

RIVER RANCH: THE COLLECTION OF
CAROLE HARRIS



STAIR





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TABLE OF CONTENTS

RECOLLECTIONS BY COLIN STAIR - 10

CAROLE & JOHN HARRIS - 11

THE MAIN HALL - 19

THE COCO CHANEL CABINET - 21

THE LIVING ROOM - 25

THE YELLOW DRAWING ROOM - 31

RECOLLECTIONS BY MELISSA GAGEN - 36

GEORGE I GILT-BOTTLE GREEN JAPANNED BUREAU-CABINET - 37

THE ENCLOSED PORCH - 41

THE DINING ROOM - 47

RECOLLECTIONS BY BRIAN McCARTHY - 56

THE BREAKFAST ROOM - 59

THE CHAPEL - 65

THE BLUE TOILE BEDROOM - 69

THE PRIVATE SUITE & SITTING ROOM - 73

THE POOL HOUSE - 79



Carole at the Fresno County
Fair Grounds.

RECOLLECTIONS BY COLIN STAIR



Carole at one of the early Harris Stables.

As we prepare for Carole's upcoming sale, I've been flooded with fond memories of the time we spent together. While writing this and selecting the photographs for this book, I could feel her presence—as if she were standing right behind me.

River Ranch, Carole Harris's beloved home for over thirty years, has always been a special place for me, as much for the beautiful things it housed as for the special person who lived there. I first met Carole in 1989 while I was working at Sotheby's Restoration. Carole needed advice on a lot in an upcoming auction and I was happy to provide her with all the information she needed. I remember vividly how certain she was about what she wanted and how determined she was to make sure it was exactly how she envisioned it. We would spend hours on the phone together discussing furniture, looking at auction catalogues and deciding what she would bid on in various sales. Carole loved history and architecture, studying books on design and sending me copies so that we could talk about what she had discovered.

Around this time, Carole embarked on the renovation of River Ranch in the Central Valley of California where her family had farmed for generations. Guidance for the interiors at River Ranch came from Sister Parish and Brian McCarthy of Parish-Hadley, all of whom Carole admired greatly and worked with to create the layered, personal spaces that would eventually showcase her amazing collection. Carole's confidence in her own ability to create her interiors grew as the project progressed, and in the end, she was able to finish the interiors herself with a knowledge of fabric, color and texture that was second to none. Throughout this process, Carole and I talked about and bid on many of the important items that were in the house and would form the core of her large collection. Walking through River Ranch recently, I was reminded of all the time we spent together, the trust we had in each other's taste, and the bond that forms when two people rely on each other and share a similar passion. It has been one of the greatest pleasures of my life to know Carole Harris and call her not only my best client but a true friend.

CAROLE & JOHN HARRIS

Carole and John, both born into long-established local farming families, had known of each other since childhood. Their paths truly converged when Carole invited John to accompany her to her senior ball at Castilleja. Their relationship grew during their time at the University of California, Davis, where they both pursued their studies in Agriculture. After graduating, they were married.

Harris Farms began when John's grandfather moved from Texas to California in 1916. John's father, Jack, recognized the value of California's Central Valley, creating in 1937, what has become a diversified farming operation in 1937. Building on this legacy, John and Carole expanded the company's scope, with Carole instrumental in the design and architecture of the Harris Ranch Inn and Restaurant.

Over the years, Carole and John remained involved in both community and global experiences. As members of organizations like the Young Presidents' Organization, they had the opportunity to travel, including to historically significant regions. Through both personal philanthropy and corporate giving, they contributed generously to a wide range of causes — from education and healthcare to agricultural advancement. Their professional and philanthropic efforts have had a lasting influence on the growth and development of California's Central Valley.





The Harrises purchased the home that would later be named River Ranch in 1984 from the Giffen family. Renovations began within a year, with Carole leading the charge and executing her vision alongside a skilled team of craftsmen, architects, and designers. Equal attention was given to both interior details and exterior structures, including significant changes to the roofline and the addition of a mansard roof. This photograph shows Carole drawing her vision of what the roofline could be.





River Ranch under construction, circa 1985.





THE MAIN HALL

The entrance to River Ranch welcomed visitors into the Main Hall which was well-appointed with a selection of wonderful furniture and decorations. The hall spans the length of the house, offering access to the formal rooms beyond and providing the first glimpses of the collection.



THE COCO CHANEL CABINET

This Louis XIV ormolu-mounted cabinet has a storied provenance, most notably for its time at 31 rue Cambon, the Parisian apartment of Coco Chanel, and later in Lausanne, Switzerland.

The famed Parisian residence was where Chanel held court, entertaining guests amid her curated collection of furniture and decorative arts, most famously, her collection of over thirty-two Asian lacquer screens.

