

A NEW APPROACH TO ART

After having been a military stronghold for two centuries, the fortifications of Charleroi were dismantled around 1870 to allow the city to expand and avenues were built on the ramparts. At the beginning of the 20th century a new residential district originated, which was mainly populated by the middle classes that arose from the soaring development of the steel, glass and coal industries. These middle classes wanted to live in comfort and display their newly acquired status by building sumptuous mansions to mark their recent success. Consequently, Art Nouveau found a fertile ground for its development and left traces in the architectural environment of the city.

Art Nouveau is the apotheosis of steel and glass. Steel, which until then was only used in commercial or industrial architectures, was given access to private homes. Glass, for which the know-how is well recognised in the region of Charleroi, is introduced into splendid stained-glass windows that illuminate bourgeois interiors through skylights, winter gardens or large luminous bays. Everything is shown in curves and waves. Nature offers the much sought after natural fluidity (flowers, leaves, stems, insect flights...). Female faces and allegories are the other preferred motifs.

Art Nouveau is based on the dexterity of the local craftsmen and involves all the trades to craft the minutest details. Wrought iron takes pride of place on balconies and railings, sgraffiti invade the facades whereas the door and window decorations become very important. Decorative arts are elevated to the rank of major art.



GUIDED TOURS

A city walking tour for groups, following a route that runs past attractive Art Nouveau facades, may be organised upon request. These same visits are organised for individuals at fixed times: available from May to October and requiring prior registration.



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**CHARLEROI**

Avec le soutien de

**Wallonie**

**tourisme**

**CGT**

PHOTOGRAPHS : Luc Denruyter, Gina Santin, Mireille Simon.

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CREATION : Office du Tourisme de Charleroi 2020

Published by : Lahssen Mazouz – Director General. - Hôtel de Ville – Place Charles II – 6000 Charleroi

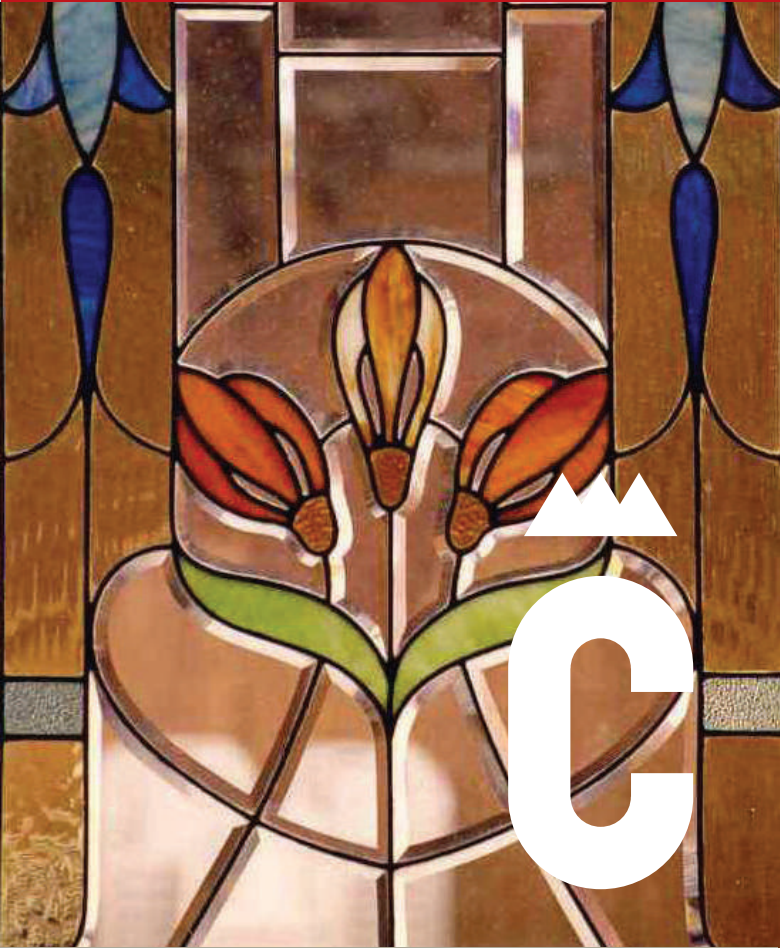
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CHARLEROI

HERITAGE

ART NOUVEAU

RECOMMENDED ROUTE



In 1987, a bold restoration project was launched together with the listing application. Two architects, Luc Schuiten and Paul Warin successfully updated this building to offer the comfort and space required by modern life, while respecting its initial style. The annex, set back in respect of the facade, is therefore contemporary as are the wrought-iron railings, whose shape echoes the recurrent trapezoidal elements of the facade. This annex to the original house is a complete success. It is perfectly integrated in the whole building without spoiling its harmony and consistency.



