



Buildings

MANHATTAN: FLAGSHIP PROJECT FOR SUSTAINABLE RENOVATION

AFTER 45 YEARS, THE ICONIC MANHATTAN TOWER IN BRUSSELS NEEDED SOME TENDER LOVING CARE. RATHER THAN CHOOSING TO DEMOLISH THE BUILDING, REAL ESTATE INVESTOR VICTORY CHOSE BESIX, IN A JOINT VENTURE WITH LOUIS DE WAELE, TO NOT ONLY RESTORE MANHATTAN TO ITS FORMER GLORY, BUT UPGRADE IT TO A BEACON OF SUSTAINABILITY IN THE CAPITAL OF EUROPE.

AS FROM SEPTEMBER 2020, ITS FIRST TENANTS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ENJOY THE TASTEFULLY RENOVATED INTERIORS, A NEW GLASS FAÇADE AND TWO EXTRA FLOORS. WE SPOKE TO BEN COOPER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT VICTORY AND JAN VAN STEIRTEGHEM, GENERAL MANAGER OF EUROPE AT BESIX ABOUT THE CHALLENGES BOTH PARTIES OVERCAME TO DELIVER AN ASTONISHING RESULT AND THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD INVESTOR-CONTRACTOR RELATIONSHIP.

Ben, can you explain why Victory chose renovation for Manhattan instead of rebuilding from scratch?

Ben: "We have always had a strong commitment to sustainability, and as the saying goes "the most sustainable building is the one that you didn't build". In our opinion, we simply cannot afford not to renovate existing buildings. The UN Environment Programme indicated that in 2018, real estate was responsible for about 40% of all global energy and process related CO₂ emissions, so the responsibility for addressing this seems quite clear. If that isn't enough, perhaps we can persuade people by highlighting that GRESB¹ suggest that by 2035 50% of all buildings will not be compatible with the Paris Agreement. Of course, renovation comes with more operational challenges than demolition. For Manhattan it would have been much easier to start from scratch, but deciding to renovate the building and retaining the concrete frame saved more than 4,500 tons of embodied carbon and equaled almost 6,000 fewer waste truck and cement journeys. We are proud to call Manhattan a sustainable development."

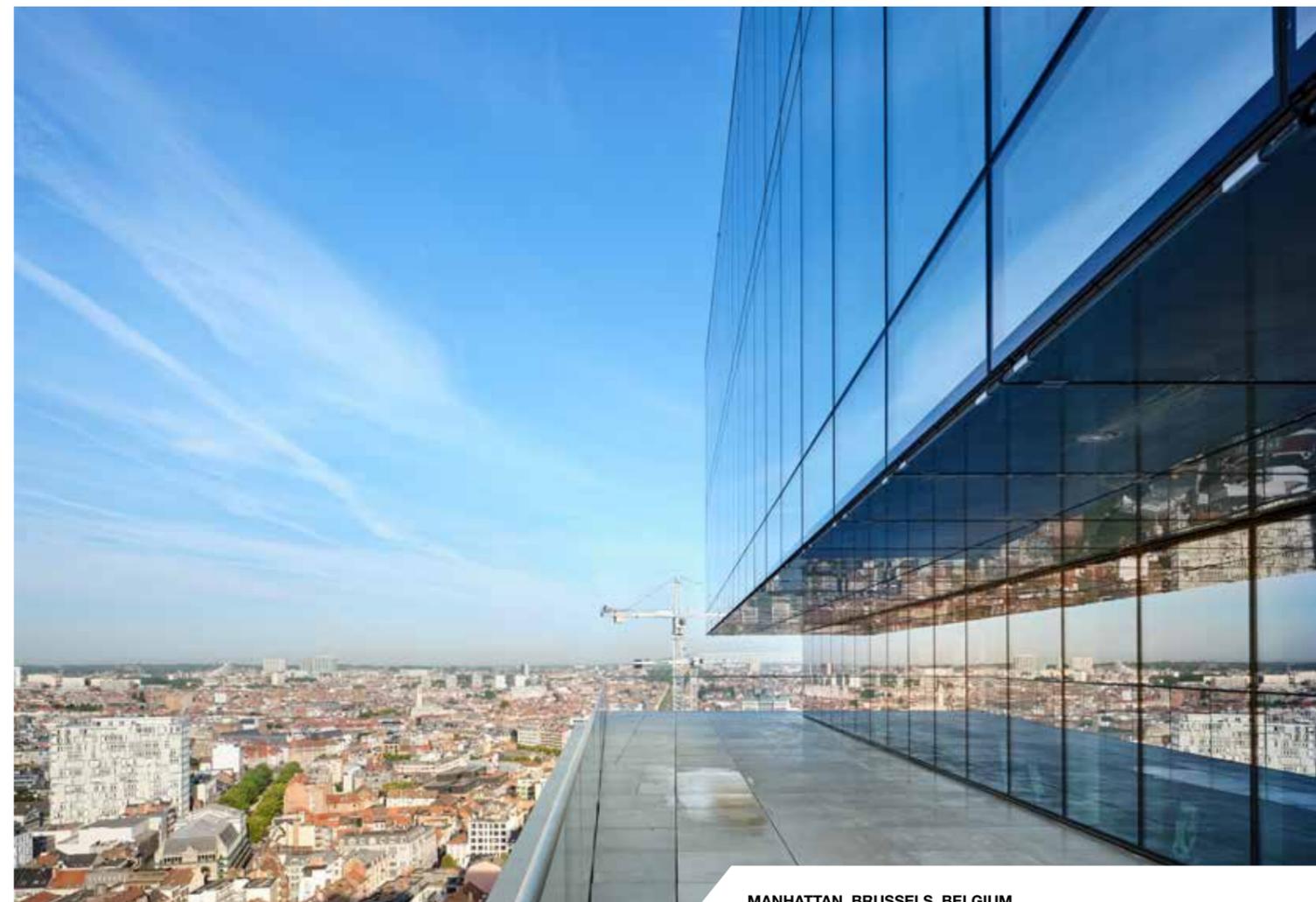
Jan, can you tell us a little bit more about the specific challenges the project faced?

