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Rooms with a View

A newly renovated alpine pavilion overlooking France's Lake Annecy is a showcase for a varied collection—and a burgeoning talent for design



By **JENNY FLORENCE**

Photography by SUE BARR



In the great Room of Marjan Ertefai's house near Lake Annecy in eastern France, a colorful Marshmallow sofa by George Nelson stands opposite a Paul Evans dining table surrounded by leather and tubular steel cantilevered chairs. The room is illuminated by an Ambassador chandelier by Mark Brazier-Jones. Objects from Ertefai's collection, including a nineteenth-century Nepalese gong visible in the back corner and a yellow Murano glass vase in the kitchen, are scattered throughout the house.



A sky-blue Pierre Paulin Amphys sofa and two 1950s armchairs originally from the Teatro Regio in Turin surround a L'Oeil table by Pierre Chapo, on which is displayed a pair of antique Nepalese beaded hats.

In the courtyard of the house, Ertefai sits on a Pavo Real rattan chair, designed by Patricia Urquiola for Moroso.

IN 2008, AFTER YEARS OF BEING SHUTTLED to secluded mine sites accessible only by air, Marjan Ertefai—a financial analyst in the mining sector—earned her pilot’s license. “I fly small propeller, single engine planes,” she says, matter-of-factly. Ertefai is not one to shrink from a challenge. In fact, when it came to finding a new home, it was a primary requirement. “I wanted something that needed work,” she explains. “I wanted something run down.” With no formal training and only a single renovation project under her belt, Ertefai transformed a nondescript 1970s house near the banks of Lake Annecy into an airy, light-filled pavilion—a fitting showcase for her growing collections and burgeoning interest in design. Already a traveler, explorer, collector, and pilot, Ertefai could safely add “designer” to the list.

Before it characterized her attitude to interior design, this willingness to tread into unfamiliar territory described Ertefai’s approach to her career, both figuratively and literally. To inspect distant mines Ertefai has traveled not only thousands of miles to some of the world’s most remote locations—from the Siberian taiga to the jungles of Papua New Guinea—but also deep underground. In her off hours she explored local markets and bazaars, bringing home tokens of her travels and sparking a passion for collecting. Soon she was spending her vacations visiting design



and antiques shows throughout Europe and in New York. Given the opportunity to redo her flat in London, her former home base, Ertefai managed the job herself and found the experience immensely satisfying. Her attraction to design had become undeniable. “I fell into finance,” she says. “but I just realized that maybe architecture is the thing that I really want to do with my life.”

Ready for her next project she focused on Haute-Savoie, a region in eastern France near the Swiss and Italian borders. Ertefai had visited the area—known for its majestic alpine landscapes and clear glacial lakes—several times to ski, but what drew her most was the lifestyle preserved in its intimate stone villages. “It’s one of the few areas of France that hasn’t been exploited by tourism,” she says. “You still have your local butcher and local cheese shop, and everybody knows each other....It’s very unpretentious here.”

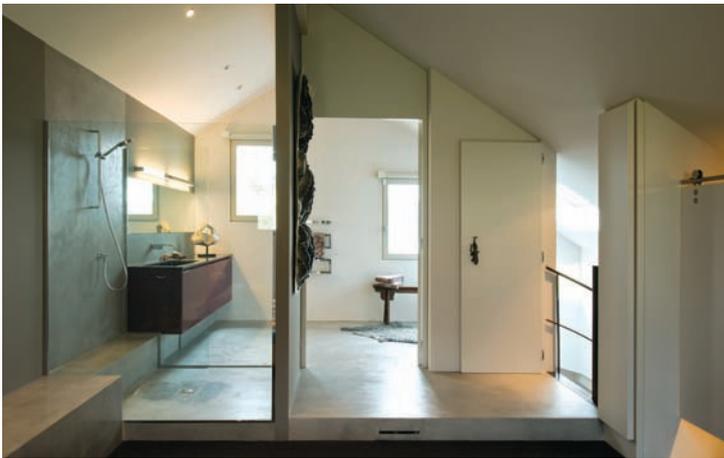
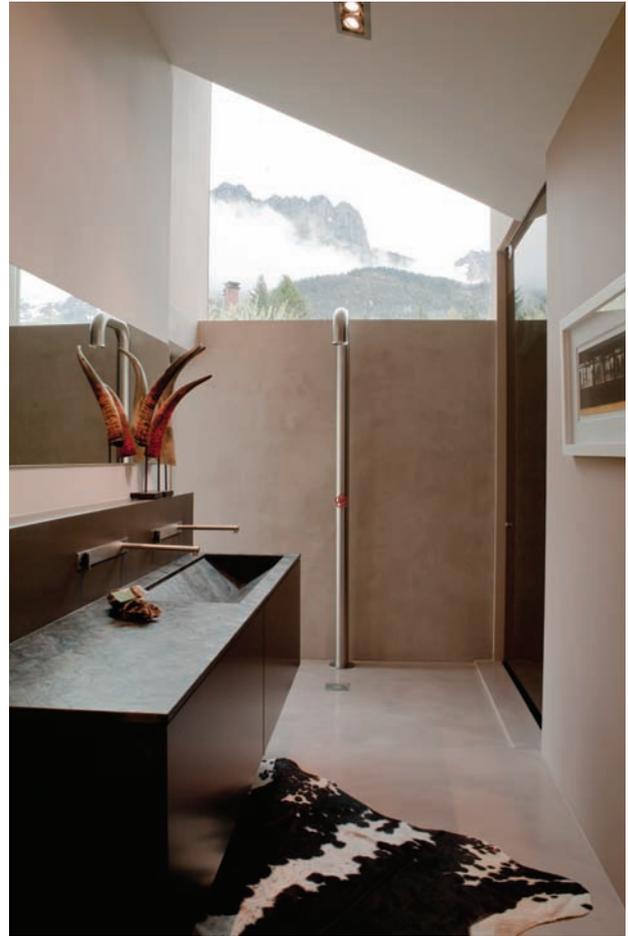


