

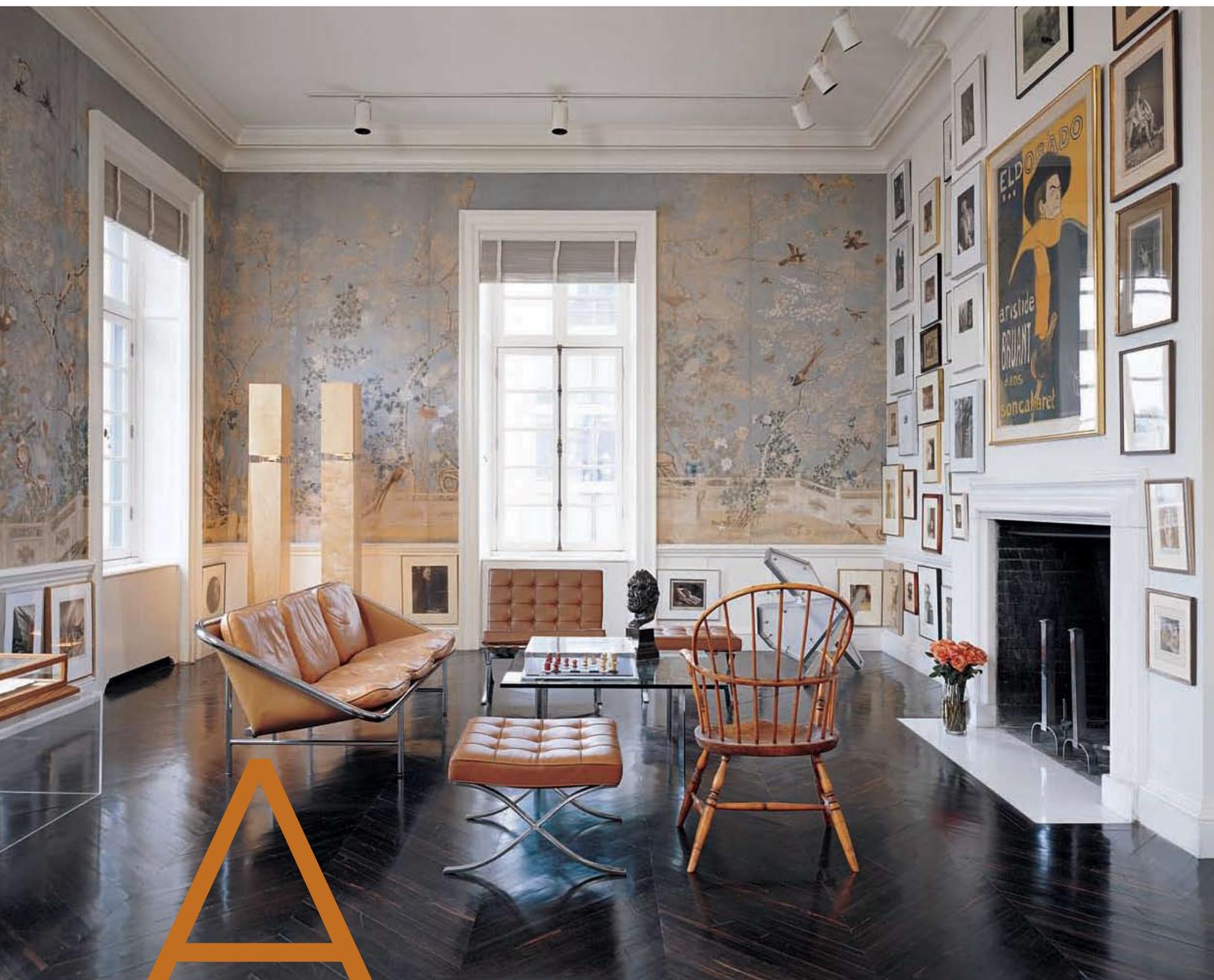


Photography dominates Ellen and Richard Sandor's collection, but other objects make the mix: Edward Curtis orotones under the stairs surround a Plains Indian garment and a rifle once owned by General George Custer; on the low wall, Marcel Duchamp's license plate hangs near one of his lithographs and his portrait by Man Ray. Ellen Sandor (right) stands between interactive sculptures by Fernando Orellana in the grand salon.



