

CELEBRATING PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE

Buildings from the Open Call
in Flanders 2000–21

FLORIAN HEILMEYER (ED.)

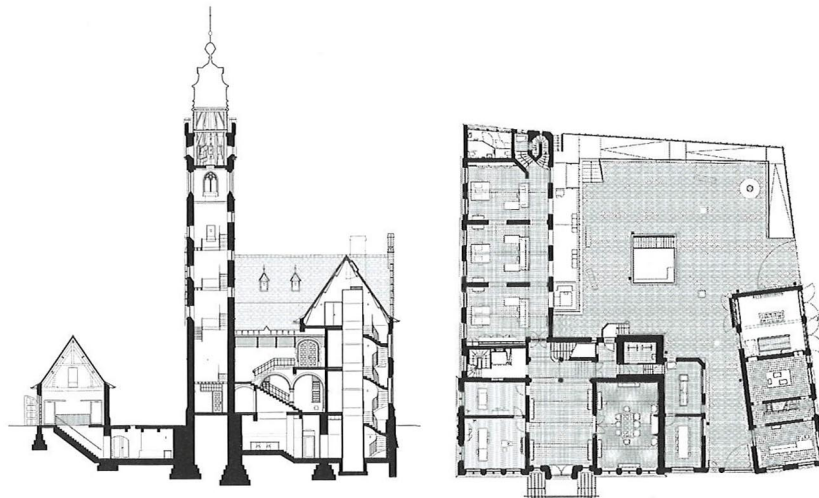


JUST REVERSE THE BUILDING: Restoration, renovation, and reorganization of the historic town hall and courtyard in Diksmuide

Architects: ono architectuur and Callebaut Architecten (restoration); Commissioner: Stadsbestuur Diksmuide. Open Call 1816; Address Grote Markt 6, 8600 Diksmuide; Date 2009–16; Budget 5.8 mil. Euro; Size 2,800 sqm; Award Prijs Wivina Demeester 2016

The eclectic town hall of Diksmuide, a city of about 16,000 inhabitants near the Flemish coast, dates from 1925 and is listed as a monument. With its elaborate front and the slender bell tower looming high above the historic marketplace, the city sees the building as one of its main “business cards.” However, this business card was in dire need of modernization. The rooms were not fit for many functions and the building lacked energy-efficiency as well as clear routing and wheelchair accessibility.

