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My Home, My Self: Photography as Art Project

TODD SELBY, a photographer based in New York, is becoming a kind of Horst of the hip set: an environmental portraitist of Williamsburg and Silver Lake society. Since the summer, Mr. Selby, 31, has been shooting his mostly young, mostly good-looking subjects — movie directors, fashion models and designers, painters, writers, indie magazine editors — in their homes in New York and Los Angeles (and, more recently, London and Mexico). The results are posted on a Web site, theselby.com, and will be exhibited next spring at Colette, the Paris boutique.

Mr. Selby started the project, he said, because of his curiosity about the ways personal space reflects personality. “I’ll see an interesting character and think, what does their apartment look like?” he said. The answers vary, of course, but most of the places in these pictures, like their inhabitants, are attractive in a seemingly offhand way (even when, like their inhabitants, they have been carefully put together).



Often, Mr. Selby hears about a compelling home through friends, and after a cursory visit he sets up a shoot — a process, he says, that is loose and collaborative. “It’s their opportunity to tell the world what they’re all about,” Mr. Selby said. “‘This is my favorite book’; ‘this is a picture of me and my mom.’ I think it’s really exciting to them.”

Several people photographed for the project know one another, and most confess they check the site regularly to see whose interiors have been added (there are now around 60 on the site, which has been growing by about three a week).

Mr. Selby’s own apartment, in Manhattan, has not made an appearance. A self-described maximalist, he said he has scaled back on flea market visits since beginning the project and being exposed to so much stuff. “I see people who have these amazing collections and I love it,” he said, “but I love coming home to a blank slate.”

He is content to live vicariously through the homes of his subjects, he said. Here, a few offer their own takes on their personal spaces and the things that fill them.



Ceramic Ponies and Blown Glass in the Kitchen: When Collections Overflow

As an interior designer who works primarily with young, affluent bohemian clients, Ryan Korban says he has developed his own “downtown” decorating style. “It’s a mixture of 1970s Italian, which is similar to midcentury but sexier and more polished,” he said, “and traditional 18th century.” He is big on brass lamps, full-length mirrors, chunky antique furniture and eccentric curios, as evidenced by his own 550-square-

foot studio apartment in SoHo.

Mr. Korban, 24, created a small, set-off living area with a pair of Federal-style chairs — for which he had powder blue tufted cushions made — and a sleek update of a Porter floor lamp. Elsewhere, he spruced up “a horrible rental kitchen” by replacing the plastic cabinet hardware with brushed nickel handles, painting the walls chalkboard gray, and adding unlikely decorative items, like a ceramic pony on a wooden lacquer pedestal, a porcelain blue-and-white Chinese urn atop the fridge, and blown-glass pastry stands from Sur la Table. “I collect these things and I run out of space to put them,” Mr. Korban said. “So I decided to put things in spaces where you wouldn’t expect. I left them there for a few days and it worked.”

Bringing Fashion to the Bathroom Walls

Last spring, when the bathroom of his apartment was being redone, Brian Lichtenberg suggested a design to his landlord. “I thought it would be cool to do it like Givenchy,” he said, referring to the fashion label’s blocky geometric logo, which is now rendered in black tile in his shower. Mr. Lichtenberg, 29, is a self-taught fashion designer with an eponymous label of his own, and he has also incorporated elements of his design work throughout the three-bedroom apartment he rents on the top floor of a 1920s house in the Silver Lake area of Los Angeles. The walls of a second bathroom, for example, are painted in a red, yellow and blue drip style, a design he developed for a hooded sweatshirt (the colors drip from the hood). He describes his aesthetic, in both fashion and décor, as “stark and minimal, but graphic and colorful,” though his at-home showroom is plain white: “White clears your head,” he said. He liked being part of Mr. Selby’s project, he added, mainly because “it was a good excuse to make the apartment tidy and nice.”





'20,000 Leagues Under the Sea,' and Below That, the Basement

Adam Wallacavage, a 39-year-old artist known for his elaborate and bizarre chandeliers, thinks of his brownstone home in Philadelphia as “an ongoing art piece.” What he describes as an “eccentric, Victorian-style” décor actually verges on the otherworldly. For instance, he created a ground-floor dining room reminiscent of an undersea realm, with a ship’s porthole looking into a sunroom, aquamarine walls and a chandelier he made from cast plaster with octopus tentacles for arms. Smaller

tentacled fixtures nearby repeat the motif. Mr. Wallacavage, whose recent show at the Jonathan LeVine Gallery in New York was dominated by nautical themes, wanted a space with a “20,000 Leagues Under the Sea” look, he said, and this house seemed an ideal place for it. “When I called the Realtor about this space eight years ago, he told me the basement looks like a ship, and I knew that’s the house I wanted,” he said. “There was a piano, a bar, portholes and ship paintings.”

