



**François Musin (Ostend, 1820 - Saint-Josse-ten-Noode (Brussels), 1888)**

***The Pavillon du Rhin, between 1874 and 1888***

Oil on panel, 31 x 58 cm

Signed and located lower left : *François Musin Ostende*

On the back, red wax seal : *F Musin Ostende*

Ostend marine painter François Musin represents here the Pavillon du Rhin, a hotel restaurant famous for its oysters and lobsters, which was one of the emblematic places on the Ostend sea wall in the second half of the 19th century.

### François Musin



Marine painter François Étienne Musin was born in Ostend in 1820. His father was an innkeeper and oyster farmer. His restaurant and its adjoining oyster breeding pond in the port of Ostend were very successful (fig.1)<sup>1</sup>. Around 1831, François Musin attended the Ostend drawing school, where his teachers were Michel Van Cuyck and François Bossuet, who had created the school. He finished his course with a gold medal. After passing through the maritime school, he continued his artistic training at the Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels from 1837 to 1843, where he was taught by François-Joseph Navez and François Bossuet. François Musin made his successful debut at the Antwerp Salon of 1840. It was the start of a brilliant exhibition career in Belgium (Leopold I bought several works from him) and abroad. His work is particularly appreciated in the United Kingdom, where he settled for a while until 1849 (fig.2). During his life, he also traveled to Spain and Portugal, the Alps, Italy and France, as well as Norway and North America.

In 1849, François Musin married a Brussels painter, Marie-Célestine Gosselin. The couple had a son, Auguste (1852 - 1923), who also became a marine painter. Widowed in 1853, Musin settled in 1860 in Saint-Josse-ten-Noode (Brussels)<sup>2</sup>, where he built a large studio in his garden which also housed his collection of maritime antiques. A rather conservative artist, he frequented the artistic and literary circle of Brussels.

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<sup>1</sup> The restaurant (*Pavillon Musin*) and oyster breeding pond (*Oesterputten Musin*) (see: FARASYN pp.23-24). François Musin got an exhibition space in the restaurant. He left his shares in the family business to his brother Auguste in 1853. The building was demolished in 1885 for the construction of the current *Visserskaai*.

<sup>2</sup> In a large house at 114 rue de la Limite.

The work of François Musin is divided into two periods. In the first, he depicted in a romantic style scenes of storms, shipwrecks or naval battles (fig.3). Then, from around 1865, his manner became more realistic and clearer. He then painted sea views and beach scenes as well as some scenes of naval history (fig.4). Ostend and more broadly the Belgian coast obviously occupy a preponderant place (fig.5). Among his important collections, it is worth mentioning the seven large canvases that he painted for the Kursaal in Ostend (destroyed during World War II)<sup>3</sup>.

François Musin died of a stroke in Saint-Josse-ten-Noode (Brussels) in 1888. For the centenary of his death, the Ostend Museum of Fine Arts dedicated him a retrospective<sup>4</sup>.

### *The Pavillon du Rhin*

In this small painting, François Musin describes the Ostend beach towards Mariakerk, the dunes of which can be seen in the background. The beach is calm, only a few cabins have approached the waves to allow bathers to enjoy the water<sup>5</sup>. On the left, the levee is dominated by a wooden construction whose indication on the side facade tells us that it is a restaurant, the *Pavillon du Rhin*. Another indication tells us of the presence of an oyster and lobster farm whose buildings can be seen on the left.

This *Pavillon du Rhin* is one of the establishments which adorn the promenade of the west levee of Ostend, which developed in the second half of the 19th century, in line with seaside tourist development (see maps)<sup>6</sup>. In this strip of land joining Ostend to Mariakerke, the Ministry of Public Works granted several entrepreneurs land where they could build wooden leisure establishments<sup>7</sup>. François Musin himself got one of these concessions in 1852. He built a hotel-restaurant there, the *Pavillon des dunes* (fig.6)<sup>8</sup>. Two other entrepreneurs, Ostend resident Louis

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<sup>3</sup> Musin also took part in the decor of the Blankenberge casino.

<sup>4</sup> HOSTYN (Norbert), *François Musin marineschilder 1820 – 1888*, Ostende, Museum voor schone kunsten, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted here that the place attracted fans of naked swimming. The beach in front of the *Pavillon du Rhin* belonged to the municipality of Mariakerke which, unlike Ostend, did not prohibit the practice. When the beach became Ostend territory in 1859, the new regulations allowed naked swimming if one undressed then dressed in a trailer. See : FARASYN, p.38.

