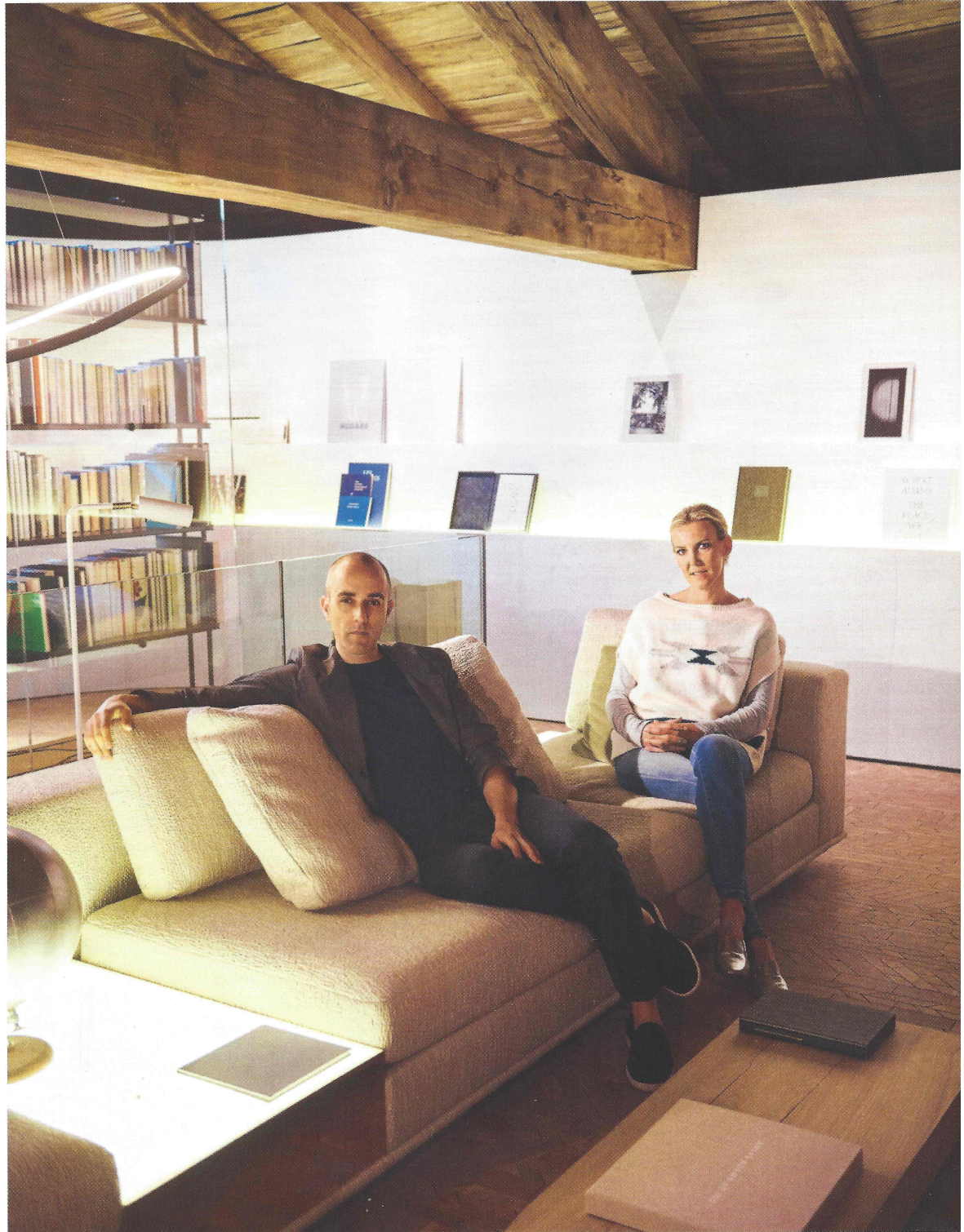


DESIGNER RAPHAËL NAVOT WITH HOTELIER AND ART COLLECTOR GARANCE PRIMAT IN ONE OF TWO NEW LIBRARY SPACES AT THE DOMAINE DES ÉTANGS. THE 'FUTURE' (PICTURED) AND 'PAST' LIBRARIES OCCUPY MEZZANINE LEVELS FLANKING THE ESTATE'S LA LAITERIE EXHIBITION SPACE



