beliris
POUR BRUXELLES
VOOR BRUSSEL

Composing the Future

The restoration and extension of the Brussels Conservatory

More info

Simulations:
©TM Origin-A2RC-FVWW
Photos: © Beliris (unless otherwise indicated)

Editor: Beliris
Responsible publisher: M. Bossut,
Vooruitgangstraat 56, 1210 Brussel
October 2024

The project team

OWNER / MANAGER

Public limited company Conservatoire: representatives from the federal government, the Flemish and French communities who are jointly responsible for the management of the Conservatory.

USERS

PRIME CONTRACTOR

Beliris, a federal government agency, implements construction, renovation and restoration projects to improve Brussels as the capital of Belgium and Europe.

The non-profit organisation Conservamus' main objective is to promote the protection of the Conservatory buildings and has already had a few urgent restoration works carried out.

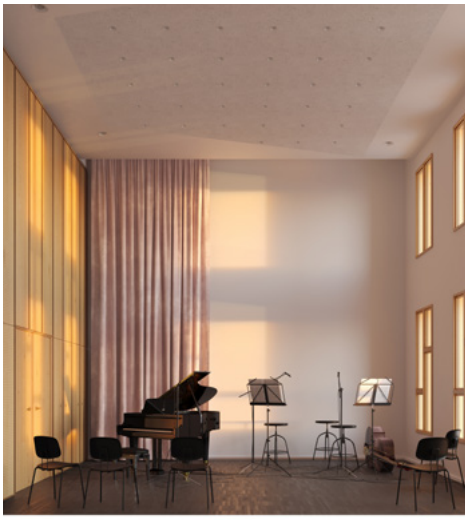
Project management assistant: ACMG

DESIGN TEAM

The architectural offices Origin-A2RC-FVWW are working with a team of specialist consultants:

Stability: Ney / **Acoustics and building physics:** Daidalos-Peutz / **Special techniques and stage techniques:** Ingenium / **Landscaping:** Eole / **Fire safety:** FPC Risk / **Cost control:** Widnell / **Organ expert:** Koos van de Linde / **Health and safety coordinator:** Sweco-Cosep / **BREEAM sustainability assessment:** Sweco / **Technical control and fire safety:** Seco

