

# STYLE & ENTERTAINING

The New York Times Magazine

Part 2 Fall 2000

You're  
Invited



And the guests include  
Uma Thurman

Fashion Food Interiors



# Footnotes Resource references and the back story behind the story.

why people are interested in style are still mesmerized. It's all about individuality, which today is in short supply."

All you have to do is look at any photograph of any room she ever lived in to understand why the Pauline fan club is alive and well, more than 30 years after her heyday. Sterling-silver faucet handles in the shape of life-size lemons. Floors warmed by furry white goatskins, rush matting or frankly faux marble. Ruffled pillow shams dripping with two-inch-wide ribbons of blue satin. Tables of tortoise-shell plastic alongside gilded Empire chairs. An iron bed cast to resemble birch branches. For someone whose taste was a legend when many of her admirers today were still in diapers — myself included — de Rothschild's unconventional mode of living remains the penultimate statement of life as a carefully considered work of art.

Even a dish as simple as a salad composed of rice and raisins was subjected to almost scientific scrutiny, repeated every night for a month until her cook produced a silken masterpiece. (Or maybe it was a salad of carrots and raisins; her friends' memories differ.) And like so many of those great hostesses of the past whose dinners were legendarily delicious, de Rothschild was a stranger in the kitchen, but she knew how to get the best performance out of her staff. And how to protect her investment. When the Duchess of Windsor begged for de Rothschild's secret recipe for *chaud-froid du poulet* (chicken served cold encased in chilled aspic or with cream sauce), the baroness replied that the superlative dish would be impossible to duplicate without Mouton's chef and another master — herself.

Of course, today, this kind of attention to detail — O.K., O.K., obsession — is almost laughable. After all, de Rothschild had nothing but time on her hands and plenty of money for exploring her fantasies (and, oh, yes, no distracting children underfoot). But follow her lead, at least once. Set the table with cattails and an Indian-print cotton bedspread. Tie your hair into a long pigtail over one shoulder. Stock up on old earthenware plates, papal-quality silver and Uncle Ben's rice (that was the secret, apparently). Mies van der Rohe said, "God is in the details," but it was Pauline de Rothschild who served up a little slice of heaven on earth. ■

1. Though her mother claimed that her daughter looked best in candid poses, Pauline de Rothschild eagerly sat for artists of every persuasion, from the sculptor Laurence Tompkins (his bust of her was exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1941) to the photographers

George Platt Lynes and Cecil Beaton, John Huston painted a portrait of her, too, but she hated the result and pasted newspaper over the face. This sketch of Ileana Douglas by the Swiss artist Michael Nicklaus recalls one of the baroness by Barnaby Conrad III.

2. John Sahag had Douglas's hair colored dark auburn and dressed it in rolled curls in homage to de Rothschild's 1940's look. "It's retro," he said, "but with a touch of oddness." To approximate de Rothschild's pearly pallor, Linda Mason used a mix of mustard, peach-yellow and white foundations from her own cosmetics line, Elements. De Rothschild's droopy eyes — more sultry than sad — were achieved with false lashes in the corners. Douglas was intrigued by the transformation but anxious to scrub it all off: "It's not easy being a baroness," she said. The Art of Beauty by Linda Mason is at 26 Grand Street.

3. Reclining was de Rothschild's favored posture. When not greeting guests from bed, she perched her lanky 5-foot-9 frame on Billy Baldwin's ground-hugging slipper chair. Reportedly developed with her shapely extremities in mind — Philippe de Rothschild once called his wife "a glorious piece of woman, long-legged, deep-breasted" — the Baldwin chair is still made by Billy Baldwin Studio (732-872-7300).

4. Back in the 50's, de Rothschild purchased a set of antique Chinese wallpaper from a cash-strapped young widow. She papered her Paris bedroom with it — her husband lived across town throughout their nearly 22-year marriage — and its verdant exoticism dominated an iconic photo of the baroness by Horst. You can get a similar effect with a hand-painted silk wall covering by de Gournay

1,2.



in London, called Earham. Prices start at \$500 a roll; 011-44-207-823-7316.

5. Her lifestyle may have seemed baroque, but de Rothschild's personal tastes were quite simple. On her floors, for example, she liked the peppery scent of wax mixed



with a bit of turpentine. On her person, she often wore a man's cologne — West Indian Extract of Limes — sent to her each year by the Joseph Alsops. In return, they got a dozen bottles of vintage Mouton Rothschild. The cologne by Geo F. Trumper is \$66 at Barneys New York. 6. Southern-bred women always have a dependable chicken recipe up their sleeve. As a teenager in Baltimore, de Rothschild feasted on the crispy finger-

licking variety, courtesy of an elderly great-aunt's cook. As the wife of a great Bordeaux vintner, however, de Rothschild devised chicken recipes that, like her wardrobe, were made-to-order confections. Alas, de Rothschild's recipe for her famous *chaud-froid du poulet* has vanished, but the fried chicken she ate as a child probably tastes a lot like Hank Tomaszewski's version, below.

## SPICY FRIED CHICKEN BALTIMORE STYLE

- 2 chickens, each cut in 8 pieces
- 1 quart buttermilk
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons cumin
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 tablespoons ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon cayenne pepper
- 2 cups flour
- 1 quart vegetable oil.

1. Cover the chicken with the buttermilk. Refrigerate for at least 8 hours and drain. In a separate bowl, mix together the garlic powder, cumin, salt, black pepper and cayenne and sprinkle evenly over the chicken.
  2. Place the flour in a plastic bag and add the chicken pieces, a few at a time, shaking to coat. Place floured pieces on a dry sheet pan and let them stand for 30 minutes.
  3. Heat the oil in a cast iron skillet over high heat until it is nearly smoking. Cook the pieces until golden brown on each side, about 12 minutes per side. Drain on paper towels. Finish off in a 350-degree oven for about 15 minutes or until cooked through.
- Yield: 4 servings.

—Mitchell Owens



Jacket, \$2,100, and skirt,  
\$1,500, Oscar de la Renta.  
At Bergdorf Goodman. Saks  
Fifth Avenue. Pearls,  
\$75,000 each. At Fred  
Leighton, 773 Madison  
Avenue.

Opposite, far left: Dress,  
\$929. At Alberta Ferretti,  
Santa Monica, Calif. Jewelry,  
Fred Leighton. Shoes,  
Chanel. Paneling and  
painting from Newel Art  
Galleries. Chair and mirror,  
Dalva Brothers. Carpet,  
Stark Carpet. Vanity mirror,  
Kentshire Galleries, New  
York. All china, Bardith.  
Candlesticks, Tudor Rose  
Antiques. Glasses, Tiffany &  
Company. Linen, Porthault.  
Vase, Sinotique.

Opposite, top right:  
Pajamas, \$250. At Sherle  
Wagner.

Opposite, bottom right:  
Stamp,  
[www.rubberstampman.com](http://www.rubberstampman.com).