

Case Study BEL1: Creneau International Taking the Future of Interior Design Beyond the Stars



Chateau Creneau: Creneau's head office in Hasselt, Belgium



Diners experience a 360° view of the city at the Sky High Restaurant located 60 meters above ground.

“I think what we do might be the future of interior design. Though we’re not an advertising agency, we create 3D-brand atmospheres by translating our client’s brand values and business goals into a total concept.”

*Fillip Janssen, Sales and Marketing,
Creneau International, Hasselt, Belgium*

With a vision larger than life and a staff of just over 50 forward-thinking people, Creneau International aims to be Belgium’s premier interior design agency. Their mission declares, “As atmosphere architects, we thrust our way into your environment bearing our ideas of the anti-ordinary.”

For over twenty years, Creneau International has taken Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia by storm with its innovative fair exhibits, offices, hotels, bars, restaurants, graphics, and retail outlets that continually

defy the ordinary and create worlds unto themselves. Creneau’s portfolio is very diverse, ranging from interior design for trendy clubs, bars, and restaurants to reinventing the image of a 200 year-old crystal brand. “Our focus has slightly changed from retail to what we call hospitality—restaurants, cafés, bars, and clubs. But I don’t think we’d refuse an assignment,” says Davy Grosemans, a Senior Designer at the firm. “We always find an interesting, cool angle.”



Modular meeting room at Chateau Creneau.

What's their secret? "Interior design is all about communication," explains Phillip Janssen. "Gone are the days of non-communication, when the designers were locked up in their office." As a Sales and Marketing Associate, Janssen is a liaison between the designers and their clients, providing a vital link. "It's a step-by-step process where a lot of ideas are being exchanged," adds Grosemans. "You get together to do step one. Then you go to step two, and so on. Until you get the final result which is always unique. Every client and every assignment is different. That's why there's no such thing as a typical Creneau Style."

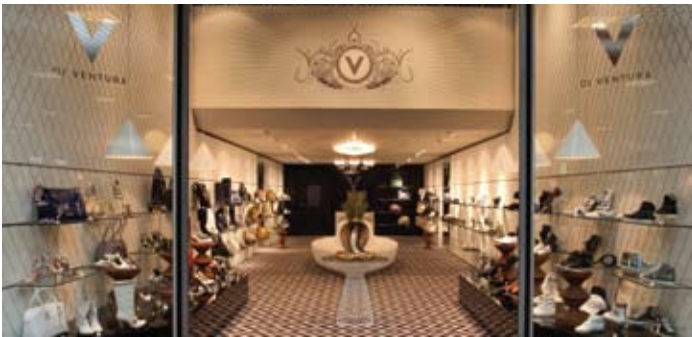
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Creneau International's logo features two winged monkeys and the tagline "Hac Itur Ad Astra," or "This Way to the Stars." It captures the magic of one of Belgium's leading interior design agencies—creating anti-ordinary, out-of-this-world projects designed to give their clients an extra boost and help them stand out from their competitors. So what about the monkeys? "Well, we like to have fun while working," laughs Grosemans.

Their whimsical headquarters, Chateau Creneau, reflects the open minds at work—there are large airy offices, a big kitchen where designers cook their lunches together, two hip cafés, an actual Asian restaurant, Ken® and Barbie® signs on bathroom doors, and a fanciful roulette table. It might look like all fun and games, but Creneau is above all focused on the business. These creative outlets inspire the interior designers, graphic designers, product developers, and craftsmen who hail from all over the world to think differently when posed with design challenges.

At Creneau, the design process is simple. Each project is owned by a designer, from start to finish. There are no art directors. This gives designers the freedom to carry a vision through to fruition. At 33, Davy Grosemans is already a senior designer, with 10 years experience in the company, "We like working with young people, fresh from school. They don't wear blinders and their ideas about design are not scaled down by previous work experiences. When someone applies for a job, we don't focus on their resumes. If we get a good feeling about him or her, he or she gets the job." Grosemans himself studied product design, but now spends 90% of his time designing interiors.



The open, transparent V di Ventura shop front has a central gate and high windows to attract passers-by.



Helga Verlinden Jewellery's flagship store in Hasselt, Belgium.

High Profile Design for High Profile Clients

Since its founding in the late 80's Creneau has been asked frequently by retail companies like Levi's®, Lee®, and Wrangler® to create new atmospheres surrounding their products. "We provide everything except the product itself and the ad campaigns," notes Grosemans. "We design the exhibition booths, point of sale (POS), the flagship stores, the shop-in-shops, the packaging, and more."

