

MANSION

THE MARKET

Decked Out in Art Deco

Brussels celebrates homes in the popular architecture and design style—some for sale

By J.S. MARCUS

The Art Deco architecture and design movement left its mark world-wide from Manhattan to Mumbai, but it is enjoying renewed cachet in Brussels, where Art Deco-era homes have carved out a niche market.

Typically built as house-size units in high-end apartment buildings during the 1920s and '30s, Brussels Art Deco residences are clustered south and east of the historic center, especially around the city's grand southern thoroughfare, Avenue Franklin Roosevelt, where their stark, geometric facades rub shoulders with stately embassies.

Brussels has one of Western Europe's strongest residential real-estate markets, with prices rising nearly 12% between the third quarters of 2017 and 2018, according to Knight Frank, the U.K.-based real-estate analyst. David Chicard, owner of Belgium Sotheby's International Realty, says the lower end of the luxury market is seeing the strongest price increases. He describes the market between \$1.1 million and \$1.7 million as "very robust," while homes above \$2.2 million are stagnant.

Prime Art Deco units are the exception. They start as low as \$840,000, says Mr. Chicard, but passionate buyers often pay above asking prices for the right listing. A renovated Art Deco property with original detailing can get a 15% premium, he says, compared with similar units in a different 20th-century style.

A three-bedroom apartment in a landmark 1920s building on Avenue Emile Duray, near Avenue Franklin Roosevelt, is listed at \$2.1 million. The 3,050-square-foot corner apartment has original Art Deco fittings, such as a built-in, chrome-trimmed cocktail cabinet.

The building is part of a five-building complex, collectively known as the Palais de la Cambre, which was featured in 1925's International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, the Parisian World's Fair that launched the Art Deco style. Each of the stone buildings has a monumental entrance decorated with bas-relief sculpture.

The term Art Deco first came into use in the 1960s, says Werner Adriaenssens, a professor of history of decorative arts at the Free University of Brussels, and

15% Premium that Art Deco homes with original detailing can command on the home-sales market

it can now cover a broad range of architecture and design that flourished from the end of World War I until the late 1940s. He says that the style, typically marked by geometric shapes and expensive materials, started out in the 1920s as a way to convince "rich people to buy modern things." The great Art Deco furniture designers of Paris relied on rare marble, tropical hardwood, lacquer finishes, and even pale

green shark hide to create luxurious homes. An Art Deco mansion-size townhouse on Avenue Franklin Roosevelt is on the market for \$5.5 million. Built out of beige French limestone, the geometric facade has a towering bas-relief sculpture depicting a shining sun.

Brussels residents Bernard Roché and Christina Cunningham Roché have created their own version of an Art Deco home in a 1937 apartment building by combining vintage Art Deco originals with East Asian antiques and funky 1960s objects. They capped off their endeavor by commissioning a ceiling-high relief sculpture of a jungle scene, first painted by French lacquer artist and designer Jean Dunand (1877-1942), and now considered a giant of the Art Deco movement.

The couple asked a Paris sculptor to render the painting in eggshell-colored plaster—and work their



Palais Stoclet, above, and the Van Buuren Museum, left, in Brussels.

FESTIVAL DAYS

Each spring, Belgium's capital celebrates its place in the decorative arts with the **Brussels Art Nouveau and Art Deco Festival**, held this year **March 16 to 31**. The festival arranges tours of landmark properties, such as the Villa Empain, a 1930s mansion-turned-museum, and allows rare looks inside private homes, including a 1939 Art Deco villa and the Vizzavona House, an Art Nouveau home known for its stained-glass skylight.



Bernard Roché and Christina Cunningham Roché, above, and their Art Deco home, listed for \$2.8 million. The wall, left, has a custom homage to famed Art Deco artist Jean Dunand. Below, a powder room.

"Like my father," she says, referring to Garrick C. Stephenson, a celebrated New York art and antiques dealer who died in 2007, "I think it's important to find things that you like. You don't always have to go with the same theme—totally English, totally French. Everything can go together."

After selling, the couple plan to find a small pied-a-terre in Brussels. They are renovating a 19th-century Sintra manor house with a light-filled, 360-degree view.

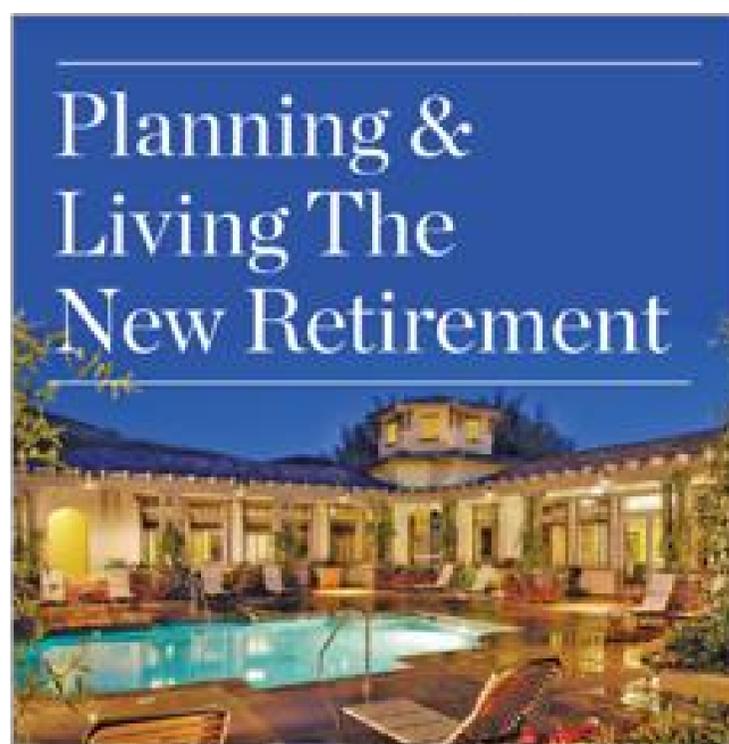
As in their Brussels Art Deco home, the new house "will be a mix," says Mrs. Roché. Though they may take their Dunand-inspired frieze with them, all in all there will be "more of a tropical feel," she says, and "less eggshell."



pet Papillon dog, Biska, into the setting. It dominates a wall in their second sitting area.

The couple, both in their 50s, are leaving Belgium's gray winters to spend much of the year in Sintra, Portugal. They have put their 4,200-square-foot Brussels apartment up for sale. The four-bedroom, three-bathroom unit has a terrace off the kitchen, as well as an open plan connecting two salons with a dining room. The asking price is \$2.8 million.

The apartment is rich in authentic Art Deco furniture, first bought in Paris by Mrs. Roché's parents in the 1930s, and later accented with objects from a range of eras, from 18th-century France to 20th-century Hollywood.



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BRUSSELS LISTINGS WITH ART DECO FLAIR



\$6.2 million

Square du Bois, 1927 home

7 bedrooms, 6 bathrooms, 10,200 sq. ft.

Art Deco elements: Sleek marble fireplaces in bedrooms. Agent: Sylvie Koch, Belgium Sotheby's International Realty



\$5.5 million

Ave. Franklin Roosevelt, 1930s townhouse

6 bedrooms, 4 bathrooms, 4,800 sq. ft.

Art Deco elements: Landmark home has marble fireplaces and parquet floors. Agent: Jean de Kerchove, Immobilière Le Lion

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