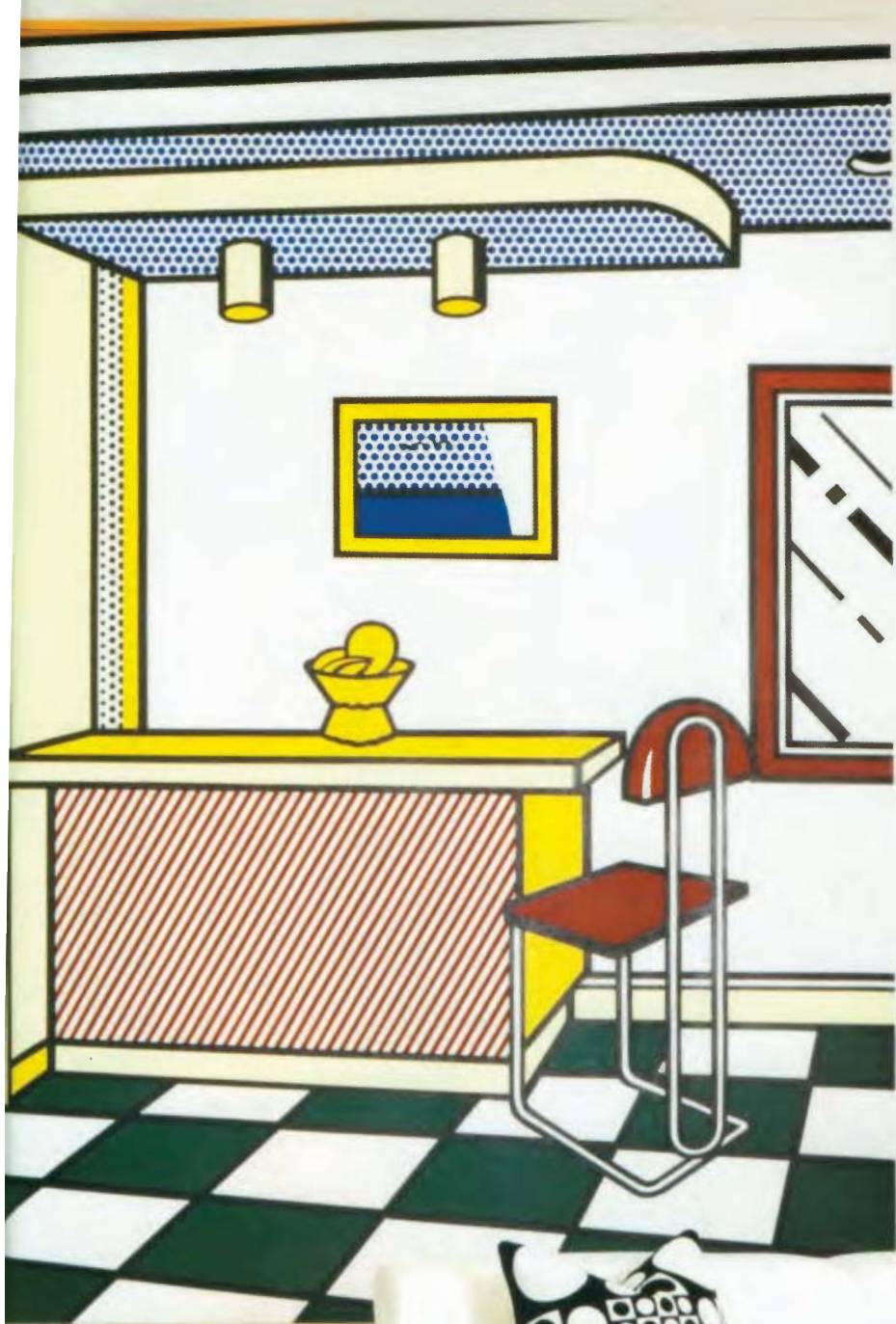


# Pop star

Lisa Perry lives for Sixties art and style, but her astonishing private collection makes connections between the Pop giants and artists of different eras, discovers Rebecca Dimling Cochran. Photography by Roger Davies





**This page:** Lisa Perry surrounded by art in the living room of her Manhattan penthouse. On wall, Roy Lichtenstein, *Interior with Built-In Bar*, 1991, oil and magma on canvas, 292.6 x 420.6cm; on left-hand table, Clive Barker, *Twin Cokes*, 1968, polished aluminium, 24.8cm; Claes Oldenburg, *Soft Fur Good Humors*, 1963, fake fur filled with kapok, wood painted with enamel, four units, 48.3 x 49.5cm



