



BUSINESS CARDS OF STONE, TIMBER AND CONCRETE

THE ARCHITECT'S OWN HOUSE
AS A COMMERCIAL TOOL

LINSY RAAFFELS, STEPHANIE VAN DE VOORDE,
INGE BERTELS AND BARBARA VAN DER WEE

Architects literally shape society: the houses, offices, shops and schools they design form the backdrop against which daily life plays out. In so doing they take account of various constraints and strike a balance between the client's wishes, the available budget, the prevailing urban development regulations and the geographical context. But when an architect is their own client and builds or renovates a house for themselves and their family, the conditions under which they work change.

More than in any other design project, they can design their own house as a stylistic manifesto, as an exemplar of a new formal idiom or as a material-technical experiment. Thereby, the design of their own house enables architects to promote themselves to potential clients and to add a life-size business card to their portfolio. As such, the architect's house, functioning as it does on the borderline between work and private life, plays a special role in the architect's oeuvre.

▲ Detail of 3B. See page 5

In this article, based on an extensive literature review, archival research and on-site visits, we describe how an architect's home develops into a business card and to what extent architects consciously deployed it as a commercial tool to attract clients. In the introduction we consider international research into architects' houses and place our own study in the context of ongoing research into architects' houses in the Brussels-Capital Region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹ We then go on to identify the characteristics of an architect's house that make it possible to define it as a specific building type and enable us to fully comprehend internationally recognized archetypes, such as an experiment, prototype, manifesto or, in the case of this article, a business card. We illustrate how the house's role as a commercial tool can be revealed with reference to three exemplary architect's houses: those of Henri Van Massenhove (1860-1934) and Gustave Strauven (1878-1919) in Brussels (1894 and 1902 respectively) and of Luc Schuiten (b. 1944) in Overijse (1976).

RECOGNITION OF THE ARCHITECT'S HOUSE AS A BUSINESS CARD

The dual role of client and designer that architects assume when designing their own house implies that the result can be read as a reflection of their ambitions, their preferences, their view of architecture. Because of this, architects' houses often appeal to the imagination and have frequently featured in international compilations like *Houses architects design for themselves* or *One hundred houses for one hundred European architects of the xxth century*.² These books are nearly always prompted by a fascination with architectural design principles or with the interior design of the individual projects. A number of authors of architectural-historical publications also acknowledge the unique added value of architects' houses by delving deeper into the way these dwellings are designed by the individual architect as an archetypical experiment, manifesto or prototype. The dwellings featured in *Activism at home. Architects own dwellings as sites of resistance* and 'La casa propio, territorio de libertad', for example, are studied as perfect settings for experimentation and as catalysts for later work.³ Although the business card as archetype is mentioned in the introductory chapter of *Het huis van de architect*, it is not fully addressed in the subsequent 45 Dutch case studies.⁴ The question of how architects design their own home as a business card and deploy it in their architectural practice consequently remains largely unanswered.

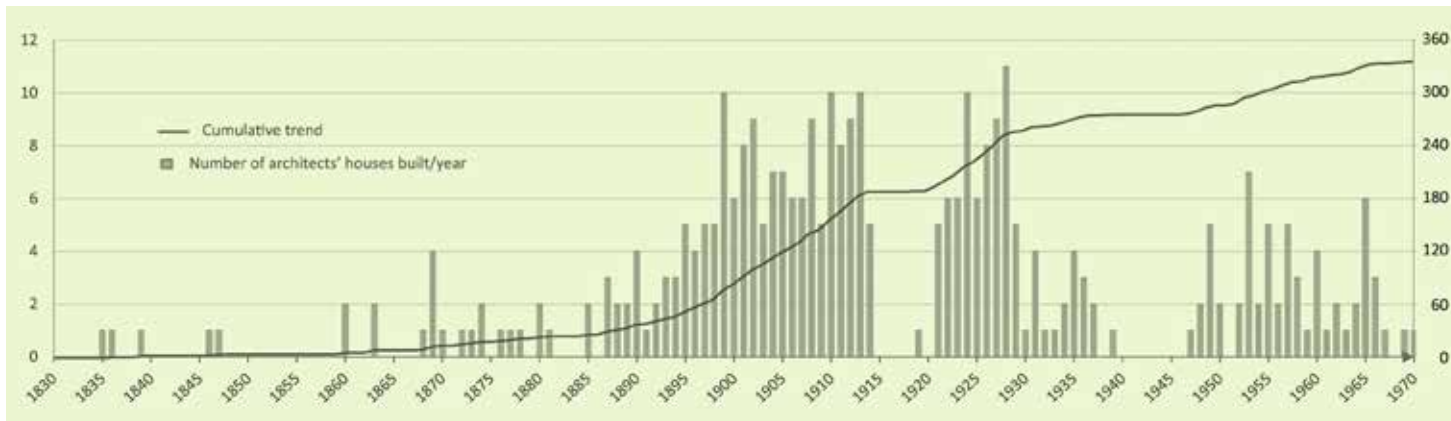
The international architecture-historical research focuses mainly on a few specific archetypes of architects' houses, combined in a few cases with in-depth analyses. However, those analyses are rarely if ever

embedded in broader research into inherent, overarching characteristics of the architect's house as a specific building type. Such typological research, in which different examples and archetypes are compared with one another, is an essential basis for a thorough understanding of the significance and characteristics of the archetypes. The need for a broad typological study is also implicit in the 'memorandum of criteria' drawn up in 2007 by the Flemish Heritage Agency in the context of the thematic preservation file 'Architects' own houses'.⁵ Our study of architects' houses in the Brussels-Capital Region, which began in 2016, seeks to fill these gaps: the inherent characteristics of the architect's house as building type are investigated and different archetypes are analysed. In this article we focus on one of these archetypes – the architect's house as a business card – with due regard for how it came about, how it is deployed and how it colours the architect's portfolio.

THE BRUSSELS-CAPITAL REGION AS TEST CASE (1830-1970)

Over the years, the reference area for this study – the city of Brussels and the eighteen surrounding municipalities – has developed into a single, densely built region with its own government, policy and architectural culture. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries all the different types of architectural training available in Belgium were to be found in the Brussels Capital Region: from an artistic education at the academy to Catholic vocational training.⁶ As a result, the Region exercised a strong attraction on (aspiring) architects. Unsurprisingly, research yielded a database containing over 330 architects' houses built between 1830 and 1970.

