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Three Profiles of "Interior Architects" in Postwar Flanders:

The Historic Distinction between Practitioners with a Degree, Domestic Advisors, and Interior Decorators

Els De Vos, Inge Somers & Bart Eeckhout

Introduction

Figure 1: Restyled room of the company offices of Levis by Marianne Burton. Notice the false perspective on the wall and the illusion of sunlight falling through the windows created by means of the painted surfaces on the floor. (Photograph: Marianne Burton)

The design of this room in the offices of the paint manufacturer Levis is quite fascinating in its manipulation of the visitor's view.¹ An urban nightscape is evoked on the wall. The wall paintings create false depth, suggesting the perspective of an illuminated highway (fig. 1). Radiators and pipes are treated as part of the walls. The dark ceiling, full of spotlights glittering like stars, makes the room seem lower than it is. This effect is strengthened because the color of the ceiling extends down three of the four walls. The bright surfaces on the floor are not caused by sunlight falling through the windows, but are painted on the floor to simulate the effect of sunny patches. Contrary to what one might expect, this room was not the work of an interior architect with a degree in what was then called "domestic interior art,"² but that of a journalist and self-made interior decorator who worked for the commercial women's magazine *Libelle* in Belgium and who called herself a "domestic interior architect." It serves as an excellent introduction to our case study of one country's attempt to professionalize the practice of designing interiors.

By means of original archival research and interviews conducted with key persons (some of whom have since passed away), we will uncover how professional identities emerged and were labeled in postwar Flanders, the Dutch-speaking region in the north of Belgium. Our historically and culturally specific case study can be framed against the internationally ongoing process of professionalization. In Western countries, the discipline of interior design has struggled to define itself from its beginnings.³ One reason is that

¹ The authors wish to express their gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for JID, whose useful comments have contributed substantially to reformulations in the text.

² As will be explained below, the first fulltime degree in interior architecture in Flanders was called "domestic interior art."

³ See, for example, Cys, J. (2006). [un]disciplined. *IDEA Journal*, 14-25; Marshall-Baker, A. (2010). Interior Design and Interior Architecture: Why not?, *Proceedings IDEC-conference 2010*, Atlanta, 552-555; Somers, I. & De Vos, E. (2013). With the Other, Beyond Confusion. *The International Journal of Interior architecture + Spatial design*, 1(1), 22-32.

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designing interiors is a multifaceted, layered, even interdisciplinary process. One has to deal with architectural environments as well as objects, with spaces as well as more ephemeral backdrops.⁴ Moreover, because designing interiors is perceived as not very different from everyday activities in which nearly everyone engages, such as furnishing, choosing colors, and decorating one's home,⁵ interior professionals want to dissociate their activities from everyday decorating.⁶ Nomenclature has played an important role in trying to emancipate the discipline in Belgium. By employing the terms of "interior architect" or "interior designer" (depending on the country), European professional practitioners long have sought for ways to separate their work from everyday design practices. Yet interior architecture also wanted to avoid being seen as inferior to architecture. As a result, alternative terms have circulated, none of which have solved the problem. "Interior design," for example, remains too broad and vague, referring to "an interdisciplinary practice concerned with the creation of a range of interior environments that articulate identity and atmosphere," according to the definition proposed by Sally Stone and Graeme Brooker.⁷ Thus, the ongoing search for a collectively accepted title reflects the struggle of the discipline to professionalize and define itself.⁸

The road toward professionalization in Flanders runs parallel to that in other Western countries. However, the Flemish case is different because matters of nomenclature and identity formation were heavily debated and even taken to court earlier, from the mid-1950s until the mid-1960s. While in North American and Australian educational programs and professional contexts, the adoption of titles such as "interior design" and "interior architecture" occurred more recently,⁹ this process had taken place in Flanders during the 1960s. The first Flemish interior architecture program, originally called "domestic interior art," is indeed one of the oldest in Europe;¹⁰ our consideration of it below is intended to contribute to the ongoing international debate about the professionalization of the interiors discipline as well as to discussions on nomenclature and the complex relationship between

⁴ Klingenberg, E.S. (2005). Interspace. In: *Design Competence*. Oslo: KHIO Faculty of Design (December), 5-24.

⁵ Belis, H., Pombo, F. & Heynen, H. (Eds.). (2014). Interior Architecture in Flanders: Gendered Perceptions and Professional Realities. *Architectonica*, (4), 13-20.

⁶ Beegan, G. & Atkinson, P. (2008). Professionalism, Amateurism and the Boundaries of Design, *Journal of Design History*, 21(4), 305.

⁷ Brooker, G & Stone, S. (2009). *Basics Interior Architecture. Form + Structure*, Lausanne: AVA, Academia, 16.

⁸ See more in detail in: Somers, I. & De Vos, E. (2013). With the Other, Beyond Confusion. *The International Journal of Interior architecture + Spatial design*, 1(1), 22-32.

⁹ For America, see for example: White, A.C. (2011). What's in a Name? Interior Design and/or Interior Architecture: The Discussion Continues, *Journal of Interior Design* (35) 1, x-xviii; Marshall-Baker, A. (2010) Interior Design and Interior Architecture: Why not?, *Proceedings IDEC-conference 2010*, Atlanta, 552-555 and Hildebrandt, H. (2004). The Gaps Between Interior Design and Architecture. *Design Intelligence*, issue 15, March <<http://www.di.net/articles/the-gaps-between-interior-design-and-architecture/>> (20.09.2014). For Australia see for example: Cys, J. (2006, 14-25).

¹⁰ The Antwerp program in Interior architecture was founded in 1946, only a year after the German Interior Architecture program founded in Detmold, which has been described as "one of the oldest in Europe." Pottgiesser, U. (2011). Interior Design as an Academic Discipline in Germany. *Journal of Interior Design*. 36(4), vi.

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professionals and amateurs.¹¹ As Gerry Beegan and Paul Atkinson observe in their introduction to a thematic issue of the *Journal of Design History* on the tensions between professionalism and amateurism in design, "Professional practice defines itself by its distance from the unschooled practitioner. . . . At the same time, the professional is often a categorization that the amateur designers reject, as a limitation to their creativity or originality."¹² This raises three questions: first, does schooling restrict designers; second, do interior architects with a degree design differently; and finally, do interior architects with a degree conform to particular stylistic conventions or ideologies? Through a historically and culturally specific case study, this article will show how different profiles, ranging from schooled interior architects to self-made interior advisors and interior decorators, enabled practitioners to approach interiors differently and sometimes to design in different ways in Flanders.

Diverse Profiles

In the postwar period in Flanders, several categories of practitioners were active in the broad and dispersed fields of interior architecture, interior design, and interior decoration. On one hand, there were interior architects with a degree. On the other, there were self-made interior professionals who could be roughly divided into two types, those with a background in home economics and those with a background in journalism or decoration. Remarkably, they all called themselves in retrospective interviews "domestic interior architects" (Dutch: *binnenhuisarchitecten*). In what follows, we will unravel why they did so and what their practice looked like.

