

# Home

SECTION

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## A Little Fantasy To Be Comfy With

By SUZANNE SLESIN

**T**HEY form a congenial group at the French Designer Showhouse, which opens today in a mansion at Park Avenue and 64th Street. Some of them French, most of them Francophiles, the 38 designers seem to have nothing but compliments for one another's rooms, which is somewhat unusual for a show house.

The display, which is open through Nov. 17, is the second French show house to benefit the American Hospital of Paris Foundation. The first was in 1989.

With rooms billed as homages to Matisse, Rimbaud and Grand-mère, it offers a variety of energetic styles. If there are excesses, they are not excesses of yardage, but of overactive imagination, as in the architect Thierry Despont's surreal suite titled "A Nomad Halt, or, Deep Breakfast With Rimbaud."

A partial explanation: The two rooms are a homage to Rimbaud, the 19th-century Romantic poet. One is empty, save for a huge winged bathtub, some colorfully painted lances and a glorious glass sphere on a tripod.

The small adjacent room, formerly a pantry, is cluttered with old leather suitcases, bundles of yellowing letters and big leather-bound accounting books. Perched on the

## Imaginings at a French show house.

wood counter top is a gilded cast of the head of the statue "Civic Fame," which was reinstalled this week atop the Municipal Building on Centre Street in Manhattan. Twigs and spears fill the sink.

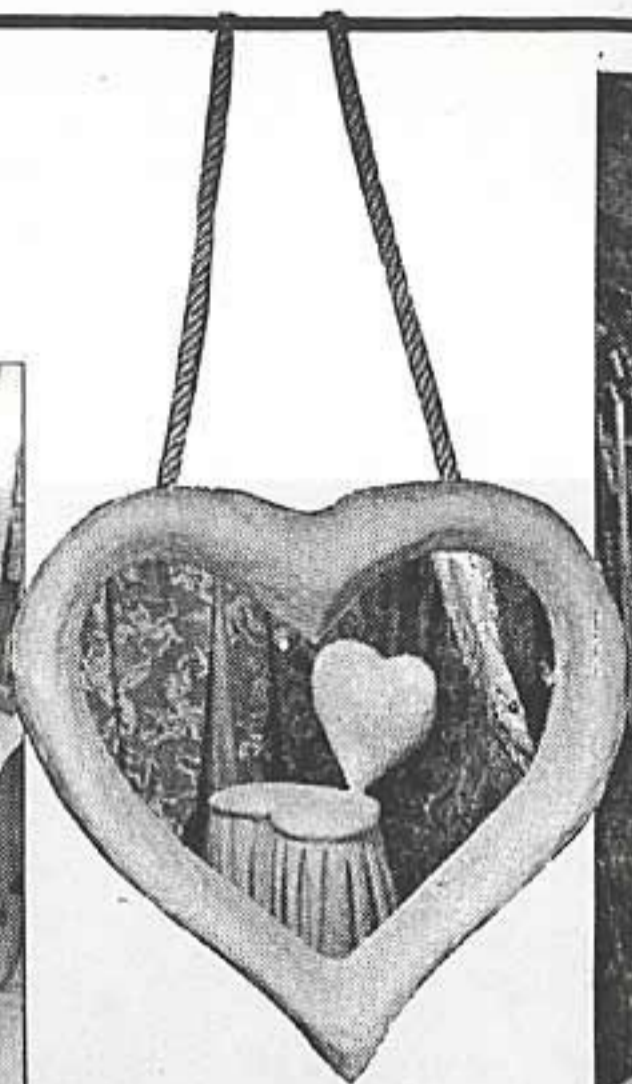
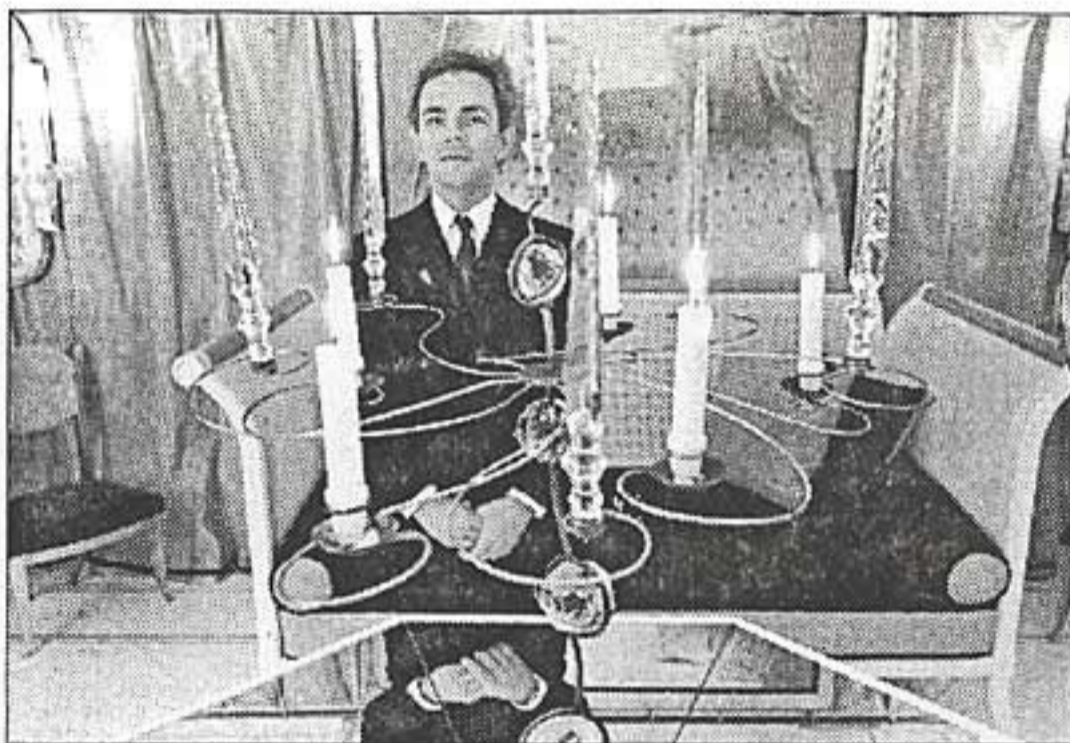
"It's a poet's refuge," Mr. Despont said, "the place where Rimbaud spent his years in Africa. Even though he didn't write any poetry there, he couldn't escape his past."

