



## Explanatory sheet (type 3a)

### Private mansion (pre-wars)

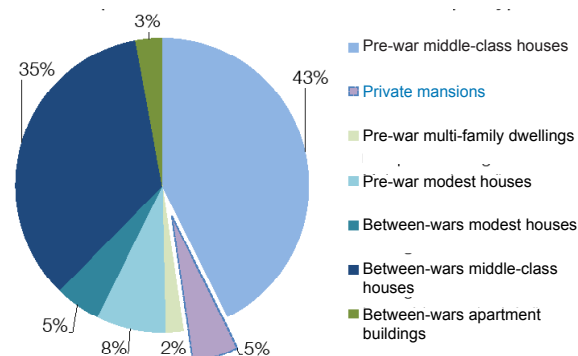


Figure 1: Representation of middle-class houses in the Brussels dwellings stock before 1945

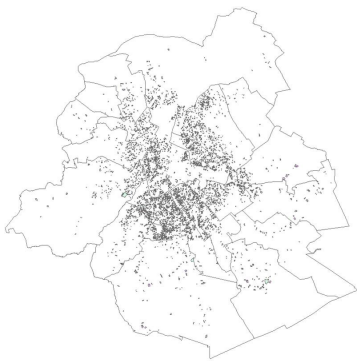


Figure 2: Urban repartition of pre-war private mansion



Figure 3: Private mansion designed and built on a streetcorner by the architect Gabriel Charle, in 1908, now demolished

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Figure 4: Three private mansion in Italian Neo-Renaissance style, built on Avenue Louise and now demolished

- at n°65, private mansion drawn by architect W. Janssens in 1884.
- at n°141, private mansion drawn by architect J. Brunfaut in 1888
- at n°277, private mansion drawn by architect J. Van Mansfeld in 1893.

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#### Preamble

The single-family dwelling built from 1700 to 1914 constitutes the most common housing type in Brussels. It is rare to see multifamily houses or apartment buildings appear before the First World War except for some unsuccessful attempts on the boulevards of the centre.

Originally reserved for urban dwellings located between courts and gardens, the term «hotel (mansion)» gradually designated all abodes with higher quality than the middle-class house. The main building was originally completed with annexes and stables, on the court side. It features a coach passage, allowing the carriage and horses to enter the court.

This housing type is installed on a usually larger land area which results from the joining of two or three plots and offers greater freedom of composition.

Private mansions (also called private hotels) represent, according to the analysis of the Brussels building stock, carried out on the basis of the land registry table No. 212AM (situation at 01.01.2012), around 5% of the Brussels residential stock before 1945. A little more than two thirds of them have since been converted into multi-family dwellings.

It is clear that many private mansions have also been converted into office spaces. These have not been considered in the study since the land registry table No. 212AM (situation at 01.01.2012) used only gave information on plots dedicated to housing.

#### General description

This housing type appears with the first middle-class expansions of Brussels, from 1830, in the Léopold and Louise quarters, and some quarters of Schaerbeek, Saint-Gilles, Ixelles and Uccle. It is installed along wider avenues or boulevards like Avenue Louise or Avenue Franklin Roosevelt and also around certain squares or parks. Some private mansions were also located on corner plots.

#### Main characteristics

This housing type is based on the same principles as the middle-class house while it is designed with greater richness of form and vaster spaces.

Three characteristics however differentiate it from the middle-class house :

- a buried basement
- the door and coach entry, a deep, wide and covered passage leading to the interior court where the outhouses and stables were located;
- the glazed lantern, located above the monumental stairwell and which lights it naturally.

Compared with the middle-class house, it has a wider façade, containing the third span for the coach passage.

This housing type contributes, like the middle-class house, to the formation of residential ensembles characteristic of the era and to the urbanisation of the Brussels conurbation.

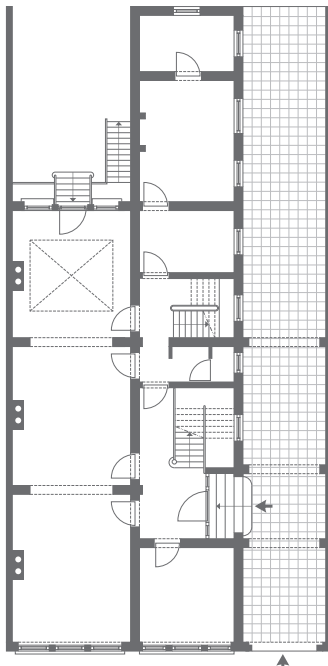


Figure 5: Plan of a private mansion (ground floor)



Figure 6: Decoration and ornaments in the living room - Listed building located at n° 344 Avenue Louise



Figure 7: Vehicle passage - Listed building located at n° 344 Avenue Louise



Figure 8: Porch giving access to the entrance hall - Listed building located at n° 344 Avenue Louise

#### Urban situation

The private mansion or hotel is found along wide arteries, in the peripheral quarters and expansions of Brussels. It is installed either fronting on the street (Léopold Quarter) or set back. In this case, a small pleasure garden separates it from the public space and the street. This is especially the case in some quarters of Ixelles, Saint-Gilles and Uccle.

