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# Mix Master



Designer Robert Couturier orchestrates art and antiques with panache in his SoHo apartment.

By Brook S. Mason  
Photography by Bruce Buck

*In the office (above, left), a stitched-leather desk and chair by Jacques Adnet stand underneath a 1903 Victor Prouvé drawing. A Louis XVI chair (above, right) is coupled with a Louis XVI mahogany table and a 1950's French bamboo floor lamp.*

*FACING: Accenting the diminutive French Forties chaise longue is a window shade with embroidery by Gian Luca Berardi. French artist and decorative painter Paulin Paris treated the walls and created the columned plaster lamp (one of a pair).*

Some designers cherish a particular style and consistently stamp their interior commissions with that singular period and medium. But few can match the sheer sophisticated universality of taste espoused by Paris-born and New York-based architect and designer Robert Couturier. After all, who else but Couturier could claim such an A-list roster of international projects, beginning with landing Sir James Goldsmith's 60,000-square-foot palace commission in Mexico at the age of only 26? Then there's his recent spate of projects ranging from a Palm Beach villa to a Jackson Hole, Wyoming, ranch and a cluster of 19th-century Manhattan townhouses—all of them filled with art and antiques.

"I'm constantly exploring new artists, designers, cabinetmakers and styles," says Couturier. And a glance around his SoHo loft attests to his rare command of art spanning thousands of years and punctuated with quixotic surprises. Yes, this is no "art-history textbook" saturated residence. What makes Couturier's abode so distinctive is not the collection per se, but rather its presentation. Take, for example, his placement of a recent purchase: a porcelain sculpture of a cavorting mermaid, created by Clovis, Paul Gauguin's son. The designer nestled this figure—which is colored in a swirl of pastel hues—alongside a Greek Attic vase, an Indian tile and an 18th-century Italian horse made of gleaming silver. Nearby is a gouache of Capri by English 19th-century cartoonist Edward Lear. It is a vignette fizzing with contemporary spirit.

Overall, Couturier's residence references his rather intriguing childhood. Growing up in a Paris townhouse designed by Art Nouveau master Hector Guimard, his furnishings were by the stalwarts of Art Deco—Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann and Jules Leleu. And

*A trophy-grade zebra "Shadow Skin" ottoman stands atop a 19th-century Turkestan Samarkand wool rug. A T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings table supports a 7th-century gray sandstone statue of a male deity, probably from Hari-bara in Cambodia. Couturier designed the white armchairs and draperies. The two 8-foot-high plaster figures clad in classical drapery were created for England's Syon House and were previously owned by Pop artist Andy Warhol.*





his play dates were spent cavorting around Charles de Beistegui's acclaimed Château de Groussay, among other fabled homes.

Today, Couturier continues to rely on the *théâtristes* and *artistes* whom he revered as a child. In the foyer, a pair of 18th-century pastel portraits of a regal-looking couple gaze out of original delicately carved frames. But that's where exacting reverence stops and Couturier as a mix-master of style extraordinaire begins. Just steps away is a Leleu circular rug in blazing red, accompanied by Leleu's table and chairs in the library for a stunning contrast to the portrait.

"The accent is on the sculptural in every way," Couturier explains while pointing out the rigor of an Adnet day-bed, a crisscross of wrought-iron contrasting with 8-foot-tall plaster figures swagged in classical drapery and created for England's grand Syon House, and a

series of rock-crystal columns by the French Forties designer Serge Roche. "The emphasis on the antiques dates back to my architecture student days, when I copied reams of Greek and Roman statuary," he says.

Functionality unites the three different spaces in Couturier's residence—main salon, library and bedroom—for each serves as a sitting room. For example, the bedroom contains an 18th-century French bed in the style of Louis XV, plumped high with raspberry-colored satin pillows with art books nearby.

Couturier purchased 70 percent of his antiques in Paris' auction houses and galleries, including L'Arc en Seine and Anne-Sophie Duval. But with great 20th-century French furniture now approaching scarcity levels, he has taken to scouring Manhattan. (He found his Adnet desk with its regulation leather top from luxury supplier Hermès, at Barry Friedman Ltd.)

*Fernand Léger's "Rouge 9" rug serves as a focal point in the living room, along with a rug created for tapestry patron Marie Cuttoli and a 1950's French sofa-bed covered in zebra-printed shearling.*

Couturier makes certain his space is never static. Piled high in the library area is a stack of auction house catalogs and newly published art books. "Have you seen the Byzantine art exhibition at the Metropolitan?" he asks. "Did you catch the show at R 20th Century downtown? Check out Christie's English furniture sale; it has some fantastic things." His calendar is packed with events as well as museum and gallery openings that would make even the most sophisticated urbanite pale.

