



BOTANIC
SANCTUARY
ANTWERP

History Shapes the Present



THE LEADING HOTELS
OF THE WORLD®



Every Story Has a Beginning

... and mine starts in this bustling city centre. It is the tale of a prophecy that came to me in the far and distant past but was kept secret for many, many years. The time has now come to lift the veil on this mystery.

A vision was revealed to me of a destination, a hidden gem in the Botanical Garden that would become a landmark for Antwerp: rooms, suites and spa suites spread across historic buildings that mirrored the past and looked into the future – beautiful and spiritual. This place would offer feelings of freedom and luxury born from nature, space and true privacy.

The visions were breathtaking: an unparalleled location providing exceptional experiences accomplished with the craftsmanship of extraordinary men and women. In place of the paints used by my contemporary Rubens, I saw artists using flavours and foods as their media. Stepping out, I was enchanted by the sights and fragrances of the Botanical Garden's herbs and plants – clearly the inspiration for the holistic spa concept that was foretold.

As I stood alone in this place of beauty I was overcome by a profound sense of wellbeing, knowing that it would flourish and bloom once more and be filled with laughter and joy. Where wedding vows would be exchanged, glittering balls would be held and people would go about their business with a sense of ease and confidence.

The prophecy of an extraordinary 5-star superior destination where the splendour of nature and history combines with sophisticated luxury, where businesses meet and people connect, is about to come true: the Botanic Sanctuary Antwerp.

The Past Shapes the Present

My Vision of the Future

I knew that I would need to look to the past if I wished to fully understand my vision of the future. Travelling across Europe, I visited eminent libraries to consult ancient maps and dusty manuscripts, discovering that the monks and nuns who, long ago, preceded me, had left the confines of Antwerp's city walls in search of greater and more salutary space.

They discovered a place of healing: a grove of alders – handsome hardwood trees that symbolise strength, release, and protection. In this auspicious woodland, they began to build a refuge and sanctuary for the weary and infirm, providing hospitality and healing and weathering the storms of war and plague.



Chamomile

The fertile soil allowed our order's brothers and sisters to cultivate the finest vegetables and herbs for sustenance and medicinal purposes. Indeed, not long before my own birth, the famous apothecary and botanist, Pieter Coudenberg, set out his own physic garden in this propitious place.

... the finest vegetables and herbs for sustenance and medicinal purposes.

My excitement grew ... was it possible that our centuries-old traditions of sheltering and healing would be revived in the 21st century? I felt certain that my precognition would not fail me.



Sage



Echinacea



Valerian

The Privacy to Simply Be

Indeed, the vision I had of the 21st century showed me buildings both familiar and unfamiliar.



The *Sint-Joris, Monasterium, Sint-Elisabeth, Alnetum* and *Filips Van Marnix Huis*. Each of these buildings, sensitively restored, held an array of elegant rooms, suites, and spa suites. As I wandered through them, I saw that each room and suite had been skilfully integrated into the monastic complex, each with its own, distinct configuration – but all exuding a beauty and serenity that induced in me a desire to fall into a deep and restful slumber.



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PRIVACY IS NOT
SOMETHING
I'M MERELY
ENTITLED TO, IT'S
AN ABSOLUTE
PREREQUISITE.

MARLON BRANDO

I saw spacious rooms with saunas, whirlpools, and devices to clear the air of environmental toxins. I saw special cabinets in which were kept fine wines ... and every room was luxuriously furnished, expertly designed and beautifully modernised to provide exquisite privacy. Serene and spiritual.

But where, I wondered, did the people who resided here in such sublime surroundings find sustenance for the body?

An Epicurean Exploration

Searching for the refectory, I discovered not one, but four dining rooms – or restaurants, as people now refer to them – each with its own character and style.

Nestled in an unparalleled setting in the conservatory of the Monastery Garden, 1238 RESTAURANT is where the talented chef Wouter Van Tichelen offered me light, timeless and stylish dishes based on the classic foundations of French and Belgian cuisine.

