

# LIFESTYLE

## STAYING POWER

A sense of timelessness combined with simplicity and sophistication characterises ARNAUD ZANNIER's collection of hotels, as well as his shoe business. It is a design ethos reflected in his family home near Ghent

TEXT DOMINIC BRADBURY | PHOTOGRAPHS MICHAEL SINCLAIR



Arnaud with his dog Scott outside his country house, which is located between Ghent and Bruges.

**T**here is a timeless quality to French hotelier Arnaud Zannier's Belgian home. The elegant rural villa not far from Aalter, between Ghent and Bruges, is surrounded by an extensive garden and woodland, and it is hard to tell at first glance when it might have been built. Its thatched roof and refined but relaxed interiors seem outside fashion and interiors trends. It feels rooted to its setting, with a wealth of organic materials lending it depth and warmth.

The house was actually built in the Seventies and then extended several times before Arnaud and his wife Julie bought it in 2007. They stripped it back to the bones: rooms were reconfigured, new windows and doors introduced, and the garden's terrace redesigned. It was a complete transformation, creating a welcoming family home for the Zanniers and their

three children – Zoe, 17, Jules, 15, and Alexandre, 11. The house was also the first of a number of collaborations with the Belgian architect Johan de Groot, who has been working with Arnaud on a series of hotel projects ever since.

'I have always been interested in architecture and design, and have learnt a lot living in Belgium,' says Arnaud. 'I have discovered different styles and ideas about ways of living that are particularly Flemish. It helped me create hotels with timeless interiors, which is the way that I live at home. Our house is a wonderful place for the children and the gardens are a great playground. We had some strong ideas and knew what style we liked, but we needed some assistance from an expert – and that's how we first met Johan.'

Arnaud grew up not far from Lyon, but has been based in >



Arnaud with his wife Julie and their three children Jules, Zoe and Alexandre in the sitting room of their country house



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Zoe's bedroom has a study area by the window. Zoe, Julie, Jules and Arnaud in the garden. Large photographs of the couple's children hang in the sitting room. The staircase. The library adjoins the sitting room (centre)



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Arnaud with store manager Alcides Navarro in front of the Brussels shop of his shoe label NDC (also top right). A leather boot by NDC. A display of shoes and bags inside the shop; they are handmade in Italy, Spain and Portugal



Belgium, where Julie's family is from, since 2001. His office is in the nearby city of Ghent, a place of great charm with a strong creative community at its heart, and Brussels is around an hour away from home. 'I knew that I would be travelling a lot for work, so it's easier for us to be here and to have Julie's family nearby,' says Arnaud. His father is the businessman Roger Zannier, who built a family empire that was focused initially on textiles and fashion brands, but which now also includes vineyards in France and Portugal, real estate and hotels.

Julie and Arnaud met at boarding school in Switzerland when they were just 17, before both moved to Paris to go to business school. There was a brief internship for Arnaud with the family company back in Lyon before he moved to London, where he worked with the shoe brand Kickers. Their daughter

Zoe was born in London - as was Arnaud's own shoe label, NDC (short for Nom de Code). With flagship stores now in Brussels and Paris, NDC specialises in leather shoes for men and women that are handmade in Italy, Portugal and Spain.

Six years ago, Arnaud launched Zannier Hotels, opening his first hotel in the French Alps with a design approach based upon his own love of simple but sophisticated spaces with luxury services. Le Chalet Zannier in Megève takes the form of a micro village, with a principal lounge and bar in a new building looking out over the mountains and the town, plus a restaurant and spa on the lower levels. It's also a place where the whole family can gather; Arnaud's children love to ski, so the resort, with its wide choice of pistes, is a big attraction. Two existing chalet buildings >





ABOVE Head of development Pierre-Vincent Heyraud and general manager Steven Jacob with a receptionist at the main entrance to Le Chalet Zannier

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The communal sitting area of Le Chalet. The hotel's snow-clad exterior, Interior designer Geraldine Dohogne outside the little cabin at the hotel. The hotel's logo





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were updated to a five-star standard and complemented by smaller cabins dotted upon the hillside. Johan looked after the architecture, while Zannier Hotels' interior designer, Geraldine Dohogne, created the interiors, mixing bespoke elements and period pieces with locally made ceramics and antiques.

'A lot of luxury brands use the same interior designers and architects all over the world and the hotels look the same wherever they are,' says Arnaud. 'We want Zannier to be recognised for a quality experience and unique interiors. The idea is that, over time, the interiors of the hotels will gain added character.'

Another old friend, French chef Julien Burlat, was added to the small team at the heart of Zannier Hotels. Arnaud and Julien have known one another since they were children, and Julien also found his way to Belgium, opening the Michelin-starred Dôme restaurant in Antwerp, as well as a brasserie and bakery. He runs La Ferme de Mon Père, the restaurant at Le Chalet Zannier.

Arnaud's future plans include the expansion of his hotel business with the ambition of creating a portfolio of highly individual retreats. A second hotel, Phum Baitang, opened last year

in Cambodia close to Siem Reap and Angkor Wat. Comprising 45 timber villas plus two restaurants and a spa, it's a more ambitious project, with the concept masterminded by Johan and the interiors by Geraldine, while Paris-based firm AW2 headed up the architecture. There are also plans for a finca in Menorca and work is underway on the biggest project to date: a 90-room resort arranged around a private bay in Vietnam, created in collaboration with Studio KO, designers of London's Chiltern Firehouse.

'We have a small team, but we also like to work with different architects on different projects to bring in fresh ideas. In Vietnam, I think we can push it up to 90 rooms and still keep the same kind of atmosphere that makes the hotels unique to us. It is a perfect setting – very green and wild. We want to keep it very pure and protect the surroundings. The atmosphere and the feeling of the country is so important to us; you don't want to sit in a bar in Vietnam that feels exactly the same as a bar in London. For me, emotion is always the most important part of it all' □

Zannier Hotels: [zannier.com](http://zannier.com)



OPPOSITE Arnaud with his childhood friend Julien Burlat, who is the chef at the Le Chalet's La Ferme de Mon Père restaurant. THIS PAGE ABOVE FROM LEFT The wooden bed of an open-plan suite at Le Chalet. Dining at La Ferme de Mon Père



ABOVE Chef Julien at work. RIGHT The sitting room of the largest suite at Le Chalet, which has an open fireplace