

MAY 2020

THE WORLD OF INTERIORS



CATH KIDSTON AT HOME
How the Queen of Print captured her castle



I N F I N I T E

Thanks to a splash of genius on the part of Laurent Minot, a deeply philosophical French architect, the bath- and shower rooms in this he has cleverly conjured lots of endlessly thrilling vistas as well as an air of *ancienne élégance*. Who wouldn't want to wallow among



W I S D O M

Paris apartment allow for limitless self-reflection – literally. By lining them with space-expanding antique mirror, one ceiling included, all that marble, mosaic and monochrome artwork, asks Elfreda Pownall, soaking up the atmosphere. Photography: Ricardo Labougle



'THE MAN walks into the room. He sees the window. He turns. We see what he sees. It is like an Alfred Hitchcock storyboard.' So says the French architect Laurent Minot when describing his approach to design. 'For me, space and the owner's experience of it are all-important,' he continues. 'I don't think this should be, say, an 18th-century or an Ottoman-inspired room. I look at the empty space and that's where I start, where my inner storyboard starts.' But Alfred Hitchcock and bathrooms? Should we be thinking *Psycho*...?!

Of course, Minot's rational approach results in rooms that couldn't be less stressful or better balanced. We are currently in an apartment in a beautiful 17th-century building on Paris's Ile Saint-Louis that faces south and has glorious views as far as the Panthéon; from its balcony you can see nearby Notre-Dame. 'We completely changed the interior layout,' says Minot. 'Luckily with many listed buildings in France restrictions only apply to the exterior.'

He had originally hoped to make one very large bathroom, borrowing space from adjacent rooms, but the owners (this is the fourth home he has designed for them) had other ideas. With great ingenuity he finally carved out two bathing areas: a handsome bathroom, with roll-top bath, which is approached by a long corridor that leads off the majestic hall-cum-dining room, and a tiny T-shaped shower and basin space. The latter forms a bright spot in a long enfilade that stretches from the main bedroom, through the study and a dressing room, to the kitchen.

The elements in both bathroom and shower are consistent: white Arabescato-marble walls and skirting, antique mirrors, and black-and-white mosaic floors of different patterns handmade to Minot's designs by artisans in Damascus. 'Their work is superb. The marble is new, but their dexterity and the slight imperfections of the one-centimetre-square hand-cut mosaics make it so special, so charming,' he says. 'I also like the sensuality of being able to walk, barefoot, on marble mosaics when you wake up.' The designs themselves are inspired by balconies in Beirut, terraces in Naples and antique Roman remains. In the main bathroom there are large shapes – squares, quarter circles and what look like crossed coffins – while in the small, enclosed loos tiny repeats are used. All are chosen for their formal qualities and graphic interest.

Minot has drawn all his life, from early childhood. After studying painting and applied arts at the Sorbonne he attended the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, a school founded in 1766 by Louis XV. He took on interior-design projects while there and continued during architecture school, and later at the Ecole de Chaillot, which specialises in the restoration of historic monuments.

His understanding of earlier styles and materials is particularly clear in the bathroom, where the bath is sur-

Previous pages: the door to the right of the Volevatch bath leads to a loo. A Marcel Lémarr bronze horse stands in the window, which is curtained with vintage sheets. This page, from top: one of the owner's many sculptures huddles on an Art Deco bathroom table found in an old Normandy hotel; the taps are by Lefroy Brooks. Opposite: a 1950s Italian ceiling pendant is reflected ad infinitum





rounded by panels of antique mirror that Minot sourced from the dealer Vincent Guerre, who restored the Galerie des Glaces at Versailles. This pre-1850 mercury glass cannot be glued, so the panels are kept in place behind narrow wooden mouldings. Similar shapes of mirror hang above the vanity unit on the opposite wall, creating infinite reflections. 'I was inspired by the Chrysler Building in New York for the shape of the vanity unit,' Minot explains. He has lined one of its mirrored doors with gold leaf, and lit it with LED lights to bring a golden glow to this predominantly white room. 'The only colour in a bathroom should be your skin,' he continues. 'It's a place of peace and transition in the morning, and white is so relaxing. Besides, bathroom ceramics appear too white, too stark, if you use them with coloured walls.'

The owners are keen art collectors and like moving pieces around, even in the bathrooms. Here hang Raphaël Thierry's dense pencil drawings of torsos trapped in circles, and a small sculpture of a horse perches on a patinated-bronze radiator cover put there for just such a purpose.

You approach the T-shaped shower room from the other end of the flat. The top stroke of that T is made up of a tiny central area, its floor covered with a mosaic of Venn-diagram-like overlapping circles copied from a Roman pattern of the first century AD. 'The circles work on every axis,' Minot points out. To one side of it is a marble-lined shower, to the other, under the window, a solid-marble basin. The floor here is defined by a series of small black mosaic crosses on a white ground.

The ceilings were already high for the size of the room, but Minot has made them even taller by removing a false ceiling, and then seemingly taller still by placing mirror overhead. In fact, there is mirror just about everywhere you look, making this bijou space appear much wider than it actually is: on the doors of the narrow cupboards lining the walls and on a pair of shutters at the window. These reflect light back into the room, can be used for shaving or make-up, and at night swing shut to provide privacy. The overall effect is wonderfully exciting, with fascinating reflections, and reflections of reflections, glimpsed all around. A small door leads to the wood-lined loo. 'I hid the loos so as to have fewer elements in the bathroom,' says Minot. 'There are more doors here than a Feydeau farce.'

The owners are delighted with the apartment. 'The shower is my favourite space – I can't stop looking up when I walk into there. It has a completely different perspective to the rest of the apartment,' says one.

And here we are again: 'The man walks into the room. He sees the window. He turns. We see what he sees' – himself, in a million iterations, looking up at a mirrored ceiling, with the only colour in the room that of his own skin ■
Laurent Minot. Ring 00 33 1 40 20 41 27, or visit laurent-minot.com

This page, from top: the shower room's mosaic floor, marble basin and 1950s Scandinavian pendant lamp are seen reflected in the ceiling; Laurent made the blinds from bamboo edged with vintage fabric. At night the mirrored shutters can be swung shut. Opposite: the two truncated pillars at the entrance to the shower provide a resting place for toiletries. The soap dish is from Beirut

