



# San Francisco

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MODERN LUXURY





Carla Emil and Rich Silverstein next to Roni Horn's *Pink Around*, which reflects a neighboring Dan Flavin light sculpture.

#### PARTNERSHIP

## A Guide to Buying Art and Staying Married

Inside the Rincon Hill home of Carla Emil and Rich Silverstein, co-collectors and co-habitators for the past 37 years. BY ERIN FEHER

For the first decade of their married life, whenever Carla Emil and Rich Silverstein would walk into their home, there would be dozens of faces staring back at them—many with strange, puzzling, or pained expressions. There was the elderly woman from the Deep South perched on a rusty hunk of patio furniture, smoking a cigarette and giving a suspicious side eye; the frumpy-looking character with unnaturally blond dreadlocks and an unflinching gaze; and the pretty young woman dressed as her own mother with the frozen half grin of a Stepford wife.

"Sometimes I'd say, 'God, some people must come in here and think, These people are nuts,'" Emil says. "We thought it was perfectly

normal." While other couples get hitched and begin building a collection of garden gnomes or bone china, Emil and Silverstein, who met 37 years ago while working in advertising at Ogilvy & Mather in San Francisco, became collectors of photography, and it was often faces that attracted them the most. At least that was the case in the beginning. "I am at a point in my life, and it may be because I'm older, where I want to be surrounded by things that make me feel more peaceful," says Emil, who, with her sharp black bob and petite frame, is 68 but looks decades younger.

Beginning March 24, visitors to SFMOMA can judge Emil and Silverstein's early face fetish for themselves, as the couple's personal and sometimes unnerving photography col-

lection—including works by Claude Cahun, Cindy Sherman, and Gillian Wearing—will make up the exhibition *Selves and Others: Gifts to the Collection from Carla Emil and Rich Silverstein*. For the couple, the show will be something of a walk down memory lane, as their collecting has long since veered from photography. "It's funny, when you really know something for a while, there's nothing new to it," says Silverstein, also 68, adding that very little of their beloved photography collection still hangs on the walls of their home. "And then you're living in the past all the time. They're great, but you're living in the past."

Because of their happy financial circumstances and their ever-evolving aesthetic tastes, Emil, a former advertising executive and longtime SFMOMA trustee, and Silverstein, a founding partner and co-chairman of the advertising conglomerate Goodby Silverstein & Partners, live with a strikingly different kind of art collection in a dramatically different kind of home than they did when they were starting out. Though they have always identified as city people—and San Francisco was where they longed to be—family commitments kept them in suburban

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Mill Valley for much of their marriage. Emil muses on whether their in-your-face photography collection was an unconscious acting-out in response to that. Silverstein chimes in, "That collection, it's very psychological. It's intelligent and psychological, and it's not everybody's kind of collection."

They finally made the move back to San Francisco in 2014, landing in the dictionary definition of an urban loft: a converted 1927 knitting factory in Rincon Hill with exposed beams and original steel-framed windows. ("The only neighborhood we knew we didn't want to be in was Pacific Heights," Emil says of their house hunt.)

They worked with Fiedler Marciano Architecture and designer Steven Volpe to revamp the loft, creating an open layout with floating walls that stop just short of the soaring, vaulted ceilings. An all-white modern kitchen takes up a small corner, and a blackened-steel staircase leads up to a roof deck that has views of the fast-growing Transbay development. There are few doors throughout, just beefy partitions to wander among—and, of course, hang art upon.

And while there are far fewer actual faces adorning the walls, it's clear that each piece still speaks to the couple, if more quietly than before. Emil gestures to a Gutai-style painting that holds center stage in the living room, *Work 66-A* by Takesada Matsutani. It looks like two giant globules of dripping white and tan paint on a white background and is nearly six feet tall. To hear the couple discuss the artwork is to see their distinct yet complementary personalities put on display. Where Emil responds viscerally to the piece and speaks of the artist and his role within a larger creative movement, Silverstein appreciates first and foremost its value as an appealing work of graphic design. For him, it wasn't love at first sight. "I saw this and I went, 'What?' And now I love it. But it took a while. I mean, I would've never...I just would have walked by it."

Emil and Silverstein both concede that their current collection is directed by her vision and interests, and there are some pieces in the home that Silverstein, well, tolerates. But that's not to say Emil isn't strongly attuned to her husband's tastes. Silverstein lights up when he begins talking about the best birthday present he ever received: *Child with Toy Hand Grenade in Central Park, NYC* by Diane Arbus. "I said, 'I don't ever want anything else.' That I could have an Arbus?" Emil looks at him with a wink and says, "Who'd you get that from?" ■



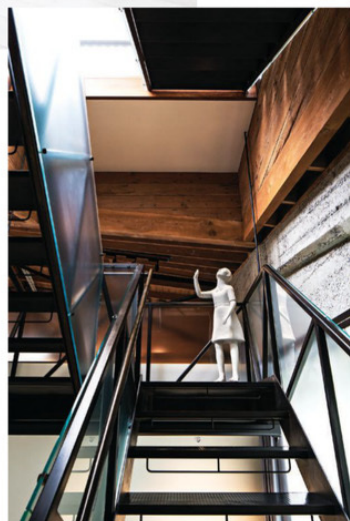
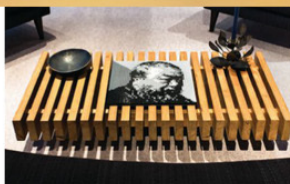
Left: In the dining room, which is open to the main living space, a painting by Francis Picabia is a favorite of Silverstein's.

Below: Visitors walking up the stairs to the roof deck are often surprised to encounter *Standing Girl* by Kiki Smith.



Above: In the master bedroom, a multimedia work by Pipilotti Rist includes video and a collection of found items.

Center: A Pierre Guariche cocktail table is set with conversation pieces, including a self-portrait by Ai Weiwei made from Legos.



Right: In the living room, the steel bookcase was modeled after one in designer Steven Volpe's own home. The painting, *Work 66-A* by Takesada Matsutani, is beloved by both Emil and Silverstein, albeit for different reasons.