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A T T R A C T

A Paris rooftop apartment renovated by Studio KO celebrates contrast. Both inward and outward looking, it’s a pied-à-terre poised in midair.

Photographer: PHILIPPE GARCIA
Writer: RENAU LEGRAND

Olivier Marty, seated, and Karl Fournier of Studio KO in the apartment’s living area. The 1950s chair, by Carl-Gustaf Hjort, was bought at auction; the antique-style table is from Saint-Ouen Flea Market; and the floor lamp is a vintage piece. OPPOSITE: In the darkly painted entrance, bathed in vivid daylight, the staircase leads up to the living room and terrace. Wall paint by Farrow & Ball. Details, last pages.
The kitchen is conceived around a gold-hued island designed by Studio KO, which contrasts with the black lacquer joinery. The Spanish bar stools, like the vintage pendant, were lucky secondhand finds. Vases by Claude Morin, from Meubles et Lumieres, and Mireille Mosco-Perrens, from Galerie Cécilie.

OPPOSITE: The dining room adjoins the living room on the upper level. With calming, diffused light, it features a table by Valentin Loellmann, from Galerie Gosserez; vintage dining chairs by Jean Prouvé; a Günther Leuchtmann pendant from Tecnolumen; and a Shizu Imai ceramic bowl from the Chahan Gallery.

Hat was perfect. Now, let’s do it again!” So it’s claimed French film director Jean Renoir would say to his actors at the end of a take. That also could sum up the story of this two-level penthouse in Paris’s Marais quarter. Many would think it was perfect from the start: it occupies the seventh and eighth floor of an elegant 1930s building, while, on a wedge-like corner site, the building and this apartment on top tower over the Marais, offering 360-degree views of all Paris.

Once offices, this apartment has long been the envy of its bohemian neighbourhood. Jean-Paul Gaultier once had it in his sights, but the former owners were not ready to sell. However, what proved a blow for Gaultier has been a boon for its lucky new occupant, especially since he placed the apartment’s recent renovation, or rather reinvention, in the hands of Paris-based architects Studio KO and its principals, Karl Fournier and Olivier Marty.

With offices in Paris, Marrakech and London, the duo has worked magic on everything from a Moroccan riad to this urbane city pad. The apartment’s most recent renovation, in the 1990s, had rendered it “a paradise of plastic, glass and stainless steel”, says Fournier, out of character with the building. He and Marty reinvented the apartment by rethinking the spaces, and indeed the whole spirit of the place, and by stripping it back to basics. “The space is for a well-travelled businessman,” says Fournier. “He wanted a Chateau Marmont atmosphere, but also with raw materials, like wood, brick and concrete. As it was built in the ’30s, we tried to find the DNA of the building — its own structure.”
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The dressing room on the open-plan entry level, which flows into the main bedroom and ensuite. The key cabinet, designed by Studio KO, is in oak, a recurring material throughout; Sputnik vintage lamp by Doria; Illusion 5 photograph by Iraqi artist Halim Al Karim, from Galerie Imane Farès. Also on the lower level is a black-and-white acrylic fresco by French painter Pierre-Rox-Camille. Upstairs, in the living room is a sofa by Jacques Charpentier, reupholstered in blood-red velvet, from Les Ateliers Polybe et Malet. On a coffee table by Vincenzo De Cotis, from Galerie L’Eclaireur, sits a 1967 terracotta sculpture by ceramicist Jean Mégard, from Galerie Schwartz. Behind the bedhead in the bedroom is a Castiglioni Snoopy lamp from Flos and artwork by Billie Zangewa, from Galerie Imane Farès.

INSPIRED BY AN ORIENTAL BATHHOUSE, the ensuite features blue-and-gold mosaic tiles from Bisazza. The ‘Must’ vanity is from Altamarea, while the oak stool is by Belgian furniture maker Kaspar Hamacher.
As you enter, the stairway linking the two levels is perhaps the most dramatic revelation. A metal spiral, it twists in vivid daylight under a glass canopy, which, in turn, reveals a vast expanse of sky. On the lower floor, the two architects honoured the bow shape of the building by designing wedge-like spaces, including spokes radiating around the central staircase hub. Also on this level are the dressing room, bedroom and ensuite — without walls, totally fluid, in the style of a bachelor flat or a hotel suite. “As the owner travels a lot,” says Fournier, “he wanted that spirit, with the flow and everything in easy reach.”

Up the sinuous spiral to the upper level are the living, dining and kitchen areas, a small guest room, a huge paved terrace all around and, beyond that, Paris. In the living room, the structure has again been made visible, with a wall of original brick, imperfect and painted white — a Studio KO trademark, it glorifies the building material, in elegant play between brutalism and sophistication.

The white wall is also the only light surface on that level, creating an element of surprise from two architects known for their dark hues. Throughout, the apartment plays with light and shadow. An entryway in rich green, a staircase in gunmetal grey, a bathroom in intense blue-and-gold mosaic tiles and a kitchen in black lacquer perfectly complement an extraordinary home that literally and figuratively soars high over the Marais. “These deep colours are a counterpoint to the view and the light that bathes the apartment,” he says. “On the upper floor, you can almost touch the sky.”