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Madeline Stuart Creates the Perfect Setting for an Extraordinary Art Collection

Works by Alberto Giacometti, Frank Stella, Yayoi Kusama, and more take center stage at this ultrachic L.A. home

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A Yayoi Kusama sculpture adds a Pop splash to the lawn of a Los Angeles home designed by Appleton & Assoc., with interiors by Madeline Stuart.

Photo: Trevor Tondro

It was a classic new-phase-of-life story—kids grown up and moved away, a couple of empty nesters looking to hit the reset button. Only, for the husband and wife in this particular tale, the nest wasn't exactly empty, with all the Lichtensteins and Stellas and Kellys on display in their longtime Los Angeles home. Over the course of a few decades, the couple had amassed a museum-worthy trove of modern and contemporary art and "wanted to build something beautiful for the collection," says the husband, who works in the entertainment industry. "We also wanted to build something for the two of us."

Specifically, they had in mind a traditional house that could comfortably accommodate casual family gatherings with grandchildren as well as more formal events, while showing their ever-expanding assemblage of art to maximum advantage. "The challenge was to design a home that also functions almost as a gallery," says Marc Appleton (<http://appleton-architects.com/>), the architect charged with the task. His solution: a stately two-story white-brick Georgian (with a vermilion front door inspired by the wife's favorite nail polish, a Chanel red) that takes a contemporary turn inside. The layout Appleton composed is classic but also uncommonly airy and light-filled, marked by expansive walls, generous 12-foot ceilings, and pared-down architectural details, all serving to spotlight the art.



A two-part Frank Stella painting and a curvy Brice Marden abstraction overlook one end of the living room, where 1940s Italian armchairs from Karl Kemp are upholstered in a Classic Cloth linen velvet. A Jerry Pair leather covers a Lee Calicchio stool, while on the tables flanking the sofa are an Ibo figure from Nigeria and a sculpture by Claes Oldenburg.

Photo: Trevor Tondro

Appleton designed wide hallways to function as gallery spaces and long enfilades that create dramatic sight lines to certain works. As new acquisitions are made and older pieces lent to exhibitions, the owners occasionally mix up what's on display, though a number of prized works rarely move from their high-impact focal points. Roy Lichtenstein's *Reflections on Profile*, which is given pride of place over the dining room fireplace, is a prime example, as are Ed Ruscha's *House Leak*, a black-and-white canvas strategically hung in the library to be visible from other rooms, and a large Martin Kippenberger painting of Jacqueline Picasso, prominently installed directly opposite the doorway to the den.



In the living room, an Alexander Calder sculpture on a 1930s Jean-Michel Frank side table is joined by vintage Jules Leleu chairs from Maison Gerard and rosewood-framed sofas by Therien, all set around a Laurent Chauvat cocktail table from Bernd Goeckler. The Franz Kline above the fireplace is flanked by an Elizabeth Peyton painting and an Alberto Giacometti bronze. The large canvas at right is by Morris Louis; the custom-made rug is by Tai Ping.

Photo: Trevor Tondro

When it came to the decor, the couple consulted a number of designers before enlisting Madeline Stuart (<http://www.madelinestuart.com/>), a witty and versatile decorator who won them over with her "great passion for the art," says the husband. As with Appleton, everything Stuart did was aimed at showcasing the collection. "The mandate was always that the furniture would be in deference to the artwork, which makes such a powerful statement," she says. "But I also didn't want the furniture to be overwhelmed by the art. Each piece has its own artistic integrity." The balancing act starts in the entry, where a sensuous oak sideboard by Jean Royère supports a Robert Gober shoe sculpture, while signature works by Jasper Johns and Fernand Léger hang directly above.



A work by Mark Bradford; the room's custom-made rugs are by Tai Ping.

Photo: Trevor Tondro

Stuart procured furnishings that together speak to a timeless modernity rather than any specific era. In the center of the sun-splashed living room, a pair of Jules Leleu armchairs flank an Alexander Calder sculpture perched atop a Jean-Michel Frank side table, while the surrounding walls display a head-spinning array of major works by Mark Bradford, Morris Louis, Cindy Sherman, Franz Kline, Frank Stella, and others. Here and in other rooms, chevron-pattern French-oak floors are warmed by pale wool rugs. Textured linen velvets and handwoven textiles add subtle variation. Milky tones predominate throughout the house, the walls painted in multiple shades of white, with "an infinitesimal amount of cream" added to avoid a cold gallery feel, Stuart explains.

There are a few spaces where the designer injected a bit of color. One is the master bedroom, where a soft palette of dusty grays, blues, and lavenders plays off Ellsworth Kelly's prismatic *Study for a Spectrum* and Cecily Brown's vivid canvas *Lunge*. And in the den, where the family gathers to watch movies and football games on a 100-inch TV, Stuart opted for red leather club chairs, a richly patterned antique Kirman rug, and walls upholstered in a flax-hued linen, which enhances the room's acoustics and complements a small, perfect canvas by Willem de Kooning.

In the end, the couple got exactly what they wanted: a home as well suited to relaxing with their two young grandsons as it is to hosting 200 guests for a museum fundraiser. Sometimes those worlds collide in amusing ways. "We had an event here a while ago, and a well-known artist was wandering around upstairs," recalls the wife. "When he came down he asked us, in all seriousness, 'Who did the crib installation?'"

[Click here to view more photos of the home.](#)



On the covered terrace, Carole Gratale lanterns are installed above McKinnon and Harris tables and chairs, the latter upholstered in a Perennials fabric.

Photo: Trevor Tondro

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