

Designer Charles Zana's regal Art Basel outing

The French architect debuts his latest furniture collection in the storied environs of the Hôtel de La Marine



Zana's 'Rimbaud' rocking chair © Vincent Leroux

Flanking the northern end of Place de la Concorde, the Hôtel de la Marine is the former 18th-century palace commissioned by King Louis XV. Its storied history includes being the home of the Royal Furniture Guard (Garde-Meuble royal), the institution responsible for the selection, purchase, and maintenance of the king's furniture. The crown jewels were also kept here until they were stolen during the French Revolution. For the two following centuries, it served as the administrative headquarters of the French Navy — until 2015, when it was entrusted to the Centre des Monuments Nationaux, restored, and reborn as a museum in 2021.

It's the grandest of locations for a display of the latest furniture collection by French architect and designer Charles Zana, in a five-day exhibition titled *ITER* ("path" in Latin), which will be held during this autumn's Art Basel in Paris. "I liked the concept of doing something ephemeral," says Zana, who will take over private apartments, a six-room enfilade steeped in emblematic 18th-century architectural details.

“
These classic designs never go out of fashion. More than just furniture, they convey a certain attitude to life

The same high-quality workmanship informs Zana's namesake furniture line, which he launched in 2022 as an extension of the [architecture](#) and [interior](#) design agency he established in 1990. Distinctly modern, his collection celebrates noble materials — oak and

walnut, velvet, brass and marble — and has a strong presence, drawn in streamlined shapes and imposing forms and proportions. Take, for example, the "Franck" chair (a homage to Jean-Michel Frank), distinct for its slender arms and legs forged in brass, and a deep, cube-shaped cushioned seat resembling a suspended ottoman or pouffe. The "Teddy" bed, first designed as a bespoke item for a circular bedroom in a London project, looks like a lush sofa bed with an outsized, cocooning bedhead.



The Hôtel de la Marine, the former 18th-century palace commissioned by King Louis XV, is now a museum © Jean-Pierre Delagarde

It's a far cry from Zana's childhood home in Paris. He remembers the interiors, which were emblematic of the 1970s — bright colours and an eclectic mix of furniture, often in “new” materials — and the modern spirit of the Pompidou years. Zana's father, a publisher and well-known collector, favoured the vibrant and retro-futuristic work of designers of the time, such as [Pierre Paulin](#) and Verner Panton, which he mingled with Bauhaus reissues by Knoll.

Little of this design moment infiltrates Zana's work today — an ever-increasing portfolio of hotels, private villas, and luxury addresses, such as the Goyard boutique in Monte Carlo or David Mallett's hair salon in New York. He draws on the classicism of 18th-century French architecture and the savoir-faire of the art deco period, a fertile time for French design, thanks to the output of architect-designers such as Frank and Pierre Chareau. “These classic designs never go out of fashion. More than just furniture, they convey a certain attitude to life,” he says of their enduring influence.



Charles Zana with his 'Franck' chair © Luna Conte

He admires and collects, too, the work of great Italian design masters [Ettore Sottsass](#) and Carlo Scarpa, though their work furnishes his home more than his inspiration board: “They moved the boundaries and they were more than architects, they were philosophers, and that interests me . . . but I am also interested in domestic considerations, how this works in a [home](#),” he says of his designs.

Indeed, the new exhibition’s *mise en scène* will feature 20 furniture styles for the home, 14 of which are either new, or updated in new fabrics and materials. The “Teddy” headboard is cast in a new fabric embroidered by Lesage with delicate motifs in warm ochre that resemble lichen “eating the bed”, as he says.

Then there is the “Ernest” bar (named after Hemingway), a fully outfitted bar concealed by double doors crafted from Breccia Fantastica marble — assembled in the book-matching effect, so they mirror each other dramatically — mounted on solid walnut. He will also introduce his first *chaise longue*, drawn in curved lines and crafted from oak, and a new reading chair in walnut and bronze, upholstered in a lush caramel-coloured fabric.



The 'Teddy' bed, first designed as a bespoke item for a circular bedroom, has now been updated in a new fabric © Vincent Leroux

“Charles finds that perfect marriage between the desire for modernity and sobriety, but without sacrificing the beauty of the materials, the originality and finesse of the craftsmanship and the comfort,” says Hervé Lemoine, Director of the Mobilier National, the contemporary Garde-Meuble, who has closely followed Zana’s career. “What also characterises his work is a sophisticated mastery of the volume relationships between furniture and space, even if it means surprising us with proposals that are by no means classic.”

The exhibition will also feature several paintings by the 84-year-old Viennese artist Martha Jungwirth, on loan from Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac. Zana first encountered Jungwirth’s vivid abstract paintings at the Venice Biennale inside the Giorgio Cini Foundation and was struck by the “explosion of colour”. That mix is all a part of a necessary global perspective. “Today, it’s about . . . integrating music, art, and lifestyle,” Zana says of the

evolution of his work. “It’s not just about having nice interiors: through the choices you make, you are expressing something about your inner self.”

ITER is on at Hôtel de la Marine, Place de la Concorde, 75008 Paris from October 15 to October 20. zana.fr