

EXHIBITION / HYÈRES, FRANCE

HOUSE PROUD

The clean Modernist lines, light and space of the Villa Noailles has made it a fitting home for the International Festival of Fashion and Photography – an essential celebration of design forged far from the polestar of Paris. Here, event director Jean-Pierre Blanc picks the best of the villa's pieces and places.

WRITER *Sonia Zhuravlyova* PHOTOGRAPHER *Julien Oppenheim*

Some 30 years ago, Hyères native Jean-Pierre Blanc wanted to connect budding fashion designers with more established houses but Paris seemed a million miles away. "The idea at the end of the 1980s was to celebrate the new fashion world in France because there was a lot of freedom and innovation at the time; fashion was very fresh and dynamic," he says, debonair and gravel-voiced. "For me it was natural to have it here – it was unimaginable to do it in Paris as I didn't know anyone."

From modest beginnings the International Festival of Fashion and Photography and its home the Villa Noailles – both under the direction of the affable Blanc – grew to become a cultural hot spot in the south of France. Big names such as Martin Margiela, Helmut Lang and Jean-Paul Gaultier have all taken their places on the jury. The focus has remained firmly on nurturing emerging designers, artists and photographers, many of whom have gone on to become household names, such as Viktor & Rolf.

The Villa Noailles was built between 1923 and 1927 by architect Robert Mallet-Stevens for art patrons Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles; they were admirers of the avant garde so Giacometti created art especially for them. The sharp lines, stretches of white walls and floor-to-ceiling windows – as well as the geometric garden – have since made it a fitting backdrop for showcasing new talent. It has expanded its activities to become an art centre and now also hosts part of the annual Design Parade, a festival of fashion, photography, architecture and design; it's on here until 24 September. In the meantime, look right for Blanc's tour of his favourite rooms and works of art.

About the writer:

Zhuravlyova is a Russian-born London-based writer. She loves all things mid-century and concrete and will cross land and sea to seek out the best modernist buildings. Next on the list? Alvar Aalto's library in Vyborg, Russia.



The sharp lines, stretches of white walls and floor-to-ceiling windows of the modernist villa are a fitting backdrop for showing new talent



Clockwise from top: Villa Noailles; Jean-Pierre Blanc in the swimming pool room; looking at the glass roof of the Pink Salon; sculpture by Alberto Giacometti; another sculpture, this time by Pierre Charpin

Sentimental sculpture

"One of the most important pieces for me is a sculpture by Alberto Giacometti. It's called 'La Table Surrealiste'. Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles bought it in the 1930s and then offered it to the Centre Pompidou. It's the first time it has come back to the villa because we celebrated the centre's 40th anniversary this summer here. It was really emotional to have it back home."

Light and shade

"One room that I particularly love in the villa is the old painting room of Marie-Laure de Noailles; there is an amazing retracting bay window, which takes up the entire wall. It was Marie-Laure's atelier, where she used to paint. The light and the view are really amazing."

Pretty in pink

"Another room I love is called the Pink Salon. It was an atelier too. It was added by the architect Mallet-Stevens in 1929, after the villa was built. The light comes from the roof, from a cubist stained-glass skylight, like in a church. The interior architecture of the room, the design of the walls, is very specific, very modern and cubist – but pink."

Nice ring to it

"French designer and artist Pierre Charpin was president of the jury three years ago for Design Parade. He decided to offer us a big bell – it's 1.5 metres high so we put it in the garden of the villa. We ring it when something special is happening."

Fountain of colour

"I love one of the young designers who is taking part in the festival this year, Arthur Hoffner. He made a statue of a fountain. It won the City of Hyères public prize. I really like the surrealist shape and the bright colours – pink again."

Glass menagerie

"One of last year's winners was a French designer called Pernelle Poyet. She combines porcelain and glass. One of her vases is presented in front of a window in an exhibition room; the sunlight from the garden goes through it and makes for a very nice effect."

The up and comers

"The last one is the exhibition of two young French artists, Mathieu Peyroulet-Ghilini and designer Laureline Galliot. The iPad drawings by Laureline are portraits, and Mathieu's shapes are more abstract and free from reality; the form of the object disappears a little."

BEACH READS / GLOBAL

Seeking the shades

The holiday read is a sacred text and vital companion. But it needn't be confined to pure escapism: there's a host of genres that can transport you on your trip.

