NEW YORK

Annabelle Selldorf—The formidable ice queen of New York architecture melts for the PIN–UP camera.

Interview by Ricky Clifton, Video stills by Julika Rudelius, Styling by Parinaz Mogadassi.

1-2. (Above left) The Selldorf offices in New York are in the same building where Warhol's Factory used to be 30 years ago.

3. (Above) Annabelle Selldorf came to New York in the late 1970s to study architecture at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.

4. One of Selldorf's latest projects, 200 Eleventh Avenue in Manhattan, features a car elevator serving each of the 18 floors.

5. She has made an impressive evolution from high-end niche architect to full-on power player on the New York architecture and real estate scene.

ANNABELLE SELLDORF
17

6. Jacket with deconstructed sleeve, Yohji Yamamoto; denim pants, model's own.

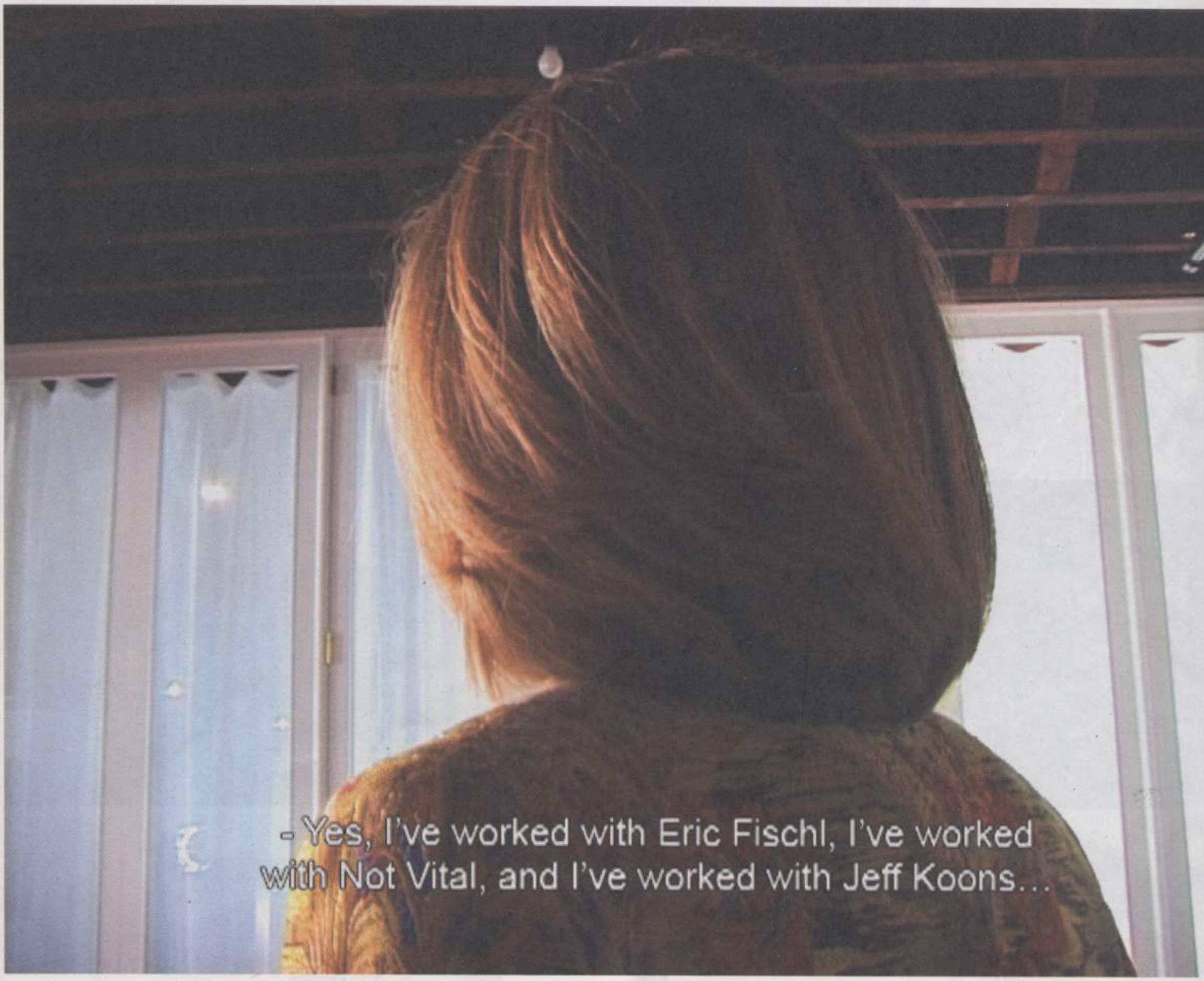
7. Jacket with deconstructed sleeve, Yohji Yamamoto; lucite jewelry, Patricia von Musulin.

