

NEPTUNE



The Parisian home of Jacques Grange photographed by Jesper D. Lund

*Bottega Veneta - Cameron Smith - Chris Wallace - Fondation Giacometti
Frances Palmer - Fredrik Nielsen - F Taylor Colantonio - Green River Project - Jackson Design
Jacques Grange - Outsider Art - Pierre Yovanovitch - Sylvie Selig*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESPER D. LUND

BIG BUSINESS AND BALLET WITH PIERRE YOVANOVITCH

WORDS BY ELLIE PITHERS



Despite being one of the most successful interior designers in Paris, Pierre Yovanovitch is, he insists, among the most insecure. Shy in manner, boyish in stature, though he has robust opinions on everything from materiality to sensuality, Yovanovitch is the antithesis of the grand décorateurs who once ruled by diktats. *“I like people who are a bit unsure, a bit nervous. I am like that. And I recognise that in others,”* he says, blinking behind his black-framed Cutler and Gross spectacles.

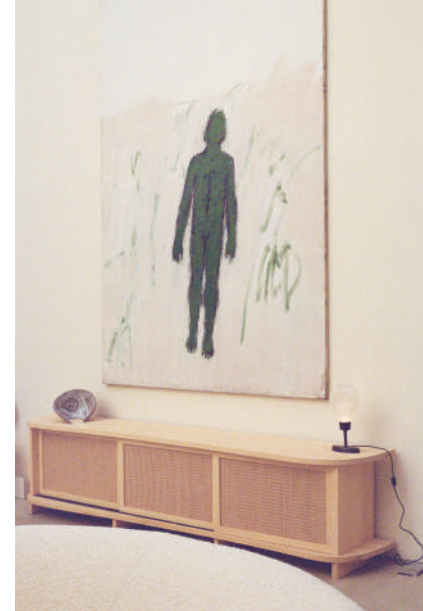
Anxiety hasn't put paid to ambition. Rather, it has augmented it. On the bright spring morning when we meet in his showroom in a former fashion atelier in the Marais neighbourhood, Pierre Yovanovitch Group – note the collective noun – has just announced its acquisition of the historic French furniture manufacturer d'Argentat, as well as its subsidiary Écart International, the archival furniture house founded by Andrée Putman. Yovanovitch knows the family business – which sits on the banks on the Dordogne in the central Corrèze region of France – well, having collaborated for years with its artisans to create custom designs that bring an *“haute couture”* sensibility to his projects. The acquisition will allow him to shift production of his eponymous furniture line, launched in 2021, to Corrèze in order to better control the quality, and will swell his employee count to 122 at the time of writing. Écart will remain

separate from his own line, and efforts will be refocused on reproducing historical designs from the 1920s and 1930s. *“I need to have more and more, it's a way to move forward,”* he says, half-apologetically, as he hands me a newspaper article detailing the buyout. *“There is always a feeling of dissatisfaction. I'm never happy.”*

Accordingly, he is always on the move. Regularly flitting Stateside to check in with myriad American clients and his newly opened New York showroom in a Chelsea penthouse, the day after we meet he will fly to Melbourne for four days to launch his first solo show in Australia at Criteria Gallery. Next, he will head to Rome to scope out plans for an upcoming opera scenography, then Switzerland for a ski holiday with friends. In May, he will present a collection of chairs created with his old friend Christian Louboutin named after goddesses historical and contemporary, from Nefertiti to Josephine Baker (all featuring red-soled heels as the feet of the chair, a nod to Louboutin's scarlet soles). He and his team are currently juggling 27 residential projects, ranging from East Coast mansions to Paris pied-à-terres to Saint Moritz chalets, alongside several new furnishing launches.

Then there's the new apartment of his own that he is renovating, overlooking the École des Beaux-Arts in the well-heeled 6th arrondissement of Paris, the adjacent quartier to his current home which overlooks





the Seine. He splits his time between the French capital and Château de Fabrègues, the 17th-century Provençal manse he bought in 2009 when it was in ruinous condition and restored to a state of Scandinavian-inflected splendour. “It had belonged to the same family since the 10th century,” he says. “*Can you imagine?*” After major renovations, he filled it with Axel Einar Hjorth furniture, Otto Schulz armchairs, Paavo Tynell chandeliers, and his vast collections of ceramics.