This study's research into the various profiles of interior architects in postwar Flanders relies on two main types of sources. The first includes such primary resources as archival materials from the first Flemish program in interior architecture that are housed at the University of Antwerp; the holdings for Jul De Roover (the founder of this first program) at the Architectural Archive of the Province of Antwerp; the archives of various social women's organizations at KADOC and AMSAB; and some books, catalogues, and other materials from diverse libraries and private collections. In addition, we conducted interviews with several key figures, including Jul De Roover, some of his former students (e.g. Christiane Groenen-Magniette, Steven Stals, and Johan Van Steenberghe), and Jul's brother Walter De Roover. We also conducted retrospective interviews with some interior professionals who were active between 1946-1980 in Belgium, such as Marianne Burton, Godelieve Van Cleempoel, Lieve Snellings-Van Renterghem, and Krie Smet. By means of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, we wanted to develop a better understanding of their educational

¹¹ Two thematic issues of the *Journal of Design History* are devoted to those topics: Lees-Maffei, G. (Ed.) (2008). Special Issue: Professionalizing Interior Design 1870-1970, *Journal of Design History*, 21(1) and Beegan, G. & Atkinson, P. (Ed.) (2008). Special Issue: Ghosts of the Profession, *Journal of Design History*, 21(4).

¹² Beegan, G. & Atkinson, P. (2008). Professionalism, Amateurism and the Boundaries of Design, *Special Issue: Ghosts of the Profession. Journal of Design History*, 21(4), 305.

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backgrounds, work experiences, and artistic visions. The conversations were important supplements to the published materials and helped to contextualize and substantiate the facts on file. Finally, the resulting historic and cultural case studies were framed by recent studies in the field of interior design.¹³

Practitioners with a Degree: The First Graduates in Interior Architecture

While in North America and Australia interior design programs generally emerged out of art schools,¹⁴ this was not the case in Europe, where they tended to branch off from architectural schools. This was also true in Flanders, although the situation there was more complex. Initially, architectural departments and their educational programs were themselves part of art schools or academies of art, but later these architectural departments and programs became independent. They, in turn, launched programs in interior architecture, which was called at the time *Binnenhuiskunst* – literally meaning "domestic interior art." Unlike what the name suggests, however, these programs had nothing to do with art in the strict sense of the word. Instead, they corresponded more closely with what we now understand as interior architecture. In Antwerp, for example, the architectural school *Nationaal Hooger Instituut voor Bouwkunst en Stedebouw* (National Higher Institute for Architecture and Urban Planning) or *NHIBS* separated from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in 1946. This split acquired a momentum of its own, creating a dynamic that led to the development of new degrees, namely, urban planning, conservation of monuments and sites, product development, and interior design.¹⁵ As a result, in 1946 the first program in interior architecture in Flanders, called "Art of the Domestic Interior", was set up.

Other architectural schools in Flanders offered smaller evening classes and training programs, and soon they also launched their own fulltime programs, such as the Royal Academy of Ghent in 1947 and the competing architectural school Saint Lucas, also in Ghent, in 1949.¹⁶ All the above mentioned interior programs were staffed mainly by modernist male architects who expanded their expertise into the realm of interior design. They included Jul De Roover and Paul Smekens in Antwerp, and Jos De Mey and Willy van der Meeren in

¹³ These include, among others, Taylor, M. (Ed.) (2013) *Interior Design and Architecture*. Bloomsbury Academic; Weinthal, L. (Ed.) (2011). *Toward a New Interior*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press; Taylor, M., Preston, J. (Eds.) (2006). *Intimus*, John Wiley. Important is also the research of Inge Somers: Somers, I. Ongoing PhD research, *A Process of Becoming. Mapping and analyzing the Western Identity Discourse of the Interior Discipline*, University of Antwerp (expected in 2016); Somers, I. & De Vos, E. (2013, 22-32).

¹⁴ See for example in: Edwards, C. (2011). *Interior Design. A Critical Introduction*. New York: Berg Publishers, 53-62.

¹⁵ For more information about that process, see: De Vos, E. (2014). Together, but different: two co-occurring new degrees at the school of architecture in Antwerp. In Barbosa, H. & Calvera, A. (Eds.). *Tradition, Transition, Trajectories: major or minor influences?, Proceedings of the 9th Conference of the International Committee for Design History & Design Studies*, Aveiro: UA Editora, 115-120.

¹⁶ Nevejans, A., Van Impe, E. & Van de Voorde, S. (Dec. 2012/ Sept. 2010). *Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten, Gent (1751-)*. In *ODIS - Database Intermediary Structures Flanders* [online]. Record no. 5864. Available from <http://www.odis.be>. Van De Perre, D. (2003). *Van twee werelden*, Wetteren: Provinciebestuur Oost-Vlaanderen, 81.

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Ghent.¹⁷ It was quite common in Europe for instructors of the newly founded interior architecture programs to be modernist architects. In the case of Denmark, for instance, which was recently explored in the pages of the *Journal of Interior Design*, the director and principal instructor of the School of Professional Interior Architecture in Copenhagen during the 1940s and 1950s was the modernist architect Finn Juhl.¹⁸

For present purposes, we will limit ourselves to one exemplary case, the *NHIBS* in Antwerp. At the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, from which the *NHIBS* derived in 1946, the degree in domestic interior art developed from a series of evening classes in interior design that had been launched for men at the *Avondschoon voor kunstambachten* [Evening Classes for Arts and Crafts], also in Antwerp, in 1941. Historically and comparatively speaking, the male target group is rather exceptional, because interior design classes in Flanders, unlike architectural classes, have tended to be largely for women (as is the case in the rest of Europe and North America).¹⁹ However, one of the historically specific motives for launching the 1941 course in Antwerp was to keep Belgian men out of the German army during World War II. Viewed from a wider international perspective, the setting up of educational programs in interior design during these years is characteristic of the professionalization process of the discipline, which may be traced throughout the industrialized West.²⁰ Especially during the postwar building boom, specialization was needed in order to treat interior spaces with the same commitment as exteriors.²¹

In order to understand the context against which the Antwerp program in domestic interior art developed, it is necessary to go back to the middle of the nineteenth century. The very roots of the first Flemish program in interior architecture can be traced back to the decorative arts, which were taught for the first time in Belgium at the Antwerp Academy of Fine Arts in 1848.²² The Belgian educational system followed a general reform trend in artistic teaching at the time – hence the introduction of new courses such as the one in Antwerp. The internationally renowned Art Nouveau architect Victor Horta, who was head of the architectural design studios at the Academy from 1919 to 1927, included interiors in his courses, since he considered architecture to be a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a comprehensive work of art that draws on all art forms, from architecture to interior decoration, furniture

¹⁷ Interview with Krie Smet, Gent, 4 Apr. 2013.

¹⁸ Lytken, M. (2013). The Danish School of Interior Architecture. *Journal of Interior Design* 38/3, 1-19, 1.

¹⁹ In 1961, Saint Lucas I n Ghent even created a degree in domestic interior architecture only for female candidates interested in architecture; they did so at an off-campus at the school Nouveau Bois, which was run by female nurses. Not until 1966 were women allowed to study architecture at any of the Saint Lucas schools. Van De Perre, D. (2003, 22). For more information about the situation in other countries, see: Muller, U. (2009) *Bauhaus Women*. Paris: Flammarion; Lytken, M. (2013, 1-19: 6); Ockman, J. (2012) *Architecture School: Three Centuries of Educating Architects in North America*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: MIT Press, 324-325.

