

October 2006

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inspirations

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLLEEN DUFFLEY
AND WILLIAM HOPKINS

a tale of *new* textiles

The story behind Eric Cohler's first fabric collection

IF YOU ASK NEW YORK INTERIOR DESIGNER Eric Cohler about his new fabric and trim collection for Lee Jofa, he'll tell you it's been a lifetime in the making.

It actually began with a few old boxes stuffed with swatches, photographs, fashion ads, textiles, and watercolors—items that Eric has collected over the years and on his travels to Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. These boxes gradually accumulated, gathering dust and waiting patiently for the right time.

That perfect time is here. In his own words, Eric tells us about the inspirations and process behind his first collection.

APRIL 2003. A fabric collection evolves over time and is inspired by many, many things—a color from an antique textile,

Above: Eric Cohler peruses fabrics at Lee Jofa's studio in New York. **Left from top:** A collection board of Eric's fabrics. ■ Fabric samples. ■ Eric and Hyosoon Lee, Lee Jofa print stylist, discuss fabric color and design.





Opposite: Eric covered an ottoman in the Kips Bay 2006 Decorator Showhouse with his "Dinisen" fabric in plum/olive. **Clockwise from above:** Pillows covered in (from top): "Fishbone Raffia," "Amber Plaid," and "Cord O' Roi" with "Plain Jane." ■ Eric's Kips Bay Decorator Showhouse room. ■ An inspiration board illustrates color selections. ■ Eric in Lee Jofa's Manhattan studio. ■ Eric's fabrics (from left): "Matt Stripe," "Heavenly Hound," and "Yasmin." ■ Fabrics in the Lee Jofa studio. ■ Another inspirational color board.

variety). As a child, I was captivated by adventure and science fiction books—from Kipling to C.S. Lewis to Bradbury. My parents would find me curled up in my

father's Eames chair, book in hand, swiveling around as visions of far-off places flashed through my mind. These impressions of a larger world fueled my imagination then—and still today help give voice and texture to the collection.

Family, too, is an influencer. During the late 19th and most of the 20th centuries, my family owned Kuppenheimer Clothiers, a national brand based in Chicago. One might say that fabric is in my blood; I am fascinated by the weight and feel of wool, cashmere, silk, linen, and cotton. I like the density and honesty of natural fibers—the way fabric can be applied to both home and fashion. The place where fashion and interior design meet is the bedrock of the new line.

SPRING 2005. To my delight, I rediscover old advertisements for Kuppenheimers that appeared in *The Saturday*

a carving seen on a trip to Tunisia, the perfect herringbone suit. For me, the planets align when I have the good fortune to sit next to Cary Kravet, one of the owners of fabric house Lee Jofa, at an industry dinner. We chat about trends and what consumers look for in fabrics.

OCTOBER 2003. Six months later, Cary calls. Am I interested in developing a line for Lee Jofa? I am. No question.

It's a rare opportunity to explore a direction that reflects my sensibility and knowledge of fabrics, both from memories of the family clothing business and through my design work, where I spend my days with textiles of every imaginable description. My occupation gives me a unique vantage point.

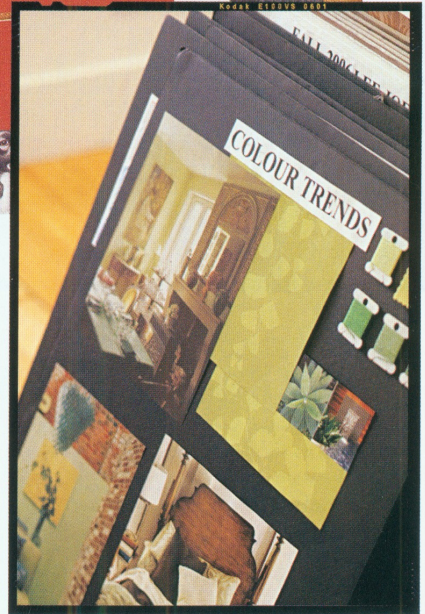
Ideas also come from travel. For me, traveling takes two forms: physical (with ticket in hand) or passive (the armchair



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“Unleashed” was the celebration of the American dog—especially those that my family has had as pets over the years. —ERIC COHLER



Evening Post in the '20s and '30s. The images in these ads, all created by Christian Lydecker, influence my choices of color and material.

Designing fabric is a collaborative process. It involves many people and multiple steps—from concept meetings with the design team to color trials that must be approved before the fabric can be printed or woven.

Collaborating with the über-talented team of textile designers in the Lee Jofa design studio here in Manhattan, we turn some of my favorite visual cues—the sketches and archival material that I pulled from those dust-collecting boxes—into fabrics. We spend countless hours culling through my treasures, choosing

those that can be translated into beautiful fabric designs—no easy task.

Stephen Elrod, Lee Jofa's creative director, encourages me to take risks. He and his alchemists allow me un tethered access to their documentary fabric files and help me combine my designs in unusual ways.

SUMMER 2005. I first spend the summer traveling—studying textiles, paintings, and color palettes—then gather with the team to review initial designs. We flout expectations that certain palettes must be used for certain fabrics. I specify lambswool flannel but ask that it be colored in a lush palette. There are corduroys in vibrant purple, ochre, and royal blue; crewels to be handwoven in Asia; chenilles in a textured jacquard weave; flocked taffeta dressmaker silks reminiscent of Art Deco ball gowns; and houndstooth checks in an exaggerated scale.

I learn a new vocabulary as well. Words such as trapunto (a quilting technique), ►

Left from top: Eric's poodle Sebastian. ■ Eric and Sebastian on the seashore. ■ His poodle Tyler. ■ Serena Savage, Lee Jofa colorist, puts the finishing touches on Eric's "Unleashed" design. Top: The final product—"Unleashed." Above: Color boards help guide the creative process.