<sup>6</sup> About the *Pavillon du Rhin*, see : FARASYN, pp.37-38 and 53-55.

<sup>7</sup> Ostend being a military town, the wooden constructions allowed for rapid demolition for military purposes. The situation changed under the reign of Leopold II.

<sup>8</sup> See : FARASYN, pp.33-36 and 53. François Musin delegated the operation of the place to others but he benefited from a studio there. He sold the pavilion in 1877 and it was destroyed two years later.

Royon-Hertoghe and a merchant from Cologne, Gustave Bettger, joined forces in October 1856 to establish a hotel-restaurant on the border between Ostend and Mariakerke, the *Pavillon du Rhin*, and its oyster and lobster breeding pond located at the back below (fig.7)<sup>9</sup>. The establishment, inaugurated in July 1857, quickly enjoyed a lot of success. The freshness of its dishes and the location of the restaurant at the end of the west levee, which also made it a destination for walks, were greatly appreciated. Among his clients was the Duke of Brabant, the future Leopold II.

In 1865, following a misunderstanding about the quality, size and price of a shipment of oysters to Cologne, the company was dissolved and the following year, Bettger died. Royon, now his son-in-law, took the lead of the pavilion<sup>10</sup>. That same year, in 1866, Royon enlarged the pavilion by adding a long gallery of glass and ironwork (fig.8), as well as an ice pit<sup>11</sup>.

In the 1870s, the government sold the land that was under concession along the west levee. Operators of already established hotels and restaurants had priority. Negotiations between the government and the owners of the *Pavillon du Rhin* and its oyster pit were particularly difficult, but an agreement was reached in 1883. With the urbanization of the west levee, most of the wooden pavilions disappeared, leaving room to stone hotels and villas. The *Pavillon du Rhin* would be the last wooden pavilion to survive.

In the background of the painting, behind the *Pavillon du Rhin*, we see the royal chalet built by Leopold II and inaugurated in September 1874 (fig.9)<sup>12</sup>. We clearly recognize its wooden architecture painted in light colors with its gallery on the facade as well as the street lamps which border the levee. And then, above all is this octagonal turret which topped the chalet and which displays here a Belgian flag. One can wonder about the proximity between the *Pavillon du Rhin* and the royal chalet in Musin's representation. Indeed, even though the two buildings were

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<sup>9</sup> The pavilion measured 25 m long, 15 m wide and 7 m high and had one floor. According to: FARASYN, p.37.

<sup>10</sup> In 1866, Bettger sold his shares in the oyster pit to Bruges lawyer Charles Meyne. The latter also seized a sixth of Louis Royon's shares, so that Meyne and Royon each owned half of the oyster pit. However, the *Pavillon du Rhin* hotel-restaurant remained entirely in the hands of the Royon-Hertoghe family. When Louis Royon died, his son-in-law would manage the business. According to: Oesterpark Royon-Hertoghe, in : Coastal Wiki.

<sup>11</sup> Strangely, Musin's painting does not seem to depict this gallery, which existed at that time given that the royal chalet, inaugurated in 1874, appears in the background. The gallery clearly extended beyond the pavilion, towards the painter's point of view, as can be seen on the maps (*schets 6*) or in fig.8.

<sup>12</sup> This chalet replaced the two pavilions built by Leopold I in 1863. It was a chalet designed by English architect W.J. Green and inspired by a chalet seen by Leopold II at the Universal Exhibition in Vienna in 1873. Damaged during World War II, the chalet was destroyed in 1953. See: LOMBAERDE, p.217-220.

neighbours, they were separated by a distance of 65 meters<sup>13</sup>, as can clearly be seen in period photographs (fig.10). In addition, the royal chalet was located on a raised platform compared to the *Pavillon du Rhin*. No doubt is the perspective particularly compressed. It can also be noted that the central body of the *Pavillon du Rhin* is barely visible.

The end of the *Pavillon du Rhin* started in 1892, when its furniture and wine cellar were liquidated before the pavilion and oyster pit were put up for sale for demolition. The following year, Michel Halewyck-Royon bought the entire site, which had become buildable, from Alfred Royon and associates. Less than two years later, in January 1895, Michel Halewyck sold the site to King Leopold II. The latter, from 1889 on, led an active policy of purchasing land surrounding his chalet. In fact, he wanted to build outbuildings for his chalet and control the views from there to the Kursaal. In April 1898, the remains of the old oyster pits disappeared. These land purchases allowed for the construction between 1900 and 1903 of the Venetian gallery designed by architect Henri Maquet on the land adjoining that where the *Pavillon du Rhin* was erected. (fig.11 and see maps).

