



**LOVE STORY**  
“Art is about giving access, thinking about where you are, who you are with and not with,” says Iwan Wirth, photographed with his wife, Manuela Wirth. They are co-founders of Hauser & Wirth and have been married since 1996.

# Wirth the Wait

The genre-busting art gallery Hauser & Wirth opens a five-story New York outpost this May. Next up is a repurposed 18th-century compound in Menorca, Spain.

BY JAY CHESHES  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMIE HAWKESWORTH

**O**N A WEDNESDAY NIGHT in February, just before the Frieze art fair opens at a Paramount Pictures studio lot in Los Angeles, Hauser & Wirth’s 116,000-square-foot gallery complex in the city’s downtown Arts District is hosting a party. One wing is devoted to Lucio Fontana’s Spatial Environments, immersive light-filled spaces originally produced in Italy in the 1940s, ’50s and ’60s and never before shown together in the U.S. In another wing, 39-year-old Swiss artist Nicolas Party, a recent addition to the gallery’s roster, is making his debut with super-saturated paintings and pastel murals. Artists, collectors, curators and museum directors mill about the courtyard among the picnic tables and an outdoor sculpture, the produce beds, and the chickens that supply eggs to the gallery’s airy restaurant, Manuela. Hauser & Wirth co-founder Iwan Wirth, 49, holds court outside in a light suit and red sneakers, across from a shop selling artist jewelry and skateboard decks, pushing dessert on everyone to close out the night. “The food is great—we were eating chicken skewers in front of the chickens,” says millennial art star Avery Singer, another recent gallery recruit (her presentation at Hauser & Wirth’s Frieze booth of large technology-assisted paintings would sell out that week).

Iwan introduces Los Angeles artist Paul McCarthy to Pablo Picasso’s granddaughter Diana Widmaier Picasso, who is showing off her new jewelry collaboration with the Louise Bourgeois estate, cradling a 24-karat-gold spider in her hand. “Paul!” booms Wirth. “Would you like to do something with Diana?” “Sure,” deadpans McCarthy, “I’ve wanted to do a crown...for you.” “That’s amazing!” says Wirth. “You don’t have to wear it,” says McCarthy. “Just for a photograph.”

Hauser & Wirth is celebrating its 28th birthday this year. It was started in Zurich by Iwan Wirth when he was just 22, in partnership with his future mother-in-law, Swiss industrialist and art collector Ursula Hauser, now 80, and her daughter Manuela, now his wife. Lately it’s become perhaps the fastest growing of the big four galleries—including David Zwirner, Pace and Gagosian—currently dominating the art market. Its nine locations include new outposts in St. Moritz and Hong Kong, and next month its first ground-up gallery building, a five-story New York headquarters, is opening. A 10th location launches next year on the Spanish island of Menorca, with another, in Paris, in the early planning stage.

These days, Hauser & Wirth’s mix of museum-style shows, hospitality and serious scholarship is redefining what a large gallery can be. The gallery produces a magazine and has established a nonprofit art institute and a publishing arm that released 22 books last year. Its

lively, rambling, multiuse spaces in Somerset, England, west of London and in downtown Los Angeles have become popular destinations.

“They have been adventuresome, they have been ambitious, and they have been innovative,” says Glenn Lowry, the director of New York’s Museum of Modern Art. “And on all those fronts they have done important work, whether it was thinking about the gallery as more than a place just to sell—as a locus to dine, to meet, to think, to buy books—or thinking about different ways of selling art.”

The gallery has been adding artists and estates at an accelerated pace, representing 90 at last count. These include recent high-profile additions like Michelle Obama portraitist Amy Serald and the estate of sculptor John Chamberlain, with Singer and veteran painters George Condo and Henry Taylor signing on in the last few months. Hauser & Wirth has doubled its staff, to around 280, over the past five years to accommodate the new locations and artists, along with the restaurants, shops and public programs that, in an unusual move for a commercial gallery, have become an integral part of its business.

It introduced a new management structure at the start of this year, elevating eight senior staff to partners and Marc Payot, 53—a Swiss native who has been with the gallery for two decades and has run U.S. operations for the past 11 years—to co-president alongside Iwan and Manuela. (Ursula maintains an important behind-the-scenes role.) The three heads of the gallery share every major decision, they say, with no individual remit beyond what geography dictates—with the Wirths, who live in the U.K., focused on Europe, and Payot, in New York, more hands-on in the U.S.

