

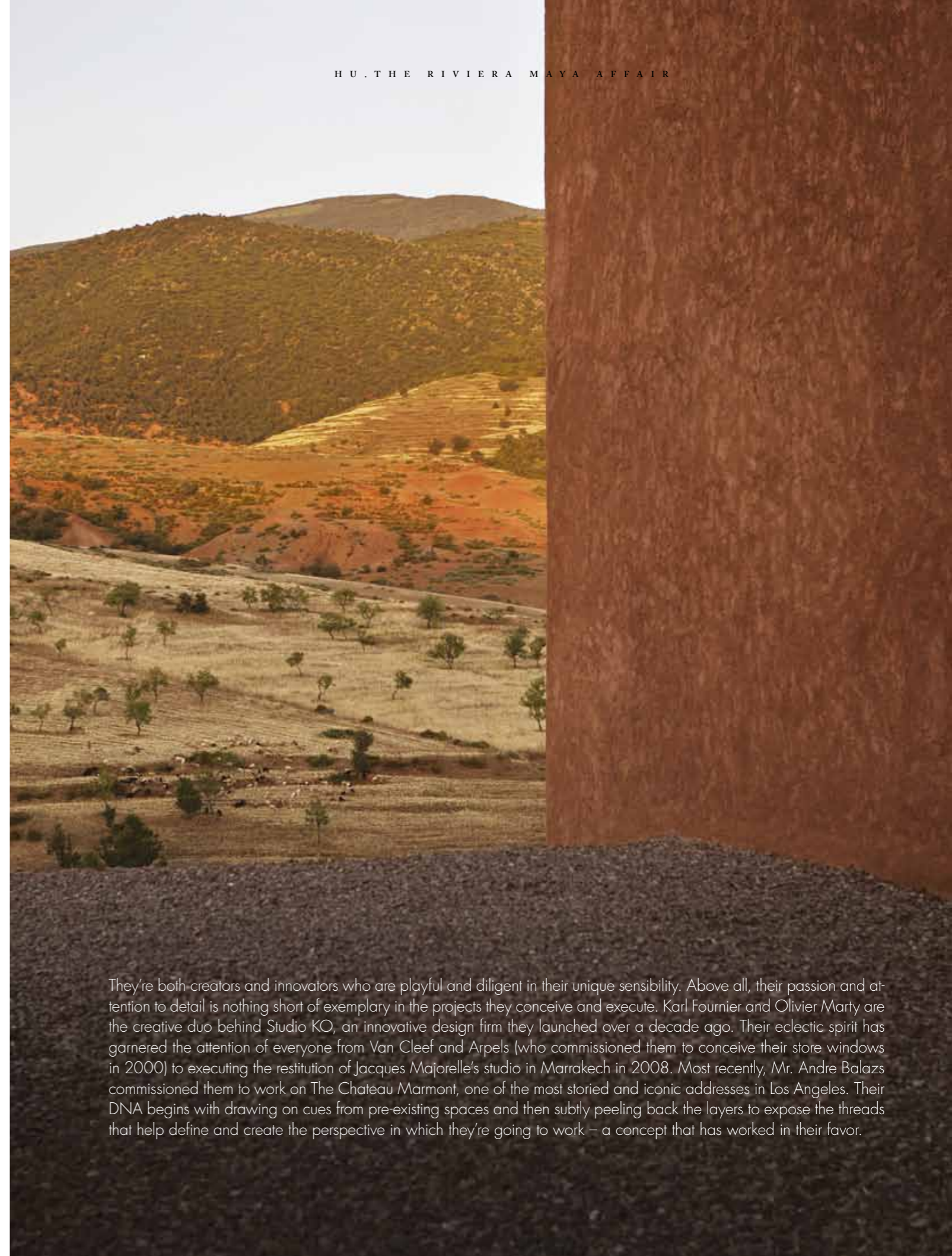
Double Take.

Creative duo *Studio KO*. Interviewed by *Yale Breslin* & photographed at their Paris studio by *Carlotta Manaigo*.



(O L I V I E R M A R T Y & K A R L F O U R N I E R)

Right, Villa E in Ourika, Morocco.



They're both creators and innovators who are playful and diligent in their unique sensibility. Above all, their passion and attention to detail is nothing short of exemplary in the projects they conceive and execute. Karl Fournier and Olivier Marty are the creative duo behind Studio KO, an innovative design firm they launched over a decade ago. Their eclectic spirit has garnered the attention of everyone from Van Cleef and Arpels (who commissioned them to conceive their store windows in 2000) to executing the restitution of Jacques Majorelle's studio in Marrakech in 2008. Most recently, Mr. Andre Balazs commissioned them to work on The Chateau Marmont, one of the most storied and iconic addresses in Los Angeles. Their DNA begins with drawing on cues from pre-existing spaces and then subtly peeling back the layers to expose the threads that help define and create the perspective in which they're going to work – a concept that has worked in their favor.



