FASHION & INTERIORS
A GENDERED AFFAIR

HANNIBAL

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Amber Valletta wearing a suit, photographed by Craig McDean for *Interview Magazine*, July 2014.

FOREWORD

Kaat Debo

In the spring of 2025, MoMu – Fashion Museum Antwerp – is presenting *Fashion & Interiors. A Gendered Affair* MoMu might be described as a lens through which to observe the world from different angles, exploring the limits of what fashion can mean and looking beyond the canonised stories from fashion history. The *Fashion & Interiors* exhibition reflects that mission.

In this book we bring to life the historical and present-day interconnection and complex relationship between fashion and interior, with a special focus on gender mechanisms. This exploration starts in the second half of the nineteenth century, a time when both fashion and interiors played a crucial role in affirming social status and gender roles. The (bourgeois) lady of the house was pivotal in conveying a carefully constructed image of elegance and sophistication, not only through her dress, but also in the way she furnished her home. The interplay of textiles, form and space tells a story of emancipation but also of restrictions within the gender roles of the time. During this period, the aesthetics of clothing and home décor merged into a shared visual language. Drapes, rich fabrics and ornaments were not only decorative elements

but also symbols of power, status and femininity. Curator Romy Cockx and the authors of this book consider how these principles were applied, adapted and even challenged by designers and users, both men and women, and how fashion and interior continue to evolve and respond to changing ideas about gender, identity and space. A special place is set aside in the exhibition for three Belgian fashion designers – Ann Demeulemeester, Martin Margiela and Raf Simons – whose visual language and design methodology are a surprising echo of and reflection on the historical relationship between fashion, architecture and interior.

The exhibition would not have been possible without the support and collaboration of a number of researchers, designers, museums and lenders. Jelle Jespers designed the book and the campaign. Francesca Bonne and Veerle Van de Walle of Altu architecture studio designed the exhibition space and Victor Robyn the gallery texts. My special thanks go to curator Romy Cockx for putting together the content of this project and also to the dedicated MoMu team, who brought this ambitious exhibition to fruition. Also a special word of thanks for our partners, Vitra and the Vitra Partner Store Antwerp, as well as for Tanguy Van Quickenborne from the company Van Den Weghe.

Patty Carroll, Mad Mauve, *Anonymous Women* series, 2018.

INTRODUCTION

Romy Cockx

Fashion & Interiors. A Gendered Affair explores the relationship between fashion and the interior through the lens of gender. It begins in the second half of the nineteenth century, a period in which these two aesthetic forms were brought into play to consolidate the power and social position of the new (Western) bourgeois elite. The lady of the house played an important role in this: it fell to her to visualise the recently acquired status through her dress and tastefully furnished home.

The ideal of bourgeois domesticity divided the sexes into two separate spheres. While the husband went out to work, his wife would concentrate on injecting life into the home. With an eye on comfort, she would decorate it with soft cushions, curtains, handiwork and all manner of knickknacks. Her body too was heavily draped with layers of fabric and passementerie, causing her to seemingly merge with her interior.

At the end of the nineteenth century, male designers like Henry van de Velde and Josef Hoffmann waged war on that decorative excess and on women's fashion in particular. They can take the credit for two of Belgium's internationally renowned total works of art, Villa Bloemenwerf and Palais Stoclet, where they

matched the interior and the lady of the house's garments, still emphasising her decorative role. Both the Van de Veldes' residence and Hoffmann's Wiener Werkstätte approach, however, show that women also made an active contribution to the Gesamtkunstwerk in spite of the limitations imposed by gendered norms.

Women also played an ambiguous role in the approach taken by the French fashion designer Paul Poiret. Although he found the Gesamtkunstwerk concept too extreme, his contacts with the Wiener Werkstätte inspired him to set up the Atelier Martine interior-design business, attached to which was a school where girls from working-class backgrounds created textile designs. Denise Poret played a pivotal role as the primary model in her spouse's lifestyle branding. Then there was Jeanne Lanvin, the first female fashion designer to reinforce her brand identity through interior design, a strategy that is followed to this day.

The total approach also attracted the attention of architect and cultural critic Adolf Loos. He derided Van de Velde and the effeminate Wiener Werkstätte, and demonised women's fashion. A pioneer of modernism, he favoured sobriety and functional male clothing, preferably bespoke British tailoring. He was followed in this by Le Corbusier, who not only commissioned a mysterious jacket for himself but in 1952 also designed garments for women. Moreover, both men's discourses display gendered parallels between fashion and (interior) architecture.

Despite the problematisation of bourgeois 'feminine' taste, some women designers still managed to forge a career in 'masculine' modernism. Lilly Reich is an interesting example: besides clothes, she also designed interiors, furniture and exhibition sets. Her collaboration with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, however, also highlights the complexity of authorship and the male shadow of history.

The ways in which fashion designers have incorporated the interior into their visual language in recent decades mirrors the retrospective reassessment described above and the fragility of our Western approach to domestic comfort.

‘Her sphere is within the household, which she should “beautify”, and of which she should be the “chief ornament”.’

(Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1899, 82)

Alfred Stevens, *The Visit*, c.1870, oil on panel, Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, 1955.861.

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1 Afternoon dress in shot silk fabric with floral pattern, silk velvet ribbon and silk fringing, c. 1855, MoMu, Antwerp, T21/1.
2 Désiré Guilmard, design for a window dressing, colour lithograph, from *Le Garde-meuble ancien et moderne*, 1839, album 60, plate 169, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Library, New York.

WEARING THE HOME IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

Romy Cockx

Over the last two decades, elements from the home – ranging from bedding through carpets to chairs – have been integrated into fashion silhouettes by fashion designers. What may sometimes appear to be gimmicky creations reflect the precarious situation of a modern Western ideal: the house as a 'home', a place where comfort, safety, privacy and domesticity converge.

