

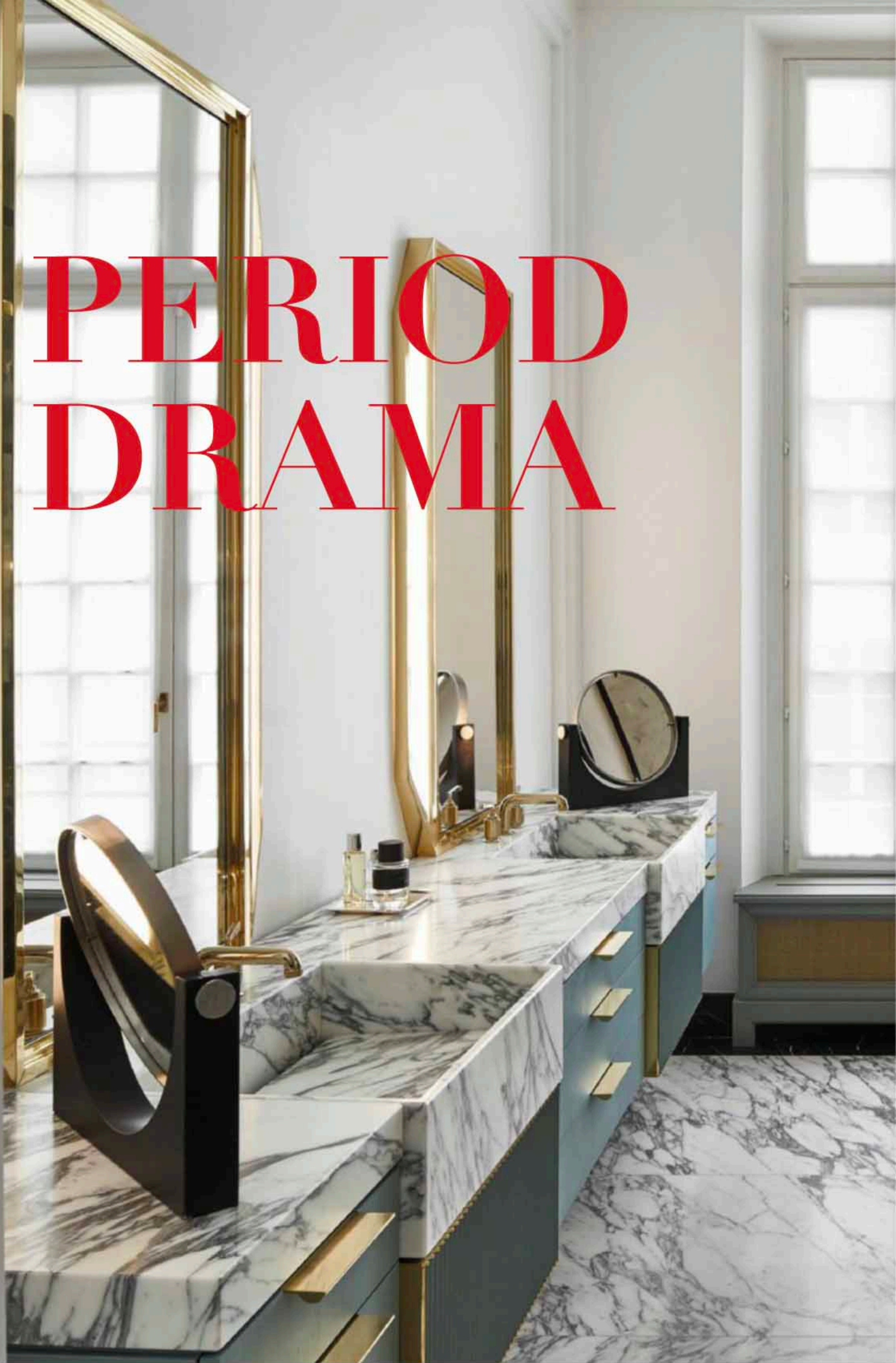
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THIS PARIS HOME SKILFULLY ALLOWS
ART DECO, MID-CENTURY MODERN
AND ULTRA-CONTEMPORARY STYLES
TO THRIVE IN A 17TH-CENTURY SHELL

Photography Francis Amiand Words Judy Diamond

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icture the scene: you've been commissioned to remodel an apartment in a 17th-century mansion in the middle of Paris. You're expecting great things: elaborate cornicing, imposing fireplaces, parquet flooring at the very least – all the flamboyant details that come with an authentic slice of heritage living. You open the door... and nothing. There are no remnants of former glories, no reminders of the wealthy blue-bloods who must once have lived it up here, just bare, ordinary walls and floors.

