

Juliaan Lampens



Authentic Modernism from Flemish Soil

Shortly after the N60 motorway, just past the village of Oudenaarde near Ghent, we turn onto the Edelareberg. It's 10 o'clock in the morning and the roads are still quiet. As we open the car door, we feel and smell it – this is where the Flemish Ardennes begin. A group of bent riders confirms our location. The Edelareberg, a slope that has featured in the last 35 editions of the Tour of Flanders, Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne, Across Flanders, Three Days of De Panne-Koksijde and Nokere Koerse.

But cycling is not our focus today. After a climb of 1,500 metres with a 4.6% gradient, we reach the summit and begin our day immersed in concrete, purity and detail with the pilgrimage chapel Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Kerselare in Edelare, designed by Juliaan Lampens.



Eddy Merckx, the Belgian cycling legend widely regarded as the greatest of all time, Paris-Roubaix.



The Architect Behind the Concrete

Juliaan Lampens (1926–2019) hailed from De Pinte, near Ghent. Raised in a traditional family, he inherited a keen sense of craftsmanship from his carpenter father. Even in his youth, he displayed a talent for drawing and dreamt of becoming a painter. Following the advice of his village teacher, in 1940 he enrolled at the Higher Institute for Art and Professional Education in Sint-Lucas to train as a technical draughtsman. From 1946 to 1950, he studied architecture at the same institute and, in his graduation year, established his own studio in Eke/Nazareth.

His career, however, did not truly take off until a decade later when his architectural vision matured. It was then that his affinity with the work of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe became evident. Before 1960, he built in what might be called a renewed traditional style, about which little is documented.¹ Juliaan Lampens was never a man of grand gestures. In Belgium, he existed largely unnoticed in the background – a forgotten architect of a silent generation.



Juliaan Lampens,
1 January 1926 – 6 November 2019.

In this obituary on VRT
(the national Belgian TV)
you can watch an overview
of his work.

¹ *Juliaan Lampens in perspectief,
de stem van de stille generatie.*

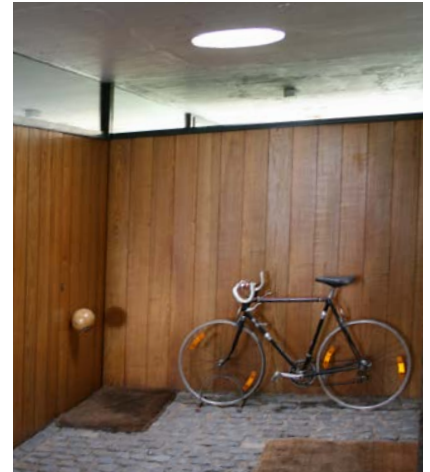
Turning Points

Lampens was profoundly influenced by the *1958 World Exhibition* in Brussels, which marked a decisive turning point in his architectural philosophy. Following this exposure, he focused on minimalist concrete architecture characterised by honest use of materials, logically constructed structures, and an austerity free from folklore.

The Chapel of Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Kerselare (1964–1966) exemplifies this approach, with its ideal acoustics resulting from its distinctive shape and careful material selection. Regarding his preference for concrete, Lampens once remarked in an interview with Koenraad de Wolf: “Brick remains one of the best building materials, but unfortunately its possibilities for use are limited. I am not in love with concrete, but I do love the possibilities that the material offers. After all, the constructive gesture that you make as an architect is the first step towards beauty.”

Lampens’ own home, built in 1960, marked another crucial milestone in his career by demonstrating his principles in residential architecture. He rejected the conventional notion of a house as a collection of separate rooms divided by walls, doors and corridors. Instead, he introduced an open concept where all spaces interconnect. He envisioned living spaces where small communities could experience essential intimacy with nature.

Juliaan Lampens’ home.



The Lampens-Dierick house, home of one of Juliaan's sons.



