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NEW ITERATIONS OF PIERRE PAULIN'S  
 FREEFLOWING 70S FURNITURE  
 HAVE A CONTEMPORARY RESONANCE.  
 SON BENJAMIN IS FUTURE PROOFING THE LEGACY.



WORDS ALISA LARSEN

Being the son of Pierre Paulin and growing up in the 1980s meant Benjamin Paulin could wow his friends by living in a “James Bond villain’s house” surrounded by sculptural furniture often clad in colourful stretch fabric inspired by swimsuits. The family home in Cévenne was a laboratory for his father, who filled it with prototypes that were a joy for the eye as well as his son’s young mind.

Benjamin, who was born in Paris in 1978, was almost 30 when his father died in 2009 after an illustrious career designing everything from the French Prime Minister’s residence to mass-produced household appliances. Curious and prolific till the end, Pierre Paulin left behind an extensive archive of drawings and prototypes, many yet to be realised and never commercially produced.

Although Benjamin had a successful career in the music industry and his wife Alice Lemoine worked in fashion, the couple decided they wanted to do something together and Paulin Paulin Paulin was born. Under close supervision from Benjamin’s mother Maia, Pierre’s wife and business partner until his final days, they are custodians of the legacy.

Many of Paulin’s best-known designs such as Mushroom, Ribbon and Tongue, are licensed and made by Artifort. Benjamin and Alice are focusing on other pieces that never reached their full potential.

“We have archives from the late 50s until the late 2000s. My father was always producing a lot of ideas. We can identify some designs that were not interesting to pursue, as they were a process, a means to something else. Yet some were obsessions,” says Benjamin. Alice adds that pieces they have put into limited edition production such as the Origami-like daybed, Tapis Siège, are just that.

“The square pieces with angles, they were an obsession and reappear often. In the late 60s, 70s, 80s, 2000s, even he was constantly trying to put them into existence and it never happened.”

A recent collaboration with Danish brand Gubi brought the commodious Pacha chair from 1975 back into production, after what Benjamin describes as an intuitive process.

“We didn’t have the drawings but we had an original in good condition at the Centre Pompidou, from a Paulin exhibition. We took it to Gubi to try and understand the shape and construction.”

Upholstered in textiles by French legend Pierre Frey, Gubi’s Pacha chair easily shifts from Paulin’s 70s colourful stretch fabrics into a luxurious and contemporary vibe.

“When Pacha was first produced it came in a very limited range and never really made its way to the greater public. These days we can see they are extremely sought after at auctions, that there is a big interest around the design today,” says Benjamin. The rebirth is a testament to the relevance of his father’s designs today, he says. His furniture induces reactions and is decidedly relaxed, a mood that resonates after a decade of mid-century-modern rationale.

“There’s a social dimension in his design. In the 60s and 70s designers felt they could change the way that people interacted. His mission was to bring people closer, to encourage them to let go a little and to open up. The designs show who you are and there’s little to hide behind. They’re very unpretentious,” says Benjamin.

Approaching the 1980s, Paulin took a surprising turn. While still working on an industrial scale he began to explore the artisanal, looking to the limited edition as a way of counteracting mass consumerism and emphasising things that would last.

But Paulin never wanted to be seen as an artist, even though he began his career as a sculptor’s apprentice and many of his works have a sculptural quality.

“He always said the artist is like a wolf, totally free, he obeys no one. The designer is more like the dog, it obeys the industry.”



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1. Canape Alpha sofa. 2.+3. President Georges Pompidou enlisted Paulin to remodel the private apartment of the Élysée Palace in 1971, dining room and ceiling detail. 4. Siège Déclive, 1968. 5. Élysée Palace smoking room. 6. Pacha lounge chair (1975), relaunched by Gubi in 2019. 7. Tapis Siège, 1980. 8. Pierre Paulin. 9. Diwan rug and Tongue armchairs at La Bergerie, Paulin's home in Cévennes. Photo Julien Oppenheim.