

Cahners

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# Wall to Wall

A Dallas art dealer and his wife find a modern townhouse that can accommodate large-scale contemporary artworks.

"I LIKE TO LIVE with big art," says John Runyon, co-owner of Turner & Runyon, a contemporary art gallery in Dallas (*Interior Design*, Feb. 1999). But during the year that he and his wife, Lisa, spent house-hunting, the art dealer discovered that not everything is big in Texas: "It's not easy to find residential spaces that can accommodate large-scale works," he notes. Consequently, the day the couple saw a 2,800-sq.-ft. townhouse built in 1977 for a prominent art collector, they bought it. Designed by James Wiley, now retired, and the late Bud Oglesby of the Oglesby Group, the house is one in a row of seven similar but not identical dwellings situated in the Turtle Creek section of Dallas.

In a city that embraces Tudor half-timbers, mansard roofs, Palladian windows, and colonial columns (often applied to a single house), the Oglesby Group's architecture is unmistakable. A native Texan, graduate of Cornell and MIT, and student of Alvar Aalto, Oglesby opened his Dallas firm in 1950 and is credited with bringing modern architecture to Texas. Characterized by asymmetrical massing, informal plans, exposed structure, and extensive glazing, the firm's work did not reflect the regional influences that are prevalent in many of the modern buildings in Texas. "Oglesby and his partners espoused more of an international-style modern architecture indebted to European design," says architect Graham Greene, whose firm merged with the Oglesby practice in 1994 to form Oglesby-Greene.

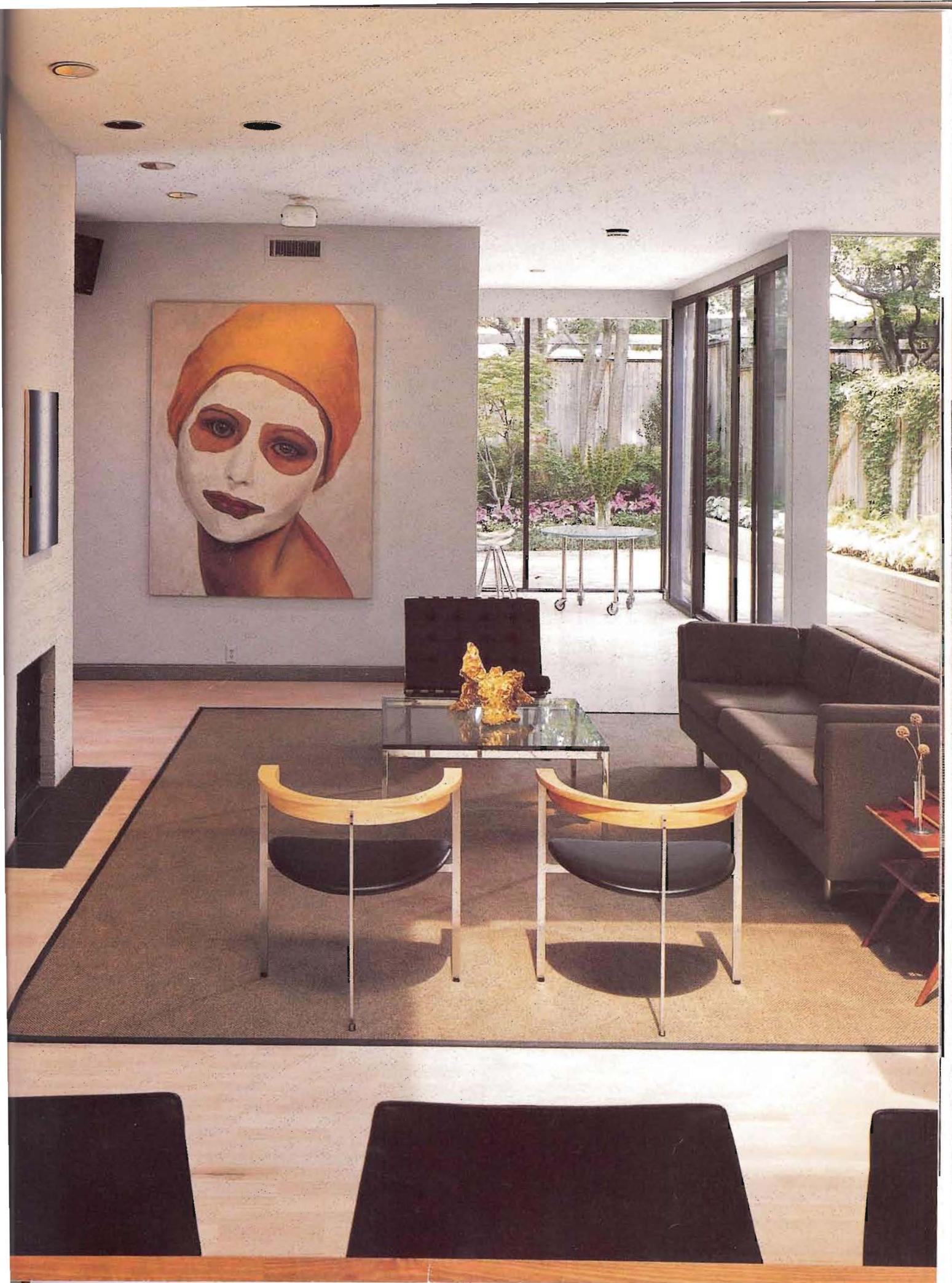
With its open plan, soaring ceiling heights, large expanses of uninterrupted wall space, and profusion of natural light, the design of the house was clearly informed by the origi-

