

MARCH 2022

THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

THE HOUSE THAT FORGOT TIME
In an east London merchant's home,
Georgian life endures. Almost...



NEW GAULDEN AGE Exiled nobleman's
Somerset manor reawakened

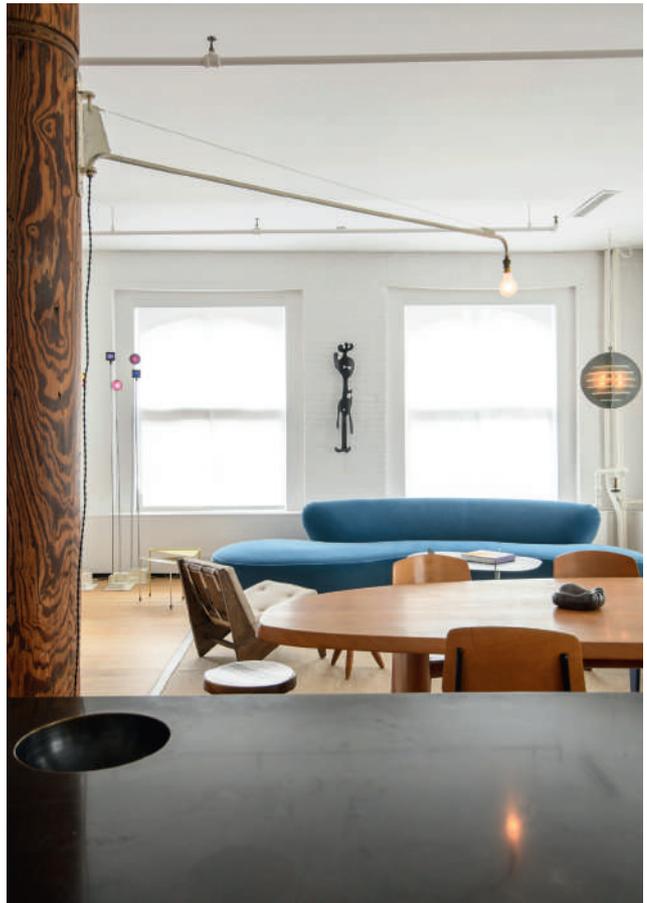
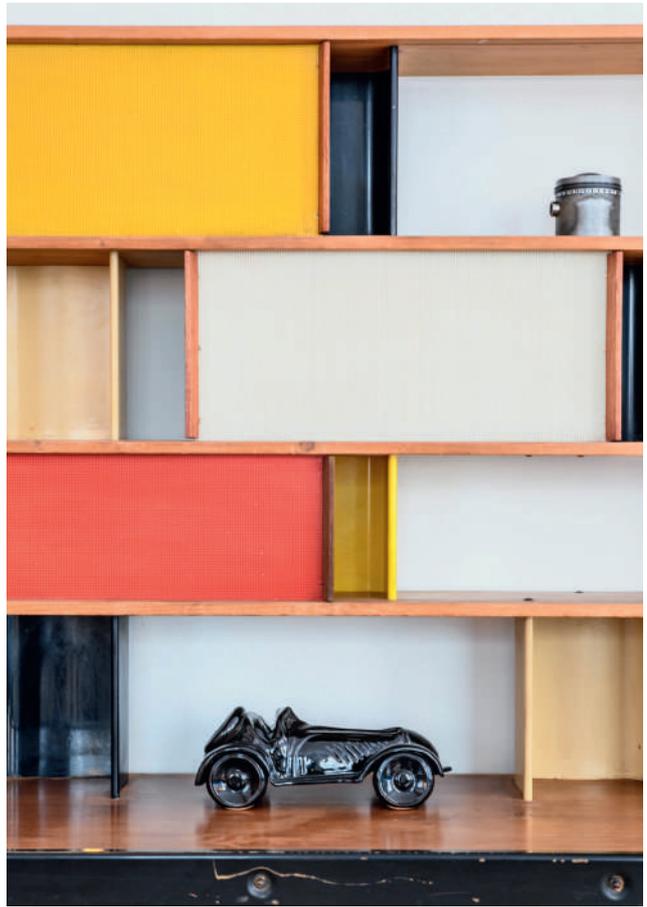
In the main room, the curves of a Charlotte Perriand 'Forme Libre' dining table are echoed in a 1970s 'Serpentine' sofa by Vladimir Kagan found in a flea market. Hanging on the wall between the windows is a very rare splint sculpture by Ray Eames, c1943



