

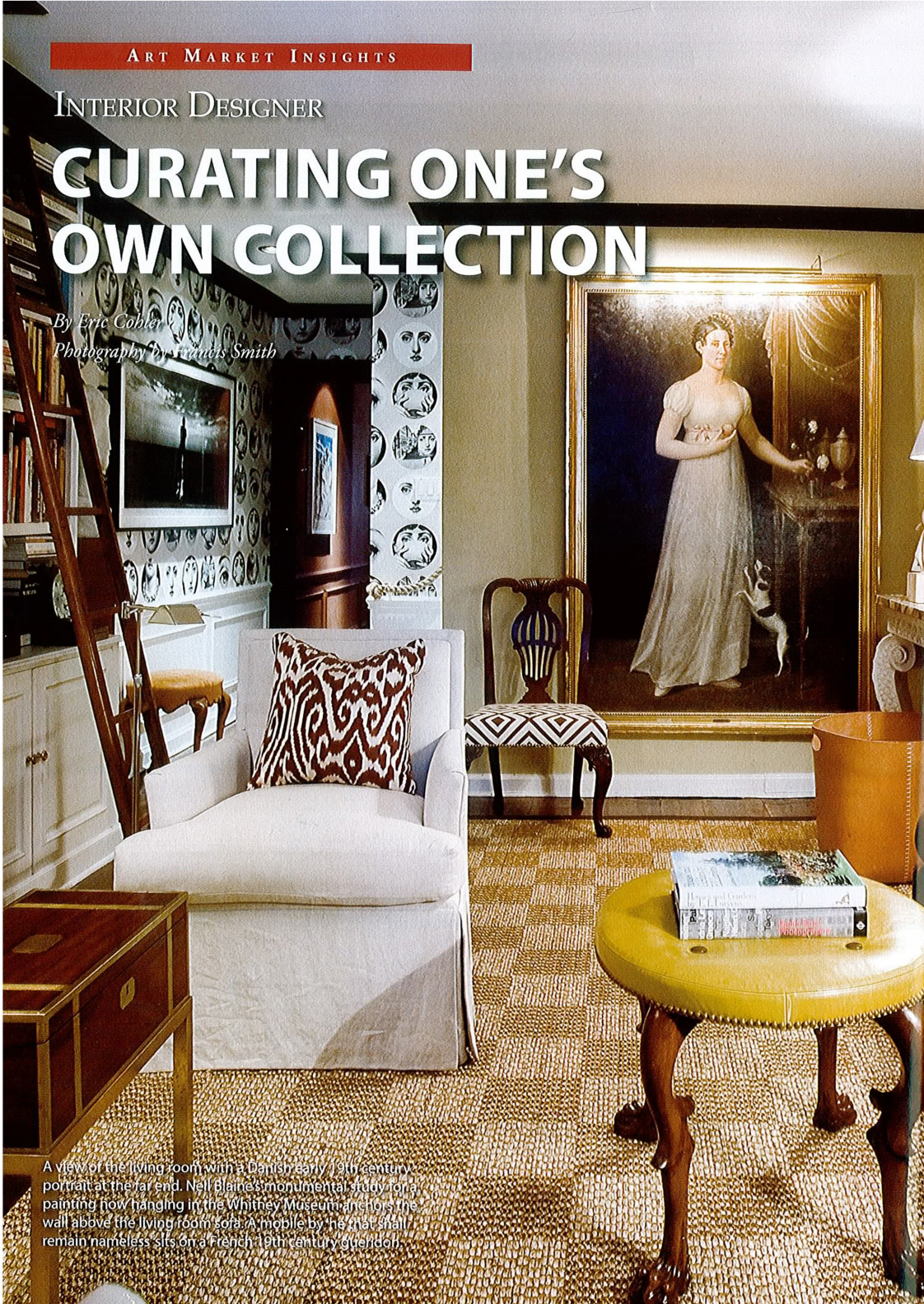
ART MARKET INSIGHTS

INTERIOR DESIGNER

# CURATING ONE'S OWN COLLECTION

*By Eric Cobler*

*Photography by Francis Smith*



A view of the living room with a Danish early 19th-century portrait at the far end. Nell Blaine's monumental study for a painting now hanging in the Whitney Museum anchors the wall above the living room sofa. A mobile by her that shall remain nameless sits on a French 19th-century gueridon.