The seed of this concept was sown in the seventeenth-century Netherlands, where the home acquired a new sense of a private space and the middle-class wife was responsible for the housekeeping.[1] For most Europeans at that time, the dwelling was where work and relaxation were shared with a wide social network of family and live-in employees. The concept of domestic 'comfort' only took root under the reign of King Louis XV (1710-1774). From then on, an unprecedented assortment of upholstered and stuffed seating accommodated the refined manners and dress style of the French aristocracy.[2] During the nineteenth century, accelerated industrialization and urbanization brought privacy, domesticity and comfort within reach of a growing middle class. The home became a sanctuary for the husband who went out to work. His wife stayed at home, and her taste in both fashion and interior decoration reflected the family's social status.[3] Today we can no longer take cover behind our drapery. Hence the suggestion of some fashion designers that we wear home comforts outdoors.

BEDDING AND HOME TEXTILES AS ARMOUR

In the run-up to the year 2000, there was real concern about the 'millennium bug', which it was believed would cause computer systems around the world to fail, possibly resulting in power outages, plane crashes and an apocalyptic recession. Thanks to Maison Martin Margiela, women could prepare for the worst and take the comfort of a warm bed with them wherever they went. The Maison's Autumn-Winter 1999-2000 collection featured a white coat made out of a duvet: two long removable sleeves attached with zips to a quilted, feather-filled, cotton duvet. The Maison presented the collection in a film in which vintage floral motifs were projected onto the models wearing the white coat (Fig. 5) so that they seemed to merge with the wallpaper. Ringing out in the background was Timmy Thomas's song 'Why Can't We Live Together'. The duvet coat could be worn with a cover made from 1970s floral bedsheets (Fig. 4) or with a protective PVC cover.

Simultaneously with Margiela, Walter Van Beirendonck designed several blanket coats for men (Autumn-Winter 1999-2000 collection). A quilt consisting of patches of printed cotton fabrics was secured around the body with a cord and a safety pin (Fig. 7). The frayed edge revealed a warm lining and underneath a bodysuit. Van Beirendonck sent his models confidently into the new millennium in protective gear: they wore helmets designed to protect them from sunlight and the atmosphere.[4]

Wearing bedroom comforts has since been explored by numerous fashion designers. For example, the Dutch designer duo Viktor & Rolf added satin pillows to a collection that merged evening wear and sleep wear with bedding (Autumn-Winter 2005-2006 collection) (Fig. 6). The luxury materials, finished with embroidery and lace, and the title *Bedtime Story* evoked the atmosphere of an escapist dream from which you never want to wake up. *Vogue* suggested: 'Why not go out to work in your bed?',[5] a notion that ties in with the ascertainment that the gendered distinction between private and public prevalent during the nineteenth century no longer exists today. We live in a 24/7 culture from which the rigid separation

1 John Galliano for Maison Margiela, trompe l'œil Chesterfield-printed dress, transparent coat, bolster and backpack with integrated screen, Autumn-Winter 2018-2019, Artisanal Collection.

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2 Simone Rocha, bomber jacket inspired by vintage eiderdowns, Spring-Summer 2023, MoMu, Antwerp, X2150.
3 Marine Serre, deadstock blanket couture dress, Autumn-Winter 2019-2020, photographed by Valeria Herklotz for *Dazed*.
4 Maison Martin Margiela, duvet coat with flower-printed cover, Autumn-Winter 1999-2000, MoMu, Antwerp, X1443.
5 Maison Martin Margiela, duvet coat with floral overlay, Autumn-Winter 1999-2000, photographed by Marina Faust.

Grand châle en maille laine & lurex REF:732506. Duvet long REF:31A036.
Jupe rayures tennis en laine REF:31N109. // Big knitted shawl in wool &
lurex REF:732506. Long duvet REF:31A036. Pinstriped wool skirt REF:31N109.

6 Viktor & Rolf, duvet coat in quilted silk satin with embroidered pillows, Autumn-Winter 2005-2006, photographed by David LaChapelle, *House at the End of the World*, 2005.
7 Walter Van Beirendonck, long coat made from a patchwork quilt, Autumn-Winter 1999-2000, MoMu, Antwerp, X1556.
8 Jenny Fax, pillowcase mini-skirt with pillow apron, Autumn-Winter 2022-2023, MoMu, Antwerp, X2004.
9 Comme des Garçons, quilted floral-printed dress, Spring-Summer 2020, photographed by Elizaveta Porodina for *Magazine*, No. 37, Spring-Summer 2022.

between work, leisure, domesticity and sleep has been removed.[6]

With the Tokyo-based label Jenny Fax, pillows and pillowcases took on the shape of the body (Autumn-Winter 2022-2023 collection) (Fig. 8). The Taiwanese designer Jen-Fang Shueh turned bedding from an ultra-girly teenager's bedroom into soft armour. The pillow is no longer a pillow to drift off to sleep on but one that helps you face the world.

The collections of Marine Serre, who like Shueh studied at La Cambre, regularly feature repurposed home textiles, including constants like silhouettes made out of sheets, blankets (Fig. 3) and table linen. She also gives brocade home furnishing fabrics a new lease of life. In her 2020 Autumn-Winter collection, she combined them with her signature crescent-moon motif, jeans and a vision of the future in which people are able to travel between planets (Fig. 11).[7] Craig Green sent 'carpets' strutting down the runway. His creations often feature architectural volumes, creating a seemingly protective environment. A sense of isolation provides recurring inspiration, and in his Autumn-Winter collection for 2017-2018 this was expressed in clothes that enabled the wearer to brave unfamiliar waters and an uncertain future (Fig. 10).[8] Both designers encourage us to go on a journey of discovery in their wearable home textiles.

WALKING FURNITURE

Travel, nomadism and displacement are also important themes in the work of Hussein Chalayan: 'Our lives are in a constant state of mobility and [...] in some ways that could affect memory, could effect our attachment to domestic things. What would new comfort zones be in those kinds of situations? You know it's this whole idea of creating a refuge wherever you are.'[9] He has frequently explored the borders between fashion and furniture design, and in a number of respects his *Afterwords* collection (Autumn-Winter 2000-2001) (Figs. 22 & 23), was trailblazing. During his show, the models entered an all-white space furnished with four chairs, a coffee table, a flatscreen television and a selection of vases and bowls which, one by one, they picked up and took with them. At the end of the show, four of the models removed the covers from the chairs. They then put the covers on over their grey shift dresses, two of the covers having first been turned inside out. The chairs were folded up

10 Craig Green, garments in rug-like textiles, Autumn-Winter 2017-2018, photographed backstage by Morgan O'Donovan.
11 Marine Serre, recycled tablecloth top, Autumn-Winter 2020-2021.

