

INTERBELLUM

The two decades from 1920 to 1940 are marked by a major social turning point. Society is on the move, the progress of industrialisation shakes up working habits and leads to a new way of living. The working classes progressively access a better quality of life, whereas the middle classes start to leave the city centres to move to the greener suburbs, for example Loverval. Architects try to meet the wishes of all social strata with new techniques like reinforced concrete, that enables building at lower cost.

Two architectural styles will develop in that economic and social context: Art Deco and modernism.

Modernism completely reinvents architecture. The new, very understated style, with its pure lines and shapes represents a complete break with the past. This architecture is stripped of any frills and the main focus is placed on the functionality of the building and the incidence of light in the interiors.

Art Deco, however, is slightly more moderate, seeking expression in a geometrical and stylised way, whilst keeping the decorative spirit that marked the heydays of architecture since the XVIIIth century. Whereas Art Nouveau favoured 'whiplash' decoration, Art Deco opts for lozenges, zigzags, shapes that are easier to mass produce, and modernism will eliminate them altogether.

In Charleroi, the large boulevards, in particular those built north of the city, on the outskirts of new residential neighbourhoods, would provide unspoilt land for those new artistic movements.

In addition to several interesting architects such as Leon Coton, Maurice Hosdain and many others, three big names define the urban landscape of the era: Marcel Leborgne, Joseph André and Marcel Depelsenaire.



TOURS GUIDÉS

Guided tours for individuals are organised on set dates by the Maison du Tourisme du Pays de Charleroi and accessible by booking.

For groups, a city tour on foot on a route lined with the most beautiful examples of Art Deco and modernism can be organised on request, subject to availability of the specialist guides.



CHARLEROI TOURIST OFFICE

MAISON DU TOURISME

Place Charles II, 20 - 6000 Charleroi

Tel. : +32(0)71 86 14 14

maison.tourisme@charleroi.be

www.charleroitourisme.be

INFO TOURISME

Gare du Sud

6000 Charleroi

Tel. : +32(0)71 31 82 18

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CHARLEROI
HERITAGE

ART DECO
MODERNISME

RECOMMENDED ROUTE

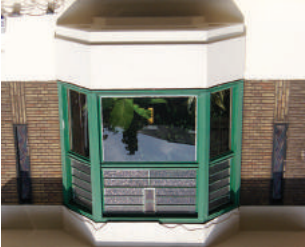


Marcel Depelsenaire
(Ath, 1890 - Loverval, 1981)

One of the most famous architects in Charleroi, Marcel Depelsenaire, places modernism at the service of tradition. We owe several town houses along the new tree-lined boulevards in Charleroi. We also owe him, either influenced by modernism or of slightly expressionist Dutch inspiration, after his stay in Holland during WWI. That stay was to influence and shape his career.

His approach is rational but without the inflexibility of some of his peers. He very often roams the border between Art Deco and modernism in a typical regional harmonious blend.

Marcel Depelsenaire's work in particular - is therefore very personal, perfectly integrated in its era and benefits from the innovations of modernism, while demonstrating a precise sense of detail and finish inherited from past times.



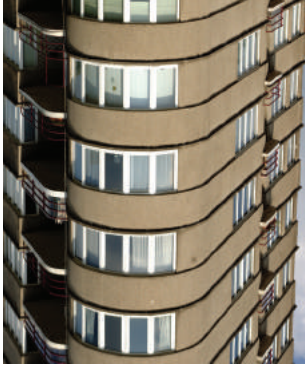
Joseph André
[Marbais, 1885 - Charleroi, 1969]

One architect who left a major imprint on the Charleroi landscape during the interwar period was undoubtedly Joseph André. However, although closer to the Art Deco movement than 'hard-core' modernism, it is difficult to attribute him an individual style as he easily adapted to the social status, ambitions and new requirements of his clients.

He created numerous masterpieces with extremely different codes. He made family homes with a very modernist sobriety and pure and uncluttered shapes, but also apartment buildings with very elaborate 'Haussmann-like' facades, full of curves and waves.

The high point of his career is unquestionably the Town Hall of Charleroi and its bellry, listed in the Unesco World Heritage (*See leaflet about the Town Hall*).

It is obvious that all Joseph André's work is unique, different, sometimes modernist, sometimes Art Deco, sometimes between the two movements.



