

## THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT!

*Watch out, Nate Berkus. With one drop-dead luxe living space under his belt, Colin Cowie might be moving in on Oprah decorator-darling status*

BY SAXON HENRY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBIN HILL

A person couldn't pull off celestial celebrations for the likes of Oprah Winfrey, Elton John and John Travolta without having an exacting definition of style. "Style is about being conscious—of yourself, of your surroundings, and especially of the people in your life," says Colin Cowie, who counts Winfrey's Legends Ball, an Academy Awards party for Elton John and Travolta's surprise 50th-birthday celebration among the many occasions he's transformed from events to extravaganzas.

In his new book, *Colin Cowie Chic: The Guide to Life As It Should Be*, the Zambia-born lifestyle expert expounds upon this philosophy—explaining that the secret to success, whether you're planning for an ordinary day or a prodigious party, is an abundance of style mixed with clever organizational techniques and ruthless editing. And while some things are easier said than done, Cowie's sophisticated South Beach sanctuary, a condominium at the Icon South Beach that he took from bare bones to voluptuous, is an illustration of these principles.

In creating his local pied-à-terre, the starting point for the detail-driven party planner-cum-interior designer was a restrained color palette that moves from parchment and rich butter to truffle and saffron depending upon the light. Then, the trick was to keep architectural details to a minimum: Cowie did away with door handles and doorjambes, used only recessed lighting, insisted on blind-cut doors that disappear into the walls when closed, and put museum grates over air conditioning ducts.

"It's relatively small—only 1,500 square feet inside and 800 square feet outside—so I wanted a complete environment that tells one story, rather than a string of themed rooms," Cowie explains.

Within the inviting backdrop, Cowie placed a tasteful mix of furnishings that include black lacquered pieces, 1940s French classics, bronze elements and a three-tiered nickel-and-Bakelite cigarette table that was once owned by Andy Warhol. While most people would have been tempted to place furniture against the walls, he opted for an arrangement that encourages conversation.

"I placed the round carpet in the center of the living room and arranged the curved sofas at its edge," he says. "Then I scattered coffee tables, which are organic, amoeba-like shapes, with ottomans in the center. [The result is] that the room is extremely conducive to entertaining, whether I'm having one person or dozens of people in."

The E word is one of the most important in Cowie's vocabulary.



**CONTOUR CULTURE:** Semicircular 1940s French sofas frame the living area and harness guests into a single space, while a series of bronze coffee tables designed by Cowie make entertainment a breeze. Den Wilhelm Moser's *Atomium 5* sculpture serves as an inevitable conversation piece. The bronze and Gallic period motifs are continued in the dining room, with a 1940s French chandelier and a bronze table base by Gene Summers. The dining room chairs are by Charles Evans.





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Whenever he's in town—his main residence is in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood—Cowie is likely hosting cocktails, a dinner party or nightcaps. During Art Basel, he threw a soirée for 30 that featured such bold-faced names as Miami interior design star Charles Allen, New York fashion designer Catherine Malandrino and mega-socialite Denise Rich. "I designed this apartment for fabulous casual entertaining at a moment's notice," he says.

The harmonious relationship between the indoor and outdoor spaces is one of Cowie's favorite aspects of the condominium; even if





he's planned to pour Mojitos on the terrace, he can quickly change his mind and serve Asian curries indoors if the weather turns disagreeable. "I cook ethnic and spicier foods when I'm in Miami," Cowie adds. "I think it's because of the sexiness of being surrounded by the Latino community—both geographically and personally."

Being in Miami is also about de-stressing. "I designed this to be an escape where I could float along and recharge my battery," he says. "Miami is about having fun and relaxing." Because he paid close attention to all things sensual, unwinding is effortless. "I turned the shower into a steam shower, and replaced a Jacuzzi with an overflow tub," he explains. "I also added multiple lighting levels so that I can achieve a variety of moods quite easily."

Not that Cowie needs a remote control to create a mood. When he gathers friends around him, morning coffee on the terrace may segue to afternoon tanning; then, as the sun eases toward the horizon, Cowie takes his cues from the sky's softening glow. "In the evening, I'll push the chaise longues together, cover them with a slipcover, put a big tray and a candle on top, and I have instant atmosphere," he says.

Cowie admits that his flair for entertaining comes naturally. "But along the way, I've refined those talents by what I'm exposed to on a day-to-day basis," he adds. The influences on his interior design skills were clearly equally effective. "I took this South Beach apartment from a stand-in to a star," Cowie remarks. "It's very cool by day, but extremely glamorous by night." **M**



**POINT OF VIEW** *Opposite page:* Cowie's terrace overlooking Biscayne Bay is one of his favorite entertaining spaces. *Above:* A 1940s Ritter Antik black lacquered saloon chair in the bedroom faces a three-tiered nickel-and-Bakelite cigarette table that once belonged to Andy Warhol. Mexican artist Ricardo Villasana's oil painting, *Art Oasis*, hangs above the sofa. *Left:* Cowie loves candles! "There's no such thing as too many," he says, adding that they're essential elements when entertaining. "I love mixing votives and tapers together. They cast a glamorous glow on your guests."