

Power | *players*

| POWER MUSEUM

Location, (Re)location

THE RELOCATION OF THE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN (MAD) to its new \$90 million building is a real New York story. And like the best of them—*An Affair to Remember*, *Pride of the Yankees*, even *King Kong*—it's all about real estate and passion. MAD's new home is 2 Columbus Circle. Originally the Huntington Hartford building, it had undergone a long period of neglect before its meticulous conversion into a museum. Driving the transformation of the modest 17,000-square-foot space on 53rd Street into a 12-story, 54,000-square-foot international showcase was MAD board chairman Barbara Tober, who's had a lifelong passion for decorative arts and design.

Tober's enthusiasm began when, as a six-year-old, she watched an artist use a Bunsen burner to transform a glass rod into a glass menagerie. "I thought it was the most incredible thing I'd ever seen," she says, her eyes lighting up. Today her collection includes ancient pieces such as two Tang Dynasty horses as well as modern masters like William Morris and Dale Chihuly. "The process," says Tober of Chihuly's work, "is as worthy as [that of] the fine arts. Sculpting a complex piece of glass requires just as much skill as a bronze sculpture."

Since its founding in 1956, MAD's mission has been to celebrate the arts and design that enhance contemporary life. Tober joined the board in 1989 after more than four decades in publishing, most notably 30 years as editor in chief of *Brides* magazine. She was elected chairman of the museum's board in 1994.

It was in early 2001 that the board decided the museum needed a space better serving its collection and the public, and looked to 2 Columbus Circle. The first meeting to discuss the building's acquisition with then Mayor Rudolph Giuliani was scheduled for the morning of September 11, 2001. Needless to say, the project was postponed. Even after gaining the enthusiastic support of Mayor Bloomberg, his administration, and several community groups, the City of New York and MAD still faced opposition (four lawsuits and four appeals) from a preservation group.

But Tober's team remained steadfast, and today the metamorphosis is complete. The expansion more than tripled the museum's space and doubled that of the gallery. There is a \$2 million jewelry gallery, sponsored by the Tiffany & Co. Foundation, which is a "laboratory" of exciting jewelry ideas. The Arts and Design Education Center has studios and classrooms for master classes and artists in residence as well as a state-of-the-art 150-seat multipurpose theater. The museum emphasizes international trends and the importance of decorative arts and design.

"Columbus Circle is now finished and lives up to its potential as the center of the city," says Tober. "[It is] the culmination of a lot of hard work for a number of us who've had our shoulders to the wheel these seven years—the validation of a field I've loved since I was a child, and the fulfillment of a dream to have a proper showcase for the full recognition of contemporary decorative arts and design." *Museum of Arts and Design, 2 Columbus Circle, 212-956-3535; madmuseum.org.*—SETH MICHAEL DONSKY



Barbara Tober.