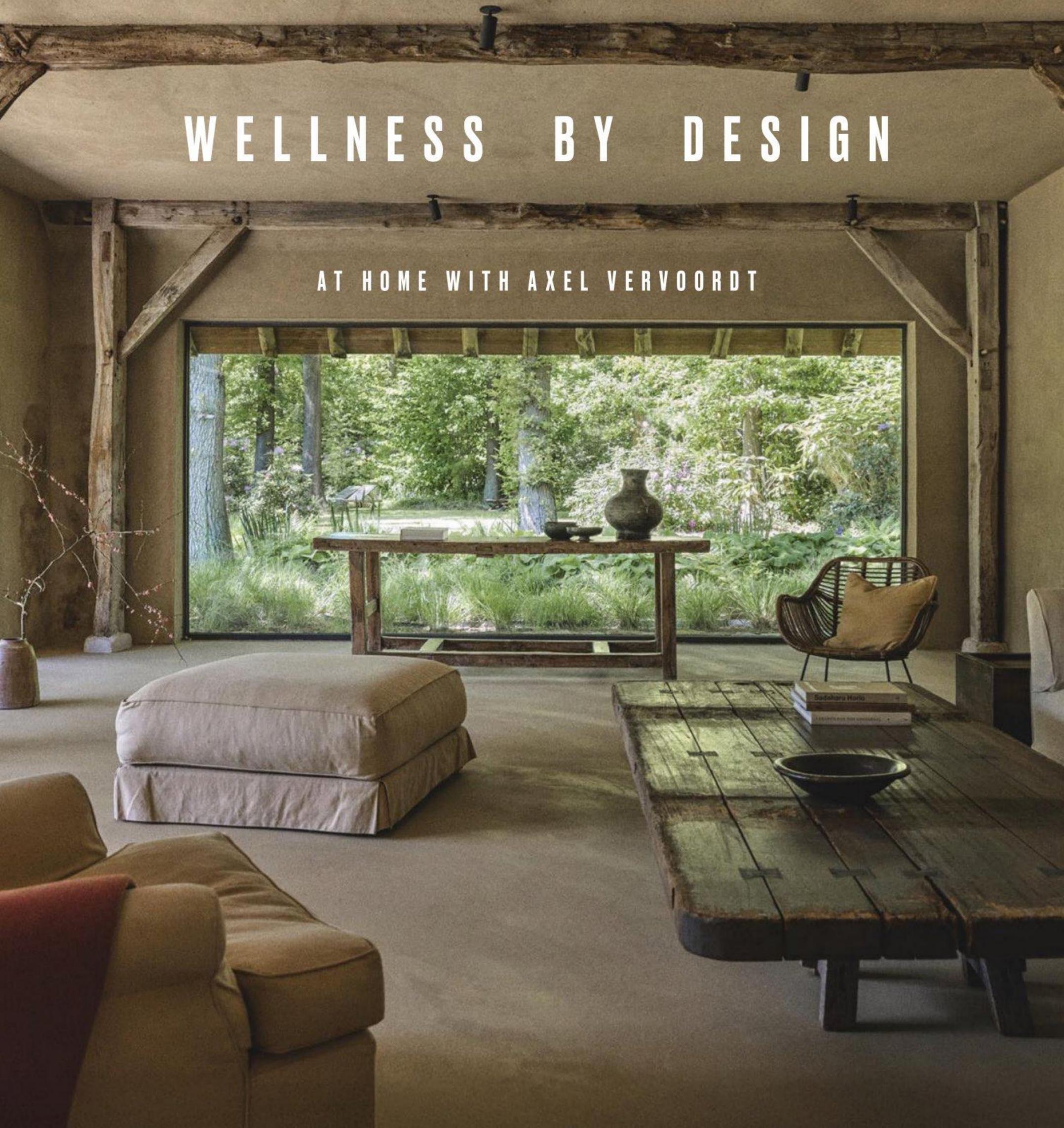


VOGUE AUSTRALIA LIVING

WELLNESS BY DESIGN

AT HOME WITH AXEL VERVOORDT



RITA'S CHAIRS BY MARTINO GAMPER; ZOU MEY TABLE BY ARNO DECLERQ; BACKGAMMON SET BY GEOFFREY PARKER FROM ABASK; PENDANT LIGHT BY PAAVO TYNELL. PHOTOGRAPHER: MATTHIEU SALVAING.



HOMES

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A photograph of a Provençal estate. In the foreground, a gravel path leads towards a stone house with a tiled roof. The path is flanked by rows of lavender plants. The house has several windows with white shutters and a central entrance with a glass door. The background is filled with tall, mature trees and a clear sky.

A NEW LEAF

Romantic, BUCOLIC and imbued with the spirit of its *legendary* former owners, this Provençal estate has been resurrected with the DEEPEST respect for the past.

By DAVID NETTO *Photographed by* MATTHIEU SAIXAING



This page in the salon of this home in Provence, screen, table lamp, side table and coffee table, original from the Catroux; existing sofas were re-upholstered. *Opposite page* in the kitchen, custom zinc-topped island; Rose Uniacke bar stools; Maison Pichon Uzès hand-glazed ceramic raised bowls and ceramic serving bowl in Ochre from Abask; Julia tapware from Waterworks. *Previous page* in the outdoor area, the gardens have been updated by Dominique Lafourcade, who first helped design them some 30 years ago. *Details, last pages.*

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hen 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 co-founded 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 behavioural change, particularly when it comes to home. Realising 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 mid-century 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 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 says. “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.” ■ bzinteriors.com

Opposite page in the dining room, **table** by India Mahdavi; **chairs** by Charlotte Perriand; custom plaster **pendant light** by Robert Lemarley.





This page steps lead from the pool up to a walled garden and the dining room terrace beyond. *Opposite page, from top* in the front salon, custom-painted brass-framed screen by Arien Valizadeh; armchairs upholstered in Rose Tarlow fabric; bamboo and brass chair reupholstered in Dedar fabric; Helga floor lamp by Silvio Bilangione and Paolo Portoghesi for Fumagalli; 1970s ceramic table lamp by Georges Pelletier. In the main bedroom, bed and ottoman upholstered by Hubert Zandberg Interiors; vintage rattan sofa and armchair upholstered in Libeco Hudson fabric in Dijon-5188; Banci Firenze table lamps sourced by Hubert Zandberg Interiors; *Heavy Lidded* (2019) artwork by Christina Forrer.





This page in Ruth's study, custom desk by Martino Gamper; chair by Jean Prouvé for Vitra; Onos counterweight pendant light in brass with custom rattan shade by Hubert Zandberg Interiors; 1940s Barovier & Toso floor lamp; Anglepoise desk lamp, enquiries to Cult; 20th-century glazed stoneware bas-relief from the Catroux collection; artwork by Jean Derval. *Opposite page* in the bar, vintage bench; 1950s ceiling lights by Lisa Johansson-Pape; Bronte wall light by Porta Romana; photograph by Julien Drach; artwork by Ahmed Morsi.





These pages the garden area. Details, last pages