

Hôtel Frison by Victor Horta – A Living Museum

DORKA DEMETER · OCTOBER 21, 2020 · 4 MINUTE READ

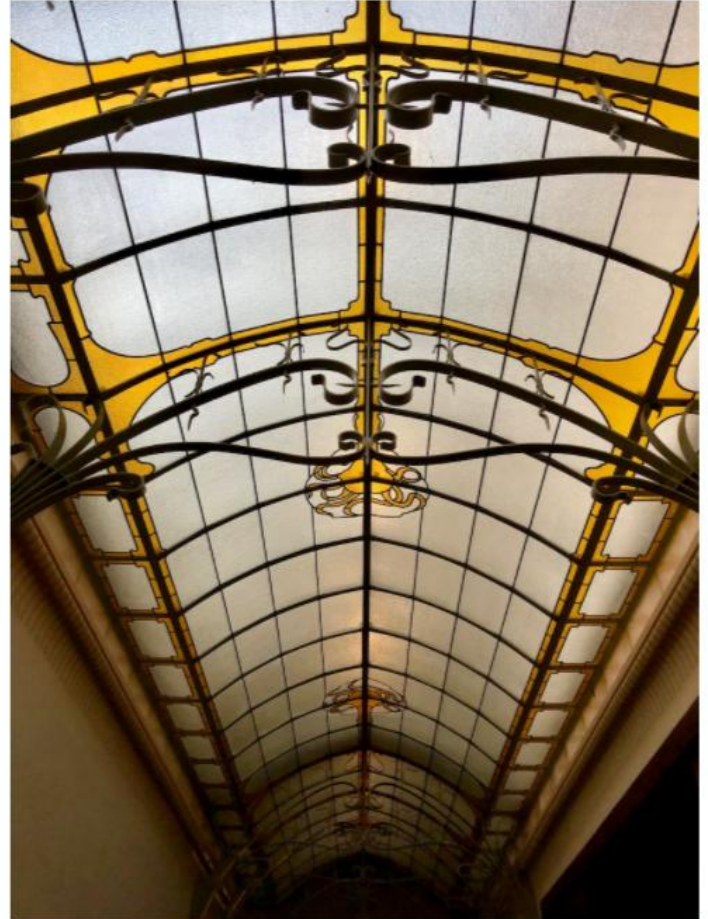
If one thinks of Victor Horta, several magnificent houses would come into our minds. Hôtel Frison, though, the great architect's only townhouse in the city centre of Brussels, would most probably not be one of them. This changes for good if one meets its owner, Nupur Tron, and walks into this living museum with her guidance.



Imagine this: you are walking the streets of Brussels and by chance you see a sign on a house that it is for sale. The facade is not too dominant, but its lines and form stand out from the neighbouring neo-Renaissance and neo-Classical buildings. You just feel an urge to see it from the inside and call the owner right away. An old lady arrives, opens the front door, you enter and suddenly have that deep feeling of arriving home, of completing that circle of your life: this is it, this is the place. It turns out that the house has been for sale for years. After a three hour long conversation the lady tells you that you are the one, she wants you to buy and preserve it, to take this precious place over and take good care of it.



parents' and grandparents' home in India. With colonisation the Belgian and English brought there the European culture, but the artists of the time also were inspired by Indian culture. The forms, the symbols, the colours have such similarities that connect the East and West, the Indian culture with the European culture – a connection that Nupur Tron wants to showcase.



After designing Maison Autrique and Hôtel Tassel, the career of the merely 23-year-old architect takes off. Maurice Frison, famous lawyer of the court of Belgium asks Horta in 1894 to design a building for him that would serve as his office and home as well. The concept of such a “double function” was rather modern at the time. The building is an intricate scheme of levels adding up to a total of 8 floors from the ground floor hosting the servants' quarters up to the attic where the curved roof has a large window, thus is also inhabitable. A rather dominant element of the structure is the main staircase taking almost half of the width of the building. In his *Mémoires* Horta writes about the house: “the design, including the expense incurred, was to everyone's satisfaction, including that of the client's fiancée”.

