



**Color her bold:** Dominique Lévy has no fear of decorating in bright hues, such as those in Verner Panton's Fireball lamp type E, 1970. Behind it are prints, drawings and embroidery by various artists. Opposite: Lévy in her Tribeca loft with Marc Newson's Fauteuil/ Orgone, 1993.



Gallerists of all stripes agree that design is the perfect pairing for modern and contemporary art. By Julie Brener and Sarah Douglas

# DEALERS' CHOICE

Ten years ago, the New York contemporary-art dealer Sean Kelly wandered into an unassuming antique-furniture shop in upstate New York and saw a circular brushed stainless-steel PK54 table by the Danish designer Poul Kjaerholm. The 1963 piece is expandable and has a slightly rough, flint-rolled marble top. "Everything about it is extraordinary: its design, technology, the way the surface was used, the interplay of materials," Kelly says now. Unable to get it out of his mind, he returned a few days later and bought it. "I became fascinated by it as an object," he says, "and realized it is an artwork."

With that purchase, Kelly was hooked. He now owns some 100 Kjaerholm creations, which he displays in his SoHo loft and will soon install in the country house he is building just outside the town of Chatham. There he will place one of the designer's "suspended" sofas—a modular piece bracketed to the wall—next to Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void*, 1960, a doctored photograph of what appears to be the artist gracefully plummeting from the window of a Paris apartment.

Kelly is among a growing coterie of modern- and contemporary-art dealers who are bringing design into their homes and, more recently, their personal styles into their galleries. Not only does their appreciation of one-of-a-kind furniture dovetail with their love of fine art, but high design also plays up the paintings and sculptures with which it is displayed. Plus, having a smart collection gives the impression of being in the know, thus burnishing dealers' images and helping them woo clients. In the clubby and cozy art trade, sales are increasingly taking place in dealers' homes, or at least starting there, and fashionable furnishings can inspire prospective purchasers. An added benefit: If a client wants a similar table or chair to go with the painting or sculpture he or she just bought, the dealer may be in a position to source it.

The Central Park West apartment of Michael Rosenfeld and Halley Harrisburg, the husband-and-wife team behind Rosenfeld's eponymous New York gallery, which specializes in 20th-century American art, is a showplace of sorts. "What a lot of people find fascinating when they come to our home is that we live with a lot of sensibilities. It's fun to make people realize, 'Oh, no, you can hang four things in that little space,'" Harrisburg says. "We enjoy helping clients do that." The couple has been able to bring disparate elements together by toning down colors and keying up textures, such as the warm, gnarly wood of George Nakashima, the smooth grains of Gilbert Rohde and the leather of Kjaerholm. The result is a decor that has panache but is also neutral, so that it doesn't distract from the art: gray, multidimensional wall pieces by Lee Bontecou ("Much of the design of this house was about living with her work," says Harrisburg), a horse sculpture by Deborah Butterfield, a pastoral family portrait by Fairfield Porter, as well as paintings by artists the gallery represents exclusively, such as Alfonso Ossorio and Betye Saar.

Has the design craze among dealers contributed to the perception of design as art, or is it a by-product of it? The answer probably is a little of both. Some trendsetting dealers have been acquiring this material for decades, while others are just cutting their teeth. Matthias Arndt, founder of the Berlin and Zurich gallery Arndt & Partner, and his wife, Tiffany Wood, the creative director of Phillips, de Pury & Company, began buying design pieces just two years ago for their apartment in the German capital. Arndt's reason for branching into the category is a practical one. "I'm not supposed to collect my artists, because it keeps the work away from my clients," says the dealer, who represents a host of German talents in addition to the American Sue de Beer, the French Sophie Calle and the Japanese Hiroshi Sugimoto. "I thought this could be a field where I could try to build a collection that I can live with." He and his wife favor objects from the 1960s-'80s by the likes of Joe Colombo, Javier Mariscal and Gaetano Pesce, as well as even newer pieces by such young German designers as Vogt & Weizenegger: A prototype of the duo's plastic Sinterchair No. 0, sits in the couple's living room on a pedestal, as if it were a sculpture, underneath German painter Thomas Scheibitz's small 1999 oil of a cropped tree trunk, *Plexat*.

Many dealers, like a great many collectors, have chosen to focus on



In the clubby and cozy art trade, sales are increasingly taking place in dealers' homes.



