

FRAME

Art

of the

Interior

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Issue 82

The Great Indoors

Sep / Oct 2011



€19.95 EU – CHF 30 Switzerland – \$19.95 USA – \$29.50 Canada
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In the Best



Ooze

Apartment

140

Possible

Art works
dictate Ooze's
apartment
in Knokke.

Taste

Ooze

Apartment

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In Knokke, on the Belgian coast, Ooze Architects designed a holiday home for Rick Hunting that is well worthy of his art collection.

Words **Femke de Wild**
Photos **Jeroen Musch**



Behind the glazed shower stall in the master bedroom are a toilet and a sauna.

Just south of the Dutch-Belgian border lies the coastal town of Knokke, a popular destination for holiday-makers with a penchant for daytime sand and sea and night-time entertainment. Dutch businessman Rick Hunting had been visiting the town for years when he decided to buy a seaside apartment. Because the existing interior was long, narrow and labyrinthine, he commissioned Ooze Architects to transform his new acquisition into a dwelling more worthy of his art collection.

'Built in the 1980s, the apartment had a postmodern interior clad in faux marble and melamine wood,' says French architect Sylvain Hartenberg. 'We stripped it bare.' He and German partner Eva Pfannes established Ooze in 2003. Pfannes, also an architect, had been working part time for Jurgen Bey when she met Hunting. 'Eva had a hand in a collaborative project that involved MVRDV, who were designing a house for Hunting, and Bey, the man

responsible for the interior. Although the house never materialized, Hunting later called Eva about designing the apartment in Knokke,' says Hartenberg. He and I are in the Ooze studio: an old, high-ceilinged classroom of a converted school in Rotterdam.

Not only a successful entrepreneur, Rick Hunting is also a collector of contemporary art. He asked Ooze to create an interior for the display of items from his collection, a request that made Hartenberg and Pfannes think of Sir John Soane, a British architect who exhibited his collection of antiques at home. 'We had a lot of freedom,' continues Hartenberg. 'Eva knew what Hunting wanted, and Hunting respected our proposals. The project was based on trust.' Their first concept, with its abundance of glass, was too radical for a home that would be shared by Hunting's wife and their two youngest children. After revising the design, however, they hit the bull's-eye with their second concept.

'Besides creating more space, we also wanted to use only natural materials,' says Hartenberg. 'We steered away from painted surfaces and gave the art – with its own painted surfaces – neutral, authentic surroundings.' The architects focused on the apartment's bare concrete surfaces, finishing them where needed with cement plaster. Even the flooring looks as though it's been custom-designed for this interior. Browsing the Rotterdam waterfront, Pfannes discovered old floorboards originally from the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. 'That merbau flooring turned out to be crucial to the design,' says Hartenberg. 'We also used it for the kitchen walls and sauna.'

The architects' interventions generate a great sense of spaciousness. The wall between the children's bedrooms has a large 'bathroom alcove' on one side that protrudes into the bedroom on the other side of the wall. The use of glass for doors, walls and hanging wardrobe opens up



unexpected sightlines throughout the apartment. Refrigerator and oven double as pedestals for works of art, and a homogeneous lighting system twists and turns over ceiling and walls, illuminating each item on display. 'We had selected works for display in the interior,' says Hartenberg, 'but because the building process took over two years from start to finish, certain pieces ended up in locations other than Knokke. To compensate for such changes, we designed a flexible lighting system.'

Finding the ideal contractor was no easy task. 'We're not an outfit of one-liners,' Hartenberg points out. 'Our designs demand fine-tuned precision. Here in Knokke we needed not only seamless transitions between materials – glass, concrete, ceramic – but also people who understood what we wanted to do.' The solution lay with Ruben Cattrysse, who

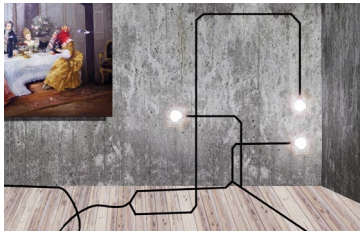
joined the project as site architect. The network of local contractors that Cattrysse had built up was a definite plus point.

