

# MARTIN BRULE

# PARISIAN PIED TERRE



# M

artin Br   knows how to install himself rent-free in your head. Not just through his work, which stands for the exact opposite of anything rent or free.

The owner and creative director of his namesake studio ([Interiors. Antiques. Decoration.](#)), with headquarters in New York, is at a point in his career, where, if we were watching a movie about him, would show a dynamic success montage of his current projects: The Chanel Cruise collection in Biarritz! The *Vanity Fair* Oscar Party at the LACMA! A residence in a Rosario Candela building on Park Avenue! Plus all the other fabulous endeavors that may be talked about in hushed tones only and not to be put into writing.

We meet at his former apartment in Saint-Germain   recently turned office  ly   where the team has grown from two to ten, since he first moved here less than three years ago. His new private apartment in Paris is nearby, but not quite ready, he tells me. Stylistically, it reverts back from his passion periods of Art Deco and early modernism towards  more 19th and even 18th an tury  and his aim there is  to show, how all this can be set up in a very different way than usual. It's very exciting! 

Admittedly, I have come to meet Martin not to marvel at the furniture in his office   although that cannot be avoided. My main interest is to get a feeling for the inner fabric of the man, who is an epitome of discretion, and at the same time, unapologetic about posing in his lavish interiors, all dressed up, as if to present himself as the ultimate aspirational character in these settings, that exude sleekness and wealth of cinematic proportions.

Clues can be found on his patchy Instagram account, that nudges the imagination towards  Brat Pack  literature. In 2015, as a curtain-raiser, it kicks off with the caption  More than a standard love story,  arm in arm on the High Line with former US Vogue editor Elisabeth von Thurn und Taxis, photographed by Mark Guiducci, then also editor at Vogue, now global editorial director at *Vanity Fair*. Asked about these earlier days of their friendship and when he first realized Martin's talent, he answers in writing:

 The first time I saw his apartment, which was a tiny little one bedroom on the far East Side of Manhattan, I thought it was very special  Martin has an innate elegance to him and high standards. He's patient and has a deep bench of references. He's an expert when it comes to Art Deco but I don't think his work ever looks referential. 





Scrolling up the timeline we see, that one of Martin's earliest projects was probably Martin himself: dressed solely in tight black trousers, lying on a white daybed in a Parisian apartment and naked by palms on enormous columns in silver buckets. Martin in monogrammed pajamas and sunglasses on another bed. Martin driving a convertible and winking suggestively at the passenger beside him. Martin on yachts, in bars and at weddings. It's as if he is marking the scene that he plans to enhance with his work at a later point in his life.

In 2019 we get an Instagram glimpse into his first office in Brooklyn: "A box with inexpensive red event carpet on floor and walls with Thonet chairs, museum-style original leather and a desk from the 1940s," he explains. On the back wall hang photo prints by him of men wearing only white underpants, lying on the floor in the same red boxy room. It has a dazzling and slightly claustrophobic infinite mirror effect. Between 2021 and 2024 he posts hardly anything, until in 2024, the account finally starts to move into the direction of a more conventional virtual showcase for his work, which by then has blown up. Trying to string the narrative together, trying to decide if this presentation is careless or highly intentional or both, makes me dwell on this man, who seems so brazenly out there and also mysteriously shielded by an almost fictional character aura that he has built around himself.

The first thing I notice, when I meet him in Paris in person, is that trying to get his attention comes with its own rhythm of his impatient finger tapping, that subsides the longer we speak. And, as a wabi-sabi kind of detail, I notice non-functional, cute freckles. We are seated at an 18th-century Georges Jacob dining set on a round table and chairs with silk-upholstered seats in the middle of a centerpiece salon with four-meter-high ceilings, mirrored walls and windows facing a courtyard. There is also "a false pair of glass vitrines slimly framed in shiny steel by Art Deco architect and furniture maker Jacques-Louis Ruhlmann, the modernist Ruhlmann, which I like more than the ornate one," Martin says. An office chair by the same man stands in a corner. "The Maharaja of Indore had one as well; I like to think about these details and to go deep into the history of things." There are chairs originating from the 17th century Hotel Lambert: "I

found them at a very small auction. Things move around." And a large print by Richard Prince from 1991 hanging on the mirrored wall over a André Sornay sofa. The walls in the room, which are not mirrored are painted in a trompe l'œil paper impression by Belgian artist Mathilde Van Der Schueren: "They almost feel like they are alive, but at the same time they look very clean and crisp."