Restoration, renovation and extension

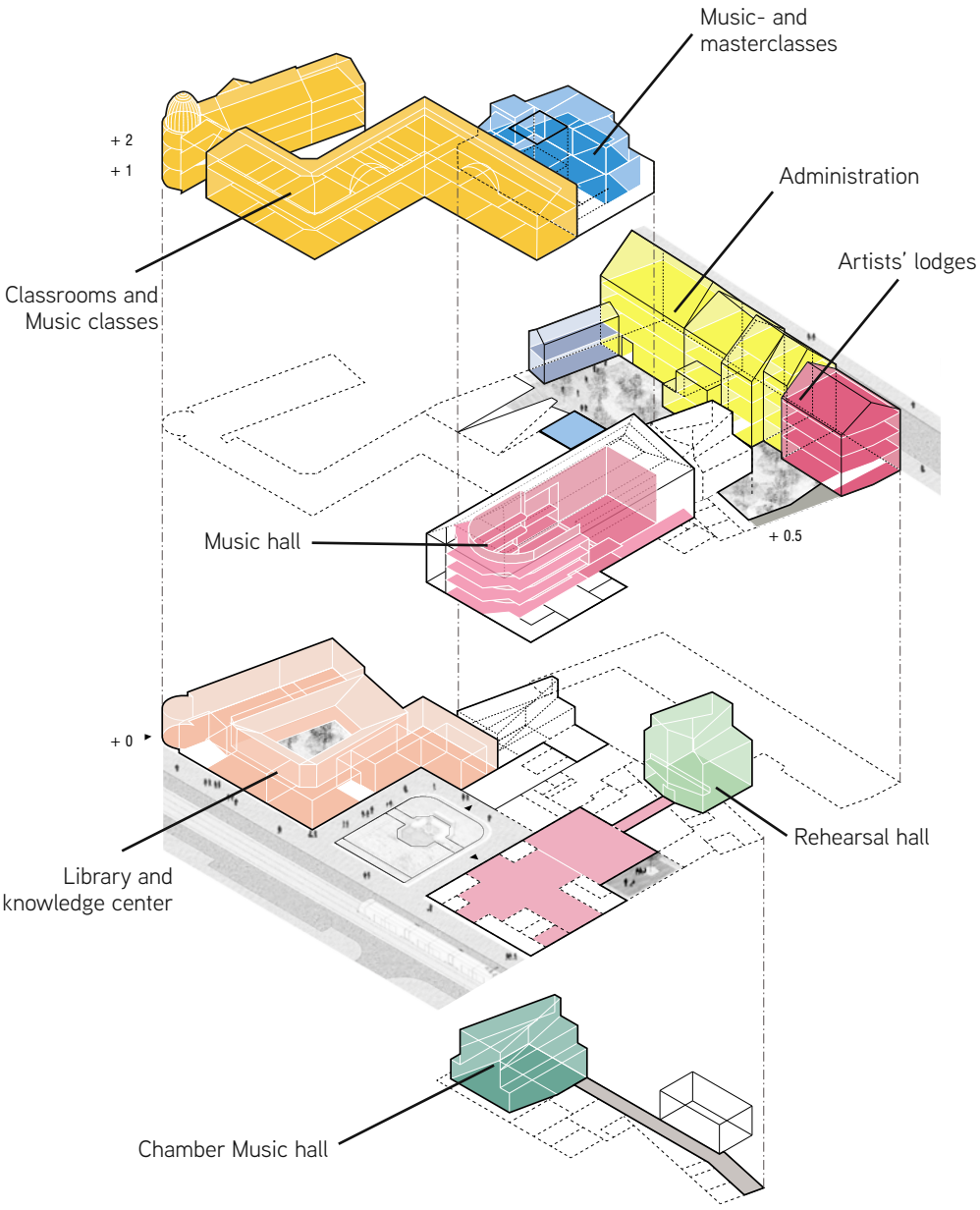


The Brussels conservatory is an architectural gem in the heart of our capital where two schools, the Koninklijk Conservatorium Brussel and the Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles make music together. This complex of diverse buildings, some of which are protected monuments, is in need of renovation and does not provide enough space for the activities of the two music schools. Therefore, the conservatory will benefit from a thorough renovation that respects its heritage value.

The landmark building along Rue de la Régence, along with the director's residence and secretary's house at Place du Petit Sablon, forms an important late 19th-century ensemble designed by architect Jean-Pierre Cluysenaar. In time, the conservatory was expanded to include five historically valuable houses on Rue aux Laines, some dating back to the 17th century. This valuable heritage is being restored and adapted to contemporary comforts.

In order to meet the increasing number of students and provide the infrastructure worthy of an international conservatory, it is necessary to build a contemporary extension. The new construction will blend harmoniously with the historical buildings. It will house high-performance master classes and two concert halls.

The project combines the restoration of a beautiful piece of architectural heritage with the construction and renovation of the infrastructure needed for the two conservatories, a prestigious music library and three concert halls. Quite an achievement!


Music- and
masterclasses
+ 2
+ 1
Administration
Artists' lodges
Classrooms and
Music classes
Music hall
+ 0.5
+ 0
Rehearsal hall
Library and
knowledge center
Chamber Music hall

150 years of history

CLUYSENAAR BUILDING

The conservatory building on Rue de la Régence is as old as the street it was built on. In 1872, when the Rue de la Régence was extended from Sablon to today's Place Poelaert, the Princely House of Thurn and Taxis, which then housed the conservatory, had to be demolished. And so, after the road works were finished, a replacement was constructed. This is the first time a building was designed specifically to serve as a conservatory. That project was entrusted to architect Jean-Pierre Cluysenaar, who has many other villas, castles and public buildings to his name.

The **main building** includes three wings arranged in a U around a *cour d'honneur*. The monumental façades are in French neo-Renaissance style, characterised by symmetry and strong horizontal lines, the use of various materials with contrasting colours and richly decorated with sculpture. The fact that this building was intended as a music school is clearly shown in its façade. The ornamental garlands and palms were complemented by musical instruments, and the five pediments in bas-relief represent instrumental music, orchestration, musical composition, stagecraft and poetry. No fewer than a dozen artists collaborated on the façade's many decorations.

Jean-Pierre Cluysenaar, born into a Dutch family of artists in 1811, studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels. He became the figurehead of Belgian eclecticism, which combines characteristics of various different architectural styles and art movements. In particular, the Renaissance, Romanesque, Gothic and even English picturesque styles inspired his work. He was a very prolific architect who accomplished the most diverse projects: houses, working-class neighbourhoods, railway stations, castles, villas, mansions, decorations, town planning, etc. The construction of the Brussels Conservatory and the director's residence was the architect's last project. He died in Brussels in 1880.

