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PATRON SAINT

ANTHONY VACCARELLO ON 10 YEARS AT YSL

PLUS 20 COOL CABINS, SUPER-AUCTIONEER PHYLLIS KAO TALKS TASTE, FIVE GREAT ALT-CHAMPAGNES, NIKOLAJ COSTER-WALDAU'S COPENHAGEN



The kitchen of Sandra Benhamou's cider barn has lime-coated walls, old oak beams and an aged-stone floor, with vintage table, chairs and pendant lights. Opposite: the landscape was designed by Jean-Luc Bonnet



In Deauville, interior designer Sandra Benhamou has spent 15 years finessing her dream renovation. The latest addition? A cider barn turned sanctuary.
By Alice Cavanagh

Photography by DePasquale + Maffini

A Norman CONQUEST



“I LOVE TELLING A STORY AND CREATING A WHOLE SCENOGRAPHY”

Sandra Benhamou first began looking for a holiday home for her young family in the French seaside village of Deauville 15 years ago. She visited several properties, but nothing quite appealed. Then the estate agent decided to show her the wild card: a 1920s half-timbered, Anglo-Norman manor house with a dilapidated cider barn attached. “We were looking for something much smaller,” says Benhamou, “but it was a *coup de coeur*.”

Scarcely touched since the 1950s, the home is in nearby Tourgéville – along a single-lane road that winds up the hill behind the Hippodrome de Deauville-La Touques – and was a dream renovation.

The property was designed by Charles Adda, the architect behind the art deco baths and cabins that line Deauville’s iconic Les Planches de Deauville, and is surrounded by picturesque farmlands with a rare view that stretches from the English Channel all the way to Le Havre. Benhamou immediately set about restoring the two-storey building to its art deco splendour. She redesigned the fireplace in the spare style of French modernist architect Pierre Chareau and sourced period pieces by Jacques Adnet. A glass conservatory was installed next to the kitchen, while outside she added a pétanque court and a pool.

The home encapsulates her signature aesthetic: an ultra-feminine balance of contrasting styles and eras, which is also at the heart of her interior-design practice. She has worked on hotels such as the Castelbrac Hotel in Dinard and Hotel Belloy in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, as well as private homes.



The barn’s master bedroom with original wooden door and uprights. Opposite, top: the Anglo-Norman manor was designed by the French architect Charles Adda. Far left: a vintage copper bathtub in the master bathroom, finished in polished concrete. Left: Benhamou by the stairs she designed in the barn’s main entry



The barn's lounge with its Tellus Mater rug by Sandra Benhamou for Edition 1.6.9. Below: the sculptural staircase. Opposite: the gardens feature Ugo Rondinone's sculpture *The Capable*, 2021

Benhamou, now in her early 50s, is of Italian-Tunisian descent. She was raised in Paris and went on to attend business school but her career started in cinema. In the late '90s, she moved to New York for a role in marketing and international distribution at Miramax. "It was terror management, like the film *Swimming with Sharks*," she says of working for the Weinstein brothers, then at the height of their power. Pregnancy offered an exit strategy: she focused on renovating the home she had recently acquired in the Hamptons with her husband, Michael. She filled it with their nascent collection of New York artists – from Raymond Pettibon and Richard Prince to Cindy Sherman and Nan Goldin, "when they were still affordable" – and added cinematic touches. Her experience in the film industry has always influenced her work. Her first foray into furniture, *The Ginger Collection*, featured velvet chairs and a mirrored table in homage to Sharon Stone's character in Martin Scorsese's *Casino*. Last year, she presented a show for *The Invisible Collection* in London inspired by Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love*. "I love telling a story and creating a whole scenography," she says.

The same narrative approach has been applied to the cider barn, which she has now converted into a three-bedroom guesthouse more than a decade after first arriving on the Tourgéville plot. Here, she also turned to films for inspiration; *The Straight Story* by David Lynch – a quiet portrait of rural life – and *The Bridges of Madison County* by Clint Eastwood informed the serene sanctuary she has created, in a landscape designed by

Jean-Luc Bonnet that is lush with jasmine, roses and hydrangeas throughout the summer months.

The renovation began with an emergency restoration of the steeply pitched thatched roof. The loft was also reinforced to create a second floor, featuring two bedrooms, reached by a sculptural staircase with a plaster-finished balustrade. Local materials and traditional craft techniques pay tribute to the building's agricultural legacy, from the cool stone floors and lime-washed walls to the furnishings in natural fibres such as linen and wool.

The stripped-back interiors, with their nearly bare walls and muted colour palette, represent a clear design departure. "I couldn't make it sophisticated and bourgeois; it's a countryside refuge," she says. With her three children now grown up, the space also captures a new chapter in her life. "The idea of an empty nest literally, and unconsciously, exists in that project. I wanted to come back to something essential, spiritual even. I felt the need for inner peace."

The open-plan kitchen and living area revolves around two sofas next to each other to form an enormous L-shape. The furnishings are minimal but deliberate. Tribal art pieces from Paris gallery Lucas Rattou are displayed on an antique sideboard. A tea set created by ceramicist Sam Bakewell for Loewe sits on the coffee table. Beneath it lies one of Benhamou's Tellus Mater rugs, a collaboration with French design brand Edition 1.6.9 whose handwoven patchwork of wool, linen, merino, hemp, natural silk and bamboo fibres evokes topographical landscapes.

"It's inspired by my travels; it could be the Negev desert, or it could be Normandy," she says. Whether she's working on a rug or a calming scheme for an old barn, her creative process is the same. "In the end, my work is close to painting; I draw the main lines and then add to it, brush by brush." ■HTSI