#### Spatial organisation/programme

The Brussels private mansion well reflects the life style of the upper classes of the 19th century.

It encloses all the spaces required for its daily life. This is organised in three modes : reception, family spaces and services or domestic spaces.

The mansions had many domestic servants, most of the time relegated to the kitchens-cellars and attic rooms. However, small rooms allowed the staff to stay in the core of the dwelling, like the scullery or, more rarely, a sewing room, linen room, etc.

This housing type has two different scales, according to the width of the street façade which is between 8 and 12 metres wide or more than 12 metres wide. The cornice height is more than 15 metres, usually between 15 and 18 metres and the depth of the house is around 15 metres on the ground floor and between 10 and 15 metres at the upper floors.

Like the middle-class house, it is organised around two types of living rooms :

- the main rooms, living and reception rooms
- the secondary rooms dedicated to the services, to domestic servants and to circulations

The distinction between these two spaces is made according to a longitudinal division which separates the house into two distinct spans in the ratio 2/3 – 1/3. This composition is enhanced by a side vehicle passage crossing in a third span.

The stairwell and the circulations are amplified and richly decorated.

The feature of the private mansion is partly the coach entry leading to part of the interior court, stables and outbuildings, and partly a large hallway in the centre of the dwelling. This hallway houses a monumental staircase leading to the upper floors.

The ground or main floor is raised by 60 centimetres to one metre above the street level and is enriched with a veranda or a greenhouse which leads to the garden space.

The living and reception rooms have great ceiling height, significant width (4 to 5 metres) and are mainly lit by large glazed bays. These rooms are also richly decorated and ornamented.

From 1900-1910, the conventional ranking between the façade rooms and the back rooms starts to evolve in some hotels<sup>1</sup>: the «fine» rooms, like the salon or dining room, are

<sup>1</sup> This is linked to the influence of the Art Nouveau and Beaux Arts





Figure 9:  
Main staircase- Listed building located  
at n° 344 Avenue Louise

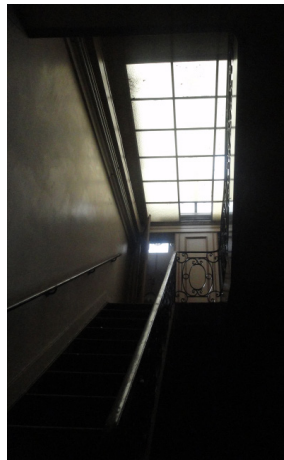


Figure 10:  
Skylight above the main staircase -  
Listed building located at n° 344 Ave-  
nue Louise

found at the back façade and no longer at the front façade as in the 19th century.

The equipment of these mansions often reveals uncommon luxury: rooms reserved uniquely for clothing (dressing room) or shoes, safe box room in the entresol, ground floor parlour so as not to introduce just any visitor into the main rooms.

#### Circulation and stairs

In the middle of the coach entry, a porch leads into a large hallway which houses the start of the main staircase, often monumental and richly decorated, leading to the upper floors. This stairway is double flight with an intermediate landing. It is usually topped with a large roof lantern which lights the entire stairwell.

There are many circulations. Apart from the main staircase, there are up to two service stairways, a dumbwaiter and sometimes even a lift.

One of these service stairs is usually arranged in the circulation and service span, near the scullery. This feature enables a clear separation of family flows from those of the domestic servants.

#### Construction system

The private mansion's construction system is similar to that of the middle-class house (type 2).

The party walls are brick of local origin. These partition walls are not loadbearing.

The upper floors bear perpendicularly to the street on façades and shear walls. Joists are spaced from 35 to 40 cm. The thickness of the bearing walls is also codified by the building regulations to ensure their stability. The 1857 regulations (article 58) stipulate that :

- the minimum thickness of shear walls and gables is 28 centimetres, plaster not included.
- the thickness of the façades along the public street is determined by their elevation. Façades less than 15 metres high have minimum thickness of 36 cm at the ground floor and 28 cm at the upper floors. Façades of 15 metres high and above have minimum thickness of 46 cm at the ground floor, 36 cm at the first floor and 28 cm at the upper floors.

