



VUYLSTEKE WELDS CABLE DUCTS FOR OFFSHORE ENERGY ISLAND

Family business Vuylsteke produces J-Tubes for the Princess Elisabeth Island that will be located off the Belgian coast in the North Sea. These tubes are essential for transporting energy generated at sea ashore.

TM Edison, a consortium of offshore specialists DEME and Jan De Nul, was commissioned by system operator Elia to build the energy island. For an indispensable part of this innovative project, TM Edison selected the company Vuylsteke based in Ledegem. During a rigorous procedure, Vuylsteke proved that it can guarantee the much-needed top quality thanks to its unique welding expertise and quality control.

“As a West Flemish family business, we are contributing to a structure that helps Europe with its transition to renewable energy. And we are quite proud of that!”

BART, BUSINESS OWNER AT VUYLSTEKE



Find out more about this challenging project on pages 4-5.

BIGGEST CHASSIS EVER

Building a chassis weighing several tonnes is something the team at Vuylsteke Constructie does not shy away from. But the job assigned to us by Anglo Belgian Corporation was unprecedented.

For more than 100 years, the Anglo Belgian Corporation (ABC for short) has been manufacturing engines and generators, mainly for shipping. Today, they are working hard on a new generation of engines running on biofuel, methanol and hydrogen.

They commissioned us to build 3 giant chassis for 3 huge generators. Each chassis weighed around 21 tonnes. And these were easily the largest we had already produced in our workshop. We took complete control of this project and completed this special chassis in just eight weeks.

For the tech enthusiasts:

- **Sheet material thickness:**
25 to 45 mm
- **Welding:**
A10
- **Welding meters:**
600 m throat height



615 TONNES OF STEEL IN JUST TEN WEEKS!

Sometimes the impossible turns out to be possible after all. When a global player in hoisting - the Belgian company Sarens - has a special request, we make sure the job gets done.

The order? To process no less than 615 tonnes of steel sheets and profiles into class 3 structures. This became the largest project ever for Vuylsteke Constructie at the time, both in terms of value and weight.

In order to meet the deadline of the job, we organised ourselves into two shifts for 10 weeks. Our people took care of weld edge preparation, assembly, welding, painting and applying an anti-slip coating for each of the 92 pieces. Mission accomplished!

For the tech enthusiasts:

- **Material:**
steel HB400, sheet material of 15 mm
- **Dimensions:**
12,2 m x 1,8 m x 400 mm
- **Weight:**
5.6 tonnes/piece

Also in this newspaper: [workshop in Heule](#) | [meet our partners](#) | [certifications](#) | [in the future](#)

ABOUT VUYLSTEKE

Family business Vuylsteke is a reference for reliable welding, metal constructions and assembly. In the workshops in Ledegem and Heule, the team of qualified and certified employees perform both classic and highly specialised construction and welding work. A stringent control system guarantees the highest quality standards, resulting in a portfolio full of challenging projects for renowned companies.

“INITIALLY, COMPLEX OFFSHORE PROJECTS WERE NOT INCLUDED IN OUR ROADMAP”

In this edition of Vuylsteke Courier, you'll have a glimpse of our projects and partnerships, our new workshop in Heule and even an island in the North Sea ...

For us, the creation of this newspaper also meant looking back at how we started in 2000. Thanks to the advice and assistance - and constructive criticism - of key people, loyal clients and reliable suppliers and sometimes a bit of luck, Vuylsteke is standing where it is today. Even though our unrelenting interest in the craft, our continuous investments in certification, in machines and especially in our people are definitely a contributing factor.

No, it was not part of the plan to evolve from maintenance work and simple welding constructions to large-scale, complex offshore projects. And no, it didn't happen automatically. The saying 'One learns by doing' also applies to us. We learned to assess projects by conducting evaluations after each project, we gradually learned to deal with employees, clients and suppliers. And we knew: failures make you stronger, running away from your problems does not..

