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Decostyle



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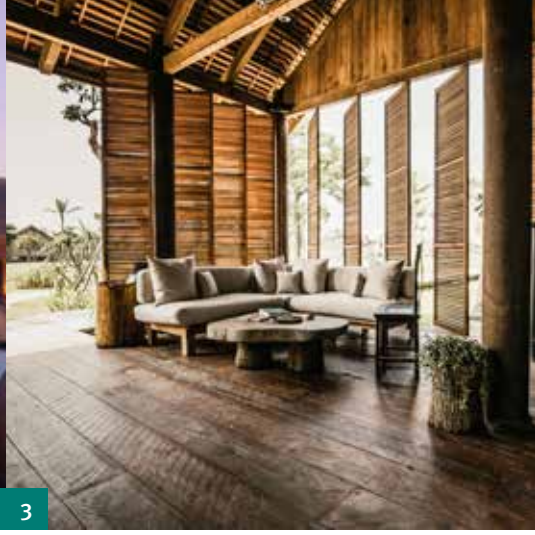
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Geraldine Dohogne

designing with a sense of place

The renovation of the 1898 Porter's House hotel in Ghent brought us into contact with Geraldine Dohogne. Over the past seven years, this Belgian interior designer has built up an international practice, with projects across Europe, Africa and Asia. Based in London and Belgium, she creates interiors that are not only visually appealing but also tell a story about the place in which they are situated. Historical layers, authentic materials and timelessness are key principles in her work.

Dohogne grew up in Ghent and worked in Belgium for ten years before establishing herself in London as well. This was not solely for professional reasons, but stemmed from a desire to broaden her horizons and gain fresh inspiration. Today, she runs Geraldine Dohogne Design, a studio dedicated to interiors where history, culture and materiality converge.

We didn't really have to think too long about our opening question. Belgian designers who, certainly at a relatively young age, take the step of moving abroad are, for the time being, part of a rather select group of people.

What brought you to London?

"London came into my life because of my personal fascination with the city. After ten years working in Belgium, I wanted to broaden my horizons, discover new things and develop further as a designer. London seemed to me to be the ideal place for that."

"What appealed to me so much – and still appeals to me enormously today – about the British capital is the extraordinary amount of energy and diversity. The art scene, the architecture, the exhibitions and, above all, the people you meet constantly confront you with different perspectives. Within the creative community, we exchange ideas and experiences and learn from one another. I find that particularly enriching."

That international environment may well have had a significant influence on your work?

"I wouldn't claim that British design has influenced my work directly or stylistically. Rather, it is the encounters, experiences and different ways of thinking that have broadened my horizons. At the same time, my Belgian roots remain important. They may well have helped shape my sensitivity to materials, proportions and craftsmanship. For me, the cross-pollination lies in the dialogue between that sensitivity and everything I discover along the way."

In your portfolio, we see references to authenticity and timelessness with striking frequency. Could you describe your design philosophy for us?

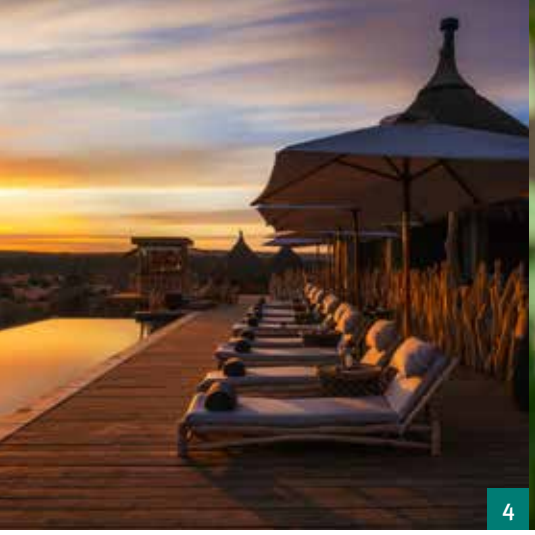
"If I had to describe my approach, I invariably come back to those core concepts of authenticity and timelessness. They are simply always central to my projects. Ultimately, my team and I create spaces where people should feel at ease. They want to feel comfortable there and enjoy spending time in them."

"For me, authenticity begins with understanding a place. We are often privileged to work in special locations with a rich architectural, cultural or historical identity, and there is already a wealth of inspiration there. It is our task

1 Photo 1: Dohogne grew up in Ghent and worked in Belgium for ten years before also establishing a presence in London (Portrait photo and photos 7, 8 and 9: Geraldine Dohogne)

2 The Zannier Sonop Hotel in Namibia (Image: Oyen Rodriguez for Zannier Hotels)

3 Reception area of the Zannier hotel in Phum Baitang, Cambodia (Image: Zannier Hotels)







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as designers to discover and understand as much as possible, and to breathe new life into things. I want to build on a place's story, not simply add a new layer to it."

