

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

For accessories designer, collector, philanthropist and mother of three Christine Mack, and her husband, Richard, a Carnegie Hill townhouse became a refuge for their passion for all things art.

By Pamela Fiori
Photography by Karen Fuchs



Gorgeous statuesque Swedish blonde. The very words are intimidating to petite brunettes (like me). Then I met Christine "Chris" Mack. While I wouldn't make a habit of being photographed standing next to her, sitting across from her in the upstairs office of her townhouse in Carnegie Hill—where we were eye level—was both comfortable and comforting. Chris exudes warmth and exuberance for all that she embraces: her family, her philanthropic interests, her career, her cache of contemporary art, a fascination for butterflies and, of all things, a love of hip-hop music. Clearly

this is a woman who can't be pinned down or typecast, which has more than a little to do with her background.

"I was born in Manila," she tells me, "and lived there with my mother and sister until I was 7." After that, Chris' family moved to Sweden to be near her mother's family. When her parents divorced, her father, who was American, moved to NYC. "I used to visit him in the late '70s and '80s when the subway cars were full of graffiti," Chris says. "I vividly remember seeing the Keith Haring 'Crack is Wack' mural on East 128th Street and Harlem River Drive. The



HIGHER GROUND
A custom-made chandelier hangs from the ceiling of Chris and Richard Mack's double-height vestibule, while a painting by Julian Opie accents a wall near the staircase. Opposite page: Chris with her dog, Toby ("He's my fourth son," she says), next to a sculpture by minimalist artist Sol LeWitt.

HOOP DREAMS
 From top: In the backyard, a basketball hoop for the block boys hangs above a graffiti drawing by artist and former Def Jam Recordings Creative Director Cey Adams; "Cape Diem" is a reminder for my boys to seize the day," says Chris, "and to make the most of the least and the least of the worst!" In the family room, a 1960s lacquered Aldo Tura coffee table is surrounded by custom-made sofas and chairs, pillows and throws from Barneys New York and a Hermes bag sculpture by Jonathan Seliger.



city back then was full of tags, visuals and statements. There was an energy that made New York so exciting and expressive."

Despite the lure of NYC, Chris wasn't ready to become a full-timer—not just yet. She started modeling at 15, which gave her the chance to live in London, Paris and Milan, and to travel all over the world. Still, she kept hearing New York's siren call and finally answered it in 1987 at all of 18 years old. She was first represented by the Ford Agency. Even at her young age, she knew that she wouldn't be modeling forever, so she enrolled as a student at Parsons to study advertising and graphic design. That led to a brief stint as a graphic designer at *House Beautiful*, then to her own firm, which she named Cee Jay Design. "Most of my clients were in fashion," she says. "But I also did plenty of pro bono work for some of the NYC-based charities I was becoming involved with." By this time she'd married real estate executive Richard Mack, had three small children and realized that working at home made more sense.

Today, Creel-Mack, the affordable-luxury accessories company she launched in 2011 with her friend Jennifer Creel, occupies a good part of her time, but so does her focus on art and philanthropy. "I

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became an art collector by default," she admits. "My in-laws are both big collectors, so I started going to fairs and galleries with them and their art adviser Rita Krauss." She also received guidance from Natasha Schlesinger, art adviser and founder of ArtMuse. Chris was hooked. A few pieces lent to her by her mother-in-law, which she and her husband incorporated into their various residences, became the starter kit for what is now an impressive array of paintings, sculptures and objects of their own.

The Carnegie Hill townhouse, where the family now lives, was once three row houses dating back to the late 19th century. In the 1950s, they became the Spence-Chapin adoption

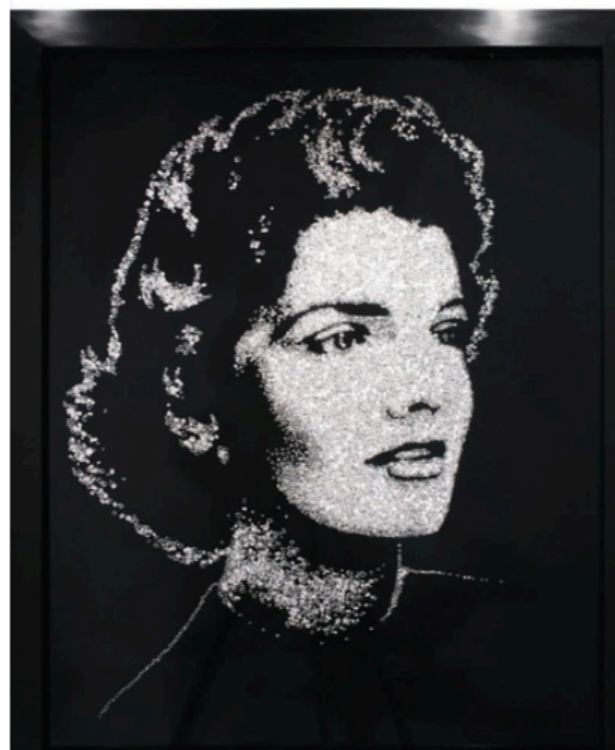
agency. When Richard Mack first bought the property in 2007, he intended to convert the space into condos. Eventually, the Macks decided to call it home and hired Leroy Street Studio as the architects and Jim Aman to handle the interiors. Although the two firms had never worked together, their six-year collaboration on the home garnered them the 2014 Carnegie Hill Neighbors Award.