Villa E in Ourika, Morocco. Photographed by Dan Glasser.

The two of you launched Studio KO over ten years ago – how did you originally meet? We both met at architecture school, in the Beaux-Arts in Paris, about 18 years ago. Since then we've done everything together - including school projects and our diploma. **What is your background in terms of schooling?** Before going to architecture school, Karl was about to become a theater actor. Just before entering a famous French acting school, he suddenly moved to architecture. Olivier had wanted to be an architect for much longer, making drawings of cities and houses from a very early age. **You have an affinity for Morocco. Why?** It's chance probably! After going there on vacation, we were offered the possibility to work in Morocco for a year for a member of the Hermès family - Patrick Guerrand-Hermès. Having already started Studio KO in Paris, at a small scale first, we opened a second office there in 2001. It was an amazing opportunity to get commissions at a very young age for architects. This country gave us our first great clients and we were very committed and inspired for those projects - talented Moroccan artisans did the rest. **Why do the two of you work well together?** **What is your working relationship like?** We both have very different tempers. Karl is more intellectual and is used to conceiving projects through words, dreams and abstract directions. Olivier is much more visual - producing drawings and sketches. Karl is airy, calm - a diplomat indeed.

Olivier is sometimes more immediate, down to earth at some point, but very intense and highly focused. **I'm interested to know what your offices are like... What do they look like?** In Paris, the offices are in Le Marais, just a few steps from Beaubourg, in a former ecclesiastic tapestry restoration studio. Walking through a very anonymous courtyard, you discover a huge 19th Century glazed roof with people working underneath. We like that idea of a surprise. In Marrakech, in the French colonial quarter of Guélize, we were lucky enough to purchase several apartments in a 1930's untouched building. We recently refurbished the 3rd floor in a very open and architectural space with marble tables and rough ceilings and walls - it is great working there. In London, our new-born little office is in SoHo. **You're particularly interested in light, space, and texture. What is it about these three areas that you're especially drawn to?** We believe that whatever the quality of an interior or an architecture project is, either minimal or composed, the comfort that one will feel comes from those three elements. Light, particularly natural light, is the base of everything, especially when you design a house: it is often the matrix to the first sketches. Avoid West and focus on South. Be as opaque as possible on North. Space is an experience rather than just square meters. For instance, the bigger you have, the emptier you can go in the composition; the smaller, the more composed and partitioned you need.



Villa E in Ourika, Morocco. All photographed by Dan Glasser.



“BE *modern*
IS TO RECOVER
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House G in Bonnieux, France. Photographed by Dan Glasser.

It seems the idea of modernity is something that is embedded throughout the DNA of your projects. What is it about modern elements that you're so inspired by? Well, modernity is a vast subject and one often makes confusion between being up-to-date, fashionable, into the trends, and being modern. To us, to be modern is to recover the past and divert from it. We would see more modernity in an agricultural technique, a moth-eaten embroidered fabric, or what it could become. We like writings by philosopher Jacques Derrida about beauty - to us you can't speak about modernity without considering beauty. It can be a gift, a handsome face, a beautiful landscape. But when it comes to creating or suggesting it, it embraces harmony, how appropriate an approach can be, the tension between an architectural object and its context. Today, beauty has become a subversive word. Look at how little this word is used in the architectural or design process. Beauty sounds dangerous for the one who mentions it. **Whether private residences, public spaces, or contemporary homes in natural settings, each project is a ground for play, an opportunity to bring imagination to life. How do you approach each project? What's your very first step?** To start a project is like inventing a food recipe. You need ingredients. It can be a site, a client's personality, his obsessions; it can be everything together. What never varies is our attitude, the creative and narrative process. But because the material we feed ourselves with is so different, and thus the narratives, the formal result can be surprisingly different from one project

to another. **Looking back on your career thus far, is there a project that you've completed that you are most fond of? If so - what is it? Why?** We would say that one's first case-study house is always an adventure; but we try not to lose the 'juvenile' joy of creation we felt at that time. The last house we finished in the mountains of Morocco recently gave us a similar pleasure indeed. **You're currently working on the renovation of the Château Marmont in LA and on André Balazs' first European hotel in London. How did your working relationship with Mr. Balazs begin?** It all started with the project in London. André came to see us in Paris one beautiful summer day. We didn't know each other: he had only stayed in Essaouira Hotel l'Heure Bleue, that we had completed back in 2004. He said, 'this place you have done is not flawless, but I think that the ones who conceived it could have a nice story to tell for the fire station and I am willing to turn into a hotel in London'. A few weeks after, we were in. We had 3 intense years together, those years that make you grow up. To work with André is great because he is very supportive of designers. He loves the design process, and gives you as much as you give him. Meaning...a lot. The Chateau came afterwards, but more as a conversation than a classical project. People feel at home there, they shouldn't think that someone has ruined their imagination: change everything, but change nothing. One could say this is not rewarding because no one is supposed to even notice what you have done but it is so exciting to be part of the story of such an iconic address.

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