

House Proud

Fabrizio Casiraghi creates warm, eclectic spaces with a human spirit. Joshua Levine visits the architect and interior designer at home in Paris.

*Photographed by Lukas Wassmann
Styled by Rogelio F. Burgos*



When it came to finding a Paris apartment for himself, the young interior designer Fabrizio Casiraghi was willing to settle for a lot less than most of his clients. He didn't require anything nearly as grand as, say, the 4,500-square-foot apartment he's currently finishing in a building in the 7th arrondissement. But if Casiraghi's needs were modest, they were also nonnegotiable.

First, two outdoor terraces—one facing each way. “Two little terraces because I need to stay outside, drink a glass of rosé in the sun,” Casiraghi says. Second, a working fireplace. “A small dinner, with risotto around the fireplace, for me is very important—even if I don't have a table. My mother made these fantastic handmade napkins for me, and I give these to everybody and we sit on the pouf, on the sofa, with a plate of risotto and a glass of champagne, and everybody's very happy.”

Casiraghi had luck on his side. His dream apartment fell into his lap—fireplace, two terraces, and all—with the first real estate ad he answered. He didn't mind the fact that it was just 700 square feet and a fifth-floor walk-up because the space is an old *atelier d'artiste* with a huge north-facing window and a double-height ceiling in the living room. Casiraghi, 33, trained as an architect and urban planner at the Politecnico in Milan, where he grew up, and although he took a sharp swerve into

design in his mid-20s, the architect in him is still very aware of the proportions of an empty space. “Even if the apartment is small, this 13-foot ceiling is very important, because we feel like...”—Casiraghi pauses here to fill his lungs—“we breathe!”

We're standing on his front terrace overlooking a quiet street in the 9th arrondissement, not far from Montmartre. When Casiraghi moved to Paris four years ago, he lived in the trendy Marais, and he seems relieved to be rid of its oppressive chic. “I love this neighborhood. A lot of families with children, old people, straight people, gay people. A little bit hipster, but not too much. We don't have a lot of fashion boutiques. That's good,” he says.

That spirit of grounded realism is what Casiraghi's clients appreciate; his spaces are meant to serve the people who live in them, not the other way around. His own apartment is filled with a mixed bag of treasures found over the years. He brought the pouf that's in front of the fireplace back from Morocco, and the masks on the wall are from Kenya. “I traveled to Sweden and fell in love with that magnificent lamp there,” he says. “That's a Josef Hoffmann table. The room is the result of where I've traveled, where I've lived, the places I've visited, what I've seen in my life. For me that's very important.” »

This page: The living room of the interior designer Fabrizio Casiraghi's Paris apartment, with a hanging lamp by Josef Hoffmann, a 1930s Italian bust, a metal sculpture by Gareth Griffiths, and a framed series of geometric images by Casiraghi's father, Andrea. Opposite: A view of the kitchen, with Casiraghi peeking through the double archway; Lucio Fontana's study for his “Concetti Spaziali” hangs near the front door, and the table and fruit basket are by Josef Hoffmann.





All these disparate objects sit comfortably together, as if they've been sharing this home for a long time. "I like to create spaces that look like they've been lived in for 10 years," Casiraghi says. "You feel a little bit the same when you come into this apartment. You don't think I moved in two months ago."

There's some good art here too, not that it ever pokes you to pay attention to it. "That's a Lucio Fontana painting that nobody notices by the entrance. I don't hang it in the middle of the wall with a light facing the painting. I just put it next to the door, maybe behind the door. Even if nobody cares to see it, I see it every morning and I'm happy with that, and this is the way I like to approach my projects. I hate loud things. I hate those things you have to show people that you are rich or cultivated. That is what my family taught me."

Casiraghi comes from good Milanese bourgeois stock. His father worked in the art department of the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*; his mother was a university administrator. Their strong presence hovers over the apartment—quite literally. On the big living room wall is a series of stark graphic images, all signed PAPA. "He doesn't do things for the public, only for the family. It's easy, but I like the shapes. Also, it's very feng shui," says Casiraghi, who takes the Chinese principles of harmonious design quite seriously in his own low-key way. Casiraghi's mother is represented too. She isn't your typical Italian mother—Casiraghi says she can't cook worth a lick. But she can weave like Arachne: Her drapes frame the tall windows.

Casiraghi first moved to Paris after graduation to work with Dominique Perrault, the architect and urban planner who developed the massive François Mitterrand Library on the banks of the Seine. But what really set him on his path was volunteering at Villa Necchi Campiglio, an iconic 1930s mansion in the heart of Milan that is now a house museum. "I fell in love with the handles, the hinges, the way the floor was done," he says. "I fell in love with the kind of detail that is impossible to find in urban planning."

