



Press Conference Boerentoren

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Deel I: The Boerentoren: a concise history and background

The first skyscraper in Europe, a product of innovation

The skyscraper emerged as a construction type at the end of the 19th century thanks to innovations such as steel-structure skeleton construction, safety lifts (Otis), and foundations with an enormous load-bearing capacity.

In the United States, skyscrapers underwent rapid development. Meanwhile, in Europe, admiration for the high-rise buildings in cities such as New York and Chicago was set in motion. Their construction, sturdiness, rapid development capabilities, roof gardens, fire safety, urban planning, and architectural value captured the imagination of European developers and architects.

Skyscrapers were hotly debated throughout Europe, but Antwerp's first skyscraper on the European continent was built in just three years: the Boerentoren (1929-1931).

It would remain the only skyscraper in Europe until long after World War II. Likewise, the Boerentoren was the only skyscraper outside of America.

The (organic) establishment of the Boerentoren

Antwerp developed from a fortress on the Scheldt to a commercial city. This growth did not occur according to a city plan but rather organically as the population increased. Urban development proceeded according to the bricolage of migration's influx. Therefore, social engineering was the driving force behind Antwerp's urban development.

The Boerentoren was established in the historic city centre on the initiative of Frans Van Cauwelaert, who was mayor of Antwerp from 1921 to 1933. In 1930, he arranged for the renowned World's Fair in Antwerp. However, to eliminate the hole on the Schoenmarkt caused by the German artillery in 1914, Mayor Van Cauwelaert found a developer to build on the derelict 3500m² area behind the Meirbrug, namely, The Algemene Bank Vereniging (General Bank Association). This was commonly known as the "farmer's bank" because of the importance of the Boerenbond (Farmer's Union) as a significant shareholder.

To quote Van Cauwelaert: "The heart of Antwerp is undergoing a beneficial rejuvenation ... an impressive complex of large modern buildings testifies to the economic strength and indestructible self-confidence of our Antwerp business community."



Protests against the Boerentoren

The plans for a skyscraper were met with a great deal of opposition. Often, concern for preserving the historic cityscape and heritage went hand in hand. Seemingly, locals of Antwerp were not yet ready for the 'high-rise era'.

To quote *Le Matin* (27 August 1928): 'Car tel est le but : abîmer la plus belle perspective d'Anvers pour montrer aux touristes, ..., que les Boerenbonden sont maîtres de la place.'

De Nieuwe Gazet (29 August 1928): 'The scandal has taken place. Antwerp in the hands of the Boerensocieteit (Farmers' Society) ... The Aesthetics, sacrificed to Finance.'

The critics seized on aesthetics to spout criticism. Specifically, the damage a new tower would do to the view of the Cathedral was put forward.

Le Neptune (10 October 1928): 'A propos de l'éléphantiasis du Boerenbond. Plus qu'un crime. Une faute ! Les grandes règles de l'urbanisme moderne.'

Approved thanks to leading architects

Eventually, a committee comprised of the following architects: Victor Horta, Henry Van de Velde, and Hendrik Petrus Berlage approved the design plans, and a building permit was issued.

First expansion in 1970

In the late 1960s, the bank was faced with a choice: to demolish or to renovate. Fortunately, a decision was made to renovate and add a new wing on the remaining derelict 1200m² on the Eiermarkt. The architectural firm Léon Stynen brought more comfort, technology, and hygiene into an additional annex. The monumentality and recognisability of the Boerentoren were preserved.

The Boerentoren was recognised as a protected monument in 1981.

The name of the 'Boerentoren' icon

The original official name 'Torengedouw' (Tower building) gradually disappeared in favour of the vernacular name 'Boerentoren' (Farmer's Tower), which has since become a public asset and is perceived by the Antwerp residents as an honorary title for the tower that, together with the cathedral, symbolises and shapes the city.



The Current Situation

Works are now in progress in the Boerentoren, which is being completely emptied. The existing steel skeleton is being cleaned and restored while all the floors are removed and replaced. The outer walls, the steel and the concrete structure of the annex added in the 1970s will be retained. Everything else will be removed for safety reasons due to asbestos.