8. Gold brocade blazer, Daughters By Obedient Sons; long sleeve jersey tee with abstract print, vintage Helmut Lang; lucite jewelry, Patricia von Musulin.

12. Black stiletto-heeled bottines, Bruno Frisoni for Ohne Titel.

11. Fuchsia-colored satin pumps with ankle straps, Miu Miu.

10. Black brushed twill pants, TSE Cashmere.

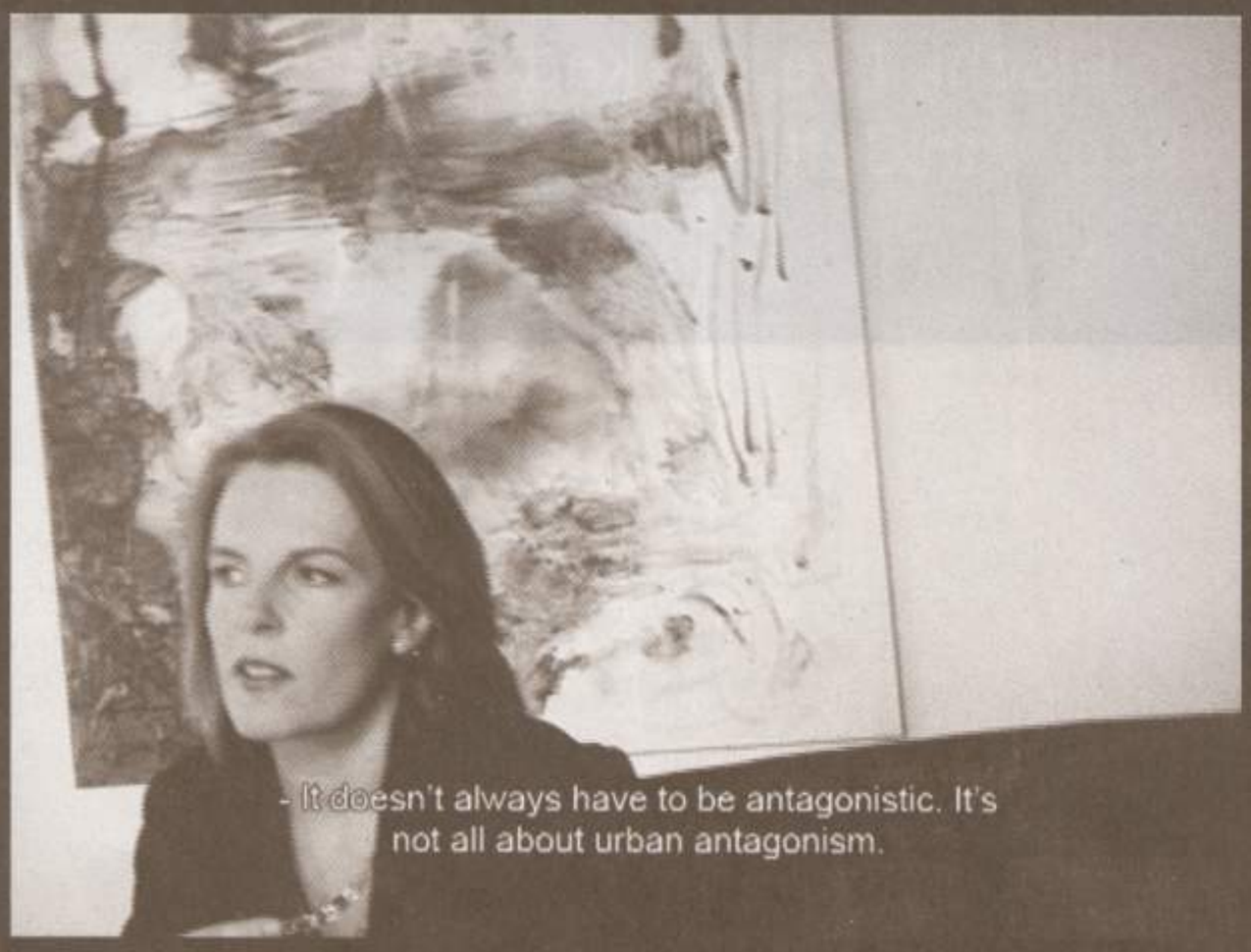


9. Annabelle Selldorf is still the go-to architect for the upscale New York art set. For this story, hair by Anthony Campbell, Makeup by Anouck Sullivan.

