

MAGAZINE

Tour an Out of This World Home in the Swiss Alps

A creative dream team including activist Nachson Mimran and AD100 talent Francis Kéré injects daring vision into a compound of traditional chalets in Gstaad

By Sam Cochran

Photography by Cassie Floto Warner

Styled by Berit Hoerschelmann

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The project's creative director, Nachson Mimran (left), and interior architect Francis Kéré stand in the indoor-outdoor pool that links two private chalets in Gstaad, Switzerland; Kéré designed the ceiling canopy out of 9,964 laser-cut bamboo poles.

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Conventional wisdom suggests that too many cooks would disturb the creative kitchen. But Nachson Mimran—a free-spirited activist working at the intersection of climate science and refugee empowerment—is not one to abide by hackneyed thinking. “The more the better,” muses Mimran, cofounder of the foundation and platform to.org. “Let’s let loose.” It was just that mindset that appealed to a philanthropist-entrepreneur looking to build a

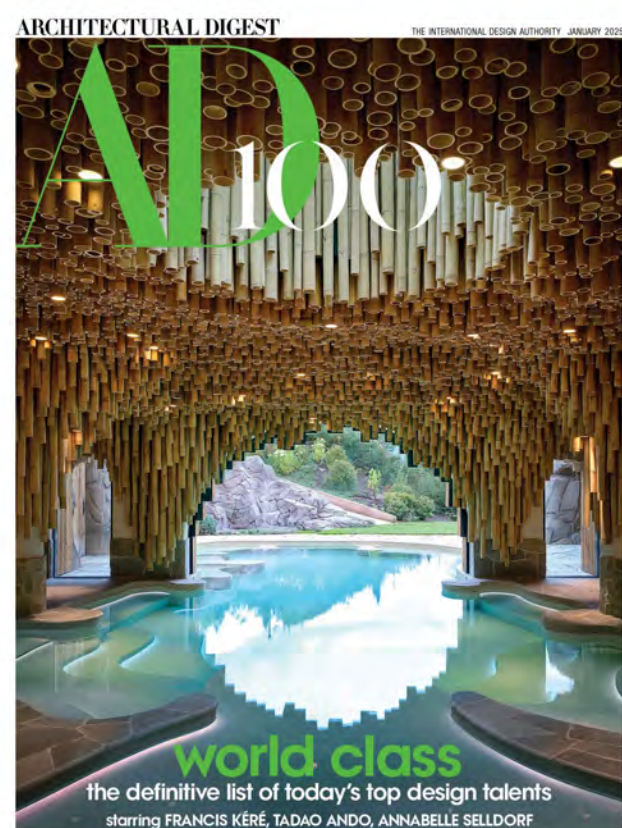
private residence in Gstaad, a Swiss ski town synonymous with alpine glamour. More than simply a home, the project was meant to be a catalyst for cultural exchange, foregrounding the work of designers and makers from around the world, with a particular emphasis on Africa and the African diaspora. Entrusted by the client with that open-ended mandate, Mimran acted as the project's creative director, orchestrating both individual commissions and the larger ethos of collaboration. As he reflects, "What ideas emerge when you bring together a lot of strong voices?"



In one chalet's living room, as throughout the compound, Muza Lab collaborated on the interior design; wall carvings and staircase by Kéré. Art: Paul Klee © 2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Chief among those was AD100 Hall of Famer Francis Kéré, whom Mimran met by chance over dinner, several years before the architect won the Pritzker Prize. The two immediately bonded over their past work in refugee camps—Mimran, who grew up between West Africa and Switzerland, having dedicated himself to creating spaces for culture and connection within displaced communities, Kéré having designed schools in rural Burkina Faso, where he was born. In Gstaad, the men have joined forces to disrupt the local vernacular, reimagining two classic chalets as vessels for contemporary innovation.

Designed with Chaletbau Matti, a Swiss firm specializing in the traditional alpine housing type, the side-by-side residences abide by strict local building codes, which dictate everything from the style of buildings down to the angles of roofs. "Gstaad feels like a fairy tale, extremely charming but also extremely homogeneous," notes Mimran. "Constraints push you to think outside the box." Within the homes' conventional shells, he and Kéré collaborated on a series of interventions that address the property's multifold ambitions, which Mimran distills into three themes: Regenerate, Think, and Play.



AD's January 2025 issue.

AD's January 2025 issue.



