

The Rachofsky residence is an artistic triumph

Owner's modern works are worthy of a museum

By Janet Kutner

Art Critic of The Dallas Morning News

Lots of people buy art to fill their walls. Howard Rachofsky commissioned a postmodern landmark for his collection.

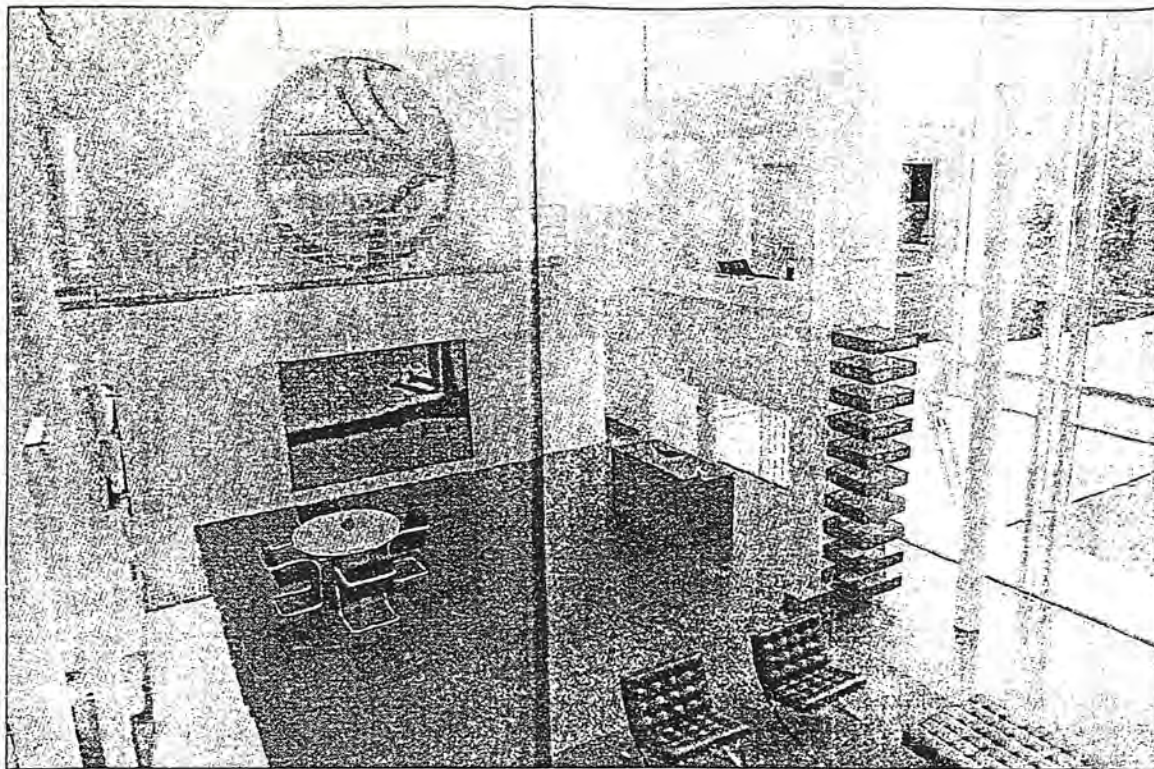
Designed by award-winning architect Richard Meier, whose current commissions include the new Getty Art Center in Los Angeles, the Rachofsky house is a series of serene white spaces that provide

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the perfect backdrop for contemporary works of bold dimensions.

Mr. Rachofsky made his money managing hedge funds — mutual funds that to some degree bet on a declining market — and he's got a similarly gutsy streak when it comes to buying art. The collection is eclectic to the point of eccentricity, with works by little-known artists juxtaposed with those of blue-chip talents. Minimalism mingles with multi-layered narratives, witty satires with ominous views of the world.

Although this is clearly a private residence, the collection, which reads like a Who's Who in New Please see **MAKING** on Page 6C.



INNER SPACE EXPLORATION: One of the most dramatic spaces in Dallas investor Howard Rachofsky's home is the two-story living room, which soars 23 feet high and features cantilevered balconies. The room also showcases works of art by Frank Stella, Donald Judd, Robert Motherwell and Sol Lewitt.

