

# ELLE DECOR

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Elliott Barnes and  
an Art-World  
Maverick Make  
a Splash in Paris

# THE A-LIST ISSUE

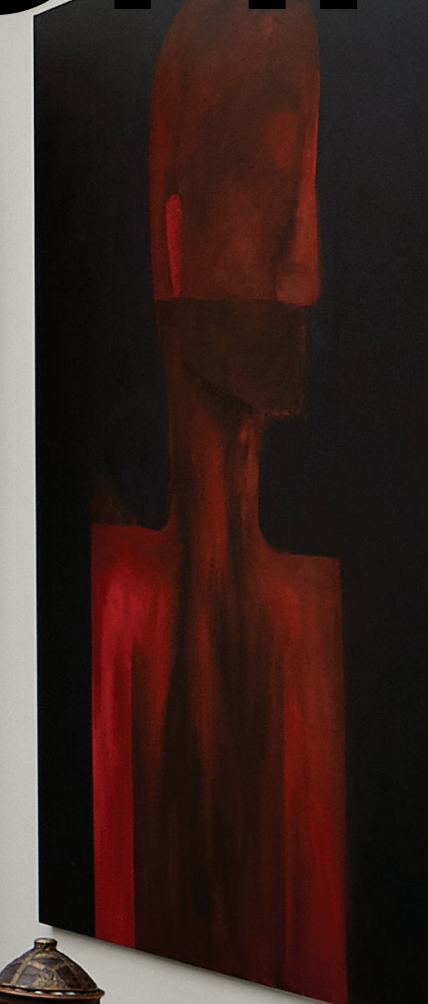
DESIGN'S  
101 TOP  
TALENTS



# The Artist Is Present

For a keen-eyed collector, architect Elliott Barnes carves out a Paris retreat that centers an impressive breadth of work.

By Camille Okhio  
Photographs by Billal Taright  
Styled by Olivia Gregory



A living room in Hélène Nguyen-Ban's Paris apartment, designed by Elliott Barnes. Artworks by Harold Ancart (center) and Raphaela Simon hang among African and Filipino antiques. For details, see Resources.

**F**or architect and designer Elliott Barnes, a minimalist approach to design can contain multitudes. Take, for instance, the Paris home he designed for veteran art collector and tech innovator H  l  ne Nguyen-Ban. "There was only one constraint," Barnes says. "She wanted to use one single material throughout the whole home." That material was the gray-hued, porous, hard-wearing Vals quartzite that's been used in some of the world's most luxurious buildings, including Peter Zumthor's thermal baths in Vals, Switzerland. It covers two of the three floors in Nguyen-Ban's 8,000-square-foot home.

Here, the stone serves as the protagonist in a space designed to disappear. "My whole job was to provide H  l  ne the absence of presence," says Barnes, an ELLE DECOR A-List designer. "When a friend walks into a client's house, it's important to me that they feel it's a representation of that person. If they say, 'This is an Elliott Barnes space,' then I didn't get it right." Barnes's use of the stone served an overarching requirement: to afford the best environment for Nguyen-Ban's art collection, which includes contemporary pieces by Danh Vo, Thao Phan Nguyen, and Thu-Van Tran. "My art is part of my family," she says. "I wanted a space that would not only showcase my collection but enhance it. I needed a designer who would respect that."

Nguyen-Ban and Barnes met nearly 20 years ago while he was under the tutelage of Andr  e Putman. When Nguyen-Ban approached Barnes about this project in 2009, their rapport was already well established. "I was working at Louis Vuitton on the launch of Marc Jacobs's first ready-to-wear collection for the brand and needed a place close to my office in the 7th arrondissement," she says. "I was lucky to find such an industrial space in this classical, conservative area of Paris." The apartment had started life as horse stables in the 1870s, servicing a much larger bourgeois house adjacent to it. Eventually the stables became a printing house, and then in the 1990s a studio for the Spanish painter Miquel Barcel  ; Nguyen-Ban moved in in 2011.

Now the apartment doubles as an office for Nguyen-Ban's latest venture, the newly launched collecting app Docent, which combines algorithmic data with art-world expertise to make personalized recommendations. It's also a home for the pieces that first drew Nguyen-Ban into the fine-art world. Inherited antiquities from her parents hold pride of place in both public and private spaces, supplemented by the African and Asian ritual figures that Nguyen-Ban collects. The French collector spent her childhood in Ivory Coast, where her Alsatian mother met her Vietnamese father. From there,



H  l  ne Nguyen-Ban stands with a work by Zheng Huan. Sculpture by Pascale Marthine Tayou.

the family moved to Togo and then Cameroon. Now Nguyen-Ban lives most of her life in London, where she keeps a Victorian townhouse with her husband and three daughters.

Her Paris home is a place to recharge and recalibrate; Barnes even managed to squeeze a subterranean swimming pool into the space. "The unique industrial qualities of the apartment have allowed me to incorporate architectural elements that are typically challenging to integrate in private, classical homes here," says Nguyen-Ban. "We created a very Zen room with Asian artifacts and antiquities, where I practice a shiatsu ritual every morning at sunrise. In London my days begin in a room with Andres Serrano's *Last Supper*, which is of course an entirely different experience."

Serrano's work also appears in this apartment, with his *Red Popes I-III* triptych gracing a rooftop gallery that is more glass than wall. Windows on this floor open completely—another request of Nguyen-Ban's, with art installation and movement at the forefront of her mind. A Richard Serra-esque spiral staircase descends into the main suite, with several other bedrooms nearby for family and friends. (Illustrious overnight guests have included the artist Henry Taylor and Serrano himself.)

