

# THE COMMUTER CLUB



## The story behind The Arc: meet Marie- Julie Gheysens, Head of UK, International Business Development at Ghelamco

Ghelamco was established in 1985 by Paul Gheysens and is a market leader in both Belgium and Poland, with a strong presence across many other European countries. The company is currently developing The Arc, a new mixed-use scheme located in Shoreditch. A family-owned business through and through, Marie-Julie Gheysens heads up the UK office.

I have always been interested in the interactions of different atmospheres and how different needs can be glued together. Similarly, I have always been enchanted by roundabouts - where everyone walks simultaneously but also individually. My family and I have always been fascinated with circulation and thoroughly enjoy exploring this in every development we work on. Each development is part of a creative process where

we truly try to envision every single detail and make it come to life in our own minds. My studies included real estate investment, which sharpened and challenged me. The study abroad programmes I undertook gave me the opportunity to see different perspectives and cultures, which have in turn inspired me and constantly generate new ideas and ways of thinking. I find one of the fundamentals to success lies in undertaking in-depth research and teaming up with the best artists.



The Arc, City Road

**The most important thing that women in construction can do is believe that there are no more barriers.** The more we normalise, the more it becomes the standard and becomes easier to break through. It all comes down to know-how; if you have the confidence to believe in your idea and you want to take responsibility for your educational journey, you will come out on top. I know it is obviously much easier to say than do, and there are still a lot of people out there that are not accepting of female leaders, but that is often linked to deep-wounded insecurities in society. As long as we have confidence in ourselves, we will get there.

The correct training and focus within education is fundamental. This starts with school initiatives and ensuring the students are aware of all the career options available to them. There are so many potential career opportunities within development and construction that can be attractive to all skillsets, abilities and interests; ranging from the sourcing of building materials, energy efficient concepts, interior design and financial returns analysis.

At Ghelamco, I feel the entire company breathes a strong female aura. It is a very inclusive and grounded culture, where hard work and friendship go hand-in-hand. Ghelamco's star ambassador is still my mother, Ria Gheysens, who leads an entirely female team, which includes project management, marketing and day-to-day operational management. The company is currently 50:50 male to female - we hire people based on merit and mentality; the rest follows.



City Road reception

**The Arc is Ghelamco's first project in the UK, and adds to an already extensive track record across Europe.** The building is located in London's 'Tech City'; on City Road and less than 5 minutes' walk to Old Street station. We named the building after the luminescent arches (arcs) in the entrance of the building and it will be a unique new addition to the area. The interiors have been designed by Bowler James Brindley, with AHMM architects leading on the exterior design – which is a very powerful, and award-winning, combination. Our aspiration for the building was to create a mixed-use hub, with a strong focus on sustainability and wellbeing. The building itself will be triple certified; with BREEAM Excellent, WELL Gold and DGNB Gold certification. The building will be fully electric and its carbon emissions are actually 30% lower than its multi-fuel-operated cousins. Surplus energy in the apartments will be freed up for use by another apartment, whilst the offices will be heated and cooled via a radiant system, which is 33% more efficient than fan coil units. The building will set new standards for energy efficiency in London.

On the ground floor of the building, a lifestyle restaurant, shops and workspace will ensure there is an active frontage at the base of the building, along City Road and Shepherdess Walk. Meanwhile, the London Plane tree at the front of the site is being protected and preserved, with seating added around it to create a new open space for all to enjoy.

The site itself was formerly home to a hospital, which was demolished in 1986 after falling into disrepair. Little evidence of the hospital remains on the site, although the entrance gates and brick pillars on the periphery of the site were saved and will be carefully integrated into the completed development.

The Arc will create a work and lifestyle-based mixed-use development that, through a high tech and tailored design-led approach, will appeal to all age groups working in Hackney's Tech City and the City Fringe. This includes the provision of flexible working space to meet the needs of the Tech City community. The building will, in effect, be a 'campus' and will create a place for innovation by providing an inspiring working and living environment, centred on the TMT industry.

In addition, The Arc offers a creative solution to tackle the serious problems employers face in attracting a workforce from the shrinking local community and those wanting accommodation within close proximity to their workplace. The vision for the building's design is to reinforce the emerging and existing hierarchy of tall buildings on City Road by marking a location of urban design and strategic importance with a building of significance, encompassing needed and complimentary uses of commercial floor space and residential units.

**The design of the building was inspired by both Star Wars and New York's Meatpacking District.** We wanted to create a light-filled, energising environment. The glow and 3D effect of the Star Wars lightsabers is very much in line with the Ghelamco look & feel; organic and angular with a foundation of energy. Historically, the Meatpacking District in New York always stood for regeneration and new trendy concepts; for example, Samsung's first retail VR concept was based there.

Merging the artisanal craftsmanship and heritage of the WWII hospital pillars and red brick exterior with a bright and luminous interior results in the combination of two completely opposite concepts, but the end result is a perfect match. A home with its own experience.

My favourite thing about Shoreditch is the speakeasy mentality and the never-ending train of new concepts, on top of a strong foundation of existing bars, restaurants and retail. It continues to grow and keeps the heart of the

area warm for everyone that enjoys its history and its future at the same time.

A lot of people mention that the site of The Arc is/was one the last remaining pieces of land in Shoreditch but I always saw it as a key part of forming the connection between Hoxton and Islington. To the left and right there are high-rise buildings, but there was an underutilised gap that led to its surroundings being neglected. This development changes everything as it welcomes a new public open space, creating a wide-open pavement with new landscaping. One of our first actions in terms of design was to implement a public piazza at the front of the building with a beautiful bench around the tree where people can meet and socialise or relax and read a book, with an open connection with the retail on the ground floor where various lifestyle, F&B and the holistic gym destination will be located.

**There are so many amazing restaurants and bars in Shoreditch – you're really spoilt for choice.** I'm a big fan of Monohon Ramen, on Old Street, and just a few minutes' walk from The Arc. Their ramen is one of the best I've had and perfect for warming up on a cold winter's day! I also find it interesting that The Hacker Project (a collaboration of Balenciaga and Gucci) is based in Shoreditch, with its multisensory space only based here and the other in Harrods. Having Shoreditch as its flagship location truly shows the belief in the area and the shift of retail to create more authentic and inclusive experiences.

