

Style / Tech &amp; Design

## How a Hong Kong design company gave Vienna House – once an Austrian summer retreat for the aristocracy – a Gustav Klimt-inspired makeover

Grace, style and heritage meet at Vienna House, an 1890s summer retreat given a sumptuous makeover by Hong Kong-based ST Design

Topic | [Architecture and design](#)

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"When you see a place like this, with heritage and history, you start with structure and literally start at the beginning: at the entrance. And the idea is to change everything – but leave everything as it is." This is how Hong Kong-based ST Design's creative director Stefano Tordiglione describes the approach he took for the comprehensive redesign of Vienna House, which was completed late in 2019. Located just outside the Austrian capital, Vienna House dates back to the 1890s, once serving as a summer home for aristocracy.

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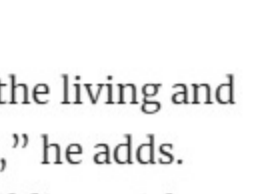


Expansive windows and motifs on the walls help connect the gardens with the interior of the house.

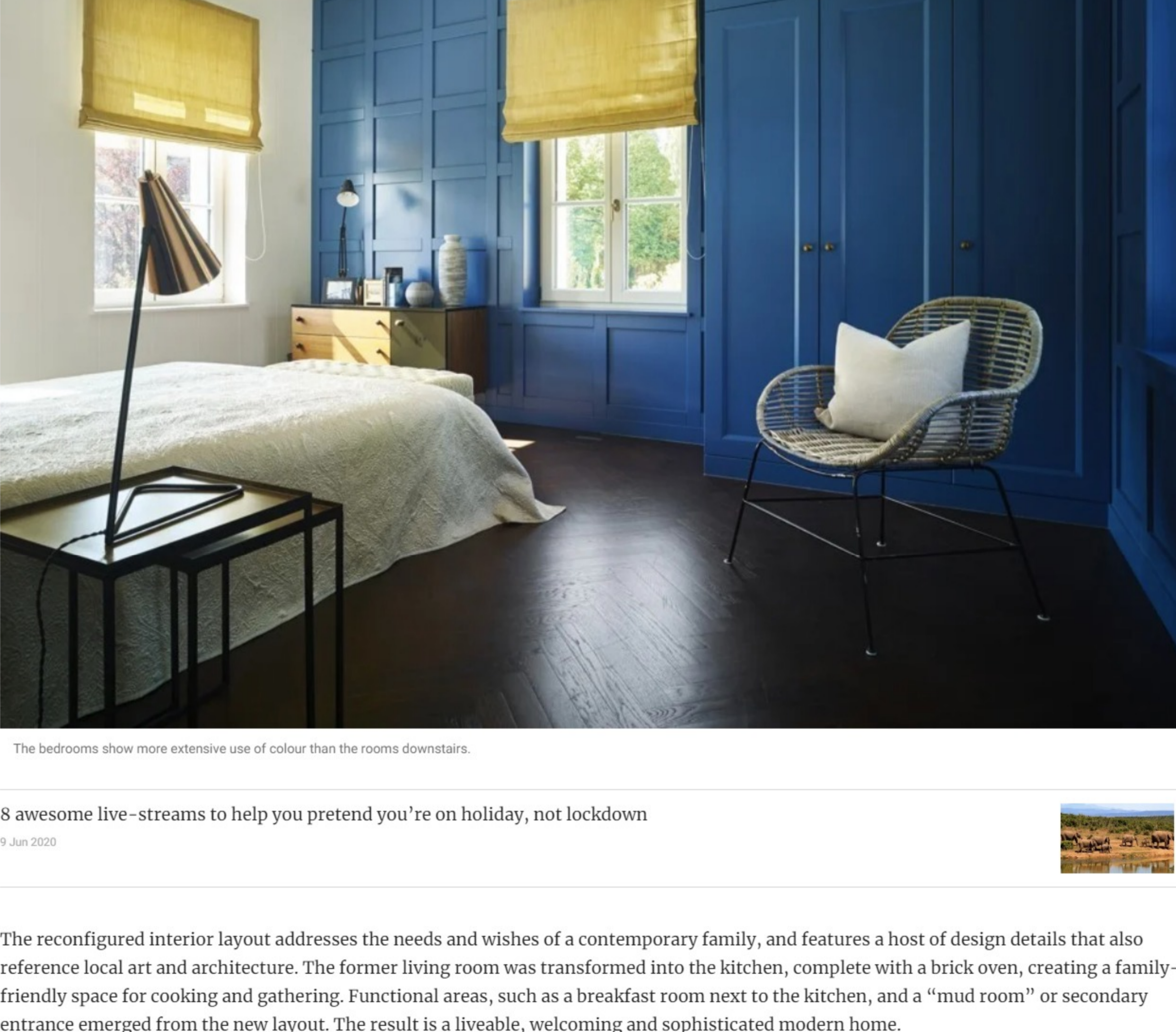
Now a private residence for a family of five, the 700 square metres home took three years of work to achieve its final opulent, but still welcoming, form. While most of the original house's interior has been replaced, Tordiglione restored a few key features, most prominently the ground floor parquet floor, main entrance and its connecting staircase. The goal was to create a working home while simultaneously paying homage to the Vienna Secession movement during which the house was constructed. The movement, founded by a group of artists and architects that included Gustav Klimt, was rooted in a non-traditional, "total art" ethos, exemplified by the 1898 Secession Building in Vienna.

