



Nasos Thanopoulos with his art adviser and friend, Veta Stefanidou Tsoukala, with Marina Karella's Kosmos Chair, 1984, bought for €40,000 in 2008. Also pictured are *Bouzouki Capital* (1957) by Chryssa (far left), and Karella's *Tree of Life* (1989) sculpture (above, one of a pair)

FINDERS KEEPERS

# archaeology-inspired design

Sculptural pieces with classical elements bring a familiar ambience to the homes of a Greek financier, under the guidance of an Athenian gallerist, says **Kasia Maciejowska**. Portrait by **Bill Georgoussis**

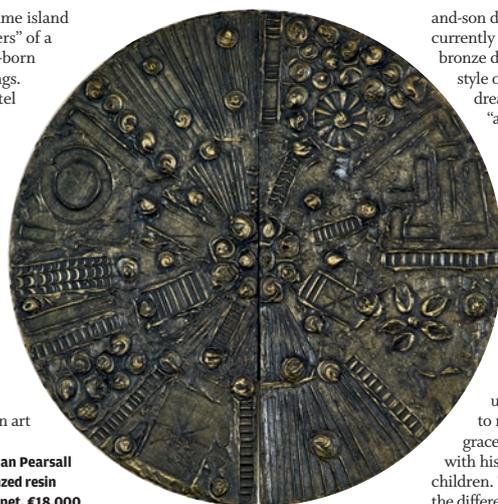
In 1998, Nasos Thanopoulos had just bought himself an apartment on the 18th floor of Pimlico's Riverwalk building. Located on the northeast corner of Vauxhall Bridge, the flat had a 180-degree vista taking in the Houses of Parliament, the MI6 HQ and the mutable banks of the Thames as it oxbows through London. What it didn't have, however, was anything "homely", recalls Thanopoulos, who had recently moved to Morgan Stanley. "It was the first time I'd thought about anything related to interior design," he remembers. "I'd go to friends' houses in London or Gstaad or wherever, and ask them, 'Where did you get this? What is that? How did you find it?' And people kept saying, 'Oh, Veta got it.' I wondered, 'Who is this Veta?'"

This Veta is Veta Stefanidou Tsoukala, the archaeologist-turned-interior designer-turned owner of VST Gallery in Athens. "My university professor was an exceptional archaeologist who uncovered important ruins at Santorini," Tsoukala

says, adding that it was on the same island she later discovered "great masters" of a different kind, including British-born tastemaker TH Robsjohn-Gibbings. "I was staying at the Atlantis Hotel and was blown away by his beautifully sensitive, minimalist scheme. That contemporary simplicity in a historical environment had a huge impact on my own style."

Tsoukala was Thanopoulos's interiors go-to before becoming his art adviser and friend – and, five years ago, godmother to his eldest daughter, Natalia. "We are family now," he says. "There are no professional emails, we just have lunch or dinner together, and sometimes that includes talking about certain art pieces." That might be the 1960s cabinet (pictured overleaf) by American father-

Right: **Adrian Pearsall 1960s bronzed resin drinks cabinet, €18,000**



and-son duo Philip and Kelvin LaVerne currently on display at VST. With patinated bronze doors depicting figures in the style of Balthus, it's Thanopoulos's dream piece, but he finds the price "a little high for now". (According to Tsoukala, a similar edition – there are three in existence – sold at Sotheby's for €91,000 in 2009, and is now worth more than €300,000.)

Thanopoulos's most recent acquisition is a 1960s carved bronze resin, wall-mounted disc (€18,000, pictured left) by another midcentury American, Adrian Pearsall. Measuring 1.5m in diameter and based on the ancient discus used in athletics, the design splits to reveal a drinks cabinet and now graces a wall in the home he shares with his wife, Nasia, and their two children. "Veta is excellent at integrating the different styles of husband and wife,



Clockwise from left: base, shown with a pair of 1960s leather and walnut Klismos chairs by TH Robsjohn-Gibbings and a Philippe Hiquily 1980s brass and marble console. Thanopoulos's brutalist bronze dining table with a sculpted base, shown with a pair of 1960s leather and walnut Klismos chairs by TH Robsjohn-Gibbings and a Philippe Hiquily 1980s brass and marble console. Thanopoulos's "dream piece": 1968 Bathers cabinet by Philip and Kelvin LaVerne in patinated bronze on oak. 1970s Paul Evans dining table with a sculpted brutalist bronze



**“These objects are a tool for remembering the history of my country”**

which we all know is a considerable skill,” he says with a laugh.

The centerpiece at that same home is a chair (pictured on previous page) by Greek artist Marina Karella, which references classical aesthetics with fabric-like drapery in white resin and a globe poised on one arm, bought for €40,000 in 2008. There are several other Karella designs: a second white resin chair topped by an Egyptian-style cat’s head; a coffee table with a flower-shaped base, its pearlescent white, gold-tipped stamens bursting through the glass; and a pair of bronze candelabra titled *Tree of Life* (pictured on previous page).

Thanopoulos’s favourite piece, however, is one he bought in London – a sculpture (pictured on previous page) by Chryssa Vardea-Mavromichali (known as Chryssa) that replicates the capital of an Ionic column, pierced with pegs from the traditional Greek stringed instrument the bouzouki. “In London it was important for me to have touchstones like this around me, so I could stay connected to my roots,” he explains. “Now, with Greece still going through a hard time economically, these objects serve as a tool for remembering the



history of my country. They communicate the power of being unafraid to rework the past and make it relevant today.”

Pieces by fellow Greeks are evidently pivotal in Thanopoulos’s collection – including a round steel table with a top painted by artist Alekos Fassianos, and another table with a resin base by painter Kostas Paniaras (pictured above left) – but he also owns a table by Paul Evans (pictured above) and a pair of wall lights by Karl Springer, both of whose designs can be loosely bracketed in the American postmodernism movement. There is a set of 1960s Klismos chairs (pictured above) by Tsoukala’s beloved Robsjohn-Gibbings, as well as furniture by another Tsoukala favourite – the late David Hicks, with whom she collaborated on a century-old house on the island of Hydra. “He used

proportions and geometry in the same way as the ancient Greeks,” says Tsoukala, whose approach to understanding a client also comes from Hicks: “He wanted to know everything about how his clients lived – right down to what they ate for breakfast.”

Much of Hicks’s furniture is now highly collectable, and the value of Thanopoulos’s collection in general continues to benefit from a boom in postmodern design. “I don’t intend to sell anything and I’m not aware of fashions and so on,” he clarifies, although he does, of course, appreciate Tsoukala’s eye for investment pieces. It was in fact Tsoukala’s daughter, Laura, a graduate in history and archaeology, who persuaded her mother to establish a gallery aspect to VST, which now exhibits at PAD art and design fair in Paris and London, as well as curating a roster of shows in the

Athens space. Most recently, it showcased the sculptures by Paris-based kinetic artist Vassilakis Takis, whose solo show is at Tate Modern this summer. Thanopoulos owns a pair of his charming Signal sculptures, pieces of delicate post-industrial bricolage that echo antennae, bought in 2008. But despite the increasing significance of the artworks in his care, Thanopoulos remains unpretentious. “I don’t really see myself as a ‘collector’ per se,” he says. And he never tells his daughters not to sit on the Karella chair: “Even if it were the most expensive piece on the planet, I wouldn’t. It’s important that everything is part of the house.” ♦ VST Gallery, 136 Kifisias Ave, 15125 Athens (vstgallery.com). PAD London, Berkeley Sq, London W1 (pad-fairs.com); September 30-October 6.