THE HOME BOY

Designer Yorgo Tloupas remains close to his roots



Words Nick Spain

Photography Philip Andelman

The French way, Yorgo Tloupas having a smoke with his mother, Marina Assaël Tloupas. **Opposite:** *Pierre De Coubertin (*the founder of the modern Olympics), 2000, by Philolaos Tloupas.

What's the first home you remember living in? Can you recall the specific color on the walls of your bedroom, or recreate the sensation of your feet hitting its floor? Do you recall the view outside your window? What did it smell like, and when was the last time you were there?

For most of us, these questions are unanswerable, lost to that long highway of time that stretches between infancy and adulthood. We can drop the proverbial pin at our origin point, but it's unclear how to return. Memories may occasionally resurface with the unexpected encounter of a Proust madeleine, but even then, they aren't to be trusted, memory itself having a notorious propensity for beatific distortion.

Not so for Yorgo Tloupas. He regularly sleeps at his childhood home, roughly one hour outside of Paris in the hills of Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse. The house and workshop handbuilt by his father, the artist Philolaos Tloupas, is inhabited by Yorgo and his free-spirited mother. But his father's presence looms large too. All you have to do is bask in the light that blasts through the full-height windows and bounces off the artist's stainless-steel works: futuristic tv stands, a cabinet for hiding lovers, and countless sculptures. Most of it has been left in the exact same place for decades.

It's unusual to have an artist's world left completely intact, let alone one that also happens to be your family home. Realizing this, Yorgo and his mother are in the process of ensuring that legacy continues by getting the home historically registered. Here, he speaks about the impacts of growing up in a modernist house, how you may be seeing his father's name on the collectible design circuit more regularly, and why he won't be looking to the Jackson Pollock estate for guidance.

Nick Spain *Where are you right now?*
Yorgo Tloupas I'm in Paris. I'm in a photographic studio. We're doing a photo shoot for one of our clients.
NS *How's it going?*
YT Really good. I mean, as long as the client is happy, I'm happy.
NS *Well, today we're talking about your childhood home outside of Paris — your father's house and studio. How did it come about?*
YT The whole thing is the result of my dad moving to France, in 1950, to pursue his artistic career after doing fine arts school in Athens. He became a teacher in an arts collective near where the house sits now on the top of a hill. That's actually where he met my mom. He saw a piece of land at the bottom of that hill, and he bought it in 1962. It's at the edge of a national park, so it's preserved from construction, although we have quite a few houses that got built around the house over the years.

He had no formal training. He hung pieces of white paper from a structure that he put up there and drove all the way down to the bottom of the valley to see how the facade would impact the environment, which I thought was crazy. It's so clever, but it's also so much effort.



"This is the living room, where I spent a lot of time as a kid. All the furniture is designed by my father — from the concrete chairs to the metal table. The big metal sculpture is his *TV Trunk Sculpture*, made for massive '80s TV sets. The funny thing is that my parents drilled both doors of the sculpture to attach a lock so that, coming home from school, I wouldn't spend my time watching stupid cartoons."





A sculpture from 1985 by Philolaos Tloupas, commissioned for a tower in La Défense in Paris. "It was hung over the entrance desk for decades. When the building was decommissioned and transformed, they naively gave the sculpture back to us, unaware of its value." **Opposite**: In the workshop, *The Little George of Olympus*, 1954, by Philolaos Tloupas.

At a couple of points, he got some helpers to do it and then he got a plumber and an electrician, but mostly he did it all by himself.

NS *And your mom lives there full-time now?*

YT Yeah. She met my dad — she's 15 years younger. She was pregnant by herself in Paris, and then she decided to move when she gave birth to me. I was born [in] '74, and she's been there since. My dad passed away 15–16 years ago? I don't know, many years ago. She's looking after the place, obviously. She's been doing a lot of work on the estate of my dad, on the idea of listing where every single art piece is, in which collection it is, what size it is, what material, when it was done, et cetera.

NS *Has it changed much since he passed?*

YT The funny thing is the place kind of looks similar today. I mean, obviously there's a lot more plants. My mom's put a lot of plants in there, but the state of the whole thing is pretty identical, really.

NS *That reverence for your father, has it ever felt constricting for her? Does it feel like a burden for you when you're in the space?*

YT Not for her. She's been a widow for 15 years, but she's not really a widow because it's as if my dad was still here. So, for her, it's fine. For me, it's halfway between a weight on my shoulders and a blessing.

NS *It's very rare that people are able to inhabit the same space for their entire life. When you go back, are you sleeping in your childhood bedroom? And what does it look like to actually inhabit the space?*

YT [The] first thing is, when you grow up in a modernist house, because that's kind of what it is, it's the norm for you as a kid. I was thinking, "Okay, this is what a house looks like. " And then I would go to my friends' houses in this residential area, and some of them would have exactly the same house as the other and it felt a bit bizarre. After high school is when I realized how lucky and unusual this was. As time passes by, it becomes more and more valuable because it's more and more ancient. The fixtures of the house, the window seals — all that stuff people don't build anymore. I don't sleep in my childhood room because, in the '90s, we built an extension on top of the house and that's where I sleep.

Recently, I went to Manitoga, Russel Wright's former home in Garrison, NY. Have you been?

NS *I've never been, no, but I would love to go.*

YT It's very similar. It was built earlier, but it's completely livable today. We could do that with my dad's workshop because it's exactly in the state in which he left it when he died. All the tools are there. It's actually quite rare to visit an artist's workshop that has been kept in the state that it was when the artist died. There's few out there.

