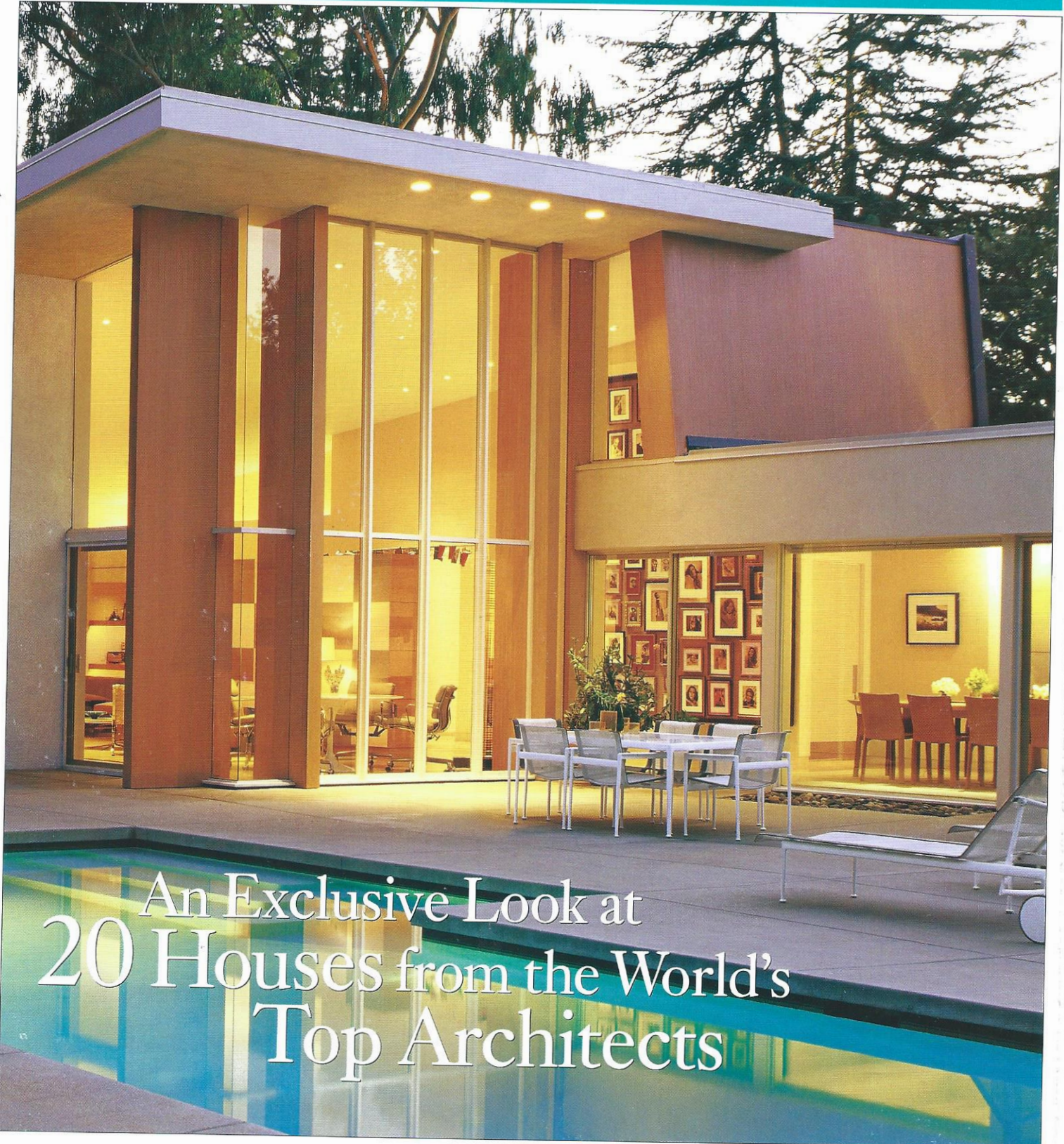


# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF INTERIOR DESIGN

MAY 2005

## ARCHITECTURE ISSUE



An Exclusive Look at  
20 Houses from the World's  
Top Architects

# Singular Vision

One Man's Passion Yields a Distinctive Collection of 20th-Century Works

Text by Joseph Giovannini/Photography by Mary E. Nichols



The Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, a private museum, showcases the late businessman's collection of modern and contemporary art at his Los Angeles estate.

