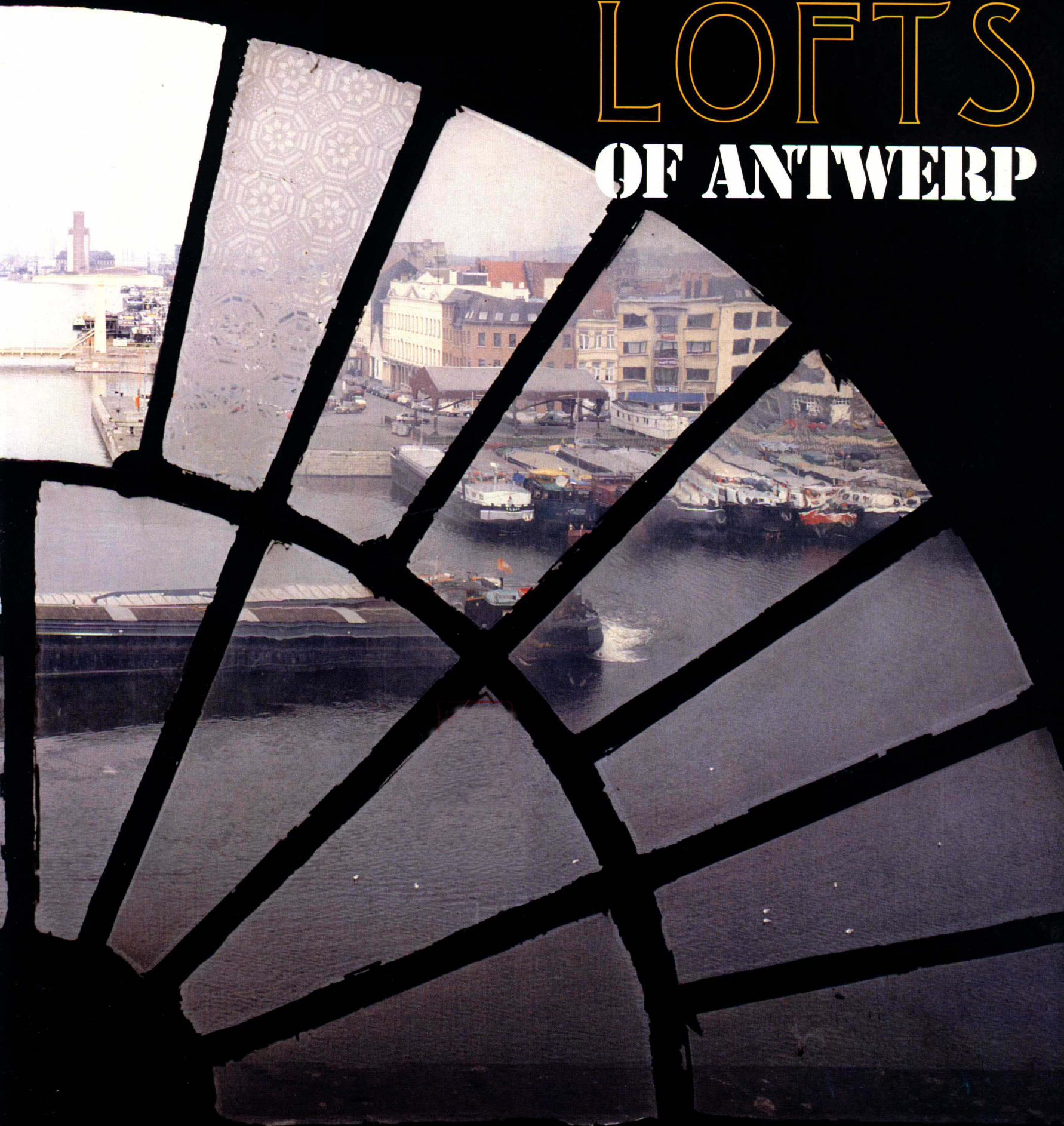
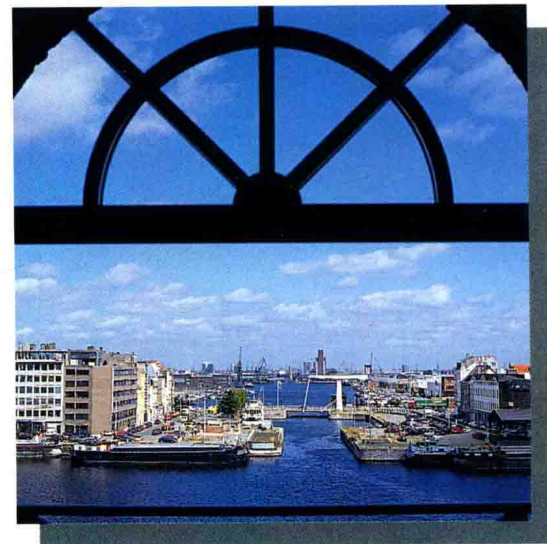
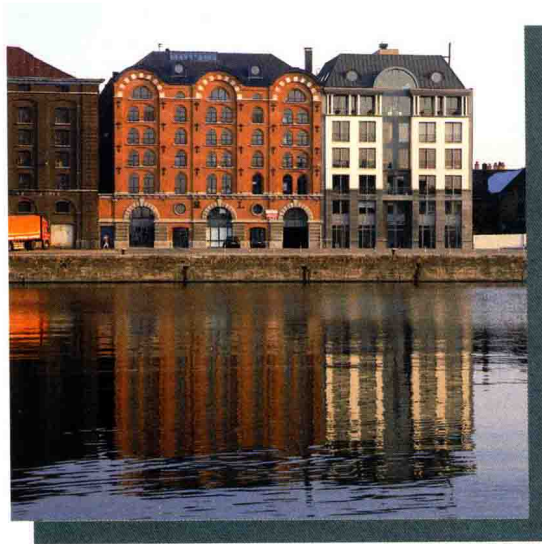
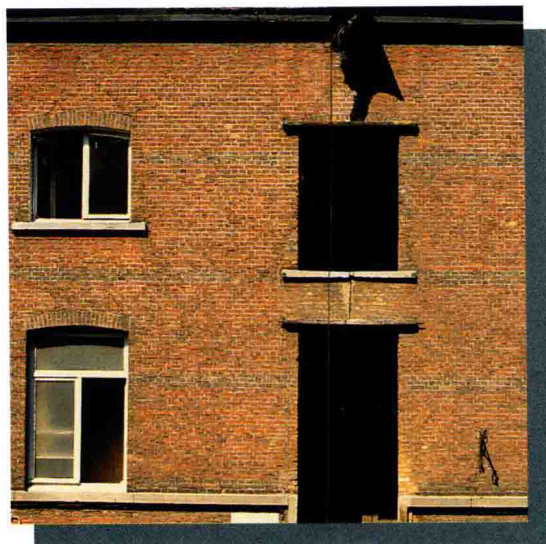


