

Award-winning architect and product designer Vincent Van Duysen has spent more than thirty years honing a multidisciplinary approach that he calls simply “the art of living.” Since establishing his own practice in 1989, Van Duysen has developed an extensive portfolio that ranges from private residences around the world to a new hospitality project for JNcQUOI in Comporta, Portugal. While the commissions have been diverse, the visual and sensory experiences Van Duysen seeks out have remained the same. “My work is pretty quiet and calm and serene and contemplative,” he says. “For me, an interior is all about calming down the senses and bringing in a great sense of comfort and well-being.”

The Belgian designer purchased a former notary’s office in Antwerp, his hometown, and transformed its warren of rooms into a simplified, open-plan living space. While the building’s nineteenth-century neoclassical style was respected with the restoration of period features, including an original staircase that was scoured, sanded, and stripped down to its barest essence, natural light was amplified with the introduction of three oversized windows with industrial steel frames. “They’re kind of the protagonists,” he notes of the impact these new additions have had on the ground floor.

A number of interior walls were knocked out to create a sprawling one-thousand-square-foot (one-hundred-square-meter) living room that, at first, Van Duysen admits he was “very scared” to decorate. Furniture was placed at asymmetrical angles to create intimate zones within

the space that tailored to daily needs. “It’s a place where you can hang out, where you can read, where you can rest, where you can meditate, where you can play with your dogs,” he says. Much of his enjoyment comes from the curated selection of pieces on display, including vintage Chinese stools, side tables sourced from Italy, and a low-standing B&B Italia coffee table holding an impressive collection of books. On top of a wooden pedestal sits Van Duysen’s most treasured possession: a sculpture of an owl by British contemporary artist Thomas Houseago. “I like the fact that it relates somehow to a mask,” he says. “It’s like a sacred sculpture that stands in the middle of my living room and watches over everything that happens.”

Throughout the property, Van Duysen focused on warm, natural materials. Wide poplar floorboards were laid down on the first and second floors, while walls were plastered in a bone-colored finish that was enhanced by handwoven Belgian linen furnishings in the same shade. In the attic, which was not renovated until more than a decade after the rest of the house had been completed, seventeenth-century reclaimed oak planks were placed across the floor and along one wall to complement the heavy oak-beam ceiling. Tucked into one corner, a bath made from slabs of locally sourced Belgian bluestone adds a subtle contemporary note.

“It’s all very soulful,” says Van Duysen of the home he’s created. “It’s very personal, and it really reflects me, whether it’s the choice of materials, the vast interior, or the furniture and art pieces. All of them are in balance and in dialogue with each other.” —Pip Usher











