

The Great White Way

With a retrospective book in the wings, award-winning architect **Richard Meier** forges ahead with sculpture, dinnerware, and a minimalist approach to keep it simple. by Kelly Killoren Bensimon

RICHARD MEIER IS TO THE COLOR white what modern architecture is to Richard Meier. In 1984, the Newark, New Jersey, native was awarded the Pritzker Architecture Prize, often equated with the Nobel Prize, and has since become one of the most famous modern architects of the 21st century. His list of groundbreaking commissions includes the Getty Center in Los Angeles, Barcelona's Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Camden Medical Center in Singapore, among countless other government buildings, corporate headquarters, and personal residences nationwide. (Some of these homes are in our own Hamptons backyard.)

As if this weren't enough, Meier crafts sculptures, lectures at Yale, designs tableware, and even created a watch, which (ironically) he prefers in black rather than his signature white. The latest addition to his résumé is a book from Taschen entitled *Richard Meier & Partners, Complete Works 1963–2008*, with text written by architectural critic Philip Jodidio, which is due out June 1.

But just who is the man behind the white?

I decided to meet with "Richard," as everyone calls him, in his offices in New York City to find out.

As I looked around, I noticed that the man who was influenced by the minimalist styles of Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Luis Barragán, has an office decorated with a colorful Frank Stella painting/sculpture, plus one of his own sculptures made from remnants of old molds. Where a desk should be sits a large table lined with a set of Viennese chairs by Josef Hoffmann, an Austrian architect whose work was important in the early development of modern European architecture. The effect is more like a dining room than a formal work area.

His table is filled with books—from selections on art to the *Big Book of Boobs*. He shows me his daughter Ana's cashmere sweater hanging inside

a white closet, which they designed together for Tina Lutz and Marica Patmos's line, Lutz & Patmos. "It comes in black, white, and gray, and all the proceeds go to a charity—Architecture for Humanity," Meier says.

About his new tome, he explains, "At first I thought the scale of the book was too big. What student would carry this around? You can't even put it on a bookshelf."

As for Meier, life in the Hamptons is "quiet." He bought a 1907 East Hampton farmhouse that was painted white; he noticed cedar shingles under all the white and stripped the house to its original state. The inside, however, is

painted his signature color. "Everything but the refrigerator is white," he says. He designed all of the tableware, trays, vases, and flatware in the house for Swid Powell, a New York-based company known for its promotion of chic ceramics, silverware, and glass created by leading international—and, like Meier, postmodern—architect-designers.

Meier steps out to eat at Nick & Toni's in East Hampton once a year, but prefers to grill meat, fish, and vegetables at home for his friends. He's patient with his designs, but impatient with his

cooking. "I like easy, simple food," he says.

I begin to wonder if Meier's other personal tastes are as simple as his buildings. Beer or wine? He likes wine. Boxers or briefs? He wears either. But only in white.

I talk with him about working with computers and ask if he thought it was cheating. He quickly replied that he still draws with ink, but that the computer makes the changes and planning much faster. As for the actual building process, he reins himself in, going to a site only at the beginning of construction and then not coming back until it's complete. If he visited during the building, he tells me, he'd want to make "way too many changes." Says Meier, "The past is the past, and I never look back." **H**



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