

# Interiors. Notes and Figures



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## Press kit

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[interieurs-notes-figures.be](http://interieurs-notes-figures.be)

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The concept of the interior is fundamental in architectural design. Yet there are very few studies that approach it as a separate field of inquiry. Behind the permanence of buildings' façades, all sorts of transformations, adjustments and modifications are carried out by successive owners and occupants. Counter to the notion of modernity as an all-consuming phenomenon, a study of our everyday interiors reveals a vernacular architecture in which it seems that modernity itself is being consumed and absorbed.

Focusing on the home, the book "Interiors. Notes and Figures" records and analyzes the domestic landscapes that result from this process of modification. Based on the documentary evidence of thousands of photographs of home interiors throughout Belgium, it names and identifies the elements of a culture that is specific to these transformations. Photographs, texts, and diagrams pinpoint the ways in which an interior metabolism engenders and correlates forms of life and the life of forms.

Presented in the Belgian Pavilion, the exhibition "Interiors. Notes and Figures" comprises a series of architectural interpretations of the study's significant figures in the form of models, treatments of surfaces, and attitudes. Each intervention is accompanied by the pages from the book that locate its point of emergence. Bringing these figures together traces out, beyond their domestic origin, a project landscape that is walkable and reflexive. "Interiors. Notes and Figures" is envisaged as an operational study that considers the inhabiting practices of built space as potential project resources.

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**Curatorial Team**

Sébastien Martinez Barat (1983, France) is an architect based in Paris. Together with David Apeceix and Benjamin Lafore, he co-founded the studio *La Ville Rayée*. From 2007 to 2011, he was the editor in chief of the architectural journal *face b*. In 2013, he has been taking part in Le Pavillon Neuflyze OBC, the Palais de Tokyo's research program in Paris.

Bernard Dubois (1979, Belgium) is an architect based in Brussels. His studio designs projects for private commissions in Belgium, France, Switzerland, Italy and China and public commissions in Belgium. His practice ranges from architecture to furniture and often focuses on the interior.

Sarah Levy (1982, Belgium) is an architect and urban planner. Since 2010, she has been a PhD candidate within the Laboratory for Urbanism, Infrastructures & Ecologies (LoUIsE) of the Faculty of Architecture of ULB and the Center for Urban Research (Cosmopolis) of the VUB where she works on the issues at stake in urban development in view of the transformation dynamics of public policies.

Judith Wielander (1969, Italy/Belgium) is a freelance curator in contemporary art based in Brussels. She is currently co-curating the research project *Visible - when art leaves its own field* and becomes visible as part of something else. She is also developing a platform for participative design that involves Le Costantine Foundation in Lecce, the University of La Cambre in Brussels and the University of Arts in London. She has been a collaborator for several years of Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto, where she curated several exhibitions, community based art projects and conferences. She has been a member of the artistic direction of the Turin Biennale Big Social Game (2002) and part of the curatorial team for Evento II, Bordeaux Biennale of Urban Art (2011).

**Photographer**

Maxime Delvaux (1984, Belgium) is an architectural photographer who lives and works in Brussels. In 2012, he worked on *Post City*, the Luxembourg Pavilion for the Venice Biennale of Architecture with Philippe Nathan, Yi-der Chou and Radim Louda. In 2013, he carried out the whole photography series for Architectures Wallonie-Bruxelles *Inventaires # Inventories*, a collection of book published by the Wallonia-Brussels' architecture agency. He presented his last personal project about the power of propaganda in North Korea at the museum of photography in Charleroi.

**Collaborators**

Benjamin Lafore (1983, France) is an architect based in Paris. Together with David Apheceix and Sébastien Martinez Barat, he co-founded the studio *La Ville Rayée*. From 2007 to 2011, he was the editor in chief of the architectural journal *face b*.

Sophie Dars (1983, France) is an independent architect based in Brussels. In her practice, she established various collaborations with artists and architects. She has been teaching at the Faculty of Architecture La Cambre Horta since 2009, where she runs the studio *Unité de Production* with Thierry Decuypere. She co-founded the architecture magazine *Accattone*. In 2013-14, she attended Anne Holtrop's Studio for Immediate Space at the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam.

