



PLAY LANDSCAPE BE-MINE: A PLAYGROUND SET ON A COAL MINE

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The team of Carve and Omgeving (design) and Krinkels (contractor) won the international competition to design an adventurous play-scape and landmark on a *terril* in Beringen, Belgium, in January 2015. The adventure mountain is part of the touristic, recreational project be-MINE, which aims to breathe new life into the monumental coal mining site in Beringen, the largest industrial-archeological site in Flanders. The former mining city wanted to add a new function to the 60-meter-high rubble mountain and to redevelop the old industrial buildings into a cultural hotspot, where its history could be experienced in a playful way.



The spectacular scale of this site – regarding both the height of the *terril* as well as its industrial

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heritage – is unique in the relatively flat surrounding landscape of Limburgian-Flanders. The intervention is a landmark on a large scale, but through its playful character it also reflects the small scale of a child. The values of the industrial heritage have been a continuous leading theme in the design process, which resulted in an unprecedented playscape. The mining *terril* has been given a new meaning, rooted in both the past and the future.

The design consists of three parts, which create a unity with the mountain and its past: a pole forest as a landmark; an adventurous prismatic play surface on the flank of the mountain; and a coal square on the top of the *terril*. The spine of the ensemble is a straight stairway that provides access to all levels. At night, a line of lights along the stairs makes the topography of the *terril* visible.



Pole forest as reference to the mining past

The topography of the landscape regains structure and is made visible by a pole forest: 1,600 timber poles are anchored in the northern flank of the *terril*, from top to bottom. The rounded poles refer to the mining past; they were used for supporting the kilometres-long underground mining shafts. This is a strong spatial gesture and an intervention that relates to the scale of the hill and the industrial heritage on this location.

A section between the poles has been dedicated to an adventure course with balancing beams, climbing nets, hammocks, a labyrinth and a rope course. The poles are placed in a grid, which results in an interesting perspective effect: the sightlines create an experience that recalls the dark mining shafts of the past.

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Prismatic playsurface

Wedged in between the pole forest sits a large, prism-shaped play surface. It has been 'draped' over the *terril*, following its heightlines – a gesture that is visible from afar. The surface is a challenging object, which narrows down to the top and 'crumbles' at the foot of the hill. This tectonic landscape offers space for an endless variation of play options and is scattered with crawling tunnels, climbing surfaces with climbing grips, and giant stairs. Its spectacular highlight is the more than 20-meter-long slide, which is situated halfway up the hill and is integrated into the relief of the concrete play surface. The various prismatic surfaces invite children to climb, slide, hide and discover. The surface consists of sloped, horizontal and vertical crossings, inspired by the underground mining shafts.

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<https://urbannext.net/play-landscape-be-mine/>

All integrated play elements in both the pole forest and the prismatic playsurface have one thing in common: they challenge children physically, to play together and use their motor skills. The sensation of an increasing height and difficulty level of the 'parcours' – the higher you climb, the more difficult it gets – demands collaboration and mutual encouragement in order to reach the top. Cooperation and stimulation are therefore intrinsically connected with the play experience, as an immaterial reference to the hard physical work of the old mine workers, who had to trust one another unconditionally.



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Coal Square

On top of the *terril*, at a height of 60 meters, a 'Coal Square' was created that reflects both the past and the present character of the *terril*. The square is sunken and represents the presence of 'black gold'. Its sunken position provides shelter from the strong winds at the top of the hill. From the middle of the square the horizon is no longer visible, directing one's full attention to the clouds above. The sloped edges of the Coal Square can be used for seating and contain historic information about the site and the surrounding mining landscape. Visitors can take a stroll on the raised talud and enjoy the panoramic views of the surrounding Limburg mining landscape.

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Together, the pole forest, the prismatic play surface and the Coal Square create a unique addition to the Masterplan Adventure Mountain, developed by Antea Group, and are a valuable contribution to the transition of Flanders' largest industrial heritage towards a touristic, recreational project.



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