



# OPEN TO THE ELEMENTS

*Nestled on France's Île de Ré,  
this unique property combines  
industrial surfaces with raw  
materials to dramatic effect*

Words **SARA WHITE WILSON**  
Photography **KAREL BALAS/VEGA MG**

**Entrance** The exterior's blackened pine cladding is like that of a traditional salt barn. The entrance, with a view into the interior courtyard, is signposted with a 350-year-old olive tree from Spain, whose branches are trimmed to appear like small tufts of clouds



**Laurence Simoncini**, co-founder of Parisian children's furniture boutique Serendipity, and husband Marc, an entrepreneur, had fate to thank when they discovered the last stretch of wild coastline for sale outside the village of Ars-en-Ré while holidaying in the area in 2006. The couple snapped up the plot on instinct, and within a year had built this single-storey, four-bedroom space with the help of architect André Blanchet. It is the couple's second holiday home on the island of Île de Ré, where they spend time with their children, Léa, 17, and Ugo, 13.

At first sight, the blackened pine-clad house resembles a traditional salt barn, the façade blending with its surroundings as if the property had always belonged there. Each room has its own large window, so that the 600-square-metre space is flooded with light. The dramatic interior features textured concrete walls, while the footprint of the house wraps round an inner courtyard skirted by a veranda, which in turn follows the line of the swimming pool. The black-tinted concrete finish colours the water, making it almost lagoon-like.

Laurence has played with dualities in her choice of colours and furnishings: the warmth of wood against soft fabrics, the severity of stone with smooth ceramic and the interplay of light and shade. 'Nature inspired the decor of the house,' she says. 'I chose raw, honest materials for the furniture, most of which was unearthed on the island and has a history.'

Wood is a constant theme in the house: it is used for the open-truss beamed ceiling and reclaimed oak floor, and much of the sculpture is perched on slabs of tree trunk. In the main living space, industrial-style coffee tables contrast with delicate paper 'Nuage' suspension lights by Céline Wright ([celinewright.com](http://celinewright.com)). The feeling of weightlessness in the room is enhanced by sculptures mounted on wire by artist and ceramicist Antonella Fadda-Haffaf ([antonellafaddahaffaf.com](http://antonellafaddahaffaf.com)); a pair of ghost-like trees stripped bare of bark flank the generously proportioned couch by Caravane ([caravane.fr](http://caravane.fr)). The lighting in the space includes a mix of vintage and contemporary pieces: lamps by Paola Navone sit alongside original Jieldé designs.

Concrete is used to create a dappled effect in muted tones throughout the interior. In the bathroom, the tub is forged into the concrete floor, and the simple shower area created in situ in the same material.

Industrial elements also set the tone in the kitchen: the rugged backdrop of warm red brick tempers the edges of stainless steel (try Bulthaup for a similar kitchen; [bulthaup.co.uk](http://bulthaup.co.uk)) for a convivial feel. Laurence has used open shelves to create areas of storage and has teamed these with traditional wood tables. 'There's a beautiful atmosphere that emerges from the marriage of these materials and objects,' she says. 'I chose them with love, so it's a joy to see everything come together.' > [serendipity.fr](http://serendipity.fr)







**Pool area** The house wraps around an inner courtyard with a central swimming pool. The base of the pool is finished in black concrete >