His side hustle is designing scenography for operas. Having hinted heavily in press interviews that set design was in his wheelhouse, he was rewarded with a brief to imagine the scheme for the Basel Opera’s performance of Giuseppe Verdi’s *Rigoletto*, which debuted in Switzerland in 2023. “*I always said, ‘Next for me, it’s décor for opera.’ And I said that like, 10 times? And one day it happened,*” he laughs. Now, he is working on a scheme for a production of Wagner’s Ring cycle in Rome. How many hours does he sleep a night? “*Six hours, when it’s a good night,*” he says. “*But yesterday I had dinner with a friend, I went to bed at one o’clock and I woke up at 5am. It’s not enough.*” He pauses. “*I put a lot of face cream everywhere.*”



In style, Yovanovitch’s work is characterized by rigour and warmth, with a deep-seated appreciation for natural materials. Minimalist tendencies are spiked with humorous details. At Le Coucou, the five-star ski hotel he designed in Méribel, one wall of the restaurant features a wall of unusually-shaped cuckoo clocks. Meanwhile the ceiling above the chef’s table at Hélène Darroze’s restaurant at The Connaught, in London, features a custom fresco Yovanovitch commissioned, titled ‘*The Utensils of Heaven*’ by the French artist Rochegaussen, depicting colanders and cheese graters traced like constellations against a midnight-blue sky. One of his most popular designs is a chubby, sheepskin-upholstered armchair with teddy-bear ears sprouting from the backrest and two buttons for eyes. Naturally, it comes in three sizes: Papa, Mama and Baby.

Yovanovitch takes equal pleasure in naming as in designing his furnishings. Two floor lamps are named James and Marsha, after the president and first lady in the 1996 film ‘*Mars Attacks!*’. “*Life is too serious,*” declares Yovanovitch.

"It's very serious work because you have to do the work on time, you have to pay attention to budgets, good quality always and working with the best craftsmen... but at the end, I want to have fun also with the clients. For me, it's fun."

Yovanovitch was born in Nice in 1965. He puts his mercurial mix of anxiety-driven ambition and assiduous aspiration to look on the brighter side of life partly down to his parents: an industrialist Yugoslavian father whose family emigrated to France from Serbia, and a French mother whose family lived in Algeria until the 1960s when it gained independence from France. They split when he was small. *"My father is very mélancolique. I have some part of that. I try to work on it, and to be more happy every day, but it's complicated!"*

Yovanovitch says. *"My mother is from the south of France and she is more sunny."* Both families' itinerant histories seem to have affected him. *"There were very few heirlooms. This is probably why I need to create my own spaces and create my own legacy."*

Locales also played a part in his upbringing. Yovanovitch grew up in the chateur of Nice, but spent holidays in the Alps at his grandmother's home in Valberg, surrounded by her collection of 1950s Vallauris Picault ceramics and a whole heap of rattan furniture. It's a style he has previously cited as formative in his aesthetic education – he is constitutionally unable to walk past a brocante without acquiring something, and today he collects Vallauris Picault ceramics himself. *"For me, it reminds me of the sun, the wind, the light, and the happiness of the French Riviera,"* he says.

After school, he attended business school in Paris. In 1990, in a successful attempt to swerve military service by making use of a scheme that allowed him to work overseas, Yovanovitch wound up in fashion. He took a job at Pierre Cardin in Brussels, where he managed the designer's menswear licenses, later overhauling

the collections completely as a designer. In 2001, he decided it was time for a change, and set up his interior design business with *"no clients, no money, no nothing."* He smiles. *"I think it was completely crazy."* His first client was Patricia Losey, the film producer and English wife of the *'Don Giovanni'* film director Joseph Losey. He filled the industrial artist's atelier in Paris's 14th arrondissement she had recently acquired with Pierre Chateau furniture. The project was featured in *Madame Figaro*. He hasn't stopped working since.

