

towards an

Aline Asmar d'Amman, the mastermind behind the Hôtel de Crillon lavish new interiors, shares her inspirations for a successful and emotionally enriching design. Rebecca Anne Proctor visits the architect and designer in Paris

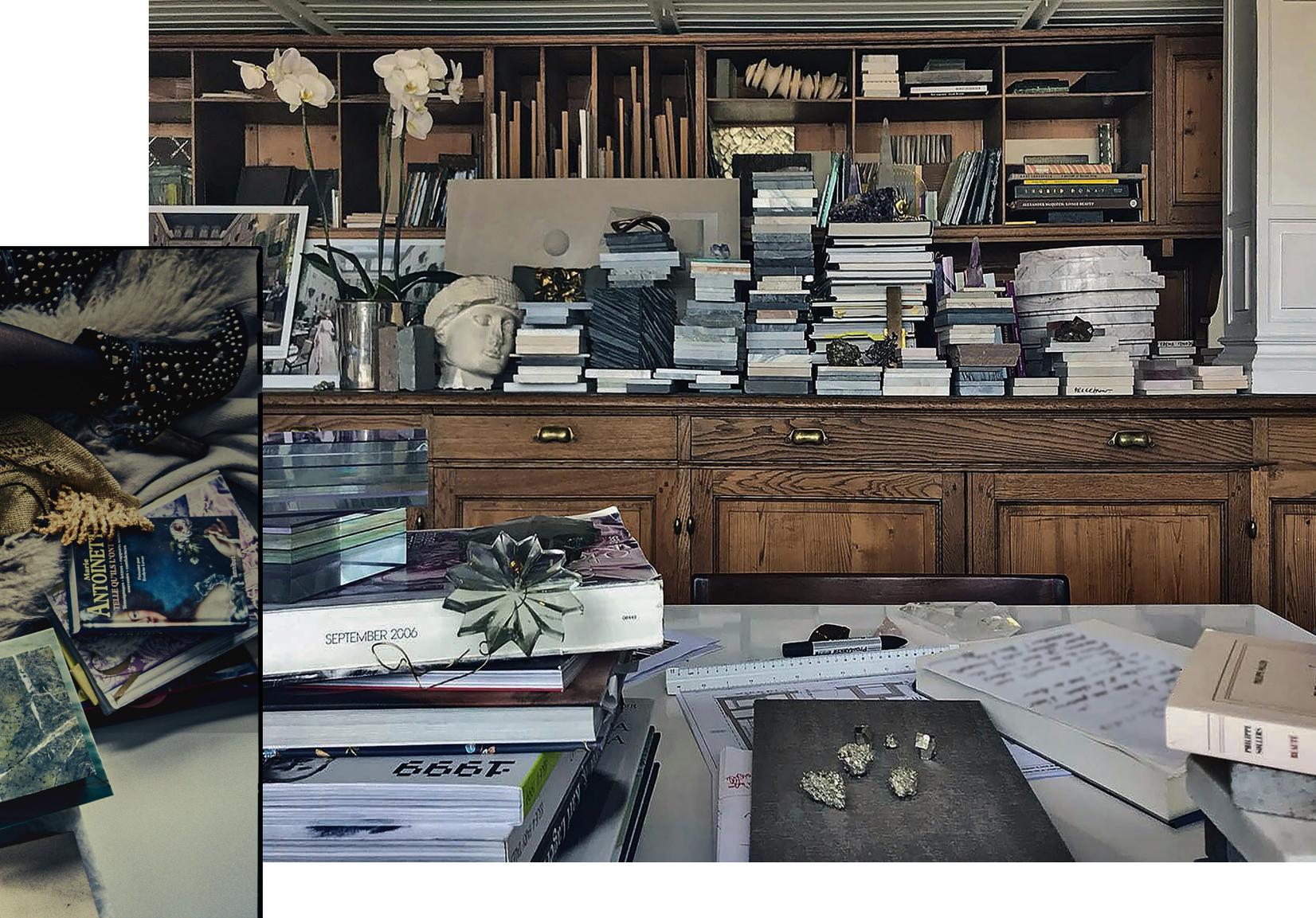


emotional ARCHITECTURE

In the midst of Paris Couture Week, a quick stop at Culture in Architecture on 114 Boulevard Saint-Germain provides a welcome respite from the fashion frenzy outside. Founder Aline Asmar d'Amman greets visitors with an exuberant welcome. Her staff scurries about enthusiastically amidst a clutter of architectural maquettes, art and fashion magazines, and vibrant Middle Eastern contemporary art, such as a painting by Bahraini Hala Al Khalifa that hangs in the reception area. Stones, marbles and crystals proliferate Aline's atelier offering a glow of positive energy – energy which she believes is pivotal to the creative process. “I start every project with a stone – a reference to fashion and a story,” says Aline. “This is also why I called my company Culture in Architecture.” D'Amman's bubbly and vivacious personality stems from her love of culture, architecture and emotion – the three pillars that serve as her creative foundation. “I believe these

This image and facing page, top right: At Culture in Architecture various materials and books define the spirit of d'Amman's practice; Above: Aline Asmar d'Amman





are the pillars of our life.”

