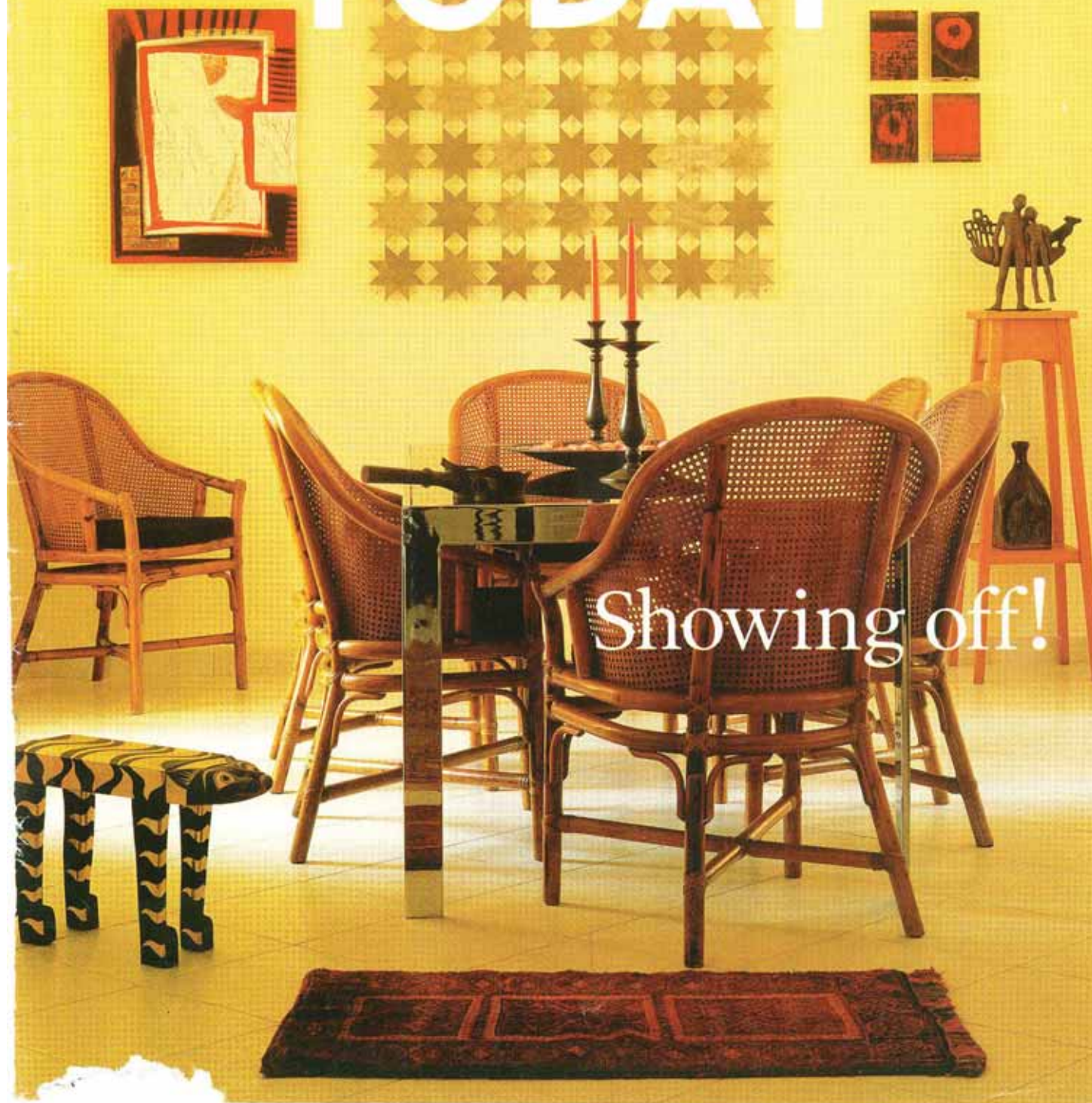


SPECIAL REPORT

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Showing off!

