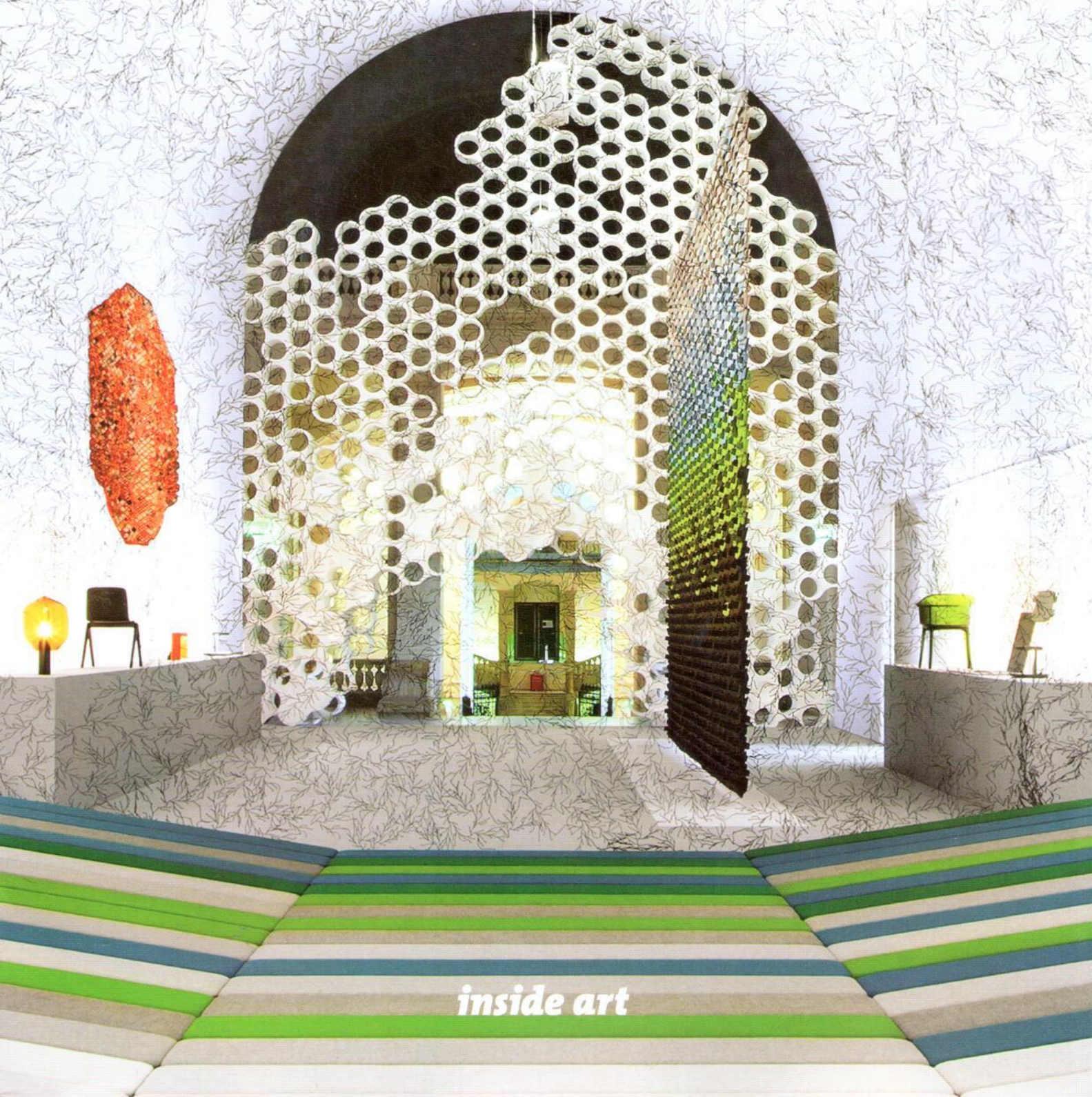


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text: *craig kellogg*
photography: *eric laigne*

his life's work

Jack Lenor Larsen shares extraordinary
collections of art and artifacts at
LongHouse in East Hampton, New York





Under a Tiffany blue sky, Jack Lenor Larsen seizes the wheel of a white golf cart, one of two parked at LongHouse Reserve, his estate in East Hampton, New York. Larsen, who at 86 is still lanky, trim, and tanned, wears loose khaki shorts with a wildly original jacket made of fireproof semi-sheer drapery fabric manufactured by Larsen, the company. "It's fifth-generation polyester," he says proudly. This celebrated textile designer lives at the center of a tourist attraction. From April through October, 2,000 schoolchildren and 8,000 other visitors tour the 16 landscaped acres. They're dotted with a permanent collection of more than 90 contemporary sculptures and works of ethnographic craft and also host temporary installations. This summer saw exhibitions of large garden pots, chosen and filled with plants by local landscape designers, architects, and artists, and of billowing black and white resin sculptures by Jack Youngerman.

