

Legend Award  
Trisha Wilson

Designer of the Year  
**Krista Ninivaggi**

35th Annual  
Interiors Awards





In Ghelamco Arena in Ghent, Belgium, the K.A.A. Gent soccer team's signature color is incorporated in the form of blue ambient lighting. A more literal reference to the activities within is a large soccer ball light sculpture suspended in the double-height main lobby.



Ghelamco Arena



# Massive Design

Client  
**Ghelamco Group**  
Location  
**Ghent, Belgium**

Acoustic ceiling tiles (right) bring a sense of scale to the stadium's vast spaces. Varying column sizes are made uniform with the additions of Gyproc GypArt shells (below).

**“Pushing the idea of fabrication, the designers took the branding of the soccer team and introduced progressive architecture that engages the soccer fans. It looks like soccer heaven.”** JURY

By Cody Calamaio  
Photography by  
Saverio Lombardi Vallauri

When Massive Design came on board to design the interiors of Ghelamco Arena in early 2013, the project was already on a tight schedule in order to host an opening celebration in the summer that would be attended by royalty. The newly constructed soccer stadium in Ghent, Belgium, built by Bontinck Architecture and Engineering, needed a softer feel in its interior for when the King and Queen of Belgium made their last public appearance before voluntarily abdicating the throne.

“We didn’t have time for brainstorming and over-analyzing—I had to come up with something different and nice,” says Przemyslaw “Mac” Stopa, founder and chief architect of Massive Design. The Polish interior planning and design firm, known for creating stimulating and unconventional interiors, was tasked with designing 200,000 square feet of interior space—including multiple entrances, a main lobby, ticket areas, bars, restaurants, and VIP lounges—spread over four floors.

Working directly with the client, Ghelamco Group, Stopa developed the design in about one month. It focuses on two simple concepts: color and form. “For me, the natural way of thinking was to do design that connects the geometry of the soccer ball and the colors of the local team,” he says. The stadium is home to the K.A.A. Gent soccer team, and the design incorporates the team’s signature color in ambient blue light that reflects off the clean, mostly white surfaces.

Stopa drew inspiration from the form of a soccer ball, and incorporated it in various ways. The most literal way is a large soccer ball light sculpture that is suspended from a double-height ceiling in the main lobby. Soccer balls also appear in abstract three-dimensional graphics throughout the arena, but other logos are kept muted to avoid interrupting the stark color scheme. Stopa designed a series of tessellating acoustic ceiling tiles—with a shape reminiscent of the hexagonal pattern on a soccer ball, only with softened corners—that are suspended in cloud-like forms hovering over many of the stadium’s concourses. “I believe that in architecture, we prefer to be surrounded by softer forms because we feel closer to nature,” he says.

Because ceiling heights vary under the stands, more than 10,000 hanging ceiling tiles establish a uniform height and create a sense of scale. They also dampen noise in the vast, open areas, and conceal air ducts. The surface above the tiles was kept raw, but lit with blue uplights set on suspended tracks to flood it with color. White LED downlights balance out

the hue, so the colors of the walkways below do not appear to be distorted.

To further establish uniformity, Stopa made the various sizes of support columns throughout the massive stadium look consistent. Based on the diameter of the widest column, Stopa designed a shell made of Gyproc GypArt to fit around the columns. The shells fan out and hug the ceiling, echoing the muted hexagonal shapes of the ceiling tiles. Blue LED rope lights wrap the tops of the columns along the ceiling, providing a subtle pop of color in areas such as the lobby, which are mostly white. The floors are primarily paved with polished, porcelain tiles in white, gray, and black, which at times reflect the shapes of the molded forms around them.

Due to the project’s tight schedule, Stopa was not able to gather input from the team’s players before the stadium was built. But he had no need to worry: the local sports community has quickly embraced the interior design, which takes an elevated approach to the colors and shapes they may have expected in a stadium. “The reaction has been very nice,” Stopa says. “The players have said it’s more like a modern hotel.”





adaptive reuse  
 education  
 exhibition  
 healthcare: large  
 healthcare: small  
 hotel  
 office: large  
 office: small  
 public space  
 restaurant  
 retail  
 sports  
 sustainable  
 student

# 35th annual interiors awards

Demonstrating the power of place, each of the 14 winning projects is located in a different city in the United States, Canada, Spain, Austria, Belgium, and Japan. The five members of the 2014 Interiors Awards jury—leading designers from across the United States, selected winners from nearly 400 excellent entries. Juror Loriann Maas, a principal at Swanke Hayden Connell Architects, summarized: “The jury celebrated projects that had a distinctive sense of place. Increasingly, we find that it’s difficult to get our bearings when design trends are copied and replicated around the world. It was refreshing to see strong design concepts closely tied to the characteristics and architecture of the buildings.”



The 2014 Interiors Awards jury (from left):

- Joey Shimoda  
Shimoda Design Group
- Andreas Charalambous  
FORMA Design
- Anne Schopf, FAIA  
Mahlum Architects
- Loriann Maas  
Swanke Hayden  
Connell Architects
- Siobhan Barry  
ICRAVE