



André Snippe: 'In Brussels, there's been too much emphasis on the construction of office-buildings and not enough on housing.'

André Snippe, Managing Director at City Projects:

'City of Brussels understands the project developer'

André Snippe, a project developer from Amsterdam, has found his niche within only a two-hour drive from the capital city of the Netherlands. Of the six housing projects totalling 53,000 m² in Brussels and Gent, construction on three of the projects will commence this year. Others will follow in 2007 and 2008. 'You should always build where there's a market!'

It was back in January 2004 when André Snippe really first saw Brussels from the perspective of a project developer. The property man from Amsterdam is convinced that the city, where his wife was born, offers great opportunities. There's not a single affordable owner-occupied apartment in the city centre of the Belgian capital. Yet every morning, some two million commuters jam up the access roads and almost give the city heart congestion. Snippe says that Belgians like to own their own homes. He decided to 'roughen up' the Belgian marketplace, which is what he calls his analysis. Brussels is the European centre, with all the workers being dependent on it. Thousands of students come to the Belgian capital and not only from EU countries. The Belgians are a frugal people. 'Where the average Dutchman has a debt of a few hundred-thousand, the average Belgian owns some 50,000 euro. A Belgian doesn't just simply take out a mortgage. He prefers to build his house on his own property. Seven out of ten Belgians own their own homes, as opposed to five out of ten in the Netherlands.'

Affordable owner-occupied apartments
Snippe has observed that young Belgians often want to settle down permanently in the big city. Yet nobody offers 60 m² for 179,000 euro to these starters, which is what they want. On the other hand, the price per square metre of property in the city centre of Brussels costs between 2,300 and 2,800 euro, as opposed to 4,500 euro in the heart of Amsterdam. Therefore, there must be a market for affordable owner-occupied apartments in the heart of this administrative centre of Europe. 'You should always build where there's a market.' There's plenty of space in the city. Many build-

ings that are now vacant, as well as those that have long been neglected and designated for offices or for housing in Brussels, are begging for redevelopment. 'There has been too much emphasis on the construction of office-buildings and not enough on housing.' Offices can be redeveloped and the redevelopment of premises into relatively cheap apartments (up to 300,000 euro) is what André Snippe is good at. He has already proved this in Amsterdam. However, the Dutch capital city makes it difficult for him (see Vastgoedmarkt of March 2005), whereas the Belgian administrators wel-

This is now the time to construct new housing in Brussels

come him with open arms. ('This is where public authorities applaud you!'). Building permission is granted in Belgium within six to nine months, but this can take up to 48 months in Amsterdam. According to project developers, such long-term projects present an interest risk.

'When I started out in 1988, 70 percent of my projects were in Amsterdam and the rest were elsewhere in the Netherlands. At present, Snippe Projecten and City Projects have approximately 90,000 m² under development, 60,000 m² of which is in Belgium. 'Brussels thinks along the same lines as project developers.' This also applies to the city of Gent, where Snippe is also

active. 'It even goes so far that the authorities of the city of Gent have reserved space for a large inner urban project by City Projects in Gent, right next to our stand at the Mipim Property Fair in Cannes [14 March through 17 March, ed.]. Brussels is the same name for the City of Brussels, the capital city of the country and of the Brussels Regional Capital, which comprises nineteen municipalities. The city of Brussels encompasses seven suburbs spread out over a region of 32 square kilometres. The region has more than a million inhabitants.

Amsterdam

Since 1989, André Snippe has successfully developed about thirty inner urban housing projects in Amsterdam. He established his company, Snippe Projecten in 1988 and he is the sole shareholder. His target group was made up

of the wealthy parents of students, graduates and business people who were looking for accommodation within the city where they worked. This is now the same target group in Belgium. The municipal administrative policy changed around 1998. The so-called harmony model, which was introduced in order to renovate office premises with a surface area of more than 1,000 m² into apartment complexes, was dropped. The parking standard was set at one parking space per 250 m².

