

“You can't have a good dinner party with a bunch of wet blankets.”

Daggy Corcoran in conversation with Hunter Drohojowska

Daggy Corcoran's house is easy to spot among the others in north Bel-Air. Instead of beige stucco with a red tile roof, hers is painted deep plum with lime trim. A neon sign over the door announces "Dining Room Open." What she calls a suburban tract house has been transformed to accommodate her sense of style.

Walls have been knocked out. Everything is painted bright white to enhance the large paintings or drawings by Joe Goode, Richard Jackson, Enzo Cucchi and K.H. Hockney. Her friendships with artists are evident in such gifts as Roy Lichtenstein's tea set, the wooden centerpiece of flowers by David Hockney or a simple drawing of a ginkgo leaf by Ellsworth Kelly. The furnishings are comfortable, elegantly spare: a black leather sofa, Hoffman chairs and a mirror-topped dining table that seats 24 once owned by Mrs. I. Magnin.

Corcoran, 40, has many identities: fourth-generation Californian and scion of the Janss family (Edwin Janss, her grandfather, developed Westwood; her father, Edwin Janss Jr., developed Thousand Oaks, where she grew up); the wife of art dealer James Corcoran, though they have been legally separated for seven years; the mother of 10-year-old Tim, who attends the private Curtis School near her home; proprietor of a very special store on Almont Drive, Art Catalogues, which carries exactly that; a trustee of the American Cinematheque; and one of L.A.'s most skilled hostesses. The social whirl at her Martha's Vineyard home was documented last summer in Vanity Fair, complete with an eyebrow-raising photo of Daggy in a bubble-filled bathtub.

Corcoran, a tall, handsome blonde with a disarmingly straightforward manner, looks fresh and energetic despite having returned from her flat in London only the night before.

Herald photo
by Paul Chinn



HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA: Why did you buy a flat in London?

DAGGY CORCORAN: I have a lot of customers in London and I think it's the best city in the world outside of Los Angeles. I thought I would open a branch office there. Then I was having dinner with someone and learned there was this apartment for sale. The next thing I knew I had the apartment and no office. But I'm delighted by it. I have an assistant who is working for Art Catalogues in London, which makes it a lot easier for our clients there.

H.D.: Are your clients in Europe, or is this just London you are talking about?

D.C.: No, everywhere, all over the world. My largest group of clients is in Australia, of all places. I have lots and lots of big customers there and in Japan, particularly Tokyo.

H.D.: Who are the big customers?

D.C.: Libraries, institutions, but also humans out there who long for this stuff because exhibition catalogs are not distributed like books. They are a big pain in the neck to find. You remember a show, but you don't remember the title or where it was. I can usually figure it out and I usually have it.

H.D.: How do you determine what to stock?

D.C.: It's my decision finally to focus on modern art. My specialty is American painting of the 1960s, but I decided to do only the last 100



Daggy Corcoran is noted for a variety of skills: She's the owner of the store Art Catalogues and one of L.A.'s best hostesses

years of art. I'm confident I can make a proper response to that field. Before that, my personal knowledge is too weak. My customers are really well-educated and I have to be on my toes and totally informed because they often know more than I do. It's horribly embarrassing. If I were out there

talking about classical painting I would feel like an idiot.

H.D.: When did you start Art Catalogues?

D.C.: Nine years ago, which is amazing. It started because I was working with Jim Corcoran and a lot of times he'd have a painting and need the provenance searched

and a lot of that information comes from art catalogs. I realized at that time they were very difficult to find. No library actually had a lot of them. Often the gallery or museum that publishes them loses them or they just beam up somehow. Then

My Style

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(art dealer) Nick Wilder, who had the apartment above Jim Corcoran's Gallery, was moving, and the Pasadena Art Museum went out of business and was selling its catalogs. I went and bought every single one. I took Nick's apartment and I was suddenly in business. It really has been the proper thing for me to be doing.

H.D.: Did you major in art history in college?

D.C.: No, I majored in history at Stanford, then worked for a couple of years, then came down here to UCLA and got my masters in art. Then I worked for a gallery on La Cienega called Multiples, working for my best friend, Babs Altoon, who is John Altoon's widow. The two of us had a riot, across the street from Irving Blum (then of the Ferus Gallery, now of Blum/Hellman Gallery in New York) and with Nick Wilder in town all the time. We had this amazing, wonderful time. Then I got married to Jim (Corcoran) and moved to Florida, where he had his gallery in Coral Gables. Then we came back here when he opened the gallery where he is now.

H.D.: Did you ever want to be an artist?

D.C.: Not at all. I have no talent. I admire artists more than anybody because the idea of being able to cook up something and get it from your brain onto a canvas is beyond me. I can't draw a circle.

H.D.: What was your artistic influence?

