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**THE ARTFUL
WORLD
OF CAIO FONSECA**

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BLANK CANVAS

ARTIST CAIO FONSECA HAS REFINED HIS WORLD TO ONLY WHAT HE NEEDS—
AND FOR HIM, THAT LITTLE BIT GOES A LONG WAY

Text by Vicky Lowry · Photography by Roger Davies · Styled by Carlos Mota





THE BEST HOMES are autobiographies of the people who live in them. The apartment of abstract painter Caio Fonseca, however, delivers a double-header tale of sorts. The building itself, a grand structure in lower Manhattan, has an intriguing past. Constructed in the late 19th century, it has served as a beer and concert hall, television studio (rumor has it *The Honeymooners* was shot here), and warehouse. By the time Fonseca came upon it in 2000 it was an exhibition space that had gone belly-up, with a raw 7,000-square-foot floor-through that looked perfect for living quarters and a painting studio. When he saw all that wall space, the 13-foot-high ceilings, and 24 windows offering light from every direction, "I just got that *boom* feeling," he recalls.

Because Fonseca has spent almost his entire career creating grand effects within the confines of plane

surfaces, this art-world luminary, whose gorgeous, lyrical paintings hang in New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, knew just what to do with that cavernous shell. "I have lived in so many little places that I had prepared for exactly what I would do if I ever lived in a larger space," he explains.

With help from his former brother-in-law, architect Jonathan Marvel of Rogers Marvel Architects, Fonseca conjured a loftlike residence with spacious, flowing rooms and oversize details to match, such as a massive Brazilian wood table near the open kitchen and an overscale bathtub he designed. He included 10-foot-tall doors only where necessary. "I added bedroom doors after living here for a year," he says, smiling. "It seemed like a good idea."

Despite the gallery ambience of those crisp white walls, rustic touches soften the edges. A carpenter

Caio Fonseca in front of *Fifth Street C00.1* in his New York City loft/studio. Facing page: The piano room displays the paintings *Pietrasanta C97.43* and *Tenth Street #66* by Fonseca and the sculptures *La Regente*, *Oculus*, *Digwemus*, and *La Torre* by his father, Gonzalo Fonseca. See Resources.



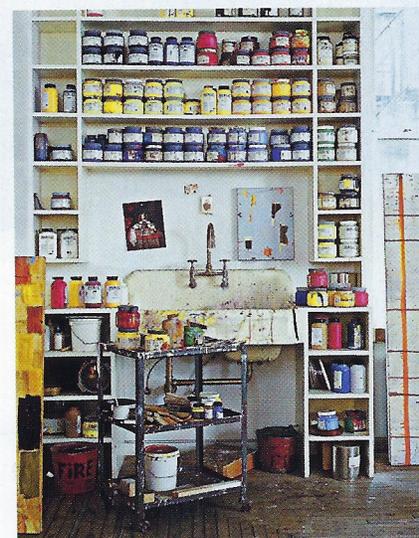
In the studio, a collection of mixed-media works, including a charcoal study. Facing page, from top: In the living room, the painting is *Seven String Etching With Yellow and Red* by Fonseca, and the throw and antique textile are from Quina Fonseca Collection. The spacious studio was formerly home to a soundstage. See Resources.



friend made windowsills from rough-hewn joists, and reclaimed wood became kitchen cabinets. The fireplace in the living room is plain brick, while the kitchen sink and bath surrounds are honed Bardiglio marble, an inexpensive stone imported from Pietrasanta, a small coastal village in Tuscany where Fonseca spends the spring and summer months painting in near seclusion. A few of the furnishings have an even more humble spirit: A battered chaise longue in his bedroom was a thrift-shop find, and mismatched chairs, all plucked from the street, surround the dining table. "I need chairs, but it's just not in my nature to go out and look for them," Fonseca says.

