

ART MARKET INSIGHTS

INTERIOR DESIGNER

# LOUISE SUNSHINE

Collector & Dream Maker

The living room of a unit in Louise Sunshine's latest project, Granite Park Place is full of natural light, perfect to display an impressive collection of fine art and an eye for design.

By Eric Cohler  
Photography by Jeff Corney





Artwork seems organically fit into the second bedroom of the home.

There was an iconic axiom, or established principle, promised in Herbert Hoover's 1928 presidential campaign: "A chicken in every pot and a car in every garage." In other words, home ownership was to be a given; the great American dream fully realized. A haven for family and friends that is uniquely one's own. Louise Sunshine has built a career on the belief that home ownership is one of the most important investments that we make in life. She has worked with the greatest developers of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries; visionaries who have transformed skylines and made vertical what was simply horizontal. Louise is an alchemist of sorts; conjuring up visions of Hoover's slogan, but tailored for modern life. The garage today may hold hundreds of cars as it is most probably located deep beneath the apartment buildings that she markets, and the chicken is most likely cooked in a microwave, but the concept remains true. Louise does, in fact, turn base metal to gold. She takes the raw clay of a developer's dream and molds it into reality. Through the clutter and bureaucracy of a typical development process, which can take years, her clarity of purpose, of a lifestyle imagined and then realized rings through. In her private life, she and her husband have built a unique collection of glass, ceramics,

paintings and sculpture that is world class. It's as though New York's new Museum of Arts and Design opened satellite branches in Louise's own two homes. Her passion for collecting and curating art extends to the projects that she develops and markets. All of her buildings feature art and sculpture in lobbies and public spaces by prominent local artists, and this is something that Louise has made a personal mission: to embrace the local arts community and bring their work "home" to a broader public. Louise is in constant motion, sometimes flying across the country two or three times in a given week or immersed in strategy sessions with developers, yet I was able to catch up with her recently in Florida where she was enjoying a rare long weekend.

**Eric Cohler:** Louise, you are one busy person. It must be gratifying to be in such demand.  
**Louise Sunshine:** It's about passion. I love what I do. Without passion there is no tension, and without tension there is no structure and balance.

**EC:** I'm in awe of your career, not to mention your art collection.

**LS:** Thank you, somehow it evolved and fell into place.

**EC:** You make the process seem effortless. Louise, you've become a tastemaker, with a name that practically every developer and real estate firm in the country knows. When you call, people pick up the phone. Who have you worked with?

**LS:** (Laughing) Who haven't I worked with? I won't name them, but we all have a mutual admiration society for what each one of us has brought to a project.

**EC:** How did you get started collecting?

**LS:** Again, it distills down to passion. I collect art as curator of my own dreams. Watching a collection form and evolve is one of the great joys of my life. It's never about one collection, but about layers and pentimento; about seeing the beauty underneath and helping to nurture that beauty and bring it to the surface. It's the same way that I look at buildings and homes, and perhaps that's what has given me a unique perspective. I bought my first pieces of art and sculpture when I was in my early 20s.

**EC:** So it's a combination of your love of art in all mediums and the mixture of form and function?

**LS:** Exactly. And it should be noted that it's not always about price. More to the point,



Sunshine is drawn to three-dimensional forms, sculpture and ceramics and is creative with positioning pieces on the floor and on pedestals, tabletops and in cabinets.

**"Great homes and important art 'marry' one another. One is the perfect envelope and the other is what fills the envelope with verve and dimension."**

collecting is about perceived value, whether collecting art or real estate.

**EC:** It is said that you are a visionary, that you "see" what others can't envision.

**LS:** To me, it's about trying to be a perfectionist, to get the foundation right if you will. Without a strong foundation there is no hope of building an art collection, or a home, or apartment complex for that matter. It's about the total picture and conflux of ideas.

**EC:** I thought that I was the "mixmaster."

**LS:** We can share the moniker. Curating and collecting, marketing and developing is all about forming the right mix; the right combination. It's also an iterative process and one from which people gain true knowledge.