How does a boy, born and raised in Montreal circa forty years ago, find his way to this kind of peak level refinement?

"I grew up in Montreal in a lovely house, but my parents were not into design. It was nice, but nothing like what I do. I always changed everything and moved everything around. My mom was a good hostess and I would set the table with the silver that they got for their wedding. It was instinctive, I was very curious. For a long time I was lost though, because everything was limited in an environment like Montreal. And I had a passion that was really an obsession. There were the grandparents of a friend of mine though, that were very chic, stylish and powerful people. They had designers from Paris, which was very rare. I also have an uncle, who was a big inspiration and who lived in Hong Kong until I was 14. He then got an apartment in Montreal. He has great taste and is very stylish and handsome."

What did your first apartment look like?

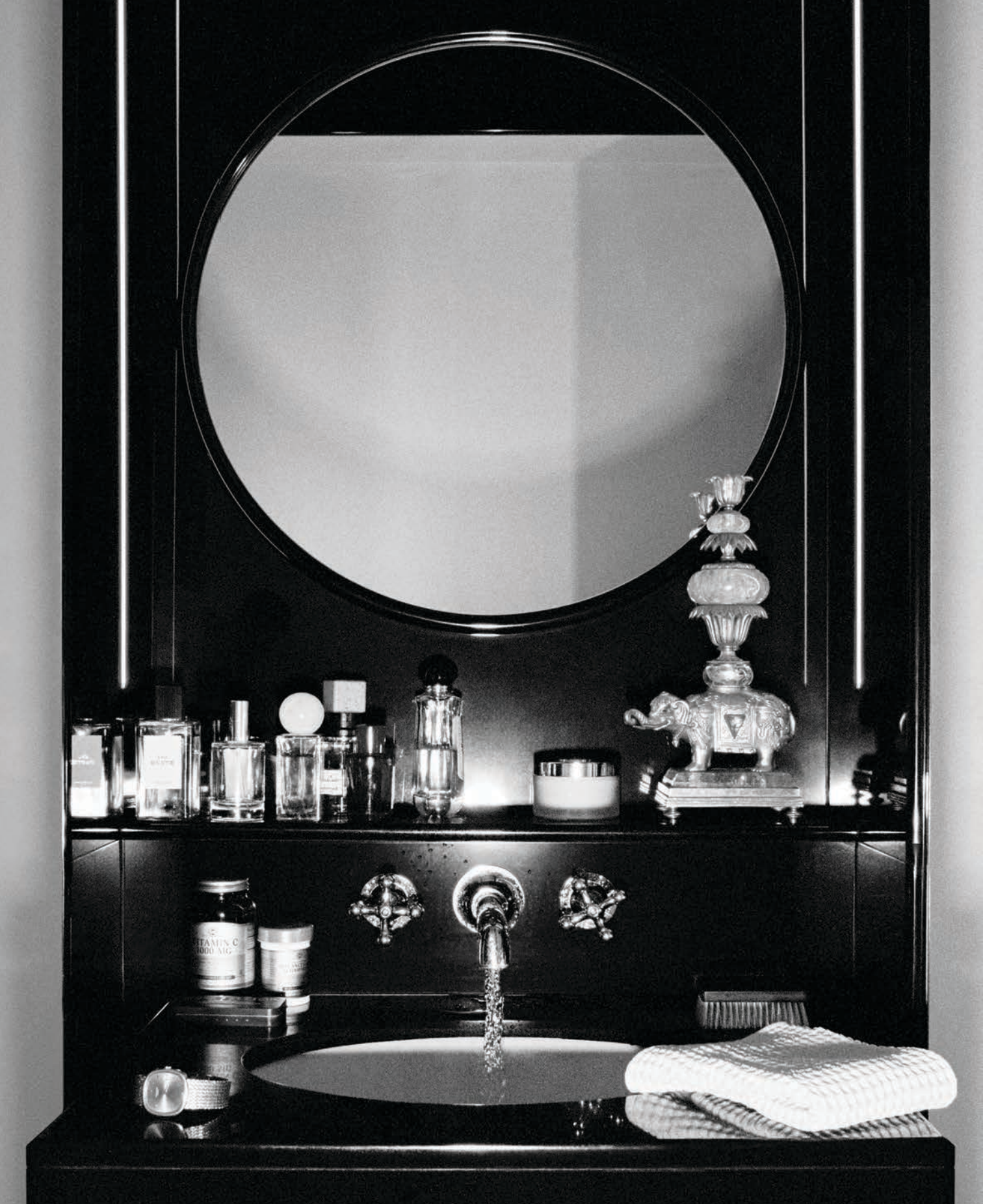
"It was great. I was maybe eighteen years old and it was a loft with two big windows and was rough. In a way though, my apartments are always quite similar: There is often one big room in the center with a high ceiling and windows. That one was just a big loft with a niche for a bed. I had no money so it was furnished with just whatever I could find. I remember I had a very large carpet with a Miró painting on it. I had made bedding out of American flags, which was kind of weird. And a big fur blanket on the bed. At some point I had a friend that made a painting on the wall."

