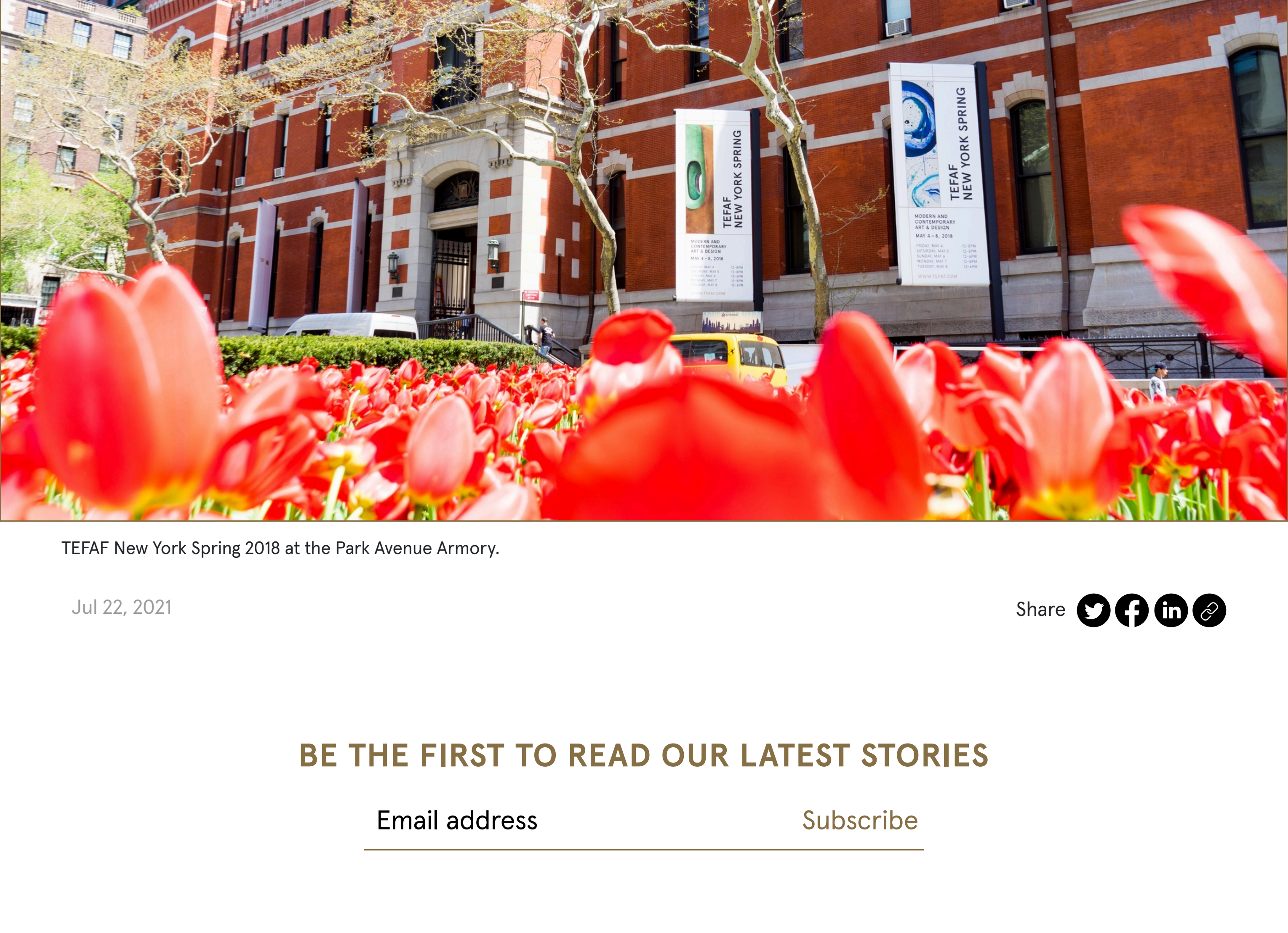


# DESIGNER LICHENG LING LOOKS BACK AT HER FIRST TIME VISITING TEFAF

How a visit to the fair filled the Homeism founder with creative inspiration



TEFAF New York Spring 2018 at the Park Avenue Armory.

