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SCOTT POTTER'S DECOUPAGE

Scott Potter had visited Puerto Rico more than 15 years ago to see some friends and to have a good time. Back then, he never dreamed that he would return as a famed designer of objects d'art, ready to present his collection at one of the island's most exclusive home wares retailers. Earlier this year, Potter was invited to San Juan by Sara Kier, owner of Oggetti in Condado, to unveil a special collection of his unique decoupage house ware creations.

A former ballet dancer and choreographer from Portland, Maine, Potter took up the old art of decoupage after visiting an exhibition of English castle print-rooms at the New Orleans Museum. Potter was mesmerized by the beauty of the castles' decoration, heavily adorned with elaborate paper cuttings of flowers

and fruits. Back in Maine, Potter began forging his own creations—plates, bowls, trays, vases, urns, screens, ornaments and even furniture—using that ancient art form.

"We were listening to these speakers in New Orleans and they were talking about these beautiful renderings that aristocrats would handcut from paper and decorate their rooms with," recalls Potter. "They would put [them] on porcelain, so I thought it would be great to do that on glass. Because I love the classical motif, I experimented with some of the designs and applied them to glass."

Potter works with a variety of materials for his creations, going from wood to porcelain, but according to the designer about 90 percent of his work is in glass. To these he applies decoupage, the old

technique of assembling, pasting and varnishing paper cutouts to decorative objects.

Decoupage dates as far back as 12th century China, where peasants created vividly colored paper cutouts to decorate windows, lanterns, gift boxes and other objects. Five centuries later, oriental lacquer objects became fashionable in Europe. When demand exceeded supplies, Venetian cabinet makers produced their own lacquer work in order to fill the demand. Apprentices hand-colored prints and engravings by leading artists of the day, cut them out, pasted them to the surface and covered them with heavy layers of lacquer to resemble the look of the original oriental objects. Wealthy classes at the time hired master painters to decorate their home interiors and furniture but not



everyone could afford to have this done. These people opted instead to cut out drawings from the artists of the day, glued them down and covered the with lacquer to resemble the original paintings as much as possible.

For his decoupage pieces, Potter uses hand made papers—some made of fine silk—fabricated by master papermakers in Japan who have been honored as national treasures. He combines these with fine reproductions of early

European prints that have been cut an layered behind glass and finished in gilding or silver.

Going from dancer to designer was not a stretch for Potter. He sees his new venture as an extension of his creative energy.

"[The transition] was very graceful," he says. "Because it was another form of art, it was still the same feeling that I had for dancing. It's the same feeling that's transformed from one [art] to the next."

Seeking inspiration for his work, Potter keeps an eye on the fashion industry and the latest on interior design. The flair of these two arts, combined with his creative fire, allow him to produce pieces that capture a classic look yet maintain a contemporary feel.

"Definitely I look toward the fashion industry," says Potter. "I like it because it works with textures and layers, which I do with papers, gold, silver, engravings and [other] things. I really try to absorb as much as I can through



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the fashion industry as I do with interior design because people create these incredible spaces and I got to figure out how my work will look in different angles, different table settings." Pottery creations are in high demand all over the world. His pieces figure in the private collections of several high-profile customers including Oprah Winfrey, Maria Shriver, Leslie Ann Warren, Whoopi Goldberg, Robert DeNiro, Victoria Rowell and Katherine Graham. Potter has also had special commissions from the Sultan of Oman, the Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti royal families and a presentation vase for Lady Soames, daughter of former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, at the launching of a naval ship named in her father's honor. In addition to Oggetti, his wares can be found at exclusive shops such as Asprey & Garrard in London, Bergdorf Goodman in New York, Shreve Crump & Low in Boston, Henry Birk's in Canada, the Corning Glass Museum in Corning, New York, Room With a View in Santa Monica, Calif. and in Potter's gallery in Portland, Maine. The collection Potter brought to Puerto Rico, emphasizes Potter, is completely different than those he exhibits and

sells in other stores worldwide. The pieces available at Oggetti have more of a tropical spirit, using earth tones and bright colors to connect more closely with their Caribbean surroundings. "I work with the whole spectrum," Potter says. "I work with varied jewel tones and pastels. Coloration can be adapted anywhere; it depends on the sophistication of the person and their focal points, whether they are serving ware or decorative wear." All his collections, though, maintain Potter's trademark balance of classical beauty and modern elegance. "I have a traditional collection that is popular in places like New York, and Boston; they have a very traditional look," comments Potter. "But on the other hand, people find it very neoclassical, almost like art nouveau because of the design. So, what I think makes art traditional, someone else make think of it as art nouveau or a very Asian influence. I think it all depends on the person's likes and dislikes and what they perceive as traditional or neoclassical. I see it in my work, even though I have all these collections, they do have that versatility where you can put them in a very traditional home or you can put them in a very contemporary home.

The versatility comes from the fact that they are so unique and collectible. people wait until the next collection to get the spectacular pieces and snatch them up right away." Like fashion changes every few months, interior design seems to do the same. Many homes embraced the stark Armani-like minimalism that was the rage during the 1990s. But will the new '80s retro flair that has been dominating fashion runways since last fall translate into interior designs also? According to Potter, it doesn't necessarily have to be one or the other. "I think it's definitely a preference for people," he says. "To me, my home needs to be very warm and relaxing so I can be myself. I need to have a place, a haven where I can reflect on my problems at work or just to create. I need palette. I mix the contemporary with classical things. I like that nice transition because you can think of something else and then of something else and still have that evenness. So to me, home is a haven, a place to be. Other people do it because they want to create a mood, it's an atmosphere thing. I very much feel that my things are versatile enough so they can go into any style of home." ■

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