

**TRIAMANT** OPENS A SECOND OFFICE IN WERVIK

# 'WE ARE REALLY JUST LIKE TREE GROWERS'



*The entrepreneurs in the aging economy fall into two groups: the care entrepreneurs and the project developers. But there are also those who do not just fit in a box.*

*Such as Triamant.*

ROELAND BYL, PHOTOGRAPHY DEBBY TERMONIA

**R**est homes are 'passé', believes Jo Robrechts, the executive chairman of Triamant. With his partner and managing director Dirk De Baets he started a company in care in 2007. Initially he still respected the rest home legislation, but now the duo wants to create entire neighbourhoods where in addition to seniors also ordinary families live. Robrechts calls this new approach 'Triamant 2.0'. That sounds hip, and therefore the question arises: are they preparing the road of the real estate for the ageing population of the future, or are they

rather ghost riders in the care of the elderly? "We are in any case different", he says. "We wanted to come up with alternatives nobody actually wanted to think of. And we are not really looking at what others are doing."

Robrechts has a history as a serial entrepreneur and earned his spurs as manager at Janssen Pharmaceutica. The man from the Kempen region (Belgium) also has a visionary side. In the eighties he was one of the architects of a strategic and futuristic plan to shake up the economic activity in the Kempen. >

**JO ROBRECHTS** "The seniors of tomorrow shudder with the offer of yesterday."



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> Now he is one of the many players in the ageing economy. Robrechts and Baets emphasize that in the first place they want to make a better place of the world. Apparently they have always remained a bit of a scout.

They followed a long-term real estate training at the KU Leuven, when they came up with the idea to start something at the crossroads of housing and care. They felt that a different approach was needed. Robrechts: "The population is ageing very fast. Based on the demographics, the growth can even accurately be forecasted: we go towards 28 percent of people aged 65 and over by 2030. At the same time, you can see the needs of each new generation change in an accelerated way. The seniors of tomorrow shudder in the supply of yesterday."

### Building neighbourhoods

Triamant wants to emphatically innovate the offer. In the early years, he even received a subsidy of 65,000 EUR of the IWT for this. "The challenge is to offer a response to what the people really want," he says. "You need to go looking for the basic flows:

### LOOKING FOR THE COMMON DENOMINATOR

In his quest to find a new business model Triamant took the common living solutions under the magnifying glass. "For our neighborhood model we wanted from each of the classical living forms the key advantage, but without the disadvantages," says Robrechts. Typical you first live at home until that is no longer possible, then you move to a service flat until that is no longer possible, and then you end up in a residential care center. The costs will increase as a result in large leaps, while the living quality drops and a man only gradually becomes older. "We want to maintain the quality of life as high as possible without creating large leaps in costs", says Robrechts. "Elderly people who live at home, isolate easier and live in 88 percent of the cases in an inappropriate apartment. Often, in order to resolve that, important investments are needed to adapt the house. In our approach, every square meter is designed with a view to people who are gradually getting restrictions"

where is the society heading? That is

### "We are there for people in all stages of health. From sporty, healthy people to people with risk behaviour and people who are vulnerable or chronically ill"

why we build places where people can be happy as long as possible, as healthy as possible. We want to create welcoming, lively neighbourhoods where people no longer want to move away from. That goes further than the classic care infrastructure. Our concept is constantly evolving. That will never stop, we plan to continue to innovate."

In 2010 Triamant has achieved its first project in the rural Velm, near Sint-Truiden. It subjected a castle domain to a prestigious conversion. There is now place for 200 residents and a further 60 flats and 5 houses were built. This brings the total area at 26,000 square meters,

good for 300 residents. The commercialisation is carried out in accordance with the principles of an open area, which Triamant 2.0 has in mind. "There is space for a number of families with children", says Robrechts. "We also want to keep some flats available for people with disabilities. And there are eight guests-rooms. These are full scale hotel rooms, but they are equipped for all kinds of limitations. We notice that we have attracted therefore a very diverse audience, of future residents who want to breathe the atmosphere, to Australian tourists."

Furthermore, at the beginning of July a second project will be delivered, in Geluwe, between Kortrijk and Ypres. There will be 120 apartments and studios. Robrechts: "At least one in six residents is between 20 and 55 years of age. Our preference goes to singles. This target sector is too easily overlooked in the real estate property. We prefer to aim for people who are willing to perform 10 hours per month of voluntary work. We will meet them in the rental."

The idea of a lively welcoming neighbourhood is not completely new. In the academic literature, ten years ago, a

similar Dutch experiment was described. Germany has also been experimenting in that direction. Triamant wants to push through the idea of a joint neighbourhood. We are there for people in all stages of health", says Robrechts. "From sporty, healthy people, to people with risk behaviour and people who are vulnerable or chronically ill."

