



AD

VIBE SHIFT

WAO

DRAMATIC
REINVENTIONS
IN TUSCANY,
PROVENCE,
MEXICO CITY,
NEW YORK,
AND MILAN

ONCE DESCRIBED AS "HALF
FORTRESS, HALF
FARMHOUSE," PARTS OF
THE STRUCTURE DATE
BACK TO THE 14TH
CENTURY. THE GARDENS
HAVE BEEN UPDATED BY
DOMINIQUE LAFOURCADE,
WHO FIRST HELPED DESIGN
THEM SOME 30 YEARS AGO.

A PERFECT MATCH

Searching for a getaway in *Provence*, fashion entrepreneurs *Ruth* and *Tom Chapman* found one with a storied pedigree—the former retreat of another stylish couple, *Betty* and *François Catroux*.

TEXT BY DAVID NETTO PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHIEU SALVAING



BETTY CATROUX, RECENTLY WIDOWED, HAD AN UNDERSTANDABLE LEVEL OF ATTACHMENT TO THE PLACE AND WANTED TO MAKE SURE IT PASSED INTO THE RIGHT HANDS. "YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED TO BUY IT," SHE TOLD THE CHAPMANS, "UNTIL YOU SEE IT."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT AN ASSEMBLAGE OF OBJECTS, INCLUDING A STONEWARE EGG FROM THE CATROUX COLLECTION, IS DISPLAYED ATOP A ROPE CONSOLE BY CHRISTIAN ASTUGUEVILLE. AN EPOQUE TUB BY RECOR WITH A THG PARIS FILLER IN THE PRIMARY BATH. A GUEST ROOM FEATURES A METAL FOUR-POSTER BED BY HUBERT ZANDBERG INTERIORS AND A BENCH THAT WAS PART OF THE CATROUX COLLECTION. OPPOSITE THE SALON FEATURES SEVERAL ITEMS THAT BELONGED TO THE CATROUXS, INCLUDING THE SCREEN, TABLE LAMP, SIDE TABLE, AND COFFEE TABLE. EXISTING UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE WAS RE-COVERED.

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WHEN RUTH AND TOM CHAPMAN bought the house in the Provence region of France, on these pages, it carried both the gifts—and the weight—of previous owners. The gifts are obvious: the village of Lourmarin is one of the loveliest, quietest spots in Provence, and the building and its gardens are among the most widely admired visions of country life in that part of the world. The weight (if that is the right word) was that Les Ramades, as this property is known, had belonged for more than 30 years to one of the most stylish couples in the world, François and Betty Catroux. It had been photographed and rephotographed, published and celebrated, each time its rooms taking on a sense of inevitability that comes with legend. The question for Tom and Ruth was, how to make it theirs?

"Luxury is authenticity," says Hubert Zandberg, the decorator they brought aboard to help sort through the legends and start a new story. "Our challenge was to respect the history—but come up with a design perspective that reflected Tom and Ruth as the new owners, authentic to them." (In 1987, the Chapmans cofounded Matchesfashion, which grew from a single boutique in Wimbledon into a pioneer in

e-commerce before the couple sold it in 2017; in 2022, Tom co-launched the online curated luxury furnishings retailer Abask.)

How the couple ended up in Provence is one of the myriad stories of COVID-driven behavioral change, particularly when it comes to home. Realizing during confinement that life had abruptly altered and was at that point unclear if it was ever going back to the way it was, they looked for a country retreat they knew they wouldn't actually be able to visit for a while...which turned out to be about three months. Perhaps it was a way of staying optimistic.

Even looking at Les Ramades on a phone, they knew this one was a gem: "The real estate agent took us around on WhatsApp, and we fell in love," says Ruth. Betty Catroux, recently widowed, had an understandable level of attachment

to the place and wanted to make sure it passed into the right hands, as well as shrewd business advice to offer the would-be buyers. "You're not allowed to buy it," she told them, "until you see it."

Time passed, the Chapmans got their dream country retreat, and the impulse buy became a story that ended very well.

