


Zurenborg

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A WALK PAST VILLAS  
AND MANSIONS





Procession on Cogels-Osylei.

## Welcome to Zurenborg!

Two hundred years ago, Zurenborg was still a rural area, with only one large farm surrounded by agricultural land. That changed when Antwerp began to burst at its seams in the mid-19th century. The prosperous middle classes wanted to escape from the city centre to a fashionable street with fine houses, while remaining close to the centre.

The story of Zurenborg as we see it today started right here. In the late 19th century, a property development company began dividing up the land into the first plots. The richer the people who moved to Zurenborg, the more lavish and extravagant the houses the architects designed for them: a fascinating blend of neo-Gothic, neo-Classical and especially Art Nouveau.

This walk will take you down Zurenborg's finest streets, foremost among them being Cogels-Osylei. But beyond the architecture itself, you will discover the stories behind the façades, the history of the district and the trendy area that is Zurenborg today.



# THE HISTORY OF ZURENBORG IN TEN DATES



## Before the 16th century acidic soil

Until the 16th century, no one was interested in the area now called Zurenborg. Due to the regular flooding of two rivers, the Herentalse Vaart and the Potvliet, the soil was acidic and the land was therefore of little economic value.

In his account of the revolution of 1830 which led to the creation of Belgium, Hendrik Conscience describes the fighting between Belgians and Dutch near the farm at Zurenborg:

*“It was at Zurenborg, between Borgerhout and Berchem: a great farm stood ablaze there. The Belgians’ artillery shells had caused the fire. The stable had already been razed to the ground; a dozen half-charred cows’ corpses were lying among the smouldering ruins of the straw roof. We found some Dutch soldiers cutting chunks of flesh from the bodies of the burnt cattle in order to eat. My brother and I tried it too: it was bitter as gall and had an unspeakable taste of choking straw smoke.”*

(H. Conscience, *De omwenteling van 1830. Herinneringen uit myne eerste jeugd*, 1858. Free translation.)

1500

1800

## 16th century Zurenborg Farm



Zurenborg Farm in 1880.

An Antwerp businessman built a large farmhouse in this marshy area. To drain away the excess water, he had a wide canal excavated, raised the level of part of the land and planted 180 tall poplars. The acidic soil became farmland. The name ‘Zurenborg’ (‘zuur’ means ‘acidic’) also dates from this period. The farmhouse stood until 1894 on what is now the roundabout on Cogels-Osylei.





### Mid-19th century a city bursting at the seams

By the mid-19th century, Antwerp was back on track towards becoming a major port. The population was also growing rapidly: around 1800, Antwerp had 50,000 inhabitants; by the eve of the First World War there were more than 300,000. The city centre within the old Spanish Walls was beginning to burst at the seams. After lengthy lobbying of the government in Brussels, Antwerp gained permission to demolish the old ramparts and build a boulevard: today's Amerika-, Britse-, Frankrijk- and Italiëlei.

### From 1881 the middle classes move to Zurenborg

The middle classes wanted to get away from the stifling city centre with its social unrest. They wanted to live on a smart street behind a beautiful façade with an imposing front door. But they also wanted to live within the new fortifications, where they felt safe, and close to Antwerp's economic heart: the port and the Scheldt. A property development company was formed, which began to parcel out the land between the old and new ramparts.

1850

### 1859 new ramparts



The Borsbeek Gate.

In 1859, the Belgian government decided to build a completely new defensive ring around the city. The Brialmont Fortifications are 15 kilometres long and consist primarily of earth ramparts on a brick base, fronted by a ditch. The fortifications also had eight forts, nineteen gates, a storage area for weapons and barracks. The last traces disappeared in the 1960s when the ring road was built. Where Berchem Station square is now, there used to be a passage through the fortifications.



1886  
establishment of the 'Société'

Following a merger, the company was named 'Société Anonyme pour la construction de maisons Bourgeoises' (Public Limited Company for the Construction of Townhouses). It mainly built houses to let, mostly for Catholics.



Publicity photograph of the property development company, after 1910.

1900



7 and 8 October 1914:  
**bombardment of  
Antwerp during First  
World War**

For 36 hours, three to four German shells fell on the city every minute. Fires raged and more than a hundred thousand people fled. Zurenborg bore its share of the assault. A few days later, Antwerp had fallen.

Generaal Van Merlenstraat  
after the bombardment.

1950

### 1960s demolition plans

In the late 1960s, a plan emerged to demolish Cogels-Osylei and the surrounding streets and create a new luxury residential complex. The developers were ready and poised for the demolition of the houses. However, the area was saved following the international outcry from a number of architects.

### 1980 protection

Under the Royal Decree of 10 January 1980, the area around Cogels-Osylei became a protected townscape. On 11 April 1984, a further 170 homes received protection as listed monuments.


2000

### 1960s a haven for hippies

In the 1960s, Zurenborg was taken over by hippies and flower power. It was Antwerp's alternative district.



