



# A 280

October/November 2019

**Special Edition: Collective Housing**



# HOUSING APART TOGETHER

COLLECTIVE  
HOUSING  
IN FLANDERS

an exhibition by  
**Architectuurwijzer**

10/10/2019 - 05/01/2020

C-mine Genk

19/01/2020 - 03/05/2020

STAM Gent



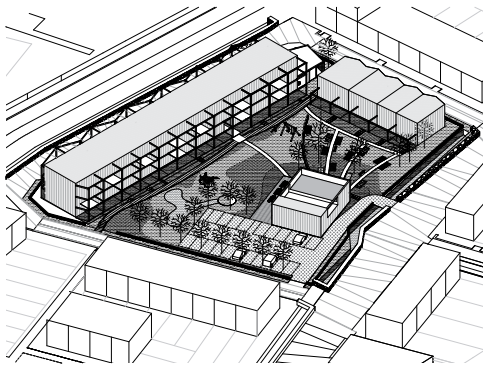
v.u. Architectuurwijzer vzw, Postbus 80, 3500 Hasselt



# Strategic collectivity

*Gitte Van den Bergh*

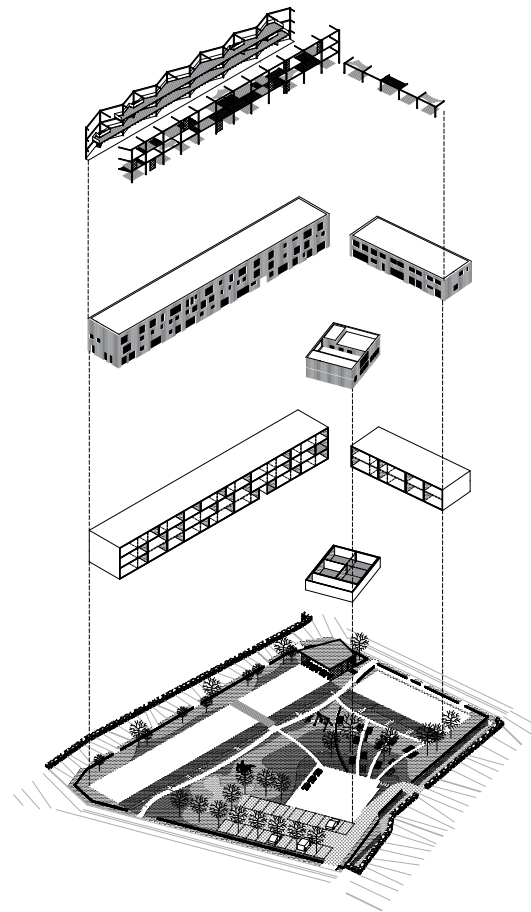
Looking for neighbours, resident Elke organized a first information session on Cohousing Waasland in 2011. Thanks to the support of Samenhuizen vzw, the initiative was able to grow and in 2016 five residents appointed Blaf Architecten and Denc!-studio after a competition. An intensive process of co-creation generated a concept in which a mix of types results in a compact project that sets out to protect the open space.



The search for a location ultimately led to a plot of land in the Clementwijk<sup>2</sup>, an urban expansion area on the northern edge of Sint-Niklaas. The cohousing residents saw their desire for an affordable and ecological construction reflected in the vision set out in the master plan that postulates a green, sustainable residential area with about 700 housing units, a park and various collective facilities.

For the architects, the preservation of the open space in this new urban environment was central. Unlike demand for ground-level units, BLAF and Denc! proposed during the competition a compact volume with a flexible structure. They gradually elaborated the design over the course of an intensive process of co-creation. In addition to four classical ground-level homes, 18 units were ultimately realized in a stacked volume with duplexes and apartments on a limited footprint. The protected volume is rectangular, with neither staggering nor overhanging, the advantage being reduced material use, small energy requirements and a lower construction cost. In terms of stability and acoustics, the architects opted for a massive load-bearing structure made of concrete and sand-lime bricks with large spans. This structure made it possible to create a huge range of types, individually tailored to each resident.

In order to avoid cold bridges and complex details, a secondary construction in wood was placed on both the north and south sides to create terraces and a gallery. Residents were free to choose their own window size, the playful stratification of the wooden construction preserving a sense of unity within these variations. The sustainable cladding with thermally modified wood was extended to the four



ground-floor units and the collective pavilion. This lends the site as a whole a strong sense of identity and distinction.

On the garden side, the interior of the wooden structure consists of an alternation of terraces and voids, dimensioned as desired per unit. The structure of the private terraces allows for more seclusion, but retains interaction with the green outdoor space: 'When you talk about collectivity, the private sphere may become more important precisely', says Bart Vanden Driessche of BLAF. 'The terraces are not screened, but the structure is strong enough to allow residents to provide their own screen if they think it's necessary.'