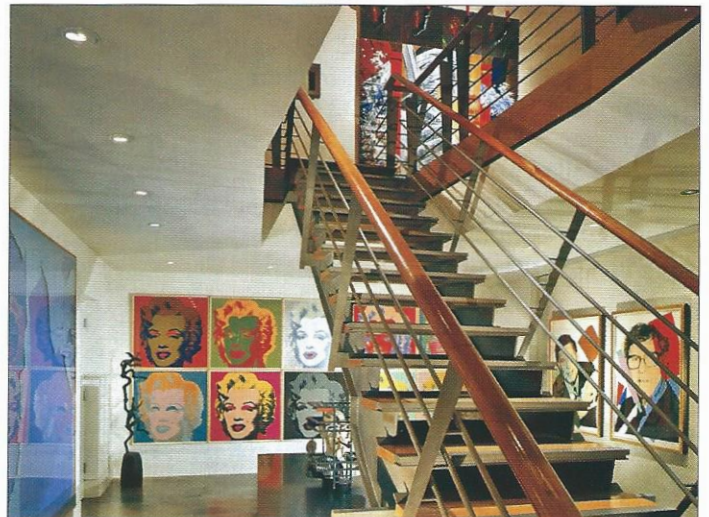
LEFT: Frank Israel designed the annex in 1988. BELOW: Warhol portraits of Weisman, right, and Marilyn Monroe are in the annex, which was built for larger works.

LIKE FILM DIRECTORS, architects often set the scene with an opening shot, and in vintage California houses of a certain era, the front door gives onto a gracious hall whose back doors frame a view of the garden beyond. But the front door of one prominent Spanish Colonial Revival house on a terraced hillside estate in Los Angeles opens straight onto a work by Sandro Chia, centered on a figure so robustly painted that it seems to burst into the entrance hall. The es-

tablishing shot announces that the house no longer looks out so much as in, that its object of contemplation is not the garden but the art. The eye wants to stay inside.

The spirit who staged the new opening shot here is Frederick R. Weisman, a businessman and collector who left his house, paintings and sculpture to the eponymous art foundation that now opens that paneled mahogany door to the public by appointment. It was Weisman, simultaneously a

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Weisman may have entered the art world at arm's length, an admirer of contemporary masters, but it's clear that he became a player.



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tough hombre and a blithe spirit, who walled in the original French doors set into an arcade designed by Gordon B. Kaufmann, the celebrated architect who conceived the rambling two-story mansion back in the 1920s.

Some collectors buy art on the advice of experts, and indeed Weisman and his first wife, Marcia, started out with the counsel of well-established dealers. But there are collec-

tors who buy what they like and keep their own counsel on how to live with it, and by the time Weisman moved into the estate in the early 1980s, after the couple divorced, his tastes were formed. "Certainly by the early 1980s Fred was on his own," says Billie Milam Weisman, his second wife and now director and president of the foundation. "He had developed an impeccable eye, and if he felt strongly about a work, he just purchased it. He

was eclectic in his tastes and very spontaneous. He never bought by chronology or within a single school."

Marcia and Fred Weisman split their collection by drawing straws. Weisman went on to expand his half in what soon emerged as a collection so personal that it fast became autobiographical. Although he and Marcia Weisman had gravitated largely to postwar artists, especially Ab-

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The annex's main gallery. Duane Hanson's 1972 *Rocker* is between motorcycles made by Keith Haring and LA II in 1987. Donald Judd's *Untitled*, 1967–80 is at left; at right is Frank Stella's *Madinat As-Salam I*, 1970.



house was beautiful, and he respected it.”

