

Building a new state-of-the-art, four-storey house in the centre of Paris is surely an impossible task? Not so, it seems. Hélène and Laurent Chapuis have done just that and created a contemporary family home in the city on a plot that used to be a car-parking space

# Paris match

Words **Trish Lorenz** Photography **Chris Tubbs**

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**picture** Much of the culture and storage in house is bespoke. The enormous fireplace on the first floor was designed by the architect and divides the sitting area from the kitchen



You might think the hardest part of creating your own grand design lies in the detail of the project: the bricks and mortar, the contractors, the construction. But sometimes it's the first step that's the most challenging. This was the case for H el ene and Laurent Chapuis. The couple wanted to build a home in Paris, with the sky-high property prices and land-shortages that London faces, and spent more than 10 years fruitlessly scouring the city for a plot. The city famous for its apartment living, and off-houses are rare, with plots to build them usually impossible to find. They'd almost given up hope and had started searching in the countryside outside Paris when, in mid-2004, Laurent found a rare corner plot advertised for sale on the internet; it was too small to interest developers but perfect for a family home. 'The land had belonged to the same family for a long time. The guy who owned it used a parking space but after he died his widow

wanted to sell. I rushed round, took one look and bought it immediately', says Laurent.

Today, almost six years later, a stunning contemporary house stands on the former parking lot in Paris' 20th arrondissement to the east of the city. A box of wood, glass and steel, its design at ground level is contextual (though its arrival has provoked enough excitement that strangers are forever knocking at the door asking for a tour), with a stone exterior that blends and complements the neighbouring millstone facades of the small cottages. But look up, and a vast glazed wall reflects the greenery of the trees opposite and what looks like a sail on the roof seems to move this apparition through the densely packed streets of Paris.

The design is the brainchild of Argentinean born, Paris-based architect Pablo Katz, who H el ene and Laurent employed to help them realise their vision. The couple knew from the off that they wanted to work with Pablo. 'We read\_\_



'I WOULD SAY LIGHT IS THE KEY MATERIAL WE USED IN THE HOUSE'

**this picture and left** The minimalist kitchen is by Siematic, the table is Cappellini and the Hi Pad chairs by Jasper Morrison for Cappellini

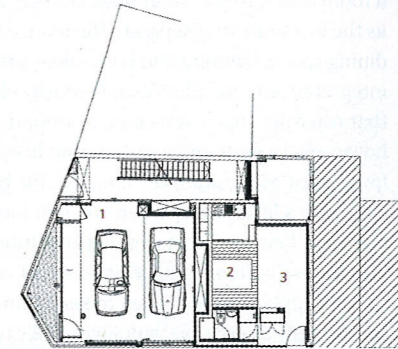
of magazines while we were planning this project and they featured quite a few of Pablo's designs. We really like them. Once we had the house we asked him to work on the design; we didn't look at any other architects,' says Laurent. Hélène and Laurent briefed Pablo to create a temporary home with a timeless approach. The house we pictured had to be in tune with its location but not at the mercy of fashion,' says Hélène. Pablo's response was to create a vast open-plan living area, with the functional materials and structural elements (such as the steel supports) all fully exposed. This is architecture stripped bare. Each element is a fundamental part of the whole; a minimalist style that is typical of Pablo's approach. The materials of the house are really important to the aesthetic. The structure and how it is used, the concrete, steel, wood glass, it's all on show,' says Laurent. Beautiful, quirky details in the house, such as small imperfections in the smooth, brushed concrete, from when the panels were cast from moulds, chime well next to the precise junction of the steel and glass. Wood, used to clad the exterior and throughout the interior for flooring, adds real warmth. Spread over four floors, the house pays homage to open-plan living, with a focus on light and space. Even the ground-floor garage is open to the rest of the house, accessible from the entrance hall through huge glass doors, with space to kick off your shoes. 'I always liked the concept of having the car visible within the house,' says Laurent. 'We made the garage just like all the other rooms, with the same finish as the rest. It's basically park the car inside the house.' To walk upstairs to the main floor and you find yourself in the living, dining and kitchen area. The leather, wood and lacquered furniture contrast with steel and glass, and light floods in through vast windows on two sides. Glass plays a key role in the design and the house is filled with light, though direct sunlight is softened by the clever use of an opaque rain-screen cladding commonly used for office buildings. Pablo created a striking facade by alternating stripes of clear glass, which has the dual effect of lending privacy to this key living space – it's the modernist's equivalent to net curtains, just far more elegant. 'The house is very open. There are lots of windows, lots of views and there's lots of light. I would say light is the key material we used in the house,' says Laurent. Much of the furniture and in particular the rug is bespoke. An integral part of Pablo's design, it forms part of the architecture. Pablo designed the incredible fireplace that acts as