Scenes from Lévy's loft, clockwise from top: Franz Ackermann's *Untitled (Mental Map: Evasion I)*, 1996, frames Oscar Niemeyer's *Fauteuil et pout*, 1972; Ron Arad's *Rolling Volume* armchair, 1996, complements David Hammons's sculpture *Untitled (Rock Head)*, 2001-2; and a Jeff Zimmerman custom chandelier, 2002. Opposite: Newson's *Pod of Drawers*, 1987, glimpsed behind an aubergine floor lamp by the Bouroullec brothers and bright orange armchairs by Jean Royère.







Opposite: Matthias Arndt and Tiffany Wood in their Berlin apartment, featuring a plush Jeffrey Bennett Tulip chair in the living room and a dining table and chairs by Eero Saarinen. This page, clockwise from top: An Anton Henning painting above a 1952 Bertioia bench; Joe Colombo's 1960s Tubo chair; and a hallway with Eames plastic side chairs and works by Todd Eberle and William Cordova.



modern French design. The Swedish-born, New York-based dealer Stellan Holm favors Jean Prouvé, whose furniture he began buying 10 years ago. "His pieces are uncomfortable and totally impractical, but I like them," says Holm, who was a secondary-market dealer until a few years ago, when he opened his Chelsea gallery, presenting a varied program that ranges from young artists to the estate of William Burroughs. "They have an edgy, almost industrial look. They don't look like anything that came before them. Whereas a lot of modern designers look like they got a lot of their ideas from Prouvé."

The Swiss-born dealer Dominique Lévy, who runs New York's L&M Arts with the former Wall Street titan Robert Mnuchin, started her design collection 15 years ago. In the beginning she, like Holm, favored mid-20th-century French furniture by Prouvé, Charlotte Perriand and Jean Royère, but she has since diversified. Guided mostly by Didier Krzentowski, of Galerie Kreo, in Paris, Lévy moved on to newer designers, like Ron Arad, Marc Newson, Ettore Sottsass and Martin Szekely. In the Tribeca loft that she shares with her partner, the film producer Dorothy Berwin, and their two sons, she has pieces by all these designers mixed with flea-market finds—not to mention blue-chip contemporary art by the likes of Franz Ackermann, Julie Mehretu and Cindy Sherman. Unlike Harrisburg and other collectors who decorate in subdued tones so as not to detract from their artworks, Lévy embraces bold colors, combining a shocking-pink coffee table by Mattia Bonetti, a bright orange chandelier by Verner Panton and a grass-green TV vase by Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec. "I feel that things of quality complement each other," she explains.

Some dealers, such as the Swedish-born Per Skarstedt, bucked the French trend early on. When Skarstedt, whose Manhattan gallery specializes in historical exhibitions of contemporary American and European artists, began his design collection 10 years ago, he acquired objects by such Danish talents as Kjaerholm, Finn Juhl and Hans Wegner. These now fill the Upper East Side duplex where he lives with his wife, Helena, and their two children. The simple blond-wood, brushed-steel, stone and leather furniture works well with their in-your-face art by George Condo, Willem de Kooning and Richard Prince, the last of whom Skarstedt says he recently turned on to Danish design.

Perry Rubenstein, too, has swerved away from the French, in his case concentrating instead on the wood furniture of Mira Nakashima, the daughter of George. The first items a visitor sees upon entering the spacious Chelsea loft that he shares with his wife, the art world publicist Sarah Fitzmaurice, and their two daughters are a barled redwood coffee table by Nakashima and, above it, a canary-yellow 2004 vinyl wall work, *Grove of Trees in El Tigre Viewed on the Way to El Tropezón*, by the Argentinean-born artist Santiago Cucullu, whom Rubenstein represents. "Every edge is free," says the dealer, marveling at Nakashima's handiwork. "It's the most extreme version of a table that would fit my contemporary aesthetic, my minimal aesthetic, and also retain the spirit of the 1970s."

Although Rubenstein has presented a show of Nakashima, and Kelly has shown Kjaerholm's work in his gallery, art dealers generally agree that design is more of a personal interest than a commercial one. "Collecting great furniture is fun and rewarding, and it's relaxing, frankly, because it's not my job," says Holm. "I can look at something without the intention of selling it." As for Skarstedt, any sale he has made of a design object so far has been accidental. Such was the case with the round stone-top Kjaerholm table in his booth at last year's Art Basel Miami Beach. "The first day a collector came in and asked if he could buy it," the dealer recalls. "I said, 'Yeah, why not?'" The question was rhetorical, but it does, in fact, have an answer: