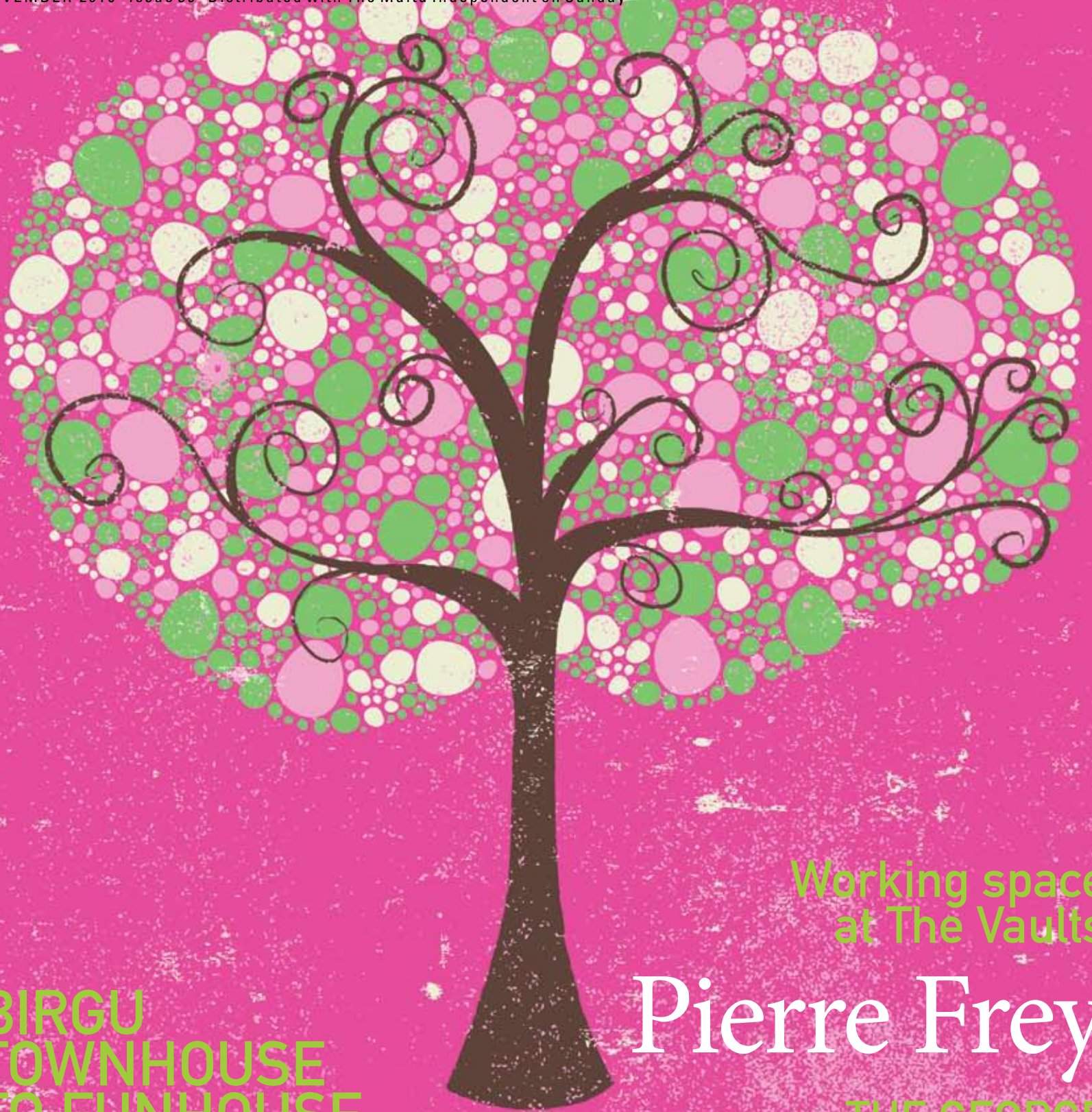


Flair

GET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER

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Working space
at The Vaults

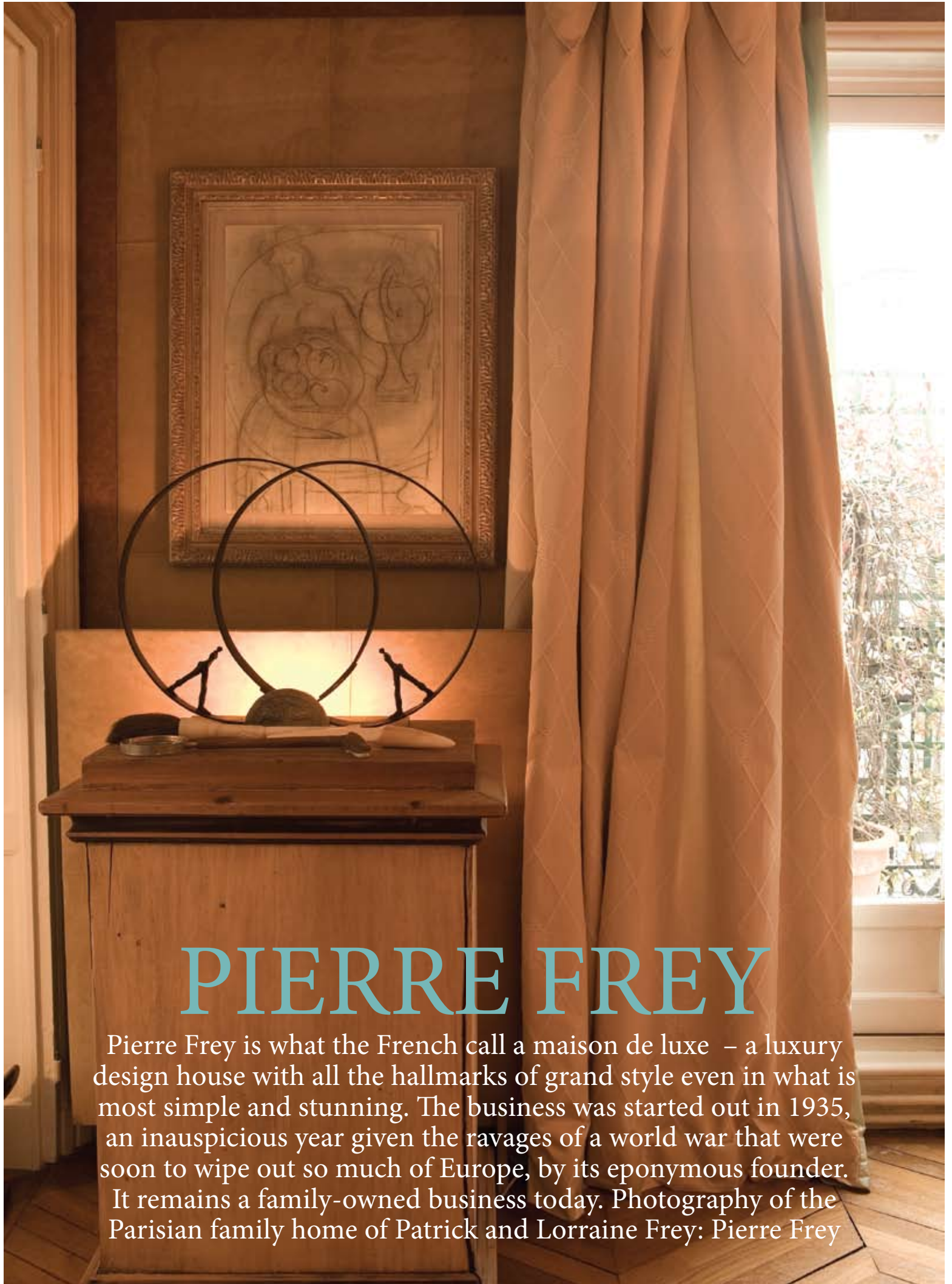
Pierre Frey

THE GEORGE

BIRGU
TOWNHOUSE
TO FUNHOUSE

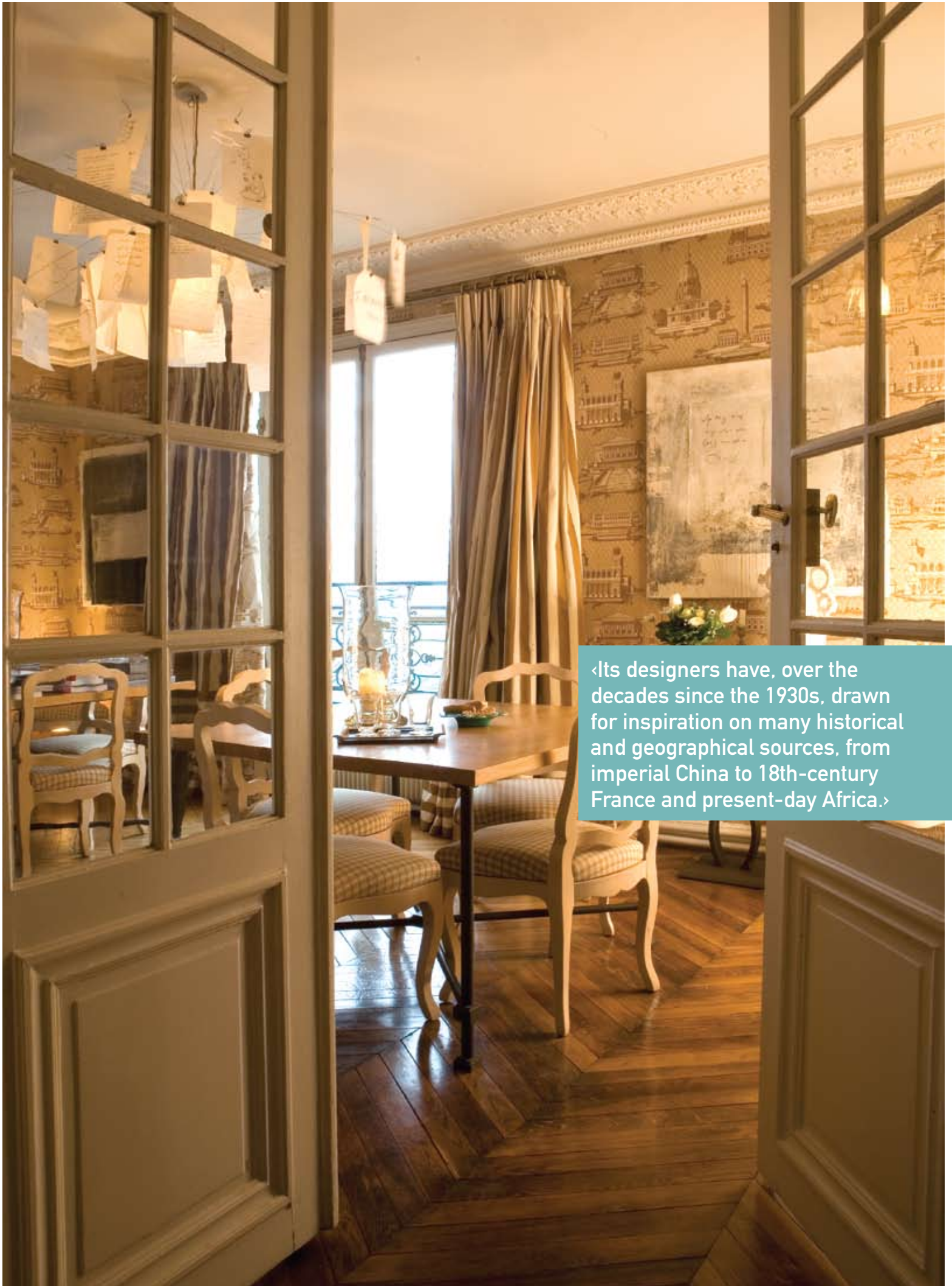
Growing things

ROCCO FORTE'S
SICILIAN BEAUTY



PIERRE FREY

Pierre Frey is what the French call a *maison de luxe* – a luxury design house with all the hallmarks of grand style even in what is most simple and stunning. The business was started out in 1935, an inauspicious year given the ravages of a world war that were soon to wipe out so much of Europe, by its eponymous founder. It remains a family-owned business today. Photography of the Parisian family home of Patrick and Lorraine Frey: Pierre Frey



«Its designers have, over the decades since the 1930s, drawn for inspiration on many historical and geographical sources, from imperial China to 18th-century France and present-day Africa.»



