

SIMPLY THE BEST

In his Tribeca loft, design dealer *Hugues Magen* surrounds himself with awe-inspiring objects

TEXT BY HANNAH MARTIN PHOTOGRAPHY BY KELLY MARSHALL STYLED BY DORCIA KELLEY

ART © 2022 MIKE KELLEY FOUNDATION OF THE ARTS / LICENSED BY VAGA AT ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (AR.S), N.Y.
OSSIP ZADKINE © 2022 ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (AR.S), NEW YORK / ADAPP, PARIS.

THE TRIBECA HOME OF DESIGN DEALER HUGUES MAGEN, DECORATED BY GABRIELLA ASFAR, FEATURES A SOFA BY PIERRE SZÉKELY, AN ARMCHAIR BY JEAN PROUVÉ, AND A DINING TABLE AND SIDEBORD BY CHARLOTTE PERRIAND. THE COCKTAIL TABLE BY ROBERTO LARDERA HOLDS A PUNU OKUYI MASK FROM GABON, AND THE DRAWING IS BY MIKE KELLEY.



LEFT MAGEN ON A 1956 SOFA BY PIERRE SZÉKELY. BEHIND HIM, A JENNY HOLZER PAINTING HANGS ABOVE A CHARLOTTE PERRIAND SIDEBOARD. ABOVE IN THE BEDROOM, A LA BORNE VESSEL BY

PIERRE DIGAN SITS ON A PIERRE CHAPO STOOL. ON THE SHELF ARE A CERAMIC BIRD BY JACQUES POUCHAIN, A SCULPTURE BY FORREST MYERS, AND A LEGA MASK FROM THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO.

JEAN PROUVÉ STANDARD CHAIRS SURROUND A PIERRE CHAPO TABLE IN THE BREAKFAST ROOM. THE CERAMIC MADOURA BOWL IS BY SUZANNE RAMIE, AND THE MASK IS FROM VALLAURIS, A HUB OF CERAMIC PRODUCTION IN FRANCE. RIGHT A JEAN PROUVÉ DAYBED AND SIDE TABLE; CERAMICS BY ROGER HERMAN AND ROBERT PICHAULT. THE DRAWING IS BY ROBERT LONGO, AND THE PAINTING IS BY STEFAN BRÜGGEMANN.

ART: © 2022 JENNY HOLZER, MEMBER ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK; FORREST MYERS, JACQUES POUCHAIN, ROGER HERMAN, GPR/AEZX, 2012, STEFAN BRÜGGEMANN.

It's a sort of communion," says Hugues Magen, examining the contents of his Tribeca living room—the largest existing dining table (nearly 12 feet long) by French designer Charlotte Perriand, an original Kangourou armchair by Jean Prouvé, a carved-wood Punu mask, a garbage drawing by American artist Mike Kelley. "In order to communicate with each other, they have to have a certain degree of what I call a vibrational aesthetic."

But vibes are just one element of the equation for the man behind the New York City design purveyor Magen H Gallery, who says,

"I've always tried to buy the best pieces I can find." When looking at furniture or art, he considers form, technique, and context, as well as his gut feeling. "I think it's an instinct," he explains. "You just gravitate toward the right object."

Such a precise yet subjective system for measuring beauty is fitting for the Paris-born dealer, who moved to New York in 1980 to pursue dance. He performed with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and the Dance Theater of Harlem, where he served as a principal for more than a decade before retiring in 1999. "To me, it's just an extension of dancing,"

he says of design dealing. "It's poetry, motion, beauty, form."

Magen came to his second career somewhat by accident at the end of the 1990s, when a friend in Paris asked him to find some American furniture in New York. Magen scored a pair of Eames LCW chairs in SoHo that he deconstructed, packed into a suitcase, and brought to France. When they quickly sold (for quite a profit), his wheels started turning. Soon he began doing the same with already collectible midcentury French designs by the likes of Perriand, Le Corbusier, and Prouvé, steadily mixing in work by lesser-known talents. In 2003, after several years of selling pieces to other dealers, he and his then wife, April Magen, opened a gallery on East 11th Street, just a few doors down from its current location.

