

# UTILITARIAN CHIC

On any given day, Stuart Parr looks like a surfer boy, dressed casually in colorful shirts and shiny shorts or pants. But looks can be deceiving. His loft, a vast haven with beautiful views of the waterfront in lower Manhattan, is a cement bunker in the sky stocked with Modernist furniture, ▶



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Cubical shelving along one wall was designed by Parr and built by Professional Furniture Finishing. It houses his extensive collection of Warren McArthur furniture, which he sells and rents out. See Resources.

IN UPSTATE ROME, NEW YORK, PARR "EXPECTED TO FIN



particularly some of the popular aluminum constructions designed by Warren McArthur in the 1930s. As a dealer, Parr has assembled a formidable client list for his wares, including photographer Annie Leibovitz, fashion designer Valentino (Parr outfitted his showroom in Milan), Martha Stewart, director Joel Silver, art dealer Robert Miller, and artist Peter Halley.

In the kitchen area, Parr's two dogs lumber and drool on the wood floor; the view of nearby rooftop water tanks could well be a Hopper cityscape. Yet behind this scene of modern domesticity one encounters another shock to the system: Parr's photography collection (a perk from dating Mary Doerhoefer, who recently left the Robert Miller Gallery to deal privately). Elegantly framed are a Lewis Hine photo of a factory worker, a haunting Margaret Bourke-White image of a dirigible, a loving portrait of Parr and his dogs by Tiziano Magni, and much more.

Like photographers, Parr is inspired by landscape and light. When he moved to the loft, in 1992, the exposure facing the Hudson River was a solid wall. He had it broken out—no small feat—and installed a series of plate-glass windows that opened up to a vista of swollen office towers, quarter-mile-long cement piers, Ellis Island, and the Statue of Liberty. So all-encompassing is the wide-

**MCARTHUR FURNITURE EVERYWHERE. I WAS SO DEPRESSED'**



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Facing page: Parr's photography collection includes works by David Salle, Lewis Hine, and Kelly Klein. The table and faux cane chairs are by Dan Johnson. This page, top to bottom: Rider and Puppy hang out in the kitchen; the stove is a 1930s Magic Chef. The table and chairs are by Frank Lloyd Wright. The painting and the sculpture are by Mac James. See Resources.



angle view that the motion of the river makes visitors feel as if they're drifting. Opposite this amazing wall of windows is a block of white cubical shelves that houses part of Parr's equally spectacular furniture collection. Each cubby holds a different piece by McArthur, whose unique designs incorporated steel rods within tubular aluminum legs, providing tension and remarkable strength.

Though it's clear, after meeting him, that Parr is definitely not a typical surfer boy, he did grow up water-skiing on the American River in Sacramento, where his passion for the Modernist aesthetic took hold. "At three years old," he says, "I could name every car on the road: Auburn boat-tail speedsters, Cadillacs, Aston Martins." He also began learning about Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe from a friend of his father's who owned the lone hip art gallery in town. As a young man, Parr modeled in Europe and acted in a horror film before settling in New York, where he worked as a waiter at Raoul's. "On weekends," he says, "I would go picking with my then girlfriend, who had a collection of turn-of-the-century kids' clothes. I focused on furniture and objects." With \$200 in his pocket, Parr decided to make hunting furniture his day job. He discovered a forgotten department store in Philadelphia and bought 12 rolls of vintage linoleum there (they sold quickly in Manhattan). He also got hold of Deco fixtures, which he off-loaded at the building that now houses Robert De Niro's film studio. "I made, like, \$5,000 the second week."

The relentlessly energetic Parr began selling at the flea markets and paying to view furniture early at the Salvation Army in Brooklyn. "I found Alvar Aalto, Eames, Rohde," he says. One fortuitous day at a flea market, he



ROAD: AUBURN SPEEDSTERS, CADILLACS, ASTON MARTINS"



Top left and right: In the bathroom, a turn-of-the-century pedestal sink and a fiberglass outdoor lounge used as a shower bench. Above: Parr's shoe rack is a 1930s Chris-Craft wooden boat ladder. Facing page: The anodized aluminum night table is by Warren McArthur. The bed linens are from ABC Carpet & Home. See Resources.

observed the sale of an aluminum chair for quite a bit of money. "I turned it over; the label read 'WARREN McARTHUR, ROME, NY.'" The next afternoon Parr found himself in the upstate town of Rome. "I expected to find McArthur furniture everywhere," he says. "I was so depressed." Parr eventually tracked down some former McArthur factory workers and finally hit pay dirt. "I met guys who, some 60 years later, could tell you every seat-part number of the products: 'That's a 107583 with a 3 back and a 5B seat.'" Parr soon acquired a cache of important pieces from a movie theater and a Masonic temple. "The guys would say, 'Oh, yes, we did a job there.'"

Today Parr owns the exclusive rights to reproduce McArthur's designs. Working with a German manufacturer, he recently put out a line of repros, some of which now decorate Martha Stewart's new offices. Parr also rents out his high-ceilinged space for fashion-magazine photo shoots (even his McArthur pieces can be rented, at breathtaking day rates: sometimes up to 10 percent of full value). The peripatetic dealer is constantly moving things around, though, so prospective renters shouldn't expect to encounter the exact same space every time. On one visit, a circa-1929 mahogany boardroom table from the Crocker National Bank in San Francisco took up practically the entire breakfast area; on another, a cast-aluminum table and faux cane seats designed by Dan Johnson in the '50s had replaced it. And Parr has just sold the '20s rococo silver filigree headboard that framed his bed. As they say, Change is good. Especially for Stuart Parr. ★

*WITH \$200 IN HIS POCKET, PARR MADE HUNTING FURNITURE*



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