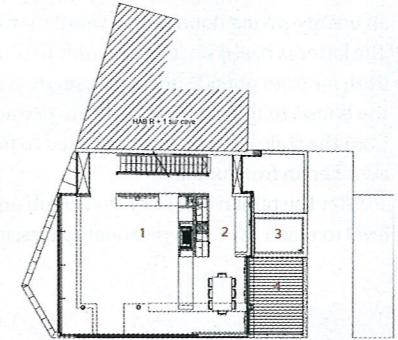
Among the personal rooms on the second floor is a mezzanine space to the double-height lounge below, comprising a library and reading area. The stainless-steel radiator at floor level was specially made for the space and was so long that it had to be tested in a swimming pool. The chair is by Mendini for Cappellini and the bookcases were designed by the architect



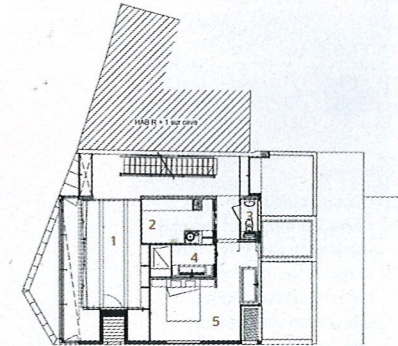
**GROUND FLOOR**



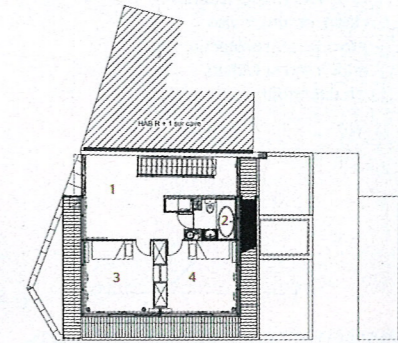
**FIRST FLOOR**



**SECOND FLOOR**



**THIRD FLOOR**



<b>ground floor</b>	3 garden	4 bathroom
1 garage	4 terrace	5 bedroom
2 bedroom		
3 entrance hall	<b>second floor</b>	<b>third floor</b>
	1 library	1 playroom
<b>first floor</b>	2 dressing	2 bathroom
1 living room	room	3 bedroom
2 kitchen-diner	3 wc	4 bedroom

divide to the minimalist kitchen, as well as low units that separate the lounge from the space. Lighting and technology are fully integrated and include AV and security elements from touch-screen pads around the house plus a door entry system that uses fingerprint recognition technology. 'The house feels a little empty when you first look at it, but it's because most elements are integrated into the walls, floors and ceilings,' says Laurent. The couple were also keen to keep things as simple as possible, employing fully recyclable materials, including wooden insulation. Alongside the panels, there's a water-recycling system and an energy-saving double-flow ventilation system. The water is based on a central unit that takes in air from outside and exhausts stale air from the house. In the winter it is able to extract heat from the stale air, which is then used to heat fresh air in from outside.

From the public first floor, you climb one more level to reach the more personal spaces, including

the main bedroom and dressing room. White floors, white walls and white leather furniture keep the space feeling calm. 'The bedroom has a very Zen atmosphere,' says Laurent. Deliberately it's not huge, big enough for sleeping and relaxing in, but allowing space for a library and reading space on the same floor – a sort of mezzanine to the double-height lounge below. In the centre of the all-white bedroom sits a wet room, but the focal point is the stand-alone bath, perfect for watching films projected on to a wall opposite the bed, or for H el ene to lounge in the tub while chatting to Laurent, or just staring out of the window over the Paris rooftops.

The third floor is currently the domain of the couple's two-year-old daughter, with a playroom, bedrooms and bathroom. Here, there are windows on all sides with wide views compounding the sense of light and space.

