



## An Interview with Eric Dupont

By Daniella Ohad



THE ART DEALER ERIC DUPONT, WHOSE PARIS GALLERY HAS MADE ITS NAME IN CONTEMPORARY ART, HAS DEVELOPED A TASTE FOR REFINED, SOPHISTICATED MID-CENTURY DESIGN. HERE, IN THE FIRST OF A SERIES, WE SPEAK WITH HIM ABOUT HIS COLLECTION.

Top: One of Eric Dupont's favorite pieces is this green upholstered armchair from the Multimo series F280 designed by Pierre Paulin (1969).

Above right: A rare low chair, one of a pair, designed by Janine Abraham and Dirk Jan Rol, 1956.

Right: The Pointe de Diamant credenza that Antoine Philippon and Jacqueline Lecoq designed for Behr, 1961, is made of steel and lacquered palissander.



THE APARTMENT ERIC DUPONT SHARES WITH HIS WIFE, HERMINIA IBARRA, in a magnificent Beaux Arts landmark building on a wide Parisian boulevard expresses the individuality of the couple in every object, every form, every color. The Duponts live with a collection that has grown from serious research, deep knowledge, an aesthetic sensibility—and from the desire to live with important objects that are also cornerstones in the story of modern design.

The apartment retains much of its original architectural detail, and the rococo style moldings integrate beautifully with the Duponts' modernist objects and contemporary art. Dupont seeks out areas that have not yet been discovered by the marketplace, rare pieces, prototypes, and objects that did not make it into production. Among the standouts of the collection are a pair of rare low chairs (1956) designed by Janine Abraham and Dirk Jan Rol (recently included in the *Chefs d'Œuvres* exhibition at the Centre Pompidou-Metz), and a glass-topped desk (1960) and several cabinets designed by Antoine Philippon and Jacqueline Lecoq between 1958 and 1961.

### When did you start getting interested in design?

Design and its aesthetics have played a role in

my life almost as far back as I can remember. As a young adult, I was interested in good design, in sophisticated design, but this was long before I could afford to buy it. I was living in Toulouse, where I had opened my first art gallery, and it was in Toulouse where I first learned the meaning of great design.

**Do you remember what you saw in those days that captured your interest?**

During the 1980s several galleries in Toulouse began offering French design of the 1930s and 1940s, particularly the work of such art deco masters as Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann and Jean-Michel Frank. This is the material that first sparked my love for design and my appreciation for its power to evoke emotions. But at the time I was mainly preoccupied with building a business and with extending my family, so I could not afford any of these. My period of exploration and educating myself extended into the 1990s, when many of



the progressive galleries began showing French postwar design—by Jean Prouvé and Charlotte Perriand. By the late 1990s, when I was ready to start collecting, I felt confident about my understanding of modern design and knew what I wanted to live with. When Herminia and I bought our apartment, it was clear that we wanted to collect together. We wanted to furnish our home with pieces we loved, with pieces that worked well with our art collection. For the most part our design collection comprises objects that were underappreciated when we bought them—designs we discovered and love.

**What do you collect?**

My collection is comprised of two major areas: French furniture of the 1950s and 1960s and lighting by Gino Sarfatti.

**Top:** Among the furnishings of the master bedroom is a hanging cabinet by Philippon and Lecoq, this one produced in 1958 by the Bofinger firm. On top of it (at the right) is an Acrilica table lamp designed by Joe Colombo and produced in 1962 by Oluce; at the left is table lamp, no. 599, designed by Gino Sarfatti and produced by Arteluce in 1968. Paulin's Dos à Dos is in front of the window

**Center:** Philippon and Lecoq's glass, wood, and lacquer desk was produced by Jules Degorre, 1960–1967.

**Bottom:** Philippon and Lecoq's desk was advertised in various magazines during the 1960s.

TOP: ERIC DUPONT PHOTO MIDDLE: COURTESY GALERIE PASCAL CUISINIER



**What is it about the lighting designs of Sarffati that you love?**

Sarffati devoted his entire career to designing lights and he was the greatest at it. Experimenting with unorthodox forms and advanced technology he worked for Arteluce [the company that has since merged with Flos], which realized many of his designs. I have found, though, that his most groundbreaking designs often did not enter production because they were too avant-garde for the popular taste. They are the rarest and the most collectible pieces of his work.

