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# House Beautiful

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Interior design by PAOLO MOSCHINO

Interview by LISA CREGAN

Photographs by SIMON UPTON

## THE ULTIMATE *Warmth*

Easy, worldly comfort in a rare American house by Paolo Moschino. This is decorating with nothing to prove...

LISA CREGAN: *How can it be that a house in New Jersey looks so rooted, so lived in and, frankly, so gloriously Italian?*

PAOLO MOSCHINO: I grew up near Florence, in a small town on the coast. Our doors were always open. I was used to beautiful light and doors that open out into a garden. That's what I take away most from Italy—a sense of light. I don't like making dark rooms. And I suppose, being Italian, I have a strong sense of family. I tried to make this house feel like one big comfortable room. >>

OPPOSITE: In the living room, Moschino worked from the reds, creating a supremely comfortable background for intriguing objects like a 19th-century French oval mirror and a Buccellati silver monkey. With walls bathed in a custom sand color, the red cotton curtains and red chenille sofa warm the neutral palette. Sofa pillows include a mix of bronze silk and antique French embroidery.

**You started out designing fabric and furniture for Nicholas Haslam in London, and eventually bought the company. How is it that you became an interior designer?**

More and more people started coming into the showroom saying, 'This is the look I want for my house'—so I started doing houses!

**Okay, so you had this house to furnish and you were five time zones away. How did you begin?**

This house was completely gutted. I did things like raising the height of the doors everywhere. For me, it's important to get the bones right before I start. When I walked into the living room I decided to start with that red fabric for the curtains and it influenced the rest of the room, like the rug, then the sofas and chairs in simple colors and simple fabrics.

**Tell me about your thought process as you laid out the kitchen and dining areas.**

This is a young family so I didn't want it to be super-traditional, or too modern, either. It is a compromise between the two, a classical feel, I think. And the idea of a formal dining room is a joke, anyway. You should be able to use every single room every day. I like to cook, and so does this client. When I have friends over, I don't like to be in the kitchen, hearing everyone in other rooms having fun. That's why we made this kitchen much bigger than it was originally, and we opened it up into the dining room. You can see through from one room to the next. This is a small family—they have only one child, and I wanted to make the whole first floor feel open, so that if the mother is baking a cake in the kitchen, their daughter is playing the piano in the drawing room, and her father is reading in the library, they all feel they're together. None of the rooms are tucked away.

**Are there other signature Moschino looks here?**

Well, I never put a sofa against a wall. To start, if you have a sofa right against a wall you can't put a table behind it, and I like to put a lamp behind a woman, rather than next to her. It's the same effect as women in candlelight—it's nicer. And I always make sure there is a flow, but I like every room to be a bit of a surprise. I wouldn't want anyone to come in here and say, 'Oh my God, all the rooms are all the same.'

**These backgrounds are nominally neutral, but they have so much texture.**

All the walls are special finishes, hand-painted. I like adding the patina of age and I use a color I call 'greige'—a gray beige—quite a lot. I painted the moldings darker shades of the wall color, because I think otherwise the walls look flat and the room looks like a box. In the dining room people always ask, 'What kind of wallpaper

is that?' It's actually hand-painted. The idea was to do a chinoiserie white scene—white trees, white leaves, all very whitewashed. Yes, a little like a fresco.

**Marble busts, Victorian curiosities, sundry antiques. Is there a method to your mingling?**

I don't know. I do it the way I like. I buy only what I would like to live with. I can't imagine buying an expensive table for a client just because I thought I would make a big commission—what if someone saw it and asked, 'Where did you get that ghastly table?' I think it doesn't matter if an object or painting doesn't have great value if it works for the room. For example, there's a bronze sculpture from the 1920s under a mirror in the living room in this house, in the same room as an 18th-century statue, and on a table in the hall is a 19th-century marble bust. I think they go together well. I don't much like houses where they have hung Picassos everywhere, you know? You might as well hang a clear plastic bag full of cash on the wall if you want to show off how much money you have. In this house some pieces have great value and some are purely decorative.

**You don't take on projects in America very often. What was it about this one that made you say yes?**

I knew the family, met them about ten years ago. They're Americans, but they used to live just outside London in a

converted 19th-century barn. And here, in New Jersey, they live in the country too. They have horses. And chickens! I like to laugh, to have fun when I work. They both have a great sense of humor, and they're open-minded about every single idea.

**Apparently open-minded enough to hang a 19th-century Florentine painting over a child's tub and put an antique secretary in a bathroom.**

Anyone else might say, 'Let's put that painting in the dining room,' but she immediately said, 'Let's put it in my daughter's bath.' I was surprised for just a moment and then I thought, why not? I don't think your most precious pieces have to go in the living room. My client spends a lot of time in her bath, and this way she can look at things like the secretary and that suede and leather chair every day. They're special and she can enjoy them.

**Did some baronial hunting lodge get sacked to fill this master bedroom?**

The bed in the master actually came from the family's house in England, and so did the wicker dog bed. I wasn't really thinking of a theme. They do have two dogs, though. One of those dogs speaks only Italian. I'm serious! It's a rescue dog from a pound in Italy, so when I visit, he is always very happy to see me. We speak the same language. PRODUCED BY DAVID M. MURPHY

OPPOSITE: The living room fireplace was marbled by English decorative painter Dawn Reader. Neoclassical obelisks and urns on the mantel mix with English antiques. Club chairs upholstered in linen velvet and a copious olive beige sofa—all fabrics and furniture from Nicholas Haslam—give the room a cozy sophistication.



The dining room feels European, with walls painted in a custom white botanical chinoiserie pattern and the ceiling dominated by a 19th-century French bronze and crystal chandelier. OPPOSITE FROM TOP: On a curvy antique chest in the dining room, French balustrade lamps flank a 1950s Adam-style stone bust. The kitchen, which Moschino designed, is painted a gray green that he says works because there is green garden to one side and gray dining room to the other. The breakfast area chairs are Louis XVI.







The X-pattern of the dressing room's oak cabinets were Moschino's way of adding interest to a very large space. OPPOSITE The walls of a tiny guest room are custom-painted in a bamboo lattice pattern. In keeping with the theme, the bed is vintage American faux bamboo and the bamboo floor lamp is a Moschino design.







#### THE ULTIMATE BATHTUB

In the master bathroom a 19th-century English secretary makes a surprising focal point. OPPOSITE TOP: The color palette in the daughter's bath, all shades of blue, was drawn from the Italian chinoiserie-style painting over the Barber Wilsons footed tub. CENTER: The round bedside tables in the master are 19th-century Flemish. BOTTOM: The master bath sink is an antique commode refitted with a limestone sink. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES.