



HOME TOUR

Inside the Soulful London Home of Christian Louboutin's Favorite Designer

From textiles bought in auction to family heirlooms, architect Tarek Shamma transformed a dated apartment to one infused with warmth and stories that span continents

Ask architect and designer Tarek Shamma what defines a home, and he won't speak of square footage or location. "It isn't where you stay the longest, but a place that is a true reflection of you," he says. Indeed Shamma, Cairo-born and London-based, has spent his illustrious career shaping spaces that blend craft and personal storytelling. For years, he has collaborated closely with his good friend Christian Louboutin, designing his boutiques globally alongside Louboutin's residential projects, which include the experimental La Folie in Portugal, a three-story "party tower" inspired by the 18th-century Jantar Mantar observatory in Jaipur, India.

And yet Shamma had, for nearly two decades, lived in a central London apartment that left him stone cold. "It was in a new-build, and I realized that style is not in my DNA because it was so soulless. I stayed for 19 years but it never felt like home," he admits. The turning point came in 2018 when Louboutin visited and, perplexed, bluntly asked, "Why are you living here?" That question, one Shamma had posed to himself numerous times, finally propelled him on a search that led to a top-floor one-bedroom apartment in a red-brick 1890s building in Knightsbridge. Tucked into the mansard roofline, it had been untouched for 50 years. "But what I loved about it was the light," he recalls. Shamma speaks often of soul—the missing ingredient in his previous apartment. This time, he pursued it intentionally. "I wanted walls that told a story. No plasterboard or hollow spaces."



The gouged oak bar cabinet with parchment panels, filled with [Baccarat barware](#), was initially designed by Shamma for an exhibition. It was inspired by one of his favorite Italian designers, Aldo Tura, who worked a lot with parchment. “It’s a natural material that has a texture and a pattern without being a pattern,” says Shamma. Next to it is an [Azucena floor lamp](#) designed by Ignazio Gardella. The Ashanti stool is an early-20th-century piece from Ghana while the coffee table is by [Christian Liaigre](#).

The apartment’s bones were reimagined: the kitchen reoriented, a second bedroom added, stairwells opened to light with carved ovals that frame vistas. Shamma worked with decorative painter [Lottie Radford](#) to achieve textured stucco throughout. “Flat white emulsion looks clean, but you lose a lot of warmth,” he says. “What’s nice is when walls absorb and reflect light in different ways.” Every intervention reveals his preference for imperfection over polish. “People always worry about marble staining,” he says of the Arabescato worktop and splash back in the kitchen. “But you have to let marble develop, patina, and become part of the story.”



Sitting within the dining area in the living room is an Andre Arbus dining table, the first piece Shamma purchased from London's Sotheby's auction house. Alongside it is a Napoleon III chair upholstered in Pierre Frey cotton velvet. "It was bought at the Pucés in Paris on a rainy day," he recalls. The Persian runner was an Istanbul buy. The painting above the table is from Lindon & Co. Shamma's maternal grandfather, Mina Sarofim, painted the kitchen artwork in the 1980s.



In the kitchen, the specialist wall finish is by Lottie Radford. The bespoke shelves and cabinetry are in blackened steel and fluted glass and the countertop and backsplash are Arabescato viola marble. The shelves are lined with personal pieces including an opaline vase with Papal insignia, bought at auction, a porcelain given to Shamma by his grandfather, and a Larry Bell piece gifted by his art dealer friend Graham Steele. The larger artwork on the bottom shelf is by McDermott & McGough. All appliances are Miele and the induction stove is from Novy.



The living room, which is at the apex of the top-floor apartment, is painted a textured, specialist finish by [Lottie Radford](#). A built-in bespoke sofa in palm wood veneer, designed by Shamma, wraps around the room. The window, flanked by [Luigi Caccia Dominioni](#) sconces, is dressed with a vintage linen blind featuring a 19th-century Japanese painting on velvet, made by London-based textile studio [Govindia Hemphill](#). The early [André Sornay](#) armchairs were reupholstered in an Egyptian moire while the Persian rug was given to Shamma by his parents.

In the living room, early André Sornay armchairs, Italian modernist sconces, and English silver mingle with inherited family pieces and his own designs. “I am addicted to auction websites,” he says with a laugh. His approach is very much one of an elegant, well-travelled collector, mixing eras and cultures. An antique textile featuring a Japanese painting has been reconcieved as a window blind, while others—such as vintage Hermès scarves and a Greek embroidery with floss silk from his mother, passed on from her parents—were repurposed. “I made the embroidery into cushions and gave it another life,” he says. That is in fact his philosophy for even the most precious of pieces. “Live with your things, enjoy your things. There’s no reason to save the best for guests. We no longer live in that era.”



The entrance landing features a built-in bookshelf in eucalyptus burl veneer. “As well as books, it has ceramics, objects, and sculptures that I’ve collected or been gifted over the years,” says Shamma. He also designed a bespoke balustrade—in corten steel, green onyx, white onyx, brass, and rosewood—which has a triptych of symbols paired with practical niches for mail, candles, and pocket clutter. The Turkish rug was bought in an Istanbul grand bazaar.

The custom built-in sofa with palm wood veneer wraps around the room like a ribbon (“I love palm wood, so it was a non-negotiable,” Shamma says), and a bar cabinet made of gouged oak, partly inspired by one of Shamma’s favorite Italian designers Aldo Tura, serves as both a storage and sculptural piece.

Even utilitarian features become talismans. The bespoke stair balustrade, for instance, holds a triptych of symbols: a cross, a medallion of the Virgin Mary, and a stone evil eye, each paired with practical niches for post, candles, and pocket clutter.

While the main living space has warm stuccoed tones, in contrast the guest bedroom plunges into enveloping lacquered red, not dissimilar to Louboutin’s iconic shoe soles. “It was not intentional but perhaps psychological,” muses Shamma. “But my feeling was that it isn’t a room I use often, so why not have fun with it?” Bathrooms too are curated with theatrical flair and the layering of cultures: a vintage poster of an Egyptian pharaoh, Italian mirrors, and South American masks all make the mark.

While Shamma splits his time between London and Cairo, this apartment remains his anchor and a distilled manifesto of his design philosophy. “Home changes and develops with you,” he says. “But the most important thing is how a space is lived in and that it has soul.”



In the primary bedroom, Shamma designed a custom bed in eucalyptus burl and dressed it with a 19th-century Boukhara bed throw. On the wall, which is clad in linen sourced by Govindia Hemphill, hangs a midcentury Peruvian mirror. On the floor is an early 19th-century Chinese Ningxia carpet.



The lower half of the primary bathroom and basin is in travertine, while the vanity is made from eucalyptus burl. A Russian silver beaker on the vanity was given to Shamma by his grandmother. The rug is from Siwa.



A special mirror finish red lacquer was developed by Shamma and a Portuguese craftsman friend for the guest bedroom. A late 19th-century Japanese silk embroidered textile was used to create the blind and the red moire silk pillows were embroidered in Siwa, in Egypt's Western Desert. The 1940s sconces are from Maison Jansen.



The guest bathroom features Portuguese tiles with a mica finish. The vintage table, by André Sornay, was bought at auction. The vintage Egyptian train poster is a nod to Shamma's heritage and the small artwork next to it is by Pierre Molinier.