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LIMITED EDITION COVER
BY CAETANO PESCE

Smart Art

THIS PICTURE, THE DINING ROOM OF THE CONVERTED FARMHOUSE HAS HAD ITS FOUR WALLS FRESCOED BY ARGENTINIAN PAINTER GUILLERMO KUITCA

OPPOSITE, THE SITTING ROOM FEATURES A FILM AND CHANDELIER BY SWISS ARTIST PIPILOTTI RIST. THE LATTER WAS MADE USING PIECES OF GLASS UNEARTHED BY THE WIRTHS' 15-YEAR-OLD SON IN A NEARBY FOREST



The Swiss gallerists Manuela and Iwan Wirth and Ursula Hauser have form when it comes to taking on unusual buildings for conversion into gallery spaces. They started out in the historic Löwenbräu Brewery in Zurich in 1996, and have since expanded into several more distinctive spaces, including a 1922 Lutyens-designed bank in London and the former Roxy roller disco rink in New York. But even by their standards, a farm dating back to 1760 is an adventurous choice.

Nonetheless, three years ago they acquired 100 acres and a set of Grade II-listed buildings (including a farmhouse, stables, piggery, cowshed and barns) at Durslade Farm, just outside the town of Bruton in Somerset, which had been unoccupied for 30 years. In September, the first part of the project – the conversion of the farmhouse into a guest house – reached completion. While the other buildings will house galleries and a restaurant, the farmhouse will be used by invited guests and passing artists. (And if

an international gallery landing in the middle of the rolling English countryside sounds truly ridiculous, it might help to learn that the area also happens to be home to a handful of significant and well-funded art lovers, from Phoebe Philo to Cameron Macintosh.)

'It was completely abandoned when I first came here three years ago,' says the 44-year-old Argentinian architect Luis Laplace, who was charged with the internal rehabilitation of the farmhouse. 'But I didn't want to impose anything. I wanted to listen to it, and see what it told me. I believe strongly in responding to a context, and anyway, I'd hate to find a formula. I'd get bored.'

Laplace, who has run a practice in Paris for ten years, has just completed two spectacularly different projects: an apartment filled with pumped-up colour and African fabrics for artist Cindy Sherman in his adopted city; and a sharply modern, all-white villa for a wealthy client in Ibiza, where the natural landscape is so dazzling they decided

it would eclipse even the owners' most exuberant artworks. But the Bruton house spoke a different language. As the remnants of years of human occupation and subsequent decay were removed, internal windows, layers of old wallpaper and paint, gaping ancient fireplaces and even the occasional peephole were revealed. Laplace has kept them all, interweaving original pieces with locally sourced vintage furniture, contemporary art from Hauser & Wirth's bulging inventory, and found portraits from Somerset's antique stores. An attic bedroom, with a damaged 1970s door plaque featuring a kitten and the words 'Jackie's room', is now hung with five Martin Creed highlighter pen-on-paper pieces. (Jackie, now aged 35, lives nearby with her musician husband.) Another bedroom with a dense, blue-painted ceiling has one wall partially papered in Paul McCarthy's Chocolate Butt Plug design.

The bathrooms, with their dark tiling and coloured baths and washbasins, wouldn't »

A photograph of a room with a wall covered in hanging glass bottles and a window with a red view. The room features a blue armchair, a wooden table with books, and a patterned rug.

Fertile ground

A dilapidated farmhouse in Somerset has been transformed by gallerists Hauser & Wirth into a remarkable rural retreat

Smart Art



LEFT, IN THE SITTING ROOM, STANDING, FROM LEFT, ARCHITECT LUIS LAPLACE AND ARTIST GUILLERMO KUITCA; SITTING, FROM LEFT, HAUSER & WIRTH SOMERSET DIRECTOR ALICE WORKMAN, RESTAURATEUR CATHERINE BUTLER AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT PIET OUDOLF; ON FLOOR, ARTIST PIPILOTTI RIST

BELOW, WORK IN PROGRESS AT DURSLADE FARMHOUSE, WHICH DATES FROM 1760



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‘We did go for the unloved pieces, but I think there’s beauty in ugliness’

look out of place in a rundown American motel. ‘We did go for the unloved pieces when we went to the reclamation warehouses,’ he says, ‘but I think there’s beauty in ugliness.’

The house is not deliberately ironic, and neither is Laplace playing with the contrivance of shabby chic, but he has taken many of the conventions of decoration and subverted them with glee. At times it has an almost sinister edge, too. Added to over the years, it has a chaotic plan; bathrooms can be strange slivers carved uncomfortably out of large bedrooms; doors come in a bewildering variety of heights. And the art – photos of growling bears by Roni Horn and smudgy-eyed faces by Ida Applebroog – can be challenging. ‘I wanted to make people think. We’re so comfortable with the minimal,’ says Laplace. ‘Also, today’s architects are often accused of being afraid of colour.’ His rejoinder has been to paint the entrance hall and stairs in a brilliant red gloss.