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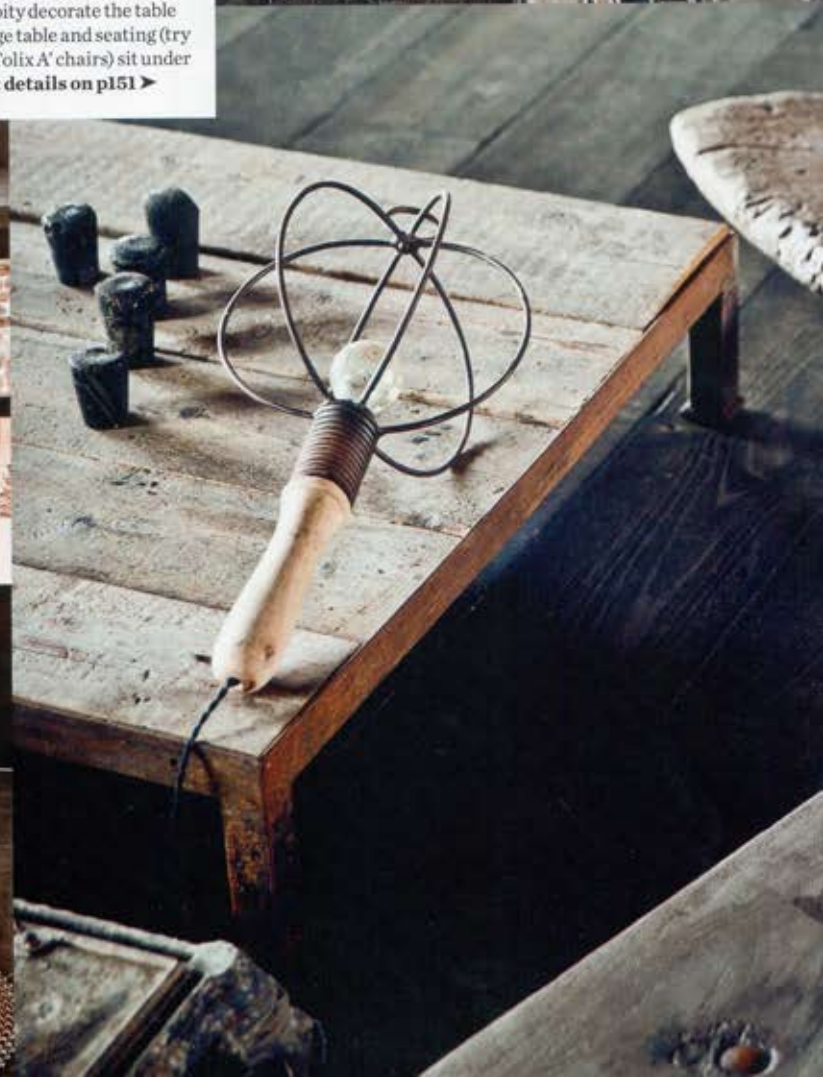


**Living area** In the open-plan living space (top), a 'Mira' chair by Caravane sits by the French doors, which lead out onto a deck. A cluster of pebble-shaped seats by Mahatsara can be found inside, echoed outdoors in the resin seating by Caravane (opposite page, top left)  
**Exterior** The house looks directly onto a stretch of picturesque wild coastline **Stockist details on p151**





**Kitchen** A stainless-steel island contains the hob and sink; Japanese raku vases sit with tableware by Fiorirà un Giardino  
**Living area (detail)** Barrel stoppers and a lamp from Serendipity decorate the table  
**Dining area** A vintage table and seating (try The Conran Shop's "Tolix A" chairs) sit under twin lamps **Stockist details on p151** ▶











**Living area** Japanese 'Nuage' paper pendant lights by Céline Wright hang above a sofa by Caravane. Paola Navone lamps, also from Caravane, sit beside vintage designs by Jieldé (a selection is available from Holloways of Ludlow). The sculptures mounted on wire are by artist and ceramicist Antonella Fadda-Haffa **Stockist details on p151** ▶





## MY STYLE

**I love this house** because it makes me realise how lucky I am to have built such a large family home with a beautiful view; our holidays here are always a success.

**My favourite memory** is of enjoying a dozen oysters with a glass of Pineau des Charentes among the marram grass facing the sea.

**My biggest must-haves** are sun, a fireplace and candles.

**I would always spend money** on items that I fall in love with.

**I would cheat on** nothing.

**My best piece of advice** is to discover your own style. Buy objects that you love and you will find a place for them.

**I would never part with my** terrace facing the sea.



**Bedroom** A monochromatic photograph by Florian Maier-Aichen dominates the wall. Flanking the bed are vintage lamps and church candle holders, as well as two old washing machine drums that have been turned into bedside tables. Society Limonta linen and a felted merino wool plaid throw by Mahatsara adorn the bed. The cushions are made from dyed grain sacks and the rug is by Private 02 04 Stockist details on p151 **ED**