This painting of the *Pavillon du Rhin* appeared under number 323 of the public sale of the estate of Auguste Musin, the son of François, at the Galerie Fievez in Brussels in 1924<sup>14</sup>. It should be noted here that Auguste Musin himself produced a drawing of the *Pavillon du Rhin* in 1877<sup>15</sup> and that painter Jean-Baptiste de Greef (1862 - 1894) would create a view of the pavilion from the dunes (fig.12).

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<sup>13</sup> Accordind to : FARASYN, pp.42-43.

<sup>14</sup> HOSTYN (Norbert), *François Musin marineschilder 1820 - 1888*, Ostende, Museum voor schone kunsten, 1988, pp.44-45.

<sup>15</sup> According to Hostyn.

Illustrations

In the text : E. Drot, *Portrait of François Musin*, Ostend, Archives.

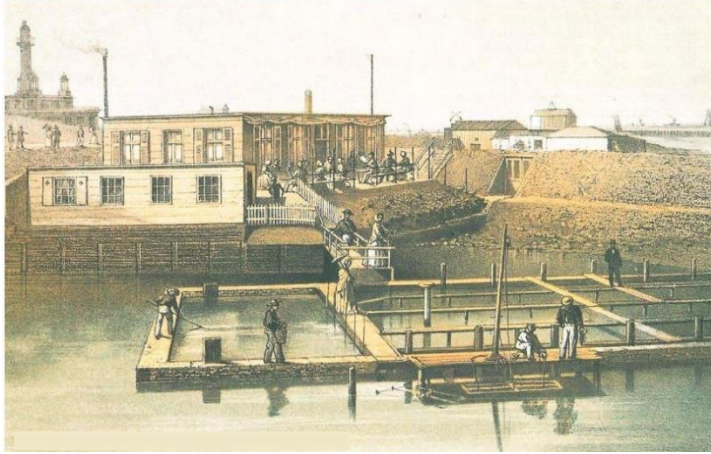


Fig.1 : The *Pavillon Musin*.



Fig.2 : François Musin, *HMS 'Erebus' in the Ice*, 1846, Greenwich, National Maritime Museum.



Fig. 3 : François Musin, *Sea Fight*, Sheffield, Museums.



Fig.4 : François Musin, *Marine*, private coll.

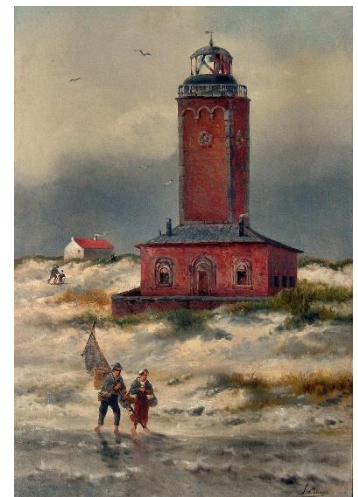


Fig.5 : François Musin, *The Ostend Levee with the Kursaal*, Ostend, Muzee / *The Knokke Lighthouse*, Knokke, Municipal heritage.



Fig.6 : François Musin, *The Pavillon des dunes*, 1852.

