



20 Rue Royale
Brussels

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20 RUE ROYALE

20 rue Royale is located near the Royal Palace and the Parliament buildings in Brussels. On the upper floors it houses offices for the Bank's General Management and operational departments, while the ground floor contains impressive reception and meeting rooms. The important role the bank has played in the economic and social history of Belgium pervades the unique atmosphere of the premises.



100 Belgian Francs' bank note of the Société Générale de Belgique, established issuing bank in 1837

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The origins of rue Royale go back to **1731** when a **fire destroyed the Dukes of Brabant's Palace on the Coudenberg hill** which dominates the town. The site was left a pile of ruins for more than forty years until the Governor General of the Austrian Netherlands, Duke Charles of Lorraine, decided to rebuild it to give Brussels a new large and impressive building. He commissioned two renowned French architects, **Jean-Benoît Barré** and **Barnabé Guimard**, to undertake the work.

The surrounding area was remodelled in line with the strict tenets of urban construction at the time and took on the clean lines of the neoclassical style. This part of Brussels is called the **Royal Quarter**. It is one of the most **essential place in the history of Belgium** as it had a prime view of the tumultuous events during the 1830 Belgian Revolution. On land formerly used by the Dukes of Brabant as their hunting estate, the planners laid out the Brussels Park, a large public garden edged by four main residential streets, one of which is rue Royale.

Rue Royale was built in 1787 to link place de Louvain to place Royale. Two-storey townhouses were designed with classical and symmetrical façades. The owners were businessmen, lawyers, bankers and political figures.



View of the Brussels Park on a winter Sunday, Franz Gailliard, 1886, oil on canvas, BNP Paribas Fortis Collection

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Portrait of the Dutch monarch William I of Orange. Anonymous, oil on canvas, BNP Paribas Fortis Collection

The year 1822 marks the beginning of the history of the Bank : William I of Orange, King of the Netherlands, establishes the **Société Générale des Pays-Bas pour favoriser l'industrie nationale (General Company of the Netherlands for Promoting Trade and Industry)**. This bank is a forerunner of Société Générale de Belgique and of today's BNP Paribas Fortis. It is headquartered at 3 Rue Montagne du Parc, a street which runs at right angles to Rue Royale.

The Bank acquires the first building facing on to Rue Royale in 1904, so that clients could reach the cashiers' desks more easily. Further acquisitions followed and in 1922 that of the private mansions between Montagne du Parc and Baron Horta streets.

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In 1934, a Belgian law requires the **split up of 'mixed banks'**, i.e. financial institutions which combine deposit banking activities and those of a merchant bank with corporate stakes. Société Générale de Belgique, being a perfect example of this type of bank in Europe for a century long, accordingly transferred its retail banking activities to a newly-created subsidiary, Banque de la Société Générale de Belgique. Then, the two distinct entities had their premises separated : the holding company took over 20 Rue Royale, and the retail bank moved into the offices along Montagne du Parc and Baron Horta streets.

In 1972, in order to meet the new organizational requirements of the company, **all the buildings on rue Royale were completely rebuilt**, preserving the neoclassical features of the façades and recreating the original and historic decoration of the rooms on the ground floor.



Main entrance at 20 Rue Royale by the 1910s

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The **Kings' room** is so named after the portraits of the sovereigns hung there, from the Dutch monarch William I of Orange to Albert II, the current monarch of Belgium. During World War I the **Belgian Relief** - whose task was to ensure imports of essential foodstuffs - met there under the chairmanship of **Emile Francqui**, **Director of the Société Générale de Belgique** and **Herbert Hoover**, **later President of the United States of America**.

The **Lorraine room** takes its name from the two 18th century tapestries which adorn its walls. They display the coat of arms of François of Lorraine, spouse of Empress Maria-Theresa of Austria, ruler of the former Austrian Netherlands.

The **Tapestry Gallery** connects these two formal rooms. It is colloquially called after the set of five tapestries,



The main lobby with the counters by the 1910s

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woven between 1742 and 1763 in the **Van der Borcht brothers' workshop** in Brussels. Illustrating episodes of the life of Moses, they are based on masterpieces by the Flemish painter Jean Van Orley (1665-1735).

In the lobby, there is a **painting by the Belgian neo-impressionist Franz Gailliard (1861-1932)** showing a view of the Brussels Park on a winter Sunday in 1886.

Some of the Collection's strongest and more interesting works of art are also on show at 20 Rue Royale, which contributes to promote Belgian 20th century artists. It reflects the Bank's commitment rooted in a long-standing tradition of artistic philanthropy.



The Lorraine room



Cover photo - Main entrance at 20 Rue Royale, Brussels • Back photo - The Lorraine room, detail from the door • BNP Paribas Fortis • Printed on paper sourced from sustainable forests • 2012



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