



Masters of Modern

Serge Castella and Jason Flinn found one of the only period modernist homes on the Costa Brava. They've brought it into the twenty-first century.

As a boy growing up in Vermont, Jason Flinn was used to chasing the sun. Its rays and warmth were maddeningly elusive, so that when the sun did shine, he wanted to be immersed in its glow. His love of that is one reason why he and his longtime partner, the noted designer and antiques dealer Serge Castella, moved to Spain's Costa Brava and where they have lived and thrived for decades. But in a region of the Iberian Peninsula where the sun is ubiquitous, most of the inhabitants often seek refuge from its harshness and glare.

"We saw this house, oddly and luckily situated in the rolling hills of the region, and knew even from the road that it was right for us," Flinn recalls. The circa-1960s Modernist house appeared in the landscape seemingly as a prime example of California's classic Case Study modular houses of the period — one-story dwellings that were designed to be affordable and adaptable to post-War families. Like those houses, this one, too, had wide overhanging roofs that created expansive shaded terraces and porches beneath. "Our house allows us to be outside, where you want to be

all the time in Spain," says the Spanish-born Castella, "but protected by the shade of the roof. All the houses we kept seeing when searching for something close to Barcelona but in the countryside were either old stone farmhouses, ruined castles, or unimaginative, over-the-top suburban-style spec houses. Here was our answer to be not so much contemporary but contemporal, if that's a word."

Because Castella's work as a designer is unlike anyone else's, he is allowed to coin a new word to describe his and Flinn's aesthetic. Flinn, who as part of their life and work partnership oversees the architecture and logistics of their design projects, embarked on the decision to open up the floor plan, make a formal entryway where there had been

Opening page: Serge Castella and Jason Flinn kept the original wood doors and period hardware on their circa-1960 house in Spain's Costa Brava. Left: A conspicuous item in the living room is a built-in sofa designed by Castella and covered with fabric from his Port Lligat Collection for Gancedo.

INTERIOR DESIGN BY SERGE CASTELLA AND JASON FLINN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MANOLO YLLERA

PRODUCED BY PATRICIA KETELSEN

WRITTEN BY DAVID MASELLO

Farrow & Ball's All White serves as a perfect backdrop for the living room. Elements include 1950s armchairs covered in a cotton tweed fabric by Gancedo, and a wool and silk rug designed by Castella for the Spanish rug company BSB.

