

OCTOBER 2012

House Beautiful

GET THE LOOK!

FANTASTIC
IDEAS AND
INSPIRATION
FROM AROUND
THE WORLD

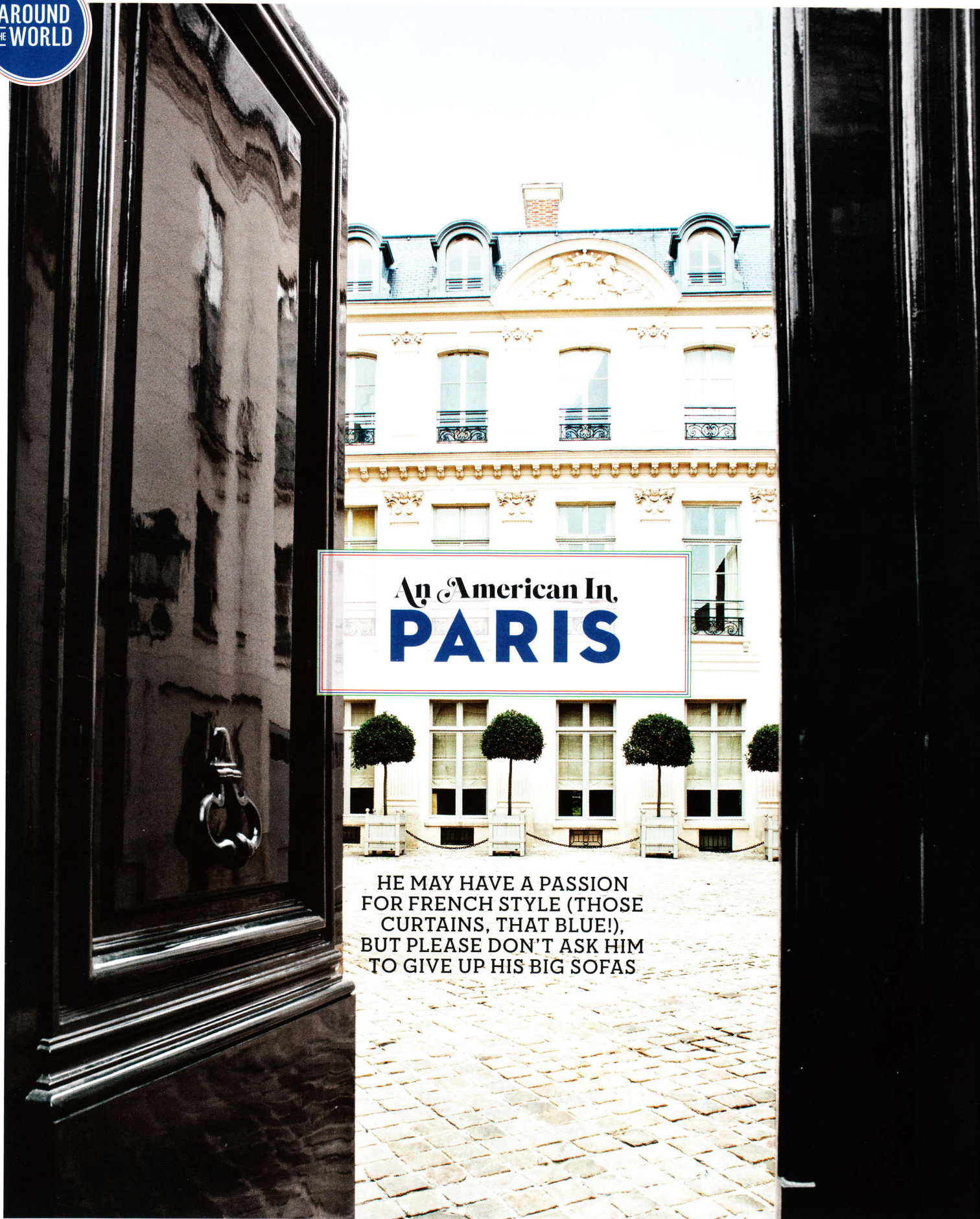
PLUS
kitchen
of the
year!



\$4.99

1 0 >





An American In,
PARIS

HE MAY HAVE A PASSION FOR FRENCH STYLE (THOSE CURTAINS, THAT BLUE!), BUT PLEASE DON'T ASK HIM TO GIVE UP HIS BIG SOFAS



LISTEN!
— SCAN THIS
PHOTO TO HEAR
WHY ROBERT
COUTURIER LOVES
PARIS



For an American who loves big sofas, designer Robert Couturier put a back-to-back seven-foot pair in the living room of his Paris pied-à-terre. Both of the sofas—upholstered in De Medici by Fortuny—have easy access to a vintage Ettore Bugatti drinks trolley. Blue rooms are a tradition in France; Couturier lacquered the walls in a custom shade and framed the windows in a sumptuous silk velvet, Velours de Soie by Prella. **OPPOSITE:** The apartment is on the top floor of an elegant 18th-century *hôtel particulier*. Its courtly facade is punctuated by traditional French topiary “lollipop” trees in orangery tubs.



CAROL PRISANT: I'd love to ask about every amazing thing in this Parisian pied-à-terre, but to be honest, I can't take my eyes off those blue lacquered walls in the living room.

ROBERT COUTURIER: Isn't that an amazing blue? We borrowed it from the pair of framed Delft tile ship mosaics flanking the door. It's very French to have blue walls. The French have always liked blue.

But your client is American.

Oh, he's a serious Francophile! And he trusted my choices. Mostly the colors just popped into my head. There's a point where you have to follow your instincts. This room says to you 'I want to be blue,' this one says 'I want to be red,' 'I want to be green.'

Your red and green rooms here are also lacquered.