When Nupur Tron bought the house in 2017 it was in a deplorable state. Six months of thorough cleaning followed, as well as the restoration of the incredible winter garden to its original glory. The energy invested is finally bringing back the respect and dignity that this house merits.



In the caves original fine furniture by Victor Horta, Henry van de Velde, Gustave Serrurier-Bovy, Gustave Strauven were piled up. It was the very last minute to save and restore them, and to place them back in the different rooms of the house where the visitor can admire these art nouveau gems. Besides the furniture, the walls also hold secret treasures. Under 12 layers of plain paint, Victor Horta's original frescoes lay. As it turns out, Nupur Tron spent most of her time during the COVID lockdown stripping the walls and uncovering the frescoes depicting tendrils and natural curves – so typical to the work of Victor Horta. During the last three years she also renewed the garden. With the guidance of Francios Aubry, former curator of the Horta Museum and great expert of art nouveau, plants typical to art nouveau period were planted.

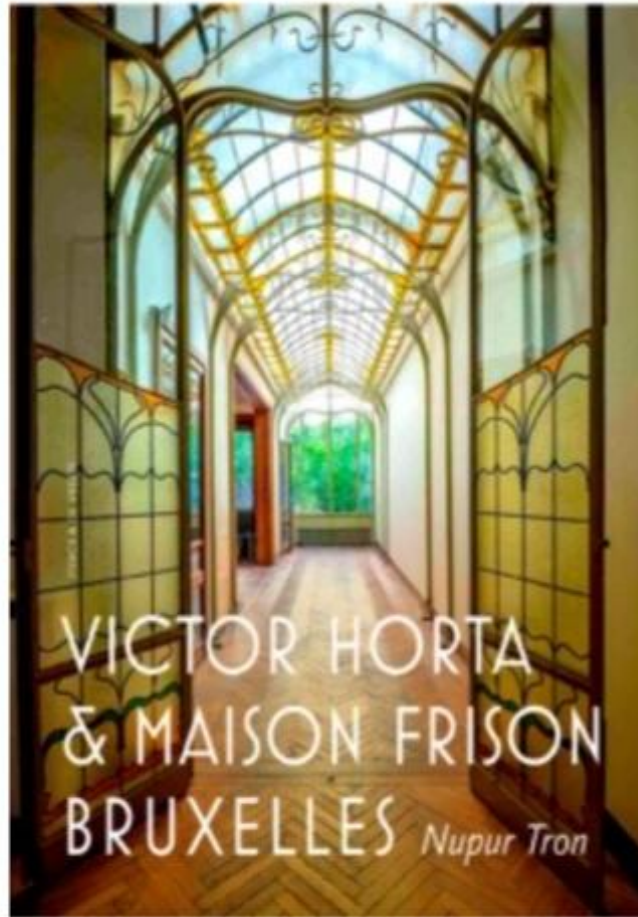


The Foundation Frison was created in January 2018 by the new owner with the aim of serving as a multidisciplinary centre, a living museum as she says. Performing art events take place in the house, exhibitions are put on display in cooperation with other institutions – a real “arts and crafts” centre. Nupur feels that her mission is “to bring to life this sleeping beauty and show it to the world; to connect the heritages of India and Europe, to build a cultural bridge between the East and the West”. This is the reason she offers guided tours into her own home. Imagine a kitchen where people eat on an original Horta table!

A visit to Hôtel Frison guided by Nupur Tron is a lifetime experience in the capital of art nouveau for first-time visitors and experienced art nouveau-lovers alike. It is a real escape to Wonderland even on dark, rainy days. Book your tour here:

<https://www.foundation-frison-horta.be/guided-visit/>

Should you not be able to come in person or want to dig deeper in the history of this amazing house, the book entitled ‘Victor Horta and the Frison House in Brussels’ by Nupur Tron is available to buy on-site or online.



*The photos of the winter garden included in this article were taken by the author who is a great fan of art nouveau. Check out her [Instagram](#) for more archi adventures. The other pictures were kindly provided by the owner of the house, **Nupur Tron**.*