Pierre Frey's name is generally associated only with textiles, but the company makes the most beautiful wallpapers, strong furniture shapes and decorative items. Its rich collection – everything is archived and orders based on archived designs can still be filled - of around 7,000 different pieces and textile designs. The range includes the collections of three other prestigious textile names which Pierre Frey acquired over recent years: the French names of Braquenié and Boussac and the Italian house of Fadini Borghi.

Pierre Frey has built a big reputation on its ability to replicate or evoke the spirit of the richly elaborate tones and textures of antique surfaces and oil paintings, of chateaux and history – and this without any attendant sense of stuffiness or overwhelming weight. Much-favoured examples include its Petit Parc textile design, and its reinvention of the famous toile de Jouy pattern, which it has turned into a journey in ancient China, *Voyage en Chine*. Equally popular is its palmette motif, inspired by the French Empire period and updated in the 1940s, on satin. This is an art that imitates life to inspire and delight.

Pierre Frey remains determinedly linked to soft furnishings and textiles, but it has attuned itself to the contemporary market by developing a range of 'wish-list' furniture and ornamental pieces. They have something in common in that all these non-textile pieces have been devised to complement and bring the best out of Pierre Frey textiles, most obviously so with the upholstered furniture and carpets. But there are also lamps, cushions, throws, and candles, all with the distinctive Pierre Frey design hallmark. The company made its name by melding a sense of adventure with the most incredible quality and the slightest tinge of fun which sometimes extends to the strongest of style statements. Its designers have, over the decades since the 1930s, drawn for inspiration on many historical and geographical sources, from imperial China to 18th-century France and present-day Africa. Pierre Frey's son, Patrick, who now heads the company and works alongside his wife Lorraine and sons Patrick, Vincent and Matthieu, says: "The source is unimportant as long as one respects the essential factor: a design of the utmost elegance. The influence for a textile design might be a La Fontaine table, a building in Paris, mythological animals or window display of patisserie." >p49



