

MEDIA INFORMATION

January 2024

Möllerei, Esch-sur-Alzette:

Contemporary witnesses of the steel industry

Belval's blast furnace road is at the heart of the transformation of a 120-hectare industrial wasteland into a modern urban district. The two preserved blast furnaces and other industrial monuments have been integrated into the urban development. The renovation of numerous industrial glazing units with steel profile systems preserves their authentic appearance.

For decades, Belval, in the northeast of Esch-sur-Alzette, was something like the 'Ruhr' of Luxembourg. And like in the Ruhr, there are no more smoking chimneys in the 'beautiful valley' (the translation of 'Belval'): The production of pig iron in Luxembourg came to an end in 1997 with the closure of the last blast furnace. This event also marked the start of a large-scale urban development project. Based on a master plan by Dutch architects Jo Coenen, a new urban district with housing, workplaces, a university and research facilities is being created on the approximately 120-hectare industrial site. As the industrial facilities were to become part of this urban environment, the two remaining blast furnaces A and B (a third was dismantled and sold) and other buildings on the former blast furnace road were included in the urban development concept.

Existing buildings protected by the status of historical monument

One of these buildings is the 'Möllerei'. Coke and iron ore, called 'Möller' in German, used to be mixed and stored here. Built in 1910 and modernised in the late 1960s, the building is 164 metres long, 25 metres wide and on average 26 metres high. In 2000, this huge hall at the foot of the blast furnaces was added to the "Supplementary List of National Monuments", with the obligation to preserve it. Its conversion took place in two construction phases: The northern part of the building, approximately 110 metres long, has been used as a university library (also known as the Luxembourg Learning Centre) since September 2018. The remaining third of the Möllerei will be converted into an events and exhibition hall in a further construction phase between March 2020 and February 2022, under the direction of the architecture firm BFF architecture & urbanisme, Luxembourg.

Structural upgrades and appropriate energy standards

The highest priority in the renovation and conversion of the Möllerei was to preserve the building as it was when it was built in 1970. With this in mind, the corroded metal panelling on the façade was replaced with new sheet metal and the roof was also renewed. However, thermal insulation in line with today's energy requirements was deliberately omitted: 'It was decided at the time that we would protect the building from the weather, but that an interior temperature of around 12 to 15 degrees would be sufficient for use as an events and exhibition hall', explains Julia Nockemann from BFF. 'The client also wanted to keep the ribbon windows as visually unchanged as possible.' As the conservation authorities also valued the preservation of the exterior appearance more highly than the energy-efficient renovation, the ribbon windows on both long façades and the gable façade were ultimately replaced with the non-insulated Jansen-Economy 50 steel profile system. The heating system has also been reduced to a minimum, in keeping with the industrial character of the building, but this does not preclude the organisation of events during the cold season: Areas where events take place are designed with thermally insulated profiles. This includes, in particular, the new entrance area with the adjoining foyer. The thermally insulated Jansen VISS TVS mullion and transom system was used here, which can be used to create particularly elegant façades. The entrance doors themselves were made using the Janisol steel system, which is also thermally insulating.

Change of use requires new access

The conversion of the Möllerei into a publicly accessible location also required some structural changes that went beyond the structural upgrading and refurbishment of the existing building. Among other things, a new staircase with a lift system has been added, as well as ramps and walkways that allow visitors to tour the industrial monument. Since the completion of the renovation work, almost 400 square metres of digital and interactive installations have been used to document the operation of blast furnace A. While blast furnace A was completely preserved due to its good condition, blast furnace B was only preserved as a shell. As identity-forming industrial monuments, they are a reminder of the importance of the iron and steel industry in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Project details:

Client: Belval Fund

Architect: BFF architecture & urbanisme, Luxembourg

Metalwork: Lefevre Lux S.a.r.l., Bascharage

Steel profile systems used:

Economy 50 fixed glazing, Janisol 2 door, Janisol door, VISS TVS

System supplier: Schüco Stahlssysteme Jansen, Bielefeld

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