



WHEN HOTELS COMPETE WITH GALLERIES AND GUEST ROOMS BECOME ART INSTALLATIONS

INVESTMENT Hoteliers are increasingly aware that their guests appreciate art and expect more than a familiar print bolted to the wall. Luxury brands are investing substantial sums in works by established or emerging talent and are curating their own collections, as Kathryn Tully discovers

■ Earlier this month, The Standard Hotel in New York held a party in the ultra-hip Boom Boom Room to celebrate the launch of its second series of video installations to be shown in all guest rooms. The videos include work from seven contemporary artists and in *Rabbit Holy Days*, by Terrence Koh, fluffy white bunnies are filmed relaxing in one of the hotel's minimalist bathroom sinks and admiring the view from the 18th floor.

While the long-held stereotype of hotel art has involved something bolted to a wall, simultaneously decorative yet bland and almost apologetic for its own existence, things have moved on a lot. In recent years, the hotel industry has realised that many of their guests are also art aficionados and that cultural tourism can begin the minute they arrive the lobby.

In an increasing number of hotels, art is not an afterthought, but a central part of the guest offering. In fact, it is so integral to some new hotels that they are designed with the art work in mind. The Sofitel Vienna Stephansdom, for example, designed by architect Jean Nouvel, features multicoloured video ceilings by Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist.

Today, many hotels compete with galleries and museums as an alternative exhibition space, producing glossy catalogues of their collections and employing creative directors

and curators to help them select works for permanent display or temporary exhibitions.

When Brian Williams, managing director of Swire Hotels, wanted to create a contemporary art collection for The Montpellier Chapter in Cheltenham, he turned to Jane Lee, course director in fine art at Central St Martins College of Art and Design in London for help after he met her at a degree show. "We were very keen to promote both established and young British artists and Central Saint Martins has a long reputation for producing artists of some repute," he says.

Approaches vary quite dramatically. Sometimes, art is intended to gel with the hotel's overall design aesthetic; sometimes quite the opposite. In The Surrey, a renovated Manhattan hotel that reopened in 2009, the ambience of a luxurious, traditional Upper East Side townhouse is offset with playful contemporary art works, such as a graffiti-adorned armoire in the lobby and graffitied tables in the bar by UK furniture designers Jimmie Martin.

This was also the thinking at The Montpellier Chapter. "We were keen that the art was a standalone feature of the hotel and not driven solely by design aesthetic," explains Mr Williams. "We wanted our guests to be intrigued and interested by the art and that it didn't feel like a corporate acquisition."

Some hotels, like Zurich's The Dolder Grand, are proud of their extensive, museum-quality collections. Others, such as The Opposite House in Beijing, want to showcase the work of emerging artists. Earlier this year, it commissioned art students at China's Central Academy of Fine Arts to produce a series of postcards to be left as gifts during the hotel's turn-down service.

But not all properties want to be thought of as an art hotel. "We didn't want to be another art hotel, where you just put high-end, expensive art into the environment," says Eva Ziegler, global brand leader of Le Méridien and W Hotels Worldwide. "We want our lobbies to be a creative hub where people can gather and exchange ideas." Nevertheless, Ms Ziegler says that guests formulate lasting impressions of hotels within ten minutes of arriving, which is why Le Méridien has high-impact art in its lobbies.

Yet, whatever the approach, the benefits are much the same. Art is a way of defining a hotel's identity and giving it a unique draw, whether that draw is the presence of Old Masters by Giuseppe Zais and Giuseppe Bazzani in the lobby of Rome's Cavalieri Hilton or guest-room murals by contemporary artists in Copenhagen's Hotel Fox.

Of course, it certainly helps if a hotel owner already has an exten-

sive art collection or a hotel can borrow from other private collections, because it is never easy to build a collection from scratch. Finding, selecting and buying the art or commissioning the right artists takes time. It took two years to put together the collection at The Montpellier Chapter, which started by buying works by established artists such as John Hopper and Mario Rossi and then adding to these core pieces with art by younger talent. Executing bespoke commissions takes even longer and installing art work presents another logistical challenge before a newly built or newly refurbished hotel can throw open its doors.

