

PENTHOUSE WARMING



The man with the plan: Decorator Carleton Varney takes his ease in the penthouse's drawing room.

SO THE FAMOUS **DOROTHY DRAPER** DECORATED THE STONELEIGH HOTEL'S PENTHOUSE IN 1938. WHO DO YOU CALL TO GIVE IT A 70TH-ANNIVERSARY FACELIFT? HER HEIR APPARENT, THE INIMITABLE (AND CERTAINLY COLORFUL) **CARLETON VARNEY**, OWNER AND PRESIDENT OF DOROTHY DRAPER & COMPANY. MR. V. GIVES OUR **ROB BRINKLEY** THE \$11,500 TOUR.

PHOTOGRAPHY JUSTIN CLEMONS

"AREN'T THESE *MUCH* BETTER OVER HERE?"

Carleton Varney is moving — lamps, vases, you name it. He'd lug the sofa across the room if he could. Carleton Varney, you see, likes things just so. Which is why he's here this bright June morning, in the sun-dappled penthouse of the Stoneleigh Hotel & Spa, moving lamps from here to there. As he crisscrosses the blinding-red, two-story music room, something stops him in his tracks. Pillows. The pillows on the blood-red sofa under the room's enormous stained-glass window. He stops to fluff those pillows. Just so.

What a history this place has. The hotel itself, of course, was opened in 1923, as The Stoneleigh Court Hotel, lauded then as "the finest structure of its kind, the most modernly operated, most beautifully and completely appointed hotel south of the Mason and Dixon line." Rooms brimmed with unheard-of mod cons: refrigerated air, Murphy beds, electric lights and chilled drinking water piped to every kitchenette. But it wasn't until 1934 when Colonel Harry Stewart, shall we say, ramped things up. The Ford tractor distributor bought the hotel — smack in the middle of the Great Depression — after falling in love with it during a stay. He set about improving the hotel and, by 1938, had converted most of its 11th floor into a 7,500-square-foot duplex penthouse for himself, complete with a 12th-floor terrace, secret passages (routes to late-night poker games, it is said), carved-oak walls from London, marble everywhere and cedar planks to line all the closets. Stewart hired the young Dorothy Draper — long before she became known as "America's most fabulous decorator" — to do the place up right, filling it with antiques, dramatic statuary, exuberant fabrics, even a curved stair hall and railing, modeled on the one she had designed in the late '20s for the River Club, the New York society rendezvous. That

stair hall? Today it has been slicked in pulsating Draper red, its stairs outfitted in black-and-white zebra-print carpeting.

Which brings us back to Carleton Varney. That was his doing, as was the same red for the music room, the black-and-white geometric rug under the room's wildly floral sofa, wildly striped chairs, the softly tropical blues and greens of the oval dining room and — you get the drift. Varney loves color and pattern. Draper loved color and pattern. Varney makes no bones about it, as he zigzags about in his white slacks, pink blazer and sky-blue kerchief: The whole penthouse, he says, is "my homage to Dorothy." And he's not finished. More to come, he says, in the way of exuberant accent pieces, a fabulous Aubusson rug for the gallery hall, pops of blue-and-white porcelain, even contemporary paintings to replace the more traditional portraiture that hangs about. Stick around, he says, because the penthouse — already back in swing as a setting for weddings, receptions, meetings and glittery affairs, complete with two luxurious bedroom suites, a clubby library and an adjoining bridal suite — will become "more intimate, more homey, like someone lives here." Judging from this first look, we'd say that a certain spirit — initials D.D. — already does.

A sunny corner of the Presidential Suite's bedroom. The wallpaper is a Draper design, from Varney's line, Carleton V Ltd.

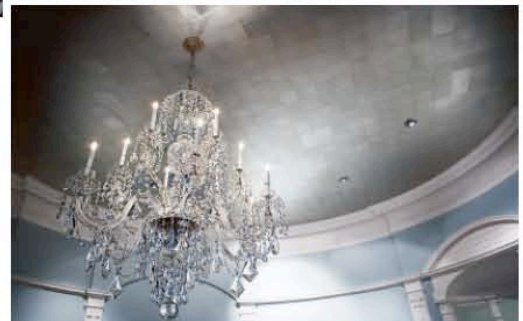


A red-hot rendition of the famous Draper Chair, designed by Draper in 1944 for the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. This moment greets guests stepping into the 11th-floor elevator lobby, which leads to the penthouse's massive front doors. The wide black-and-white stripes? Pure Draper.

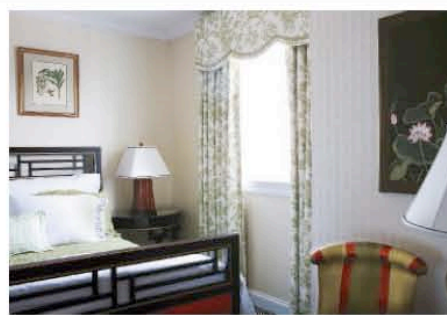
The dramatic red stair hall, the passage between the penthouse's first and second floors. Draper modeled it after the staircase she designed for New York's tony River Club in the late 1920s. The zebra-print carpet is Draper, too.



The bedroom of the Presidential Suite on the penthouse's main floor, available from \$3,500 nightly. (The Bridal Suite at the opposite end of the penthouse begins at \$1,500 nightly. The entire penthouse — all three bedrooms and all the living spaces — can be yours from \$11,500 nightly.) The bed is by Kindel Furniture Company in the 18th-century style. The carpeting is from Stark Carpet.



One sparkly dining-room centerpiece, in the Draper style, from Thomas Grant Chandeliers.



In the penthouse's upstairs bedroom — part of the 12th-floor, multi-room Penthouse Suite from \$3,500 nightly — a bed designed by Dorothy Draper as an update on Chinese Chippendale, one of her favorite styles. The side table is an adaptation of one from the Draper archives. The striped slipper chair at right is the Draper Chair of 1944.

The long, wide gallery, the main thoroughfare through the penthouse.



The music room, with one of Dorothy Draper's most well-known pieces, the Dorotheum Sofa, still made today (Kindel Furniture Company is the manufacturer) and first designed by Draper for her 1954 decoration of the cafe at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is covered in fabric called Baroque Bouquet from Varney's fabric line, Carleton Varney by the Yard. The striped chairs are new, designed in the manner of dear Dorothy. The geometric rug is also new, its pattern referencing the decorative plasterwork of the room's ceiling. Varney plans to replace the painting over the fireplace with something bold and modern.