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## Inside the Elizabeth Collective, Elizabeth Taylor's former Midtown mansion turned arts collective

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When you think of the heart of Midtown, the first thing that comes to mind is probably not a turn-of-the-century mansion dripping with historic details. But nestled amongst the office buildings on West 56th Street between 5th and 6th Avenues is just that. Designed by architects Warren & Wetmore of Grand Central fame, 10 West 56th Street has gone through several incarnations over its lifetime, from private residence (including the one-time home of Elizabeth Taylor!) to high-end retail space.

Its most recent transformation was helmed by Roxana Q. Girand, founder of real estate development firm [Sebastian Capital](#). Wanting to merge her expertise and passion in commercial space, art, and beauty, she opened the [Elizabeth Collective](#) this past fall as part art pop-up event space, part permanent studio workspaces. 6sqft recently visited Roxana at the Collective to get a behind-the-

scenes look at the incredible French Renaissance Revival building, see how she's given the space a new life, and learn more about what's to come.



*The entrance to the house*

Roxana was born in New York and raised in Spain and Colombia. She received a JD in International Law in Bogotá and first moved to New York City to work for the UN. She was offered a position within the Women's Rights Division, but the pay was barely enough to scrape by on. Not knowing what to do, she separately went with her cousin to *his* interview at a real estate firm. One thing led to another, and it was Roxana who ended up getting hired. "I started doing real estate, and I just fell in love with it. I fell in love with New York, architecture, buildings. It was just such an amazing experience for me, and I was able to apply my legal background," Roxana told us.



*The rear of the first floor*

With nearly 15 years of experience under her belt, in 2016, Roxana realized her vision of creating “an innovative firm that would be able to integrate different fields of real estate as a whole.” Sebastian Capital does leasing, brokerage, project management, and property management, along with building acquisition. But what sets them apart is their specialization working with Latin American families who have real estate assets in the U.S.

Sebastian’s portfolio is mostly commercial buildings, with one residential property, but when you hear her speak about it, it’s obvious that the Elizabeth Collective is Roxana’s baby. “Anybody can come up with a business model, but I put my heart and soul into this because I want people to experience what I like.” To that end, the Elizabeth Collective merges art, fashion, design, and historic architecture.

