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Greek chorus

With a brief to honour Patmos traditions while updating this former merchant's house, design duo Campbell-Rey has introduced a finely balanced blend of colour and character



ENTRANCE Duncan Campbell and Charlotte Rey of Campbell-Rey beside a 20th-century Austrian **chair** from 1stDibs. The **door** is in 'Blue Verditer' on the exterior and 'Jewel Beetle' on the interior, both by Little Greene Paint & Paper. **MAIN BEDROOM** *(detail)* A Scavo Murano glass vase on a Maison Jansen swan-head **side table**, also from 1stDibs, stands out against the whitewashed wall

The Greek island of Patmos is not for the faint-hearted.

Getting to one of the Dodecanese's smallest islands is a challenge in itself – either a two-and-a-half-hour boat trip after a flight into Kos, or an eight-hour ferry ride from Athens. And once you've docked, it's a hairpin-bend drive up to the capital, the craggy mountaintop village of Chora. Then it is a case of following your nose on foot (nowhere really has an address) and navigating a maze of alleyways, suitcase in tow. Clusters of tightly packed sugar-cube houses rise up to meet the 11th-century monastery of Saint John the Theologian, which marks where he wrote the Book of Revelation. It's one of hundreds of churches, leading to the island being dubbed the 'Jerusalem of the Aegean'.

Imagine, then, having to transport a 2,000-piece Murano-glass chandelier, destined for one of the whitewashed old merchant's houses in Chora. 'It felt a bit like a medieval operation getting it up here,' recalls Charlotte Rey with a laugh. Co-founder of art and design atelier Campbell-Rey, she had been holidaying on Patmos for years – wooed by the low-key, bohemian feel of the place that has attracted an aesthetically minded set. When a friend introduced her to a well-travelled Greek family who were looking to breathe new life into a higgledy-piggledy old house on the island, Charlotte and her business partner, Duncan Campbell, gamely accepted. That they would not be able to move a single wall, as Chora is fiercely protected by Unesco World Heritage Site status, didn't deter them. 'Limitations are what create the magic,' Duncan observes.

The fact that the island has a strong decorative vernacular (think monastic, with whitewashed walls and painted woodwork) added another layer to their approach. 'Our clients wanted us to bring in some colour and glamour,' says Charlotte, explaining that it needed to be respectful but not a pastiche, and to 'bridge the historic past with a life of hosting and entertaining'.

The designers started their careers as editors working for the cult publication *Acne Paper* and thrive when they are weaving together various threads. An additional narrative strand came from the fact that the island has always been a cultural melting pot, having been variously ruled by the Byzantines, Venetians and Turks, and was historically an important trading port between Europe and Africa. 'We wanted to continue that spirit of exchange through the juxtaposition of pieces,' says Duncan.

First, though, it was a case of making sense of the old building, which resembles a collection of Tetris-like cubes. Split over two levels, with four bedrooms and a couple of tiny kitchens, it feels warren-like thanks to level changes, internal and external staircases and two large terraces that provide epic views towards the Aegean.





BREAKFAST ROOM A **banquette** in Nobilis' 'Kiosque' cotton mix sets off the 1970s Chelini 'Wheat Sheaf' **table** from Brownrigg and an Ottoman suzani on the wall. TERRACE 'Chameleon Stripe' acrylic by Perennials was chosen for the **seating** and **cushions**. HALLWAY The red Biedermeier onyx **column** is from 1stDibs

SITTING ROOM The warm tones of Patmian floor tiles are picked up in a pair of custom **armchairs** in 'Wobble Grid' from Rubelli and a 19th-century Anatolian saf prayer rug, used as a **wall hanging**, from Robert Kime. The Vico Magistretti **dining chairs** are from 1stDibs, the 'Green Vine' **tablecloth** is from Carolina Irving & Daughters and the custom Murano **chandelier** is by Sogni di Cristallo. The **kitchen cabinets** are painted in Little Greene's 'Heat' and the **shelf skirt** is made from Soane Britain's 'Qajar Stripe' linen





