INSIDE STORY

A Villa in Lebanon Purges Its Ghosts

Damaged during the country's civil war and subsequent Syrian military presence, a home in the mountains gets a seven-year-long, $10 million transformation by a grandson. 'I wanted to show that life could come back.'

BY BROOKE ANDERSON

NINE YEARS AGO, Lebanese architect Nabil Gholam was taken to a villa in the mountains above Beirut. Completely unkempt, it had been damaged during Lebanon's 15-year civil war and Syria's subsequent military presence in the years before its 2005 withdrawal.

According to local residents and family members the home was used by the Syrian military as a base of security operations and as a prison. Captives scribbled their names on the wall with charcoal and match sticks.

"People used to drive by and not look at the house," said the home's owner, Geneva-based hedge-fund manager Philippe Jabre, whose said his brother was killed while trying to defend the home from the Syrian army in 1976. "When the Syrians finally left, it became a pilgrimage house for people to show their families where they'd been jailed."

As Mr. Gholam recalled, it would be "a difficult exorcism."

Mr. Jabre, 55, was born in Lebanon in 1960 and worked at a British hedge fund before founding Jabre Capital in Geneva in 2006, now a $2.5 billion hedge fund. Though his wife, Zaza, was reluctant to set foot on the property because of its past, Mr. Jabre was determined to renovate the house his paternal grandfather had built. "I wanted to show that life could come back," he said.

The renovation cost more than $10 million and took more than seven years. A total of 120 workers and craftsmen worked on the house over the course of the project, which was completed in 2013. It added more than 21,000 square feet to the original 16,000-square-foot stone house, along with an annex and guard house. In the end, all that remained was the house's shell and its checkered past.

The architect and owner decided, "What Syria didn't destroy, we wouldn't destroy. Everything was totally gutted, but we kept the shell," said Mr. Jabre.

In a relatively safe area of Lebanon, the villa is a spacious, three-story modern home with large bedrooms, a home theater, an indoor swimming pool and sauna, an elevator, and large windows with sweeping views of the gardens and surrounding forest. The ground floor of the main house is white reconstituted stone; the first floor is made of solid oak. The piazza flooring is made from basalt embedded with lines of shahhar, a local dark stone, giving different hues of red and brown.

The living room includes simple, understated furniture by French designer Jean Royère, whose work in the middle of the last century was collected by Middle East royalty and top hotels in the region.

The white-walled rooms also house about 60 pieces of art from around the world, including contemporary works by French sculptor François-Xavier Lalanne, Catalan sculptor Jaume Plensa and Italian artist Giuseppe Penone, as well as pieces by Japanese artists Yayoi Kusama and Takashi Murakami.

For the landscaping, Mr. Gholam, who worked on the project with landscape architect Vladimir Djurovic, says a source of inspiration was the work of German painter Caspar David Friedrich, whose early-19th-century paintings often showed vegetation taking over buildings.

Rhododendron, lavender, jasmine and ivy cover the exterior. More than 1,000 pine trees were added to the property: umbrella pines, oak trees, cork trees, Lebanese cedars and other indigenous trees dot the landscape, which also includes a rose garden.

The shell of the house's new addition, as well as the balconies that overlook the vast gardens and forest, are made of Cor-Ten steel, which changes color and ages along with the surrounding nature. To honor the loss of life, Mr. Gholam had tiny dots punched in the Cor-Ten to create the faint images of trees ("tree trunk ghosts") throughout.

There are other symbols. What appear to be piles of stones in the front garden are sculptures of the family's members—Mr. Jabre, Zaza, and four children. Lines etched into doors represent the ups and downs of the stock market, a nod to Mr. Jabre's career.

Along with the aesthetic details, Mr. Jabre spared no effort in making the house as energy efficient as possible. It uses solar energy for winter heating, harvests rainwater and all walls are double insulated. The villa's shading is designed to take advantage of the natural light and shade.

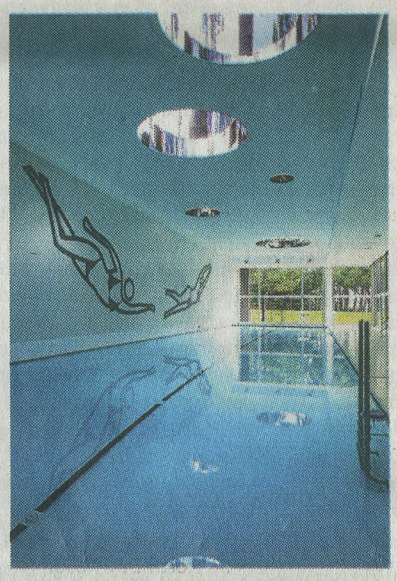
As the project neared completion, Zaza started making regular trips to the house. The couple started flying in nearly every weekend from Geneva, their primary residence, and now spend about a month a year here. They also have homes in Beirut, London and the French Alps for winter skiing.

Mr. Jabre and Mr. Gholam continue to work together to develop the estate. Two planned additions include a large balcony overlooking the rose garden and a small chapel built into rocks between trees that will offer views of the hills beneath.

