



# MODERN Marvels



Gallery living for a contemporary art collector in Manhattan

"ART IS AN EXPRESSION OF YOUR OWN FEELINGS AND desires at a point in time," says Carol Schuster. "You find you go through stages where something speaks to you, then you move on to something else that offers you new information."

BY JORGE S. ARANGO + PHOTOS BY HARRY ZERNEKE

Previous pages. Right: New York advertising executive Carol Schuster lounges on a Mies daybed before a Sol LeWitt installation in her Tribeca loft. Her gown is from Hermès; the throw is from Interieurs. She recruited architect Paul Baird to help her convert the space into a gallery for her contemporary art collection. Left: The winter garden holds a Jenny Holzer bench, a Liam Gillick panel sculpture and a work in paper by Charles Long.

Right: The high ceilings and long walls of the open living area serve as a fitting backdrop for pieces by, from left, Ricci Albenda, Rachel Selekman and Dan Walsh (above the sofa). Complementing the Eames chair, ottoman and stool is a marble-and-steel table designed by Baird, who also built the half-floor mezzanine for Schuster's bedroom, bath and closet.





**S**O IT WAS THAT FIVE YEARS AGO, when this smart, attractive, no-nonsense executive at Ogilvy & Mather bought a raw, 3,000-square-foot loft in Manhattan's Tribeca neighborhood, the art she collected was completely different from the minimalist contemporary vein she has mined since then. Today the place is filled with works by Sol LeWitt, Jenny Holzer, Liam Gillick, Louise Lawler, Joel Shapiro and others. But when Schuster began collecting in the early 1990s, while living in Warsaw during a stint with another ad agency, her focus was another thing entirely. She had lived in Austria, Germany and China by then and acquired a certain measure of worldliness, but her tastes still ran toward smaller, more conventional two-dimensional art. She put this collection in storage while her friend architect Paul Baird worked on making the new space habitable.

"I wanted the place to be a living, working art gallery," explains Schuster. Almost immediately upon embarking on the design process, however, something in Schuster shifted. It was partly the process itself, which opened up new ways of seeing things. But another pivotal moment occurred at the Whitney's Sol LeWitt retrospective, which she visited during the winter of 2000-2001. "I just lit up," she remembers. "It changed my life. I was literally gasping for breath, I was so excited. It was that peace, that calm, that spirituality in his art."

Schuster's epiphany forever changed the way she viewed her previous acquisitions. "I started to realize the things I was getting ready to take out of storage weren't going to work," she says. "So when the movers arrived with all my things, I asked them to leave my clothes and my couch and take the rest back to storage—the very same day! I lived that way for about eight months and started over."

Indeed, the space itself cried out for larger-scale pieces. The building had been a fabric warehouse in the early 1900s, then a public building run by the city. When Schuster and Baird came across it, a developer had recently added several stories and was starting to outfit the new lofts. The first floor had been the delivery bay for the warehouse, so it boasted 17-foot ceilings. The additional floors were supported on large pilasters that ran along the north and south walls of the space, making them, says Baird, "almost crenellated." To create the white-box gallery atmosphere Schuster desired, these would have to be plastered over, resulting in a loss of several inches of depth on either side. "The project became about reclaiming what we had lost," says Baird.

To keep things open and airy, he continues, "we wanted to limit the amount of interventions we made in the space in terms of carving it up into rooms." Baird created a half-floor mezzanine above the entranceway to house Schuster's bedroom, bath and a large office-closet. The footprint of the latter became the delineation of the kitchen and a large pantry and closet below, its southern and eastern boundaries creating the smoke baffle required by standard building codes.

That configuration would make for a perfect single woman's apartment, but, says Schuster, "while I was adamant about keeping the openness of the loft and didn't want to create yet another room, I needed a place for guests." Baird's ingenious solution was to design two 700-pound East Indian rosewood doors, concealing Schuster's audio equipment and TV behind one (accessible through a cut-out sliding panel) and, behind the other, a Murphy bed. When the doors are opened on their center-pivot hinges, they form two sides of a square "guest room." The fourth wall, running parallel to the kitchen, is a scrimlike shade that rolls down from the ceiling at the touch of a button.

Once a delivery bay for a fabric warehouse, the loft is situated on the first floor and faces east. Schuster brought in video artist Christine Scull to implement a computerized lighting system to brighten the space and create different moods. A Poul Henningsen Artichoke lamp hovers over the main room, which includes a large, wood sculpture by German artist Thomas Scheibitz, at right. The sofa is from Minotti.

Below and right: Beneath the bedroom mezzanine is an entertainment area that, with the help of a pivoting wall, a Murphy bed and a retractable scrim, doubles as a fully enclosed guest room. The carpet is by Vivienne Westwood for the Rug Company. At right is the kitchen, which contains a Sub-Zero refrigerator and a range from Miele.



At the eastern end of the loft, opposite the front door, is a floor-to-ceiling glass wall that leads to a winter garden. The developer had intended this to be a masonry wall punched through with doors and windows overlooking an outdoor terrace. But the view was to a family court building, with its uninspired bureaucratic architecture, and the itinerant Schuster would not be able to care for a conventional garden. So she and Baird worked with the developer to enclose the terrace with glass for a Zen garden of teak decking surrounded by river rocks. More scrim shades roll down from the ceiling to cover the glass wall, a device that enables Schuster to project video art and other images onto it. "One New Year's Eve, we projected the scene live from Times Square," she says.

Obviously, a first-floor loft with east-facing windows looking at a tall building translates into a paucity of light, so Baird and Schuster hired video artist Christine Sciuilli to design an infinitely variable computerized system of

Schuster's bedroom contains Selekman's cement purses, on the floor at left, a hanging piece by Banks Violette, a small sculpture by Takashi Murakami, which is beneath a work from Tom Wesselman's *Blue Nude* series, and a photograph by Warren Neidich, over the bed.

lighting that enables Schuster to create hundreds of different moods ("It's taken me five years to figure it out," she laughs). Baird added illumination in the form of backlit, acid-etched glass—in the stairwell, behind honed, black-granite countertops and enclosing the office-closet—creating boxes of light that glow intriguingly in corners that would have been otherwise dark.

This backdrop serves Schuster's busy lifestyle and operates as a versatile gallery in which to exhibit the fruits of her ever-evolving collecting passions. The main area is dominated by a large LeWitt wall structure, an enormous painting by Dan Walsh, a sensuous sculptural relief by Ricci Albenda and a fiber sculpture by Rachel Selekman. Sharing the floor with a Mies van der Rohe daybed, a Minotti sofa and a massive cocktail table of marble and cold-rolled steel designed by Baird is a painted-wood sculpture by German artist Thomas Scheibitz.

In the winter garden, a Liam Gillick panel sculpture is suspended between a towering Charles Long piece of painted, crumpled paper and a Jenny Holzer granite bench. Viewed through the glass wall, says Schuster, "the art looks like it's swimming" in an aquarium. Upstairs are works by Tom Wesselman, Takashi Murakami, Banks Violette, Jean Shin and Till Freiwald, among others. Monitors around the house—in bathrooms, too—play loops of video art by Raymond Pettibon, Ellen Harvey and Meredith Monk. Even Schuster's furnishings seem curated, like a Vivienne Westwood rug that, she says, "looks like the Union Jack soaked in blood."

But Schuster is making no promises as to the future aesthetic of her space. "Every time you bring in something new," she says, "it changes everything, the whole dynamic. Who knows what next year will bring?"

Paul Baird, Baird Associates, 415.420.9890

Christine Seull, 212.625.1770, www.soundandvision.cc

