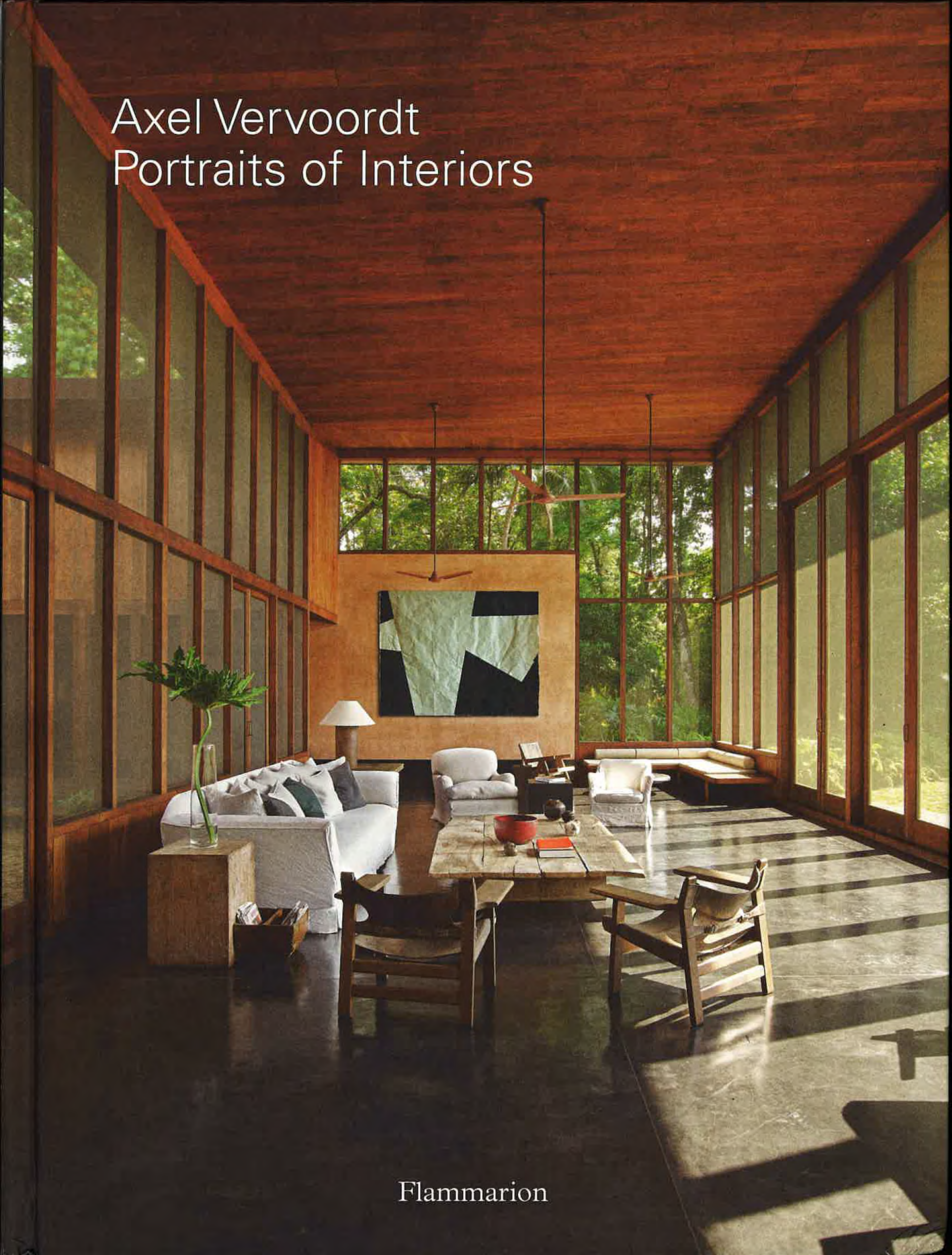


# Axel Vervoordt Portraits of Interiors



Flammarion







# Mediterranean Villa

“There is an immense ocean over which the mind can sail, upon which the vessel of thought has not yet been launched.”

Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart*

The origin story of this new home began about twenty years ago along the Mediterranean coastline in the south of France. A European family built a neo-Palladian villa with a sense of classical style on a pristine, sea-facing property. Recently, the owners acquired an adjacent property with the dream of creating a second home. The family collaborated with the Vervoordts on both projects. The new home would become a more private getaway, so that the existing main residence could be used as a larger common guest house for the couple’s children, extended family, and friends.

The original villa’s spacious kitchen, dining areas, and terraces would continue to be utilized for entertaining, while the new structure would be designed purely to meet the necessities and sensibilities of the family’s matriarch and patriarch. The new home, a Palladian-style villa, presented an opportunity to reimagine the entire landscape and write a new chapter in which both homes could coexist in dialogue together within the splendid scenery.

The result is a remarkable feat for all involved. Axel, along with the company’s team, worked very closely side-by-side with two specialists from the Côte d’Azur: landscape designer Jean Mus and architect Luc Svetchine. Together, they formed—in many ways—a dream design team, in which all participants engaged in an intense collaboration to achieve a result that was made to last for generations.

“This home is built as an Italian-inspired Palladian villa, which reflects this specific region’s influences,” says Axel. “But rather than an Andrea Palladio copy, this home is built based on an intense study of proportions and focused on the needs of the family.”

This distinct community in the south of France is famous for its legendary homes and its iconic buildings of remarkable architectural heritage. To Svetchine, a technical expert and architectural leader in this area, “The creation of a residence is the shaping of an architectural form in an answer to a given question. A question that results from the encounter between a client who has his needs—and his longings—with the environment that has its qualities—and its constraints.” This is particularly true in the case of this villa.

