SPLURGE WORTHY

This Vintage Furniture Dealer Loves Her Mies van der Rohe Armchairs

They're simply iconic

By Morgan Goldberg
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Cat Ward Carothers

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What makes a purchase "worth it"? The answer is different for everybody, so we're asking some of the coolest, most shopping-savvy people we know—from small-business owners to designers, artists, and actors—to tell us the story behind one of their most prized possessions.

Who?

After living in New York City for seven years, Cat Ward Carothers decided to leave the bustling metropolis and settle down with her husband in Dallas. She was ready for a slower-paced life and a career change from her role designing corporate spaces for WeWork. But once she arrived in Texas and tried her hand at residential interior design, she realized that wasn't quite right for her either. "I wanted to go back to the decorative arts," she recalls. "I found that I was way more passionate about objects and furniture than all of the other things that go into interior design."

Cat leans on one of her MR20 armchairs, with plaster artworks by Alan McCollum behind her. Cat Ward Carothers

Cat turned this epiphany into her dream job by founding The Selby House, a vintage furniture studio that is bringing New York's eclectic design sensibility to the South. Named for Cat's great great great grandfather, George D. Selby, and the shoe company he founded in 1880, the studio sources and restores iconic and one of a kind 20th-century pieces. "I like to call my style a mindful mix," Cat describes. "I like things that are French farmhouse but also postmodern or Italian. I mix different times, styles, and origins. It's not just one specific style, which I found was missing in the Dallas area."

What?

Of course, Cat's own home is filled to the brim with vintage gems. Her most beloved find is a pair of MR20 cantilever cane armchairs by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Designed in 1927 for an exhibition, the sculptural tubular steel seat was the first of its kind. The chair was then mass-produced in Germany in the early 1930s, before production stopped during World War II. But the model was so popular that it reemerged after the war and was eventually manufactured by Knoll in the 1950s, which is likely when Cat's pair was crafted.

Cat worked with Austin-based interior designer Christina Cole to achieve a collected look throughout the home. Cat Ward Carothers

When & Where?

Last December, Cat flew to Los Angeles to purchase the Mies van der Rohe armchairs at Billings auction house. She previously spotted them online, but was too nervous to buy them just looking at the photos. Luckily, the chairs were just as striking and well-maintained in person. "Usually, rattan wears very easily, so I was [really] surprised that the chairs were in very good condition, being a material that, over time, typically isn't as sustainable," Cat shares.

Why?

Cat has been a fan of Mies van der Rohe ever since she learned about him while studying art history at the University of Kansas. She came across the work of the German American architect again as a graduate student at the New York School of Interior Design, which cemented his influence on her. So it only makes sense that his chairs would hold a special place in her heart. "It's a very iconic chair," she says. "I love the Bauhaus school, which Mies van der Rohe was a part of. I felt like, by purchasing the chair, I was purchasing a little part of that history, which I was very excited about."

The MR20 chairs are situated at the head of Cat's dining table, which was crafted by an Austin-based artisan. She completed the space with Rainer Daumiller nine dining chairs, a vintage oriental rug, and an Anne Collier Pop art piece from Sotheby's auction. "My home is definitely a reflection of the studio," Cat concludes. "The reason I started Selby House was to bring the culture and the energy and the uniqueness of New York, [which] I missed, to Dallas. I want to bring individuality and a variety of cultures, mixing styles and origins [in] my home too."

MR Armchair

$2,831 AT DESIGN WITHIN REACH

Bauhaus MR 20 Cantilever Arm Chairs by Mies Van Der Rohe for Stendig

$6,400-$5,120 AT 1STDIBS

Vintage MR20 Lounge Chairs in Leather by Knoll

$4,250 AT 1STDIBS

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