ART, A VITAL PART?

A close look at a serious art collector's paradise reveals that being surrounded by art need not impart a detached, museum-like quality to a personal living space

BY DEVJANI COX

Special to Gulf News

There's a home in Al Sufouh in Dubai, which just cannot be slotted pithily into any style. It is neither contemporary, nor country, not cottage or traditional. But a living, breathing environment with a deep-seated tranquillity which can only come from the fact that this is a space that is loved and lived in and the inhabitants of the home are deeply comfortable with every piece of furniture and bit of furnishing in the house.

Everything fits in naturally and the appeal is amazingly individual.

What gives this home an edge is that it is not just a cornucopia of interesting finds but a serious art collector's paradise where each piece has been chosen, not for how much it costs or what their friends will think of it, but because the owners fell in love with it.

Collector's paradise

A major part of their life's finds (from serious art to a collection of shells picked up from local beaches) is out on display, which in any other home might have led to clutter; here it has been decorated with such flair that it has brought symmetry, freshness and originality that can only come from a natural, innate sense of style. The fact that the pieces they have chosen are so steeped in character also helps.

The couple, seasoned expatriates of over 30 years, have lived in a variety of interesting locales. With an inherent interest in art, they kick-started their collection when they were very young with emerging artists' works done on small canvases (these were young artists who probably couldn't afford the bigger canvases or the huge amount of paints needed) and have built up an impressive collection, that is mainly Australasian interspersed with some Vietnamese art.

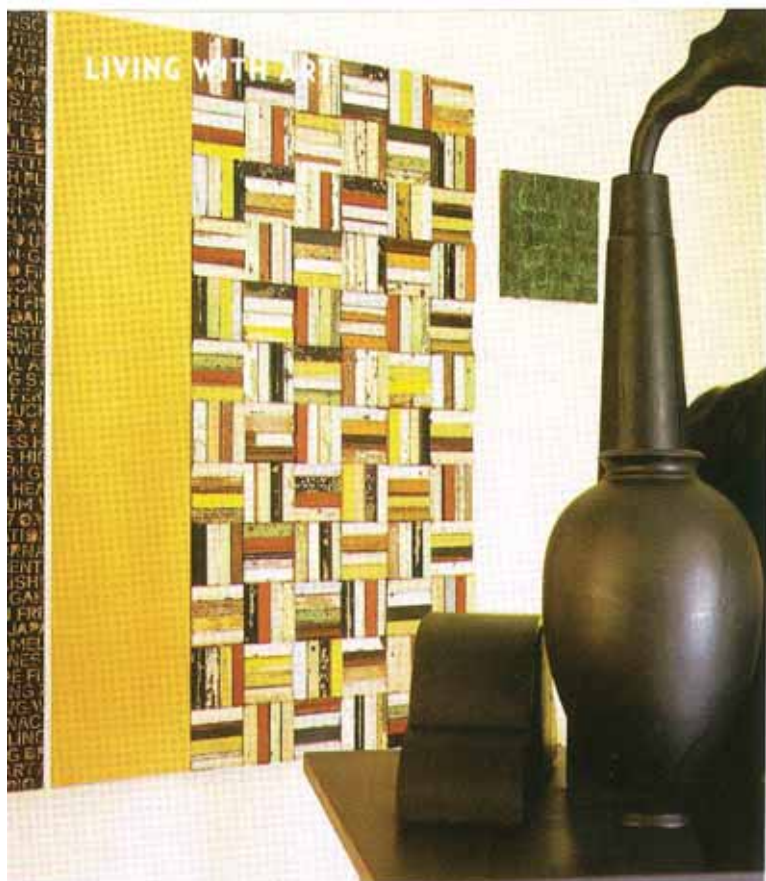
Seasoned expatriates

The Dining Room is anchored by a 70s' style black glass and chrome dining table bought during a stint in South Africa. Rounded cane chairs, an interesting juxtaposition, and one that gives the space a sense of warmth and welcome soften the starkness of the table.

