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September 2002

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"There is in true beauty,
as in courage,
something which narrow souls
cannot dare to admire."
—WILLIAM CONGREVE



TO SIR WITH LOVE

From top: Sir James Goldsmith in 1987; Robert Couturier in his Connecticut living room with a 4th-century A.D. Roman bust of Faustina, Marcus Aurelius's mother-in-law, and an 18th-century Turino chair, May 30, 2002; Goldsmith's castle in Cuixmala, Mexico, designed by Couturier.

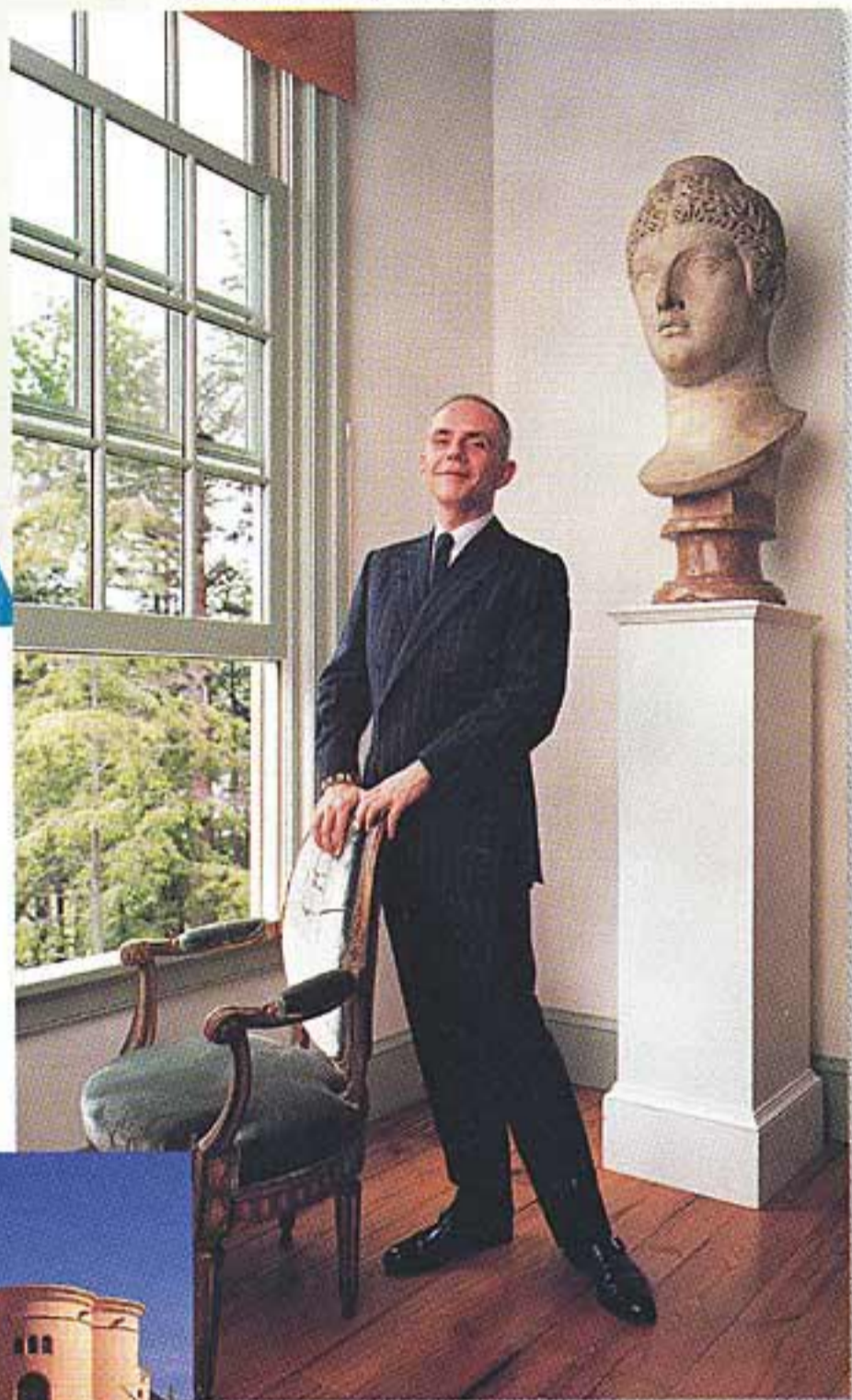
The Titan and the Architect

At 26, architect-decorator Robert Couturier met Sir James Goldsmith, the client who would make him famous, beginning

15 breakneck years of work on the late billionaire's mansions, his private 757, and his famously luxurious castle complex in Mexico.