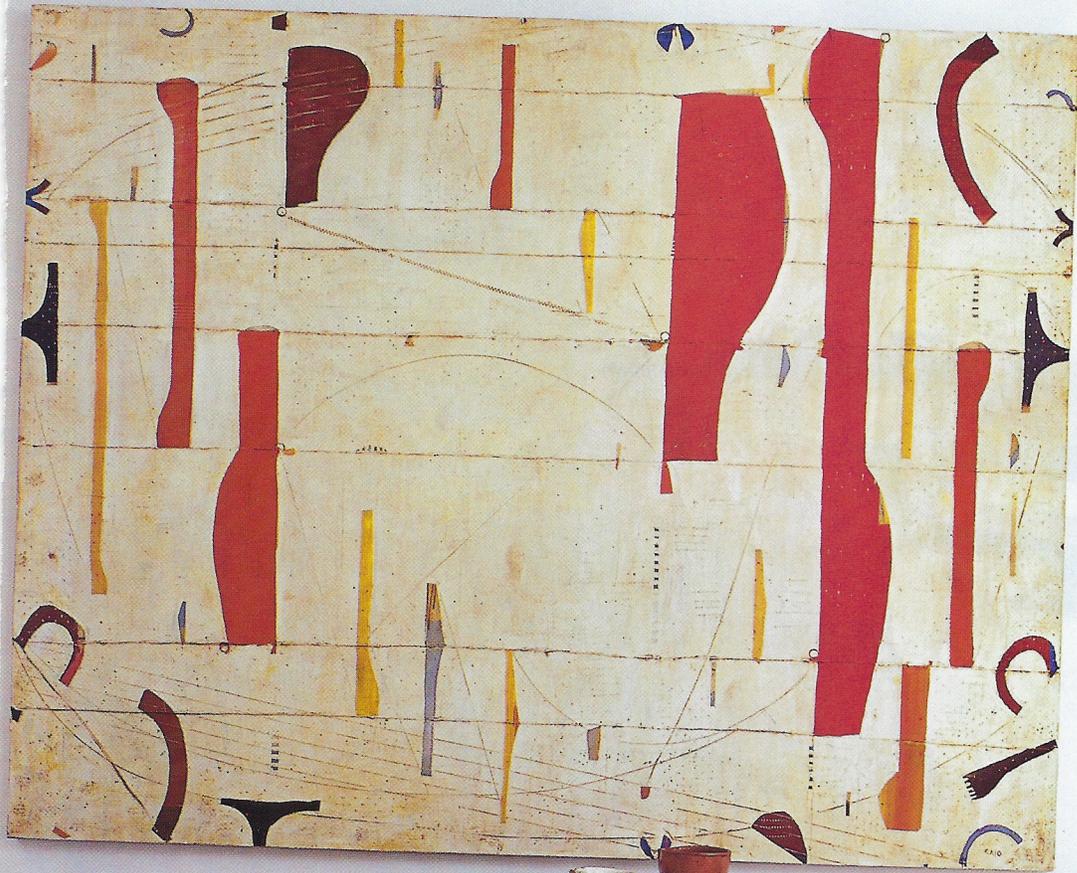
It takes extraordinary confidence to live with both cast-off furniture and costly creations. Which brings us to the second story that emerges from Fonseca's surroundings—that of the artist on intimate display. Almost every wall of the residence features his work, from early drawings when he studied in Europe 20-odd years ago to the most current painting, a 12.5-foot-high piece that required scaffolding to tackle its upper reaches. Art hangs above the kitchen sink and over the fireplace, is propped by a bathtub, lines the corridors, and, of course, covers his 2,300-square-foot paint-splattered studio. "They are part support group, part inspiration, informing the next paintings," he explains of the works. "I don't hang them the way a collector would. I'm constantly changing and moving them. It gives a great insight into your life."

For him, it has been a life immersed in arts and culture. Fonseca is the scion of a prominent New York





In the bedroom, *Tenth Street C99.1* by Fonseca, a portrait of the artist by his father, and a reproduction of an 18th-century Italian gateleg table. Facing page, clockwise from top: Fonseca's *Gran Arco, B12* hangs above the sofa in the living room and his *Pietrasanta C98.43* is displayed atop the mantel. In the bedroom, *Constructivo en Blanco, No. 1* by Joaquín Torres-García and a 1930s chest; a 1980 Fonseca still life and a vintage Argentine chair from Quina Fonseca Collection are next to the doorway. In the piano room, a pen-and-ink drawing by Gonzalo Fonseca and a mixed-media work by Caio Fonseca hang next to the window; the Mason & Hamlin piano is covered with an Indian crewel fabric. See Resources.





clan: His father, Gonzalo, was a renowned modernist sculptor from Uruguay, and his mother, Elizabeth—a daughter of former Welch's Grape Juice Co. owner Jacob Kaplan—is also a painter. His sister Isabel, a writer, is married to British novelist Martin Amis, while another sister, Quina, imports South American furnishings, textiles, and jewelry.

Fonseca's artistic routine, he admits, can be monastic at times. A self-described Bach fanatic, he practices piano every morning, then takes a long walk around downtown Manhattan before sequestering himself in the studio, often until late at night. This discipline may help explain the pared-down look the apartment still retains eight years after the painter moved in. Fonseca went ten months without a dining table, for example, until he found one he liked. "I try not to bring in anything I don't love looking at," he says. "It's about restraint. Like a painting, if you keep adding perfect little elements there's a point where you get diminishing returns. There is something about an unfinished quality that leaves within you that sense of possibility." ■

Pietrasanta C04.65 by Fonseca hangs above the sink, while *Constructivo en Blanco y Negro* by Joaquín Torres-García rests on the bathroom windowsill. Facing page, from top: In the bedroom, the antique lamb's-wool coverlet is from Quina Fonseca Collection. A pen-and-ink drawing by Gonzalo Fonseca above the bathtub; the shower is sheathed in Bardiglio marble. See Resources.

