The International High-Rise Award

Internationaler Hochhaus Preis

Press Release
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The ZIN in Brussels wins the International High-Rise Award 2026/27

The winner of the International High-Rise Award (IHA) 2026/27 has been chosen: The **ZIN** mixed-use high-rise in Brussels, designed by the architectural practices **51N4E, l'AUC and Jaspers-Eyers Architects**, has won the competition for the world's most innovative skyscraper.
The prize consists of EUR 50,000 and a statuette created by the internationally renowned artist Thomas Demand.

Representing the architects at the award ceremony were **Johan Anrys** and **Olivier Cavens** of 51N4E, **Alessandro Gess** and **Djamel Klouche** of l´AUC and **John** and **Loik Eyers** of Jaspers-Eyers Architects, **Jean-Philip Vroninks** attended on behalf of the developer Befimmo. The award was presented at a formal ceremony in Frankfurt's Paulskirche by **Dr. Ina Hartwig** (Deputy Mayor in charge of Cultural Affairs, City of Frankfurt), **Birgit Dietl-Benzin** (Member of the Board of Management of DekaBank) and **Peter Cachola Schmal** (Director of Deutsches Architekturmuseum).

ZIN represents not only an architectural renewal but also a paradigm shift in high-rise construction: Instead of demolition and new construction, the focus now is on transformation, resource conservation, and mixed-use development. The two former *World-Trade-Center* towers were not completely demolished; their service cores and the basement levels were retained and integrated into the new building. A slender structure was inserted between the two towers, connecting them to form a single building. Today, ZIN serves a variety of purposes, and parts of it are freely accessible to the public. Sports clubs train in the gym; the building also houses apartments and a hotel as well as a huge rooftop garden and a greenhouse that is also used by the hotel's café. The Flemish government has relocated its headquarters to ZIN.
The project marks the starting point of a comprehensive revitalization of Brussels' North Quarter. Its mixed-use design opens up to the city and its residents.

The jury's focus: A high-rise building should be a „good neighbour"
The jury for this 12th International High-Rise Award focused on the question of what role high-rises might play in the future. Regardless of aesthetics and function, the jury agreed that a high-rise building's ability to "be a good neighbor" is of fundamental importance. In other words, a high-rise should give something back to its surroundings, enhance the context in which it stands and benefit both the city in which it was built and the people who live

DAM Deutsches Architekturmuseum

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there. The jury's starting point was the idea that the winning high-rise should still be relevant fifteen years in the future. An additional question increasingly relevant in the European context concerns refurbishment: how can high-rises be transformable and how can they accommodate a variety of uses. The jury agreed that, if high-rises are "good neighbors", it is crucial to promote towers that are not monofunctional but instead help revitalize city centres and central business districts.
As a result, the jury unanimously selected **ZIN in Brussels, Belgium, as the winner of the International High-Rise Award 2026/27**. Brian Yang, as chair of the jury and the winner of the IHA 2024/25, captured the reasoning as follows: "High-rises are no longer all about being a tall symbol of power. They are about the power to transform, to change, to respond to a situation. I think it's important for a neighborhood to be full of life, and that can be achieved with a mix of offices, hotels, and apartments, like at ZIN."

ZIN is boosting the neighbourhood in which it is located
The jury agreed, that ZIN presented by far the most compelling overall narrative: It showed how the idea of refurbishment could be taken to new heights and given a new quality. In addition, ZIN is exceptionally large by European standards. With its 10,000 square meters of floor space, it serves as a major draw in a less attractive neighbourhood and, ideally, will stimulate further construction activity.
The jury concurred that, while the building might not be an incredible eye-catcher in aesthetic terms, this was precisely what made it stand out: Its ability to "do so much", as Peter Cachola Schmal put it, without trying to be iconic. Brian Yang, as chair, confirmed this assessment: "It seems like an amazing project that does everything a high-rise can do in a positive way: Through a process of transformation, it brings meaning and quality to the area, thereby strengthening the entire neighborhood. It enhances the surrounding area and features a wonderful internal topography. The transitions between public and private spaces are exceptionally well executed."
The project rejects the strident claim of "Here I am" and instead emphasizes on getting the message right. Whereas many of the high-rises in Brussels are classic glass-and-steel monoliths, ZIN breaks completely with that idea. The two original *World-Trade-Center* high-rises that stood here were stripped back to their cores and redeveloped by embracing between them an intervening new structure with double-height floors, designed to encourage mixed use, both vertically and horizontally. Offices, residences, hotel rooms, retail, and green spaces are interwoven to create a coherent unit that is never "dead" at night. The new glass podium building to one side and the connecting tower, with differently spaced ceiling slabs, add diversity to the new/old build. The project achieved Cradle to Cradle certification for 95 percent for the new materials used. This represents a closed loop – endless raw material cycle rather than a waste one – a figure never before achieved for a European mixed-use project of this size.

Statements by the winner and partners of the IHA

51N4E described enthusiastically: „This project proposes a different future for high-rise architecture: not an exclusive landmark competing for height, but an open, generous building connected to the city. By reusing an existing tower, it creates a constellation of spaces and uses that becomes a vibrant part of urban life, especially at ground level. In Brussels, where towers still evoke the scars of aggressive urban renewal, this international recognition matters. It shows that existing high-rises are not obstacles, but starting points for transformation. The award celebrates the courage of a developer willing to take a different path, in close collaboration with the city and an architectural practice bringing a fresh perspective. For 51N4E, it recognises our ambition to reconcile complex demands in an architecture that is both efficient and generous. More than a building, this award celebrates a bold, collaborative approach to adaptive reuse, and a new role for high-rises in the city."