nal owner's prolific art collection, which naturally appealed to the young couple. "When I saw the space," recalls Runyon, "I immediately thought of things I'd had in storage that I hadn't been able to fit in my previous home, and I identified walls for particular works of art." Fortunately, the house required little work. The Runyons chose a chalky shade of white paint for all of the walls and trims, and refinished the first story's bleached wood floors, opting to keep the neutral carpet that is inset in the stair treads and installed throughout the second floor. A previous owner had the metal baseboards stripped and given a brushed finish to match the dramatic steel staircase.

The furniture, an eclectic mix of modern classics, coalesces with the architecture and coexists peacefully with the art. Influenced not only by his father ("an insatiable collector" whose taste ranges from pre-Columbian to Pop art, turn-of-the-century quilts, Clarice Cliff ceramics, and modern furniture) but also by his stepfather, Dallas-based interior designer David Corely, Runyon has an affinity for iconic and offbeat modern designs. The front entry opens up to a sky-lit, double-height volume that serves as the dining area where brown leather Cab chairs are assembled around a simple walnut La Basilica table, all by Mario Bellini. This elegant group appears all the more sober and restrained →

*Opposite: View from the dining area to the living room and kitchen. Mask, a painting by Richard Phillips, and an untitled painting by Christian Garnett are accompanied by Ghost Dance, a bronze-and-gold leaf sculpture by Lynda Benglis.*

PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER AARON, ESTO



in relation to some of Runyon's more exuberant, colorful works: a Day-Glo painting by Peter Halley and a series of intensely pigmented panels by John Zinsser. "At times, I have invited clients to my home to see bold works in a residential environment. It's less intimidating and more accessible than the gallery. Here, one can see that even though a painting such as the Peter Halley contains challenging color relationships, it can still fit harmoniously into a home."

In the living room area, furniture is casually grouped around the hearth. A tuxedo-style sofa, rescued from Runyon's parents' storage room, along with a Florence Knoll coffee

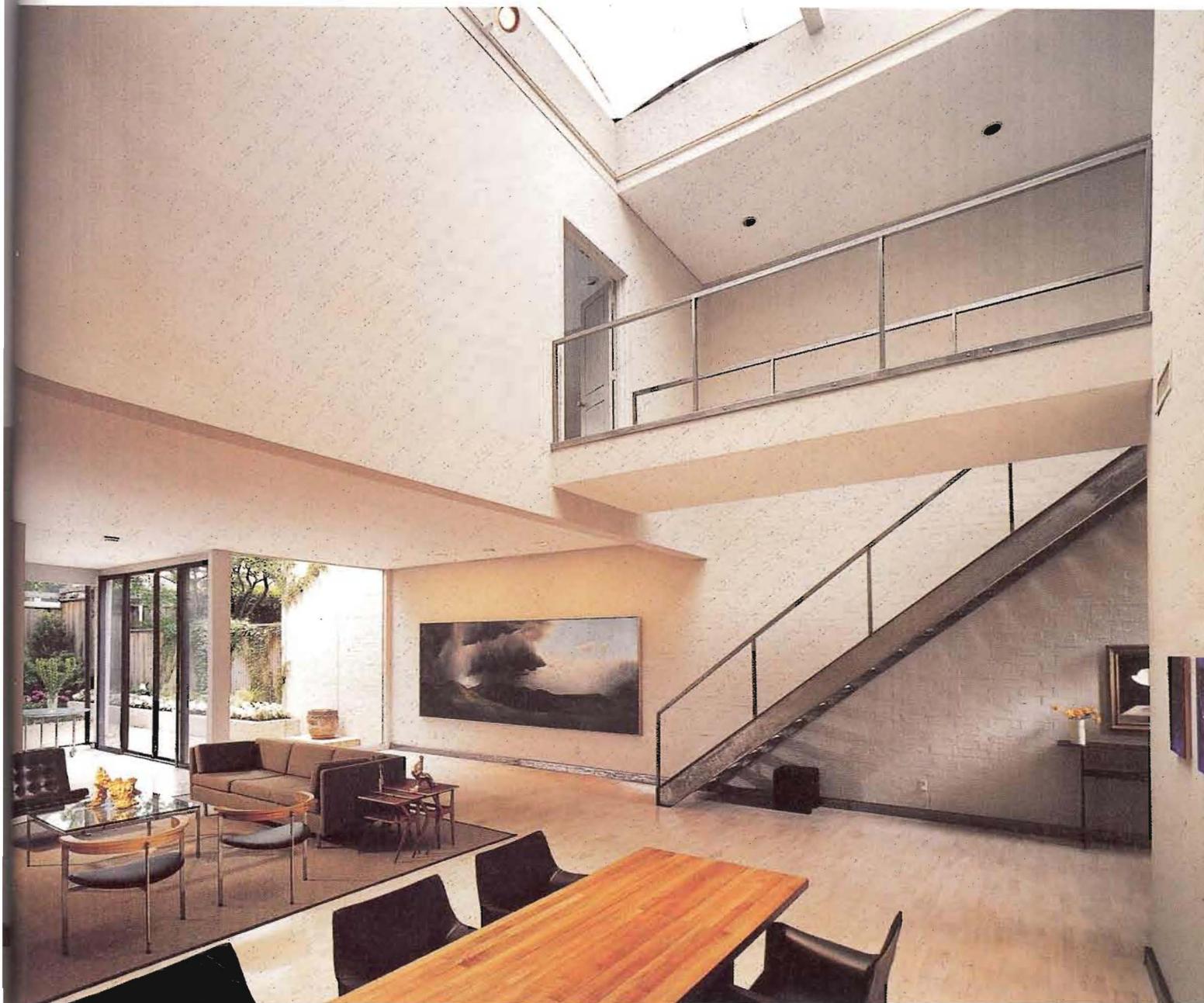
table, anchors the arrangement. A single Barcelona chair is stationed opposite a pair of three-legged steel-and-ash Poul Kjaerholm armchairs that a Dallas furniture dealer located for Runyon in Denmark. Chosen for their uncomplicated profiles and combinations of materials, the furniture, says Runyon, is an extension of the building's simplicity. Above the humble, painted brick fireplace hangs an untitled oil painting by Christian Garnett, an artist known for his studies of light. Less diminutive in scale is the Richard Phillips painting entitled *Mask*, which is mounted on the partition between the living room and the kitchen. Turner & Runyon was the first

