

Refurbishment of 3 historical buildings

We regard renovations as exercises in empathy. In the renovation of the eclectic buildings in the Leysstraat in Antwerp, we used a lot of empathy to give a nineteenth century building a second breath. Behind the flamboyant, eclectic façade, a whole series of uninteresting rooms were hidden. In the design we try to eliminate the schizophrenia between a masterly façade and a meager interior.

We adopt a formal strategy that, like the façade, is eclectic and accumulative. Room after room we define the potentials and the necessities associated with the refurbishment into apartments.

An essential spatial component are the breakthroughs. What were once 3 historic buildings, we now renovate up to 2 apartments per layer. We dramatize the breakthroughs through the party walls. Along the chimney, through the chimney or on the mantelpiece, there are perforations that create a new route and connect the room structure.

Double circulations, steps and deep perspectives contribute to the spaciousness of the circulation. Some openings are cut out of the corner.

Surprising moments are hidden in all corners of the building. A shower under a bas-relief, a hidden door to the elevator, a paravent contains a shower.

The materialization breathes an equal amount of empathy. Kitchens receive profiling or become aedicules. Arches and color accents contribute to the quality of each room. The attic has its own, unpolished atmosphere. Interventions have a coarser grain here.

Client	AG VESPA, Paradeplein 25, 2018 Antwerp
Program	Refurbishment of 3 houses into 8 appartements and 2 shops
Location	Leysstraat 7-15, 2000 Antwerp
Brut/net surf.	719 m ² - 677 m ²
Start	08.2014
End	09.2018
Budget	€ 2.800.000 excl. BTW
Design	Dirk Somers, Sander Laureys, Gosia Olchowska, Wim Boesten, Sidse Hald, Christopher Permain, Henk Jan Imhoff in collaboration with Barbara Van Der Wee Architects
Photographer	Filip Dujardin



Site plan



Mediocre interiors



19th century variations: chimney pieces



Facade of the building in the main shopping street of Antwerp