today.

Building culture as a process of negotiation

A key recurring theme throughout the publication is the notion of friction. In the editors' view, architecture rarely arises from harmony, but rather from ongoing negotiations. Designers come up against regulations; sustainability ambitions clash with economic realities; and social expectations collide with spatial constraints. Buildings are the visible traces of often invisible processes.

The book's selection process also reflects this idea. The editorial team assessed 272 submissions and visited a hundred projects across Flanders and Brussels. Consensus proved to be the exception rather than the rule. Discussions on quality, social relevance, heritage, sustainability and use formed an essential part of the editorial process. These differences of opinion were not seen as a problem, but as a necessary condition for revealing the richness and diversity of contemporary architectural culture.

From Usquare Feder to social housing

In total, the book documents more than sixty projects. Eight of these are examined in detail as outstanding examples of productive collaboration between diverse stakeholders and interests. A further fifty–four projects are covered in essays, visual contributions and thematic reflections.

The book opens with Usquare Feder in Brussels, the transformation of a former barracks site into a university and urban campus by evr–architecten, BC architects & studies & materials, and Callebaut Architecten. According to the editorial board, the project brings together, in exemplary fashion, a range of contemporary challenges relating to reuse, public commissioning, urban development and architectural quality.

Other selected projects address themes such as affordable housing, educational infrastructure, healthcare architecture, circular construction, public space and participatory design processes. Featured projects include the Rustenhove social housing scheme in Ypres, the Psychiatric Centre for Children in Pelt, the Kadee Nursery and De Fierenshoven in Antwerp, the VTI in Ostend and Recypark Demets in Anderlecht.

Five productive frictions

The publication is structured around five thematic clusters, each of which highlights an area of tension within contemporary architectural culture: 'Policy • Matter', 'Prosperity •

PRESS RELEASE

Infrastructure', 'Indoors • Outdoors', 'Practice • Process' and 'Architecture • Arts'. Within these chapters, architectural projects engage in dialogue with essays and photographic contributions from authors, researchers, designers and artists.

The authors include **Paola Viganò, Kristiaan Borret, Stijn Oosterlynck, Juliane Greb, Heleen Verheyden, Dennis Pohl, Amber Vermaete** and **Hülya Ertas**. Their contributions explore contemporary issues such as the future of school infrastructure, social facilities, spatial justice, healthcare architecture, the role of architectural policy and the social significance of architecture exhibitions.

A book as a forum for debate

With *Flanders Architectural Review No. 17*, the VAi does not seek to pass definitive judgement on the state of architecture in Flanders and Brussels. The book's primary objective is to contribute to a broader debate on the future of our built environment. The selected projects do not offer ready–made answers, but show how architecture acquires meaning today within a complex reality of social, cultural and ecological challenges.

As the editorial board states, this issue ultimately aims to be a catalyst: an invitation to draw connections, delve deeper into differences of opinion and explore new forms of building culture.

PRESS RELEASE

Quotes

1. *'When we approach social infrastructure as the foundation of community life, the aim shifts from stimulating civic participation to creating and designing environments in which that participation can arise spontaneously.'*

   – Stijn Oosterlynck, Professor of Urban Sociology at the University of Antwerp

2. *'The existing fabric witnesses the spatial research from the past: the existing is not only a gigantic material storage, but also a superb deposit of spatial concepts that can prove to be contemporary still.'*

   – Paola Viganò, founder of Studio Paola Viganò

3. *'Nothing is more sustainable than what already exists.'*

   – Kristiaan Borret, former Government Architect (BMA) for the City of Brussels

4. *'In times of housing shortages, climate pressure and spatial fragmentation, the government architect's role is not a luxury, but a dire necessity.'*

   – Maarten Van Acker, Professor of Urban Design at the University of Antwerp

5. *'The architect is no longer merely "the one who knows", but rather the one who guides, uncovers and connects.'*

   – Aya Akbib, architect and urban planner at 51N4E

PRESS RELEASE

Projects in the spotlight

1. Usquare Feder, Brussels
evr–architecten, BC architects & studies & materials, Callebaut Architecten

After years of standing empty, the former gendarmerie barracks in Elsene have a new future. With Usquare Feder, seven historic buildings have been repurposed into an international university campus and a multifunctional urban neighbourhood where education, research and city life converge. Sustainability and circularity run throughout the project. In addition to reusing existing materials, bio–based building materials such as lime–hemp, clay finishes and shell–based insulation were deliberately chosen. This ecological approach respects the site's historic character and supports forward–looking development.

2. VTI Workshops, Ostend
NWLND Rogiers Vandeputte & Kris Broidioi

The new workshop building at VTI Ostend replaces an outdated wing within a campus that had grown organically over time. The project opens up the previously enclosed school site to the city, with a transparent entrance and visible workshops that strengthen the relationship with the neighbourhood. A clear layout, featuring a concrete load–bearing structure and a separate steel structure for circulation and services, makes the building exceptionally legible and flexible. This structural honesty serves an educational purpose: pupils can see at a glance how the building is constructed. In this way, the workshop becomes not only an extension of the school, but also a learning tool that makes circularity, adaptability and craftsmanship tangible.

3. Recypark Demets, Anderlecht
51N4E

Recypark Demets in Anderlecht demonstrates how a recycling centre can be more than just a logistical facility. The project, designed by 51N4E, Witteveen+Bos, Détang Engineering and Rotor, combines waste processing with public space, thereby bringing urban facilities closer to residents. A container park, a skate park and a green space are interconnected beneath a large wooden canopy. The architecture gives waste recycling a social and urban significance, whilst reuse takes centre stage. The canopy is constructed from reclaimed wooden beams from a former riding school. As such, Recypark Demets serves as a pioneering project for circular construction and future recycling parks in Brussels.

4. Psychiatric Centre for Children, Pelt
De Gouden Liniaal Architecten

The Psychiatric Centre for Children (KPC) combines the functional requirements of healthcare with a warm, homely atmosphere. Three low–rise buildings form a gentle transition between the nearby hospital and the residential neighbourhood. Inside, a variety of spaces, plenty of natural light and a strong connection to the garden create a safe and

secure environment for children and young people. The layout of the building combines openness with discreet support and supervision. Thanks to its unassuming architecture and approachable character, the centre is not perceived as an institution, but as a welcoming place where wellbeing, care and everyday life come together.

5. Rustenhove Social Housing, Ypres
platform architectuur

Rustenhove in Ypres demonstrates how a housing project for older people can contribute to the densification of the urban fabric. Four buildings comprising twelve homes surround a green courtyard garden that encourages social interaction without imposing it. Galleries, walkways and carefully designed transitional zones strike a balance between community and privacy. The architecture combines functional clarity with a warm, informal character, evident in the rhythm of the façades, wide window sills and personalisation. Thanks to the abundance of natural light and the strong connection to the outdoor space, each home offers comfort, autonomy and tranquillity within a socially supportive living environment.

PRESS RELEASE

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