

NATHALIE CAPART, ISABELLE DE PANGE  
AND JEAN-JACQUES EVRARD



# SECRET BRUSSELS



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## THE SOLVAY LIBRARY

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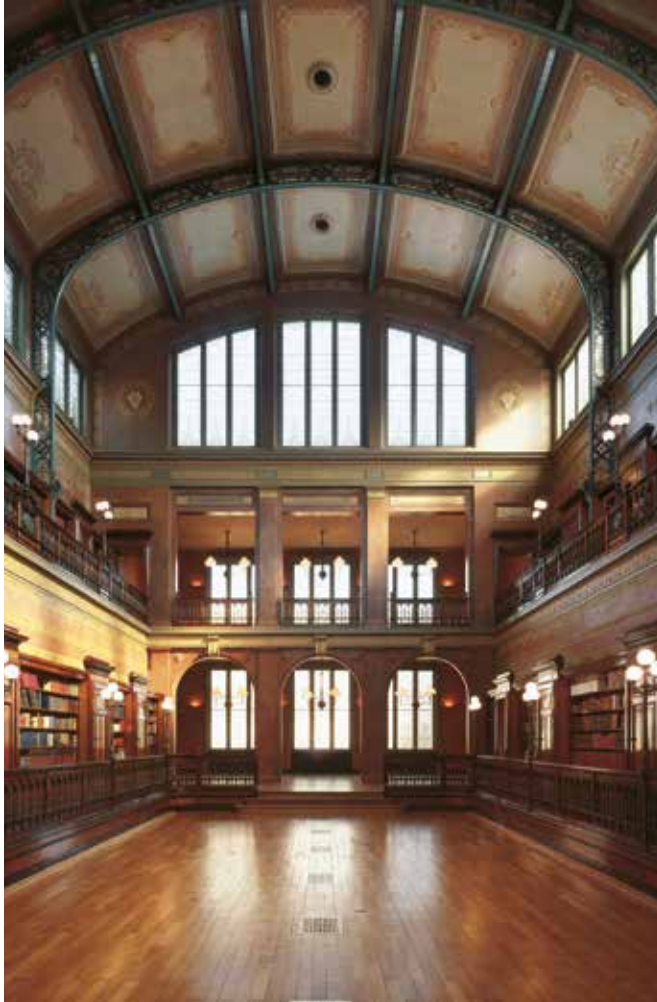
*Industrialist Ernest Solvay made the library his 'brain factory'*

Parc Léopold

Rue Belliard 137

Visits during occasional exhibitions or by arrangement – 02 738 75 96

Bus No. 12, 21, 27 and 59, Parc Léopold stop



You'll need to follow the winding paths of Parc Léopold to find the small jewel of the Solvay Library. Built in 1901 by Constant Bosmans and Henri Vandeveld, this library completed a vast project creating a scientific complex in the park (five institutes and research laboratories), isolated from the noise of the surrounding city. The industrialist Ernest Solvay was the driving force behind the whole scheme: the library became his 'brain factory' and a laboratory for his scientific and political ideas. But this great dream came to an end in 1919 when the university abandoned the monumental buildings and moved to the Solbosch campus.

After having been squatted for many years, the library was renovated in 2004 and now houses various European associations as well as hosting a number of events. In the central hall, which has a beautiful curved vault, you can readily imagine the quiet, studious atmosphere of the library's former years, particularly when you see the individual study carrels behind the doors lining the gallery. Double natural lighting (from above and the sides) highlights the precious woods, mosaics, stained glass and painted decor.

### NEARBY

*'Bruxelles Europe à ciel ouvert' Campground*

15

Chaussée de Wavre 203

02 640 79 67

Only during July and August

Métro Trône

A place to sleep right in the heart of the city, for only €6 per night? *'Bruxelles-Europe à ciel ouvert'* (Brussels Europe, under an open sky), offers you an unusual spot to stake out your favourite tent, within the very chic Ixelles neighbourhood. The rather terse signposting, consisting of a card with the word 'camping' scrawled in biro followed by a vague arrow, add to the feeling that you've found a secret hideaway, far from the wild jungle of Matongé, the bottomless cliffs of the European district and the grassy hills of Etterbeek.

