

THE AUSTRALIAN

wish magazine

JULY 2024

THE FRENCH ISSUE

LA FAMILLE

The first joint Olsen-Ormandy
art exhibition takes Paris



TO THE BORDEAUX BORN

A Saint-Émilion winemaking
dynasty champions our vines



PROVENÇAL PERFECTION

Martin Grant's fresh perspective
in the South of France



Shine on Julien Sebban of French design firm Uchronia and his Australian husband Jonathan Wray opt for a kaleidoscopic use of colour in their Paris home.



Excess all areas Clockwise from above, Sebban and Wray's technicolour apartment in Paris's 18th arrondissement.



BRIGHT SPARK

JULIEN SEBBAN OF PARISIAN DESIGN STUDIO UCHRONIA DARES TO DREAM BIG, WORKING WITH FRENCH ARTISANS – AND HIS CREATIVE AUSTRALIAN HUSBAND – TO TRANSFORM TECHNICOLOUR DREAMS INTO REALITY.

By CARLI PHILIPS



Pair of aces Jonathan Wray (left) and husband Julien Sebban.

Every year, architect and designer Julien Sebban and his husband Jonathan Wray escape the wintry chill of Paris to spend summer with family and friends in Australia. This year, however, was a little different as they made new industry contacts and forged organic friendships with designers they had long admired from afar. They also regularly got high – on sugar, that is.

“We love ice-cream and for some reason all the ice-cream shops in Melbourne have really cool interiors. We went to a random place called Fluffy Torpedo where the floor looks like it’s made out of sour strap lollies and silicone is oozing out of the bricks. It was completely amazing and we loved it,” says the Sydney-raised Wray. With wacky flavours like Berocca Choc Chip and Musk Sticks with Eclipse Mints, Fluffy Torpedo specialises in colour on colour on colour – just the way they like it.

The couple met in 2016 in London, when Sebban was doing his masters of architecture at the Architectural Association, and Wray, an interior architect and photographer, was working for furniture manufacturer SCP and The New Craftsman. When Wray was offered a job as the artistic director of French furniture house Maison Royère, the two decided to get married and give things a go in Paris. >

FELIX DOU MALLOT





Take a seat From left, the installation at Hôtel de Sully in conjunction with heritage silk manufacturers Prelle.



Making friends From left, Bloom, a collaboration with heritage bronze makers Maison Charles; Chromo Sapiens exhibition space for Le French Design by Via.



Sebban's business idea began brewing while he was still studying and he graduated with a clear business plan, taking the name Uchronia – a concept that refers to a fictionalised or ephemeral period of time – and manifested it into a dynamic, multidisciplinary studio that actualises “places of experience” such as fashion shows, interiors and exhibitions. Initially, he dabbled in some set design and Airbnbs, but his big break was the Créatures restaurant on top of Paris's famous luxury department store, Galeries Lafayette Haussmann. From there, things snowballed and he's since worked on everything from Forest, the terrace restaurant at the City of Paris Museum of Modern Art, to a Parisian taco joint with Fanta orange ombre walls, to a range of crochet spiral rugs with renowned Italian rug company CC-tapis.

At just 31, Sebban has been hailed as a rising star by *Architectural Digest* and won Emerging Interior Designer of the Year at the 2023 Dezeen Awards. While grateful for the accolades, he's candid about measuring success. “While awards and titles are great on paper, they don't necessarily help young designers like me in a practical sense. Mentorship is really valuable, especially from established designers,” says Sebban, who oversees a team of 10 all aged under 30. “There needs to be a way to pass on the baton,” echoes Wray, who is an unofficial member of the Uchronia team.

The two have complementary skills: Sebban's approach tends to be big picture and conceptual, while Wray leans towards historical research. “The press we've received has been amazing, but we don't have a PR agency – we like to be very straightforward and approachable,” says Sebban. “I consider myself a young brand with big ambitions.”

They recently completed a renovation of their apartment in Paris's 18th arrondissement, a neighbourhood Sebban confesses to loving so much that he barely leaves. The fantastical interiors are a kaleidoscope of colour: toothpaste green and blue, mirrored tiles, marshmallow-pink walls, ruched lemon-coloured curtains, lime drapes. “We couldn't decide on the colours, so we just used a lot of gradients just to get as many in as possible,” says Sebban. “Orange is our white.” Five minutes away is Château Uchronia, their “crazy and fun” five-storey office building, showroom, terrace and meeting room.

In addition to Uchronia's portfolio of hospitality, retail and residences, they also have a furniture range of kooky pieces including Cookie and Peanut tables, grape-hued resin bistro tables and purple stucco-marble flower cake stands. They ship from France with prices up to \$40,000 and – without advertising or local stockists – have found their way into some Australian homes, including a house designed by prominent firm K.P.D.O., who sourced their Sunny armchair. Uchronia is now available for the first time at design gallery Studio ALM in Sydney's Woolahra.

Sebban follows Australian design closely and always stocks up on Dinosaur Designs when he is in Sydney. “I've been obsessed for years,” he says of the celebrated resin-based homewares brand. This time, co-founders Louise Olsen and Stephen Ormandy (read our interview with the Olsen-Ormandy family on page 40) sent them home with some pieces for hairstylist David Mallett they'd had difficulty posting. “He works at the Ritz Paris and is one of the biggest hairdressers in the world. When we dropped them off at his salon, he offered us a free cut, which is why we have such fresh hair,” says Sebban. At €650 for a cut, you'd hope so.