Jul 22, 2021

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Licheng Ling is the founder and designer of Homeism, a design house dedicated to reinventing women's and men's loungewear. Living in New York City for over a decade but born and raised in Shanghai, her Chinese roots are reflected in her designs. Its concept is found in ancient Chinese minimalism from the Song Dynasty (920 to 1279), specifically Hanfu, the historical clothing of the Han people. However, she approaches design with global and contemporary inspirations, combining traditional Chinese-inspired shapes and Western pattern technique. "In my design and how I creatively express myself, I follow the motto 'less is more.' I embrace old aesthetics and give them a modern touch. That's why a minimalist aesthetic and contemporary art are so influential on my design," Ling shares. She also curates "The Ideal Home," a project in which she designs an ideal living environment in collaboration with artists and designers, in which she presents her collections. Here, Ling shares how she experienced her first time at TEFAF New York Spring 2018, the works that impressed her, and how the visit filled her with creative inspiration.

How do you usually experience art in the city, and how were you introduced to TEFAF?

Since I moved to New York—the capital of modern and contemporary art—in 2010, I've been gallery hopping almost every week. The city provides me the opportunity of exploring art and design that can't be easily experienced elsewhere. My first TEFAF experience came in May 2018, after my friends Yuan and Nicholas invited me to a private dinner at their newly opened gallery Nicholas Hall on the Upper East Side. The dinner was co-hosted with Laffanour Galerie Downtown, a gallery I have been following on Instagram for years. Yuan and Nicholas are connoisseurs of Old Master paintings with exquisite yet modern taste. After having dessert, wine, and appreciating how beautifully Yuan decorated wisterias in a woven basket by Tanabe Chikuunsai II among their Old Master painting collection, they introduced me to art dealer François Laffanour and his wife Alexandra. We had a lovely chat, and I was invited to visit their stand at TEFAF New York Spring. This is how my TEFAF experience started.

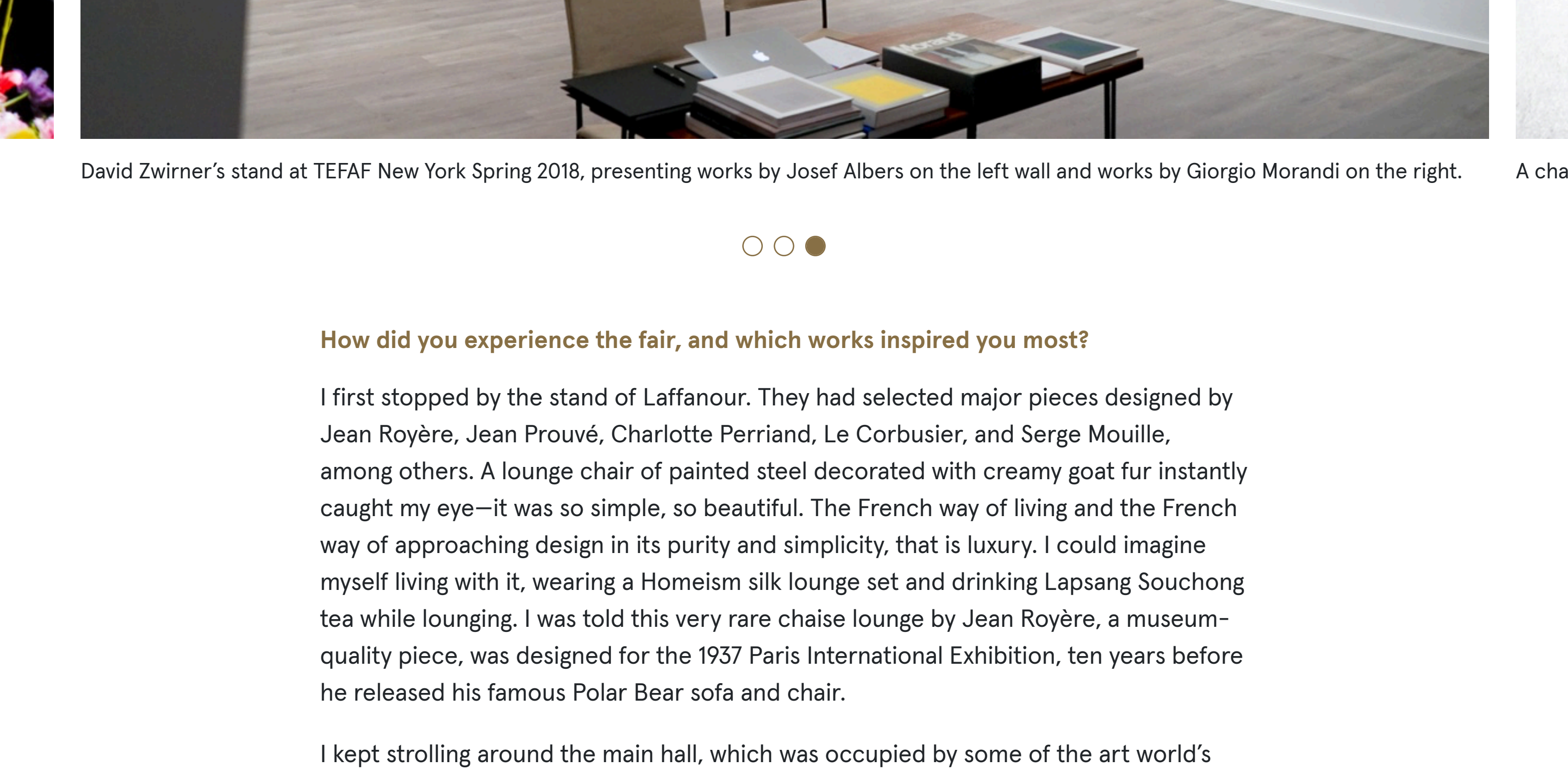
Nicholas and Yuan know I am an art lover and that I am drawn to objects that involve historical attributes. I was so excited that finally I could make it to the fair that has such a celebrated reputation among insiders. Other friends also compelled me to visit TEFAF after seeing my designs, as they felt my aesthetic connected to TEFAF. One question was constantly buzzing in my mind, however: what makes TEFAF so particular?