This is how we reached the point where even 'the leading players' are referring to us as the company to turn to for quality welding. And that we, as an SME, are involved in a project of unprecedented scale: the energy island that TM Edison is developing off the Belgian coast. A project we sometimes call 'our magnum opus'. Just kidding, but still: it is time to get rid of our Flemish modesty.

And that is exactly what we achieve with this edition of Vuylsteke Courier. We are proud to be able to say that Vuylsteke is renowned for its quality and reliability. We continue to invest in training, certification and digitalisation and look with confidence to the future.

Our team is ready for another series of great (stainless) steel projects!

Bart Vuylsteke & Virginie Blomme
Business Owners

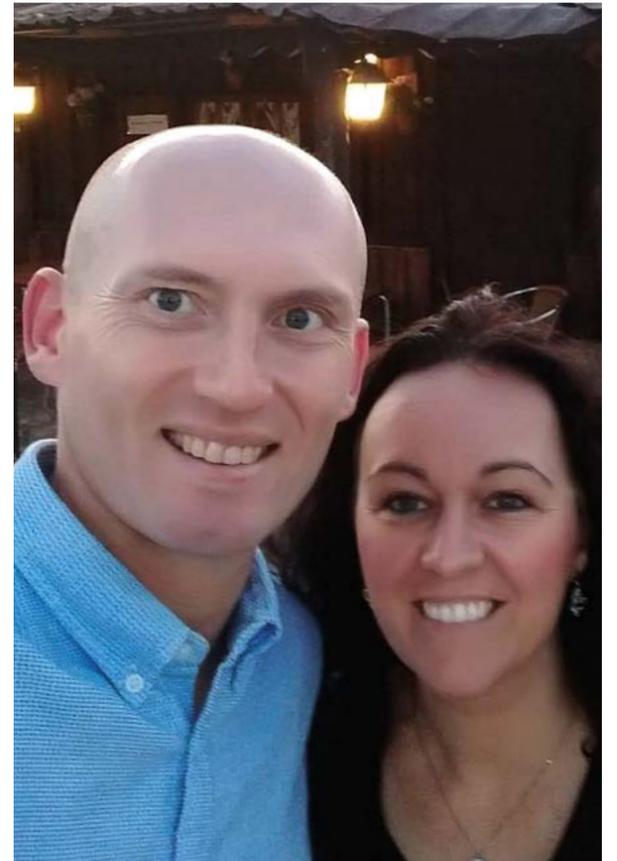


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The advantage of our profession is that we can build our constructions ourselves, like a Meccano set.

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't Lindeke 30
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www.vuylsteke-constructie.be

Contact details

Any questions regarding something you read in this newspaper?? Or are you just curious about what Vuylsteke could do for you? **Contact us!**

Call +32 (0)56 72 34 69 or send an e-mail to info@vuylsteke-constructie.be.

VUYLSTEKE
EXPERTS IN METAALCONSTRUCTIES

SECOND PRODUCTION WORKSHOP IN HEULE: SPACE FOR VERY AMBITIOUS PROJECTS

In recent years, Vuylsteke invested heavily in a second production workshop in Heule. With this workshop, which is twice as big as the first one in Sint-Eloois-Winkel (Ledegem), we are able to meet the growing demand for our services.

At the same time, we are also attracting additional projects. Some of these projects are of an unprecedented scale, such as the J-Tubes we are currently producing for the energy island being built in the North Sea. In this way, our investment in more production capacity thus translates quite quickly into growing turnover.

Our focus is shifting to projects where our welding operations have to meet calibrated standards.

Whereas we used to mainly focus on mechanical engineering, our focus is now shifting to large projects where we have to deliver welding work according to calibrated standards. Even for these projects, we continue to maintain the high quality of our welding work, thanks to the appropriate, up-to-date machinery we have at our disposal in Heule. Here two foremen work in the workshop, two draftsmen in the office and a dozen welders, all certified professionals. In addition, owners Bart and Virginie frequent the sites on a daily basis.