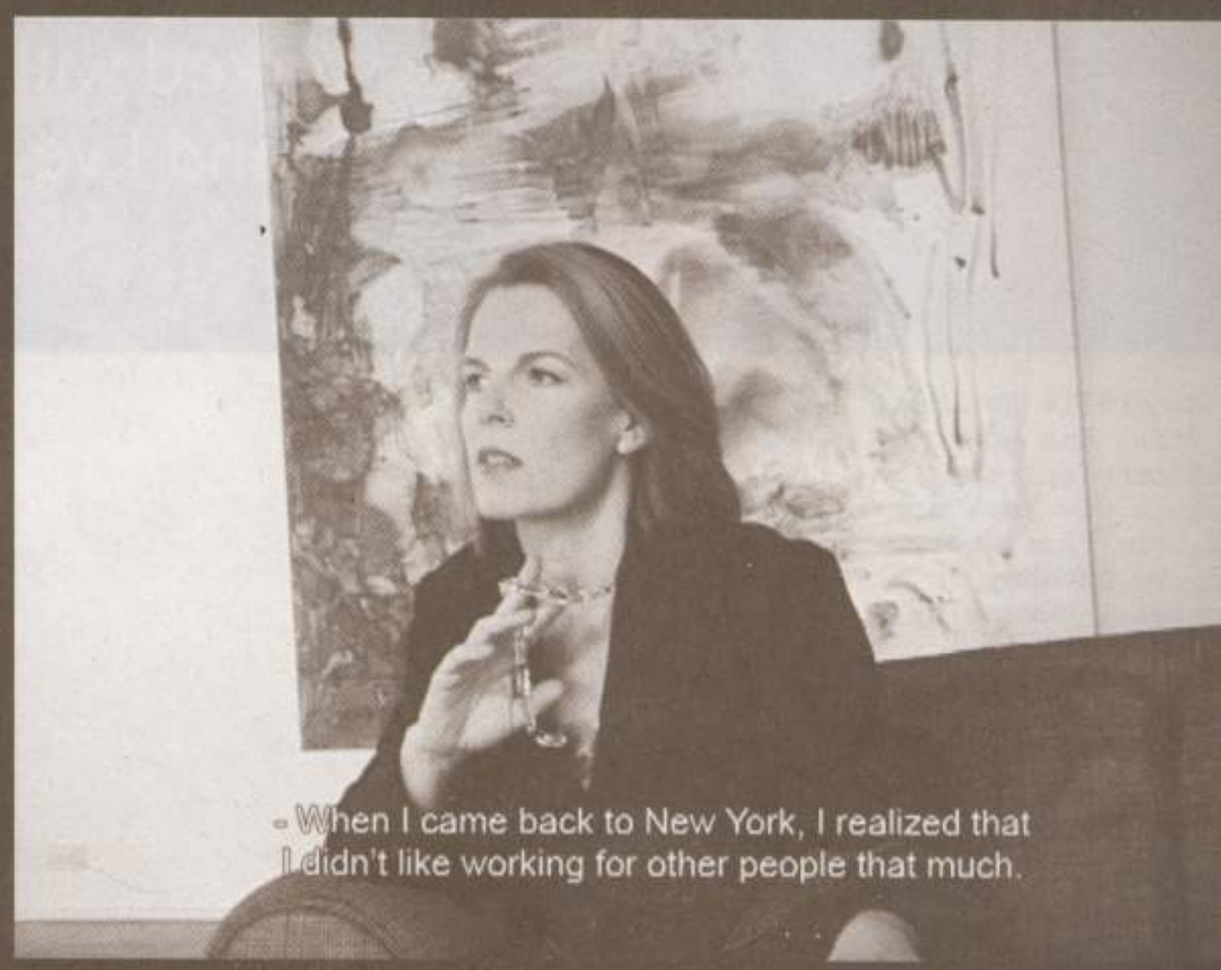
13. During her studies at Pratt, Selldorf spent two inspiring semesters in Florence, Italy.