Emerging from the lengthy realization phase is a richly detailed interior. Glass kitchen shelves supported by leather belts refer to Hunting's original enterprise: a belt-making company. Leather loops serve as door handles; rubber used for the lighting system is repeated in multiple sockets; and scenic Maxime Ansiau-designed bathroom tiles feature staggered horizons, with little boats floating by. Equally noteworthy are walls that seem to be customized to show the paintings they hold, and spaces that appear to cater to the often rather alienating sculptures within them – even though many pieces were chosen only at the last minute. 'You need time to get an *au naturel* effect,' says Hartenberg. 'Time for reflection allows you to make the right choices.' _

Thanks to the cubicle's glass walls, paintings by Adrian Schiess seem to be inside the shower stall itself. Artist Maxime Ansiau is responsible for the blue *Seascape* tiles, which have been used in bathrooms throughout the apartment.



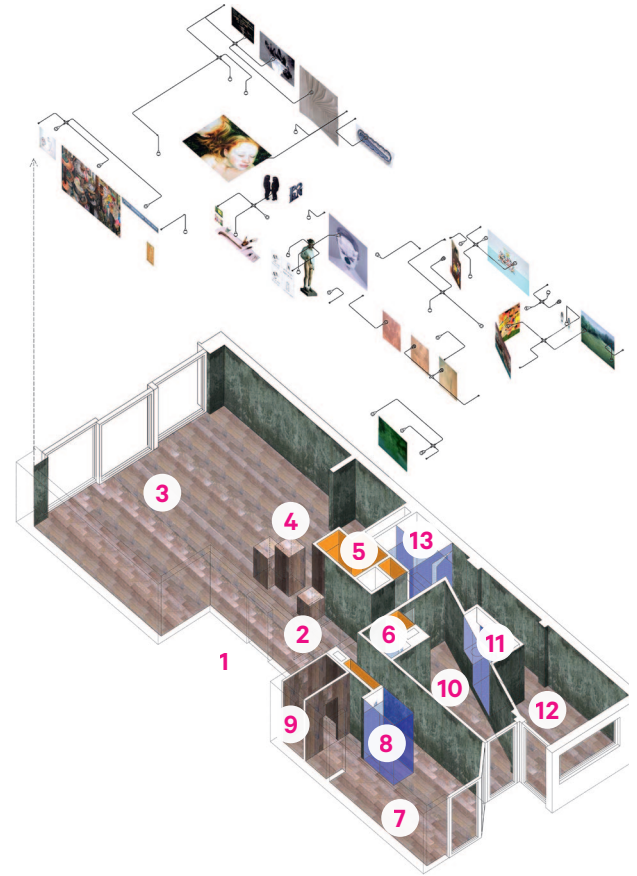
'If nobody has the nerve to do something different with their interior, nothing ever changes'



Drawings show two important features of the design: a lighting system that twists and turns through the space (top) and a 'bathroom alcove' (centre) that protrudes into the bedroom on the other side of the wall (bottom).



People entering the apartment are confronted by *Shemale* (centre), a sculpture by Sofie Muller. Merbau timber used for flooring also covers the refrigerator and oven, which serve as pedestals for the display of art.



Axonometric projection that includes works of art and lighting system.

1. Entrance
2. Hanging wardrobe
3. Living room
4. Kitchen
5. Storage
6. Toilet
7. Bedroom 1
8. Bathroom 1
9. Sauna
10. Bedroom 2
11. Bathroom 2
12. Bedroom 3
13. Bathroom 3

Art Cave

Location Knokke, Belgium

Design Ooze (ooze.eu.com)

Client Rick Hunting

Area 150 m²

Walls Cement plaster, concrete, reflective and coloured glass

Flooring Merbau (reused timber flooring from the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam)

Kitchen and bathroom tiles Maxime Ansiau (maximeansiau.com)

Table Ooze, in collaboration with Vincent de Rijk (vincentderijk.nl)

Curtains Eric Klarenbeek (ericklarenbeek.com)

Budget €180,000

Completed 2010



The Art Collector

Art collector Rick Hunting's love of unorthodoxy extends to his home in Knokke.

