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# MANN REPORT

RESIDENTIAL



| KEEPING THE WORLD SPOTLESS ONE STAIN AT A TIME |

## **The Madame Paulette Organization**

JOHN MAHDESSIAN

# Restoring Fashions, Fabric, And Furnishings

## The Madame Paulette Organization

The location was an elegant 14-room apartment in the legendary residence building, 740 Park Avenue. In the library, the walls were covered by 25 imported hand-dyed silk panels that had hung there for a quarter-century—mauve colored, hand-dyed, so old now and so uniformly oxidized that the individual panels could no longer be matched. Any new ones would have simply looked out of place, and the whole room would have lost its understated style.

However, through water leaks from outer walls, two of the panels had become damaged. Fortunately, the set of silks was heavily insured—but it looked like the insurer would be paying a steep toll for what could be seen as destruction of the complete set.

The insurance company promptly placed one phone call—to The Madame Paulette Organization. Considered the world's leading custom couture cleaning specialist, Madame Paulette, under the direction of the firm's president, John Mahdessian, has expanded its services to include the cleaning, restoration and preservation not only of fine couture apparel, bridal gowns and vintage creations, but also of interior furnishings.

Madame Paulette's interiors experts visited 740 Park, conducted tests of the fabrics, and then painstakingly restored the two damaged panels to their earlier age-appropriate look, to match their "sisters"—at a substantial savings in cost to the insurer.

"The words 'no' or 'can't' are not options at Madame Paulette," says John Mahdessian. "We have gone above and beyond old methods and techniques to create our own, which have established us as experts in our industry. Today, with technology that we have pioneered ourselves, we are able to restore and save what industry norms would have considered unsalvageable. In the company's earliest days, our focus was fashion. Today we have gone further: we have taken our expertise into the home."

The company's Director of Interiors, James Riley, cites an example. "We are doing a job right now for a wealthy family with a Manhattan townhouse. They have a set of 48 dining chairs made with a fabric that was loomed in Lyons, France. While there are reproductions of the fabric in America, nothing could substitute for the real thing for these clients. It wasn't that the chairs were soiled; our client simply had grandchildren running around the house, and the chairs had fingerprints all over them and food particles embedded in the seats. Our client herself brought one of the chairs to our plant; we did some test studies, and later went back to her home and cleaned them all. The chairs also had a gold leafing effect on the wood; we

bought special 18-karat gold-leafing tints, and brought the chairs back to new. Whatever a job takes, especially going beyond the usual, is what we do. Fabrics, rugs, wood: our scope is wide. There's almost nothing we can't bring back to life."

The real estate industry constitutes a frequent group of clients. "Many brokers call on us whenever they are about to show an apartment," says Mr. Riley. "We come in with our cleaning crews and we detail everything, from shining the brass, checking staircases and balconies, detail-cleaning the kitchens, all of it. If there are broken mirrors or tile work that need to be fixed, we can tackle those too. We try to bring as wide a repertoire as we can, either with our own crews or with specialists that we work closely with on special projects such as these. If real estate agents have houses or apartments they want to show, and they want it in sparkling condition and not showing a speck of dust, that's when to call Madame Paulette to come in and detail it."

"We did a major duplex on Park Avenue, where one family had lived for many years and now wished to sell it," adds David Moir, the Interior Group's Sales Manager. "The apartment had simply aged. We were called in to restore it, from top to bottom. Our work took one week, cleaning the furniture and draperies, restoring the flooring, even cleaning some bedding they wanted to include in the showing. When we were done, the family was able to put it on the market for \$35 million.

"We've also done a lot of work at 15 Central Park West," he adds. "Even though the building is comparatively new, there has been a lot of post-construction work in it. No matter how hard the crews try, they always leave behind some post-construction residue."

Even airplanes and yachts come within Madame Paulette's expertise. "We've detailed Donald Trump's private 747 jet plane, augmenting the work of his regular cleaning crew," says Mr. Riley. "We tackled every corner, every crack, every patch in the seats, sometimes using toothbrushes or smaller brushes! When the regular crew finds stains they can't remove, they call on us. We come in and finish the job, and make everything look brand new."

Perhaps the greatest success story of The Madame Paulette Organization is that of the company itself and its founding family, the Mahdessians. The company was started in the 1950s by John Mahdessian's great-uncle, whose wife was French; they emigrated to the United States from Cyprus, and founded a dry-cleaning business on the Upper East Side, lending her name to it. The



John Mahdessian

founder's nephew, Noubar Mahdessian, later joined the firm, working there by day and attending New York University at night. After some years, his wife, Ann, left her work as a school teacher to join him running the business.

Their son, John, was headed originally for a different career. Graduating from Villanova University, where he maintained the Dean's List, he was about to take a high-paying job in investment banking. However, before beginning it, and with his father ill, he went to help out for a month at Madame Paulette. He decided to stay, and, contributing his own business skills, paved the way for his father to retire.

Since then, John Mahdessian has continued to create and master new techniques and processes for cleaning, restoring and preserving apparel and textiles. His work has attracted fashion houses such as Vera Wang, Christian Dior and Chanel; major retailers such as Barney's, Bergdorf Goodman and Saks Fifth Avenue; and impressive commissions such as restoring the gowns of Princess Diana.

Today the organization has expanded its client base to include

fabric houses, interior designers, insurance companies, the real estate industry and fine homes. In fact, the firm will now be conducting new programs aimed at major real estate managing agents and owners, to offer ideas, guidance and value-added services for their clients.

"People's personal property is probably their largest investment," says John Mahdessian, "and maintaining a beautiful home and its furnishings on a regular basis is the right way to go. But, of course, time passes, and accidents happen. When they do, and when your home needs expert help, you want a specialist. That's when you call The Madame Paulette Organization." ■

*By Peter Haas*

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