Meier's design achieves utopian ideal, if not ease

By David Dillon

Architecture Critic of The Dallas Morning News

There has always been something utopian about Richard Meier's houses. All those white panels and shimmering glass surfaces call up visions of perfection, of the way things ought to be. Elegant, rational, pristine — and just a bit eerie, as though they are not intended for human habitation.

Mr. Meier's new house for Dallas investor How-

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ard Rachofsky expresses all of these qualities. The architect describes it as "an ideal, an investigation into all of the possibilities of house as a building type, without many of the usual compromises."

For "compromises" read children, in-laws, mud rooms and basement workshops. Mr. Rachofsky, a bachelor and avid contemporary art collector, calls the house "a one-bedroom apartment over a public space."

Both are right.

The idealizing elements are immediately apparent from the street, where the form sits on the land like an elegant white box on a black table. Is it a Please see **AN ATMOSPHERE** on Page 6C.

The Dallas Morning News: Ariane Kadoch

Making up for lost time

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York galleries, is the closest thing Dallas has to a contemporary art museum.

Sculptures by two generations of prominent international talent fringe the property, a peaceful enclave just two blocks north of busy Preston Center. A thrusting geometric figure by Joel Shapiro is out front, a craggy Anish Kapoor boulder shadowed by a hole in the ground on the side. Signature examples by other artists are around back — angular limestone benches by Scott Burton, voluptuous bronze "vessels" by Tony Cragg, a 25-foot-tall chair by Marina Abramovic, a contemplative circle of limestone rocks by Richard Long.

The front hall is a long gallery hung on both sides, with a brooding abstraction by Mark Rothko at one end and Ross Bleckner's metaphysical study of light in motion at the other. In between are works spanning a decade of new imagery and new abstraction — Peter Halley's glaring geometric maze, Philip Taaffe's muted organic patterns, a fragmented interior by Elizabeth Murray, an ironic neo-expressionist painting on velvet by Julian Schnabel.

Part of what makes this collection so exciting is its newness. Mr. Rachofsky started buying art only 15 years ago, and didn't become passionate in his pursuit until 1989. Most of what he owns is from the '90s.

"Because I came to the art experience relatively late in life, abstract expressionism is still very fresh to me," the 52-year-old Dallas native says of post-World War II paintings by Adolph Gottlieb, Robert Motherwell and Rothko. "But I don't have a large inclination or budget to go back and buy '60s works by artists like Jasper Johns or Roy Lichtenstein."

Instead, he's trying to round out his collection of Germany's cutting edge. A rippling abstraction by Gerhard Richter is in his dining room; a Sigmar Polke is in the kitchen. He's on the lookout for works by Georg Baselitz and Anselm Kiefer.

Although Mr. Rachofsky has bought almost exclusively from New York galleries and auction houses, the collection has a strong international flavor. Marina Abramovic is from Yugoslavia, Mr. Cragg, Mr. Kapoor and Mr. Long from England.

An apparitional figure by Italy's Mimmo Paladino sits on a platform outside the dining

room, its timeless presence linking contemporary art with that of classical antiquity. A sealed cabinet by Colombian artist Doris Salcedo evokes thoughts of political oppression in Latin America. Five headless burlap figures by Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz suggest the horrors of concentration camps.

"It would be easy to focus on one school and really buy in depth," Mr. Rachofsky says. "But the more you read and study, the more you tend to go in different directions."

The trick, he says, is "to take all these things and integrate them into your life. For me, the feel of it is living with it, not just saying you have it."



The Dallas Morning News: Arlane Kadoch

A NEW LOVE: "Because I came to the art experience relatively late in life, abstract expressionism is still very fresh to me," says Howard Rachofsky, standing before a Robert Motherwell painting.

An atmosphere of cool control pervades the residence

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house? A museum? An office building? The headquarters of a foundation?

The stark white facade with its ribbon window and slender supporting columns declares the house's pedigree to be early 20th-century European modernism, Le Corbusier and the Villa Stein in particular. It is cubic and continental rather than linear and American.

