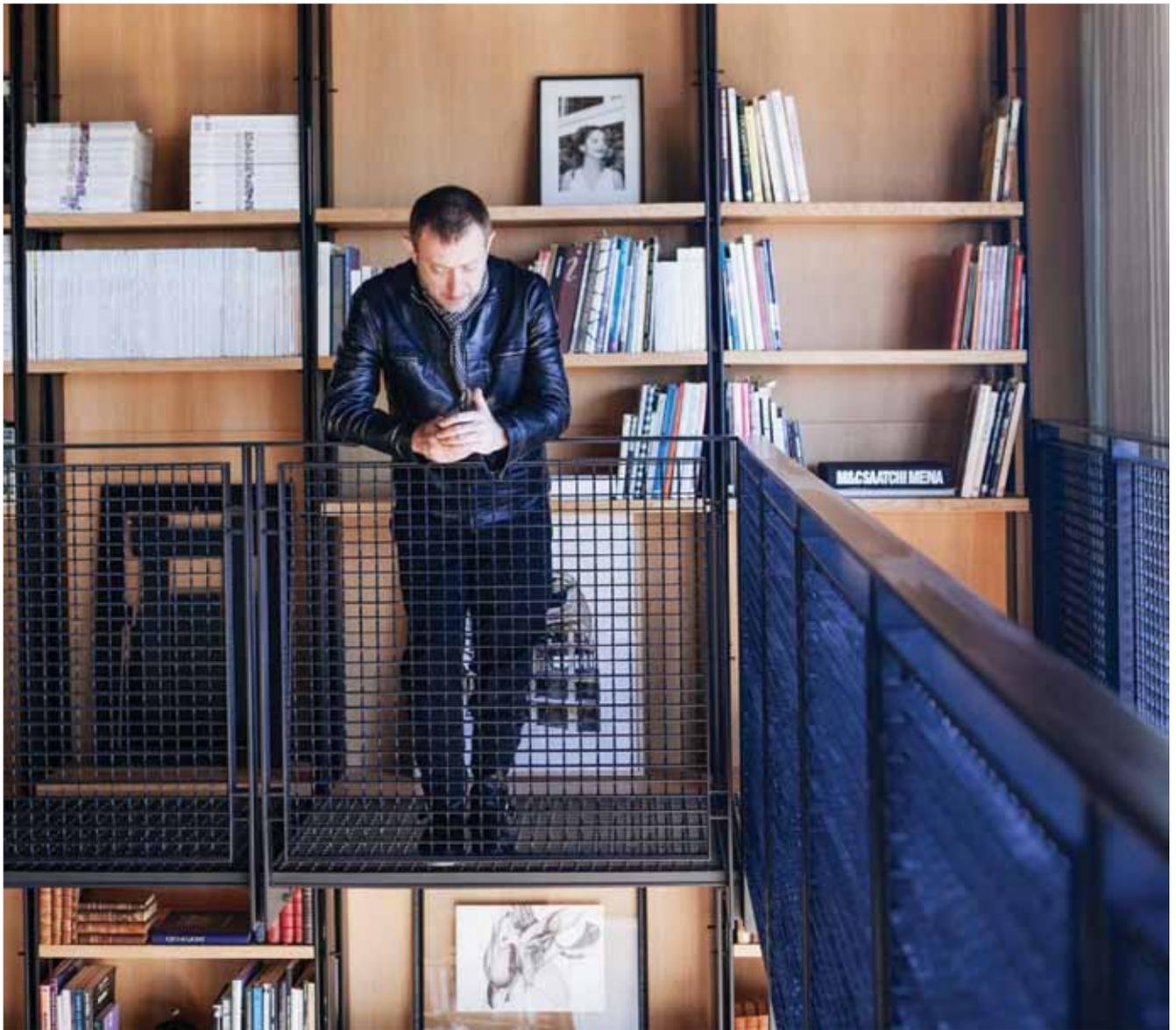




RESIDENCE  
Beirut, Lebanon

# In Full Swing

After years of designing the dream homes of others, Bernard Khoury has finally created his own





'I can see all the way up to the Chouf mountains and, straight ahead, all the way through the southern suburbs of Beirut. You can see the chaos and extreme density, and the hell we've produced over the last fifty years,' says Bernard Khoury, staring at the view from his new million-dollar penthouse.