‘The application of the principles of rational design to a woman’s wardrobe was part of my attempt to find a fresh approach to creating objects for everyday use’

‘L'application des principes de la conception rationnelle à la toilette rentrait dans le cadre de l'action que je menais pour donner à la création d'objets d'usage quotidien un nouveau point de départ, valable pour l'ensemble de cette production.’ (Henry van de Velde, *Récit de ma vie*, 1863-1900, 375)

Maria Sèthe in a house dress, sitting in an armchair designed by Henry van de Velde in the dining room at Villa Bloemenwerf, c. 1900, La Fondation L'Écuyer, Brussels.

HENRY VAN DE VELDE'S METAMORPHOSIS: VILLA BLOEMENWERF AND THE ROLE OF HENRY'S MUSE MARIA SÈTHE

Werner Adriaenssens

Belgian artist Henry van de Velde (1863-1957) produced a cross-disciplinary body of work which includes paintings, graphics, typography, book art, designs for furniture and interiors, and also architecture. As well as a visionary designer, he was also an influential theorist whose work was infused with social engagement. A lesser-known aspect of his oeuvre is the clothing he designed with his wife Maria Sèthe in the setting of their home, Villa Bloemenwerf. Although she invariably stayed in the background, Maria was an indispensable partner and pillar of support in Van de Velde's artistic development.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT AND OF SOCIAL CONTACTS ON VAN DE VELDE'S ARTISTIC TRAJECTORY

In a radical artistic departure, between 1892 and 1894 Henry van de Velde's focus shifted from painting to the applied arts. Crucial in this was his encounter with the Belgian painter William Finch at the *Les XX* Salon in 1892. Finch introduced Van de Velde, who had trained as an artist, to the thinking of John Ruskin and William Morris, prominent figures in the British Arts and Crafts movement. This led to a profound change in Henry's perception of art, in which the artistic and decorative crafts came to occupy a central role.[1] After much hesitation, in February 1893 Henry van de Velde exhibited a piece of embroidery titled *Engelenwake* (The Angels' Watch) at the final *Les XX* Salon. This was an important step; from that point on, he regarded himself as an artisan. Several months later, he met the young pianist and artist Maria Sèthe through one of his friends, the painter Théo Van Rysselberghe (Fig. 14). During a walk in Zeeland, Maria asked him about his artistic change of direction. Though irritated by her direct questions, Van de Velde opened up for the first time and told her about the influence of John Ruskin and William Morris on his work, and about his aspiration to follow their ideals.[2] That conversation, on his thirtieth birthday, was liberating, and his artistic uncertainties gradually began to recede. Maria was well informed about developments in the applied arts in England[3] and offered to collect documentation about the Arts and Crafts movement during the trip she was planning to London. He gave her specific instructions about companies and artists he was interested in – among them William Morris – wallpaper manufacturers and publishers of art books.[4] She had a good command of English and would also translate important treatises into French for him.[5] This enabled Henry to explore and gain a more in-depth understanding of the innovative British artistic movement. Maria's cultural background, artistic affinities and creative talent were of crucial importance in the evolution of her husband-to-be.

MARIA SÈTHE'S ROLE IN HENRY VAN DE VELDE'S ARTISTIC WORK

During his professorship at the National Higher Institute of Fine Arts in Antwerp, which began in 1893, Henry was able to develop and share his ideas on the decorative arts. As he gradually turned his back on the 'art for art's sake' doctrine, he emphasised the importance of applied art being accessible to everyone.[6] His first articles were devoted to the subject of wallpaper. In his teaching notes, he twice refers to the *papier Sèthe*, illustrated with a sketch which later became known as the 'Dahlia' wallpaper (Fig. 6).[7] The use of the term *papier Sèthe* suggests that Maria may have been the sole author of this design. In his memoirs, however, Van de Velde is less explicit. On the one hand, he mentions that Maria and he created their best wallpapers together, but he also states that the designs for both 'Dahlia' and the second wallpaper, 'Tulipes' (Fig. 4), were entirely Maria's work.[8]

This ambiguity in his memoirs, written decades after the events, can be explained

4 Maria Sèthe and Henry van de Velde (?), 'Tulipes' wallpaper, 1893, KIK-IRPA, Brussels.
5 Henry van de Velde, bookcase in Irma Sèthe's salon with the 'Tulipes' wallpaper, from *Dekorative Kunst*, 1898, KMKG-MRAH, Brussels.
6 Maria Sèthe, 'Dahlia' wallpaper, 1893, Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, Trondheim.

7 Maria Sèthe on the mezzanine floor at Bloemenwerf in a town dress designed by Henry van de Velde, c. 1900, from *Album Robes de Dames*, 1900, plate 8, KMKG-MRAH, Brussels.
8 Maria Sèthe in the central hall at Bloemenwerf in an evening gown designed by Henry van de Velde, c. 1898, from *Album Robes de Dames*, 1900, plate 10, KMKG-MRAH, Brussels.
9 Maria Sèthe in the atelier on the ground floor at Bloemenwerf, photographed by Emile Tassel and Charles Lefébure, c. 1900, KBR depot at AML, Brussels, FS10 00882/0001/002/15.


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FASHION FROM THE 'KLIMT-GROUP' – GUSTAV KLIMT, SCHWESTERN FLÖGE AND THE WIENER WERKSTÄTTE'S ARTISTIC FASHION

In 1905 the Wiener Werkstätte began collaborating with Gustav Klimt on the Palais Stoclet in Brussels (Fig. 1) for the Belgian engineer Adolphe Stoclet, who had met Hoffmann while working in Vienna. There exists a myth suggesting that the Wiener Werkstätte only started producing women's dresses after Madame Stoclet was seen in the Gesamtkunstwerk Palais Stoclet wearing a mismatching gown by Paul Poiret.[5] Although a 1911 article quoting Fritz Waerndorfer mentioned that the Wiener Werkstätte had indeed designed dresses and accessories for Madame Stoclet,[6] it is not known whether the myth's claimed sighting really served as the impetus for the founding of the Wiener Werkstätte's fashion department.