What was your first impression upon entering the fair?

Specific memories come to mind, thinking about the day that I first visited the fair: passing by a blooming tulip-lined street on a sunny morning; entering the Park Avenue Armory, where light suddenly became dim; a 1970s Alexander Calder mobile, *Les Trois Barres*, swung over the venue; and the smell of tulips, the Netherlands' iconic flower, which hung from the ceiling. But I was also overcome by a broader feeling: this was my first time at an art fair, and it felt like coming home. The way exhibitors at TEFAF presented art in a collage aesthetic, mixing works from different periods and categories, is exactly what I would do in my home.

As a designer focusing on garments destined to be worn in the home, what does the concept of "home" mean to you, and how does art serve as an inspiration?

"Home," to me, is a destination, and a space in which one lives with thoughtfully collected pieces of furniture, art, decorative objects, and textiles. One space that has inspired me in this area is the artist Donald Judd's 101 Spring Street home. I remember Judd had a wooden Ethiopian headrest on the third floor of his home placed alongside a Larry Bell sculpture, an old Alvar Aalto lounge chair, and his own aluminum work, and I was surprised to find he liked drinking Chinese green tea in his kitchen. At Judd's home, I felt a sense of warmth, history, and ruggedness. It is a forceful expression of his aesthetic and philosophical preoccupations and reflects who Judd was—there may be no other way to know an artist better than to look at their home. Judd's careful placement of his collection of art, furniture, and other objects in his home space inspired me to define what Homeism is and curate "The Ideal Home." I strive for my design, my brand, but also the art and furniture I collect and live with to all reflect that.



David Zwirner's stand at TEFAF New York Spring 2018, presenting works by Josef Albers on the left wall and works by Giorgio Morandi on the right.

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How did you experience the fair, and which works inspired you most?

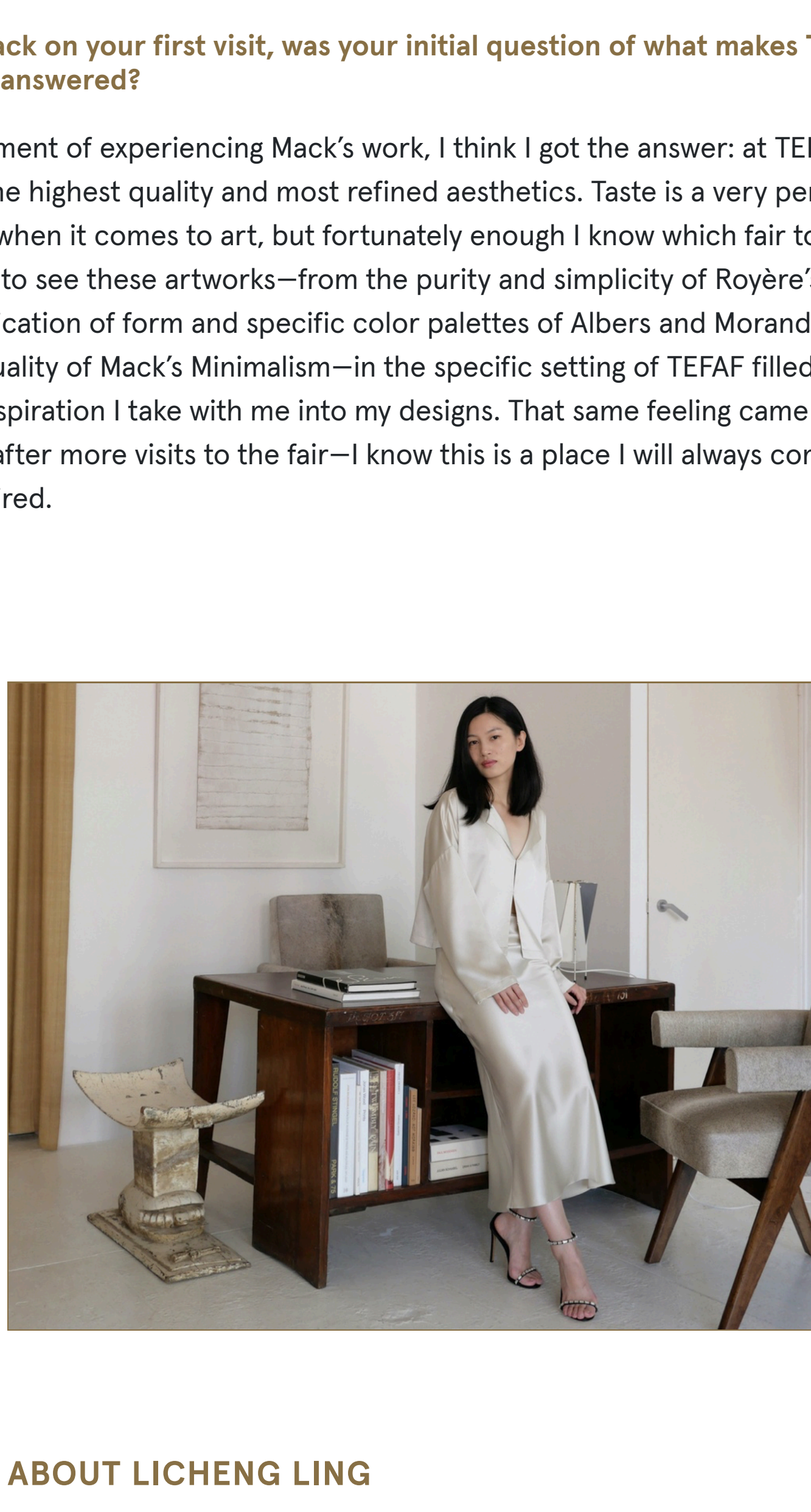
I first stopped by the stand of Laffanour. They had selected major pieces designed by Jean Royère, Jean Prouvé, Charlotte Perriand, Le Corbusier, and Serge Mouille, among others. A lounge chair of painted steel decorated with creamy goat fur instantly caught my eye—it was so simple, so beautiful. The French way of living and the French way of approaching design in its purity and simplicity, that is luxury. I could imagine myself living with it, wearing a Homeism silk lounge set and drinking Lapsang Souchong tea while lounging. I was told this very rare chaise lounge by Jean Royère, a museum-quality piece, was designed for the 1937 Paris International Exhibition, ten years before he released his famous Polar Bear sofa and chair.

