



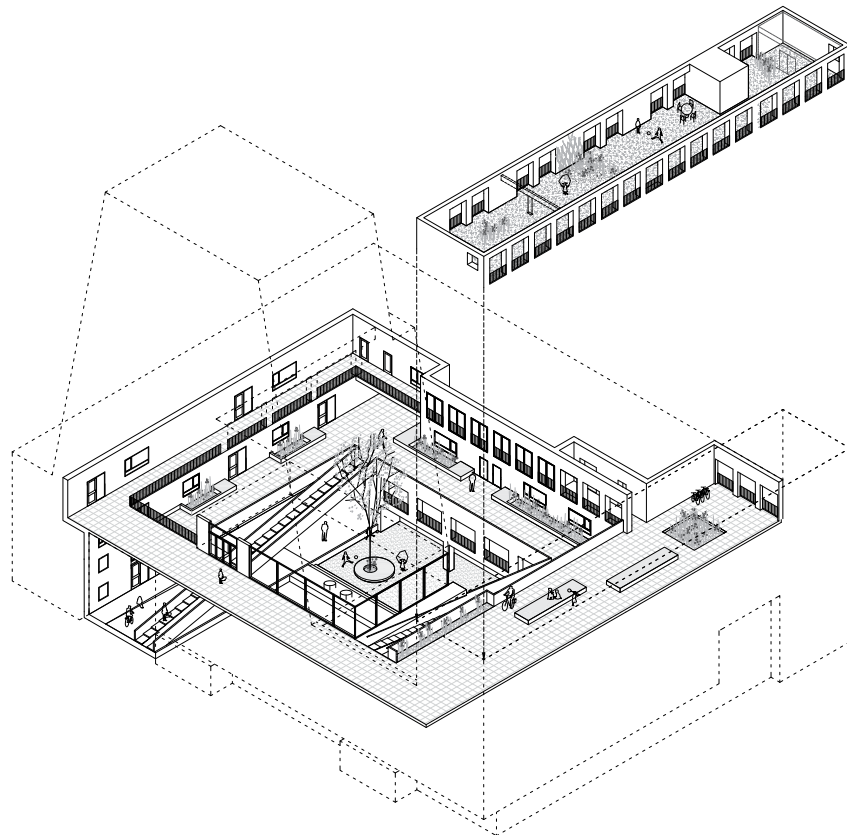
A 280

October/November 2019

Special Edition: Collective Housing



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Guy Châtel

is an architectural engineer and a senior lecturer in architecture in the Department of Architecture and Urbanism of Ghent University.

Oswald Devisch

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Stefan Devoldere

is dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Art at Hasselt University. As president of the 'Stadsatelier Oostende' (from 2016) and as former deputy and acting Flemish Government Architect (2011–2016) he stimulates the quality of the built environment in Flanders. A former editor-in-chief of A+ (2004–2010), he has curated several international architecture exhibitions.

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Barbara Roosen

is an architect doing research and teaching at Hasselt University. Her main research topic concerns collaborative urbanism and mapping in suburban contexts.

Ruth Soenen

obtained a master's in Educational Sciences and a PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology. She is a senior ethnographic researcher specialized in the study of everyday life. She is the owner of the research and consultancy office Simply Community, where, among other things, she translates anthropological insights into architectural practice.

Pieter T'Jonck

is an architect. He writes on architecture, the visual arts and the performing arts for several Belgian and foreign newspapers and magazines, and has also written several books. He works for Klara Radio and is a former editor-in-chief of A+.

Peggy Totté

is an architect and urban designer who works on the theme of collective building and cohousing for Architectuurwijzer. She brought the exhibition 'At Home. Building and Living in Communities' from DAM Frankfurt to STAM Ghent (2018) and C-mine Genk (2017). Today she is the curator of the exhibition *Housing Apart Together* on collective housing in Flanders.

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obtained a master's degree in Dutch-language cinematographic, theatrical and literary arts in 2011. In 2015 she obtained a master's degree in architecture and cinema as an architect at the University of Antwerp. She has worked at re-st since 2016. Until 2018 she was a member of the editorial board of A+.