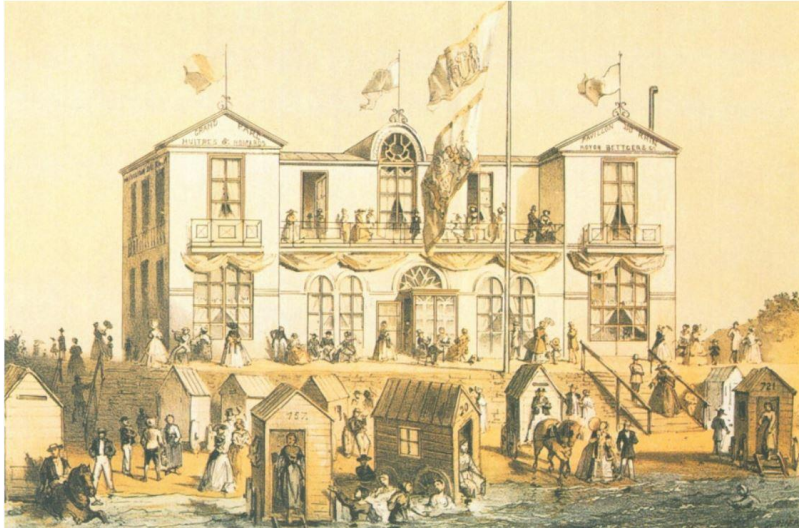
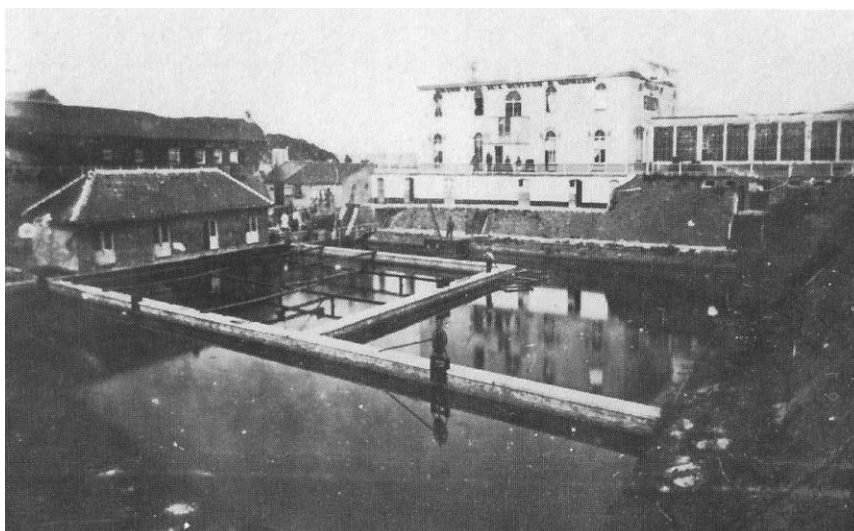
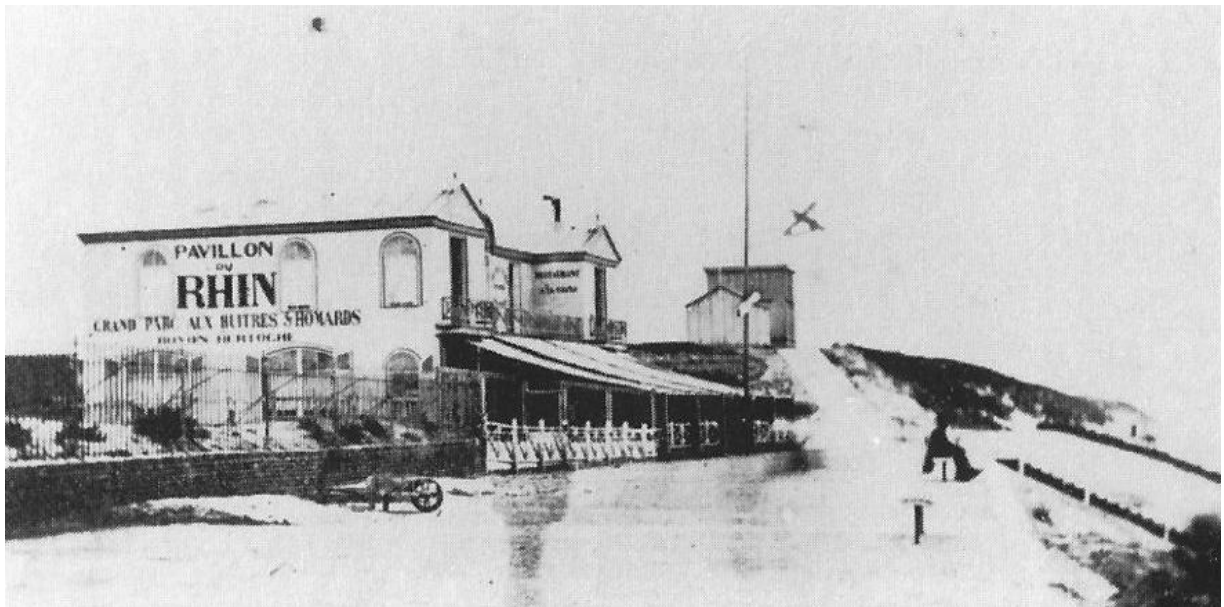


Fig.7 : The *Pavillon du Rhin* before the expansion of 1866.



The oyster pit and the rear of the pavillon (the gallery added in 1866 is visible on the right).





Fig.8 : Photographs of the *Pavillon du Rhin* after the addition of the gallery.

