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JOSEF FRANK CHAIRS  
GATHER AROUND A  
CUSTOM DINING TABLE  
BY FABRIZIO CASIRAGHI.  
PENDANT BY ISAMU  
NOGUCHI; SCONCES BY  
VICTOR LEVI. FOR  
DETAILS SEE RESOURCES.

# FRENCH EVOLUTION

Designer *Fabrizio Casiraghi*  
breathes new life into a  
grand Paris flat

TEXT BY JOSHUA LEVINE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CERRUTI DRAIME

THE LIBRARY FEATURES A GAE AULENTI MARBLE COCKTAIL TABLE, A 19TH-CENTURY FRENCH RUG, AND A PAIR OF DAVID HICKS ARMCHAIRS COVERED IN A PIERRE FREY FABRIC. VINTAGE LAMPS; 20TH-CENTURY AFRICAN MASK.  
OPPOSITE CASIRAGHI DEvised AN ABSTRACT ELLSWORTH KELLY-INSPIRED ARTWORK FOR THE CEILING OF THE ENTRY HALL. THE 19TH-CENTURY FRENCH ARMCHAIRS WEAR A NOBILIS FABRIC. 20TH-CENTURY PAINTING (LEFT).



THEODORE SCHEMPP



LEFT A CLAUDE KINTZLER MOBILE HANGS IN A HALL WHOSE SHADE AND VALANCE ARE MADE OF A CLARENCE HOUSE FABRIC. 1930s TABLE; MAISON LELEU RUG; JEAN ROYÈRE SCONCE. RIGHT CASIRAGHI IN THE LIBRARY.



ANTIQUE AND VINTAGE FURNISHINGS DECORATE THE LIVING ROOM, WHICH IS CROWNED BY AN ALEXANDRE LOGÉ CHANDELIER. ROBERT MARC PAINTING.



M

adame and Monsieur had it all worked out—or at least they thought they did. The fashionable Parisian couple bought a big apartment with many

tiny rooms in the 2nd arrondissement, and promptly knocked down all the walls. They had no children, and much as they tried, it didn't look like they were meant to have any. You can guess what happened next. Boom! A week after they moved in, Madame got pregnant. Then she got pregnant again. Suddenly they needed rooms and walls—in short, they needed the whole habitat for bourgeois Paris family life. So they started looking for a new home.

The place they found, a 4,800-square-foot maze of rooms and hallways, all on one floor, is as classical as the previous was bohemian. The building dates from 1900 but was designed to evoke an even earlier time. Elaborate ornamental moldings

summon the ghosts of the *ancien régime*. Decorating it would require a delicate touch. Somewhere between too stuffy and too funky lay the perfect balance, but where, exactly?

To help find it, the owners called upon Fabrizio Casiraghi, a young Italian designer who set up his own practice in Paris five years ago and has been causing a stir since then. Casiraghi grew up in modernist Milan and cut his design teeth at the influential Dimore Studio, the AD100 firm that showed the world what you could do with a hodgepodge of found objects and the full range of colors in a pack of crayons. In more ways than one, this apartment did not speak his native tongue.

“The project was complicated for me at the beginning, but in a good way—I love a challenge,” says Casiraghi. “It’s everything I don’t know. In Milan, this doesn’t exist. And with Dimore, it’s always a case of smooth boxes that you cover with objects and colors. This is the opposite—a box that talks a lot. You’ve got to enter a little bit on tiptoe.”

Take the apartment’s grand living room, for example. The walls are alive with the busy plasterwork filigree that is among the glories of French decorative art. Casiraghi even amped it up a bit by adding bronze-colored highlights in spots—if you’ve got it, flaunt it. But then he countered the rococo dazzle with two blunt, almost brutally abstract sculptured plaster ceiling fixtures by contemporary designer Alexandre Logé and wall lamps by Jean Royère with sinuous, tendril-like arms. The right balance had been struck.