"I believe this approach is important everywhere, but perhaps it takes on even greater significance when it comes to the hospitality sector. Sometimes you travel to the other side of the world only to find yourself in an interior that could be found anywhere else. To me, that is neither more nor less than a missed opportunity. When you travel, you should be able to feel where you are. Architecture, materials, craftsmanship and atmosphere must connect you with your surroundings. That doesn't have to happen literally or in an obvious way."

How important is curiosity in that design process?

"Everything starts with passion and curiosity. So it stands to reason that I approach design in exactly the same way. I'm interested in a wide variety of subjects, including things that lie far beyond the somewhat narrowly defined disciplines of architecture and interior design. If you want to remain creative as a designer, you have only one choice: keep feeding your curiosity as much as possible."

"I don't believe creativity develops in isolation. It grows through what we experience, the people we meet, the places we discover and the things that challenge our view of the world. Moreover, thanks to my projects, I have the freedom to choose where I go and work. Those choices must also feel right on a personal level: I want to be in places that inspire me, with which I feel a connection, and where I can continue to grow both personally and creatively."





1898 Porter's House, a design inspired by a story

An illustrative example of Geraldine Dohogne's approach is 1898 Porter's House, which opened its doors on 1 September in the historic heart of Ghent. This new hotel is housed in the former porter's lodge of the monumental post office building 'Hôtel des Postes et des Télégraphes', which now accommodates 1898 The Post. The emphasis at 1898 Porter's House is on preserving the authenticity of the original building, both externally and internally.

Historic architecture as a starting point

1898 Porter's House is conceived as an elegant historic residence, with rooms and suites that can be used individually or as a whole. The building's architecture is distinctly neo-Gothic, featuring a light-coloured natural stone façade, tall arched windows, a monumental wooden entrance and a stepped gable with pinnacles.

During the renovation, the emphasis was on preserving the original features. Ghent-based Vertongen Architecten and Jan Van Loock oversaw the restoration, which involved retaining, amongst other things, high ceilings, original doors and fireplaces. As a result, the historic building does not merely serve as a decorative backdrop for the hotel concept. Rather, this structure forms the starting point for the entire interior design.

6 Entrance hall of a house in London (Image: Michael Sinclair)

5 Detail of a residence in Xala, Mexico (Image: Geraldine Dohogne)

4 Swimming pool at Omaanda in Namibia (Image: Zannier Hotels)



Principle carried through into the interior

This principle is also carried through into the interior. Marble, weathered wood and richly textured fabrics are combined with hand-woven rugs, linen armchairs and vintage mirrors. Antique writing desks and lamps, collected in Belgium, lend the rooms a multi-layered character. The colours – soft shades of red, muted gold, bronze and forest green – create a warm atmosphere that is more reminiscent of a private home than a traditional hotel.

Geraldine Dohogne based her approach to the interior design on a combination of history, culture and materiality. Her focus was not only on the visual appearance of a space, but also on the story that space tells and the way in which a visitor experiences it.

For Porter's House, this meant creating a design that keeps the building's history visible and tangible without descending into a nostalgic reconstruction. This approach aligns perfectly with the interior architect's background, having previously been responsible for the interior of the adjacent 1898 The Post.

For this project, Dohogne collaborated with local craftspeople. She translated this collaboration into an interior in which bespoke pieces and artisanal materials are juxtaposed with historical elements. The result is deliberately neither uniform nor sterile: different textures, furniture and objects bring a certain sense of depth and homeliness to the spaces.

From post office to contemporary accommodation

The building's original function also remains subtly present in the interior. For instance, an antique desk in the Porter's Room alludes to the building's postal heritage. At the same time, the bathrooms are distinctly contemporary, featuring marble, rain showers and freestanding baths. In the suites, terraces and wellness facilities are added, including copper baths and saunas.

This creates a tension between old and new that defines the character of Porter's House. The historic architecture is not overridden, but complemented by contemporary comfort and an interior design language that focuses primarily on materials, tactility and atmosphere.



An unconventional background

Geraldine Dohogne has an unconventional background for a designer. She studied 'International Business' rather than design and took her first steps in the world of interior design at Zannier Hotels, where she worked for around 14 years alongside founder Arnaud Zannier.

"My time as Design Director at Zannier Hotels was a significant chapter in my career. It gave me the opportunity to immerse myself fully in designing for the hospitality sector, to take on key creative responsibilities and to develop my own design vision. What made that experience particularly valuable was the chance to understand the hospitality sector from different perspectives. As well as the creative aspects, I gained an insight into the development, planning and operational sides of hotels. It gave me a broader understanding of how a project comes to fruition, how different disciplines interact and how design contributes to the overall guest experience."

"At the same time, this was also a period of creative exploration. Each destination presented its own challenges and opportunities, which encouraged me to look beyond aesthetics and reflect on the relationship between a place, its architecture, its surroundings and the people who stay there."

"Since setting up my own studio, I have continued to explore and refine my approach with complete creative independence. My work is not defined by any particular style or formula. I prefer to approach each project with a fresh perspective and take the time to understand its history, culture and identity before developing a design direction." ■