

AD

CREATIVE VISION

Khuloud Al Thani, Kueng
Caputo, Raneem Farsi,
Barnaba Fornasetti, Rosita
Missoni, Mercedes Salazar,
Marta Sala & Kenzō Takada

DESERT ODYSSEY

Sandcasted
furniture, art in
AIUla & the new
Arabian architecture




HOTELS BY
DESIGN
Stylish stays
from Milan
to Miami

A minimalist dining table for six sits beneath the high, wood-beamed ceiling.

OPPOSITE: The apartment's welcoming space is multi-use, and blends the living, kitchen and dining areas together.

ARENA/Lyon



EQUAL PARTS

A mathematician's home in Lyon manages the perfect formula of renovation and reinvention

Words **Jeremy Callaghan**
Photography **Gaelle Le Boulicaut**



The architects incorporated modern materials, like green Valchromat, to add a contemporary edge and offset the original features, such as the stone fireplaces. Here, the material marks the gallery kitchen that's fitted into the step in the wall.

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Contemporary furniture in the living room includes a Muuto sofa, Vitra armchairs and an Arper pouf. The arched niches in the wall are painted hues of green to complement the neutral tones found throughout the apartment.

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BEHIND THE HIDDEN PASSAGES, vaulted tunnels and zig-zagging stairways that mark Lyon's 2,000 years of history sits a recently renovated home that belongs to a modern-day mathematician. Drawing similarities between the homeowner and famous French physician Nostradamus – who's rumoured to have practiced his own calculus on the same street nearly 500 years ago – Paris-based architecture firm, Studio Razavi Architecture (founded by Iranian architect Alireza Razavi), hoped to instil 'a sense of rigour and a tactile approach'. Abandoned for over a decade, the apartment came with an unfortunate history of several renovations that disguised the original architecture of the space. Sitting behind a heavy wooden door at the top of a stone staircase in a courtyard-style complex, it was, for both the client and the architects, a project about returning the space to its earliest state while incorporating contemporary features.

"During the design phase, there was a lot of talk about the golden ratio, Pythagorus and Fibonacci, which, for the amateur mathematicians amongst us, pertains to naturally occurring perfect proportion," says Studio Razavi's Andoni Brioni.

"The movement between tunnels and open space, taken from the context of Lyon, is a theme we chose to work with – it's why we were against using walls and doors. We wanted to create a free-flowing complex space, something special. You can't imagine the amount of geometry we put into this project. There had to be an ordered complexity that promoted harmony."

The team began the process by demolishing the 'add-ons' until they arrived at the original volumes. Although long and narrow, the space boasted four-metre-high ceilings supported by wooden structural beams and two ancient stone fireplaces. The apartment also featured a stone spiral staircase, large windows that offered views of the historical street and the building's courtyard, as well as



a hidden passage less than a metre wide with carved gargoyles. It was, to Brioni, ‘totally impressive’.

Although the historic features stunned Brioni and his colleague, architect Federico Mächler, both understood that while the client wanted authenticity, he didn’t want ‘old-looking’. The challenge, then, was to conserve the architectural heritage they’d uncovered without mimicking what Brioni describes as a ‘kind of castle’.

“There is an intimacy created between the spaces, and we thought a lot about how the client could live between the different volumes,” says Mächler. “His request was to have a place where he could live, work and spend a lot of time, but that looked like it came out of a dream.”

The architects exploited the biggest space and converted it into a combined lounge, dining and kitchen area. With plenty of natural light and a generous layout, the area offers everything needed for the day-to-day. The dividing walls, which were part of the original structure built in the 14th century, were brought back to life using an old natural-toned, lime bagging technique. While inspired by Lyon’s traboules, and the way light and shade alternate within them, the interior architecture also reflects a sort of ‘modern, universal classicism’.

For Brioni and Mächler, the idea was to create a geometry and architecture that would be recognisable over the centuries, essentially mirroring architectural evolution. “In this way,” says Mächler, “the apartment takes on a universality and timelessness.”

“Timelessness was achieved by the repetition and rhythm of the niches using universal forms and geome-

ABOVE FROM LEFT: The 14th-century apartment is located in one of Lyon’s historical quarters; inside the bathroom, a series of arches reference the city’s Roman-era architecture.

OPPOSITE: Bed linen by Maison de Vacances covers the bed, while the playful bedside light is from Pianca.

try,” Mächler adds. “The tenant is immediately put at ease because they are confronted with nothing that they haven’t seen in the surrounding quarters as they access the apartment from the main street. In its context, these forms are naturally occurring, and therefore, inside the home, they are familiar and comforting.”

Using green Valchromat, a modern material that can take on various appearances, the apartment’s cabinetry, desks and shelving feature a neutral undertone that complements the natural colours and materials found elsewhere, like the wooden ceiling beams and the stone fireplaces. Along with minimalist furnishing, the Valchromat offers a contemporary visual rest from the original, aged forms of the apartment.

“The client is not a collector of things,” says Brioni. “He wanted a space that was uncluttered without looking empty. We created a minimal colour palette that we used throughout. This way, the space feels like it’s lived-in but open enough to nurture creative thinking.” ^[AV]

studiorazavi.com



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