It is plausible that prior to the official opening of the fashion department, Hoffmann and Moser[7] had already designed costumes and dresses for select Wiener Werkstätte clients, as suggested by Adolf Loos's recommendation for Hoffmann to establish a women's fashion department,[8] as well as a satirical play by Fritz Waerndorfer from 1909 depicting an average day in the Wiener Werkstätte.[9] While around 1910 the Wiener Werkstätte started producing fashion, in the preceding years their artistic clothing designs were likely rather similar to the anti-fashion ideas of the *Reformkleid* which Henry van de Velde had already propagated around 1900. In 1906, a special issue of *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* dedicated to the Wiener Werkstätte featured corsetless dresses in the *Reformkleid* style which, according to the description, had been designed and photographed by Klimt and executed by 'Schwestern Pfluege' (!) (Fig. 4). The dresses were worn by Emilie Flöge, who was the creative director of the company Schwestern Flöge, which she ran with her two sisters. Although many believe Klimt only took the photographs, there is correspondence between Waerndorfer and Hermann Muthesius, who was supposed to write an article on the Wiener Werkstätte for *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration,* which confirms Klimt also had a hand in the design of the clothes.[10]

Emilie Flöge played a significant role in the artistic-dress scene in Vienna at that time, especially in her connections with Klimt and the Wiener Werkstätte. She not only modelled for Klimt, who worked closely with the Wiener Werkstätte for the Palais Stoclet[11] and the Cabaret Fledermaus, but also served as a mannequin for the Wiener Werkstätte. Her boutique also produced dresses for them (Fig. 3). The Schwestern Flöge's salon in the so-called Casa Piccola on Vienna's Mariahilferstraße (Fig. 2), designed by Hoffmann and Moser in 1904, also sold jewellery by the Wiener Werkstätte, which Emilie herself wore as well.[12] Flöge is particularly known for the distinctive wide and often striped dresses and caftans which she was frequently seen wearing in pictures with Klimt around 1908 and 1909 (Fig. 14).

These garments reflect the aesthetic of Koloman Moser, who is said to have designed similar ornamented clothes for his wife Ditha and most likely for the opera singer Anna Bahr-Mildenburg and her husband, writer Hermann Bahr.[13] A later Poiret dress from his wife's estate (Fig. 16) was likely produced under the influence of the Viennese artists who were internationally renowned for their black-and-white designs. Especially the dress's cut echoes documented designs by Josef Hoffmann (Fig. 18) showcasing the Empire waistline trend as well as the influence of Indian dresses that were worn by women in Vienna's artistic circles at the beginning of the twentieth century.[14]

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13 Gustav Klimt, portrait of Emilie Flöge, 1902, Wien Museum.
14 Emilie Flöge in Schörfling am Attersee, photographed by Heinrich Böhler, c. 1909.
15 Emilie Flöge, photographed by Madame d'Ora, c. 1909, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, Madame d'Ora Bequest, P1965.420.22.

27 Martin Margiela, dress from the Wiener Werkstätte-inspired *Les Orientalistes* collection, Spring-Summer 1985, photographed by Patrick Robyn.
28 Eduard Josef Wimmer-Wisgrill, design sketch for a dress with 'Heimchen' motif, 1912, from *Jahrbuch Deutschen Werkbundes* 1912, 89.

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The living room of Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé, 55 rue de Babylone in Paris, 1984, photographed by François Halard.

Yves Saint Laurent at home in Paris, photographed by Horst P. Horst, *Vogue*, 1 November 1971.

Karl Lagerfeld's apartment in Monaco, furnished with Memphis Milano designs, photographed by Jacques Schumacher for *Mode und Wohnen*, January 1983.

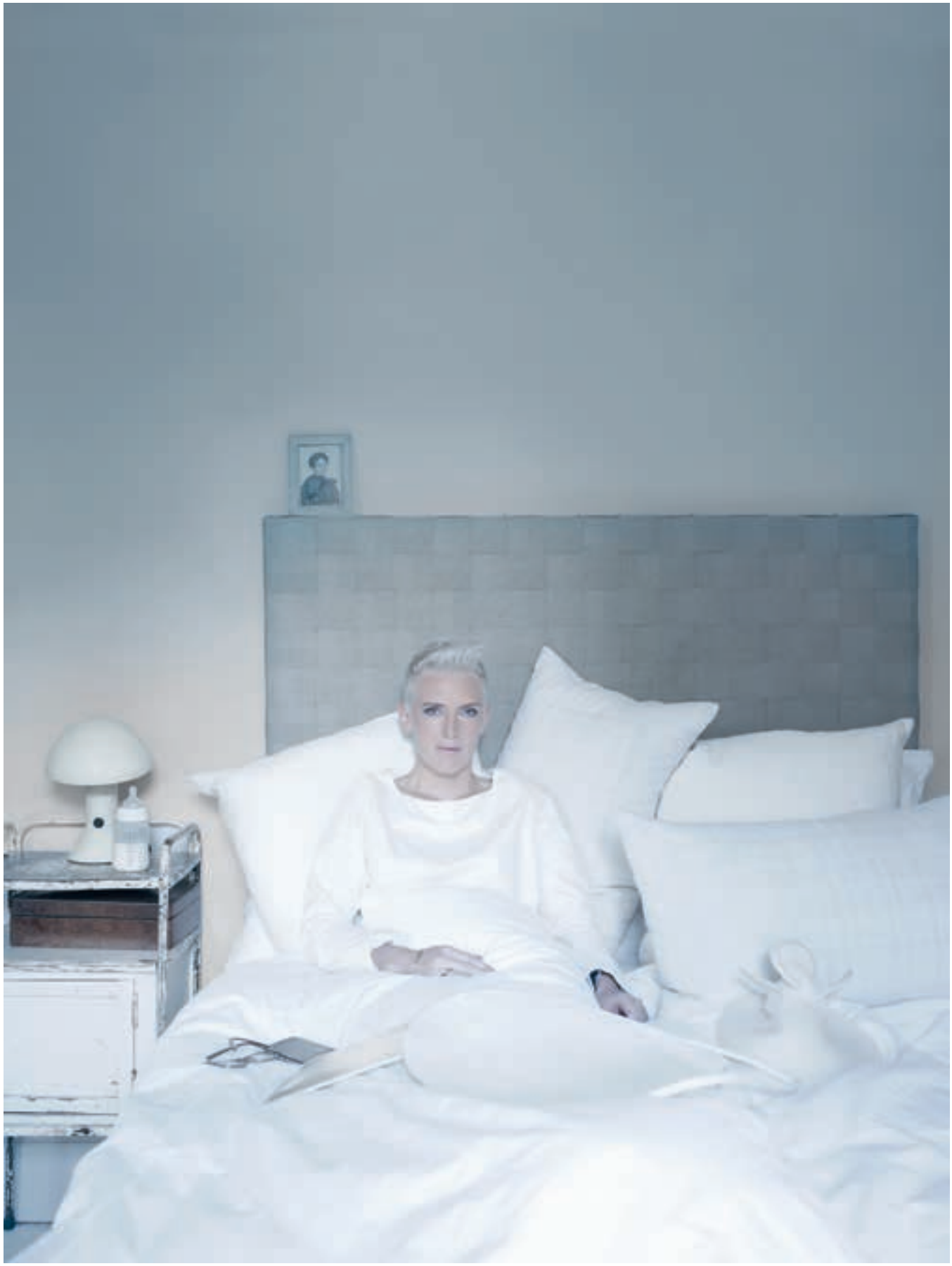
Karl Lagerfeld at a table in his 'Memphis' apartment in Monaco, photographed by Jacques Schumacher for *Mode und Wohnen*, January 1983.

