

"There is no question about keeping my passion for art alive. The only question is of growth and sustainability as a career. Photographs are easy. Being a working artist is the hard part."
—Paul Mpagi Sepuya

CAMERA OBSCURA

Fashion photographer and creative director Matthias Vriens-McGrath returns to design and focuses his lens on his latest project, his eclectic LA boutique.

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THE STOREFRONT ON BEVERLY

Boulevard is at first unassuming, until you notice the Baroque detailing, worn from years of benign neglect, and the unusually high display windows, a relic from the glory days of glamour retail. Over the door is the stylish double fish logo of the establishment, Atelier MVM, the design boutique opened in May by the Dutch-born photographer and art director Matthias Vriens-McGrath. "The logo I adapted from an ancient Roman pendant I saw," says Vriens-McGrath, who conceived and created his beguilingly stylish new shop in one month. The fish emblem is applied to a number of bespoke items he designed, which are arrayed throughout the two-level store, including faux antique glass bottles based on very old Roman and Syrian pieces. Most of the objects in Atelier MVM are fabricated locally, giving the shop a unique blend of European design sensibility, but one animated by the creator's elegantly resourceful artisanal flair.

"I started my career at 18 in Amsterdam, when I opened an antique store on Kerk Straat in the Spiegelstraat Quarter" says Vriens-McGrath, referring to the city's famous antiques district. He then moved on to Paris in the 1990s, and established himself as a preeminent fashion photographer for titles such as *Vogue Hommes* and *iD-Magazine*. Vriens-McGrath also served as worldwide creative director of Giorgio Armani and editor of the wildly influential and subversive fashion glossy *Dutch*. "This is really back to the future for me," he says, standing on one of the spectacular pieces of free-form pink Arizona flagstone, which he had brought in to pave the showroom floor. "It's a very awkward moment for fashion photography and magazines. After shooting just about everyone in Hollywood for over 15 years, I realized it

was time to move on and start taking pictures that I find myself in again, while also going back to design and getting my hands dirty, making objects and putting rooms together, which is something I love."

The store is very personal, even in its design. The soaring wood staircase is painted a deep dark green color, the same used for the front doors on old canal-side houses in Amsterdam. The boiserie and bookshelves lining the gallery are a copy of the walls in Vriens-McGrath's Hollywood living room, which was designed by its original occupant, the quintessential Hollywood decorator William Haines. Vriens-McGrath has made the former Haines house a showcase for his brand of eclectic style, displaying his collection of tramp art pieces (some of which he's adapted and incorporated into lamps and vases arrayed at the store), and high and low style vintage pieces, mixed with absurdly elaborate creations of his own. The showstopper and centerpiece of the boutique, however, is an 18-karat gold-plated candelabra, made of assembled pieces, cast in bronze: a turtle shell, baroque candle holders, antique blood coral pieces, rubies and an African fertility stick, jutting determinedly toward the heavens.

There is no shop in LA more outside-the-box than Atelier MVM. Even Vriens-McGrath's own sofa—an obscure kidney-shaped Scandinavian piece, which he has reinterpreted and had reproduced—is on sale here, along with a breakfront full of the delicate vintage fabrics he has collected from all over the world. Browsing the store is like a trip through the very creative mindscape of LA's most imaginative and roguishly stylish expat. "When I drive by the shop at night, and I see the big windows lit up, even I get excited," he says. "I can't believe that place is mine!"



An Atelier MVM oxidized brass table and chair in front of a mural by artist Miguel Villalobos.



Atelier MVM directoire chairs in Rose Cumming velvet, coral lacquered side table, coquillage mirror and various Oceanic and African artifacts.



Atelier MVM solid bronze wall sconce and oxidized brass Cocteau chair.



A locally-made Atelier MVM glass vase, inspired by ancient Roman forms.



A photograph by Vriens-McGrath that will appear in volume two of the "Taschen Big Penis" book (2019), obscured by an antique rock crystal phallus, 18th-century English intaglios and a bronze vase.