

# New heights

*Flawlessly* fusing THREE apartments into one, DUTCH design duo Nicemakers *elevates* the status of a former 1960s office space to a LOFT of luxury.

By Chris Pearson Photographed by Alan Jensen Produced & styled by Marc Heldens



**THESE PAGES** in the living room of this Maastricht apartment. Groundpiece sofa by Antonio Citterio for Flexform, enquiries to Fanali; Chiefain armchair by Finn Juhl; vintage wenge coffee table found in Brussels; Alva Two side table by Sebastian Herkner for Polipo, enquiries to Hub Furniture; vintage floor lamp found in Brussels; vintage lamp (on left corner) with leaf pattern from Galerie Chalet Design; En Suite rug by Mae Engelaar from Frankly Amsterdam; solid walnut wall panelling, floor tiles (on podium) from Dominique Desimpel; sculpture (on back wall) found in Lisbon; artwork by Emma Bernard from Brussels Design Market. *Details, last pages.*



OPPOSITE PAGE In the dining area, custom dining table and Luca chandelier, both from Fiona McDonald; Beele chairs from Gubi, engravings to Cobi; chairs upholstered in Giant fabric, enquiries to Acero; vintage cabinet found in Brussels; Cvetta spotlights from Aldo Bernardi; rug from Amadi carpets; vintage vase, iron sculpture (all on cabinet), and sculpture (on dining table), all from Nicemakers' private collection.

Stark minimalism and sumptuous tactility teasingly rub shoulders in this penthouse apartment in the southern Netherlands city of Maastricht. With surprises at every turn, it embraces a sense of discovery in the spirit of the great Dutch explorers.

The owners, style-savvy expats, envisioning this as a pied-à-terre in their home city, had clear, if eclectic, ideas of what they wanted when they briefed Amsterdam interior designers Nicemakers back in 2017. "Design for a comfortable home," they told principals Joyce Urbanus and Dax Roll, "where the architecture of the Bauhaus meets the glamour of the Chrysler Building, where furniture designer Jean Prouvé meets interior designer [and architect] Joseph Dirand, where interior designers [and one-time set designers] Roman and Williams meets *Mad Men* and where Swiss minimalist architect Peter Zumthor meets *The Wolf of Wall Street's* Jordan Belfort."

While the brief – with leanings towards Manhattan, European modernism and the cinematic – may have been lofty and expansive, so too is the apartment, a three-level concrete aerie atop a 1960s building. One of Maastricht's few high-rises, it affords stunning views over the city centre. Those birds-eye panoramas and the design potential, together with a touch of nostalgia, underlined the building's appeal for the globetrotting professionals.

"As a boy, I walked along these streets and knew the building," says one of the owners. "It always intrigued me." In its former life it was a nurses' hostel and then offices sat behind the functional facade. When a developer divided the building into apartments, the couple bought one apartment on the ninth level, both apartments on the 10th level and combined all into a three-bedroom home. As an added bonus, the top level included a roof terrace with 360-degree views.

"When we first entered," says the other apartment owner, "it took us just ten seconds to decide to buy the apartments for the renovation project." The internal walls were demolished, leaving just the shell, a blank slate for Nicemakers, whom the couple hired on the advice of a friend. "From the outside, the building is quite boring," confesses Roll, "but the inside, especially the stripped tenth floor with its bare concrete and the beautiful rhythm of all the square windows, had the wow factor."

Fusing all those design influences, the owners wanted "to create a 1960s and '70s feeling, with warm colours, custom elements, vintage mid-century modern elements and a cossetting living space." And all that within the building's brutalist concrete backdrop.

Drama and gradual reveals are recurring themes, perhaps not surprising when TV and movie sets imbued the brief. "I saw film sets in front of me and everything came to life," says Urbanus who, with Roll, has created a series of atmospheric spaces resembling mises en scène. "The elevator door on the ninth floor opens and you immediately find yourself in the world of *Mad Men*, feeling anxious and expecting to hear Don Draper's favourite music," says Roll.