Stairway to Heaven, a Murano glass light fixture by Ini Archibong, hangs in the stairwell.



Manna Chandelier by Ini Archibong

SHOP AT
FRIEDMAN BENDA



Amma, 2024 by Lina Iris Viktor

SHOP AT
PILAR CORRIAS



The Hive, 2022 by Balla Niang

\$4,000
ARTSY

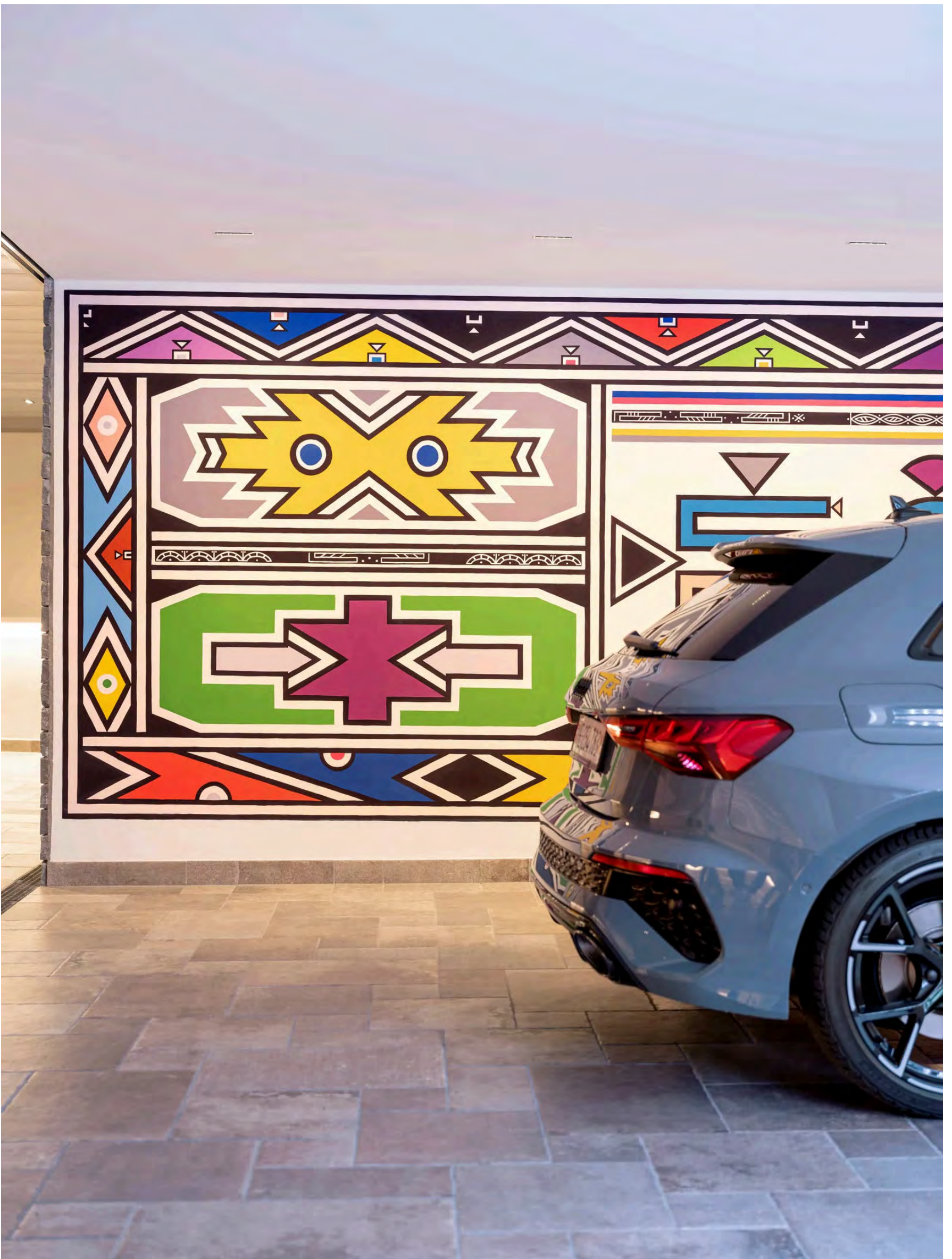


Vekpuk Yelo Scarf

\$60
VEKPUK

Linking the chalets, the Regenerate space features an indoor-outdoor swimming pool, for which Kéré conceived an undulating canopy of 9,964 bamboo poles, laser-cut at varied lengths. “You don’t need extremely expensive materials to create something unique and high level,” says Kéré, whose work has long pioneered low-cost building techniques. He likens the installation to the cosmos (a metaphor he previously explored at his pavilion for Montana’s [Tippet Rise Art Center](#)). “It’s meant to be the universe,” he explains, albeit “a different configuration of what the universe could be.” It’s also a place to relax, whether in solitude or surrounded by friends and family. “The pool should touch all the senses—the visual, the emotional, the tactile,” says Kéré. “Water embraces the user.”

