

RONSE: Art Deco walking tour

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Between the two world wars, Flanders experienced a period of economic prosperity. The horrors of World War I were followed by a time of peace and freedom from cares, when people enjoyed spending money to forget the years of scarcity and deprivation... Many buildings that had been destroyed during the war were rebuilt. Many architects turned to the Art Nouveau style that was in its heyday at the time. However, they also longed for a new form of architecture that would place more emphasis on the functional, and rejected whatever was superfluous and overly decorative.

In 1916, the French government had planned to hold an International Exhibition of Decorative Arts in Paris, but history decided otherwise. The "Exposition des Arts Décoratifs" ultimately took place in 1925 and came to be the symbol of the **Art Deco style**. The name was applied to **architecture and furniture** that combined elements from different currents of the day. In Ronse, too, this new style made its mark. During the inter-war period, the city experienced an economic boom thanks to the flourishing textile industry. Business executives and textile barons soon began to erect homes on the edge of the city, in the fashionable style of the day: Art Deco. Thanks to the rising standard of living, this trendy style began to appear on a larger scale as well.



Ronse still boasts a considerable number of Art Deco houses. With this walking tour, we wish to offer visitors the opportunity to discover and admire these unique pearls in Ronse.

- Distance: 4 km
- Departure and end: Belevingscentrum Hoge Mote (De Biesestraat 2, 9600 Ronse)
- Parking: see below
- Wheelchair-accessible: yes
- Signage: none, see description and route map
- Ronse Tourist office website: www.visitronse.be

Parking

It is best if you use the free "Portois" parking lot (Oude Vesten – M. Portoisstraat, see map).

GPS coordinates: N 050°44'49.37" E 003°36'17.97"

Or the free "Familia" parking lot (Familia is accessible via the Kegelkaai or via the Kruisstraat, see map)

GPS coordinates: N 050°44'59.48" E 003°35'53.71"

TIP: at the end of this walking tour description, you will find a treasure hunt that follows the same route as this one. This means you can easily combine the two.

What you need to know about Art Deco

Recognising Art Deco homes is not always easy. And yet, there are some elements and materials that appear frequently and can be considered typical of the Art Deco style:

- Vaulted façades with oblong, very smooth bricks. The colours vary from light to bright red, yellow or brown and/or combinations of these.
- Use of cement, alternating with bricks, in wide horizontal or vertical rows.
- Stairwells with stained-glass windows in clean geometric patterns.
- Horizontal, straight lines.
- Use of expensive (and durable) materials: bluestone, metal and exotic wood varieties (ebony, mahogany, etc.).
- Geometric, straight forms: rectangle, square, circle, spiral.
- Wide use of ceramic tiles as wall cladding. Bright (contrasting) colours such as azure, green, red and brown were very much in vogue.

This list is only a sample of the typical Art Deco features that you can discover during the walk.

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Route description

1 We start our walk at the “**Hoge Mote**” reception and experience centre (Belevingscentrum). The restoration of this site is definitely worth seeing. Via interactive panels, audio recordings of stories, films and virtual reality, visitors can discover more of Flanders’ loveliest landscape, the devotion to Saint Hermes and the expertise in textile production. An interactive wall provides a fine introduction to Art Deco. Certainly worth a visit.

The Hoge Mote already had three towers, and with a fourth look-out tower the view is now complete. The Hoge Mote was originally a canon house, surrounded by water. It constituted one of the 9 “protective mounds” on the north side of Ronse. The Hoge Mote was the only one to survive the ravages of time and later served as the home of a textile baron, who had a textile factory built next to it.



The factory portion has been converted into the **Must – the Museum of Textiles**.

The jewel in the crown of the textile museum is the weaving mill, with operating looms. It is accessible only on an organized tour with a guide. You can buy tickets in the experience centre.

In the inner courtyard of the Hoge Mote, you can admire **colourful glass sculptures** by the Ronse artist and glazier **Jan Leenknecht**.

