

ART HOUSE

Calling on the cultural legacy of a New York City townhouse, a Belgian architect designs a travertine temple for art and sculpture.

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A red-brick, turn-of-the-century former carriage house in the Upper East Side has forged its cultural lineage by being passed almost exclusively from one art collector to the next. Previously owned by famed modern and contemporary art dealer Larry Gagosian and renovated by architect François de Menil in the early nineties, the townhouse has seen some of the 20th century's most significant artworks. Works by Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Picasso and Damien Hirst have all graced its walls.

The home's newest art-collecting resident

sought an outsider's perspective from Belgian architect Nicolas Schuybroek to expand its spatial potential and create interiors with an enduring, contemplative impact. "The house carried a certain cultural self-awareness," Schuybroek says. "It knew it had been looked at, inhabited and discussed. I was less interested in referencing Gagosian directly than in respecting the idea that this was never meant to be neutral," the architect continues. "It has always been a place of taste and intensity, and our task was to recalibrate that energy for a different moment."

Schuybroek was more concerned with the continuation of de Menil's decades-old renovation than with its preservation, which had already liberated the home from domestic convention with its ground-floor swimming pool and generosity—300 square metres on each level. "We didn't imitate his language, but we respected his boldness," he says. "In a way, we responded with a quieter radicalism."

The choice of a Belgian architect stemmed

from the client's desire to see New York with "slightly altered eyes"—the clarity that comes with geographical and cultural distance. Schuybroek set out to design spaces founded in "emotional minimalism", humanising the architecture's precise lines and symmetry with a material tactility to "hold the art without competing with it."

Collaborating with local architect and FROM Architecture founder Matteo Fraticelli, Schuybroek first improved the interiors' relationship to the central window, a New York City interpretation of Pierre Chareau's Maison de Verre. This involved "hollowing out" the interiors, so the functional areas on the first floor, such as the kitchen, pantry, elevator, staircase and fireplace, are arranged around the core, and the living spaces remain uninterrupted. The home's skylights, some of which were pre-existing, work in tandem with the circular floor inserts to let light infiltrate vertically.



Previous spread: Charcoal-clay plaster walls and dark wide-plank Douglas fir floors cocoon the Pierre Paulin Alpha sofa set, vintage rattan, lacquered metal and fabric armchairs by Janine Abraham & Dirk Jan Rol, 1774 low table by Max Ingrand, G1 lamp by Pierre Guariche and artwork *Fabulous Muscles* (2012) by Danh Võ in the reading room on the first floor. **This page:** Rounded furnishings in the first-floor living room soften the architecture, including the Rouleaux alpaca sofa and Ours Polaire armchair by Jean Royère, and the Goutte d'eau low table in gilt bronze and lacquered metal by Ado Chale. The painting is *Anxious Red* (2020) by Rashid Johnson, with the Caryatid table by Diego Giacometti underneath, and the Totem floor lamp in patinated bronze and parchment by Ingrid Donat to the left. **Opposite page:** The Carlo Scarpa-inspired entrance is clad in travertine with a terrazzo floor and features a marble bench from the *Survival Series* (1985) by Jenny Holzer alongside a *Date Painting* (1972) by On Kawara.



The living room is choreographed around the grid window, reminiscent of Pierre Chareau's *Maison de Verre*. The shelving exhibits small sculptures by Isa Genzken and *Turisti* (1997), the pigeons by Maurizio Cattelan and a Prouvé chair adjacent. Gala varnished rattan armchairs by Franco Albini for Bonacina and the Tabouret Berger stools by Charlotte Perriand for Cassina continue the curved forms.



This page: *Early* (2017) by Lynette Yiadom-Boakye commands attention on the landing before the travertine staircase. A Chaise Cité chair by Jean Prouvé features in the foreground. **Opposite page:** The dining space is a tribute to Jean Prouvé, combining the French architect's integrated Meudon doors, Standard chairs and Trapèze dining table. Behind, the Bibliothèque Tunisie bookshelf by Charlotte Perriand, Jeff Koons's *Puppy* sculpture, Sherrie Levine's *Caribou Skull* (2006) and *Untitled* (2006) on the wall by Wade Guyton.



Taking the townhouse to four storeys, Schuybroek added a new penthouse level with a primary suite and rooftop terrace, both hidden from street view. Placing the private spaces at the top steers the psychological experience of the home, designed to become quieter, lighter and more introspective with each floor. "It's a slow withdrawal from the city—a recalibration," he says. "It's less an addition than a culmination." The primary bathroom is all white marble with a water-jet finish, down to the double sinks and freestanding bath, while suede coats the his-and-hers dressing rooms, absorbing light and noise.

Schuybroek was intent on editing the city out from the entrance—a previously ordinary space. The square antechamber references the work of Carlo Scarpa, who "taught us that arrival is a ritual, not a function," Schuybroek says, with its terrazzo floors, travertine walls, doors and staircase. A constant in the

architect's practice, stone "introduces weight, time and seriousness to the home, in particular travertine, which has a quiet authority," he says. "It's monumental without being authoritarian." A marble bench by Jenny Holzer, the *Date Paintings* series by On Kawara, and rare Chateau sconces complete the soft landing.

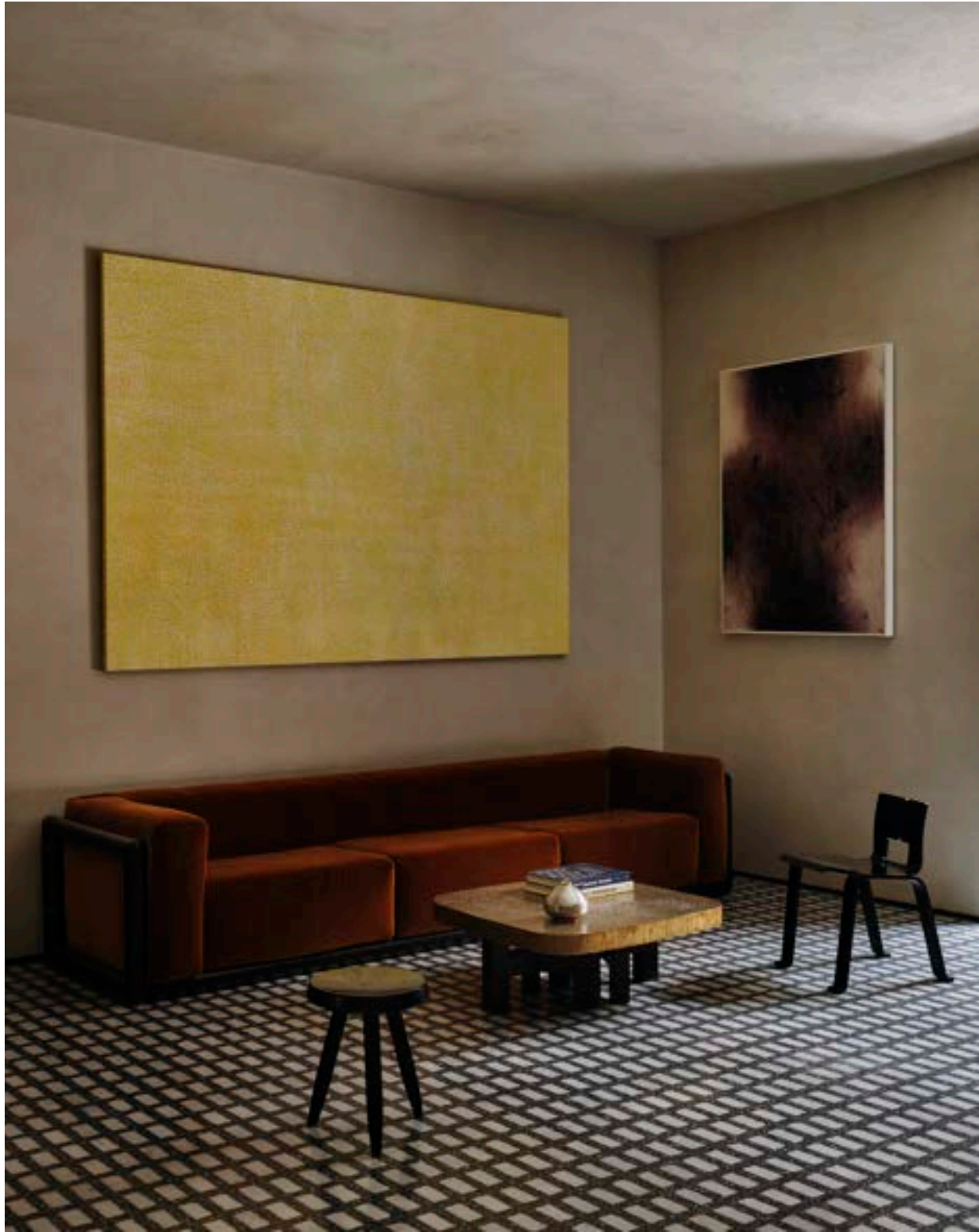
Acknowledging the interiors read as a series of scenes, Schuybroek used darkness to heighten intimacy and concentration. Beyond the black marble hallway, the reading room's charcoal-clay plaster walls and black wide-plank Douglas fir floors enshrine a Pierre Paulin Alpha sofa set, 1950s bamboo armchairs by Janine Abraham & Dirk Jan Rol, a Pierre Guariche lamp, and artwork by Danh Võ, doused in theatrical light from above.