The basement, meanwhile, serves as a discotheque and games room dedicated to the concept of Play. (“We named spaces after what we wanted them to manifest,” Mimran explains.) Kéré devised interior architecture flexible enough to accommodate crowds of all sizes, sharing the creative wand with Thomas Karsten and Alexandra Erhard of [Studio Karhard](#), the designers of Berlin’s Berghain nightclub, who helped outfit the subterranean spaces. Guests can cozy up along upholstered banquettes; bowl a match in the state-of-the-art alley, enlivened by a Victor Ekpuk mural; shoot a game of pool on the bespoke marble table; or retreat inside the shaggy nest sculpture made by Porky Hefer in collaboration with Ousmane Mbaye, Doulsy, and Ali Mbaye. Here, Mimran says, people can “let the animal spirit out.”



The walls of the arrival area are covered with murals by Esther Mahlangu.



Untitled Carved Form, 2020 by Madoda Fani

SHOP AT
SOUTHERN GUILD



Untitled Acrylic on Canvas, 2023 by Esther Mahlangu

\$1,500
THE MELROSE GALLERY



Asturias Rocking Armchair by Carlos Motta

SHOP AT
ESPASSO



Xigera Coffee Table, 2020 by Adam Birch

\$3,170
XIGERA LODGE



Designed by specialized builders Chaletbau Matti, the traditional chalets feature carved façade panels conceived with Kéré.

The living area of one chalet became the so-called Think forum, dedicated to reflection and conversation. Kéré conceived an open circular hearth crowned by a metal hood that pulls the eye toward the sky, its asymmetrical conical form encouraging “ideas to flow in different directions.” Growing up in Burkina Faso, he recalls, there was no electricity. “On a cold night you would surround the fire. This is where stories get told. That was my vision—a place for the community of the house to gather.” For the other chalet’s living area, meanwhile, he designed a staircase inspired by a baobab tree, a symbol, Mimran notes, “of wisdom and safety.”

Taken as a whole, the project incorporates the vision of countless global talents. The London-based design firm Muza Lab decorated interiors; French lighting maestro Hervé Descottes calibrated the rooms’ consistently exquisite glow;

and AD100 landscape architect [Sara Zewde](#) reimagined the grounds with native plants and concrete walls that evoke Saharan mineral deposits. Other commissions include chairs by [Yinka Ilori](#), fabrics by [Aïssa Dione](#), and chandeliers by [Ini Archibong](#), who made a monumental fixture to cascade down one stairwell. Joining that mix are site-specific artworks by the likes of [Billie Zangewa](#), [Esther Mahlangu](#), and [Rashid Johnson](#). And there's more on the way, with ambitions for an artist residency dubbed Create—a fourth conceptual pillar—slated for a third chalet on the property.

A panoply of perspectives, of course, was always the intention—to bring people together, excite their minds, and see what breakthroughs come. Reflecting on the team effort, Mimran says, “everyone was out of their comfort zone. We gave everyone permission to fail but also to dream big.” Check your egos, in other words, at the chalets’ doors. Says Kéré: “In debate we create harmony.”