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A+ Architecture In Belgium

Bimonthly magazine, ISSN 1375-5072, Year 46 (2019) N5

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Cover image
BLAF and Denc!-studio,
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Contents-page image
URA, Wisselspoor, Leuven

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A+ is a publication of CIAUD/
ICASD Information Centre
for Architecture, Urbanism
and Design.

Publisher

Philémon Wachtelaer
Ernest Allardstraat 21/3 –
1000 Brussels

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→
The bent back
elevation is deter-
mined by the
building regulations.



Collective in the row

Guy Châtel – Photos Filip Dujardin



Havana architectuur is behind a cohousing project in the Schilderstraat in Ghent. *De Schilders* is a town house for eight families. Each family has its own individual dwelling. Together they share a garden, a communal kitchen and living spaces on the ground floor, and a laundry and storage in the basement. The course of a bent back elevation – determined by the building regulations – has been picked up in the frontage, a façade which otherwise suggests a regular arrangement of the individual dwellings. Nothing could be further from the truth, however. For this specific programme of collective housing, Havana threw the tacit codes of architecture over board and designed one big house that moves the residents to live together.



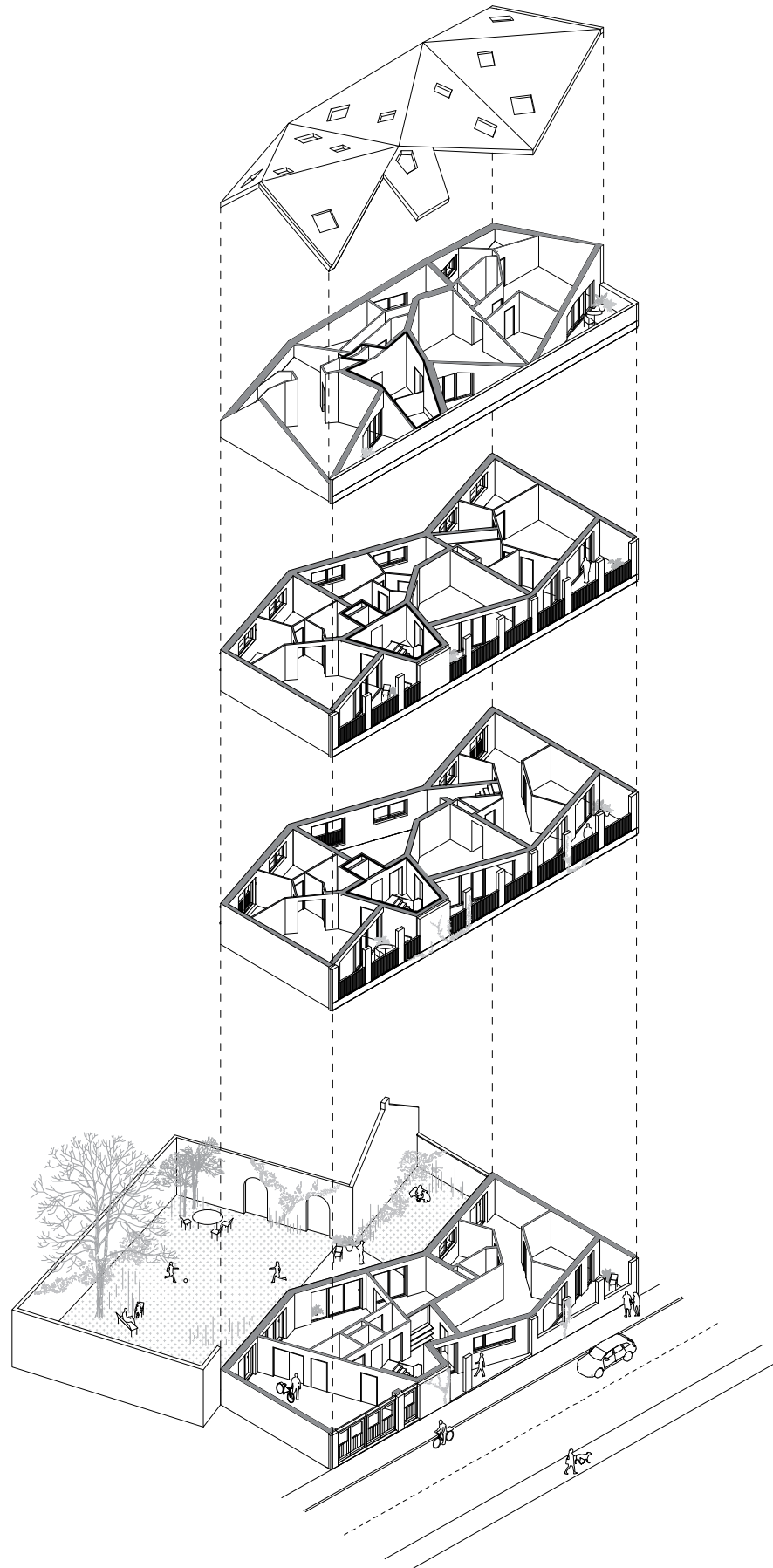
The building stands in the row with a tight rhythmic masonry façade of about 25 by 10 m, a grid of pillars and architraves in three layers. Little suggests that behind this vast, regular front there is a particularly disparate housing programme – little, except for the snake dance of what is to be found in the second row. Behind the bays of the frontage, the zigzag of an additional façade line makes way for triangular terraces. The foreground seems to be under pressure from the second plan. It looks as if the regular row model is being put under pressure by the unruliness of cohousing. This can also be seen from all the stuff that has been put away on the built-in balconies. But of course, the opposite is true. The usual urban building models have been tried and tested in the traditional housing forms. If they are interpretable and lend themselves to a different kind of habitation, then this is not without some resistance. Licence is only the leave to which the rule consents; freedom is allowed to indulge itself against a rigid background. That coercive agreement that architecture usually tacitly endorses was simply reversed. Here, freedom unfolds behind a countenance of strict order. It could be said that this swapping of background and foreground ultimately doesn't matter, that in the end it all comes down to the same thing. But exposing an unspoken rule already implies its protest, and moreover, in doing so its effect is limited to the formal register.