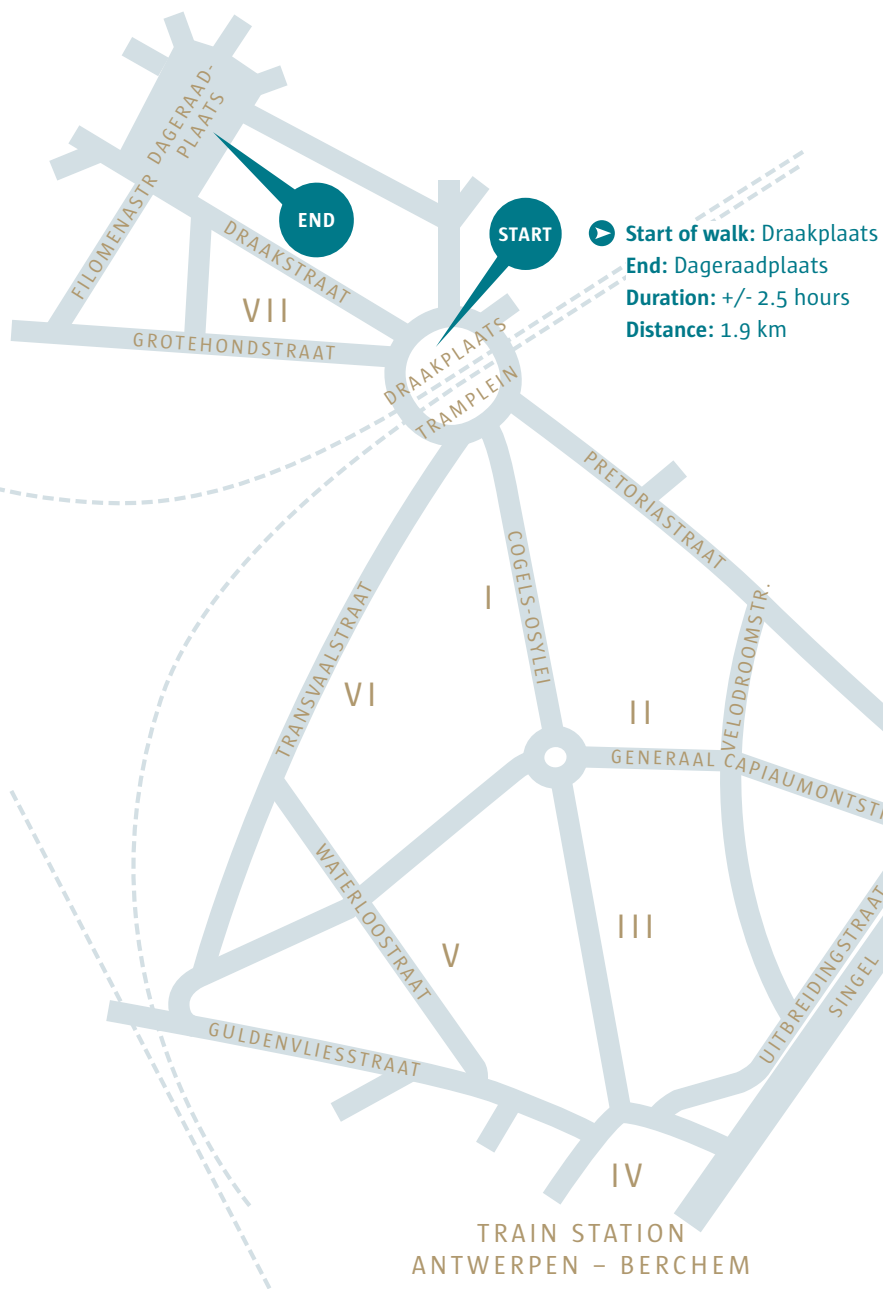
Local residents established a Sunday art market on Dageraadplaats in the 1970s to inject new life into the area. A drawing by Stan Bervoets.



Procession through Zurenburg.  
The Borsbeek Gate is in the background.



## WALK







# I.

## FROM DRAAKPLAATS TO THE COGELS-OSYLEI ROUNDAABOUT

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- The walk starts on Draakplaats.

### A square with two names

You will be immediately struck by the railway bridge that divides the square into two. On one side, you are in Draakplaats in the district of Antwerp, while on the other you are in Tramplein in the Berchem district. The railway is not the only feature dominating the square: the De Lijn bus depot is also striking. This has been a public transport hub since the 19th century.

The name of café-restaurant **Wattman** on the corner refers to this historical association with trams. A 'Wattman' is the old Dutch name for a tram driver. You may know the *Suske en Wiske* / *Bob & Bobette* comic album of the same name, in which the heroes discover a mysterious tram.

The Wattman together with numbers 2 and 4 on Cogels-Osylei form a group of houses known as 'Pieter De Coninck and Jan Breydel'.

The house names refer to the novel 'The Lion of Flanders' by Hendrik Conscience. Breydel and De Coninck were the protagonists in the Battle of the Golden Spurs, the popular uprising against French rule in 1302. Their surnames are represented on two coats of arms: **four royal crowns** for De Coninck (meaning 'king' in Dutch) and **four bridles** for Breydel.



The Sainte Marie bakery.







Can you see the white stone statue of Mary in the bay window above Café Wattman? It is by Josuë Dupon, whose studio we will come across shortly on Guldenvliesstraat (see p.35). It is a silent witness to the Sainte Marie bakery, which stood here for many years.

On the other side, at Cogels-Osylei 1, yet another hero stands in triumph: an armoured **Brabo**. More statues of Brabo can be seen in the city, the best known being the Brabo Fountain in the Grote Markt. The legend of Brabo is closely linked with Antwerp. The story goes that the city was once terrorised by a giant, Druoon Antigoon, who forced all sailors to pay a toll before they could cross the Scheldt. Those who refused to pay had their hand cut off. Finally, the Roman hero Silvius took Brabo on. He cut off the giant's hand and threw it into the river. Legend has it that his action, 'handwerpen' in Dutch, gave the city its name.

The door under the bay window has disappeared.

Next door, on the corner where the **Burgerij** is now located, one of Antwerp's finest cafés once stood: Café Cogels. It had a beautiful covered terrace which was populated with folding chairs in the summer. It was demolished in the 1960s to make way for a petrol station.



Brabo.







Local station and gasometer.

Café Cogels once stood at the corner of Pretoriastraat.

## Dominated by public transport

Borgerhout Station — now Antwerp East — was opened in 1879. The owners of the land, Eduard Osy and John Cogels, saw a chance to turn their holdings in Zurenborg to profit. In 1880 they sold two hectares to the London-based Imperial Continental Gas Association for the construction of a **gas plant**. For decades, the imposing round gasometers dominated the streetscape.

As well as the freight station, **the local station** on Tramplein was opened in 1885 a short distance away. This was especially important for transport to and from the Kempen region. From the Kempen came coal, pinewood and building materials. Dockers from the Kempen also boarded the tram to go to work in the port. They worked 14-hour days, only returning home at the end of the week. They slept in wooden troughs. The tram also brought fresh milk to the city. In the evening it drove back with the ‘city muck’.



A connection with the city centre was also introduced in the late 19th century: **the Omnibus**. This was a horse-drawn carriage with capacity for some twenty passengers. It was quite a rough ride, so it was a big step forward when the Omnibus Tram came, better known as the horse tram: a tram on tracks, pulled by a horse.

Zurenborg has remained a public transport hub to the present day: the building on the corner of Grotehondstraat is still the regional office of the Flemish transport company De Lijn. Across the street is its bus depot, and Antwerp Berchem Station stands at the end of Cogels-Osylei.



Horse-drawn trams on Draakplaats.

- Carry on down Cogels-Osylei as far as number 6.

**6-12: Carolus Magnus** (Charlemagne) is the name given to a group of four houses behind one façade. The building is made of rough natural stone, with **an octagonal turret reminiscent of Aachen Cathedral**. Carolus Magnus is a great example of façade architecture. The rough stone of the façade continues a little way on the side walls, but then gives way to simple red brick.

#### Interesting fact

Cogels-Osylei still has its original cobblestones from 1894.

**Number 20** was once the home of a circus artist. He was a retired lion tamer, and he kept a few lions in cages in his garden. His beloved pets were allowed to stretch their legs in the garden on a regular basis.



There are a few houses that particularly catch your attention on the street, not because they are larger or more extravagant, but because at first sight they do not appear to fit in. Numbers **31 a and b** are examples of this. 31a is a modern house built in 1992 by the famous architect Christine Conix. Until the 1930s, the finest, largest, most impressive house on Cogels-Osylei stood here: **Villa Mercurius**, a detached property with impressive Ionic columns and pilasters. Right at the top stood the statue of Mercury, the Roman god of trade and profit, and there was a huge garden. Joseph Bascourt designed the house for Karl Fischer, a German tropical timber wholesaler. The house was badly damaged during the First World War. Afterwards it fell into a state of disrepair, and was demolished in 1933. Only the **obelisk** now recalls the glory days of Villa Mercurius.

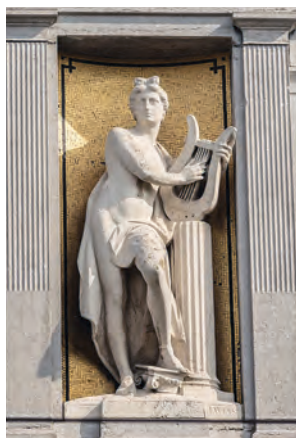
**Apollo** can be seen playing his lyre at numbers **19-23**. His name appears in Greek on the façade.

**The Star, Sun and Moon (25-27-29)** is a neo-Renaissance building with three homes under one roof. It is a tribute to 16th-century brick-and-sandstone architecture in Brabant.

As you may already have noticed, the property development company liked to build houses in groups: several adjacent homes were designed, contracted and built simultaneously.