These days, the basement is his work space, its floors given over to bags of plaster, its rafters teeming with ornate picture frames. “I just collect things, like picture frames,” he said. “When I don’t know what to do with them, I’ll stick them in my basement.”

Mr. Wallacavage recently rented the house out as a backdrop for a magazine photo shoot; Todd Selby was the photographer, which is how he discovered the space. “It was nice to see the house through someone else’s eyes,” Mr. Wallacavage said.

Poetry Student Who Can’t Stop Collecting

“In terms of my decorating style, I love stuff,” Chase Cohl said. “I love really unique and special stuff.” Ms. Cohl, a 21-year-old poetry student at the [New School](#), has a simple theory about accumulation and décor: “If you pick up things that your personality is drawn to everywhere you go, you’re bound to have an interesting space.”

The living room of the two-bedroom apartment is an array of items, including a zebra-print rug, a bar end table and a vintage floor lamp with beaded fringe, bought at a local antiques shop. She found most of her furnishings, in fact, at antiques shops and flea markets (the Rose Bowl market in Pasadena is a favorite), except for the bed, which her mother picked out at ABC Carpet & Home.



“She said, ‘It might be really cool to have a plain bed because all of your other stuff is crazy,’ ” said Ms. Cohl, who nevertheless put a pair of painted papier-mâché lips (another antiques store find) above the headboard.

Several people have praised her style since the photographs of her apartment appeared on Todd Selby’s Web site, Ms. Cohl said, and while she is flattered, she isn’t taking it too seriously. “It’s not like I pride myself on the fact that I can put a chair next to a lamp and make it look O.K.”



Unfettered Actress's Well-Furnished Lair

Krysten Ritter, a model-turned-actress who co-stars in the coming movie “Confessions of a Shopaholic,” doesn’t see herself as the domestic type. “I’m a girl on the go,” she said. “I own six pieces of clothing and one piece of furniture.”

Luckily, Ms. Ritter, 26, has made up for this lack by renting an apartment in a striking house built in 1980 by the architect Dion Neutra (son of Richard), and sharing it with an interior designer

roommate, Lauren Bratman. Ms. Bratman, 29, decorated in a style she described as “bohemian vintage,” filling the house, in the Silver Lake area of Los Angeles, with pieces like brass and leather kitchen barstools from the 1970s (picked up for \$80 at a vintage store in Westwood), a ’60s-era one-piece teal sofa (\$500 at an estate sale), an Art Deco coffee table that she refinished (\$100 at an estate sale), and a digital reproduction of a William Eggleston photograph that dominates a living room wall. Ms. Ritter’s contribution is “Guitarlos,” an acoustic guitar painted with a woman’s face; it was found by an ex-boyfriend on the streets of Brooklyn, where Ms. Ritter lived prior to moving to Los Angeles last year, and now hangs near the kitchen.

“This is by far the coolest place I’ve ever lived,” Ms. Ritter said of the wood-shingled home, which has a pool, a Jacuzzi, a fireplace and three big bedroom closets for her clothes. “Every day I’m, like, really? Is this really our house?”

In a Tattoo Parlor, an Antique Settee and Rifle-Target Wallpaper

In a few cases, Todd Selby photographed his subjects’ work spaces rather than their homes, because these were the places into which they had “put all their creative output.” Scott Campbell’s Saved Tattoo parlor in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, is the opposite of the cramped, dimly lighted aesthetic of most ink emporiums. Housed in the 2,000-square-foot ground floor of a warehouse, it has the bright, airy feel of an art-filled loft apartment. Mr. Campbell, 31, lives in a studio apartment a few blocks away that he says has a similar feel on a smaller scale.



He used to run a combination tattoo studio and antiques shop nearby, and his love of old things is obvious here. He works on clients in an area furnished with an antique dresser and settee, and he installed subway tile and an old-fashioned sink in the bathroom. For that room’s wallpaper, he used rifle targets bought in his native Louisiana; bullet cartridges embedded in a Lucite toilet seat extend the theme. Mr. Campbell said the studio is meant to be welcoming and comfortable — home-like, in fact — “because obviously getting a tattoo is stressful.”