

MOUNTAIN HIGH

Converted into a holiday home in the 19th century, this historic alpine farmhouse has been reinvented by a dynamic design duo as a year-round home and creative hub

Words **TESSA PEARSON** Photography **MARTIN GUGGISBERG**



This page The homeowners enjoy spectacular views of the Abendberg ('Evening Mountain')

Opposite The southern façade of the old farmhouse still has its original shingle cladding; the wooden ornamentation is a later, typically 19th-century, addition ▶





Sympathetically restored yet imbued with a new and distinctly contemporary identity, this impressive mountain home in the Swiss town of Interlaken is testament to its talented owners' combined eye for design. Mirko Beetschen and Stéphane Houlmann work across a vast range of interiors-related projects – from journalism, PR and branding to interior design consulting – for their Zurich-based creative and communications agency, Bergdorf, so they weren't short of ideas when it came to renovating this rambling old chalet in the Bernese Oberland. The house had been standing empty for several years when Mirko and Stéphane discovered it, but with the help of master craftsmen and talented carpenters, they repaired and reconstructed the building from the inside out. And with a broad but cohesive palette of no fewer than 40 different shades, they breathed new life into its historic interior. Here, Mirko tells us more about the project.

What first attracted you to the house? I grew up nearby and Stéphane spent a lot of time in the area when he was younger too, but we weren't actually searching for a home here. We are always on the lookout for beautiful spaces, and one day we passed by the house and peeked through a window – we were enthralled by what we saw.
What was it like inside? It was like something out of a fairytale – full of dust and cobwebs. When we first looked round we couldn't believe our eyes; there were so many doors leading into incredible rooms with wood panelled walls and parquet floors, not to mention the library with its huge fireplace.

What's the history of the house? It was originally built as a farmhouse, but we think it was converted into a country home in the 19th century when alpine tourism took off in Interlaken. This would explain the Victorian additions throughout. During the renovations we unearthed English newspapers from 1895 and an old Charles Dickens novel!

What kind of atmosphere did you want to create? We wanted to preserve the soul of the house but we didn't want it to be a museum. It had to feel alive and contemporary, but in a natural way. To this end, we chose simple, honest furniture – a mix of vintage, antique, contemporary and design classics. We also wanted to make sure it would be a creative space where our friends could come to work and to socialise, so there are places to mingle but lots of quiet, cosy corners too.

Do you and Stéphane have similar taste? So similar it's uncanny. We've been together for almost 20 years, so I guess our styles have developed in the same way. However, we each chose very different furniture and were allowed to 'reign' over certain spaces. Stéphane, being the main cook, got to choose the kitchen for example, and I decorated the writing room on the first floor.

