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Above: The historic house of Marie-Louise van Overdijk-Reek and her husband Willem in the little village of Oostkerke, West Flanders. The village is famous for its white houses centered around the old church.

Left: Marie-Louise van Overdijk-Reek.

COLLECTING: AN INTERNATIONAL ARTFORM

Situated right in front of Sint-Kwintens church, in the little village of Oostkerke, is the oldest known rectory* in West Flanders. The place is well known for its little white houses, all centered around the church. Home to some 600 residents, Oostkerke in recent years was declared the most beautiful village in West Flanders. Here, in the very center, lives the well known interior specialist, collector and art dealer Marie-Louise van Overdijk-Reek and her husband Willem.



The green living room with a bronze chair by Barbara Greenberg, a white sculpture by Miguel Ybáñez, a painting by the German artist Jupp Linssen and a collection of impressionist French painters.



Between 1605 and 1786 their home in the village was property of the Church and used as a restcory. At the end of the 19th century the house became one of eleven inns in Oostkerke, under the name 'De Nieuwe Wandel-ing' (The New Ramblers).

In 1944, during WWII, fighting left the church tower and surrounding houses badly damaged. The former pres-bytery was totally restored in 1946, retaining as many of the undamaged, historical features as possible.

The house has a T-form floor plan. This layout appears on 18th century drawings, and during the rebuilding in 1946 this was respected.

This was the situation that Marie-Louise encountered when she and her husband took over the house. And, within that historical framework Marie-Louise was able to let her artistic instincts loose on the interiors.

As always, with her way of approaching an interior, this resulted in a fascinating confrontation between old and new; between historical relevance and the everyday comfort of a twenty first century house.

What is essential for her in an interior?

"For me artworks are the the starting point. As far as my interior was concerned, what you see is the result of years and years of collecting. In our house antique furniture is combined with modern and contemporary art and objects. That mix-and-match of color, material and artworks makes a house and an interior really personal for me. In this house I have combined the things that I had already and mixed them with 'a twist'."

Marie-Louise van Overdijk-Reek is a force of nature. Al-ways restless to discover new things in life as well as in art and interior design, she now runs the ML Gallery in

an old farmhouse in Oostkerke, not far from her home and is concentrating on the fine arts.

She has been a collector almost all her life: Antiques, art, fashion accessories and fabrics.

"Once you have got the collecting bug, it stays with you. It is a passion for the beauty in life that never fades. All my life I have had an intuitive sense for harmony: Colors, forms, the tactile, everything that is memorable and beautiful in the world [...] I love the mix of historic archi-tecture and contemporary art, with a touch of fun added to the mix."

Born in the Netherlands, she soon gained a reputation in the worlds of high-end fashion, elegant fabrics and accessories, sophisticated interior design, furniture, anti-qualities, modern and historic art.

As a young fashion coordinator and stylist at the Dutch Fashion Institute in Amsterdam, she attended the haute



TV room with two artworks by Miguel Ybáñez and a portrait painted by Osvaldo Leite, an artist from Uruguay who also painted the Belgian Royal family. To the right, against the wall, 'White Prelude' by the German artist Manfred Müller, who lives and works in Los Angeles and Düsseldorf. The small master bedroom is situated right under the roof beams.

Right-hand page: The hall-ibrary with a 18th century mirror. On the table a con-temporary dhurrie.





The dining room with a colored ceramic artwork by Belgium artist Jeanne Oppenhaffen and over the sofa a family piece: Portrait of a reading lady with head 1900. In the background a collection of 18th century tulips. Marie-Louise collects antique majolica to create the cozy country atmosphere.



These pages: Images of Marie-Louise's ML Gallery in Oostkerke, with the large exhibition space showing artworks by Arty Grimm and Jeanne Opgenhaffen.

Below and right-hand page: The garden room with artworks by Jupp Linssen, Arty Grimm and Miguel Ybáñez.

The gallery is located in an 18th century farm next to one of the beautiful canals and is bordered with majestic trees.

couture and international fashion shows from Paris and Milan to London and New York. She made a name for herself as a designer, stylist, and coordinator. During her term as president of Intercolor in Paris, she was involved in determining which colors would be 'in' during the following seasons.

After that she founded her own international consultancy firm and intensified her collecting of art and antiques. With M&L Interiors, Art & Antiquities, she began designing interior concepts and color schemes for clients around the world; all with her cosmopolitan and eclectic signature. Trying to transfer her international inspiration and her passion for life to her clientele.

"So many people go through life without properly looking at the world around them. I have an insatiable appetite for looking, for observing my surroundings.

Both the beautiful and the not so beautiful; it is sometimes a blessing and a curse at the same time."

Marie-Louise has lived and worked in historic properties for most of her life, and she renovated and decorated them herself.

From a monastery in the center of Maastricht, in the south of The Netherlands, to the 18th century Fonteneau Castle, in Brussels: From Crabbenburg Castle, near the Belgian city of Ghent, to the monumental townhouse Mansion Vanden Bussche in Antwerp.

"I love architecture that tells stories. I draw my inspiration from such buildings for my career as a designer and stylist. Bringing different styles together from different centuries and cultures is my calling; in harmony with architecture and contemporary or historic art. For me it is a way of life, a life's work and the expression of an ultimate 'joie de vivre.'"





Flanders at its best: Dark clouds over a white farm house with, in the background, the Damme Canal (Damse Vaart), a canal with trees on both sides. In the farm on the right is the main exhibition space of ML Gallery. In the smaller building the garden room is located.