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The white walls and neutral-coloured seating in the sitting room call for bold artwork, which comes in the form of a large linocut by Christoph Ruckhäberle, to the left of the door to the kitchen, and a cryptic sculpture by Julien Brunet from Galerie Patrick Fournin on the coffee table

Taking on a Paris apartment once decorated with extravagant frescoes, architect and designer Alireza Razavi chose to maintain the flamboyant tone, but to modernise it, resulting in rooms that are as absorbing as works of art

TEXT IAN PHILLIPS | PHOTOGRAPHS STEPHAN JULLIARD



The owner of this apartment near Parc Monceau in Paris's 8th arrondissement can still clearly recall the first time she visited. 'It was impossible to be indifferent to it,' she says. The space then belonged to the air force brigadier general Pierre-Marie Gallois, who had initially studied at the École des Beaux-Arts and was known as the father of French nuclear dissuasion. Many of the great Gallic politicians of the twentieth century visited the apartment and, on his retirement, he painted it almost entirely with frescoes. There was a red faux-marble motif in the entrance hall and Italian garden scenes in what is now the kitchen. 'Although they gave the place a lot of character, they also made it quite overwhelming and intense,' the owner says. Not enough to put her off buying the 240-square-metre property, however.

To transform it into a family home for herself, her husband and their three children, she called upon the Paris-based architect and interior designer Alireza Razavi, whom she has known since childhood. Born in Tehran, Alireza fled his homeland after the Iranian Revolution in 1979. He went on to study in Paris and Milan before starting his career in the New York offices of Peter Eisenman, and Agrest and Gandelon. 'I love everything Alireza does,' says the owner. 'Each of his projects is unique, and they all have great character.' For Alireza himself, their bond greatly facilitated the process. 'I knew she would trust me,' he says.

Alireza wanted to extend the general's concept for decorating the apartment's walls, but with a more contemporary feel. He also wanted at least one of the rooms to have a 'wow' effect. He and the owner agreed it should be the eat-in kitchen. Taking inspiration from the work of artists including Sol LeWitt, Frank Stella and Sarah Morris, he came up with a motif of jagged, geometric shapes in bright candy colours that pop straight off the walls. 'Everyone who comes into the kitchen, whatever their age or their social milieu, is completely absorbed by it,' says the owner. In the middle of the room, Alireza installed a dining table made from a slab of cedar wood, which he left deliberately untreated. 'That way it will still smell of cedar as it ages,' he says.

The other area with high visual voltage is the entrance hall, which Alireza devised to look slightly surreal. This time, his influences came from the films of the San Francisco-born artist Matthew Barney. 'In his work, he's created a parallel world where things look familiar, but they're not really,' he says. Similarly, Alireza wanted to come up with something in direct contrast with the style of the classical, nineteenth-century building. To that end, he created a space-like scheme with a backlit-drop ceiling made from interlocking diamond shapes and walls covered in grey and white tiles that initially appear to form perfectly regular cubes. 'Take a closer glance, however, and you will notice that some have been deliberately disarranged. I wanted to convey the idea that things are never perfect,' he explains. 'Plus, I very much like the notion of delayed experience. You see something that looks banal or mundane, but you then discover it's not what you thought it was.'

The rest of the apartment is rather more sedate. The owner specifically asked for a white carpet in both the sitting room and main bedroom, which are linked with double doors. 'I hankered after that feeling of comfort, of being able to sit down on the floor,' she says. Alireza himself wanted a calmer backdrop to display some of the owners' artwork, which includes fine line drawings by Hans Bellmer and Joseph Beuys. The carefully edited furnishings, meanwhile, bring together a pair of Sixties Danish armchairs, an Arflex daybed, a small Konstantin Greic marble side table and one of Mies van der Rohe's iconic 'Barcelona' chairs. The opposite end of the apartment brings you to the children's rooms and guest shower room at the back.

The overall look is certainly a lot more light and airy than in Gallois' time. Yet, while his frescoes have disappeared, he has left a lasting mark on the outside of the building. On the courtyard walls, he painted a series of trompe-l'œil windows that remain today. Behind one is a bouquet of red and orange flowers, another depicts the silhouette of a man behind closed curtains. On the top floor, meanwhile, stands a scantily clad female figure, apparently based on a neighbour with loose morals. It was only after a series of complaints that Gallois eventually agreed to 'dress' her. □

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OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A pair of Sixties Danish armchairs bought at a Paris antiques fair sits on a 'Criterion' rug from Tai Ping in the sitting room. Adjoining this space is a second, more informal sitting area, where a monochrome palette is lifted by a brick red 'Strips' sofa by Cini Boeri from Arflex. The open-plan kitchen and dining room is accessed through a set of doors in the main sitting room and has an eye-catching mural designed by Alireza and painted using colours from Sikkens (also bottom left); the effect is muted by the bespoke cedar-topped table and high-gloss white units from Zecchinon Cucine





OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Double doors open onto the main bedroom in a corner of the sitting room. The en suite main bathroom has a free-standing Victoria + Albert bath and a custom-lacquered MDF and glass vanity unit; the walls are clad in streaky, textured MDF. The guest shower room has a 'Louis Ghost' chair by Philippe Starck for Kartell and honeycomb-shape tiles from Kalebodur. *Worldview Model III* by Ottmar Höri stands at the centre of the entrance hall; to the right is a custom bike from Cyclope.

THIS PAGE In the main bedroom, there are pockets of built-in shelving in Hungarian oak, with a dividing wall in the same material