For the Shanghai World Expo 2010, Creneau was commissioned to create three eye-catching corners, representing Belgium's three best-known export products: beer, chocolate, and diamonds in the country's pavilion.

In the Diamond Shop the design chronicles the various stages of cutting and polishing used to transform a rough diamond into a sparkler. The shop's counter was designed to mirror the layer of stones from which diamonds are cut. Creneau created the Chocolate Corner with warm colors that blend with melting chocolate stains to bring the product to life.



Champagne Bar, Radisson Hotel, Hasselt, Belgium

The Belgian Beer Expansion

One of Creneau's most successful projects is the Belgian Beer Café (BBC), a concept commissioned by brewer AB Inbev (formerly Interbrew) and designed by Atmosphere Architects Annemie Stevens and Lieve Vandeweert. In less than ten years, they've opened the doors to more than 90 Belgian Beer Cafés across the globe.

These ready-made vintage bars hearken back to the early 20th century. Creneau has re-created an old Belgian café, with an open atmosphere that invites communication and connection. The designers describe it "like the Cheers bar, but 50 years older." Each café has an old clock on the wall where the time is always five minutes to 12, the official closing time in those days. The walls showcase the official portraits of a young King Leopold III and his wife, Elisabeth, drunkenness regulations dating from that period, and long-gone metallic beer ads.

The defining pieces—photos, tables, and bars—are unique to each location; they're bought at flea markets and if necessary, restored in Creneau's studio. In a special process, the bars and the furniture are designed and assembled in Belgium and then shipped to the final location. Two weeks before the opening, one of the designers oversees the final touches at the new café.

"There's no better software for an interior designer," says Grosemans. "Vectorworks is easy to use, and you can use it throughout the whole design process—from early sketch to very detailed drawing."

*--Davy Grosemans, Senior Designer
Creneau International, Hasselt, Belgium*



Large airy meeting room that fosters creativity and idea exchange.

Growing the Vision through Living Space

Creneau has designed many hotels, restaurants, and cafés over the years, so it wasn't a big leap to designing ready-made hotel rooms. Similar to the mass-production concept of streamlining manufacturing through standardized parts, this process has the Creneau hallmark of creativity that keeps things fresh. "The idea is to create one type of mock-up room for a complete hotel chain so you won't have to design every single room," says Janssen.



RBG Bar and Grill

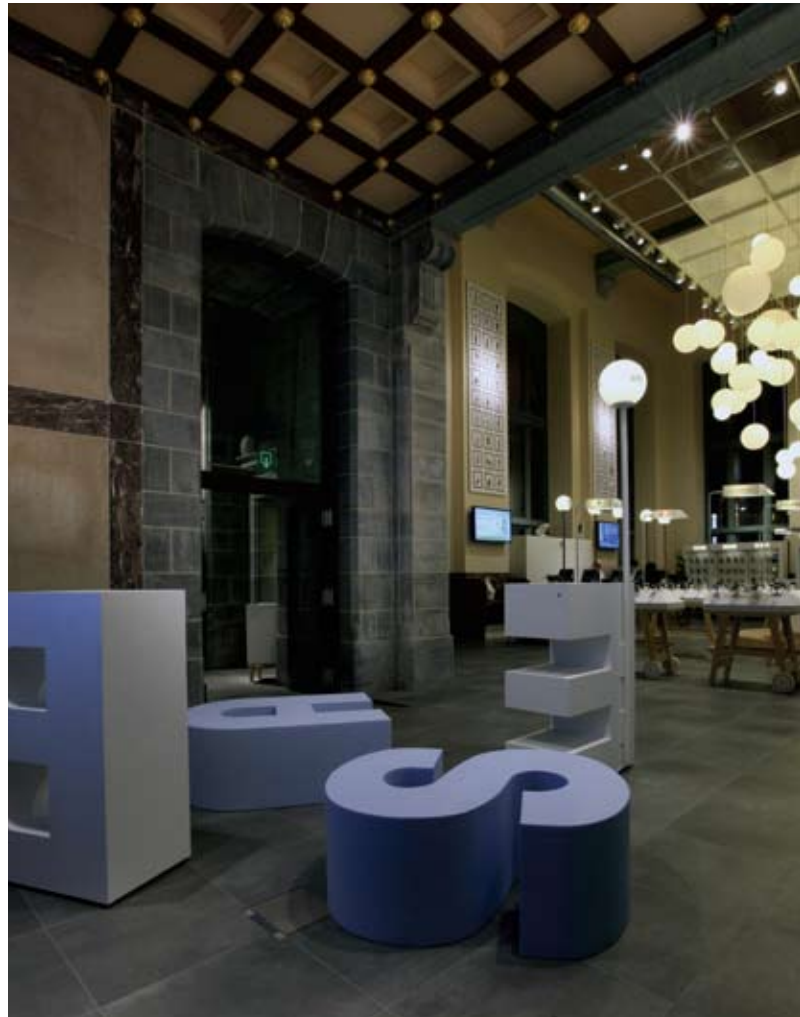
At the workspace adjoining the design studio, a life size prototype includes the smallest details, like a bank safe hidden in a drawer and the chocolates on the pillows. Before creating the prototype, the firm uses Vectorworks® software to build 3D models on screen that are very accurate, even detailing brand name furniture, lighting, flooring, and various other components. Since all measurements are stored within the project model, a change made on the screen automatically updates all data so that it remains accurate throughout the design process—from initial drawing through modeling, and finally, presentation.