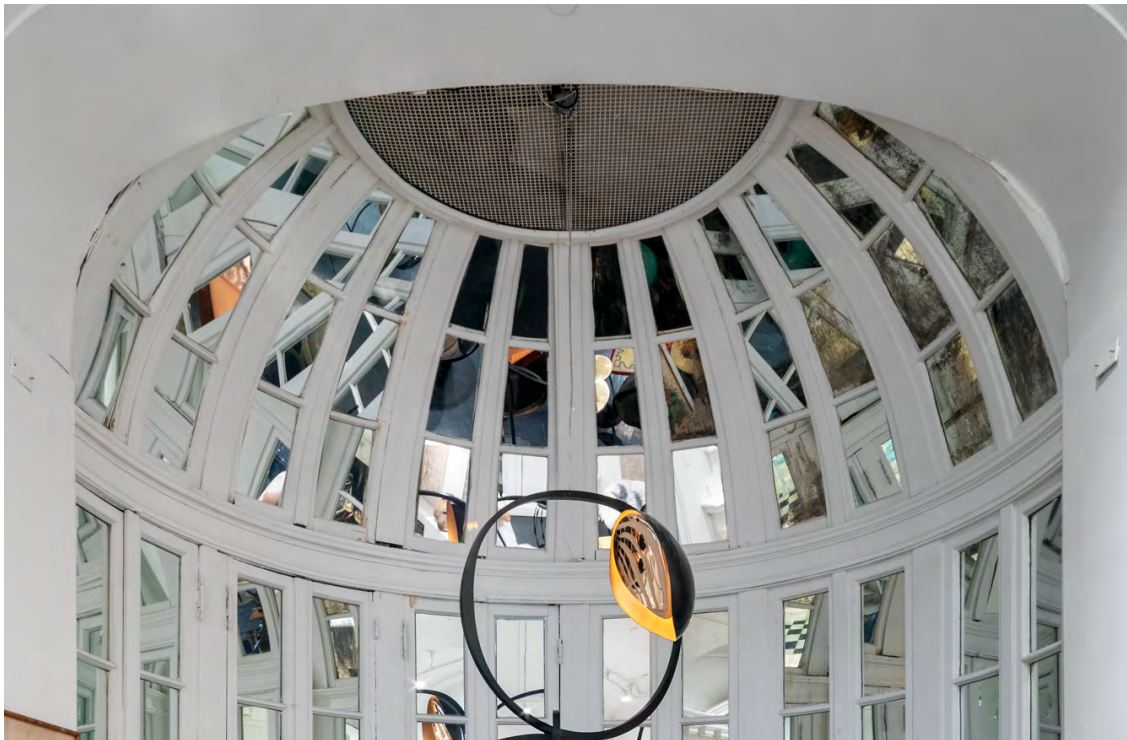


*Roxana kept all of the original plasterwork and molding; the only thing she had to redo was the floors*

The name Elizabeth Collective comes from the fact that Elizabeth Taylor lived in the six-story house for two-three years during the mid- to late-'50s. Her personal elegance matched with that of the house immediately inspired Roxana. When she started researching Elizabeth Taylor, her vision grew. "It was great because I learned so much. I had no idea how much of an activist she was. She was a proponent of a lot of women's rights. Later in her life, she got really involved in AIDS research, children, everything. It was fascinating for me to learn that."

From there, she contacted Elizabeth Taylor's foundation, the [House of Taylor](#), who even came to the house to meet with her. Roxana hopes to form a "more solidified partnership with them" and likes the idea of opening other Elizabeth Collectives in cities like Chicago and Mexico City. But the idea is "movable," as she explains. "It doesn't have to be inspired by Elizabeth Taylor only. We could find another property that has some historical significance, that has its own life, and would create its own presence."





*The rear of the second floor*

But of course, even without a celebrity connection, the landmarked building is noteworthy in its own right. When the house was built in 1901, Fifth Avenue below Central Park was still lined with mansions of New York's wealthiest families. As [Daytonian in Manhattan](#) explains, in 1899 newlywed couple Frederick C. Edey and his wife Sarah Birdsall Otis Edey bought the land at 10 West 56th Street. He was a prominent banker and socialite and her father was Senator James Otis. They commissioned the architectural firm Warren & Wetmore more than a decade before they would become famous for their work on Grand Central. Setting it apart from its mostly brownstone neighbors, the home was done in a light limestone. It was most striking for its massive Palladian window at the second story, and inside, for its rear glass bay windows, sweeping staircase, grand mezzanine, Corinthian columns, and wealth of ornamental plasterwork.

Since the Edys sold the home for \$200,000 in 1920, it's been occupied as commercial and retail space for everything from hats and lingerie to cosmetics. More recently, the space was rented to the swanky John Barrett Salon, as well as Japanese design company Felissimo.

