



CREATURE COMFORT

Primack, the new executive director of Design Miami, in his home in Miami. The hippo is by Renate Müller, the artwork on the wall by Florian Baudrexel.

MIX MASTER

Rodman Primack brings a diverse art-world résumé—and a passionate collector's eye—to the task of reinventing Design Miami.

BY JEN RENZI PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM FRIEDBERG

FOR RODMAN PRIMACK, the collecting bug came early. His youthful obsession, at the age of 12: “Day of the Dead-themed folk art from Oaxaca, Mexico,” explains the new executive director of Design Miami, the biannual fair devoted to collectible furnishings that’s a sister show to blue-chip stalwart Art Basel. Primack has since graduated to other passions and now lives among an eclectic array of 18th-century embroidered textiles, Latin American art, midcentury furniture, 1980s Memphis design and works by Charlotte Perriand and Jean Prouvé. “My interests are very broad,” Primack says with a laugh. “I am not nearly as focused a collector as I recommend that others be.”

Even so, Primack’s far-reaching enthusiasms are an asset to his new gig—as is his diverse background.

His former titles include chairman of auction house Phillips de Pury’s office in London (now Phillips), director of Gagosian Gallery’s Los Angeles outpost (where he sold everything from Calder mobiles to Gerhard Richter landscapes), founder of online auction site Blacklots and Latin American art specialist at Christie’s. For the past decade, Primack also helmed his own Manhattan-based interior- and textile-design firm, RP Miller, helping clients curate—and create surroundings for—their art collections.

Strengthening the bond between art, design and interiors is a mission he shares with the fair (this year’s Swiss edition of the event opens June 17; the Miami version falls in early December). “The idea that people can collect really seriously in one area, like art, but not also collect design and commission a great

environment for that art, is so strange to me,” he says. “I mean, I even collect my socks!” Among his colleagues, the 39-year-old Primack is known as a connective tissue between disciplines. “Rodman bridges what gaps still remain between art and design collectors with his deep knowledge, experience and connections in both worlds,” explains Evan Snyderman, cofounder of New York design gallery R & Company. That’s why he was hired in the first place: “His time at Phillips honed his understanding of how to engage collectors and grow the market,” adds fair founder Craig Robins. “And working with Larry Gagosian is a fantastic complement of art-market awareness. He’s a perfect choice for the next phase of Design Miami’s growth.”

Primack cites his six-year chairmanship of Phillips as most analogous to his current job. “My time there >

was distinguished by a lot of flux, since our new building wasn't ready and we had to do these pop-ups and guerilla maneuvers," he explains. "I love that scrappy energy, which is something Design Miami shares." In terms of connoisseurship, however, Primack's most formative experience was a stint at the studio of Peter Marino, go-to architect for Chanel and Louis Vuitton. "That's where I began looking at design and furniture in a different way, not as simply tables and chairs to sit at, but also as important and collectible," says Primack.

He has since spent his career observing the emergent design market, which he is now positioned to help mature. "The pricing and structure for contemporary design is different from that of contemporary art," explains Primack. "There are areas that have coalesced into clearly demarcated markets—Prouvé, Perriand, Maria Pergay, midcentury French design, Art Deco furniture—but otherwise it's still a landscape in discovery, which leaves room for experimentation."

That's also how he sees Design Miami. In comparison to more staid, trade-focused events, the 10-year-old fair has always had a rakish vibe. Early installments were mounted in unexpected venues (a church, an old market). One of Primack's ambitions is to preserve the show's edgy, upstart spirit as it becomes more established. He's also keen to bolster its Hispanic constituency. Fluent in Spanish and Portuguese, Primack lives part-time in Guatemala, where his TV-executive husband, Rudy Weissenberg, is based. "Having traveled all over South America, my perspective is obviously Latincentric. That's a collector base that we would like to see more of, in both Miami and Basel," he says.

When Primack came on board in February, the lineup for the Swiss fair was all but finalized by his predecessor, Marianne Goebel. And yet he has already begun lending his imprimatur. The Basel show will debut a program called Design at Large, high-concept installations—both historic and contemporary—curated by Barneys creative director Dennis Freedman. Primack is also attending to more mundane matters. "I started thinking about basic ways to make the fair experience more pleasant, from better Wi-Fi to having more—and more generous—table space for people to spread out and meet with clients," he says. "And as someone who's unfortunately ruled by my stomach, it's important to have food you want to eat."

Primack has an appetite for a wide swath of culture, waxing poetic about Paul Gauguin and the "Pina Bausch-like choreography" of Audi's assembly line in the same breath. "Rodman has depth of knowledge of the design field, from his art history education to his practical experience at all ends of the spectrum: designing, marketing and selling to the public," says Primack's former boss, Marino. "I particularly like his non-narrow vision of what constitutes interesting and valuable design."

Although his role vis-à-vis the fair is to help expand the market for rare and limited-edition collectibles—pieces that often walk the line between functional object and fine artwork—he's unmoved by high-design navel gazing. "I'm interested in connecting what we exhibit at the fair to the bigger canvas of design and science, technology and materials development," he says. "The process of bringing better design to a bigger number of people—that improves life."



HOLLYWOOD GLAMOUR
Clockwise from above: Grey, whose boutique offers cult-favorite products by brands such as Lipstick Queen, Tom Ford and La Prairie.



THE BEAUTY OF

VINTAGE CHIC

Tucked between the West Hollywood branches of Chloé, Isabel Marant and the forthcoming flagship of The Row, the newly opened brick-and-mortar outpost of the shoppable beauty website violetgrey.com features seasonally curated products hand-picked by the celebrity-makeup-artistry elite, all perched above '30s-era French furniture and two Deco seats from the set of *L.A. Confidential*. Dean Martin's makeup chair makes a cameo in the application studio toward the front of the gallery-like store, owned by 37-year-old Cassandra Huysentruyt Grey. According to the pixie-shorn brunette, the 1,100-square-foot atelier fosters a "salon-type environment." (Her company's moniker is a play on the purported color of Elizabeth Taylor's eyes and Grey's married name, which she took after wedding Paramount Pictures chairman and CEO Brad Grey). "You don't even see the product for the first 10 minutes," she says of the Bill Sofield-designed makeup mecca. 8452 Melrose Place, Los Angeles. For details see Sources, page 102. —Celia Ellenberg



TIME MACHINES

WATCH THE GAME

Hublot's Big Bang Unico—the official timepiece of the 2014 FIFA World Cup—caters to the *futebol* fanatic who doesn't want to miss a beat: Decorated in Brazil's national colors (yellow and green), the watch has a chronograph that ticks through the 45-minute periods of a game, and a push button tells you when it's halftime.

For details see Sources, page 102.