

PARIS – BRUSSELS

After Brussels–Vienna in 2007, the first in a series that explores the architectural comings and goings between the Belgian capital and its European neighbours, the Paris – Brussels exhibition highlights the often unsuspected wealth of architectural exchanges between France and Belgium in the XIXth and XXth centuries. Hundreds of original documents illustrate these two centuries of relations and cross-fertilisation between the two capitals.



TWO CENTURIES OF ARCHITECTURAL AFFINITIES

Architecture Museum – La Loge
Exhibition
from 19 January to 6 June 2010

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The chosen starting point for the exhibition is the period when Belgium was French, between 1794 and 1814, and young Belgian architects went to Paris to study at the *École des beaux-arts* and possibly to win the *Prix de Rome*. This gave rise to lasting exchanges. One of the many examples is that of Jean-Pierre Cluysenaar who, in 1845, built the *Galleries Saint-Hubert*, drawing much of his inspiration from the *Galerie d'Orléans* at the *Palais-Royal* in Paris, destroyed in 1930. Viollet-le-Duc, Mérimée and Ludovic Vitet, the inventors of the concept of the historical monument, contributed to restorations and to the essays published in the Belgian architectural press.

From 1870, Brussels started to Hausmannize and a Paris property company and its architect were involved in building the broad boulevards of the city centre, importing the apartment building typology.

The influences were not one way. It was after visiting the works of Victor Horta and designing the private house of Paul Hankar that the architect Hector Guimard found his personal style that he soon applied to the metro stations financed by Baron Empain. Another future celebrity, the Parisian architect Henri Sauvage, was at the time training in Brussels with Paul Saintenoy, the architect of Old England. For his part, Henry van de Velde was invited to present his furniture at the Bing gallery, and then to draw up the initial plans for the famous *Champs-Élysées* theatre before the project passed to Auguste Perret (born in Ixelles, the son of a sculptor and former Communard in exile who worked on the decor for the Bourse). Gustave Serrurier-Bovy, one of the pioneers of the "l'Art dans tout" group, opened a shop in Paris. In Brussels, Georges Chedanne, designer of a remarkable industrial building on the *rue Réaumur*, built the French *Chancellerie* while his compatriot Alban Chambon, who had settled in the Belgian capital, produced the decor for the *Métropole* Hotel and, in Paris, the residence of the automobile manufacturer Mors, of which the *Ranelagh* theatre remains to this day. Hennebique, the man who invented reinforced concrete, was based in Paris but began his career in Brussels by proposing to build a wooden tower rising to 300 metres at the entrance to the *Bois de la Cambre*.

We will also see how Léopold II's enthusiasm for French architecture of the Beaux-Arts style was ill-received by certain young Brussels' architects, such as Fernand Bodson in his journal *Tekhné*.

While the Art Nouveau of Brussels was one of the major sources of inspiration for French architects, the 1925 Paris Exhibition of Decorative Arts made a lasting impression on the imagination of their Belgian colleagues. These included Antoine Courtens, a major figure in the Art Deco movement, who completed his training with a Parisian interior designer. The exchanges were also by way of publications, exhibitions and conferences. Victor Bourgeois published in *7 Arts*, edited by the Parisian painter P-L Flouquet, works by Rob Mallet-Stevens, who was related to the Stoclet family, Lurçat and also Le Corbusier, who he invited to Brussels to give lectures.

French architects built in Brussels, such as Süe and Mare, who designed the château de La Fougeraie in Uccle. Michel Roux-Spitz built a luxury residence on the square Frère Orban in Brussels. Similarly, architects originating from Brussels made their careers in France, such as Théo Clément, who was active in Le Vésinet where he settled after the First World War. It was he who built the Farm-School complex in Waterloo, a remarkable set of buildings that are now listed. Parisian and Bruxellois architects also at times worked together, such as Camille Damman and Pierre Patout who co-designed a vast residential complex in Paris. Also, it was after visiting the works of Le Corbusier and of Chareau in Paris that Paul-Amaury Michel combined these influences in his design of a glass house. The architects Emile Goffay and Marcel Leborgne built villas and apartment buildings that were also inspired by the creations and the writings of Le Corbusier.