²⁰ This process is described in Lees-Maffei, G. (2008). Introduction. *Journal of Design History*, 21(1), 1-18.

²¹ Hay, F. (2007). Interior Architecture, *proceedings Thinking inside the box*, Interiors Forum Scotland (1-2nd March), 1.

²² Prina, D.N. (2013). Architectuuronderwijs aan de Antwerpse Academie voor Schone Kunsten, tussen traditie en innovatie (1831-1914). In E. De Vos & P. Lombaerde (2013, 70-87); Prina, D.N. (2010). Design in Belgium before Art Nouveau: Art, Industry, and the Reform of Artistic Education in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century, *Journal of Design History*, 23(4), 329-350.

design, paintings, sculpture, tapestry, and so forth. He taught a course on *Ameublement* [Furnishing] in which he discussed furniture as well as other objects, ranging from vacuum cleaners to lighting fixtures, bottles, and radiators. Rationality, functionality, and sobriety in the design were some of the key elements in his courses, although he refrained from imposing a particular style. Under his guidance students studied so-called stylish furniture, which derived its look from the past, as well as modernist furniture.²³ The openness towards stylish and more traditional furniture began to change from 1941 onwards, when two former architectural students from the Royal Academy of Antwerp, Jul De Roover (fig. 2) and Paul Smekens, were hired to teach the evening classes on interior design in Antwerp. While Smekens preferred to turn a blind eye to conventional decorative elements, such as imitation candles on a candelabra to create an ambient effect of coziness, De Roover unrelentingly addressed them. Thus, he labeled the stereotypical "Persian carpets" fabricated in a Flemish town "expensive, ugly, and bad."²⁴ De Roover convinced the director of the *NHIBS* to organize the first full-fledged degree in interior architecture in Flanders in 1946. He himself became the only teacher responsible for the practice-based part of the program. From 1950 onwards, he was supported in this capacity by the modernist interior architect Rob Van Tenten.²⁵

De Roover was a member of the Belgian branch of the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) and was a fan of the French architect Charlotte Perriand and the brother-in-law of the modernist architect Renaat Braem, who had been himself an apprentice of Le Corbusier.²⁶ He was committed to the ideas of the modernist movement, and this was clearly evident in the courses he set up. Rationally designed kitchens and the idea of an affordable, contemporary "true design" were heavily promoted. Yet, because architectural modernism was beginning to lose its legitimacy in the postwar period, De Roover was less dogmatic than Le Corbusier. He made a point of saying explicitly he thought

a good home is not a machine for living; . . . in the first place we should create a living environment where we gather with relatives and friends, where we show our personalities, where the small enjoyments of life, such as flower arrangements, the placing and hanging of art objects and knick-knacks, reproduce the character of

²³ Jaenen, M. (2013). De discussie rond de architect als kunstenaar (1919–1936). In: E. De Vos & P. Lombaerde (2013, 90).

²⁴ Smekens, P. (1946). *Interieurkunst*, Antwerpen, De Sikkels, 50-51; De Roover, J. (1948). Zo willen wij wonen. *Vloerbedekking*, *Stem der Vrouw*, 9, 7.

²⁵ The duration of architectural studies, including interior architecture, was reduced from 7 to 5 years as a result of educational reforms in 1951. In 1964, the length of interior design studies was reduced still further to 4 years.

²⁶ Braeken, J. (2012). *Braem 1910-2001*. Brussels: Vlaams Instituut voor het Onroerend Erfgoed, ASA Publishers; De Vos, E. (2010). Living with High-rise Modernity: The Modernist Kiel Housing Estate of Renaat Braem, a Catalyst to a Socialist Modern Way of Life? *Home Cultures*, 7(2), 109-116.

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inhabitants in the interior, and where the colors also reflect the mood of inhabitants.²⁷

Figure 2: Portrait of Jul De Roover in front of a home he designed for his brother in 1955. (Photograph: Bert Husselmans, 9.12. 2005)

Instead of Le Corbusier's phrase "machine for living," De Roover used the Latin-derived French term *habitat*. In this, he was most likely inspired by the *Chartre d'Habitat* that was prepared by the Belgian editorial board for the CIAM IX in 1953.²⁸ With this untranslatable term, he indicated that (interior) architects should include in their designs the entire living environments of their clients, from chairs and tables all the way up to the urban plan.²⁹ Indeed, De Roover's design studio assignments were not limited to renovation and interior design, but frequently included architectural designs.³⁰ The term *habitat* was used to explain the objectives of the courses in interior design in Antwerp.

By 1967, De Roover admitted with disappointment that modernism had failed, as he thought that it reached only a cultural elite, not the public. He argued that modernist architects "all too easily have a tendency to determine FOR OURSELVES HOW people should live – how many square meters and with what kind of equipment. Architects should primarily learn to listen to the arguments of their 'victims'" (capitals in the original). Over the course of his career, he came to take a more modest stance toward clients because he believed he initially dominated them too much. For example, at one point in his early years he asked a client, after finishing his home, what the client thought of the carefully chosen colors for the walls (De Roover always paid a lot of attention to colors and lectured on the topic), the client admitted reluctantly he was color-blind.³¹ Although De Roover searched for alternatives in the anti-design movement and in structuralism,³² a tempered modernism

²⁷ Jul De Roover, written texts entitled "Onze wooninrichting" [Our Design of Dwelling Interiors], 1959, Archive of J. De Roover, APA. All translations from Flemish Dutch are by the authors.

²⁸ The term was drawn from geographers and anthropologists to indicate geographical space and land, on the one hand, and their relation with civilization, on the other. See Eleb M. (2000). An Alternative to Functionalist Universalism: Ecochard, Candilis, and ATBAT-Afrique. In: S. W. Goldhagen & R. Legault (Eds.) (2000). *Anxious Modernisms*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 55. The *Chartre d'Habitat* was discussed at CIAM IX in 1953. The engineer Vladimir Bodiansky and Michel Ecochard, head of the Service de l'Urbanisme in Morocco and of the African modern movement, the ABTAT-Afrique (Atelier des Bâisseurs), argued at CIAM IX for the right to a human habitat. They did so in response to rural depopulation and growing slums in North Africa. The "habitat" had taken the place of the "machine à habiter."

²⁹ De Roover, "Architectuur is KUNST van het Creëren van het menselijk milieu, in zijn meest brede zin gedacht: l'hâbitat." De Roover, J. (1962). Architectuur voor mensen. Text written for the Verbond Vlaamse Academici Antwerpen, 23.01.1962, Archive De Roover, APA.

³⁰ For example, sophomores were asked to design a boat or a single-family home; their final project could even be a youth hostel.

³¹ Interview with Jul De Roover, Orban, L. & Thyssen, J. (1996). *Jul De Roover, een visie op wonen*, video of Jul De Roover, DVD.

³² One of De Roover's favorites was Habitat 1967, an experimental housing complex with shops and a school designed by the Israeli-Canadian architect Moshe Safdie for the 1967 World Exposition in Montreal. It consisted of 354 identical, prefabricated concrete forms piled up in diverse configurations, which gave the complex the

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remained the dominant aesthetic paradigm in his courses as well as more generally at the Royal Academy (fig. 3). The principles and ideas of the modern movement continued to dominate the design studio and the formation of generations of interior architects.³³

Figure 3: The tempered modernist interior of the Steurs house; home and bookshelf design by Jul De Roover, 1961.

