

AT HOME

A Private Collection by Design

By ISABEL FORGANG

With a treasure trove of 20th-century art and design masterworks right at hand, you might expect the owners of the highly regarded Magen H Gallery in Greenwich Village, Hugues and April Magen, to be regularly borrowing pieces from the gallery to decorate their apartment on lower Fifth Avenue. Not so.

Although the work of some of the artist-designers represented at the gallery can also be found in their home, including sculpture by Pierre Székely and Philippe Hiquily and furnishings by Jean Prouve, the couple does not send pieces back and forth. No displaying one object until another they like better comes along to take its place. Instead the furnishings and art in the Magens' home are all "special" pieces to be kept where they are.

"Our home is not a gallery. This is our private collection," Mrs. Magen said emphatically of the eclectic mix that pairs 20th-century French furniture and art objects with African sculpture and contemporary American paintings and furnishings.

"We love great design," the Paris-born Mr. Magen said of the diversity of pieces in the apartment, "and great design comes from many sources."

The couple's keen eye and uncanny ability to keep a step ahead of the art world — they were promoting the work of artists from the Art et Industrie movement of the 1970s long before anyone else — has landed them among the noteworthy "New Tastemakers" featured in this month's issue of House & Garden.

In the bedroom, an enormous aluminum louvered window screen made in 1954 by Jean Prouve hangs over a long, narrow oak dining table designed in 1947 by Charlotte Perriand.

During a recent visit to their home, Mr. Magen explained how he found the louver, with its green painted wood frame, in France. "It was originally made for the Air France building in Brazzaville in the Congo," he said. "It's a work of



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HUGUES AND APRIL MAGEN

art even though it was used as a functional object. It transcends functionality — and it still works."

Of a dining table supported on wide oval legs, he noted, "it's so nothing but it's everything. It's made of several pieces of wood but it hasn't warped in 60 years." The secret, he said, were several metal rods concealed inside the tabletop. One of two large sculptures from the early 1950s displayed on the table is a favorite ceramic by Székely. "The biomorphic shape is perfect in terms of texture. You need to see it from all sides," Mr. Magen said. Tucked under the table was an African stool from the mid-1930s.

Mrs. Magen has arranged African sculpture in the living room and dining room, as well. "I'm not a 'thing' person," she said. "I have an appreciation for the [art] objects but I collect books and transient things. I like to warm things up and the African pieces lend a spiritual feel."

Her own favorite piece is not on display. There just isn't room in the apartment for a 6-foot-by-4-foot black-and-white photograph by Howard Meister. It remains carefully rolled up and out of sight. The image gives the viewer plenty to think about. "It has a mind of its own," Mrs. Magen said, noting that at times the falling figure looks like a dancer and, at others, an angel.

It's not surprising that she might see the suspended figure as

a dancer. Both husband and wife were dancers before they became collectors and gallery owners. Mr. Magen was dancing in France 20 years ago, when Alvin Ailey discovered him and brought him to America. He joined the Ailey Company, and then went on to become a principal dancer with the Dance Theater of Harlem. Mrs. Magen, a Baltimore native, was working as a modern dancer with Donald Byrd/The Group, when the pair met 14 years ago.

About 10 years ago, Mr. Magen

turned to collecting from dancing after friends who owned a gallery in France enlisted him to track down some Charles Eames furniture. He found a pair of LCW chairs by the designer, and dismantled and packed them in a suitcase for the trip abroad. "That's the genius of Eames," he said, recalling the ease with which he could take apart and reassemble the chairs.

The pieces sold within half an hour. Encouraged, Mr. Magen took on more scouting for friends. On his next trip to France, he brought 40 disassembled Eames chairs with him in suitcases. He continued to comb auction houses for finds in America, and helped to produce the first shows of works by Isamu Noguchi and Eames in France.

Mr. Magen gradually expanded his knowledge of the field, and began buying 20th-century furniture in France and bringing it back stateside. He sold at first to New York gallery owners but eventually decided to take the plunge, opening Gallery H downtown on East 11th Street in June 2004.

Today he couldn't be happier with his collections for the gallery or his home, Mr. Magen told The New York Sun. "It's great to have beautiful objects around you," he said. "You have to have great food and great wine to cultivate the palate. So, too, with beautiful objects. They clean your eye." The Magens are seeing very clearly indeed.

SHOP BOX

The heat isn't the only indication that summer is on its way: End of season sample sales are in abundance. A blowout sale at **Searle** should help ease the transition between seasons. Clothes are reduced between 40% and 75%, and all shoes, regular priced or reduced, are 30% off. *Today, through Monday, June 25, Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m., Saturday, 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Sunday, noon-7 p.m., Searle, 635 Madison Ave. at 60th Street, 212-750-5153, and other locations.*

At **Alice + Olivia**, all spring merchandise is reduced up to 70%. Pants, summer dresses, and shorts are priced between \$88 and \$440. *June 19 and 20, Tuesday and Wednesday, 10 a.m.-7*

p.m., Alice + Olivia, 80 W. 40th St., between Fifth and Sixth avenues, 212-840-0887.

Shoshanna swimwear and dresses are must-haves for the summer and major discounts on beach wear and other items are on offer during next week's sample sale. A triangle-top chocolate swimsuit with cherries and ruffles and a string bottom is reduced to \$60 from \$127, and a geometric check sweetheart babydoll dress is reduced to \$175 from \$385. *June 19 and 20, Tuesday and Wednesday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Shoshanna showroom, suite 422, 231 W. 39th St., between Eighth and Ninth avenues, 212-719-3601.*

Laura Sinberg