

MOTIFS D'HORTA

Étoffes et papiers
dans les maisons bruxelloises

Press
release



HORTA MOTIFS. Fabrics and Wallpaper in Brussels Houses

18/04/18 au 27/01/19

Inside Art nouveau buildings, both Victor Horta and his contemporaries gave meaning to the concept of total art and revolutionised the applied arts, abolishing the hierarchy between different forms of plastic art. The exhibition restores this fragile heritage to its rightful place in the history of forms.

Scientific committee :

Wivine Wailliez

Françoise Aubry

Benjamin Zurstrassen

Françoise Marneffe

With the support of :

La Fonderie ; Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique ; Bibliotheca Wittockiana ;
Musée Horta ; Archives de la Ville de Bruxelles ; Musées Royaux d'Art et
d'Histoire ; Archives et Musée de la Littérature ; Michel Gilbert

11/06/2018 at 8pm

Lecture «Le papier peint au temps de l'Art nouveau» by Jérémie Cerman.



Public relations : Viviane Vandeninden
viviane.vandeninden@klach.be - +32 (0)472 31 55 37
www.vandeninden.com



M A I S O N



AUTRIQUE

Wednesdays to Sundays

From 12 to 18h

Chaussée de Haecht, 266 - 1030 Bruxelles

02 215 66 00

info@autrique.be

www.autrique.fr



1.

Horta motifs. Fabrics and Wallpaper in Brussels Houses

At the end of the 19th century, Art Nouveau architects wanted to develop a homogeneous aesthetic. Whereas the building envelope was important, attention to detail in interior decoration became a key concern for the architect's work.

Victor Horta advocated the abolition of hierarchy in the arts, which led to a profound renewal in decorative arts and the artisanal or industrial production of everyday objects.

In the 1890s, coordinated wallpapers and fabrics designed by British designers of the Arts & Crafts movement played a leading role in the decoration of Art Nouveau interiors in Western Europe. Men such as William Morris, Walter Crane or Charles Francis Annesley Voysey designed wallpapers with stylized motifs inspired from nature that were particularly appreciated by the main representatives of Art Nouveau in Belgium. Victor Horta and Henry Van de Velde used these British models for the interiors they designed. The success of English products was further bolstered with the presentation of creations by manufactories such as Essex & Co. at the Paris World Expo in 1900.

Wallpaper industrialists brought Art Nouveau articles on the market while continuing to produce popular and affordable wallpaper that could be used for the interiors of all social classes. The wallpapers of Morris or Voysey, who advocated a return to traditional production methods (block-printing), were very expensive.

The material components attesting to the presence of wallpapers in Brussels interiors by Victor Horta are rare and not widely known. At times, photo close ups yield information and make it possible to identify the wallpaper. Owing to its ephemeral nature, wallpaper is often replaced as fashions come and go, when it does not disappear completely under layers of paint. Restorers and curators often have only thin fragments to account for the decoration of an interior at a given period.

Photography (of amateur or artistic nature) can also be used for identification. The postcard, then in its heyday, is a source of choice for documentation. Specialized catalogues and periodicals such as L'Art moderne, The Studio or L'Art décoratif provide the most valuable evidence of the success of a creation, by confirming its name.

The exhibition Horta Motifs showcases Victor Horta's approach of Art Nouveau's principles and the way he displayed them in bourgeois interiors: decorative arts at the service of the total art work.

2.

Use of fabrics and wallpaper in Victor Horta's houses

Today we enter a house or manorial residence by Victory Horta to admire the architecture and the elegance of the line. Visitors are attracted by the composition of each room in which they are invited to enter: the fine materials and furniture which are perfectly attuned. The architect has become a master in the art of producing wholes.

Organizing an exhibition on wallpaper in the interiors of Victor Horta is challenging. He is not the Art Nouveau architect who uses wallpaper the most to cover walls, preferring a painted wall (Frison, Hallet) or a simple silk (Autrique).

