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Restored Villa Nisot in Brussels brings modernism to the 21st century

Restored Villa Nisot in Brussels updates modernism with contemporary character

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(Image credit: Nicolas Schimp)

BY SISKA LYSSENS
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Villa Nisot in Rhode-Saint-Genèse sits on the green outskirts of Brussels, an area dotted with stacked geometric volumes – homes whose streamlined façades speak to the steady influence of Belgian architecture's modernist pioneers. The particular modernist architecture gem was completed in 1934 by Louis Herman De Koninck. Over the course of two and a half years, Labscape, an architectural practice based in New York, Brussels and Pisa, restored the home for an artist's family with a deep affinity for all things midcentury.

(Image credit: Nicolas Schimp)

The rebirth of Villa Nisot

'It was a very heavy restoration,' begins Tecla Tangorra, the lead architect on the project. The original concrete walls didn't have insulation, and the home was due for a rear extension. 'The difficulty was to find a balance and conserve as much as possible of the initial design despite adding another volume.' De Koninck was a contemporary of architects such as Léon Stynen, Rudolph Schindler and Walter Gropius, and his highly original form of modernism informed Labscape's plans for the built-in furniture, the glass elements in the home's entryway and kitchen, and the selection of art deco-inspired textiles.

(Image credit: Nicolas Schimp)

'Nothing of the original interior remained, so almost everything you see is designed by us. Many elements were inspired by or reproduced from sketches by De Koninck,' says Tangorra.

The painstaking work resulted in some striking pieces of furniture, like the onyx-topped music-room cabinet on the ground floor and the brass-detailed desk in the upstairs office. Both designs mirror the straight lines and rounded corners characteristic of modernist detailing, and are made of solid rose wood by local manufacturer Walnut's Groove.

(Image credit: Nicolas Schimp)

'The client had a preference for natural materials with a lot of character,' adds Tangorra, who embraced the challenge to create a home with a strong identity. Dark and glossy wenge wood floors ground the living spaces. In the living room, a travertine fireplace is flanked by a hidden bar, its rounded door panelled with corrugated walnut. A metal 'Yin Yang' coffee table by Willy Rizzo from 1970 satisfies the eye with more curves. In the music room and in the upstairs hallway, angular Jules Wabbes sconces line the wall, sourced from a local modernist design dealer.

(Image credit: Nicolas Schimp)

In the kitchen, which retains its original dimensions, lava stone is used for both floor and countertops. Brazilian marble in an expressive pattern and moody, amber-hued fluted sandwich glass add intensity and contrast to the worn, white maple cabinetry below. A Verner Panton chandelier crowns the breakfast nook, teaming up with the suspended glass shelf to refract the light throughout the day.
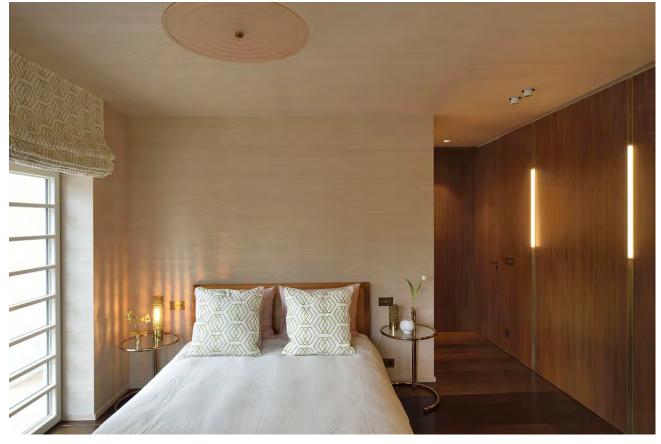
(Image credit: Nicolas Schimp)

Upstairs, three en suite bathrooms drive home the concept of materiality with striking tenacity. Black and white linear Striato Olimpico marble envelops one bathroom, while floor-to-ceiling Bisazza mosaic tiles in pink and gold, and blue and green cover the other two. Making the most of light and space, in line with the owner's individualist bent, they transport De Koninck's design principles right into the present.
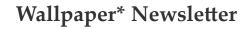
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