▲ The Saint-Hubert Galleries, Jean-Pierre Cluysenaar (1811-1880), © Audrius Meskauskas Creative Commons license

A sampling of Cluysenaar's work

◀ Chateau de Viron at Dilbeek, © Vitaly Volkov, Creative Commons license

▲ Kiosk at Brussels Park, © Michael Wilson, Creative Commons license

◀ Train station in Aalst, © Vitaly Volkov, Creative Commons license

Public areas such as the hall, the foyer, the grand staircase and the concert hall in the right wing were given the necessary splendour: columns and sculptures adorn the interior. Both the monumental staircase and the concert hall were bathed in natural light thanks to a skylight. The first no longer exists today and will be reconstructed.

The **classrooms and administrative areas** in the left wing and the rear façades were kept sober with light-coloured plaster, hard stone frames and wooden joinery.

▲ Picture from 1893 of a rehearsal conducted by the Director, Mister Gevaerts, in the concert hall
Source: Conservatory Archives

▶ Stairwell leading to the balconies of the concert hall

▲ Historical picture of the entrance hall («vestibule»), bathed in light thanks to the skylight, published in 1932 in the periodical «A-Z hebdomadaire illustré.» Vue from the foyer to the monumental staircase.
Source: © KBR, via «BelgicaPeriodicals»

◀ Picture of the same location today, without the skylight

▲ Music class
© Felix Rabou

THE ORGAN

The concert hall contains a true showpiece: the organ. Built in 1880 by Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, one of the greatest organ-builders of the 19th century, the instrument is one of the most valuable historical organs in Belgium. Only the Moscow Conservatory still has such an instrument in an academic context.

The Brussels Conservatory organ, which originally had 45 stops on three manuals and a pedal, has not been preserved in its original state. In its 140 years of existence, it has been through a great deal, and was even made into an electrical instrument in 1960. Unfortunately, the organ has been idle for the past few years because the electric drive system posed a fire hazard.

▲ © Felix Rabou

THE DIRECTOR'S RESIDENCE AND SECRETARY'S HOUSE

Next to the music school, on the corner of Place du Petit Sablon, a residence for the director (No. 17) and one for his secretary (No. 16) were built once the construction of the conservatory was completed. The director's residence has a façade in an eclectic style inspired by the neo-Renaissance. The building consists of two wings forming an L and raised around a round tower. The director's residence contains several salons with rich interior elements.

From private collection to Musical Instruments Museum

Did you know that the MIM originated at the conservatory? The first director of the Royal Conservatory of Music was the renowned musicologist François-Joseph Fétis, who was also an avid collector of historical instruments. After his death in 1872, his collection was purchased by the Belgian state and kept at the conservatory. In 1877, this collection was supplemented by about a hundred Indian instruments, a gift from Rajah Tagore to King Leopold, to form the Instrument Museum. The collection was kept at the conservatory with the goal of introducing students to historical instruments. First in the attics, then at Rue aux Laines 11 and finally at the director's residence. It was not until 1992 that the MIM became part of the Royal Museums of Art and History.

Source: https://www.mim.be/en/history-mim

▲ MIM, ©Bernard Brummer, Creative Commons license

◀ Entrance hall of the director's residence © Felix Rabou

THE MANSIONS ON RUE AUX LAINES

From the end of the 19th century, the five mansions behind the conservatory were gradually added to the music school as it grew. The neoclassical façades form a coherent unit in the Rue aux Laines. Some date back to the 17th century, when they were inhabited by the city's nobility.

Over time, these homes experienced many transformations: Nos. 3 and 5 were joined and separated several times, Nos. 7 and 9 were probably originally one house, and No. 11 lost some of its authenticity due to serveral extensions, such as the addition of a passage leading to the concert hall, and heavy renovations in the 20th century.

VARIOUS RENOVATIONS

To overcome the lack of space and meet the needs of the school, several renovations were made during the 20th century. In the 1950s, a large **library** was built in the inner courtyard behind the central wing of the Cluysenaar building, for which a number of outbuildings and the original staircase in the central wing were demolished. The many interventions have resulted in a labyrinthine whole and a sharp reduction in daylight in the building.

