

LADIES' DAY

Annabelle Selldorf on the site of her new-build gallery for David Zwirner, which should be completed by 2012. It is located on New York's 19th Street, next to Zwirner's original gallery, which Selldorf also designed

Right, a paste-up piece by NYC street artist Clown Soldier



GRAND OPENINGS

Beloved by her gallerist clients, New York architect Annabelle Selldorf builds the art spaces that are going places

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WATCH THIS SPACE
Selldorf's renovation of the Haunch of Venison Yard in London's Mayfair transformed the listed building into a striking gallery space, reopening in September

According to her friend and long-time client, art dealer Iwan Wirth of blue chip gallery Hauser & Wirth, if Annabelle Selldorf were a brand of car, she would be an Aston Martin: 'She's one of those people I would call a quiet force,' he says. 'It's the modesty, elegance and precision of her architectural approach. It's not a self-obsessed or ego-driven practice.'

Modesty, elegance and precision are words often associated with both Selldorf and her work. The German architect, who studied at New York's Pratt Institute and Florence's Syracuse University, doesn't have the typical attributes of most 'starchitects' of her generation: she's humble, thoughtful, understated, quietly dynamic. 'She not only speaks but also listens,' offers another of her regular clients, art dealer David Zwirner, who has worked with Selldorf since the beginning of their respective careers, almost 20 years ago.

Selldorf has designed major residential, retail and mixed-use spaces, including various condominiums in New York, several Abercrombie & Fitch flagship stores, and a recycling facility in Brooklyn. But it's her cultural and art projects for which she is most sought after.

Her ties to the art community go back to the start of her career, when she worked with New York firm Richard Gluckman Architects (now Gluckman Mayner Architects). Its noteworthy

projects included New York's Whitney Museum of American Art, Tokyo's Mori Arts Center and Málaga's Museo Picasso. Selldorf established her own firm in 1988 and worked on her first art gallery project for Michael Werner Gallery in 1990. To turn a former retail space in a quaint building on New York's Upper East Side into showrooms and art storage, she brought in warm elements such as dark walnut floors and custom glass doors to the minimal, otherwise white interiors. 'It was a small space and I had very simple instructions from Michael,' says Selldorf. 'Eventually I just started to think, "What do you need in a gallery?'. There are so many types of exhibition spaces, so you have to think about how they flow, what size they are, the kind of art that is being shown, and also the way it is shown.'

Over the years, Selldorf has been hired to design art galleries and studio spaces, as well as residences, for artists David Salle and Eric Fischl; art dealers Wirth, Zwirner, Werner, Barbara Gladstone and Per Skarstedt; and billionaire art collector François Pinault, among many others. She has also worked on museums, including transforming a 1914 Carrère & Hastings mansion in New York into the Neue Galerie for German and Austrian art, and renovating an Upper East Side townhouse for the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World. This year she has completed two projects for Haunch of Venison, the London

and New York galleries now owned by Christie's, and is currently working on upcoming projects with Zwirner in New York (a LEED-certified new build on 19th Street, adjacent to the gallery's 25,000 sq ft space, also designed by Selldorf); the renovation and expansion of the marble Museum Building and Manton Research Center at the Clark Art Institute in Massachusetts; and her first design of a temporary building for the inaugural Frieze Masters show in London next October.

'In a way, designing art spaces has focused my approach to architecture,' says Selldorf. She comes across as both delicate and strong, in control but not inflexible. 'I think designing art spaces comes with a degree of purity. Working on a gallery, there are those tasks that are universal that everybody has to do, but how you go about them, what they look like, and in what sequence they occur is potentially very different. Eventually, it comes back to what it feels like in a space, so it's about rhythm and proportion and light. I think that's what distinguishes the work that we do.'

Selldorf often uses the words 'light,' 'proportion' and 'rhythm,' 'integrity' and 'balance' when speaking about her architectural practice. She is known for her ability to balance two diametrically opposed ideologies — classicism and modernism — framing the former in way that gives both a voice. This was best seen in her treatment of the Neue Galerie, where she >>

ALL WHITE NOW
The Haunch of Venison Yard features Selldorf's trademark attention to light, proportion, balance and rhythm



altered the neoclassic building in ways that fit its contemporary function. She brought clarity to the elegant line of the original Beaux-Arts staircase by adding a minimalist black stone reception counter and appropriate lighting. But Selldorf is also known for reinventing very modern spaces, for example in her 2010 project for Hauser & Wirth on Savile Row, now London's largest commercial gallery. Located in a slick Eric Parry-designed building, the two exhibition spaces, totalling 10,500 sq ft, feature contrasting lustrous concrete floors and rich oak wood floors.

'I don't have a particular minimalist axe to grind,' says Selldorf. The daughter of Köln architect Herbert Selldorf and interior designer Dorrit, she says that from a young age she has looked at things – both physical objects and situations – in a multidimensional way. 'I like creating a certain logic, if you will.' It's this pragmatic side that may have sometimes made Selldorf appear too restrained (or very German), but actually her rational approach is offset by her constant questioning of the philosophy behind her practice, and the way she balances the 'facts' of a space (its limitations, materials and clients' needs) with her intuition. In fact, Selldorf is more radical than it would appear in her quiet designs.