1238
est
38
RESTAURANT

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FOOD IS NOT
RATIONAL. FOOD
IS CULTURE, HABIT,
CRAVING AND
IDENTITY.

JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER



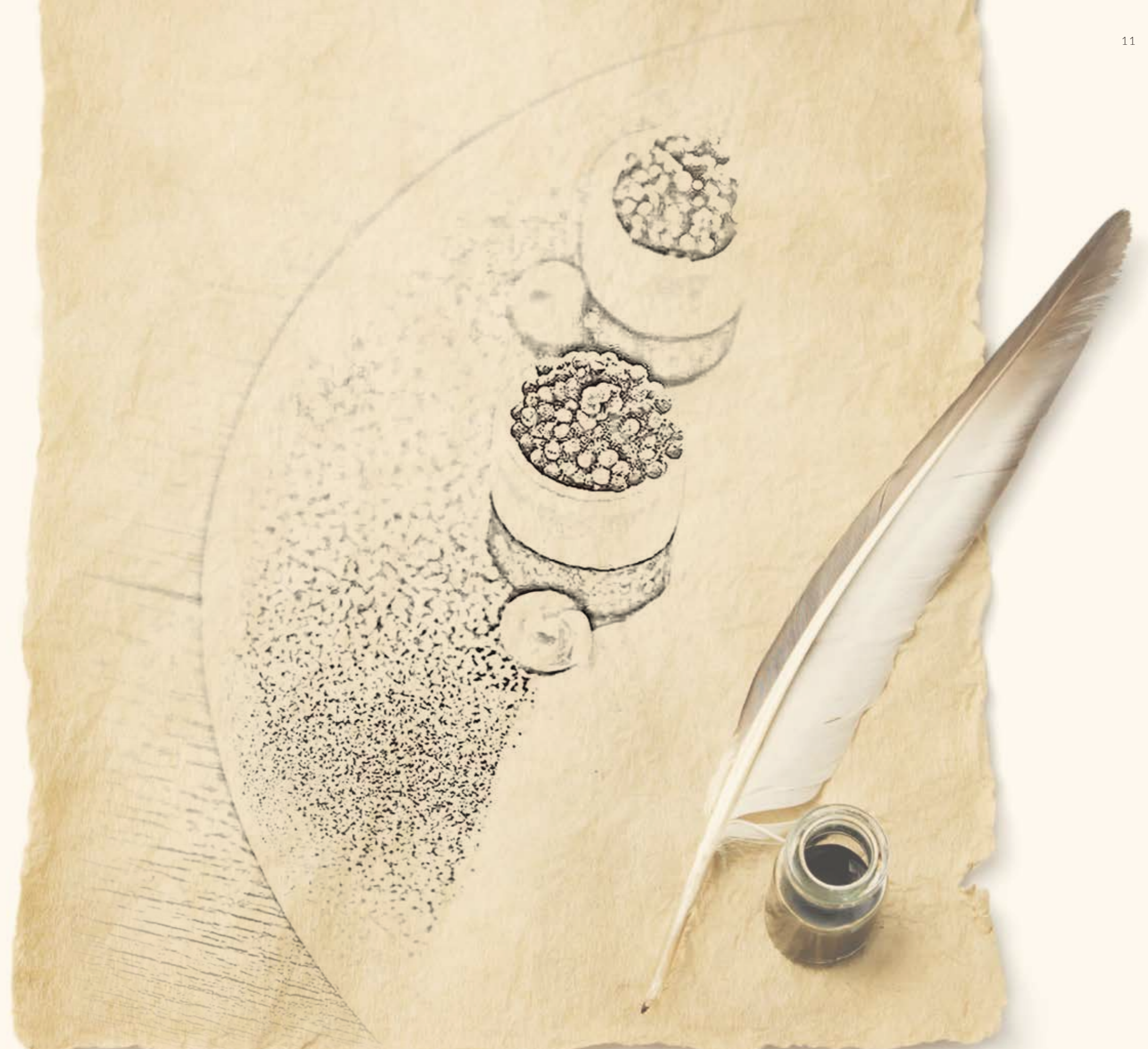
At HERTOOG JAN I encountered the Michelin-starred partnership of Gert de Mangeleer and Joachim Boudens whose fine dining experience in an intimate setting also features a glasshouse, beehives and herb garden – as well as uncompromisingly stunning cuisine. Simplicity born of devotion and sublime skill!