I kept strolling around the main hall, which was occupied by some of the art world's biggest galleries. David Zwirner had a narrow selection, but of great quality. They exclusively showed work by Josef Albers and Giorgio Morandi, two of my favorite artists and also two artists who one might not normally pair together. Both dedicated their work to the very specific theme: Albers explored repetition and space while Morandi involved himself with daily objects. These modest masters thus focused on the simplification of form and the interplay between color, proportion, and balance, something I equally strive for in my designs and curation. Albers said, "art is not an object, it's an experience," and I greatly respect that. In addition, the impressive color palette of their works presented felt like how my TEFAF experience started.

On the second floor of the fair, my initial feeling of being at home upon entering the area continued. The light felt softer, and the way exhibitors presented their works here was more intimate, as if you're walking into your Upper East Side neighbor's home. I spent quite a long time at German gallery Beck & Egging, who were showing artists from the ZERO movement: Heinz Mack, Otto Piece, Günther Uecker, and Anselm Kiefer. I wasn't familiar with them, never having seen their work before. I stood in front of a 1958 painting *Dynamische Struktur* by Heinz Mack and couldn't move away. With its monochromatic, synthetic resin on canvas, the artist wanted to create visual sensations of light and rhythm, but the brushstrokes also reminded me of Chinese calligraphy. It was fascinating, the aesthetic of this painting was, to me, "Zen"—minimalism, a certain cool austerity in Eastern culture. I was surprised to feel this connection in a contemporary artwork by a German artist. My curiosity had also been totally piqued at that moment, realizing I saw something wonderful that I hadn't known before at all.

Looking back on your first visit, was your initial question of what makes TEFAF so particular answered?

In that moment of experiencing Mack's work, I think I got the answer: at TEFAF you will only find the highest quality and most refined aesthetics. Taste is a very personal thing, especially when it comes to art, but fortunately enough I know which fair to visit now. Being able to see these artworks—from the purity and simplicity of Royère's design, the simplification of form and specific color palettes of Albers and Morandi, to the Zen-like quality of Mack's Minimalism—in the specific setting of TEFAF filled me with a creative inspiration I take with me into my designs. That same feeling came back again and again after more visits to the fair—I know this is a place I will always come back to, to get inspired.

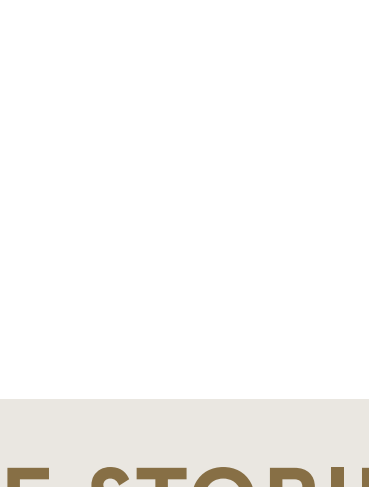


## ABOUT LICHENG LING

Ling is the founder and creative director of Homeism, and currently based between New York and Shanghai. Prior to Homeism, she worked as fashion editor at InStyle China magazine. She is also a brand consultant for fashion houses, lifestyle brands, and art organizations.

In 2018, Ling founded "The Ideal Home," her ideal living environment with like-minded collaborators such as Kasmin Gallery, R & Company, Michael Bargo, Bosco Sodi, Byredo, and Rizzoli Bookstore.

## IN THIS STORY



EXHIBITOR

Nicholas Hall Ltd.

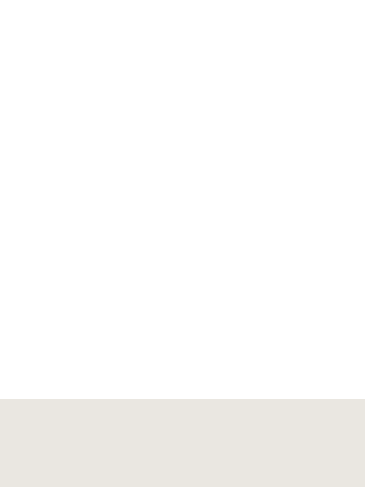
New York

EXHIBITOR

Laffanour /

Galerie Downtown

Paris



EXHIBITOR

Van de Weghe

East Hampton

EXHIBITOR

David Zwirner

New York



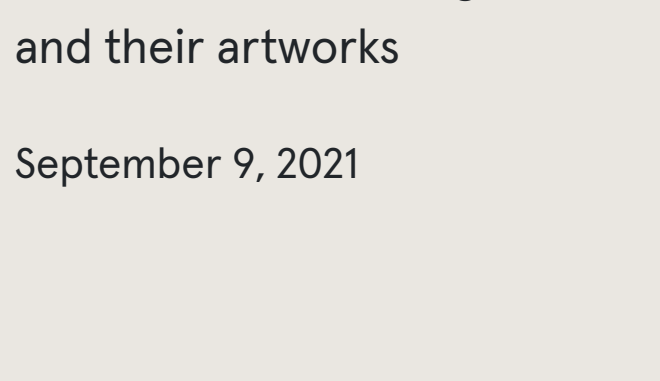
EXHIBITOR

Beck & Egging

International Fine Art

Düsseldorf

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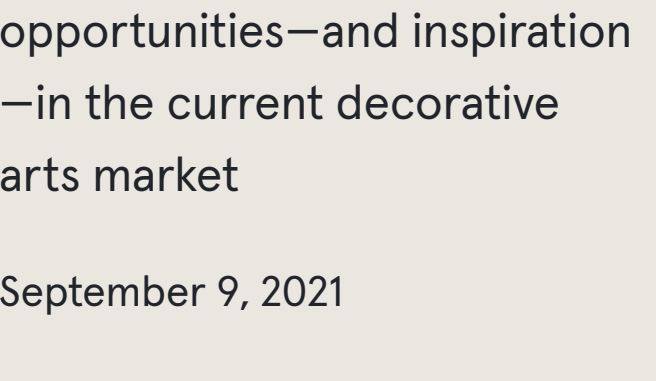


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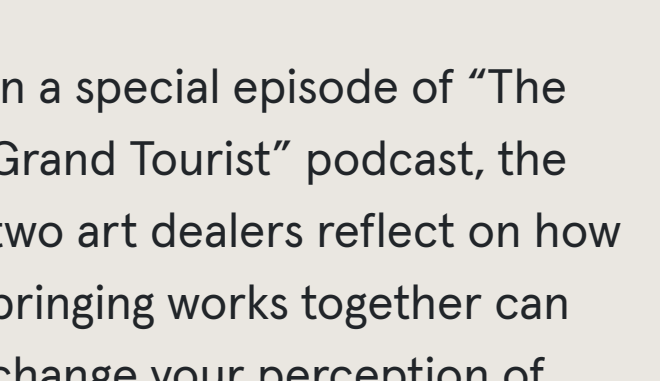


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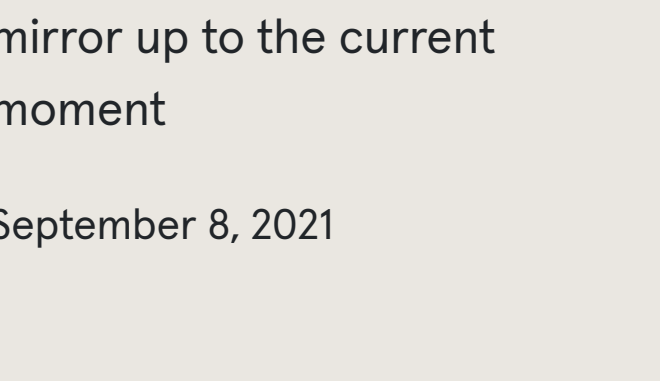


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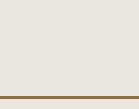
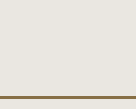
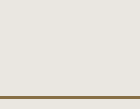
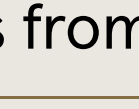
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