BATHROOM A pair of 'Crespi' Perspex **wall lights** from Collier Webb frame the Paolo Moschino 'Roche' resin **mirror. Woodwork** painted in Little Greene's rich 'Jewel Beetle' sets off the terracotta tiled **countertop** and **floor**



BEDROOM Custom-made in Athens, the **bed** is dressed in Dedar's 'Blazer' linen satin in two contrasting colours, a **runner** in 'Coquelicots' linen from Soane Britain and **cushions** in Colefax and Fowler's forest green 'Arbour' linen. **Armchairs** in Le Manach's 'Gorgone' from Pierre Frey complement an 18th-century Gustavian **bench** sourced from 1stDibs



BEDROOM (*above*) A runner in Colefax and Fowler 'Pashley' complements Vanderhurd's 'Ponti' **rug** and **cushions**. BEDROOM (*below*) The traditional ceiling is echoed by a Vaughan 'Whitway' **chandelier**, with an antique tapestry hanging behind the bed. TERRACE **Seating** is in Perennials' 'Jake Stripe' in tutti frutti



One part of the house, although in need of a refresh, was already lived in and had been made good, but another, which now accommodates three bedrooms, a kitchen and dining area, required a complete overhaul. 'There was mud and straw on the floors, so it was a real ground-up project,' says Charlotte. Working with Yannis Stavropoulos, a local architect with intimate knowledge of the vernacular, and builders from the island, they set about preserving what they could, including joinery, doors and the original wood-beamed ceilings that are woven with branches. Woodwork in an almost verdigris green was kept exactly as they found it. 'We have no clue when it was painted, but it has this beautiful mottled effect that is the result of hundreds of years of being by the sea,' she explains.

New materials all came from the island. Traditional Patmian clay floor tiles – characterised by three squiggles that run across them, created by the makers dragging their fingers across the wet clay before it dries – were used throughout. For the kitchens and bathrooms, lattice-fronted cupboards – a classic Patmos design intended to improve airflow in the damp winter months – were made by carpenters on site, while tabletops and bases were made from stone that came from a quarry on the island. 'There's something wonderful about working with a palette of materials that are so specific to the place,' Charlotte says.

Bar the odd piece of upholstery, fabrics were deployed relatively sparingly. 'People don't really use textiles here, because they don't fare well in the damp winters,' Duncan notes. 'It was exciting to have certain tools removed from our usual arsenal, because it made it all about finding extraordinary objects that nodded to the fact this was once an important trading route,' he adds.

In one bedroom, an ebonised four-poster featuring pomegranates was made bespoke by a workshop in Venice and offers a take on a traditional marital bed. Opposite it stands an Art Deco desk and a folksy 19th-century Tyrolean wardrobe. 'These pieces might seem disparate, but when brought together, they feel like a cocktail party full of characters,' says Duncan, pointing out a combination in one of the other bedrooms, where a Swedish Gustavian bench, a mid-century Maison Jansen swan side table and another bespoke Venetian chandelier all sit in effortless harmony.

In typical Patmian style, walls are limewashed throughout, so objects were key to establishing a palette. A pop of red in a hallway comes from an Austrian metal chair, while in another bedroom, an elaborate Tyrolean cabinet, from the sale of Robert Kime's collection, introduces reds, yellows and greens.

At the heart of the house is a fluidity between inside and out. Summers are spent largely outdoors on one of the three terraces, which the duo have treated rather like rooms, even laying a rug on one of them. 'We've tried to imagine all the different scenarios throughout the day. It might be a shady spot for breakfast,' reflects Charlotte, referring to a charming covered lower terrace. 'Or somewhere heavenly for afternoon cocktails, like on the upper terrace, where we've added pink banquettes and created a real moment. It was about celebrating the joy of life and about providing a place where the owners could have as good a time as possible' □

Campbell-Rey: campbell-rey.com

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