LOFTS OF ANTWERP



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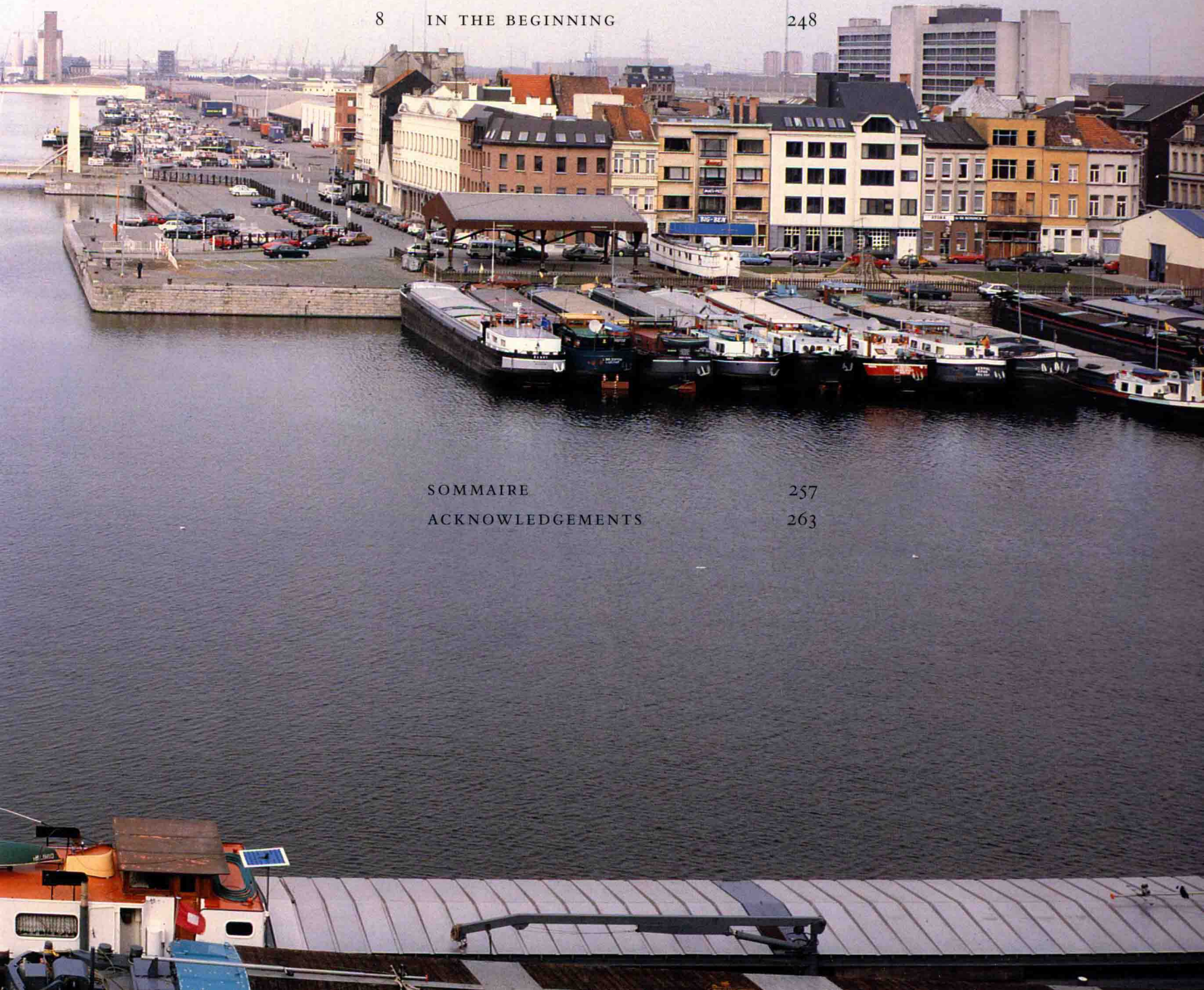
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