The professional entry point for Martin was fashion and nightlife. He started working for a privately run luxury boutique in Montreal around age sixteen. He describes the owner as his first mentor.

"Within six months I was doing the buying and was the creative director there. I discovered Milan and Paris through buying for the store. Fashion was my main interest at the time. I always liked a mix of designers, but I definitely had a moment when I was wearing head to toe Hedi Slimane and then a lot of what Raf Simons did for Jil Sander."

Left: On the bar, a René Lalique lemonade set stands between a Jean Després lamp, silver box and a Gabriella Crespi rhinoceros. The stools are by Louis Sognot and the glassware in the cabinet is by Baccarat.

*Left:* A Serge Roche sconce hangs above a Gilbert Poillerat bed. In the background, a games table, stool and chairs by Jean-Michel Frank sit under a light by Gerrit Rietveld. Night valet by Lucien Rollin.  
*Right:* An elephant sculpture by Atha, Patek Philippe watch and Hermès brush in the bathroom.



Next, together with his brother, he opened a night club called Velvet, located in the basement of an 18th-century former Inn. Dig through the internet and still today you'll find former guests praising the place as a speakeasy by the "parallel universe."

"Velvet was open from four am to four pm. It was all stone and we lit candles everywhere. Hundreds of candles, lasers and smoke machines, which is actually a really good combination. From my late teens until my mid-twenties I only lived at night. You meet all types of people at 5 o'clock in the morning. But when you live at night it's kind of hard to do things during the day. I made a lot of money, but spent more than I made. It was not healthy at all. It had to end. I woke up to the reality of having to become an adult."

Today, Martin is "sober from everything," he says. He tells me it is really important to him, that I don't "glamorize" this part of his life. What can fairly be said though is that he still knows how to design a space, that pours the spirit of debauchery into sleek and shiny settings, that tease extreme behaviour at least on a thought level. Like catching yourself undressing someone in your mind.

Leaving this early chapter of his life behind he moved to New York and signed up to study fashion design at Parsons, "not very engaged." He also became very close friends with the Parisian antique dealer Jean-Paul Beaujard, who back then lived in New York. Mr. Beaujard introduced him to Carlyne Cerf de Dudzele, former fashion director at Vogue US, stylist and art director, for whom Martin started working as an assistant. He says, that he thinks of Mr. Beaujard and Ms. Cerf de Dudzele as his "artistic parents."

"Carlyne and I became very close. Just by being around her I learned a lot. She is a force of nature in a very instinctive way. She is a zero-compromising person. Watching her work is like watching someone make a painting. It's very raw and I now have a similar approach to my work."

"Jean Paul and I are very much alike and he knows so much about aesthetics. It's a very natural friendship and a very important one. I had an apartment on the Upper East Side, the cheapest you could get. It was literally the size of a closet, closer to 1st Avenue. He lived on Park Avenue on the same street. I learned so much from him. He consciously taught me many things."