That was the situation facing Emil Humbert and Christophe Poyet a couple of years ago when they were asked to turn the space into a home. If they were disappointed, they got over it quickly: there was a lot of work ahead. The French architecture and design practice took what was effectively a blank canvas and created almost every element of the interior, arranging the layout, repositioning internal walls and doorways, inserting a staircase, designing light fittings, making the key pieces of furniture and much more. "When the owners first asked us to look at the property, it was in fact two separate ►



[Previous pages] Brass-trimmed mirrors reflect the rich marble decoration of the main bathroom. It feels simple but opulent and continues the interior scheme of the rest of the house. [Left] The children's bedrooms are just as considered as the rest of the house [Above] Polished brass, statement lighting, bespoke furniture and striking artworks, all set against a monochrome backdrop, are the hallmarks of Humbert & Poyet's design for this house.

[Right and previous page]
The Flexform bed is flanked by pendant lights by Magic Circus above tables designed by H&P, who also created the sideboard. The painting over the bed is by Aaron Young. The Pierre Paulin armchair and the Serge Mouille sconce look utterly modern but were designed in 1966 and 1954 respectively.





[Right and opposite, top] The bottom and top of the new staircase, from the entrance hall with its terrazzo floor and wall to the upper landing and the bedrooms. The brass balustrade and stunning light fitting were designed specifically for this space. The classic 20th-century furniture pieces by Le Corbusier and Jean Prouvé give a flavour of what is to come. The wall light is an H&P design. The artwork just visible on the left of the hall is by Keith Haring – the wall it hangs on was built specially for it. **[Opposite, bottom]** This corner of the living room (more overleaf) shows the doors H&P designed for this house, their simple frame and half-moon handles giving them an Art Deco flavour. Next to the Le Corbusier chaise longue is a brass floor lamp from the H&P collection

apartments, one above the other,” recalls Emil Humbert. “The two floors were not connected. And their interiors were very plain, with nothing special about them at all apart from the high ceilings. The parquet, the mouldings, the period details were all completely gone. We had to give it back its soul and its heart. We had to recreate everything. Only once these elements were in place were we able to add more contemporary touches.”