"When you return in a month, there will be changes," he exclaims. They are bound to be stylish ones, too. □



#### LONDON

- **Blanchard.** Furniture: Continental, Georgian, painted, period oak, mirrors. Art: Oil paintings and sculpture. 011 44 20 7823 6310.
- **John Eskenazi Ltd.** Buddhist and Hindu sculptures; Himalayan bronzes and paintings; Middle and Far-Eastern textiles/rugs. 011 44 20 7409 3001.
- **S. Franses Ltd.** Antique tapestries, carpets and textiles. 011 44 20 7976 1234.
- **Carlton Hobbs Ltd.** 18th- and early 19th century English and Continental furniture and art. 011 44 20 7340 1000.

*A 17th-century French textile and a 1930's portrait of a young man by an anonymous artist in Florence, Italy, hang behind a 1930's bamboo-and-steel Jacques Adnet daybed with hand-stitched leather cushions (left). The Robsjohn-Gibbings table (below) displays a series of rock-crystal columns by French Forties' designer Serge Roche.*

## Couturier's Favorite Haunts

#### NEW YORK

- **Ann-Morris Antiques.** Antique lighting, old wood furniture, farmhouse tables, Windsor chairs, garden benches. (212) 755-3308.
- **Louis Bofferdin.** Furniture designed by prominent 20th-century decorators, such as Elsie de Wolfe, Syrie Maugham, Stéphane Boudin of the Maison Jansen and Louis Sûe of Sûe et Mare. (212) 744-6725.
- **Chinese Porcelain Co.** Asian ceramics, works of art and sculpture, European furniture and decorations. (212) 858-7744.
- **Delorenzo.** Museum-quality French Art Deco furniture. (212) 249-7575.
- **Barry Friedman.** Bauhaus, 1930's to 1940's French furniture, 1920's Scandinavian neoclassical furniture and contemporary decorative arts. (212) 794-8950.
- **H.M. Luther Antiques.** 17th- to 19th-century Russian, English, French, Scandinavian, Italian and Asian antique furniture. (212) 505-1485.
- **L'Antiquaire & the Connoisseur.** 18th-century French and Italian furniture. (212) 517-9176.
- **Maison Gerard.** Fine French Art Deco furniture, lighting and decorative objects from the 1920s to '40s from celebrated designers such as André Arbus, Paul Dupré-Lafon, Jean Michel Frank, Jules Leleu, Jean Pascaud and Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann. (212) 674-7611.
- **Reymer Jourdan.** Late 18th- and early 19th-century French antiques, 1940's French furniture, mirrors and chandeliers. (212) 674-4470.





*Couturier paired a marble-top mahogany Louis XVI dining table and mahogany console table (far right) of the same provenance. Three black-and-white photographs by the German artists Bernd and Hilla Becher, who are best known for their architectural portraiture, complement the brilliant red, black and white c. 1930-40 rug.*

- **John Hobbs Ltd.** 17th- to 19th-century English furniture; 18th-century European furniture. 011 44 20 7730 8369.
- **Christopher Hodson.** 17th-, 18th- and 19th-century furniture, sculpture and pictures. 011 44 20 7730 3570.
- **Mallett & Son Ltd.** 18th- to 19th-century English and Continental furniture, works of art, glass and painting collections. 011 44 20 7499 7411.

#### PARIS

- **Alexandre Biaggi.** 20th-century furniture. 011 33 1 44 07 34 73.
- **Aveline.** 17th- to 19th-century paintings, furniture and art objects. 011 33 1 42 66 60 29.
- **Luc Bouveret Antiquaire.** 17th-century furniture. 011 33 1 40 20 91 21.
- **Camoin-Demachy Antiquités.** Art Deco and furniture from the 17th to 19th centuries. 011 33 1 42 61 82 06.
- **Galerie du Passage.** Art Deco and furniture from the 19th century. 011 33 42 36 01 15.
- **Kugel.** Gold and scientific instruments. 011 33 1 42 60 86 25.
- **MONLUC.** 17th- to 19th-century furniture. 011 33 1 42 96 18 19.

#### LOS ANGELES

- **Lief.** Swedish antiques from 1770 to 1850. (310) 550-8118.

- **Richard Shapiro Antiques and Works of Art.** 16th- to 18th-century Italian furniture, sculpture, mirrors, paintings and drawings. (310) 275-6700.

#### CONNECTICUT

- **Hamrah's Oriental Rug Co.,** Woodbury. Persian and European rugs and tapestries. (203) 266-4343.
- **Tyler Antiques and Appraisals,** Litchfield. 17th- to 19th-century Continental furniture, decorative arts, paintings and ethnographic arts. (860) 567-0755.

*Art & Antiques' New York correspondent Brook S. Mason trained at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London and contributes regularly to the Financial Times WEEK-END. Her report on the state of the market appears on page 76 of this issue.*