

# CON TRIBUTORS

ERIK  
RIMMER



Erik Rimmer, editor-in-chief of *Bo Bedre*, “Scandinavia and Denmark’s largest interior design magazine”, approached *Vogue Living* with the story on the Danish royal couple’s renovation (page 26). “Seeing the new building was a great experience,” says Rimmer, who spent time on-site. “Something the pictures cannot show is the atmosphere, which is superb; the acoustics are second to none. I have known Queen Mary for years because she has presented design awards, which my magazine hosts. Her heart beats for young designers.” Sustainability is an “incredibly important part” of Scandinavian design, he notes, and by leading this circular project, the King and Queen “are showing a model example of the construction of the future. It is not necessarily easy, but it is necessary.”



PAOLA  
MORETTI

A creative director and designer, Paola Moretti has an endless capacity to be inspired and a wide-eyed view of the world. Moretti, who is based between Milan and Brescia in Italy, styled and produced our story on a 17th-century house in the Medina of Tunis (page 118), an ancient town she describes as “truly authentic, not for tourists but for locals, with a labyrinth of narrow streets, little shops, hammams, mosques and Arabic music”. Moretti marvels at British architect John Pawson’s transformation of the property, “so contemporary and clean, but still respectful of time — the staircase perfectly integrates into the traditional architecture, his stone furniture appears as if it has always been there”. What resonates most is “the genius of the place”, she says, “the feeling, the atmosphere, its soul”.

TOM  
ROSS

Melbourne-based photographer Tom Ross responds candidly when asked to identify the ‘why’ behind his work: “It’s the best job in the world — there’s no philosophy, it’s just an itch I have to scratch.” That itch manifested around age 12, when Ross’s first subjects were his sister “and best mate”. Since then, he’s amassed a distinct editorial and architectural portfolio that includes the Loft Residence project in this issue (page 80). Of the architect Oliver Du Puy, Ross says, “Oliver’s work feels effortless, serene. Being in a room he’s designed makes me say to myself: life is good.” The light was interesting all day, he recalls, “and working with Joseph Gardner for the first time was great”. For Ross, what makes a job compelling “is when there’s genuine intent... something on the line. When the designer has honestly exposed themselves, for better or worse.”



PHOTOGRAPHER: LIAM AYRES (TOM ROSS)

# COUP DE FOUDRE

Redesigning a 17th-century COURTYARD HOUSE in the ancient *Medina of Tunis*,  
JOHN PAWSON reconciles *traditional architecture* with minimalist philosophy.

*By* CHIARA TOMASINI

*Photographed by* SIMON WATSON

*Styled and produced by* PAOLA MORETTI

*This page* in the living room of this home in the Medina of Tunis, Tunisia, **table** by Hans Wegner; **stools** by Eero Saarinen; **floor** in 17th-century tiles. *Details, last pages.*







*These pages* in the library, **chairs** by Hans Wegner for Fritz Hansen; **stools** by Alvar Aalto; Thonet **rocking chair**.







**T**o fall in love with a 17th-century courtyard house in the very heart of Tunis's Medina is not a common thing, and to ask the minimalist architect John Pawson to redesign it is a real challenge.

But this is what happened to a Paris-based design consultant who had long been familiar with Tunisia. It was a strange choice for a holiday home, accessible only by foot through the winding, crowded streets of a historic medina in the midst of an Arabo-Muslim city of more than two million inhabitants. But there is no way of predicting a *coup de foudre*.

The Medina of Tunis, with its souks, residential quarters, madrassas (schools where the Koran is studied), mosques and zaouias (mausoleums), monuments and gates, constitutes an urban fabric among the best conserved in the Islamic world. Like all the local *dar* (a traditional Arabic townhouse), the property is located at the end of an alley, its traditionally decorated door with large black nails is the only element visible from the outside. When the door is open, a dimly lit chicane on the left leads to an internal courtyard. With a burst of blinding light, the patio comes into view. Tall doors are louvered and folded like the pages of a book using a peculiar yet infallible locking system from the inside — there are no keys or locks, just sliding wooden bars and the movements of a vice. The binary view of the immense cubic volume and blue sky resembles a work by the artist Donald Judd.

The house is located in the middle of the medina, next to the main mosque, the Jamaa Ez-Zitouna (its towering minaret can be seen from the terrace). It would seem the *dar* was originally built for a Cadi, an Islamic judge and a key figure in Muslim society.

Before the house was purchased it had been owned by an elderly couple, the former neighbourhood postman and his wife. They had lived in a small section of the ground floor — nobody had entered the first floor since the Second World War — with little access to electricity and no running water. The property was dilapidated, but the proportion of the rooms and the courtyard possessed charm. It took three years to rebuild the house, and being next to the main souk, building materials could only be brought to the house on Sundays when the shops were closed. "Keeping with Arab tradition, the owner furnished lightly and readily altered the functions of the rooms," Pawson says.

One of the British architect's challenges was to find a way to get up to the terraces, given that the ground floor has six-metre ceilings and the old stairway was uncomfortable to navigate. He had the brilliant idea to knock down some kitchen walls to make room for a sculptural staircase that perfectly integrates into the traditional architecture of both the house and the medina.

"A patio sometimes reveals to you the nature of the people who live in it, torn between a globalist modernity, the half-tinted manifestation of several layers of colonial past, and a new wave of contextualised nationalism, eventually giving birth to an architectural patchwork," says Pawson, who spent much time reflecting while working on the project. Pawson designed some of the furniture, collaborating with skilled Tunisian craftsmen using local materials. Stone masonry has been practiced here since the Romans.

The patio's four mirrored doors open onto long, narrow and very high rooms with beamed ceilings and plaster-decorated arches — the greenish dining room, a main bedroom with local thala stone in the bathroom, plus another bedroom. The patio also connects to a wing of the house that includes a living room and a desired but yet to be completed hammam with a bedroom and living room on its upper floor.

From the other side of the patio, there is access to an almost open-air main kitchen, and to staircases that lead to several terraces on different levels. The owner's private apartment comprises a studio-library with a bedroom overlooking the patio, but their favourite space is at the top of a steep staircase, where a tiny room with a mini kitchen and shower looks over the medina roofs and into the oncoming wind.

The guardian's quarters, which also sit at the top of the house, retains the building's original character — its tiled walls and blue doors have survived. From up here, time peacefully slows down, it is extremely quiet, the silence only broken five times a day as the city simultaneously reverberates with calls to prayer. ■ [johnpawson.com](http://johnpawson.com)

*Opposite page* in the office, iron **table** with marble top by John Pawson; **stools** by Eero Saarinen; **lamp** by Ingo Maurer.







*This page* in the courtyard of the guest house, traditional Tunisian mosaic tiles. *Opposite page* in another view of the living room, vintage Giogali chandelier by Angelo Mangiarotti.











*This page* in the hammam, **daybed** mattress upholstered in vintage linen. *Opposite page* in the dining room, marble **tables** by local artisans; Danish stainless-steel **candleholders**.





*This page* in the bedroom on the first floor, stone **sink** designed by John Pawson; original 17th-century **moulding**. *Opposite page* in the main bedroom on the ground floor, Brazilian wool **bed cover**; 1970s mother-of-pearl **chandelier** by Verner Panton. *Details, last pages.*











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