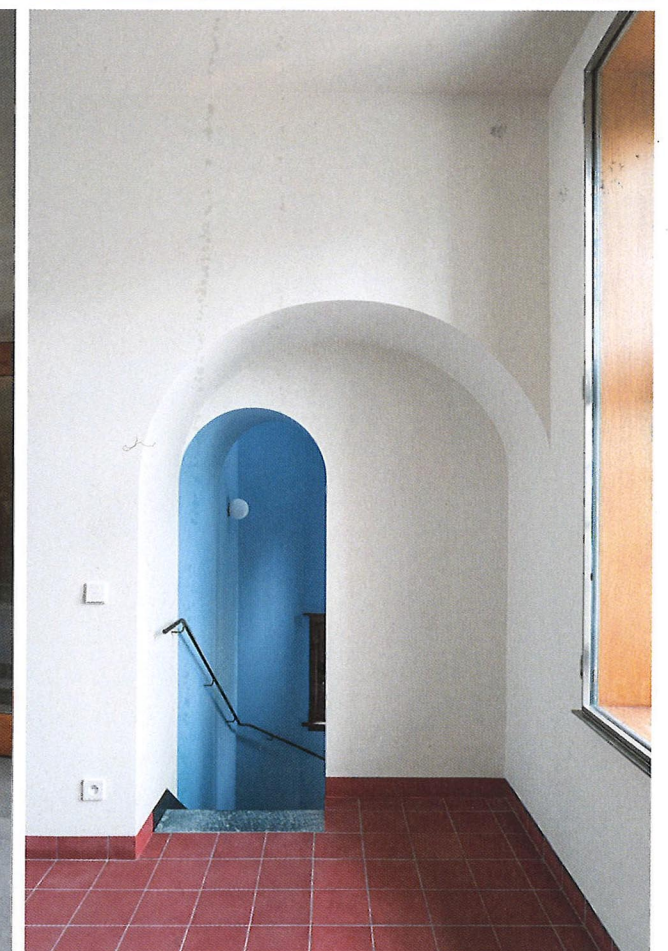
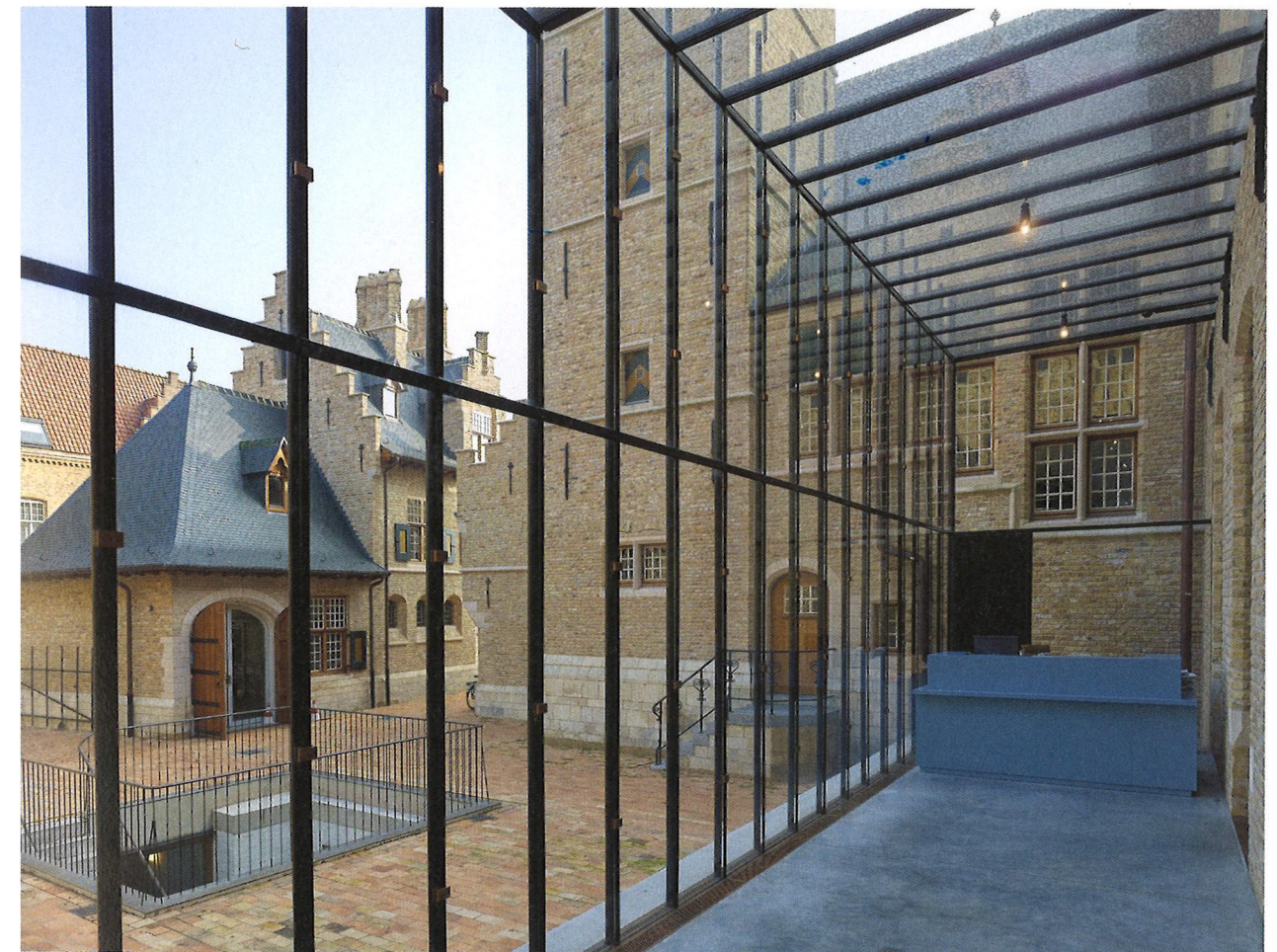
The proposal of ono architectuur solved this by entirely reversing the building’s organization. The main entrance is no longer through the meticulously restored front façade, but via the beautiful, quiet courtyard at the back. In the historic façade, five former window openings have been enlarged to become an open arcade that opens the building towards the courtyard. An extremely light construction of thin metal profiles and glass creates a new entry zone, welcoming, warm and transparent. A long, inclined concrete ramp runs around the courtyard, forming a



protective wall while also gracefully granting accessibility. From being an almost unused space, the courtyard now forms an intimate little square and lively meeting zone. It is also connected to the historic market square in front of the Stadhuis via a public passage between city hall and the tourist agency.

