

MODERN MASTER

Paris-based architect and designer-of-the-moment Joseph Dirand creates chic spaces informed by historic visions of contemporary living; By Hamish Bowles.



In 1975, *Vogue* called François Catroux “the crack interior designer of Paris . . . who moves space and volume, texture and light, objects and planes with the sense of an architect, the eye of an artist.” Through the years, the magazine has documented Catroux’s elegantly urbane work for tastemakers from Marie-Hélène de Rothschild to Lauren Santo Domingo, but in 1970 Horst photographed Catroux in his own house, with his rangily elegant wife, Betty (muse and intimate of Yves Saint Laurent), lolling against the polished-steel chimney breast. *Vogue* dubbed the exhilarating space an “Op-art-ment . . . a 1970 space capsule within a historic building” that was filled with African sculpture and the designer’s “favored surfaces of stainless steel, lacquer, slicked plastics, and matte fabrics.”

When it came to creating a home for his young family, the thoroughly twenty-first-century architect and designer Joseph Dirand, 43, also fell on the stately proportions of an apartment in a regal seventeenth-century *hôtel particulier* on Paris’s Left Bank. Dirand laid parquet de Versailles floors

AN EDUCATION

JOSEPH DIRAND, PHOTOGRAPHED AT LEFT IN HIS PARIS APARTMENT (PAINTING BY LAWRENCE CARROLL), AND A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION, RIGHT: BETTY CATROUX IN THE “OP-ART-MENT” CREATED BY HER HUSBAND, THE MODISH DECORATOR FRANÇOIS CATROUX.

of grayed wood, and used Italian plaster on the walls and a faintly yellowed whitewash on the woodwork to suggest that it had been stained by decades of cigarette smoke. He filled the apartment with furniture designed by the architects he admires—Oscar Niemeyer, Jean Prouvé, and Le Corbusier among them—reflecting an aesthetic education that had begun in childhood. Dirand’s mother was a fashion designer and his father, Jacques Dirand, a noted photographer of interiors. Dirand remembers his father reviewing contact sheets at home every evening. “It was so wide, the range of things that I saw,” Dirand says. “I was educated with visuals; it was just information, information, information.”

As a student at the École Nationale Supérieure d’Architecture Paris-Val de Seine, and subsequently at DESIGN>158

DIRAND: MATTHIEU SALVAING. SITTINGS EDITOR: HAMISH BOWLES. GROOMING: OUERDIA SENOUCHE.



Paris-Belleville, the precocious Dirand was already practicing architecture. He received his first commissions at the age of 23—a store for the fashion designer Junko Shimada, a house in India, an office, and a small apartment for family friends.

Dirand's brother, Adrien, has followed in his father's footsteps and has photographed the projects in the new *Joseph Dirand: Interior* (Rizzoli)—a book that reveals the arc of Joseph's evolving aesthetic. In the beginning, his guru was the minimalist John Pawson. Today he enjoys the balance "between the ornamental and the abstract," citing the inspiration of a Richard Serra sculpture in the unexpected setting of an ancient monastery rather than a glacial contemporary gallery.

He first experimented with this aesthetic in a Paris boutique of Pierre Balmain, and a slew of fashion-world projects followed: Balenciaga, Chloé, Rick Owens, Emilio Pucci, Alexander Wang, and Givenchy among them. "It was very schizophrenic," he recalls. "One is very feminine, one is very glamorous, one is very radical and brutalist. How do you reinvent yourself every time? The exercise gave my work a lot of freedom.

"Fashion was an important chapter," he adds, but he was troubled by the ephemeral nature of some of his projects. "It's pretty violent when work is just erased because of trends, or the brand changes, or the store moves."

So he gravitated toward the hospitality industry instead, memorably creating the soaring-ceilinged restaurant Monsieur Bleu at the Palais de Tokyo opposite the Eiffel Tower. At Loulou, the Italian restaurant in the Musée des Arts

MISE-EN-SCÈNE

A DIRAND SAMPLING, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: THE STAIRCASE OF A COMPLETED HOUSE IN FRANKFURT; A BEDROOM IN HIS PARIS HOME; AND DIRAND'S MASTER BEDROOM, WITH AN OSCAR NIEMEYER CHAIR AND A PHOTOGRAPH BY IRVING PENN.

Décoratifs, meanwhile, he was inspired by the eclecticism of the museum's holdings. And at the new Joël Robuchon restaurant in Manhattan he's creating a garden of green marble, green plants, and a few pieces from developer Aby Rosen's superb art collection.

"I'm no longer a frustrated architect who only does interior design," Dirand says, "and I'm happy it happened so late, as I am much more mature. Now I feel free to select projects that are really different one from the other."

Currently these include a reimagining of Miami's Surf Club, where members including Al Capone, the shah of Iran, and Frank Sinatra once partied hard; a glamorous house in Frankfurt inspired by Czech Cubism; and a truly spectacular triplex penthouse on Manhattan's downtown waterfront that looks like the Gotham Deco HQ of a comic-strip baddie.

Dirand began to design the interiors for a client's 370-foot yacht and ended up designing the ship itself, its sleek lines suggestive of a Jazz Age liner but its slither of infinity pool splicing the deck entirely 2017. He is also developing a spectacular five-mile island in the Bahamas, once owned by a henchman of Pablo Escobar, where he is designing sustainable and ecologically sensitive modular housing kits inspired by Jean Prouvé and Japanese architecture. "It's going to take the rest of my life!" he says. □

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