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Among the cues Tordiglione lifted for Vienna House were the warm yellow exterior and stucco finish on ceiling perimeters in the living and dining rooms. "The dome was an inspiration, which is the reason for the double height windows, to give that sense of volume," he adds. "There are a number of Klimt paintings throughout the building, and that carried over to the house. It's like a Renaissance building without going quite that far."



The bedrooms show more extensive use of colour than the rooms downstairs.

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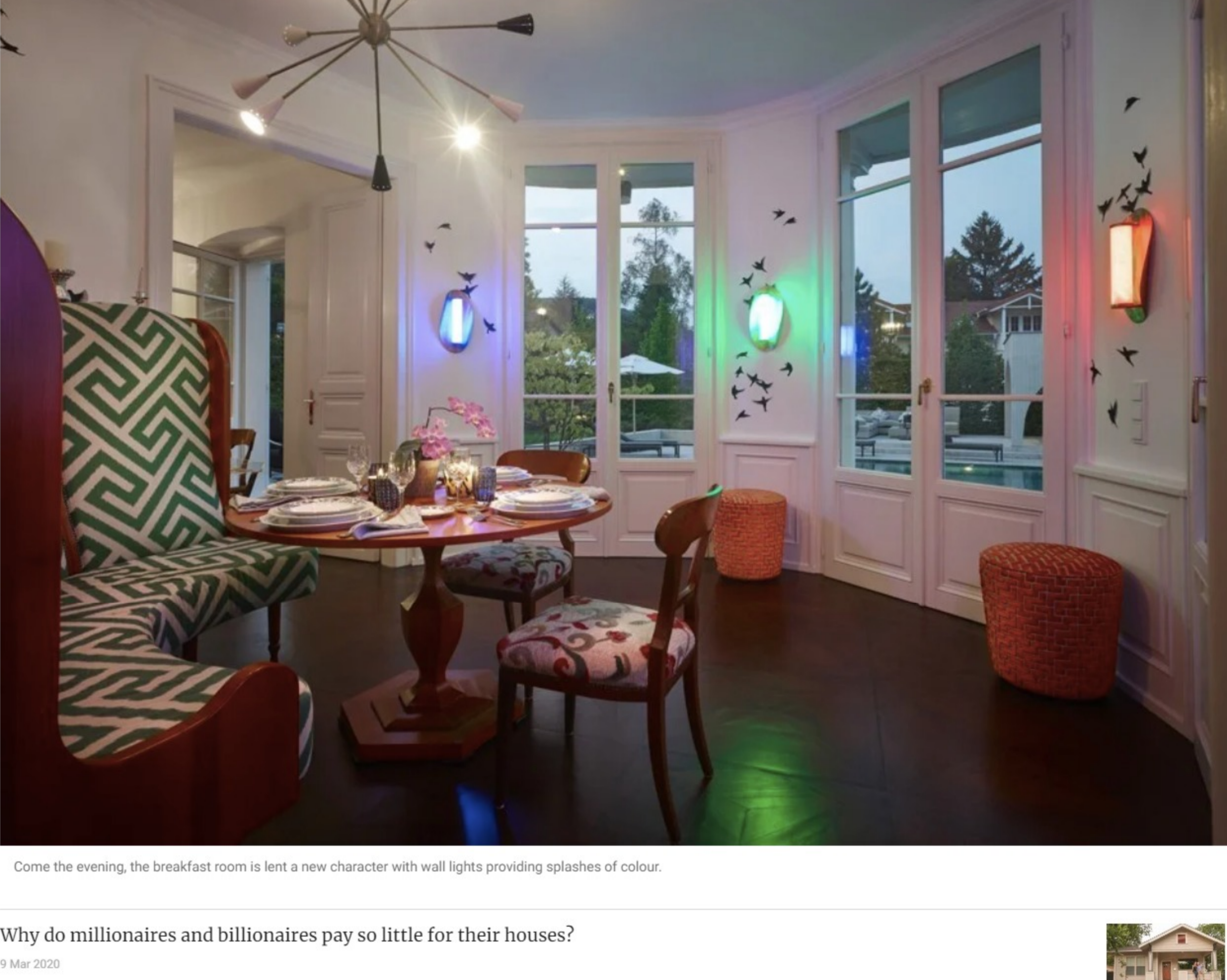


