

**STEPHANE BEEL**

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## STEPHANE BEEL

I have always been especially interested in the clear and precise architecture of Stephane Beel. His Villa M, in all its simplicity, has always been something of an obsession for me. I have met Beel on two occasions. The first, in Belgium, after visiting one of his houses with a group of Belgium architects. He made a fleeting appearance. Years later, in 2000, my black and red Spanish Pavilion had been awarded in Venice, and I found him in the door. He was sparing of words, but warm. I thanked him for his praise, that of a man younger than myself, whom I admire, a lot.

His architecture continues to be not abundant in quantity but always of enormous quality. If I had to find an adjective to describe it, I would say it was silent architecture. Like the silence that Mies' work inspires. Of such clarity, of such logic. Beel likes to speak of "reticence" ("more and more, reticence guides my architecture"). And immediately he clarifies that it has nothing to do with the minimalism currently in fashion.

His latest constructed house, DF in K, is magnificent. The drawing with which Beel summarizes the operation is very expressive (his pedagogic drawings communicate his ideas very well). It is like a table with many legs resting on a plinth among poplars. The basic plan of Villa M is present but is elaborated here with greater freedom. Air flows through the house, and the patios are dug out to fill it with light. Then, with some delicate walls, the view is nuanced, all with enormous delicacy. The garden, almost nothing: the old poplars, the new trees, the lamps and the flat water with the white wall. A paragon of wisdom.

And when it is a matter of integrating a "curing machine" into the fabric of the current city, Beel acts with an effective naturalness. The Klimop Center is a (box) structure that is subtly adapted to the lot with slight grace notes. A simple structure, open with glass; closed with zinc. As fitting. Inside it is full of light. Outside, as it is round, it looks as though it has always been there. A piece of great interest.

And this will of how to disappear ("as it were", "almost" writes Beel) is clear in the Roger Raveel Museum in Machelen. Beel makes a jewel, almost a necklace, of extraordinary beauty. He places a broken construction that is going to adapt to the movements of the city. Seen both in the floor plan and in section, it disappears opening up and closing to the street, to the garden, to the sky, as fitting. Like a "path in a covered garden". It seems as though the architect had listened closely to what Raveel noted in his work: "put things in perspective". The museum's halls "in perspective" and full of light are impressive. It is a wonderful gift to Machelen.

Beel's wisdom is made even more evident in the extension to the Singel International Art Center in Antwerp. The extremely complex operation is resolved brilliantly after a correct analysis that he describes very well in the project. He is like a doctor diagnosing a patient. The solution, absolutely brilliant. Beel synthesizes it in a very direct and expressive drawing on a photograph of Stynen's old building. The Squat Tower is key.

This architecture, which really is essential, sets a possible example for the future. A certainly reticent architecture. Logical, almost obvious, magnificent. An architecture of the more with less with which Beel always leads us to Beauty.