14. The German-born architect's career is a typical New York success story.

15. The Urban Glass House was a collaboration between Selldorf and Philip Johnson Alan Ritchie Architects.



17. Selldorf fashions a historically sensitive approach to architecture.



16. After opening her own office, one of her first projects was a gallery space for Michael Werner.

For the past 20 years, German-born Annabelle Selldorf has established herself as the go-to architect for the upscale New York art set, having worked with the likes of David Zwirner and Jeff Koons. Her uncompromisingly classic and tastefully understated designs, including furniture, appeal to artists, gallerists and collectors alike. High-profile commissions such as the infamous *Abercombie & Fitch* flagship on Fifth Avenue have rounded out her portfolio. Now, as her office has grown to over 40 employees, Selldorf is working on a number of luxury condominiums in Manhattan, completing her impressive evolution from high-end niche architect to full-on power player on the New York architecture and real estate scene.

PIN–UP paired the usually no-nonsense Selldorf, who has a reputation for Teutonic rigor, with former cab driver, artist, interior designer, and general downtown *demi-mondain* Ricky Clifton, with whom she worked on the Hauser & Wirth residence on the Upper East Side. The two sat down for an informal chitchat in Selldorf's offices in Union Square, former house to Andy Warhol's Factory.

Ricky Clifton: Your father, Herbert Selldorf, who is an architect in Cologne, was he a big influence on you?

Annabelle Selldorf: Yes absolutely, but not in the Frank Lloyd Wright kind of way, stomping through the house in his black cape. Actually, both my parents were a big influence—their way of living, their way of looking at the world.

RC: What did your mother do?

AS: My mother was just supportive of my father, and worked with him a lot. My parents did something that I think is very wonderful: they had a whole life concept. Life and work was almost the same for them…

RC: I have a friend who is a banker and he told me once: you never work. And I said: what do you mean? I always work!

AS: Exactly.

RC: So your father started with interiors first, he didn't go to architecture school?

AS: No, he didn't go to architecture school. It was a company called Vica, that was part of the family, my grandmother started it and then her children joined her after the war.

RC: How old is that company?

AS: It's been around for a long time. Now it is no longer called Vica, it's part of another company now. In large part it was something that was a response to post-war Germany: how do you start your life over again? My father was working with his siblings, and they had a company and they provided interiors—they would do room design: have furniture made, upholstery, and curtains. Very sort of haute bourgeois with a modernist slant. At first I didn't think that that's at all what I wanted to do. But by the time I finally signed on to the idea of being an architect, I wasn't eligible for architecture school in Germany because I was never a very good high school student. But somehow I was accepted at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. I went there thinking I would perhaps go there for a year or so, and next thing you know, 30 years later I'm still here.

RS: And then you stayed in New York all the time?

AS: Yes. I didn't know where else to go [laughs]. How long have you been here?

RS: I moved here in 1975, and a couple months after I moved here I came to do a movie as a conceptual artist, and I did costumes for my best friend Jean-Paul Goude. Back then he was the art director of *Esquire*. He lived over here, Andy Warhol had his Factory upstairs [from Annabelle Selldorf's office on Union Square], and I had this idea for *Esquire* to costume celebrities' pets as other celebrities. So the first of the series was Andy's two dachshunds Amos and Archie as Jacques Cousteau and The Pope.

AS: You're kidding?

RS: And it's on page three of the Warhol diary.

AS: That's hilarious. So this building where my office is really means something to you?

RS: Yes, but let's get back to you! So did you go to Pratt for architecture?

AS: Yes, because by then I really knew that that's what I wanted to do.

RS: What did you do before that?

AS: I apprenticed in a number of different architecture offices in Cologne, and then I started working in Richard Gluckman's office. And I worked there until the early '80s, approximately. Then I went to Italy for a year, in Florence…

RS: Aha, I think I notice the influence! What's the Italian word for fascist architecture? It starts with an "r"…

AS: You mean *Architettura Razionalista*—rationalist architecture?

RS: Yes! That's my favorite! All that early 1930s early fascist stuff. To me that's just great. And I can see elements of that in your project for Hauser & Wirth—the doorway, for example.