Mr. Rachofsky commissioned Mr. Meier after seeing his High Museum of Art in Atlanta in the mid-1980s. A problematical setting for art, the museum nevertheless possesses the kind of luminosity, day and night, that Mr. Rachofsky was looking for.

It took another 10 years to complete the house (there were several false starts), during which Mr. Rachofsky's art collection grew dramatically. He wasn't interested merely in owning art; he wanted to live with it — day by day, week by week — constantly moving pieces around in search of ever more surprising juxtapositions. For this, he needed a house that functioned as a gallery; Mr. Meier had been designing them for years.

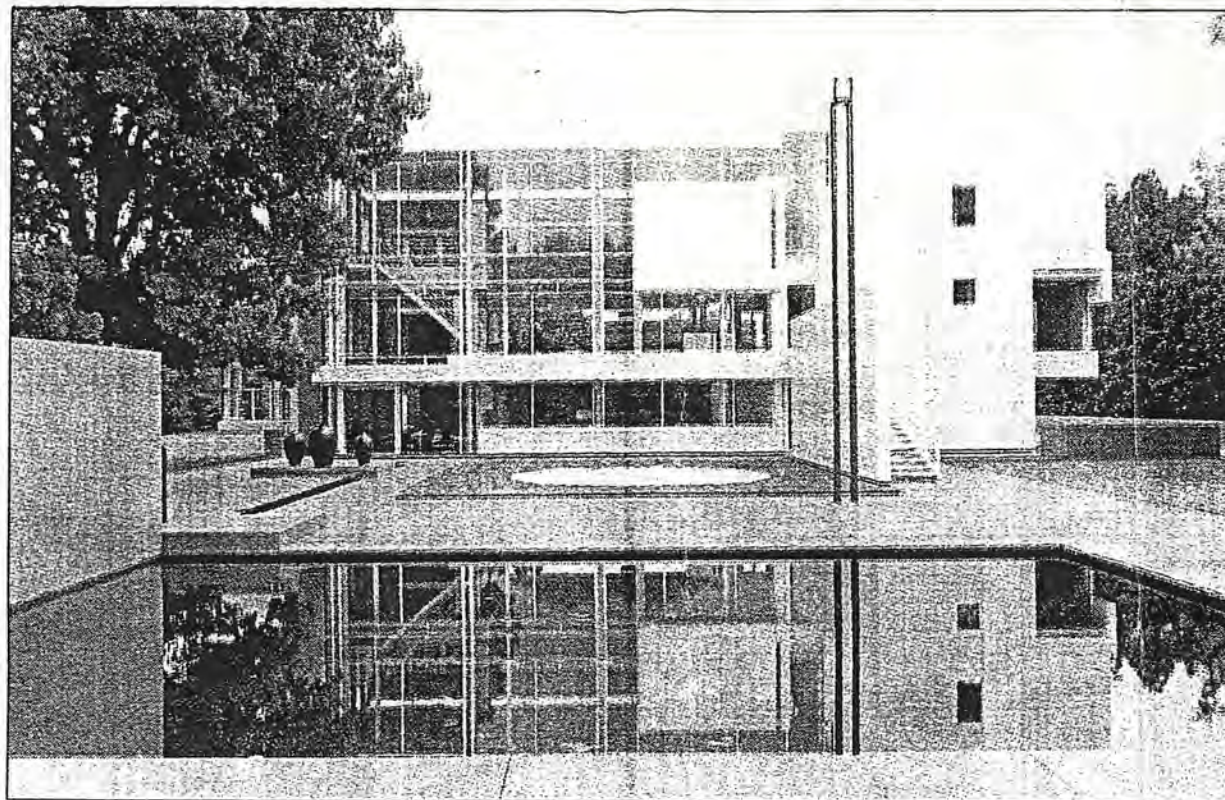
The Rachofsky house makes no concessions to traditional ideas of welcome. There is no walk or front stoop. The front door is a discreetly pivoting white panel without handle or knob. No conventional hardware anywhere, for that matter. The entire house is an essay in flushness.

