

INSPIRATION

CREATIVES FROM PARIS

Part of the cultural DNA of Paris itself, these designers and style gurus have transformed the city into a world-class wonderland, full of cutting-edge design, vision and creativity.



AGNÈS DEBIZET

Ceramicist Agnès Debizet likes to do things her own way. “I’m radically opposed to mastering traditional methods,” she says. “I prefer to let accidents happen and to repair them if necessary.” She first turned her hand to pottery in 1980 and for decades worked solely as a sculptor, driven by a desire to tell stories through her art. “I never thought about whether it may be sold or not,” she recounts. Ten years ago, she started making furniture and lighting out of clay, and has not looked back. The surfaces of her creations are often crackled and her forms always extremely personal. Inspiration comes from both antique civilisations and the natural world. As her Parisian dealer Victor Gastou says, “When you see a piece by Agnès, you immediately know it’s by her. For me, that’s the mark of a great artist.”



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RAMDANE TOUHAMI

The epitome of the descriptor ‘creative’, Ramdane Touhami refuses to be pigeonholed. Once described as a ‘multi-disciplinary and polymath entrepreneur’, the 49-year-old turns his inventive eye and head for business to everything from masterminding the revival of historic French beauty brands (Cire Trudon and Officine Universelle Buly 1803) to creating cool, quirky hotel interiors, designing wooden furniture, hosting podcasts and starting a publishing company. He may just be the busiest man in Paris, and it would be hard to find someone with a more varied CV.

His art direction agency, Art Recherche Industrie, is the hub of all his endeavours. Set within a 19th-century restaurant and club in Paris’ 10th arrondissement, the space combines old-world charm and colourful, contemporary interventions, the contrast summing up the vibe of many of his projects.

Unsurprisingly, fashion, too holds significant allure for Touhami, in both his personal style and occasional business pursuits, mixing that same touch of vintage and prescient trend nous. “My motto is: one foot in the future, one foot in the past,” he confirms.

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PIERRE GONALONS

Pierre Gonalons has many strings to his bow. He works as both a decorator and the creative director of the legendary Italian furniture brand, Paradisoterrestre, as well as producing his own furniture and lighting through his Ascète label and running a showroom in the 19th-century Parisian shopping arcade, the Galerie Véro-Dodat.

He loves to incorporate circular motifs in his work and is extremely deft with colour. For an apartment he renovated in Venice, for instance, he adopted a striking palette largely dominated by pink and green.

He also draws much of his inspiration from the past – “its symmetry, geometric forms, columns, domes and obelisks.” An example is his exquisite red-marble Palais collection, which directly references the Grand Trianon at Versailles. But perhaps what most sets Gonalons’ work apart is its originality and touches of whimsy. As he admits, “I like nothing more than a touch of fantasy.”



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LAURA GONZALEZ

If there is one word that best describes the work of Laura Gonzalez, it would probably be “exuberance”. Since setting up her own firm, Pravda, at the age of 24 in 2004, she has made her mark with an aesthetic characterised by an array of bright hues, a plethora of pattern and an avowed love of fine craftsmanship. It’s a winning combination that has led her to decorate the mythical Lapérouse restaurant in Paris (which first opened its doors in 1766), as well as a Christian Louboutin store in Barcelona, and Cartier boutiques in Zurich, Stockholm, and New York.

One of her latest ventures is the Japanese-inspired Hana Hotel close to the Opéra Garnier in Paris. Visitors to the French capital would do well to check out her furniture gallery on the Left Bank, whose décor is re-themed at least once a year. There, you can particularly admire the limited-edition pieces she creates with French artisans such as Véronique Rivemale, Thomas Boog and François Mascarello.



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ALEXANDRA SAGUET

An interior architect-designer for over 10 years, Alexandra Saguet is the founder of AS Interior Design Studio in Paris. After undertaking training in design at Penninghen and studies in interior design at the École Supérieure des Arts Modernes, she spent a number of years at a renowned Parisian agency before following her dream of opening her own design studio.

