

SOCIETY & CULTURE

art



From left: Julia Friedman and her pup pose amid the works in her living room, including LG Williams' "How to Explain Art to the Sports Generation (Mona Lisa)"; Yoav Shavit's "Lobster" lamp, shown here from two different angles, hangs in her kitchen.



« "I firmly believe that art has significance beyond aesthetic and monetary. It is a path to understanding history, culture and politics." —JULIA FRIEDMAN »

EYE OF THE WRITER

Creative curator, historian and author Julia Friedman sees art all around.

By Leslie Paxton // Photography by Jay Reilly

Russia-born Julia Friedman (juliafriedman.net) has lived all over the world (including St. Petersburg, Tokyo, Paris and Boston), but the art historian, curator, collector and writer with a new tome on the way chose to put down roots in a city not typically known as artsy: Irvine. "Yes, Irvine!" says Friedman, who shares a home with her high school-age son and rescue dog named Vincent (he's missing part of his left ear). "Contrary to its beige reputation, historic Irvine is an authentic California

community that fits perfectly into the vernacular of midcentury-modern ideas." Then she makes this a teaching moment and provides an account of Irvine's history—how renowned architect William Pereira helped master-plan UCI and the first sections of the city with "parks, broad green belts and golf courses abating residential estates aimed at maximizing the enjoyment of Southern California weather." And how Pereira's pioneering planning landed him on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1963. "I feel fortunate to live in a community that is an architectural landmark," she says. Friedman's love of art started at age 6 or 7. She began reading art books and giving impromptu tours of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) to her family. She had a captive audience of three: Mom, Dad and a German shepherd. At age 12, she began a five-year introduction-to-art program at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. Because she came from a family of physicians, she made a brief attempt in college at becoming a doctor and "failed spectacularly." Instead, she immersed herself in art studies. "I firmly believe that art has significance beyond aesthetic and monetary," she says. "It is a path to understanding history, culture and politics." Currently, Friedman is a teacher at Cal State Long Beach and lecturer at O.C. museums, a prolific writer with a new book on American painter Wayne Thiebaud nearly finished and an avid art collector with about 30 works on display at her home at any time. "I like good art, smart art, complicated art," Friedman says. "I collect the art that I love to live with." Among the works currently outfitting her home are Israeli artist Yoav Shavit's "Lobster" lamp and Nicolas Africano's "The Doctor" (her most recent acquisition). As for local talent? "LG Williams is the artist to watch," she says. "[His] recent works are a tribute to both O.C. and the art historical traditions of Southern and Northern California." Asked which part of her career she likes best, Friedman responds: "I'm an art historian by training, a teacher by calling, a writer by chance and necessity—nonacademic writing is how you share your ideas with others who like art and are not scholars."

JULIA FRIEDMAN HAIR STYLING BY SHANGHAI SALON, COSTA MESA