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Art's Content

Gallery owner Kenise Barnes fills her Larchmont home with found treasures and pieces from her favorite artists.

BY: SUSAN HODARA PUBLISHED OCTOBER 10, 2008 AT 08:13 AM



Even on her days off, Kenise Barnes can't help but be drawn to those things that speak to her artistic aesthetic. Which makes sense, given that for the past 12 years, she's owned and operated Kenise Barnes Fine Art, a gallery in Larchmont that represents 40 contemporary artists from across the country. Given that as a college student, she studied painting at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia and, after graduating, honed her skill at Christie's in Manhattan for five years. And given that, she says, "I truly believe that living with art improves the quality of everyday life."

Following that credo, Barnes and her family—husband Eric Lorberfeld; daughter Audrey Sage, 17; son Ian Barnes, 13; and a slew of pets—live with art throughout their Larchmont home, a French Normandy Tudor built in 1919. There's a

Christo in the dining room that Barnes uncovered at an estate sale and a delicate pair of tiny shoes made from orange peels behind glass in the bedroom. There also are scores of works by the artists Barnes represents. "I have collected nearly all of them," she says. "I believe in these artists."

On a recent morning at her home, Barnes shared a selection of items that are most meaningful to her.

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familiar fragrance

Barnes' daughter, Audrey, used to take her mother's pillow and snuggle with it in her own bedroom. "She'd tell me, 'It smells like you,'" recalls Barnes. That smell was the gallerist's signature cologne, Cristalle by Chanel, a fragrance that, she says, "I realized then I could never change."

shrine on

Barnes, who meditates daily, set up a space in the bathroom because "it's the only place in the house where I can close the door and be alone." She sits on a rug before this small spherical table her mother-in-law carried back from Hong Kong. "I was raised Catholic and my husband's Jewish, but I don't really practice anything now. That's why I meditate—to find the spiritual side, that quiet place."



in fine feather

This floral satin number with blue ostrich feathers rimming the hem was created by a friend, artist and clothing designer Beverly Karnell, whom Barnes met when they were both working at Christie's. "Being with her is like playing Barbie," she says. "It's great when a clothing designer has a master's degree in painting!"

table it

Barnes bought this mirrored writing table five years ago on a Monday, the day her gallery is closed and she finds a chance to "poke around." She spotted the piece ("it's probably French and I'm guessing from the 1920s") in an antiques shop in Norwalk, Connecticut. "It was all beat up," she says. "I thought I'd restore it, but I decided I liked the piece the way it was."



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lighting the way

Shortly after she and her husband decided to renovate their kitchen nine years ago, Barnes discovered this French opaline glass chandelier in an antiques store in Stamford, Connecticut (on another one of her Mondays off). “We hadn’t even chosen an architect, but I knew as soon as I saw it that this was the perfect light,” she says.

wave off

Weather permitting, Barnes hits the Long Island Sound in her robin’s egg-blue kayak once a week. She spent extra money on this Kevlar model because it’s so lightweight. Says Barnes: “I can lift it myself, attach it to the top of my car, bring it to the Sound, put it in the water, take an hour-long paddle, and still be dressed for work by 10 a.m.”



book smart

Barnes has close to 100 art books lining her living room bookshelves and topping her coffee table. One of her current favorites is Vitamin P: New Perspectives in Painting by Barry Schwabsky (Phaidon, 2004). Another is Letters to a Young Artist, edited by Peter Nesbett, Sarah Andress, and Shelly Bancroft (Dart, 2006), a compilation of letters from 24 contemporary artists offering practical and philosophical advice to a fictional young protégé. “I got it as a thank you gift,” Barnes says. “I loved it so much I gave it to each of my artists for Christmas.”



gift horse

Three years ago, Barnes spent a solo weekend in Hudson, New York, a town known for its many antiques stores, returning home with this glazed ceramic horse’s head. The piece, which had cost less than \$20 and now peers out over the kitchen, left her family bewildered. “I don’t know where it comes from or what it’s meant to be used for, but I like it,” she says.



home on the range

“The real reason I wanted a new kitchen was that I wanted this range,” admits Barnes of this Viking Professional with two ovens, six burners, a stovetop grill, and 11 dials to operate them all. The gallerist cooks dinner for her family nearly every



night, using as many local and organic ingredients as she can find, including produce from the local farmers market and herbs from her garden.

art apart

Two of Barnes' favorite pieces are small works that hang in her kitchen. One is a 10-by-10-inch intricate pencil drawing by Michiyo Ihara, a Japanese-born artist whom Barnes has represented for almost two years. "I spent six months trying to track her down," she says. "At first she didn't think I was serious. She's ended up being one of my biggest sellers." The other piece is by Lucy Fradkin, another of Barnes' artists: a four-by-five-inch gouache of a blonde-haired fairy dressed in pink and dusted with a smidge of glitter. "Lucy made this as a thank you card after I'd sold a lot of her work a couple of years ago," Barnes says. "Inside it read: 'Thank you for being our fairy godmother.'"



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN O'DONNELL

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