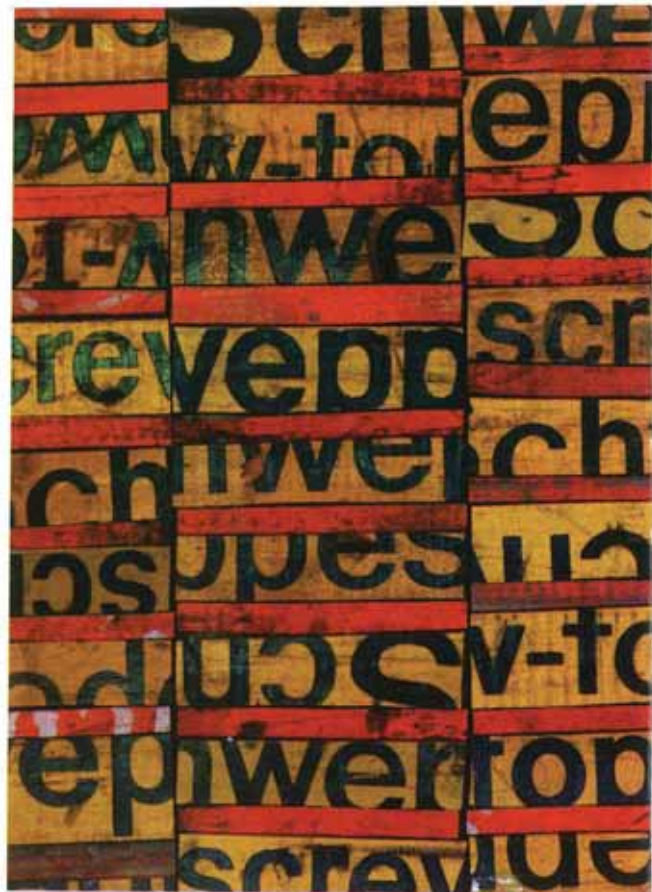
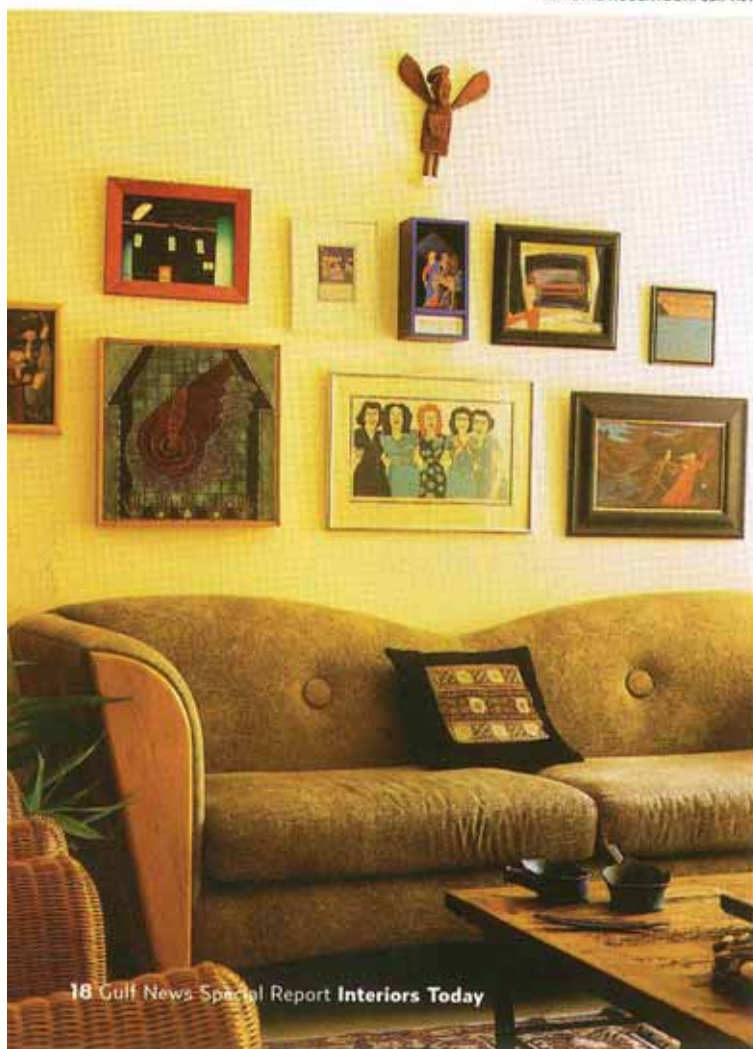
The blonde wooden stand next to the dining table is made of Huon pine, an ancient tree of Southern Tasmania, highly protected; any furniture is made from fallen trees. On top of it sits a bronze by Australian sculptor Anne Ross. The symbolism wrought by the sculpture is powerful, that of life's rocky journey, of hope and of starting over. Just above this are four small paintings in