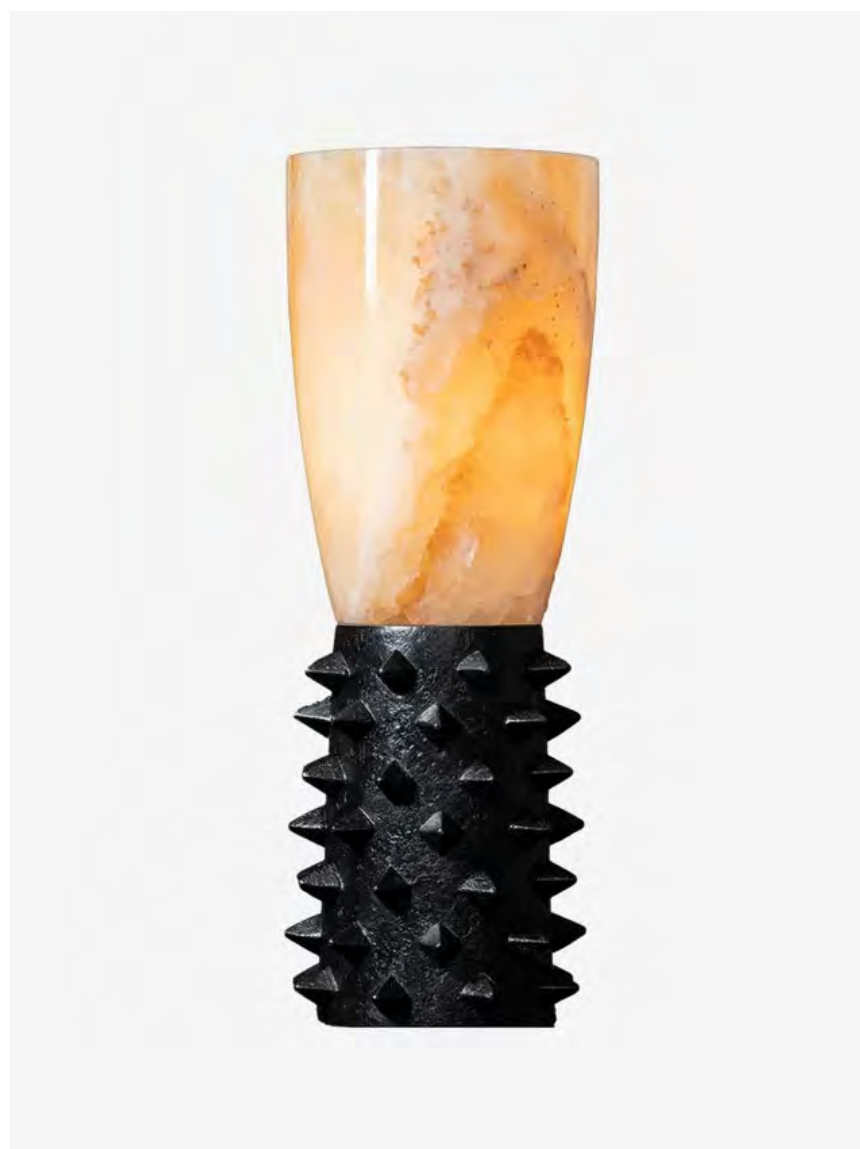


Baolé Print Handwoven Cotton by Aïssa Dione

SHOP AT
AISSA DIONE TISSUS



A nest sculpture by Porky Hefer, in collaboration with Ousmane Mbaye, Doulsy, and Ali Mbaye, stands in a play area.



SHOP AT
SOUTHERN GUILD

\$6,200
ALEXANDER LAMONT



Mimran (left) and Kéré stand by a living room's staircase, whose organic form was modeled after a Baobab tree.

This house in the Swiss Alps covers AD's January issue. Never miss a story when you subscribe to AD.



1/20

AD100 landscape architect [Sara Zewde](#) made conceptual links between Africa and the Alps.



2/20

Kéré designed a fireplace with an asymmetrical metal hood for a living area; stools by [Madoda Fani](#).



3/20

Carved-walnut cabinetry by [Chaletbau Matti](#) and Kéré complements interior walls made of rammed earth, straw, and hemp.



Art: Rashid Johnson/Hauser & Wirth

4/20

In one living room, a site-specific mural by [Rashid Johnson](#) crowns woodwork and a fireplace designed by Kéré.



Art: Georges Mathieu © 2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

5/20

An Ini Archibong light fixture hangs above a dining suite by [Balla Niang](#); artwork by [Georges Mathieu](#).



6/20

Niches in a rammed-earth wall display an installation by [Lina Iris Viktor](#).



