

DAMN^o 60

A MAGAZINE ON CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2017



Dieter Rams
Didier Faustino
Gregor Hildebrandt
UMWELT
Bas Smets
Thomas Thwaites
Eames Demetrios
Alain Biltreyst
Barbara Jakobson
Mary Reid Kelley
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Special:
NEW SURFACES



#60

14 / FRAMED LANDSCAPES

16 / Postcard from Chile

UMWELT challenges the idealised view

text VEERLE DEVOS

UMWELT saw off competition from 140 other young practices to win the Début Award at the Lisbon Architecture Triennale for architects under 35. The body of work that the promising Chilean duo has already completed combines built projects with highly relevant research work, whereby connections can be found with their critical look at the landscape and territory along with the powerful bond between the pair's conceptual thinking and the realisation of their projects.

Edificio Integra, 2014, Osorno, Chile / Photo © Felipe Fontecilla



News From Somewhere / 22

My life in the woods with Werkraum Bregenzerwald

text THOMAS GEISLER

Designer, curator, and author Thomas Geisler has recently moved to the remote area of Bregenzerwald, where he is the managing director of Werkraum Bregenzerwald, an initiative of regional handicraft enterprises situated in a corner of Austria. As an urbanite moving to the countryside, he had some initial qualms, though these clearly vanished once he settled in. Not only is the natural environment stunning but the charms of the dedicated craftspeople and the local attitude to life are seemingly contagious.

Chapel by Cukrowicz Nachbaur Architekten Alpe Niedere, Andelsbuch, 2008

Photo © Ian Ehm / friendship.is

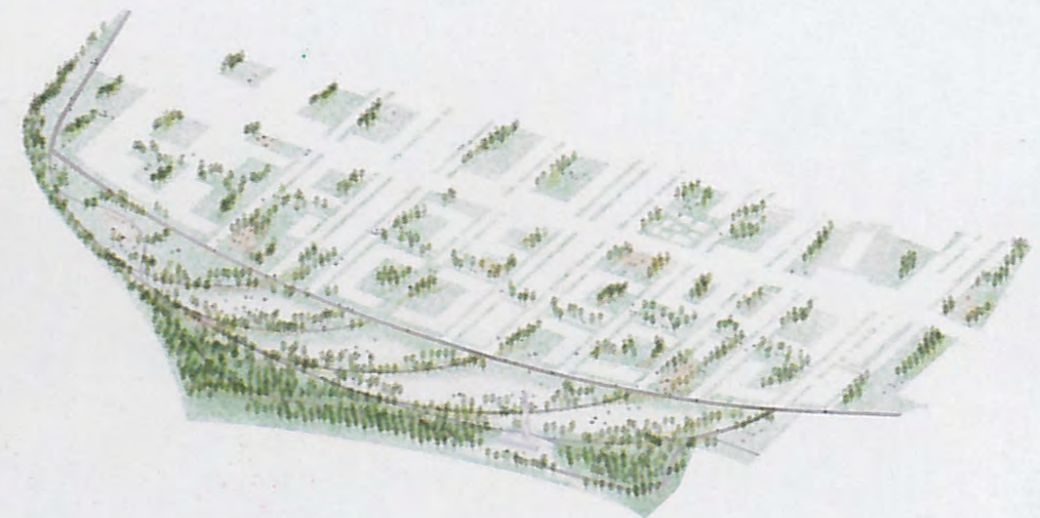
28 / Inventing a new Landscape

Bas Smets intervenes in the terrain

text SAM STEVERLYNCK

In the projects undertaken by Bureau Bas Smets, landscapes become more performative. These performing landscapes aim to create a more sustainable environment through the organisation of nature within a given context, while creating exciting atmospheres for visitors and inhabitants alike. Artistic and scientific research is a crucial part of this endeavour to invent, meaning that every project undergoes a detailed study prior to any intervention. DAMN° interviewed the landscape architect to get an idea of the integrity involved in such achievements.

NIEUW ZUID, 2013–18, Antwerp, Belgium / Client: Triple Living



Crossing a Mountain / 36

Thomas Thwaites: My life as a Goat

text NADINE BOTHA

First he blew us away with The Toaster Project, taking nine months and spending \$1792 to make a domestic appliance from scratch. From mining the materials to wiring the element, it was a poignant reflection on our consumer society. Having landed a BBC TV deal on the basis of this, Thomas Thwaites's Royal College of Arts interaction-design graduation project was a tough act to follow. But now the Toaster-guy has gone in search of greener pastures. His hilarious and fascinating adventure, culminating in an alpine stint, has been chronicled in a new and delightful book. Thwaites tells DAMN° what this recent experiment means for design.