We now leave the inner courtyard, cross the bridge and go to the little park on the other side. There you will find yourself face to face with a **handsome example of distinctive Art Deco houses**. Despite the recessed and protruding series of façades and the variety in sizes, the specially designed large middle-class homes on the **J-B Mouroitplein** nevertheless make up a homogeneous whole. In some houses, you can immediately detect some of the typical characteristics of Art Deco: vaulted façades, stairwell with a portal, simplified patterns. The five houses on the right are particularly noteworthy: they were all built in red brick following the same concept. Given the arrangement of the façades, they can be seen as a single unit.



In the middle of the park you will find the statue “**Huiselijke zorgen**” (Domestic cares) by **Rik Wouters**. This sculpture dates from 1913 and is an intimate representation of a housewife contemplating her daily cares.

We now continue in the direction of the **Grote Markt** and we see the **Obelisk** that adorns the market square. This 12-metre high monument in bluestone dates back to 1818 and once served as a public fountain. At the top is the coat of arms of Ronse with the crowned two-headed Habsburg eagle. When the Grote Markt was renovated, the town hall was also given a facelift. The building dates from 1949-1953 and was designed by the architect Frans Blockx. A large wooden turret was mounted on the rooftop. This is topped by an octagonal spire on which, like the obelisk, we see a crowned two-headed eagle.

The city boasts countless cafés, each more colourful than the next. Three cafés are listed monuments, thanks to their lovely ceramic tile images. Two of them are on the Grote Markt. The **beautiful glazed wall tiles in the Brasserie “Harmonie”** and, **across the street, the Brasserie “Local Unique”** are veritable showpieces. Feel free to take a look and enjoy a local beer.



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2 We now leave the Grote Markt via the passageway across from the town hall, and cross the Oude Vesten.

We come to the **Charles Vandendoorenstraat**, named for one of the nineteenth-century pioneers of the Ronse textile industry. It is a typical residential street with row houses built mainly between 1895 and the beginning of the First World War. This neighbourhood is part of the 19th-century expansionary phase of the city, to which the railway station also belongs. The street gives a good idea of the prosperity and confidence in the future that the population of Ronse enjoyed. Most of the houses have maintained their original character. House numbers 10 (now a gourmet restaurant called “Maison D.”) and 14 are perfect examples of the eclectic style, in which several different styles were combined. Notice also the fine sgraffito panels above the windows of house number 10. Sgraffito is a technique in which line drawings are engraved in fresh mortar and then coloured.

From the Kerkplein, the stately neo-Gothic **Saint Martin’s Church** casts its gaze upon us. The church was completed in 1896 and is built principally of red brick. The fine stained-glass windows, with scenes from the Old and New Testaments, belong to the loveliest of their kind and are certainly worth a visit.



3 We continue to the right and walk along **J-B. Dekeyserstraat**. Around midway along this street you will see a toy store where at the very top of the building you can spot a metal ornament, a little harp. In the past, this was an organ manufacture. Their first commission was to build the organ in the new Saint Martin Church nearby.

At the end of this street, we cross over the Guissetplein and turn into the first street on the right: the **Charles de Gaullestraat**. This is where we begin our discovery of the Art Deco district.

The first building we encounter is a sizeable one:

The **Saint Anthony of Padua College** (now the Sint-Antoniuscollege) is a 19th-century complex with dormer windows. It is made up of sober structures in the Flemish Renaissance Revival style, of brick with sporadic bluestone for the sills and capstones. We can recognize the horizontalism and stylised vaulted gate on the corner of the Collegestraat.



On the other side of the street, you can see the **19th-century industrial building of the former mechanical weaving mill: “Usine du Vieux Moulin – Guisset Frères”**.