I visited the Jackson Pollock place in the Hamptons two weeks ago, and it's kind of the same. And again, you've got those guides that take you through the thing. The funny thing with the Pollock house is the workshop: it's got good, clever volumes. You see all the drips on the floor, and the paint stacked in boxes, but the house is horrendous. It's just, like, such bad taste. You go, "What the fuck?" I mean, Bauhaus was half a century before that. He had all the time to learn ... and it just ...

NS *Doesn't look like anything?*

YT Yeah. It's none of that. It's just really bad.

NS *With the consistency of this building in your life, do you feel like your taste has evolved to be different from it?*

YT I would say there's two sides to this. There's the taste I have and the references I have. Funny enough, when I was visiting Manitoga, at the end of the tour, the guide told us a story of how he guides tours pretty much all year round. At the end, he often asks them, "Oh, would you live in a house like that? " And he says, "Oh, I get a lot of different answers, including never. I would never." Obviously, I didn't want to brag or show off, but I was thinking, "Guys, I grew up in a house like this and it's the best fucking thing in the world, and I would never trade it for anything." It's funny because it also influenced my sleep patterns.

NS *Because you're used to that light pouring in?*

YT I don't need curtains anywhere, ever. And also, the house was kind of cold. It wasn't like the warmest house, so I'm never cold. In the coldest of winter, I'd be wearing a t-shirt, a jumper, and a jacket, and that's it. Never more. I'm quite often in the mountains for skiing, and even when skiing, I'm never cold

But the other thing, on a psychoanalytic level, I'm following in the footsteps of my dad. I don't do the same job as him. I'm not an artist. I'm a designer. But if I take a step back and look, I've done pretty much everything that he's done in a less evolved or less finished way.

I'm in the process of getting the house historically registered. I've been working with a young architect and she's a certified historic monuments architect in France.

NS *If you're opening that workshop to being kind of a visitor center, for lack of a better word, do you worry at all about the life coming out of it when that happens?*

YT It is [open] already. It's on the list of the places you can visit in France. There's two days of the year when the state provides access to normally closed spaces, and a lot of castles and modernist houses and even some old banks in the center of Paris open and you can visit them on reservation. So, we do that every year, and it hasn't altered the place at all. The only thing that could happen is people stealing stuff.

NS *How does your mom feel about this home that she's lived in being canonized? Does she like it?*

YT She loves it. She's very reluctant to sell anything. She's very attached to everything. We did one big auction 10 years ago at this big auction house in Paris. It went really well, but it was hard for her to see pieces go, and I understand that. She's literally the flag bearer of my dad's career. It takes a lot of her time, but she loves it.

TV Trunk *Sculpture*, 1975
(with a contemporary TV)
by Philolaos Tloupas.
Opposite: Mme Tloupas
with her La Paz cigarillo.





Opposite: In the foreground, the workshop with the living area on the mezzanine. "When my dad used to take his daily siesta on the concrete couch, sometimes he'd pretend to be sleeping when I sneaked in and approached his mouth with my finger — and he would try to bite it off. "

NS *Do you have a favorite piece that you're interacting with daily?*
YT I love the metal bottles. I think they're great. We store a Greek alcohol called Tsipouro in them. It gives the liquor a bit of a metallic taste, but I just love that you can use them.
NS *When you are at the house, are you enjoying it, or are you there, archiving?*
YT It's a hard question. First of all, it's very comfortable. You're in the countryside, it's sunny, you can eat outdoors. There're no neighbors, technically there are, but they're hidden. So, it's extremely pleasant. But yeah, there's the pressure of all the stuff that I'm supposed to be doing that I don't do. I've got my whole career to look after, and I've got a studio with 15 employees. I need to get some work and also, I've got a career to promote. So, when I'm there, I'm just extremely worried about what's going to happen when my mom passes away, because it's going to happen at some point. Do I have the shoulders to take on the responsibility, and do I have the time?
NS *How do you feel about that right now?*
YT I'm scared. I need someone to look after it, to welcome visitors, to look after the archive. The logistics of it are quite hardcore. How do I find someone? Can I get funds from the government to pay for that person, or do I need to set up a foundation? How does it work? How much of my dad's work do I need to sell?
NS *But part of what makes your father's legacy so special is that his work is not widely accessible, nor mass-produced.*
YT I mean, there's a bunch of stuff that we could sell. Why? Because my dad left instructions on how to reproduce them, and some of them were produced as editions back then. So, the concrete chair, the metal chairs, there's a bunch around that sometimes appear, and the metal bottles as well and the cups. So, all of this is bound at some point to become collectible design for sure. The metal chairs, I've seen them in the Jacquemus showroom. The Row, they have one of those somewhere.
NS *If you go into that [collectible design] world, does it lose some of the charm? If they're in every collector's living room, does the home lose some of its weirdness?*
YT My Dad was a total artist. Total as in the sense that his whole world was designed, thought, and built by him. I'm sorry, I'm going back to Jackson [Pollock]. The only trace of Pollock's creativity was the leftover drips on the floor, and that's it. He didn't build a house. He didn't build any of the furniture. He had actually pretty *bad* taste in furniture. So, I think that says a lot about this place, because not every artist creates the world around their works, around the art pieces. And here the art pieces fit within the house, but the house is a work in itself. I think that's exceptional. UD

Nick Spain is a designer and writer working across interiors and gardens. His work has been featured in The New York Times, Architectural Digest, World of Interiors, *and more. studionickspain.com*
Philip Andelman is an award-winning music video director and photographer; he was featured in Issue 20. Trippingwithphil.com