He spent the next two years at Milan's Dimore Studio, the influential partnership of the interior designers Emiliano Salci and Britt Moran that has become a kind of design academy unto itself. "They are obsessed with light, color, the atmosphere, mixing objects," Casiraghi says. "That is what I learned from them." Casiraghi had already begun to think beyond Dimore when the Paris-based design agent Julien Desselte gave him free rein with his small apartment in Venice. Desselte is a big wheel in the design world, and he could have picked any of the A-list architects he represented to help. Casiraghi crushed the commission, and Desselte made him part of his roster.

The attention he got for the Venice apartment, and Desselte's backing, helped Casiraghi set up his own firm in Paris in 2015. He was not yet 30. Among his commercial projects are stores for the fashion label Kenzo and the chic candlemaker Cire Trudon. He put his stamp on hotels in Verbier and Mykonos. He refreshed the familiar Café de L'Esplanade, across from Les Invalides, without feeling the need to trample the spirit of its previous designer, Jacques Garcia.

Casiraghi's peculiar mix of confidence and humility impressed Laurent Gardinier, who owns the Parisian restaurant Drouant with his two brothers. Gardinier, too, needed to transform an iconic venue without turning it inside out—Drouant has been around for a very long time, and it looked like it. But this was an especially

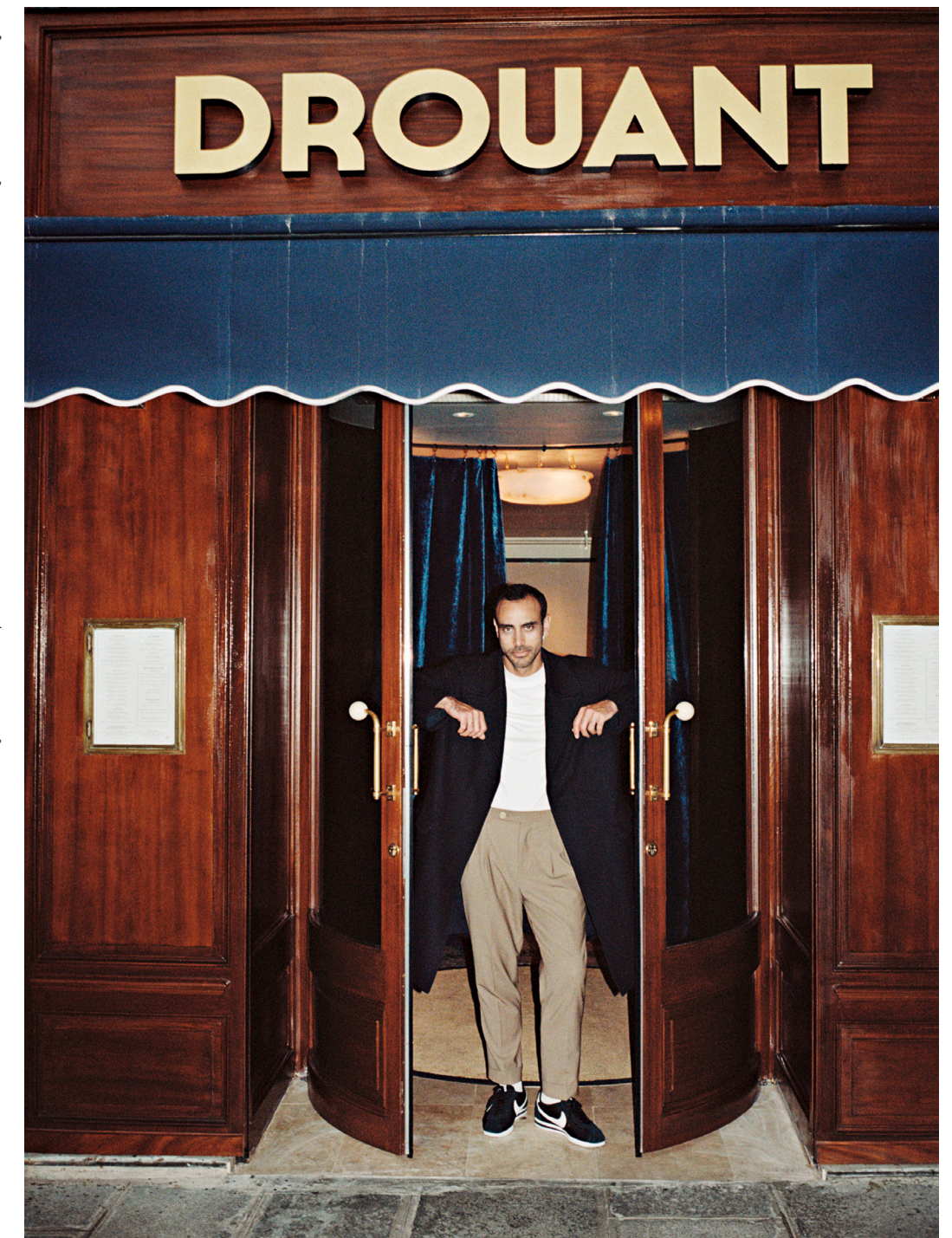


This spread, clockwise from bottom left: Another view of the living room, with a carved-wood panel purchased in Palm Springs, California, and a 1940s Persian wool rug; in the kitchen, a wall piece by Enrico Castellani, a banquette covered with an old Uzbek kilim, and a 1920s wooden temple by Joseph Müller; in the bedroom, a handle by Victor Levai and lacquered shelves in Portofino Olive; from the kitchen, a view of one of the terraces, and a 1940s Danish painting above the sink; the bedroom, with sconces by Marcel Guillemand; the apartment's staircase, with a sconce by Green River Project. Casiraghi wears a Prada sweater; Acne Studios jeans; J.M. Weston shoes.



This page, clockwise from left: The Salon Proust of the restaurant Drouant, with a fresco by Roberto Ruspoli that Casiraghi commissioned; the designer in the restaurant's Salon Colette; Drouant's restroom; a view of Drouant's famed staircase by Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann. Casiraghi wears a Brunello Cucinelli jacket and pants; Sunspel T-shirt; Nike sneakers. Opposite, from top: The restaurant's Salon Cocteau, with a wall piece by Antonine de Saint Pierre; Casiraghi, at Drouant's entrance, in his own coat.

Grooming by Frédéric Kebbabi at B Agency.



sensitive facelift: The winners of France's most prestigious literary prizes, the Goncourt and the Renaudot, are announced from the steps of a magnificent Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann staircase in its main room.