From this point forward, Lampens worked almost exclusively with concrete, steel, wood, glass and occasionally brick. His homes are designed in harmony with their environment and explore themes such as boundaries, orientation and direction. For Lampens, windows were not mere openings but glass walls that frame the landscape as an equal element in the composition.

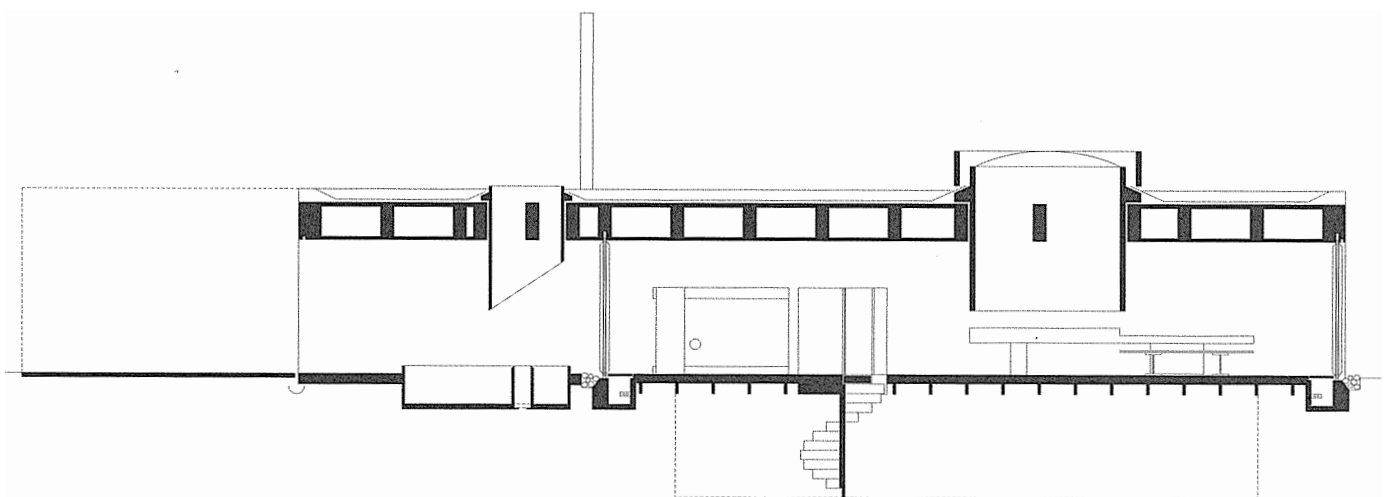


Detail.

Spatial Conventions and Natural Light

The Vandenhoute-Kiebooms house, in Huise.

Lampens creatively interpreted Le Corbusier's famous 'plan libre', upending calibrated living forms. His treatment of light transcends conventional approaches. He sometimes handles light in an almost sacred manner, as in the Vandenhoute-Kiebooms house in Huise, where sunlight falls on the kitchen table, transforming it into something akin to an altar. His manipulation of natural light creates an elusive, super-natural atmosphere in his buildings.



The kitchen of the Vandenhoute-Kiebooms house.



Beyond Brutalism

Lampens' achievements avoid the bleakness often associated with brutalist architecture. He managed to liberate traditional brutalist architecture from its rigidity and claustrophobia. Unlike much contemporary architecture of his time, his homes offer a sense of security while radiating transparency and even a certain frivolity.

His work transcends conventional design, emphasising the utopian avant-garde concept of living without borders. In contrast to the bourgeois emphasis on individuality, Lampens prioritised communality and equality within living spaces.

The Velghe-Vanderlinden house.



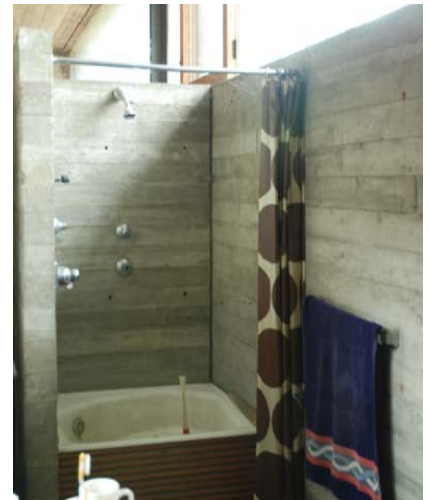
Storage building next to the house.