Gert and Joachim are also behind BAR BULOT, a welcoming and stylish à la carte brasserie where I indulged in traditional Belgian and French fare. The menu offers fish, seafood, and meaty classics such as steak tartare – as well as some very tasty wines to accompany them! How could I resist?

Onward to the FINE FLEUR where I encountered two chefs from Michelin-starred restaurants! Jacob Jan Boerma and Thomas Diepersloot's signature dishes and profound passion for seasonal and regional ingredients spoke to me of balance and serenity. Their serendipitous alliance has resulted in an experience that only the finest cuisine can offer: heavenly!

I continued my perambulation of the majestic building complex. As the idea of a soothing digestif grew in my mind, threatening to obliterate all else from my consciousness ...

... I noticed an ancient staircase descending into what I could only assume was the dark, dank cellar of my own era.



Not the Taverns of My Youth!

Piqued by curiosity, I made my descent.
No one could have been less prepared for the
sight that opened up before me:

—
Bottle upon bottle of fine wines from
every corner of the known world –
hundreds of them! I could see people
of the modern age enjoying tastings
of this most precious nectar, while
a commanding looking figure – I
overheard someone referring to her
as a ‘sommelier’ – offered words of
wisdom.

My attention was then diverted by
snatches of music that seemed to
emanate from above. Intrigued, I
retraced my steps and discovered
an unobtrusively lit space that had
previously evaded me: Henry’s Bar.
In this elegant and sophisticated bar,
contemporary zeitgeist and historical
building fabric were harmoniously
combined, creating an ambience that
was as intimate as it was convivial.
While some people were dancing,
others were simply connecting,
enjoying each other’s company over
a drink.

Tempting as it was to linger and
partake of all the treasures of this
pleasant place, I could sense there
was more to discover.