Directly inside the front door is a long gallery featuring paintings by Mark Rothko, Elizabeth Murray, Julian Schnabel and others. The house is organized as a series of zones, running from public to private, formal to semiformal, solid to transparent.

The gallery is a kind of lobby, and while conceptually intriguing is too narrow for the art it contains. It's impossible to get back far enough to study the paintings.

But the procession through the gallery to the main staircase is magical. Having been confined, we are suddenly released into a landscape of magnolias and red oaks and dramatic Texas sky, as though we had entered a crystalline aerie in a nature preserve.

No contemporary architect captures the landscape better than Richard Meier. His houses are not frames for viewing nature; nor do they suck up to it with soft colors and materials. Instead, they reach out and ap-



The Dallas Morning News: Ariane Kadoch

DEFYING THE SUN: An all-glass rear facade looks out over the pool area, which features works by Tony Cragg, Richard Long and Marina Abramovic.

propriate it by means of staircases, projecting planes and free-standing walls.

In the Rachofsky house, an axis runs from the driveway through the front door and the kitchen to an outdoor staircase and finally to the pool house, pulling house and site together like an architectural drawing.

The architects also went to extraordinary lengths to protect the magnificent trees, including underground fans to aerate the soil. Mr. Meier even skewed his own grid — the ultimate sacrifice — in order to keep piers away from the roots.

But Mr. Meier has chosen to defy the Texas sun. The rear or west facade is virtually all glass, exposing the

layers of space like a sectional diagram, but requiring special glass, mechanical sun shades and tons of air conditioning to keep from quick-frying the occupants.

The main staircase leads to the *piece de resistance*, the two-story living room. Twenty-three feet high, it is punctuated by dramatic cantilevered balconies, including Mr. Rachofsky's office on the third level that resembles the bridge on a battleship. Right full rudder!

In this one grand space Mr. Meier has concentrated the major themes of his architecture: light, abstraction, the play of solid and void, containment and transparency. Unlike most of his contemporaries, who have changed their "isms" as often as their underwear, he has focused single-mindedly on a few central

issues. The line from his early houses in the Hamptons to the Getty Art Center in Los Angeles is so narrow and often deep.

Spatially, the Rachofsky living room is lyric, light varied and hypnotic, its engineering conceptions precise. Yet, as in the house as a whole, its relentless formality can become oppressive. We search in vain for a fireplace and an easy chair, or for a space where we can flop in a non-orthogonal heap. Even in the private third floor, where the art is edgy and confrontational, the spirit of cool control prevails.

"In this house I finally got to do exactly what I want," Mr. Rachofsky says triumphantly.

The Rachofsky House, like many of Mr. Meier's earlier houses, is a modern villa in which all the individual pieces — house, gallery, pool, landscape — have been calibrated into an ensemble. It's the mark of a commission that architects dream of — an engaged client, total control, nothing left to chance.