On the north side, the circulation is defined by v-shaped elements in concrete that create meeting areas. A steel safety net contains window-like openings that give onto the open landscape and are also used for removals. All entrances are

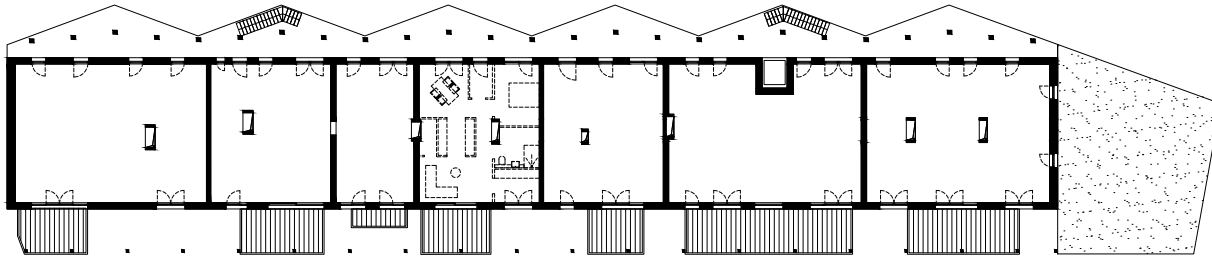
connected to the bicycle line and park promenade, and a path to the garden makes the site passable. Living streets and canals further demarcate the site, and traffic is rightly directed to a grouped car park on the edge.

The collective pavilion with kitchen, play area and roof terrace partly hides the car park from view, and so the three buildings together embrace the interior garden with gully, sunken seating area, play zones and picking garden. The pavilion and the garden make up the engine of the collectivity, but the architects have also organized strategic meeting places. Places used for everyday activities – the laundry area, bicycle shed, letterboxes, compost heap, storerooms – all feature a slight excess that encourages people to have a chat, without turning it into something compulsory.

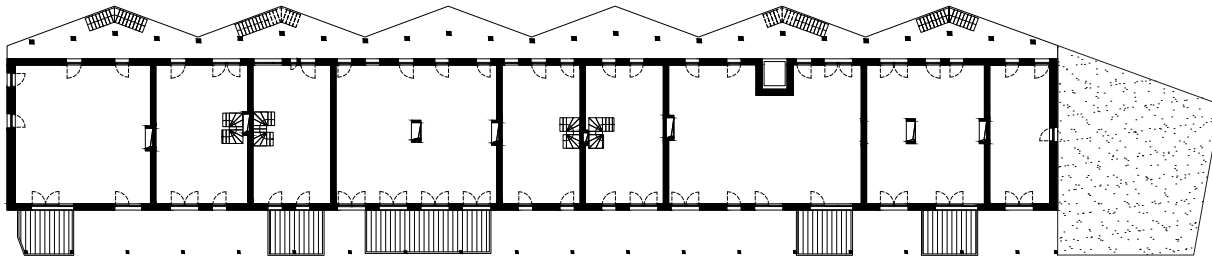


In addition to these collective spaces, the project includes a guest unit. Each unit can also make use of storage space on and in the pavilion, and technical facilities such as the elevator, rainwater pump and circulation pump are grouped together. As a result, the living space of the individual units is limited, ranging from 80 m<sup>2</sup> to 165m<sup>2</sup> gross. 'It could certainly be even more compact, but we have already used up the reserve', Vanden Driessche makes clear. 'Thanks to the mix of types, young and old can find something to their liking here and support each other, so that cohousing also implicitly entails the care concept.'

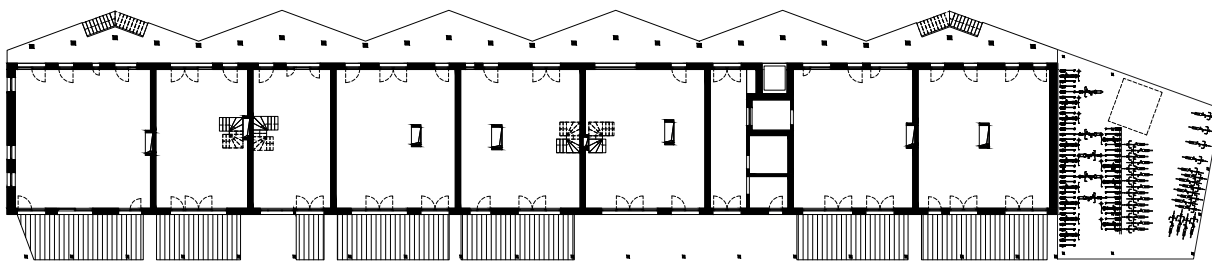
Cohousing Waasland is currently an 'association of co-owners'. The participatory process certainly stimulates the team spirit; from the start, residents set up workgroups around everyone's field of expertise, and these groups still exist today. During the construction phase too, residents were asked what they themselves could do. This work method gave the architect a novel position, in which his role mainly consisted in channelling and translating the various ideas into an unambiguous concept. ▲ ■ ●



Floor 2



Floor 1



Floor 0



Architect  
**Denc!-studio – BLAF**  
Website  
**denc-studio.be – blaf.be**  
Official project name  
**Cohousing Waasland**  
Location  
**Sint-Niklaas**

Programme  
**Newly built cohousing project with 22 private housing units: four single-family houses, 18 apartments + collective spaces: one community house, one guest house, a technical room (with a heating network) and a bicycle storage**

Procedure  
**Competition**  
Client  
**Cohousing Waasland**  
**VZW**  
Lead contractor  
**G-build – LAB15**  
Structural engineering  
**SEC**  
Building physics  
**Denc!-studio**

Sustainability  
**Denc!-studio**  
Completion  
**2018**  
Total floor area  
**3,064 m<sup>2</sup>**  
Budget  
**€ 4,500,000**  
**(excl. VAT and fees)**