

VOGUE

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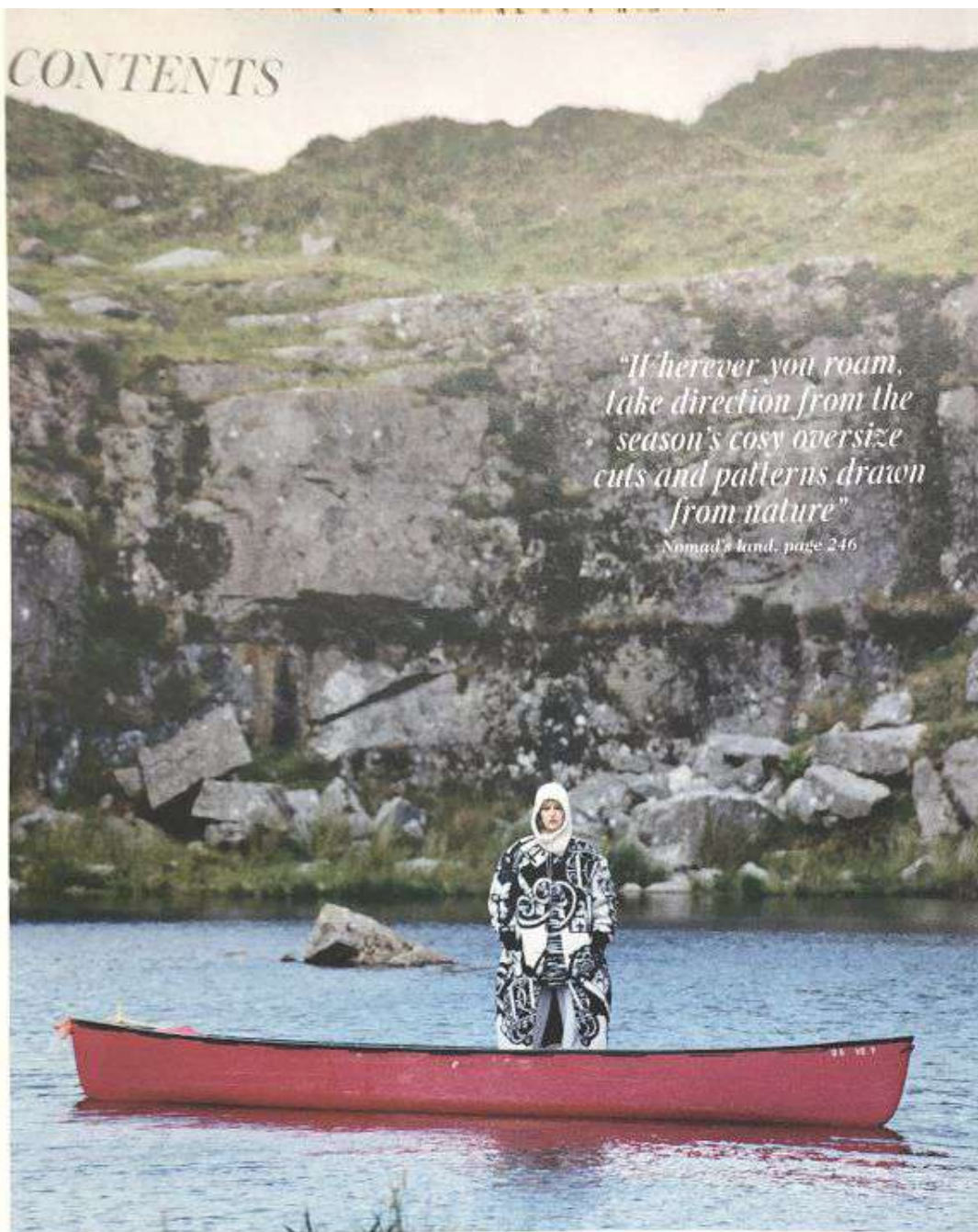
Starring
LADY GAGA

