

Villa Empain - art deco showpiece restored to its former glory

In 1929, the 21 year old Louis Empain inherits his fathers' fortune and business empire, and commissions a villa that is to become a masterpiece of art deco architecture. The house is subsequently used as his private home, museum, Gestapo headquarters, Soviet embassy and TV-studio. After decades of misuse, looting and squatters the Brussels villa is now finally restored to its former glory. A five million Euro, two year renovation project turned it into a museum for intercultural dialogue. The management and architects chose APart for their sound system.

In the late 19th and early 20th century the Empain family rank amongst the five richest families on earth. Their fortune is built on constructing railroads in Russia, Congo, Egypt and China. Baron Eduard Empain is the driving force behind the construction of the Paris underground. As an admirer of old Egypt he commissions the construction of an entire Cairo suburb: Heliopolis. It's the boomtown of the early twentieth century: magnificent villa's, avenues and palaces spring up in a desert oasis.

When Eduard Empain dies in 1929 his two sons inherit the family fortune. At age 21, Louis asks Swiss architect Michel Pollak to build a villa that is a masterpiece of art deco style. Only the most exclusive and precious materials are used: window frames are covered in 23.75 carat sheet gold, walls are decorated with marble of uncommon beauty, and floors are covered with rare tropical hardwood.

The house is ready in 1934, but Louis Empain leaves it after only two years. In 1937, he gives it to the Belgian state for use as a museum. From 1940 to 1945 it is occupied by German forces, and after the war the Belgian government puts the building at Soviet disposal for use as their Brussels embassy. A lawsuit brings the villa back into the hands of the Empain family. When Louis Empain decides to sell the villa in 1973, the new owner rents it to RTL for use as a television studio. After the network walks away from it in the eighties, neglect, decay, vandalism and squatters reduce the once-magnificent villa to ruin.

In early 2007 the villa (in the meantime protected as a historical monument) is bought by the Boghossian Foundation who wants to use it as a museum for intercultural dialogue. The foundation asks Francis Metzger, an architect with experience in renovating famous art deco buildings to lead the restoration. It is the start of an extensive two year, five million Euro renovation project. Metzger and electric installer TS P&O ask Brussels integrator and APart dealer Strobbe to take care of AV in the renovation project.

Laurence Rosseels of Strobbe comments "We worked with the architects on various art deco renovation projects before, and of course we were very pleased to be able to participate in this project. As it is a historical building, we had to hide all the loudspeakers behind heating radiator grilles or air duct grilles. Everything had to stay completely invisible. We used a mixed sound installation with both 100 Volt and low impedance amplifiers and loudspeakers. In total we've used more than 40 APart sound columns and some sound projectors. All the speakers are in black color, to make them as invisible as possible. Further we have a paging microphone, and a BGM3000 CD-player/media player. We are using a Beyer Dynamic headset or wireless microphone for presentations and have two Xantech touch screens that are used to

control the audio system.” Rosseels is happy with the way the project has run: “This is a building with a true soul. Working within the restrictions of a protected historical monument was a challenge, but achieving all our goals and seeing a satisfied customer made it a pleasure to work on”.

www.villaempain.com

Museum ground floor and first floor

- 1 x CHAMP4 amplifier
- 2 x PA2240BP amplifier
- 1 x PM1122 pre-amplifier
- 2 x PM122RL control panels
- 1 x MICPAT-D paging microphone
- 1 x BGM3000 tuner/cd-player/music player
- 24 x COL81S column speakers black color
- 4 x COL41S column speaker black color
- 4 x MPH30-G sound projector black color

Basement

- 1 x PA8250 amplifier
- 1 x PIR7600 pre-amplifier
- 16 x COLW41 column speakers grey color