Each Hauser & Wirth gallery, insist its founders, is its own self-contained universe, rather than an offshoot of a mother ship.

“We care about our presence in different places. It’s not just, Oh, something doesn’t sell in New York, we will do [it] wherever,” says Payot. “It’s not that mentality.”

Still, Hauser & Wirth is investing big in New York. Its new 36,000-square-foot building in Chelsea, designed by longtime collaborator Annabelle Selldorf and her firm, Selldorf Architects, tops out with an enormous column-free exhibition space on the fifth floor. Sunlight streams in from a series of clerestory windows 18 feet overhead, surrounding a roof hatch that opens to crane in huge works of art. The hatch was developed with artists like Roni Horn, a mainstay of the gallery since 2004, in mind. Her monumental solid-glass sculptures can weigh over four tons. All the floors of the gallery are constructed to hold that kind of weight, says Payot, touring the building site with Selldorf a few months before opening.



The new building makes its public debut just before Frieze Week in New York in early May, launching with a sprawling museum-caliber show, *The Bride of God*, from writer and independent curator Philip Larratt-Smith, organized thematically around Daniel Paul Schreber's 1903 *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, a documentation of madness that inspired Sigmund Freud. Works from the gallery's artists and from icons beyond it (including Francis Bacon, Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol and Weegee) will fill the new building, along with Hauser & Wirth's existing galleries in the former Dia Center for the Arts. The fifth-floor windows will be shrouded in dark film to allow Jenny Holzer's recent LED work *I Woke Up Naked* to shine. Paul McCarthy's mechanized *Mad House*—a 2008 piece that consists of a padded seat inside a wooden box that spins around wildly—will be installed in another gallery. Also on display will be Louise Bourgeois's *Twosome*, an enormous installation with two metal tanks on tracks that repeatedly slide into each other, which hasn't been seen in New York since 1991.

Permanent site-specific installations from the gallery's stable will fill the new building beyond the opening show, including a meeting space fully conceived by New York-based Rashid Johnson and a mural from abstract painter Mary Heilmann on the fourth floor.

Lisa Phillips, director of New York's New Museum, who first met the Wirths in 1999 while organizing McCarthy's first American museum survey, says the gallery has long operated on a slightly different model. "They seemed like more of a hybrid of a gallery and a foundation," she says, "and I think they've carried that hybrid quality even further over the last 20 years."

Says Roni Horn, "They've always done what's best for me even if it wasn't the best business for them."

Johnson, who joined the gallery nine years ago, became especially close to the Wirths (and their four kids) after he moved with his wife and son for a three-month residency at the Somerset complex, near to the Wirth family home. "I think one of the great misconceptions about Hauser & Wirth is that it's a corporate gallery," he says, "but you realize it's just like a family."

The Wirths frequently entertain artists at their homes in Somerset, New York, Scotland and Zurich and often vacation with them. Two of the Wirths' sons worked for Los Angeles artist Mark Bradford this past winter. Johnson is thinking of buying a home in Menorca. Plus they have the residency program in Somerset, which a lot of their artists have gone through, and will have a similar program in Menorca.

As Hauser & Wirth has grown, the partners have integrated artist input into their new building projects. "We always show the plans to Roni [Horn],"

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—RASHID JOHNSON



says Iwan. "She has an extraordinary sense of space, volume, architecture." While the Somerset art center was still a work in progress, Johnson, Horn and McCarthy all weighed in on it: The center opened six years ago with its own restaurant and bar, guest-house and working farm, and a busy program for local schoolkids. The rural compound, a two-and-a-half-hour train ride west from London, drew 130,000 visitors in its first year.

"In most of the things we do, it is about access to culture, access to art," says Payot. "With the restaurants we create an easier way into this world—not this idea of a white cube, sterile, where you think, Am I allowed to go in there?"

"Like the gardens—in Somerset, it was the gardens," says Manuela, 56, who in public is often less loquacious than her husband but is often beside him, adding details here and there, encouraging him on.