Jean Prouvé, Charlotte Perriand and Jean Royère lead the home's roll call of revered designers, with Schuybroek maintaining particular pieces were acquired for the home

"because they could hold their own against the house's spatial rigour," he says, adding, "Royère's sofas bring curves, softness and humanity in the living space, Prouvé brings logic and tension—the project's duality." Prouvé's designs are particularly commanding in the dining room, which features the French architect's Standard chairs, Trapèze table and Meudon glass-and-steel doors; the Meudon doors reappearing by the tin bar.

Like the collectable furniture and design elements, art is embedded in the architecture itself, in its proportions, alignments and places for pause. "The house doesn't display art so much as converse with it," Schuybroek explains. "Certain views are composed almost like installations, others deliberately resist framing. Some of the most important works are the ones you feel, rather than see."





This page: A Cornaro sofa by Carlo Scarpa upholstered in a rust velvet, a coffee table by Ado Chale and a Cassina 517 Ombra Tokyo chair in black stained oak, designed by Charlotte Perriand, on Venetian terrazzo floors. *Summer Solstice* (2022) by Howardena Pindell and *Rushing Water* (2000) by Emmi Whitehorse are displayed above. **Opposite page:** The custom-designed sheet-metal bar references Prouvé's architectural elements in the home, topped with Rocchetto vases designed by Ettore Sottsass for Bitossi Ceramiche with stools by Piet Hein Eek tucked underneath.





Previous spread, right: Colour enters the home through art, with works by Rashid Johnson on the clay-plaster walls and a sculpture by Mark Grotjahn on the plinth in the hallway. **Left:** Light enters the lower levels via generous skylights above circular floor inserts, evoking Prouvé's iconic Door with Portholes. **This page, clockwise from top left:** A white Carrara marble kitchen island and La Cornue cooker on travertine floors bring the Belgian architect's signatures to New York City. Custom 1930s Bauhaus MR 20 armchairs by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich sit opposite. Pictured: *Hang* (2007) by Jim Hodges, vintage Tabouret Berger stools by Charlotte Perriand for Cassina and a Privat Lampe II by Franz West. The primary bedroom is located on the new fourth level, opening onto a rooftop terrace. A custom suede headboard and bench reference the suede-lined walls of the adjacent his-and-hers wardrobe, while Belgian linens enhance the room's textural language. Also pictured: the Series 3 E table lamp by Christopher Baker and *Planting Field* (1992) by Emmi Whitehorse. **Opposite page:** The upstairs study is another space dedicated to Jean Prouvé's designs, featuring the Standard chair and desk, in the company of a Lampe Tripode by Serge Mouille and vintage Nordic armchairs.