



The Power of Collecting

Almost everyone collects something; and, as you'll see on the following pages, our motivations are as varied as the objects of our affection. Toy houses satiate the design dreams of a would-be architect; the antique irons and lusterware that populate one weekend getaway serve as an escape from minimalism; and, in the case of our namesake herself, a rose-filled garden accents the ultimate retreat. What these collections share is their owners' willingness to strut their passions, to celebrate and live with what they love.

Some of Bill and Ruth Ehrlich's collection of Clément Massier ceramics. See "Second Nature," page 86.



Art Nouveau vases by Clément Massier, a late 19th-century French ceramist, sit on hanging, reinforced beams in the living room. "The iridescent glaze of these pieces gives them a fiery life of their own," Bil says. "We love how the rich yet subtle colors change with varying shades of light." Humphrey, the family's mini wirehaired Dachshund, stands proudly in front.



The urban landscape of our young century throngs with people who live for minimalism, for pristine spaces and angular white walls that play the perfect host to cutting-edge furniture and today's giant photographs and paintings. But when it comes to the weekend, many of those modernists slink off to country houses with gables, where they lounge on squashy vintage-style sofas in front of nice old fireplaces—traitors to the modern cause.

You'd never think Bil Ehrlich to be such a man. He doesn't only live in a modern Manhattan townhouse; he designed the place himself in the late 1960s, before turning from architecture to real estate. And yes, its soaring, sharp white walls feature major modern art; most of the tables and chairs hail from the Italian company Zanotta. Certainly, Ehrlich's retreat would be some Marcel Breuer-designed box. Yet the upstate New York vacation home he shares with his wife, Ruth, and their son, Ace, is as rural and as a 19th-century as one could imagine. The fact that it has no air conditioning is only the beginning.

The Ehrlichs, you see, didn't just fall in love with one old house. They amassed five forgotten farm structures—a large and small barn, cabin, granary, and silo—with the help of a man who specializes in finding old agrarian buildings. Then Bil designed a home encompassing all of them. This part came from Tennessee, that part from Indiana, and so on.

"What we wanted was a building that felt like it had always been here," Bil explains. The one-time cabin is now a grand, two-level master-bedroom suite. The large barn, on one end, is a high-ceilinged living room with a massive stone fireplace that opens onto a lovely porch; on the other, it's a downstairs kitchen and two upstairs bedrooms. The structures are joined with an indoor bridge: a new catwalk that connects the second levels of the cabin and the barn. ■



TOP LEFT: Bil, Ruth, and their son, Ace, 13, stand on the side porch with Lola, a long-haired Chihuahua. TOP RIGHT: A wooden sculpture by artist Nancy Dwyer urges guests to spend time in the living room. The room's Prairie-style windows are originally from a home in Cincinnati. BOTTOM: This underground culvert tunnel, with a poured-concrete floor, connects the main house and the garage.

“All the art we selected is based on the theme of artificial nature. We love the simplicity that nature implies, but so much of what we respond to has been manipulated by man.” —BIL EHRLICH

