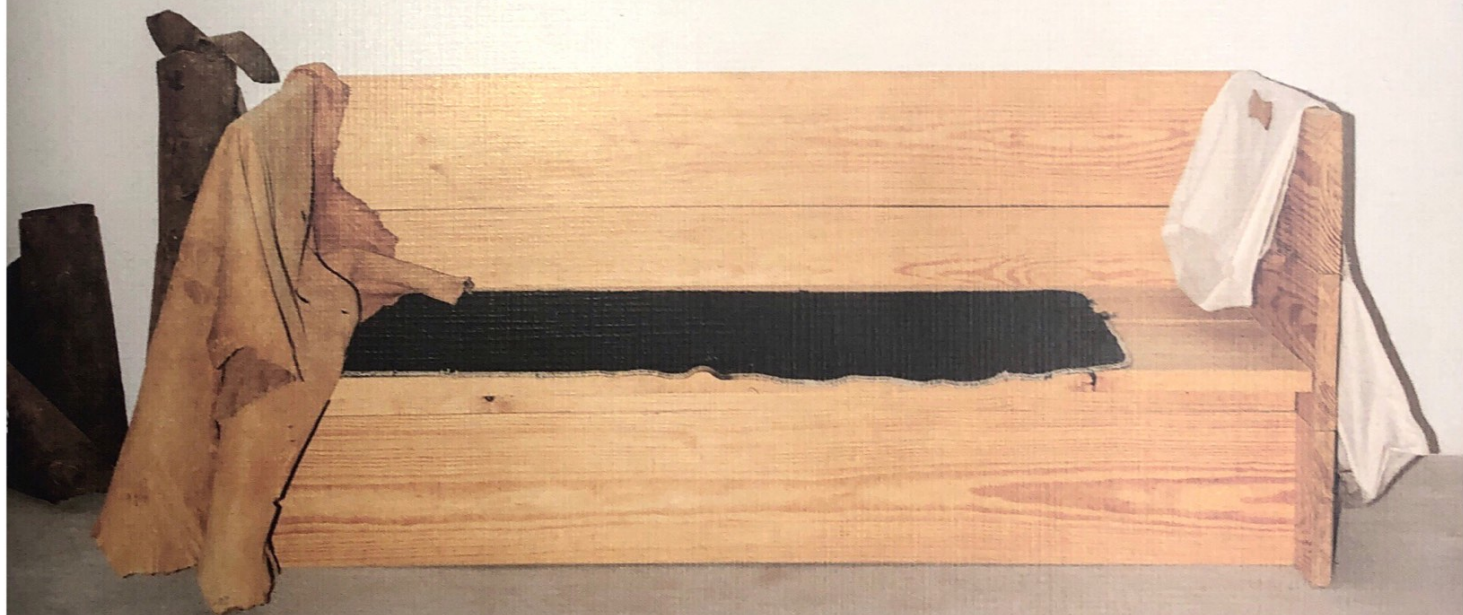


an everyday life interiors magazine – issue #16

apartamento

Featuring: a trip to Donald Judd's Texan ranch Las Casas with Flavin and Rainer Judd, a collection of Donald Judd's everyday life objects, Gary Panter, Matt Connors, Arielle Holmes, AA Bronson, Xavier Corberó, Fernando Higuera, Denise Scott Brown, Philolaos, and Guillermo Santomà. Plus: **'The private world of Pablo Picasso'**, and a **portrait of a house** by Jean-Philippe Delhomme



€12.00
\$19.95 £9.50



9 772013 019003

16

As a kid growing up, your house defines what a house is, and coming to grips with the fact that other people live in structures that are radically different from yours takes time. Yurt-dwelling Mongolians consider their tents to be the quintessential home, as do McMansion-bred kids from Florida. Only with the years and with travels and encounters do you slowly realise what makes your childhood home special and unique (or not).

Shortly after my father, the Greek-born sculptor Philolaos, moved to Paris in 1950 to pursue his career, he found an art-teaching job in a quiet village 25km south of the capital, and moved into a small workshop there, in an artist community of sorts. In between giving pottery and wood-carving lessons, he discovered a nearby plot of land and decided to start building his own workspace,

Everything that Philolaos didn't like he designed

INTERVIEW BY YORGO TLOUPAS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY FREDERIKE HELWIG

and then our home a bit below on the hill. I was born in 1974; the house is the only house my family has ever lived in, and since Philolaos' death in 2010, his workshop has remained in the same state as when he was using it. With my mother, Marina, and sister, Isabelle, we never cease to marvel at the ingenuity and instinctive creativity that my dad gathered to design, build, and fill the place. Every piece of furniture, from the fruit cup to the TV-covering sculpture, was designed and built by him. And be it in the snowiest winter or the hottest summer, the place feels like a homely base. I had a sun-soaked conversation with Marina to find out if there were details I wasn't aware of and to understand how that radically different house could seem so normal to us. Olives, feta, and local Tsipouro liquor were consumed during our talk—served, of course, in Philolaos-designed pieces.

apartamento - Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse





So Philo built the workshop in 1967?
He finished it in 1967.