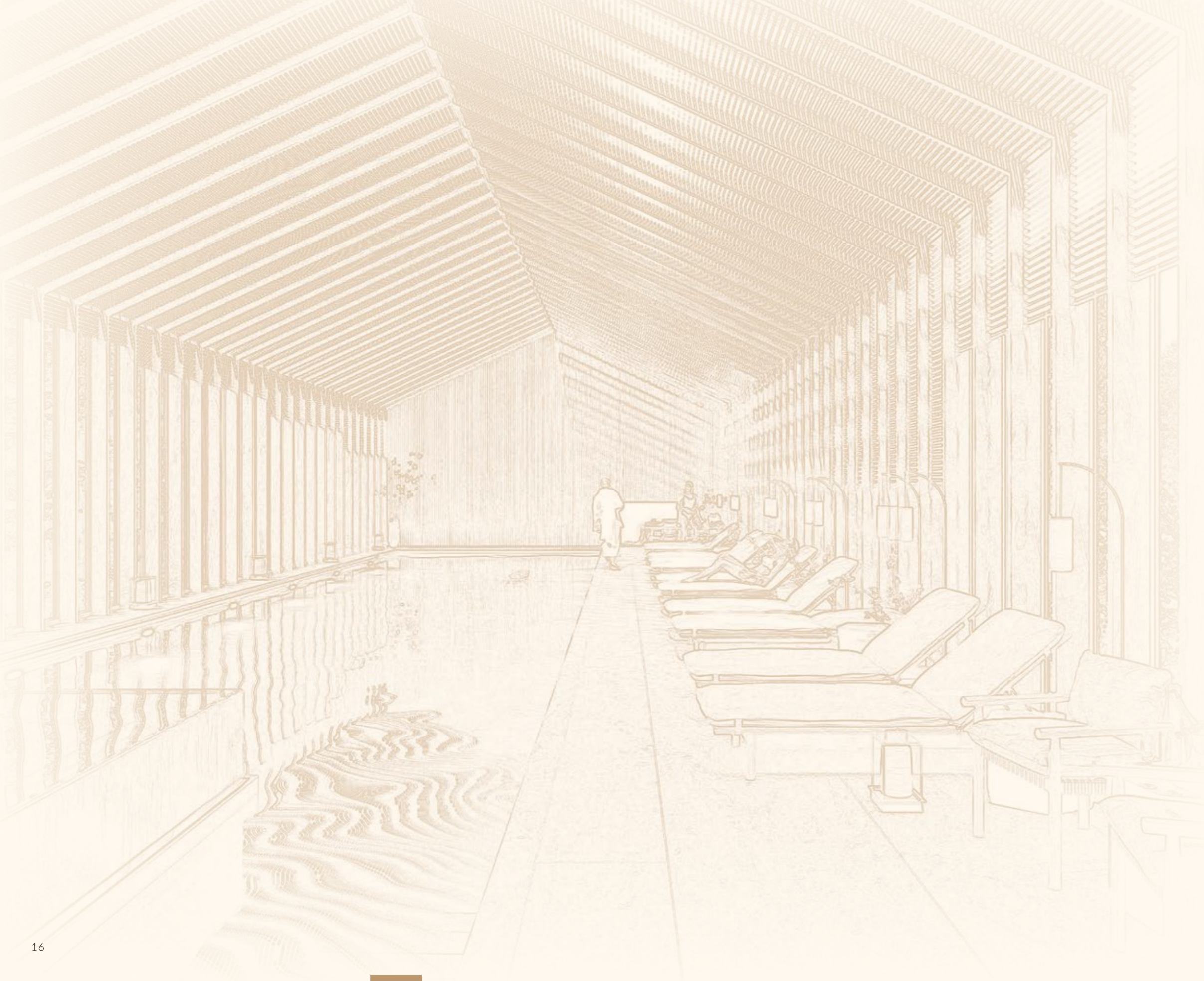
*My heart told me that, as well as conviviality, there was
healing to be found within the Botanic Sanctuary ...*



Healing and Ease

My heart had not betrayed me,
and the Botanic Health Spa was all I had
prayed for and more!

I marvelled at the architecture's harmonious balance of wood, natural stone and glass, its sustainable design and eco technologies, and rejoiced when I understood that the holistic spa concept honoured our own monastic healing traditions.



The healers I observed drew on the elements of wind, fire, air, and water to restore the energetic system, combining herbalism, phytotherapy and nutrition in a holistic and complementary approach to health. Great was my elation when I saw that they too understood the importance of opening up to the sacred forces to bring about spiritual, emotional and physical restoration.

Centuries of healing behind these ancient walls lived on in a spirit of community, healing and comfort.

*Warmed by this elating experience,
I sought the cooling freshness and
healing green of a garden.*



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 NOTHING
 IS SO
 HEALING
 AS THE
 HUMAN
 TOUCH.
 BOBBY FISCHER



Gardens of Healing

Stepping out of the Sanctuary into the Botanical Garden, I was startled by the green oasis that greeted me. Unable to resist the delicate petals of exotic plants, I gently stroked them as I inhaled the fragrance of mysterious blooms.

The smooth texture of the succulents' supple leaves intrigued me, as did the many entirely unfamiliar plants.

Then the sound of flowing water caught my attention: a stream, delicately cascading over rocks, fed a pool in which golden fish bobbed effortlessly to the surface then disappeared in the blink of an eye, leaving behind only a faint trace of bubbles.





In a time when everything has changed, I derived comfort from this garden, built in the same spot as another garden long ago, where I used to pick herbs to heal the poorly folk at the hospital. Indeed, it was apothecary Pieter Coudenberg who filled it with medicinal plants and herbs back in the day. Yet despite all the modern technologies and scientific medicines, the Botanic Sanctuary has paid homage to its roots, recognising the benefits of natural healing passed down through the centuries. Even modern-day apothecary, Alexander Ehrmann, has created natural remedies with herbs from our soil for use at the Botanic.