Dirk Van Saene and Walter Van Beirendonck at home, photographed by Alexander Popelier, *Knack Weekend*, August 2018.

Dirk Van Saene's studio, photographed by Alexander Popelier, *Knack Weekend*, August 2018.

p. 142 The living room in the London home of Faye Toogood and Matt Gibberd designed by Walter Segal, photographed by Henry Bourne, 2019.

p. 143 Faye Toogood in bed, photographed by Henry Bourne, 2019.



‘Ladies fashion!
You disgraceful chapter in
the history of civilisation!
You tell of mankind’s
secret desires. Whenever
we peruse your pages,
our souls shudder at the
frightful aberrations.’

‘Damenmode! Du gräßliches kapitel kulturgeschichte!
Du erzählst von der menschheit geheimen lüsten.
Wenn man in deinen Seiten blättert, erbebt die
seele angesichts der fürchterlichen verirrungen und
unerhörten laster.’ (Adolf Loos, ‘Dokumente der Frauen’,
themanummer *Frauenkleidung*, no. 23, 1 March 1902)

ANN DEMEULEMEESTER, MARTIN MARGIELA, RAF SIMONS AND THE CROSS-POLLINATION OF FASHION AND INTERIORS

Romy Cockx

Over recent decades, numerous fashion houses have turned to the world of interiors to reinforce their brand identity, branching out with their own interior collections and design collabs, and opening luxury flagship stores to draw us in. In some cases, their vision of an interior is very much in keeping with their visual language and design methodology. Exponents of this are Belgian fashion designers Ann Demeulemeester, Martin Margiela and Raf Simons, who also prompt us to reflect on the historical relationship between fashion and interior.

LE CORBUSIER'S MAISON GUIETTE: THE PREDESTINATION OF THE PURIST COUPLE DEMEULEMEESTER-ROBYN

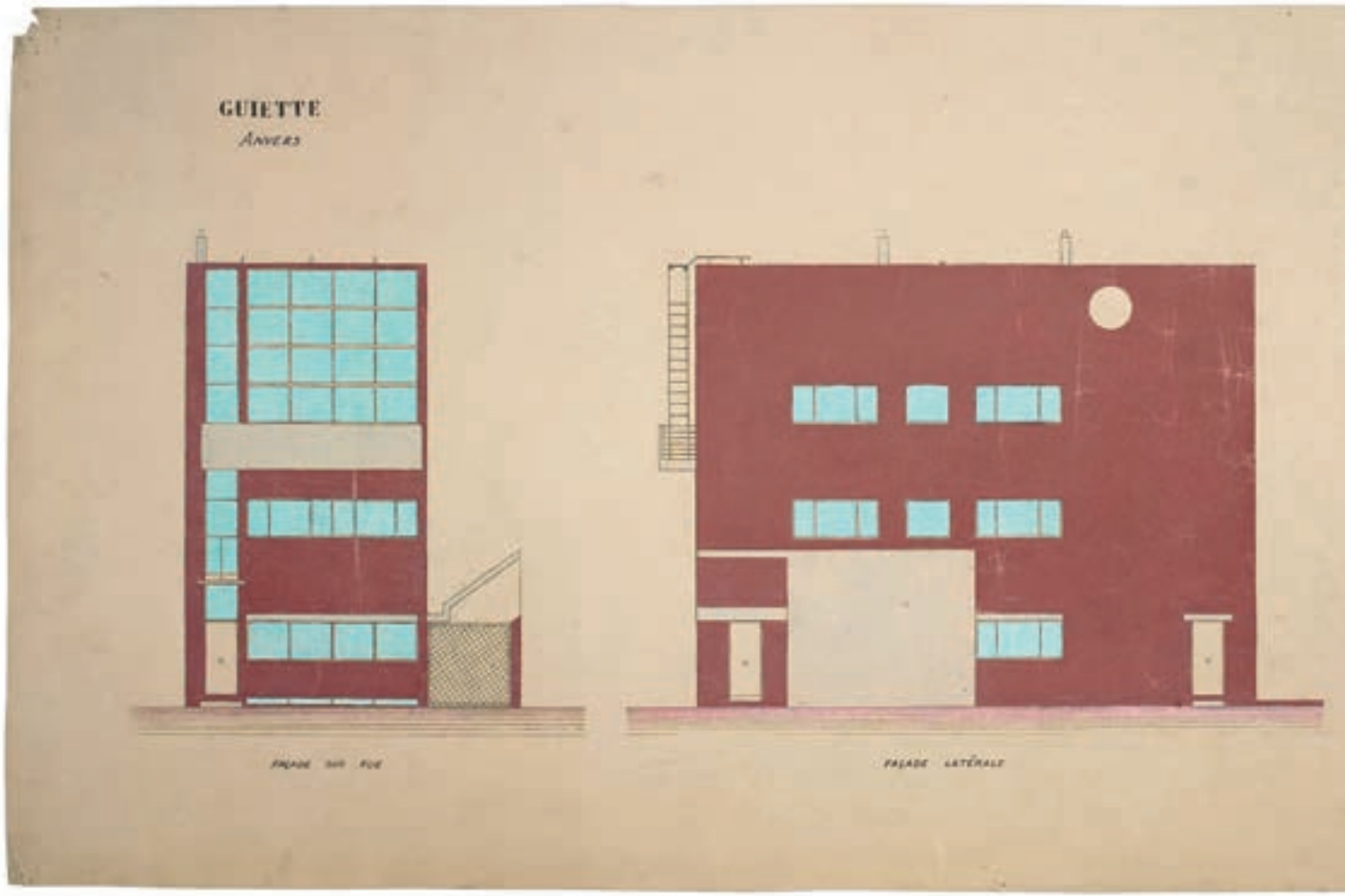
In 1983, fashion designer Ann Demeulemeester and photographer Patrick Robyn purchased Le Corbusier's one and only building in Belgium. The house cum studio had been built for the Antwerp painter René Guiette in 1926-1927. The young Robyn-Demeulemeester couple discovered the building in 1981 while looking for a location to photograph her modernist graduation collection. At the time, the building was being used by the contractor working on the nearby motorway. Although it was in a poor state of repair, they were smitten by the house and could not stop thinking about it.[1]