Casiraghi loves Art Deco, and he loves Ruhlmann, he says, pointing out a brass Ruhlmann door handle on his living room cupboard. But Drouant was trapped in its identity. "It was horrible. We changed everything and just kept the beautiful staircase in the middle. I had to build the Art Deco sensibility in a modern way. I hate historical reconstitution." The new room is light and airy, with yellow seating. For Drouant's Salon Proust, Casiraghi commissioned a whimsical fresco of nymphs wearing dark blue garlands by his friend Roberto Ruspoli, who also painted constellations on the ceiling of Casiraghi's apartment.

"Fabrizio managed to restore the restaurant's Ruhlmannian character without making it a pastiche," Gardinier says. "He gave it back what had been lost. For someone so young, he's got a very strong sense of cultural patrimony. He suggested simple black and white mosaic on the floor, and when we ripped up the old flooring, we found an unusable mosaic just like it, from 1925, that had originally been there—he didn't even know it was there!"

Many designers have a recognizable signature. Casiraghi does not, largely on purpose. But if you're looking for telltale signs of his handiwork, check out the angles on his walls—they are often soft. He did very little structural work on his own apartment, but he did add a double archway between the living room and the kitchen. "Every passage is rounded—it's more cozy, more gentle. And where I cannot do that, I put a little rounded shape between the wall and the ceiling. It makes you feel like you're in a grotto." Also, lacquer: Casiraghi tends to use it a lot. He's done his minuscule bedroom in a shade he calls Portofino Olive (green with a lot of brown); the walls of an apartment he's doing in the 10th are all burnt orange. "Lacquer is like a mirror—it increases the amount of light," he says.

For the most part, though, Casiraghi steers clear of imposing his preferences on the people he works for. He asks clients to send in five images—any five images—and starts by constructing a mood board around them. From there, he operates almost like a parent, guiding his charges to a more sophisticated expression of their own tastes. This can take a very long time, but he can't help himself. "I cannot decide everything in a month," he says. "I have to put on a first layer, go inside with the clients, so we put on a second layer, then a third, then a fourth. I finished an apartment one year ago, and we are still adding things. If they need me, I'm there."

When pressed, Casiraghi owns up to some enduring likes and dislikes. He's crazy about Hoffmann, Koloman Moser, and the Wiener Werkstätte. Ditto for the '70s grooviness of the sophisticated hippie Gabriella Crespi, whose sky-high prices put her work beyond his reach, he says regretfully. Midcentury modern, that chestnut of decorative chic? Meh. Oh, and don't get him started on minimalism. The architect in him admires the skill of masters like John Pawson and Peter Zumthor, but the designer in him, well, doesn't.

"I think minimalism is fascism because it forces you to live in a very unnatural way," he says. "You're a prisoner of the order you built to maintain the perfect shape of the home. I want to create places where, if you put your newspaper down like this or like that, it still works, because it's life, and life is like that." ♦