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THE WORLD OF INTERIORS



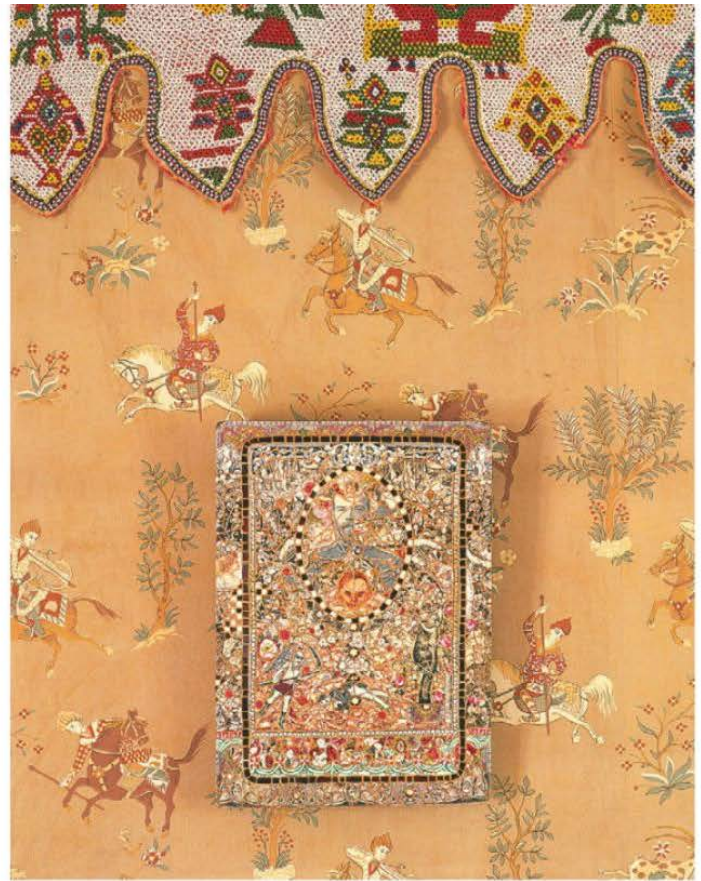
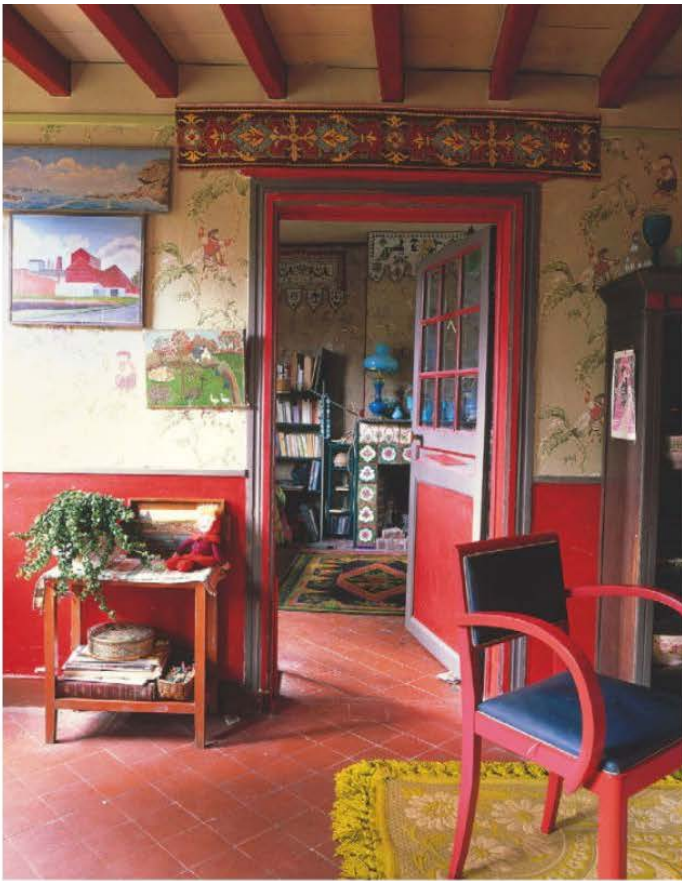


Above: Caroline Loeb took her cue from the Jardin Majorelle in Marrakesh when painting the walls of her courtyard, her favourite part of the house. The shade here is 'Ultra Blue' by Little Greene, punctuated by lemon yellow. Opposite: in a corner of the dining room two primitive landscapes hang against a document chinoiserie wallpaper by Nobilis. The quilt to the left of the door is 20th-century American, while the tablecloth fabric is Indian