Now, at last, Couturier is building a life, and a home, for himself

BY AMY FINE COLLINS



No lapse of taste, no fault of historical accuracy, no revealing detail of social history escapes the vigilant eye of the Paris-born, New York-based 47-year-old architect-decorator Robert Couturier, who is sweeping through the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "This is approaching perfection," Couturier says in front of the Wrightsman Collection's 1780 Hôtel de Crillon room. "But the candlestick on the desk would have been gold. Not silver." Navigating next to a gallery of 18th-century French sculpture, he

dashes over to a marble portrait bust by Guillaume Coustou—which, for Couturier, could just as well be a flesh-and-blood acquaintance at a party. "That's the most powerful banker in Louis XIV's France, Samuel Bernard—the precursor to Jimmy Goldsmith," he says, referring to his most famous client, the late Anglo-French financier. Gravitating to a 1718 bedroom from the Palazzo Sagredo in Venice, he sighs, "All for pleasure, for joy." His eyes lift skyward to the clustered buttocks of the stucco putti, suspended like foam from the ceiling. "So sexy!" he exclaims. "You can almost hear the canal water splashing outside. I don't know where this idea came from that the French make good lovers. French love is a mental game, only about how you get there. And why not? Afterward it is just another porn movie anyway."

Finally, he arrives at the goal of today's pilgrimage, the exhibition "Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence,"

TOP: BY PETER JORDAN

where he lingers, enthralled, for the next two hours. Before a spectacularly gory circa-1500 woven evocation of the Trojan War—a decapitated corpse spews blood in the lower left corner, a cheek is sliced off on the far right—Couturier reflects wistfully, “What confidence they had in their time—to dress these warriors in the clothing of their own day. Why now do we copy the past? One must not regret the past, one must learn from it!”

Couturier—who would probably be more in character in white tie and a monocle than in his museum outfit of Prada coat and Gucci suit—has, like Penelope, spent the last two decades unraveling and reloomng his own history. The son of a family enriched by a world monopoly on photographic gelatin, Couturier grew up in a Hector Guimard-designed *hôtel particulier* in the posh 16th Arrondissement. He saw his parents so infrequently that whenever his father entered the room, he says, out of fear, “I peed in my pants.” The novelist and publisher Cécile David-Weill, who was raised in a similar milieu, says, “Robert was brought up to be an old man—polite, well dressed, and miserable. He has spent his adulthood learning to become young.” Couturier recalls, “I escaped by building castles and farms out of Legos—ideal homes for ideal families.”

In spite of his family’s conviction that he was condemning

“We are Eurotrash,” Couturier proclaimed to *People* in 1983. “We are spoiled. We are brats.”



himself to entering friends’ houses through service doors, he enrolled, after boarding school, in Paris’s École Camondo to study architecture and decoration. “Robert was an aesthete, an artist, a *personnage* of Proust,” Cécile David-Weill remembers. “All day long he was drawing—façades, friezes, furniture, the details of the houses he went to.”

And Couturier was admitted at all the best houses. Béatrice Stern, Cécile’s sister (both are daughters of Lazard chairman Michel David-Weill), says, “It was the era of the *rallyes*”—the debutante parties that, in the 1970s, still structured the social lives of patrician Parisians between ages 16 and 20. “Robert was the most cultured boy, and the best dancer.” Adds screenwriter Natalie Merveilleux du Vignaux, a third David-Weill sister, “At 18 he had already read the great books and had a fully digested knowledge of music, art, history. It gave him something different—a point of view about life.”

This viewpoint led him on a direct path out of France to Manhattan, where he moved permanently in 1981. In need of a job—his family’s fortune had by now evaporated—Couturier showed his drawings to the restaurant designer Adam Tihany, who immediately took him on. As part of Tihany’s office, Couturier worked on a country house in Pawling, New York, for film producer Dino De Laurentiis and actress Silvana Mangano. With Tihany he also designed the junior-jet-set nightspots Club A and La Coupole. He experienced a spark of fame in January 1983 after *People* interviewed him for a story entitled “The New Immigrants,” about the Mitterrand-era flotsam of young Continentals who had just washed up on the Eastern Seaboard. “We are Eurotrash,” he proclaimed, bringing the recently coined New York term to a wider public. “We are obnoxious. We are spoiled. We are brats. You name it. But we are not only that. We can also work a lot and prove that we have something to say. We are the beautiful people of the future.”

About a year and a half earlier, at the New York apartment of Prince Michael of Greece, Couturier had met Laure Boulay de la Meurthe, a 28-year-old journalist and equestrienne whose exalted position in French society derived in part from her kinship with the Comte de Paris, the pretender to the French throne. De la Meurthe’s other conspicuous advantage in life was her role, since 1976, as official mistress to Sir James Goldsmith.

