

VIEW FROM THE TOP

arbiter of taste

AN ART CONNOISSEUR AT HEART, PAULA CROWN CONTINUES TO MOVE THE COMMUNITY FORWARD.

BY NICOLE FREHSÉE

Paula Crown is an artist, but her paintings probably aren't what first come to mind upon hearing her name. Maybe it's because her family owns the Aspen Skiing Company and The Little Nell, among other Aspen properties. Or because she's an executive at mega-successful investment firm Henry Crown and Company. Or perhaps because she and her husband, businessman James Crown, are among President Obama's top campaign financiers (and personal friends).

Nonetheless, Crown's artsy side is revealed with the December release of *The Aspen Series*, a book to which she contributed, featuring photographs by Walter Niedermayr. "Walter did some courageous things for those photos; he got on a snowmobile and went places photographers can't normally get to," says Crown, who invited the Italian artist to Aspen in 2009 after seeing his work in a New York gallery. She then commissioned a collection of 40 panoramic mountain landscapes for exhibition at

continued on page tk

Paula Crown in front of a work by Christopher Wool. Pieces of her own, *Perforations*, are shown leaning against the wall and in front of her on the floor.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KARINA WITTKAMP

continued from page 16

various Ski Co. venues; the book is an outgrowth of that project. “Walter’s art gives Aspen a new vision,” says Crown, adding that a favorite photo is *Aspen 72*, which depicts skiers dotting the steep ridge on Highland Bowl. “I didn’t want another picture of a snowboarder going off a mountain. I wanted something that transcends the local.” Crown’s local outreach includes raising the “hip” factor of ski helmets, now mandatory for Ski Co. employees. “It’s an advocacy effort of great importance to me personally,” she says.

In addition to *The Aspen Series*, Crown, a mother of four who splits her time between Aspen and Chicago, spent 2012 pursuing another venture: curating the art at Element 47, The Little Nell’s new restaurant (formerly Montagna). The name is a nod to silver (the 47th element on the periodic table) and Aspen’s mining history, and the restaurant will feature works by Chicago artists Michelle Grabner and Scott Reeder, as well as Cameron Martin and José Lerma of Brooklyn.

The restaurant, designed by the James Beard Award-winning firm Bentel & Bentel, is full of natural touches that radiate coziness: reclaimed wood, stone, and blackened steel. “You want to have breakfast with your kids there, but you want it to be elegant at night,” says Crown. “We had to figure out how to mix black tables with eggs Benedict and pancakes.”

Striking the right aesthetic balance comes easily to Crown, whose interest in art dates back to her childhood in Marblehead, Massachusetts. Decades later, after a job on Wall Street and time served on the boards of Duke University (her alma mater), New York’s Museum of Modern Art, the National Council of the Aspen Music Festival, and the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, Crown decided to formalize her passion. Earlier this year, she graduated from the Art Institute of Chicago with a master’s degree in painting and drawing.

“People asked me, ‘Why did you go back to school? Why take the risk?’ [I tell them] I wanted to be around people who were looking at things in new ways, using new technology, and finding new tools.”

Now homework-free, Crown is focusing on her art. “Creating it is my true joy. I just try to remember the privilege of it all.” **AP**



The wall above Crown’s desk is adorned with collected ephemera.



Crown’s digital image of Aspen.



Coffee-table books in Crown’s office, including one by Niedermyr, demonstrate her passion for all kinds of art.



Personal photos and reading material are displayed throughout Crown’s work space.



HIGH ON THE ARTS

Creativity is tops for Crown.

on inspiration

In the summer, you can usually find me at the Anderson Ranch Arts Center. The most extraordinary artists—potters, sculptors, photographers, and furniture makers—come from all over the world to take workshops there. The people I met there inspired me to go back and pursue my degree.

on icons

My favorite artists of all time are Leonardo [da Vinci] and Henri Matisse. I love too many contemporary artists to name, but a few are Agnes Martin, Richard Diebenkorn, and Jaume Plensa.

on design aesthetic

I love classical bones with a mix of influences. If you look around my [Chicago] home, you’ll see a Tibetan sculpture next to a modern piece. I love that dialogue, the communication across centuries.

on ski rituals

If the snow is good, we do “first tracks”—we go up the mountain as the lift is opening and ski the first run of the day, then come down and have a family breakfast.