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By Chris Dercon
All photos Courtesy of Milène Guermont / ADAGP

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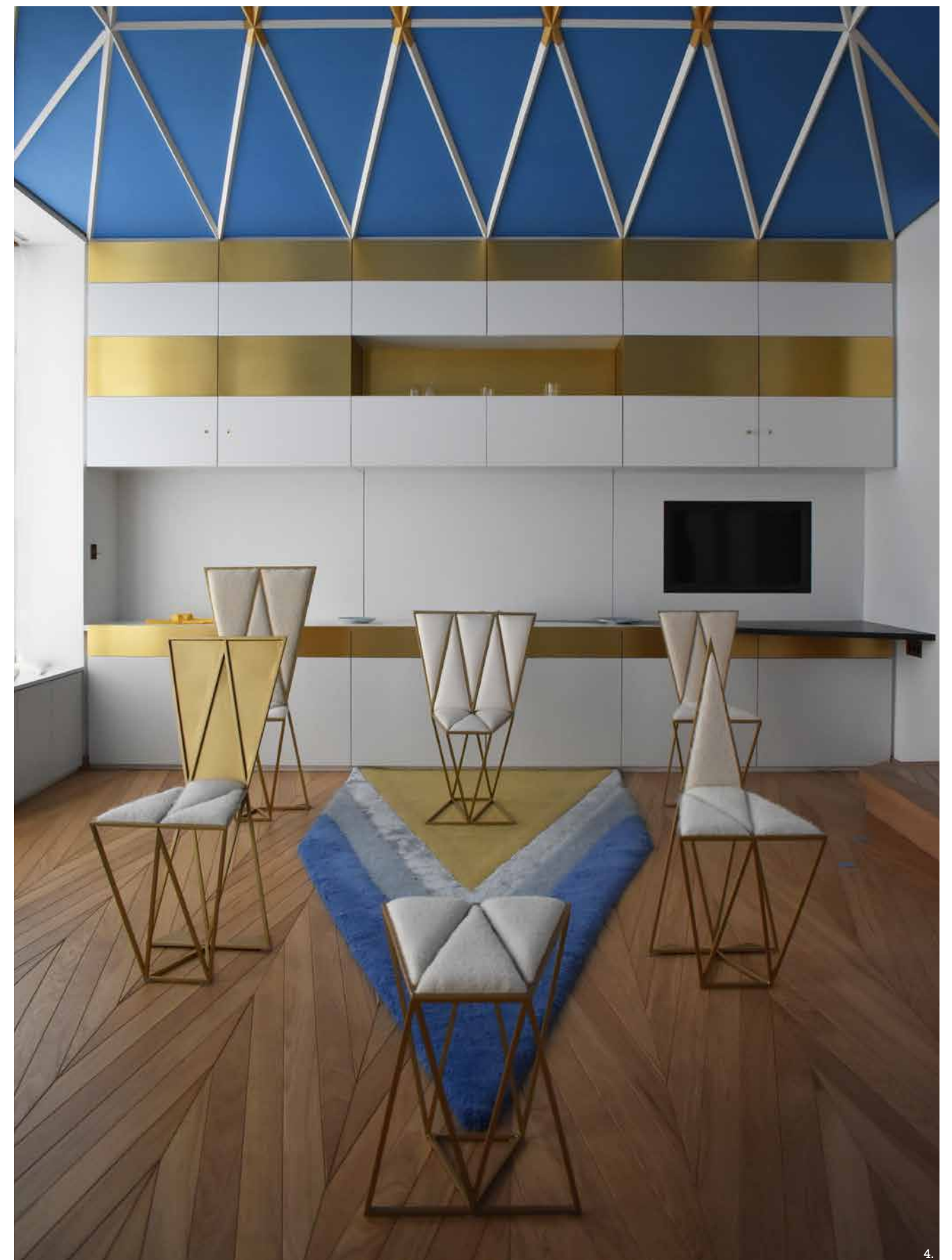
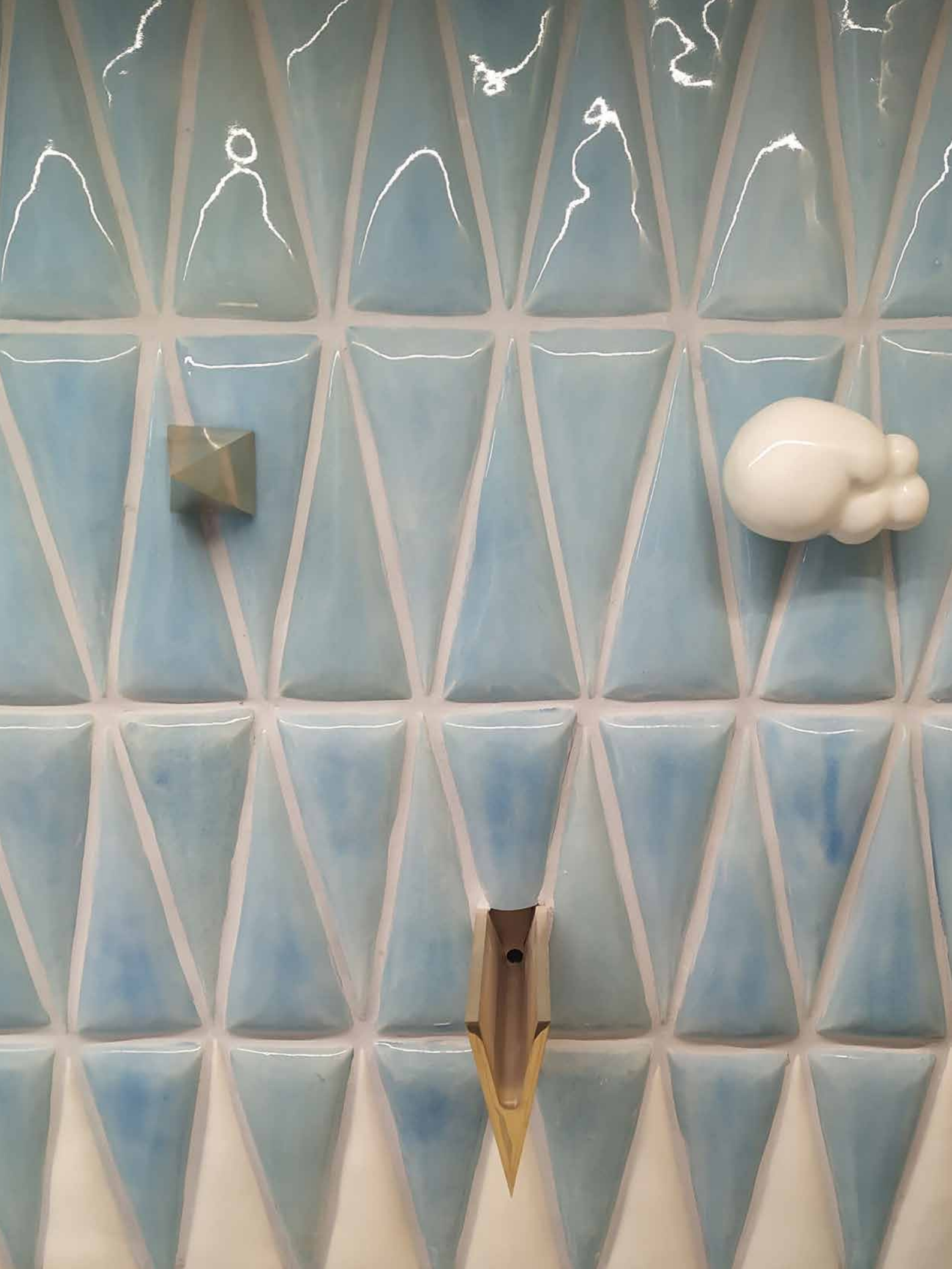
© Photo: Paul Kozłowski

