

CARTE BLANCHE: FREDERIC HAESEVOETS - "MIPIM - WHAT CANNES I DO?"

MIPIM Cannes is THE international real estate market. Yes, but for whom? For what kind of Architect?

In March 2009 I had just turned 30 and recently been entrusted with a flagship project for the agency, that of Herstal town hall. That is when I got my first taste of the MIPIM.

Flushed with pride, I had the impression of discovering a world completely foreign to me? a world of sanitised, globalised architecture. After 3 days at the show, I had lost all my bearings. "Where was I?"

I had trained as an architect with the Studio Odile Decq in Paris between 2000 and 2005. Thanks to this firm I had become accustomed to working in different countries and different cultures, and participated in projects of different scales, from the Museum for Contemporary Art of the City of Rome (MACRo) to the redevelopment of the Port of Gennevilliers. And while I also had the opportunity to discuss and interact with other architects, politicians, companies, investors, developers, renowned designers, this was almost exclusively on a one-to-one and ad hoc basis.

Among the 18,000 participants, the Belgian delegation packs a punch, but the truth is that audiences were not queuing up to meet me! Cannes, beyond the beach, cocktails and parties is one big concentrate of actors and public and private decision-makers brought together in one place, present to defend their interests and promote them.

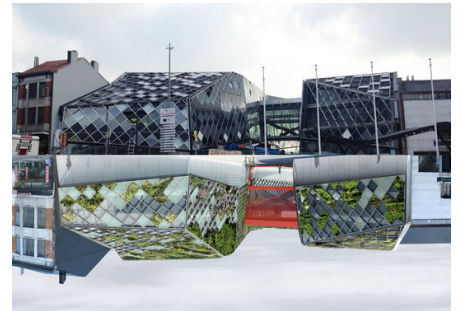
That is what makes this event so unique.

And, after some years of experience of the Show, this has also rubbed off on my approach to my role as architect. I am no longer present only to be a listener, but to defend my profession and promote myself.

Therefore, MIPIM has a place for all architects working at all scales; it is not just the reserve of mammoth agencies or corporate architectures. The architect defends his projects, his ideas and ambitions.

An example.

Back in 2011, I was an architect based in Brussels, working a bit in the Liege region and I was interested in seeing what was going on in the other Belgian provinces. So I attended this conference on the various projects in the province of Namur. There were all these politicians presenting the different development projects for their City, one of which stirred my curiosity. The mayor of the town of Andenne presented an ambitious project to regenerate the centre of the city. It was accompanied by very realistic images of the plans, making me naively believe it to be a completed project. Not at all in fact, the aim was to illustrate his programme.



I put it to the Mayor that his ambitious project for the city centre, as presented, was ambiguous.

Without hesitation, I accepted his challenge that evening to develop my ideas and submit them to him. It was certainly ambitious, but I thought that I could do better.

Today, four years later, the project is in full swing in its first phase, with many partners, architects, developers, builders ... It adds up to a 300 unit housing programme, shops, public spaces, public buildings, an administrative centre, a school, a kindergarten and public car park ... But if today the agency participates to develop the project for Andenne city centre this is certainly down to my presence at MIPIIM in Cannes.

The years go by, each new, each different. And MIPIIM is also the backdrop for the most unusual encounters.

MIPIIM takes place from Tuesday to Friday morning, but as I like the good things in life, I enjoy making the most of the city and its surroundings a few days before and after the event. Sitting comfortably on a sun-drenched terrace on Friday afternoon, discussing architecture and landscape, I was surprised to see sitting at a nearby table a Parisian client accompanied by friends. One of them suggested I accompany him the next day to see a new project that he had acquired in Cannes. Although rather sceptical at first, I went along and discovered with amazement that the project consisted not only of the renovation of a stunning duplex, but that, opposite it, it had a 1200 m2 terrace to be developed along the Croisette. It was the type of magical place where one begins to dream of relief, artificial landscape, the Esterel, of the local Klein blue, the lush vegetation...

Today the agency will soon be celebrating its tenth anniversary and in that time it has gained a good grasp of some of the avenues offered by architecture, and hinged its practice around a multidisciplinary approach: design, architecture, planning, while striving to develop a dynamic and innovative architecture where each project is therefore a new challenge.

This will remain the point of view and experience of a young architect a little lost in the hubbub and profusion of projects, each more ambitious than the other.

But my MIPIIM, and Cannes as well, is the right for everyone to be dazzled, to dream, to believe, to hope, to think, to plan and to project, to wander around and to discover, to travel, to learn and to listen and, ultimately, to offer.

Whatever the approach: humility or boldness, tranquillity or pugnacity, polite or irreverent, deconstructed or regular...

At the end of the day, we are only architects with convictions, and we have this great chance and opportunity to have an audience and a public at this theatre we call the MIPIIM.

By Frederic Haesevoets, from Frederic Haesevoets Architecture.

Publication 17/02/15

Author(s) Frederic Haesevoets Architecture