More in-house production

Production planner Stijn Baelen, who together with project manager Bert Pauwels is in charge of the daily management at Vuylsteke in Heule, explains: 'The workshop in Heule is an XXL version of the one located in Sint-Eloois-Winkel. There we have more welding stations

and a lifting capacity of 20 tonnes, compared to 10 in the other workshop.'

"Furthermore, we invested in efficiency gains, with, for example, welding tractors capable of automatically welding V-seams. For long welds, this is a nice added value. And since we switched to a 1.4 welding wire, we finish jobs faster. On top of that, we are able to pre-treat the steel more often in-house, as we now have a blast and spray cabin."



THE FACES OF HEULE

If you visit Vuylsteke in Heule, you will almost certainly bump into Bert and Stijn. We briefly introduce them to you.

Stijn Baelen



Role

Production planner in Heule workshop, a regular at Vuylsteke since 2011. Stijn stands between the welders, the draftsmen and the manager. He checks whether everything is running smoothly in the welding workshop, which keeps both his colleagues and our clients happy.

Superpowers

Quite brilliant in dealing with all types of people and in thinking along with the client. Stijn is constantly striving for simplicity and efficiency, because 'why making things unnecessarily expensive for our client?'

Behind the scenes

Stijn is 31, married and has two sons. The motto of this social being? 'I like to be present everywhere!'

Bert Pauwels



Role

Project leader in workshop Heule, has been employed at Vuylsteke since 2003, almost as long as manager Bart. Bert translates our clients' designs into technical drawings and makes sure our welders have all the materials needed to put them into practice.

Superpowers

Creates magical things with 3D drawing software Creo Parametric. Bert constantly 'ping-pongs' with Stijn to make the welding work as efficient as possible and deliver a rock-solid result.

Behind the scenes

Bert is 50, cohabiting and has two daughters. Beneath the windless surface of this bon vivant you will find the roaring engine of a true Harley Davidson enthusiast.



New employee: Nick Degryse

As junior project manager, Nick follows up the welding works and monitors the quality delivered by us. We often encounter him riding his bike in the workshop in Heule, as he is a passionate amateur cyclist in his free time

Welcome, Nick!

VUYLSTEKES SECRET WEAPON: THE POWER OF THE TEAM

When calling Vuylsteke, you will usually hear Virginie Blomme on the phone - who is also Bart's indispensable partner outside the company. If you drop by in Sint-Eloois-Winkel or Heule, you're more likely to bump into Bart himself. 'You can find me in both workshops every day and insist on greeting every employee. Sometimes I lend a hand in the workshop. This allows me to quickly sense when something is going wrong,' he says.

