



Attention to Detail

Atelier d'Architecture Bruno Ericum & Partners (AABE), one of the Architecture Top 50, is a firm concerned with modern architecture, with its headquarters in Brussels. AABE was founded led by architect Bruno Ericum, who gathered a team of passionate architects to realise multidisciplinary projects across the globe as this article from the man himself reveals.

Over 30 years of experience have resulted in the realisation of different types of projects including private dwellings set in an urban context, secluded villas located on remote hilltops by our firm AABE.

In addition, we have also realised buildings with a more public function such as museums, office buildings, hotels and commercial real estate. The numerous publications and awards granted to AABE underpin the worldwide appreciation for our architectural philosophy. The Atelier consists of 15 architects, so we are of a sufficient size to master multidisciplinary projects, yet small enough to function as a team collaborating to achieve unique projects time and time again.

We have realised constructions in the following countries: Caribbean, South Africa, Germany, Greece, Belgium, United-States, Spain, France, Great-Britain, The Netherlands, Italy, Peru, and Switzerland.

Adapting to changes in the industry

I have always paid much attention to detail - in order to make the most of the techniques

available - and to really bring out proportions. However, there is something else that has begun to influence my approach more recently that is a change in approach triggered by the realisation that after five or ten years, many modern constructions that were initially pristine have now lost their brilliance. So rather than turning increasingly to materials that would suffer the ravages of time, I decided to take on a patina.

My colleagues and I have turned our Brussels workshop into a laboratory. It is a collaborative space where we work on exploring different solutions, before taking the final ones to building sites in a dozen or so countries throughout the world. Each time, we compare the specific benefits of different types of wood, stone as well as smooth and granular concrete.

In Corsica, for example, we added tuff dust from a Bonifacio stone, to a mixture of cement, sand and stone, so the resulting colour of the concrete would blend in with the surrounding nature. We also poured this concrete into forms fitted with planks of wood of different thicknesses. This resulted in a grooved effect - and also created flat horizontal parts - where

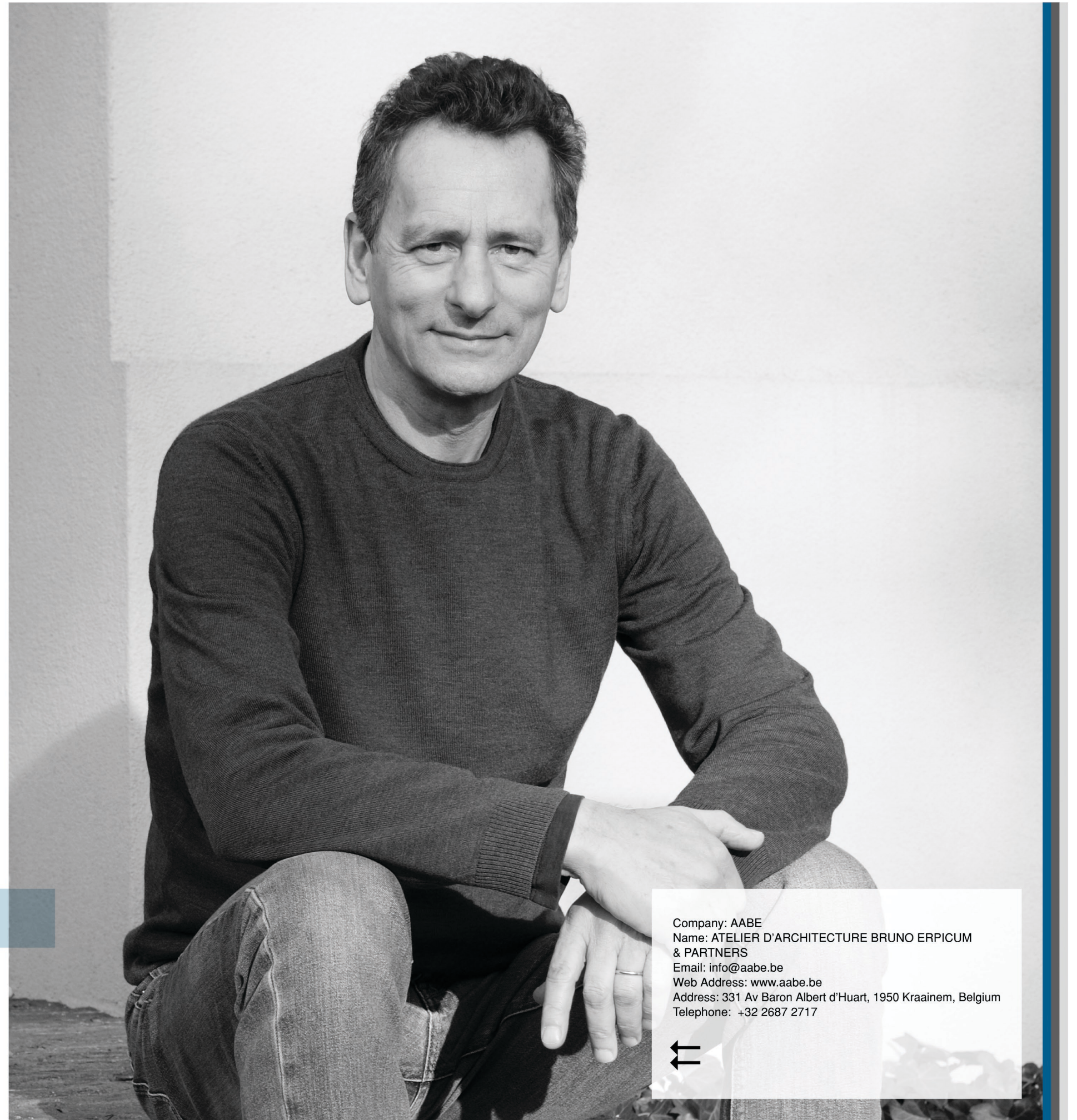
vegetation debris and marine sediments could be deposited.