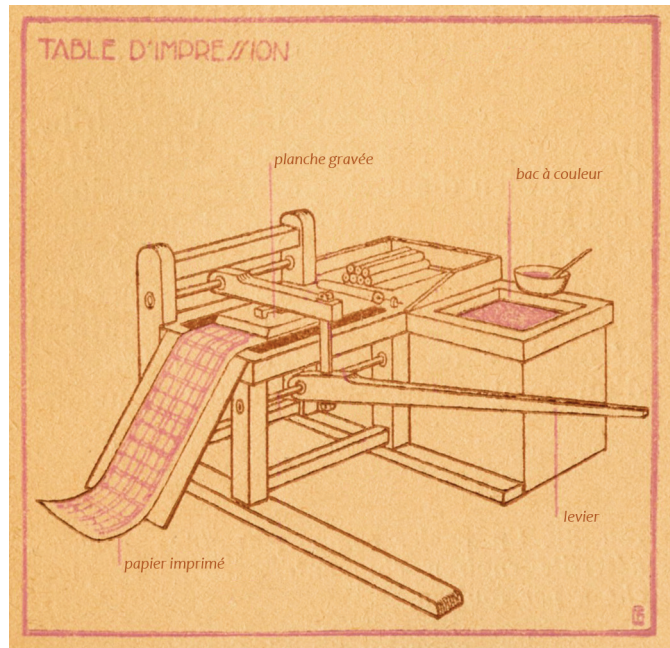
The architect combines easily shapes, colours and materials. For the decor, there is unfortunately only one by Van de Velde in Brussels that represented the London firms officially (reproduced in his Memoires; the original is lost).

Wallpaper is used very scarcely for the interior decoration of the Hôtel Solvay. In a bedroom on the upper floor, a photograph from a restoration album confirms the use of "The Savaric," a wallpaper by Charles F.A. Voysey, designed in 1897 and printed by Essex & Co. This blue tone motif representing birds on leafy branches is considered very modern at that time. Voysey's favourite models such as "The Owl," "Fairylend," or "Isis" represent swarms of stylized birds.

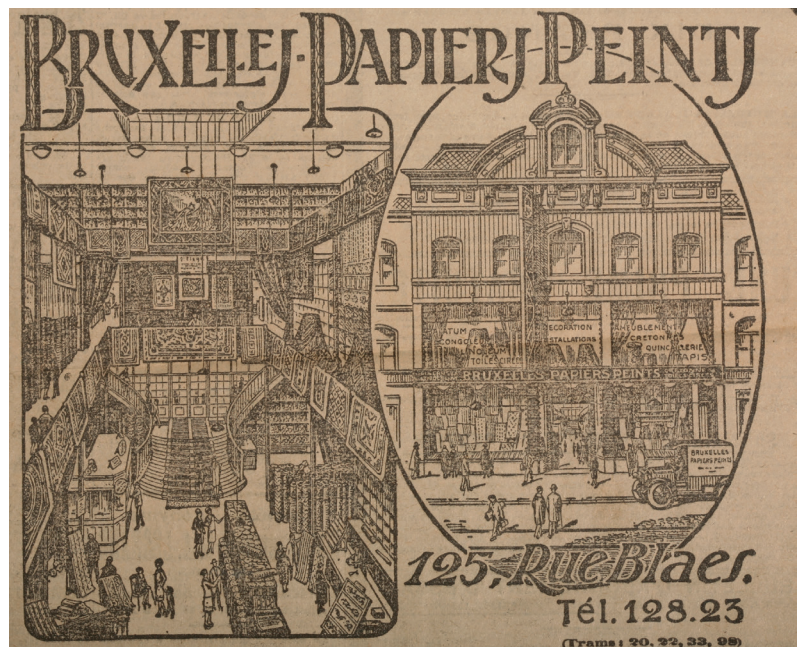
We find fine examples of English fabrics use in bourgeois houses decorated by Victor Horta. The walls of the main living room of the Hôtel Van Eetvelde are adorned with the "Daffodil" fabric, designed by Lindsay P. Butterfield and woven by Morton for Liberty & Co. in London. It was reproduced recently by the Lyon-based firm Prella. A photo of the Hôtel Tassel suggests that at least one chair seat was covered by this same fabric with stylized daffodils in another interior than that Van Eetvelde's.

Whereas wall paper changed to suit trends, fabrics were also subject to the vagaries of time and tastes of families. Two chairs covered with a Grasset tissue were perhaps designed for the interior of Anna Boch. The chair and armchair with "butterfly wings" in the boudoir of the Horta Museum were reupholstered when Mr and Mrs Horta moved to 136 Avenue Louise when they got back from America.

