

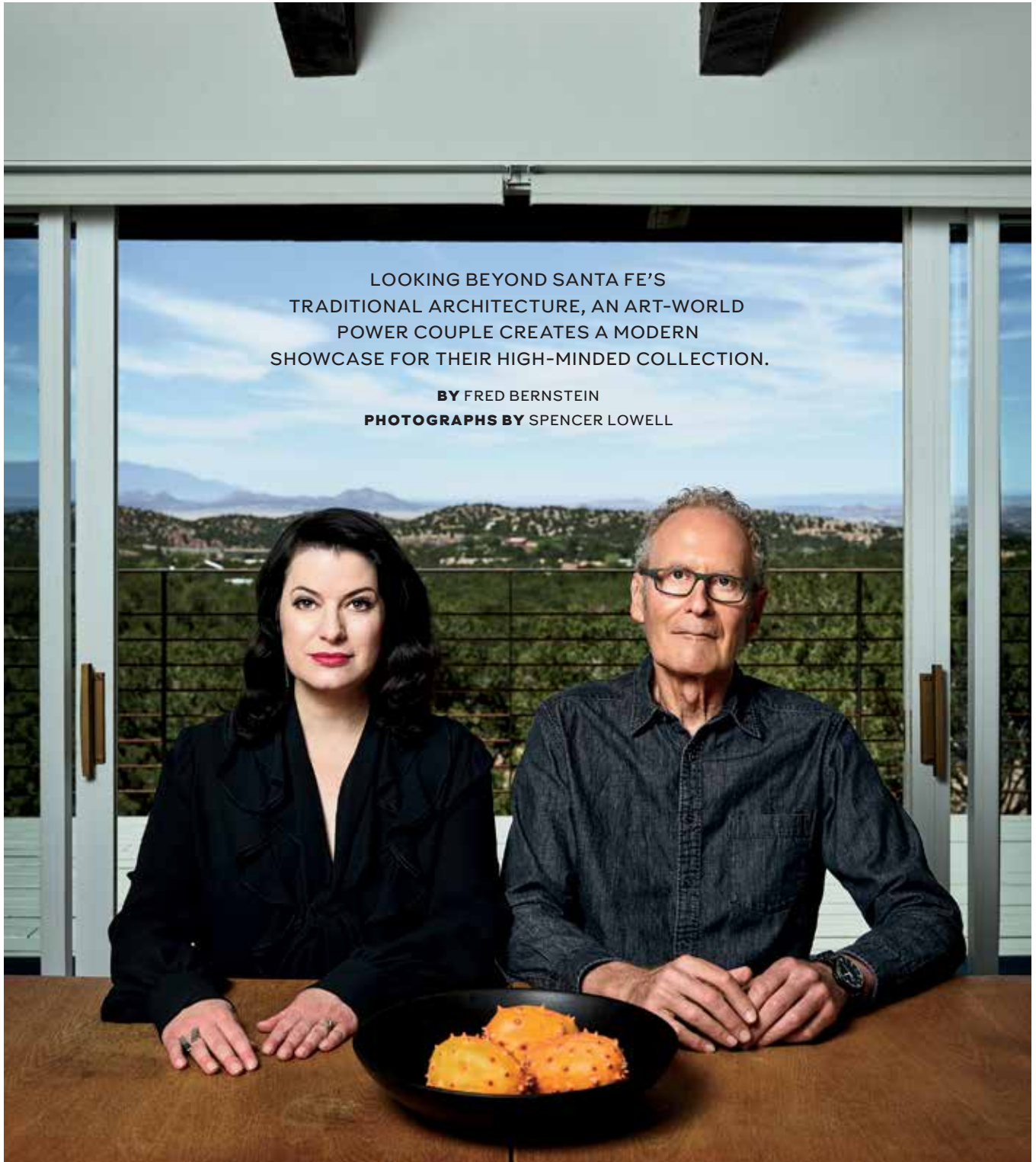


Eames plywood chairs from Design Within Reach surround a vintage Bruno Mathsson table in the Santa Fe dining room of Irene Hofmann and Max Protetch (opposite). For details, see page TKT:

# INTELLECTUAL

LOOKING BEYOND SANTA FE'S  
TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE, AN ART-WORLD  
POWER COUPLE CREATES A MODERN  
SHOWCASE FOR THEIR HIGH-MINDED COLLECTION.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY SPENCER LOWELL



# PROPERTY



**S A NEW YORK GALLERIST** for 40 years, and the man who created a market for architectural drawings, Max Protetch has broken lots of ground. But never as literally as when he helped enlarge the basement of his new house near Santa Fe. One wall of the subterranean space was an outcropping of granite. Protetch learned to use a jackhammer, and over the course of three days he and a team removed several tons of stone to make way for a new master bedroom. The work, says the normally cerebral Protetch, was “surprisingly satisfying.”