This mansion, built in 1908 by the first Art Nouveau house to be listed in Charleroi, in 1989. Tall and very straight, it stands out because of its sober aspect. Its overall shape is evocative of the Vienna Secession movement with its trapezoidal windows and a certain geometry in the ornamentation. This construction was probably inspired by the Lapallemansion, rue Saint-Séverin, 26 in Liège built by architect Victor Rogister in 1904-1906. You are first struck by the stained-glass windows above the doors and windows that represent the naked back of a woman in a highly stylised manner, with flowers covering her lower back.

On the second floor, bas-reliefs figures represent various trades. The presence of a painter symbolises the Art Nouveau spirit that valorises craftsmanship, rejects series production and the domination of man by machines. Another medallion represents the caduceus as a reminder that this house was built for a physician. The inspiration drawn from the plant world is present in a stylised manner. The frieze under the cornice, the stained-glass windows of the winter garden or the elegant curves of the magnificent wood frames and ironwork bear witness to the know-how of the craftsmen.

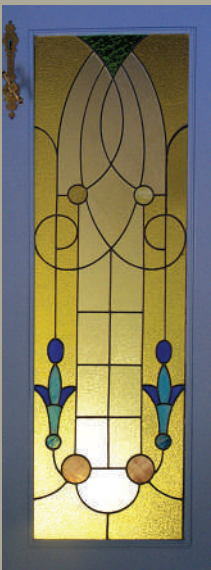


Designed in 1908 and listed in rue Léon Bernus, 40 this facade comprises three levels and four bays; the main bay that is highlighted by the entrance door projects slightly. It is asymmetric: the bay on the right has a wider design in order to emphasize a circular bay and its brattice. A Moorish influence can be detected in the polychrome effects and in the shape of the days adorned with an arch whose curve extends beyond the half-circle (horseshoe shape), also referred to as horseshoe arch.

The acronym «CD» in the sgraffito: this acronym is said to come from the Greek *Chrusos Dikos*, meaning golden house. These motifs are present in the ironwork and the famous whiplash line can be found over the entire facade. The stained-glass window of the winter garden door was realised in bevelled glass, allowing extremely fine joints. This obviously indicates that this house was owned by renowned master glazier, Adolphe Chausseur.



The stress on polychromy present on the whole facade and the use of a mix of decorative processes, make this building built by architect Alfred Frère in 1899 for the Adolphe Chausseur family, a rich glass manufacturer, and listed in 1993, a highly representative example of Art Nouveau. This facade displays a pallet of different colours. Its originality lies in the effects of the coloured materials, the stained-glass windows, and more specifically the grandiose use of sgraffiti, attributed to Brussels painter and decorator Gabriel Van Dievoet. Indeed, usually the sgraffiti are realised to enhance a facade. Here, the house seems to have been built around the sgraffito decorated with plant interlacing and stylised flowers.





START

Maison du Tourisme,  
Place Charles II

1. rue Neuve, 26 (Hector Tonet)

The ground floor of this store has maintained a wood panelling shop window inspired by the Belle Epoque. The architect’s signature can be found on the base.

2. rue Neuve, 23-25

These two semi-detached facades only differ because of the use of yellow or red bricks. Their composition is geometrical and vertical and the windows are high and narrow. Their protruding wood cornice is delicately crafted.

3. boulevard Janson, 29

Sgraffiti attributed to Paul Cauchie represent faces of women in medallions with floral motifs.

4. boulevard Janson, 38

This building was inspired by the Vienna Secession style, recognisable by the use of a coating and by the geometrical and spare aspect of the ornamentation. The cut-off facade on the corner of the street is lived up by a wrought iron balcony.

5. avenue de Waterloo, 5 to 9 (1910 – Edgard Clercx and Octave Carpet)

The spare style of these constructions might suggest a lack of means. In fact, minor regional industrialists preferred this bare style for reasons of economy. However, Art Nouveau references can be found in the constructions and there is a beautiful unity in the composition.

6. rue Zénobe Gramme, 20-32 (Vers 1910 – Octave Carpet)

The frames are curved and the use of white bricks adds a decorative note to the very harmonious whole realised in red bricks. The architect’s signature can be found on the base of No.22.

LA RUE LÉON BERNUS

This street is remarkable because of the abundance of Art Nouveau elements. Although some houses are not typical, many present an element in that style: a lock or letter box ornamentation, a stained-glass window, ironwork...

The alignments, from number 28 through 56 and from 23 through 55, built at the very beginning of the 20th century, were listed in 2010 as «architectural ensemble». They are interesting because of the homogeneity of their size, their overall composition and the similar use of materials, while each house acquires an identity of its own through the shape of its windows and doors, the brickwork, the colours or even the motifs of the stained-glass windows.