No two days are alike

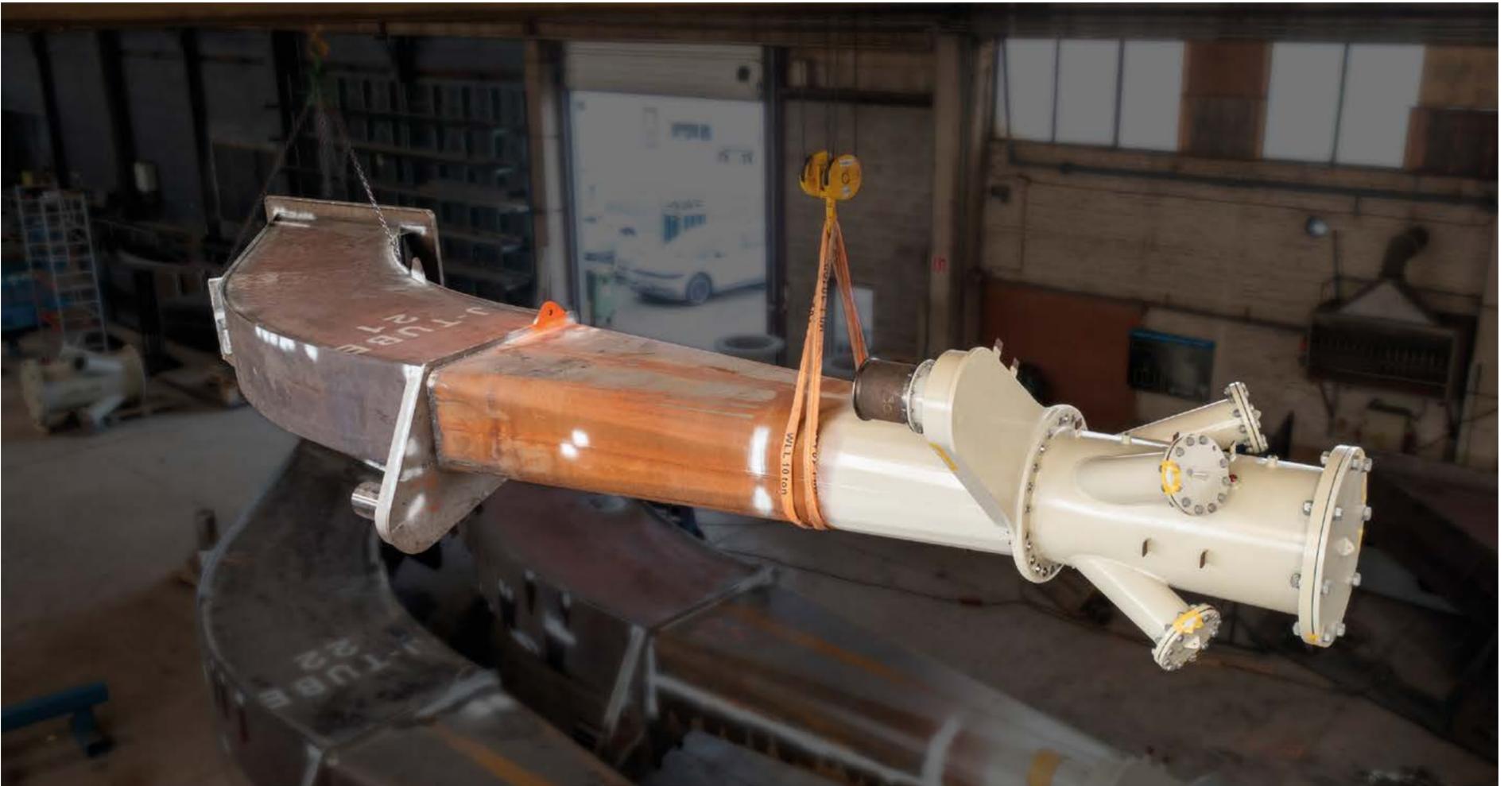
"You usually know when you start and finish, but not what you will do in the meantime," says production planner Stijn. "We constantly assess the progress with our assignments and regularly adjust our approach to progress more smoothly. On the one hand, we deploy each welder where they perform best; on the other, we make sure everyone has varied work."

Everyone is doing their bit

Bart Vuylsteke swears by a flat structure: 'On our work floor, we do not apply a hierarchy system, because, in order to deliver the quality we are known for, everyone is equally important.'

Stijn adds, 'We don't organise official team-buildings, but on Friday afternoons we often go eating French fries together, or we have a beer after work. A few times a year we all enjoy dinner in a restaurant together. But Bart and Virginie show their appreciation for their people especially in many small things and this is how they create this great working atmosphere. You can literally discuss anything with them.'

"And vice versa," Bart adds. "I regularly ask my people to share their views on a particular project or a tender I am preparing. Their input is valuable to me and they appreciate the fact that I involve them."