As to the *École des beaux-arts* in Paris, this continued to fascinate young architects who had trained at the Brussels Academy. It was there that Henry Lacoste sharpened his sense of composition and taste for the exotic. He then in turn sent his own students to Paris to refine their skills and sensibilities in the 1950s, including Paul Mignot, Charles De Meutter and Jean Koning.

The 1958 exhibition celebrated the Americanisation of Belgium and presented two pavilions whose constrictive and plastic daring were a pronounced departure from architectural functionalism: the Philips pavilion by Le Corbusier and the French pavilion by Guillaume Gillet.

Later, the intensity of these exchanges reflected the speed of communications linking the two capitals: first the Trans Europe Express, then the motorway, and today the Thalys that every year carries 11 million passengers from the one capital to the other, the equivalent of the entire population of Belgium travelling the 315 kilometres between the two stations in just over an hour.

In the XXIst century, the border is no more than a memory, travelling from the one city to the other being as easy as dropping in on a friend or relative. This has further increased the artistic and architectural exchanges. Charles Vandenhove designed the Abbesses Theatre in Montmartre, Jean Nouvel was charged with restructuring the area around the Gare de Midi and Christian de Portzamparc, recently charged with developing the area around the European district in Brussels, celebrates, with the building of the Tintin Museum in Louvain-la-Neuve, the coming together of the clear Belgian line and Parisian elegance.

INFO

The location: Architecture Museum – La Loge

The exhibition is housed in a building that is worth a visit in itself: the Architecture Museum – La Loge is the first museum of architecture to be installed in a former Masonic Lodge. The building, the first temple of obedience to Le Droit Humain, was built in 1933 by the architects Fernand Bodson and Louis Van Hooveld and renovated, in 2001–2002, by the architect Elie Levy and the Ekla agency. The museum opened in 2002 as a major player in the cultural life of Brussels through its architecture, town planning and design exhibitions covering the period from 1850 to the present day, coupled with a range of activities including guided visits, workshops for children, conferences, seminars, etc. Designed for a broad public, the “Paris–Brussels” exhibition aims to increase the appreciation of still little-known aspects of Belgian architecture.

Practical information

Dates: 19 January to 6 June 2010

Place: Architecture Museum – La Loge

86 rue de l’Ermitage – 1050 Brussels

Tel : 02/642 24 62

Fax : 02/642 24 63

E-mail : info@aam.be

Opening hours:

Tuesday to Sunday from 12.00 to 18.00

Wednesday from 12.00 to 21.00

Closed on Monday

Admission price:

Adults: €4 (reductions: €3, €2, Article 27, €1)

Guided visits on request: 02.642.24.62 or 02.642.24.80

Educational service

In partnership with the Fondation pour l’Architecture, the educational service proposes fun yet educational activities in connection with the exhibition.

Interactive guided visits, creative workshops, holiday courses, etc. are designed for a young public and are accessible to families and schools.

Info & bookings : 02.642.24.80, info@fondationpouurlarchitecture.be or www.fondationpouurlarchitecture.be

Catalogue

An exhibition catalogue has been published, in French and Dutch, in the “Carrés d’Architecture” collection.

Catalogue price: 12 euros

Project managers

Curators

Maurice Culot & Anne-Marie Pirlot

ampirlot@hotmail.com

02.642.24.70

Design

Patrick Demuylder

patrick.demuylder@hotmail.com

Press

Bertille Amaudric

bertilleamaudric@hotmail.com

02.642.24.80

Educational service

Anne-Catherine Laroche

info@fondationpouurlarchitecture.be

02.642.24.80

www.fondationpouurlarchitecture.be

ARCHIVES D’ARCHITECTURE MODERNE

Rue de l’Ermitage 55 Kluisstraat

1050 Brussels

02/642.24.62 – info@aam.be

www.aam.be

ARCHITECTURE MUSEUM – LA LOGE

Rue de l’Ermitage 86 Kluisstraat

1050 Brussels

02/642.24.62 - info@aam.be

www.aam.be

Partnership

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