The renovation that followed was exhaustive, comprehensive, and took over two years to complete. It is, by intent, nearly undetectable. ("Are you *sure* you renovated?" is a compliment if heard at the end of a project like this.) With the spirit of a conservation campaign, every door, every shutter, every window was replaced. Most incredibly, the poured cement floors with inlaid pebbles in a diamond pattern—a technique known as "calades"—are all new, yet indistinguishable from the floors François put in three decades ago and which had become a signature of this house.

"I am more of a maximalist than Ruth, and she is a bit of a purist," Tom says with a chuckle, explaining how the process went. "Ruth was the main editor." His wife doesn't disagree. Having bought the place furnished as Betty suggested, Ruth and Zandberg methodically curated the contents, keeping certain key Catroux elements, like the pair of walnut screens flanking the sofa in the salon alcove, the metal lion sculpture on the mantel in the front salon, and the upholstered furniture in the two salons. New on the scene are chairs by contemporary artisans like Martino Gamper, lighting by Paavo Tynell, and a general sense of midcentury energy running through the proceedings.

In a funny twist of kismet, project architect Alexandre Lafourcade is the son of the original architect who worked with François and Betty. The



STEPS LEAD FROM THE POOL UP TO A WALLED GARDEN AND THE DINING ROOM TERRACE BEYOND. OPPOSITE TOP: RUTH CHAPMAN IN A GARDEN. OPPOSITE BELOW: A CIRCULAR FOUNTAIN CENTERS A GARDEN AREA.



Chapmans also decided to use the same garden designer—Alexandre’s mother, Dominique, who has now done this ravishing garden twice.

Les Ramades was François Catroux’s most personal project, as well as a demonstration of his range as a decorator—most clients did not look for such humility from him—and his love of gardening (he really put his hands in the dirt, and would drive home from a nursery with a huge tree sticking out of his convertible Aston Martin). Of all the good things that went into this house—his house—the most cherished was what the house gave back to him: the happiness that he and Betty enjoyed there. How he would delight in seeing another stylish couple returning the compliment.

“What we loved when we first saw the house still stands today,” Ruth tells me. “It is the simplicity of lifestyle: beautiful light, good food and wine. That said, the elegance and playful energy of the place are there only because of Betty and François, and buying it and renovating it with respect to their imprint was very romantic to us. I think of them there often, and it brings a smile to my face.”



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP IN THE DINING ROOM, A CUSTOM PLASTER PENDANT LIGHT BY ROBERT LEMARIEY HANGS ABOVE AN INDIA MAHDAVI TABLE SURROUNDED BY CHARLOTTE PERRIAND CHAIRS. A CUSTOM-PAINTED BRASS-FRAMED SCREEN BY ARIEN VALIZADEH WRAPS AROUND THE FRONT SALON’S SOFA. TOM CHAPMAN IN A DOORWAY. OPPOSITE IN THE SALON, A PAIR OF RITA’S CHAIRS BY MARTINO GAMPER PULL UP TO ARNO DECLERCO’S ROUND ZOUMEY TABLE, ON WHICH SITS A COMPETITION BACKGAMMON SET BY GEOFFREY PARKER FROM ABASK. THE LIGHT FIXTURE IS BY PAAVO TYNELL.

DESIGN NOTES

THE DETAILS THAT MAKE THE LOOK

IN THE KITCHEN, ROSE UNIACKE BARSTOOLS PULL UP TO THE CUSTOM ZINC-TOPPED ISLAND.

EVIL EYE BOWL BY VIYA; \$310. ABASK.COM

BLANKET BY ROSE UNIACKE; \$4,945. ABASK.COM

MARGUERITE LINEN BY NICOLE FABRE DESIGNS; TO THE TRADE. JOHNROSSELLI.COM

GEOFFREY PARKER COMPETITION BACKGAMMON SET; \$6,785. ABASK.COM

CERAMIC BRAIDED RAISED BOWL BY MAISON PICHON UZÈS; \$445. ABASK.COM

BASKET-WEAVE FABRIC BY PAOLO MOSCHINO; TO THE TRADE. LEEJOFA.COM

“I am more of a maximalist than Ruth, and she is a bit of a purist,” Tom Chapman says with a chuckle. “Ruth was the main editor.”

