



this page The house wraps around an inner courtyard with a central swimming pool. The base of the pool is finished in black concrete

TREAD LIGHTLY

Built in the middle of a coastal marshland off the West Coast of France, this island haven blends dramatic design with a serene atmosphere – where the emphasis is on the raw and natural surroundings

PHOTOGRAPHS **KAREL BALAS/ VEGA MG** TEXT **JULIE BOUCHERAT**





'I TOOK A SANDY PLOT OF LAND AND BUILT A DREAM OF A BEACH HUT ON IT'

In a gamble that more than paid off, Laurence Simoncini took a sandy plot of land on the Île de Ré, an island off the west coast of France, and built her dream of an oversized beach hut on it. She then opened the doors to her holiday home, surrounded by marshland, birdlife, dunes and salt.

The plot was the very last one available on the island's natural and undeveloped 'côte sauvage'. Laurence bought it from an elderly lady who wanted to sell it so that she could donate money to help build a hospital. With its natural flora and extensive ocean views, one visit was more than enough to convince Laurence, who fell head over heels in love with the location. She did her utmost to respect this natural environment when designing the house, establishing a coherent relationship between the interior and the exterior. In her mind's eye, she saw an unobtrusive single-storey house, but aiming for simplicity always turns out to be more complicated than you might think. She approached architect André Blanchet for his sensitivity and their shared love of nature. Together they developed a pine-clad salt storehouse, solidly anchored to the ground. Inside, the pair opted for untreated materials, with cement on the walls and a concrete floor. Their vision was perfectly in tune with the island's spirit, the location proving to be all the inspiration they needed.

Laurence has a passion for interior decoration, and her approach is quasi-hedonistic. 'My house is like a second me, an extension of my tastes and my sensibility. It may not be a coincidence that I gave it a feminine name... It's also an anagram of "aimons", which means "we love" in French.'

For the interiors, the inquisitive owner trawled antique fairs and flea markets looking for rare finds. Even before the house was finished, she could picture every little detail. She rented a hangar to store her treasures as she collected them, working on the premise of 'only buying things that I have really fallen in love with and are from the island. What a pleasure to reuse things that already exist and what fun rummaging through all the things on display looking for that special something.'

It was working with local craftsmen that really made the difference, and when the house was finally finished Laurence couldn't wait a second longer. She brought in all her collected items one after the other, each finding its place as if by magic.

The result is breathtaking — the house feels lived in, as if it has always been there. It belongs. In this quest for authenticity, the result is a tribute to Île de Ré's natural beauty in grey, black and white; to its vegetation and the sand dunes that border it. ■

this page from top French doors lead onto the deck. The chair is by Mira and the pebble-shaped seats are by Mahatsara. Below, the exterior blackened pine cladding is like that of a traditional salt barn. A 350-year-old olive tree from Spain marks the entrance **opposite** Resin seating by Caravane echo the interior pebble-shaped seats







left to right Japanese 'Nuage' paper pendant lights by Céline Wright hang above a Caravane couch. Vintage metal lamps by Jielde sit amongst contrasting woven lamps by Paola Navone. Sculptures mounted on wire are by Antonella Fadda-Haffa





this page The kitchen is industrial in style. A large, stainless-steel island, with sink, stove hob and oven, complements the warm red brick. Open shelving displays tableware by Florià un Giardino



*'MY HOUSE IS LIKE A SECOND ME,
AN **EXTENSION OF MY TASTES** AND MY SENSIBILITY'*

this page The central focus is a monochromatic photograph by Florian Maier-Aichen. Dyed grass sacks are used as cushions, the hemp rug is by Privat22 SA. The bed is covered by a merino wool plaid throw by Mahatsane and linen by Society Linorita. Two old washing machine drums have been revamped into bedside tables.