GoatMan project

42 / Art Amidst Nature

Museum Voorlinden's gentle landing

text JURRIAN BENSCHOP

The inviting landscape of Voorlinden Park in the Netherlands has embraced a new museum housing a large private art collection. At once respectful of its luxurious setting and matters of presentation, the building engages in direct dialogue with the natural environment, balancing this with the display of works that relate to the surrounds as well as the architecture. Museum Voorlinden also includes a variety of spaces and a temporary exhibition programme that sets it apart from others of its ilk.

Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, Netherlands / Photo: Antoine van Kaam



INVENTING A NEW LANDSCAPE

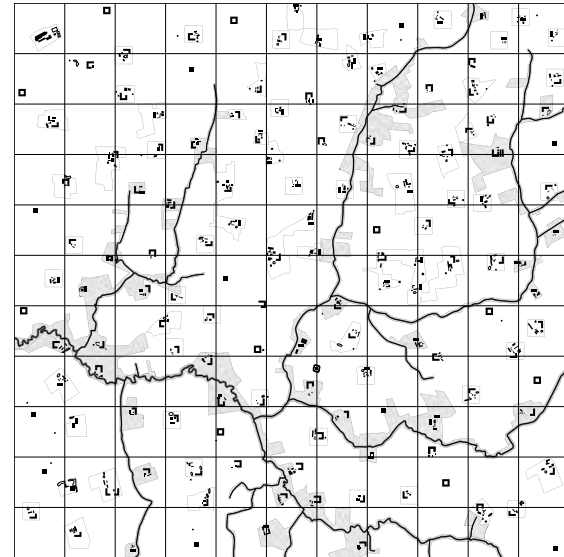
Bas Smets intervenes in the terrain

Bas Smets is adept in analysing the big picture – he has a background in landscape architecture, civil engineering, and architecture, and often teams up with architects, artists, and scientists. Since establishing his office in Brussels 10 years ago, the group of 15 architects and landscape architects has constructed projects in more than 10 countries. These projects vary in scale from territorial visions to infrastructural landscapes, from city centres to film sets. Each of these is considered part of an all-encompassing research into the contemporary role of the landscape. With a particularly interesting array of projects in several countries currently on his plate, DAMN° decided to have a chat.

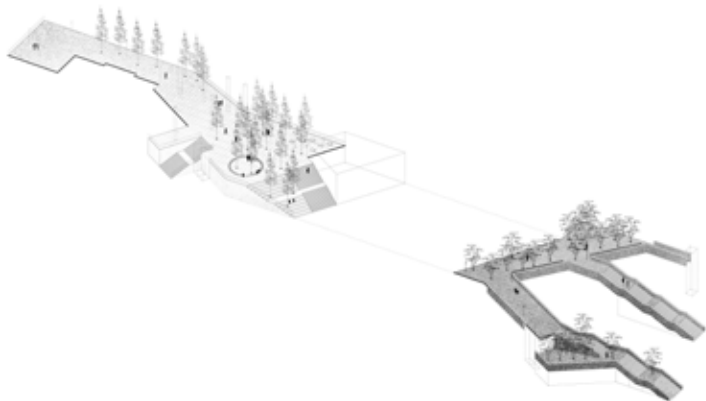
TEXT Sam Steverlynck



NIEUW ZUID, 2013–18
Antwerp, Belgium
Client: Triple Living nv



STRATEGY FOR A LOST LANDSCAPE, 2009
Watou, Belgium
Client: Watou 2009
Architects: Office KGDVS



TRINITY, 2011-18
Paris, France
Client: Unibail
Architects: Crochon
Brullmann + Associés
Image: Crochon
Brullmann + Associés

Landscape architect Bas Smets has not gone unnoticed the last couple of years. His office was involved in various prestigious projects in his native Belgium and abroad, from rooftop gardens in Hong Kong to a park for the National Museum in Estonia, from private gardens in the Caribbean to the Parc des Ateliers at the LUMA Foundation in Arles, the latter in close collaboration with Frank Gehry.

