

Sandra Benhamou's expert advice for creating a home with atmosphere

This Parisian designer is the queen of subtlety, embracing muted colours and contrasts inspired by fine art and cinema

BY AMY BRADFORD PUBLISHED: 06 JANUARY 2026



Gaëlle Le Boulicaut

Interior designer Sandra Benhamou is a cosmopolitan figure: of Italian-Tunisian heritage, she lived in the USA for many years, but is now based in Paris, where she founded her eponymous studio in 2010.

Although she was a collector of design and art from a young age, she attended the prestigious ESSEC Business School in Paris, then did a masters in audiovisual law, after which she spent a decade working in the film industry. Her path as a designer has been entirely self-taught: her first project was her own home in the Hamptons, which led to commissions from friends.



Cyrille George-Jerusalimi

While her business training has made her 'structured and professional', her route into the industry has also made her 'very intuitive' in the way she works. 'I have no codes, no rules,' she explains.

What's everyone reading?



Nicola Harding's Rules Will Help You Design A Beautiful Powder Room



It's Official: These Are The Best Homes Of 2025 According To You



The 10 Trends That Defined Interiors In 2025

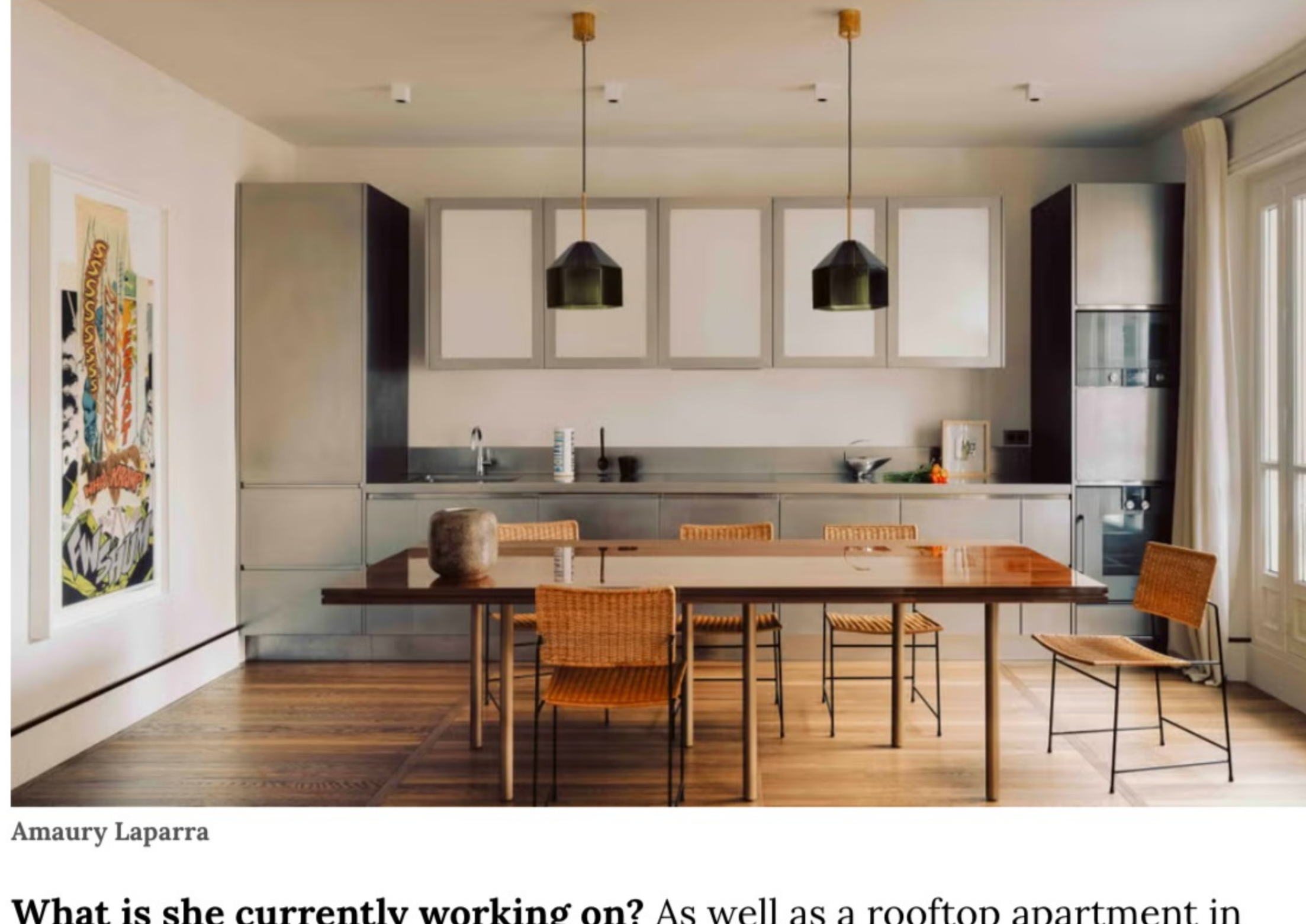
'My work is all about maintaining a delicate balance between influences and styles, as well as between masculinity and femininity, strength and fragility, vintage and contemporary, discretion and assertion.' Her deep love of 1930s avant-garde art and modernist designers such as Jean-Michel Frank, Carlo Scarpa and Gabriella Crespi can be felt in her interiors, as can her passion for cinema – her own furniture collections have been inspired by Hong Kong film director Wong Kar-wai (as shown in a recent exhibition at The Invisible Collection in London) and American artist Donald Judd.