VUYLSTEKE BUILDS CRUCIAL ELEMENTS OF GROUNDBREAKING ENERGY ISLAND IN THE NORTH SEA

Family business Vuylsteke is involved in the construction of the world's first artificial energy island, which will be located off the Belgian coast. The impressive J-Tubes we produce are essential for getting the energy generated at sea ashore. "As a relatively small Flemish company, we are making an important contribution to a structure that will help the transition of Europe to renewable energy," says manager Bart Vuylsteke proudly.

Electricity hub for Europe

In the Belgian North Sea, construction works on the energy island equivalent to 24 football fields have been in full swing since early 2024. This Princess Elisabeth Island will be the first hub of an integrated European electricity grid at sea. The high-voltage infrastructure will bundle export cables from wind farms in the Princess Elisabeth area.

The cables connect offshore wind farms and countries. They link the Belgian power grid to the British and Danish grids. This way, Europe has access to the massive amounts of renewable energy needed to reduce the industry's dependence on fossil fuels in the short term.

The energy island connects offshore wind farms and the electricity grids of Belgium and Denmark.

Network operator Elia commissioned the construction of the energy island to TM Edison, a consortium of offshore specialists DEME and Jan De Nul - both regular clients of Vuylsteke. For an indispensable part of this innovative project, TM Edison calls on Vuylsteke's

expertise. As a specialised welding company, we are producing 88 huge cable ducts, or J-Tubes, for the energy island.

A challenging procedure

Without exaggeration, we can safely say that the selection procedure that Vuylsteke completed to win this flagship project was one of the toughest in nearly 25 years of our history. Which is remarkable, as the competition consisted of significantly bigger companies. In the tender we presented to our client, TM Edison, we insisted on the classification of all our welders, the quality and traceability of all materials used - down to the smallest screw - and safety in the production hall.

To substantiate all this, TM Edison screened our entire business. We mapped all our procedures down to the smallest detail and presented piles of documents and accreditations demonstrating that we are able to ensure the promised quality and traceability.

The energy island IN FIGURES

- ▶ The artificial island will be located **45 kilometres off the coast**. It covers an area of about **12 hectares**.
- ▶ This is a crucial step for Europe to generate **300 GW** of offshore electricity **by 2050**.
- ▶ The island receives **3,5 GW HVAC** and converts it to **220 kV** for transmission to the mainland.
- ▶ And the financial picture? The energy island can count on funding from the European Covid recovery fund. Together, the EU and the Belgian government are granting a subsidy of around **€100 million**.

Our expertise in complex welding projects and our flexibility were the decisive factors.

Business owner Bart Vuylsteke: "TM Edison also put some of our previous projects under a magnifying glass, such as the Suzan Daniel cycle bridge in the Brussels canal zone. We also demonstrated our expertise in producing each individual component. That was the deciding factor, along with the flexibility and short communication lines we can offer as a small player."

J-Tubes: a giant work of precision

The J-Tubes we produce at Vuylsteke are huge cable ducts. These steel tubes guide the power cables through the walls of the concrete foundation of the energy island to transfer electricity ashore.

The J-Tubes protect the cables from salt water and corrosion. Therefore, the quality requirements for these essential components of the structure are obviously extremely strict. Since the welding for an offshore project like this has to be perfectly watertight, we cannot afford even the slightest deviations. On a J-Tube of over 14 metres, we only have two to three millimetres of clearance. So, it's imperative to constantly monitor extremely carefully whether everything still fits perfectly.

Two to three millimetres of clearance on a 14-metre-long weldment. That requires constant precision checks.

This process of constant monitoring, of both the base materials and the welding work itself, is a responsibility we all share at Vuylsteke. Every employee goes for top notch quality. In addition, our design engineer Thomas Popelier compiles a file containing 700 to 800 pages for each J-Tube, which proves that we truly live up to what we have committed ourselves to.

