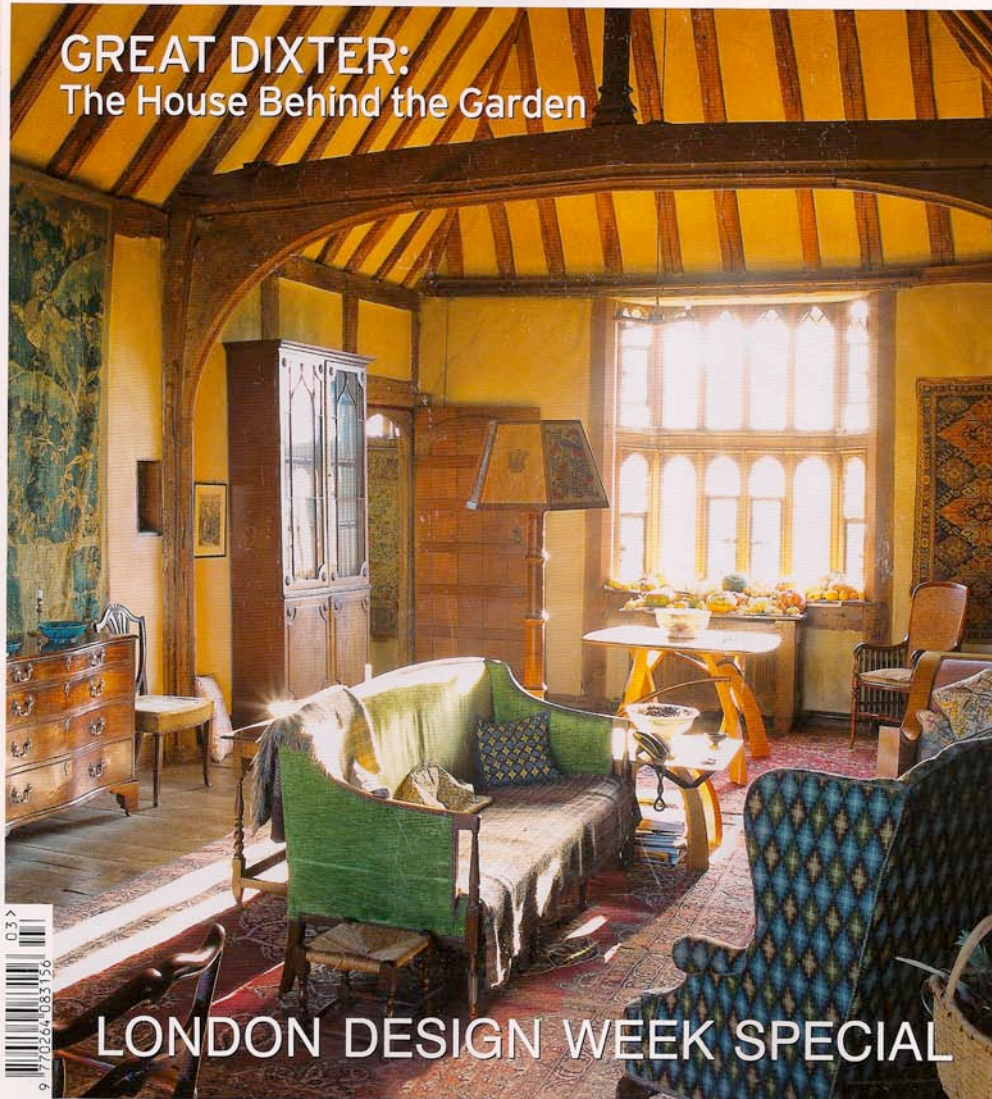


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# THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

**GREAT DIXTER:**  
The House Behind the Garden



LONDON DESIGN WEEK SPECIAL



In her Saint-Germain bolthole awash with crayfish tallboys, seahorse dressing tables and other deep-sea décor, new interior designer Vincent Darré. Surreal and sexy, it's a lovers' launch pad, ideal for dipping in and out of Paris