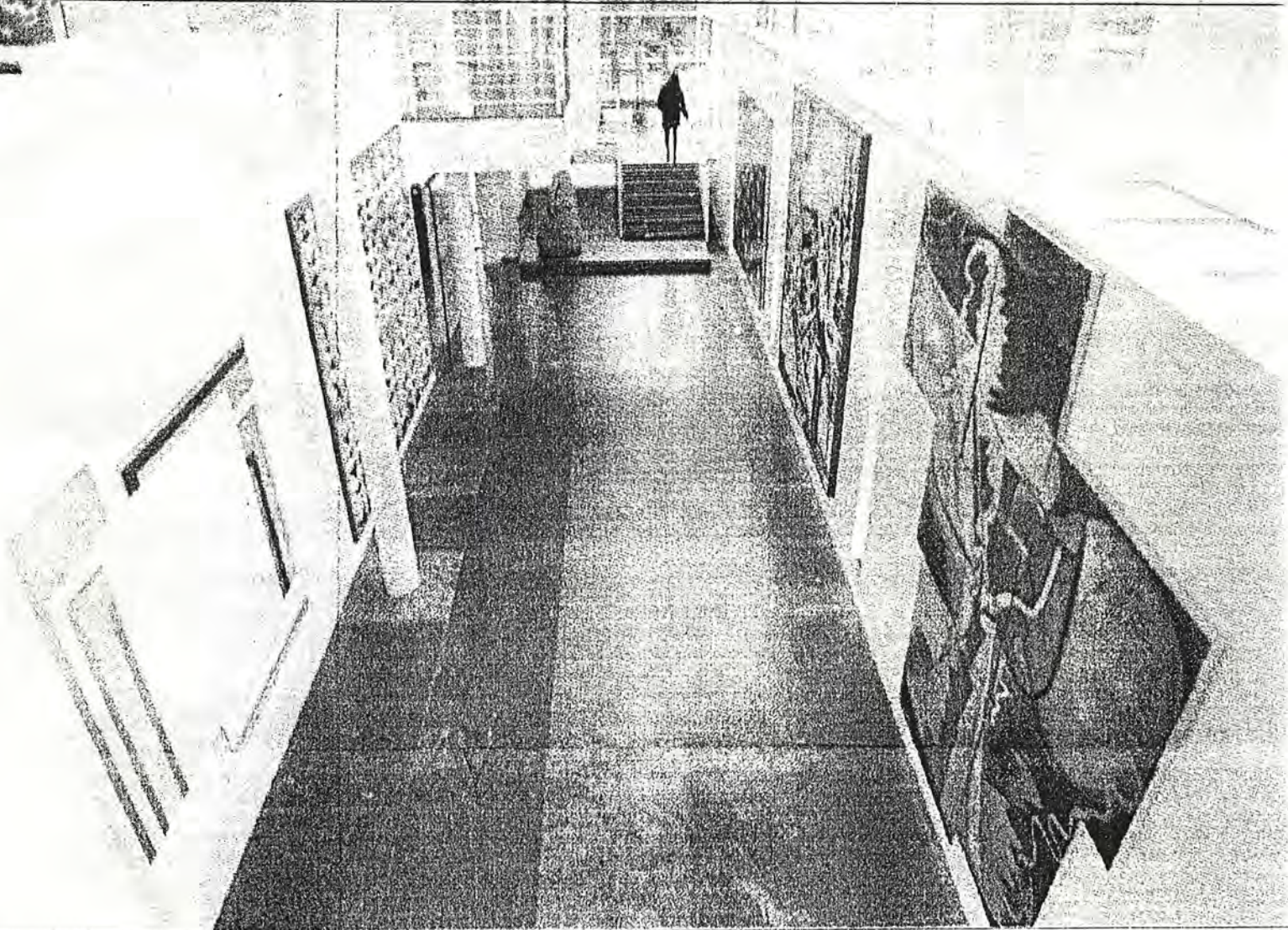
"Howard made it clear that he wanted a total composition, not just a house," explains project architect Howard Cox. "That meant that everything from the facade to the soap dishes had to be of a piece. It was the situation."

The final piece of the composition, an art gallery along Preston Road, will be finished next year. In addition to providing a buffer for the house, the gallery will give Mr. Rachofsky the chance to share his collection, and his enthusiasms, with the public.

"I want to make contemporary art user-friendly," explains. "You shouldn't have to go to a museum to see it. I want it to be part of daily experience."

This is an extraordinary civic gesture in a city such as Dallas, where houses by celebrated architects are seen by appointment only, if at all. Mr. Rachofsky estimates that he will host nearly 30 events over the next 12 months.

Similarly, Deedie and Rusty Rose have viewed their house in Highland Park, by Antoine Predock, as a public resource as well as a private domain. Dallas has half a dozen contemporary houses of international distinction, as well as slightly earlier modernist jewels by Howard Meyer, O'Neil Ford, Bud Oglesby and others. With its public realm largely bulldozed or bulldozed, Dallas' architectural legacy may well be its exclusive private houses.