From this point forward, an architectural competition was launched to make the icon ready for the future. The main priority is to turn the Boerentoren into a cultural tower accessible to the people of Antwerp and everyone visiting the city.

The winner of the competition is leading architect Daniel Libeskind.



Deel II: The Renewed Boerentoren: a tower for the future

Think Big

The Antwerp lifestyle includes the city's history and aura of its international tradition as a commercial city, port city, world petrochemical centre, the industrial capital of Flanders, cultural and university city.

Antwerp people are *Sinjoors* (colloquial term for an Antwerpian), and there is a flamboyant dimension to that. Antwerp was once Europe's most significant trading centre, the junction between east and west, north and south. It was also the financial heart of Europe. Goods from all over the world were traded in Antwerp's Handelsbeurs (Bourse of Antwerp). Therefore, the Golden Age (1498-1585) is permanently part of the city's DNA. Since the 16th century, Antwerpians have tended to think big and continue to do so in the future.

Leading architect Daniel Libeskind gives Antwerp landmark a new future

The Boerentoren is in the heart of every Antwerpian. The Boerentoren is the heart of Antwerp. The building stands at the intersection of two critical axes: on the one hand, the famous skyline, and on the other, the so-called 'Via Sinjoor', the (future) traffic-free axis from the Central Station to the Scheldt. The new Boerentoren will turn this central point into a public space, allowing the city to reinvent itself further.

Daniel Libeskind creates and further enhances the landmark status of the Boerentoren, making the tower accessible to Antwerp residents and everyone visiting the city. As a result, Libeskind places the new Boerentoren literally and figuratively among the works of other leading architects such as Richard Rogers (the new Courthouse) and Zaha Hadid (the new Port House).



The Boerentoren will entirely be a public space

With this project, we are giving the Boerentoren to the people of Antwerp (we are not 'giving it back' because it never really belonged to the people of Antwerp). For the first time in its history, the Boerentoren will have a public function.

When the plans were drawn up, a clear choice was made to dedicate the tower to culture. As a result, any residential and commercial functions were completely scrapped. Instead, the integral Boerentoren will become a cultural tower with exhibition spaces, a sculpture garden, a panoramic viewpoint and a bookshop. At least three full and double-height floors will be reserved in the monumental plinth for temporary and long-term exhibitions. The same applies to a large part of the basement and the current parking floors, where an impressive amount of space will be equipped for exhibitions. The narrow tower will house spectacular exhibition spaces. As it befits a contemporary museum, there will also be plenty of room for a culinary experience, with museum cafés, coffee bars and restaurants.

Daniel Libeskind's task is to make the tower a public place where visitors feel at home, enjoy the building, the view, the exciting cultural projects, and have something to eat and drink. In this way, the Boerentoren hopes to contribute to a warmer society.

We bring the Boerentoren to life - as the city's beating heart.

...thanks to private initiative

The renewal of the Boerentoren is an exceptional project. It is realised from a socio-cultural and historical inclination of the Antwerp family Huts and the international, Antwerp-based nation company Katoen Natie.



Two interventions respecting the heritage value

The new design is based on a solid belief in the future, just as it was for the original tower. And just like then, we are fully drawing the map of innovation.

The Boerentoren will be renewed based on two primary interventions. 1) There will be a new crown to let everyone enjoy the panoramic view, and 2) a new bow for improved accessibility.

The ambition is to give the Boerentoren an additional, monumental allure without detracting from its past or surroundings. The individuality of the Boerentoren must be preserved. The new, contemporary additions respect the history and heritage value, giving the Boerentoren an additional allure ensuring it is ready for the future.

In doing so, the Boerentoren's original steel structure is fully preserved. With floors and walls being removed, the pre-existing steel skeleton is exposed and can be thoroughly cleaned and painted (with fire-resistant paint). This will become the sensational backdrop for the building's exhibitions and events.