“
TRADITION IS
NOT KEEPING
THE ASHES,
BUT STIRRING
UP THE FLAME.

ALEXANDER EHRMANN

“
BOTANY I RANK
WITH THE
MOST VALUABLE
SCIENCES.

THOMAS JEFFERSON

I returned to the Sanctuary via Mother Nature's hideaway: The Monastery Garden. Smiling at the giggling children, blissful newlyweds and groups of friends chatting, my senses filled with the scents of rosemary, juniper, basil, thyme, chamomile, and mint; so redolent of their power to heal and soothe. And now they would be laying the foundations for a truly extraordinary holistic spa concept.

In need of rest, I took refuge on a bench to admire the abundant life that surrounded me: a spider patiently spinning an intricate design between the twigs of a shrub, his lacework moving freely with every welcome breeze. The sound of birdsong harmonised with a chorus of bees, creating a sweet orchestral serenade that gently lulled me into a state of deep relaxation. Is there really a bustling city centre within minutes of this haven? Hard to believe.

*I shook myself awake –
I still had much to do if I wished to
unravel the secrets of this prophecy!*



A Matrimony of Romance and Beauty

As the prophecy had also told of couples uniting in love, I furtively entered the Chapel of our Lady. A wedding was in full swing.

Pews filled with joyful guests, dressed in their finery; the loveliness of the chapel embellished by elegant floral displays and decorations; and down by the altar ... a beautiful bride and groom, radiantly exchanging vows.

Not wishing to intrude, I backed away discreetly and, lost in thought, envisioned the thrilling twirl of dancers in a grand ballroom; lovers kissing under the stars;

intimate ceremonies and grand receptions with families and friends delighting in every moment. I saw jewels designed by artists and made by talented craftsmen, intricate flower arrangements adorning the walls, eyes sparkling with romance. Two souls united in matrimonial bliss: a celebration of love. Here, at the Botanic Sanctuary Antwerp.