Weisman, then, did not try to make the house over in the image of a museum or gallery, with blinding white walls that demand sunglasses. Edges are soft; the atmosphere of a gentler era lingers. That billowing chintz sofa in the living room, for example: It stands its floral ground, without apology, in front of the Blue Period Picasso over the mantel and the de Kooning next to it. The ensemble appealed to the businesspeople who gathered here, often for meetings, and to the artists who came over regu-

LEFT: In 1982 Weisman bought the 1920s house, designed by Gordon B. Kaufmann; he commissioned artist Robert Graham to create the fountain in the entrance court.

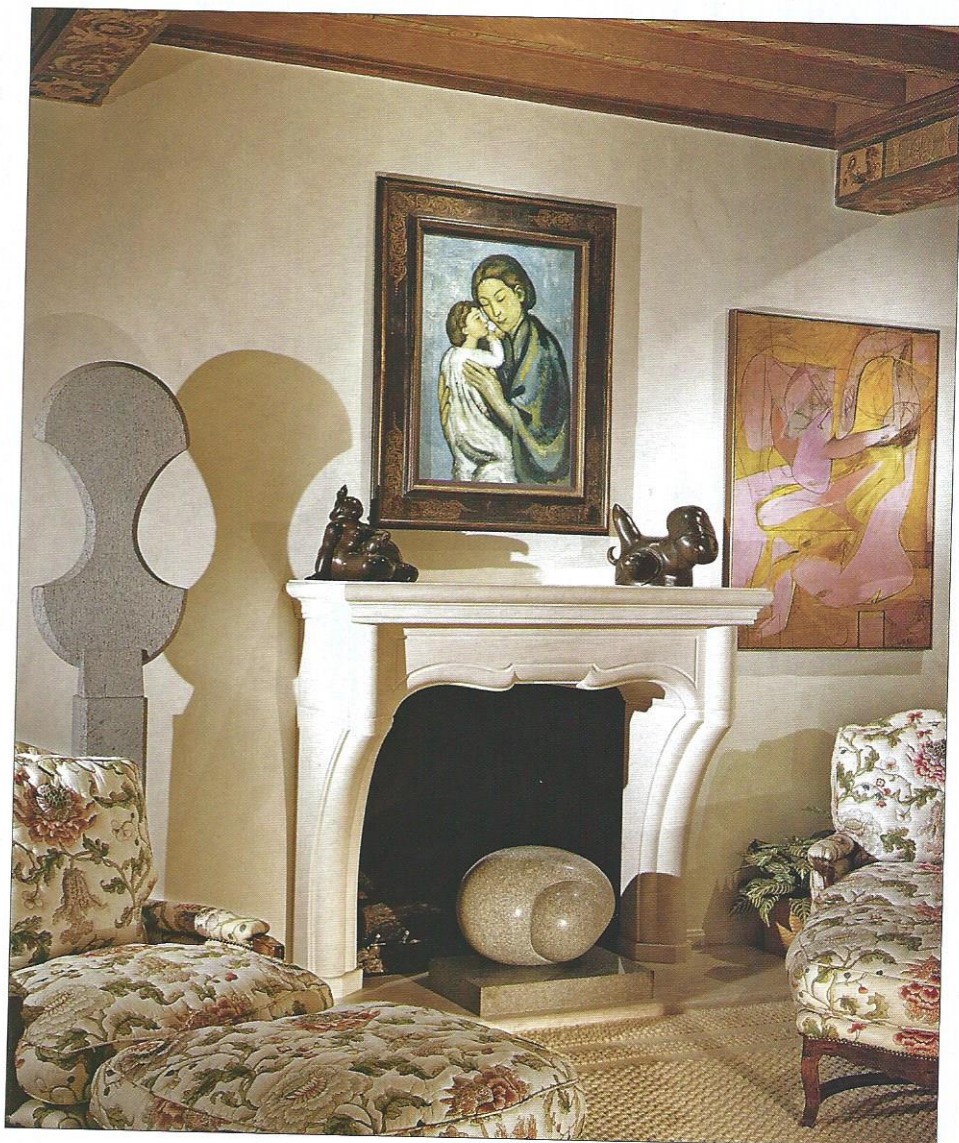
BELOW: *Mother and Child*, a 1901 Picasso oil, is above the living room fireplace, which is flanked by a 1986 work by Beverly Pepper, left, and a circa 1945 de Kooning oil.