When she found the house—a warren of dark rooms arranged in a shallow U around a central courtyard—“I had a sense immediately of what I wanted to do,” says Ertefai, who saw potential in its plan and single-story elevation. She set about opening the interior—tearing down walls separating the rooms, removing drop ceilings, widening windows, and extending the ends of the U. Two years later, the space is permeated by light and air, with breathtaking views of the lake and mountains from almost every room. Set against a hillside of deep green firs and brush, the house is angular and pale, but soft, with exterior walls clad in vertical panels of cedar or hand-brushed plaster. Attesting to the resourcefulness of its designer, the house is a triumph of instinct rather than training.

Ertefai took a similarly intuitive approach to decorating, selecting a combination of contemporary furnishings and mid-century finds, and studding the space with an array of objects from around the world. And within the expansive white shell of the house, she gave each piece room to breathe. In the entry hall, a grouping of early twentieth-century African masks and a suit of Japanese Edo-era armor greets visitors. In the family room, an eclectic arrangement of furniture—including a pair of 1960s Soriana lounge chairs by Tobia Scarpa, a Redondo sofa by Patricia Urquiola for Moroso, and a

In the family room, an intimate arrangement of mid-century and contemporary furniture—including a quilted Redondo sofa by Urquiola, a pair of Tobia Scarpa Soriano chairs, and a table designed by Ertefai—is complemented by Persian rugs and pillows made from Turkish kilims.

Wide windows and large doorways give generous views of the lake and mountains from almost every room.



surfboard-shaped coffee table designed by Ertefai herself—huddles around a freestanding fireplace. Persian carpets and Turkish kilim pillows bring color and pattern to the room, which is watched over by a traditional warrior's costume Ertefai picked up in Papua New Guinea. Her bedroom is a spare gallery of objects, including an eighteenth-century Japanese emperor's robe, and a sixteenth-century Chinese coal bucket, one of the first things she collected upon entering the mining sector. The overall effect is at once sophisticated and personal, compelling and comfortable.

Enamored with the house's hillside siting, Ertefai sought to connect the interior and exterior, encouraging flow between the two. "There's constant movement from outside to inside the house," she says. In the courtyard are places to lounge and perch: a pair of large Turkish cushions and a Persian rug; an eccentrically patterned Shadowy chair

by Tord Boontje, with a Seussian backrest that curls to shade the sitter; and a Pavo Real armchair by Patricia Urquiola that riffs on the ubiquitous rattan models. At the center of the courtyard—the heart of the house—Ertefai installed a narrow pool that drops off at its far end to waves of tall grass and a riot of wildflowers. "When you're swimming you feel like you're surrounded by nature," she says. "You're swimming into the grasses."

Despite having only recently settled in following the two-year gut renovation, Ertefai is looking for her next challenge. "It's livable now, but there are so many things I want to do," she says. There is, for example, a mural she has planned for a large, now-blank wall. As usual, she is undaunted by inexperience. "I've never painted—I want to just start. I mean, what's the worst thing that can happen?" Ertefai will undoubtedly soon add "artist" to her list of occupations. **M**



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A sixteenth-century Chinese coal bucket, a nod to Ertefai's career in the mining sector and one of the first objects she collected, is displayed in her bedroom. On the wall hangs a Japanese robe from the eighteenth century.

In the en suite bathroom, a serene view of the mountaintops.

In the courtyard, Tord Boontje's Seussian Shadowy chair, with matching ottoman, offers shade.

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Ertefai's vision for the exterior and landscaping of the house was as strong as her scheme for the interior. A pool anchors the courtyard, which is surrounded by terraces of long grasses and wild flowers that descend to meet a forest of trees and brush.