Mathieu Berger (1979, Belgium), Sociologist. Ph.D. in social and political sciences, Mathieu is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Louvain (UCL). As a sociologist of urban politics and policies, he is a senior researcher at CriDIS (Center for interdisciplinary research on Democracy, Institutions and Subjectivity - UCL) and an associate researcher at CEMS (Center for the Study of Social Movements - EHESS, Paris).

**Graphic Design**

Gregory Dapra (Belgium, 1985) and Laure Giletti (France, 1986) are graphic designers based in Brussels. Their practice focuses on editorial design and visual identity. They began their collaboration in 2012 after graduating from the Werkplaats Typografie (Arnhem).

Photo credit: Maxime Delvaux

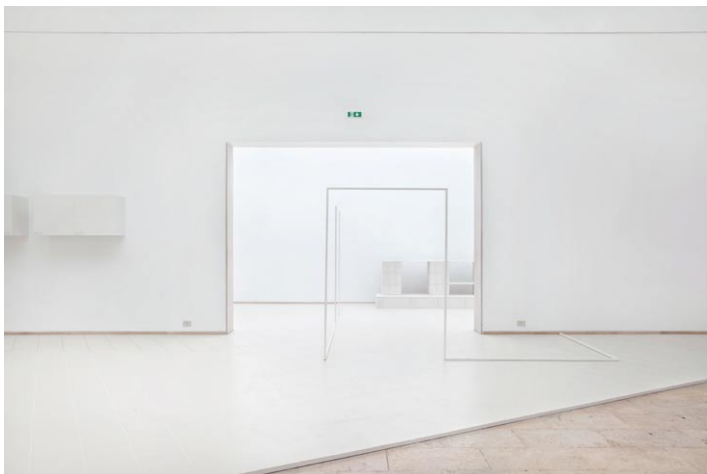


Photo credit: Maxime Delvaux

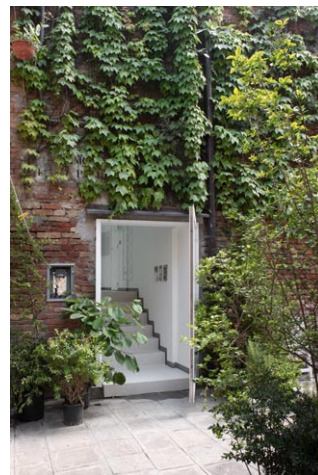




Photo credit: Maxime Delvaux



Caption: semi-detached house, owner, La Hulpe, 1973.



Caption: row house, owner, Namur, 1930.



Caption: apartment, owner, Auderghem / Oudergem, 1965.



Caption: detached house, owner, Lommel, 1983.



Caption: row house, tenant, Habay, 1971.



Caption: apartment, tenant, Saint-Josse-ten-Noode / Sint-Joost-ten-Node, 1930.



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Interiors

Forms of life

The interior is not absolute. As a living space, it provides the framework for life, but is itself affected by the lives led within it – by their necessities and contingencies, routines and circumstances, capabilities and needs, their degree of control or *laissez-faire*. Occupying a building means interpreting it – adjusting, modifying, transforming, selecting, rejecting. Analyzing the diffuse and dialogic collaboration between the architect and the occupants (both current and former) offers valuable insights for the discipline of architecture. Designing inhabited spaces means defining the relationship between a domain left to interpretation and a domain thought of as permanent.

Life of forms

While changes in economic, demographic and ecological conditions profoundly modify the production of new housing, existing buildings must adapt. This is true wherever real estate inherited from the past no longer corresponds to current needs and lifestyles. Behind the permanence of façades, an internal metabolism generates a life of forms that is correlated to the diversity of forms of life. A study of domestic interiors provides valuable information on issues that are critical to the future of architecture.

Vernacular architecture

The interior is both the subject of our study and the perspective from which we operate. Our hypothesis is that a vernacular architectural culture, characterized by the transformations made by occupants, can be observed in a domestic context. It is, however, little documented or analyzed – once construction is complete, it seems that buildings no longer open their doors.

Belgian territory

The study began on September 1, 2013. The first step was a photographic survey of domestic interiors throughout Belgium. These were selected according to a theoretical sampling method based on geographical, historical, and typological criteria, modified if necessary according to practical obstacles – of which the principal was people’s willingness to open their doors. The method was simple: the photographer, accompanied by an architect from the team, would arrive unannounced at the selected home. If the occupants were present and willing to participate, the dwelling was photographed. If the occupants refused or were absent, the team would go to a nearby dwelling that met the same criteria. Successful visits were relatively rapid, usually guided by the occupants who pointed out and explained the changes that had been made to the dwelling.

