blush

La Salvada – Christian Laboutin's private villa in Portugal – achieves something almost impossible with its pink walls: it makes the sunset last forever

pink

Words by Arantxa Neyra Photography by Clément Vayssières & Ricardo Junqueira







Previous spread The cactus that predated everything and shaped the villa's construction, its architecture recalling Mesopotamian ziggurats. A line of blue tiles traces the stepped form of the pink terracotta facade. **This page, clockwise from top left** A carved wooden door frames a view of the blue corridor beyond, where the staircase climbs toward the main house. Beneath a handloomed raw silk tapestry by French designer Hélène Henry (1930s, from Louboutin's own collection) is a bench recalling Gaudí's Confidente for Casa Batlló, and a braided wicker floor lamp by Vida Dura, set against hydraulic tiles in green, blue and grey. Below, a whitewashed exterior wall catches the afternoon light under the shade of the pines. **Opposite** The kitchen's handcrafted tiles, laid in an irregular checkerboard, frame a window onto the pines; on the counter, an array of Portuguese ceramic tableware.



A cactus no one wanted to remove. A furniture collection assembled piece by piece over decades and a painting that couldn't find a wall. Holding it all together, a friendship: that of Egyptian architect Tarek Shamma and French designer Christian Louboutin, who is also its owner. Out of all this came La Salvada, decorated by the duo as an extension of the Vermelho hotel in Melides, 130 kilometres south of Lisbon.

"The brief was remarkably clear from the beginning," Shamma recalls of the project's beginnings. "We wanted to respect the footprint of the ruins already on the site rather than erase them, allowing the new house to grow from what was already there. There was also a very practical requirement: Christian had a monumental painting that had never found a home, so creating a space worthy of it became one of the anchors of the design." As the project progressed, "the brief became less about building a house and more about choreographing an experience through landscape, light and carefully framed moments."

Pink came first, as an instinct shared by architect and designer. "It recalls that fleeting moment just after sunset when the landscape seems to dissolve into soft shades of rose. It feels warm without being nostalgic."

It's the tone that covers almost the entire house, with one exception: a blue wall, Louboutin's idea, which at a certain hour of the day aligns almost completely with the sky, dissolving the boundary between architecture and the rice-paddy landscape, and creating "the feeling that you could simply continue walking into the horizon."

Colour here is never just decoration. It shifts with the natural light throughout the day and, as Shamma puts it, "the architecture only feels complete once the light begins to move through it."

The references for La Salvada came from far away. Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan – known as the pink city – and in particular its *baoris*, the stepwells, were decisive. There, architecture takes on an almost ceremonial character, something Shamma and Louboutin had already explored together in previous projects. Petra, in Jordan, and AlUla, in Saudi Arabia, had a similar influence; the two friends had travelled there nearly a decade earlier and returned fascinated by the Nabataean monuments and by architecture that seems to rise out of the landscape itself.

And yet, Shamma points out, "the house ultimately belongs to Portugal because of its materials and its makers. The stone is local. The bedroom ceilings are woven from traditional rush. The tiles are handmade and glazed individually, carrying the subtle irregularities and traces of the people who made them. Architecture provides the framework, but craftsmanship gives it its soul."

The plot sits on a hillside that, on arrival, reveals only a glimpse of the house. From there, one climbs toward the entrance, catching small fragments of the landscape before it opens up completely, followed by an almost ceremonial descent toward the main living spaces.

The villa is laid out across two independent bedrooms – each with its own private entrance – and a generous living area with a skylight, combining the living room, dining room and a reading nook. The bedrooms are built with double-height ceilings, each concealing a smaller raised space that shapes how it's inhabited. In the bedrooms, a platform holding the bed creates a more intimate zone; in the living room, a raised fireplace invites people to sit and gather.

All the furniture – the rattan chairs, the Gobelins tapestries, the Castilian tables, the Moroccan lamps – came from Louboutin's own collection, so for Shamma, the job in Melides came down to letting objects that already had a life of their own tell their own story. Both the art and the furniture were factored in from the very first sketch. So was the cactus by the entrance. This five-metre prickly pear was so imposing that removing it was never even part of the conversation; the house was designed to acknowledge it, almost like another resident.

What Shamma hopes now is that guests won't see the villa as something untouchable, but as a place that reveals something different every day: a shift in morning light, the roughness of a tile underfoot that went unnoticed the day before. A place, he says, "shaped by craftsmanship, travel and curiosity, where architecture quietly frames the landscape, the light and the stories collected along the way." ● **@hotelvermelho @christianlouboutin @tarekshamma,**

Opposite The living room plays with geometry and volumes set at different heights. On a raised platform sits the fireplace, its lines kept pure. Above it hangs a plaster ceiling light by French artist Patrice Dangel, its vertebra-like forms commissioned specifically for the space; around it, masks by Elizabeth Garouste. In front of the fireplace, a cluster of lounge chairs, a sofa and a thick bamboo table in the style of 1970s designer Budji Layug. Here Louboutin found the room for the nearly six-metre triptych by Pakistani artist Imran Qureshi, hung above a built-in banquette upholstered in striped Egyptian tenting fabric. In the foreground of the room is Jorge Zalszupin's sinuous Onda bench beside a set of wood-and-rattan armchairs in the style of Pierre Jeanneret.





Previous spread In the bathroom, veined marble and brass fittings meet a band of oxblood tile, made in collaboration with the Azeitão tile factory, which also supplied the floor tiles throughout the house. In the bedroom, the headboard – glazed ceramic in forest green, a Portuguese technique shaping plant-like forms – sits inside a gilded frame above the lacquered orange bed base, beneath a ceiling of woven rush. Above it, an antique textile reveals well-travelled influences, its central motif recalling both Indian block print and Central Asian Suzani embroidery. **Opposite** The long, solid-wood Castilian table invites lunches and dinners outdoors; light bistro chairs in natural fibre balance its weight. On the table, Portuguese ceramic tableware, beside a Moorish-style masonry fireplace with a trapezoidal firebox set on three square pillars. **This page** The pool sits embedded in the landscape; beside it, rustic natural-bamboo reclining sun loungers, with their signature red-and-white striped towels.





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