Aline was little known outside of France until 2011 when the Saudi owner of Paris’s acclaimed Hôtel de Crillon took her on as artistic director for the renovation of the revered 1753 building overlooking the Place de la Concorde. Born in Beirut, she grew up in Lebanon in the 1980s and early 90s, in the midst of the country’s ongoing conflicts. Graduating from A.L.B.A, her final studies project was awarded both the prizes of the Ministry of Culture and the Order of Architects and Engineers of Beirut. It wasn’t until receiving such recognition that she decided to leave Lebanon for Paris where she had the opportunity to collaborate with architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte, among others.

“Everything I do must have a meaning – my design always has a narrative,” she shares passionately. She points to a private palace in Riyadh that is under construction that pays tribute to Zaha Hadid. “I believe in the strong women of today and importantly, the strong women of the Middle East.” Aline feels particularly close to Bahrain, a country she’s been visiting since 2006 after she was invited to give a conference by the French Embassy, and where she met with Sheikha Mai. “She is one of my founding encounters in life, an incredible woman who defends culture, art, design and life in the Middle East,” says Aline. “She’s a constant source of inspiration.” The two developed a friendship whereby they regularly shared with each other their ideas on culture and art.

Aline’s passionate love for art and design was also what spurred her serendipitous collaboration with Karl Lagerfeld on the most exceptional suites of the Hôtel de Crillon. The

The Suite Jardin at the Hôtel de Crillon opens onto the terrace de l’Orangerie, a modern reinterpretation of Marie Antoinette’s love for nature and poetry

