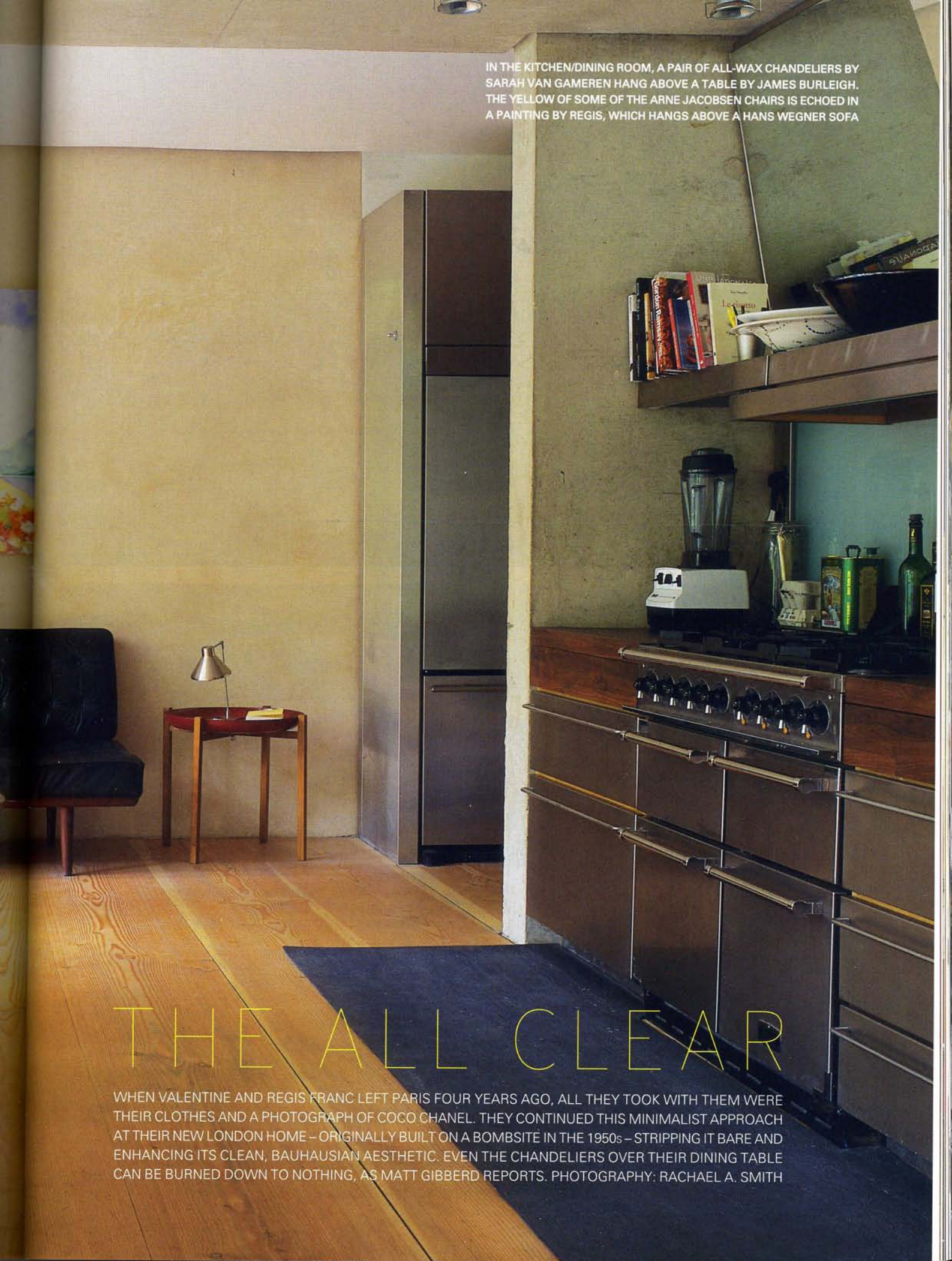


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THE WORLD OF INTERIORS







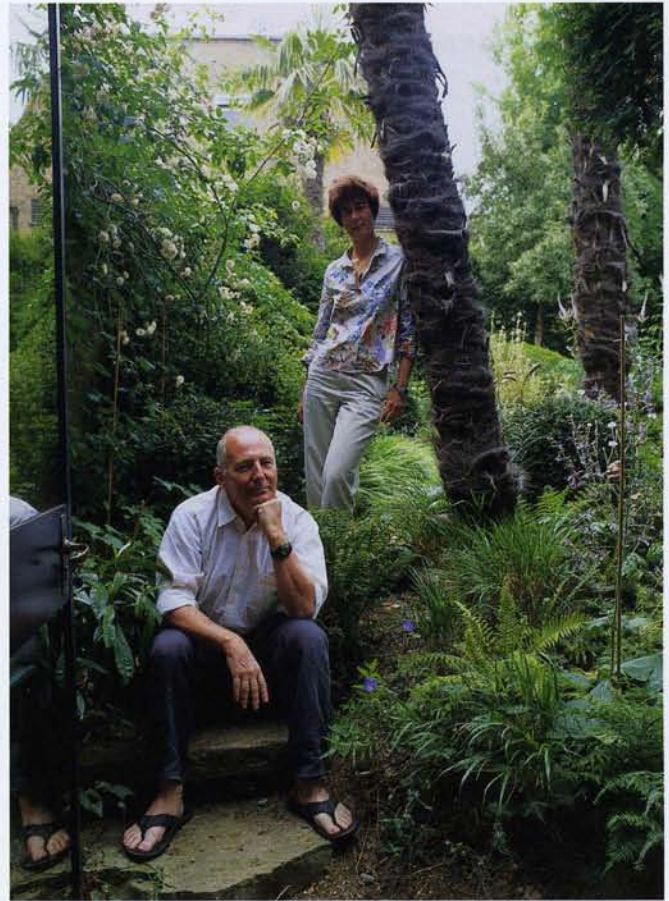
IN THE KITCHEN/DINING ROOM, A PAIR OF ALL-WAX CHANDELIERS BY SARAH VAN GAMEREN HANG ABOVE A TABLE BY JAMES BURLEIGH. THE YELLOW OF SOME OF THE ARNE JACOBSEN CHAIRS IS ECHOED IN A PAINTING BY REGIS, WHICH HANGS ABOVE A HANS WEGNER SOFA

THE ALL CLEAR

WHEN VALENTINE AND REGIS FRANC LEFT PARIS FOUR YEARS AGO, ALL THEY TOOK WITH THEM WERE THEIR CLOTHES AND A PHOTOGRAPH OF COCO CHANEL. THEY CONTINUED THIS MINIMALIST APPROACH AT THEIR NEW LONDON HOME – ORIGINALLY BUILT ON A BOMBSITE IN THE 1950s – STRIPPING IT BARE AND ENHANCING ITS CLEAN, BAUHAUSIAN AESTHETIC. EVEN THE CHANDELIERS OVER THEIR DINING TABLE CAN BE BURNED DOWN TO NOTHING, AS MATT GIBBERD REPORTS. PHOTOGRAPHY: RACHAEL A. SMITH



TOP: ABOVE THE KITCHEN UNITS, MANUFACTURED BY DMI, A SLANTED BRASSERIE-STYLE MIRROR, FRAMED BY CURTAINS, PROVIDES A VIEW OF THE GARDEN FOR DINERS WITH THEIR BACKS TO IT. ABOVE: THE KITCHEN LEADS INTO THE GARDEN, WHICH SLOPES GENTLY UPWARDS. TODD LONGSTAFFE-GOWAN REVERSED THE ARCHETYPAL GARDEN LAYOUT, SO THAT THE TREES ARE NEAREST THE HOUSE AND THE SEATING AREA IS FURTHEST AWAY



