



Thanks to the interventions of consultants Eye Buy Art and Arthouse, the interiors for Epoch at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Toronto feature artwork that defies the conventions of hotel art. Photo: Gillian Jackson

Designer Takes

Installing New Art? Here's What Not to Do, According to the Pros

AD PRO taps experts in art consulting for their best practices and budgetary advice

By Jessica Ritz

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A couple of decades ago, putting the words *hotel* and *art* together might have elicited a polite grimace at best. No longer. Whether it's a gallery of blue-chip artwork accessed via a Las Vegas casino floor, a high-rise hotel lobby, or bungalows in a tropical resort, boasting a strong art program has become an essential part of [hospitality design](#).

The public has come to expect seeing better and more compelling art in hotels, and hierarchies and boundaries about what constitutes legitimate or serious places to experience art have become less rigid. This is good news for artists and designers. The growth of specialized art consultancies provides another level of engagement and service too. "With increased standards, the budgets have increased," says Ari Grazi, founder of [Indiewalls](#), a hospitality art consulting firm based in Brooklyn.

Hospitality design and art professionals share insights with AD PRO about pitfalls to consider when devising a well-executed art plan. From not spending your budget soon enough to forgetting your gut-check, here are a few common mistakes that can lead you and your client to art-purchasing peril.



An interior at 1 Hotel Miami. Photo: Courtesy 1 Hotel South Beach

Starting too late

Art “used to be the last thing that people thought about and sometimes it still is, unfortunately,” observes Grazi, whose company partners with independent artists outside of traditional galleries. Starting late in the process can still result in successful results, but it’s not ideal.

“We plan art in the concept phase, because the importance of the art will affect the architecture, or the interior furnishings,” says Elisabeth Rogoff, principal at [Champalimaud Design](#), a firm known for its extensive high-profile luxury hospitality portfolio (Aspen’s [Little Nell](#), the Hotel Bel-Air renovation, and the Newbury and Mandarin Oriental [hotels in Boston](#) among them). “You design the entire picture so that it’s cohesive,” says designer Anwar Mekhayech, cofounder of [DesignAgency](#) in Toronto. It’s not easy to massively readjust, say, a lighting scheme; plus, “If there are going to be feature art pieces, you want to design for them,” he adds.

Trying to do it all

For smaller hospitality projects like restaurants, overseeing art is feasible, and many designers are eager to get into the weeds. “My favorite part is when we get heavily involved in the art, because we’re working with local galleries and curators or artists themselves,” Mekhayech says. He also loves matching deserving artists with hospitality commissions.

But at a certain scale, bringing in consultants can be a life saver. When hundreds of items are needed for installing new art in guest rooms and public spaces in a hotel, “There’s so much curating,” Grazi says—which means a big investment of time and energy will be needed for procurement and contracts. With art work, it isn’t just a matter of picking pieces from a catalog or website, he says: “You have to take a much deeper dive to get it right.”



Art in the bar room at Epoch in the Ritz-Carlton in Toronto, where Eye Buy Art and Arthouse consulted. Photo: Gillian Jackson

Not spending the art budget soon enough

“The art budget can get eaten up by FF&E [furniture, fixtures, and equipment],” Grazi says. And right now, that reality is compounded by supply-chain challenges and rising material costs. The sooner the planned artwork moves from a vague concept and towards something more concrete, the more likely a client is to approve and commit. Once again, budgets need to be discussed up front. “A lot of what we do is managing expectations,” Mekhayech says. “You’ve got to be resourceful,” he says, so tapping “emerging artists who are looking for a break” can be a smart route.

Not being clear about whose collection or taste will be on display

“Art is so personal,” Mekhayech says. Art consultants might have their own take, or hotel owners might want to integrate highlights from their own collections. All can be fruitful collaborations as long as the lines of communication remain open, and the art sits right with the

established narrative and design. “It’s a little disappointing if someone curates something out of left field, and a piece of art shows up on site [with no place to go],” Mekhayech says.

Thinking of a hospitality project as static

“I believe strongly in hospitality as being a driver for cultural and art-based” activations, says Mekhayech, whose firm’s projects include the Montage Cay in the Abacos Islands, Momofuku restaurants, the landmark [NeueHouse Bradbury](#) in L.A., among others. A mix of fixed and rotating pieces can be exciting, especially as more hotels do double duty as offsite galleries and unorthodox exhibition spaces. Champalimaud’s Elisabeth Rogoff appreciates this type of flexibility as long as it emerges from “an intentionally thoughtful process.”





Neuehouse Bradbury, located in Los Angeles within the iconic Bradbury Building, with *Blade Runner*-inspired art on the walls. Photo: Courtesy NeueHouse

Forgetting to go with your gut and heart

“Art is a personality, it’s a feeling, it’s an emotion, it’s a reaction,” says Rogoff, who counts her mother and other relatives as professional artists. Merely fixating on pretty pictures can mean “throwing interest, whimsy, or provocation out the window. Complement the interior with the art, and think about what you are trying to accomplish by wanting to activate a space,” she says.

Getting too stuck on local

Many hotels and consultancies promote their local art programs, which can be a powerful tool to support surrounding creative communities. Context and project dynamics are everything, and art should add another rich layer to the brand and/or interior design vision. A mix might be best, such as [Lendrum Fine Art](#)’s deft curatorial work seen alongside Martin Brudnizki’s interiors at the [Pendry West Hollywood](#). “If it ends up being local, great,” Mekhayech says, and yet looking farther afield need not be a deal breaker. Ultimately, beware of how the term local is bandied about as a marketing buzzword.

Playing it too safe

Each hotel has a distinct set of parameters, but art is meant to be fun, challenging, and push boundaries. (That said, violent or sexually graphic content is typically off limits.) With that in mind, designers should feel emboldened to experiment with materials and mediums.

Mekhayech, for one, has recently gotten into sourcing digital art, for instance. Designers need to confidently remember that their clients hire them for their eye and expertise—so don’t be afraid to expand comfort zones. With decor and furnishings, “We’re only going to put forward what we believe in,” Rogoff says. “That’s true for art too.”



Frank Stella's *Bene Come Il Sale (As Good as It Gets)*, from 1989, hangs in the lobby of the Post Oak Hotel at Uptown Houston. Photo: Courtesy Post Oak Hotel at Uptown Houston

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