

# VIP (window) treatment for sale

BY JURA KONCIUS

**T**he wear and tear of two decades of visiting foreign dignitaries have taken their toll on the stately rooms at Blair House, the president's guesthouse across the street from the White House. This weekend, window treatments and other furnishings from several guest rooms will be auctioned by the Potomack Co. of Alexandria to benefit the Blair House Restoration Fund.

Provenance? You can't get much better. Since being acquired in 1942, the house (which now consists of four townhouses seamlessly joined into one) has been host to VIPs such as Gen. Charles de Gaulle and Queen Elizabeth II. The Obama family checked into Blair House in January 2009 just before his inauguration, as is customary for a president-elect.

In the 1980s, the height of the English country look revival, celebrity decorators Mario Buatta and Mark Hampton dressed up the 120 Blair House rooms as part of a major overhaul. They used antique furniture, historical portraits, porcelains and yards and yards of fabric, a lot of it chintz. Buatta says they always wanted Blair House to look like a house, not a hotel. But it hosts foreign leaders and their delegations as overnight guests who are in residence usually for three to four days. Buatta says many of the fabrics he and Hampton, who died in 1998, used have been discontinued and cannot be matched.

Last month, two of Buatta's bedrooms and one of Hampton's got new paint, wallpaper, upholstery and curtains created by New York designer Bunny Williams.

"Mario and Mark are at the heart of

Blair House; their presence will always be felt but over time the rooms need to be refreshed," says Andrea L. Metzger, executive director of the Blair House Restoration Fund, a charitable organization that pays for the decor, furnishings, gardens and fine arts of Blair House. (The federal government is responsible for the buildings and staffing.)

Metzger also noted other Blair House changes. One is a renovation of the bathroom in the Foreign Minister's Suite, with fixtures and tiles donated by Waterworks, countertops by Rugo Stone in Lorton and architectural design by architect Victoria Rixey of Georgetown. The design of the 2008-09 renovations of the two bathrooms of the Principal Suite was donated by Carolyn Thomas of Jennifer Gilmer Kitchen & Bath in Chevy Chase. Other bathroom donations: fixtures by Kohler, tiles by Betty Sullivan of Architectural Ceramics in Rockville, countertops by R. Bratti of Alexandria and cabinets by Wood-Mode.

Among the items up for auction are a Lee Jofa chintz bedroom group of curtains, bedspreads and bed skirts (pre-auction

## Home Front chat

Annie Selke, founder of the Dash & Albert and Pine Cone Hill companies and author of "Fresh American Spaces," will take your design questions with staff writers Jura Koncius and Terri Sapienza at 11 a.m. Thursday. Go to [washingtonpost.com/home](http://washingtonpost.com/home).



MARY E. NICHOLS

**Blair House's Queen's Bedroom as decorated by Mario Buatta in the 1980s. Some of the furnishings will be auctioned off. For more photos, go to [washingtonpost.com/home](http://washingtonpost.com/home).**

estimate, \$200 to \$400) by Hampton; the Queen's Bedroom collection of headboards, drapery panels, valance and two bed coronets (estimate \$400 to \$600) designed by Buatta in a Lee Jofa fabric; and Brunschwig & Fils glazed chintz curtains, bed hangings and other accessories (estimate \$400 to \$600) from another small Buatta bedroom. Also on the block are Brunschwig & Fils bathroom curtains and a Stark rug. Proceeds will be used by the Blair House Restoration Fund for the home's enhancement and preservation.

The auction house may be spearheading a comeback of formal 1980s window treatments. In June, it auctioned a cache of elaborately swagged and festooned draperies from Patricia Kluge's Charlottesville estate, Albemarle, created by designer David Easton. "They did very well," says Elizabeth Wainstein, the owner of the Potomack Co. "It shows there is still an interest in the 1980s look, especially coupled along with a historical or interesting provenance."

She reports a lot of buzz about the Blair House furnishings. "The Blair House curtains are in excellent condition and

have been extremely well cared for," Wainstein says. The top-selling Kluge curtains were two pairs of yellow silk drawing room draperies (one panel with a four-inch rip) that had been estimated at \$600 to \$800. They were sold for \$16,450 to a Palm Beach designer.

Buatta may be bidding on his own pink, blue and green floral chintz curtains from the Queen's Bedroom. Not for himself, but for a client because he can't find more fabric.

"Flowered fabrics are always in style, for home and for fashion," says Buatta. What else would you expect a guy known as the Prince of Chintz to say? "It's all over the runways this week. Anna Wintour was wearing a flowered dress at the collections. There will be more flowered chintz in living rooms soon. You'll see."

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Items can be previewed Thursday through Saturday at the Potomack Co., 526 N. Fayette St., Alexandria. The Blair House collection is scheduled to come up for auction at 10 a.m. Saturday. For information, go to [www.potomackcompany.com](http://www.potomackcompany.com) or call 703-684-4550.