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HOME & GARDEN

Don't Show Me the Money

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Socialize First, Pay Later

CreditRandy Harris for The New York Times

House Proud

By SANDY KEENAN

Once [Loreen Arbus](#) had secured the large, elegantly understated apartment on Central Park West, she set about turning it into something else entirely: a flamboyant place that friends and strangers would hanker to see, but that only she and Pupi Dupi, her teacup poodle, would call home. “No one else could live with my taste,” said Ms. Arbus, the first woman to head programming for a U.S. network, a feat accomplished twice -- at both Showtime and Cable Health Network/Lifetime.

Out went the circa 1905 pocket doors, sconces and chandeliers, banished to a storage facility for safekeeping. In came the painters and muralists, and one shocking shade after another. For the living room, she chose the brightest of pinks and oranges in an ombre effect. Murals evoking the work of Henri Rousseau and Rene Magritte were commissioned for the foyer, which she furnished with an antique garden fountain stocked with plastic lily pads and toy frogs. Urban graffiti now covers the butler’s pantry and a déclassé “pee-pee” sign hangs on the powder room door, evidence of Ms. Arbus’s slightly bawdy sense of humor.

“If you were a recluse,” she said, “you would not have an apartment like this.”

Who else would have introduced kitsch to classic as she has, in a yearlong renovation that was completed in 2012 and was inspired by the depths of her psyche? A renovation accomplished without the benefit, or interference, of a design professional. (One was hired, but did not stay for long.)

And yet behind the array of art, fine and otherwise, is a strategic philanthropic formula of her own design. Ms. Arbus has opened her home for about 25 gatherings between January and May 2014 in support of causes she fancies: nonprofit groups devoted to disability issues, the betterment of women and children, animal rights and the arts, just to name a few.

Here’s how it works: she provides the apartment with its panoramic views of Central Park, as well as the food and drink. Her job, as she sees it, is to engender good will and make introductions from the extensive database of friends, colleagues and acquaintances she has accumulated over the years in television and publishing and through

the dozen or so nonprofit boards on which she serves. Business cards and numbers can be exchanged, but soliciting donations is against the rules.

“This is more friending-up and cultivating than fund-raising,” she said. “I don’t want people to think, ‘Oh, here she comes, asking for money again.’ This is different. People are resourceful, they’ll help later in whatever way they can.”

Ms. Arbus has a long record of doing things her own way, dating back to her childhood. Although she was given the name Loreen Joy Goldenson at birth, by the time she was 13 she had assumed her maternal grandmother’s maiden name, in hopes of avoiding some of the baggage that came with being a daughter of [Leonard H. Goldenson](#), the founder-chairman of ABC who built the corporation into a \$3.5 billion empire when it was sold in 1985. Classmates were asking for favors like getting celebrity autographs or wondering whether Loreen could help secure a hot band for the next dance. It bothered her.

“People always wanted something,” she said. “I have a lot of complexes about this.”

To this day, she is happiest meeting people who don’t know anything about her. Although willing to discuss almost any difficult subject she refuses to disclose or confirm her age or her educational and marital history. “I just hate labels of any kind,” she said. “People discriminate on the basis of such things.”

When she’s in New York, her place is usually booked, whether it’s for a play reading for [Culture Project](#) (attended by celebrities like Sting and Trudie Styler) or a screening of “[A Whole Lott More,](#)” a documentary she Executive Produced about employment opportunities for the developmentally disabled, which won a [2013 audience award](#) at Hot Docs, the international documentary film festival in Canada and four out of four Audience Favorite Awards at other festivals.

[Victor Buhler](#), who directed and produced the movie, observed that Ms. Arbus’s aesthetic can be a shock to the senses, but in a thought-provoking way. “There’s not a single boring item in Loreen’s apartment,” he said. “Anyone who mistakes her eccentricities for not being clued in would be dead wrong.”

[The Clinton Global Initiative](#) has held events here, as has the [Brookings Institution](#), [Women Moving Millions](#), [The Women’s Leadership Board at the Harvard Kennedy School](#), [Harvard Medical School](#), [Harvard School of Public Health](#), and [United Cerebral Palsy](#),

a group that her parents, now deceased, [helped found](#). (Ms. Arbus's older sister, Genise, who died at 29, was born with cerebral palsy.)

By now you may be wondering what the co-op board thinks of all of this. Did anyone notice in March, when Ms. Arbus had 25 dogs and their owners over for Pupi Dupi's second birthday party, a brunch at which a donation to four animal-related organizations was merely suggested?

Turns out, she does not own the grand apartment. "I rent," she said. I like to keep my money liquid."