T O N E D E F T

A chanteuse and artist, Caroline Loeb has an ear for a catchy tune and an eye for a pop-tastic palette. At her home near Beauvais in northern France she has torn through the colour charts, cleverly introducing hit after hit of intense shade, from ultramarine to vermilion, which positively sing alongside the patterned wallpapers hung in the 1970s by her mother. All told, Valérie Lapierre reckons this single-minded visionary has produced a masterful remix. Photography: Bruno Suet



'IT'S THE OLDEST

farm in the village. It dates from 1677 – or 1766. I can never remember which,' the French artist Caroline Loeb says with a laugh. She is talking about her house deep in the countryside near the city of Beauvais, 75km or so north of Paris. 'I was lucky enough to have a New York childhood, between the ages of four and ten. To keep a tie with France, my parents bought this place, which my mother had fallen in love with at first sight and where we spent the summer holidays,' she explains. 'Once we had returned to Paris from America, I used to come here as a teenager with my friends, then as an adult with my daughter. When my mother wanted to sell it, it broke my heart and so I bought it back.'

Caroline Loeb is famous in France as a 1980s pop star, thanks to the hit song *C'est la Ouate* (*And So What* is the title of the version in English), which she co-wrote and performed, and with which she is forever associated in the national consciousness. Of Russian descent through her mother, the writer and publisher Cécile Odartchenko, Loeb is the daughter and granddaughter of gallery owners on her father's side – her grandfather, Pierre Loeb, chiefly exhibited the Surrealists and was a friend of Picasso, as well as being the brother of the photographer Denise Colomb.

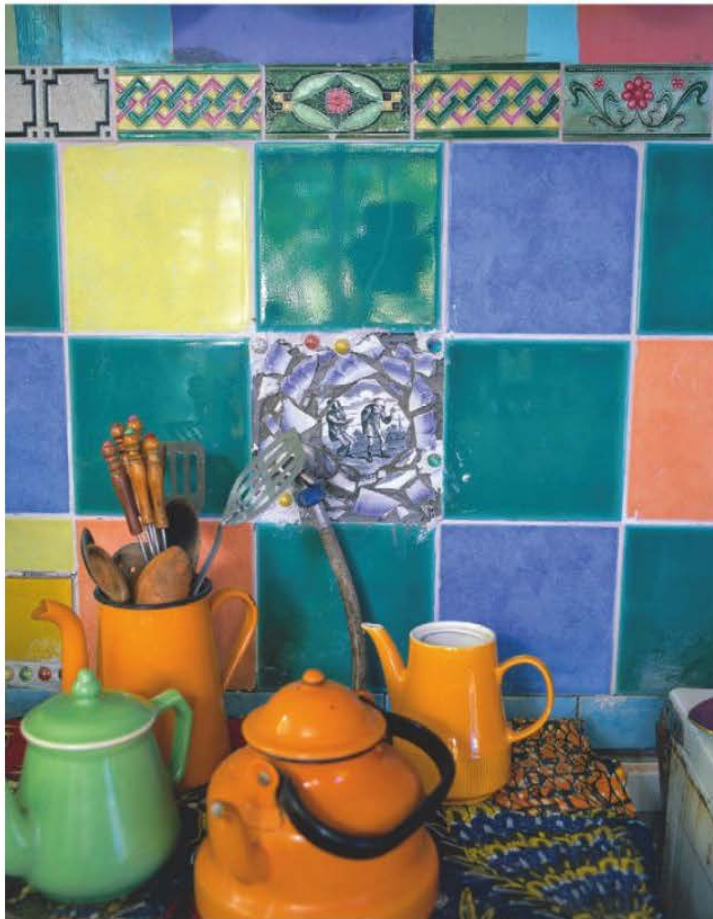
With her baccalauréat behind her, the young Loeb hung around with the 'Saint Laurent crowd' in the Paris clubs back in the 1970s. 'Loulou de la Falaise found me my first job, as a sales assistant at Kenzo, to pay for my theatre studies.' But the enormous success of that 1986 chart-topper proved overwhelming to the young singer/songwriter, actor and stylist for the photographer Jean-Baptiste Mondino. 'It's difficult to get over a hit like that,' she sighs. From the 1990s, pop stardom behind her, she turned to directing other performers, and wrote shows for herself based on her heroines, such as George Sand and Françoise Sagan, or cabaret-style pieces. It was then, alone on stage save for her three accompanists, that she really shone, her Parisian humour something of a trademark. Before long Jean Paul Gaultier was inviting her to be a star turn on his burlesque *Fashion Freak Show*.