We also collaborate with an employee of the client, TM Edison, who works in our workshop several days a week. He monitors quality and ensures a direct line to the construction site in Vlissingen, the Netherlands, where our J-Tubes are transported in one piece after assembly and they must arrive at exactly the right time. There, TM Edison assembles them into the giant concrete elements, before transporting them by ship to the energy island.

Gigantic J-Tube as a construction kit

You can compare welding a J-Tube to a gigantic Meccano toy set. Our suppliers supply us with all the parts of such a J-Tube which we assemble professionally. With the difference that we also draw the manual ourselves. Between early 2024 and mid-2025, about three quarters of the capacity in our workshop in Heule will be dedicated to this project. Broadly speaking, our production process looks like this:

We convert the client's design into a 3D drawing of a concrete product.

Our client's drawing office presents a design and a list of technical requirements. We translate this into a 3D drawing of a concrete product consisting of 3 major parts. For each of these, we technically draw, step by step, how these will be built. Every weld, every detail is carefully considered and drawn so that we can repeat the same procedure for each of the 88 J-Tubes.

After approval by the client, we order the required steel from our supplier, who provides us with a gigantic 'construction kit' of steel plates with weld edge preparations, which strengthens the final welding work. Subsequently, our designers compare the delivered steel with the drawings and check with the welders which welding needs to be done where and what strength is required. It is also thanks to this constant communication between draftsmen and welders that we are able to constantly monitor quality.

We assemble the J-Tube with a pre-made mould, in order to check that everything fits together. A temporary weld will be applied in critical sections. If everything fits well, we permanently weld the whole assembly together. Meanwhile, we double- and triple-check all the time whether all elements are still 100 percent correctly positioned in relation to each other (with 3D scans), whether they are strong enough (with strength tests) and whether there are no air bubbles in the welds (with ultrasonic measurements).

J-Tubes passport

-  **What?**
Steel cable ducts
-  **What for?**
Energy island in the North Sea
-  **Length:** 14,7 metres
-  **Width:** 4,8 metres
-  **Height:** 1 metre
-  **Weight:** 11,5 tonnes
-  **Quantity:** 88 pieces
-  **Manufacturer:** Vuylsteke



Welders and draftsmen constantly discuss the best approach

And finally, we assemble the 3 finished parts in the mould and - after a final check - everything is bolted together. Once a final layer of paint and coating has been applied, the J-Tube can be loaded onto the truck heading for the energy island..

Since we are dealing here with a product that will be underwater for years, we also check the welding in between subjecting it to pressure. Together with rubber seals in crucial spots, these guarantee that the J-Tube remains watertight.

As we carefully document and sometimes optimise each step, we 'easily' repeat this process 88 times.



Vuylsteke produces 88 J-Tubes, huge steel cable transits.



Vuylsteke assembles the J-Tubes in its workshop in Heule.



The J-Tubes enter the foundations of the Princess Elisabeth island.



In Vlissingen (NL), TM Edison places the J-Tubes in the concrete caissons that constitute the foundations of the energy island.



Specialised welders at work, all certified according to the ISO 3834-2 standard.

STRIVING TOGETHER FOR TOP NOTCH QUALITY

Specialised firms cooperating closely and combining their know-how: this is how excellence is achieved..

For complex assignments such as the production of the J-Tubes for the Princess Elisabeth Island (read more on pages 4-5), Vuylsteke Constructie can count on fantastic partners who are equally driven and passionate about their profession.

We are happy to introduce them.

Meet DWK Welding, Kaayman and Verhoestraete.

KNOWLEDGE, ADVICE AND EXPERTISE AT DWK WELDING

For the relatively fast production of the high-quality J-Tubes, it was necessary to improve the efficiency of certain welding processes. In addition, a sparring partner in the field of material selection and specific welding installations was crucial. For all these aspects, Vuylsteke Constructie knew that DWK Welding was the perfect partner. And that proved to be true.



Just like Vuylsteke, DWK Welding has extensive expertise in welding technology and optimisation. We both strive for the same level of perfection and finish. So, when we brainstorm, we come up with solutions that increase efficiency without compromising on quality.