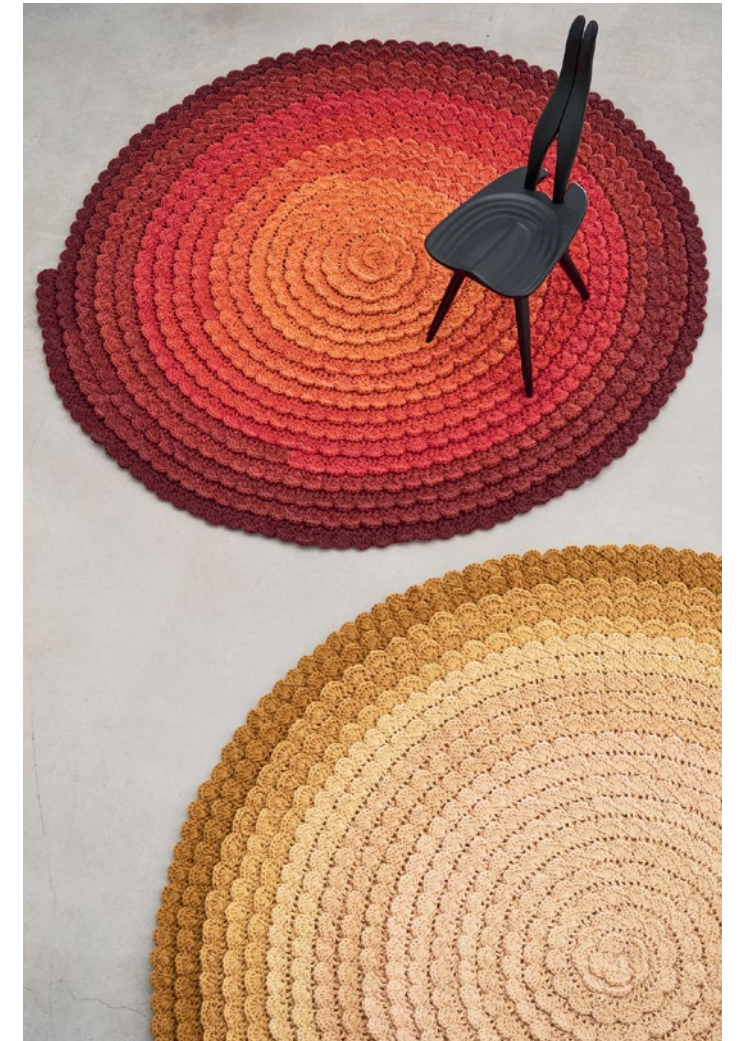
Back in Paris, Sebban is feeling inspired. He's working on a private apartment in the 8th arrondissement, retail store Koibird in London and has a six-piece collection with Monoprix, one of France's biggest retail chains, launching in December. The range will be more affordable than Uchronia's main line. “Because it's produced on a large scale, the price point is more accessible. It means that other people not in our immediate circle can have access to our work.”

Uchronia's polychromatic furniture is full of whimsy as fun daisy-shaped cushions are re-upholstered in luxurious Damask silk and traditional passementerie tassels are layered on Aperol-toned stools. Sebban works closely with French artisans who use time-honoured techniques to help turn his oftentimes wild visions into reality. “I love discovering them as it means that the important older crafts won't be forgotten,” he says. “The older generation makers have more experience, but I have fresh eyes.”

Many of these working relationships have developed into personal relationships, too. “Most of my friends are in their sixties,” says Sebban proudly. “Jon makes fun of me because when we go to events, I'm surrounded by 60-year-old-women while he's hanging out with their kids. One of my best friends is Bruno, a specialist in marble stucco. I'm the same age as his children. He complains about his kids and I complain about my parents.”

Spatial and ephemeral design is also a core part of the studio's work and they've done retail pop-ups for both French fashion brand Sonia Rykiel and department store Le Bon Marché. For the studio's 2022 Under the Sea range, they conjured up a fanciful immersive showroom with a dreamy ocean-bed floor surrounded by glowing cabinets with hundreds of ceramic fish made using stucco marble and wood marquetry.

So, what's the dream project? “I hate that question,” Sebban says candidly. “I've already completed a big dream,” he says, referring to *Think Pink!*, an installation in the gardens of Hôtel de Sully in conjunction with heritage silk manufacturers Prelle. “It's a major museum in a prime location and hundreds of people turned up. Prelle pretty much allowed us to do whatever we wanted, which was an honour. We took their original motifs but modernised them with an evolving spectrum of graphic lines in sunset colours. They usually only work with their archives, so to collaborate with them was incredible, but we still wanted to be considerate and respect their makers.” ■



In a spin Crochet spiral rugs with renowned Italian rug company CC-tapis.



Life in colour Uchronia's unique style is on display at Parisian restaurant Taco Mesa.

FELIX DOL, MAILLOT, YOHANN FONTAINE, CLÉMENT SABEL