#### Façades and materials

The two façades of the private mansion, to the street and garden/court are largely pierced with bays and mostly highly decorated. This decoration is the representation of the occupant's social status.

The « garden » façade in the 19th century is not considered as a real « façade ». Not intended to be seen, it is the subject of very little research and care.

The street façade is strongly worked and decorated since it clearly expresses the owner's social status.

There are many decorative elements like a glazed impost, often in a stone frame above the entrance door, one or several

styles



Figure 11:  
Neoclassical private mansion, rue Al-  
sace-Lorraine 33 to 37 in Ixelles  
© www.irismonument.be



Figure 12:  
Neoclassical private mansion, rue An-  
gletterre 53 in St Gilles  
© www.irismonument.be



**Figure 13:**  
Private mansion in eclectic style,  
Square Ambiorix 45 in Brussels  
© V. Heymans, 1993



**Figure 14:**  
Private mansion in eclectic style, Ave-  
nue Brugman 203 in Ixelles  
© www.irismonument.be



**Figure 15:**  
Private mansion in Italian Neo-Renaissance style, Chaussée de Charleroi 127  
in Ixelles  
© www.irismonument.be



**Figure 16:**  
Hôtel particulier de style néo-Renaissance flamande, Rue Dailly 78 à  
Schaerbeek  
© www.irismonument.be



**Figure 17:**  
Hôtel particulier de style néo-Renaissance flamande, Avenue de la Cou-  
ronne 40 à Ixelles  
© www.irismonument.be

balconies with balcony doors and balustrade guardrails in stone or iron or cast iron grill, a bow-window on one or more levels, bays of windows of different forms and natural stone reliefs (surround and column), oriel and dormer windows in the roof, etc.

The composition of the street façades as well as the materials used evolve according to the different styles: neoclassical, eclecticism, neo-renaissance, Art Nouveau, Beaux Arts, etc.

#### Façade in neoclassical style

One of the first styles used to compose the street façade of the private mansion is neoclassicism, a style situated between 1830 and 1890. The façade is brick, mostly rendered in light colour (white or light grey) and sometimes faced with plaques of Gobertange stone, on bluestone plinth, often treated with bosses

The symmetrically composed façade has simple geometry, composed with three or four equal spans. It is pierced with rectangular or low arch bays often with bluestone framing. This classical composition of the street façade in the first place fits in with the urban order. Individual design gives way to homogenisation of the whole.

#### Façade in eclectic style

The eclectic style starts in parallel with neoclassicism and prolongs until beyond 1900. The eclectic style is characterised by increased façade ornamentation, usually limited to framing, to fixings, entry devices and aprons. The structure of the façade itself remains close to neoclassicism. More ornamented, these mansions are often designed by architects and no longer by entrepreneurs or builders.

The street façade is symmetrically composed generally with three stories and three spans, but it is faced with ornaments, often loaded. The ground floor usually displays rendering with dummy joints or bosses, sometimes executed in bluestone. On the upper floors, the axial span is accentuated, surface treated and bearing balconies. The upper stories are ornamented with rich window surrounds, special guardrails, cornices and massive pediments.

From the 1880s, rendered façades give way to natural materials such as brick or local stone that are combined to achieve a polychrome result.

#### Façade in Italian neo-Renaissance style

The Italian neo-Renaissance style occupies an important place in the first phases of the expansion of Brussels, especially on Avenue Louise. This style is made fashionable with the construction of the Palais d'Assche designed by Alphonse Balat in 1858 in the Léopold Quarter. It is characterised by stable proportions, marked by a horizontal character, often completed with Attican balustrade, with rectangular bays topped with a pediment and having moulded framing, with balustrade guardrails on the balconies.





**Figure 18:**  
Private mansion in eclectic style,  
Square Ambiorix 45 in Brussels  
© V. Heymans, 1993



**Figure 19:**  
Private mansion in eclectic style, Ave-  
nue Brugman 203 in Ixelles  
© www.irismonument.be



**Figure 20:**  
Private mansion in Beaux-Arts style,  
Rue Américaine 219 in Ixelles  
© www.irismonument.be



**Figure 21:**  
Two private mansion in Beaux-Arts  
style, rue de l'Armée 74 and 76 in Et-  
terbeek  
© www.irismonument.be

#### Façade in Flemish neo-Renaissance style

Towards 1890, eclecticism evolves in its proportions, now more vertical, and in its polychromatic appearance under Flemish or French neo-Renaissance influences.