The building is, to put it mildly, an impressive space, made all the more so by the art it houses. On a casual tour, Chris points out two Cindy Shermans, a series by Keith Haring, an Alice Aycock sculpture called "Cyclone Twist" (which is exactly what it looks like), a Robert Rauschenberg, a Sol LeWitt and a small Banksy perched on a mantelpiece. There's not a room in the triplex that doesn't have something of significance—and yet it's anything but weighed down by it all. That's partly because the chosen pieces are colorful, upbeat and, while serious in an aesthetic sense, they themselves aren't in a real sense. That's on purpose. "I like positive and fun art," says Chris.

She also favors unexpected materials: An exquisite creation by Colombian artist Federico Uribe looks as if it were made of gold and silver fibers. Those fibers turn



ARTIST'S COLONY Clockwise from top left: The Mack abode houses an impressive art collection, including a painting by Banksy, purchased at Art Basel, of a boy looking through a peephole that is an actual hole in the painting ("It reminds me of my boys being curious and naughty," says Chris); a painting by graphic artist Ryan McGinness; the dining room features antique regency chairs, Italian ceiling fixtures from the 1960s, Robert Lee Morris brass sculptures on the table and a wall piece by Federico Uribe that's made entirely of paintbrushes; "Love is the Answer (Einstein)" by Mr. Brainwash; Keith Haring prints, gifts from Chris' mother-in-law; "Jackie O" from the *Pictures of Diamonds* series by Vik Muniz, who used 3,000 loose diamonds to create the image, and then photographed it; and a triptych photograph by Lalla Essaydi.





TWISTED SISTER
From left: The master bathroom has a 1960s light fixture by Gino Sarfatti and a tub by Water Monopoly; "Cyclone Twist," a miniature version of one of the sculptures from Alice Aycock's installation on 57th Street and Park Avenue this past summer. "I needed a sculpture that would be durable, since this is the basement gallery," says Chris. "My boys throw things down from the fourth floor. I sometimes find Nerf gun pellets and balls inside of it."

and create something tied to nature"—in this case, branches of cherry blossoms.

"I also think it's important to encourage culture and art in our communities," says Chris. "Art should bring the community together, not divide it. Many galleries are pretentious and the art is too expensive." That's why her interest is not limited to Manhattan and has extended to places like Bushwick, Brooklyn, and to Wynwood in Miami.

And, yes, there's her predilection for what she refers to as "domesticated street art": "When we built the townhouse, I wanted to commission a graffiti artist to tag the wall in our backyard. A friend of mine who lives in Brooklyn introduced me to Cey Adams, who was the creative director of Def Jam Recordings and is now known for his hip-hop graphic designs. He was a graffiti artist in the late '70s and early '80s whose work was exhibited alongside Jean-Michel Basquiat and Haring. I figured I couldn't do better than that." Not a bad addition to a backyard where there's also a basketball hoop (three boys, remember?).

There are other signs of children: a ground-floor sports room that, if need be, can be converted for art exhibitions. But for now it houses a pingpong table

and a collection of lacrosse sticks, skateboards and basketballs. "I didn't want a house where the boys felt they had to be contained," Chris says. "That's why there are only a couple of formal rooms, like the dining and formal living room (where they don't want to be anyway). The rest of the house is a yes house."

As for philanthropy, the entire Mack family has long been generous to causes close to their hearts, so it was only natural that Chris find her own way to follow in their footsteps. This fall, she and her husband co-chaired events for New Yorkers for Children, the Child Mind Institute and the American Friends of the Israel Museum, as well as serving on several boards.

So from where did this civic-minded impulse stem? "Where I grew up in Sweden, everyone is treated the same and has the same opportunities in life," explains Chris. "All of the outreach by New Yorkers with big hearts is making this city a place where every child and young adult will have the same opportunities to succeed, to find their passions and to become leaders of the world. Despite all the places I've lived and worked, there's no place that feels like home to me more than New York."

Spoken like a true native. **M**

out to be from ordinary paintbrushes. A magnificent chandelier suspended in the center of the house is not vintage Venetian glass but parchment ("Very organic," says its owner). A triptych by Moroccan photographer Lalla Essaydi of a beautiful Muslim woman posed like an odalisque is draped in what seem to be clusters of gold nuggets. Look more closely and you'll see that what appears to be nuggets are actually bullets. Not fun, but definitely startling.

The art flows through into every space, including the sons' bedrooms. That's one of the reasons Chris likes discovering young artists: "So our boys will grow up feeling comfortable with such talent," she says. Her latest commission by Jessica Lichtenstein—an acrylic sculpture—will be placed in the boys' homework studio. "I asked Jessica to take the word 'dream'

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ARTFUL LIVING
In the living room are cocktail tables by Willy Daro, a custom-made ceiling chandelier, metal rugs by Holland & Sherry and a painting by Valerie Jaudon above the sofa.