



MAGAZINE

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INSIDE A DESIGNER'S HOME

BY: A.M.A SELECTIONS | LOCATION: ANTIBES, FRANCE

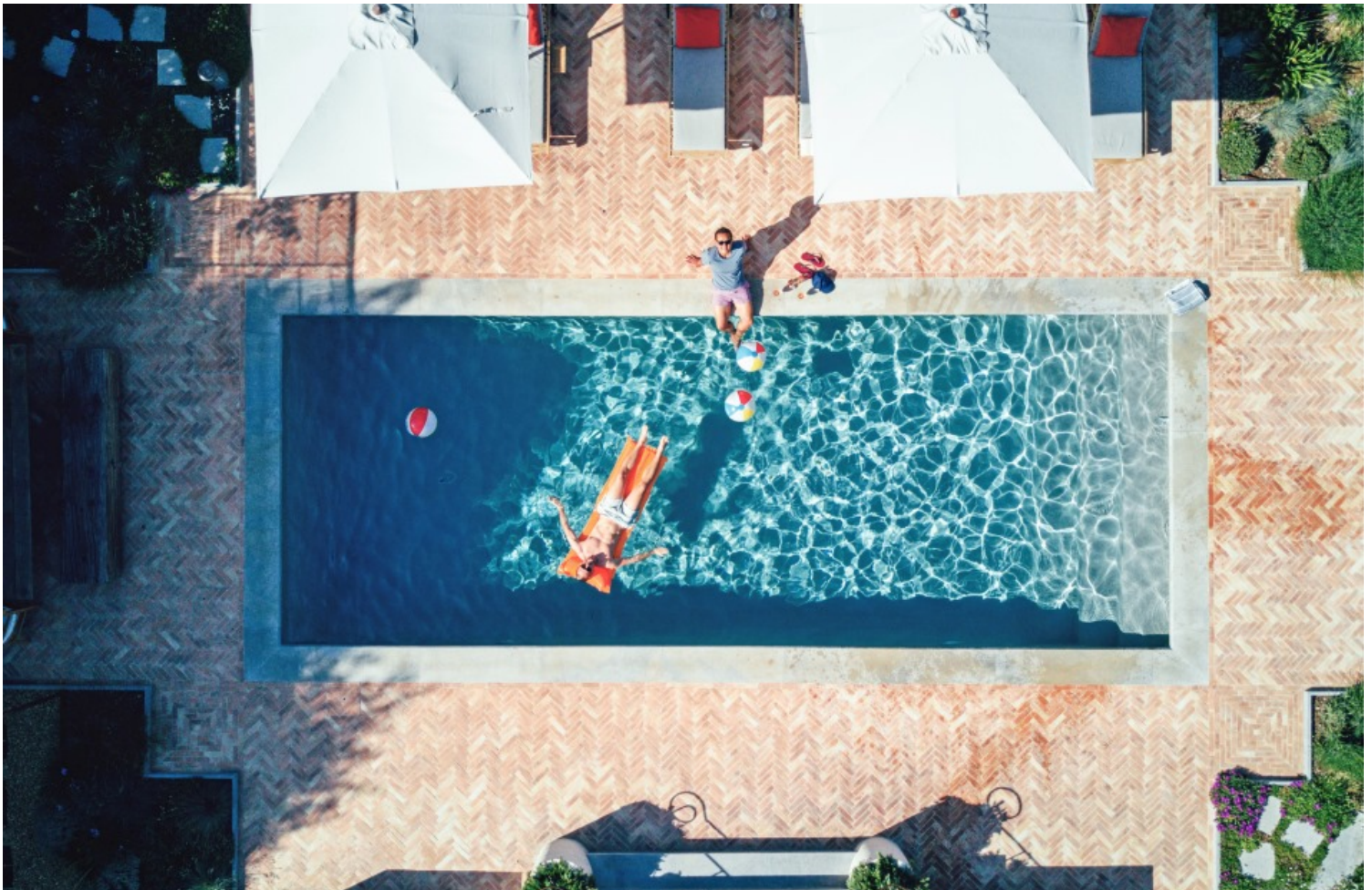


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We sat down with Tom, a former luxury hospitality interior designer, to find out more about the renovation of his [beautiful villa in the South of France](#).

1. Tell us a bit about yourself. How did you get involved in interior design and how did you end up in the South of France?

