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the ultimate  
kitchen

Chic remake of  
a 19th-century  
Paris apartment

Design award  
winners

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# GRACE

## *regained*

A PARIS DESIGNER EFFECTS A 21<sup>ST</sup>-CENTURY REMIX  
IN A CLASSIC 19<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY APARTMENT.

BY ELLEN HIMELFARB

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GWENN DUBOURTHOUMIEU

In this apartment in an old Haussmann building in Paris, furnishings chosen for their patina and scale take precedence over the "stuff" that can often overpower a family home. "The place has big volumes and lots of space," says designer Elodie Sims. "I didn't want to lose that with clutter. There are four kids, who play ball in the house, so I didn't want the space to be occupied by furniture." In fact, when the project began, the owners had only two children. When twin boys came along, a purpose-built study became a third bedroom and the rosewood desk landed here in the living room, alongside an heirloom baby grand. The elaborate frizes and marble mantel are original to the property, their splendour enhanced by a sinuous chandelier bought at a flea market. Drapes and sofas, Caravane. Coffee table, The Conran Shop.





The original panelling in the living room perfectly frames—and provides a foil for—the family's contemporary artwork. The designer found the industrial standing lamp at the shop of an antiques market dealer who customizes vintage pieces.



Just as Haussmann transformed Paris with spacious boulevards that draw the eye towards historic monuments, the designer transformed this home, creating a fluid layout that inspires a sense of anticipation and delight as you move through it.

Sire transformed the house with widened rooms, and used the great double doorways as frames for imposing historic pieces like the pair of mammoth 19th-century Parisian street lanterns. Her passion for flea market treasures is unmistakable here, as it is throughout the apartment.



Strikingly open and light for a Parisian apartment, the property works, says Sire, like a stand-alone house. It's substantial enough for a family with four children, and filled with warmth and atmosphere—with the added benefit of a back garden. To engineer the graceful flow of the interior, the designer pushed out the kitchen walls and brought in the antique parquet from the living room, "so it seems as though it's always been there." She also continued the pastel and wood theme from the rest of the home, so that even the kitchen island is a wood antique. "I detest a modern kitchen," says Sire. "That's not at all my look." Aiming for unrefined sophistication, she sourced reclaimed wood from a local dealer for the cabinetry and designed a simple oak dining table on antique trestles, simple enough for the family of six, and then some. *Chairs, Ikea.*



The focus of the kitchen is the makeshift island fashioned from a woodworking bench and a pair of oak stools—or, rather, toadstools. "They look like big mushrooms," says Sire. The mix of pristine Burgundy-stone countertops and rustic cabinetry couldn't be further from the prior 1960s kitchen with plastic cupboards. Around the work space, Sire replaced the typical parquet with worn wood and rugged limestone tiles. The cluster of pendant lamps is a charming variation on a kitchen light fixture—six old ship's lanterns customized by a dealer at the local flea market.



The ground-floor entrance, with its original herringbone parquet, mouldings and grand double doors, offers sightlines throughout the house. Sire spent more than a year on the project, tearing down 1960s drywall, rewiring, and choosing traditional Parisian blue-green for the reception room. To widen the hallway, she demolished one of two powder rooms. Seven elegant stairs lead to a mezzanine library and, just beyond, the home's three bedrooms. The pendant light is a recent addition—from Ikea—purchased by the homeowners. "It is not my lamp," the designer notes, "but it is fine. The house is living and people buy things."



## THE LEGACY OF BARON HAUSSMANN

The Pompidou Centre and the Eiffel Tower may be the most visited tourist attractions in Paris, but the city's most enduring look goes by the name Haussmann. Those ubiquitous white stone-fronted terraces, ringed with wrought-iron balconies and topped with mansard roofs, are Paris's uniform, designed to an exacting standard over nearly two decades by Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, who was appointed Prefect of the Seine in 1853 by Napoleon III.

Along with sweeping boulevards and sublime parks—antidotes to the congested medieval alleys that spread disease across imperial Paris—he rebuilt an estimated 60 per cent of the city in the Haussmann style, targeting tracts of land that linked major rail hubs like Saint-Lazare and Gare du Nord with the grand monuments of Old Paris.

"He created a whole different look for Paris, and consequently made it easier for those big military parades of the Second Empire to happen," says Bob Preston, founder of EuroPanache, a cultural tour operator based in the city.

The social fallout was a sort of class cleansing. As Haussmann quite literally whitewashed the urban fabric of Paris, he drove legions of the poor to neglected areas, such as the Marais and beyond. Then there was his "regularization" of architecture, criticized by the chattering classes—for no great change in Parisian brick-and-mortar can come without controversy, as President Georges Pompidou and architect Gustave Eiffel would learn, along with Le Corbusier, who in the 1920s took Haussmann's mantle as the city's top urban planner. Such is the true French Resistance.

Today, though, even with i. M. Pei's Louvre Pyramids winning over the public, a classic Haussmannian apartment has become as desirable—"a desirable residence"—as you can get in Paris, the equivalent of the New York

brownstone. Elegant and spacious, with the square footage of a stand-alone home—2,000 to 3,000 square feet is the average—it is distinguished by herringbone parquet floors, marble mantels and tall sash windows. And if you're lucky enough to land a flat on the second or fifth floors, with high ceilings and iron balconies, you will be the envy of the ficklest locals.

"In Haussmann's time, elevators were beginning to appear," says Preston, "so the dynamic where wealthy Parisians would live only on the ground level changed with the Haussmann buildings. And Paris gentrified a lot."

But with the listed status comes responsibility. Every five years, for instance, owners are required by law to thoroughly clean the façades, from the door to the dormers. They also have to jump through bureaucratic hoops to make any external changes. But we all know how Parisians feel about change.

—Ellen Himelfarb

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HAUSSMANN STYLE

- Uniform building height (dependent on street width)
- Uniform heights for each floor of neighbouring buildings, resulting in cohesive, orderly façades
- Mansard roof
- Ornamental ironwork
- Limited palette of types of stone used on façades
- Shops located on the ground floor
- Obsessively straight streets
- City boulevards lined with rows of chestnut trees