*Fabulous
Fashion*

SENSATIONAL
DRESSES,
STATEMENT
ACCESSORIES &
FOREVER JEWELS



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take direction from the
season's cosy oversize
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The light Fantastic

*In Northern France,
John Galliano has created
a romantically lit home
befitting the idiosyncratic
beauty of his tenure at Maison
Margiela, finds Hamish Bowles.*

*Photographs by
François Halard*

I can't miss a market or a *brocante*," says Maison Margiela's creative director, John Galliano. "I'm very curious; I love hunting, and then the find – the excitement of the unknown, that one key in a door that opens the door and another door and another door." "You have to pull him back," admits Alexis Roche, Galliano's partner and collaborator. "Otherwise, he doesn't stop!"

Galliano, however, cherishes "things that I've found in a flea market, or travelling geographically, or historically – they come imbued with a story, an energy," he explains, "and they start deep emotions. And when those emotions start, I'm able to create."

Many of those treasures are showcased in Galliano and Roche's Paris apartment in the Marais, and in their modest stone farmhouse in the Auvergne – one of the most unspoiled but remote parts of *la France profonde*, where Roche's grandmother was born. That house proved to be the perfect refuge at a moment when Galliano's professional life was unravelling a decade ago, but as he conquered his demons through rigorous recovery programmes and brought his creative genius to reshape Maison Margiela – which he has helmed since late 2014 – the couple began to yearn for a country retreat that would be more accessible to Paris.

An antique-dealer friend suggested they look at a house in the almost absurdly picturesque Gerberoy, in Picardy, a village of cobbled lanes and half-timbered houses framed by roses and hollyhocks in Northern France.

"It's like you stopped time," says Roche. "We felt there was a soul to the village." (The proximity to the fabled antique shops of nearby Rouen was an additional incentive.) Gerberoy is famed for the gardens created at the turn of the century by the post-impressionist artist Henri Le Sidaner >





Galliano, seen here with his Brussels Griffon terriers Coco and Gypsy, worked with the landscape designer Camille Muller on the house's English-inspired garden, which is punctuated by a small lily pond. Sitings editor: Hamish Boscles



The 18th-century house, which Galliano shares with his partner, Alexis Roche, sits in Gerberoy, a quaint village some 50 miles north-west of Paris. "It's like you stopped time," says Roche

in the ramparts of a ruined country house, which served as endless subjects for Le Sidaner's shimmering, evocative paintings. He even painted the very house that Messrs Galliano and Roche had gone to see: an 18th-century gentleman's residence that might, as Galliano suggests, have been a setting for Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. The couple were smitten by both the house and the town's beauty and storied history, and could not resist.

The house, though, was in a parlous state, and Galliano embarked on an ambitious restoration plan that would preserve its romantic patina. The roof tiles were each carefully numbered, removed and, once the structure was stabilised, replaced to rise and dip as they always had. The reconfiguration of the rooms, meanwhile, was largely determined by the light and the views. The main bathroom, for example – crowded with antique perfume bottles, etched Venetian mirrors and Baron von Gloeden's photographs of winsome Sicilian youths – serves as an anteroom to the bedroom itself. Now, sitting in the antique bath or standing at the sink, Galliano and Roche have the best vantage points from which to admire the landscape below the window.

While staying at Claridge's in London, Galliano always took time to admire the antiques and the iconic chintzes at the decorating firm of Colefax & Fowler, then seductively arranged in an 18th-century town house that once belonged to the legendary Nancy Lancaster and was famed for the high-ceilinged drawing room that she painted "buttah-yellah". Galliano clearly admired that room, as well as the exacting haute couture standards of the firm's custom work – "finding craftspeople," as Galliano notes, "is like gold" – and collaborated with

