

Mad about fashion

The new Mode and Design will bring together Brussels' fashion agencies in one fabulous place

Katrien Lindemans

With Mode and Design – also known as MAD – Brussels has its very own centre of expertise for all things fashion and design. In 2015, MAD will move to a renovated building amid the capital's Dansaertstraat fashion district. The centre is awaiting planning permission, but behind the scenes, director Alexandra Lambert and her team are already hard at work

Much like this year's food celebration *Brusselicious*, the city of Brussels devoted a year to fashion and design in 2006, with *Mode Design Brussels*. "Once the event was over, we didn't want to see our efforts go to waste," says Lambert, who worked at that time with *Brussels Export*. "We felt local fashion and design should be more than tourism. That's how the idea grew for an organisation devoted to supporting the creative sectors of fashion and design, and putting them on the international map." One year later, Lambert had put together a dossier explaining how a fashion and design centre could be beneficial to the area. She filed it with the Brussels-Capital Region, and eventually not just the region, but Europe and the city of Brussels contributed to a start-up fund of nearly €7 million.

But naturally, there were conditions. "We had to find a building in the right area and prove that our project would integrate with the area," explains Lambert. "The centre needed to be more than a trendy place and had to interact with the fragile area around the canal."

Two years later, the right building (formerly occupied by a Danish company that specialised in water meters) was found and bought

on the Nieuwe Graanmarkt. A competition was held to renovate the building, and honours went to design agency V+ and architects Rotor, both based in Brussels. "They are renowned for renovations based on actual structures, rather than knocking everything down." Works will start at the end of 2013. Spread over 3,000 square metres, MAD will have a large exhibition space, a visitor centre, library, gift shop, conference room, cafeteria and 500 square metres dedicated to international residences.

The opening of the centre may seem a long way off, but MAD has been active for a while – the non-profit organisation was created at the end of 2010 as *Brussels Fashion and Design Centre*. It was renamed MAD Brussels last March and officially opened in the Dansaert Centre on Aalststraat, just a few minutes' walk from their eventual permanent home.

Fertile ground

"With MAD, we want to integrate all the existing structures in Brussels that deal with fashion and design," says Lambert. "They all deliver great work but only operate vertically. Modo Brussels, for instance, represents Brussels fashion designers, and the Brussels Invest and Export agency deals with the economic development of the region. MAD wants to offer a series of integrated services for everything fashion- and design-related."

There are a few action points in particular, including supporting economic growth and working closely with schools to support designers of the future. MAD will "organise business seminars to help combine the creative and economic aspects of the sector," says Lambert. "We will also work with the Brussels employment



Modo Parcours mixes art and fashion in the capital this month

agency Actiris on job opportunities in the industry."

MAD "wants to be there for all the professionals in the sector too," she emphasises: "designers, journalists, production directors and so on. And to put Brussels on the larger fashion map, we'll invite international artists to stay at our residence halls and develop similar interactions with other fashion and design centres."

The idea of designers in residence isn't reserved for internationals, though: In a second building called *Potier* (in Gierstraat), MAD is already inviting graduates from local art schools for three-month stays. "They will have to do something interactive with the area, as agreed in our initial dossier," says Lambert.

MAD's place in the Dansaert Centre, a creative business centre, puts them next to the *Modo Brussels* team. *Modo Brussels* will join MAD in the new building when the time comes "and continue their excellent work," says Lambert. "Of course there will be interaction with other organisations and cities as well. But as a lot of our subsidies come from Brussels, we'll mainly engage with this city and its own creativity. It's got its own particular vibe, different from anywhere else. I would say that the multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism of our city results in a creativity without roots, one without references. Brussels is very fertile ground for artists."

► www.madbrussels.be

MAD FOR MORE?

The fashion fun continues this autumn with **Brussels Fashion Days** from 19 to 21 October: Fashion shows, pop-up stores, makeover sessions and much more

► www.brusselsfashiondays.be

Modo Sales takes place from 2 to 3 November: Rummage through the stock leftovers of Brussels designers and score some top creations at (very) affordable prices

► www.modobrussels.be

MODO PARCOURS FASHION TRAIL

To see the very best of Brussels and Belgian fashion, join the masses from 12 to 14 October for the 12th edition of *Modo Parcours*, an annual free fashion trail through the capital. Seventy-five shops and galleries will host installations by Belgian fashion designers.

"Some of the boutiques or businesses are quite exclusive, which makes the Parcours the perfect opportunity to discover the place and a fashion designer at the same time," says *Modo* coordinator Elke Timmerman.

Modo Parcours is the largest fashion event of its kind in Brussels or Flanders, and this year, for the first time, it will be all Belgian, with the theme *Fashionalism*. "We've asked designers to showcase their true fashion identity," says Timmerman. The idea was inspired by the economic crisis and the recent bankruptcies of great local



© Javier Barcala

talent such as milliner *Christophe Coppens* and designer *Luc Duchène*. The list of participating designers



and shops is a real treat for fashionistas; *Modo Parcours* showcases their latest collections as well as boasts clever window displays and fashion-as-art installations. Fancy checking out *Bruno Pieters* at *Haleluja*, *Raf Simons* at *Stijl* or *Jean-Paul Lespagnard* at *Zsenne Art Lab*? There are some lesser-known names, too. Take the new store *Summer Ends* (*Rollebeekstraat* 43), for instance. It's been open

only two weeks and will feature the work of accessory designers *Geoffrey Massure* and *Kristof Buntinx*. The former designs jewellery made from hair, the latter will present a collection of ties and scarves. *Buntinx* used pictures he drew during an emotionally difficult period in 2007, which he manipulated digitally and printed on silk (pictured left).

► www.modobrussels.be

High Fashion Low Countries

Every year, the *Modo Parcours* plays host to an exhibition as well. This year, in another first for the event, the exhibition is in collaboration with a guest country. The winningly titled *High Fashion Low Countries* is the brainchild of the Dutch embassy in Brussels and is staged

in the building that is the future home of MAD Brussels at *Nieuwe Graanmarkt* 10. "Belgium and the Netherlands have never worked together on a fashion project, but we have lots in common," says curator *Javier Barcala*.

Three designers in each country were asked to work around the theme of sustainable fashion. "We've asked them to create pieces made with a technique they haven't used before, and in collaboration with artisans from their area." The exhibition (pictured far left) has travelled from Amsterdam to Antwerp and will end in Brussels. "We're not sure what will happen next," *Barcala* says, "but there is talk about it travelling to London or New York." *High Fashion Low Countries* runs longer than the *parcours*, until 26 October.

► www.highfashionlowcountries.com