This club-like entry level contains a lounge area, study, kitchen and two guest bedrooms. "Here the clients wanted a more feminine ambience, hence the intimate salon feeling," says Roll. Walk up the stairs and it's like a curtain lifting on a theatre production, the drama reveals itself on a minimalist stage – walls, ceilings, columns and lift shaft are expressed in concrete formwork. Textured glass sliding panels envelop the basalt stairwell connecting the floors, with sunlight creating shadow plays on the glass, while herringbone timber, marble and terrazzo floors layer on the luxe, further expressed in deep velvets, leather and brass. Classic 20th-century furniture, lamps and accessories were gleaned at fairs, auctions and at galleries in Milan, Paris, Brussels and New York.

As the clients are keen entertainers, Roll and Urbanus placed the kitchen centrestage of the vast open-plan zone, which shares the upper floor with the main bedroom suite. The island, in the form of a table with brass frame and lava-stone top, surveys the entire loft space. To the left, the eye journeys towards the living room and dining area, while to the right it takes in the informal meals area with the main bedroom beyond. Service areas, tucked in behind the stairwell and clad in walnut, feature a small intimate passage that leads towards the bedroom.

"We love to introduce perspectives that invite you to discover an interior, introducing a flow but also a connection," says Roll. "They tease the eye and let you see the different spaces with one glance. Then light, layout and the various settings take you by the hand and guide you through." Like artworks on constant rotation, the uniform square windows enclosing the apartment frame ever-changing views beyond.

The apartment revels in surprises and contradictions. "It shows as a warm and comfortable interior," says Urbanus, "but look closely and you will see the complex details, the interiors' second layer, including the materials and textures, and carefully chosen furniture, lamps and accessories. They caress the senses." The interior is rich but with an industrial edge, simple and natural but layered and complex, raw yet sophisticated and, perhaps most importantly for the owners seeking a home, it looks lived in, despite being so new. [VL nicemakers.com](http://www.nicemakers.com)

"We love to introduce perspectives that invite you to discover an interior... they tease the eye" DAX ROLL



*"It shows as a warm and comfortable interior, but look closely and you will see the complex details, the interiors' second layer"* **JOYCE URBANUS**

**THIS PAGE** in the breakfast area, T21B dining table by Pierre Chapo from Morentz; Chandigarh chairs by Pierre Jeanneret from SixGallery; custom brass mesh and black steel storage system with solid walnut handles designed by Nicemakers, produced by Soons Interieurbouw; vintage credenza from Paul Bert Serpette; ornament (on credenza) from Philippe Kersten; artwork by Piet Killiaars; glass lamps found in Brussels; Tribeca rug from Massimo Copenhagen; custom smoked and stained solid oak flooring from Bloemen Parquet. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the kitchen, custom counter with antique brass frame and Pyrolave enamelled lava stone benchtop designed by Eginstill in collaboration with Nicemakers; custom rangehood by Eginstill; Tumbler pendant lights by Lee Broom, enquiries to Space Furniture; Eiffel 1000 single wall light from Frama.



**THIS PAGE** in the bathroom  
off the main bedroom,  
custom natural stone sink  
designed by Nicemakers,  
and marble floor tiles,  
and marble floor tiles,  
both from Solid Nature;  
Landmark Industrial  
tapware by Samuel Heath;  
vintage brass wall lights  
found in Brussels; vintage  
mirror from Galerie Libelle.  
**OPPOSITE PAGE** in the  
sauna, zellige floor and wall  
tiles from Emery & Cie;  
Landmark Industrial  
tapware by Samuel Heath.



*"From the outside, the building is quite boring, but the inside, with its bare concrete and the beautiful rhythm of all the windows, had the wow factor!"* **DAX ROLL**

THIS PAGE in the main bedroom, custom bed designed by Nicemakers, produced by Soons Interieurbouw; custom desk by De Intuïtiefabriek; Nimbus side table by Heerenhuis, enquiries to Spence & Lyda; custom bench designed by Nicemakers, produced by Soons Interieurbouw; Kiddle bedside lamps by Bert Frank; Chasing Light rug from Franky Amsterdam. OPPOSITE PAGE on the terrace, vintage leather chairs from Brussels Design Market; Caldas coffee table from Mambo Unlimited Ideas; 1960s ashtray stand; dining table from Le Grenier de Sasha; Series 7 chairs by Arne Jacobsen for Fritz Hansen from Le Grenier de Sasha, enquiries to Cult; floor lamp by Serge Mouille, enquiries to Cult; walnut timber ceiling. Details, last pages.