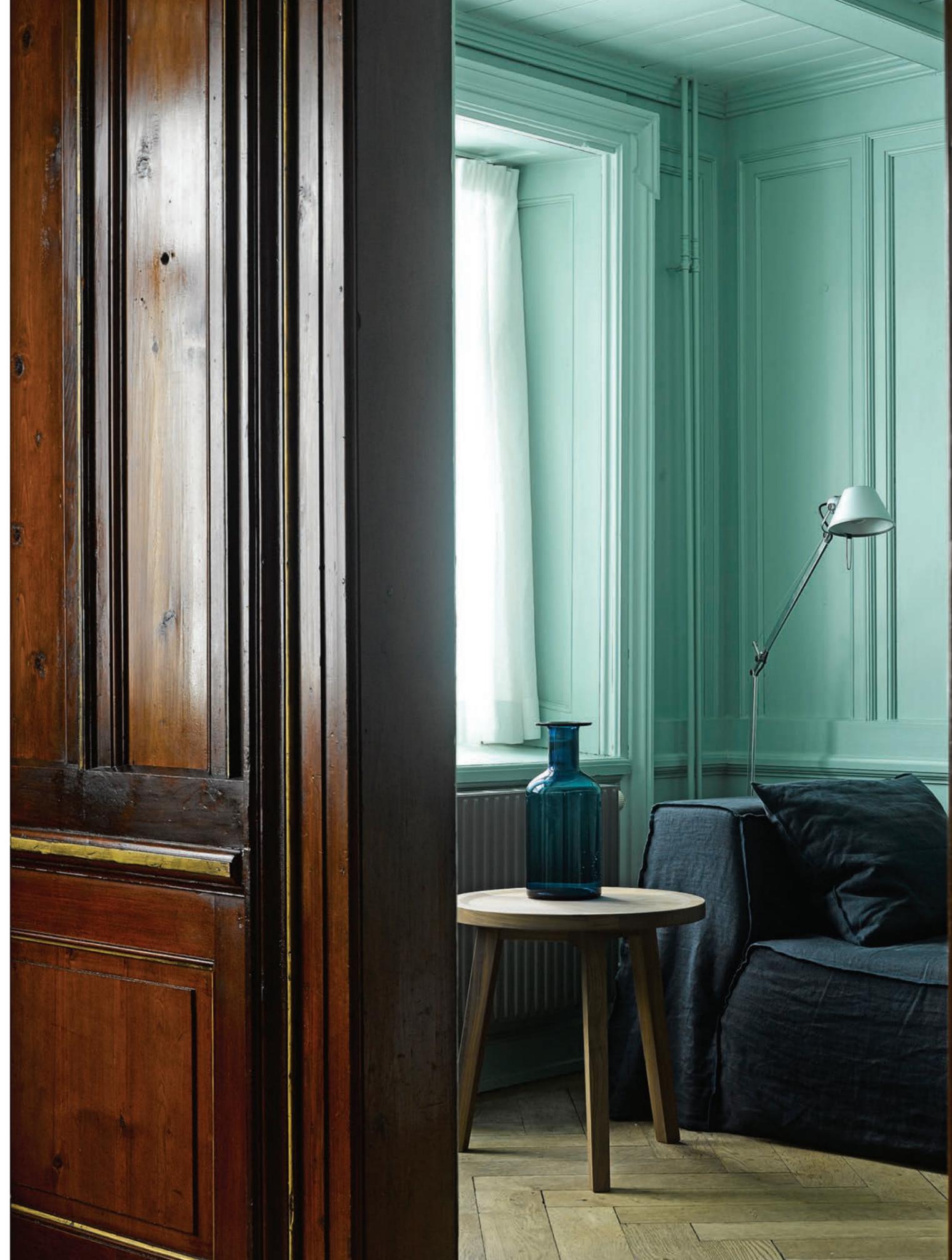
What are your favourite spaces in the house? Mine is the tea parlour: I love the colour and the Gervasoni daybed. Stéphane likes the kitchen and the library. In autumn and winter, he lights a fire in there first thing in the morning; it's the perfect spot to curl up with a newspaper and watch the snow falling outside.
bergdorf.org

Library The library, which now has a picture window onto the veranda, was painted dark green and the decorative fireplace was restored. Shelving was moved and painted to suit the homeowners' needs. The 'In Out' rocking chair is by Paola Navone for Gervasoni. The wicker basket is from local shop Veranda Wohnen
Portrait Homeowners Mirko Beetschen (left) and Stéphane Houlmann, who own a creative and communications agency in Zurich, repaired and reconstructed the building with the help of a team of master craftsmen **Stockist details on p214 >**



'WE'D ALWAYS DREAMT OF HAVING A MAGICAL OLD COUNTRY HOUSE WITH MANY ROOMS SO WE COULD HOST LOTS OF FRIENDS'

Living room The view from the tea parlour into the larger living area reveals a glimpse of the original wood-paneled walls, now restored
Tea parlour The smaller of the two reception rooms was designated the 'tea parlour'. Painted a soft celadon green, it is furnished simply as befits a space intended for reading and talking ►





'WE DIDN'T OVER-DECORATE THE ROOMS; WE WANTED TO LEAVE SPACE FOR OTHER PEOPLE'S IMAGINATIONS'

Dining room Originally the stable, the dining room was incorporated into the main farmhouse some 120 years ago. The extendable pine table is a bespoke piece. The grey-lacquered 'Series 7' chairs are by Arne Jacobsen for Fritz Hansen, and the light blue 'Tulipani' chair (against the wall) is by Roderick Voss. The ornate fireplace was taken apart, repaired and then reassembled tile by tile. Its original sandstone bench was replaced by a Bernese stone example. The yellow 'Annie' lamp is by Frau Maier
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'WE WANTED TO CREATE A FEEL-GOOD ATMOSPHERE THAT UNDERLINED THE BEAUTY OF THE ORIGINAL STRUCTURE'

Attic The attic level received a new demilune dormer window
Bedroom There are two guest rooms in the north part of the house, each with views of Interlaken's local mountain, the Harder. The bedspread, found in Morocco, is made of camel hair and the 'Ghost' bed is by Paola Navone for Gervasoni
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