



# Aspen

# Chic

BY HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP

Scaling the Rockies in style.

**I**T TAKES SAVOIR FAIRE AND STAMINA TO FURNISH TWO HOMES AT the same time, especially when one is a sprawling Beverly Hills mansion and the other is a pair of Aspen condominiums that have to be stripped down to their basics and then reconstructed as one unit. But interior designer Robert Couturier is eminently qualified for the task.

Couturier brings a sense of occasion and grandeur to any project. Born to a wealthy family, and a graduate of interior architecture and design at the Ecole Camondo in Paris, he moved to New York in 1981 to work for designer Adam Tihany. In 1986, Couturier established his own practice there. The following year, when he was only 26, Couturier was building a palace in the jungle of Mexico for the late financier Sir James Goldsmith. Cuixmala, as the 60,000-square-foot getaway was known, catapulted Couturier into the ranks of top designers. He went on to complete two more estates for Goldsmith as well as the interiors of his private Boeing 757. The wealthy and powerful have been standing in line for Couturier's services ever since.

For Maryann O'Donnell, a pioneer investor in the internet provider EarthLink, Couturier proved the ideal interpreter for her Francophilic sensibilities. His organizational skills also meant that he could simultaneously renovate and outfit the Beverly Hills house and the Aspen condo in just over a year. The solution was to make one major shopping trip for both projects to save time and, possibly, money.

O'Donnell, who now works in real estate, recalls, "We decided on a style that captured my heart—French design from the mid-20th century. For that, you need to work with the highest-trained person you can find. Robert was perfect because of his incredible connections and because he had my best interests at heart. You are not just a commodity to Robert; you are part of his art. He always made the best choice. It was reassuring, because one mistake could have thrown off the whole timetable."

The majority of the shopping was done in Paris. "With Robert, it was all business, very targeted, no wasted time," O'Donnell says. "It wasn't like we partied; it was like we had a mission. We were frugal, and we found pieces that were interesting for their value and function."

Before any furniture could be used, however, the two uninspiring condos had to be completely renovated. Couturier describes the architectural style of the building as "ugly, 1970s, cheaply built, hideous." He may

Robert Couturier gutted two condos in Aspen and created one urbane space—a slice of the city in the mountains—for EarthLink pioneer investor Maryann O'Donnell.





Decorative painter Paulin Pâris gave the condo a polished finish. Two muses grace the living room's pearl-colored walls.

be unpretentious, but when it comes to his projects, Couturier will tolerate nothing but the best. "The architecture was bizarre and gratuitous," he adds. "The rooms were weird, with either low ceilings or sloping ceilings. It was half an A-frame, where ceilings are 17 feet tall on one side and 8 on the other. We changed the whole layout." The outcome was a 2,500-square-foot, two-bedroom, three-bath plan with a kitchen, morning room, living room, dining room, and even a small wine tasting room.

Couturier began restructuring the architecture at the front door. He shortened a corridor and added a domed, circular entry hall with arched doorways that lead to the other rooms. The doorways mirror one another and, from certain perspectives, establish a small-scale enfilade. Instead of being an elongated and claustrophobic space, the condo now opens like a flower. In the entry hall, one six-pointed star is painted in gold on the domed ceiling and another is inlaid in black stone on the floor like a giant compass. "It



Couturier performed a total renovation on the condo, starting with the entrance hall. He created a round hallway and had a star painted in gold on the domed ceiling and another star inlaid in black stone on the floor. "It gives a sense of place, where you are welcomed before you go into the living room or the morning room," he says.

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The building had been constructed carelessly, so he replaced all of the trims and finishes. "It was important that the condo have a quality that the building itself lacked, a quality of refinement," Couturier says. "Maryann insisted that the finishes should be impeccable, even though this was a second home."

Decorative painter Paulin Pâris was brought in to add subtle elements of pattern and color throughout. His touch is most visible in the dining room, where arabesques in tones of



ivory and gold lend a sense of scale to the tall, narrow room. All the finery is surmounted by an elaborate chandelier made of cardboard, an effect that is both startling and amusing. "It makes you stop and wonder," says Couturier. "It's a big mixture of things and a beautiful space to be in." In the living room, Pâris graced the pearl-colored walls with pale painted figures of muses representing summer and winter, each holding a cornucopia. "They give the room character and body and help to make sense of the architecture," Couturier explains.

O'Donnell is a skier, but she is also a city girl, originally from Boston. She eschewed the customary Colorado log cabin look—antler chandeliers, fake fur upholstery—for an urban



sensibility. "I loved the idea of having a citified look in a mountain environment, just for the fun of it," O'Donnell says. The atmosphere is distinctly après-ski in the living room, where Couturier-designed sofas are covered in beige and cream fabrics. The snowy scene is brightened with pillows of red velvet.

Yet, with an abundance of overstuffed and down-filled seating, the cozy factor is much in evidence. "I was involved in emerging technologies, political fund-raising, and the film industry," O'Donnell says. "I had a diverse group of people to entertain, and I wanted the furniture to lend itself to that." Adds Couturier, "She wanted something glamorous and lovely at night, which is the only time you spend indoors in Aspen."

While the public rooms are more formal, the bedrooms are easy and intimate. The master bedroom was afflicted by low ceilings, so Couturier had them coffered to reinforce warmth and privacy. Textured ivory covers on the bed and deep-cushioned armchairs, along with a red chenille comforter, provide an enveloping sense of serenity that is especially welcome after a day on the slopes. "I think Robert took more chances with the condo,"

O'Donnell says. "He matched delicate with sturdy. He used pieces that I had found in the French flea market, some antique leather club chairs. He built a little attached house for my dogs out on the deck, with a dog door so they could go in and out."

Couturier may be rigorously correct, but he is also irreverent and a nonconformist. He made sly reference to Aspen's upscale rustic style while using small doses of it. In the master bathroom, for example, a vanity stool by Paris furniture designer Hervé van der Straeten has the spindly black legs and furry top of a mountain goat. The guest room bedcoverings and hangings are the red tartan of a hunting shirt but made of silk taffeta as opposed to a more homespun wool.

"I wanted to slightly make fun of Aspen design, which is usually pretty unattractive, and not be too serious about it," says Couturier, who has decorated other houses and condos in the town. "It is reminiscent but has nothing to do with what Aspen is about, really. This is a sophisticated version of how we understand Aspen houses." □

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