

House of *style*

The designer Julie de Libran's Left Bank apartment is big enough to work from, raise her family *and* throw the odd catwalk show, says **Mark C O'Flaherty**

Photographs **Mark C O'Flaherty**



This picture The ceiling lamp is by London-based designer Michael Anastassiades, and the chairs are by French architect and designer Jean Prouvé. **Right** Julie de Libran at the foot of the rod-iron 'snake' banister designed by her cousin, the artist Aurélien Raynaud. **Far right** The wooden panels and vintage Danish chair are from a flea market in Paris



We've all had our eye on a dream home at some point in our lives, but the fashion designer Julie de Libran spent years staring down at hers. In 2010 she moved into a fifth-floor apartment in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Paris, which had been her husband Stéphane de Luze's family abode. It was the perfect base for the couple to start their family, while de Libran was working in the city with Marc Jacobs at Louis Vuitton, before moving to become artistic director at Sonia Rykiel in 2014.

When she discovered that the courtyard apartment below her was available, she saw a golden opportunity. "A pair of architects had been living there," she says, "and it was originally the archives of the publishers of the Larousse dictionary, which Stéphane's grandfather used to run. I knew we had to have it. It's so quiet, and has green space but, with the iron girders and brickwork, it looks more like a SoHo loft [in New York] than Paris. I amplified the industrial elements by raising the ceiling heights, opening spaces up and exposing certain elements as features."



Left The feather artworks above the bed, which is covered in a vintage Prada blanket, are by the British sculptor Kate MccGwire. The orange sculpture is by the French artist Laurent Grasso. The stool is an antique find. **Below** The sink, designed by Zana, inspired by the sculptor Noguchi, makes a statement against the tiles by the Italian designer Gio Ponti

Above The tranquil courtyard. **Above right** The stone sink in the bathroom was commissioned by the architect Charles Zana. **This picture** Dresses from Julie de Libran's Couture Collection 2022 are displayed in front of shelving, which was found at a Paris flea market. The framed collage is by Yves Saint Laurent, and the 1970s lamps are by the Italian designer Willy Rizzo



De Libran worked with the renowned interior architect Charles Zana to create her dream space through most of 2017. He reworked the chimney into a gold-covered fireplace and made her an epic bespoke sofa, 360cm long, S-shaped and upholstered in olive-coloured velvet. Zana loved the result so much that he now offers the "Julie" sofa for sale via the Invisible Collection in London. If you have the space, and £57,500 to spare, it's yours. The rest of the house is full of modernist design classics —furniture by Prouvé, Charlotte Perriand and Pierre Jeanneret, as well as framed photographs of the architecture that Jeanneret's cousin Le Corbusier created for Chandigarh, the city he designed in India.

A few weeks ago de Libran, 49, also installed 22 couture pieces in the apartment for invited guests to view and order. The collection is based on the concept of the little black dress, but elevated with feather trim and sequins.

This wasn't the first time the apartment has been the backdrop to her work. "In June 2019 I showed my first collection here," she says. "The models came down the stairs, into and around the space, and we had cocktails for guests in the courtyard and kitchen. It felt just like having friends over." As people were leaving, de Libran's teenage son Balthazar handed them white roses. "It was a tribute to Azzedine Alaïa in a way, because he always showed in the gallery space next to the kitchen in his home and studio, and I like how personal that feels."

The family apartment is 15 minutes away from the store de Libran opened at the start of the year, close to the historic Café de Flore and Les Deux Magots. There are just two racks of clothes, surrounded by cabinets of her artisanal jewellery, and each garment is part of a numbered edition. "I worked for luxury houses for 30 years and I knew the time was right for my own label, which would be something that countered how wasteful our industry is," she explains. "I had been going to the mills, and started exploring their archives, and realised I wanted to work with these beautiful remnants. I don't





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want waste. I don't want to produce 300 metres of new silk to make my clothes. I get inspired by the existing end of rolls. They dictate how many I can make of each thing and give me an idea of what to design.”

Originally from Aix-en-Provence, de Libran grew up in California but is now as Parisian as can be. In 2003 she established a made-to-measure atelier for Prada in the city. Before that she had worked with Gianfranco Ferré and then Versace. But now she feels committed to her own brand, working in a way that feels modern and sustainable in every sense.

The apartment is part of that and she has married her love of modernist design with the way she works there. “I discovered my huge Jeanneret desk at an auction in the south of France,” she says. “I love to sit at it late into the night, when the family has gone to sleep, sketching my next collection.” While de Libran sketches the winter couture, she is watched over by a framed black-and-white portrait of herself shot by David Bailey. This would be many people's dream home, but it's everyone's fantasy of how Paris fashion is created. ■



The bench is by the artist Latifa Echakhch, and the vase is by the architect and designer India Mahdavi. The photograph of Le Corbusier's Chandigarh is by Manuel Bougot, and the stand was made for Couture Julie de Libran Paris by Marion Bernard



Top The bespoke kitchen. **Above** The ceiling light was sourced by the architect Marion Bernard. The desk is by the Swiss architect Pierre Jeanneret, with David Bailey's portrait of de Libran and a bronze branch by artist Judith Hopf above. The 'Julie' sofa was designed by Zana. **Right** The lamp is by Gio Ponti