The reconfigured interior layout addresses the needs and wishes of a contemporary family, and features a host of design details that also reference local art and architecture. The former living room was transformed into the kitchen, complete with a brick oven, creating a family-friendly space for cooking and gathering. Functional areas, such as a breakfast room next to the kitchen, and a "mud room" or secondary entrance emerged from the new layout. The result is a liveable, welcoming and sophisticated modern home.

Vienna House is surrounded by a sprawling lawn and garden that can be "felt" inside the house, either through interconnected motifs (a different one for each room), colour and texture, or the expansive windows.



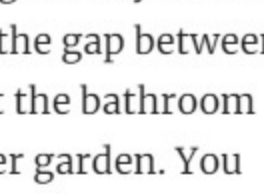
The airy entrance hall has been rejuvenated with Lucca frames and a handmade pendant light.



Come the evening, the breakfast room is lent a new character with wall lights providing splashes of colour.

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"The house is all about 'Wow, interesting'. You go into the cigar room and think it's welcoming and elegant, then in the dining room you feel surrounded by forest. The flower patterns in the living room are evocative of another way," Tordiglione explains. He identifies the gap between constancy and change. "It's the same in the bedrooms. The master bedroom needed a time to separate its uses. You don't want the bathroom in your face, so I put a wall in the middle to create spaces that are separate, with the turning panels and mirrors, and the winter garden. You can play around with the space.

"The past-present connection indeed begins with the entrance and its original staircase, rejuvenated with black and white Italian stone to recapture the pattern typical of the period." Natural light fills the high-ceiling space, giving it a gallery feel reflected by the installation of 1950s custom Lucca frames and a handmade lantern. The entrance is one of Tordiglione's favourite elements because of "the feeling of space it immediately gives off. The huge pendant is an outdoor lamp from Florence that I redesigned to fit and it really makes a statement. It's a really beautiful piece".



The cigar room's dark tones create an intimate counterpoint to the bright and open feel of the breakfast room.

The ground floor feels traditional, in the sense that it is a social, relaxing space housing the kitchen, living areas and cigar room. Every room is finished with late 19th or early 20th century accents, such as the 1940s Gio Ponti lamps in the living room, hand-painted birds and flowers by decorative artists Alexander Hamilton and Caterina Enni-Misson, or Klimt-inspired shapes and tones, usually Klimtian golds in fixtures and fabrics, such as copper-framed sliding doors from Rome and the rotating mirrors in the master bedroom. The cigar room is outfitted with deep indigo wood and a rich, dimpled leather sofa, with a fireplace that was commissioned in London – a spatial counterpoint to the bright breakfast room created from a one-time corridor that exemplifies togetherness.

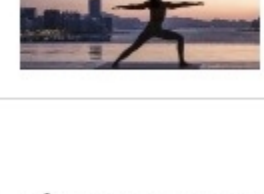


The rotating mirrors of the master bedroom are edged in gold in homage to the palette used by Gustav Klimt.

"I really like the breakfast room, too," notes Tordiglione. "It was just a passageway, and the owners were considering a powder room, but I [persuaded] them to make a breakfast nook. It looks out to the garden, it's a cosy family space with colour and light. It's a real luxury."

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The second floor is dominated by en suite bedrooms in pretty colours, accented with vivid Arabescato Marble, stylised koi fish, cityscapes and monochromatic striations. Despite the distinct themes, each space subtly flows into the next, linking elements by a floor tile pattern, or a floral motif that gives way to trees, or another shade of gold, ensuring that "Every room is a home", as Tordiglione sums it up.

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