

# SILVER TIMES

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S I N C E 1 8 7 4

## Mindful Design

*The private realms of  
Vincent Van Duysen*

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# “A home is not a museum”

Belgian architect and designer Vincent Van Duysen has built a reputation for his elegant, understated designs, spanning from houses to furniture to fashion store interiors. For Van Duysen, the essence of great design is rooted in authenticity and natural materials – never plastic.



**M**r. Van Duysen, those who know you say you're always in motion.

That's true! My mind is like a sponge, constantly absorbing inspiration from the world around me, whether it's books, art, documentaries, or travel. But the biggest source of my ideas comes from everyday life, from the people I meet and that surround me. Everything goes through a personal filter and becomes the seed for a new concept. I am always sketching in my mind, taking notes, and observing. Turning off that creative engine is difficult for me. I've had to teach myself to unplug, which I do through a daily meditation routine. I also find peace at home with my family and our three dachshunds.

**Early theologians believed that architecture shapes people more than the Bible. Do you agree?**

From a theological point of view, that may make sense. Architecture has the power to shape how people feel and live. For me, architecture is about creating sanctuaries for people, places of calm, security, and balance. I like to think that architecture has the potential to make us better individuals and, by extension, a better society. One can see that in all my projects and designs, and it is the same for myself and my two residences. My work emphasizes purity, naturalness, and timelessness.

At Casa M, Vincent Van Duysen prefers to move barefoot through his spaces, grounding himself in his surroundings.

For his vacation home near Comporta, the Belgian architect Vincent Van Duysen has conceived of a sand-colored, bunkerlike home that blends seamlessly into its setting.

The historic townhouse in Antwerp, once home to notaries' offices, was streamlined and restructured by Van Duysen, who let in natural daylight everywhere.

Photos and cover photo by François Halard

**But can architecture also evoke feelings of loneliness or meaninglessness?**

It can, absolutely. If a space doesn't reflect the needs and soul of its inhabitants, or if the flow of the space feels off, it can create an unsettling atmosphere. A well-designed space must be functional, not just beautiful, it should enhance life, not just serve aesthetics.

**Do you personally suffer from bad architecture?**



Unfortunately, yes, it happens often. I'm very sensitive to my surroundings, so bad design affects me. If I can't avoid being in such a space, I distract myself by mentally redesigning it. Of course, personal taste plays a role here. What might feel like bad architecture to me could work for someone else. I make decisions based on instinct.

**Your parents had different plans for your career, didn't they?**

Yes, my parents wanted me to become a lawyer. However, they educated me about many different arts as a child. My father worked in the carpet industry but had a passion for art, he loved to paint. We traveled a lot, visiting galleries and exhibitions across Belgium, and I was exposed to artists, sculptors, and architects from a young age. That's when my interest in architecture blossomed. It was the perfect blend of all the applied arts. I could easily have become a photographer, filmmaker, or painter, but a traditional desk job was never an option.

**There seems to be a clear divide between architecture and interior design. Does that separation make sense to you?**

Not at all. I find that divide puzzling. People often think architecture is about logic and structure, while design is purely creative. For me, architecture is about creating environments that people live in. It goes beyond just the physical building, it includes the art, furniture, and objects that enrich the space. I call it "the art of living". My approach has always been holistic. To me, living is a Gesamtkunstwerk.

**Your two homes, known for their tranquility and warmth, reflect your love of aesthetics. Are you a minimalist?**



I wouldn't call myself a minimalist, especially not in the way the term is used in the art world, where minimalism emerged in the 1960s. I don't favor stark, austere interiors; I want my spaces to have a soul. I aim to achieve purity in design by stripping away the unnecessary and focusing on the essentials, but never at the expense of warmth. That's why I always use natural materials and textured, tactile finishes. They age beautifully, developing a patina that gives interiors, spaces, and objects a timeless quality.

**Fashion designer Riccardo Tisci once used 19 shades of beige for Burberry's flagship store, and beige seems to dominate interior design trends. What do you think of this color's sudden popularity?**

Is it a trend? I've been using beige tones for over thirty years. For me, these shades are timeless. They create the perfect backdrop for art, furniture, and objects, allowing them to stand out. Neutral tonalities like beige have a calming, understated presence. They don't compete with the items in a space, they let them breathe. But just to be

clear, I'm not shied to use other colors either; I use them when they feel right.

**After more than three decades in the industry, you've seen many trends come and go. Is there a style that stands the test of time?**

I collect vintage furniture, from Brazilian designers like José Zanine Caldas to pieces by Pierre Jeanneret. The great classics will always make a strong statement. What makes these classics endure is their purity of form. Jean-Michel Frank is another example, he was a pioneer in interior

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”

and furniture design with his subtle, refined aesthetic. His work, defined by clean lines and sophisticated materials like straw, parchment, and leather, resonates with any style in any era.

**You famously avoid plastic in your designs. What is it about the material that bothers you?**

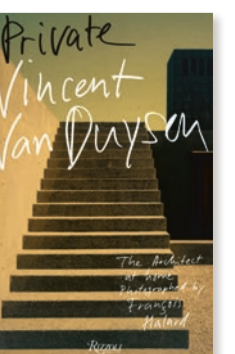
Plastic lacks the warmth and individuality that natural materials like wood, stone, or linen bring to a space. I prefer materials that tell a story, that age beautifully, and feel human.

**Many decor blogs showcase perfect homes with no signs of life – no toys, no unmade beds, no sagging sofa cushions. What's the secret to avoiding that sterile, uninhabited look?**

A home is meant to be lived in, not curated like a museum. Just live within your space and let the world see it, that is how interiors should be photographed. Functionality should come first, but if you combine that with timeless pieces, art, and objects, you're well on your way to creating a space with soul. My key advice: less is more. Better to have one fewer chair than to overcrowd the room. At the same time, invest in individual pieces that are special. My latest purchase, for example, is a pair of armchairs from 1929 by Eyre de Lanux. Made of mahogany and woven straw, they're simple, timeless, and incredibly rare. I found them at Sotheby's.

**Are your dachshunds allowed on them?**

Of course! My dachshunds are part of the family – they're free to roam wherever they like. 🐶



Private. Rizzoli, 94 Euros