Believed to have been given to Chanel by the 2nd Duke of Westminster, the cabinet was later privately acquired by Galerie Kugel. The cabinet spent two decades in a Parisian private collection, until it sold at a Sotheby's London auction on June 13, 1997. Purchased by Lily and Edmond J. Safra, the cabinet was subsequently sold in their Sotheby's, New York sale on November 3, 2005.

This cabinet is the epitome of exoticism and grandeur in 18th century French Chinoiserie decoration, with intricate combinations of natural elements like mother-of-pearl to form detailed motifs. The technique, known as Boulle marquetry, is named after André-Charles Boulle (1642-1732), famed cabinetmaker to Louis XIV, whose studio was in the Galerie du Louvre. Boulle largely used inlays of brass, animal horn and pewter with contrasting woods such as rosewood and ebony to create rich and elaborate designs.

The panels of the cabinet are designed to replicate the effect of verre églomisé, which is a meticulous process. In this case, gold or silver leaf is applied to the reverse side of the glass panels and a design is etched, engraved, or painted onto the gilded surface. The panels shine with the use of mother-of-pearl embellishments at the base of the panels, highlighting chinoiserie figures, unusual birds and figures in period costumes.

**Louis XIV Ormolu-Mounted, Mother-of-Pearl,
Brass and Ebony 'Boulle' Marquetry and Verre Églomisé Cabinet on a Later Stand**





Coco Chanel and Cecil Beaton were longtime friends and creative partners, sharing a rapport that thrived on both sides of the lens. His portraits of Chanel—often taken at her studio and residence at 31 rue Cambon—are among the most iconic, capturing his subject surrounded by her work and beloved personal collection. Beaton was one of the few photographers granted access to the more intimate, private side of Chanel.



A photograph of Coco Chanel by Cecil Beaton.

THE LIVING ROOM

The Living Room was an example of Carole's interior design prowess, showcasing her sense of scale and texture to create a harmonious room that was ever-evolving as new acquisitions joined the collection.







George III Style Mahogany and Parcel-Gilt Cabinet on stand,
In the Manner of Thomas Chippendale



THE YELLOW DRAWING ROOM

Carole was very partial to the Yellow Drawing Room, having labored over the paint color to create her idea of the perfect 'butter yellow' to showcase the Chinoiserie decorations that are the theme of the room and very representative of Carole's aesthetic vision.







RECOLLECTIONS BY MELISSA GAGEN

Working with Carole Harris throughout my long tenure as a senior furniture specialist at Christie's was a pleasure. I was fascinated by what held interest for her in any given sale. She would pick out a seemingly disparate array of objects— but truly, these choices were bonded together by personality and flair, whether they were decorative embellishments or important objects. One constant rule was to stay away from anything that even suggested the color orange. Carole was decisive; that color would never see the light of day at River Ranch.

After I left Christie's, Carole asked me to create a comprehensive listing of her vast inventory, something that to my amazement had never been done before. As I progressed through each room, each chock-a-block with eye-popping objects, an admiration for her natural eye, brilliant juxtapositions, and attention to every detail kept my engines rolling for my week-long visit.

Melissa Gagen is a New York City-based appraiser and a furniture and works of art specialist.

GEORGE I GILT-BOTTLE GREEN JAPANNED BUREAU-CABINET

This bureau-cabinet is one of the objects that stopped me in my tracks. Its gilt decoration is particularly fanciful – with its sumptuous floral sprays, exotic birds and beasts, figures with fans, enjoying tea or flying atop dragons. And how about that smiling sun? It is a superb example of early Georgian ‘japanning’ (European imitation of lacquer) fueled by a wide-eyed enthusiasm for faraway lands. The vignettes pop against a rare green ground, a particularly desirable color for collectors. On one level, one might say the cabinet ticks the ‘decorative’ box. But it is so much more. The cabinet’s exceptional quality, distinctive form and idiosyncratic decorative details, suggest an attribution to famed London cabinet-maker John Belchier (d. 1753). Belchier’s authorship is based on comparisons to similar examples, such as the two supplied to Erddig Castle in Wales. The Erddig cabinets were described in 1732 as being ‘in ye grandst manner and after ye newest fashion’. Such cabinets were significant furnishings to make their owners proud. It is easy to admire such a wonder in the present day: fabulously grand and yet warmly anchoring any interior.

- *Melissa Gagen*

George I Bottle Green and Gilt-Japanned Bureau-Cabinet, Attributed to John Belchier







THE ENCLOSED PORCH

The Enclosed Porch can be accessed from the drawing room, welcoming guests with a view of the fountain and the river beyond.







THE DINING ROOM

The Dining Room is a master class in wall decoration highlighted by the decorative wall paintings created by Susan Huggins that complement the furniture and tabletop decoration, the Clare Potter porcelain hollyhocks and the porcelain flowers and vegetables that decorate the various surfaces.