To reach it, go to Saint-Sacrement church then make your way to a car park up a slope, where you'll see the entrance to the campsite. A patch of open ground consisting of a pretty lawn dotted with trees and flowers, yet surrounded by tall buildings, this land used to belong to the youth hostel on chaussée de Wavre. The garden was bought by the Viale Europe community seven years ago. It is practically next door to Place Royale and the Saint-Boniface district and very near to the city centre itself. The campsite can accommodate 50 tents. If this refuge in the greenery inspires you, the nearby church holds Masses or other services every day, at noon and in the evening.

# ART NOUVEAU WALK AROUND ÉTANGS D'IXELLES

35

*A few gems ...*

*Avenue Louise 346 – Rue de Belle-Vue 30, 32, 42, 44, 46,  
Avenue du Général de Gaulle 38–39 – Rue Vilain XIII 9 et 11  
Rue du Lac 6  
Trams No. 92 and 93*



© Jean-Jacques Evrard

The Étangs d'Ixelles neighbourhood has a small number of Art Nouveau buildings, only some worth visiting casually. We propose here a selected tour that includes the most interesting.

At 346 avenue Louise you'll find the Hôtel Max Hallet. Built by Horta in 1903, this is by no means the most spectacular house from the master of Art Nouveau, but the quality of construction and of the materials used are still admirable. It is sometimes open for guided tours ([www.asbl-arkadia.be](http://www.asbl-arkadia.be); Tel. 02 563 61 53) or for events ([www.events-at-horta.be](http://www.events-at-horta.be)).

Continuing along avenue Louise towards the Bois de la Cambre, turn left on rue Belle-Vue. At No. 42, 44 and 46, you'll come across three houses built by the architect Blérot in 1899. They are remarkable above all for the unusual character of their corbelled balconies, the surbated arches above the doors and windows, and the originality of the doors themselves with their wrought-iron grilles. There are some pretty sgraffiti at No. 42. A short distance away are two other eye-catching works by Blérot at No. 30 and 32, also notable for their sgraffiti.

When you reach the end of this avenue, turn left onto avenue du Général-de-Gaulle. At No. 38–39 is yet another project by Blérot (1904), but in a different style. More sober in appearance, these twin houses stand out mainly for the curving lines of their wrought-iron balustrades, and the mosaic paving of the entrance hall. Walk on towards place Flagey and turn left on avenue Vilain XIII. At No. 9 and 11 you'll see two more houses built by Blérot in 1902 that are worth mentioning for their sgraffiti, stained-glass windows and artful use of wrought iron.

Next, take a right on rue du Lac to arrive at No. 6. Built in 1904 by Léon Delune, the façade of this house has a surprising geometric originality. Note the play on the architect's surname: the moon in its various phases – full, half, and crescent – can be seen on the façade. The stained-glass window is the work of Raphaël Evaldre.

## *Vilain XIII (14)*

Avenue Vilain XIII owes its bizarre numeral (XIII rather than XIV) to Viscount Charles Hippolyte Vilain XIII, the former Belgian minister of Foreign Affairs who gave his name to this street. During the siege of Namur (1692–95), one of his ancestors, Jean-Philippe de Vilain, is said to have received permission from the French monarch Louis XIV to add the number fourteen to his name, but only on the express condition of writing it 'XIII'.

## SGRAFFITI ON CHAUSSÉE DE WATERLOO

④

*When the sun meets the moon*

*Chaussée de Waterloo 246–256*

**B**uilt in 1901 by the architect Jean-Pierre Van Oostveen, the six houses between numbers 246 and 256 Chaussée de Waterloo feature a few architectural gems.

Was it out of modesty that he signed only one stone? Or was it because he was not among the best-known architects of the Brussels Art Nouveau movement?