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crimson and black by Dubai-based artist Nelda Gilliam, part of a series, relating to the artist's feelings of upheaval engendered by the war in Iraq.

Occupying centre stage is a huge sculpture of burnished steel by artist Lezlie Tilley. Each piece can be separated and decorated individually. The interesting shapes and shadows cast by this sculpture as the sun moves over the house give it a surreal quality. Off to the right is an assemblage by New Zealand born, extremely well known artist who spent a large part of her life in Australia, Rosalie Gascoigne. It is titled Red Rag, (meaning red rag to the bull) symbolising the aborigines' fight for autonomy. With powerful political overtones, the art work is made of tin and metal found on the side of the road, important ingredients in this edgy artist's life's work.

Artistic inclinations

The entrance of the home is a testament to the couple's artistic inclinations. Bang in the centre is a huge black tabletop assemblage by Peter Tilley. The scene is of Newcastle, Australia, a town dominated by a steel industry. This particular piece is an artist's tribute to his dead father, symbolised by a faceless clock, a referral to the stopping of time for his father.

A smoking chimney refers to his father's job at the steel mill but other components in the form of fruits and a woman's figure etc. refer to the mother, life's source, the seeds of the fruit conjuring rebirth and the renewal of life.

Another very striking piece sitting on a ledge is made of Australian hardwood scrap timber and galvanised iron, simply titled Dog and the Village by Australian artist Angela MacDougall. Village homes with

COLLECTORS' CHOICE

Rooms with a view

Some privileged, tantalising glimpses into 'other' lives

BY CLAIRE FRANKEL

Have you ever visited a collector's home and been delighted to see their artworks displayed in an intimate, private setting? Just as the contents of a bookcase show the personality and interests of its owner, so the choice of art and how it complements the other art pieces and furnishings are illuminating.

Recently, La Maison Rouge, a French art foundation, re-created that privileged moment of discovery with *L'intime, Behind Closed Doors: the Private World of Collectors*.

The work of some 200 contemporary artists has been displayed in 15 rooms, exact replicas of those in the collectors' homes. The artworks are shown complete with furniture, rugs, lamps, books and magazines lent for the occasion. Given that the exhibition is on for four months, one wonders how the collectors are doing without so many of their pos-

sessions?! The rooms include one bedroom, two dining rooms, an office, a narrow hall with stairs leading up, a foyer, a lounge, an attic and no fewer than four toilets. The names of the lenders are not given and this piques the viewer's curiosity about who these people are, what their lives are like and how they relate to the art.

An eclectic mix

Consider a few items in the parquet-floored Foyer: two 1920 Josef Hoffmann pieces, a banquette and round table, a Bertrand Levier 'Black and Decker' sculpture and seven stuffed pigeons perched above the door frame. What kind of person puts together an eclectic mix like that? And what might they have in their dining room or living room that is not on loan?