Marcel Leborgne
(Gilly, 1895 - Charleroi, 1978)

The iconic figure of modernism in Charleroi, Marcel Leborgne created many buildings here, villas with geometric volumes, apartment buildings that recall the great ocean liners, ... His designs are stripped of all flourishes, but elegant and practical. The light enters through very wide bay windows and huge interior spaces. The austerity of the facades, often white, is broken by a new exceptional control of the swung line. As a 'lyrical builder' his vision of modernism is refined and elegant.

Following the reflections of the famous architect Le Corbusier on collective housing - « *La où naît l'ordre, naît le bien-être* » *where order originates, well-being originates*, Marcel Leborgne tries to meet the reality of the new society and its needs.

He understands the importance and usefulness of apartment buildings and imagines a 'vertical city' with spacious, airy, organised, practical, light apartments.

Listed in 1995, his major work, the building of Pianos De Heug, on the quayside, is severely damaged and will be restored in 2015-2016.

Departure, Charleroi Sud station

1. pont Roi Baudouin – Railing

Despite numerous urban changes in the past decades, part of the decorative elements of the bridge over the river Sambre in front of the Gare du Sud have survived. The bronze decoration of the railings and the street-lamps, with geometric patterns of two intertwined circles, is very representative of Art Deco. Unfortunately parts of the railing are damaged.

2. quai Arthur Rimbaud – Pianos De Heug, Marcel Leborgne, 1935

One of the architect’s major works. Very elaborate volumes, very elegant lines, an omnipresent curve on the facade and a vertical rise emphasised by the column in which the stairway is housed. Wide windows let in maximum light. This beautiful building was the object of a meticulous restoration in 2017.

3. rue de Dampremy, 74 – Marcel Depelsenaire, 1937

This apartment building is built on the corner of two streets with wide, undulating facades. The whole building, with the vertical flight marking the angle and the almost sole use of red bricks evokes expressionist architecture, so dear to the architect.

4. boulevard Audent, 11 – Joseph André, 1922

The facade of this apartment building combines an undulating movement on the facade and skilfully-placed decoration under the windows. We see rich vegetal decorations that still evoke the tradition of the XIXth century, but counter-balanced by much more contemporary geometric decorative elements in the ironwork. This building clearly belongs in a transition period between the two eras.

5. square Charles II, Town Hall – Jules C  zar and Joseph Andr  , 1936
(see leaflet «Heritage: Charleroi Town Hall»)
Inaugurated in 1936, Charleroi City Hall is an outstanding Art Deco building from every point of view.

6. boulevard Jacques Bertrand, 51 – Moderne r  sidence, Alfred Machelidon
This apartment building is structured by a central axis and, on each side, a double curve created by the line of the balconies and the windows. This symmetrical composition gives the whole a very balanced, very simple look. Completely contemporary: modernist and functional.

7. boulevard Solvay, corner rue Fagnart – Maison Bertinchamps, Jules Laurent and Marcel Depelsenaire, 1926, listed in 1999
Corner house where you see the Dutch influence, present in a great majority of the work of Marcel Depelsenaire. This building is remarkable for the attention to the stonework, stained glass and the treatment of the facade and bricks in particular at the angle. We notice the small windows. In that era, the population needed to feel secure, sheltered in a cocoon. Those small windows that hide lavish rooms are one of the architectural responses to that need for privacy. We also see the colourful geometric Art Deco stained glass that compensates the sobriety of the facade.

8. avenue Jules Henin, 2 – Jean Marchel, 1934

The treatment of the corner with two brick columns surrounding a triangular oriel window is particularly successful. The original oriel window has disappeared and was replaced. The general look of the building, large brick surfaces and impressive volumes evokes Dutch architecture.

9. rue Isaac, 6 – Maison R  my, Gaston Halloy, 1933

An Art Deco treasure renovated in the 1990s. We notice the intention to exploit natural light with, on the first floor, a window across the whole facade, following the movement of the bow windows. We notice Art Deco in the design of the ironwork and the stylised floral motifs that decorate the facade. The whole evokes the ‘Vienna Secession’ movement that already preached the geometrisation of the decorations at the start of the century.

