



Haute Couturier

The interior designer takes an unexpected step back in time with his own Connecticut retreat

Text: Jennifer Lea Reed Photography: Nathan Kirkman



French-born architect and interior designer Robert Couturier is a favorite among the cosmopolitan cognoscenti who seek discriminating, polished, über-elegant interiors. Known today for his adroit and contemporary juxtaposition of a variety of style periods in a provocative, comfortable, seemingly organic accumulation, quintessential Couturier delivers, in his own words, interiors that are "strict, modern and pared-down to a degree."

So why, when it came time to design his own South Kent, Connecticut, country retreat, did Couturier switch gears and head straight for an 18th century English/French interior?

"An apartment is like a suit—you change suits," says the man who has moved apartments on average every two years for the last 30 because, as he says, change is fun. "But a house in the country tends to become grounding; it gives one a relationship with the past. And so here I am more traditional."

Couturier's countryside complex sprawls across 16 acres of lakefront property and comprises a 1739 saltbox farmhouse (with a period interior true to its American origins), an old barn, a guesthouse and "the new house," a classically rooted exploration devoid of unwanted architectural constraints. "Knowing that [my partner] and I collected furniture and Old Masters paintings, the interior had to be something sympathetic to that," Couturier says, adding that it was imperative to focus on the classical proportions of the rooms, the light and the interior architectural elements, such as the fireplaces and the windows themselves. Despite its classical bent, its unusual layout is pure Couturier. "It's not all under one roof; it doesn't have the regular entry hall leading to a living room on the left and a dining room on the right. It's two pavilions linked by a little pavilion in the middle. It's completely organic in its layout and not classical, but its elements are classical."

Although it is said a lawyer who represents himself has a fool for a client, nothing could be further from the truth when it comes to designers, and Couturier is no exception. Able to make quick decisions that are simultaneously reflective, the designer says he focuses not just on an element—a chair, a fabric or a painting—but on its relationship to other elements—light, color,





and other similar elements in the home or the emotional resonance for both owner and guest. The new one bedroom house, originally constructed with a living room, sitting room, kitchen/dining room and two bathrooms in 4,000 square feet, gave Couturier ample opportunity to draw those correlations.

Throughout, Couturier relied on colors that would amplify the natural light and warmth of the rooms, on textiles that hearkened back to his French roots and on furniture that carried personal meaning. "I think it's quite instinctive. If [my partner] had had his choice, and only his, the living room probably would have been simpler, and probably less extravagant in its proportions and shapes, and probably monochromatic. But with me, it became many different colors—mostly golds and greens—and the furniture certainly became more classical, and certainly more French." Anchoring one wall is an 18th century Italian mantle the couple discovered in Florence, below a large-scale painting by Gilbert Jackson (active 1622-1642), which they purchased in London. The Louis XV armchairs were auction successes from New York, and the large walnut Alsatian armoire dates to 1601. But even Couturier could not escape his own modus operandi entirely—his gentle nod to modernity is found in the 1940s sofa (he had a second copied) paired with Jean Michel Frank (1895-1941) low tables in shagreen. But even so, the sofas are brought back to his period theme through their fabric. "The fabric is a very old color and texture, 17th century French. It looks contemporary, too, but it's really very old-fashioned."

In fact, throughout the house, all the textiles are period textiles from France or England. And wall treatments range from simple paint in the living room to floor-to-ceiling paneling in the sitting room to an 18th century English stencil pattern that has been replicated in the dining room.

Couturier's current New York apartment is a SoHo loft on Mercer Street between Spring and Broome, and soon he will switch apartments again and return to his trademark design style. But he doesn't see himself ever selling his home in South Kent, not just because of the security it offers but because it graciously accepts Couturier's need for change. "We keep on adding on to it. We took a little terrace and made it a winter garden. I built myself a little office, and now we're adding a new dining room. And we added a garden. I think we will stay here until the end. I don't care about settling in the city. I've settled here" ■ Robert Couturier, Robert Couturier & Associates, 69 Mercer Street, New York, NY 212.463.7177 robertcouturier.com