

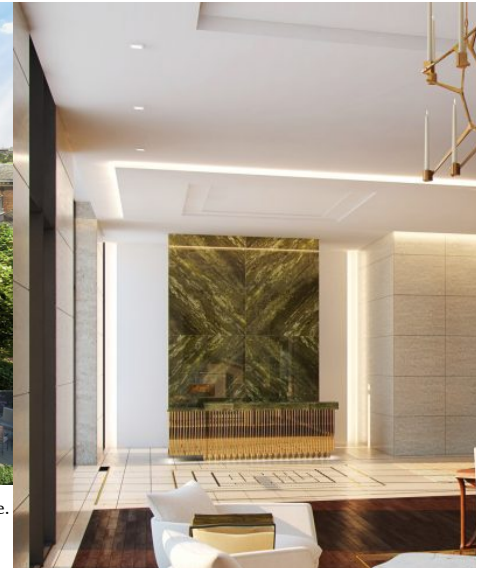
# INTERIORS

REAL ESTATE

## The Art of the Deal: Stunning River Oaks High-Rise Adds a Surprise, Pricey Art Perk

BY CATHERINE D. ANSPON

01.06.17



Poolside at The River Oaks. Note the greenscape designed by landscape architect McDugald-Steele features a space for sculpture.

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FULL SCREEN

**O**ne eagerly anticipated sky-rise has given us an insider peek at an amenity that matches its design appeal, one which is every bit the equal of its Italian marble hand-selected from Carrara, **Gaggenau** appliances, and **Poggenpohl** cabinetry.

**The River Oaks** high-rise has made its first art acquisitions, and not only are they museum enviable — but the new artworks were obtained at two of the world's priciest, and important, art fairs. Cue **Art Basel Miami Beach** and the **Untitled** fair, both held the first weekend in December in the tropical playground of Miami, and the place where the very top echelon of collectors from around the global flock to rub shoulders and engage in premier art shopping.

First a little background on The River Oaks, 3433 Westheimer Road. On a timeline for October through December 2017 move ins (and already more than 60 percent sold), the modernist masterpiece circa 1963-1965, was designed by noted 20th-century Houston architect **Cameron Fairchild** (1902-1985). Fairchild's half-century portfolio ranges from one of the first homes built on River Oaks Boulevard to the five-house enclave River Oaks Courts along Stanmore Drive, as well as the Jesse H. Jones Library at the Texas Medical Center, plus substantial homes and public buildings throughout the state, from Galveston to Georgetown, Texas.

Flash forward to today. What was once a ritzy, custom-designed apartment building for modern Houston will be reborn as one of the premier addresses among the city's new fleet of high-rises redefining the skyline. Drawing gasps for its penthouses, which top out at \$13 million for a jaw-dropping 13,000 square-foot unit on the 18th floor, the building is being updated for the new century with luxurious appointments that pay homage to its Mies-inspired bones. Developer **Arel Capital** has tapped a veritable dream team — architect **EDI International**, interiors architect **Rottet Studio**, and landscape architect **McDugald-Steele**, rounded out by construction manager **GT Leach** and sales/marketing gurus **Sudhoff Companies**.

Now add a bold plan for an art collection for The River Oaks' common areas, and building dwellers and guests will be in for an elevated aesthetic in keeping with Houston's place as a substantial U.S. art capital and market. Arel Capital managing partner **Richard Leibovitch** earns kudos for stepping outside the realm of decorative art to truly curate a visual experience. Assisting Leibovitch — himself a collector of contemporary talents from Jeff Koons to Damien Hirst, and Pop icon Tom Wesselmann — are **Lauren Rottet**, founding principal and president of Rottet Studio, who is known for her sophisticated eye and embrace of avant-garde painting and sculpture, and Houston-based art consultant **Lea Weingarten**.

And who are the first artists to be acquired by The River Oaks?

Back from Miami, Leibovitch, advised by Weingarten and Rottet, has selected two senior masters, one American born, the other from Argentina. They are respectively **Stanley Whitney** and **Liliana Porter**, both talents in their seventies who explore painting and drawing (Whitney) and conceptual photography (Porter) to forge original works that possess nuance, beauty, understatement, and allude subtly to issues of identity. Reportedly, the Whitney monotype and the Porter photographs each were five-figure purchases.



Above: The Library at the River Oaks is destination art, and will feature a major work on paper by New York-based, internationally exhibited Stanley Whitney.

Leibovitch notes, “The goal is for the art to complement the elegance of the building.” And the Art Basel Miami collecting jaunt is just the beginning. “We are actively looking,” the developer says, “going to art fairs, galleries, and art studios.”

Stay tuned. Rumor has it Houston dealers are also on the shopping list.

Weingarten adds, “People can sense immediately when the finest building and design selections are made — and when art is an afterthought ...

“Many of The River Oaks’ [future] residents are art collectors in their own right, savvy when it comes to artwork selections. It is important that the pieces going into the common areas are well-chosen.”



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