In the beginning of the 20th century, when the building was occupied by the Post Office and the Chamber of Commerce, it was endowed with an Art Deco interior. Many lovely elements still survive – note among other things the many decorative (floral) cast-iron elements that adorn the façade and the window frames. This building is now the head office of “Alpinter”, an internationally renowned company that produces outdoor items, mainly tents and other camping equipment.

4 After that, we turn left and walk into the **Gefusilleerdenlaan**, where a number of typical houses can be seen on the right-hand side. On the left stands the former textile manufacture “Tissage C. et P. Dupont”. For many decades, a great deal of sweat flowed here from the strenuous labours of the textile workers. Their living conditions were far from rosy: long days at work, child labour and insalubrious accommodation made for a lot of misery. Today, this is a sports and fitness centre.

At the end of the street on the other side, we can see the **Pessemiersbrug** (bridge), which was built around 1920. It was one of the earliest concrete structures in Belgium.

We now cross this bridge and see on our left, at the beginning of the **Saint-Sauveurstraat** (the street of Our Saviour), next to a villa dating from the interwar period, an Art Deco jewel, No. 16, where several typical features are clearly visible: stairwell, colourful stained-glass windows with geometric patterns, iron parapets, etc. On its right, in mirror image, stands a building in a simplified Art Deco style.

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5 We now cross back over the bridge, cross the street again and go left on the **Viermaartlaan**. Several Art Deco houses adorn this street. Numbers 9, 21, 23, 27-29 in particular feature decorative masonry with patterns typical of the style: stylised flowers, lovely protruding and supportive corbels, small front gardens enclosed in ironwork and lovely gates, etc.

Halfway down, we turn right into the **Gomar Vandewielelaan**. On the left, we see an entire row of typical Art Deco homes. Remarkably, the 4 row houses with numbers 69-67-65-63 are mirror images of each other. The identical numbers 69 and 63 stand alongside the identical numbers 67-65 with colourful façades in yellow and red brick.

When we are nearly at the end of this street, we turn right into the **Léopold Sturbautstraat**. This private lot from the early 1930s was very soon built over. Here you can enjoy the many Art Deco homes to your heart's delight. Despite the repeated elements, each house maintains its own identity. We will give you a brief summary below of the typical features on the right-hand side of the street:

- No. 47: typical door in a stepped frame and a transom window with glass panes and lovely stained glass
- No. 45: beautiful stained-glass windows
- No. 43: very colourful and authentic Art Deco house, beautifully finished iron gate on the upper floor
- No. 41: door with decorative forged iron and stepped frame, finished with green ceramic tiles
- No. 33: substructure covered with green ceramic tiles, the protruding floor is supported by a massive substructure
- No. 13: sober cemented and protruding façades and contrasting black glazed tiles. A narrow door frame on the left and garage door on the right.
- No. 11: yellow brick with decorative rows of masonry

We walk to the end of the street and cross over to look at the even numbers on the way back:

- No. 2: corner house, commercial style in yellow brick on a base of brown glazed tiles, playful façade composition with recessed and protruding surfaces
- No. 16: traditional concept, orange-red brick façade, adorned with cement rows (now painted), a garage door with lovely wrought iron work
- No. 28: fine black tiled façade, stylised floral pattern in the ironwork.
- No. 26: highly colourful ensemble in red and natural brick, bluestone, azure-coloured ceramics, distinguished door frame, entrance portal
- No. 32: flat, yellow brick in a decorative masonry pattern, windows and door with original woodwork and stained glass
- No. 40: row house in dark brick in a decorative pattern, wide oriel windows with lovely Art Deco stained glass in the transom windows
- Nos. 50-52: two identical Art Deco houses built in dark brick in a decorative masonry pattern and adorned by (now painted) cement elements, wrought iron door between square pillars with a floral pattern.

