

BLIND DATE IN A HENRY VAN DE VELDE VILLA

New works by Maniera at Hôtel Wolfers

Belgian design house MANIERA has a knack for inviting artists and architects who share common interests to create limited-edition furniture pieces. After having brought together Anne Holtrop and OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen to create special pieces for presentation at Biennale Interieur 2014 in Kortrijk, it has now commissioned 6a architects and artist Richard Venlet to produce new work that enters into dialogue with a landmark modernist building in Brussels: Hôtel Wolfers by Henry Van de Velde. It was a case of love at first sight for all concerned.

SAM STEVERLYNCK



Dust Free Friends series by 6a architects
2 'crossed-legs' stools
400 x 400 x 400 mm each

Facing page:
Wolfers door, day bed, stool by Richard Venlet
Location: Hôtel Wolfers, photo © Geert Goiris

An impressive villa, shaped a bit like a bunker, Hôtel Wolfers is situated at the corner of an upscale residential street in Brussels. The building might seem inward looking, but the door is open. Upon entering, much to our surprise, we see a stately hall

and several rooms where the paint is literally peeling off the walls. The owner of this modernist gem by Henry Van de Velde is a famous Belgian art collector who decided to reside in the house as it is: a kind of living organism subject to entropy, instead of feigning a permanent state of youthfulness. Inside, design pieces like daybeds and stools are scattered throughout the rooms. The listed villa is the perfect setting for the second presentation by Belgian design house MANIERA. Having a soft spot for artists/architects working at the crossroads between its own discipline and design, the owners invited Brussels-based Richard Venlet for its second project. "Richard immediately came up with the idea to do something in Hôtel Wolfers", says Amaryllis Jacobs, who runs MANIERA together with her partner Kwinten Lavigne. "Ten years ago, he had already formulated a proposal for a work in the villa. During his research, he found some archive material illustrating that the doors of the dining room, main hall, and music room were originally silver-plated. Hence, he proposed to bring these doors back into their original state." His other creations, all limited editions – which is MANIERA's bent, also refer to the house. The lamps, both freestanding and suspended, are also covered in silver, while the daybeds are shaped according to the plan of the villa.





1

Wolffers stool by Richard Venlet (1)
Location: Hôtel Wolffers
Photo © Geert Goiris

Dust Free Friends series
by 6a architects (2)
1 'crossed-legs' coffee table
800 x 800 x 300 mm

Dust Free Friends series
by 6a architects (3)
Day Bed & Table & Stools
1 day bed or 3 'diamond' coffee
tables
3135 x 605 x 329 mm (all together)
2 'crossed-legs' stools
400 x 400 x 400 mm each
Location: Hôtel Wolffers
Photo © Geert Goiris

Every new MANIERA commission is launched with an exhibition. For this edition, which concluded at the end of June, Venlet showed his work alongside that of London-based 6a architects. Tom Emerson, one of the duo at 6a, remarked, "The people from MANIERA brought us together, which was a nice thing. It was a bit like a blind date, if you want. We felt something for what Richard did, and I think the feeling was mutual. It was really Richard's relationship with the owner that led this project. We knew the house was more present in his work. But we loved the idea of showing our pieces in a domestic setting instead of in a gallery." The architects presented the series Dust Free Friends, a set of small pieces of domestic furniture in plywood – steps, stools, tables, chairs, etc. The inspiration for this was a book by Italian designer Enzo Mari published in the early 1970s about 'self design'. "Having made some very expensive furniture for big companies, Mari suddenly had a sort of crisis", informs Emerson. "Then he designed a series that the user could make himself by following instructions. The pieces were super simple to make. You didn't need to be skilled." Stephanie Macdonald, the other half of 6a architects, continues: "We were wondering how that would work today. So many things are IKEA nowadays. The trend moved from Mari to IKEA. But with



