



CLARENCE HOUSE

THE ART OF THE TEXTILE FABRIC FOR THE INSPIRED HOME

KAZUMI YOSHIDA



Photography by
FRANÇOIS HALARD

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

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with Sabine Rothman

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Dedicated to Robin Roberts
for his vision, creativity, and kindness

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Foreword

Kazumi's work strives for the universal.

His take on nature is vivid, focused, and inspired. Art that is captivating, poetic, and free.

His oeuvre is deeply rooted in the twentieth century: that of Matisse and Basquiat, via Picasso and Cocteau, which continues to thrill us, and will do for generations to come.

I was lucky enough to be introduced to Kazumi's work during my first foray into the workplace in the world of textiles at Ratti. Kazumi's designs for Clarence House were then the epitome of refinement and the benchmark for quality upholstery. I was well schooled—my eye for design was honed and it signaled the path I was to take.

Much like Morandi, Kazumi studies the very essence of things.

He re-creates the natural world with elegance, fantasy, and a certain levity, in the perpetual quest for the endless beauty of life. **PIERRE-ALEXIS DUMAS** CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER, HERMÈS INTERNATIONAL

Page 4: Japanese photographer Koji Yano interpreted the energy of Clarence House in an image that marries a scarf flung into the air with a vivid fluorescent background. Opposite: *Hommage à Cocteau*, a silk-and-linen brocatelle, is an adaptation of a French Renaissance fabric from the archives of Bucol, a mill owned by Hermès. Stylized sunbursts and flames inspired by the Jean Cocteau film *La Belle et la Bête* were substituted for the original fabric's lilies.



Foreword

I've been following Kazumi Yoshida's work with great interest and indeed passion since the early 1980s, when he first started working with Robin Roberts and became the creative director at Clarence House.

This partnership led to America's acquainting itself with new tastes and new aesthetic benchmarks through the spread of fine fabrics from Europe never seen until then. The result has seen Clarence House becoming the present-day symbol and style-setter for the world of interior design.

Kazumi has thus brought about an important creative revolution by introducing a new, quintessentially Japanese brand of aesthetics, along with a new way of conceiving beauty. Sophisticated, modern, visualized research that juxtaposes "emptiness" with the "fullness" of Western culture, the sense of incompleteness, and the asymmetrical; the result is the very height of evocativeness, whereby a decoration with a clear-cut sign represents insight into an aspect of reality, although it can never be completely grasped.