Besides the aesthetic paradigms at the school and interior design studios of Jul De Roover, his contribution to the professionalization of the discipline and its education also is important. His main efforts were aimed at upgrading the program institutionally. Initially (until January 1969), graduates in domestic interior architecture received merely a certificate of technical secondary schooling. Thus, their diploma differed from an architectural diploma, which was equivalent to a university degree. This changed when De Roover and the then-director Frans De Groodt managed to get the diploma of domestic interior architecture recognized as a higher-education degree in art studies. (In today's terms, this would be a master's degree at university level.) Although this was a very important step, domestic interior architecture was still classified under art studies. It would take until 1991 before an education in domestic interior architecture was classified in the same category as architecture, provided the first two years were jointly organized with architectural programs.³⁴

Yet, even then, there continued to be an important difference. While Belgian architects were and still are protected by law (because the granting of building permits has depended on the contribution of a licensed architect since 1939), no similar provisions exist for domestic interior architects. Initially, the graduates were not even allowed to use the term "domestic interior architect," because it included the addition of "architect," which was a protected title. The Belgian Association of Architects guarded (and still guards) that title closely.

Being himself an architect, Jul De Roover pleaded for the full recognition of domestic interior architecture as a discipline beyond interior decoration. The title for him was a symbolic representation of the position and perspectives adopted by experts in the field. He aimed at a full-fledged architectural approach toward interiors, because "unsupported by architecture, domestic interior design would be reduced to banal ornamental art; it would be futile, without character, falling prey to the commercial concepts of an upholsterer and decorator."³⁵ Domestic interior architecture could be deemed more useful and important than interior decoration, which was associated with commonplace consumption and

outlook of vertical slums on a hill. Smits, J. (2007). De Silvertoptorens van architect Jul De Roover, unpublished Master Thesis, Faculty Design Sciences, University of Ghent, 79.

³³ Based on interviews with Johan Van Steenberghe, Julienne Van den Berghe, Jean Wauters, and Steven Stals, Antwerp 2012.

³⁴ It would be classified as, literally, Higher Education of the Long Type. Laporte, D. (1996). Van Binnenhuiskunst naar Binnenhuisontwerpen. In D. Laporte, C. Kieckens, J. Thijssen, et al. (Eds.), 50 jaar interieurarchitectuur Antwerpen. Antwerpen: Handelsbeurs, 11.

³⁵ Jul De Roover (s.d.). Over de titel. In: Archive De Roover, APA.

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commerce. In the spirit of architecture as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, De Roover stressed the importance of mutual cooperation between interior architects and regular architects, instead of a merely supportive role for interior architects.³⁶ He believed that the act of *designing* distinguished interior architecture from the tasks undertaken by other suppliers to the architect, like joiners, plumbers, building constructors, etc.³⁷ Another reason why De Roover advocated for recognizing the profession and including the term "architect" instead of "designer" was the fact that interior architects were not allowed to sign their own plans and systematically had to appeal to an architect to get a building permit.

By contrast, in Belgium's main neighboring countries, the Netherlands, Germany, and France, "architect" was included in the respective professional titles during the fifties and sixties, namely *binnenhuisarchitect*, *Innenarchitekt*, and *architecte d'intérieur*. The nomenclature in surrounding countries encouraged De Roover to plead for the same change in Belgium, that is, to include the term "architect."³⁸ Joining forces with the Professional Association of Interior Designers from Antwerp, he launched a legal appeal against the Belgian Association of Architects. As a result of his efforts, domestic interior designers were allowed to include the word "architect" in their titles, beginning in 1964, which resulted in the use of *binnenhuisarchitect* (domestic interior architect) in analogy with their colleagues in the Netherlands. While the French and German titles did not explicitly contain the word "domestic," the Dutch title did so. In 1995, along with the reorganization of higher education in Belgium, "domestic" would be dropped from the title as the profession did not limit itself to domestic spaces, but dealt with public interiors as well, a change that had to be recorded in the title.³⁹ A similar evolution occurred in other countries as well.⁴⁰

The graduates from the program in domestic interior art ended up in a wide range of jobs.⁴¹ About 20 to 25 percent were hired at an (interior) architectural office or furniture company, although this was sometimes combined with a teaching position or a small job as a journalist for a women's section on interior design in various magazines and periodicals. In 1961, for instance, Christiane Groenen-Magniette took over the section on interior design for the *Socialistische Vooruitziende Vrouwen* [Socialist Visionary Women] from De Roover while she was working at an architectural office.⁴² Some, such as Claire Bataille and Paul

³⁶ "We say 'cooperation' and not 'collaboration' because interior design is essentially on a higher level that cannot be compared with any artisan's trade which lends its collaboration to the erection of a building." Jul De Roover, Letter to the K.M.B.A., 6.11.1954. Archive of De Roover, APA

³⁷ Letter of Jul De Roover to the K.M.B.A., 6.11.1954. Archive of De Roover, APA, 1.

³⁸ In a drafted letter, De Roover refers to the names in the Netherlands, Germany and France. Letter to the K.M.B.A., 6.11.1954. Archive of De Roover, APA, 3.

³⁹ The term evolved from the Dutch *binnenhuiskunst* [art of the domestic interior] to *binnenhuisontwerpen* [domestic interior design], then to *binnenhuisarchitectuur* [domestic interior architecture], and finally to the current *interieurarchitectuur* [interior architecture].

⁴⁰ "The interior cannot be equated solely with the domestic," see: Lees-Maffei G. (2008, 3).

⁴¹ Laporte, D. (1996, 7-12). Also based on interviews with Van Steenberghe, Van den Berghe, Wauters & Stals, Antwerp, 2012.

⁴² She worked from 1961 until 1975 at the office of Verduyn before starting her own practice. From 1965 onwards, she combined this practice with teaching at the NHIBS in Antwerp, but she stopped her work for the journal. Interview with Christiane Magniette, Antwerp, 17.04.2012.

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Ibens, who became the best-known graduates from the program, established a successful office together. Hallmarks of Bataille and Ibens's work were simplicity and austerity, and their portfolio ranges from designed objects to public buildings – from coffee pots to general urban plans.⁴³ In the spirit of De Roover, they believe that designing is an approach and a spatial art irrespective of the scale of the design.⁴⁴ They had to hire some younger architects so as to be legally able to realize architectural projects. Because only a small number of students (e.g., five in 1961) graduated during the first decades of the school's existence, they were highly sought after by architectural offices and built-in-furniture companies because they were both specialized in the architecture of interiors and furniture and skilled enough to design, understand, and supervise entire projects.⁴⁵ It seems that men were in higher demand than women. In 1973, a vacancy at *Top-Mouton*, a renowned interior office at the time, explicitly asked for a male interior architect or designer.⁴⁶

The profile of those who obtained the degree of domestic interior architect in Flanders was closely associated with a modernist architectural approach toward interiors. The strength of those interior architects was their familiarity with the fields of architecture and engineering as well as furniture and interior design. The act of designing a habitat was a central concern in their education and professional practice.