Strange stories are told about **Villa Mercurius**: some say that the stones were numbered piece by piece and that the house was rebuilt somewhere in the United States. Another story has it that a Russian who lived there quarrelled with his wife. Under the terms of the divorce, he got the house and she got the land. A man is also said to have once walked into the pharmacy in Zurenborg saying, "If I do not get enough war reparations, I will demolish it."



Apollon.



- Continue as far as the roundabout, and admire the white mansions to be found here.

Architect E. Dieltiens took his inspiration for these four groups of houses from Château de Chambord in France. One of the 12 rental properties with their white plastered walls was occupied mainly by senior military officers. **Zurenborg Farm** stood here until 1894.



Château de Chambord.



### By the way: front gardens

You will have noticed that the houses on Cogels-Osylei all have front gardens. This was the first street in Antwerp to have this feature. The developers or 'Société' got the idea from England. Trees were not allowed in the front gardens, to ensure that the façades remained visible. A gardener from the Société made sure that everything stayed looking picture-perfect. The Société provided everything: a night-watchman, shops, smart cafés...





## Keeping up appearances

Whatever was visible from the street had to look beautiful, but inside and to the rear the houses were often very plain. It was no different with these white mansions. The material is not real stone, but Boom brick coated with white plaster. Benno Barnard described Cogels-Osylei as one big illusion. Once you shut the front door behind you, behind the ridiculous façade, you find yourself standing in a conventional bourgeois interior. Most of the houses had the same layout, mosaic floors, fireplaces, doors and banisters. They were industrially manufactured ornamental products — almost like the Ikea of **the day**.









## II.

# GENERAAL CAPIAUMONTSTRAAT

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- Turn left down Generaal Capiaumontstraat and carry on to numbers 2-4.

### A Greek temple

Build a Greek temple? Why not? Presumably this was architect Joseph Bascourt's train of thought. And so he designed Euterpia, a double residence in neo-Classical style, with all the trimmings: a triangular pediment above the garden gate, an Ionic column surmounted by an image of **Euterpe** (the muse of music), and a turret that is itself a miniature temple. At the corners of the tower there are even four braziers in which fires can be lit in honour of the Greek gods. Take a look at the door handles, too: they are shaped like Olympic torches.



Euterpe, the muse of music.

- Walk on as far as the junction with Velodroomstraat.

The entrance and ticket offices to the velodrome stood here until 1909. From 1895, thousands of people would come here on a Sunday afternoon to enjoy cycling spectacles on the wooden elliptical cycling track. In 1895, for example, "the famous Amazon Miss Annie Wilson, riding a horse like a man

and clad in Mexican costume" took on a racing cyclist. Antwerp football club also made use of the velodrome: for several years, the footballers played their home matches in the area in the centre of the track. In 1910, the track disappeared to make way for new construction.





After the velodrome's demolition, the property development company planned to build four groups of houses: the Four Elements (Earth, Air, Fire and Water). The idea was that they would form a counterpart to the Four Seasons at the crossroads of Generaal Van Merlenstraat and Waterloostraat (see p. 37). The project was never completed: only Earth and Water were built, and Water's middle section was demolished in 1965 to make way for a new building. Only Earth (right) has remained intact.



In action on the cycling track.



The entrance to the velodrome.







The Water group of houses, shortly before its demolition (1965).

► We return to Cogels-Osylei.

As you retrace your steps, stop for a moment at number 12. This simple house from 1934 by the Jewish-Polish architect **N. Kaplansky** is a fine example of the New Objectivity style.

Look out for the **bear** in the beautiful house at number 1.









### III.

## COGELS-OSYLEI BETWEEN THE ROUNABOUT AND STATION

- At the roundabout, walk back up Cogels-Osylei as far as number 42.

### Flower houses

Numbers 42 to 52 are a series of art nouveau houses named after flowers: The Waterlilies (42) – The Iris (44) – The Rose (46) – nameless (48) – The Sunflower (50) and The Tulip (52). Typical art nouveau features include the ‘whiplash line’ in the ironwork, a horseshoe-shaped window, colourful mosaics and ornate woodwork and glazing. **The Water Lilies** (42) is the premises of ‘T.O.P.office’ – the firm of architect and urban planner **Luc Deleu**. One of his container sculptures stands in the open air Middelheim museum in Antwerp.

The yellow house, **the Iris** (44), has a very asymmetrical facade. The architect took inspiration from nature, because “In nature nothing is symmetrical: everything is asymmetrical”. Here too, the architect’s purpose is to bring art onto the street. Just look at the porch, the little bay window (never used, but there nonetheless), the interrupted gabled roof and the beautiful wrought-iron iris right at the top.

**The Tulip** (52) was the residential studio of landscape painter **Eugène Joors**. He used to work behind the large window on the second floor.

At number 54, **the Cloverleaf**, the wooden gallery with stained-glass windows running across the façade is a striking feature.



The Tulip.