AS: Yes, absolutely. Of course, that's where a lot of influences came from, too. Florence was such a great experience, because maybe more than anything else, it made me want to be an architect, because I spent all of my time going around looking at architecture. It was the first and only time that I really had the time to just be dedicated to studying. When I was in New York, I always worked at the same time as I was going to school, so that was always very stressful. But in Italy, I didn't work, I just went from place to place, and I had some really wonderful professors. So when I came back to New York, I realized that I didn't like working for other people that much. And in my youthful enthusiasm, I thought I could work at night, and hang around during the day, going to museums, looking at art… Of course that doesn't at all happen that way. I realized you can't really control how much work you do or don't have—if you don't have enough work you worry that you might not have money to eat, and if you have too much work you have to put out.

RS: So, what was your first job that you did as an architect by yourself?

AS: My first job was a kitchen renovation. It took forever, and it took up a lot of my time because I was involved in it until the very last detail. After that was done, someone else came around who had another kitchen and bathroom to do. So all of a sudden, I had done one job and I was already in business. One thing sort of led to another…

RS: What was your first architectural project?

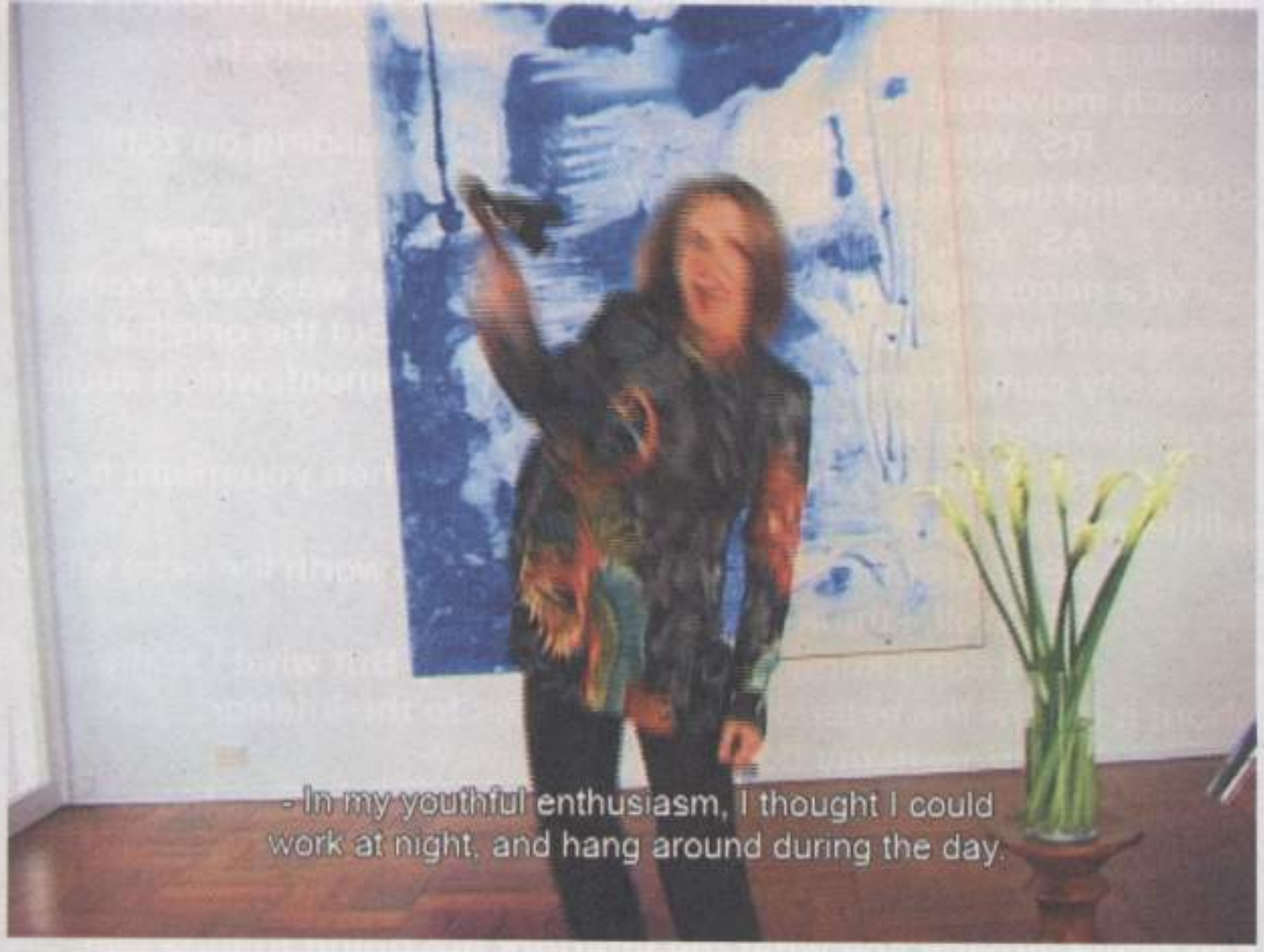
AS: One of my first real jobs that I did was a gallery space for Michael Werner, on 67th street; that was a job that I really loved.