The most beautiful house is at number 250. Recently restored, it has

a beautifully balanced façade. A frieze supports the two windows that are themselves topped by seven small bays decorated with magnificent stained glass in geometric shapes. The upper balcony is topped with a magnificent sgraffito depicting the day and the night.

This sgraffito, like the entire façade, was covered in white paint at a time, not so long ago, when Art Nouveau was no longer popular.

Some of Brussels' magnificent and exuberant works – by Victor Horta, Ernest Blérot and Paul Hankar, to name but a few – have been irretrievably destroyed, replaced with the banal constructions of property developers from the 1960s. Only the house at No. 254 has kept its original ground floor and a beautiful door. The fronts of the other five houses were converted into shop windows between 1930 and 1950.



## MAISON HANNON

⑦

*The only Art Nouveau work by the architect Jules Brunfaut*

*Avenue de la Jonction 1*

*Wednesday and Friday 11am–6pm and weekends 1pm–6pm*

*Booking: maisonhannon.be*

Today occupied by the photographic association Contretype, the magnificent Hôtel Hannon is one of the finest examples of Art Nouveau in Brussels. Built in 1902 by the architect Jules Brunfaut, this townhouse has the remarkable attribute of being his only work in the Art Nouveau style. He was actually a close friend of the owner, Edouard Hannon, and he expressed his friendship in trying out a new style for him in this building.

The result speaks volumes. Clearly inspired by Horta, as well as Van



Rysselberghe, Brunfaut also called upon the famous master glassmaker of Nancy, Émile Gallé, for the furnishings and on the Rouen painter Paul Edouard Baudoin, pupil of Puvis de Chavanne, for the superb staircase fresco.

The house was abandoned in 1965 on the death of Denise Hannon, the owner's daughter, and was threatened with demolition by a property developer. The district council rose up against this aberration and the Saint-Gilles commune bought the house in 1976, the year it was listed, although the restoration wasn't complete until 1988.

During this time most of the furnishings disappeared. Some can now be seen at the *Musée des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris. Although the building now serves as a space for photographic exhibitions (a nice gesture to Edouard Hannon's passion for photography), it is particularly valued for its exterior architecture and its ground floor, staircase and fresco.

### *A home, not a hotel*

Although it was listed in 1976 as Hôtel Hannon, the building is now called Maison Hannon, because it has none of the architectural features that would make it a mansion: no vestibule or carriage entrance, no service staircase for the servants, no kitchen cellar or maids' rooms, and a relatively narrow façade.

For the sake of accuracy and respect for the intentions of the Hannons, it was decided to rename this residence Maison Hannon because, although large and luxurious, it was above all the living quarters of two connoisseurs and by no means intended as a stately home.

## NEARBY

### *Les Hiboux House*

⑧

*Avenue Brugmann 55*

Another beautiful example of an Art Nouveau house in Brussels, built in 1895 by Edouard Pelseneer (1870–1947). Note the sgraffiti of the two owls for whom the house is named, as well as the round windows that give the impression of looking fixedly at you, like owls' eyes. The house is privately owned.

### *Fernand Dubois House*

⑨

*Avenue Brugmann 80*

This is the former house of the sculptor Fernand Dubois, built between 1901 and 1903 by Victor Horta, although this is not his most spectacular or most accomplished work.

## STAINED GLASS WINDOWS OF THE FOREST

19

*The finest Art Deco stained glass in the city*

Rue du Curé 2

Trams No. 18 and 52, Forest-Centre stop



Opposite the abbey, the Forest community hall is a fine Art Deco building by Jean-Baptiste Dewin, dating from 1934. If most of its visitors are there only for administrative reasons, the building deserves a tour on its own merits, to admire the richness of its architecture and interior decoration. A visit is so much easier when it's free during normal opening hours.

Going in from the abbey courtyard side, immediately to the left in the Salle des Pas Perdus, note the stained glass created in 1939 by the master glassmaker Colpaert after designs by Balthus. Climb the grand staircase in front of you. Other stained-glass windows are signed by the same artists.