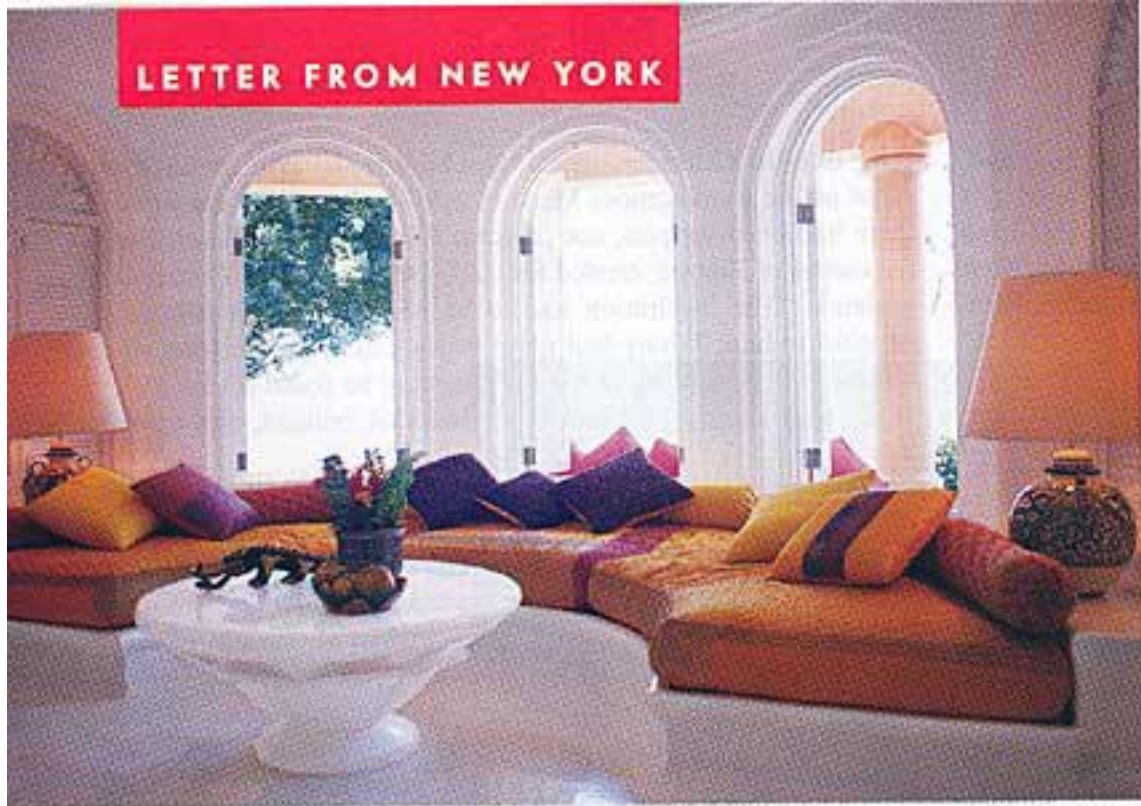
Almost a year after they met, de la Meurthe (later the editorial director of the French society glossy *Point de Vue*, which Goldsmith had bought for her) solicited Couturier’s opinion of the couple’s new, double-width town house at 116 East 80th Street. “It was an old and gloomy house which still smelled of the previous owner, who had died there,” de la Meurthe recalls. Couturier says he had “no hope of Jimmy hiring me. So, not having slept, I showed up for the meeting with Jimmy. I’d been up all night drinking, doing cocaine—everything. I had nothing to lose, so I felt completely at liberty to tell him exactly what I thought. ‘Break through the ceiling and open up a big central courtyard to the sky,’ I said. ‘You need air!’ I think I was the one who needed air, because I was so hung over! To my surprise, Jimmy said, ‘Great! Finish it in three months.’” De la Meurthe says, “It was a stroke of genius. . . . This great idea gave birth to our long collaboration. . . . We were happy, very happy, during the time we spent there, and the architect is partly responsible.” An immediate consequence of this auspicious encounter with Goldsmith was that “I had to sober up,” Couturier says. “Jimmy saved me.”

By 1986 the French architect had set up his own practice, on East 86th Street. His first clients in the new office were Marina

Galesi (“born Princess Wolkonsky; her ancestor was the model for Prince Andrei Bolkonsky in *War*

20 QUESTIONS

A 20-year-old Robert Couturier hanging out at Castel, the Paris nightclub, in a Valentino suit, 1975.



him from Annabel." Couturier says, "Jimmy represents a male fantasy. He did what other men never did, couldn't do, never allowed themselves to do."