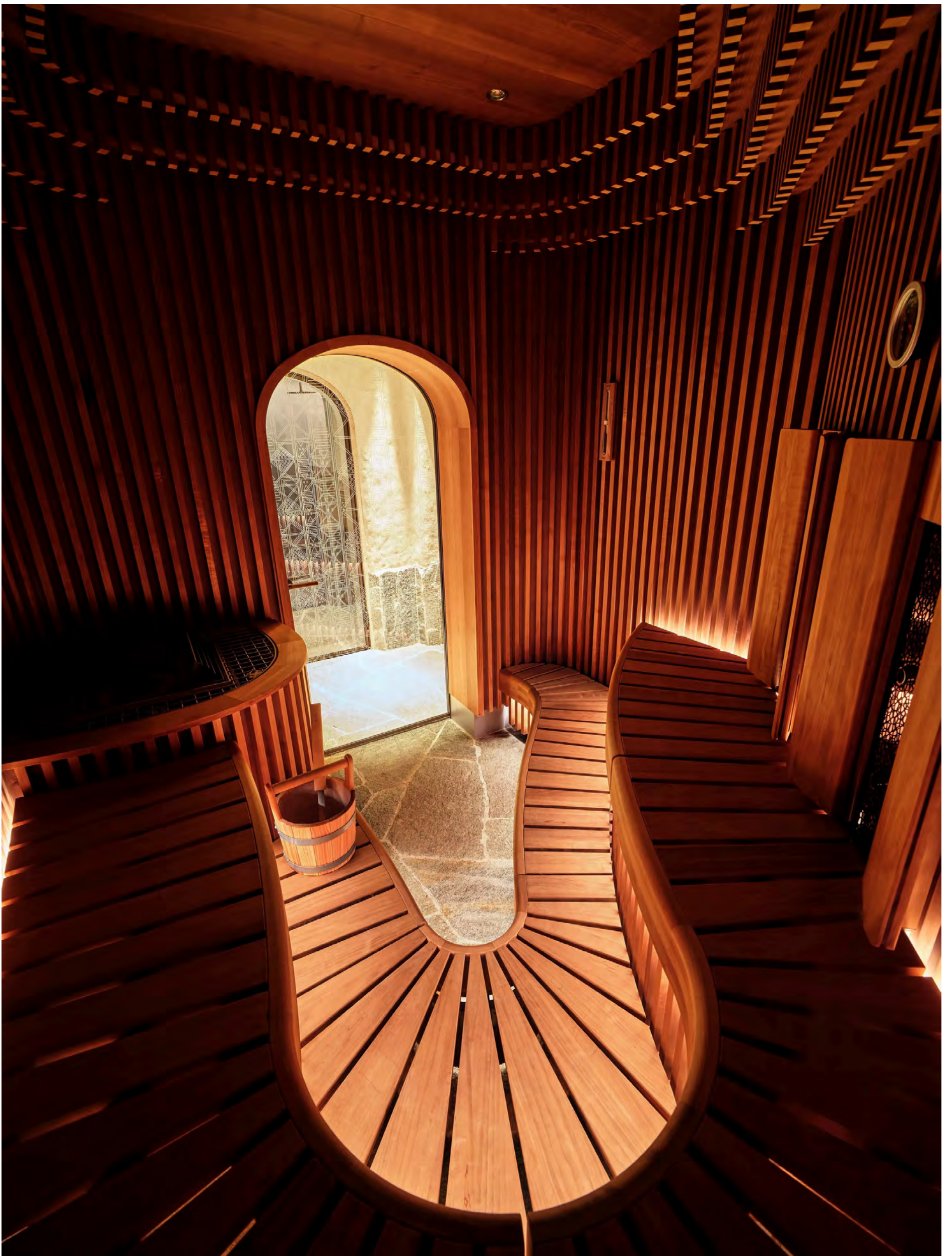
7/20

A bathroom features carved woodwork by [Chaletbau Matti](#) and Kéré; interior design by [Muza Lab](#).



8/20

Muza Lab outfitted a mezzanine seating alcove with upholstered walls and a banquette; lamps by [Alexander Lamont](#).



9/20

The sauna's etched-glass door was designed by [Chaletbau Matti](#).



Photo: Abdoulaye Konaté

10/20

An indoor hydroponic farm by [Babylon Micro-Farms](#) greets visitors arriving through the subterranean carport; in the entry beyond, artworks by Pierre Huyghe and Abdoulaye Konaté.



11/20

Studio Karhard created a circular fireplace for the basement “play” space.



12/20

The home's record collection.



