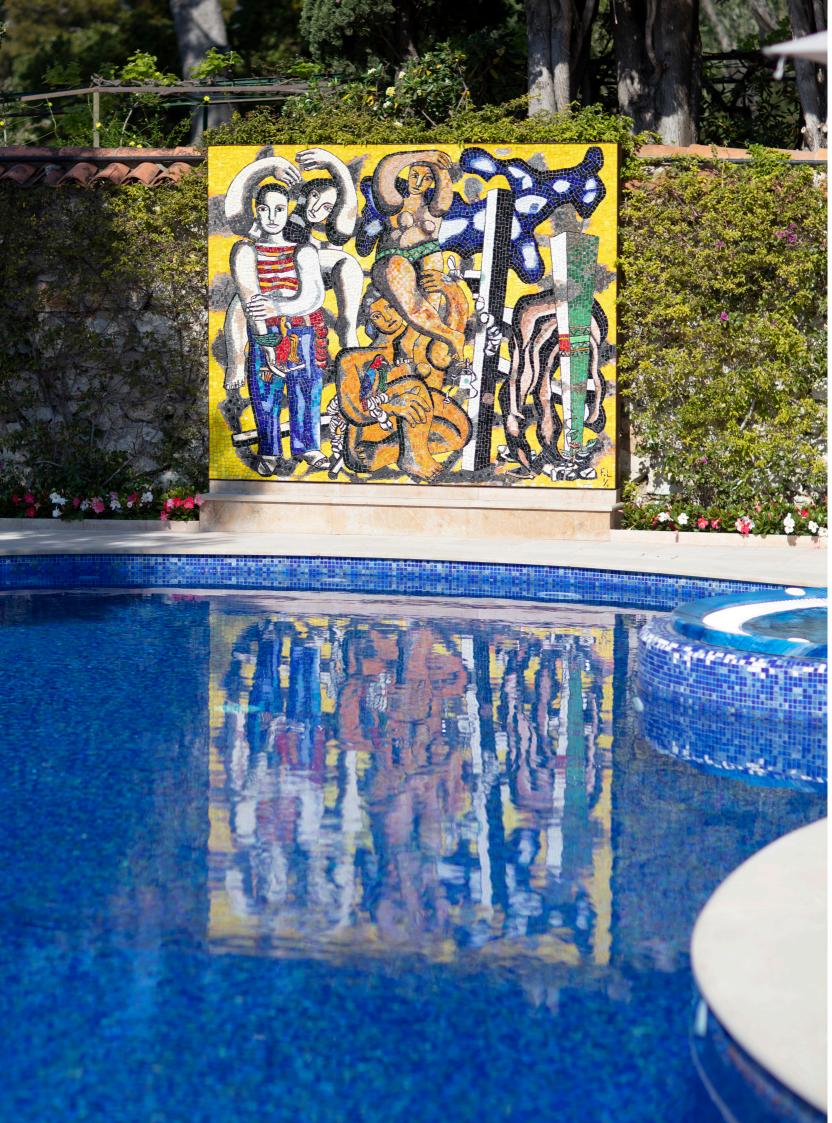


Perched on a peninsula in an ancient seaside village is an alluring home called Villa Cuccia-Noya. We discover the mesmerising space nestled in the heart of the French Riviera

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Photography by: Loic Thebaud Styling by: Adeline Rizzante



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that back in the 6th century, a monk named Hospitus miraculously cured the ill, a mystical quality which earned a small village in the French commune of Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat its name of Pointe St. Hospice. Today the scenic town is home to only sixteen villas, of which one is called Villa Cuccia-Noya. Overlooking evergrowing lush greenery, the depths of the tranquil deep blue Mediterranean Sea and reminiscent of a late 1800s mansion, the sixbedroom home belongs to Basil Sellers, an accomplished Australian entrepreneur,

sportsman and philanthropist.

The earliest residents of the home can be traced back to 1894, a couple named Luc Becchi and Eleanor Martin. In 1992, Australian businessman John Elliott sold the property to Sellers, rewarding him one of the most notable days of his life. "I have been the owner for twenty eight wonderful years," remarks Sellers. "Cuccia-Noya is a joy and I really love the villa. There is a serenity to the home which is hard to explain to anybody who has not stayed there."