The different rooms, in a very pure Art Deco style, are worth a detour. Note the rich materials used to decorate the interior, exotic woods and marbles, as well as the bronze sculptures by Minne and Verbeyst.

Outside there is an attractive belfry reminiscent of the Middle Ages, ornamentation praising the virtues of family life and sculptures by Victor Rousseau.



## FORGOTTEN FAÇADES OF RUE GEORGES MOREAU

⑥

*In the street, be careful not to come across  
the wrong numbers*

Rue Georges Moreau 148, 162, 164 and 170  
Access Gare du Midi



© Jean-Jacques Eyraud

Avenue Georges Moreau has some very beautiful façades off the traditional beaten track in this neighbourhood.

Coming from the direction of the École Vétérinaire, the façade at No. 148 includes a sgraffito, unfortunately in poor condition.

A little further to the right, the former workshop/home of Victor Delplanque, maker of enamelled plaques, was built by architect Arthur Nélissen in 1906. Its façade is decorated with some very pretty enamelled plaques. Note in particular the pictures of a swan and a peacock.

One small unusual feature is that these twin houses are numbered 172 and 174. But as you go along the right-hand side of the avenue, you'll be surprised to see houses numbered 170 and then a second 172! The street numbers of the previous two houses are simply false. Following recent renovation work, for some mysterious reason the owner had them inscribed with the wrong numbers. The real numbers are 162 and 164. The postman is aware of the mix-up so the residents still receive their respective mail.

The most beautiful house in this avenue is certainly the one at No. 170. Built in 1908 by architect and surveyor Hector Gérard, it combines medieval, Renaissance and Art Nouveau influences. In particular it has a magnificent sgraffito in good condition, although the author is unknown. An ode to painting, and in particular, to several Flemish painters, the house was recently restored.

The names of Rogier Van der Weyden, Jan Van der Meeren, Memling, David, Blondeel and Lucas Van Leyden, as well as Hubert and Jan Van Eyck, are all inscribed here. Encircling the pretty wooden bow window on the first floor, the sgraffito represents four women surrounded by garlands of flowers and arabesques.



## FAÇADE OF THE FOYER SCHAERBEEKOIS

⑤

*'Be active, be clean, be thrifty, for everyone'*

Rue Victor Hugo 53–59



© Michel Wal

At the end of the 19th century, several municipalities across Brussels embarked on vast social housing construction programmes aimed at the poor. Slums in unhealthy cul-de-sacs were demolished and local authorities bought the land.

The municipality of Schaerbeek, which was particularly wealthy at the end of the century, built many of these housing estates, some of which have now been demolished.

The two buildings at No. 55 Rue Victor Hugo were designed by architect Henri Jacobs (who also built around 15 school buildings – see p. 272) in an eclectic style with a strong Art Nouveau influence.

The flats, built in 1899, consisted of three rooms with running water and flushing toilets, and were considered very luxurious at the time. They were saved from destruction in 1968 and eventually renovated in 2001. The flats that were deemed too small for today's standards were merged.

The yellow, orange, red and black brick facades have been remarkably restored, including the beautiful sgraffiti that celebrate, in French and Dutch, the values of living together, cleanliness, hard work and frugality.

The typically Art Nouveau arabesques under the cornices are also noteworthy.

The central bay has been completely preserved, with its original frames, columns, and colour. While the entrance doors have been changed, the original wrought iron oculus with the letters F and S for 'Foyer Schaerbeekois' has been replaced.

This is a fine example of a restoration carried out without the use of new materials, which would not have been in keeping with the original, and it shows how considered social housing was more than a century ago.





## SCHAERBEEK MUNICIPAL HALL

17

*Very few entered it*

*Place Colignon*



© Edison McCullen

If most Brussels residents know the imposing Schaerbeek Municipal Hall, very few have ever been inside. Built out in the countryside by the architect Jules Jacques Van Ysendick, then reconstructed in 1911 after a fire, this town hall is a good example of Flemish neo-Renaissance style. Admire above all the stained-glass windows of the main stairway inside, the two lateral staircases, the glass wall at the rear and the principal rooms at the front of the building, notably the wedding hall and the council chambers. The chambers have some pretty Malines tapestries representing cherry trees, whose fruit is the symbol of this commune.



