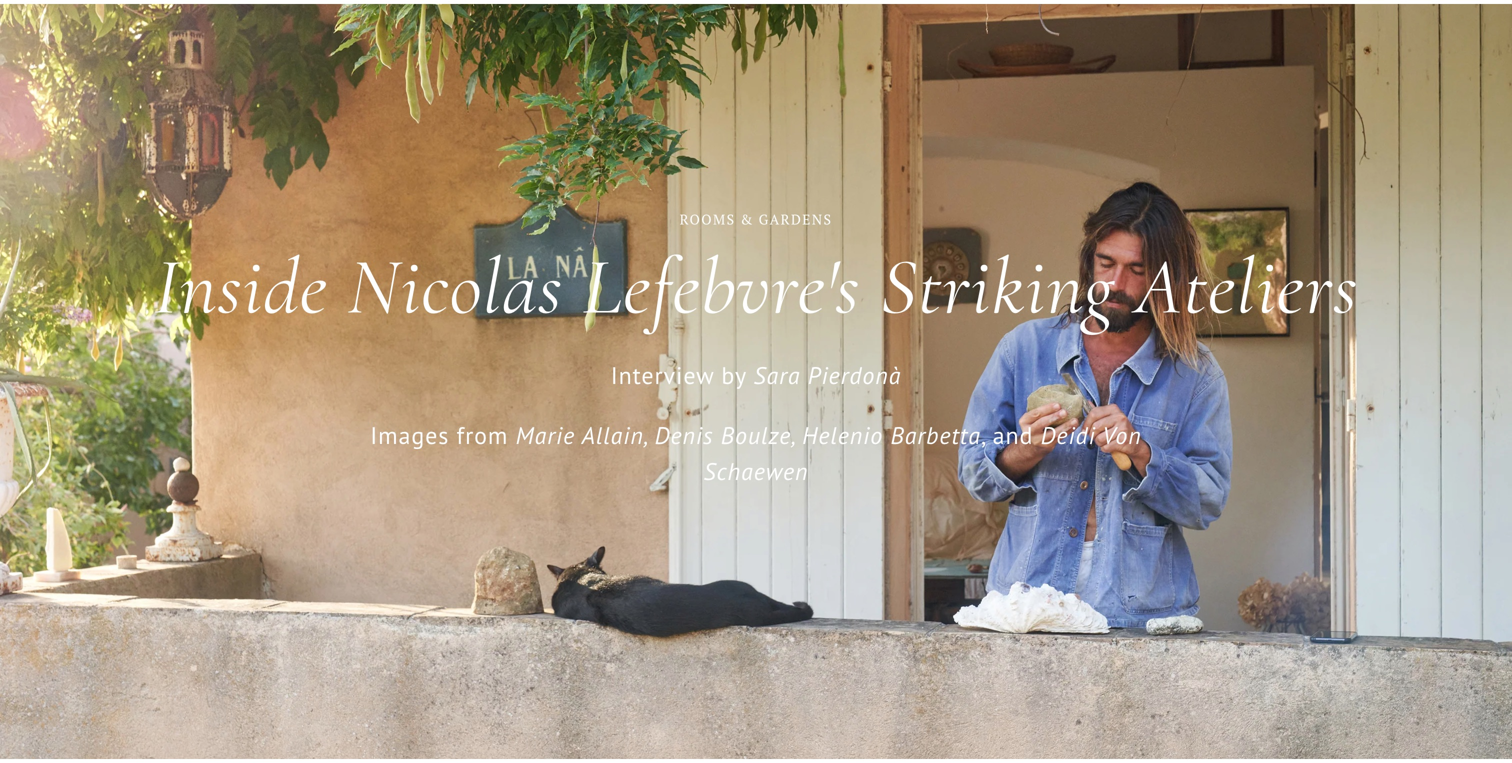

ROOMS & GARDENS

# *Inside Nicolas Lefebvre's Striking Ateliers*

Interview by *Sara Pierdonà*

Images from *Marie Allain, Denis Boulze, Helenio Barbetta,* and *Deidi Von Schaewen*

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CHANEL
HIGH JEWELRY

*French sculptor Nicolas Lefebvre has worked with design legends including Axel Vervoordt and Jacques Lacoste, who sent him to Peru to find furniture by Jean Royere. He walks Sara Pierdonà through his own objects and artworks, created in his striking studios across France.*

BY SARA PIERDONÀ | ROOMS & GARDENS | 16 NOVEMBER 2024

COLLECTION N°5
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*Nicholas Lefebvre's sculptures and collections at this studio in © Marie Allain*

Nicolas Lefebvre is a sculptor, but perhaps the more exact definition for his work is assemblages. There are three studios where he re-elaborates raw material – in Paris, Barbizon and Saint Tropez – but again, perhaps there is a more correct word: *cabinets de curiosités*. Despite its affinity to the Arte Povera movement, in every corner, Nicolas' spaces reveal the pleasure of decorating and collecting.

From here, creating art was a spontaneous evolution. “In the beginning, I put these objects together for me, for pure personal pleasure. It was other people, before I realized the real potential of what I considered just a game, who insisted that I exhibit them. But that's ok, isn't it? Artists have to play,” he says.

