

In This Bachelor Pad, the Design Is as Impressive as the Sneaker Collection

“The more expensive the piece, the more you should be able to use it,” says designer Nicole Fuller.

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As a young collector moving into his first home, Ryan Lee wanted far more than an interior designer—he wanted a collaborator, someone from whom he could learn about collectible design to the same degree he appreciated the 100-odd pieces in his burgeoning art collection.

After a meteoric rise at RXR Realty (he was promoted to senior vice president of investment), the 30-year-old real estate wunderkind cofounded Lee Group Holdings with his father, a former architect at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill who went on to work in real estate development and private equity. While he knows his way around a balance sheet, Lee has a passion for art that goes far beyond its value as an asset class; he serves on the Trustees Council for the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. and was recently appointed to the board of trustees at the Brooklyn Museum.



When he purchased this unit at 40 Bleecker, a luxury building in New York's NoHo neighborhood with residential interior design by Ryan Korban, a tip from his broker led him to his ideal collaborator: the ELLE DECOR A-List firm of Nicole Fuller. "One thing that really stuck out about Nicole's portfolio was that each project felt very unique," says Lee. "You could tell she really catered to the client's taste."

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The goal was to be able to rotate through a selection of art—Lee has roughly 25 pieces on display at any given time, with the rest in storage—on a calming backdrop of whites, grays, and neutrals. His first pieces—including a watercolor by the artist Nicolas Party, from Karma Gallery—mingle with blue-chip acquisitions from the likes of Rashid Johnson and Wolfgang Tillmans, all acquired under the guidance of art advisor Rachel Cole. Now, they're complemented by equally pedigreed vintage and contemporary furnishings and decor.

"With Ryan, [designing] was a great tennis match," says Fuller. "I would say something and then he would go down this rabbit hole of research, and then we'd go to dinner and we'd talk about it, and then the next day we'd be in a totally different place."

*"The more expensive the piece, the
more you should be able to use it!"—
Nicole Fuller*



Frank Frances Studio

The primary bedroom features a photograph by Wolfgang Tillmans and a bed by Willo Perron.

While collectible design was foregrounded in their conversations, Lee, who loves to cook and whose parents often visit, wanted to be able to have people over without “feeling like I live in a museum.”

Fuller was right there with him. “I said to Ryan, ‘Your home should not be precious whatsoever,’” says Fuller. “The more expensive the piece, the more you should be able to use it. Sit on your De Cotiis coffee table, put drinks on it. You know what I mean?”



Frank Frances Studio

Lee's home office features a custom-designed mirrored desk and storage console.

The two-year process had its ups and downs, of course: a custom chandelier from **Frederik Molenschot** consumed months of hand-wriving. They couldn't shut down the street and remove the windows to crane it in; the super got wind of and foiled a plan to saw the piece in half and reweld it in the apartment. Eventually the piece was "lightly bent" to fit into the building's elevator and reshaped in the living room. Lee even took a seat on his condo board to help smooth things over with the other residents—and to pave the way, of course, for them all to be able to live with great art and design.