

Is This the World's Most Interesting Art Gallery You've Never Heard Of?

Aspen is famous for its world-class skiing, but this gorgeous little space, newly reimaged by Annabelle Selldorf, may be worth a trip on its own

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Boesky West. The wood sided cabin on the left belonged to Horsethief Kelly and is now employee housing. 

It could have been out of a *Grey Gardens (Wild West Edition)*, when in the early 1970s, local officials were called to check on an elderly woman who lived alone on East Main Street in Aspen. They found her indigent, walking barefoot on a floor littered with old glass plate photographs taken by her long-deceased father, a local photographer and perhaps less-than-honest horse dealer who was known as “Horsethief Kelly.”

Thanks to gallerist Marianne Boesky and architect Annabelle Selldorf, old Horsethief will become something of a mascot for the town's relationship with the arts, with his cabin-cum-photo studio now reinvented as Boesky West. In the decades between its identity as 19th-century cabin and blue chip art gallery, the building at 100 South Spring Street was expanded into a 3,000-square-foot vacation home with prime mountain views. This was around the same time Boesky's father, Ivan, was inspiring Oliver Stone's protagonist in the film *Wall Street* as America's most notorious inside trader and source of the infamous credo, “Greed is good.”

Marianne—who has since made the name Boesky far more associated with West 24th Street than with Wall Street—began her Aspen gallery endeavor back in 2007. “If you don’t have unlimited funds to buy an existing turnkey dream space,” Boesky explains, “you have to get creative with whatever circumstances you’re given. Here, the location worked and more importantly the price was right.”

Enter Selldorf, the highly esteemed, German-born AD100 architect who is the art world’s go-to for quiet, elegant renovations. Her client roster includes Hauser & Wirth, Barbara Gladstone, David Zwirner, Jeff Koons, Larry Gagosian, the Neue Galerie, the Clark Art Institute, and, currently underway, the Frick Collection renovation.



Installation view of John Houck: Tenth Mountain at Boesky West, 2017.

Boesky had bought the lot in 2014 and was already working with local architect David Johnston when she brought in Selldorf, a longtime friend, who describes her own methodology and goal as, “to stay close to the bone, to find a narrow path to poetic resolution amid precise argument.”



The gallery entrance on the right, “skiers” entrance on the left.

Precision along narrow paths would come in handy, as Boesky describes the project to *AD*: “It was important to get the scale and the vernacular really right—both respectful and contemporary—and to make a space that highlighted the power of its natural surroundings and history...within Aspen’s intense building code limitations. Annabelle is patent genius at all of these things.”

In addition to Aspen’s stringent building codes and budget-breaking construction costs, there is also a loud chorus of powerful locals who are still smarting from the *Shigeru Ban-designed Aspen Art Museum*, an enormous (by Aspen standards) structure just two blocks from the gallery. That project drew criticism for its lack of context both in its design as well as its programming, which many argue is geared to coastal and international artists and collectors.



The glass entrance allows for light as well as large crates. Installation view of *Frank Stella & Larry Bell*.

Boesky West was careful not to earn the same reputation. In fact, the average passerby would be hard put to know it was gallery at all, which is probably why it slid into the local art scene so seamlessly. That scene now includes, along with the Aspen Art Museum and its glitzy *ArtCrush fundraiser*, the *Art Aspen art fair*, stalwart galleries *Casterline Goodman Gallery* and *Baldwin Gallery*, the beloved *Anderson Ranch Arts Center*, and a number of other community organizations. Art insiders are cautiously optimistic about this new high-water mark. Ups and downs are a given, but this town's devotion to art-making and art-collecting will remain intact. Horsethief Kelly can attest to that. The actual footprint of his former cabin, next to the gallery extension, is now city-mandated employee housing. Maybe the tenant will pick up photography, when they aren't running a ski lift.