The dining room features a Russell Young of Frank Sinatra over the fireplace, a David Slivka and Alex Katz hang above a Swedish 19th century console and Dale Chihuly basket. The English equestrian portrait is mid-18th century and attributed to Killenbeck.

I realized recently that I've lived in 16 apartments since college and rather than be horrified, I'm delighted; delighted that I've had a chance to hone my skills practicing on myself rather than a client. Each apartment is part design laboratory, part culmination of my oeuvre up to a certain point in my career. With the completion of each apartment I become a better designer, empowered with the knowledge that only comes from trial and error.

The fact that I have just myself to please is only part of the equation, for with every move I have the opportunity to rehang my collection of paintings, sculpture, photography and drawings. This allows me to see the art with fresh eyes and forces me into a decision on what stays and what should be deaccessioned. My new mantra is that if it doesn't fit on my walls, it goes. I've filled room after room in warehouses

with the leftovers of past apartments and although it's like seeing an old friend when I do get out to the storage facility, these trips are becoming increasingly rare; for I simply don't have the time.

There are many hundreds of pieces of art in storage, and as much as I do claim this as the mark of the true collector, there also comes a time when a collector has to let go and refine his or her collection; to distill it to that which is truly important or beautiful. For me, this has meant selecting my favorite pieces and auctioning off the rest. My latest apartment is a small triplex on Manhattan's Upper East Side. It's a relatively modest 850 square feet divided over two floors in a narrow townhouse. Due to space constraints, I decided to hang a representative cross-section of my collection.

Selecting a few works from each area wasn't difficult once I had made up my mind to trim down the collection. The

hard part was figuring out how I would get the art through the doors and into the apartment. The building is only 11 feet wide and the front door less than 30 inches, making for a tight squeeze and forcing me to choose art that would fit—or be hoisted in through the dining room window. So the curator in me took charge making the trek to the warehouse in a far borough of the city and spending countless hours sifting through pictures and sculpture.

Decisions made, I had the works delivered and, by happy accident, almost all of the art fit; almost all because two large pieces made it through the door, but not up the slim spine of a staircase connecting the three levels. I was delighted with the results. The pieces had never looked better as there was more breathing room between each one. In past apartments I had hung my art 'vision obscura' with paintings



An early Regency console houses a collection of prints, photographs and drawings. A Picasso etching leans against the wall while a John Piper gouache sits below.



A corner of the bedroom showing a rare Old Master Italian drawing and an antique Chinoiserie chest. The lampshade is painted whimsically in the style of Matisse.

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The master bedroom is hung with a series of smaller works including these by Warhol, Priscilla Clough, Hockney, Joe Brainard, and Sally Michael. A large Regency steeplechase hangs above the desk.

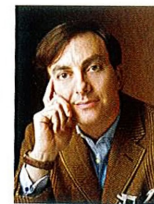
and photographs cheek and jowl, floor to ceiling. Even though my other apartments were considerably larger, the result always felt a tad too forced to me. I was learning again and expanding my curatorial abilities in the process.

The art was hung differently than at any time previously. Photographs line the stair hall; American impressionism the entry; small works are relegated to the bedroom along with a rare Regency steeplechase; Warhols fill the bedroom corridor and the living room is a study in realism.

As for the core collection, that was sold this fall and winter... with the exception of several pieces that at the end of the day I just couldn't part with. This gives me an excuse to move again when my lease is up as I'll need to rotate those works, or at least to switch a few out with those in my existing apartment. One thing is for sure, a collector is never quite finished with a collection. To be brutally frank, even now there's a pile of catalogues from galleries and auctions on my desk. True, they remain unopened but curiosity may get the better of me and then the cycle could repeat itself, or could it? I wonder... ●



*Eric Cobler, president of Eric Cobler Inc., holds a master's degree in Historic Preservation from the Columbia School of Architecture. He won a Designer of the Year Award in 1998, and in 2000 the D&D Building in New York recognized him as one of the 26 leading designers in the U.S. Eric has appeared on CBS Morning and Evening News and CNN Style and he is a featured designer on the Home & Garden TV Network.*



The bedroom corridor has a number of Warhols, including *Sunflowers*. The painting is by Dan Christensen.