

BRUNO ERPICUM





He looks up to renowned architects such as Peter Zumthor, Alberto Kalach and Rick Joy, but the Belgian Bruno Erpicum certainly measures up to these international greats. With a career spanning more than thirty years, he has already completed numerous phenomenal projects in his home country and abroad. In the very first edition of *Imagicasa Magazine* – now four years ago – we already wrote about Erpicum in the context of his second monograph that was published. In the meantime, the architect has not been idle and has even turned his ‘modern architecture’ into a real lifestyle. And so, it’s high time to devote some more pages to his exceptional talent!

Bruno Erpicum talks with great pride about the many projects he has completed in France, Spain, Italy and even Peru and Israel. He explains his international success as a result of his work experience abroad – after his studies, Erpicum worked in South Africa and the United States – as well as of the various media that allow him to share his projects. Because in addition to books, magazines and word-of-mouth advertising, social media nowadays also generate more brand awareness or ensure that a wider audience won’t forget you.

Such a long career as Bruno Erpicum’s, of course, is not something you can easily look past. One of his buildings even got a supporting role in Erik Van Looy’s action thriller *De Premier* (2016). And despite the international attention, the architect still prefers doing projects in Belgium and this will always be his country of choice to work in. According to him, our country is so diverse and that’s what makes it so interesting. “It’s fantastic to be able to work in these different environments. It’s even more amazing to be able to work in different cultural environments,” says Erpicum.

He tells us that Belgium is historically situated on the border between the Latin and Germanic culture and therefore is in a very lucky position. “The light here is beautiful, the climate has four seasons, it is relatively easy to live here comfortably without having to be very wealthy,” he continues. And all of this can be seen in the context of Bruno Erpicum’s special vision of life and design. He describes his creations as a ‘development of emotions’ and at the same time is inspired by the 20th-century Modernist movement in which unnecessary decorative elements give way to the essential. *Imagicasa* selected some unique projects to illustrate this and talked to Erpicum about his career, portfolio and future.

AABE

Bruno Erpicum graduated from ISASLB (Institut Supérieur d’Architecture Saint Luc Bruxelles) in 1983. Fascinated by the pure

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“CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT FAVOURABLE FOR HUMAN ACTIVITY”

Modernism that reached its peak in the 1920s and 1940s, the young architect went abroad. His preference for a more simple architecture did not correspond to the popular practice in Belgium at the time, so he looked elsewhere for the right inspiration and motivation. It should come as no surprise that Erpicum admits to being rather rebellious and individualistic in character.

Nevertheless, when he returned to his homeland in 1988, he founded Bureau d’Etudes GMT together with François de Montlivault and Marc Timmermans. Despite the many assignments, managing a business with three partners and often three different visions is not always easy. After ten years, the firm split up and De Montlivault took over the engineering activities (GMT Project) while Erpicum devoted his full attention to the architectural side (GMT Concept).



From 2001, he continued his activities under the name Atelier d'Architecture Bruno Erpicum (AABE), which would never have more than fifteen employees. For him, it was a deliberate choice in terms of quality and to be able to evolve – as he himself indicates – with a clear vocabulary in terms of architecture. “This way of working is a dream,” Erpicum tells us. And with AABE, he has been able to make the dreams of many others come true as well. Both Belgian and foreign clients regularly come to Erpicum for the renovation of their home or to design a newly built residence. For both types of clients this could be in Belgium, but also in France, Spain or Germany.

“THE UNIQUENESS OF EACH DIFFERENT LOCATION TRIGGERS THE CREATIVE MIND OF THE ARCHITECT AND CHALLENGES HIM”

What you can expect from a Bruno Erpicum project: a modern design where the right proportions and well-thought-out details take precedence over purely decorative elements. A pure form of architecture, but one where the result feels anything but cold or impersonal. Our environments, the buildings we look at, the spaces we stay in, etc. undoubtedly evoke certain emotions and, according to Erpicum, have the inevitable ability to contribute to a greater sense of well-being.

EMOTIONAL ARCHITECTURE
The design philosophy of Bruno Erpicum's design office is quite clear: “Creating an environment favourable for human activity.”

And whether they are working on a residential or a commercial project, for them, life is about more than the “proteins that allow us to function”. Architecture also has a not to be underestimated impact on our lives and the quality of it. That's why Erpicum and his team keep creating spaces that make you feel good, at ease, at home.

Harmony is a key word and the integration of the environment is a first important aspect where this is reflected. That's why in every project AABE's architects not only rely on the inspiration they get from the client's personality, but also by nature. They often don't even have a choice, Erpicum explains

to us, because the unique environment is the main starting point for a design, and this is not like a white canvas or blank sheet of paper on which a painter or poet releases his creativity. “It is precisely the uniqueness of each different location that triggers the creative mind of the architect and challenges him to reconcile the pragmatic requirements of the client with the beauty, uniqueness of the surrounding environment,” says Erpicum. And it would be a shame to keep out the beautiful surroundings. A recurring element in his portfolio – whether it's a holiday villa in sunny Spain or a residence in a wooded residential area in Belgium – is the abundant use of glass. Ceiling-high windows provide beautiful views, terraces and verandas bring the green even closer and the clever play of light brings the architecture to life.

overall balance in a design. The projects that Bruno Erpicum has worked on often look like a play with form and an accumulation of volumes. However, each space and how it is connected to the next one has been very well thought out. As a result, these realisations radiate positive feelings of peace, comfort and happiness. And that is precisely what Erpicum means by emotive architecture: it strengthens and promotes our position in and view of life.

MODERNISM IS A LIFESTYLE

Bruno Erpicum extends his design vision to other aspects of life and is now also venturing into product design. After all: “There are no limits in architectural design and who but the architect can perfectly assess the needs of a project”. Of course, this again has to do with Erpicum's desire to create spaces in which all the elements down to the smallest detail are in order to create the ultimate sense of harmony. So he regularly designs doors,





to him, there is still so much to discover in the world and although he admits to perhaps having less energy than before to deal with the everyday concerns of running a business, he will always try to keep searching for the pure, the essential in a design.

LABORATORY

The search that Bruno Erpicum talks about is already reflected in the evolution of his architectural office towards a kind of laboratory. "A collaborative space where we work on exploring different solutions, before taking the final ones to the building sites in a dozen or so countries throughout the world. Each time, we compare in particular the benefits of different woods, stones as well as smooth and granular concrete."

With his rich career and after many years in this sector, Erpicum also came to the conclusion that, after five or ten years, many modern constructions begin to lose their 'brilliance'. He made alterations to his approach and now increasingly chooses materials that withstand the ravages of time even better. This even gives the buildings a beautiful patina and, instead of being outdated, they simply look authentic. The architect sees it as an ode to the passing of time.

Admittedly, whether it concerns a design from the 90s or a recently finished villa: we are fans and look with great pleasure at the result! After a long career, this architect is still able to remain true to his original design vision, while at the same time responding to today's challenges. We are curious about what we can expect from Atelier d'Architecture Bruno Erpicum in the future. 🌟



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