I have really moved around quite a bit during my life. I am Belgian by nationality but grew up in Sweden and spent part of my university days in Barcelona studying architecture. For about 10 years, I had the opportunity to develop my career in New York, Tokyo, and Hong Kong.

My involvement with interior design started in Tokyo and continued during my six years in Hong Kong where I worked in the hospitality design business. My company in Hong Kong was involved with high-end hotel, restaurant, and spa design for luxury projects throughout the world including W in Bali, Mandarin Oriental in Singapore, and Jumeriah in Saudi Arabia.

About seven years ago, Paul and I decided to leverage on our previous experience, myself in the design business and Paul in finance, to embark on our new journey to develop high-end vacation rentals in Antibes.



Photo Source: A.M.A Selections



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2. Why did you decide to purchase this villa?

When we first moved to the region seven years ago, I had spotted this amazing neighborhood of Antibes and thought it would be an ideal location to purchase a villa.

We discovered this grand villa in the neighborhood after much research. The property was built in 1926 in a Belle-Époque style and was home to the same family the entire time. This magical and well-situated villa was exactly what we were looking for but required a complete restoration—a multi-year project.

3. What do you enjoy most about the location?

We think our villa provides an ideal setting for a vacation home—located at the base of the Cap d'Antibes in a charming neighborhood with other similar villas also built during the Belle-Époque era. Moreover, the villa is within a ten minute walk to the old town of Antibes with its shops, restaurants, and Provençal market, and a short five minute stroll to a sandy white beach.

Antibes itself is perfectly situated on the French Riviera. Several beautiful beaches with clear azure waters and white sand surround the historic old town of Antibes.

The Nice Cote d'Azur Airport, which serves all major airports in Europe, is a short twenty minute drive from Antibes.

Antibes is also a short drive from Cannes, Monaco, St. Tropez, Eze, Cap Ferrat, St. Paul de Vence and other major attractions found on the French Riviera.



Photo Source: A.M.A Selections



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4. How long did the renovation process take and were there any challenges along the way?

This major restoration project took us about two years to complete. As the villa is a listed building with many restrictions on changing the look of the building, the Bâtiment de France, who is in charge of preserving historic buildings and structures throughout France, was involved throughout the process and we needed to get its approval before starting the restoration.

We had originally intended to use traditional building techniques with the aid of local artisans to help preserve the original feel of the villa. Although requiring the approval of Bâtiment de France added to the complexity of the project, it also helped provide a framework and direction to guide the restoration.

The villa was originally designed and built by famous local architects, Francois Aragon and Edmond Copello, who were also responsible for the design of many other villas in the neighborhood and were involved with the original subdivision of the Cap d'Antibes.

These two architects were known for their Art Deco and Neo-Provençal style which often incorporated columns, arched windows, and geometric decorations. In the gardens of the villas, Aragon and Copello's signature design item was large, Neoclassical vases.

Our villa definitely showcases many of these well-known design features of Aragon and Copello including the large, Neoclassical vases which we have placed in a prominent position surrounding the swimming pool. The pool itself takes its inspiration from the shape of traditional Provençal-style wash basins found in the region.



Photo Source: A.M.A Selections



Photo Source: A.M.A Selections



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5. How would you define your design style? Where did you draw your inspiration from when designing your home?

Paul and I both feel that creating a sense of place which highlights the design aesthetics of the region is a key element that we need to keep in mind when embarking on a new project.

With this design framework in mind, we tend to use local materials, employ traditional building techniques, and select a relatively neutral color palette. However, we also try to bring in a modern twist to our design to adjust to the needs and comforts of modern life.

Above all, we feel that all of the spaces we create must be comfortable, spacious, and inviting to anyone who comes to the villa. We have created many spaces to relax and enjoy the villa—both inside and outside.

Beside the design elements, we also incorporated details we would want to have included in a high-end vacation home such as comfortable bedding clad in high-thread count sheets, en-suite bathrooms for each guest room, a fully equipped chef's kitchen, built-in music which streams your favorite tunes, a complete outdoor kitchen with barbeque, etc.

We also included some additional wow factors which really amaze our guests such as a fully-stocked wine cellar, a gym and spa area with a marble-clad steam room, an ancient Koi fish pond with a green-walled grotto, etc.

6. Taking on such a big renovation project with your partner can be challenging. Where did your style preferences differ and where did they meet?