It is time for a fresh helping of national heroes at houses 51–45, where a figure of **Baldwin Iron-Arm** stands. He was the first count of Flanders. Number 45 was the residence of the painter Hippolyte Daeye (1873–1952). He had a large studio built in the back garden. He would invite mothers with their babies and paint them. Artists such as Tytgat and Permeke visited him there.



© Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens Deurle, photo: Guy Braeckman

Hippolyte Daeye,  
Child with green sleeves.



The little door underneath to the right was a service entrance for the staff.

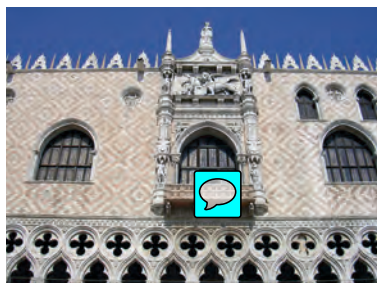
### Madame est servie

At number 59, you can see a little door on the right next to the steps. This was the service entrance for the staff. The maids' kitchen was in the basement, and they slept in a small attic room at the top of the house. It was unheated and there was no water. The girls worked 14 hours a day, with Sunday afternoon as their only time off. For anyone interested to know more about the life of a serving maid, in Diane De Keyzer's book 'Madame est servie' more than 90 witnesses talk about their years in the service of a wealthy family.





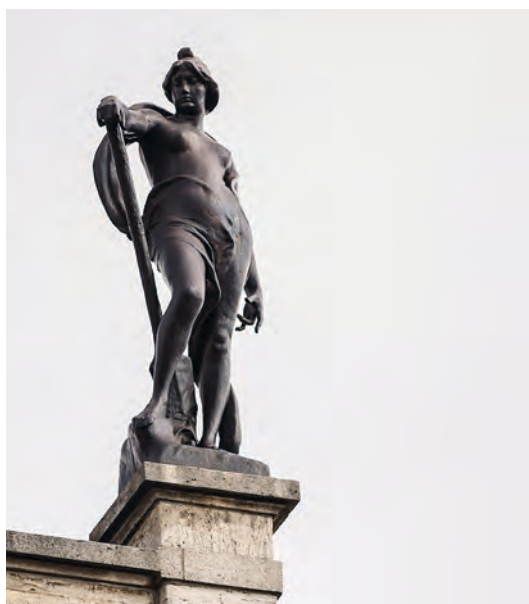
The Scaldis group (71–65) is a tribute to the River Scheldt, which has brought Antwerp so much wealth. Above the cornice stand Poseidon and Amphitrite, god and goddess of the sea. The four houses under one roof are clearly inspired by the Doge's Palace in Venice.



The Doge's Palace in Venice.

At number 61, look up for a moment at the wrought iron globe with **zodiac**.

**68: St Joseph's House:** In 1902, architect Van Not built a neo-Gothic family home for an ultra-Catholic contractor. Behind the statue of St Joseph was a private chapel. A priest read mass there every morning.



Amphitrite.

## The blacksmith who became a painter out of love

Quinten Matsys House (80) is a wonderful example of Art Nouveau. Architect Jacques De Weerdts drew inspiration from the Maison Saint Cyr in Brussels.

The story goes that the blacksmith Quinten Matsys (1466 – 1530) had fallen in love with the daughter of a painter. But the girl's father considered the blacksmith's trade too lowly for him to win the hand of his daughter. While the father was on a business trip, Quinten crept into his studio. On a painting that had been left to dry there, he painted a fly on a devil's backside. When the father returned from his trip and saw the fly, he tried to brush it off. Only then did he realise that the fly was not real, but had been painted on. He exclaimed: "Whoever has painted this is a true professional and has permission to marry my daughter!"

Above the top terrace is the image of Quinten Matsys. Can you also spot the fly in the ironwork on one of the balconies?



Quinten Matsys House.

## The name Cogels-Osylei

The grandest street in Zurenborg is named after Baron Eduard Osy and Senator John Cogels. They founded the East of Antwerp Public Limited Construction Company, which was later transformed into the Public Limited Company for the Construction of Townhouses. The Osy family had owned Zurenborg Farm and the surrounding land since 1837.













