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O’Flaherty, Mark C. “Earthly delights: Richard Long unveils a series of art installations at Houghton Hall.” *www.telegraph.co.uk (The Telegraph)*, 22 April 2017.

The Telegraph

The red hula hoop resting in a corner of the capacious entrance to Houghton Hall is more than a little incongruous. The grandest space at one of the grandest homes in the country, the Stone Hall has a swirling 18th-century stucco ceiling and a black-and-white tiled floor that conjures images of sweeping petticoats.

This profoundly stately home in Norfolk was built as the chief residence of Sir Robert Walpole – the de facto first prime minister of Great Britain – and is periodically open to the public, but it is also a family home for David Rocksavage, the 7th Marquess of Cholmondeley (pronounced ‘Chumley’), his wife, Rose, a former model, and their children (seven-year-old twins Alexander and Oliver, and baby Iris, who counts Kate Moss as a godmother).

Rocksavage, 56, inherited an estimated fortune of £118 million, and Houghton Hall, at the age of 29 and was dubbed “the greatest catch in England”. Before he married Rose (23 years his junior) at Chelsea Old Town Hall in 2009, he dated a string of beautiful women including the French actress Isabelle Adjani and heiress Sabrina Guinness. Now a family man, he lets his boys roam through the great house that it has become his responsibility to maintain and keep vital.

“I used to come here during my grandmother’s time when I was my children’s age, and she was very strict,” Rocksavage recalls. “Our children get to run around here. There isn’t much that’s fragile.”

The sturdy splendour of the Stone Hall currently has even more to draw the eye. Richard Long, the British land artist, has installed a work beneath the chandelier as part of his summer show at Houghton, *Earth Sky*. This particular piece stops you in your tracks more than the others – it’s a black, white and grey circle of rocks, formatted as compass coordinates. It brings the wild irregularity of nature inside, but ordered perfectly, as if by magic. “I will certainly miss this piece when it’s gone,” says Rocksavage. “It’s an incredible architectural intervention.”

It’s also strangely and beautifully pagan. Long, 71, who usually loathes discussion of his work, appreciates the description. “Yes!” he enthuses. “Pagan. That’s a good word to use. It is... primitive, and all to do with



Richard Long in the Stone Hall at Houghton Hall
PHOTOS: MARK C O’FLAHERTY

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The Marquess of Cholmondeley



The house was built for Britain's first prime minister, Sir Robert Walpole, between 1722 and 1735.



The White Drawing Room walls are covered in woven silk. Much of the original furniture and fabrics are still in place

energy. I feel very close to the energy of rock and roll, for example. There's a huge amount of pagan energy in certain music – sexual energy also. It's all the same thing.”

Long has created a similarly remarkable series of stone and slate pieces – spirals, crosses and lines – in the grounds of the house. Much of the work is informed by his obsession with walking; for Long, a walk can be the greatest and most immersive “art” of all, and he often ritualistically places a stone by the roadside at the same spot during his daily walks, blurring the edges between nature and what is man-made.

The relationship between Rocksavage and Long is fascinating to observe. There are obvious parallels with the historical aristocratic patronage of the arts, and Rocksavage is as much a curator as a family man at Houghton. The house has always had a phenomenal art collection, and one of his first missions as owner was to initiate an exhibition of the Old Masters that had been in the Walpole family collection before their sale to Catherine the Great of Russia in 1779. After several years of negotiations, 70 of the 204 canvases made the journey home in 2013.

“We had six times our usual visitor numbers for that show,” he recalls. “It was very touching for me, as I know the house so well, and had always imagined what it would be like with the paintings back in place.”

Rocksavage's personal tastes in art are decidedly contemporary; hence the James Turrell show in 2015 – all coloured lights and sensation – and the Rachel Whiteread concrete ghost shed that lurks in a clearing in the grounds. “We have an arts trust now,” he says, “so what we do will be protected in the future. These projects are long-term.”

The visual arts in general are a serious business to Rocksavage. He has directed films (an adaptation of Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is among his accomplishments) and counts Johnny Depp and Mick Jagger as friends.

While most of the Richard Long pieces will disappear at the end of October, the artist's 2003 work *Full Moon Circle* will stay. It is part of a growing number of permanent commissions and purchases that started with Turrell's *Seldom Seen* in 2002 – one of his Skyspace structures that isolate your view of the sky to make it appear an unusual colour.

Some may see these sculptures, including Phillip King's brightly coloured *Dunstable Reel* (which the twins love to clamber across and play around) as being at odds with a classic Palladian mansion,



Richard Long's work, *A Line in Norfolk*, 2016, in the grounds of Houghton Hall

but they are a conceptual fit. “The idea of a folly is very much in the 18th-century tradition,” explains Rocksavage. “We found maps from 1720 that documented certain architectural follies around the grounds, which have disappeared. So really, this is about bringing them back.”

The twins took great delight in helping Long create some of the new work. “They really like him,” says Rocksavage. “We all got to help him on the pieces on the lawn, because he couldn’t lay every stone himself on a 60-metre line. It was fun. The boys loved being involved. And then they wanted to do their own versions. ‘Look, we’ve made our own little Richard Longs,’ they said, which amused Richard immensely. It’s also been great watching him work. He’s sort of ageless, the way he bends and moves the stones.”



Long's *Full Moon Circle*, 2003

For Rocksavage and his family, Houghton Hall is very much home. But, he says, his children are well aware that this isn’t how most people live, even in their social circle (the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge’s Norfolk home is four miles away). “And we have private areas and public areas,” he explains, as he walks me through a long dark entrance hall littered with scooters, children’s toys and walking boots, which is one of the former.

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It leads to an Aga-warmed kitchen, full of books and games and newspapers, that feels very much the heart of the private home. “We don’t really use the rooms upstairs if the house is closed, except to show friends,” Rocksavage explains. “Although we use the Stone Hall sometimes, for concerts.” Concerts and, just maybe, a little hula-hooping.

Earth Sky runs from 30 April to 26 October

The Marquess and Marchioness of Cholmondeley greet the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge at a gala dinner, held at Houghton in aid of the charity East Anglia’s Children’s Hospices, in June 2016
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