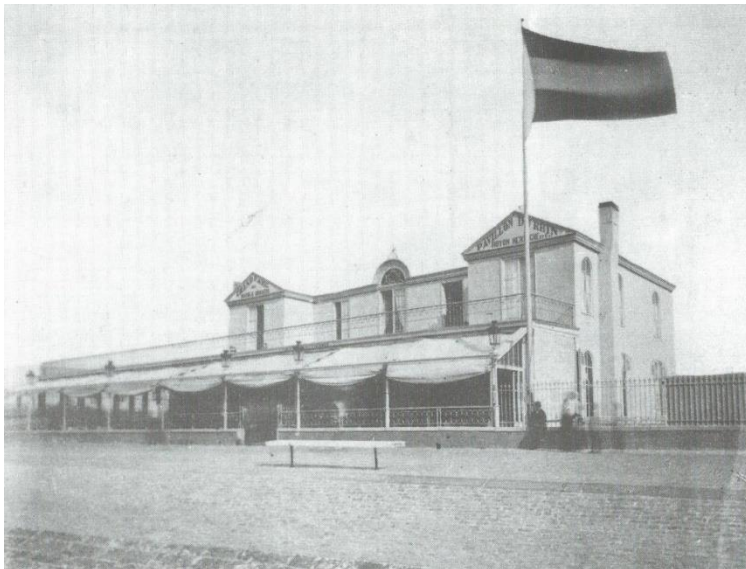


Fig.9 : Photograph of the royal chalet. The part visible in Musin's painting is in the background, in the center of the photograph.



Detail of a photograph showing the visible part of the royal chalet in Musin's painting.

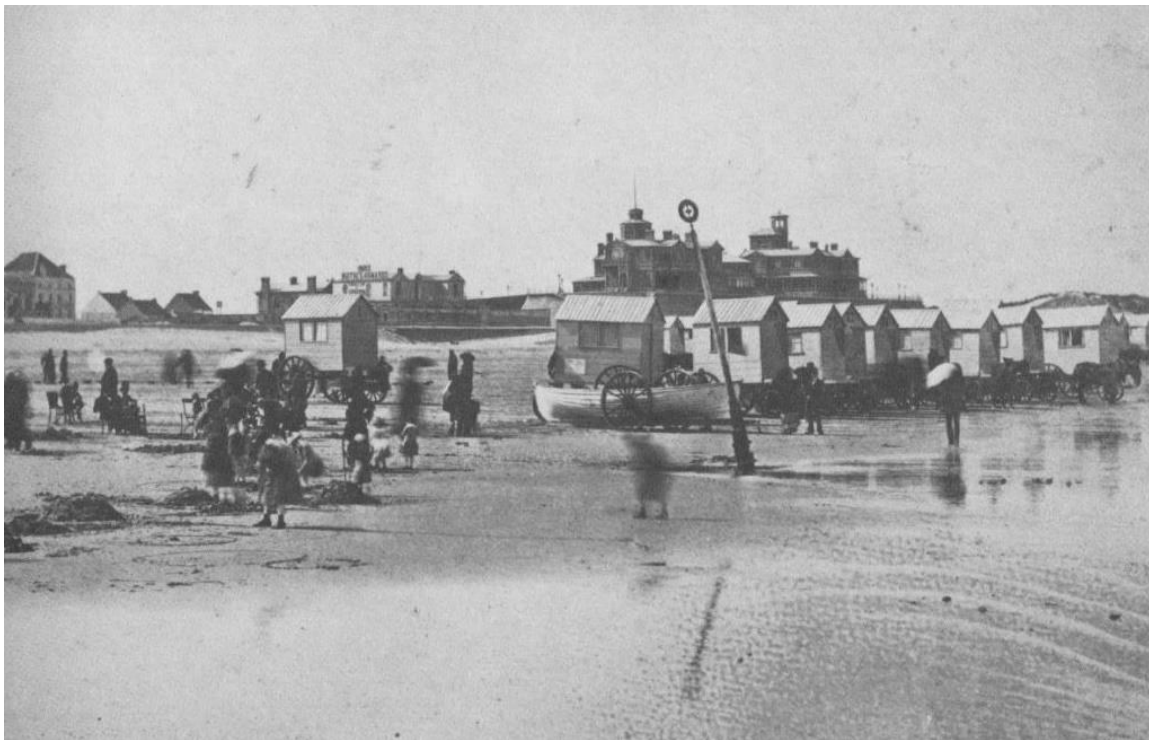


Fig.10 : Photograph clearly showing the distance between the *Pavillon du Rhin* (center left) and the royal chalet (center right).