6 Feast your eyes and walk on further to the right until you reach the **Koningin Astridplein (Queen Astrid square)**. Before you stands the **Dr. Ovide Decroly school**. You can see at once that both old and new elements are combined in the school building. Older elements include the stylised decorative forms, the little tower as a motif and the bluestone wall base. Newer elements are mainly the large metal windows and door. In the garden stands a statue of Ovide Decroly. This Ronse resident was known for his pedagogical method, which met with great success and was applied even beyond Belgium.

We continue to follow the pavement to the right and walk on until the first street on your right: the **Pierre D'Hauwerstraat**. The houses on this street seem a bit newer than those in the Sturbautstraat. It also has a greater variety of architectural styles, which does not detract from their attractiveness:

- Nos. 48-46: set of two houses in mirror image
- Nos. 38-36: striking dormer windows
- Notice on the other side of the street right across from nos. 38-36, house no. 21: a classic example of the Art Deco design language: the inscription "Garage" in Art Deco lettering
- No. 24: semi-detached house in orange-red brick with contrasting white rows
- Nos. 6-4: two houses in mirror image, with circular stained-glass windows
- On the corner of the Gefusilleerdenlaan, we see a former butcher shop, in which the Art Deco style can be seen in the typical yellow brick on a red base and the stepped masonry.



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7 We turn off to the left into the **Fostierlaan**:

- First, take a look at the other side of the street: on the corner of the Charles de Gaullestraat and the Fostierlaan, we can still see a clear remnant of Art Deco style. In this corner house (no. 60) in red brick and yellow ceramic tiles, the geometry can be easily seen in the horizontal masonry pattern.
- Nos. 55-53: noteworthy and impressive town house from 1928, in neo-Louis XVI style, richly ornamented front façade made of sandstone and bluestone, marked by an upper layer swinging inward and outward, topped by a rounded vase and a turret with a weathervane
- Nos. 51-49: clean geometric forms in the façades. On no. 51 take note of the masonry on the balcony. Number 49 has a wrought iron door with accompanying decorative lanterns.

On the other side of the street:

- No. 50: contrast between the brown faience tile-covered base and the yellow brick upper structure, beautifully glazed iron door and a garage door with Art Deco patterns
- Nos. 48-46: erected in mirror image, the red-brick façade of the house on the left (no. 46) has now been painted white, which slightly breaks up the original concept of symmetry. Beautifully designed doors with typical stylised floral Art Deco patterns.

At the end of the Fostierlaan, we come to the Hoogstraat and follow the pavement to the right, until we reach the **Rooseveltplain (square)**. Two buildings are worth mentioning, as they have preserved their authentic look over the years:

- On the other side of the street, we see no. 23, now “optiek K. Dhondt”: worth noting on this corner building are the white glazed tiles adorned with green rows and the many colourful faience scenes in Art Nouveau style. In the centre, we can see a lovely angel figure, flanked by scenes with garlands and florals. Above it, at the centre of the vaulted scene is a figure on a medallion, surrounded by floral elements. Lastly, 2 remarkable wrought iron lion heads adorn the upper façade.
- At about the middle of this square, on the left-hand side, we see once again an imposing Flemish Renaissance Revival house, no. 11. On the right-hand side façade, we can see the initials “CM” of the Cambier-Magherman family: a lawyer, owner of a textile manufacture and former city councillor of Ronse. At the top of the Kruisstraat, he also had a stately home built (now the “Boeckhaege” restaurant), and he also had numerous workers’ cottages built. At present, the real estate company “De Nieuwe Haard” occupies the premises.

8 We continue walking to the right in the direction of the **St.-Martensstraat**. On the square where the Rooseveltplain splits into the Wijnstraat and the St.-Martensstraat, stands the artwork titled “**The dancing stones**”. The pressure of the water makes the heavy granite blocks dance on the water, and a puddle forms below. So it is not surprising that the popular name for this spot is “the puddle”. In the Middle Ages, this was a watering place for horses.

