

SPRING 2021

DEPARTURES

HOME + DESIGN



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DISPATCHES



Duchaufour-Lawrance in front of a ceramic panoramic in Monsanto Forest Park, one of his favorite spots in Lisbon.

Putting Down Roots Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance was at the center of the Paris beau monde. But then he traded it all for a new life, and groove, in Portugal.

by Gisela Williams. Photographs by Sanda Vuckovic



In Duchaufour-Lawrance's living room, the Ottoman seat he designed for Ligne Roset. *Left:* The designer in his home, sitting on his Harper chair for Bernhardt Design.



ALREADY YEARS BEFORE the world stopped because of COVID-19, the respected French designer Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance longed to escape Paris. Since gaining renown in the early aughts for designing the wildly trendy London restaurant Sketch, he had been so consumed with projects—for everyone from Hermès to Ceccotti—that he felt like he was always racing around the city on his motorbike “chasing time.” He explains, “I was longing for a place to slow down and reconnect with nature.”

Duchaufour-Lawrance, 46, who since the success of Sketch has designed restaurants for big names like Alain Senderens

and Yannick Alléno, was fascinated by the renegade chefs who opened restaurants in countryside settings and created a unique experience for those that made the pilgrimage. He wanted to do the same in his field. “I hoped to create a design project connected to its natural environment,” he says.

At first, he thought he would pack everything up and move to Italy; then he thought about Spain. Although he had been hearing whispers about Portugal. In 2017, he had to make a stopover in Lisbon. He spent a night alone in the city, walking through the historic Alfama and Bairro Alto districts; he was smitten, and the next day he called his family and announced that they were moving there. Four months later they had an apartment in the charming residential Estrela neighborhood. “Lisbon has this energy which is so welcoming,” he says. “The light and atmosphere sometimes make it feel like you are in a theater.” He noticed that so many Portuguese were returning to their country, joined by creative people from all over the world. “There is such a dynamic exchange happening here.



In the kitchen, Duchaufour-Lawrance's Mediterranea light for Petit Friture hangs above a Charlotte Perriand dining table from Cassina.



DRAWING: COURTESY NOÉ DUCHAUFOUR-LAWRANCE. LAMP: NUNO SOUSA DIAS

There is a sensation of forward movement, but at the same time there is such a deep-rooted culture.”

For the first year in Portugal, Duchaufour-Lawrance made time to travel within the country, sketch, and experiment with other mediums like watercolor and ink. “Portugal has a rich heritage of craft; I spent time searching out and spending time with artisans throughout the country and deep-diving into their process.” Finally, at the end of this year of exploration, he was ready to put his energies into a project he'd had in the back of his mind for years: creating a design lab inspired by his environment and the raw materials and talented artisans around him. Meanwhile, he would continue to dream up bespoke furniture, made by French artisans, for private clients that he plans to eventually turn into a limited-edition collection.

This past fall he opened Made in Situ, a gallery, studio, and experimental space next to the city's botanical garden in Príncipe Real, which serves as a platform for his design experiments in collaboration with traditional Portuguese craftspeople. The first exhibition featured a collection of black vessels and lamps known as *barro negro*, or “black clay.” The unglazed earthenware is fired in underground pits and is still made on Serra do Caramulo, a mountain north of Lisbon. Duchaufour-Lawrance first came across this type of pottery



Clockwise from top left: The Made in Situ gallery in Lisbon; vases in the Xana and Carlos series at the gallery; an ink study by Duchaufour-Lawrance; the Caramulo Lamp I from the Barro Negro series.

in the National Museum of Ethnology's archives in Lisbon and immediately felt drawn to the coal-like material. He discovered that the firing process, called *soenga* in Portugal, dates back to the Neolithic era and is as much a ritual as it is a technical procedure. Typically, it happens once a year and involves the entire village, but it's a dying art. Duchaufour-Lawrance found two artisans who tentatively agreed to help him organize a *soenga*. “They never said no, but they said



Duchaufour-Lawrance in his gallery's office.

it would take time, and they were right," he says. "It took a year and a half."

It was worth the wait. The *soenga* happened in July, with people around the fire all night. In the morning, the pieces were pulled out of the earth. "It was a beautiful moment," he says. "Creating something in an amazing place surrounded by huge boulders and a forest with a full moon in the sky working with clay and fire and good people. I really believe the pieces themselves retain the value and intensity of that common experience." Duchaufour-Lawrance invited André Fernandez, the chef at Attla restaurant in Lisbon, to cook and asked a friend to film the event. The short was then screened at Made in Situ's opening exhibition; everyone who had been involved in the making of the work was invited. "It's not just about showing the process," explains the designer. "It's about also trying to capture the moment and the interaction with people." The resulting work is meant to illustrate that as well: the "circle vases" are four sets of 12 differently shaped vessels that are all connected; his lamps look like the boulders typical of Serra do Caramulo.

Duchaufour-Lawrance's next experiments in natural material include *bunho*, a rush harvested by artisans near Santarém; furniture made from cork in the Algarve; objects made with marble from Estremoz; and candlesticks that use bronze from Peniche, with candles handmade from local beeswax. "One idea leads to the next one and the next," says Duchaufour-Lawrance. "I couldn't make candleholders without deciding to make the candles, too." Free to express his ideas without compromise, the designer doesn't miss working for big brands. "I'm not designing for the sake of design but instead, like the chefs I admire, I'm making things to create an environment of connections."

Duchaufour-Lawrance is still searching for the perfect house on the Tagus River. For now, he has settled down in the historic neighborhood of Lapa and filled his home with things from France and some of his Made in Situ prototypes. He says that he's started to chase time again. But this time around, now that he's the designer of his own life, he's okay with that. 351-918/844-380; madeinsitu.com.

The Lisbon List

MUSEUM

While the Gulbenkian Museum holds one of the world's largest private art collections, it is most beloved for its architecture and garden, designed by several groundbreaking modernist Portuguese architects in the 1960s. Japanese architect Kengo Kuma is working on an expansion of the gardens. gulbenkian.pt

RESTAURANTS

One of Duchaufour-Lawrance's favorite chefs is Leopoldo Calhau, who has two restaurants in Lisbon: Taberna do Calhau (*Largo das Olarias 23; 351-21/585-1937*) and Bla Bla Glu Glu (*Largo das Olarias 22; 351-910/163-649*). "He travels all over Portugal to find little producers and is incredibly knowledgeable about all of them," the designer says.

NEIGHBORHOOD

The designer is partial to the area where he lives, Lapa, which is home to historic palaces and embassies. "I like the fact that it is so close to the postindustrial Alcântara neighborhood just under the 25 de Abril Bridge, and that if you cross the bridge you're very close to the beach," he says. "Caparica, a beach where I windsurf, is only 30 minutes from my house."

EXPLORING

On weekends, Duchaufour-Lawrance loves to bike to the district of Belém, with stops at the LX Factory (lxfactory.com), a complex of shops and restaurants; the tropical botanical garden (*Ferreiros a Belém 41*), an oasis in the city; the Gothic Jerónimos Monastery; and the Museu Coleção Berardo (museu.berardo.pt). He ends his visits at Espaço Espelho d'Água (espacoesselhodega.com). "It's a cultural space with a nice restaurant and a beautiful Sol LeWitt on the dining room wall."