

# IMAGICASA

INTERIOR DESIGN

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# SOBER CLASS WITH A HINT OF EXOTICISM



The best designs do not arise suddenly, but take time to grow. Architect Alireza Razavi fully believes in this idea, which is probably why his work is so appealing. With his Studio Razavi, he designed this magnificent residence in Paris, where sober class speaks from every corner and luxury takes on a new meaning.

The perfect balance between science and art: this is how Alireza Razavi describes design. The architect has already covered a fine trajectory in his career, from courses in New York and Paris to collaborations with prestigious studios. His interesting take on architecture and interior design is therefore based on a strong theoretical background, a lot of experience, and a clear vision. 'Design is informed by art and science, never just one of the two. It is up to the designer to decide which of the two they want to emphasise more strongly and how they can find the right balance in a specific project.' Of course, intuition also plays a big role, and the feeling of the entire team is always crucial in this, not just his own. Over the years, Razavi gathered a loyal group of experts around him, working according to the same fundamental principle: materiality as a spatial experience. For them, successful design only arises when techniques are applied with a kind of architectural sensitivity and a thorough understanding of the relationship between the two.

#### LAYERED PROCESS

With an extensive portfolio and offices in Paris, London, and New York, Studio Razavi clearly does not find itself at an experimental stage. A key requirement in all their projects is that the result is timeless, as the studio believes that long-term enjoyment of an interior is one of the best indicators of success. A second requirement revolves around craftsmanship and finding the right materials. Above all, Razavi wants to create opportunities to realise impressive craftsmanship. 'As architects, we draw something with the sole aim that it will one day be realised. That is where all our efforts, or our science, so to speak, go. Meaningful designs, in my opinion, are the ones that manage to best convey materiality.' This of course brings us straight





to the materials the architect prefers to work with, although he has no specific preference in this regard. For him, all materials have their own qualities, so he is open to many options. Of course, the context, the clients' budget, availability, and suitability within the project largely determine which palette is composed. Is there a common thread in all of the studio's designs? It is a question Razavi finds rather difficult to answer, and he actually prefers to hear the answer from others. Recently, though, he was told that there is a strong clarity running through the studio's portfolio, and that is what they ultimately strive for. 'From the inside, it is harder to define one's own style. When I think about the questions we always ask ourselves before we start a new project, I would say that is why there is a kind of thread running through our work, rather than a fixed house style.' In addition, the architect likes to talk about the evolution of the design process, and how it is sometimes difficult to outsource it. When he meets clients for the first time, the main thing is to get them to talk about what they are looking for, who they are, and whether they have already built or renovated a house before. Of course, the contact does not stop there, because for Razavi, architecture is a layered process that needs to be constantly fed with new information. He tries to communicate this idea to all clients from the start: even with the existence of all those realistic visualisations, design visions remain ideas that need space to mature. Between the first sketch and the final result, there is a lot of time and often some structural changes. The Sydney Opera House is a good example of this, as several proposals were first made before arriving at the striking design we all know today. After an idea is drawn out, the architect leaves his work to craftspeople who will realise the project. This is a difficulty for Razavi at times. 'The most beautiful project can become a disaster if it is poorly executed. If a design goes out the door, it does not mean that architects are no longer responsible at all, but the success of the project is no longer entirely in their hands. This puts you in a very difficult position.'

## Curved shapes should ensure that harsh shadows are avoided

### NEW AND AMBIGUOUS

An inspiring location is already half the battle. This is true not only for the clients, who can look forward to stunning views from their latest residence and an environment that is in line with their indoor requirements, but certainly also for the architects, who can be inspired by it. This Paris apartment is located in an eighteenth-century residence that once housed a monastery and was thoroughly renovated after the French Revolution. As only very few original elements remained and some significant structural changes were needed, Studio Razavi opted to completely demolish the existing and start from a blank canvas. They took inspiration for the new design from the emotions evoked by the place, and then it was soon clear that a form of tranquillity, class, and timelessness needed to find a place. Overlooking the Jardin du Luxembourg and in the centre of Paris, authenticity and elegance were also natural qualities for the interior. The neighbourhood in which the apartment is located is one of the oldest in the city, as the street was even once a Roman road. Surrounded by a beautiful setting with private homes, churches, monasteries, and beautiful squares, Razavi says the apartment ultimately had to become 'something new and ambiguous'. 'We tried to create a place of contemplation where you can retreat,' he says. The key material? Natural light, which enters the residence from three different directions. Furthermore, the load-bearing walls and columns were not simply hidden away, but integrated into the interior like generous elements. Their materiality was emphasised by applying a plaster stucco that catches the light in an interesting way. All the strategies used in this project were meant to create a sense of tranquillity and a Parisian elegance. The finishes were kept quite sober, with light beige complemented by a lot of wood. Curved shapes, also found in the paintwork, should in turn avoid harsh shadows. The furniture was chosen in function of this calm design vision. A striking feature in the living room is the circular seating area, with a rough side table that draws all the attention. Then, in the dining room, it is the Alborz Dining Table, Studio Razavi's own design, that keeps you fascinated. Remarkably, the table legs from Fior di Pesco run through





the glass tabletop. As we leave the living areas and make our way to the private zone, a subtle change in the colour palette takes place. The base still consists of soft beige and white tones, but colour accents were introduced here and there. The master bedroom was given extra depth by the dark blue headboard, which adds extra intimacy to the warm atmosphere. The final touch was reserved for the many works of art, which were carefully selected to take the interior to an even higher and more luxurious level, if that is even possible. There are some unique exotic and particularly ancient pieces, such as the South Arabian tombstone mask in limestone from the first century **BC** or **AD**, the marble tombstone fragment with Kufic inscription from the ninth or tenth century, and an Egyptian vase made of carved alabaster estimated to have been made between 1500 and 1000 **BC**. These are just some of the unique finds in this apartment, and they form a flowing whole with the contemporary pieces.

Alireza Razavi himself finds it difficult to find suitable words to describe his work, but we are happy to make an attempt to summarise this project. Class, authenticity, and warmth are the first qualities that come to mind. A personal interpretation of French elegance certainly also fits the bill, as do playful touches in, for example, the use of colour and shapes in the painting. Add to this the many artworks, often with an exotic hint, and it is clear that Studio Razavi's style is mostly one of a kind. 🌿 (Text: Eva Janssens)