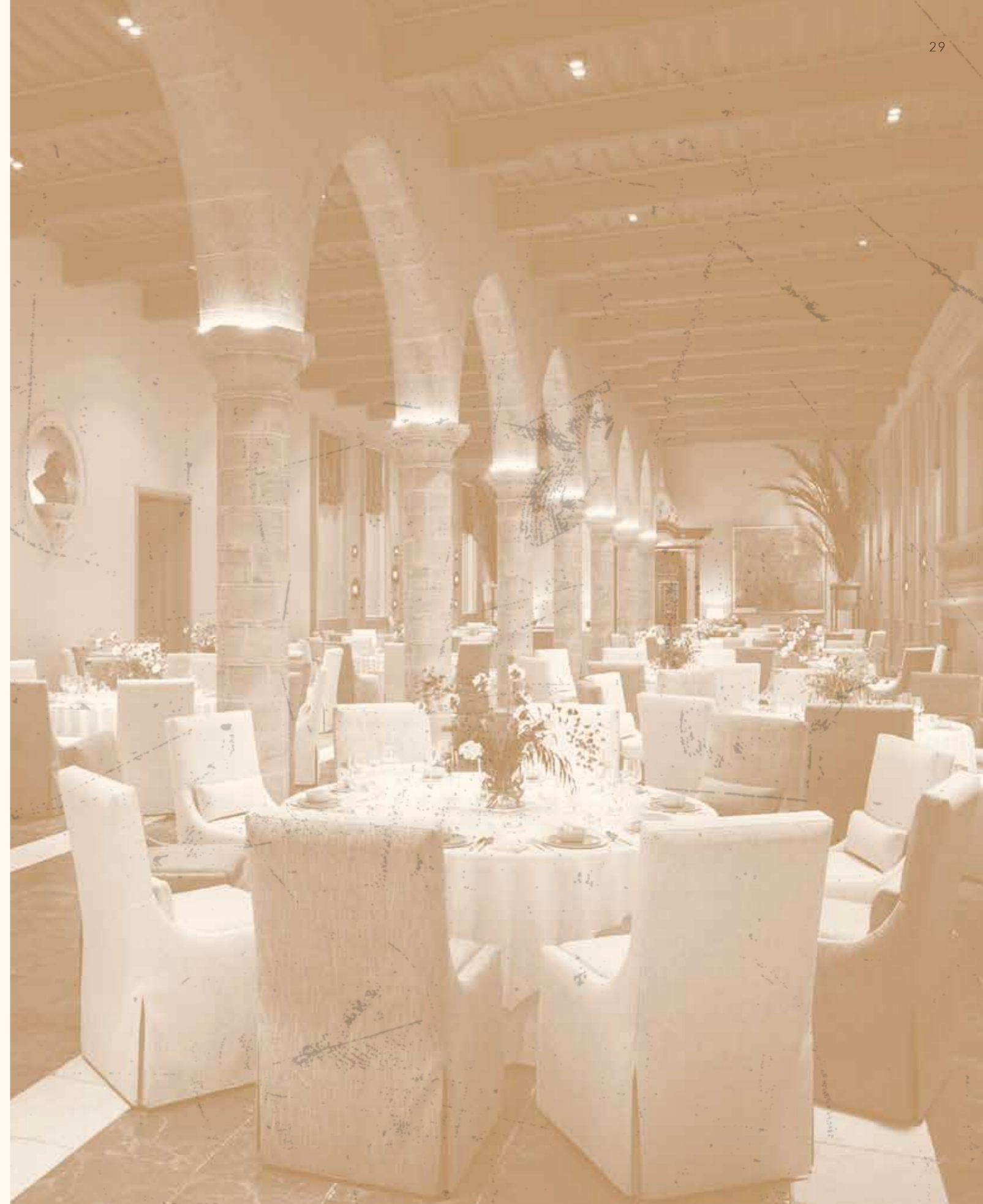
The story foretold was clearly one of laughter, dancing, joy, and merriment. Could there be more?

Revels and Revelries

Stepping out into the Monastery Garden, scores of happy people were clinking sparkling glasses of Champagne and nibbling on the daintiest of canapés. The sight of prettily dressed children playing and laughing among the adult guests cheered my old and weary heart.

Although tempted to linger outside in the gentle summer breeze, I returned to the building's interior in search of the meaning behind this revelry. And I found it in a grand hall bathed in the warmest and most subtle light, delicately decorated in floral displays with elegant drapery over circular tables made ready for a magnificent dinner. I saw a space for dancing, just waiting to be filled. Stealthily approaching a small group, I eavesdropped on an illuminating conversation: the festivities were in celebration of a golden wedding anniversary – family and friends joined together to revel in 50 years of love. It was an event as majestic as it was deeply moving.

Everything I had seen so far indicated a world entirely dedicated to the finer pleasures in life. There had to be a more serious side to this universe, hadn't there?