KEEPERS OF THE FRAME

A prominent **Chicago** couple make their own house rules when they display their enormous collection of photographs.



Ansel Adams said, “There are no rules for good photographs; there are only good photographs.” Ellen and Richard Sandor, a Chicago couple who live with one of the most impressive private photo collections in the country, have applied the rules-be-hanged principle not only to the display of their art, but in their own respective fields. Ellen Sandor is an artist who is pioneering digital virtual-reality photography; Richard L. Sandor invented the interest-rate futures market and is now developing environmental futures.

The Sandors (and about half their photographs) have lived for the last 30 years in a 1928 art deco duplex on a historic Chicago street. The property has quite a patrician pedigree: The building was designed by noted Midwestern architect Philip Maher; the apartment was designed by David Adler for the Potter Palmer family. The second owner, salt heiress Suzette Morton Davidson, installed the 19th-century Chinese Chippendale wallpaper in the grand salon. The Sandors are the third owners.

The futurist Sandors elected not to modernize their duplex but to preserve everything “except for kitchen appliances that couldn’t be serviced anymore,” cracks Ellen. And they furnished it on their own. “We never even thought of getting help,” she explains, “because we knew what we wanted to do—fill it with photography and just get simple classics that wouldn’t compete with it.” Furniture in the 60-foot-long living/dining salon runs the chronological gamut and includes 20th-century pieces like a vintage George Nelson sofa, a Mies van der Rohe *Barcelona* chair and stools, 18th-century Windsor chairs and a 17th-century Pilgrim dining table.

Above: Antique paper wraps around three walls in the grand salon, but the painted wall and wainscoting are fair game for frames. The Toulouse-Lautrec lithograph over the simple, neoclassical fireplace is hung near a selection of period photographs of the artist. Opposite: A maquette of Rodin’s “Monument to Balzac” stands on Plexiglas near four Aegean-marble pillars originally from the Palmer estate.

PRODUCED BY LINDA O’KEEFFE AND LISA SKOLNIK. PHOTOGRAPHS BY NATHAN KIRKMAN. WRITTEN BY LISA SKOLNIK.



*** Key to the (Hanging) Style**

- Group artworks by subject and content rather than artist, period or medium.
- Simple frames and single mats in neutral colors help the art to work in groups.
- Choose streamlined furniture regardless of its period or provenance.
- With this much art, skip most knickknacks.
- Keep moving things around (stock up on Spackle and touch-up paint).



As for hanging the thousand or so objects from their collection, forget “eye level” and “group like objects together.” The Sandors call their own shots. To create cohesion, they group the photos by theme and add pieces in other media that flesh out the backstories. In the main room, various groupings focus on World War II, postmodern masters and famous artists. The latter group includes sculptures, paintings and lithographs of and by the artists. The maquette of Rodin’s Balzac, for example, stands near a Man Ray photograph of Francis Picabia imitating Balzac as well as the photogravure Rodin asked Edward Steichen to take of the piece. “We pay an enormous amount of attention to history and provenance to convey the context of the work,” Richard explains.

Iconic images of Hollywood stars like Garbo, Swanson, Dietrich and Monroe span the foyer, while subsets that line the stairwell include famous American bad boys (think Billy the Kid and Jesse James), followed by Cindy Sherman stills, Richard Prince pieces,

historical Brazilian photographs and a cache of Annette Messenger prints. Virtually every iconic photographer is represented as well as contemporary mavericks like filmmaker John Waters.

Their self-determined strategy also informs their display tactics. Instead of using installers, “Richard hangs everything himself,” reports Ellen. “We had to buy an extension ladder for the stairwell.”

“Our new acquisitions are mostly contemporary, fueled by Ellen’s interest in postmodernism and new media,” says Richard. As for space, appearances are deceiving. “Nobody thinks it’s possible, but I can find at least 100 more spots on our walls,” insists Richard. ☛ *See Resources, last pages.*

Above: Smoking is the subject in one bedroom, with photos arranged around Ed Paschke’s colorful “Fumar,” which is installed next to Ellen Sandor’s co-venture with Paschke, “No Fumare Por Favore.” A jacket made of cigarettes by Sharon Scott adds depth to the topic. Opposite: In the stairwell, the two largest works (from top) are “(Pictures of Chocolate) Joseph Beuys” by Vik Muniz and “Untitled Film Still 1978” by Cindy Sherman.