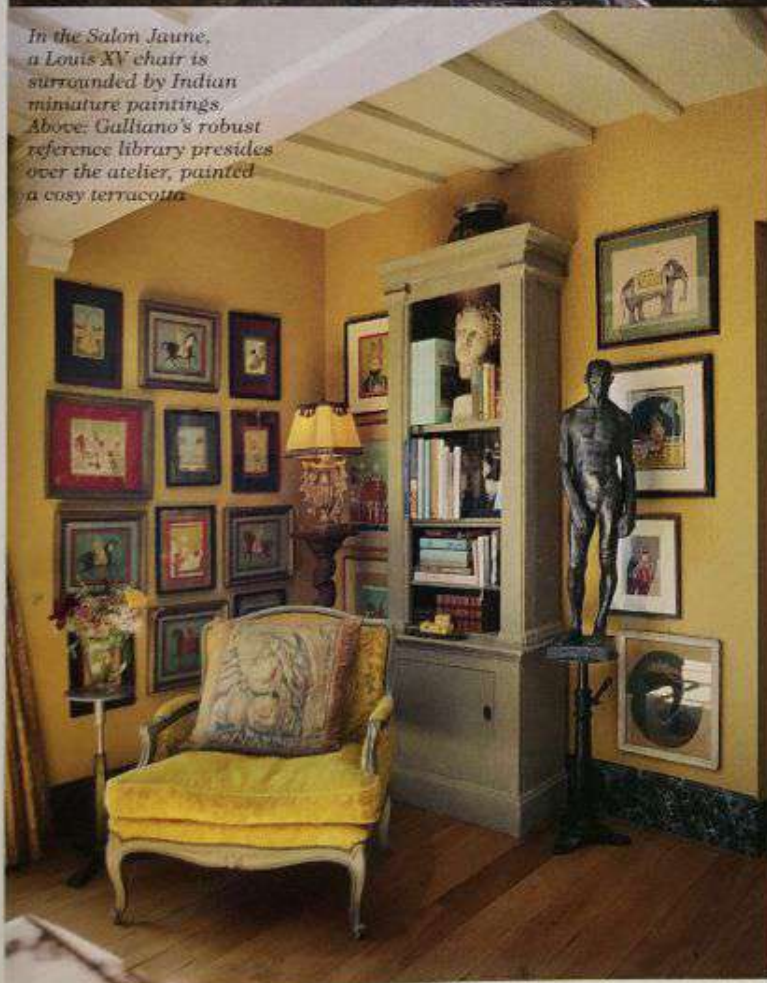
the decorators on the curtains for his Paris apartment. In Gerberoy he worked with Daniel Slowik, formerly at Colefax & Fowler. "It was a very collaborative process," Slowik recalls, "and it was fun to work with a fashion designer who understands the feel and idea of couture. He's always going for the most exciting options."

Ancient kilim carpets, for instance, were carefully reassembled into a patchwork runner for the staircase, which is adorned with racy drawings and photographs, while antique Moroccan wedding coverlets, their purple silk floss embroidery long faded to raspberry pink, were hung unlined in the upstairs pink drawing room to filter the daylight. "He's so interested in where the light falls and catches," says Slowik, who drew colour inspiration from paintings and objects in Galliano's collection. (Galliano also put amber glass panes in the door to the kitchen so that at teatime the dining room is bathed in light.)

The dining room, with wide, tapestry-seated Louis Quinze chairs drawn up to the circular table and portraits of toucans and parrots (and earnest early-19th-century children) on the cool blue walls, has taffeta curtains in an antique pale yellow and blue stripe tied back with rosettes scrunched from the same fabric, all based on examples in 18th-century upholsterers' manuals – along with those in Pauline de Rothschild's fabled London apartment, which was designed with John Fowler himself. The yellow drawing-room windows, meanwhile, are hung with a silver and buff African-inspired glazed cotton that Galliano worked on with Fortuny, and the main bedroom is hung and curtained with a chintz from Antoinette Poisson that evokes the blue-and-white azulejos tiles that Galliano admired in Portuguese



In the Salon Jaune, a Louis XV chair is surrounded by Indian miniature paintings. Above: Galliano's robust reference library presides over the atelier, painted a cosy terracotta.