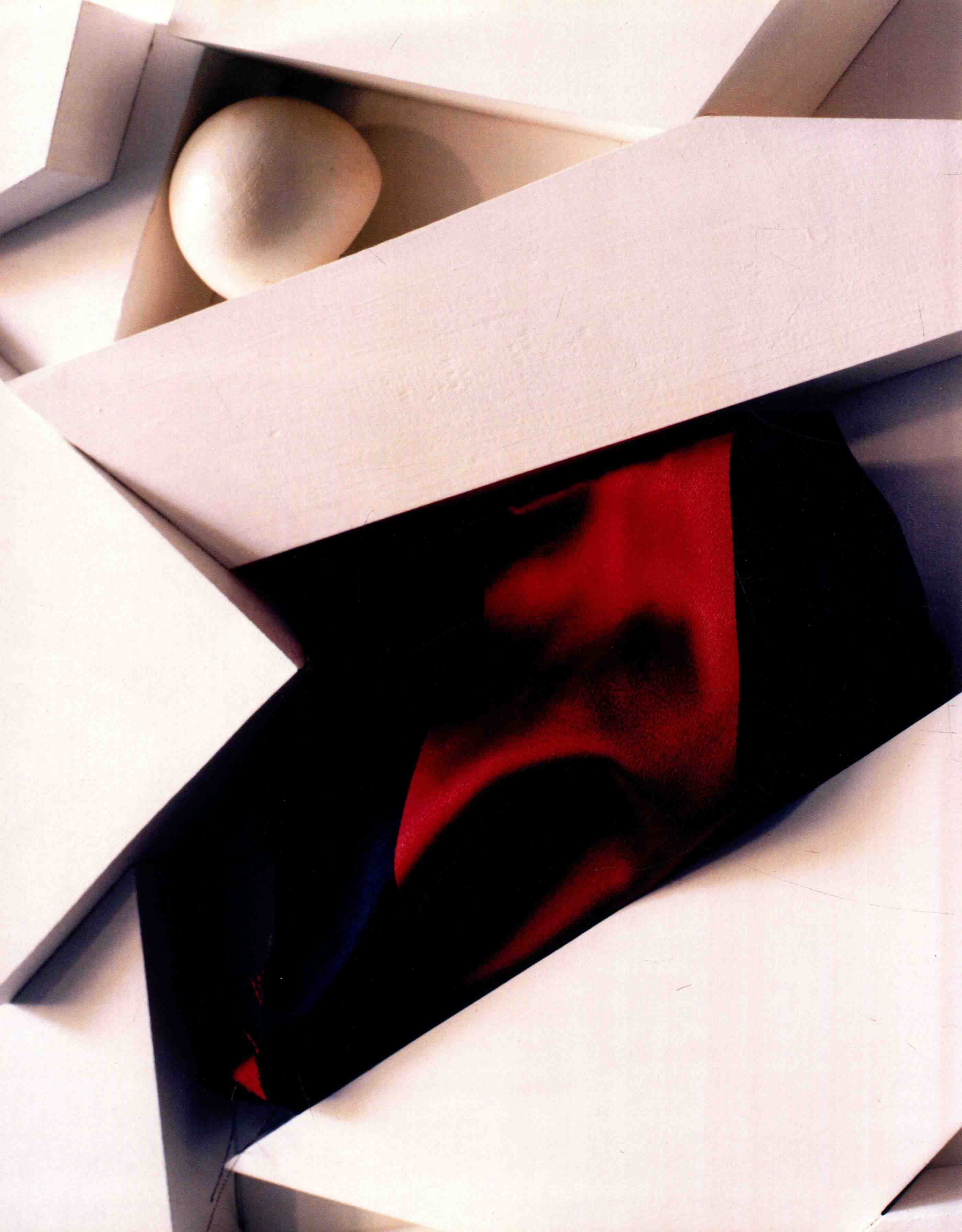
Kazumi has shown us the way toward essentiality, gradually reducing figuration to the bare bones. In doing so he has taken us in the direction of Japanese aestheticism of the "aware," the emotive quality innate in nature, in art, and in the emotional reaction of a person faced with aesthetic expression, the emotion of things and the beautiful fleetingness of the world.

He has found an innovative way to combine Japanese tradition with American culture to perfection. In doing so he has found new dynamics, resulting in a new and eclectic taste that introduces an exotic feel in the world of fabrics. Color becomes crucial in its Japanese connotation between ethnic and aesthetic, in the refined combinations of color and the pairing of hues that attain the highest form of expression.

The distinctiveness, the actual potential in the refined aesthetic sensitivity of Kazumi Yoshida, resides in something very subtle indeed.

JACOPO ETRO CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF TEXTILES, ACCESSORIES, AND HOME DEPARTMENT, ETRO

Opposite: *Flowering Quince*, one of Clarence House's most beloved designs, embodies a fascination with nature and the marriage of East and West, which are evident in some of Kazumi Yoshida's most compelling work. Using techniques from Japanese brush painting, the pattern combines speed, lightness, and fluidity—the hallmarks of Kazumi's gestural signature—with a staccato rhythm and pretty, abstract blossoms. Everything contributes to a remarkable sense of balance.



Introduction

Clarence House was founded by Robin Roberts fifty years ago, a time when the design community was under the dominant influence of English designers as well as English furniture and fabric design. There was little influence—and almost no products—coming from the Continent. It was this void that Robin sought to fill during his many trips to Paris and in his subsequent decision to start Clarence House.