In December 2001, invitations to a 'Space Odyssey' arrived in mailboxes in London and New York. The occasion was not a costume party peopled by intergalactic beings, but a celebration of the overhaul of a Manhattan penthouse. Visitors were able to see at first hand the stunning transformation of a manor-like apartment with gilded ceilings and marble fireplaces into an elegant but very mod pad, all directed by the unerring eye of their host, Lisa Perry.

The guest list included everyone who was instrumental in making the space so fantastic: her architect, David Piscuskas, her interior designer, Tony Ingrao, and many of the artists whose work graces the walls. Robert Rauschenberg, Tom Wesselmann and Jim Dine are just some of the art-world heavyweights that form the backbone of one of the most seamless and courageous collections of Pop and Pop-inspired art in the US. Built in just over four years, it includes paintings, sculptures, collages and prints, all of exceptional quality. While most of the works are from the 1960s and early 1970s, Perry creates incredible juxtapositions with contemporary pieces by artists such as Jeff Koons, Gary Hume, Elizabeth Peyton and Julian Opie.

The focus of the collection is not arbitrary. Perry has fond memories of her Sixties childhood. 'I grew up in a really cool house,' Perry remembers of her home in suburban Chicago. 'It had a pool in the middle surrounded by Japanese shoji screens – very modern.' Her father, an amateur painter, put his canvases on the floor and painted in the gestural style of Jackson Pollock. Her mother owned a gallery selling blown glass, pottery and limited-edition prints.

Perry's love for the period first manifested itself through fashion. An avid follower of contemporary couture, she was given a piece of

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vintage clothing for her 40th birthday. Soon after, she went to the clothing store Lily et Cie, on a trip to LA. She fell in love with Sixties dresses by Courrèges, Pucci and Cardin. 'I thought, "Wow, these are things I can actually wear?" From that day, I've been collecting and wearing vintage clothes,' she explains, propped on a sofa in a Sixties Rudi Gernreich checked top and Manolo Blahnik shoes.

A few years later, Perry and her husband decided to move with their two children to a new apartment. They found a penthouse on the East River that was once the grand home of Winston and CZ Guest. It took someone like Perry to visualise what could be done with the antiquated space known as 'the apartment with two ballrooms'. She knew that she wanted to focus on the 1960s: 'I'd been collecting Sixties clothes and accessories, and vintage *Life* magazines. I was very attracted to that era, the fashion, everything.' The place filled up with Verner Panton furniture, Pucci fabrics and a white leather couch in the living room specifically designed to imitate a conversation pit.

The cool white walls and sleek furniture provide the perfect backdrop for the striking colours and daring shapes of the art she collects. At first, Perry purchased works by contemporary artists who were clearly influenced by Pop art, such as Michael Craig-Martin, Julian Opie and Gary Hume. Then Perry purchased a 1965 Warhol *Campbell's Soup Can* whose electric blues and purples she fell in love with. When she brought it home, her reaction was much like her reaction to vintage clothing: if I can have work by artists practising in the 1960s, why not? Not long after, she discovered Roy Lichtenstein's *Interior with Built-In Bar* (1991). 'I'll never forget standing in front of the giant Lichtenstein the first time I saw it,' Perry recalls as her face breaks into a broad smile. 'It literally took my breath away.'

'My husband and I started going through Pop art books and seeing who we liked and what things we liked,' she continues. 'We decided to focus the collection on work from the 1960s and early 1970s.' But Perry was not wed exclusively to the representational content of Pop. She developed a love for the geometric abstraction of the period as well. 'To me, it was natural to put Pop and Op together. I have a feeling that it came from the whole aesthetic of combining the furniture, the fashion... it just felt right.'

Bridget Riley's black-and-white-striped painting *Intake* (1964) vibrates on one of the dining-room walls and Victor Vasarely paintings and sculptures punctuate the space. The art-world snobbery against the French artist is of no importance to Perry. 'The Vasarelys are exactly my taste and what I love. People come here and they say, "We would never have thought of putting Vasarely in this context but it works so well." But it was so natural for me. I never thought twice.'