Among all these off-kilter details, though, the beds are comfortable; the linen curtains and new upholstery are from Du Long et Du Lé; and the hand-woven carpets are by the classy German company Kinnasand.

Bespoke art pieces have been skilfully incorporated into the design. In the sitting room, a film and chandelier by Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist occupies one corner. Rist, who more frequently makes chandeliers out of underpants, has here employed pieces of glass retrieved from a 300-year-old dump recently unearthed by the Wirths’ 15-year-old son and

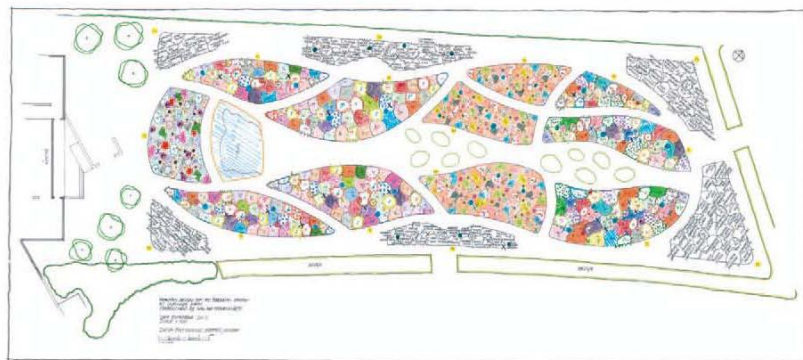
his metal detector in a nearby forest. These create shadows against a 14-minute projection in which a young local farmer lovingly caresses flowers and stones. ‘He was incredible and innocent,’ says Rist. ‘He knew exactly how much pressure you could apply to a plant without crushing it.’ The combination of film and dancing shadow creates what the artist describes as ‘a negative hallucination. I was thinking of when you need a place to rest in the evening, and a feeling of lightness. We fight gravity all day – this is anti-gravity.’

While Rist, in her tartan dress, sought inspiration in Somerset’s fields, Argentinean painter Guillermo Kuitca brought his ideas fully formed from his Buenos Aires studio where he had been experimenting with corners and volumes. He has painted all four walls of the dining room in a continuous cubist/futurist design that creates one single plane. ‘If you’ve been working within a canvas all your life, this is so liberating,’ says Kuitca, looking at the newly minted work. ‘It took four weeks of ten-hour days. When I was working up high on the scaffolding, I couldn’t step back to assess the work. I was saying to myself, this might be horrible.’ Far from it, the painting has enormous movement and depth, and creates a modernist oasis in the slightly unnerving house. ‘When the room was finished the space felt quite austere – quiet and religious,’ says Kuitca. ‘Now I can’t help seeing the dining table as an altar.’

Laplace has spent much of his design life creating interiors to deftly accommodate art.

But here the incorporation of work was more organic by far. ‘Pipilotti’s work is filled with saturated tones and that inspired a lot of the colour I used in the house,’ he says. ‘But as many came from Piet Oudolf’s landscapes.’ The feted Dutchman, known for his naturalistic planting, is creating a 1.5 acre garden at Durslade which, he says, ‘will incorporate conceptual ideas: a meadow and wetland area around a pond and a series of tall perennials to create a boundary. But I’ve been looking at Pipilotti’s film. She’s worked a lot with plants; she cares about what they do to your senses. I’m interested in their individual characters and how colour creates mood and emotion.’ At Durslade, all these considerations can artfully collide.

Meanwhile, work continues all over the site. Laplace is creating new gallery buildings, as well as turning the cowsheds into a restaurant. This will be run by Catherine Butler and Ahmed Sidki, proprietors of the At the Chapel restaurant in Bruton, alongside Björn Roth, son of the famous Swiss artist Dieter. ‘Björn hunts in Iceland where he lives, and builds grills to cook in the middle of the tundra,’ says Butler, whose existing restaurant serves local game, fish and salads. More than that, ‘he grew up in restaurants, and he knows that a restaurant should be everyone’s third space,’ she says. Indeed, Durslade in its entirety looks set, by its completion in 2014, to become a third space for the whole of Bruton and beyond. ★ www.hauserwirthsomerset.com



TOP LEFT, *LONELINESS*, 2007, BY ANDY HOPE 1930, CONTRASTS WITH A TOILE WALLPAPER BY SANDERSON IN ONE OF THE GUEST ROOMS

TOP RIGHT, A RONI HORN PHOTOGRAPH HANGS ABOVE ONE OF THE BEDS LEFT, A STILL LIFE OF LOCAL PRODUCE IN THE KITCHEN

ABOVE, A SKETCH OF THE MEADOW GARDEN DESIGN BY CELEBRATED DUTCH LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT PIET OUDOLF