Alessandro Gess, I´AUC, expressed: “The former World Trade Center I & II in Brussels embodied the metropolitan ambitions of the post-war period, a vision of urban modernisation that profoundly transformed the existing fabric of the city. ZIN confronts this legacy, exploring its contradictions alongside the unrealised potential of the existing structures. The transformation became a collective endeavour to develop new ways of working with existing buildings, challenging established practices of construction, demolition and project development. The process required constant negotiation between what could be retained, what needed to change and what could be invented. It opened up new possibilities for combining programmes, creating spatial generosity and reconnecting the building with the city, while questioning how we build, reuse and transform our urban environments.“

Jaspers-Eyers Architects were delighted: “Winning the International High-Rise Award is a remarkable recognition of ZIN and of the ambition behind the project. For Jaspers-Eyers Architects, ZIN demonstrates that the future of high-rise architecture does not necessarily begin with building anew, but can emerge from transforming what is already there. The project gave us the opportunity to rethink existing structures and their relationship with the surrounding city, creating new value rather than starting from scratch. We are proud that this approach has received international recognition. It strengthens our conviction that transformation can be one of architecture’s most powerful tools in creating more adaptable, resilient and lasting cities.”

Jean-Philip Vroninks, Chief Executive Officer, Befimmo Real Etsate Group pointed out: “We are deeply honoured that ZIN has received the International High-Rise Award. For Befimmo, this prize recognises our conviction that the most sustainable building is often the one that already exists. Rather than demolishing the former *World Trade Center* towers, we chose to transform them, keeping their structure and giving them a new life as a mixed-use place

where people work, live, stay and meet. ZIN shows that a high-rise can be open, adaptable and genuinely connected to the city around it. This award belongs to everyone who made it possible: the architects of 51N4E, l'AUC and Jaspers-Eyers, our partners and contractors, the Brussels authorities, and our own teams, who believed in this bold choice. It also strengthens our commitment to the Brussels North District, which we want to help grow into a vibrant, liveable neighbourhood called bxnord. We see this recognition as an encouragement to keep reusing, rethinking and reinventing the city."

Frankfurt's Lord Mayor **Mike Josef** said: "Frankfurt/Main is Germany's city of high-rises. Our skyline not only defines the city's appearance; it has long since become a landmark. That is precisely why we must address the question of not only how we rethink skyscrapers in the future, but also how we deal with the existing buildings. ZIN serves as a prime example of how this can be achieved: existing structures are preserved, different uses are integrated, and a former office complex is transformed into a place for working, living and socialising right in the heart of the city. The International High-Rise Award therefore does more than simply recognise outstanding architecture. It brings ideas and inspiration to Frankfurt from which we can learn for the development of our own city."

Dr. Ina Hartwig, Deputy Mayor in charge of Cultural Affairs, City of Frankfurt, noted: "It enhances the neighbourhood by not trying to be a standalone icon. Yet it is eye-catching, not because of its beauty, but because of the way it values and improves the urban context. It quite simply defines a paradigm. This narrative is also attributable to the care taken with the 'human' details. For example, during the planning phase, the architectural teams moved their own offices into the building and tested which of their plants would thrive best there, as they wanted to make their building a biophilic partner for future residents. The overall result of their efforts is an impressive architectural work that is as diverse as it is inviting."

Birgit Dietl-Benzin, Member of the Board of Management of DekaBank, emphasized: "From a long-term investor's perspective, ZIN in Brussels is an exemplary project for the future: it combines the resource-efficient use of existing buildings, flexible usage options and a significant urban development impact. In this way, ZIN demonstrates why the transformation of existing buildings is increasingly becoming a key component of sustainable property investments that retain their value over the long term."

Peter Cachola Schmal, Director of Deutsches Architekturmuseums (DAM), explained: "I think the process of transformation isn't just about adapting something so it's usable now, but is actually about adding significance and additional quality, and specifically elevating the public realm, elevating the spaces of the entire neighborhood around it."

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During the awards ceremony, the four other finalists were also honored:

- **AGE 360, Curitiba, Brazil**
  Architecture: Architects Office, São Paulo, Brazil & Triptyque, São Paulo, Brazil/ Paris, France
- **Tencent Tower, Guangzhou, China**
  Architecture: Ateliers Jean Nouvel, Paris, France
- **88 Walker, Sydney, Australia**
  Architecture: Fitzpatrick + Partners, Sydney, Australia
- **One Pearl Bank, Singapore**
  Architecture: Serie Architects, London, UK & Multiply Architects, Singapore

Of the more than 1,000 high-rises completed worldwide over the last two years, Deutsches Architekturmuseum (DAM) nominated 30 outstanding buildings from 12 countries. An international jury of experts from architectural and engineering practice together with the partners of the IHA, namely DekaBank, the City of Frankfurt, and Deutsches Architekturmuseum met to select the five finalists and subsequently the winner. The jury was chaired by Brian Yang (Architect, Partner BIG, Copenhagen).

International High-Rise Award (IHA)

The International High-Rise Award (IHA) **was jointly initiated** in 2003 **by the City of Frankfurt, Deutsches Architekturmuseum (DAM) and DekaBank** and was awarded for the first time in 2004. Since then, it has been organized and jointly every two years.

The IHA is open to architects and developers whose buildings are at least 100 metres high and were completed within the previous two years.

Deutsches Architekturmuseum presents all the nominated projects

The **exhibition *Best High-Rises 2026/27 – The International High-Rise Award***, which the Deutsches Architekturmuseum (DAM) will show from November 5, 2026 until April 4, 2027, includes all the nominated projects in addition to the award winner and the short-listed finalists.

More information from:

www.international-highrise-award.com

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