Automation of welding processes

In order to increase efficiency and reduce lead times, DWK Welding introduced the Koike rail system to us. This advanced system automates high-quality welding processes ensuring the highest precision and reliability. By incorporating some of the J-Tubes' welding work into this system, we are now able to meet deadlines and maintain the highest level of consistency and finish.

We consulted DWK in selecting the most optimal welding wire for the J-Tubes.

Not all welding wires are alike

We consulted DWK in selecting the most optimal welding wire for the J-Tubes. They recommended Kobelco's metal-filled welding wire to us, which turned out to be a great success. The Kobelco welding wire increases productivity, as this material ensures that the tubes almost consistently pass power tests, thus reducing the need for rework.

Welding equipment that can take a beating

For the production of the impressive J-Tubes, we needed machines designed for intensive operation in demanding conditions. DWK recommended the powerful Kemppi X5 water-cooled welding machines, which also turned out to be an absolute added value for the project. These machines allow us to perform our welding work with the highest precision and quality.

Shared goals

Regardless of the profound knowledge and substantial added value we sought and found in a partnership with DWK, it became very clear that we are on the same page when it comes to our commitment to excellence and innovation. And that too is key to a very successful partnership.



KNOWLEDGE IS POWER, WITH KAAYMAN

When undertaking a project such as the J-Tubes, it is of paramount importance to constantly carry out measurements during the production process. Over the entire length of 14 metres, including bends, the tubes must be accurate down to 2 to 3 millimetres. Our calibrated slats are too small to measure this. We turned to the engineering company Kaayman with this rather unusual question. And they proposed an equally unusual and innovative solution.

The engineering company Kaayman already has the right mindset needed to carry out such a complex measurement task successfully. After an internal brainstorming session and a thorough analysis, they decided to join our project. The engineers compared various options and subsequently opted for 3D laser scanning as their measurement technique.

Laser scanning as a solution

For this assignment, it was crucial to obtain an accurate measurement result in a cost-efficient way. After comparing different measurement equipment suppliers, Kaayman deliberately chose the Faro 3D laser scanner. The first step for the engineers was to thoroughly test this equipment to optimise laser scanning accuracy.

STRONG STEEL AT VERHOESTRAETE

At Vuylsteke Constructie, we may be specialised in welding, but of course it all starts with the steel parts we assemble. The quality and durability of the raw materials must be excellent, especially for offshore projects where the material is exposed to very rough conditions and repairs are not self-evident. So, for the J-Tubes, we rely on Verhoestraete, a family business boasting more than 100 years of experience in metal and tailor-made solutions.

Next level metals, that's Verhoestraete's slogan, and that's exactly what they specialise in. Their machine park is absolutely impressive and up to date with the latest metalworking technologies. From small parts to large metal structures: they make it all. A second strength of this family business is their profound knowledge of materials and resources. Building something like this is not achieved overnight; it is nurtured and passed on from generation to generation.

A closer look at the technical challenges

Verhoestraete brainstormed with us about the technical challenges and quality requirements of the J-tubes. They proposed solutions and managed to achieve timings and quality - down to tolerance thickness material and fracture toughness at low temperatures - thanks to their excellent relationships with steel producers worldwide. Each piece of metal is fully traceable with certificates, which allowed us to obtain reliable materials in a very transparent way.

Test pieces

The Verhoestraete team frequently faces intense situations, and the manufacture of the J-Tubes also came with some technical challenges. For example, making square-round pieces with a thickness of 20 mm, but with a volume of 1.6 m by 4.5 m. Not an everyday job! So the team made test pieces to fine-tune the production method. Only when they could guarantee consistent quality did they start production.

Right time, right place

Timing was a crucial factor in every step of the J-Tubes production process. All parts have to be delivered to our workshops at exactly the right time to start welding workshops at the right time for. And here, too, we could count on Verhoestraete: they stored the parts in their 20,000m² production hall so they could bring them to us at exactly the right time.