TOP: THE UTILITY AREA AFFORDS A VIEW THROUGH TO THE GARAGE, WHICH HOUSES VALENTINE AND REGIS'S NISSAN 'FIGARO'. ABOVE LEFT: AS SEEN AT THE BACK OF THE HOUSE, THE ARCHITECT WANTED TO MAXIMISE ITS BAUHAUS AESTHETIC, SO HE HAD THE RENDER PAINTED BRIGHT WHITE AND THE WINDOW FRAMES BLACK. ABOVE RIGHT: REGIS AND VALENTINE FRANC IN THEIR PALM-DOTTED GARDEN, DESIGNED BY TODD LONGSTAFFE-GOWAN

IN THE LIVING ROOM, A PAIR OF PATRICIA URQUIOLA CHAIRS SIT ACROSS FROM A HANS WEGNER 'FLAG HALYARD' CHAIR (1950). THE PINE FLOOR WAS SUPPLIED BY DINESEN, AND CONSISTS OF WIDE SINGLE PLANKS THAT SPAN THE ENTIRE LENGTH OF THE ROOM







TOP: A HIGHLY SCULPTURAL TIMBER STAIRCASE MADE BY GERMAN COMPANY WEGMANN DIVIDES THE ENTRANCE HALL. ABOVE LEFT: A MERET OPPENHEIM 'TRACCIA' TABLE STANDS BESIDE ONE OF A PAIR OF 18TH-CENTURY SOFAS AND BELOW A DOUGLAS GORDON INVITATION. ABOVE RIGHT: ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STAIRCASE HANGS A PORTRAIT OF THE QUEEN BY CHRIS LEVINE. BEYOND IS A CABINET MADE FROM PAPER BY SARAH VAN GAMEREN



TOP: THE MASTER BEDROOM IS SITUATED ON A MEZZANINE OVERLOOKING THE LIVING ROOM. ABOVE LEFT: A GLIMPSE INTO REGIS'S STUDY REVEALS A DESK MADE UP OF WOODEN TRESTLES FROM PARIS AND A GLASS TOP FROM HABITAT. ABOVE RIGHT: THE TELEVISION ROOM/GUEST-ROOM IS ADORNED WITH CUSHIONS AND TEXTILES FROM CONRAN, TEO JASMIN AND PORTOBELLO MARKET, WHILE THE TABLE COMES FROM CARAVANE



IN 2001, the artist Michael Landy pressed the reset button. Making a stand against consumer culture, he destroyed every one of his worldly possessions. Once his Saab 900, a postage stamp and 7,004 other items had been through the shredder, he was left with just an overdraft and a cat called Rats. For Parisians Valentine and Régis Franc, their move to west London four years ago represented a Landy-like wiping of the slate. As the doors of their 17th-century Marais apartment creaked shut behind them, their suitcases bore the weight only of clothes and a black-and-white photograph of Coco Chanel (some things, after all, are indispensable). 'We left all of our furniture and belongings behind,' says Valentine. 'New city, new life.'

The newest thing of all is their house. Looking at its sweeping white render and black-painted Crittall windows, you would be forgiven for thinking it's a forgotten Modern movement masterpiece by Robert Mallet-Stevens. In fact, it's the product of some admirable ingenuity by the architect Philip Gumuchdjian. It forms part of a dilapidated terrace of houses built on a bombsite in the 1950s, most of which have been garnished improbably with classical architraves, Italianate shutters and fetching shell motifs. 'This was considered the ugly block on the street,' says Valentine. But she and Régis were seduced by the sheer scale of the house (it is 9m wide), and the flexibility it offered them and their two teenage children, who were enrolled at the Lycée. Indeed the building is, as Gumuchdjian describes it, 'family home, artist's studio, writer's womb, theatre for cooking, art gallery for showing work, and lovers' retreat'.

