



1. Aula Academica
Voldersstraat 9



2. Pand monastery
Intersection Predikherenlei and Hoornstraat, at the bridge over the Lys



3. Courts of Justice
Koophandelsplein



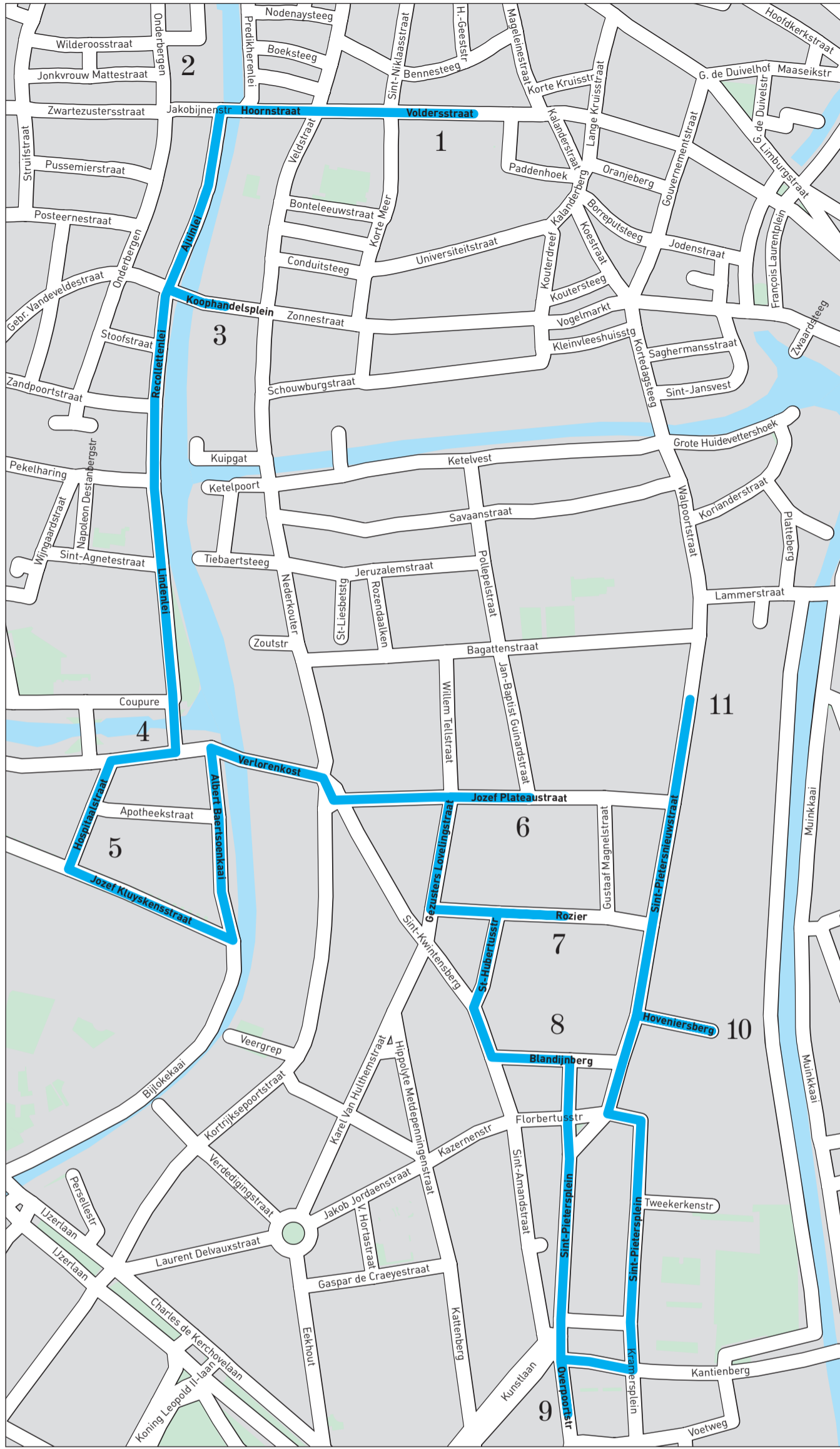
4. Coupure
At the bridge over the Coupure, near the little harbour



5. Rommelaere complex
Intersection Hospitaalstraat and Jozef Kluykensstraat



6. Plateau
Jozef Plateaustraat 22



7. Book Tower
Rozier 9



8. Blandijn
Blandijnberg 2



9. Overpoortstraat
Overpoortstraat



10. The Thermanal
Hoveniersberg, near the river



11. UFO
Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 33

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Touring past City & University

The tale of Ghent and Ghent University begins on 9 October 1817. On that day the flags were flying high at City Hall and the bells of the belfry were ringing. In the presence of twelve professors and municipal, provincial and military authorities, the Dutch Crown Prince inaugurated a new university in the throne room of the City Hall.