In the middle of the new courtyard, a square patio guides visitors and staff

down into the historic basement, which houses the art archive—the so-called *Wunderkammer*—and quiet reading rooms for research and study. All the historic interiors, including a representative entry hall, Gothic Hall, and the wedding room, were given a sober aura thanks to clear leveling and routing, rethinking the interior room by room and subtle but very precise restoration work.





A WELL-TEMPERED SCULPTURE: Replacing the Queen Elizabeth Hall in Antwerp

Architects: SimpsonHaugh Architects in collaboration with Kirkegaard Architectural Acoustics (acoustic engineers);
Commissioner: vzw KMDA Koninklijke Maatschappij voor Dierkunde. Open Call 1704; Address Koningin Astridplein 23,
2018 Antwerp; Date 2009–17; Budget 52.68 mil. Euro; Size 23,915 sqm

The Queen Elisabeth Hall was built in the 1950s as a venue attached to the Antwerp Zoo. It seated about 2,000 people and was used intensively for modern and classical concerts, performances, and congresses. The building complex in which it was nestled also houses historic halls that were used for conventions, opening out onto a lively square in front of the central train station. Prime task of the project was to improve the acoustic and performance functionality of the concert hall. British architects Simpson-Haugh came up with an additional idea to link the different uses of the complex by means of a new foyer beneath and alongside the elevated concert hall.

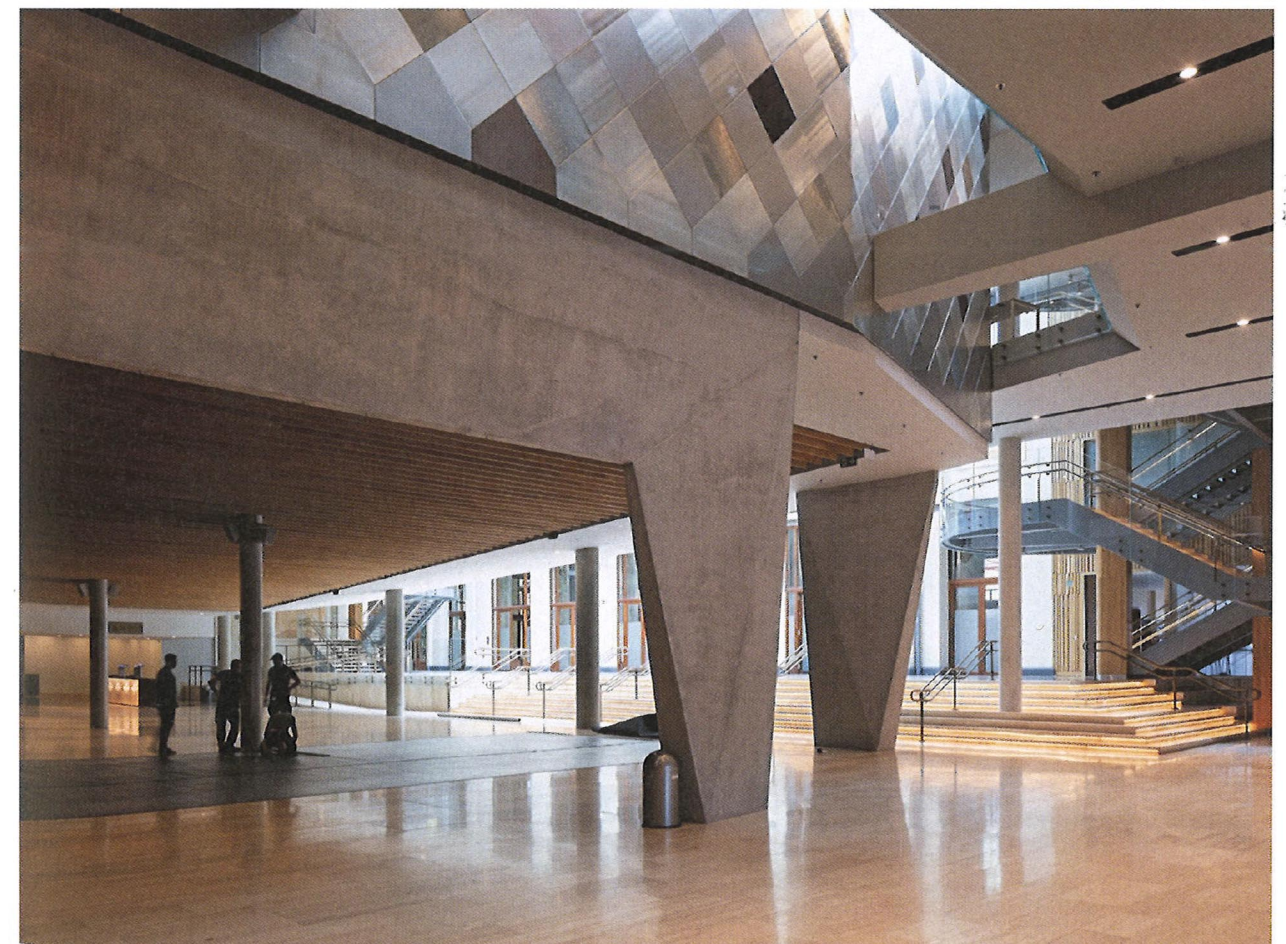
Collaborating with the American acoustic engineer Larry Kirkegaard, they replaced the old concert hall with a new one of “shoe-box” configuration. This offered acoustic improvement while its narrower format opened up space within the existing building. The architects created an atrium between the new and existing structures housing the historic Darwin Hall and Marble Hall. The extended foyer improves orientation since it makes visible the public entrance from the main




