

# My World *at* HOME

*Karl O'Hanlon, founder of hotel group Domaine & Demeure describes his home Domaine La Martine in Languedoc, France*



“We live on the edge of the Orb valley, surrounded by national parks, about ten minutes from the Mediterranean coast. One of the reasons my wife Anita and I moved to France was so that our kids, [Cara, 20, Tonio, 14 and Daisy, 7] would grow up in a natural, country environment, what the French call the *retour aux sources*. We're very privileged to live here.

When we found the house in 2014, it had been untouched for 70 years. The original building was a monastery though the current house dates from 1760. At that time it was an apple farm before becoming a winery in the 19th century. Our first impressions were a maze of tiny, dark rooms and

the sense of claustrophobia was increased by massive trees coming right up to the windows. It had a lot of potential though and the size worked as we needed space for the studio and workshops for our furniture collections. The location was perfect as it was within a short distance of our three hotel estates – Château Les Carrasses, St Pierre de Serjac and Capitoul.

We worked with the architect and artisans who renovated Les Carrasses and St Pierre to create a relaxed, family home which could also be a hub for the business. We stripped the property back to a smaller number of rooms while keeping the bones of the building intact, bringing light back in but not so much as to lose the cool atmosphere – it gets very hot here and we wanted to avoid having to rely on air conditioning.

The ground floor consists of a kitchen/dining room running the entire width of the house, with two living areas and a workshop where Cara restores chandeliers. There are four bedrooms on the first floor. The second floor houses the studio and offices and two bedrooms for extended family and friends who visit. Not this year unfortunately. We also converted a barn into a workshop and gallery.

We live close to Béziers and Montpellier which, along with Avignon, are hubs for wholesale antiques in France. Dealers come from all over the world to the regular *déballage* sales and we source a lot of pieces there.

Our antiques business grew organically from our love for vintage chandeliers and mirrors. Cara restored her first one when she was ten and she is now quite an expert. We have hung lots in the hotels and also sell mostly by commission or to guests who come to see them in the gallery. We have a few hanging in the house too.

The decor at La Martine takes its cue from the early 20th-century heyday of the Languedoc. It's quite different from Provençal style, more influenced by Art Nouveau and Art Deco, with a predominant palette of greys, blues and greens. The house also features lots of prototypes from our Domaine & Demeure furniture collections.



ABOVE In the salon, the Thurman sofas are by Orior, Newry; the gilt mirror and marble fireplace are both late 19th century. The Italian brass clock is mid-century. The kitchen/dining area features a prototype table originally meant for Château St Pierre de Serjac. The chairs are inspired by a mid-century American design. The brass billiard light is from a hotel in Limoges, and the photograph of Bowie and Jagger is by rock photographer Denis O'Regan.



TOP RIGHT The façade of La Martine, which dates back to 1760. TOP LEFT Karl and Anita O'Hanlon. ABOVE The hallway. RIGHT a mid-century French credenza in burnished burr walnut on which sits a collection of vintage cocktail shakers. On the wall, framed 19th-century bird lithographs.





LEFT The kitchen, by Scavolini, features an island unit in burl walnut. The light fitting is an early 20th-century French *boule*; Luna, an Australian German Shepherd Red Setter cross. BELOW A view of the master bedroom and bathroom featuring a Carrera marble fireplace with a pair of classical Sèvres porcelain vases and a reproduction Trumeau mirror. The chandelier in the bathroom is early 20th century.



In the master bedroom is a 19th-century Italian basket chandelier found in pieces in a box and totally restored by Karl and Anita's daughter Cara. It also has a prototype *bergère* chair and mid-century *herbier* of pressed dried flowers.

the collection slowly but surely. My favourite design is our *bergère*, a classic French armchair which we enlarged and adjusted to make it more comfortable.

Anita runs the show outside – seven acres at La Martine as well as the gardens on the three estates. The house is within a walled garden and we have an old orchard and a meadow, both of which we are rewilding to see what it does for the biodiversity. The birdsong is amazing in the spring especially, and we sit outside with binoculars trying to spot different species. We're trainee twitchers, but of the armchair variety.

The idea of the hotel business was to turn around “sleeping giant” wine estates, renovating the wine side and creating resorts from the outbuildings. We try to blend the facilities of a hotel with the practicality of a villa, the authenticity of a vineyard and the atmosphere of a private club. We sell some of the properties on site as second homes which are mainly bought by overseas owners. Each interior is unique but always authentically French. When the owners are not in residence the houses are rented to guests who come from all over the world.

It's been a tough year for hospitality and like most we were hugely impacted. We're also very aware that our environment made confinement a lot easier than for most. During lockdown we moved many of the team into empty properties on the estate so they could have more space and more room to breathe. It was nice to be able to do that.

Our current focus is on launching Château Capitoul which opens in June and we hope to re-open Les Carrasses and St Pierre in May – they have been shuttered since September.

We're not planning on expanding any further. Together with our team, we decided it would be more interesting to try to “go deep” to see where we could take the business in terms of making a lasting contribution to the local community. Our focus now is on projects that have a social or environmental impact. It's important for us to have a business we can all be proud of.” ■ [www.domainelife.com](http://www.domainelife.com)



ABOVE A reproduction of a traditional French galleon cast iron bath by The Hurlingham Bath Co. The table is early 20th-century Spanish and the Murano mirror dates from the 1970s. BELOW Washingtonia palms surround the pool in the walled garden of La Martine, with loungers from the Domaine & Demeure collection.



We started manufacturing in 2009 when we realised our furniture budget for Château Les Carrasses was woefully short. With the help of Marius Verwijns [founder of Kilcrouney Furniture in Bray and now a partner in Domaine Life], we realised there was nothing stopping us from producing good quality, stylish furniture without paying middle-man mark-ups. We based the first outdoor furniture collection on classic French styles and had them made in traditional weaving villages in Java. While our main focus is garden furniture, we're expanding