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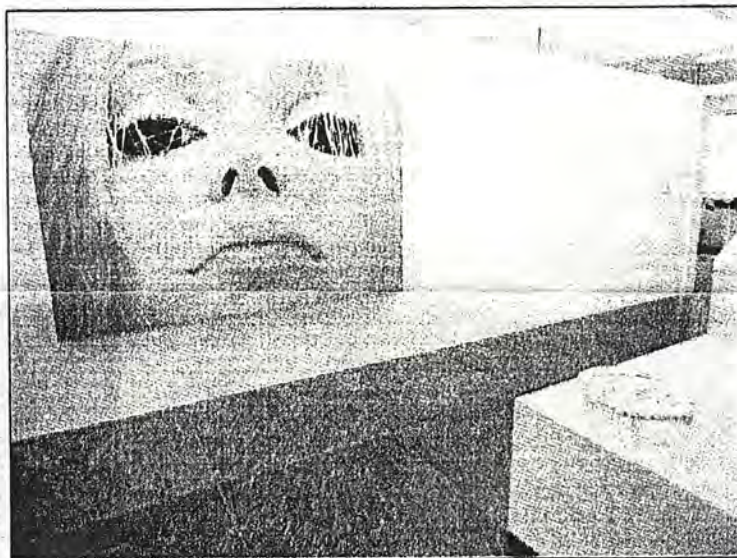
HALL OF FRAME: The front hall of the Rachofsky residence is a long gallery featuring works by Mark Rothko, Ross Bleckner, Peter Halley, Phillip Taaffe, Elizabeth Murray and Julian Schnabel

It's feeling — emotional content, tactile surfaces, vibrant colors, rhythmic forms — that unites so many disparate styles and themes. Given the house's spare proportions, Mr. Rachofsky might have been expected to gravitate toward minimalism. But modular sculptures by Donald Judd and Sol Lewitt are among a mere handful of reductive works.

Despite its resemblance to a private museum, the house is far from austere. An intimate dining room with a low ceiling puts visitors in close proximity to the tactile surface of the Richter painting. A sitting room sans chairs is just large enough for an earthy abstraction by Sean Scully, a radiant "sun and moon" by Mr. Gottlieb, and a colorful entanglement of car wreckage by John Chamberlain. Lyrical paintings by Richard Diebenkorn, Joan Mitchell and Donald Sultan are tucked away in powder rooms.

Mr. Rachofsky reserved his most personal works for the library, a sanctuary he describes as "the closest thing I've got to clutter." Intermingled with art books and family photographs are introspective objects incorporating text. Ken Aptekar's adaptation of an old master painting includes a poignant parable about a boy's bar mitzvah suit. Mark Tansy's provocative "wheel of fortune" table has the potential of producing thousands of different word combinations.

Eager to share his love of contemporary art, Mr. Rachofsky has agreed to host two dozen charitable events in the next 12 months. He realizes that some works will shock people, so he has relegated the more controversial things to the third floor — Jeff Koons' kitsch sculpture of a woman bathing, a psychologically charged painting of a nymph by Lisa Yuskavage, Richard Phillips' ominous blow-up of a fashion model's face, Da-



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GUARDING THE GUEST TOWELS: *Horizontal Blonde* (1995), Richard Phillips' ominous blow-up of a fashion model's face, dominates a third-floor bathroom.

mien Hirst's symbolic representation of *Uncaring Lovers* as cows' intestines sealed in glass jars.

Some of the most disconcerting works are in the master bedroom — a broken crockery portrait by Mr. Schnabel, an enigma of layered imagery by David Salle, Freudian nudes by Eric Fischl.

But Mr. Rachofsky's wry sense of humor comes across on this floor as well. An Ashley Bickerton painting of a newborn girl who's already had a makeover is in the master bath, as is Chuck Agro's satirical ceramic Bible.

"Do I remember beauty?" it asks on one

page. "I barely remember lunch," on another. Mr. Rachofsky identifies

He continues his whirlwind packing New York buying trips around hosting. He intends to change the decor every six or seven months, adding cutting-edge work. Meanwhile, the 15-foot, glass-roofed building on top of his property are under way; it will have more display space as well as needed.

"This collection is very much in progress," Mr. Rachofsky says. "It's like a kid in a candy store — you grab things you like."