## IV.

### STATION SQUARE

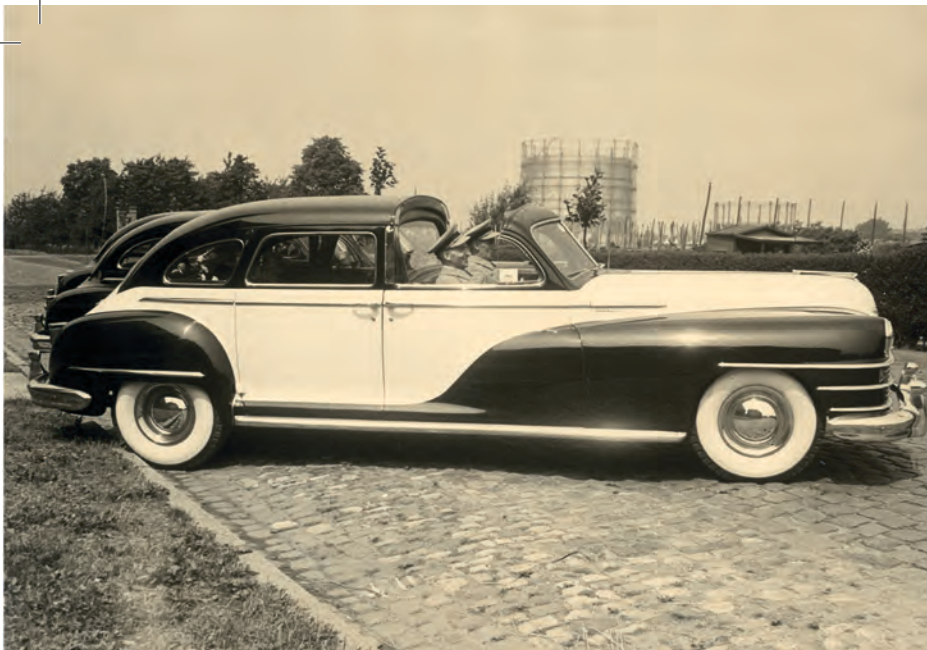
- Carry on down the street as far as the station forecourt, officially known as Burgemeester E. Ryckaertsplein.

We have now come to the station square. The restaurant on the corner of Guldenvliesstraat was one of Frans Van Hombeeck's cafés. Van Hombeeck was mayor of Berchem and a brewer. The murals in the restaurant have been restored: for example, you can see Bacchus sitting on a barrel.

Where the bus and tram station is now, the impressive **Borsbeek Gate** once stood: a gate through the Brialmont Fortifications (see p.7). Army barracks used to occupy what is today the station esplanade. The lower-ranking soldiers lived in the remarkable row of white houses on the right, while the senior officers lived in the stately mansions nearby.







**Chrysler Imperial**, 1948 model, of the firm De Merode Tax. The picture was taken near the current Wapenstilstandlaan in Berchem. In the background you can see the gasometers of the Zurenborg gasworks.

Just to the left of the station square, at Uitbreidingstraat 526, the firm **De Merode Tax** took up premises in 1946. The taxi company also rented out limousines for weddings and funerals. Countless Zurenborg couples were driven in a De Merode luxury car to their wedding ceremony at St Norbert's Church. Affluent local residents would arrange to be driven to the opera in similar style. The company even provided cars together with a chauffeur in a chic uniform for foreign trips.



The barracks.

## A neighbourhood full of street art

The neighbourhood around Antwerp Berchem Station is becoming a hotspot for graffiti fans. Graffiti artists have sprayed a number of white walls along the railway between the stations of Berchem and Antwerp Central. At the old gasworks in Minckelersstraat there is also some magnificent graffiti art by national and international artists such as Steve Locatelli.









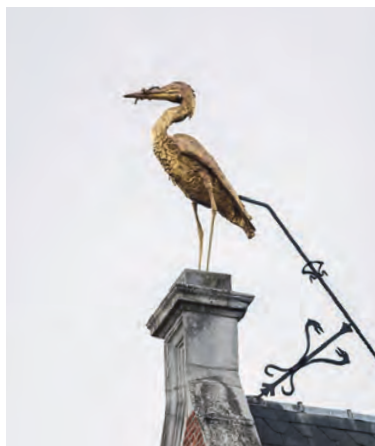


V.

## GULDENVLIESSTRAAT WATERLOOSTRAAT

### ► Turn right into Guldenvliesstraat.

If you wish, you can walk all the way to **Heron House** on Guldenvliesstraat 40, designed by J. Hofman. The Antwerp sculptor Josuë Dupon (1864-1935) lived and worked there. Dupon specialised in making animal sculptures. Look at the beautiful gilded heron at the top of the roof. Dupon's inspiration came from Antwerp Zoo. His best-known work is the bronze camel over the entrance to the Zoo.



### ► Return to the junction with Waterloostraat.

At the corner you are greeted by **the Waterloo Lion**, which stands on top of the corner house between Waterloostraat and Guldenvliesstraat. The ground floor was converted after the Second World War into a petrol station, which remained open until about ten years ago. It has now been refurbished to modern standards.

The name Waterloostraat and many of the houses on the street refer to the **Battle of Waterloo** in 1815, which

marked Napoleon's downfall. The use of these names is part of the romantic glorification of the nation's past.



**Napoleon**, at number 30.



861



Blueprint of Les Mouettes (The Seagulls).

On Waterloostraat a lot of houses have colourful tiles on the walls, in varying states of preservation. Slow down a little as you go past houses 63 – 55: **Morning, Day, Time, Night and Evening**. Morning is represented by a sunrise with birds, while flitting bats symbolise evening. A blazing sun and joyful lady celebrate Day, while a fairy, owl and crescent moon stand for Night. The central house, Time, has a striking horseshoe-shaped window with the words Den Tijd ('Time') written in beautiful Art Nouveau letters.

