



OBJECT LESSON



At Hermès petit h, the legacy French house's experimental atelier, magical thinking reconstitutes would-be waste into mind-bending wonders.

There are certain experiences that wriggle their way back into my mind at unexpected moments. They're not of the anxious variety. They're not ruminations at all, really. They're more like lenses. Because they quite literally alter the way I interpret the world around me. Like a visit to The Noguchi Museum in Queens, New York, that cubby of amorphous, structural wonders. Days later, harried and rushing to the subway, I catch sight of a hobbled, old barricade that, to my newly tuned eye, looks like a handsome, slanted sculpture (Noguchi's doing.) It's a delight — this unanticipated intrusion of new sight.

The same is happening now, as I delve into the ebullient, absorbing story of petit h, a madcap laboratory of sorts, where viewing the world askew has always been the order of the day. Comprised of a small yet nimble ➤

*Words by Khira Jordan
Photography by Erwann Petersen*

➤ team of craftsmen, designers, and artists, this atypical Hermès atelier has set itself the task of gathering waste from the house's other creative métiers — all 15 of them — and zealously reimagining what those disparate bits could coalesce to create.

Enterprising and more than a bit impish, petit h was founded in 2010 by Pascale Mussard, a sixth-generation descendant of Thierry Hermès and a child of the Second World War, whose waste-conscious household sparked her penchant for collecting and collaging whatever was at hand. Since 2018, petit h has been stewarded by creative director Godefroy de Virieu, an industrial designer by training and something of a hummingbird by nature, buzzing through the space, creatively cross-pollinating from project to project. It's a tall order to deal exclusively in elements destined for the bin. Yet, with one look at petit h's array of singular creations — whether a sled, swing, music box, or cuckoo clock — you realize that this material constraint acts more like a catapult, prompting the enclave's most free-thinking instincts. "The more complex it is, the more excitement there is to achieve it. It gives an energy," affirms de Virieu.

Located in an old factory building in Pantin, on the outskirts of Paris, the petit h workshop and its "nursery" (the name given to the room that houses objects-in-progress) have a real whirl to them. Amidst a backdrop of imperfect buttons, shards, saddles, and scraps — each treasured for its particular character — new creations are conceived, tinkered with, expertly perfected, and then "off they go," as the affable studio head puts it. Upon learning just how improvisational the atelier's processes are (no drawing, no sketching, no preconceptions; just "*intuition immédiate*"), perhaps it is more accurate to say that new pieces are hinted at, articulated, evolved, put aside, revived, finessed, and finally, when they seem to practically announce themselves, unleashed into the world. That's the idiosyncratic path a beautiful but unusable chair took to become an elegant broom with matching dustpan and how a fully functioning clock ended up inside a tipped-over teacup.

Yet for all their mirth, nothing at petit h is simply a curio made for show. Every bit of whimsy comes with an equal dose of rigor. As its founder Mussard frequently observed, "There is no object without an objective." So, spectacularly fashioned though they may be, every lamp is meant to be lit, every stool to be sat on, every guitar to be strummed, every hammock to be swung in — like fabulous *cadavres exquis* artisanally coaxed into being, all in the name of sustainability.

It's an ingeniously modern preservation of tradition too. Inside every finished product is both a fleeting, associative moment of creativity and nearly two centuries of artisanal expertise; an experimental blend of ephemeral, here-and-now ingenuity and eternal, meant-to-be-handed-down quality. In the colorful words of de Virieu, it's a special amalgam of play and nurturance, "*du jeu et de la nourriture*." Indeed, petit h's very existence, its investigative nature, its spirited resourcefulness is an ode to magical thinking — a vibrant rallying cry to always tilt our heads ever so slightly to the side. When we do, the prescriptive, the foregone, the always-was-and-always-will-be becomes malleable, and, poof: "*les formes apparaissent*." Possibility takes shape. //



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