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In the living and dining areas of Paula Nataf's Paris apartment, which was designed by Commune, an expandable dining table is surrounded by Hans Wegner chairs, the floor lamp is by Jean Rispal, the sofa is by Maxalto, and the cocktail table is by Alma Allen; the rug is by Andrée Putman for Christopher Farr, the light fixture is by Lindsey Adelman, and the painting is by Bernard Frize. For details, see Resources.



PARIS ON PACIFIC TIME

An entrepreneur who loves Paris and Los Angeles gets the best of both when she enlists Commune to update a dream apartment on the Right Bank

ELLE DECOR: Where in Paris is your new apartment?

PAULA NATAF: It's in the 17th arrondissement, right behind the Parc Monceau. The area is part of the Haussmann redevelopment of the 19th century, so it has all the charm of old Paris, with a local market, good restaurants, and nearby galleries.

It's the opposite of where I live in Los Angeles, which is on the beach in the Marina Peninsula.

ED: What made you choose this particular apartment?

PN: It's on the top floor of the building, which I wanted, and was built as an artist's studio. It's about 1,000 square feet, ▷

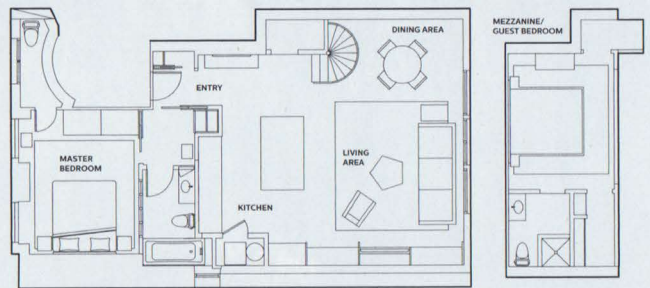
The Gerrit Rietveld armchair is from Cassina, the painting is by Peter Zimmermann, and a Jean-Michel Othoniel sculpture hangs from the ceiling.



In the upstairs guest room, the Indian bedcover is from Pat McGann Gallery in Los Angeles, the bathroom tiles are by Exquisite Surfaces, and the shower fittings are by Volevatch. For details, see Resources.



The floor plan.



with two en suite bedrooms—one downstairs, which I use as the master, and the other up a spiral staircase to a loft with windows that overlook the living room. The apartment has a northern exposure and gorgeous natural light. I don't have to turn on the lights even on the gloomiest rainy day. And I can see the Sacré-Coeur from my window.

ED: You asked Commune, the popular Los Angeles design group, to renovate and furnish your apartment. Why that firm?

PN: I find them very innovative in what I call a quiet way. They put things together in a unique manner that's both eclectic and unfussy. Their aesthetic is a very good match for my company, Exquisite Surfaces. In fact, they have designed all of our showrooms, in addition to wood and tile products for us.

ED: You founded Exquisite Surfaces in 1997. What is it you do?

PN: We sell stone, wood, and tiles for floors and walls as well as fireplaces and fountains. I was working as the accountant in L.A. for a stone-import firm that went out of business in 1995, so I decided to go into business for myself with nothing but a shelf and a desk on La Cienega Boulevard. My business took off when a designer bought a fireplace I featured in my first ad in ELLE DECOR and used it in the home of a movie star.

ED: Did either of Commune's principals, Steven Johanknecht and Roman Alonso, work on your apartment?

PN: Steven was in charge. He worked with a French architect who is on his staff, and they completely redid the apartment. They left the plumbing and the load-bearing walls in place, ▽

but they devised an entirely new layout otherwise, with a modern kitchen and updated bathrooms.

ED: What was the concept for the apartment?

PN: The guiding principle for the new look was the idea that I was returning to Paris with the experiences I'd had living in California. We wanted to express both the American and French parts of my life and personality, with some hints of North Africa. I grew up in Tunisia, which is why you can see the influences of North Africa, for example, in the bathrooms. I lived in Paris for 20 years, but not until later.

ED: Are all of the furnishings and art new?

PN: I did own some of the pieces before. Some came from the U.S., some from France. Steven ultimately chose everything—I would show him things I wanted to buy, and he would either approve or not, and he would show me things, and I would approve or not. We ended up with an Italian sofa from Maxalto and some 20th-century classics from Europe and America. The Wishbone dining chairs were designed by Hans Wegner in 1949, and I had the circular dining table made here in France. It opens up for dinner parties, but I've never used it—when people come over, they all wind up around the kitchen island. ▷



The kitchen's bluestone countertops, tiles, oak flooring, and cabinetry are by Exquisite Surfaces, the stools are by BassamFellows, and the vintage sideboard is by Alfred Hendrickx. For details, see Resources.



The master bath's sink and tub are by Duravit, and the fittings are by Volevach; the Fez wall tiles are by Exquisite Surfaces.

WHAT THE PROS KNOW

- Commune is acclaimed for its unexpected mix of pieces, a look that appeals to Nataf. "Mixing furnishings keeps a space casual and collected," says Commune's Steven Johanknecht, "but it is important to balance scale and materials." The living room contains a classic Gerrit Rietveld armchair, originally designed in 1935, a walnut-and-brass cocktail table by American sculptor Alma Allen, an Andrée Putman rug, a Lindsey Adelman light fixture, assorted midcentury-modern pieces, and a sweeping staircase that's an homage to Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret's Villa Savoye (completed in 1931). "I just felt that a solid curving element was preferable to an open railing in the space," says the designer.
- For floors and backsplashes in the new kitchen, Johanknecht and Nataf chose Navajo cement tiles from Commune's Native line, the firm's second tile collection for Exquisite Surfaces. Although the pattern is bold, it isn't overwhelming. "The white ground of the tile feels fresh, and the lines are simple," says Johanknecht. "The upper and lower cabinets are oak and don't compete for visual attention. Ultimately, there's a simplicity to the overall design. The white floor keeps the bluestone island from looking too heavy."
- For the upstairs interior windows that overlook the living area below, Johanknecht took a cue from his Commune partner, Roman Alonso. "Roman had made similar fabric panels for windows in his apartment. They have grommets in the corners and hang on hooks mounted on the wall. They can be closed for privacy or shade. It was a great, simple solution—drapery would have felt too heavy and fussy." Full velvet curtains, however, add deep comfort and luxury to the master suite.

ED: Speaking of the kitchen island, it's very bold. I assume it's an Exquisite Surfaces product?

PN: Yes, it's made of bluestone or "petit granite," as it's sometimes called. I saw a similar stone island in the showroom of the man who fabricated all the cabinetry and took a picture to send to Steven. The cabinetry in the kitchen and living room is made from European oak finished in Belgium. And the floor tiles in the kitchen and master bath were designed by Commune for our company.

ED: How often do you use your apartment in Paris?

PN: I spend about six months a year there. I love Paris. I love being able to walk everywhere. In addition, my sons, Franck and Alexis, who are in the business with me, use the apartment when they travel to Paris for work. I find it so comfortable, so cozy, with all the warm colors and soft textiles. I feel so much at home. It's convenient in its layout, and the visual variety is such that I never get tired of looking at any of the rooms. When I'm here I have everything I need, and I always think, Why do I need anything more than this? ■



In the master bedroom, the bed and side table are custom designs, the kilim pillows are by Commune, the bedcover is from India, and the artwork is by Lisa Eisner; the walls are painted in Farrow & Ball's Charleston Gray. For details, see Resources.