

INTERIORS

HOUSE OF ROCK

Perched high above the bay of Portofino is a remarkable retreat where the owner revels in a simple palette and even simpler pleasures. By **Elsbeth Thompson**

Photographs by Patrizia Mussa



The artist Kris Ruhs is known for his graphic paintings, ceramics and sculptures, often in monochrome black and white. So it is perhaps no surprise that there is so little colour to be found in the weekend house he shares with his wife, built into the cliffs at the fashionable Italian resort of Portofino. Taking his cue from the original geometric black and white floor tiles, Ruhs has used a palette of black, white and just a little blue to decorate the large open-plan living-room and the downstairs bedroom with its walls carved into the rock. The reason is not purely a matter of artistic taste, however. 'You just can't compete with the blue of the sea,' explains Ruhs. 'It is





ook - through
ed windows,
the bedroom
really don't
ch colour with
ue around.'
erally perched
bay, with
usy harbour
the remote
d and open

'You just can't
compete with
the blue of
the sea. You
really don't want
or need much
colour with
that around'

Spread over three storeys, with a west-facing
middle floor, all the major rooms have arched
out to sea. With the windows thrown wide
the sea - and the liquid light that reflects off
a part of the interior. 'Too much colour and
don't work here,' says Ruhs. 'I knew right away
as key.'

hall a pair of black and white metal floor
at the tone for what is to follow, with their
ring and graphic sculptural shapes. Black and
n in bold abstract designs, again by Ruhs, are
ed floor, while in one corner a long curved
igned by Pierre Paulin and upholstered in
dark blue, makes an unconventional yet
dow seat. Even the kitchen is hidden away



THE BEDROOM, DRAMATICALLY
CARVED INTO THE ROCK, WITH RESIN
FLOOR, CIRCLES FABRIC BY NIGEL
ATKINSON AND PIERRE PAULIN STOOL
ABOVE RUHS CREATED THE MOSAIC
FLOOR AND CERAMIC TABLE AND
STOOLS ON THE TERRACE

behind a curved black bar, with sculptural white seating in front. There are circles everywhere: in the rugs and paintings, in the dramatic black wall lights by Serge Mouille and on the beautifully textured black and white furnishing fabrics.

This could all look a little 1980s, were it not for the many quirky personal touches and the presence of Ruhs's own work - his curvaceous creamy ceramics, the four black and white paintings behind the kitchen bar and, in particular, a huge metal mobile that looks like a chandelier from a distance but is, in fact, made up from striped and spotted black and white birds. With the breezes coming in off the sea, this is almost perpetually in motion, casting a scribble of shadows around the white walls. Most extraordinary of all is the master bedroom, reached by stone stairs carved directly into the rock. It is starkly elemental: sitting up in bed you have the raw rock face behind you and the view out to sea in front. Here, Ruhs made another slight concession to colour, with a dark blue resin floor. 'I wanted it to look like water,' he explains, 'So we poured a really dark blue resin with a highly reflective surface like polished marble. With the stone walls, it makes for a very cool and calming space.'

Ruhs uses the house as a weekend retreat from a busy life in Milan, where he has his studio and is also a partner in the fashion and interiors shop and gallery 10 Corso Como. Sunny days are lived out on the terrace, which Ruhs updated with a pebble mosaic floor, Harry Bertoia seats and a ceramic table and sculptural stools of his own design. A series of steep paths lead to the sea on either side. 'It is wonderful as, if we want to be sociable, we can head off to the harbour for the bars and shops and company,' he says. 'But if I want to be quiet I can disappear down the other side, where the path sometimes tunnels right through the rock. There are some very remote places there. It is really the very best of both worlds.'

So does he ever set up his easel and paint down by the sea? 'Oh, no,' he says, smiling. 'I very rarely work down here. My favourite thing is to go fishing, right off the rocks, set up a barbecue and eat the catch, right there, alone or with my wife and friends and a few beers. Life really doesn't get much better than that.' ●

'New Seaside Interiors' (Taschen, £24.99), by Angelika Taschen, is available from Telegraph Books (0870 428 4112; books.telegraph.co.uk) at £22.99 plus £1.25 p&p

'My favourite thing is to go fishing, right off the rocks, set up a barbecue and eat the catch, right there'

CLASSIC 1950S 'DIAMOND' CHAIRS BY HARRY BERTOIA ON THE TERRACE BELOW THE DINING-AREA, WITH TABLE AND CHAIRS BY ARNE JACOBSEN, SERGE MOUILLE LIGHT AND CERAMICS BY RUHS

