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Christian Louboutin
in his penthouse
in Paris' 1st
arrondissement

THE PASSIONS OF CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN

Step inside his Parisian home, a space bursting with the energy of a life well-travelled

Words RANIA HABIB Photography MARK LUSCOMBE-WHYTE



here were many near iterations to *Christian Louboutin's* Paris apartment, a top floor space near the city's majestic Opéra. A snapshot from *La Bohème*, Puccini's romantic magnum opus — “*Too opera-ish*,” recalls *Louboutin*.

The dreamy Putman painting just outside Louboutin's bedroom door was gifted to him by the famed interior decorator herself. A lava lamp installation is the fulfillment of a childhood memory, when Louboutin used to look into the window of a shop on the Champs Élysées that sold 1970s-inspired lighting accessories. “Every single kid I knew would be glued to this giant installation moving slowly in the window,” recalls Louboutin. “One day I saw a smaller version of it at a Paris flea market, and the

A turn of the 20th century *salle de sport* with a trapeze as a centerpiece — “The ceiling was missing at least a metre to install a proper swing,” he says, wistfully. After searching for a place to call home in the heart of Paris for years, Louboutin's friend and famed furniture dealer Pierre Passebon beckoned the shoe designer to view this top floor space on Rue Volney, in the 1st arrondissement. “It was just an attic with a lot of small rooms,” he says. “I decided right away that I wanted it.” Louboutin finally settled on a theme inspired by the 1944 cult film *Kismet* starring Marlene Dietrich. “A movie set in the 1940s, taking place in Paris—with an Egyptian feeling,” is how he describes his abode.

The fantastical footwear designer has created a space that reflects his many, many passions, which he feeds on his equally countless travels and adventures. The white *mashrabiyyas* from Alexandria that separate the two parts of the apartment (the second is still being built) are the first indication of the bold energy infusing Louboutin's home. From the Andrée Putman painting on the wall to the mesmerising lava installation in the living room, the taxidermy cougar, Demi, crouching over the fretwork closet to the mosaic kitchen floors and the *oeil-de-boeuf* windows peering out onto the zinc roofs of Paris, it's safe to say that nearly every item in Louboutin's home is storied. “I always pick up objects on my travels, and they are always well documented,” he says, explaining that he buys continuously and keeps everything in storage because “everything will come together one day”. “You only regret what you don't get,” he continues.

seller told me he owned the large one. Of course, he wouldn't sell it as he was also fascinated by it in his youth. Years later, he sold it to me when he left Paris and I did not even want to know the price. You don't put a price on the memories of childhood or something you are attached to. I see the same pattern in my line of work — people don't ask about the price of fantasy shoes, they get excited about it. When they are more functional pieces, then price comes into play.”

Louboutin worked with Passebon and his partner, celebrated interior decorator Jacques Grange to find the right place for each of the pieces the designer wanted to have in his home. “Funnily enough, I have no sense of volume,” says Louboutin. “Nor a sense of comfort. I had a lot of objects but no idea how to display them. So Jacques asked me three things: ‘Do you want to host dinners and parties? Do you want to have a guest bedroom? Are you messy?’ To which I answered: ‘Yes. No. And no, I am not messy.’ Pierre turned around and said: ‘You are *super* messy’.”

In the study, the desk is from Galerie Eric Philippe. On top, a prototype of Louboutin's famed 13-inch heel, and a statue of Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra, gifted to him by the late actress

The main space is an open-plan living room where Louboutin has referenced the mahogany red tiles he once saw in the chapel of the National Azulejo Museum in Lisbon, Portugal. "I wanted red, red, red floors — not lipstick red, but the same kind of mahogany I had seen there." The deep red sofas are offset by a number of unique sculptures, such as a Janine Janet bust made of shells. The *oeil-de-boeuf* windows, which the designer is "super in love with", are replicas of windows he saw in an attic above Versailles' Hall of Mirrors, which he worked on with several carpenters before finding the one who would hand-make the exact sinuous oval shapes he wanted.

On a wooden console by the windows, Louboutin has displayed a number of objects including Native American Kachina spirit dolls, pre-Colombian, Peruvian and Amazonian objects, and Mexican, Aztec, Totec and Olmec pieces. Underneath, a majestic taxidermy tiger takes pride of place. "I don't like it when animals live in cages, like birds in a cage," he says. "It makes me sad. So the only way for me to have animals in the city would be to have stuffed, taxidermy ones."

Other Louboutin "obsessions" were the gorgeous carved blue doors from Cairo that lead into the kitchen, where he placed a 17th century mosaic floor from a palace in Damascus. The floor dictated the rest of the colours in the spacious kitchen, where a carved fireplace from Iran flanks a large portrait circa 1580 on one side. The rectangular kitchen table was created from an old dentist's chair, manipulated to hold a bespoke glass top.

In the office-cum-guest room, which Louboutin designed to give guests a short-term pied-à-terre (should they need one — the

designer refers to this apartment as his "HQ", the more private place where he lives and works), a desk from Galerie Eric Philippe serves as a creative launchpad. Books, pens, sketches, pictures, objects and his own design of the striking 13-inch Louboutin heel surround this fertile space.

Louboutin, who owns homes in Paris, Vendée, Portugal, Egypt, Aleppo and California, loves real estate. "A friend once told me 'you and I my dear, we have the same disease — the stone disease'," he laughs. "She loves to buy places and cannot resist; thankfully, I do. But when I visit a place and like it, one of the first things I do is go to the real estate office and imagine that I am going to buy something there."

Each of his homes is different, as the French-Egyptian designer always works with local craftsmen to decorate. "There is always a reason why decor and architecture are strong in a certain country," he explains. "In Rome, they use a lot of travertine because they have many quarries for example. It's often connected to the nature of the place, and if you go against the natural flow, it can look nice but sometimes it just doesn't work."

He has noticed that, with time, he has centered his real estate purchases around the Mediterranean, with the hopes of one day retiring from his wildly successful shoe business to travel around the region by caravan, stopping in each of his homes along the way. "To be a bit like a gypsy," he says. "I learned four years ago that my real father was Egyptian, and I have, in any case, always had something for the Middle East. That's why, if I were to make another purchase, I would not buy very far."

Every item in Louboutin's home is storied. "I always pick up objects on my travels"

The central coffee table from the 1960s by Maison Jansen is flanked by red sofas, which are decorated with Vincent Darré cushions. On the wall, an Italian 1970s lamp in Inox. On the Brazilian side table from the 1960s, a lamp made of wood beads from Galerie Réfractaire in Paris



In Christian Louboutin's **bedroom**, an Indo-Portuguese bed frame is surrounded with artefacts and objects collected on his many travels around the world, including a ceremonial Hopi mask and a tall Kachina statue









*In the **bathroom**, Louboutin chose a distinctive stone, Marble Cifonelli. Its placement ensures the beautiful markings remain a focal point. Opposite: In the **bedroom**, the artwork is by Congolese artist Chéri Samba. On the dresser, some Kachina masks, a pre-Colombian terracotta pot and a lamp-bird by François-Xavier Lalanne. In the foreground, an Egyptomania 19th century English style chair*

*Louboutin enlisted the help of Pierre Passebon
and celebrated decorator Jacques Grange*



In the kitchen, the fireplace was imported from Iran, and the painting on the right is circa 1580 by Spanish artist Alonso Sánchez Coello. Opposite: Striking blue carved doors to the kitchen were sourced from Cairo, while the floor tiles are from Damascus. The table was created from an old dentist's chair, which now holds a bespoke glass top

The gorgeous carved blue doors from Cairo were one of the designer's "obsessions"