An old photograph of the Hôtel Winssinger shows a curtain with peacocks and fritillaries on the wall. A few pieces of it are shown in the exhibition.



© La Fonderie



© La Fonderie

3.

Duplication of motifs

In 1895, “L’Emulation” published a photo story about the Hôtel Tassel which is considered as the manifesto of Art Nouveau. This reportage makes it possible to identify two types of wallpaper by Charles F. A. Voysey: “Elaine” and “The Astolat”. “The Astolat” is a block-printed wall paper by Essex & Co. which can also be found on the photograph of one of the first interiors by Henry Van de Velde in 1893 for her sister-in-law. [We also find a sofa covered with the “Dove and Rose” fabric by William Morris]. The door frame by Fernand Dubois is reminiscent of the floral motif “Astolat.” Victor Horta reproduced this correspondence of nature between wall paper and painted decorations in other bourgeois houses.

A photograph of the dining room of the Hôtel Winssinger makes it possible to identify acanthus wallpaper. Horta had for that matter recommended to his client the “Acanthus” model, one of the most expensive wallpapers by William Morris. Designed in 1875, this wallpaper was printed by Jeffrey & Co. specialised in high quality artistic wallpaper. As its name suggest, “Acanthus” is a repetition of large acanthus leaves much appreciated by buyers for large rooms. As the walls of the room were subsequently painted, it is impossible to confirm the colour of the installed wallpaper. The curator of IRPA, Emmanuelle Job, specified that the “Acanthus” model had several nuances, including red or green, both of which were available at the end of the 19th century. Another photo, showing the street facing the living room of the same Hôtel Winssinger, shows fitted carpeting on the floor, also with an acanthus design, probably stemming from an English manufactory.

At the Frison House, known for its staircase painted ensembles and its living room on the noble floor, a mustard-coloured wallpaper was installed in a small room in the rear of that story. A drilling operation uncovered a painted décor protected by a false ceiling. The tone and the motif echo each other: large curved petals in mustard tones. So far, the only evidence left of the wallpaper is a photograph of an old drilling operation. We have not yet identified the designer nor the company that produced the motif.

Another example, the dining room at the Hôtel Max Hallet, represents a very complete deciduous ensemble. The wallpaper of the English designer Harry Napper published by the Swiss firm Salubra (Tekko luxury line) adjoins paintings at the top of the walls and on the ceiling, evoking the Japanese niwaki motif, i.e. a tree in a garden that concentrates the vegetation in certain places. This niwaki could be of a magnolia. The wallpaper is in ochre hues, and the bouquets of leaves are brown on the wall and cream-coloured on the ceiling.



© KIK-IRPA / Martine Gillet



© KIK-IRPA / Martine Gillet

Leaves and large flowers contribute to this Art Nouveau interior design. Some species of flowers are encountered more frequently than others: different species of poppies and irises first and foremost, but also chrysanthemums (Hôtel Max Hallet), thistles and orchids (Léon Losseau House in Mons), or tulips (Quaker House on the Square Ambiorix, in Brussels).

Instead of conventional wallpaper, Tekko, a Japanese wallpaper, was applied at an uncertain date. It is a kinkarakawakami – the Japanese word means “foreign gilded leather paper” which designates an imitation paper made of embossed gilded leather. This discovery shows the interest of the bourgeois at the time in raised wallpaper. The billiard room of the Hôtel Van Eetvelde was also decorated with leather paper, albeit historicist and not Japanese.

These flowers are used by the artisans from other media such as glassware and ceramics, examples of which are presented in Brussels in the replica of the Wolfers Gallery at the Art & History Royal Museum, or in the Gillion Crowet collection at the Fin-de-Siècle Museum in Brussels. On a stylistic level, some flowers are indeed reminiscent of the well-known Art Nouveau exuberance.



© KIK-IRPA / Martine Gillet

4.

Binding: paper, silk or leather

By producing their own wallpapers, artists like Henry Van de Velde or Georges Lemmen worked on a smaller format: books. They got interested in this technique of decorative arts by opting for a classic technique and materials combined with quite a sober motif – a restraint that contrasts with the charged decoration which usually accompanies old binding.

The Bibliotheca Wittockiana has a collection of these works, some samples of which are shown in the exhibition.