The founding ideology of Clarence House, which always guided Robin in his selection of products for the company, was that all good design must adhere to a strict coda of design rules. These principles pertained to all aspects of design: fabrics, furniture, and even the design process itself. These principles were not so much universal aesthetic tenets that we might ascribe to discussions of art or music. Rather, they were historical and archival principles, embedded in the evolution of design and with which Robin was intimately familiar—principles that he subscribed to as the formula for the growth of Clarence House.

In addition to archival products, Robin was able to attract the best collections available in Europe, firms that wanted to have their products displayed in the showrooms of Clarence House, which was fast becoming the destination of choice for smart and sophisticated designers throughout America. Manuel Canovas, Etro, Osborne & Little, Colefax and Fowler, all called Clarence House home and all benefited from the growth of the company and the brilliant showmanship of Robin Roberts. While each of these lines took certain liberties in their design direction, they were still essentially a reverberation of the baroque, archival style of Robin Roberts, albeit perhaps in a stylized version of his point of view.

In the late seventies, Clarence House held sway over the design community, and Robin Roberts had established himself as a larger-than-life figure in the interior-design world. One thing was missing, however, and Kazumi

Opposite: A detail of the sculpture above the fireplace in Kazumi Yoshida's New York apartment with a swatch of *Rayure Satin Monceau*, a striped satin fabric, tucked into it.



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CLARENCE

Introduction

Yoshida fulfilled that need. The missing piece for Clarence House was an in-house signature, a design statement that truly set the company apart from the staid, traditional, documentary world that we accepted as the paradigm for the world of high-end design.

The arrival of Kazumi brought a new energy and new influences—an inherent aesthetic that began Clarence House's move away from the archival influences and into the stylized worlds of art and fashion. Kazumi was being educated by Robin in the historical waves of design founded mostly on the Continent, and he was interpreting these movements through his unique eye (and hand), filtering them through his knowledge of the great artists and fashion designers that he so admired.

The team of Robin and Kazumi established a new benchmark for creativity in both prints and wovens, yet Clarence House was still “Robin’s” Clarence House and the product, while stylized and artistic to a point, was still what I would refer to as “period faithful.” Kazumi, out of respect and admiration for Robin and perhaps because he relied so much on him for direction and vision, restrained his artistic exuberance. While there was frivolity and glamour, there was still not the completely free artistic expression that was to come later—and which is evident in this book.

After 9/11 there were major events that altered the direction of Clarence House. Business suffered dramatically as did Robin's health. Robin asked Peter Kaufmann, an old friend and colleague, to come in and rescue the company, which Peter was happy to do. Clarence House is today the crown jewel in the corporate stable of P/Kaufmann Inc.

The most difficult element in the transition was that Kazumi, the resident artist, had lost his muse. There was no longer anyone to define the parameters and limits to which Kazumi's creative efforts must adhere. The company could no longer survive as “Robin’s” Clarence House, because Robin was no longer around. The only hope for the firm was that it could be transformed into “Kazumi’s” Clarence House—free from archival restraint, youthful, energetic, and artistic in the fullest and freest sense. The new Clarence House is not a stylized version of a historical document but new artwork itself. As you can see in this book, Clarence House has evolved. From Robin, to Robin and Kazumi, to Kazumi, the product has developed but the bar has never been lowered. The history of Clarence House is a history of glamour, luxury, and art served to the world by two extraordinarily talented people. **ROBERT APPELBAUM** PRESIDENT, CLARENCE HOUSE

Opposite: A study of the silk cut velvet pattern *Labyrinth*. A sterling example of timeless elegance, it would look completely at home in a modern interior but nods to ancient motifs. Gathered at top left, a swatch of *Zèbre Velours Soie* (Zebra Silk Velvet), a fabric that renders the sure appeal of animal patterns in the most luxurious material.