**Tell me about Antoine Philippon and Jacqueline Lecoq, whose work has a tremendous presence in your collection.**

They were a couple of great furniture designers who never managed to gain success in the marketplace. Their aesthetic celebrates a particular moment in the history of modern design in France in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, when designers began to

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Above: The living room in the Duponts' Paris apartment contains a loveseat by Pierre Paulin (1969) next to a Grip lamp by Achille Castiglioni (1985) for Arteluce. Also visible are a low chair by Janine Abraham and Dirk Jan Rol and, at the left, a coffee table by Maria Pergay.

Right: A corridor in the Duponts' apartment, showing a white credenza, designed by Philippon and Lecoq, painted palissander and steel, 1962, produced by Behr.

Below: A mahogany hanging cabinet of four panels designed by Philippon and Lecoq, 1962, produced by Behr.

**In your journey into the world of design, is there any design dealer or expert you have found particularly inspiring?**

The one and only one was the late Pierre Staudenmeyer. He taught me a lot, and helped me to navigate through the process of defining and refining my own taste. Pierre was ahead of his time, but exemplified the way design should be dealt with. He had a great eye for new talents and produced their designs himself in limited editions; most of these pieces are still considered ultra-collectible. Now, that collecting contemporary design has become a part of our culture—of art fairs, international auctions, and in defining today's taste—he is not here to enjoy the realization of his dream. I first met him in the 1980s at his Neotu Gallery in Paris. He then founded a second gallery, the Re Gallery in New York, which opened in 1997. Pierre was a visionary, whose great eye for design and for young talents resulted in the discovery of some of the stars of our time—Garouste and Bonetti, Martin Szekeley, and the Bouroullec brothers, just to name a few. At Neotu, Pierre formulated a concept that stands at the core of most contemporary design galleries today, where a gallery takes on the production of objects and acts as the exclusive retailer of those pieces.





challenge the market for postwar industrial production made for the millions by introducing examples of handmade modern design. But the market was not yet ready for this new type of luxurious product, and Philippon and Lecoq ultimately produced only about three hundred pieces altogether.

**I noticed the two upholstered seats by Pierre Paulin, which look more like sculptures than pieces of furniture. For the most part Paulin's furniture was industrially produced, permitting the public to discover the comfort of modern living. What areas of his work do you like to collect?**

Pierre Paulin had a key role in shaping twentieth-century design, and we are fortunate to have two rare models, a red Dos à Dos from 1966 that belongs to Herminia, and an upholstered armchair from the Multimo series F280, designed in 1969. Paulin worked with Artifort, a furnishing company based in the Netherlands. They produced only seven of each of these models to test the market, but they were not successful and were never put into production. I am totally moved by these two designs.

Top: Maria Pergay's triple-tiered painted steel coffee table was designed in 1968; this example was a special commission of 1972.

Center: Paulin's Dos à Dos of 1966.

Bottom: This small sideboard designed by Philippon and Lecoq for Behr, 1960, is of mahogany and brushed metal, with white paint.



**What does collecting "design" mean to you and what is the difference between collecting art and design?**

My home is an important piece of my identity. To me collecting art and design are the same. It is about surrounding myself with things I love and that become integral to my everyday life. I recognize a part of myself in everything I own, and living in this home, surrounded by these things, is the fulfillment of a dream.

**Who do you consider a great design collector?**

Didier Krzentowski, the cofounder [with his wife Clémence] and director of Galerie Kreo is a great collector. I respect his taste and his collecting decisions; we inspire each other.

**What is the best advice you can give someone who wants to start collecting design?**

The first step in creating a collection is to get educated. Visit fairs, auctions, exhibitions, design galleries, museums. My second piece of advice is to follow your heart and trust your feelings, collect what you love.

TOP: JOUSSE ENTREPRISE, ERIC DUPONT PHOTO MIDDLE: ERIC DUPONT PHOTO BOTTOM: FRANK LANDAU, FRANKFURT