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# THE WORLD OF INTERIORS



# HIP SNAKES

Whether it's an S-shaped velvet sofa, a parabola of Ponti tiles or a sinuous banister tipped with a serpent's head, crescents are among the coolest components of Julie de Libran's Paris apartment. The fashion designer, now launching her own label, has transformed a publisher's archive into one of haute couture's most creative hubs. Virginie Valoroso finds herself charmed by its new skin. Photography: Vincent Thibert



Market Set's ceiling light formed from rattan lozenges hangs above a low Charlotte Perriand table, an arresting Ugo Rondinone sculpture and Charles Zana's undulating sofa, covered in Pierre Frey's 'Teddy' mohair. To the right of the flue hangs an Yves Saint Laurent collage, c1970







This page: the reverse view. Opposite, top: a curving banister, designed by Aurélien Raynaud, ends in a snake's head, which eyes an Empire round table topped with a Kate McGwire feather sculpture. Bottom: seated at a one-off chair by Martino Gamper, De Libran works at a Pierre Jeanneret desk, which supports a pair of Gio Ponti lamps and an Ooumm marble 'Toucana' photophore. Beyond, next to the designer's black-and-white portrait by David Bailey, hang two prototype dresses from her new couture collection









**AT** the far end of the courtyard of a Haussmann building in the seventh arrondissement of Paris, an exceptional trio is converting the former archives of the Larousse publishing house into a top-flight hub of creativity. Fashion designer Julie de Libran, who keeps a low profile despite her prestige in her field, has joined forces with architect Charles Zana and landscape shaper Louis Benech in the realisation of her new apartment, which has the look of a family home – albeit one for artists.

'I had wanted a garden or a roof terrace,' says De Libran. This hankering for fresh air comes perhaps from memories of her childhood near Les Baux-de-Provence in the south of France and from teenage years in San Diego, California. It has also been a feature of her career. For 30 years, she has worked with a succession of top designers such as Gianfranco Ferré, Gianni Versace, Miuccia Prada, Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton (the *Telegraph* described her as 'Vuitton's secret weapon'), and most recently Sonia Rykiel. Now she has launched a brand under her own name. 'When you are creative, you have this desire to express yourself. I love my job. Perhaps this recent experience of five years following in the footsteps of an icon such as Sonia Rykiel, a woman who designed for women – with her [sense of] freedom, which is very much my style – laid the ground for me to bring a long-nurtured idea to fruition.'

De Libran is aiming to combine haute couture with environmental responsibility, a concept centred on that most feminine of garments: the dress. She envisages designs being commissioned in short-run editions and in sublime fabrics enhanced with embroidery or unearthed at her former suppliers. 'I lived in Italy for 15 years and I had the opportunity to work with the finest producers, who open their doors to me today. In their warehouses, I come across short lengths, genuine treasures.'

This rare mix of high-quality materials and fine workmanship is visible in her home. 'I like it when furniture has a story,' she says. Each item, from the wall-mounted bookcase with veined-wood panels – picked up in the Paul Bert Serpette antique flea market even before she had the apartment – to the Danish armchair and Charlotte Perriand chairs, is the result of a long quest or a must-have item she picked up on her travels. Her mother, Corine Longanbach, an interior designer in the United States, instilled in Julie a love of things that pulse with personal history. So in the apartment, an 18th-century gilded-metal mirror, a family heirloom, rubs shoulders with a Pierre Jeanneret desk, topped with Gio Pontilamps. De Libran handles the juxtaposition of styles with ease, probably unsurprising in a Parisienne who is so Californian but is steeped in memories of the Provençal countryside.

Only one architect came to mind when De Libran acquired these four partitioned floors (one of which is in the basement). 'I had already met Charles Zana when we redesigned the Sonia Rykiel stores. I liked his character very much.' They share a passion for Italian art and design. 'I didn't want an architect who would impose his style on me.'