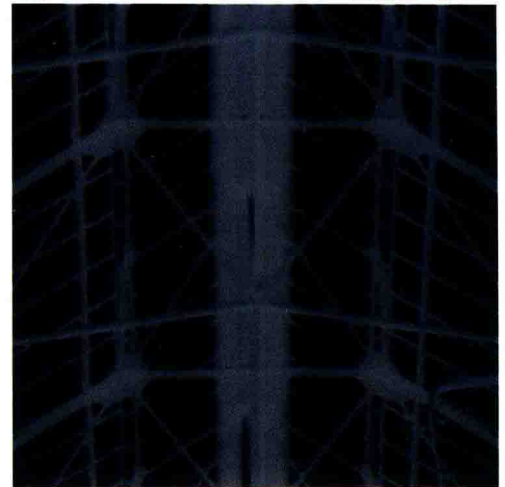
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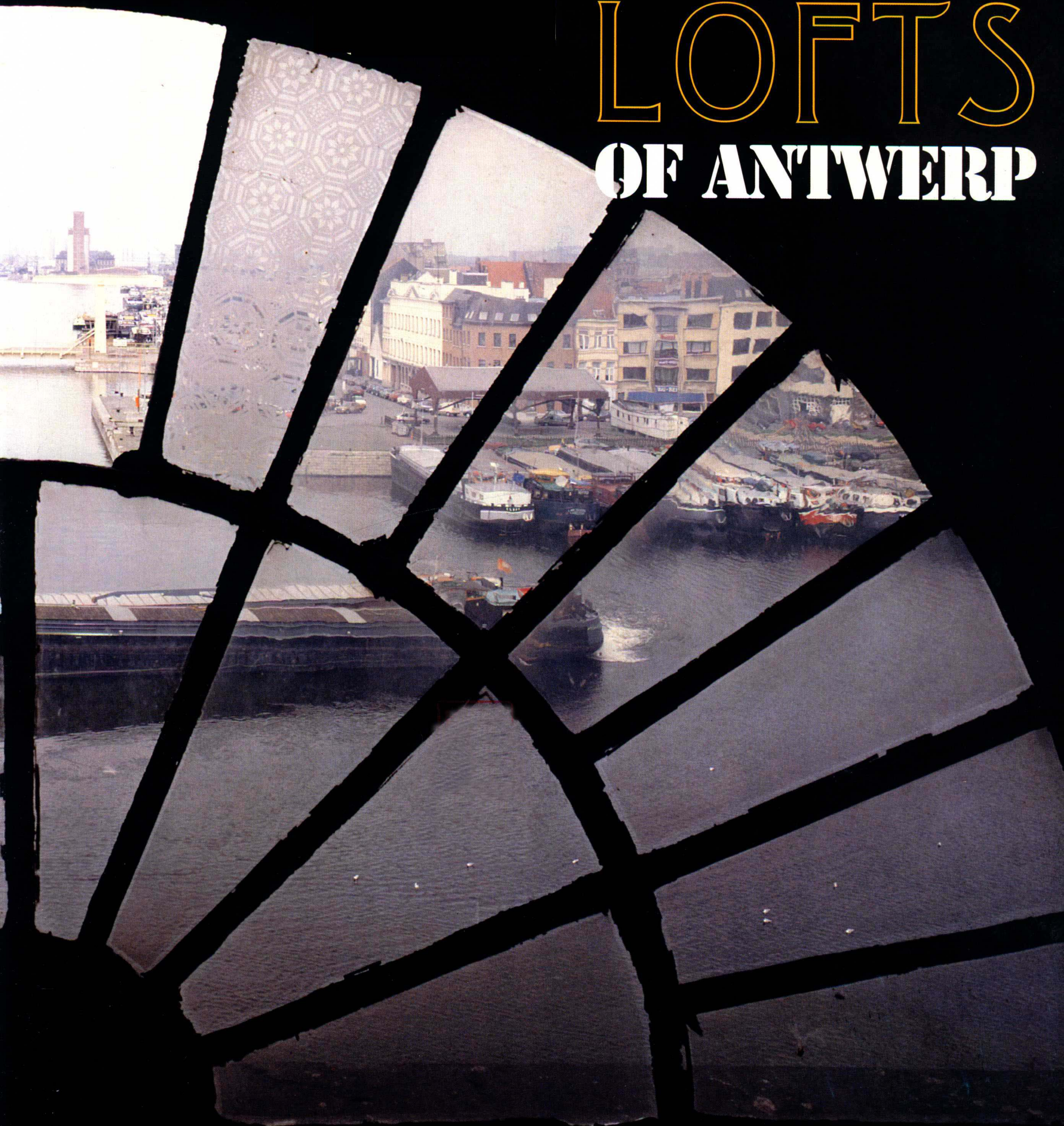


