

# For Founder of High-End Furniture Retailer, Luxury Is About Unique, Bespoke Pieces

The Invisible Collection's Anna Zaoui on the rising popularity of soft, cocoon-like furniture, and more



Anna Zaoui is the co-founder of luxury online furniture retailer The Invisible Collection, along with Isabelle Dubern-Mallevays.

The company sells furniture designed by more than 80 renowned French and international decorators and artisans, featuring names such as Pierre Yovanovitch, Pierre Augustin Rose, Vincent Darre and Goossens Paris.

Last week, it launched its first collaboration with a U.S. designer, Kelly Behun—a collection that retails exclusively through their platform. The pieces, many of which are meant for the outdoors, are “amazingly beautiful and elegant,” Ms. Zaoui said. “It’s inspired by antiquities, but younger and fresher.”

Many of the collections on the platform are collaborative and exclusive to The Invisible Collection, and the co-founders continue to curate an ever-growing roster by seeking out new talent.

We caught up with Ms. Zaoui, 55, to discuss the effects of quarantine on furniture consumers, the importance of young designers learning from those who came before them, and more.

### **Mansion Global: How has business been since Covid-19 started?**

**Anna Zaoui:** We work between Europe and the U.S. The wave started in Europe, so March was strong because the U.S. wasn't under lockdown yet, but then April got slow. By the third week of April, it kicked off again. We worked hard to keep business going and artisans working. Some things couldn't be done—some fabrics weren't available— and Italy, of course, was completely shut down.

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### **MG: What are you expecting the longer-term impact of Covid-19 to be on the industry?**

**AZ:** We're an online company that's been digital since day one. So for us, that wasn't new. People are focused more on their homes, though, for sure. The people who never have time and are always traveling finally have time to focus.

We all have more dinners at home, and are being more conscious about doing things from home. It's not just home offices. Tableware has also become very popular. My bet is that it's a trend that will keep going. People have noticed that it's quite nice to come back to the old days a little bit, and stay home.

Quarantine gave a boost to all digital businesses. Places that weren't digital built new websites in a couple of months—from food delivery to very expensive art. That should last.

At the same time, there's also a surge of people who want to go into a showroom and a gallery. I have that need to go into a showroom and have human contact. It's about wanting to have more than a Zoom conversation.

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### **MG: What are some trends you're seeing in furniture?**

**AZ:** We are showing a few designs with the trend of no real angles, like Pierre Yovanovitch's pieces. The materials are exquisite, soft, rich and also the colors are

muted. Nothing hurts the eyes. It works as a pacifier. We've also worked with Pierre Augustin Rose on rounded pieces. Everyone wants to feel like they're in a cocoon.

On the other hand, colors are popular too, because they break up the monotony of being home and being inside.

Soft fabric is really important, though, materials such as velvets and mohair.

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**MG: Do you suspect that design style will be altered dramatically by quarantine?**

**AZ:** It won't be changed drastically, but, of course, people will want more home offices, gyms, dining tables.

We've been seeing a trend toward contemporary art. Now people realize you can't have a serious collection of art on the walls and not a serious collection of furniture on the floor.

The trend is that more attention is being given to furniture—even for vintage, because it goes well with contemporary.

People are looking for work that's from artisans and handmade, pieces with soul that don't feel like they were made in a factory.

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**MG: How would you describe your personal dream property?**

**AZ:** As soon as I finish a house, I'm thinking of another.

Now I'm dreaming of a chalet in Switzerland where I can put old-fashioned furniture and the [Alexandra](#) [mohair] sofa and lots of fluffy rugs.

**MG: What does luxury mean in terms of furniture?**

**AZ:** First of all, it's when it's been designed by someone with an eye toward proportion, with a knowledge of art and art history. When it's made by craftsmanship and with beautiful fabric. If it feels bespoke, and fits perfectly into your home, that's luxurious.

And if it gives an extra dimension to your space, that's luxury.

The bespoke nature is the ultimate luxury to me.

You can feel it when the designer has learned from what was before them.

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**MG: What about design more broadly? What makes a space feel instantly luxurious?**

**AZ:** It's luxurious to have pieces you haven't seen everywhere. It's really the material that is the basis of everything.

I don't like a room that's too crowded with pieces of furniture, I like when a room is very calm and private and peaceful, but the overall ambiance keeps you calm. Like a room that gives you a big hug.

You can also mix and match styles. But if you have one beautiful piece—a beautiful sofa or table or armchair, you will have a point to look at that's luxurious.