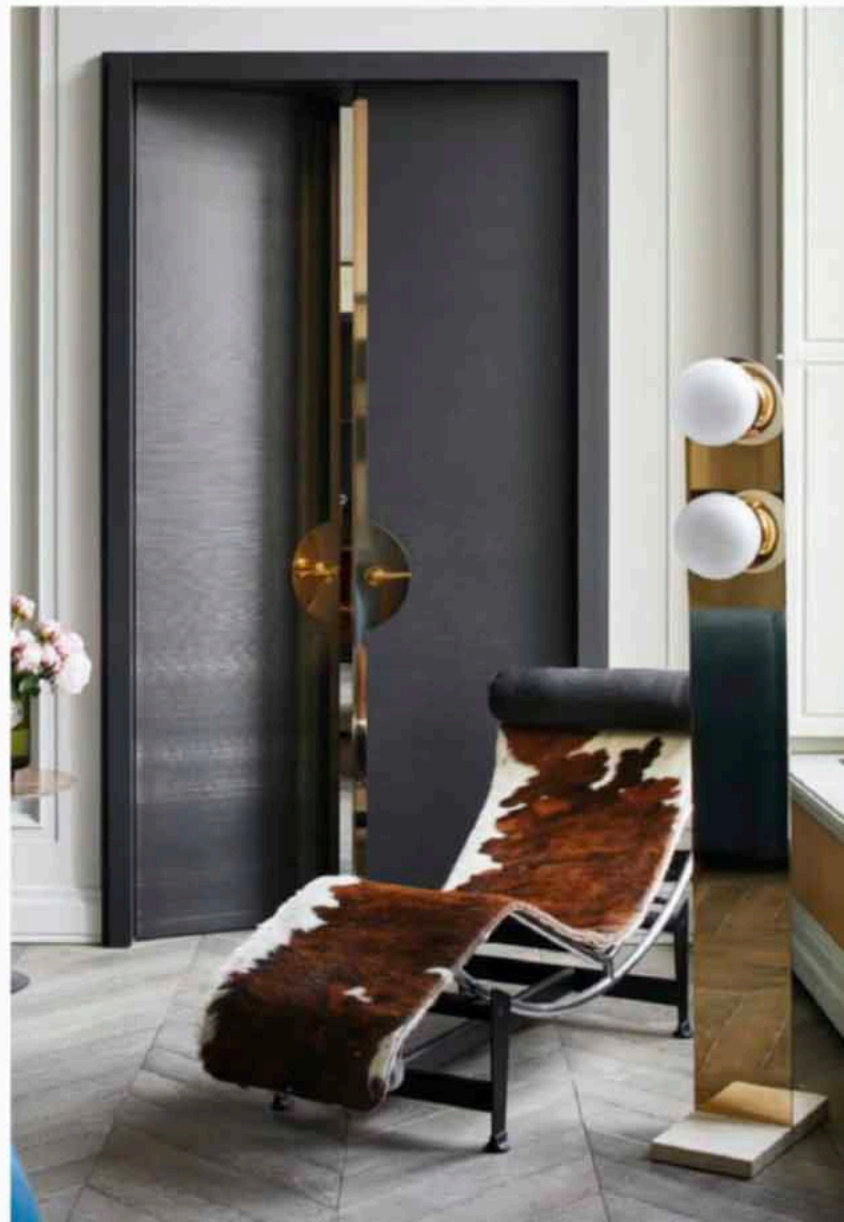
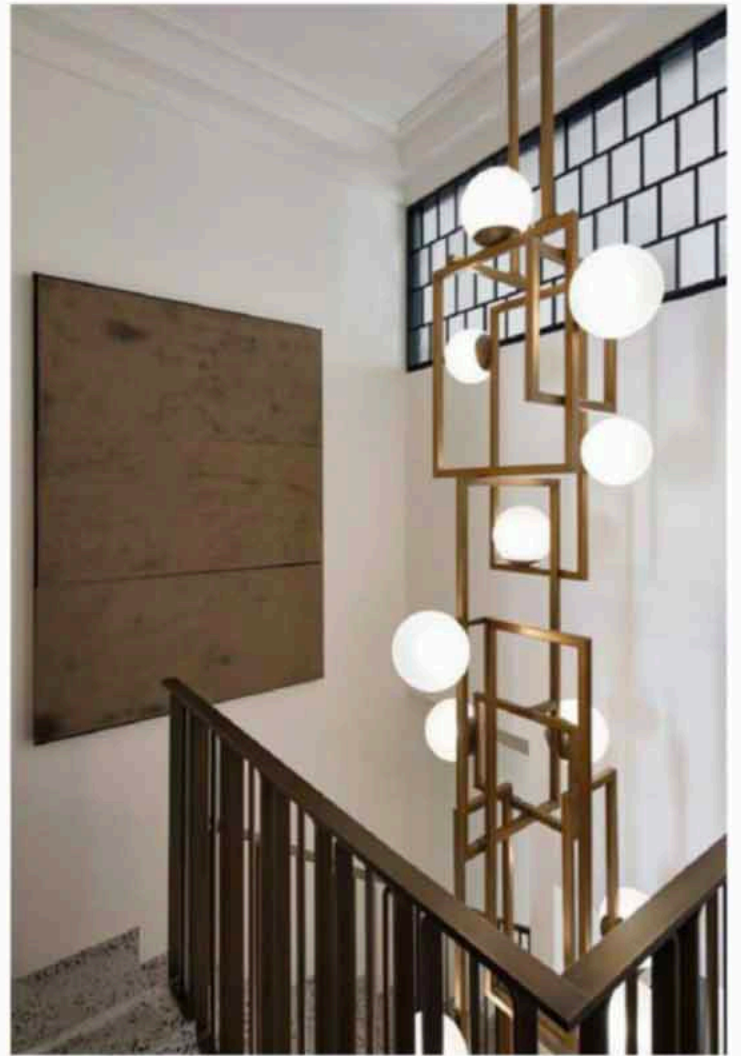
What the property did have was good proportions and lots of space – 250 square metres in total. This is a *hôtel particulier* – a grand mansion house hidden from the street behind lofty walls and a courtyard. It’s right in the heart of the city in the old aristocratic district of Le Marais just to the north of the Rue de Rivoli. Some *hôtels particuliers* are now museums; this one was broken up into apartments long ago.

The owners had high hopes and a simple brief: they had a young family but they also liked to entertain, and they had a large and interesting collection of modern art that needed to be thoughtfully displayed.

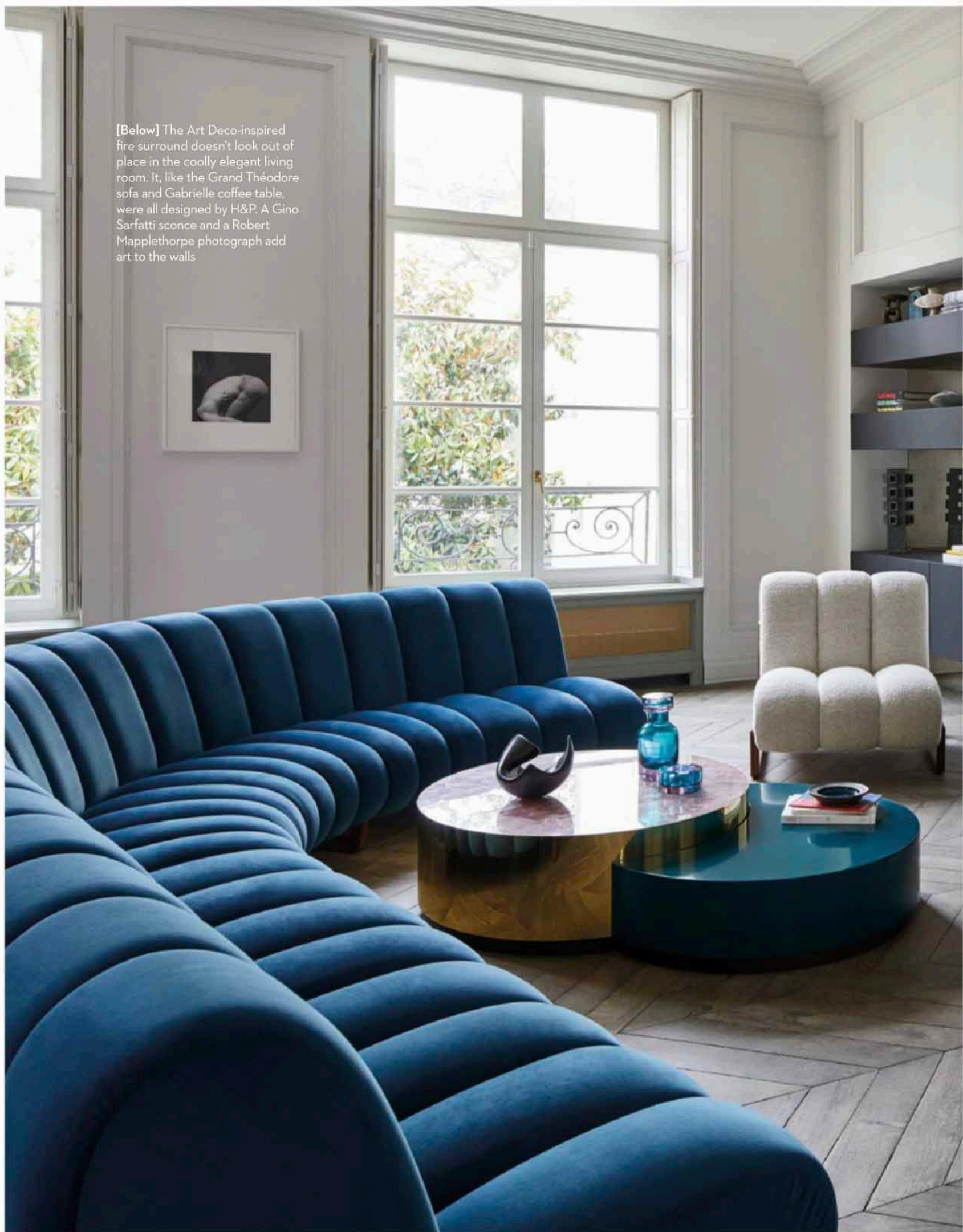
The project began with the laborious restoration work. “There was scaffolding everywhere – it was a real mess,” Humbert admits. “It took a very long time, well over a year, with lots of craftsmen around the place.”

