



Annabelle Selldorf.

SELLDORF ON ELEGANCE AND ARCHITECTURE

When the venerable piano maker Steinway & Sons needed a new showroom and performance hall in Manhattan, it turned to an architect whose work can be described, in musical terms, as *pianissimo*. Where New York City's real estate usually shouts, architect Annabelle Selldorf whispers—her buildings and interiors are quietly elegant and subtly nuanced. Born in Cologne, Germany, Selldorf—whose career is surveyed in a new book, *Selldorf Architects: Portfolio and Projects* (Phaidon)—is known as much for her modernist residential design (clients include artists Cindy Sherman and Eric Fischl) as for her renovations of art galleries and museums, such as Manhattan's Neue Galerie and the Clark Art Institute in Massachusetts. On the boards: a gleaming SoHo luxury condo, 42 Crosby; a \$30 million expansion for San Diego's Museum of Contemporary Art; and a nonprofit school in southern Zambia. Of the latter, she says: "I jumped up and down with joy at the opportunity." **INGRID ABRAMOVITCH**

MATTERS OF TASTE

• Good taste has gotten a bad reputation. I think it's wildly important, but too often, it connotes something bourgeois, predictable, and conventional. I have to be careful talking about it because I don't want to be seen as that well-bred German girl who is always very proper—though anyone who gets to know me realizes that is not at all who I am.

• Good taste actually has nothing to do with being proper. It is about discernment and the choices you make. It's a sensibility you hone. It has to do with dimensions, proportions, materials, and colors; it can go even deeper than that. There is a great deal of intuition in what I do.

IN THE KEY OF LIFE

• When Steinway approached me, they were moving out of a space on 57th Street where they had been for 90 years. They wanted the design of their new home to reflect an attitude of permanence and timelessness while still feeling modern and forward-looking. The old hall had beautiful architectural details. I would've loved to have renovated it and made it relevant for today, but the building was sold.

• We looked uptown, downtown, and near Carnegie Hall for a new location. In the end, we chose the old International Center of Photography building, a magnificent modernist space in midtown, a block from Times Square.

• The design was inspired by the colors and woods you find inside a piano. I went to the Steinway factory in Queens and saw a bolt

of bright yellow suede that is used inside the piano keys. I chose that color, which is called Imperial Yellow, for the new hall's poured-resin floor, seats, and curtains. It's an invigorating hue, a complement to an otherwise modern and rational palette.

LUXE EFFECTS

• Over the last 20 years, the demands of luxury-home clients have really changed. Increasingly, they expect to live on a big footprint—a testament to the wealth they have accumulated and are willing to spend.

• In this market, there is no apartment that doesn't have a wine refrigerator. People have greater storage needs than ever before. Everybody still wants a major media theater, but



A former carriage house in Greenwich Village, 2010.



The Sunset Park Material Recovery Center in Brooklyn, 2013. ABOVE: Selldorf's new monograph.



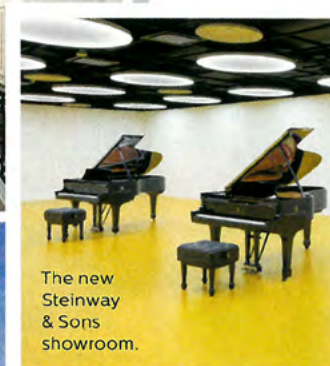
The Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, 2014.



David Zwirner gallery in New York's Chelsea neighborhood, 2013.



The Neue Galerie, 2001.



The new Steinway & Sons showroom.



A rendering of 42 Crosby.

that's going to change. Soon we'll just put on glasses and little earphones to be entertained.

• For an architect, it's uncommon to find a developer who supports your vision. I was lucky with 42 Crosby. The owners were proud to have bought the site, having beat out several others for it. They were very open to our design attitude and made sure the quality was adequate.

• It's challenging to design condos without a specific client in mind. We try to make it interesting by creating a narrative or doing something we haven't done before.

CONNECT THE DOTS

• Houses are like portraits. When you create a home for someone, you have an opportunity to make it specific, individual, and a little bit uncanny. It should fit like a glove. If we were working together, you would tell me about yourself, and I would try to be responsive. It's a fun process because you get to know somebody.

• Many of my clients have become friends. It's terrific when you create a home for them, and when it's finished, they invite you to stay. I'm always pleased when it turns out the way I imagined it—though I do find myself pushing the furniture around a little bit.

SLOW START

• My father was also an architect. In Germany, when I applied to architecture school, I was rejected not once but twice. It really shook my confidence. That period between 18 and 20 was awful. I was full of doubt and fear.

• I must have been more determined than I remember. I got into architecture school at Pratt in New York. Once I got started, I loved it. I didn't like the air-conditioning courses, but I did love the design studios, and art and architectural history classes. I never looked back.

• Women are underrepresented in many professions, including this one. I work with many fantastically accomplished women. I never had children, but I've watched several of my colleagues have their first, second, or even third child while working here. I have so much admiration for how they manage.

• Architecture is a profession that motivates people to be passionate. You have to love it, because otherwise it is too tedious. Architecture is not glamorous. It's a lot of hard work and collaboration. You have to be patient and willful.

PRIDE OF PLACE

• As an architect in a gentrifying city, I feel a responsibility to produce a great building—not just for the condominium buyer, but for every person who walks or drives by it. I want to be proud of my buildings. A rewarding project for me was designing a recycling center in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, that the public can visit.

• I've worked on several museums and galleries. Each case is unique. A museum that exhibits Greek and Roman sculpture will have different requirements than one filled with old masters. In one situation, you might want daylight, while in another, you might abhor it.

• I love being out in the world and looking at what other people do. I recently went to the Vitra Campus near Basel, Switzerland, and saw a factory designed by SANAA. It is so simple, so functional, and just beautiful. It made me elated.