Casiraghi likes to fresco his walls and ceilings. He’s commissioned constellations for the ceiling of his own charming flat, and had fanciful nymphs painted on the walls of the Proust salon at Drouant, the iconic Paris eatery that he just redid top to bottom. But the more he thought about it, the more he felt that such whimsy wouldn’t quite work here. “In an apartment that is already so *decorated* on its own, it’s better to go with

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LEFT IN THE CHILDREN'S BEDROOM, THE CUSTOM HEADBOARDS AND CANOPIES ARE MADE OF A PIERRE FREY FABRIC. A 1950s TABLE LAMP SITS ATOP A 19TH-CENTURY ENGLISH SIDE TABLE.

“I don't trust things that are too *à la mode*,” says the homeowner, who happens to work in the fashion business.



BELOW IN THE MASTER BATH, 19TH-CENTURY PRINTS HANG ABOVE THE WATER MONOPOLY TUB. THE STRIPED CURTAINS ARE MADE OF AN OUTDOOR FABRIC BY DEDAR. RIGHT A CUSTOM BED AND CURTAINS DECORATE THE MASTER BEDROOM. PIERRE FREY FABRIC-COVERED ARMCHAIRS BY PAOLO BUFFA; 18TH-CENTURY ARTWORKS; GREEN RIVER PROJECT SCREEN.



something more geometric,” says Casiraghi. “So we took forms à la Ellsworth Kelly, which is a reference that always comes in with me.” And there they are, two chunky, unexpected blue shapes hovering above you as you enter, startling but also right.

Casiraghi certainly has touchstones—his “paw,” as the French put it. Kelly, frescoes, Wiener Werkstätte, rounded corners, and lacquer are a few elements that show up regularly, but you have to look hard to see his paw print. “I don't have a real signature—if I had a style now, at age 33, what would I do at 50? I prefer adapting myself to the client and listening a lot.”

**CASIRAGHI'S PROJECTS** all start with a mood board of evocative images sent in by the client, and this one did too. But the mood board is never meant as a blueprint. It's more of a signpost toward an unknown destination. “What I like about Fabrizio is that he didn't come back with the same images as ours,” says Madame. In the kitchen, for instance, Casiraghi proposed a brick-colored terrazzo tile floor. Terrazzo has been basic Milanese vernacular for a long time—Casiraghi's grandmother's house had terrazzo floors. She loved the idea, but in Paris, terrazzo is a novelty that is currently having its moment. It's a little *m'as tu vu*—“Hey, look at me.”

“I don't trust things that are too *à la mode*,” says the homeowner, who happens to work in the fashion business.

“It's a little like seeing a movie with an actor who's too well known. You've got this incredible story, and then you find yourself saying, ‘Wait, isn't that . . .?’” In the end, the owners suggested using old *tomettes*, the glazed terra-cotta tiles that you see all over France. “It's the French version of the terrazzo, but we never would have ended up there without Fabrizio's original proposal.”

Of course, there was some pushing and pulling along the way. When is there not? Particularly when forceful personalities with strong preferences are collaborating, as they were here. “At the beginning, I think it was not so easy for Fabrizio,” says Madame. “There's what I like, and there's what *Monsieur mon mari* likes, and our taste isn't always the same. Sometimes it's like we're in two different countries.”

Solomonic compromises were occasionally required. Monsieur doesn't really like tassels, for instance. Madame loves them (as does Casiraghi). So the orange tassel on the big Noguchi ceiling lantern in the dining room gets hung when her friends come to dinner, and removed when they leave.

Mostly, though, everybody's tastes ultimately converged, to the point where it became difficult to tell whose paw was whose. “A friend of ours came over and said, ‘You can see it's Fabrizio, but at the same time, it's totally you.’” Which is exactly the compliment Madame was hoping for. ▀

NOBILIS FABRIC-COVERED  
SOFAS FLANK A CUSTOM  
MIRRORED COCKTAIL TABLE  
IN THE LIVING ROOM. ART  
(FROM LEFT) BY GEORGES  
ROUAULT AND AUGUSTE  
HERBIN; 1970s CHROME  
TABLE LAMPS ATOP CUSTOM  
PLEXIGLAS SIDE TABLES.



GEORGES ROUAULT © 2020 ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK, NY  
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