

URBAN EXPRESSION

WITH ART ALWAYS ON THEIR MINDS AND SIGHTLINE'S GUIDANCE, DAVID AND PHILIPPA HUGHES TURN AN INTEREST INTO A PASSION

WRITTEN BY **SHERRY MOELLER**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **STACY ZARIN-GOLDBERG**

Letting art into your life can be as simple as being open to possibilities. "Through education and genuine enthusiasm, Allison facilitated our transition to more serious art collecting," says David Hughes, who, along with wife Philippa, collaborated with Allison Cohen, owner and founder of the art consulting firm Sightline, to purchase their first few pieces of contemporary art. "We also found that we share similar aesthetic sensibilities."

By learning her clients' interests and then guiding them through art galleries and studios, Cohen helps people move beyond any anxiety they may have about starting an art collection and provides them with the confidence to know that art is accessible at whatever level one wants it to be.

Discovering art often happens in phases. "We always had art in our minds," says Philippa, who left her career as a lawyer four years ago to find a different outlet for her creative energies. She recently founded The Pink Line Project, an organization focused on supporting the art community.

Cohen, also a lawyer who recently closed her practice to devote herself full time to Sightline, grew up with parents who love art and fostered that love in her. "I always knew I wanted to do something related to fine art," she says.

Cohen says her parents taught her how to defend art that is not easily accessible. "Some of the favorite pieces in my personal collection encourage people who come into my home to stop in their tracks and ask questions," she says. "In other words, they challenge the viewer."



Homeowners David and Philippa Hughes, left, and Allison Cohen, owner and founder of Sightline, flank their first collaborative purchase, Roland Fischer's *Dong Sanhuan*, a photograph from G Fine Art. It is hung against Maya Romanoff's *Beadazzled*, *Geode*, *Caviar* wallpaper from Donghia in the Hugheses' Logan Circle loft. The coffee table is from Brueton with a Chiquita rattan pole stool from Muleh in the foreground.





The Finding Phase

The Hugheses began collecting art in college, but their conceptual journey into the contemporary art world began when they sold their traditional home in Virginia and bought a PN Hoffman-built loft in DC. They also sold their belongings and started fresh, buying major works of art first and then decorating the rest of the spaces around the pieces. “We were starting a new phase of life,” David says. “It challenged us to discover and define ourselves.”

“We always knew at some level that art is an expression of self,” Philippa says. Collecting art makes Philippa feel not only connected to the art world, but also personally creative. Just as listening to music or walking on the beach may be among the most profound moments in one’s life, viewing art has a powerful effect on the Hugheses.

Defining an Art Collector

Consider various factors when selecting art for a collection. “It doesn’t mean you have to have a precise game plan,” Cohen says. “But there may be common threads in the approach and in the collection itself, such as medium, process, or subject matter.” Thinking beyond impulse is important, Cohen adds.

“People who are buying beyond the question of the space can be defined as art collectors,” Cohen says. It’s not about

the immediate placement; it’s more intellectual than that. A work will have an initial surface beauty to it, but it has to continue to give something substantive to the owner over time, she adds. Art should tug at you. Buyers should look beyond the space where the art will hang – look into the “mental home,” David adds. Once past the initial reaction to a piece of art, a collector may experience other feedback that should be considered before making a purchase.

“An art collector is someone who sees value or meaning in an art piece that has nothing to do with the price tag,” Philippa says. As an art collector, “I have a passionate commitment,” she adds.

David sees collecting art on different levels. “At our level, art collectors are impassioned people with limited resources supporting impassioned people with limited resources,” he says. “An art collector hears the message of the work and makes a decision to support that message.”

The Enjoying Stage

While the Hugheses enlisted Cohen to help with art selection, they also worked with Christopher Barson of Christopher Barson Interior Associates for interior decorating, Liz Levin of Liz Levin Interiors for window treatments, Kimberly Graham of Hemphill for color consultation, and Ben Gilligan for art placement and hanging. “The goal in our



design process was to create a sophisticated, yet funky backdrop that would complement the unique and fantastic art collection," Barson says.

The Hugheses' previous perception of art collecting was that it was untouchable. Now they realize there are people out there who are "just like us," Philippa says. Just as there are commonalities within their collection, such as pieces demonstrating precision and order, they realize they have more in common with the art world than they thought previously and a greater appreciation for artists. "Artists are wonderful vessels for the creative optimism of humans," David says. "They live their work all day."

"There's a gradual realization you don't have to follow rules when collecting art ... Allison helped guide us to the point to realize we can make our own rules," David says. "It's the ultimate free speech." **ws**

ABOVE, clockwise left to right: With Maya Romanoff's *Moulin Rouge*, Cafe wallpaper as a backdrop, the homeowners enjoy Lisa Stefanelli's *Godspeed 2*, enamel on panel, in the bedroom. Patrick Wilson's *Fall Bloom*, acrylic on canvas, accents the office featuring a parsons table from Room & Board and Eames chair from Design Within Reach. Andy Warhol's *Cow*, screenprint on wallpaper, accents a kitchen wall.

OPPOSITE, left to right: The Hugheses' loft in *The Metro*, designed by SK&I Architectural Design Group and developed by PN Hoffman, opens to *A Calm Storm* by Kevin Kepple, epoxy and ink on panel. An Artefacto table and Theodore's chairs complement the setting. In the loft, Beau Chamberlain's *We Watched You Play the Game*, acrylic on panel, accompanies the white Ligne Roset sofa and Plattner table from Vastu. A Jonathan Adler piece tops the side table.



RESOURCES

■ **Christopher Barson
Interior Associates**
202.255.0190

■ **Sightline**
202.441.4082
sightline.biz

■ **G Fine Art**
202.462.1601
gfineartdc.com

■ **The Pink Line
Project**
thepinklineproject.org

■ **Hemphill**
202.234.5601
hemphillfinearts.com