13/20

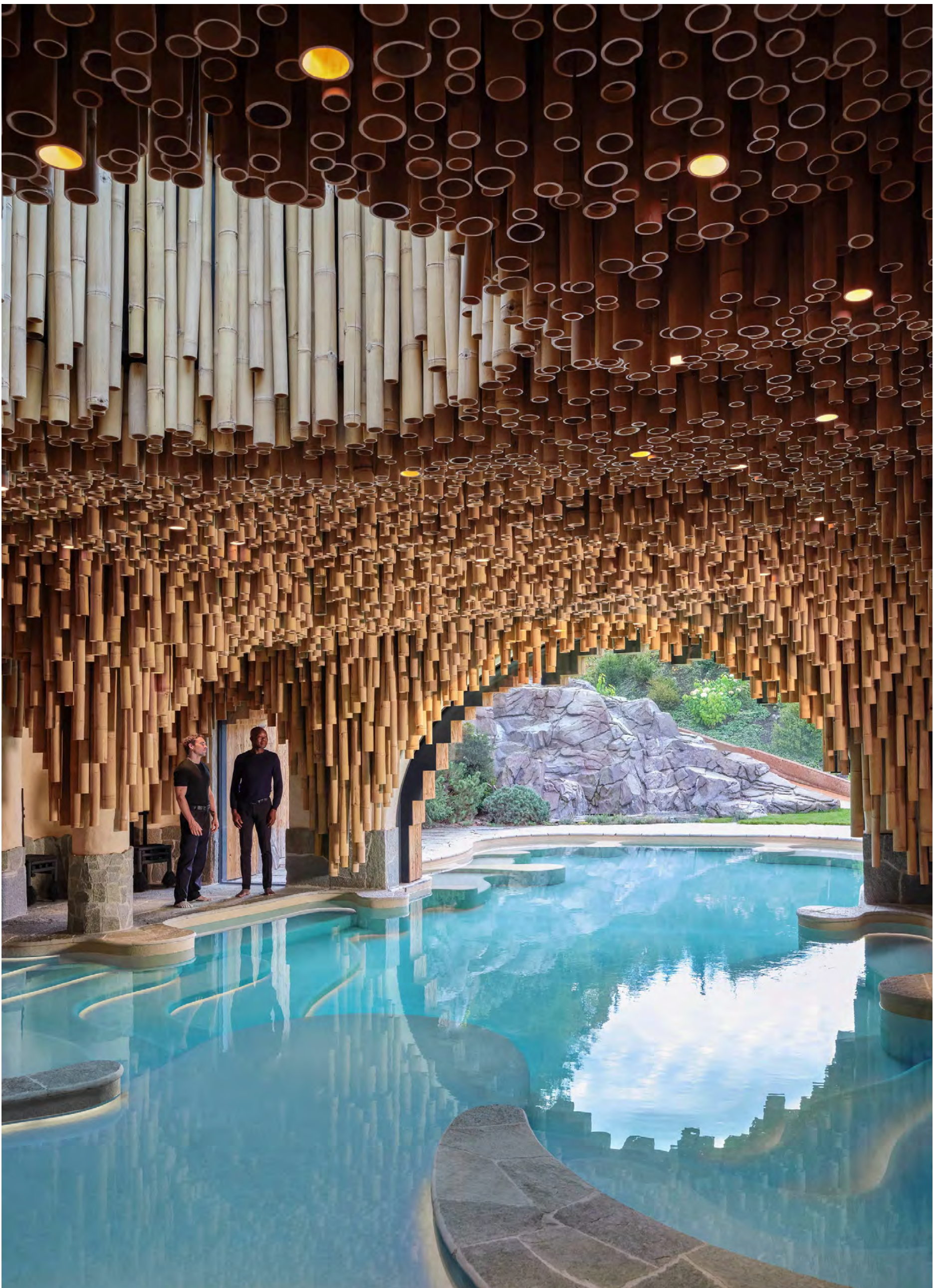
A lounge area designed by [Studio Karhard](#) for the basement “play” space; DJ booth by [Ousmane Mbaye](#).



Art: Victor Ekpuk

14/20

A mural by Victor Ekpuk enlivens the bowling alley.



15/20

Mimran (left) and Kéré beside the "Regenerate" pool.



