



WHITE ALBUM A
uniform palette gives the master bedroom its tranquillity; a suede-covered Oscar Niemeyer chair sits in front of an Irving Penn photograph.



BY TOM DELAVAN PHOTOGRAPHS BY SIMON WATSON

THE REINVENTION OF MINIMALISM

In his elegantly spare Paris apartment, architect-of-the-moment Joseph Dirand introduces sensuous materials and classical elements to sublime effect.

“JE SUIS FRANÇAIS, FRANÇAIS, FRANÇAIS,” Joseph Dirand says. “Parisien, parisien, parisien.” The son of Jacques Dirand, arguably the most famous interiors photographer of his day, and now himself one of fashion’s most heavily sought-after architects, Dirand has built a career on incorporating a quintessentially French style of design into otherwise minimalist interiors. In his hands, minimalism becomes the canvas for a portrait of a few classical elements, such as a parquet floor or a gilded bronze doorknob.

Despite the demands of his booming business, Dirand, 40, recently found time to renovate an apartment in Paris’s Seventh Arrondissement, where he now lives with his girlfriend and their two daughters, each from previous marriages. He wanted to find a home that would reflect the rhythm of his modern life — something that had a generously proportioned living and dining room for entertaining, and a series of bedrooms to provide ample

SPARE COMFORT

Below left: the mirrored closet doors reflect the bed and an Azucena scone. Right: Dirand beside a Living Divani modular sofa: "It's the first time I buy something as comfortable as that!" he says. The charcoal drawing is by Thomas Houseago.

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privacy for a family of four. "We live like parents for one week, then like teenagers the next," Dirand says with a smile, running his fingers through his thick brown hair. (Whippet-thin, with the bearded face of a 19th-century French poet, he is effortlessly stylish and good-looking in a way that makes Americans feel inadequate.) He settled on a design that is elegant and a little bit *louche*. "I don't care about style anymore, in a way I hate style, I hate design," he says. "It's about life, and generosity."

If he does indeed hate style, it is not apparent from his home. Dirand's apartment could easily be mistaken for one that is miraculously well-preserved, or painstakingly restored. The parquet de Versailles, the elaborate moldings, the bronze doorknobs are all, as the French would say, "*corrects*"; but they are not old. "I wished to find an apartment with all the details, but I had to create them instead," he says. Dirand used the best craftsmen in France to ensure that the details reflect the former glory



STONE AGE
A massive block of marble has only the slightest indent for the sink, with Waterworks fixtures. Concealed between the slab and the wall is an open space for storage.





LOW LIFE The living room highlights some of Dirand's favorite pieces. With the exception of the Ron Arad coffee table and the Le Corbusier cube stool, the furniture is vintage Pierre Jeanneret. The painting is by Lawrence Carroll, and the red ceramic piece by Sterling Ruby.

of the apartment. "I didn't want anything Haussmann," he says of the 19th-century plaster detailing often found in buildings of the period in Paris. Instead he sought to replicate the simplicity of Italian interiors of the 17th century from which he borrowed molding details and plain walls adorned with marmorino, a type of pigmented stucco. The slightly irregular walls subtly shift in color throughout the space, creamier in the bedroom and grayer in the entry and kitchen. The only surface that is painted is the millwork. He chose an off-white that "looks like it has darkened over time, with age and dirt — a white that is no longer white."

The traditional details of Dirand's apartment are balanced with modern elements, particularly in the kitchen and the master bathroom, where he uses large slabs of heavily veined marble, a signature of his work. "I like to look for materials that express a lot of disorder," he explains. In the kitchen, books, glasses, bottles and cooking utensils accumulate on the open shelf against his minimal impulse. While he doesn't feel it necessary to hide all signs of real life, Dirand has developed a sleight of hand for those things he finds aesthetically unacceptable. A vent on the counter, for example, is painted faux marble to match the Paonazzetto slab. "I hated that this stainless-steel thing ruined the beauty of this stone," he says with a grimace. Similarly the flat-screen television in the living room disappears into a cabinet at the touch of a button. Speakers, however, remain in plain sight. "I know all the tricks to hiding things, but sometimes it is better to show it in a nice way," he says, pointing to two large Wilson Audios that look like robots. "Yes, you can hide them in the wall, but not if you care about how they sound," he adds, raising the volume on the techno music to demonstrate.

The layout also provides floor-to-ceiling windows that allow light to flood into every single room of the apartment, a photographer's dream. "I think in pictures, because of my father," Dirand says. Every night after dinner, Jacques would look over film that had just come from the lab, selecting his favorite images and sharing them with his family. "Every day was a new place," he says. Today, Joseph creates highly detailed renderings for his projects complete with furniture and installed art,



Explaining the heavily veined marble, he says, 'I like to look for materials that express a lot of disorder.'



tweaking the design until the picture is perfect.

In his earlier work, Dirand tended toward the minimal with a palette that rarely veered from black and white. The purposefully limited vocabulary emphasized the drama of a few well-chosen objects. In one of his memorable early residential projects, an exquisite Cy Twombly painting, an Art Deco marble fireplace and a vintage Serge Mouille lamp stand out against stark white walls and an ebonized floor. But subsequent projects have challenged him to expand his vocabulary. As his style has evolved over the past decade, he has honed his skills at incorporating the elements that evoke a history of a place or a brand. Perhaps the best example of this is the Balmain flagship store, considered by many to be one of the most beautiful stores in Paris. When Dirand went to visit the space where Pierre Balmain once lived and worked, he was shocked to find a dropped ceiling, fluorescent lights and Sheetrock walls. "Who gave

permission to destroy this beauty?" he remarked at the time. He restored the space, drawing from the French vernacular: gilded bronze hardware, black-and-white limestone floors, boiserie and a marble fireplace that hints at the site's previous use as Balmain's residence. The only Modernist intervention is a series of floor-to-ceiling reflective panels that divide the space. Since then, he has gone on to design stores for Givenchy in Paris, Alexander Wang in Beijing and Rick Owens in London, has done the interiors of a luxury hotel in Mexico City and is currently working on Miami's Surf Club. "I realize that brands come to me not for my own style, but for the way I tell a story," he says.

His home accomplishes that, too, telling the very personal tale of someone who is deeply cultivated, effortlessly cool and, above all, enjoying life. "It's not a showroom, or something to show clients," Dirand says with a shrug. "It's just my home." ▀

THE KITCHEN SINK

Despite the sleek design, the kitchen gets a lot of use. A photograph by Dirand's friend François Halard leans on the open shelf. Dirand and his family often eat in the kitchen at a vintage Ettore Sottsass table, unusual for its absence of color. "It's as if he designed it for me," he says.