**HAUSER & WIRTH** was an early adopter of the system, increasingly ubiquitous in the contemporary art world, of assigning each artist a dedicated liaison to assist with production, logistics, and communication with the artist's studio and with museums—providing a "support system within the management of a career," as Payot describes it. The concept developed to meet the needs of a Swiss artist, Pipilotti Rist, as she worked on her prizewinning video installation, *Ever Is Over All*, for the 1997 Venice Biennale. "Pipi wrote the script of what she needed," says Iwan, who lent her his car for a scene in her film in which she smashes its windows.

The gallery's close ties to its artists often enables them to produce their work by supplying the financial resources and personnel to bring the most ambitious projects to fruition. British artist Phyllida Barlow was 65 and recently retired from teaching—having spent her career in relative obscurity—when the Wirths first visited her studio in 2010. As an advance against future sales, they put up the resources for her to hire a team of assistants and move from her cramped home studio into a much larger, dedicated space. "We could not believe an artist [like her] could not be on the world stage given the quality, her way of thinking, of making art," says Iwan. Barlow, who had never had gallery representation or a substantial market for her

work before joining Hauser & Wirth, went on to represent Britain at the 2017 Venice Biennale.

The gallery's artists have been effective ambassadors, recommending friends to the program. In the '90s the founders met Los Angeles artist Jason Rhoades, their original guide through the city, who would pick them up at the airport in his Chevy Impala blasting Power 106. Rhoades, who died in 2006, helped cement the Wirths' relationship with his art-school teacher, McCarthy, who in turn introduced his mentor, Richard Jackson, who is best known for his use of automated painting machines. All three wound up working with the gallery. Similar intergenerational networking followed Mark Bradford's joining Hauser & Wirth in 2013, leading it to sign an artist he admired, abstract sculptor and painter Jack Whitten, in 2016, and conceptual art pioneer Charles Gaines, Bradford's teacher at CalArts, two years later.

George Condo met with Payot and then with the Wirths at the recommendation of Rashid Johnson, a friend, and joined in January. "I got the feeling that what they want is to see me—finally, after all these years—do what I want to do and feel like I have the support of the gallery behind me," he says. "There's none of the vibes [that], this is good for the market, this is bad for the market."

**IWAN WIRTH** made his professional debut as an art



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dealer at the age of 16. With help from a friend of his father's, a landlord who signed on as a business partner, he'd rented a basement space for a gallery in his hometown, Oberuzwil, an idyllic community east of Zurich. He'd sent out letters cold to a few Swiss artists he admired. Only one, painter Bruno Gasser, replied, inviting him for a studio visit and signing on for the opening show. Along with his abstract paintings, Gasser offered the teenager an art world education, inviting him to Egypt, where he was doing a residency that spring. "You need to come and visit me because that's what gallerists do," he told him. And so that spring Iwan followed Gasser's art world itinerary, flying first to Cairo (in part using funds he'd been saving up to buy a tennis racket), and then, in the summer, on his own to New York and the south of France.

Iwan says he'd been an art obsessive for years by then, tracing his passion back to museum visits with his architect father and schoolteacher mom, who

introduced him to Picasso and Giacometti when he could barely read or write yet. "On Sundays," he says, "my parents would take us to a museum or the mountains." At 7, with the help of his grandfather, he staged a show of sculptures he'd made, and even sold one.

While other kids were consumed by music or sports, young Iwan spent his free time hanging around galleries. At one, in the neighboring town of St. Gallen, he befriended another teenager, two years older, who was just as obsessed with art: future Serpentine Galleries artistic director Hans Ulrich Obrist.

"When you're 15, 16, 17 and you have this contemporary art obsession, you don't have many people in high school you can talk with about it," says Obrist. "We would just talk about art and make lists of what we had seen. We would always make lists."

While Obrist dreamed of a career in museums—curating his first show in his kitchen while still in his early 20s—Iwan, who'd read about Andy Warhol's New York dealer Leo Castelli in a school library book, dreamed of a career selling art. At the opening show for his gallery, which he ran on weekends and Wednesday afternoons, when school was out, he sold pieces by Gasser. Among those in attendance at the opening was Ursula Hauser, a wealthy acquaintance of his parents from the neighboring village, who'd amassed a fortune from the household appliance business her late husband had started and who ran her own gallery focused on local art. The precocious teenager and the widow soon forged an unlikely friendship.

Iwan became her art adviser, directing her to work by Gerhard Richter, Alexander Calder and Eduardo Chillida, among other artists. As he graduated to more ambitious dealing, she put up half the funds for him to acquire and then sell a Picasso and a Chagall.