DAMN°: Your headquarters is in Brussels, a chaotic capital city in a country that is not exactly known for its urban planning. Belgian architect Renaat Braem even called it the ugliest country in the world. Is that an inspiring context for you?

Bas Smets: When I set-up the office in 2007, I had just moved back to Brussels after having lived in Paris for eight years. On returning, I was fascinated and at the same time appalled by the Belgian landscape's lack of identity. There's a huge urban sprawl here, caused by the fact that there is no resistance from nature itself, as there are no mountains or large rivers. Belgium is characterised by a flat landscape that seems endless. It has therefore proven very interesting to find new ways of creating a landscape in these conditions. One of my first commissions was a study for a potential project dealing with the leftover parcels of land in Flanders. Along with my team, we started mapping the many plots, with the assumption that by studying the existing landscape we would know what to do with the residual spaces. But we soon realised that the surrounding landscape was not strong enough to define the many residual spaces. We then turned the question around and proposed making a new landscape, starting with those residual spaces, imagining a new identity for the Flemish landscape. I renamed the study 'Strategies for a land without a landscape'. That study turned out to be the key to all 293 projects we've done in the last 10 years.

DAMN°: How would you define 'land' as opposed to 'landscape'?

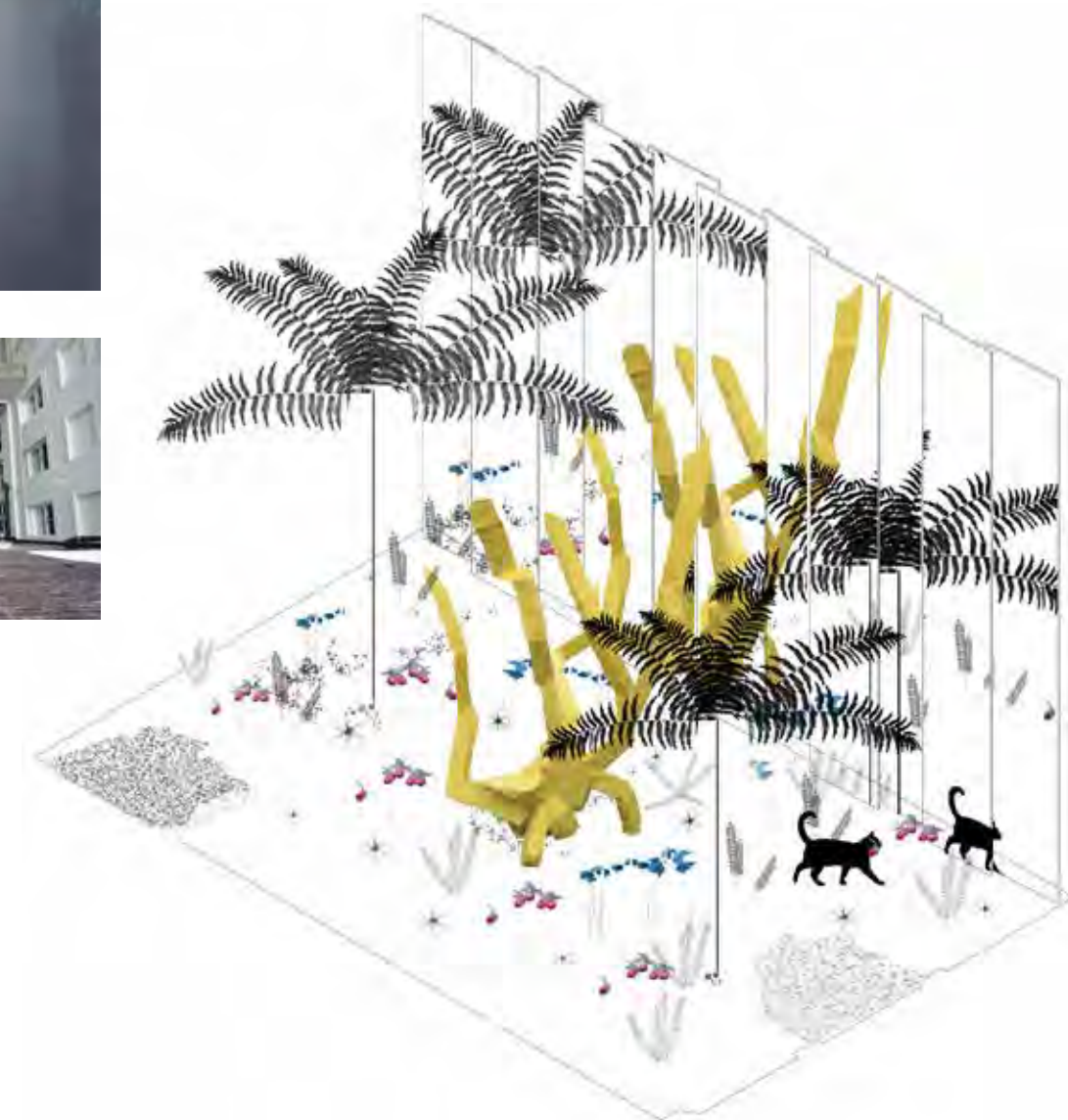
BS: The land is the given, the existing situation. The landscape is the perception of it. Not only visual, but also sensorial. Or, as Oscar Wilde put it: "It took a painter like Turner to show us the mist above the Thames." A landscape tries to reveal something that is visible but unseen. In that way, I interpret every project as the invention of a new landscape. It is not only about protecting nature, but also about organising nature to create coherence within a territory.