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Critically, some artists are also ambivalent about their work appearing in hotels or any large commercial setting. Le Méridien bypassed this problem by recruiting Jérôme Sans to be the hotel's cultural curator, who has selected Le Méridien 100 (LM100), a group



01 SOFITEL VIENNA STEPHANSDOM

02 LOBBY OF NEW YORK'S THE STANDARD



which includes artists and photographers such as Sam Samore, Joan Fontcuberta and Ralph Gibson, to create art works, video installations and soundscapes for the hotels. As Ms Ziegler puts it: "Jerome opens doors that we would never have been able to open as a brand, particularly for artists that don't normally engage with big companies."

However, Anne Pasternak, president and artistic director of public art, non-profit Creative Time, which curated The Standard's new video series, thinks that, as long as artists work with the right brand, the pervasive clichés surrounding hotel art are redundant. "Not one artist that we approached to work with The Standard turned us down," she says, adding that the hotel has a very hip reputation.

If anything, she says that the hotel project gave video artists more creative flexibility than they have when producing installations for other public spaces. "We do video projects in New York's Times Square where passersby have a very short attention span, whereas a hotel guest might engage with an in-room video installation for 20 minutes."

Of course, a still more compelling reason for hotels to exhibit art is that it democratises the process of enjoying it.

JW Marriott has teamed up with Christie's auction house to feature special art exhibitions. The first of these was a preview of unseen Beatles photos at London's Grosvenor House. Another is due to be held in December at Miami's JW Marriott Marquis. ●

RENAISSANCE FRESCOS OR CONTEMPORARY STREET ART?

CASE STUDIES Kathryn Tully combines hotel living and art appreciation in a tour of five of the world's leading art hotels which each offers its own individualistic guest experience



THE DOLDER GRAND
ZURICH



FOUR SEASONS
FLORENCE



HOTEL FOX
COPENHAGEN



LANGHAM PLACE
HONG KONG



GRAMERCY PARK HOTEL
NEW YORK

■ Built between 1897 and 1899, and spectacularly reimaged by architect Norman Foster before it reopened in 2008, The Dolder Grand sits on a hillside just 15 minutes from Zurich airport. The two modern wings, added by Lord Foster to the palatial original building, allow guests a panoramic vista of the city. The Dolder Grand boasts an impressive art collection selected by owner Urs Schwarzenbach. Salvador Dalí's *Femmes Metamorphoses* hangs in the restaurant. Other highlights in the hotel's common spaces are *Horizontal Brushstrokes* by Sol LeWitt and a permanent installation by Joachim Fleischer. Hotel guests can also enjoy discounts to major art events taking place in the city. The Dolder Grand offered 10 per cent off entry to the recent Picasso exhibition at Zurich's Kunsthau museum.

■ Hotel owners often spend years building art collections in their properties from scratch. Another approach is to open a new hotel in a stunning 15th-century palace, already heaving with Renaissance frescos, friezes and sculptures. This is what guests will find at the Palazzo della Gherardesca, Florence, which has been home to nobles, princes and the future Pope Leo XI, since it was built in 1473. It opened as the Four Seasons Hotel, after a seven-year renovation, in 2008. The lobby features bas-reliefs by Bertoldo di Giovanni, who taught Michelangelo. All guest rooms combine antique furnishings and paintings with 21st-century amenities, but those who stay in the Royal Suite, Gallery Suite, Noble Suite, Renaissance Suite or Presidential Suite can also enjoy vaulted, frescoed ceilings, without leaving their rooms.

