



Durk Dehner, (top right) founded the Tom of Finland Foundation in 1984. Headquartered in L.A., Tom House (above) maintains the artist's archives and personal ephemera, including his drawing desk and army uniform.



Leather Bound

A new book goes behind the hedgerows at the Tom of Finland Foundation

BY MICHAEL SLENSKE

In the early '90s, creative director Michael Reynolds began collecting photography with a focus on homoerotic works by Peter Hujar, Robert Mapplethorpe, George Platt Lynes and Wilhelm von Gloeden. "Eventually I decided to include illustration, and collect works by Tom of Finland," says Reynolds. In 2001 he bought his gateway pieces: a drawing of a biker spanking another biker from a 1960s fantasy narrative sequence and a late-'70s preparatory drawing of a nude male writhing like a snake on the floor through a forest of leather boots. At the time, Reynolds heard about a turn-of-the-century hilltop home in Echo Park, Los Angeles, where Tom, born Touko Laaksonen, lived and worked during the final decade of his life.

"When I first went there it was a total mind fuck," says Reynolds of his virgin encounter with the property that is now known as Tom House. It was purchased in 1979 by a "band of biker brothers" that included Durk Dehner, a Canadian-born art student who had

previously lived in New York and played model/muse to artists like Bruce Weber and Ken Haak during the last days of disco. Dehner had stumbled upon Tom's work on a poster outside the Manhattan leather bar the Spike. "I saw that drawing and I had an experience," he says.

In fact, it moved him so much that he hosted Tom at his Silver Lake residence in 1977, then began traveling with him to exhibitions and organized a show of his work at the Manhattan boot shop/gallery Stompers, where Tom first met Andy Warhol. Dehner quickly assumed the role of best friend, guardian angel, confidant, model, publicist and business manager. "I said, 'Tom, I love your work and we have to develop an archive for you.'" By 1984, the Tom of Finland Foundation was born.

As the public acceptance of LGBTQ culture grew, so did the house—which has become a sort of Playboy Mansion for the gay leather community—while Tom of Finland's acceptance into the mainstream has

become all but complete: In addition to a 1998 Taschen monograph and a 2013 retrospective at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, Finland honored Tom's work with three postage stamps in 2014. The foundation is now represented by David Kordansky Gallery, which opened a brilliant exhibition last spring.

"It is clear that Tom of Finland has finally arrived in the blue chip art world," says Reynolds, who, along with photographer Martyn Thompson and design critic Mayer Rus, collaborated on the substantial new design-art-gay history tome *Tom House: Tom of Finland in Los Angeles* (Rizzoli), which catalogs everything from the whips, chains and cages in the still-active subterranean sex dungeon to Tom's Finnish Army uniforms to never-before-published drawings.

"At the end of the day, it's about a brotherhood of men who have dedicated their lives to preserving erotic art," Reynolds says. "It's a magical place, an absolute rarity in this day and age."