Domestic Advisors: Home Economists and Advisors on Home Culture Design

Besides graduates with a degree in domestic interior architecture, there were a variety of self-made *aficionados* in Flanders. One category is that of the home economists who worked for sociocultural women's organizations between the 1950s and mid-1980s. During those years, several sociocultural organizations in Flanders informed people about home culture, interior design, and domestic appliances. They included the Socialist Visionary Women and three organizations of Christian inspiration: the Association of Farming Women, the Christian Workers Women's Guilds, and the Christian Middle-Class Women. These groups educated their memberships in accordance with their respective ideological models of domesticity and did so through journals, contests, lectures, display houses, and classes (fig. 4).⁴⁷ Some had a special section, such as the Home Service of the Association of Farming Women, which was

⁴³ Van Synghel, K. (2003). De kwadratuur van de cirkel. In Vandeveld, T. (Ed.), *Claire Bataille en Paul Ibens: projecten en objecten 1968-2002*. Gent: Ludion, 19-20.

⁴⁴ They are still alive. Interview with Bataille and Ibens in: Dubois, M. (2003). Op zoek naar de nobele eenvoud. In T. Vandeveld (Ed.), *Claire Bataille en Paul Ibens: projecten en objecten 1968-2002*. Gent: Ludion, 165-175.

⁴⁵ Based on interviews with former teacher Christiane Groenen-Magniette and teacher Miep Van den Berghe, Antwerp 2012.

⁴⁶ Interview with former teacher Jean Wauters, Antwerp 2012.

⁴⁷ For an example of how their ideology influenced the designing of homes, see: De Vos, E. (2010). Contradictions in the Promotion of Domestic Comfort in Cold-War Era Flanders. Proceedings of the 11th International Docomomo Conference, Aug. 24-27 2010, Mexico-City.

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staffed by home economists and/or teachers who occasionally collaborated with external architects to offer lectures or advice about the organization's manuals.⁴⁸

The home economist was a kind of home consultant *avant la lettre* who visited the organization's members and gave them suggestions about renovations to their homes or encouraged them to build new ones. Advice ranged from legal and financial information on loans and financial premiums for building houses to information about renovations, the furnishing and arrangement of homes, or labor-saving household appliances. Home economists often made rough sketches with suggestions for the possible renovation of a home or lay-out for the furniture, though they left the final design, drawings, and realization to the architects they recommended (fig. 5). Their role was mainly to inform and guide people so as to help them identify their needs and allow them to communicate with architects.

Figure 4: Open kitchen of a model apartment in Bruges; design by the provincial committee of West-Flanders, 1978. (Photograph: Provincial Archive of West-Flanders)

These women trained as interior consultants by taking a variety of courses. Lieve Snellings-Van Renterghem, who worked for the Christian Workers Women's Guilds, called herself explicitly a "domestic interior architect." As she explained, "My initial degree was *technisch lerares* [the equivalent of a Professional Bachelor in Education: Home Economics], and I educated myself as a domestic interior architect, because the professional title was – and still is – not protected by law. This was mere child's play: a matter of taking a few classes here and there."⁴⁹ She attended evening lectures and other small classes taught by architects, such as Jul De Roover, Jos De Mey, and Karel N. Elnó. These were set up on a contractual basis by organizations such as the Lodewijk de Raat Foundation, which has been organizing popular education for adults since 1952; the Confederation of Painters; the Association of Flemish Academics, and so forth.⁵⁰ Such organizations were not design offices; they were primarily aimed at adults with an interest in various aspects of home-making.

Maria Van Cleemput, the head of the Home Culture Service of the Belgian Association of Farming Women, enjoyed a similar training. Like her successor, Godelieve Van Cleemput, she had a degree as *landbouwwregentes* [the equivalent of a Professional Bachelor in Education: Agriculture], and she had taken a number of extra courses in home economics at the famous Landbouwhogeschool [Agricultural University College] in Wageningen in the Netherlands. Besides taking courses, these women deepened their expertise as (interior) consultants by working with architects on advice manuals for rural homes or by organizing workshops about the construction and design of homes. They, in turn, trained local (unpaid) staff members of their organizations who taught local courses in housing and home culture. In the case of Lieve Snellings-Van Renterghem, she even trained women from every Flemish

⁴⁸ De Vos, E. (2012). *Hoe zouden we graag wonen?* [How Would We Like to Live?], Leuven: UPL.

⁴⁹ Interview.

⁵⁰ See Archive of De Roover, APA.

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province to read and comment on building plans in order to infiltrate social housing companies and eventually even the realm of political decision-making.⁵¹

Figure 5: "Things Have to Change in Our Kitchens." A design proposal published in the journal of the Christian Workers Women's Guilds. ("Het moet veranderen in onze keukens". *Vrouwenbeweging* (1960), 11, 41)

The staff members of the home culture services of sociocultural women's organizations were extremely aware of developments in home economics, rational housing, domestic architecture, and interior design. They constantly informed themselves about trends and new evolutions in the field. They were, for example, familiar with the famous Frankfurt kitchen designed by Schütte-Lihotsky in 1927, but they did not copy the model indiscriminately. The Association of Farming Women, for example, argued that a kitchen should be bigger than the German kitchens of six square meters. The kitchen for the "healthy farmer's family, which is usually made up of many and hearty eaters," should "allow two persons to be at work without mutual obstruction" and should not be too small "considering that most of our mothers are not particularly slim."⁵²

The greatest asset of home consultants was their familiarity with the target group for whom they worked. They knew how their members thought and lived and what they needed. In advising individual members about building and decorating a home catering to their needs, they did not promote a single style. Since their organizations were geared toward the recruitment of a wider membership, home consultants did not treat architectural concerns and stylistic preferences as crucially important. Godelieve Van Cleemput, who led the Home Culture Service from 1971 to 1984, always had to compromise between her own, "modern" preferences and the more traditionally oriented desires of members.⁵³ This was also the reason why she included furniture with a traditional look in the manuals of the Association of Farming Women, although she was chided for this by a monk who lectured at the architectural school Saint Lucas in Ghent. Like his colleagues in Antwerp, the monk preferred modernist furniture.⁵⁴

When asked to consider the qualities interior consultants most needed, Snellings-Van Renterghem and Godelieve Van Cleemput both stressed, on the one hand, a commitment to learning about housing design and domestic matters, and, on the other, the need to be endowed with a feeling for architecture and interior design. Snellings-Van Renterghem put it succinctly, "As I had no children, I had already been training myself in this matter for quite a long time. I had a lot of talent for it."⁵⁵

⁵¹ De Vos, E. (2012) Hoe zouden we graag wonen?, 71-94.

⁵² De Vos, E. (2009). The American Kitchen in Belgium?, *The Tensions of Europe/Inventing Europe Working Papers Series*, <<http://www.tensionsofeurope.eu/www/en/publications/working-papers>>

⁵³ De Vos, E. & Heynen, H. (2007). Shaping Popular Taste: The Belgian Farmers' Association and the Fermette during the 1960s-1970s, *Home Cultures*, 4(3), 237-260.

