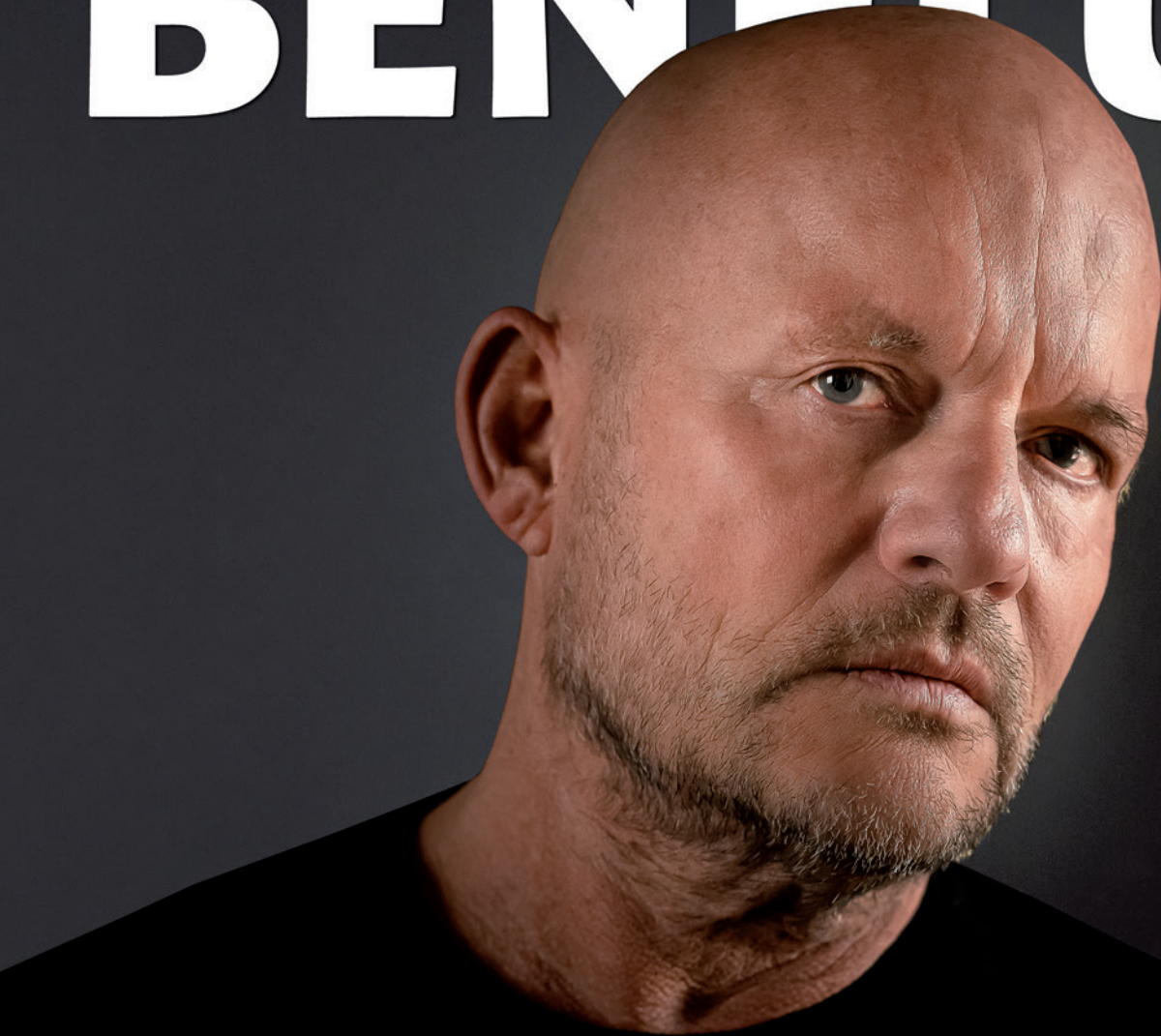


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BENELUX



**ZEELAND'S
SEAFOOD
DELIGHTS**

**CREATING, ON A
HUMAN LEVEL:**

**EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW
WITH VINCENT
VAN DUYSSEN**

**PLUS:
THE ARTS IN ANTWERP
OUTSTANDING DUTCH DESIGN
CULTURE, TRAVEL & EVENTS**

PROMOTING BELGIUM, THE NETHERLANDS & LUXEMBOURG



Vincent Van Duysen. Photo: Piet Albert Goethals

Creating, on a human level

Throughout its history, the port city of Antwerp has brought forth its share of talent that has put it on the map as one of the world’s leading creative hubs. Among these noteworthy individuals is Vincent Van Duysen, hailed as one of Europe’s most renowned architects and designers.

TEXT: PAOLA WESTBEEK



VVDA 2021 EK Residence, LA.
Photo: AD USA (Stephen Kent Johnson)



VDA 2021 EK Residence exterior.
Photo: Stephen Johnson

After completing his studies at the Sint-Lucas School of Architecture in Ghent in 1985, Vincent Van Duysen (Lokeren, 1962) embarked on the first steps of his prolific career training alongside post-modernist designer and architect Aldo Cibic in Milan and later working with Jean-Jacques Hery in Brussels and Jean De Meulder in Antwerp, the city he has called home for more than three decades.

Van Duysen established his eponymous multidisciplinary firm in Antwerp in 1990

and has since added everything from architectural and interior projects (including designing Kanye West and Kim Kardashian's house in California; Winery VV, nominated for the Mies van der Rohe Award; and the interior of Graanmarkt 13 in Antwerp) to collaborations with international brands to his portfolio. This past June, he continued his partnership with Zara Home – started last year – by launching a dining and entertaining collection that features cabinets, tables, chairs, tableware, cutlery, linens and more.

Van Duysen's work, which fluidly merges architecture with the design of interiors, products and furniture, is characterised by the use of pure, natural materials and meticulous attention to how space is experienced. Within these main pillars, he embraces timeless aesthetics and resolutely eschews fleeting trends.