A chronological-geographical analysis shows that from 1885 onwards the architect's house was visible in the streetscape (fig. 1). In the first instance this was related to the rapid growth of the city's population from the middle of the nineteenth century, stimulated by the second industrial revolution. The city centre expanded and neighbouring municipalities like Elsene, Schaarbeek and Sint-Gillis became urbanized. The population in the city centre grew by half between 1850 and 1910, in Elsene it increased sevenfold and in Schaarbeek and Sint-Gillis as much as tenfold.⁷ The employment prospects for architects in these municipalities were consequently so favourable that they settled there: almost half of all architects' houses in the Brussels-Capital Region were built between 1885 and 1914, over 85 per cent of them in the four aforementioned municipalities. In this period, which roughly coincides with the heyday of art nouveau, the architect's own house offered a perfect opportunity for self-promotion: whether as an adherent of the new



1. Graph showing annual number of architects' houses built in the Brussels-Capital Region 1830-1970 (graph Linsy Raaffels, 2020)

style, perhaps with a personal interpretation, or as a representative of neoclassical or eclectic architecture catering to a more conservative clientele.⁸

After the First World War members of the modernist avant-garde discovered that the design of one's own house was an effective means of taking a stand and of putting the possibilities offered by new design principles, materials and forms to the test. More than once in the 1920s and 1930s this resulted in a manifesto house that would in time prove to be the forerunner of the later oeuvre, such as Paul-Amaury Michel's *La Maison de Verre* in Ukkel (1935).⁹ During the interwar years, as well as a stylistic development there was a geographical shift: whereas before the First World War architects had often sought to settle in the vibrant part of the city, from the 1920s they gravitated towards quiet and leafy suburbs like Ukkel. This shift also affected the type of dwelling: the abundance of undeveloped land in the green periphery meant that architects could look beyond the terrace house to a semi-detached or free-standing dwelling, which accordingly became the most popular typology for an architect's home in the interwar period. From the interwar years onwards, architects also increasingly opted for an apartment; after the Second World War as many as one in four. This development demonstrates the fact that in their choice of home, architects often followed or even initiated general trends.

THE ARCHITECT'S HOUSE AS SPECIFIC BUILDING TYPE

To fully comprehend the significance and added value of architects' houses, a macroanalysis of the geographical context and stylistic convolutions does not suffice. Equally crucial is an analysis based on the dual client-designer role, given that this is the basic characteristic that distinguishes the architect's house from other projects. With this dual role as starting point it is possible to distinguish five complementary characteristics of the architect's house as a specific building type:

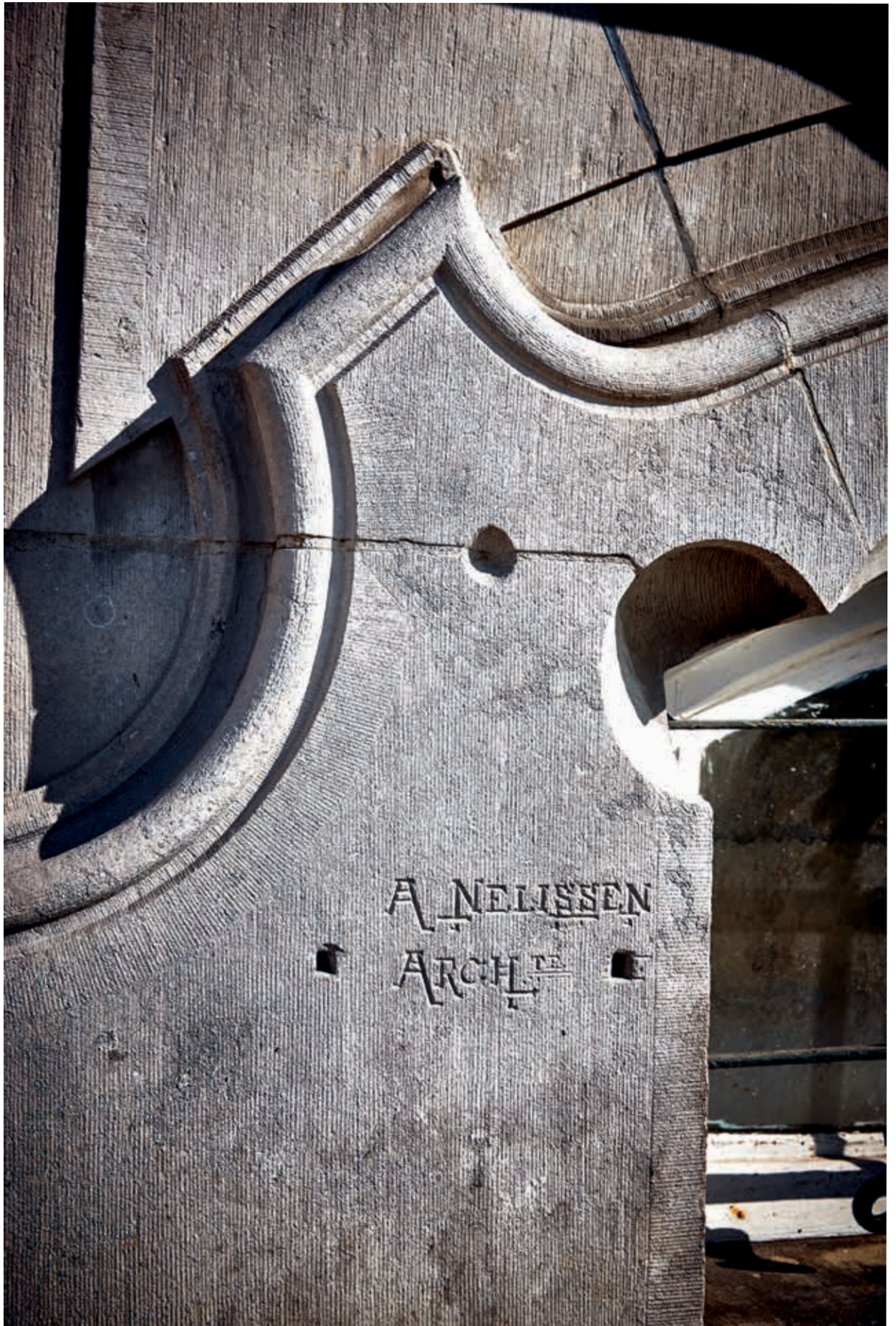
the way the architect positions their house vis-à-vis their clientele; the relation of the house to the architect's entire body of work; the combination of home and work; the architect's possible collaborations with other building actors in their professional network; and how the house compares with an earlier or later version. In the following sections we explain how an analysis based on each of these characteristics can inform us about the realization and effectiveness of the architect's house as a business card.

POSITIONING VIS-À-VIS POTENTIAL CLIENTS

The most obvious way for an architect to promote themselves is the inscription of their name and profession on a facade they designed (fig. 2). Another way of reaching potential clients is the publication of their work in architecture magazines. Less explicitly, every facade they design can be regarded as a life-size calling card from which their personal use of materials, craftsmanship, formal idiom, colour palette or stylistic interpretations can be deduced. In the design of their own house they can often go further down this road than in projects for clients. Whereas in an 'ordinary' commission the facade reflects the client's preferences, architects can design the facade of their own house as a commercial tool to promote a particular style, design principle or use of materials or, conversely, to express their versatility. This gives potential clients a clear idea of the architectural skills and vocabulary they can expect. An early example of this is the house by Paul Hankar (1859-1901) in Sint-Gillis (1893): in addition to his name and profession 'p. hankar/architecte', the front elevation displays the architect's personal artistic idiom and showcases the materials he is skilled in using (figs. 3A and 3B).

