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RECALL: 2/11/16



HALL

The clean lines of the architectural staircase add to the property's understated air, with the hall and living areas delineated by polished concrete and textured oak flooring respectively.

For a similar concrete floor finish, try Puur, puurfloors.com. For a similar metal banister rail, try Fine Iron, fineiron.co.uk.

BELGIAN FARMHOUSE

Inner PEACE

With a flowing layout and pared-back interior, the simple style of this recently renovated home is a lesson in perfect harmony

WORDS SARAH FARLEY PHOTOGRAPHS JAN VERLINDE



During the ten years before Ann-Sophie De Stoop and her husband, Charles, decided to rebuild this early 20th-century farmhouse in the Belgian countryside, she amassed a considerable file of ideas for it. “I’m a complete magazine addict and the folder was full of pages I had torn out of them, pictures of furniture and spaces I liked,” she says. “For a decade, I planned what our house would be like.”

WORKING PARTNERSHIP

To help them achieve Ann-Sophie’s dream, the couple chose long-standing friend and architect, Benoit Viaene. “I knew he was good at respectfully giving old buildings a second life,” says Ann-Sophie. They decided to keep the exterior walls of the house but to demolish the internal walls so they could create a new layout that would flow in an elegant yet practical way. “This now means that we use the whole house every single day, even the laundry room,” says Ann-Sophie.

To help further improve the flow of the carefully planned spaces, with their mix of wood and polished concrete floors, the trio decided to finish the walls in white lime plaster. Combined with the arched windows that are so characteristic of buildings in this region of northern Belgium, the overall effect is akin to that of a meditative cloister, with windows thoughtfully positioned to provide views of the lush green fields and farm animals on both sides of the house. “We have cows on the right and horses on the left,” Ann-Sophie says.

SITTING ROOM

The austere lines of the black square fireplace are softened by the white relief sculpture (above), while Ann-Sophie’s love of combining furniture from different eras is shown by her choice of chairs, which range from an 18th-century piece (right) to a more recent

vintage design. The long, low table is by the property’s architect, Benoit Viaene. **Wallwave Vibration artwork** by Loris Cecchini, Galleria Continua, galleriacontinua.com. **Vintage Pierre Paulin chair**, Authentic And So, authenticandso.com. **Aesthetics table**, Benoit Viaene, benoitviaene.be.





KITCHEN

The large French range cooker is backed by a wall of creamy white tiles. In contrast, the island, inspired by a picture of an old Italian chest, is topped with a Brazilian marble known as Shiraz because of its red tones. In the informal

eating area (right), vintage furniture – an old Indonesian table and wirework stools – offers a stylish yet practical option for a family of five. **Similar range cooker.** Lacanche, Fourneaux de France, lacanche.co.uk. **KM05 wire stools,** £240 each, Pastoe at Viaduct, viaduct.co.uk.



CONTEMPORARY INSPIRATION

The property's restrained interior has another function, acting as a domestic gallery space for a collection of contemporary art that changes as Ann-Sophie buys and sells pieces. "I studied history of art and from 1997 worked for Christie's, the fine art auctioneers," she explains. "About five or six years ago, I decided to become a consultant for the firm so that I could set up my own antiques and vintage business, Authentic And So."

It was the outbuildings that came with the farmhouse that convinced Ann-Sophie they should buy it, and she now uses them on her biannual viewing days: "I love to show people how to combine old and new," she says. "It always works, as long as the pieces have soul. We're lucky in Belgium to have so many interesting artists, whose work I love to live with."

There is one artwork that will never leave the De Stoop home: a white, circular, dotted resin piece by the Italian artist Loris Cecchini, which the De Stoops discovered while visiting San Gimignano in Tuscany. "We fell in love with it and decided we'd find a place to display it when the house was finished. We put it above the fireplace and plastered around it."

MATERIAL WORLD

In her choice of artwork and the way she has furnished her home, it seems texture is important to Ann-Sophie. A bespoke black steel cabinet displays a selection of irresistibly touchable treen that she started collecting at the age of 16, while a circular artwork in the informal eating area turns out to be the wooden top of a wine table, with pieces of old linen still attached. The kitchen island is topped with a thick slab of red-toned Brazilian marble, while the base was inspired by an old Italian walnut wood chest, a picture of which Ann-Sophie had filed in that voluminous folder. It appears that ten years of inspiration gathering has more than proved its worth, leading to the creation of a beautiful and harmonious home for a busy family.



DINING ROOM

The impressive acacia wood table with wood pedestals was specially made for Ann-Sophie, who has paired it with vintage Danish Erik Christensen Boomerang chairs.

Industrial chandelier, around £1,630. Workstead, workstead.com.

White on Linen (on left) by Nathalie Provosty at Jablonka Maruani Mercier Gallery, jmrngallery.com.

Artwork by Leon Vranken, Meessen De Clercq, meesserdeclercq.be.



STUDY WINDOW

Characteristic of the local vernacular, this arched window (left) was positioned to make the most of the view. **Artwork with feathers.** Carol Solvay, carolesolvay.be.

MAIN BEDROOM

Walls finished in a velvety off-white plaster bring a gentle warmth to this inviting space. The shape of the contemporary fireplace (below) is neatly echoed by the radiators under the window seats, while one of the more unusual objects

in this room is the whale bone on display next to the door.

For similar Belgian linen bedding, from £36 for a pillowcase, try Libeco, libecohomestores.com.

BATHROOM

The sense of serenity continues in the bathroom (right) where the washbasins and bath, which are set in Belgian marble, have been aligned to run in the same direction as the wide floorboards.

Gris Cehegin marble. Van Den Weghe, vandenweghe.be.





“

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GUEST BEDROOM

The bedhead (above left) has been cleverly designed to incorporate a hidden washbasin and storage shelves (above) for towels and toiletries. Black fittings were specially chosen to make a dramatic contrast with the wood surround. **Similar tap**, Tre Mercati Milan Black mixer tap, £272. QS Supplies, qssupplies.co.uk.

STUDY

Comfortable vintage chairs and cupboard doors, disguised by being given the same treatment as the walls, contribute to the contemplative mood in this quiet corner **Artwork**, Tim Volckaert, bamart.be.