



Nature indoors, Morlanwelz

With its expression of the natural landscape, the library by **SHSH** combines Japanese and European design and anticipates the future.

BELGIUM — TEXT: ROBERT-JAN DE KORT

SHSH, the office of Shin Bogdan Hagiwara and Shizuka Hariu, produces architecture and scenography. Hagiwara and Hariu, both from Japan and based in Brussels, strive to create memorable spaces through simple means. In their work, the two architects try to bridge the gap between Japanese and European design culture. A typically Japanese aspect of their work is their aspiration to make the designed spaces part of nature. Openness and lightness are therefore the core concepts, despite that, according to them, architecture in Europe has traditionally been more closed and heavy – a contrast, in fact, with respect to the landscape.

In 2012, the office won the competition for the new public library of the Belgian municipality of Morlanwelz. Hagiwara and Hariu distinguished themselves from the competition by situating all the library's functions on the ground floor, beneath an undulating green roof, and thus making the public building fully accessible. Moreover, they anticipate a future with fewer books, and designed

a distinctive area where the number of bookcases can diminish over time.

The new library will be built just outside the centre of Morlanwelz. Its green roof matches with the adjacent football fields, and the main entrance of the triangular building is accessed via a forecourt. Another corner provides a second public access, complemented by a vegetable garden that will be set up by local schoolchildren.

Once inside, an interior world that SHSH characterizes as a forest unfolds. The roof structure is visible everywhere. The architects modified a seemingly simple structural design of portals that support wooden roof beams by varying the lengths of the columns. This creates the wave-like appearance of the rafters, allowing the supporting structure to lend every place in the library its own character.

During the design process that followed the competition, SHSH optimized the shape of the roof to let in more natural light. In contrast, the facades became

more closed. The architects also developed a pattern of square windows in three different sizes. These provide varied views towards both surroundings and sky.

The organization of the interior area is such that all the spaces are connected to each other. The entrance hall, for instance, leads to the reading room. Although it accounts for the building's largest space, because it begins small, then widens and bends around a small patio, it is not at once perceivable as such. In this way, the visitor can penetrate deeper into the forest and seek a suitable place for concentration or study.

The relatively closed character of the building will make it a rich spatial experience, one that allows the public to escape from the everyday environment instead of connecting to it. Despite the Japanese theme, it will still become a reasonably 'European' structure as a result. The artificial landscape is still pending, as construction of the library is expected to begin in early 2016. ◀

MORLANWELZ PUBLIC LIBRARY, 2016 –

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↑ Occlusion render of the roof structure



↑ Grass will cover the undulating roof. ↓ Situation



↓ East elevation



↓ West elevation



↓ Section



↓ Section