Details of the Lampens-Hartman house, home of one of Juliaan's sons.



The Van Wassenhove house.



Shower.



Detail.

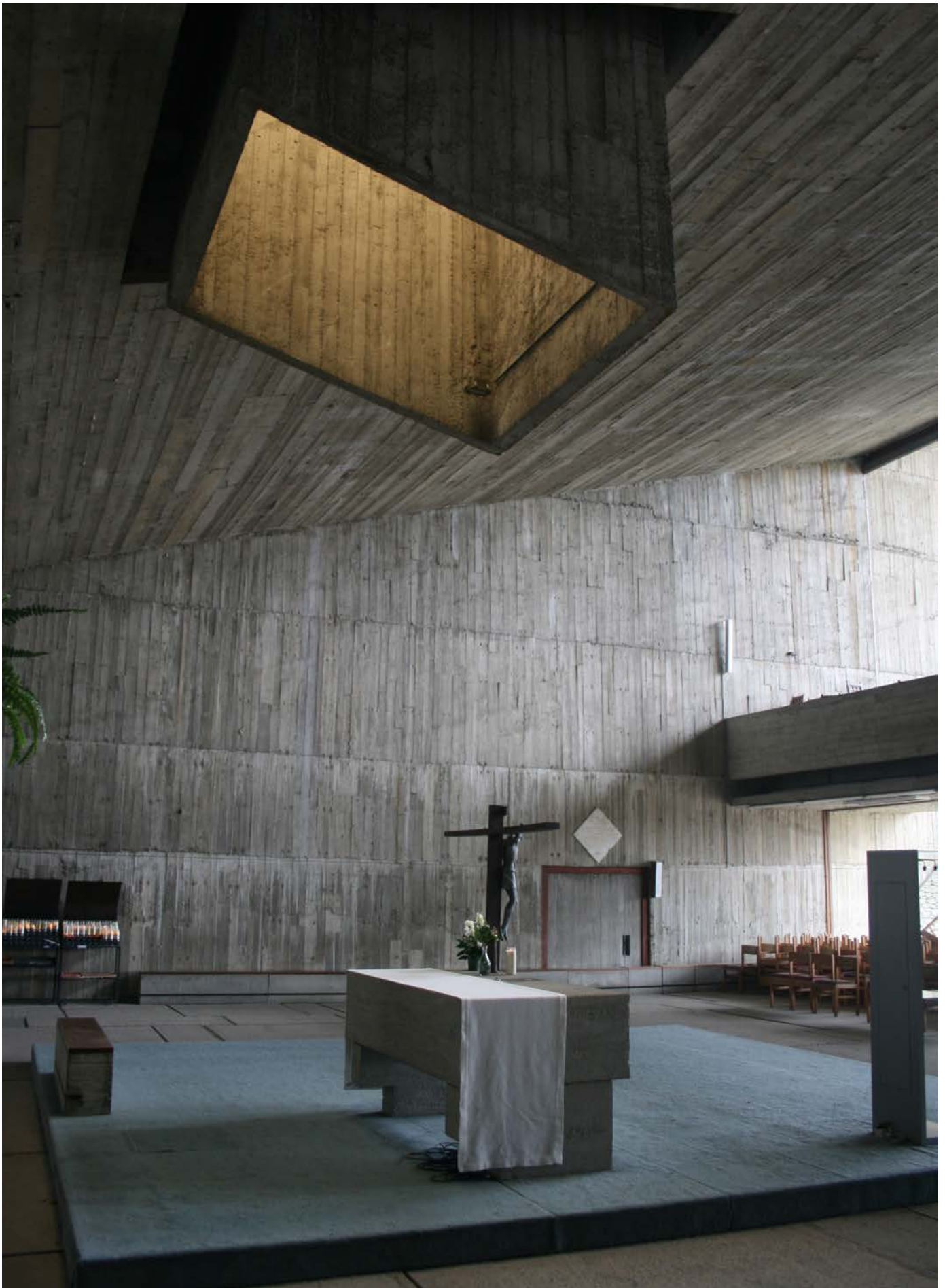
Ronchamp, a brothel

The chapel of Kerselare in Edelare (1966) evokes a skyward ramp and represents one of Lampens' few commissions in public space. The church administrators were initially led astray by decoy drawings: "I made many false drawings!" Lampens admitted. "Only the pastor got to see my real plans. He supported me, if only to minimise objections from the area's notaries."

Thousands of pilgrims visit the chapel each year, with Ascension Day and May being particularly popular. The chapel's architecture strikes a balance – neither overly secularised nor laden with ecclesiastical symbolism. It concerns itself with elements ranging from air to