

THEY ASKED FOR DRAMA

Designer Sarah Dray oversees a sparkling transformation of a classic French city apartment.

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In the sitting room of an apartment in Paris's 8th arrondissement that was renovated by interior designer Sarah Dray, the curved sectional is a vintage DS-600 by de Sede. Vintage lounge chair by Le Corbusier; cocktail table by Beije Avenue; custom alabaster pendant, bookshelf, mirror, and rug. For details, see Resources.

Sarah Dray is an out-and-out Parisienne. The interior designer was born in the French capital and has lived in traditional Haussmanian apartments ever since she was a child. “The aesthetics of Parisian buildings fascinate me,” she says. “I’ve never seen anything quite so beautiful.”

Dray initially trained with two pre-eminent purveyors of French decorative taste. While in college, she interned in the offices of ELLE DECOR A-List Titan Jacques Garcia. She recalls seeing the iconic designer from afar and noting his bright red socks and green crocodile loafers. She later worked for Isabelle Stanislas, known for her revamping of three state rooms in the Élysée Palace. “It’s through her that I really discovered what I like,” Dray says. “I adopt a similar contemporary approach within classical settings.”

Since founding her firm in 2010, Dray has worked largely under the radar, despite attracting several noteworthy clients. She renovated a townhouse for France’s answer to Stephen Colbert, talk show host Laurent Ruquier. Most of her work involves renovations of large-scale Parisian apartments, such as this 2,400-square-foot unit close to Parc Monceau and the Champs-Élysées.

The owners—a doctor and her dentist husband with three young daughters—had been searching for the perfect space. The wife had already visited dozens of listings on her own. “My husband said that if I liked it, then he would automatically like it too,” she says. As fate would have it, they ended up checking out this one together. “On the day of the appointment, his alarm clock didn’t go off and he was at home,” she says. “I persuaded him to come with me.”

Stylistically, the couple shares Dray’s love of classic Parisian architecture. On a more practical level, they were attracted to the apartment’s proximity to their children’s schools. Still, it required a leap of faith to buy it. “The former owner had lived there for the whole of her life, some 93 years,” Dray says. “Nothing was up to code.” There were squat toilets and stains from successive water leakages. As for the electrics, she notes, they were “*un drame*.”

In total, it took 18 months to get everything in shape. Dray largely reconfigured the layout, extending the kitchen by enclosing a light well and creating a series of spacious openings in the public rooms. She also reinstated a host of architectural details. She loves strong axes and perfect alignments, cornices and moldings that frame and structure spaces, and vertical elements that add a strict sense of rhythm. She has a particular predilection for fluting on walls. “It adds a sumptuous yet subtle detail and a very bespoke touch,” she notes.

Her clients asked for a gentle palette. Although the wife was the main go-to for design decisions, the husband



had one surprising request: a pink primary bathroom. Dray responded by pairing an expressively veined blush-toned onyx with a beautifully textural travertine.

Elsewhere, she shook things up with a few equally dramatic gestures. The large sitting room is dominated by a vintage sofa from de Sede, measuring 13 feet and consisting of 21 different modules. “It has incredible character,” Dray says. “For me, it’s like a piece of art.”

On the dining room ceiling, she installed custom light fixtures made from one of her favorite materials—alabaster. “There are dozens of them to create the impression of a starlit sky,” she says.

In each of the girls’ rooms, meanwhile, she managed to incorporate their own bathroom. “That way, they can each have their independence,” she explains. The eldest daughter had a very particular wish—an eye-catching mirror she could use as a backdrop for Instagram posts. Dray came up with a wavy design that she sees as a nod to Ettore Sottsass’s iconic Ultrafragola model.

A version of that design will be part of her debut furniture collection, due to launch on her website this fall. After years of plowing a very personal path, it would seem Dray is finally ready to step into the limelight. “It’s hard for me to explain how I got to where I am today,” she says. “It’s like everything happened quite naturally.” One reason may be her very upbeat approach to her profession. “I always stay extremely positive,” she says. “Some people feel like the world is about to end whenever there’s the slightest difficulty with a project. For me, there’s always a solution to every problem.” ■



Dray designed the dining room’s sculptural ceiling lights in alabaster. Custom dining table; chairs by Gallotti&Radice; curtains of a Dedar fabric.

OPPOSITE: Sarah Dray in the sitting room. Armchair by Mojow; side table by Beije Avenue; wooden bird sculpture by Chandler McLellan.



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The entry hall has custom fluted walls and a marble floor by Marbrerie de l'Emperador. Sculpture by Jean Touret; painting by Aude Herlédan.

OPPOSITE: In the kitchen, a table by Beije Avenue is framed by a custom leather and oak bench and Emmanuelle Simon chairs. Custom alabaster pendant and island in bronze and quartzite.



In the primary bedroom, the custom headboard is upholstered in a Dedar fabric. Bedding by Lissoy; custom side table and rug; lamp by Denis Castaing; wall treatment by Signature Murale; curtains of a Dedar fabric.

OPPOSITE: The primary bath has a vanity top and floor in pink onyx from Marbrerie de l'Emperador. Custom mirror and travertine tub; side table by Daniel Berlin; fittings by Gessi.