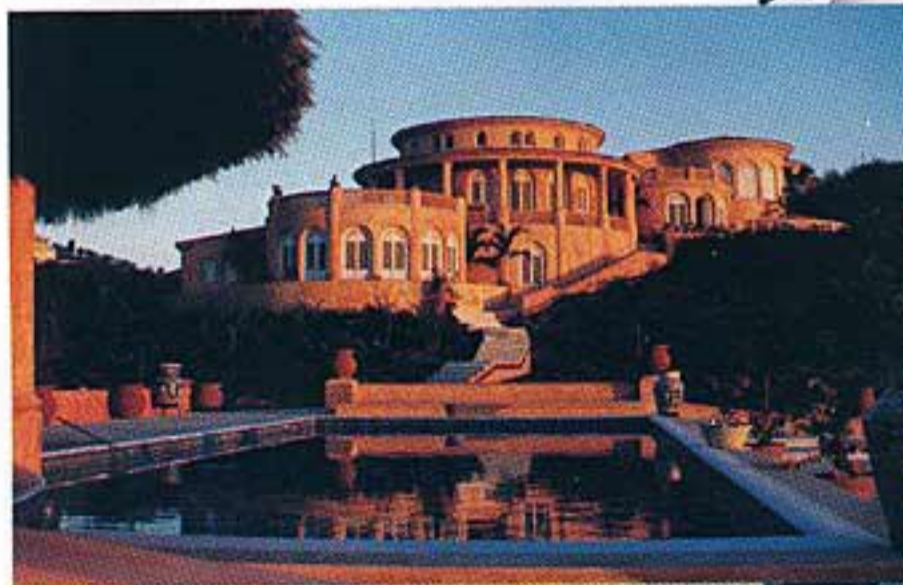
The colossal proportions of the main house—its arched wooden doors, carved in India, stand 15 feet high—were, Couturier calculates, commensurate with its six-foot-three owner. "Jimmy lived bigger than most, was larger than life. His passions were huge. Even his rages were grand! Jimmy understood that a castle is a reflection of power, not wealth. The house is masculine, dominating, a lion on a rock." In contrast, Ginette's sinuous Italianate abode, which undu-



REX-MEX

From top: a guest bungalow overlooking the Pacific at the Cuixmala compound; Laure Boulay de la Meurthe and Goldsmith at a ball given by Count Giovanni Volpi, Venice, 1991; the 200-step double staircase leading to a swimming pool; the seaside villa of Ginette Lery, Goldsmith's second wife.

The architect's role at court was defined by "his alliance with Laure," says one Cuixmala habitué.



lates near the sea, "is feminine, soft, curvy, yielding to the landscape."

Cuixmala, Couturier explains, "was a court. And we led a very courtly life there. It was an incestuous group, composed of family members, extremely powerful men, intellectuals. You'd have Marchioness of Dufferin, Jacob Rothschild, John Aspinall, Johnny Pigozzi, Lord Thomas, various Zilkhas, Nixon, Kissinger." From December to May, when Goldsmith was in residence, his visitors and their infinite surroundings were attended by a retinue of 400, including gardeners, cooks, security guards (recruited from the Mexican police force), and, says a frequent visitor, "two full-time cushion sewers" to keep in good repair the 1,300 vibrant Indian-silk pillows strewn across the enormous built-in sofas and armchairs. "Jimmy was the source of the whole

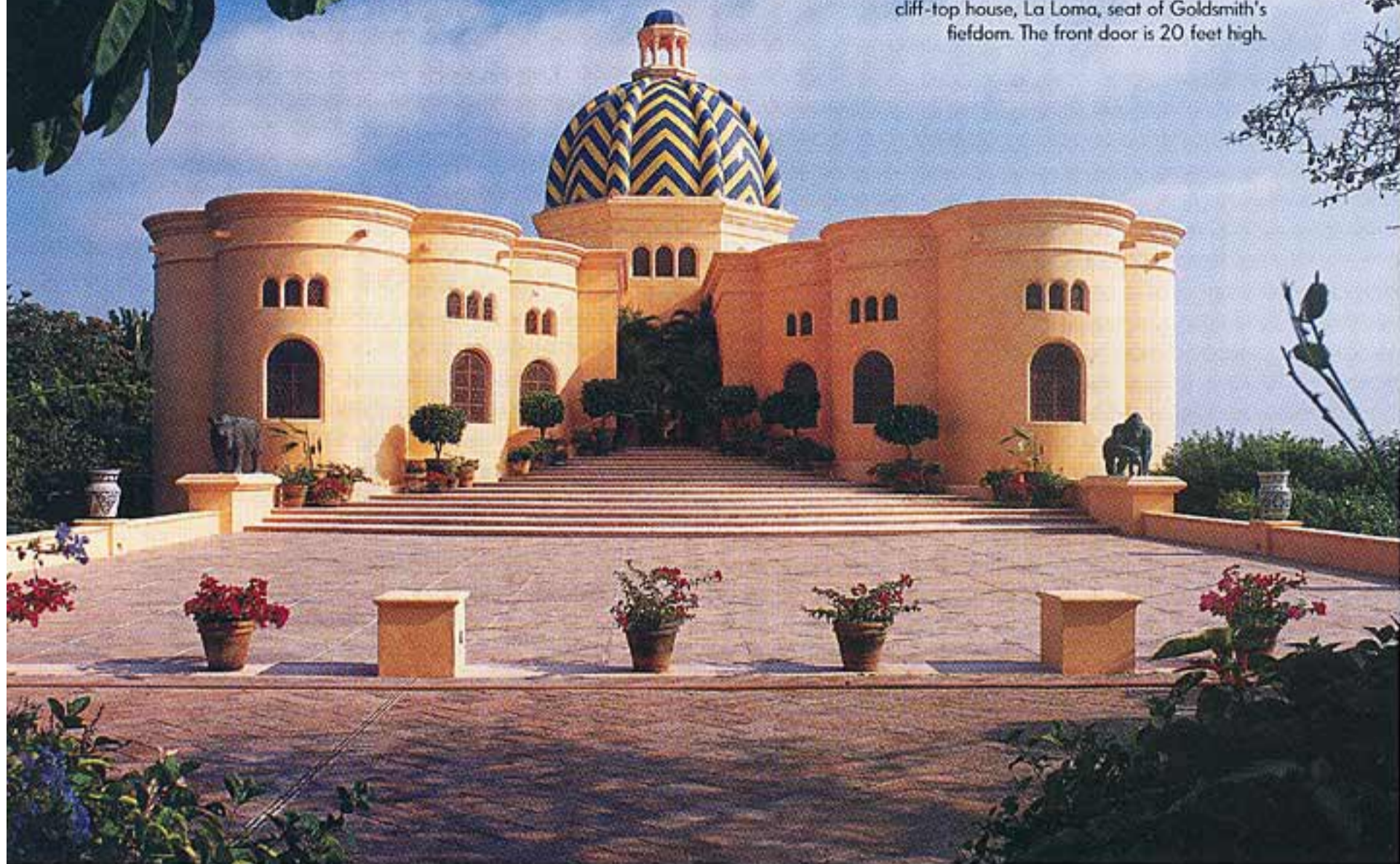
region's economy," Couturier says.