earth. The altar is not placed at the highest point but at the midpoint. Lampens was known to have dismissed Le Corbusier's Ronchamp chapel as a "brothel", a criticism stemming from that sense of the over-elaborate that Le Corbusier himself apparently incorporated in an innocent trance.

Pilgrimage Chapel of Our Lady of Kerselare.



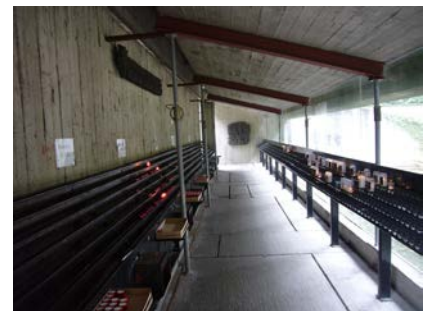






Preservation Challenges

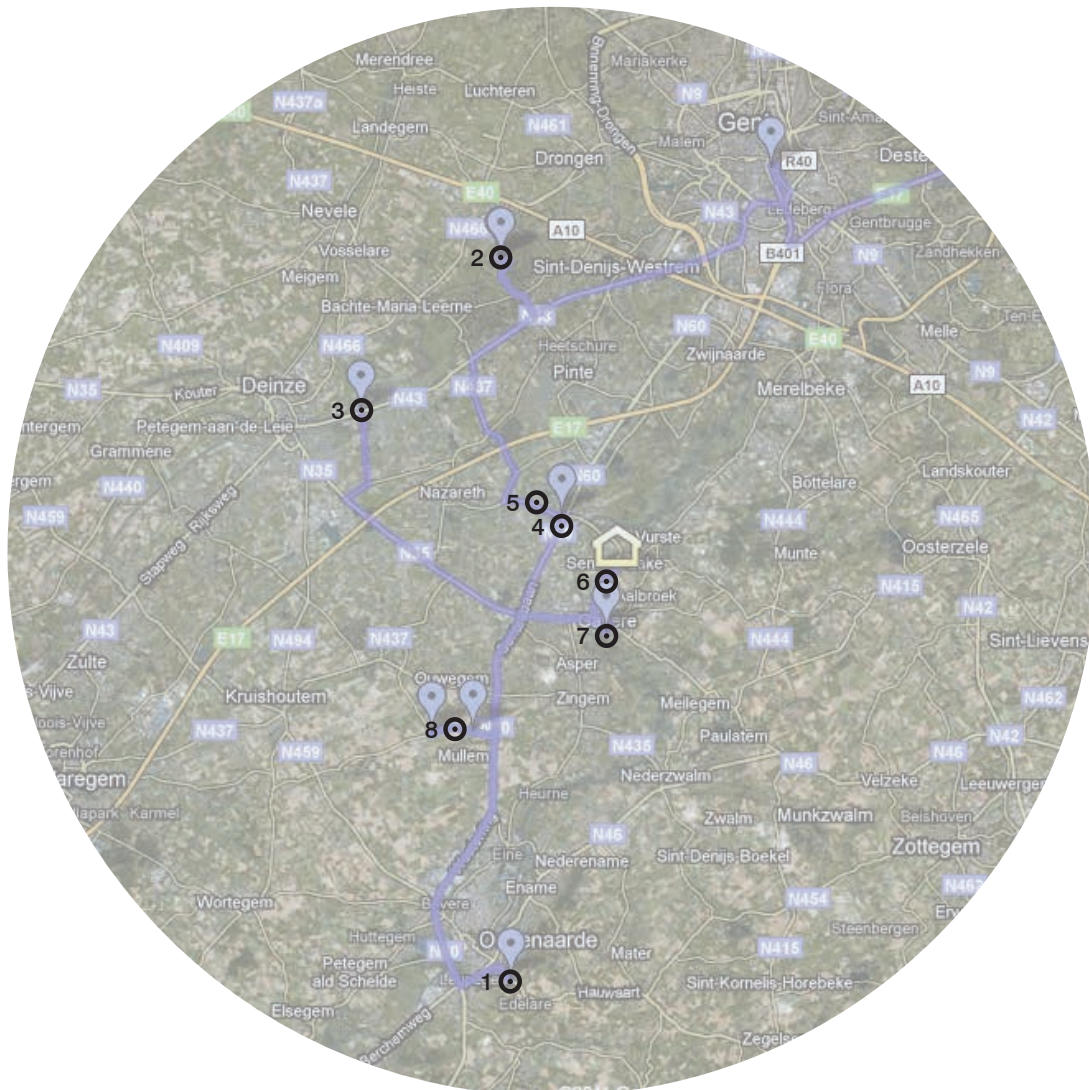
As of October 2012, the architectural condition of the Kerselare Chapel had deteriorated significantly. The building urgently needed thorough renovation, with its roof propped up to prevent further cracking and its concrete seriously damaged. Following its designation as a protected monument in 2009, investigations began into how the structure could be properly restored.