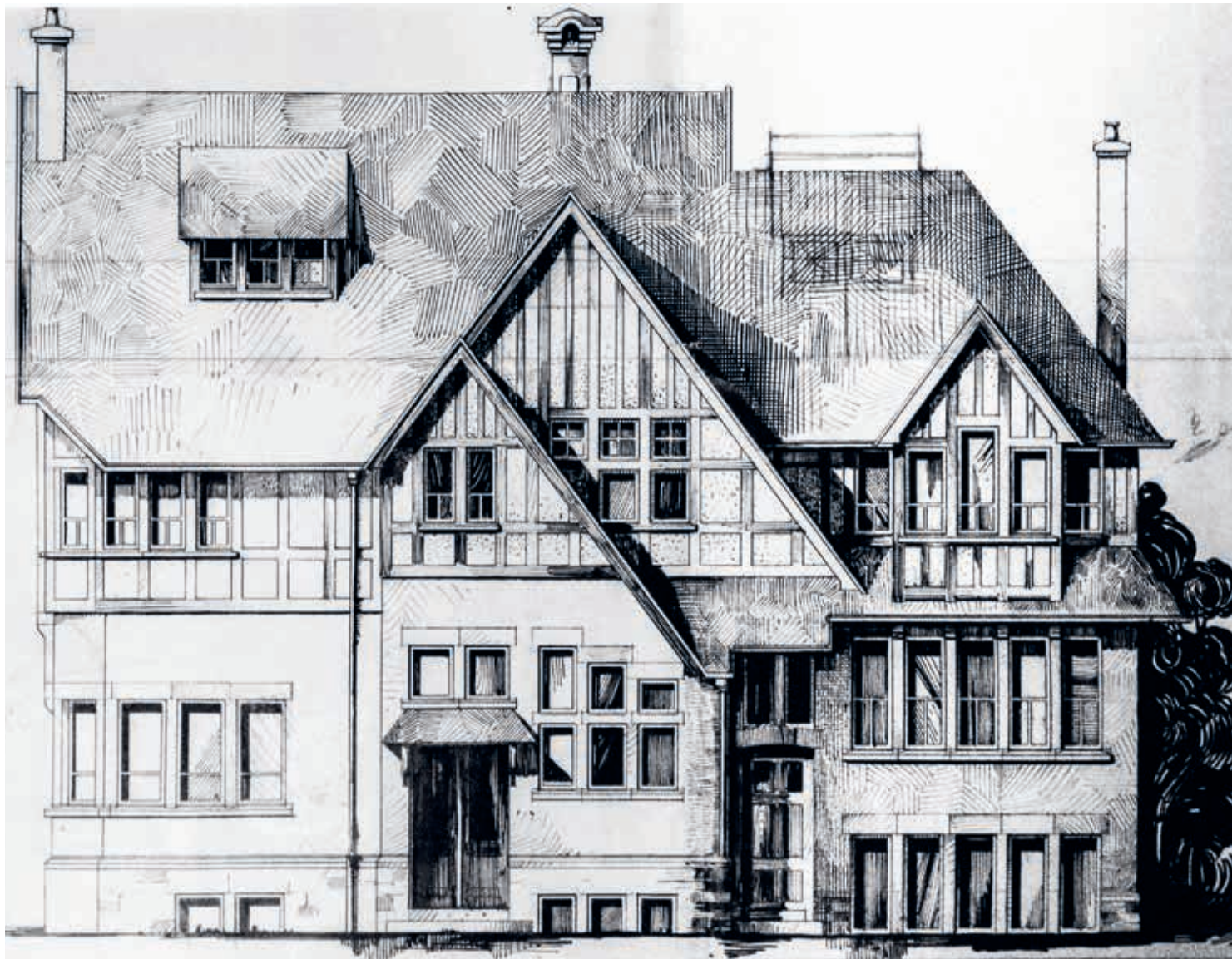
To maximize the impact of this unique business card, a carefully considered geographical location is essential – not only when the architect wants to put their stamp on the development of a new district, but

2. Arthur Nelissen's name and profession recorded on the facade of his house, Vorst, 1906, (photo Jan Verlinde, 2017)





3A. Paul Hankar's house, Sint-Gillis, 1893 (photo Linsy Raaffels, 2018). 3B. Skilfully designed stone and ironwork in the front elevation of Paul Hankar's house, Sint-Gillis, 1893 (photo Jan Verlinden, 2017)



4. Design sketch for Edouard Pelseneer's home, Ukkel, 1908 (private archive Edouard Pelseneer)

also when they want to appeal to a specific clientele. In the latter case it is vitally important that the house should mirror the socio-economic status of the intended clientele: if the architect is looking for affluent clients they would do well to build their house in one of the wealthier areas and to meet a certain higher standard. On the other hand, a socially-minded ambition to build for the masses loses credibility if the architect's own home is a spacious villa in a wealthy neighbourhood.

RELATION TO THE OEUVRE

When the architect is also the client, they have more scope than in other projects to follow their own technical, ideological, stylistic or typological preferences. As a result, the architect's own house often has a unique yet representative character: it can be regarded as a key

or means to discern the red thread of the architect's singularity running through their entire body of work. Thus the architect's house as exemplary business card often occupies a special position in the oeuvre.

Most of the architects in the Brussels-Capital Region were between 27 and 35 years of age when they designed and built their own house. This often corresponds to the first five to ten years of their careers, by which time they had already built up a certain financial capacity and acquired more experience and self-assurance than immediately after graduation. Nevertheless, the architect who waits until they are in their forties or even at the end of their career before building a house of their own is no exception. The representative nature of a house built at the beginning or end of a career is, however, very different: young architects often use their own house to steer their career in a cer-

tain direction, whereas older colleagues tend to regard their own house as the consummation of a lifelong architectural development, free from any explicit commercial objective.

THE HOUSE AS WORKPLACE

In an architect's house, apart from the private living quarters, there is often an architectural office and/or a reception area for clients. The layout of these working quarters is – unlike that in a doctor's, lawyer's or artist's house with a practice or workspace – not purely functional but also a testimonial to the architect's work. The architect will have given professional and commercial consideration not just to the facade, but also to the semi-public interior. Edouard Pelseener (1870-1947), for example, divided his free-standing villa in Ukkel (1910) both functionally and stylistically in two. On the left were the living quarters with an interior characterized by an exuberant art nouveau style. On the right, the working quarters: the art nouveau of the living quarters extended into the waiting and reception area, whereas the architectural practice was furnished in a more sober, traditional beaux arts style. The facade, a reinterpretation of the English Cottage Style, merges the two parts into a single whole (fig. 4), allowing Pelseener to showcase his interpretation of different styles to the full. But even architects' houses without a reception area for clients are often an important work-related instrument for the architect. Architects not infrequently admit clients to their private living quarters in order to show them the practical application of certain forms, layouts or construction principles.

