

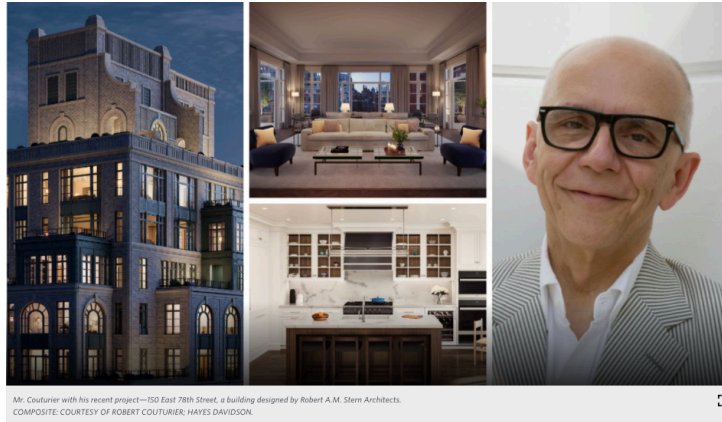
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With a Focus on Comfort at Home, Bold and Warm Colors Are Back, Says Interior Designer

Robert Couturier says minimalism is less appealing today

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Architect and designer Robert Couturier is known for private home and grand-scale commissions around the world, but he was recently tapped for his first residential new development project: the interiors at 150 East 78th Street, a building designed by Robert A.M. Stern Architects.

“It’s very discreet, and harks back to what buildings were in the 1920s,” Mr. Couturier said. “What I find interesting is that they all have very definitive spaces. It’s very difficult during Covid time to be in an enormous open space. Today you need functions to be specific to specific rooms.”

From 1988-97, Mr. Couturier was the personal designer for British billionaire and conservationist Sir James Goldsmith, for whom he created Cuixmala, a former private estate that is now a boutique hotel, on 30,000 acres in Mexico’s Costalegre. His projects have included a French castle, an Upper East Side townhouse, and homes in the English countryside. Locales have spanned from Aspen to Paris to Jerusalem.

While working on projects in upstate New York and on the West Coast, Mr. Couturier has spent most of the last year at his home in Kent, Connecticut, going back and forth to his office in New York City, where his eponymous firm is located.

We caught up with the France-born Mr. Couturier, 65, to discuss trends in a Covid-impacted world, his love of collecting, and more.

MG: How has business been since Covid started?

Robert Couturier: I’ve been very lucky in that everyone’s been terribly busy. We have quite a few new clients and some former clients doing their houses over. There are challenges, obviously, because it’s difficult when you’re remote, and it’s been hard getting inside the spaces, because of Department of Buildings rules—like the fact you can only have two people to a room.

MG: What are people asking for now as a result of Covid?

RC: People are looking at their home in a very personal way. They don’t care very much about what others would think, because they’re not having others in their house. It’s about what they like and not what their friends like, which is a relief. People are looking at their home as a place where they want to spend time, not as a reflection of their wealth.

MG: Will design style change long-term as a result of Covid?

RC: It's difficult to say, because you never know. But the absence of social life, and the loss of travel, sets up a different way of life, and it's a way of life people are finding themselves comfortable with.

People would like not to live in fear, but I think in some ways people are happy with the lives they have now. Spending more time with your children and your partner, it's a nice thing.

MG: Have you noticed any recent style trends?

RC: Aside from the home office, which is obvious, it's about a change in atmosphere. People want a different atmosphere, they don't want cold/minimalist, they want something comfortable. More bold colors, more patterns. All in all, more texture, more warmth, more comfort as a whole. The whole white-on-white-on-white trend has seen better days—it's less and less part of what people want.

MG: What does luxury mean to you?

RC: Depends where you are. In New York, it's silence. The material definition is space—having enough space for everything—and beautiful materials.

In the countryside, it's all of that as well, but you're also protected from the outside world.

MG: How do you feel protected by the outside world?

RC: When you don't see it. When you look out the window, you don't see buildings, or traffic. You see only what you want to see. Also, the combination of the political stress, the social stress is really tremendous. Being able to think about something else besides Covid and politics is a luxury.

MG: How would you describe your ideal property?

RC: My ideal property is where I am. I don't look at what others have with much envy. I'm really satisfied in my house. I have a big garden, and a view of the lake. I don't hear anything but birdsongs or animal calls. And my house contains everything that is dear to me. It has most of the things I would want to have. So my ideal property is really my own. It's populated with my husband and my dogs. What else could I want?

MG: What's your favorite part of your home?

RC: My living room. There's a corner where I have a view of the room and the garden, the dog sits next to me on the sofa and I can get to work.

MG: Is your interior design style different in your own home compared to the homes you work on?

RC: I think your own house is always different. What you do in your own house is an emotional response to what you've seen. If I design a house for a client, the personal elements aren't there. I'm not gonna put my background onto their homes. My house is particularly my own. It has much more classical, old masters, antique furniture, and objects. I relate to objects very keenly. All the objects in the house say something to me. And if the object doesn't say anything to me, and it doesn't bring anything to my mind, I don't have it.