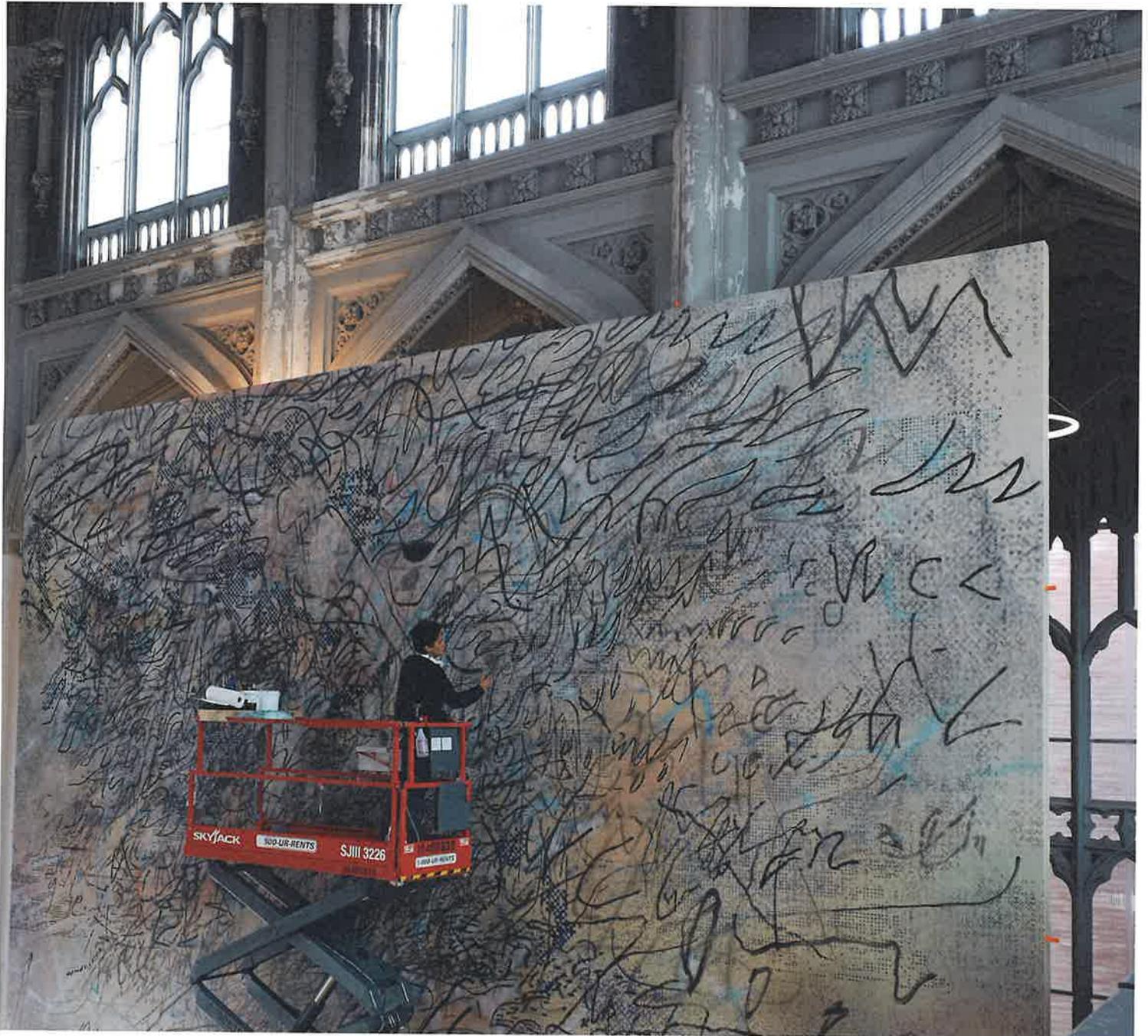


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Domestic Theatre



Charles Zana. Right: A residential restoration project of a 17th Century Palazzo in Venice, Italy, 2017
(c) Olivia Haudry

The inspiration of architect and designer Charles Zana can be traced to a young exposure to art.

by Daniel Nash

You could say art runs in the blood of Charles Zana. The Tunisian-born, Paris-bred architect and interior designer grew up in a family of collectors. "It began when I was very young, my father was an art collector in the 1970s and was always taking us to exhibitions, and the house was filled with Skira art books and Picasso ceramics and interesting objects... it was a different time," he reflects from his studio in Paris.





