

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF DESIGN

MAY 2007



# Nested in the New York Sky

A LOFTY FLOOR OF THE TIME WARNER CENTER IS A PERFECT PERCH FOR FAMILY LIVING

Interior Design by Robert Couturier  
Text by Steven M. L. Aronson  
Photography by Durston Saylor

What, this side of Spidey, possessed an international investor and philanthropist to make the leap from a town house just off Fifth Avenue to one of the highest floors of the Time Warner Center on Columbus Circle? "He was cloistered in his fourth-floor office and felt he wasn't seeing enough of his wife and two young sons, who were spread out over the other four stories," his interior designer, Robert Couturier, explains. "Those five stories just separated us and isolated us," the wife is quick to confirm. "Here everybody is on the same floor and you can sort of just wrap your arms around the whole family." "Here," one hastens to add, is the entire 78th floor of the center's south tower—all 8,500 square feet of it. "And there's another big plus," she confides. "I'm getting ready to do this mountain in China, and I decided to train by running up and down the stairs of this building."

For the designer, the question that loomed almost as large as that mountain was: How do you bring "history and culture" to something as supremely impersonal as the Time Warner Center? The answer: antiques, the more the better—and what's more, of any given country, period, or pedigree. He saw these disparate

A couple with houses all over the world commissioned Robert Couturier to decorate their New York apartment, which occupies the entire 78th floor of the Time Warner Center. **RIGHT:** The living room has an 18th-century Chinese six-panel lacquered screen. A Louis XVI daybed by Jacob sits across from a Couturier ottoman and sofa, both in a Brunschwig & Fils white silk.









**ABOVE:** Beyond Jean Dunand's 1925 lacquered greyhound doors is the dining room, a space that Couturier (below) sought to instill with "understated luxury." Prominent pieces include the 1940 Serge Roche tocchio and the circa 1770 21-light iron-and-giltwood chandelier.

**COURTIER:** To provide the wife's study with a brightened sense of warmth, the designer upholstered the walls in a red silk—a striking counterpoint to the zebra-stripe carpet. The desk, crafted of bronze and leather, is a contemporary design by Ingrid Donat.



objects all working together as densities to stabilize and anchor the rooms so they didn't go flying out the window. "Besides," he says, "in an ultra-sleek building like this, modern furniture would only have made the apartment look like a gigantic hotel suite."

It's collections that give character—"no collections, no character," Couturier pronounces. Happily, the clients' holdings already included modern art (works by De Kooning, Dubuffet, Diebenkorn, Baselitz, Hans Hofmann, and Louise Nevelson, whose monumental jet-black wood assemblage lends needed weight to the immense,

glass-walled living room), not to mention Orientalia (Chinese and Japanese screens, Tang Dynasty horses, and 17th-century foo dogs, one of which "one of our two black Labs managed to chew the ear off and I had to have a museum restorer put it back on," the wife volunteers). And, thanks to Couturier, they also include tip-top furniture, French (Louis XIV right through the big-ticket Art Déco names Ruhlmann, Dunand, and Serge Roche) and other Continental (the dining room's 18th-century Italian chandelier, which shimmies when the wind is strong, and the living room's circa 1920 German globe with its



He saw these disparate objects all working together to stabilize and anchor the rooms.

encircling bronze figures that in effect make the known world go round).

"These pieces have nothing in common historically—nothing," Couturier acknowledges. "But the quality of everything here is so high, and all excellences work together, I've always believed." Asked how he determines what exactly to put next to what, he demurs: "I enjoy playing what I call the game of associations, which has no rules." The ensuing mix is so successful that no single piece can be heard screaming. "Look at me!" Organized as they are in orderly groupings here on the one floor and bathed in the unrelenting light from the windows, the clients' old things all look sharper, cleaner, and "more unconfused." There is, it would seem, plenty of rigor in the designer's M.O.—but no mortis.

Couturier kept the background simple and neutral, lacquering the dining room white so its petit-point-upholstered Louis XIV chairs would stand out in high relief and the living room café au lait to give it "life and depth." He "personalized" the wife's study with a cherry-colored handwoven-silk fabric from Laos and the master bedroom with woven-silk wall panels that look like straw (the media room boasts genuine straw walls). As for window treatments, "the clients needed to be protected from sunlight and vertigo," he insists, elucidating the various layers of silk, linen, and cashmere he put to use. "The colors and textures all hang together," the wife says. "The apartment just has this very mellow sense of well-being—remember that old James Taylor lyric, 'a song that they sing of their home in the sky.'"

The husband commandeered the room

*continued on page 284*

The master bedroom, with its silk-covered paneled walls and Couturier-designed four-poster bed, sofa and lounge chairs, overlooks the Empire State Building, among much else. "The custom canopy bed," says the designer, "creates a room within a room." The drapery silks on the windows and on the bed are from Bergamo.

