

VOCAL LIVING

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INTERIORS TO ENCHANT, INSPIRE & COMFORT

THIS PAGE outside Château de Fabrègues, a property owned by designer Pierre Yovanovitch in the south of France, dogs Kim and Stella; **landscape design** by Louis Benech. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the living room of La Ferme, the farmhouse on the property, 1930 pine **armchair** by Axel Einar Hjorth; bronze-framed **table** with travertine top by Jules Wabbes, circa 1965; Bean **sofa** by Otto Schulz, circa 1930; carved hardwood **screen** by Veronica Rodrigues; Laura **wall lamp** from Pierre Yovanovitch Mobilier; mahogany **dish** by Alexandre Noll, circa 1950; *Favelas in Gent N°13* (2012) **artwork** by Tadashi Kawamata. *Details, last pages.*



TRUE to form

The perfectly imperfect nuances that underline all of Pierre Yovanovitch's designs have revitalised a former farmhouse set on his grand estate in the south of France.

By Annemarie Kiely Photographed by Jérôme Galland



In a design firmament glittering with luminaries Pierre Yovanovitch's star shines blindingly bright. It exerts a strong gravitational pull — on both media and society's upper milieu — makes deep space fit for human habitation, and is the body around which spheres of influence increasingly orbit; meaning VIPs tap him to shape their schtick into perfectly imperfect rooms.

They range in sway from chef Hélène Darroze who trusted only Yovanovitch to translate her Michelin-starred provincialism into a palate-cleansing prettiness at The Connaught in London, to the Pinault clan, founding owners of the French luxury Kering Group. Even Danish architect du jour Bjarke Ingels recently teamed with Yovanovitch to parlay the structural bravura of The XI — two luxury apartment towers twisting through New York airspace — into equally fearless penthouse interiors.

But the astral analogies apply best when it reveals that Yovanovitch, a self-trained interior designer, formerly presided over prêt-à-porter menswear for Pierre Cardin — the design polymath who rocketed 20th-century fashion into space. Certainly, the couturier's forward thinking and mastery of line are legible in Yovanovitch's oeuvre, but where Cardin objectified NASA's exploration into outer space, Yovanovitch plumbs the depths of inner space and proves string theory — time past, present and future co-existing simultaneously. Or so his latest project, La Ferme, would suggest.

A 19th-century farmhouse that he flipped into five-star guest housing at his residence Château de Fabrègues in the south of France, La Ferme absorbs into the magic of a 36-hectare estate that still pulses with the history of the Fabrègues family, the owners since the 12th century.

It appends to a 17th-century chateau — the turreted-type looming in romantically dark fairytale — and forms the latest chapter in a page-turning narrative that started for Yovanovitch back in 2009.

Speaking from his Paris office, Yovanovitch avows that at no stage was he looking for a country house when he found Fabrègues' real-estate listing and felt compelled to visit it. "I thought I had arrived at the edge of the world," he recalls of a passage through old fields and a portal in time to stand facing its ethereal wonder. "Fabrègues radiated a comforting sense of isolation. I know the region well as I grew up in Nice, so the estate ended up being a very natural fit."

But that fit — frayed and loose in its foundations — required a willingness to wrap in what the designer terms "a certain romanticism and the suspension of all disbelief", as modest

renovations escalated into major repairs and structural reinforcements to a chateau found resting on nothing but clay.

"We ended up having to renovate almost everything... The surrounding land had no garden, no path, nothing but pine and oak trees," he says, crediting "master" landscape artist Louis Benech with the seeding of painterly fields of Provençal plantings, a yew tree labyrinth and the fairytale framing of the chateau with woodlands. "It was certainly an ambitious undertaking, but there was a magic to the property that I was entranced with."

Noting that the first-stage refurb of the barn-like structure incurred part removal of its upper floors to create space and clear room for a terrace, Yovanovitch says he left La Ferme's key walls in leaning profile to preserve their soul. Within their tilting boundaries he worked all amenity, adding eight colour-drenched bedrooms and crafting a kitchen that nods to the pottery-making history of nearby Vallauris in a patchworked ceramic wall by artist Armelle Benoit. "Geometry, colours are what should [be in] a rustic room with this typical farmhouse beam ceiling," he says of a decor determined by the earthiness of structure.

The kitchen's art-infused utility seeps into a living room furnished with flea market finds, antiques and some of Yovanovitch's furniture — typically over-scaled objects ordered with a levity of line. The resultant confusion of periods is made coherent with reduced materials, minor details and a snaking line of grey larch-wood sofa plumped with soft pink upholstery and sited under the eyes of Stephan Balkenhol's sculpture. "I love the large scale of the artwork," says Yovanovitch as he expounds on art being central to his design. "The eyes watching are captivating".

Responding to an effort to glean his design sympathies and downtime activities, Yovanovitch concedes to exhibiting a little of the severity and harmony of 16th-century architect Andrea Palladio, confesses to a love of Donald Judd's purity of volume and precision, notes some commonality with Memphis Group's twists, and declares a deep appreciation of Le Corbusier's tonal sensibilities. "These are colours we don't find anywhere else," he says. "I always keep Corbusier's colour chart by my side."

As for recent music rotations and readings, it's Jessye Norman performing Richard Strauss's Four Last Songs and Albert Camus's sizzling 1944-1959 correspondence with his lover Maria Casarès, all of which circles discussion back to philosophy, Fabrègues' inner space and the following Camus wisdom: "To create is to live twice". **VL** pierre-yovanovitch.com



THIS PAGE in another view of the living room, grey-tinted larch wood sofa with Jouffre upholstery and ceramic coffee table by Armelle Benoit from Pierre Yovanovitch Mobilier; 17th-century wood table; 1902 wood armchair by Carl Witzmann; *Augenkreuz* (2012) wall sculpture by Stephan Balkenhol; *Robot-Hibou* (2009) sculpture by Xavier Méricot. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the entrance, oak and wicker chair, circa 1970; enamelled ceramic table lamp by Björn Wiinblad, circa 1970; frosted glass and metal ceiling light from Pierre Yovanovitch Mobilier; burgundy limestone pavers; *Untitled* (1975) artwork by Richard Nonas.



THESE PAGES in the kitchen, ceramic patchwork splashback by Armelle Benoit for Pierre Yovanovitch Mobilier; glassware from Biot; *Urban Planners* (2013) mixed-media collage artwork by Derrick Adams.

THIS PAGE in the dining room, French **chairs** and **table**, circa 1960; **console** by Axel Einar Hjorth, circa 1942; 1960s **mirror** found in Vallauris; 1970s French **dish**; terracotta **pavers**; **artworks** (1995) by Marcel Robelin.
OPPOSITE PAGE the extensive gardens of Château de Fabrègues feature a maze designed by Louis Benech.



THESE PAGES in a second-floor guest bedroom, Berga pine **armchair** with wool **cushion** by Axel Einar Hjorth, circa 1930; 1960s ceramic **mirror** found in Vallauris; ceramic **dish** by Roger Capron, circa 1955; Ball **cushion** with Jouffre upholstery and wicker **pendant lamp** from Pierre Yovanovitch Mobilier; Harpie-Fleur embroidered **artwork** by Guidette Carbonell, circa 1980.





THIS PAGE the swimming pool on the grounds of Château de Fabrègues.
OPPOSITE PAGE in a first-floor guest bedroom, 20th-century French timber
bench; wicker **pendant lamp** from Pierre Yovanovitch Mobilier; custom
wall colour by Pierre Yovanovitch and Mériquet Carrère; *The Failure*
of Reason #2 (2002) **photograph** by Sam Samore. *Details, last pages.*