Modern furniture can fit into a traditional room as smoothly as a hand into a soft leather glove, as Yves-Germain Taralon proves with his master bedroom suite on the third floor. Mr. Taralon pairs avant-garde tables and accessories by Olivier Gagnère with an upholstered four-poster bed.

More emphatically dramatic is the second-floor landing by Paul

*Continued on Page C12*

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ABOVE Candelabrum by Bob Russell frames Robert Couturier in all-white room.  
INSET Heart-shaped chair and mirror in Konstantin Kakanias's romantic room.

Continued From Page C1

Mathieu and Michael Ray: chairs in gold fabric; graphic wallpaper and small wood sculptures by Michel Mathieu, the designer's father.

Big spaces are not necessary to make a point. On the upper floors, many designers gave their all to small rooms: Konstantin Kakanias's "Cabine d'Amour," a romantic frivolity; Ashley and Allegra Hicks's ode to the French chair; the Composition Group's bathroom by Richard Jarden, with a plant-filled tub; Roger de Cabrol's attic room, and Michael Tyson Murphy's scaled-down study.

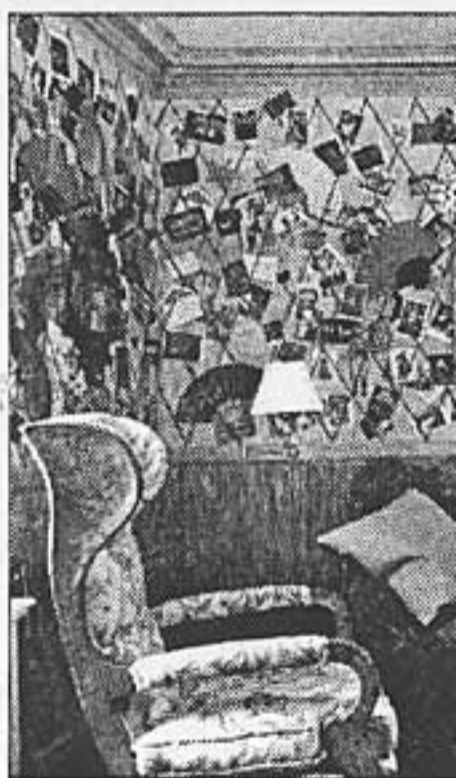
Hilton McConnico, who designed the sets for the movie "Diva," turned a hall closet into a dinette for two.

"I don't want people to think they can't do anything in small rooms," he said. "It's a room for people who don't have excessive wardrobes."

One of the boldest and most confident statements was by Marie-Paule Pellé, the creative director of Condé Nast Traveler magazine, who seems to be propelling herself full force into decorating. She created a man's room in memory of the decorator Rubén de Saavedra, who died last year. She used oversize armoires, a swooping metal bed, a black and



ABOVE Coral chairs, a gilded ottoman and a black and white checked rug set the scene in Marie-Paule Pellé's room.



ABOVE Memorabilia tucked turned David Salomon's s

white checked carpet, black and white striped draperies, coral-colored chairs and a gilded ottoman.

Ms. Pellé redefines the boundary where minimalism meets clutter.