An avid collector of art, Sellers has adorned the villa with pieces from prestigious artists in the region and beyond. A work the owner adores is a signed mosaic sculpture by the late French artist Fernand Léger, placed by the end of the swimming pool; Sellers' favourite spot in the home. Here, another sculpture by Léger called La Fleur qui Marche is also displayed. "They are situated so a swimmer in the pool can always see one or the other when swimming, that is, if they can tear their eyes off the stunning sea view," laughs Sellers. The villa also houses works by Italian artist Piero Manzoni, American sculptor Alexander Calder, Picasso and French-Iranian multidisciplinary artist Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar. >

Facing page: a view of the swimming pool featuring an artwork by French artist Fernand Léger. Above: an interior view of the villa featuring works by Sassan Behnam Bakhtiar by the staircase

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#### "THERE IS A SERENITY TO THE HOME WHICH IS HARD TO EXPLAIN TO ANYBODY WHO HAS NOT STAYED THERE"

Basil Sellers

Behnam-Bakhtiar's works are prominent throughout the abode, emanating a type of vibrancy that can be seen and almost touched. "When I saw excellent photographs of Sassan's works, I was astounded," expresses Sellers. "His works are full of energy and colour coordinated in a spectacular way." Some might know him as the artist who can see energy.

Rebirth, an exhibition taking place at Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat's cultural space Villa Namouna in September this year, is set to unveil Behnam-Bakhtiar's newest works. The show will be held under the patronage of the Mayor of Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, Jean-François Dieterich, and organised by the Town Hall's cultural department, marking the inauguration of two public sculptures which pay homage to the beauty of humanity and nature. "The sculpture he is putting up on a prominent spot on the road leading into the village will be sensational and will be a major part of the very popular Mayor of St.Jean's vision to make the area famous for its art," expresses Sellers. "What an enormous amount of energy rises from Sassan's works and the use of colour gives the feeling of emerging energy. I can see why the exhibition is called Rebirth." A private viewing of the exhibition will be hosted inside Villa Cuccia-Noya and in the beautifully manicured gardens outside.

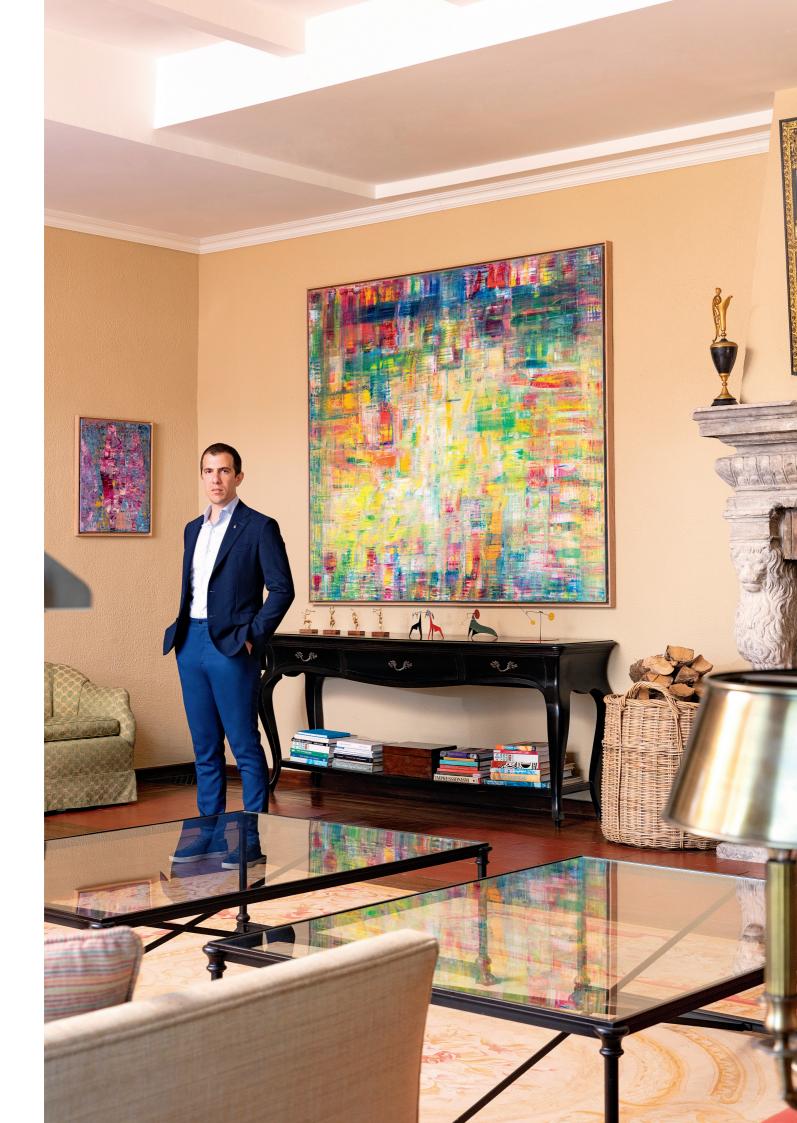
A total of 11 paintings by the artist were specially prepared for Sellers' home. "When asked to prepare works for special properties such as the Villa Cuccia-Noya, I always tend to spend some time within the property and in its gardens, to better feel and take in the energy present throughout the property," explains Behnam-Bakhtiar. "This lets me create a bond with the energy present and create works I feel would be right for each respective space. The new paintings are all in my signature style and