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stract Expressionists, he later expanded his range to embrace Pop artists, photo-realists and such classic modernists as Picasso, Cézanne, de Chirico and Tanguy. He conducted his pursuit with an independence and a self-confidence tinged with humor—sometimes with a naughty wink. In a bath off the music room, a life-size nude by Carole A. Feuerman stands at the doorway dripping wet, wearing only a terry-cloth turban on her head and drops of water pearling on her smooth skin. Her mouth is parted.

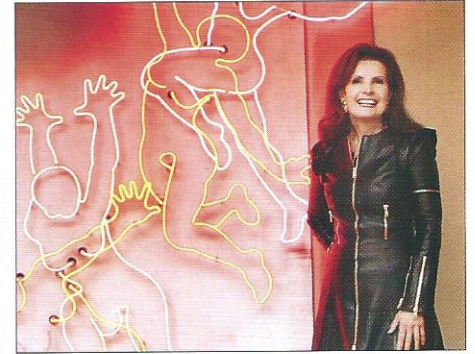
An intuitive buyer, he took risks and occasionally made mistakes, but the need for art became a drive, and the constantly growing collection eventually challenged the notion of what the house should be. “Fred thought the furnishings were secondary to the art, a backdrop,” says Milam Weisman, “but that the house should still stay homelike. He felt a lot of people were frightened of contemporary art, and he wanted to put that fear to rest with a setting that was domestic. He thought the old



TOP: GRAY CRAWFORD



“If he felt strongly about a work, he purchased it. He was very spontaneous.”



LEFT: The entrance hall. An 1895–1900 Cézanne work, far left, is the collection’s earliest piece. Paul Klee’s 1931 *High Group* is at left, and a 1954 Clyfford Still oil is at right.

ABOVE: Billie Milam Weisman, the foundation’s director and Weisman’s widow, is next to *Caryatids Descending*, a 1986 site-specific neon sculpture by Alice Lees.

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larly for dinner. Weisman hyphenated different worlds, and the house was the scene of his personal diplomacy as he hosted both business and social events. For artists, dining under the cut-crystal chandelier in the paneled dining room was an exotic experience.

A traditional house might seem like a tough love nest for cutting-edge work, especially in Southern California, with its legacy of steel-and-glass houses. But Weisman had a voracious need for the wall space traditional houses provide. Surrealist paintings by Magritte and de Chirico hang in the dining room, whose wood paneling handles intimate works, while large tableaux by

Francis Bacon and California artist Ronald Davis climb with the staircase in the main entrance hall. A triptych screen by Helen Frankenthaler stands at the foot.

With ever more pieces necessitating more wall space, museum-caliber art migrated from the main formal rooms into the corridors, back bedrooms and baths. Even in this vintage two-story Spanish Colonial Revival house, he required ever more hanging room, and he sometimes walled over windows and doorways. Inspired by ceiling frescoes, he started hanging art on ceilings: “The first canvas we mounted over a room was a diamond-shaped Color Field

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RIGHT: *Prime Course*, a 1964 acrylic by Kenneth Noland, hangs in the music room. A 1968–76 Claes Oldenburg work, left, and a 1966 Calder piece, right, are on the table.



Weisman's eye—enthusiastic, curious, puckish—is still alive and well, thriving in a house that remains, in a way, his life's work.



Weisman may have entered the art world at arm's length, an admirer of contemporary masters, but it's clear from the collection that he became a player, that he enjoyed returning the ball from his side of the court. Andy Warhol painted the four portraits of Weisman now in the upstairs addition. Two more hang in its stairwell, and another two in the master bedroom sitting area. He commissioned Duane Hanson to sculpt his parents, who stand in the library, the father making a telephone call and the mother prim in a suit.