DAMN°: So, in a way, you combine separate elements by means of vegetation?

BS: The overall structure derives from the many layers that define the territory: topography, hydrography, ... Vegetation would be the result of that. Trees grow when there is sufficient irrigation. You have to reveal the logic of nature and understand how things work. We try to approach an existing situation without an a priori. By studying maps, we attempt to learn the logic of the land and then we go on site to verify our ideas and fine-tune them. We look at the location both from a distance and from nearby. We aim to reveal the most compelling landscape hidden within the existing situation.



SUNKEN GARDEN, 2009-11
London, UK
Private client

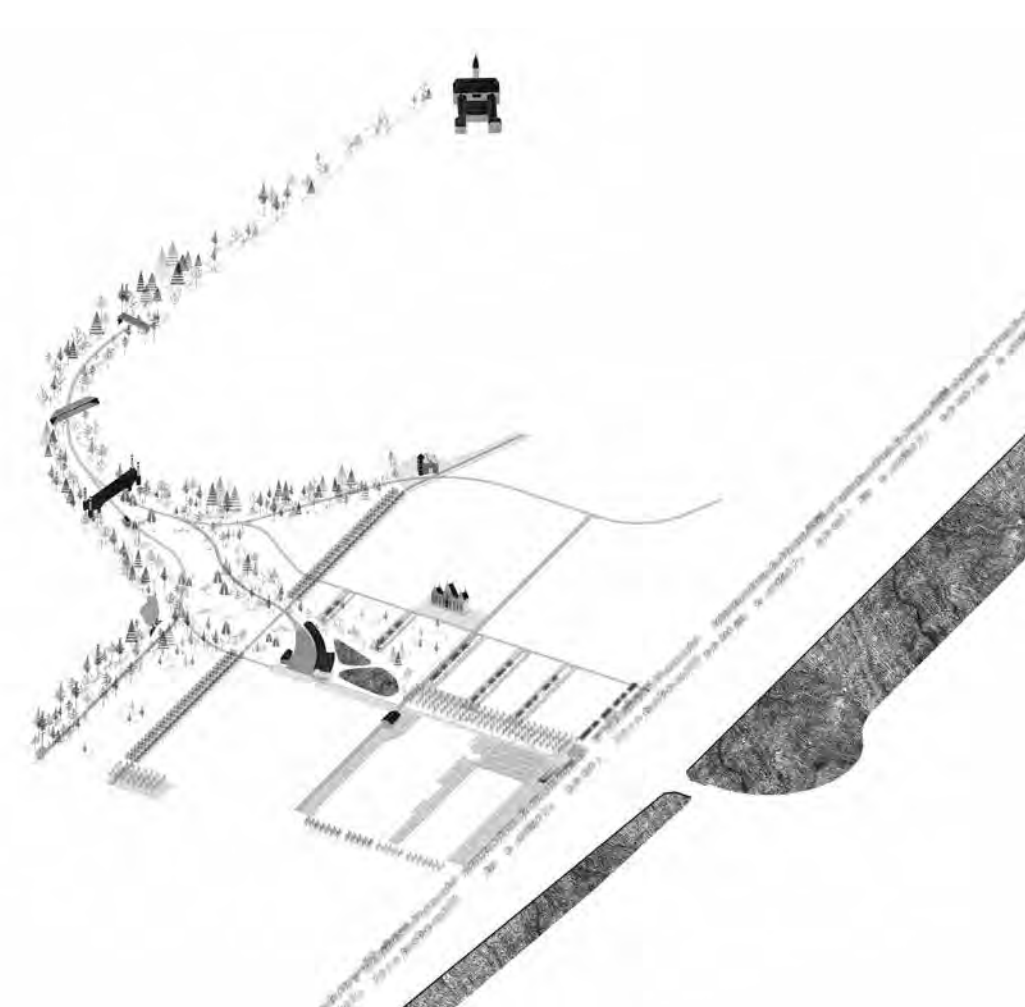




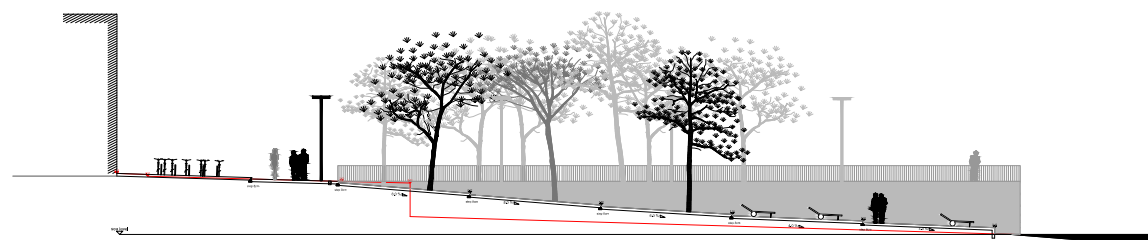
A11 MOTORWAY, 2011-17
West Flanders, Belgium
Client: Via Brugge on behalf of Via-Invest
Architects: Zwarts & Jansma
< Image: LUXIGON



TOUR & TAXIS PARK, 2012-on-going
Brussels, Belgium
Client: Extensa



HIMARA WATERFRONT, 2014-16
Himara, Albania
Client: City of Himara
Architects: SON-group



DAMN°: Your method has also been compared to acupuncture: you use minimal interventions for a maximal result.

BS: There is not a lot of money in landscape design, as we mostly work in the public sector. You have to be smart. The more you study, the more you know where to intervene and what to add. In architecture, you can easily say: this is the building; the rest is context. When we do a project, it's hard to say which tree we have planted and which one was already there. What we do is inclusive, while architecture is often exclusive. We have to understand the existing situation as much as possible and then activate it through an acupunctural intervention.

DAMN°: Some of your interventions are very humble. Many passers-by would not even notice them.
BS: Landscape is humble by nature. It is also evolving. What we plant now will outgrow ourselves. There is an innate humbleness, as you always build for the next generation. If you go to Central Park, you see a full-grown park that Frederick Law Olmsted, its landscape architect, has never seen himself.