St.-Martensstraat

We now walk across the boundary of “**De Vrijheid**”. This is the historic neighbourhood around the St Hermes Basilica, which includes the Kleine Markt (small market square), the Bruulpark and the Old St Martin’s Church. Its origins date back to the High Middle Ages, in the 11th century. Over the last few years, the city administration has undertaken a historical revaluation of this part of the city. The site is definitely worth a visit.



Once we have walked down the **St.-Martensstraat**, we can find the **Old St Martin’s Church** to our right. The church was built around 1050 as a parish church for what was then the town centre. The oldest part still standing today is the tower, which dates from the 15th century and has a typical octagonal pinnacle. After the New St Martin’s Church, which we have already seen on our walk, was consecrated in 1896, the old building served various purposes, including a sawmill, a cinema and a garage, until a Ronse patron of the arts could no longer bear to see its state of decay and turned the building into a spot for foodies: “De Passage”, definitely recommended for food-lovers.

9 Kleine Markt

Via the lovely redesigned **Albertpark**, we walk past the **World War I memorial monument**. This monument, erected in 1923 and known locally as “Den Bluuten Pompier” (The naked fireman), is the work of the architect Valentin Vaerewyck and the renowned sculptor Oscar Sinia, based on a design by Godefroid Devreese.

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We now leave this park along the pavement on the left until we end up right before the side façade of the **St Hermes Basilica**. This Late Gothic structure with Romanesque remnants has lovely choir stalls with a fine bronze and marble lectern (1685), which is considered one of the masterpieces of Mechelen bronze casting. Next to the high altar on the right are the remarkable reliquary shrine and life-sized equestrian statue of St Hermes. In the niche across from the St Hermes altar is an oak beam with iron hooks, where excessively turbulent people with mental illness would be chained up during the priest's homily. The St Hermes Church (with its crypt) was given the status of a basilica on 2 February 2019. This historic event marked a milestone in the history of the city of Ronse and the cult of its patron saint, Saint Hermes. Feel free to go inside.

10 St.-Hermesstraat

Along the left-hand side of the basilica is the entrance to the fine Romanesque **St Hermes** crypt. Thanks to the architectural blend of Romanesque and Early and Late Gothic styles this crypt, with its 32 columns, is a veritable “underground cathedral”. It was consecrated in 1089 as the burial place for the relics of the town patron saint, St Hermes, and was a highly frequented pilgrimage site for people with mental illnesses in the Middle Ages. You can still see the well, the dual access to the upper church, the built-in burial chamber and the bathing area for the sick. It is the jewel in the crown of Ronse.

St Hermes and the Fiertelommegang

In the Middle Ages, people with mental illnesses came on pilgrimage to Ronse from all over in the hope of finding healing from their patron, St Hermes. The condition for healing was some form of physical effort. And so the procession known as the “Fiertelommegang” was born, a day-long tour of 32.6 kilometres along the finest landscapes. Every year, on the Sunday after Pentecost, the shrine containing the relics of St Hermes is carried around the city of Ronse to offer protection to its residents. When the shrine and pilgrims return to the town centre, they are preceded by a historical procession in which many actors re-enact the history of Ronse and the life of St Hermes. Since 2009, the centuries-old tradition of the Fiertelommegang is recognised as part of the Flemish Immaterial Cultural Heritage. There is also a process underway to get the Fiertel included on UNESCO's list of world heritage.