His first atelier, in a Haussmannian building in Paris' 9th arrondissement, evolved accordingly too, becoming a striking set for his objects and creations. "It [had] 12 *chambres de bonne*, of which I kept the floor plan intact, [with] different keys and separate entrance doors for each of the rooms. Having a passion for furniture, each one was furnished differently. I used to work a lot with fashion and film, as it was convenient for them to have these sets ready next to each other."

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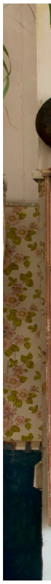

The first artworks he created in his atelier, over 20 years ago, were very personal, composed of objects that had belonged to his late mother. "I think those who saw them were able to perceive the enormous emotional component contained in the inanimate objects, even though it was obviously my story, my mourning."

According to the authors of his monograph, published by *Tristan Hoare Gallery*, the materials he uses now include: "white monkey hair, a basin, a Khmer mirror, a whale rib, Niger currency, a Papuan spear, a weighing pan, a stoup shell, a Tibetan prayer wheel, a Berber tent peg, an archery target, a Koran table, a drainpipe…"

He even has his own tricks to even out the patina of his objects, such as leaving stones, wood and sculptural artefacts exposed to the sea air for months. “I feel the call of the sea, and on the beach I work well. Not only because salt, wind and sun smooth the surface of my objects, ageing them in a way I like, but because walking along the seafront I often find shells that I incorporate into my sculptures."

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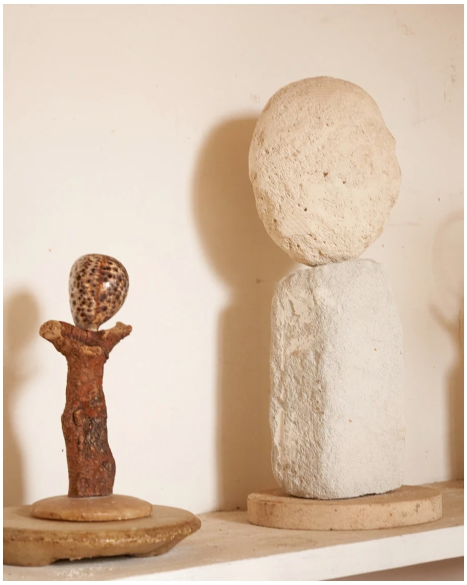
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For Nicolas, it was 'always about the objects'. During his formative years in Paris, he worked for *Hotel Drouot*, after which Jacques Lacoste sent him to Peru in search of furniture produced in Lima by Jean Royere in the 1950s. Back in Paris, he met Axel Vervoordt, with whom he worked for the Antwerp Antiques Biennial.

“When I was young I thought I would become an antique dealer. I still frequent markets and auctions regularly and, although in a different way, I have still made it my profession. My life is punctuated by objects...whether it's cycling through the streets of Paris or getting lost in the woods, there is always the moment when I pick something up off the ground. And I often find myself on the phone with some unfortunate friend: ‘where are you? Can you help me take this object home?’".

Starting out, he perceived the difference between a work of art and a design object was "too blurred". "The warning I received from insiders was that such precious, aesthetically pleasing objects risked...not rising to the status of art. But I was finally understood: it takes a long time to make my works, because what matters to me is to invest them with an emotion that can be perceived from the outside."

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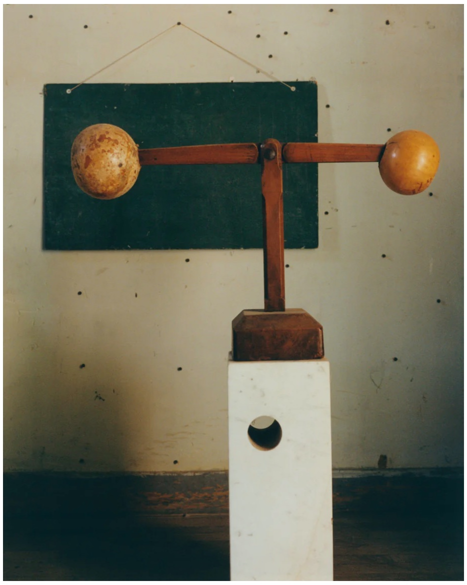

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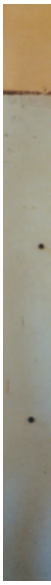

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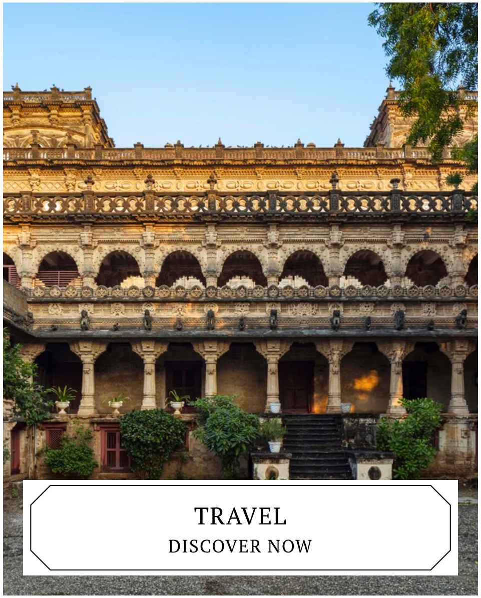

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