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# GLOBAL STYLE

Jean-Louis Deniot is a French designer with an international eye. His unique ability to combine periods and styles to create contemporary spaces grounded in tradition have made him one of the most celebrated interior designers of his generation. Charlotte Abrahams met him to find out more



When the 12-year-old Jean-Louis Deniot came across a pile of interior design magazines in the school library, he could not believe his eyes. "I thought, wow, there are magazines about interiors! I was amazed," he says. More than three decades later, Deniot is a regular in most of those magazines. His supremely sophisticated take on neo-classical style has earned him a place on top international design charts such as AD100 and *Elle Decor's* A-List, and seen *Forbes* magazine herald him as "the Modern Master of French Interiors."

Born in Paris, Deniot spent his childhood visiting museums with his grandparents, making models of exotic interiors, building tree houses and "hanging out in abandoned houses making them feel like my own." He also joined an after-school drama class, drawn by a fascination for the sets rather than the acting.

Design had clearly chosen him so, having studied architecture followed by interior architecture and product design at Paris' Ecole Camondo, Deniot opened his eponymous studio in Paris' 7th arrondissement just

three months after graduating. He was 26. "If you start working for someone else, you become very influenced by them and that leaves an imprint on your creativity," he says. "I had a blank canvas."

He does however cite legendary French designers Henri Samuel and Alberto Pinto as major inspirations. Samuel's grand salon with its red-orange upholstered walls, Empire woodwork and experimental contemporary furniture showed him the power of mixing classicism with the avant-garde, while Alberto Pinto's ability to reflect the myriad of different countries he worked in made him determined to do the same. As he writes in his latest book, *Destinations* (Rizzoli), "very early on in my career, I made it a personal challenge to work in as many locations as possible."

The studio's projects cover five continents, ranging from tropical retreats in Miami, a waterfront villa in Italy, and a super-contemporary city apartment in Colombia, to bespoke new builds in India and a complete makeover of London's Cambridge House club. Provisionally set to open in late 2024, this former

private members' club will become one of the capital's grandest hotels.

Every one of these interiors is a reflection of its home country but there is also something about Deniot's work that is quintessentially French. The spaces he creates have a certain insouciance. They are both serene and sexy, relaxed but refined. "I have an international interest with a French translation," he explains. That translation is evident in his own 1930s 'get away' home in Los Angeles that conjures both mid-century Hollywood glamour and Coco Chanel's neo-medieval French villa; and in a home he has created in the most traditionally English of locations, Eaton Square, London.

Deniot says he "treasures English architecture," and "would not normally alter the archetype of a protected building," but because this project integrated three apartments in several buildings, they were able to demolish everything and create a symmetrical layout that is unmistakably French. "The English and French floorplans generate very different flows," he explains. "One separates the rooms into enclosed

OPPOSITE: Jean-Louis Deniot, who opened his own studio in Paris aged just 26, and whose latest monograph *Destinations* (Rizzoli) covers project across five continents.  
ABOVE: The designer's Spanish-style 1930s home in Los Angeles celebrates his eclectic style, as well as embracing some old-Hollywood glamour – mixing antique, mid-20th-century and sculptural pieces with a pair of huge fishtail palms that stretch up to the ceiling





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private areas, whereas the other opens them up and connects them.” Within this Gallic framework, the apartment is a clever cross-channel confection. In the entrance hall, the ceiling moulding references the Palladian architecture of 17th- and 18th-century England, while Visual Comfort & Co.’s antique lantern is pure French art deco. In the living room, a pair of stools by Parisian furniture makers Hamilton Conte have been upholstered in fabric by that most English of brands, Colefax and Fowler.

Deniot’s interiors are also reflections of their immediate surroundings. “I love the idea of the interior being a continuation of the exterior,” he says. Merging the two not only roots the interior in its surroundings, it also provides a story to base the scheme on. In the duplex penthouse he designed in the heart of New York’s Chelsea district, the hay tones of the master bedroom reflect the views towards the countryside, while in the living room, the shimmering, seven-metre-long curtains embroidered by Jean-François Lesage on Pierre Frey’s ‘Kalahari’ linen were inspired by the Hudson River outside.

This storytelling is important. Deniot’s aim is to create an entire setting in which there is a continuous thread but each room has a sensibility all of its own. “My interiors are not a single song, they’re a whole album,” he explains. “To make people comfortable in a space, it’s important to give them options – different rooms to reflect different moods so that each person finds their perfect corner.”

Deniot’s unerring ability to deliver aesthetically beautiful interiors in which people can also live comfortably stems in large part from his architectural training. He has an instinctive understanding of space. “Each project starts with me listening to what the space has to say,” he says. “I look for the faults and focus on how to turn them into qualities, and reconfigure layouts so the bones of the house give maximum potential in terms of circulation, light and access. That brings a sense of serenity and tranquillity. Then I like to add a great layer of curiosities on top to keep a level of excitement – because being comfortable in a space is not only about being serene, it’s also about being captivated.”

His many international clients are so captivated that the majority of them never change the spaces he has created for them. But Deniot himself is captivated too. Now headquartered on Paris’ famed Quai d’Orsay, and with an office in New York, the passion he felt for interior design as a boy chalking layouts on the paving stones outside his home is undimmed. He is rarely not at work, creating not only a wealth of both residential and commercial projects (many of them filled with furniture and furnishings sourced from the Design Centre – C & C Milano, Arte, Kvadrat, Holland & Sherry, Brunschwig & Fils all make regular appearances in his projects) – but also furniture, lighting and objects. Right now he is working a range of JLD decorative home accessories titled Quai D’Orsay.

When I ask him how he would spend a day off, he pauses before saying “catching up with friends, family, and my pets.” (These pets include not only cats and dogs, but also camels, donkeys, and a duck called Chatty). Then he adds, “What I do is translate a sense of beauty and my ultimate aim is to motivate dreams. I don’t consider that to be work, it’s a passion.”

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: In London’s Eaton Square, Deniot brought together three apartments to create glamorous lateral living, with a hallway whose grand proportions are complemented by a ‘Gale’ pendant by Thomas O’Brien for Visual Comfort & Co.; a Bangkok three-storey penthouse that features a private gold ‘grotto’ that opens at the flip of a switch – the living space includes a pair of stools by Arflex by Gastón y Daniela and fabrics and trim from Casamance, Dedar and Houllès. OPPOSITE A duplex penthouse in New York’s Chelsea, where the ceilings are more than 7m tall: the curtains are Pierre Frey’s ‘Kalahari’ linen, custom-embroidered by famed French embroiderer Jean-François Lesage, with a water pattern that mimics the Hudson River beyond, while further fabrics were sourced from Brochier and Zimmer + Rohde



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