In 2016, Van Duysen took on the role of creative director at Molteni&C, a leading Italian furniture design brand with more than 600 stores worldwide. From 2018

to 2020, he was Sahco's creative director and is now one of the Danish textile company's senior designers. Van Duysen has been lauded numerous times with awards such as the Flemish Culture Prize for Design (2015) and the Henry van de Velde Lifetime Achievement Award (2019). In 2016, he was named Designer of the Year.

Were you born a creative?

My parents educated me across many different arts as a child – architecture,



VDA 2019 August Antwerp. Photo: Mark Seelen

painting, arts, photography. Thanks to them, from an early age, I inherited an interest in the arts and got the education to develop that further. It obviously helped that I always had a natural kind of understanding of beauty. I always had a very intuitive sense of creativity in all forms: dance, fashion and so on. I took up architecture because within my parent's circle of friends there was a professor from the Sint-Lucas School of Architecture in Ghent who explained to me that the enduring quality of architecture was that it covered so many aspects of all of the applied arts I had been exposed to. Architecture gave (and still gives) me the opportunity to express my creativity in many different ways.

In your 20s, you trained with Aldo Cibic in Milan. What do you remember most about that experience?

When I started, it was around 1985. I was passionate about architecture and design but still had a lot to learn. Postmodernism was emerging as a recognisable style and, in many ways, that influenced my outlook. I was always very interested in architecture that exhibited a rigor or purity, but due to my time working in Italy with Aldo Cibic and Sottsass Associati, there was always an element of playfulness and spirit to my work. My time with Cibic in Milan gave me an appreciation for essential and pure forms.

In 1990, you founded Vincent Van Duysen Architects in Antwerp. Tell us about your first major project.