The designers also had to figure out how to join the two apartments together and how to arrange the living spaces. The latter was relatively straightforward: a large living room, a library, a formal dining room and a marble-clad kitchen downstairs, with bedrooms and bathrooms on the upper level. Linking the two is a new staircase, whose brass balusters are echoed by the sharp lines of the bespoke geometric light fitting that fills the stairwell. “We felt the ►





[Below] The Art Deco-inspired fire surround doesn't look out of place in the coolly elegant living room. It, like the Grand Théodore sofa and Gabrielle coffee table, were all designed by H&P. A Gino Sarfatti sconce and a Robert Mapplethorpe photograph add art to the walls





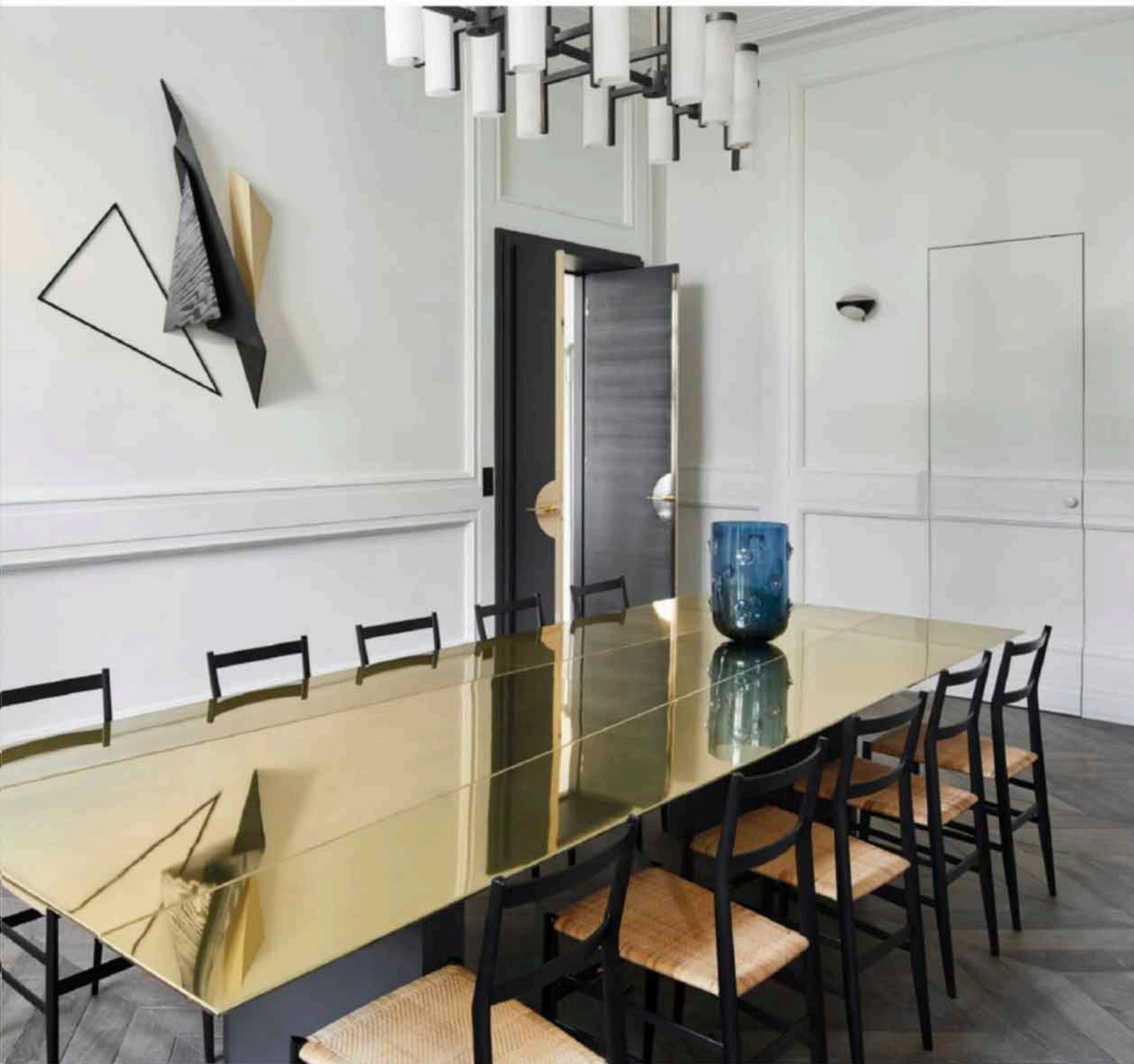


[Above] Another view of the living room, where the sofa and Bertrand Lavier canvas deliver a jolt of colour. **[Right]** A 4m-long brass-topped dining table (H&P's Apolline) sets the stage for dinner party drama, alongside Gio Ponti chairs, H&P lights and a wall sculpture by Berlin artist Katja Strunz. Note the hidden door to the kitchen. "This is a supporting wall, so we couldn't remove it. We decided to disguise the opening in the mouldings. It's like a secret door - I love that idea," says Humbert



double-height entrance needed a statement light to go alongside the brass banister," says Humbert.