Larsen steers our golf cart past Yoko Ono's giant chessboard, a conceptual sculpture on the theme of trust—supplying both players with indistinguishable white chessmen on squares similarly all-white. I snap blurred photos as we rocket down shaded paths through a series of gardens on

color themes: white, pink, red. We pause, and Larsen stoops for something. Could that be a weed in his meticulously manicured flower bed? Our route also threads past enormous blown-glass floats by Dale Chihuly, through sand dunes sprouting lined-up patches of beach grass. Exactitude and discipline underscore every gesture, though the result is typically easy.

Though LongHouse is closed to the public this particular afternoon, a pair of trespassing German tourists appear in the distance. Larsen drives up, but the men don't recognize him and seem ➤





Previous spread: In Jack Lenor Larsen's living room at LongHouse Reserve in East Hampton, New York, ceramics by Alev Ebüzziya Sieshye, Ursula Morley Price, and Marc Leuthold line a Chinese antique table. Above hangs George Kozman's *Duomo* in acrylic on paper.

Opposite top: The living room's main seating group incorporates a stool by Charles and Ray Eames, a chair by T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbins, and a sofa by Edward Wormley, surrounding a cocktail table by Richard Schultz. *Opposite bottom:* *Idol*, Judith Sheo's sculpture in cast bronze, stainless steel, and aluminum, presides over part of the garden near the house.

Top, from left: Bertil Vallien's *Head 27* in cast glass and wood with nails. Dale Chihuly's hand-blown glass *Silvered Jerusalem Cylinder With Golden Ochre Crystals*. The front entry to the 1992 house, a collaboration with Charles Forberg & Associates. *Bottom:* An arch by Wharton Esherick guards the entry to the living room, with its klismos chairs by Robsjohn-Gibbins and its custom daybed and lounge chair.