**Les Mouettes** (The Seagulls) at number 39 is one of the finest Art Nouveau façades by architect Jacques De Weerd, who drew inspiration from Brussels' architect Victor Horta from Brussels. Note the beautiful ironwork and the two fish holding the railing on the second floor in their teeth. Gulls are depicted on the mosaic at the top and between the windows on the ground floor.

Across the street, at number 30, a mosaic with the bust of **Napoleon** can be seen.





A young woman symbolises summer.

Architect Joseph Bascourt built four nearly identical houses in 1899 at the intersection with Generaal Van Merlenstraat: **the Four Seasons**. These are austere buildings in white brick, with a garden running parallel to the street. In spring and summer, green, vibrant hues predominate, while in autumn and winter the architect opted for dark, brown colours.

The real showpieces are the decorated bay windows resembling Chinese lanterns, and above all the mosaics representing the four seasons. **Spring** shows the head of a young girl surrounded by garlands and hyacinths against a gilded background. **Summer** is a young woman with a **poppy** in her hair, and **autumn** is a mature woman

with auburn hair, surrounded by bunches of grapes. Finally, **winter** is a balding old man amid snowy pine branches. Each mosaic also contains the corresponding signs of the zodiac: Aries, Taurus and Gemini for spring, Cancer, Leo and Virgo for summer, Libra, Scorpio and Sagittarius for autumn and Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces for winter.

We continue along Waterloostraat. The house at number **9** used to have a curious turret, which was unfortunately destroyed by lightning. It is called The Battle of Waterloo. The figures of Wellington and Napoleon can be seen in the mosaics. The bayonets, banners, smoking guns and drums leave no doubt as to the subject.

► Continue along Waterloostraat.









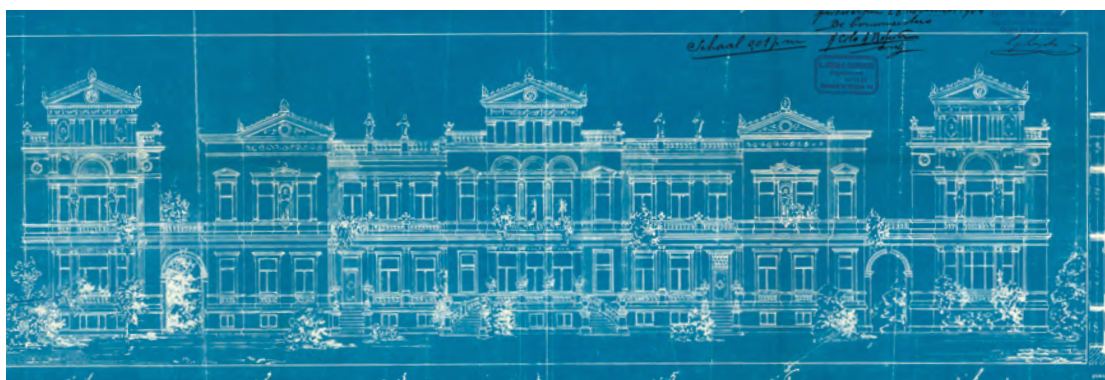
## VI. TRANSVAALSTRAAT

- Carry on to the end of Waterloostraat until you join Transvaalstraat.

Approaching Transvaalstraat from Waterloostraat, you cannot fail to be overwhelmed by **'The Temple'**: seven neo-Grecian townhouses with triangular pediments, loggias, columns and a pair of philosophers on the roof... The female caryatids serve as pillars. The position of the seven houses mid-way down the street is no coincidence. The sacred number seven separates good (the Twelve Apostles at numbers 13-17) from evil (the Twelve Demons at 59-61).

### Links with South Africa

The name Transvaalstraat refers to the Boer War in South Africa, as do Pretoriastraat and Krugerstraat. Paul Kruger, the then president of the Transvaal Republic, visited Antwerp in April 1894, after which the city council decided to give the name Transvaal to a street in the Oostkwartier. Two years later, the names Pretoriastraat and Krugerstraat followed.



Front elevation of 'The Temple'.

Did you know that the ceilings in these houses are 5.27 metres high?



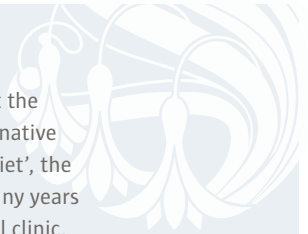


- Turn left down Transvaalstraat, walking as far as numbers 13-17.

**The Twelve Apostles.** The heads of the twelve apostles and the house name are shown in sgraffito, but are badly damaged. In this technique, a line drawing is scratched into fresh plaster and coloured using the fresco technique. Sgraffito was widely used in the Art Nouveau style, for characteristic images such as graceful women, stylised fruit or flowers.

