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Christen Wilson's Dallas: The collector-about-town has all the insider intel you need to take this year's Dallas Art Fair like a true tycoon.

By: Fan Zhong



Christen Wilson

The art world fixture Christen Wilson sits on the boards of the Whitney Museum in New York and the Tate in London, but the collector remains a woman-about-town in Dallas, where she's settled. As the rest of the art world arrives on her footsteps for the Dallas Art Fair this week, Wilson reveals her insider's guide to the essentials for the chic, powerful, and BBQ-starved.

Describe your Dallas neighborhood:

I live in the town of Highland Park, which has been around for over 100 years so it has big old oak trees and a nice neighborhood feel. I'm also next to another area called Knox-McKinney; I can walk to restaurants and boutiques and walk on Katy Trail, the old Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad track that used to make a stop off Knox Street. It is now a very well landscaped walking/biking trail that runs from Highland Park to Downtown. You can get to many restaurants off the trail—or you can just run as fast as you can, right by them.

Describe the aesthetic of your home in three words:

White, fun (energy), art. It looks a bit traditional on the outside, but once you enter ... well, there is nothing traditional about it. My house is made for art and parties.

Best place to take a visiting artist for drinks or dinner:

Tei An, in One Arts Plaza, near all the museums. This quiet sushi/soba noodle house is chef-owned by Teiichi Sakurai. Yosuke Fukuda, who runs the front, graciously greets you at the door. I like to hang out in the Zen-like bar for drinks and a quick dinner. The white seaweed salad is a must to start, and then go crazy with soba noodles and sushi. Or there is the Mansion on Turtle Creek bar. This is an icon. I was just there two nights ago, and was reminded of my thoughts from when I first moved here from Los Angeles; I felt like I was sitting in an episode of Dallas with J.R. There is a perfect air of nostalgia. Old-school Dallas society hangs out here, along the best martini in town. You add those and some out of town guests and you have yourself the new 'Dallas' TV show. Make sure you visit the terrace on a beautiful evening.

Dallas-only food staple or restaurant dish you can't live without:

Mi Cocina is a Dallas staple for Tex-Mex. If you go before 7:30 pm it can seem a bit like a romper room for kids because all the parents are drinking margaritas called Mambo Taxis while their kids run around. So please go after 7 pm. I also love a Tex-Mex restaurant called Mr. Mesaro's on McKinney Avenue. Make sure you order the brisket nachos, and you can drink as many skinny margaritas called Size 2 as you want and not feel as bad.

Favorite power meal spot:

The Green Dragon Restaurant & Bar at Old Parkland. Old Parkland is on a campus that covers over nine acres with striking architecture. There is nowhere in Dallas that has more of a power lunch than this restaurant. Oil tycoons, the biggest family offices, and hedge fund stars can be seen dining together in this mega-power lunch location. The catch is that you have to be invited there by a tenant of Old Parkland. This makes it the hottest power spot in Dallas. Or there is Grange Hall, a mix of Paris and Texas that's somehow unique unto itself, with curation by Rajan Patel and Jeffrey Lee. The lunch-only restaurant in their boutique truly has the best food and ambience I have seen — not just in Dallas. It could hold its own anywhere. The store also has a full floral boutique. I consider this the power spot for ladies that lunch.

Favorite date night restaurant:

Le Bilboquet is a chic French bistro in the Knox McKinney area. The owner Stephan Courseau will graciously greet you at the front door. I love sitting outside on a beautiful evening. You must order the crab and avocado salad to start and the filet au poivre with peppercorn sauce and frites, of course. Yum.

Favorite BBQ spot:

Lockhart Smokehouse. Don't wear nice clothing here because you will leave with BBQ sauce somewhere on your body. You can order brisket, ribs, sausage, chicken by the half-pound, and make sure you add on the BBQ Baked Beans and Blue Coleslaw.

When going for a late, late night, you go to...

When all else fails, there is The Grapevine Bar. A dark after-hours bar, you can play pool, or basketball outside, or get into some serious conversations. There is a jukebox to play your favorite song, from Dylan to Slayer to Depeche Mode. Last time I was there, I got into a basketball game in my Dior heels and left at 3 am.

Where to two-step (even if ironically):

The Round-Up Saloon and Dance Hall. You can watch cute cowboys doing the two-step on a circular dance floor that resembles a skating rink. Best to go after a late dinner — or they do have a 'Howdy Hour' on the weekends. It has been rumored that Karl Lagerfeld has been here, and I also know it is famous far beyond London and Paris. I have a museum group coming from London and their first request was, "Christen, will you take us to the Round Up?"

Favorite Dallas museum:

Best of the best, for me, is the Renzo Piano-designed Nasher Sculpture Center. You can walk the galleries inside and downstairs, and then stroll outside through the sculpture garden. Have lunch at the Nasher Cafe by Wolfgang Puck, where you can sit outside on a nice day.

Most unexpected place/area to see great art:

AT&T Stadium, aka the Dallas Cowboys Stadium. Honestly, I couldn't care less about sports. But when someone says, "Christen, I have a suite at the Cowboys Stadium, would you like to go see a game," I'm there! The stadium is filled with amazing contemporary art, which is shockingly good. There are two HD LED video displays that hang from the dome, which are 160 feet wide and 72 feet tall — the largest in the world. Plus, who doesn't want to see the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders?

Most essential local galleries:

A quick shout out is Erin Cluley Gallery, and James Cope's And Now.

Favorite stores:

Forty Five Ten. Comme des Garçons, Dior, Givenchy, Lanvin—they have all the best designers, new and established, plus jewelry, handbags, shoes and makeup. It's also the best boutique in town for men, plus a fantastic lunch spot. A must-visit in Dallas. Local mega-collector Howard Rachofsky's project space of postwar Modern and Contemporary Art is to not be missed. If you get a chance or an invite, you must go! Highland Park Village is the first outdoor shopping mall ever built in America. This is a place where real shoppers go for Chanel, Dior, Hermès, Balenciaga, Saint Laurent, Harry Winston, and the list goes on. Plus some of the best restaurants, like Mi Cocina, Bistro 31 and Cafe Pacific. And there is also Vintage Martini. I have never gone in this vintage clothing store and not left with something. The costume jewelry and handbags are great, also. Ask for Ken Weber if you want the hidden treasures.

Best spa:

The Spa at the Joule Hotel. Just go get a massage and then soak in the Vitality Pool ... best thing to do after a long day at the art fair.

Local motto you live by:

"None of my ex's live in Texas."

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