ART MEETS INTERIORS

KELLY BEHUN BASICALLY CREATED AN ART MUSEUM IN THE CLOUDS FOR A MANHATTAN HOMEOWNER

"I can't decide if what I made is art and Nate calls it because it's at once," the owner says.

BY ELIZABETH SMITH DEUTSCH AT HOUSE BEAUTIFUL · PUBLISHED: FEB 15, 2023

SAVE ARTICLE

When a pair of friends art collectors bought a pied-à-terre on the 32nd floor of a Manhattan skyscraper, they wanted a home that would be a showcase for their collection. Their requirements were fairly standard, fantastic bay and skyline views, and they—without realizing at first—were also inhabiting a museum. They turned to ELLE DECOR A-List Team Kelly Behun to fashion comfortable interiors around their striking collection.

The couple's in the front is by K. Kumin. The crown is by Bryan Hunt, the butterfly is by Jose de Rivera, and the bronze is by Tony Smith. Behun had the ceramic bowl is by Adrienne Vittadini.

"See, for me, lives in its own lane, and that is not about decorating," says Behun, who never puts an artwork in the service of a design scheme. The homeowners' art, which they started collecting in the early 2000s, ranges from abstraction of myths. "A dollar of love," it says in paint on a large work element canvas by Angel Otero that layers hand-sign shapes with organic forms. The piece originated in different parts in the great works before settling. Its visual conversation over a sculptural bone console by Marcel Wanders.

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Known for her warm modernism, Behun in turn found the perfect client in the owners, who, like the designer, is from Pittsburgh. "She's drawn to eccentric adventurers; she has strong opinions about things," Behun says. "But she's not unwilling to consider other ways of thinking."

A Robert Gober thumbnail sculpture stands in the great room by a custom six-foot in and out Chloé bench from The Apartment. Behun also commissioned the pair to paint the hand-painted wallcovering by Fawn Sims.

The collectors—who make frequent trips to New York to visit their two adult children—bought their 57th floor aerie in the new supertall Steinway Tower, which is the tallest residential building in the world by a pencil thin. "We walk in and that view is spectacular," the client says. The great room overlooks Central Park, while windows in the kitchen and bedroom face downtown. "Everything else is kind of a backdrop," the client says.

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> *"Art, for me, lives in its own lane, and that is not about decorating."—Kelly Behun*

The first time she entered the apartment, she instinctively knew where to hang certain works. A Charles Gaines piece—an acrylic box encasing a gridded image of an unnamed tree, from his "Central Park" series—would go in the foyer. Behun's suggestion to place Jeff Koons's *Balloon Dog (Orange)* on a white wall would be perfect for one of El Anatsui's monumental tapestries stitched together from discarded metal bottle caps—and she hunted until she found just the right piece. Behun also chose a small painted portrait by Salt of a dog to hang at the bottom of the stairs.

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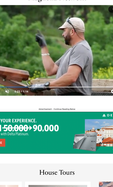

For the rest, the owner turned to Behun, who proposed a soft, neutral palette that would allow the artwork to shine. She commissioned custom furniture designs. In the great room, a distressing leather-wood chest (headline by Hillmer & Saint Lager is in lovely dialogue with the real shade visible through the windows behind it. Behun also had the path. Before the Ugly is Unmistakable textural table by Jeanneau for Galerie, a vetted marble and bronze. "It's almost like a puzzle underneath a sofa," Behun said, with pretty colors and reflections," Behun says of the arrangement.

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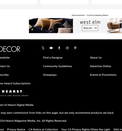

In the great balconies, the sculptural steel is by Anna Weiss. The chandelier is by Wood/Stone lighting, the curtain fabric is by Lelievre & Son fabric, the silk wallcovering is by Phillip Jeffries, and the rug is by Stark.

The space also has a wraparound sofa where the sitemen like to lounge and watch television, when they are not gazing at passing planes and the dramatic vista one side. Behun could have planned a dining table in the room, but the homeowners like to eat in the kitchen, which has a large island and a nook at the end of the city's great restaurants. So instead, she designed a curvaceous sofa bar in white quartzite hand-painted with gold leaf. And of course there is world-class art, including a towering Jack Lee Kaufman sculpture and, on the windowsill, a ceramic bowl by Simone Leigh.

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In the kitchen, custom plaster pendants hang above an island designed by Studio Sofield. Its bronze is by Fairfax, the stools by Ellie Berg, and the cabinets by Studio Sofield.

In the kitchen, echoing the white island by Studio Sofield—which designed interior finishes throughout the building—Behun added a quartz bar as an informal place to eat. She topped it with a ceramic piece by Jaume Plensa that resembles a human figure. Behun also added a Lucite pendant fixture by Allied Maker, another whimsical touch against its dry quartz bedroom, where Jaume Plensa's small-cone sculpture—it resembles a giant Kiss fingernail bowl—seems to be watching over a resting bed and a breathing bronze sculpture. It's one of the couple's favorite pieces in the apartment. "I'm always saying to them, 'Can I Complain Bedroom TV's work or bug,'" Behun remembers to Pierre Soussenkoff's Papa Bear armchair in the primary bedroom. "Every morning I can't decide where I want to sit and have coffee because it's so nice in every room," the owner says. "I'm so happy to be here."

The story originally appeared in the March 2024 issue of ELLE DECOR.

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