

FEBRUARY 2019 £4.99

THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

HANDMADE TALES

From a madly marbled
Swedish manor to Moroccan
rugs recycled from refuse



books

Pleats on repeat, the 100 club, godmother of the PRB



DIOR AND HIS DECORATORS: VICTOR GRANDPIERRE, GEORGES GEFFROY AND THE NEW LOOK (by Maureen Footer; Vendome, rrp £50) Doubtless Victor Grandpierre and Georges Geffroy will need little introduction to many readers of this magazine. But for anyone unfamiliar with their oeuvre I have one word: *portières*. Gosh, they loved them. After ploughing through this ambitious tome you could be forgiven for thinking the two *grands fromages* of postwar French interiors were competing to see who could use them most. There they are framing a fireplace in Gloria Guinness's Paris flat, courtesy of Geffroy, so that the chimney piece looks as though it's squashed in a fitting room. And what are those flanking a sarcophagus of a bath (silver-plated and topped with – *horreur!* – swan taps) that Grandpierre installed in Christian Dior's Passy town house? That's right! There must have been ten pairs, complete with key-tasselled tie-backs, just in the hall of the *hôtel particulier* Geffroy decorated for free-with-her-affections socialite Daisy Fellowes.

But of course there's more to both men – and indeed this book – than curtain rivalry, though it's true they weren't exactly buddies. Let's not forget that Grandpierre had, according to Footer, 'an affinity for tufted poufs', which made me chuckle, and probably did more than anyone for sales of tiger-print silk velvet, Geffroy aside. Despite their hostility, both had a hand in the succès fou that was Dior's New Look, Grandpierre in particular. As the *éminence grise* at the fashion house – with the emphasis on the *grise* – he took his friend Dior's pet palette (grey and white) and periods (the 18th century and Belle Epoque)



and parlayed them into a modern and fresh *maison d'haute couture*. Thus was born the much-copied 'Louis-Dior' look, a minimalist interpretation of historic style, though minimalist is obviously a relative term here: John Pawson would take one look at the *fauteuils* and *fontanges bows* and hyperventilate.

That Dior even needed a hand in matters aesthetic might be news to some, yet his early experiments in décor weren't always lauded: after one visit in the late 1930s, *Vogue* declared his first Paris flat 'provincial', on account of the damask wallpaper, stolid furniture and a profusion of palms on pedestals draped with velvet. Even as his taste in interiors became more refined, vestiges of caprice and kitsch, such as plastic dolls, often lingered.

Footer is at her best dissecting Dior's formative influences, beginning with his childhood in Granville, but a few chapters in, the poor man is prematurely dispatched (as in life, so here), only to be hastily resurrected for an appendix about his country houses, as if to justify the title. So ultimately this is very much VG and GG's book – and, dare I say, a slightly hard-going one at that, thanks to a surfeit of information. Whole paragraphs bow under the weight of over-exacting detail about their respective projects for society clients, from Alexis de Redé to Marcel and Hélène Rochas. I swear I'm not someone easily bored by talk of *gauffrage* and *guéridons*, but my interest did wane rather. However, it is certainly meticulously researched. And the photographs are a delight – especially if you like curtains ■ GARETH WYN DAVIES is a freelance writer ▷