

FALL 2019

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+ DESIGN



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Artist Alexis Christodoulou creates a home filled with Italian design, page 104. B&B Italia Atoll sofa, from \$14,314, 212-889-9606; bebitalia.com. Poliform Creek side table, \$2,350, 212-672-0600; poliform.com.

Feats of Clay

An artistic couple's pottery collection is defined by an eclectic aesthetic.

by Pilar Viladas. Photographs by Paola + Murray

STEP INTO Janis Provisor and Brad Davis's Tribeca loft, and you'll see works by artists like Mickalene Thomas and Thomas Nozkowski, furniture by modernists such as Florence Knoll and Paul Frankl, and ceramics—lots of ceramics.

For the couple, who had established careers as successful artists before launching their carpets firm, Fort Street Studio—known, aptly enough, for its painterly (and widely imitated) designs in knotted silk—collecting ceramics started out as a lark. In the early 1980s, Davis, seeking a gift for Provisor, found a piece of '20s Silvertone pottery made by the Ohio company Weller. With its high-relief, pastel floral decoration, it looked, Davis says, as if the ceramists “were trying to channel late Monet.” Provisor adds, “I thought it was ugly. But then we started learning

more about it.” Silvertone led to Coppertone, another Weller creation, which has a mottled pattern of copper and green.

The two were soon hooked. “Once we began to collect a particular artist or period, we felt compelled to find variations. It’s the fun of the hunt,” Provisor says, adding, “We were drawn to the tactile, painterly aspects of ceramics.”

As their tastes evolved, the couple discovered German Art Deco pottery, like the pieces Eva Zeisel designed for Schramberg in the 1920s, their simple forms enhanced by colorful, geometric patterns. Later, they were drawn to German pottery from the '60s—popularly known as Fat Lava for its bubbly glazes—and shapely pitchers from the German potter Wilhelm Kugel, with their rich green glaze and subtle

In the kitchen, shelves are filled with the couple's ceramics, including examples by Eva Zeisel. The head, placed on a 1960s Italian tray, is by American artist Kate Costello.





Above: Brad Davis and Janis Provisor in their living room. The two sculptures at right and the one in Janis's lap are by Klara Kristalova. The Karl rug is by Fort Street Studio. Left: In the entryway, vessels and sculptures from the couple's collection sit on a Paul Frankl bench. At center are *Alice*, by Kiki Smith, and *Ghost*, by Anna Sew Hoy.

designs, as well as 1960s Italian pottery. They now own about 300 pieces. While some have increased in value, others have fallen out of fashion.

Most recently, the couple began buying works of contemporary ceramic art, including a seated figure by Paloma Varga Weisz and Klara Kristalova's glazed ceramic heads, which Davis compares to "three-dimensional watercolors." Provisor adds, "Like some of our paintings, most of the ceramic sculpture is not only figurative but also often alludes to fairy tales or a poignant mood." You can see that with Kristalova's anthropomorphic elephant—which has "a very human intimacy," says Provisor—as well as Kiki Smith's unglazed porcelain *Alice* in Wonderland.

The couple, whose Fort Street Studio showroom is in Chelsea, recently rented a Brooklyn studio to spend more time painting and making ceramics—together and separately. "We may do ceramic furniture," Davis says enticingly, though their focus for now is one-off art pieces. Collecting offers a wealth of inspiration, but ultimately, Provisor says, "we think of ourselves as makers."