

THE NEW LOOK

WITH HER LATEST BOOK, ON CHRISTIAN DIOR'S DECORATING LEGACY, DESIGN HISTORIAN MAUREEN FOOTER GIVES US A PRIVATE TOUR OF HER COUTURE QUARTERS.



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Tiger velvet, spring color, and far-flung artifacts reinterpret Dior's New Look decorating in the living room. Custom sofa in a Bergamo fabric. Sconces, Urban Archaeology. Artwork (left), Bryan Burkey. Window shades in a Brunshwig & Fils damask. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: Author and homeowner Maureen Footer. Galleries from her new book on Christian Dior and his decorators.



Modern furniture contrasts with a traditional backdrop in the dining room. Saarinen table and Brno chairs, Knoll. Aubusson tapestry, Galerie Perpitch & Bringand. Silk velvet on walls, Lee Jofa. Louis XV-style chandelier, Nesle Inc.



LEFT: The library features cerused-oak paneling—an homage to Jean-Michel Frank—and Fortuny pillows, a Chinese chest, and a Sultanabad rug from the owner's travels. Pendant, Elk Lighting. Vintage Elsie de Wolfe slipper chairs. BELOW: Custom leather shelf edging on a bookcase. ВОТТОМ: The entry's orange-lacquered walls complement the Armand-Albert Rateau-inspired wallpaper in the butler's pantry. Louis XVI console, Galerie Delvaile. Pendant, Aerin.



I WAS SUBMERGED in research for my new book, *Dior and His Decorators: Victor Grandpierre, Georges Geffroy, and the New Look*, when life threw the perfect apartment in my path: eight rooms in a 1922 neo-Georgian building with seductive views overlooking the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Once owned by James M. Guiher, Jr., the venerable editor of H.W. Janson's landmark *History of Art*, the apartment was in a bohemian state of neglect that required a gut renovation. Loving the gracious prewar layout, I decided that my mission was to rejuvenate. So while the second bedroom was transformed into a paneled library (finally, enough space for my books), the floor plan did not change an iota. And not surprisingly, since my mind and heart were immersed in the Paris of the glamorous postwar years, all that neoclassical restraint, tiger silk velvet, and spring color found its way into my apartment.

My friend Anthony Minichetti mastered the architecture, creating spaces as clean and airy as the Dior couture salons. And in the spirit of Dior's house in Paris, designed by Victor Grandpierre and Georges Geffroy, I conceived the decor of my own space for comfort and the specific needs of my life—reading by a window, taking coffee in the library, working (all too frequently) at the dining room table, and inviting friends





FAR LEFT: Hand-painted Gracie wallpaper and fretwork on shutters transform a city bedroom into a magical garden. Bedding, Casa Del Bianco. Lamps, Christopher Spitzmiller. Pendant, Chameleon Fine Lighting. Louis XVI chair, John Rosselli Antiques. LEFT: A custom hat from New York milliner Suzanne Newman tops an 18th-century bust. BELOW: Manolo Blahnik heels and Florentine white-leather gloves in the dressing area. Tabriz rug, Persian Gallery New York. For more details, see Sourcebook.



for dinner. Both Dior and Grandpierre often worked with Sèvres colors (though not, of course, in Dior's famously gray-and-white couture house). I, however, amped the saturation to a 21st-century level that made my painter shake his head in doubt. I knew that my tapestries, art, mirrors, and furniture would temper the high-voltage orange lacquer and apple green into neo-Dior elegance.

The painter also blanched when I insisted on painting by brush, not roller, but by then, I was in the thrall of Geffroy and his uncompromising standards. Enchanted, too, by the Parisian decorator's timeless blend of old-world style and New Look chic, I upholstered the dining room in silk velvet, added a custom Saarinen table, and ordered new leather (again, many color samples) for my Brno chairs.

My travels played a decisive role as well, for from the moment I arrived in Japan at age 16, wanderlust has consumed me. My apartment brims with objects picked up from all over the world: Japanese temple dogs, Burmese boxes, Indian palanquin finials, pre-Columbian sculptures, camel bones from Wadi Rum in Jordan, and 18th-century furniture acquired in Paris and hidden

corners of Versailles. These finds remind me of where I've been and what I've discovered along the way. Indeed, over time, it has been the learning of travel that has obsessed me most.

Exploration of ideas is a destination in itself and is, I think, what draws me to write about design and social history. Writing—or researching, to be more accurate—represents another form of travel, literally and figuratively. One tantalizing fact leads to the pursuit of re-creating people, times, and circumstances—and, most important, the *why* behind the story. *Dior and His Decorators* required months of research in Paris, trips in both space and time. And, although I'd lived in Paris before, this project introduced me to a new world: the city's libraries, archives, and fashion traditions, along with its writers, historians, and tastemakers.

While my mentors, Dior, Geffroy, and Grandpierre, inspired colors, comfort, and the melding of past and present in my personal space, the spoils of travel also brought memory to the mix. Coming home to my French furniture and far-flung artifacts allows me to relive life's voyage, and its discoveries, anew. □