A full circle in a spiritual sense, the home gives Nguyen-Ban a feeling of permanence in response to a childhood spent romantically, though a bit traumatically, in movement. The house's actual shape is closer to that of a cul-de-sac, offering transportive formal qualities for which Barnes and Nguyen-Ban had not initially planned. Standing at one end of the home, Nguyen-Ban can throw open a window and call across the courtyard to a friend or family member on the other side. In Barnes's eyes, "it makes for a very interesting living experience right in the center of Paris." ■



A large-scale artwork by Pierre Soulages anchors the entrance. The jars are 18th-century Chinese; photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe; artwork (at left) by Zao Wou-Ki.

In the dining room, a 1930s table with a molave wood top is surrounded by Pierre Jeanneret's Chandigarh dining chairs. Sculptures by Camille Claudel (left) and Auguste Rodin.

OPPOSITE: The custom kitchen in brushed stainless steel was designed with Boffi.



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—Hélène Nguyen-Ban



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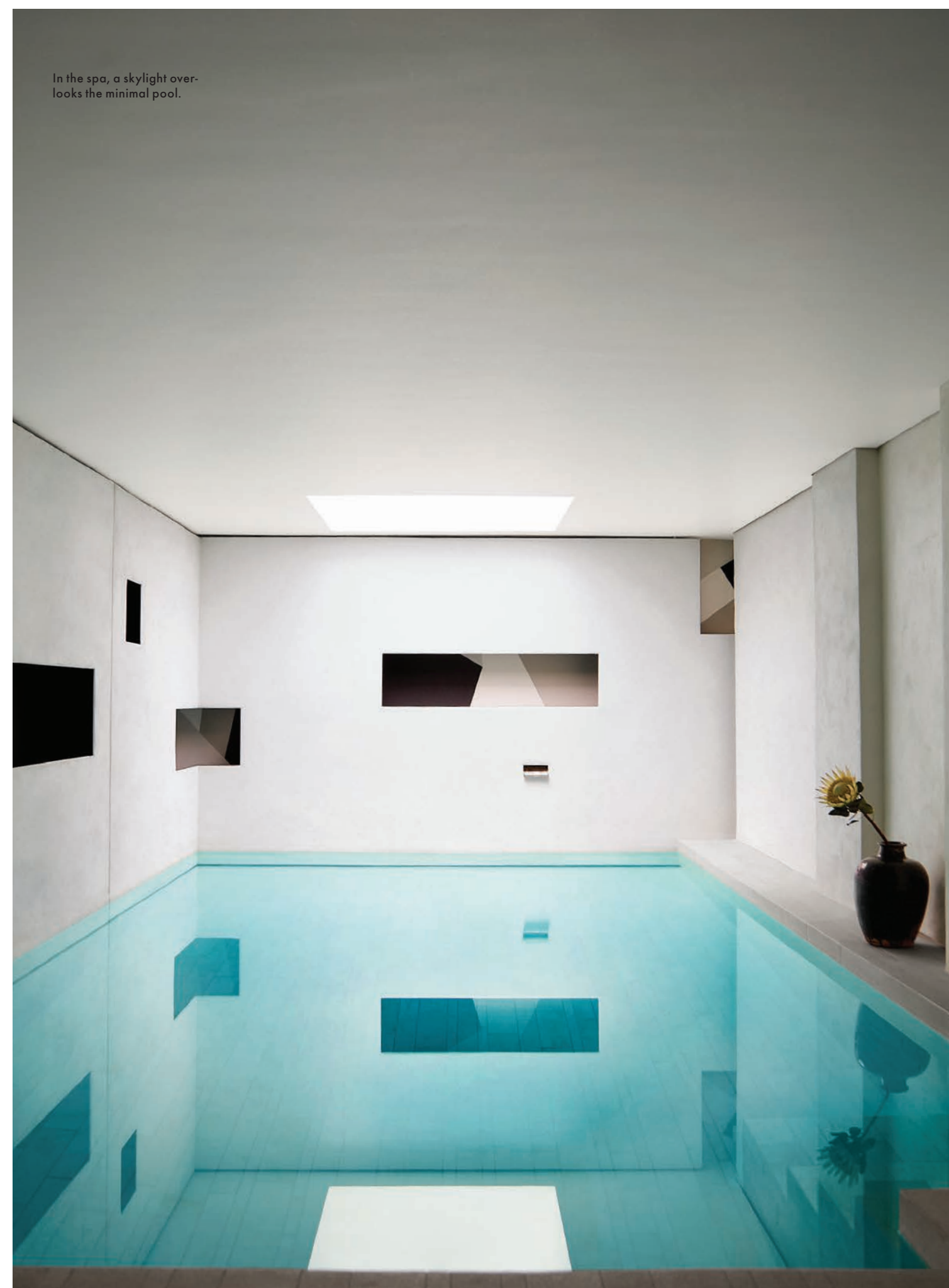
ABOVE: On the top floor, the golden cross is by Jean-Michel Othoniel. Artwork by Oscar Murillo.



ABOVE RIGHT: A bedroom features built-in storage.



RIGHT: A daybed by Christian Liaigre in the reading room. Artwork by Hiroshi Sugimoto.



In the spa, a skylight overlooks the minimal pool.