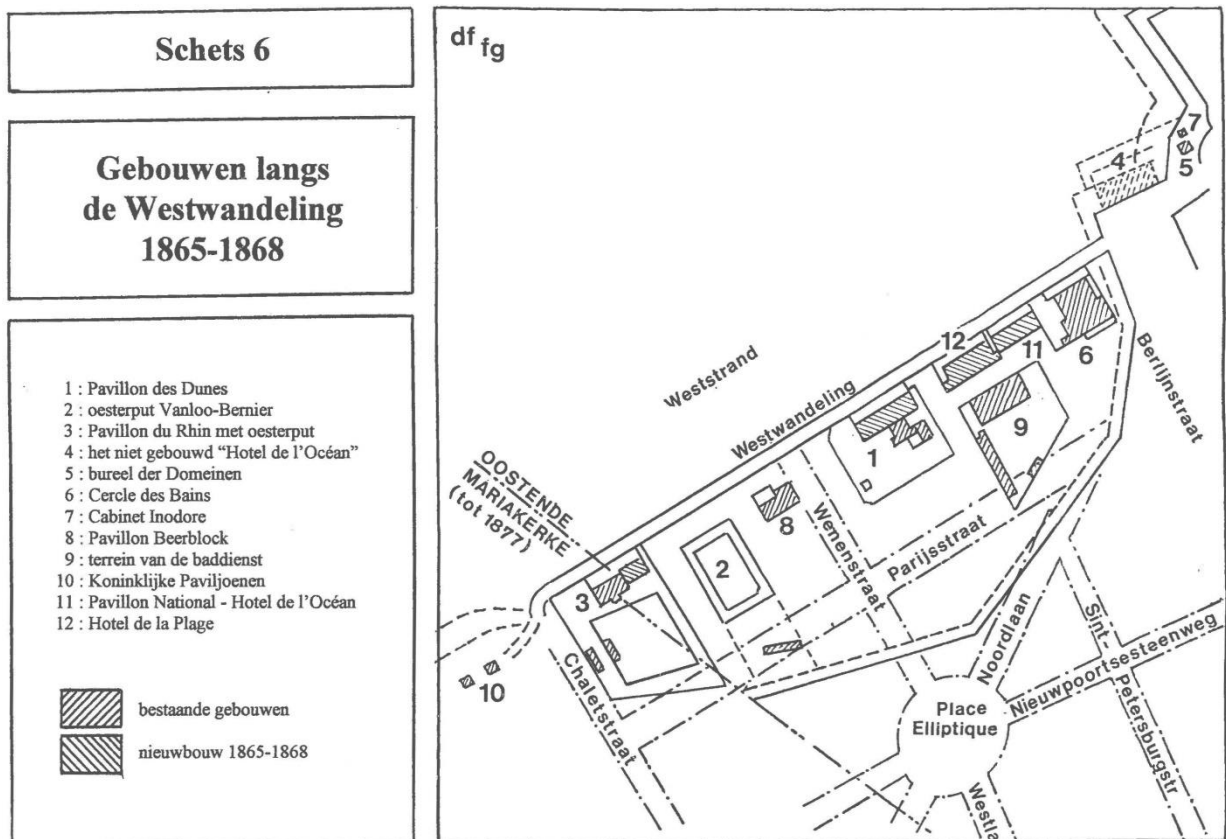
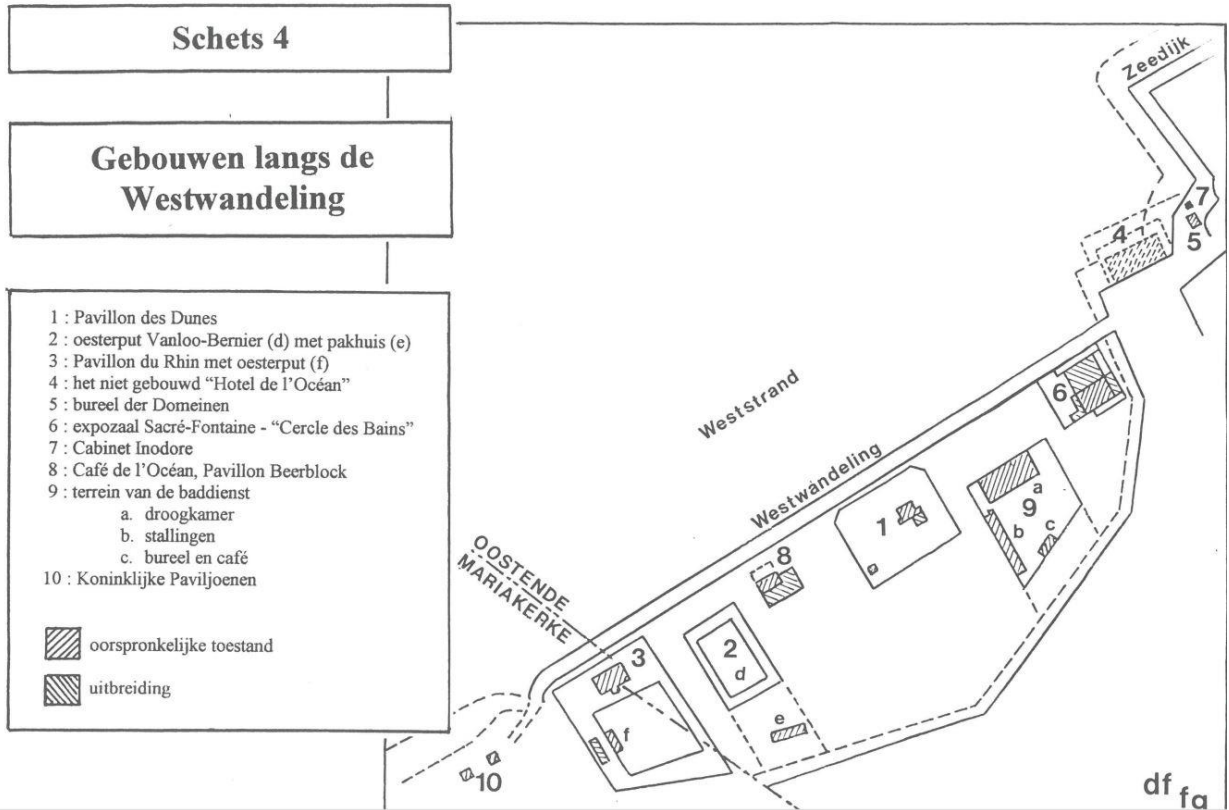