BOLLEGLASS BUD VASE; \$124. ABASK.COM

PORTOFINO TUMBLERS BY LOS VASOS DE AGUA CLARA; \$425 FOR A SET OF SIX. ABASK.COM

DOUBLE DIAGONALE TABLE BY INDIA MAHDAVI; PRICE UPON REQUEST. RALPHPUCCI.COM

DOTS JUG BY POTERIE D'ÉVÈRES; \$930. ABASK.COM

THE PRIMARY BEDROOM FEATURES AN UPHOLSTERED BED AND OTTOMAN BY HUBERT ZANDBERG INTERIORS.

LES CATROUX OF PARIS AND PROVENCE...

Much ink has been spilled over their style in town—but when it came to downtime, Betty and François Catroux loved to be together in the country at Les Ramades, their getaway in Lourmarin. While the building now straddles the line between farmhouse and manor (it may once even have served as a convent), François fell in love with the place as a ruin, then spent decades refining the interiors and gardens with equal parts poetry and plainness. New owners Ruth and Tom Chapman loved the Catroux style of plain white vaulted ceilings and pebble-inlaid cement floors and have kept many pieces of furniture—while also telling a new story, interweaving their own signature moments of curated modernism. —DAVID NETTO



ABOVE: In another area of the living room, illustrated by a paper slip that hangs over a rectangular ottoman and sofa, all designed by Zandberg. Hanging on top of the low table by Tom Chappan are books from the

the broad-shouldered beams, creating an architectural mosaic that gives the entire room a classical air. The inspiration is reinforced by the simplicity of the furniture and the strong presence of the new objects Catroux has incorporated. “I wanted the overall result to be open, very comfortable—and unpretentious,” he says. “The opposite, in fact, of houses in the French style.”

Catroux has designed residences for Susan and Rosslyn Gray de Rothschild near Amsterdam (1986), April 1987), Milla Solari and the family in Madrid. “My clients in international art,” he says. “I never accept more than twelve projects a year, generally private residences.” His work has taken him all over the world, and each job is based on close collaboration with his clients. “I don’t like to do it until I see it. If I don’t see the exterior of a certain building, I prefer to have my own way.”

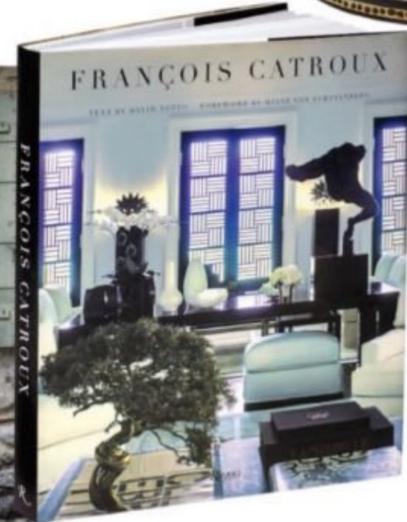
In stark contrast with this unassuming style, Les Ramades is a house of power. “The house shows an array of any weekend use,” says Catroux. “We were able to spend Christmas here with the family. It’s only an hour from Paris, after all, and the wild climate is perfect for all seasons.”

Stretching the length of Les Ramades is a garden with many layers of trees. This creates a vista that includes a long, winding path surrounded by gently sloping hills. “I



INTERIORS: MATTHEW SALVING, ART: BERTHINA FORRELL, LIVING: AUGUSTINE, NEW YORK, AND CLOSET: TONY FERRARI, PARIS, FRANCE; PHOTOGRAPHS: AUGUST F. FRANÇOIS AND HALLIE JOHNSON; STYLING: JANE ROSS; PRODUCTS: COURTESY OF THE COMPANIES.

“The local stone is a dark red,” says Catroux. “I decided to preserve the style of the stone with a modern, custom-made, double-sided stone from the other direction.” ABOVE: The dining room, which includes a dining table, opens to the terrace. At right is a single-headed



FROM FAR LEFT BETTY AND FRANÇOIS CATROUX AT HOME IN PARIS, 1970. A SPREAD FROM AD’S DECEMBER 1993 STORY ON LES RAMADES. FRANÇOIS CATROUX IN PROVENCE, 2011. THE COVER OF AD100 DESIGNER AND WRITER DAVID NETTO’S MONOGRAPH FRANÇOIS CATROUX (RIZZOLI, 2016).