

# Quietly COMPOSED

An impressive collection  
of *mid-century* furniture  
finds the perfect home in  
an *architecturally rich* 1920s  
townhouse  
in *Brussels*.

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This page The dark wood of the staircase contrasts with the white stucco walls. Opposite page The original timber flooring has been waxed in a tobacco colour. The marble fireplace is also original. Pierre Jeanneret black lacquered teak and cane chairs from Chandigarh flank the fireplace. The single chair (in the foreground) is Jean Pruvé's 'Antony' chair. The mirror is a vintage find. Artwork on the mantel is a Jean Cocteau lithograph. Portrait was a present from the architect's father for his 15th birthday.

Architect Nicolas Schuybroek and his wife Gwendoline purchased, some time ago, a little 'jewel' from the 1920s in the historic district of Elsene in Brussels. The townhouse had seen many former uses – during the 50s it was a butcher's shop, with apartments above, and then a renowned restaurant. Nicolas has renovated the house in accordance with his personal style which is restrained and deliberate, doing justice to the historical character of the building, while keeping an eye on space, detail, proportion and materials without compromising his signature as a contemporary architect.

It had been quite a task to find a good property in the couple's favourite neighbourhood, near the Ixelles Ponds and the Bois de la Cambre. Nicolas says, "The building had an unusual facade, sufficient size for our requirements and, at ground level, space for my office. The location, volume, light, the classical character, all these factors were perfect, but internally it was a hovel. The challenge was to put everything back in proportion, emphasising the architectural highlights, such as the entrance, the staircase, the 3.5-metre ceiling height, the marble fireplace, the stucco ceilings and original timber floorboards. And trying to restore all that with a fixed budget!"

Fortunately many original features, hidden under layers of linoleum and wallpaper, could be preserved, including the characteristic tiling of the former butcher's shop downstairs. It gave the office an unexpected cachet. "At first we wanted to take them away because they were not in such good condition, but eventually we kept them anyway. The classical context of the house lent a natural simplicity, enhanced by the richness of the architectural details. That monastic feeling within a space – proportion and light in relation to the materials' patina – is a contrast I often use."

Nicolas began studying architecture at Saint-Luc Brussels, continuing his studies in Montreal in Canada, and then working for Intégral Jean Beaudoin studio in the same city. Later he returned



This page, clockwise from above Architect Nicolas Schuybroek. Indian wooden boxes and photographs by Horst P Horst and Nicolas Schuybroek. The red-brick exterior of the 1920s townhouse. The architect's office still has the butcher's shop tiles on the walls. The table and cupboard date from the 19th century. Charles and Ray Eames chairs. Tolomeo table lamp. Opposite page Sofa from Marie's Corner. Serge Mouille 'Lampadaire Droit' floor lamp. Charles and Ray Eames 'La chaise'. Pierre Jeanneret classroom chair.



These pages Eclectic furnishings in the living room include mid-century modern black lacquered teak and cane chairs by Pierre Jeanneret, 'Antony' chair by Jean Prouvé, and wooden stool by Charlotte Perriand. 1920s coffee table. Vintage brass counterweight light by Florian Schulz.

to Belgium to work for various renowned architectural offices before starting his own interior design practice in 2011. Nicolas says, "My experience in other practices inspired me a lot. Many images and impressions were stored in my mind, especially my search for the symbiosis of architecture and interior design. My eye for small details has been guided in this way; the importance of texture, tactility, the right proportions and, of course, light."

Nicolas's work includes private homes, lofts and retail projects in Belgium and abroad. For his own project, wife Gwendoline was a very good sounding board. She says, "I fell for the charm of the house, the red brick facade, the dark woodwork, the old materials, the high ceilings, the mouldings, and especially the location and the little triangular square with trees in front of the house."

One of the standout features is the imposing wooden staircase. The dark colour contrasts with the crisp white of the stucco walls. While the staircase claims a lot of space, this is hardly noticeable as the ceiling height compensates. Gwendoline says, "My input was to preserve the soul of the house, as well as the original elements so it wouldn't be transformed into a purely contemporary project." Nicolas says, "That was accomplished with a simple, graphic colour palette – lots of matte white combined with very dark tones – and also by the selection of vintage and antique furniture."

The couple have furnished the house with modern classics and antiques, as well as vintage pieces from Chandigarh in India by furniture designer Pierre Jeanneret. Says Nicolas, "I am a huge fan of mid-century modern furniture, and we already had some unique pieces from Serge Mouille, Charlotte Perriand, Jean Prouvé and Pierre Paulin. The wooden 'Antony' chair by Jean Prouvé, now standing in the living room, is rare, as are the various 'Chandigarh' pieces we have by Pierre Jeanneret. I bought these many years ago because they all have an unprecedented beauty. Their honesty in form and function, the graphic lines and the use of tropical woods display the symbiosis and interweaving of 'colonial' and 'Western'. They also display a kind of simplicity, a minimal appearance. I think that underlines the special relationship between the 20s architecture of this house, the interior design and my collection of mid-century modern furniture." ■

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#### SPEED READ

» Architect Nicolas Schuybroek and wife Gwendoline bought a 1920s townhouse that was formerly a butcher's shop and a restaurant and was in a state of disrepair. » The couple carefully restored the building, maintaining the architectural highlights such as the high ceilings, classical mouldings, marble fireplace and the original timber floor. » An impressive collection of mid-century furniture by Jean Prouvé, Pierre Jeanneret, Pierre Paulin and Jens Risom lend the desired warmth and style.



This page 'Plafonnier 3 Bras Pivotants' light by Serge Mouille hangs over the bed. Jens Risom vintage woven leather chair beside the bed, and Pierre Paulin 'F444' leather chair near the window. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Photographs by Nicolas Schuybroek decorate a shelf in the main bathroom. 'Standard' chair by Jean Prouvé. The dining area has a wooden table with teak and cane chairs from Chandigarh by Pierre Jeanneret. The custom-designed kitchen features matte white ceramic tiles with black grout and dark grey cabinets. When Objects work ceramics. A view along the corridor to the kitchen.