

RECLAIMING HOME

BERNARD DUBOIS RETURNS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE OF HIS YOUTH

Words by CAMILLE OKHIO

● *Bernard Dubois is an old-school architect. Like Frank Lloyd Wright or Josef Hoffmann, he prefers to look at a project as a whole, from the roof tiles down to the door knobs and furnishings. For clients like Courrèges and Lanvin, he envisions modern gesamtkunstwerks, designing interior worlds that flow from a singular, distinct aesthetic point of view, often working with a very limited material palette. His commercial work is precise, with no detail left unconsidered, and his home is similarly refined but diverges from his professional work in the feeling of calm and ease that flows through it. While his architectural practice is a well-oiled machine, his home in the countryside of Belgium is something closer to a daydream.*

Enough stars to form a constellation connect in architect Bernard Dubois' country house in Lasne, Belgium. When he bought it three years ago, the house already held associations with childhood innocence, memories real and imagined, beginnings far removed and recent.

Dubois first saw the four-bedroom, 280-square meter modernist house when he was a child. It was built by a doctor and one of his mother's professors in two parts between 1968 and '72. Dubois came across it again when researching Belgian vernacular architecture for his 2013 Venice Biennale proposal. Its design was heavily influenced by the mid-century modernists the original owner had encountered in Britain and North America

in the 1950s, but the low-lying structure still reads as distinctly Belgian due to its white-brick shell and humble scale.

As a structure, the house inspires a feeling of nostalgia, as does its setting, which influenced the orientation of the house. "When I arrive here, all my problems fade away," says Dubois. "The house offers something almost ancestral."

Large original portrait windows frame lush views of the surrounding forests and fields. In the living room, arrow landscape-oriented windows higher up let in light from above. The fireplace, with its simple mantel lifted a short distance off the floor, reads as sculpture. A plain glass door, which leads to an outdoor patio with a second fireplace, follows the same spare language as the rest of the windows in the house. These repeating rectangular volumes give the interior the feel of a De Stijl composition.

Dubois made only slight improvements to the house, updating a few interior details, materials and millwork, and repainting all the ceilings and walls to bring the house into its purest form. He populated the walls with art by fellow Belgians Léon Wuidar and Walter Swennen. There is also a photograph by Rineke Dijkstra that he has admired since childhood, acquired from a friend, the gallerist Jan Mot.

The furnishings were kept simple. First-edition Leggera chairs by Gio Ponti surround a dining table of Dubois' design. Above, original steel ceiling lights restored by Dubois mimic the table's cylindrical form. Dubois also designed the sofa in the living room.

Vintage floor lamps from the 1970s find their way into corners throughout the house. Chairs by Frank Lloyd Wright from between 1910 and '14 and a chair by Philippe Starck from the '80s provide seating throughout the rest of the house. Vases by Mario Botta provide homes for foliage brought in from outdoors.

The house's essentialist design allows for nature to occupy a central role in the experience of being there. "For me, the feelings of being home and feeling safe are related to the innocence of the countryside—horseback riding and biking everywhere," says Dubois. "Buying this house was a way to merge with that feeling."

The house is also a regenerative force. Dubois' parents divorced during his early adulthood, complicating his earliest understanding of the meaning of home. Now, they visit frequently, bringing memories and ephemera from his early adulthood and their own—old photos, heirloom china—and introducing a feeling of family into the home. "I like to think of homes as archives," says Dubois.

The house is quiet, allowing Dubois to circulate, look and think, with a lot of "little contemplative moments throughout the day." It forms a full circle connecting the creative capacity of youth with the reality of adulthood. "It's like a refuge," he says. "We are told when we are kids that we need to do well in our studies and go to work, and everything will be fine and easy. But then you grow up and learn that is not the way it works; it's not that easy. To somehow find your way to something that feels safe and like home feels like an accomplishment."

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ALL MY PROBLEMS FADE AWAY.”



Photographs by FEDERICO TORRA



Table by Bernard Dubois and Leggera chairs by Gio Ponti, edited by Cassina.







Photo on wall: *Olivier, The Foreign Legion, Ferme du Cuin, Orsan, France, August 10, 2000* by Rineke Dijkstra. Table by Bernard Dubois and Leggera chairs by Gio Ponti, edited by Cassina.



FM 61 Pastoe armchairs by Radboud van Beekum.