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>Pierre Frey fans love the range precisely because it is so very eclectic. Going through a thick row of the company's textile swatches brings a surprise every few seconds and the occasional exclamation of delight. Its staples are its trademark damasks, jacquards and moirés with the latest contemporary fabrics, but then there are highly stylised fish, butterflies and rows of antique china tea-cups woven into thick linen. The textiles themselves are a pleasure to touch and stroke, glowing silk, thick, crisp cotton, soignée linen, consoling wool, precious cashmere. There are 5,000 shades of colour, a range unrivalled in its diversity and expressive richness, with names that recall their subtle inspiration in nature: pomegranate, cardinal red, tisane green, absinthe, leaf, meadow, mint and moss. Since 1961, a large proportion of Pierre Frey's collections have been made at the company's mill in northern France.

Pierre Frey's archives are the way in which this astonishing design heritage is managed and preserved

for continuity. The archives include other historic design items and sources of inspiration which predate Pierre Frey at times by centuries. Over the last seven years, under the supervision of Patrick Frey whose idea it was, more than 30,000 documents – including designs and samples of textiles and carpets – dating from the 16th century through to the present, have been archived near the company's Paris headquarters, where they can be searched by period, colour, motif and technique. The archives were created first for the Pierre Frey collection, 70 years of textile design and all the sources used for its inspiration. But it has since been extended to include the design archives of Braquenie, which Pierre Frey bought in 1991, Lauer, bought in 1995, Boussac and Fadini Borghi, bought six years ago. It's an extraordinary resource which presents designs from the company's four brands, along with a selection of rare pieces acquired at auction, from antique dealers and from private collections. The archives are so extensive and specialised that they have become a source of reference for museums. >p51



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>“Each of those houses has a strong heritage,” Patrick Frey says. “Braquenié has a heritage of 18th- and 19th-century French cottons and silks. Fadini Borghi takes Italian silk from the Renaissance to the present. Because of all this, we are now in possession of a very fine collection of European furnishing fabrics covering the 16th century to the 21st. They bear witness to changing tastes in interior design. Our oldest piece, an Italian *façonné* velvet, dates back to the 16th century. And we also have a rich archive of carpet designs thanks to the Braquenié collection, which includes some 900 gouache drawings from the 19th and 20th centuries.” Sophie Rouart, who has long experience working for museums in France, manages the department. After micro-vacuuming for the removal of dust, the items are put away in plan-chests, separated by sheets of conservation paper or rolled up depending on their size.

The story of the actual Pierre Frey is one of adventure. It is not exactly a Dick Whittington or rags-to-riches tale because he was born into a bourgeois family in northern France, in 1903, and grew up surrounded by elegance, music and beautiful furniture and furnishings. But this is where the ‘rags’ come in. The family fortune disappeared and Frey was taken out of school and sent to work to bring in some money for survival. But the road from ruin turned out to lead to even greater riches and success. Starting out at 16 as a lowly assistant in an antiques business on the Place de la Madeleine, he then moved to Lauer in his 20s, unable to foresee that he would end up building a business that would eventually buy Lauer.

When he was 32, he branched out on his own, but the worst conflagration in history broke out just four years later. He struggled on alone, having no real alternative but to do so, making deliveries by bicycle and persisting right through. Curiously, this paid off, because by the time France was liberated by the Americans, the little seed of success was there already. After 1945, there was really no looking back. Pierre Frey brought in interior designers, painters and other artists to develop designs and bring their gifts to bear on the range he was now selling fast. He built the image of his company on his own: ambitious, dedicated, elegant, passionate, and with a rigorous attention to detail. >p52



>Pierre Frey had just the one son, Patrick, who fortunately shared his father's passion for textiles and also inherited the creative inclinations of his mother, a textile designer, and of her father, Rene Prou, who was a renowned interior designer in the Paris of the 1930s. Patrick joined the family business in 1969, when he was 22, and worked in all departments to find out how things were done. He became creative director in 1975 and chairman a year later. "I personally approve every new textile we make, which means around 50 a year," he says. "I travel quite a lot and find inspiration wherever I go. Like my father, I am completely involved in this work. My wife, Lorraine, helps to develop the company's international profile." Of their sons, Pierre has taken charge of the US subsidiary and Vincent of marketing and development.

Pierre Frey now employs 300 people in its various offices around the world. Thirty per cent of its production is sold in France, and the rest is sold globally. It has subsidiaries in the United States, Britain, Italy, Germany, Switzerland and Dubai, and 60 showrooms in 37 countries, where 1.5 million metres of 7,000 fabrics are sold every year. ■

Pierre Frey textiles are sold by
Camilleri Paris Mode, Rabat.
www.pierrefrey.com
www.camilleriparismode.com