RELATION TO THE PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

During the course of a project it is not unusual for architects to bring in the expertise of engineers, contractors, artists and other specialists of their acquaintance. In the design of an architect's house, the three-way relationship that usually exists between architect, specialists and client takes the form of a dialogue in which a previously agreed price and construction period may be subordinated to the collective ambition to innovate. With fewer constraints, more freedom and more scope to experiment than in other projects, the rapport between architect and specialist may result in new techniques or building materials being developed and/or employed in the design. Moreover, these can be repeatedly perfected without any risk to the architect's professional reputation, before being suggested to clients and eventually making their appearance in the later work.¹⁰

DEVELOPMENT OF THE HOUSE AS A BUILT ARTEFACT

Any architect wishing to use their own house as a commercial tool, consciously or unconsciously takes the four abovementioned characteristics into account when making design choices. After all, a house is not as conducive to 'reprinting' as paper business cards. Yet even these built business cards have an expiry date. After a few years, a radically modern dwelling that breaks with current conventions loses its initial impact. Changes in clientele, zeitgeist or construction methods may also prompt an architect to create a new calling card in the form of a new house. We see this in the case of over thirty Brussels-based architects. For example, in 1919 Victor Horta (1861-1947) exchanged his 1901 art nouveau house in Sint-Gillis for an existing building in Brussels, which he transformed using a manifestly art deco formal idiom. Another option is to alter one's existing house, which is what Louis Herman De Koninck (1896-1984) did: in 1968 he added two new floors, supported by a separate load-bearing structure, to his 1924 house in Ukkel, which allowed him to explore new materials.¹¹

DIVERSITY IN SINGULARITY: THREE EXEMPLARY ARCHITECTS' HOUSES

The five characteristics described above are present in every architect's house, albeit with varying degrees of prominence. Thanks to the specific way the architect consciously or unconsciously deploys them and the ever-changing context, every house tells a different autobiographical story. Within the group of houses used as business cards we also see considerable diversity of motives and methods. A house's success as billboard has a lot to do with the degree to which it responds to the prevailing architectural culture and practice and the extent to which it strikes a chord with potential clients. In order to elucidate this, we discuss three cases, each of which illustrates different motives and methods on the part of the architect concerned and a different decisive combination of characteristics. The first case concerns the house of Henri Van Massenhove, which served as a model for the many houses he went on to build in the same district. In the second case, Gustave Stauven demonstrated that a richly elaborated design is also possible on a smaller budget, which enabled him to appeal to a much broader clientele. Finally, we look at how Luc Schuiten translated his ideological convictions into an architecture in which nature played a central role. In these three cases, each with a different architectural-historical and material-technical context, the design, construction and deployment of the house as a business card provided a specific response to the prevailing architectural culture.

HENRI VAN MASSENHOVE'S MODEL HOME

The work of Henri Van Massenhove is virtually unknown, unlike that of his famous former classmate at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, Victor Horta. Interestingly, his oeuvre is distinguished by over two hundred private dwellings, 43 of which he was the owner. Three of these he lived in successively himself, the remaining forty were rented out and are therefore strictly speaking not architects' houses. Looking at his geographical work terrain we find a very high level of activity in the Plantsoenwijk, a district of green 'Squares' northeast of Brussels. In 1890, according to the writer Émile Leclercq (1827-1907), this district was 'earmarked for future populations, ... yet there is not a house to be seen; it is the district of the future, which will certainly become populated once ... a few brave pioneers have pitched their tents there.' Four years later, as one of those pioneers, Van Massenhove moved into the still largely undeveloped district. Between 1894 and 1904 he built no fewer than 86 houses here, 27 of which at his own expense (fig. 5).

In 1894 Van Massenhove designed his first building for the district: a house for himself, with offices, in a prominent position on Brabançonnelaan (fig. 6). It was the second dwelling to be built on this street. The

asymmetrical front elevation in an eclectic style is distinguished by red brickwork with horizontal bands of white stone, while the limestone plinth consists of alternating strips of white Gobertanger and Belgian blue limestone. Remarkably, all the commissions the architect realized in the district later this same year were variations on this facade; using his own home as model, he set about designing the Plantsoenwijk. The individual differences are mainly to be found in the ornamentation and volumetric effect of the facade: on some occasions he designed an exuberant gable, on others he replaced the first-floor balcony with a bay window, or added more decorative elements to the facade surface.

In 1895 Van Massenhove built his first investment property in the district, which he later leased to a family member. This was the first sober interpretation of his model home, built almost entirely of brick, with fewer ornaments and a less elaborated gable. From then on, the architect designed either one of these two variations on his model home for three out of four clients (fig. 7). As many as sixty per cent were based on the investment property of 1895, which clearly appealed to such clients as carpenters and teachers. Twenty per cent were the brick version of his own home of 1894,

5. Left: buildings designed by Henri Van Massenhove in the Brussels-Capital Region. Right: activity in the Plantsoenwijk (maps Linsy Raaffels, 2020)





6. Henri Van Massenhove's first personal home Brussels, 1894 (photo Linsy Raaffels, 2020)

7. Selection of Henri Van Massenhove's works related to the model home (photos irismonument.be and Linsy Raaffels, 2020; collage Linsy Raaffels, 2020)

Model home

1894: First realization in the neighbourhood and introduction to model home



1894 - Brabançonnelaan 7
First personal residence

1894: Interpretations on the model home



1894 - Maria-Louizasquare 42



1894 - Brabançonnelaan 17

From 1895 onwards

Version 1



1895 - Edgnotenstraat 8
First investment property

Version 2



1899 - Franklinstraat 118

Version 3



1898 - Brabançonnelaan 49
Second personal residence



1896 - Brabançonnelaan 47



1899 - Edgnotenstraat 54



1905 - Ambiorixsquare 13

8. Facade of Henri Van Massenhove's second personal home, Brussels, 1898 (drawing H. Van Massenhove and G. Löw, *Les maisons modernes*, 1901)





