

SEEN



CASEY KELBAUGH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

MEET THE AUTHOR Scott Sanders signing a copy of his book, "Picture Perfect," for Barbara Toll at the Max Lang gallery.

Crayons and Legos: A Designer's Tools

By JOYCE WADLER

THURSDAY night is gallery trolling night in Chelsea, so it was not surprising last week to find a crowd upstairs at the Max Lang gallery, examining the early works of the interior designer Scott Sanders.

Under the proud eye of the curator, Shirley Sanders, the crowd examined drawings like "Self-Portrait With Rosy Cheeks," a crayon on paper, from 1969, which showed a grinning little boy in dark glasses who looked eerily like the 47-year-old Mr. Sanders looks today; "Colonial Home," a ballpoint pen on paper, from 1977; and "Mega Mansion," a marker-pen drawing on paper, from 1975, of a great house set on a hilly landscape.

To the critical eye, the work was markedly immature, even overwrought, with a disregard for American Crayola tradition. The yellow hands of the little boy in "Self-Portrait," what was that about?

Still, who is going to knock the drawings someone did as a child, particularly when his mother is in the room? The answer: New Yorkers, we figured with some pride and confidence — even if they had come to celebrate the publication of Mr. Sanders's book, "Picture Perfect: Designing the New American Family Home." Has a book party ever stopped a New Yorker from savaging the author?

And yet, asked to assess the works of the designer, who grew

up in Piqua, Ohio, where his father and grandfather were builders and developers, the guests had nothing but praise.

"I love the sense of whimsy at such a young age," the designer Anthony Baratta said. "There's a lot of sensitivity, the proportions are spot on. And he was in this joyful, playful land he had created himself. I only wish I could visit him in this place."

"The irony is, he and Peter Wilton, who's a major corporate lawyer, have a place like this," Dr. Bruce Norton said, referring to Mr. Sanders's partner, while standing in front of a painting of a country mansion. "He painted it

A designer paints a house as a boy, 'and it all came true.'

as a little boy, and it all came true."

The only dispassionate voice we could find came from Mr. Sanders's father, Charles Sanders, whom we found somewhat away from the tumult of the party, studying the drawing "Subdivision Plans With Landscaping Detail," which Mr. Sanders did at 13.

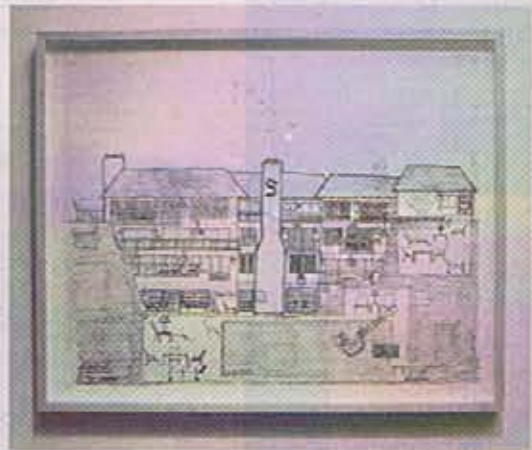
"I don't understand it," Charles Sanders said when asked for his opinion. "Every house has a pool and a tennis court. I guess he was a dreamer, because every house had a pool."

Did Mr. Sanders, who has built hundreds of homes in Ohio, build any houses like that?

"We never built a house with a pool," he said. "It was much too cold. I knew a guy who had a house with a pool. He took it out."

Scott Sanders's book, which includes some of the childhood drawings that hung on the wall at his party, deals with the creation of a house that is indeed a dreamer's house: a four-story 9,000-square-foot home with five bedrooms, 10 bathrooms and, of

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY CASEY KELBAUGH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

MOM, THE CURATOR Shirley Sanders greets guests at her son's gallery show. Thanks to her foresight, they saw his childhood work, like "Self-Portrait With Rosy Cheeks" and "Mega Mansion."

Crayons: A Designer's Tools

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course, a pool.

It also tells his story of becoming a designer: the influence of his mother — and his grandmothers, who were both enthusiastic amateur designers — as well as the developments created by his father and grandfather, and the 10 years he spent at Ralph Lauren, where he became the interior designer of the Madison Avenue flagship store in New York.

Our interest was in the art, and so early in the evening we corralled the curator, who was wearing a hot pink jacket with a small ladybug pin on her shoulder, and the artist to discuss the show. What compelled Mrs. Sanders to keep her son's drawings all these years?

"Well, you know, you think whatever they do is the best of anything, so you want to save it," Mrs. Sanders said.

Now, for the early years of the artist, hold nothing back, Mr. Sanders. You were designing interiors as a child, you say?

"I made furniture out of my Legos and carpet out of carpet



samples," the designer said. "I took furniture from my sister's dollhouses and installed them in my houses, and she would yell at me."

To some of the later works: the Greek Revival Mansion with basement spa, wine cellar, library, 21-piece sectional sofa, spa and ballroom. And would that be a menorah on the mantel?

"Chandelier," Mr. Sanders corrected the reporter. "It came from the first season of 'Be-witched.' She had a candelabra in

the entrance. Oh, look — little wineglasses sitting on the coffee table."

He moved on to a drawing of a penthouse interior.

"This was probably attributable to 'Family Affair,'" he said. "It was a TV show in the '60s, rerun in Ohio in '70, about a New York City family who had a fabulous penthouse." (Fanatics will know it ran until 1971, but no matter.)

Mr. Sanders is now a successful designer in New York City, inhabiting a world he created in drawings. He saw those drawings for the first time in decades when his mother found them for his book. What was it like to see the drawing he did as a little kid back in Ohio?

"It was just really special," he said. "It's a connection to your past, but it's also a reminder that you're doing the right thing. I love what I do, and I took the right path. There's a lot of joy associated with that."

What happens to the art after the party?

"It's going up on my office walls."

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CORRECTIONS

The Seen column on April 1, about a fragrance symposium, misspelled the name of a participant. She is Yuka Hiyoshi, not Yoko Hiroshi.

The Seen column last Thursday, about the Lenox Hill Neighborhood House spring gala, misidentified the distributor of the television show "P. Allen Smith's Garden Home." It is American Public Television, not the Public Broadcasting Service.

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