



## Le refuge

Architect and designer Valérie Chomarat  
creates a grounded getaway in Provence

*Words / Karine Monié  
Images / Vincent Leroux*



Valérie Chomarat's decision to create her French family refuge in the coastal town of Bandol was no accident. Originally from Ardèche in the Rhône-Alpes region, the architect and designer had spent her childhood summer holidays in Provence, close to the sublime Calanques of Cassis, a National Park that straddles land and sea. "I am very attached to it," she says of the area.

Naturally, Chomarat felt that this would be the perfect place to conceive a home for herself, her husband and their two young sons, where they could recharge and spend quality time together. Having found a house surrounded by shady pines and with views of the sea, she fully played her role of architect for this personal project, enlarging and rebuilding the exterior, as well as taking care of all the interior spaces down to the smallest details. "It is a home connected to nature and the horizon," says Chomarat, who always reflects the importance of perspective in her wider work. "There is a continuity between the architecture, the spaces, the furniture, the door handles..."

Having grown up in an indoor-outdoor house inspired by Japanese architecture, and being an admirer of Tadao Ando, Chomarat drew on this to design something that would echo these

influences. "Traditional Japanese architecture is calm and invites [you] to contemplate," she says. And this is exactly what happens here, where elongated openings and longitudinal lines make the sea into both the main protagonist and the backdrop.

"There are different spaces that seem to be inside and outside at the same time," says Chomarat. The ground floor opens up to a pool and patio, where the exceptional panorama takes centre stage. The pines, coastline, blue of the sea and the sky, as well as the muted tones of the local stone used for the floors, basins and worktops – all typical of the Mediterranean landscape – informed the natural, earthy colour and material palette. Whitewashed walls and ceilings contrast with the wood as a way to further highlight the architecture. "I wanted to use the least materials possible," says Chomarat. A sense of subtlety and precision prevails in every nook of this poetic house.

Inside, Chomarat wanted to create the feeling of being under the trees and protected from the intensity of the sun. Acting as a transitional space shaped by the sculptural and diffused natural light, the staircase is one of the designer's favourite features, with every step infused with the possibility that it can be used

Facing page  
The kitchen is made from warm-toned walnut; two photographs by John Pawson are propped on a shelf

Previous page  
Chomarat's architecture was inspired by the restraint of Japanese design



Above  
An informal built-in sofa lines the living room; the Slab Arm lounge chair is by George Nakashima

Facing page  
A painting by Korean artist Yun Hyong-Keun sits on a long, low cabinet in the living room





“My objective was that every member of our family could find his or her place”

as an occasional seat. “I used the architectural vocabulary to respond to the sensations I wanted to give,” she explains. “It has been very interesting to have the opportunity to think about every area in its relationship with the exterior.” Spreading across a total of about 220 sqm, some of these areas are very intimate, while others are ideal for entertaining.

Throughout the project, Chomarat strove to tell a visual story where harmony would reign. “My objective was that every member of our family could find his or her place,” she says. The house’s multiple levels called for some streamlining between the furniture and the architecture, with custom-made built-in pieces such as sofas that merge with the envelope.

Constantly on the hunt for unique pieces that speak to her aesthetic, Chomarat has adorned this home with some design icons such as a Pierre Jeanneret bench, an Akari light by Isamu Noguchi, chairs by Poul Kjaerholm and George Nakashima, and a Magistretti lamp, complementing them with art troves. Among them are African shields, Bénédicte Vallet ceramics, a Julia Atlas oversized necklace, a Robert Courtright mask, as well as paintings by Japanese artist Sadaharu Horio and Korean

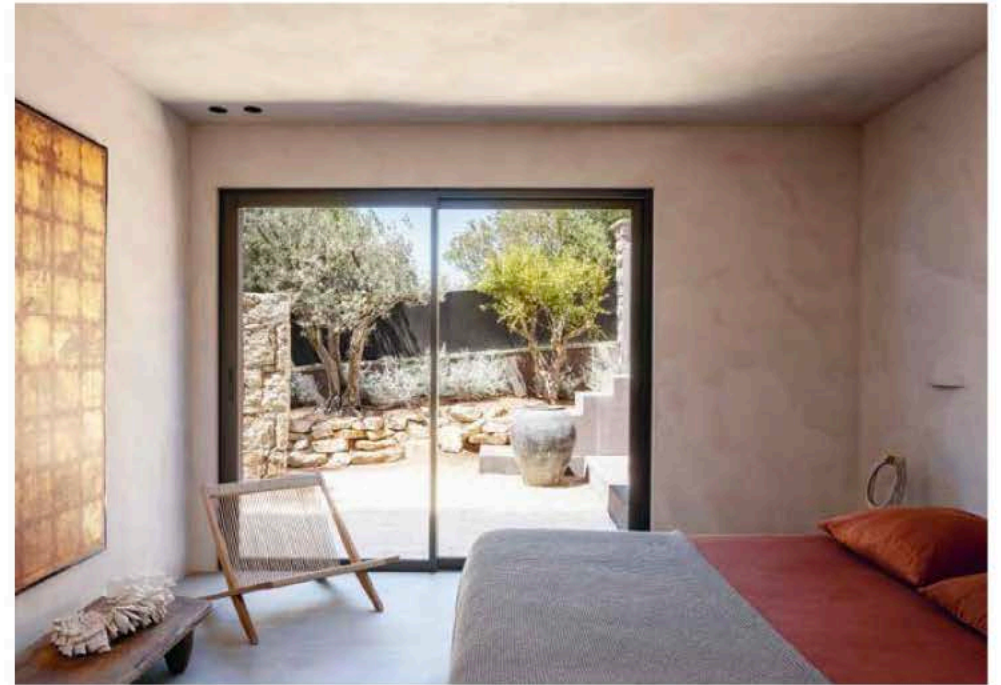
artist Yun Hyong-Keun, to name only a few. Very dear to Chomarat, two photographs by John Pawson – her mentor and former employer – are displayed in the kitchen.

Designed as a layered composition where every detail is part of a whole, this home appears as a synthesis of Chomarat’s creative vision. There is no hierarchy between the building itself and what it holds; between the surroundings and the house; or between one object and another. On the contrary, the continuous flow proves that coherence and balance have been achieved through thoughtful simplicity.

“One of the challenges was that I made myself less available for my project than when I work for a client,” says Chomarat, who despite this constraint knew she needed to consider all aspects of the house to truly bring it to life. Taking her time to accomplish what she had in mind at a slightly slower pace than usual, Chomarat enjoyed the process along the way.

Truly hers, the result exemplifies what has guided Chomarat since she started her career: “To create a beautiful way of living.” It may sound simple, but only a select few are capable of honouring all that this approach entails.

Facing page  
Covered outdoor  
spaces feel cosy  
and cocooning,  
with their earthy  
plaster walls



Facing page  
An Isamu Noguchi Akari light hangs in the stairwell; the landing doubles as a useful workspace

Above  
Earthy Mediterranean tones and textures are echoed across the interiors, uniting inside and out

Next page  
The architecture is designed to draw the eye to the vista, such as this sea view across the pool