### Self-care in a holiday village

For its residents, Triamant focuses more on autonomy and vitality than on healthcare facilities. Which are obviously also available if needed. "Autonomy means for us that someone retains control over his life until >



# 2500

*is the number of residents Triamant will count by 2025.*

supports”, says Robrechts. “In our vision it is not even about care, but about health. The care is present, but we prefer to focus on what our residents still can do. Too often you see people who come into a rest home and languish because they focus on what they can no longer do. We make sure that around the clock professional aid is present. If in Velm someone falls on Saturday night, there is in 80% of cases an intervention within three minutes. This is a lot faster than the 30 minutes that is the agreed limit for assistance properties.”

**“Autonomy in our vision means that someone keeps control over his life to the last day”**

The Triamant founder is also proud on the methodology with which his people come up with for so-called co-creation projects. These are matters for which residents form a group and take initiatives themselves. For example, to start a library, to reconstruct a ruin in the park, to open a chapel. These are all authentic examples, where the initiative came from residents in Velm and where Triamant supplied support.

When Robrechts talks about Triamant, he talks about the attention for privacy, meeting places and activities. Such a residence project in the long term sounds almost like the description of a holiday village of Club Med. “I certainly did not want to say that, because each brand name has its own reputation”, refines Robrechts. “But every day >

> the last day”, says Robrechts. “Again, vitality revolves around a healthy lifestyle. We actually start from self-care. You have control. Your trusted network stimulates you not to let go. From the moment you decide that you need more care, we are there. You do not need to move anymore. We come to you with the

care. Including palliative care.”

The Voka Health Community was first to give Triamant for this approach the title of CASMA ambassador. This abbreviation stands for 'community assisted self-management'. “The responsibility for the care lays in that model with the individual, whilst the community



#### FROM ONE TO SIX

"Originally, there was one company. But as our business model changed, we divided the activities judiciously," explains Robrechts. The holding company Triamant nv built own assets of 11.9 million euros. The financial holding company AAAfinance NV, with which bonds are concluded, has its own assets of 20.1 million euros. In the company PatriVelm nv contains the project in Velm (22,250 euros loss in 2014). The operation is in the hands of the association AAACare (298,022 euros loss in 2015 through the start-up costs of enlargement with 86 living-care rooms in 2014). There are still no figures available for Van Care Property Fund, because it was only incorporated in 2015. The company Care for life nv, where all the knowledge and know-how are brought together, has had a profit of 14,741 euros.

> a little holiday, with an eye for the happiness of the people, that is what we do stand for. Our home and living projects are an open community, for which hospitality and social interaction is important. We create a whole village with a site manager, just call it some kind of internal mayor.

I dream that someday we will be able to show scientifically how our approach improves the life quality and the life expectations of our residents."

#### Not a flat, But a living obligation

At the present moment about 100 people are working for Triamant. There are still neighbourhoods in the pipeline in Ronse, Zottegem and Bree. Today, 200 units are inhabited, and 300 are in construction. In addition, there are permits for another 450. Normally contractors want to make a profit. "We reinvest our profits fully," says Robrechts. "We do not aim at making profits for tomorrow, but in the very long term. I come from a family of tree growers, you could say that we are in fact a type of tree growers in Triamant. The financial product for our residents is a living right bond on fifty years. We believe in life cycles"

#### "Every day a little holiday, with an eye for the happiness of the people, that is what we stand for"

The living right bond comes down to the fact that someone acquires the right to live in a flat of Triamant for 50 years. Because it is a financial product, there will be neither registration fees nor VAT to be paid. The bond is covered by a life insurance. As long as the owner does not live there, Triamant pays an interest rate of 3.25 percent. If he does live there, then he pays a remaining daily compensation for the cost of the services and the care part. Subscribing to a living right bond can start from 150,000 euros.

"Our profit margin is in both the construction and the operation", says Robrechts. "We are good with the control of the cost of the infrastructure, but in addition, the operation also has to make a profit. To keep control on a cost point factor, we handle a minimum scale of 120 units per project. Many classical

players in the market believe that this is big."

In Velm, Triamant operates for the greatest part in accordance with the resident care legislation. That is why the operation is in a non-profit association. In the future, that will no longer be the case. "You are subject to many restrictions", says Robrechts. "The pricing is one of them. As such you need to work with a daily rate in which all the things that you must do, are defined. We are doing much more, but our approach to community assisted living falls outside the healthcare legislation. Therefore, we now use amongst others the regulations for home nursing and home care. The compensations are lower here. By centralising, we think we can reduce the cost per person for the state by half. I think we can say that we have been able to create a new business model."

Moreover, we also bring in long term investors within a financial product with a long term lease formula. Preferably,

life insurers. As such the 'Gemeenschappelijke Verzekeringsskas Integrale' invested in May last year 28.5 million euros in the Triamant project in Zottegem. "It allows us to, on the one hand, have the necessary means available upfront, and thus to acquire the whole again at the end of the journey", says Robrechts. "In order to maintain the residential mix, in the future we want to market a third of the flats through lease."

By 2025, Triamant strives for 2500 residents. "That is an internal target", stresses Robrechts. "We are going for it, but it is not set in stone. We prefer to sustain growth and therefore provisionally leave abroad aside. We do not even look at Wallonia or Brussels. The growth potential in Flanders is too large. What are 2500 residents in a population of 7 million Flemings?"