WRITER *Georgina Godwin*
PHOTOGRAPHER *Salva López*



When you read for a living it is a luxury to casually choose your next book. Normally I have a strict line up, all neatly stacked in date order; by the time I interview an author for *Monocle 24's Meet the Writers* I'll know the work intimately. But next to that is my secret stash, a teetering pile of books that I pine for; I have to treat it in the manner of an addict who knows she mustn't indulge or she will be lost. Garish paperbacks, slim hardback volumes of poetry, doorstep thrillers and tasteful literary novels all jostling with each other and screaming, "Me next!"

The perfect beach read needs an engrossing plot that's going to grab you by your bronzed arm and coax you into a different world. It needs to be a story that will keep your attention, that can be consumed alongside an aperitif in a busy bar or digested in solitude and silence.

There should be no place for literary snobbery on holiday but your poolside companions will probably judge you for your well-thumbed Jeffrey Archer; more than 33 million copies of *Kane and Abel* have been sold since it was published in 1979.

A Kindle may be handy for disguising your taste but it's preferable to stick to a proud paperback to attract erudite companions impressed by your Auster or Austen.

Can you judge a book by its cover? Can you judge a reader by their book? Do we really care in the summer? This is, after all, a time when formulaic novels fly off the airport shelves. You know the ones: gaudy pink-and-gold graphics, swirly writing, pictures of girls in bikinis and idyllic summer scenes. Or the ones by men for men, maybe with a silhouette of a gunman on the cover and a short, blunt, one-word title.

But do beach reads mean suspending all critical faculties? Must reading on holiday be an exercise in escapism? A good beach read is a page-turner, a book that will hold your attention in competition with stunning vistas and noisy fellow travellers. It's a huge market for publishers who love a bandwagon and if a *Girl (With the Dragon Tattoo/On a Train/Gone)* sells, you can bet there will be many more to come.

Why not embrace geography? Making your reading relevant to

Buried in a good book: *Well, it certainly beats being buried in the sand: no shower required afterwards and you're afforded a much more expansive view of the world*

Best beach reads:

1. **The Sad Part Was** by Prabda Yoon. A short-story collection about Bangkok life.
2. **Oblivion: A Memoir** by Héctor Abad Faciolince. A memorial to the writer's father, who was murdered by Colombian paramilitaries.
3. **Reckoning: A Memoir** by Magda Szubanski. The performer's funny and thoughtful reflection on her life.
4. **The Lazarus Effect** by Hawa Jande Golakai. Appealing crime fiction.
5. **The Lesser Bohemians** by Eimear McBride. Once you get into the narrative style, this is a masterpiece.
6. **The Return: Fathers, Sons and the Land in Between** by Hisham Matar. This memoir won the 2017 Pulitzer prize.
7. **Septimania: A Novel** by Jonathan Levi. If Dan Brown had written a literary novel...
8. **Britt-Marie Was Here** by Fredrik Backman. A feel-good, easy read.
9. **Hay Festival Conversations** edited by Allah Wakatama Allfrey. Join the world's most eloquent brains.
10. **The Silk Roads: A New History of the World** by Peter Frankopan. This bestseller will change how you see the past.

your travels can enhance your trip no end. You don't have to disengage intellectually with an escapist read or plough through something considered worthy. Perhaps it is time we redefined the beach read.

Anyway, which beach? Rose Cole, who runs Daunt Books in Marylebone, London, says, "Our shop's arrangement with an escapist read or plough through something considered worthy. Perhaps it is time we redefined the beach read. Anyway, which beach? Rose Cole, who runs Daunt Books in Marylebone, London, says, "Our shop's arrangement for the many readers who want to read a book about where they are going, be it southern Spain or the wilds of Africa. More often than not you

The perfect beach read can be consumed alongside an aperitif in a busy bar or digested in solitude

will discover something previously unknown, whether it's a travel account, history or novel. This sense of discovery makes choosing your books that bit more exciting."

Cole's recommended beach reads this year are *The Underground*

Railroad by Colson Whitehead, a Pulitzer prize-winner and genuine page-turner despite its unflinching take on the slave trade. The other is *Swing Time* by Zadie Smith, a very different but equally compelling read. Both have recently been long-listed for this year's Man Booker prize but are extremely accessible. Reading the prize lists, or indeed finally getting around to *War and Peace* or *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is another way to structure your literary leisure time.

The excitement of cracking a new spine, the anticipation of starting a new story, is exhilarating. But there is also something to be said for an old friend. In my holiday pile will always be something I can almost recite, a book that feels like slipping on a favourite jumper. Well-worn words can soothe the soul. And for those all important poolside encounters, of course you'll want to have something that chimes tastefully with your towel and tote.

For more literary discussion, tune in to 'Meet the Writers'; visit monocle.com/radio