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SUMMER IN THE MOUNTAINS

Relax, restore,
revitalize



a fresh breeze

by SALLY KILBRIDGE

Self-described “therapist for the home” Barclay Butera says it’s time to give mountain retreats a sunny rethink

A quartet of glass hurricane globes march along a mid-century credenza. An upholstered zebra-print coffee table fronts a leather sofa. A glossy white sunburst mirror punctuates a pinstriped wall. For Barclay Butera, good design is equal parts tailored and non-conformist, symmetrical yet surprising, and always employs a touch of history. Butera brings his approachably elegant aesthetic to seaside villas, sleek apartments, and mountain lodges, which have been featured in just about every design magazine

on the planet. With his own furniture collections, showrooms in Newport Beach, California, and Park City, Utah, and collaborations with partners including Kravat textiles and Lexington furniture, he’s a busy man. We caught him while buzzing between consultations, and asked about his approach to mountain style.

Stylish Serenity

Butera has been designing mountain interiors for over two decades, and most recently has been spearheading a broad move toward a lighter, less ornate

look. “Even in my own condo, I am taking all of the color out and making a much cleaner slate. I am not going to get rid of my stone fireplace’s huge wooden mantle, and I’m keeping the rustic millwork, but in the mountains, I want things to be cleaner, more transitional, less fussy.”

He says that part of that desire is a contrast to his life in California, a goal of many clients for whom the mountains are a second or third home. “They want a place that’s softer, not as harsh. I want to create a place of solace that allows them to slow down. We are seeing a

complete change in taste in the mountain states, much more transitional than on the coast.” But rather than rip out a home’s good bones, he relies on decorative changes. “I’m using white or grey-white paint, fresh textiles, carpet, and new tiles to create soft, contemporary spaces.”

De-Accessorize

This thirst for cleaner, less-accessorized design isn’t confined to ski towns. Butera says regardless of where they live, clients in general are happy with the prospect of lightening up. But because traditional



mountain design has so often leaned in an ornate log cabin direction — antlers, fur, heavy carving — these homes benefit dramatically from a more minimal outlook. “People don’t want to live in the mountains the way they did 15 years ago. Our tastes evolve.” So, it’s out with the antlers (unless they’re birchwood) and rustic accessories, and in with the transitional lines and rich textures.

Yours, Mine, Ours

Every client approaches a new project with at least a few heirlooms in tow. For some designers, it’s a headache. For Butera, it’s an opportunity to add depth. “I use a philosophy I call ‘yours, mine, and ours.’ I often have to work with heirlooms and specific pieces of furniture that a client has

a real emotional tie to.”

The result is a textured space that combines sophisticated style with personal touches that bring depth and resonance. And what happens when something strikes a very discordant note — for example, a client’s beloved set of dark Queen Anne chairs in a transitional living room? “I’d bleach them! It immediately changes the finish and makes them much more current. You retain the history but have a totally different look.”

Collaboration isn’t always a smooth process, most often when there are too many people involved in the process. “Too many opinions can actually bring a project to a standstill. I say that I’m a therapist for the home, often mediating between people who may have two different

aesthetics. We have a meeting of the minds and find a solution. It’s not always fun, but I’m there to even it out.”

The Geography of Color

If most designers start with color when rethinking interior spaces, Butera takes a site-specific approach to his choices. With homes in Newport and Palm Springs as well as Park City, he understands that different natural settings call for different interior color plans. His desert retreat, for example, “is very pastel with pinks and yellows and vivid green-blues. I added a lot of color, a lot of playful elements.” By contrast, “At the beach I’m using bright white wainscoting and wallpaper on the ceilings. In Park City, the palette is quieter and more

neutral, with textiles giving a totally different feel.”

Lighten Up

While mountain homes seem made for winter, with their large fireplaces and wealth of warm woods, introducing the spirit of summer doesn’t have to be a huge effort. For Butera, textiles are a surefire way to instantly transform a space. “I immediately think about replacing area rugs and throw pillows. You put in a lighter carpet, and all of a sudden it brightens the entire room. Textiles in a crisper color palette are immediate fresheners.” He’s also a big believer in silk plants, which inject a bright note regardless of the weather. “There is a silk plant for any environment. In the mountains, we do a lot of orchids and succulents,







Park City Pros — and One Con

Barclay Butera put down roots in Park City 23 years ago in a small Deer Valley condo. In 2002, when “nothing was selling in Old Town,” he bought his large showroom space on Heber Avenue. He says Park City’s appeal is simple. “In general, I love the accessibility, it’s so easy to get to. And the town still has a lot of charm, the restaurants are great, and there’s such a positive atmosphere. A lot of Southern Californians have second homes here, which means we’re always working.” The one downside? Working on mountain homes that were built to take advantage of stunning hilltop views, particularly those that incorporate wall after wall of floor-to-ceiling windows in a series of radii. “It’s impossible to drop a bed into a space like that. The architect is looking at the site. I’m looking at a furniture plan.”

which work beautifully in a transitional atmosphere.”

Be Inspired

Even the most talented designer looks for outside inspiration. Butera says he finds his in several sources.

First, cinema. “The beautiful scenery and staging from ‘Out of Africa.’ The kitschy and fun sets in ‘Auntie Mame.’ The beach house in ‘Something’s Gotta Give’ — those are three representations that I continually jump back to.” Second is his travels. “I was recently in Mexico City, and found it very inspiring — the artisans, the way they combine unexpected colors. And in Europe, designers use jewel tones that we don’t even approach. The way art, textiles, and colors are blended is way outside

the box.” Third is fashion. “Ralph Lauren is, of course, the epitome of Americana. He creates environments that are so different and are inspired by his surroundings. And Thom Browne, an avant garde designer whose clothes have very good detailing, has inspired how we use welts and flanges and trims.”

Spend Smart

It doesn’t matter how much money you allocate to design: There’s always a budget. That goes for full-on renovations as well as a simple facelift. Butera says that adhering to the estimate means clients need to be reasonable. He cites wallpaper, drapery, and area rugs as the unknown costs in any project, and says that if a client spends big on one of these, it will mean cutting

back on another. “I have a client building a \$22 million home, and the budget is going to take a huge hit because they’ve chosen gold-plated faucets embedded with semi-precious stones.” Spend money on what makes you happy, but know what you’re doing to the bottom line.

Signature Style

While Butera’s projects span a wide spectrum from traditional family homes to beach cottages to sparkly hotel penthouses, there’s always one surefire sign that he’s had his way with the project: a sense of balance. As the designer says, “I hate to put myself in a niche, but I’m very much a symmetry gentleman. If there’s one specific thing I like, it’s symmetry.” ☺