gallery outside of New York to show Phillips' work, disturbingly close-up and larger-than-life portraits often based on advertising imagery from the 1960s and '70s. *Highland*, a 10-ft.-long landscape painting by April Gornik that even defied the gallery's storage facility, is installed on the staircase wall with a healthy amount of space around it. "This sort of architecture is very difficult to find in Dallas," says Runyon gratefully. "It's hard to find a house with walls wider than six feet."

Upstairs, a catwalk connects the master suite and a study where additional works of art are displayed in more private quarters. Furnished sparingly, the master bedroom's →



Opposite page: Jimenez. Above: Jimenez. A catwalk.



*Opposite: The dining area serves as a gallery unto itself, where Firefighter, a fiberglass sculpture by Luis Jimenez, Lead Soul by John Zinsser, and Untitled (red cell, turquoise prison) by Peter Halley are visible.*

*Above: The ground floor features an informal, open plan that provides distinct areas for different functions. A steel staircase leads to the second floor, where the master bedroom and study are linked by an open catwalk. The focal painting, Highland by April Gornik, measures 10 ft. wide.*



*Above: The bedroom's distinguishing features are its lush treetop views and sybaritic bathroom. The bedroom flows into a spacious dressing area and bathroom. Machine Parts #2, a drawing by Joseph Stashkevetch, and a carved headdress from New Guinea provide a compelling juxtaposition.*

*Opposite: In the study, a three-armed Gino Sarfatti lamp from the early 1950s sheds light on a leather Terraza sofa by Ubald Klang from the early 1960s. Persia by Richard Phillips appears with DH in Hollywood by Howard Hodgkin (on the wall), and IBM Pavilion, 1959, by Damien Smith (on the floor).*

main attractions are *Machine Parts #2*, a charcoal drawing by Joseph Stashkevetch, and a totemic carved mask from New Guinea. When questioned about how he determines the placement of art in his home, the dealer reiterates the advice he often gives to novice collectors. "The more one focuses on the artwork and the less one focuses on where to put it, the better and more rewarding the decisions one makes," he says. "Decisions about art should be based on intuition rather than decorating." The study's three-armed Gino Sarfatti lamp and leather Ter-

raza sofa are relics from Runyon's boyhood home. Above hangs another work by Richard Phillips entitled *Persia*, a formidable yet kitschy painting of a giant, odd-eyed cat. The intimately scaled room, which doubles as a guestroom, also houses the couple's library and a number of smaller works that invite close study.

Throughout his career, Oglesby made "quality and modernity" priorities for his designs and those of his firm. "There is no reason a client's personal likes and dislikes should be abandoned in the scramble for

purity," he said shortly after the townhouse was completed. "A personality can combine harmoniously with an architectural statement." Indeed, the house was designed with a keen sensitivity to the original owner's interest in art and now accommodates the young couple's art acquisitions. "The house is very functional and it works perfectly for us. There is not a single area or room that is underused," confirms Runyon. "Living with art is our priority, and the architecture makes this possible."

—Julia Lewis