## An alternative bastion

There are still obvious signs that the quarter was a 'bastion' for alternative lifestyle in the 1960s. 'De Margriet', the house on the corner, was for many years an alternative, anthroposophical clinic. A Steiner school, Het Speelschooltje, is still to be found at number 21, and the alternative toyshop 'In den Olifant' on Leopoldstraat started out at Waterlostraat 3.



Front elevation of The Twelve Apostles.





► Return as far as number 30.



The architect Jacques De Weerd – who also built Quinten Matsys House – created a beautiful Art Nouveau home here for Miss Tolkowsky. The Tolkowskys were a wealthy Jewish family of diamond merchants. In the 1930s, they emigrated to America. The house is rather narrow, but its corrugated wall skirting makes it look wider. The Tolkowsky family itself built the house at number 30, so it was not owned by the property development company. You could build a house yourself if it ‘made the grade’.

**Boreas** or the north wind (56) was the very first Art Nouveau creation in Zurenborg. A year later, **Bascourt** reused several features of this house in his **Four Seasons**, such as the bay window in the shape of a Chinese lantern, the ribbed bluestone plinth and the narrow rectangular windows. Note the plate with the house name on it, the front door with its geometric pattern and the beautiful ground-floor windows. The houses at numbers 54 and 52 (**Lotus and Papyrus**) are also by Bascourt. On the edge of the roof you can still see special ‘stake battlements’, although unfortunately on the left side these have been sawn off.





Across the street, the **Twelve Demons** look down on you. The thirteenth demon in the middle has disappeared: he was completely eaten away by woodworm. This is not an isolated case. Nearly half of all the decoration of the houses in Zurenburg is gone! Murals,

ironwork and mosaics all show the ravages of time.

The Twelve Demons has a very classical façade, and was designed by **Hofman**. Believe it or not, **the** same architect also designed the modern Art Nouveau **Sunflower House** on Cogels-Osylei.











## VII.

# VIA GROTEHONDSTRAAT TO DAGERAADPLAATS

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► You are back on Draakplaats and Tramplein.

Before you turn left down Grotehondstraat, pause for the poem by **Herman De Coninck** (1944–1997) under the railway bridge (second passage on the right). De Coninck was a poet who lived for many years in the district.

On the corner of Draakplaats and Grotehondstraat, you can sometimes see a tram disappearing into the fortified city through the gate. It's a remarkable sight!

This was the headquarter of the Antwerp tram company and is still the Antwerp office of transport company De Lijn.

**Grotehondstraat 42-44** formerly housed the offices of the Société: the construction company that built and leased most of the houses in Zurenborg. The façade is strongly reminiscent of Paris Town Hall, but in miniature. For more than thirty-five years, Louis Luyckx, the director of the Société, lived in an apartment above the registered office.

### Home

I look outside, to the prospectlessness that has slowly become my prospect; a Rambler without roses, withered things, a Rime prayed together by the cold on every branch, the ancient clear tidings of winter, all is bright nothing. A garden full of mist. Frozen past. And a belonging-nowhere that wants to stay here. Me. You. And a lostness that is easy to find: Berchem, Cogels-Osylei.

*Herman de Coninck (free translation)*



Paris Town Hall.





## Louis Luyckx

It is no exaggeration to call Louis Luyckx (1857–1939) the father of Zurenborg. He worked his way up from accountant to director of the Société. Louis was a hard worker and a perfectionist. He did virtually everything on his own: he conducted the correspondence with the authorities, negotiated with contractors and architects, showed prospective tenants round the homes, signed the leases and took defaulters to court. He toured the construction sites almost every day. He insisted that the houses were finished to perfection. In 1888, he wrote to architect Dieltiens: “You may say to me ‘There is that fellow again with his saw, but there is nothing I can do about that: we will not allow shoddy work to be delivered.’”



Old photos of Dageraadplaats.

### ► Turn right into Filomenastraat.

**Dageraadplaats** lies before you at the end of the street. The walk ends here. Before heading into one of the many cafés or restaurants, have one last look at St Norbert's Church.







Dageraadplaats is a great place for children to play.  
As well as a small playground, there is also a basketball and football area.



## The streets of Zurenborg

The name Dageraadplaats ('Dawn Square') refers to the rising of the sun in the east. It is one of the many streets in the Oostkwartier or 'Eastern Quarter' which are named after constellations and the universe. Other examples are Grotehondstraat ('Canis Major Street'), Tweelingenstraat ('Gemini Street') or Schorpioenstraat ('Scorpio Street').

On 25 September 1904 'the streets of Zurenborg' marched. The colourful animal cavalcade was an initiative of a local liberal festivities committee, and took place in the context of the political struggle with Zurenborg's Catholics.





Even on cloudy nights you can do some stargazing on Dageraadplaats.  
The artificial starry sky is a playful reference to the district's name.





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## Like to know more about Zurenborg's architecture?

Read the book 'Op wandel door de Belle Epoque. Cogels-Osylei. Zurenborg' by Alex Elaut and Jan Possemiers.