⁵⁴ Interview Van Cleemput, Steenokkerzeel, 8 Mar. 2004.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

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Godelieve Van Cleemput, likewise, emphasized that she worked hard to get her position. Responding to the researchers' suggestion that she was able to follow in the footsteps of her aunt Maria Van Cleemput as head of the Home Culture Service, she objected strenuously by saying, "No, absolutely not, I had to fight for it when she retired. I had to jump in for Maria sometimes – when she was ill or such. And I knew some architects. Actually, I felt at home there. But I had to pass an exam."⁵⁶ Although the prerequisite of passing an exam was exceptional – it was more common just to ask one of the employees to run the home culture service – the Association of Farming Women indeed asked the architects involved to organize an exam because it wanted to hire a competent successor for Maria without the suggestion of any bias. As Godelieve had already settled into the work, was familiar with the service, and enjoyed the confidence of a number of architects, she passed the exam with flying colors.⁵⁷

Even though these two women mentioned that they felt endowed with a certain natural talent, they both stressed that "having no children" was an important condition for them to do their jobs properly, as they would otherwise have lacked the necessary time for them.⁵⁸ They insisted that the job they did depended on more than aesthetic intuition: it required a lot of dedication to the work, besides talent. The main strengths of this category of interior consultants were their training in home economics, their commitment to the job, and their knowledge of the target audience.

Interior Decorators: Journalists and Self-made Interior Decorators

The third and final category of practitioners is connected to the field of commercial women's magazines. To make a clear distinction with interior architects who received a professional training, we will call them interior decorators, following the example of Joel Sanders in his seminal article "Curtain Wars." Sanders refers to "the common perception that architects work conceptually, using durable materials to shape space, while decorators work intuitively, adorning rooms with ephemeral materials and movable objects."⁵⁹ Along the same lines, Penny Sparke uses the term "interior decorators" for the work of Elsie De Wolfe and other professional female practitioners who emerged in the U.S. during the first decades of the twentieth century. These practitioners saw themselves as operating within a fashion system and consciously emulated a number of commercial strategies.⁶⁰

The work done by this third category of practitioners was published in commercial women's magazines. As journalists, these women focused on the furnishing and

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, Interview with Lieve Snellings-Van Renterghem, Aalter, 30 June 2004.

⁵⁹ Sanders, J. (2002). Curtain Wars: Architects, Decorators, and the 20th-Century Domestic Interior. *Harvard Design Magazine* 16, 14-20.

⁶⁰ Chapter five: "The decorative interior", in: Sparke, P. (2008). *The Modern Interior*. London: Reaktion Books, 91-110.

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arrangement of rooms; they showed no interest in building or construction. Examples include Marianne Burton, who wrote for *Libelle*, and Ann Sibergues, Michèle Le Brun, and Michèle Ghislain, who all worked for *Rijk der Vrouw* [Woman's Realm].⁶¹ Information about the background of people in this group is very limited owing to a lack of documentation. Only Marianne Burton could be traced because she recently published for *Villas*, a commercial magazine specialized in housing issues. She is an excellent example of a successful self-made *aficionada* with an atypical career path.

By the age of 18, Burton finished an unusual mix of studies. She obtained her certificate of secondary education through the *middenjury* (an alternative to regular high-school degrees), went on to study "Diction, Theater, and Discourse" at the Brussels Conservatory, and eventually obtained a degree in journalism from the Institute for Journalism in Brussels in the early 1960s. After her studies, she was immediately hired as an independent journalist by the francophone Belgian newspaper *La Dernière Heure*. Shortly afterwards, she became a copywriter for the Belgian branch of the French advertising agency *Publicis*, where she was responsible for the housing section, including construction materials. Soon she began to organize events to promote products because a *soirée* with a fashion show at the Avenue Louise in Brussels had much more impact than a printed ad did. At one of these events, Jo Jaegers, who from 1924 to 1980 was the head of the editorial department of the commercial Belgian women's magazine *Libelle*, offered her a job to serve as editor of the home section in his magazine.⁶²

Again shortly after this, Burton became the chief editor of the section "*Maison Architecture Consommation*" [House Architecture Consumption] for both the Dutch- and French-speaking parts of Belgium. Next, she became responsible for the first section on Europe in the commercial press, called "*Les femmes et l'Europe*" [Women and Europe], which was set up in cooperation with European government agencies. Besides writing texts, she contributed to several styling projects for *Libelle* and other clients, such as the paint manufacturer *Levis* and the carpet manufacturer *De Poortere*.⁶³

In addition to writing editorials on houses or rooms in the houses of (interior) architects, such as Pieter De Bruyne, Burton regularly reported on exhibitions and interior design fairs, for instance, the interior fair *Salon of the Ideal House* in Brussels or the Cologne furniture fair.⁶⁴ She paid a lot of attention especially to *Visiona*, an initiative by the German chemical and pharmaceutical company Bayer, since this was also presented at the Brussels *Salon*. Each year between 1968 and the mid-1970s, Bayer rented a pleasure boat during the

⁶¹ Stevens, E., (2003-2004). *Opvattingen over wonen in de jaren zestig aan de hand van vier tijdschriften* [Ideas about Dwelling in the Sixties Based on an Analysis of Four Magazines], unpublished diss. Architectural Engineering, KU Leuven, 127.

⁶² The first article that appeared under her name in *Libelle* dates from 1962, viz. Burton, M. (1962). Licht, bron van schoonheid [Light, the Source of Beauty], *Libelle* 7, 24-29.

⁶³ More information on the manufacturers Levis and De Poortere may be found respectively at <<http://www.levis.info/be/>> and <<http://www.louisdepoortere.be/benefits/>> (accessed on 17 Jan. 2014)

⁶⁴ See, for example, Burton, M. (1979). Een salon voor een ideaal huis, *Libelle*, 3, 32-33; Burton, M. (1979). Een leefbare leefwereld achter een oude gevel, *Libelle*, 5-8, 59-62.

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Cologne furniture fair and asked a well-known designer⁶⁵ to transform the boat into a temporary showroom furnished with plastics and textiles from Bayer. From 1975 onwards, designers from several countries were invited to create showrooms of 30 square meters at *Visiona*. Burton was one of them.⁶⁶

By then, she had experience with furnishing houses for *Libelle*.⁶⁷ As of 1974, she also participated every two years in the *Salon of the Ideal House* with a showroom for *Libelle*. For the first of these, she arranged and furnished an entire 1,120-square-meter house that was designed by the architect Pierre Preud'homme and constructed in prefab methods. In 1978, she created a large, open, multifunctional interior with several "corners" that served the functions of bedroom, living room, kitchen, etc. Many other commissions followed, though none would ever involve a complete house.⁶⁸

Figure 6: Color is used to accentuate architectural elements in the entrance hall of the Levis company offices; design by Marianne Burton, s.d. (Photograph: Marianne Burton)

Figure 7: Beach icons are used in the canteen of Levis; design by Marianne Burton, s.d. (Photograph: Marianne Burton)

Her biggest project was for Levis, a paint manufacturer. The company asked her to restyle the entire company offices in two weeks' time. She had to transform all the rooms, including the entrance hall, dressing room, toilets, and canteen, but all she had at her disposal were paint, a team of painters, and a small budget for gadgets. While in some rooms she used color to articulate architectonic elements or pieces of furniture, such as doorframes and table legs (fig. 6), in others she created a sort of stage set in which the architecture of the room was ignored and a dream landscape was evoked. In the canteen, for example, she painted the ceiling and a horizontal strip under the ceiling in the same dark color so as to give the room a lower feel. Beach icons ranging from the picture of a sunshade to beach cabins evoked a beach landscape, which completely transformed the identity of the canteen (fig. 7). In another underused big room, she had an entire landscape painted on the wall, including the perspective of a highway on the front façade (fig. 1). Some elements of the architecture, such as the framing of the entrance hall, were highlighted (fig. 8), while others were almost camouflaged (figs. 7 and 1). The ceiling and top of walls in some rooms, such as the entrance hall (fig. 6), the canteen (fig. 7), and a conference hall (figs. 1 and 8), were painted in the same dark colors so as to create the illusion of a heavenly sphere. This also obscured boundaries between walls and ceiling, making it seem as if the room was not

⁶⁵ E.g., Werner Pantón in 1968 and 1970, Joe Colombo in 1969, and Olivier Mourgue in 1971.