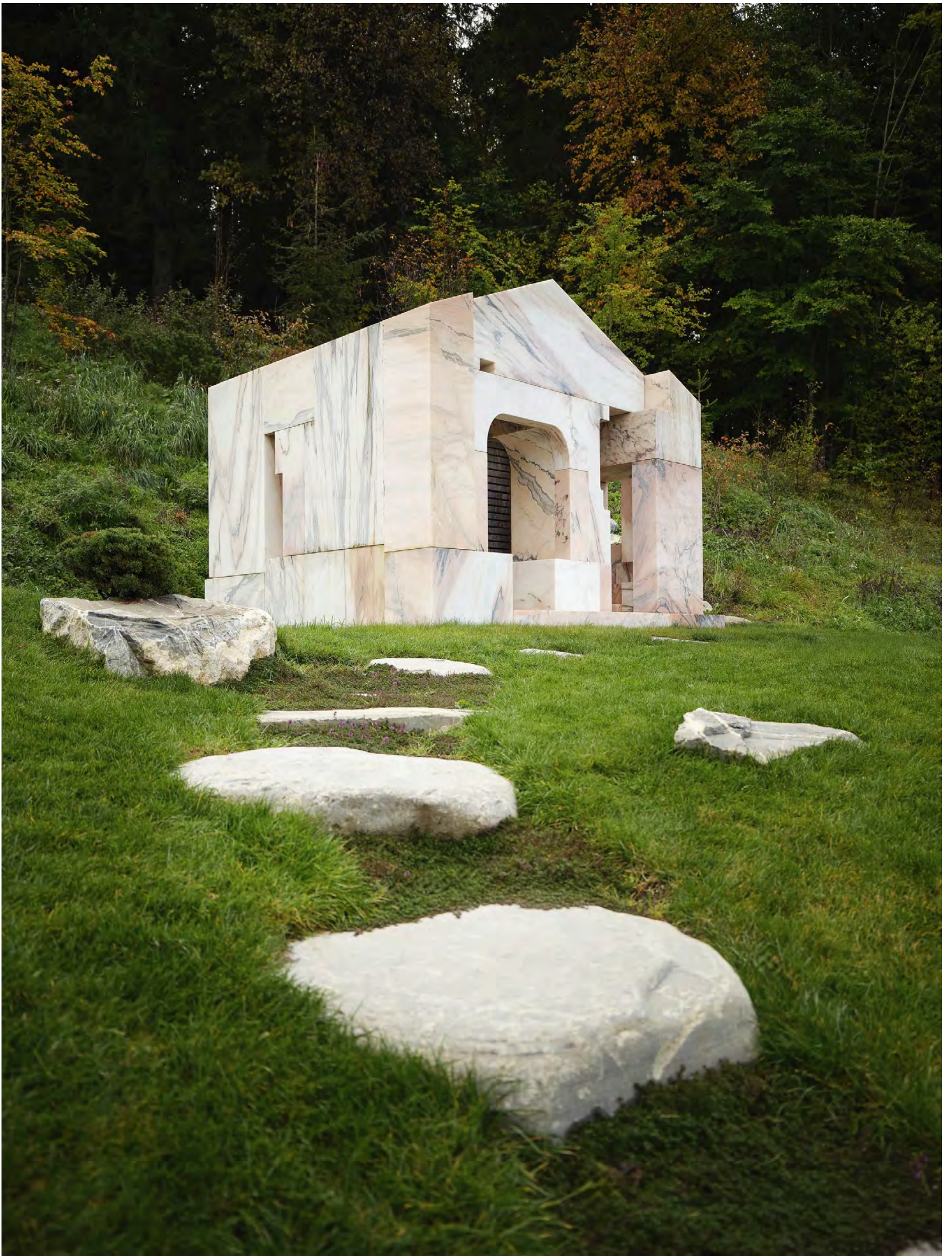
16/20

Kéré (left) and Mimran outside the pool.



17/20

A balcony frames views of the Alps. Kéré based the carved and pierced woodwork—both inside and outside the chalets—on traditional Swiss-alpine façades.



18/20

A folly by the Danish art collective Superflex uses discarded stone from Portugal.



19/20

Mimran (left) and Kéré in one of the boulder-like installations that Zewde created for the grounds.



20/20

A view of the grounds and the Swiss Alps beyond.



[Sam Cochran](#) currently serves as the brand's Global Features Director. In that role he shepherds coverage of design, culture, travel, and architecture news for the print magazine while contributing to all of *AD's* international platforms, editorial initiatives, and events. As an expert in sustainability, renovation, and contemporary design topics, he... [Read more](#)