A Calder mobile sways from the ceiling in the second-floor library where the decorator Jacques Grange has mixed art from the 1950's, William IV pieces, furniture by Isamu Noguchi and Jean-Michel Frank, a sofa like Coco Chanel's, and carpeting based on a Matisse drawing.

"I don't know why it works," he said. "It just does."

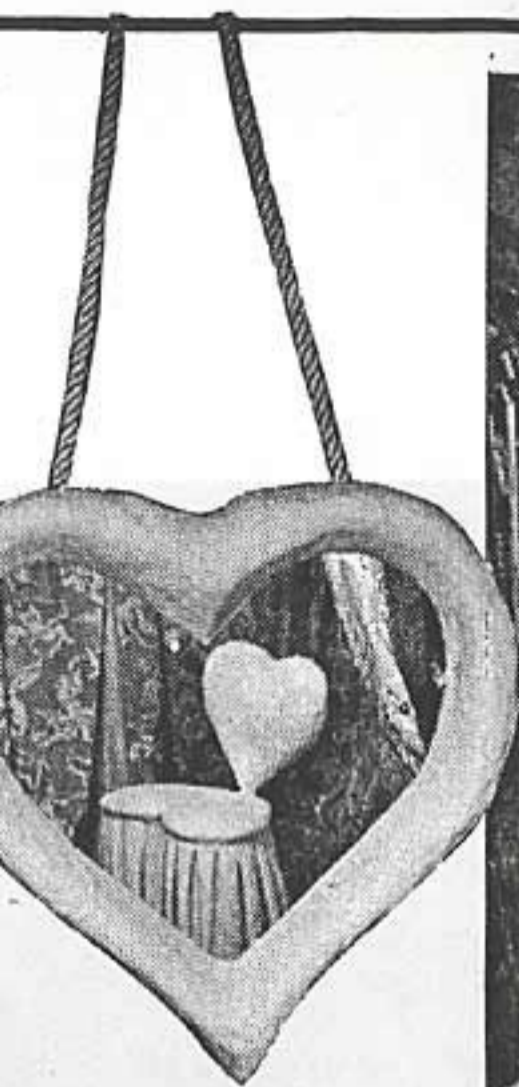
"It's not an intellectual exercise. It's a room. Very manipulated. Very controlled. I look at it and I think, not bad, but good. Who knows?"

Sig Bergamin, a Brazilian designer, described the fourth-floor room he did with Jacqueline Coumans, the owner of Le Décor Français in Manhattan, as "more about life than décor." They combined African textiles, a Mies van der Rohe rug, a Chinese

mask and a drafting table.

There is very little that is French in David Salomon's fourth-floor sitting room. "I'm one of New York's greatest Francophiles," he said. "One day I'll live in Paris. If I close my eyes, the Seine is outside the window."

For the time being, Mr. Salomon has one of the great design gimmicks at the show house: crisscrossed ribbons stapled onto the walls, which transform his room into a colorful three-dimensional bulletin board.



man and a black and white Paule Pellé's room.

ABOVE Memorabilia tucked into crisscrossed ribbons turned David Salomon's sitting room into a bulletin board.

ABOVE Jacques Grange's homage to Matisse pairs William IV furniture with works by Calder, Noguchi, Miró and Olitski.

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pered with postcards, masks, invitations, photos, letters, newspaper clippings, paper puppets, coasters. "Layering is alive," Mr. Salomon announced. "You do all this; then you let the walls disappear by hanging important things like paintings and mirrors over it all." Robert Couturier took a more spare approach. Extolling the virtues of "light, air and clarity," Mr. Couturier put together an all-white dining room. He had some help from a can-

delabrum by Bob Russell and photographs by Ingrid Dinter and Gerald Incandela.

Who lives here? "Me, basically," the designer said.

Jean-Paul Viollet, a French furniture maker, is the Zelig of this show house. His well-mannered, highly polished pieces pop up in Mr. Couturier's and Ms. Pellé's rooms, as well as his own, where he shows a small table made of straw marquetry.

"A tedious technique," Mr. Viollet said with a sigh, "but one I'm hoping to revive."

Don't forget to visit the basement. That's where David Linker, an ébéniste, or cabinetmaker, is working away, just as he might have in the 18th century.

"People in America only know about furniture refinishers, but not about craftsmen," said Mr. Linker, who has spent the last 15 years learning his trade in Europe.

And what about New York City's steam heat, that enemy of antique furniture? "I tell people to keep the temperature at 68 degrees," Mr. Linker said.

The 1991 French Designer Show House is at 603 Park Avenue (64th Street). It is open seven days a week, 11 A.M. to 5 P.M. (till 8 on Thursday). Admission is \$15.

Photographs by Jim Estrin for The New York Times