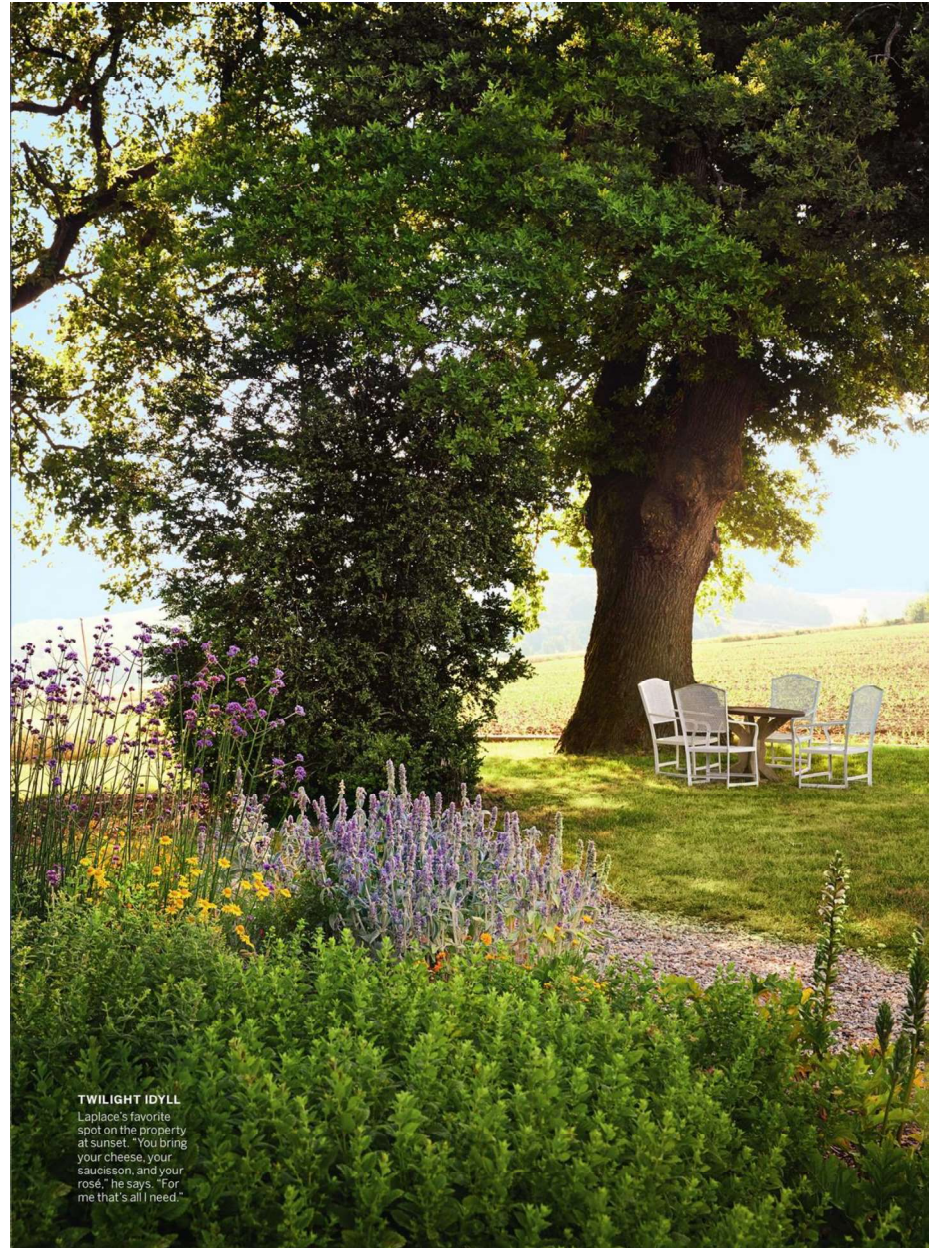


INTO THE WILD

For Paris-based architect Luis Laplace and his partner, Christophe Comoy, a rambling summer estate in southern France is a place of bold contrasts and simple exuberance. Chloe Malle pays a visit. Photographed by Pascal Chevallier.



PURPLE REIGN
One of the sitting rooms, painted a deep violet, where hand-dyed Belgian linen curtains by Du Long et Du Lé hang next to mezzotints that belonged to Comoy's grandmother. The lamp is antique Pierre Lotier.
Sittings Editor: Hamish Bowles.



TWILIGHT IDYLL
Laplace's favorite spot on the property at sunset. "You bring your cheese, your saucisson, and your rosé," he says. "For me that's all I need."

