



PIERRE  
YOVANOVITCH

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# Rigour and poetry

French interior designer Pierre Yovanovitch turns a Brussels mansion into a contemporary art refuge

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Two sculptures by German artist Stephan Balkenhol populate the foot of the staircase. The owners of the Brussels mansion are avid art collectors

Above  
Elegant period windows dominate the first-floor living room. The facade dates to 1910 and is the only element of the building to survive the renovation

In the Belgian capital, the suburb of Ixelles stands out for its enchanting and romantic atmosphere, thanks to its buildings' rich mix of architectural styles – from neoclassical to neo-renaissance, but especially art nouveau – ringed around two beautiful ponds.

It is here that French interior designer Pierre Yovanovitch has worked on the remodelling of an exceptional 1,200 sqm mansion spread over five floors. Behind a facade made of brick and stone dating back to 1910, it strikes the perfect balance between grandeur and warmth, with pure lines, noble materials and custom features.

The property is the primary residence of a Flemish couple with four children, who are avid collectors of modern art and passionate about architecture and design. Having similar aesthetic tastes to Yovanovitch, they felt an immediate connection with his work, trusting him to lead the remodelling of this historically classified monument.

"The brief from the family was to have a warm and bright house," says Yovanovitch, "so my work consisted of bringing natural light inside the building." The facade is the only element left from the original structure. All the interior spaces were removed, leaving Yovanovitch with an "empty box" to completely rethink, both in terms of flow and style.

Several key features shape the airy space, most notably the geometric stained-glass roof, which is situated at the centre of the rebuilt home. "I felt that we needed to add some poetry and colour to the white architecture, so we had the idea of creating a skylight," says Yovanovitch. This playful element helps to balance the rigour of the rest of the house's design.

The glass roof sits at the top of a monumental staircase – a sinuous sculptural element that has become the backbone of the house. Down in the basement, which also houses the utility areas, Yovanovitch designed a 15-metre-long swimming pool for the family.

"I tried to keep the soul and architectural spirit of the house," explains Yovanovitch, who describes the home with the same adjectives as its dwellers: sophisticated, generous and simple. "The eclecticism of the house is what makes it interesting."

In the generous hallway with its period front door, a piece of art by Jonathan Horowitz has been placed on the wall above a Yovanovitch-designed two-piece bench and a Paavo Tynell floor lamp. The contemporary kitchen is also on the ground floor, sitting adjacent to an outdoor terrace; it features a ceiling light by Ru Editions, a Dornbracht island and stools by Mark Albrecht Studio.

Living spaces take up the first floor – reception areas, living and family rooms – with the master suite and bathrooms on the second storey. The couple's children have been given free rein on the top floor, with three bedrooms, a bathroom, a sitting room and a terrace.

"Every area of the house has its own spirit and, altogether, they contribute to create the cosy ambience," says Yovanovitch. "For example, the powdery pink master bedroom adorned with a woman's portrait by Magritte above the fireplace corresponds to the sophisticated, soft personality of the wife, while the bar (and cigar cellar) with walls covered in caramel-coloured leather and blackened larch reflects the festive, welcoming character of the husband."





### “I like it when the furniture is in dialogue with the art”

The doors of each room, in chiselled oak and featuring custom-made hexagonal handles, are invitingly tactile and three-dimensional; there are also niches everywhere, for displaying art or as seating nooks, which further create a play of light and shade, changing as the day progresses.

Wide-plank Danish oak floors from Dinesen add a further sense of warmth. Throughout the house, silk, linen, hemp, cotton and wool are introduced through textiles and hand-woven carpets. Shades of blue, Chinese red and gold evoke a sense of richness: the kitchen is an almost womb-like red room, dominated by a custom-made stone-topped island at its centre.

With work by Roy Lichtenstein, Pablo Picasso, Henry Moore, Alexander Calder, Frida Kahlo and René Magritte – to name just a few – the owners’ impressive collection of art plays an important role in the refined spaces. “I like it when the furniture is in dialogue with the art,” says Yovanovitch. Purchased in auctions

and international galleries, the furniture is a mix of European (mostly Scandinavian) and American design from the 1930s to the 1950s. Philip Arctander and Viggo Boesen armchairs, a Hans Wegner table, a Poul Henningsen piano and wall lights by Franco Albini are just a few of these mid-century classics. Contemporary pieces such as a Jorge Zalszupin desk, Nendo chairs and a custom-made chandelier by Jeff Zimmerman complement the look.

Giving priority to authentic materials (such as wood, stone, marble and metal), Yovanovitch designed several pieces himself: an eight-metre-long asymmetric sofa in solid oak, a table with legs in patinated metal and occasional tables in ceramic, among other furnishings. They were fabricated by skilled craftsmen, like the German designer Matthias Kohn who made the pink concrete dining table. “I love the materials for which you feel the hand of an artisan,” says Yovanovitch. “For me, it is what humanises a place and gives it personality.”

#### Previous page

A enormous zig-zagging sofa acts as both room divider and plentiful seating for a large family. The artwork above the fireplace is by David Altmejd

#### Facing page

Tucked into a curve, a dining area features Yovanovitch’s Essim Table in pink concrete for Matthias Kohn and Danish mid-century oak chairs by Ejvind A Johansen







Facing page  
Danish flooring – with some  
planks more than 7m long – runs  
throughout. The sofa and desk were  
designed by Pierre Yovanovitch

Above  
A work by New York-based artist  
Jonathan Horowitz hangs in the  
hallway. The vintage floor lamp is  
by Finnish designer Paavo Tynell



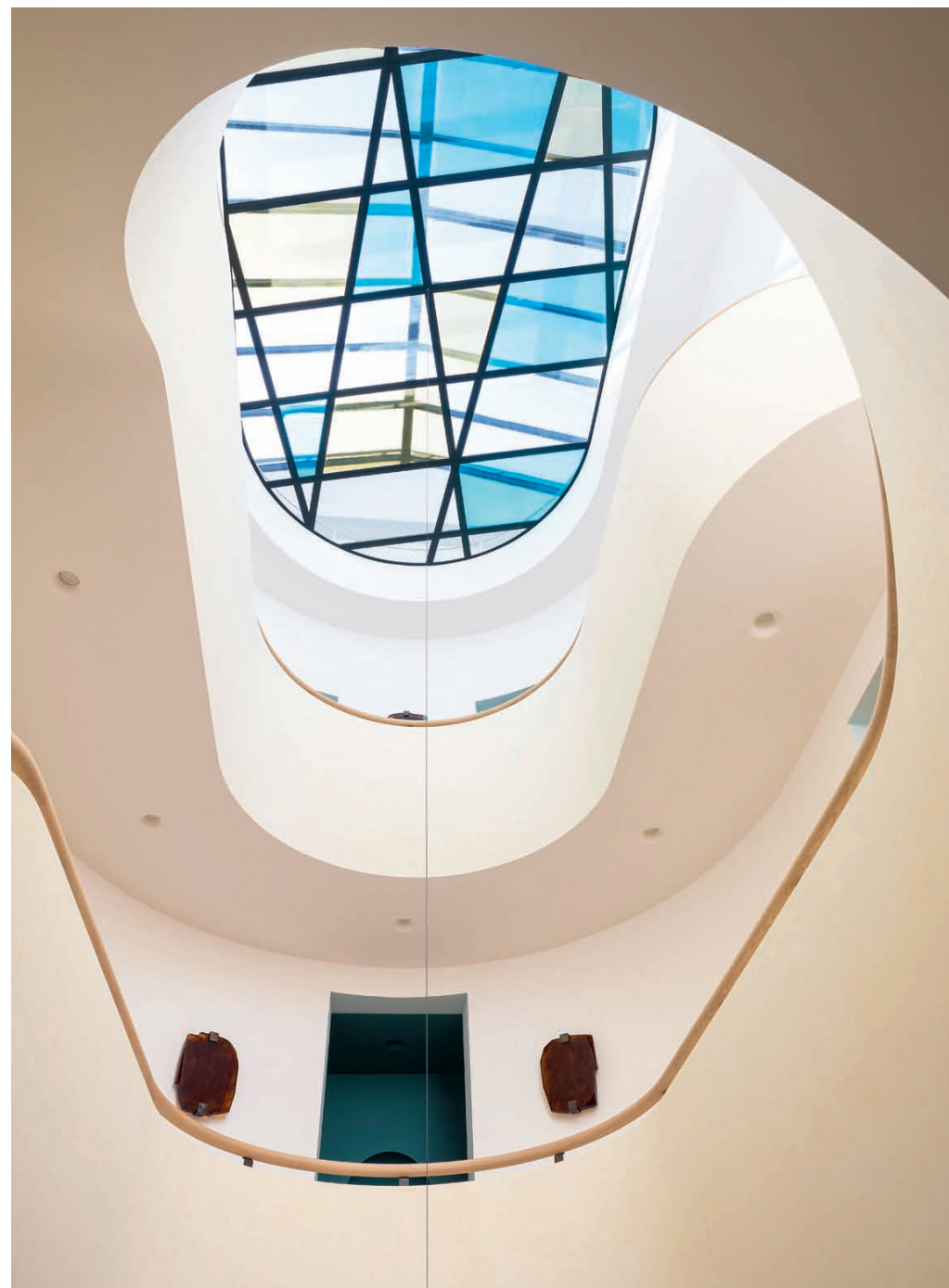




Above  
At the heart the house's sinuous  
staircase, a sculpture by Jean Dubuffet  
occupies an ocean-blue niche

Previous page  
A Frida Kahlo painting hangs above  
a red travertine fireplace. The Clam  
sheepskin chairs are by Philip Arcander

Facing page  
Snaking three floors up, the curved  
staircase is topped by a colourful  
geometric stained-glass rooflight



“I love the materials for which you feel the hand of an artisan.  
For me, it is what humanises a place and gives it personality”



Above  
A Magritte painting sits against a powdery-pink plaster wall. The 1920s red and gold chair is by Swedish designer Carl Malmsten

Facing page  
Niches – for seating, and for art – are a recurring motif in the house, creating a sense of cosy domesticity as well as a play of light and shade





Above  
Walnut bookshelves hug the walls of the oval-shaped sitting room; the vintage rocking chair and side table are by Swedish designer Axel Einar Hjorth

Facing page  
A large picture window at the rear of the property looks into the bright red kitchen. The little figure in the kitchen is a sculpture by Stephan Balkenhol

