



PURE BEAUTY

A NEWLY DESIGNED HOUSE IN THE BELGIAN COUNTRYSIDE HAS BEEN GIVEN A QUIETLY ELEGANT INTERIOR THAT CELEBRATES THE INHERENT CHARM FOUND IN OBJECTS AND MATERIALS WITH PATINA AND SOUL.

INTERIOR DESIGN BY JORIS VAN APERS | PHOTOGRAPHED AND WRITTEN BY MICHAEL PAUL/LIVING INSIDE



Reclaimed elements, such as an 18th-century French stone fireplace, give a new home a worn, authentic look. Art, Claude Monet. OPPOSITE: The house recalls traditional Belgian farmhouse design.



FOR THE PAST DECADE,

what is often described as the “rough yet refined” Belgian look has been captivating the design world.

Perhaps it should more accurately be referred to as the Flemish look, as it is these individualistic people, with their history of craftsmanship, who are the main protagonists. It’s a style that embodies a penchant for simplicity and primitive pieces, in which noble materials and contemporary art mix seamlessly with antiques. Design maestros Axel Vervoordt and Vincent Van Duysen are considered the doyens of this timeless and accessible aesthetic. However, a new school of young Belgian interior designers and architects are making waves, including Joris Van Apers, who specializes in the handcrafted touch, favoring reclaimed building materials and architectural salvage.

One of his projects, a house near Ghent, was completed last year for a local businessman with a flair for design and art. “Right from the start the client was a joy to work with,” Van Apers recalls. “He understood perfectly our ideas and the constraints we faced.”

Luckily, the interior was pretty much a blank canvas on which to start. “When we took on the project, the house was nothing more than a newly completed construction shell,” he continues. The client’s goal, Van Apers adds, was to “create a space that suited



Throughout the house, softly hued lime paints were used to suffuse the rooms with a romantic patina. **CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT:** Antique Swedish cupboard and table. A more robust color scheme of terra-cotta and gray in the library-cum-dining room. Sofas, Minotti. **OPPOSITE:** Floors, reclaimed French hardwood. Art, James Ensor.

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A custom island made to look like an antique anchors the kitchen. Range, La Cornue.

his personality, and to avoid making it too lavish.” The result, he says, is “hip classic with a contemporary twist.”

“Wherever possible, we tried to use reclaimed materials to give the house a soul, and that sense of being lived in and loved, rather than modern and characterless,” Van Apers says. In fact, the interiors appear humble and unassuming, but with a restrained sense of opulence. From the moment you enter, there is a feeling of warmth that makes the space at once inviting and comfortable.

To create this ambience, a palette of natural, earthy tones resonates throughout. The colors Van Apers chose—moody blues, faded greens, chalky whites—bring a vitality as well as a sense of calm. “I love experimenting with color,” he says. “It’s a powerful tool to trigger the senses. I have been greatly influenced by famous Flemish artists who understood the persuasive power of color.” Perhaps the most striking scheme is in the dining room—cum-library, where the use of a Florentine terra-cotta is contrasted with a dark stone gray. “Dining rooms are often a bit boring—that’s why we gave this one more of an arty feel with a bold Italian color scheme.”

Reclaimed materials play a pivotal role. Old French hardwood planks and aged pine and oak boards were used for the flooring; exposed oak beams retain their natural patina. In the master bedroom, those beams, combined with walls and a ceiling of wood, have been treated with layers of earth-toned lime. The effect looks natural and simple but belies the many painstaking hours it took Van Apers’s craftsmen to create the patina and the caress of time.

“As Belgians, aesthetics are in our DNA,” Van Apers says. “I am simply trying to continue a tradition that Flemish craftsmen and designers have inherited from the past.” □

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A spare, modern tub and reclaimed terra-cotta tiles exemplify the rough but refined Belgian look. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: Oak beams span the orangery. Earthy tones wash over the master bedroom. For more details, see Sourcebook.