THE BOULEVARD DEWANDRE

Drawn on the derelict land that appeared after the demolition of the ramparts in 1870, the boulevard Dewandre will have to wait until the 1920s to become the privileged ground of the architects of the interwar period. During that period the whole boulevard will be lined with countless buildings in modernist and Art Deco style, designed by Marcel Leborgne, L  on Coton, Maurice Hosdain, Joseph Andr  , ...

Among all those residences, we notice, among others, a very beautiful bas-relief at number 17, by Joseph Andr  , the originality of the balconies at number 9, by Mazurelle, the stonework on the roof of number 18 and numerous other examples.

10. boulevard Dewandre, 22 – Joseph Andr  , 1935

This apartment building combines very sharp angles with nicely marked curves. There is little ornamentation and the whole provides a geometric look.

11. boulevard Dewandre, 8 – Maurice Hosdain

This magnificent town house combines elegance and functionality. A large projected ‘banner’ window animates the facade with an elegant curve. Geometric and asymmetric: this building is typical of its day. We find the same look on the back facade, rue L  on Bernus, but in a simpler organisation.

12. boulevard Dewandre 3 – Maison Mattot, Marcel Leborgne, 1937

A house that belongs to the rational modernist movement. A living space designed to be practical, functional, airy, with large openings for maximum luminosity. The bay windows are so essential that they seem to form the whole facade all on their own. We also see the use of volumes and curves dear to Marcel Leborgne.



13. boulevard Dewandre, 1 – Marcel Leborgne, 1939

As light is at the core of the concerns of modernist architects, we find large luminous bay windows in this apartment building that follow the curve of the corner. It is a perfect example of functional modernism. No unnecessary frills, rational use of space and efficient use of light. The railing evokes the topsides of ocean liners, a recurring influence of the modernist architects in general and Marcel Leborgne in particular. age des paquebots, influence r  currente des architectes modernistes.

14. boulevard Mayence, 41 – Marcel Depelsenaire, 1935

A very beautiful example of Art Deco – modernism transition. The white facade of the house is symmetrical with stylised geometric ornamentation. The two top floors consist of a rounded projection (a sort of half bow window) supported by a wavy console and extended by a balcony.

15. rue G  n  ral Michel, corner boulevard Mayence – Residence Plein Air, Marcel Depelsenaire, 1936

This apartment building in Dutch style presents a central column on the corner of the two streets to which the balconies of apartments are attached on either side. The whole is very geometric, from the shape of the facade to the ornamental details such as stained glass.

16. boulevard Audent, 45 – Joseph Andr  , 1929

The geometric Art Deco facade of this house, with protruding rectangles, symmetrical openings and a flat roof cleverly combines various materials: stone, brick and coating.

17. boulevard Audent, 32

This facade mainly stands out by the use of bricks and artisanal ceramics representing pine cones. The bricks were designed by the internationally renowned master potter, Roger Gu  rin, originating from Jumet (1896–1954). Each brick represents four pine cones surrounded by foliage.

18. boulevard Audent, 42 – Maison Dermine, Jules Laurent and Marcel Depelsenaire, 1921, listed in 1994

This is an absolutely remarkable construction, a happy union of very refined Art Deco decoration and a more modernist uncluttered general line. The details are carefully chosen from the vegetal world as in the past, but treated in the style of the era. Note the asymmetry of the facade and the stonework in the support console of the loggia, representing an owl with outspread wings. We also notice a curious little dragon, clutching the frame of the bay and looking through the window of the first floor.

19. rue de Montigny, 29 – Maison Van Bastelaer, Marcel Leborgne, 1932

Known for his audaciously uncluttered buildings, Marcel Leborgne here designs a youth work to the specifications of the owner. It evokes traditional town houses but the stylised patterns in wrought iron, the stonework and the bow windows give it a more modern touch. We are standing in front of a carefully decorated yet simple facade.

20. platform of the gare du Sud – Hotel des Chemins de fer, Paul Nouille, 1933

In this building you feel the influence of an international figurehead of modernism and a fervent defender of functionalism, Henry Van de Velde, who supervises the design of stations and trains for the Belgian Railway Company. For Charleroi, Paul Nouille designs a building that plays with our subconscious: the numerous windows form a glass bar, and the horizontalism of the whole inevitably evokes trains and speed.