“It was always my dream to have my own collection, it is so exciting to design furniture for projects that are not our own and see how people have placed them.”
— Charles Zana.

At 17, he decided to combine his skill at mathematics with art and trained to become an architect. He studied in France then moved to New York in the mid-1980s “we lived the American dream”.

Over the years, Zana found his initial architectural training feeding into his interior design and vice versa, but always centred around his young exposure to art. “Maybe my love of art was the connection between interior design and architecture as I always thought about my work as an art director,” he says.

Zana started his own company in the 1990s in Paris, when there was little competition for the service he was offering. He naturally uses his builder’s sense of scale and precise proportions, which creates elegance and comfort, he adds.

“In France at that time it was the beginning of that era, there were some decorators and there were architects, but no one connecting art and architecture. I started each project being informed by my architect background, for example, how to change the fundamental construct, change the circulation of the energy, change the vision you have in home and apartment, the volume, and the basics such as how to hide the AC and so on.”

Left: Charles Zana Gallery details (c) Gaspard Hermach. Below: A renovation of Fondation CAB Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France, in 2021. (c) Antoine Lippens.

Today, he employs a team of 30 in Paris, juggling around 20 different projects annually around the world in residences and hotels in diverse places such as Saint-Tropez, Geneva, Dallas, New York, Porto Cervo, London and many more. To get an idea of his work, visit the Louis Vuitton store in Ghangzhou, China, or the Yann Couvreur café and patisserie in Miami.

Everywhere he designs there is a strong sense of being informed by place and context. "I always try to capture culture in a project," he says. "Whether I am doing a project in Sardinia or New York, I read a lot about the local history, draw from the artisanal, the local art and craft, find out about traditional stone in the area and figure out the way the light falls. Although I consider myself a modern architect, it's a very big anchor. I love to be local."

In February 2022 he launched the Charles Zana Mobilier gallery on the Rue de Seine, filled with a furniture collection that was a long time in the making. He says: "It was always my dream to have my own collection, it is so exciting to design furniture for projects that are not our own and see how people have placed them."

"I love mixing objects together; I am not fixed to one era or style. I like to tell a story, to create domestic theatres."
— Charles Zana.



Above and below: Charles Zana's apartment in an 18th Century building in Faubourg Saint Germain (c) François Halard.



Here you will find his best-selling Alexandra sofa, large, horseshoe shaped velvet-clad seating arrangements with space for the whole family, as well as an eclectic mix of mirrors, tables, beds, consoles and lighting. He reflects that “people’s tastes have changes and what to be cosy, closely seated all together, since the pandemic”.

Zana has lived most of his life in the central Parisian village of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, a place filled with culture and heritage, and now resides in an 18th century apartment.

At home in his light-filled white-oak panelled duplex, he collects vintage Italian design. He describes his tastes as “mix between sophistication and bohemian”. With this he intersperses contemporary art and pieces of furniture from his own collection. Under the curved staircase sits his Lava Desk, a black, fluid, sturdy piece that seems burnished with fire. In his sitting room is the Dune coffee table and a Franck Bridge chair. It’s so eclectic, and yet all so harmonious. “I love mixing objects together; I am not fixed to one era or style. I like to tell a story, to create domestic theatres.” ◇

Left and Right: La Résidence in New York’s SoHo, created in collaboration with Yann Nury (c) Adrian Gaut.