RS: Were the people from the early projects, were those art people as well? Because that's something I realized, that you're doing all these projects for people in the art world.

AS: You know, I think it's an affinity to the same esthetic. And in the case of the Michael Werner space, that was sort of the first of many others, where you realize that people look at the same things. Some of it is a simple as having the same tastes, but as an architect of course you also establish an architectural idea. But that overlap was good. So then I worked with David Zwirner, which was the first project of many others to follow. This was his first gallery on Greene Street, where we were both on our hands and knees doing a lot of things ourselves. But in a way it was really great to grow up together in that way, because then you really appreciate what you accomplish. And that has always mattered to me, to be around people and to deal with people who have similar interests. I'm sure it's the same thing for you, and always will be.

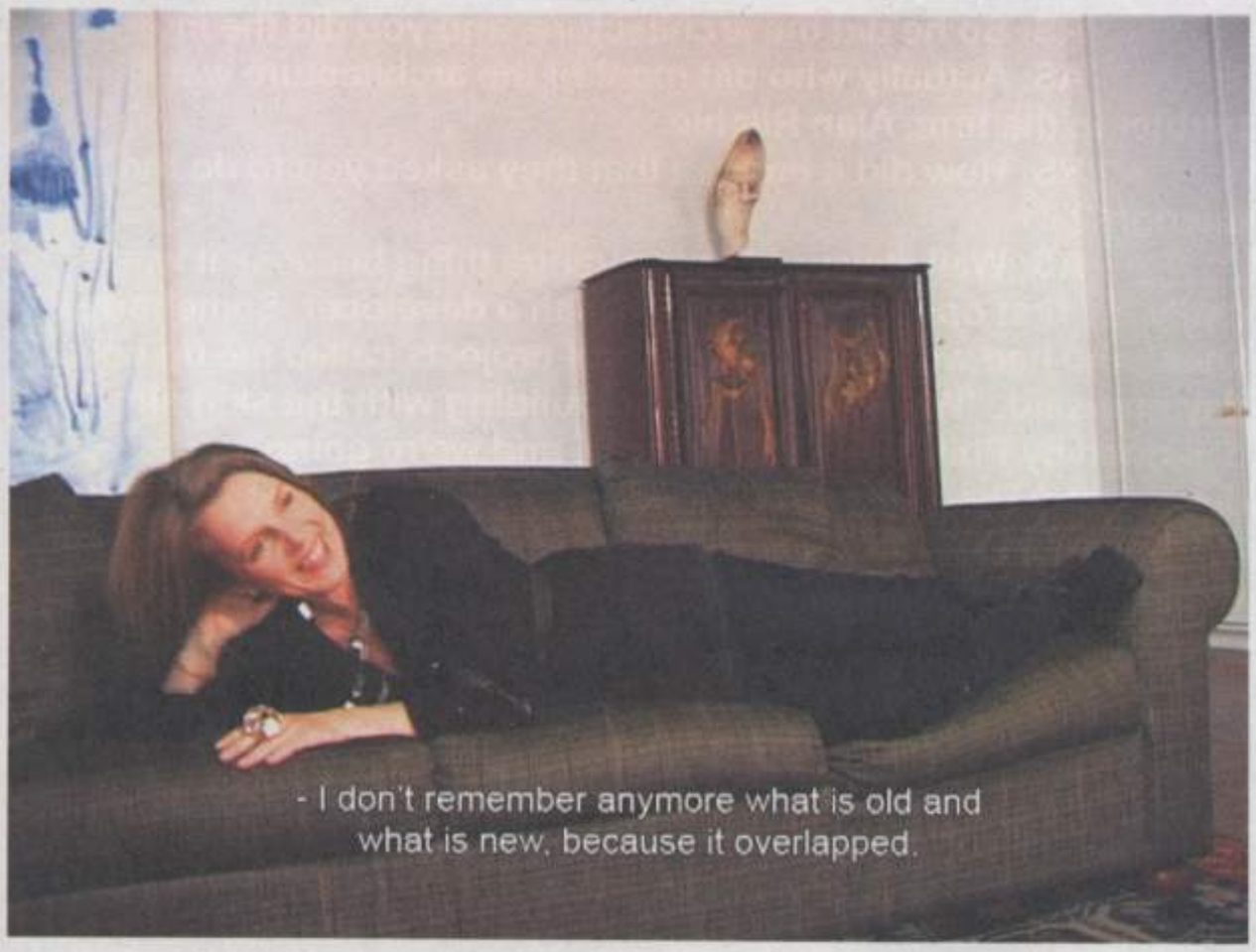
RS: I sort of work with a lot of friends who are artists,