The architect's role at court was defined by "his alliance with Laure," one Cuixmala habitué says. "She absolutely adored him and he was her court spy. The two of them would lie on adjacent deck chairs at the pool, or sit together at dinner, giggling while Jimmy talked to his male friends." Couturier says, "Jimmy

CENTER: BY DAVID JONES

PALACE IN WONDERLAND

The concrete-and-steel façade and tiled dome of the 60,000-square-foot cliff-top house, La Loma, seat of Goldsmith's fiefdom. The front door is 20 feet high.



“I had in mind a castle in the sun, something that the Crusaders might have built in the 12th century.”

was truly possessive of Laure, and a little jealous of our intimacy.” Yet, says Béatrice Stern, “Robert was a member of the family. Laure and Jimmy’s two children called him ‘Uncle Robert.’” One Cuixmala regular states, “Jimmy raved about Robert, he raved about the place. Everybody raved about the place. Back in England, you would hear people say, ‘Isn’t it dreadful, isn’t it vulgar?’ But those who said that had never visited. Anyone who had ever been to Cuixmala thought it was the most magnificent paradise on earth.” So potent, de la Meurthe says, was the “exotic fragrance” permeating Goldsmith’s kingdom that “many friends of mine fell in love on the property.”

Yet the realm of Cuixmala—built in just two years—was not enough to satisfy Goldsmith’s expansionist urges. He annexed onto his Mexican colony a 6,000-acre, 19th-century hacienda, Jabali, a few hours away from Cuixmala in the verdant mountains of Colima. “It was beyond beautiful there, so calm and peaceful,” says Couturier, who refurbished the Spanish-colonial-style complex for him in 1994. “The climate was softer and drier, and the elevation more comfortable.” Threatening the tranquility of the setting was the fact that the hacienda was nestled beside a volcano—“an active one, of course,” a Goldsmith associate says. “The central fact about Jimmy is that he thrived on adversity. He chose to build in Mexico partly out of rivalry with his first in-laws, the Patiños [South American tin moguls]. But its real appeal was the utter danger, the im-

possibility of the place. The ocean of Cuixmala is unswimmable because it is infested with sharks. The lagoons teem with crocodiles—Jimmy had an inventory done once, and they numbered 800. He stocked the land with beautiful animals—zebras, antelopes, gazelles, and ocelots. But it was also plagued with poisonous lizards, venomous snakes, African killer bees, and, infamously, deadly scorpions.”

The scorpions were such a lethal menace that Goldsmith had glazed-tile moats (which the toxic creatures could not traverse) installed along the perimeters of all dwellings and driveways. Even the hundreds of acres of gardens were protected by tiled walls, monitored at night by a lamp-bearing scorpion patrol. But the billionaire’s concern about scorpions paled next to his phobia of rubber. “I could not have a rubber band around my drawings,” Couturier says. Otherwise, he’d “scream that it should be immediately removed and that I should wash my hands. Nobody around him could have a ponytail tied with a rubber band. He would have the offending ‘thing’ thrown down the loo.”

