

Micro-hubs Arresting developments

Take a disused site, add a handful of diverse businesses and a sprinkling of food and drink options, and allow to stand: the micro-hub is a real recipe for success.

Twenty years ago a fledgling business would often have found itself stuck in a shoddy, less-than-cheap office. Today all that's changed. One of the trends responsible is the "micro-hub", a small development housing a group of businesses of the same ilk (art, fashion or tech) alongside a nice spot for food and coffee (usually for outside consumers too, not just tenants). These are places where you can grow a business without worrying about rickety stairs or the landlord's failure to fix the boiler.

"Can you believe this was almost knocked down?" asks Belgian entrepreneur Stefan Bostoën. He's in a quiet, cobbled, car-free piazza at the heart of Pakt, a regeneration project in Antwerp. Formerly a construction yard between new real-estate project Het Groen Kwartier (the Green Quarter) and Antwerp's historic Jewish neighbourhood, its beautifully renovated

buildings have housed independent businesses since 2017.

Bostoën is one of the driving forces behind Pakt, along with Yusuf and Ismail Yaman, the two owners of the project. Bostoën guided the brothers after they bought the site in 2007. "Initially their idea was to create lofts to sell and rent out," says Bostoën. But the city's building regulations prevented this and, for a while, nothing much happened. Then, in 2014, they had the idea of using the site as a hub for creative businesses.

It took some time to determine the concept and two years working with Belgian architect Roel Vermeesch to transform the warehouses without interfering with the essence of the place. Building restrictions again forced a rethink but the trio fought to keep as many original features as possible.

Some additions were made, including an old bridge that hangs over the

