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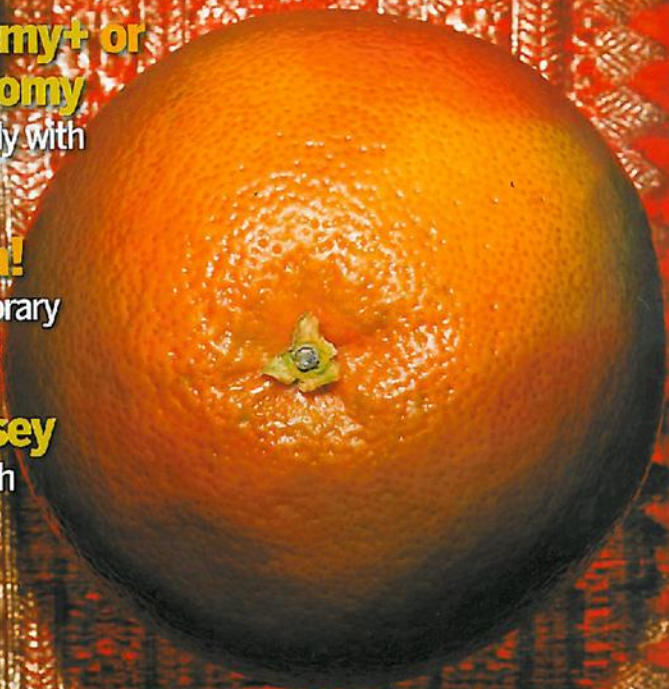
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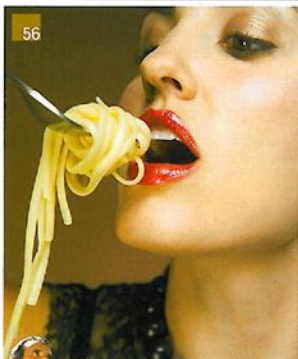
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“It’s true that in this business you’re a young architect when you’re 50.”

Left This development period is similar to that to provide 1,000 apartments in Denmark’s capital. **Below** Julien De Smedt inspects a model of one of the many projects his team is working on.

Julien De Smedt is a prodigy. Aged just 32, this Brussels native is already an acclaimed architect, with a Golden Lion from the Venice Biennale under his belt. He also manages his own firm – his second – which employs 35 people. In contrast, most of his colleagues have to wait until they’re middle aged to get a first taste of recognition or the chance to become independent.

“It’s true that in this business you’re a young architect when you’re 50,” smiles De Smedt, as he welcomes us into his office on a snowy Sunday in Copenhagen. Situated in the Nørrebro district, at the back of a quiet residential courtyard, IDS Architects looks more like a trendy design collective than a successful architectural firm. Huge paintings by the Belgian graffiti artist Pablo Gonzalez adorn the walls. De Smedt’s desk is separated from the others by a bright yellow plastic curtain, and hip young things in funky T-shirts are hard at work. De Smedt, who is Belgian on his mother’s side and French on his father’s is wearing a black hat and skinny jeans.

The young architect has built his

reputation on several projects, among them the VM housing blocks, completed in Copenhagen in 2006. One of the buildings is V-shaped and features fun triangular balconies, while the other is M-shaped and has smooth facades. “They were shaped that way as they afforded the best views and light, given the environment,” explains De Smedt. They also look fun and playful. “I think of them as a three-dimensional game of Tetris,” he says.

He designed the buildings together with the Danish architect Bjarke Ingels. The two met while working for the renowned Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas in the late 90s. They left, originally to direct a movie together. “We got some funding from [Danish director] Lars Von Trier’s production company, which is why we came to Copenhagen,” explains De Smedt. “But the project fell through and we went back to what we knew.”

They founded their firm, called Plot, in 2001 and parted ways in 2006 to concentrate on their own projects – but not before they had designed acclaimed schemes such as the Copenhagen



Top: Gonzalo Pacheco
Images: IDS Architects, Nikky Valdes

Brussels Airlines: Theodor Hagerstrand
February 2008

FROM SKATEBOARDS TO skyscrapers

Belgian architect Julien De Smedt first found his place in the urban environment as a skateboarder – now he’s transforming how we live in it



The balconies are like a three-dimensional game of Tetris

hurricane bluffs, which allow local residents to swim in the super clean waters of the Danish capital. The Maritime Youth House, also in Copenhagen, is a space shared by a sailing club and a youth club, where the soft-curved wooden deck serves both as an outdoor playing area and a storage space for boats. It's also reflective of one of De Smet's inspirations: skateboarding.