- 1 — Facade of *MAISON GUERMONT* with the artist and the *STORE-POÈME* on the windows
- 2 — *MUR NUÉES* (sonic and luminous Craters and Polysensual Concrete that emits sound & light according to the magnetic field of the one who touches it)
- 3 — *NUAGE LACTÉ* (handmade ceramic covered with white enamel), *POIGNÉE PYRAMIDION* (brass covered with 24-carat gold), *TECTORIUS* (handmade ceramic covered with an enamel entitled *Bleu Ciel De Paris craquelé*)
- 4 — *PHARETTES* (steel covered with Or Guermont, wood, foam, upcycled textile), *BUREAU A SECRETS* (wood, brass), *PLAFOND RÉSILLE* (*Bleu Ciel De Paris* satin, wood, 3D printing, gold leaf, electronics, home automation), *PARQUET EN POINT D'ALEXANDRIE* (*PARQUET* (varnished oak parquet with a special pattern), *TAPIS QUI S'AGRANDIT* (wool, yarn, connections to extend the carpet)

This text is from the object-book on *MAISON GUERMONT* which will be launched at the Le Grand Palais Immersif in Paris in a few months. The 50 book-objects can be exclusively reserved from November 15, 2024 on www.maisonguermont.com.
Until spring 2025, the total work of art *MAISON GUERMONT* is open twice a month for 8 people during an artistic performance entitled *IMMERSION*, reservation on www.maisonguermont.com

Visiting *MAISON GUERMONT* immediately makes one think of other great examples of architects, artists and even writers who built, assembled or described houses, real or imagined, for themselves or for others. Edgar Allan Poe's short story *Landor's Cottage* (1849) consists almost entirely of written images. The bulk of the text is a detailed description of a house that the author compares to a work of art. In the final paragraph, he writes: "It is not the purpose of this work to do more than give, in detail, a picture of Mr. Landor's residence—as I found it. How he made it what it was—and why—with some particulars of Mr. Landor himself—may possibly form the subject of another article." In similar fashion, this book aims to present "another article", that is, the full story of the artist-engineer Milène Guermont and her *MAISON GUERMONT*,

which occupies a former travel agency, at 27 rue La Bruyère, in the 9th arrondissement of Paris. "A house is a work of art" is not only the core of Edgar Allan Poe's last short story, it also is a declaration made in 1962 by the legendary Japanese architect Kazuo Shinohara, whose work as a mathematician, not unlike Guermont's, strived on uncompromising pursuit of geometric aesthetics. Today, as Shinohara did in his houses, Guermont deconstructs the traditional meanings of architectural elements and reassembles them into very personal vehicles. In a similar manner to a hero of architectural deconstruction: Claude Parent, who did not want to destroy existing structures; he was interested in taking things apart in order to put them back together, in a playful, non-hierarchical way.





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5 — *COUVERTS DE LA PYRAMIDE AU NUAGE* including: *FOURCHETTE PYRAMIDION*, *CUILLÈRE À SOUPE NUAGE*, *COUTEAU PYRAMIDION*, *CUILLÈRE À CAFÉ PYRAMIDION* (3D print in stainless steel and 24-carat gold).
6 — *MADELEINE FONDANTE* (bronze covered with 24-carat gold).
7 — *VERRES PYRAMIDIONS* (glass) with *EAU FRISSONNANTE* (special purified and sparkling water created for *MAISON GUERMONT*).
8 — *PLAQUE DE PORTE* (varnished brass), *POIGNÉE MADELEINE* (bronze covered with 24-carat gold).
9 — *MÉGACONCRÉTO* (monumental *estampe* made from a matrix composed of Craters Concrete), *PLAFOND RÉSILLE* (Bleu Ciel De Paris satin, wood, 3D printing, gold leaf, electronics, home automation), parquet in Point D’Alexandrie (special pattern created for *MAISON GUERMONT*), *TAPIS QUI S’AGRANDIT* (wool, yarn, connections to extend the carpet).
10 — *MINI AGUA* (sonic Polysensual Concrete), experimental picture on glass of *PHARES* shot from Place de la Madeleine in Paris.



