

Life size

There's nothing superfluous in this bespoke Paris apartment, where space is surpassed by charm.

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DO YOU HEAR THE PEOPLE SING? A FEW HUNDRED years ago, you probably could have in the Paris apartment Rod Fry, his wife Laurence Varga and their son Arlo share – it’s situated between Place de la Bastille and Place de la Nation; key events of the French Revolution actually took place in their neighbourhood.

Rod’s own story is also pretty exciting. “I grew up in Pakuranga, Auckland,” he says, before getting to the good bit. “I left New Zealand almost 24 years ago [and ended up working] in Taiwan. Two years into my stay, I met my [French] wife Laurence, and we later moved to Shanghai. Then we were faced with the decision of whether to go to New Zealand or France – and we opted to try France first.”

In 2004, with a confirmed soft spot for his adopted country and looking for a new way to earn a living, marketer/designer/writer Rod and sociologist Laurence hit upon an idea. Recognising the abundant talent of Kiwi designers and believing there was a place for their work in France, they started the conversation in Aotearoa, then in 2006 published *The Long White Book* on New Zealand design, architecture and art, aiming to contextualise it for their new European market. They began doing design shows and meeting with key French journalists, architects and showrooms, and little by little, the collection took off.

Today Moaroom distributes the work of top Kiwi creatives – as well as Rod’s own range of furniture, Pi System – in France, Belgium, Switzerland and Holland. The flagship store is just five minutes’ walk from home. >

TOP LEFT David Trubridge, Jamie McLellan, Nat Cheshire, Simon James, Brendan MacFarlane and Phil Cuttance are among those represented by Moaroom. **ABOVE** Rod and Laurence. “We’re not really into ‘decorating,’” says Rod. “Apart from the furniture we designed ourselves, everything in our apartment was bought for its own sake, beauty or story long before we bought the apartment. We even have a rule that if we find a potter we like, we only buy bowls that we’re going to eat out of.”

DINING The table is from Rod’s flat-pack Pi System range. The trestle legs enable the creation of a variety of furniture items, including shelves, by inserting timber or concrete panels and pivoting the metal into place. Overhead, Rod’s Autel Particulier pendant allows flowers, candles and found objects such as feathers to be hung together in a graceful suspension, and provides lighting without cluttering the small room with lamps.



THE PROJECT

Owners of Moaroom (moaroom.com) Rod Fry and his wife Laurence Varga renovated this two-bedroom apartment in Paris for themselves and their son Arlo (10).



“It’s a very clean, zen space because there are places to discreetly store things built in everywhere.”



TOP LEFT “Laurence and I fell in love with this Sofia Tekela-Smith photo at a time when we didn’t really have the money for it – then a year later it was still eating at us, so even though we still didn’t have the money, we bought it.” **TOP RIGHT** At a former atelier, a two-storeyed section that now includes the apartment was built at the back of a wood-stacking area. A glass-roofed wintergarden joins the spaces and faces into the light well between the neighbouring buildings and onto a courtyard full of plants.

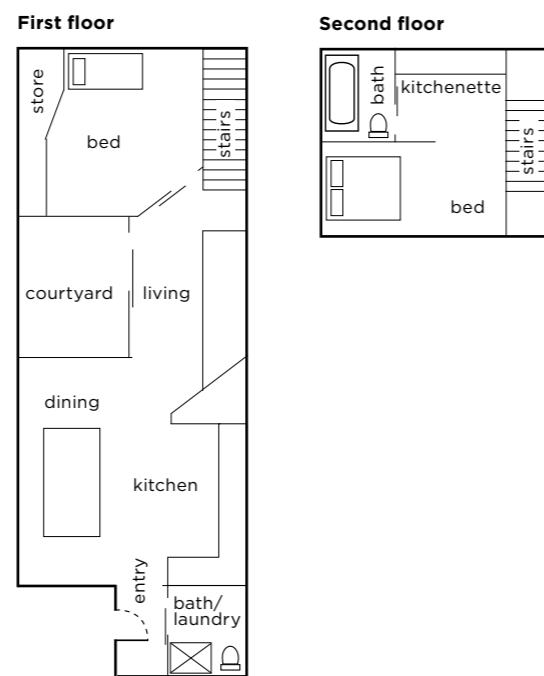
Just east of the Marais, home is in the heart of the district where Paris’ fine furniture makers historically lived and worked in a multicultural maze of streets and alleyways. “I have older friends who remember when almost every apartment building in the area had wood drying in the staircases and hallways,” says Rod. “Now we’re one of a few young furniture firms trying to re-establish the traditional soul of the area, although most of our wood-working is done in Normandy and Bourgogne.”