The generously spaced out rooms, re-created in a disused factory, offer a wide-ranging view of how different collectors live with their art or, in one



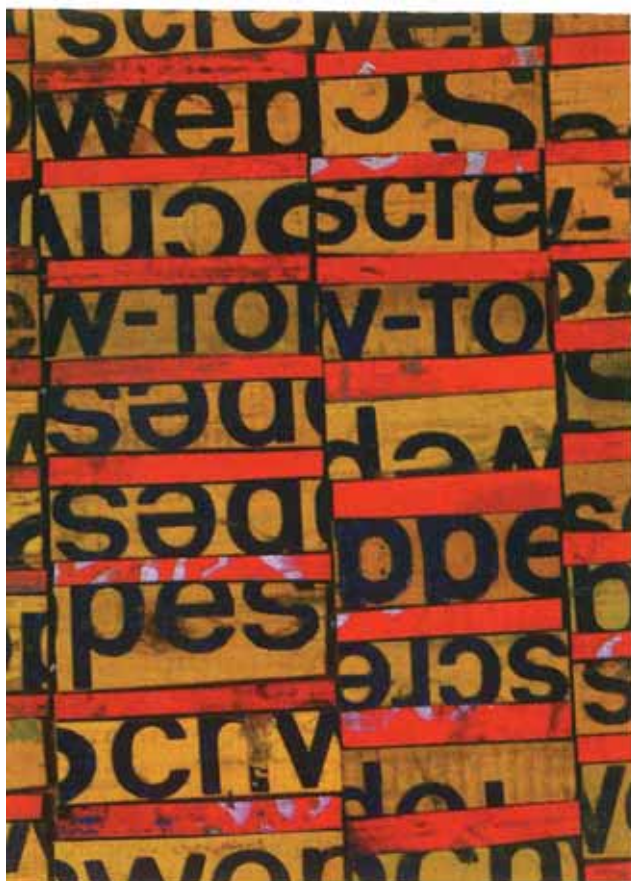
case, do not. This collector has on display a List, placed — tongue in cheek — on a tall plinth under glass. His List — for I am convinced it must belong to a man — is minutely printed on five-inch-wide paper, folded accordion-style.

Squinting madly, I read from Vito Acconci to Yves Aurstrassen. Among the 150 or so names are Carl Andre and Tony Cragg, Gilbert and George and Sol Lewitt, Aristide Maillol, Joan Miró and Cy Twombly — a superb collection. But the List stands alone on the cement floor of the basement, surrounded by empty space. The works are not "at home". How can this be?

Visitors can enter some rooms, such as the Attic. For others you look in through a doorway or a paneless win-



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steep roofs with a dog running through the rusticity in the dead of night — the undertones here are somehow very European.

Upstairs, the TV area is a haven of fusion of old and new, east and west, where even the invasion of technology in the form of a plasma TV has done little to overturn the strong aesthetics of this delightful room.

Haven of fusion

The entire area is presided over by a large aboriginal painting in vibrant hues. The bedroom is an oasis of calm with mainly blues and whites with a collection of Australasian art behind the bed. Some are canvases, some are on wood, the overall effect is one of serenity.

The lobby area upstairs is in vibrant shades of reds, greens and golds. Here the mood is distinctly Oriental, presided over by two large paintings, the one in front by young Vietnamese artist, Thanh. This is a self-portrait of the artist, an ironic comment on the new way of life transgressing the old, the shaven head injecting Buddhist shadings but the shirt and tie, invoking modernisation.

Rich hue

The Vietnamese lacquer painting at the far end is by artist, Chung. Each layer has been built up over several years, resulting in an incredibly rich hue. The scene is of a North Vietnamese soldier, home to his wife and child after the gruelling war, trying to pick up the threads of his life. Once again, the notes here are of hope and renewal.

With courtyards lush with bamboo and frangipani, this home is a graceful journey into a home alive with art depicting life's rich tapestry meeting everyday life — the result is one of timelessness and natural style. ■



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