Gumuchdjian worked with Richard Rogers for more than 20 years, and his eponymous practice is currently collaborating with Shigeru Ban and Jean de Gastines on the new Pompidou Centre in Metz. He is an experienced architect. But rarely can he have come across more agreeable, imaginative clients. 'In the end, everything was a collaboration,' he says. 'Valentine and Régis are great patrons.' Valentine is a costume designer who is now turning her hand to jewellery, and Régis is an accomplished artist with a glint of mischief in his eye. Together, both architect and clients decided to strip the house bare and make it more Bauhausian than it was originally. Gumuchdjian explains: 'The ground floor was effectively staff accommodation, and you were taken immediately upstairs to a notional piano nobile, which wasn't very *nobile*.' The space was opened up to create a bright new hallway with a powerful timber staircase that he describes as 'a giant saw-toothed sculpture'. A new terrace was added at first-floor level, along with a suitably Modernist curved study for Valentine. One end of the living room is double-height, which gives Régis the perfect stage for flourishing his paintbrush. 'It references early Modernist houses, which were always based round artists' studios,' says Gumuchdjian.

The architect wanted the majority of the interior to have direct views over the garden, designed by Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, so the master bedroom has been placed on a mezzanine above Régis's painting area. This close relationship with the outdoors finds greatest expression in the kitchen-cum-dining room downstairs, where a pair of columns act like a proscenium, forcing



the eye towards a surreal panorama of palm trees and rolling box. A tilted brasserie-type mirror above the worktop ensures that, even with your back turned to the garden, you still get verdant views.

Gumuchdjian describes the kitchen as a 'theatre for entertaining', and that's very much how it feels. The furniture is proplike: Valentine and Régis commissioned Sarah van Gameren of Studio Glithero to produce a cabinet made from paper, having seen her student show at the Royal College of Art. Chandeliers made entirely from wax, also by Van Gameren, lurk over the dining table; when the urge takes hold during a dinner party, Régis will light these and let them burn down in histrionic fashion.

Continuing the theatrical theme, Longstaffe-Gowan relates how the landscaping has been designed in layers, like a stage set. 'The clients had never had a garden before. I decided that the only way they would venture to the back of it was to reverse the perspective. So we put all the trees in the foreground, which makes it seem more extensive, and from there the whole thing slopes upwards in a gentle ramp.' The planting is simple but climactic. Longstaffe-Gowan describes the box as 'clouds' and the flowers as 'rockets'.

The palm trees are an exotic nod to Régis's south-of-France heritage. Getting them in wasn't the easiest exercise: 'They had to be pulled through holes in the walls like missiles,' Longstaffe-Gowan explains. 'It was part of the fun and the drama.' Fortunately, the landscaping was completed in advance of the building work. For eight months, the back of the house was boarded up to stop the workmen

from destroying the plants. As soon as the decorators laid down their brushes, the stage curtain was pulled back and the garden was revealed in all its fragrant finery.

'Our work tends to be quite minimal,' explains Philip Gumuchdjian, 'and here we invited the client and the landscape architect to provide contrast and enhance it.' Indeed, Longstaffe-Gowan's baroque, sensuous approach is an unlikely but utterly magical foil for the clean-lined Modernism of the house. Similarly, Valentine and Régis have added layers of intrigue to the interior, using the shadow gaps and whitewashed walls as a blank canvas for their new belongings. In his studio area, Régis has designed a pair of pendants, in conjunction with SKK Lighting, that are adorned with feathers inspired by Rebecca Horn. At his insistence, all of the doors in the house, which are so thick as to be almost bombproof, have been painted in pillar-box-red gloss. Unsurprisingly, much of it has a Parisian flavour, with tables from Caravane and monochrome rugs in layers. A Douglas Gordon multiple and a Chris Levine work share wall space in the hall, where a Meret Oppenheim 'Traccia' table performs a spindly-legged curtsey beside an 18th-century sofa. In the living room, chairs by Patricia Urquiola sit opposite a 1950 Hans Wegner 'Flag Halyard' chair that Valentine and Régis picked up at Sotheby's. Slowly but surely, in a conservative corner of west London, these enlightened, urbane Parisians are rebuilding their life's inventory ■

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