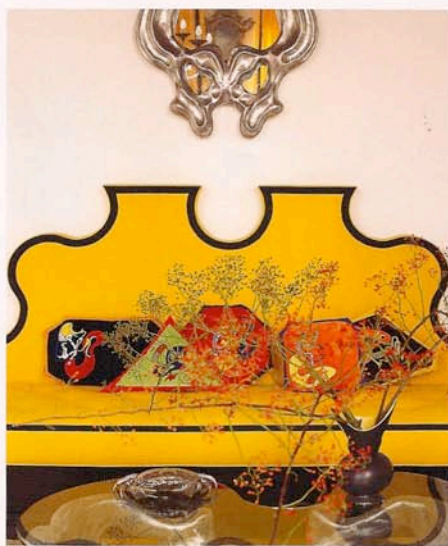
The load-bearing wall between the living rooms is covered (on both sides) with enlarged zoological line drawings. The 'Appliquez-vous' sconces, 'Fat-mur' mirror and coffee table come from the 'Ossobuco' collection, the designer's first. The 1970s circular sofa divides into four

...sini finds herself submerged in the salty imagination of  
...nce Boyer reports. Photography: Alexandre Bailhache

# Pied à Mer



In the second living room, a 19th-century chandelier hangs above vintage Chinese armchairs. They surround an ottoman dotted with beakers designed by Marie Brandolini for Maison Darré as well as an Olympia Le-Tan book-jacket clutch bag (*W&A* Oct 2010)



This page, clockwise from top: two crayfish tallboys from Vincent Darré's new collection, 'A l'Eau Dalf', stand sentinel on lacquered floors; these 1950s painted-metal iron flower lights were acquired from a Spanish restaurant; Vincent designed this Baroque-inspired match the black-trimmed yellow curtains (top). Opposite: a Carlo Mollino-style wing armchair partially obscures an 'Osoburo' chair.



**NERINA ROSSINI** is Italian and lives in Athens with her Greek husband, so when she talks about her house in Paris, she is looking out on the Parthenon. But tomorrow she is off to see the extravagant 'marine' furniture newly installed in her French home by her friend the interior designer Vincent Darré. 'I love Vincent. His Paris apartment [Wol/Nov 2008] delights me. We have compatible tastes. He loves Italy and, like me, he's in the fashion world. I've let him use my house as an experimental laboratory, and I promised myself not to veto anything... I know that it will be neither rigid nor dull and above all not "show-off" or nouveau riche – that's my greatest fear. Vincent is funky, he is a genuine free spirit.'

In one of those delightful little streets hidden in the 'holy' rectangle of antique dealers wedged between the church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés and the Seine, Nerina's place is tucked away at the back of an old cobbled courtyard. It's a kind of four-storey town house trapped between two other buildings. It was once a publisher's office, which explains the efficient linear simplicity of the banisters and staircases. There are two ways in: the official one through the double living room on the first floor, or via the small door of the dining room on the ground floor, which opens directly on to the courtyard. This dining room, which doubles as an entrance hall, is linked to both a basement kitchen and the reception rooms on the first floor. Above these living rooms are two bedrooms: Nerina's own, the guest-room and their bathrooms.

The grand first floor, with its high ceilings, large windows and stout beams, dates, like many buildings in the neighbourhood,

from the 17th century. Vincent has incorporated a fire and two additional openings in the huge load-bearing wall that creates transparency between the two existing spaces and defines the internal flow. From the first living room you go down to the dining room and from the second you go up to the bedroom. This complicated little 'tower' doesn't really need to be theatrical as Nerina and her 'beloved' – they are newly married – come here only occasionally on flying visits. 'I don't rate Venice in the world more highly than Venice or Paris,' says Vincent charmingly. 'Here I don't do anything – I just browse the antique shops and have a good time. It's a dream. I imagine myself a temporary Parisienne. I like to go up and go for a stroll round the city. The light here is a gift from God. When I go to the Grand Palais and cross Pont Alexandre III [Wol/April 2010], I feel like I'm on the stage of an opera.'

When the refurbishment began, Nerina was a little dismayed by the building's lost history, but asked Vincent for ideas on black floors to match her collection of contemporary photographs. 'I'm not rich enough to have a genuine collection of fine art, the Modiglianis and Giacomettis that I'd like... But when it comes to photos, it's a bit easier, and I love Horst and Newton.'