When did he start?

I don't really know how long it took him—I think it took a few years. When I met him in 1967 he had just finished it, and if I remember well, there was no electricity.

He did the plans by himself?

Oh, yes, by himself, totally.

But he had no proper architectural training.
Absolutely not.

top of which the house is built was very empty, and he liked what he saw from far away. Architecture students love that anecdote.

What about that golden ratio story? Is it true?

He was always very fascinated by the golden ratio, and it's true that when he was hesitating about something, he'd exclaim, 'Let's do my golden ratio!' He'd do it very quickly and spontaneously, not necessarily in a systematic way, but he'd resort to it when needed.

So when he built it, did he already have the furniture in there?



So how did he manage to make it all stand upright and not fall apart?

For that, he asked his friend Jacques Salles to do the mathematical work, to figure out the strength of the construction materials, the type of concrete needed, and so on.

But what about the structure, the actual architectural shapes?

Well, that part was in his head; he did it naturally. One thing that I found cute at the time was that he set down a structure with wooden poles and newspapers in roughly the size of the prospective building, and he went across the valley to see it from a kilometre away to decide if it wasn't too disruptive to the landscape—if it fitted well. Back then the hill on

Some of the furniture has been built into the structure, in concrete, but I think some of the metal chairs were already built, as were the moulded-concrete white chairs, which he'd built for a project in Balaruc-les-Bains in the '60s. But he did build stuff along the way; for example, the oval table in the living area of the workshop was clearly built to fit the space perfectly.

And as soon as it was finished he started working in the workshop?

Straight away, yes; you can't imagine how happy he was to be able to use it.

Back then did the architectural press take notice?

Yes, of course. *Abitare* came, *Elle*, *L'Œil*, and others, too.

One of my first memories is stumbling upon a photo shoot in the workshop with a big black woman naked and wearing makeup, fondling my hair. Turned out it was Grace Jones shot by Franck Dieleman for a magazine.

Yes, it was for something like *Playboy*, *Lui*, or *Privé*. What happened is that from very early on, architects came to visit Philo. André Gomis was one who introduced him to many others; Pierre Joly was also there—he was an architecture teacher.



What about the foundations? That's quite an industrial venture. Did he do it by himself? There is that ongoing myth that he did everything alone.

Well, for the concrete slabs of the foundations, there was a truck and a contractor there to do it. What he'd do by himself was raise the cinder blocks, but he had a guy to help him, a Portuguese guy called Manuel.

What about the window installation?

That he did by himself! I don't know how he did it.

And the roof?

Oh, yes, that too—the wooden structure and

all. When he was up there sitting on a wooden beam and he dropped his hammer to the floor metres below, he used to complain that he really wished he had at least one helper.

What about plumbing and electricity?

For that he had help—for example, this guy Yves Berry, who went on a world tour on his sailboat. This guy did the electricity, I'm sure.

So nothing became a source of problems in the long term?

Not really. The whole structure moves a bit, depending on the heat, but overall it's OK.

What was his schedule like once he moved in? Did he spend a lot of time up there in the workshop?

He'd wake up early, around 6am. He'd go up to the workshop and have a Greek coffee, then he'd start to work. I'd wake up around 7am some days, as I was teaching in schools far away; he'd walk back down to the house and prepare me a coffee. We'd have breakfast together, I'd leave for work and he'd go back to the workshop until midday, then do his short daily siesta, then he'd work again until 7pm, but no later. I never saw him work at night. He'd go and buy *Le Monde*, read the paper, and we'd have dinner.

Very regular, then.



Very, very regular.

So before I started school, how did you manage?

There was this lady, don't you remember? I worked in Bezons when you were a kid, a town to the northwest of Paris. We'd leave and I would drop you off at this house where a lady would look after a few babies. At first I was torn apart, crying and all—you'll see how it feels! You'd have a bit of a tantrum, but it was fine.

So the house itself was built in 1974?

Yes, that's it.



For my birth?

Well, when you were born I lived a bit in the workshop, because the house itself wasn't completely finished; a few bits were missing. I was living up there, but Philo had left to work on a big project in Toulouse. I can tell you that the first nights I was a bit afraid, as I wasn't used to living in the forest.

Where was I sleeping?

You had a small bed and we slept next to you. At the time Philo was working a lot somewhere else, far from Paris, so it was fine. But we did the house rather quickly. When we left for our holiday in Greece, you were seven months old. We lent the workshop to friends, and when we came back at the end of the sum-

mer they hadn't left yet, so we had to move into the house, down the hill, which wasn't totally finished.