Note-taking

The visits offered a succinct and partial opportunity for observation. In relation to an interior that initially presents itself as a unified whole that is resistant to analysis, photography carves up and takes away: in the midst of a continuous and super-abundant reality, it focuses intensely on selected criteria. In each dwelling, the same protocol was applied: a frontal, wide-angle, distanced shot. The photographs were indexed according to dwelling type, building date, location, and type of occupancy. Each of them was annotated with observations and comments in the form of both text and diagrams. This empirical material forms the basis of the study.

<b>Notes</b>	Reporting	<p>How do we catalogue the ways in which interiors are inhabited? Why do we want to show the evidence of common and recurrent transformations? How can we make an example of ways of organizing furnishings that are anything but exemplary? How do we translate the sometimes almost imperceptible variations that find their laws and meaning in the manner of inhabitation? What can we learn from the oh-so-familiar ways in which the objects in a room define its status? Answering these questions requires a precise and rigorous accounting method, albeit free from any positivist temptations.</p>
	Handling	<p>Firstly, there is the handling of the images. Initially comprising 1,247 photographs taken during 256 visits, the archive was progressively slimmed down. The systematic nature of the photographic protocol produced comparable images that highlighted both differences and similarities, therefore permitting a selection. The inventory, consisting of 208 photographs, was organized through their sequence, arrangement, and confrontation. Successive layouts constituted different prototypes suggesting possible stories. The wide angle allowed the particular point of interest to be analyzed in its context. Photographs are accompanied by relevant factual information, as well as a series of texts and drawings.</p>
	Formulating	<p>Beyond a mere collection of pictures, the composition and practice of a “language of inhabiting” is proposed through the descriptions of the interiors. Inspired by the prospective systematism of Thomas Clerc in his autofictional description of his own apartment, our goal is to establish rigorous and inventive connections between the place, the viewer, and the words. Behind the apparent homogeneity of a domestic landscape, the comparisons, juxtapositions, and organization of the images point towards a plurality of communicating situations. Occupant and architectural rationalities respond to each other through the describable nature of the former and the descriptive potential of the latter. Located at the interface between the form of life and the life of forms, between the situation’s accountability and the exercise of giving an account of it, our study became a search for the right language. The primary requirement was for a vocabulary: objects must be named, situations must be qualified. Producing such a vocabulary meant going beyond the usual professional jargon. Then, there was the need for a grammar and syntax. As a fundamental operator, “invariable” basic terminology allowed us to encode and generalize the spatial relations that articulate the interiors, combining or separating their components.</p>
	Drawing	<p>The textual interpretation of the photographs is continued through graphic representation. The drawings constitute a new step in the decontextualization process. They operate through separation, superposition, selection, change in scale, and abstraction.</p> <p>The analysis is threefold: the photographs carve up and take away, the texts capture and display, the drawings summarize and generalize. These successive notes are the tools of a project in reverse that encounters a reality. They delineate figures.</p>

## Figures

## Defining a terminology

The figure emerges at the intersection of the photographs, texts, and drawings. It grasps what, in the evolution of domestic landscapes, is inherent to the metabolism of the interiors. It names forms and configurations: for example, an “inalienable object” is one that has become architectural through the loss of its mobility; a “cold hearth” is a group of objects at the heart of a home, often around a fireplace, that makes explicit the transition from an economy based on raw materials to an information economy. Figures are also a way of qualifying the attitudes and the registers of interpretation of a building: the “approximation” is the disparity between the imagined project and the final result. The figure brings to life: “a figure is established if at least someone can say: ‘That’s so true! I recognize that scene’”.\*

## Seeing with words

Whether the forms are imposed, chosen, or involuntary, figures target the causes, but only articulate the consequences. Figures relate to a tangible reality of architecture as it is. Figures gather familiarities found in divergent and sometimes contradictory processes. Establishing figures is a question of seeing with words.

## Guiding

No *a priori* logic binds the isolated figures together and determines their contiguity. Strong figures can be said to embody the entire study. Weak figures illustrate it in successive steps. An index lists the significant terms, but also the factual information from which the archive was constructed. Structuring the publication, the index subverts the inherent linearity of the book and suggests different pathways. The publication is multiple, subject to the various iterations produced by an active rather than a passive reading.