THE HOUSE WAS IN A PARLOUS STATE, AND GALLIANO EMBARKED ON AN AMBITIOUS RESTORATION PLAN THAT WOULD PRESERVE ITS ROMANTIC PATINA

gardens and houses. (He was so obsessed with them, in fact, that he commissioned the trompe l'oeil artist Eloïse d'Argent to create a narrative sequence of Delft tiles that now spins its tale on the Salon Jaune's fireplace wall, and brings even more light into the room when the fireplace is roaring.)

The property is protected by a 1779 gatehouse – now crowned with a banner, crafted by the Margiela atelier, depicting two roosters (*galli* in Spanish, for Galliano) – that once served as monks' quarters. Galliano created a brace of guest rooms and a soaring atelier in the space, complete with a library of his favourite reference books. (His beloved first-edition Dickens novels, with the illustrations that so inspired him as a child and as a fashion student, are kept closer to his bedside table.)

After the atelier's terracotta *tomette* tiles underfoot were carefully restored and laid with antique Turkish rugs, Galliano had small squares of the different colours that he was considering painted around the room to determine the changing effect of the light. "The ultimate test with me is always candles," says Galliano. "The glow, and how the colour reacts: that's when the colour really sings. I spend a lot of time in candlelight." He settled on a rich terracotta, a colour that he describes as "almost like a deep breath in the evening". That singing pink is painted eight layers deep, ceiling and all. "I wanted this kind of cocooning effect – the idea was that the light would reverberate and bounce off each wall and the roof," he continues. "And it works: it's super-relaxing in here. I come to pull out my favourite Vionnet book and dream."

Through the centuries, artisans – tile makers, glass-blowers and, of course, the tapestry workshops of nearby Beauvais – have flourished in this region of France. In homage to their work, Galliano began sleuthing the artworks originally created to serve as templates for those weavers at the local antique fairs. "I kind of live, breathe my work," Galliano avers, "so, being at Maison Margiela, this idea just came very naturally to find these wonderful cartoons and recycle them, upcycle them." He cut them up into a collage of imaginary landscapes that now cover one wall. "I love the trompe l'oeil effect of real trees swaying and refracting in their light," Galliano explains. "I was playing with the idea of the outside in and the inside out. I've saved some," he adds, "and when the fancy takes me, I'll do another little collage."

The atelier's mystery is further enhanced by the window blinds. "They're from a Japanese monastery," Galliano says, and were assembled by Lilou Marquand, a friend and collaborator of Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel. Galliano, who describes the nonagenarian Marquand as "an artist, a poet", was bidden for tea at her Parisian home to see if he passed muster as a client. "You could feel the energy zooming around her," Galliano says. He was enraptured by her atelier, "an Aladdin's cave of >



Roche walks the stone garden path. Above: the upstairs sitting room. Right: in the entrance hall of the main house, handsome terracotta tiles and Turkish rugs lie underfoot, while an eclectic mix of drawings and photography hangs on the staircase walls.

"We felt there was a soul
to the village," says Roche
of charming Gerberoy



THE FRUITS OF GALLIANO'S SLEUTHING WITH ROCHE ARE ABUNDANTLY EVIDENT

wonderment, of Japanese fabrics, Indian sari fabrics from the '30s, pom-poms, trims, tassels – I was gagging on the Chanel ribbons!" At one point during the visit, Madame Marquand "trod on something – I don't know whether it had fallen out of her very elegant trouser suit, or if it was already on the floor," Galliano recalls. "She picked it up, and it was like this little elephant: a pincushion, with really sharp pins on it," fashioned from pink silk velvet that had rubbed bald through years of use and love. "I'd never seen anything so gorgeous," Galliano says. "I'd like you to have this," Marquand told him. "It belonged to Coco."