⁶⁶ Burton, M. (1975). België aanwezig op Visiona [Belgium Present at Visiona], *Libelle* 10, 70-79; Burton, M. (1975). Wonen en dromen in één ruimte [Dwelling and Dreaming in One Space], *Libelle*, 11, 81-84.

⁶⁷ Burton, M. (1972). Waarom is dit een droomhuis? [Why Is This a Dream House?], *Libelle* special edition 8, VI.

⁶⁸ At the outset of the 1980s, she created a futuristic room for phone banking. In 1985 and 1987, in cooperation with the paint manufacturer Levis, she designed a showroom that evoked a home. In the first case, the design consisted of a loose collection of separate cubical showrooms, ranging from a kitchen and dining room to a living room and dormitories. Two years later, the rooms were connected by a single walking corridor and became more varied in shape.

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composed of a geometric form. In the conference hall, a moon was added to the interior as a finishing touch (fig. 8).

Figure 8: Decorated meeting hall. Note the play with perspective, the moon painted on the left wall, and the accentuation of the entrance door while radiators are camouflaged by the use of color. Design by Marianne Burton, s.d. (Photograph: Marianne Burton)

Many of Burton's creations date from the late 1970s to mid-1980s, and thus bear some of the marks of postmodernism. Yet she dealt with spaces and interiors in a totally different way from other interior professionals: she created attractive decors and splendid showrooms rather than real interiors for real users. Her skill was in creating harmonious and exclusive decors that evoked a pleasant, poetic atmosphere and, in some cases, even a dream image. She employed the techniques of figurative visual story-telling and illusionistic ceiling-painting. In contrast, most modernists focused on functionality, rationality, and standardization, and generally ignored other values such as tradition, (figurative) decoration, local context, dreams, feelings, and associations. In the 1970s, with the introduction of semiotics in architecture, a renewed interest in architecture's power to communicate beyond its mere function arose, although the basic features of modernism continue to be quite evident in Flemish architecture.⁶⁹ In order to create stories, Burton employed techniques that had been used frequently in periods before modernism. She returned to *trompe-l'oeil*, which dated from Ancient Roman times and was especially important in Baroque architecture. Furthermore, her dark painted ceiling full of spotlights could be regarded as a modern version of Giotto's famous frescos in the 14th-century Scrovegni Chapel in Mantova. On the barrel vault of the chapel, Giotto had also painted a sky full of gleaming stars.

Aesthetics and a clever use of colors were very important in Burton's work, along with marketing. Using products from the manufacturers and shops that needed to be advertised, she sought to lift such products from a purely consumerist to an artistic level. The products were not exhibited as separate objects, but integrated into the narrative she conceived for the building. Even so, money, marketing, and entrepreneurship inevitably remained key aspects of her job. A photographer who recorded her creations served as her main assistant; the architect came only in second place.

Whenever possible, Burton nevertheless addressed the functionality of showrooms or houses. For example, in her discussion of *Visiona 3* (designed by the French interior designer Olivier Mourgue) in 1971, she criticized the fact that the kitchen was too small to prepare full meals and that the necessary art works were missing; and she regretted the persistent smoothness, absence of plants, and exaggerated tendency toward communal

⁶⁹ Van Herck, K. & Loeckx, A. (2001). De queeste van de architectuursemiotiek. In: H. Heynen, et al. (Eds.), *'Dat is architectuur'*. Rotterdam: 010, 801-817.

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living.⁷⁰ From the end of the 1970s onwards, when the oil crisis began to influence housing policies, she paid attention to energy-efficient solutions in housing and cohousing projects.⁷¹

Looking back on her career, she said, "What I've practiced is the profession of a domestic interior architect, but I did not do the studies."⁷² Indeed, she never took any courses, apart from some training sessions by Levis and taught herself entirely through practice and reading. She calls herself a *natuurcolorist*, a natural color specialist, as well as somebody who followed her own instincts and interests.⁷³ Burton was essentially a decorator or interior stylist, not an interior architect, although she assumed that title. Yet she was well informed about evolutions in the field of architecture as well as (interior) design. She may be said to have outshone most of her peers in the category of self-made interior decorators. She dealt with interiors in an unconventional way. Not bothered by the aesthetic paradigms of modernism or any particular stylistic conventions, she included techniques that were frequently used in architecture before the twentieth century, such as illusionistic painting and the narrativizing of rooms.

Conclusion

While there has been, in recent years, a lot of discussion in North America and Australia about the nomenclature and institutional place of interior design/interior architecture, those debates were conducted in Flanders from the mid-1950s onwards. These discussions were part of the professionalization process in which institutions, organizations, and educational programs tried to define themselves.

In the Flemish case study presented here, Jul De Roover, who acted as a gatekeeper both within the educational system and professional organizations, defended the notion that designing interiors was a part of architecture. As a result, he argued for the name "interior architecture" instead of "interior design." As a trained modernist architect himself, he was convinced that the interior was an architectural element just as much as the exterior and should be approached as part of a single, comprehensive form of art that is to be situated in the tradition of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which the modernist avant-garde inherited from the Arts and Crafts Movement and Art Nouveau. De Roover's choice of "interior architecture" as a designation was a conscious strategy to elevate the discipline from the less prestigious, more commercially driven, ephemeral, and seemingly feminine field of interior decoration. His attitude was similar to that in many other Western countries. As the design historian Penny Sparke notes,

⁷⁰ Burton, M. (1975). Visiona 3. Een verbazingwekkend woonexperiment [Visiona 3: An Amazing Dwelling Experiment], *Libelle*, 11, 91.

⁷¹ Burton, M. (1979). Het eerste huis in België dat met zonneënergie verwarmd wordt [The First Home in Belgium to Be Heated by Solar Energy], *Libelle*, 6, 39-42; Burton, M. (1979). Vier huizen in één grote tuin [Four Houses in One Big Garden], *Libelle*, 7, 64-69; Burton, M. (1979). Onder één dak en toch apart [Under a Single Roof and Yet Apart], *Libelle*, 8, 64-66.

⁷² Interview Burton, Brussels, 4 Feb. 2013

⁷³ Ibid.

