

# PARIS MATCH

Shoe designer GHERARDO FELLONI on the home version of love at first sight and the artwork that has taken up residence in his three-storey townhouse

WORDS GRACE CAIN

GHERARDO FELLONI HAS HIS CAMERA OFF. “It’s because I am a mess.” His voice crawls dryly out of the void. I brace myself for an awkward online video interview with a black screen and unwilling subject. How wonderful it is (sometimes) to be proved spectacularly wrong. When the shoe designer and creative director at Roger Vivier flicks his camera on, he’s wearing a hoodie rather than his signature combination of a shirt and flamboyant 19th-century jewellery, but he doesn’t look a mess and he wears a warm smile. His penchant for antique jewels is just one of many subjects that he talks about with

great fervour (“I wear them on the subway, because everyone assumes they are fake!”), along with classic film, design and art – all of which inform his work at the luxury brand. Felloni is the sort of charming person you’d like to have as a friend – although don’t hold your breath for any dinner invitations.

“I do not invite many people to my house, because it is my house,” he says, as though this should be obvious. “I will make Christmas

dinner for my close friends, or sometimes in summer we will do lunch in the garden. I like to entertain – but only once or twice a year.”

The garden is a huge part of the reason why Felloni is sitting here now in his home on the edge of Paris. He explains that when he first moved here from Milan, he was specifically looking for a property with an outdoor space – something that is difficult to find in the French capital. However, there’s an alternative universe where he never even stepped through the door of this three-storey townhouse. “I cancelled the viewing four times. This house is in the 20th arrondissement, which is very far from my office and the centre of the city. The agency kept calling me and telling me that I must see it because it is so lovely,” he chuckles. “I kept saying that I would, but then I never did.” A cancelled meeting and an unexpectedly empty schedule finally nudged him into the neighbourhood. “When I arrived, the sun was shining, children were playing in the streets and [the area] was full of cats and gardens. I saw this house and I said: ‘Okay. I will be back with the cheque tonight.’ I had never seen anything that beautiful in Paris.”

Today, the garden is still his favourite place to pass the time. “When the weather is good, I always sit and relax outside. And the room that I live in the most is the dining room, which has big windows onto the garden, as well as the table where I work and eat.” That table – like many of Felloni’s possessions – is the physical manifestation of a story. “I bought it from a man in Milano, who bought it from a teacher who had created it in the 1940s,” he remembers. “[The teacher] had six children, so he constructed this table with six drawers and a hole in the middle, so that he could stand in the centre and give them their lessons. “All the pieces in my house are a piece of my heart,” he continues. “But if I have to mention one particularly special piece, it’s probably the Gio Ponti desk in my bedroom.” Finished in deep green Formica and topped with a perfectly round mirror, this particular treasure began its life in Ponti’s monument to modernism, the Hotel Parco dei Principi in Sorrento. “A big company bought the hotel and sold all the furniture – they probably did not know what they had on their hands!” says Felloni, gleefully. “So, I had the chance to buy this desk. It was about 15 years ago when nobody was caring about Gio Ponti. And then his work had a big boom, and now it’s impossible to buy.”

This, apparently, is something of a theme when it comes to Felloni’s choices. “I feel lucky because whenever I feel interested in something, >



This page: Gherardo Felloni with a Victor Vasarely painting that he discovered in an auction house. Opposite page: A classical sculpture takes pride of place among contemporary collectables







it's normally not in vogue at that moment," he says. "You know how it is with design: sometimes mid-century furniture is really hot on the market, and sometimes nobody cares about it. I'm usually attracted to things that are a little bit unexpected, and then over the years they become masterpieces." Obviously, I ask him to tell us all his treasure-hunting secrets – but he's elusive. "It's just a feeling," he shrugs. "I like to mix things that are not usually supposed to go together, like designs from different epochs. It's really instinctive and there is no logic. When you create an interior, the risk is to do it too perfectly and then you have this problem where it feels cold and unreal. A house has to look alive."

His approach to art is equally intuitive. "I don't go out searching for pieces, and I don't think too much when I buy them. I let them come to me." The luminous Victor Vasarely painting that hangs between two 1960s glass sconces from Milan Centrale railway station was discovered in an Italian auction house, as were the works by avant-garde artist Enrico Castellani.

In the dining room, a portrait by Nicolas Party watches warily over the teacher's old table. It's one of two "super-precious" pieces by the Swiss artist in Felloni's collection. He bought the first from the Francesca Kaufmann Gallery in Milan, and naturally there's a tale to go with the discovery. "Francesca is my friend, and I met Nicolas when he was doing his first exhibition in Milano," Felloni recalls. "I had the chance to have lunch with him and really fall under his charm. I'm not usually a fan of figurative art, but I felt like he was doing something that no-one had done before in painting – which is pretty difficult to achieve."

Felloni was immediately drawn to the way that Party combined contemporary style with historical references, which sounds a little like a certain shoe designer and a certain shoe designer's eclectic Parisian townhouse. "But decorating a house is very different to my work, because my house is really personal," he insists. "There is no business here, so there are no rules." He pauses thoughtfully. "Of course, there is some link because my brain is one brain. The mechanism is the same, so the way I create is the same. I always try to impress myself before I impress anyone else."

Aspects of Felloni's work life do find their way into the corner of his sanctuary in the form of his impressive collection of shoes, which he displays on shelves and alongside ancient-Greek-style busts as though they are works of art. "I have some Roger Vivier shoes from the 1950s and 1960s, which I bought at an auction in Paris. Then I have a few pieces by Charles Jourdan, another genius of shoes. But the majority are my own designs. Years ago, I started to keep my favourite piece from each collection. I'd buy it in the store, so it's all proper!" he adds, quickly. His collection encompasses shoes from his time at Miu Miu and Dior, as well as his most recent creations for Roger Vivier. "It's so I don't forget," he explains. "And when I am old, I will still have something to remind me of this nightmare of fashion." He laughs a loud, good-natured laugh.

And when that "nightmare" is all over, perhaps Felloni will still be sitting in his little garden in Paris, pursuing the dream that has been in the back of his mind since childhood. "I always wanted to be an architect. I think that everything is linked to architecture, even the heel and last of a shoe," he explains. "It's something that I would love to do, but I think it would be better when I am old," he chuckles. "There is always time to be an architect." □

Gaëlle Le Boulleaur/Photofeyr



Scan the QR code to shop the latest Roger Vivier shoes



From top: A Nicolas Party portrait examines Vico Magistretti's dining chairs; tactile textures and natural tones create a relaxing atmosphere in this seating area; a Gio Ponti desk sets the teal tone in Felloni's bedroom



**"I'M USUALLY ATTRACTED TO THINGS THAT ARE A LITTLE BIT UNEXPECTED"**



Clockwise from above: Beloved shoe designs from Felloni's personal archives are sprinkled with artworks and other precious trinkets; a sitting room looks onto the designer's garden; Felloni's creations for Dior, Miu Miu and Roger Vivier look elegant among his books; Greek sculptures are a recurring theme in this Parisian home

