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# French superstar designer Pierre Yovanovitch is heading to Melbourne

*French master Pierre Yovanovitch makes his Australian debut with a showcase of his influential furniture and haute couture aesthetic. From the upcoming autumn issue out on March 16.*

**Stephen Todd** [[/by/stephen-todd-gwglzd](#)] *Design editor*

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When the doors open for the new Criteria furniture showroom in Melbourne this month, they'll provide a unique portal to Paris. Behind a handsome Italianate facade on a South Yarra side street, a three-roomed gallery space has been conceived by French interior designer Pierre Yovanovitch and populated with his gently eccentric *mobilier*: the seating, tables and lighting that have made him a mainstay of the influential *Architectural Digest* AD100 list this past decade.

There's his Asymmetry armchair, a slightly discombobulated cube shape typically upholstered in a rich wool bouclé. And his Mindy sofa, an elegantly elongated arc hewn from solid oak padded with feathers clad in

linen and velvet. The Roze dining table rests on gaggles of flared steel legs lacquered a rusty red, a blob of lava-like ceramic anchoring its raw oak top.



Yovanovitch at his gallery. **Antoine Doyen**

Yovanovitch's aesthetic is an idiosyncratic *chic rustique*: elemental materials and heightened craftsmanship harnessed to create forms of a robust whimsy. "I view 'chic' as a sort of understatement. Something of exceptional quality and function can be so simple it's luxurious," says Yovanovitch, who sees his work echoing the "deep French culture in decorative arts".

Indeed, the spirits of 20th-century French masters Jean-Michel Frank, Charlotte Perriand and Pierre Paulin [<https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/arts-and-culture/lounging-about-with-designer-pierre-paulin-20160812-gqrhw4>] traverse his work like ectoplasm, never settling but leaving a definite impression.

In fact, his most iconic piece (yes, I'm placing an early bet), the Mama Bear armchair of 2012 [<https://www.instagram.com/p/CjIFCmyytyj/>] seems a direct response to Jean Royère's now highly coveted Ours Polaire (Polar Bear)

seating of 1949. Yovanovitch designed the cutesy-comfy-just-right seat for the apartment of a private client and it – along with Papa and Baby Bear – formed part of a capsule furniture collection, released in 2017. “As with most of my designs, there’s a certain playfulness happening,” says Yovanovitch.



Yovanovitch restored the Château de Fabrègues over three years and it is now a showcase for his furniture. **Jérôme Galland**

This playfulness is underscored by a kind of knowing naivete. Yovanovitch admits his main influence is his “home in Provence and the nature of the

surrounding region. The dense forest, rich sunsets and lavender fields are all elements that I draw inspiration from in my work.”

Never mind the fact that “home” is the 17th-century Château de Fabrègues, situated on some 40 hectares of woodland about 20 minutes’ drive from the marshland of the Camargue where wild horses and pink flamingos roam. Restored by Yovanovitch over three years – and with works still going – its rather rudimentary cube structure is offset by four turreted towers topped with polychromatic tiles. The interior – decked out with the designer’s own furniture mixed with rare vintage pieces – includes a chapel with murals hand-painted by LA-based French artist Claire Tabouret.

The takeover of the Criteria space in Melbourne will create a Gallic style outpost in Australia. Rachael Fry, who founded Criteria [<https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/design/how-melbournes-criteria-showroom-is-shaking-up-the-nations-design-aesthetic-20180112-h0hix8>] in 2018 as its creative director, enthuses: “Pierre is such a master of colour, light and volume and we’ve worked intensely with him to create an emotive showcase for his genius furniture.”

A graduate of New York’s prestigious Parsons School of Design, Fry moved to Melbourne with her Australian husband in 2016 and spent two years researching the design market to identify gaps. She began by showcasing North American brands before expanding to a European offering. Yovanovitch, she reckons, incarnates “heritage flair” while being “fully singular and modern”.



Yovanovitch at his gallery in Paris. **Antoine Doyen**

Yovanovitch, 58, was born and raised in the south of France. He studied classical piano in Nice before moving to Paris to take up commerce, then sidestepped into a job as menswear designer at Pierre Cardin. Once the interior design bug bit, he began devising interiors for friends and decided he'd found his calling. In 2001, he set up his own studio, Pierre Yovanovitch Architecture d'Intérieur, in Paris. "I had strictly zero clients," he recalls. "It was madness, but I just had to do it."

Today, his office, atelier and showroom occupy a grand Hausmannian building in the newly groovy Sentier (rag-trade) precinct of the second arrondissement. He has designed innumerable private interiors across the French capital, as well as a flagship boutique for Christian Louboutin and the headquarters of François Pinault's luxury group Kering, which owns Saint Laurent, Balenciaga and Gucci, among other high-profile houses.

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The Roze dining table by [@pierre.yovanovitch.mobilier](#) fabricated in solid oak with lacquered steel legs and a glazed ceramic insert.

Featured in Pierre Yovanovitch Mobilier x CRITERIA opening on 15 March 2024.

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He's delivered a hotel in the French Alps at Méribel; another on the Swiss side at St Moritz. The restaurant of French superstar chef Hélène Darroze at London's Connaught Hotel is by PY, as he is known in the industry. As are the interiors of Lasata, the former Hamptons summer home of Jackie Kennedy, which was acquired by Tom Ford last year for \$US52 million (\$79 million).

As well as designing the interior architecture, Yovanovitch often creates bespoke furniture for his projects. It's these that morphed into the Pierre Yovanovitch Mobilier collection that hit the market in 2021. Such was the critical acclaim and commercial success that he opened a standalone Mobilier gallery in the Marais district of Paris last October; another was inaugurated in New York's Chelsea precinct in December.



Yovanovitch's Asymmetry armchair.

The collaboration with Criteria, which has been in the pipeline since pandemic times, is the third incarnation of the Pierre Yovanovitch Mobilier brand in the world, making it quite the coup for Melbourne.

The designer describes the showcase at Criteria, which will be staged in immersive “residential vignettes”, as a perfect combination of his galleries in Paris and New York. “It will make it feel like you’re in a PY-designed home.”

- ◆ *Until May 2 at Criteria, 50 Davis Avenue, South Yarra, Victoria.*



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