

In an important heritage site destined for tourism, a2o architecten and AAC Architecture inspire the next generation to learn how past and future coexist at Straf! KABO Beringen

RIGHT The original facade of the building is complete with characteristic brickwork arranged in specific patterns and a complementary colour scheme in glazed bricks.
Photos Stijn Bollaert



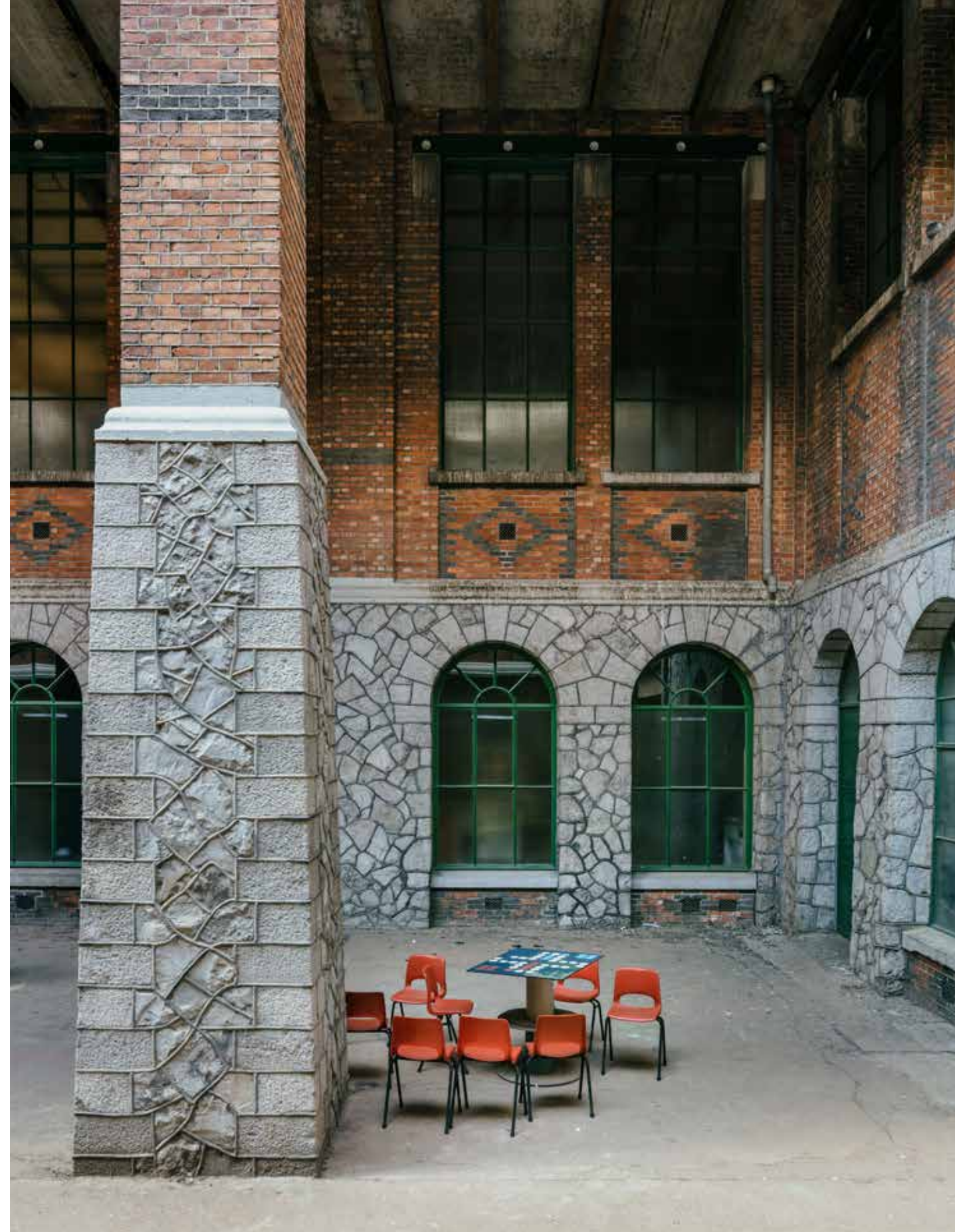


BERINGEN In Flanders' largest industrial heritage site, tribute is being paid to the region's mining past across 100,000 m² of existing building heritage. What makes Beringen unique in Europe is that the industrial heart of the mine has been preserved to be redeveloped as a mix between heritage, recreation and tourism with urban functions such as living, working and shopping – giving the mining land, once dedicated to the extraction, a dignified, valuable and contemporary interpretation.

In this setting, the former bathing halls of the complex have been converted into a nursery and an elementary school with after-school care. Physically and symbolically, the past and the future communicate here. The existing facades of the building have been kept while new additions have been placed in a retained manner that does not impose itself but let history breathe. Wooden elements, large windows and minimal design interventions intoned colours function as a framing device, highlighting the stylistic features of the existing building in plain sight rather than imposing themselves to transform it. The design reflects the school's philosophy, which follows a strong focus on living learning in all its activities, allowing children to discover their surroundings playfully.

ABOVE The ground floor is an open plateau made of a large concrete slab, which rests on robust beams and columns.

RIGHT The colossal building once served as a storage unit for mine wagons and provided changing rooms for the miners. The renovation has left the aesthetic of the heritage-listed structure intact while adapting it to new functions.



Architectural features that bring the existing heritage into the future without imposing itself on them

LEFT The new materials contrast warm and cold while creating a tranquil atmosphere and an understated context in which the original patina comes to the fore.

BELOW The nursery school has eleven classrooms and a reception room, which brings young learners together to help them build social skills and play.





LEFT TOP Lively details like the blue play house are intended to break the sober minimalism of the overall design.

LEFT BOTTOM Despite creating sixteen classrooms for the primary school, there's still a seeming excess of space and generous open plan areas the architects have preserved.

RIGHT Overpowering clarity and gentle contrast are continuous elements of the applied methodology, warm materials that mingle with more sterile elements.