THOROUGHLY MODERN MILIEU

Wherever the eye wanders in this lofty pied-à-terre there are extremely sought-after pieces by Prouvé, Perriand et al. In fact, such is the owner's dedication to design classics the dealer/decorators Jeffrey Graetsch and Ashley Booth Klein have even furnished his bathroom using them. Doesn't he worry about water stains and ring marks? Not a bit. This is a machine for laid-back living, he tells an incredulous Augusta Pownall. Photography: Zach Pontz





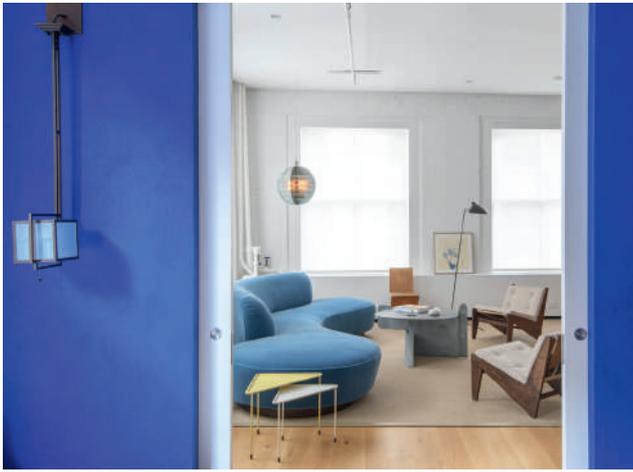
This page, clockwise from top left: the 'Marcoule' bench in the hall is from France's Marcoule nuclear plant; a Perriand bookcase bought to replace another of inferior patination houses a ceramic model of an Isotta Fraschini car by Giuseppe Mazotti; a Jean Prouvé 'Potence' swing-arm lamp chimes perfectly with exposed pipework; a group of 'Signals' sculptures by the Greek artist Taki. Opposite: on the table sits a 'Patte d'Ours' ashtray by Georges Jouve





Above: one of an edition of 36, a 'Pierced Seat' chair by Isamu Noguchi sits below a pair of Le Corbusier coat hooks from the 1950s. Despite his career success, the owner lives with relatively few possessions, incredible furnishings aside. Opposite: even ablutions occasion extremely sought-after pieces - a 'Mexique' bookcase by Charlotte Perriand offers privacy, while the bench is one Pierre Jeanneret produced for Chandigarh, Le Corbusier's utopian project in India





COLLECTORS are obsessives. They have to be. You're unlikely to unearth a piece of treasure unless you get up at 5am and stand in the cold riffling through stalls at an antiques fair or drive around yard sales with some rolled-up notes in your pocket. It's a fact not lost on the collector-cum-dealer-cum-gallery-owner-turned-decorator Jeffrey Graetsch. 'I grew up watching *Indiana Jones*,' he says. 'It's the best thing ever, treasure-hunting and finding something. I can't describe what it's like to find something special.'

When Jeffrey was a teenager in suburban Toronto in the early 1990s his predilection for seeking out high-end design was considered an oddity. In high school, he would drive hours to scour different markets for glassware. He once took a truck to Michigan, where he and a friend packed it with Florence Knoll and Charles Eames furniture scrapped from industrial buildings such as Eero Saarinen's mid-1950s Tech Center for General Motors. 'No-one wanted it,' he says. 'I used to find a hundred Eames chairs at a go. They were five dollars each. It was just a different time.'

At first, this impulse grew out of a simple yearning to live with the stuff, intertwined with a love of American design. 'I really don't like to use the word collector because a lot of times it refers to things in a monetary sense. For me, it's a pure passion,' he tells me over Zoom from his home in Brooklyn, explaining that he now focuses on early 20th-century French designers as well as Japanese/American makers such as George Nakashima. 'I love this stuff so much. Maybe I can sometimes border on OCD and just this obsessiveness.' With the zeal of an archaeologist (or Indy) uncovering an ancient tomb, Jeffrey talks about the painstaking detective work involved in authenticating a Noguchi bowl. He checks a list of Google search terms multiple times a day to make sure he doesn't miss a gem. Flights are booked to far-flung places to inspect pieces personally.

