

Elisabeth de Lestrieux's Exploration of Vernacularized Modernism

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This research focuses on the work of the Dutch Elisabeth de Lestrieux (1933-2009) who made a successful career as designer setting a trend of converting out-of-use Dutch farmhouses in houses to live in. She contributed to the recognition of the vernacular tradition in her quest of transforming the spaces instead of destroying them. De Lestrieux considered that the vernacular tradition interpreted through the modernist approach to dwell confers a vivid sense of belonging to the experience of inhabiting the spaces. She was a pioneer, exploring design possibilities, always prioritizing the co-presence of nature, the interconnection between indoor and outdoor and the balance between simplicity and abundance. De Lestrieux highly personal aesthetics received recognition during her lifetime, once her statements about modern dwelling and her exploration of solutions as a designer were broadcasted in diverse media and influenced the lifestyle options of many of readers, namely in The Netherlands.

In this article, the authors discuss five of her homes as case studies of her responses to interior design problems, including one in Loulé, in the south of Portugal (Figure 1) where she spent the last 14 years of her life. When living in Portugal, De Lestrieux accepted commissions to design interior spaces as a restaurant for Dutch clientele, family houses and the landscaping of a private home. Her own house in Loulé was all white, on top of a hill with an extensive garden area also delineated by white walls in a sign of acknowledging the local culture. This article was published in a book about Documents and Histories (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2023) of women's designers and architects and is receiving particular attention and interest considering its contribution to the studies of a vernacularized modernism in the spaces to dwell. This investigation enlightens the role of a designer addressing, during decades, topics as sustainability, nature balance, and materials authenticity which inspires further research about core challenges for the design in the present time.

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FIGURE 1
Location of de Lestrieux five homes: four in the Netherlands and one in Loulé, Portugal. Number 6 is the location of her tomb.