D.C.: Probably my father, who is a very interesting art collector. I grew up with paintings all around me. His focus, and probably the reason I'm so interested in it, is American painting of the '60s: Rauschenberg, Sam Francis, Philip Guston, all the big American painters, as well as Francis Bacon, Hockney, Gorky, Giacometti. Beautiful paintings that caused me to look at paintings in a certain way.

H.D.: So you are interested in the act of painting?

D.C.: My personal interest is in the gesture, the artist's hand. Seeing how a painting is made.

H.D.: Do you consider yourself an art collector, and was that another influence from your father?

D.C.: I'm not an art collector, I'm completely focused on the catalogs and that's all I collect. Only in the last few years have I realized what a really fine collector my father is. Now he's begun to collect weird

things from New Guinea or African art. I thought at first that was a kind of change from what he was doing before, but I suddenly realized that it's not at all, it's an extension. Basically, it's from having a very consistent mind and eye. He's a real collector because he has always done it in an idiosyncratic and personal way.

H.D.: Are you two close?

D.C.: We are. He literally taught me everything I know, including how to cook. He's been incredibly supportive of all I've ever wanted to do. But he hasn't tortured me. I appreciate the way he encouraged all of us, my two brothers included, to do something on our own, think for ourselves, and find a kind of job that would get our minds out of second gear.

H.D.: Was your grandfather also a collector?

D.C.: No, it is my father's sensibility. Before he started collecting

like a spider in the store for the artist to come in, who I promptly ask to sign the book. The artists are incredibly generous about signing them to me. It's so personal. (She shows an Ellsworth Kelly flower drawing in the frontispiece of his book.) I have a Jasper Johns flag in the front of his book. Once Robert Therrien came in the shop, bought a catalog with his MasterCard, and I forced him to sign his book.

H.D.: You have a reputation for being a marvelous hostess and cook. What makes a good hostess?

D.C.: I'm lucky to have incredibly interesting friends. I've met a lot through the shop, through my father, friends from the art world and the movie world. I think about, "Who do I know who wants to meet somebody else?" and then I try to put them together. A sort of social matchmaking. And I have a range of friends age-wise. But it's abso-

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Dagney Corcoran

contemporary art, he had collected chess sets. Again, these things were all just a little off, crazy. Then he met (Ferus Gallery founder and curator) Walter Hopps, and that changed everybody's life. The influence of Walter on my father was phenomenal. He went from going straight ahead in his business suit, turned left and went absolutely nuts. Thank the Lord, it was terrific and a big, big change in our life. He became friends with Sam Francis, met Irving Blum and a lot of artists.

This is the late '60s and it was a difficult period because he and my mother were getting divorced, probably a lot because of this. It was very far out. I must have been 17 or 18 and through my father and Walter I met all the major American artists. Twenty years later they are all my personal friends: Johns, Lichtenstein, Rauschenberg.

H.D.: Do you still buy art?

D.C.: From time to time. I don't personally have the money, it's all in the catalogs. And I'm in a unique position to collect them. And I wait

eating peanut butter, mayonnaise, fried egg and avocado sandwiches on sourdough bread, which is delicious.

H.D.: I've heard you do all the cooking for your dinner parties.

D.C.: That's my only creative moment. I love to cook, but I can't cook for two people. I can only cook for 16. And I love to eat. There is something about having a group of your friends over and making a meal for them. That's sort of a gesture of respect and it's also fun to see how far you can go.

If you have a bunch of stuffy friends coming over, it's fun to give them something they have to eat with their hands or that spills, something sort of hopeless. Eating with your hands, I didn't realize how it daunts people. Nothing scares me. There are so many times you go to someone's house and you basically have the same meal. A chicken breast, a nice refined pea-pod. I like to serve food that is a little bit against the law.

H.D.: You and Jim are still married, not divorced?

D.C.: Legally, we are. We haven't bothered to get a divorce. I have a great deal of respect for him. I must say he's the most interesting person I've met. The father of our child. So we soldier on. I see him constantly. He takes care of Timmy when I'm out of town. It's the kind of situation where you love somebody and you want them to be in your life, but you just don't want to live with them. We've been married for 13 years, and in separate houses about half that time.

H.D.: Do you travel a lot?

D.C.: Yes, that's why I work. Every time I get \$500 in my pocket I take off. But I do it a lot on business. Every year I go to the Frankfurt Book Fair. I make a point to visit an area I have never been to meet the museum people and the art people. I love being in a place where I'm not so confident. If you're in a town where you are not so sure, you have to pay attention and I like forcing myself. It's amazing, but you can be in Hot Coffee, Idaho, and there is a reason to be there, someone who appreciates what you do and is more intelligent than you are and who teaches you something. I get kind of blasé living in L.A., everyone is so stylish, chic and intelligent. You start to think you know everything. And that's when you miss stuff.

That's why I like to travel alone, and even though I hate it, I also like putting myself in a position I don't know. You have to go out and make something happen.