The cohousing project brings together eight dwellings that meet the various needs of as many families. Apart from a shared laundry room and a lot of storage space in

the basement, the collective parts are located on the ground floor, in connection with the garden: a communal kitchen, a large dining, playing and working space, the garage or bicycle storage which, between street and garden, can also occasionally serve as a reception room. They represent a supplement to the dwellings which, although diverse in size, are all complete as such. The architects set themselves a few design rules which, though basic, were difficult to reconcile: that every dwelling would be accessible by lift from the same stairwell and would have a dual orientation, to the south on the street and to the north on the garden. Within the volume of three regular above-ground storeys plus attic, where a large part of the ground floor is reserved for the collective, this leads to a far-reaching entanglement of the housing facilities.

The architects gratefully seized the fact of a rear construction line in three segments to organize and give shape to the necessary intertwining. The zigzag line was first corrected – i.e. made equilateral and equiangular – and then reproduced at the front, immediately behind the surface of the façade. The building was thus divided according to three identical parallelograms – almost rhombuses, in fact – which, subject to some adjustments and an additional diagonal division, produced a configuration of six identical isosceles triangles. This scheme laid the basis for the composition of the housing units: two triangles for the smaller units, three for the larger ones. The keystone of this structure – at once also the precondition for a possible concordance of a unique access with a generalized





