

# ELLE DECOR

JULY/AUGUST 2019

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In the drawing room of a duplex apartment designed by Jean-Louis Deniot, in London's Belgravia neighborhood, the sofa is from the designer's collection for George Smith, the 18th-century armchair (left) is English, the 1940s chair is in a Brochier fabric, and the pendant is by Hubert Le Gall. The watercolor is South African.

# STAR TURNKEY

CAN A LONDON SPEC HOME HAVE JE NE SAIS QUOI? MOST DEFINITELY, IF FRENCH A-LISTER **JEAN-LOUIS DENIOT** IS THE DECORATOR.

BY IAN PHILLIPS  
PRODUCED BY CYNTHIA FRANK  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SIMON UPTON



The dining room's table, chairs in Romo and Pasaya fabrics, and Blue Savoy marble mantel are custom. The crystal chandelier is Louis XVI, the sconces are by Hamilton Conte, and the curtains are of a JAB Anstoetz fabric.



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TO MANY, THE IDEA OF BUYING A TURNKEY HOME—ONE that is fully furnished and kitted out like a luxury hotel suite—may be a head-scratcher. Why purchase an apartment imagined and decorated for a fictitious owner when you're wealthy enough to hire your own interior designer who could tailor it specifically to your tastes and needs?

Yet the turnkey craze is sweeping the globe, and among its fans is the superstar French interior designer Jean-Louis Deniot. He is currently working on several such projects, from Hong Kong to West Palm Beach. "I enjoy the financial pressure of creating a home that needs to sell," he says, "and the fact that the design choices are more than just 'I like blue, you like pink' and are based instead on what adds real value to a property."

While many interiors commissioned on spec inevitably tend to be bland and impersonal, Deniot's approach is different. "I try to convey a sense of nonchalance so that the decor doesn't feel stiff," he says. The developer for whom Deniot decorated this 5,000-square-foot duplex in London's prestigious Belgravia neighborhood is wont to agree. "Jean-Louis has this ability to design things that are truly unique and one-off," he says. "He really understands how people want to live today."

The four-bedroom home, which was previously three separate apartments, has numerous assets—a prime location, a double garden, its own front door, and lots of lateral space in a city where small rooms are the norm. Given that the clients for turnkey developments are for the most part from other countries, Deniot is particularly focused on creating a sense of place. Here, for instance, he installed floor-to-ceiling doors in the 18th-century English Adam style. While he is an unabashed fan of luxe details, in a project like this Deniot is conscious that he needs to strike a fine balance. "A developer wants everything to be very beautiful and luxurious, but also to be competitively priced," he notes.

One place he never holds back: the entry hall, as illustrated by the custom geometric door and bronze door-and-wall trims he designed for this project. An antique Venetian lantern hangs overhead, and the custom floor is in Carrara and Nero Marquina marbles. "First impressions last," Deniot says, "and I wanted to mesmerize visitors straightaway."

He also took pains to design unique cornices for each room and to include a few surprises. For instance, in the



The entry hall's André Arbus-inspired custom benches have seats in a Naturtex leather. The pendant (foreground) is by Circa Lighting, and the one near the door is 19th-century Venetian.



In the kitchen, stools by Face Design pull up to a Calacatta marble island. The cabinetry is custom, the range and hood are by Wolf, the sink is by Dornbracht, and the pendants are by Lee Broom.





The master bedroom's headboard in a Kirkby Design fabric, bench, and nightstands are custom, and the walls are upholstered in a Pierre Frey fabric. The armchair is by Deniot for George Smith, the custom bedding is in Loro Piana and Lelièvre fabrics, and the 1950s chandelier is by Lalique.



In the guest room, the Carrara marble mantel is Louis XVI, and the walls are in Benjamin Moore's Van Deusen Blue. The blue sculpture is by Curtis Jeré.

closets, some drawers have glass faces so you can see what's inside, while others are lined with cedarwood.

Cost cutting—an exercise in which Deniot is actually quite well versed—took place elsewhere. His interiors, even for private clients, are rarely awash in fancy designer names. He has a knack for transforming a bargain buy into a star turn simply by reupholstering it in the right fabric. For the Belgravia project, he imported textiles from Thailand or had them custom made in Morocco and opted for bamboo rugs over pricier silk ones. Stylistically, his goal was to concoct a timeless look, but with just the right amount of personality—“enough to stand out, but not too much to deter a potential buyer.” To that end, he adopted a neutral palette, adding interest in the form of sunny yellow and rich blue accents. “The weather's fine when I'm in London, but apparently that is not always the case,” he says with a smile.

Where Deniot's turnkey interiors particularly sing is in his use of antiques—a rarity in the spec-house world, where the norm is contemporary furniture fresh from the factory. Here, the living room's 18th-century English neoclassical armchairs and the dining room's Louis XVI crystal chandelier deftly add a historical layer without jeopardizing one of Deniot's golden rules. “In a turnkey project, you have to avoid giving potential buyers the impression that they're entering someone else's home,” he says. “They want to feel like nobody has ever sat on that sofa or used the bathroom. It needs to be fresh, fresh, fresh!” ■



The master bath's tub and fittings are by Kallista. The midcentury Italian armchair is upholstered in Jim Thompson and Créations Métaphores fabrics, and the walls, tub surround, and flooring are Calacatta marble. For details, see Resources.