**EC:** And knowledge is empowerment.

**LS:** Yes, and empowerment is freedom; freedom of choice and a say in the decision-making process. I read as much as I can about a given project or artist. Exposure to information is critical to success. You could call it saturation.

**EC:** Immersion in one's field.

**LS:** Naturally, and also immersion in a general sense, of soaking up the essence of the community around you and embracing that community. That's what I am working on with a new project in Pasadena called Granite Park Place. We will feature art in the two main buildings by regional artists. What I'm truly excited about is our artist's in residence program where some of our live/work townhouse apartments will be given over to community artists to use as temporary studios and gallery space. The artists will have the run of the space for six months to a year. It's about giving back and nurturing the creative spirit.

**EC:** I love the concept. It's fresh and unique. Makes me smile.

**LS:** Marketing—and I must say that the same applies to collecting—is about constantly exposing oneself to new ideas and experiences.

**EC:** Staying one step ahead of the curve?

**LS:** Yes, but also not veering too far left of center. I do it by degrees.

**EC:** Tell me about your own art collection.

**LS:** It's dynamic and constantly evolving. I am drawn to three-dimensional forms, sculpture





Two larger pieces match the sleek sophistication of the master bathroom.

and ceramics and especially glass. I began by collecting Chinese antiquities, Han, Tang and Ming pieces and then morphed into contemporary works.

EC: Interestingly, the Chinese works were incredibly iconoclastic for their epoch. They still remain modern in feeling to this day, so I can see how you connected the dots.

LS: I find art glass rarefied; especially American and Italian pieces. Japanese works also captivate me with their lyrical beauty.

EC: There is an expression in Japanese for that essence of beauty. It's called wabi-sabi; a beauty that is described as "simplicity, modesty, intimacy and the suggestion of natural processes."

LS: That makes perfect sense. The ineffable, and that's what I strive for in marketing buildings and collecting art.

EC: And for me in living life.

LS: *Touché*.

EC: Which artists do you collect?

LS: To name a few: Tahiro Kondo; Laura de Santillana; Giorgio Ferro and Juan Correa. And I have tremendous respect for their galleries; including Barry Friedman and Marlborough.

EC: What are your favorite museums, places from which you draw inspiration?

LS: On the West Coast, the Norton Simon. In New York, MOMA, and in London, the Tate Modern.

EC: How do you display your collection? Glass can be problematic.

LS: Not if you're careful. I have pieces on the floor and on pedestals, tabletops and in cabinets. I've recently branched out and acquired a totem pole.

EC: Where are you going to put that?

LS: Good question. Probably at my house in Connecticut.

EC: Who are some of the regional artists that

will be represented at Granite Park?

LS: Kenton Nelson—I'd love to hang a painting of the Arroyo Bridge over the fireplace in the lobby at Granite Park. And Sally Storch for sure. We've already acquired a large work of hers for the library.

EC: What you are saying is that great art and great real estate form a synergistic whole.

LS: Absolutely. Each lends the other greater depth and resonance. Great homes and important art "marry" one another. One is the perfect envelope and the other is what fills the envelope with verve and dimension.

EC: In your personal art collection how do the individual pieces relate to one another?

LS: They strike an emotional cord—goes back to your philosophy about balance and harmony.

EC: And atonality thrown in for good measure?

LS: On occasion, but shaken gently, not stirred.



The comfortable elegance of the home's master bedroom.



Another view of the beautifully balanced sitting area.

EC: Well at least James Bond would approve. Art imitating life and vice versa.

LS: Here's to a life well lived!

EC: And to a collection well curated. ●

*Eric Cohler, president of Eric Cohler Inc., holds a master's degree in Historic Preservation from the Columbia School of Architecture. He won a Designer of the Year Award in 1998, and in 2000 the D&D Building in New York recognized him as one of the 26 leading designers in the U.S. Eric has appeared on CBS Morning and Evening News and CNN Style and he is a featured designer on the Home & Garden TV Network.*