Couturier completed two other projects for Goldsmith. As costly as Cuixmala (and, by old-world standards, just as grand) was the complete rehabilitation of an immense 1640 château on 6,000 boar-filled acres in Europe, bought by the tycoon for de la Meurthe in 1990. The historic estate became something of a battleground, Couturier says. “Laure wanted to reclaim the aristocratic Eden of her ancestors. Jimmy was not at all interested in stepping into someone else’s clothes. It was a split vision—

and Peace," Couturier says) and her businessman husband, Francesco, for their Manhattan apartment in River House. His next commission came from an old acquaintance, Philippe de Nicolay, Marie-Hélène de Rothschild's son from her first marriage, for a London town house. "It was sumptuous, luxurious," says Couturier nostalgically. "The kind of house I had known all my life, a perfect 19th-century house in the *style Rothschild*."

In 1987, Goldsmith asked Couturier to return to work on the Manhattan mansion. But then, abruptly switching plans, the financier sold the property for a reported \$17 million. Goldsmith, an ardent environmentalist, had meanwhile envisioned a far more kingly outpost for himself in the New World.

The preceding year, the billionaire had purchased from hundreds of disparate owners approximately 20,000 acres of remote, godforsaken land—encompassing an entire dry rain forest—on the Pacific Coast of Mexico, near Careyes. "It was unbelievably, staggeringly gorgeous," Couturier says, "the way the

thing that the Crusaders might have built in the 12th century. It could not be an indigenous Mexican style—in that part of the world there had been temples, not palaces. And it could not look like the castles of Europe, created for cold, damp climates," Couturier explains. "The inspiration had to be Moorish, North African, Moghul Indian. Jimmy had never really read a plan before. After one minute looking at the first drawing he could read a plan better than most professionals. He was that brilliant, that quick about everything."

On January 21, 1988, ground was broken at Cuixmala. "It was exhilarating," Couturier says. The architect was embarking on this formidable, herculean enterprise with a staff of just four, but a labor force of 2,000 and a budget of "dozens of millions." Goldsmith's Fitzcarraldo-like undertaking encompassed far more than the construction of a majestic monument in the hinterlands—a looming beacon that the billionaire decreed must be "impressive but not overwhelming." Couturier and his crew were, in fact, wresting out of the raw terrain an entire, self-sufficient,

Couturier explains, "We led a very courtly life [at Cuixmala]. It was an incestuous group, composed of family members, extremely powerful men, intellectuals. You'd have Marchioness of Dufferin, Jacob Rothschild, John Aspinall, Johnny Pigozzi, Lord Thomas, various Zilkhas, Nixon, Kissinger."

world might have looked after Creation." Goldsmith engaged a Mexico City architect to build an enormous house on a steep bluff overlooking the sea, on a spot called Cuixmala, spanning the states of Colima and Jalisco. "Cuixmala" means "soul haven," "soul rest," de la Meurthe says, "and maybe, who knows, that was what we needed!"

One Sunday morning in June 1987, de la Meurthe phoned Couturier from Paris. "*Le Sieur* would like to speak to you," she announced, passing the instrument to Goldsmith, who informed Couturier, "You must come to Mexico and explain to this architect what I want. You are the only one who understands." De la Meurthe says, "The other architects we tried to work with were sad, their drawings were somber, unhappy." Goldsmith flew Couturier to Careyes for a July 10 meeting. What the Mexican architect had suggested for Cuixmala "was a football stadium," Couturier says. "To me it was very clear that what Jimmy wanted was a palace, a good, old-fashioned castle with everything that implies—land, guesthouses, dwellings for dependents. I cannot blame the Mexican for not understanding. How can any normal person imagine such a thing?"

Goldsmith and de la Meurthe gave the 32-year-old Couturier until September 1987 to reconceive Cuixmala. On schedule, he arrived in Paris (where the couple lived in Cole Porter's former Left Bank house) prepared to show 20 large sheets of drawings. "But first we attended the Féerie Ball of Marie-Hélène de Rothschild," Couturier remembers. "Then Jimmy decided he wanted to go to Istanbul!" Finally, floating in a hired boat on the Bosphorus, Couturier unfurled his drawings. Couturier says he summoned up "out of nowhere, but in a way out of all civilizations," something "very fanciful. I had in mind a castle in the sun, some-

Goldsmith-ruled cosmos. For its center—a resplendent sun among satellites—Couturier had charted out a vaulted, 60,000-square-foot concrete-and-steel main house, crowned by a vividly hued dome—a commanding cliff-top sanctuary for Goldsmith, de la Meurthe, and their two children. At a site 15 minutes toward the sea, he mapped out a subsidiary, 25,000-square-foot villa for Ginette Lery, Goldsmith's second wife and former secretary (his first wife, Isabel, had died during childbirth in 1954). Among the other dwellings fanning out across the land were six circular, 1,000-square-foot guest pavilions with views of lakes, rivers, mountains, and a dormant volcano; a seventh, larger guesthouse of similar plan; up the hill, a 15,000-square-foot guest dormitory; on a ridge, two houses for Ginette's son and daughter, Manes and Alix; numerous, gargantuan, thatched palapas, where most of the living and dining would actually take place; and stables. To house Goldsmith's biologist, pilots, secretaries, estate manager, and tutors, Couturier contrived a hill community with its own medical center, airstrip, and pool. And then there was Couturier's tour de force, the great double helix of a staircase linking the main house to the Pacific in a ziggurat-like, rhythmic cascade of 200 steps.

