

La Forêt Noire

By Jean Nayar
Photography by
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Serpentine, velvet-upholstered banquettes define distinctive seating areas within the bar.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ERICK SAILLET

French designer Claude Cartier brings warmth and an enchanting residential air to her first restaurant interior near Lyon



PHOTOGRAPHY: GUILLAUME GRASSET (BOTTOM); ERICK SAILLET (ALL OTHERS THIS SPREAD)



La Forêt Noire
 Interior Designer **Claude Cartier**
 Client **Isabelle and Charles Darnault**
 Where **Chaponost, France**
 What **1,300 square feet on one floor**
 Cost/sf **Withheld at client's request**
 For a full project source list, see page 100 or visit contractdesign.com.

Enthralled with Claude Cartier's design for their private home, food lovers Isabelle and Charles Darnault tapped the inventive French designer's talents again when they chose to open their third restaurant. The Darnaults were convinced that Cartier, based in Lyon, would bring a fresh approach to her first restaurant design. With the 120-seat La Forêt Noire in the French village of Chaponost near Lyon, Cartier did not disappoint.

As a starting point for the visual narrative, Cartier turned to her favorite dessert as a child—Black Forest cake. "We imagined the signature dessert for the restaurant would be *la forêt noire*," explains Cartier, noting the rich chocolate confection that also became the establishment's name. Intonations of the spirit-infused cake—as well as the eponymous dense German woods that inspired it—set an engaging tone for the decor.

Telling a mysterious and exotic story

Her clients understood and admired Cartier's sensibilities, and that connection helped in the creation of this restaurant. "There is something very extraordinary in the way Claude Cartier designs projects that always reveal a great elegance without ever being ostentatious," says Isabelle Darnault. "These projects tell a story, like La Forêt Noire tells the story of nature—a little mysterious and exotic."

Cartier's associate Fabien Louvier, who collaborated on the design, says the Darnaults had asked for "a French brasserie—sophisticated, and without too much fashion—like a dining room

Against a muted palette of blue, green, and sienna, a mirror called Palanco by Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec (left and below) and a brass starburst chandelier (opposite) add a touch of sparkle. A semiprivate dining area (bottom) features custom carpet with a boldly patterned palm-inspired design and an Italian wallpaper with a leafy motif.

at home." As such, the designers dispensed with overtly thematic gestures, opting instead for plush, inviting furnishings and finishes, as well as finely honed simple details.

Cartier and Louvier divvied up the 1,300-square-foot space into several distinct areas with diverse seating and a mix of round and rectangular tables—some with marble tops—on either side of a central brass bar, creating a sense of intimacy with a residential air. Custom carpets underfoot, including one with a boldly patterned palm-inspired design, help to define each zone, as do pivoting mirrors backed with Pierre Frey wallpaper with a bark-like texture.

An Italian wallpaper with a leafy motif, which, Cartier says, "looks like an old *grisaille* of a dark forest," is an essential design element that reinforces the choice of the restaurant's name. Covering the walls of a semi-private room, the wallpaper's smoky tones align with Cartier's consistent use of black (a signature touch in her residential work) and complement the restaurant's industrial elements, including spherical brass pendants, ebony subway tile, and exposed ductwork. At the same, the wallpaper's old-world avian-inflected imagery infuses the space with





contrasting notes of refinement and history, while a black-and-white checkerboard floor of Carrera and Marquina marble injects a shot of Dorothy Draperesque grandeur.

A common thread throughout Cartier's residential work is an emphasis on contemporary furnishings. For La Forêt Noire, she and Louvier mixed glamorous velvet-upholstered banquettes, a serpentine sofa, and midcentury-inspired armchairs with newly iconic Bodystuhl chairs—English designer Nigel Coates's updated variations of Thonet's classic cane and bentwood seating.

Suggestive of a black forest

Set against a rich palette of materials, colors, and patterns that reference woodsy vegetation, the clean modern lines of the furnishings are tempered with deep tones of olive, teal, forest green, russet red, and burnt sienna. In contrast, brass details, a mirror by Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, plus a lively brass starburst chandelier and other fixtures by new French lighting company Magic Circus Éditions add touches of sparkle.

“All of the decorative ideas—the colors of the velvet for the chairs, the palm-leaf carpet designed by Dimore Studio, and the black-painted ceiling,” Louvier says, suggest a dark forest. And the designers' attention to detail—including the entrance door's exquisite brass and marble handle, designed by India Mahdavi for Maison Vervloet—was applied with the same care they bring to their residential spaces.

“Habitually, we work with private clients, and we focus on the details,” says Cartier, noting that they approached their first restaurant as they would a home for a private client. “We know that [the Darnaults] like this,” she adds. No doubt, the clients, who made a point of including Black Forest cake on the dessert menu, appreciate it, too. “Whoever comes into the forest is enchanted,” says Isabelle Darnault, alluding to the restaurant's ambiance. “We will let you discover why.”

Key Design Highlights

To create the sophisticated-yet-residential feel requested by the clients, the designers chose plush furnishings and finishes.

Dining areas, located on either side of a central brass bar, feature diverse seating—from velvet banquettes to updated takes on classic cane and bentwood chairs—and a mix of tabletops.

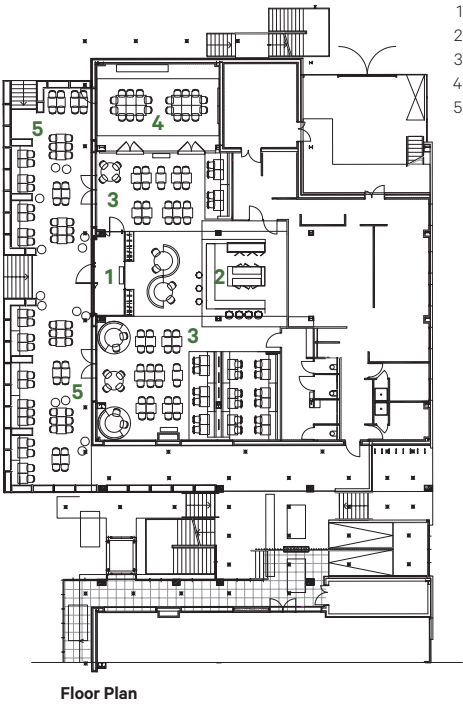
Custom carpets and wallpaper featuring forest-inspired patterns lend texture.

The color palette includes natural and subtle tones, such as olive, teal, forest green, russet red, and burnt sienna.

Brass light fixtures and details, as well as full-length mirrors, add sparkle and dimension to the interiors.

The brass bar (opposite) and sculptural Cirque stools are set against black subway tile and a black-and-white marble tile floor. Dining areas feature chandeliers (right, top) and spherical brass pendants (bottom two) from Magic Circus Éditions, as well as Bodystuhl chairs—Nigel Coates's update on classic cane and bentwood seats.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GUILLAUME GRASSET (TOP); ERICK SAILLET (ALL OTHERS THIS SPREAD)



- 1 Entrance
- 2 Bar
- 3 Dining area
- 4 Semiprivate dining room
- 5 Outdoor dining area