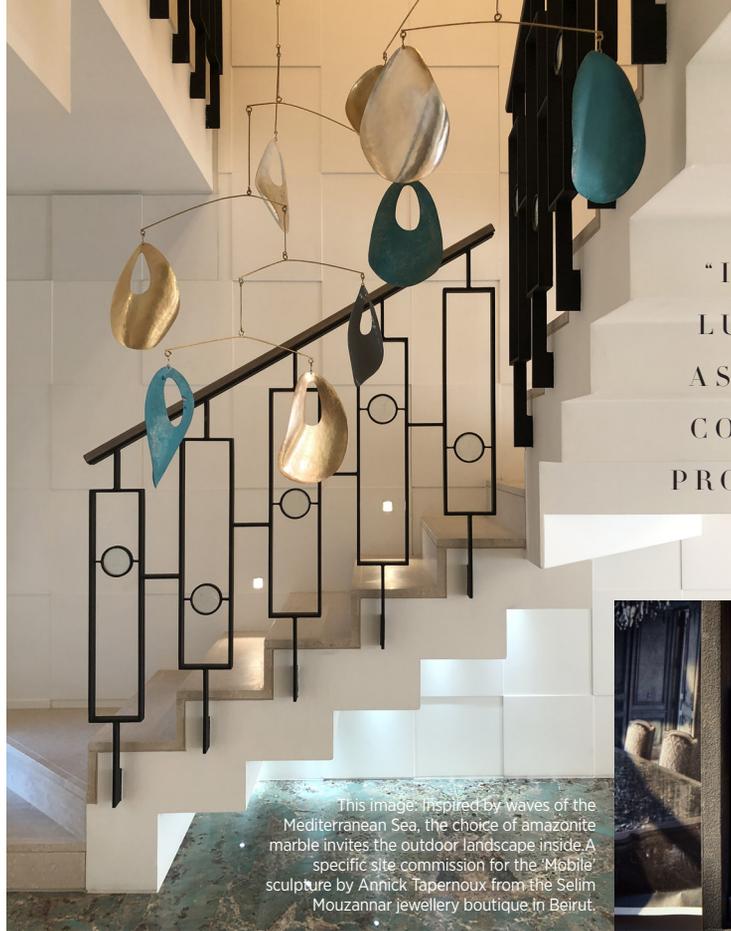


opportunity came just a few years after she founded her interior design firm with branches in Beirut and Paris, and it’s a fairytale encounter. Aline had no previous connection with Lagerfeld. “I thought Karl was the perfect match for the spirit of the renovation for the hotel,” she says. “He’s incredibly knowledgeable about 18th-century decorative arts, an amazing photographer, design connoisseur and of course fashion icon.” She wrote him a manuscript letter and delivered it personally by hand. The iconic designer, touched by the gesture, called her the next day. “I never learned so much about French art-de-vivre, history and modernity than during these work sessions, watching the master’s creative process and his incredible skills and knowledge. When around Karl Lagerfeld, you definitely understand the meaning of the word ‘genius!’” The two would regularly hold meetings in his office. “It looks like a giant library, a sort of cathedral of books; they literally cover the walls from floor to ceiling and have a magical presence,” muses Aline.

French literature covers the entirety of Aline’s office. Books are clearly one of her most important sources of inspiration. “Baudelaire once said: ‘There is no intimacy in a place,’” says Aline. Her vision for the Hôtel de Crillon was therefore to make it a residential address – a hotel where despite its lavish and ornate detailing, everyone felt at home. Marie-Antoinette was one of the defining inspirations for her design. “It’s about heritage meeting the contemporary, celebrating a legacy and then opening it up to the world and to the traveler of tomorrow,” she says, adding with a laugh: “It’s also like throwing a party in a church – creating fantasy in a sacred place.”

Born in 1975, Aline says that it was beauty that saved her from the conflicts going on around her. As a child in Beirut she would read so much that she was given a nickname *oum kitab*, meaning that she was protected from the bombs through her books. This obsession with beauty, history and culture is that dress that she has endowed to the iconic Hôtel de Crillon.

“I looked at every single detail and layered it with emotions,” she adds. Art and design collectibles can be found throughout the hotel, particularly in the lounge areas and quiet places for a moment to pause and relax. They also appear in each room, with some previous objects dating back to the time of the old Hôtel de Crillon. The hotel, through Aline’s vision and alongside that of Karl’s and architect Richard Martinet, creates a dialogue between the past and the present. Operated by Rosewood Hotels, “I instinctively thought of gathering the best interior design dream team to echo Louis XIV’s ‘look at the details of everything’ vision for Versailles. We needed the best dream team to design those details, executed by the finest craftsmen who brought some edge to traditions. I called out on to my fellows, Chahan Minassian, Tristan Auer and Cyril Vergniol to collaborate each on an area with their specific skills. We all worked hand in hand with the architect Richard Martinet and the operator Rose-



“I BELIEVE THAT LUXURY, AS WELL AS BEING ABLE TO CONVEY EMOTION, PROVOKES MEMORY”

This image: inspired by waves of the Mediterranean Sea, the choice of amazonite marble invites the outdoor landscape inside. A specific site commission for the 'Mobile' sculpture by Annick Tapernoux from the Selim Mouzannar jewellery boutique in Beirut.



Trays of material composition between precious and raw from d'Amman's offices.

wood Hotels and Resorts who’s ‘sense of place’ philosophy embraces the dialogue between the past and the present.”

Since Aline’s work at Hôtel de Crillon, everything has changed. Now an in-demand name of the international design scene, she is currently working on several projects, including private residences in Europe and the Middle East, alongside an iconic, but still confidential, Parisian project. **Discretion being one of her mottos, Aline remains secretive about the many great adventures to come in 2018, however does express how much she’s thrilled to be back on the selection committee of the next Beirut Design Fair in her home town Beirut in September. “I try and convey culture and emotion in every project – no project resembles another – each must have its own story,” she adds.**

We are sitting in one of Aline’s work areas overlooking a panoramic view of Paris and its dazzling skyline. “The equation for every project starts with the combination of words, a stone, an artistic inspiration... art or fashion are endless sources of creative inspiration,” she says. “They draw an inner landscape which unfolds into more magical sentences when combined with natural beauty of marbles and quartz. I believe that luxury, as well as being able to convey emotion, provokes memory,” she muses. “Beauty and emotion are addictive. When you provoke an emotion you become addicted to it – you come back for that – for the memory. Something that you feel you never forget.” And that’s key for d’Amman – that transmission of feeling and memory through her work. Design must entice and allure not just visually but physically and spiritually. It explains why we fall in love with certain places and long to always return to them – its for the memory, the experience, and most important, the emotion that they provoked. ■

Cultureinarchitecture.com



An image taken from a sourcing trip for marble in Italy

The FEATURES

A view of the bathroom in the Suite Jardin at the Hôtel de Crillon. Clean lines and marble layering offer travellers the feel of a modern Parisian apartment.

