

# Au Naturel

A French couple restored two old homes in France, while also reinventing a venerable wicker-making industry

INTERIOR DESIGN BY *Benoît Rauzy and Anthony Watson*  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Joanna Maclellann*  
WRITTEN BY *Jean Nayar*







Opening pages: A centuries-old Brittany farmhouse, with outbuildings, serves as both a refuge and working studio for the founders of Atelier Vime, a maker of wicker furnishings. The dining room features an eighteenth-century farm table set with Audoux-Minnet chairs that are covered in a fabric based on a 1930s pattern. The lamp on the buffet is by Atelier Vime. Opposite: Eighteenth-century Italian tiles and a vintage fabric imbue the kitchen with pattern and color. This page: In what the homeowners call The Wicker Field, they have placed some Atelier Vime wicker planters and vintage chairs by Mathieu Mategot.






This page: When Benoît Rauzy inherited the home from his parents, he kept the wood and terracotta-brick shelves that his father constructed. A 1929 collage by Albert Huyot is set on the top shelf. Opposite: A nineteenth-century ceramic stove is both a decorative and practical item in one of the bedrooms. The drawing by Natalia Gotcharova dates from 1950.





A master bathroom with a rustic, cozy feel. The ceiling is made of dark wood planks. A white pedestal sink with a chrome faucet stands on the left. A bathtub is positioned in front of a large window with green frames and patterned curtains. A wicker armchair is in the foreground. A rope light fixture hangs from the ceiling.

In the master bath, the tub, pelmet (the border over the window), and armchair are made by Atelier Vime. The pedestal sink, tap, and mirror are from the 1930s, while the rope lighting fixture dates from the 1950s.

**W**HENEVER Benoît Rauzy and his partner, Anthony Watson, feel the urge to escape the whirl of their lives in Paris, they retreat to the hush of their country home in Brittany. The

nineteenth-century stone farmhouse, which belonged to Rauzy's parents when he was a child growing up in the 1960s and '70s, not only brims with charm and fond memories, but also serves as a working extension of the furniture-making business the couple developed at their other getaway property (located in the south of France).

Prior to purchasing the residential structure that would become their second home-away-from-home, the two men searched for a home in Provence, recognizing that they wanted a dwelling rooted in the allure and history of the region. Upon discovering a Louis XV-style mansion built in 1730 overlooking the Rhône river, they immediately saw the home as an ideal Provençal retreat. And after researching its history, they also realized how the property would come to alter the working pattern of their lives. "The mansion, known as a *hôtel particulier*, is located in Vallabrègues on a peninsula where some 450 wicker workers contributed to the dominant trade of the area during the eighteenth century," explains Rauzy, noting an on-premises workshop constructed in 1878, a large courtyard, and three wicker-soaking ponds as remnants of its incarnation as a wicker-making facility. Since the couple acquired the property, they have reconstituted much of the related history by developing a wickerworks business, Atelier Vime (from the Latin *vimen*, which means "twig").

Meanwhile, they turned their cottage in Brittany into a northern outpost of their business, using its surrounding fields to grow and harvest the reeds and other plants necessary to make the wicker accents and furnishings they produce at Atelier Vime. The property, which occupies several acres that stretch along the westernmost point of northwest France and to the shore of the Atlantic Ocean, is reminiscent of the humbler steep-roofed cottages that pepper the British countryside across the English Channel.

"Located not far from the village of Pont-Croix, the farmhouse and its out buildings and stable were built in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by farmers who were quite poor, so the rooms of the home are modest, but the views of the sea to the south and west are magnificent," Rauzy emphasizes. His recollections of summers in the

home as a youngster influenced the couple's approach to refashioning it to suit the way they live there now. "It has a happy atmosphere, so we wanted to keep the spirit of the house as it was." As such, the only areas of the home they chose to significantly update were the kitchen, where a band of eighteenth-century Italian tiles they purchased in London set an upbeat tone as a backsplash, and the master bath, where a tub is wrapped with an apron of woven wicker.

"Even before we launched Atelier Vime, we were collecting furniture made of rattan, bamboo, and rope," says Watson, a former art director for various luxury brands. He points to some of the many vintage pieces, such as a quirky two-pronged floor lamp with hat-like shades in a bedroom, which they've mixed with new wicker pieces from Atelier Vime, including a chair in the bath and a pendant fixture in the kitchen.

Other rooms still house some of the furniture, art, and objects acquired by Rauzy's parents over the years, including a yellow ceramic stove positioned in front of the fireplace in a bedroom and, elsewhere, works of art and sculpture created by local artists. "My parents often invited artists and sculptors from the region to come for the summer and stay at the home where they would work and exhibit their art," Rauzy says. His early exposure to art eventually fueled a passion for collecting drawings, paintings, and other decorative objects, as well as Turkish rugs and Uzbeki kilims, a few of which he acquired while working as an international environmental consultant.

Many of the collectibles that Rauzy and Watson have picked up at auctions and estate sales wind up in their Brittany cottage, such as a lacey mid-century wrought-metal dining set by Mathieu Matégot that they have placed in the garden. Other items, though, including distinctive pieces by mid-century designers like Janine Abraham, Tito Agnoli, Louis Sognot, Jacques Adnet, Adrien Audoux, and Frida Minet, are sold through Atelier Vime.

Ultimately, the two men see their approach to their life and work as an extension of a sustainable point of view that includes their appreciation of history, art, and crafts, as well as nature. "The story of a house should not die; it should be a living history that isn't only about regional pride but also about living in a way that's most adapted to the clime," says Rauzy, who thinks of their home in Brittany as an evolving work in progress. "I hope our home will never be finished, but instead be a place where it's always possible to dream." ■



# Outtakes



"We're not obsessed with modernity, we're not in a hurry to find something new."  
—Benoît Rauzy

Clockwise from top: The cottage's so-called Little Bedroom features a 1960s rattan and brass bed. In the home's salon, a 1930 Breton ceramic lamp is positioned near a 1940 painting by Michel Jamar. A 1960's French Riviera armchair is positioned on the lawn at the back of the house. A patio was created within an old stable. One of the bedrooms is furnished with a seventeenth-century canopy bed that is draped with Aubusson tapestries. Benoît Rauzy (left) and Anthony Watson.