"Fred had to know and like the artists to get involved with  
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**LEFT:** The Weismans installed a bed by Max Ernst, *Lit-Cage et Son Paravent*, 1974–75, in a guest room. At the windows are companion 1974 screens, *Le Grand Ignorant*.

**BELOW:** Large-scale sculptures, including a 1991 Ida Kohlmeyer work, *Fenestrated Rebus #2*, left, and a 1988–90 piece by Viola Frey, *Resting Man*, right, are in the rear garden.

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painting by Kenneth Noland from 1985 that we put in the library," says Milam Weisman.

In 1988, still searching for wall space, the Weismans commissioned Los Angeles architect Frank Israel to build a barnlike volume of space as a contemporary gallery for the large-scale art. There Weisman could park the motorcycles by Keith Haring and LA II, and large canvases by Ellsworth Kelly, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Motherwell, Frank Stella, Ed Moses, Sam Francis and Christo.

Although this collection boasted pieces of international stature, there was a local subtext. California artists are especially well represented because they were his pals. "He felt all communities should support their local artists, and since Fred spent so much time in California, he became friendlier with the artists here," notes Milam Weisman.



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### An Organization with a Mission

Minneapolis-born Frederick R. Weisman (1912–1994) once said his business success gave him “a responsibility to share with others in a meaningful way.” Besides maintaining his estate and collection of over 500 artworks for the public, the foundation he began has arranged touring exhibitions and scholarly workshops and supported artists and arts communities.

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their work,” says Milam Weisman. “I would say that artists were our closest friends.” She remembers one evening when Weisman enlisted his guests between dinner courses to help him site *La Joconde*, a bronze by René Magritte, in the library; they successfully squeezed it between bookcases, where it still stands.

Like a hostess making a seating plan, Weisman devised almost conversational juxtapositions of paintings around a room. As with the words that Tom Stoppard put in the mouths of James Joyce, Tristan Tzara and Lenin during an imaginary meeting in *Travesties*, Weisman set the

the two black paintings by Still and Francis. That created more space on the outside of the wall, where the site-specific neon sculpture he commissioned from Alice Lees, called *Caryatids Descending*, is in a portico that became a viewing niche.

If closing certain windows erased the view from the house, the many sculptures that Weisman acquired have taken over the garden. The plantings in the terraced yard recede in importance as the sculpture, piece by piece, stands out. On the deck around the pool, Weisman set Botero’s *Adam and Eve* next to *Woman with Sunglasses on Bench* by George Segal. All look onto Renate Göbel’s *Floating*

“He felt all communities should support their local artists, and since Fred spent so much time in California, he became friendlier with the artists here.”

paintings into visual conversation. “He thought that objects in close proximity spoke to each other; he put a black Sam Francis and a black Clyfford Still together to create an atmospheric environment.

“He tied together strands of subconscious things whenever possible,” Milam Weisman continues. “He liked how regal Giacomo Manzù’s *Grande Cardinale* looked in the living room framed by that arched window. He liked the Rothko above the sofa, which you could contemplate comfortably from the velvet chairs. Viewing positions mattered.”

Pieces migrated. “Fred moved them to see them differently, to rediscover them,” she says. Just as he closed off French doors in the entrance hall, he filled in a set in the living room giving onto the side yard for

*Pool Figure* sunbathing on the water. Again, he fashioned a seating arrangement among figures who have something to say to one another.

Weisman’s eye—enthusiastic, curious, puckish—is still alive and well, thriving in a house that remains, in a way, his life’s work. If he is still close in spirit, he is not far away in fact. Several paces from his parents in the library, in the entrance hall, a small bronze by Henry Moore rests atop a vessel inscribed with the words, “Frederick Rand Weisman: Beloved Husband, Father, Brother, Philanthropist.” □

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