

# Thoroughly Modern



# Milano

Designer **Alice Cottrell's** downtown townhouse is study in textures and beautiful modern Italian design.



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**THE WHITE ROOM:** Alice Cottrell's ground-floor den doubles as guest quarters. Even in a room that sees infrequent use, fabrics are luxe and sensuous. The sofa becomes a bed—with a *très chic* and almost indestructible white-vinyl upholstered headboard. Who wouldn't want to sink their feet into this Edward Fields rug? One guest compared Larsen's Vice Versa fabric, used here as draperies, to teddy bear fur.



Set against the backdrop of downtown Dallas, designer Alice Cottrell's three-story townhouse glows. Bathed in natural light during the day, her interior is clean and serene. At twilight, it's stunning. Glass, chrome, and Lucite twinkle. Wood gleams. And the fabrics glisten. The experience of being in Alice's home is akin to standing in the middle of a suite in a five-star hotel. You take a deep breath in and slowly let it out, expelling all of your stress along with it.

And that's just what Alice had in mind. A commercial designer by trade (she specializes in hotels), she travels almost constantly and spends her days surrounded by a cacophony of color and pattern. When it came time to design and decorate her own home, she imposed calm and order. In 1996, she bought the shell of a three-story townhouse from a developer and massaged the standard plans to create a unique interior suited to her own tastes. The architect ordered a stained concrete floor; she had it waxed. He specified slate tiles as flooring accents;

**SUSPENDED:** (Right) Alice customized the floating staircase by painting the metal white and waxing the beautiful wooden treads.



**UNDERSTATED:** (Above) Surrounding the stairwell with glass panels maintains an open feeling and allows the transfer of light from one side of the main living area to the other. Alice designed her kitchen as a workspace, not a show-place. White cabinets and stainless appliances were chosen for functionality, but the result is simple beauty. (Left) Alice loves the clean lines and classic styling of the B&B Italia credenza she found at Smink.

she chose understated limestone. The original plans called for exposed brick and black ironwork, but Alice painted the brick and metal white, causing the walls and architectural elements to recede and opening up the space. The result is a clean, almost slick interior where the eye is drawn to the 25-foot windows and amazing downtown views beyond. "For me, the most soothing way to live is with a neutral palette and white walls," she says.

A palette of warm neutrals and a collection of plush upholstered pieces save the interior from monastic severity. The tactile experience is as rich and sensual as the aesthetic is spare. "My first priority was the absolute comfort of every single piece of furniture," she says. The largest seating pieces are custom made, stuffed with down, and covered in commercial-grade fabrics; they're beautiful, inviting, and meant to last. "I want to buy furniture once and be done with it," Alice says. "Who wants to have to think about all this again in five years? So I ordered custom couches and covered them in commercial fabric that's meant to last seven years in a hotel setting, which means it'll last 30 years for me." Alice's commercial fabrics range from linen velvet to curly mohair and are chosen for their texture and come-hither touchability. Most guests are sur-



**MODERN MEETS CLASSIC:** A Brueton P Series dining table found in New York is surrounded by vintage Knoll Tulip chairs from Century Modern and set with crystal, silver, and Wedgwood china Alice inherited from her grandmother and great aunt. "I believe in timeless design," she says. "Period doesn't matter. If the pieces are classic, they'll all work together." Alice found the painting, Johnny Robertson's *Hollywood*, at Conduit Gallery.







prised to learn they're so drawn to contract fabrics, but, as Alice says, commercial fabrics are much more luxurious today than they've ever been.

Playing counterpoint to the softer-than-silk upholstered pieces, Alice's other furnishings are clean-lined examples of modern Italian and midcentury design—Minotti ottomans and B&B Italia tables in the living room and a Brueton P Series table and vintage Knoll Tulip swivel chairs in the dining room, to name a few. "I saved money by having the upholstered pieces custom made, so I could splurge on truly gorgeous accent pieces," Alice says. "The pieces I buy are either indestructible or investments; I fully expect to have them for the next 20 years, so I buy designs that will never look dated. I love the clean lines on the Italian pieces. And the designs are so honest and so classic that they'll always look great. They already look as good as the Brueton or the Knoll chairs, and I expect I'll have them just as long."

Viva, Italia! **D**



**SUITE DREAMS:** (Above) On the third floor, a small sitting area is perfectly positioned to take advantage of the downtown Dallas views. As Kelly demonstrates, the linen velvet-covered furniture encourages lounging. B&B Italia tables are nearly invisible in the space. The Flos lamp from Scott+Cooner is supported by a slick, marble base. The Rodger Stevens sculpture, *Vishnu Abstract #4*, is a recent find. (Left) The overhead lighting in the master bath is soft, even whimsical, a welcome counterpoint to the no-nonsense lines of the countertop and glass-walled shower.