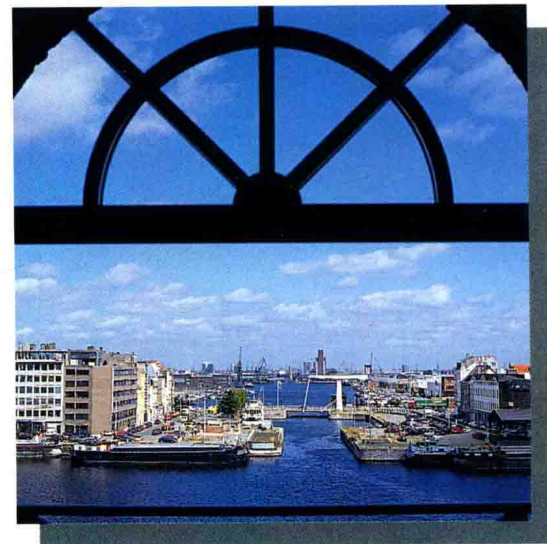
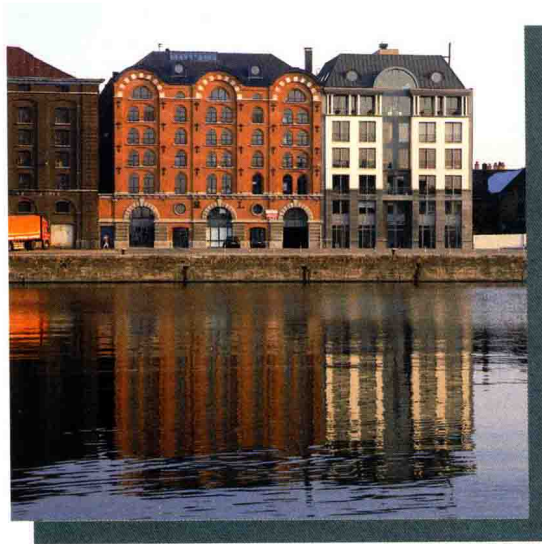
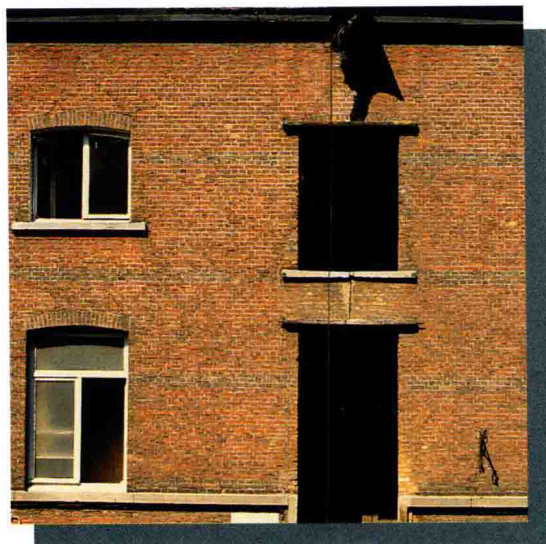
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FOREWORD

Over the last several years, lofts have exercised a magical attraction upon people who wish to live differently. The opportunities presented by old freight-buildings and warehouses struck an imaginative chord. Loft dwellers look for a building with a history. Original structures, of a different height, where rafters or hefty pillars remain visible and come into their own as aesthetic components.

Lofts have made inroads in all the major cities of Belgium, with Antwerp as the trendsetter. Owing to the port's post-war expansion northwards, many warehouse-type buildings in the old harbor became bereft of their usefulness. The part of the harbor along the river Scheldt near the city-center, now sounds with only the faint echo of the activity presently based in endless docks kilometers away. The former stockhouses that stand on 'het Zuid', 'het Eilandje' or in the neighborhood of the Hessenhuis offer a multitude of possibilities. Life has again returned to these quarters, and has contributed to the gradual change of the city's face. These communities are also integral to the city as a whole.

Rather than demolishing these venerable structures, the choice was made to restore them for new use. They have recently begun a new lease on life, and often have undergone impressive transformations that have brought benefit not to their inhabitants alone.

The municipal authorities wish to make living in Antwerp even more attractive.

In this regard, lofts represent one of the most important trends in urban renewal.

MIEKE VOGELS
Alderman for Environmental Planning

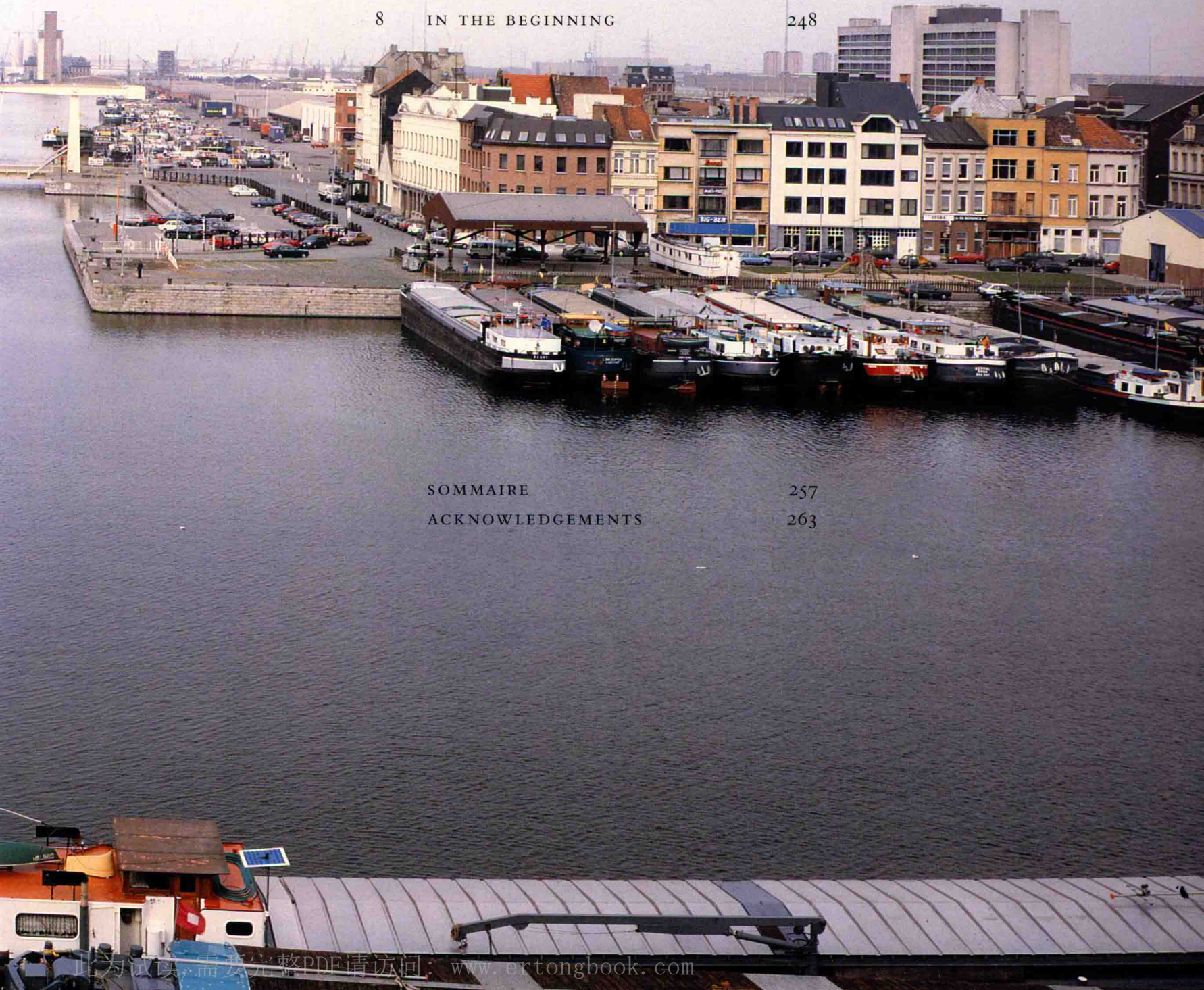
LEO BARON DELWAIDE
Alderman for the Port





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Tectum Publishers are especially grateful to Inge Vyt, managing director of Isis Belgium project development and financing, whose contribution helped make it possible to publish this book.

INTRODUCTION

Lofts of Antwerp is the first book in Flanders devoted to this new way of living. The word 'loft' was originally the designation for a warehouse's upper stories. The cradle of the loft may be said to be New York where, in the 1960's, former industrial buildings were given over to another function. In no time, the SoHo district became the mecca of this new lifestyle. This concept floated over to Europe at the end of the 70's, interpreted within the dwelling traditions of the old continent.

In Antwerp the loft story really began centuries ago when the 'naties' (commercial-trading associations) established their warehouses along the river Scheldt. The port's activities have in the meantime transferred to well-beyond the city's center, and many abandoned warehouses have undergone a metamorphosis over the last several years. They are experiencing a second youth, with many magical transformations into striking lofts.