The street façade has mixtures of bricks, bluestone and white stone features, gable dormers, crosses, apparent relieving arches, diamond-shape decoration, etc.

#### Façade in Art Nouveau style

In 1893, Art Nouveau appeared in Brussels with the construction of the Hôtel Tassel (V. Horta). This new current is the response given to the insistent demand of the Brussels intellectual elite for artistic renewal, for a new formal and architectural language.

For Victor Horta, the façade is the immediate reflection of the complex organisation of the plan and the spatial division in the building. The composition of the façade results from the spatial arrangement of the interior and, unlike that of the traditional middle-class house, is no longer designed for itself. Art Nouveau style façades are characterised by architectural and decorative details borrowed from nature or from medieval architecture and by special attention paid to the furnishings. New materials are used like iron, cast iron or steel.

#### Façade in Beaux Arts style

Directly following historical styles, the Beaux Arts style appears around 1905, in reaction to Art Nouveau. Structures in this style often replace the oldest houses/buildings. If the Beaux Arts façade asserts itself, by taking former stylistic grammars, especially those of the grand French styles of the 18th century, the interiors it conceals retain the lessons of fluidity and luminosity of Art Nouveau. In this way the roofs are pierced with wide lanterns intended to bring light into rooms traditionally the darkest. Thus, the stairway loses its «enclosed» appearance to become the backbone of the house, both living room, circulation and distribution space. The street façade is usually covered with facing of white stone or rendered with white cast stone, on bluestone plinth. It is divided into three or four equal spans (at the upper floors). The window bays have varied shape arches, some marked with a decorative key. Bow-window or small balconies are present at the upper floors, all with wrought iron guardrails. The coach door mostly has wrought iron elements and oak furnishings.





Figure 27 : Private mansion, Avenue Louise, 344 in 1000 Brussels. Location in Brussels

#### Example No. 1 – Private mansion

Address : Avenue Louise 344, 1000 Brussels

Year of construction: 1873-1874

Architect : /

Style : Eclectic

Classified building: Envelope classified 30 March 1989

Renovation : Interior decoration and back façade remodelled in Beaux Arts style in 1909. The entablement frieze was opened. In the court, appendage for stable use and outhouses, neo-medieval style, 1905, probably on the plans of the architect A. Cordyns. Currently being renovated (Damien Mathelart)

#### Location

- between adjoining buildings
- in second crown perimeter
- mixed quarter with shops, offices, services, housing
- dense environment but close ???

#### Scale

- 3 stories + attics (cornice height around 15 metres)
- roof with two slopes
- fronting the street
- 3 spans + entrance span
- back garden with appendage for stable use and outhouses, neo-medieval style, 1905, probably on the plans of the architect, A. Cordyns.

#### Street façade

Symmetrical façade with white stone and bluestone, characterised by two groups of two spans projecting on both sides of the axial span. These projecting spans each have a continuous balcony closed by a stone balustrade which extends the whole width of the floor.

The ground floor is marked by bossed pilasters. The coach door is a semi-circular archway. The original furnishings as well as the shutters have been conserved.

The roof has two slopes covered with terracotta tiles, of local origin, wooden cornices.

The putlog holes (for erecting scaffolding) under cornice are blanked with wooden caps

#### Construction system

- bearing façades and shear walls in solid bricks
- non-bearing partition walls in solid bricks (of local origin)
- wooden floors (oak) which span from façade to façade, joists saced from 35 to 40 cm
- roof purlins resting on partitions
- brick arched ceiling on metal beams in cellars

#### Composition

**Basement** : basement over whole area of the house, accessible by passing under the second flight of the stairs and accessible from the interior court. Basement lit naturally on the two façades.

**Ground floor** : ground floor slightly raised (60 cm), accessible by the coach entry, hallway, monumental staircase with two flights in the service span, three rooms in succession in the rest of the width. All the reception rooms and the monumental staircase



Figures 29/30: Private mansion, 344 in 1000 Brussels. Front and rear façades





Figures 31/32 : Vehicule passage and main entrance - original woodwork

*are richly decorated: floors tiles or coated with marble, walls panelled or faced with stone, ceilings with mouldings, parquet, mirrors, etc.*

*First floor : living space comprised of three rooms in succession and an office above the hallway. All is richly decorated.*

*Second floor : living space comprised of three rooms in succession and an original bathroom above the hallway. All is richly decorated.*

*Attics : space dedicated to house staff. The rooms are smaller and less high. No decorative elements.*



Figures 33/34 : Main staircase



Figure 35 : Decoration of reception rooms