18. Annabelle Selldorf's father, Herbert Selldorf, is an architect in her home town of Cologne, Germany.



19. Floral-dragon print silk tunic, Yohji Yamamoto; black brushed twill pants, TSE Cashmere.

20. The painting in the background, Untitled (Lapis-Lazuli), 1998, is by the artist Sigmar Polke.



23. In 2001, Selldorf was the architect for the renovation of the Neue Galerie at 1048 Fifth Avenue, a private museum for German and Austrian art.

22. Rather than imposing a signature style, Selldorf is careful to adapt her architecture to the urban context.

21. Annabelle Selldorf also designed the Abercrombie & Fitch flagship stores in New York, Los Angeles, and Tokyo.

and then, as you said, one thing leads to another. It's also kind of a social thing, I don't know…

AS: Yes, but it also boils down to a shared sensibility. How would you describe what you do? Is it decorative arts? It's probably more applied arts, right?

RS: I don't know how to describe it. I do painting and sculpture, printing and all that. And I find furniture and objects and I am producing a lot of different things that all become environmental to me—and I never do the same thing twice. When I get desperate about explaining this, I often ask if the person knows who Jorge Pardo is. My gallerist, Lorcan O'Neill, told me not to say that, but I'm using the name as a figure of speech.

AS: Yeah, and I think that's actually very good: making Jorge Pardo a technical term [laughs].

RS: You know, my favorite project you have ever done is the Neue Galerie on Fifth Avenue. And the café downstairs, which is named after my favorite café by Joseph Hoffmann, Café Fledermaus. And I thought it would be great to do some weird tile work down there. I love that place. Did you find the paneling for the Café Sabarsky upstairs yourself?

AS: The paneling was there, but so much of the rest was not there. So now when I go I don't remember anymore what is old and what is new, because it overlapped. Maybe that's in some ways apt to describe how I work. Because it's not all about saying "this is what I did" but to find a sort of pact, where far from being distinct and soulless, you just decide where you want to articulate and where you want to have your own separate identity versus being part of a bigger thing. And I think that's a pretty interesting and relevant idea in architecture, where we deal with the urban condition all the time. You know, the Neue Galerie is a prominent object on a street corner but it still has to be part of a larger environment.

RS: But you consider that! Some people don't. You know, Rem Koolhaas did a design for the Astor Place Hotel, which was never realized, and it had these bombed out windows—it looked like Beirut. It wasn't a bad idea, but it was completely ignoring the whole neighborhood. Every building in sight on Astor Place has arches, so I thought what a great opportunity to pay homage to the arch, like the *Square Colosseum* at the E.U.R. area outside of Rome.

AS: I know what you mean. I think it's legitimate to ask, "What is the function to provoke?" I think there is more than one way of doing that. It doesn't always have to be antagonistic. It's not all about urban antagonism.

RS: But you also worked with so many artists: David Salle, for example.

AS: Yes, I've worked with Eric Fischl, I've worked with Not Vital, and I've worked with Jeff Koons… And recently I did a cabin for an artist. Working with an artist is fun, but it's such a different kind of exchange. It's a visual exchange, rather than a verbal one. If you admire somebody, then it's a big treat to do something for him or her.

RS: So tell me about the apartment building you're doing on Eleventh Avenue, 200 Eleventh. I looked at the interior renderings on the website, and it looks like a French artist studio, with the stairs coming down into the living room, the large windows—almost like the Atelier Ozenfant or something.

AS: I think that's definitely true. What happened is that we were asked to do this building, and more than anything I cared about was to create something that was in some way related to the neighborhood. And the design is pushing it a little bit, but it's also a building that comes to the ground solidly, that isn't all glass. It has relatively small windows, but I think the way they frame the views is quite extraordinary.