This process gave the impression that the material was living, stamped with a certain 'dirtiness', reflecting the rocks encompassing this enormous structure. No more talk of 'ageing' or 'deteriorating', but rather 'patina' and 'authenticity'. Put simply, an ode to time passing.

As you no doubt will have gathered, my architecture practice stems from an unconditional love for the modernist movement. Ultimately, it's about freeing oneself from all forms of decoration, including the facing of facades and walls - notably cement works - so that we can continue working unconstrained.

When undertaking a new client or project, I believe that close communication is critical to ensuring the best possible outcome. We can treat your files in the following languages: French, English, Dutch, Spanish, and Italian.

In terms of what sets us apart from other companies in this industry, I believe that we are the best option for our clients because we trigger and endorse



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emotion. Whatever the size of the project, what counts are the interaction, passion and the quality of the people working together. Integration of a project entails the ability to endorse the features of the surrounding aesthetics is defined by proportion.

An architectural project is worked out while answering a multitude of constraints, the objective to create an environment favourable for human activity. We all know that we do not only live thanks to some proteins which enable us to function: the quality of our life, the power of our memories, the importance of our interpersonal exchanges, the reading of the environment, all these moments trigger emotions.

Within the wider industry, we distribute our knowledge and experience by reading books, magazines and websites as well as attending international conferences. We are always searching for details. We are busy creating our own 'specifications book', in order to communicate about this with the clients and the builders.

Overall aim - definition of the target

Integration of the project and of the details into it. Architects create living spaces and work environments. But there is more to their work than meets the eye. Through their work, architects also share a vision of the world. It is herein that lies the dual nature of this noble profession: pragmatism versus creativity.

While designing a building according to the requirements of their client, the architect does so with the objective to incorporate beauty into the project. In a way, an architect can be perceived as a painter or a poet. Except that the architect does not start from a blank canvas or a white sheet of paper. The starting point for the architects' work is the unique environment provided by the plot of land on which the project is to be realised, each time with its specific, on of a kind features.

It is precisely the uniqueness of each different location that triggers the creative mind of the architect and challenges him to reconcile the pragmatic requirements of the client with the beauty, uniqueness of the surrounding environment. There are rules aplenty on how to erect a building on a piece of land, but applying them to the letter does not suffice to achieve the objective of reconciling pragmatism with creativity.

Four solid walls topped by a reassuring roof no doubt brings promise of home comfort. The indescribable beauty of nature, however, hides elsewhere. So, when architects embark on their journey, they must free themselves from the shackles of everyday conventions. If they allow their imaginations to guide them, the architects' creations will include a touch of uninhibited, tempestuous chaos. Inspiration will come from a breath of air, like wind blowing away traditions to reveal unknown sensations. At last, the architect is complete. They become artists, genuine ones, capturing in a flash of light the intuition of a world we no longer tend to see.

Our successful projects include:

- BIFSA – Building Industries of South Africa – RSA;
- Dali Museum – Riverside – County Hall – London - England;
- ICE – Institute of Italian Exterior Commerce – Italy;
- Les Montres Rolex SA – Suisse ;
- Région Poitou Charentes – France Rewarded at the Architectural BIFSA Awards – RSA.

Some of our awards include the following:

- Awarded at the Eric Architectural LION Awards – England'
- Mention in Architectural Belgian Awards – Belgium;
- Participation in the international Colloquium 'Contemporary Architecture' organised by the Brussels Government in March 2003;
- « PRIX DE L'URBANISME 2004 » - Belgium;

- Awarded at the Big Mat International Architecture Awards 2013;
- Awarded at the International Space Design Awards IDEA-TOPS 2013 – Villa category - Shenzhen, China;
- Participation in '#Infrastructure and Property Development MEA Summit 2014' - Dubai - United Arab Emirates;
- Awarded at the RE-THINKING THE FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY AWARDS 2014 - Residential Building Built;
- Awarded at the GPAW – Grand Prix d'Architecture de Wallone 2015 with the "House HIFI" and;
- Biennale di Venezia 2016, Time Space Existence – AABE exhibition at the Palazzo Mora.

At the end of the day, I believe that every single new project is important, whatever the size, whatever is the budget.

A new 'tap' with CEA

Architecture is without limits, starting with the initial design up until the development of the smallest details of an object. Throughout this process, one single objective is kept in mind: eliminate superfluous elements to retain only what is essential.

This philosophy has been applied while designing OPUS, a 60-mm cylinder for the hand tap and a narrower model to facilitate the water flow, with no rosette or joystick. The object consists of merely one material, stainless steel. It is a pleasure for the eyes at a first glance, then for the hands after the first touch."

Concluding thoughts

I believe that all new projects start from a 'white page' and every single new technology is integrated. In terms of the future, I hope for a progression in the quality and results we provide.

