

# “I Want to Keep Creating for Mankind”

An interview with Vincent Van Duysen



Yama for Mutina – Photo by Gerhardt Kellermann

Words: Éva Molnár

Why do contemporaries consider his work “The total work of art” – or Gesamtkunstwerk? The internationally renowned Belgian architect and designer opens up about human-centered creation, the evolution of design, and what fuels his vision today.

## WHAT'S BEEN INSPIRING YOU LATELY?

Everything inspires me. I'm like a sponge, absorbing from the most diverse disciplines: a book, a work of art, an image on Instagram, a gallery visit, a movie. It all goes through the filter of my empathy and imagination. But I'm at my most creative when surrounded by people. Daily life, daily encounters, my travels, and my team – these are my deepest sources of inspiration.

## DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST SPACE OR OBJECT THAT MADE YOU FALL IN LOVE WITH ARCHITECTURE OR DESIGN?

A trip to Egypt with my parents, where I encountered the temple of Hatshepsut. I still see it as modern architecture.



**“Despite being small, the country has a strong influence across Europe”**

Portrait of Vincent Van Duysen – Photo by Piet-Albert Goethals

## LOOKING BACK, IS THERE A TURNING POINT IN YOUR CAREER?

There are many. My ten-year collaboration with Molteni was pivotal – a traditional Italian design house appointing a Belgian architect as creative director was a first. Other moments include my first large-scale project, the Concordia offices in Belgium, my first residential project in Mallorca, and more recently, several outstanding hospitality projects across Europe.

## HOW HAS THE IDENTITY OF BELGIAN DESIGN EVOLVED?

Belgium has a rich heritage in arts and industries, and it's cosmopolitan in culture. Architecture, fashion, theatre, dance, photography – all thrive here. The Antwerp Academy has helped cement Belgium as a cultural center. Despite being small, the country has a strong influence across Europe.

## WHAT NEW PERSPECTIVES ARE SHAPING DESIGN TODAY?

In my opinion, awareness and values dedicated to the wellbeing of humanity.

## WHAT CHANGES ARE YOU SEEING IN DESIGN, NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY?

I see two directions: one is eclectic, powerful, and colorful; the other – mine – is durable, timeless, and sustainable, striving for purity, authenticity, and organicity.

## WHICH TRENDS OR MATERIALS ARE GAINING PROMINENCE?

I don't follow trends. Social media creates a lot of visual clutter – beauty without depth or soul doesn't interest me.

## WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT THE FUTURE OF DESIGN?

To keep evolving, to create works that stand the test of time and inspire generations. To keep creating for mankind, improving lives. I also want to take on unexpected clients and projects that push me out of my comfort zone.



**“My values remain constant: purity, sensuality, timelessness, organic materials, and human-centered design”**

La Rinascente, Rome – Photo by Marco Beck Peccoz

## WHAT DEFINES GOOD DESIGN TODAY?

Purity, timelessness, authenticity. A deep connection to its surroundings. Functionality that makes people feel protected, balanced, and inspired.

## HOW IS DIGITAL INNOVATION SHAPING DESIGN AND HOW ARE BELGIAN DESIGNERS BLENDING TRADITION WITH TECHNOLOGY?

I'm not from this era, but I see through my team that digital innovation is inevitable. It's essential for communicating concepts and helping clients visualize our work. Belgian designers combining traditional craftsmanship with new materials in experimental, poetic, and emotional ways.

## HAS YOUR PHILOSOPHY CHANGED OVER TIME?

Not fundamentally. Since founding my firm in 1989, the scope of my projects has grown, but my values remain constant: purity, sensuality, timelessness, organic materials, and human-centered design. I'm aware of trends, but I steer clear of them.

## WHAT ROLE DOES INTUITION PLAY IN YOUR WORK?

A big one. Senses, instincts, and gut feelings are vital sources of guidance in every project.

## HOW DO YOU BEGIN A PROJECT?

I'm always designing in my mind - there's never a 'blank canvas.' I observe constantly, discuss ideas with my team, and always start with context, location, and relationships. Every project is tailor-made.



**“I work in a  
Gesamtkunstwerk  
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Cascade for Swarovski – Photo by Swarovski

## **ANY CURRENT PROJECTS YOU CAN SHARE WITH US?**

We’re working globally – residential, hospitality, commercial, retail, and product design – from Iceland to Asia, New York to the UK, plus projects in Belgium. There’s also new furniture and products for prestigious Italian and international brands.

## **YOUR WORK EMPHASIZES MATERIALITY. HOW DO YOU CHOOSE MATERIALS?**

I favor organic materials – they age beautifully, gain patina, and bring warmth, tactility, and sensuality to a space.

## HOW DO ARCHITECTURE AND PRODUCT DESIGN INFLUENCE EACH OTHER?

They're connected. I work in a Gesamtkunstwerk manner – from a door handle to a structural beam, every element is part of a harmonious whole.

## WHAT MAKES A COLLABORATION MEANINGFUL?

Mutual respect, shared vision, and listening to one another.

## CAN TIMELESSNESS BE ACHIEVED IN DESIGN?

Yes. Through materiality, form, functionality, and soul. Balance and purity are essential to work that will endure.



Zara Home + by Vincent Van Duysen – Photo by François Halard