RECOLLECTIONS BY BRIAN MCCARTHY



Carole had always admired the work of Sister Parish and Parish-Hadley. Sister Parish is shown here with Brian McCarthy and Carole in the late 1980s.

I was standing shoulder to shoulder by Carole at a Stair & Co. opening in 1988 when I overheard her telling someone about her “ranch” in the San Joaquin Valley. My ears perked up that instant and I turned and introduced myself as a partner at Parish-Hadley. She was immediately overjoyed as Sister Parish was the high Priestess of decoration. Before I could say a word, she took out her pocketbook, opened several folded xeroxes with images of the “ranch house” from all sides, including an aerial, which at first glance I thought was a country club. Several months later when we had Carole & John Harris as new clients Mrs. Parish said to me one morning that she would do anything for me to make the project a success. I looked at her in disbelief and asked if that included flying to the Harris River Ranch, her reply was "Absolutely". Mrs. Parish had a fear of flying so this was a tremendous gesture that she agreed to the undertaking.

We landed at the San Francisco Airport and were greeted by the Harris’s pilot who escorted us to their King Air turbo prop. Did I mention white knuckles? We landed at the ranch and a red carpet met Mrs. Parish as she stepped off the plane. Mrs. Parish and Carole immediately hit it off and it led to a wonderful friendship with an open line between the two of them for years to come. Carole had a voracious appetite for decoration and a wonderful library of books to be inspired by and inspired she was. Virtually every day I would get an envelope with images of furniture, fabric, and objects to be scrutinized and debated before a decision was made. She had the energy of an army and always so grateful for everyone’s hard work and dedication to her and the project. Suffice it to say there is nothing more inspiring than an inspired client which Carole was in multiples. The last time I saw her was at the San Francisco Antique Show and she lit up like a Christmas tree. Her collection is from the heart and the passion of a true collector.

Brian McCarthy is an award-winning New York City-based designer and former partner of the legendary design firm Parish-Hadley.



Carole with Sister Parish and Brian McCarthy.



THE BREAKFAST ROOM

The intimate Breakfast Room is flooded with sunlight in the morning, adding a soft glow to the trellised adobe wall decoration by Pat Hopper and the porcelain collection it showcases. The view down the hall shows a large painted bird cage and some of the many potted African violets that were Carole's favorite and could be found throughout the house.





Another view of the Breakfast Room, with wall decorations by Pat Hopper and a nod to Carole's love of Flora Danica.





THE CHAPEL

The room known as The Chapel is a rhapsody in blue, with modern furniture sitting comfortably with Asian ceramics and French decorations.







THE BLUE TOILE BEDROOM

The Blue Toile Bedroom continues the blue-palette theme, incorporating toile wall coverings and a mix of blue fabrics with French mirrors and bedroom furnishings.





In the toile bedroom, a charming blue-and-white moment exemplifies Carole's love of French furniture, showing a Régence carved walnut commode, a Louis XVI-style walnut armchair, and a late 19th-century French painting of a moody blue harbor scene.



THE PRIVATE SUITE & SITTING ROOM

Carole's bedroom on the second floor was a sanctuary for her and housed many of her favorite things including dog paintings, porcelain dog figures and Mario Buatta-designed chintz upholstered furniture. A sunny sitting room off of the bedroom provided another area of respite surrounded by cherished objects and a view of the property.







THE POOL HOUSE

Across a cobblestone courtyard sits The Pool House, surrounded by formal gardens and a tapestry of plantings.





The pool house was built in the early 2000s, and is reminiscent of the “chateau” style. It was also meant as a guest house and a place for parties. Each bedroom was appointed in a different style, theme, and decoration. It was a wonderful addition to the ranch.







This beautifully appointed bedroom was lacquered in a lovely sheen of aubergine.







ABOUT STAIR

STAIR is an auction house in Hudson, NY, founded by fourth-generation furniture specialist Colin Stair. Since 2001, STAIR has established itself as a leading regional auction house, with a team of specialists whose combined experience spans over 150 years.

From single items to entire estates, the STAIR team handles every sale with sophistication, integrity, and a rare level of personal attention. Clients recognize STAIR for exemplary client service and expertly curated sales, guided by the notion of “selling interesting things, from interesting people”.

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STAIR invites you to discover

RIVER RANCH: THE COLLECTION OF CAROLE HARRIS

Part I: Tuesday, June 17 at 10 am

Part II: Wednesday, June 18 at 10 am

Part III: Thursday, June 19 at 10 am

The fully illustrated catalogue will be available at stairgalleries.com on Monday, June 2.

We welcome you to preview the collection in Hudson, NY from June 2 – June 16.

For more information, please visit stairgalleries.com

SPECIAL THANKS

Brooke Johnson

Janet L. Wright

Brian McCarthy

Melissa Gagen