A new crown for the Boerentoren: 360-degree view of the city

As a skyscraper, the Boerentoren has the great advantage of being unique as it has no counterpart. Its singularity, uniqueness, central location, significantly distinguished size, and appearance make the tower, along with the Cathedral, icons in Antwerp's skyline.

The Boerentoren is the only skyscraper in Antwerp with a panorama room at the top. In 1932, visitors could buy tickets and look out the window at the top. However, accessibility and safety quickly became a concern. When the Boerentoren was renovated in 1970-76, the bank tried to optimise by adding a new panorama room at the top of the tower. Once again, however, accessibility ran into fire regulations, evacuation difficulties and accessibility problems. Throughout its almost centennial history, the tower's crowning glory was regularly changed and modified, usually for the advertising that needed to be on top.

Daniel Libeskind's design will make the phenomenal view of the Scheldt city accessible to as many visitors as possible. Central to the concept is the creation of a new crown that will house an easily accessible panorama room with a multifunctional event space underneath. Both will offer spectacular 360-degree views of the entire city. Furthermore, the new crown provides ample opportunities for walking around and enjoying a meal and a drink.

The new crown will be slid over the tower without damaging the existing building, leaving its structure completely intact. As a result, the future and the past will synchronise.

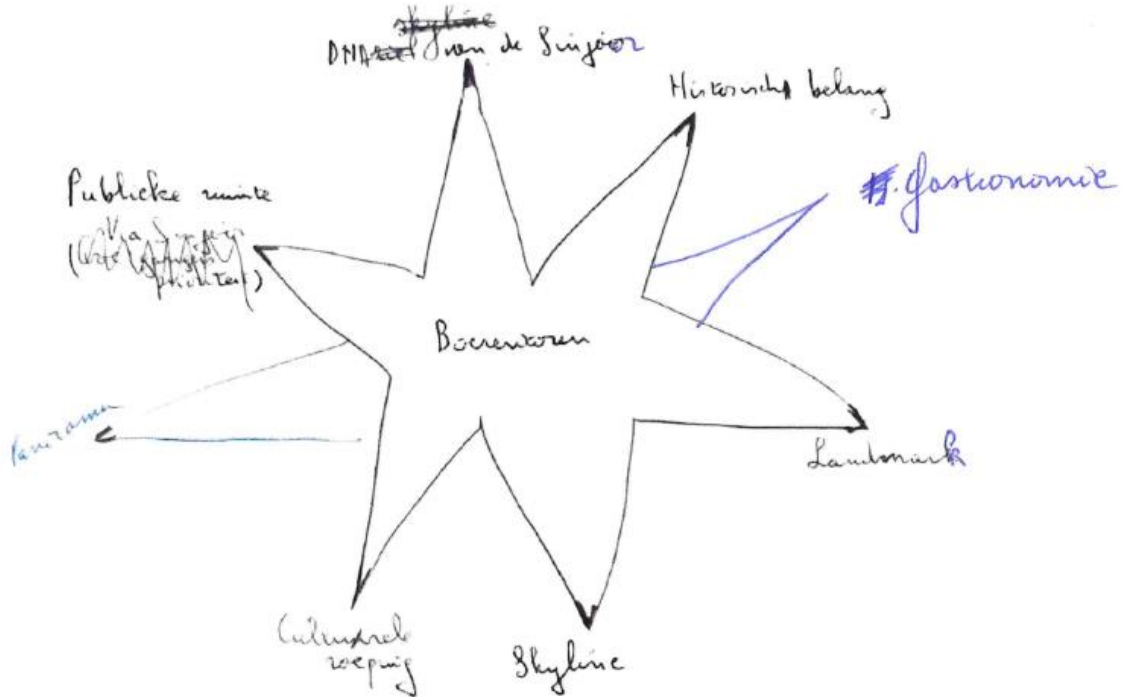
A new bow for a spectacular visitor experience

To reach the new crown, lifts and (fire) stairs are necessary. For this reason, and to guarantee the tower's stability, the present design adds the so-called 'bow' - a nod to the ships Antwerp owes its wealth. Architecturally, the bow will be a unique, light structure with lifts, (emergency) stairs, and a green lung with vertical gardens, providing a green lung.



