

BY ASAD SYRKETT PHOTOGRAPHED BY STEFAN GIFTTHALER

ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME

For the multihyphenate *designer* and creative RAMDANE TOUHAMI, his home in *Palazzo Borghese* marks the perfect canvas for showcasing his IRREVERENT and *unique* style.





These pages in the entrance hall of this home in Rome, custom **stools** and **tables** designed by Ramdane Touhami; Costela **armchair** (left) by Martin Eisler and Carlo Hauner; blue 1955 **sofa** by Osvaldo Borsani; 1985 **chaise longue** (right) by Paolo Passerini; Akari **floor lamp** by Isamu Noguchi for Vitra. *Previous page* Ramdane Touhami.



This page in a living area, Wicker chair by Marc Newson; console table by Paolo Buffa; stool by Charlotte Perriand; artworks by artists unknown.
Opposite page in the formal dining room, vintage Superleggera chairs by Gio Ponti for Cassina.





I'm very excited about the idea of making our new flat in Rome," wrote Ramdane Touhami, interior designer, DJ, creative director, and artist, on Instagram last August. "Making a flat that looks like a museum could be fun!" he added.

As it turns out, Touhami wasn't downplaying the scope of his project at all. His new "apartment" is truly a museum-worthy architectural work: a grand residence in the Palazzo Borghese, in Rome's Campo Marzio district. Construction of the first section of the mighty late-Renaissance palace began in the 1560s, designed by the renowned Mannerist architect Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola (among many other notable projects, Vignola completed work on St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican after Michelangelo's death). The palace was later expanded by Cardinal Camillo Borghese, who purchased it in 1596. He would later lend his name to the building and become Pope Paul V.

In Touhami's 280-square-metre, F-shaped apartment, the soaring ceilings are adorned with decorative paintings and frescoes, as well as other details resulting from countless additions over the centuries, such as the B-shaped (Borghese) doorknobs in the dining room, which, according to Touhami, date back to the 19th century.

It is the most recent home of the nomadic designer, his wife, Victoire de Taillac-Touhami, and their three children, aged 22, 20, and 18. The couple's Paris apartment, in a former home of French writer Honoré de Balzac, made bold use of ebony panelling, constructed to give the illusion that a large section of the burlled wood is peeling away from the wall, exposing the decorative mouldings beneath.

At Palazzo Borghese, this sleight of hand isn't present, but the magic remains. First, there's the surprise of the entrance, a long atrium and gallery-like hall, which Touhami punctuated with his own geometric white oak furniture and a group of statuettes and busts created by Roman students. Displayed along the floor and walls of the space are images from the book *Roman Portraits*, published by Phaidon in 1940. "The faces are very contemporary," says Touhami. "They could be people you see today."

A similar contemporary energy is found in the two large portraits flanking the formal dining room. The two men painted against a deep blue background are Andrea Costa and Pietro Nenni, founders of the Italian Socialist Party. "We bought them at a flea market," explains Touhami.

Throughout the apartment, Touhami seems to delight in combining and layering design eras: antiquity, mid-20th-century modernism, and beyond. In the main bedroom, a 19th-century Neapolitan bed in richly decorated metal has a profoundly contemporary feel, despite its age. A Thonet bench, circa 1940, and a 1970s Audoux Minet floor lamp stand guard nearby.

In a relatively less formal but still striking dining room near the primary bedroom, Touhami continues to play with eras: here he pairs a 1917 De Stijl armchair, designed by Dutch architect Gerrit Rietveld, with pieces from the 1930s, 1950s, and 1980s. Despite the 20th-century feel, the mix feels effortless. Perhaps because finding harmony between different aesthetics is central to the collaboration between Touhami and de Taillac. "Victoire and I have completely different tastes," he states, explaining that the design of their private rooms is usually his wife's responsibility. "We never step on each other's toes," he adds.

During a recent visit, on a quiet vacation afternoon in Rome, Touhami quickly moved from room to room, then disappeared to video chat with partners in Japan and then with a client in London. Jazz and funk from across the African diaspora blasted from a speaker on the floor of the gallery-like living room.

On his way out, Touhami stopped to point out one of his favourite features of the apartment: a small hidden window in the guest bathroom. The opening offers a view of the stairwell outside the apartment and the opportunity to eavesdrop as guests leave.

"Funny, right?" Touhami says with a smile. "It's a way to hear what people are saying." Even at Palazzo Borghese, Touhami embraces his signature irreverent touch. ■ ramdanetouhami.com

Opposite page in a dining area, 1987 M Series **table** by Philippe Starck; antique **artwork** by artist unknown.





This page in another view of the entrance hall, **statuettes** created by art students from a local university; **portraits** from the 1940 book *Roman Portraits*, edited by Ludwig Goldscheider. *Opposite page* in the main bedroom, 19th-century Neapolitan **bed**; mid-century **desk**; **bench** by Vittorio Nobili. *Details, last pages.*

