





Heinz Legler and Veronique Lievre.  
Photo [Alexei Tylevich](#)

**a**t the Topanga home of Heinz Legler and Veronique Lievre – an idyllic mid-century modern in the mountains just south of Malibu – the sun shines even when Los Angeles is cloudy, and it's so deadly quiet I hear coyotes howling. As a person petrified by silence and wildlife, I wonder what it's like to live in this environment. Reading my thoughts, Lievre tells me: 'Oh, our place is available for rent on the website, too.' It's clear that these people practise what they preach.

Just over a year ago, Legler and Lievre launched Boutique Homes, a curated website of architectural vacation rentals. Say Konstantin Grcic were to ask an intern to scour the web, comb VRBO and Airbnb, then compile a list of places that, were he to spend a holiday in them, wouldn't hurt his aesthetic sensibilities – it might read something like Boutique Homes. Among the 150 plus places currently featured on the site are the Juvet Landskapshotell by Jensen & Skodvin in Norway, the Palafitte by Kurt Hofmann in Switzerland, and classics by Albert Frey in Palm Springs and Le Corbusier in Marseille. As their motto goes, Boutique Homes is 'tailor-made for people for whom style is more obsession than afterthought'. There are comparable services online, like [stayinstyle.eu](#), which offers a Corbu and an Oscar Niemeyer for short-term

rental in Berlin; and the patient internet forager will find vacation rentals by the likes of Toyo Ito and Lloyd Wright elsewhere, but, for the moment, Boutique Homes appears to be the most comprehensive site of its kind. The question is: What does its existence say about the greater climate of architecture and its disciples? Who are Boutique Homes' clients? Where do they come from? It's not as if a Hilton Group marketing survey suddenly showed that the public wants more concrete floors and Bertoia chairs. So what is it that Legler, Lievre and their competitors are picking up on?

**Is there something about the current climate of architecture that told you now's the time to launch a site like Boutique Homes? Do you believe the claim that more people are demanding design today, as is so often stated in design-related PR campaigns?**

**Legler:** Absolutely not. You can't say that the demand for design has increased – I've been hearing that slogan since the day I was born. Instead, what we noticed is the lack of options for the amount of demand that's always been there. We travel, too. We go through other rental-home websites looking at thousands of places that aren't even close to what we want.

### Venice, California, USA



Project: Cactus Flower  
Architect: –  
Accommodates: two  
Rate from: \$1,600 per week

### Mirror Lake, Wisconsin, USA



Project: Seth Peterson Cottage  
Architect: Frank Lloyd Wright  
Accommodates: four  
Rate from: \$275 per night

### Table Cape, Tasmania



Project: The Winged House  
Architect: Richard Goodwin  
Accommodates: four  
Rate from: \$350 per day

### Methow Valley, Washington, USA



Project: Rolling Huts  
Architects: Olson Kundig Architects  
Accommodates: four  
Rate from: \$125 per night

**Do you feel you have much competition?**

**Legler:** Not direct. Many sites are limited to a certain area, like Marseilles or Barcelona.

**Lievre:** And others may happen to have some Corbusier, but architecture is not their focus. Then there are those that build a few spaces specifically to rent, like Living Architecture ([living-architecture.co.uk](#)). That's great, but different from what we're doing.

**Legler:** Airbnb seemed interesting in the beginning, with nice photographs – maybe they were thinking along lines similar to ours. But they charge a high percentage, and they allow anybody to upload whatever they think is rentable. They're going to end up like VRBO. Boutique Homes is not a site where everybody is free to upload. Our site is strictly curated by us; it's a special collection of houses that share a certain architectural quality. Of course, there's a limit as to how many architects have built houses that are now for rent, so the homes we feature are not necessarily all designed by famous architects, but they do have to have style.

**But style is subjective. What are your criteria? Do you sometimes represent homes you don't like, aesthetically?**

**Lievre:** No. If we don't like it, it's not on our website. And that happens a lot. Our site is very personal. What you get is a sampling of our tastes. We also want to emphasize that travelling with an eye for architecture does not need to be expensive. Often, when you look for a well-designed rental home, you get to sites offering 'luxurious escapes' that are way too expensive for most people. So we thought: Enough, let's do a site for people who want affordable design. It can even include modern trailers and cool cabins. If places are too expensive, we don't even consider them – we're not interested in houses that cost \$5,000 per night. Our average is probably about \$250 a night.

**Legler:** I feel that people think of the word 'luxury' in many different ways now, not just chrome and silver.

**Lievre:** Simplicity can be luxurious as well.

**Legler:** But we don't have to convince the people who keep returning to our site; we don't have to explain to them what we're doing or that it's something different. They know as soon as they see the homes for rent.