She's known for orchestrating an elegant blend of graphic lines – and curves aplenty – with harmonious natural materials like blonde wood, marble and leather, bringing the elements together across family homes, chic restaurants and hotel interiors. Her design identity is to create a cohesive space that is modern and fits well in a bustling city but also provides a sense of homely, soothing calm. The finishing touches? Creating just the right custom-made furniture or cabinetry and judicious selection of the occasional vintage piece sourced from Paris markets to suit.



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FREDERIC BERTHIER

Architect Frederic Berthier is known for his modern minimalism, using a monochrome palette to his advantage. The result is a cool, considered, but not spare aesthetic that is likely honed by Berthier's background, having worked with design leaders like Philippe Starck, Dominique Perrault and Jean Nouvel over an impressive career. His own signature comes through in his spaces, however, with a black-and-white palette punctuated with elements of warm oak, rosewood and cedarwood.

"I like quiet design, because I design mostly houses," he explains simply. In his own space more personality starts to shine, with shelves full of books and musical instruments on display, including a number of vintage guitars from the 1950s and 1960s. "There is something special about guitars for me," he says. "It's such a cool instrument."



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HUGO TORO

Over the past few years, interior designer Hugo Toro’s trajectory has been extremely swift. He has been appointed to American *Elle Décor’s* A-List and named as one of the world’s top 100 designers by the European editions of *Architectural Digest*. He has launched his own furniture line and completed projects that have included attention-grabbing restaurants, such as the Booking Office 1869 at London’s St Pancras International Station, and three eateries, all named Gigi, in Paris, Saint-Tropez and Val d’Isère. Currently on his drawing board is a new Orient Express hotel, located just a stone’s throw from the Pantheon district in Rome, slated for 2025. What all these projects share is a certain flamboyance and theatricality. He also loves to weave in references to the past and to shake things up a little. As he says, “I love creating things you look at and say, ‘That’s bizarre’, or at least, ‘not common’.”



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LOUIS DUROT

Louis Durot’s destiny could have been quite different. Born to a Jewish mother in 1939, he was arrested by the Nazis during World War II and earmarked to be deported by train to Auschwitz. However the truck transporting him was delayed and arrived at the station too late. On the eve of Christmas, the Germans decided to send him and its other occupants back home, allowing him to take refuge for the rest of the conflict. Now 84, Durot has gone on to become both a renowned chemist and artist-designer. As a scientist specialising in polymers, he has developed materials that have been used on the stands at the Roland Garros tennis arena and the Stade de France. Since the Seventies, he has also created his own furniture using materials he develops, which have surprising, innovative and playful forms. They include the ‘Plante Carnivore’ chair and the ‘Tongue’ table. Among his fans are Californian interior designer Kelly Wearstler. “I am continually drawn to the sculptural quality and meticulous attention to detail inherent in his designs, seamlessly blending artistic finesse with practical functionality,” she says.

FÉLIX MILLORY

Architect and interior designer Félix Millory is revered for renovating existing spaces, both reinvigorating those with heritage details unique to his home city as well as taking a 'clean slate' approach. The 38-year-old already has a swathe of Paris projects to his name, updating stark or dated apartments and residences with elegance and precision. Now heading his own agency, he says as a child he spent time painting, tinkering and "destroying my toys without ever succeeding in reconstructing them!"

"I think I was destined to deconstruct, to seek and above all to create," he says. Sturdy materials like wood, concrete and marble dominate his designs, but his talent extends far beyond the big picture, ensuring every small décor detail and artistic finishing touch – even designing his own lighting – gives identity and meaning to homes always imagined around the people who live in them.



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PIERRE & ÉMILIE FREY

Pierre Frey is Communications Director at Parisian fine fabric and home textiles brand Maison Pierre Frey, the business his grandfather (whom he was named after) established in 1935 and is still family owned and run. Frey is helping extend the brand's reputation for eye-catching and eclectic art-inspired designs and clever use of colour, something wife Émilie also embraces in her lighting and lamp brand Caneloupo. Pierre Frey is still headquartered in the same building the business was started in, near the Palais Royale. Pierre and Émilie live upstairs, extending their life's work into their home spaces.

The creators embrace a daring sense of design that is still grounded in local history and style. "Our designs are influenced by elements from around the world, but our perspective is always French," he says, encouraging a blend of old and new from luxury auction buys to hand-me-downs ... accentuated, of course, with fabulous wallpaper and upholstery.