2



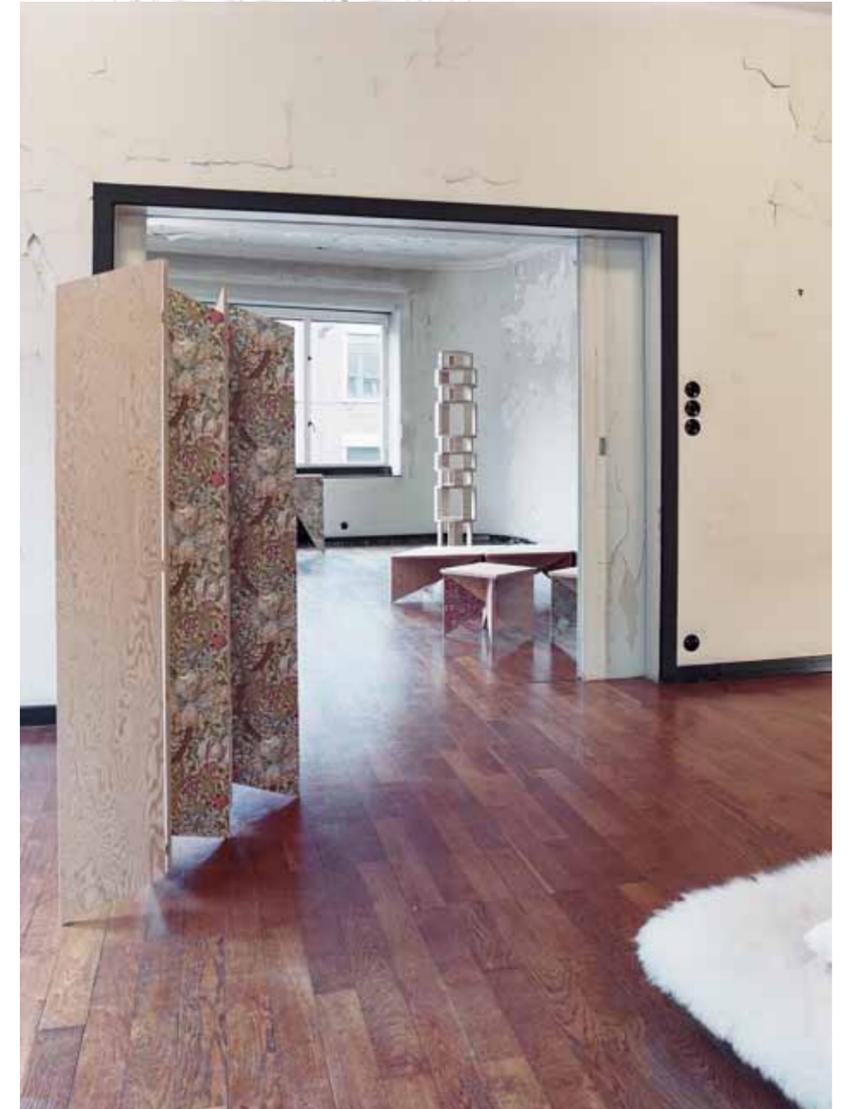
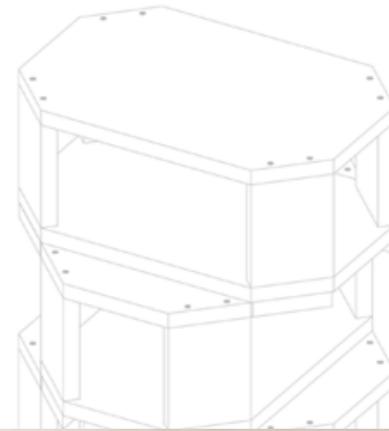
3

IKEA it is not making, it's just assembling. Which is often frustrating because you don't have any control or choice over things. We want to find pleasure in the work again." Hence, the pair came up with a catalogue containing pattern-cutting instructions for each piece. "The instructions are like a recipe", Emerson says. "You can follow it or vary it. The basic ingredients are there. It's like if you would add more or less coriander." A graph indicates the most limited cut. They always use only one sheet of plywood. "We want to make it as efficient as possible. When you're finished, there is no material left." One element often leads to the next one. A small step can, when a second one is added to it, become a chair... or a bedside table. If you add several of these together, it becomes a column. "We discovered that it was fun to move around", says Macdonald. "It is very modular. You end up with a group of furniture elements." The pieces are dressed with wallpaper designed by William Morris, one of the driving forces of the Arts and Crafts movement who wanted to make art accessible to all, just as 6a architects does. "But he was in a sense a conflicted person", Emerson adds. "He was socially committed, but at the same time only sold to the rich." What about Van de Velde, another design giant whose influence permeates this collection? "It is amazing to be so close to the first director of the Bauhaus", emotes Emerson. "We will always be reminded of Van de Velde when we show this series elsewhere." <

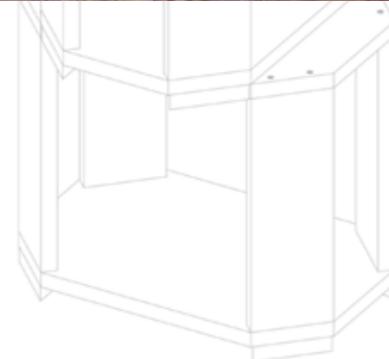


1

maniera.be
6a.co.uk



2



Dust Free Friends series
by 6a architects (1)
Column / Step & Stool
5 steps + 4 stools
505 x 270 x 2390 mm each

Dust Free Friends series
by 6a architects (2)
Assembled pieces
Location: Hôtel Wolffers
Photo © Geert Goiris