

LEFT AND BELOW: ART AT STOCKHOLM'S STORY HOTEL YOU CAN TAKE HOME A PRINT OF JENNY MÖRTSELL'S WORK (AT LEFT)



NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

Haute hoteliers bring the art home.
By JOHANNA LENANDER



Remember when the design hotel was the sexiest thing going? Well, now it's about as tired as a Fendi baguette. Forget sleek and minimal lounges courtesy of Philippe Starck, lacquered wall panels and leather-upholstered beds. Today's It factor is all about the imperfect beauty of sculptures, paintings and installations. The trendiest hotels offer lodging, room service and a crash course in Damien Hirst. This is a long way from the Monet reproduction in the hallway. Art in hotels used to be elevator music for the walls; now it's the main event. In-the-know hotels display regularly rotating multi-million-dollar art pieces, have dedicated gallery spaces and employ in-house curators.

"The chic-ness of contemporary art is something that hotels today are desperate to be affiliated with," says Brett Littman, director of the prestigious The Drawing Center in New York. And why not? Everyone knows that if the artist

builds it, the people will come.

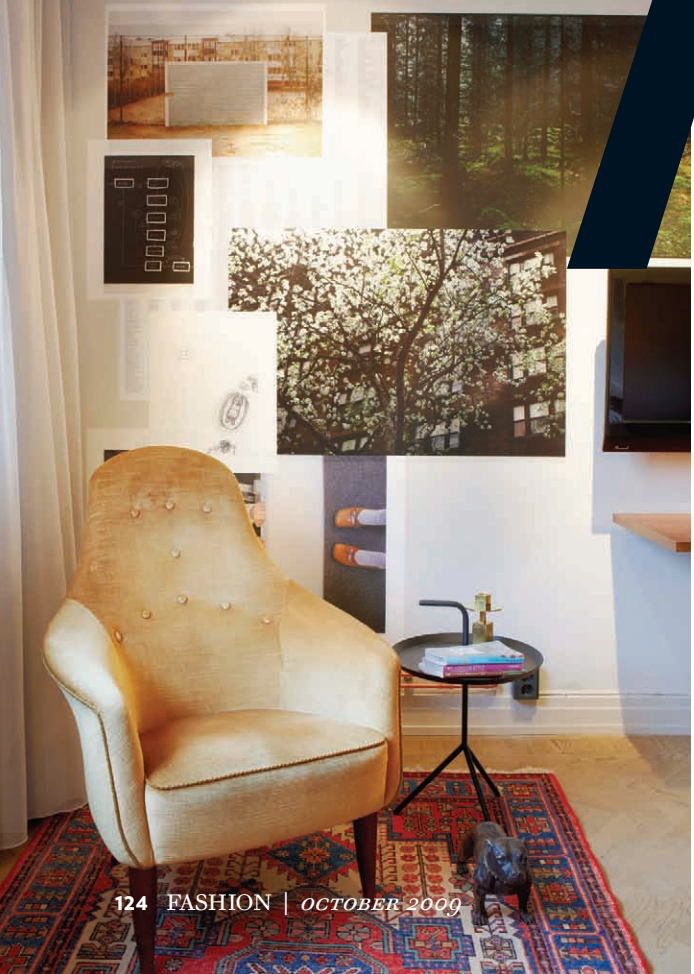
Toronto hot spot the Gladstone Hotel is one of the pioneers in this genre. When the *fin de siècle* Victorian hostelry reopened in 2005 after an extensive restoration, it had been made over into a cross between a hotel, gallery space and 3-D art installation. Each room is designed by a local artist, and an entire floor is devoted to exhibition spaces. The hotel's art program is focused on Toronto talent and includes popular annual events, such as the trend-setting "Come Up To My Room"—for which designers and artists transform a hotel or exhibition room into an installation. The hotel also features curated exhibitions in its public spaces.

"In any given month, we have from four to 12 shows," says Chris Mitchell, the Gladstone's director of exhibitions, marketing and development. "We deliver a completely immersive experience, with living, breathing art in all of our spaces. We have evolved into a cultural hub in the city."

She says that the hotel's art reaches a broader audience than the already-converted crowd that frequents galleries and museums. "Guests become enriched by an exposure they didn't expect. When you have to walk through a hallway installation to get to your room, it might change the way you look at art."

The Chambers Hotel in Minneapolis (which opened in 2006, billing itself as "the country's first luxury art hotel") offers a comfortable introduction to the modern-art world.

"It's fun to break down that barrier of 'I don't get this' to people who are not familiar with contemporary art," says Jennifer Phelps, who curates the hotel's exhibitions and coordinates tours of its oh-so-fashionable collection of pieces by British art stars such as Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, Sam Taylor-Wood and Gary Hume. (Chambers' owner, Ralph Burnet, is one of the world's leading collectors of the "Young »



British Artists” movement.) “It makes people walk away with a feeling of ‘Wow—what else is out there?’” Phelps also thinks that the pleasant environment means that guests experience the work differently than they would in a museum. “People are relaxed here. You can enjoy an installation with your coffee and newspaper. It’s spontaneous.”

When larger-than-life New York artist and film director Julian Schnabel collaborated on the interiors for New York’s glamorous Gramercy Park Hotel in 2006, the hotel put out a press release claiming it would “take the pretension out of art and make it democratic.” That meant displaying some of the world’s most valuable paintings—by the likes of Andy Warhol, Basquiat, Richard Prince and, of course, Schnabel himself—in an environment that felt like an haute-bohemian drawing room. It makes the experience of hanging out in an insanely rich art collector’s home accessible to those of us who don’t fraternize with billionaires. Renowned photographer Roxanne Lowit, whose celebrity and fashion portraits are displayed in a lounge area by the plush public

bathrooms, thinks that the hotel’s intimate setting makes the work more approachable. “It feels very informal and inviting, unlike a big, brightly lit gallery,” she says. “The last time I was at the GPH, I ran into Nicolas Cage, standing there admiring my work. I think he felt comfortable talking to me because we were in a cozy environment.”

While Gramercy Park’s homeyness channels eccentric heiress, the new Story Hotel in Stockholm is more arty rockstar. Its cool, eclectic rooms display a lived-in aesthetic, with unfinished surfaces and collages of artwork by the city’s top talent. The hotel takes the concept of curated art one step further by offering for sale prints of five specially commissioned photos and illustrations. “Our idea was to offer ‘art to go,’” says Nina Beckmann, founder and co-owner of Wonderwall, the art agency that partnered with Story. “We make quality art attainable. The work is more precious and unique than mass-produced art, but much more affordable than fine-art collections in galleries.”

So how do art-industry insiders feel about this trend? “It depends,” says Littman. “If the hotels make an effort to support the art community and buy work from local artists, which they rotate, then I think it’s great.” However, hotels are often reluctant to pay for the art they display, thinking exposure is payment enough. “That sits uneasily with me,” says Littman. “Art has to be valued for something other than its hipness.”

But the artists themselves seem to feel that the hotel environment can benefit the work in a way that a museum or gallery doesn’t. “The work is on display for a much longer time than the average gallery show, which lasts about a month,” says Lowit. “It’s also available to a larger audience. They can look at the work at their leisure, and even come back and see it again next time they’re in town. It’s art for art’s sake.” □



GLADSTONE
HOTEL'S BLUE
LINE ROOM, BY
GHOST DESIGN