in-line with my vision of extending the connection of the villa to its natural surroundings."

After spending long hours in the home's gardens in the winter's crisp air, the artist immersed himself in the serenity and beauty which permeates throughout the space. "I had already bonded with this 'happy place' - the energy was uplifting, giving a sense of positivity and balance," he recalls. "I couldn't help myself but to go in the same direction with my work for the villa. The tall ceiling of the living room and its arch windows letting so much light in as if the sunlight is having a conversation with you, were asking for large-scale colourful works being an extension of nature within the property." The surrounding nature and positive ambience inspired the artist to create the works, such as Eternal Garden, Trees of Life and Green Tree of Life, which is displayed by the staircase.

In the living room hangs a painting called Bougainvillea of Life, which >

Above: An oil on linen work made



An interior view of a bedroom at Villa Cuccia-Noya featuring an artwork called Sunset Oneness (2019) by Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar

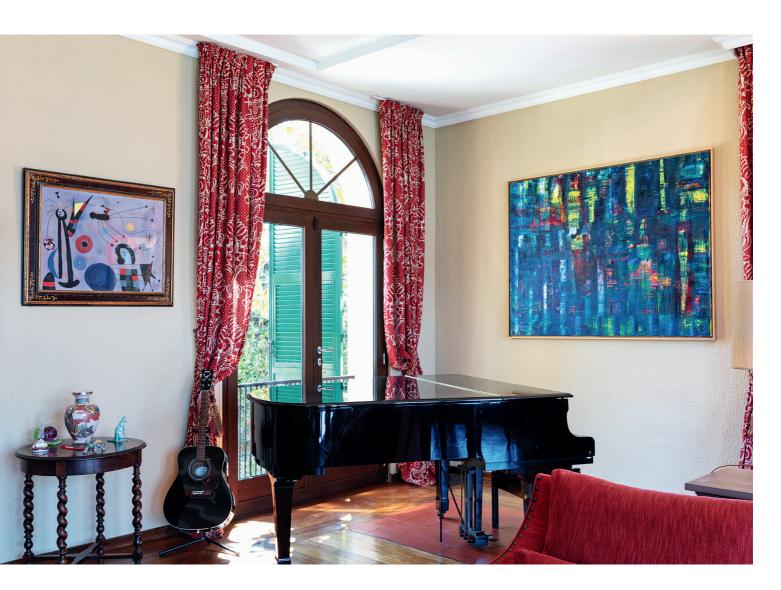
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Clockwise from top: An interior view of the living room featuring an oil on canvas work called Blue Soul Groove by Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar and a work by Joan Miró; Interior view of the formal drawing room; Signed La Fleur qui Marche sculpture by the late French artist Fernand Léger placed at the end of the swimming pool



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represents peace, protection and spiritual connection. "I wanted to bring out these notions in this large-scaled work for the living room facing the sea, in a way that you have an indoor garden by the old stone fireplace," explains Behnam-Bakhtiar. "The Bougainvillea which I have painted in the midst of a garden in front of a sunset brings out a sense of protection and security while focusing on a deep connection to nature and its energy network surrounding us at all times."

