



Pure and tactile materials, essential design and authenticity. These are the hallmarks of Vincent Van Duysen's designs. In 2015 he oversaw the concept and the complete refitting of the *RH3 Expedition Yacht*.

«The main challenge was to avoid typical boat interiors while respecting traditional naval design elements and create a serene and timeless atmosphere: a floating home away from home»

by Francesca Molteni

A SPARE ELEGANCE

There are houses for men and houses for sailors. Ernesto Nathan Rogers expressed it well in 1946 in the first issue of *Domus* magazine, which he directed: «A house is not a home if it's not warm in winter, cool in summer, and serene in every season to welcome the family in harmonious spaces. A house is not a home if it doesn't enclose a corner for reading poems, an alcove, a bathtub, a kitchen. This is the house of man». Yes, but how do you design a traveling house for great explorations and long voyages that must face sea, wind, sun, and storms?

A yacht completely rebuilt and redesigned to meet contemporary needs? «A floating home away from home», as Vincent Van Duysen defines it. The Belgian architect and designer confronted his first nautical project, the RH3 Expedition Yacht, in 2015, overseeing the concept and mood, from the complete interior renovation to the exterior modifications, that have been made in collaboration with the engineers and designers of Vripack, the naval design studio based in Sneek, Netherlands.

«We had to design a new yacht that would guarantee a very high level of comfort and luxury», says Van Duysen. «We carefully selected natural and tactile materials to create a serene and timeless atmosphere, just as one can find in the owner's home. The interiors, in particular, are a special environment where guests can explore and experience the space with all their senses, interact, and immerse themselves in the unique character of the vessel».

This project reflects the strong relationship between architecture, interior, and industrial design that Vincent Van Duysen has woven into his creative path, with a unique and personal style where pure and tactile materials, essential design, and authenticity are distinctive features. Everything is meticulously designed with a comprehensive and immersive approach.

On the RH3, the curved wood panel walls, together with brushed oak, Carrara marble, leather, cashmere, rope, and handmade vegetable carpets provide a pleasant touch and visual appeal, refinement, and sobriety. «The main challenge was to avoid typical nautical interiors by bringing warmth and balanced materials while respecting the traditional key elements of naval design, such as cylindrical accents, glossy finishes, and rope. Above all, we aimed to create meaningful experiences within limited space», Van Duysen explains.

Structural and dimensional limitations that dictate the functions, light and movements, and differentiate a house on the water from a land-based construction become opportunities for new experiments. The valorization of heritage and the ability to blend the old and the new in a contemporary project have made Vincent Van Duysen the interpreter of a new vision of living, with strong Mediterranean accents in a Nordic context, humanistic and cultured, yet always functional and built to last.

Vincent Van Duysen Architects was established in 1989 in Antwerp, the great maritime capital of Flanders: a city known for Pieter Paul Rubens and Anthony Van Dyck, trendy fashion, and ever-evolving architecture. Today, the studio has more than 30 collaborators and a wide range of projects, from industrial design for international brands to residential architecture in Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and the United States, from the Winery VV by Vinetiq to the new headquarters of Loro Piana in Milan and residences in the Hamptons. It is perhaps this unique blend of rigor, search for beauty, respect for craftsmanship, and ability to interpret manufacturing that makes this studio a contemporary laboratory, always with an emphasis on pure elements and essentiality.

«I like to bring nature into spaces. Let's take my relationship with the sea, which is a deep dependence. I have brought it into the Casa M project in Portugal, my temple and sanctuary, where I detach myself from everyday life and connect with the Atlantic, the dunes, the storks, and the maritime pines», Vincent continues. Casa M is his retreat in Melides, a labor of love built over three years, camouflaged among the hills, dunes, and cork oak trees of Alentejo, south of Lisbon. Sand, light, wind, sun, air, fog, and the ocean inform the sculptural and ornament-free concrete structure, with maritime pines serving as canopies where the sunrise and sunset inspire the color palette and atmospheres, blending the volumes into the landscape.



Left, HBH Residence is located in Southampton and is part of the stretch of shoreline known as the Hamptons. Historically, this area has been devoted to agriculture and fishing. Right, Vincent Van Duysen collection for Zara Home. Below, the RE Residence in Paris designed by the Dutch architect. Previous page, Vincent Van Duysen was born in Lockeren, Belgium, in 1962.



Staircases by Vincent Van Duysen. Right, the one in the Zonhoven residence, whose simple structure fits in with the contiguous structures of this small village in Flanders. Below, EK Residence in Brentwood, California. Front page, August Hotel in Antwerp.

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The guests of the August Hotel can still feel the sober, understated life of the convent nuns who lived ascetically here during the 19th century





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A floating home away from home. RH3 Expedition Yacht (on this page and on the next two ones) has been refitted by Vincent Van Duysen Architects in close collaboration with Vripack engineers and designers, on the exterior, and the yacht's owner: RH3 is an expedition yacht with an ultimate level of comfort and luxury. Front page, Vincent Van Duysen.