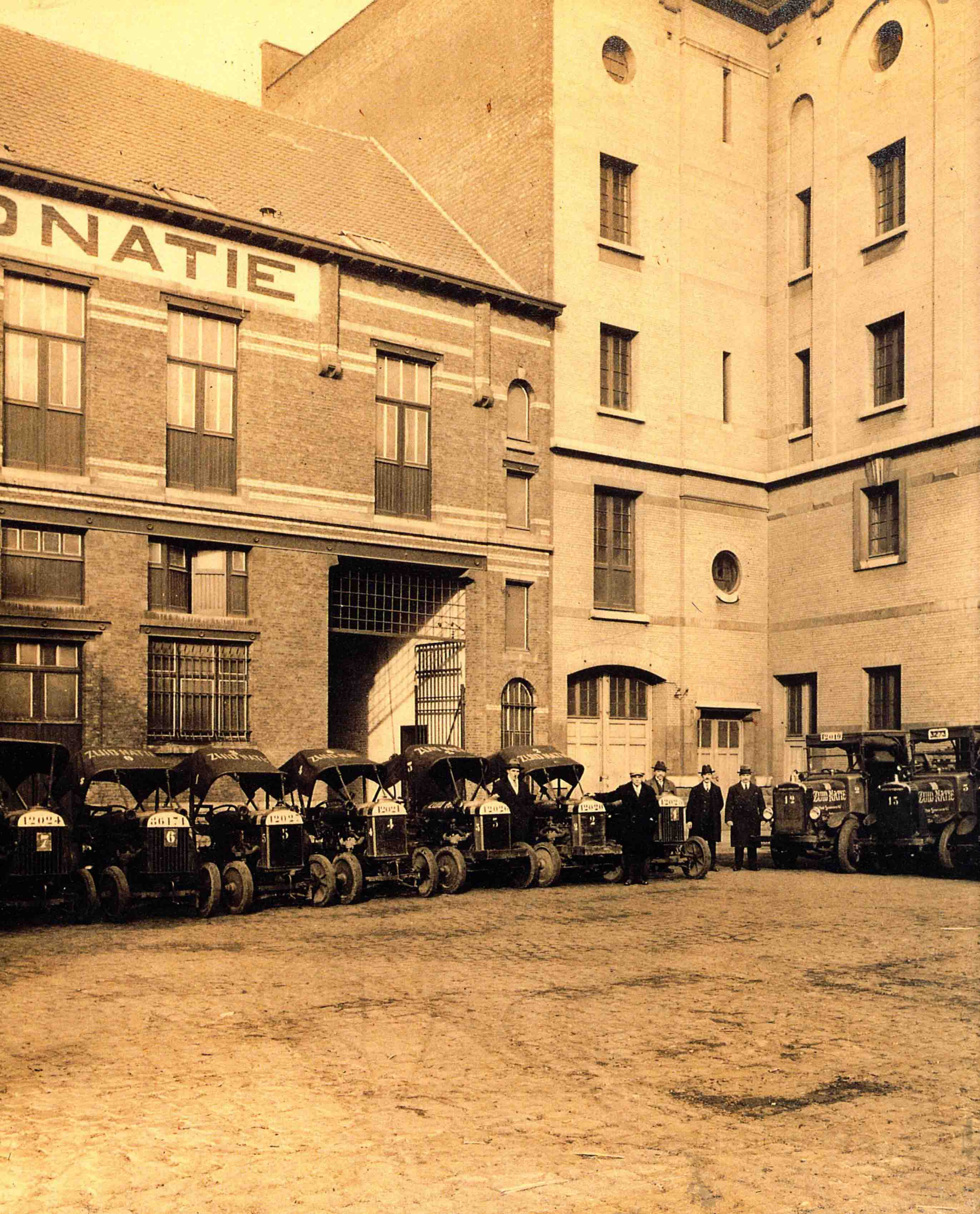
A loft is clearly no apartment. To live in a former rice-husking plant, an old gymnasium, a cloister or printing premises, guarantees a quite singular living experience. Loft dwellers are often non-conformists who wish to live differently. They long for atmosphere and character, and they attempt to clothe their interiors in a personal way. The function these spaces take on are extremely diverse: from the classic living situation to offices, from dance studio to art gallery or film studio.

Lofts are to be found in all big cities and many provincial towns, but Antwerp is here Belgium's trendsetter. These buildings present a broad array of possibilities for re-use. Once languishing neighbourhoods - like 'Het Zuid', 'Het Eilandje' and the area around the Hessenhuis - are now reborn, thanks in part to the arrival of this "loft life". The preservation of these sites is important to a city's history.

This book takes you on a tour of discovery through 50 lofts, often in surprising locations.

Lofts of Antwerp makes no claim to be exhaustive or complete. It does give an informative glimpse into late-20th century loft-mania. The texts have been intentionally kept short, letting the photographs of these spaces speak for themselves.