▲ Staircase in Rue aux Laines 3

▲ © Felix Rabou

▲ © Felix Rabou

▲ Rooms on the 1st floor of Rue aux Laines 11

◀ Rooms in Rue aux Laines 11
© Felix Rabou

Restoring Brussels heritage to its former glory

▲ Stratigraphic research

The valuable heritage will be restored and adapted to contemporary comforts. The entire ensemble by architect Cluysenaar will be returned to its former glory: the monumental street façade, the roofs, the foyers and concert hall, the classrooms, etc. Thanks to stratigraphic research, rooms will be given their original colouring.

A number of interventions will bring the building up to current safety standards or improve the comfort and sustainability of the building. These interventions are done with the utmost respect for the heritage. For example, the simple rear façades will be insulated along the outside, whereas the monumental street façade will be insulated along the inside. The roofs, whose slate and zinc cladding are severely outdated, will be completely updated and insulated.

Naturally, the right wing remains dedicated to concerts. The rest of the Cluysenaar building, including the director's residence and secretary's house, will host the library on the first floor and classrooms on the upper floor.

THE CONCERT WING

The monumental entrance hall combines ‘French stone’ tones with varnished wood. The skylight above the grand staircase, which at present is no longer there, will be reconstructed to allow more natural light into this prestigious space. The second foyer will also receive more light by reopening the old courtyard as an outdoor patio. There will be a parquet floor here, as it was originally intended.

A lot of thought went into compartmentalising the auditorium and stairwells by integrating fire doors that are more in keeping with the historic setting. The Queen’s staircase, once destroyed by a fire, will be reconstructed.

The ventilation and acoustic insulation of the concert hall will be improved, always with the utmost respect for the heritage, in order to keep out the sounds of Rue de la Régence so they will no longer disturb a concert. The original skylight will be restored and the upper skylight will be replaced with one with higher performance, equipped with sun protection in the form of aluminium slats.

The historical organ was dismantled before the works and moved to a specialised workshop where it will regain its original splendour and timbre. It will return to the concert hall once the construction en renovations works are completed.

▲ Reconstruction of the colourings of the concert hall

▲ The second foyer

▲ Entrance hall for the concert hall

THE LIBRARY

The historical interiors on the ground floor of the Cluysenaar building and director's residence will be restored and furnished for the library and the knowledge centre with a reading room, meeting rooms and various offices. The reading room has a view of the courtyard garden thanks to its glass façade.

Students will use the main central entrance as before, whereas the prestigious entrance of the director's residence will serve as visitor's entrance.

THE CLASSROOMS IN THE CLUYSENAAR BUILDING

On the upper floor, the small and medium classes are furnished. In order to make things more comfortable for the students and professors and meet the acoustic requirements of a music room, greater interventions will be needed here, such as internal wall linings, lowered ceilings, secondary glazing and interior insulation. Furthermore, the staircase in the director's residence needs to be extended to connect to the Cluysenaar building. Some remarkable rooms (the classroom in the tower, salons, etc.) will be preserved as witnesses to the past.

▾ Student entrance

▾ Consultation room

▴ Monumental staircase connectiong the old building to the new

▴ Consultation room

▲ Reading room around the winter garden
wintertuin

A harmony of old and new

To accommodate the increasing number of students and meet the school's requirements, an extension is necessary. The new building will house high-performance master classes and two new music halls.

ARCHITECTURE GRAFTED ONTO THE PAST

The new building will be situated behind the Cluysenaar building, replacing the old library building. The contemporary architecture is inspired by the rear façades of the surrounding historical buildings to create a harmonious ensemble. The brick walls will receive a glazed finish in light shades. The roofs will be covered in a dark metal roofing reminiscent of the original zinc roofs.

CENTRAL STAIRWELL

A grand staircase located behind the central entrance at the *cour d'honneur* will connect the Cluysenaar building with the new building. This is in the spirit of the original staircase that was removed in the 1950s. Just as in the stairwell in the concert wing, a skylight will provide plenty of natural light.
This staircase not only provides access to the classrooms, but also gives direct access to the gardens behind the building, and thus to the buildings on Rue aux Laines. This makes the overall accessibility of the complex easier.
The stairs lead up to the roof, where there is a roof terrace, green roof and photovoltaic panels.

MUSIC ROOMS AND MASTERCLASSES

To complement the classrooms and music rooms in the Cluysenaar building, the new building will feature four double-height master classes and high-performance classrooms that keep heavy bass sounds such as percussion in. Thanks to adaptable acoustics, the classrooms have a very high flexibility.

THE CHAMBER MUSIC HALL AND REHEARSAL HALL

The chamber music hall has a gallery for 150 spectators. The rehearsal hall will be strategically embedded between the concert hall and the artists' residences. Both halls have windows so that daylight can enter as well.