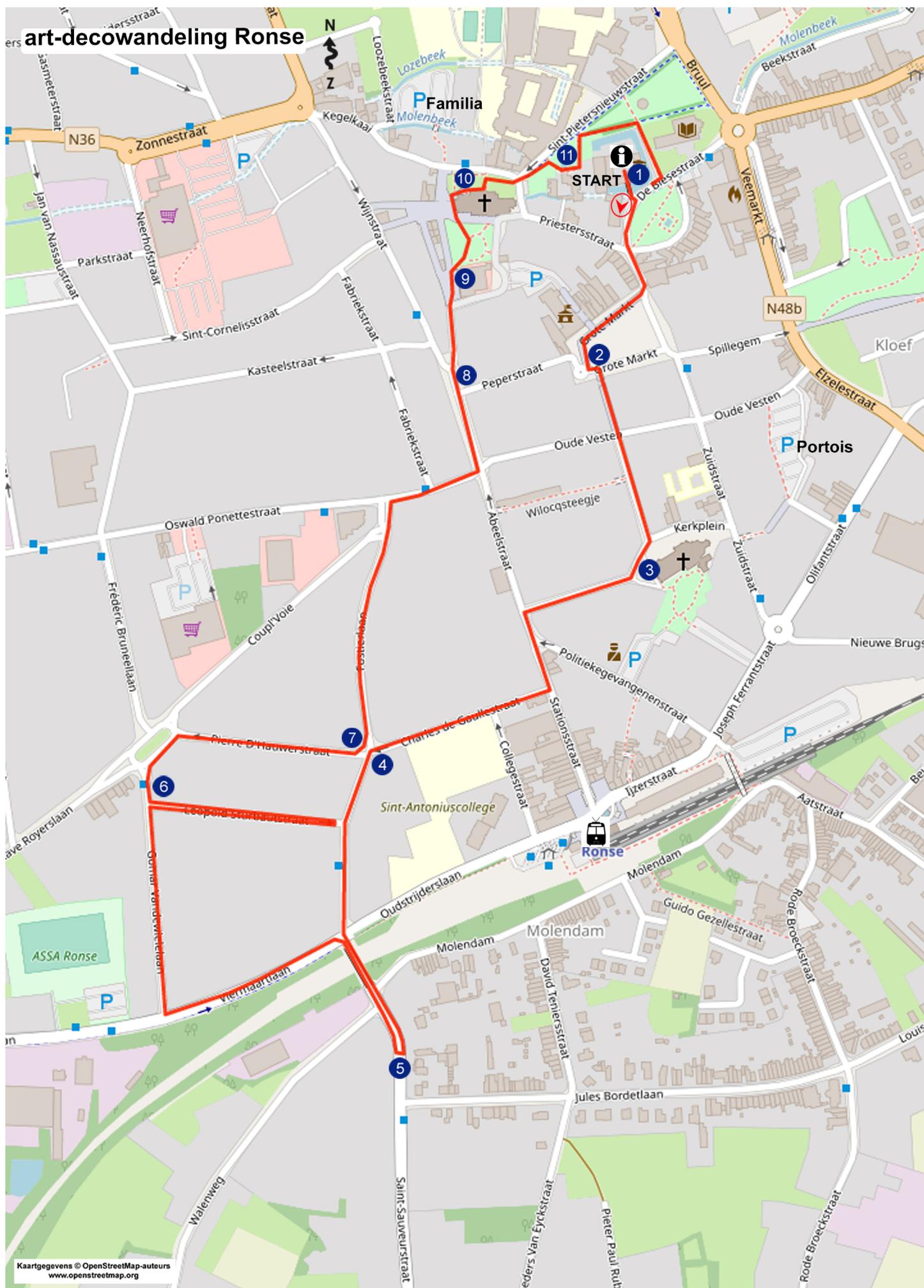
Back outside, we head off to the right in the direction of the **Bruulpark**. Midway through the park, we come face to face with a life-sized statue of the 19th-century priest **Modest Glorieux**, who played an important role in caring for the less fortunate residents of Ronse. A bit farther on, you can see the **Spanjaardenkasteel** (the Spaniards' castle). In the 17th century, this building was occupied by a garrison of Spanish soldiers who were entrusted with keeping public order in the city, whence its name.

11 Next to the castle is another attraction: a **loom** that signifies that you are close to the **Must – Museum of Textiles**. The saw-tooth roof evokes the former use of the museum, namely, the Cambier-Robette textile factory. The entrance is from the inner courtyard of the Hoge Mote. A very unusual feature of this museum is that every spinning frame and every weaving loom still works. So you can see a wonderful demonstration of how the locally varied production developed.

