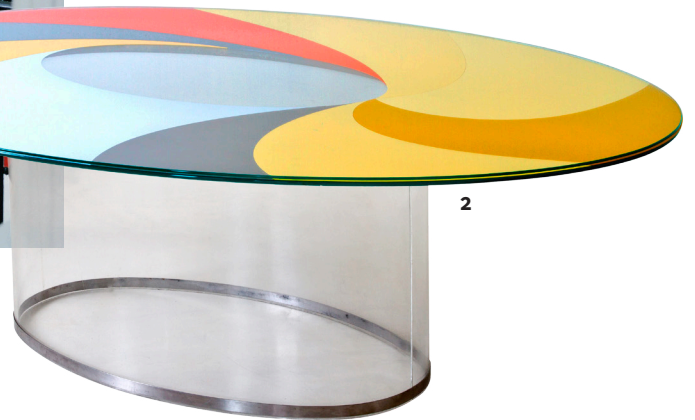




AD VISITS

Ave Maria

Modernity's matriarch opens her home for the first time—and it's a buzzy blend of now and then



1. ONE OF DESIGNER MARIA PERGAY'S MOD RING CHAIRS SHIMMERS AT HER HISTORIC HOME IN BÉZIER, FRANCE. 2. A 2010 DINING TABLE OF HER DESIGN. 3. PERGAY IN HER SALON.

Maria Pergay has designed some of the most famous metal furnishings of the last century, from wavelike daybeds to a multipart cocktail table that resembles an archipelago. But the unstoppable matron of modernism—born in Romania, based in France, and now in her 88th year—lives with very few of her own creations, the most iconic being the Ring chair, which she created in 1968 after being inspired by the coiling shape left over from peeling an orange.

“It is the fruit, if you will, of my first artistic success,” Pergay says, smiling. Two of those supple, if penitential, seats welcome visitors in the entrance hall of her house in Béziers, a sun-kissed town in the South of France. They are made of stainless steel, her material of choice since the 1960s. “Copper is too fragile, aluminum too light, gold too symbolic, silver too weak; bronze is out of fashion and platinum inaccessible,” Pergay once explained. “Nothing is more beautiful than stainless steel.”

That being said, her residence is no machine for living. It is a stately 19th-century townhouse with a Proustian array of egg-and-dart moldings, marble mantels, and herringbone parquet. The formal architecture, though, embodies Pergay's traditional roots: In the 1960s, working for Jansen, an august Paris decorating firm, she designed Empire-style bath fixtures for Tunisia's new presidential palace.

“I imagine this will be my last house,” the octogenarian says matter-of-factly, adding that she purchased the Béziers place several years ago, so she could be closer to her children and their families. Until recently, though, Pergay didn't consider its



PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANÇOIS HALARD

2. COURTESY OF DEMISCH DANANT

DISCOVERIES



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“My personal style has always been to mix ancient and modern.”
—*Maria Pergay*



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1. RING CHAIR (1968). 2. FRENCH ANTIQUES AND ASIAN ARTIFACTS MINGLE CHEZ PERGAY. 3. NAUTILUS LAMP (C. 1969). 4. BORGIA CABINET (2016).

decor to be complete, but now that it is, she opened her doors to eminent interiors photographer François Halard. His images illustrate *Maria Pergay by François Halard*, a jewel-like double-volume salute recently published by Demisch Danant, her Manhattan gallery.

Suzanne Demisch describes the book as “a portrait of Maria.” What’s surprising about that portrait is how much the past has always been part of Pergay’s present. “I am an antiques dealer in my soul,” the designer says, noting that “I’ve been fascinated by the historical masterpieces of Japanese and Chinese craftsmen my whole life.” Exquisite old lacquer boxes—black, gold, eggshell—are displayed in the snow-white salon, positioned on cantilevered Plexiglas shelves that Pergay conjured up for that purpose. Here some cloisonné, there a portrait of an unknown but regally attired Asian beauty. (“I was seduced by her sweetness and serenity.”) Underfoot, lotuses bloom on a velvety carpet.

French treasures are part of Pergay’s personal roomscape, too, including a life-size gilded lion that would not look out of place at Versailles. “My personal style has always been to mix ancient and modern,” the designer explains.

It’s a preference that infuses her work, too. Recent proof is her Borgia cabinet, a brooding storage unit of black and white ebony that sits on 18th-century-style claw-feet and incorporates steel only sparingly, as accents. “It’s practically medieval,” Demisch says. And, yet, like all things Pergay, totally modern. demischdanant.com —MITCHELL OWENS