Captivated by its purist architecture, they moved in immediately after purchasing the building. However, damp problems forced them to vacate it temporarily.[2] In 1985, they appointed the architect Georges Baines to restore it, and the work was carried out in 1987-1988.[3] In 2017, Luc Deleu was commissioned to restore the building once again, and the work was completed in 2023. In 2016, Maison Guiette was added to the UNESCO World Heritage list, and the Robyn-Demeulemeester couple have now been the custodians of Le Corbusier's legacy for over forty years.

As a reaction to the mass destruction of the First World War and inspired by the production processes of the automobile industry, Le Corbusier developed pioneering concepts, which he crystalised in his Dom-Ino and Citrohan housing prototypes.[4] Maison Guiette gave him the opportunity to implement those concepts, albeit subject to urban-planning regulations and his client's wishes. The load-bearing side walls and the concrete skeleton support a free-plan view and the free design of the façades with horizontal windows. Le Corbusier also applied key principles from his Five Points of New Architecture in, for example, the roof terrace, while the cellar windows are a subtle reference to his *pilotis* or pillars.[5]

At Maison Guiette, Le Corbusier also put into practice his evolving ideas about the use of colour, drawing on his expertise as a painter. He insisted on deciding on the colours on site after completion of the building[6] on the grounds that colours sculpture a space.[7] He combined natural pigments such as ochre, sienna and ultramarine with white, taking into account their psychological effect and the natural light.[8]

The house made a deep and lasting impression on Demeulemeester: 'This house has always meant a great deal for my work. The purity of the building has helped me in my collections.'[9] In particular, Le Corbusier's purist ideals resonated in her 1996 Spring-Summer collection (Fig. 8), which she described as a watershed: 'I reached a crucial point with the summer collection. The silhouettes are consistently clean and pure. I ruled out anything that smacked of decoration. I had never gone that far.'[10] In the early 1920s, Le Corbusier published his aesthetic theory of purism, which advocated a methodical refinement of form.[11] A comparison can be drawn between his approach to architecture as 'pure création de l'esprit' and Demeulemeester's approach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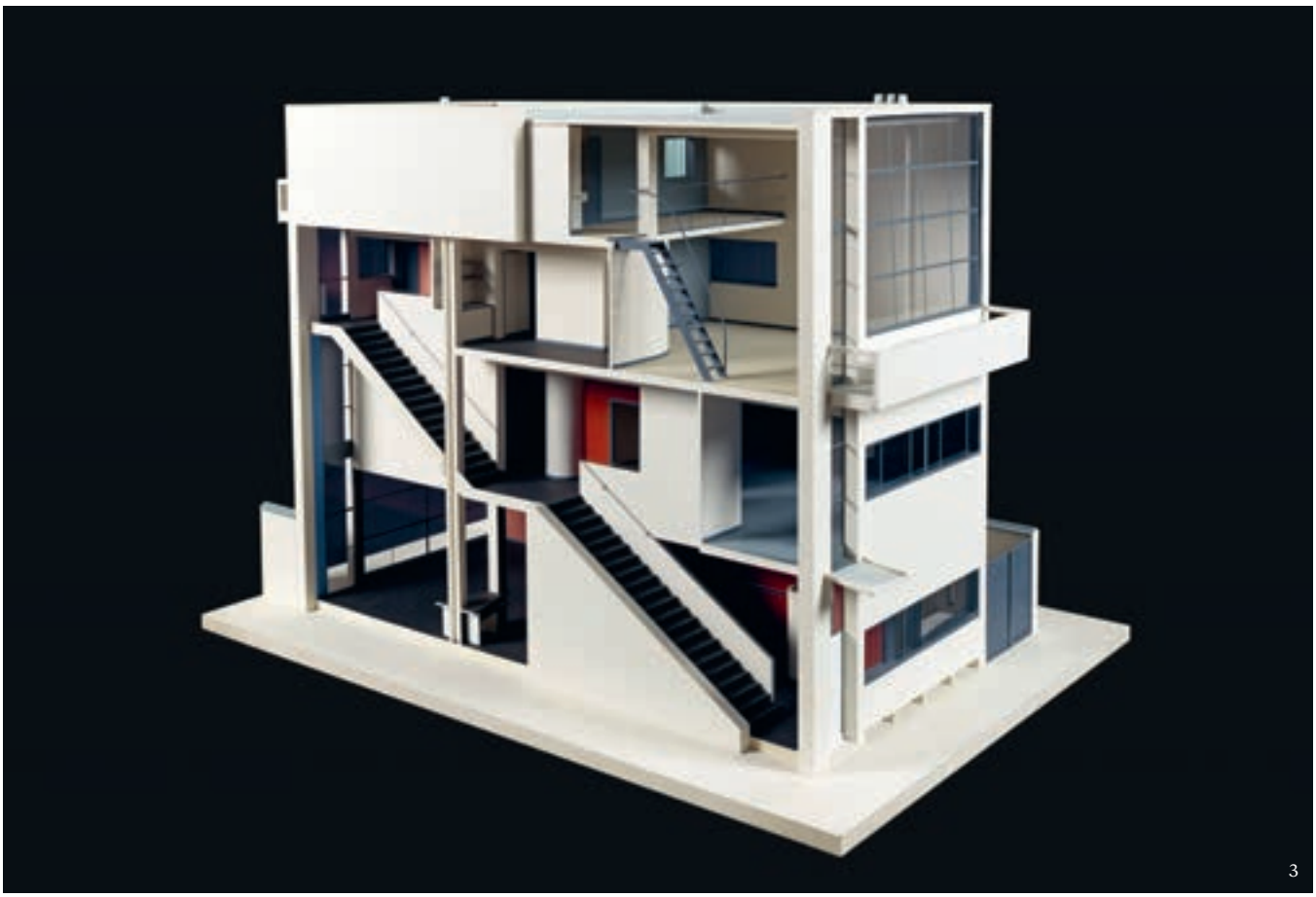
FAÇADE SUR RUE
FAÇADE LATÉRALE



