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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Ghent's New Design Museum: A New Landmark

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After four years of renovation and construction, Design Museum Gent reopens with DING (Design IN Gent), a striking new wing. It brings more space, accessibility and sustainable materials, but also raises questions about architecture, heritage and public investment.

DING, short for Design IN Gent, finally connects the museum's previously separate buildings. The expansion brings the museum to around 6,500 square metres, including some 3,700 square metres of exhibition space. New facilities include a forum, workshops, temporary exhibition areas, a city room and a fourth-floor Loft with a winter terrace and views across Ghent. A new lift and improved visitor facilities also address long-standing accessibility issues. The aim is to make the museum not only a place to see design, but also a place to meet, experiment and reinterpret it.

Sustainability is central to the design. The new wing has a visible timber structure using CLT and wooden beams, including beech-based BauBuche laminated veneer lumber. Timber from the museum's former staircases was reused in the new building. The façade consists of more than 82,000 Gent Waste Bricks, developed specifically for DING. They contain 63% recycled waste streams from Ghent, including crushed concrete and construction glass. Unlike conventional fired bricks, they are pressed and harden through a lime-curing process. The developers say their embodied carbon is around one third that of a typical fired clay brick.

The building has nevertheless sparked debate. DING rises above the historic buildings and is clearly visible from the Graslei and Korenlei, part of Ghent's best-known historic panorama. Critics argue that its height and scale disturb the protected townscape and introduce a building of a very different character into the historic waterfront. Others see precisely that contrast as a statement that Ghent is not a museum frozen in time, but a living city in which contemporary architecture can coexist with historic buildings. Whether DING becomes a new landmark or an unwelcome interruption of the skyline will remain a matter of interpretation.

The project cost €21.8 million, while the Flemish government provided a further €1.75 million for the museum's 2026 Open for Everyone programme, including its reopening festival. The timing raises another question. Parts of Flanders' cultural and heritage sector are facing financial pressure, with some non-profit organisations dependent on public funding for staff and daily operations. When structural funding is

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reduced or disappears, jobs and activities can be affected, and smaller institutions may struggle to remain open. The contrast is therefore difficult to ignore: how should public authorities balance investment in new cultural infrastructure with the long-term funding needed to keep existing cultural and heritage organisations alive?

DING is therefore more than an expansion of a museum. It is an experiment in contemporary architecture, circular construction and public access, placed directly within Ghent's historic heart. Its success will be judged not only by the exhibitions it can accommodate, but also by how the city and its visitors respond to its presence, and by what resources remain available for the wider cultural and heritage landscape around it.

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