

SHAPES METALWORKS WORKS

South West Flanders is a Belgian region often described as 'Texas of Flanders', owing to its industrial prosperity. It is home to many machine-building and metalworking companies, such as Shapes Metalworks, just a stone's throw from the LVD headquarters.

Supply reliability paramount

Shapes Metalworks is a dynamic sheet metal subcontractor, led by Dirk Haerinck and Fritz Walcarius. "In a capital-intensive industry, you have to have the courage to invest if you want to grow with the market," explains Dirk.

"Customers from Flanders sometimes had to go to the Netherlands or to Germany for larger sheet metal jobs so in 2014 we decided to invest in a PPEB-H 1000-ton 8-meter press brake and an Impuls 12-meter CO₂ laser. The supply of lasers over 3 meters used to be pretty limited in our region."

In recent years, the number of customers using large sheets has risen and the geographic range has also increased. This was why last year Shapes acquired an

Easy-Form 220/50 press brake with a Starmatik bending robot.

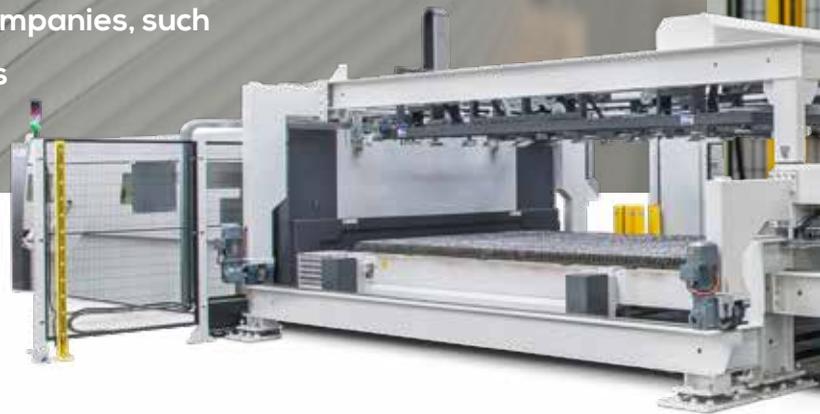
"A major project from one of our customers meant that we had a large volume to handle. If we were to serve our other customers just as quickly, we needed to expand in laser cutting as well, as the *Impuls* was working three shifts from day one."