The entrance contains all the elements of the design scheme: the background is a subtle blend of black, white and grey (here in the form of the terrazzo floor and walls) interspersed with splashes of colour. Classic pieces of 20th-century furniture (here, a Jean Prouvé console and Le Corbusier chairs) sit alongside specially created designs by Humbert & Poyet (such as the wall lights and pendant). Brass gleams and contemporary artworks



take pride of place: “We built a wall here in the entrance hall especially for a Keith Haring work,” says the architect. “All the owners brought with them was their art collection, so we had to choose the right place, the right wall for each piece, and put the right furnishings next to it to show it off at its best.”

In less sure hands, mixing Art Deco styling, mid-century furniture and contemporary art with classic period detailing could have felt clumsy. Indeed, had the latter been original, the architects might have been less bold, too respectful of the past

to risk overshadowing it. Because they created it, though, they clearly felt less constrained by tradition.

The practice has in fact won acclaim for daring juxtapositions in some of its large-scale commercial projects across France and beyond. One recent job, Beefbar Paris, in a listed building just off the Champs-Élysées, sees contemporary furniture complementing glorious original Art Nouveau architecture.

“Designing a home is quite different from doing a restaurant or a hotel, though,” Humbert points out. “It’s not harder, it’s ►

just more personal and you get much more involved in the life of the client because it's their home. There's a lot of emotion too. With a commercial project, there's a certain economic reality that we have to work to: yes, no, let's go!"

Of course, when you can't find quite the right piece for a particular room, it helps if you can create something yourself to fill the gap. The living room's cool neutrals are brought to life by a blue velvet sofa whose voluptuous curves could easily seat six. It and its accompanying armchairs, like the coffee table and the Art Deco-inflected fire surround, are all the studio's creations. "The sofa was designed for this house, but we liked it so much that it is

now part of our collection," explains Humbert. On the walls are a Robert Mapplethorpe and a piece by French painter Bertrand Lavier in typically lively colours.

Double doors edged in brass lead through to the dining room. It feels restrained, almost stark, in daylight, but this is a space that comes alive once night falls. "The brass-topped table creates beautiful reflections, especially in candlelight. It gives a gorgeous ambience. You certainly don't want to cover it up with a tablecloth – better to use really nice placemats!"

The owners are keen cooks so the kitchen had to be functional and practical. "But it also had to be beautiful – a lot of ►

[Right] Another view of the dining room, where a playful piece by Günther Förg breaks up the cool sophistication of the brass and marble decoration **[Opposite]** The kitchen works hard without sacrificing its glamour. Tractor stools by BassamFellows at the Arabescato marble-topped island bench provide a casual dining place. The bronze and glass light is an H&P design.





[Right] The black-framed shower echoes the tall double window. [Below] The lacquered console is an H&P design, as are the mirror and sconces. The sculpture is from Kelly Wearstler



things happen in a kitchen!" smiles Humbert. "When you have a party, there's always a gathering in the kitchen – here, it's around this incredible marble island. But it works just as well when the children are sitting here during the day."

The marble and brass are not reserved for visitors to admire in the public rooms. They reappear in the bathrooms and bedrooms, marrying the decoration and giving the home that elusive sense of unity. "We work closely with the Carrara quarry," says Humbert of the marble. "I go myself and handpick every slab. We employ a lot of Italian artisans on our projects for the quality of their work. It's so important to us to keep the old crafts alive, and we always try to find the best artisans and specialists for each job."

With the furniture in place, the paintings hung and the gleaming La Cornue range cooker ready for dinner party action, the owners were finally able to move into their new home. "They're really delighted with the house," Humbert concludes. "They are so happy here. It's what they wanted – functional and comfortable, but grand and glamorous at the same time." ■