



Elizabeth and Stuart P. Feld. Photographs are by Eric W. Baumgartner.

An enfilade of galleries seamlessly displays American and European furniture, decorative arts, and paintings of multiple centuries.

“We’ve done something that hasn’t been done before,” Stuart P. Feld told me, raising an eyebrow ever so slightly above the rim of his glasses, after the opening earlier this year of Hirschl and Adler’s exciting new gallery in the Crown Building, on the southwest corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street in midtown Manhattan. And indeed, decorative and fine arts of multiple centuries and mediums mingle here in a way that one rarely encounters in an antiques shop or fine arts gallery, or even a museum—not separately but together entirely copacetically. It whets the imagination, even if one is not a collector.

The gallery design, the result of what all parties have called an enormously satisfying team effort, was jointly devised by New York architect Evan Mann in close collaboration with the Felds—Stuart and his wife Sue, and their daughter Elizabeth, who has been an official part of the team at Hirschl and Adler since 1999, and now serves as the director of the decorative arts department and managing director of the firm. “Evan is as detail-oriented as a Feld could hope for,” Liz says, “and most importantly he understood the importance of the classical line, which is really what enables us to show works of all periods so seamlessly in the new space.”

It is at once classic and contemporary, a twenty-first-century home for an art and antiques business with a long and distinguished history. (The firm opened in 1952 and Stuart joined it in 1967, after six years at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and became sole proprietor in 1982.) From the front door one proceeds along a hallway to the reception desk, and from there the showrooms open up in several directions at once. Doorway widths and

ceiling heights vary, each chosen to create uncluttered sight lines that allow the eye to take in a huge range of paintings and decorative arts, yet not feel overwhelmed. The main enfilade of showrooms permits enormous flexibility: viewing the opening installation from the south end, for example, encompassed paintings by contemporary artist John Moore as well as by earlier American and European painters and folk artists, sculpture, furniture, and glass, culminating in the north gallery with a quintessential neoclassical Boston sofa and a grand manner portrait flanked by English Argand sconces.

Flexibility is important because exhibitions change often: between now and when this issue is printed, a show of the works of William Adolphe Bouguereau and his contemporaries will have been mounted and taken down, and “Masterworks: The Best of Hirschl and Adler” will be on view—a multitude of the finest examples of the gallery’s fine and decorative arts, including aesthetic period works. In the not too distant future the “World of Duncan Phyfe” will take center stage.

Beyond the actual physical layout of the galleries, two other elements are key to making the space so adaptable to the many different types of art Hirschl and Adler has to display: the lighting and the wall colors—the latter are Benjamin Moore’s Balboa Mist and Collingwood, two shades of warm gray that are contemporary yet equally as complimentary to a Gothic revival sofa as to a twenty-first-century painting.

“The design process was exciting,” Liz recalls. “Since we didn’t use an interior designer, it was very specific, very detail oriented and required us to make decisions on the most minute aspects of the job.” Mann appreciated the Felds’ input: “it was refreshing to have a client willing to massage



Dealer profile

things—evolve details, shift walls—even as those things were getting built,” he says. And some would-be problems resulted in brilliant solutions: when Mann realized that the walls between the two galleries at the north end would have to be a cumbersome eighteen inches deep to accommodate structural beams above, Liz and Stuart immediately brightened, “vitrines!”—where they can showcase fragile porcelains and other vulnerable objects that would otherwise have to be stored out of harm’s way.



American neoclassical furniture is featured in this assemblage, which also includes paintings by Severin Roesen and Ammi Phillips. At the right is one of the vitrines built into an unusually deep wall necessitated by structural beams above the doorway.

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century works of art visible here include Wilhelm Hunt Diederich's bronze *Greyhounds* of 1913, as well as paintings by Clarence Holbrook Carter, Joseph Stella, and John Moore.

“The way the gallery works,” Mann told me, “is that every space has to both display and store art,” which led to several design innovations. “We wanted to have our stock readily available to show to clients and easily accessible to us,” Stuart says, opening the doors of the cabinets lining one side of the entrance hall: inside, readily visible because the shelves are just deep enough to hold them in single rows, are all of the candlesticks and candelabra, and glass objects in the firm’s inventory. Such cabinets are found throughout the office—outside the actual gallery rooms—and are organized by category, so that, for instance, all sinumbra lamps are together, all argands, all art glass, all ingrain carpets, all porcelain, all looking glasses, and so forth. It is a masterpiece of storage, and a revelation to look at.

The actual working offices also offer opportunities for display. Each of the specialists selected the furnishings and art for his or her own office from the gallery’s holdings, so that each space expresses its occupant’s tastes and interests. In Liz’s, for instance, it is clear that she likes to combine works of all periods—a twentieth-century Italian desk and a chest of drawers attributed to Thomas Seymour, neoclassical chairs and paintings by contemporary artists—not to mention a delicate hollow sphere sculpted from Italian marble by Elizabeth Turk, a favorite of Liz’s of whose work she says, “I can no longer

inhabit a space without one by my side!” Stuart’s office is a temple to the American neoclassical style: he sits at a Boston desk marked by Stephen Smith, in front of an enormous New York breakfront that houses Old Paris porcelain; right now there are a pier table by Duncan Phyfe, a portrait of George Washington by Rembrandt Peale, and a bust of Benjamin Franklin by Houdon. But, he likes to change things and often rotates the objects in his office. Besides, of course, the offices are retail space too, so you cannot be sure you will see the same things twice.

It was Liz Feld who found the space in the Crown Building—some thirteen thousand square feet that Playboy Enterprises no longer had use for. Some time ago the decision was made to leave the seven-story leased town house on East 70th Street that had been Hirschl and Adler’s home for thirty-three years, but the search for a new locale was far from easy. “We needed a convenient location, a large space, and easy access for large works of art,” Liz says. “We also wanted something a bit more manageable than the town house, as we often had false alarms in the middle of the night (some of which required my husband or me to run down the street in our pajamas to check it out), not to



mention the issues of security and time occasioned by the large number of people who would just walk in—in search of restrooms or our ‘gift shop!’” At first the Felds figured they would stay on the Upper East Side, but at one point while Stuart and Sue were traveling Liz was shown the Crown Building and came to realize it would be the perfect locale, “with so many other excellent galleries of varying specialties within just a few block radius.” As a sales location, August Heckscher, the building’s original owner, thought it couldn’t be beat either, reportedly once musing, “in the last analysis, whoever will not shop on Fifth Avenue and 57th Street will not shop anywhere.”