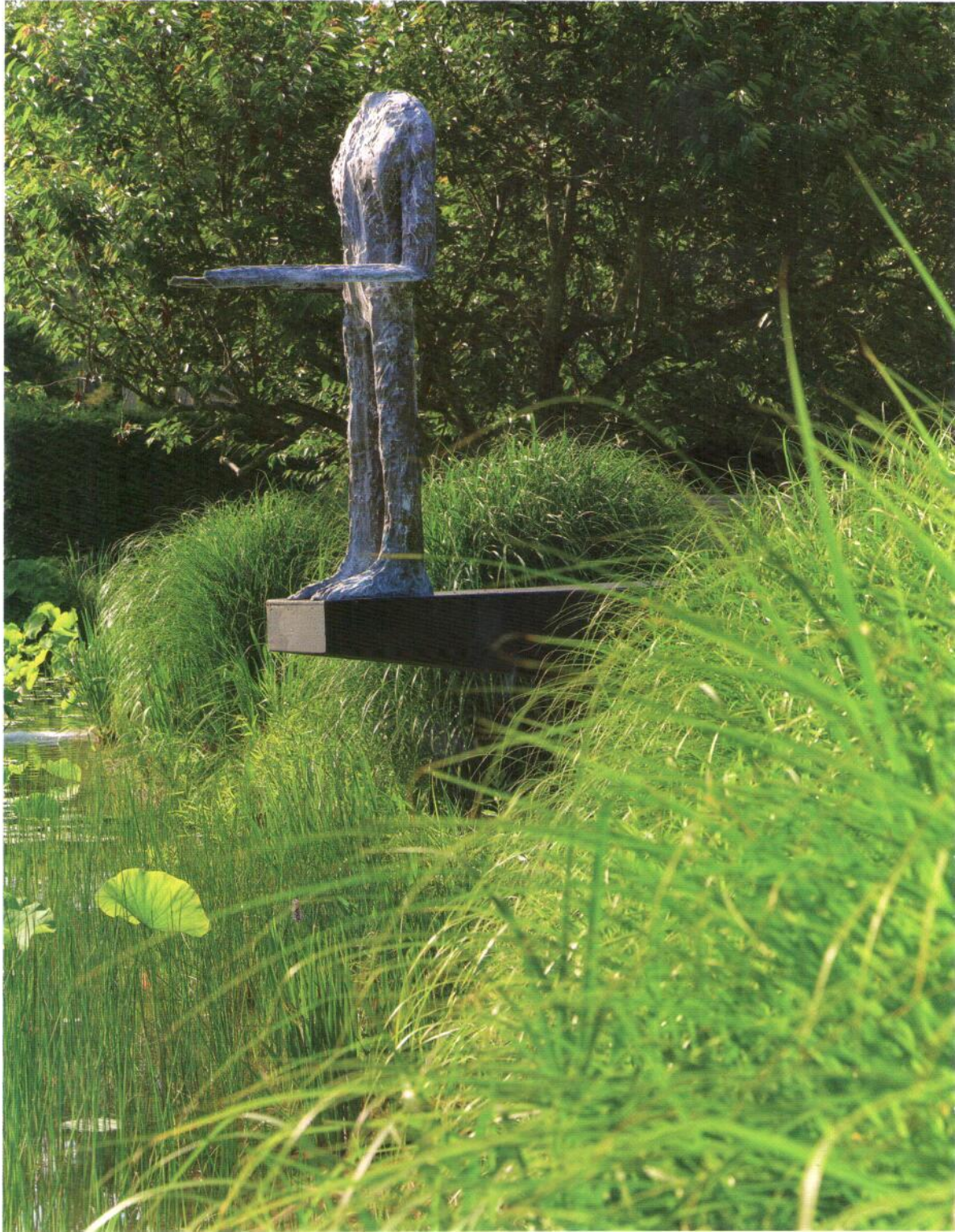


reluctant to leave when he says, "We're not open today." Only by repeatedly pointing toward the road does he persuade them to trudge away. Should a stranger ever wander up to the house itself, signs sternly warn: "Private Residence."

Larsen was living next door back in 1975, when he acquired the LongHouse property and began to cultivate the gardens. When he eventually built the house, completed in 1992, it was a collaboration with Charles Forberg & Associates. (Larsen studied architecture at the University of Washington before shifting his focus.) The spectacular structure combines a slender rectangular main volume with a perpendicular wing for staff offices—a total of 18,000 square feet. Rafters project through a sharply pitched roof that pays homage to Japan's Grand Shrine of Ise. "The emperor is crowned there as king of heaven," Larsen notes.

LongHouse's principal living spaces are on the second level. The master suite anchors one end, followed by a breezeway furnished with Larsen's own ash-wood furnishings. Next comes the dining area, displaying a peerless collection of Wharton Esherick furniture opposite what would have certainly been termed a "gourmet kitchen" when it was designed. Midway along this enfiladé, an open staircase leads up to a study, in the rafters, or down to the ground level, shared by guest rooms and a public gallery. Beyond the stairs, the second level terminates with a palatial living room guarded by Esherick's monumental carved-chestnut arch and capped by a beamed cathedral ceiling. At the far end, doors open to a veranda overlooking the lilies of Peter's Pond, named for Larsen's friend Peter Olsen.

Larsen and I eat lunch on the veranda. You'd expect nothing less splendid from a man who wove curtains for Eero Saarinen when his namesake firm was building J. Irwin and Xenia Miller's house in Indiana. "I've worked for every great architect except Corbusier," Larsen recalls. Frank Lloyd Wright, encountered when living at the Plaza Hotel in New York, ▶