Ghent would not be the same without the university. Students and scientists have coloured the city's landscape for a long time now. They live, work, buy a house and marry in Ghent. Numerous public buildings and private residences have been designed or rebuilt by the civil engineers trained at Ghent University. And then there are the dozens of university buildings themselves... But this relationship is reciprocal: the university would not be the same without the city either. Their mutual history is the subject of this tour. UGentPassage takes you through the history and collective memory of city and university. The eleven locations along the route are symbolic places where the university has grown into the city. They are *lieux de mémoire*, places of memory that highlight the relationship between university, city and society.

1. Aula Academica

Voldersstraat 9

The Aula is the glorious gift of welcome from the city to the university. To this day, it is the ceremonial heart of Ghent University. The intention of the architect, Louis Roelandt, to mimic the columns and pediment of a Greek temple is obvious. The Aula is a 'temple of science', where reason is celebrated. Roelandt uses many classical elements both outdoors and indoors, adding to the monumental nature of the building. Art experts are critical though: they believe that the auditorium is a stylistic cacophony. But the university and the city are not bothered: 19th-century travel guides quickly rate the Aula as a three star site.

After the joyous inauguration in 1826, the university adorns its lavish palace with symbols and rituals. Professors, students, administrators and politicians use the symbolic value of the Aula to make statements about the state of science, education, the university, the people and the country.

The town and its citizens, generous donors as they are, always find an open house in the 'Palace of the University'. For instance, at the opening of the academic year, not only does the Rector give a speech here, but so does the Mayor. Until the First World War, the city awards prizes to the best grammar school pupils during the opening ceremony. Even the Belfry Dragon found shelter in the Aula in 1912 when the tower of the Belfry was renovated. In 2000 the artist Jan Fabre decorated the columns with ham: an image that the citizens of Ghent will remember for a long time.

2. Pand monastery

Intersection Predikherenlei and Hoornstraat, at the bridge over the Lys

The large striking grey building along the canal is called 'het Pand'. When the university acquires the old Dominican monastery in 1963, it is in disrepair. Because of its lamentable state as a grimy tenement, the people from Ghent call it the *Vlooienspaleis*, Dutch for 'Palace of the Fleas'. The University of Ghent initially wants to turn the monastery into a new residency for students. But the Department of Monuments of Ghent doesn't agree. It thinks that, after 750 years of turbulent history, the monastery deserves better!

One such episode in the building's history takes place between 1580 and 1584. During four years it accommodates a Calvinist university. In this 'first University of Ghent' Protestant pastors are trained. Although this university does not last long, the city uses the early presence of a university as an argument 230 years later in lobbying for the state university. Instead of becoming a student residence the building undergoes a long and thorough restoration. Today the old monastery is the cultural centre of the university. It houses the communications service, a restaurant, the Faculty Club, several conference rooms and three historical collections.

3. Courts of Justice

Koophandelsplein

You are now facing Hippolyte Metdepenningen. A citizen of Ghent, Metdepenningen was a lawyer, journalist, politician and a freemason. He helped to establish the Liberal Party in Ghent. Not bad for the first alumnus of the University of Ghent! The bronze statue of Metdepenningen has most certainly seen a fair number of students enter the impressive courthouse with their tails between their legs. The student's combination of youthful ambition and continual beer swilling can become quite a nuisance for the residents of Ghent. All in all, it's typical of a college town. If you read through old student journals, a night out seems to be a success only when the citizens of Ghent shout at you or you are chased by the police.

Do the columns of the building look familiar? Like the Aula, this neoclassical building is designed by Louis Roelandt. The city is so pleased with Roelandt's university building that they promote him to the post of City Architect. Besides the Aula and the Courts of Justice, he also designs the Opera, the Casino and St. Anne's Church. From 1835 onwards, Roelandt continues his work as the city's architect, while holding a professorship at the university. Roelandt is a real entrepreneur and convinces the city to use gas from his gas plant to illuminate the streets of Ghent. The professor has therefore determined the streets of Ghent in more than one way!

4. Coupure

At the bridge over the Coupure, near the little harbour

The Coupure, nearly a mile long and lined by lime and plane trees, is one of the most exclusive residential sites in Ghent. The houses are built by the 19th-century jet set of Ghent. The elite is attracted by the mix of vast fields, windmills and well-maintained buildings. Among them you can find owners of factories, entrepreneurs, doctors, judges and... professors.