Gaëlle Le Boulicaut

What are her recent projects? In Normandy, Benhamou has renovated a small traditional home that once housed a cider press. Like many of her projects, it features natural materials, which, she says, 'bring vibration and texture to a space; a sense of grounded reality'. In this case, she used a mix of stone floors, limewashed walls, reclaimed wood, linen and terracotta, with her own wool, silk and alpaca 'Tellus Mater' rug for Edition 1.6.9. 'We made a radically simple home in muted tones,' she says. 'A gentle warmth comes through in the attention to detail; it does not seek to be noticed.'

In complete contrast is a flat on the top floor of a 1930s building in central Paris for a writer and art collector. Having chosen a handful of artworks with the client, including a Klimt portrait and images of an Olivetti showroom designed by Carlo Scarpa, Benhamou then added 'strongly present' designs by Gio Ponti and Gaetano Pesce. 'We totally restructured the spaces, creating a world that is compact and warm, open and protective,' she adds.



Amaury Laparra

What is she currently working on? As well as a rooftop apartment in Milan with a swimming pool and a New York residence, Benhamou is designing interiors for two new-build homes, which is a fresh departure for her. One is a big family home in Paris, and the other is a beach house in the south of France. 'I'm loving it because they are blank pages: we can work more on the proportions and actually create space,' she says. 'Plus, it's a challenge to give soul to something new.'



