

Class Action

As a sideline to his fashion career, A.P.C. designer Jean Touitou opens a new Paris preschool.

Photographs by THIBAUT MONTAMAT



Inner circle:
Playtime at A.P.E.

Spend a few minutes at Ateliers de la Petite Enfance, a new nursery school two blocks from Paris's Luxembourg Garden, and you might not initially notice anything out of the ordinary. In one corner, a two-year-old boy slathers orange fingerprint on just about everything except the blank sheet of paper he's been given, while at a nearby table, another boy kneads a block of clay into an amorphous blob that he triumphantly declares is a birthday cake. Gradually, however, a discerning eye will spot a few unmistakable signs of pre-K fabulousness. The blue cotton smocks, with their tiny front pockets, look very A.P.C., the label known for low-key Parisian cool; the kiddie-size chairs are by Alvar Aalto. The school's logo is a multicolored tree created by fashion designer Jessica Ogden, who also serves as a part-time art teacher.

Welcome to Paris's hippest private preschool, open since January in the heart of the 6th arrondissement. The school's name—A.P.E. for short—draws a clear connection to its cofounder, A.P.C. owner and designer Jean Touitou. But for Touitou, a former Trotskyite who made his name creating rigorously untrendy, logo-free pieces inspired by proletarian workwear, issues of style are often inseparable from questions of politics and philosophy. And A.P.E. is his attempt to offer a creative alternative to France's by-the-book state schools, which have stuck with the same rigid teaching system for decades. As for the Aalto chairs and the chic gray cotton-cashmere blankets that are handed out

"This is a nursery school, so you can't just put in a concrete floor because it looks good," says Touitou.