square, the access routes to the auditorium, the historic spaces and even the Zoo beyond. And it heightens the sense of anticipation before performances through the act of seeing and being seen.

As for the new concert hall, the architects chose a palette of warm materials: wall and floor cladding is of walnut and oak, a bronze metal mesh was chosen

for the balcony fronts and suspended ceilings. Curved oak wall panels preserve sound resonance, while the bronze mesh is acoustically transparent to prevent “sound shadows.” Outside, the roof of the large concert hall makes a visible statement above the historical façade. Here, the architects created a “contextual sculptural expression,” but a well-tempered one in dark metal shingles.



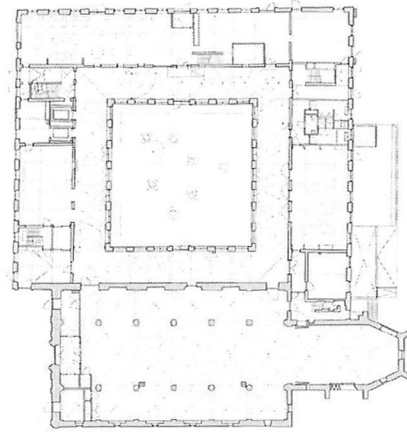


"With regard to the Open Call, our experience was one of a fresh and open approach that focused on ideas and quality and which importantly allowed engagement and dialogue with the client at a very early stage. It was truly refreshing to be involved in such an enjoyable procurement process."

RACHEL HAUGH, SimpsonHaugh Architects

A MULTILAYERED MONUMENT: Conservation and transformation of a listed monastery to a municipal library in Mechelen

Architects: Korteknie Stuhlmacher Architecten in collaboration with Callebaut Architects (restoration) and Bureau Bouwtechniek (technical advice and cost management); Commissioner: Stadsbestuur Mechelen. Open Call 2213; Address Goswin de Stassartstraat 88, 2800 Mechelen; Date 2011–19 (library), 2019–22 (church); Budget 14.6 mil. Euro; Size 5,032 sqm; Awards ARC19 Interior Award; Heritage Award Flanders 2020



The Predikherenklooster is an imposing seventeenth-century building, a former Dominican monastery north of the city center and just a few steps from the Dossin barracks (see p. 170). After years of vacancy and neglect, it was also in an imposing state of decay. In 2010 the city council decided to transform it into the city's main library.