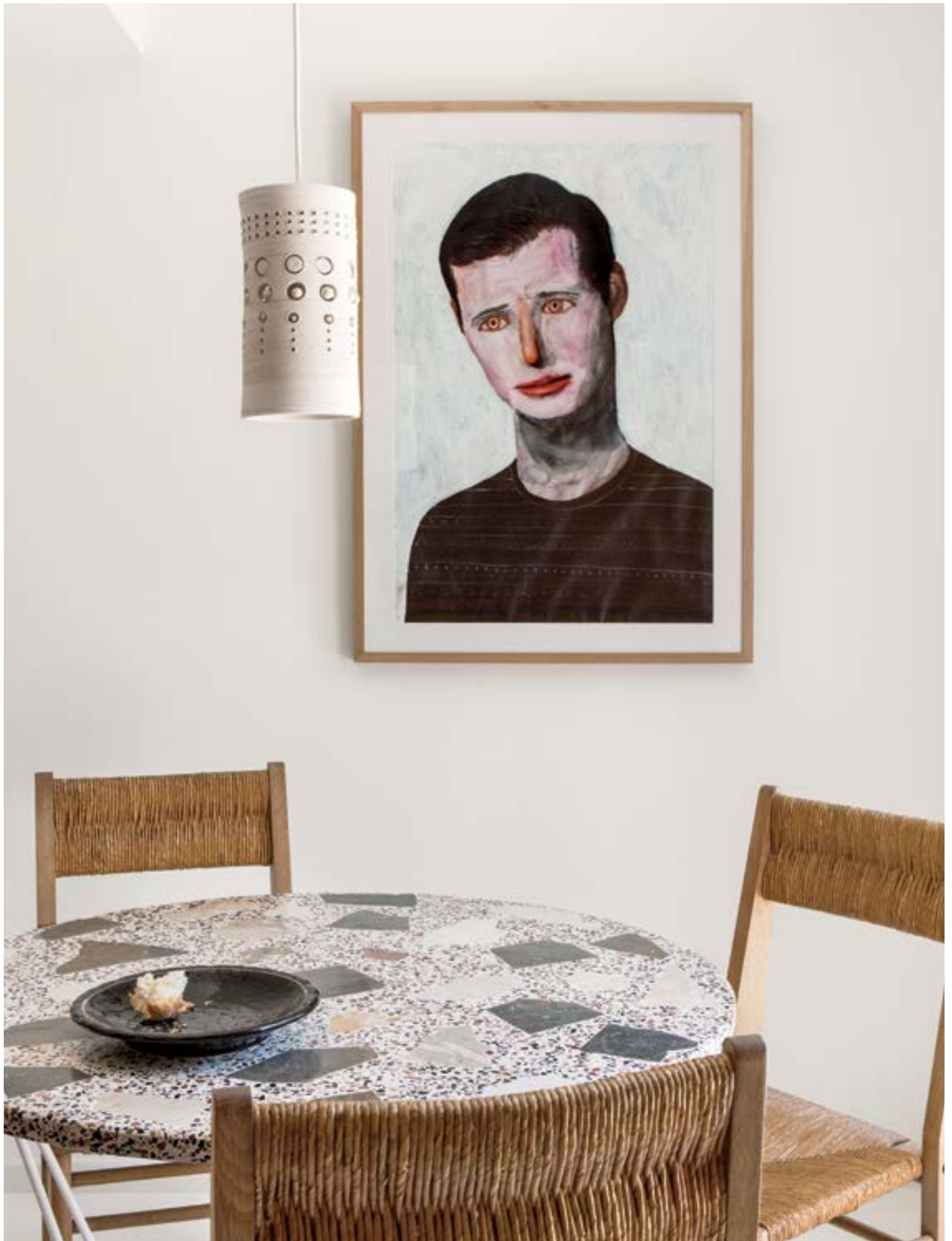






The kitchen's smooth-finish oak cabinetry and the highly sculptural wall relief that serves as a backsplash and decorative element above the cabinets were designed by Serge Castella. The faucet is Vola, the sink is Franke, and the oven and stovetop are Bosch.





none, and imbue the dwelling with a main façade that its original owner/architect had neglected to articulate. “We saw right away what was not working in the house,” Flinn says. “For one thing, we’re not into hallways because they waste space,” Flinn emphasizes, which required reconfiguring the one-story three-bedroom home so that the public rooms — living, dining, kitchen — melded, while linking it with the more private area of the home.

“The strong point in all the work we do, both for our own homes and for our clients, is to establish comfort,” says Castella. “I’m not talking just about comfy pillows and sofas, but creating visual comfort, through the colors and dimensions and proportions we establish.” Although much of the interior floor plan was reconfigured and reconstructed, Castella did decide to keep the original doors and period Memphis hardware, a style made famous by the late Ettore Sottsass. “We kept those because they were true to the original house. They complemented nicely where the house had been and where we were going to take it.”

In a region that Flinn and Castella like to refer to as “the undiscovered Tuscany of Spain,” the couple entertain friends and family often. “What you wear here are espadrilles and linen,” says Flinn, “and while we like the great informality of life here, we also wanted to make the house a little more hip and stylish than that, if you will. Our friends and family have come to look upon this place as a kind of sanctuary, a place they can use to get away. Clients, too, come to see some of the antiques we keep in an onsite showroom here. They just call us up and ask to swing by.”

As he does with almost all of his projects, Castella has kept the interiors muted and neutral, with white the prevailing color, even for the polished concrete floors that he installed in place of the original tile.

The rooms become canvases, in effect, for any other artwork or sculptural furnishings that are brought in. “It’s that notable antique sculpture or highly textured cabinet that is going to immediately become the focal point of the room,” he emphasizes.

When he isn’t designing his own rugs, lines of fabrics, and pieces of furniture for the rooms, Castella is constantly finding period pieces in his work as an antiques dealer that reflect the home’s original era. Chairs from the 1950s by French architects Guillerme and Chambron, in particular, are used in many of the rooms, as are period designs from Italy.

Because the kitchen is now part of the open plan, indeed among the most conspicuous places within the home, Castella decided to make the room a functioning work of sculpture. He designed a carved oak backsplash that rises above the plain oak cabinetry to have the effect of bas relief. In a home that is largely neutral in color and restrained in its detail, Castella and Flinn wanted the kitchen to stand out among all other rooms, have its own personality.

“What the cabinetry reveals is exactly what Serge’s work is all about,” explains Flinn. “Serge’s designs appear to be, and are, simple, but sometimes really surprising. Look closely at enough of what he creates and you see something you’ve never seen before — and yet it all makes sense. What he designs enriches interiors. Nothing is too outrageous so that you don’t understand it. I’m always talking up Serge’s work and yet what he does dazzles me every time I see it, even after our thirty years together.”

For the eating area in the kitchen, Castella found a 1960s Spanish terrazzo table with an inlaid surface, around which he has positioned 1950s oak and raffia chairs. The 1960s light fixture is by Georges Pelletier. The artwork, *Untitled*, is by the Spanish artist Guim Tió.







Left: A starburst mirror becomes a focal point in the master bedroom. Linen bedspread is by Merci. The rug, inspired by a Frank Lloyd Wright design, is produced by BSB. Farrow & Ball's All White is used on the wall. Curtain fabric is from Castella's Port Ligat Collection for Gancedo. This page: Bathroom mirrors are Italian, circa 1970. Faucets are Vola.

“When Serge has an idea, I understand it pretty well. He designs it. I make it happen.”

— Jason Flinn



A porch off of the master bedroom features three ceramic wall-sculpture sconces that were made by Georges Pelletier in the 1970s. Terra-cotta tiles used on the floor and bench are made locally. The organic olive-wood table is also local.