The professor's residence is more than just a private home within walking distance of the university buildings. The professor has his study there, his library and his private practice. It often happens that students grow familiar with the house of their mentor and, besides the private collection of books, take an interest in the daughter of the house too. It is remarkable how many family or political ties are forged between the families of professors: true academic dynasties emerge.

Not only does the Ghent elite enjoy the Coupure. The place becomes the favourite 'promenade' of students and citizens of Ghent alike. It is the starting point for long walks along the Lys. At the Coupure, students rent rowing boats for playful romantic getaways. To this day you can find plenty of students along the Coupure: not rowing but jogging.

5. Rommelaere complex

Intersection Hospitaalstraat and Jozef Kluykensstraat

For a long time the city hospital was located in the neo-Gothic building with the glass entrance. Initially, it is here that the students of the Faculty of Medicine practise their medical skills. Interaction between city and university has nowhere been as intense as here. The confrontation with the misery of the workers from Ghent must have been quite a shock to many students. For the professors, the patients were a constant motivation in their quest for improved diagnoses, better remedies and more accurate treatments

But nowhere interaction has been more problematic either. The ongoing difficulty lies in sharing and distributing tools, patients and corpses. These are needed for educational purposes, but the city doctors do not like to share them. The two parties also often question each other's diagnoses. Not very conducive to the health of patients...

Things improve considerably when the university opens its own medical institutions in 1905. The Rommelaere complex is located across the street. The building is notable for the coloured stone facade and frivolous turrets, the trademark of City Architect, Louis Cloquet. Patients who want to be examined and treated by university doctors can visit this Rommelaere complex. For nursing and hospital healthcare, patients have to go to the Bijloke. This means that every day patients are moved from one building to the other. It's a very bumpy route!

6. Plateau

Jozef Plateaustraat 22

Christmas 1881. Three hundred families from the neighbourhood of Batavia are told that they have to make way for a new university building. The city does not really care where the workers move to. The main concern is that the impoverished neighbourhood – a threat to public health – is cleaned up! The Institute of Science opens ten years later. Covering an area of 14,700 square meters, it is one of the largest buildings in Belgium. Because narrow streets surround it, you cannot have a complete view of it. But it is truly gigantic in size. And once again, the building has been designed by a City Architect and professor. Adolphe Pauli devises a building that is packed with 19th-century science laboratories, classrooms, workshops and offices. There are two entrances. The one in the Plateaustraat provides access to the engineering schools. Four allegorical statues above the entrance represent the initial study directions for an education in engineering: Bridges and Roads, Civil Engineering, Arts and Manufacturing, and Architecture. The lush facade of the building recalls the majestic grandeur of this education: in the 19th and 20th centuries, Ghent engineering schools were renowned all over the world and attracted many foreigners from Eastern Europe and Latin America. At the peak of their fame, more students attended classes here than in all the other faculties combined.

The second entrance to the complex is located in the Rozierstraat and provides access to the Faculty of Science. Physics, chemistry, geology and paleontology are each allocated one wing. Pauli receives a lot of praise for his design. He has succeeded in accommodating all the sciences within the same building. Or at least for a while. Because nobody could foresee how quickly the numbers of sciences and students would increase during the 20th century. Despite its monumental size, by 1905 the Plateau building is already too small. The building has been in a constant state of transition ever since: levels are split, courtyards filled with smaller buildings, basements used and units moved. The Plateau building has become a virtually impenetrable maze where generations of students got lost. If the entrance on the Plateaustraat is open, you can try and cross the building on your way to the next location in the Rozierstraat. Good luck!

7. Book Tower

Rozier 9

'Powerful symbol of science', 'violation of Ghent's airspace', 'symbolic lighthouse', 'academic erection', 'cathedral of knowledge'... The perception of the Book Tower varies. The citizens of Ghent have to get used to a fourth tower on their city skyline.

It remains a masterpiece all the same. Architect Henry van de Velde has designed a Modernist work of art. Both the interior and exterior of the university library consist of a combination of horizontal and vertical axes. Viewed in its entirety the tower looks sober, balanced and powerful. This is exactly the impression the university wants to radiate in the 1930s. The contrast with the old, cold and damp Baudeloo Library, which the university shares with the city, could not be greater.

Choosing a tower for the new university library is not obvious. Van de Velde needs to do a lot of persuading for his 'oversized bookcase'. The former head librarian, for instance, is not in favour of it. The distribution of books is difficult to organize in a building with 20 floors. The size of the tower has more or less survived the explosion of 20th-century knowledge. Today it holds approximately three million books, periodicals and manuscripts. But overall, the condition of the building is poor. Decades of neglect and improper repairs have taken their toll and the building is up for a long restoration.