Selldorf's 'point of view' is confidently subtle and nuanced, and reveals itself in the way the light moves across a room or a space demands a particular cadence. This lingering effect is one that many architects have difficulty achieving. 'In large part, that's what I find interesting about architecture: each client, or object of portraiture, is different.' Like an artist looking at a subject, Selldorf reads each client as if she's making a portrait of them, a practice grounded in human values and concerns, though not empty of her own gestures. 'It's a creative and collaborative process, because she's able to expand an idea,' says Wirth of working with Selldorf. 'She's got the patience to wait and to listen and to find solutions and to deal with demanding clients.'

For the Haunch of Venison Yard project, for example, Selldorf assessed the space – a listed building in London's Mayfair – and, working within the rules and regulations of English Heritage, rethought its layout. Moving from

Wallpaper*

SELLDORF ARCHITECTS

Principal of Selldorf Architects, Annabelle Selldorf was born and raised in Germany before leaving Europe for the US to study, eventually setting up her firm in New York in 1988. While her portfolio encompasses a wide range of projects, from cultural to retail to residential, it is her extensive experience and flair with art-related work that attracts gallerists on both sides of the Atlantic. In 2004, her practice bought furniture firm Vica (which also produces re-editions of pieces by her father, architect Herbert Selldorf), so Selldorf, a modernist at heart, now complements perfectly her elegant designs with a range of classic modern furnishings. Major works include the Hauser & Wirth galleries in Zurich, New York and London, the Michael Werner and the David Zwirner galleries, both in New York, as well as the residential building 200 Eleventh Avenue in New York, which includes a sky garage – a car elevator that allows the residents to park outside their own doors. A monograph on Selldorf Architects was published in 2009 by Monacelli Press. **Elle Stathaki**

its temporary home in Burlington Gardens back to its original Haunch of Venison Yard location, the gallery downsized by nearly two-thirds. 'It's a homecoming, going back to what we used to be known for,' says Matt Carey-Williams, international director of Haunch of Venison London. It's not only a return to the location that gave the gallery its name, but also a return to a programming with a one-show rotation. 'For us it's a relief to get back to one exhibition at one time. It's the old Haunch but slightly different.'

Taking on board the requirements of the gallery and its artists, Selldorf opened up the atrium of the former space, which used to house a long, narrow annex gallery. The double-height atrium allows the gallery to show monumental sculptures, while its glass ceiling lets in plenty of natural light, diffused by a layer of film. Two entrances – one to the private showing room and another for the general public – make functional

sense (what Carey-Williams called 'feeding clients from both ends') while also creating a circular rhythm in the space's layout.

'Annabelle has a tremendous understanding of the relationship between space and art. She adapts the space she is working with to perfectly correspond to art and to light,' says Emilio Steinberger, international director of Haunch of Venison New York, where Selldorf made less substantial but equally important structural changes to the gallery's new location on the ground floor of a Chelsea building (having moved from a Steven Learner Studio-designed midtown space). Selldorf redesigned the entrance and front gallery space so as to move visitors through a smaller gallery to get to the larger main space. 'This will create better flow for the exhibitions,' says Steinberger.

Working on a ground-up project, such as the David Zwirner gallery, brings its own freedoms and new considerations. 'It adds another dimension,' Selldorf says, 'which is to somehow figure out what the building's context is, what attitude the building brings to its neighbourhood and working out what it looks like in a layered approach.' The gallery, set to open in late autumn 2012, is now breaking ground. Selldorf hints that its facade served as a jumping off point for the entire structure: 'David had a particular idea for the material expression of the facade that he wanted to pursue. It was a kernel of an idea that we then pushed really hard to make it work in this new and different context.'

Selldorf has created exhibition designs for Gagosian Gallery in the past, but this year she will be building a fully fledged temporary structure for the first time, for the Frieze Masters Art Fair next October. Selldorf hopes to 'find the glory of the temporariness' of the building, yet at the same time 'make sure that it doesn't come across as insubstantial'. And this is perhaps the best way of explaining Selldorf's practice overall: differentiating qualities of material, light and proportion so as to understand the true nature of a building and its requirements.

Selldorf, however, is not just an art-world subcontractor, be it of an elevated sort, but also a trusted advisor. 'I would say she knows every single artist that we work with and she's seen every single show,' says Wirth. 'We discuss exhibitions, we discuss artists, we discuss art. She is a part of the international art circus in the best possible way.' Though Selldorf doesn't consider herself a collector, she has amassed a number of artworks, notably drawings, in her downtown Manhattan apartment. 'I think that both collecting and looking at art is a very personal thing and there is an element of composition,' she says, adding that she currently has more drawings than she can hang on the wall. However, that's not to say that her walls are brimming with artworks. 'My main living space is pretty empty,' she laughs. 'There's something about this rhythm that I like.'

Selldorf's hero, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, once said: 'An interesting plainness is the most difficult and precious thing to achieve.' It's a challenge that Selldorf continues to accept. ✱ www.selldorf.com

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