

CLIFF FONG

I first met Cliff Fong at the Hollywood department store Fred Segal, where he worked the floor. He was my favorite sales guy. He was super smart and had great taste, so I asked him to do some personal styling for me for an upcoming stand-up tour. And before we knew it, we weren't just stylist and stylee or salesperson and salespersee, we were friends. Sometimes he would even stay at my house while I was away to watch my cats. On one trip when I knew I was gonna be away for a while, I asked him if he would find me some furniture and rearrange my home a little bit. Without exaggeration I can say it was one of the best things that's ever happened to me in my whole entire life. He bought me my first Prouvé chair, he tweaked my house until it was just perfectly imperfect, and we kicked off a working relationship that's lasted decades.

This is why I like working with Cliff: I primarily work off instinct and gut; he works off that a bit, but he also works off emotion and story. He thinks about everything so deeply that he can sort of make you fall in love with anything. He was a debater in high school, so he's quite persuasive when you actually get him talking. I spent a lot of time in high school debating whether or not I was gonna marry Donny Osmond, so we're different in that way. Cliff's really taught me to think about the big picture—to think about what objects meant forty years ago and what they mean today.

OPPOSITE: Because Cliff "doesn't want it pretty," he gravitates to pieces that are a bit more conceptual and esoteric. Some are huge names—Prouvé, Royère—others are humble flea market finds. Here, a Bruno Mathsson Pernilla lounge chair nestles with an industrial side table from the '20s. The painting is by Jim Lambie.











PAGES 242 AND 243: Cliff lived in this building when he was in college. When he heard it was going condo, he threw his hat in the ring for a one-bedroom and ended up stretching for a stately junior six on the corner. Washed with sunlight, Cliff mixes crisp modernity with warmer organics. An armless sofa from Marco Zanuso faces off against a Jean Prouvé daybed and Pierre Paulin's Oyster chair. The stools are Charlotte Perriand.

LEFT: Cliff's collection of furniture is always evolving, which he chalks up to his ongoing education. "It's that saying, 'If you think you're ripe, you're going to rot; if you think you're green, you're going to grow.'" The Mathieu Matégot sconces that frame the Paul Klee above the hearth probably aren't going anywhere (they're some of the sole pops of color), and neither is the brass chandelier above the table. It's by an unknown designer. "That's one of the first pieces I ever bought," he explains. The dining room table is Knoll, the chairs are Hans Wegner, and the pastel is by John Jakle.

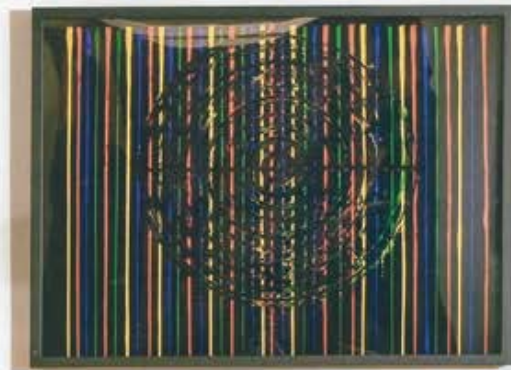
Since meeting Cliff, I haven't owned a home that he hasn't touched. Sometimes he leads the entire effort. Sometimes he'll redo something after it starts to feel a little stale. Sometimes he just comes in at the end, after the very last lightbulb is installed, and tweaks it all ever so slightly—changing the wattage of the lightbulb, shifting the placement of a chair or a painting, adding a trash bin or some other element that makes the space a bit more livable. Cliff really thinks about these things. He thinks about how someone would actually live in a space and move throughout the room. As much as he can go abstract, he's also capable of pondering the tiny details in a way that can make other people's heads hurt. All I know is, I've never had a piece of trash in my hand at home for longer than three seconds.

Cliff is a partner alongside Cameron Smith (see page 264) in Galerie Half (see page 280), a home store in Los Angeles that basically embodies everything I've come to love over the past twenty or thirty years. You'll find Prouvé chairs and primitive benches; you'll find the occasional Royère sofa, or Serge Mouille lighting fixture. Like in my homes, Cliff is charged with the display of the shop so that anyone who walks by would want to move right in. Cameron does most of the buying and sourcing and has one of the best eyes for both pedigreed and anonymous pieces in the business. No—make that two of the best eyes.

Cliff lives in a three-bedroom apartment in Koreatown. In fact, he lives in the same building that he lived in when he was in college. (Worry not—he moved out for a few years in between renting and ultimately buying.) It is a gorgeous space filled with light and Cliff's three big dogs. He has a rotating cast of truly spectacular treasures that I often want to, and sometimes do, buy right out from under him: a Prouvé sideboard, a perfectly worn in Illum Wikkelsø couch, along with some really beautiful art from young up-and-comers. In summation, Cliff really knows what he's doing.

OPPOSITE: A well-loved Børge Møgensen sofa doubles as “the world's most expensive dog bed” for Cliff's three dogs. The black-and-white gallery wall above includes photographs from Mark Segal and Shahid Datawala. Cliff found the coffee table at a flea market.







THOUGHTS, IDEAS, AND ADVICE FROM CLIFF

1. Don't be afraid to mix high and low price points. Not everything has to be precious to be important.
2. Splurge on something you really love, especially something with some inherent design value.
3. Buy lots of books, especially on art. Read them.
4. Take a trip to Europe; spend as much time there as possible.
5. Learn another language.
6. Don't be afraid to experiment.
7. Find beauty in imperfection.
8. Experience and appreciate nature.
9. Mix new and old.
10. Live deliberately.

LEFT: Throughout his apartment, Cliff uses antique, primarily Turkish textiles. "I like old textiles," Cliff explains. "Sometimes new rugs look too done."