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Art collectors Robyn Menter and Martin Posner spent years honing their skills before investing in a single brush stroke. Now they're flexing some major wallpower!

BY REBECCA SHERMAN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE SHAFER

Some people have all the luck. For interior decorator Robyn Menter and her psychiatrist-and-art-consultant husband, Martin Posner, fortune smiled during a weekend trip to New York 12 years ago. The couple, then sans respectable art of any kind, bumped into fellow Dallasite and mondo international art collector Howard Rachofsky. Only the merest of acquaintances, Rachofsky generously asked if they might like to bum around Manhattan's gallery scene with him for the day. Who wouldn't? It's the art equivalent of a round of golf with Tiger Woods. Or a Friday night in the kitchen with Charlie Trotter. For Menter and Posner, the brief sojourn was the start of something big. "The red carpet came out when we walked in because Howard knew all the dealers," Menter says. Rachofsky was fearless about asking to view under-the-radar works from the galleries' back rooms, and dealers were happy to oblige. Guts, Menter and Posner learned that afternoon, trump everything. "Howard told us that we had nothing to lose by asking. It's something we tell our clients now—don't be afraid to ask questions. Most people are intimidated when they walk into a gallery. But you can't be shy if you want to collect."

In the living room, furniture becomes sculpture, including Frank Gehry-designed table and chairs; Mies van der Rohe Barcelona chairs and ottomans; large red acrylic on canvas by Mark Francis; 'Jazz' sculpture by Matthew McCaslin.

Menter and Posner flew back to Dallas that weekend without buying a single piece of art for their house in University Park. "We bought this house with the idea that it would be temporary," explains Menter of their 1982 brick and gabled-roof home purchased 17 years ago. Rachofsky had urged patience. "We continued to travel and study what was out there. We didn't even begin our collection for three years," says Menter, 57. And when they finally did, it started with a bang. Or a crash, if you will. "We were at the Carpenter Gallery in Santa Fe and they were selling off a lot of works from the storeroom," says Menter. "We fell in love with a series of works by Jim Dine called *The Crash*," five abstract black and white lithographs with violent, beautiful energy. Dine created the works after being in-volved in a serious car crash during the late 1950s. The couple purchased the lithographs, returned to their hotel and switched on the television. "The Princess Diana crash had just happened. It was all over the news," Menter recalls. The melancholy coincidence made the artwork even more meaningful. The series now has permanent residence in the living room. "I don't think we'll ever sell it," she says.

As their contemporary art collection grew, so did the need to remodel their house. "The house was very traditional and we had a lot of upholstered furniture that felt too fussy for the art," she says. "As we got into collecting more, we cleaned everything up, got rid of the window treatments and added track lighting."

During the past 10 years, Menter and Posner have been on more than two dozen art and architecture related trips, and amassed a vast collection of editioned works by such blue chip artists as Lucien Freud, Richard Serra, Chuck Close, and Louise Bourgeois. Menter, who hails from South Africa (she came to the states in 1981 and still speaks with a soft accent) is especially fond of South African artist William Kentridge's charcoals of big women. There's one hanging over the stairs. "She's not attractive at all, but I never get tired of it. It's wonderful to look at." But it's notorious British figurative painter Freud's drawings that have them both

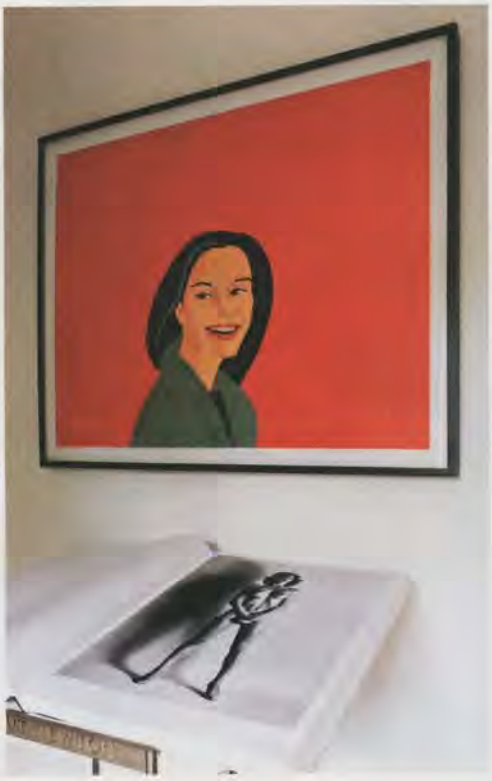
Above: **Dakota Jackson chairs and Mario Bellini table, all from Scott + Cooner; woven bamboo centerpiece by Yamaguchi Ryuun; painting at left is by Callum Innes; Ken Aptekar's painting hangs at right; a painting by South African artist William Kentridge hangs in the hallway.** ***Opposite page:*** **Martin Posner's study has a handmade desk and chair by Hughes Chevalier; the painting is by Julio Sarmento.**

"The first time we ever saw his work, it just totally spoke to us," says Robyn Menter of the notorious British figurative painter Lucien Freud. "We bought one, and it was like a disease, we had to get more."

captivated. "The first time we ever saw his work, it just totally spoke to us. We bought one, and it was like a disease, we had to get more." Several Freud portraits hang above the master bed.

Art looks best on white walls, says Menter, but every wall was covered in grass cloth. After a disastrous and heroic effort to remove it, the couple abandoned the project. If the walls would not cooperate, the furniture would have to. The idea was to make everything a backdrop to the art. In the living area, Barcelona chairs are classic and minimal, yet roomy. Two large coffee tables pushed together hold dozens of art books, a smattering of the couple's collection that numbers into the hundreds. "Art and books are our accessories—we don't have anything else." A Frank Gehry-designed table and chairs in the living room provide additional seating. They are in fact art themselves. Says Menter: "I look at furniture as sculpture for the room."

Since that chance meeting in New York with Rachofsky, art collecting has become a central part of the couple's lives. Posner, 70, continues his medical practice, but has become a de facto art consultant for his wife's firm, spending 10 days at a time in New York visiting dealers and galleries, often with Menter's clients in tow. His skills in psychiatry have come in handy, his wife says. "He's more objective than I am. I tell people they must have something because it works. I don't have the patience he does to educate them." But patience is key, along with a little restraint. Says Menter: "Never buy on vacation. People go on cruises and come back with that awful art from the ship. The important thing is to start out slowly. Find out what you like before you buy." ■



Above: The breakfast room has a pair of Menter's favorite prints by Chuck Close; Jeff Koons' _Porcelain Puppy;_ Cassina Cab chairs; Table designed by Peter Gutkin. _Right:_ An Alex Katz painting hangs above a limited edition book by Helmut Newton. _Opposite page:_ A stairway leading to the second floor creates a graphic palette for Robyn Menter and Martin Posner's modern art collection, which includes works by Ellsworth Kelly, Bruce Nauman, Lucien Freud, Jennifer Bartlett and Terry Winters; Mies van der Rohe day bed; the couple's extensive collection of art books are also a research center for their clients.

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