■ It cannot boast the same ultra-luxurious accommodation offered by some of its art-hotel rivals, but this fun, city-centre boutique residence certainly wins marks for innovation. At Hotel Fox, each bedroom is a different piece of art. When it reopened in 2005, as part of an innovative marketing campaign for the launch of the Volkswagen Fox 21, a collection of 21 contemporary artists, graphic designers and illustrators painted and adorned each of the hotel's 61 rooms in a different style. Guests can find themselves sleeping surrounded by street art, benevolent monsters or Mexican wrestlers. Be warned, much of the art in Hotel Fox is loud. If you don't fancy sleeping in a hot pink room featuring a large black-and-white weightlifting cat, for example, then room 407 is probably not for you.

■ Chinese contemporary art is the hottest art market in the world at the moment and Hong Kong's Langham Place hotel has a world-class collection. The hotel houses an eclectic range of 1,500 art works, which can be found on each of the 42 floors, some by big names such as Wang Guangyi, Yue Minjun and Jiang Shuo. The lobby is used as a temporary exhibition space and, from February to April, the hotel's art consultant, Angeli Li, arranged for 29-year-old Chinese sculptor Luo Zhenhong to hold his latest exhibition, *Mirror Mirror On The Wall*, which featured 109 caricature sculptures, all posing on and around a battered Mini Cooper, taken from a scrap yard. Essentially, though, the whole hotel functions as a gallery and, if they choose to, guests can take tours of the whole collection during their stay.

■ The Gramercy Park's lobby, famous Rose Bar and other common spaces feature an extremely impressive collection of 20th-century masterpieces by Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Damien Hirst, Richard Prince, Keith Haring, Julian Schnabel and others, which are on loan from private collections. Currently, three oil paintings from Damien Hirst's 2008 series, *The Golden Jubilee*, hang in the sumptuous lobby. Julian Schnabel designed the interior of the hotel, in collaboration with Ian Schrager, when the 1925 landmark building was renovated. Guests will find framed photos in the hotel's bedrooms, which were selected from the *Magnum* archive, the photographic agency founded by Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Capa, George Rodger and David Seymour in 1947.

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COMMERCIAL FEATURE

Quality, style, sanctuary and relaxation



When it comes to standing out from the competition, architects know that the hotel bathroom is where first impressions and reputations can either be won or lost.

That is why they turn to Swiss bathroom specialists Laufen who have developed sanitaryware ranges with the hotel environment specifically in mind. These ranges enable designers to create spa-like retreats that offer guests the last word in comfort.

With homeowners looking to create their own ever-more luxurious bathroom spaces, the hotel bathroom is a focus for guests seeking a new level of sanctuary and relaxation. The quality and comfort of the hotel bathroom will stay in the discerning guest's memory long after their visit is over.

Understanding the importance of good bathroom design, whatever the setting, Laufen has introduced several sanitaryware and furniture collections that are not only ideal for architects

working in the hotel sector but can also be chosen to create a luxury boutique hotel-look at home.

A timeless classic, Palace offers great versatility in the hotel bathroom by effortlessly combining form with function. Central to the range is the elegantly simple washbasin, with ample open storage in the form of an easy-to-clean ceramic shelf below the basin and other practical details that are integral to hotel bathroom design, including an optional liquid soap dispenser in the washbasin.

Taking bathroom ceramics to new heights, Living Square by Laufen has been designed with the ultra-chic city hotel in mind. Featuring sleek surfaces and clear-cut contours, the washbasin gives the appearance of hovering in front of the wall, while a practical washing area is created by the ceramic shelf below the double washbasin. Meanwhile, Laufen's Il Bagno Alessi One ceramics collection is the

epitome of bathroom luxury and opulence, as shown on the left. The soft lines and beautiful shapes of the range are encapsulated in the iconic washbasin with gentle curves that create an elegant wave-like appearance and an extended countertop space that provides the perfect wipe-clean area for guests to store toiletries. For a fully co-ordinated bathroom design, the Il Bagno Alessi One collection also features a luxuriously deep bath, WC, bidet and shower tray.

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