So the house was finished in 1974?

Yes, roughly around 1974 or 1975.

And as for the workshop, it was built by Philo himself, alone?

There was also me! He asked me, 'How do you want the house?' I said, 'I want it like this, in a U shape'. The rest was his idea; the proportions surprised me, he had a gift for that. It's one of the things that always amazed me!



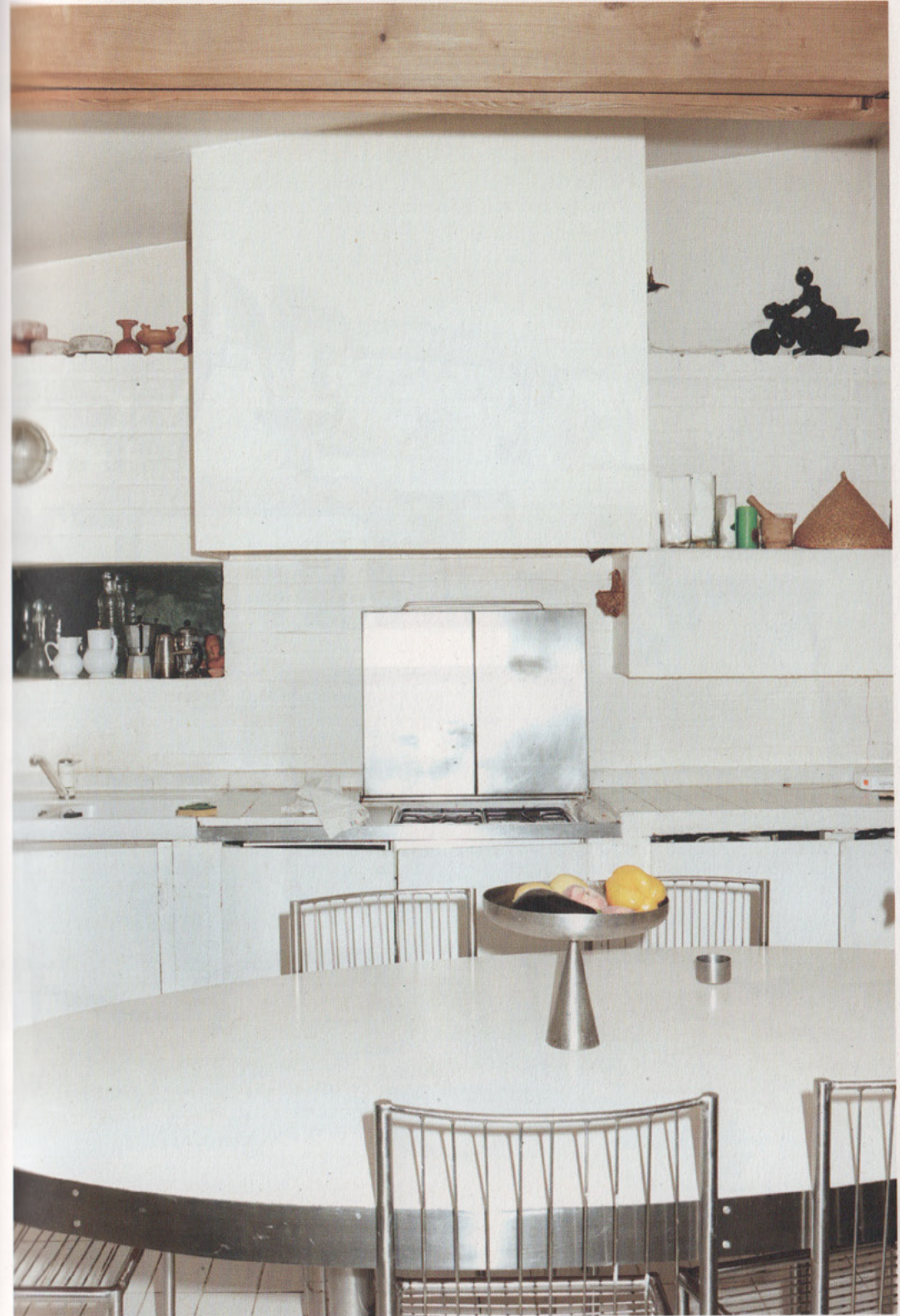
he would always find the right proportions straight away.

Whose idea was it to have a patio, with this concrete water basin and the sculptures, in the middle of the U shape?

That was because of my U shape gesture.

And the house didn't seem dangerous to you for a kid, with all the sharp angles and metallic edges?

Seriously, you're not going to design something all rounded, with cushions on every angle! But, yes, you did fall off once down the stairs and you have a scar on the back of your head. But we taught you from the start to crawl down backwards.