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Building an Asian Empire

Creneau has also developed its own prototype for an Asian café-restaurant based on traditional Indonesian restaurants, named Cho Gao®. It's Creneau's first own franchise project. Creneau's headquarters creates the design, the Dubai office does the technical drawings, and the assembly takes place in Jakarta. The interior has an authentic look and feel. "All the materials come from Asia. We've opened up a workshop in Jakarta where teak wood from torn down houses is recycled into tables, room dividers, and seats. The lights are from recuperated bamboo stems and ornaments like the bird cages also come from Asia," explains Janssen. No detail is left to chance.

The first Cho Gao® opened in Sydney two years ago and was an instant success. Since then, three other Cho Gao® café-restaurants opened their doors and several more are planned this year. "The investment cost is very low since the kitchen is very small. Plus, the concept has already proven to be a success, so there's no risk involved," believes Grosemans.



BASE's super stylish, transparent shop contrasts beautifully with the rest of the newly renovated historical Central Station.

How Vectorworks Helps

Ever since they switched from manual drawing to CAD, the designers at Creneau have used Vectorworks software for their 2D and 3D drawings. "There's no better software for an interior designer," says Grosemans. "Vectorworks is easy to use, and you can use it throughout the whole design process—from early sketch to very detailed drawing." It eliminates the need for several applications to get from start to finish.

Grosemans likes to create his visualizations in a unique style, mixing the old and the new. Using the Vectorworks software, he creates a 3D rendering that he uses as a base for a manual sketch. Then, he scans the hand-drawn sketch and colors it with Adobe® Photoshop. This provides a hand-drawn, authentic look that is underpinned by accurate measurements, and can easily be updated when changes occur.

The firm relies on the Vectorworks application for its ease-of-use, and it is also an effective tool when training young employees. It's intuitive, so it can be learned quickly. The layout sheets and viewports are a big timesaver. Users can choose their own workflow, so they can pick the way that works for that particular project.



Cho Gao - an Asian-style restaurant.

The Vectorworks application also helps Creneau reduce the time spent on making attractive presentation drawings, since it reduces the need for an external graphics solution. Product presentations created with the Vectorworks application are some of the most graphically rich out there. "Vectorworks gives us the freedom to create whatever we've dreamt up," says Grosemans. Thanks to Vectorworks' wide variety of 2D and 3D import options, it's really easy to include even the latest and newest designer furniture collections in their drawings.

Grosemans is effusive about certain features in recent versions, "I especially love the object transparency capabilities, the rotatable view, the scalable hatches, and the viewports on design layers," he says. These enhancements can save Creneau a lot of time, so they can continue to focus on the future of interior design.

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A Bit of Background

Creneau International was founded in 1989. In addition to its headquarters and studios in Hasselt, Belgium, the firm maintains a second office in Dubai and a workshop in Jakarta. Creneau also is commercially represented in Sydney, Kiev, Jakarta, and Prague. Throughout the years, Creneau has been working for an impressive portfolio, including brands such as: Levi's®, Converse®, Wrangler®, O'neill, Val Saint Lambert, World Expo Shanghai, Deutsche Bank, AB Inbev, L'Oréal®, Park Inn, and ING Real Estate. The firm has garnered numerous awards through the years, among them "The Best Global Self-Promotional Agency," "The Design Week Awards," and "The Best Retail Concept 2008 for Beaudevin, Negocio Award." To find out about their latest innovations, see www.creneau.com/www.chogao.com.



Lobby and kitchen ground floor at Chateau Creneau.