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THIS PAGE, A CREDENZA,
DESIGNED BY THIERRY LEMAIRE
AND MADE FROM LAYERS
OF RECONSTITUTED WOOD,
SITS UNDER MAHOGANY
BOOKSHELVES BY
CHARLOTTE PERRIAND
OPPOSITE, A BLACK METAL
SPIRAL STAIRCASE AND
ANGULAR ARCHES IN THE
STANDALONE GALLERY



Smart Art



SOLO SHOW

An art collector's new home and standalone gallery
on Lake Geneva comes with plenty of curve appeal

PHOTOGRAPHY: JEAN-FRANÇOIS JAUSSAUD WRITER: NICK COMPTON



There comes a point for every serious art collector when all that canvas and twisted steel starts to get in the way. The collection needs its own space, a place to breathe and be seen to its best advantage. When a Corsican businessman, having amassed that kind of stockpile, contracted South African architecture studio Saota to design a new home on Lake Geneva, it suggested creating a standalone private gallery. The house's main living quarters – by design, too light-filled and lake-and-Alp framing to be a proper place for art appreciation – could then stay largely art-free, except for the odd judiciously placed Fontana and Hiquily.

Plans drawn up – including a zinc-clad three-storey gallery – and foundations laid, our committed collector turned to Paris-based Thierry Lemaire, an architect-turned-interior designer who has built his reputation with a series of apartments and chalets in Geneva and Gstaad, cinematic spaces of dark masculinity that pay homage to a particular sort of 1960s glamour.

Lemaire was charged with every element of the interior design, bar a black metal spiral staircase in the gallery space. And while the dedicated art building – including a gallery within a gallery flanked by angular arches and a glass box that helps to pull in diffused light – required 'white cube' restraint, Lemaire could go full tilt at the main house.

He works with a luxurious but tightly controlled material palette that usually includes lashings of marble. At Villa Courbe, as the house is tagged, this means white wood marble on the floors and Bianco Lasa Macchia Vecchia on walls and framing staircases,

often using flipped slices of the same slab to create a mirror effect. In the bathroom, the marble is vividly veined in concentric swirls, something close to petrified wood. 'The house is so strong and architectural, with a lot of raw concrete in places, so that works here,' he says. 'You wouldn't necessarily use that kind of marble in a classical Paris apartment.'

Lemaire's other favoured material here is copper, most dramatically employed on huge, faceted doors, built in dark copper panels with exposed and highly polished copper insides. 'We wanted to make them three-dimensional, very sculptural,' he says. 'And you can see that shape all over the house.'

A key feature of Saota's design, apart from its scale and floor-to-ceiling windows, was its ample curves. The house was designed to resonate with the gentle slopes that swell and roll down to the lake. 'Nothing was straight, everything was curved, so we worked with the curves,' says Lemaire.

The house's huge double-height main living area includes curving balconies, offering more views over the water. Underneath them, Lemaire has placed a huge boomerang-shaped sofa of his own design, set around a monolithic Black Horse granite fireplace. Lemaire's training as an architect is clear in his confident control of spaces, and spaces within spaces, and here he adds two Christian Liaigre coffee tables to create an intimate lounge on the marble plains.

Most of the larger pieces in the house – a number of sofas and a 5m-long marble-topped table, as well as chairs, coffee tables and credenzas – are of Lemaire's»



THIS PAGE, ABOVE THE FIREPLACE HANGS A BRONZE AND GLASS SCULPTURE BY GIANNI PINNA, FLANKED BY A 'BAROMETRO 2.3' FLOOR LAMP BY GIACOMO RAVAGLI. OPPOSITE, A PAIR OF 'DIGAMMA' ARMCHAIRS BY IGNAZIO GARDELLA, A COFFEE TABLE BY GIO PONTI AND PIERO FORNASETTI, AND AN ART PIECE PICKED UP FROM A FLEA MARKET

RIGHT, A 'FLYLIGHT SOI' CHANDELIER BY STUDIO DRIFT HANGS ABOVE A TABLE BY THIERRY LEMAIRE AND A CERAMIC SCULPTURE BY ROBERT AND JEAN CLOUTIER
BELOW, A GLASS BOX BRINGS LIGHT INTO THE GALLERY

own design. He works with a number of makers and workshops, all in France, and he opened his own gallery in Paris two years ago, selling a range of his own designs in limited runs. (President Macron is a customer. Earlier this year, the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson caused a minor diplomatic incident when he put his feet up on a Lemaire coffee table at the Élysée Palace. The Twitter storm surrounded a tableau of Macron looking chic and composed on a Lemaire sofa with Johnson, dishevelled and slovenly on a Lemaire armchair, *la différence* painfully clear.)

Lemaire likes to share the load and is an expert customer of other Paris design galleries. His client had limited his collecting to art, but Lemaire has curated the beginnings of a serious design collection here, both vintage and contemporary. Studio Drift's 'Flylight Soi' chandelier, picked up at Carpenters Workshop Gallery, finds a place above Lemaire's statement table while Giacomo Ravagli's hulking 'Barometro 2.3' floor lamp, also from Carpenters, flanks the fireplace.

Elsewhere in the main living space, a 1950s table, by Gio Ponti and Piero Fornasetti, from Galerie Jacques Lacoste, is framed by a pair of Ignazio Gardella's 1957 'Digamma' lounge chairs. On the black monolithic fireplace, Lemaire has mounted and backlit a 1973 glass and bronze sculpture by Gianni Pinna from Galerie Yves Gastou. He also finds a place for a small 1960s steel sculpture by the German-born, Paris-based sculptor Dietrich-Mohr and a ceramic of the same vintage by Robert and Jean Cloutier.

Meanwhile, mahogany bookshelves by Charlotte Perriand have been wall-mounted on raw concrete.



'If you design something to go with Perriand, it has to be very luxury but very discreet'



Lemaire designed a curvaceous credenza, using layers of reconstituted wood, to sit underneath the shelves. 'If you are designing something to go with Charlotte Perriand, it has to be very luxury but very discreet,' he says. More shelves by Perriand are partnered with a 1970 coffee table by Pia Manu. Elsewhere, there are superior flea market finds, often refurbished and customised by Lemaire and his band of artisans.

Lemaire also commissions other artists and designers and, above a dark Boffi kitchen, is a marble and bronze piece by the Paris-based mosaic artist Béatrice Serre. 'The kitchen uses a lot of dark materials,' says Lemaire. 'So I wanted something warm inside it. I asked Béatrice to do something that looks like the lake, with waves.' Unsurprisingly, the project took a full year from conception to realisation, which Lemaire regards as a rapid turnaround and all down to his simpatico relationship with the client.

Such is their rapport that the pair are now plotting a neo-brutalist hunting lodge in Corsica, with Lemaire handling architecture and interior design duties. He is also working on a 5,000 sq m suite of private offices for a North African businessman and politician, 'like an office for James Bond', with other projects in Beirut, Paris and London. There has been no call from No. 10 yet though. ✱ thierry-lemaire.fr; saota.com