‘In this house, I learned about light, proportions and respect for pure lines.’[12]

(Ann Demeulemeester)

Ann Demeulemeester in the third-floor office of the Le Corbusier house

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5 Living room at Maison Guiette, photographed by Victor Robyn, 2024.
6 Ann Demeulemeester in the atelier at Maison Guiette, photographed by Jean-Philippe Piter for *W Fashion Feature*, June 1995.
7 Stairwell at Maison Guiette, photographed by Victor Robyn, 2024.
8 Ann Demeulemeester, sleeveless open-back top with trousers, Spring-Summer 1996, MoMu, Antwerp, XI409.

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to fashion. She always likes to start from scratch, in search of the ultimate exactness of a form inspired by emotion and desire.

Her use of colour also revolves around precision and poetry: 'For me black and white signify simplicity and essence. It is rather like looking at a black and white film. Without colour, you can feel and see everything. I concentrate on the architectural and do not want to be distracted by colours and patterns. For me black is the most poetic colour, the strongest too. White is the light, the purest. Every now and then I fancy working with colours, but I approach them as shades, like the play of light and shadow.'[13]

In 1996, when the Belgian furniture manufacturer Bulo gave Demeulemeester carte blanche to design a piece of furniture, she presented a simple table covered in white artist's canvas tacked down with rivets (Fig. 15). Underneath the table is the label with which she also signs her fashion collections. Patrick Robyn and Ann Demeulemeester's *Table Blanche* referenced the archetype of a table that bears all the marks of time. The virginal white canvas has a special meaning for them. They also overlaid it with invitations to her fashion shows and the catwalk itself. Moreover, canvas plays an important role in the interior of Ann Demeulemeester's flagship store on Leopold de Waelplaats in Antwerp, where wall panels covered with artist's canvas envelop it like a second skin and filter the incoming daylight. This nineteenth-century corner building was renovated by architect Paul Robbrecht in collaboration with Patrick Robyn in 1999. The historic façade was restored, but the inside of the building was stripped to evoke Demeulemeester's atelier space. Painted white, the metal columns that were revealed when the internal walls were removed refer to Le Corbusier's *pilotis*. The interplay of lines in the interior resonates with Maison Guiette's artistic idiom and provides the ideal setting for Demeulemeester's garments, furniture, lighting and homeware.[14] Fashion and interior design, work and private life, function and emotion converge here in the Robyn-Demeulemeester couple's purist Gesamtkunstwerk.

11 Atelier on the third floor of Maison Guiette, photographed by Victor Robyn, 2024.
12 Ground floor of Ann Demeulemeester's flagship store in Antwerp, photographed by Victor Robyn, 2021.
13 First floor of Ann Demeulemeester's flagship store in Antwerp, photographed by Victor Robyn, 2021.

14

14 Ann Demeulemeester, invitation for fashion show overlaid with canvas, Spring-Summer 1996, MoMu, Antwerp, BI8/1.
15 Ann Demeulemeester and Patrick Robyn for Bulo, Table Blanche, canvas over wood, 1996, photographed by Patrick Robyn.

‘To present the extreme fashion I had in mind, I thought it was very important to show it in a kind of universe. It had to be constructed around a colour.’

(Martin Margiela)

‘a pretty, bright, clear room, white walls, good cane chair or the Thonet; table from the bazar de l’Hôtel-de-Ville (department store) (Louis-XIII tradition, very nice table) painted with Ripolin’.[21]

Maison Martin Margiela unconsciously translated the Law of Ripolin for the postmodern era. Like Le Corbusier, the fashion house associated white with honesty and purity, but also with fragility and transience. The ‘clutter’ was not discarded, but given a white coat. Vintage furniture, crystal chandeliers, strip lighting, telephones, radios, air-conditioning, box files and office supplies: white froze everything into a moment in time and brought past time into focus. ‘White means the strength of fragility and the fragility of the passage of time. An expression of unity, purity and honesty. It is never just white but more – whites – all the shades possible! We usually use matt white so that the passage of time is evident.’[22] The layer of white was used not only for the inside of the offices, ateliers, showrooms and shops, but also on clothing and accessories. The paint crackles as it is worn, gradually revealing the colour and texture of the underlying item. So the painted object acts as a palimpsest, slowly divulging a hidden past.[23]

Margiela also underlined the transient nature of fashion and interiors with trompe l’oeils. The fashion house moved to several different addresses within Paris but took its history with it by integrating into the new premises photographs of elements from the interiors of previous locations. From 2004 to 2023, the offices were located in a nineteenth-century building which had originally served as a charitable institution and from 1939 housed a school for industrial design. Maison Martin Margiela covered the original furniture with a layer of white paint and created a surrealist labyrinth by plastering the existing doors with photocopies of other doors and adding extra door panels and white ladders that led nowhere. The front door of the apartment on Boulevard Saint Denis, where the showroom was initially situated, reappeared, and black and white photographs of a whole range of interior features evoked the atmosphere of the eighteenth-century *hôtel particulier* – private mansion – on Rue Faubourg Poissonnière, where the offices were located between 2000 and 2004. The baroque mirrors, marble mantelpieces, ornamental frames and rosettes were also produced photographically in various Margiela shops all over the world (Fig. 22).[24] Just as the (white-painted) Stockman dressmaker dummies and the white coats worn by the staff were a nod to the history of French couture, the historical interior features recalled the decors of couture salons like Worth, Doucet and Paquin with their Louis XVI furnishings.

