FESTEN

Every morning, Charlotte de Tonnac and Hugo Sauzay walk from their home in the first arrondissement of Paris to their office in the Marais. After more than two decades in the city, the sights haven't lost their impact. "*I find it sumptuous,*" says Hugo. "*The Pont des Arts, the Seine, the light, and how the sky changes – all of it is sublime.*"

De Tonnac and Sauzay came to Paris as many do – to study. The French couple, and duo behind the interior architecture firm Festen, both had childhoods far removed from that of a young Parisian. "*I grew up in a very small village, surrounded by forests. I had a very late relationship with the city… While it wasn't so far from my home, it was, nonetheless, quite complicated to access,*" Hugo tells me. Charlotte grew up in several places, from small cities in France to Detroit in the 1980s. Now, both have called Paris home for more than twenty years.

In that time, they have built one of France's most recognised interior design studios. Their projects include the Hôtel du Couvent in Nice, recently ranked 38th on the World's 50 Best Hotels list, recognising the quality and boldness of its interior design.

The story of how they got there takes us back to Paris, where they met as students at the Camondo design school.

Hugo had never been on a plane when he arrived in Paris at eighteen. He landed, by a stroke of luck, in a small flat beside the Jardin du Luxembourg. "*I had no idea what the gardens even were, but I was very lucky to be in the neighbourhood,*" he says. "*I got to know Paris by foot, very quickly.*"

Around the same time, Charlotte arrived in Paris, wide-eyed and ready to consume as much culture as possible. "*When you're not Parisian, you go to the museum four times more than everyone else,*" she says. Despite grades that might have led her towards law or one of France's Grandes Écoles, she enrolled at Camondo. "*From a young age, it was obvious that I was attracted to everything artistic, even though nobody in my family is in the arts. It was a necessity.*"

Hugo came to Camondo after a brief stint studying design at Penninghen. Neither had initially set out to become interior architects, but both felt an early pull towards spaces and buildings. "*Spaces were always important to me, I realised. I've always felt good in old places, places with history*" Hugo says.

Their first commission arrived while they were still students, in circumstances particularly Parisian. Hugo was at a bar when an older man began flirting with him and mentioned that his niece was looking for an interior architect for her apartment in the 7th arrondissement. "*I said to myself, 'Yes.'*" He didn't want to take it on alone. "*I asked Charlotte if she wanted to join me,*" he says. Through the kind of inexperience that gives you "*wings*", they embarked on their first project together. "*It was really an opportunity that we seized*", he says.

They have never worked under another interior architect. "*We had to create our own style*," says Hugo. Four or five years of experimentation followed, much of it spent eliminating the things they didn't want to do. "*Our culture is a fusion of Charlotte and I,*" Hugo says. "*Our clients helped us structure our thoughts, and our ideas.*"

At the heart of Festen's style is the way they read old buildings. "*What interests us is all the layers of the past*," Charlotte explains, "*and creating an interpretation of them.*" In Paris, a city where the old occupies more space than the new, this mindset is intrinsically linked to the city. "*We work on existing places, but we always devise our projects for the 21st century*," Hugo says.

He pushes back against the idea of Paris as a museum city. "*I find it extraordinary that we managed to make the Louvre Pyramid, and Beaubourg… This is why Paris is dynamic.*" So enamoured is he with the city's dialogue between past and present that he tells me he would even consider joining the municipality of his arrondissement to work on the preservation of Paris's urban environment. As for the future of architecture, Hugo cites Jean Nouvel: "*The most beautiful architecture will make beautiful ruins.*"

Now, Festen is quietly releasing its first furniture collection. The collection grew from pieces originally designed for their projects, after clients began asking where they could buy a sofa they had seen in a hotel, for example. There will be no launch events, the collection will be released under the radar. "*We'll see how it's received*," Hugo says. "*We're very proud of it.*"



Charlotte wears her own poplin shirt and denim while Hugo wears a shirt by Hermès over his own tee-shirt and jeans.