Jan: "In order to significantly reduce the project's carbon footprint, it was decided to retain and reuse the 28,000 ton concrete frame of the building. This required an in-

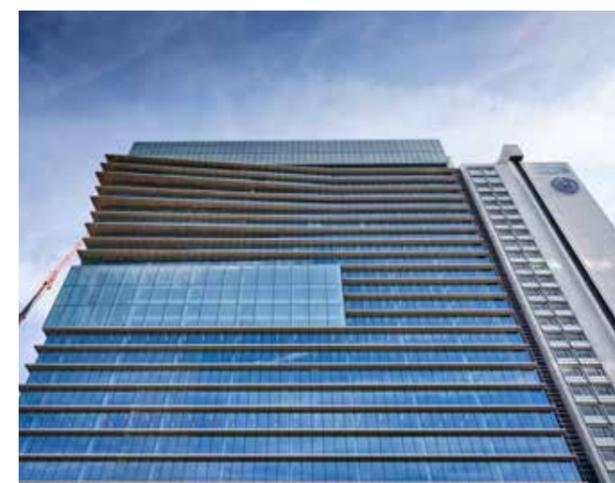
depth study of the stability of this existing structure and its foundations and, as is common for a building of this age, a lot of the original structural drawings were missing, and then we needed to integrate these aspects into the new design. We ran into the additional problem that the as-built file did not match the reality of what we encountered on site. More than once, our teams had to go back to the drawing board, which meant wasted time and higher costs. Moreover, the location of the project posed logistical challenges. You can compare this renovation with open-heart surgery: Manhattan is not a stand-alone building, it is part of a complex with two adjoining hotels, one of which had to remain operational throughout the works."

What does a renovation like Manhattan require of the investor-developer relationship?

Jan: "It requires mutual trust, which is one of the major challenges in our sector. But it does not have to be! Building and maintaining a good partnership is first and foremost an "attitude", but it also has a rational component: sound agreements and excellence in everything you do make good friends. We have to understand that projects involve great risks for us, but that this is no different for the client. That is why it is so important to have a balanced contract and common goals at the start of the project. These goals are what both parties need to overcome difficulties: what do we want to achieve together and how can we help each other?"



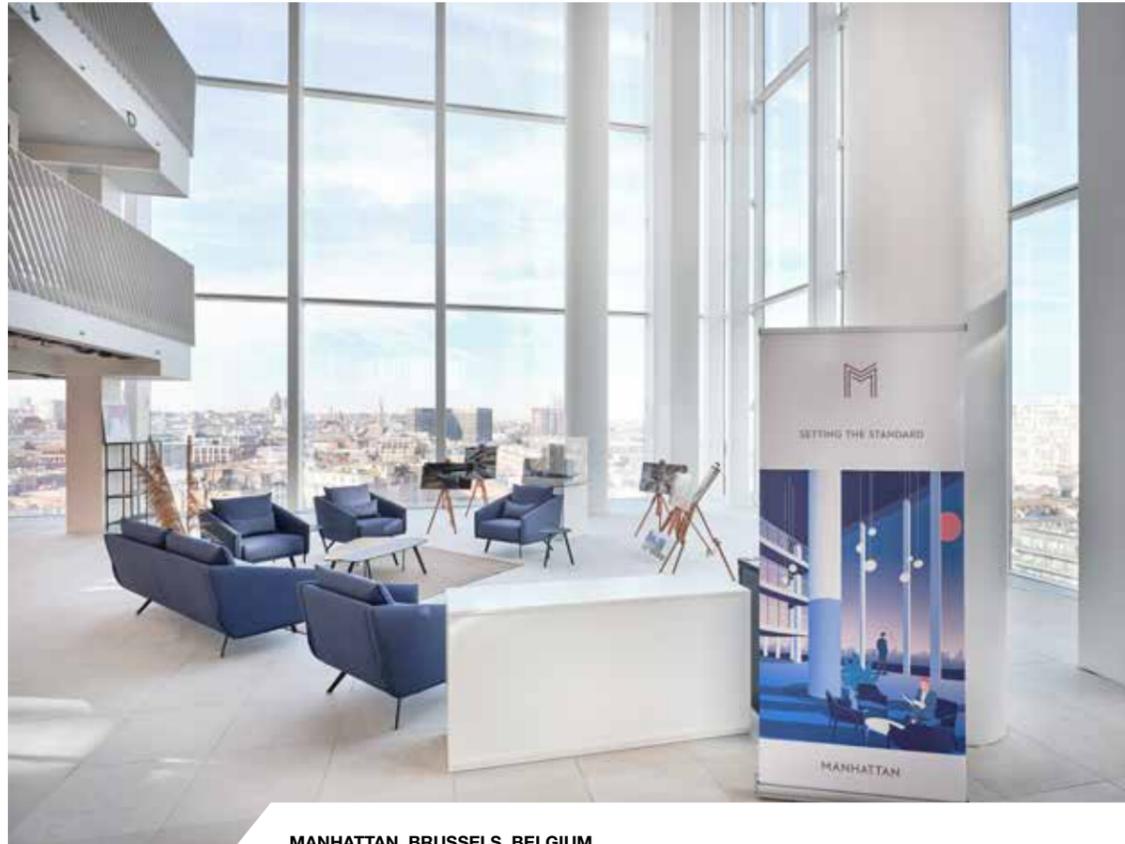
MANHATTAN, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM



IF YOU WORK WITH BESIX, YOU BENEFIT FROM EXCELLENT DESIGN TEAMS AND HAVE ACCESS TO CUTTING EDGE TECHNOLOGY THAT IS AT THE FOREFRONT OF THIS PROCESS. //

BEN COOPER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT VICTORY





MANHATTAN, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

Ben: “A renovation takes a different approach in order to manage the construction process. The older and more adversarial approach between investor and contractor is outdated and does not work for this type of work. Investors and construction companies need to work closely together to implement best practice technologies, advanced survey methods and, critically, forward-thinking contracts that better align cost management between investor and contractor. The good news is that all of these tools exist, we as an industry just need to get better at using them.”

Jan: “It’s also an aspect that is open to innovation. BESIX has already taken the first steps in this direction by using early contractor involvement, but this only covers the design phase. We want to go further, and that is why we are working towards signing projects according to Integrated Project Delivery (IPD), a principle launched by the American Institute of Architects (AIA). This principle assumes that the current way of drawing up contracts and designing collaborations leads to too many budget and planning problems, mistrust and mutual reproaches. IPD starts from the acceptance that the interests of all parties must first be reconciled: budget, timing, quality level and a payment system in which either everyone wins or everyone loses. After that, you can work together more constructively because each party benefits from solving all problems. This is the same mindset we held on to while building Manhattan and cooperating with Victory.

The collaboration we achieved is not only more efficient, it is at the same time a lot more fun for everyone involved. Our passionate colleagues don’t want to argue with their client, they want to co-create.”

Ben, for future projects, what would be your main requirements for the choice of the design and construction company(ies)?

Ben: “As I’ve already touched on, we’re looking for ways in which we can contract work through more collaborative contracting methods. Contractors need to be flexible, have the ability to be agile with planning and lean in operation. Secondly, we will look for partners with experience in renovation: this work is challenging, so partners should have the nimble, open-minded approach to projects that suits renovation. Lastly, we pay attention to their expertise in technology and design. Renovation requires the investor and contractor to find complex solutions to challenging problems, and technology can help with that. On this project we’ve noticed that if you work with BESIX, you benefit from excellent design teams and have access to cutting edge technology that is at the forefront of this process.”

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**JAN VAN STEIRTEGHEM,
GENERAL MANAGER
BU EUROPE BESIX**



// Deep-dive into the project

The metamorphosis of Manhattan is impressive to say the least. The BESIX teams added two floors, which enabled the 100m tower to reclaim its spot on the Brussels’ skyline.

The tower was carefully stripped of its façade and reclad with glass which is solar-reflecting, heat-blocking and thermally insulating. The design by Jaspers-Eyers Architects draws visual interest to the top floors where, from the 18th floor upwards, the original rectangular floor plan was elongated along the south and western sides, creating increasingly cantilevered floors.

As a visitor, you are struck by the winter garden in the middle of the tower, an open space reaching over four floors, attained by stripping away the flooring in this space.

One of the main challenges was renovating the building’s podium levels while the restaurants, supermarket, the Vlerick Business School and one of the two adjoining hotels remained operational. Manhattan’s main operational systems were installed in the basement, and shared by the two adjoining hotels. BESIX had to disconnect everything to allow for a stand-alone system, and reconnect all technical installations from the basement levels through to the tower, whilst safeguarding the operations of the surrounding buildings.

The podium levels, including the two extra floors which were added above the Vlerick Business School, were clad in marble.

To top it all off, tenants have spectacular views over Brussels from the highest terrace in the city on the 27th floor.

Manhattan is a flagship project of BESIX’s undeniable expertise and knowledge in sustainable renovation, especially in urban environments.