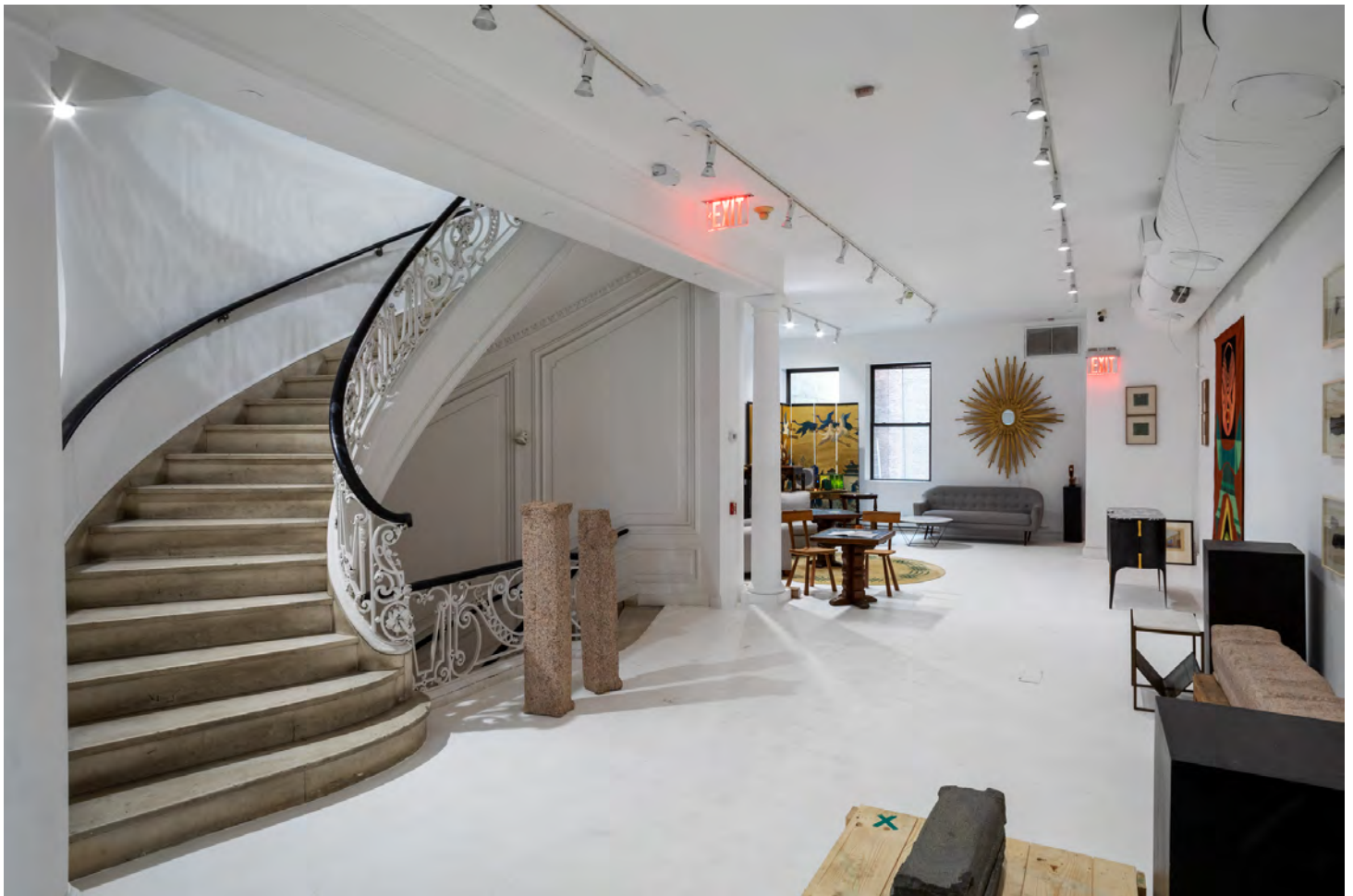




*The front room on the second floor sits behind the huge Palladian window*



When she took over, Roxana met Benoist F. Drut, the owner of high-end antique furniture dealer [Maison Gerard](#). They formed a partnership and Maison has set up a showroom throughout the house, not only allowing clients to come in and peruse but also filling the space out with furnishings and decor. Their collaboration also led to the Elizabeth Collective's first exhibit. Benoist owns a collection of rare photographs of Andy Warhol, which went on view in January. The next exhibit in the spring was a new series of sculptures from artist Sebastian Errazuriz.





*The third floor is currently an extension of Maison Gerard's collection*

In addition to the larger exhibits, Roxana plans to dedicate the third floor to curated exhibits. “It will be up to [the curator] to bring new, innovative artists or traditional artists... it’s a wide-open canvas to be another avenue of expression for those artists that maybe people on the Upper East Side don’t know about,” she says.

Finally, the upper three floors of the Collective will be for member business. Currently, members include ADA Diamonds (who make and sell lab-grown diamonds) and Face and Body by Runchana.



*The half-floor between the second and third floors*

If you'd like to visit the [Elizabeth Collective](#) and get a look for yourself, you can make an appointment with Maison Gerard or contact the Elizabeth Collective to see their current exhibit, the debut collection of works by designer [Laura Kirar](#). In October, photographer Jerry Schatzberg will exhibit a selection of his photos of Bob Dylan, as well as other celebrities and fashion.

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