

FALL 2018

# DEPARTURES



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+ DESIGN

Gallerist Benoist F. Drut in the Maison Gerard gallery at the Elizabeth Collective. The Black Poise chandelier is by Niamh Barry.



## House Proud

The former Manhattan residence of Elizabeth Taylor has become the latest address for one of America's top design galleries. *by Stephen Wallis. Photographs by Arian Camilleri*

**BENOIST F. DRUT** is proof that a dedicated downtown guy can become, well, at least a midtown guy. For years, the ebullient head of the esteemed Manhattan decorative arts gallery Maison Gerard tried his best to avoid venturing far north of Tenth Street, where he has lived since moving from France a quarter century ago. Tenth Street is also where Maison Gerard—which Drut took over from longtime business partner and gallery founder Gerard Widdershoven in 2016—has a pair of spaces to showcase its elevated mix of vintage pieces by Art Deco and midcentury masters. Here you'll find the likes of Jules Leleu and André Arbus, combined with an expanding array of works by contem-

porary artisans and artists such as Hervé Van der Straeten, Fernando Mastrangelo, and Ayala Serfaty.

So when Maison Gerard announced the opening of a third location, at 10 West 56th Street—right in the heart of midtown—it came as something of a surprise, even to Drut. “I never saw a need for it,” he admits, “but this building really won me over.” The building is a landmarked 1901 French Renaissance Revival mansion, one of the few surviving residences built by Warren & Wetmore, a firm that later worked on Grand Central Terminal. Extensive renovations have altered the interior of the six-story townhouse, but the lower floors—which are connected by a

sweeping, elegantly balustraded central staircase—have retained their decorative plasterwork and other details.

Previously occupied by the Japanese design boutique Felissimo, the building has been rebranded as the Elizabeth Collective, a design, fashion, and beauty headquarters for various brands. The name comes from the townhouse’s most famous resident, Elizabeth Taylor, who lived there in the 1950s. For the inauguration earlier this year, the Elizabeth Collective hosted an exhibition of photographs of Andy Warhol shot by

Robert J. Levin, who shows with Maison Gerard. Drut was invited to furnish the spaces for the event, and wound up moving in. “Once I saw the place, I got very inspired,” he says.

Maison Gerard now occupies the second floor, plus a small mezzanine with a Juliet balcony overlooking the front parlor, which is bathed in natural light from a soaring Palladian window. The space at the rear features a fireplace surrounded by ornamental millwork and a large bay with windows that have been mirrored over. It’s an opportunity for Drut to tell the gallery’s story in a domestic setting. “It allows a lot of flexibility to create scenes that are different from one room to another,” he says.

Drut plans to use the midtown address as the primary location for special exhibitions, which will be staged throughout the year, always with the gallery’s signature combination of vintage and contemporary. Among the shows planned for the fall are presentations of Italian architect Achille Salvagni’s latest luxe-artisanal furnishings, glass artist Kiko Lopez’s lamps and silvered eglomise mirrors, and a selection of furniture by the polymath artist-designer Louis Cane. “Today, everybody focuses on online,” says Drut, “but there’s only so much a good photo can do. Even for designers who have known us for 30 years, there’s still a wow factor here. It’s seductive.”



From top: A salon in the gallery showcases an armchair by Ayala Serfaty, a candelabra by Claude Boeltz, and bronze side tables by Franck Evennou; a Spider Jewel chandelier by Achille

Salvagni installed above seating by Louis Cane and a Paule Leleu carpet; handblown Murano glass vases from the Aldus collection, designed by Salvagni and Fabio Gnessi.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ARIAN CAMILLERI (2); COURTESY ACHILLE SALVAGNI ATELIER (2)