Why did you ask Ooze to design your holiday apartment in Knokke?

Rick Hunting: I got to know Eva [Pfannes] when she was working for Jurgen Bey. She's a nice woman – and a talented architect with a lot of good ideas. In about 2000, I was working on the design of a house with MVRDV. Jurgen Bey was going to do the interior. Winy [Maas, of MVRDV] and Jurgen are my heroes. They are the best designers and artists that I know, as well as exceptional human beings. It was set to be what we envisioned as the most beautiful house in the world.

But it was never built . . .

Ultimately, my wife and I didn't want to live in that area any more, and I sold the piece of land. It was going to be a house without walls. Special objects would form the various parts of the house. A covered wagon, for example, might have made an excellent bedroom. We still have to find our 'definitive' house; we've been drifting here and there for a while now. There are so many pieces of my collection that I want to unpack and put on display.

What kind of art do you collect?

My collection comprises 400 post-war works made by artists worldwide. Most of my more recent works are by Dutch artists or by artists with a Dutch connection, but I run across interesting art everywhere I travel in Europe. At one exhibition, for example, I walked into a small room and saw children's clothes strewn across the floor. Only afterwards did I hear that the clothing belonged to children who had died in gas chambers in the Second World War. It gave me goose flesh. The installation was by Christian Boltanski, and I now have one of his works in my collection.

What is it that attracts you to a piece of art?

Good art is a reflection of society; it makes you think. Every time you look again at a painting by René Daniëls, one of my favourites, you see something new. I'm also mad about the work of Kerry James Marshall, William Kentridge, Nan Goldin and Franz West. Their art explores the fringes of society. But I have a problem with work that takes three professors to explain what it's all about.

Certain pieces from the collection are in your apartment in Knokke. Would you call them confrontational works?

Have you seen the little sculpture in the hall? At an exhibition in Antwerp, I caught a glimpse of it on a patch of land, surrounded by very high grass. For a second I thought it was Manneken Pis [statue in Brussels of a small boy urinating], before suddenly noticing it was

a girl. I realized that it wasn't her choice to be different; she is what she is. Everyone who enters the apartment in Knokke seems to respond positively to the piece. The only one who constantly tries to pull up her pants is my grandchild.

You haven't opted for a museum-like 'white box' effect as a backdrop for your art.

My wife thinks the place is dark. The interior in Knokke can be compared to art, actually; it's right for my collection. Every time I walk in, I stop to think about what a good job we did. There have to be people with the nerve to do something different with their house or their interior. Otherwise, nothing ever changes. If a car salesman asks whether you want an older model that's served its purpose well – or the very latest model, with every cutting-edge gadget available – everybody goes for what's new. But when people are asked to choose

between a house that features the most recent technological innovations or a brick house built in 1930, everyone wants the older house. My mother, who's 78, visits us often, both in Knokke and at our apartment in Amsterdam. She thinks both places are beautiful. There are also people who just don't get it . . .

In terms of a place to live, what do you envision for the future?

We'll probably buy a house. There's nothing better than developing something in collaboration with creative people, but I've worked on the design of a house for my family twice now, and both times things went wrong. The next time I hope it goes faster. My dream is to convert an old factory into a place that is half residence, half museum. I want to live in the midst of my art. _



Brightening the bedroom of the client's young son is *Bonus Pater Familias*, a colourful painting by Christian Schmidt Rasmussen (right). The boy's bathroom is at the rear; on the other side of the mirrored window (left) is his sister's bathroom.

'It was going to be a house without walls'