"[My mother] was impressed by this young person, he was a little wunderkind," says Manuela, who was beginning to pursue a teaching career when Iwan first entered the picture. By the start of the 1990s Iwan and Ursula were officially in business together, operating a private dealership out of Iwan's Zurich apartment. Manuela helped out in the office a few days a week. Their working relationship had turned romantic by the time Hauser & Wirth launched as a commercial gallery in 1992 (they would marry four years later). The two Hausers and one Wirth began traveling to New York together, visiting artist studios and galleries. "The art world was much smaller," says Iwan. "It was a very different time."

On one early trip to New York he wandered into David Zwirner's new gallery downtown, which the

German dealer, some years older than Iwan, had just opened on Greene Street. He walked away with a Gerhard Richter painting and a Dieter Roth piece, and an important new contact.

**FAMILY TIES**  
Manuela (left) and Iwan (opposite), photographed at Hauser & Wirth's gallery in Somerset, England.



“He arrived as this extremely young and curious [fellow],” recalls Zwirner. “I could tell there’s a very young guy who is trying to make himself look a little older, and we immediately had a good conversation about art.” Zwirner opened a lot of doors, introducing Iwan to the gallery’s go-to architect, Selldorf. “David said to me, ‘Iwan is an incredibly smart and out-there person, you’ve got to work with him because I know you’ll do many projects together,’” says Selldorf—who went on to design their first major gallery, which opened in the former Löwenbräu brewery in Zurich in 1996, and almost every gallery since. And Zwirner introduced the partners to Rhoades, who strengthened the gallery’s relationship with his mentor, McCarthy, both artists known for their ribald, often challenging work. Hauser & Wirth’s early shows in Europe with Rhoades and McCarthy established a track record for supporting difficult work and for corraling artists on the fringes of the market.

Rhoades and McCarthy wound up casting Zwirner and Iwan—unwittingly—as porn producers in a satirical film, *Proposition*, shot in part at the Peninsula New York hotel, luring the dealers with a spoof business proposal (surrounded by actors and a camera crew). “We told them we had this company that wanted to make toys and movies and get into real estate,” says McCarthy. “We had fake people there that we said represented Disney.” Zwirner and Iwan quickly figured out it was in jest, but were good sports. “[It was] a joke on Hollywood and the art world,” says McCarthy. The finished piece made its debut at the Venice Biennale in 1999.

“[Iwan] was very supportive of what I was doing, I don’t mean just financially, but really wanted to think about the work and be very engaged with it,” says McCarthy, who creates films, sculptures and performances. “He made you feel secure. He was excited by stuff, and you kind of knew you could take it somewhere. And work really did take off for a lot of artists.”

Zwirner, also impressed by his compeer from Zurich, began to collaborate with him on deals on the secondary art market. In 2000 they set up a business together, Zwirner & Wirth, focused on that lucrative niche, Iwan’s first foothold in New York operating out of a townhouse on East 69th Street. Though the joint venture dissolved after nine years to avoid “brand confusion,” as Zwirner describes it, the rival art dealers remain friends who still occasionally collaborate. (The building uptown became Hauser & Wirth’s first New York gallery in 2009.)

Momentum from secondary market sales helped fuel a period of explosive growth for Hauser & Wirth, starting in 2003, when it expanded to London, opening in a former bank building in Piccadilly. In 2005, the Wirths, expecting their fourth child, relocated there from Zurich, moving out to Somerset two years later. A derelict 18th-century farm purchased near their home there inspired Hauser & Wirth’s evolution.

“We realized very early on that the conversations we had with the artists were always at the studio and then straight to the restaurant,” says Iwan, touring the Somerset art center this past winter. “There, people speak from their heart. This egalitarian idea that we like...the kitchen table in a public forum.” The property’s Roth Bar & Grill, which will have its own cookbook from Phaidon this fall, features an elaborate

bar that’s also an art piece, hand-built by the son and grandsons of the late Dieter Roth, who was known for working with food and found materials. The dining room’s walls are packed with work largely by gallery artists. Outside, across the sculpture-filled courtyard, lies a guesthouse. Beyond the public buildings is a garden from Dutch landscape designer Piet Oudolf, who oversaw the planting of New York’s High Line, surrounding a Serpentine Pavilion from Chilean architect Smiljan Radić that sometimes hosts performances, yoga classes and weddings.