**So who are the people returning to your site? Do you notice your clients are somehow more involved in the design world?**

**Legler:** Our clients are not necessarily architects >

## 'LUXURY MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS NOWADAYS, NOT JUST CHROME AND SILVER'

### Sayulita, Nayarit, Mexico



Project: Magia Sayulita  
Architect: –  
Accommodates: two to six  
Rate from: \$250 per night for the whole house

< or designers themselves, but they do tend to be people who appreciate the work that architects and designers do. These are people who don't want to go somewhere beautiful and end up staying in a crummy little shack there.

Lievre: I'd say our clients don't like big hotels on the sand, because those hotels have no personality.

Legler: And, yeah, there are designer hotels, but that's a whole other world. A hotel, no matter how modern, is designed as a hotel. A private house will have a certain personality, and to experience that can be very enchanting, very personal. It's an experience that lets you learn about someone else's life. You look through books, you see which paintings are on the walls, you notice the cookbooks, the music.

Lievre: Many of the homes we feature are places where people actually live. They are never empty.

Legler: Again, we don't have to convince our clients of what we're doing. But it can be hard, sometimes, to convince the architects that we want to represent. Architects can be very special, if you know what I mean: Why should I give you *my* creation to show?

**And what do you say?**

Lievre: Well, I think the architects that do like our idea see renting as a means of showing their designs

## 'ARCHITECTS SEE RENTING THE HOUSES THEY'VE DESIGNED AS A WAY TO REACH POTENTIAL CLIENTS'

### Marseille, France



Project: Classic Corbusier  
Architect: Le Corbusier  
Accommodates: two  
Rate from: \$107 per night

### Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada



Project: Sliding House  
Architects: MacKay-Lyons  
Sweetapple Architects  
Accommodates: four  
Rate from: \$1,800 to \$2,250 per week

in a very experiential way. Maybe a short-term renter will even say: Okay, I want a house by that guy! We've been contacting more architects to see whether their projects fit into this idea, but we do everything ourselves, so it's a slow process.

Legler: Let's just say, we're not funded. That means we can develop as we go. If we had investors with an interest in the money we're generating, this project wouldn't work. So our hope is that, as we gain recognition, more architects will come to us – and they have been. We hope it continues.

**Do you see Boutique Homes growing?**

Lievre: Yes, but we don't want too many houses in each city, because that would defeat the purpose of the site. We want to keep it small enough so that our clients don't get lost, as often happens on other rental sites.

Legler: We have to consider striking a balance between destination and architecture. Either we single out areas where many people travel to and feature several homes there, or we put design first and, in the case of an architectural masterpiece – even if it's in the middle of nowhere – go ahead and feature it anyway, despite the risk involved. After all, who goes to the middle of nowhere?

Lievre: Well, if they're really into architecture, people will go anywhere. But an example of what you're talking about is that place in Tucson, Arizona [Desert Nomad House by architect Rick Joy]. Even though it's a really great design, the inquiries for it are limited, since so few people travel to that area.

Legler: I'd say 80 per cent of the people that visit our website already know where they want to go.

**And the other 20 per cent? Do some people choose a holiday destination based on the architecturally interesting rentals available there?**

Lievre: We think that's the case, especially when we notice inquiries from one person asking about several very different destinations.

Legler: Turkey, Nova Scotia, Mexico ...

Lievre: So, yes, certain people seem to be choosing where to go based on the homes they like.

Legler: We understand that. We also think constantly about architecture and design. And when we travel, we are interested in experiencing places from that perspective.

**How did you develop this interest? Do you have formal backgrounds in architecture or design?**

Lievre: I used to have a store that sold modern

### Sierra National Forest, California, USA



Project: A-Frame Cabin  
Architect: –  
Accommodates: four  
Rate from: \$250/nt based on 2 pp

### Sierra National Forest, California, USA



Project: Vintage Trailers  
Architect: –  
Accommodates: two to four  
Rate from: \$125 per night

20<sup>th</sup>-century furniture in San Francisco and Los Angeles. After that, I worked as a stylist for magazines, commercials and music videos. So I've always been in the world of design. And Heinz used to design sets for the movie industry. Then, when we met, we opened up a hotel, Verana, in the jungles of Yelapa, Mexico. We just decided to build a hotel on the site where we were camping. The project became our playground for doing whatever we wanted: Heinz did most of the exterior, and I did the interior.

### Venice, California, USA



Project: Venice Beach Loft  
Architects: Sant Architects  
Accommodates: four to six  
Rate from: \$600 to \$750 per night

**You just built a hotel, spontaneously?**

Lievre: Actually, the hotel wasn't supposed to be a hotel, at all; it was going to be our home. The idea evolved after we had some friends over for New Year's and thought: We can see more people here; why not make it bigger? And since we were building in Mexico, we could basically do whatever we wanted. It evolved in a very natural way. Our approach is always to develop as we go.

Legler: And over the years, we've developed a very specific point of view. <

[boutique-homes.com](http://boutique-homes.com)