The project developer completed the last project by Snippe Projecten in Amsterdam (for the time being), Quartier Latin, situated at the location of a former school building in the urban district of De Pijp at the end of 2005. This new housing project consists of 88 apartments and has 76 parking spaces. Twelve business units are situated on the ground floor. All the 60m² apartments, each with an average selling price of 219,000 euro with no additional costs payable by the purchaser, were sold. This is a relatively low price in the Dutch capital. Due to the ever-increasing prices of housing, the poor economy and the stricter financing institutions, the sale of Quartier Latin was not easy. The high property prices are to blame for the high selling prices in Amsterdam. 'They have risen to such an extent that the average person living in Amsterdam cannot afford to live in the city.' The property prices in Brussels are the lowest in comparison to other major European cities, but according to the Amsterdam project developer, that could soon change. More and more large companies are settling in the Belgian capital and this is due to the effects of a more lenient tax legislation.

Brussels Projects

In July 2004, City Projects moved to the stately Louiza Avenue in Brussels. Soon after, the first building models were presented to André Snippe for approval. One by one, the projects bloomed from Snippe's concepts.

- The Victor Jacobs project in Brussels will be completed in 2007: two buildings with a total of 33 apartments and parking spaces (3,000 m² above ground level and 500 m² below ground). 'In a month time the first apartments will go up for sale,' Snippe says enthusiastically.

- The La Faisanderie project in Brussels will also be completed this year. La Faisanderie encompasses 42 luxury apartments and parking spaces (5,000 m² above ground and 1,600 m² below ground) for the top segment of the market. This project will be implemented according to the Quality Lifestyle concept. This is a hotel service concept, even with medical care on demand. Each apartment goes with its own covered parking space. Residents can also make use of a swimming pool and a fitness area.

- Kasteelhof in Buggenhout: four buildings in condominium style, encompassing 32 apartments and parking spaces (3,200 m² above ground and 1,400 m² below ground). The residents will move into their new homes in 2007.
- Project Gerlache, situated in the small township of Etterbeek, near Brussels must also be completed in the same year. The project



2007 Will see the start of the Gerlache project, situated in the small township of Etterbeek near Brussels. The project comprises 73 one, two and three-roomed apartments and 73 basement parking spaces.

comprises 73 one, two and three-roomed apartments and also provides 73 parking spaces in the basement.

- In addition, there's also the De Hooikaai project in Brussels, which will commence in the third quarter of 2006. This project, situated in the very heart of the Belgian capital, comprises two residential towers with 77 apartments and parking spaces (7,000 m² above ground and 1,700 m² below ground).

- Reylhof in Gent: an impressive building in the city centre of Gent, redeveloped into a hotel by City Projects with 40 luxury service apartments. The property will also include four new buildings with 99 one, two and three-roomed apartments with parking spaces (16,500 m² above ground and 4,000 m² below ground), as well as health care facilities. Residents must be able to move in by 2008.

'As opposed to Amsterdam, in Brussels it is quite common to construct parking facilities beneath apartment complexes', says Snippe. 'In Belgium quality is important. They don't save costs on things like that, like they do in the Netherlands', says Snippe. And this is where that starting point relates to his own individual concept: 'My criterion is that my projects should reflect where I myself would want to live, work and do my shopping. My projects are something I want to be proud of, even twenty

years from now.' Local architects and building companies assist him in achieving that quality. ('I see myself as the conductor of an orchestra'). He doesn't talk about the amounts invested in his projects.

Growth Market

On January 26 2006, one and a half years after his first surveying expedition in the Belgian capital, André Snippe says that the city of Brussels is 'bubbling'. 'Employers almost insist that their employees speak at least two languages. English is spoken more and more because of the international composition of the population. The economy in the capital city is also blooming.' Snippe describes the situation in Gent as 'stimulating'. 'It's a university city with lots of students and is currently undergoing a thorough renovation.'

From his office on the 24th floor of the Générali Tower on Louiza Avenue in Brussels, the project developer has a view of the Atomium and buildings belonging to other major Dutch property giants like Breevast and the Hugenholtz Project Group. Building cranes are shooting up like bamboo in the Belgian capital.

'Dutch property companies have also discovered that Brussels is an important growth market'. He's actually talking about his own company. In the meantime, there are four project developers working at the Brussels branch of the Amsterdam-based property company. André Snippe knows that 'this is the time to develop new housing in Brussels.' 'The prices for land will certainly increase in the near future.' He expects an increase of up to about 3,500 euro per square metre.

STEFAN VAN MIERLO



The De Hooikaai project in Brussels will commence in the third quarter of 2006. This project, which is situated in the very heart of the Belgian capital city, comprises two residential towers with 77 apartments and the same number of parking spaces (both above and below ground).

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