The Kerselare Chapel
under construction.



Featured projects



Religious building:

1 📍 Pilgrimage Chapel O.L.V. van Kerselare (1966), adjacent to Kerzelare 92, 9700 Edelare/Oudenaarde

Residential building:

2 📍 Van Wassenhove House (1974), Brakelstraat 50, 9830 Sint-Martens-Latem
 3 📍 Velghe-Vanderlinden House (2002), Pontstraat 1, 9800 Astene/Deinze
 4 📍 Juliaan Lampens-Vanhove House (1960), Stationsstraat 12, 9810 Eke/Nazareth

Public building:

5 📍 Eke Municipal Library (1970), Steenweg 88, 9810 Nazareth (Open Saturdays until 11:30)

Family Residences:

6 📍 Lampens-Dierick Residence (1990), Meersbloemstraat 30, 9890 Semmerzake/Gavere
 7 📍 Lampens-Hartman Residence (1990), Meersbloemstraat 26, 9890 Semmerzake/Gavere
 8 📍 Vandenhaute-Kiebooms Residence (1967), Lange Aststraat 20, 9750 Zingem (Huisse)

These locations are situated just south of Ghent, and the distances can easily be covered in a day trip

Publications

- *Wallpaper*, April 2010
- *OASE 55 – Home and Garden: Living Towards Nature: Houses by Juliaan Lampens*, by Like Bijlsma
- *Juliaan Lampens* edited by Angelique Campens (ASA Publishers, ISBN: 9789461170057)
- *Juliaan Lampens: Projects 1950–1991* edited by Katrien Vandermarliere (deSingel, out of print)

Online Resource

De heldere stem van een stille generatie – Juliaan Lampens in perspectief, by Philip Willaert, Archined

Visitor Information

VZW Juliaan Lampens can arrange visits to selected houses for groups.

“Ontmoeten is het ontdoen van het moeten.”

[“To meet is to unmeet the must”]

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