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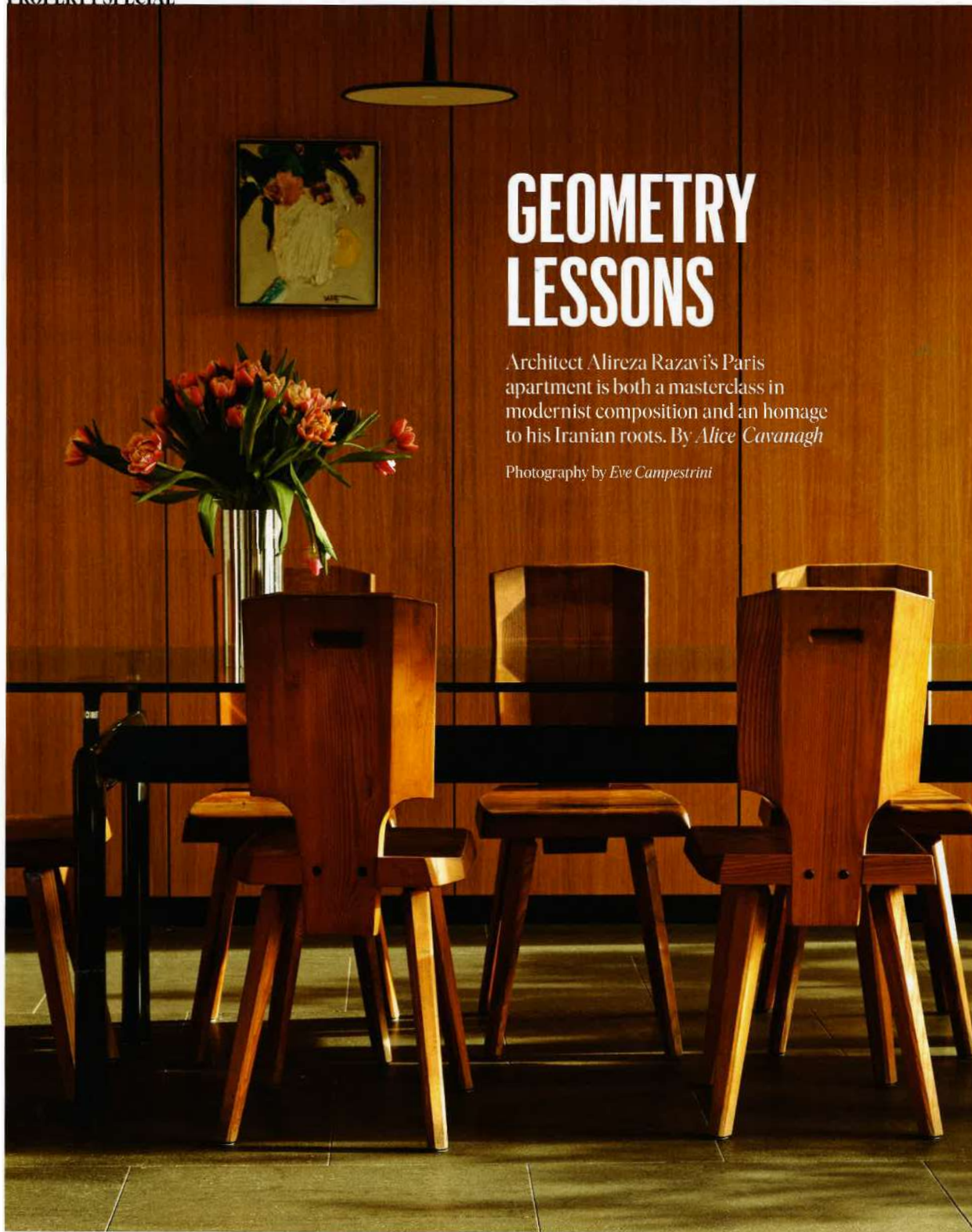
THE MAN WHO CAN

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GEOMETRY LESSONS

Architect Alireza Razavi's Paris apartment is both a masterclass in modernist composition and an homage to his Iranian roots. By *Alice Cavanagh*

Photography by *Eve Campestrini*





Untitled, 1990, by Sharon Lockhart hangs above Multicolor Twist 1, 2016, by Matthew Chambers, in Aleeza Razaev's Paris home. Opposite: *Peonies*, 1966, by Manoucher Yekta; behind S28A chairs by Pierre Chabo and a G table by Le Corbusier; Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand



Razavi sits in front of *Linoleum cut Untitled (Woman 4)*, 2006, by Christoph Ruckhäberle. The sofa is a 1970 Arflex designed by Mario Marengo. Below: the master bathroom gives onto a dressing area

While many Parisians covet a home emblematic of the city's architecture – stately, Haussmannian, or even older replete with the classic flourishes – Iranian-born, Paris-based architect Alireza Razavi has different ideas. His professional practice and personal taste lean towards modernist style. The building he most admires in the French capital is the Australian embassy, an imposing example of Harry Seidler's 1970s brutalism. "I prefer to design and build something from scratch and ensure that the interior has a conversation with the shell," he says of his multidisciplinary practice, which spans architecture, interiors, furniture and objects.