I've used lacquer forever. It's very glamorous and old-world. Sleek but soulful, too. Lacquer gives depth to the walls, and it's so beautiful at night, the way it shimmers. I think of it as a kind of liquid wall. I've always used it a lot on ceilings—it gives the room an immediate grandeur. Strangely enough, white is often the best color to lacquer. It's like peering at a bottle of milk. I did an apartment in New York in all creamy white lacquer, and it's ethereal, almost surreal.

Even the kitchen cabinets are lacquered blue. Aren't they hard to keep clean? Fingerprints, et cetera?

Not at all. You just wipe them down. That's one more thing I love about lacquer—easy maintenance.

That's so American of you! You grew up in Paris, but you've lived in the States for more than 30 years. What compelled you to move?

My profession. In the world I came from, it was looked down on to be a decorator. Jean-Michel Frank did work for my grandmother, and she had him come through the back door! **Has living and working in America influenced your interior designs?**

Of course. America invented decorating. Most of all, it has given me liberty of choice, which the French don't have. I have the freedom to mix styles and periods, like the Yves Klein table



and the 16th-century tapestry in the bedroom. The French have a tradition of historical re-creations of rooms. It's foolish and it has no meaning. I like Louis Quinze, but I'm not apish about it. Americans believe in their instincts. I like that. I think it's very cool, very lifting and fresh. So over the years I've learned how to be more relaxed in my approach.

That explains all the big sofas here.

Yes, not a French thing at all. Big sofas are very American. You like comfort, and we're happy sitting on tiny, upright 18th-century furniture. My client insisted on them, and I understood, despite the fact that my grandmother always said that sofas encourage bad posture! They're everywhere here. He practically lives lying down. He reads, writes, and talks lying down. He even wanted to put one in the foyer so he could stretch out and contemplate that Zuber wallpaper!

America might have invented decorating, but France invented scenic wall-

ABOVE: To add a playful vein, Couturier papered a hallway in Clarence House's Lyford Key. He also laid wall-to-wall carpet here and in the rest of the apartment to muffle sound. **OPPOSITE:** The blue of the living room walls was taken from the Dutch tile mosaic, one of a pair, hanging above a metal table topped with an antique scagliola panel. A painting of one of Louis XIV's generals by Hyacinthe Rigaud, a leading ancien régime portraitist, is casually leaned behind a Jansen bergère.

paper. And Zuber is the crème de la crème. Jackie Kennedy papered a room in the White House with a Zuber panorama of American scenes.

This one is an exotic 1807 design of scenes from India—palms, elephants, palaces—and it really engages the imagination. In the adjoining hallway, we put that luxuriant palm-leaf pattern. I got the idea from the banana-leaf wallpaper at the Beverly Hills Hotel. It enchanted me. You come out of your room into the corridor, and it's like a tropical forest. It's such a dichotomy having it in Paris, and that makes it fun.

This apartment is filled with big gestures. What made you hang a large 16th-century tapestry behind the bed?

Aside from the fact that it's beautiful, this was a practical solution. There are a pair of unused doors behind it. I gave it a soft, thick backing, the same material you would use for a headboard, so he could lean his head against it.

Brilliant! Of course, it makes the bed look even lower than it is.

French beds have been this low since the fifties. In the States these days, we're doing the high beds of the 18th and 19th centuries, but in France, most beds are like this one. The box spring sits on four little legs. It's the height of an ottoman, about 18 inches high. Frankly, I don't like low beds. It's like sleeping on the floor. But my client wanted it.

The curtains in the living room are classically French, too, with that air of simple luxury. They look like poured fabric. What's the secret?

It's the beauty of the fold, the way the silk velvet breaks on the floor. I love silk velvet. I think if there's a secret, it's our haute couture tradition. I remember the ball gowns my mother and grandmother wore. The structure was as hard as wood, and yet the flow of the fabric was so lush and luxurious, it made you think they were light. French upholsterers and couturiers are not so different. They both know how to make fabrics sing. These curtains are like music for the windows.

PRODUCED BY SABINE ROTHMAN
STYLED BY KARINE RÉVILLON





1



2



3



7

1. Zuber's panoramic wallpaper, L'Hindoustan, lends a dreamy exoticism to the entry. 2. A carved giltwood Régence mirror is an ornate counterpoint to the simple marble mantel. 3. A rug from the owner's collection was repurposed as curtains for the dining room. 4. From the living room, an idyllic view of the garden. 5. One of six George I dining chairs covered in fine 17th-century Flemish floral tapestry. 6. The guest room's greens were inspired by the antique crewel from Cora Ginsburg. Couturier bought the daybed from Yves Saint Laurent's collection and covered it in a Prelle silk velvet. 7. Part of an extensive collection of mounted Grand Tour plaster cameos. **OPPOSITE:** Tradition meets chic meets whimsy in the kitchen. Louis XV caned armchairs surround a painted 19th-century Italian table; the high gleam of lacquered cabinets, smartly trimmed in silvery metal, reflect a Parisian view; and Ingo Maurer's flexible Zufall pendant appears to be sporting a jaunty sun hat.



4



6



5

In the master bedroom, a 16th-century Brussels tapestry, doubling as a majestic headboard, hides an unused doorway. A Louis XVI bench by the master *menuisier* Georges Jacob adds a luminous elegance to the room. Bedside tables couldn't be less alike: a high, round 19th-century Italian marble table and Yves Klein's low, square 1960s glass-and-Plexiglas *Table Bleu*. Tiny Edgar Brandt candle sconces get an assist from equally tiny swing-arm reading lamps. **OPPOSITE:** Facing the bed, French windows bracket an exuberant Italian mirror and an antique French chest that displays part of a collection of malachite. **FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES**