"I think skateboarding is the reason why I became an architect," he reckons. "I spent seven years as a teenager in the streets of Sherbrooke, a colourful district of Brussels, as part of this culture of hip-hop singers and graffiti artists. As a skateboarder, you do slides and grinds on surfaces like concrete, metal or wood. You're constantly learning about the environment around you and you make real use of it. You learn how to deconstruct while, as an architect, you learn how to recreate."

Skateboarding also made him aware of the need to create buildings that are inclusive. For instance, the design of a courtyard hall in the Norwegian city of Stavanger, which won him and Ingels the Golden Lion for best concert hall in



2004, allow for activities such as film screenings and shows to be held outside the venue. "I always try to bring an added value to a project, so that everyone can enjoy the new building, not just the people using it," he explains.

These are some of the projects that have brought De Smet acclaim in the world of architecture. Days before we meet, De Smet was in Barcelona giving a lecture and was supposed to fly to China the day after for another round of public speaking. "Unfortunately, my neck is killing me and I have to stay here," he says. But he won't be idle, as he has many projects on his plate.

Among them is the development of a 1,000-unit housing scheme in

Le skateboard, piste d'essai pour l'architecture

Avant de se lancer dans la conception d'un bâtiment, Julien De Smet aime se faire inspirer par la culture du skateboard. C'est pourquoi il a conçu un bâtiment à Bruxelles qui ressemble à un jeu de Tetris en 3D.

De Smet a conçu un bâtiment à Bruxelles qui ressemble à un jeu de Tetris en 3D. Le bâtiment est composé de balcons cantileverés qui se chevauchent les uns les autres.

Le projet a été financé par le gouvernement de la Région wallonne et le conseil municipal de la ville de Bruxelles.

Le bâtiment a été inauguré en 2004 et a depuis lors accueilli de nombreuses activités culturelles et sportives.

Julien De Smet est un architecte belge d'origine néo-brésillienne. Il a étudié à l'école d'architecture de l'Université de la Colombie et a travaillé pour plusieurs bureaux d'architecture avant de fonder son propre atelier à Bruxelles.

Brussels All-Bees by/for magazine February 2008

Images: A. H. Hansen, H. K. K. K.

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I think skateboarding is the reason why I became an architect

Van skateboard tot met behouder

Julien De Smaet is een architect die zich niet alleen richt op het bouwen van gebouwen, maar ook op het creëren van openbare ruimtes. Hij is de ontwerper van de 'Van Skateboard tot Met Behouder' in Brussel, een project dat gericht is op het verbeteren van de leefbaarheid van de stad door middel van het creëren van openbare ruimtes die geschikt zijn voor skateboarders en andere gebruikers.

De Smaet heeft een aantal belangrijke principes in gedachten bij het ontwerpen van deze ruimtes. Het gaat om het creëren van een openbare ruimte die geschikt is voor skateboarders, maar ook voor andere gebruikers. Het gaat om het creëren van een openbare ruimte die geschikt is voor skateboarders, maar ook voor andere gebruikers.

Above The Maritime House in Copenhagen may house boats, but it also offers residents a skateboard park. **Below** is De Smaet's view of a vertical city green space, brought indoors so that they do benefit full time.

toronto, Canada that will surround a huge silo with shared-use blocks of flats and three-dimensional green spaces in front. Another is a floating island with its soft rolling lines, akin to a rollercoaster. It's being developed as a spa resort, but you can imagine other uses for it. 'My projects as how it evolved, they're not aesthetic achievements or genius coups with no grounding in reality,' explains De Smaet. 'They are studies that can be adapted to different environments and conditions, so they can be easily exported.'

Perhaps his most important project is that of the vertical city, a glass tower mixing housing and minor public parks. 'It is using promotes offer terraces on condominium projects as a laudable option, but they're usually too small and if they're 30m off the ground, they become unusable because of the wind,' he explains. 'I instead I want to create common indoor parks that can be used year round. You could have a barbecue in December, for instance. They would also be naturally ventilated and you could have turbines that provide free energy.'

The environment is an important concern, too. 'Green building is the current buzzword in architecture, with every project having to respect guidelines such as good insulation. But you can imagine that these buildings, in addition to being sustainable in a passive way could be actively sustainable by creating their own energy. For instance, you could have buildings with windmills. That's one of the things we're working on.'

One project De Smaet is particularly excited about is the opening of an office in Brussels this past New Year's Eve. 'The thing that drew me away from Brussels, a sense of stagnation in the city, seems to be disappearing. There are signs of renewed energy, with young architects opening off-sets and fashion designers moving in from Antwerp... things are happening in Brussels.'



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