In the colourful living rooms, Vincent has created two spaces for socialising, where Nerina can comfortably sit up to read or for a chat over a glass of wine. She is keen on parties, just as a decorator. 'First of all I found this funny circular piece, by Vincent, 'part Lampedusa's' Leopard, part Pierre Paul



Opposite: in the guest-room, two watercolours by Lurçat sit beneath an anonymous 1950s tapestry maquette. This page: Vincent's design of a bed and padded cupboards (opposite) incorporates a Josef Frank fabric from Svenskt Tenn. The erotic photographs are by Horst and Spiros Vasilas (a close friend)



This page: reminiscent of the blown-up zoological drawings upstairs, these armchairs in the dining room (which opens on to a courtyard) are covered with Josef Frank fabrics, originally designed in the 1940s for Svenskt Tenn. Opposite: tubular-steel chairs upholstered in 'Disparation' by Pierre Le-Tan are overlooked by a pair of blackmoor candle holders. The rugs are from Maison Darre's 'Ossobuco' collection.



can be divided up into four seats if needed or just used for throwing your coat over. I've matched it with Carlo Mollino-style wing chairs. Then I designed a large Baroque sofa and finished off with some small lacquered vintage Chinese chairs to add a touch of humour... I was particularly keen to have seating that didn't match and was reupholstered and rejuvenated.' The large sofa and the cotton curtains are both golden yellow braided with black. The chairs in the first reception room are orange-red. The seating in the second one is acid green, with a touch of lilac. Plain colours only, big solid blocks that catch the slightest ray of sunlight.

Between the two living rooms, the walls are hung with rather peculiar natural-science illustrations depicting insects and plants, and the three openings are topped with mirrors. In the first of these spaces Vincent has installed an 'Ossobuco' table and mirror from the early days of Maison Darré, and he has hung up some large odd 1950s luminous flowers made of painted iron, inherited from a Spanish restaurant. In the second room, Vincent has let loose his half-Surrealist, half-Japanese sea monsters: two tall crayfish chests and two fish bookcases. This new furniture collection - 'A l'Eau Dalf' - was devised, according to the press kit, for 'an Esther Williams-type Hollywood screen idol who would do her make-up on her seahorse dressing-table surrounded by frog bedside tables before reclining on a crocodile sofa'... a weird and tender Peter Pan world. This suits Nerina down to the ground. 'I love my bedroom. It reminds me of the one I had when I was a child in the countryside. The walls were covered in a delightful

18th-century paper with, I think, little marquises on it. You understand: nothing is serious here, it's all for fun.'

Surrounded by Nerina's collection of erotic photos, and dined in a Carlo Mollino style, the bed has a pink fabric designed by Pierre Le-Tan (*Vol Dec 2010*) for Vincent, his friend. The head recalls the two busts leaning towards one another in painting reinterpreting Millet's *Angelus*. 'It's a bed for lovers,' explains Vincent. It faces a dressing table supported by two horses on which Nerina has arranged her collection of jewelry by Elie Top, Lanvin's designer. 'I wanted to create a bed that was a boudoir,' explains Vincent, 'a love nest. What he imagines he will see when he goes to find madame, and the bed door leads nowhere - it's just to add a little bit of Surrealism. The adjoining guest-room showcases, like the dining room, fabrics designed by Josef Frank in the 1940s for the Swedish Svenskt Tenn. They match the slightly later Lurçat tapestry and the rugs. These textiles carry along the rest of the sea creature - plus the crocodile and frog furniture - and the photographer Horst, Newton or Nerina's good friend Spiros Vasilas in an ironic, playful and theatrical contemporary dance.

'With its two staircases and fireplace, it's a bit like a weekend cottage in the country,' says Vincent dreamily. 'I wanted to create a place of happiness for Nerina - a pied à terre where she can be free. Milan, Athens and all their cares are far away. You drop your bag, and Paris is your oyster' ■

To contact Maison Darré, ring 00 33 1 42 60 27 97, or visit [maison-darre.com](http://maison-darre.com)

... site: Nerina's Elie Top jewellery is arranged on a seahorse dressing table from Vincent's 'Eau Dalf' collection. This page: from the 'Eau Dalf' range, verdigris frog bedside tables supported by two horses; 1920s chinoiserie lamps from New York; Vincent's 'Apparition' design covers the bed

