

REAL ESTATE

# House Hunting in Belgium

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By **MARCELLE SUSSMAN FISCHLER**

## A FIVE-BEDROOM TOWNHOUSE IN A SUBURB OF BRUSSELS

### **\$3.2 MILLION**

This broad multilevel townhouse, built in 1927, is on a street lined with Art Nouveau and Art Deco mansions in Uccle, an upscale suburban municipality 15 minutes by tram or car south of Brussels's city center. It is on a 0.19-acre lot, with a swimming pool and garden.

The 6,458-square-foot residence, with five bedrooms, two full baths and two partial baths, was designed by the Belgian architect and decorator Leon Sneyers as his home and workshop, said Anne Montanari of Brussels Sotheby's International Realty, which has the listing. A 2014 renovation by the current owner, the architect Smadar Baron, synthesizes its original Art Deco moldings, stained glass, light fixtures and high ceilings within a sleek, contemporary space with a new kitchen and baths.

The original textured-glass and metal front door is bracketed by sidelights, with a clerestory window. It opens onto an octagonal entrance hall with a black marble floor and marble paneling, along with a built-in marble bench with cushions that match the wallpaper.

To the left of the foyer, the kitchen is outfitted with black lacquer Boffi cabinets on the perimeter, a white Corian-topped center island with a drop-down breakfast bar and Gaggenau appliances. Beyond, the formal dining room

overlooks the pool.

A powder room and a study are to the right of the foyer. Straight ahead, a vestibule opens through French doors to the formal living room, which has a new Art Deco-style black marble fireplace with bench seating to each side. Against the opposite wall, a stepped, marble-topped staircase surround has distinctive built-in light fixtures. A second staircase leads from a hallway off the study to the garage. Beyond the living room, a raised den has stained-glass windows above sliding glass doors to the deck.

A library is on the upstairs landing. The master suite with a private terrace overlooks the garden. The master bath is white marble laser-engraved with a light green Art Deco motif. It has two vanities, a bathtub, a heated towel rack and an Italian rainhead shower. Also on the second level are two family bedrooms and an office/game room. Another bedroom and a shower room with a sink but no toilet are on mezzanines between the master bedroom and the top floor.

A swimming pool is built into the deck, with a fresco of a pond set into a wall next to it. A lattice gazebo forms an entryway to the fenced garden steps below.

The basement includes a two-car back-to-back garage, a kitchenette, a wine cellar, a laundry, a boiler and rooms for storage and swimming pool equipment.

Uccle, with 80,500 residents, is home to several embassies and is laced with parks, villages, a French school, forested areas and a cornucopia of restaurants. Four miles north, Brussels's cobblestoned Grand Place bustles with cafes, ornate Baroque and Gothic houses and a 13th-century town hall.

## **MARKET OVERVIEW**

“The market is always very stable in Belgium and in Brussels,” Ms. Montanari said, given the city's status as the headquarters of the European Union. As part of the green belt south of the city, Uccle has prices that are among the highest, and they have risen 20 percent since 2008, said Jean Corman, managing director of Victoire Properties, with offices in Brussels and Uccle.

While houses in Brussels and its suburbs generally gained 50 percent in

value between 2000 and 2008, prices remain 15 percent lower than before the global economic slump, Mr. Corman added.

The luxury market, more affordable than in Paris or London, ranges from \$1 million to \$18 million, said David Chicard, managing director of Brussels Sotheby's International Realty.

Since the downturn, more buyers are choosing to live in the city rather than the suburbs, Mr. Corman said. Most new development consists of apartments, particularly close to Brussels's historical center and in the up-and-coming Canal District, where residential projects are being built on former industrial sites. At the new 42-story UP-site tower, one-bedrooms start at 325,000 euros (\$360,750).

Philippe Rosy, a director of Engel & Völkers, said overall inventory is high, a combination of old and new stock.

## **WHO BUYS IN BELGIUM**

Luxury home buyers from France, drawn to Belgium by the absence of a capital-gains tax, buy homes in Uccle and other high-end neighborhoods south of Brussels, where international schools are found, Mr. Corman said. British, Italians, Germans and some Swiss and Dutch also are among the foreign buyers, agents said.

"You really need a reason to come to Belgium, usually family or business or taxes," Mr. Chicard said. "We don't have the Seine."

## **BUYING BASICS**

There are no restrictions on foreign buyers. Buyers and sellers are required to have a notary draft the sales agreement and place a 10 percent down payment in escrow, said Alexander Caudron, a notary. For the closing, the notary makes sure the contract is "valid and well-balanced for all parties involved."

Most luxury buyers obtain a mortgage from the bank, Mr. Caudron added; a 30 percent down payment is typical.

## **WEBSITES**

Belgium tourism: [visitbelgium.com](http://visitbelgium.com)

Belgium portal: [belgium.be](http://belgium.be)

Brussels tourism: [visitbrussels.be](http://visitbrussels.be)

## **LANGUAGES AND CURRENCY**

Dutch, French and German; euro (1 euro = \$1.11 )

## **TAXES AND FEES**

Annual property taxes on the townhouse are about 3,764 euros, or about \$4,180, Ms. Montanari said.

Registration taxes in Brussels run up to 12.5 percent of the property's value, with a deduction of 60,000 to 75,000 euros (\$66,600 to \$83,250) on the purchase price for tax purposes for first-time buyers who establish residence within two years of buying a house or apartment and maintain it as a primary residence for five years, Mr. Caudron said. A notary fee of 2.5 percent is based on the purchase price. Costs also include a stamp duty of 50 euros, administrative costs of about 850 euros, and a 21 percent value added tax (V.A.T.) on the notary costs. There is also a 1 percent registration tax due on the value of a mortgage.

## **CONTACT**

Anne Montanari, Brussels Sotheby's International Realty, (011-32-2) 640-08-01; [brussels-sothebysrealty.com](http://brussels-sothebysrealty.com)

### ***Correction: August 12, 2015***

An earlier version of this article described imprecisely a deduction allowed in some cases on registration taxes on home purchases. It is a deduction of 60,000 to 75,000 euros on the purchase price for tax purposes, not a discount of that amount on the tax itself.