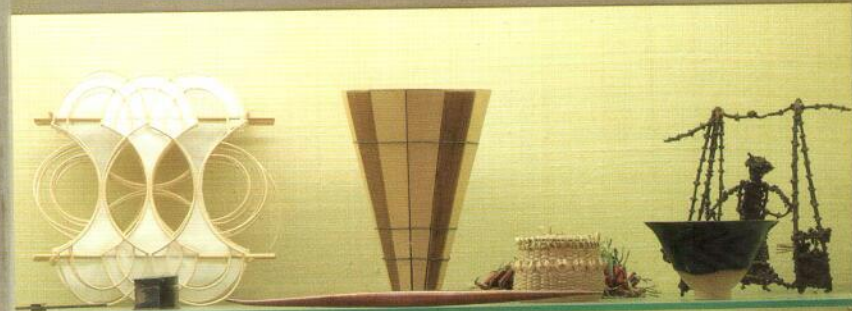
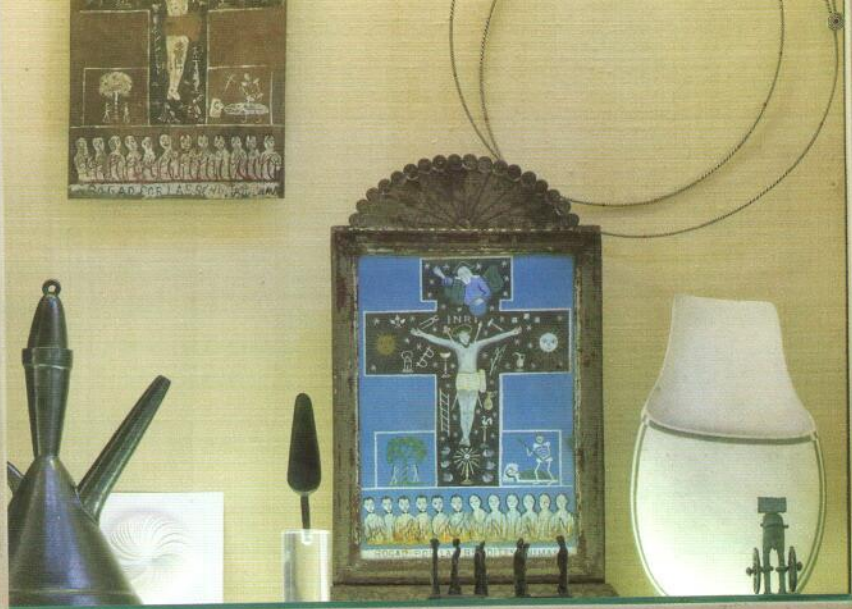
“You’d expect nothing less splendid from a man who wove curtains for Eero Saarinen”



Opposite: Magdalena Abakanowicz’s aluminum *Rabdomante* (Black Standing Figure) is supported by a wooden plinth.

Left, from top: “Roots of Modern,” an exhibition of non-European arts and crafts, was recently on view in the public gallery. Esherick designed the dining area’s mirror, shelf, and stools. **Right, from top:** Lilies flourish in the pond out back. A window over Larsen’s bed offers a view all the way through to the living room.





Opposite: Dawn MacNutt's *Kindred Spirits* in dyed sisal and woven copper wire dominates the staircase. The wool tapestry *Talking Trudeau-Nixon* is by Helena Hermarck.

This page: Panels of Larsen's own *Swan Song* linen-silk flank shelving in the dining area.



asked Larsen to choose fabrics for Fallingwater in Pennsylvania. Wright's irreverence impressed the hot young weaver. "It was to demonstrate alternatives to the norm," he tells me. "Taste is less important than nonconformity." Another Wright, Russel, was a travel companion for a 1960 trip to Saigon, Vietnam. Louis Kahn was one of Larsen's weaving students at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan. And he was the one who initially pushed Chihuly toward free-blown glass.

Larsen's own fabrics, even when factory-made, reach for the texture and charm of handwoven products. Innovation with yarn was a calling card—think heat-set monofilament fishing line. His bohemian oatmeal weaves and tie-dyed velvet are equally well known. He also pioneered stretch upholstery. Adventurous clients ranged from Edward Wormley to Marilyn Monroe.

Later in the afternoon, I sit with Olsen, who mentions preparations for an eventual transition from private house to full-fledged museum. When it's finally time to return to the entry court where the tour started, I notice a car-size black canopy that bears these small but telling words: "Personal Parking of Jack Lenor Larsen." For the present, no one except a German tourist or two could doubt who is lord of the LongHouse manor. 🍷

PRODUCT SOURCES

FROM FRONT HERMAN MILLER: STOOL (LIVING ROOM). CASSINA: RED CHAIR. OUX DESIGN: BED (BEDROOM). LARSEN: CURTAIN FABRIC. LARSEN THROUGH COWTAN & TOUT: PANEL FABRIC (DINING AREA). **THROUGHOUT** SUMMITVILLE TILES: FLOORING.





Opposite top: Esherick's bench and, placed on it, Gregory Roberts's carved ceramic KalaPani (Blackwater) stand out against the dining area's Japanese paper-covered screen. *Opposite bottom:* Between the dining area and the master suite, a breezeway features Larsen furnishings in ash wood. *Top:* A geodesic dome by Buckminster Fuller inspired Fly's Eye Dome, John Kuitik's fiberglass version. *Bottom, from left:* Larsen on his bed, with a Cedric Hartman lamp. The living room's ceramic sculpture by Leuthold and woven horsehair wall hanging Tierra y Oro #5 by Olga de Amaral. Nearby, Ethel Stein's cotton weaving Snake.

