

he space was a mystery," says author Andrew Solomon of the original jumble of closets and cut-up rooms he found on the second floor of his West Village townhouse when he purchased it in 1994. He promptly enlisted designer Robert Couturier to completely renovate the house. Couturier, whose book, *Robert Couturier: Designing Paradises*, was published by Rizzoli this fall, is a master of inventing magical interiors. For this particular space, he took as his inspiration Sir John Soane's breakfast parlor, one of Solomon's favorite rooms. "We visited Soane's house in London," says Couturier, "and the thing that is so striking is the incredible geometrical shapes, and those vaulted ceilings."

Couturier's plans included locating the kitchen on one end of the second floor and the formal dining room on the other; this middle space would have its own character while creating a transition between the two.

"Robert correctly thought that the only way to make the awkward space graceful was to let loose on fantasy," Solomon says. "He proposed it as a kind of garden. Hence the fountain and the limestone floor."

Then Solomon met the mosaicist Farley Tobin, who, along with her architect husband, Alton Parks, transformed the room even further. The process of designing and installing the ceiling mosaics and inlay work behind the fountain was complex and painstaking—each of the thousands of tiles was hand-cut and set by Tobin—and took years to complete.

"This commission was unique in my experience," says Tobin, "because fabrication and installation occurred simultaneously." The story has come to a happy end—until that is, another wall beckons. "Architecture is usually a static beauty, but that room is awash in movement," Solomon says. "Robert gave it an exquisite body, and Farley added a twinkling soul." w.g.

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 Designer Robert Couturier transformed a warren of closets into an intimate dining room. Mosaic artist Farley Tobin embellished it.

# Dine

Photograph by Annie Schlechter

Couturier's architecture for this room was inspired by Sir John Soane's breakfast parlor.

"I found the Cheuret bird sconces to finish up the look," Solomon says. The rest of the lighting design was done by Hervé Descottes, "so that the glitter of the room was fully realized."

Mary Krueger and Andrés Saavedra of Carmona Designs + Events have designed all of Solomon's parties—including the launch for his most recent book, *Far From the Tree*—where the flowers always play a central role.

Solomon gave the framed prints of the tile floors of Pompeii to husband John Habich Solomon as a wedding present.

The Regency penwork chairs were purchased at Guinevere in London. "For years, they were in our London house, where they never quite fit in," says Solomon. "When we did the fountain room, I knew they'd found their place."