The new future of the Boerentoren:

Harmony and balance between:



Hand-drawn sketch by Ferdinand Huts outlining the tower's future focal points: DNA of the Sinjoor, historical importance, gastronomy, landmark, skyline, cultural vocation, panorama and public space.



Parisians hated the Eiffel Tower when it was first built. It was ridiculed as an empty-headed thing, and yet in time it became the most beloved structure in Paris. This may be true for any great building that is artistic.

It cannot immediately become part of everything, it cannot easily fit in, because if it did, that probably would mean it was just a repeat of what was already there.'

Daniel Libeskind

Ladies and gentlemen,

About a year ago, I had my first appointment with Daniel Libeskind and I was a little bit nervous. Surely you don't meet someone of his calibre every day - someone who has received so many awards, both for his work as an architect and for his contribution to society. Someone who is a living architectural history. A star architect.

I think it took a full minute for the ice to be broken. What followed was friendship at first sight. The star architect turned out to be a fantastic, warm, genial, yet normal human being, with a lively sense of humour, plenty of self-deprecation and endless stories about the wonderful life he has led so far that made him who he is.

Daniel Libeskind was born in 1946 Poland, the son of two parents who survived not only the Holocaust but also the gulags. When little Daniel was 11, the Libeskind family packed its scant possessions together in a single box, and swapped Polish Łódź for a kibbutz in Israel. Two years later, they headed for New York. From the deck of one of the very last immigration ships, 13-year-old Daniel watched as the Statue of Liberty welcome him to the land of promise.



While his father worked in a print shop and his mother dyed fur collars in a sweatshop, Daniel turned out to be a musical prodigy: he emerged as a brilliant accordion player and stood on stage with the leading musicians of his time. Later, Daniel wanted to be an artist, but it was his mother who advised him to become an architect. Architecture is an art form, but it is also a solid profession. And so Daniel became an architect.

Daniel Libeskind never interned at an architectural firm, or at least not for more than a day. He did however get an appointment at the prestigious Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan - a kind of academic Utopia, where most teachers never want to leave. However, when Daniel disagreed profoundly with his colleagues during a meeting, he resigned on a whim. And so it happened that Daniel Libeskind, together with his wife Nina and their still very young children, moved to Milan on a whim. There, he set up a study centre for architecture and urbanism, and promptly won a prestigious fellowship from The Getty Center in Los Angeles. For a year, The Getty would pay Daniel, and he was allowed to do, think and write anything he wanted while overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The Libeskind family packed up all the furniture, toys, books and clothes, and sent everything to LA. They themselves would follow a little later. Or at least that was the plan.

Meanwhile, Daniel had also entered the competition to build the Jewish Museum in Berlin. Indeed, he, an architect who had never built a building before, won the competition. And while the Libeskind family's entire belongings were in a container somewhere between Milan and Los Angeles, Daniel and Nina realised: if we want to make this project a reality, we have to live in Berlin. And it might also be useful for us to build up an architecture firm.

That was in 1989. The Jewish Museum was finally festively inaugurated 12 years later. And in the meantime, Daniel Libeskind grew to become one of the world's most inspiring architects. He built the 'Hamilton Building' of the Denver Art Museum (USA), where some of you saw our Phoebus exhibition 'Saints, Sinners, Lovers or Fools' recently. He has built museums in - among others - Manchester, Dresden, Toronto, Osnabrück, Copenhagen, Vilnius, and a theatre in Dublin. In doing so, Daniel often combines historical buildings with something new and unseen in a highly innovative, but never non-committal way. In this way, he gives a future to buildings that at first glance appear to be just history.

In addition, Daniel Libeskind realised residential buildings in Singapore, South Korea, Poland and the United States, to give just a few examples. His work was shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, at The Art Institute of Chicago, at the Berlin Bauhaus Archives and at the Centre



Pompidou in Paris. And, last but not least, after the 9/11 attacks, he designed the master plan for Ground Zero.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, he is here in Antwerp, giving new life to 'our' Boerentoren. I am therefore particularly honoured to hereby introduce you to one of the most important creative minds in the world. A man who understands better than anyone that buildings and cities have a heart and a soul, and who knows how to make that heart beat faster. A man who reinvents architecture, using the past as a foundation, but looking to the future. Ladies and gentlemen: Daniel Libeskind.

Dr Katharina Van Cauteren

Chief of Staff of the The Phoebus Foundation Chancellery



About Daniel Libeskind

An international figure in architecture and urban design, the architect Daniel Libeskind is renowned for his ability to evoke cultural memory and is informed by a deep commitment to music, philosophy, and literature. Mr. Libeskind aims to create architecture that is resonant, original, and sustainable. Born in Łódź, Poland, in 1946, Mr. Libeskind immigrated to the United States as a teenager and with his family, settled in the Bronx. After studying music in New York and Israel on an American-Israel Cultural Foundation Scholarship, he developed into a musical virtuoso, before eventually leaving music to study architecture. He received his professional degree in architecture from the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in 1970 and a postgraduate degree in the history and theory of architecture from the School of Comparative Studies at Essex University in England in 1972.

Daniel Libeskind established his architectural studio in Berlin, Germany, in 1989 after winning the competition to build the Jewish Museum in Berlin. In February 2003, Studio Libeskind moved its headquarters from Berlin to New York City when Daniel Libeskind was selected as the master planner for the World Trade Center redevelopment. Daniel Libeskind's practice is involved in designing and realizing a diverse array of urban, cultural and commercial projects internationally. The Studio has completed buildings that range from museums and concert halls to convention centers, university buildings, hotels, shopping centers and residential towers.

As Principal Design Architect for Studio Libeskind, Mr. Libeskind speaks widely on the art of architecture in universities and professional summits. His architecture and ideas have been the subject of many articles and exhibitions, influencing the field of architecture and the development of cities and culture. His new book *Edge of Order*, detailing his creative process, was published in 2018. Mr. Libeskind lives in New York City with his wife and business partner, Nina Libeskind. The Studio Libeskind office headquarters are in New York City.



Boerentoren for the next 100 years by Daniel Libeskind

VISION

- Boerentoren, the 'Farmer's Tower', bringing Art and Nature, Heritage and Future together in a sustainable way
- Phoebus Art Experience as a new attraction for Antwerp and the world
- Spectacular publicly accessible Crown celebrating the Tower
- Prow Gardens as a ecological 'lung' and means of access to the Tower and its Crown

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

- Triple height Ground Floor: a multifunctional City Living Room
- Atrium bringing daylight to the center of the entire building
- Auditorium and Sculpture Garden on roof of existing building
- Revitalizing the historic structure for flexible galleries and diverse public activities

About The Phoebus Foundation

The Phoebus Foundation is a Belgian-based art foundation under Anglo-Saxon law, with purely philanthropic objectives. It is the proud owner of a wide-ranging collection, from Coptic textiles, Flemish Old Master paintings and vice-regal Latin-American art, to Belgian impressionism, symbolism and expressionism, CoBrA and contemporary Latin American masters. The Foundation acquires art and provides a professional framework for the conservation and management of art works, ensures their preservation and restoration and aims to achieve a high level of scientific research. The results of these efforts are shared as widely as possible by means of exhibitions and loans, cultural events, symposia and publications. The Phoebus Foundation is the creation of Flemish entrepreneur Ferdinand Huts (Katoen Natie, Indaver) and is headed by its chief of staff, Dr Katharina Van Cauteren, who also curates the exhibitions organised by the foundation.

Together with the local multi-disciplinary architecture and engineering firm **eld**, **Studio Libeskind** will realise the new extension to the iconic Boerentoren. The Phoebus Foundation will then house its art collection. Furthermore, various public and private partners will be invited to collaborate and showcase their collections to make these accessible to the public. The Phoebus Foundation's future in the Boerentoren intends to make art available for as many people as possible and continue its philanthropic objectives there.