## Projecting

Naming and assembling the elements of a culture that is specific to the practice of inhabiting allows us to reveal the invisible dynamics of our familiar built surroundings. Beyond words, the figures become architectural operators. The study vouches for the usefulness of these vernacular practices in designing architectural projects that are devoid of any unifying or planning ideology, and lays bare a background process of “becoming” which stands in relation to the specific local environment.

Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, Seuil, Paris, 1977 (\*)

Andrea Branzi, *Domestic Animals: the Neoprimitive Style*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1987

Thomas Clerc, *Intérieur*, L'Arbalète/Gallimard, Paris, 2013

Xavier De Maistre, *Voyage autour de ma chambre*, GF Flammarion, Paris, 2003

Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, 1967

Charles Jencks, *Architecture Bizarre*, Academy Editions, Denoël, Londres–Paris, 1979

Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1964

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Recherches philosophiques*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005

024



Le seuil distinguant la cuisine du salon est marqué par la rencontre de revêtements de sols différents. Cette limite diagonale joint l'angle du bâtiment à celui du socle de la cheminée. Malgré la présence d'aspérités au plafond distribuant l'espace en trois parties, la division manifeste du sol engendre deux espaces équivalents et complémentaires. La position de la table, neutre, souligne ce compromis radical.

The threshold between the living room and the kitchen is marked by the meeting of two types of floor covering. This diagonal demarcation links the corner of the room to the base of the fireplace. Although the ceiling's configuration divides the space into three, the floor's division prevails to create two equivalent and complementary spaces. This radical compromise is highlighted by the neutral position of the table.





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Banquette, radiateur et soubassement sont unis et confondus par une teinte rouge identique. L'ensemble coloré se détache du mur blanc et s'apparente à un canapé disproportionné. Des objets divers, amalgamés, profilent un meuble figuré.

A banquette, a radiator, and the lower part of the wall are merged and united as one by the same shade of red. This colorful ensemble stands out from the white walls and resembles an oversized sofa. An amalgamated group of diverse objects forms a figurative piece of furniture.



069



Appartement  
Propriétaire

Apartment  
Owner

Auderghem / Oudergem  
1965

074



L'ensemble des petits et gros électroménagers est entreposé dans une même pièce. La cohérence manifeste de cette gamme d'objets standards est soutenue par un meuble qui s'immisce dans la série en en reprenant les attributs. Par analogie, l'apparence normée d'un mobilier technique devient effet de style.

All of the large and small electric appliances are stored in the same room. The obvious similarities between these standardized items are highlighted by the presence of a wall cupboard with similar attributes. By analogy, the family appearance of domestic appliances becomes a stylistic effect.



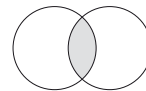


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Deux fauteuils font face à un mur à demi carrelé. Un réfrigérateur, quelques meubles et une canalisation évoquent les proportions d'une cuisine qui n'est plus là. La pièce est double, d'un côté sont groupés les attributs du salon, de l'autre persistent les restes d'une cuisine. Le collage de deux groupes de mobilier témoigne d'un moment d'indétermination et rend la dénomination de la pièce incertaine.

Two armchairs face a wall with tiles on its lower half. A refrigerator, some furniture, and a pipe evoke the kitchen which is no longer there. The room is double: on one side we find the attributes of a living room, while the remains of a kitchen survive on the other. The combination of two groups of furniture creates an indeterminate state that makes the room's naming uncertain.



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Deux tablettes sont fixées à l'armoire et au mur. Le meuble au centre unit et isole ces deux surfaces. La composition tripartite, et l'utilisation d'un bois d'aspect similaire, forment l'idée d'un tout malgré la persistance des parties. Par l'intermédiaire de ses accessoires et des réseaux, l'armoire est prise dans le mur. Défait de sa mobilité, ce groupe solidaire s'apparente à un objet inaliénable.

Two countertops are fixed to the wardrobe and the wall. The wardrobe unites and separates these two surfaces. The tripartite composition and the use of a similar type of wood convey the idea of a whole, despite its being made up of distinct parts. Through its accessories and the plumbing, the wardrobe is secured to the wall. No longer mobile, this unified ensemble becomes an inalienable object.