Rudy Stevens and Daisy Mertens of the project-development firm Condominium, who between them probably have the most experience in the purchase and conversion of Antwerp's industrial buildings, provided the enthusiastic inspiration for this book.

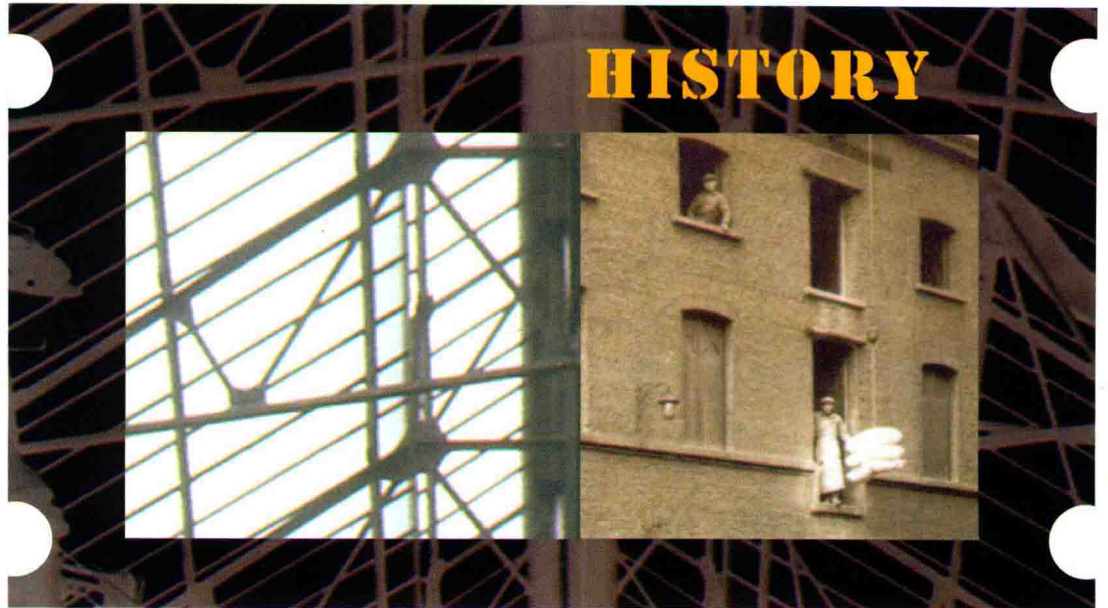


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HISTORY



The re-use of buildings is something completely natural. Buildings, which were structurally sturdy, have always been adapted for new requirements, new functions. That was already the case for the Colosseum in Rome and other monuments from antiquity. At the beginning of the 19th century cloisters, churches and castles were transformed by the new industrialists into factories and workhouses. Redundant textile factories were in turn transformed into warehouses, potteries and dwellings.

In the 1970's the concept of 'adaptive re-use' grew into a new architectural discipline, particularly so in North America and Britain. And in this respect, lofts comprised an important trend in urban renewal.

The New York cast-iron buildings which dated back to the 19th century and the brick buildings of London along the Thames were early sites of metamorphosis into private dwelling places. And was not England the cradle of the Industrial Revolution? They have more regard there than elsewhere for everything to do with the past. In a period of economic stagnation, simple demolition was out of the question – too great a loss in energy and material for any foreseeable gain. Thus, thought was given to new uses for these buildings abandoned by industry and commerce.

The idea of turning unused industrial and semi-industrial sites into places suitable for living undoubtedly wafted over to Europe

from America. In the 70's, loft-living became a veritable subculture. In the United States the rental or purchase of a living space can be a quite substantial investment, and the positive price/space equation made lofts an attractive alternative.

Since the end of the 1940's, lofts in SoHo in Manhattan were in the main occupied by artists, designers and squatters. In the 70's, the City of New York decreed that empty SoHo warehouses could only be rented to artists, and then at a reasonable price.

Manhattan is bulging at the seams. On the relatively small island of Manhattan, building is always ever skyward, in an attempt to house the maximum number on a minimum of ground-space. The architectural patrimony is carefully preserved and gradually restored. A contemporary architect rarely gets the chance to put his stamp on the city, unless perhaps behind the facades of imposing apartment buildings, or old warehouse spaces. It is mainly in these warehouse spaces or lofts that young architects or interior-designers can give free reign to their creativity. The open character of these spaces offers unending possibilities for conversion to habitable premises.

Former warehouses are, for that matter, particularly flexible. They are sturdy, robust and rather astonishingly conceived: straight walls and pillars support a towering building.

Not too long ago, in Antwerp hardly a

Around 1900: the 'wagon-park' of the Zuidnatie. In the corner one sees the (then) just completed warehouse 'La Cloche'.



The Molenbergnatie most probably dates from 1802, but documentary proof remains lacking.

soul would cast a second glance at a brick-works, a warehouse or a mill. Together with bridges, locks, depots and many other types of built structures, they comprise tangible memorials to our industrial past. Warehouses and depots came to spring up in any location that commerce, particularly related to the port, dictated.