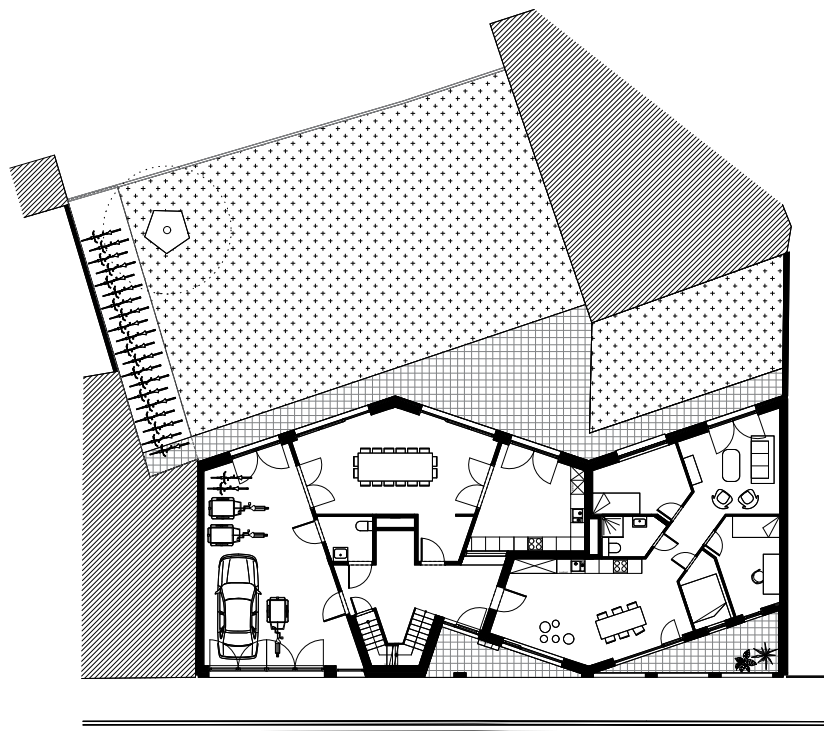
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The building is divided according to three identical parallelograms which, subject to some adjustments and an additional diagonal division, produced a configuration of six identical isosceles triangles.

double-sided orientation – was obtained by fitting a dwelling on two levels: a duplex unit that uses a triangle for the entrance, the kitchen and the dining room on the first floor and, connected via an internal staircase, occupies two triangles for the rest of the housing programme on the second floor.

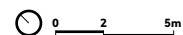
Each unit therefore consists of a rhombus, which may or may not be complemented by a triangle. This specific configuration fills living with a remarkable dynamic. All the large rooms are fan-shaped. They are drawn in by a symmetry axis that runs diagonally relative to the window wall. As a result, they lack an unambiguous definition. The plans in which the furniture is drafted seem to represent a randomness of furnishing. It is not the case that eventually the residential accommodation comes to a standstill on one or another stable formation. It is being set down in changeable constellations. The circulation is also diagonal, always mainly along the long axis of the rhombus, which is again skewed with regard to the contour and to the orientation of the prospects. Housing is commonly conceived as an appliance of functionalities, an embranchment with separate destinations at its extremities. Things seem to be different here. The rooms can of course be used, but every one of them requires interpretation, invention. Every room somewhere

has a right angle, but the course of the walls prevails. There, a stationary body is surrounded by suggestions of movement; every action seems to have to participate in the pace that the insides of the building conjures up. In *De Schilders*, individual living is depicted as a succession of transient dealings.

The street front slopes inwards to give access to the building. Just next to it, the position of the stairwell in the façade is marked as an exception by an enlarged pier. Staircase and landings are inscribed in a trapezium that opens up inward. The lift does not have a closed cabin but a loader that slowly rises and descends in the open shaft. The upper floor extends under a faceted roof that is edged horizontally on the street side and forms an inwardly folded gable at the back. The yielding and pushing of the rear front is curbed by the stone ribbons that run across the entire back elevation, above and below the windows. The point is that, beyond the appearance of a regular street front, all these distinguishing marks frankly convey the anxious movement of the individual housing. As if cohousing should demonstrate commonness and admit uncommonness, yet only comes to fulfilment in the garden rooms, at the sociable gathering of the collective.▲■●



Floor 0



Architect
Havana architectuur
Website
havana.be
Official project name
Cohousing De Schilders
Location
**Schildersstraat 5,
Sint-Amansberg**

Programme
A new construction for eight families. Each family has an individual home. Together they share a garden, a communal kitchen, living areas on the ground floor, and the laundry and storage area in the basement

Procedure
Private commission
Client
**Burgerlijk maatschap
Cohousing De Schilders**
Lead contractor
Gebroeders Callens
Structural engineering
Lime
Building physics
Havana architectuur

Sustainability
Havana architectuur
Completion
March 2016
Total floor area
1,187 m²
Budget
**€ 1,300,000
(excl. VAT and fees)**