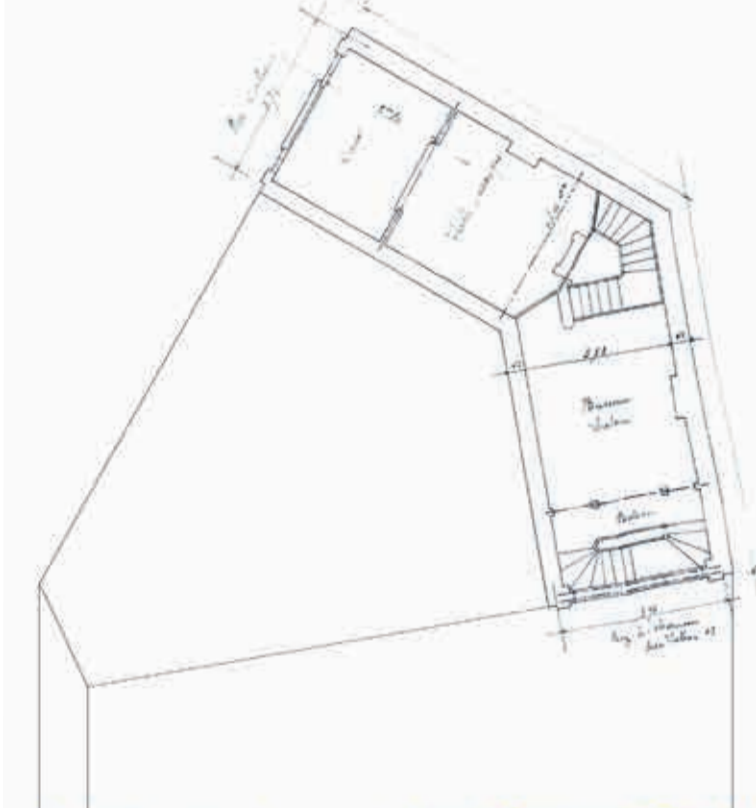
which was popular with more well-to-do clients. The remaining twenty per cent involved a grander version, built using a larger proportion of stone and designed specifically for the more affluent among his clientele, such as rentiers, doctors or engineers who had purchased a plot on one of the Squares. In 1898, Van Massenhove himself opted for this third version when he relocated to the middle of Brabançonnellaan, where development was just getting under way (fig. 8).¹²

Whereas his first house had introduced the model home, the investment property represented a more modest interpretation that appealed to less well-off clients. Complementing this deliberate socio-economic mirroring, we note also that the architect deployed the judiciously located self-financed houses as a commercial tool. They stand almost without exception on plots in undeveloped streets or parts of streets, resulting in high visibility; often they were the first houses in the street so that they immediately caught the eye of passers-by looking for a plot of land. If they liked the look of a house, the occupant could simply refer the interested party to the architect, who only lived a few streets away and could receive them straight away in his office.¹³ It is mainly thanks to this strategy that it is Van Massenhove's traditional, eclectic style that characterizes the district today, rather than the (more expensive) art nouveau which was then enjoying its heyday.

THE VIRTUOSITY OF GUSTAVE STRAUVEN

After graduating as architect from the Sint-Lucas school in Schaarbeek in 1895, Gustave Strauven worked as a trainee for other architects, including Victor Horta, until 1898.¹⁴ During this period he developed a personal, exuberant, nature-inspired architectural formal idiom that quickly came to characterize his work.¹⁵ The Maison de Saint Cyr (1900-1903) in the Plantsoenwijk is the most flamboyant example of his idiom (fig. 9). In 1902, during the construction of this artist's house, Strauven spotted an opportunity to realize an equally exuberant house for himself on a corner plot on the outskirts of this same district. Because of his limited budget as a young architect, he divided the plot in two. He sold the larger corner plot to his colleague Édouard Ramaekers and used that money to realize his own house on the remaining, extremely narrow plot measuring a mere 3.75 metres wide (fig. 10).¹⁶ It was no easy task because the narrow, angled strip of land was sandwiched between two streets. This meant that, just as in Maison de Saint Cyr, the architect had to forgo the normal enfilade layout, in which the staircase is inserted longitudinally in the ground plan. The

9. Gustave Strauven, Maison de Saint Cyr artist's house, Brussels, 1900 (photo Linsy Raaffels, 2020)



10. Gustave Strauven's own house next to the corner house by architect Édouard Ramaekers, Brussels, 1902, showing plot and location of stair (photo Linsy Raaffels, 2020; plan Stadsarchief Brussels; collage Linsy Raaffels, 2020)



11. Interior with stair in Gustave Strauven's house, Brussels, 1902 (photo Linsy Raaffels, 2019)





12A. Corbels and stone elements in the facade of Gustave Strauven's house, Brussels, 1902 (photo Association pour L'Étude du Bâti, 2015)

12B. Cast iron elements in the facade of Gustave Strauven's house, Brussels, 1902 (photo Association pour L'Étude du Bâti, 2015)

result was a plan with a central stairwell, in this instance positioned at the kink in the ground plan (fig. 11). This allowed for a maximum room width of 3.3 metres in front of and behind the stairwell, not far off the standard room width in a traditional terrace house.

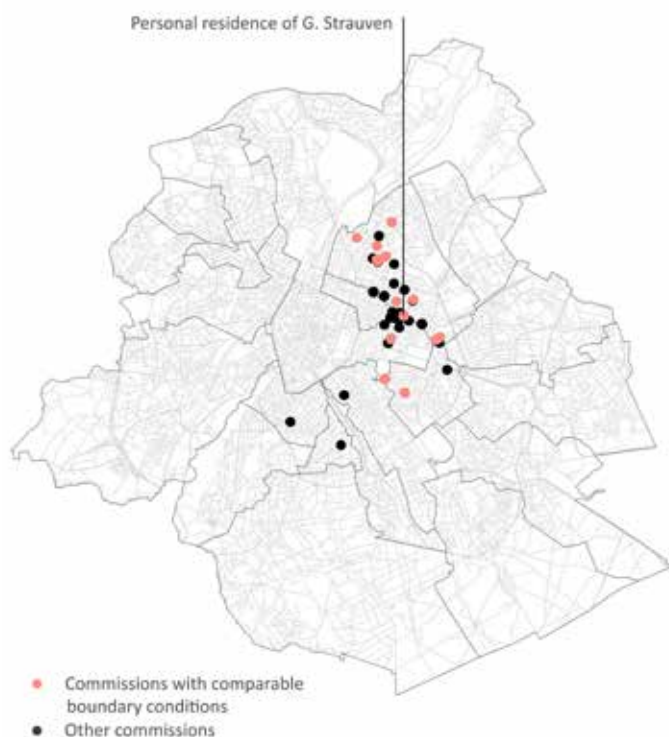
Strauven's ingenuity in making a virtue out of a necessity is evident not just in the plan, but even more so in the front elevation, which showcased his preference for traditional building materials like stone, wood and above all brick.¹⁷ Thanks to a captivating play of form, volume and colour based on yellow and blue enameled brickwork and enlivened with decorative woodcarving for the corbels and other elements, Strauven was able to confine the use of the more expensive white limestone to smaller decorative features in

the facade, without compromising his formal idiom (fig. 12a). Moreover, the repetition of elegant cast iron patterns – in contrast to the wrought iron elements more usual in art nouveau – enabled him to reduce the costs still further. By varying the orientation of the patterns he still managed to create the illusion of a more complex play of lines (fig. 12b).¹⁸ Thus, with an ingenious application of traditional and affordable materials, Strauven succeeded in designing an opulent, decorative and colourful facade which, just like his design for the more well-to-do artist Georges Léonard de Saint-Cyr, displays the exuberant formal idiom of art nouveau.