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, one could come across such structures in the Southern Netherlands in important commercial centers like Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp.

If Antwerp can be said to be the economic

heart of Flanders, then certainly the river Scheldt is its aorta. Indeed for centuries this river has seen most of the traffic, for both the import and export of goods. As far back as the 12th century, port activity was centered round a small peninsula, later called 'Het Eilandje'. By the end of the 16th century, the number of wharfs had grown to eight, each with its own name.

The part of Antwerp's city-center with the greatest concentration of historic warehouses and depots, is situated to the north of the medieval city, within the 16th-century ramparts. This precinct, according to the design of master-builder Gilbert van Schoonbeke, became urbanized after the middle of the 16th century. It was to become one of the earliest examples of an 'industrial zone', here mainly devoted to breweries and related premises. Within the chessboard-like street plan, where later excavations would yield the Bonaparte- and Willem docks, the Hessenhuis building became the first warehouse. Later, most of the 'Naties' also erected their depots in this same area.

These Naties (literally, Nations), which began life in the Middle Ages as professional associations, evolved during the industrial age into firms responsible for loading and unloading, storage, measuring and weighing. Undoubtedly the largest and most important Antwerp warehouse faced with the wrecker's ball at the end of the 1980's,

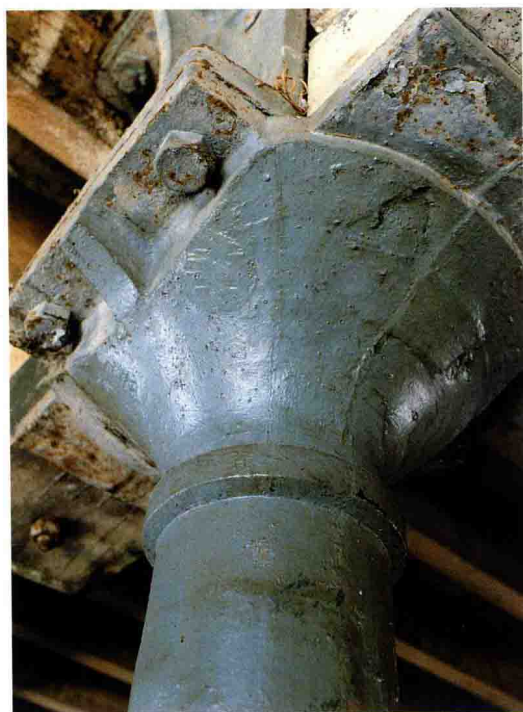


One of the warehouses of The Antwerp Grain Works Company; transformed in 1996 into an indoor amusement park.



St. Felix Warehouse on the Godefriduskaai

Cast-iron columns as structural supports were in use in large warehouses from 1860.



was the Royal Depot (built 1902–1906). This was the first warehouse built in reinforced concrete, just before the Godfried storehouse located on the eponymous dock. Along this dock and the Oude Leeuwenrui are situated the most important warehouses from an industrial–archeological point of view. A number of these were municipal properties.

Of these the St. Felix warehouse is the most interesting example, unique for its kind. It was built in 1863, after its predecessor had burnt down on the same site. The structure sits diagonally on a 77-meter wide lot, with a 6.45-meter broad cobblestoned and overspanned loading bay. The building comprises a total storage-surface area of 22,045 m² and has two facades.

The architectonic aspect of the majority of the oldest Antwerp storehouses was extremely rational and simple, this to maximize profits and minimize costs. They are for the most part built from red brick and often appended with brickwork in relief. Sometimes alternating brick and sandstone layers imitate the traditional sandstone–brick style. In some cases pilasters, window casings and profiles appear on the facade in a sort of near-black brick. Between 1850 and 1880 natural stone was mainly worked in a strictly functional way: for window and door sills, facade entries for hoistbeams, the plinth or sometimes for the finishing of roof borders.



The outer appearance of these buildings, often also exhibit many similarities. This is in part due to the local planning/building regulations which specified how and where facade-materials were to be used, to what degree they may or must extend, etc. Also prescribed was the thickness of the outside walls, probably at least in part due to reasons of safety, given the occasional enormous warehouse fires of the day. Walls were always termed ‘supporting’, including those of warehouses where the structure itself was self-supporting. Wood was not much used in the facades. Only the cornice and sometimes the window shutters and doors were made of wood. Additionally, a wooden windhut may also have been fashioned to protect the far-extending wooden or iron hoistbeam.

Only after 1880 was there some diminishing in this sober use of materials. The then widespread use of natural stone and various types of brick for facades, ran in parallel with a more aesthetic stream in Antwerp architecture. Even the fashionable neo-styles of the time made their presence felt.

Window openings were generally small and, more often than not, could not be opened. A limited amount of illumination sufficed, and this was not contested by building regulations.

Oftentimes there were no windows at all, but only loading doors. In the case of the oldest warehouses, win-