With Marquand's blinds at the window, the room, notes the designer – in true Galliano-speak – "is a little bit of Marlene-on-the-train". He is referring to Marlene Dietrich in director Josef von Sternberg's 1932 *Shanghai Express*, veiled and shaded in feathery glamour by the costume designer Travis Banton. "It's a place of mystery," says Galliano.

The atmosphere of the house is enhanced by the soundtrack – Billie Holiday's plaintive voice on the day I visited, for instance – and the heady, richly layered fragrances that Galliano loves, including church incense, Diptyque's musk, Santa Maria Novella's pomegranate and Indian joss sticks that waft through the rooms.

The main house is also one room deep and flooded with light from both sides. That upstairs pink sitting room is filled with devotional church figures in their antique robes of shattering silk ("I turn

everything into shrines," Galliano confesses), and the drawing room below is painted another 18th-century colour that was known, as Galliano notes with delight, as *pipi de vache*, as it was inspired by the urine of cattle fed a mango diet. "Once again," he explains, "it's an amazing colour that works in a mysterious way in sunlight and sunset, and glows in candlelight."

The fruits of Galliano's sleuthing with Roche are abundantly evident. His suave juxtapositions in the Salon Jaune, for instance – including splay-legged 1950s Gio Ponti armchairs upholstered in a chintz design of plump pomegranates and peonies, a rosy needlepoint rug, a 1940s marmalade red velvet sofa, a Louis XV chair in sunflower silk velvet, and an 18th-century painted Italian commode – bring the room seductively into the 21st century and illustrate the couple's passions.

Galliano thinks nothing of hanging a Sex Pistols poster or Ron Raffaelli's portrait of Jimi Hendrix to jostle 19th-century salon art, Brassai and Penn photographs, and homoerotic Jean Cocteau drawings. *Madame Bijou*, Brassai's 1932 portrait of a dishevelled woman sitting at a table in a bar, an original print of which now hangs in Galliano's guest bathroom, "has inspired many a collection," the designer confides. "The volume of the coat, the hat, the wig, the jewels, the fallen stockings, the tap-dancing shoes – I mean, it's just an endless dialogue with *Madame Bijou*!"

Delft tiles designed by artist
Eloïse d'Argent cover the
fireplace wall in the Salon
Jaune. Below: in the guest
bedroom, a Directoire bed sits
below artworks including,
centre top, a fashion study by
Howard Tangye, Galliano's
tutor at Central Saint Martins



The house is also a palimpsest of the places Galliano and Roche have travelled, particularly on the epic inspiration trips that Galliano once took with his teams for his eponymous brand and for Christian Dior, the house that he redefined as artistic director from 1996 to 2011. These travels took them to Japan, China and India, among other exciting locales. One end of the Salon Jaune, for instance, is hung with a collection of exquisite 17th- and 18th-century Indian miniatures found in Rajasthan on that India reconnaissance mission. "There's always been a magical relationship with India," Galliano says.

Outside, Galliano worked with Camille Muller to create a romantic, English-inspired garden, although it is an ancient beech tree that perhaps excites his imagination the most. (In the last quarter of the 18th century, a complaint was brought against the house's dissolute owner, and Galliano is convinced that the scars in the stately tree's trunk are a flagellant's stigmata.)

Soon after they arrived, Galliano and Roche befriended the village's colourful cast of neighbours, who now provide gardening and psychic advice, gossip, and delicious produce and local culinary delicacies. Dressed like a Bloomsbury Group eccentric on an afternoon that I visited – in a Margiela prototype sweater knitted from strips of blue and lilac gingham, a Margiela trench, Wellington boots, and a woven-straw cloche hat pulled down low on his brow – Galliano set off with Roche to pay his calls with the couple's Brussels Griffons, Gypsy and Coco, gamboling at their feet.

He seemed very much at home. ■





*Trailed by Eos,
Roche and
Gulliano head
off into town*