

Refined Belgian Living

Hailing from Holland, Marie-Louise van Overdijk is a respected figure in the Belgian port of Antwerp, not least yet not only for her ML Design Gallery at the heart of the city. The atmosphere pervading the space is equally important to the gallery owner as the paintings of the famous artists who queue up to exhibit with her. GG paid a visit to this remarkably cosmopolitan lady at her residence, where the architectural design forms an ideal realm for art to come alive. A talk about abounding female power, professional beginnings in Amsterdam and Paris, and why sensibility can be both a blessing and a curse in life. TEXT: Melanie Klusmeier PHOTOS: Marc Seelen



The study, flooded with light, exudes a cordial warmth despite its purist design thanks the wooden parquet floors and golden stuccowork.

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MARIE-LOUISE VAN OVERDUK



Impressive works of art adorn the capacious interiors throughout the property. Pieces by Cole Morgan and Miguel Ybáñez hang in the study.



1 Built in 1911, this majestic residence stands resplendently like an elegant grande dame on the 'Arthur Goemaerelei' in Antwerp 2 The light-flooded stairwell, which features a charming round alcove set over two floors and intricate banister railings in solid oak wood, links all four levels of the property 3 A light sculpture by Adalbert Gans is installed in the space. Paintings and sculptures perpetually change the ambience 4 A spiral staircase leads to the uppermost level of the mansion, which boasts an overall interior of no less than 850 m². This space could be easily converted into a separate, self-contained apartment, office or children's wing 5 Period features like marble fireplaces and elaborate stucco ceilings adorn the historic rooms 6 The representative and prestigious interiors such as the dining and living room are graced with impressive doorways built from hand-carved wood with glazed panelling 7 A vast terrace stretching across the entire length of the mansion looks out over the charming garden with its expansive lawns and rich abundance of beautiful trees, adjacent to a private park.

Some people collect antiques, others works of art, accessories or fabrics. Marie-Louise van Overdijk collects something of everything. But that is not all – she is also one of the fortunate few to have succeeded in transforming their passion into a profession. “I just love the amalgamation of historic architecture and contemporary art, with a touch of fun added to the mix,” says the illustrious gallery owner. Born in the Netherlands, she has been a reputed figure for many years now in the worlds of high-end fashion, elegant fabrics and accessories, sophisticated interior design, furniture, antiques, modern and historic art. She regularly attends Europe's most important conferences dedicated to art and antiques. And she knows what she is talking about. “All my life I have had an intuitive sense for harmony, colours, forms, the tactile, everything that is memorable and beautiful in the world.” She listens to her instinct. As a young fashion coordinator and stylist of the Dutch

instinct that saw her assigned to the haute couture shows of this world, from Paris and Milan to London and New York. Garnering a name for herself as a designer, stylist, coordinator and as president of Intercol in Paris for three years, she was involved in determining which colours would be “in” next season, and which would be “out”. At her side, trend-watchers from some 23 countries. She travels the world. Soaks up the inspiration. Founders her own international consultancy firm and begins to collect art and antiques. What starts off as small mementos soon develops into a serious collection of art, books, designer furniture and antiques. “Once you have got the collecting bug, it stays with you. It is a passion for the beauty in life that never fades.” Under her own label M&L Interiors, Art & Antiquities, she begins to create interior concepts and colour schemes for clients around the world. Her focus centres around castles, manor houses, grand townhouses and penthouse apartments, which she furnishes with avant garde artefacts, contemporary paintings, antiques and designer furniture. “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,” she laughs.

The current home for her art also happens to be one of the most impressive residences in the whole of Antwerp. Just some of her favourite artists include Miguel Ybáñez, a great talent in the world of painting from Spain, Sergio Fermariello from Italy, Arty Grimm from the Netherlands and the German artists Jupp Linssen and Manfred Müller. The ‘Mansion Vanden Bussche’, designed in 1911 by the architect Ernest Pelgrims, ranks amongst the largest and most prestigious townhouses built in the period prior to the First World War. Before the turn of the century, Pelgrims built predominantly in the Flemish Neo-Renaissance and Neo-Classical styles, turning increas-

ing to beaux-arts architecture over time. His prestigious public buildings such as theatres, museums and town halls, as well as stations and schools, were also particularly akin to this distinctive style. Conceived as a grand family home for the wealthy bourgeoisie, the mansion embodies this aesthetic with its exaggerated dimensions and impressively ornate detailing. The natural stone façade with its five round alcoves, quartz corner piers and intricate adornments imbues the property with a gracious elegance. Situated in one of the most desirable districts in the port city of Antwerp, the mansion stands with an almost majestic splendour alongside its well-to-do neighbours. This splendour is precisely what greets guests upon their arrival – helped along by the opulent Neo-Rococo staircase connecting all floors, with intricate wooden embellishments and period wood panelling. The attic level beneath the slated mansard roof is accessed via a spiral staircase, which enriches the entire space with stylish finesse. An elevator provides a convenient easy-access alternative. The ground layout with its reception areas, private quarters and utility rooms is typical for such monumental townhouses of the period. Equally fitting as a splendid home or prestigious office, the eight grand main interiors include magnificent ground floor spaces such as the grand hall, dining room, living room and study with an original period marble fireplace. A number of rooms serve individual purposes in the pursuit of hobbies or as storage space. The majority of the space is used by Marie-Louise to showcase sculptures, canvases, frames and the like. “If you love art, rooms cannot be flexible or large enough.” All wings of the house are conceived in such a way that they can be altered with little effort. The kitchen, for example, could easily be relocated from one room to the next depending on the requirements of the owners. The residence has been restored and finds itself in impeccable condition. “The views overlooking the garden are a particular joy, both in the summer and in the winter. The grounds form an integral part of the interior – something which is really quite unusual for city dwellings,” Marie-Louise enthuses.



Marie-Louise van Overdijk is devoted to first-class architecture and exceptional interior design. Her residence is one of the most beautiful in the city.

His dynamic lady, with a passion for life in all its facets, has always lived and worked in historic properties, also renovated and decorated herself – in century-old country houses, a monastery in the centre of Maastricht where she had her business M&L Interiors, Arts and Antiquities, the 18th century Castle Fonteneau near Brussels, and her current residence of Castle Crabbenburg near the Belgian city of Ghent. “The idea of living in a castle has always held a certain magic for me. It is a way of life, a life's work and the expression of an ultimate ‘joie de vivre’. I am in absolute awe of architecture that can tell 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.” The ‘Mansion Vanden Bussche’ has so many stories to tell. Marie-Louise van Overdijk knows all too well just how valuable such a heritage is. **MK**