Naturally, his tastes have changed over the past two decades. *"When I started, it was very minimal, very white. And year after year, I thought that colour brings something to the architecture, makes something stronger,"* he reflects. He is particularly fond of pink, in unfashionable salmon shades. *"My clients are very big collectors of contemporary art, but I tell them, you don't need to do your house like a white-cube gallery. We can have colours, fabrics, textures. I want to bring more warmth, more fun, to be more playful."*

Part of that playfulness comes down to the site-specific artworks he commissions. He regularly works with Claire Tabouret, the French artist who filled the chapel at his Château de Fabrègues with an emotive mural of children. *"We had this very strong connection and we are always talking about l'enfance,"* he says. *"She has made her peace with her childhood. And me, I try!"* He has commissioned the Japanese installation artist Tadashi Kawamata at least six times for different projects (one of his huts is currently perched high above our heads). The French artist Daniel Buren is another frequent collaborator alongside the Flemish sculptor Johan Creten, whose giant ceramic owl currently bears over us at Yovanovitch's showroom, where we are taking tea on a boomerang-shaped, white bouclé sofa. Owls are another Yovanovitch obsession. His childlike fascination with the bird has engendered a collection





in his Provence home that he estimates is now some 270 pieces strong, ranging from ceramic Vallauris versions to paintings by the Senegalese artist Omar Ba. Perhaps he sees in them a totemic quality. He admits that though he longs for weekends alone at his château, after several hours he begins to feel lonely. *“It’s very funny because I like to be alone. And then, when I am alone, I feel depressed. I have a lot of friends. I have very close family. It’s very important for me, these relationships. Because I am insecure, I need them. And I think they need me too,”* he says. He loves animals, and is never happier than when he is surrounded by his three snowy-coated Italian mountain dogs, Stella (*“one of my favourite names”*), Fuji (*“like the Japanese mountain”*) and Kim (*“I was thinking that Kim Basinger was very pretty”*). A fourth dog, Théo, a big-dog-energy Italian Lagotto breed, was a gift to his groundskeeper.

In addition to providing a plush lifestyle for the hounds, the château has unleashed a more daring side to Yovanovitch’s practice, lending it a fairytale dimension that has in turn won him grander and more extravagant projects. *“It’s really a place where I can experiment, where I feel more free,”* he says. He never intended to buy the property, and only viewed it out of curiosity while spending a weekend with family in the area. *“I was shocked by the beauty of the house. It was very romantic. No heat, only one bathroom, there was a hole in the roof, some trees were growing out – very wild. But so nice,”* he says. The three-year renovation was “crazy” but has given him, he senses, a “legitimacy” with his clients. *“The more you do, the more creative you are. I feel much better now than I did 10 years ago. It’s easier for me to feel the volume, to feel what I want to do, and also to have more confidence in my ideas with my clients. At the beginning I said, ‘We could do that’. Now I say, ‘We should do that’.”*

Set in 1,000 acres of Provençal woodland, lavender fields and farmland, the château has also instilled in him a love of gardening. Having worked with the renowned French landscape gardener Louis Benech to restore the park and its miles of dry-stone walls, Yovanovitch now spends weekends with his hands in the soil. The grounds lend themselves to cultural events and exhibitions, with highlights including a 2019 exhibition of giant, planet-like marble sculptures titled *“Pars pro Toto”* by the Polish artist Alicja Kwade, off the back of Yovanovitch appreciating her work in Venice. In June, the French ballet dancer Hugo Marchand is set to give a performance.

Until then, Yovanovitch will spend what little spare time he has tending to the 1,000 trees he has planted in the park. *“It’s very joyful to see the trees grow so big. I love them! I know them all by heart,”* he says. It must be a comforting feeling to plant something and see it grow stronger each year. Yovanovitch admits that sometimes the opposite can be true. *“You see also that you plant a tree here, and a tree here, one grows very tall, and the other is small, and you don’t understand why. C’est l’injustice de la vie! Even when you go to the gym, you stay skinny. That’s life!”*