Once business took off, he wanted to keep some pieces for himself. When Magen moved into this apartment in Tribeca eight years ago, he transformed it, with the help of Paris-based interior designer Gabriella Asfar, from a funky artist's studio into a vitrine for his personal collection. "We wanted the objects to have space to breathe, so we kept it very pure and sparse," says Asfar, who used a subtle color palette to create an atmosphere for Magen's collection. Over the years he'd amassed art by masters like Mark Tobey and Robert Longo, African and Oceanic antiquities, and furnishings by a

list of makers that reads a bit like his roster. Many pieces were transient, migrating in and out of the gallery, or into a client's collection, but a few he vowed not to sell: a ceramic sculpture made by Véra and Pierre Székely and André Borderie and an exceptional Prouvé gueridon and daybed, which he still looks at in awe, saying, "It's so elegant that it transcends words."

AT THE GALLERY, Magen carved out a niche for himself with more obscure names, diving into legacies like La Borne, a community of ceramists working in postwar France (their work is sprinkled through the home); Art et Industrie, a New York gallery and group of radical artist-designers in the 1980s and '90s; and the French maker Pierre Chapo, whose simple timber furnishings have skyrocketed in value since Magen mounted a seminal retrospective in 2017. "It's really like detective work," he explains of these uncharted subjects. "Trying to find out where these pieces could be."

His latest obsession is Hervé Baley, who Magen sees as the foil to French modernist Le Corbusier. Where Corbu prescribed stark, rational machines for living, Baley—who often collaborated with the architect Dominique Zimbacca—took a more Frank Lloyd Wright-ian approach. "He basically brought this very organic form of architecture to the forefront

in Europe," says Magen, cocooned in an origami-like chair by the architect that would move to the gallery for a fall showcase of his work. In Magen's living room, it sits across from a horsehair-covered bench by Pierre Jeanneret (Corbu's cousin) that Magen calls "the opposite pole" to Baley.

Conversations like that one unfold between objects throughout the apartment. A tall wood sculpture by François Stahly and a carved ebony figure attributed to Ossip Zadkine (both French) seem to chat, over the Perriand dining table, with a Baule mask from the Ivory Coast and an Idoma Oglynye Society head crest from Nigeria. There's a low, unattributed bench that Magen believes might be African or 1920s Pierre Legrain, a French designer whose work referenced African forms. A sculpture in the bedroom by Art et Industrie artist Forrest Myers made of cocktail straws from Max's Kansas City sits with a ceramic vessel by Pierre Digan for La Borne—both revolutionaries in their own way.

Contemporary creations make appearances too: ceramics by Roger Herman and Natasha Dakhli, artworks by Jenny Holzer and Ugo Rondinone. Magen, who recently showcased new furnishings by AD100 designer Giancarlo Valle, is starting to dip his toe into the present day. "I'm curious," he says simply. "I'm interested in people who are pushing boundaries." ▀

“I think it’s an instinct,”
Magen explains. “You
just gravitate toward
the right object.”

ART: © TAKESADA AMITSU, HANSELER & WIRTH, PHILIPPE HOUJULY © 2022 ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK / ADAGP, PARIS
© 2022 MARK TOBEY / SEATTLE ART MUSEUM, ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK, FRANÇOIS STAHLY © 2022 ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK / ADAGP, PARIS, ALEXANDER MAY.

THE CHAIR IN THE FOREGROUND IS BY HERVÉ BAILEY. THE LONG TABLE DISPLAYS (FROM LEFT) AN IDOMA HEAD CREST, A BAULE MASK, A FIGURE ATTRIBUTED TO OSSIP ZADKINE, A PHILIPPE HOUJULY SCULPTURE, AND A LA BORNE CERAMIC VESSEL. THE TALL SCULPTURE IS BY FRANÇOIS STAHLY, AND THE INK PAINTING IS BY MARK TOBEY.