Luckily, he found a fellow obsessive and willing treasure hunter in his wife, Ashley Booth Klein, a Yale architecture graduate and an alumna of the practice OMA, who shares his passion for Charlotte Perriand, Jean Prouvé and others. She was already dealing in the decorative arts when they went on their first date – appropriately to a Carlo Scarpa exhibition at the Met. Rather less luckily, the design-curious set has since caught on to their methodology, meaning that the couple are no longer able to stock MDFG, the Williamsburg furniture shop they set up in 2015, by rummaging around on people's front lawns. 'When we started, we would still go to Chelsea to certain flea markets,' Ashley says with a laugh. 'We don't do that any more.'

Without the couple ever quite meaning it to, buying for clients has led to decorating their homes too. Like the showroom and

what I can see of the couple's own apartment, this urban pied-à-terre they have designed – for an academic who was successful in business – has bright white walls that provide a neutral backdrop for a jaw-dropping collection of furniture. The combination could lend a gallery-like air, but Ashley and Jeffrey insist that these are spaces to be lived in. Explains Jeffrey: 'We are building these collections for [clients] and I think they like our sensibility – they like how we live. People like to see that you can actually live with this stuff... It's not precious.'

If 'gallery-like' suggests a certain coldness, how would they describe their style? 'There's this question we ask ourselves: Does it have soul?' says Jeffrey. 'We talk about the soulfulness of an object displaying these patinas.' Perhaps it is the lack of kid gloves that makes this contemporary take on Modernism feel modern. These objects were made to be used – and used they are, as the multiple water rings on the Perriand dining table in this apartment attest. The clean lines and simplicity of Modernism were originally intended to sweep the past away, but Jeffrey and his client still want to feel its hand. 'If we find a better example, we replace it,' he explains. 'And a lot of the time when we say a better example, that's our wording for a better patina.' Art-world clients often tell a baffled Jeffrey that they'll never let anyone sit on their latest purchase. 'They aren't just to look at,' he says animatedly. 'They're meant to make our lives better. That's what design is. Design is there to make our lives mesh and become easier and simpler in some way. You shouldn't be thinking about it. It should be seamless – from the glass you pick up to your knife and fork.'

The idea of design as a tool for living made complete sense to this owner, a well-informed Perriand acolyte who leads a peripatetic life. Those Le Corbusier wall hooks say it all. With the help of architect Brent Buck, the previous Martha Stewart-esque fripperies were whipped away in favour of impeccable white plaster walls. A ritzy marble island was in consideration for the kitchen, but Jeffrey and Ashley put their foot down. The slatted wooden design carries the floor up and echoes the materiality of much of the seating. It is the more fitting choice.

There are few architectural elements in these rooms. Water pipes and air vents are exposed, allowing the building to function as a design element, in true Modernist style. The big windows in the main living area reflect the sharp lines of the Perriand 'Tunisie' bookcase – the one piece that the owner says he will always keep – while those pipes chime nicely with the Prouvé swing-arm light. With their playful curves, the Vladimir Kagan 'Serpentine' sofa and that Perriand dining table are almost exotic creatures in such a subdued setting.

The 'Tunisie' bookcase was designed for the dorm rooms in the Maison de la Tunisie at Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris. To my mind, there's a certain spareness and austerity to this apartment, decorated with pieces designed for students just starting out in life. 'I don't find it austere,' its owner insists. 'I find it freeing. Everything is functional. I like the organic shapes, I like the feel of the wood, I like seeing the joinery of it... I like to sit here with a glass of red wine and feel like I'm a part of the conversation with these designers. I think it's that connection that I'm looking for. So, am I a collector? Not in that sense. I want to be a participant' ■

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Top: to the left of the door from the media to the main room is a 1920s lamp by Frank Lloyd Wright from John Storer House in Hollywood – of the three made, two are now in this home. Opposite: the painting is *Ice* by Leelee Kimmel, a recent work that she exhibited at her first solo show at New York's Journal Gallery