Scanner, software and engineering brains

Kaayman set up tests with the laser scanner, trackers and scanning spray. They adjusted the equipment to achieve a repetitive and accurate measurement result. Then the scans had to be processed and analysed correctly. To this end, Kaayman made use of specialised software. The advantage of working with engineers is the fact that they think along with us and offer valuable advice and insights to improve production.

At crucial moments during the production process, the tubes were scanned at millions of points from all possible angles.

Solid partnership

It is an amazing feeling to be able to work with a partner like Verhoestraete on a project of this scale. We know that they are just as driven and committed to achieving an outstanding end result as we are. On top of that, we both operate in the same region, we are both family businesses and it just feels right to form team up with a partner you can trust.

Each piece of metal is fully traceable with certificates, which allowed us to obtain reliable materials in a very transparent way.



Getting started with the J-Tubes

Before the measurements were taken, Kaayman drew up a detailed procedure. Nothing was left to chance. At crucial moments during the production process, the tubes were scanned at millions of points from all possible angles with the Faro, which looks like some sort of rotating camera. Then those scans were superimposed on the theoretical model for comparison. This allowed us to easily and quickly make adjustments where necessary.

Side by side for the best result

During the whole process, Kaayman worked very closely with us. We were constantly in touch so we could immediately evaluate the measurements. The smooth mutual communication and sound advice ensured that the J-Tubes were finished on time, piece by piece.





OUR QUALITY: BLACK ON WHITE

It is a well-known fact that we are passionate about delivering rock-solid results. On top of that, our precision, expertise and craftsmanship are also officially recorded and checked in the form of legal standards.

As one of the few players in Belgium, we meet the legal standard ISO 3834-2 and renewed our **EN1090 class 3 certificate**, both for our workshop in Sint-Eloois-Winkel and for our new steel workshop in Heule.

Since it is usually mainly large multinationals that achieve this standard, this makes us extra proud of our SME and our team.

STANDING STILL MEANS GOING BACKWARDS

If you want your company to keep up and grow in your sector, it is important to invest in the right things. For Vuylsteke Constructie, that primarily means investing in equipment, training and certification.

Investing for growth

As a certified business, our clients can rest assured that we are fully screened. All our processes are documented down to the smallest detail. These certifications are truly quality and safety labels that allow us to distinguish ourselves in our field.

A certified company requires excellent personnel. It goes without saying that our hard-working teams receive all legally required training, but they also stay up to date with the latest technologies and techniques, allowing us, as a production partner, to actively think along with clients - something they really appreciate. Again: this is how we make a difference.

And of course, in order to grow and increase profitability state-of-the-art equipment is vital. That is why we invested in a new workshop in Heule, where we had a lot more space and were able to locate more efficient and larger constructions and more workstations.. For more details, please read the article on our new workshop on page 3. Thanks to these investments, we can now take on projects of volumes we could only dream of before.

Great ambitions and dreams for the future

futureWe are committed to further exploring the path of automation. For example, we will analyse which parts of the welding process we can further robotise. The advantage of our profession lies in the fact that we can build our machine park ourselves, as if it were a Meccano set. Of course, we have to purchase the ingenious welding equipment or robotics, but the set-up and layout can be designed, welded, burned and folded entirely by ourselves.

For the future, we still dream of our own large company site, where we can nicely combine the capacity of Heule and Sint-Eloois-Winkel.

With Vuylsteke Constructie, we are on track to enter our most successful decade since its foundation. Our future dreams include a large company site of our own, where we can smoothly combine the capacity of Heule and Sint-Eloois-Winkel.

And what about tomorrow? Tomorrow a new challenging idea or project is likely to come our way. Because at Vuylsteke no day is identical to the previous one. And that is exactly what makes our job so fascinating!