RS: Is every unit the same?

AS: No. There are about four or five different types. But it's quite complex, because they're all duplex apartments, so they have this yin-yang thing going on, hooking into one another. But the real reason why everyone is talking about the building is because it has parking that allows the cars to come to each individual floor.

RS: Which is like the Starrett-Lehigh building on 26th Street and the West Side Highway.

AS: Yes, exactly. And the funny thing is that it grew out of a necessity, but it became something that was very exciting because it had never really been done before. But the original necessity came from the lack of an actual basement, which could have provided for a garage.

RS: I guess you could have one, but then you might have a little water problem.

AS: You got it. So we figured that it was worth the extra effor

RS: Well, I think it's also really sexy.

AS: I don't know about that [laughs]. But what I really like about it is how the exterior volume relates to the interior.

RS: How many floors does it have?

AS: There are 18 floors, but they are very, very high-ceiling floors. So each of the floors has double height spaces. The construction is up to the thirteenth floor now and you can really already see what the interiors are going to look like.

RS: Good, because what I always hate is low ceilings. All the Trump buildings have really low ceilings because they're trying to fit as many units as possible. The only exception is the Trump World Tower. It's in that Sidney Lumet movie—*Before The Devil Knows You're Dead*—the drug dealer lives there. You should rent that movie. But all the other Trump residential buildings feel like office buildings.

AS: Yikes.

RS: I guess another interesting building is your collaboration with Philip Johnson on the Urban Glass House. How did that happen?

AS: Well, Philip Johnson died before I really had anythin to do with the project.

RS: So he did the architecture, and you did the interiors?

AS: Actually who did most of the architecture was his partner in the firm, Alan Ritchie.

RS: How did it happen that they asked you to do the interiors?

AS: Well, it was a really strange thing because it was really my first opportunity to work with a developer. Somebody I knew who had worked on a variety of projects called me up one day and said, "We purchased this building with the skin already designed by Philip Johnson's office, and we're going to develop it." Then they asked me whether I would like to work on i Initially I thought I didn't want to do that, because everything was already decided for—they already knew how many units, etc.

RS: The layouts…

AS: No, we did the layouts. But the positioning of the units already existed, and we thought maybe there is not that much to do—because if it was just about selecting the bathroom tiles, I wasn't really interested. But then we started working on it and we realized that if we pushed things around here and there you could actually make some really great apartments. And in the end I'm really proud of it, because it did end up being a lot of work, but that really helps, because it gives you stamina. And a nice effect of that project was also that it made me look very carefully at Philip Johnson's work—of course liking some things much more than others. But I really have a lot of respect for what he did.

RS: You know I'm from Fort Worth, and Philip Johnson did all these buildings down there, and when I used to drive a cab I picked him up a couple of times—him and David Whitney [Johnson's boyfriend]. You know, in the middle of the night….

The developer's billboard advertising for the Urban Glass House featured larger than life portraits of herself and Philip Johnson.

25. The Urban Glass House was Selldorf's first foray onto New York's real estate scene.

AS: Is that true, here in New York? I never realized you used to drive cabs…you lived dangerously!

RS: Yeah. Back then you could make a lot of money. And after I stopped driving a cab I was a cater waiter for about three months. Back then the best catering was Glorious Food. And they called me up one day and told me, at the last minute, to come to Lever House. And I got there and it was the dinner to celebrate the fact that they had saved the Lever House, because they were going to tear it down. It was hosted by Jacqueline Onassis, for whom I also used to do floral arrangements. So I was pouring wine at the table behind her and she tapped me on the shoulder and said, "So you changed jobs?" And Philip Johnson was behind me listening, and I said, "Well, I also drove a cab and I picked him up twice." I told him that I was from Fort Worth, and he said, "Yeah, I remember you. You're the one who said I'm the Maria Callas of architecture." So everyone was laughing, but the Glorious Food people were all glaring at me. Needless to say I never worked with them again.

AS: [laughs] Uh-oh! That's hilarious. Listen, I am sorry, but I really have to go now.

RS: That's OK, I think we've talked about everything but Anna Wintour's residence, which I saw mentioned on your web-site—but no pictures.

AS: Oh, just forget about that.

26. Interior designer Ricky Clifton and Annabelle Selldorf worked together on the Hauser & Wirth residence on New York's Upper East Side.