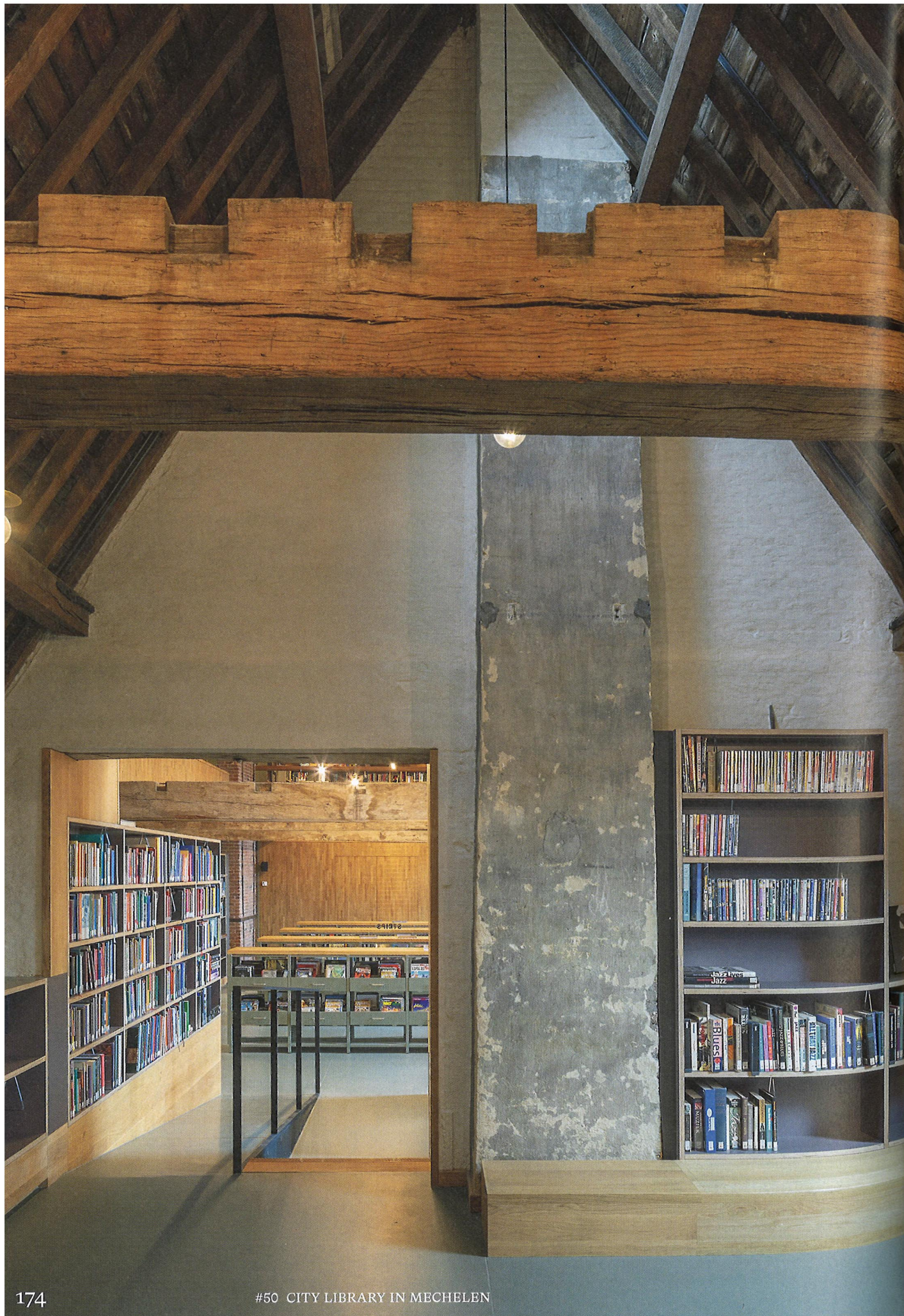
Encouraged by the good experiences with the museum at the Dossin barracks, the council decided to launch another Open Call for this highly complex task.

The winning proposal convinced the jury particularly by fitting the reading rooms into the former attic, with its striking wooden structure. While this created some delicate challenges for the old roof, it also allowed the remaining program to be distributed in the historic rooms around the beautiful inner courtyard. The old roof structure was repaired and left fully visible. To meet safety and insulation standards, a self-supporting steel structure was invisibly integrated. New dormer windows and skylights allow for views, daylight and natural ventilation—plus they serve as a smoke and heat exhaust system. Furniture plays a key role: technical features are often integrated into benches, paneling, tables or bookcases. At the same time, this furnishing reduces the sometimes monumental

scale of the historic rooms to a more human (and practical) one.

The architects used several strategies of conservation, repair, extension, alteration and intervention. They were not afraid of radical changes where needed, like the severe alteration of the roof or some extra-large windows that appear as explicitly contemporary elements with thin metal frames. Historic structures are preserved in their dilapidated charm, while present-day demands and necessities are integrated either as invisibly as possible, or as a clearly visible new layer. This exemplary approach bears a relationship with renowned conservation projects like Neues Museum in Berlin by David Chipperfield Architects, or the postwar recovery of the Alte Pinakothek in Munich by Hans Döllgast. All of these projects left many marks of the buildings' complex histories visible to preserve them as multilayered monuments while still making them perfectly fit for present usage.





"The architects showed the jury not only what can be, but also what is already there. Their design centers on the soul of the Predikheren monastery and shows us how it can assume its new function in a smooth and natural manner."

STEFAN DEVOLDERE, Interim Flemish Government Architect 2015–16