

BEATA AND VANN Fisher, both lawyers, had not really considered buying art until the turn of the millennium. It wasn't the heralding of a new century that encouraged them, but seeing the impressive contemporary art collection of a friend. "Vann and I were transfixed by a painting by Ugo Rondinone. Really before then, we were more than content with our small collection of paintings and artefacts, none of them really particularly valuable," says Beata. The Bill Viola video installation at their friend's home also captured their hearts and imaginations. "At that point, you could say we were intoxicated with contemporary art and keen to learn more," says Vann.

The couple started visiting local galleries, both in their city and interstate. Gallery owner Ray Hughes took the couple into his loft, introducing them to artists and providing them with histories and backstories for many of the works. Other galleries made their back rooms available, as well as their extensive expertise and knowledge. The Olsen Irwin Gallery showed them the work of Amanda Marburg. "Marburg was probably our first 'serious' piece of art," says Beata, who now has a number of the artist's works.

BEATA & VANN FISHER

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Their interest for fine art—whether it was painting, sculpture or an installation—took hold. By the time they were planning the build of their house—designed by architect Russell Casper, then design director for Grodski Architects—nooks, walls and spaces correlated to various works of art. Rather than traditional fixed walls, the Fisher’s home is not dissimilar to a warehouse gallery, with sliding walls designated for larger paintings. One such painting, by Robert Owen,

features in the couple’s formal dining area. In 2005, as they were travelling to purchase the Robert Owen painting, they read in a newspaper about the opening of a Sam Jinks exhibition. Beata can still recall her reaction to the images in the newspaper, “Oh my god!”. And so Jinks’ *Pieta* takes pride of place in a nook in the formal lounge, specifically designed to accommodate the two realistic figures of a son holding his dying father in his arms. “We love his work,





but we also enjoy the memory of seeing it and then purchasing it. There's also the reaction from family and friends. Some who may have recently lost someone feel a little uncomfortable," says Vann.

As lawyers, there was always an agreement between the two when the art collection was moving forward. "We both have to love the work. If Vann sees something without me, I need to see it and agree. But I can buy art without his permission. It seems to work,"

says Beata. However, the works in their collection are strongly linked by colour and movement. “We both respond to art that’s arresting, literally stops you in your tracks and makes you think,” says Vann. And while some works are colourful and joyous—like Kyoung Tack Hong’s vibrant assortment of pencils, pens and erasers—others, such as Sam Leach’s painting, are dark and brooding.

The Fisher’s art collection grew in stages—Indigenous Australian art followed by photography. The couple has several works by Polly Polixeni Papapetrou as well as Callum Morton, both arranged at the entrance to the home. If they aren’t familiar