Paul and I have been together for almost 20 years and our design sense and styles are actually quite similar and complementary. We do question each other on certain aspects of the design which we both think is very healthy and an important aspect of the design process. I think our guests like the final product because everything is very well thought through.



Photo Source: A.M.A Selections



Photo Source: A.M.A Selections

7. What design element have you always wanted to try that made it into your home?

After working on large hotel and resort projects when working in Hong Kong, it was really great to be able to include some of the details we employed in our villa project.

I particularly enjoyed creating and designing the swimming pool and area around it which includes a summer kitchen, dining area, gardens.

It was also very rewarding to develop the three unique garden areas that surround the villa. In keeping with our "sense of place" mantra, I chose to use local plants to create a Provençal garden which included olive trees, grape vines, cypresses, rosemary, lavender, thyme, and citrus trees. This garden is also more eco-friendly as it requires less water.

I also enjoyed building the steam room (hammam) in the spa area. We wanted to have a showcase hammam that would be of the standards that you would find in a five-star luxury hotel. I think we achieved an amazing result by utilizing beautiful white marble from Carrara and a design aesthetic of a traditional Turkish bath.



Photo Source: A.M.A Selections



Photo Source: A.M.A Selections

8. What is your favorite space and why?

This really depends on the season of the year.

During the summer, it would definitely be the pool area with the heated salt water pool, our fully equipped summer kitchen with refrigerator, dishwasher, dishes and silverware, gas barbeque, the comfortable sun loungers, the outdoor dining area shaded by grape vines, etc. This area really makes you feel like you are on vacation and can truly relax. Many of our guests agree and spend most of their vacation in this area.

The roof terrace just off of the penthouse room is also an ideal place to spend some time during the summer. We enjoy having a morning coffee here while reading a book, sun bathing in the afternoon while gazing toward the Azure blue waters of the Mediterranean or watching the stars at night. This terrace is ideal for watching the fireworks over the old town of Antibes on Bastille Day (July 14).

During the spring and fall seasons, I enjoy spending time in the olive garden with the Koi Pond and green grotto. The sound of the fountain in the fish pond is very relaxing. In the evenings, I enjoy building a fire in the outdoor fireplace which adds to the atmosphere of this idyllic Provencal garden. We also love to use this fireplace for barbecuing a nice entrecote steak.

In the winter season, we enjoy taking a nice bath in our large oversized tub, spending an evening watching Netflix in the living room or having a massage followed by a nice steam in our hammam in our spa.



Photo Source: A.M.A Selections

9. What design feature or furniture piece do you love the most?

We have incorporated many design features in the villa which includes mid-century Scandinavian chairs, the original oversized wooden doors, and unique objects and artwork throughout the house. We are particularly fond of our large Picasso-inspired vase as well as other ceramic works in the living and dining room.

10. What are some tips you can share about decorating / designing a home?

We think that the most important thing that a designer needs to consider is the “sense of place” we mentioned earlier. This is a crucial element found in all our vacation homes—which is also well received by our guests.

We also believe that comfort is essential and should come before design in all cases. We want to have a well-designed home, but it needs to have very comfortable and inviting spaces that make guests feel at home and relaxed.

It is essential that the design feels real, is well thought through and not artificial in spirit and concept.



Photo Source: A.M.A Selections

11. Why do you think your villa is such a successful holiday rental?

First, we really feel that the location of the villa is one of its key selling points—it is a short stroll from the old town of Antibes, beautiful sandy beaches, and excellent restaurants, bars, and shops. No car is needed to enjoy an amazing holiday in our villa. In fact, many of our guests do not rent a car or find that they use their rental car very little during their vacation.

Second, we provide great amenities that really cater to our discerning guests. We have a heated salt water pool, we provide five well-appointed bedrooms each with its own en suite bathroom, we provide comfortable areas to relax both inside and outside the villa, we have indoor and outdoor dining areas that can accommodate a big group, Wi-Fi works throughout the house and gardens, the entire house is well air conditioned, etc.

Third, we have thought about the design features which feel luxurious and enable our guests to feel like they are spending their holiday in a very unique and special place.

12. Describe your home in three words.

Comfortable, Elegant, Timeless

If you're interested in renting this villa, [click here](#).

Tags: Cap d'Antibes, French Riviera, Interior Design, Luxury Villa, Renovation



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