SHELF LOVE

A French chatelaine, a British bookseller and an Israeli designer unite to create the perfect library

Building a library from scratch to tell the history of creation might be a daunting task. But that's exactly what Garance Primat – with bookseller Nicky Dunne and multidisciplinary designer Raphaël Navot – set out to do at her estate in south-west France.

The estate, the Domaine des Étangs, is located in Massignac, a commune near the city of Angoulême, less than two hours from Paris by train. Visiting it, though, feels like travelling back in time. An 11th-century château sits at the heart of 1,000 hectares, with seven»



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ponds, pastures, gardens and a forest. The estate has been in the Primat family since the 1980s, when Garance's father, the French oil baron Didier Primat, bought it as a holiday home and renovation project. In 2015, Garance decided to turn the château into a hotel, filling it with an array of artworks and curiosities from her personal collection. Two years later, she transformed an adjacent former dairy barn into an exhibition space, La Laiterie.

'From the beginning, the idea was to mix art and books to tell a story of past, present and future that would mirror that of the Domaine itself,' says Primat. 'Nature is my passion, and also the one thing that is transmitted from generation to generation, so I wanted it all to gravitate around that one subject.'

There would be two libraries, located in mezzanines on each side of the barn and representing the past and the future respectively, with the art space in-between symbolising the present (its current show, 'Poussières d'Étoiles', features works by Yves Klein, Sol LeWitt and David Nash, among others). But how to start filling the

ABOVE, IN THE 'PAST' LIBRARY, AN 8M-LONG BOOKCASE MADE IN THE 1930S BY MICHEL ROUX-SPIZT FOR THE FRENCH NATIONAL ARCHIVES IS NOW FILLED WITH CLASSICS SUCH AS THE DRAKE MANUSCRIPT. THE LIBRARY IS FURNISHED WITH A BESPOKE HANGING LAMP BY NAVOT; MATTHEW HILTON'S 'OSCAR' OTTOMANS FOR SCP; A PAIR OF 'CLEMENTE' FLOOR LAMPS BY AERIN; TWO BESPOKE CHESTERFIELD MERIDIANS MADE BY ATELIER JOUFFRE; AND A BOOK STAND DESIGNED BY NAVOT AND CARVED FROM 200-YEAR-OLD SOLID WOOD FROM THE DOMAINE DES ÉTANGS BY A LOCAL ARTISAN

bookshelves? 'I've been collecting books all my life, either finding treasures among my father's things or buying rare pieces in auctions,' explains Primat. 'But, for this, I knew I needed to bring in professionals who could really advise me.'

Enter Dunne and Navot. Manager of the renowned bookshop Heywood Hill on London's Curzon Street, Dunne started offering a library curation service a few years ago and, with his team of 16, has put together all manner of bibliophile treats, from an American history-centred library in Maine to one about Antarctic exploration in London. 'Garance's plan was an unusual one, and unusually large,' he says, 'but her idea was crystal clear: she wanted a collection of books on the subject of knowledge transmission, featuring biology, geography, history, anthropology, art, literature and astronomy, mostly in English, yet with a good proportion of French authors, as well as some books in other languages.' It takes Dunne eight to 12 months to complete a library. The process includes several conversations with the client, establishing an >>