© Edison McCullen

### NEARBY

#### *Private house of Henri Jacobs*

18

*Avenue Maréchal Foch 9*

A short distance from the Schaerbeek Municipal Hall, the architect Henri Jacobs built a house in 1903 that served as both his residence and office. It has in particular a magnificent sgraffito between the cornice and the four ogival windows on the upper floor. It owes its good state of conservation to the wide overhang of the cornice, which has protected it from the elements. This same cornice, however, has the drawback of leaving the top of the sgraffito in shadow much of the time. As you walk by, admire the neighbouring house at No. 11, also built by Jacobs. Henri Jacobs was also architect of the schools in rue Josaphat and avenue de Roodebeek, as well as the Institut Diderot at Les Marolles.

## CASTEL DE LINTHOUT

### *Dive into the neo-Gothic period*

*Avenue des Deux Tilleuls 2*

*Admission sometimes possible if you ask nicely*

*Metro or tram No. 23, 24, 25, 39, 44 and 80, Montgomery stop*

①



Within the grounds of the Institut du Sacré-Cœur of Lindthout, the aptly named ‘*Castel*’ (mansion), was formerly a private residence. The house, built from 1867 to 1869 by Ghent architect Florimond Vandepoele, was given its current form by architect Edmond De Vigne in 1898 for his client, the captain of industry Charles-Henri Dietrich, as related by the inscription on the front façade. Dietrich didn’t live in the house very long, preferring the well-known Val Duchesse priory. In 1903, he transferred the estate to the nuns of Lille’s Sacred Heart Church. It later fell into disuse and was eventually bought by the village of Woluwe-Saint-Lambert in 2000, which turned it into a school of music, dance and the performing arts.

Now magnificently restored, this mysterious edifice has preserved all of its neo-Gothic interior. The site is not officially open to visitors, but if you ask politely, you’ll probably be allowed a quick glance inside.

From the moment you enter the foyer, the Gothic architecture sets the tone. It is enhanced by paintings depicting landmarks of the Woluwe-Saint-Lambert of yesteryear: the old village, the Lindekemale mill, the Hof ten Berg (an old farm belonging to Abbaye de Forest), and a pond. The corridor on the right leads to the mansion’s star attraction: the ballroom, which the nuns (quite understandably) used as a chapel and which today is the perfect venue for concerts and school rehearsals.

Lit by a rose window, the room is topped by a wooden ceiling in the shape of a boat’s hull. Other rooms are similarly decorated, such as the main staircase or the rooms on the first floor (the ‘ceramics room’, the ‘Renaissance room’ or the ‘golden sitting room’), but none of them matches the magic of the ballroom.

## NEARBY

### *Ceramic panels*

②

*Avenue Henri Dietrich 27*

On the house at avenue Dietrich 27, two large ceramic panels depict women picking flowers. Produced by the Helman factory of Berchem-Sainte-Agathe, and probably based on a drawing by Jacques Madiol, they have been wonderfully preserved. This house designed by architect A. Aulbur in 1906 also has a magnificent wrought-iron and glass awning.



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**SECRET**

# BRUSSELS

Stunning Art Nouveau façades, a stretch of the Senne reconstituted in Saint-Géry, a farm in the city centre, a Freemasonic interpretation of Brussels Park, the amazing physiognomical fountain of Magritte, the place where the Tsar of Russia vomited in Brussels Park in 1717, the rotunda of the Panorama parking garage, a tribute to the soldier pigeon, speleology in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, a panoramic swimming pool, a scandalous pavilion in Cinquantenaire Park, a huge vegetable garden in Uccle, a 19th-century artist's studio in Schaerbeek, a campsite in the heart of the city, a garden forgotten in the Forest...

For those who keep a keen eye, push open doors and get off the beaten track, Brussels is full of curiosities and suprising details that will amaze inhabitants and visitors alike who think they know the city like the back of their hand.

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