Razavi, 55, has stayed close to this philosophy for the recent renovation of his own apartment: a top-floor duplex in a concrete 1968 modernist building in the city's 17th arrondissement. He moved into the 90sq m space with his wife Vanessa 15 years ago, and while the bones were good – including an expanse of floor-to-ceiling windows on one side framing a sweeping view of the neighbourhood's surrounding zinc rooftops – the central living area, from which all other rooms flow, was divided by partitions. Free from the restrictions of regulations governing historic buildings, those were the first to be knocked down, restoring the pure lines of the rectangular-shaped living room. "None is load bearing,

which is one of the amazing things about this building – there are no beams," says Razavi.

As his family has expanded (he and Vanessa, a hotelier, have two daughters), Razavi's modernist preferences have paid off further. Two years ago, he added a new-build to the top floor – a lightweight construction of concrete and wood, with a sedum green roof system – doubling their floorplan and gaining three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a study. The original residence's first floor was reconfigured and is now entirely dedicated to living.

The renovation was a complete refurb, yet nothing feels "new". "I wanted something that would be ambiguous, as if it was built yesterday or 50 years ago," Razavi says of the work that went into creating a seamless transition between the two floors. There is an abundance of natural light; the palette is restrained, while Hungarian oak-wood cabinetry and block-coloured tiled feature walls add tonal contrast. In the main open-plan living and dining area, he laid down dark basaltina flooring and installed a single steel column to cover a chimney flue – a facsimile of an original column in the foyer.

The furniture leans towards 20th-century modernism. A set of Pierre Chapo S28A dining chairs surrounds the "6" dining table by Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand, while a Mario Marengo sofa set from the 1970s sits atop an early-19th-century Tabriz rug. Above the sofa hangs a large, graphic black and white linoleum-cut work by the contemporary German artist Christoph Ruckhäberle. "First and foremost I like things that are well-built," he says. "These chairs might crack,

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"I WAS DEPRESSED WHEN WE MOVED TO PARIS – THE BUILDINGS WERE SO DARK"



Top: a painting by Al Taylor, Razavi's portraits of his daughters and a mid-century Iranian workers' poster behind the double-helix staircase. Above: an LC1 chair by Le Corbusier and table by Eric Buchli sit on a late-20th-century Iranian rug. Bottom right: E1027 side table by Eileen Gray in the bedroom

but that's perfectly OK... they're probably going to last another 100 years. And the rug is from my family. I'm interested in permanence... in materials ageing."

With the new floorplan, the family gained a bigger kitchen, transforming the former kitchen into a nook with a daybed – clad in the same rectangular black tiling that is a feature throughout the home. Razavi's "den" is an homage to the modernist architect Richard Neutra's house in Silver Lake, Los Angeles. "It filled a necessity for a more intimate, compact space in which we invariably all feel good," he says.

The nook is also a microcosm of Razavi's approach to art collecting – a long-time personal passion that began in his student days at the Beaux-Arts in Paris. Vividly colourful paintings by Iranian artist Mostafa Sarabi hang alongside a tonal floral painting by Glenn Sorensen; just below those is the building's remnant square steel rubbish shoot. "It's our Duchamp," he jokes. Razavi has made his own moves in the art world, having worked on projects for Larry Gagosian, Sotheby's and most recently the David Zwirner gallery. Vanessa is also an avid collector – revealed here in the works of contemporary ceramic artists such as Matthew Chambers, Turi Heisselberg Pedersen and Réjean Peytavin.

The bookshelf opposite displays a ceramic sculpture by Riccardo Scarpa, with a wooden sarcophagus mask from the first millennium BC and a Roman head fragment, as well as family heirlooms, Amlash pottery dating from 2,000BC and a Nishapur ceramic from the 11th century. "These are pretty much the only pieces my parents could get out of Iran," Razavi says, recalling the family's emigration to France overnight when he was just nine. "It was sort of a secular upbringing, and Tehran was a modern city, so I was depressed when we moved to Paris – it was January, and the buildings were so dark."

Razavi has yet to return to his roots, but has created a connection to his birthplace through pieces that conjure life and colour throughout the apartment, and span 4,000

years: from Amlash culture to paintings by contemporary artists such as Manoucher Yektai from the New York School art movement, the modernist Behjat Sadr and the young Iranian artist Sarabi, whose work he discovered through the Tehran-based Delgosha Gallery. "Somehow, this has been my way of staying in touch," he says. He has just started a residential project in Azerbaijan – his first-ever commission in the region.

Upstairs, in the main bedroom above the bed, is an early-19th-century oil painting, a portrait of a young man, the son of Fath Ali Shah Qajar – Razavi is a descendant on his maternal side. There is also a fragment of tiling from the 12th century and a framed antique Iranian textile; its warm, earthy and time-faded tones echo the room's colour scheme. This blend of history and art is an intriguing foil to Razavi's appreciation for function, form and brute materials. An unlikely dance that continues to inspire and push him forward.

"Architecture is probably the midpoint between technique and the arts – this is why I was drawn to it in the first place," he says. "There's nothing certain about architecture. You could argue there's nothing certain about science or arts – a lot of it is intuition." ■ HTSI