Wedged between three other buildings in a one-time atelier’s wood-stacking area, the apartment has a modest footprint. Rod says its renovation was driven by his desire to feel he’d “challenged the status quo and replaced something standard with something based on the real way we want to live”. He and Laurence designed a quiet, easy-care home lit mostly by skylights, with the dining table, not the TV, the centre of things – then he did most of the reno work in a single summer while the rest of the family holidayed, sleeping in the dust for six weeks.

So, not a lot of room, but plenty of character features to work with: the previous owners had left the original rough-hewn oak beams exposed, as well as a huge steel beam with giant Eiffel Tower-style hot rivets. “We added ‘space,’” says Rod. “We put the kitchen along the wall facing the dining table to leave the eating area very airy; we took a bit of the space we gained there by angling the couch into it to make that area large enough for the three of us to relax in or for our friends to sit in before dinner. We also stole a bit of the extra space at the other end by angling the bookshelf into Arlo’s bedroom; >

ARLO’S ROOM Someone who’s “always thinking about how furniture or living spaces could be better conceived for today’s humans”, Rod says, “The wall of shutters works brilliantly for opening up the space when we want the natural light to come down, and to privatise it when Arlo wants to sleep or needs quiet.”





OVER & ABOVE Situated on the ground floor and surrounded by five-storey buildings, the apartment's only real view is of the sky, seen here through the glass ceiling above the sofa and in the main bedroom. "Almost every house and most rooftop apartments in France use these opening skylights," says Rod. "They're incredibly well engineered and perfectly waterproof. They really help to regulate the heat in summer."

I think even basic houses can benefit from using a few lines diagonal to the parallel and perpendicular ones. We also gained a lot of storage space in the back and base of the hollow couch we made ourselves. It's a very clean, zen space because there are places to discreetly store things built in everywhere."

Quite: every inch is used intelligently. "I don't think that a big bedroom where one might only spend an hour of their awake time is necessarily a good use of space, and kids seem to do their homework better on the dining table while Mum or Dad work or cook around them. So Arlo has a good-sized room, but I actually use the bottom bunk as much as him for reading, and when his door is open and the shutters are turned out, it feels like a continuation of the apartment."

Describing the finished home as "functional minimalism with restricted zones of chaos and personality, and a flavour of New Zealand", Rod says, "I basically designed and made everything, including the furniture, but what I'm most proud of is how the architectural decisions reinforce our good habits – it matches our values. It's natural to eat every meal around the table and to pick up a book or listen to music when you sit on the couch, because it's a nice, well-lit area and the TV's forgotten about when the cabinet doors are closed."

Living in the heart of one of the world's most spirited cities, you need a haven to retreat into. Dressed in white, this uncluttered, enclosed dwelling has been turned into an oasis of calm. It's compact, but Rod and Laurence have discovered that small can also be practical and wholly sophisticated. You might say it's a French revelation. ■

DESIGN DETAILS



TOP Pi System table by Rod Fry, POA, davidtrubridge.com. **MIDDLE, FROM LEFT** Sove linen pillowcase, \$70/pair, cittadesign.com. Tangerine chair by Simon James for Resident, \$591, simonjamesdesign.com. **BOTTOM, FROM LEFT** Gather Clear B vase by Sam Anderson for Good Thing, \$59, timwebberdesign.com. (*Brown Eyes Blue*) Rotuma 2, 2004 photographic print by Sofia Tekela-Smith, POA, jonathansmartgallery.com. Astronaut duvet cover set by Snurk, \$129/single, chicos.co.nz.

ASK THE OWNER:

Rod Fry of Moaroom

Rod, do you have any advice for those hoping to renovate? Do it purely for yourself and your family: who you are, how you want to live and the values you want your kids to be exposed to. Don't fill your house with French stuff if you have no link to France; don't fill it with New Zealand art if you really don't enjoy that; don't buy 'fake' anything. Try to be aesthetically cohesive – if something you've had for ages or inherited doesn't work with the rest, then hide or sell it.

And when it comes to renovating small spaces? If you can, leave uncluttered lines of vision from one end of the apartment to the other to avoid any

sense of claustrophobia. Proportion the spaces based on the time you'll spend in them. For us, living in such a constrained space is like living on a boat – you need to really think about storage so that you can leave as much space around you as possible. Build storage wherever you can – such as in the bases of couches, or in cubes used as coffee tables – and build your higher storage units into the darkest corner or wall.

What makes your renovation especially satisfying? Big, noisy dinner parties that everyone leaves smiling; your son sitting on the couch reading rather than turning on the TV; hearing him explain how cool and well made his bunks are; actually preferring to eat at home rather than at a restaurant.