Although Strauven's house was the product of personal preferences and free of commercial motives, an analysis of his oeuvre reveals that it enjoyed unex-

pected success as a business card. While his early work was characterized by flamboyant projects for prominent clients like rentiers, lawyers and successful artists, after the completion of his own house he also attracted clients of more modest means. Tellingly, these were often self-employed entrepreneurs like bakers, butchers, stonemasons or carpenters, who were already living in the Plantsoenwijk when they engaged Strauven to design their new home or investment property (fig. 13).¹⁹ So these prospective builders would have already been familiar with the architect's striking house a few streets away. As well as the art nouveau stylistic language and the rational use of materials, the atypical ground plan behind the narrow facade would also have played a role in the choice of Strauven as architect, especially for those clients wanting to build houses on complicated 'leftover plots'. That such commissions were no exception can be deduced from the architect's later work. From 1902 onwards, approximately half of Strauven's work involved a complex plot of land. A great many of his architectural realizations are characterized by an even more rational use of materials than his own house but are still enriched with his personal formal idiom in the detailing. Also striking is the fact that Strauven frequently used the decorative cast iron patterns he had introduced in his own house in his later work, chiefly for the design of balustrades (fig. 14).²⁰

13. Works by Gustave Strauven in the Brussels-Capital Region, indicating houses with constraints similar to those applying to his own house (map Linsy Raaffels, 2020)



THE IDEOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS OF LUC SCHUITEN

Luc Schuiten received his architectural diploma from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels in 1967. Galvanized by the first oil crisis of the early 1970s he developed a design philosophy grounded in the value of nature and an ecological awareness of the scarcity of raw materials.²¹ Central to this philosophy were sustainable choices and the pursuit of energy autonomy through the use of 'soft', non-polluting technology.²² Nature, and his admiration for all it had to offer, was his main source of inspiration.²³

During the early years of his career, Schuiten designed mainly single-family homes, but they never allowed him to give full rein to his progressive philosophy. His ideal was a fully self-sufficient house, but given that such a design was without precedent it would entail great demands and risks, something that clients usually shy away from. To fully test and refine his ideas, client, contractor and architect needed to be in complete accord, to trust one another blindly and willingly accept all the risks. An almost impossible scenario – unless the architect became his own client.²⁴

During the design of his own house, Maison Oréjona in Overijse, in 1976, Schuiten and his chosen contractors together explored how to build a house that would function entirely on the basis of natural raw materials and energy sources (fig. 15). In section the house is triangular, a form dictated by ecological considerations: the roof surface was maximized and placed at an angle of 60 degrees, making this south-facing surface ideal for the installation of forty square metres of the first solar panels on the European market capable of capturing the energy of the low winter sun. The solar heat, which was used to heat the house, was stored in an insulated, 100,000 litre water tank in the basement. Heated to 70°C, this volume of water provided an energy autonomy of 97 per cent (fig. 16). The remaining three per cent was obtained from a small wood stove. In addition, electricity was supplied by a wind turbine and rainwater was harvested, making the house fully self-sufficient.²⁵

As a manifesto and as one of the first, entirely self-sufficient houses in Europe, Maison Oréjona quickly acquired international fame via reviews in, among others, *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (1980), *Architecture Belgium* (1981) and the Japanese magazine *A+U* (1985). These articles played an important role in generating broader support for the design philosophy of the architect, who gradually succeeded in capturing the interest of potential clients. If a strong affinity for that philosophy became apparent during initial discussions, the architect would occasionally show the interested parties around his own house, which was virtually next door to his office, thereby allowing cli-

14. Development of Gustave Strauven's oeuvre (photos Association pour L'Étude du Bâti, 2015 and Linsy Raaffels, 2020; collage Linsy Raaffels, 2020)

1898 -1902: First projects



1899 - Clovislaan 85-87



1900 - Ambiorixsquare 11



1902 - Troonafstandsstraat 4

1902: Personal residence



1902 - Lutherstraat 28
Personal residence - Front facade



1902 - Calvijnsstraat 5
Personal residence - Rear facade



Personal residence - Floor plan (ground floor)

More subtle recognizability in later work

Materials



1905 - Peter Benoitstraat 2-4
Brick facade with cast iron grilles

Formal idiom



1905 - Peter Benoitstraat 2-4
Graceful details in cornice, cast iron grilles

Floor plans



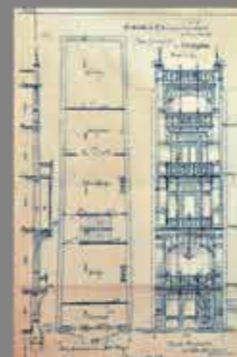
1905 - Peter Benoitstraat 2-4
Corner plot