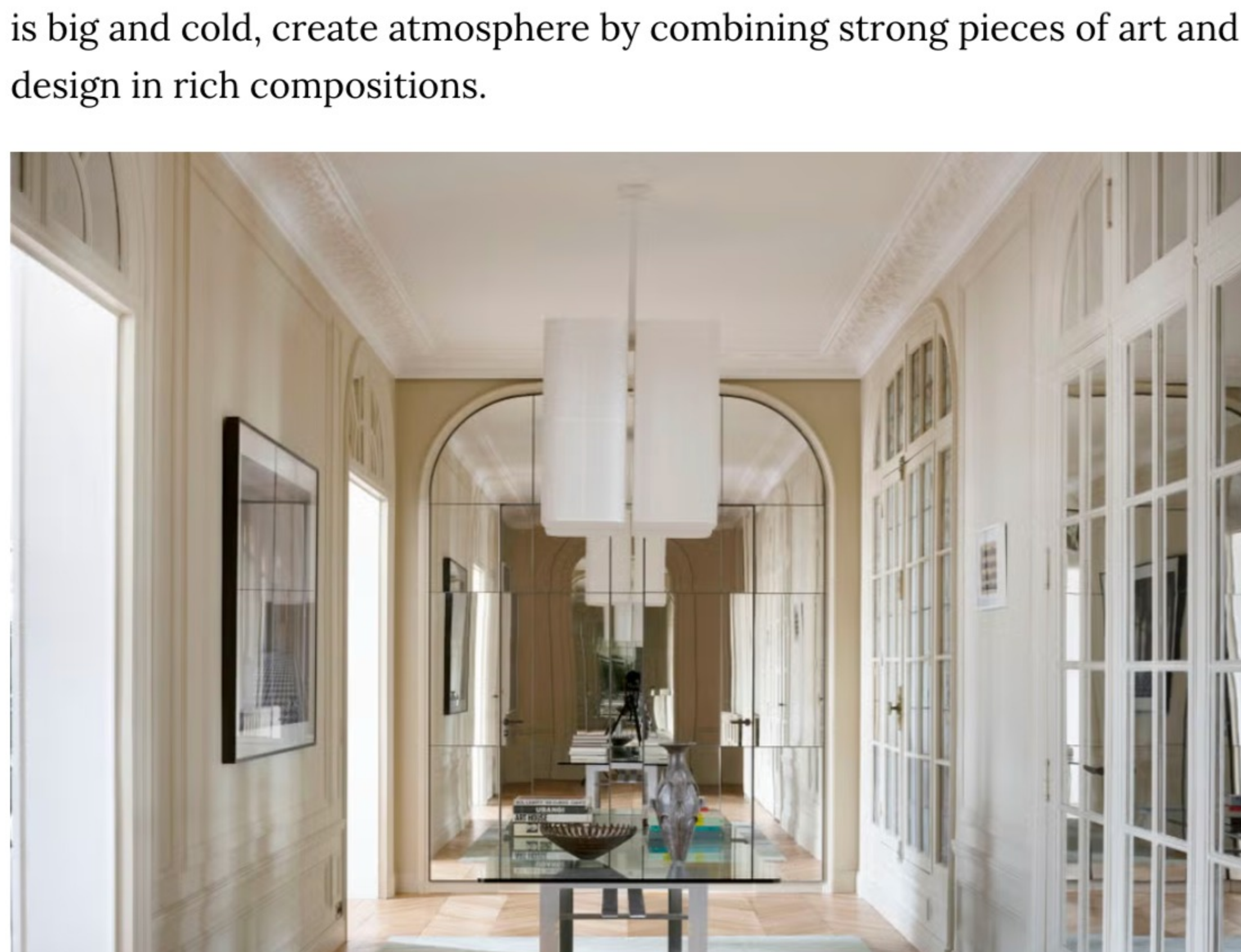
Ariadna Bufi & Bianca Bufi

She says: 'There is no recipe or preconceived idea in my projects. I work with the place, its history, my intuition. My work is similar to painting: I draw the main lines, and then the concept progresses from there, touch by touch.' sandrabenhamou.com

Expert advice

Sandra Benhamou on how to create a Parisian atmosphere in any interior

The first thing to do is to understand your space. Is the ceiling high? How do the different zones communicate? Sometimes you can accentuate a difficulty to make it interesting. For example, if your living room sits directly next to the kitchen, playing with the doors. Or, if a room is big and cold, create atmosphere by combining strong pieces of art and design in rich compositions.



Ambroise Tézénas

Cultivate indirect and diffused light. I worked that aspect a lot in a north-facing Parisian flat – it made the place more protective, intimate, almost secret. I love to use metal and mirrors to play with light and give depth to small spaces, such as dressing rooms. They can create 'traps' for the eye, drawing it towards doors, fireplaces and other features.

Curate displays of objects: create a dialogue, invent a story, mix masterpieces and more anecdotal objects. Above all, don't be too reverent. Follow your intuition – knowing, of course, that intuition has to be constantly nourished and enriched.



Amaury Laparra

Colours bring texture, reflection and relief. I always prefer subtle nuances and avoid garish shades, so there is room for objects. Colour choices are also linked to light – more and more I like to play with chiaroscuro, using different tones of one colour.