



GREAT HOMES AND DESTINATIONS

House Hunting in ... Antwerp, Belgium

Home in a Converted Chapel for Sale in Antwerp, Belgium

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By **MARCELLE SUSSMAN FISCHLER**

A FOUR-BEDROOM HOME IN A CONVERTED CHAPEL

\$1.51 MILLION (1,095,000 EUROS)

In the Flemish village of Bazel, nine miles southwest of the center of Antwerp and 150 yards from the moated Wissekerke Castle, a brick chapel built by local nobility in the second half of the 19th century was used to teach the bible to the children of the village.

Almost in ruins when it was bought in 2003, the chapel was restored and converted two years later into one large and one smaller loft-style home, said Antoon Van Coillie, who owns the larger home with his wife, Natasha Coolsaet, the architect. From the pointed arch of the entry door of the larger residence, to its four huge Gothic windows on the main level, its ecclesiastical roots are distinctive.

The entry hall, which has the chapel's original flagstone floor, includes a cloak room and a powder room. A staircase to one side leads to the main floor, where a doorway was built around a set of tall wooden doors salvaged from a demolished church. The 49-by-33-foot main open room has parquet floors with radiant heat and is illuminated by the Gothic windows with a living area near the fireplace and a dining space. A music area is defined by a narrower pointed arch window.

An L-shaped wall with built-in cabinetry and an oven and microwave partitions the kitchen, which has a large marble-topped center island

housing a cooktop, a two-basin sink, a dishwasher and multiple drawers.

To one end of the living room, three sets of new French doors lead to a wood-plank terrace, from which Bazel's medieval church is visible. Two steps down at the far side of the terrace, a more secluded and sunny deck overlooks a small parklike backyard.

On the top floor, two children's bedrooms with floor-to-ceiling windows share a tiled hall bath with two vanities, a shower and a separate toilet. The laundry room is nearby. At the end of the hall, the master suite has a walk-in closet and an en-suite bath with large beige ceramic tiles, twin vanities, a shower and separate tub. Ceilings in the bedrooms are sloped, with a 19th-century wood beam from the original roof structure visible in the master suite.

Under the sloped eaves, framed by wood beams and illuminated by venting Velux skylights, is a roof loft used as a fourth bedroom/den.

A staircase from the living room leads to a lower level, which was created during the renovation by lifting the original floor to the level of the Gothic window sills. The lower level includes an office and television room, a library with a fireplace and four storage rooms. A one-car garage is accessible under a brick archway to the left side of the chapel house.

Bazel, which has about 15,000 residents, is a popular weekend destination for Antwerp residents. It has a one-star Michelin restaurant, Hofke van Bazel, several other brasseries and restaurants, and an extensive park linked to the castle. Extensive flat farmland and towpaths along the Scheldt River in Flanders draw walkers and cyclists. The castle now houses an art academy and can be rented for weddings.

MARKET OVERVIEW

The Belgian real estate market is "quite slow for the moment," said Frederic Van Blerk, a managing director of Engels & Voelker Antwerp, the listing broker, partly in anticipation of elections on May 25. "For the last year we have a standstill in everything from a \$100,000 apartment to a \$5 million house." Prices on half-million-dollar-plus homes in Antwerp are down about 20 percent over the last three years. "A castle that cost 10 million euros five years ago, you can have for half the price," he said. "It is a very difficult market."

Hilde Couturier, the managing director of Metropolitan Real Estate in

Antwerp, said the inventory of homes for sale and rent is high. Banks require 30 percent down to get a mortgage. As a result “right now it takes one year or more until something is sold,” versus two to three months in better times, Ms. Couturier said.

WHO BUYS IN ANTWERP

With no restrictions on foreigners, “Belgium is a paradise for people who want to buy,” Mr. Van Blerk said, but the tide of wealthy Russians who bought homes in Antwerp a few years ago has ebbed. Similarly, the Dutch, who for 20 years came to live in Belgium when taxes were more favorable, now stay in Holland or opt to buy elsewhere.

BUYING BASICS

Nearly all buyers and sellers use a neutral public notary, said Erik Celis, a notary in Antwerp. Forty percent employ the same notary, while in 60 percent of transactions, buyers and sellers each seek their own representation. Belgian law requires an energy certificate divulging the property’s energy consumption level be delivered to the buyer.

WEBSITES

Antwerp Tourism: visitantwerpen.be

Flanders Tourism: visitflanders.us

LANGUAGES AND CURRENCY

Flemish, German and French; euro (1 euro = \$1.39)

TAXES AND FEES

Property taxes on the chapel house are about 2000 euros a year, or \$2,773. There is a 10 percent stamp duty on the transaction price, Mr. Celis said. Notary and other fees add another 2 percent. According to Barbara Rommens, the office and marketing manager of Engel & Voelkers Antwerp, the seller pays a three percent commission to the realtor on the sales price, excluding a 21 percent value added tax.

CONTACT

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