

Hardware store by Huib Hoste



After the first world war architect Huib Hoste was commissioned to build a new hardware store in Wervik. The architect was a relative to the commissioner of the store Marie Plancke. Her husband Arsène Vandesteene died during the war and was a cousin of Hoste. After the death of Marie Plancke, her daughter continued the store with her husband Leo Vancanneyt. The hardware store Vancanneyt was in use until the end of the 20th century. Afterwards it had been empty for several years. The store and its storage rooms were listed as a protected monument in 2001. A year later the buildings were sold to a new owner who would open the restaurant *'t Isermael* after the refurbishment of the buildings. In 2018 the building was for sale again after the restaurant closed. It's current whereabouts are unknown.

Hoste was very active in Wervik after the first world war. The government chose Hoste to rebuild the city after the world war. The city and its neighbouring municipalities Geluwe, Geluveld and Zonnebeke were heavily damaged in 1917 during the battle of Passchendaele. Wervik was also the city where his mother was born in 1844. In Wervik the architect would build multiple new buildings next to the hardware store in the years following the world war:

- Groenstraat 30-34 (1919)
- Groenstraat 36 (1920)
- Molenstraat 7-9 (1921)

- Molenstraat 100 – 102 (1921)
- Ooievaarstraat 45 (1920): former apothecary, now a restaurant.
- Steenakker 37 (1921) former hostel, now a store
- Zuidstraat 32-40 (1921)
- Monument for the war victims (1922): next to the church of Geluwe

The Architect: Huib Hoste

Architect Huib Hoste was born in Bruges in 1881 in a catholic household. He studied architecture at University of Ghent with Louis Cloquet as teacher. Cloquet was celebrated for his Gothic Revival architecture. Hoste worked several years for Cloquet before he started his own architectural firm around 1910. His first buildings were influenced by his teacher and were also built in Gothic Revival style.

Hoste fled to The Netherlands during the First World War where he got influenced by modern Dutch architecture by architects such as Hendrik Petrus Berlage. While in the Netherlands he developed progressive and modernist visions on architecture and encountered members of De Stijl movement. He also met Louis Vander Swaelmen with whom he would collaborate often after the second world war. Back in Belgium he would be appointed to help the rebuilding of several areas in Western Flanders such as Wervik and Zonnebeke among others.

Hoste is considered as one of the pioneers of Modernist architecture in Belgium. He spread his ideas on modern architecture through several important architecture magazines. Besides that he also organized lectures. Later in his career he would be appointed as a teacher at La Cambre in Brussels and would develop a close correspondence with French architect Le Corbusier. His designs weren't always appreciated at the time by the primarily catholic population in Belgium which were more fond of neo styles architecture.

The Construction

The construction of the hardware store Vancanneyt was revolutionary in Belgium as it was the first time that reinforced concrete was used in the structure of a store. It is also one of the first buildings built in the new modernist architectural style in Belgium. The construction is very sober and symmetrical. The decorations in its exterior are limited to some cubist influenced elements which have disappeared now. The windows of the buildings have been changed during the years. The store had a storage in the back and a garage next to the building. It also incorporated a residence for the owners of the store.

The program of the buildings plan was very classical and followed the example of other stores at the time. The store was situated in front of the building in an open central space with a zenial light indecency. In the back were storage rooms. The approach was influenced by large scale department stores in Paris (Au Bon Marché) and Berlin (Wertheim) from the beginning of the 20th century. The architect applied the composition of these department stores on a smaller scale in the hardware store and changed it stylistically. An monumental staircase in the centre of the open space allows the visitor to climb to the second floor of the building.

The composition of the large glass window was influenced by De Stijl. Originally the interior was painted with several colours such as red and green next to white and black. This was also influenced by the progressive art movement. This has been changed over time according to the owner of the building.

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