Top: a pair of cement armchair-sculptures by Willy Guhl sit in the courtyard garden designed by Louis Benech. Left: framed by Prouvé chairs, baked goods from Poilâne perch on the family table picked up in the Saint-Ouen flea market. Opposite: suspended above is a Michael Anastasiades ceiling light. The vintage electric clock is by Brillié









Opposite: the bathroom is an ode to the *heure bleue*, or twilight. With a pink blind that recalls the setting sun, marble like a streaking sky, and walls the colour of night fall, this graceful space features antique mirrors that are family heirlooms. This page: seen through a partition wall made of swivelling vertical strips of wood are a double washbasin and shower designed by Charles Zana. The rare Gio Ponti sconces have followed De Libran through all her house moves





I really like his taste. We have Milanese friends in common, such as Nina Yashar of Nilufar Gallery,' De Libran asked Zana for a configuration that would allow objects to be moved around according to use: home, creative work, welcoming guests. She even held her first two fashion shows here – with 300 people in attendance – in July 2019 and January 2020. 'Many different ways of living in the space are possible, just as clothes can be worn in different ways. The dress allows a wide range of creativity; the environment has to be adaptable too and allow change.'

Zana devised new spaces for the ground floor. He raised the ceilings, moved a metal beam, changed the location of the entrance. He also brought in light on all sides: pivoting glass panels for the kitchen, bay windows on either side of the lounge, an immaculate wide staircase with soft lines. De Libran has organised this ample space in a line. The open shelves by Franco Albini define the office area. Zana has designed remarkable, oversized elements: the fireplace in stone and brass (inspired by one in the De Libran family chalet); the sofa facing two ways (one looking over the interior and the other towards the exterior). The bedroom reflects the designer's attraction to light, using the effect of an openwork wall composed of swivelling strips of exotic timber to offer a glimpse of the bathroom. 'I very often move the furniture around to play with the sun's rays,' she says. This interest is illuminated by the careful choice of lamps, from historic designers such as Gio Ponti and newer names like Michael Anastassiades.

Known as 'the collectors' architect', Zana offers the fashion designer a terrific range of ways to find self-expression. 'I like to bring together the artists that inspire me, whose work I follow.' Several imaginative sculptures made from the blue-black feathers of crows or the lustrous green of ducks, by British artist Kate McGwire, populate the loft. In a corner, next to a portrait of De Libran by David Bailey, is a bronze branch by sculptor Judith Hopf; at its foot lies a 'brick ball' by the same artist. The primary colours of Ugo Rondinone's *Magic Mountains* heckle the subdued palette of the living room. On the staircase wall, space is afforded to photographs by American feminist Talia Chetrit, which were discovered in the gallery of another Milanese friend, Francesca Kaufmann. Latifa Echakhch's graffitied bench stands in the entrance, acquired long before she won the Prix Marcel Duchamp in 2013.

In the main bedroom, on the first floor, space has been found for an optical sculpture by Laurent Grasso, all shimmering edges, diffracting the light into a thousand bursts. 'Art is everywhere,' she says. 'I am very visual; artworks influence me.' The chair that faces her on her work table is by Martino Gamper, known for his project *100 Chairs in 100 Days*. The garden, thanks to landscape designer Louis Benech, remains green all year round; there, two cement armchairs by Willy Guhl, a pioneer in the use of the material, take pride of place, acting like guardians of this place – one that is so very Saint-Germain-des-Prés ■

*Julie de Libran. Visit [juliedelibran.com](http://juliedelibran.com). Charles Zana. Visit [zana.fr](http://zana.fr)*

Top: a Charlotte Perriand chair sits beneath paintings by Gabriele de Santis in the bedroom. Left: behind a conventional Haussmann entrance, the hall features a fountain sink, lit by a ceiling light from RW Guild, New York, and surrounded by a serpentine wall of Ponti tiles. Opposite: a metal wall work by Laurent Grasso diffracts the sun's rays