D

o you want to meet Simon?" asks Christophe Comoy as he places a worn straw hat on his head. "See-mon!" He whistles shrilly, and Simon, a haughty Marans rooster, stalks proudly to the edge of his fenced-in kingdom and lets out a salutary cry. He is one of three cocks currently reigning over Combenègre, the summer home in the southwestern Midi-Pyrénées region shared by Comoy and the Paris-based Argentinian architect Luis Laplace. The couple, partners in life and business (Comoy left a career in finance to run Laplace's firm), purchased the estate from Comoy's cousins six years ago when his grandmother, the house's longtime proprietor, passed away.

"Christophe, his passion is to go with the chickens. He spends hours with them," says Laplace, who prefers to spend time in the local villages and trawling nearby *brocantes*, and admits he likes his chicken from the supermarket. "He talks to them, then the chickens follow him up to the house." Two of Simon's hens even joined the *Vogue* photo shoot earlier in the summer, although one, Odette, got fed up half-way through and flew out the window, never to be seen again. "She just said, 'I'm tired of it,'" Comoy says with a mournful sigh. "*Ça va, Ico?*" he asks as the couple's fog-gray Korat cat mews plaintively at the coop's perimeter. "*Il est jaloux.*"

The chicken coops sit below the house near the farm's apiary. In the pantry, Laplace and Comoy have an entire armoire filled with honey—pale yellow from *les fleurs d'été*, dark gold from chestnut flowers in winter—as well as a medley of jams made with berries from the vast *potager*, or vegetable garden. When the couple return to Paris on the hour-long flight from nearby Toulouse, they travel with eggs, honey, courgettes. "We traffic, basically," Comoy jokes. Last year Comoy made tomato sauce for days to deal with the endless kilos of tomatoes. This season he is overwhelmed by berries and plums, and has already set to work on preserves. You have to be patient with these, he tells me, holding an underripe blackberry between thumb and forefinger. "You can't pull them off. When they are finally ripe, they should fall into your hand."

A similar philosophy has been applied throughout this seventeenth-century onetime vineyard in *la France profonde*, where every detail feels lovingly and patiently addressed. The couple waited three years to find perfectly sized poplar beams for the restored stable, and throughout the house various caveats are offered regarding ongoing and future projects: a planned Moroccan hammam in the barn, a possible painting atelier. At first sight the whole rambling affair seems a world

1. The facade of the 17-century house, trimmed with hydrangeas.
2. A sitting room with an antique Portuguese chandelier and upholstered pieces by Du Long et Du Lé.
3. Fuchsia oleander plants flank the arch of the barn.
4. A view of the front of the house.
5. The restored stable, now used as a seasonal dining room.
6. A château-salvaged oak workbench in the kitchen.
7. Simon, the Marans rooster.
8. The gate to the *potager*, or vegetable garden.





ALLEE-OOP
A series of
grindstones,
potted lemon trees,
geraniums, and
oleander between the
house, OPPOSITE, and
the crepi-walled barn.

away from the clean and deliberate yet boldly chromatic designs in Laplace's portfolio. And yet, on closer inspection, the exacting attention and deference to culture here recall a sharp-cornered villa he built for a client in Ibiza, or his celebrated transformation of a Somerset farm into Hauser & Wirth's newest exhibition space, Durslade Farmhouse. "He has a soft touch," says Iwan Wirth. "Whether it's a restoration of an old building or simply choosing a fabric, his ability to have not a single Luis style but to speak all these architectural languages—that is his great quality."

"I'm always trying to preserve the quirkiness of the house," says Laplace as he ducks under a slanted doorframe leading into Combenègre's master bedroom. "The way it grew was very natural, very unacademic." The oldest section—the cave, or wine cellar—dates to 1661, the year they discovered etched into the oak *foudre*, a massive wine-making vat. Under Laplace and Comoy's supervision, the *foudre* was dismantled and the planks turned into a dining table in the former stable, which now serves as a seasonal dining room.

Many of the other furnishings in the house remain from Comoy's grandmother, but they have been personalized to suit the couple's aesthetic: A mahogany armoire in the dining room, for instance, has the doors removed to reveal a neatly stacked china collection. "We preferred it without the door—it was a bit baroque," explains Laplace. "The house needed a lot of work. A lot," adds Comoy a bit wearily. "My grandmother lived in Toulouse, and this was a summerhouse—you know, typical French, a bit dusty, and then *à la Toussaint* [November 1] you close it, and you reopen it at *Pâques* [Easter]." Laplace and Comoy, however, use the house year-round. Christmas is spent grilling duck sausages over a blazing fireplace with Laplace's three siblings and their children, visiting from Buenos Aires for the holiday.