The two music halls will be equipped with the necessary infrastructure for fine-tuning acoustics. Their acoustics are adaptable thanks to wooden wall coverings and sound-absorbing curtains.

▲ Stairwell

▲ Chamber music hall

▲ Rehearsal hall

The five mansions

▲ Halway1 in Rue aux Laines 3

The townhouses will be given all contemporary comfort while respecting their heritage value. They will accommodate the administrative functions, a guest house and artists' lodges.

RENOVATING WITH RESPECT

In some houses, majestic staircases, ceremonial salons with faux marble, panelwork and decorative frames still bear witness to their rich past. With a view to ensuring the comfort of the users and the conformity of the buildings, some interventions are needed, but they will always take place with the greatest respect for the heritage. These include insulating the roof, installing secondary glazing and acoustic floor insulation, improving accessibility for people with limited mobility, etc.

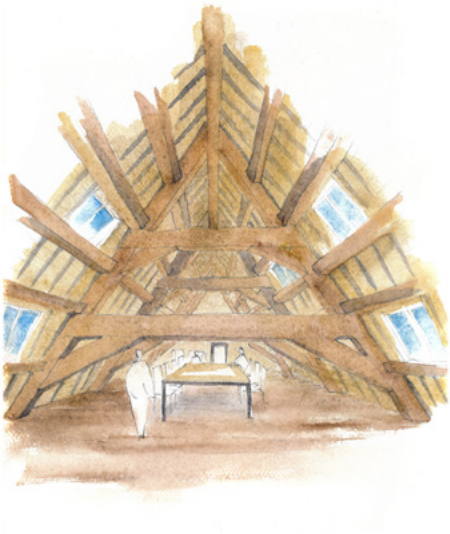
LOGISTICAL CONNECTION

The logistical connection between Rue aux Laines No. 11 and the music hall will be improved. The long corridor will be glazed along its entire length.

Due to its advanced state of decay and programmatory constraints, the former horse stable will need to be demolished and rebuilt. Materials will be recovered as much as possible for the reconstruction.

There will be a new piano elevator that will serve the three music halls. A tuning room will be set up on the top floor.

▲ Stair well in Rue aux Laines 3



▲ Attic in Rue aux Laines 3

▲ Salon in Rue aux Laines 5

Performing in a green setting

▲ Students' garden

This project aimed to achieve a BREEAM score of 'very good', a sustainability rating for the environmental performance of buildings. In the end, the design for the building attained an "excellent" score.

BREEAM looks not only at the sustainable use of energy and materials, but also at transport, well-being, future use, etc. In particular, water management, greening the site and enriching biodiversity stand out.

SIX GARDENS

The unbuilt areas will be designed as six gardens – oases of tranquillity and light that increase biodiversity and allow rainwater to infiltrate. The **court of honour** at the entrance will be revalued and the fountain restored. The new library's reading room will overlook a **winter garden** inspired by those of the 19th century. This garden will be built around the current eucalyptus tree, which is classified as a remarkable tree. From there, a staircase leads through a **vertical garden** with climbing plants to the **students' garden** with a cafeteria and terrace, intended for students, professors and any visitors. Next to this, behind the house at Rue aux Laines No. 11, will be the **artists' garden**, reserved for artists and residents. Finally, a **patio** will be set up next to the second foyer of the historical concert hall.
In addition, the green roof of the new building will be arranged with inaccessible flower borders, which can be seen from the roof terrace.

WATER MANAGEMENT

Rainwater will no longer go straight into the sewer system. The depaving of the courtyard and the installation of intensive green roofs on the flat roofs will allow for maximum infiltration of rain on site. The rain water of the remaining roofs will be collected in two rainwater tanks of 225 m^3 and 50 m^3, to be used for toilets, plants, the fountain in the court of honour and maintenance of the classrooms.

BIODIVERSITY

All the gardens will be landscaped with various plantings in different layers: trees, shrubs, herbaceous plants, etc. The local fauna was also taken into account: watering troughs for birds and insects, nesting boxes for birds and bats and insect hotels will be provided around the gardens. Extra attention will be paid to the placement and choice of lighting to reduce light pollution.

▲ Reading room with a view of the winter garden

▲ Artists' garden

AT YOUR SERVICE

info.beliris@mobilit.fgov.be

0800 11 299

www.beliris.be

\belirisforbrussels