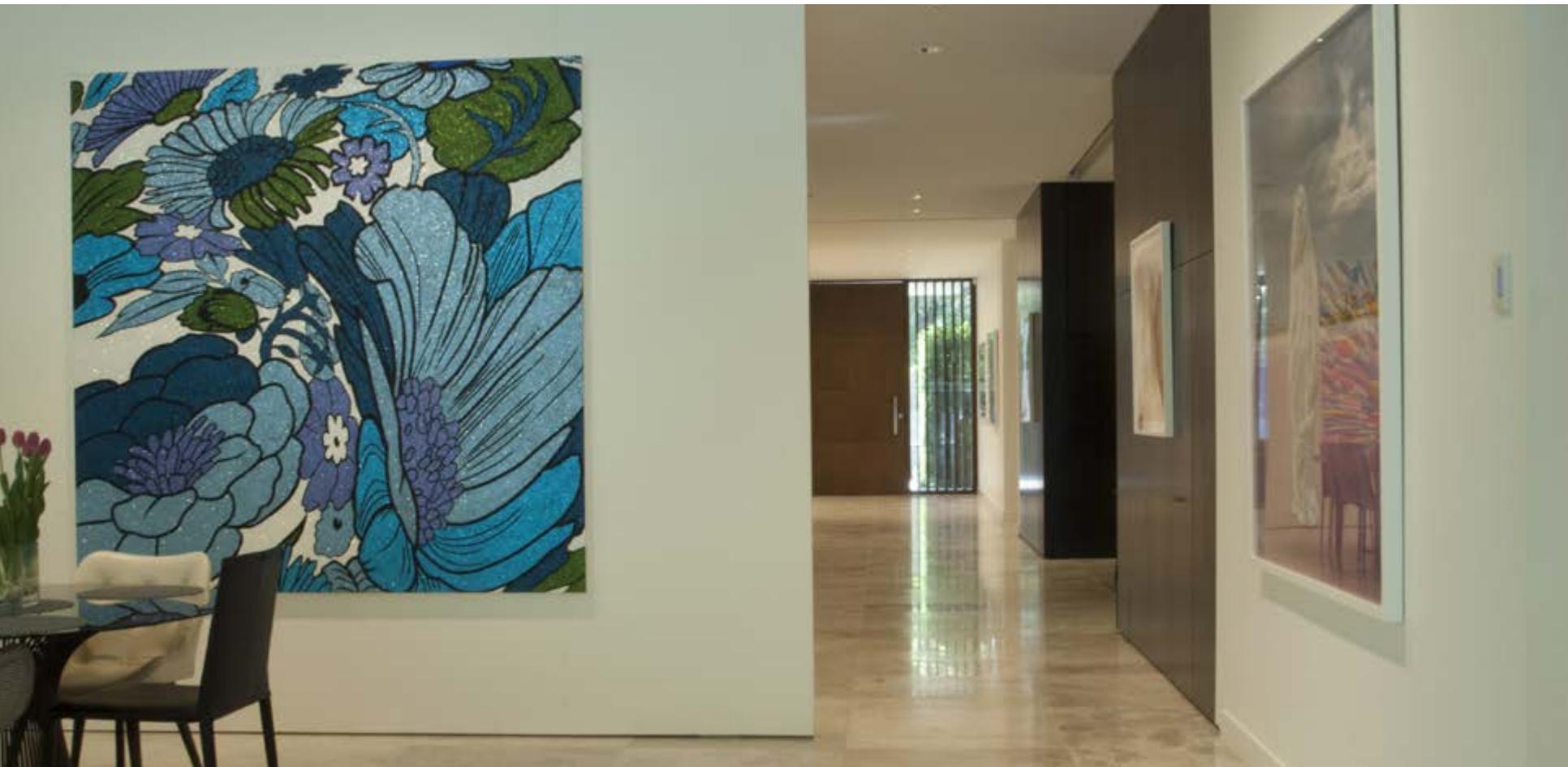
with certain medium, such as photography, they will start by looking at a few established artists.

Sculpture is also on their radar. As well as the indoor sculptural works such as Christopher Langton's *Give the Dog a Bone* in the dining area, there's a considerably weightier piece—a Clement Meadmore work—in a courtyard. The couple still recalls the arduous process of purchasing and shipping the Meadmore piece from outside of New York. Weighing 300 kilos, the Meadmore is an important piece in the collection.

The Fishers not only had to work out the logistics of buying something they had only seen in a book, they had to “identify” themselves to the seller to prove that they were serious art collectors, including providing a number of references from leading galleries. Meadmore's *Three Up* also had to be collected in a relatively short time, as it was located in a courtyard of a building and renovations were about to commence. “We were fortunate that Russell (Casper) went over to the States to assess its condition,” says Vann.



One of the largest paintings was also “close to never happening”, at least for Vann. Darren Wardle's *Lost Weekend*, a large painting, takes pride of place in the formal living room. Vann and Beata initially saw the painting at a gallery, but there was a sold



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sticker next to it. The buyer was Beata, who bought it as a surprise for Vann's upcoming 60th birthday. For the next month or so, Vann spoke endlessly of missing out. Even when family and friends went to the gallery to see the painting still on the wall, with tape written below wishing him "Happy Birthday", the "penny still didn't drop", he says.

Since then, there have been new works as well as commissions—such as the Sam Jinks self-portrait displayed in the home office. "We're still collecting art. I'm still keen to one day buy a painting by Ugo Rondinone," adds Beata.

The Fisher's art collection is owned by a trust.