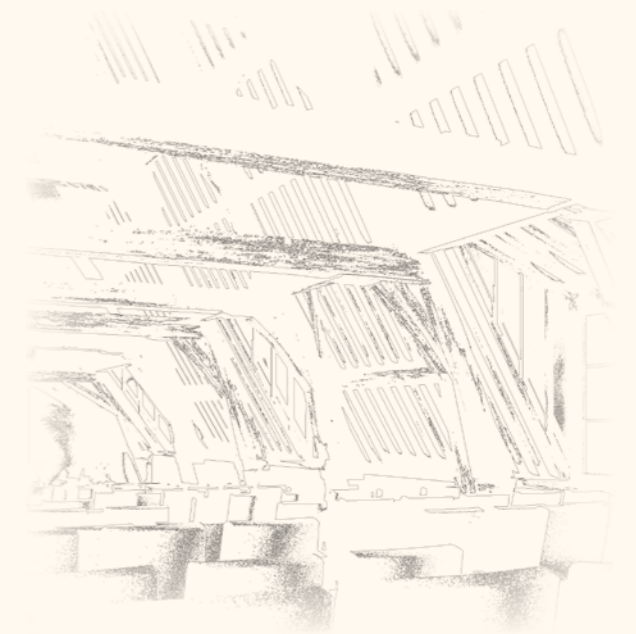
The Business of Life

And there was! A sheer unimaginable future was revealed to me: within the historic ambience of the Sanctuary I saw futuristic equipment, an impressive auditorium with technological apparatus beyond my wildest dreams that made it possible to speak to a vast audience in many different tongues simultaneously.

In one of the 18 flexible, attractive, and individually designed rooms dedicated to meetings, incentives, conferences, and events, I overheard a gentleman explain possible configurations and adaptations – there had to be magic at play!

More wizardry met my eyes in the grand Amaryllis Hall itself where an exhibition of motorised carriages was taking place.

Shaken by so much inventive innovation, and seeking repose in the Monastery Garden, I discovered folk meditating, meeting, and mulling over ideas, while in my beloved chapel, I spied a collection of exquisite garments being unveiled before an adoring audience.



Was there more to this hive of commerce?

Bountiful Bazaars

As I continued my circuit, pondering the many ways in which people find healing at the Botanic Sanctuary Antwerp, I encountered a shopping arcade. Having heard speak of a curative method that, until then, had been unknown to me – retail therapy they called it – I was not entirely unprepared. But the bounty of beautiful and healthful things available to purchase could not but astound me.

A unique sphere has been created with the SAINT CHARLES flagship store where ancient knowledge is combined with the latest modern findings. According to Paracelsus, there is a herb to counteract every disease and keep us healthy, and right under our noses too. As well as reviving our ancient healing practices, this is the place where I was introduced to a fine array of luxury and niche spa brands – quite an eye-opener for an old monk like me!

BEAUTIQUE BOTANIC has been gracefully integrated into the architecture and is suffused by the Botanic's signature scent. I noticed the source of this aroma: candles – so different to the candles of my day – among an array of other intriguing goods.

Another emporium of note is the GRANADA GALLERY, a place of great artistry where the discerning will find jewels and gemstones, minerals and fossils, prized timepieces, and costly adornments by the illustrious designer Jochen Leën in cooperation with Schaap & Citroen.

Born out of pure passion for single malt Scotch whisky, Scotch Whisky International has made Botanic Sanctuary its Antwerp home. THE UNPRECEDENTED holds the finest single malt whisky I have ever tasted!

My prophetic vision had taken me on a long and arduous journey during which I had become privy to many of the Sanctuary's secrets.

I could feel my own epoch drawing me back, but before I could leave, I needed to know what had happened to my beloved city of Antwerp in the years between my time and this ...

Antwerp, City of Art and Culture

The prophecy had foreseen that Antwerp would continue as a flourishing centre of art and culture, even becoming a Flanders Art City.

I had to find out for myself, so I wandered beyond the perimeter of the Sanctuary where I joined the busy city-centre throng and was met by a cornucopia of cultural delights: the Rubens House, the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, the Maagdenhuis Museum, the Diamond Museum, and the theatre and fashion districts all held me in thrall. I even discovered a museum entirely devoted to chocolate!

Although much had changed (especially the port!), many aspects of the city were preserved, and I was delighted to find our beloved Cathedral of our Lady had survived the vagaries of time.

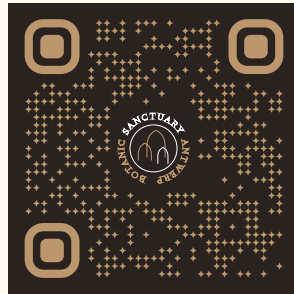
Tired but elated, I retraced my steps and spent a few restful hours in the Botanical Garden before returning to the monastery.



and now a new botanic
life begins in 2021

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EXPERIENCE THE OFFICIAL TRAILER



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