The success of Hauser & Wirth Somerset opened a new chapter for the gallery. The partners launched an urban version in a former flour mill in Los Angeles. “We decided to open not where the collectors live but where the artists work,” says Iwan. McCarthy was integral to the expansion out West and the first to suggest a location downtown. As construction started he shot a satirical western there, circling the building with a stagecoach and dangling life-size cowboys from the ceiling inside. “It was kind of a way of letting L.A. know Hauser & Wirth was here,” he says.

Now a Mediterranean version is in the works in Menorca on a small islet facing the port of Mahón. The site, home to a defunct naval hospital and near a Unesco bioserve, is being transformed by Luis Laplace, a former Selldorf acolyte and the same Paris-based architect behind the Somerset complex and some of the Wirth family homes. Though it doesn’t officially launch until the spring of 2021, with an Oudolf garden and a Menorcan restaurant, community-building activities begin this summer to welcome locals.

Laplace came across the location while on a scouting trip through the Mediterranean in search of the perfect spot for a vacation home for the Wirths. “We saw a lot of properties; this one was the most realistic,” says Laplace, who has become so close to the Hauser & Wirth team over the years that his studio in Paris exhibits rotating work from the gallery’s artists.

Along with the outposts in Los Angeles and Menorca, the Somerset project helped encourage the founders’ interest in a sideline business in hotels, run under a new company, Artfarm, they set up separately from the gallery. The Wirths opened their first, the Fife Arms, in Scotland last year—a follow-up, of sorts, to an earlier venture as investors, in the 1990s, in the Hotel Castell in the Swiss Alps. Though more hospitality projects are in the pipeline, the Wirths say that Artfarm is only a part-time adjunct to the serious business of running one of the world’s busiest galleries.

“We had to create Artfarm and also explain it,” says Iwan. “The art world is conservative; we had to say, No, no, the gallery is not becoming a restaurant, we’re not a lifestyle brand. It grew organically. It’s close to our heart, but it’s separate.”

Though the new Hauser & Wirth building in Chelsea won’t have a restaurant, it will have a bar and a bookshop on the second floor, with a balcony and space for socializing. The Wirths and their new co-president, Payot, hope their artists will want to spend time there and, of course, show their work in the building, and that new audiences will also discover it.

“[The new building] becomes a home for all the artists in New York,” says Manuela. “We thought, OK, who needs what.... So it’s not about the building. It’s really about the artists, the shows, the spaces.” ●



**WORLD TOUR** Top, from far left: Hauser & Wirth opened in Zurich in 1992; a 1998 Dieter Roth installation in Zurich; a piece from a 2003 David Hammons show in Zurich; a sculpture by Paul McCarthy, who took over the London gallery for its 2003 opening. This row, from far left: William Pope.L’s restaging of Allan Kaprow’s *Yard* at the 2009 New York opening of Hauser & Wirth; Martin Creed’s 2013 installation at the Chelsea gallery in New York; Piet Oudolf’s gardens at the Somerset complex, which opened in 2014; the L.A. space, which opened in 2016, includes Manuela restaurant.



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF HAUSER & WIRTH; COURTESY OF AMY SHERALD AND HAUSER & WIRTH; PHOTO: JOSEPH HYDE; COURTESY OF ALLAN KAPROW ESTATE, © ALLAN KAPROW ESTATE, PHOTO: HANNAH HEINRICH



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF THE DIETER ROTH ESTATE, © DIETER ROTH ESTATE; COURTESY OF DAVID HAMMONS, © DAVID HAMMONS; COURTESY OF PAUL MCCARTHY, © PAUL MCCARTHY; PHOTO: GOSWIN SCHOENHUBER; PHOTO: ELEN SCHENHOLZ; PHOTO: DAMIAN DEL CLERCO; PHOTO: JASON INGRAM; PHOTO: JASON INGRAM. ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF HAUSER AND WIRTH

**FRAME BY FRAME**

From left: A piece by Amy Sherald, who joined the gallery in 2018; *Ursula* magazine, named for Ursula Hauser, a gallery co-founder and Manuela’s mother; Marc Payot, who was named co-president in 2020; the Menorca property.