Loeb is an extrovert, and youthful-looking today in a flashy pink jumper and flowery trousers. She's been wearing the Japanese designer Sueo Irié's clothes on stage and off for 30 years. 'I'm crazy about colours,' she says. 'As a child, I loved my Caran d'Ache crayons! Then my eye was trained at Kenzo, who was the first to mix it all up: flowers, checks, spots, stripes... Loulou de la Falaise inspired me a great deal too with her bohemian chic and her cascades of necklaces and bracelets.'

Loeb subscribes to a similar more-is-more style in her country home, where she revels in colour, disorder, improvisation and spontaneity. 'I detest Zen, I'm anti feng shui!' she exclaims. 'I'm a big

Top left: a cross-stitch panel hangs above the door to the living room like a lintel. Top right: Séverine Gambier made the small mosaic from fragments of broken plates. Opposite: Loeb considers the fireplace, which is covered with 1920s and 30s tiles and topped with a Napoléon III planter, among other things, perhaps the greatest of her decorative triumphs. The 'frieze' of Indian fabric came from Sophie Lescot's (now closed) antique shop in Paris





Top: Cécile Odartchenko's paintings are displayed in the kitchen, alongside her daughter's handiwork – the Technicolor freehand stripes. Above left: like so much else in the house, the pots and utensils were bought at car-boot sales or fleamarkets. Above right: a chorus line of Provençal figurines survey going-ons in the courtyard. Opposite: antique Desvres tiles frame one of two doors in shades that are reminiscent of Charleston farmhouse





bargain hunter, so I accumulate stuff without knowing what I'm going to do with it.' She is a fan of the baroque, outsider art, over-the-top places like Postman Cheval's Ideal Palace in Hauterives, and the Bloomsbury Group. 'For me, being an artist means being it all the time and about everything, and I get a huge amount of pleasure putting objects together, getting out my paint pots and brushes.'

The walls inside are still covered with the papers her mother chose in the 1970s – the height of bourgeois taste then, if slightly kitsch-looking today: exuberant flowers in the entrance hall, turquerie in the living room, chinoiserie in the bedroom and dining room, all in an array of assertive hues one after another, uninterrupted by so much as a single plain stretch. This abundance of pattern suits Loeb, and she has added more of it to the bedroom ceiling, fortuitously having discovered a stash of unused rolls. 'My mother always adored really beautiful wallpapers and I have set them into colours to make them stand out,' she says. She has also repainted the woodwork to further enhance the effect, creating kaleidoscopic outlines. Far from limiting herself to papers and paint, however, Loeb has also introduced mismatched 20th-century tiles in a boldly unusual way around the living-room fireplace, on top of which sits a collection of blue opaline glass, and in the kitchen, where the rest of the walls are painted with freehand stripes. Outside, she has even outlined earthenware tiles with a collection of tiny porcelain figures.

There is nothing of huge financial value here, however; everything, or almost everything, has come from car-boot or garage sales. The mistress of the house adores Indian folk-art textiles, such as the embroidery that adorns the upper part of those turquerie living-room walls. In the dining room, meanwhile, naive rural scenes painted by her mother hang against a chinoiserie pattern on a pale-green ground. A different atmosphere altogether prevails in the bedroom, where the palette is an opulent red and black and where Loeb has glued autumn leaves on to every one of the cupboards. A plaid blanket, Indian kantha quilts and multicoloured cushions hold their own against the scarlet mandarins populating all four walls and the ceiling.

With its conspicuous absence of white, the entire interior is a bold patchwork of wallpapers, ceramics and objects, influenced by the spirit of the subcontinent and Russian art. Yet the owner's favourite place is the terrace, which nestles at one corner of the house. It'll come as no surprise to learn that she's painted this Majorelle blue with accents of an eye-watering lemon yellow ■

'Chichel', Caroline Loeb's one-woman show, is at l'Archipel, 17 Bvd de Strasbourg, 75010 Paris (00 33 1 73 54 79 79; larchipel.net), until the end of December

Top: a dramatic black carpet reclaimed from the set of one of Loeb's shows has now come to rest on the floor of her bedroom, where it is offset by a faux-leopardskin sewing box/stool and other furniture picked up in fleamarkets. Opposite: a blowsy floral Nobilis wallpaper hung by her mother in the 1970s enlivens almost every surface – ceiling and internal doors included – of the entrance hall. The coffee-and-cream geometric tiled floor is original