1906 - Josaphatstraat 259
Brick facade with cast iron grilles



1906 - Josaphatstraat 259
Details of blue limestone

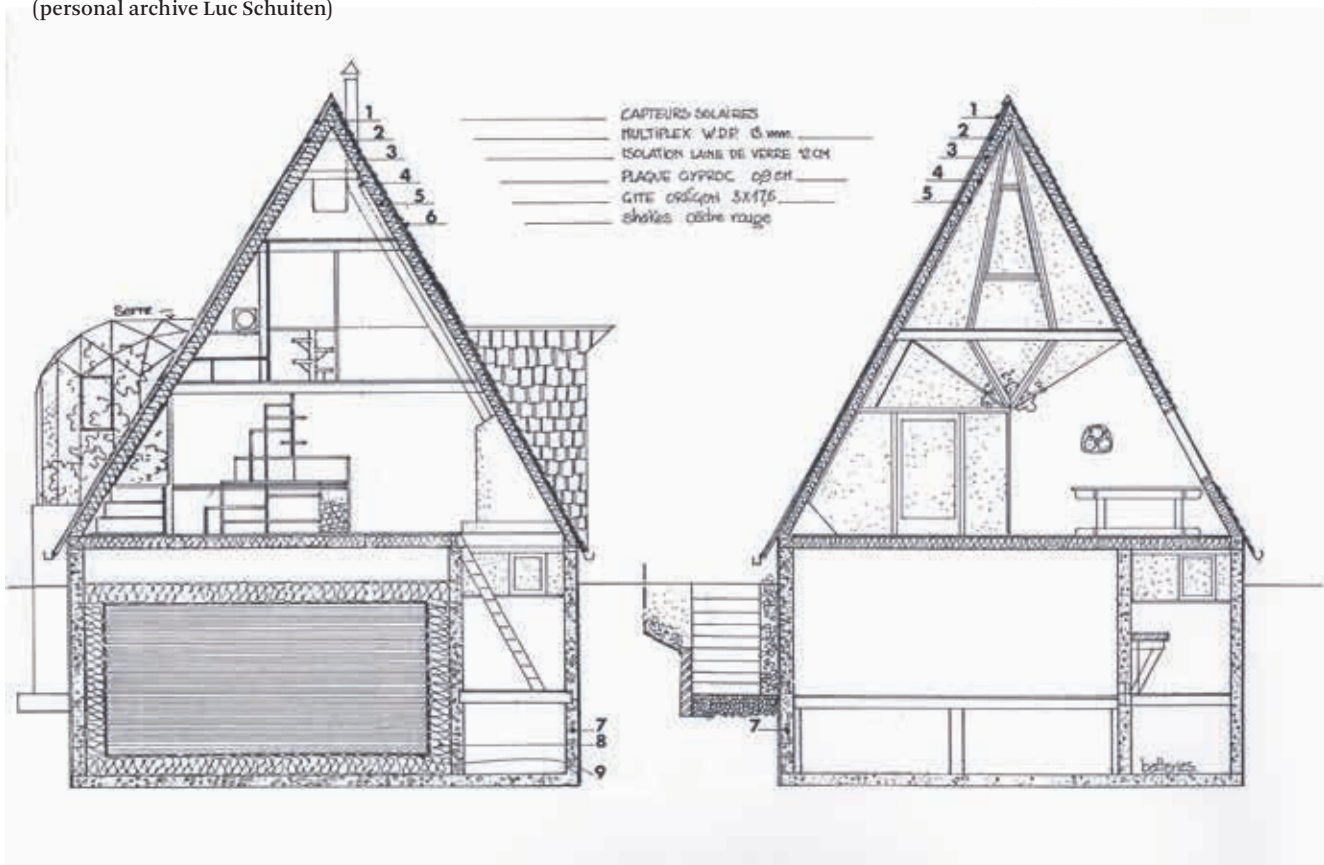


1906 - Josaphatstraat 259
Narrow parcel and central staircase



15. South elevation of Luc Schuiten's house (Maison Oréjona) clad with solar panels, with wind turbine in the garden, Overijse, 1977 (photo Luc Schuiten, c. 1980)

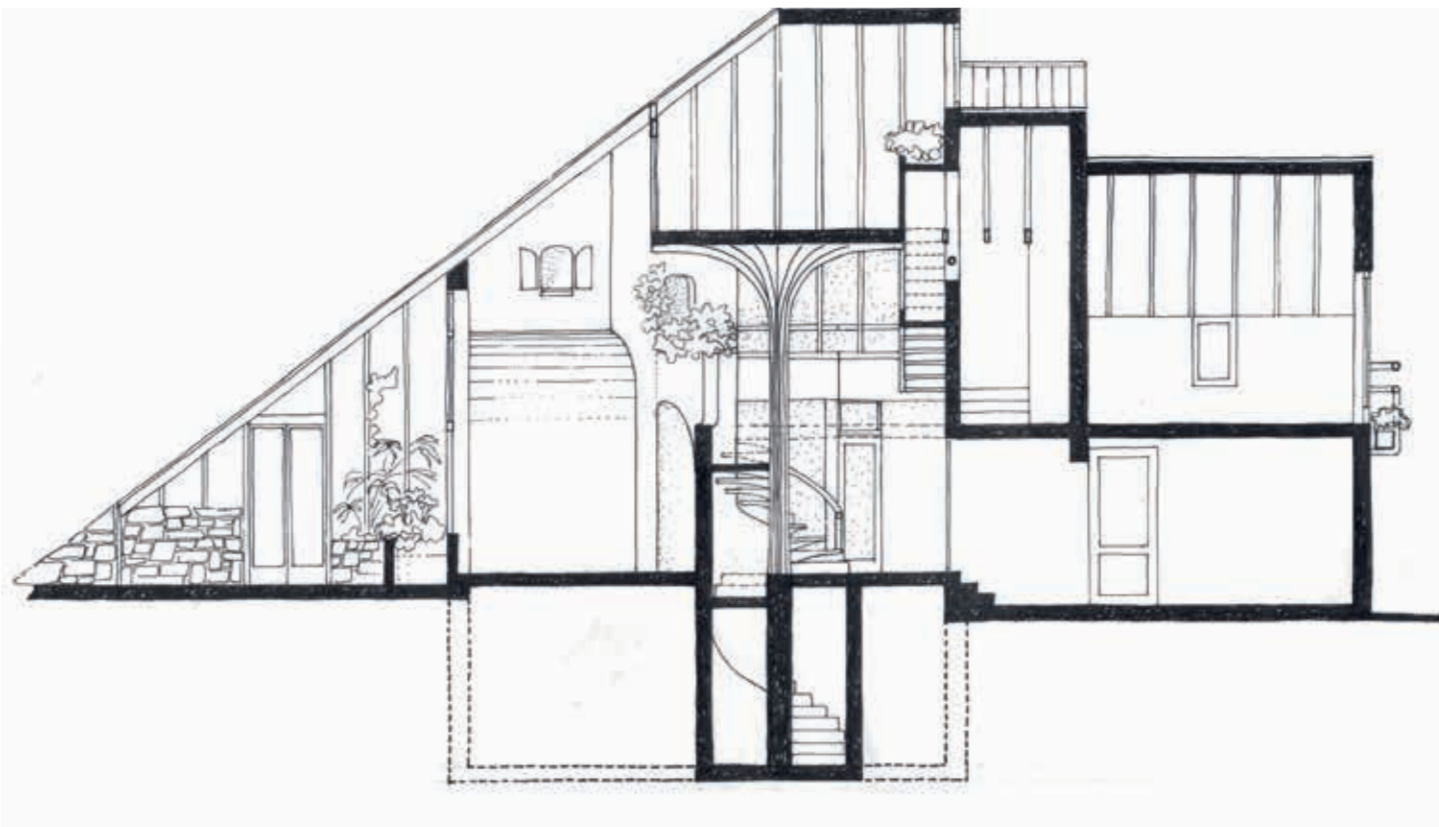
16. Section through Luc Schuiten's own house, Overijse, 1977, indicating water tank for heat storage in the basement (personal archive Luc Schuiten)





17A. Winter garden of Dawant House designed by Luc Schuiten, Province of Waals-Brabant, 1981 (photo Lara Haelterman, 2019)

17B. Section through Dawant House designed by Luc Schuiten, Province of Waals-Brabant, 1981 (personal archive Luc Schuiten)



ents to experience for themselves how his design principles translated into architecture and how the connection with nature could enrich the living experience. This often served to persuade them of the chances of success of Schuiten's innovative concepts, leading to their being increasingly duplicated in his later designs.²⁶ In the Dawant House of 1981 (Waals-Brabant province), for instance, a generous south-facing winter garden provided a strong connection with nature and bathed the dining room, octagonal stairwell and all adjoining rooms in light (figs. 17A and 17B).

