



# OV HOUSE

*Bruges, Belgium*

Photos: Claessens & Deschamps





Architect Nicolas Schuybroek received a call a few years ago from Thomas Ostyn, the third-generation generation owner of the company Obumex, a Belgian company specialized in high-end millwork and especially renowned for their kitchens. They regularly worked together with distinguished architects, including Joseph Dirand and John Pawson. The work relationship started in a slightly awkward way, when Thomas and Nicolas declined to work on the renovation of a house on the Belgian coast which did not speak to them, making it impossible to achieve an interesting result there.

Nicolas didn't hear anything from Thomas for a year after this initial exchange. Thomas later called Nicolas with the news he had bought a plot of land in Bruges, practically adjacent to the place where Nicolas had gone to boarding school, and suggested a kind of partnership: Nicolas would do the architecture while Obumex would work hand in hand with the architect and his team on all the details of the millwork and finishes, to make a kind of showplace for his company. For an architect, Thomas Ostyn is not your average client: his level of commitment to his company is very high, his positive energy is uncommon, and issues get solved very quickly.

This collaboration was special in many ways, and it was the first time Nicolas Schuybroek would work at this level with a client and his company, where the client also played the role of the interior contractor. Thomas and his wife Julie have three young children, and the house needed to contain and absorb their energy while not putting bounds on it. The surroundings were also challenging: woodlands dense with pine trees. There was something a bit dark and slightly gloomy about the landscape, which was also Nicolas' strongest association with the area from his days of boarding school. The most important thing was to bring in light and create a sense of openness in this place: But how to do this?

The architect pushed the house as much as possible to the back of the plot, which allowed him to create a larger, open garden in the front. The house itself is built in long gray brick. The material gives a certain solidity and robustness to the architecture, but it also allows it to blend with the natural environment, creating a timeless beauty: luxurious, but not in a showy way. They added texture and warmth inside with a limited palette of materials: Muschelkalk, sandblasted aged oak and metal. Given the countless possibilities at the Obumex workshops, it's fairly remarkable that they managed to pare down the amount of materials.

Inside they settled on a very open design with a core living space that connects to all the rooms and allows for an easy flow through the space, even for a young family. They tried to optimize the use of furniture in the home to maximize circulation and to select works that would only be enhanced with the patina of touch and time, such as Pierre Jeanneret chairs, a Rick Owens console (holding vases designed by Nicolas Schuybroek Architects), and custom furniture provided a platform for the clients to live, play, and entertain. There is no visual excess here, and they stayed true to their own taste, to the environment, and to the lifestyle of the family. This creation was the opposite of a showroom; ninety percent of the house is used ninety percent of the time. The family's favorite spot in the house is a large table in the kitchen that brings them all together to eat, do homework, and sit and read.

[www.ns-architects.com](http://www.ns-architects.com)



