8. Blandijn

Blandijnberg 2

As you arrive at the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, you have walked into the post-war university: an era of democratization, consolidation and grey construction. Dozens of post-war university buildings will help determine the cityscape, but are architecturally much less challenging than their predecessors. Blandijn, for instance, can hardly be called to most inspiring of the university's building.

However, it is Henry van de Velde himself, who initiates its construction. He draws a magnificent complex that looks out onto St. Peter's Square, forming a whole with the Book Tower. But the university is changing faster than Van de Velde can draw. After 30 years of bureaucratic ordeal, he gives up, disappointed, and leaves pen and table to his students. This building in glazed clay tiles is the result. The covered entrance is the only architecturally interesting feature.

But the Blandijn does not need prestige, as it is an important part of the university all the same. The central location, the large lecture theatre, the proximity of the Students' Union and the Faculty of Arts turn Blandijn into a congenial centre of student activity. The major part of the building's fame stems from its being a centre of student protests in the turbulent 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The Blandijn building is repeatedly smeared, occupied and even besieged. It develops a reputation for being 'the Cuba of Ghent'.

9. Overpoortstraat

Overpoortstraat

It would be quite an understatement to say that the Overpoortstraat is defined by the presence of the university and its students. Packed with pubs and cheap eats, the street is virtually a student enclave within the city. It forms the backdrop for parties and other activities held by the dozens of student organizations from Ghent University and Colleges.

The rapid succession of generations of students in the Overpoortstraat makes you forget the age of the student-like presence there, as if the university never had its student area anywhere else. Which is, of course, not true. Students in Ghent have been having nights out in the cafes and restaurants near the Aula for 150 years. During the fifties, this gradually moves to the Kuiperskaai too. The Overpoort obtains her status as a student boulevard with the arrival of new campuses and the University Hospital. The Overpoortstraat connects these new university sites south of the city with the 'old university' in the city centre. Ghent University builds a student restaurant and three halls of residence in and around the centrally located Overpoortstraat. And in the wake of the students, shops and pubs follow.

10. The Thermanal

Hoverniersberg, near the river

Idyllically located on the waterfront, the Ghent Student Unions and associations have their own hidden oasis here. The Student House is located in the old coal furnace of the university. On the quayside, coal was unloaded and then processed in the furnace to generate steam. This then heated the adjacent university buildings through a system of tubes.

After a prestigious renovation of the old 'coal shed', the Thermanal opens its doors in 2006. The brick chimney still reminds us of the former use of the building. Student unions and associations can use the Thermanal for their activities and meetings. Compared with the old House around the corner, the Thermanal resembles a palace. It fits the idea of the 21st-century student, who is a customer of the university and needs to be indulged with ample infrastructure and facilities.

Ghent can't ignore its students. It is a huge group: 32,000 university students and a similar number of college students. One in five inhabitants out of a total of 240,000 is a student. The impact of the students on mobility, housing and waste management is therefore enormous. The university relieves the burden on the city by offering numerous amenities: dorms, restaurants, sports facilities, bicycles, doctors and facilities like the Thermanal. The biggest challenge remains to try and integrate the constant increase of students with the rest of the city.

11. UFO

Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 33

The last stage of UGentPassage brings you to the University Forum, in short UFO. Since 2010, this striking building has become the jewel in the university's architectural crown. The break with the utilitarian style of the 1960s and 1970s could not be more obvious. Unlike before, the university has now become its own master builder and it can profile itself architecturally as well. For large construction projects, the University of Ghent organizes tenders, collaborating with prestigious architectural firms. The UFO was designed by Stéphane Beel and Xavier De Geyter, two of the most influential architects in Flanders and representatives of the New Simplicity. The centrepiece of the building is the spacious foyer that occupies the entire length of the building. Inside, the UFO is dominated by a large auditorium with a capacity for a 1,000 people. Branches of the central services and the departments of History and Archaeology are located to the left and right of the auditorium.

The UFO is the centrepiece of a master plan for the St. Pietersnieuwstraat. The aim of this plan is to improve traffic circulation between the university buildings and to provide a feeling of space with a few new squares. After a long period of breaking away from the inner city, the 21st-century university looks onto the city centre again. It represents a turning point in ideology. University and City Council have deliberately opted for the university and students to be actively involved in city life, even though this requires a considered mobility policy, housing arrangements, and cultural and social engagements.

Craving for more history of City and University?

Please have a look at www.UGentMemorie.be. UGentMemorie is the virtual memory of the university. You will find dozens of articles and images about people, places and events that have shaped the relationship between the City and University of Ghent.