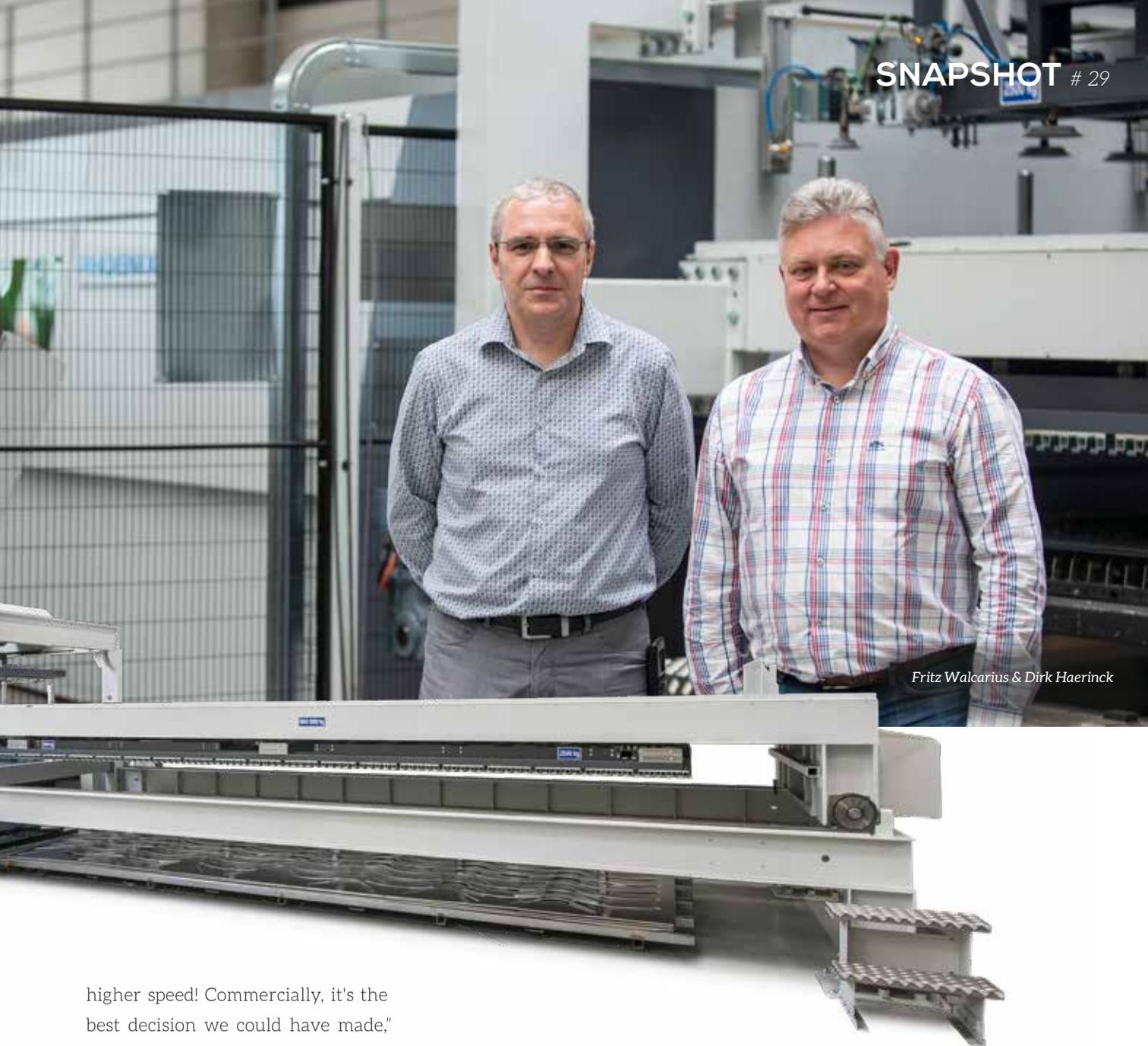
"Companies who were once looking to the Eastern bloc for sheet metal work are gradually coming back. Fast delivery times, smaller volumes, and lower inventories have become increasingly more important than

price alone. Customers are looking to us for our flexibility, reliability of delivery, and quality."

When cutting speed matters

"We've had the 6 kW *Phoenix FL-6020* fiber laser cutting machine with automated loading/unloading unit since the beginning of the year. The machine has really bowled us over with its speed, dynamics, and fantastic cutting quality. The finish has improved tremendously, even on sheets up to 25 mm, and the automatic loading/unloading takes less than 90 seconds. All of this allows us to produce at a much





Fritz Walcarius & Dirk Haerinck

higher speed! Commercially, it's the best decision we could have made," says Fritz Walcarius.

"The *Phoenix* cuts sheets of 6 by 2 meters, and if speed is a factor in the pricing, there couldn't be a better machine. The loading/unloading system also helps to speed up the throughput of a large series of pieces. The *Impuls* is used for piece production and for sheets in excess of 6 meters. We use a roller bridge for loading and unloading."

"All of our operators had previously worked with the *Impuls*, so we

didn't have any delays in getting the *Phoenix* up and running as the two share the same control and software. It was mostly about adjusting to the automated loading/unloading system."

What the future holds

"We're always looking for new ways to optimise throughput. The machines need to be well organised, but so too does the periphery," explains Fritz. "We plan to introduce more automation for efficient supply of sheets and sorting the cut pieces.

We're always looking to the next stage, as this helps to keep us alert and competitive."