Building lines and codes are tightly regulated in this community, as elsewhere in the Côte d’Azur, and the position of the home and the views of the sea were of the utmost importance. For the owners, sailing is more than a mere hobby; they are avid sailors and needed an open view of the sea from their private quarters. From the vantage point of the new villa, they have a unique sight line toward the idyllic marina nearby that allows them to watch the comings and goings of boats of all sizes.

Their two-story villa includes a spacious ground floor sitting room that’s simultaneously open and airy, with an elegant seating area,

















great works of art, a fireplace, and desk space for working. The home also serves as a backdrop from which they enjoy the panoramic sea views and the rugged, mountainous coastlines in the distance. The second floor consists of a series of rooms in varying sizes that include an entrance hall, separate dressing areas, a bathroom, and a master bedroom. Each room is proportionally designed around a central foyer where all of the spaces converge; there, the old wooden floors come together around a star-shaped parquet remnant.

Furniture, objects, and art are central elements to the design philosophy, and doors, in particular, are an important element throughout the home. "We found old polychrome doors to use in many of the home's passages," says Axel. "This, in combination with the old floors, is not to be old-fashioned, but to establish a timeless story. To connect the two houses together. They give the new home a patina, as though it has existed for a long time already."

In the main sitting room, the rich terrazzo floors embrace the Italian influences. The rest of the color palette was inspired by the tonality and patina of the polychrome doors. A trio of large arched windows were installed and

are nearly floor-to-ceiling in height. To open the windows, the panes descend into the floor; this creates a sense of spaciousness and highlights the combination of interior and exterior atmospheres that is immediately connected to Jean Mus's lush, green garden.

The garden had to be reconsidered to foster a sense of unity on the property and to create a logical transition via the narrow strip of land between the two buildings. The key was to establish pathways and connections to address the geographic limitations. In addition, the homes are built on different levels of land, which raised a specific challenge for the team to surmount. An underground grotto is defined by its rough surfaces, while large stone terraces made with Turin granite help link the two homes together. These stone pathways meander through the property's landscape and create a cohesive entity. The unity of the overall story wouldn't have been possible without Mus's work. By preserving the land's existing pine trees, he formed an alliance between the two homes through nature. "What Jean did here was to create a masterpiece," says Axel.

Throughout the home, the family's art collection includes paintings by Japanese Gutai painter Kazuo Shiraga, Korean Dansaekhwa painter Yun Hyong-keun, and Belgian abstract artist Jef Verheyen. In a coastal region that has inspired painters, artists, thinkers, and entrepreneurs for decades, these works seem right at home.

All in all, the magic of this place is found in the abundance of sunlight and nature's power to sustain a diversity of trees and vegetation. The community is celebrated for its aesthetic achievements in beautiful landscape that is also recognized for its ecological diversity. The unique peninsula stands out from the rest of the Riviera. And this new villa fits right into the setting. Together, these two homes express the yearning for a relaxed quality of life with space for silence, serenity, and sophisticated surroundings. The new home is a retreat in which the details express the owners' sense of style with an overall spirit of timelessness.











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Sea view from the loggia. Terraces around the existing home and pool are made from large granite slabs recuperated from Turin. Chestnut armchairs are placed at the long oak table that was made in the company's workshop. Axel designed the pergola's hanging pendant lamps using recycled copper.

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The narrowness of the peninsula offers privacy and exceptional views. The infinity pool seems to extend into the Mediterranean. Views of the marina are important to the family's avid sailors.

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Traced to the sixteenth century, the stairs are made with reclaimed stones from Turin; they lead to a belowground wellness area.

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The grotto's discreet entrance is nearly hidden within a rough rock formation. Offering shade and a pleasant respite during intense summer heat, this feature is reminiscent of the grottos found in grand sixteenth-century Italian gardens.

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Detail of the master suite's antique parquet.

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The design concepts integrate a sense of lightness and relaxed sophistication. Above the salon's fireplace is *Umber-Blue*, a painting by Yun Hyong-keun (1975–78). Sofa, coffee table, and chairs are made in the company's workshop. Three Early Dynastic Egyptian vases rest on the table, with its lapis lazuli top and Egyptian rosewood frame.

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The homes are built on different elevations but achieve unity in the property's landscape. Architect Luc Svetchine's new Palladio-inspired villa at right evokes timelessness, while offering open vistas. Preserving the old pine trees and creating a lush, connecting garden were important feats for Jean Mus's landscape design. The new grotto's entrance is at right.

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Detail of Kazuo Shiraga's *Yaeshiki* painting (1991); a prominent artist from Japan's avant-garde Gutai group, Shiraga's works merge oil painting and performance. His foot paintings explore the connection between body, energy, and material.

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Rich, red terrazzo floors embrace the Italian- and Mediterranean-inspired influences. Old doors are a significant feature throughout the home. The origin of the important large, white marble basin is traced to the transition period between the Roman and Byzantine Empires in the fourth century.

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Above a late eighteenth-century French console table is a painting by Jef Verheyen, *T II ◊ V VII à la Bonheur* (1970). Connected to the ZERO group, Verheyen was a Belgian artist who specialized in light and geometry and was a master in expressing color's immateriality.

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The initial home's timeless atmosphere. Discovered during restoration, the eighteenth-century French wood paneling shows traces of original paint in a green hue. The family's collection of books, objects, and vases represents diverse, multicultural interests.