7. boulevard Solvay, 7 – The Lafleur Mansion (1908 – Victor Rogister)  
(See overleaf)

8. rue Isaac, 33-35

Two semi-detached facades in white glazed bricks, realised in Jumet ceramics. The one is adorned with yellow cross motifs and the other with the same cross motifs in blue. Note the fine metal columns on the second floor, as well as the brattices. The design of the ironwork illustrates the term *whiplash* to perfection.

9. rue Léon Bernus, 42-44 (1906 – Edgard Clercx)

Two houses form a harmonious whole. The stonemasonry is quite remarkable. Presence of a brattice.

10. rue Léon Bernus, 40  
The Physicians’ Mansion (1908)  
(See overleaf)

11. rue Léon Bernus, 39 (1905 – Georges Colin)

A stained-glass window represents an iris on the ground floor.

The entrance door combines wood and wrought iron.

12. rue Léon Bernus, 38 (1907)

A beautiful stained-glass window above the entrance represents a fountain. The use of opalescent glass was common in the region of Charleroi, famous «glass country».

13. rue Huart Chapel, 7-9 (1913)

Two semi-detached houses in coloured glazed bricks. The realisation of the doors and frames is remarkable. The stained-glass windows, in which iris representations and a sgraffito representing a flower basin can be perceived, are most elegant.

14. rue Léon Bernus, 14 (1912)

This house displays antequely-inspired portrait medallions in blue plaster and gold. The fine stonemasonry, wrought iron and elegant window shapes are also noteworthy.

15. rue Léon Bernus, 1-3 (1912 – Hector Tonet)

These two semi-detached houses are enhanced with decorations and sgraffiti.

16. boulevard Janson, 50

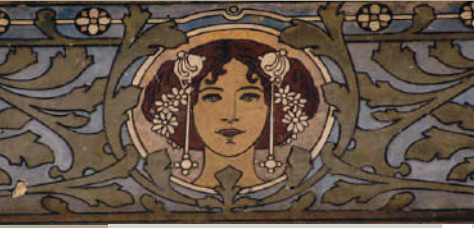
A remarkable stained-glass window surmounts the entrance door. It represents vines and bunches of grapes. A bow-window is present on the first floor.

17. rue Tumelaire, 15 – The Golden Mansion (1899 – Alfred Frère)  
(See overleaf)

18. rue Tumelaire, 91

(1906 – Hector Lecomte)

The openings in *horseshoe design*, the wrought iron balcony and sculpted stone are eye-catching. The architect’s name is engraved on the base.



OTHER BUILDINGS ARE WELL WORTH A DETOUR...

19. rue de la Régence, 63 (1909)

The top floors of the coated facade display an astonishing decoration of undulating mouldings inspired by the «Vienna Secession» style.

20. boulevard Mayence, 4 (1906)

The floral sgraffiti are attributed to the studio of Paul Cauchie.

21. rue de Marcinelle, 34 → 40 (1904 – Zacharie Clercx)

A very successful ensemble of four houses in different coloured bricks similar to the style of Paul Hankar. Note the use of broken arches, small stone columns and stylised ironwork.

22. rue de Marcinelle, 5 (1908 – Raoul Taburiaux)

On the first floor note the exceptional shape of the wooden frames of that period. The stonemasonry is very meticulous and sgraffiti with plant and heraldic motifs (lion rampant holding a crown above a coat of arms) adorn the ensemble.

23. rue de Dampremy, 12 (1907 – Hector Tonet)

The facade, in white glazed bricks, is adorned with three panels in sgraffito, probably originating from the studio of Paul Cauchie. They represent female faces, their hair girded with flower crowns, in medallion. An inscription in the tympanum of the second floor windows reads *Anno 1907*.

24. rue de la Montagne, 38

On the second floor, a protruding arch bay is surmounted by a tympanum adorned with a sgraffito representing a woman’s face in a medallion surrounded by floral motifs. It is exceptionally signed by Paul Cauchie, Belgian architect, painter and decorator (1875-1952), undisputed master of the sgraffito.

25. avenue des Alliés, 22, 24, 26 (1917 → 1922 – Hector Tonet)

Three houses built in a spirit close to that of Art Nouveau, namely elegant and harmonious. The architect alternated the coloured bricks, the blue stone and the sgraffito friezes. The distinguishing feature of No. 22 is the stained-glass windows representing muses.

SGRAFFITO

This Italian word «*sgraffito*» means «scratch». This wall decoration technique dates back to Antiquity. Long forgotten, it again became fashionable at the end of the 19th century. The technique consists in covering a first layer of dark mortar with a light coating. A drawing is then created by engraving the light coating while it is still fresh in order to display the underlying dark coating. The lines of the drawing thus appear hollowed and dark. The light coating is subsequently coloured.