Having designed the building himself, Khoury – arguably Lebanon's most sought-after architect – framed the city he repeatedly describes as having been 'cannibalised', 'ravaged' and 'ruined' by rapid property development with a 12 metre-high, wall to wall window in the main room of his apartment, inviting his beloved urban portrait to take pride of place.

Gauging from the glittering CGI sea vistas promised beyond the fences that surround the city's construction sites, it's evidently not a view that many Lebanese aspire to. But it is one that Khoury describes fondly.

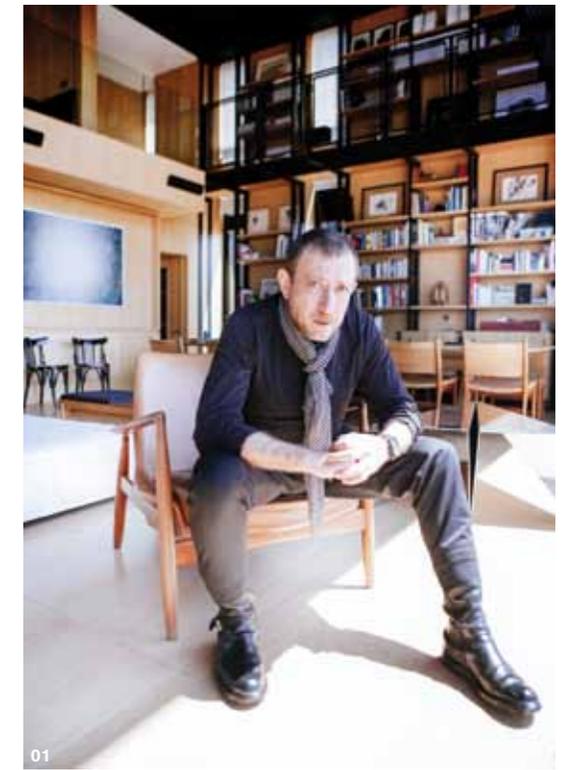
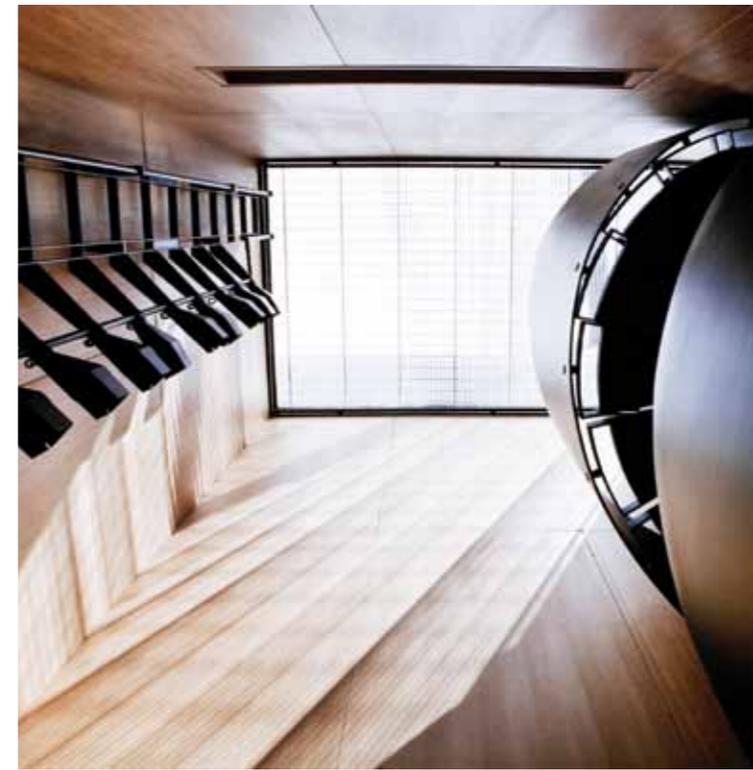
'It's not romantic. It's a realistic, very sour view of Beirut,' he says. 'And there's something fascinating about it.'

Khoury has been building on this gritty fascination for the past 15 years. It has inspired his architecture firm, DW5,

to contribute a series of daring, brutalist structures that have earned him a rebellious reputation and have become well-known references in the fabric of his much loved hometown. After years of designing residential properties for others, though, Khoury finally found the perfect location to build a home for his family.

Crouching atop a 12 unit condo, the apartment ('Think of it as a detached house perched on top of a building') overlooks Damascus Road – an axis that runs from the National Museum to Sodeco Square, effectively dividing the city in two. 'I didn't want to be in east Beirut and I didn't want to live in west Beirut, so the fact that the plot sat smack in the middle was an important political standpoint for me,' he says. 'The decision was immediate.'

The Khourys moved in just over one year ago, leaving behind a more humble apartment in the neighbouring town of Jounieh. 'We've been living in a building that my father designed in the early '80s, where I grew up before moving out of Lebanon. We were quite happy there, but the commute was becoming a problem – the traffic in Beirut is catastrophic,' he says. As far as settling in goes, it seems old



01

## You're literally flying above the city

BERNARD KHOURY



02



03

01 Bernard Khoury sits in his Mathaf penthouse, on a chair he designed himself

02 The 12 metre-long bespoke dining table  
03 Khoury's leather swing – a gift from a friend





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habits die hard. 'Unfortunately I don't spend enough time at home. I live in my office. I sleep most of the time, or party whenever I can,' he says.

After leaving the apartment his father designed, Khoury stamped his own blueprints with the same conceptual mix of masculine industrialism and high-finish design work that have come to be synonymous with his name.

'It's spread over three levels. The arrival level incorporates all the vital functions – the kitchen, the reception area, the dining room and the master bedroom. I can basically live on that level. Above me, on the mezzanine, are my two kids, and another level up is a semi-independent suite or apartment for guests which has access to the terrace and pool but is pretty much autonomous.'

Although the façade is ultra-sleek, Khoury made a concerted effort to keep his home personal, preparing for his family's future by referencing his past. 'I'm someone who has been making things with my own hands since my childhood,' he says.

The floor to ceiling étagères that bookend the main reception room were designed by Khoury himself, and this

time crafted by an old family friend. 'I worked with an artisan who used to work with both my grandfather and my father – an old man with a great knowledge of wood. I'm a big advocate of trying to reconnect with local artisans wherever you are across the planet when trying to design and build.'

Just like the cabinets, Khoury designed pretty much everything himself, from the bespoke four metre-long dining table to the lighting installations, save for the last layer of finishes which he says his spouse, Nathalie, was very much involved in. 'I rarely do interiors – I have limited input beyond the outer walls. This was the one occasion when I could literally go inside the walls and handle everything down to the last screw.'

'The only piece that I didn't design is a sort of low table sculpture that was designed by Karen Chekerdjian, a close friend of mine. It looks like a paper plane but is made of stainless steel. Although it's not a very functional piece, I like it because of its playfulness. It's very intelligent in its simplicity. Karen is great, one of the most interesting industrial designers of our generation.'



Khoury moved into his new penthouse after years spent living in an apartment designed by his father, Khalil Khoury.

Khoury senior was a leader of Lebanon's Modernist vanguard – the 'Mr Concrete' of Beirut, Bernard says. His designs can still be seen in Beirut, most notably Hamra's brutalist Interdesign building

Khoury's architecture is largely experiential; his well-known entertainment projects, like the nightclub B018, built on a former refugee camp, are famous for the escapism and sense of release they offer via an interaction with the immediate environment. His home is no different.

'The swing is a gift given to me by a very dear friend of mine,' he says of a swing that hangs from a chain next to the glass wall – one of Khoury's more 'specific needs'. The panels of the glass wall are, in fact, able to fully retract and disappear completely, suspending the space over the cityscape that fascinates him so.

'You're almost 50 metres up, but completely immersed in the city. At night when we open the façade and you swing on this thing, it's absolutely surreal. It feels scary. You're literally flying above the city.'

Khoury currently has a handful of residential projects under construction but, having adapted and designed his new home to suit his lifestyle, tastes and complex perspective of the city, is he a happy man? 'The typical thing about your own place is that you're never done with it.'