



FINANCIAL TIMES

# How to Spend It

34-PAGE MENSWEAR SPECIAL

THE JOY OF  
THE ARTFUL HOME

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Victor Gastou (far right) of Galerie Yves Gastou, and Fatine Layt, CEO of ACG Capital. Artworks clockwise from below: Carrara marble and Murano glass vase and Murano glass and stainless steel ceiling light, both by Emmanuel Babled. Sculpture by Jean-Claude Fàrhi. Brass and Altuglas Coque chair by Philippe Hiquily. Aluminium and bronze table by Ado Chale. Slate and steel cabinet by Paul Evans

**FINDERS KEEPERS**

# artist furniture

A private equity CEO and a Paris gallerist may be “comme chiens et chats”, but when it comes to mobilier d’artiste they’re hand in hand, says **Claire Wrathall**. Portrait by **Léa Crespi**

When it comes to discovering stellar examples of late-20th century *mobilier d’artiste*, literally furniture that has been designed by an artist (also referred to as “design art” in English), the best opportunities tend to arise when you least expect them, says Victor Gastou: in flea markets, house clearances and bric-à-brac shops in provincial cities. “It’s as Warren Buffett says,” he adds. “The time to get interested is when no one else is.”

From the Paris gallery he runs with his father, Yves, Gastou (pictured above right) deals in artists including the French sculptor Philippe Hiquily (1925-2013) and the American craft artist Paul Evans (1931-1987). They may not be

household names (although Hiquily exhibited alongside the likes of Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, Isamu Noguchi and even Marcel Duchamp in New York in the early 1960s, and one of Evans’s Sculpture Front cabinets realised \$125,000 at Christie’s New York in June), but their work is in demand among a discerning client base – including the musician Lenny Kravitz, the architect Peter Marino and Fatine Layt (pictured above left), formerly an investment banker and, since June, CEO of the Paris-based private equity company ACG Capital.

“I had known about the gallery for some time,” says Layt. “Victor’s father and I had friends in common and I knew it was very much linked with beautiful





people. But it was a stereotype I didn't feel I fitted with. We were just too different: *comme chiens et chats* [like dogs and cats] – do you have that expression? But, long fascinated by art – in particular Jannis Kounellis and Giuseppe Penone of the *arte povera* movement, a term coined in 1967 to refer to a loosely connected group of artists who used found objects, industrial scrap and natural materials in order to make statements about consumerism – she “was intrigued and one day I plucked up the courage to ask Yves to dinner at my home. And when he saw my place he realised I was not a typical banker and that I might be quite interesting. After that I started to visit the gallery, which is how I met Victor. When I moved into a new flat, I asked him to help me find objects for it.”

The first piece she bought was a Coque armchair (pictured on previous page), designed by Hiquily in 1970 in brass, Altuglas and hide, one of an edition of 40 produced by the gallery. (A shrewd investment, it turns out: last year Phillips sold one in London for £18,750 against an estimate of £4,000-£6,000.)

“I have an 18th-century gilded commode, which I love,” she says, “and Victor suggested we put it alongside the chair, so that the gold of the commode is complemented by the gold of the chair, and I just thought, ‘Wow’. I love the way it is reflected in the arms of the chair, the way the hide seat seems to float above the transparent stand, and the different textures and surfaces. It may sound stupid, but every day I’m happy to see it. I never tire of it. It’s a constant pleasure.”

To date, Layt has bought “seven or eight” pieces from Gastou’s gallery, among them a contemporary marble console by Gerard Kuijpers; a 1970s sculpture (pictured above) by Jean-Claude Farhi; a c1976 sideboard (pictured top right) by Paul Evans; and a superb bronze and aluminium coffee table (pictured above right) by the



Clockwise from top left: polymethacrylate sculpture by Jean-Claude Farhi. Steel, slate, wood and enamel sideboard by Paul Evans. Bronze and aluminium Joséphine table by Ado Chale

### “In my working life I have to be rational, but my interest in art is driven by emotion”

octogenarian Belgian designer Ado Chale (another name, incidentally, whose stock is rising apace: three years ago Christie’s sold an occasional table of his in London for £51,650 against an estimate of £15,000). Its textured surface reminds her, she says, of fingerprints.

“Fatine is very sensitive and tactile,” chips in Gastou. “And this is a piece that demands to be touched,” which is one of the great pleasures of living with sculpture or sculptural furniture. “In fact, the pieces she has chosen need to be touched. Discovering a piece with your fingers can elicit a whole new emotional response.”

Then there is a remarkable vase (pictured on previous page), one of the *Osmosi* series by the Amsterdam-based French designer Emmanuel Babled, who works in Murano glass and precision-cut marble, creating pieces

that combine 18th-century techniques with 21st-century technology. “I like the mix of fragility, brutality and strength,” adds Layt. “In a way it’s how I see myself. I may feel fragile but I can’t be because I am a businesswoman.”

Not that Gastou approves of everything Layt has acquired. “I bought a pair of very classic Knoll armchairs,” she admits. “And when Victor saw them, he said: ‘How could you? There is nothing unusual about them; they are everywhere.’” So now she keeps them in her bedroom. Equally, the pieces she owns by Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec have been relegated to her farm near Marrakech (Layt, who is half-Moroccan, also has a home in Tangiers). “I still love them,” she says, “but they no longer fit in Paris.”

Layt is reluctant, however, to call herself a collector “because that suggests a goal, an aim, a strategy. In my working life I have to be very rational, very dispassionate, very strategic. In contrast, my interest in art is driven by emotion. At work you are always under pressure from other people: people who are richer, smarter, better informed than you are. So my home is the one place I can express my personality. I am sure I have a

lot of faults, but if I have bad taste, at least it’s my taste.”

For even if they agree to disagree on some issues, Layt and Gastou are clearly friends. “With art dealers, you know they are always dealing,” she says circumspectly. “They need their clients to buy, so the relationship is not always easy because in the

end I’m also a client. But I trust him. I also don’t have a lot of time, and though I love meeting people, there are only a few I’m happy to see at weekends.”

It’s a tribute to the friendship that’s grown out of their common interest then that they see each other “maybe twice a month”, he says, meeting for lunch at Café Flore, which is convenient both for the gallery and Layt’s home. And from time to time they meet on Sundays at the fabled *Marché aux Puces* at Clignancourt. “It’s incredible what you can find going there with Victor. He spots objects that I would never notice. Whatever its condition, he can tell if something is a good piece. Signed or not, he’ll know what it is, when it was made, what the story is. There aren’t many people you can be happy with and learn from.”

Cats and dogs, it seems, can have more in common than their stereotypes suggest. Yes indeed, says Gastou. “Fatine is really very rock ‘n’ roll.” ♦ *Galerie Yves Castou, 12 Rue Bonaparte, 75006 Paris (+33-1-5373 0010; www.galerieyvescastou.com). The gallery will be exhibiting at PAD (+33-1-5330 8520; www.pad-fairs.com) in London, October 14-18.*