

DESIGN FOR THE WELL-LIVED LIFE

FEBRUARY 2009

HOUSE & GARDEN

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Family History

STRIPPING AWAY THE GILT OF A MANHATTAN TOWN HOUSE, JUDICIOUSLY ADDING DETAILS, AND MIXING FINE PIECES FROM DISPARATE ERAS, ROBERT COUTURIER FASHIONS AN INTERIOR THAT LOOKS AS THOUGH IT HAS BELONGED TO THE OWNERS FOR GENERATIONS

TRADE SECRETS **FABRICS** Couturier creates an exuberant entry by hanging a 1940s wool tapestry designed by French textile artist Jean Lurçat. **FURNISHINGS** A George I chair is upholstered in Fortuny's Glicine damask. The mahogany table is 19th-century Italian. **ACCENTS** Two 17th-century Chinese foo dogs flank the front door.



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The original town house in New York City had burned, leaving only remnants of its stately nineteenth-century origins. It was rebuilt in the excessive high style of the 1990s, so that by the time architect and designer Robert Couturier saw what his clients had just bought, "it was pretentious and felt very artificial."

Couturier envisioned a house of embracing warmth and refinement, "cozy and luxurious at the same time." His plan did not include gilded ceilings or mirrored walls, so the first step was to strip those away; then add back selectively. "I wanted it to feel pleasantly original, referential to what it was, but particular to the people who live in it," he says. The house, he thought, should seem as if it had long been in the family, modified generation to generation, a showcase of custom and culture alike.

Furniture and fittings span the continents and the centuries. The French-born Couturier, who is based in New York and known for his ability to draw inspiration from disparate periods and styles, found the mantelpieces in Europe. The chandeliers, among them a 1940s silver gilt piece, came from Paris and London. The rugs are fine, venerable-looking antiques and "give the feeling they have always been there," he says.

The owners are not collectors. Instead, they act more like curators who select specific pieces. Thus, a single large Louise Nevelson work is on one wall opposite the stairs; a Chinese screen and a Thai sculpture adorn the living room. Other pieces include a 1940s panel by French artist Jean Dunand and a nineteenth-century German globe.

"I've never been very keen on an over-abundance of objects," Couturier says. "I think they fight each other." Each piece here has

TRADE SECRETS

FABRICS Walls in Nina Campbell's Orleans silk damask give the living room a luxurious tone. Curtains are in a Jim Thompson silk. **FURNITURE** Couturier designed the tufted sofa and footstool. **TWO FRENCH LOUIS XV fauteuils** retain their original velvet. **Mirrored pedestals** by Serge Roche, ca. 1940s. **ACCENTS** The 20th-century chandelier is gilt wood and metal. **810 A Turkish Oushak**, ca. 1870.



TRADE SECRETS FABRICS In the dining room, this page, Couturier upholstered wall panels in a Clarence House damask, painted the walls in a Benjamin Moore black, and restored the ceiling's original Gothic detail. **LIGHTING** The chandelier is Italian, 1770s. The chandelier, opposite page, is a Louis XIV Revival piece, ca. 1960. **ART** The rose artwork is by Donald Baechler. A Louise Nevelson work anchors the second-floor landing. **ACCENTS** A 19th-century German globe is on a Jean Prouvé table. The 19th-century rug is an Indian Amritsar.





TRADE SECRETS

FABRICS Couturier designed plush seating for the screening room, this page, in Gretchen Bellingier velvet, and covered the walls in silk. The master bedroom, opposite page, has a custom canopy bed designed by Couturier, with curtains in Bergamo silk. A 19th-century bench is covered with Great Plains velvet and a Holland & Sherry cashmere throw. 800 Turkish Oushak, ca. 1870s. 880 LINDS Marquise de Laborde, France. See Shopping pages, back of book.

York," Couturier says. Chairs are covered in lush red velvet and the walls in what he calls "weird greenish-gold-colored silk."

On the third floor, the master bedroom is all white, except for a gold rug that almost glows underfoot. The bed is a custom-designed Couturier concoction "with a big crazy canopy that the children love to hang from," he says. Among the furniture finds for the room is an early-nineteenth-century French drop-front desk with inlaid leather.

A guest room, which Couturier says "looks like a room at the Ritz," has walls clad in blue-and-white Fortuny fabric and a suite of 1920s French furniture that Couturier describes as "almost cubist." To add to the mix, he took two "not so good" Louis XV chairs and covered them in zebra skin.

Those chairs, in a way, offer a metaphor for this house—the formidable and the whimsical assembled into a seamless, sumptuous whole. "It is not exceedingly serious, but it's elegant, and the owners have some truly beautiful things," Couturier says. They had wanted a true town house—a city residence for a family that has other houses elsewhere and a yacht for summers at sea. And this is an inward-turning house: as a winter house, it envelops its occupants in warmth and shields them from the harsh weather. As Couturier says, "The house is a cocoon." ▸

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SUPERB PIECES—A NEVELSON WORK, AN ANTIQUE GLOBE—PLAY OFF EACH OTHER AND ESTABLISH THE LANDING'S PARED-DOWN LOOK



its own importance and, often, a use. A mid-century tapestry by French artist Jean Lurçat, which Costurier divided into two, serves as draperies, covering the front door. Ancient Chinese foo dogs flank the door, doing exactly what they are supposed to do: stand silent sentinel. Costurier takes a pared-down approach to furniture, too. "You should have only a few pieces—very well chosen—or otherwise it becomes like a shop set," he says. He sought an internal logic for it all, from the progression of rooms to the placement of furniture.

In the living room, Costurier added crown moldings and dado paneling, painted the ceiling white, and upholstered the walls in brown damask. "It makes the room very, very private and cozy," he says. Similarly, he chose subdued fabrics, among them a

muted striped *Scalamandré* silk for the drapes and a Fortuny linen for two eighteenth-century French Régence armchairs. Two side tables—"quite important ones"—were designed by the twentieth-century French decorative artist Gilbert Poillerat.

Rather than argue about the darkness of the dining room, Costurier made it darker—"almost baronial." He painted the gilt ceiling white, and set into the walls panels of a French silk damask in a very old pattern. He found a stately seventeenth-century Italian table and bought imposing seventeenth-century chairs in Paris. It is not a huge space, he says, "only for sit-down dinners."

Likewise, the media room is comparatively intimate and embracing. "It is the most glamorous projection room in New

A FANCIFUL CANOPY GIVES A WHIMSICAL TOUCH
TO THE COOL, SOPHISTICATED MASTER BEDROOM