We walk through the **Bruulpark** and follow the path between the Hoge Mote and the Library. And so we are back at the starting point of our walk.

Have you taken any nice photos during the walk?

Share your photos via social media and use the hashtags: #ronse, #visitronse, #stadmetuitzicht, #vlaamseardennen.



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Ronse treasure hunt: “Art Deco”

Would you like to get to know the lovely Art Deco houses of our Hermes city in a fun way? Then this treasure hunt is just the thing for you! Dive into the Art Deco period in Ronse.

This treasure hunt follows the route of the Art Deco walk.

A list for your answers is provided on the last page.

Curious about the right answers? Send an email to toerisme@ronse.be

PART 1: PHOTO QUESTIONS

The following photos are of façade elements you will see along the way.

To make things easier, we put the photos in the order of the walk.

Note the street names where you see each of these façades.

Photo 1:



Photo 2:



Photo 3:



Photo 4:



Photo 5:



Photo 6:



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PART 2: QUESTIONS ALONG THE ROUTE

Here, too, the questions are arranged in the order of the tour. The questions begin only after the Pessemiersbrug (Pessemiers bridge).

Pessemiersbrug

Question 1: This bridge is a lovely example of the Art Deco style being used.

Below is a summary of 4 characteristics, 3 of which are typical Art Deco features that we can find here as well. *One* of these does not apply:

- a) Geometric patterns
- b) Garlands – and wavy ornamentation
- c) Straight lines, stylized design
- d) Cement structure

Saint-Sauveurstraat

Question 2: Indicate the house address of this home, which is a jewel of Art Deco style. It has a clearly visible clean geometric stairwell on the street side.

Viermaartlaan

Question 3: There are two adjacent houses with a small front garden surrounded by beautiful Art Deco ironwork. Which addresses do we mean?

Gomar Vandewielelaan

Question 4: In this street, there is a set of 4 very special row houses – what is so special about them? Complete the following sentence: “Numbers 69-63 and 67-65 are built in each other’s”.

Léopold Sturbautstraat

Question 5: At house no. 37, you can see an inscription on the wall base to the left of the door with the name of the architect and the year (in Art Deco letters).

Question 6: Find the number of the house with a wall base in striking green ceramic tiles.

Question 7: There is a house with a remarkable combination of very colourful red and yellow bricks, bluestone, azure ceramics, and a striking doorway and entrance portal. Which number is this?

Pierre D’Hauwerstraat

Question 8: The garage of this house is in Art Deco style, built of brick with a contrasting painted cement substructure. There is a marked central doorway with the inscription “Garage” in Art Deco lettering. Which house are we looking for?

Question 9: There is a semi-detached house in orange brick with contrasting white rows and broad window frames continuing to the rounded right corner.

Which house number are we looking for?

Question 10: As we have already mentioned earlier during the walk, it is customary for Art Deco homes to be built in mirror image. This street also has two fine examples of this. We have already seen numbers 48-46. But further on, there is another striking example of this phenomenon.

Tip: the façade has a yellow brick on a base of brown glazed tiles and bluestone.

Question 11: On the façade of the above double home, you can also see a decorative inscription with the name of the architect in striking Art Deco letters. Name the architect:

Fostierlaan

Question 12: In this street, we can find a typical Art Deco home with a lovely glazed door and garage door with Art Deco patterns. Tip: the brown faience tiles of the base contrast with the yellow brick upper structure. Which house are we talking about?

We hope you have enjoyed this treasure hunt. Curious to find the answers?

Send an e-mail to: toerisme@ronse.be - Website: www.visitronse.be

ANSWER SHEET

ANSWERS TO PHOTO QUESTIONS:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ALONG THE ROUTE:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.