

# EXPO SHANGHAI 2010 THE BELGIAN/EUROPEAN PAVILION

Placed under the sign of hope of better cities for a better life, Expo Shanghai 2010 promises to be the largest universal expo of all time, with 167 participants and 70 million expected visitors. A little curtain raiser on the Belgian Pavilion currently under construction, with architect Christine Conix.

The call for tender for the design, building, maintenance and demolition of the Belgian/European pavilion was won last spring by the JV Shanghai 2010.be made up of Interbuild and Realsys Group. As a building company established in Belgium, specialising in non residential buildings, Interbuild also made the Belgian pavilion in Hanover. The Realsys Group project manager is guarantor for local involvement thanks to his experience on the Chinese market and his department in Shanghai. In JV Shanghai 2010.be, including among others Jan Hoet Jr and Virtualis (scenography) and CJI (local entrepreneur), Conix Architects is responsible for the architectural design of the pavilion.

"In a constantly changing world everything happens with passion," Christine Conix says. It is more true than ever in this project that it is the building as such or the public space created round it. Our architectural task is continuously guided by passion because we want to go beyond the pure and simple planning of the building." The architect speaks of the very particular thought which underlies the concept of the Belgian/European pavilion, 5000 m2 destined to a collection of images and shows. How to place it on the scale of Shanghai, its 19 million inhabitants, its energy, its lights, its tentacle like motorways? How to translate Belgium's central geographical position in Europe and its historical position at the cross roads of Latin, Germanic, and Anglo Saxon influences, its cultural openness and its diversity? And how to remain attentive to the notion of durability? "The fact that the building is ephemeral posed a big problem for us. It is important that it should open onto another life after the Expo. This is why we have designed it like a meccano set which can be dismantled and reconstructed somewhere else. In China, I hope. We have made up a simple shell corresponding to the image of the Belgians, firstly discrete towards the outer world but then they surprise with their talent, creativity and high technology." The building is integrated into the landscape with a garden sprinkled with trees, created to entice strolling around and to accommodate the waiting lines. Enclosed on three sides to adapt to Shanghai's hot and humid climate, its parallelepipedal form covered in aluminium mesh opens to the north through a long glass facade onto the large esplanade.



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In a wide 12 m high interior empty space, visible through the glass wall, the form of a gigantic neuron is a strong and intriguing signal in a country which traditionally thinks in terms of symbols. "Seen as a symbol of today's complex and interconnected world, this textile neuron in changing colours above all reflects Belgium's connectivity with all the surrounding countries, its innovative power, its open spirit, its dialogue between different cultures and communities." Beyond the Belgian exhibition spaces, the pavilion will also reserve an important space for the European Union and

will shelter the two floors of friendly meeting places. Speaking about sustainable development, social environment, national values and cultures, this projects confirm that Conix Architects are not just interested in creating iconic buildings for their own sake. Impassioned by the diversity of architectural operations, the office always displays the human scale as a reference in this work strategy. See you in Shanghai next 1<sup>st</sup> of May!

Christine Conix in her office (Antwerp)

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