Brushed oak, Carrara marble and fine Italian leathers design the luxurious comfort for the 10 guests of the RH3 Expedition Yacht. On the upper deck, sun pads and an al fresco dining table shaded by a Bimini top



«I like the sea because it can be very contemplative and inspire me to be reflective, but a storm can also transform tranquility into a tempestuous sea». Everything seems effortless in his architecture, but it is deeply thought out for the context and incorporates ancient techniques, such as wrapping a house in smooth white stone or terracotta tiles, using wooden planks, playing with lights and shadows, or designing a spiral staircase in walnut or travertine.

In the project for Winery VV by VinetiQ in Liezele, a fraction of the village of Puurs, south of Antwerp, Vincent chose to prioritise the connection with the terroir, the landscape that, in painting, originated in the Flemish context in the 16th century. It is a plain intersected by the precise geometries of asparagus crops, rows of vines, and field boundaries. The architecture designed by Van Duysen draws inspiration from local Flemish farms and respects rural tradition. The large horizontal barn and a small vertical farmhouse, overlooking the vineyard, create a new hierarchy that engages with the surrounding nature. The color of the terroir inspired the choice of gray lava stone for the access roads and the central courtyard. The black wood of European larch, used for the barn shutters and cladding of the main house, also references the local barns painted with coal tar to protect the structures. Non-intrusive volumes become part of the landscape, creating a sort of land art piece.

Art plays a prominent role in many interior projects, both through the artworks selected by Van Duysen to give strength to the spaces and provide a surprising touch to the architectural experience, and through commissions from collectors, such as the RE Residence in Paris. Resting on an Art Deco building, formerly a hôtel particulier, it is now a private two-story house with a large panoramic terrace overlooking the Seine, housing artworks by Richard Serra, Alexander Calder, and Louise Bourgeois. The project pays homage to Jean-Michel







Above, the MT Apartment in Milan (left) and EK Residence in Los Angeles (right). Below, the Molteni&C stand at the Salone del Mobile 2023 (left) and the Augusto Sofa designed by Van Duysen for Molteni&C. Front page, Casa M in Melides, Portugal, is meant to take in sand, light, wind, sun, air, fog and even the Ocean in the distance. The umbrella-like canopies of marine pines take the center of attention. Sunrise and sunset dictate the palette of colors and moods.



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With an exterior of exposed aggregate to reveal its craggy components and a bone hue colour, Casa M achieves the opposite effect of many Brutalist forebears



Frank, the visionary interior designer who, in the 1930s, proposed a radical aesthetic revolution to the sophisticated French elite, based on the concepts of harmony and minimalist elegance. «With a few carefully selected materials, such as juxtaposing natural stone with dark wood, plastered walls, or refined wallpapers, we deliberately wanted to create sober interiors for this place that houses artworks and contemporary furniture. We also emphasized the tactile aspect in the choice of materials and finishes». With a mix of intuition, attentiveness to clients' needs and a search for authenticity, Vincent has reached great heights. «There has been an evolution in my approach, but it is always based on remaining true to my language, my values, and my DNA. The goal is longevity, architecture centered on humans. My evolution was driven by more international projects and clients who challenge me and my team, serving as a great source of inspiration», he continues.

Among the many challenges, there is also the one of art direction for Molteni&C since 2016, as the head of global image, in charge of the design of flagship stores, stands, and new collections. The new Pavilion for the design brand at the Giussano headquarters, completed in 2022, is a project that redesigns the ground floor and the garden, featuring a new central courtyard resembling a cloister, welcoming guests in tranquility before accessing the company's exhibition and production spaces. «The project originated from the idea of creating a continuous dialogue between domestic environments and open spaces. That's why, in addition to the new Pavilion and the transformation of the existing ground floor, I wanted to give great value to the exterior», Vincent Van Duysen explains.

This collaboration provides new tools to the architect and his studio to explore the excellence of Made in Italy in technology and materials, as well as the ability to find new solutions, with increasing attention to sustainability. This sensitivity for longevity is also found in the collections designed for Flos, Mutina, Paola Lenti, Kvadrat, Zara Home. And what about the future? «I wouldn't mind designing another explorer yacht, for the nobility and authenticity that characterizes them. And why not sailboats as well?» Vincent Van Duysen concludes. ■

The Van Duysen's signs in Belgium.
Left, VM Residence in Sint Martens Latem: long brick walls and stacked volumes define its architecture.
Right, the DLC Residence in Kruishoutem, in Flanders.
Front page, the Concordia Offices in Waregem, (above).
Below, the Winery VV by Vinetiq in Liezele. and (right) Schelde 21, exclusive apartment building south of Antwerp.





An existing building for a Belgian weaving company was stripped and expanded. Now the monolithic character of the Concordia Offices is a new presence in the landscape

