

TIMELESS AND SERENE





The decision to become an architect was already made when he was only 12 years old. Since then, he has conquered the whole world with his timeless, serene projects. His portfolio includes apartments in Paris and Antwerp, residences in Mexico City and Bali, a hotel in Chicago and shops and offices all over Belgium. In between, he also designed a number of functional objects for the Belgian brand When Objects Work. Nicolas Schuybroek's diary is therefore well-filled, but Imagicasa managed to secure him for an interview. "Tranquillity is a central theme in my work," the architect tells us. So together, we reflected on his success and his realisations for a moment.



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In 2011 Nicolas Schuybroek – then 30 years old – started his own architectural office in Brussels. At that time, he had already been working on a holiday home on the French Riviera for two years. Talking about launching your career with a highlight! The steps he took to reach this point bear witness to a great drive and enthusiasm. Although as a teenager he went to – according to his own words – a strict school where creativity was not exactly at the top of the agenda, he still went on to study architecture at Saint-Luc in Brussels. After obtaining his bachelor's degree, he moved to Canada where he completed his studies at McGill University in Montreal. It is also in this city that he took his first steps into the professional world of architecture and design. He did so with none other than the renowned urbanist-architect Jean Beaudoin who is known for his highly personal approach with which he creates transformative spaces.



On his return to Belgium, Schuybroek was immediately given the chance to work for Vincent Van Duysen. For five years he worked there as a project director and was involved in many high-end projects in Belgium and abroad. Schuybroek calls this work experience “a fantastic learning experience”, although the urge to be able to do even more of his own thing continued to grow.

REINVENTED MINIMALISM
The goal of Nicolas Schuybroek's firm is to design architecture, interiors and objects with a great emphasis on details, craftsmanship and intuition. The spaces he creates are characterised by a certain simplicity, but at

the same time radiate warmth thanks to the use of different textures and raw materials. The result: pure and authentic spaces with a soul. This contextual approach and his search for timeless minimalism have won the architect many prizes and honourable mentions in a short space of time.

Schuybroek, for example, has already been included four times by AD France in their Top 100 of best (interior) architects. Last year, he was also named one of the 10 best international designers by the Australian Est Living, along with two other Belgians: Vincent Van Duysen and Hans Verstuyft. Est called him the

‘king of reinvented minimalism’. Imagicasa therefore humbly went to Nicolas Schuybroek and was able to ask him a few questions about the details that typify his work and his career.

HAVE YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BECOME AN ARCHITECT?
“Photography has always appealed to me enormously, but to be honest: the concrete question has never really asked itself in the sense that my choice was already made from the age of 12! Everything revolved around drawing with the intention of being able to build something concrete, physically, either a model, a tree house, anything!”

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO START YOUR OWN OFFICE?
“The choice to start my own office was above all a question of freedom: freedom of choice, design, sensitivities, etcetera. Also, to avoid the feeling of control and having to justify oneself internally. If you miss something, it is difficult to pin it on someone else, if something succeeds, it is another story. It gives a lot of satisfaction to do your own thing.”

YOU HAVE WORKED FOR VINCENT VAN DUYSSEN, AMONG OTHERS. HOW DID THIS EXPERIENCE INFLUENCE YOUR OWN WORK?
“That remains difficult. You always want to do things better and different from what you have done before. I try not to look

back too much and only to focus on the inspiration or knowledge I have gained myself. At the same time, I have to admit that Vincent has been a fantastic learning school and that I will always carry those great memories with me!”

WHO DO YOU LOOK UP TO IN THE BELGIAN ARCHITECTURAL WORLD? WHO OR WHAT INSPIRES YOU?
“What I think makes an architect, is his work in the long term: how consistently is a certain aesthetic pushed through? Do you have the right feeling with the context? How timeless is the work? Many names from recent or less recent history appeal to me, ranging from Soane, Louis Boullée to Luis Barragan, Geoffrey Bawa, Studio Mumbai and

“IT IS AN OBVIOUS FACT THAT ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIORS FLOW TOGETHER”

Peter Zumthor: architects with a very consistent approach, who do their own thing in a driven way. It would be too restrictive to cite only names from the world of architecture: music, visual art and exhibitions also have an enormous indirect influence on me.”

ARE THERE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PROJECTS YOU DO IN BELGIUM AND THOSE ABROAD?
“The approach and requirements usually remain the same: to provide a design that is as detailed as possible and in which everything can be checked down to the smallest details. The big difference is mainly in outsourcing the follow-up to a local team. Sometimes there are pleasant surprises, sometimes the opposite: the biggest difference lies mainly in



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finding good local partners who understand our approach and philosophy so that the project is also much better ‘defended’ by the local architect.”

YOU MAINLY DO RESIDENTIAL PROJECTS, BUT ALSO SOME COMMERCIAL PROJECTS. DO YOU HAVE A PREFERENCE?
“At the moment, we are mainly working on residential projects, but with a wide variety of scale and type. For example, we continue to accept very small projects that are worked out in a very detailed way, as well as much larger renovations or new construction projects. We have done some commercial projects in the past such as The Robey in Chicago and shops in Brussels. The approach is completely different and refreshing in the sense that the full process needs to progress quickly, which is sometimes lacking in private projects.”

PRODUCT DESIGN. WHY THE CHOICE TO DESIGN FUNCTIONAL OBJECTS? HOW DO THESE FIT INTO YOUR PORTFOLIO?
“Product development is a fascinating story because it is nothing more than architecture on a much smaller scale. However, the relationship and details must be worked out on a completely different level: everything is visible, everything is tangible. Object or product development does not

allow for errors. That’s why some products, for me, fit seamlessly into our story.”

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ARCHITECT AND INTERIOR DESIGNER IS GETTING SMALLER AND SMALLER. MORE AND MORE (INCLUDING YOU) ARE ACTIVE IN BOTH FIELDS. WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?
“Personally, I can’t imagine an architectural design being separated from its interior. It is and remains a central thread and it is self-evident to me that architecture and interiors merge. Art and furniture are an integral part of this. The principle of the Gesamtkunstwerk, with ambassadors such as Adolf Loos, Jozef Hoffmann, Henry van de Velde or Victor Horta in the 1920s and 1930s, remains for me the pinnacle of refinement.”

FINAL QUESTION: HOW DO WE RECOGNISE A TYPICAL DESIGN/INTERIOR BY NICOLAS SCHUYBROEK?
“Timeless, serene and contemplative. Tactile, warm and simple. I’m not really interested in bling-bling architecture, interiors or design and certainly not in turning it into a spectacular show. Tranquillity is a central theme in my work, sometimes even an obsession.”