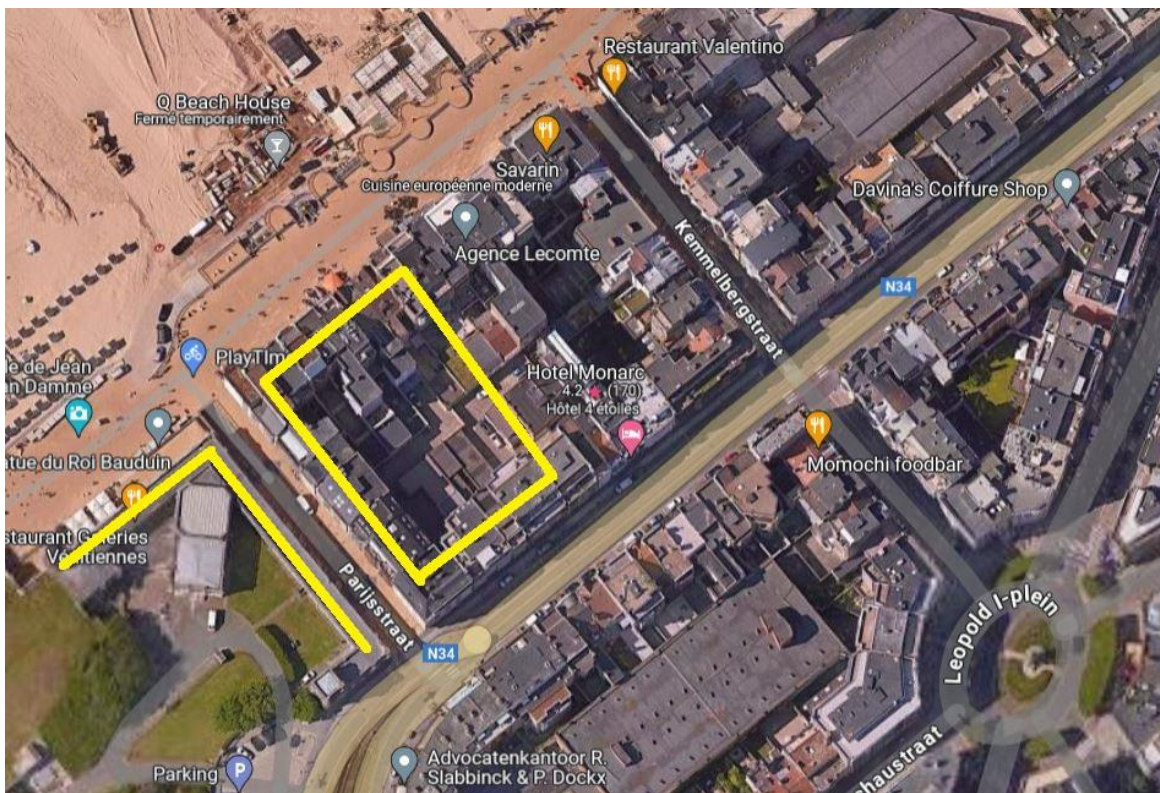
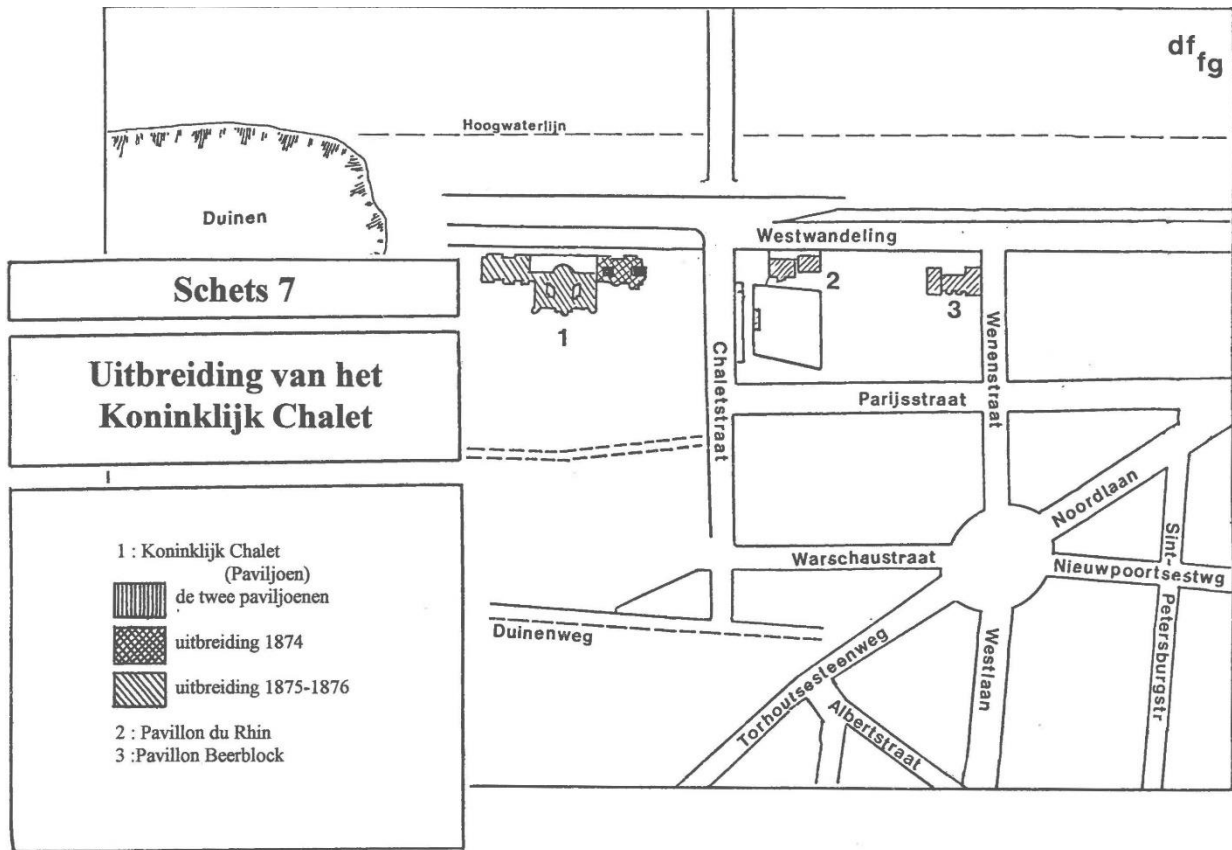
Fig.11 : Photograph showing the Venetian gallery (left) and the royal chalet (right).



Fig.12 : Jean-Baptiste Degreeef, *Dunes and oyster breeding pond near Ostend*, c.1880, Ostend, Muzeec.

Maps (from FARASYN and google)





Current plan. In yellow: Venetian gallery (left) and location of the *Pavillon du Rhin* and its oyster pit (right).

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Vlaams Institute voor Zee.