At the time, Protetch, 72, and his partner, Irene Hofmann, 48, the director and chief curator of the contemporary art space Site Santa Fe, were living in a guesthouse on the hillside property. “I thought of Irene as the client,” says Protetch, who managed the renovation while Hofmann put in long hours at Site.

His plan involved converting the four-bedroom house into a one-bedroom: Two children’s bedrooms on the main level became part of an expanded living area, while the adjacent master bedroom was reconfigured to serve as Hofmann’s closet, dressing area, and bathroom. There, she starts her days while Protetch is still sleeping; the couple’s Bernese mountain dog, Hannah (named for Protetch’s mother), perches on a white leather Mies daybed while Hofmann showers, then dresses in

a style she describes as “the elegant side of goth” (Rick Owens is a favorite designer). Protetch, whose wardrobe, he says, consists of “denim and more denim,” wakes up later and uses the new basement bath, next to the master bedroom, where he has a tub he loves. “The secret to a good relationship is separate bathrooms,” Protetch says.

The two entertain often. After openings at Site, they might host 150 people for tacos and Frito pies. “It can feel like a big house because of all the walls we took out,” says Hofmann, “but we also throw small dinner parties.”

The couple met in 2000, when Hofmann was a curator at the Cranbrook Art Museum in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and Protetch was running his eponymous gallery in Chelsea. Hofmann hoped to mount a show of the work of Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, a conceptual artist represented by Protetch. “Iñigo had to be convinced to work with someone so young, though neither he nor I realized how young she was,” says Protetch.

Hofmann, then 30, proved persuasive, and Protetch began working with her on a show that ended up touring to six museums. By the time the tour ended, in 2003, Hofmann and Protetch had become a couple. Hofmann moved on to jobs in Newport Beach, Calif., and Baltimore, before becoming direc-

Clockwise from top left: On the wall of the gallery area is a relic of the demolished Chicago Stock Exchange. A multipanel work by Byron Kim overlooks the living room sitting area, which includes an Eero Saarinen Womb chair and ottoman from Knoll. The view from the stairs leading down to the master bedroom. Bronze sculptures by Yue Minjun at the entrance.



tor of Site in 2010. Protetch, who had sold his Chelsea gallery to a Dutch businessman, wasn't sure if he'd move from Manhattan to Santa Fe. But he began looking for houses there "just for fun." To find something with a modern sensibility, he went outside Santa Fe's historic center, which is dominated by adobe buildings. Eventually, he saw a modest house with immodest views of the Jemez and Sandia Mountains. Built in the 1970s, it had been occupied by one family ever since. The basement was a warren of small rooms, but when he looked behind a wall and saw the rock outcropping, he was hooked.

Working with the architecture firm Suby Bowden + Associates, Protetch hired a local metalworker to create the thinnest possible railings for the house's wide wooden deck and to build a stairway to the new basement bedroom. And he had the floors, a mix of wood, vinyl, and tile, covered in concrete. But he wasn't trying to erase the past. Hofmann points out that the house's wooden ceiling was left untouched, providing a connection to the local vernacular.

For Protetch, the house provided a chance to display beloved architectural drawings. Rather than block the sunlight streaming in through sliding glass doors, he built a hallway gallery in which to hang renderings by Frank Lloyd Wright (Protetch engineered the sale of 60 drawings for Wright's cash-poor estate in the '80s), Aldo Rossi, Buckminster Fuller, Paul Rudolph, and many others. Protetch could teach a class about each drawing; indeed, he says that what he misses about having a gallery is the chance to "proselytize." It's no surprise, then, that he's working with art historian Martin Hartung on a book about his years as a gallerist, which started in 1969 in Washington, D.C., when he showed conceptual art while still a grad student at Georgetown. His innovation, he says, was treating architectural drawings as artworks, which raised their profile. But it wasn't always easy. "Trained on competition and criticism, architects are much more difficult to work with than artists," he wrote in a prospectus for the book. "The architectural world is so vicious, it makes the art world seem cozy and supportive."

That's one reason he also represented contemporary artists, some of whose pieces are in the Santa Fe house. Hanging from the living room ceiling is Manglano-Ovalle's eight-foot-long *Cloud Prototype No. 2* (2006), a fiberglass replica of a real cumulonimbus cloud coated in titanium leaf. "It was created digitally, but finished by the artist's hand," says Hofmann. Nearby is an array of 96 painted panels by Byron Kim, which depict the skin colors of his subjects. To make enough wall space to hang the piece, the couple filled in a small window.

When the renovation was over, Hofmann notes, Protetch was actually a little sad. Asked if he would do another house, Protetch says, "In a heartbeat." Especially, he adds, "if there's a jackhammer involved." ☺



The master bedroom features a vintage Le Corbusier chaise longue and a George Nelson sconce. The tripod table is by artist Scott Burton.

Protetch learned to use a jackhammer, and he and a team removed several tons of stone, extending the space for a new master bedroom.