CONCLUSION

Thanks to the unique client-designer relationship, architects' houses explicitly and unambiguously attest to the architectural convictions and capacities of their designers. Accordingly, they often function as life-size business cards to attract potential clients and win specific commissions. In the quest to discover how an architect, whether consciously or not, designed and used their own house as a commercial tool, an analysis based on five complementary characteristics of architects' houses proved very useful. In particular the positioning vis-à-vis potential clients, the house as workspace, and the relation to the architect's entire body of work recurred frequently in the analysis of the business card as archetype. With regard to the relationship with the oeuvre, it is no accident that each of the three cases discussed above involved an early work of the architect concerned. This is because early on in the career, an architect's own house more often presents a perfect means of creating a profile for the young architect and in so doing influencing the future portfolio in terms of materiality, formal idiom or stylistic preferences. With regards to the architect's house as workplace which, even without an office, finds itself at the interface between the professional and the private spheres, its very accessibility enables clients to get an excellent feeling for a particular design method or new design philosophy, also ensuring that this catches on more quickly than would otherwise be the case. Both Van Massenhove and Schuiten made deliberate use of this, albeit each in their own way. Lastly, the position-

ing vis-à-vis potential clients also yields a nuanced picture: in Van Massenhove's case we see a proactive and deliberate positioning, whereas the other two cases reveal a less or more subtle commercial attitude but are no less effective for that. Yet the remaining two characteristics also play a not insignificant role in producing an appropriate business card in certain cases: Van Massenhove built several self-financed houses in a short span of time because a single structure did not fully embody the diversity of his model home, while Luc Schuiten's exemplary house would never have been built without the collaboration of an extensive professional network.

This study thus provides insight into the various ways in which an architect can actively and passively promote their own house and use it as a business card. But it also shows that in addition to purely commercial motives – that are sometimes ill-considerately or too easily linked to the 'business card' archetype – other, more prominent motivations also ensure that an architect's house becomes a calling card. This means that it is not possible to fully reveal the underlying significance of an architect's house by way of predetermined archetypes. All three houses discussed in this article are in fact business cards, but their individual significance is very different: Strauven simply wanted to create a Maison de Saint-Cyr for himself, a personal experiment that evidently inspired potential builders in the district and thus went on to dominate the rest of his oeuvre. For his part, Schuiten craved the opportunity to test his architectural ideals in practice with the result that his own house became a means of allowing clients to experience his ideology first-hand. For Van Massenhove, displaying a model home was undoubtedly the primary ambition, but without thorough analysis based on the complementary characteristics of architects' houses, his prominent business cards in the Plantsoenwijk might easily be dismissed as ten a penny. Thus this study demonstrates that such an analysis is crucial to being able to specify the added value of the architect's own house based on the recognition of the architect's house as a specific building type.

NOTES

- 1 The ongoing doctoral research project 'Architects' Houses in Brussels. Strategies for Valorisation' is being conducted by Linsy Raaffels under the supervision of Stephanie Van de Voorde, Inge Bertels and Barbara Van der Wee. The research is funded by Innoviris with a DOCTIRIS grant.
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- 4 C.P. Krabbe, J. Smit and E. Smit, *Het huis van de architect*, Amsterdam 1999.
- 5 J. Braeken, 'De eigen woning van archi-

tecten', Brussels 2007 (unpublished). Also interesting in this context is Linda Van Santvoort's doctoral research into artists' houses, which exhibits several methodological similarities: L. Van Santvoort, *Het 19de-eeuwse kunstenaarsatelier in Brussel*, Brussels 1996.

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- 15 Van Loo 2003 (note 6), 521-522.
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LINSY RAAFFELS (PhD architectural engineering) conducts research into the architectural value of architects' houses (1830-1970) and links this to future valorization perspectives. The research project 'Architects' Houses in Brussels. Strategies for Valorisation' is being carried out part-time in the Department of Architectural Engineering at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and part-time in the office of Barbara Van der Wee Architects.
Linsy.Raaffels@vub.be

PROF. I. BERTELS (PhD architectural engineering) is vice dean and professor in the Faculty of Design Sciences at the University of Antwerp. Her research spans the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century architecture, construction and urbanism. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Flanders Architecture Institute and of the advisory committees of the international magazines *Construction History* and *Aedificare*.
Inge.Bertels@uantwerpen.be

PROF. S. VAN DE VOORDE (PhD architectural engineering) of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel conducts research into the history of architecture and construction, materials and architectural culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and into (modern) heritage. She is an editor of *M&L (Monumenten, Landschappen en Archeologie)*, Expert Member of the ICOMOS-committee ISC20C and founding member of the International Federation for Construction History.
Stephanie.Van.de.Voorde@vub.be

B. VAN DER WEE, through her practice, Barbara Van der Wee Architects, Studio for Architecture and Conservation (Brussels), undertakes the restoration of nineteenth- and twentieth-century heritage structures, including many art nouveau buildings. She teaches at the Raymond Lemaire International Centre for Conservation (University of Leuven), is a member of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts and an expert consultant for Europa Nostra and UNESCO World Heritage.
info@barbaravanderwee.be

BUSINESS CARDS OF STONE, TIMBER AND CONCRETE

THE ARCHITECT'S OWN HOUSE AS A COMMERCIAL TOOL

LINSY RAAFFELS, STEPHANIE VAN DE VOORDE, INGE BERTELS AND BARBARA VAN DER WEE

The house the architect builds for himself and his family can be considered as a unique, autobiographical record. Because of the twofold role of being both designer and client, the architect can seize the opportunity to conceive his house as a manifesto, a technological experiment or as a turning point in his career. Moreover, he can also deploy his house as a commercial tool to attract future clients; as a life-size business card which demonstrates his professional expertise and ambitions.

Research into this specific building type has revealed over 330 architects' houses built in the Brussels Capital Region between 1830 and 1970. A geographical and chronological analysis showed that many architects used their own home to take part in, or even to anticipate on, evolutions related to the extension of the urban fabric or the development of new architectural styles like art nouveau or modernism.

To fully grasp the significance of the architect's house as a specific building type, we critically reflect on the characteristics that distinguish this project from other buildings. As such, we have identified five inherent characteristics, namely the position of the house within the oeuvre of the architect, the relationship with the future clientele, the house as working place, how the architect engages his professional network, and finally how the house relates to an earlier or future version. For instance, the ambitions and impact of a house built at the beginning or near the end of the career will be very different. It can also be particularly

interesting to see whether the architect uses the house to engage with his clients in a socio-economic or geographical way. Whether and how the architect integrates an architectural studio or office in the house is often also telling for how he practices architecture, as is the way he collaborates with other building actors during the design. And if an architect built several houses for himself, the comparison of these projects generates a deeper understanding of the personal ambitions, professional development and the different space-time contexts in which the architect operates.

Through the lens of these relationships, we discuss how architects' houses can evolve into a business card. Therefore, in relation to the architectural and professional aspirations of the architects, especially the role and impact of their own houses on their future portfolio is investigated by means of three case studies; the own house of Henri Van Massenhove (Brussels, 1894), Gustave Strauven (Brussels, 1902), and Luc Schuiten (Overijse, 1976). Each of these houses illustrates a different ambition and tells a unique story embedded in a particular context. Ranging from a model house to a personal statement, they all show the various ways in which architects' houses can become a harbinger for the architect's future work and how it can function as a business card, both accidentally as intentionally. As such, the analysis based on those five inherent characteristics enables us to fathom the added value of the architect's house as a specific building type.