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Dutch creative Sabine Marcelis employs an exuberant spirit to explore scale and material in her work and embraces this same attitude at home.

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In the living area, homeowners Paul Cournet and Sabine Marcelis with their son Koa, Boa pouf in Oatmeal by Sabine Marcelis for Hem, enquiries to District.

Some of Sabine Marcelis's most in-demand pieces, arguably building blocks of her creative journey, are her cast resin Candy Cubes. Realised in delicious tones — think marshmallow pink, fresh spearmint, pastel-pretty grape and zesty tangerine — the polished sugar-sweet blocks appear softened at the edges with diffused light. While they have drawn near-universal acclaim, a literal building block was the one real point of conjecture in crafting her personal sanctuary in The Netherlands.

“We somehow never disagreed on much other than the glass bricks in the patio,” says Marcelis of the Rotterdam home she created with her architect partner Paul Cournet. “In the end, Paul drove to France where he found rectangular glass bricks for sale second-hand and loaded them up in the car. I still got my bricks in the end, but much more special ones!”

“Special one” is an appropriate way to describe Marcelis. The lauded designer and artist seemingly has the Midas touch, reflected not just in (mirrored) gold but in happy kaleidoscopic hue on pieces fashioned primarily from resin or glass. “I use colour as a tool to design with, to exaggerate certain effects I want to achieve and to inject atmosphere into objects and installations,” she says.

“Certain combinations of colour achieve very different feelings than others and I love to play with that.”

The award-winning creative’s exploration of tone, forms, materiality and sensorial experience filtered through a refined aesthetic has seen her produce everything from neon-lit reflective Dawn and Totem lights, optical dimension-defining Seeing Glass mirrors to brushstroke-esque rugs for Cc-tapis and a doughnut inspired Boa pouf for Hem. Clients who have sought out her light-and colour-yielding magic include Celine, Dior and Isabel Marant.

“Each project brings its own challenges and I love a challenge,” Marcelis says with a smile. “It’s also important for me to work across those different types or projects. I get to work completely autonomously and free of clients in my gallery work, like the pieces I will be presenting at Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert in Sydney [Marcelis’s Shadow Light exhibition runs from May 18-30], and then at the same time I’m trying to optimise the packaging of an Ikea collection so as to not ship air around the world. All the while, I’m trying to inject this sense of wonder into all projects across the board. It gives me a lot of energy to create this way.”

For her own personal space in Rotterdam’s Coolhaven — “there’s a bit of everything with people of all walks of life” — she and Cournet purchased a single-level 520-square-metre former paper factory that they divvied up (the other half is now two rental properties). Other than two bedrooms, two bathrooms and two powder rooms, the space is completely open. “Paul was adamant about keeping the open-loft feeling of the uniquely open space; I even had to fight for a closed off-toilet at some point,” Marcelis says. “I’m very happy with the openness of the house. It’s big but we can create intimate cosy spaces at the same time. I can be cooking dinner while Koa is in the bath. We can be in the bath and project movies on the wall.”

While Marcelis and Cournet established their versatile place back in 2018, son Koa came into the world when it had shut down, allowing the couple even more creative licence with their home.

“There is always a difference in how you expect to use a space and how you actually end up using it,” she says. “We actually never even thought about a child living in the house when we designed it, so when we found out we were having a baby, we thought at first to create a room on wheels that could be stationed anywhere in the loft depending on where it would make sense, or a repurposed ski lift as his room for example. But, in the end, we moved our walk-in wardrobe to a different location and gave him his own room.”

And as homes come to reflect our lives, the Marcelis-Cournet family’s contemporary open space unsurprisingly takes the concept even further. “I absolutely see our house as an extension of our lives. We are surrounded by our friends at home; our friends’ work,” says the designer and artist. “We are very strict about what we bring into the house and certainly neither of us is a fan of knick-knacks — it’s only if they bring a memory, a story or some other emotional value with them. We thought a lot about the sofas we have and generally are very conscious and take a long time to decide on a purchase. And if we can’t find anything suitable, we design it ourselves.”

Being at the forefront of diffusing the boundaries of design and art means Marcelis is also keenly aware of how important it is to support fresh talent. She is speaking at Semi Permanent Sydney in May and collaborating with La Prairie to mentor graduates taking part in the Women Bauhaus Collective exhibition at Art Basel in June, following her leadership of ECAL (École cantonale d’art de Lausanne) students last year. This is meaningful work she finds “insanely inspiring and rewarding”. “I definitely see it as my duty now as someone who is a bit further in their career to guide the next generation and share my experiences and advice so that the mistakes I made along the way, they can avoid,” she says. There’s no mistaking her home showcases the very building blocks she has crafted her career around though: colour, light and investing in things that really matter.

In the dining area, glass table by Sabine Marcelis; stacked foam stools by Sabine Marcelis and Paul Cournet; Soap column by Sabine Marcelis; Fold chair by Olivier Gregoire; Liquidish bowl (on table) by Vincent de Rijk from RiRa; Devon Made glass lemons by Devyn Ormsby; artwork by Marria Pratts.

In the living area of this Rotterdam home, LC2 Foam chair by Paul Cournet; Osaka sofa by Pierre Paulin in Febrik upholstery from LaCividina; Diamond table in concrete and mirrored steel by FOS, a birthday gift from the artist; Off Round Hue mirror in Sunrise by Sabine Marcelis and Brit van Nerven; concrete totem by Magnus Pettersen; Chair #1 (2015) photograph (behind sofa) by Pim Top.



In the kitchen designed by Sabine Marcelis and Paul Cournet. bar stools by Sabine Marcelis and Paul Cournet; Lazy Suzan (on island) by Sabine Marcelis and Paul Cournet; coffee cups by Peter Shire for Echo Park Pottery, a birthday gift to Sabine from Paul, enquiries to Third Drawer Down; pepper mill (on rear bench) by Maarten Baas for Valerie Objects, a housewarming gift from Baas, enquiries to Spence & Lyda; Added glasses by Nienke Sikkema from RiRa; Elgar lights from Sammode, enquiries to Oblica; Void Vessel artwork by Jonas Lutz.

Bed designed by Sabine Marcelis and Paul Cournet using ALPI Sottsass Grey veneer, enquiries to Elton Group; bed linen from Tekla; Soap column by Sabine Marcelis; Soap bathroom by Sabine Marcelis and Paul Cournet; Totem light by Sabine Marcelis; resin cube prototype by Sabine Marcelis.

In the library, Barcelona Foam chair by Paul Cournet; Marnet shelving from Phil Procter.

In another view of the library, Impose Velvet Flock saddleseat by Handmade Industrials; vintage Trio sofa from Cor, enquiries for reissue to Collective; curtain by Ehsan Sefat.

In the bed zone, Cournet and Marcelis with Koa.

In the office, recycled foam samples from Paul Cournet's LC2 Foam chair projects; One Yellow Line (2017) artwork by Thomas Trum.

In a corner of the library, Candy pyramid prototype by Sabine Marcelis for Celine; Tweety sculpture by Daniel Arsham; light by Miya Kondo (part of an installation for Stella McCartney).