Above, on the roof, is the 50sqm garden, complete with a luxurious all-singing, all-dancing Jacuzzi, a barbecue and a large sail-like canopy



**Picture** Open-plan living continues in the main bedroom, which features a bed from the Kennedy collection at Poltrona Frau and an open-plan bath with bleached oak wood cladding, from Duravit's Elysium floor range. Exterior lighting, which also provides sun protection, is of interest with its circular motif



On the third-floor top landing, the classic Sixties Adalto Ball chair by Eero Aarnio provides a curvy, organic form in a home dominated by clean lines



**above left** Laurent worked very closely with the architect to create the contemporary style of the house **above right** The architect designed the bespoke stairs in tune with the functional, almost industrial, aesthetic **below** The exterior is virtually all glass, framed by wood, with a stone facade on the ground floor that blends with the neighbouring millstone cottages



that opens and closes automatically responding to the weather. 'We often close it at night, too. It reflects the lights from the city below it and lights up the whole garden,' says Laurent.

While the design of the house is spare, some would say clinical, the house is a surprisingly warm and effortless space to be in. It exudes a sense of calm and order that, says Laurent, works perfectly for them. 'It looks quite minimalist or modernist, but there's a lot of emotion in the house, the whole space has surprises and brings out different feelings,' he says. 'It's actually a very comfortable house to live in and it works exactly

as we need it to. There really isn't anything that I would do differently, we made the house exactly the way we wanted it.'

Getting the project right, says Laurent, was really down to one thing – they took plenty of time to make the right decisions early on in the proceedings. 'We spent a whole year in the planning and design and then two-and-a-half years actually building it. It was a long time and we were impatient to move in, but we always preferred to take time to make the right choices rather than rush the process,' he says. You really need to give time to the process, it pays off in the end.★

## Suppliers

- > **Architect** (also designed staircase, storage and fireplace) Pablo Katz ([pablokatz-architecture.com](http://pablokatz-architecture.com))
- > **Glazing** Interpane (+49 5273 8090; [interpane.com](http://interpane.com))
- > **Wood cladding** Prodema (+49 3496 415 334; [prodema.de](http://prodema.de))
- > **Roof terrace awning sail** SunSquare ([sunsquare.com](http://sunsquare.com))
- > **Oak flooring** Marty ([parquets-marty.fr](http://parquets-marty.fr))
- > **Lighting** Deltalight (0870 757 7087; [deltalight.com](http://deltalight.com))
- > **Fortuny Moda lamp** (as seen on front cover) by Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo for Pallucco at Made in Design (020 7692 4001; [madeindesign.co.uk](http://madeindesign.co.uk))
- > **Fireplace technology** Stuv (+32 081 432 327; [stuv.com](http://stuv.com))
- > **Kitchen** Siematic (0844 335 6595; [siematic.com](http://siematic.com))
- > **Dining table** Cappellini ([cappellini.it](http://cappellini.it))
- > **Hi Pad dining chairs** Jasper Morrison for Cappellini ([cappellini.it](http://cappellini.it))
- > **Armchair** Patrick Norguet for Cappellini ([cappellini.it](http://cappellini.it))
- > **Rugs** Toulemond Bochart (+33 169 204 030; [toulemondebochart.fr](http://toulemondebochart.fr))
- > **Leather sofas, armchairs, pouffe and bed** Kennedy series by Jean-Marie Massaud for Poltrona Frau (020 7014 5980; [poltronafrau.com](http://poltronafrau.com))
- > **Projector in bedroom** LG (0844 847 5454; [lge.com/uk](http://lge.com/uk))
- > **Painted chair** Mendini for Cappellini ([cappellini.it](http://cappellini.it))
- > **Stainless-steel radiator** Carisa at Worldstyle Design (+33 140 269 269; [anatomique.com.fr](http://anatomique.com.fr))
- > **Eero Aarnio Adello Ball chair** Nest (0114 243 3000; [nest.co.uk](http://nest.co.uk))
- > **Bathrooms** Duravit (0845 500 7787; [duravit.co.uk](http://duravit.co.uk))
- > **Home automation** ABB (01925 741 111; [abb.co.uk](http://abb.co.uk))
- > **Audio video system** Russound ([russound.com](http://russound.com))
- > **Security system and fingerprint door entry system** Bitron Video (01371 871 585; [bitronvideogroup.co.uk](http://bitronvideogroup.co.uk))