Goldsmith's first child, Isabel, and his third and last wife, Lady Annabel, were not components of the original arrangement. "Annabel had her house in Spain," Couturier says. (Residences for Annabel's children Jemima and Zacharias were nonetheless considered for a future date, as was, eventually, a house for their mother.) This unconventional constellation of wife, ex-wife, mistress, and their offspring cohered because "every second number got along," a Goldsmith insider says. "Annabel took Jimmy from Ginette, and Laure evened the score by taking

he wanted an Arab tent, she wanted Versailles." De la Meurthe affirms: "We were not there to innovate," but rather to revive an enchanted Sleeping Beauty castle "according to Art's rules." Inevitably, Couturier says, "Jimmy fired me, because he couldn't fire Laure. But he took me back."

The final, less emotionally fraught task Goldsmith entrusted to Couturier, in 1996, was the interior design of his Boeing 757. "I made him a flying carpet with a motor," the decorator notes. A Goldsmith crony says, "I'll never forget what [A.I.G. Investments co-owner] Bob Rubin said to me: 'I deal with a lot of billionaires, but Jimmy is the only one who spends and lives on the level of his wealth.'" The difference, Couturier states, between Goldsmith and the others was that "Jimmy was an all-around genius, not just a financial one."

Debilitated by pancreatic cancer, Goldsmith died of a heart attack in July 1997, at age 64. In his approximately \$2 billion estate he left behind trusts for the maintenance of the hills, forests, lakes, and beaches of his Mexican sultanate. But the individual houses were to be the separate responsibility of each designated owner. Observers have inferred that Ginette Lery may be buying out de la Meurthe, who nonetheless remains hopeful that "the dream will continue, for the benefit of those

He also refurbished the Sterns' small château in Burgundy. "People say, 'How lucky to have found such an old place in such flawless condition,'" Stern says. But in fact, Couturier had demolished and rebuilt every element of the antiquated structure, with the exception of the four exterior walls. "Everything Robert touches," Stern says, "seems to have been born that way."

In spite of these professional exertions, Couturier was in perilous shape fiscally and emotionally. "Robert was too elegant and too generous to say no to anybody," says Philippe Lauro-Baranes, his business partner for several years. "Certain people took advantage of him, because they thought, out of friendship, he should do everything for free." Couturier says, "Of course I could have made more money, but out of love for Jimmy and the others, I worked more and asked for less. I am not mercenary—money has never been an objective."

In 1998, Couturier called Lauro-Baranes, then the agent for muralist Paulain Paris, and announced, "I'm exhausted and broke. Please see if you can sell my business to an architectural firm. I want to be rid of clients. I want to be free to draw, draw, draw." Couturier was desolate over the loss of Goldsmith, his father figure, and he was "celibate," having terminated a five-year

"Jimmy Goldsmith represents a
male fantasy. He did what other men never did, couldn't do,
never allowed themselves to do."

who are still to come." The hacienda is now a national landmark, leased out to the Amanresorts hotel chain. "It would be a lack of courage for Laure to abandon Mexico," one insider remarks. The big house "was the Goldsmith castle, Jimmy's imprint on earth."

Béatrice Stern says, "There was always an air of unreality about Mexico. It was attached neither to time nor to space. The house could have been anywhere—in Mexico or on the moon," a hallucination or a mirage, a surreal decoration concocted for "a ball. To me it would not be surprising if Mexico does not survive Jimmy."

Couturier says, "Laure herself told Jimmy, 'One day, the only thing that will be left of you is what you have built.' After all, every big house is a mausoleum, created for posterity. Who would remember Louis XIV without Versailles? The word 'Cuixmala'—'soul rest'—already suggests a tomb." In that spirit, Goldsmith's ashes were scattered by his firstborn son, Manes, on the sea by Cuixmala while various members of his four families lined up to watch from the beach.

"When Jimmy came into my life it was a privilege, the greatest gift," Couturier reflects. "But it was a bit of an evil present—something for the end of a career, not the beginning. It isolated me from the rest of the world for 15 years. If you have worked for a king, whom do you work for after?"