Were the TV-hiding sculptures there from the beginning?

Yes, there was already a small one up there in the workshop. I didn't want a TV in the house, I remember. But the small one was up there, on a bench, before he built the big one for the house down here.

Did you have any other unusual or surprising sculpture-furniture pieces from the start, apart from the cache-amant? [A 'hide-lover', a tall and narrow sculpture in which a lover could hide quickly if needed.]

Back then the famous French cartoonist Reiser

Oh, yes, though he really didn't want to. There were these Guilma pieces of furniture, which we still have and use as drawers and cupboards. A friend of his was designing them back then. It was way before Ikea, and you'd buy the flat-pack elements and build them yourself.

What about the light switches, with their square and simple plastic design?

Even back then it was hard to source them. Maybe they were from an Italian brand. But to be honest it felt marvellous to see him building things himself. It's true that I was surprised; I remember back when I barely knew him, he



came over—he was adorable. He was really into ecology, and he asked a lot of questions about that. Ecology had been taken into account, with clever and simple thermal solutions within the walls, double-glazed windows, and a simple heat-capturing system in the fireplaces. We also added a couple of verandas in front of the doors, to better preserve the heat in the winter.

I remember that, as a kid, having all these bottles, chairs, and salt and pepper dispensers built by Philo seemed normal. But didn't you find it strange, unusual?

No, I just thought it was a good thing.

Did he ever reluctantly buy homeware?

took me to the garden where he had a small plot with plants, and I was thinking, 'He even builds his salads!'

I remember that even my toys were made by him, no?

Yes, there was that rocking horse, a couple of small wooden trains, a few small cars.

Then of course I probably evolved and asked for shitty plastic toys.

You had a lot of those, especially Caterpillar construction engines. You also had a baby bed; it's down there in the basement.

A kid's pram?

Yes, built like the chairs.



In stainless steel? Really? Is it still useable?

It's like brand new.

Well, all that's left is to have a baby.

Yes, indeed.

Is it not dangerous? Because my girlfriend is going to freak out if it is.

No, I don't think so, unless a kid's head could fit between the bars. But I think it's safe.

So, with the years, everything stayed in condition, basically as it was from the start?

No, not really; it filled up a bit, in my opinion—and especially in Philo's opinion. He didn't want me to add stuff, and he was right. It's true that I bring a bit too much of a mess, although I make a lot of effort.

It'd be good for us to do a proper renovation.
The house deserves it.

With people who specialise in that kind of architectural project—there are the guys who look after houses by Robert Mallet-Stevens, for example.

Yes, a man came over, and he looks after the *Journées du Patrimoine* [a French governmental initiative that allows the public to visit cultural landmarks, on specific days, that are otherwise closed].

Oh, yes, I sent them pictures.

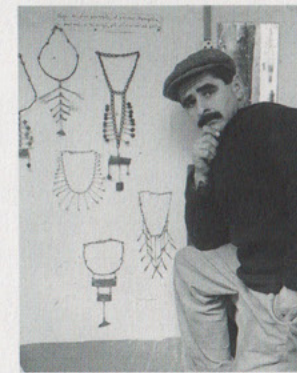
So this guy came, and he mentioned the idea of creating a foundation. He said that there were some constraints, but also benefits. We could get help for a restoration; the constraint is that it means nothing can really be changed. But to be honest it hasn't changed anyway. We just can't sell any more sculptures—and I don't really want to.

But we could still sell some of the bas-reliefs, no? We have a lot.

It's true, but in any case they are mostly in storage.

Wasn't there talk of a swimming pool at some point? I think you wanted one.

I wanted it for Philo after his first accident in



Philolaos in the '60s with a jewellery collection he designed. Photographer unknown.

2001, when he wasn't as mobile as before. He had thought about it, too—a pool in front of the house.

But there isn't much sun down there.

There was sun there, it's just that the trees have grown a lot. But, frankly, I prefer the local village pool. And when you were a kid you did use the basin on the patio, with the water-throwing sculptures. We need to fix it, by the way; it doesn't empty properly these days.

But fixing things is kind of tricky today, no? We always wonder how Philo would have decided to go about it.

Yes. For example, today I need to decide how to replace this big bit of broken glass inside the workshop. For the moment, we've just put on transparent tape to hold it together. Really ugly, especially since we have a public visit on Saturday.

I guess he would have been upset and angry about that.

Well, he was very careful about how the place looked. He said once that his workshop was like his portrait and that for interviews there was no need to have a picture of him—the house, objects, and sculptures said enough.

Wasn't it hard to live 'inside' that portrait?

It had its inconveniences. It was hard sometimes to create something by yourself, as it was difficult to design or think in a better way than Philo would have done. But today I do think there is a bit of me in here.