When the couple met at a Christmas party in a Chelsea apartment in 2001, both were living in New York, Laplace working for the architect Annabelle Selldorf, and Comoy, a lawyer by trade, toiling in finance. Three years later they decamped to Paris, where Laplace opened his firm and Comoy eventually joined as business partner. "My goal is to take care of what Luis should not have to take care of, so he can focus on creativity," says Comoy. In Paris their perfectly appointed apartment is on the third floor of their showroom and office building. "Yes, sometimes we talk about work on the weekend or at night," admits Comoy, "but I mean it's also a lifestyle. Our work is not regular work, in a way."

On this late July afternoon Laplace has arrived at Combenègre from Gstaad, where he is restoring a chalet once owned by Gunter Sachs and installing an art gallery in the space. The architect is adept at catering to the needs of an environment where fine art is a priority: For a chalet in Megeve he fashioned a swimming pool around a hallucinogenic film installation by artist Pipilotti Rist, and for a home in Majorca he designed a vast living room to accommodate a nearly ten-foot-high Louise Bourgeois spider.

"We don't really have a formula," explains Laplace of his approach. "Each project can be very, very different. I love to think of context, culture, geography." Laplace traveled throughout the Albi region before beginning the Combenègre restoration. "We visited farms, estates, churches, flea markets, and museums," he says, which helped him understand the local materials as well as the area's history as the center of the pastel trade. One discovery was a woman

who hand-mixes traditional lime paints from plants including the pastel plant, known for its indelible indigo hue. A deep-violet sitting room is the result of crushed flax, dame's rocket, and lavender, while the rich cream of the central stairway is made from wheat; the tiny powder room under the stairs glows like the inside of a ruby.

Laplace is known for his deft use of color, challenging the notion that contemporary architects shy away from vibrant hues. He painted the entrance hall of Durslade Farmhouse a brilliant red and added riotous Bantu-print curtains in Cindy Sherman's Left Bank pied-à-terre. "He just does it very naturally," Sherman says of Laplace's bold combinations. "In some cases I was skeptical, because they're not obvious choices, but they really work."

Vintage cow and horse busts, rescued from old butcher-shop wall displays, survey Combenègre's activities from high perches. One wooden mare's head wears a Renaissance crown. The stairwell is decorated with a collection of ornithological prints collected from an antiques dealer in Paris. Comoy, a bird lover, picked only species that can be found in this region: tawny owls, Eurasian Golden orioles, European greenfinches and goldfinches, gray herons. On the third floor, vintage cognac leather gym mattresses are stacked for napping or lounging, and two large wooden grape troughs from the Champagne region—plus one of the house's recycled doors—serve as a TV console. In the evenings the couple head up there to watch Apple TV. "U.S.!" Comoy says proudly, thanks to Laplace's American credit card. "So we watch movies here that are in the theaters in Paris." The attic provides a sweeping view of the property's 120 acres, a vast patchwork of fields full of corn, rape, sunflowers, and wheat.

When Comoy and Laplace bought the estate, the grounds surrounding the house were wild. "We did a lot of work with the Caterpillar." The way Comoy pronounces *cah-ter-pe-lahr* makes it sound impossibly chic and not at all like a garden appliance. The planting they have done feels natural. Linden leaves crunch underfoot from the branches overhead, and red beeches provide thick pockets of shade. Comoy proudly introduces the trees he has planted: a Lebanese cedar, a young acacia, a still spindly locust. On the other side of the house a neat apple orchard overlooks a recently added linden allée.

Downstairs Laplace adds utensils to platters laid out on a large oak working bench. Comoy checks the lamb chops on the open fire, which, until the couple added the Aga stove, was the way things were cooked. "My grandmother used only the fire. Everything, even the coffee. She had no oven."

Lunch is served on the massive table in the converted stable. Except for the meat—fire-grilled pork, lamb, and beef brochettes from the butcher in nearby Gaillac—everything comes from the *potager*. Potato salad with dill and onions, tomatoes sliced with basil, green beans with shallots. Berries picked this morning are removed from the freezer at the end.

"Do you prefer cassis or raspberry?" Comoy asks. Raspberry is decided upon, and Comoy transports the berries from a frozen Ziploc to the silver cylinder of the Thermomix. With the addition of an egg white and the proud flip of the switch, three minutes later the deed is done, and Comoy serves berries transformed into a rich and gelato-like consistency. "Et voilà! Sorbet!" □

FLEURI OF ACTIVITY
Wildflowers and lush grasses on the grounds of the 120-acre estate.

