

# Sotheby's



CHINA'S TOP  
MEDIA MOGUL  
OPENS HIS HOME

VINTAGE  
COUTURE

MEXICO CITY  
REVEALED

RICHARD MISHAAN'S

## LUXE LIVING



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# STAYING IN CONTEXT

**Richard Mishaan** takes an instinctive approach to arranging clients' collections.

**R**ichard Mishaan has devoted a good portion of his life to collecting art, a passion he inherited from his mother and grandmother while growing up in Cartagena, Colombia. It's hardly a surprise that he is one of the most sought-after designers among art collectors, but not simply because he is a kindred spirit. What clients are drawn to is Mishaan's innate understanding of colour and composition and his unique ability to contextualise their collections by creating thoughtful, meaningful arrangements that act as a backdrop to their everyday lives. Take, for example, the client who presented him with a few dozen Persian miniatures that she wanted incorporated into her living space, or the one whose 26-piece collection of Buddhas was begging to be displayed in a more modern way. But Mishaan never imposes his own favourites on anyone; in fact, he considers each commission an education, noting that many of his clients have introduced him to new works. His signature "layered" approach (a minimalist he is not) has been chronicled in two books published by Monacelli Press: *Modern Luxury* (2009) and the recently released *Artfully Modern*. Both devote pages to private residences, including his own, as well as projects for hospitality clients. Mishaan recently revamped the 290-room Shelborne in Miami Beach and has a number of other hotel projects in the pipeline. Along with his lighting collection for Urban Electric and several collaborations with well-known tableware brands (Lenox and Dansk among them), he sells a custom furniture line from his Greenwich Village shop, Homer. Stephanie Vanamee had a wide-ranging conversation with Mishaan about how collecting inspires his approach not only to interiors, but to living.

The living room of Mishaan's own New York apartment, with art by Donald Baechler over the sofa and Niki de Saint Phalle's colourful *Nana* sculpture on a side table.

PHOTOGRAPH © JOSHUA MCHUGH, COURTESY OF THE MONACELLI PRESS











*"LIFESTYLE CHOICES  
ARE WHAT DRIVE  
MY DESIGNS."  
—RICHARD MISHAAN*



**BOTH OF YOUR BOOKS HAVE "MODERN" IN THE TITLE. WHAT DOES THAT WORD MEAN TO YOU, AND HOW DOES IT HELP YOU DEFINE YOUR APPROACH?**

Modern means new, clean, innovative and architectural. It does not mean minimal or uncomfortable. It's also very much about technology. Modernism began with advances such as Frank Lloyd Wright's development of precast concrete and evolved over time but it is still evolving today. Technology is such a large part of our lives and I need to be ahead of the game, researching what materials are best to work with when I design furniture. But it can also be about making sure there are outlets and WiFi beside the beds.

**YOU ARE A PASSIONATE ART COLLECTOR. HOW HAS YOUR EXTENSIVE KNOWLEDGE OF ART INFLUENCED YOUR WORK?**

Art influences everything I do. I have always made a point to go to every exhibit I can. I go to everything from tag sales to auction exhibitions to major museums. Putting all this data in my memory can help instruct my next design project.

A very close artist friend once pointed out to me, in a discussion about Winslow Homer, that in Homer's paintings there is a side of the canvas left to the imagination. That conversation forever changed the way I look at art – and even more so, design. When it comes to the work I do, there is no such thing as being finished, because people's lives, and thus the spaces they live in, are always evolving. There's always something left to the imagination.

**YOUR CLIENTS ARE MOSTLY AVID COLLECTORS. WHY DO YOU FEEL THAT COLLECTIONS ARE IMPORTANT TO THE LIFE OF A HOME?**

Collections transport you to faraway places or subtly alter your mood. Giving a context to others' collections is what I am hired to do. I like to understand why they love whatever they collect and then put the project together to reflect their voices, not mine. People collect for all different reasons – identity, curiosity, discovery or just for the thrill of the hunt. But collections give a room soul.

**DID GROWING UP IN COLOMBIA INFORM YOUR SENSE OF DESIGN?**

Colombia has the most passionate painters, poets, writers and musicians. The people there are colourful in the way they talk, dance, dress – even in the way they prepare food. Details like the colour of the soil and the way the light is so pure have stayed in my emotional memory to this day.

(Above) Richard Mishaan at his home in Cartagena, Colombia.

(Opposite) A library interior by Mishaan with a Jules Olitski painting and a Greco-Roman torso.









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#### WHAT ELSE INSPIRES YOU?

Lifestyle choices are what drive my designs. It is important to create the most functional spaces for my clients. We can create luxurious rooms that are filled with beautiful items, but if people are not comfortable and the space is not satisfying their needs, we have not succeeded.

#### YOU HAVE EXPANDED YOUR BUSINESS TO INCLUDE HOTEL DESIGN. HOW DOES YOUR PROCESS CHANGE WHEN YOU WORK ON A HOTEL?

I love designing hotels because it is an exercise in branding, and I get to design every aspect of it, from the furniture to the objects on the bedside table, so I am creating an entire experience. I have designed items for hotels that I hope one day will be iconic – I would love to think that in 50 years people might buy these pieces and say, “that’s a Mishaan desk from the such-and-such hotel.”

#### TELL ME ABOUT HOMER, YOUR WEST VILLAGE DESIGN SHOP. HOW DO YOU KEEP THE CURATION OF IT FRESH?

I look for collectible items that will make a home more interesting. I represent furniture makers from around the world doing really incredible limited-edition work. People love having special pieces that are not available just anywhere, so I focus on bringing in really unique designs that will enhance your life.

#### WHICH OF YOUR CURRENT AND UPCOMING PROJECTS ARE YOU MOST EXCITED ABOUT?

It’s like with your children – I have always loved everything I am working on. I am working on a hotel in Cartagena, Colombia for the incredible fashion designer Silvia Tcherassi. We have a unified vision that is going to redefine Caribbean style. I am also starting a hotel project in Dubai. I am thrilled to be a part of the growth in that region.

Stephanie Vanamee is a freelance writer and editor based in Brooklyn.

(Above, left to right) A dining room created by Mishaan for the Hamptons Cottages & Gardens show house and the designer’s grand living room for the Kips Bay Decorator Show House.