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MANHATTAN

NATALIE PORTMAN

A CLOSE-UP ON HER
NEW ROLE AS DIRECTOR

WOMEN OF STYLE

NEW YORK'S TASTEMAKERS
& TRENDSETTERS

DIANE LANE RETURNS
TO BROADWAY IN
THE CHERRY ORCHARD

FALL FASHION

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SEPTEMBER 2016 \$5.95

STYLE & DESIGN

profile



A FRIEND

Indeed

Interior designer **Valerie Pasquiou**'s aesthetics are influenced by her hometown of Biarritz, France, as well as her global travels and close-knit relationships with other creatives. Here, model, actor and longtime pal of Pasquiou **T.R. Pescod** sits down with the designer to talk beauty, finding inspiration and how deep friendships can produce stunning design, as is the case with Atelier d'Amis, a new furniture company founded by Pasquiou and her two French partners.

Being a French woman and having grown up in a country that celebrates aesthetic beauty in such a unique way, were you always visually motivated? I was born in Biarritz, an elegant French Basque city by the ocean, where the culture is immensely rich in history and diverse architecture, influenced by the Spanish and the English noble class from the 1800s. I'm grateful to have grown up amid such sources of inspiration. I was surrounded by beauty, but I did not study design—I went to an advertising school in Bordeaux. My great-grandmother was an antiques collector. The second floor of her country house was like a small museum through my young eyes. I was in my first antique store when I was 4 years old, and I was intrigued. My mother has

also always had impeccable taste in design and fashion. She became a bit of a mentor as well.

Why did you decide to leave France?

I lost a friend's bet in the summer of '89. I got a ticket for L.A. thinking I would go for three months to polish my English. It's been 27 years, with the last 11 in New York, my second home.

When did you first decide to pursue a career in design?

When I moved to L.A., a photographer who was very dear to me asked me to style one of her shoots. She pushed me to continue, as it appeared to her that I have a very sharp eye. I quickly became a set decorator and designer. The experiences over a 10-year career in Hollywood

LOFTY AMBITIONS From top: The living room at this Wooster Street loft, designed by Valerie Pasquiou, features vintage 1940s chairs recovered in cowhide, a sofa by Pasquiou and a table by Blackman Cruz (foreground); the reading room, adjacent to the bedroom at right, can be closed off from the living and dining room by this set of stainless steel and glass doors.





« *You don't always have to seek inspiration; be open and curious and it will come to you in the most unexpected ways.* »

—VALERIE PASQUIOU »

taught me so much. My imagination had no limits there.

Interior design came very naturally, so I entered the industry as it became a passion, and I landed my first large project for a celebrity. I've learned how to bring a vision and story to life. It's a very personal and powerful experience.

Who are some of your greatest influences?

The French artist Louise Bourgeois for her creativity, “avant-gardiste” and provocative mind; Andrée Putman, the French interior and product designer, for such a unique eye, determination and an influential career—I found her designs to be elegant and timeless; and any amazing human being who wants to make a change and contribute to a better world. We need more of these kinds of people today.

How do you find inspiration?

I always discover something that inspires me during my travels, which are very frequent for my projects. In Biarritz, there is an old castle built in 1895 on top of a cliff. It was abandoned for a long time after its owner, Albert de l'Espée, a very eccentric baron, died in 1918. As kids, we were always wondering what was behind those mysterious walls, but we could never access it. Last week, with two of my best friends from New York and by pure chance, we got to go in. It was an incredible experience to be walking through there. Peeling walls roughed up by the ocean salt and storms, an incredible staircase, the details on the doors and a huge organ room where the baron used to play were finally unveiled in front of my eyes. I felt embraced by the space. You don't always have to seek inspiration; be open and curious and it will come to you in the most unexpected ways.

When you're working with clients, what are the biggest challenges and rewards?

One challenge is when a client hires you but is resistant to your advice and expertise. It's a form of insecurity, which I can understand as residential projects can be emotional for someone who has never been through the process. As designers, we have to be good listeners—sensitive, reassuring and, overall, good problem solvers. But a happily overwhelmed phone call from the client to tell you how pleased and grateful they are about the end result of their project—mission accomplished.

You recently launched a new furniture company, Atelier d'Amis, which translates to Workshop of Friends. What inspired that move?

Rooted in the spirit of collaboration, Atelier d'Amis strives to create pieces that go beyond luxury furniture to become pieces of conversation for the home. Our vision flourished among three friends: furniture entrepreneur Philippe Boccara, artist and designer Sebastien Leon and myself, as an interior architect. While we are based in New York and Los Angeles, the fabrication of our collections takes place in the hands of expert craftsmen in Italy.

Sebastien and I designed our first collection, named Laisse Béton, inspired by the constant rhythm and endless construction happening in New York. It's also a wink to our French language, as “laisse” means “let” and “béton” translates to “concrete;” this slang expression was commonly used in the '70s to tell someone to “let go.”

What's on the horizon for VP Interiors?

We're in the process of developing a European clientele base, as I want to spend more time there. We're hoping to design a hotel as well. And Atelier d'Amis is a very exciting adventure with a great future. The response has been phenomenal. It's all very promising. atelierdamis.com; vpinteriors.com ■



FRENCH CONNECTION

Clockwise from top left: The Washington credenza, a piece from Atelier d'Amis' Laisse Béton collection; Valerie Pasquiou; in the Soho loft, a vintage patchwork metal table by Paul Evans is complemented with clear acrylic chairs by Twentieth.