In the living room, an André Sornay sofa and Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann armchairs frame a Eugène Printz table on which sits an Ernest Boiceau vase. To the right, a Serge Roche sconce and polaroid by Andy Warhol. Above the sofa, a three-dimensional work by Agostino Bonalumi.





Left: Visitors to the Brno residence are welcomed by trompe l'œil parchment walls created by Parisian artisan Mathilde van der Schueren. The light fixture is by Maison Desny and, the umbrella was purchased at Lorenzi Milano. Right: On a Marc du Plantier table, Baccarat glassware sits on a Christofle tray next to a pair of Jean Dunand vases. The sofa by André Sornay faces a pair of Jean-Michel Frank armchairs.



I speak to Mr. Beaujard about Martin on a video call, where his beaming face fills most of the screen on my phone and he frequently erupts into utterly contagious laughter. How does he remember meeting Martin?

*“I went to visit a friend in Montreal, who introduced me to Martin. He was running a nightclub. He was very young, I was 40 years older, but we immediately had a connection. He said to me: ‘Let’s organize a dinner for you tomorrow.’ And you know, people don’t usually do that, but he asked his grandmother to prepare the food and the next day we were ten people around a table. After that he moved to New York and we became neighbors by accident. We spent a lot of time together and I showed him many decorative pieces and talked with him about them. He was obsessed with clothes. He looked at the quality of the fabric, the cut and he bought a lot. I’m not sure how he did that, but if he wanted a pair of Gucci shoes he got them. Even at the time he had all the qualities that he has today. He had this style in him. It was very much about clothes, but by showing him antiques and talking to him about decorating he became more and more interested. It’s so strange with taste, how it arises, where it comes from, but he just had it. I admire him and he works like a dog and knows how to put things together so well.”*

*I have another friend, who unfortunately passed away, but she was obsessed with buying beautiful things. She would buy at Yves Saint Laurent, but she would take out the lining of the clothes and put in her own. She would have been a perfect match with Martin, I am so sorry they never met. On the other hand, they would have spent a fortune together.”*



In 2017 Martin Brügge finally founded his *creative studio*, not really fixed on a specific genre of creativity.

*I was doing very small projects: For example a friend of mine was selling classic linens. I helped her with all the creative, the showroom, I would do the set up. It was not what I wanted to be doing at all.*

Again, things evolved over dinner.

*I always had dinner parties in the same apartment, that I still live in today in New York, but now on my own. A friend, who came from the Middle East loved my apartment and asked me for a creative vision for a project of his on Park Avenue, that others were working on. It was an office with a domestic feeling to it. Soon the interior designer and architect left because they didn't want to listen to me and I continued the project. It gave me a lot of confidence, because he had the highest standards of expectations. After that I had to do the business from scratch. The first person I hired is still with me, she is the director of production.*

Since then, it has not even been ten years and the Martin Brügge Studio has 22 people on staff. But that's really just a number. There are higher ceilings to tend to. Currently Martin is working on his first hotel in Milan, due to open in 2028.

What else?

*Together with my brothers – one a property developer, the other in marketing and hospitality – I am looking at small residential buildings in Paris or Milan to buy and to create a whole world, where people can live in. I could also own a restaurant, or, potentially, a hotel. I never think: Oh, I'm a designer and that's it. My studio is the best vehicle I could find to do the things I like doing. It's just the beginning.*

So, who is Martin Brügge? Someone with a larger-than-life life, someone you can buy taste and sophistication from. Someone, who knows how to navigate the social waters at high tide with ease? I still don't know, who Martin Brügge is. The main character of his own designs? The soft-spoken man, who says:

*It's important to be human, it's important to be kind and positive, but it's also very important to follow your gut and your purpose. I'm doing what I do because that comes out of me. The more you know, who you are the more things come to you. And if you want my advice: Do something and speak about what you want to do to anyone who listens.*

To anyone, who listens: Martin Brügge, who describes his work as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, an all encompassing work of art, is most likely one himself.



Left: Brügge wears a Patek Philippe watch and Charvet shirt while indulging in a midnight snack. Right: A set of André Arbus chairs frame a Maison Jansen dining table on which are laid out sets of Puiforcat silverware and Baccarat glassware. The table lamp is by Jacques Adnet. Contributing creative director: Gabriele Paul.