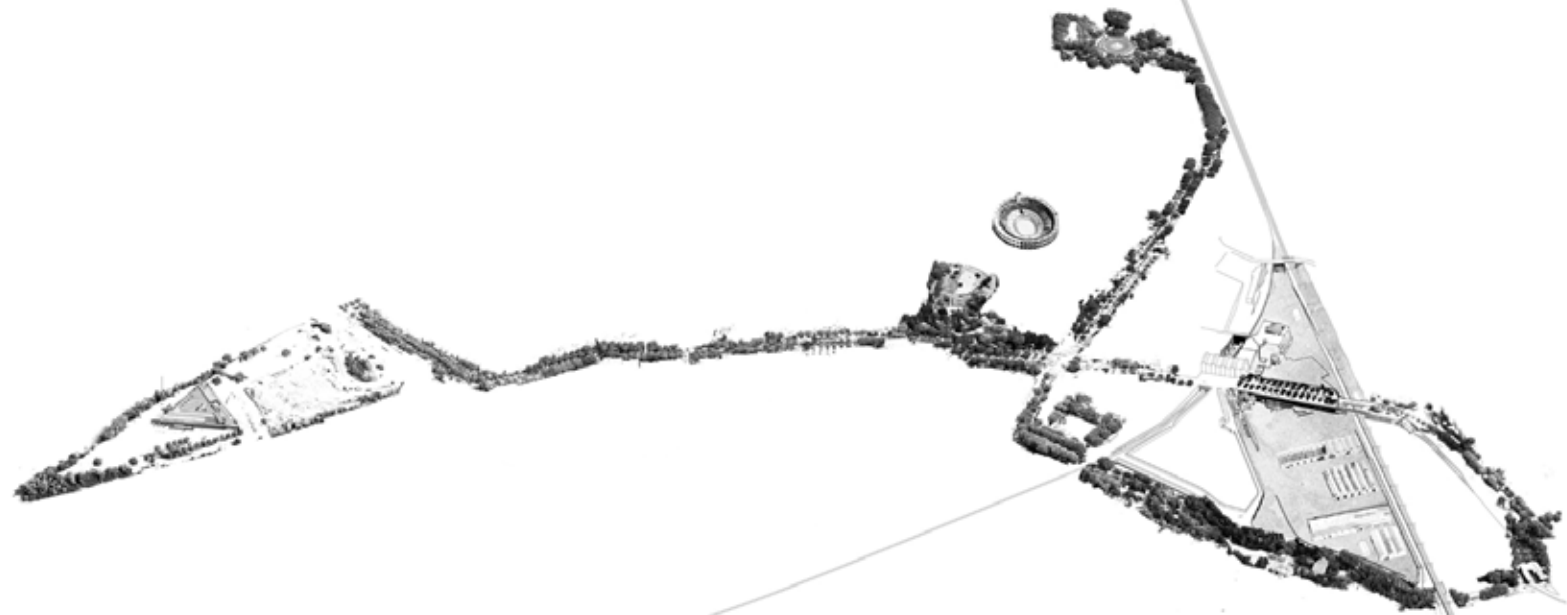
DAMN°: Can you tell us something more about your on-going projects in Brussels?

BS: We will start next year with the Parvis in Saint-Gilles. The municipality closed the Parvis to traffic a couple of years ago to create more space for terraces. This functioned very well, so they launched a competition to turn it into a real city square, replacing the actual design of parking spaces that are no longer in use. We worked on this with the municipality and with the inhabitants, and the new square will be constructed next year. We also won the competition for dealing with the zone between the Jardin Botanique and the North Station. We are calling this series of spaces the St-Lazarus Squares. It is once again based on the reading of the existing territory marked by the creation of the North-South axis. We want to turn these leftover areas into a green valley along the railway tracks that run parallel to the former Zenne River. There will be limited traffic, with many new trees creating a microclimate while blocking the downdraught caused by the high-rise building. Another project we are working on is a park at Tour & Taxis. The developers were obliged to start with the construction of a 1.5-hectare park before further developing the site. We convinced them to create the first phase of a much larger park that will evolve over time into the centrepiece of the development. It will happen in different steps. The final result will be ready in 10 or 20 years.



SAINT GILLES PARVIS, 2013-on-going
Brussels, Belgium
Client: Municipality of Saint-Gilles





PARC DES ATELIERS, 2009-18
 Arles, France
 Client: Fondation LUMA
 Architects: Frank Gehry, Annabelle Selldorf



DAMN°: You are also preparing a project with Frank Gehry for LUMA Arles in France. What is the concept?

BS: It's a fantastic concept! This private foundation wants to create a centre for the production of art. They bought some terrain in a former 10-hectare rail yard. The site is carved out of bedrock – it's completely artificial and there is no vegetation at all. We want to keep that artificial touch but at the same time let nature invade. We asked ourselves: What kind of landscape would exist in 300 years if we didn't touch the site? That's the landscape we have conceived, and it is now under construction.

DAMN°: What other projects are you working on right now?

BS: We have a very nice project in Los Angeles, in the grounds of the Château Marmont Hotel, and have just finished a waterfront in Albania and the National Museum in Estonia. We are also working on the courtyard of a hotel in London and have other projects in Lebanon and Bahrain. And of course we are doing things in various parts of Belgium: Nieuw Zuid in Antwerp, Tweewaters in Leuven, and Zuidboulevard in Waregem, to name a few. At the moment, we have construction sites in 10 countries. We like to check our approach in different places in the world – it allows us to fine-tune our methodology! •

bassmets.be

