

designer profile

favorite
thing

Hélène Aumont narrows it down to three

by Sara Jaqua

photos by Lawrence Anderson

AIn order to enter Hélène Aumont's house I need to get past two excitable Labradors eager to greet me. After a brief inspection they let me through and I stand in the foyer waiting for Aumont to discover that I've arrived. I've come to find out what three things Aumont has chosen as her favorite pieces, and why. I'm hoping it will give me an understanding of her design style.

I can tell already that Aumont is not your average designer. Although the house is an old farmhouse in Los Alamos, I feel as if I am in France. In the dining room I can see a beautiful antique Venetian chandelier hanging over a table with Louis 16th chairs. Behind the table a *directoire* screen represents the revolt of Napoleon.

Aumont arrives and gives me a brief tour. If it's possible for a house to feel both luxurious and relaxed at the same time, Aumont's house is a perfect example. Although it's filled with beautiful textiles and wonderful 17th and 18th century antiques, as well as French 1940's, nothing seems stuffy or unapproachable. As if to illustrate the casual elegance, one of her peacocks wanders by outside the kitchen window.

Aumont's experience as a designer started early. Her grandmother was a decorator, her grandfather was a painter and her mother was a textile restorer. Aumont designed her first house in Paris at the age of 19, but not wanting to take the path that was easily available to her, she waited 13 more years before officially becoming a designer of homes. She now has her own line of furniture as well.

Ironically, Aumont's daughter had asked her the day before my visit what she would take from the house in case of an earthquake. In her bedroom she shows me the three things she chose: One, a small Matisse *conté* crayon sketch of a face by the great art forger Elmyr de Hory. There's a personal history behind the drawing, which attracts Aumont to it as well. De Hory, a famous faker, was a family friend of her husband, Patrick. On the drawing he writes a personal note to Patrick, "Don't get bitten another time," in reference to a dog bite Patrick received as a young boy.

Aumont would also save (two and three) the pair of 18th century Italian candelabra standing almost 6 ft. tall on either side of the French doors. Rustic, unpretentious and carved entirely from wood with the gilt worn off the wooden tassels, she thinks the pieces probably came from a country chapel. "They are so whimsical. I love pieces which make me dream and smile," she says.

Aumont does indeed reveal her design style in her choices. She admits to being influenced by beautiful pieces, but doesn't like anything too perfect. "What you want to train your eye and the eyes of your client to see and appreciate is the beauty of imperfection. When you see an old house or a beautiful piece of art there is no symmetry. There is something which triggers your eye and that's what makes that piece interesting, something is off balance," she says.

"I think sometimes the placement in American homes is beautiful but static. Something alive is missing, so they'll put a dog in the picture, but it doesn't give you the effect like a house with an entire family having fun and living there."

Hélène Aumont can be reached for design consultation and full design at: 813 Anacapa, Studio 5, (805) 884-0440. Her furniture can be seen at Europa, 812 State Street, #37.



Opposite: Hélène Aumont in her studio;
The "Matisse" in question (above)