Couturier's services, in fact, were eagerly sought by many of his friends. He renovated a Beekman Place maisonette for design entrepreneur Cathryn Collins and plastic surgeon Dr. Gerald Imber, who laud Couturier's "spatial eye" and "erudition." For writer Andrew Solomon, author of *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression*, he transformed an 1848 Greenwich Village brownstone into a sybaritic scholar's lair. And in France he redecorated apartments for his loyal champions the David-Weill sisters—Cécile, Béatrice Stern, and Natalie Merveilleux du Vignaux.

relationship. Over dinner one night at Mortimer's in 1997, he had told a friend, "I am going to be alone the rest of my life."

The next day he met Jeffrey Morgan, an expert in restoring pre-Revolution Connecticut houses. "Once you accept something," Couturier says, "then life changes." Right away he started spending every weekend with Morgan in his austere timber-frame 1743 cottage in Kent, Connecticut. And with Lauro-Baranes reorganizing his finances, suddenly "the big jobs came back," Couturier says. For Maryann O'Donnell, a founding partner of Earthlink, he decorated a lodge in Colorado and a house in Beverly Hills. He will be fixing up Anne Hearst's beach retreat in Water Mill, Long Island, with furniture handed down from her grandfather, newspaper titan William Randolph Hearst. "Successful, powerful men respect Robert because of the breadth and depth of his knowledge," says another major client, for whom Couturier is assembling a blue-chip collection of 18th-century French furniture and 20th-century paintings. "And they enjoy his company because he is so delightfully funny."

Fashion historian Katell le Bourhis, a friend for 25 years, says, "When Robert started out he was the perfect inheritor of the Grand Tradition—he excelled in French classicism to the point of arrogance. But with the passage of time he has developed personal genius. His work is lush, light, sensual, experimental, and witty. He keeps his clients forever because he takes them along with him in his own evolution."

Says Andrew Solomon—whose brother, David, and father, Howard, C.E.O. of Forest Laboratories, the pharmaceutical concern, are now also Couturier's patrons—"Robert has an understanding of the underlying mathematical issues of architecture. He has a sense of scale and proportion to rival [18th-century British neoclassical architect] Robert Adam's. Robert's work is informed and authentic, not pretentious; he has ideas, not opin-

“When Jimmy came into my life it was a privilege, the greatest gift. But if you have worked for a king, whom do you work for after?”

ions. He is a thinker. Yet he has great humility. The manifest proof of that is the modest scale of the house he’s building in Connecticut.”

In his custom-made Lobb shoes, Couturier is pacing the muddy hemlock forest around Spectacle Lake, in Kent, where his new house, a harmonious union of American and French 18th-century architectural idioms, is rising—mind over matter—from the earth. Pure, white, and serene, it is the projection of a mentality both capricious and precise—a life-size materialization of one of his exquisitely lucid drawings, or, perhaps, a full-scale embodiment of one of the idealized Lego dwellings of his boyhood. Ecstatic to see the rapid progress at his construction site, he expounds on his plans for the rest of the property. “I’m clear-



ing out some trees to make my park, in the French fashion. Down the hill will go a little ballroom, where we will play Baroque music. Further below, on the other side, we will reassemble a 1730 house from Dover, Connecticut, that Jeffrey salvaged from a farmer!” He casts a final, contented glance at his handiwork, taking special satisfaction in the tall, elegant windows which frame the vistas of the sparkling lake beyond into a series of balanced, vertical pictures. “It is a little universe,” he declares. “My non-aggressive, mini Jimmy compound—my own idea of heaven.”

Couturier drives back to the house he and Morgan occupy for now, and rounds up his three Shih Tzus—Chuck, Lili, and Henriette—who burst out the door with him for a few minutes of air. When Couturier returns, the animals are subdued, and he is glowing with contentment. “I don’t think I’ve ever been so happy in my life. As you grow older, the quality of your happiness is deeper, because you know it’s not forever.” He prepares a cup of Lapsang souchong tea and sets it down on the dining room’s 1650 oak table. The drink cools; he has begun to draw. A few pen strokes later, a footed terra-cotta Chinese pitcher emerges on his sheet of notebook paper—an illustration of an artifact he saw earlier that week at an exhibition at the Chinese Porcelain Company. “It is from 3000 B.C.—5,000 years ago. It is perfect, universal, and it’s priced at \$22,000. That comes to just \$5 a year! I think I will buy it.” He pushes the tea away, picks up the pen again, and sketches the pitcher once more, this time from another angle. “The only thing that makes any sense in the world is art,” he says, pleased with his second rendering. “It is the only eternity there is. And the more futile the art is, the better!” □

ROBERT BARON

Top, Couturier before the lakefront façade of his Connecticut house with Shih Tzus Chuck and Henriette, May 30, 2002; left, a sitting room with 1940s Sèvres nymph, transitional Louis XV–XVI chair, and 1840s-chestnut floor.