The inclusion of Vasarely, admits private dealer Dominique Levy, 'is one thing that really triggered my enthusiasm for the collection. American collectors who are able to look at Lichtenstein but also at an artist like Vasarely, who is not appreciated in America, are really fantastic. His work is completely part of that movement and [to find] someone like Lisa, who appreciated that work, was one of the main reasons I wanted to work with her.'



This page: the living table  
from Wassily Gropius, *Möbel 10*, 1959,  
66 cm diameter, 129.7 x 120.5 cm;  
Cappellini chairs in neon orange leather  
**Opposite page, left:** the living room.  
Victor Vasarely, *Tettye*, 1974-76, oil on  
canvas, 202 x 202 cm **Opposite page,**  
**right:** Robert Rauschenberg, *NY Birds*  
*Call for Oyvind Fahlstrom*, 1965,  
silkscreened ink on cut and torn papers  
stapled to canvas and covered with  
Plexiglas, 236 x 208 x 28 cm



**This page:** the media room. In window, Robert Indiana, *Love*, 1966-99, stainless steel, 91.4 x 91.4 x 45.7cm; works on shelves include, on middle shelf, Victor Vasarely, *Felhoe*, 1983, painted wood, 38.7 x 40cm; on far left, Joel Shapiro, *Untitled*, 1996-97, mahogany and yellow cedar, 35.6 x 21.6 x 16.5cm; on bottom shelf, Deborah Kass, *Four Barbaras (The Jewish Jackie Series)*, 1993, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 50.8 x 61cm



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◀ Born in France, Levy worked for many years as international director of private sales for Christie's and is now a private consultant. She has helped Perry acquire significant pieces from private collections in Germany and Belgium, and has also been instrumental in expanding the collection beyond the traditional Anglo-American focus of Pop. 'The Pop movement, although stronger in America, was as important all over Europe,' Levy explains. 'Because of my European background, the Perrys were very happy to look towards European Pop.'

Today the collection includes two significant paintings by Martial Raysse and a large-scale collage by Jacques de la Villeglé. Eduardo Paolozzi is also represented with a work from his 'Bunk' series. Perry remarks, 'There are so many similarities between Rauschenberg, Rosenquist, Wesselmann, Paolozzi and Villeglé. These artists were looking at what their peers were doing, which is one reason why the collection is so focused.'

While it is generally true that works from the same period can share sensibilities, the cohesiveness of the collection must be attributed to Perry's unfailing eye. Elizabeth Peyton's *Prince William and Prince Harry* (2000) provide an interesting counterpoint to Andy Warhol's 1966 *Self-Portrait* or Roy Lichtenstein's *Girl with a Dish Rag* (1962). Michael Craig-Martin's *Tulip Chair* (2000) plays nicely off the Eero Saarinen originals around the kitchen table and Gary Hume's black and white snowmen fit well on the patio beyond the large Lichtenstein painting. 'Pieces come our way all the time and we're very open to moving things around and changing. There is nothing, besides the Lichtenstein, that I would say has to be in that space forever.' On Perry's wish list are works by Rosenquist and Ed Ruscha.

'My bottom-line criteria for every piece of art is that when you look at it, you smile,' says Perry. While this may sound trite, it is an apt reflection of her personality. A woman who works tirelessly for Democratic causes, including campaigning for the election of women to Congress, and who is on the advisory board of NARAL Pro-choice New York, Perry reflects continual optimism. Perhaps it harks back to her love of the 1960s, where people fought for their beliefs and believed they could change the world.

'You can see Lisa's incredible passion for the 1960s through her collection of vintage clothing or through the way the apartment has been designed,' explains Dominique Levy. 'It's an in-depth passion. It's not just the art. It's the books, the novels and it's the cinema. It's everything out there.' The package is so focused that visiting the space, experiencing the art and speaking with Lisa Perry is like taking a journey back in time. With the benefit of a contemporary vantage point, it's an enlightening, and very worthwhile, odyssey.

**Top right:** the master bedroom. Tom Wesselmann, *Great American Nude #92*, 1967, Liquitex and collage on panel, 122 x 168 x 2.5cm; Laverne Lily chair, 1959, custom-made headboard and carpet **Below right:** the entrance gallery. Martial Raysse, *Rosa*, 1962, acrylic and fluorescent light on canvas, 180.3 x 130.8cm