Margiela applied the same layering to garments by screen-printing onto them black-and-white photographs of vintage items of clothing (Spring-Summer 1996). In the 2004-2005 Autumn-Winter collection, interior and fashion literally flowed over into

each other in trompe l'oeil Chesterfield prints (Fig. 21). The interplay between fashion and interior was also expressed in the fashion house's transformation and deconstruction methods. For the 2006-2007 Autumn-Winter collection, Margiela disassembled sofas waiting to be upholstered in white fabric. He removed the leather upholstery from the seat, draped it over a dummy and made it into a jacket (Fig. 19, p. 54).[25] The instinctive desire to dismantle constructions and reuse materials to arrive at something surprisingly new is expressed in all that Martin Margiela touches.

18

19

18 Maison Martin Margiela, hand-painted vintage handbag encased in a made-to-measure white-cotton cover, Autumn-Winter 2002-2003, MoMu, Antwerp, B05/1.
19 Maison Martin Margiela, pair of Tabi ankle boots in black leather painted white, c. 1990, MoMu, Antwerp, B13/25ab.
20 The ceiling of the Maison Martin Margiela showroom, 1991, photographed by Ronald Stoops.
21 Maison Martin Margiela, leather jacket with trompe l'oeil Chesterfield print, Autumn-Winter 2004-2005, MoMu, Antwerp, T24/269.

24

CORPO AND QUILTS: RAF SIMONS'S PROTECTIVE WRAPPINGS

Raf Simons, one of the most influential fashion designers of the last twenty-five years, has no formal education in fashion, having studied industrial design at the Higher Institute for Visual Communication and Design (Stedelijk Hoger Instituut voor Visuele Kommunikatie en Vormgeving) in Genk.[26] In 1989, his interest in fashion led to an internship with fashion designer Walter Van Beirendonck, who took him to Paris Fashion Week (Spring-Summer 1990), where Simons attended the shows of Jean Paul Gaultier and Maison Martin Margiela. His compatriot's iconic 'white show' left an indelible impression on him: 'Nothing else in fashion has had such a big impact on me. Only at that point did I understand what fashion could be or what it could mean to people.'[27]

In June 1991, Simons graduated with *Corpo*, a collection dedicated to linking fashion design and furniture design. He used seven 'accessory cabinets' to convey the central idea of the relationship between the human body on the inside and the outside structure of the product. All the pieces have a basic cylindrical form on four legs that is enclosed or clad in different materials such as leather, textile, wire mesh or Niroflex. Simons described his design method as follows: 'The way I work consists of collecting everything I think might be interesting to reimagine as a new product: ideas, materials, drawings, theories of forms, texts, products, images, photographs, video, film, visions, information, philosophies and so on. [...] The challenge is to bring different elements from the collection together in a harmonious manner in a single design, in other words: turn disorder into order.'[28] In an accompanying signed VHS video cassette, a woman's voice coupled with a monotonous droning soundtrack explains the concept: each product can be seen as a body, with an inside and an outside. Derived from different cultures and periods, Simons's visual sources reveal a universal human desire to protect, decorate and transform

‘What we must never forget when designing for the interior is the sense of hominess.’[36]

(Raf Simons)

The wooden barn resurfaced at Design/Miami Basel (June 2018), where, partnered with Cassina, Simons presented his interpretation of the iconic Feltri armchair, designed by Gaetano Pesce in 1987. Simons replaced the plain quilted upholstery of the original design with one-of-a-kind ‘heirloom’ patchwork quilts ‘emblematic of both American heritage and a homespun, handcrafted ethos of days gone by’.[35] The flexible backrest of the felt throne lends itself to hugging the body. Simons contrasted this protective seat with a less comfortable chair: printed onto the wooden barn was Andy Warhol’s *Electric Chair* from 1964 (Fig. 31).

The furniture and collections discussed here display a profound awareness of human vulnerability and a hankering for protection, hominess and comfort. Simons also mentions this when talking about his favourite furniture designers: he does not like the cold interiors of the 1980s, much preferring the mid-century designs of George Nakashima, Jean Prouvé, Jean Royère, Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand, which he associates with human warmth and social responsibility. During his spell at Jil Sander, he reflected on the day-to-day lives of women when not in the company of men. For him, a picture of a model taking a nap on a rug in the living room of Charles and Ray Eames, which was published in an article in *Vogue* in 1954 (Fig. 33), represents ‘a domesticity that doesn’t feel contrived. These pictures aren’t about fashion, they are about life’.[37]

33 The interior of Charles and Ray Eames’s house in the Pacific Palisades neighbourhood of L.A, photographed by Karen Radkai, ‘California Ideas’, *Vogue*, 15 April 1954.

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WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO
Noémie Brakema
Yaël Coopman
Ann Demeulemeester & Patrick Robyn
Bianca Luzi
Martin Margiela
Alessandro Michele
Bob Verhelst
Priska Schmückle von Minckwitz
Henry van de Velde Family Foundation
Willy Vanderperre

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PHOTOGRAVURE
Johan Bursens

PRINTING & BINDING
Printer Trento, Italy

PUBLISHER
Gautier Platteau

ISBN 978 94 6494 193 7
D/2025/11922/19
NUR 452

COVER
Amber Valletta wearing a suit, photographed by Craig McDean for *Interview Magazine*, July 2014
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