Rooted within the ideology of modernism, the newly defined interior design profession broke away from the older, pre-modern, discipline of interior decoration, which had been tainted by links with amateurism, femininity and domesticity, and linked itself more strongly with architecture and the language of modernity. . . . By that period, most interior designers were trained first as architects and, in the spirit of the modernist idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, saw the interior as a natural extension of their work.⁷⁴

However, De Roover differed notably from the international community of interior practitioners referred to by Sparke, such as Richard Neutra in the U.S., Jean Royère in France, and Jaap Penraat in Holland, in that he had a strong social agenda. Typically for a representative of the modernist movement in interwar Europe, De Roover initially believed that interior architecture should contribute to the emancipation of low-income families by offering them low-priced and labor-saving interiors and furniture. More than his American colleagues, for instance, he had a strong desire to make design democratic, and he consciously chose to design affordable houses and furniture. Thus, the term "interior architecture" was for him also a political tool to make a distinction with the more commercial, less utopian practice of interior decoration.

The choice of "interior architect" as a title had a strategic aspect as well. Because architects in Belgium are authorized to apply for building permits, assuming the title of architect by interior designers was intended as a first step toward legal recognition and protection (which is still to be realized). To complicate the Flemish picture, the title of *binnenhuisarchitect* or domestic interior architect (later interior architect) came to be adopted by some of the other profiles of practitioners identified in this article: the home economists-cum-domestic advisors and the journalists-cum-interior decorators. Despite having had little formal education in design, these practitioners did not reject the categorization proposed by professionals. To the contrary, by adopting the term of (domestic) interior architect they intended to stress their enduring commitment to their jobs and signaled their own professionalism. They also saw the title as an opportunity to raise their social status and obtain greater recognition, because interior architecture was thought to rank higher in the social hierarchy than its associated fields of practice. After all, architecture works with durable spaces and materials; it is an established and recognized profession with a long tradition, and it enjoys legal protection in Belgium. Furthermore, design is at the core of the activities of interior architects more than of interior decorators, and certainly of domestic advisors. As the design historian Grace Lees-Maffei observes, professional status goes hand in hand with the concrete act of designing.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Sparke, P. (2004, 1986). *Introduction to Design and Culture 1900 to Present*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge, 168.

⁷⁵ Lees-Maffei, G. (2008, 1-18).

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In reality, however, each profile developed its own characteristic activities and designing methods. Unsurprisingly, interior architects with a degree preferred a modernist architectural approach. In line with the principles of the modernist movement in Europe, they tended to design interiors that are functional, austere, transparent, "authentic" (no fake references to the past), "rational," and standardized.⁷⁶ The famous German Frankfurt kitchen exemplifies this kind of interior. As we saw, De Roover was also driven by a strong ideological desire to emancipate his clients.

The other two historic categories of practitioners were clearly much less beholden to the principles and dogmas of architectural modernism. The home economists and domestic advisors, in particular, sometimes surpassed interior architects in communication skills and understanding of their target group. They were deeply familiar with the wishes and desires of their clients, who were often members of their own organizations. The incident in which De Roover managed to overlook the color-blindness of one of his clients would be unthinkable among the home economists and domestic advisors, since they engaged so closely with their members. At the same time, because home consultants made their own stylistic preferences clearly secondary to their clients' wishes and adapted themselves directly to the everyday practices of their organizations' members, they developed solutions that were artistically less avant-garde – hence, less appreciated by architects, and, therefore, easily perceived as less professionally advanced. Yet one might also argue that these domestic advisors addressed more effectively the postmodernist ambition to eliminate the barriers between high and low culture.⁷⁷ This was noticeable in many of the interiors in which the taste of (mainly female) inhabitants dominated. What distinguished Flemish home consultants from commercial consultants in other countries was their strong drive to educate and emancipate their members along specific sociocultural lines, be they Catholic, socialist, or those of a Christian farmers' culture. The wellbeing of clients was central, but it was viewed within a specific ideological framework.

Finally, the journalists-cum-interior decorators who worked for commercial women's magazines, such as *Libelle* or *Woman's Realm*, were likewise free from stylistic conventions and ideological restrictions. This set them against the typical modernist.⁷⁸ They considered their clients first and foremost as consumers that had to be enticed into buying certain products for their interiors. They engaged with fashion and lifestyles. Marianne Burton stands out in this group. In comparison with her colleagues at *Woman's Realm*, she had a more international profile and did not limit her writings to this one magazine. She also took on other projects, such as the creation of backdrops for exhibition stands or the refurbishing of a paint manufacturer's offices. Her case beautifully illustrates how practitioners with her

⁷⁶ The modern interior is discussed at length in Sparke, P. (2008, 129-202).

⁷⁷ Sparke, P. (2010). *As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste*. Halifax N.S.: NCAD University, 164-165.

⁷⁸ Huysmans, W. (2006). *Beeldvorming over wonen in de jaren 1960-70. Architectuurtijdschriften, handboeken en commerciële bladen*. Unpublished diss. Architectural Engineering, KU Leuven; Stevens, E. (2003-2004). *Opvattingen over wonen in de jaren zestig aan de hand van vier tijdschriften*. Unpublished diss. Architectural Engineering, KU Leuven.

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profile engaged with interiors in a totally different way. Burton's designs were fresh and original. In her interiors, she created a dream world that allowed users to relax and escape from everyday life. Not bothered by established ideologies, she used non-modernist tools, such as illusionistic painting techniques and visual story-telling. Her work had more affinities with temporary stage sets and popular culture than with architecture. And although modernists and interior architects with a degree rejected the approach of interior decorators, the work of Burton shows that some of them had a very personal way of dealing with interiors.

As these case studies demonstrate, in Flanders a similar process of professionalization took place as in North America and Australia. The struggle for an appropriate professional title is closely intertwined with the search for an autonomous, strong identity. Yet our example also makes clear that debates about nomenclature need to be understood against their sociocultural backgrounds and are not directly transferrable from one context to the next. For example, the initial title of the discipline of interior architecture, *binnenhuiskunst* (domestic interior art), has no equivalent in the English-speaking world. Content-wise, it had much in common with the American term "interior architecture."⁷⁹ The term "interior design" has been employed in Flanders since the reorganization of higher education in 1995 to refer to a professional bachelor's degree of three years, which prepares students to implement concrete interiors. By contrast, the label of "interior architecture" has been applied since 1995 to an academic master's program, in which the remodeling of existing buildings as defined by Brooker and Stone forms the core of the design studio, and academic research and reflection are simultaneously crucial. This training program has grown out of the interior architecture courses set up by Jul De Roover back in the 1940s. Although these labels in Flanders have been fixed since 1995, the debate on the position of interior architecture in education and the profession continues unabated. As an in-between discipline – hovering between architecture and everyday decorating, revolving around the design of something in between architectural environments and material culture – interior architecture remains in a difficult, but interesting position.

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⁷⁹ As defined in the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) developed by the U.S. Department of Education, Interior Architecture is "a program in the applied visual arts that prepares individuals to apply artistic principles and techniques to the professional planning, designing, equipping, and furnishing of residential and commercial interior spaces. Includes instruction in computer applications, drafting, and graphic techniques; principles of interior lighting, acoustics, systems integration, and color coordination; furniture and furnishings; textiles and their finishing; the history of interior design and period styles; basic structural design; building codes and inspection regulations; and applications to office, hotel, factory, restaurant and housing design." (<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode/CIPDetail.aspx?y=55&cid=88702> Accessed 6/12/2014)

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