Looking at his home, which 10 years ago was a wreck, Mr. Jabre says, "When people look at this house, they see a message."



A SECOND LIFE 'People used to drive by and not look at the house,' said owner Philippe Jabre. He spent more than $10 million and over seven years to renovate his grandfather's villa. More than 1,000 pine trees were added to the property.









ADDING ON The renovation added more than 21,000 square feet to the 16,000-square-foot stone house. The indoor pool, top left. Clockwise from top middle: a view into the pool; the curved steel staircase has a French oak handrail; living room; dining room; sculptures in the garden of the family's members—Mr. Jabre, wife Zaza and four children.





Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal (7)

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Damaged by War, a Villa in Lebanon Gets a Transformation

Used by the military, a family home is revived by the grandson of its builder

By
Brooke Anderson
Jan. 22, 2015 12:45 p.m. ET



A decade ago, Philippe Jabre's villa in the mountains above Beirut was completely unkempt, having been damaged during Lebanon's 15-year civil war and Syria's subsequent military presence in the years before its 2005 withdrawal. Mr. Jabre, a hedge fund manager, was determined to renovate the house his paternal grandfather had built, and conducted a renovation that cost more than $10 million and took more than seven years. The entrance to Mr. Jabre's villa features garden sculptures and pine trees. *Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal*

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The renovation cost more than $10 million and took more than seven years. A total of 120 workers and craftsmen worked on the house over the course of the project, which was completed in 2013. It added more than 21,000 square feet to the original 16,000-square-foot stone house, along with an annex and guard house. In the end, all that remained was the house's shell and its checkered past.

The architect and owner decided, "What Syria didn't destroy, we wouldn't destroy. Everything was totally gutted, but we kept the shell," said Mr. Jabre.

Located in a relatively safe area of Lebanon, the villa is a spacious, three-story modern home with large bedrooms, a home theater, an indoor swimming pool and sauna, an elevator and large windows with sweeping views of the gardens and surrounding forest. The ground floor of the main house is white reconstituted stone; the first floor is made of solid oak. The piazza flooring is made from basalt embedded with lines of shahhar, a local dark stone, giving different hues of red and brown.

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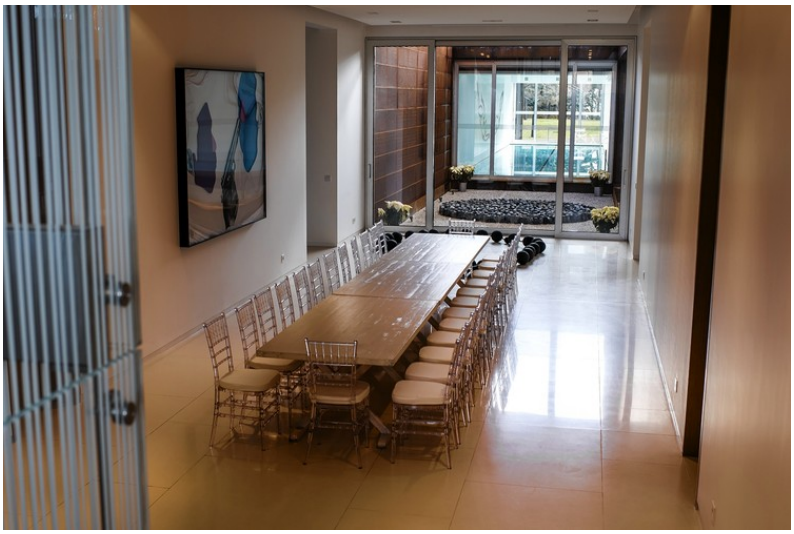
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The dining room of the home. Photo: Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal



Located in a relatively safe area of Lebanon, the villa is a now spacious, three-story modern home. The furniture by the fireplace is by French designer Jean Royère. *Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal*



The living room: A total of 120 workers and craftsmen worked on the house over the course of the project, which was completed in 2013. Photo: Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal



The home’s indoor swimming pool. Photo: Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal



A view into the swimming pool. Photo: Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal



‘What Syria didn’t destroy, we wouldn’t destroy. Everything was totally gutted, but we kept the shell,’ says Mr. Jabre. The winding staircase has French oak banisters.
Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal



The house also has a home theater, an indoor swimming pool and sauna, an elevator and large windows with sweeping views of the gardens and surrounding forest.
Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal



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A view of the pool’s sun roof. *Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal*



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Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal



A view from above of the circular sunroofs of the indoor pool, with sculptures and trees in the background. *Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal*



A sculpture in the rose garden by Catalan artist Jaume Plensa.
Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal



Stone sculptures by Catalan artist Xavier Corbero of Mr. Jabre and his family. More than 1,000 pine trees were added to the property. Says Mr. Jabre: ‘I wanted to show that life could come back. *Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal*



A view of the pool’s sun roof. *Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal*



The pool offers a view of the surrounding forest.
Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal



The bedrooms have en-suite bathrooms and beautiful views.
Roger Moukarzel for The Wall Street Journal

http://www.wsj.com/articles/damaged-by-war-a-villa-in-lebanon-gets-a-transformation-1421948701?tesla=y&mg=reno64-wsj