**Inauguration of venue building Silt Middelkerke**

**Amsterdam, 22 March 2024**

**This coming weekend an extraordinary venue building will be inaugurated in Middelkerke: Silt. An inspiring building, this is an asset to the Belgian coast, and provides impetus to its context in several respects. With great love for the sea and the dunes, this new eye-catcher combines coastal reinforcement, liveability and sustainability. The extraordinary design is a creation of architectural studio ZJA and DELVA landscape architects, in collaboration with OZ and Bureau Bouwtechniek and a wealth of experts who together make up the Nautilus Consortium.**

**Silt: a new beacon on the coast**

The architects have anchored the building to its location by integrating it into a new experiential landscape inspired by the former island of Testerep, characterized by dunes (coastal defences) and water channels (prosperity). The fusion of the building with the landscape ensures that coastal defences, enhanced quality of life and sustainability merge harmoniously into the existing coastline. In the heart of the landscape, the hotel tower manifests itself like a new beacon on the coast. Silt also houses a casino, a restaurant, a multifunctional events space and underground parking.

**Integral coherence as the basis of an extraordinary design**

The essence of the design lies in the integration of significant aspects, from the experience of the public to coastal reinforcement and economic impetus. With the once bleak Epernay Square as its centre, the sea embankment and coastal defences are now fused together, and an extensive new experiential landscape has arisen.

Steven Delva, landscape architect and founder and partner at DELVA, says, “*Skyscrapers determine the skyline of a modern city. For Silt the design team sought a ‘landscraper’, a new and unique dune landscape with a programme inside. We have deployed the characteristic landscape as a means of integrating all the tasks set us in a way that looks natural. The result is a new dune landscape to be experienced, a landscape in which residents and visitors can once again enjoy the view, the sea, the sky and the dunes*.”

Underground parking ensures that this is a car-free zone. The ground level is thus dedicated as a public space. Marram grass, the dune basin and sand channels leading to the beach give back to Middelkerke the characteristic landscape it holds dear. The climb to the top of the new dune offers breathtaking views and becomes a tourist attraction in its own right.

**Firmly anchored to the spot**

To anchor the project in the spatial, social and economic context of the place, the design team has produced an integral concept of high quality. Rather than a detached, inward focusing building, this is a structure integrated into a landscape that in every respect has a sustainable relationship with its environment.

Reinald Top, partner and architect at ZJA, says, “*The design rewrites the historical relationship between the seaside resort and the sea, and with its modest hotel tower it adds a lot of new public space to the location while having a relatively small footprint. At the same time, the hotel tower is an eye-catching building, with its striking shape and external wooden structure. Visible from along the entire historical coastline of the former island of Testerep, from Ostend to Westende, Silt is unassuming while having maximum impact. The catalyst for a new vibrant centre of Middelkerke"*

The hotel, directly connected to the venue building, enhances the coast with its enigmatic, sculptural silhouette. A modest yet striking tower with an open lattice of curved beams of Accoya wood, it exudes not just the connection with its surroundings but sustainability as well. Because sustainability is just as central to the design as safety, functionality, and aesthetic and economic value. The aim has been to optimize energy supply, waste disposal and production processes.

**Transcending local ambitions**

Silt radiates strength, restraint and refinement, as well as great love for the sea and the dunes. It is a project that perfectly reflects the character of the seaside resort, and that can mark the start of the creation of a new centre for Middelkerke, a pleasant place to live or to spend time.

Jean-Marie Dedecker, mayor of Middelkerke, is particularly proud of the new landmark in his municipality. “*You immediately feel that Silt far transcends local ambitions. Whether it’s a matter of innovative and aesthetic coastal defences or the development of a fantastic tourist attraction, it will undoubtedly become an irresistible pull. To say nothing of the beautiful architecture we are gifting to our fixed, artificially straightened coastline*.”

Silt will be given new sea defences that can withstand the worst storms expected in a thousand years. It can cope with extreme weather including extraordinarily high waves and water more than two metres above the present sea level. It makes Middelkerke the best protected place on the entire Belgian coast.

**Exceptionally short building period**

The project has been completely remarkably quickly. In February 2022 the building team began excavating the immense construction site. Only two years later, the building has been completed. This is attributable to the close collaboration and dedication of all the parties involved.

Guy De Meyer (responsible for the project on behalf of developer Debuild) says, “*From the first spade in the ground, everyone was on the same page. This has proven of immense value several times over. During the building process, the proprietors added several new elements to the programme. Because of our open and structured communication, we were quickly able to come to a unanimous decision and we succeeded in delivering the project on time even with those new elements. That is an achievement of which we are justly proud. We have executed a unique building project on the Belgian coast, thanks to the expertise, dedication and tenacity of the combination of TM Furnibo-Democo, all its building partners and the entire site team*.”

*Client: The municipality of Middelkerke*

*The Nautilus Consortium is a Dutch-Belgian collaboration between:*

*Architect: Chief designers ZJA (architect) and DELVA (landscape architect) in collaboration with OZ (casino and hotel design) and Bureau Bouwtechniek (project architect)*

*Developer: Debuild*

*Advisors: COBE, VK Engineering, Beersnielsen, Witteveen+Bos, Plantec, MINT and Sertius*

*Building contractors: TM Furnibo-Democo*

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