Antwerp, the coffee port where everything is possible

More than 250,000 tonnes of coffee beans are stored in the port of Antwerp at any one time. That’s enough for 27 billion cups, making Antwerp by far the largest storage site for coffee in the world. “We never say no,” says president of the Belgian Coffee Federation Yvan Rombouts, explaining the port’s leading role in storage, handling and distribution of the aromatic bean. Apparently this philosophy is very much to the taste of the big coffee operators.

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Yvan Rombouts
president
BELGIAN COFFEE FEDERATION
In the port of Antwerp a wonderful aroma of Robusta and Arabica coffee hangs over the warehouses of Molenbergnatie, one of the world’s leading players in handling and storage of coffee and cacao. Everywhere you look in the airy hangars there are big bags, bins and neatly piled jute sacks of raw coffee. At any given moment Molenbergnatie has some 45,000 tonnes in stock. Each year more than 85,000 tonnes of coffee passes through here on its way to Europe from the growing countries in South America, Africa and Asia. “The beans lie here sometimes for one day, sometimes as many as five before they go to the industry for processing,” explains commercial manager Matthias De Smedt. “Belgium has the ideal climate for storing coffee: not too cold and not too wet. And of course all our warehouses are designed to keep the coffee under the best possible conditions.”

**Total logistics solution**

Each batch of coffee arriving in the port is subject to quality control, with a sample being taken from every sack. The quality of the beans is checked and damaged sacks are quickly detected. The stock controllers offer a total logistics service package for customers, from grower to end consumer. This total solution is typical of the port of Antwerp. “The port can do everything,” says Yvan Rombouts whose famous family name appears on millions of packets of coffee in supermarkets throughout Europe. “Enormous flexibility and fast, high-quality service mean that in Antwerp we can respond effectively to market demand.”

**Great in every way**

The port of Antwerp owes its position as the world’s leading coffee storage site to its accreditation by not one but two commodity markets – LIFFE in London and ICE in New York – together with its superior connectivity between the producing and consuming countries. But Molenbergnatie is not the only major international player in the port of Antwerp. Other big coffee names to be found here include C. Steinweg, CWT, Durme-Natie, Pacorini, Unicontrol commodity (Katoen Natie) and Vollers. Together they offer more than 1 million square metres of storage space for the wakeful and delicious bean. It’s no coincidence that all these companies have opted for Antwerp: the port runs on coffee,” says Matthias De Smedt of Molenbergnatie. “The warehouses are located close to the quayside. Furthermore all the sites have direct rail access, with up to 15 rail cars per week leaving for Switzerland alone. And of course there is also barge and truck transport.”