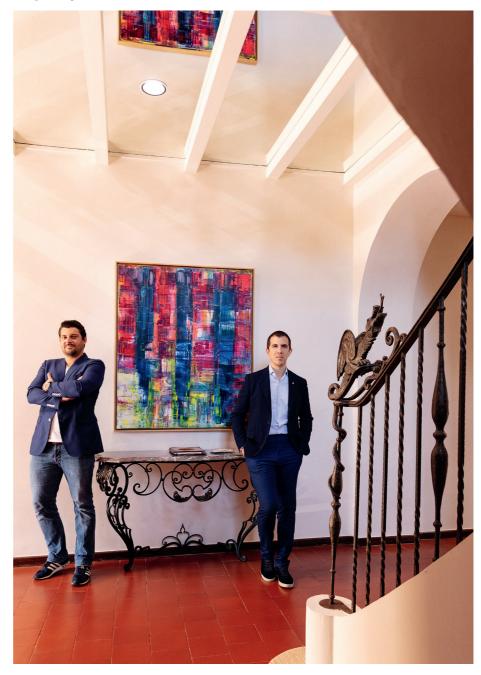
Another painting of note is Blue Soul Groove, which was inspired during a visit to the villa on a cold rainy day. "I was standing outside and the rain had just stopped with rays of light coming down between the clouds floating on top of me," recalls the artist. "I started seeing shapes created by water evaporating

in a way that they were all dancing and going upwards towards the sky - nature's souls having a gathering. This left such an impression on me that I had to bring it out on the canvas, which is Blue Soul Groove." The painting hangs above a grand old piano in the living room.

Behnam-Bakhtiar has also painted two pine gardens specially for this home. They are, as he says, "symbols of wisdom and longevity - having tall, old beautiful pine trees in the villa's gardens, I really wanted to open a window into these majestic trees inside of the villa's walls." The artist was at once drawn to the gardens facing the sea and the villa's old Spanish charm. "Once you enter the gates of the villa gardens, you feel this calming happy vibe taking over making you want to stick around."

The picturesque home, rich with historic anecdotes, the endless beauty of nature and exquisite art, is a seaside gem to be admired from afar and close by. But what makes it truly a marvel is the energy it exudes; a sense of ethereality attainable perhaps by only this charming village and this very land; a majestic feeling which lingers long after you have left. "ONCE YOU ENTER THE GATES OF THE VILLA GARDENS, YOU FEEL THIS CALMING HAPPY VIBE TAKING OVER MAKING YOU WANT TO STICK AROUND"

> Sassan Behnam - Bakhtiar



Right: Cultural consultant Julien Fossat stands with Sassan Bakhtiar. In the background: Eternal Garden by Behnam-Bakhtiar, made in 2020, 130x110cm Editor's LETTER

## THE GREAT REALISATION

Purple vintage-style teacup and saucer by Rockett St George; Light pink Panton Junior chair by Vitra; Ayesha Shehmir

As we face a 'new normal' together, and while it may sound like a cliché, one thing is clear: our reality is what we make it. Many are calling this the 'great realisation', a period to reflect on what matters the most - to think, breathe and to slow down. In this issue, we celebrate (drumroll...) our homes. A place we may have taken for granted pre-pandemic and a place where, (who knew!), so many things are possible. Our cover shoot (page 76) took place inside a hidden gem in the South of France called Villa Cuccia-Noya, nestled in a picture-postcard seaside village known as Pointe St. Hospice, just before the lockdown. Besides its obvious beauty, the home caught our eye for the endless positive energy it emanates and the rich history of its surroundings. The owner is Basil Sellers, a renowned philanthropist and an avid art collector, who has lived in the home since 1992. Many pieces were specially created for this villa by multidisciplinary artist Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar, as an extension of nature within the home and symbols of longevity and wisdom. He calls it a "happy place". What makes a home a happy place? We posed this question to nine influential interior designers in the region and beyond, from Kelly Wearstler to Aljoud Lootah (page 104) because now, more than ever, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to spend so much time in, and with, our homes - what better time to show our love and gratitude for a space which continues to provide endless solace during these trying times? For those finding it challenging to maintain productivity at home, we spoke to Dubai-based clinical psychologist Dr. Saliha Afridi of The LightHouse Arabia (page 72) who shares her tips on restructuring thoughts, explains the importance of setting up a workstation at home and says a little positivity goes a very long way. You will, of course, find plenty of dreamy design inspiration, from a gorgeous townhouse overlooking London's prestigious Regent's Park (page 50), redesigned to preserve its rich English heritage to a vintage-style *pied-à-terre* by the eponymous Nebihe Cihan Studio (page 66), which has seamlessly married Victorian era charm with Parisian influences. We have also rounded up ten tableware trends to watch out for this season (page 38), along with tips on mastering the chicest dinner looks. As we get the chance to spend more time at home, alone or with loved ones, I hope you stay positive, connected and inspired. As Confucius once said, "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." Stay safe, x



Mirror from the Arc Collection by The Line Concept. Photo by Natelee Cocks