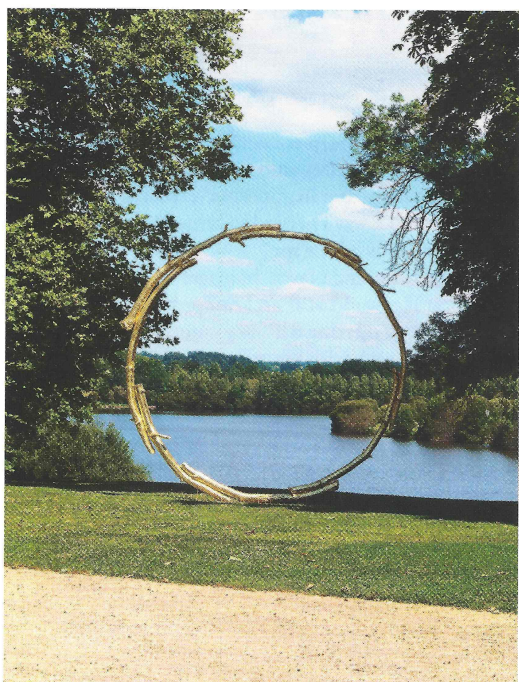
'I couldn't complete this project that celebrates knowledge and lock it up. It has to be for everyone'

ideal bibliography ('We do a lot of our research online, but I have yet to find a place as useful to my job as the London Library,' Dunne reveals), sourcing titles through auctions, bookshops, private sellers and publishing houses, and, of course, organising the library.

'That's when I talked to Raphaël,' says Dunne. 'Within the first minute of our first meeting in London, he had sketched some of the bookshelves we would end up using.' Born in Jerusalem and based in Paris, Navot recently garnered attention for his work at the Hôtel National des Arts et Métiers (W*226). Says Primat, 'He uses mainly natural raw materials and, rather than trying to subdue nature, he goes with its flow. He was perfect for this.'

It was up to Navot to create the Past and Future library spaces. The former emulates the familiar comfort of a gentleman's club, complete with Chesterfield sofas; the latter has a softer, airier atmosphere. In both, most of the furniture was custom-designed and crafted by Maison Jouffre using Pierre Frey textiles, but Navot also worked with Massignac artisans on the oak parquet floor and two polished stone desktops. 'But the most challenging part was the bookshelves. Until the early 20th century, books were all pretty similar and titles on their spines were horizontal. With the rise of marketing came different formats, vibrant colours and, for some reason, vertical titles. Have you noticed how we always tilt our heads in contemporary libraries?' says Navot. This, he explains, is why he decided to shelve the books back to front in the Future library, 'for a more Zen effect'. Spines are visible from a passageway behind the bookshelf.

Not that spending a few hours in the libraries – leisurely poring over the likes of Margaret Mead's *Male and Female*, Rosamund Young's *The Secret Life of Cows*, a first edition of Scott's *Last Expedition*, as well as Edward Barnard's *Photographic Atlas of Selected Regions of the Milky Way*, or the Drake Manuscript – wouldn't make anyone feel Zen. 'Which is why I wanted this project to be public,' says Primat. Advance booking is all that's needed for those wishing to visit. 'I couldn't complete this project that celebrates knowledge and then lock it up. It has to be for everyone.' ★
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ABOVE, THE 'FUTURE' LIBRARY FEATURES A HANDMADE OAK PARQUET IN 'FORÉT' END-GRAIN FLOORING, DEVELOPED BY NAVOT FOR OSCAR ONO. ALSO DESIGNED BY NAVOT ARE A VELVET ARMCHAIR, AND A 6M-LONG SOFA MADE BY ATELIER JOUFFRE. ON DISPLAY ARE MANY OBJECTS FROM PRIMAT'S ANTIQUE COLLECTION, INCLUDING A 1780 GREGORIAN TELESCOPE

LEFT, *THE SUN*, AN ARTWORK IN GILDED BRONZE BY SWISS ARTIST UGO RONDINONE, FRAMES ONE OF THE DOMAINE'S SEVEN PONDS