My first apartment in Antwerp (VVD I Residence), followed by the renovation of AK Residence, still in Antwerp.

What has been one of the most fulfilling projects to work on and why? And the most challenging?

Too many to mention. They're all different and have had the right share of self-fulfillment and challenges. It depends on the scale, the location, or the client.

You have referred to your work as 'human-centric'. In your designs, how do you go about capturing the essence of what your clients want?

I work for human beings first and foremost, to improve their lives in an organic and timeless manner. I want to keep on designing and creating new architectures, products and interiors for mankind in an organic way, giving timeless objects to human beings. Ever since the begin-

ning of my career – 30 years ago – the most important thing has always been to consider architecture as a profession dedicated to humanity; and that means starting from the architecture of places whose inhabitants need to feel protected and relaxed, right through to the furniture and the objects around them that are necessary for them to live a comfortable and happy life. It is very important to understand the client, to meet their demands and wishes, but to also have mutual respect and a chemistry.

Who or what has inspired you most in your career?

I am like a sponge absorbing from the most diverse disciplines. Everything has the potential to inspire me: a book, a work of art, all sorts of visual stimuli, galleries, movies. It all goes through the filter of my empathy and my imagination, and that's how I create. But I'm optimally creative only when surrounded by people. I believe that for me, daily life, daily encounters, is what inspires me most. And my travels. And my team!

How has your work evolved during the past decades?

My approach over the years has changed and evolved a lot due to the ever-changing clients' requests, but also to what each decade required of us architects and designers. We're living in a fast-paced, on-demand society, so we need to be more aware of the quality and beauty of good design. In my case, even though today there is a lot of technology in designing and planning, I am still aiming for authenticity and consistency. What hasn't changed is my human-centric approach, which instills a very organic feeling into my work. I enjoy sharing and being inspired, and I think it is important to develop work that demonstrates a progression or evolution of thinking. I like that people refer to my work as timeless, but it is important to me that my work continues to be contemporary, surprising and reach people on an emotional level.



VVDA 1994 AK Residence Antwerp.
Photo: Alberto Piovano



VVDA 1988 VVD I Residence.
Photo: Giorgio Possenti



VVDA 2020 CASA M.
Photo: Ricardo Labougle

Last year you started a collaboration with Zara Home. Tell us about your upcoming dining and entertaining Zara Home+ Collection 02. Where did you get your inspiration for the pieces?

The inspiration came from wanting to translate my DNA into a full programme, harking back to the last 30 years of my work. The starting point for this challenging exercise was to revisit the key elements that defined my signature, distil shapes and forms and instil purity into these new creations.

Your home (and Dachshunds) have been featured in numerous publications. Are you a homebody?

I am not a homebody per se because I like to travel, meet people or enjoy nature, but of course, it is also true that I enjoy staying at my two homes to unplug, re-energise and feel protected.

What are you doing when you're not working?

My mind never stops working, but I meditate in the morning before starting my day.

After a working day, I go to the gym and train with my personal trainer, after which I go home to enjoy my family and dogs.

What are the draws of living in Antwerp?

Belgium and Antwerp are strongly cosmopolitan in both arts and culture and have a huge breadth of creativity – theatre, performance, dance, fashion, architecture – with participation by many, but in varied and unique ways. In every discipline, like architecture or fashion, there are a lot of individual expressions according to unique personalities. The cultural and creative aspects of the Belgian cultures or Antwerp's have always inspired me, even to this day.

Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

I want to still be where I am now; that is, being creative. I would like to expand my portfolio by creating more public projects with something dedicated to art, like a museum or gallery, or something sacred like a chapel or church. And I'd like to be considered an inspiration to the world. My creativity is my longevity.

VVDA 2017 VO Residence, Knokke, Belgium. Photo: François Halard



VVDA 2017 VO Residence, Knokke, Belgium. Photo: François Halard

VVDA 2003 VVD II Residence.
Photo: Thomas Seear Budd