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The rich construction of *MAISON GUERMONT* makes one think of Poe and Shinohara, as well as other interiors, such as the ones of the Giacometti family, especially the design-oriented work of the younger brother, Diego. The attention of the artist to rich scenographic details, the taste for local craftsmanship, and the balance that Guermont strikes between the old and new with her sharp and deliberate stylistic transgressions reminds us of the buildings of Carlo Mollino, and designs of Gio Ponti, one of her favourite designer-architects. Ponti's empathy for rational beauty, that one can see in his ceramic tiles, door handles and choice of cutlery – “*E un mobile semplice, ma di forma non inerte*”¹ – forms the basis of the interior of Guermont's “house”. Her spatial conversion works upon the principles of layering: details of

1. Translation in English: “It's a simple piece of furniture, but one whose form is not inert.”

different scales communicate with each other through echoes, while different materials operate in transitions that both separate and connect and which, in many instances, take on a narrative quality. *MAISON GUERMONT* wants to be an ideal house.

Beatriz Colomina wrote the following of Carlo Mollino's ideal houses: “It is hard not to think about Walter Benjamin's famous text *Louis-Philippe, or the Interior*: under Louis-Philippe, the private citizen enters the stage of history. For the private person, living space becomes, for the first time, antithetical to the place of work... From this spring the phantasmagorias of the interior. For the individual, the private environment represents the universe. In it he gathers remote places and the past. His living room is a box in the world theatre.”² It hence comes as no surprise that *MAISON GUERMONT* occupies a former travel agency. Like Des Esseintes, the protagonist of the novel by Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À Rebours*, that so fascinated Mollino, Guermont makes us travel without leaving her interior. But unlike Mollino, who chose nausea over comfort, Guermont strongly believes that architecture and its fixtures must be “totally good”, or, in today's language, that it must perfectly accommodate the needs of its user. Although in some instances, Guermont may challenge such a “rule”, in the uncanniness of her fixtures, full of formal ambiguities – and even guilty pleasures.

As Emanuele Coccia tells us in his recent book *Philosophie de la Maison*: “We build houses to live better: the essence of each house lies in this adverb. The foundation of each house is moral, not purely aesthetic or architectural.”³ This pursuit of morality, found above all in the expressions of “*bonheur*” (joy in English), is perfectly visible in Guermont's choices of balanced geometric patterns, which articulate around triangles that turn into diamonds; in quiet but precious ornaments, such as the bespoke forms of shells and clouds; in the joyous luminosity and steady variety of colours; white, gold, sky blue, forming a perfect trinity in *MAISON GUERMONT*.

These and other “fundamentals” of Guermont's work point to her deep attachment to alchemy. As Coccia writes at the end of his book: “The goal of alchemy was the synthesis of the philosopher's stone: not another structure of the stone, but the principle allowing the transformation of any stone into any other form and thus to affirm the unity and equivalence of each atom of the world's flesh. The house of the future should be this philosopher's stone: the principle that allows all things to transform into each other and all life to know itself as equivalent to all other life.” It is in that sense, first and foremost, that *MAISON GUERMONT* is an ideal home. ◇

www.mileneguermont.com
@mileneguermont

2. Beatriz Colomina, “A slight Nausea” in Carlo Mollino - *Maniera Moderna*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Koenig, Koeln, 2012, p. 252.

3. Emanuele Coccia, *Philosophie de la maison*, Bibliothèque Rivages, Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2021, p. 193.

